

# Folklore in Hawaii

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## Folklore in Hawaii

By *Bernhard L. Hormann*, Honolulu

To discuss folklore in Hawaii is like discussing folklore in the United States or Australia. One thinks first of all of remnants of aborigines with a few surviving folkways, more or less out of context, and of immigrant groups from various parts of the world, who, in becoming a part of the new country, have little opportunity, and relatively little incentive, to transplant much of their folklore. So in Hawaii, we have a community of seven inhabited islands, in area not quite half as big as Switzerland, set off by over two thousand miles of ocean from the mainland of the United States, of which it is now the fiftieth state, and about as far from the Polynesian islands, Tahiti, and others whence the aboriginal inhabitants were derived. Discovered only 185 years ago, the nearly two centuries of contact have seen the native population reduced from an assumed 200,000 to less than 40,000 in the first decade of this century, and now mainly as a mixed part Hawaiian population becoming the fastest growing element of a very heterogeneous population and passing the 100,000 mark in the 1950's. None of these "natives" carry on anything approximating an aboriginal way of life. None of them live on reservations. They are part of the general population, rural and urban; upper, middle, and lower class. Of the other half million people in Hawaii today, one fifth are connected with the U.S. military establishment as officers, servicemen, or dependents, and are therefore quite temporary residents.

The established originally immigrant population consists, first, of the Caucasians, whose ancestors came over in the last century from New England, Great Britain, and Germany as missionaries, traders, adventurers, capitalist-enterprisers to establish the foundations of modern Hawaii, in its sugar, pineapple, and tourist industries, and in its American forms of government, schools, religion. Some of the leading non-Hawaiian families of Hawaii have thus been identified with Hawaii for four and five generations. They are, however, representatives of cosmopolitan Western civilization.

The rapid growth of the sugar industry, particularly in the half century from 1875 to 1925, led, in the dearth of a native labor supply, to labor importations from China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, from the Portuguese Azores and Madeira, Spain, Norway, Germany, Russia, and from Puerto Rico, and in small numbers from several other countries. Of these immigrants, many returned to their homes, many others moved to the U.S. mainland, but of today's population

perhaps 60 per cent are derived from this labor immigration. The largest ethnic groups are Japanese (about 200,000, including perhaps 30,000 Okinawans), Filipinos (about 70,000), and Chinese (nearly 40,000). There are probably as many Portuguese as Chinese, although they are no longer counted separately. The children and grandchildren of these people have attended the American schools of Hawaii, and are in various stages of assimilation as Americans. In the process, however, there have been, temporarily at least, some ethnic communities. While even these are never solidly of one folk, nor completely isolated from the life of the wider community, it is nevertheless here where one would look for folklore.

Research, attempting to reconstruct the pre-contact native way of life, has been done primarily by the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, Honolulu. However, under the auspices of the University of Hawaii, as well as independently, anthropologists have also studied modern Hawaiians. (Representative work is by Beaglehole, Beckwith, Finney, Forster, Handy, Heen, Luomala.) Social scientists, particularly anthropologists, have also been interested in the Samoans, of whom several hundred have drifted into Hawaii, many of them settling in a Mormon rural community. (See Eyde, Pierce.) While sociologists have been primarily interested in studying the social disorganization and reorganization of the Hawaiians (see Lind), there have been studies by sociologists and others of Hawaiians in a community setting, where attention has to be paid to such matters as beliefs and practices about health, illness, and death, and about birth and marriage. (See Forster, Heen, Yamamura.) Studies of surviving Hawaiian language usages and of emerging dialectical English as spoken by Hawaiians are being conducted by Samuel H. Elbert, Professor of Pacific Languages and Linguistics, and Elizabeth B. Carr, Professor of Speech at the University of Hawaii. Dr. Carr's interest extends to dialectical forms of English which have developed among the immigrant groups of Hawaii. Katharine Luomala and Martha Beckwith are names of international reputation for their studies on folklore. In regard to the immigrant ethnic groups, the primary research emphases have been either on the history of the movement or on the process of the attrition of the cultural heritage and the rapid assimilation not only of the European immigrants, in the typical American pattern, but also of those from the geographic area in Asia over which Chinese civilization has been dominant. The interest has been how peoples outside the Judeo-Christian religious stream, with written and spoken languages

unrelated to the European, of different race, have yet become assimilated. (See, for instance, Adams, Cariaga, Glick, Kim, Lind.)

Thus, if it is remembered that this has been the general interest, several studies may nevertheless be mentioned in which the imported folkways are treated. A study for a master's thesis on Germans in Hawaii (Hormann) describes the coming over of German peasants from Niedersachsen and West Preussen in the 1880's and 1890's, bringing with them the kitchenware and Christmas tree ornaments, and, through a German-directed plantation management, able to reconstruct and carry on German ways in a sort of German community woven into the wider community. This was active until America's entry into World War I. A German Lutheran church with a parochial school was the center of this life. German baking and cooking, a few elderly people capable of speaking good German, several English speaking Lutheran churches are about all that remains in Hawaii to remind one of this German immigration.

The growth of a Japanese community in the coffee-growing small-farm area of Kona, island of Hawaii, was capably described by the late anthropologist, John Embree, author of the now classic study of a Japanese village: Suyemura. Most of the Japanese coffee farmers were from the same prefecture, Kumamoto, in which Suyemura is located, and therefore Embree was able to point to comparisons and contrasts, and particularly to the incompleteness of the reconstruction of Japanese folkways. However, customs of reciprocity, the life cycle of the individual, household arrangements and activities, holiday celebrations are all handled. Lind studied assimilation of these same people in rural Hawaii. The Japanese form of defense, karate, has been investigated by Haines.—Glick studied the immigration of the Chinese. He found that some of the institutions established in Hawaii were not direct replicas of ancestral ones, but represented adaptations of immigrants in a foreign land in their attempt to maintain their identity. In his study of Honolulu's Chinatown he discovered that Chinatowns on the Mainland of the U.S. were more exclusively Chinese than Honolulu's. Yet Chinese ways, particularly familism, surname-societies, and temple worship were established in Hawaii and Glick discusses these matters and their attrition.

Annually since 1935 sociology undergraduate students and sociologists on the faculty have collaborated in the publishing of *Social Process in Hawaii*. In the successive issues have been descriptive articles of Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, and Portuguese families; birth, marriage, and funeral customs; folk magic and folk dancing. A fairly extensive

bibliography on social research in Hawaii is in preparation by the writer and will be issued in mimeographed form by the Romanzo Adams Social Research Laboratory of the University of Hawaii, which is one outgrowth of the social research program initiated in 1920 by Hawaii's pioneer sociological researcher, Romanzo Adams. It is this Laboratory which has through the years accumulated files of materials on the ethnic folkways, institutions, and interrelations and assimilation in Hawaii. Only a year ago the Laboratory finished under contract a study of Chinese and Japanese associations in a down-town section of Honolulu now undergoing urban redevelopment, and found that even under third generation leadership there is still vitality in them.

In the past few years a number of social scientists at the University have become interested in the Okinawans. Two anthropologists, William P. Lebra and Thomas W. Maretzki have done research in Okinawa, where Lebra has studied shamanism and Maretzki child-rearing practices. Since Lebra is now director of the Social Science Research Institute, a continuation of such research among Hawaii's Okinawans may be expected. In the meantime, a sociologist, Yukiko Kimura, has been studying the immigration of Okinawans and their assimilation in Hawaii. Her first report is listed in the bibliography.—A proposal by Lind through the Adams Laboratory to produce a pictorial record of the rapidly passing folkways and institutions of the immigrant ethnic groups has not yet found financing. The Honolulu Academy of Arts has a collection of photographs on the changing architecture of Hawaii.

These few remarks should suggest that if folklore studies are to be done on a larger scale than here sketched, now is the time. Before long it will be too late, as the tradition-directed immigrant folk become the other-directed urban mass. If there were isolated communities to be found in Hawaii, or if Hawaii itself were away from, instead of on, the "Main Street of the World" one would be able to study the process of the making of folkways at first hand. The way the pidgin English of the commercial establishments of Honolulu and of the rural sugar plantations became virtually a Hawaiian Island dialect of English suggests, that, under conditions of relative isolation, this interesting development of a new folk way of life would have occurred. At the "Crossroads of the Pacific", however, such a development is effectively prevented.

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