

## *CHOSOKU KOCHI*

I was born on February 27, 1898 in Gibo-machi, Shuri, Okinawa, to Matsukane and Nae Kochi.

My father was the third and youngest son of Shō Tokuko who was also known as Kochi Oyakata Chojo. Shō was the clan name (family name of the King of Ryukyu), Tokuko the personal name, Kochi was the surname, Oyakata, his rank, and Chojo his name. My grandfather was a serious and firm man who had the trust of King Shō Tai and received the King's sister as his wife. She was the daughter of King Shō Iku. He became the King's ambassador to China.

My mother and I lived with grandmother, Kochi Oyakata's wife, in the Kochi family estate since my father traveled to Hawaii in 1906. The Kochi family estate had a palatial two story house with approximately 30 rooms, surrounded by a stone wall. There was a large concrete pond and a stable of horses which were a hobby of one of my uncles. There were approximately 30 maids and man-servants to look after the estate and household needs.

In 1879, the Ryukyu Kingdom came to an end. My grandmother's brother, King Shō Tai, was deposed and immediately required to go to Tokyo. He was reluctant to leave Okinawa because he paid homage to China. For instance, he used to receive messengers from the Emperor of China, welcomed them and fed them royally, allowing them to stay for a month. He sent sugarcane and other products from Okinawa to China.

Grandfather Kochi Oyakata, who was the King's ambassador to China, appreciated his close relationship with China. Chinese officials in turn showed their support by protecting him. Grandfather showed his feelings in the matter when it was said he would rather die in China than show allegiance to Japan. Grandfather Kochi Oyakata left Okinawa for China

when I was about three years old and never returned. Possibly he stayed at the Ryukyu residence in Fukien where it is supposed he died.

Grandmother was about 30 years old when grandfather left for China leaving her a "widow." She had no worry about her livelihood since she received a monthly stipend of 15 yen from the royal government. When that was abolished, she received a lump payment of 40,000 yen from the Meiji government. Having money, she covered her loneliness for her absent husband by patronizing the theater. She paid the theatrical troupe, Samukawa Shibai, a goodly sum to have them perform plays of her choice. Occasionally she even sponsored banquets for the performers. Although most people walked to the playhouse, grandmother was carried in the palanquin. She had a special reserved section in the center of the theater. The performers paraded around the city saying, "Come and see Mrs. Kochi's favorite today." Many people attended the plays resulting in good profit for the theater. Grandmother spent approximately four to five hours at the theater; I don't remember exactly since I was so young—probably six or seven years old.

Because of my grandmother's love for the theater, I watched a lot of plays and my friends and I used to put on our own plays at home. We would make a round revolving stage with a big round table. One person moved the table as another play-acted on the table. We put on old Chinese dramas of the Meiji period. Those were the things we did after school. We had the maids and servants watch our plays.

In 1904 or 1905, there was a war between Russia and Japan. During those years, I played war games with classmates. We made our own guns out of wood. We would act out that Assault 203 in Russia by General Nogi, climbing up to the big forest, attacking, capturing. At times it would rain and force us to run home. Stopping at the Kochi gate, forming a single line, six or seven of us would march through the family gate, bugling like soldiers. Our aunts would say, "Those foolish kids, getting soaked in the rain. Come in right now." More often than not, we would be given hot potato soup to warm our bodies. There were also toys called *patchi*, made of small round paper with pictures of General Nogi and Oyama pasted on them. That was not for girls to play with, only for boys. You throw your *patchi* under theirs, trying to flip them over, and you take the ones that flip over. We played that kind of war games in spite of the scoldings.

I attended eight years of school in Shuri, graduating at age 15. Our textbooks were identical to those used in mainland Japan, published by the Japanese Ministry of Education. Everybody in Tokyo, Kagoshima, Hiroshima, Yamaguchi used the same textbooks in elementary school, so we did not have Okinawan books.

### *First Clerical Experience (1913)*

Upon graduation, I traveled to Osaka and spent my next three years assisting my uncle. My father's oldest brother, Chozui was active as manager of the Osaka branch of the royal family's Maruichi Yōko store. The company

belonged to the Shō family; it was a business which handled the import of sugar and tea from Okinawa. My uncle spent most of his time in Osaka and returned to Okinawa three or four times a year. He traveled by the boat *Koun-maru* which belonged to the Shō family. As kids we enjoyed eating cookies he brought home from Osaka, which were a real treat, since they were rare in Okinawa.

My job at Maruichi Yōko concerned the control and distribution of sugar and tea. I received no steady pay for my labors, but was given my subsistence and a spending allowance on occasion.

Three years later, I moved to Tokyo to live with my mother's sister and family to work in their antique shop owned by her husband, Reigi Jounten. The shop was located in Imagawa-koji, Kanda, at the foot of Kudanzaka, near Yasukuni shrine. While working there as a clerk, I came in contact with many wealthy and prominent people. The former Minister of Education, Dr. Suematsu Kencho often came calling in his two-horse carriage to see if something new hadn't been uncovered. He would spend several hours in the shop and say that the Emperor had requested something from the shop. Once, I went to the residence of Admiral Togo in Koji-machi where my uncle was asked to appraise the Admiral's books. I also accompanied my uncle in his many trips to the auction areas in the countryside where he purchased treasures and heirlooms for resale from old-time big shots and other people who used to be rich but were getting poor. These people sold their family treasures cheap in Fukushima and Niigata.

In addition, I attended Seisoku English School in Kanda and Tokyo Shōgyō Gakko (Business School) during the evening hours. I was fascinated with many exciting events and experiences in Tokyo. The language and way of life were different. I enjoyed my new life in Tokyo. In Okinawa, we just spoke the Okinawan dialect, but on the mainland I spoke the Japanese mainland dialect. Although some people wouldn't have understood why, I was so proud to be going to the Japanese mainland at that time. Just as it's fun to go to cities from the country, going to the Japanese mainland from Okinawa—which is country—was fun. The things I saw were different; the scale was bigger in everything. For instance, in Okinawa, people went barefoot, but in cities on the Japanese mainland, we wore *geta* (wooden clogs). Clothes were neater; the *obi* (sash) was the flat and square kind. A 15- or 16-year-old boy wore deep-sleeved kimonos, whereas in Okinawa we just wore the simple kind of sleeves. There were streetcars and trains—we didn't have those in Okinawa.

I also went to the Ryukyu residence where I visited with Shō Sho, King Shō Tai's grandson, and his wife Momoko Ogasawara.

### *Coming to Hawaii (1917)*

During these years, we learned nothing from my father who had traveled to Hawaii in 1906. Friends who returned from Hawaii said they did not know his whereabouts. At that time, we thought Hawaii was one big island. My grandmother went to see people who came back from Kauai, Hawaii and

Maui, but they all said they had not seen him recently. After a period of time, my grandmother thought him to be dead and had his *ibai* (altar tablet) prepared in his memory. One day a Mr. Matsuda of Shuri returned from Hawaii with news and a gift of \$3 for my grandmother to spend for tea. She was astonished at the news, saying "Heavens, my third son is still alive!" and burnt his *ibai*.

The news that my father was still alive prompted me to correspond with him for the next few years. I missed my father whom I had not seen since I was seven years old and decided to follow him to Hawaii.

My father sent me \$60 to pay my way to Hawaii. My transportation cost about \$40 and the remainder was used to buy shoes and a second-hand suit. I wore my suit proudly. It was of the type worn by adults with a turned-down collar in contrast to the student type worn with a standup collar. The standup collar was commonly worn by the young folks in Tokyo. I was unusual because I wore the clothes of an older man although still a boy.

I traveled in the midst of poor immigrants in the third (lowest) class on a ship called *Nippon-maru* and was 11 days on the water. If there were rich people they were on the upper deck, first class. As for the poor, since they were used to being poor and eating poor food, it wasn't difficult to cope.

I arrived in Honolulu on November 20, 1917 but my father was not there to greet me. The names of immigrants from Japan were listed according to the *ken* (prefecture) they came from. He was unable to find my name on the list of arrivals from Okinawa and hadn't realized I was a recent resident of Tokyo. The confusion, due to a lack of good communication with my father, resulted in my temporary detention at the immigration office. Fortunately, my father had instructed me in one of his letters to go to the Kome-ya Hotel where Mr. Miyasato was to give me further guidance. The Kome-ya was owned by a person from Yamaguchi prefecture and Mr. Miyasato, who was from Okinawa, was a head clerk there. He had taken care of many other immigrants from Okinawa and was able to get my immigration paper clearance.

When I was still in Tokyo, I imagined America to be what I saw in magazines and newspapers with tall buildings and everyone speaking English. I had studied English in Tokyo but the English I heard here had a different accent. I could write English rather fluently but I lacked conversational English and was eager to use my new language. I expected the people living here in Hawaii to be saying "Hello, hello" and I looked forward to making new friends with westerners, of whom I saw none while being detained at the immigration office. I had imagined living with westerners and was curious about it. I was surprised to find even buildings of big companies to be made of wood and many people speaking Okinawan. I felt that I was being cheated of my dreams. I thought then that I couldn't stay even a year but ended up living in Hawaii for 62 years.

Many immigrants from Japan, Okinawa, the Philippines, and China came for the sole purpose of making money and returning to their native countries. I had come to Hawaii in search of my father whom I had not seen

since I was seven. Now that I knew he was alive, I was eager to find and see him.

Mr. Miyasato arranged my passage by boat to the island of Maui, where my father was residing. The only means of transportation between the islands were by the inter-island passenger and freight ships. It took almost 12 hours to Lahaina, Maui, leaving at 7 p.m. and arriving at 6 a.m. At that time, my father was living in Honolulu which is few miles out of Lahaina, but he did not come to meet me at the pier. So I rested awhile at a barber shop in Lahaina. I was told it would take about one hour to get to Honolulu, so that I should go by old man Miyashiro's buggy. My father probably asked the owner of the barber shop, Mr. Nakasone, to take care of me if I arrived. In the country, everyone used the buggy for transportation and everyone knew each other.

I learned that my father joined a *tanomoshi* (mutual finance club) to send me the \$60. To join, a member paid \$5 every month. With 20 members, it becomes \$100. My father obtained the \$100 in my name, saying that I would make the monthly payment of \$5 after I arrived and started to work. So, upon my arrival, I had to pay \$5 every month starting the next month. Out of the \$100 my father received from *tanomoshi*, he sent me only \$60, using the other \$40 to buy a fighting cock, which was a hobby of his, used in gambling. My father had not worked in his life while growing up in Okinawa and was so spoiled he could not work in the canefield. He'd never even done simple jobs. He never thought of working to eat. He became a fisherman and sold fish to earn money since fishing was fun.

My father had lost his entire fortune in stocks and bonds in Osaka. Not having work to do, he started playing the stock market while living with his brother. He could not go back to Okinawa. He thought he would hide in Hawaii for only a year, then go back to Okinawa. But it did not work out as he planned. He remained in Hawaii ten years. He drowned and was lost in the ocean off Maui when the fishing boat capsized.

### *Plantation Life*

Since there were no jobs in Honolulu, I moved to Lahaina and lived with Mr. Toguchi, another single man who was also from Okinawa. I worked in the canefield for a week when I developed some boils and could not work. Burnt cane would get underneath the clothes and the body gets black because of ash. Getting black was okay because it would come off in the bath, but because of the boils, I could not work. Mr. Toguchi encouraged me to work in the sugar mill where he worked as a mechanic. My job at the mill was to mix the sugar as it was processed. My pay was one dollar a day or \$24 a month since we did not work on Sundays.

The *bangō* (employee identification number) was made of metal as big as a one dollar coin, and my number "3939" was written on it. I remember that number well as *sankyu sankyu* (39 39). In Japan, the word "Thank you" is mispronounced as "Sank you." Having just come from Japan, I re-

membered my number as “sank you, sank you” which is *arigatō*, *arigatō* in Japanese.

I kept my *bangō* in a drawer along with my father's. One payday, I looked in the drawer for my *bangō* but it was missing. I went to the cashier and was told that the paycheck for number 3939 had already been picked up along with my father's. I later learned that my father had taken my paycheck when he called for his. He went to Wailuku and gambled, playing *hana-fuda*, and did not come home for a week. I didn't have any money. Mr. Kikkawa of Kikkawa Store informed me that I could not charge anything from his store since I was *molōa* (lazy). Since I was new and did not know that Hawaiian word, I thought it meant something good.

Mr. Toguchi was sympathetic and fed me since I didn't have any money. Things were cheap then. A 100-pound bag of rice was \$3 but the pay was cheap as well.

### *Working for Kikkawa Store in Lahaina (1917)*

So here I was, with no money and afflicted with boils. Mr. Kikkawa, learning that I had valid reasons for not being able to work was sympathetic to my situation and asked if I could write. Most immigrants from Okinawa had almost no education and it was rare to find someone who could write. He asked me if I could write my name on his order book. So I wrote: Kochi Chosoku, Okinawa-ken, Shuri-shi, Gibo-cho, 4-chome, 1-banchi, (my name and address). Mr. Kikkawa, who was about 50 years old, was astonished. He had only finished the third grade while I had gone eight years. So he asked me to become an order salesman since my writing was legible. I said I would try.

After working one week in the canefields, I went to work for Kikkawa Store in Lahaina. My experience in business before I came to Hawaii was beneficial and gave me a start in the business world. Kikkawa Store was a grocery store selling rice, soy bean paste, *shoyu* (soy sauce), salt, matches, cigarettes, etc.

My work involved going house-to-house in certain camps taking orders in the mornings. Then I went back to the store to fill that morning's orders and delivered the next morning. Taking orders took time—approximately four hours—half a day, asking customers what they wanted. Delivering did not take much time.

As a salesman for Kikkawa Store, I took orders in the Kiawe and Mill Camps. I dealt with Okinawans and Mr. Kikkawa took care of *Naichi* (mainland Japanese) people. Because of the language difference, Okinawans and *Naichi* didn't communicate very well; they didn't have much to say to each other and didn't socialize very much after work. For about 10 years after I arrived, the Okinawans could not speak the Japanese language and spoke only the Okinawan dialect. Therefore, my customers were Okinawans.

There was no difference in the goods the *Naichi* and Okinawans bought; however, I noticed that the Okinawans ordered and ate more *udon*

(wheat noodles). *Udon* was expensive but they ate a lot of *udon* instead of rice. Comparatively speaking, *Naichi* spent twenty-five cents for *udon* whereas Okinawans spent two or three dollars. Kikkawa Store had only one kind of anything but the customers did not complain. They bought whatever was available at the store.

Okinawans were good at making *tempura* (deep-fat fried food) and *Naichi* made various types of *sushi* (vinegared rice)—*maki zushi* and *bara zushi*. The Okinawans made delicious *andagi* (doughnuts)—with or without sugar—there are many different ways to make them.

Also, Okinawans raised pigs. They bought young pigs for about \$2-\$3 and sold them for \$30 or \$40 after raising them for about ten months. They made good profit if they raised five or six pigs. Ten out of ten Okinawans who were married and living in the country raised pigs. The *Naichi* people thought pigs were dirty and not edible. When I lived in Japan, I never saw pork for sale in shops.

In those early days when I started as a salesman, credit business was our way of selling. People didn't have money except on paydays and were unable to pay their bills until after payday. In those days we lived from payday to payday, not like today when money is in your pocket regardless of when payday is. On paydays, I went out to collect from my customers. The good customers had money ready for Kikkawa and other stores, so I collected those at night. At first I couldn't tell who would pay promptly and who wouldn't, but in two or three months, I got to know them better. There were lots of single men who indulged in gambling, playing *hanafuda* (cards) as a form of entertainment. I had to go to them first, because as soon as they dried off after a bath they would gamble their money away; they wouldn't have any money the next day. For the single men, after a long day's work, all there was to do was enjoy a beer after taking a bath. There wasn't any recreation, like movies, plays, and beer halls.

There were 15 or 16 Okinawans in Kiawe Camp, four or five in Mill Camp and four or five in Maruyama. They were all single men. There were only about two men with wives, Mr. Tamashiro and Mr. Oshiro. Most of the single men got together and played *hanafuda*.

There were only two stores—Masuda and Kikkawa—which took orders in the camps. Since there was no competition, nobody knew if our prices were high. They accepted it as reasonable, saying all right to everything. The stores made huge profits, buying for 10 cents and selling it for 15 cents. Half of it was profit, so they didn't add any interest on customer's credit.

Order clerks for Masuda and Kikkawa had their own territories. It was difficult to sell with two order salesmen in the same territory; therefore, Kikkawa's men went to the camps where Masuda's didn't go and vice-versa. People bought from the men who came to them.

### *Working for Onishi Shōkai in Kahului (1920)*

Mr. Kuniyoshi from Kahului who was also from Shuri (capital of Okinawa) asked me how much I was receiving every month at Kikkawa Store.



"Twenty-five dollars," I said. He said, "Then, come to my store, I will give you \$40." Mr. Kuniyoshi and other friends of mine worked for Onishi Shōkai. I decided to work at Onishi Shōkai because the salary was better; I needed the money. My friends from Shuri were also there, including Roy Yonahara's father, a very good friend.

In Kahului, there were the "big five" Japanese stores: Nihonjin Shōkai, Kobayashi, Maui Shōkai, Ikeda, and Onishi. Because the competition was great, each store tried to sell their goods cheaper even by five cents, trying to catch the customers.

Because we dealt with only Japanese customers, all the workers at Onishi were Japanese. The plantation stores had Filipino customers, Koreans and Puerto Ricans. The Maui Shōkai had Filipino customers, so they had Filipino salesmen. The stores with only the Japanese customers had merchandise appropriate for their taste and use and did not carry any merchandise for other nationalities. The stores in those days operated very differently from stores of today. Business was not on a cash basis like today. The Japanese went to a Japanese store and Filipinos to Filipino stores. The plantation stores were patronized by everyone. There were plantation stores at most all the plantations such as Puunene plantation store, Paia plantation store, Wailuku plantation store, etc. They sold and catered to all nationalities because their method of selling was different from ours. They had Portuguese, Spanish, Korean and Filipino workers too.

Onishi Shōkai was a general store and carried most everything. Unlike today's supermarkets where customers go to the stores to buy their goods or groceries, the salesmen traveled many miles to do their selling and order-taking. It took approximately half a day to go to 30 or 35 houses and delivery was made the following day. During those days, both husbands and wives worked and couldn't travel all the distance from outlying camps to do their shopping at big stores where goods were purchased on credit. There were small stores in the camp which dealt only in cash and sold cigarettes, soda pop, candy, etc. They didn't sell groceries, rice or *shoyu*; we had to bring in things that they ate everyday.

We also had clothing; almost everything the workmen needed. Because there was no refrigeration, we did not carry anything perishable. In town there was a small store which sold ice cream. And there were stores which sold vegetables and meat. Nakashima was one such store next to us.

Customers couldn't buy too much because there were no iceboxes. It was all dry stuff that you could keep even if you didn't eat it right away. Plantation workers didn't have enough money to buy furniture. There weren't even radios. There were hand-operated gramophones. Hokama Music Store, which sells records, started about 50 years ago in Wailuku and they are still selling records today in Honolulu.

The plantation stores had a different method of credit selling. For instance, if you charged \$10 worth of goods and your salary was \$25 (dollar a day for 25 days of work), you received just \$15 salary for that month. At Onishi store, we did not deduct from salary. Payments were received from



customers when they received their pay. If they were unable to pay they said "No can pay," and we couldn't do anything but wait.

There is what we call *kompang* dollar. It takes 18 months for the sugarcane to grow. Some people work for 18 months at just one dollar a day. But since they are contracting to do, say, one or two acres under the *kompang* (cooperative cane cultivation) at the end of 18 months they can sometimes get \$300 or \$400 extra at one time if more than a certain tonnage is harvested. Since Onishi Shōkai wasn't receiving payments from *kompang* workers every month, it might get a \$150 payment at cane harvesting time. More than \$200 or \$300 credit was given this way at Onishi Shōkai.

I took over Mr. Okusako's position at Onishi since he was leaving the company. He warned me about the customers who were a problem to him, such as gamblers who were not reliable. He warned me who I must not sell to; an order taker had to have good eyes. There were a lot of order takers who were cheated

At Onishi Shōkai, my work was identical to my job at Kikkawa Store. I went from camp to camp taking orders—rice, *shoyu*, *udon*, just about everything—even cigarettes. There was *sake* (rice wine), too. There were all kinds of groceries. From noon on I would take orders in a book and at night I would return to my home. The next morning I would report to the store and fill the orders: sugar, ten pounds; flour, ten pounds; *udon*—they were buying in big wooden boxes at that time. All those items ordered were then noted on a bill. The order was filled and from noon I would deliver.

Deliveries were fast because I didn't talk and visit. I only had to throw the items into the house, the kitchen. I can deliver in half hour's time but to take orders I needed four or even five hours because I had to talk and talk: "This is good, this is bad, buy this, buy that." After delivery, I would go to the next camp and again take orders. At that camp it may take until five o'clock or six o'clock in the evening because some of them didn't get home until that time. I had to wait for those and take their orders. While taking orders, I took my time and did not rush. Many times I was a listener and a friend they can talk to: whose boy passed away, whose place was robbed . . . Next day, if I have a half hour or one hour, after my delivery, I would go on, to the next camp.

After leaving the store, I was on my own and free to do whatever I pleased. There were times when I happened to go to a home where the neighborhood housewives whose husbands had gone to work had gathered together for a social, having tea with some goodies they had made. They used to invite me in saying, "Mr. Kochi, why don't you come in and rest awhile." So, I would join them and partake of their food and conversation. They would talk about maybe a fire in Honolulu, what was happening in America, and just about anything. At about 4 p.m. they would return to their homes. That was about the time their husbands came home from work.

Onishi Shōkai dealt with most of the Okinawans on Maui, probably 80 percent of all Okinawans on Maui. There were a lot of Okinawans in Ka-

heka. It seems the Okinawans wanted to be together. Like the fish in the sea, an *akule* (scadfish) goes to where other *akules* are. And again, as a carp lives in ditches with all the other carp, *aku* (bonito) don't go there. What they ate and what they spoke were the same, so they got together.

### *Selling on Credit*

In Japanese we called it *tsukigawari* when one month ended and a new one started for billing purposes. Anything you bought up until the 20th of a month would be paid for on the first of the next month; anything bought after the 20th would be paid for six weeks later. So, from the 21st on was considered a new month and customers bought more then because they knew they wouldn't have to pay immediately. But they would only buy what they could according to their pay. If they made \$20 a month, they might buy up to about \$15. They had to budget their money to buy things. And if they shopped at the Puunene plantation store, the company would just deduct what the customers owed from their pay on payday. Because of that, the plantation store could manage with lower prices. The same amount of rice that sold for \$5 at the Japanese stores might cost \$4.75 at the plantation store. It was cheap because the plantation store could deduct what you owed from your pay each month. The Japanese stores charged higher prices but waited for payments if the customers asked them to.

Even if the merchandise at the plantation store was 10 percent cheaper, people bought from Onishi Shōkai because they could charge and have a balance. They wouldn't have any pocket money if their pay was docked at the plantation store, so they came to the Japanese stores. They knew it was more expensive. People who actually had cash wouldn't buy from the Japanese stores. It was mostly poor folks who were customers of the Japanese stores—people who would say, "Wait for my payments." The customers were clever, too. Knowing that the Japanese stores would wait for payments no matter how long, they would make the Japanese stores wait. Even if they had money they'd say, "Wait for the *kompang* dollars." And, then they would use their money for something else—clothes or something like that. They couldn't afford to buy nice clothes or a dress if the plantation docked their pay.

This difference in prices also affected the timing of new month. If the Japanese stores had had their new month at the same time as the plantation store it would just have meant more business for the plantation store since they were cheaper. So the Japanese stores had it earlier than the plantation-owned stores. The Japanese stores usually talked it over so everyone would have it at the same time. So Maui Shōkai, Kobayashi Shōkai, Ikeda, Nihonjin Shōkai, and Onishi Shōkai all had their new month at the same time.

Not all of these five Japanese stores in Kahului went out to Puunene. Only two of them came up to the camps on that side—Maui Shōkai and Onishi. It was up to the salesmen and we all went to the places where we had some friends. When our friends bought, the neighbors would come over and buy something too—even if we didn't know them. So although there

were five stores, there weren't any camps that all five went to. Sometimes even if they were rich and had enough money to shop at the plantation store without charging, they might buy from me because I was their friend. So, although there were five stores, there weren't any camps that all five sent salesmen to.

Someone who just bought from us salesmen and wouldn't pay us the bill would be garnisheed. There was a collection agency and the store would sell the account to them. The store would pay them a commission so that if they collected \$100, the store would get \$80 and they would get \$20. But the store wouldn't have anybody garnisheed just because they didn't pay for two or three months. But if they didn't pay for four or five years and even quit buying from us and started buying from some other store, we would do it because they weren't our customers anymore. But you can't garnishee them while they're still your own customers. You just have to wait until they finally pay you.

### *Matchmaking and Other Services*

In my travels from camp to camp, meeting with many people, I was thrown into the position of a "matchmaker." It was my own special service, not part of business. I helped 48 young people meet and unite in marriage.

Wedding parties were held in the camps with the whole community assisting with food preparations. A big tent was put up for the party. There were times when I sold 200 sheets of *sushi nori* (pressed, dried seaweed) for the party. I also sold most of the other food ingredients.

In my work I helped many people with personal favors too. For instance, young men from Japan had to send requests for deferment from military service every year. I assisted them in writing letters to the consulate. The clerks at the post office in Puunene offered this type of service, but they charged two dollars. I did it for free. Because of that, customers spread the word and told others to buy from me.

### *World War II*

Before the war I used to go around by car from early in the morning until late at night. But during the war I couldn't work until late. I'm a citizen now, but back then during the war I was an alien. There was strict curfew. There were military police with guns everywhere—it was too frightening to stay out late. And I couldn't even drink liquor.

Despite the curfew and restrictions, Onishi Shōkai did well during the war. Goods were bought with cash. Wages at the plantation went up. I recall sugar prices went up too. With strict military control the people were confined to their camps and couldn't do anything; they couldn't even gamble. We sold more things and the money came in better than before. It was good all around.

A friend of mine had gone to Japan before the war and when they dropped the atom bomb on Hiroshima he and his whole family except his son were killed. So then this son took over the family business in Hawaii.

But because his family, including his wife and two boys too, had been killed in Japan, he couldn't take it and just drank all the time. He drank Japanese *sake* from morning on, straight out of a gallon bottle. He became more despondent. Then his liver got bad and he went to the hospital in Kula and died there. There are no members of this family left.

Before the war business had been almost all by credit. After the war, it was all by cash. Everybody had money, so they paid cash. I don't know what it was about the war, but everybody had money. Anyway, if people had been making a dollar a day before, afterwards they were making a hundred-something a month. Then once everybody had cash they started buying from the plantation stores again because they were cheaper; people would just go to the cheapest place. The Japanese stores were more expensive, and had survived in business until then only by letting people charge things. That's why the five big Japanese stores eventually went broke. That's why I came to Oahu. Business was down by about half. Where we used to sell more than \$1000 in one month, we were selling only \$600 or \$700. After paying my salary the store could hardly make a profit.

### *Leaving Maui (1947)*

So afterwards in 1947 I came to Honolulu and started a shop, Princess Market on Fort Street. But it's gone now. At that time my girls who are now in America were going to McKinley High School. During the day there weren't very many customers. Only passersby came in for soda pop, banana, etc., so there wasn't much business. But from about 4 o'clock in the afternoon, I used to sell fish and meat because housewives came in to buy their husbands' food for the following day.

Since I had been brought up in business, involved in it for a long time, I was used to it. I wouldn't have started Princess Market if it was my first experience. But, since I'd been doing it for 30 years, I felt confident of success.

I learned how to deal with customers. It may sound strange if I say "apple-polishing," but you can't do business without it. You can't do business with a sour face and tell customers, "Buy what you need." You have to say something nice to make them want to buy. I must have learned how to do business while in Tokyo. All my life I stayed in business—Onishi Shōkai and here in my own store until 1961. Even after closing my store I continued to help part-time at a *tōfu* (bean curd) business, the Kanai Tofu Factory, here in town.

# UCHINANCHU

## A History of Okinawans in Hawaii

CENTER FOR ORAL HISTORY  
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I AT MĀNOA

HAWAI'I UNITED OKINAWA ASSOCIATION



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