



MEDIA RELEASE

INTERESTING ITEMS FROM THE COLLECTION

The museum is very proud to have two exquisite pieces of woodwork on display at the Pier Store. On loan from Phil McDowell, these two items have strong ties to both the Robinson and Rossiter families.

The table was carved by Ethel Rossiter (nee Robinson) at the Melanesian Mission around the turn of the twentieth century. It is a piece of high quality workmanship, with every leg being of unique design including fuchsia plants, flowers and decorative crosses reminiscent of the pews in St Barnabas. There is also a beautiful flower on the back of each leg. It can also be completely dismantled and reassembled with wooden pegs used to secure its construction. Ethel's table bears a strong resemblance to other works produced by a craftsman known as Erromanga Martin. Not much is known of Martin except he hailed from the island of Erromanga, Vanuatu and has left a wonderful legacy of beautifully carved tables in a number of old Islander homes. Ethel's table suggests he may have been the wood work instructor at the Melanesian Mission and taught carving to students as well as islanders.

The second item is a stool made by Ethel's daughter Elsie. Elsie recounted, "Out of curiosity, I attended carving lessons at the Melanesian Mission, where I learnt to carve. I must say, it is quite different from the English woodwork and designs. Well, I learnt to hand carve a stool. However, we have to remember that islands all over the pacific carve, weave and plait, but every tribe has his own different tools and designs to use." With the mission closing in 1920, Elsie would at most have been 20 years old when she completed the stool, but probably younger. The carving technique is less refined than the table, but still a very impressive piece, especially for a beginner carver.

These two artefacts are a small example of cross cultural exchanges between the Norfolk Islanders and the Melanesian Mission being a concrete example of skills being transferred and adopted.

Both pieces are on display on the top floor at the Pier Store. Please come and have a close look at the intricate workmanship. If you have further information about Erromanga Martin or his tables, feel free to ring 23788 or email us at info@museums.gov.nf



Figure 1: Front and back of one of the table legs

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Figure 2: Ethel Rossiter's Table



Figure 1: Elsie Rossiter's carved stool