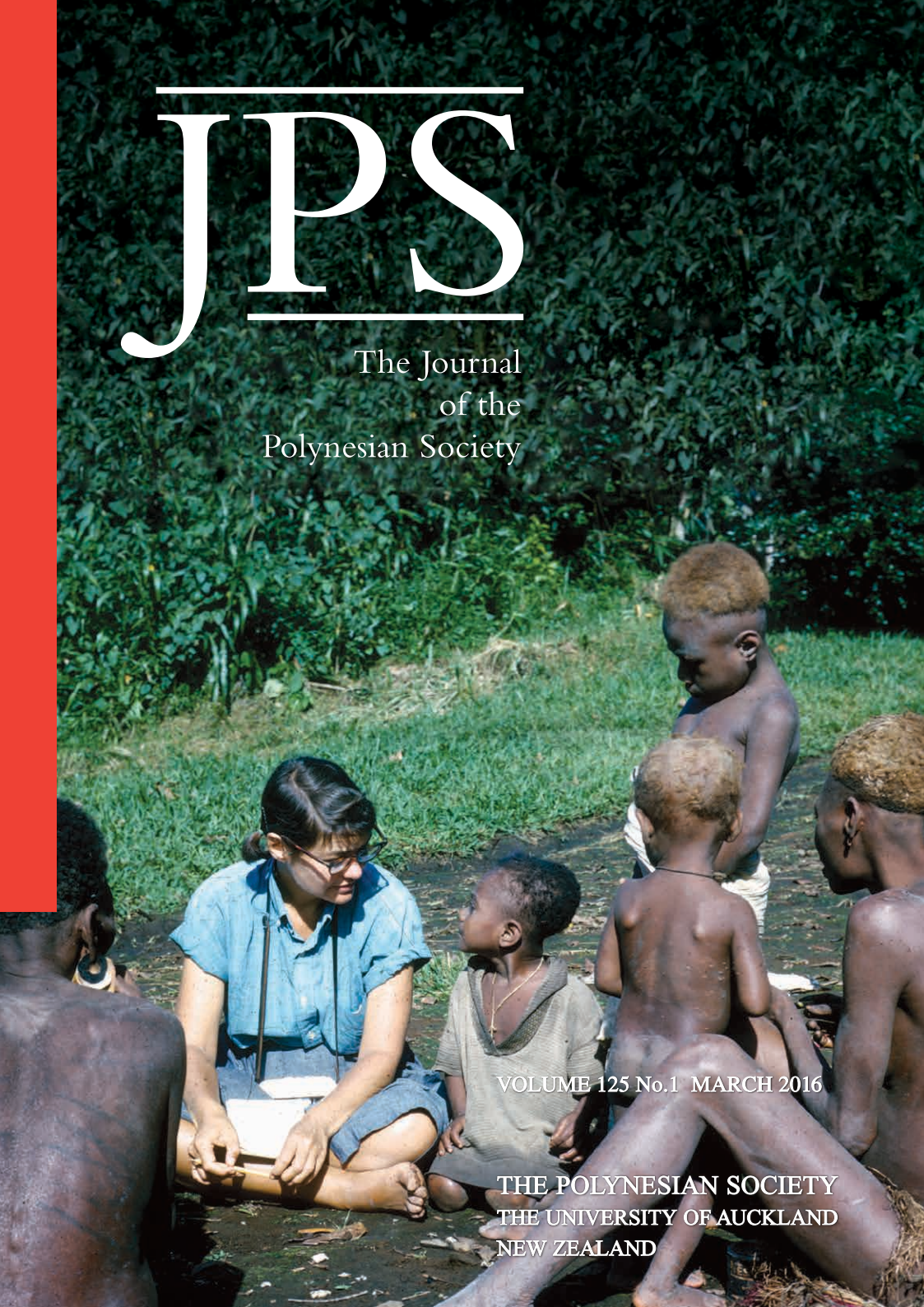
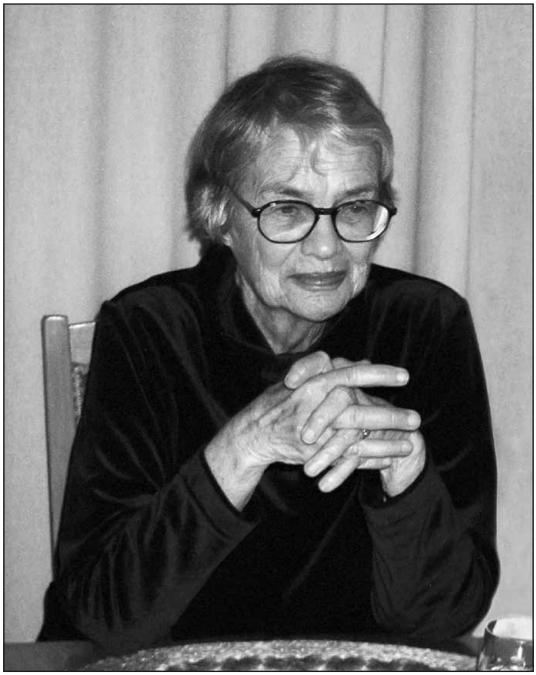
JPS

The Journal
of the
Polynesian Society



VOLUME 125 No.1 MARCH 2016

THE POLYNESIAN SOCIETY
THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
NEW ZEALAND



MARTHA ANN CHOWNING (1929–2016)

Professor Ann Chowning died in an Auckland nursing home on 25 February 2016. A noted anthropologist and linguist, her life and achievements are well described by Judith Huntsman (2005). That essay, written with Ann's co-operation, appeared in her Festschrift, a volume that also contains important tributes from friends and colleagues and includes a detailed list of her publications.

Born in Little Rock, Arkansas and educated at Bryn Mawr College and the University of Pennsylvania she was, even in the 1970s, a rare and fine example of the American "four-field" approach to anthropology which demanded knowledge of prehistory, culture, linguistics and physical anthropology. Her expertise in archaeology came from work in Tikal Guatemala and New Britain, Papua New Guinea. Her socio-cultural fieldwork in Lakalai, Molima, Kove and Sengseng (PNG) established her as a respected and accomplished fieldworker as well as linguist of Austronesian

languages. She published on a wide range of topics, often papers contributing to symposia and conferences devoted to particular topics.

Rather than repeat what has already been published, we will focus further on our experience of Ann as an anthropologist, teacher and colleague at the Victoria University of Wellington.

Ann came to the University in 1977 from the University of Papua New Guinea where she had been Associate Professor of Anthropology and Dean of Arts since 1970. One of us (HBL) was instrumental in Ann applying for the position, as he had tutored for Ann at the University of Papua New Guinea before coming to Victoria in 1975. He mentioned to Paula Brown, his PhD supervisor, who was visiting Wellington at the time, that the Department was experiencing problems filling the chair vacated by the retirement of its foundation professor, Jan Pouwer. Paula said Ann had expressed a wish to leave New Guinea as she considered Port Moresby was becoming unsafe for female expatriates. But the job market in the United States was depressed and she had been unsuccessful in finding a suitable post. Ann submitted a late application for the position at Victoria and she was offered, and accepted, the position of Professor and Chair of Anthropology.

Ann inherited an Anthropology Department at Victoria in some disarray. Jan Pouwer had favoured Lévi-Strauss's ideas viewed through a Dutch lens. His perspective enthused many students and some academics in the University, but few of the anthropologists he recruited to teach anthropology in his Department. Moreover, unlike at the University of Papua New Guinea where anthropology and anthropologists had a central role in research and teaching, at Victoria the subject was considered marginal and was under-resourced. Faced with this situation, Ann tried to reconstruct the Department and raise the discipline's profile in the University with extremely limited resources.

In the introductory courses she presented the broad vision of the kind of anthropology in which she had been trained. But this could not be developed into higher levels of teaching. Archaeology and physical anthropology were excluded from funding, then centralised through the Ministry of Education, and none of the other lecturers had sufficient knowledge of the technicalities of linguistics to develop this field. Linguistics was taught within the English Department and was devoted to English and other Indo-European languages. Anthropology courses beyond the first year concentrated wholly on social and cultural topics. At the two-hundred level there was a core course on theory and then students were expected to move on to more advanced courses that dealt with new and emergent ideas in anthropology. Like any good plan, the delivery of the programme was limited by the skills, knowledge and willingness of Department members to contribute to the overall vision. This often meant that Ann had to fill-in the missing bits, sometimes in jointly-

taught courses, when and where members were willing to be involved. It also meant that, given a very small academic staff and a large number of students, she had little time to teach her own particular interests. However, her lectures were always illustrated with examples drawn from her rich resource of ethnographic experiences, often with slides that provided students with insights into ethnographic research.

Postgraduate teaching was likewise limited by the availability of resources. While obviously willing to include anthropology in the University's curriculum, the powers that be were less willing to sponsor the kind of research required to sustain it as a proper academic discipline. Most critical was the absence of funding for ethnographic research, a problem that affected both postgraduate students and the academic members of the Department. Caught between a heavy teaching load, administrative and management duties, Ann's ability to sustain her own research suffered. The arrival of one of us (JU), from Australia in 1983, relieved some of the pressures, as we shared the management of the Department and co-taught a number of courses.

Ann continued, however, to be highly productive in producing papers for conferences, many of which were published in conference proceedings or in collections of essays. Indeed, it often seemed that she needed a conference or research seminar to turn her rich store of ethnographic knowledge into papers and subsequently into publications. We still have a vivid vision of Ann frantically writing an ever-lengthening paper, then editing it down to an acceptable size, losing many interesting ideas in the process, and finally hurriedly posting it as close to the deadline as she could manage. The development of fax machines merely moved the deadline closer to the final submission point. The result, however, was always a carefully structured, richly illustrated paper.

Ann never wanted to retire but was forced to do so when she reached the age of 65 by the law at the time. It may have been a blessing. Released from the pressures of teaching and administration, she moved north to Auckland where she could escape the cold wind and rains of Wellington. She continued to work on her writing and remained associated with anthropology and friends and colleagues at the University of Auckland. She was also active in the editing of this journal. Unfortunately her body proved to be not as resilient as her mind and she physically became increasingly frail. Fortunately, she at least lived to see her dictionary of the Lakalai language published (Chowning and Goodenough 2015), a work to which she had devoted a great deal of her research time (see Sperlich and Pawley 2015).

Respecting her wishes not to have a formal memorial service, Ann's friends and colleagues in Wellington met in early March to share reminiscences of her contributions to the development of anthropology and the academic life

of Victoria University. We recalled her unique teaching style—assigning readings which she then extensively criticised during lectures, often to the consternation of students. Her commitment to fieldwork was noted, along with the importance she placed on learning by quietly observing, listening and participating rather than through conducting formal interviews. Colleagues from linguistics recalled their appreciation of her contributions to their field, how she essentially served as their professor for a few years until linguistics became properly established in the University. We remembered her eccentricities, her ubiquitous raincoat and jandals, and her love of reading that included not just academic works but also Mills and Boone, Georgette Heyer and detective stories. These she gladly lent or exchanged with anyone interested. And finally, we remembered her love of her cats.

Ann was a very special, unique person, not easily forgotten who left a lasting legacy.

REFERENCES

Chowning, Ann and Ward H. Goodenough, 2015. *A Dictionary of the Lakalai (Nakanai) Language of New Britain, Papua New Guinea*. 424pp. Available at: glottolog.org/resource/reference/id/475142

Huntsman, Judith (with Ann Chowning), 2005. Ann Chowning – Polymath anthropologist and traveller. In Claudia Gross, Harriet D. Lyons and Dorothy A. Counts (eds), *A Polymath Anthropologist: Essays in Honour of Ann Chowning*. Research in Anthropology & Linguistics Monograph No. 6. Auckland: Department of Anthropology, pp. ix-xvi. [Available from: http://www.arts.auckland.ac.nz/en/about/schools-in-the-faculty-of-arts/school-of-social-sciences/anthropology/journals-and-associations/ral/monographs.html]

Sperlich, Wolfgang B. and Andrew Pawley, 2015. The Making of the Lakalai Dictionary. ical13.ling.sinica.edu.tw/Full_papers_and_ppts/July_19/G-101.pdf

Hal Levine and Jim Urry
Victoria University of Wellington