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Introduction

The 'Western Pacific Archives' (WPA) was the name given to the group of archives at one time held in Fiji and comprising the records of the Colony of Fiji and those of the Western Pacific High Commission and its constituent territories. The history of the Archives is complex, and this Guide is intended to assist researchers by describing the history of the collection, how to search for materials using the finding aids, and how to access the collection in Special Collections.

The intention is to develop the Guide in the future with additional background on the administration of the WPHC, and the progress of finding aids and indexing activities.

History of the Western Pacific Archives

The Western Pacific High Commission (WPHC) was established by Order in Council in 1877 to extend British authority over British subjects in the islands of the southwest Pacific, then outside any formal colonial control. For the first 75 years of its existence, it was located in Fiji, where the posts of High Commissioner and Governor of Fiji were held conjointly. Following the Berlin Congress of 1884-85, a further Order in Council in 1893 vested the High Commissioner with executive and legislative powers and re-defined his jurisdiction, limiting it to territories under British control. Establishing the form of colonial control was a complex and lengthy process, but by 1900 the High Commissioner's responsibilities comprised the Solomon Islands, the Gilbert and Ellice Islands (Kiribati and Tuvalu), the New Hebrides (Vanuatu), Tonga and Pitcairn.

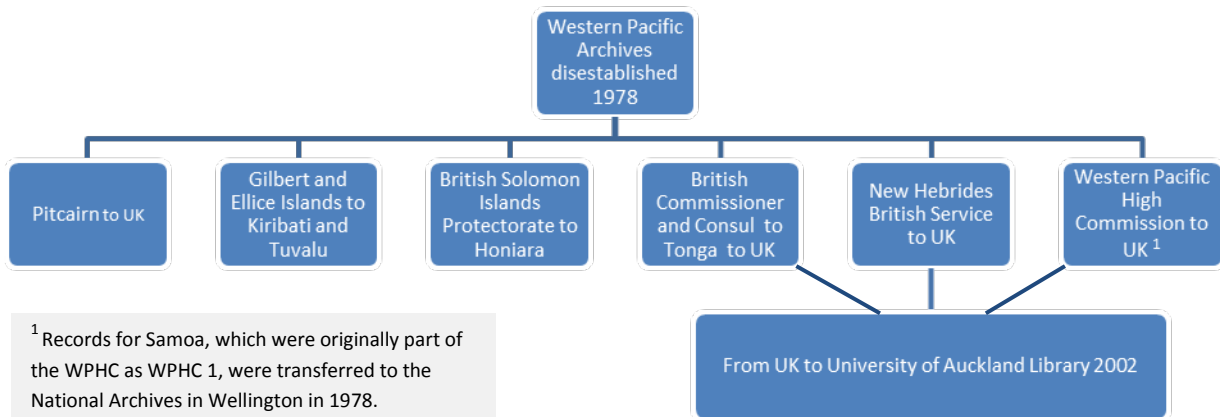
Intended initially to control the more unruly and illegal activities of European traders and settlers (especially the labour traffic), the Commission over time became a vehicle for British imperial expansion generally, taking on comprehensive administrative functions in the New Hebrides, Gilberts and Solomons including health, taxation, communications, land policy, and public works.

In 1952, the posts of High Commissioner and Governor of Fiji were separated and the WPHC moved to Honiara, where the High Commissioner became Governor of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate in addition to his other duties. The earlier records of the WPHC from 1875 on remained in Suva where they were administered as part of the newly created 'Central Archives of Fiji and the Western Pacific'.

When Fiji became independent in 1970, the records of the Governor of Fiji were transferred to the new government and the Central Archives were disbanded. The remaining collections were renamed the 'Western Pacific Archives'. At this time the WPA comprised the files of the High Commission itself, together with records relating to the New Hebrides British Service, the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony, the British Agent, later Commissioner and Consul, Tonga, and Pitcairn. As the High Commissioner's responsibilities diminished with de-colonisation, the Western Pacific High Commission became increasingly redundant and in 1978 the WPA closed.

Following the closure, most of the post-WWII records of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands were sent to Tarawa (Kiribati) and Funafuti (Tuvalu); those of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate were sent to Honiara (the pre-1941 records of the BSIP and GEIC were mostly destroyed in the war, but copies of many remain in the WPHC archives); and those of the Western Pacific High Commission were sent to London together with records relating to Pitcairn, Tonga and the New Hebrides. Records relating to Samoa before its separation into American Samoa and Western Samoa in 1900 formed series WPHC 1. These records were also separated from the Secretariat records and transferred to the New Zealand National Archives in 1978.

Distribution of the Western Pacific Archives after 1978



Although various proposals to return the Archives to the Pacific were made over the years, it was only after lengthy negotiations that agreement was reached between the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the University of Auckland Library to transfer the material to the Library. A formal transfer took place at the University's Waipapa Marae in October 2002.

The material transferred to the University, in summary, consists of the record groups remaining after the post-independence diaspora, i.e.: the records of the Western Pacific High Commission (WPHC), the British Commissioner and Consul to Tonga (BCT), and the New Hebrides British Service (NHBS). As a British Overseas Territory, the Pitcairn records (PIT) remain with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Jurisdictions of the Western Pacific Archives

British Solomon Islands Protectorate

The Solomons were included in the jurisdiction of the WPHC in 1877, but the British Solomon Islands Protectorate was not established until 1893. This name was changed to 'Solomon Islands' in 1975, when the country gained internal self-government in 1976. The Solomons became fully independent in 1978.



'Photograph album: scenes from British Solomon Islands Protectorate, ca1939–1949'. WPHC 10/XV/325/009.

Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony (Kiribati and Tuvalu)

The area came within the jurisdiction of the Western Pacific High Commission in 1877, and the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Protectorate was proclaimed in 1892. The status of the group changed to Colony in 1916. Control of the Tokelau Islands was transferred to New Zealand in 1925.

In 1972, the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony separated from the Commission: the Ellice Islands separated from the Colony in 1975, becoming Tuvalu in 1976 and gaining full independence in 1978. The Gilbert Islands Colony existed from 1976 and became independent under the new name of the Republic of Kiribati in 1979.

New Hebrides (Vanuatu)

The New Hebrides British Service was established under the Anglo-French New Hebrides Convention of 1906 which provided for joint rule of the New Hebrides by France and Great Britain. The Convention was revised in 1922. The Service formed part of the Western Pacific High Commission with a Resident Commissioner in Port Vila reporting to the High Commissioner, until the Commission ceased in 1978. The New Hebrides was renamed Vanuatu at independence in 1980.

Pitcairn Islands

Although Pitcairn became a British colony in 1838, it was not until 1898 that it came under the jurisdiction of the Western Pacific High Commission. Government under a Chief Magistrate was established by the British Consul in Tahiti, R.T. Simons, in 1904, and amended to its present form by H.E. Maude representing the WPHC, in 1940. Responsibility for Pitcairn was transferred to the Governor of Fiji in 1952. When Fiji became independent in 1970, Pitcairn remained a British Overseas Territory, with the British High Commissioner in New Zealand becoming the Governor of Pitcairn.



"Awahou", M.V.: - Survey and Registration of. 1946.' WPHC 9/II/F.46/17/8.

Tonga

Although Tonga has been a constitutional monarchy since 1875, under treaties of friendship of 1879 and 1900 the kingdom ceded control of its foreign affairs and the right to try all foreigners as British subjects under British law, to Great Britain. Great Britain was represented by the British Agent and Consul who reported to the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific. The Treaty of Friendship was revised in 1958, changing the office of the Agent to 'British Commissioner and Consul'. Tonga gained full independence in 1970.

References

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Western Pacific Archives: scope and content

The Archives comprises more than 760 linear metres (approximately 2,800 archive boxes) of records covering all aspects of colonial administration in the Western Pacific from 1877-1978, making it a treasure trove for researchers. For example, there are records on the development of health services, taxation, communications, land policy, and public works, not to mention the World Wars. The documents include registers and indexes, correspondence, circulars, financial records, annual reports, local administrative reports, some graphical records such as maps, plans and photographs, and any other record of activity deemed worthy of permanent retention.

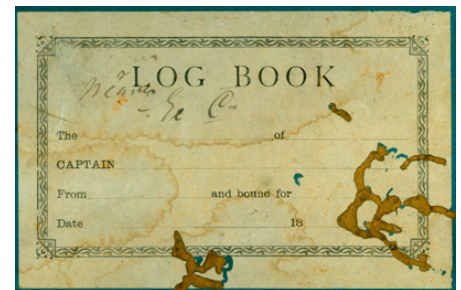
The WPA has been used in a range of research projects and publications in recent years, including the history of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony; the interface between native medical practitioners and the colonial administration; German migrants in Tonga; the history of coastwatchers; children of servicemen in World War Two; the legal status of indigenous peoples; and numerous family history projects. For family history, the records of the two Resident Commissioner collections are especially useful: the New Hebrides British Service (NHBS) and the British Commissioner and Consul in Tonga (BCT). These records are rich in personal details because of the range of functions the WPHC carried out in Vanuatu and Tonga. These included issuing passports and certificates of identity, administration of civil and criminal law, and the registration of births, deaths and marriages of British subjects.

The WPA is divided into three groups of records:

Records of the Western Pacific High Commission (1875-1978)

The largest record group within the WPA collection, this consists of the records of the High Commissioner of the Western Pacific – altogether 550 metres, arranged in 33 sub-collections. The Resident Commissioners or representatives in the following areas reported to the High Commissioner, who in turn reported to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in the UK:

- British Solomon Islands Protectorate
- Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony (Kiribati and Tuvalu)
- New Hebrides (Vanuatu)
- Pitcairn
- Tonga



'Log Book containing the proceedings on board the Schooner "Colonist" from Sydney...' WPHC 2/VIII/14a.

Note: Records for Samoa, which were originally part of the WPHC as WPHC 1, were transferred to the National Archives in Wellington in 1978.

The bulk of the WPHC consists of the 'Inwards Correspondence' series which, despite its name, is a comprehensive record of activity. It consists of correspondence between the Resident Commissioners and the High Commissioner, and the High Commissioner and the Secretary of State for the Colonies, as well as other entities with which the WPHC interacted. It includes copies of replies as well as the inwards letters, together with comments, annotations, and instructions by administrators. The series designated as 'WPHC 4/IV' runs from 1875-1941, and is arranged by year/number and indexed in the Subject Indexes and Correspondence Registers. From 1917, the folders are also listed in the finding aids for the collection. From 1942, the 'Inwards Correspondence' folders are arranged by subject classification, making retrieval considerably easier.

Records of the New Hebrides British Service (1902-1975)

The New Hebrides British Service was established under the Anglo-French New Hebrides Convention of 1906 which provided for joint rule of the New Hebrides by France and Great Britain. The Convention was revised in 1922. The Service formed part of the Western Pacific High Commission with a Resident Commissioner in Port Vila reporting to the High Commissioner, until the Commission ceased in 1978. The New Hebrides was renamed Vanuatu at independence in 1980.

The NHBS records encompass 171 metres, arranged in 19 sub-collections, covering every aspect of colonial administration in the New Hebrides, including correspondence, land records, civil and criminal legal cases, native administration, and district agents' reports.

Records of the British Commissioner and Consul, Tonga (1862-1968)

Although Tonga has been a constitutional monarchy since 1875, under treaties of friendship of 1879 and 1900 the kingdom ceded control of its foreign affairs and the right to try all foreigners as British subjects under British law, to Great Britain. Great Britain was represented by the British Agent and Consul who reported to the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific. The Treaty of Friendship was revised in 1958, changing the office of the Agent to 'British Commissioner and Consul'. Tonga gained full independence in 1970.

The BCT records cover 42 metres, arranged in seven sub-collections and include correspondence, passport applications and photographs, and criminal and civil legal cases.

For Researchers

Access to the collection

This is a restricted collection, and readers must apply for access to the [Special Collections Manager](#), in addition to consenting to the standard conditions of access for the Library's manuscripts and archives collections. The exception is the copies of the WPHC correspondence (1875 – 1925), which were purchased on microfilm when the Archives was still housed in Fiji, and which are openly accessible in the Microtexts Room.

Because the WPA is such a large and complex collection, researchers are recommended to contact [Special Collections](#) to discuss their research interests before embarking on extensive research. This approach has proven particularly useful for overseas researchers, and those based outside of Auckland, who have limited time to use the collection.

Searching the Western Pacific Archives

Online finding aids

Eighty-seven online finding aids, which provide folder-level descriptions of *most* of the WPA material, are accessible through the Library website.

Covering the records of the BCT, NHBS and WPHC (excluding the pre-1917 WPHC 'Inwards Correspondence'), the finding aids are based on inventories compiled by the WPA archivists in Fiji prior to the archives' transfer to the UK.

The finding aids are best accessed from the MSS & Archives homepage, which provides a filtered search of the Catalogue:

<http://www.library.auckland.ac.nz/manuscripts-and-archives>

In the search box on that page,

- Enter the keyword *WPHC* for Western Pacific High Commission records, *NHBS* for New Hebrides British Service or *BCT* for 'British Commissioner and Consul Tonga'. This will retrieve 56 WPHC finding aids, seven BCT finding aids and 21 for the NHBS. Click on each record and then click on *Finding aid* to bring up the finding aid.
- Each finding aid can be browsed or word-searched using 'Ctrl F'.



The image shows a document record on the left and a search dialog box on the right. The document record includes the following text: "From : Secretary of State.", "No : Circ.", "270/1933", "Date 9 Dec. 1933.", and "Subject: Biologists, education and supply of, Report on, by the Committee of the Economic Advisory Council." The search dialog box, titled "Find", has a search input field containing "education", two checkboxes for "Match whole word only" and "Match case" (both unchecked), and "Previous" and "Next" buttons.

Pre-1917 WPHC 'Inwards Correspondence'

No online finding aid is currently available for the pre-1917 WPHC 4 I/IV 'Inwards Correspondence', so searching these early records needs to be done in Special Collections. This material was microfilmed in Fiji during the 1960s-1970s and distributed to various libraries and archives, and is therefore unrestricted.

Various microfilmed subject indexes and correspondence registers are used to locate this material; the references must be interpreted correctly to locate the file numbers. As this is a reasonably complex process, Special Collections is developing an index to folder titles which will be made publicly available. In the meantime, Special Collections can undertake limited searches of the index for researchers, depending on the time involved. Alternatively, the microfilmed subject indexes and correspondence registers (reels 561-565, 79-1 and 79-2) can be consulted in the Microtexts Room next to Special Collections.

The remainder of the WPHC 4/IV 'Inwards Correspondence', from 1926 – 1941, has been microfilmed for preservation reasons and will be issued in preference to originals in the Microtexts Room.

Ordering material to view

Material can be ordered in person or by email. To help ensure the correct items are retrieved, please provide the following details from the finding aids:

- Finding aid reference, e.g. NHBS 3.
- Location (box or microfilm reel number).
- Folder reference number.
- Folder name.

NHBS 3/II. General correspondence files. 1943–1953.

Location	MP No.	Title
3025999	1/1	Burns Philp Account - Change of Terms & Conditions.
	1/3	Department of External Territories - Condominium Agency.
	2/1/2	Quarantine. Epidemics - Measures against Whooping Cough, Typhoid, Infantile Paralysis, T.B. etc. including Decs. Regs. & Orders - General.

Records held off-site (most of the WPA records) will be ready for viewing in the Special Collections Reading Room within 12 – 24 hours of placing the order. Twenty-five boxes can be ordered per day; each box may include more than one required item. Readers are allocated 10 items at a time.

The unrestricted microfilms are freely available in the Microtexts Room and the restricted microfilms (WPHC 4 I/V 1926-1933) are supplied on request to registered users during Special Collections' opening hours (Monday – Friday, 8.30am-5pm).

Citing materials in your research

Although the way you cite material will depend on the referencing style you are using, we recommend including the following elements when citing material in the WPA to avoid ambiguity:

Whole folder

Jonfrum Cult, Tanna. Activities of. 1941–42. NHBS 17/II/1. Western Pacific archives. MSS & Archives 2003/1. Special Collections, University of Auckland Libraries and Learning Services.

Individual document in a folder

James Nicol to Resident Commissioner, 6 June 1941. NHBS 17/II/1. Western Pacific archives. MSS & Archives 2003/1. Special Collections, University of Auckland Libraries and Learning Services.

Research Service

Special Collections has limited resources to conduct research on behalf of individuals, and the most satisfactory experience for the reader is personal research in the archives rather than through an intermediary. Depending on the nature of the enquiry and the time involved, Special Collections can conduct limited research. There is no charge for this service unless it extends beyond one hour.

Microfilming and digitisation

When the WPA was housed in Fiji, an extensive preservation microfilming programme commenced which reproduced all of the WPHC 4/IV 'Inwards Correspondence' series up to 1925, and accompanying indexes and registers. The University of Auckland Library has continued this work and has microfilmed the WPHC 4/IV correspondence from 1926 – 1941. Where available, the microfilm version will be issued in preference to originals to help preserve these valuable materials.

Digital copies of some fragile materials, such as the passport photographs in BCT, and early land records of the Solomon Islands, have been made for preservation reasons, and references to these are recorded in the finding aids.