

Media Release
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Historical Signage at Polynesian Spa – The Hysterical; Bogus Beauty; and True Record

A fake beautician called Rachel peddling flim flam; a Roman Catholic Priest with arthritis and a penchant for thermal heat; a water jet massage said to treat ‘hysteria, engorged liver or piles’; and a tourism complex named after the Duchess of York (who then declined to use it).....

These colourful stories are commemorated in newly installed signs at Polynesian Spa, Rotorua, and are part of the Spa’s remarkable, 130 year-old post-European history. The Maori history goes back far further. Maori knew for generations about the alkaline pool Whangapipiro (renamed Rachel Spring, during European times), and the acidic pool Te Pupunitanga (now the Priest Spa).

“The new signs are a touchstone for visitors,” says Managing Director of Polynesian Spa, Martin Lobb. “They reflect a quaint, anachronistic, sometimes amusing but highly significant chronicle of the past. We already know that tourists look for the remarkable history of Rotorua, and here at Polynesian Spa, they are finding absolute authenticity.”

The new signs also feature charming historical photographs of the serious business of health, therapy and relaxation at the foundation of Polynesian Spa.

Polynesian Spa (www.polynesianspa.co.nz) – with its 26 pools and eight therapy rooms - is the only thermal mineral pool and spa treatment complex situated on the shores of Lake Rotorua, overlooking an area known as Sulphur Point. The waters in the lake at Sulphur Point are milky and highly acidic – as the signs point out “birds that nest here have to leave the area each day to find food, as nothing lives in the oxygen-depleted water.”

Polynesian Spa is sited historically, the Ward Baths (1931) and the Pavilion and Duchess Bathhouses (1882) having preceded it on the same land. Polynesian Spa still draws pure, thermal mineral water from the Rachel Spring, Radium Spring and Priest Spa.

Amongst the tales that Polynesian Spa yields – celebrated by the signs – are:

- Where the public (adult) pools are currently, a women’s only pool once was. Women bathed naked there in Rachel Spring’s alkaline water. Rachel was named after a fraudulent European beautician, who claimed ageless beauty from the softening effect of the silicone in the water. Dr Ginders, Superintendent of the Rotorua Sanitorium, seemed to agree! He said (1898) the water gave “a delicious sense of bien etre (well being); the soft satiny

feeling of the skin must be felt to be appreciated.” The signage photo depicts the ladies huddled under the water to preserve their modesty and presumably conserve their youth!

- The blokes had their own hot water to get into. Where the family spa bathing now is, a main pool was filled with Rachel Spring’s silky water. Men could bathe naked there too, in complete privacy. If you needed a bit of help, there was a hoist capable of gently dropping you in – unless you weighed more than 20 stone.
- Father Mahoney, a rheumatically priest, rolled up to the area in 1878 – having heard about the waters. He hand dug a pool, and it filled with the waters of Te Pupunitanga – known now as the Priest Spa. A few months later, he claimed a cure from the soaking! Later, others claimed rather more cures including to ‘reduce plethora and corpulency without prostration’ (!)
- In 1901 The Duchess of Cornwall visited Rotorua and opened the Duchess Bath nearby. She declined to take a dip after the ceremony!
- In 1903, Aix therapies (from Aix-les-Bains, in France) were first introduced to Rotorua. Aix, which are hot water jet massages, are still amongst the most popular therapies at Polynesian Spa. In those days, it was claimed the treatment was a help if you had ‘hysteria, engorged liver or piles’. Nowadays, says Martin Lobb drolly, ‘we believe this very relaxing treatment just pampers you!’.

“Polynesian Spa is unique in New Zealand – and regarded as an outstanding international thermal spa around the world,” says Mr Lobb. “It is also a genuine spa – from the Latin Sanus Per Aquam (health through water). The Romans knew about and strongly believed in the health giving effects of geothermal water. History shows, from these signs which we have now installed, they were not alone in their beliefs!”

Polynesian Spa is a member of The Best Spas of New Zealand
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For Whangapipiro - Rachel Spring & Te Pupunitanga – Priest Spa

http://www.nzetc.org/tm/scholarly/tei-Gov11_07Rail-t1-body-d24.html

<http://www.rotoruamuseum.co.nz/things-to-see-and-do/taking-the-cure-gallery/a-european-tradition/>

<http://www.jeffpylenz.com/Jefferys-blog/WEB/Government%20Gardens%20-%20Rotorua.htm>

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