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RESOURCE, RESEARCH, AND PROTECTION: An Approach

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“Resources, Research, Protection” was the motto of the Symposium on Historic Preservation in Micronesia. But as we go about into our work preserving Micronesia’s heritage, we would do well to ask a few basic questions of ourselves. What are the resources in question? What kind of research is needed? What is it that we seek to protect?

A SAMPLER OF THE RESOURCES

The most obvious resources with which Historic Preservation Offices deal are the visible sites dating from post-contact times, what we may call the historical era. They include battle sites, buildings and structures—material things that are easily identifiable, reminders of a past that is fairly well documented. Some of the most prominent historical sites in the region are these.

- Guam: Spanish plaza in Hagåtña and the remains of the old Spanish colony, Spanish-built bridges found throughout the island, Magellan’s landing place at Umatac;
- CNMI: Last Command Post, Isley Field, Tinian airfield and bomb pit used for launching air strikes against Japan, Japanese jail, Japanese hospital, sugar refinery;

- Palau: World War II Japanese caves and guns on Peleliu, old Japanese buildings such as those housing the national legislature (OEK) and the Supreme Court, the remains of the Shinto shrine;
- Yap: O’Keefe’s headquarters at Terang, remains of the old Spanish fort in Colonia, the German cable station;
- Chuuk: Japanese Naval headquarters on Tonoas;
- Pohnpei: Spanish Wall that once surrounded the colony, Japanese agriculture station, Langar Island, remains of the Japanese sugar refinery at Sapwalapw;
- Kosrae: Protestant mission training school at Mwot;
- Marshalls: German trade center at Jaluit, battle remains at Kwajalein.

The list of resources, of course, must be expanded to include prehistoric sites. These are the visible remains of a cultural past that predates European contact and the first written records. A few examples are listed below.

- Guam: petroglyphs in Gadao’s cave;
- CNMI: latte stone sites and quarries;

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- Palau: the monoliths and terraces in Babeldaob.
- Chuuk: old moats and defenses (eg, on Weno and Foupe), petroglyphs at Wichen River on Weno;
- Pohnpei: Nan Madol, and the remains of the old shrine in Salapwuk;
- Kosrae: ruins at Lelu.

These, among others, are the visible remains that can be identified from the past, historical period and further beyond. They ought to be preserved for sure. They are markers of our history. But they do not alone comprise our remembered past, nor do they alone define our sense what we sprang from. They are a point of departure for further work in uncovering the past and its relevance to the present.

Our work (or someone's work) is to extend our efforts beyond those sites, deepen our understanding of the periods they represent, and protect and make available for future generations these resources. In other words, expand on our resources, research them to bring to light further resources to help us understand the past, and protect them for the future. "Resources, Research, Protection" is the motto.

RESOURCES: EXPANDING THE FIELD

What about those structures that were important in the past, that defined a certain period of history, even if remains of these structures cannot be recovered? Consider the following.

- Guam: Umatac played a key role in the Spanish period; the governor resided there for a time, and the yearly galleon usually put in there, with a week-long bazaar following the arrival of the ship.
- Palau: Japanese governor's house was situated on a hill near the Palau Pacific Resort; while Malakal, the tiny island connected to Koror by a causeway, was the site of foreign traders during the late nineteenth century.
- Chuuk: Eten was the base of the German traders, (just as Langar Island was on Pohnpei); while the first Protestant mission school was situated on Weno; and Imperial Navy buildings were once prominent on Toloas.

- Pohnpei: Langar was a trade station for representatives of German firms at the turn of the twentieth century.
- Marshalls: In the years immediately following WW II, the district center was located in Laura, Majuro.

These sites do not cease to be important for us because we can't recover them. They play an important role in our historical awareness of that era. Unless we can "restore" them in some way, our sense of the past is defective—and the past defines in part who and what we are now.

RESEARCH: DEEPEN OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE PAST

What, then, do we do about these structureless sites? These are sites that may have defined a certain period of island history even though their remains can not be recovered. How can this part of our past be restored?

I would propose a strategy that includes these elements:

- identification of these sites
- photos of these structures in the past
- stories associated with these places
- music, as well as art, that can help us recapture a sense of the time and place (just as, for instance, the soundtrack in the War Park on Saipan captures something of the era through battle sounds, wartime pop tunes from the US, and radio broadcasts).

Then, too, there are the sites prominently mentioned in oral history, but with no visible remains today. One example is those sites associated with the Soukachaw tales related to the resettlement of Chuuk in the twelfth century. These legends, centered around Mount Tonachaw on Weno, tell of the meeting house and bathing place and earth oven of Kachaw, who was credited with founding the present-day social and political system. To cite another example, the small island of Namu in the Marshalls is said to be the birthplace of all Marshallese clans.

Oral legends point to these places. The tales that tell of them are also resources. But how do we protect the memory of these places? This may be especially difficult because of the privileged status of such information, the reluctance

of most people to share this or offer it for the public. Then there is the additional problem of the contested nature of such information. Should we insist on Western norms for the preservation of such information rather than the restrictive passing down of such prized knowledge that is characteristic of the Pacific?

PROTECTION FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

The point of preservation is more than just keeping old structures intact. The sites protected by HPO are to become historical markers—pointers to the past, if you will, to assist us in building an identity that is rooted solidly in the past. For me, preservation and protection always point to something beyond: namely, education.

Hence, my proposed strategies for preservation include five different types of historical markers.

- The historical sites with evident remains (such as the Japanese agriculture station on Pohnpei) are the least problematic. At the head of the agenda for dealing with such sites are two concerns: research needed for the documentation of the site and identifying sources of financial aid for the restoration of the site. Most of the HPO experience has been in dealing with this sort of property.
- The prehistoric remains entail the same concerns; research and financial aid for restoration are the principal needs. There is, however, often the additional difficulty of sorting out the various claims that interest groups have in the properties. Claims to the custodianship of Nan Madol on Pohnpei, for instance, may be contested by the state government, municipal government, traditional leaders, and landowners. What can be done to break logjams of this sort?
- Historic sites of significance that no longer exist and cannot be restored clearly present an even greater challenge. In this connection, we must not just think of the various colonial governments and the wars they fought. We should also be mindful of the sites related to early missions—sites that

might include the first churches at Shalong Point on Temwen and in Rohnkiti on Pohnpei, as well as the early training schools for pastors and teachers in Ohwa, Pohnpei, and in Mwot, Kosrae.

- At very least we can retain a visual image of these historical sites as they once appeared. A few of the institutions in the region—Belau Museum, CNMI Historic Preservation Office, the Marshalls Cultural Center on Kwajalein, and Micronesian Seminar—are collecting and archiving photographs that document such sites.

These photos not only “restore” historical sites that have no visible remains, but they also add an important dimension to sites with remains inasmuch as they allow us to visualize the historic site in its heyday. Some institutions in Micronesia, taking their cue from museums in other parts of the world are going a step beyond this to reconstruct the layout of these towns and other sites through a diorama.

- Prehistoric sites with no material remains present the greatest challenge. The Soukachaw sites on Weno, Chuuk, and certain cultic shrines on Yap are examples of this category. The very identification of the site is often a problem, not to speak of the further difficulty of gathering sufficient descriptive information on the site to convey a sense of its significance.

With no hope of retrieving visual remains, the best we can do is to collect oral historical information on sites of this type. This demands that we decide on an acceptable format for the presentation of this information. Should it be written down or simply tape-recorded? Should everyone have access to it, or just select people in keeping with traditional norms for such knowledge? Might it be used for public education purposes, or would public dissemination profane this sort of lore? In other words, what sort of property rights ought to be observed here?

- This is one final type of resource that ought to be mentioned even though it can not be considered a place or site, and so

does not fall under the sphere of the Historic Preservation Office as narrowly defined. This type of resources comprises all the non-material artifacts of a culture that help to define that culture—for instance, music such as dance chants, nose flute recordings, religious chants, and laments. In addition, there are other cultural features like recipes for magic and love potions, healing arts, martial arts techniques, and so forth.

The value of such material for an appreciation of the culture is obvious, but such items are also an invaluable means of contextualizing the past eras of which there are few visible remains.

The collection of old music, which can be readily done today through audio digitization, is important in its own right and is being conducted by the government radio station on Yap, Scott Steege in Majuro, and recently through the Micronesian Seminar. More institutions and individuals should be involved. Even if this is not the designated work of HPO itself, every effort should be made to stimulate and collaborate with this work.

PRESERVATION FOR WHAT?

At the end of it all, what do we have? Just a collection of loose materials? A rat's nest of old junk? No, we have the raw material for a public education program that never quits—one that goes on and on.

Please note that a public education program is by no means the same thing as attempting to incorporate this material into an elementary school or high school curriculum. Mention of education usually triggers thoughts of school-rooms and curriculum in most of us. This is unfortunate, for young people often enough just aren't ready to use material of this sort. As we become older and possibly more curious about our own past, on the other hand, the value of this historical material grows.

Let me illustrate by saying a word or two about St. Ann's School, the school in Buffalo that my father and his entire family attended when he was a child.

At one time it was the largest school in the world with over 3,000 elementary students. St. Ann's was part of a German Catholic parish staffed by priests who were quick to use corporal punishment when deemed necessary (and it often was so deemed). I heard the stories many times over at family parties when I was a kid, but they never meant much to me. I had no real interest in the school or the parish. My father had moved out of the parish long before and I was happier where I was. As I became older, however, my curiosity was tweaked about the place. What had gone into making my father the man he was? What was it like to be taught in German by missionary priests in my own country? How high were the ceilings, and how did they heat such a big place in the frigid Buffalo winter?

My curiosity spread to the rest of the neighborhood. What did my grandfather's small store sell? Pickled eggs in jars, like the neighborhood taverns? What kind of candy did he offer? Where was the sauerkraut made and how was it done and who did the work? Did someone really come around and light the gas street lamps each evening? When did electric street lights arrive?

I would have killed for some good photos of the school in operation and our family store, but the only photos we had were those stiff old formal shots of the family, nothing on the surroundings. When I visited Buffalo, I sometimes went over to see the old family lot, but there was no house there any longer. It was just a vacant lot in a rundown neighborhood. I could see the church, but I'd have to use my imagination to see it filled with German immigrants attending mass, with clouds of smoke from the incense and gold glittering on the altar, and the priest climbing the winding stairs to the pulpit high overhead. (I would have had the same problem imagining mass at the old German church in Kolonia if I didn't have photos of it in its heyday.) Imagine the added attraction of being able to hear the kind of music the organ and choir produced at those masses.

Let me summarize this personal saga, while trying to draw some conclusions that are relevant to our work in Micronesia.

- My fascination with the past grew as I matured, and perhaps as I became ever more distant from it. My guess is that this happens with most of us. If so, the real payoff of public education is not in our early years, but later in life as we wonder about what went into making us and our families and our communities. (Similarly, the thirst may be even greater among those who have moved to Oklahoma or Florida or some other part of the US—we find some evidence for this on our MicSem website.)
- The church and school are still there to see, and many of us make pilgrimages to the neighborhood to see these grand old buildings. They're marvelous to see, but they are shells without the vibrancy they once had when they were part of a community's everyday life. To make these places come alive, I need stories (let's call this oral history). The stories were recorded in print, thanks to the efforts of my aunt, who wrote long letters filled with remembrances of the old days.
- The letters my aunt left us will never be published, but everyone in the Hezel family knows how to access them. The non-Hezels have their own stories, I suppose. If they don't, they can always write or email one of us, and we will be happy to share with them.
- My grandfather's house and store no longer exist, although these are as important a part of my remembered past as the church and school. Restoring the school would be a worthy project, but that only gets us so far. What about the family store? What about the tavern at the corner of Broadway and Emslie that my uncles used to frequent? Here's where we need photos, music, sketches. They assist us enormously in imaginatively recreating the neighborhood for ourselves. (The Georg Fritz photos do this for German times, just as the Joachim DeBrum photos do for Marshalls at the turn of the 20th century.)
- The end product of all this is not just to satisfy my curiosity, but to deepen my

understanding of the environment and the forces that went into shaping my family and, ultimately, me. I think I can say honestly that the more I understand what went into making us in the past, the more conscious I am of my own identity.

CONCLUSION

Granted, this is a broad canvas view, but it is what I see as the goal of our work. If it is indeed our goal, then it may well be too ambitious for HPO offices to achieve alone, so it will demand collaborative efforts between various agencies and offices. Perhaps the initiative for such collaborative work must be made by ourselves.

In summary, then, our work must involve, three elements:

- Expanding the field of *resources*—uncovering other sites that might not have the rich visible remains of the ones on which we focus, but are still critical in defining the past;
- Deepen our understanding of the past through *research*—bringing to light information and other resources (music, photos, etc) that help us imaginatively capture the spirit of a period;
- *Protection* of these resources for the future—making them available for us when we need them (not as 6th graders, but later when our thirst for an understanding of the past kicks in).

ENDNOTES

Paper delivered at the Pacific Preservation Symposium, Majuro January 17-19, 2006.

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eties. He has also written dozens of articles and five books on Micronesian history, including *The First Taint of Civilization* and *Strangers in Their Own Land*. His latest book, *The New Shape of Old Island Cultures*, explores the extent of social change throughout the region since the end of World War II.

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