

# History of the Northern Mariana Islands

Excerpts from a new textbook by Don A. Farrell

*Editor's note: The Northern Mariana Islands Public School System on Sept. 28 introduced History of the Northern Mariana Islands, a new book written by Don A. Farrell and illustrated by Barry Wonenberg. Copies of the hardbound book can be obtained at the Public School System treasurer's office in Lower Base, Saipan, or may be ordered through the mail from CNMI Public School System, P.O. Box 1370 CK, Saipan, MP 96950. The price is \$35 per copy; add \$8 for shipping for mail orders.*



*Don A. Farrell (right), history consultant to the Northern Mariana Islands Public School System, Sept. 28 accepts an advance copy of History of the Northern Mariana Islands from Lt. Gov. Benjamin T. Manglona at a ceremony at Hyatt Regency Saipan. With them are Florine Hofschneider, a member of the board of education; and Juan L. Babauta, vice chairman of the board.*

## From Chapter 4:

Several archaeologists and physical anthropologists have studied the skeletal remains of the ancient Chamorro people. Certain characteristics of the various bones and teeth can give these researchers information about the condition of those people when they died. The researchers can determine whether the remains were of males or females, how old they were, some diseases they may have had, how many children the females had, and how they lived.

In brief, the studies of ancient Chamorro bones suggest that it was difficult for children to survive the first few years of life. If they survived the rigors of childhood, however, the ancient Chamorros could expect to live into their 30s or 40s. A few would have lived longer.

There was a high mortality rate among children. Many died at birth due to complications. Many mothers also died of complications during childbirth. A young Chamorro woman began menstruation at about the age of 16 and probably had her first child at about the age of 18. The baby would have been breast-fed for two or more

years. The young Chamorro child was then fed special foods, such as the intestines of fresh fish and mashed taro, breadfruit, and yams, until it was able to eat more solid foods. After the age of about five, the child was expected to feed itself. The mother would have three or four children before she died at about the age of 30. Her oldest child would then be about 12 years old. The children would then be raised by their older brothers and sisters, and by adoptive parents.

There were occasional food shortages caused by typhoons and droughts. The diet of the ancient Chamorros consisted mainly of taro, breadfruit, yams, bananas, coconuts, and fish. The ancient Chamorros' diet was largely vegetarian. After a severe typhoon or a long dry season, these foods would become hard to find. This caused periods of malnutrition in the children.

The life of the ancient Chamorro was fairly strenuous. Farming, cutting trees, and paddling canoes was hard work. Most Chamorros had arthritis by

their mid- to late 30s.

Broken bones, especially in fingers and toes, were common. Some of these injuries would have developed infections, including infections of the bone. Some individuals survived these infections. Those who did not would have suffered an agonizing death, as there was probably little in the way of painkillers.

Yaws infected some people. Yaws is an infectious disease that is seldom fatal. The first stage of the disease causes sores on the skin. In the second stage sores begin to form on the bones. The third stage has both skin and bone lesions.

Studies of the teeth from Chamorro skeletons

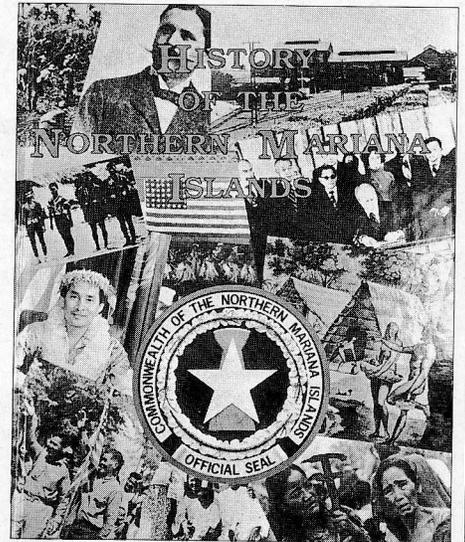
showed that not all people chewed betel nut. None of the skeletons found in San Antonio, Saipan, had teeth with betel-nut stains. About one-third of the skeletons studied showed some use of betel nut. Some teeth had designs filed into the surface. It is not known why this was done, but some researchers have speculated that it might have been a sign of marriage, or status in the clan. Most Chamorros had cavities in their teeth by the time they were 30. Tooth loss because of cavities would have been painful.

The average female Chamorro was between 5 feet 2 inches tall and 5 feet 4 inches tall. The average male was between 5 feet 4 inches and 5 feet 7 inches tall. The tallest skeleton found so far is about 5 feet 10 inches.

The archaeological evidence of how the Chamorros looked and lived is somewhat different from the reports of the early Western visitors. Overall, the health of the early Chamorros was good compared to other people living in other places at the same time. If a person survived childhood, then a life

# History of the Northern Mariana Islands

By Don A. Farrell  
(Published by Public School System,  
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands,  
Saipan; 701 pages, \$35)



**H**istorian Don A. Farrell, in cooperation with the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Public School System, has drawn on a variety of sources to create the most complete and cohesive history of the Northern Marianas to date.

The 18 chapters of *History of the Northern Mariana Islands* present a unified time line that begins with the volcanic origin of the Northern Marianas — Rota, Tinian, Saipan, and the smaller islands to their north — and reaches to the establishment of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in the late 1980s. The book is intended for classroom use, but Farrell has managed to make its wealth of material readable despite the textbook format. Some of his sources include the University of Guam's Micronesian Area Research Center, the Guam Museum, the University of Hawaii, Library of Congress, the National Archives, the Smithsonian Institution, the U.S. Navy Historical Center, and the National Air and Space Museum.

After an examination of the geological and biological forces that shaped the Mariana Islands, the book presents what is known about the first inhabitants of the islands, who evolved into the people that today are known as Chamorros. They are believed to have arrived in the Marianas from China and Southeast Asia by way of the Philippines. Farrell uses anthropological, archaeological and linguistic techniques to create a surprisingly clear image of the ancient Chamorros

and what their culture and society may have been like.

The next few chapters cover the painful period of Spanish occupation and subjugation from 1668 to 1899. This was what the Spaniards referred to as *reduccion* — the conversion of native populations to the religion, lifestyle and values of Spanish culture. By the mid-1700s, almost constant warring between rebellious Chamorros and the Spanish had resulted in the virtual depopulation of the Northern Marianas. Farrell goes into some detail describing the migration to Saipan of Caroline Islands natives, a relatively little-known aspect of Marianas history. The influx of Carolinians, and the resettlement of Saipan by Chamorros and mestizos from Guam during the late 1800s, repopulated the islands with the ancestors of today's inhabitants.

The German administration of the Northern Marianas from 1899 to 1914, and the Japanese administration from 1914 to the start of World War II, together represent one of the few peaceful periods the islands have known since the first contacts with the outside world. The book does a good job of describing how the two nations introduced industry and economic development to the islands, and established the first programs for public health and education.

Farrell looks at the fierce World War II battles for Saipan and Tinian from both global and local perspectives. Aside from showing the key role that the capture of the

islands played in overall U.S. strategy, the book describes the courses of the battles with text, maps and photographs, with an emphasis on the effect the war had on the islands' inhabitants. This is followed by an unusually clear account of the sometimes confusing history of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands and its origins. Finally, the book brings us up to the present with an account of the political processes that led up to the establishment of the commonwealth.

*History of the Northern Mariana Islands* contains many historical photographs, engravings and illustrations. The text is accompanied by numerous maps, graphs, timetables and charts that give the book a snappy, colorful look. In many cases important documents mentioned in the text are printed in their entirety in appendices following the chapters in which they are covered. Barry Wonenberg, who designed the book, also has contributed some hand-drawn illustrations, and Phyllis Koontz has done her usual competent job of editing.

In the preface Farrell expresses the hope that this volume will be the first in a series of more detailed accounts of Northern Marianas history. There is no doubt that for many years to come students of Marianas history and culture will benefit from his labor of love.

— Jonathan Needham

of at least 30 more years could be expected. Some individuals could have lived to be 100 years old, but this would be uncommon. Generally, they lived a fairly comfortable life. However, they faced the possibility of discomfort from arthritis or toothaches from their 30s onward.

## From Chapter 9:

Father Corbinian of Rota in 1910 recorded historical and contemporary accounts about earthquakes:

"We don't know what will happen to these islands in the course of time, whether they will disappear again one day just as they emerged from the depths because of an earthquake.

We are reminded each year by the occurrence of earthquakes of such a catastrophe, which will probably be the work of an instant. Seven or eight years ago, an English island lying east of the Marianas, Laysan, suddenly disappeared in an earthquake. A steamer

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## History ...

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that wanted to go to the island searched for it in vain.

But we don't have to go so far afield! It is certain that the island of Anson lying south of Guam disappeared into the deep ... Chamorros of today still talk of a Spanish ship searching there, on which the crew were able to exactly distinguish trees and houses in a shallow enough area.

Similarly, the Zealandia Banks north of Saipan between the islands of Guguan and Sariguan, consisting of three crags two meters high, have sunk again in an earthquake.

The severest, also frightful, earthquakes (on Rota) occurred in the year of 1767 and in October 1905."

Little is known about the first one. It is only certain that the people of Rota made a votive offering to "Our Lady, Mother of Light," (Sainan Ina) and selected the holy Franze of Borgias (San Francisco de Borja), the main patron, as an auxiliary saint in view of this earthquake. ...

Concerning the damage the earthquake of that time inflicted, it is only known that a large and wide, impassable and deep crack, was formed in the middle of the southern part of the island and that, on the west coast of the northern part of the island, a large block thirty to forty meters high and twenty to thirty meters in diameter was dislodged and cast into the depths.

The earthquake of the year 1905 occurred around nine o'clock in the morning and lasted approximately seven to ten minutes. According to the parish chronicle: "In October this year a terrible earthquake happened. The island threatened to tip over, since it had leaned so much to one side. On that day, something especially striking happened to the hill of Taipingot on the southern part of the island. It had the shape of a wheel, which is why the Spanish called the whole island Rota. Initially, it lay on one (the western) side, then just as sharply lay on the opposite one. At last, another tremor restored it to its earlier position. As a consequence of the powerful tremors, the ocean appeared as white as snow for some distance."

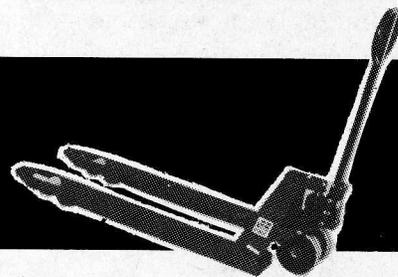
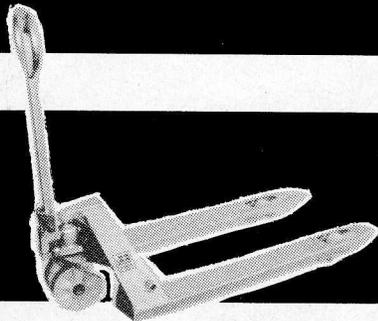
### From Chapter 18:

After the inauguration of the first Commonwealth government in 1978, investors began to show interest in the Northern Mariana Islands. A constitutional government had been estab-

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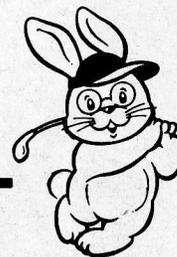
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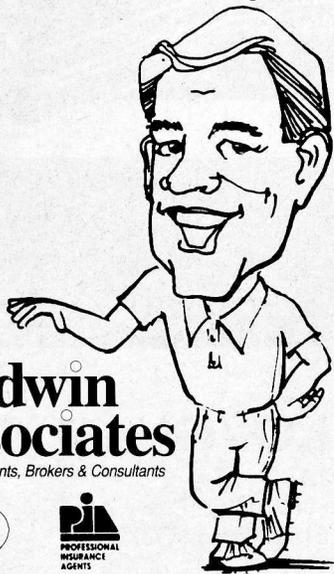
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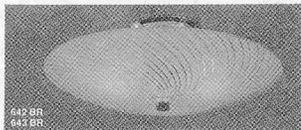
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lished under the protection of the American flag. The covenant and the constitution provided political stability, which attracted investors. It was not long before new construction began to take place on Saipan.

One factor that probably stimulated economic development more than any other was the labor laws. Because only certain sections of the U.S. naturalization and immigration laws applied to the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, it was easy and inexpensive to bring in labor. Outside labor had made sugar king in the Marianas during the Japanese administration. Now imported labor would make tourism from Japan king in the Marianas.

Japanese investors recognized the opportunities available. Long, white-sand beaches and a year-round tropical climate were a short three-hour flight from Japan. The low cost of hotel construction made the tourism industry attractive to investors. Because contractors could bring in their own labor at less than U.S. minimum wage, they could quote much lower prices for the construction of hotels and supporting facilities. The Northern Marianas immigration laws assured the contractors of having the laborers they needed to complete their projects. It was not long before the construction industry was booming. Hotels appeared along Saipan's Beach Road all the way from Aigang to Marpi.

Along with the hotels has come the construction of other recreational facilities for tourists to enjoy. Golf courses, restaurants, scuba-diving shops, floating restaurants, glass-bottomed boats, shooting galleries, and nightclubs have sprung up all around Saipan. Tour buses make the daily circuit from the hotels to shopping centers and historic sights. Supporting these businesses are new banks, laundromats, office-supply stores, grocery stores, and many other establishments.

The garment industry also developed as a result of the covenant. The covenant provided that products manufactured in the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas could enter the United States duty free. Garment manufacturers around the world were very interested in this article of the covenant. ...

Shortly after the first administration took office, several garment manufacturers began looking at investing in the Marianas. Today, there are a number of them operating on Saipan. They ship hundreds of thousands of garments to the U.S. every year. ■