



# The Way We Were

By  
Peter Gellatly

Kāne'ohe's Hula Preservation Society (HPS) is anchored firmly in the past, the present and the future, all at the same time. Its driving force, kumu hula Maile Beamer Loo, has sat with the elders and learned what hula was, how it has changed, and where it is headed.

2019 marks 19 years for the nonprofit and 21 years for Loo's own hālau, Kaho'oilina Aloha. She and three other Windward hālau call HPS's Alaloa Street studio, Hale Pulelehua, home.

Kumu Maile began her hula studies as a teenager at Kamehameha in the community education program, where Beamer hula was being taught by Auntie Ke'ala Brunke. She fell in love with everything about the tradition and continued dancing during and after her years at Stanford.

In 1998, she reached out to Auntie Nona Beamer to further her learning, and Auntie responded as she did to practically everyone who wrote her, "Come dear! Come visit!"

"Auntie had retired in 1987 after nearly 40 years at Kamehameha," Maile recalls, and relocated to her beloved Hawai'i Island. She built her home, Pulelehua, in the middle of the 'ōhi'a forests of Puna. It was an oasis of culture and aloha.

"Those were the days of the airline coupons, and it was so easy to go to the Big Island. I would fly over nearly every week. It was immersion: Dance, study, talk hula. Whatever she wanted to teach me, I was open to learning. We spent more and more time together and grew closer and closer. What came out of that, along with our relationship, was HPS.

"Basically, we were sitting and talking hula at Pulelehua, as we would do for days on end. She was a very curious person who always wanted to keep learning. We would have these great conversations, and she would remember things. Then one day she just said, very simply, 'Oh, I wonder what Uncle George knows about that. We should go talk to him.' And that's exactly how HPS started."

"Our motto was  
'Noke nō. Persevere!'"



In the nearly two decades since Maile and Auntie Nona first sought the insights of Merrie Monarch Festival founder George Na'ope, the Hula Preservation Society has documented the wit, wisdom and wonder of over 100 kupuna, collecting more than 2,000 hours of video. This vast treasure of irreplaceable cultural lore is housed a stone's throw from Windward Mall.

"We started having conversations with Auntie Nona's peers — George Holokai, Puluelo Naipo Park, Kent Ghirard, other elders from throughout the islands. They were not all kumu hula; some had taken hula from a master like Auntie Nona's grandmother. For others, hula had played a big role in their lives. They were always happy to see each other and talk about what they loved and had in common.

"In those early days with Auntie Nona, I would shoot very low-key home video, just to record the conversations for myself. When it became more than just us, we knew we needed a professional, so I asked Gene Kois for help. Nineteen years later, we're still together.

"The first three years it was crazy. We were doing so much work. We just had this urgency ... we need to talk to people. We had no clue about funding, setting up a nonprofit or anything. Friends helped. We received a grant from the Atherton Foundation that covered airfare and a small honorarium. We were on a shoestring for 10 years. Our motto, and Auntie's personal motto, was 'Noke nō. Persevere!'

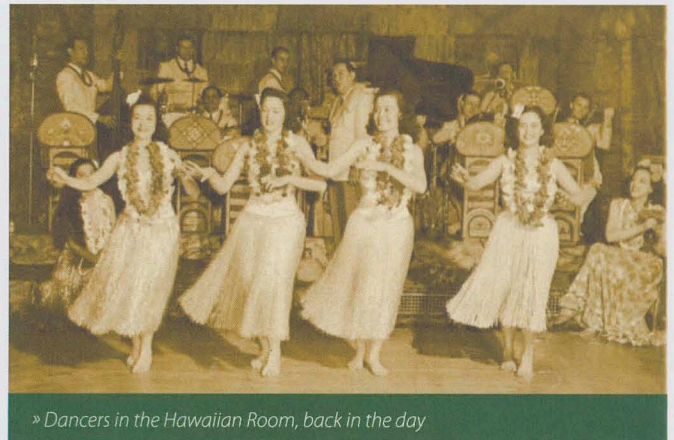


» Uncle George Na'ope, Merrie Monarch patriarch, used to visit and teach at Mary Wong's studio.

In the digital age, the HPS website, Facebook page, and Vimeo channels are delightful places to get lost on a rainy afternoon. They house introductions to fundamentals, in-depth profiles of kupuna, and segments from the oral histories compiled through the years. The Vimeo channels feature priceless footage of 'Iolani Luahine and kupuna feted by BYU Hawaii in a series of programs in the 1980s, "Na Makua Mahalo Ia." HPS was entrusted with digitizing and sharing these pieces, both of immense historical significance.

Two DVDs featuring oral histories have been completed so far. "Voices Of Our Kūpuna" and "Ho'ohali'a, Stories From Our Kūpuna" were recently distributed free of charge to all public libraries, college libraries and high schools in the state in fulfillment of a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. These are the heart of the HPS mission.

## "The Hawaiian Room dancers still bubble with excitement and pride."



» Dancers in the Hawaiian Room, back in the day

It's one thing to read about George Na'ope as the international teacher and esteemed father of the Merrie Monarch Festival, It's another to witness him bantering with women of his generation as the kolohe character he was.

Watching an 80-year-old describe how she auditioned for a dancer's position with 'Iolani Luahine when she was 14 is mind-boggling.

A septuagenarian recalls how her mom drove the family from Puna to Halema'uma'u Crater, stopping at a liquor store for a gift of gin for Pele.

To hear someone say that her grandmother danced in Queen Liliuokalani's court is to gaze out a window to the past that is closing quickly, forever.

HPS continues to conduct interviews, though much of the emphasis has shifted. "We used to shoot practically every week, for years. Most of our recent grant funding, though, is focused on creating and sharing educational resources based on the oral histories and archival materials we have. The last big group we interviewed as a whole was from the Hawaiian Room, which ended up being a film."

HPS partnered with filmmaker Ann Marie Kirk to present "The Hawaiian Room," chronicling a showroom in New York City's Lexington Hotel alive with hula and Hawaiian music from 1937 – 1966. The dancers still bubble with excitement and pride recalling their salad days in the Big Apple. The film is available as a DVD and has been presented several times locally, including on public television. It will be screened again in January at the main branch of the Hawaii State Library.



"We used to shoot  
practically every week,  
for years."

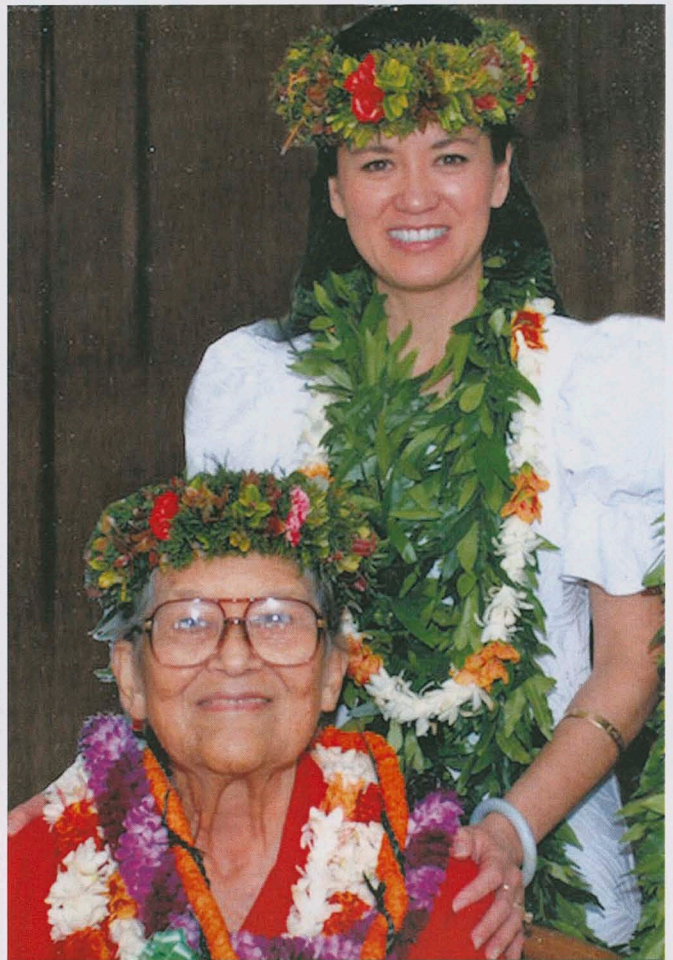
HPS is Kāne'ohe-centric in more ways than one. Maile grew up at St. Mark Lutheran (her mom, Virginia, was a long-time teacher), and over time Kāne'ohe's green glory made an indelible impression. Videographer and editor Gene Kois has lived in Coconut Grove for decades. Collections Manager Keau George is a Castle High School graduate. Hale Pulelehua is a community studio open for local folks to rent for classes and/or meetings. Four Windward hālau currently hold classes there, and it has also hosted hip-hop, salsa and zumba sessions.

The 20th Century was a time of remarkable transition for Hawai'i and hula. It wasn't painless, but most memories evoke deep, lingering smiles and captivating stories. These remembrances and their documentation, along with yesterday's spellbinding performances alive today, are the fruit of nearly 20 years of work by the Hula Preservation Society. They are precious gifts from kumu Maile and Auntie Nona to us, and to our children's children.

## More Information

### » Hula Preservation Society

HPS is a nonprofit and welcomes tax-deductible contributions, volunteers and visitors at any time. For further information, please email [archive@hulapreservation.org](mailto:archive@hulapreservation.org) or call (808) 247-9440.



» Kumu Maile and Auntie Nona spend time together in 2008, shortly before Auntie Nona passed away.

» Members of Kaho'olina Aloha rehearse at Hale Pulelehua before an October 2018 performance at 'Iolani Palace.





# Kāne'ōhe

## MAGAZINE

### Kāne'ōhe, A Glimpse into the Past

From rural to residential,  
the Ko'olaus remain a constant

### Hula Preservation Society

Hula Preservation Society perseveres  
under Kumu Hula Maile Loo

### Who Owns Kāne'ōhe?

First-time look at who owns what in  
the 96744