Hawai‘i in the Movies, 1898–1959, Part IV

This research note further amends the lists of feature films made in or about Hawai‘i previously published by the Hawaiian Historical Society. In 1988, the Society issued a monograph describing 120 such motion pictures produced prior to statehood.¹ Three years later an addendum listed twelve others, plus further details about three of the films previously cited.² Three others were added in 1992.³ Here are twenty-six more that have come to the author’s attention since then, plus new material on one noted earlier.

1933

Lucky Devils

RKO Radio. 3 Feb. 1933; Hon., NA. Sound, b&w, 60, 64, or 70 min. Dir., Ralph Ince. With Bill Boyd, Dorothy Wilson, William Gargan.

Adventure-drama about Hollywood stuntmen. Halfway through the picture, the hero marries and honeymoons in Hawai‘i.⁴

1934

Song of the Islands

Palmer Miller and Curtis Nagel for the Hawaii Tourist Bureau. 1934; Hon., NA. Sound, Vericolor (an early two-color process), 40 min.

¹ Robert C. Schmitt, an associate editor of the Journal and a frequent contributor to its pages, is a retired statistician for the Hawai‘i State Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism.

Dir., NA. With Pualani Mossman, Sam Kapu, Ray Kinney, Don Blanding.

A travelogue about the Islands, made for the Hawaii Tourist Bureau. The same title was used in a 1942 Betty Grable musical. Four ten-minute travelogues, one each for the major islands, were produced by the same group and also released in 1934. All five films were rescued from a trash barrel and restored by Lowell Angell for the Bishop Museum in 1992.5

1935

Rocky Mountain Mystery


A western/mystery, filmed in California. At the end, the hero and heroine marry and set up housekeeping on a ranch in Hawai‘i.6

1936

Anything Goes


The Cole Porter musical comedy about entertainers, gangsters, and others aboard an ocean liner sailing from New York to Southampton. Some shipboard background shots were filmed in Honolulu. Reviews of the picture varied widely.7

Charlie Chan at the Race Track

An Australian taking his prize horse to the Santa Juanita Handicap is killed aboard a liner as it approaches O'ahu. Honolulu detective Charlie Chan, investigating, continues with the ship to California. There, Chan foils race track gangsters attempting to fix the race and solves the murder. Although the picture supposedly begins at the Honolulu Police Station, no location shooting is evident. Reviews were mixed.8

High Tension
A deep-sea diver takes a risky assignment mending the Honolulu–San Francisco cable, working out of Honolulu, rescuing a buddy underwater, and romancing a brassy writer of magazine adventure fiction. Reviews were generally favorable, although the Star-Bulletin criticized the film’s portrayal of Honolulu as a place “where nobody works between the hours of 11 a.m. and 2 p.m., where people ride about in bullock carts, and where cable company employes reside in a little colony all their own.” Obviously filmed elsewhere.9

1937

Charlie Chan at the Olympics
Chan investigates the disappearance of an experimental airplane over O'ahu and the murder of its Navy pilot. Leaving Honolulu, he pursues foreign agents by Pan Am clipper, transcontinental aircraft, and the dirigible Hindenburg to Berlin, where “No. 1 son” Lee Chan is competing in the Olympics as a member of the U.S. swimming team. No record of Hawai'i location filming. Reviews were mostly favorable.10
Fly Away Baby

Warner Bros. 19 June 1937; Hon., NA. Sound, b&w, 60 min. Dir., Frank McDonald. With Glenda Farrell, Barton MacLane.

Reporter Torchy Blane and her fiancé, policeman Steve McBride, join a dirigible flight around the world in pursuit of a murderer thought to be aboard. When the airship lands at Honolulu, they unsuccessfully search a suspect’s room, then continue on until, at the climax, the slayer leaps to his death trying to parachute from the dirigible. No record of location filming. Variety’s comments were generally favorable; those of the New York Times much less so.11

Think Fast, Mr. Moto

20th Century–Fox. 27 Aug. 1937; Hon., NA. Sound, b&w, 66 or 70 min. Dir., Norman Foster. With Peter Lorre, Virginia Field, Thomas Beck.

Kentaro Moto, a Japanese American businessman and amateur detective, pursues jewel smugglers across the Pacific from San Francisco’s Chinatown to Shanghai. During a brief layover in Honolulu, Moto’s liner is boarded by a mysterious woman. First in a series that eventually reached eight pictures, this picture received generally favorable reviews.12

Nudist Land

States Rights (dist.). 1937; Hon., NA. Sound, b&w, 6 reels. Dir., A. Royal Horter.

A documentary that begins with scenes of the healthful lifestyles of people in Africa, Bali, Samoa, and Hawai‘i, then describes in detail life in an Oregon nudist camp. A review called this film “entirely inoffensive . . . entirely moral.”13

Renai Hawaii Kooro (Lovers in Hawaii’s Paradise)

Kyota and Miyoko, from a small Japanese village, marry despite parental objections and go to Tokyo. There, Kyota rescues a Hawai‘i theater man from muggers and as a reward is given an introduction to the man’s son, Makihara, in Honolulu. The son arranges a try-out for the couple at the Waikiki Theater, where their act combining classical Japanese dances with the Hawaiian hula is a sensational success. They return in triumph to Japan, where they receive their parents’ belated blessing.

Shooting began locally in July 1937 and included scenes of Punchbowl, the Punahou campus, the Waikiki Theater, the docking of the *Asama Maru* at Pier 11, and Maui and the Big Island. Several local Japanese appeared in supporting roles.14

1938

*Hollywood Stadium Mystery*


Mystery set in Hollywood. At the end, “Bill . . . suggests [to Polly] they try Hawaii, where they go on their honeymoon.”15

*Held For Ransom*

International Film Corp.; dist., Grand National Films. 17 June 1938; Hon., NA. Sound, b&w, 59 min. Dir., Clarence Bricker. With Blanche Mehaffey, Grant Withers.

Kidnapping drama. At its conclusion, “Larry and Betty decide to marry and sail to Hawaii on their honeymoon.” *Variety* called this film “very poor.”16

*Meet the Girls*

Two young women lose their jobs as entertainers in Honolulu. Broke, they stow away on a San Francisco-bound liner, where they get mixed up with a diamond thief, a gigolo, a hypochondriac, a watchful ship’s captain, a sailor, and a drunk. *Variety* panned the picture. No mention of location shooting in the Islands.\(^{17}\)

1939

*Charlie Chan in Reno*


When a young Island woman is arrested in Reno on a murder charge, Chan travels to Nevada to defend her. The film begins in the Honolulu Police Department laboratory, but was probably shot elsewhere. Reviews were mixed.\(^{18}\)

*Charlie Chan at Treasure Island*

20th Century–Fox. 8 Sept. 1939; Hon., NA. Sound, b&w, 59, 71, 72, or 74 min. Dir., Norman Foster. With Sidney Toler, Cesar Romero, Pauline Moore.

Chan is aboard a Pan Am clipper flight from Honolulu to San Francisco when, during a storm, a fellow passenger apparently commits suicide. After landing in California, Chan investigates and solves the mystery. This is another of the many movies that take place partly on ships or aircraft en route to or from the Islands. Reviews were mixed.\(^{19}\)

1941

*Dive Bomber*

A U.S. Navy flight surgeon assigned to a squadron in Hawai'i (and later San Diego) studies pilot black-out during power dives. Mostly filmed at San Diego and Pensacola Naval Air Stations, with a few background shots of Pearl Harbor. Praised for its aerial photography and grasp of flight medicine but not for its plotting or romance.20

*The Perfect Snob*


A girl vacationing in Hawai'i with her parents is told by her mother to marry for money but by her father to choose love. Fortunately, the supposedly poor young man she falls for turns out to be the owner of a sugar plantation. Includes "natives" and a "witch doctor" mostly played by haoles. Presumably shot on the Mainland. So-so reviews.21

*Blue, White and Perfect*

20th Century-Fox. 18 Dec. 1941; Liberty, 21 March 1942. Sound, b&w, 73, 74, or 78 min. Dir., Herbert I. Leeds. With Lloyd Nolan, Mary Beth Hughes.

Private investigator Michael Shayne pursues spies who are smuggling industrial diamonds to the enemy, following them aboard a Honolulu-bound liner and nabbing them as it makes port. This picture, released only eleven days after the Pearl Harbor attack, was the first to show the United States clearly involved in World War II. Reviews were average to somewhat above average.22

1943

*Gung Ho!*


"Carlson's Raiders" are followed from their initial selection and train-
ing to their bloody raid on Makin Island in August 1942. The O'ahu training scenes are accompanied by stock shots of Pearl Harbor and Diamond Head. Reviews were mostly favorable.\textsuperscript{23}

1944

*Wing and a Prayer*


About a U.S. aircraft carrier at sea between the Pearl Harbor attack and the Battle of Midway. Includes documentary and newsreel footage of Pearl Harbor and Wake Island. Generally favorable reviews.\textsuperscript{24}

1946

*Flight to Nowhere*


This film opens in Honolulu, where a Korean courier is slain before he can give a Justice Department operative a map pinpointing uranium deposits on a South Sea island. The hero, a former intelligence agent now employed as a charter pilot, flies everybody to a Death Valley hotel, where two more homicides take place and the map passes through many hands. Called a “bottom of the barrel film” by Nash and Ross and a “bomb . . . ultracheap, ultra boring” by Maltin. Location shooting unlikely.\textsuperscript{25}

1949

*Task Force*

The development of naval carrier aviation from the 1920s through the 1940s, as seen by an officer stationed at Pearl Harbor in the 1930s and again in 1941 and present at the Battle of Midway. The Hawai’i scenes are partly stock footage and partly faked. Above average reviews.

1951

*Let’s Go Navy*


The “Bowery Boys” join the Navy to pursue sailors who have robbed them. Their travels take them, among other places, to a Honolulu curio store, where they encounter a hula dancer and buy a talking parrot. Twenty-third in a long-running series, this entry was surprisingly well received by critics.

1958

*The Naked and the Dead*


A bowdlerized filming of Norman Mailer’s notorious World War II novel. The picture starts in 1943 in a Honolulu bar, where female strippers rather modestly perform before rowdy servicemen, then moves to the South Pacific war theater. Nash and Ross called it “a dismal film of a talky, overrated novel.”

1959

*Up Periscope!*


During World War II, a Pearl Harbor-based submarine commander
and a Navy frogman are assigned to capture a vital code from the Japanese on a South Pacific island. Mixed reviews. Variety particularly objected to the ending: the victorious sub returns to Pearl “to find wives, sweethearts, etc., all standing on the pier cheering their men home [which] seems a little unbelievable, considering it's wartime.”

**Don't Give Up the Ship**


An ensign, given command of a destroyer escort during World War II, is charged with failure to turn it in at the end of hostilities. One scene portrays his angst-ridden initial departure from Pearl Harbor. Panned by the *New York Times* as an exceptionally unfunny comedy.

**Notes**


13 AFI Catalog 1535.

14 Consolidated Amusement Co., Show Parade for week of 26 Dec. 1937. I am indebted to Lowell Angell, whose collection includes bound volumes of Show Parade, for calling this source to my attention. The citation for this film in my 1988 monograph was limited to major credits.

15 AFI Catalog 944–45.


