

Germans entered the Marshalls during the 1850s, with Adolph Capelle arriving on Ebon from Samoa in 1859. Five years later, he was joined by Jose deBrum, a Portuguese whaler. Together they built a trading post on Ebon, and permanently settling here, married into Marshallese families.

Subsequently, several German firms began establishing themselves. Foremost Godeffroy & Son of Hamburg, which had pioneered copra production on Samoa by exporting fried coconut meat rather than pressed oil that could go rancid on the voyage. In the 1870's Godeffroy & Co. set up a trading station on Ebon. Another German company, Hensheim & Co. began to trade from Jaluit. Later Godeffroy & Co. was to extend its trading stations to Jaluit, Namdrik, Mili, and Maloelap. Capelle and deBrum eventually acquired Likiep Atoll and turned it into the most efficiently run profitable copra operation in the Marshalls.



***Flag of the Ralik Islands adopted in 1878. The colours reflect Imperial Germany.***

These early traders worked with Iroijlaplap Kabua Kabua, the most powerful Iroij of the Ralik (sunset) chain. Through such relationships, the German traders were able to gain leases on individual islands and expand their networks.

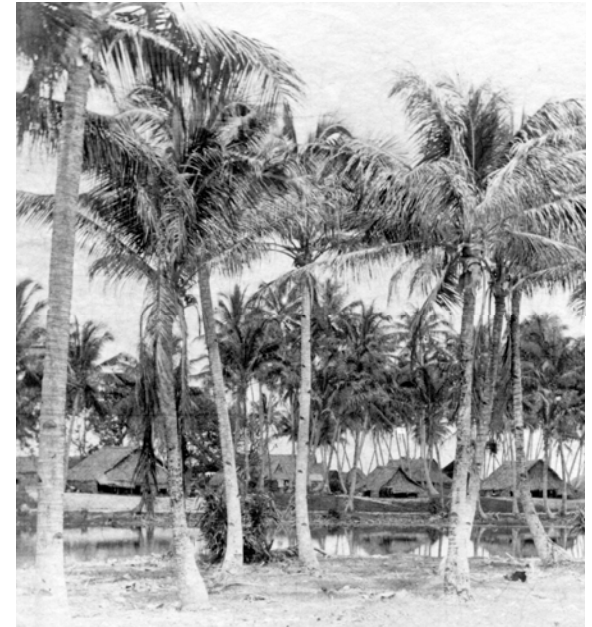


***The German settlement on Jabwor, Jaluit in about 1901.***

The hold on the islands was consolidated through a Treaty of Friendship, which Imperial Germany signed with all the relevant Ralik chiefs and the establishment of a German Consulate in 1875.

Following a dispute over territorial and commercial rights in Micronesia, Germany officially bought the islands in 1885 from Spain. Germany sent the gunboat *Nautilus* to Jaluit where Captain Rötger and Iroij Kabua and four lesser Marshallese chiefs signed an agreement making the Marshall Islands a German protectorate in 1885. In 1886 Nauru was added.

The German government handed the administration of the protectorate to a concession company, formed by a merger of all German trading interests in the Marshall Islands. The new *Jaluit Gesellschaft* had a virtual trading monopoly (until 1906) squeezing out American and British competitors.



***The Marshallese settlement at the northern tip of Jabwor, Jaluit Atoll.***

Important social changes occurred in the Marshall Islands during the German period.

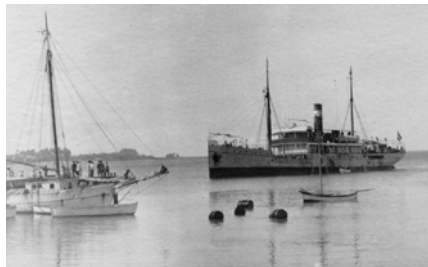
The introduction of a head tax, payable in copra, consolidated the colonial return from the islands. Because traditionally, the chiefs would be given a share of all produce, the Germans made the *Iroij* responsible for tax collection and formalized a share of the copra given to them.

Even though copra had been important before the formal establishment of the German colony, it became the dominant industry in the Marshall Islands, with all islands contributing.



*A severe typhoon on 30 June 1905 destroyed the Hotel Germania (above) and most of the German settlement on Jaluit.*

Germany treated the Marshall Islands as an economic colony and never made any attempt to fortify or defend them in case of war. Thus when World War I broke out, Japan, which had joined the allies quickly after the beginning of war, sent a naval squadron and took military possession of the islands in October 1914.



*The German postal steamer Germania photographed in Jaluit Lagoon ensured mail and passenger connections with Sydney and Hong Kong, tying the German Marshall Islands into the world trade network.*

### *Places to Visit*

Even though the social and commercial influences of the German period were profound, the passage of time, as well as the ravages brought about by World War II, has diminished historic places from the German period.

The most remarkable of these is the deBrum House on Likiep, which was erected by Joachim deBrum in 1904/05. It is the only intact German-period wooden building in entire Micronesia, and still retains much of its original furnishings.



*The deBrum house on Likiep.*

Examples of photographs taken by Joachim deBrum can be found in the Alele Museum.

Text: Prof. Dirk HR Spenneman 2003. Photos: Jon O'Neill (deBrum house). Others, courtesy of Micronesian Area Research Center, Guam.

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# Germans in the *Marshall Inseln*

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