

PACIFIC MANUSCRIPTS BUREAU

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Trip Report

PMB fieldwork in Micronesia

30 April – 24 May 2016



The Marshall Islands Journal sign outside the business in Majuro

Summary

The main purpose of this trip was to:

- Copy baptism, marriage and death registers of the Mt.Carmel Catholic Church in Saipan.
- Copy The Marshall Islands Journal newspaper in Majuro, Marshall Islands.
- Attend and present at the Pacific History Association conference, Guam.

Whilst working in Micronesia, the following manuscript titles were digitised:

PMB MS 1420 Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church, Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Baptism, first communion, confirmation, marriage and death registers, and other church archives, 1850-. PDF. Restricted Access.

PMB Doc 543 The Marshall Islands Journal, 1965- . PDF. Available for reference.

In 2015 the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau Management Committee asked me to investigate the possibility of undertaking some preservation copying work for the PMB member libraries in Micronesia. The Pacific History Association conference was to be held in Guam in May 2016 so I decided to make the most of the trip to Micronesia and undertake some preservation copying work whilst in the region. Early in 2016 Paul D'Arcy, the Chair of the Bureau, and I emailed several academic, library and archive colleagues who have or are currently working in Micronesia to investigate their ideas for preservation copying work in the region. Several suggestions for copying projects came forward. We chose to digitise important Catholic Church records held in Saipan and the Marshall Islands Journal newspaper held in Majuro, Marshall Islands.

Before departing Australia I needed to be sure that the PMB equipment would work in the places I was to visit. The Bureau already had U.S. electrical adaptors for the wall sockets and I purchased a "step-up" transformer for the PMB lights. This meant that although the voltage was 110 volts, the "step-up" transformer converted the voltage to 240 volts. There were no issues with the electricals during the fieldwork. The copying table lights were quite hot at times, but I turned them off whenever they were not needed and they cooled down.

After departing Canberra I travelled to Sydney then via Manila to Guam and then straight on to Saipan. It was a long journey of around 26 hours door to door so I was glad when I finally arrived in Saipan. Fr. Ryan Jimenez, the Parochial Vicar of the Diocese of Chalan Kanoa in Saipan kindly arranged a hire car and accommodation for me at the Kanoa resort in Saipan. Father Ryan is currently the Bishop-Elect for the Diocese of Chalan Kanoa and is due to be ordained bishop on 14 August 2016.

Catholic records in Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas

The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands is comprised of a series of 14 islands in the Western Pacific Ocean. The islands are volcanic and coral in form and are part of the Mariana chain, along with Guam. To the east of the chain lies the Marianas Trench, the deepest point in the surface of the earth.

During a short five day visit I listed 133 registers held in the Canonical Records Room in the Mt. Carmel Church rectory office. Twenty-eight of these registers were digitised, a total of 3983 individual pages.

The collection includes birth, first communion, confirmation, marriage and death registers held at the Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church, Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. The collection also includes indexes to registers, parish family registers (1910-1911), files with copies of civil registrations, lists of Chamorro families who were residing in Yap, c.1890-1948, lists of names of Chamorro people who returned to Saipan from Yap, Pagan, Ponpei, Palau, Anatahne, Alimagan, Japan, San Francisco after 1944 and some loose individual baptism certificates as well as lists of people who died during World War II on Saipan.

Some of the volumes are in Latin and old Spanish. The first three volumes that were copied relate to the period from 1856-1905 when Saipan was governed by the Spanish. Key local names that appear in the registers during this period include Borja, Kwabero, Kamachos,

Cruz and Delion Gerero. During the 1860s and 1890s more people returned to Saipan as it became the main centre for the Northern Mariana Islands.

Following the governance of the Mariana Islands under the German (1899-1914), Japanese and American governments, the Spanish Jesuits took over the pastoral care of the Northern Mariana Islands. Prior to WWII the Mariana Islanders were under Japanese rule. The Japanese did not encourage the pastoral activities of the Church and many adjustments were made to the demands of the Japanese rulers. One modification was that Sunday Mass was held very early in the morning before sunrise.

The end of WWII brought the Church in the Mariana Islands together under the Americans. The Spanish Capuchin missionaries who had been serving on Guam since the late 19th century extended their mission field to the Northern Marianas and assigned at least one priest to each of the islands of Saipan and Rota. After WWII many local people joined the church. As more clergy were available, the number of clergy assigned to the Northern Marianas increased. There was also a shift from the status of a mission station to that of a parish and eventually the establishment of other parishes.

Spanish missionaries had been active throughout the Southern Arc Islands of the Marianas Archipelago (Guam, Rota, Agiguan, Tinian and Saipan) since 1668. However the first parish was established in the village of Garapan (Our Lady of Mt. Carmel). Tanapag parish was predominantly made up of Carolinian people. Garapan was the name of the parish and the main village from the Spanish period until after the battle of Saipan (15 June through 9 July 1944) when it was raised to the ground. After this, the local population moved to Chalan Kanoa village and the Church of Our Lady of Carmel was established on 14 December 1949. The Church in Garapan was then changed to Kristo Rai Church (Church of Christ the King). The Catholic Church in the Northern Marianas post WWII included Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church, Saipan, Kristo Rai village, San Jose, San Antonia, San Vicente, Santa Remedios church (also known as Tanapag), San Roque church.



Some of the Catholic parish churches on the island of Saipan

On June 15 1955, Jose Leonl Guerrero became the first local diocesan priest. Father Guerrero died in December 1975 after more than 20 years of dedicated priestly life.

On 8 November 1984 the Diocese of Chalan Kanoa was created. On 13 January 1985 Monsignor Tomas Aguon Camacho, from Chalan Kanoa in Saipan, was ordained and installed as its first Bishop. Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church became its' cathedral and patroness of the diocese. In 2016 the Diocese of Chalan Kanoa is composed of eleven parishes and one mission parish. Each of the traditional villages on the islands of Saipan, Tinian and Rota constitutes a parish except for the villages of Susupe and Chalan Kanoa which are combined to form the Mount Carmel Cathedral Parish. Each of the northern islands has a chapel and is designed as a mission. Bishop Camacho retired on 6 April 2010 and Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church is currently administered by Fr. Ryan is to be ordained the Bishop of Chalan Kanoa on 14 August 2016.



Fr. Ryan with Kylie Moloney with the PMB digital camera set up ready to copy Church registers at Mt. Carmel Church.

The court of the Northern Mariana Islands holds no birth, marriage or death records prior to 1950. The records for the Northern Mariana Islands prior to 1950 are held by the Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church rectory in Saipan. These records are highly sought after for genealogical and land research as well as for individuals needing proof of identity for social security documents. Due to the sensitivity of the information held in the registers the Church has placed a "Restricted Access" condition on the Bureau's digitised copies. Individuals who wish to access these PMB titles must write to the Bishop-elect, Fr. Ryan Jimenez (Bishop as of 14 August 2016) of the Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church to ask for permission.

I especially wish to thank Genevieve Cabrera for assisting in the arrangement and descriptions of the Mt. Carmel Church archive collection. Genevieve is a knowledgeable historian of Chamorro heritage who generously volunteered each afternoon and helped me organise and copy the collection. Genevieve's knowledge of the history of the Church and CNMI was invaluable when deciphering and listing the contents of the church registers. Genevieve told me the story of Fr. Jose Maria Tardio hiding church registers in cloth and large biscuit tins during the war and burying them under the Church belfry tower in order to protect them from damage.

"Fr. Jose Maria Tardio and his trusted Carolinian acolyte placed the canonical records of the church in large biscuit tins and buried them inside the belfry. The tins would have been Japanese tins used for Japanese dried food stuffs. There were no American goods readily available on Saipan at the time and most especially from 1938 when all travel to, from, and in between the Mariana Islands was no longer permitted save for military-related activities. Fr. Tardio, a Spanish Jesuit, entrusted his acolyte to not breathe a word about the church records until after the war and only to a church priest should he, Fr. Tardio, not survive the Battle for Saipan." [Story from Genevieve Cabrera, August 2016].

Items 1420_006, 1420_007 and 1420_008 are Chamorro translations of the early Spanish baptism, marriage and death registers. The translations were made by Father Palermo who was the first local Chamorro priest in the CMNI region.

Recent religious data shows that between 79% and 83% of the CNMI population are baptized Catholics. The remaining population are Protestants and non-Christians. This figure has remained steady for many years, even with a great increase in migrant workers, as the majority of workers enter the CNMI come from the Federated States of Micronesia, Philippines and other Asian countries like Bangladesh, China, Korea, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand. It is estimated that there are over 53,000 Catholics in the Diocese of Chalan Kanoa. The ethnic distribution of Catholics in order of proportion is Chamorro, Carolinian, Filipino, other Micronesian, Korean and American.

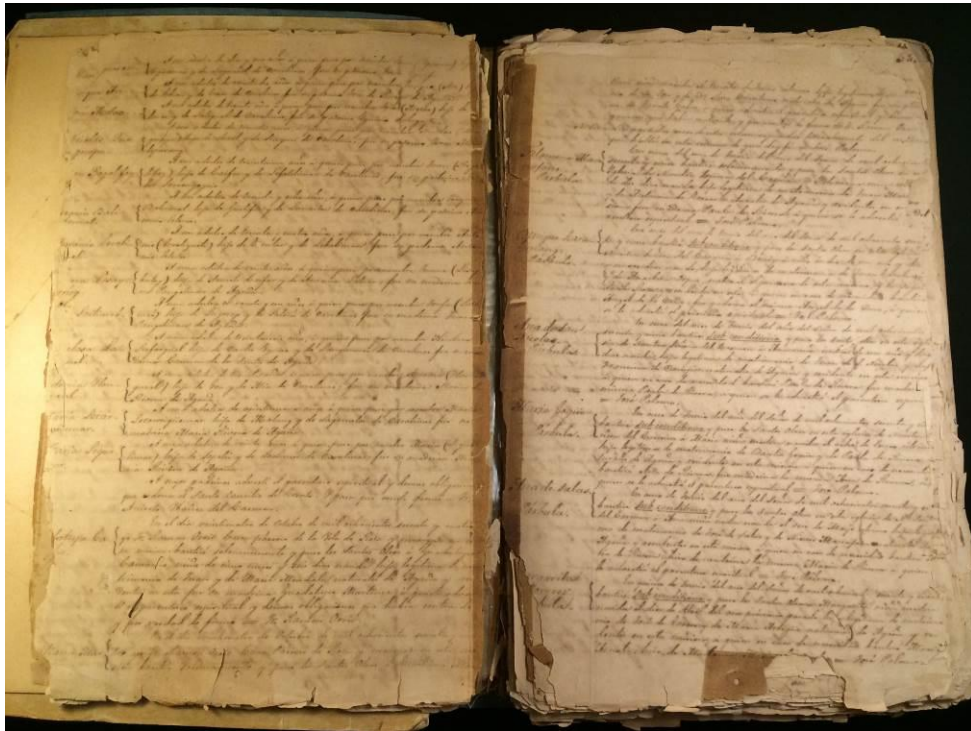
References: 2016 Catholic Directory, Diocese of Chalan Kanoa, prepared by Lolita M. Babauta and reviewed and approved by Rev. Fr. Ryan P. Jimenez (Apostolic Administrator)

The earliest register I copied dated from 1856.



One of the earliest baptism registers copied by the Bureau, signed by Fr. Palermo in 1889.

Many of the registers were large and cumbersome to handle. Some of them had water damage with signs of ink bleeding on the pages. Many of the old bindings were brittle and the paper was very fragile and easily tore. Some of the volumes were bound very tightly. I worked very slowly and carefully taking care of the original registers when copying them.



A photograph showing the fragile nature of the registers that were copied.

Whilst working at the Mt. Carmel rectory office I was invited to visit the Church archive and library in the Mt. Carmel Curia building. I was asked by Fr. Ryan to offer advice on the storage conditions of the archive, library workflows and archiving systems. Fr. Ryan asked Angie at the Mt. Carmel Church rectory office to show me the FileMaker Pro database that stores current registry information. I offered Fr. Ryan advice on updating the database and migrating it to a new computer and software package.

Whilst in Saipan I visited Scott Russell who formerly worked for the Historic Preservation Office (HPO) in Saipan and now works at the Northern Mariana Islands Humanities Council. He informed me that not all files were lost in the HPO office fire in the 1980s. He said the HPO collection includes file folders and archival boxes of obscure publications on the Northern Mariana Islands. The collection includes some unpublished materials and some copies of documents acquired from other institutions such as the Library of Congress. Scott said that the HPO office has a photographic collection but it is not well organised. The HPO office in Saipan currently has no historian, but has recently appointed a new archivist. The NMI Humanities Council initiative makes contact with researchers and others world wide with the aim of digitally repatriating any material relating to the NMI. Dirk Spennerman has assisted in the repatriation of German materials and the NMI material held in Rome is currently being digitised.

In 2012 the first Marianas history conference was held with the assistance of Guampedia and the University of Guam. The conference proved successful, especially the workshops where local people were encouraged and taught how to undertake historical research. Marianas history conferences were also held in 2013 and 2015.

I was unable to arrange a visit to the Micronesia Area Research Centre in Saipan. The MARC centre has a large collection of early administration material relating to Saipan which has been microfilmed in-house.

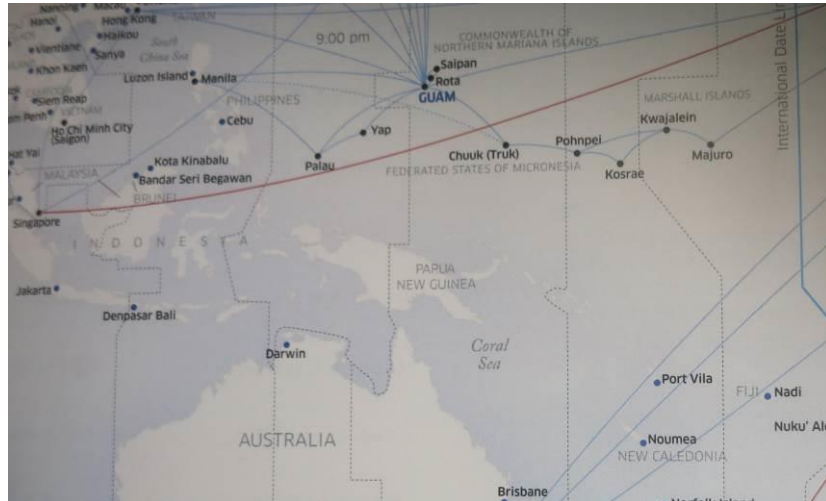
Genevieve Cabrera kindly took me on a tour of the island of Saipan on Sunday where I visited Banzai cliff, and learned about the Battle of Saipan from 15 June – 9 July 1944 as well as the history of the Chamorro people of Saipan.



Banzai Cliff, Saipan.

Marshall Islands

From Saipan I caught an aeroplane at 4am on Monday 9 May from Saipan to Guam. In Guam I transferred to the United Airlines Island Hopper aeroplane from Guam to Majuro landing at Chuuk, Pohnpei, Kosrae, Kwajelin and then Majuro in the Marshall Islands. The plane landed and broke very fast on each of the small islands as the runways are extremely short. Local people hopped off and on at each of the stops with their cargo, including eskys containing fresh fish, local vegetables, handicrafts and boxes of live tropical fish.



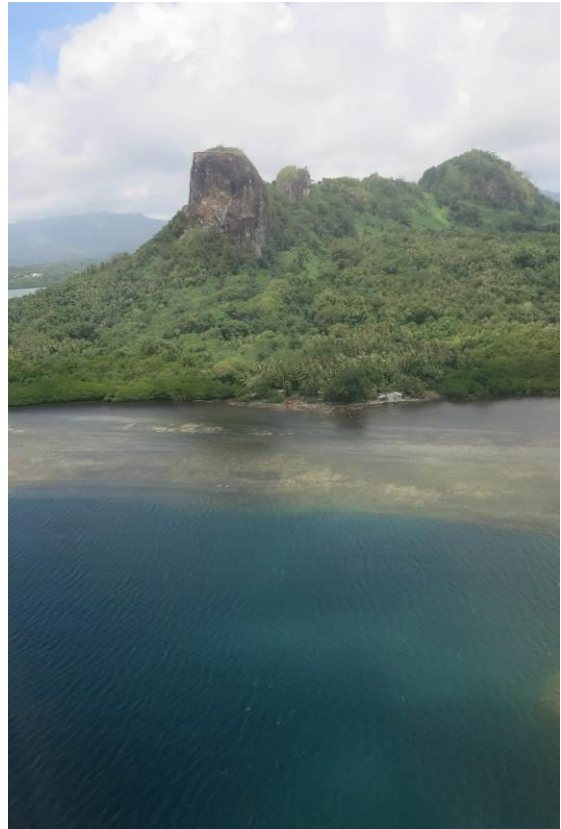
Map showing the route of the Island Hopper to get from Guam to Chuuk, Pohnpei, Kosrae, Kwajalein and Majuro



Departing Chuuk



Departing from Kosrae



Arriving into Pohnpei

I arrived in Majuro in the evening and was met by Ingrid Ahlgren, a PhD student from the Australian National University who also works as a casual employee at the Bureau. Ingrid has lived in the Marshall Islands for several years, is fluent in Marshallese and has many local contacts.

On our first day of work at the Marshall Islands Journal we met Joe Murphy, Giff Johnson and the staff of the Marshall Islands Journal. The Journal began publications in the mid-1960s. The staff kindly cleared a small office space where old issues of the Journal were held so that we could be close to the collection. It was very hot working in the confined space, however the staff provided a pedestal fan which provided some airflow. Joe Murphy generously provided accommodation for Ingrid and I during our week long stay in Majuro.



Joe Murphy, Kylie Moloney and Ingrid Ahlgren in the room where we digitised the Marshall Islands Journal.

The Marshall Islands Journal was copied as PMB Doc 543. The copying was relatively smooth although many of the early issues had been laminated, which meant that the newspaper had not decayed at all due to the humid and tropical environment. The laminated pages did cause some light reflection problems for our digital copying. The early editions are particularly interesting with hand drawn illustrations and interesting advertisements and news features.

The Marshall Islands has been experiencing drought for several years and is extremely dry. We joined the local people in their relief when it began to rain however rain in the islands is never light and the large downpours meant that parts of the roof under which we were copying, began to leak. We managed to continue digitising the newspaper, even when a local visitor – a hermit crab – crawled through the coral wall and onto the copying table of the room we were working in!



Hermie, our new friend crawled out of the coral wall and onto our copying table when the downpour of rain started... just to see what we were doing!

Giff Johnson kindly showed us the *Marshall Islands Journal* printing press in action on Thursday evening. It was a privilege to witness the fine-tuned production line of a well-oiled machine and workers printing out the weekly newspaper that has been published in Majuro for over 50 years!





The production line for the weekly print run of The Marshall Islands Journal. Some old printing presses in another section of the print room. There was an overwhelming smell of oil and ink in these rooms and the machines were very very noisy.

There were a few power outages – some planned and others not (!) – during our week of work however the power outages meant we were able to stop digitising and follow up with local meetings. We met with Bill Graham who has worked for many years on the Nuclear Claims Tribunal. Bill and his staff have been working with Trudy Peterson, the former Acting

Archivist of the United States from 1993-1995, to digitise the tribunal records. A series of grants have funded this work and by mid 2016 the work will be complete. The digitised records, some which have closure periods, will be deposited with the Swiss Federal Archives and the College of the Marshall Islands. The College of the Marshall Islands has offered to take the original records.

Ingrid and I met with Molly Helkena the Acting Secretary of Internal Affairs to talk about possible PMB project in the Marshall Islands, especially the archives held at Alele Museum. Molly confirmed that the Marshall Islands has a National Archives Act (1989) however a National Archivist or building has never been established, see: http://www.paclii.org/cgi-bin/sinodisp/mh/legis/consol_act_2004/naa1989176/naa1989176.html?stem=&synonyms=&query=Public%20Records Molly encouraged us to meet with Carol Curtis at the Alele Museum. Ingrid arranged for us to meet with Carol at the Alele museum on 12 May. The roof of the Alele museum was damaged in a large storm a few years ago. Many of the collections and boxes on the top floor of the Alele museum were damaged and remain unsorted. Carol showed us the De Brum archive collection which is safely stored in a secure room in the downstairs area of the Museum. Before the Bureau can copy this important collection permission and agreement from all family members needs to be sought. The ownership of this collection is complex and held by different De Brum family members. The Bureau has offered to digitally preserving this material however the De Brum family are yet to come to an agreement on whether or not the Bureau can work with this archive. Ingrid and I also made a visit to the University of the South Pacific campus on Majuro where we met with Taufa Domona, USP Librarian. I was delighted to see the Bureau's poster and pamphlet on the wall encouraging USP students to search the PMB's digital catalogue.



Taufa Domona and Kylie in front of the Pambu poster at USP Library in Majuro.

Ingrid and I continued our work making copies the *Marshall Islands Journal* that are not available elsewhere. Joe Murphy, the owner of the Marshall Islands Journal gave the Bureau permission to source and copy “missing” editions of the *Marshall Islands Journal* in order to make a full set. The Bureau will work with the University of Hawaii and the Mitchell Library in order to fill the gaps of this collection.

Ingrid kindly took me to a nearby island on Sunday where we relaxed and saw some beautiful fish snorkelling. There is very little fresh food in Majuro so I was delighted when Ingrid introduced me to the “bob fruit pandanus” a local fruit which is extremely sweet.

After finishing as much work as Ingrid and I could complete in a short 7 day visit to Majuro I boarded the island hopper plane to return to Guam for the Pacific History Association conference. The Pacific Arts Association conference was beginning the same week as the PHA conference and many local people, elders and youth, boarded the island hopper plane with an air of excitement wearing costumes and carrying dance ornaments and gifts on board. The plane felt very heavy to me, however it managed to take off and land on each of the small island states as we headed West towards Guam.

PHA Conference in Guam

I arrived one day early for the PHA conference in Guam and took the opportunity to visit the library in the University of Guam and the Micronesia Area Research Centre archive. At the MARC centre I met Omaira Brunal-Perry who gave me a tour of their extensive archive of Spanish documents collected over the past 20+ years. Omaira said that the University of Guam would be willing to join the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau if they were offered a discount island membership rate. She said the University of Guam MARC centre and Spanish documents centre would be most keen to assist the Bureau with digitisation projects of the older titles within the MARC collections and with missing issues of Micronesian newspapers.

The theme of the 22nd PHA Conference held in Guam was *Mo’na: our pasts before us*. Eleanor Kleiber from the University of Hawaii and I developed a library and archive panel for the PHA conference in Guam which included the following presentations:

1. Making history. Opetia Alefaio, National Archives of Fiji
2. Genealogies of the Marshall Islands. Wilbert Alik, College of the Marshall Islands and Eleanor Kleiber, University of Hawaii at Mānoa.
3. Patrolling the past: Bringing Papua New Guinea Colonial-Era Reports into the Digital Realm. Kathy Creely and Cristela Garcia-Spitz, University of California San Diego Library.
4. Making Pacific language materials discoverable: Changing how we describe language at the University of Hawai’i Library’s Pacific Collection. Eleanor Kleiber, University of Hawaii at Mānoa.
5. Wherever you may be... improving access to Pacific Island archives. Kylie Moloney, Pacific Manuscripts Bureau.
6. Archival project at the RFT Micronesian Area Research Center under the auspices of the National Historical and Publications Commission, NHPRC. Antonio Perry, University of Guam.



Delegates of the 2016 PHA conference at the University of Guam.

Thank you

I would like to thank the following people for their support and assistance during my stay.

Fr. Ryan, Mt. Carmel Church, Saipan

Sr. Emma Lusterio, Fr. Harold Funa, Fr. Ken Hezel and the office staff at Mt. Carmel Cathedral, Saipan

Genevieve Cabrera, Saipan

Joe Murphy and Giff Johnson at the Marshall Islands Journal

Ingrid Ahlgren, PhD candidate at the Australian National University

Kylie Moloney
Executive Officer
Pacific Manuscripts Bureau
July 2016



Reef with Pohnpei in the distance. Micronesia is made up of over 2000 thousand small islands and coral attols. The total ocean area within the perimeter of the islands is 7,400,000 square kilometres.