

WHO IS ON THE COMMITTEE?

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:

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COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

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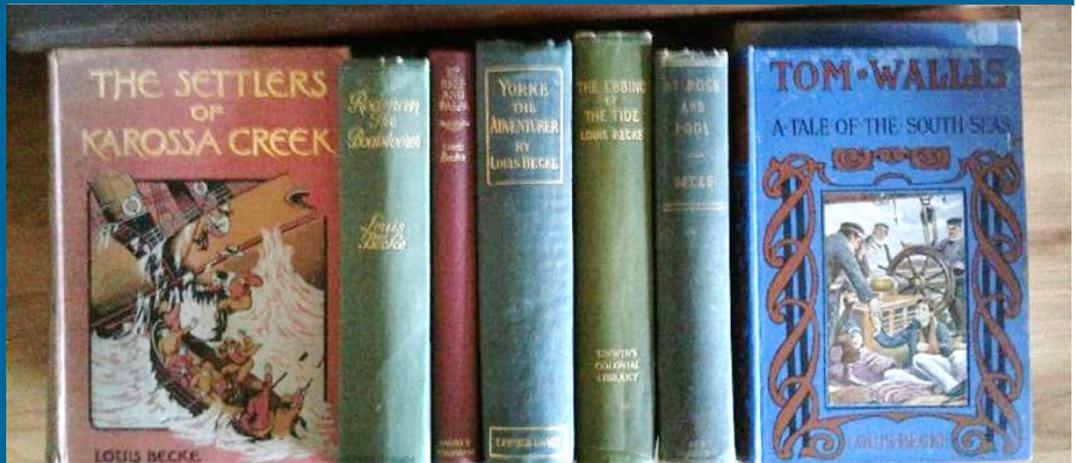
JUDE DURRANT

HONORARY MEMBERS:

ANNA UNDERWOOD:
Family historian; W.A.

ALLEGRA MARSHALL:
Becke historian and attendant to his grave at Waverley Cemetery, Bronte, N.S.W.

DR. CHRYSOPHER SPICER:
Cultural historian, author and Senior Research Fellow at James Cook University, Cairns, QLD.



THE LOUIS BECKE SOCIETY (PORT MACQUARIE) INC.

A NOT FOR PROFIT COMMUNITY PROJECT

To foster a greater recognition and understanding of the life and writing of the “adventurous” Australian author LOUIS BECKE, born Port Macquarie 1855 and died Sydney 1913. Recognised internationally within his lifetime, he wrote mainly about his 20 or so years travelling in the Pacific during the 1870’s—90’s as well as historical accounts of Colonial Australia.

PRESIDENT’S “DESPATCHES”

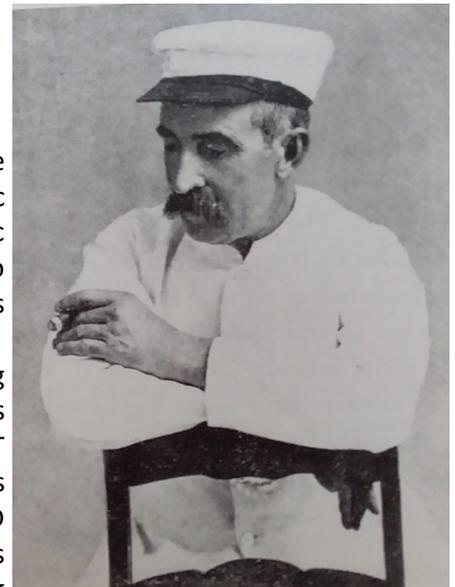
by Glenn Dick

My new role as President of the Maritime Museum Organisation has been rather hectic these past 9 months. We have three Historic Waterfront Cottages to manage and are also maintaining a number of other projects simultaneously!

THE LOUIS BECKE SOCIETY is progressing with our proposed display about Louis Becke’s Life and Times in Cottage Number 4 (PILOT STATION PRECINCT). The Maritime Museum’s newly appointed CURATOR/ARCHIVIST is DAVID MARTIN who has written a number of books about Port Macquarie. We will be working along with David over the next few months in determining the most appropriate concepts/methods to gain a meaningful and worthwhile display. This all takes time and patience and of course, the practical means to create it all on a shoestring budget.

Recently the Maritime Museum was a recipient of a truly remarkable artefact - one of two known pianos which were retrieved from the wreck of “The Wanderer” (a 280-ton ex Royal Navy gun brig) in 1851, on the bar at Port Macquarie. Becke writes about Ben Boyd’s stunning ship and his exploits in the southern district of NSW (Boyd-Town). Boyd absconded to America to escape his creditors and was murdered at Guadalcanal in 1851 and his heavily armed ship turned up at Port Macquarie with a wild crew on board. Becke, in one of his short stories about his boyhood days, describes playing on the remnant wreck around 1860.

The piano will require some initial professional restoration and will be placed in the same room as the BECKE display. MAJOR ARCHIBALD INNES acquired it at a



Portrait of Louis Becke from Frontispiece of Notes from My South Sea Log 1905, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

PRESIDENT'S "DESPATCHES" continued

sale and had it taken to his mansion at Lake Innes. Innes was a Commandant at the Port Macquarie penal settlement in the 1820s and in the 1830s became one of the Colony's richest landowners. In the 1850/1860s, a depression hit the NSW Colony and Innes abandoned his holdings and returned to Newcastle where he died. Again, Becke writes about the time he visited the mansion describing it as an abandoned relic.

The Artists' Market is held once a month in the grounds of the Maritime Museum and we will be participating in promoting the LOUIS BECKE SOCIETY once again.

Our AGM will be in October and notification will be sent to all financial members before hand.

Thanks to Anna, Allegra, Jude and Greg for the production of our newsletter.

I enjoyed a little "tipple" to celebrate LOUIS BECKE's birthday. He was born on the 18 June 1855 in Port Macquarie in a house on the corner of William and Owen Streets, once known as "Becke's Corner", very near to where the Maritime Cottages stand today.

Glenn Dick

President/Secretary

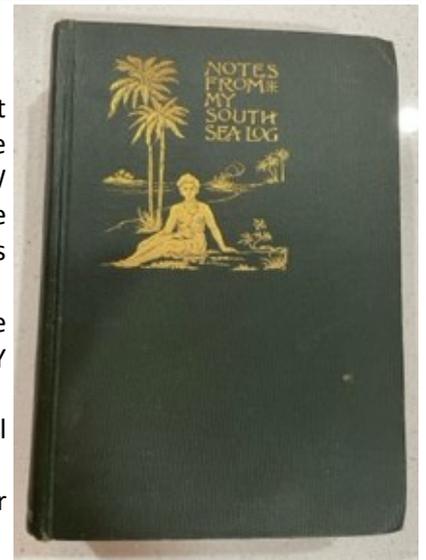
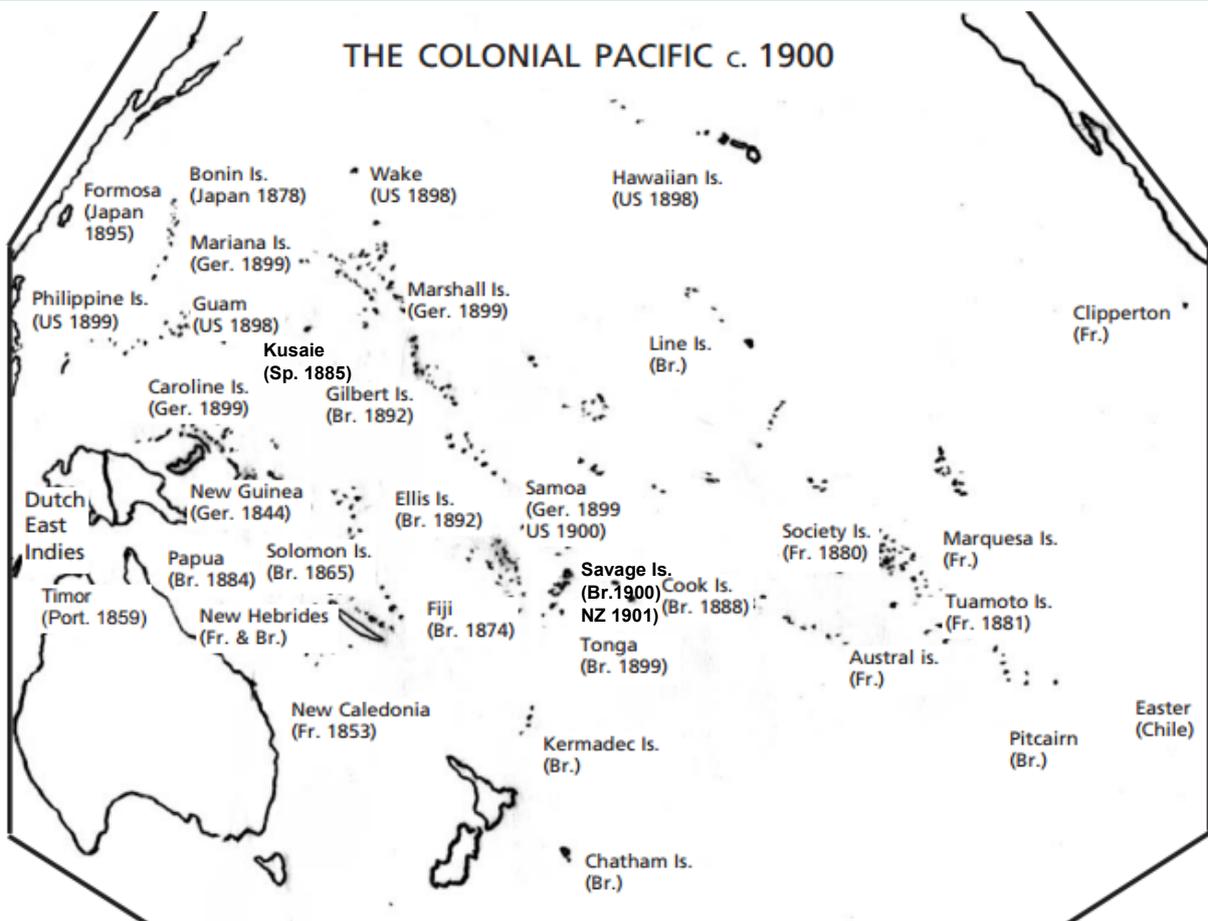


Photo of Notes from my South Sea Log 1901 (book—courtesy Jude Durrant)



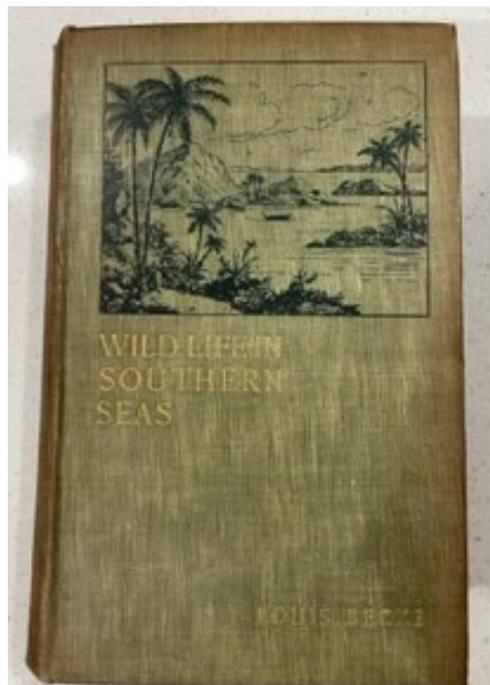
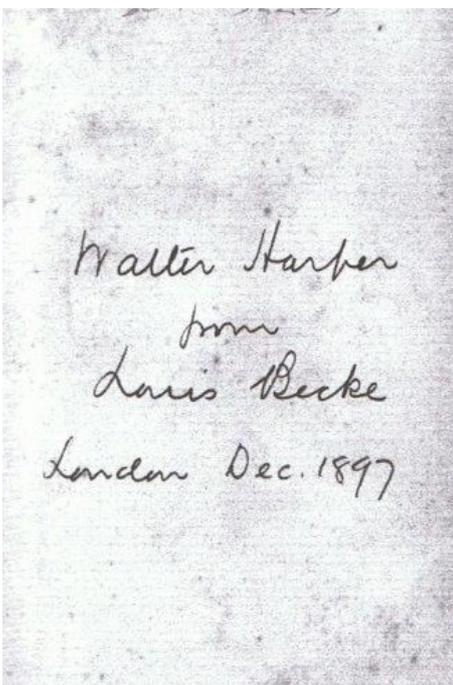
The Colonial Pacific Map circa 1900 shows the Pacific South Sea Islands and the colonising countries at the time.

Map reference: [doleguide \(Page 1\) \(hawaii.edu\)](https://www.hawaii.edu/doleguide)

CHRONOLOGY OF LOUIS BECKE'S PACIFIC ISLAND TRAVELS

- 1855 June 18, born at Port Macquarie, NSW
- 1865 Travelled to Lord Howe Island on the family's sixty ton ketch
- 1869 July 23, sailed on "Lizzie and Rosa" from Newcastle to San Francisco with his brother, Vernon
- 1872 March 21, stowed away on the bark "Rotumah" for Samoa where he worked in a store in Apia
- 1873 Dec 3, Louis delivered a ketch "E A Williams" to Captain Hayes at Milli Atoll in Marshall Group
- 1874 Jan 17, signed on as supercargo for Captain Hayes in "Leonora"
Mar 15, the "Leonora" sank in a hurricane off Kusaie (Kosrae or Strong Island)
- 1875 Various jobs in Australia and Pacific Islands
- 1880 April 11, trader for De Wolf Company of Liverpool, England
- 1881 Moved to Nukufetau (Ellice Islands)
August 24, his ketch "Orwell" wrecked on Beru Island, Kingsmill Group
Oct 6, departed on the "George Noble"
- 1882 Feb 16, at side of dying Captain Gustave Rabardy of "Génil" off New Britain
Nov 1, wrote to his mother from Majuro in Marshall Islands
- 1886 In NSW and Queensland Australia and Pacific Islands with his family
- 1893 May 6, first of Becke's stories appeared in *The Bulletin* in Sydney
- 1896 Spent six months in Port Macquarie, writing various publications
June 9, left for England and wrote numerous books and publications
- 1908 With family, returned to the South Seas and Scientific studies
- 1910 Sept 7, elected member of Royal Society of NSW (which is a Geographical Society)
- 1913 Feb 18, died at York Hotel and buried at Waverley Cemetery, Sydney NSW

(Time line based on the *Chronology* in "Louis Becke" by Professor A Grove Day, University of Hawaii, 1967)



Photos of "Wild Life in the Southern Seas" cover and signed flyleaf courtesy Allegra Marshall.

'Louis signed this book for Walter Harper (1880-1956) who was an agriculturalist and one of the founders of the Westfarmers and CBH Cooperative Bulk Handling Group.' See Link below:

[Biography - Charles Walter Harper - Australian Dictionary of Biography \(anu.edu.au\)](#)

PACIFIC ISLAND ARTEFACTS in the MUSEUM of APPLIED ARTS and SCIENCES (MAAS)
(POWERHOUSE MUSEUM)

By 1892, Louis Becke must have been feeling the pinch of lack of work or wanted to offload his vast collection of curios due to the enormity of the collection and lack of room to house it.

In a letter to The Technological Museum, Sydney on **12 January 1892** he wrote...

82 Rowntree St, Balmain

To: J H Maiden Esq,

Dear Sir,

Herewith I send you for inspection a collection of curios, native manufactures etc, from various parts of Polynesia. These articles I have collected myself and I venture to think that you will find the collection an interesting one and the price I ask for the whole lot an extremely moderate 12 pounds. I need not call your attention to the five specimens of native cloth, they are among the best ever made on Savage Island. [*Savage Island is known as Niue today].

I am Sir

Yours obediently

Louis G Becke

Time and money were obviously becoming dire as Louis wrote a follow-up letter to the Curator of the Technological Museum, Sydney on **21 January 1892**.

Dear Sir,

I respectfully beg to inquire whether you have decided to purchase the collection of curios submitted for your inspection on the 12th visit. As I propose returning to the Islands in a few days. I shall feel much obliged if you will kindly let me know at your earliest; if you have decided to purchase.

Sir, yours respectfully,

Louis G Becke

The amount was duly signed off by Mr Maiden, Curator, for 12 pounds. Sadly the native cloth as mentioned, did not last the distance of the 130 years, as it was a natural fibre and would have surely disintegrated. No such cloth still exists today according to the Museum. Part of the curio collection consisted of Bonito hooks from Savage Island. A bundle of Arrowroot from Savage Island still exists as does a basket made out of the ribs of the coconut. The letters above are courtesy of the Powerhouse Museum (MAAS).

By J Durrant

* The first Europeans to sight Niue sailed under Captain James Cook in 1774. Cook made three attempts to land, but the inhabitants refused to grant permission to do so. He named the island "Savage Island" because, as legend has it, the natives who "greeted" him were painted in what appeared to be blood. The substance on their teeth was hulahula, a native red fe'i banana. For the next couple of centuries, Niue was known as Savage Island until its original name, "Niue", which translates as "behold the coconut", regained use.
[Niue - Wikipedia](#)

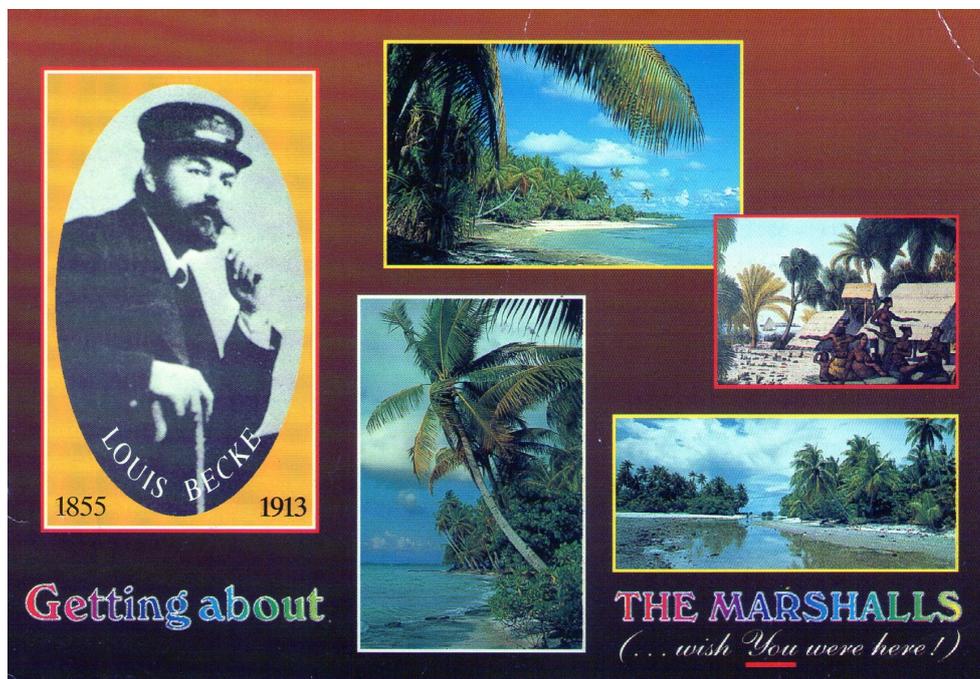
The image of a bundle of Arrowroot (a starch obtained from the rhizome of a tropical plant) courtesy of the Powerhouse Museum (MAAS).



POSTCARD from MICRONESIA by John Murray

After decades of an occupational life encompassing travels in Asia, the Middle East, Europe, South America and Africa, I was offered a role in the South Pacific which extended to ten years traversing 16 island nations/territories extending east to west from **French Polynesia** to **Papua New Guinea** and south from the **Cook Islands** and **Tonga** across the equator to the **Federated States of Micronesia** and the **Marshall Islands** and everything in between. It covered a geographic area of 30 million square kilometers with but two per cent of its surface above sea level and having fewer than six million within its mixture of **Melanesian, Micronesian and Polynesian** inhabitants.

A steep learning curve to appreciate the culture, traditions, politics and expectations of the people with whom I was to deal was required as was an awareness that not all airlines are alike. I was far from assured by exhortations of safety when boarding a hastily chartered prop-driven craft, the late arrival of which was explained as due to a faulty compass, by the pilot casually stating that he knew the way to our next destination three hours over nothing but ocean.



Marshall Islands post card courtesy John Murray

Majuro, the main atoll of the Republic of the **Marshall Islands**, could be reached either by the airline bearing the name of that country or in more comfort and relative efficiency by what were the island-hopping return flights of Continental-Air Micronesia from Guam to Honolulu. The history of these atolls was similar to those of its nearest neighbours in having been located by 16th century Iberian explorers such as Magellan and Mendaña then frequented two centuries later by German traders and American whalers. The name they now possess was given by Admiral von Krusenstern in respect for Captain John Marshall, RN, who mapped the southern group of these islands in 1788 while on a homeward voyage from **Botany Bay**.

After cursory immigration and customs checks on arrival at the airport, the quarter hour trip on the sole road to **Majuro** township gave a preview of expectations for any visitor. There were tiny but tidy houses scattered between an array of junk yards, modest churches, stray dogs, foraging pigs, poultry, wharves harbouring predominantly Chinese fishing trawlers and the skeletal remains of a large hotel originally being constructed on behalf of the **Nauruan** government before it was abandoned due to that nation's financial meltdown.

Due to the pervasive salt air climate most vehicles were heavily scored by rust, some held together with

masking tape and lengths of wire while rolling on tyres revealing more canvas than rubber as drivers peered through cracked or shattered windscreens. The roadway itself was the result of a landfill linking of the islets Dalap, Uliga and Djarrit to form the single entity eponymously referred to as DUD. In times of cyclonic weather, oceanic surges flood across the narrow landmass less than three metres above sea level, taking with them houses, vehicles, animals, loose property and junk to dump on the lagoon side where everything non-salvageable remains rusting, unsightly and undisturbed.

What could benevolently be called the CBD is dominated by the four storey Capitol Building of reflecting glass and metal housing government departments and ministerial offices but since vacated due to encroaching structural deficiencies. The Australian flag I saw flying from the roof was not to honour my presence but that of the visiting Australian ambassador from **Pohnpei** in the **Federated States of Micronesia** who had dual diplomatic accreditation to these once united nations.

The name Reimers was ubiquitous in **Majuro** for this German merchant, born in 1909, had extended his commercial empire which thrived from the 1930s, through the Japanese occupancy in WWII and subsequent US Trust Territory years, to control practically every aspect of retail and wholesale trade from boat building, food, clothing, copra, perfume, frozen goods, fuel outlets, hotel accommodation, restaurants, fishing and aquaculture. Had the USA not had responsibility for the postal service and military presence Reimers would have undoubtedly owned those as well as he'd negotiated a 99 years lease of the **Majuro** town precinct which, after his death in 1998, remains permeated by his many descendants as Robert Reimers Enterprises. It is truly a company town.



Photo of Reimers Enterprises courtesy John Murray

It was, however, during a lunchtime stroll that I entered the post office to examine the colourful philatelic offerings for, similar to many small nations inclusive of nearby **Tuvalu**, the **Marshalls** offer an array of stamps to commemorate events and personalities having nothing or little to do with the country but to entice the few tourists or foreign collectors to pump money into the local treasury. Among the stamps displayed was a group depicting a variety of publicity photos of Marilyn Monroe that I thought worthwhile placing in my travel album, alongside a shelf of postcards showing scenes of the **Marshalls Islands** and their people.

One of these headed "Getting about the Marshalls" showed four mini photos of island scenes beside a larger portrait snap of a bearded gentleman named "Louis Becke 1855-1913" (see Newsletter 1, June 2020) who, on the reverse of the card, was defined, inter alia, as a "famous Australian novelist". This description stoked my

immediate interest for, despite having done a year of Australian literature as part of an Arts degree, I had never previously heard of this person nor his works, so its purchase was added to those stamps of the pouting Miss Monroe.

On returning to Australia on completion of this first Micronesian peregrination, I turned to then non-internet sources of information and local library to glean more about this unknown figure and his writings to learn that his 19th century sea voyages and subsequent travels in many ways presaged those aerial trips of mine over a century later. They, too, encompassed sojourns at such isolated spots as **Easter Island** where I once stopped briefly between flights from Santiago to Papeete, and **Ellice Islands**, now **Tuvalu**, where Becke had engaged in trading on Nanumaga and Nukufetau, whereas I went no further than Funafuti and its adjacent islets of Amatuku housing the Maritime Training Institute and now deserted Papa Elise where a girls' boarding school had been erected during WWII to quarantine the Polynesian beauties from the US military presence.

Becke had also included in his writings the piratical and "blackbirding" activities of Messrs Hayes and Pease and the savagery of the fictional Macy O'Shea and similar South Seas profiteers, but their reincarnations remain, the pilot of an Air Marshall Islands HS-748 once telling me prior to takeoff from Suva to Majuro via Funafuti that he "could identify a carpet-bagger on every flight", hopefully not including me among them. His attitude was echoed in **Kiribati** - another of Louis' ports of call when it was the **Gilbert Islands** - by the Australian manager of the local bank who proudly confided that after years of encountering them in the Pacific, he'd developed "a nose for shysters".

Efforts to borrow one of Louis Becke's works in the local library were in vain as they had but one for loan but in large print and solely to people with impaired vision. Despite this not having been lent out for over two years it was not available for the normally sighted. Queries at bookshops resulted in blank looks with excuses that his novels must be out of print but I resolved to delve further into the history of Mr Becke and his anonymity within academic studies. My own research into his later life and death led me to further parallels with my own travels, not solely to the many islands on which he'd engaged in domestic and business affairs as in **New Caledonia** and **Samoa**, but also his three years in **France** where I had lived for the same time span.

Subsequent travels to **Majuro** failed to locate any tangible reference to either Louis Becke or George Lewis Becke other than that mentioned on the postcard. He is as unknown among the general or expatriate populace of the **Marshalls** as he is in any other of the former colonial outposts he visited, traded or resided and never settled long enough to attain anything approaching the local status as did R. L. Stevenson on **Samoa** as "Tusitala", being "teller of tales", for his literary output and sympathetic attitude to *Faa'a Samoa*.

My interest waned in the shadow of other responsibilities and although making reference to his Pacific travels and writings in a later book of my own, it was not until during a visit to my parents' burial spot in Waverley cemetery that I enquired from the office as to where Louis Becke was interred. This led me to an unkempt and all but concealed gravesite with an eroded and undignified tombstone largely illegible with little to suggest, other than the hardly decipherable words "Author of 'By Reef & Palm' and other books", that the interred remains equated in any manner to those of other writers in the same necropolis as Henry Lawson, Henry Kendall and Dorothea Mackellar.

Some time later, however, in 2015 I noted in an issue of *The Sydney Morning Herald* that a gathering was to take place in Townsville of descendants or family members of Louis Becke and for anyone interested to contact the organizers. To conclude using a commonly abused cliché, the rest is history. From this snippet I consequently met up with Anna Underwood, did some occasional tidying up of Louis' gravesite during later cemetery visits and have maintained contact with Papeete-addicted Allegra Marshall who once showed me her extensive collection of Becke novels. An added bonus has been introduction to the Louis Becke Society and receipt of its newsletters by which one can become even more immersed in the life, or indeed many lives, of Becke himself.

John Murray

FROM THE TREASURER

Memberships

Thank you to everyone who joined again last financial year (June – June). Please encourage others to join by forwarding the membership form to them. *If you are already a member, the form does not need to be returned to me.*

A direct transfer can be made to:

Louis Becke Society
BSB 932-000 (Regional Australia Bank)
A/C 500203408

OR please send cheques/money orders to my postal address: 11 Rafael Crescent, Port Macquarie, NSW, 2444.
Membership costs - Adults \$20; Family \$30; Student \$15; Local Business \$100; Corporate \$250. Overseas members are able to transfer funds by **Xoom, a Pay Pal Service.**

Memberships plus donations have been our main fund raiser. These funds are vital to our ongoing promotion of Louis Becke and his achievements from the 1880's to 1913.
Thank you to all our current members for your ongoing support.
Your contribution is very much appreciated.

David Bawden

Treasurer

Ketches, of the kind likely to have been sailed by Louis Becke, wait patiently at the main wharf at Port Macquarie in the mid to late 1800s. The post in the foreground is the approximate location of the Lady Nelson Wharf as it is today.

(Courtesy David Martin)



This Newsletter has been prepared and edited by Anna Underwood, Allegra Marshall and Jude Durrant and kindly typeset by Gregory Ross of the Friends of Waverley Cemetery.