

MISS LETITIA ROSE

Most folk know little of the islands that constitute Micronesia and Melanesia. Here philatelists are unusual, for the Crown and other postal agencies have marketed these islands to us collectors for decades. The names will be familiar : the Solomons, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Hebrides, Marshall, Gilbert, Turks and Ellis, Samoa, Tokelau and Tonga.

Delve a little deeper and some collectors may even recall the proximity of these exotic isles to the International Date Line and others the fierce fighting in that sector during the WW II or the nuclear tests on Bikini atoll. I think it fair to say though that few in South Africa will have seen postal stationery from any of these places; and exceptionally few will have seen mail posted there and arriving in South Africa during the Anglo-Boer War (1898-1902).

This is the story of some such mail.

MARSHALL ISLANDS

The Marshall Islands lie in the north central Pacific Ocean. Numbering over 800 islands and coral atolls, Jaluit and Majuro are the two largest and best known.

A German presence in the Pacific first took the form of the Hamburg-based trading firm of *J.C. Godeffroy and Sohn*, which, in the 1850s, established a trading station, their purpose to capture a share of the coconut oil and copra trade. By the mid 1880s, joined by other companies like that of *Eduard Hensheim*, the Germans dominated the copra trade in the area. However, when Bismarck tried to annex the Carolines and Palau groups in 1885, Spain claimed the islands and the Marianas as part of her empire. The Micronesian islands finally were sold to Germany in the wake of the Spanish-American War and the Marshall Islands, long a centre of trade, became quite prosperous.

The *Jaluit Gasellschaft* administered the Marshall Islands by Imperial charter from 15 October 1885 until 31 March 1906, being granted a monopoly in 1901 for the "economic exploitation of the coral atolls" in the eastern Carolines. The company provided equipment, seedlings, and provisions in return for the right to buy copra at the rates prevailing for the Carolines and Marshalls. The main *Jaluit Gasellschaft* station was on Langar Island in Pohnpei Harbour.

When an official German administration was established, small Japanese companies, called "*mini shosha*", were operating from there and doing a brisk trade. Within two years, the Germans had deported virtually all the Japanese, leaving the field open for German investment. The German colonial presence was a short fifteen years for New Zealand forces occupied the islands on 29 September 1914. When the Japanese were awarded the islands on 17 December 1920, they in turn ousted all German firms.

Though short, the impact of the German colonial effort on Micronesia was substantial for the Germans introduced the people to a cash economy, and promoted the first modernization and urbanization of the island societies. Typhoons, plagues,

pestiferous and destructive insects constantly tested German perseverance. However, commentators are of the opinion that were it not for WWI, the Germans would have prevailed over the island environments and cultures, and the course of history would have been much different.

MARSHALL ISLAND POSTAL SERVICE

A postal service was established in the Marshall Islands on October 1888 and Imperial postcards over printed “Marschall-Inseln” were issued in 1897. In 1900, the first full year of German administration of the district, Bizerksamptman Albert Hahl forecast a gloomy economic picture for the region, citing the distant markets and high shipping charges. This gives one a sense of the hazards to which any post sent from these islands would have been exposed. Certainly a cursory glance at an atlas underscores the geographic isolation of Marshall Islands.

So what of postal history in my possession. There are two pre-printed postcards in fine condition. They were sent by one, Carl Friedrich Buess originally of Baden, Germany to Miss Letitia Rose then living in Bloemfontein. Posted in Jaluit, Marshall Islands and dated 23 May 1902, their route is defined by cancellers : Victoria, Hong Kong 27 June 1902, Singapore 2 July 1902, Colombo, Ceylon, 8 July 1902 and Bloemfontein, Orange River Colony 4 August 1902. One bears a censor mark, a Pretoria double triangle in red on the reverse.

The cards themselves differ in that one is a pre-paid postcard 1901 showing 5 pf in green to which is added a 5 pf stamp (SG G12) (Fig.1) . The other is a pre-paid postcard 1901 with 10 pf in red. (Fig. 2)



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

MISS LETITIA ROSE

Anne Letitia Hill Rose was born in Grahamstown on 13 October 1857. She was one of 5 daughters and 4 sons born to George Arthur Rose a Wesleyan minister (d. 1883) and Sarah Catherine neé Impey (d. 1921). She died in the Wesleyan Parsonage of the Rev. Robert Flowerday on the 13 March 1931. Her estate was valued at £304/16/1. A spinster, she lived much of her life in Port Alfred where is she buried together with her mother and a brother in the Kowie West Cemetery.

Many people are said to own correspondence sent to Letitia Rose. A sister, Sarah Georgina Filmer Crosby of “Winfield”, Claremont was executor of her estate and conceivably was responsible for releasing the mail onto the Cape Town market. Certainly, I have a number of examples of the postal stationery of European nations addressed to her and arriving in South Africa in 1902. I am told that she was a member of pen club, the members of which exchanged postal stationery one with the other. I cannot help reflect on the nature of what must once have been a fascinating collection of postal history, accumulated at a time when distances were great, friendships were long and exchanging correspondence was the only means for most to maintain contact one with the other. Her hobby has left us with some fascinating pieces of postal history.

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