

BINA NIEPER MOSSMAN

THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Bina Nieper Mossman

(1893 -)

Bina Mossman is best known for her musical and political careers in Hawaii.

In 1914 she organized Bina Mossman's Glee Club and entertained at important social functions for thirty years, discontinuing the group in 1944 because she was involved in politics.

She was elected as the first woman Representative from the 5th District on Oahu in 1938 and was re-elected in 1942 and 1944. She served as Territorial High Sheriff from 1953 to 1957; and as Republican National Committeewoman from 1940 to 1957.

In this interview, Mrs. Mossman recalls her personal history and political experiences.

Katherine B. Allen, Interviewer

© 1979 The Watumull Foundation, Oral History Project
2051 Young Street, Honolulu, Hawaii 96826

All rights reserved. This transcript, or any part thereof, may not be reproduced in any form without the permission of the Watumull Foundation.

BINA N. MOSSMAN

Professional - Bina Mossman

Date of birth: January 7, 1893
Place of birth: Honolulu, Hawaii

Parents: Susan Titcomb Nieper
John Theodore Nieper

Husband: Richard N. Mossman

Children:

Richard N. Mossman, Jr.
Ynez Mossman Whittle (Mrs. Edward Whittle)
Mapuana Mossman Healy (Mrs. William Healy)
Sterling Kilohana Mossman

Education:

St. Andrew's Priory - one year
Sacred Hearts Academy - three years
Central Grammar
McKinley High - Graduated 1911
Phillips Commercial School - 1912

MUSICAL CAREER

My first real interest in music was at age ten at the Central Grammar School (Princess Ruth's old home) and at McKinley High School.

At age thirteen, when I was in the eighth grade, I led the assembly of the sixth, seventh and eighth grades. Even earlier, when I was in the sixth grade, a school operetta was planned and a blond girl was sought for the main role of "Rose Queen". But, none of the blond girls could sing and I was given the part. We performed at the old Opera House and it was very successful.

I organized Bina Mossman's Glee Club in 1914, and for thirty years until 1944, we sang for the elite of the town. We sang for parties, wedding receptions, concerts at the Honolulu Academy of Arts and other functions.

The Bina Mossman Glee Club entertained at Washington

Place during the term of Governor Wallace R. Farrington. We also entertained for Governor Lawrence M. Judd on several occasions. Governor Joseph B. Poindexter asked me to handle the entertainment for President Franklin D. Roosevelt when he visited here in 1934. He wanted my group and the Kawaihāo Choir and also a pageant by the Daughters and Sons of Hawaiian Warriors.

We also entertained at parties given by Princess David Kawanākoa, Prince and Princess Jonah Kuhio Kalanianaʻole, Mr. & Mrs. Walter F. Dillingham, Mr. and Mrs. Harold Dillingham, Mr. and Mrs. Clarence H. Cooke, Mrs. C. M. Cooke (Mother Cooke), Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Cooke and many others.

For seventeen years we had a program on KGU with Charles E. King as narrator. I was in the music field for seventeen years before other commercial choral groups were formed.

We held many of our early rehearsals at Washington Place, Queen Liliuokalani's home on Beretania Street, which became the Governor's Mansion sometime after her death. The Queen helped us with the correct enunciation of Hawaiian words. When she died we were chosen to stand around her bier, waving kahilis and singing her own compositions.

As a little boy of four, my son Sterling sometimes joined us, because even at that early age he liked to sing and could carry a tune. One of his favorite songs was "Does Your Mother Know You're Out Cecilia?" On one of our radio programs he sang "A Million Dollar Baby."

We then discontinued the Bina Mossman Glee Club because I was involved with political activities.

In February of 1952 I organized the Kaahumanu Choral Group and was director until I retired in September 1968. By 1952 the tourist industry was growing and there was a demand for Hawaiian music in the hotels. We staged many beautiful shows at the Royal Hawaiian, Halekulani, Hawaiian Village, Queen's Surf, Moana Surfrider, Princess Kaiulani, McKinley High School Auditorium and on the outer islands as well as on the mainland.

The Kaahumanu Choral Group made the following concert tours: West Coast 1960, Northwest, including the Seattle Fair, 1962; and to San Francisco, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Chicago and the New York World's Fair in 1964.

We also made a "holoholo" trip to the Orient in 1966, primarily for sightseeing, but with some informal singing. We visited Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Manila and Hong Kong.

I was chairman of the first and second Holoku Balls, held at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel when Lang Akana was president of the Hawaiian Civic Club of Honolulu.

I have written a number of songs, many of which have been recorded by Bina Mossman's Glee Club and other groups. Among them are:

NIU HAOHAO
HE ONO
KA PUA UI
MAPUANA KUUALOHA
KUULEI
STEVEDORE HULA
LAE LAE

and many more not recorded. I have had forty-six years in singing with organized groups.

ORGANIZATIONS

Hawaiian Civic Club of Honolulu, secretary for several years.
Kaahumanu Society
Daughters of Hawaii
Hui Poni Moi
Republican Women's Club (president - three years)

POLITICAL CAREER

Even as a young girl and before women had the vote, I was interested in politics. My first experience in campaigning was for Prince Kuhio as Delegate to Congress. Later, in the 1920's, my husband served one term in the territorial legislature, but did not continue because of ill health.

Hawaiian entertainment was an important part of the open-air campaign rallies, and I sang at Republican rallies for many years. I wrote a special campaign song for my husband which I sang at the rallies before he spoke and we sang together Sonny Cunha's "Hapa Haole Hula Girl," which was very popular.

I was secretary to the executive secretary of the Hawaiian Homes Commission from 1922 to 1925 and secretary to the executive secretary of the Territorial Employees' Retirement System from 1925 to 1934.

I served as journal clerk of the Territorial House of Representatives in 1925 and 1949; engrossing clerk in 1935, 1951 and 1953, and as clerk-stenographer of the Hold-Over Committee in 1949.

I was approached by various people to run for office in 1938 and was elected the first woman Representative from the 5th District (all of Oahu ewa of Nuuanu Street). In 1942 and 1944 I was re-elected.

In the 1939 Session, I was a member of the Public Education, Rules, and Social Service and General Welfare Committees.

In the 1943 Session, I was chairman of the Municipal, County and Civil Service Committee and a member of the Public Improvements Committee.

In 1945 I was a member of the Public Education, Public Institutions, and Social Service and General Welfare Committees.

From 1953 to 1957 I served as Territorial High Sheriff.

I was elected Republican National Committeewoman in 1940 and served until 1957.

/signed/ Bina Mossman

INTERVIEW WITH BINA NIEPER MOSSMAN

(MRS. RICHARD NORMAN MOSSMAN)

In her Makua Alii apartment #709, 1541 Kalakaua Avenue, 96826
September 29, 1971

M: Bina Nieper Mossman

A: Kathy Allen, Interviewer

M: Bina Nieper Mossman, born in Honolulu, Hawaii, January 7, 1893.

A: If you would, Mrs. Mossman, I'd like you to tell a little bit about your own family, the Nieper family.

M: Well, I never saw them. They're all from Germany. My father's family all were in Germany. I don't know who they all are. My father came here at age twelve.

A: What was his occupation? What kind of work did he do?

M: Well, he first worked on the plantation in Kekaha, Kauai and then worked right through to sugar boiler. When he was through, he thought he'd go into the express business and it was called the Nieper's Express. He had charge of all the baggage, incoming and outgoing; passengers for schools and permanent people of the Islands. One of the first [express companies], I believe. And he continued with his express business until his death. I don't know what year but he was in his seventies when he died.

My mother was born Susan Titcomb and married John [Theodore] Nieper. She was born in Kilauea, Kauai [exactly opposite Kekaha: northeast and northwest, respectively.] My mother had one child in Kekaha, Kauai--my oldest brother, Carl H. Nieper. Another son she had was born in Eleele, Kauai--George Nieper. Then the rest of us were born here [in Honolulu]. I had another brother whose name was Julius Lawrence Nieper who died at age twelve. Then myself. And then, my youngest brother, John Kamealoha Nieper. He was a very good musician. I haven't heard yet a falsetto voice like he had. He died early too. Four boys

in my mother's family and I'm the only girl.

A: Where did you live, as a little girl, in Honolulu?

M: Up in Palama. My father had several acres of land here because he had to let his horses run in the pasture, you see. And his stable with all the horses and harnesses and feed for the animals. And our home was right there.

When my mother died at age forty-six, my husband and I bought a place in Kalihi, at the corner of Nakuina and Beckley streets. There we lived for many years.

A: How did you and your husband meet?

M: We met because my husband's sister, Charlotte Mossman, was married to Don A. Sheldon and, of course, lived with my aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. William J. Sheldon. And he lived there too with his sister at my aunt's home and I used to go down there quite a bit, see, in Auld Lane. That's where they lived. And of course my uncle, he loves to sing, so we both sang. And then he, my husband, was going out. He was not my husband at that time but just a young man going out calling, I guess. And I sang the song: "I love you, I love you, I love you. You are the ideal of my heart" or something like that, you know. I've forgotten the song. Well, he came back and stayed a little while, then he left. And from that time on, we met. (She laughs heartily) It was a popular song at that time that I don't quite remember.

A: So your musical career has entered into every aspect of your life. What was your husband's occupation?

M: His first occupation was a dock clerk for Matson Navigation and then he worked for the railroad--for the Dillinghams--as a timekeeper. During politics, Mayor [George Fred] Wright [1/2/31 - 7/2/38] took him in as a complaint clerk and the different girls used to call him up and tell him they lost their false teeth--you know, joking with him in that manner. He worked there until he became ill--he had a heart condition--and he died early. He died at age forty-eight.

A: Would that have been before or after you entered politics?

M: He was still alive when I ran for office. He died in 1940 and I was elected [Territorial Representative] in 1938 and re-elected twice after that.

A: What do you consider your greatest achievement as a representative, especially a [first] woman representative?

- M: Well, I've forgotten the things that I proposed. I just remember my committees, that's all. I do remember one thing, though. We talked about a wall or a fence around the Kalihi-waena Fernandez Park [now Kalihi-waena Playground], so we got that up to make it safer for children. They were always running out in the streets. And many other things that I co-sponsored with other people. I wouldn't call that my greatest achievement, there were so many other things--I don't know what they all are. I don't have a book on it or anything. Never kept a record.
- A: What would you consider your greatest achievement in the musical field?
- M: Well, many. They're all great as far as I'm concerned.
- A: You have been on many tours and so has your son, Sterling. Do any of these musical tours stand out in your mind for any particular reason?
- M: Everywhere we went it was lovely. I can't say one was better than the other. And we were told, when we were in Europe, that we were the only female group composed of mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers and I was really proud of my group--the Kaahumanu Choral Group--because they sang well. We rehearsed twice a week to perfect the songs, to perfect the dancing and everything.
- A: Who were some of the women in your group?
- M: We had thirty of them. I can't name them all. Too many.
- A: Did you have any soloists?
- M: Yes. She's dead: Sarah Apana. And another soloist we had was Emily Kaaina. I think she's on the Mainland somewhere.
- A: I notice that you had started your own glee club in 1914 and that you mention something about Queen Liliuokalani working with you. What are your remembrances of her?
- M: Well, she was a very fine woman and a very intelligent woman and a very wonderful composer. We just went there [to Washington Place] for several rehearsals, that's all, and if we didn't pronounce our Hawaiian correctly, she would send Mrs. Rose Tribe, who was her companion at the time, to tell us because Rose was singing with me in my glee club. She would tell us the right pronunciation. Rose is deceased also.

A: As a young girl, you had quite a responsibility even in the eighth grade, leading the assembly of the sixth, seventh and eighth grades. Is there anything about that that you can remember?

M: Well, I led the group at Central Grammar for the morning assembly in school songs, not any Hawaiian songs. There were two sections of each grade--a large group. They all were given books of school songs and practiced from them. The teacher of each class taught them how to sing and this was just a get-together.

Earlier, I went to St. Andrew's Priory for one year and to the Sacred Hearts Convent for three years, then went to the fifth grade at Central Grammar at age 10.

A: Do you have any memories of your childhood; what it was like in those days; any experiences with your parents, your family, that you remember especially?

M: My mother herself was a great composer, mostly chants. I don't remember them, only one song that's recorded. It's called "Lae Lae." (She sings the first line) She had others but I was too young then to realize what they were, besides the chants.

A: The chants were telling stories of your own family or the history. . .?

M: Telling stories about me or some of the other children, something like that. Mostly about me because I was the only girl, I guess.

A: What do you remember about your mother, other than that she was a composer?

M: Well, I knew she was my mother, that's all. What else can I say about it?

A: I mean, how did she look or what was she like?

M: Oh, she was a beautiful Hawaiian woman--three-quarters Hawaiian, one-quarter English. You don't have to put that in there.

A: Well, it's of interest to people to know, you know. Do you remember what your grandfather's name was: her father?

M: Her father? Jules Titcomb. Her mother? I don't know. Of course he was living when I was a young girl but she had died and his last wife was Sophie Houghtailing. She was the last wife. I think he married three times. That one, I knew.

A: What do you remember about your grandfather?

M: Nothing. Nothing. Just, he was an invalid and stayed with my mother. They stayed and then they moved to their own cottage after.

A: Is there anything about your father that you remember especially?

M: Well, as I said, my father started up an express business and that's what he did. I don't know of anything greater that he did or anything. He just continued in that capacity until he died.

A: I just mean what kind of a person was your father?

M: He was a kind person, very nice.

A: You don't mince words, do you? You have four children. Do they have children?

M: The oldest is Richard Norman Mossman, Jr. He has three children.

1. R. N. (Dutch) Mossman, III--we call him "Dutch"--married to Jonnita (Midge) Thompson and they have two children:

Parker (Duke) Kalaionamoku Mossman
Conrad Kalahoochie Mossman

2. Boyd Moki Mossman married Maile Malie and they have two:

Shalainani
Kealii Kalahui

3. Bina Mapuana Mossman married Michael Chun and they have one:

Maureen Kailipaina Chun

Next is Ynez Mossman (Mrs. Edward Whittle). She has one child:

1. Mrs. William Cole (Rowena Ipo Whittle). They live in Oregon.

Tara Kaipolanimanu Cole - one year old in December 1971.

Mapuana Mossman (Mrs. William K. Healy) has no children. Lives in Fresno, California.

The youngest is Edwin Sterling Kilohana Mossman. Married Virginia Frances Enos on May 15, 1943. They have two children:

1. Sterling James (Kimo) Mossman
2. Allan Kekulalani (Kula) Mossman

A: Do you have a Hawaiian name?

- M: Kailipaina. The little Chun girl is named after me.
- A: Your mother's father, Jules Titcomb, came here from where?
- M: From Kauai. Born on Kauai somewhere but I don't know where. My mother was born in Kilauea, Kauai.
- A: How did his father happen to come to Hawaii?
- M: I don't know.
- A: Do you have a favorite song?
- M: No, they're all my favorites.
- A: What about Hawaii before World War II--what do you think was the best thing about Hawaii before the war?
- M: It was the best then. Not so overcrowded like we are now. There're too many people here, too many cars, too many everything.
- A: Where were you on December 7, 1941?
- M: At my home in Kalihi.
- A: Do you remember that day? What was your reaction?
- M: December 7th? Yes. We were evacuated to Palolo, to my daughter's home. High up, you know. My daughter begged me to go up there with her, see, so I went.
- A: Do you remember when annexation occurred? You were about six years old. Do you remember that?
- M: No, I don't remember. Only from reading, that's all.
- A: Do you remember anything about the political rallies?
- M: No, only that we sang for political rallies. I have it in my Musical Career [section of biographical data].
- A: Do you have any one outstanding memory?
- M: No, I don't. Sometimes, you know, I meditate in bed and then I get it. If I get it, I can call you, but otherwise I couldn't do it at random. That's how I wrote this thing out; had to think.
- A: This apartment building in which you live is called Makua Alii and this is a fairly recent building, isn't it? How

long have you been living here?

M: Yes, it is. Since 1968. January 1968.

A: Now I notice that you have about the best view of Diamond Head.

M: Yes, for now. They're probably going to put some more units down here somewhere and take down all these family units they have down there (clustered around a circular driveway behind the Makua Alii and beyond toward Waikiki). They are duplex sort of apartments down here for families. See, over here they don't have children. Children are not allowed. They can come and visit, maybe stay over the weekend, but not to stay here permanently. [It's for senior citizens, mostly]

A: How do you account for your interest in politics as a young girl and before women had the vote?

M: Well, I used to love to go out there because there were a lot of people around there, you know, handing out cards for different candidates and I was passing Prince Kuhio Kalaniana'ole's cards around.

A: So you helped in campaigns even as a child and got sort of a feel for politics, apparently, because you then went on to become the first woman representative from the Fifth District.

M: Those days they had Fourth and Fifth District. They didn't have all these little sections like they do now.

A: This is because of population growth, I guess.

M: Yes.

A: How did you like being a representative?

M: Oh, I loved it.

A: Is there anything else that comes to mind?

M: No.

A: Do you have any hobbies? Would you say that music is . . . ?

M: Music is my hobby. Used to be music and politics. But now it's only music.

- A: Have you ever made a Hawaiian quilt?
- M: Quilt? Oh yes, I've sewn many of them. I think about seven or eight. Gave them to my children. But I don't do it anymore.
- A: What do you like best about Hawaii?
- M: Well, because for one thing, it's my home. And I love the surroundings; I love the people.
- A: Well, I don't want to take up any more of your time (She had said that she would have to leave at 11:45 a.m.). Do you have any last words?
- M: I hope this will be the last interview.
- A: You're tired of being interviewed. Have you been interviewed a lot in your lifetime?
- M: Well, enough. Who's Who in the West; Men and Women of Hawaii; Who's Who in Hawaiian Entertainment; and now this one. Pau. I think that's enough. There's nothing more I can give.

ENDS AT 35 ON SIDE 2/TOTAL: 30 MINUTES

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed and edited by Katherine B. Allen

Subject Index

Biodata prepared by Interviewee

- 1 - 3 Family and education
 Musical career: 1914-68
 Bina Mossman's Glee Club
 KGU radio program; Charles E. King
 Kaahumanu Choral Group
 Bina Mossman's compositions
 Organizations: membership
- 3 - 4 Political career: 1938-57

Interview data

- 1 - 2 Family history; Nieper's Express
 Richard N. Mossman; employment
- 3 - 4 Political and musical careers
- 4 - 6 Family history; genealogy
- 6 - 8 World War II; Makua Alii-Kalakaua
 Political rallies and districts

THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

In May 1971, the Watumull Foundation initiated an Oral History Project.

The project was formally begun on June 24, 1971 when Katherine B. Allen was selected to interview kamaainas and longtime residents of Hawaii in order to preserve their experiences and knowledge. In July, Lynda Mair joined the staff as an interviewer.

During the next seventeen months, eighty-eight persons were interviewed. Most of these taped oral histories were transcribed by November 30, 1972.

Then the project was suspended indefinitely due to the retirement of the foundation's chairman, Ellen Jensen Watumull.

In February 1979, the project was reactivated and Miss Allen was recalled as director and editor.

Three sets of the final transcripts, typed on acid-free Permalife Bond paper, have been deposited respectively in the Archives of Hawaii, the Hamilton Library at the University of Hawaii, and the Cooke Library at Punahou School.