

AN AMERICAN COMMUNITY IN A MICRONESIAN TOWN

Peter Fagaldafrad
Moses Moglig
Lorin Robert

INTRODUCTION

Of the several non-Trukese minority groups living on Moen, the most populous and the most influential is the American Group or, as we will term it throughout this paper, the "American Community". Like the rest of the minority groups, the American community is made up of people who have migrated to Truk. Unlike others, however, this group has a history which extends back to the late forties. In addition, the Americans represent Micronesia's mother country--the United States. Therefore, their primary purpose in coming to these islands is aiding the local people to achieve their national sovereignty. It is this particular group on which the subject of this work is concentrated.

This American community has come to Moen to work, but insodoing, affects the life style of the people as well. Take, for instance, the American custom of talking at a meal table. This is not a common part of Trukese traditional eating habit, but it is becoming obvious that Trukese will eventually take on to the habit of sitting leisurely around the table recapturing a particular incident that has occurred a night or two previously. Our purpose is to identify the effects of the American community on the local people.

The question of how and where these Americans on Moen spend their leisure time curiously came up in our observation. We found that although picnicing or swimming at such beaches as Southfield or Pisiwi does not appear to be the most common types and places for recreating among the Americans, it is becoming more and more typical of a Trukese family on Moen to make arrangements for a weekend trip to such places. Whereas

the Americans only bring along a little food, such as soft drinks or beer, sandwiches or hamburgers and cookies, one time during our observation a particular Trukese family came down to the Southfield beach bringing about two cases of soft drinks plus some beer, packages of kon, a case of tuna and mackerel and cookies. Why is this, then? We could not give a more practical reason behind it than to say that perhaps these people tend to enjoy the occasion much more by being assured that they had enough food for a feast. Needless to say, these Trukese people have eventually found a new way of enjoying themselves during their leisure time.

Throughout this paper, we will draw conclusions from the facts we have gathered in our field work. Most of these facts were obtained through statistics, personal interviews, and field study method.

GENERAL BACKGROUND

When we talk of the American community on Moen, we are aware of the possible ambiguity of this phrase, so perhaps it might be better to define it. This community is the particular group of people possessing United States citizenship who will be residing on Moen for at least a year. They may either have jobs on Moen, or they may stay with job-holders from this community or the local people. Here we are referring to the unemployed housewives, the children, and those who are married to local people. So, the American community includes all the government and private employees, the Peace Corps Volunteers, the missionaries, the housewives, the children, and the few who are married to local people along with their American dependents.

Although its population had grown previously, the number of American employees and missionaries has been decreasing during the past couple of years. For instance, in the four-year span from 1970 to 1973 the population rose from 76 to 95; a 23% increase. The community's population (counting only the wage earners and the missionaries) reached its peak in 1973. It was in this year that the single-pay plan, legislated by the Congress of Micronesia and put into effect by the Administration, sharply reduced the salaries of non-Micronesians on "local hire" contracts; it was the most significant salary

change in years. When the bill took effect, therefore, many Americans left. Since, then, the American population has been decreasing. Since 1973 the population has decreased by 7%, the annual decrease being estimated at 5%.

It must be clearly understood that the single-pay plan was not the only cause of the decline of the Americans on Loen. Another reason was that there was an increasing number of Trukese college graduates who were ready to take over many positions in the local government. In the Education Department, for instance, there are more and more Trukese college graduates who have taken over previously American-held positions, such as elementary and secondary teachers.

Of the total 114 Americans in the community, 87 of them are working; 67 of whom are wage earners and 20 are missionaries. Of the remainder, 12 are children, 13 are housewives, and a couple of unemployed males (see chart 1). The 67 wage earners can be broken down in this way: 14% private employees; 24% Peace Corps Volunteers; and 62% government employees, more than one half of whom earn at least 10 thousand dollars a year.

The majority of Americans (69%) are concentrated in the Nantaku area, where most of the government apartments are located (see map 1). In this area you will find most of the government employees, the majority of whom are the highest-paid workers in the community. Furthermore, the local people in this area tend to be moving into the apartments and live almost like the Americans do. Here, then, one can find very few "huts", which generally indicates that there are not very many financially "poor" residents here.

The next two most populated are Mwan and Tunnuk villages. These villages are located outside what we would call the 'heart of town'. They each have at least 8 Americans residents. Mwan residents, unlike Tunnuk residents, however, live separately in rented houses, usually one family in each house. These residents are mostly Peace Corps Volunteers, whereas the Tunnuk residents are all missionaries, living on mission-owned land. The rest of the small community, except the Mabuchi community - another mission community - are very much like the Mwan community where the residents live separately in rented houses.

The whole area which includes Iras, Nantaku and Nebukos is very different from Wichap, Epinup, Nukanap area as far as social and cultural advancement is concerned. In the former, one lives in a modern environment where living requires money almost all of the time. You will notice that almost 70% of the Americans live within this area. The other area, however, has just about no American residents. Here, one will find no hint of modernization, except one elementary school, a worn-out chapel, and a few typhoon houses. There is practically no business there with the exception of a few small, unlicensed, family-owned stores that sell only mackerel, tuna, cookies, and such needed things.

Briefly, then, the American community tends to concentrate in the town area where social and economic opportunities exist. In addition, the social center for the local people is also in this area, indicating social change in this particular community.

THE ECONOMIC PROFILE

Through our interviews, information gathered from Personal Office, and some reliable sources, we were able to get a fairly good picture of the American community's economy and profile. Three specific areas were studied - earning, spending and personal possessions. For the most part, we will be reporting on the 67 wage earners - a group that includes the government and private employees and the Peace Corps Volunteers. The salaries of these wage earners range from \$ 1,600 (Xavier faculty) to \$ 30,000 for highly-paid professionals. Total annual income of these 67 wage earners is \$ 611,000 and \$ 9,400 is the average income. This is relatively high compared to the \$ 3,500 average income of the Trukese - approximately 1/3 that of the Americans.

Out of the average American income, an average amount of \$ 2,500 goes into the local economy. Most of these Americans go to such places as Marmar, Continental, and Christopher Inn for dinner, usually on weekends, and also buy canned foods from the local stores and markets. According to our interviews, Americans spend more on food than any other thing on Moen. Very few buy clothing locally, most of them buy either from

1974 - 1975

CATEGORIES	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL
PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS	10	7	17
PRIVATE EMPLOYEES	7	2	9
GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES	33	8	41
MISSIONARIES	15	5	20
HOUSEWIVES, CHILDREN & UNEMPLOYED	9	18	27

Guam or Sears. Some even write home for clothing, personal belongings, and such things as stereo-cassettes and tape.

A small portion of their spending goes to ten local individuals who are married to Americans. In addition to these ten wives and husbands, there are 27 others who are wholly or partially dependent on Americans' income. These 27 dependents include the relatives of the Trukese wives and husbands, sponsored students and others not necessarily related to the family. Usually on weekends these sponsored students go to dine with their friends or spend two or more nights with them. Sometimes they receive cash from their friends for their personal needs. Based on the 64 people we interviewed, we found that there is a ratio of one vehicle to every four Americans. The Trukese have the ratio of one to every twenty-six. The American community has the ratio of one musical device to every two persons. We were unable to figure the Trukese ratio, but we believe it is much lower. Stereo-cassettes, tapes, phonographs, huge radios, are categorized as musical devices. There is a big income and wealth difference between the Americans and the Trukese; truly one or the other has to be affected by this difference.

The Nantaku area (where most of the Americans live) is referred to by the local people as the most modernized area on the island of Moen. Through our figures we have shown that the Americans are richer than the Trukese. Some life patterns of the Americans will eventually affect the Trukese lifestyle, if they have not done already. One example is the way they spend their money. It seems that the Americans have fixed times for shopping; they buy food on certain days and if they run out of it they go shopping again. The Trukese, however, buy things any time it is needed.

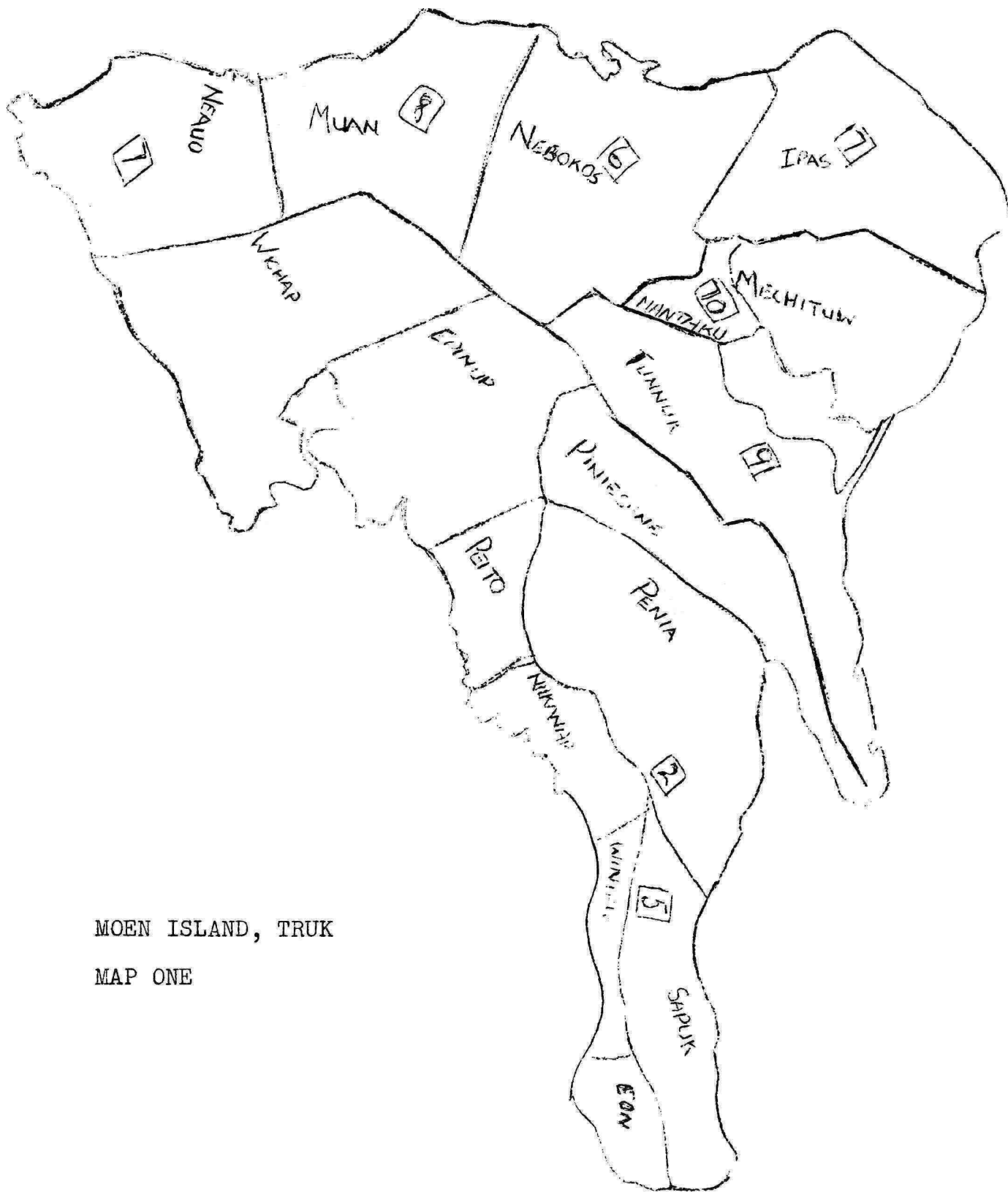
THE SOCIAL PROFILE

The American social activities are very different from that of the Trukese. Much of their time is spend at home, especially in the case of couples, reading, listening to music or concentrating on hobbies. If they leave home, they go to Southfield where they may pass the day away swimming, sailing or scuba diving.

In groups they frequent the Continental or the Marmar. These groups are small, consisting of a few who have agreed to go out for the occasion. It is by no means all the people in the American community. They usually go there for a Friday night buffet or just for a drink. There are usually more Americans at the Marmar than at the Continental. Americans are most numerous there in the morning for breakfast and in the afternoon for lunch. The reason why more Americans frequent the Marmar than the Continental is probably due to the easy accessibility of the Marmar or the lower prices there. We discovered that there is no distinction between the financial upper and lower echelon in the American community by places they frequent. It is more a taste rather than financial position which makes them choose either the Marmar or the Continental.

There are two American clubs on Moen. There is the movie club which shows movies every other Friday at the Continental, and there is the scuba diving club which has just been formed. Besides the clubs, there are also a few Americans who play poker game regularly at one of the members' house. Not all the Americans belong to these clubs. The Americans do not necessarily socialize among themselves. At any party or gathering you would not expect to find all of the Americans attending. Most social activities involve only among a small group of people.

Among the Americans on Moen, those who have been on the island for about two to five years and former Peace Corps Volunteers have the most contact with the Trukese outside of work. What is meant here is that any social activity which includes both Americans and Trukese. Those who have been here from two to five years have acquired some friends who they invite to their houses about twice a month on the average. Their Trukese friends, likewise, invite them to their own houses about the same number of times a month for a drink, party or whatever.



MOEN ISLAND, TRUK
MAP ONE