Hawaiian Chinese Multicultural Museum & Archives

Mission: To honor, preserve and perpetuate the legacies of Hawaii’s Chinese and the Chinese pioneers who blended their bloodlines with the native Hawaiians, resulting in a uniquely rich heritage and culture.

History: The Museum was born of informal discussions among friends in 1994, who agreed that the story of the Chinese arrival in Hawaii and the subsequent mixing of the Chinese and Hawaiian bloodlines was an under-appreciated part of Hawaii’s history. Members of the founding group included Alice Keikilani L. Char, James G.Y. Ho, Richard B.W. Ing, William H.K. Lum, and Gordon S.K. Au. Officially organized in 1997, the HCMMA has been approved as a non-profit organization by the IRS, and was the recipient of a start-up grant from the State of Hawaii to plan and develop a museum to preserve the culture, heritage, and legacy of the early Chinese and their native Hawaiian benefactors. In 1999, a lease agreement was signed with LNW Management, Inc., to convert the six-story building at 91 South King Street in the Honolulu Chinatown district into a museum and archives for this purpose. Over the next three years, the Museum attracted over 17,000 people to visit the district through its exhibits and walking tours. Unfortunately, in October, 2001, the building was sold. The HCMMA is currently working with the Honolulu city administration to obtain use of the Daniel Liu Building at 79 N. Notel Street (where the police station is located) in Chinatown, to re-open the Museum.

Membership:
HCMMA plans a membership drive, to establish a broad based member organization. Corporate membership will also play a significant role, to provide volunteer personnel as well as financial support. Individual volunteers are also freely welcomed. Currently there is a group of 25 active members supporting the aims of the association.

Cover of Untold Fragments of Hawaii’s History by James G.Y. Ho
Activities

The Hawai‘i Chinese Museum has collaborated with The State Foundation on Culture and the Arts to develop its collection and exhibition space. The major emphasis of the museum will be upon the historical, socio-economic, and cultural contributions of the Chinese, as well as the human drama of their lives. Interpretive displays are organized in the following categories:

- the sandalwood era—1794 to 1830;
- the whaling era—1830 to 1865;
- the sugar era—1852 to 1900;
- the establishment and growth of the Honolulu Chinatown;
- personalities and families among the early settlers.

A preview opening, by invitation, was held on April 1, 2000. Since then, several organizations have toured the Museum and its facilities by appointment. A grand opening is planned for a later date.

HCMMA has begun publication of a semi-annual newsletter called the Pake News. It also publishes an article in the Downtown Planet in the first week of every month.

Members conduct Chinatown walking tours for seniors and students, lecture for school and community groups, and lecture on cruise ships about Chinese and Hawaiian history, and the history of Chinatown.

The current goals of the HCMMA are to acquire a land base and funding to establish a permanent facility for the display, research, collection, cataloging and archival storage of historical artifacts, documents and materials. The collection and ongoing research will cover all aspects of Hawaiian Chinese history, with much of the initial emphasis on collecting and sorting all related evidence of the early years of the Chinese in Hawaii and the early blending of the Chinese with the Hawaiians. The collection of oral histories has a high priority in the overall plan, especially the histories of the oldest surviving generations. Through use of such histories, artifacts and other materials, the museum will present the story of the Chinese in Hawaii and the creation of Hawaiian Chinese culture.

Association president
1997–pres. James G.Y. Ho

Right: Illustration from Untold Fragments of Hawaii’s History, about the birth of Honolulu Chinatown adjacent the harbor

Source: Correspondence with James Ho