

HAROLD HEWETT YOST

THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Harold Hewett Yost

Although Mr. Yost was interviewed by Lynda Mair (now Lynda Ion) on October 14, 1971, he preferred to write a narrative about the Honolulu he remembers. Portions of the narrative written in 1971 were revised and edited by Mr. Yost in September 1981.

Of particular interest is his story about Mid-Pacific Institute where he developed the Mills School's dairy and fruit farm into a profitable operation and taught a course in agriculture.

Mr. Yost has also written an autobiographical sketch which outlines his background and employment history, and pays tribute to George Armitage with whom he worked at the Hawaii Tourist Bureau, predecessor of the Hawaii Visitors Bureau.

Katherine B. Allen, Editor

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## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH BY HAROLD HEWETT YOST

Harold Yost, author of the accompanying narrative depicting some aspects of life in the Honolulu of over a half a century ago, was born in Chicago, Illinois early in the 1890's, but was taken to California when he was only five years old and became an adoptive Son of the Golden West.

Yost's boyhood and early manhood were spent in the university community of Berkeley, California, just across the bay from San Francisco. He attended the Berkeley schools, graduating from Berkeley High School in 1910, then entered the University of California, from which he was graduated cum laude with the class of 1915.

Shortly after his graduation, Yost accepted a position on the faculty of Mills School in Honolulu, a private school primarily for boys of Oriental parentage offering primary, intermediate and high school courses. Yost's official title at Mills was Superintendent of Farm and Grounds and Instructor in Agriculture.

During his two-year tenure at Mills, Yost developed the small dairy and fruit farm on the school's property into a self-supporting organization; superintended construction of the athletic field on the makai side of the school building, and coached the school's first baseball team in the Interscholastic (high school) League.

In 1917, with United States entry into World War I seemingly inevitable, Yost took Army Board examinations for a Reserve Corps second lieutenantcy and was commissioned shortly after the outbreak of war. In June of that year he resigned from the Mills School faculty and returned to Berkeley and, in August, was ordered to active Army duty at the Presidio of San Francisco where the Second Reserve Offi-

cers Training Camp was in session. In December, following the completion of the training course, he was married in San Francisco to Gertrude Knowles, a music teacher at the Kamehameha Girls' School and organist at the chapel on the Boys' School campus.

Following two years of wartime active duty, Yost was returned to Honolulu and honorably discharged from active duty at Fort Shafter. Finding conditions at Mills School unsatisfactory to him, he declined an offer to resume his work there and, after a short stint on the Honolulu Star-Bulletin reportorial staff during the editorship of Riley H. Allen, accepted an offer from an export-import firm in Manila undergoing Americanization. However, the Manila climate, without air conditioning, proved to be too much for Mrs. Yost, and when George Armitage, an adoptive Honolulu who had been one of Yost's brother-officers during the war, was appointed to organize the Hawaii Tourist Bureau (predecessor of the Hawaii Visitors Bureau) and shortly thereafter wired Yost a job offer as his assistant, the offer was promptly accepted.

Incidentally, the trip from Manila back to Honolulu, which today could be made by air in a matter of hours, then had to be made by steamer going first to Hong Kong, then up the China coast to Shanghai; across to Nagasaki, through the Inland Sea to Kobe; around to Tokyo/Yokohama, thence to Honolulu. Total time en route: three weeks!

The Tourist Bureau of the 1920's and 1930's bore little resemblance to the top-heavy, bureaucratic Visitors Bureau of today. The staff consisted of Armitage, Yost, a secretary and an office boy. Our total annual budget was \$50,000, and Armitage and Yost had to assist in soliciting funds for the business community's \$25,000 share. The Territorial Legislature grudgingly contributed \$25,000, subject to our collecting the \$25,000 from the business community.

Armitage proved to be the right man in the right place. He foresaw the tremendous importance of travel agents, then few in number and confined largely to metropolitan areas such as New York, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles. The Bureau cultivated them right up to the hilt or, at least, to the limit of its financial ability. It also started in a small way getting into the field of "visitor satisfaction," but that was secondary for some time. In 1922, it was decided to open an HTB office in San Francisco, and Yost was assigned to manage it, which he did until 1926. His regular contact with the Islands ended there, but not his interest.

Yost had become a member of the Outrigger Canoe Club shortly after his arrival here in 1915. He was on military leave from mid-1917 to mid-1919, and continued his membership until he was transferred to the Mainland in 1922. Retiring in 1957 as public relations manager at the San Francisco headquarters of California Packing Corporation (known here as CPC and now officially Del Monte Corporation), he returned to Honolulu and at once resumed membership in the Outrigger Canoe Club. He is author of the club's official history, The Outrigger, and of a book first published by Bishop National Bank (now First Hawaiian Bank) in 1959 titled The New State of Hawaii and sent to Bishop National's correspondent banks all over the world. Yost also co-authored, with Alex Castro, The Hawaii Almost Nobody Knows, a collection of vignettes of the Hawaii that was. He now lives in retirement in Arcadia Retirement Residence in Maki-ki.

NARRATIVE BY HAROLD HEWETT YOST

My first contact with Hawaii came in 1915. Shortly before my graduation from the University of California in May, I was called into the office of Professor John W. Gilmore, former president of the College of Hawaii in my undergraduate days, and head of the Agronomy Department at the university. [John W. Gilmore was president of what was known then as the College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts from 1908 to 1913. Founded in 1907, the college became the University of Hawaii in 1919. edKBA]

Professor Gilmore asked me if I would like to "isolate myself from the Mainland for a couple of years." I asked, "Where?" "Hawaii," he said. "A private school there needs a good man to improve and expand their small dairy and fruit farm; see that the school campus is made more attractive, and teach a course in agriculture. I think you can handle it. If you want to look into it thoroughly, I'll make an appointment for you with John F. Nelson, principal of Mills School. How about it?"

Since I arrived in California at age five, I had never been more than a couple of hundred miles away from Berkeley; also, I happened to know some very nice people from the Islands, so I guess I showed a lot of enthusiasm when I talked with Nelson, a man somewhere in his late twenties. At any rate, I was offered the job and accepted on the spot. I was to report at Mills School very shortly after September 1. I could hardly wait.

I arrived in Honolulu late in August 1915 after a voyage of nearly six days on board the Matson Navigation Company's S.S. Wilhelmina. Six days, averaging around 350 nautical miles a day--about the distance a modern jetliner

would cover in maybe forty-five or fifty minutes! But all modes of transportation were slow in 1915. It took five days by fastest train from New York to San Francisco, so a New Yorker coming to Hawaii spent at least eleven days en route; more if he failed to make good steamer connections.

Matson was then primarily a freight carrier. The company's earlier freighter-passenger vessels--the Lurline, the Manoa, and the Enterprise out of Hilo--had accommodations for not more than sixty or sixty-five passengers, and local businessmen were given top priority when space was scarce. The Wilhelmina, however, had accommodations for about 150 passengers and, as she carried neither livestock, poultry, nor raw sugar, she became very popular with the local traveling public.

Our trip down was a lot of fun, despite the lack of professional entertainment of any sort, and the climax came on the last morning when practically everybody got up before dawn to join returning Islanders who simply had to be topside to catch the first glimpse of Makapuu Light flashing through the murk far off the starboard bow. [There is a lighthouse at Makapuu Point. <sup>©KBA</sup>]

The Matson passenger pier in Honolulu was old Pier 15, located approximately at the foot of Smith Street, the pier entrance being on what was then North Queen Street [now Nimitz Highway]. The Royal Hawaiian Band, under famed Henri Berger, was on the pier to meet every incoming passenger ship, the bandsmen all in white and Captain Henri, with his cap cocked rakishly over one eye, leading them with a zest that only Arthur Fiedler could match. There were throngs of people on the pier, most of them in white, even the men--something new to me, though I had seen something of it on shipboard where Islanders broke out their whites as the weather got warmer.

I remember wondering why so many people would turn out

to meet a steamer and was told that Wednesday was the weekly "steamer day," the one day in the week when mail came in from the Mainland; friends and relatives returned from trips; newspapers and magazines arrived, a bit out-of-date but still interesting. After all, at that time, only fifty-six years ago, Honolulu's only communications with the outside world were by surface mail and trans-Pacific cable. The only means of communication! Incredible perhaps, but true.

There weren't many automobiles on Oahu in 1915--a few thousand, perhaps; hardly enough to be noticed today even if they were all on Kalakaua Avenue at one time. Only the wealthy had cars, and the Mills School representative was not one of them. After arrangements were made to have our luggage hauled to the school, we were walked the few blocks from the pier to the corner of Fort and Kings streets, then the very heart of Honolulu and, for many, practically the hub of the universe.

There we boarded an electric trolley car, the first all-open trolley car I had ever seen, coming as I did from the cool San Francisco Bay area. The car was on the Punahou line which ran up Fort Street to Beretania Street; along Beretania to Alapai Street; then up the hill to Lunalilo Street and along that street to Pensacola Street; then along Wilder Avenue to what was called Punahou Junction, right at the corner of Wilder and Punahou streets. There we changed to a smaller trolley car which took us up the hill past Punahou School, which many old-timers still called Oahu College, and into lower Manoa valley.

Mid-Pacific Institute was located then where it is now, and the original Mills School building--I believe it was called either Damon Hall or Gulick Hall but forget which--stood where its present frame replacement stands. The original building was an almost exact counterpart of what was the Kawaihāo Girls' School building which still stands at

the mauka end of the Mid-Pacific Institute grounds.

[The original building on the Manoa site was Atherton Hall, into which the girls from Kawaihāo Seminary moved in the fall of 1908. The Mills Building, also known as Mills School Hall, was occupied by the boys from Mills School in September 1910. In 1916 the Mills Building was renamed Wilcox Hall in honor of George Norton Wilcox, who provided funds "for the building and its equipment and for the purchase of more land," according to Helen Gay Pratt in The Story of Mid-Pacific Institute. The idea was to integrate the two schools, Kawaihāo Seminary and Mills Institute, into Mid-Pacific Institute. <sup>cdKBA</sup>]

Mills School was then considered a missionary school, primarily for Oriental boys. It was presumably supported largely by what was then called the Congregational Church, then represented in Honolulu by Central Union Church and a few smaller churches of that denomination. The salaries paid teachers in both the boys' and girls' schools were ridiculous by today's standards--probably the equivalent of \$200 or \$250 a month in 1971 dollars, but the fringe benefits included room, board and laundry--probably another \$250 in today's dollars. And what you could buy for a dollar in those days would make your eyes pop--like men's white cotton drill suits, made to measure by a Chinese tailor, for around twelve dollars; good shoes for three or four dollars; car-fare, with transfers all over town, five cents, et cetera.

The very first day I was here, after we had lunched and been introduced to the few faculty members who had returned to school early from their summer vacations, some of us were taken by the Mills School principal, John F. Nelson, a young fellow only five or six years older than the new college graduates, down to the Outrigger Canoe Club. That organization, then only seven years old, was located on an acre or two of beachfront land almost exactly where the present Out-

rigger Hotel--no relation, believe me!--now stands.

To get there from Manoa valley, we took the Manoa trolley car to Punahou Junction, there changed to a Punahou car eastbound which eventually landed us at Pawaa Junction on King Street. There we changed again to a King Street car which turned makai on McCully Street to cross what were called the "duck ponds," a swampy area of small Oriental-type farms which covered much of the Moiliili district lying between King Street and Kalakaua Avenue.

It was an interesting, if sometimes malodorous, ride across a watery no man's land, the so-called duck farms occupying small islets scattered through the swamp. At Kalakaua Avenue the carline headed diamondhead along a dusty, poorly paved road with few habitations on either side until we reached the Moana Hotel. That, in the public mind, was the site of the newly famous Waikiki Beach.

The Moana Hotel of 1915 was the original frame structure which now forms the central part of the hotel, between the two concrete wings, the latter added in 1916. Our destination, the Outrigger Canoe Club, was next door to the Moana on the ewa side, separated from the hotel grounds by the Apuakehau Stream and a small pond or lagoon into which the stream emptied. The clubhouse comprised two wooden-frame pavilions fronting on the beach, one with a dance floor of sorts and both with storage space under the elevated floors for outrigger canoes, surfboards and the like.

The Outrigger Canoe Club had been founded in 1908 by a South Carolinian named Alexander Hume Ford, a somewhat eccentric self-styled ex-journalist who had landed in the Islands fortuitously in 1907, struck up acquaintanceship with the free-swinging novelist Jack London and, reportedly as a result of their meetings on the beach, developed the idea of the club. It was founded as an organization for men and boys only, but wives of the members and some outsiders had

formed what was then called the Women's Auxiliary of the Outrigger Canoe Club, later the Uluniu Women's Swimming Club, which maintained a grass shack-type dressing room on the club's premises for its members.

A very popular feature of the Outrigger Canoe Club was its hau lanai in the area mauka of the pavilions. There the club maintained a small commissary where a bowl of hot rice and tomato soup and other light edibles could be purchased by those who wanted a picnic lunch at the beach. Cost of the rice and tomato soup, served by an affable Japanese caretaker named Sasaki, was five cents, and more than worth the price.

Waikiki Beach itself was a disappointment, especially to people from California or the eastern seaboard, who were accustomed to the extensive beaches of seashore resorts along both coasts. Our beach was no more than twenty or twenty-five yards wide at low tide, and extended only from a point about opposite the Banyan Court of the Moana Hotel, westward to about where the concrete groin marks the ewa end of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel grounds. Beyond those points in both directions were only sea walls, with perhaps a narrow strip of sand and coral at low tide and no sand at all at high tide. The surf was just as it is today and that was Waikiki's main attraction. Swimmers had to pick their way through coral outcroppings off the beach, and cut feet were a common complaint of unwary visitors.

The rest of the Waikiki district, which extended from around McCully Street practically to the ewa base of Diamond Head, was sparsely populated. Of modern shops there were none, not even in the neighborhood of the Moana Hotel. Across Kalakaua Avenue from that hostelry was a small residential district known as Royal Grove, and beyond that on the diamondhead side were Aina hau and other estates of high-ranking Hawaiian and haole families. On the makai side of

Kalakaua Avenue were a few residences, including one owned by Queen Liliuokalani; a resort known as Heine's Tavern, and not much else along what is now Kuhio Beach. Farther along toward Diamond Head there were a few ocean front homes used as North Shore homes are today--to escape from the summer heat in Honolulu.

END OF NARRATIVE

Typed, with minor editorial changes, by Katherine B. Allen

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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.