



The Story of
Venerable
Suzanne
Aubert

Meri
Hōhepa

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COVER PORTRAIT

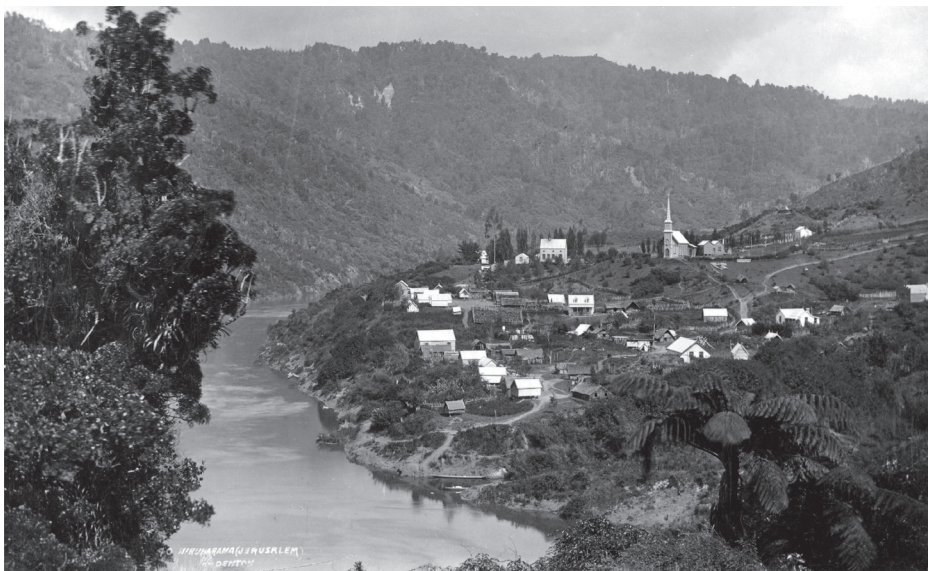
The Sisters of Compassion commissioned this portrait of their Foundress as her cause for canonisation moved forward. Suzanne Aubert (1835 - 1926) is pictured in her full habit with its distinctive wimple and medal.

She stands in front of the Whanganui river with Hiruhārama/Jerusalem in the background.

She is holding kawakawa leaves, symbolic of her vast knowledge of natural health remedies.

Suzanne is also holding her prayer book. True to her “contemplation on the go” as she called it, her finger marks a page showing that while she drew her life from God, her source, she was ever present to those around her.¹

¹ The oil painting was done by The Studio of St John the Baptist, an Auckland-based studio which specialises in sacred art and iconography.



Hiruhārama/Jerusalem from the Whanganui River (c1895).

Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington (Denton collection, G11231/1)



South side of the Jerusalem Convent.
Chapel level 1. Children's dormitory level 2.
Sisters of Compassion Archives



Sisters on horseback, Hiruhārama (1916).
Sisters of Compassion Archives, Wellington

of our Institute."
Suzanne Aubert



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The Sisters at Hiruhārama, in addition to the usual customs of religious life, taught and nursed, farmed newly-cleared bush, tended an orchard, made and marketed medicines, sold fruit to tourists and raised homeless children. The community grew and thrived.



Suzanne and Sister Magdalen, on the collecting tour to raise funds to build a new church and convent.

Sisters of Compassion Archives, Wellington



Suzanne Aubert with a group of Sisters (1894).

Sisters of Compassion Archives, Wellington

The Society of Mary in France, however, was unhappy with the direction the Hiruhārama community had taken. Archbishop Redwood intervened and on 14 October 1892 appointed Suzanne as Mother Superior of the newly-established Daughters of Our Lady of Compassion.

“Never forget that we were primarily founded for them, that our first house was in their woods, that by our vows we are bound to their service. They have the birthright to our love; let us never forsake them. The work of the foundlings, and that of the incurables,



The first Sisters of the Third Order Regular of Mary in New Zealand. Suzanne (on right) with (from left) Sisters Bridget Brownlie, Anne O'Rourke, and Carmel Gallagher.

Sisters of Compassion Archives, Wellington

Suzanne and the Sisters became a familiar sight around Wellington, pushing wicker prams, and collecting food and clothing for the needy, whatever their religious background.

Suzanne's vision and confidence grew, as she tackled her most ambitious project to date. In 1907, following a huge fundraising effort, an impressive Home of Compassion building was opened on the slopes of Island Bay, initially for the care of children and babies. Civic as well as church leaders turned out in force for the opening. The Sisters' non-sectarian approach, and their tireless, practical brand of Christianity, had won the respect of the Wellington community.

Suzanne never stood still. Her next plan was for a home for foundlings in Auckland which, as well as meeting an obvious need, would also open the way for the congregation to move from diocesan status to that of a papal congregation. But times were changing and so were the authorities. While Rome was tightening up controls across the wider Catholic



Soup Kitchen, Buckle Street (1901).

Joseph Zachariah Collection, Sisters of Compassion Archives



Crowd at opening of Home of Compassion (28 April 1907).

Joseph Zachariah collection, Sisters of Compassion Archives, Wellington



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world, ageing Archbishop Redwood's new assistant Thomas O'Shea was ordering Wellington affairs. He and the new Bishop of Auckland, Bishop Cleary, decided to rein in the elderly Suzanne.

It was around this time that this determined and dynamic nun had issues with Church authorities. A report on the Sisters claimed that the Order was over-stretched and made a number of recommendations, three of

which Suzanne could not accept: that the Sisters could no longer work with Māori on the Whanganui River, that they discontinue taking in babies from birth and they operate more within the Catholic parish system.

Since she had arrived in New Zealand, Māori had been part of her life's meaning, and so had the wider mission of unquestioning Christian love for everybody. For Suzanne, Christ was in everyone.



Babies and Sisters gather under the arches on the first floor of the building.
Joseph Zachariah collection, Sisters of Compassion Archives, Wellington