

AN ENDURING RELATIONSHIP





MR MASASHI YAMADA (1923 – 2025)

Masashi Yamada was born in 1923 in Miyagi in Sendai in a town called Ishinomaki and brought up by his mother, a businesswoman who started a fishing company and founded what would become the Yamada Group.

“There were very few women in those days who could speak English and who were involved in business, so she was one of a kind, the first leader and first chair of Yamada Group. Thanks to trade she started to do some good business and invested the profits in real estate. This is how the real estate sector of the Yamada Group started,” said Mr Yamada.

As business flourished, his mother moved to Yokohama to develop the company. Mr Yamada went to university in Tokyo where he studied property management, and on graduating moved into the family business. He helped out in administration of real estate and developed the company through four streams – trade, fisheries, real estate and leisure. His mother was very active socially, and met a lot of people in Yokohama where she also owned a couple of restaurants. She was also a woman who cherished peace and believed that education was a good basis for peace.

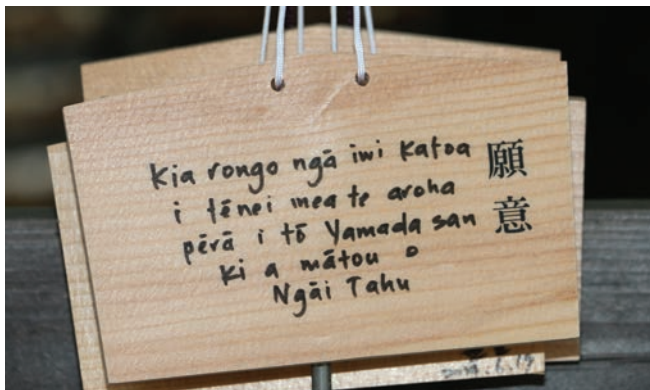
“She believed that to avoid wars, people needed to be educated properly and that education was the base of peace. I was brought up with that in mind, so education was always very important.”





Above – top: Tā Tipene and Mr Yamada with Mr Narimoto in the Te Waipounmu House boardroom in Armagh St; bottom: Pōwhiri at Takahanga Marae.





ACROSS DECADES, OCEANS AND GENERATIONS

The Pacific Ocean that divides Aotearoa from Japan breaks just metres from where Tā Tipene O'Regan recounts the story of a more than 30-year friendship between two men from two nations. Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa has always played a part in that bond.

The relationship began in 1989 when a delegation from the Yamada Corporation came to New Zealand to look at property investments. Graham Kitson (Ngāi Tahu), a Christchurch-based businessman with a long-held interest in Japan, including attending university there, was asked to assist with showing the Yamada delegation potential investments in Te Waipounamu. It was during this visit that Dr Kitson suggested if he was interested in fishing, Mr Yamada should meet Tā Tipene. It was a serendipitous meeting. Unbeknown to many at the time, the iwi was broke and about to abandon its legal fight for settlement.

A series of loans – multi-million dollars – from Mr Yamada during the 1990s gave the iwi the financial breath of life it needed to get through years of Waitangi Tribunal hearings and Crown negotiations.

Mr Yamada told *TE KARAKA* in 2014 about his first encounter with Tā Tipene.

"I was very taken by his passion and the way he talked about his culture and about Ngāi Tahu, and I thought he was a fantastic human being. He touched me very much. That was the trigger of my interest for the Ngāi Tahu, that very strong, passionate personality of his."

"And then I also remembered my mother's words about how it was important to have friends all over the world, and I thought I should make this man my friend and support him. That was also part of the relationship, the human encounter."

This relationship with the Yamada family not only allowed for the settlement, but it was the beginning of Ngāi Tahu Fisheries, which then capitalised Ngāi Tahu Property.

Above: A prayer left at the Meiji Shrine in Harajuku. May all peoples of the world experience the generosity of spirit like that shown by Mr Yamada to us of Ngāi Tahu.

Left – top: Tā Mark Solomon presenting Mr Yamada with the tokotoko Tākurikuri in remembrance of the relationship between Mr Yamada and Bill Solomon; bottom: Mr Yamada gifting to Tā Tipene.



THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION – THE YAMADA-O'REGAN SCHOLARSHIP

In June 1992 Mr Yamada returned to New Zealand where he gifted Ngāi Tahu a traditional noh mask which is now housed in Aoraki, the main boardroom at Te Whare o te Waipounamu. During this visit he also went to Takahanga Marae where he shared thoughts with Bill Solomon on the importance of educating young people.

"I remember sharing some delicious lobster and soup, and during that dinner that Bill Solomon and I talked about the next generations and young people and how important it was to ensure that they would keep on the traditions in which they were born. He talked about it with pride and with anxiety," said Mr Yamada

Post settlement Mr Yamada again displayed his generosity and commitment to the development of indigenous cultures by gifting a substantial fund to establish a trust. As a result, the Ngāi Tahu Mātauranga Trust was established in 2001 to provide and promote educational opportunities for the benefit of Ngāi Tahu whānui.

"When Sir O'Regan came back to see me to repay the loan that I had given the tribe, I thought about that conversation I had with Bill [Solomon] about how important education was for young people, and about all that it meant for all of us, and this is why I decided to say, 'No, why don't you keep it and let's make a scholarship that contributes to the cause of education for Ngāi Tahu people.'"

The objective of the Yamada O'Regan Secondary School Scholarships is to advance Ngāi Tahu secondary school students to complete the school year and successfully attain a secondary school qualification. Named after Masashi Yamada and Tā Tipene O'Regan, these scholarships are a representation of cross-cultural friendship and also profound generosity.

Above: Bill Solomon and Mr Yamada at Takahanga Marae, 1992.

Right: Tā Tipene and Mr Yamada, Tokyo, 2014.

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TOKYO 2023 – A FINAL FAREWELL

Three generations of the Yamada and O'Regan whānau gathered in Tokyo in November 2023 – what was to be a final farewell between Mr Yamada and Tā Tipene. A 10-day trip complete with tears, joy, haka, generosity, and friendship solidified between the two younger generations.

During that visit, there were discussions about another donation from the Yamada group of \$10,000 a year, which the iwi would match to fund an alumni group.

"On the last morning of our stay, he came to say goodbye to us at the hotel. He passed a blue folder to me with documents inside giving us a contribution to the fund of \$1 million," said Tā Tipene O'Regan.

The Yamada-O'Regan friendship will continue through these younger generations, and through Tā Tipene's close friendship with Mr Narimoto, who is credited with facilitating their introduction.

Below: L-R – back: Ben Bateman, Miria O'Regan, Hana O'Regan, Te Rautawhiri Mamaru-O'Regan, Manuhaea Mamaru-O'Regan, Sara Yamada, Yoshikazu Narimoto, Masanobu Yamada, Yoko Yamada; left to right – front: Lady Sandra O'Regan, Tā Tipene O'Regan, Masashi Yamada, Shinji Yamada. Front cover: Tā Tipene and Mr Yamada, Tokyo 2023.

