

## The scam of 1897!

Today with the internet and rapid communication, we are used to scams of all sorts. In the 1890's the following example shows that scams did indeed occur; the only difference was that communication was slower, and what was achieved in 2 years would have occurred in 2 days today. The following item was offered for sale on e bay, and in my regular searching for New Zealand items of interest, I came across the following item with a Maoritanga connection, although you wouldn't guess from the (incorrect) description.

"RARE New Zealand 1898 cover to Jeffersonville, ILL, San Francisco, California"

"RARE!! antique New Zealand 1898 cover to Jeffersonville, ILL, San Francisco, California. 117 Years Old!! Measures about 5.5 x 3 1/4 inches. VG Condition... see photos".

"It will be very carefully packaged to ensure safe arrival".





I bought it blind before researching the item, because at the time I had never heard of Princess Tonomaroanu.

My research revealed a very interesting story!

In late 1897, a Melbourne businessman, a Mr MacFarlane, was on a world cruise with his wife, having passed through New Zealand (and Rotorua) on his way to New York. On arrival in New York, his hotel had published a list of “important guests” in the local paper, explaining that Mr McFarland and his wife were on a world trip. He was hunted out and interviewed by a New York Times reporter. McFarlane was unable to report any newsworthy items except that the Purser had been arrested for smuggling, but showed the reporter some photos from Rotorua including one purported to be of a Maori princess.

The reporter took the photos and said 'I shall weave a pretty story round these,' as he departed, and from that moment forward he was not seen again. On the following day Mr. and Mrs. Macfarlane sailed for Europe, having left instructions that the photographs were to be forwarded on when done with. The sequel contains most of the interest of the story, and certainly all the humour. When Mr. Macfarlane returned to Melbourne a few weeks later he received a letter containing an article cut from the New York Herald of the 8th of January, 1897.

If the letter puzzled him, “the article threw him into a condition of amazement from which he has scarcely yet recovered”. This is how the article began:

“PRINCESS WOULD WED. SHE WANTS TO SEE THE GREAT WORLD AND CARES NOT FOR HER OWN PEOPLE. HAS \$600,000 OF HER OWN. WOULD ALLOW HER WHITE HUSBAND TO SPEND \$35,000 A YEAR ON HIMSELF. WILL BE PRINCE CONSORT”.

It went on to say that “Princess Mary (or Tonomaroanu), of the Royal house of New Zealand, wanted a white husband, and that she had \$600,000 in her own right, together with a good English education. So eager was she for the society of a white companion that she was willing to allow him

\$35,000 (£7000) a-year to spend on himself, conferring on him also the title of Prince Consort. She only stipulated that he would be reasonably young, and 'not a criminal'.

This article was taken up by the newspapers in the USA, Britain, and Australia. The result was a flood of mail and reply paid telegrams to the newspapers and Mr. McFarlane in Melbourne.

The Melbourne "Argus" reported that some 600 letters had been received at the Auckland Post Office – "about a score of them registered, while a number of them are deficient in postage". Some made their way to Rotorua, New Zealand like the example above, and ended up with "Maggie", although she didn't pay the deficient postage!

Pearson's Weekly, a London publication, reproduced the hoax from the New York Times with terrible consequences. The editor complained that he had been inundated with letters. "We have" he said "received thousands – yes, thousands – of applications both by letter enclosing stamped envelope for reply and by reply telegram asking for further particulars. It has taken five of our clerks nearly all the week to do nothing but reply to these letters, and it really looks like some steamship company should charter a special steamer for the purpose of taking out these suitors. What a steamship party that would be! And what a sight would be the landing of the party in Maoriland!"

I am interested in obtaining any scans of similar material. I feel that because of the scam, that very few copies were saved, and that most were committed to the waste paper basket.

L G Chitty