

# **HUI PANALĀ'AU: Hawaiian Colonists in the Pacific, 1935–1942**

**Center for Oral History  
Social Science Research Institute  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

We would like to acknowledge the eight interviewees and their families. We also thank James Carroll, a member of Hui Panalā‘au, and his wife, Agnes Carroll, for sharing their time and memories with us.



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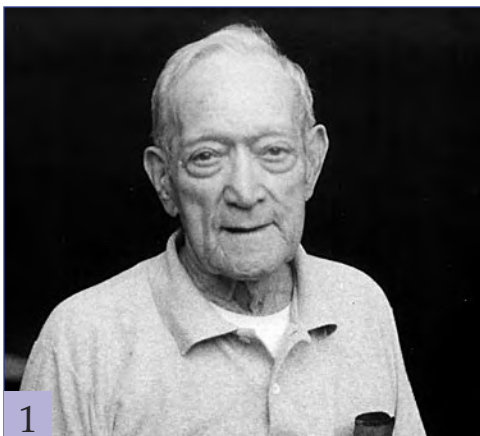
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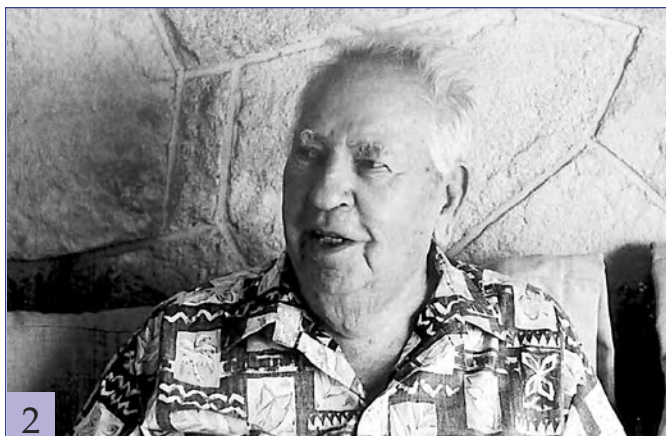
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1. Kenneth Bell (COH photo)
2. Arthur Harris (COH photo)
3. George Kahanu, Sr. (Ty Tengan photo)
4. Victor Kim (Ty Tengan photo)
5. Henry Knell (Courtesy Hannah Knell)
6. Elvin Mattson (Ty Tengan photo)



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7. Paul Phillips (COH photo)

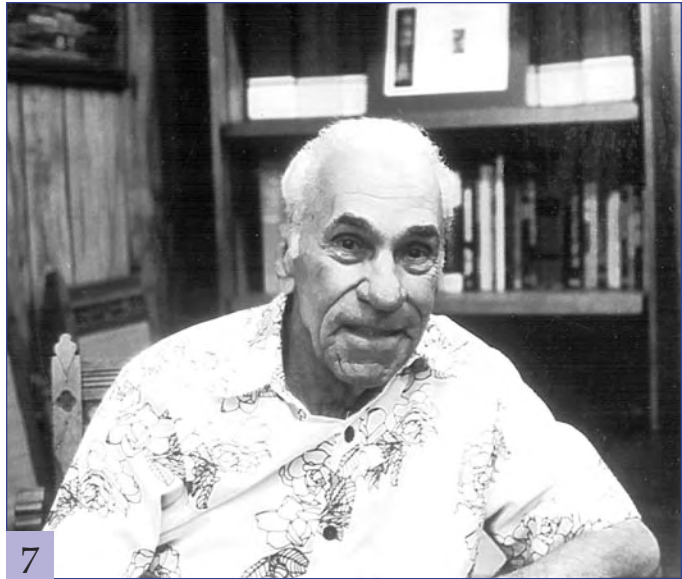
8. Emanuel Sproat (COH photo)



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9. Interviewers Warren Nishimoto and Ty Tengan and interviewee George Kahanu, Sr. (Ty Tengan photo)

10. Warren Nishimoto with interviewee Victor Kim (Ty Tengan photo)



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11. Hui Panalā'au exhibit opening at Bishop Museum, 2002. *Left to right*, Victor Kim, James Carroll, George Kahanu, Sr., Arthur Harris, Noelle Kahanu (wearing *haku lei*), Elvin Mattson, Abraham Pi'iana'ia. (Ty Tengan photo)

12. Standing, left to right, Noelle Kahanu, Victor Kim, George Kahanu, Sr., Arthur Harris, James Carroll, Elvin Mattson, Abraham Pi'iana'ia. (Ty Tengan photo)



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**BISHOP MUSEUM**  
proudly presents

**HUI PANALĀ'AU**

*Hawaiian Colonists, American Citizens*

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**May 25 – June 16, 2002**

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Please join us for the opening ceremony  
on May 25, 2002,  
12:00 noon,  
in the Castle Building lobby.

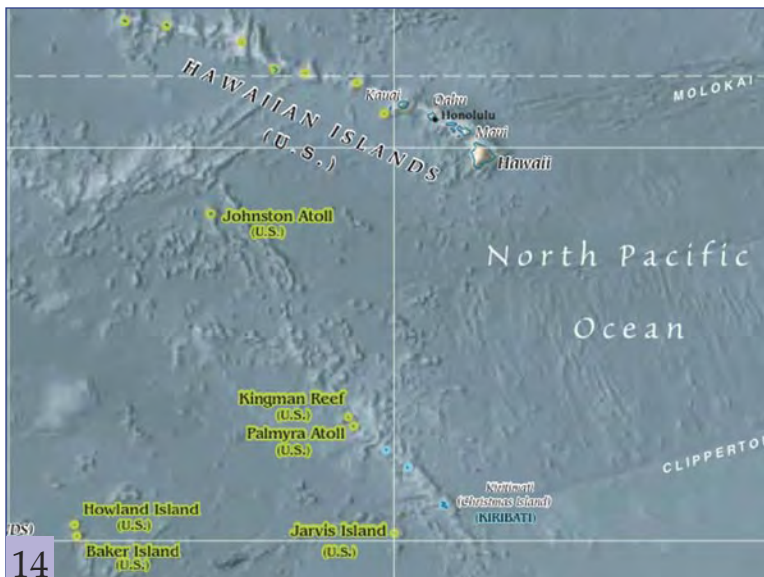
Made possible by the generous support of  
the Hawaii Council for the Humanities,  
the Dwayne and Matt Steele Fund,  
and a Congressionally-directed grant administered by  
the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

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13. Bishop Museum Hui Panalā'au exhibit opening ceremony invitation. (Photo courtesy Bishop Museum)



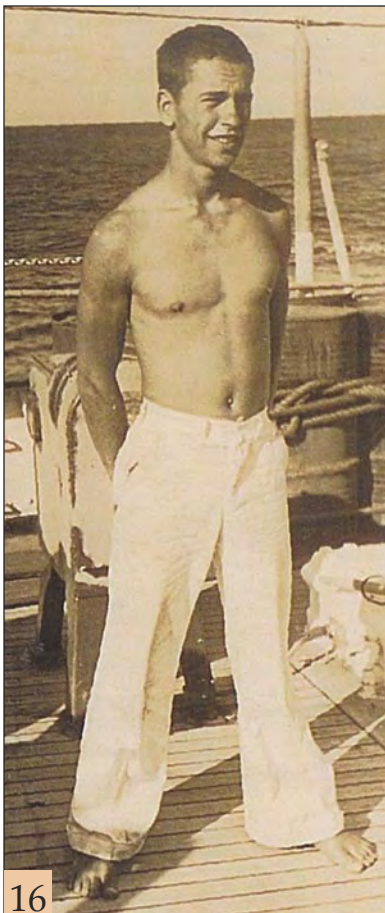
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14. Map of Line Islands (Baker, Howland, and Jarvis). These islands were continuously occupied by Native Hawaiian and other young men from 1935 to 1942 to establish jurisdiction by the U.S. government. (Courtesy University of Texas at Austin Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection)





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15. Graduates and students of Kamehameha School onboard the *Itasca*, 4th expedition, January 1936. *Back row, left to right:* Luther Waiwaiole, Henry Ohumukini, William Yomes, Solomon Kalama, James Carroll. *Front row, left to right:* Henry Mahikoa, Alexander Kahapea, George Kahanu, Sr., Joseph Kim. (George Kahanu, Sr. collection)

16. Arthur Harris onboard the *Itasca*, 1930s. (George Kahanu, Sr. collection)

17. George Kahanu, Sr. (left) and William Stewart Markham onboard the *Itasca*, August 1936. (George Kahanu, Sr. collection)



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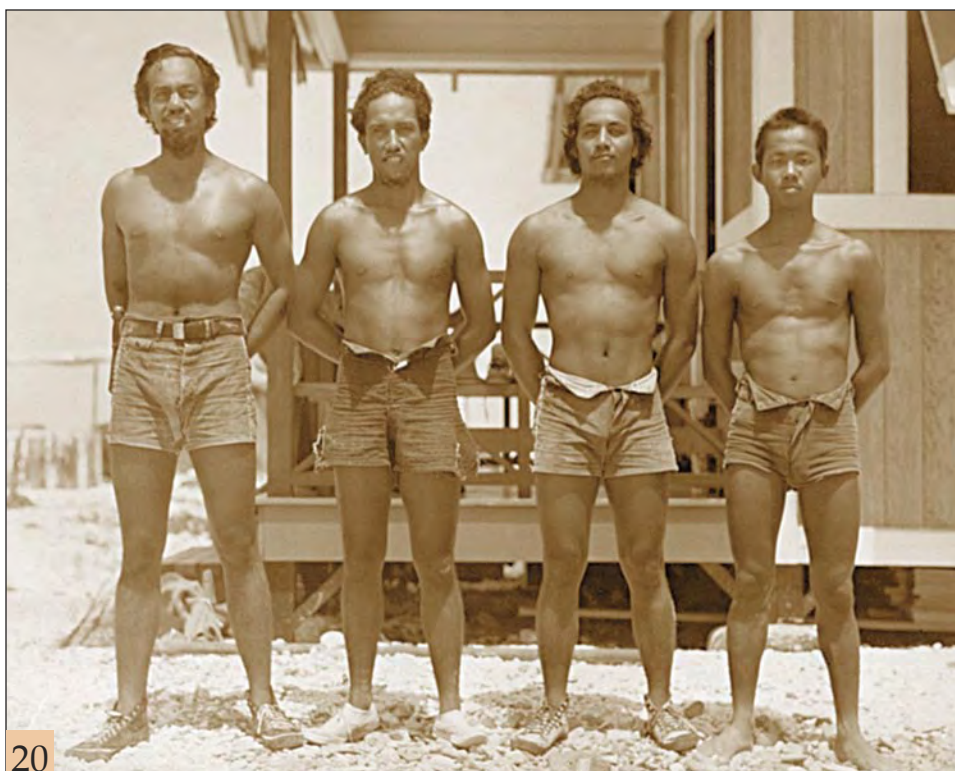
18. *Left to right (shirtless), Abraham Pi'iana'ia, Kenneth Bell, William Kaina, and Ed Young, with two military personnel, on Baker, 1936. (Bishop Museum Archives)*

19. *Left to right, Albert Akana, Gabriel Victor, Eugene Burke, and Paul Yat Lum, on Baker, 1937. (Bishop Museum Archives)*

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21. Harry K. Stewart, territorial architect for Hawai'i, assisted in the construction of government houses on each of the islands. Howland, 1936. (George Kahanu, Sr. collection)

22. *Left to right (shirtless)*, William Stewart Markham, Kini Pea, Killarney Opiopio, James Kamakaiwi, and two military personnel, on Howland, 1936. (Bishop Museum Archives)

23. *Left to right*, James Kamakaiwi, Joseph Anakalea, Folinga Faufata, and Killarney Opiopio, on Howland, 1935. (Bishop Museum Archives)

24. *Left to right*, Elvin Mattson, Richard Whaley, and Joseph Keli'ihananui, on Howland, 1941. (Elvin Mattson collection)





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25. The “Forgotten Eight.” Back, left to right, Karl Jensen, James Riley, David Hartwell, and Joseph Kepo’o. Front, left to right, Ernest Renken, James Bruhn, Bernard Hall, and Paul Phillips onboard the *Oliver Olson*, 1942. (Paul Phillips collection)



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26. Cultural artifacts, onboard the *Itasca*, 1936. One of the men’s assignments was to collect natural and cultural history specimens for the Bishop Museum. (Bishop Museum Archives)





## 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, *Hui Panalā'au: Hawaiian Colonists in the Pacific, 1935–1942*, focuses on the experiences of Hawaiian men recruited by the United States government starting in 1935 for a unique expedition in the South Seas. The 130 men, many of whom were Kamehameha School for Boys students and graduates, occupied the uninhabited Line Islands of Baker, Howland, and Jarvis continually, in three-month shifts of four men per island, in an attempt to help the United States assert territorial jurisdiction over the islands, a jurisdiction crucial to air supremacy in the Pacific.

In the mid-1930s, the United States was exploring air routes between Australia and the U.S. West Coast. Because non-stop, trans-Pacific flying was not yet possible, various islands in the Pacific were looked upon as potential sites for the construction of air fields. The U.S. Bureau of Air Commerce identified the equatorial Line Islands as suitable sites. Historically, the islands were mined for guano in the mid- to late 1800s by both the U.S. and Britain, although apparently no clear-cut claim was established by either nation. To establish a claim, international law required non-military occupation of all neutral islands for at least one year.

The U.S. Bureau of Air Commerce believed, somewhat stereotypically, that Native Hawaiian men would be best suited for the role as colonizers. At the request of the bureau, the Kamehameha Schools administration selected the participants based on various academic, citizenship, and ROTC-related criteria, as well as their meeting specified requirements for the job: "The boys have to be grown-up, know how to fish in the native manner, swim excellently and handle a boat, that they be disciplined, friendly, and unattached, that they could stand the rigors of a South Seas existence."

The *panalā'au* or “colonizing” experiment ended tragically in early 1942, after two colonists died in the shelling of Howland Island by the Japanese on December 8, 1941.

### **Project Background and Methodology**

The project was conceived when Noelle Kahanu, project manager of a photo and artifacts exhibit entitled “*Hui Panalā'au: Hawaiian Colonists, American Citizens*” at Bishop Museum in Honolulu, approached COH in 2001 about the possibility of documenting the South Seas colonization experience via oral history interviews with surviving participants. For the exhibit, Kahanu, a granddaughter of a surviving colonist (George Kahanu, Sr., an interviewee in this volume), had successfully accumulated archived and personal photographs taken during the occupation. Also gathered were written documents, including journals that detailed the colonists’ daily tasks; books such as E.H. Bryan, Jr.’s *Panalā'au Memoirs*; and newspaper and magazine articles in *The New York Times*, *Life*, and *Paradise of the Pacific*.

Oral history interviews encouraged surviving participants to not only describe in detail their day-to-day experiences on the islands but also their lives prior to and following the occupation. These life histories helped the men place the events in the context of their lives, enabling them to make sense of the experience from a present-day perspective.

The men interviewed for this project were contacted from a list of participants found in *Panalā'au Memoirs*. The majority of men listed were deceased by the time the project was conceived, but a few were still alive, sixty years after the expedition ended. COH director Warren Nishimoto and Kahanu were able to contact survivors after news about the Bishop Museum exhibit circulated.

The interviews were conducted by Nishimoto, Kahanu, and University of Hawai‘i assistant professor Ty P. Kāwika Tengan, and took place in either interviewees’ homes or at the Bishop Museum. The majority of the interviews were videotaped. The sessions averaged 90 minutes each; some interviewees were interviewed in more than one session. The men were asked to recall several aspects of their early lives, such as parents, upbringing, childhood, community life, schooling, and relationships prior to being asked details about their colonizing experience. They were asked about their experiences on the islands. Finally, the men were asked to assess the meaning of the experience relative to their lives.

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 general public scholarly and educational use of the transcripts.

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. Despite these efforts, readers must be cognizant that oral history documents are based primarily on memory, and therefore susceptible to occasional inaccuracies. Readers are urged to evaluate the validity of interview statements against existing documentation, such as journals, letters, photographs, and secondary accounts in books and magazines.

### **Transcript Volume Usage**

This volume of transcripts includes a section of historical and contemporary photos, 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. Also included are two essays: one by Kahanu and the other by the University of Hawai'i's Tengan and Scott Kekuewa Kikiloi to help place the interviews in historical and sociological contexts.

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, 38-2-1-02 identifies COH project number 38, 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 Bishop Museum. Permission must be obtained from the Center for Oral History for published excerpts and extensive use of the transcripts.

### **Transcript Availability**

These transcripts are the primary documents presently available for research purposes. The audiocassettes are in storage and unavailable 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  
Kealahou Public Library  
University of Hawai'i at Hilo Library

**Kaua'i**

Līhu'e Public Library  
Kaua'i Community College Library

**Lāna'i**

Lāna'i Public and School Library

**Maui**

Kahului Public Library  
Wailuku Public Library  
Maui Community College Library

**Moloka'i**

Moloka'i Public Library

**O'ahu**

Bishop Museum Library  
Hawai'i State Archives  
Hawai'i State Library, Main Branch  
Kaimukī Public Library  
Kāne'ohe Public Library  
Pearl City Public Library  
Honolulu Community College Library  
Kapi'olani Community College Library  
Leeward Community College Library  
Windward Community College Library  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa  
Center for Oral History  
Ethnic Studies Program  
Hamilton Library  
University of Hawai'i-West O'ahu Library

**COH Publications**

Center for Oral History publications include:

**Transcript collections:**

*Waialua and Hale'iwa: The People Tell Their Story* (1977)  
*Life Histories of Native Hawaiians* (1978)  
*Remembering Kaka'ako: 1910–1950* (1978)  
*Waipi'o: Māno 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)  
*Waikiki, 1910–1985: Oral Histories* (1985)  
*Ka Po'e Kau Lei: An Oral History of Hawai'i's Lei Sellers* (1986)  
*Perspectives on Hawai'i's Statehood* (1986)  
*Kōloa: An Oral History of a Kaua'i Community* (1988)  
*Lāna'i Ranch: The People of Kō'ele and Keōmuku* (1989)  
*Oral Histories of African Americans* (1990)  
*The State Foundation on Culture and the Arts: An Oral History* (1991)  
*Public Education in Hawai'i: Oral Histories* (1991)  
*'Ualapu'e, Moloka'i: Oral Histories from the East End* (1991)  
*An Era of Change: Oral Histories of Civilians in World War II Hawai'i* (1994)  
*Hawai'i Political History Documentation Project* (1996)  
*The Closing of Sugar Plantations: Interviews with Families of Hāmākua and Ka'ū, Hawai'i* (1997)  
*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)  
*I'i/Brown Family: Oral Histories* (1999)  
*Tsunamis Remembered: Oral Histories of Survivors and Observers in Hawai'i* (2000)  
*An Oral History of Robert Richards Midkiff* (2001)  
*Tsunamis In Maui County: Oral Histories* (2003)  
*Pioneer Mill Company: A Maui Sugar Plantation Legacy* (2003)  
*An Oral History of Sidney Kosasa* (2004)  
*The Oroku, Okinawa Connection: Local-style Restaurants in Hawai'i* (2004)

**Books:**

*Uchinanchu: A History of Okinawans in Hawai'i.* Published in cooperation with the United Okinawan Association (1981)  
*Hanahana: An Oral History Anthology of Hawai'i's Working People* (1984)

**Other Publications:**

*How To Do Oral History* (Third Edition, Revised 2000)

*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

July 2006

**Hui Panalā'au<sup>1</sup>**

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Scott Kekuewa Kikiloi  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa  
Department of Anthropology

In 1935, the United States Government began a secret operation to “colonize” the Line Islands of Baker, Howland, and Jarvis in the Equatorial Region of the Pacific. These islands, virtually forgotten since the end of guano mining in the late 1800s, were now valued for American commercial and military expansion in the Pacific. The potential for developing airways between California and Australia made it imperative that the U.S. claim islands along these routes. The U.S. Bureau of Air Commerce (U.S. Department of Commerce) began to actively recruit groups of young Hawaiian men to continually occupy the islands of Baker, Howland, and Jarvis. On May 13, 1936, the veil of “secrecy” (which had been virtually transparent since the return of the first party) was officially lifted when President Franklin D. Roosevelt claimed these islands and placed them under the control and jurisdiction of the Secretary of the Interior for administrative purposes.<sup>2</sup> Expeditions were re-initiated almost immediately as the U.S. raced Hawaiian colonists down to the islands in order to preclude any counter-claims made by would-be British occupiers. Cruises by Coast Guard cutters proceeded along the same schedule as had been carried out the previous year, making trips approximately every three months to refit and rotate the four colonists stationed on each island. Soon plans were put into place to build airfields on the islands, and permanent structures were built. Amelia Earhart’s failed attempt to fly around the world and land on Howland gave the islands a new spotlight in the early months of 1937. In 1938, the U.S. co-colonized the islands of Canton and Enderbury (in the Phoenix Group) with the British. Hawaiian “colonists” were stationed on the islands (with the exception of Canton) up until the outbreak and the beginning months of World War II.<sup>3</sup>

From 1935 to 1942 there were 26 expeditions by U. S. Coast Guard cutters to the equatorial region to station, supply, and rotate colonists on the different islands. Initially, organizers targeted young Hawaiian men who were single, physically fit, cooperative, and disciplined. At the time, Kamehameha School students and graduates seemed to embody these qualities and were actively recruited for the operation. In later years, the recruiting pool expanded to include Hawaiian and local boys from other schools such as Roosevelt and McKinley. One commonality was that most of the men shared a ROTC (Reserve Officers’ Training Corps) background, which allowed them to adapt to the military protocol and procedures of the program. A number of Asian American men (several Chinese and one Korean) were hired as radiomen and student

aerologists for the project. While there were a number of other non-Hawaiians also involved in different phases of the project, the majority of the participants were Native Hawaiian or local boys.

Once on the islands, the various groups carried out their duties superbly. Most of the boys were quite happy to be getting paid three dollars a day to go on an adventure, a considerable salary in the middle of the Great Depression. In addition to their basic duties of collecting meteorological data for the government, the colonists kept busy by building and improving their camps, clearing land, growing vegetables, attempting reforestation, and collecting scientific data for the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum. In their free time, they would fish, dive, swim, surf/bodysurf, lift weights, box, play football, hunt rats, experiment with bird recipes, play music, sing, and find other ways of occupying themselves. Although these young men lived in isolation for months at a time with very little contact with the outside world, they were usually able to maintain good health and high morale. The colonists were highly commended by the officials of the project and earned praise from others who were periodically on the islands with them.

While the young men met with much success and grew tremendously from the experience, there were also times of great sadness. In October of 1938, Carl Kahalewai, a graduate of McKinley High School, died of appendicitis while he was being rushed home for an emergency operation. Tragedy struck again on December 8, 1941 when the islands of Howland and Baker were bombed and shelled by the Japanese. On Howland Island, Joseph Keli'ihananui and Richard "Dickie" Whaley were killed. The remaining six boys on the two islands were forced to hide at day and scavenge for food and drink at night until they were finally rescued on January 31, 1942. As colonists had already been withdrawn from Canton in October 1940 when Pan American Airways took over operations on that island, the February 1942 rescue of the "forgotten eight" (as Paul Phillips describes the group he was a part of) who were stationed on Jarvis and Enderbury marked the end of the equatorial colonization project.

Both the good times and the hardships forged a strong bond between the men. As early as 1939, members of previous trips formed a club to "perpetuate the fellowship of Hawaiian youths who have served as colonists on American equatorial islands."<sup>4</sup> Initially they were called the "Hui Kupu 'Āina," which suggests the idea of sprouting, growing, and increasing land. By 1946 the group's name had changed to "Hui Panalā'au," which has been variously translated as "club of settlers of the southern islands," "holders of the land society," and "society of colonists."<sup>5</sup> In 1954, the Hui Panalā'au succeeded in repatriating the bodies of Joseph Keli'ihananui and Richard Whaley from the island of Howland to be reburied on the island of O'ahu.<sup>6</sup> In July 1956, the group was given a charter of incorporation by the Territory of Hawai'i. In addition to the preservation of the group's fellowship, other purposes were to "foster and maintain in themselves . . . the desirable traits of character constituent to the racial makeup of the members," to "honor and esteem those who died . . . as colonists of the Equatorial Islands," and to "establish and provide scholarship assistance at the University of Hawai'i for deserving



graduates of Hawai'i's high schools."<sup>7</sup> Minutes from a May 1959 meeting of the scholarship committee indicates their "policy has been primarily to help Hawaiian boys who needed help."<sup>8</sup> At the time of the meeting, three boys had already received scholarships and were doing well.

Over the years the meetings became fewer and the scholarship program was eventually discontinued. In 1974, Dr. Edwin H. Bryan, Jr. of the Bishop Museum published the only major written account of the expeditions in *Panala'au Memoirs* (Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press). A few short newspaper and magazine articles were published in the eighties and early nineties, but for the most part the Panalā'au expeditions had slipped out of the collective memory of the Hawaiian people.

Then in 2002, Noelle M.K.Y. Kahanu, a project director in the Bishop Museum's education department and granddaughter of colonist George Kahanu, brought together researchers, historians, and surviving colonists and their relatives to retell the stories of the Panalā'au. The "Hui Panalā'au: Hawaiian Colonists, American Citizens" traveling exhibit opened on May 25, 2002 and consisted of forty-six graphic panels containing over 140 photographs, bound reproductions of daily log books, a six-minute oral history video documentary, an interactive computer program, seven cases of artifacts, and a fifteen-page humanities guide containing seven essays on a variety of topics related to the project. After the three-week opening run at the Bishop Museum, the exhibit was featured at Kamehameha Schools (Kapālama Campus, O'ahu), Keauhou Shopping Center (Kona, Hawai'i), and Capitol Hill (Washington, D.C.). Museum staff, Panalā'au colonists, and humanities scholars made presentations in a panel series at the Bishop Museum and at larger meetings of Hawaiian organizations. Local newspapers and television stations reported on the exhibit and on the stories surrounding it, as did educational programs and publications sponsored by Kamehameha Schools. Lastly, Warren Nishimoto of the UH Center for Oral History (with Kahanu and Tengan on occasion) conducted oral history interviews with surviving colonists, the transcripts of which are presented here in this volume.

The Panalā'au exhibit and renewed public interest it generated also produced some unintended outcomes. The Hui Panalā'au organization was revitalized, and members organized to seek resolution of a number of outstanding issues, particularly the reburial of Joseph Keli'ihananui and Dickie Whaley in a place of honor and official recognition of the Hui Panalā'au on behalf of the federal government. The U.S. military did not retrieve the bodies from Howland until 1954, and only then due to agitation on the part of the Hui Panalā'au and family members. With no formal acknowledgement by the U.S. government for its role in the tragedy—i.e., that they knowingly put these young men in harm's way in a project whose militaristic nature was never disclosed to its participants—the two were buried at a cemetery on Schofield Barracks, a U.S. Army base in a remote and rural part of O'ahu. Their obscure placement only underscored the lack of recognition of the colonists and the colonial history they were a part of. As Ornetta Keli'ihananui Ka'a'a (niece of Joseph ) stated, "My dad never forgave the federal government. All his life he was hurt that they took away his brother without ever so much as an apology."<sup>9</sup>

With the help of Noelle Kahanu, a small group representing the Hui Panalā'au petitioned Hawai'i's congressional delegation. In an August 7, 2002 letter sent to the delegation members, Paul Phillips wrote, "I . . . respectfully request your assistance in seeking clarification regarding the hui members—civilian employees who served in a military capacity for the federal government. Although precious few of us remain, might there still be some means of finally acknowledging the contributions and ultimate sacrifices made by the members of the Hui Panalā'au...? Justice knows not the passage of time."

The petitions made by the renewed Hui Panalā'au met with limited success. A burial at (Punchbowl) National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific was denied, but the possibility of burial at the Hawai'i State Veterans Cemetery in Kāne'ohe, O'ahu received support. Yet even then, the State government initially resisted requests because of the two boys' civilian status. Only after the State Attorney General's office rendered a decision allowing for their burials (with stipulations regarding payment and withholding military honors) were the families of the Panalā'au able to move forward.

Finally on December 8, 2003, a traditional Hawaiian ceremony was held in Kāne'ohe to honor and lay to rest the young men whose memories would live on. Four of the surviving Panalā'au were in attendance along with family, friends, and representatives from various private and state organizations. In the place of a twenty-one-gun salute or the playing of taps were the performances of Hawaiian ceremonial chants and dances and presentations of traditional hand-carved spears to the Keli'ihananui and Whaley families. Paul Phillips, Ornetta Keli'ihananui Ka'a'a, and Moana Whaley Espinda (niece of Richard Whaley) made speeches that expressed gratitude for these long overdue steps toward making things *pono*, or right and just. In the preceding days and in the evening following the event, the local newspapers and television stations carried the story and highlights of the ceremony, including Paul Phillips' renewed call for recognition by the government.

The once buried and forgotten memories and bodies of the Panalā'au have finally been recuperated and given a more enduring and honored place in the minds and hearts of Hawai'i's people. Although the Line Islands themselves have once again slipped into obscurity, the contributions of Hui Panalā'au and the sacrifices of Kahalewai, Keli'ihananui, and Whaley will be remembered for generations.

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<sup>1</sup> The first part of this essay originally appeared in the humanities guide *Hui Panalā'au*, Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, Honolulu, 2002. The second part is excerpted from a longer article authored by Tengan entitled "Of Colonization and Pono in Hawai'i," *Peace Review*, 16:2, June (2004), 157-167.

<sup>2</sup> Executive Order No. 7368.

<sup>3</sup> A more detailed overview of the project is found in E. H. Bryan, Jr., *Panalā'au Memoirs*, Pacific Scientific Information Center, Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, Honolulu, 1974.

<sup>4</sup> "Line Island Pioneers Form Colonists' Club," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, Feb 16, 1939, Pg. 1.

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<sup>5</sup> "Colonizers of Jarvis, Baker and Howland Islands," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, Jul 2, 1946, Pg. 9; "2 Howland Isle Dead Home After 12 Years," *Honolulu Advertiser*, Apr 4, 1954, A6:4; E. H. Bryan, Jr., "Ka Hui Panalā'au: American colonists of Pacific have society incorporated here," Hawaiian Holiday Section, *Honolulu Advertiser*, May 8, 1958, Pg. 23.

<sup>6</sup> "2 Howland Isle Dead Home After 12 Years," op cit.

<sup>7</sup> Bryan, "Ka Hui Panalā'au," op cit.

<sup>8</sup> Bryan, Minutes of Hui Panalā'au meeting, May 11, 1959.

<sup>9</sup> Kahanu, Noelle, M.K.Y., "When the rain pours forth," *Honolulu Weekly*, Dec 3–9, 2003, p. 4



## **Enduring Legacies of the Panalā'au Expeditions<sup>10</sup>**

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In 1942, the last Panalā'au colonists were removed from the remote islands of Jarvis and Enderbury in the months following America's entry into World War II. Between 1935 and 1942, over 130 young men had been recruited, some spending months, others years, on "rat-infested, sun-blasted, barren heaps of guano," hundreds of miles from civilization. Their successful pioneering efforts enabled President Roosevelt to claim U.S. jurisdiction over the islands of Jarvis, Howland and Baker in 1936, yet these claims would not come without cost as three young Hawaiians would ultimately lose their lives. As we reflect on this dramatic, but nearly forgotten, chapter in Hawai'i's history, we cannot help but ask, what are the enduring legacies? What has been left behind in the wake of the federal government's efforts to colonize a trio of remote Pacific equatorial islands?

### **National Legacies**

The advancement of commercial aviation was the initial justification for the colonization project, with the Department of Commerce asserting that federal intervention was required to clarify the legal status of key islands in the air route between Australia and California. Amelia Earhart's ill-fated second attempt to land on Howland in 1937 affirmed the importance of these islands, but it would be Canton that would prove to be the most significant stopping point. During 1938 and 1939, Pan American Airways initiated flights to New Zealand, using Canton as one of its ports of call.

As the years progressed, and despite clear ownership by the U.S., colonization efforts continued, taking on increasingly military undertones. Each island was staffed with a radio-operator charged with transmitting daily reports, and young men once trained to take detailed weather readings and chart weather patterns were now trained to identify aircraft. The outbreak of the war and subsequent attacks on the islands of Jarvis, Baker, and Howland unfortunately confirmed their military significance.

The day after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, both Baker and Howland were targeted, leaving two Howland colonists, Richard Whaley and Joseph Keli'ihananui, dead. It would be over seven weeks later before the remaining colonists on Howland, Baker, Jarvis, and Enderbury were rescued, bringing a tragic end to the seven-year colonization project.

Two of the islands continued to be of military significance during the war. A base was established on Baker in 1943 to defend the central Pacific islands against enemy installations in

the nearby Gilbert Islands. The base, whose forces numbered 120 officers and 2,000 men, participated in the Tarawa-Makin operation. On Canton, a major airstrip was developed, and Canton became the hub of central Pacific air movement, with all plane traffic stopping there. At its peak, 30,000 American troops were stationed on the atoll. Following the end of the war, Canton continued to serve as a stopping point for airplanes between Hawai'i and Fiji, but aviation advancements soon meant more direct flights, and Canton was ultimately bypassed.

From a federal standpoint, the occupation of these islands and the weather readings taken by the young colonists appear to have had a direct bearing on wartime military operations in the Pacific. Their efforts also enabled trans-Pacific air commerce to become safer and more viable. And the islands today remain a part of the U.S., with the exception of Canton and Enderbury, both of which are a part of the Republic of Kiribati. Howland, Baker, and Jarvis serve as individual National Wildlife Refuges, and have been returned to their original inhabitants—hundreds of thousands of sea birds.

### **Institutional Legacies**

There was irony to be found in the early years of the Panalā'au expeditions. Young Hawaiian men, vilified in the national press three years earlier during the notorious Massie case<sup>11</sup>, were now being secretly recruited to colonize remote islands as quintessential "Americans." For three dollars a day, these "pioneering" Hawaiians lived on the edge of America's frontier, their very presence serving to confirm America's claim. This *de facto* Native Hawaiian hiring preference, first instituted by the Department of Commerce and later continued by the Department of Interior, was based largely on a stereotypical notion that Hawaiians could "stand the rigors" of a South Seas island existence.

Two Hawaiian institutions, the Bishop Museum and Kamehameha Schools, actively promoted this notion and offered their assistance in the recruitment process. Both institutions saw themselves as furthering their own goals: the museum was gaining scientific material, cultural insight, and confirming its prominence in the Pacific; the school was actively employing its young graduates and students at a time when good jobs were scarce. Nonetheless, these institutional benefits were secondary to their primary function of identifying and recruiting Hawaiian youths on behalf of the United States. Neither institution appeared to question their federal role or view their activities as potentially placing their students in peril.<sup>12</sup>

Kamehameha Schools in particular took personal interest in advocating for employment opportunities for Native Hawaiians. Up to 1940, Homer Barnes, supervising principal of the Kamehameha Boys School and key recruiter in the early years, advocated for a continued Native Hawaiian hiring preference to the Civil Aeronautics Authority. "The local people have become apprehensive lest this one of the few remaining outside employment channels open to native Hawaiians will be closed...it was indicated that [Kamehameha Schools] might be willing to go to the expense of teaching code if it would materially enhance the chance of their students (or possibly present colonists) getting the positions."<sup>13</sup>

Kamehameha students and alumni thus served as an ideal pool of applicants, and at least 52 of the over 130 colonists had Kamehameha ties. By the second year of the project, numerous articles began appearing in the local news and the alumni newsletters celebrating the accomplishments of the young men. Both institutions took pride in their role and contributions, although the roles of both would recede as the colonization project progressed. What endures sixty years later is somewhat more ambiguous. Bishop Museum continues to preserve specimens, data, and information collected by the colonists. The dogged determination and interest of Bishop Museum collections manager E.H. Bryan in the Panalā'au expeditions resulted in his 1974 Pacific Scientific Information Center publication, *Panalā'au Memoirs*. Kamehameha Schools, perhaps due to the Panalā'au project ending in relative wartime obscurity, rarely again featured the accomplishments of their former students and alumni. In some respects, the Panalā'au exhibit, developed by Bishop Museum and assisted by the Kamehameha Schools Archives, is both a recognition of their respective institutional legacies, and more importantly, a long overdue tribute to those young men who, but for the cooperation and advocacy of these institutions, might never have embarked on their South Seas adventures.

### **Personal Legacies**

Beyond national and institutional legacies, there are the personal legacies to consider—the legacies of those young men who participated in the expeditions. The early colonists were proud to be chosen and to serve successfully. They were representing their school, the Hawaiian community, and above all, America. These young men proved that they could excel equally in their multiple roles as Kamehameha alumni, as Hawaiians, and as Americans. Being a “worthy Kamehamehan” meant having cultural pride and being grounded, with a strong cultural foundation. ROTC training taught them discipline, resourcefulness, and respectful for authority.<sup>14</sup> And perhaps, most importantly, being school boarders—learning, living, eating, playing together, taught them the skills necessary to live for months, if not years at a time, in small, intimate groupings.

Although the recruiters relied increasingly less and less on Kamehameha School students as the years progressed, they continued to recruit predominantly Hawaiian and local boys. One after another, these colonists note how this chapter in their lives helped prepare them for what lay ahead. It made them better decision-makers, better able to socialize, to minimize conflict and focus on positive group dynamics. It also provided them an opportunity to live in a natural setting, months away from civilization, to adjust themselves “to a different outlook on life.” Many of these colonists would go on to become pillars of the community, like Abraham Pi'ianaia and Hartwell Blake.

More than half a century later, this dramatic chapter in Hawai'i's history has been nearly forgotten, except by those families whose lives became intricately intertwined. For Kamehameha Schools, precious few know of the key role their alumni played, and at Bishop Museum, the lingering scientific benefits are somewhat uncertain. The political, commercial,

and military contributions are, however, undeniable. Islands were claimed, air commerce crossed the Pacific, and the military was better prepared for its encounters in the Pacific. Their national legacy endures, in spite of the lack of recognition by the federal government for the ultimate price paid by three of the young colonists, or contributions made by the over 130 others.<sup>15</sup>

But for those of us today who reflect upon these historic expeditions, perhaps the most enduring legacy of all resides within the colonists themselves and what we can learn from their experiences—a better understanding of the importance of cultural pride and self-identity. These young men found comfort, support, strength, and inspiration in each other, in themselves, and in their environment. They had a profound ability to thrive under adverse conditions with humor, grace and humility. Their foundational cornerstones were the common values instilled in them through school, family, and community—values that remained with them no matter how far from home they happened to find themselves. Perhaps, in spite of the dramatic social, political and technological changes that have occurred over the last half century, what ultimately defines us are basic human relationships: our relationships with one another, with our environment, and with ourselves, and the common values underlying each of these interactions.

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<sup>10</sup> This introduction originally appeared in the humanities guide *Hui Panalā'au*, Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, Honolulu, 2002.

<sup>11</sup> The Massie case concerned five young local men who were falsely accused of raping the young wife of a Naval officer. In the firestorm following the hung jury, one defendant was beaten and another murdered. The subsequent murder trial was among the biggest criminal cases in the U.S. in 1932, with over 200 articles appearing in the *New York Times*, many which contained racially inflammatory remarks.

<sup>12</sup> It took three–five days for a ship to reach a colonist in need of emergency medical attention. At least four such emergencies took place prior the outbreak of the war. Two colonists suffered from appendicitis attacks, Carl Kahalewai in 1938 and Manny Pires in 1939: Pires made it to the hospital in time, but Kahalewai died en route to Honolulu. In 1941, Dominic Zagara and Henry Knell sustained severe burns when the hydrogen from their observation balloon ignited. Both returned to Honolulu badly in need of medical attention.

<sup>13</sup> Memorandum, dated April 8, 1940, from W.F. McBride, Chief Radio Engineering Section, to Civil Aeronautics Authority, Washington, D.C.

<sup>14</sup> While ROTC training helped to reinforce certain principles, these same tenets could also be found in traditional Hawaiian society: listen to your elders, learn from those who know; respect leadership and authority; and place group and communal needs before individual needs.

<sup>15</sup> Talk has resumed among some of the surviving colonists to pursue some form of federal recognition or restitution for those families who lost loved ones during the Panalā'au expeditions. Such a resolution would require official federal administrative or Congressional action.