MURRAY CHARLES GROVES
24 August 1926 - 5 May 2011

Murray Groves addressing a gathering in Canberra about ten years ago, in the presence of PNG High Commissioner to Australia Renagi Lohia, from the (Eastern) Motu village of Tubusereia.

Dr Murray Groves was the editor of the *Journal of the Polynesian Society* from mid-1960 through 1965, while Senior Lecturer (1959-63) and Associate Professor (1964-65) of Social Anthropology in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Auckland. As editor he had two aims: to make the *JPS* the leading anthropological journal for the Pacific by bringing it into the mainstream of contemporary professional discourse; and to provide informed notes and comment on current developments in a region moving towards independence by means of a new section of the journal, Pacific Commentary, which was launched in the second issue of 1959, when he
joined the editorial committee. Before he left Auckland late in 1965, journal subscriptions had risen to more than 1000, with overseas subscriptions accounting for half.

Murray was born in Melbourne on 24 August 1926, the eldest child and only son of William Charles and Doris Kathleen Frances, née Smith. His parents had met in Rabaul, New Britain, where both were teachers, and his father went on to a career as educationalist and educational administrator in the Pacific field. This culminated in a long stint as Director of Education in the Territory of Papua and New Guinea from 1946 to 1958, which covered the years of Murray’s undergraduate and postgraduate education and came to profoundly influence its direction.

Murray entered Melbourne University in 1944 to read History and Law, which he did brilliantly for the next three years, except for an inability to pass in Ancient History, then a compulsory part of a History Honours degree. He withdrew for two years to Port Moresby, where his parents were living, during which time he completed four Law subjects by correspondence and the University removed Ancient History as a compulsory unit. In 1949 he returned to Melbourne to complete a combined Honours degree in History and English Literature, graduating with First Class Honours in both and winning the Enid Denham Prize for the study of poetry. From 1950 to 1952 he taught History at the University, aiming when it was possible to go on to do a D.Phil. in History at Oxford.

He had been greatly influenced by his two years in Port Moresby, where he had worked as Judge’s Assistant on the staff of the Supreme Court of Papua and New Guinea and taught English classes in Hanuabada, the collective name for a cluster of Western Motu villages on Port Moresby harbour hard by the developing town. When he was ready to move to Oxford in 1952, he elected to do a Diploma in Anthropology ahead of his History D.Phil., but by the time the Diploma was finished in 1953, he had decided to switch to Social Anthropology for his doctoral research. For this he made a comparative study of three Motu villages near Port Moresby where traditional life had been affected to different degrees by their varying distances from the town. He finished this work, for which he received his doctorate, in 1956.

Now on the point of entering on a professional career, he was strongly supported by his teachers as a scholar of well-disciplined, forceful and original mind, an imaginative teacher and an able administrator who combined efficiency and far-sightedness. Murray was to display these qualities in the contributions he made to the various institutions in which he served.

The first of these was the Australian National University, where he was a Research Fellow in the Department of Pacific History from 1956 to 1959, continuing his study of the Port Moresby region and its inhabitants. To this he
brought, besides his experience of fieldwork there, a background of archival research in the history of Western Motu contact with Europeans from the 1870s. He engaged with a situation where after the end of the Second World War Port Moresby, now the capital of the Territory of Papua and New Guinea, was the centre of increasingly rapid social change with population increase, the growth of wage labour and the appearance of new forms of association including labour unions.

These concerns remained with him when in 1959 he moved to The University of Auckland, where one of his graduate students wrote an MA thesis on the Port Moresby Workers’ Association. At the same time he extended his knowledge of the Pacific with visits to Fiji, Tonga and Samoa, places about which he was now teaching. In 1961 he attended the Tenth Pacific Science Congress in Honolulu, giving a paper on Western Motu descent groups in a major symposium on “Social structure in the Pacific”, one of a number of symposia of interest to social anthropologists on which he reported to readers of Pacific Commentary in the December issue of the 1961 volume of the JPS. His participation in the Honolulu meetings led to a Visiting Associate Professorship at Brandeis University for the academic year 1962-63, ending with a Summer Session lectureship at the University of Hawai‘i. Over this period Murray wrote an article for JPS reviewing Marshall Sahlins’ major anthropological monograph of 1962, *Moala: Culture and Nature on a Fijian Island*. This review article, “The nature of Fijian society”, made a theoretically important contribution to the study of Malayo-Polynesian social organisation and exemplified the expanded role that Murray wanted for the *Journal*.

Murray spent the rest of his career building and directing Departments of Sociology in Singapore and Hong Kong. He took up the Foundation Chair of Sociology at the University of Singapore late in 1965 and moved to take charge of a two-year-old Department of Sociology at the University of Hong Kong in mid-1969. He was attracted by the opportunities presented by so professionally and culturally exciting a region. He became interested in promoting comparative research into problems of urbanisation, urban poverty and urban lifestyles in Southeast Asia and made reconnaissance trips to Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines to this end.

Murray stayed on in Hong Kong for a few years after retirement in 1988. He had become re-engaged with his New Guinea fieldwork, which he regretted not having published immediately after the D.Phil that was based on it, since he had never found the time for it since. This re-engagement took place in the context of what he saw as the pernicious influence of post-modernism on contemporary social anthropology. He wrote two articles on fishing and fishermen in Manumanu, the most traditional of the three Motu villages of
his doctoral research. Their subtitles indicated the direction of his thinking: “some reflections on the nature of ethnographic enquiry” and “in defence of empiricist ethnography”. He now proposed to follow up with a book on the ethnography of Manumanu and another on the aims, methods, achievements and epistemological foundations of social and cultural anthropology in the 20th century, based on a lecture course that he had given at the University of Hong Kong. In mid-1992 he spent four months working on his project as a Visiting Fellow at ANU, where there were many friends and colleagues from his past. Here he took a decision to move permanently to Canberra as an ideal location for what he wished to do.

Murray took up residence in Canberra in 1994, having been accepted as a Visiting Fellow in the Department of Anthropology in the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies. For the first few years he was able to make the occasional visit to Papua New Guinea and Southeast Asia in connection with his projects, but there were continuing problems with his health from around 1998 that interfered with their progress. With the onset of dementia, he moved into full-time care in mid-2008.

Eighteen months ago, Murray had an expression of interest in publishing his more than 50 years old Oxford D.Phil. thesis on the Western Motu of Papua. The man who expressed the interest is a fellow anthropologist, Cyril Belshaw, who knew Murray in the early 1950s in Port Moresby where he was doing the fieldwork for his own book, *The Great Village*, about the complex of Motu urban villages known as Hanuabada, where Murray used to conduct English classes. Belshaw has just started hard-copy and on-line publication under his own imprint.

The book of Murray’s thesis will be launched at a commemorative gathering in Canberra on 15 August next. Its title is *The Motu of Papua: Tradition in a Time of Change* and the publisher is Webzines of Vancouver. The ISBN number is 978-1-926820-08-8 and the website www.anthropologising.ca/webzines/webzines.

The appearance of this substantial work will give great satisfaction to the many admirers of Murray Groves’ anthropological writings. If these have not lived up in number or in weight to his promise as a young man, perhaps it is in part because we came to expect too much.

Jack Golson
Australian National University, Canberra