

Pambu

The monthly newsletter of the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau,
Research School of Pacific Studies,
Australian National University, Canberra.

No. 1

August, 1968

VIVID PLANTER'S DIARY COPIED FOR PACIFIC RESEARCH LIBRARIES

Microfilm copies of a vivid day-by-day diary kept by an Australian planter in the New Hebrides at the turn of the century will be distributed soon to the four sponsoring libraries of the newly-established Pacific Manuscripts Bureau at the Australian National University.

The diary contains frequent references to wars between native tribes of the Hog Harbour area of the island of Espiritu Santo. It gives a lively account of a planter's problems and difficulties, and describes, among other things, a gruesome custom in which the widow of a deceased chief publicly committed suicide by hanging herself from a tree.

The diary was kept in 1905 by the late Maurice M. Witts, the first European to walk across Espiritu Santo from west to east. It was made available to the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau for copying by his daughter, Mrs B.L. Tyler, of Burradoo, New South Wales.

The Bureau was established several months ago in the ANU's Research School of Pacific Studies to locate and obtain copies of unpublished documents of value concerning the Pacific Islands for four world libraries specialising in Pacific research. The libraries are the National Libraries of Australia and New Zealand; the Mitchell Library, Sydney; and the Library of the University of Hawaii, Honolulu.

The executive officer of the Bureau is Mr Robert Langdon, formerly assistant editor of the Pacific Islands Monthly.

Mr Langdon announced in July that the microfilm of the Witts diary was one of a batch of six, covering five different South Seas territories, which would be sent out soon to the four Pacific research libraries.

The other microfilms contained copies of:

* A miscellaneous collection of documents concerning the Roman Catholic Church in the Northern Solomon Islands. These documents comprised letters, reports, diaries and histories written between 1900 and 1936, mainly by missionaries stationed in the Solomons.

* Notes on Tongan history and Tongan legends by a noted Methodist missionary in Tonga, the Rev. J.E. Moulton.

* Three volumes of genealogies, beginning in 1904, of the people at the Roman Catholic mission station at Weipa, Mekeo District, Papua.

* Three documents on pre-World War II Nauru - an account of the island by the late Commander Rupert C. Garsia, the Australian Administrator from 1933 to 1938; a diary kept on the island from 1934 to 1938 by Commander Garsia's wife; and an account of medical work on the island by the government medical officer of that era, Dr Clouston.

* The issues of a Tongan language newspaper, Taumua Lelei, for the period June, 1929 to October, 1939.

Mr Langdon said that as Taumua Lelei was a published document it was, strictly speaking, outside the scope of his bureau to obtain copies of it. However, as no files of the paper were known to exist outside Tonga, it had been decided to microfilm it when an opportunity to do so arose.

Mr Langdon said that since the establishment of the bureau, there had been a remarkably generous response from present and former Islands residents, and from scholars, missionaries and administrators to allow valuable documents in their possession to be microfilmed for deposit in the four research libraries.

One scholar, for example, had given the bureau a microfilm of official records on Nauru from the German archives, together with translations of these records into English. This material would be deposited in the research libraries when the translations had been revised and checked.

Other people had promised to make available the diary of a famous beachcomber of the Pacific, William Diaper; a miscellaneous

collection of documents concerning Norfolk Island; various records of the Presbyterian Church and London Missionary Society; and the diary of a former British District Agent in the New Hebrides.

The bureau also had high hopes of obtaining an unpublished, four-volume history of New Guinea aviation; the papers of a noted former missionary of Fiji; an account of the manners and customs of a little-known Papuan tribe; and the diaries of a solitary European settler on one of the most remote islands in the New Hebrides.

Mr Langdon added that he would be pleased to hear from anyone who either knew of, or possessed, any manuscript relating to the Pacific Islands. Letters should be addressed to him at: Pacific Manuscripts Bureau, The Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University, Box 4, P.O., Canberra, A.C.T. 2600, Australia.

NOTE: This, the No. 1 and August, 1968, issue of PAMBU, is being released in December, 1968, in response to numerous requests for copies of the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau's Newsletter No. 1, which was issued on July 17, 1968, and which is now out of print. PAMBU No. 1, which had not previously been issued, contains precisely the same material as Newsletter No. 1, except that an erroneous initial has been corrected. PAMBU No. 1 is making its appearance after Nos. 2, 3 and 4 in the series for the reasons that appear hereafter.

When Newsletter No. 1 was issued, the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau had no thought of bringing out a regular monthly bulletin for general distribution. It was merely intended that a page or two of notes on the Bureau's activities should be issued from time to time for the information of librarians in the Bureau's member-libraries. However, Newsletter No. 1 was also written with the idea in mind that it would be intelligible to anyone else interested in the Bureau's establishment and so that it could be reprinted in any newspaper or periodical covering Pacific affairs.

Newsletter No. 1 aroused an unexpectedly large amount of interest and this prompted the Bureau to begin producing a regular monthly newsletter with somewhat broader aims than Newsletter No. 1. So PAMBU was born. However, in bringing PAMBU into the world in September, 1968, a bibliographic problem was created. Should the first issue be described as No. 1? Or should the prior existence of the nameless Newsletter No. 1 be recognised as the first in the series and the first issue of PAMBU labelled No. 2? Rightly or wrongly, the Bureau decided to acknowledge Newsletter No. 1 as its

first-born and to call the first edition of PAMBU to appear, No. 2. The result was that a number of librarians and others immediately wanted to know if they could have copies of PAMBU No. 1. Where such parties did not already have copies of Newsletter No. 1, the Bureau obliged them with copies of that newsletter, together with the explanation that Newsletter No. 1 was, in fact, PAMBU No. 1 minus the name.

Now, copies of Newsletter No. 1 have been exhausted, but as requests for them continue to come in, the Bureau has decided to reprint the newsletter as PAMBU No. 1 for August, 1968, and thus regularise the series.

Robert Langdon

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