

# William Maxwell Hamilton (1909 – 1992)

William Maxwell Hamilton (Max to family and friends, Bill to his colleagues) was born at Warkworth on 2 July 1909, the fourth and youngest child of William Hamilton and his wife Isabella Wilson. He grew up on the family dairy farm and orchard on the east bank of the Mahurangi River, where he worked long hours throughout his boyhood. Travelling by dinghy and school launch, he attended Warkworth School, and was in the first secondary class when it became a district high school in 1923. He was a pupil-teacher there from 1926 to 1927, matriculated, and left to manage the family farm when his father became ill.



## ***Pomaderris hamiltonii***

*Pomaderris* is an Australian-based genus with eight representatives in New Zealand; five of them endemic. *Pomaderris hamiltonii*, or pale-flowered kumarahou, is a slender, erect, much-branched shrub or small tree, up to 3–4 metres in height. Minute hairs are scattered along the midribs of the upper leaf surface and dense white to grey hairs are arranged in star-shaped clusters on the lower surface. Flowers, which appear in September–October, are pale creamy yellow, 3–4 mm in diameter, in open conical clusters. Several small populations occur from Warkworth to Omaha Bay and on the west coast of the Firth of Thames, usually amongst scrub on roadside banks where it is threatened by roadside “tidying”.

In 1930 he was top student of the short dairy farm management course he took at Massey Agricultural College. With family and university support, he decided to take a full degree in agricultural science, and in 1937 graduated MAgSc with double first-class honours in field husbandry and agricultural economics. His high academic achievement and practical farming experience led to his subsequent career in research leadership and administration.

He joined the Plant Research Bureau of the DSIR in 1936 and the following year was posted to London to relieve New Zealand’s scientific liaison officer at New Zealand House. On his return in 1940, he worked on the development of the linen flax industry for war requirements. In 1945 at Warkworth he married his long-time friend, schoolteacher Alice Annie Morrison. The couple spent their honeymoon on Little Barrier Island and lived in Wellington where they brought up their two sons and a daughter.

Hamilton’s senior management role started in 1948, when he was put in charge of the agricultural section of DSIR. In 1953 he was appointed secretary (later designated director general) of the whole organisation, and he remained in that position until his retirement in 1971. Under his leadership the quality and quantity of scientific output increased dramatically, and the DSIR established an international reputation for excellence in many fields. Hamilton was held in high regard, and his many honours include a CBE in 1970.

Throughout his career his wife Alice supported him with a warm and hospitable home. On his retirement they returned to Warkworth and developed an extensive garden containing many interesting plant treasures and curiosities, which attracted thousands of visitors over the years. His most important botanical work was on the vegetation of Little Barrier Island, where a walking track now bears his name. The type specimen of *Pomaderris hamiltonii*, named for the Hamilton family, came from plants that he grew. His service to science is also commemorated in the naming of the Hamilton Building at the Mount Albert Research Centre.

William Maxwell Hamilton died at his home on 14 August 1992.