

Some Enchanted Evening: Tales from the South Pacific

A report on work in the libraries of the Attorney-General and Supreme Court of Western Samoa.

Lorraine Weinman

Principal Librarian, Lionel Murphy Library, Attorney-General's Department

Background

The library of the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department (Lionel Murphy Library) is "twinned" with the libraries of the Supreme Court and the Attorney-General in Western Samoa. In March 1992 I put up a submission to our Secretary, Mr Alan Rose, that two librarians should visit these libraries and see how best we could help. This was approved, and funded by the Department under its international Continuing Legal Education and Mutual Assistance programmes.

On 26 July 1992, Rebecca Robinson and I set out for Western Samoa.



Preliminary Work

Several letters were written to the contact persons nominated by the Chief Justice, and the Attorney-General. A few text books (in latest editions) were purchased, also some recently superseded books were gathered. These were all catalogued, classified by Moys, and covered in clear plastic "contact". A small four drawer catalogue unit was purchased.

A box of library supplies (labels, sticky tape, pamphlet boxes, etc) was assembled for us to take with us. Any surplus items would be left behind for use in the libraries.

We landed in Apia at 5.30 am on a Sunday morning. Nothing could have been further from the frigid Canberra winter we had just left. As we drove to the hotel, dawn was breaking over the lagoon, there were plump pigs snuffling along the roadside, the air was smoky from the many "umus" cooking the Sunday meal.

Our car skilfully negotiated the several large rocks placed on the road by the villagers to slow the traffic thus keeping down the dust.

We stayed at the Tusitala Hotel, named after Robert Louis Stevenson, who lived his last years in Samoa. The Samoans called him "Tusitala" or "teller of tales".

The Attorney-General's Office Library

WHAT WE FOUND

The Office is housed in a wooden building on busy Beach Road, with the sea just beyond. It is thus much influenced by the humid, salt air, and the dust from the road outside. The Office is up external stairs, on the 1st floor. The Library is a room of approximately 35 square metres with a high ceiling of about 6 metres and very high, deep timber shelving, almost up to the ceiling.

All shelves were double stacked and full. There was material packed on the tops of the books, and books piled from the top of the top shelves to the ceiling. In fact, I could not have slid a piece of paper between the topmost book and the ceiling. I was amazed at the quantity and variety of material held. I estimate approximately 6,000 to 7,000 items were in the library when we walked in.

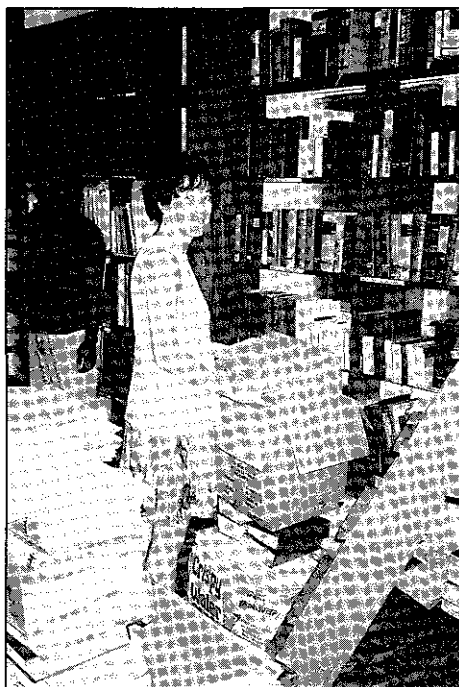
Because of the total confusion in the arrangement, it was practically impossible to use the library at all. New material was being tucked in wherever a small space was available, none of the runs of law reports were in sequence. Similarly, the text books were widely scattered and a great deal of everything was totally hidden from view behind the front stack of volumes. There were piles, and cupboards full, of loose legislation and law reports.

I believe that nothing had ever been thrown away, since Neroni Slade started the collection in the '60s. It was a very valuable collection, but like so many law libraries, it had long outgrown its space.

The room was hot, the books thickly coated in dust. There were many traces of rats, silverfish and cockroaches. Damage by the latter was especially bad. However, the lighting was good, and the shelves were very solid and strong.

The text book collection was large, perhaps 1,500 items. None of the books were up to date. Many were in editions a hundred years old, yet were carefully retained because in some instances they were the only work in the subject.

Primary material was wide-ranging and well representative of the priorities and needs of the Office. However, except for Australian legislation and the *All England Law Reports*, none of the sets were up to date. Priority material like New Zealand legislation, *New Zealand Law Reports* were four years behind published volumes. Law reports coming in from other libraries as loose parts were more up to date, but were so duplicated and jumbled they were largely unusable.



There was no fax machine in the office, and it took five days to get a requisition to send a fax.

The Attorney-General, the Principal Parliamentary draftsman, and the four State Solicitors were the main users of the library. There was a Chief Executive Officer, and four clerical staff.

Everyone was exceedingly interested in what we were doing, and very helpful with advice about what was needed and what might be moved or thrown away. They came in all the time, which helped us in understanding the nature of the work they were doing, and gave us the chance to explain to them what we were trying to achieve, and how it would help them. This interchange was vital, so that the staff of the Office could come to trust us. No-one would like two strangers to descend upon them and start tossing their library around.

WHAT WE DID

My first priority was to weed, so as to make space for the collection itself. The lighting improved dramatically when all the material on top of the top shelves was cleared.

The Office did all they could to help us. An air conditioner was installed on our second day. Arrangements were made for a prisoner from the local jail to be available to help us. He was invaluable. He helped drag away the loads and loads of rubbish and discards. He cleaned the shelves and climbed the ladder to reach the topmost piles. Rats' nests, chicken bones, ping pong balls were some of the things dislodged in the process. We had kettles of iced water to drink whenever we wanted and a constant supply of tea, coffee and local cocoa.

The text books were set out in proper subject order, and Rebecca catalogued and classified them all. A previous volunteer librarian had done a good job cataloguing many of the books, but they were all classified by Dewey. Rebecca re-classified

them all by Moys. Subject labels were stuck on the shelves and author/title and subject cards written and filed in the new catalogue unit. Approximately 1,000 texts were cleaned, catalogued, classified and re-shelved.

All the primary material was re-shelved by jurisdiction. Priority was given to the most-used material, which was placed on the lower shelves, accessible without climbing the ladder. Some double-stacking became necessary here, for example, we had to shelve *Halsbury's* 3rd ed. behind *Halsbury's* 4th.

The loose parts were all sorted (there were hundreds), duplicates discarded, and tied together in volumes. Where possible these were placed in pamphlet boxes.

The loose Australian legislation was sorted, (there were pamphlet copies accumulated over 10 years) and on the advice of the lawyers, all except pamphlet Acts Reprints were discarded. These were sorted and placed with individual index sheets in the 25 blue binders we had taken.

I visited the Government Printer, and negotiated to have 60 volumes of the ALRs bound. This was difficult, although I had sorted and tied all loose parts into volumes, as it involved processes like "removing the covers, taking the shiny pages from the back of part 4 and placing them in the front of part 1". Poor Mr Lauulu Tevaga had never coped with this sort of messy work before, but he agreed to do a trial volume, and did it brilliantly. All volumes are bound now, at a cost of WST 6.00 per volume, approximately \$A3.30.

We made a Holdings List of all the primary materials held in the library.

We promised to supply bound volumes of ALRs, NZLRs, ACRs and NZDCRs in the future.

Supreme Court Library

WHAT WE FOUND

The Supreme Court Library is in a big wooden building next door to the Attorney-General's Office. There is less of a problem with dust and humid sea air because the library is at the back of the building, and the doors and windows are closed. It is less accessible to users because it is kept locked. The room was probably slightly larger than the Attorney-General's library, perhaps 40-45 square metres. It was air-conditioned, and the lighting was adequate.

The library was neat, tidy and clean, and held approximately 4,000 items. It was far less choked with material, but was still very crowded, with no space at all for new volumes. Books were generally not double-stacked, though here too there were volumes on top of the top shelf, which could only be reached with a ladder.

There was a large collection of law reports, but very few text books, only about 150. None were in the latest edition. They were not catalogued or classified, but were shelved alphabetically, divided by yellow wooden letter-blocks.

The Chief Justice, two magistrates, and the Secretary for Justice and his Department use this library. Members of the Western Samoan Law Society have access.

WHAT WE DID

We did a certain amount of weeding and re-arranging of the collection, including double-stacking *Halsbury's* 3rd and 4th editions.

I sorted, tied up and removed 30 volumes of loose CLR's to the Government Printer for binding. This was a major task, again involving detailed explanations. Several gaps still remain in the set, as there were many missing parts.

We have promised to send bound volumes of CLR's and WLR's in the future. The Federal Court is supplying a continuing set of FCR's.

Many problems remain in both libraries

Legal publications are now so expensive, they are genuinely out of the reach of these small states. Western Samoan judicial and legal officers handle a very wide variety of work, but they would have been lucky to have one old text book on each subject. There were no tools for looking up references or citations.

There is no-one actually dedicated to looking after the libraries, nor has the country the resources for it. Therefore they have to be left as self-running as possible.

There are few records. It is very difficult to discover where material is coming from. Is there a current subscription: was there a subscription that lapsed? Is someone in Australia or New Zealand sending the loose parts? No-one can tell.

There are frequent changes of legal staff, the expatriates are on two-year contracts, and the local lawyers seem to move frequently as well. Often there is no-one left with any corporate memory.

A vast amount of unsolicited material comes in. There are multiple loose sets of reports and legislation. Conference reports, annual reports and academic reports pour in from the UN, the Commonwealth Secretariat, and a variety of other international and regional bodies. It is difficult to write and stop the flood because it is often being re-directed from another source. Pacific states must be sinking beneath the weight of paper.

Conclusion

It is essential to physically see each library before you can formulate a plan. I had no idea there would be so much material, and I had to rethink my preconceptions very quickly. It became immediately clear that two librarians in two weeks can reorganise one library only. It is impossible to do two, especially when they are as large as the two in Western Samoa. There was no time to do much training at all, this will be a priority next time.

I tackled the Attorney-General's library first because it was in worse shape, and it took almost all of our two weeks. We have recently given them a fax machine. The Supreme Court library still needs considerable work. It needs re-shelving (in some sections the sequences run from right to left). It needs weeding, and it needs to be catalogued and classified.

Another visit by two librarians for two weeks is planned for next year, so that the work may be completed and consolidated, and some training done.

My aim was to create an accessible, visible, retrievable, working collection. I believe we have done this.

We spoke of the twinning project at every opportunity, and tried to reinforce the idea that we were to be regarded as an extension of themselves. We said a fax or a letter to the Lionel Murphy Library would see us respond with a photocopy immediately.

Rebecca and I derived much personal satisfaction from the work we did. We felt a huge sense of achievement to be able to leave behind what is now a good functioning law library. We have made many new friends, and it is a great delight to receive faxes from them now, saying "I have a case next week, can you help with this reference?"

Appendix: Hints for "twins" who are sending material to the Pacific, or visiting, or both

DO SEND

- Indexes, annotations, reference works, dictionaries.
- Recently superseded text books.
- Loose parts of law reports if you know that they want them.

DON'T SEND

Loose-leaf updating material (unless you know that someone will do the work). If you send a binder full of material, close it off with labels indicating it is up-to-date to whatever date, and is not being updated. It can then be used as a text book.

DON'T USE

- Metal glider/bulldog clips, or spikes. They rust and destroy the papers underneath.
- Rubber bands - they perish and melt into the paper.

DO TIE

- Loose parts up in volume bundles, with tape or string. If possible, send a flat (unopened) pamphlet box to contain them, and a label to stick on it.

DO TAKE (IF YOU ARE VISITING)

- Scissors, rolls of tape or string, sticky and masking tape with dispensers, labels, catalogue cards, hole punch, stapler, 2 or 3 thick and thin felt pens, biros, pencils, rubber, ruler, pamphlet boxes (as many as you can), spine labels and clear contact to cover them.
- A stanley knife to rip open your boxes. and don't do as we did and pack it in a box, so it's not accessible when you want to rip them open!
- A dust coat or apron.
- Thongs or sandals for the beach, which is sharp hard coral, not soft Australian sand; very comfortable shoes or sandals for work.

- A bottle opener. Bottles of soft drink and beer don't have screw tops.
- All your boxes of books and stores as unaccompanied baggage - it is 50% cheaper. Address it to yourself C/- the official address where you'll be working. Mark it as aid/gift, and carry a letter on your agency's letterhead saying it is a gift (you could be liable for heavy customs duty over there if you don't).

Do

- Write to the Australian High Commission in the country before you go - you often need their help to sort out bureaucratic tangles.
- Write down the names, designations and titles (with the right spelling) of the people you meet and work with, you'll need them when you get back. Give them the names, phone and fax numbers of yourself and your colleagues at home. Take photos of them, their building, etc for your office, leave photos of yourselves. It all helps to build the relationship.
- Write notes all the time you are there. You'd be amazed how quickly you forget details.

Do NOT

- Forget your sunglasses, hat and sun cream.
- Underestimate the effects of the climate on yourself, the heat and humidity knocks you around.
- Expect to walk into a shop and get whatever you want. The printer for our Power Book failed, and our Help Desk in Australia said "go down to the local Apple dealer and pick up another adaptor" Well.. the only technical type shop in Apia displayed dresses and sunhats in the window! Certainly no adaptors.

It's hard work, but very rewarding. You can see a "proper library" taking shape out of the chaos, the users are enormously appreciative, and at the end of the day, you can relax under the fans at some place like Aggie Grey's, sip a cold G&T, and watch the sun go down into the Pacific Ocean.

