

PERSPECTIVES ON HAWAI'I'S STATEHOOD

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa
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Oral History Project
Social Science Research Institute
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INTRODUCTION

The Oral History Project (OHP), University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, was established in 1976 by the Hawai'i State Legislature. A unit of the University's Social Science Research Institute, OHP's primary objectives are to record and preserve the recollections of Hawai'i's people and to disseminate oral history transcripts to researchers, students, and the general community. OHP's objectives also include the development of books, articles, catalogs, photo displays, and videotapes based on oral histories; serving as a resource center for oral history materials; and training groups and individuals conducting oral history research.

This volume contains near verbatim transcripts of videotaped interviews with political leaders, aides, observers, and scholars of Hawai'i's statehood movement. The interviews were originally undertaken to serve as the basis for a thirty-minute video documentary co-produced by the Oral History Project and Hawai'i Public Television. Since the interviews contain historical data on Hawai'i's politics and government, they are transcribed and published here for archival and research purposes. As the title of this publication suggests, it is not OHP's intent to produce a comprehensive history of the statehood movement. That task has been recently accomplished by Australian scholar Roger Bell.* Rather, these interviews represent the recalled experiences/observations of nine individuals whose perspectives on statehood are as varied as their backgrounds.

All nine, however, agree that Hawai'i's drive toward statehood--involving decades of debate among local and national leaders--was closely tied to the socio-political issues of post-World War II America. The final decision to admit Hawai'i as the nation's fiftieth state rested partly on how Congress dealt with and resolved the issues of civil rights, Communism, and party politics--issues that inevitably arose in view of the Islands' largely non-white, multi-ethnic population, growing union influence, and overturn of Republican hegemony in 1954.

These issues, discussed at length by the interviewees, place Hawai'i's statehood drive within the broader context of twentieth century U.S. history while informing us of local politics and social change.

*Roger Bell, Last Among Equals: Hawai'i Statehood and American Politics (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1984).

For a condensed history of Hawai'i's statehood movement, see A.A. Smyser, The Story of Hawai'i's Statehood (Honolulu: Hawai'i Statehood Silver Jubilee Committee, 1984).

Interviewees

The nine interviewees were selected for their diverse backgrounds--representing politics, business, labor and academia--as well as their differing political persuasions. The following is a summary of each interview:

George Lehleitner

A self-made New Orleans businessman, Lehleitner is credited by many to be Hawai'i's most outspoken advocate of statehood in Congress. Disillusioned by Hawai'i's wartime experiences under martial law and the Islands' territorial status which denied its citizens an elected governor, voting representatives to Congress, locally selected judges, a locally written constitution, and a voice in the U.S. presidential election, Lehleitner lobbied vigorously on behalf of Hawai'i. He also encouraged the governments of Hawai'i and Alaska to adopt their own constitutions to convince congressional leaders of their readiness for admission.

In his interview, Lehleitner discusses the opposition of conservative Southern congressmen who feared the election of four liberal, non-white congressmen from Hawai'i who would vote in favor of civil rights legislation. Lehleitner also discusses the role of former Delegate to Congress and Governor of Hawai'i John A. Burns.

John S. Whitehead

A professor of American History at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks, Whitehead is a scholar of Alaska's statehood movement. The close relationship between Hawai'i and Alaska (both were admitted into the union in 1959) and the similar issues both movements brought out made it impossible for Whitehead to study one territory's statehood movement without considering the other.

Whitehead maintains that, because Alaska's economic growth was directly tied to statehood, its government and people view the 1959 event as a watershed in Alaska's development. In contrast, Hawai'i's statehood is regarded by many as a purely formal, long-deserved change in status.

Thomas P. Gill

In a brief interview, former U.S. Congressman and Lieutenant Governor Gill discusses statehood in relation to local politics, particularly the 1954 Democratic victory. Like others, Gill attributes the attainment of statehood to the work of many people, rather than a single individual.

Malcolm MacNaughton

As a representative of Hawai'i's Chamber of Commerce, MacNaughton lobbied for statehood with the goal of achieving equality with the rest of the union. Now, a retired executive of Castle & Cooke, Inc., he maintains that the expansion of large companies, such as Castle & Cooke, would have taken place with or without the change in status.

Hiram L. Fong

Elected U.S. senator in Hawai'i's first election since statehood, Fong

discusses the statehood question in relation to national and local politics. Regarded a "maverick" by many observers, Republican Fong was a fiscal conservative, but a liberal on civil rights. He also received consistent support from the ILWU [International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union].

Fong concludes statehood tremendously helped Hawai'i economically, politically, and socially: it enabled Hawai'i's businesses and tourist industry to expand; enabled Hawai'i to elect its own governor and four voting representatives to Congress (two senators and two representatives); and made its residents full-fledged citizens.

Robert G. Hogan

A Honolulu attorney, Hogan between 1949 and 1951 was a member of the Hawai'i Statehood Commission, appointed by then Governor Ingram Stainback. The Statehood Commission, an informational and lobbying body, was established in 1935 as the Equal Rights Commission by then Territorial Senator and later Delegate to Congress Joseph R. Farrington. In 1947, a Washington office was opened.

While lobbying as a Commission member, Hogan remembers the powerful influence of the Southern senators, who consistently blocked the passage of civil rights legislation. Without the support of these senators, Hawai'i's statehood prospects appeared dim. Upon returning to Hawai'i, Hogan suggested commonwealth status as an intermediate step to statehood. This meant residents would be exempt from federal taxes and allowed to elect a governor. His proposal was supported by many statehood opponents, including Governor Stainback and Native Hawaiian rights advocate Alice Kamokila Campbell. Hogan, although a statehood supporter, was criticized for his suggestion and accused of being anti-statehood.

Robert McElrath

Retired since 1977 as ILWU's Regional Director, McElrath was interviewed to assess the Communist issue and its influence in statehood deliberations. Major strikes in 1946, 1947, and 1949 caused many local businessmen and congressmen on the Mainland to associate the union, especially its leaders, with the Communist allegations of the McCarthy era. McElrath concludes that, given the atmosphere of the times, these allegations provided a convenient means for statehood opponents to rally around a single issue.

Daniel W. Tuttle

Perhaps Hawai'i's most authoritative political analyst, Tuttle has observed local politics for over thirty years. In his interview, he downplays the opinion held by many that John A. Burns deserves the lion's share of the credit for securing statehood. Burns, Hawai'i's delegate to Congress from 1957 to 1959, lobbied strongly on Hawai'i's behalf. His many contacts in Congress, as well as his leadership role in Hawai'i's Democratic party, are said to have been major factors in acquiring congressional support. Tuttle, however, while acknowledging Burns' pivotal role in local politics, credits George Lehleitner as the true hero in Hawai'i's statehood fight.

Daniel T. Aoki

A 442nd Regimental Combat Team veteran, Democratic party organizer, and aide to John A. Burns, Aoki (who passed away in 1986) was at the forefront of many political, social, and economic changes. In his two interviews, Aoki discussed his role in politics and his close association with Burns.

Having accompanied Burns to Washington during the latter's term as delegate to Congress from 1957 until statehood in 1959, Aoki spoke of Burns as the key figure in achieving statehood. Striking close friendships with Senate President Lyndon B. Johnson and House Speaker Sam Rayburn, Burns, according to Aoki, was able to maneuver the Hawai'i statehood bill into a favorable position. His hard-nosed, backdoor lobbying style, according to Aoki, was in sharp contrast to the ambassadorial styles of his predecessors, Delegates Joseph R. and Elizabeth P. Farrington.

Methodology

This project represents a departure from oral history methodology used in past OHP projects in that the interviews were conducted on videotape instead of audiotape.

The advantages of videotaping are obvious: users of the videotape are able to see the interview--mannerisms, gestures, the interview setting--and get a clearer picture of the dynamics of the interview situation.

The disadvantages of videotaping--at least, those experienced by OHP--stem from the manpower and equipment needs associated with a broadcast quality production.

At least six persons were required to be present at each interview session: the interviewee, the interviewer, a second interviewer/director representing the television station; cameraman, sound man, and light man. The one-to-one relationship between interviewer and interviewee found in intimate audiotaped sessions and so important to natural, spontaneous responses was absent. Before each session, the camera, sound, and lighting equipment were set up and checked; voice levels measured; furniture moved; and interviewee and interviewers located to their proper places. Once the interview began, there were stops to change tapes and correct malfunctioning equipment. These interruptions sometimes hindered the flow and continuity of the interviews.

Also, due to the high costs of videotaping OHP needed to be more selective in its topics of inquiry. The lengthy life history interview OHP is accustomed to conducting was an impossibility in this project.

Fortunately, this particular project was an ideal one to experiment with videotaped interviews. Unlike past OHP projects which focused on the lives of ordinary working people, most of whom were unaccustomed to having their voices tape recorded, Perspectives on Hawai'i's Statehood

focused on public figures who are used to being interviewed for the public record. All of them were very much at ease before the camera, had little difficulty articulating their thoughts, and were tolerant to frequent interruptions. It was indeed fortunate that each possessed the time and desire to participate as interviewees, as each saw the value of recording and preserving their experiences and observations for the public.

Cautionary Notes on Using Oral Histories

Historical propositions are only as valid as the evidence they are founded on. They may be supported by corroborative evidence, modified by new evidence, or rejected by negative evidence. Oral historical sources, when properly used, can support, modify, or reject historical propositions. These sources, however, must be treated with great care and circumspection.

Despite the presence of video cameras and the fact that they were being asked to recall on short notice experiences that occurred over twenty-five years ago, the interviewees responded with clarity, honesty, and candor. Each was given the opportunity to examine their transcripts for accuracy. Some painstakingly verified dates and the spellings of names and places.

Every effort has been made to verify statements, but it must be noted that unverifiable and questionable statements may be found in these transcripts. Historians and writers are encouraged to corroborate oral historical statements before quoting them as fact.

Transcript Usage and Availability

This volume contains a glossary of all non-English and "pidgin" English words (which are underlined in the transcripts) and a detailed subject index. A biographical summary precedes each interviewee's transcript.

All interviewees were encouraged to read their transcripts and make any deletions or additions they considered necessary before signing the following legal release:

In order to preserve and make available the history of Hawai'i for present and future generations, I hereby give and grant to the University of Hawai'i Oral History Project as a donation for such scholarly and educational purposes as the Project Director shall determine, all my rights, title, and interest to the following: tapes and edited transcripts of interviews recorded on (date), biographical data sheet completed (date), and notes of untaped interviews (date).

The transcripts, published in this volume, represent the statements which interviewees wish to leave for the public record.

The majority are almost verbatim from the actual taped interviews. Minor editing was done by the OHP staff to make the transcripts easier to read. The flavor and authenticity of interviews were not compromised by this editing. Staff additions are in brackets [].

Some interviewees made grammatical or syntactic changes in their transcripts. Others attached additions or explanations. These have been incorporated into the final transcript. Interviewee additions are in parentheses ().

A three-dot ellipsis indicates an interruption; a four-dot ellipsis indicates a trail-off by a speaker. Three dashes indicate false starts.

Videotape and Audiotape Availability

These transcripts represent the primary documents intended for archival and research purposes. However, persons wishing to view the unedited videotaped interviews can do so by contacting the Oral History Project office. The audio portion of these interviews have been copied onto audio cassette tapes and are available for listening at Hamilton Library's Hawaiian and Pacific Collection, University of Hawai'i at Manoa.

The tape identification number, assigned to each audio cassette tape and transcript, indicate project number, cassette number, session number, and year of interview, in sequence. For example, Tape No. 12-5-1-84 identifies project number 12, cassette number 5, the first recorded interview session, and the year, 1984.

The edited thirty-minute documentary based on these interviews, co-produced by the Oral History Project and Hawai'i Public Television's "Rice and Roses," is available at the OHP office, Sinclair Library's Audio-Visual Center (University of Hawai'i at Manoa), the University of Hawai'i at Hilo, and the Department of Education's Technical Assistance Center (TAC).

Perspectives on Hawai'i's Statehood and other OHP publications are available at:

Hawai'i

Hawai'i Public Library (Hilo)
Hawai'i Community College Library
University of Hawai'i at Hilo
Library
Kealahou Community Library

Kaua'i

Kaua'i Regional Library (Līhu'e)
Kaua'i Community College Library

Lānai

Lānai Community-School Library

Maui

Maui Regional Library (Wailuku)
Maui Community College Library

Moloka'i

Maui Public Library, Moloka'i Branch

O'ahu

Hawai'i State Library	University of Hawai'i at Mānoa:
Kaimuki Regional Library	Hamilton Library
Kāne'ohe Regional Library	Sinclair Library
Pearl City Regional Library	Oral History Project
Honolulu Community College Library	Social Science Research Institute
Kapi'olani Community College Library	Ethnic Studies Program
Leeward Community College Library	Hawai'i State Archives
Windward Community College Library	Hawai'i State Foundation on Culture and the Arts

OHP's publications include:

Transcript Collections

Waialua and Hale'iwa: The People Tell Their Story (1977)
Life Histories of Native Hawaiians (1978)
Remembering Kaka'ako: 1910-1950 (1978)
Waipi'o: Māno Wai (Source of Life) (1978)
The 1924 Filipino Strike on Kaua'i (1979)
Women Workers in Hawai'i's Pineapple Industry (1979)
Stores and Storekeepers of Pā'ia and Pu'unēne, Maui (1980)
A Social History of Kona (1981)
Five Life Histories (1983)
Kalihi: Place of Transition (1984)
Ka Po'e Kau Lei: An Oral History of Hawai'i's Lei Sellers (1986)

Books

Uchinanchu: A History of Okinawans in Hawai'i (1981)
Hanahana: An Oral History Anthology of Hawai'i's Working People (1984)

Finding Aids

Catalog of Oral History Collections in Hawai'i (1982)
Catalog of the ESOHP Collection, 1976-1984 (1984)
Master Index to the ESOHP Interviews, 1976-1983 (1984)

The staff of the Oral History Project, Social Science Research Institute, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa believes that researching, recording, and disseminating the experiences of Hawai'i's people will stimulate further research and foster a better understanding of our Islands' history.

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: George Lehleitner, 79, retired New Orleans businessman

"So it was a rather shocking revelation to me to learn for the first time just what the realities of territorialism were and so I was able to work up a pretty good peeve because of it. And yet I thought because it was so obvious that it was an injustice, and the injustice was so huge, I felt that Hawai'i not only deserved statehood, but if they [U.S. Congress] wanted to retain credibility with the other nations of the world, they better get this potential monkey off of their back, and stop treating American citizens and American taxpayers as second-class citizens."

George Lehleitner was born in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1906. The son of German working-class parents, Lehleitner worked as an office boy and machinist apprentice after completing elementary school. Later, he prospered as the owner of an appliance and flooring business.

Lehleitner served in the navy during World War II. He later visited Hawai'i and returned to the Mainland convinced that martial law and territorialism were injustices to Hawai'i's people.

He became a tireless statehood advocate for both Hawai'i and Alaska. He spent long hours, at his own expense, lobbying members of Congress in Washington, D.C. Many credit Lehleitner for playing a major role in achieving statehood for the two territories.

Lehleitner still resides in the New Orleans area. He was honored in 1984 in Hawai'i and Alaska as both states observed their twenty-fifth statehood anniversaries.