# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE PLAGUE AND FIRE OF 1899–1900 IN HONOLULU</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lana Iwamoto</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| HAWAII'S FIRST PHONOGRAPHS                  | 394  |
| Robert C. Schmitt                           |      |

| CONTRIBUTORS                                 | 395  |

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*     *
*     *
*     *
*     *

![Image of a page from a document with text about the plague and fire of 1899-1900 in Honolulu, Hawaii, and contributors list.](image-url)
The Black Death—that ancient scourge of mankind—seems only a faint echo from the past; a medieval horror, a banished specter that haunted an untaught and unwashed era. But not so: within the memory of living men, Honolulu, the official capital of Paradise, blanched before the threat of bubonic plague. It was on December 12, 1899, that the disease was announced after a special Board of Health meeting called to discuss the death of the first plague victim, You Chong, a Chinese bookkeeper employed by Wing Wo Tai on Nuuanu Avenue. At nine o'clock the night before, Dr. G.H. Herbert of the Board of Medical Examiners had examined him upon the request of the attending physician, Dr. Sun Chin. The patient, who had a high temperature and a suspicious swelling in the groin, had been ill for three days. He died at five the next morning. An autopsy was performed by Dr. W. Hoffman, a government physician, in the presence of Dr. Herbert; Dr. F.R. Day, the port physician; Dr. Carmichael, the representative of the U.S. Marine Hospital Service; and Dr. Sun Chin. The diagnosis: bubonic plague.¹

At the special meeting the Board of Health authorized its president, Attorney-General Henry E. Cooper, to build a crematory on Quarantine Island and to cremate the bodies of all plague victims. He was also directed to quarantine all people living in houses where the plague had occurred. Because the disease had broken out in the Asiatic quarter, the Board ruled that no Chinese or Japanese could leave Honolulu for other ports. Those of other races could not travel until they had had a medical examination and got passes from the Board of Health. Government schools were closed by order of the Minister of Public Instruction. Cleaning and the removal of garbage were also instituted, besides other work deemed necessary to stamp out the plague.²

But the killer was already loose. On the same day two other cases, both in the same part of Chinatown, were reported. One victim was Makanaila, a South Sea islander, who died on Queen Street near Millilani. The Board of Health organized a house-to-house inspection on the afternoon of December 12, with volunteers in charge. The next day it laid a strict quarantine on the area bounded by Nuuanu Street, Kukui Street, Nuuanu Stream, and Queen Street—that portion of the city then as now called Chinatown.³ Military guard enforced isolation.

On December 13, also, the infected district was subdivided into 15 parts for inspection and sanitary work. On the 14th, sanitary headquarters were set up at Kaumakapili Church, inside the quarantined section. Cleansing and disinfecting of the entire district started; this included gathering and burning rubbish and garbage, digging new cesspools, and filling old ones.⁴ Dr. J.S.B. Pratt directed the inspectors.

Thus began an energetic and systematic effort to contain the plague in Chinatown and, more broadly, in Honolulu. To effect the latter, restrictions bound seagoing vessels and their passengers. Island steamers due from outer ports were considered clean ships if they anchored offshore and held no communication with land.

¹This paper was produced for Dr. C.H. Hunter's class in Hawaiian history at the University of Hawaii in the spring of 1966.
Vessels already in port were sent out and required to undergo seven days' quarantine before being allowed to leave for other islands. These vessels were to load and discharge cargo by lighter.\(^5\) Foreign vessels were not allowed to touch the wharves, but were kept from six to ten feet away, with all cables guarded by rat-proof guards. No goods of Japanese or Chinese origin could leave port until they had been thoroughly fumigated. All shipping was done under Board of Health inspection.\(^6\)

Also under Board of Health supervision was the quarantine detaining several Chinese servants who had been visiting in the Chinatown district. They were to be released after seven days, but the period was shortened because on December 19, the general quarantine was raised. Interisland steamers were allowed to sail for other ports in the islands, taking aboard only approved freight and passengers.\(^7\)

But community relief was shortlived; a renewal of the outbreak came on December 24 and 25. Quarantine was reimposed on December 27 and regulations concerning it announced. These empowered the President of the Board of Health to

(1) establish and maintain quarantine over any dwelling, store...\(\text{etc.}\) for such period as he may deem necessary to insure public health and safety. All persons are forbidden to enter or leave a building without authority from the President of the Board of Health; (2)...establish and maintain the quarantine over any juridical district of the Hawaiian Islands; and (3)...establish and maintain the quarantine over any port or harbor of the Hawaiian Islands....All steamships, sailing vessels \(\text{etc.}\) are forbidden to enter or leave any port or harbor under quarantine without the authority of the President of the Board of Health.\(^8\)

These and other earlier and later regulations made the President of the Board of Health and the Board itself powerful in the domestic affairs of the Territory—possibly equal in importance to the chief executive.

During the same period, Board President Cooper was authorized to name a Commission of Three to investigate conditions in Chinatown and to recommend necessary steps for the reconstruction and sanitation of that district. On December 25, he reported that he had appointed George R. Carter, a businessman; C.B. Ripley, an architect, and Mr. Edwards, a sanitary engineer.\(^9\) They studied Chinatown, a practically rectangular area including part of the main business section of the city. This area, with an overwhelmingly Asiatic population of 7,000, was bounded by River, Queen, Nuuam and Kukui Streets. The most important difference distinguishing Chinatown from the business section east of Nuuanu was that the Asiatics lived as well as did business in their sector.

The Sanitary Commission made its report on December 29, saying that Chinatown was a "terribly congested district in a wretched sanitary condition....Fresh meat is exposed for sale in shops within a few feet of which are cesspools reeking with filth and vermin, from which came clouds of flies." Restaurant kitchens were built directly over cesspools, with only the floor serving as a cover. Cockroaches and flies were everywhere. Poi was manufactured and sold in shops "sour with fermented slime." Dr. Wood, who became President of the Board on January 5, supported this report with his own description: "The entire interior of the blocks, of which the stores facing the streets upon four sides formed only outer shells, were filled up with extensions, leantos, shanties, privies, stables, and chicken coops closely crowded together." Even the narrow, crooked passages between them were, "...in many cases, roofed over so that the ground saw no sun." The cesspools were under the structures. In most cases floors were directly on the ground so that there was no ventilation under the houses. "As many of the cesspools were overflowing, the sod and floors were sodden with filth. Many of them (cesspools) have never been emptied. Plague lives and breeds in filth and when it got into Chinatown, it found its natural habitat."\(^10\)
When the Sanitary Commission gave its report, there had already been nine plague cases since the outbreak on December 12. The situation was this: (1) bubonic plague had broken out in the center of town; (2) the majority of the cases were in a section densely populated and most unsanitary; (3) the Orientals living there were compelled through force and by the presence of military guards to remain in their quarantined district, where they would be in constant danger of plague; (4) it would be very hard to keep the disease within the confines of the quarantined area; thus, there was increasing danger of its escaping the boundaries; and (5) conditions in Chinatown made it impossible to disinfect and sanitize the area by ordinary means or by any means short of wholesale destruction. Therefore, on December 30, after careful deliberation, the Board of Health chose fire as the "surest, most thorough, and most expeditious" method. "Fire would destroy the plague germs, kill rats, cleanse the soil and open it up to the purifying influences of sun and air, and would prevent any occupancy of the premises until a safe period of time had elapsed."

So the first of many sanitary fires was started the next day, December 31, by order of the Board of Health. With the fire department standing by, the torch was carefully applied to a row of wooden buildings on Nuuanu Avenue across from Block 10. The occupants of the buildings had been removed to a quarantine camp at Kakaako. Their belongings and the merchandise from the stores were taken by the Board to be disinfected and stored until the owners were out of quarantine.12 Evacuation, fire, the quarantine camp, and fumigation were to be the standard pattern for the sanitary fires from then on.

Rigid and vigorous sanitary measures—quarantine, disinfection, sanitary fires, twice-a-day inspection—were conscientiously carried out by the Board of Health and volunteers. It was on April 30, 1900—four and a half months after the plague made its appearance in Honolulu—that President Wood made the following announcement:

"In accordance with a resolution of the Board of Health, I hereby declare the port of Honolulu and all other places in the Hawaiian Islands free from infection by the bubonic plague. All quarantine regulations adopted by the Board of Health on account of bubonic plague in the Hawaiian Islands are hereby rescinded."13 Thus ended Honolulu's struggle with the black death.

The plague had claimed 61 lives. Altogether there had been 71 cases, 58 males and 13 females. Table 1 gives additional information:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Cases</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaiian</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Sea Islander</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td><strong>71</strong></td>
<td><strong>61</strong></td>
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Below is a chronological record of the cases of plague between December 12, 1899 and March 31, 1900:
Of the 71 plague victims, 41 lived within the Kukui-River-Queen-Nuuanu rectangle, or immediately adjacent to it.\footnote{14}

Preceding paragraphs gave a general background of the extent of the plague and the measures enacted by the Board of Health to cope with it and to prevent its spread. These restrictions, discussed here in greater detail, have been divided into three sections: the quarantine, building condemnations and sanitary fires, and "other restrictions".

With the plague's outbreak on December 12, a quarantine was placed on the district bounded by Nuuanu Avenue, Kukui Street, Nuuanu Stream, and Queen Street, many Japanese and Chinese house servants who had visited Chinatown overnight found themselves confined within the quarantine area; their employers had to do their own chores. Restaurants were short-handed; service was both slow and poor. Often, some of the usual food was not available, either because there were no delivery boys, or because the producers were in quarantine. Said one restaurant manager:

The Chinamen who make it \text{\footnote{bread}} are all in quarantine; so are several of our waiters. I had a job getting meat today. The Metropolitan people said I might come up and cut it—they had nobody. I have been so short of help that I was obliged to go in the kitchen and wash knives and forks myself.\footnote{15}

On December 15, a formal notice of the Board of Health set the quarantine boundaries. All persons were forbidden to enter or leave the area; beginning at
the point where the mauka line of Queen Street crossed Nuuanu Avenue, up Nuuanu to Kukui Street, including both sides of Nuuanu, then by the center line of Kukui to the Waikiki bank of Nuuanu Stream, then along that to the mauka line of the King Street bridge, then across to the Waikiki side of River Street along to the mauka line of Queen Street, and to the point of origin. This was Chinatown. But before a military guard could be put around the district, 15 sailors from the Mauna Loa came ashore and wandered into the quarantine area. When the guard was established, the sailors were confined there with no extra clothes. Only a few had money. However, they were treated hospitably by the resident Hawaiians. This was a single example of the mutual aid given during the epidemic.

This first quarantine brought other effects. Mail was collected throughout the district and taken to the fumigation station at Kaumakapili Church, where it was thoroughly treated under Dr. Pratt's supervision. From there it went to the post office to undergo a second fumigation. Milk for the quarantine district was distributed from the corner of Hotel and Nuuanu Streets, where the dairies' delivery wagons were ordered to wait. Tram cars had been forbidden to pass through the district, but on December 18 the King Street cars were allowed to go straight through because the danger of plague seemed lessened. However, the cars could not stop within the district, and each car carried an armed national guardsman, who permitted no one to get on or off.

On December 19 the quarantine was raised, and people were allowed to leave; the military guards were withdrawn and afterward dismissed from duty. However, one week later the quarantine and all its restrictions were re-enforced because of the plague cases of December 24 and 25. President Cooper ordered out the First Regiment to the quarantine district, which was surrounded by a bayonet guard more strict than the previous one. Another week went by, and on January 3, a special quarantine was laid on that section of Honolulu bounded by River, Queen, Nuuanu and Kukui, and completed by a lane connecting Queen and King Streets, situated about midway between Kekaulike and Maunakea Streets. This area was divided into blocks for patrol. A daily house-to-house investigation was ordered for the "out-of-Chinatown" districts. Besides the strong cordons of soldiers placed around the area (Col. Jones of the First Regiment had already offered the services of his men), were several citizens who volunteered to act as guards. People outside the district were forbidden to harbor any who escaped the quarantine area. No resident of the quarantine district was allowed to go into the "clean" localities without first getting a permit from the Board of Health. Because of all this, business in Chinatown came to a standstill; Chinese and Japanese merchants suffered severely. Moreover, great inconvenience was caused in San Francisco, where a quarantine was put on Island vessels and cargoes, although they had been loaded with great care in Honolulu.

However, beginning in March, 1900, there was an easing off of quarantine rigidity in Honolulu, which let local merchants enjoy better facilities for interisland trade. Despite this, men were still being adversely affected by the quarantine in April. The Orientals in quarantine had a difficult time finding jobs and homes, and even Caucasians (at this time the former inmates of Fowler's Yard) were deprived of their liberty and a good portion of their clothing, and sometimes even their jobs and homes. An example of the difficulties faced by many in quarantine was given in a letter accompanying a petition asking the Board of Health to let 60 homeless Japanese and Caucasian men to stay in the quarantine quarters until May 1, because of lack of housing and money:

I was employed on one of the plantations and came into town for a few days, being unfortunate enough to get caught in the quarantine. You don't know how hard it is to get work here now. Little by little our finances have
been decreasing, and there seems no prospect at present to fill up our purses. I have had to borrow from my friends, small sums at a time, and these small borrowings amount to a tidy sum. Some have taken the prophylactic and expect very soon to get out to the plantations. But what we need is assurance that we can have a place to lay our head at night.26

This petition was written and submitted because at this time (April) the quarantine and detention camps were gradually being closed since (1) there were no new cases of the plague, (2) the people had undergone the necessary quarantine period and no longer occupied the camp to capacity, and (3) the cost of maintaining camps was prohibitive.

The danger of another outbreak of the plague seemed unlikely, and so the disinfecting corps was discontinued, while several of the detention camps were closed. The Honolulu Night School reopened on April 16, having been shut since December.27 Finally, at the Board of Health meeting on April 25, a resolution was adopted which provided that, if there were no fresh outbreak of plague in Honolulu before Monday, April 30, all quarantine restrictions at the port of Honolulu would be removed on that day. No cases did appear, and the quarantine was lifted accordingly.28

Hawaii greeted the news with joy, expressed in the headlines of the Pacific Commercial Advertiser and the Hawaiian Gazette:

"Plague Filikia Pau Loa; Drs. Will Rest While Other Businesses Boom"
"All Cahu Made Merry Yesterday Over Ending of Long Penitential Season; Business Boomed, Transportation Companies Had to Hustle, and New Regime of Commerce and Pleasure Began in Earnest"
"Today Honolulu Throws Off Shackles Which Have Bound Her For Four Months"
"The Gates Ajar and Ships Free; The Tabu Is Pau on the Wave and Waterfront and the Traffic Begins Again"

The quarantine had been especially detrimental to sailors, men working on the wharves, Chinese Japanese merchants, etc. Men could not come and go. Orders for merchandise piled up. Schools were closed for four months. Men, women and children suffered from lack of housing, belongings, and work after they had served their quarantine. But there were only two or three cases of plague among the inmates of the quarantine camps. Thus the safeguards enacted by the Board of Health did serve some purpose.

although the Board had raised the quarantine, it remained cautious. It was not until May 17 that businessmen were allowed to erect new buildings in the burnt areas of Chinatown. This permission was given only after soil specimens showed absolutely no bubonic plague bacilli.29 It was hoped that by the time the proposed new buildings were completed, the sewer system would be very nearly if not entirely finished, and that the new structures could then be connected to it.

A second kind of restriction placed on people in an attempt to curb the plague was the condemnation of buildings and the sanitary fires. On December 30, the Board of Health decided that all people who lived in infected houses should be removed to some other place and their premises condemned because these were believed a source of sickness. Thus buildings 325, 326 and 327 on Nuuanu Avenue were condemned, and their occupants quarantined in the barracks at the Kakaako Rifle Range. After the houses were vacated and the people's belongings taken to be fumigated, sentinels were put on watch, and the purification of Chinatown by fire began.30

At that time anything that came in contact with the plague was considered infected. On January 11, Dr. Wood defined unsanitary premises:

If a building is in such an unsanitary condition that it cannot [be purified] by any means other than fire, then it should be destroyed by fire. Secondly, if buildings are considered by the Board as not being unsanitary, but by reason of their adjoining infected premises and being in such a condition that rats can easily pass from one building to another, we pronounce them...
to be infected with plague, even though a death did not occur in the premisses and they are condemned to follow others in being destroyed by fire.31

Upon the condemnation of a building, and upon order of the Board of Health to destroy it by fire, the Fire Department proceeded to do so. A total of 41 fires were set between December 31, 1899 and August 13, 1900, when the pesthouse and morgue ad Kakaako were burned. The concentration of fires came in the first three months—19 in January, 12 in February, and 7 in March. There was only one each in December, April and August.32 In every case the Fire Department stood by, and safety precautions were observed to the utmost. Thus all sanitary fires were controlled and destroyed only intended areas—except the great Chinatown fire of January 20, 1900.

The Board of Health had decided that the portion of Block 15 between Kaumakapili Church and Nuuanu Avenue and mauka of Beretania Street should be burned because the area had been the site of five deaths and one suspicious case within the past week. Because this was an especially large area, extra precautions were taken and plans made to preserve the church. Chief Hunt and the entire Fire Department personnel with four engines began the conflagration at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday, January 20. A fair northeast wind was blowing, so that Engine No. 1 was placed at the intersection of Maunakea and Beretania Streets as a precautionary measure should the wind rise. A two-story frame structure behind the church had been selected because it was intended that the fire should eat its way back toward Kukui Street.

Everything was fine for one hour.33 Then the wind began to rise and shift to the east, which caused blazing embers to be carried to the dry roofs of closely-packed buildings in the vicinity. In a short time many other buildings were aflame. Then embers lodged on the Waikiki tower of Kaumakapili Church and set it afire. The firemen struggled desperately, but they could not force water to such a height. The blaze leaped to the other tower. From the twin church towers, sparks and embers were flung by the strong wind to rooftops around.

The spreading holocaust now became a raging, uncontrollable beast. Heat forced men beyond effective fighting range. Water pressure had gradually decreased; in a moment, the fire leaped out of control. The entire Beretania Street frontage was now a mass of flame. Sparks leaped across from Block 15 to Block 1, and the high wind fanned the flames so that they vaulted fifty and sixty feet to Block 2. Engine No. 1 on Maunakea Street was enveloped, and the Chemical Engine House in Block 2 burned. The Board of Health had earlier notified ships to leave the wharves for their own safety, and as the fire coursed through Block 2, vessels began moving out into the stream.

Now the conflagration jumped to Blocks 3 and 6. Citizens and guards rushed to warn any remaining residents, but they had already fled with whatever belongings they could snatch up and carry. Volunteers combined efforts to form bucket brigades to put out fires caused by flying embers. They failed to stay the blaze. But other volunteers helped by passing buckets to drench the firemen as they fought on.

Several dynamite charges were set off in the buildings along the corners of Kekaulike and King Streets. Useless: The strong winds carried the flames to the wharves. After 2:30 p.m., every block from Beretania to the harbor was ablaze. By 4:00 p.m., Blocks 3, 4, 5 and 6 were smouldering ruins. Fortunately, the U.S.S. Iroquois and the tug Max were near the wharves and directed streams of water toward the Honolulu Iron Works and structures in that vicinity. Two hundred employees of the iron works set up a bucket brigade from the wharves to the buildings. By these means the iron works and several warehouses along the waterfront were saved.

By 1:30 p.m. the fire began making its way from Beretania Street along Ahi lane toward Kukui Street. People feared that the mauka section of the city would perish. Chinatown refugees rushed back to save belongings, but were driven back
by fire and smoke; they formed a seething mob near the bridge and Kukui Street. Citizens and guards armed themselves with sticks, pick handles, bats, shovels, and similar weapons to beat back the desperate Chinatown residents. This counterforce centered at Kukui Street, but a long line of Honolulans stretched across King Street to prevent any refugees escaping the quarantine district. A strong military guard reinforced this cordon. Nearly every business house closed its doors, and the employees lent their aid. At Nuuanu and King Streets a Japanese committee calmed the mob, and wherever it set its standards (a white flag with the red cross on it, and the Japanese flag), the people rallied. The Chinese consul and vice consul also circulated among the people and tried to pacify them, since at this time the Chinese believed that the Board of Health had purposely burnt their homes.

Thus, through the efforts of concerned citizens, guards, the fire department, and others, not a single life was lost in the Chinatown fire. However, 38 acres—almost all of Chinatown—was burned: Blocks 1-10 were completely destroyed; likewise, nearly the whole of the block lying between King and Merchant, Alakea and Richards Streets. Buildings on lower Nuuanu, above and below Main (King) Street, were burned, together with those on Kekaulike near the waterfront. A row of houses was burned on Kukui Lane, and some detached buildings on upper and lower Liliha Street perished.

This disastrous sanitary fire practically ended the existence of Chinatown, and 4,000 people, most Oriental, were rendered homeless, without food and with little to begin life anew. Even those in the quarantine camps suffered, because when their homes had been sacrificed in earlier sanitary fires, their belongings had been collected, fumigated, and stored in the cellars of Kaumakapili Church, which was destroyed with everything in it. The fire killed Chinese trade and restricted local business in general to very narrow limits.

The whole of the burnt Chinatown was enclosed with a high board fence in order to prevent plague germs from being carried by debris searchers and looters. Until May 17 no buildings could be erected on this land. It was tabooed ground, although King Street was opened through it after very thorough disinfecting.

So it was that the sanitary fire of January 20, which had been lighted to purify the area, did an unexpectedly complete job, cremating as it did nearly every building, with its rats and fleas. After the Chinatown fire, the number of plague cases dropped, but it is interesting to note that 31 later fires were ordered by the Board of Health.

Besides quarantine, building condemnation and sanitary fires, the Board laid other restrictions to curb the plague. Two hundred and fifty inspectors and subinspectors were appointed or volunteered to conduct first daily, then twice-daily, house-to-house inspections. Honolulu was divided into many districts to facilitate the inspection, which was carried out by such men as J.O. Carter, Harold Mott-Smith, W.R. Castle, George Waterhouse, A.V. Gear, P. Lansdale, William King, Frank Waterhouse, A. Atkinson, W.C. Parke, O. Sorensen, S.F. Soper, P. Isenberg, P. Phillips, and C.H. Parker.

After the discovery of a few sick who had been hidden by friends or relatives, both Japanese and Chinese officials appointed on December 28 a corps of inspectors from among the better classes of their countrymen. These were to aid Dr. Pratt in ferreting out cases of illness and in spotting pestholes. To help them in their work, a resolution of December 29 made it a misdemeanor to neglect to give information which would result in sickness being found. It also became a misdemeanor to obstruct a health officer or an agent in the performance of his duty. And in March, the Board of Health offered a reward of $100 to anyone not employed by the Board who would report a genuine plague case.

In addition to these inspectors and the Commission of Three (to investigate...
Chinatown), another group of men was appointed to work with the Board of Health in attempting to restrict the plague. This was the Citizens' Sanitary Committee, organized January 15 with the Board's naming of L.A. Thurston (chairman), A.W. Carter, J.H. Fisher, S.M. Ballou, J.F. Colburn, A. Perry, E.D. Tenney, J.A. McCandless, J.G. Rothwell, and J.R. Galt. Six days later this committee passed a resolution requesting the business firms of Honolulu to open not earlier than 10 a.m. and to close not later than 3 p.m. "...in order to give the fullest opportunity for sanitary inspection" and to enable more clerks to do inspection duty. The committee also pushed forward a rat-catching crusade on February 7, and recommended the rat poison which later achieved notoriety.

Other restrictions were laid on by either this committee or by the Board of Health. One important measure which affected Honolulu even after the danger of plague was past was the series of "laws relating to sanitary conditions of dwelling houses and tenements" issued by Dr. Wood on January 11. These provided that: (1) an owner must keep his housing in good repair and furnish not less than 300 cubic feet of space for each adult occupant; (2) yards and grounds must be well drained and kept free from rubbish, and a privy provided for every six adults; (3) free access to the housing must be given to the Board of Health; and (4) failure to comply with these regulations would result in a fine.

Additional regulations required that all unsanitary cesspools be cleaned or filled up, ordered strict inspection twice a day, and stipulated that people coming from detention camps must carry a "discharge permit" to prevent escapes returning to the quarantine district. The Board of Health also recommended that anything that could not be burned be saturated with sulphuric acid. Carbolic acid, sublimate soap or a five per cent sulphuric acid solution were to be used for the hands. Sulphuric acid was manufactured in large quantities by the Pacific Fertilizer Works, whose retailer was Benson and Smith. The latter simply acted as distributor and did not make any profit.

The Board of Health also made sanitary regulations for the entire Honolulu district, encompassing Kapalama, Maunakea, Kalihi, Wyllie, Manoa, Wailae, Kapahulu, Campbell, Monsarrat, and Diamond Head. These regulations vastly improved the slimy, crowded, and generally unsanitary conditions prevalent in Chinatown before the fire. They ordered that: (1) rain water from roofs must have suitable drains to gutters; (2) air space of 10 feet must be provided between buildings; (3) at least 8 square feet of window area must be provided for each 100 square feet of floor space—with at least one half of the window space being movable for ventilation; (4) air space of at least 20 inches must be provided under buildings. If this was not possible, the floor must be concrete or masonry; (5) if there were any yards, areas or courts between or within buildings where water was used for washing or working, these must be properly graded, cemented, paved and drained; (6) floors must be waterproof, with proper drainage in buildings where water was used; (7) privy vaults and cesspools could not be located within 50 feet of any body of water, within 70 feet of a dwelling or cook-house, or in a place not easily accessible for cleaning; they must also be ventilated; (8) within 30 days after the public sewer system was put into operation, the use of privy vaults and cesspools within the area must be discontinued; (9) all garbage would be carried away free of charge by the Board of Health within the area bounded by School and Alapai Streets, and (10) yard scrapings, tree cuttings, and stable manure would not be removed by the Board of Health garbage collection.

In March these regulations were extended to an area five miles equidistant from the Executive Building. This extension was made because a great number of Chinese and others were hurriedly moving outside the former limits with permits to build and starting their structures without any attention to the sanitary regulations.
Now, however, the Board of Health appointed a sanitary engineer to check each plan for compliance with the rules, if the building was intended for the regulated area. Even those structures still remaining in Chinatown after the fire had to meet strict standards in order to reopen. Several stores on Hotel and Nuuanu Streets had resumed business late in February, but they and their merchandise reeked of the sulphur used in fumigating. Store employees swept out dead flies and cockroaches. The seriousness with which fumigation was regarded was exemplified by a comment of Dr. Ingalls, superintendent of the disinfecting corps: "If we find a single live cockroach in the building after fumigation, we fumigate again."49

Regulations restricted postal service, schools and churches. No aspect of Honolulu life escaped their influence. Immediately after the plague's outbreak was announced in December, government schools were closed. Among them were those in the quarantined district: Normal, Royal, Kaumakapili, Beretania Street, Kakaako, Kawaihao, etc.50 Schools in the quarantined district remained closed until late February; the Citizens' Sanitary Commission said that the reopening of schools would affect the efficiency of their inspection. On February 22, the Board of Health voted that the sanitary situation justified the reopening of such government schools as the Department of Public Instruction might specify. Honolulu Normal School and the High School were the first designated. Schools outside the district had begun again on February 8.51

Churches were also closed, but saloons were allowed to operate, a fact which inspired much bitter comment. Churches were permitted to resume public meetings in February.52

The postal service and public conveyances came under regulation. All street cars, buses, and other common carriers had to be thoroughly washed and disinfected daily, and had to be swept out and dusted at the end of each trip. At one time the tram cars did not meet sanitary standards and were temporarily suspended, but in a few days they were allowed to make their regular runs again.53 Post offices continued to function, but every piece of mail had to be fumigated at least twice. New hours were set: Postmaster General Cat announced that during the continuance of the epidemic train mails would close at 11 a.m. daily in order to take the 3:15 p.m. trains. Over-Pali mail would close at 4 p.m. in order to go out early next morning.54

Mail to outer islands was fumigated, as were freight and baggage. And on December 14 it was decreed that no steamer would be allowed to leave Honolulu for any other Hawaiian port without first undergoing a seven-day quarantine. No Chinese or Japanese freight of any description could be shipped, nor were any Chinese or Japanese passengers permitted. Freight was to be loaded and discharged only by lighter. Two weeks later goods received from the Orient were subjected to sulphur smoke in a specially-constructed building erected by the dock. This had been built by a steamship company to facilitate fumigation of Oriental freight.55 All such had to be properly fumigated before it could be moved from the wharf. As of January 2, under orders from the Board of Health, no steamer could land or discharge cargo alongside the wharf; everything had to be lightered to and from vessels. It is probable that some goods became slightly more expensive in Honolulu and elsewhere because of an added charge for lighterage.56

On January 9 the Board of Health decided that certain articles should be considered clean freight when destined for Island ports, subject to previous orders. These included lumber and building materials, American tobacco, gas, and kerosene. A rule instituted on February 27 prohibited the importation of certain foodstuffs from Asiatic ports. Included were substances dried or salted in manufacture and thus not subjected to heat. The following were prohibited as being incapable of
disinfection: cuttlefish, other dried fish, lily flower, oranges, dates, lichees, nuts, fungus, pork, duck, dried meats and vegetables, cabbage, sausage, olives, birds' nests, eggs, miso, seaweed and mushrooms.57

Strict rules bound passengers and baggage. In December, travelers on the Australia left cheerless because no extra baggage was permitted. No leis, flower wreaths, or Island passengers were permitted aboard. Then in March, the Board of Health restricted passengers for inter-Island ports. By this ruling all the baggage of such passengers had to be left at the Board of Health office for disinfection 24 hours before the sailing. A fee of $1.00 was charged. Passengers had to undergo the treat of an antiseptic bath and to don fumigated clothing before boarding. This service cost 50 cents.58

Oriental laborers desiring to go to other islands for plantation work had to submit to even stricter measures. First they went into quarantine at the Kalihi detention camp. They then had to practice all the usual rituals concerning disinfection of clothing, etc., for 15 days. After the quarantine, they rode from the camp to waiting vessels in one car.59

Many of the restrictions, such as the ones just mentioned, were placed exclusively on Orientals or were framed with the Asiatic in mind. This resulted, generally, from associating the Chinese and Japanese with slums and squalor—as revealed in Chinatown—and from the belief that the filthy environment of the Oriental was a breeding ground for plague germs. Many cases of plague originated in Chinatown, and the restrictions thus gained a logical support. Whether necessary or not, the regulations certainly displayed the Board of Health's power during the epidemic. The President, acting with his Board, instituted such measures as were deemed necessary. President S.B. Dole of the Republic of Hawaii was often not consulted, since the power to deal with the plague had been put in Wood's hands. Although the restrictions were numerous and binding, they apparently served their purpose; the epidemic was abated in four and a half months, and many of the regulations instituted were carried over or discussed and at times applied to the reconstruction of Chinatown.

How did Hawaii's people respond to the presence of the plague and to the Board of Health's measures? Reactions were mixed: some were terrified, some were indifferent except as they were affected personally, and some showed social responsibility to the point of volunteering their services. Throughout the epidemic this latter group donated much time and effort to relief designed to supplement government activities.

As merchants suffered and shipping lay idle at the wharves, several businessmen closed their offices and took charge at the detention camps, where thousands of refugees were quarantined. The extensive nature of the camps showed the vigor with which the Caucasian community fought the pestilence. Several people worked day and night, looking after the health guard and bringing people from plague-ridden houses to camps. Concerned citizens who did not work directly for or under the Board of Health did what they could to help. For example, the business firms complied with the Board's request concerning opening and closing hours. After some time, about 40 business houses considered it well to revert to the regular 5 p.m. closing; however, as they wanted to aid the Sanitary Committee in its work, they agreed to let all employees who were acting or sub-inspectors end the day at 3 p.m.60

Indeed, offers of assistance poured into the Board of Health. The plague fight was a community action, and people were willing to sacrifice time, energy and wealth. A committee of Honolulu wholesale merchants offered to receive and fumigate at their own expense merchandise taken from the condemned blocks.61 When health officers were looking for a site for a fumigating station within the limits of the quarantine district in December, they were offered the Boys' Bugside Clubhouse
in Kaumakapili Church. Many stalwart citizens pledged their services: Armstrong Smith volunteered to head the pest hospital; Dr. Hoffman, a bacteriologist for the Board of Health, was medical superintendent of the same institution; Judge A.W. Carter was in charge of placing guards about infected houses and removing the tenants to the quarantine camps; L.A. Thurston supervised the construction of several such camps.

Although many offered help, others held back, fearing that they would contract the plague. These people were ridiculed in print. An anecdote ran thus: "Martin's tailor shop was an accepted clearing house of town gossip, so that one of the men hired a native to enter the store, throw himself down on the floor and groan. The moment the thing happened, every man in the place grabbed his hat and coat and ran, spreading the rumor of another case of the black scourge." And Allen Dunn related the story of a man pushed out of the house because his wife feared that he would transmit germs to the baby. As a result of his wife's hyper-cleanliness and her decree that there be no cold meats, no uncooked food, and no fruit, he was so reduced and became so pale that he seemed a cadaver reeking of sulphur.

Just as there were people such as this, so there were tireless volunteers, camp administrators, doctors, and inspectors, all representative of the community's determination to rid itself of the plague. Thus citizens helped when the quarantine emergency camps were established for the 4,000 refugees from the Chinatown fire. The population eventually increased to 5,500 at one camp alone. Relief measures were instituted—delicacies were prepared for the sick, clothes and food were donated. These activities began the day the Chinatown refugees were ushered to their emergency quarters: Kawaiahao Church Camp, the Drill Shed Camp mauka of the Executive Building grounds, the Kaliihi Camp, and the Empress Dowager grounds. The Japanese, numbering 1,000, occupied the Drill Shed Camp, which in two days was expanded to comfortably accommodate all of them. There were 1,200 at the Kaliihi Detention Camp, where there were two hospitals. Approximately 400 Hawaiians were brought to the Dowager Queen's premises. There the ladies of the Hawaiian Relief Society provided food (largely poi) for the refugees, and the Metropolitan Meat Market supplied the meat. Prince Cupid himself personally attended to the wants of 100 Hawaiians who were located on his property and ordered two barrels of poi and some blankets. Those at Kawaiahao were also well provided; every one of them had all that he could eat. There were actually too many donations of bread, because as soon as the community learned that there were thousands of homeless Chinese and Japanese at Kawaiahao Church, transfer trucks and carriages arrived in great numbers, bringing food, tents, utensils, blankets, and mattresses.

Citizens spontaneously offered supplies of all kinds; merchants liberally gave food, clothes, cash, and the use of vehicles to convey goods. On Sunday, the day after the fire, the women of Central Union Church organized relief work and committees and assisted the public authorities in the work of meeting the needs of destitute refugees and a number of Nuuanu Valley ladies started a sewing bee to make women's and children's clothing for the homeless. They eventually produced 350 articles.

These were not the only ones who gave aid to the unfortunate. The Japanese had three societies working in their behalf (a fourth appeared at the time of discussion of fire claims). The Japanese Benevolent Society of Hawaii had been organized in 1898 for the primary purpose of undertaking "...the relief of those Japanese who are overtaken by unforeseen mishaps or those who are not able to provide medical care for themselves at their own expense." After the fire, it helped Japanese in the camps at Kaliihi and Kakaako with donations of enough rice to satisfy all. A second group was the Japanese Ladies' Relief Society, a temporary society organized when
the plague first broke out, following the decision of the authorities to burn infected districts in Chinatown and to send the refugees into quarantine. It was able to provide clothing and other necessary articles to hundreds of Japanese who lost everything in the fire. After those in the detention camps were released, the society was disbanded and the balance of its funds given to the Japanese Benevolent Society, which was doing general relief work. The Japanese Medical Society was the third organization. It provided the daily necessities and took care of the sick. The Society also cooperated with government in coping with the emergency.

Nor were the Chinese abandoned; there was the Chinese Society (or the Chinese Relief Society). A committee of ten was appointed to solicit money for the care of the poorer class of Chinese who had suffered in the fire and who were unable to get a new start because they lacked funds. This society also had some 1,000 wards—men, women and children who got supplies of rice twice a week. In addition, shelter was provided in the Kalihi Detention Camp for those without homes. The Society was able to raise approximately $8,000 in one week; this sum went into a special charity fund to provide food for victims of the fire who had been released from detention camps. This was to be provided until the recipients again became self-supporting.

Another group which provided important aid during the plague was the Hawaiian Relief Society, which ordinarily cared for indigent natives. However, from the early days of the epidemic, it looked after sufferers in quarantine. On the night of the Chinatown fire, it fed 50 people at Relief Camp 1 and furnished them clothing and blankets. This service continued until the following Thursday. After that, the Society had visiting committees constantly in the field and tried to help those poor and homeless who had come from quarantine. This organization also helped people within the quarantine district. Hawaiians thus cut off soon faced famine because they lived more or less hand to mouth and quickly exhausted their small food stores. Nor could they go fishing. When the HRS heard of their plight, it brought fish and poi. Altogether, the Society distributed 12,000 pounds of poi and several hundred pounds of salmon. Chinese and Japanese were also fed.

Japanese women also benefited from another assistance group. A committee representing a number of Honolulu women operated a rescue home for "fallen" Japanese females about to be released from quarantine and who expressed a desire to lead more conventional lives.

Anyone incarcerated in a detention camp had to come out when his quarantine period had ended. Camps were crowded to capacity; while there, refugees were well fed and provided for. Kalihi Camp, with 5,500 inmates, was an example. Each day the master of the household got a supply of food, including meat, vegetables, bread or crackers, tea, and sugar. The ration was ample, and there were no complaints. The Japanese and Chinese also received their national provender in addition to the regular supplies, while the Hawaiians got fish and poi. Little wonder, then, that the camps were popular. At the Drill Shed Camp for Japanese, the problem of overpopulation was handled by providing money to the Japanese who had been quarantined for a relatively long period. These refugees were given shelter by their friends. Those without funds were allowed to remain in camp until they found other accommodations. Often this was hard, and many released from camp had no housing, food or work. Moreover, although the Board of Health recognized its responsibility for looking after these people who had been made homeless by the Board's act, it did not feel obliged to support them for an indefinite period.

Therefore, in an attempt to supply the homeless with labor as soon as possible, a relief committee or labor bureau composed of J.P. Cooke and Theodore Richards was formed. As soon as a man without a home or visible means entered the camp, his
abilities were tabulated and possible jobs were discussed. The special work of the committee was "...to provide homes and food for homeless and penniless people discharged from detention camps until such time as employment could be secured for them, either on plantations or in the city or surrounding districts." In the beginning the committee was fairly successful, but in March and April they had trouble finding employment because many of the white community had the misconception that these people from the quarantine camps were still infected with germs. However, all told, the committee was fairly effective.

As evidenced by the relief societies, the volunteer workers, and the job committee, the attitude of the community was one of united support. At this time of many deaths, there was a greater degree of compassion for the common man; prominent citizens served with unknowns to rid Chinatown of the plague. It is possible that this was motivated by selfish interest, such as the state of business and trade. However, the will to survive brought together Orientals, Caucasians and Hawaiians in a common effort against the enemy.

As noted above, a chief effect of the black death was the uniting of individual concerns, if only for a short period. Other important consequences were: (1) realization of the need for a good sewer system. Therefore, $345,253.24 were appropriated for its construction and extension. With sewers installed, there were no privy-vaults or cesspools in downtown Honolulu; (2) desire for a better and more efficient water supply; it had given out during the Chinatown fire, and many did not trust the purity of the water. These demanded a filtering of the supply from Nuuanu Valley. This was done, and a new pump installed on Beretania Street; (3) appointment of a city sanitary engineer to inspect buildings in process of construction and to pass on applications for permits to build; (4) construction of a garbage crematory (money was appropriated in 1900 for this object); (5) adoption in Chinatown of the sanitary regulations passed by the Board of Health. Chinatown had been razed by the fire; in rebuilding it, the mistakes of the past could be avoided. New buildings had to comply with Board of Health rules; (6) improvement of the downtown area through destruction of unsightly and unsanitary old buildings; (7) spread of Chinese and Japanese settlement to the outskirts of Honolulu, such as near Moiliili and McCully, because no new houses could be built in Chinatown until May 17, when the soil was pronounced clear of plague bacilli. The Orientals needed housing, and they could not wait; (8) emphasis on the need for alleyways in Chinatown to cut the blocks and thus make throughways; (9) most important, general awareness of sanitary conditions in Honolulu, with resulting improvement in plumbing, water supply, sewers, regular garbage pickup on all parts of the island, and not only in the School-Liliha area.

During those bitter months of 1899–1900 Honolulu had suffered much. But it had also learned much, and these lessons were applied to create a new and better city.

NOTES

4. Ibid., p. 7.
5. BH, December 13, 1899, p. 106.
8. BH, December 25, 1899, pp. 116-117.
11. Ibid., pp. 15-16.
12. Ibid., p. 16.
13. Hawaiian Gazette, May 1, 1900, p. 1. Cited hereafter as HG.
Old timers can play an active and important role in the recording of local history. Their reminiscences often provide valuable insights and interpretations bearing on past events, personalities, locations, etc. Do you know such an old timer? If so, can you persuade him to make his stock of information and experience available to succeeding generations? A tip: He doesn't necessarily have to spend laborious hours writing. A portable tape recorder permits him to spin his yarns in the relaxation of an armchair.
HAWAII'S FIRST PHONOGRAPHS

by

Robert C. Schmitt

Phonographs and phonograph records came early to Hawaii. Islanders had their first opportunity to hear the phonograph less than two years after its invention.

The phonograph was developed in 1877. On April 18 of that year, Charles Cros wrote a paper describing the process of recording and reproducing sound. Edison invented and built the cylindrical tin-foil phonograph several months later—officially on August 12, but probably in November and December.¹

This marvel was announced to Honolulu in an item in the Pacific Commercial Advertiser on February 1, 1879:

THE PHONOGRAPH. - Our community is promised a novel treat quite shortly. We learn that a gentleman recently arrived from San Francisco, en route for New Zealand, has in his possession one of the famed Edison Phonographs, or Talking Machines, besides the 'Singing Telephone,' with which a public exhibition will be given after due notice. Mr. Kohler, the gentleman in question, will, by Royal permission, first exhibit his novel apparatus before the Court at Iolani Palace.

Kohler's performances included a benefit at the Hawaiian Theatre, on February 22, when he was "assisted, as volunteers, by Messrs. H.H. Williams, A. Wilson Snow, Jas. Luproil, the Hawaiian Minstrels, and Mr. Berger on the piano."²

The phonograph next became newsworthy early in 1891, when King Kalakaua spoke for ten minutes into an Edison phonograph placed next to his death bed in San Francisco.³ W.H. Aldrich brought the wax cylinder to Hawaii. Translated from the Hawaiian, His Majesty's words were:

We greet each other - We greet each other. I learn that you are to go with me to my country; to Honolulu. There you will tell my people that which I say to you here!⁴

This "little waxen scroll" still reposes in the Bishop Museum, but is no longer audible.⁵

Public exhibitions of the phonograph continued to be given. On February 20, 1891, Honolulu residents had "...the opportunity of listening to the registered vocalizations of the Phonograph at the Hotel, recently received per Gaelic from San Francisco, en route for Japan and China."⁶ A year later a Mr. Stoeckle presented a phonograph concert of "...speeches, vocal and instrumental music, etc., etc..." in the YMCA Hall and on the Neighbor Islands. In 1893 he returned for a repeat exhibition.⁷ As late as 1903 news stories could report "a megaphone with Chinese records" as one of the features in a ten-cent "...aggregation of entertainment on King Street that exerts an exceedingly strong pull with the masses."⁸

Meanwhile, the phonograph was entering the home. The "first commercial gramophones and gramophone records" were manufactured in 1889 by a toy factory in Germany. Five years later the American Graphophone Co. introduced the "first spring-driven talking machines suitable for home entertainment." The Victor Talking Machine Co. was incorporated in 1901, and soon became the giant of the industry.⁹

The earliest advertisements for home phonographs appeared in Honolulu newspapers in December, 1898. Wall, Nichols Co. included both Graphophones and Gramophones in its list of "Holiday Gifts at Santa Claus Emporium."¹⁰ Competition was offered by the Hawaiian News Co., Ltd., which advertised the "Symphonion Music

Almost a decade passed before Hawaiian music began appearing on records in significant quantity. In 1911, Honolulu Music Co. could advertise "New Hawaiian songs on double disc records."15 Several years later a wide range of Island artists and songs were represented in the catalogues of major companies. Examples included Henry N. Clark's version of "Old Plantation" and the Ka'i Glee Club's "Pu' u O Hulul," both on Columbia Y37; Toots Paka's "Aloha Oe" on Columbia A1616; "Mahina Malama-lama" with Pete Kalani and Kalei on Columbia A2457; the Johnny Noble-Sam Alama recording of "Ama Ama" and "I Went to Hilo" on Brunswick 55044; two numbers from Bird of Paradise: "Mauna Kea" (by S.N. Kaiawe) and "Waialae" (by an unnamed quintet) on Victor 18574; and many, many others.16

More years were to pass before the advent of electrical recording (1925), the long-play microgroove record (1948), stereo discs (1958) and tape.17 Even so, the phonograph had already established itself as a major entertainment and musical resource in Hawaii.

NOTES

2 Pacific Commercial Advertiser, February 15, 1879, p. 3; February 22, 1879, p. 2. Cited hereafter as PCA.
3 PCA, February 6, 1891, p. 2.
4 PCA, February 20, 1891, p. 3.
6 The Friend, March, 1891, p. 22.
7 PCA, February 18, 1893, p. 5.
8 Paradise of the Pacific, October, 1903, p. 20.
9 Gelatt, pp. 322-323.
10 PCA, December 12, 1898, p. 9.
11 PCA, December 16, 1898, p. 6.
12 PCA, December 6, 1899, p. 10.
13 Paradise of the Pacific, March, 1900, p. 15.
16 The records listed are all in the collection of Rose C. Stranbel. 
17 Gelatt, op. cit., pp. 325-326.

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