

Hawaii

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Lehua Kamalamalama and her Rosettes welcome the SS Monterey on its maiden voyage at the Port of Hilo on Oct. 26, 1961.

Museum needs help to identify people & places pictured in trove of photographs

By COLIN M. STEWART
Tribune-Herald staff writer

It represents nearly three decades of a man's work and passion — an exhaustive photographic record of the daily lives of Hawaii Island residents during the 1950s, '60s and '70s.

Containing between 40,000 and 50,000 images in negatives and prints, the John Howard Pierce Photograph Collection is a treasure trove of local history that is just beginning to yield its secrets. The photos more than doubled the Lyman Museum's collection when it was first acquired in 2007, and last year a museum employee, with the help of volunteers and community members, began a concerted effort to catalogue, scan and digitally preserve the images.

It's a daunting task, made even more difficult by the limited resources and manpower available to the museum, said Miki Bulos, the archivist in charge of the project.

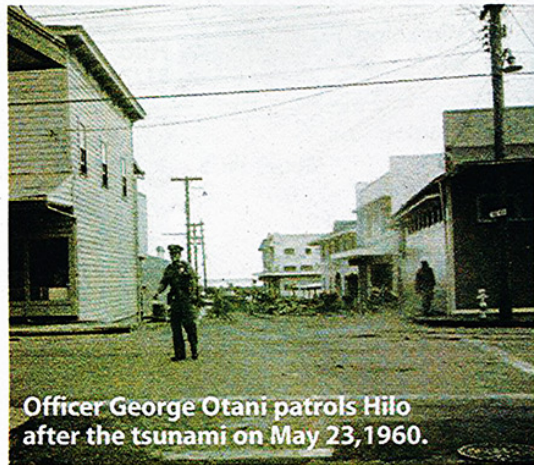
"We probably haven't even looked at 1 percent of it yet," she said of the collection. "You've got to handle them (the photos) with care, and some are only in negative form, so we have to scan them in before we can see them."

While the sheer size of the collection makes it unwieldy, she said, its potential is virtually limitless when it comes to providing a unique and valuable

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INSIDE

John Howard Pierce experienced life on Hawaii Island through the lens of his camera. Page A11



Officer George Otani patrols Hilo after the tsunami on May 23, 1960.



HOLLYN JOHNSON/Tribune-Herald

ABOVE: Photos from the John Howard Pierce Photographic Collection are organized for an exhibit at the Lyman Museum beginning Friday. **BELOW:** The Archivist Miki Bulos explains her mapping system for photos from the Pierce collection.



Lyman Museum history sleuths dig into photo collection

By COLIN M. STEWART
Tribune-Herald staff writer

Un unraveling the mysteries presented by the Pierce photo collection requires a determined approach, and the skills of a private eye.

In her office in the basement of the Lyman Museum, Miki Bulos keeps a wall plastered with photographs, looking not unlike the walls of clues one might see in the background of a police procedural on TV.

Those whose subjects have already been identified are organized into groupings based on subject matter

as the museum plans a public exhibit. But the photos that haven't yet been identified are organized more haphazardly, based on whatever information can be gleaned from their content.

Connections based on common people, places or dates are highlighted. The dates stamped onto the sheets containing the photos' original negatives have proven to be unreliable, so first-person narratives have given Bulos her best information to go on.

It's a job that's certainly been made more manageable by the tight-knit nature of the Big Isle's communities, she said. But it's still no walk in the park.

"I've been working on ID'ing these photos for about a year. ... We're just scratching the surface. I'm just really helping getting this started. This is the community's project," she said. "It's something that will take years."

As new discoveries are made about the photos, they take on much greater significance, and help to inform inquiries into other photographs. Take for instance the photo of a young woman in a pretty floral dress as she stands with a group of sailors on a Navy ship.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

From front page

historical record of an important period in the history of Hawaii.

"You don't normally get a collection in the tens of thousands from a single photographer," she said. "And the period increases the depth of importance of the collection. This includes the '50s and '60s, so it was right during statehood. A time of great change. There was a lot going on. He shot from 1951 to the '70s, and that really fills a gap in our coverage."

Pierce, who worked from 1951-1968 as a journalist for the Hawaii Tribune-Herald (then known as the Hilo Tribune-Herald) documented official ceremonies, community gatherings, small slice-of-life moments and everything in between. So, while the sheer size of the collection is enough to qualify it as exceptional, the quality and variety of the photos are amazing, Bulos said.

"He covered almost any activity you can cover. Community events, 4H, business openings, people hanging out at the beach. He was all over the place. So the collection is noteworthy for the time period, the quantity and the breadth and depth of coverage," she said.

Over the past year or so, Bulos has scanned the photos into digital format,

so they can be printed and displayed without causing further wear and tear to the original materials. It takes about a minute to scan a photo into her computer, which is then saved at a very high resolution, so it will continue to be useful as technology improves.

Pierce did a tremendous job in preserving the photos taken during his time in Hawaii, she said, carefully setting negatives in clear plastic sleeves and labeling each sleeve with a stamped date. He also kept dated notebooks of his assignments. The only problem is that the two don't really complement each other, Bulos said.

"We can't figure out what the date is he put on the negatives," she said. "It doesn't correspond with the notebooks. It could be the date he developed the film, it could be the date he put them in the sleeves. We just don't know."

Another problem the archivist faces is that the notebooks included with the collection are focused on Pierce keeping track of his expenses, rather than noting who people are in the photos and what the event being photographed is. That's where the real leg-work begins.

A small selection of about 140 prints in a three-ring binder — a collection

she calls her "most wanted" — has accompanied Bulos to various community meetings as she has worked to identify the people, places and events portrayed in the pictures.

"People in the community are really the best local historians," she said. "People in the local community who have memories of that time, they are so valuable. They are necessary to make this collection. They have their own personal history, and that, in turn, helps to put these events within the context of the history of Hawaii."

Additionally, 14 photos were released to the public on the Lyman Museum's 2013 calendar, along with a request for the public's help in identifying the people, places and happenings they pictured.

Now, beginning on Friday and running through Jan. 11, 2014, the museum will feature an exhibit of the Pierce collection, featuring 29 framed photographs that have already been identified.

Meanwhile, a slideshow of another 30 or so photos, and the 140 prints in the binder will be available to the public to peruse, and hopefully to provide their input.

Email Colin M. Stewart at cstewart@hawaiitribune-herald.com.

"We didn't know who she was, or what they were doing," Bulos said. "It wasn't necessarily that compelling of a photograph."

But when members of the community recognized the young woman as Lovey Mae Akamu Scott, who served as Miss Aloha Hawaii from May 1958-May 1959, that started an avalanche of information that has proven to answer questions about a great many of the photos Pierce took during her reign.

"She came and helped us identify people she was pictured with in many other photos," Bulos said. "She's been a huge help."

Among the questions she answered definitively was that of the naval ship photo: It was taken on the occasion of the arrival of the first U.S. flag that contained 50 stars after Hawaii was added to the union.

Suddenly, a photo that didn't appear to be terribly important on first glance took on a whole new meaning once Scott was able to provide context, Bulos explained.

Further, as Miss Aloha Hawaii, Scott's duties included welcoming dignitaries when they arrived on the island and were presented at important community gatherings. And, thanks to a fastidious grandmother, all of Scott's exploits were carefully cut out of copies of the newspaper and pasted into a family scrapbook, complete with names, places and all the other information Bulos could hope to ask for.

Like a snowball, she said, pieces of information



HOLLYN JOHNSON/Tribune-Herald

From left, Archivist Miki Bulos and Registrar Lynn Elia hold an image from the John Howard Pierce Photographic Collection. The photograph was taken from the old First United Protestant Church off of Haili Street overlooking Kinoole Street. The building was demolished in 1969.

lead to greater pieces of information at a faster and faster rate, she said.

In a phone interview on Tuesday, Scott, 73, said she was thrilled to be able to contribute to the ID project.

"I heard through a friend about it, and they just said that Miki was looking for people who could ID people in the photos," she said. "When she mentioned the name Howard Pierce, I immediately was excited. I knew him well, and I had often wondered what became of his collection."

As for her role in the unraveling of Hawaii Island's local history, Scott said she was surprised that her involvement was so highly valued by Bulos and others at the Lyman Museum.

"There were so many important people and important things going on at that time, and I just thought, 'Well, why are they looking at me?'" she said. "I was

kept any photos from those days," she said. "To be honest with you, I didn't like being photographed. I always came out looking real dorky. I didn't like seeing myself in photos."

Even so, she's looking forward to attending the grand opening of the Lyman exhibit and showing her grandsons the photos, she said, although she may be blushing at a few of them.

"After the presentation of the flag, there are pictures of me welcoming all the crew members — you know, the young men — on the ship," she said of the photos taken during the presentation of the 50-star flag. "I'm giving them kisses on their cheeks. When I saw that I said, 'Oh my gosh, I don't remember doing that to all those young men.' But there the moment was in black in white, so I must have done it!"

Despite the ubiquitous nature of her appearances in Pierce's photos during her year as Miss Aloha Hawaii, however, Scott said being the subject of pictures hasn't exactly been a priority for her.

"I personally haven't

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Photo courtesy Lyman Museum

Miss Aloha Hawaii Lovey Mae Akamu Scott is pictured in this photo taken on July 12, 1958, in the Port of Hilo welcoming the USS Walker as it brings the gift of a 50-star U.S. flag following the addition of Hawaii to the union. Also pictured is (at left holding a guitar) John Benny Kahaka and (at right in the aloha shirt and straw hat) Bryce Detton. Both Scott and the daughter of Kahaka will be attending the opening night reception for the John Howard Pierce Photograph Collection at Lyman

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FROM THE FRONT PAGE

Man behind the images

By COLIN M. STEWART
Tribune-Herald staff writer

It wasn't until late in life, at the age of 47, that John Howard Pierce moved to Hilo and began documenting Big Island life through pictures.

Like many people who move to the Hawaiian Islands from the mainland, he may have been searching for a "second chance," said Miki Bulos, an archivist and researcher at Lyman Museum who is working to preserve a massive collection of Pierce's photos.

"This is just me saying this, and I'm probably projecting, but I think he fell in love with Hawaii," she said. "This was a chance to start over, to explore. I think it was an adventure."

Born in 1903 on a family farm in Hebron, Ill., Pierce earned a degree in journalism from the University of California at Berkeley in 1924. He later worked as an agricultural reporter, covering the San



PIERCE

Francisco Bay area, including the California and Hawaiian Sugar Company.

Pierce and his wife,

Emily, had tried on multiple occasions to start a family but were met with disappointment after disappointment, Bulos said.

"We've had some people tell us that she had a dozen miscarriages," she said.

However, in December 1950, with Emily six months pregnant, the Pierces pulled up their stakes and relocated to Hilo, where he began work with the then-Hilo Tribune-Herald as the farm editor. Three months later, Emily gave birth to their one and only child, Nancy Ann.

"New home, new job, new child, new life," Bulos said.

Into this new life Pierce dove with great enthusiasm and a trained eye, she said.

No event was too big or too small to draw the attention of his camera lens.

While few records have been located detailing his early days with the paper, a review of his Hawaii Tribune-Herald personnel file shows that in 1964, he made \$127 per week.

While his subjects varied widely, he remained interested in and dedicated to farming, Bulos said, not only covering the Hawaii Island agriculture industry but also editing the island's annual progress report and closely monitoring industry changes on the island. Even after his retirement from the newspaper in 1968, he continued to edit the progress report, and also took on the job of curator of the Lyman Museum, overseeing the construction of the main building.

In 1978, while in London researching the Captain Cook Bicentennial special edition for the paper, he was hit by a double-decker bus and died within the year at the age of 76.

PIERCE COLLECTION ID PROJECT

If you think you or someone you know could help identify some of the people or events depicted in photos contained in the Pierce Photo Collection, Miki Bulos at the Lyman Museum would like to hear from you. She may be contacted at (808) 935-5021, ext. 110, or via email at archives@lymanmuseum.org. Those wishing to help are asked to contact her in advance, as Bulos may not be available to help people who drop by unannounced.

Additionally, each Saturday starting Aug. 3, the Tribune-Herald will reprint one photograph from the collection on the Community Page through the run of the Pierce exhibit, which concludes in January. So check those pages regularly, and, if you see something you remember, be sure to contact Bulos and help preserve Hilo's vital history.