ID PROJECT
MUSEUM SEES GREAT RESPONSE TO PIERCE PHOTOS

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Notable numbers
23
The number of photos from the John Howard Pierce Photograph Collection that have been printed in the Tribune-Herald.

For anyone who was living on Hawaii Island in the 1950s, '60s and '70s, it is an opportunity to see faces, places and events they might not have seen or thought about in almost half a century.

For the young, it’s a launching point — a chance to open up a dialogue with friends and family about history, community and their own sense of place and time.

The John Howard Pierce Photograph Collection at the
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Lyman Museum in Hilo is a treasure trove of nearly 50,000 images taken by Pierce during his time as a photographer with the Hawaii Tribune-Herald. And for the last year or so, an archivist with the museum, Miki Bulos, has worked to catalogue the photos and identify the people, places, and events in them. The Tribune-Herald has regularly printed images in its Community section and asked for the public to provide its input into the project, so far the response has been nearly overwhelming, Bulos said.

"It's a conservative estimate, but I would say we have had about 300 people call in on the photos in the paper," she said.

Of the initial 700 photographs presented to the community, either through the newspaper, or through the exhibit and special photo ID days hosted at the museum, more than 400 pieces were identified, at least partially, she said.

Are residents might recognize themselves, friends, family members, or former coworkers in the photos, and when they share that information with the ID project, Bulos said, the project can pay serious dividends. Almost like a snowball, a small piece of information can lead Bulos and others to reach new people and sources of information that can contribute even greater pieces of information.

"Our goal is to find out everything we can about these photos," Bulos said. "It's important. This is our community and its history."

The timing is right for the project, she added, because many of the people in the photos are of the age where they unfortunately might not be around much longer to help and share their knowledge. For instance, a woman named Julita Casil recently called to identify her husband, Alfredo, who was playing saxophone on a band depicted in one of the photos. He passed away a few months prior.

Barbara Fujimoto said she and her mother, Violet Hirata, were thrilled to be able to dig through the archives and find photos of themselves, as well as friends and family. One Saturday, they visited Bulos at the museum and found a picture of their family during a 4-H trip to Volcano.

"It was a picture of all of the 4-Hers and our parents. I'm there in the front row with my brother and sister," she said. "I didn't even remember being in that photo. It was in Volcano behind Kilauea Lodge. I had so much fun talking to my Mom about the family camp there. That photo made us start talking about our childhood and what we did together. I didn't even realize how much I (Hirata) was with 4-H."

While looking at the photographs and identifying the people and places in them is fun, Fujimoto added the best part of the experience might be in sharing the experience with friends, family and other community members.

"I took my mother over to the photo ID day, and she got to see people she hadn't seen in a while. She got to see some of the people from 4-H. It became like a reunion. We all got together and chatted through pictures. People were saying 'Look at that!' It was so exciting... I loved seeing other people getting so excited. And I learned about things I never knew. I didn't even know about Hawaiian Village in Kekaha... It just brings back how important it is to talk about our history. It starts a conversation."

"Each photo gets deeper and deeper, the more people contribute to its description... Each picture has a story to tell, and those stories will stop your heart."

Miki Bulos
Lyman Museum archivist

She was fascinated to learn about the small group of men, who had been forced into retirement from the sugar plantations, and with nowhere to turn they set up their own little community, living using traditional Hawaiian methods to survive. Calibosa even built his own shack out of driftwood.

"I knew about the immigration history. But I didn't know what happened to them after they got retired out of sugar. They were resilient. They found a life here in Hanalei. They survived here and took on roles as caretakers of the area, and of Hawaiian culture and traditions... One man said he would go there on weekends and they taught him to throw-net fish. They were stewarding the land and handing down the culture. They could have just wallowed in their abandonment, but instead they got engaged," she said.

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To help with the photo ID project, find out more information about the exhibit, contact Miki Bulos at (808) 335-5102 (once messages begins, press 5). More photos are also available at the museum's website — lymanmuseum.org — on the Pierce Photo ID page.

The museum also hosted five photo ID events since the exhibit began, and two more are scheduled — Saturday, April 26 and Saturday, June 28 — which will mark the close of the Pierce exhibit.

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