Preface

This book is the product of a long-sustained, yet desultorily applied, personal curiosity. Hence its somewhat random and eclectic composition. It is, in part at least, a harvest of uncoordinated enquiries in response to a plethora of diverse yet cognate stimuli. These include a plethora of tantalising gaps that have been left in the works of other writers on the history of the Pacific islands;\(^1\) seductively intriguing entries in archival finding lists; and puzzlement about the authorship of books on which one might draw without appreciating their provenance. Such encounters prompted questions. Who were these people and where did they come from? What else did they do? What became of them when they passed beyond the range of the records in which one first encountered them, and what more might be said of them?

The responses evoked by such questions, though, have gone beyond building a set of personal profiles. They are also designed to illuminate and test the panoply of generalisations and abstractions, the identifying of processes and the thematic essaying that are the stock-in-trade of historical analysis and reconstruction. The individuals are not isolates. They are also able to be comprehended within categories which subsume singularity: be it indigenes, colonisers, settlers, missionaries, traders, administrators, writers, patriots and so on. The particular and the collective, like the concrete and the conceptual, are distinctive entities; but these figures can be seen as representative of people operating in the Pacific within the period ranging from the early nineteenth century to World War II. Those whose stories are told here may be seen as being complementary within a broad context of historical experience.

Thus, the Sinclairs of New Zealand, progenitors of the Robinsons of Hawai‘i, were scarcely ‘typical’ of nineteenth century settlers in the Pacific. Yet they were part of—and their story helps illuminate it—a major migrant outflow from Europe that had profound implications in many parts of the world, not least for the Pacific islands and their indigenous inhabitants. The Pacific was a magnet for footloose Europeans of various kinds: missionaries (Pierre Chanel), merchants (Niels Sorensen, Ernest Allen, John Strasburg), writers (Constance Gordon-Cumming, Beatrice Grimshaw, Lucy Cheesman), colonial officials (Hector MacQuarrie, Donald Kennedy), and a stimulus for visionaries (Cardinal Moran) and scholars (Patrick O’Reilly). The native islanders, too, were an essential part of these enterprises: responding and resisting, becoming literate, acquiring

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\(^1\) For a welcome exception to this comment, see Mike Butcher, ‘… when the long trick’s over’: Donald Kennedy in the Pacific, Kennington, Vic., 2012.
new tastes in consumer goods and asserting themselves (W.J. Watriama, George Bogese, Jacob Vouza) against what they found disagreeable. And, of course, having their futures profoundly shaped by these enterprises.

For the promiscuous inquisitiveness that generated these essays, musing about the Robinsons of Ni’ihau offers a case in point. It was an unanticipated by-product of a trip to Hawai’i to conduct research on World War II in the Solomon Islands. My immediate interest in the Robinsons was born not of their notorious reclusiveness, but by the attention directed to their island through its being terrorised by Shigemori Nishikaichi, a Japanese air force pilot who crash-landed there following the treacherous and (in hindsight) ill-advised raid on Pearl Harbor on the morning of Sunday 7 December 1941. That assault propelled the United States actively into the conflict; and, so led to the turning point of the conflict in the Pacific, the Guadalcanal landings on 7 August 1942.  

Awareness of the events that took place on Ni’ihau prompted the question ‘who were these folk among whom Shigemori had landed’? It need not have, but it did. Similarly, puzzlement over the far from self-evident causal connection between the death of Pierre Chanel on Futuna in 1841 and his canonisation in 1954 led to the examination of a well-known Pacific incident in its more arcane European context. Even more puzzling, were references to a ‘King of the Loyalty Islands’ in the National Archives of Australia finding lists, when none of the many publications on Pacific kingdoms (a markedly Polynesian phenomenon) mentions such a being. But the misnomer did prompt a richly paper-generating investigation of William Jacob Watriama from that district in France’s dependency of New Caledonia, in southern Melanesia. Possibly the essay of most adventitious—and convivial—provenance is that on E.F. Allen. Over lunch one day, Beverley Simmons, an Auckland friend with Samoan connections (her father, Gordon Bryant, had been employed there on the Reparations Estates established by the New Zealand regime which replaced the German one in 1914) commented that an acquaintance of hers, Tanumafili Allen, had written a family history. Then, work on the history of Tuvalu brought Donald Kennedy, who would later achieve fame in the Solomon Islands during World War II, more clearly into view. And the story of his Solomons career could not properly be told without that of that of his indigenous deuteragonist: hence the story of George Bogese. And so it went on. Who were those women whose works occasionally appeared in footnotes: Constance Gordon-Cumming, Beatrice Grimshaw, Evelyn Cheesman? (J.C. Beaglehole, for instance, usefully draws on the latter in his edition of Captain James Cook’s account of the New Hebrides.) If there is a deity revealing suitable subjects for closer scrutiny, he/she has been working steadily, unpredictably and resourcefully.

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While the book may lack the inherent thematic unity of a monograph or of a single biography, the people presented herein may be deemed to constitute a ‘company’ in two significant senses, even if (despite the title) they do not fit together like Rudyard Kipling’s *Stalky and Co*. In the first case, they may be taken as samples of the diverse range of influences that impacted on the Pacific and helped shape its future. Of course, the various island peoples already had well-established—and enduring—cultures and identities when Europeans began arriving off their shores, following Magellan’s crossing of the ocean in 1520–1521. But there were marked regional differences and similarities. Hence, the convenient (if scarcely infallible) geographical arrangement of the Pacific into three broad ethno-cultural categories by Dumont d’Urville in 1832: Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia.\(^4\) Among the many dates making European activity a significant part of indigenous Pacific history, one may (arbitrarily!) cite 1788, the foundation of Sydney; 1797, the arrival of the London Missionary Society missionaries in Tahiti; and, 1869, the completion of the American transcontinental railway, which magnified the relevance of shipping to and from the port of San Francisco to the Pacific.

Then there is the second sense of ‘company’. In having their stories grouped within the same set of covers, the people presented herein are placed within an honourable historiographic tradition. The pattern was set by *Pacific Islands Portraits*, edited by J.W. Davidson and Deryck Scarr of The Australian National University, and published in 1970. That volume was a harvest of essays that served as a manifesto for the emerging discipline of Pacific history, of which Davidson was the founding professor.\(^5\) From a political perspective, that discipline was designed to help make peoples who were moving from colonial subjection to being citizens of self-governing and independent states more comprehensible to the world at large, and to present them and their experiences on their own terms. Nine years later a complementary volume titled *More Pacific Islands Pacific Portraits* appeared, edited by Scarr; preceded in 1978 by a related, but more narrowly focused, collection of *Papua New Guinea Portraits: the expatriate experience*, edited by James Griffin. *Watriama and Co*, then, whatever its shortcomings, is of a noble lineage. One hopes that it will prove worthy of its precedents, and will help generate further inheritors of Davidson’s inspiration.

Hugh Laracy

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