

ACCEPTANCE OF THE SIR HUBERT MURRAY PAPERS
BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR JOHN GORTON, ON
BEHALF OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA

Canberra, A. C. T.

6 DECEMBER 1968

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr John Gorton

Sir Grenfell, Mrs Pinney, Dr West and Members of the National Library Council :

This seems to be fundamentally, at any rate ostensibly, a strictly family occasion, as it were, and I feel very privileged indeed to be able to share in it and to accept on behalf of the Council these historical letters which you have so generously donated.

It is appropriate, I think, that on such a day you, Sir, as the eminent biographer of Sir Hubert Murray should be with us, and perhaps even more appropriate that you should be with us on this occasion in this place as the son-in-law of Harold White who adds to the flavour of this gathering.

Mr Harold White's acquisitive instincts, of course, are quite well known, as far as the Library is concerned, but I am not sure whether in this case he was the chief hunter after the letters which are before us or whether indeed they were freely offered, as I believe they were, by Mrs Pinney and by Dr West.

Sir, you have described Sir Hubert Murray as a great pro-consul as indeed he was - a great colonialist. It is not a word which tends to be in fashion nowadays, to be a colonialist, but I think that looking back on the times of which we are speaking, it has to be accepted that the colonial rule which Sir Hubert carried out was of immense benefit to Papua at that time and that it would have been impossible for that country to have developed to the state where colonialism is no longer acceptable had it not been for the guidance of this man.

He was a man of many parts. We hear of him first - or I hear of him first when he was at school, from which, if I am not incorrectly informed, he was ejected for taking a punch at one of his masters - a thing for which I envy him very much because it was something I always wanted to do when I was at school. I can only think that the master concerned was a very lucky man indeed that he was missed because I gather that Sir Hubert went on to become a heavyweight champion and able to take on any number of masters should he so have wished.

He had, of course, a very distinguished and interesting career in the field during the Boer War, and you have indicated to me that there were some most interesting letters here - letters from the field written at that time. He also took over the running of Papua, the bringing of Papua towards its full stature at a time of enormous challenge. So he was a man who contributed greatly to that country and we must hope - and I believe - by contributing to that country gave the opportunity for those further contributions which will be a contribution to Australia in the years ahead and the relations between Australia and Papua.

You mentioned, Sir, a time when he died in Samarai and when there was a mourning festival held, and I would like to quote in part from what was said at that time. This is a quote of what was said by a village councillor on this occasion :-

"But who is like him in Papua? There is none. There will never be one like him. He came among us and saw our lives. Sometimes when he was younger, he hunted and fished with us. He knew us in all our ways. Sometimes when his work was done, he met us on the roads as we came home from our gardens and he greeted us. Now we have lost him, for he is dead. We shall not know his friendly ways again. He was the best of men; our children and their children will talk of him. He promised us all 'I will not leave you. I will die in Papua' His words were the words of a true man for his body lies in our ground."

Now the record of the work he did lies in the National Library of Australia. With that history and with that feeling among the people for what he did when he was alive, may I renew the protestations of the gratitude we feel that these records of his work lie in the national archives for all time.

Thank you, Mrs Pinney
