In Tome 3 of his unpublished journal, Father Padel of the Marist Mission in Samoa recorded that on the 9th and 10th of February 1852 he and his compatriot, Jules Tirel, removed 500 Tokelauans from the atoll of Fakaofo, leaving “only 40 or 50 individuals... mostly old and sick people..., a few women who had hidden themselves and a few young people whom we obliged to remain to care for their old and sick parents”. Those that were removed were taken to Wallis (Uvea) “where they might find at the same time life of the soul and of the body”. This removal, at the time of its instigation by Monseigneur Batallion and in later mission publications, was celebrated as a humanitarian rescue of Tokelauans who were dying of famine. However, a close examination of Father Padel’s first-hand account and a consideration of preceding and subsequent events and circumstances suggest other interpretations.

My paper reproduces Father Padel’s journal account, places the event in historical context, traces its subsequent recounting both in Marist Mission publications and in Tokelau oral histories.