

HENRY INN

THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Henry Inn
(1899 -)

In 1908, at the age of nine, Henry Inn came to Hawaii from China to join his father, a merchant on Nuuanu Street. He, too, became a merchant and managed the family's Fong Inn Company store from 1922 until 1942.

In 1929, he began investing in real estate and built the Henry Inn Bungalows and Apartments in Waikiki.

As founder, president, and board chairman of Fong Inn Estate, established in 1932; and vice president of A-1 Superette since 1964, Mr. Inn became a corporation executive at thirty-three.

In the 1960's, he sold most of his land and leased his Waikiki property to Chinn Ho, investment banker.

He is the author of three oversized books, featuring his photography of Chinese Houses and Gardens, Tropical Blooms, and Hawaiian Types, which were published in the early 1940's.

Now retired but still active, Henry Inn recalls the events of his lifetime and the words of his ancestors who often said, "Land is the basic wealth."

Katherine B. Allen, Interviewer

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2051 Young Street, Honolulu, Hawaii, 96826

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INTERVIEW WITH HENRY INN

At his Waikiki office, Room 403, 305 Royal Hawaiian Avenue, 96815

September 28, 1971

I: Henry Inn

A: Kathy Allen, Interviewer

A: All right. We'll start the interview now, Mr. Inn. Would you please give your name, your birthdate, and your birthplace.

I: My name is Henry Inn. I was born in Canton, China, February 3, 1899.

A: All right. Is Henry Inn your full name?

I: Yes, that's my name; full name, yes.

A: You don't have any Chinese middle name or anything?

I: No, I don't have that. Legal name that same name that I became citizen.

A: I see. When did you become a citizen?

I: I think in 1943. I think, I'm not quite sure. I could look it up. [Naturalized in 1944]

A: Now you said you were born in China. What were your--how did you come to be in Hawaii?

I: My father was here about ten years before I came to Honolulu. He was a merchant in Honolulu and I came to Honolulu as a merchant's son.

A: I see. You remained in China. He came here to establish his business. What was your father's name?

I: My father's name: Yuen Kwock Fong Inn. (he spells it)

A: And what was your mother's name?

I: Mrs. Yuen Lau Shee.

- A: Did you have brothers and sisters?
- I: Yes, I had.
- A: How many?
- I: That's three brothers, one sister.
- A: Would you name them, please.
- I: The eldest ones live in China: Yuen Tong; and my second brother's Jen Han Inn; and the youngest one is Francis Inn.
- A: All right. And your sister?
- I: Mrs. Suzie Inn Lee.
- A: What is her husband's first name?
- I: Dr. Frank Lee of Los Angeles.
- A: Are the other brothers--you say your oldest brother is in China.
- I: Yes, in China.
- A: Where are the other brothers?
- I: The other two came to Hawaii.
- A: Are they living here now?
- I: The Number Two's in Hong Kong. Francis in Honolulu.
- A: What does Francis do here?
- I: He retired from City and County.
- A: All right. Now what were your. . .
- I: My Number Two brother, he was graduated from St. Louis College in Honolulu, University of Hawaii, and Yale University, and also the London University in England.
- A: What is his profession?
- I: His profession was chemical engineering.
- A: Chemical engineering and he's in Hong Kong now. Now how about Yuen Tong?

- I: Oh, he passed away long long ago.
- A: And your daughter, I gather, is a wife and mother. I mean your sister, Suzie, is a wife. . .
- I: Oh yes. Oh, they have three sons. They all--two became doctors and one is C.P.A.
- A: And do they have any daughters? Just sons. Three sons. I guess that pleases them. Now, do you have children?
- I: Yes, I have.
- A: Would you name your children. (He turns off the tape recorder to tell me he was married twice and that he has two adopted children and he is not sure this should be recorded but I assure him it is all right and is a part of his history). It's on. I mean, this is the sort of thing that --don't worry about it, you just go ahead and --now, you say you were married and your first wife died. Now would you tell about that? And then you said you adopted two children.
- I: Well, my first wife died after 33 years [of marriage], she died. And then she had--we had--two daughters and a son. Well, the son pass away when he was about 18 years old in an accident; and two daughter went to college--Mills College--and after graduation, one daughter was teaching at Punahou and few month later she pass away because of cancer. And then living, two daughters. Originally, three daughters. I made a mistake. Three daughters and one son.
- A: Now did you say that any of these were adopted? (He indicates "no.") No, these were not adopted.
- I: The remaining two daughters married and each of them has five children.
- A: All right. First, let's have your wife's name. Your first wife's name.
- I: First name is--was--Helen Leong Inn.
- A: And your daughters' names, also.
- I: The first one, Constance Inn Au Young. [Mrs. Fred Au Young]
- A: Au Young is her married name.
- I: Yeh. Second one, Hazel Inn Lau. After my . . . [Mrs. Wilson Lau]

A: Now, are these two living?

I: Living in Honolulu. (Edited out: spelling of names & recital of husband's names)

A: All right, now there's another daughter that you have mentioned yet.

I: The youngest one, Sylvia Inn. She passed away.

A: She's the one that taught at Punahou. All right, and your son, your son's name.

I: Albert Inn. Also, by accident, he passed away.

A: At 18. Was that a car accident or a . . .

I: Drowning. He tried to save someone and when he dived down, the (head) hit the rock.

A: Oh, oh. What year was that?

I: I don't remember now. It's long long time ago. [March 3, 1940]

A: And your wife, your first wife, died, you say, about twenty years ago.

I: 1949, she pass away.

A: And so then you remarried and your present. . .

I: In 1953. In 1953 I married again and adopted my wife's two daughters. [July 16, 1953]

A: Your second wife's name is what?

I: Michelle Woo Inn.

A: And the two adopted daughters.

I: Flora Inn and Kristina Inn.

A: Now, are these young ladies married?

I: Nope, they both when they came here, starting six years old, and the first went to Hanahauoli School and then Punahou and then went to Sarah Lawrence, graduated two years ago. And Flora's at the present attending Stanford, getting her Ph. D. degree. And the younger one, attending UH [University of Hawaii].

[July 17, 1979: Flora, now an assistant professor, is teaching social psychology and the sociology of education at the University of San Francisco. Kristina, studying for her master's degree at the University of Hawaii, is engaged in the federally funded Multiculture Awareness Project and Curriculum Development in Hawaii.]

A: Very good. Now you say that they both come from China, these two young ladies?

I: Yes.

A: All right, now I wonder if you could tell a little bit more about your father and what the name of his business was here and how you yourself got into business here in Hawaii and when you came from China.

I: To make it short, he was asked to join my uncle in Honolulu at the Fong Inn [Company] store in Nuuanu Street. Later years, they decided to import Chinese goods from China and then gradually our business increased. At that time we were the only one imported Chinese goods. And I remember very well that Mr. [Jhamandas] Watumull, almost the same time, opened his shop on Fort Street.

A: Do you remember what year that was?

I: That's quite a long time ago. I would say something like 1917-18, about those years. Maybe, I'm not quite sure as far as the date is concerned, but it's long long time ago.

[City Directory 1907: Fong Inn Company (Gin Jau, Lee Wa Chung), Mission style and koa furniture made to order, bedding, chairs, tables, etc. C.D. 1908: Same listing except for (Gin Jau, Yuen Kwock). C.D. 1911: Fong Inn Company, Yuen Kwock, manager. Mission style and koa furniture made to order, Chinese embroidered silks, vases and chinaware. 1152 Nuuanu Street. Telephone 3038.]

[First listing in C.D. 1914: Dharamdas & Watumull; Rochiram S. Dharamdas, manager. No address given. C.D. 1915: Dharamdas & Watumull; R.S. Dharamdas, manager. Curios. 1150 Fort Street. C.D. 1916: Dharamdas & Watumull, proprietors, East Indian Store.]

A: Now the Fong Inn Store started out as what?

I: As furniture. We were the only koa furniture store in town. [C.D. 1903-04: First listing Fong Inn Company, Gin Jau manager, furniture, 1152 Nuuanu Street.]

A: That's interesting. That was on Nuuanu Street. Then did you change the name of the store or . . . ?

- I: No, it remained the same for long years, yes.
- A: And is it still there?
- I: No, the site's still there but not the store. Later years, we came down to Waikiki and from Kalakaua Avenue we built our own building. It's still standing there with a Chinese roof on.
- A: Yes, now which building is this that you're referring to? At what location is this building that you're referring to?
- I: Now the new building is located at Kalakaua and Kuhio, opposite the old Lau Yee Chai.
- A: Oh yes, yes. What was the name of the business when it moved down [to Waikiki]?
- I: Same. Fong Inn Chinese Antiques and Furniture.
- A: What were some of the problems that you remember in those days when you first started the business; into business yourself? Do you remember? When did you begin with your --I guess it would have been with your [Uncle]. . . ?
- I: Well, I think I remember this way: we had--we'd been doing furniture business, manufacturing koa furniture, and one year my father and my uncle decided to import some Chinese goods from the Orient. And then the first shipment came in, we call up [a] few [of] our friends there--old customers; they came down to the store and they saw those merchandise and they bought up all the merchandise. See now that's how it begins. Then of course, naturally, we had more and more merchandise comes in.
- A: Do you remember what some of that merchandise was at that time?
- I: The first shipment was the old embroidery. Chinese embroidery. Those Chinese embroidery skirt, they called that, and coats and so on. And then some teakwood furniture.
- A: Teakwood. That began to take the place of . . . [koa which they had manufactured]
- I: And Mrs. [Charles Montague] Cooke, she was one of the very first one interested in Chinese things. And she then keep buying from us every time when we had a shipment came in for almost--I don't know how many years.
- A: So it was quite a move then from [the Nuuanu furniture

manufacturing store to the Waikiki import shop]. . .

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A: How long had you been in the retail business before you moved from downtown to Waikiki?

I: I would say from 1909 up to just before the second World War. [1903-39]

A: I see. So it would have been just before the second World War that you moved down there.

I: Yes. See, we moved down to Waikiki around 1939, I think. [C.D. 1939: Fong Inn's Ltd., 2037 Kalakaua Avenue]

A: Something I forgot to ask you. We didn't get your educational background, where you went to school.

I: Well, when I first came here I didn't understand a word of English.

A: You came at what age?

I: Nine years old. And I think I remember the first thing that came to me, I went to the Aliiolani School at Kaimuki, then later--a year later--I transferred to St. Louis College in River Street--the old St. Louis College--and I graduated there in 1920. I was going to the UH [University of Hawaii] but business was so good in those days and my father kept me at the store.

[The first listing in the C.D. 1907: Aliiolani College, Rev. F.F. Fitz, principal. Seventh Avenue, corner Waialae Road, Kaimuki. The last listing is in 1911. In 1925-26 Aliiolani School was erected, between Sixth and Seventh Avenues, Waialae Road. In 1908, St. Louis College was located on College Walk at the corner of Kukui Street. Following the British educational system, private schools were called colleges, even those having grades one through twelve.]

A: Where you could learn by experience really.

I: Yeh, yeh. So I didn't have the chance to go to the university at all.

A: Well, apparently you didn't need to because you've been a successful business man . . .

I: That's the reason why I--my younger brother has all the

chances in going to school.

A: Well, some people don't need it. Some people do better without, just going right into the thick of things right to begin with. What was your uncle's name?

I: Oh yeh, I was going to say something about my uncle. My uncle is Foon Fong. Yuen Foon Fong. (He spells it) See, when I first arrive here I was very young for nine years old and we had carpenter shop in the back of the store, manufacturing koa furniture, and I was of course--I was the--first thing to do is to try to--my uncle sent me to teach me how to take care of the store by cleaning, sweeping the floor and all the janitor work, you may say. But I learned from there on and my uncle was always very strict. He always teach me and, you may say--some people say--a lecture, you know. But I really appreciate it all what he did; what he taught to me.

A: Was this your father's brother?

I: Yes.

A: Your father's brother. How is it that he has a different name: Fong? Fong or--your father's name is Inn.

I: Inn is the family name and Fong is my uncle's name. Actually my father name Yuen Kwock but he didn't use that name in the firm's name [Fong Inn Store].

A: The place that you had when you moved your store to Waikiki, at first it was located at Kuhio and Kalakaua?

I: Yes, that's right.

A: And that was still Fong Inn or it was called Fong Inn . . . ?

I: Store, at that time. But we closed right after the second World War because we couldn't get any more merchandise from the Orient. So I think we close something like 1955, I think, or '56. [Last C.D. listing in 1947-48.]

A: But you also were the--were you the first to have apartments in Waikiki?

I: Oh yes, that comes later. I--you see, I remember we were doing wonderful business, wonderful business every year, from the tourist as well as local here. Then when the estate taxes came--became--very high and the customer all of a sudden stopped buying things. And I saw the--what going to happen later year, so I personally switched my business

into real estate. Of course my father and uncle, they were thinking, oh business will be just as good because they're going to have lot of tourist. But I--I change. I decided to do something myself.

A: You had foresight.

I: So I happened to save some money up to 1929, I think--that's the depression year. I decided to buy real estate. At that time it was really very cheap. The first thing they offered to me in Waikiki, this lot here [on Seaside Avenue], for ninety cents a foot. And I bought three lots. And then I bought other property at Kailua at 3-1/2 cents a square foot. And so on. I--practically I bought land everywhere in town and I hold it until, for example, I don't know how many years--maybe fifteen or twenty years later--when Kailua lot became instead of 3-1/2 cents--instead of \$350 a lot, I got \$3,500 a lot. So practically sold everything. And I kept, of course--I bought this lot here and I kept these and I built upon them during the height of depressions. I still remember when I bought the lots here [in Waikiki] and I say to myself, I got to do something on it. So I started to make a rough sketches of apartments and at that time I happened to meet Mr. Scott, a young architect from Los Angeles. Somehow he came to see me and I gave him my rough sketch and he made the regular drawing in order to get the permit. I pay him \$350 and he took the \$350, went back to Los Angeles, and later he became almost a millionaire [pronounced "a million year"].

A: What was his first name, do you remember?

I: I forgot his first name. He quite well known. Of course, he pass away later on. I heard about it. But anyway, I happen to know something about construction because I have carpenter in my shop, you see; so I ask for the old Chinese carpenter, old timer, and I show him the plan and I told him what I want. He, from the plan, he draw up--figured out all the material, lumber and so on--and he gave me a list. I took it down to Lewers & Cooke, City Mill, and one of the others to get the price and I--we--hired the best carpenter for \$3.50 a day for eight hours. I think that's the reason why I built these apartments. The whole thing cost me something like, if I remember right, was \$60,000 for 105 apartments. [First listing C. D. 1929. Henry Inn Bungalows and Apartments, 332 Seaside.]

A: Isn't that amazing. Well, as a child I remember the Henry Inn Apartments and they were spectacular. They were Oriental in design.

- I: And of course I used some of these odds and ends and all which we couldn't sell it at the store and ended up in the building, used it in the building there.
- A: Yes, it was a--I always remember it as a very attractive building. Is the building where Gump's was, was that one that you also built?
- I: No. I wasn't a builder at all, I just happened to . . .
- A: I mean, had built. But these were really just about the first [apartments in Waikiki] and these were located on Seaside Avenue.
- I: Seaside, yes.
- A: 312 A. to 336 B. Seaside Avenue (I show him an old Henry Inn Apartment ad). This ad, I don't know, this was in the --I don't know where that came from, what magazine or . . .
- I: Very interesting, this business here.
- A: Yes, isn't it. It must be out of something--an old almanac or something or an old magazine [like Paradise of the Pacific, perhaps].
- I: Are you going to continue, to know something about WHY I leased the property out?
- A: Yes.
- I: After almost 25-30 years in taking care of the apartments and the rentals haven't gone up very much, but the taxes and expenses has gone up tremendously; and with the rental without really making money at all, very little with the value of the land, so twenty years ago I decided one of the three things I had to do: to sell it, I think is out of the question because at that time the land value had gone up very very much. If I wanted to sell it at high price, I had, after deduct the capital gain, what I would do with the money? You got to reinvest again. The way I figured out, nothing better than the real estate, especially the property I'm having. So that out of question. Two, to built yourself. That mean you have to borrow money. Take me one million, two million, maybe five, six million dollars, you got to built high-rise. That mean you have to worry for the rest of your life. If anything happens, I'm afraid I don't know what to do with it. So that, I'm afraid; I decided not to do it. So the only thing I have to do is to lease it out. And then the Chinn Ho asked me and then so I lease it to him.

- A: Well, you seem to be a wise business man.
- I: Because I realize how difficult it is, how much headache you have, when you taking care of the apartments.
- A: I imagine it is. I wouldn't know but I would imagine it is.
- I: For example, at the beginning we rent the apartment out and I did everything myself and then, quite often in the evening, five minutes after ten o'clock, somebody call up. "Oo, my neighbor having a big party, I couldn't sleep. What are you going to do about it?" At the beginning I came down and tried to quiet down and do the best I could. Second time, third time, and so on. I say to myself, I'm not going to kill myself. So from there on I told the tenant: "You better call the police department." If they tell me, I say, "If you think the place is too noisy, why, try to get a better place."
- A: 'Course that's a major problem here in the Waikiki area, always has been and probably always will be.
- I: So after all these experiences, you know, I say, "No, no more apartments or anything of that sort."
- A: So you're--at present now, do you have any retail store at all now?
- I: No, I don't have any. See, I'm 72 years old so. I've been working all my life so I think I deserve a rest.
- A: Do you remember when you first had these apartments, were there I guess mostly transients--tourists--would rent these places.
- I: No, you'd be surprised. I would say eighty per cent local.
- A: Oh really?
- I: Yes. You see, my theory in those day that--I was practically the first one that built these apartments in Waikiki and then later on naturally they had other apartments. And every time when there's a new apartment came up, some of the tenants moved to the newer places. And then, at time, the rent other places going up. My rent remained the same. When other places the rate coming down, they asked me to reduce my rate and I said "No." I said, "That rate is really reasonable. I don't raise my rent just because other people raise. I don't cut my rent down because other people cutting their rent down."

A: You stabilized yours.

I: I stabilized mine. And most these tenants that stayed a long long time, they satisfied.

A: Well, it's well-located and especially then when we didn't have high-rises and all and it really was a gem of Waikiki. I can remember. What are some of your first memories of Waikiki in those days?

I: Well, I would say this way: kinda often people ask me, "Why you come down to Waikiki?" Well, my answer is: This because I was dealing in Chinese antique business and I had lot of tourist business and most of the tourist walking from me and I delivered things myself personally to the hotel. And when I came down to--each time I came down to Waikiki and I say to myself: Waikiki really is a beautiful place, beautiful beach with the Diamond Head. I also think that someday, somehow, bound to be a good place.

A: At that time, wasn't Lau Yee Chai's down on Kalia Road somewhere or down . . .

I: No, as far I remember, Lau Yee Chai first started in downtown, of course small shop--small restaurant--and then later on he moved down to Waikiki and he bought the property and he built a nice place there.

A: Which is no longer there.

I: Yeh. Of course a long long history of Lau Yee Chai, of course. How he became well-known in Waikiki.

A: Well, we're interested in your history, of course, and how you became well-known in Waikiki also. What was the, let's see--I'm trying to think how Waikiki was. I know that you saw ahead and saw how it was going to develop down in this area. Where were you and where was your family living when you first came to . . .

I: Downtown Honolulu, right back of our old Fong Inn Store at Nuuanu and Pauahi Streets.

A: Now what were your memories of that, living there in town? You've already told a little bit about your uncle.

I: Well, there's not very much to say about it. When we first were living at the--sort of a tenement house in back of the store. And later on we bought a piece of land up Nuuanu Street, near School [Street]. There we built our first home then. Then we lived there for about, oh, about 25, 30

years and later we separated. My brother became--he got married and I got married so we each had their own home.

A: And you're up on Round Top Drive now.

I: Yes, I'm staying at the Round Top Drive.

A: You have a, as I understand it, a kind of showplace there, don't you?

I: Oh, not exactly. I fix a very comfortable place. Location is very good.

A: You have a number of Chinese antiques and . . .

I: Well I, naturally I have some.

A: That's what I mean about its being a showplace because you do have these art items and your grounds are in gardens. Hasn't your home been on one of these tours--garden tours?

I: Yes, one or twice, and later on I found out it's enough for awhile for the simple reason I lost quite a number of things, including a white marble lion that was outside the house. It was cemented down. I think it weighed over three hundred pounds, and somebody took it.

A: During one of these tours?

I: No, no, but I was told it's somebody--well, I don't want to say, one way the others [one way or the other, I think he means]. No, I don't think it's worthwhile to open up resident to visitors. I think that's another reason why in late years we don't see many houses open up for tourists.

A: No, if they have--they're destructive visitors, I can imagine that they wouldn't wish to. And there is always that danger, isn't there, of having items stolen. Let's see. (I turn the recorder off for a moment then ask him to reminisce in general)

I: . . . what you refer to.

A: Well, any early memories you have of anything really that you think would be of interest.

I: Lot of things, little things about some of the people that I know in Hawaii, starting from Mrs. Charles M. Cooke and Mrs. Alfred Castle and Mrs. A. L. Castle, Mrs. Dillingham, Mrs. Charles Adams, the Baldwins of Maui.

- A: These are people you dealt with and obtained items for. Were there any special requests for things that you can recall, an item that . . .
- I: Mrs. Charles M. Cooke, that's the one that--she was the one that really interested in Chinese things. She became so interested in Chinese things, she always wants to know when we have our next shipment comes in. [He speaks in present tense about the past]
- A: What types of things did she want especially?
- I: Things ah--Chinese porcelain, pottery, old teak furniture, paintings, jades, anything that is really interesting, really rare. And so Mrs. Charles Adams, mother of Mrs. Walter F. Dillingham, she was also another one very interested in Chinese things.
- A: How did you work with them? How did you work with these people? You asked them what they wanted and you just . . .
- I: No, we have--it's my uncles, two uncles you may say; one in Shanghai, one in Canton, they also became the part-owners of the store, Fong Inn's. They the ones that collected, bought things in the Orient and sent it to us. And then later years, my father and myself also went to China every year and collects. And when we have a shipment come in, we always call up these few people.
- A: I think I asked you but I'm not sure that you answered, what were some of the major problems in being an importer in those days? You didn't have strikes or anything then to . . .
- I: No, I don't think we have so-called problems. All we did was to, my two uncles as I told you and myself, we went to China, different cities, you know, from Shanghai up to Peking and Peking down to Canton and so on and looked for those things. Anything that we think is interesting then we bought and imported to Honolulu. So really there wasn't much of a problem at all. In those days, not only the local people; later year we have tourist, especially during the winter from January up to April. Tourist from East--New York, Boston, especially--they're the ones that really appreciate it, collecting Chinese antiques. So really in those days we did wonderful business.
- A: I can well imagine. I know that Oriental things were very popular--the Chinese things were popular.
- I: And I remember well that Mrs. Cooke one year went to

New York. Of course she also quite often went to mainland. And then she also bought things from other store, like Gump's and Yamanaka [Galleries] in New York, especially. And at one time, I think, she came back, she bought something from Yamanaka. And then at that time, while she was away, we have one or two shipment came in. After she came back from the mainland, she came to my shop and I show her our new merchandise and she remembers. She said, "I got one of this from Yamanaka."

A: Yamanaka would have been your competitor there.

I: Yeh. And then we happen to have almost a similar. She asked me, "What's the price?" I told her, so much. She was really surprise as far as the price was concerned. And from then on, I remember, she never ask the questions about the price. I remember very very well. She had so much faith in me that sometimes she called me to ask me "Shall I have it for my collections?" Now how can you do business if otherwise that they see that you trying to [he indicates: raise the price to fit the pocketbook] . . . So anytime when I quote her the price, I had to think and think three times, before I quote her the price. And those are one of the things that I like to mention and yet whether these are personal, I don't know; whether I should or not, I don't know.

A: Oh, I think so, I think so. Definitely. This is of interest to people and there is a great value I think in it because it indicates the kind of person you are too, you know.

I: Oh yes, I forgot about another instance very interesting. At one time, Mr. [William Garvie] Hall, I can remember, at the Honolulu Iron Works, he call me up one Saturday afternoon, I think. He said, "Oh, I have a friend from San Francisco. [Herbert Fleischaker, banker] He's going back Monday and he wants to buy something to take home." I said, "Well, today's Saturday and tomorrow's Sunday." He said, "Why don't you make a special effort? Show these things to my friends." I said, "All right." So next day, Sunday, he came down. He bought \$13,000 worth of Chinese things from me. Gave me a check of \$13,000 something. We never saw a check that amount, that big, so we went--my cousin and I took the check down to Bishop Bank [now First Hawaiian Bank], the old Bishop Bank down at the old post office. [Bishop National Bank was located at Merchant and Kaahumanu Streets until 1925, when it moved to King and Bishop Streets. The old Post Office was at the corner of Merchant and Bethel Streets.] We told them that I--we want to cash the check in gold pieces, twenty dollar gold pieces. So they gave

us I think something like 650 or something pieces. One of us couldn't carry all that in one bag, so they gave us two bag and we just carry in our hand and walk from the bank to our shop in Nuuanu Street and we lay it on the floor there and call the family. "This is \$13,000 gold pieces."

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- A: When do you think the boom really began in Waikiki and why?
'Course it was partly the tourists.
- I: But here--that's right. When you ask me the question I'm trying to remember something. I think it began--of course you can check the facts from the newspaper. As far I remember, I think it started this way: When Kaiser [Henry J. Kaiser, industrialist-builder-hospital founder] came over and he built the--the old hotel site down--you know what I mean, now there's the . . .
- A: The Hilton Hawaiian Village?
- I: Yeh, yeh, yeh, that's right.
- A: That began it.
- I: That began. And then on top of that, Hawaii became a state. I think those two thing combined and one more, the airplanes. I think those three things combined make Hawaii boom so much. That's the way I figure it out.
- A: That's astute.
- I: From the very beginning Kaiser came over [He began his visits in 1950, bought a Kahala home in 1954, built Hawaiian Village Hotel in 1955 and sold it to Hilton Hotels in 1961].
- A: And it was he who began the development here. Yes, because after that, then all these . . . larger and larger and larger because of high-rises.
- I: I saw the, you may say, handwriting on the wall as far as tourist business concerned. All of a sudden, the tourist came over here and also local people here, they stopped buying. The one reason, they told me, was they had no cash. They have to pay high taxes, especially estate taxes after they pass away and these things they collected or they bought it, had to pay very high taxes.
- A: You mean on their collections of art and that sort of things,

they had to pay estate taxes on so that people decided that they weren't going to buy things like that if they were going to have to pay taxes on them. Is that still so today?

I: Still so.

A: Is it? They haven't changed the laws on that?

I: I don't think so.

A: So that some of these things would be exempt as objects of art?

I: Of course if you give it away, of course then you exempt from it [the taxes], you see.

A: And that's the reason. Well that's interesting. Now that I didn't . . . know.

I: Then the--thinking of other kind of reasons, I didn't want to go to any other line of business--retail business--any-more because I've been waiting on people all my life. And another thing, even in those days when you have ten or fifteen carpenters, you already beginning to realize the labor trouble. For example, we had several carpenters. After being in our shop for about five or six years, they quit and opened their own shops. Now even those days--they're about thirty or forty years ago. In those days they had no union yet. [". . . strong union activity began on the Honolulu waterfront after the 1934 strike in San Francisco . . .", according to Kuykendall and Day in Hawaii: A History.]

I: Getting a good employee is not so easy. Reliable, trustworthy, and so on, is not easy.

A: And I imagine that today it's even more difficult, the way things are.

I: So I decided to look around, to buy real estate. I also remember, even when I was young, my grandfather--my great-grandfather--they were the realtor, you may say, in China. My great grandfather and my grandfather, they were all in real estate business in owning land in China; in Canton, China. Owning rice land, rice field and so on.

A: Do you remember your great grandfather's name?

I: Yes, I remember, but that's a long, long ago.

A: Well I know, but I mean it doesn't matter how long ago it was, I would like to have your great grandfather's name if

you know it, and your grandfather's.

I: Well, I can give it to you.

A: Okay. Great grandfather first.

I: My great grandfather: Yuen Chew Den. Then my grandfather's: Yuen Kee York [pronounced Yuk: York]. They were the great farmers and businessmen.

A: So it's in your line, then, isn't it?

I: So when I recall what my great father said and told me, then I'm beginning to realize that going into this real estate business, buying land you may say.

A: What did he tell you?

I: Not exactly told me but I remember we own rice field. They would always buying rice field in order to produce rice. That's the foundations of wealth in the old days, in the Chinese thinking. Land is the basic wealth. So I remember that particular words that he mentioned quite often.

A: It still is so, isn't it? It still is so: land is the basic wealth.

I: Yes, I think I've given you quite a bit of my personal remembrance without saying too much in it. I don't know.

A: I think--no, this is very interesting. I notice that you do have a Chinese paper. You are able to read Chinese, apparently.

I: I'm still able to read, yes. To understand.

A: Any last memory that you have that we can record? Can you think of any, other than the \$13,000 check which I imagine is an outstanding event in your life?

I: I--now when you mention that I remember that I used to meet these old Chinese business men in Hawaii. You may say practically all of them that I still remember I know them. Just give you an example: C.T. Wong, that Liberty Bank father, one of them. And then the Doo family: Mr. Doo Wai Sing; their sons, Jimmy Doo, Sai Chow Doo, and so on.

A: Is that D-0-0?

I: D-0-0, yes. Then we have the Lum family. He owns lot of land in Manoa. His son is happen to be one of these appraiser. [probably Yin Tai Lum, real estate appraiser

and counselor] Forgot his name.

A: Court appraiser?

I: Yeh. Oh, there's so many of them, all of them that I know. They were fine people. They were really--get together and belong to the United [Chinese] Society and did lots of good things for the community.

A: Can you remember one thing, perhaps, that they did?

I: Well, one of the earlier things I remember, my father told me, they own the cemetery in Manoa. You see, in the old days, Chinese believe in locations--burial of their dead. So they always looking for a place, a location that is really good for the people that buried there. They said, if you're buried a good place, they're blessed--their descendants. That's why they found a place way up Manoa.

A: To have a cemetery.

I: That little things I think I remember what my father told me.

A: Did your father pass away here?

I: Yes, he pass away about, oh, eight or nine years ago already at the age of ninety-six. My mother also pass away few years ago at age of ninety-six. In fact, that's why I remember my grandfather, my great grandmother. They all lived over sixty. Changing the subject.

A: No, it's not at all. It's very much related. Longevity runs in your family. (I turn off the recorder to prepare to take Mr. Inn's photograph, then I ask him about his avocations and hobbies)

I: I am always interested in things of beautiful. For example, when you travel I like to go to places that have historical and beautiful scenery. I'm also interested in photography. Also in collecting stamps and first day cover.

A: My father was a stamp collector also.

I: I published three books. One is called the Chinese Houses and Gardens, which has had three editions already. Then I had the Hawaiian Types, showing the beautiful Hawaiian girls from different nationality. And also The Book of Flowers.

A: Are they under your name?

- I: Yes. (I take his picture) I took awful pictures. I'll show you . . . my books.
- A: I'd like to see them. You have quite a library here (in his office).
- I: Yes. Chinese library. Mostly Chinese things. This is my first edition but since then I have three editions.
- A: Chinese Houses and Gardens by Henry Inn and S. C. Lee.
- I: Shao Chang Lee, yeh, he's the editor over there. This is my Hawaiian Types.
[Dr. Shao Chang Lee was a professor of Chinese history and language at the University of Hawaii for about twenty years until 1943.]
- A: Oh yes. These are collectors' books.
- I: Um hum, collectors' items.
- A: That's right. Life size [Life-Time series size; or over-size].
- I: So far in Hawaii no one has another book like that.
- A: This is excellent. This is an excellent idea and it should be very popular today.
- I: Oh yes. See, this is not a studio picture, you know, it's just a [series of pictures taken in natural settings, mostly on the University of Hawaii campus, I believe].
- A: Yes, because what you've done here is all the different types [of young women in Hawaii].
- I: Yes. This one here, Flowers and Mrs. Dillingham--Mrs. Frear [Mary Emma Dillingham Frear] wrote the preface. Flowers. Too bad in those days I don't have color.
- A: Oh, that's right. Oh yes. Now I remember seeing these-- this book especially, I remember seeing.
- I: Yes, this book here (Hawaiian Types) is considered a collector's item. Dr. Allison went to New York and in one of the old shops there he paid \$25 for a copy.
- A: Yes and this was \$6.50 then [before WW II] and this was one of those--what would be at least a \$20 [book now]. These are girls from the University of Hawaii.

- I: (He laughs) Some of them became grandmother already.
- A: They went to the University of Hawaii when I did. Yes, this is an excellent Has this been published recently?
- I: May I have my glasses on? No, I didn't have my glasses on, did I? When we took the pictures.
- A: No. I mean, has this [book] come out again recently?
- I: No, not this one, but the Chinese Houses and Gardens . . . third edition.
- A: Yes, this I remember. I wonder if you would comment on the trends in gardens today, compared to Chinese Houses and Gardens. This was a very favorite architecture in the Islands for awhile and still is, but what do you think the trend in gardens is today, with the shortage of gardeners and all? Would you have any comment to make about that?
- I: Well, the way I think, due to the high price of land, I don't think many people can afford to have land enough to have beautiful gardens. And then not only that, the upkeep. Now for example, you can't get any gardener for less than, I'd say, four or five hundred dollars a month. Not very many people can afford to do that, so it's easiest.
- A: So would you say that the trend now is toward what would be called Hawaiian gardens--let-'em-go kind?
- I: I don't know.
- A: I mean, having ferns and ti leaves and plumeria, things that you can just let-'em-go/let-'em-grow, you know, and there's no training or anything [a minimum care garden, in other words].
- I: I guess not.
- A: I just wonder if that may be the trend now. Yes, this is a lovely book. Well, I think there's something indicated by the fact that this (book of Chinese Houses and Gardens) is being re-published.
- I: Well one thing I'm almost certain, the trend in--of the tile design may have come from this book. Before this book was published, no one ever used the tile design for the fence and the wall.
- A: I see. The Academy of Arts is an example too, isn't it?

I: Yes, that's right.

A: Did you take all these pictures?

I: Yes, I did.

A: You did? Beautiful. Well, I shall have to look around for this. Now, who is. . .

I: You can't buy anymore. The third edition is all finished; all sold out long ago. I don't know whether fourth edition is coming out or not, I don't know.

A: Too bad. This was copyrighted in 1940. Well, that speaks well for it. I notice your dedication here is "To Mrs. Charles Montague Cooke Sr., whose life, gifts, and friendship deepened, for those who shared them, appreciation for all cultures and sensitiveness to all beauty, this book is dedicated in grateful and loving memory." That's very nice. Yes, this is a beautiful book. Well, I hope they put out another edition. And this one, too--Hawaiian Types--because I think this would really, especially now, be of value because of the racial disturbances we've been having lately. This shows all these different kinds of people--types--[that are the people of Hawaii].

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed and edited by Katherine B. Allen

Final typing by Grace Akamatsu

GENEALOGY:

Paternal

Great Grandfather: Yuen Chew Den

Paternal

Grandfather: Yuen Kwee York

Uncle: Yuen Foon Fong

Father & Mother:

Yuen Kwock Fong Inn m. Yuen Lau Shee

1. Yuen Tong (deceased)
2. Jen Han Inn
3. Henry Inn m. 1)Helen Leong (deceased)
 1. Constance (Mrs. Fred Au Young)- 5 children
 2. Hazel (Mrs. Wilson Lau) - 5 children
 3. Sylvia - never married (deceased)
 4. Albert - never married (deceased)

m. 2) Michelle Woo

1. Flora
2. Kristina
4. Suzie (Mrs. Frank Lee) - 3 children
5. Francis

NOTE: Mr. Inn states that at about the time that Fong Inn Store began importing Chinese goods, Mr. Watumull opened his shop on Fort Street. He thought this was about 1917-18, but it was actually in 1913 that the East India Store was established in the Blaisdell Hotel Building on Fort Street by Jhamandas Watumull's partner, Rochiram Dharandas, as a branch of their export company in Manila. (Honolulu Star-Bulletin & Advertiser feature story by Kit Smith, Advertiser Staff Writer, October 3, 1971). Fong Inn Company began importing as early as 1911.

Mr. Inn also states that at that time Fong Inn Store was the only one importing Chinese goods. This may be, however, the Pacific Imports shop had imported embroidered ladies' dress skirts as early as 1909, according to Russ and Peg Apple in their "This Day In Our Hawaiian Heritage" column for September 29, 1971, Honolulu Star-Bulletin. And before that, Wing Wo Tai & Company, "importers and dealers in Chinese and Japanese Goods" on Nuuanu Street, advertised in The Hawaiian Gazette Company's 1890 edition of The Tourists' Guide Through The Hawaiian Islands, compiled and edited by Henry M. Whitney. Wing Wo Tai & Company was still listed in the City Directory in 1911, but the last listing for the Pacific Import Company, Ltd.--S. Ehrlich, manager; dry and fancy goods; Fort near Beretania Avenue--was in the 1906 City Directory.

The Punahou School Directory shows that Sylvia Sau Tao Inn was an assistant in the kindergarten, 1945-47.

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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.