The Oroku, Okinawa Connection: Local-style Restaurants in Hawaiʻi

Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa

February 2004
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Hawaii Pacific Rim Society
University of Hawai‘i Foundation
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clam Chowder</td>
<td>30¢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh Fruit Cocktail</td>
<td>10¢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boiled Corned Beef with Cabbage</td>
<td>75¢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey Stew with Rice</td>
<td>75¢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breaded Veal Cutlets with Gravy</td>
<td>75¢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breaded Pork Cutlets with Gravy</td>
<td>75¢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fried Liver &amp; Bacon</td>
<td>75¢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fried Fresh Halibut with Tartar Sauce</td>
<td>25¢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fried Fresh Fish with Tartar Sauce</td>
<td>25¢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chop Steak with Rice</td>
<td>75¢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamburger Steak with Gravy</td>
<td>75¢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ham Cutlets</td>
<td>50¢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lim Park Sausages with Hashed Potato</td>
<td>60¢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold Lunccheon Salad with Potato Salad</td>
<td>60¢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold Pickled Pig Feet with Potato Salad</td>
<td>60¢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teriyaki Steak with Rice</td>
<td>80¢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braised Loin Chops with Gravy</td>
<td>80¢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roasted Pork Chops with Apple Sauce</td>
<td>80¢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grilled Chicken with Napa Cabbage</td>
<td>80¢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sirloin Steak with French Fries</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rib Steak with French Fries</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-1-Flavor Steak with French Fries</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salmon</td>
<td>75¢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abalone</td>
<td>50¢</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sesame</td>
<td>75¢</td>
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### Side Dishes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Potato, Cucumber, Tomato or Lettuce</td>
<td>50¢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asparagus with Key Lime Juice</td>
<td>25¢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuna Pies</td>
<td>25¢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination Salad</td>
<td>50¢</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### beverages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coffee, Tea (hot or iced)</td>
<td>10¢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milky, Pineapple or Tomato Juice</td>
<td>15¢</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Desserts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fudge Pie, Apple Pie, STRIPED, Ice Cream</td>
<td>10¢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chilled Pudding Peaches</td>
<td>10¢</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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2. George’s Inn, interior, 1979?
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(Photos 4–5, courtesy Yoshino Teruya)

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INTRODUCTION

The Center for Oral History (COH) is a unit of the Social Science Research Institute, College of Social Sciences, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. The only state-supported center of its kind in the islands, COH researches, conducts, transcribes, edits, and disseminates oral history interviews focused on Hawai‘i’s past.

Since its inception in 1976, COH has interviewed more than 600 individuals and deposited in archives and libraries a collection of over 25,000 transcript pages.

In addition to providing researchers with first-person, primary-source documents, the Center for Oral History produces educational materials (journal and newspaper articles, books, slideshows, videos, dramatizations, etc.) based on the interviews. The Center also presents lectures and facilitates discussions on local history, conducts classes and workshops on oral history methodology, and serves as a clearinghouse for oral history research relating to Hawai‘i.

This volume, The Oroku, Okinawa Connection: Local-Style Restaurants in Hawai‘i, focuses on the origins, growth, maintenance, and decline of family-run local-style restaurants owned and operated by individuals from Oroku, Okinawa.

Since the 1920s, there have been more than seventy restaurants owned and operated on O‘ahu by Orokan-chu, or individuals whose families originated in Oroku, Okinawa. The earliest documented by the Oroku Azajin Restaurant Committee is American Café founded by Ushi Takara in 1923. Ushi Takara and non-Orokan-chu Harry Seigi Uehara, owner of Kewalo Inn, have often been credited for hiring, training, and inspiring others to open their own eateries. Orokan-chu restaurateurs also mentioned as mentors by project interviewees include: Gentaro Kaneshiro of Frankie’s Café and Columbia Inn, Fred Toshio Kaneshiro of Columbia Inn, Takaras and Teruyas of Kaimuki Inn, Saburo Teruya of Hibiscus Café, and Saburo Takara of Ramona Café.

Through the influence of these and other early restaurateurs and the efforts of young men and women who started as dishwashers, kitchen help, and wait help, the number of Okinawan-run restaurants proliferated. For three decades beginning in the 1930s, these businesses began offering set meals and services suited to the likes and needs of island families.

While all but a few among the seventy or so restaurants owned by Orokan-chu are no longer in operation, many are still familiar to old-time restaurant-goers. Aloha Grill, Bluebird Café, Columbia Inn, George’s Inn, Lucky Grill, New Capitol Café, Sierra Café, Smile Café, and Times Grill are places still remembered. The entrees, menus, and services associated with these establishments are longstanding standards for local restaurants and part of island history.

The interviews featured in this volume help preserve and share the history of these establishments.

Project Interviewees
With ancestral roots in Oroku, Okinawa, four women and seven men, ranging from fifty-nine to eighty-nine years of age, were interviewed. They represented first-, second-, and third-generation participants/observers of family-run restaurants. All, in one capacity or another, worked in restaurants.
The following is a brief description of the interviewees, in alphabetical order, with a few comments on the content of each interview:

Beatrice Kaneshiro: She was hired as a waitress at Frankie’s Café, a Honolulu restaurant owned in part by Gentaro Kaneshiro. At Frankie’s, she became acquainted with Gentaro’s half-brother, Fred Toshio Kaneshiro, whom she married in 1942. From 1941 through the mid-1980s, except for some years spent caring for three sons, Beatrice Kaneshiro worked in various capacities at the family-run restaurant, Columbia Inn. Her interview is notable for it tells the history of Columbia Inn from the perspective of a family member closely involved with its operation since its establishment to its closing.

Eugene Kaneshiro: Eldest of three sons born to Fred Toshio and Beatrice Kaneshiro, he spent part of his childhood in and around the family-run Columbia Inn in Chinatown. Starting in the mid-1960s, he became part of Columbia Inn’s management at Kapi’olani Boulevard – often assigned to do almost anything and everything that required his attention. Highlighted in his interview are observations about: Columbia Inn in Chinatown, restaurant-impacted family life, his father’s skill at public relations, his own experiences learning the business, the transition from one generation to the next, and Okinawans and the restaurant trade.

David Takara: In 1941, his father Ushi Takara became a part-owner/operator of Kaimuld Inn on Wai’alae Avenue. Involved on a part-time basis with Kaimuld Inn since his teenage years, David Takara became fully involved with the family-run business in the late 1950s. His interview provides a perspective on the history of Kaimukī Inn and a glimpse of the long hours and hard work demanded of family members.

Richard Takara: In the 1930s, his father, Taru Takara, was a member of a partnership operating Kaimukī Inn. After World War II, his parents both worked at the restaurant. From 1950 to 1988, the Takaras owned and operated George’s Inn. Richard Takara was involved with George’s Inn from the beginning – cooking, cleaning, and doing whatever he was assigned. Resonating throughout the interview are the demands and stresses placed on family involved in the restaurant business.

Wallace Takara: At thirteen years of age, he began his long career in the culinary trade. His first job was as a dishwasher, busboy, and kitchen helper at Kaimukī Inn. It was followed by employment at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel and the Ramona Café. As he honed his skills, he was hired as a chef at Queen’s Surf, Don the Beachcomber’s, the Pacific Club, the Cavalier, and Japan Airlines. He and Roger Kaneshiro owned TK Diner; he and Kiku Takara owned Nel’s Café. His efforts to improve his skills and move upward are documented in the interview. His comments on the status of cooks now and then reflect on social history.

Elsie Teruya: During the summer following seventh grade, she was asked by her half-brother Gentaro Kaneshiro to work as a waitress at Frankie’s Café. With help needed at Frankie’s, her schooling ended. Beginning in 1941, she worked as a waitress at family-run Columbia Inn. She married in 1942, became pregnant, and stopped working at the restaurant. Some fifteen years later, she resumed work at Columbia Inn, where she manned the cash register and phone for about twenty years. Her interview includes: a detailed description of life in the plantation community of Hakalau, her recollections of work and social life in a restaurant, and her memories of restaurant patrons.

Wallace Teruya: He spent his childhood on the Big Island. At the age of fifteen, he joined his brother Albert in Honolulu. He soon found employment as a utility boy at an apartment hotel; later, he was employed as a busboy and waiter at Kewalo Inn. From 1935 to 1937, Albert and
Wallace Teruya owned and operated the T and W Lunchroom. After selling the business to a friend, they opened and operated Times Grill, 1939 to 1947. After selling Times Grill, the Teruya brothers researched and worked in the retail trade to open another type of business. Their supermarket business, Times Markets, served island communities from 1949 to 2002. This interview is especially valuable for its recollections of Kewalo Inn and the Teruyas’ early efforts in the restaurant business.

Ruby Uehara: Her family has a long history in the restaurant business. Her grandfather, Jiro Takara, and later, her uncle, Koen Takara, owned and operated a bar/restaurant called the Pink Elephant in Honolulu. Her parents were part-owners of Kaimuki Inn in the early 1930s. Later, they owned and operated Choice Inn, U.S. Café, and Lucky Grill. Lucky Grill continued under the ownership of relatives from ca. 1941 to 1960. As a schoolgirl, Ruby Uehara often helped at Lucky Grill. Her interview is notable for its recollections of: family-run restaurants, family, and entrepreneurship.

Margaret Uyehara: She spent her childhood in a Big Island plantation community. As a teenager, she worked as a kimono-clad waitress at the Bluebird Café on O‘ahu. After her marriage to Herbert Uyehara, she helped at American Café. In 1938, the Uyeharas with the encouragement of Kame Uyehara became owners/operators of the New Capitol Café in downtown Honolulu. In 1945, Herbert and Margaret Uyehara opened Capitol Drive In. They continued operations until the early 1970s. Highlighted in her interview are: recollections of life on the Big Island, details about the early Bluebird Café and American Café, and an account of her own businesses.

Masaji Uyehara: He spent his childhood on the Big Island. In 1932, he helped build and worked at Smile Café, a restaurant opened by older brother Sam Uyehara on O‘ahu. In 1938, he was hired as a cook at Kau Kau Corner. Later, he worked at other eateries as well as Smile Café. In 1947, he operated the Ford Island Cafeteria. Later, he opened ‘Ilima Drive Inn and ‘Aiea Drive Inn. For twenty-seven years, beginning in 1972, he ran ‘Ilima Catering. His interview includes: a description of plantation life on the Big Island, a discussion of ties between Oroku-chu, a telling of his successes and difficulties in the restaurant business, and his observations on early restaurateurs helping others.

Masao Uyehara: Born in Kohala, Hawai‘i but raised in Okinawa for about ten years, he faced the challenges of English-language schooling when he returned to the Big Island. At the age of fourteen or fifteen, he left the Big Island for Honolulu. With the help of Gentaro Kaneshiro, Masao Uyehara was able to land a non-paying job as a dishwasher at American Café. With free food, dishwashing sustained him and gave him a skill. Again with the help of Kaneshiro, he later got a paying job at Kewalo Inn where he washed dishes, did pantry work, helped the cook, and baked. In 1934, he was asked to be a cook at Kapi‘olani Grill. In 1940, he and his brother, Kotaro Uyehara, bought Lindy’s Café. In 1954, Uyehara left Lindy’s and took over Silver Surf Fountain. He retired in 1970. Notable in this interview are: Masao Uyehara’s remembrances of his experiences as a minarai; his recollections of American Café, Kewalo Inn, and Kapi‘olani Grill; and his telling of his own experiences as an independent restaurateur.

Project Background and Methodology

The Oroku, Okinawa Connection: Local-Style Restaurants in Hawai‘i is a joint project of the Hawaii United Okinawa Association (HUOA) and the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii (JCCH). The Oroku Azajin Club, a member club of the HUOA, was assigned this specific project as phase one of a larger HUOA undertaking focused on Okinawan restaurants in general. The Center for Oral History was contracted by the JCCH to conduct the oral history interviews.
The Hawaii Pacific Rim Society and the University of Hawai‘i Foundation provided funding for the oral history project.

The focus and scope of the interviews were determined by the Center for Oral History after meeting with members of the Oroku Azajin Club. A list of about twenty potential interviewees was submitted to COH by the club’s Oroku Azajin Restaurant Committee. Following phone contacts and unrecorded preliminary interviews, eleven agreed to be tape-recorded. Selection was based on the interviewees’ depth and breadth of knowledge, their ability to articulate life experiences associated with the restaurant business, and their willingness to participate as interviewees. Some of the potential interviewees declined participation because they preferred not to recall or share their memories on the topic. Others declined because of privacy needs, conflicting commitments, ill health, or lack of confidence in their ability to recall events accurately.

COH Director Warren Nishimoto and Research Associate Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto jointly conducted two interviews; nine were conducted by Kodama-Nishimoto. All interviews were conducted at various sites on O‘ahu in 2002 and 2003. Most individuals were interviewed in two sessions, some were interviewed in one session while one individual was interviewed in three sessions. The nineteen sessions amounted to more than twenty-four hours of audiotaping.

Because interviewees were asked to comment on experiences and incidents oftentimes specific to their own lives, no set questionnaire was used. Instead, a life history approach was followed, creating biographical case studies centered mainly on the backgrounds of the interviewees and the events that shaped their lives. Interviewees were asked to describe and comment on daily life experiences such as work, family and home life, community life, schooling, cultural practices, values, and other aspects of everyday living. Interviewees were also asked to speak about their restaurants: how and why the business was started, securing capital, selecting a site, hiring employees, working with family members, running a kitchen, managing the dining room, maintaining a clientele, and sustaining a business over time. Recollections about persons instrumental in the beginnings and maintenance of the restaurant trade were also sought.

COH-trained student transcribers transcribed the interviews almost verbatim. The transcripts, audio-reviewed by the researchers/interviewers to correct omissions and other errors, were edited slightly for clarity and historical accuracy.

The transcripts were then sent to interviewees for their review and approval. Interviewees were asked to verify names and dates and to clarify statements where necessary. COH incorporated the interviewees’ changes in the final version – the version that includes all statements the interviewees wish to leave for the public record.

Prior to publication, the interviewees read and signed a document allowing the University of Hawai‘i Center for Oral History and the general public scholarly and educational use of the transcripts.

While not always entirely accurate, the aim of an oral history interview is the creation of a reliable and valid primary-source document. To achieve this end, the researchers/interviewers corroborated interviewee statements when possible, selected interviewees carefully, established rapport, listened carefully and with empathy, asked thoughtful questions, encouraged interviewees to review their statements with care, and obtained permission from the interviewees to use their real names, rather than pseudonyms, in this publication.
Transcript Volume Usage
This volume of transcripts includes: a photo section of historical and contemporary photos, a list of Oroku restaurants compiled by the Oroku Azajin Restaurant Committee, a glossary of all italicized non-English and Hawai'i Creole English (HCE) words, and a subject/name index. A biographical summary precedes each interview.

There is a series of numbers at the beginning of each transcript. This series includes, in order, a project number, audiocassette number, session number, and year the interview was conducted. For example, 40-2-1-02 identifies COH project number 40, cassette number 2, recorded interview session 1, and the year, 2002.

Brackets [ ] in the transcripts indicate additions/changes made by COH staff. Parentheses ( ) indicate additions/changes made by the interviewee. A three-dot ellipsis indicates an interruption; a four-dot ellipsis indicates a trail-off by a speaker. Three dashes indicate a false start.

Short excerpts from the transcripts may be utilized in unpublished works without obtaining permission as long as proper credit is given to the interviewee, interviewer(s), the Center for Oral History, and the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii. Permission must be obtained from the Center for Oral History and the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii for published excerpts and extensive use of the transcripts.

Transcript Availability
These transcripts are the primary documents presently available for research purposes. The audio cassettes are in storage and not available for use, unless written permission is obtained from the Center for Oral History.

Copies of this transcript volume are available at the following locations:

Hawai'i
Hilo Public Library
Kailua-Kona Public Library
Kealakekua Public Library
University of Hawai'i at Hilo Library

Kaua'i
Līhuʻe Public Library
Kauaʻi Community College Library

Lānaʻi
Lānaʻi Public and School Library

Maui
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Wailuku Public Library
Maui Community College Library

Molokaʻi
Molokaʻi Public Library

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Transcript collections
Waialua and Hale‘iwa: The People Tell Their Story (1977)
Life Histories of Native Hawaiians (1978)
Waipi‘o: Mānoa Wai (Source of Life) (1978)
The 1924 Filipino Strike on Kaua‘i (1979)
Women Workers in Hawai‘i’s Pineapple Industry (1979)
Stores and Storekeepers of Pā‘ia and Pu‘unēnē, Maui (1980)
A Social History of Kona (1981)
Five Life Histories (1983)
Kalihi: Place of Transition (1984)
Ka Po‘e Kau Lei: An Oral History of Hawai‘i’s Lei Sellers (1986)
Perspectives on Hawai‘i’s Statehood (1986)
Oral Histories of African Americans (1990)
Public Education in Hawai‘i: Oral Histories (1991)
An Era of Change: Oral Histories of Civilians in World War II Hawai‘i (1994)
Hawai‘i Political History Documentation Project (1996)
Presidents of the University of Hawai‘i: Harlan Cleveland (1997)
Presidents of the University of Hawai‘i: Fujio Matsuda (1998)
Reflections of Pālama Settlement (1998)
Tsunamis Remembered: Oral Histories of Survivors and Observers in Hawai‘i (2000)
Books
Uchinanchu: A History of Okinawans in Hawai‘i. Published in cooperation with the United Okinawan Association (1981)

Finding Aids
Catalog of Oral History Collections in Hawai‘i (1981)

Other Publications
Oral History Recorder newsletter (1984–)

The staff of the Center for Oral History, Social Science Research Institute, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, believes that researching, recording, and disseminating the experiences of Hawai‘i’s people will stimulate further research and foster a better understanding of our islands’ history. COH is responsible for any errors in representing or interpreting the statements of the interviewees.

Honolulu, Hawai‘i
February 2004