

# Field Museum News

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## STRANGE CARVED FIGURES, FROM SOUTH SEA ISLANDS, PLACED ON EXHIBITION

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The large collection of material brought to Field Museum by the Joseph N. Field South Pacific Expedition (1909-13) included a number of specimens that were too large to be placed in ordinary museum cases. Some objects were too tall even to stand upright in the exhibition hall. Until just last month, with the completion of especially constructed cases the bottoms of which are sunk below floor level, these tall specimens could not be exhibited. At the north end of Joseph N. Field Hall (Hall A) there have now been placed on exhibition four large and elaborate wooden carvings (*one of which is illustrated on the left side of this page*) from northern New Ireland. At the south end are two large figures cut out of the stems of tree-ferns (*of which one is shown in illustration on the right*), and two upright wooden drums, or slit gongs, as they are often called, from the New Hebrides (*see illustration on page 2*).

In northern New Ireland, as well as in other parts of Melanesia, there are many festivals and ceremonies of various kinds, at which much food is exhibited and consumed. Feasting and dancing provide the chief pleasures and attractions for such occasions. The area is remarkable for the number and variety of carved and painted wooden figures which are exhibited at many of these ceremonies, especially those held in honor of the dead. For such an occasion one or more carvings called *malagans*, representing a human figure in whole or in part, will be made or ordered by the head of the family or clan performing the ceremony. Usually the figures are made to order by men especially skilled in that work. Sometimes a ceremony will be held for a single individual, especially if he is wealthy or

influential. At other times it may be held for several clan members at once. Often it is necessary to wait some time for the carving to be finished, or until a sufficiently large supply of food of all kinds is accumulated. The finer the carving and the larger the feast, the greater are the honor and prestige gained by the family or clan giving the ceremony.

The carved figures made for these mortuary ceremonies are of many kinds, but are usually single human figures, somewhat less than life size, with an uncarved lower portion which is set in the ground. Sometimes two or more figures, one above another, may be carved from the same log, making a sort of column, which may be fifteen or more feet in height. All these figures may represent clan members recently deceased, or they may represent the clan ancestors in a general way. Such general ancestral figures are common.

Each clan has its own peculiar type of carving, characterized by the general form, the shape and position of arms and legs, the kinds of ornaments, and other details. There are also certain particular rites and ceremonies which go with each type of figure or *malagan*. Although figures belong to the clan in a general way, the direct ownership is usually vested in the chief man or head of the clan. A *malagan*, with its accompanying ceremonies, may be sold, however, in which case the purchaser has the exclusive right to its use. The seller must then in some way acquire another one. If not sold, the right to make and use a particular *malagan* is passed down by inheritance, or by gift.

The origin of many of the *malagans*, with their special ceremonies, is lost in antiquity. Some, however, are accounted for by dreams, and there are a number of myths and stories giving the origin of certain particular ones.

The making of a *malagan* may take a year or more. The carving is done in a special house, which only the carver and the male clan owners are allowed to enter. At the time of the ceremonies, the carvings are set up at the place where the dances and special performances are held. After this they may be destroyed, though usually no more attention is paid to them, and they are simply allowed to decay.

In the more complicated carvings the added birds, fish, or other objects as a rule seem to have no special meaning. Sometimes, however, they may refer to some particular incident in the life of the person for whom the figure is made. Such a meaning

would usually be known only to those acquainted with the person concerned.

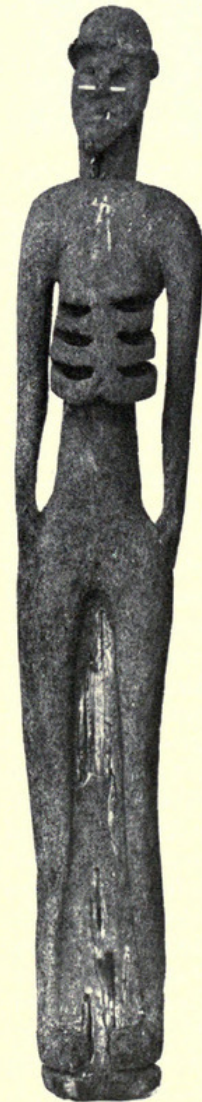
In general these ancestral figures may be regarded as memorials, and the ceremony as corresponding to the unveiling of a statue in America or Europe. The making of a fine carving, and the carrying out of the ceremony with the great amount of food and presents that accompany it, add to the prestige of the donor. Not so to recognize and honor any important member of the family who had died would be regarded as a disgrace to the survivors.

### A DIFFERENT TYPE IN THE NEW HEBRIDES

In the New Hebrides we find a different culture, with carvings of an entirely different kind and with a different meaning. In Ambrym and eastern Malekula, in addition

to wooden carvings, we frequently find peculiar large figures made from the inverted stems of tree-ferns. The native villages usually consist of a small number of crude huts placed close together, often hidden away in the forest. Somewhat to one side will be a small clearing, and near it one or more huts, each surrounded by a fence, often made of stone. These huts belong to men of high rank, a stone wall indicating the highest rank.

At the side of the clearing or near the huts there may be seen a few upright objects looking something like posts—some of wood, others of a peculiar black fibrous material, larger at the top than at the bottom. These are inverted tree-fern stems, carved to represent a head, with huge eyes, nose, and chin. Sometimes arms and legs are also crudely represented. One of these figures (*illustrated in this column*) was presented to the Museum by Mr. Templeton Crocker, of San Francisco.

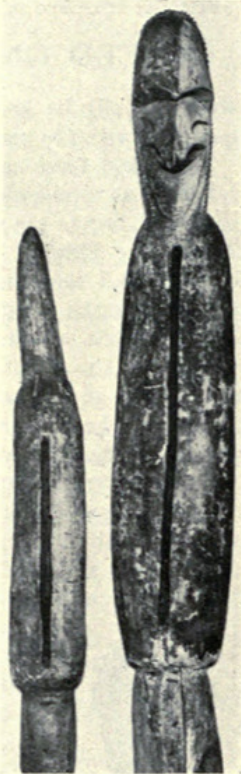




These figures are usually dark gray or black, and show signs of weathering, but occasionally one may see a newly made figure, covered with clay to form a smooth surface, and painted white and black, perhaps with some red. Around and over the figure is constructed a sort of shed to protect it from the weather. This is open at the front and sometimes at the sides. Such shelters decay in a short time, and the clay washes off, so most of the figures appear quite weather-worn. After they have once served their purpose, no further attention is paid to them.

#### TALL DRUMS OF WOOD

In addition to the tree-fern figures, there will also be some upright drums of different sizes, and probably some carved wooden posts and figures at the sides of the open space or clearing. This space serves as a dancing ground and show-place for the various ceremonies. The drums will be beaten for the dances. The large ones may serve also as signal drums.



Wooden Drums from  
New Hebrides

These instruments are sounded at the ceremonial dances, and sometimes used for transmitting signals.

If the tree-fern figures are compared, they will be found to differ in certain respects. The style of each figure indicates the rank of its owner, and such figures are set up at the ceremony given when, and by means of which, he attains the rank indicated. All the men are divided into a number of classes or ranks. In Ambrym there are ten of these ranks or degrees, but in other islands the number varies from three or four to as many as twenty. A man can advance from a lower to a higher rank only by means of a special ceremony, for which he must provide a certain number of tusked pigs—that is, boars whose tusks have been allowed to grow beyond their usual length. This occurs when the upper tusks have been knocked out, so that the lower ones do not wear down. Such pigs are usually kept tied up in the house, and fed on soft food. The lower tusks then continue to grow, finally forming one, two, and in rare cases, even three complete circles. The longer the tusk, the more valuable becomes the pig. The number of pigs required as an offering at each ceremony increases with the rank. In Ambrym, for example, to

attain the fifth rank, fifteen must be offered. For the ninth rank, one hundred pigs are required. Only an old and very wealthy man can hope to reach the highest rank.

#### FREE LECTURES FOR ADULTS WILL BEGIN MARCH 2

The seventy-third course of free lectures on science and travel for adults will be presented by Field Museum on Saturday afternoons during March and April. Scientists, naturalists, and speakers of renown have been engaged for this series. All of the lectures, except one, will be illustrated with motion pictures, and in the case of the exception, stereopticon slides will be shown. The lectures begin at 2:30 o'clock and are given in the James Simpson Theatre. Admission is restricted to adults. Following is the complete schedule of dates, subjects and speakers:

- March 2**—Springtime in the Rockies  
Mr. Alfred M. Bailey, Colorado Museum of Natural History
- March 9**—Social Insects  
Dr. Alfred Emerson, University of Chicago
- March 16**—Penthouse of the Gods  
Mr. Theos Bernard, New York
- March 23**—Threshold of a New World  
Mr. Vincent Palmer, New York
- March 30**—Our Attic Stairs—Southeastern Alaska  
Mr. Karl Robinson, New York
- April 6**—Snow Peaks and Flower Meadows in the Canadian Rockies  
Mr. Dan McCowan, Banff, Alberta
- April 13**—Africa Smiles  
Mr. Herbert S. Ullmann, Chicago
- April 20**—Birds of America  
Dr. Arthur A. Allen, Cornell University
- April 27**—Return to Malaya  
Mr. Carveth Wells, New York

No tickets are necessary for admission to these lectures. A section of the Theatre is reserved for Members of the Museum, each of whom is entitled to two reserved seats on request. Requests for these seats may be made in advance by telephone (Wabash 9410) or in writing, and seats will be held in the Member's name until 2:30 o'clock on the day of the lecture. All reserved seats not claimed by 2:30 o'clock will be made available to the general public.

#### Museum in Education Conference

Miss Miriam Wood, Chief of the James Nelson and Anna Louise Raymond Foundation, acted as chairman at one of the meetings of the National Conference of the Progressive Education Association, recently held in Chicago. The subject of this meeting was *Museums as a Resource for Education*. The main discussion was led by Miss Frances Pressler of the Winnetka Public Schools. Field Museum was represented further by other members of the Raymond Foundation staff, and by Director Clifford C. Gregg. Delegates were present from school systems and from museums in many parts of the country.

#### LEON MANDEL EXPEDITION BACK FROM CARIBBEAN

Birds, mammals, fishes, and reptiles which inhabit certain islands and keys of the Caribbean where practically nobody ever goes were brought to Field Museum last month by members of an expedition which sailed to the most out-of-the way bits of land in that sea.

The returning collectors are Mr. Rudyerd Boulton, Curator of Birds, and Mr. D. Dwight Davis, Assistant Curator of Anatomy and Osteology. The expedition from which they returned was conducted aboard the yacht *Buccaneer*, and was led by its owner, Mr. Leon Mandel. Since the first of January the *Buccaneer* has been piloted between and around the coral reefs, and through remote and tortuous channels leading nowhere of importance so far as trade routes are concerned. Purposely sought were spots which most vessels would avoid.

The places visited are almost forgotten tiny possessions of the United States, Cuba, Honduras, Mexico, and British Honduras. Some of them are scarcely a square mile in extent, too insignificant to figure in international altercations and economic struggles, but nevertheless of great interest biologically. From them, Messrs. Boulton and Davis brought back approximately 150 exotic birds, 350 reptiles and amphibians, and 500 specimens of fishes, many of them exceedingly vari-colored and strange in form. They obtained also great quantities of mollusks, marine invertebrates, microscopic creatures accumulated in masses known as plankton, and other minute organisms. Color motion picture studies were made of many of the animals collected, in particular, slow motion analysis of sea birds in flight. In most of these places little or no scientific collecting had ever been done before. At Half Moon Cay, British Honduras, after material had been collected for exhibits representing a great colony of red-footed boobies which live there, a storm of hurricane force suddenly struck the *Buccaneer*, causing the breakage and loss of heavy chains and anchors, and a hurried departure out to sea for safety.

The most isolated of the islands visited was Swan Island, which consists of two mile-square specks of land belonging to the United States but probably unknown to most of this country's citizens, or even its government officials. It lies almost midway between Cuba, Honduras, and the Yucatan Peninsula. There the expedition obtained specimens of Nelson's yellow warbler, and a species of palm lizard, both of which are most exclusive hermit-like creatures, inhabiting, so far as is known, no other place on the earth's entire surface. Also collected there were representatives of a nesting colony of brown boobies, and various sea birds.

What is perhaps the largest colony of sea birds in the West Indies was found on Mu-





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