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42/11 Namatjira Drive,
Weston, A.C.T. 2611,
12 August, 1990.

Dr Thomas F. King,
410 Windsor Street,
Silver Spring, Md 20910-4242,
U. S. A.

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TIGIAR

Dear Dr King,

The Karongoa MS has left our hands so I have a break before starting work on the 'Golden Treasury of Gilbertese Oral Traditions', arranged by subject in Gilbertese with an English translation.

(1) The Laxton Memorandum that I referred to is dated April 6, 1949, and after a day and a half of hunting for it Honor discovered it. I knew where it should have been but not where it was, as it had been borrowed and not replaced in its proper file.

Anyway, we have photocopied it and send the copy, which is a good deal clearer than the original. There are also 12 photographs (9 of the Noriti and 3 of the Nutiran areas): these I could also send if they are of any use, so that you could have them copied and the originals sent back in due course.

(2) 'The Government Station' is the term used in the Gilberts to designate the area leased by the central government to house all the homes, offices, etc., required for the island government i.e. on a typical island for the houses of the Magistrate, Chief of Kaubure, Chief of Police, Scribe, also for the male and female gaols, the Scribe's office (which usually includes the post office), the court house, homes for the warder and wardress and usually a government maneaba.

The hospital (or infirmary) is usually some way off on other leased land; and the Rest House for visiting VIPs, which may or may not be on the Government Station: more usually it is on the weather side of the atoll or island to get the benefit of the cool trade winds.

You will appreciate that as all land in the Gilberts is owned by some Gilbertese, if the government requires to use any for administrative purposes it must lease it from the owner or owners. The small population of Nikumaroro would not require all the resident officials I have mentioned (probably only a Magistrate, Chief of Police and a Scribe, who could also run the co-operative store and work the wireless). I imagine that part of the area you have shown on your map of Karaka village would constitute the Government Station on Nikumaroro and that it would include Gallagher's house (later the Rest House).

(3) I have no idea who produced the painted corner posts which you mention but doubt if Laxton brought them as an inducement to the islanders to move to their kainga lands because I cannot conceive why any inducement would be necessary.

(4) Perhaps I have not quite understood about the reason for the move to the kainga lands. The islanders had always looked forward to the day when they could move from their labour camp location to their own kainga which, with its associated buakonikai land, would belong to them and their children in perpetuity.

But they could not move until the lands had been allocated to them: and this Laxton did, with everybody being present and helping. They were no longer paid labour but independent landowners, and the next day they started work on their kainga before dawn,

women and children helping, and kept at it until they were comfortably installed - when they had a celebration picnic. It was the people who wanted to move and Laxton who co-operated.

(5) I think that buka area would have been the last to be cleared for allocation as Kainga or buakonikai lands or for babai pits; and probably the Island Lands Court (all local islanders) would have left a stand of buka trees, with a plaque stating that it was a memorial to honor Nei Manganibuka. The islanders certainly believed that the atoll was her former home; but formerly secret oral tradition makes it certain, in my opinion, that Nikumaroro was actually one of the Samoan Group (most probably Upolu).

(6) The breadfruit is very hard to grow in the drier southern Gilberts, whence the settlers came, requiring careful cultivation for several years. Had the Nikumaroro colony survived I expect that the settlers would have planted some on the atoll: certainly they would have tried to grow a few jackfruit, which requires less tender loving care., but it was natural that in the early days of settlement they concentrated on easy to grow plants and trees. Your friend Kaitara probably came from one of the northern islands where breadfruit can be easily grown - especially on Butarita and Makin.

For a discussion of kainga, utu, boti, etc., see The Evolution of the Gilbertese Boti, where there is also a map of a typical kainga group facing p.28. There are other maps in John Hosking's Traditional Architecture in the Gilbert Islands (Brisbane, University of Queensland Press, 1989). The best account of the Gilbertese way of life is in Arthur Grimble's Tungaru Traditions (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1989), which is readily obtainable and should be in most university libraries in the U.S.

Laxton was one of the best administrative service cadets sent to us by the Colonial Office in England after World War II, in which he served in the Army and rose to be a Major. If it were not for an alcohol problem he would have risen rapidly; I remember him best for his translation of Shakespear's Julius Caesar into Gilbertese - none of us old-timers could have done that.

Hoping I have answered everything,

Yours sincerely,

Harry M. Aude