

Norman Ambrose Potts (1886 – 1970)

Norman Potts was born in Christchurch in 1886, two years before the death of his grandfather, Canterbury runholder, conservationist and naturalist Thomas Henry Potts. Norman's father, Ambrose, one of Thomas and Emma Potts' thirteen children, managed a large sheep station near Waipukurau in central Hawke's Bay, and there young Norman spent his childhood. One of his early memories was of a trip with his mother to Napier, during which she pointed out a white-bearded old man walking along the street. She said he was Mr Colenso, the famous botanist, diarist and printer who, when his Māori workers at Paihia rebelled at their tedious printing tasks, would follow them to their villages and drive them back to work!



Myosotis pottsiana

Myosotis is a genus of about 50 annual and perennial herbs, commonly known as forget-me-nots, mostly of temperate regions, with some 34 species native to New Zealand. *Myosotis pottsiana* is a short-lived perennial with openly branched stems up to 10 cm or more, and rounded leaf blades that narrow suddenly to a long slender petiole; white flowers, 9–12 mm in diameter, are borne prolifically throughout summer. Favouring forested riverside banks and gorges, usually in sites prone to frequent flooding, it is naturally uncommon and sparsely distributed in the southern Raukumara Range (Waiioeka Gorge), the Galatea Hills and western Te Urewera National Park. Its few small populations are threatened by animal browsing and weeds.

Norman Potts became a lawyer, and in 1916 founded the Opotiki law firm Potts and Hodgson that still carries his name. He was also an avid botanist, plant collector and explorer of the more inaccessible places in New Zealand, especially locally in the Raukumara and Urewera areas. In Opotiki he is remembered mainly for his work in the Hukutaia Domain, an area of forest centred on the sacred Māori burial tree Taketakerau, and set aside as a reserve in 1918. Norman Potts was appointed chairman of the Domain Board in 1933, and largely due to his planning and energy, Hukutaia Domain became one of the finest public collections of native plants in New Zealand. By 1970 an estimated 7000 plantings had been made, almost all by Norman Potts himself, of local coastal species augmented by other native plants, especially those in danger of extinction, collected from around the country. These were all labelled, with their places of origin and Māori or common names if known.

On his explorations Potts undertook botanical transects, describing species sequences as well as topographical information. He gathered plant material and corresponded with other botanists, and made seeds, plants and information about the New Zealand flora available to public gardens and societies. One of his discoveries, a small and rare tutu known only from near East Cape, was grown for several years at Hukutaia before W R B Oliver formally described and named it *Coriaria pottsiana*. Lucy M Moore commemorated him in a low-altitude native forget-me-not, *Myosotis petiolata* var. *pottsiana*, which in 2013 was elevated to full species status. It was found around 1952 in a small area near Opotiki, and brought into cultivation by its discoverers Marc Heginbotham and Norman Potts. Thought extinct in 1981, plants have since been found in a few other localities in the region.

For his work in the protection and cultivation of New Zealand plants, Norman Potts was awarded the Loder Cup in 1944.

He died on 16 November 1970, at the age of 84 years, predeceasing his wife Myra who died in 1984, aged 96. Both are buried in the Opotiki Cemetery. Also there, is the grave of K-force veteran and orchardist Wardill Frederick Potts (1932–2011), probably their son. The Hinuera stone gateway and seat at the entrance to Hukutaia Domain was dedicated by the many friends of Norman Potts as a memorial to him.