

ROBERT C. SCHMITT

## More “Firsts” That Weren’t

THE 1987 EDITION of this journal included an article by the present author correcting 13 “firsts” he had misdated or misidentified in earlier issues.<sup>1</sup> As observed at the outset of that rueful exercise in self-abasement, “inevitably, further research has uncovered earlier claims to some of the ‘firsts’ cited.” That judgment unfortunately remains all too true. Here are 17 more “firsts” requiring revision. As before, they are listed in alphabetic order.

*Basketball.* Basketball arrived in Hawai‘i at least as early as February 21, 1899, when a page-one item in the *P.C. Advertiser* reported:

Basket ball is booming. Three teams here have already been organized and a fourth is in contemplation. Basket ball has become very popular in the States and it looks as if it is to be so here.

The three organized teams were the Business Men, Unknowns, and Rough Riders. Previously, the earliest local reference to the sport was thought to have been the description of a game between the Oahu College girls and YWCA on March 28, 1902.<sup>2</sup>

*Comic strip.* The first daily comic strip in a Honolulu newspaper, Bud Fisher’s *Mutt and Jeff*, made its *Star-Bulletin* debut on March 7, 1916, and not on July 7. In that day’s sardonic inaugural outing, the two friends are World War I soldiers huddled in a trench, watching an “Australian bullet-jumper” bird successfully

*Robert C. Schmitt, retired state statistician of Hawai‘i, is an associate editor of the Journal and a frequent contributor to its pages.*

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dodge a barrage of machine gun and cannon fire, only to succumb in the last panel to an unexpected cloud of poison gas.<sup>3</sup>

*Corporation.* The first corporations granted charters by the Hawaiian government were Punahou School, on June 6, 1849, and Kāneʻohe Church, on November 19, 1849. Kāneʻohe Church had previously been accorded first place.<sup>4</sup>

*Credit union.* The date of the first credit union charter in the islands, granted to the Big Island Teachers Federal Credit Union, Hilo, has come into dispute. According to the Hawaii Credit Union League, it was August 21, 1936, but a recent article by Frances Jackson gives April 27, 1936.<sup>5</sup>

*Electric lights.* Hawaiʻi's first experience with electric lights was in April 1879, when the English ironclad *Triumph* visited Honolulu. All ten of the vessel's 12-ton guns and some of its lights were operated by electricity. After nightfall, the warship unexpectedly switched on its spotlight and for nearly two hours bathed the city in its beam. Although not many residents saw the display, one who did was an *Advertiser* reporter who had been forewarned.<sup>6</sup>

As previously noted, the earliest use of electric lights ashore in Hawaiʻi was at Spreckelsville Plantation, Maui, on September 22, 1881.<sup>7</sup>

*Electric refrigerators.* The earliest newspaper advertisement for home electric refrigerators appeared in March 1924, not the following year.<sup>8</sup>

*Hospital.* Earlier articles by the author have traced the origins of Hawaiʻi's hospitals back to the 1831 "health station" at Waimea on the Big Island, the so-called British Hospital for Seamen established in a Honolulu bar in 1833, and the American seamen's hospital ("the first real hospital in the Hawaiian Islands") opened in Waikīkī in 1837. An even earlier precursor, however, was the convalescent hospital for seamen maintained by Anthony D. Allen on his property in Pāwaʻa at least as early as 1823.<sup>9</sup>

*Hotel.* The Hotel Waititi, contrary to an earlier statement, was not the first hotel in the area now defined as Waikīkī; its name notwithstanding, the hotel was actually located near the present intersection of South King Street and Kalākaua Avenue, in the Pāwaʻa district. (Waikīkī's boundaries in 1837 extended far beyond today's.) The earliest hotels truly located in Waikīkī

appear to have been Herbert's and the Park Beach Hotel. Herbert's, described as "a family resort and watering place," opened in 1884, closed, reopened in 1889, closed again, and finally resurfaced in 1893 as the Sans Souci. The Park Beach opened in 1888 but survived less than a year.<sup>10</sup>

*Intraocular lens implantation.* Late in 1969, at The Queen's Medical Center, Dr. Percival H. Y. Chee, a Honolulu ophthalmologist, performed Hawai'i's first intraocular lens implantation. Dr. Chee's patient was Thomas S. Abel, a retired bank officer. This procedure, which eventually supplanted the prescription of thick eyeglasses or contact lenses after the removal of cataracts, was developed in England in 1949 and was brought to the United States around 1965. Through oversight, it had not been mentioned in the author's 1985 history of eye care in Hawai'i.<sup>11</sup>

*Jet aircraft.* The first jet aircraft flown in the islands was a Lockheed T-28 Shooting Star, piloted by Capt. Paul Ramsey. For its maiden Hawai'i flight, the jet took off from Barbers Point Naval Air Station on October 26, 1948, and made a 25-minute, 580 mph dash to Honolulu and back. A year earlier, in October 1947, the Navy had brought in a Ryan Fire-Ball, a hybrid powered by both piston and jet engines, but the Lockheed was the earliest true jet aircraft in Hawaiian skies. Both planes were overlooked in a 1979 article.<sup>12</sup>

*Newspaper photograph.* The *Evening Bulletin* first published a half-tone engraving of a photograph—newsboys posing in front of the Charles Hustace store—on September 30, 1899, three months before the *Advertiser* cuts formerly deemed to have been first.<sup>13</sup>

*Opera.* On February 11, 1854, the Varieties Theatre presented what now appears to have been Honolulu's earliest opera performance, Donizetti's *Daughter of the Regiment*. The cast of eight local performers was led by Mrs. D. W. Waller, wife of the theater's stage manager, singing—in English—four of the opera's arias, with musical accompaniment presumably provided by a lone pianist. *Daughter* shared the evening with a tragedy by Maturin, *The Sicilian Pirate*, and thus probably was offered in a severely cut version.<sup>14</sup> An 1861 production of Verdi's *Il Trovatore*, previously acclaimed as Hawai'i's first opera, obviously wasn't.<sup>15</sup>

*Residential subdivision.* The earliest residential subdivision activ-

ity occurred, under government auspices, in the 1840s. On November 14, 1846, the Home Office inserted an ad in *The Polynesian*: “The Minister of the Interior is prepared to sell or lease Building Lots between Honolulu and Waikiki, on application being made according to law.” In 1849, Theophilus Metcalf (who was also the kingdom’s pioneering Daguerreotypist) drafted a plat map for Kulaokahu‘a, the dusty plain bounded by today’s Alapa‘i Street, Kina‘u Street, Makiki Stream, and South King Street, showing newly assigned street names and lot lines. Except for initial interest in the parcels fronting on Thomas Square, however, sales and development in this tract remained slow for many years. An earlier article had dated the first residential subdivisions in the 1880s.<sup>16</sup>

*Social welfare.* Governmental assistance to the unemployed and poor was introduced in 1915 and expanded in 1918 and 1919, some 18 years earlier than initially thought. The 1915 Territorial Legislature authorized the Board of Immigration, Labor and Statistics to provide “for the temporary relief of indigent, suffering and helpless persons.” In 1918, a special session authorized the Honolulu Board of Supervisors to appropriate funds “for the relief of aged and destitute persons,” and the regular session of 1919 created in each county a Board of Child Welfare empowered to grant allowances to widowed, deserted, or single mothers.<sup>17</sup>

*Sugar plantations.* A 1980 article quoted Kuykendall’s judgment that “the first permanent sugar plantation in the Hawaiian Islands” was the one established at Kōloa, Kaua‘i, in 1835, but noted an earlier abortive effort initiated in Mānoa Valley in 1825. Subsequent research by Cushing, however, has called attention to several still earlier (if unsuccessful) tries, including one by Chinese on Lāna‘i in 1802, the King’s mill on O‘ahu in 1811, Marin’s experiments on O‘ahu between 1812 and 1825, Lavinia’s 1823 O‘ahu trials, and several others. Cushing adds that most of these efforts prior to 1835 were limited in scope, poorly documented, and perhaps of doubtful authenticity.<sup>18</sup>

*Sunday newspaper.* The first daily newspaper with a Sunday edition was the *Honolulu Republican*. This Sunday paper initially appeared on June 17, 1900, three days after the *Republican*’s debut as a daily. The *Sunday Advertiser* was not introduced until January 4, 1903.<sup>19</sup>

Zoo. Honolulu Zoo, begun around 1914, was not Hawai'i's first; that distinction apparently belongs to the Kaimuki Zoo, erected at Wai'ala'e Road and Koko Head Avenue in 1905. An advertisement in the 1905-06 city directory listed its attractions: "Animals, fish, birds, etc., Japanese tea house, Hawaiian grass houses, vaudeville Wednesday and Saturday nights, dancing every evening." The 1907 directory added other features: "Roller skating rink, tennis courts, croquet grounds, bowling alley, theatre, chutes, etc., etc., etc. Honolulu's Coney Island." The proprietor was A. V. Gear, a real estate developer who had previously sold Hawai'i's first adding machines (1896) and participated in the first radio broadcast (1900). The Kaimuki Zoo seems to have gone out of business by the end of 1907.<sup>20</sup>

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Robert C. Schmitt, "Some 'Firsts' That Weren't," *HJH* 21 (1987): 156-57.
- <sup>2</sup> *HJH* 12 (1978): 110.
- <sup>3</sup> *HSB* 7 Mar. 1916: 4, 13; *HJH* 12 (1978): 109.
- <sup>4</sup> "Charter of Punahou School. June 6, 1849," in *Oahu College Catalogue, June 16, 1881*, 17-18; *Record, Articles of Association and Incorporation, Book no. 1* and *Record of Copartnership Firms, Oahu*, both filed in AH; *Annual Report of the Department of Treasury and Regulation, State of Hawaii, Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1960*, 15; *HJH* 14 (1980): 85. Punahou School was reincorporated, as Oahu College, in 1853, and was renamed Punahou School in 1934.
- <sup>5</sup> *HJH* 14 (1980): 84, 102; Frances O. Jackson, "Of Credit Unions, Medical Unions, and Pineapple Harvesters: Three Vignettes from the 1930s," *HJH* 22 (1988): 230.
- <sup>6</sup> Carl Myatt, *Hawaii, The Electric Century* (Honolulu: Signature Publishing for Hawaiian Electric Co., 1991) 128.
- <sup>7</sup> *HJH* 14 (1980): 91.
- <sup>8</sup> *HA* 4 Mar. 1924: 5; *HJH* 14 (1980): 93.
- <sup>9</sup> Robert C. Schmitt, "Hawaii's First Hospitals," *Hawaii Medical Journal* 8 (July-Aug. 1949): 424; Robert C. Schmitt, "Hawaii's Hospitals, 1831-1956," *Hawaii Medical Journal* 15 (Mar.-Apr. 1956): 338; Robert C. Schmitt, "Health and Medical Firsts in Hawaii," *Hawaii Medical Journal* 40 (Oct. 1981): 284; Marc Scruggs, "Anthony D. Allen: A Prosperous American of African Descent in Early 19th Century Hawai'i," *HJH* 26 (1992): 64, 68, 71, 72, 73.
- <sup>10</sup> Don Hibbard and David Franzen, *The View from Diamond Head* (Honolulu: Editions Limited, 1986): 55-57, 225; Ralph S. Kuykendall, *The Hawaiian Kingdom*, vol. 3, 1874-1893, *The Kalakaua Dynasty* (Honolulu: U Hawaii P, 1967): 113-14; *HJH* 14 (1980): 83.
- <sup>11</sup> Tomi Knaefler, "Plastic Lens Implanted in Older Cataract Patients," *HSB* 15

- Jan. 1970: B-8; Percival H. Y. Chee, M.D., letter to Schmitt, 21 Aug. 1990; Julius Shulman, M.D., *Cataracts, The Complete Guide* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1984) III-13; *HJH* 19 (1985): 134-48. Dr. Chee's letter puts the Abel surgery in 1970, but Knaefer's article dates it in the closing months of 1969.
- <sup>12</sup> *HA* 10 Oct. 1947; *HSB* 15 Oct. 1947, 20 Oct. 1948, and 27 Oct. 1948; *HJH* 13 (1979): 107.
- <sup>13</sup> *EB* 30 Sept. 1899: 1; *HJH* 12 (1978): 103.
- <sup>14</sup> Ben Hyams, "History of Opera in Honolulu," in Hawaii Opera Theatre program for *Otello*, 2-6 Feb. 1990: 34-37; Varieties Theatre playbill for Feb. 11, 1854, AH; Capt. Stephen Reynolds Journal, IX, Aug. 1853 to Mar. 1855, typescript, HHS: 67.
- <sup>15</sup> Roger Hickman, "Hawaii's First Opera," *Journal of the West* 22 (July 1983): 58-64; *HJH* 12 (1978): 105.
- <sup>16</sup> Richard A. Greer, "Honolulu in 1847," *HJH* 4 (1970): 70, and "Kulaokahu'a and Thomas Square: From Boom to Bust to Now," *HJH* 26 (1992): 133-55; *P* 14 Nov. 1846: 105; T. Metcalf maps in Hawaiian Government Survey, Register no. 278 and 284; *HJH* 15 (1981): 104.
- <sup>17</sup> S.L.H. 1915, Act 106; S.L.H. 1918, spec., Act 20; S.L.H. 1919, Act 129; *HJH* 14 (1980): 94-95.
- <sup>18</sup> Robert L. Cushing, "The Beginnings of Sugar Production in Hawai'i," *HJH* 19 (1985): 17-34; *HJH* 14 (1980): 85-86.
- <sup>19</sup> *F* July 1900: 55-56; *PCA* 4 Jan. 1903: 4; *HJH* 13 (1979): 109.
- <sup>20</sup> *Husted's Directory of Honolulu and Territory of Hawaii* for 1905-06 (1905): 222, and 1907 (1907): 222; *HJH* 12 (1978): 101.