

EDITORIAL

This issue is being prepared at a time when independence is just round the corner for the former Territory of Papua New Guinea. For the first time in Australia's history, this nation has seen the coming to fruition of a long program of preparing a former colony for self-government and independence. It would be dishonest to state that for the whole period of Papua New Guinea's emergence as an independent nation, Australia has been striding forward in a race to have the young state ready for emergence into the community of sovereign nations. There have been times when we have dragged our feet, and many events must have made the Papuans wonder if Australia would ever relinquish its hold on their native land.

However, independence has come, and this is surely a time for Papua New Guineans to take stock of their national resources. One of those resources is the national collection of books and other documents which throw light on New Guinea as a whole — the term "New Guinea" is used advisedly, and is meant in the sense that Nancy Lutton uses it in her article in this issue — the whole island of New Guinea, together with those off-shore islands which with Eastern New Guinea form the nation of Papua New Guinea. There is no imperialism in this inclusion of West New Guinea in the area of study, for political boundaries, drawn in some European diplomatic hall, do not reflect essential dividing lines for cultural, anthropological, ethnological or natural science purposes.

Some of those natural resources of bibliographical materials are proper subjects for study in *Archives and Manuscripts*. Some of them are archives, historical manuscripts, books relating to the history and cultural life of the Papuans and New Guineans. It is important that, as Australia's nearest neighbour enters nationhood, she should have available for her scholars to study the essential materials on the history and the way of life of her people. If Australia can do anything to see that these resources are assembled and ready for use, she should respond to the challenge with a will.

Unfortunately, in the past, Australia seems to have done little to help the Papua New Guineans to ensure that their documentary heritage was being preserved, and would be available for study. At times, we have taken part in a rape of New Guinean resources, including bibliographical resources. In 1972 it seems that officers of the Australian Government were being sent to Port Moresby to bring back to Australia anything in the governmental registries of Papua New Guinea which would reflect discredit on the colonising power. It was a sort of insurance against Papua New Guinean historians later being able to discover just how bad some aspects of Australian administration had been. Fortunately, active librarians and others in the then Territory, jealous for the completeness of the emerging nation's documentary resources, brought this shameless invasion to light. What started out as a rape became, so we are told, a mere temporary invasion of privacy with cameras and other technological offensive weapons. The records were being photographed, we were told, for preservation in Canberra. The originals would go back to New Guinea.

Nancy Lutton, in this issue, writes about the New Guinea Collection, in the University of Papua New Guinea. Kevin Green, a former Chief Archivist of the National Archives, writes about the prospect of a National Register of archival sources on Papua New Guinea. We had hoped for an article by Moeka Helai, who succeeded Kevin Green as National Archivist. Unfortunately (though fortunately for him!) Mr Helai was promoted too soon to be able to complete the article. This is a feature of life in the new nation. There are not a great number of indigenous people with qualifications and the right qualities for senior positions in the public service. Once an indigenous person succeeds to a senior position, and proves that he can meet the challenges it offers, he is a prime candidate for promotion. So Mr Helai, so recently appointed to the top position in the Archives, and so successful in it, became a target of the promotions machine. He ascended to the position of Acting Secretary of the Department of the Interior, and has been too busy, in his new position, to write the article we had hoped for.

This issue of *Archives and Manuscripts* is offered as a tribute to the new nation, and expresses the profound goodwill of Australian archivists and manuscript librarians towards their colleagues in Papua New Guinea. There are many documents in Australian institutions which would be useful for future historians of the new country. The Mitchell Library in Sydney, for instance, has a great deal of documentary material on New Guinea, including some priceless records of missionary endeavour. In the Colonial Secretary's records in Queensland there is a most useful series which deals with the annexation of the eastern part of New Guinea by H. M. Chester (instructed by Queensland Premier, Thomas McIlwraith, who, though he did what he did in the name of the British Queen, did not have the courtesy to consult her about it before-hand — and consequently his annexation was repudiated). This great non-event was in 1883. (Today we wonder whether or not the wishes of the New Guinea people have been consulted before any action is taken which intimately affects their future. In 1883 the question of whether or not the New Guineans were in favour of the action scarcely came up for consideration — the emphasis was on whether or not the British Government supported McIlwraith's somewhat bizarre act. It did not.)

The moral to be read into this story is surely that we are learning. We people of Western European stock have been slow to realise that other races are human, that they have aspirations, ideals and ambitions which they want to realise, and that the realisation of these concepts is every bit as important to them as the accomplishment of our national and personal goals is to us. But we are learning. And we are doing something to help this other, formerly subject, people, to achieve what seems important to them. We hope that this issue of *Archives and Manuscripts*, in describing some desirable objectives for the documentation of the way of life of Papuans and New Guineans, is able to make a contribution — albeit a very small one — towards the fulfilment of the aspirations of those people who will now become our nearest foreign neighbours.