

**THE
GILBERT AND ELLICE ISLANDS
AND ITS PHILATELY**

PART 2

By

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PACIFIC ISLANDS STUDY CIRCLE

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CHAPTER 2.7 GILBERT & ELLICE ISLANDS CURRENCY
FANNING ISLAND PLANTATIONS LTD.



R. G. Garrett, OBE

Some years after arriving at Fanning Island, Philip F. D. Palmer, who eventually became the Manager of Fanning Island Plantations Ltd., established a small private business in co-operation with the native women. It required the women to manufacture a continuing supply of native fans, hats, shark-toothed swords and other curios for sale to Palmer, who in turn sold the souvenirs at enormous personal profit. His customers were the crews and passengers of visiting ships, members of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force which occupied the island on 5 September 1939, and the American forces which replaced them at Fanning on 26 April 1942. At this later date it was reported that Palmer was paying the women up to £1 per day for their work, whilst their husbands earned only £2 per month working on the plantation; and at that time a U.S. private earned \$15 per month. Following Ron G. Garrett's promotion from Overseer of the Washington Island plantation to company Manager at Fanning in late 1942, Garrett continued Palmer's private business.

When the Fanning and Washington Island Gilbertese plantation labourers contracts expired, in about August 1942, Burns, Philp (BP), who owned Fanning Island Plantations Ltd., were unable to repatriate them as Japan had assumed control of their home islands. In September they went on strike, as they said that they were fed up with working for BP and living away from home. When the Western Pacific High Commission heard of the strike, they ordered Mr. H. E. Maude (personal communication) to investigate, so he hitched a lift down to Fanning on an American destroyer from Honolulu, where he was based as an intelligence adviser. In November he settled the dispute as best he could, and the Gilbertese were obliged to remain where they were until their islands were freed from the Japanese (see under Fanning in Chapter 1.2).

Due to the war, BP was unable to arrange any freight communication between the island and Sydney. So Garrett did not receive his usual consignment of Australian currency, and his reserve was insufficient for him to continue paying company employees their monthly wages indefinitely. Early in 1943 Garrett hitched a lift on an American vessel up to Honolulu. Where he approached the Honolulu Star Bulletin, and contracted them to design and print for him, on behalf of BP, one thousand A£1 promissory notes. These were numbered from 1000 to 1999. Whilst there he also took the opportunity to expand his own private business interests by applying for a liquor concession on Fanning. Such an application was made necessary by the fact that without it, liquor was almost impossible to obtain in Honolulu at the time. Once granted, he placed his first order for 300 cases of bottles. With this stock of liquor on board, Garrett returned to Fanning Island on the COMET in October 1943. In the adjoining cabin was Lieutenant Clifton Smith, who was on assignment to become the battery commander at Casady airfield, Christmas Island. During the voyage, Garrett produced a cigar box full of the new notes and showed them to Smith.

Although the promissory notes were demonetised in 1945, copies continued to trickle into the companies stores until 1947. Some also remained on Washington Island until at least the early 1970's, in the possession of manager Bill Frew. Following their withdrawal most of the notes were cut into halves and their corners were removed. One shilling ("1/-") was added in blue crayon to the left-hand half and two shillings ("2/-") in red crayon to the right-hand half, whereupon they were used by the company as cinema admission tickets.

Garrett was transferred from Fanning Island to Rabaul in 1946 to supervise BP's plantations in New Britain and New Ireland. He returned to Fanning again for a further year or two in about 1968, then retired and built himself a fine retirement home at Rabaul, where he died in 1975 or 1976.

Details of the Surviving Promissory Notes

NOTES AND ABBREVIATION USED :

1000 - The serial number printed on an entire

1001 - The serial number printed on the right-hand portion of a pair of mismatched halves.

PISC - Pacific Islands Study Circle Postal Auction

Extract of letter received from Mr. R. G. Garrett, Manager of Fanning Island Plantations Limited, dated 19th November, 1943 :

“These notes will be used during the currency shortage, when we again have sufficient Australian currency these notes will be withdrawn from circulation. Note No. 1000 is enclosed. The local District Officer has exchanged £100 Australian for 100 of these notes and will pay his native police with them this month so that all natives on the island will be on the same footing.”



THESE NOTES WERE PRINTED IN HONOLULU.

Illustration courtesy of Burns, Philp.

At least 40 entires and pairs of mismatched halves of the promissory notes are believed to still exist.

1000 - A framed copy on display in the Board Room of Burns, Philp & Co. Ltd., Sydney, which was mounted in conjunction with the following text

Extract of letter received from Mr. R. G. Garrett, Manager of Fanning Island Plantations Limited, dated 19th November 1943 :

"These notes will be used during the currency shortage, when we again have sufficient Australian currency these notes will be withdrawn from circulation. Note No. 1000 is enclosed. The local District Officer has exchanged £100 Australian for 100 of these notes and will pay his native police with them this month so that all natives on the island will be on the same footing".

(the Promissory Note)

THESE NOTES WERE PRINTED IN HONOLULU.

1005 - On the reverse is a typewritten note reading

Washington Island, 15/3/70

For F. B. Howard-White M.C. Central Pacific.

These promissory notes, now collectors items, were printed in Honolulu in 1942 or '43 for Ron Garrett, later a friend of mine in New Guinea in the early 1950's. They were used on Fanning and Washington Islands, it being difficult, if not impossible at that period of World War 2 to obtain currency from Australia. R. G. Garrett incidentally, was manager at Washington 1937/41, and manager Fanning & Washington 1942/46.

Thought you might like one. Sincerely.

Below it are the impressions of three Washington Island cachets, and Bill Frew signed on the dotted line of one of them.

1231 - (Sold by Ronald F. Webb of Rockdale, Australia, in about the late 1960's. Sold by Shields Stamps & Coins of Greensborough, Melbourne, in 1985 for A\$30).

1249 - (Offered for sale by Macray Watson of Melbourne on 17 November 1992 at an estimate of A\$75. Offered for sale by a PISC on 28 February 1998 at an estimate of £160).

1263 -

1271 - It has "Cancelled" written diagonally across it between two ruled lines.

1322 - (Offered for sale by Shields Stamps and Coins of Greensborough, Melbourne, in March 1996 for \$900).

1404 - (Sold by Ronald F. Webb of Rockdale, Australia, in about the late 1960's. Sold by the PISC in March 1981 for £13).

1495 -

1541 - It is in the files of the Sydney journal, the PACIFIC ISLANDS MONTHLY.

1580 - (Ex the Roger Wells collection, and sold by Cavendish of Derby, England, on 30 January 1998 for £110 plus 15% premium).

1673 -

1715 - Signed by Bill Frew.

1768 - On the reverse are two Washington Islands cachets together with a handwritten note reading

For J. Fergus Bowman ESQ.

Do hope this will eventually reach you

& prove of interest.

All good wishes from Washington Island

& the Transpacific Rowboat "BRITANNIA 2"

With kindest regards, Bill Frew.

3/11/71.

The message is countersigned by John Fairfax and Sylvia Cook, and the banknote was carried to the addressee in a special rowboat cover.