

ASAEO + NEWS = ASAO

Richard Scaglion

scaglion@pitt.edu

DRAFT: Please do not quote without permission. (I have to check on the accuracy of several statements).

This paper examines the growth of ASAO from a society primarily focused on Eastern Oceania and Austronesian-speaking peoples to an umbrella organization that, today, encompasses the entire range of Pacific Island cultures. A primary decision towards this end was to include the very large number of researchers who work with speakers of non-Austronesian languages on the mainland of New Guinea. ASAO began as ASAEO, the Association for Social Anthropology in Eastern Oceania. Its members employed a controlled comparison approach to explore social variation in Austronesian-speaking (mostly Polynesian) societies. Meanwhile, Melanesianists, especially those working on the mainland of New Guinea with Papuan-speaking peoples, were without a comparable professional organization. Starting around 1980, a regional newsletter called *NEWS* (The NorthEast Wantok System newsletter) was initiated with the goal of keeping Melanesianists located in the Northeast area of the USA in touch. It grew quickly and morphed into a regular newsletter with much wider (actually worldwide) distribution. But as the participation of Melanesianists in ASAO grew, *NEWS* became redundant with the *ASAO Newsletter*, and *NEWS* was terminated in May 1995. In this paper, I use *NEWS* as a focal point to trace the increasing involvement of Melanesianist anthropologists in ASAO and the concomitant broadening of ASAO's comparative ethnographic base.

ASAEO

In March of 1967, a symposium of social anthropologists with recent field research experience in eastern Oceania was held at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Organized by Vern Carroll of the University of Washington, the symposium focused on adoption and fosterage, but included discussions of varied and wide-ranging topics. During these conversations, participants expressed concern that, "...the intensification of modern social anthropology research in the Pacific has not so far been sufficiently systematic: we have gone out as individuals or in small team projects, largely out of touch with our colleagues, and have pursued diverse research interests and published the results in scattered bits and pieces." Because of this perceived lack of communication and organization, one of the outcomes of the meeting was the decision to form an association "...as a means of organizing research, disseminating information, and arranging recurring symposia on topics in Oceanic social anthropology." (*ASAEO Newsletter* 1:1). The geographical purview of this new organization was made clear from the outset: mainland New Guinea was not of primary interest or concern to the association.

Our primary scope includes, in area, insular Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia; and in subject, social anthropology. *Our relegation of New Guinea to the periphery* [emphasis added] is not aimed at excluding our colleagues working in this area or at denying the many ethnographic and theoretical concerns we share. Rather, it reflects our recognition of the different strategies entailed in New Guinea research, and of the great advances achieved in recent years toward the sort of organization and systematic comparison we hope ourselves to attain. (*ASAEO Newsletter* 1:1).

For the first few years, as planned, ASAEO focused on Eastern Oceania and relegated New Guinea research (and its researchers) to the periphery. But attitudes of the ASAEO membership towards including of the large number of anthropologists working in New Guinea varied, and as the membership grew, many envisioned a more inclusive association. In the spring of 1969, reorganization was in the air. A new Executive Committee was elected and charged with drafting a constitution, which was ratified by the Fellows (voting members) of the organization that fall. Newsletter 5 (March 1970:1) explained that, “The name of the organization has been changed to the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania (ASAO), deleting the ‘Eastern’ to accord with our new scope, which includes New Guinea.” The first annual meeting of this new organization, renamed ASAO, was held from March 29 – April 1, 1972 at Rosario’s Resort-Hotel, Orcas Island (San Juan Group), Eastsound, Washington (state).

Although the geographical scope of the organization had been expanded, the officers of the organization, and the various symposia that were organized during the early 1970s still had a decidedly eastern Oceania emphasis. Many New Guinea ethnographers, who had not been made welcome during the early days of ASAEO, remained reluctant to participate. But by the late 1970s and early 1980s, the involvement of mainland New Guinea researchers was increasing. At the urging of Peter Lawrence, ASAO Honorary Fellow and my own New Guinea mentor (see Scaglione n.d.), I attended my first ASAO meeting in 1976 in Charleston, South Carolina, where (according to *ASAO Newsletter* 20:3) I delivered a paper entitled, “The Abelam Yam Cult: Conflict Genesis and Management on a Seasonal Basis.” This year 1976 seems to have been a break point in the broadening of ASAO’s regional base.

Alex Mawyer and Alan Howard are researching “A History of ASAO Sessions: Formats and Topics” for our meeting. They have prepared a spreadsheet that lists (among other data) each ASAO session from 1967-2014 together with its geographical scope, whenever possible (For some sessions, especially informal ones, it was not feasible to code this information). Alan kindly provided me with a working copy of this spreadsheet. My preliminary analysis of their data suggests that there were three “epochs” in the increasing participation of New Guinea ethnographers in ASAO. During the years between 1967-1976 there were a total of 42 sessions, only three of which (7.1%) were coded as including any representation by scholars of New Guinea. This increased between 1977-1981 (the year of *NEWS*’s founding) when 17 of 44 sessions, or 38.6%, incorporated New Guinea researchers, after which, from 1982-1985, fully 62% (31 of 50) of ASAO sessions integrated participants who delivered papers dealing with PNG or New Guinea more generally. The first ASAO session that focused on New Guinea alone took

place in 1979. These data suggest that ASAO's concentration on Eastern Oceania was strong through the mid-1970, with a broadening of its geographical base during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Professional Newsletters in the 1970s-80s

The organization of ASAEO in the late 1960s came about principally to share and disseminate information. To fully appreciate how things were then, the reader must return with me to an age before the Internet became a common platform for interpersonal communication. Today it is hard to imagine an era before noteworthy events were immediately announced to the world via news outlets and social media; to a time when it was more difficult to obtain information than to sort through too much of it. Back then, scholarly communications were still mostly written and sent via regular post, or conducted by telephone. Documentary research was generally carried out in moldy archives, often in far away places, rather than by simply downloading papers from the internet. Through the remarkable resource that is ASANet today, a query for a difficult-to-find paper usually nets a pdf file via electronic attachment within hours, and a request for help on an esoteric topic typically prompts a barrage of comments from all over the world within a day or two. But it was not always like this. In the 1970s and 80s, printed newsletters were the main vehicle for contributing and distributing news items and information.

The *ASAO Newsletter* was a treasure trove of news and communication for many scholars back then, but its decidedly eastern Oceania focus made it much less useful for ethnographers working in New Guinea. A newsletter called *NEWS*, the Northeastern Wantok System newsletter, ultimately filled this lacuna. Today, the entire run of *ASAO Newsletters* has been scanned and can be accessed via the ASAO website <<http://www.asao.org/past-newsletters.html>>. Distributed electronically today, the newsletter continues to be an invaluable resource for Pacific Islands researchers. In contrast, *NEWS* ceased production around 1995 and is much harder to find since it is mostly of historical interest. To my knowledge, there is no digital copy of the run available anywhere. But Terry Hays (personal communication) donated a paper set to the *Tuzin Archive for Melanesian Anthropology* at the University of California at San Diego, where it can be accessed in person [<<http://roger.ucsd.edu/record=b7205047~S9>> and <<http://roger.ucsd.edu/record=b7208785~S9>>]. Because *NEWS* had slightly different titles in its early days (see below) the early newsletters have been catalogued separately from the rest of the run at UCSD.

In my possession, I have a binder containing a complete set of all 22 issues spanning the years 1981-1995. After an initial adjustment period, *NEWS* developed a "permanent staff" comprised of two main posts: compiler/editor and producer/distributor. I served in the latter capacity for almost the entire run of *NEWS*, and kept a hard copy of each release in the aforementioned binder. Many of these are the original typescript issues sent to me by the editors, often with cut and pasted items. For younger scholars, I should clarify that I mean this quite literally: back then, pieces of paper were cut out with scissors and pasted into place on the page with actual paste. In the early days, stencils of

these originals were then made, and copies were laboriously produced on a mimeograph machine. Nevertheless, I can't stress enough to younger readers how important these vehicles of communication were back then. In that bygone epoch, if a fellow Pacific scholar were to be giving a talk at a nearby University, one would probably not know of it except through personal communication. Nowadays, lists of upcoming talks most anywhere are readily available on the internet. But then, a newsletter sharing information periodically might be the only way one would be informed.

The Early Days of NEWS: Getting Established

NEWS #1

Sometime during the spring of 1981, Rob Gordon (Vermont), Terry Hays (Rhode Island College) and Bill Mitchell (Vermont) circulated an undated mail solicitation addressed to "fellow Melanesianists" that began,

We are trying to establish a newsletter, tentatively titled NEM (Northeastern Melanesianists), which will help those of us in the Northeast keep in touch and generally share information and ideas. While those who have worked in any part of Melanesia would be welcome (so long as they are currently resident in the Northeast), our focus will be on New Guinea. This is not intended as exclusionary, but more of a reflection of the fieldwork sites of the greater proportion of "New Guineaists" in the Northeast.

For the time being, at least, we do not anticipate any expense on your part. What we are asking for at this time is a general indication of your interest in such a newsletter and suggestions regarding persons to be included in our mailing list and proposed materials for the first "official" number. [*NEWS* 1:1].

As it turned out, interest was strong, and this mailing actually *became NEWS #1*. Besides the solicitation itself, the notice contained examples of news and items of interest. Once the newsletter got off the ground, subsequent issues were numbered sequentially beginning with this one. Examples of the sorts of contributions being solicited were:

- Announcements of pending or completed or in-progress research
- General news about relevant events, publications, and the like
- Information regarding pending visits of fellow Melanesianists (e.g., visiting professors at your institution, or guest speakers in formats which would be open to "outsiders")
- Any other items you think could be shared usefully within the region (*NEWS* 1:1)

These were just exactly the same sorts of news items being solicited for the *ASAO newsletter*, but ASAO's new purview encompassing the whole of the Pacific Islands, and its lingering emphasis on eastern Oceania, precluded the strong focus on New Guinea and the Northeast part of the USA envisioned by the *NEWS* organizers. Although by this time Melanesianists were being increasingly incorporated into ASAO, the relationship was still somewhat tenuous, with at least some early members of ASAO uncomfortable with "all those New Guinea types." Meanwhile, many "New Guinea types", especially those

of us with comparative orientations, were already committed to ASAO and already envisioned it as the umbrella organization it has now become, but we also recognized that (even today) regionally-based organizations such as the European Society for Oceanists (ESfO) or the Australian Association for Pacific Studies (AAPS) are important in the profession. The organizers of *NEWS* did not envisage a conflict with ASAO, and they were careful to address this concern in the original solicitation: “In no way are we trying to establish an alternative to existing organizations or publications, e.g., the ASAO Newsletter, and we hope you will continue to support those. We are just trying to improve communication in our region, with possibilities of special sessions at the Northeastern Anthropological Association annual meetings or other joint ventures.”

This first release was five pages long. The first page contained the solicitation summarized above; the next four pages contained “sample items” compiled by Rob Gordon. Among these was a suggestion by Rob that we have a symposium at the next Northeastern Anthropological Association (NEAA) meetings at Princeton in Spring 1982, on a broad topic like, “The Meaning of PNG for Anthropology” (this actually happened). He added, “If the newsletter does get off the ground, we envisage it being sent out once a semester. Hopefully, it would operate in the non-cash sector of the economy. It would be nice if we could make the cost of the newsletter at least one item of news, trivia, comment, hard-to-find references, etc., per year from all recipients of the newsletter.” (*NEWS* 1:2)

There were some brief news items (e.g., Jim Flanagan, writing his dissertation at Penn, would be visiting in Boston; Terry Hays would be in PNG over the summer under National Endowment for the Humanities auspices studying oral literature in the Highlands), and a section on “wanted” items (Deborah Gewertz of Amherst College was requesting references on the experiences of the Japanese occupation of PNG, Rob Gordon was seeking the location of any Annual Reports of Papua and New Guinea since 1945). A useful list of titles of films available for free from the PNG Embassy in New York was included, as well as a “Pith Helmet Corner” containing a humorous poem about anthropologists that had been published in the 1937 *Pacific Islands Monthly*. The authors of the solicitation asked for a response to the mailing from the recipients at their earliest convenience.

NEWS #2

Reaction to the proposal for a newsletter was positive, and the next number doubled in size to ten pages. Again undated, it was circulated in the fall of 1981 with Rob Gordon acting as the main compiler. It carried the heading “NEM (Northeastern Melanesianist), MN (Melanesianists in the Northeast), NEWS (Northeastern Wantok System) or call it what you like (?)” (*NEWS* 2:1). Among other items, the release contained extracts from letters received with reactions to the proposal for a newsletter.

The newsletter title itself generated considerable comment. In a plea to reconsider it, Gillian Sankoff noted, “Northeastern Melanesianists sounds too much like Northeastern Melanesia! Melanesianists in the Northeast is maybe more cumbersome but

a lot more informative (I almost threw away the circular before discovering what the “northeastern” meant). It also has the advantage that “MN” is a good abbreviation.” Other suggestions were proposed, but as it turned out, Rena Lederman offered the title that eventually stuck: “...Also, I think that we need a cuter newsletter name; maybe we should have a contest? How about ‘Northeastern Wantok System’ (NEWS)??” (*NEWS* 2:)

Some expressed concern about how the newsletter/organization would be structured. Gillian Sankoff wanted to know why it should be restricted to the Northeast, and distinct from ASAO: “I’m not sure it’s such a good idea to have a newsletter separate from ASAO. After all, mail is the same price anywhere in the country, and I’m sure that Melanesianists everywhere would want to know anything having to do with our current research; we would want to draw upon them for information about sources we were seeking (e.g. D. Gewertz’ search for inf. about the Japanese occupation), etc.” As time went on, Gillian turned out to be quite right about other Melanesianists wanting to receive *NEWS* wherever they lived. Most of the information compiled therein did turn out to be of general interest, and the distribution list grew quickly. But others saw possibilities for organizing in other ways that diverged from ASAO. Annette Weiner wrote, “I do have a few suggestions – (1) why not include the gen’l Pacific area? (2) are there any archaeologists in the NE. I always thought that the ASAO was wrong to exclude archaeology.” The suggestion to include the whole Pacific area was not well received; most people felt that it would indeed be too much of an overlap with ASAO. But the notion of going beyond just social anthropology met with favor and was actively pursued, with the idea of Melanesianists of all sorts, not just social anthropologists, uniting on the basis of regional residence and common interest.

A mailing list was published in this issue (*NEWS* 2:8-9) in response to calls to include one. It contained a surprising (to me, at least) total of 72 names. Rob Gordon reinforced its interdisciplinary compass by stating:

In this circular, a mailing list is enclosed for your information and possible additions/deletions. As will be apparent, the guiding philosophy in its construction had been to include everyone we knew, or had heard of, who might be interested in Melanesia and in participating in the network, so we have educationalists, biologists, physical anthropologists, linguists etc. on it. My own feeling is that we should try and expand it in that direction. We will probably start pruning this list after this circular in order to keep costs down.

Many correspondents wrote in with useful information of just the sort that was being solicited, and from its inception, *NEWS* contained many worthy news items that could be of historical interest in an era when information was hard to come by and easily lost. It developed into a summary and digest of happenings and research in Melanesia. It is beyond the scope of this paper to review all this, and my purpose here is simply to explore the relationship between *NEWS* and ASAO, but Don Tuzin captured the spirit of the times by writing in about a plan for a potentially important new project:

Conceived of by my colleague Fitz John Poole and myself with the advice of

numerous Melanesian scholars and a start-up grant from the University of California at San Diego, the plan envisions a combined journal/archive specializing in the capture of unpublished papers on Melanesian ethnographic topics. For too long, we feel, the chaotic state of this “hidden literature” has impaired scholarly communication and has impeded the systematic return of our ethnographic results to the academic institutions of Melanesia.” (*NEWS* 2:2).

Don’s project resulted in the *Melanesian Archive*, now known as the *Tuzin Archive for Melanesian Anthropology* at the University of California at San Diego, a resource that collects and preserves much of the “gray literature” on Melanesia (including a complete run of *NEWS*, see above). This venture was designed to address a problem that we all faced back then: difficulty of access to important information. Both *NEWS* and the *ASAO Newsletter* were other attempts to contend with this problem.

In the early days of *NEWS*, little effort was made to demarcate “the Northeast,” and, surprisingly, this never became an issue. The first published mailing list included many addresses from the New England region, together with areas surrounding New York and Washington, DC in the USA, and from the Canadian Provinces of Ontario and Quebec (and later New Brunswick). The western extent of the region, according to the list of addresses, was London (Ontario) in Canada and Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania) in the USA.

NEWS #3

The first issue of *NEWS* to actually carry a number was #3. Titled “*NEWS: Northeastern Wantok System. Niusleta Numba 3. September 1982,*” the issue swelled to 15 pages, three times the initial circular. Once again, it was compiled by Rob Gordon, who wrote (*NEWS* 3:1): “This communiqué comes to you courtesy of Rich Scaglione at Pittsburgh. The previous one was sent out by Jean-Claude Martin of Montreal just before Trudeau boosted Canadian postage rates. So if you happen to run into either of them, and are feeling generous, a beer or two plus thanks would probably be appreciated.”

Debate and questions about the mission of *NEWS* continued unabated. From the outset, there was pressure to expand geographically, and Rob Gordon wrote that, “We have also had a request from some friends on the West Coast to start a West Coast Chapter. Clearly we are soon going to be in need of sitting down sometime (At the Amer. Anth. Meetings maybe?) and discussing and possibly formalizing a skeleton organization.” (*NEWS* 3:1). Terry Hays stressed the importance of continuing with a regional emphasis:

With regard to some of the letters I still believe that we are not and should not be competing with ASAO, nor do we intend to duplicate its coverage (the whole Pacific, outside of the Northeast, etc.). Perhaps some kind of response should be included in the next number, stressing the local news orientation of what we’re doing, e.g., noticing guest speakers, visiting professors, etc., in a region which is small enough for people to feasibly travel around and take advantage of these opportunities once we know of them. Trying to expand our coverage beyond the Northeast would simply defeat this purpose; also it would then be validly open to the charge of competing with ASAO. The same is true if

we opened it up to “the general Pacific”. We simply can’t keep the project manageable and not be, to some degree, exclusionary.

Nevertheless, while the number did contain some notices of local events, most of the content was of more general interest... reports about difficulties obtaining research visas for PNG with advice about how to navigate an increasingly difficult bureaucracy, notices of new publications, future research plans, abstracts of papers from New Guinea related symposia, etc. One item, appearing under the sardonic heading, “Scaglione said to be honorable,” related that the author had received honorable mention in the 1981 Praxis Award of the Washington Association of Professional Anthropologists for applied work in PNG (*NEWS* 3:8). These sorts of waggish entries generated some tension between proponents of the relaxed, unaffected and often personal style that generally characterized the newsletter and those who preferred a more detached professional style. One correspondent noted in *NEWS* 5:10, “While I appreciate the informality of the Newsletter I would hate to see it sink into folksy, in-group trivia. Let’s not forget, academic careers have been built out of New Guinea, and it’s far from over.” Throughout the course of its existence, *NEWS* generally reflected the style of its editors, all of whom did outstanding work, and I believe that on the whole, it remained thoroughly professional if often chatty and informal, never quite sinking to the depths feared by this particular reader.

By the time release #3 appeared, Terry Hays had returned from his one-year NEH-funded oral history hiatus, and generously volunteered to compile the next release. Readers were directed to send items to his notice.

NEWS #4

With the appearance of issue #4, also totaling 15 pages, the newsletter had begun to achieve some standardization and assume its future form. It was titled, “N.E.W.S. --- NorthEastern Wantok System Niusleta Namba 4. February, 1983.” By this time an “editorial staff” had emerged, consisting of a compiler/editor and a producer/distributor, whose division of labor was described by Terry Hays (*NEWS* 4:1):

This number of the newsletter, like the previous one, is collated, stapled, folded, and mailed to you courtesy of Richard Scaglione at the University of Pittsburgh. The compilation and typing (witness the distressing number of typos and strikeovers) was all done by Terry Hays. He should be blamed for its shortcomings, I suppose, but also given credit if any is due. Blame or credit Rich, however, for receiving it at all.

The Department of Anthropology of the University of Pittsburgh should be recognized for bearing the costs of distribution from issue #3 in 1982 right through the suspension of *NEWS* in 1995. We are grateful for their support throughout. When the distribution list grew and production became more burdensome, Cecelia Dugan of Pitt’s Department of Anthropology staff assumed many responsibilities, and her efforts should also be recognized. Issue #9 (November 1986) was delayed considerably because of an illness she suffered. Obviously she should not be blamed for this; it simply illustrates how instrumental she was on the production end. She deserves praise and thanks for her work on the newsletter through the years.

With issue #4, it was again apparent (to me, at least) that the majority of the newsletter's content would be of interest to all Melanesianists regardless of where they were located. There were only a few items of truly local interest, and even a discussion of a proposed "hospitality program" in the Northeast would have benefitted from broader coverage. In September 1981, Rob Gordon wrote to the Papua New Guinea Ambassador to the United Nations about the formation and general purpose of *NEWS*, and suggested a new program. His letter included the following proposition, which met with general approval from the Ambassador:

Some people have suggested that we try to establish a closer relationship with the Papua New Guinea Embassy. Others, aware of and grateful for the hospitality they received while in Papua New Guinea would like us to develop a means to reciprocate the many kindnesses extended. One small way which has been suggested in this regard is for people in our network to host visiting Papua New Guineans for a day or two when they travel or come on official business to the United States. Naturally, too, we would be delighted to also host members of the Papua New Guinea mission for weekends, etc., should they decide to travel outside the environs of New York and Washington, be it on official business or vacations.

Apart from these sorts of local initiatives, which would be of interest even outside of the region, the newsletter offered regular headings clearly of general importance including papers given at recent meetings, recent and forthcoming publications, politics, recent and ongoing research, and something that would become a semi-regular item: Niugini Kranki-Tok, a crossword puzzle featuring New Guinea themes. There was never a "standardized" series of headings or topics, and each issue had its own character, but the above list of general headings usually appeared in every number.

The Middle Period: Growth and Development

The participation of Melanesians in ASAO had by now increased dramatically, and a landmark event occurred: ASAO poached *NEWS*'s editor! Terry Hays resigned as editor of *NEWS* with issue No. 5 (Oct 1983) because of his "recent appointment as ASAO newsletter editor," and Mimi Kahn (then at Bryn Mawr) assumed the position with issue #6 (May 1984). Mimi handled her duties admirably for a few years, but then secured a joint position as Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the University of Washington and Curator of Ethnology at the Burke Museum and departed from the Northeast, consequently resigning as editor of *NEWS*. We were delighted to see her move on to such great new circumstances, but sorry to see her go. And, apart from missing her editorial skills, her departure caused me, for one, to reconsider our distribution policies. I could not imagine removing Mimi from our mailing list after all the good service she had rendered just because she had moved out of the region. And if we provided the newsletter to her in the state of Washington, about as far from the Northeast as one could be situated, how could we then justify excluding others anywhere in the USA?

By this time, the maintenance of the mailing list had shifted to me as producer/distributor, and I began to receive many requests for the newsletter from all

over the USA and Canada, and even beyond. I never refused such appeals, reasoning that, as long as the Department of Anthropology was able and willing to bear the cost, there was no reason to be exclusionary. Periodic culling of the distribution list was accomplished simply by requesting that people return a form indicating their continuing interest. In this way, although the title of *NEWS* continued to reflect its concentration in the Northeast region, the newsletter was beginning to have wide distribution throughout the USA and Canada.

ASAO was envisioned from the outset as an international organization, but its center was rooted solidly in North America, and its international growth was slow going at first. Further, it had always seen itself as an organization for social anthropology alone. As a result of the culling of the *NEWS* distribution list via self-expressed interest, many of the early subscribers who were not social anthropologists eventually dropped out. As *NEWS*'s North American base grew and its focus narrowed to mainly social anthropology, *NEWS* and the *ASAO Newsletter* increasingly were serving much the same population, at least as far as Melanesianists were concerned.

With Mimi Kahn's departure from the Northeast, we needed a new editor, and despite Jim Roscoe's resolution that, "There's no way I'm going to be conned, murphied, or otherwise suckered into that onerous and thankless task," (*NEWS* 9:1), he consented to serve, assuming the burden with issue #9 in November of 1986. In his first editorial statement (*NEWS* 9:1), he was of course joking when he observed that:

And so, besotted with dreams of glory, I recently mentioned to Jim Flanagan that, with his editorship of the ASAO Newsletter, and my editorship of *NEWS*, the Emerald and Sceptered Isles appear pretty effectively to have cornered control of US anthropological studies of the Pacific. Either that or the Americans know a couple of suckers when they see them getting off the boat."

Jim's wry observation actually carried with it a reflection of a broader state of affairs. While neither he nor Flanagan were Americans, sharing common origins in the British Isles, they were both New Guinea scholars (as had been Terry Hays before Flanagan). So it was perhaps even more notable that New Guinea researchers now had control of two newsletters for anthropological news and communications that were spreading rapidly throughout the world of Oceanic scholarship. ASAO had already expanded its membership far beyond its North American base, and *NEWS* had by this time become the go-to information vehicle for Melanesianists throughout the USA and Canada, and was also expanding geographically. Under Jim Roscoe's able editorship, which lasted for seven years, that position only grew stronger. Jim was a real workhorse, and his dedication to Melanesian Studies knew no bounds. He even purchased a shortwave radio at great personal expense and listened to Radio Australia broadcasts to PNG in Pidgin at 5-7 am (Eastern Standard Time) just to garner information for the newsletter. Under his guidance, *NEWS* grew in size. After desktop computers and word processing became available, Jim decreased the font and increased the page count. News #18 (July 1992) contained 22 pages of text together with 18 pages of densely printed election results for a sizeable total of 40 pages and was becoming increasingly costly to produce. However, the benefits of a regionally focused newsletter became clear in

another way. Jim added a section on PNG provincial news and other specific items, and *NEWS* was now generating New Guinea-related information in much more detail than would be appropriate for the more general Pacific Islands base of ASAO and more than could be included in the *ASAO Newsletter*. By Number 19 (March 1993) Jim was exhausted, and wanted to move on to other projects, and another editorial search was underway.

The End: Redundancy and Change in the Electronic Age

As of issue #20 (August 1993) Dan Jorgensen took over that role. Dan's first newsletter weighed in at a whopping 50 pages, but was written in much larger font than Jim had been using, and the actual word count was comparable. Anyway, by now we were moving towards electronic distribution. Beginning with this version, only those specifically requesting a paper copy received one. There were some holdouts, and I did provide some paper copies, but most subscribers were happy to receive the electronic version and simply print out a hard copy if desired. In an editorial statement (*NEWS* 20:1), Dan reviewed the history of the newsletter and described his future vision for it:

N.E.W.S. is the Northeastern Wantok System Newsletter. It was started years ago by Rob Gordon and Terry Hays, who perceived a need for Melanesianists in NE North America (where we are comparatively thick on the ground) to exchange news and information. Jim Roscoe took it over about six years ago from Mimi Kahn, and has since built it up into an excellent digest of PNG news, current events, and research notes. Jim is now letting it go, having put in his bit, and I have agreed to take it on. I for one will miss Jim's wit and keen eye for nuggets of news, and am belatedly coming to realize what kind of work he put in.

N.E.W.S. now comes in two flavours, paper and ether. The hard-copy version—which I would like to phase out for financial reasons—will be printed and mailed by Rich Scaglione & Co. at the University of Pittsburgh. In addition, I am starting up an electronic version over the net (you should be able to tell which you received by switching off the power on your terminal --- if the newsletter is still there, you have the old paleo-N.E.W.S. version). The electronic version has the advantage of being easily disseminated to a readership beyond North America, and N.E.W.S. now has an email readership of about 150 from Hong Kong, Perth and Vila to Manchester, London and Nijmegen.

N.E.W.S. has traditionally taken PNG as its bailiwick, but I want to expand it to include what might be called “the Greater SW Pacific Pidgin Sphere,” i.e., PNG, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu. While this may superficially appear to reflect the old ethnological definition of Melanesia, which has been discredited in some quarters, I hasten to point out that the category is defined in terms of a respectable dialect-chain in which at least **notional** working misunderstandings could be negotiated via our respective varieties of tok. In future, associate status may be accorded folks with Fijian or New Caledonian (Kanak) connections, just as is now the case with the Melanesian Spearhead Group.

The last *NEWS* I have in my binder is #22 (May 1995), and I believe that the print version was suspended with this release. My copy was printed directly from a computer, and I did not reformat it in any way. Dan sent it to me on Friday, 12 May 1995, at 23:06:19 (EDT). He writes (*NEWS* 22:1):

This newsletter is written in haste as I prepare to embark for PNG to work with George Morren, Don Gardiner, and Rune Paulsen to look into local land issues surrounding the impending Frieda/Nena mine along the border between PNG's East and West Sepik Provinces. As I am going on sabbatical, I would love for someone to volunteer to take N.E.W.S. over. If interested, write me (not email--- my account will be shut in my absence) at..."

To my knowledge, there were no volunteers, but it didn't matter. By the time Dan returned from his sabbatical, it was obvious that rapidly evolving information technology had rendered *NEWS* obsolete. Many other platforms for the electronic dissemination of information had become available, and the newsletter was discontinued. With the growth of ASAO.net, and the *ASAO Newsletter* now being distributed electronically, *NEWS* had become redundant, and the information-related assimilation of *NEWS* into ASAO was complete.

The Aftermath

This paper has traced the growth of ASAO from a society primarily focused on Eastern Oceania and Austronesian-speaking peoples to an umbrella organization that, today, encompasses the entire range of Pacific Island cultures. It has always encouraged worldwide membership, but still retains its original disciplinary focus on social anthropology. In contrast, the Northeast Wantok System was focused on New Guinea and first had a regionally restricted membership (scholars the Northeastern US), but made an attempt to be interdisciplinary. The Northeast Wantok System was never organized as a formal association, and through time, the groups' objectives came into closer alignment. Scholars in related disciplines did not contribute much to The Northeast Wantok System, and most dropped away. At the same time, Melanesianists everywhere wanted access to the *NEWS* newsletter, which began to become redundant with the ASAO newsletter as the participation of New Guinea researchers in ASAO also increased. With the growth of electronic distribution and dissemination of information, by the 1990s, there was no longer a reason for *NEWS*, which ceased publication in 1995.

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