

“Queen Emma” in 19th Century New Guinea. Part 3.



Jonas Mynderse Coe,
father of Emma.

In the last episode, Emma Coe and her partner Thomas Farrell had finally settled on Mioko Island in the Duke of York island groups off Rabaul and had set up a trading station on Mioko. They had also settled in an area known for its cannibalism, murders and deadly diseases.

The records of the period 1878-1880, when the Farrells were establishing themselves in the Duke of York area, bristle with stories of murder, sudden death and cannibalism; and, equally, of the savage vengeance taken by the white man. The lovers - for, despite their pioneering preoccupations, the Farrells still were in that category - were involved in many incidents.

Most of the Europeans thereabouts were outright scoundrels, with the scoundrel's usual ambitions in the direction of women. Naturally, the spectacle of a woman like Emma, in that undisciplined place, aroused their interest. But big Tom Farrell was in the way, and Emma's proven expertness with a revolver further discouraged them.

The Farrells soon learned that, in relation to security from native attack their best chance was with the chiefs, and there they made valuable friendships. In Melanesian culture there is no provision for hereditary chiefs; but here in the matrilineal society of the Duke of Yorks and the Gazelle Peninsula, the last headman's sister's eldest son had the edge on all the other contenders but only if he could support his claim with strength, cunning and fighting ability.

Not long after the Farrells arrived in Mioko they met the notorious “King Dick” – Tor Poulo, a most powerful chief in the Duke of

York group. He came alongside one morning in a small canoe paddled by two of his many wives, a fat, bearded, fantastic figure, attired in a red shirt and a battered stovepipe hat.

“I am King Dick,” he announced, in surprisingly good English. “Where captain of ship?”

Farrell invited him on board. He was a famous cadger, but in spite of this and his garb, he impressed them with his dignity and arrogance. He stared unbelievably at Emma before he began chaffing with Farrell.

Later, ashore, as Emma was directing the stowage of goods, she noticed one of King Dick's men carrying off a small package. One of her Samoans intercepted the thief, and Emma slashed him over the shoulders with the riding whip she usually carried. The man snarled and leapt at her, and was felled by the Samoan just as King Dick and Farrell came up.

There were tense moments while Farrell and Emma, revolvers in hand, explained to the savage potentate the laws of meum and teum. They pointed to the solid, bamboo palisade around their group of huts. Any unauthorised native found inside would be shot, they said.

The crafty chief got the message, plus a few generous gifts from the Farrells. Thenceforward, he professed himself their friend. They trusted him, and the Nodup chief Toroturu, as much as they trusted any of those incalculable people; but they never took a risk.

From Herr Kleinschmidt, a Mioko neighbour, Emma learned a great deal about the social customs of the folk among whom she had made her home.

Kleinschmidt, an estimable German scientist, was established by Godeffroys near their station in Mioko to collect botanical and entomological specimens for certain German institutions. His fate was tragic. In 1880, the year after Farrell and Emma arrived in New Britain, his wife died from black-water fever, and in March, 1881, he was brutally murdered by a party of Utuan islanders. It was Farrell who organised the expedition in April, 1881, and punished the Utuans mercilessly: and British Commissioner H.H. Romilly reported, after inquiry, that this action was justified.

Kleinschmidt left many notes describing the social set-up of the local people, where women were regarded as chattels and beasts of burden and where cannibalism was general and frequently practised. While his observations may not always agree with later investigations into the Melanesian people, they are interesting nonetheless.

Marauding parties tried to capture their victims alive, he recorded, then cut off their feet to prevent them from escaping, searing the stumps of their legs over a fire so they would not prematurely bleed to death. In this lingering agony those destined for the cannibal feast were thus kept until required, then tortured until merciful death overtook them.

He described two feasts to which he was himself bidden. At one, at Kininiganum, on the mainland, a young wife provided the piece de resistance. She was number nine in the chief's list of wives and because she had been afraid and had cried he had become angry and killed her. At another village on the same coast, a man and his wife from enemy territory had been captured. The man was promptly killed but his wife was added to the chief's harem and at their wedding feast had helped to eat her husband.

Emma's first encounter with the low type of white men drifting into the area was not long delayed, either. In July, 1879, what the missionaries called “a piratical brig, the Adolph” which had been preying on the natives, committing many outrages, lay anchored in Mioko. One night, one of the Samoans rushed into Emma and gave the alarm that Rudy, one of the worst ruffians off the Adolph, was attacking a Samoan woman named Sositena. Sositena was the wife of a mission teacher, a handsome woman, and had been visiting Emma's servants,

Emma picked up her revolver and ran to the staff houses where the Samoan girl, in the grip of the drunken German sailor, was shrieking and fighting like a wild-cat. Emma smashed her left hand into his face. “Let her be!” she shouted. “Get out!”

The sailor cursed and freed the girl, and dived at Emma. As her Samoan servant tried to stop him, Emma fired. The bullet entered the sailor's thigh, and he howled like an animal as he rolled on the floor.

Next day Farrell, returning from Matupi,



Vulcan volcano erupting September 19th, 1994

ordered the Adolph away; but the brig was back again in October 1879, causing more trouble including the murder of a nondescript trader during a long drinking session on board her.

The three vessels lying in Mioko at that time – ship Sophia, steamer Sudsee and brig Adolph – were engaged in carrying native labourers from the Mioko area to Godeffroys, in Samoa. The traders bought slaves (taken in war, mostly) from the chiefs, and sold them to Godeffroys' agents at Mioko and Matupi.

This trade, and the European scum who engaged in it, the missionaries found even a harder cross to bear than the savage conduct of the primitive New Britain natives whom they had come to serve. How could they inculcate in these natives, the principles of Christianity when people of the white missionaries own race were living examples of all that was depraved and reprehensible.

Life for the Farrells, in the years 1879-

1882, in Mioko, was never dull, but there was more of tragedy than comedy in it,

They missed by several months, the very violent eruption of January, 1878, when Mt. Mother exploded (for the last time), and volcanoes, erupting in concert, raised a new island – later called Vulcan Island – on the west side of Blanche Bay, altered the shape of Simpsonhaven and covered land and sea thickly with pumice.

Simpsonhaven is surrounded by volcanoes, most of them now extinct, but according to early navigators' records, active in the year 1835 when they had caused a major disturbance. The Mother and others were again in violent eruption in 1877-8, when Vulcan Island appeared.

In more recent times, in 1937, Matupi, a still active crater that lies between the Mother and South Daughter, east of the present town of Rabaul, erupted shortly after Vulcan Island had exploded into a roaring volcano. In a matter of hours Vulcan

became a cone several hundred meters high, had joined itself to the mainland shore of Blanche Bay, and was no longer an island.

But if they experienced no volcanic eruptions, Emma and Farrell felt many gurias (violent tremors) and finally, in full and terrifying measure, the great earthquake which followed the settling-down period of the 1878 eruption, on the night of June 18, 1879. After that, New Britain's volcanoes sank shudderingly into their usual 50 years' sleep.

To be continued - the Farrells and the ill-fated Marquis de Rays expeditions.

NOTE: Rabaul township is surrounded by 7 major volcanoes of which five have been dormant for many years. In fact, Rabaul is the only town in the world located inside the cone of a once massive volcano that imploded over 1500 years ago, causing the ocean to rush into the volcanic caldera which in turn formed present-day Simpson Harbour.

The “troublesome two” volcanoes are Tavurvur, (Matupit), on the east side of Blanche Bay and Vulcan on the western side. On the morning of September 19th, 1994, the township of Rabaul was to witness an event that was to change Rabaul forever. The two volcanoes, Tavurvur and Vulcan, erupted together causing major damage to Rabaul and surrounding areas. Just on 93% of the township of Rabaul was destroyed in this massive twin volcanic eruption. Luckily, only a couple of people were killed in this eruption and eventually, all businesses were moved to Kokopo, 35 km south of Rabaul.

HAVE YOU SEEN CHEEKY?



Lost from the Dorrroughby area much loved galah called Cheeky. Scared off by an aggressive currawong. He's only young - 3 yrs old, soft pink and grey. Missing since 19th Nov. Not great on the vocab but does say “Cheeky Bird”.

**Please phone Colleen
6689 5210**

RURAL FENCING CONTRACTOR

4 WHEEL DRIVE
TRACTOR & TIPPER

HYDRAULIC POST
DRIVER AND POST HOLE
BORER

FREE QUOTES ON
NEW FENCES AND
REPAIRS

FULLY INSURED

**CALL ANDREW 6688 6364
MOB: 0431 095 583**