



SON OF SARAWAK

E. MANSEL

EDITED BY
H. AZAHAR

Son of Sarawak who walked on the streets of Kuching



2021

Published by Edward Lakin Mansel

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Dedication



*This book is dedicated to the people of Sarawak
who has given me this extraordinary opportunity
to share my journey.*

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Foreword

Edward Mansel, or primarily those close to him, Uncle Ed, talked about this very book about 15 years ago. At that time, we were preparing for our first training for all tourist guides in Sarawak. Uncle Ed wanted his book to be straightforward, honest and reminisces of his life story.

From a life of a Japanese mother and an English father, he was living in an era of War with limited chances of learning from schools. He talks about his early childhood and what he is doing now at this very moment. Uncle Ed shared his experience working in the agricultural department and his life as a tourist guide. Readers will be fascinated by Uncle Ed's writing.

Furthermore, he has a few book series that he wanted to share. I am always amazed by Uncle Ed's passion for sharing his knowledge with anyone that meets him. He always told me that he was a nobody.

Nevertheless, he is somebody to me and hopefully someone to the readers at some point. I will be helping Uncle Ed with his new books scheduled to be released soon. Thank you for supporting Uncle Ed and motivating more people to write and read.

Zahar Hussain

Editor

Preface

This memoir is a record of my family's experiences in the turbulent and significant times of the last century, a time of great change and transformation in the land of Sarawak. It is primarily a story about my own life experience and other persons of my generation living in those times. To understand the present, it is vital to know the past. As time recedes into the past, it becomes ever more important to record these memories before they vanish.

I lived in a period after the Pacific War of 1941-5 when my country of Sarawak experienced many rapid changes in socio-economic, educational and administrative spheres of development. As a result, four different administrations have governed Sarawak: the Japanese Occupation, the Australian Military Administration, a British Colony, and a state within the Federation of Malaysia.

For this very reason, I have endeavoured to recall and record what I have witnessed. Through my family's oral traditions, both the remarkable and the mundane, I have learned that they can be preserved as a testament to life. Thus, my life has transpired in the Land of the Hornbills over this significant period.

All my writings are of my experiences, my opinions and my readings.

The story begins as follows:

Another reason for me to write my memoir is to complement a first family book written by my English cousin Dr Christopher Lucas. Lucas who wrote a book entitled "Our Mansel Family & Denis Browne Forebears", which tells about my English ancestry. Thus, I write my book to share with my readers about my Asian origin.

How did Cousin Chris come to know of my existence?

I was on a tour assignment with a group of travel writers from many countries to promote Sarawak in 2009. These writers were sponsored by Tourism Malaysia . As usual, the itinerary was very tight and there was not sufficient time to describe the various places covered on that day in detail. Therefore, the only way to give complete information about the places or buildings visited by these writers was to provide written scripts to the tour leader. The tour leader would arrange for the hotel staff to photocopy the scripts and distribute them to each writer. The hotel staff who photocopied the scripts took a copy himself and gave it to his niece, who applied for a job in the Government service. During the interview, the lady was asked about the history of Sarawak. She gave a good answer based on my scripts and got a job in the Government. She happily posted on her face book that she obtained the information from me and mentioned my name.

A few weeks later, I received an email from a lady in England inquiring about the relationship between Francis Lakin Mansel and me. I replied that he was my late father. The information was passed on to my other English cousins, and a cousin Chris was very interested to meet me.

Dr Christopher Lucas was my father's sister son. He has retired from medical services and now lived in south India where he built a beautiful guest house which he named "Cardamom House" www.cardamomhouse.com



*Cardamom House Home Stay, Arthoor Village,
Tamil Nadu, South India
Source: Chris Lucas 2013*



*With Cousin Chris in
Kuching Padungan Market*

Chapter 1
The Brooke Era
- beginning of Western influence

Sarawak Under the White Rajahs

Sarawak, a lesser-known southern enclave of Brunei Sultanate, which later became a kingdom of the 'White Rajahs', was described by early European travellers as primitive, exotic and sometimes romantic. James Brooke, the first of the 'White Rajahs' arrived in Sarawak on 15 August 1839. He soon sailed away for a year in search adventure in the Sulu Sea. James Brooke returned to Sarawak on 29 August 1840. He helped the Sultan of Brunei to defeat the pirates who were active along the coastal waters of Sarawak. James Brooke was proclaimed Rajah a year later by the Sultan of Brunei. James Brooke was succeeded by his nephew Charles Anthoni Johnson, who changed his name to Charles Brooke. Charles was succeeded by one of his surviving son Charles Vyner Brooke. The Brooke family ruled Sarawak from 1841 to 1941.



James Brooke
1803-1868



Charles Brooke
1868-1917



Charles Vyner Brooke
1874-1963

Sarawak experienced many political and administrative changes during the times of James and Charles Brooke. When Charles Vyner Brooke became Rajah in 1917 the Government was well established. More European officers were recruited to administer Sarawak. These officers

were posted to remote outstations. They became accustomed to the hard life and spent their spare time learning the customs and cultures of the natives to which they served. Many books were written by these Europeans who served as District Officers or Residents. Books on the customs and beliefs of the native peoples were also documented by European Christian priests which recorded important events in the history of Sarawak were written by European officers My late father Francis Lakin Mansel was one of the officers who served under Charles Vyner Brooke.



Kimura Family 1950

*Back row (L to R) Akira, Jerin, Eddy, Hiroshi, Thor
Mid row (L to R) Masako, Jijah, Edmun
Seated Aiko
Source: Kimura family Album*

My family background

In 1913, my grandfather, a Japanese man named Hiroshi Kimura and using his Japanese passport arrived in Kuching, Sarawak. He settled at Kampung Quop and married Jijah ak Sipatek, a Bidayuh woman. As a non-native, Hiroshi was unable to own land designated under native customary rights. He acquired 100 acres of native land under the name of his wife Jijah,

on which he planted rubber trees. As the demand for rubber in the world market increased, rubber planting became a profitable business venture. Twenty years later, he had managed to raise a family of 8 children: 5 boys and 3 girls; among them was my mother, Toshiko Kimura.

Toshiko was the eldest and the only one to receive a formal education at St. Mary's School in Kuching. The boys only attended primary school and became full-time farmers. The other two girls did not go to school and remained on the farm. After completed Form 3 my mother left school and found work in the Statistics Department of the Rajah Brooke administration.

While working, she met Francis Lakin Mansel, an Englishman employed by the Brooke government. Francis was born on 8 May 1908 in England and entered service of the Third Rajah as an Assistant Treasurer on 18 November 1929 at the age of 21. On 27 January 1932, he was promoted to Acting Divisional Treasurer and Acting Divisional Postmaster of the 3rd Division based in Sibul. Francis remained in Sibul until the outbreak of the war. He married my mother before the war. Together they kept an orang utan as a pet, which was allowed to roam freely in the house.



*My mother with her Orang Utan pet, 1940
Source: FL Mansel*

One day when my mother was ill in hospital, my father visited her. He brought the orang utan along and let the animal loose in the hospital ward. The curious primate started to climb on the patient beds, causing a big commotion in the ward before it was restrained. There were no rules then governing the conservation of wildlife in the country.



*Francis Lakin Mansel, 1939
Photo: Anna Studio*

In Sibul my father's duty was to visit all the smaller upriver stations like Kapit and Belaga. During those days, visiting the riverine towns along the Rajang River was by slow-moving government longboat propelled by a small outboard engine.

There are other European officers served in Sibul as heads of the various government departments and among them was Andrew MacPherson, the Resident of 3rd Division.

Life in pre-war Sibü and all districts of Sarawak for that matter, was devoid of the kinds of entertainment that we know today. To make life more interesting, a group of European administrative officers founded the Island Club Sibü in 1915. It was a place where the members congregated after a hard day's work to socialise, drink beers or play a game of snooker. Occasionally dance parties were held on the weekends.

Chapter 2

The Pacific War 1941 - 1945

the dark years in history of Sarawak

Sarawak before the war



Renovated No. 11, India Street 1960
Source: E Mansel



India Street 1940
Source: Sarawak Museum

Before the Pacific War started in 1941, there were already a small community of Japanese living in Kuching numbered about one hundred. They arrived in the 1930s to work in rubber estate plantation in Samarahan District belonging to Nissa Shokai Ltd.. Dr Matsumoto establishes his clinic on the ground floor of a shop located at No. 11, India Street. The second floor served as an espionage centre known as 'Yorioka Kikan' where vital security information about Sarawak was relayed directly to the Japanese Military Headquarters in Tokyo.



Social gathering of Japanese residents in Samarahan Rubber Estate 1930
Source: Sarawak Museum

Japanese invasion of South East Asia



*Government Rest House 1940. Dismantled 1965
Source: Ho Ah Chon*



*Site occupied by the Sarawak Museum Campus 2019
Source: E Mansel*

Japan had been fighting with China for many years. To prolong the war, the Japanese needed much natural resources like oil, tin, and rubber. The capture of Borneo oilfields was essential to the Japanese because Japan had only two years supply of oil in reserve when the war started.

When news about the bombing of Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941 reached Kuching, the Government was suspicious of the local Japanese civilians and their families who resided in Kuching. The Japanese residents were rounded up and interned in the Government Rest House. Their women and children were detained at St. Teresa's Convent. Kimura was one of the detainees, together with two of his elder sons Jerin and Eddy. My Bidayuh grandmother and her other children were not interned and they were allowed to remain in their farm in Quop.

Japanese Occupation of Sarawak



*Japanese troops sea bourn landing at
Tanjong Lobang Beach, Miri 1941
Source: Google 2021*

The Japanese troops first landed in Miri in the early morning of 16 December 1941 and in Kuching on 24 December 1941. The Japanese soldiers also penetrated into the interior parts of Sarawak. The fear of the Japanese soldiers prompted many local people to leave their homes in the towns to find safer places by living among the natives in villages far from towns.

The Japanese soldiers reached Kuching in the late afternoon of 24th December 1941. When the European officers and their local employees left the Sarawak Defence Force headquarters located at the General Post Office, they were seized by the Japanese soldiers. The local Chinese employees were freed while the European captives were marched to the Astana, where they were tied up and kept in a small room without food or water for the next two days.



*Government Post Office used as Sarawak Defence Force Hq, 1941
Source: Sarawak Museum*

Two days later, on the 26th, the Europeans were brought to the Kuching Central Police Station. They were interrogated by the Kempei Tai – the dreaded Military Police well known for their inhuman treatment of offenders. One of the Europeans who voluntarily reported himself



Central Police Station Kuching 1941
Source: Ho Ah Chon

was Peter Howes. He was a young Anglican priest stationed in Kpg. Quop, a Bidayuh village located some 3 miles off 10th Mile Bazaar. Peter was accompanied by my grandfather Kimura whom he befriended before the war. The English speaking Kempei Tai officer was happy with answers given by Peter during

his interrogation. Kimura was questioned next. He was late in giving information where the weapons belonging to the Punjabi soldiers were kept and failed to comply with the Kempei Tai's instruction. He was slapped by the Kempei Tai officer and afterwards allowed to return to his farm. Since then Kimura has nothing good to say about the Japanese military handling of the locals.

Peter Howes survived the almost four years in a Batu Lintang POW Camp. He continued to serve in Sarawak and became a Bishop before he retired in England.

Bishop Peter Howes died peacefully at his home in York on 12th April, 2003 at the age of 92.



Revd. Peter Howes 1945
Source: Peter Howes album

Japanese Military Administration

During the Japanese rule, schools were closed, and only schools teaching the Japanese language were allowed to operate. School begins with an assembly, and pupils must stand at attention to sing the Japanese National Anthem and bowed to the Japanese flag three times. These gestures were to signify that the pupils be patriotic to Japan, ingrained good discipline and acknowledged the Emperor of Japan as the supreme ruler.

The Japanese administration was no respecter of religious places of worship, especially the Christians. My former school, St. Thomas's, was ransacked and English literature destroyed. St. Thomas's Cathedral was used as a store and St. Mary's Boarding House as a brothel. Christian prayer books and other literature were confiscated and destroyed. It was also an offence for the general public to keep pictures of their European friends.

Shops were closed and daily essentials became scarce. Rice was in short supply so most people resort to planting tapioca, sweet potato and yam in order to survive. As the war progressed, basic food became unavailable. The locals resort to explore new techniques to obtain whatever they needed from their own surroundings. Cooking oil and soap were produce from boiling grated coconut meat. Oil for the lamp was extracted from rubber seeds. Cloth was obtained from the tree bark or Sisal hemp. Sugar and salt came from Nipah palm. Many people died of diseases or malnutrition due to non- existence of medical services and food supply. Traditional medicine obtained from plants were widely used to cure certain diseases but with limited effects. The population at large faced great hardships especially towards the end of the war.

I was one of the few lucky people as my uncles were farmers. They planted their own vegetables and raised chickens and pigs. My grandfather, being Japanese, was allowed to live in peace. So my mother