BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: ESTA (PUNG) TENNIS, (now deceased)

Esta (Pung) Tennis, Hawaiian-Chinese, was born October 15, 1910, in Kakaako. She was educated on the Big Island and at McKinley High School and Sacred Heart's Academy. She also attended the University of Hawaii.

She worked for the Y.M.C.A., the Corps of Engineers, for the courts, and the Honolulu Police Department. She enjoyed music; played the piano, guitar, and ukulele.

Her untimely death in mid-1978 precluded an in-depth interview. However, she had generously loaned documents and materials to the ESOHP. Notes from the materials follow.
NOTES FROM UNRECORDED INTERVIEW

with

Tai Loy Ho, Kenji Nobori, Moses Pung, Esta (Pung) Tennis, and Francis Zane

May 11, 1978
Honolulu, Hawaii

BY: Gael Gouveia

In making arrangements for an interview with Tai Loy Ho, he strongly urged a preliminary group discussion with a number of former Kakaako residents. The following are notes from the group discussion.

The Hos and the Pungs are life-long friends, born and raised in Kakaako. Francis Zane is a cousin to the Pungs and Kenji Nobori is a friend of both families. During the course of the discussion, gracious island hospitality was shared. Old photographs and anecdotes about life in Kakaako were discussed.

Diving was a way of life for many young men in Kakaako including the Pungs, the Hos and Francis Zane. "You took a chance for a quarter," Francis said. Boys dove for coins on boat day. They could sometimes make $10 to $12 in a day. Many of the boys dove for coins because there were no jobs available during the Depression. Sometimes boys would kick you in the mouth to loosen the coins so they could go after them.

A story was told about one young diver, Tiny Brown, who weighed close to 300 pounds. He wasn't the speediest of divers; therefore he ingeniously developed a gimmick which involved floating on his back with a younger, much lighter brother astride. The younger brother had not yet become much of a distance swimmer or diver but he was quick, and could dart about snatching coins, and give them to Tiny, his "buoy." One day, the youngster bounced a little too hard on Tiny's stomach causing him to swallow all the coins.

Moses laughed, "You can believe, he did his business under a keawe tree so he could retrieve the coins."

There were "bulls" or leaders and almost a ritual of fights which took place to gain acceptance in the groups. Mention was made of one incident when the "Magoon Block Boys" went to Palama to fight. Generally, Kakaako boys didn't look for trouble but if it came their way, they stood united.

A number of Kakaako boys participated in the 1924 American Olympics. They brought home prizes and honor for Kakaako and Hawaii. Warren Kealoha, backstroke; and Pua Kealoha and Charlie Pung, freestyle, were among the winners.
Moses Pung also related the story of the Kaikoo-maru, an old boat that some of the diving boys took over and lived on. They lit it up with electricity that was jury-rigged from the dry dock; free water was obtained in the same way. Poi was cheap in those days. The boys pooled their money to buy about seven pounds for 25 cents. They also "borrowed" fish to eat from other people's traps. Tiny Brown one time ate seven pounds of poi and 25 akule at one sitting.

In the evenings, they'd play music until they all fell asleep. Gabby Pahinui, used to join them to play music.

Boxing was big in Kakaako also. George Kane was an all-around athlete and leader. William Huihui was an early trainer for Kewalo Club. Bill Kemp, a Tahitian; Hosoi, Sato, Johnson, Fukuda, Dutchy Freitas, and A. K. Vierra were all mentioned as important names in the boxing field in the 1930's.

The Filipino immigrants were channeled through a separate immigration station located where American Factors is now on Auahi Street, because of a smallpox scare according to Esta Pung. Her grandfather was the manager of the Immigration Station for a time.

Regattas were held for rowing clubs in September. Popular groups included Myrtle, Healani, and HuiNalu. Esta was a member of the Kunalu Girls' Rowing Club for more than 10 years during the 1930's.
Esta (Pung) Tennis was selected as a member of the Ethnic Studies Oral History Project Kakaako Advisory Committee. Shortly after selection, she began writing down her recollections of Kakaako in a notebook, which she subsequently shared with the Ethnic Studies Oral History Project. The following is a summary of her notebook recollections. She passed away before the project was completed.

People

Esta recalled kids' nicknames like "Big Ip," "Boo Nick," "Flat," "Da Doon," "Cowboy," and "Chicken." Mother Margaret Waldron was a large, part-Hawaiian woman who taught school at Pohukaina Elementary and helped keep many kids out of trouble. She organized sports activities, helped people find jobs, and was always there to talk with.

Members of the 1924 American Olympic swimming team with roots in Kakaako included Charles "Imi" Pung; Pua Kela (Kealoha), and Warren Kealoha. Harvey Chilton coached these boys along with Duke Kahanamoku and Buster Crabbe at Pier 7. Later, popular swimmers in the late 1930's were the Kalili brothers and Barney Pung.

Schools

Pohukaina Elementary School was originally located where the main branch of the Library of Hawaii stands today, on King and Punchbowl Streets. There was a kindergarten at Kakaako Mission. Johanna Mendiola, one of the teachers, used to pinch the kids when they misbehaved. Mrs. Rachel Knott ran the school. Her father, Walter Murray Gibson, had worked to help Queen Liliuokalani regain the throne.

There was a small cottage at Kakaako Mission which served as a dispensary. Miss Kingsberry was the only public health nurse in the area. During World War I, Esta was taught to knit sweaters, long socks, and small bags (10-inch by 10-inch squares with drawstrings and Red Cross appliques) for the boys. She also learned cooking there.
Places
There was an old fish market where Hawaiian Electric's powerhouse stands, facing Pier 7. The Primo Brewery was earlier known as Drier's Brewery, and before that, it was the Ice House. The Aloha Theatre, opposite the American Sanitary Laundry, was owned and operated by a Mr. Calhau. A candy store there was run by Mr. Oba, whose son was known as "Kid Sam" during the 1920's; he was a bantamweight boxing champion.

Magoon Block had many stores. Esta's Uncle, En Fee Pung, had the largest grocery. He also had two Arabian horses that he used to deliver the groceries with.

Kewalo Club House had dancing every Saturday night. Some of the orchestras that played there were Scully's, Joe Lapilio's and Fred "Sceda" Rocha's; Eleanor (Wilson) Heavey and Lei Mendiola played piano for these orchestras.

There were several "hula houses" in the area. Esta's mother, Hana, ran one. Others included Kekahas Ross, Kao-o, and Matilda Kauwe.

Japanese pushcart peddlers sold shaved ice with colorful flavors, candies, candy leis, sushi, pastries, and saimin.

There were a number of bakeries in Kakaako including Lee Woo, See Kau, and Ah Park. A confection called "kihekihe," a shredded coconut filled pastry, was a favorite. At the Ah Sing bakery and small restaurant, neighborhood people gathered with their coffee pots to have them filled for 25 cents, which included sugar and milk. A large slice of Portuguese bread spread with butter and jelly sold for 5 or 10 cents. Ah Sing also made pies for 5 and 10 cents that would now cost $3.50.

Esta also recalled attending and participating in services on Memorial Eve at Kawaiahao Cemetery. The lanterns burned all night. There was music and flowers. Soft singing went on all evening.

Politics
In the late 1930's, South Queen Street was often closed by crowds listening to their favorite candidates. Democrats and Republicans would hold their meetings on the same platforms at different times or on different days. They would be loaded with leis, mostly made of carnation, ginger, maile, and tuberoses. There were no plumeria leis in those days. Musicians like Bina Mossman and her singing girls played for the Republican candidates during Sam King's time as a delegate to Congress (1930's).

Tutu Manihi Kaaihue had hula entertainers for the Democrats. Esta also recalls the earlier times when Prince Kuhio and Paul Jarrett made speeches. Esta remembered that Kakaako was an active political community. John Lane made speeches in Hawaiian and English. Johnny Wilson ran for mayor, and running for sheriff in those days was a real contest, too.