

# MICRONESIAN

JOURNAL OF THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Vol. 1, n° 1–2

December 2002

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## BOOK REVIEW

Spennemann, Dirk H.R. (1999 [2000]) *Aurora Australis. The German Period in the Mariana Islands 1899–1914. Division of Historic Preservation Occasional Historical Papers Series No. 5.* Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands : Division of Historic Preservation. vii, 247pp. ISBN 1 878453 36 X

reviewed by

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Dr. Spennemann has given us the first English-language book on the German Era in the Northern Marianas Islands. Based on original sources, well illustrated with rare photographs, and sprinkled with maps and tables, *Aurora Australis* offers rewards to the general reader as well as to scholars concerned with the Germany's colonial efforts in the Pacific.

The Northern Marianas, having been colonized hundreds of years before the rest of Micronesia, posed few problems for German administrators. Georg Fritz, district officer for the first half of the German administration, found a small population of 2,000 Chamorros and Carolinians awaiting his arrival in 1899. Fritz, fluent in Spanish and well versed in German administrative law, proved himself an extremely dynamic and capable district officer. A homestead program was initiated to attract settlers from other Micronesian islands; compulsory, bilingual education was instituted; a militia was formed; and coconut plantations

were promoted to make the colony a paying proposition.

We find that the number of German officials and settlers never exceeded 13 during the colony's brief existence. Officials often wore two or more hats, with Fritz himself serving as a German teacher. Still, despite the devoted efforts of the colonizers and the cooperation of the colonized, the German Marianas never became self-supporting. And most of the thousands of coconut trees planted were destroyed in the great typhoons of 1905. Fritz's efforts to attract settlers were moderately successful, but the population of 1912, some 3,170 souls, was hardly enough to sustain an economy based on tropical agriculture.

*Aurora Australis* supplements Dr. Hiery's huge 1000-page anthology of articles, *Die deutsche Suedsee*, and presents a good model for needed future works on the Spanish and Japanese administrations in the Northern Marianas.

This is contribution is not peer-reviewed.

© *Micronesian Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* ISSN 1449-7336  
Letao Publishing, PO Box 3080, Albury NSW, Australia