***Micronesian Seminar Library***

PHA Meeting, Taiwan, 2015

*Beginnings*

MicSem began small in 1960–a shelf or two of books that might help the Jesuit seminarians studying theology in the US keep up their interest in the Pacific (it was presumed that all of us would be returning to the islands after our ordination).... I was the last in a line of newly ordained Jesuit priests to leave for the islands in 1969, so I brought the materials with me to Xavier HS where I was assigned to teach.

From its slender beginnings--a dozen boxes of books on the Pacific, a few rusty shelves and a battered Olympia typewriter, all housed in one of the smaller faculty rooms at Xavier High School--the Micronesian Seminar grew. Slowly at first, as might be expected of an operation run on only a few hundred dollars a year and dependent on whatever time and energy its director could summon at the end of a full day teaching high school. .

As the early years passed we moved....from a tiny room at Xavier to a much larger one, with bookshelves encircling the walls and even spilling into the director’s office. Students sat on the floor flipping through periodicals or journals of the Congress of Micronesia, as visitors stepped around them and commented on the unpretentious surroundings.

* built up the library, mostly to accommodate our needs and those of the high students. But our needs were considerable since MicSem had begun working on political status, producing history textbooks on the region, studying the rising rate of suicide, and exploring the multiple issues related to economic development.
* had been established as the social arm of the Catholic Church in Micronesia. Its importance for the church was to serve as an educational institution–not to educate children, as we were already doing in the many elementary and high schools throughout the islands, but to educate the public on issues central to the modernization they were undergoing.

*Relocation to Pohnpei*

In 1992 the MicSem library and office furnishings were once again packed up--this time it took two 20-foot containers rather than a few cardboard boxes--for shipment to Pohnpei. The Micronesian Seminar was to be relocated in the FSM capital. It was not until a few years later, in August 1996, that MicSem would move into its own new building, complete with ample library, video studio and conference room.

* were involved with a variety of projects: publication of a bulletin (Micronesian Counselor), regular discussions, visits to other island groups for weekend “retreats,” and soon production of videos for public viewing on local TV stations (73 produced in all, including a 7-hour series on the history of Micronesia).
* with a much larger library and a higher profile, MicSem was a regular stop for students, visitors, government officials, and even newly appointed ambassadors.

*Library*

* modeled to a great extent on MARC on Guam. MARC was the first major collection on Micronesia–but again went beyond published works–government reports, tourist bureau bulletins, personal notes. Special distinction was the Spanish collection–early materials on initial Spanish missionization and colonization–gathered by Marge Driver and Sr. Felicia Plaza and others. Remains a valuable source of materials today.
* MicSem never gathered archival materials as such, but was greatly indebted to institutions that did. Two examples of resources touching on my own research: whaling logs from New England and mission letters from Houghton Library at Harvard. Acknowledgment of the pioneering work of PAMBU. Its contribution–gathering of materials in private collections, missionary archives, etc. (I kept bumping into it along the way, fortunately).
* Another institution playing a large role in expansion of MicSem: Hawaii-Pacific Collection at UH. Very good library, but with addition of field notes from civil servants, ethnographers and others. Great addition of 2500 microfilm reels when TT closed down in 1980s. These include a few thousand photos from Trust Territory days.

*From Library to Resource Center*

* Turned into a library–excellent collection of books and grey materials, but not archival materials like some of the other places.
* Later added two additional dimensions to the collection: 1) visual materials (photos and movies/videos–still and moving images–collected from every major country: Spain, Germany, Japan, Italy and throughout US); 2) island music (hymns, chants, elegies, other music up to beat and R&B in island languages).
* Photos seen as important as our own albums multiplied, and as we began drawing ever more on visual materials for our own publications. Visited nearly every major collection in the main countries with material on the islands: US, Japan, Spain, Australia, NZ, Germany.... problems of getting permission for digital copies in some places (especially Germany).
* Addition of moving visuals: movies and videos. Special coup was old footage from Japanese times obtained at the Japanese Film Center. We also tried to gather copies of TV programs produced on the islands by the History Channel, Discovery Channel, etc. Also private productions.
* Finally, within the last four years, focus on music. Includes chants, old elegies, love songs, hymns and pop music such as reggae and rock (as long as it’s in the local language)

*Offering Access to the Public*

* Collecting the items is one thing, but offering access to the disparate public is another.
* Cataloguing the items (using our own home-made formats).
* Posting them on the MicSem website, but in such a way as to prevent visitors from getting what they want despite the restrictions we were expected to honor.
* Offering them an easy way of obtaining copies of these items for their own purposes.
* Today, the tally is: 25,000 print materials, 80,000 photos, 800 videos and movies, and 25,000 songs and musical items.