

Hawaiian Oral History

by Mrs. Eleanor Williamson
Assistant in Anthropology
Bishop Museum

One perspective of Hawaiian Oral History is revealed in a letter of June 14, 1898 from San Francisco. (Williamson, 1976, p.136). Charles Reed Bishop wrote to the Reverend C.M. Hyde, a trustee of the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, founded by Mr. Bishop in Honolulu and dedicated to the memory of his wife, Princess Pauahi.

"It seems to me worthwhile for the Museum to own a good phonograph and to secure a considerable number of native melees (ancient and modern) songs, speeches, etc. for preservation. What do you say to it?"

The Museum's Board of Trustees responded by placing an order for wax cylinders and phonograph, with accessories, from the Edison Phonograph Agency, Broad Street, New York. The cost was \$225.90, a commendable action which allowed for the preservation of oral traditions conveyed through the chants. Why the emphasis on the chants? Let us return to the 1898 letter from Mr. Bishop.

"A number of years ago I attended a feast given by Liliuokalani, then Princess, at which two old natives, male and female, recited with excellent effect some old melees, one

of which was said to have belonged to A. Paki. It occurred to me that those chants and others could and should be preserved by aid of the phonograph."

Through poetry, chants formalized geographical place names, marine and botanical references, social structure, practices and belief -- Hawaiian history transmitted orally. The following chants, with translations are examples.

Samuel Manaiakalani Kamakau described, in the Hawaiian language newspaper, *Ku'oko'a* of November 10, 1866, a series of battles in which chief, Kalani'opu'u fiercely fought to gain control over the island of Hawaii from Alapa'i. Kalani'opu'u found himself surrounded by the enemy and "slipped on the pahoehoe (smooth lava rock)." Kalani'opu'u was able to subdue his attackers. While he held a foe in each hand, Kalani'opu'u chanted:

He moku Ka'ula i hoa me Ni'ihau,
(An island is Ka'ula connected with
Ni'ihau

I kaulua ia Kawaihoa a Kane
(On both are the waters brought forth
by Kane,)

O kaulana o ka la i Halali'i la
(The sun shines over Halali'i there,)

Hala ka la nalo ma Lehua,
(The sun passes on and vanishes at
Lehua,)

Hiki ka molehulehu o ke ahiahi,
(The dusk of evening comes,)
Moe e no Kauai iluna ka la,
(Kauai sleeps ere the sun goes down,)
E ao ana no Lehua i ke kai.
(Lehua lies bright in the sea.)

(Kamakaua, 1961, pp. 76-77)

Sunlight and fresh water are ascribed to Kane, god of creation, mentioned at the end of line two and symbolically associated within the chant context.

Additional insight is gained from the geographic location of the island of Ka'ula situated at the western end of the Hawaiian Island chain where each day, the sun gives way to the evening dusk. This refers to the ebb of life and death.

"He moku Ka'ula" was chanted by Mr. Akoni Mika of Waiakea, Hilo, Hawaii and preserved onto wax cylinders by Helen H. Roberts in 1923. Under the auspices of the Hawaiian Folk-Lore Commission in 1923-1924, Hawaiian chants were collected and recorded by Miss Roberts, of Yale University, who had worked previously among American Indians. Native Hawaiian speakers, Thomas K. Maunupau and Mrs. Lahilahi Webb gave valuable aid to Miss Roberts, as did Kenneth P. Emory. In 1926 Bishop Museum published Bulletin 29, Ancient Hawaiian Music by H.H. Roberts. She writes:

"...a man, half Hawaiian, half Mexican Indian, who had been reared with his mother's Hawaiian people on Kauai, but who had moved to Hawaii after he was grown...he was about sixty years of age.

(Roberts, 1926, p. 26)

Although unidentified by name in Roberts' book, her letter of December 11, 1926 to Emory names the man as Akoni Mika. A significant chant contribution from Mika is:

He moku Kaula, Nihoa ame Ni'ihau
(An island is Kaula, Nihoa adjoining
Ni'ihau)

I ka ulu la'i a ka wai hoa a Kane
(In the calm rests the water produced
by Kane)

O kaulana a ka la i Halali'i
(The sun rests over Halali'i,)
Hala ka la kau ma ke kua o Lehua
(And in passing rests over the back
of Lehua,)

Kau ka malehulehu o ke ahiahi
(Then the dust of eventide begins.)
Moe e no Kaua'i i luna ka la e
(Kaua'i goes to sleep while the sun
is yet up,)

E o ana no o Lehua i ke kia
(While Lehua is still visible in the
sea.)

The translation is by Mary Kawena Pukui in Roberts' field book, page 77. The Hawaiian text is from Roberts, 1926, p. 265.

The voice of Akoni Mika remained on the fragile Edison wax cylinder until Dr. Adrienne Kaepler of the Museum's Department of Anthropology, discovered Professor Walter Welch in New York at the Syracuse University Library, where the Edison Foundation Re-Recording Laboratory is located in the Audio Archives. The expertise of Welch and colleagues, in the retrieval of voices from the past, was highly recommended. Dr. Kaepler, in 1969, hand carried several dozen cylinders to Mr. Welch. Financial support, for this lengthy and specialized skill of Welch & associates, was provided by the National Science Foundation and the University of Hawaii Committee for the Preservation and Study of Hawaiian Language, Art and Culture.

Magnetic tape examples of Hawaiian chants recorded at the Museum in the 1950's and 1960's were listened to and studied by the Edison Lab staff who then proceeded to retrieve the chants from the wax cylinders. It was a memorable and historic event to play the tape sent to the Museum from Welch, and to hear: "O Akoni Mika keia." (This is Akoni Mika.) It was truly a voice from the past chanting "He moku Kaula."

The performers who represented Hawaii at the 2nd South Pacific Festival of Arts, held in mid-March 1976, at Rotorua, New Zealand, presented before their departure, a program for the State Council on Hawaiian Heritage. Mrs. Edith Kanakaole of Keaukaha, Hawaii, had taught the group, a hula kala'au, stick dance, which Aunty Edith and her mother had learned in the 1920's and 1930's, from Akoni Mika. The hula kala'au was "He Moku Kaula." The 1976 Kanakaole version, still performed today by her daughters, Nalani and Pua is:

HULA KA-LAAU

HE MOKU KA-'ULA I HOA ME NIIHAU
 I KA ULA LAA A KA-WAIIHOA-A-KANE
 O KAULA NA KA LA I HALALII
 HALA KA LA, KAU MA KE KUA O LEHUA:
 KAU KA MALEHULEHU O KE AHIAHI
 MOE 'E NO KAUA'I ILUNA KA LA E
 I O ANA NO O LEHUA I KE KAI...I E
 E O ANA NO O LEHUA I KE KAI...I E

From the chant by Kalani'opu'u and documented by Kamakau in 1866, to a chant recorded in 1923 as a hula chant, and in 1976 to witness and hear the chant performed as a more complete segment of Hawaiian oral history, is just the beginning of utilizing today's technology as an aid to understanding our past.

Each Sunday evening, our Hawaiian elders phone to Radio Station KCCN to participate in the Hawaiian language program conducted by Kauanoe Kimura and associate instructors of Hawaiian language with the University of Hawaii Manoa and Hilo campuses.

The program, now in its tenth year, continues to attract Hawaiian language speakers, who contribute local oral accounts into a Hawaiian oral history bank, utilizing contemporary communications technology and pay the toll charges on their phone bills.

The need to collect oral history today, particularly from our grass roots people, will provide valuable documentation for the historians of the future.

Efforts towards this end are being carried out by the Multi-Cultural Center of Hawaii, Ethnic Studies Program,

University of Hawaii, Brigham Young University-Hawaii, the Institute for Polynesian Studies at Laie, Bishop Museum and other organizations and individuals throughout Hawaii who recently met to form the Hawaii Oral History Association (HOHA.) HOHA, the brain child of Dr. Michaelyn P. Chou, Hamilton Library, UH-Manoa, and Dr. Kenneth Baldrige, History Department, BYU-Hawaii, will address the goals and direction of Oral History in Hawaii.

The State Foundation on Culture and the Arts has started to compile a directory of Oral History projects, whose future depends on assured funds to preserve Oral History in Hawaii.

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