

[Professor Maude]

[The Purchase of Rabi] (Amended by Professor Maude)

I have considered the events which led up to the purchase for the Banabans of the island of Rabi. These are referred to in paragraphs 26-31 of my Memorandum and are treated fully Bundle 36. As regards the latter, I would refer particularly to the items on pages 12, 14, 16, 21, 73, 76, 83, 87, 100, 102, 126, 128, 139, 150, 151, 158, 160, 162, 164, 166, 167, 168, 169, 171, 179, 183, 186, 189 and 191.

These events took place between 1940 and 1942 when I was acting as a ~~First~~ Assistant Secretary to the Secretary (Mr Vaskess) of the Western Pacific High Commission at Suva. I had previously been concerned in the purchase of islands (not for the Banabans), for example, ~~Vaitupu~~ ^{KIOA in Fiji and NIULAKITA} for the Ellice Islanders.

To supplement the account of matters in Bundle 36, I would make the following comments:

- (1) The original interest of the Banabans was in the purchase of Wakaya in the Fiji group. I was ^{only} indirectly concerned in the ^{later} enquiries as to whether it was for sale and its suitability but did not go out there to inspect it myself.
- (2) ~~Following the receipt of Parham's report of 17th February 1941 (36/87),~~ ^{During my stay at Government House, Suva, in May and June 1941 (en route from Pileason to Tonga) and the High Commissioner and I discussed} the High Commissioner and I discussed the report and both ^{agreed} ~~thought~~ that Wakaya was unsuitable for the purpose intended. For example, it could support a maximum of 600 people and in poor conditions and its copra tonnage was only of the order of 72 per year (I would expect 1,000 tons from Rabi).
- (3) It was then suggested (36/100) that Fanning or Washington Islands should be considered (a suggestion which resulted from a visit which I had made to these islands in 1938 to consider generally their possibilities for colonisation (again, not in connection with the Banabans). I had also considered Christmas Island (not the phosphate island in the Indian Ocean) but had rejected this as being too dry.

(4) It seemed that, in spite of the unfavourable survey report, the Banabans still wished that Wakaya should be bought. However, the possibility was broached (36/128) that Rabi should be purchased from Levers. I believe that this originated with me. It is true that I obtained no report on Rabi similar to Mr Parham's report on Wakaya but this was unnecessary as the value of Rabi was notorious - it was considered the gem of Fiji". It is also true that I had not at that time visited Rabi but my wife was familiar with and had spoken highly of it (a fact recorded in Bundle 37 page 23.)

(5) ^{From} At the time of the first approach to Levers (1st October 1941) ^{the High Commissioner} I had in mind the idea of Rabi as a home for the Banabans. However, the documents show that the Banabans were still interested in Wakaya and I note that in 37/162 (February 1942) they considered that the "size and plenitude of Rabi" were "beyond their grasp". I had taken no steps to acquaint them with the advantages of Rabi and it may be that Rabi had been described to them by Mr Garvey, the Acting Resident Commissioner, who was familiar with Fiji. I recall having drafted the telegram of 4th March 1942 (36/164) from the High Commissioner to Mr Garvey, stressing the advisability of the purchase of both islands, on the basis that either could be disposed of profitably. I recall that, at that time, Levers were under the not unreasonable impression that Fiji would shortly be occupied by the Japanese and Levers were therefore ready to take quickly the sum of £25,000 for the island. I would stress particularly the last paragraph of that telegram expressing anxiety to prevent the depreciation of the Banaban Provident Fund. At that point, it was not clear that the Banabans were keen on acquiring Rabi and the High Commissioner, Sir Harry Luke, was hesitant about taking any action on the purchase which might be disapproved by the Banabans. However, I felt strongly that the acquisition of Rabi at a relatively low price was a bargain the benefit of which the Banabans ought not to lose. I therefore suggested to Sir Harry that I should be authorised to purchase it as an investment for the Banabans, X I recall that he agreed in the terms "On your own head be it" and permitted me to send the telegram in the terms in which it appears.

X whose Provident Fund was lying on fixed deposit in Sydney.

- (6) It appears (36/166) that the great majority of the Banabans (including Rotan himself) wished that both islands should be bought (other than a "committee of old men" who wished to keep the Banaban Provident Fund intact *in the hope that the interest could be distributed among themselves*).
- (7) The documents indicate that the price asked for Wakaya was considered to be unjustified but that Rabi itself was purchased; from 36/191, it appears that the formal transfer from Levers took place on 17th April 1942.

Tragically, no use could be made of Rabi by the Banabans until the Pacific War had concluded in mid-1945. I have considered in what circumstances it came about that Rabi then became the home of the Banabans. I well recall that, when the war ended, it was impracticable for them to return to Ocean Island, in view of the destruction of the villages, the lack of food and the virtual impossibility of importing sufficient food in view of the lack of shipping. The events which led to the settlement of Rabi seem well documented in Bundle 37, passim in the earlier pages. I would draw attention particularly to the detailed consideration given to the question *who made a personal visit to Rabi and reported on its suitability* and the practical arrangements by Major Kennedy *(particularly page 47 onwards)* which should go far to negate any suggestion that there had been no proper forethought for the Banabans' arrival on Rabi.

It is my recollection that I had discussions with Major Kennedy on this topic at various times during the late summer and autumn of 1945 but I have no detailed memory of such discussions. It was a time when I had very many commitments in helping to clear up the aftermath of the war in that part of the Pacific and when I was about to take charge, as Acting Resident Commissioner of the G&E Colony. Specifically, I recall having discussed the possible settlement on Rabi of the Banabans with *Ratu* Sir Lala Sukuna at that time a distinguished leader of the Fijian people, who indicated that their arrival would be welcome in Fiji.

(1) I first heard about the possible purchase of an island ... on my return to Suva on 1st ...
since I had been deputy a Govt & Code of Laws. I was asked to report to
Suva before proceeding on my next assignment and eventually reached Suva in the middle
of May 1941

(2) The H.C. (Sir H.L.) discussed the whole question of the suitability of Wabuya with me
in the light of Palau's report & we agreed that it was suitable for settlement
second of ... I suggested the form of F & W should see
make suitable to O.I. and make topography to the 4 islands.

(3) I then left for the Kingdom of Tonga a month to H.M.O. since to take a
report on the recovery of the Civil Service and on my return in December 1941
(which a month after had been resumed)
I found that Rabi Island had also been available to that the B.S. had expressed
their interest in both but wished to see them first before making a choice.

(4) Official was given to a delegation of 5 to see to Fiji but the rest of the J.W. could
not take the same as all reports were required for consideration of minor and children
Meanwhile H.C. had decided not to proceed with obtaining an option on Wabuya.

(5) As after a P.M. expired on 31 Dec 1942 but they replied that the 'my' &
plentiful of R was outside their grasp' and B.S. only wanted Wabuya.
This was on 13 Feb and as Sir H. considered W quite suitable he decided
that purchase of both should be abandoned.

Sir H. thus refused to favour R on the grounds that the B.S. has decided the purchase
(6) & it was the that I saw Sir H. after dinner in his private room and asked favour
to buy it not necessary for settlement but as an ~~investment~~ investment to fund the
other determination of the real value of the President Fund the
proceed deposit in the B.N.Z., Sydney. He then agreed to purchase of both
islands as investments

Eventually village meetings showed that all but two sales of Baolan
Committee and the other villages agreed to purchase of both islands.

£12,500, as against Chatter's estate of its being sold less than in 1933
when it sold for £5,250.