

OTTO KOCH

THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Otto Koch
(1888 - 1976)

Mr. Koch, a bachelor, was born and raised in Darmstadt, Germany where his father was a forester. After graduating from secondary school there, he went to Texas where many of his relatives had settled.

Not wanting to spend the rest of his life in Texas, he decided to come to Hawaii in 1914 at the age of twenty-six and remained here the rest of his life.

Shortly after he arrived in Hawaii, Mr. Koch was employed by the Ewa Plantation Company as assistant timekeeper. He later became timekeeper and during the thirty-eight years he worked for the company he held the positions of statistician, bookkeeper, cashier and, finally, paymaster.

Besides relating his personal experiences, Mr. Koch provides a comprehensive view of plantation life and describes in detail the operations of a sugar cane plantation.

Lynda Mair, Interviewer

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INTERVIEW WITH OTTO KOCH

At his home, 2814 Laola Place, Honolulu 96813

On October 11, 1971

K: Otto Koch

M: Lynda Mair, Interviewer

M: When you were in Germany?

K: No, this was when I was in Texas.

M: Oh. How did you get from Germany to Texas?

K: Well, about half my family lives in Texas for the last hundred and fifty years, ever since the forties of the last century, you see, and they came and visited us so I got the bug--I wanted to see what it was like--and I went there and lived there for about seven years. But I really wasn't sold on that place.

M: What part of Texas was this?

K: Austin and Galveston. So I started to go to California--I had some friends there--and I was looking for a job and everybody told me, "Oh, not a chance." So after two or three weeks there I decided I'd try Hawaii. I'd heard so much about Hawaii so I came down to this lonely speck.
(Lynda laughs)

M: How old were you then?

K: I was twenty-six.

M: How old were you when you left Germany?

K: Nineteen.

M: And what part of Germany did you come from?

K: Darmstadt, which is halfway between Frankfurt and Heidelberg.

M: Can you tell me something about your family in Germany be-

fore you go on farther with Hawaii?

K: Well, big family.

M: How many brothers and sisters were there?

K: I had three sisters, no brothers. But I hope you aren't going to get me, personally, in this thing. You just want this for background.

M: Well, you will be in it personally because I can't use the material without attributing it to the person that I got it from.

K: Oh, is that so? Oh. You know, two people have already gotten my story lately.

M: Yeh, I was curious to know.

K: Yeh, one of them is this man who works for Honolulu papers. (recorder turned off and on again)

M: What did your father do for a living?

K: He was a forester.

M: Oh.

K: A state forester of Hesse.

M: I see.

K: He studied forestry and he, himself, lived in America for a few years but he didn't feel like he belonged here and he went back to Germany. He married my mother in Germany but she was born in Texas.

M: Oh, for heaven's sakes.

K: Yeh. Then they moved back to America. He met her on a visit to Germany on a business trip there. He was running a paper mill on Staten Island in New York and they sent him back to Germany to buy rollers that they used in the factory of this agate--you know the hard agate stone?

M: Um hm.

K: And while he was there he met my mother and fell in love and married her within a month and took her back with him to New York. They lived there for several years and then they moved back to Germany.

M: That's when he became a forester.

K: No, no. He'd previously been in the forestry service but he resigned because at that time promotions were very slow. There were too many people who wanted to be foresters, you see. Well, then he came back to Germany. He was first with his father-in-law in the wholesale hardware business but he was not cut out to be a businessman. I think that's why he didn't like it here in America. Business was just not for him. He loved his old forestry. So he had a chance to be accepted again and he went back into the service and was a forester until he died.

M: Oh. And so you were born in . . .

K: I was born there in Darmstadt.

M: And then you left when you were . . .

K: I left when I finished school there.

M: What kind of school was that?

K: Well, it was what they call a gymnasium [a secondary school for students preparing to enter a university]. I had a degree that allows me to start what you call postgraduate work here and I could go and immediately study law or medicine or anything I wanted to. Their school system there is entirely different, you know; we had to work much harder than children here. In the first place, we worked six days a week and we had one month's summer vacation instead of three, so I really had two or three more years actual work in actual hours.

M: Um hm, yeh.

K: I figured the other day I had thirty-four different classes per week; thirty-four classes of fifty minutes each and then they had ten-minute intermission.

M: It didn't leave much time for anything else, did it?

K: And we had to do two or three hours homework after we got home. Yeh.

Well anyway, I didn't feel that I wanted to spend the rest of my life in Texas and when I found this place I really loved it right from the start. And I was very fortunate to get a job in Ewa.

M: Did you just get the job? How did you get the job?

K: I got that by just going around asking everybody if they had a job. I went to Castle & Cooke [Incorporated]--I didn't even know what Castle & Cooke was--and I said, "Who's the manager?" and they said, "Mr. Tenney," [E.D.] Ed Tenney who was Number One in Hawaii in those days. I mean really, he was the top man. I hadn't the slightest idea who he was. And he received me very kindly and nicely and we had a chat. And then he called up Ewa. He said he'd heard that they needed somebody there. He called up old George [Fullerton] Renton and he made an appointment for me. The next day I went down; I got the job. I was assistant timekeeper--the office end of the timekeeping department--[for the Ewa Plantation Company].

[According to Jared G. Smith in The Big Five, E.D. Tenney started working for Castle & Cooke at the age of twenty-one in 1880 as store janitor and porter of the firm's merchandising business at thirty-five dollars a month. In 1894 he went to Saint Louis, Missouri and bought the first nine-roller mill ever brought to Hawaii for the Ewa Plantation Company.]

M: I see. This was about what year?

K: Nineteen fourteen.

M: Ewa [Plantation Company] was just getting really started then.

K: Oh, no, no. Ewa had been running, I guess, for eighteen or nineteen years.

M: Yeh, it started in the nineties [1890's] but it was sort of an up and down operation for quite awhile. [The Oahu Plantation Company was organized in December 1889 and in January 1890 the name was changed to Ewa Plantation Company. Castle & Cooke did have financial difficulties until 1894 when the nine-roller mill was brought to Ewa and replaced "the diffusion plant installed at the start."]

K: Well, you know, this Mr. Renton was a very wonderful man. He was a very bright man, you might say. Ewa, like all the other plantations in Hawaii, had used a cane that was playing out; it was wearing out. Canes you know, like human beings, they're fine in their youth and then later on they go down, and the varieties they had had all played out. The HSPA [Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association], who were forever breeding new varieties, had one very promising one. H-109 it was called. He planted a little patch of twenty acres and it showed up very well so he just went right ahead and he ripped out thousands of acres of the old canes and planted only 109's. It was a gamble but it

paid off. I think they had 28,000 or 29,000 tons and gradually it went up to 35, 40, 45 and at one time Ewa had 60,000 tons. Of course by that time they had other new varieties again because the 109 was playing out again too. (clock strikes eleven)

So anyway, he gave me the job and that's the only job I ever had until I retired in 1952.

M: What were you doing . . .

K: Well, as I said, I started out as assistant timekeeper and then for awhile I worked as an overseer of a gang, you know. And then the head timekeeper's job became available and I got that and I loved that because I was out all morning, say from 5:00 a.m. till 1:00 p.m. I was out in the field. I had a little gasoline scooter and a horse and sometimes a bicycle, any way to get around. (laughter) In the afternoon I'd be in the office and it was hard work. I mean I never got home until about five-thirty or six o'clock. And we worked every Saturday and I worked Sunday mornings--every Sunday morning. But we loved it; we didn't mind that at all.

M: What did you actually do when you were playing around in the fields?

K: Well, I'd meet the different section overseers and they'd give me [an account of] all their men and charge the fields, you see. Each one of them had maybe sixty, seventy men and he'd say, so many men are working in this field, so many men working in that field; there are so many that are weeding, so many are irrigating, so many are doing this, doing that. Then I'd go to the harvesting field. There'd be four or five hundred men in the harvesting field. So many men were cutting, so many loading, so many were laying portable track and so on, and I'd record that all. I'd give the men credit for it.

The front part of the book was a register--payroll, uh?--and I'd write with columns for every day, you see. I'd write a symbol. We had about two or three hundred symbols for different jobs. I'd write a symbol in that little square for that day for that man, you see. Then in the back of the book I'd charge the field in which this work was done and the rate of pay at which it was done and that was accumulated. At the end of the month, you see, that was compiled.

M: Uh huh, I see.

K: Well anyway, after that I got into the office and worked there as statistician, bookkeeper, and I was cashier and

paymaster when I retired. That was when your father-in-law was office manager--Phil [Philip] Mair. So that's where I spent practically my life.

M: Where did you live in Ewa?

K: Well, we always had bachelor quarters there, you see.

M: Across from the school there?

K: Well, it's across from the present manager's house for the last thirty years, I guess. Over that. Practically all the time in the same location. First there was an old two-story house, and then later on they tore that down and built this horseshoe-shaped building, one story, which was very nice, with a garden in the center. And that's where I lived practically all the time.

And then the married people lived all around Ewa. There were several groups of houses, you know, on the main highway; and then away along the railroad track there was a series of houses. And now, of course, there are more and more of them. And yet the funny thing is that at that time, during my early timekeeper days, we had 1,000 to 800 people every day working; and now I think they have altogether 600 or 650 only. And that's due to the machinery, you see, because at that time everything was done by hand.

The harvesting fields alone, for instance, there must have been between four and five hundred men every day. There were, I'd say, 200 cutters and nearly 300 loaders and then there were maybe 30 men who were laying this portable track. We had thirty miles of railroad track, seven locomotives and about four hundred boxcars--cars that were open on the top and you could let the sides down. The whole side could come down. They were about as long as this lanai.

They burned the cane first. You know there's all this argument about burning cane now?

M: Yeh.

K: It never bothered anybody in those days because we didn't have any automobiles to perfume the air. Well anyway, first they burnt the cane. That was done early in the morning because early in the morning there's no wind. They'd cut a firebreak. You know what a firebreak is. They'd cut a road, so that left the amount of land they wanted to harvest during that day, you see--maybe five acres or six acres--and they'd see that this would not jump across the firebreak into other cane.

Then the cutters would go in first and cut it and right behind them come the portable track men. They'd

clear lanes and they'd lay their track in. And then the loaders would come. Loaders were always a man and his wife. The woman had a long rag like an old bag. She'd lay it on the ground, then she'd pile this cane which had been cut into about six or seven-foot lengths. She'd make a pile of that on there, as much as she thought her husband could carry. Then she'd help him lift it up on his shoulders and he walked up a plank about this wide and, well, he'd go as high as that second board up there, eh. He'd walk up that plank. The plank had little slats so he could get a hold and that poor guy would walk up there with maybe sixty or eighty pounds of cane on his back. He'd do that all day long. That was the hardest work on the plantation.

M: Did it pay well? I mean, how much were those people making in those days?

K: Comparatively. They were probably making a hundred dollars a month for the two of them. You know in those days one dollar a day was all right; that was fairly good pay. On the Mainland too. Not only here but on the Mainland. I remember at Galveston when I was working for a cousin there for awhile. He was an importer. When a ship would come in with the stuff that we imported, I'd go down and hire three or four Negroes that hang around waiting for a job and I never had to pay them more than \$1.10 a day. So that was fairly good.

But when the men were imported here--the Filipinos--they were even getting a little less than a dollar. But a dollar was a good average pay for unskilled labor. In the mill they'd get a little more. They'd get two or three dollars more a month. But of course I mean it bought so much more too.

M: Yeh, right.

K: Some men were getting a hundred dollars a month. The manager was getting a thousand dollars a month. The man who ran a 10,000 acre place and had 2,000 employees under him, he got \$1,000 a month. Imagine. That was terrific! We said that with bated breath, "A thousand dollars a month." And I think the head overseer probably got three hundred. Imagine. He could step into the manager's shoes at a moment's notice. Now some little kid in the office gets that. Well, our dollar is worth twenty cents.

M: Yeh.

K: That's why I'm not so sold on insurance--the long-term insurance. Insurance about thirty, forty years ago is worth

a very small fraction of what I paid for it.

M: Um hm. Go ahead with your harvesting story. I'm interested in that.

K: See, this was this long string of cars, eh. They were all still coupled up, you see, and there were maybe three or four of those strings in that cane [field] burnt during that day. There were parallel lines. Well, all the cane was on the cars, then the train would come along and stand on the main line outside, and the men would come in with mule teams and hook them onto these cars and drag them out to the main line and couple them up to the train. You understand what it was, eh?

M: Um hm.

K: Then these trains, when they had about fifty cars or so, then they'd go into the mill. And there was an unloading machine. The track would go right to the mill, you see, and then they'd let one side down and dump that cane onto an endless belt that carried it up into the crushing machinery. And then that car, that last car, would be switched over to the left to another track that took it back again, you see. Well, that was the old way of grinding cane.

Well anyway, you probably want to stay in the field first, eh?

M: Um hm.

K: There was the plowing, which was done all by mule teams--eight mules. (loud airplane noise) No, the plowing was done by machines--these Fowler steam plows. That was very interesting too. At that time they had two steam engines that looked like road-rollers--like the old-fashioned road-roller--one at each end of the field. They were a long ways apart. You couldn't holler down there to tell anybody. Each one of them had a sort of a roller on it and a cable ran from one to the other--a big iron cable about this thick--and in the middle of this cable, with a rope attached to each end, was the plow. The plow had two big wheels in the center and the plowshare was hooked to that. There were two plowshares, one pointing this way and one the other way. And there were two beams that stuck way up and each of them had a seat on it with a steering device.

Well, they started at one end of the field and the other fellow began to wind up the drum, you see, dragging this plow, and so the end towards the pulling went down and this man sat on top and saw to it that it stayed in line. And when he got to the other end he got off and got

on the other pulpit, and the fellow at the other end started to pull so the thing tipped down and made a furrow again. That's the next furrow, you see, they made.

M: I get the idea. Boy!

K: That was those wonderful Fowler steam plows. They came from Scotland. Fowler. They're world-famous.

M: How did they work on a slope? Did they work very well then?

K: You never plow on a slope; you plow along with a slope.

M: Yeh, but even plowing across a slope they would work over here. (evidently he is demonstrating the concept)

K: Yes, if it wasn't too bad, and if it's too bad you just couldn't plant cane or you had to make it by hand and that was, even in those days, a little too expensive. So the growing of cane was limited to that. I mean, you could get a slope like this all right. You'd go this way, you see, with your plow and you never went up and down.

M: Yeh. Yeh, I understand. Let me check this thing (the recorder, which is turned off and on again).

When you first went there [to Ewa Plantation], who was the field superintendent?

K: Well, the head luna was Alec [Alexander] McKeever. Mrs. McKeever, I think, is still alive. Alexander McKeever--big, great big man. I mean the ideal head luna, driver, full of pep and energy. And he had a horse built just like him--tremendous brown horse--and he was just tearing around all the time (Lynda chuckles), always galloping, loping. He was in a big hurry. (laughter) And he had his book in the back of his pants, you know. Anybody'd tell him anything, he'd write it down, put it back and go on. He was a great fellow.

M: Was most of this labor in the field done by Chinese and Japanese?

K: No, mostly at that time when I came, mostly Japanese but we were just importing Filipinos then. You see, the Chinese came first but the Chinese never stayed long on the plantation. They were too smart; they knew they could make more money in town. They all became little store-keepers and things like that or tailors or something. And the Japanese were really good field people because the Japanese we brought here were farmers. They got a bunch

of good farmers from Japan. And they're intelligent people. I really admire them. Then at that time, of course, the industry was developing, growing, so then they began to import Filipinos and they became, well, about half the labor force, I would say, by the time I was through in the end [1952] and they turned out very well too.

M: Can you tell me about how some of the other work was done in the early days?

K: Well, we had the plowing, eh? After the plowing was done, then they made the furrows. They called that mould-boring; to mould the land, you see. Mould the furrow. M-O-U-L-D. And they were tremendous plows. They had eight mules and a man behind holding a plow with eight mules. Imagine. They had one man driving the mules with a whip and the other man just holding the plow, and it was just all a powerful man could do to hold that plow with those eight mules pulling. He had what they called a mould-borer plow. The regular plow, you see, has a share that throws the soil one way. This, however, threw it both ways to make a furrow. The ground had already been plowed, you see, but he just made the furrows.

Well, after that was done, then the planting was done and that was done mainly by either women or kids because it wasn't very hard work. They'd bring the seed cane which is short pieces of cane. You saw that you had some of the eyes on each short piece, you see, and then they brought that into the field with donkeys. We had these little Kona Nightingales. We had about twenty or twenty-five of them and they'd walk into the field very dainty, stepping in the furrow, you know, and they had these sacks full of cane seed on their back. And then these youngsters or the girls who were doing the planting, they'd take these bags and pull the seed out and then they'd lay it overlapping. See, they were about this long, eh, or a little longer. Well, they had one here, then they'd have another one that would start here to here, and another one from here to here--had them overlap a little, not very much; not this much. And when that was done, then some of the men came along and covered it; covered it about that much.

M: So they laid it down; they didn't stick the pieces into the ground.

K: All along these long furrows. No, no, no. They were laid flat. Then the men who were later going to grow the cane, they came along. See, there was a gang of men assigned to each field. They took a contract to grow a crop of cane which lasted all the way from eighteen to twenty-two months and they took care of that field all during that

time.

M: Were these plantation employees?

K: Oh yeh, they were regular plantation employees. They took this contract; they worked on contract. They got an advance every day but when the field was finally harvested they were paid on the amount of tonnage of cane that came out. And then sometimes they did very well. I mean, if they were working hard they'd make five or six hundred dollars more at the end of the crop [harvest], see. If they had miscalculated in making their agreement or if they had been loafers, they got very little. It was to the advantage of both the plantation and the employees.

Well anyway, these men started to work then by covering the soil [or covering the seed cane in the furrows] and then they started irrigating. You know, we had these ditches all over. At that time I think we had eleven or twelve pumping stations. You know our water is underground, artesian wells, and we pumped this water up. We pumped a hundred and twenty million gallons a day. Imagine. From the pumps it was taken to reservoirs, like little lakes, and from these lakes it was distributed.

There were certain Japanese who were very experienced in knowing. . . . For instance, the head luna would tell him in the morning at the crossing where work was assigned there, "I want so many men's water in the ditch." You see, they had so many men irrigating down there and these men knew exactly how far to open these gates to let the water through ditches that were stone-lined; and then later on [or farther on], from them there were gates again into the various fields, you see, from the main ditches. The main ditches were probably almost as wide as this room--about two-thirds of the length--and then they had these gates all along; for miles, you see, these ditches go and then they had little gates that let [water] into the various fields and you could flood one furrow or two furrows at a time that way. And that's what these irrigators who took the contract for the field did.

They had asked for four men's water that morning, eh? That meant that four men were irrigating. They'd come and stand there by the gate and they'd open the gate and then they'd direct it [the water] into little side ditches, you see. It was a wonderful system, that irrigation system.

M: Yeh. Sounds like it required some skill too, to do it well.

K: Oh, it did, yeh. Yeh, sure. And these men were fussy who they would take into their gang, you see. They didn't want any bums or stupid; they wanted men who knew their

business because their income depended on good work.

Well anyway, then several times during the [growing of the] crop, that had to be fertilized, eh, and that was done while the cane was still small of course. Later on you couldn't get in there because the cane was tangled and a jungle. But they had this fertilization. In the beginning it was done by hand, then later on they decided the better way was to dissolve the fertilizer in big tubs on the outside of the field and then pour it into the ditch with the water; and in that way it was a better way of getting it to the roots of the cane. And that was usually a woman's job too. She'd sit there with her big barrel and they gave her several bags of fertilizer. She'd sit there all day and every once in awhile she'd put some more water in the thing and put some more fertilizer in and let it dissolve, then open the spigot and let it run into the field ditch.

Well then, gradually the cane closed in, you see, and then there wasn't much more to do except water. And then it became very important that you had conscientious men because some of them, the cane got so big that if they wanted to be lazy they could just open a gate and take a snooze somewhere and let the water run in there, and maybe there'd be too much in one place and not enough in another if they weren't on their toes. So again it showed how important it was to have good men doing that work.

Well, this went on until the chemist decided that the cane was at its peak, and then they would stop irrigating for another month or so to let the cane ripen and become full of juice--sweet juice--because if you had watered too long the juice would be too watery. That's why if there was a field you wanted to harvest next week and you had a heavy rain, you'd postpone the harvesting for awhile until it had . . .

M: Dried out.

K: It wasn't so full of water, eh?

M: Uh huh. Were there very many women working in general?

K: Yes, there were. Well you see, in the harvesting fields alone, all these teams. There must have been--gosh, I forget now. I think there were about two hundred. That means about a hundred women worked with their husbands, you see. Then before the cane got big, the weeds sprouted up and again, that being lighter work was done by women and young people. They'd go through the field. They had a gang, maybe thirty or about twenty-five of them. They'd just spread out and then just go along through the field and chop all the weeds. And that went on until the cane

got big enough so it'd shade the weeds and they wouldn't grow any longer, you see. They could only grow while the sun was shining down on them. So that was done by hand, which later on was done by machines too.

M: So the women's work was kind of sporadic.

K: No, there was always something. You see, there were a hundred fields and they were all in different stages.

M: Oh, that's right.

K: There were two crops growing at the same time all the time, four years, so you had from the time . . .

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Then the milling, of course. After the cane was crushed in these great big rollers--have you seen them? you've been through the mill--then the water was evaporated in the tremendous evaporating pans. And then they were taken into the pans where the sugar juice was boiled until it was this molasses in which floated these tiny little crystals. And again that was a skilled job. (loud noise of an airplane) These men were called sugar-boilers and they'd take a sample. There was a tube that stuck into this pan. They'd take that out and they were able to take a small sample out and they'd look at that through a microscope and see if the crystal was the proper size. Once it was the proper size, then the bottom was opened up and everything went down to the drying room. The dryers were these centrifugal machines. They were like these machines where you make butter. Like butter churns, you know, revolving at high speed. Then the sugar crystals would be thrown against the walls--stuck to the walls; the molasses remained on the inside.

When the man who ran the machine decided it had been run long enough, he'd stop it, open the bottom, then the molasses drained out. And then he would scrape the sugar and that would go into containers--these sugar crystals. They were then ready to go into the bags and go to the Mainland. That was that real brown, sweet-smelling sugar.

M: Yeh, we use it. Or we did use it.

K: Uh huh. That's a complicated process, sugar-making. Gee, there were so many jobs. You look at all the big boilers. The big boilers had to produce this tremendous amount of hot water that was needed in the sugar mill.

Now this was the old style I've been telling you. We had a hundred and twenty mules alone--imagine--and about

forty horses because all the overseers were on horseback. I had a couple of horses. That's what I loved. I loved to ride. I think that's why I liked that job. (laughter)

Well anyway, after awhile things changed. Wages kept on going up, up, up. You couldn't afford to have hand-labor anymore, so I guess the first thing they did was to try to get a loading machine, instead of all these hundreds of people cutting and loading, you see. And it was a strange thing about sugar cane: just above the ground it is at the weakest and brittlest, just like it was made to order for the plantations. [This is explained below.]

When they first had this cutting and loading machine, it was what they called a grab machine. Have you seen these big scoop machines on a derrick that scoop up soil, you know? You see them all over. Well, that was really the principle of harvesting cane. Instead of having the scoop, somebody invented--and I think it was somebody at Ewa that did it first--a grab. It was like fingers but they were six feet long, these fingers, and they could open and close; and that was mounted on this big derrick, eh. And the man sitting in the machine--it was a caterpillar tractor so he could go into the fields. The cane was gathered into piles all along rows, you see--but the piles this high or even higher--and then this machine would come along and grab a lot of it, maybe three or four tons at a time, and lift it onto these cars.

At that time we were still using cars and portable track. Later on that was eliminated and we bought these terrific big hauling trucks, the Tourneau haulers. They were built by a man named Le Tourneau. That's how they called them Tourneau haulers. They had six-foot wheels, rubber tires six foot high, and they carried thirty-five tons of cane at a time while the old cane cars probably carried five tons each--four tons.

Well anyway, this machine would come and load it. And later on they found out that they didn't have to have men cutting the cane first and piling it. They could just take the machine in and it would grab this cane and yank and then the cane would break off and it broke off right where you wanted it to break off, way down near the ground.

M: Oh, for heaven's sakes.

K: Because, you see, anything that you let stand is waste.

M: Yeh.

K: So that was very good. So that was the loading then, you see, and instead of loading it into these long rows of cars which eliminated leveling the ground, putting track on it, taking the track out again, making new furrows

again. All that was eliminated to some extent. Of course the Tourneau haulers spoiled some of the furrows, naturally, being a big caterpillar, but not as much. So anyway, having that grab and the Tourneau machine saved an awful lot of work and labor money. Then these machines . . .

M: What was that now? That's French, huh, Le Tourneau?

K: L-E and then another word Tourneau. T-O-U-R--I think N-E-A-U maybe.

M: N-E-A-U.

K: Le Tourneau, yeh.

M: Sounds right. Hm!

K: We call them Tourneau haulers and they go fast. They went thirty miles an hour. That's another thing. The plantation had to build new roads for them, otherwise they'd kill everybody on the other roads. So you see, all over the plantations now you see Tourneau-hauler roads only. Nobody's allowed to use them except the Tourneau haulers.

Let's see, what else is there now? We got it into the mill, yeh? This grab, of course, you know whenever you find a great advantage, you have a disadvantage along with it; it never fails. We've discovered that the grab brought not only the cane but it brought tons of dirt and rocks. Rocks! Some of the rocks weighed a thousand pounds. Unbelievable. All of a sudden we'd find them coming into the mill. They had to stop the mill and get the rocks out, so that meant another thing again. That meant that you had to have the cane cleaner and I think it took Ewa [Plantation] about three or four thousand dollars until they finally had a proper cane cleaner, which was an endless belt of iron slats that went up from below where the cane was dumped onto the slats. It went up and on the way up there were stations where the rocks could be eliminated. They were dumped to the side and, my gosh, the mountains of rocks. There was no end to the rocks in the fields there, from little fellows to great big ones, and these rocks all had to be hauled away, you see.

And all the dirt! Hundreds of tons of dirt and the only way to get rid of it is to have water spraying down onto this cane as it was going up, you see, before it reached the mill and wash that dirt and it would drop down and that would be caught and taken down below the mill where we had the coral plain. You know that I think Ewa made four hundred acres of new land from this soil.

M: Yeh, I've seen them working away there.

K: It was washed out. Yeh, yeh. And it's soil about two or three or four feet deep and it all came from soil that had been picked up in higher fields and taken to the mill. They'd let this water into it and they made a big pool--pond--and let the dirt settle there, see, and then that pool was fed by the waste water from the mill.

Anyway, this cane when it was ground and pressed, this bagasse was left over which you know what it is. It's the fiber of the cane and that again was used for fuel for the boiling house where they created the steam and the pressure and the hot water. So that helped quite a bit. I mean there were only a few times when they had to use oil; burn oil. Most of the time there was enough bagasse.

M: And it made a good fuel?

K: They are excellent, yes, and I'm rather amazed, on the Island of Hawaii they have so much bagasse they don't know what to do with it. We seemed to be able to handle it. We burned all our bagasse, it seems to me; all we could get. But over there, I read in the paper where they dumped it in the ocean. You've heard that too, haven't you? There is this objection to that. And I've wondered sometimes why [they dumped it]. Probably the reason is that they do not get as high a sugar content as we do on this island, so consequently they have much more bagasse per ton of sugar than we would have.

M: Yeh, it could be.

K: That could be the reason.

M: Did any of your family ever come over?

K: Oh yeh. Not my immediate family but a number of cousins. And now all the Texans have discovered Hawaii--two or three groups every year. (Lynda laughs)

M: Have any of the rest of your family settled here, though?

K: No, I'm the only one. No, but there were three over here at Christmas time and one or two every year for the last five or six years. Up to that time nobody ever showed up. I don't know. There is one [airplane] line now that goes direct from Texas to Hawaii without stop (Lynda laughs) and evidently they are boosting it and advertising so much that they're all coming. The other day there was a couple again. They're close friends of my family's. So that's how I get to see a lot of Hawaii now (Lynda laughs), all these places worth seeing. About once every three months I see Kawaihāo [Church] and the Capitol and the mission

buildings (laughs) and I take them up to the University [of Hawaii] and the Pali, places I never used to go to and now I see them regularly three or four times a year.
(laughter)

M: Yeh. What did you folks do for amusement out there on the plantation?

K: Well, you know I never lived in the country and I was puzzled about that and we had a marvelous time there.

M: You did?

K: Oh gosh. And ninety-nine percent of it due to the school-teachers who came from the Mainland.

M: Oh yeh.

K: All the teachers in those days were girls from the Mainland. That was before the locals began to take courses in school teaching. So that was the critical time every year when the list of the teachers was in the newspaper. All the guys would rush around to see who's coming to Ewa.
(laughter) I wonder who she is. I wonder who this one is. And then there'd be a party to introduce them, you know. We had a beautiful social hall with a stage and billiard tables and we had about ten or twelve magazines and everything under the sun. And we ourselves, our club, got together and built a beautiful swimming pool, twenty-five by fifty [feet], and the plantation, of course, helped but we paid gradually for it. We paid ten cents a swim I think or something like that.

Then every Friday night we had a sort of an informal dance. And once a month during the cooler months of the year, the club, which had about forty members or thirty members, would be divided into smaller groups. Each group had to entertain that month anyway they liked. We had very good amateur theatricals at times, sometimes lousy.
(laughter) And for the dances we'd always get an orchestra--a little orchestra from Honolulu.

I can never forget the first one I ever saw. It was the first time I got introduced to the big fat Hawaiian musicians and I can still see them sitting on the platform. There was one, he must have weighed about two hundred and fifty pounds and he was tilted back on his chair and he had this tremendous opu and he played the ukulele. He had that ukulele sitting right on top of his opu (laughter) and he was sitting there with his mouth wide open, singing at the top of his voice. I thought that was the grandest thing I'd ever seen. There were usually four or five of them in a group like that. Oh, it was fun really.

Of course we were entirely dependent on ourselves because the only way to get to town was on the railroad because nobody had automobiles. The only automobiles were the manager's plantation Cadillac coupe; then he had a Packard touring car of his own; the doctor had a Cadillac which he used in his business. The head overseer didn't even have a car at that time--Mr. McKeever. The mill engineer, Renton Hind from Hawaii--the Hinds, you know, from Kohala?

M: Um hm.

K: He was quite a guy too. He was only twenty-seven and he had snow-white hair.

M: What was his first name?

K: Renton Hind. See, his mother was a Renton. [Alice M. Renton married John Hind.] And he was a ball of fire. Anyway, he was the sport. He had a Ford Model-T. (laughter) And he was a great pal of us young fellows. He took us swimming to Nanakuli and we'd go to Honolulu in his Model-T. (laughs) We'd go to town, as I said, mostly on the train, which meant that we had to catch, I think it was, the five o'clock train. That meant rush, rush, rush after work.

M: In the morning?

K: No, in the evening, Saturday. Only Saturday. And we had to leave Honolulu again at 9:30 p.m. because I had to work Sunday morning, you know, so we didn't have much time for social life in Honolulu. I never saw the end of a movie; I always had to leave before the end and run down Hotel Street to catch the train. (laughter)

M: How long did it take you to get there? If you caught the five o'clock train, when did you get to town?

K: About fifty minutes.

M: Oh my gosh.

K: We didn't have much time. Then we'd all go up to the Young Hotel, the Roof Garden, and have a drink together and then we scattered to our various places, wherever we wanted to go. If we got somebody like Renton Hind to take us in the car, then we'd meet on the Roof Garden about ten o'clock or eleven o'clock and we'd have another drink up there and then we'd pile in his car and go on home. Sleep all the way home. In fact that train, everybody was sound

asleep on that train because plantation men are used to getting up at four-thirty in the morning, you know, and by the time it was nine-thirty we were dead to the world, so we were just like so many corpses on the train. (Lynda laughs) And the conductor, who was our great friend, he'd sometimes hold the train if he knew that you were missing. If he knew you were in town he'd hold the train ten minutes maybe.

M: My gosh.

K: Then you'd come tearing down the street and get on the train, then we'd go to sleep. And then we'd get to Aiea and he'd go to all the Aiea's [Aiea residents] and wake them up; then when we got to Waipahu he'd wake up all the Waipahu's. (laughter) Then we'd come to Ewa. That's where the train stayed overnight.

M: So that was their last run in the evening.

K: Yeh. There was one train that was an hour later and when we had something really important--some special date--we'd take that. But that train went up to Schofield [Barracks], which meant we had to get off at Waipahu, and if we still had enough money we'd try to get the taxi driver in Waipahu out of bed. Sometimes he pretended he couldn't hear us pound on his door. (laughter) He was tired. Then we'd have to walk all the way up from Waipahu along the railroad track, five miles to Ewa.

M: Oh wow. No, I don't suppose you did that too often.

K: It had to be a heavy date. (laughter)

M: I guess the Young Hotel was quite the center of sophistication in those days.

K: It was. The Young Hotel and the Moana [Hotel] at the beach.

M: Uh huh.

K: The Moana was even a little later--five or six years later --when there were more automobiles, you see. In fact, from 1919 on, that's when we began to buy cars. I know I bought my first car in 1919. Then, of course, we could stay [in town] as long as we wanted to. In fact, sometimes we stayed too long. We'd come home in the morning in our tuxedos still and we'd be dodging these people going to work. We'd figure, now which is the better way to go home and whether we'd go the upper road or the lower

road. If you went the upper road, if you were too late, you were liable to run into two hundred men standing at the crossing getting orders. (Lynda laughs) You had to go home still, take off that tuxedo and put on your work clothes and take a quick shower so you could have a cup of coffee and run up there. (laughter)

M: That must have given you a great sense of freedom, though, once you had your own car.

K: It was wonderful, oh yes. We really lived after that.

M: Yeh. What was the road like, from Ewa to town?

K: It was a two-lane road. It was paved.

M: Did it follow pretty much the same road around Pearl Harbor?

K: Well, partly, partly. No, no, no. No, no, you had to go over Red Hill.

M: Oh.

K: Yeh. You went through the town of Aiea; you went through the upper town of Waipahu.

M: Oh, that's right, the road ran from the Aiea depot or somewhere in there to . . .

K: No, Aiea depot was way down. There was nothing there. The railroad was down there. The railroad was near where the present road is. The O.R. & L. [Oahu Railway and Land] railroad ran along there, along Pearl Harbor, but the road itself was up over Red Hill and stayed above direct to Aiea. You looked down to Pearl Harbor from the road. And you know where that place is where they grow the watercress [makai of Pearlridge Shopping Center]? Well, the road was above that and it came down to Pearl City. Yeh. That's where it went; it went to Pearl City. Gosh, it's so long ago I'm getting mixed up now. I know I used to go that upper road. And then from Pearl City to Waipahu it was about the way it is now, only that you went through the upper town of Waipahu then--this lower one didn't exist--and the railroad depot at Waipahu was about a half a mile away from the town, you see. That was an awful pretty place.

I remember that railroad station. There were rice fields all along there and clumps of coconut trees and in the evening that was the most beautiful spot. I remember once in awhile when I had my car repaired in Waipahu--we

didn't have a repair shop in Ewa--I'd go down to get it on the train and then walk from there. I never forget the peaceful, lovely atmosphere down there by that railroad station. And the rice paddies. And the Chinese would be coming home from working their rice fields--all one in a row, you know, about ten men about six feet apart, walking on the little dike and having a big conversation. That's why the Chinese are such loud talkers, they tell me, because they used to carry on conversations not walking side by side but with space between them like that. (laughter)

M: Waipahu now seems like such a dusty place and it's so hot. I can't imagine it was ever pretty.

K: I saw an article about Arakawa's store the other day. Did you see that?

M: Yes, I saw that.

K: I remember when they had that tiny little place about the size of my living room. It was across on the main street going to the depot and he had everything. That was the best hardware store I've ever been in, tiny as it was. There was nothing you couldn't get. I used to go from Ewa over there. I had a lot of hobbies, you know, and I'd need tools and this and that, and Arakawa always had it. No wonder he's a success.

M: Um hm. (long pause)

K: I wonder if there is something else.

M: Did the bachelors cook for themselves and all that sort of thing?

K: No, no. We had a mess.

M: Oh, you did?

K: Yeh. Oh, that was the darnedest place too. (chuckles) That was at that time about six feet lower. The way to go from the cane yard to the mess house was on a raised road about this wide and about four or five feet above the land on both sides.

M: Oh, for heaven's sakes.

K: That was done because everything was so muddy. Crossing the cane yard you walked through mud this deep. Actually! It was just awful. I remember going on a rainy day. I'd come home from work and I'd had my lunch and I changed my

clothes to khaki or from khaki to duck, which we used to wear all of us in those days, and I'd get to the cane yard and I didn't know how I was going to get to the office across that cane yard. I'd have to go into the mill and go through the mill and come out the other side. The mud was this deep; you couldn't get through. I would have had mud up to here on my pants--on my clean new pants.

Well anyway, that restaurant was something. It was so wobbly that it shook if you went up the steps. The whole house would go like this (Lynda laughs) if you only walked in it. And there were two dining rooms, the first-class and second-class.

M: Oh, you're kidding! Separated off from each other?

K: Yeh. It was two rooms and the kitchen in the back. I started at the second-class and it was twenty dollars a month for board.

M: Oh, I see. You just paid by the month for meals.

K: Three excellent meals a day. Yeh. And the first-class was five dollars more. The difference was really only--well, the food was about the same but the difference was that you had a tablecloth in the first-class. (laughter) But that tablecloth had big holes in it like this, so the Chinese man used to put little pieces of white paper under it so it wouldn't show so much.

M: It was run by a Chinese man then.

K: We had some wild cooks. You know cooks are supposed to be wild men and, boy, was he mad when we'd go swimming at Nanakuli and get home late. Boy, he'd raise the roof.

M: He had to keep the dinner waiting for you.

K: Yeh, gosh. Sometimes, you know, we couldn't help it because it might be so dry that there was deep dust on the road to Waianae, and yet there might be a rainfall in the mountains, and coming back you'd find mud this deep in those waste ditches. You know these storm ditches that cross the road? So when I took my own car I always had several boards, slats of wood about this long. I'd keep them in the back all the time for that purpose, so I could lay them down and cross the storm ditches that way. Yeh, the old boy, I can still see him with fire in his eyes. (laughter)

M: Is that where most of the bachelors ate then?

K: Yeh, all of us. That's the only place we could get food.

M: Did the schoolteachers eat there too?

K: Yeh, they ate there too. Yeh.

M: So it was sort of a social occasion too?

K: No, this was strictly just a mess [hall]. Our social life was in the social hall which was very nice. It had a tennis court over there and everything. It was very beautiful. I remember writing home about that--how wonderfully they took care of us.

M: Hmm. Well, what kind of food did you get, if you had a Chinese cook? You weren't getting Chinese food all the time, were you?

K: Well, pretty good. Pretty good food. Of course everybody complained all the time.

M: Was it just sort of standard American-type food?

K: Yeh, oh, darned good. I liked it. I got fat on it. Sure. (chuckles) We had one old Japanese man. We all loved him very much. He left and then the Chinese came. The fiery Chinese. But this old man, you know I heard from him and I wrote to him even after this last World War [II]. He's an old man, retired in Japan. When he decided to retire, which is forty years ago, he was then about in his fifties and he told us all he had to leave, so we all chipped in and we bought him a gold watch because we all loved him. We really did. And he said goodbye to everybody and he was gone. And a couple of days later he was back! We said, "What's the matter, Naito?" He said, "Ah, no more seats on the boat." (laughter) So he stayed another week or two and then they had a boat that had seats on it and he left us. Boy, he was nice.

Well, I don't know what else. Of course things changed completely after years went by. The social life stopped when everybody had an automobile because everybody began to have friends in town, so everybody began to go his own way. And these social gatherings became sort of artificial, you know. People's hearts weren't in it anymore and so they finally just died. Everybody had his own. Then Barber's Point [Naval Air Station] started. Lot of people made friends with people at Barber's Point, so things sort of broke up then. But we enjoyed ourselves even then.

M: Of course the war brought an awful lot of changes.

K: Of course that was a difficult time because we had this blackout, you know. That morning of the attack, I had been in town the night before. There was this Shrine football game that night--a big event here, a charity football game--and I'd been not to that but to dinner at the Pacific Club with a group of friends. I had a boat in Pearl Harbor in those days, the Pearl Harbor Yacht Club, and I wanted my friends to come and go sailing with me the next morning, but by the time it was two o'clock or so they decided, oh, let's not do that. Good thing we didn't because that next morning there was the attack.

M: Next day, sailing around, wow.

K: In fact, the boat tied up right next to me had bullet holes in it--machine gun bullets. And a lot of our cars had bullet holes in them--cars parked on the street and in the back in the alley. The Livingstons' car was just shot up. The Japanese planes were flying back and forth between Pearl Harbor and Barber's Point, you see. I'd seen one fly right over my head. In fact I saw one plane so low--there's a coconut tree in the yard next to the bachelors' quarters and it was just right over the top of the coconut, which was not more than a hundred feet, and I could see his goggles.

M: Wow! Scary, huh?

K: I saw this plane with the red balls on it [the symbol of the Rising Sun]. I was awakened by a lot of terrible explosions, you know, and noise. Of course I didn't know what it was, so I got out of bed and walked into the patio and here was a fellow across the way. He said, "What in the world is this? What in the world is going on?" I said, "Isn't that a disgrace? They have this noisy maneuver on a Sunday morning. Why don't they let us sleep?" And then this plane came along and he said, "Look, look at that! Why, is that Japanese?" I said, "You're crazy. Haven't you ever heard of maneuvers--the reds and the blues?" (Lynda laughs) "No doubt it's a red, you see." But then after a few minutes we found out what was going on. Then we heard these terrific explosions from ships blowing up at Pearl Harbor, you know. Yeh, that was an exciting day.

END OF SIDE 2/1ST TAPE

BEGINNING OF SIDE 1/2ND TAPE

As I said, we were patrolling [during the blackout] to see that nobody would show lights because we expected the Jap-

anese to attack again, you see.

M: Yeh.

K: It's ridiculous how you overdo things, you know?

M: Yeh. (chuckles)

K: We'd stand in front of a house. It was about four-thirty or so in the morning, people were getting ready to go to work again, and we would say, "Is that a light in there or isn't it?" (laughter) We saw that, just a bare, bare light in there. And we'd want to visit each other, we'd sneak around from one yard to the other. (laughs)

And I can remember we had these louvers made for our windows and that way we could get ventilation, but before we had them the only way you could read. . . . I'd sit in the little bathroom, which was about four by five--a tiny little place, and you'd sit there and read and all of a sudden you'd really be choking. You'd used up all the oxygen in that little room and then you'd turn off the light and open the door to let some air get in there. (laughter)

And the parties. When you had a party of eight or ten people all smoking, oh, it was just awful. Almost choked to death.

M: Yeh, I can imagine. That went on for several years.

K: Yeh. I don't how long. Finally they called it off. I think after the battle of the Coral Sea the blackout was stopped here because by that time they figured, no danger anymore.

M: This is funny weather we're having, isn't it? You notice how still it is?

K: It's awfully still, yes. We've had very little rain this year. How do you like the color of that house? Isn't that beautiful? (Lynda laughs)

M: I can't say it's my favorite color.

K: Isn't it awful? This is terrible, I think. I couldn't believe it when I saw the painters start out.

M: Yeh. Beautiful monkeypod.

K: Oh, isn't that a gorgeous tree?

M: Oh yes. I wish I could just transplant one like that into

my yard.

K: Ahhh. They grow so fast, though.

M: Yeh.

K: You know those trees in front of the Ewa office? They were planted in 1934 and after five years they covered, oh, fifty or sixty feet. Just terrific how they grow. Things grow all year around here in Hawaii. Where is your home? On the Mainland, eh?

M: I'm from Portland, [Oregon].

K: Oh you are?

M: Uh huh. I'm not from the city. We lived way out in the country.

K: Yeh? Well, you would have liked Ewa in the early days.

M: Yeh, I don't like living in cities at all. (both chuckle)

K: Well, you live in a lovely place in Kailua.

M: Um hm. I like it. Well, I sure appreciate . . . (recorder turned off and on again)

K: . . . a piece of this iron fall down all over the place and I think they're the ones that killed some people down in lower--by where the hospital is down there in Ewa. One or two people were killed there.

After the war was over, I remember going down to this lower section, you know, on the way to the beach and there must have been five or six hundred tremendous big planes all lined up ready for the wreckers. I think they sold them for about a hundred dollars apiece. They cost a half a million or a million apiece. They were just as far as you could see. There was one row after another of planes.

M: Why were they just going to wreck them?

K: Because the war was over and there was no use for them anymore. There were some of these wrecking companies came from the Mainland and bought them for practically nothing and they'd tear them up and get the aluminum out of them and the bronze and the brass. They just covered acres and acres and acres as far as you could see and nothing but beautiful new planes.

M: Hmm.

K: During the war we used to be scavengers, you know. You couldn't buy a piece of wood; you couldn't buy a nail. We'd find a rusty nail on the street, we'd pick it up and take it or take a hammer. (Lynda laughs) Oh yeh, they were more precious than rubies. And then the Navy would get these big engines--you know, big plane engines--in magnificent boxes two-inches thick and we were starving for wood and we couldn't buy it. They weren't allowed to sell it, you see. So they'd dump them into a sort of a quarry we had down there and the section overseer down there, on the day when they dumped he came rushing up to the office and told us. We'd all get in our cars and drive down. (laughter) I still have the set of garden furniture I made out of it--two chairs and two benches and a big table--with this marvelous wood that they had. (laughter) You couldn't buy anything. Gosh. That chair is made out of some of their wood. I made that during the war.

M: This chair in there?

K: Yes.

M: For heaven's sakes. You like to mess around with wood and building things.

K: I used to; not anymore. My hobby is woodcarving. I made one of those big statues. You remember the one in the Bishop Museum, that frightful-looking one that was on the left? I went down and I asked them to let me take photographs and they took photographs for me and gave them to me and I copied it--two-thirds the size, however. The one down there is higher than this door here. Mine is about five and a half feet tall.

M: Oh my gosh.

K: It took me about nine months to make it. I made it down in the basement and I worked and worked and worked and worked. And I had a friend staying with me. He lives in Kailua but his wife was on the Mainland. And he'd come home in the evening and I'd be down there muttering to myself and swearing sometimes and he'd lean over the rail up there and he'd say, "For God's sake, what are you boys scrapping about down there?" (laughter) Me and my God.

M: Well, where do you keep it?

K: Oh, I gave it to some friends of mine.

M: Oh. After all that, you gave it away.

K: You can't keep all these things yourself.

M: Yeh.

K: About the only thing I have is a bowl I made--a platter.
Oh, I got one in there you can go and see. (counter at
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END OF INTERVIEW

Re-transcribed and edited by Katherine B. Allen

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THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

In May 1971, the Watumull Foundation initiated an Oral History Project.

The project was formally begun on June 24, 1971 when Katherine B. Allen was selected to interview kamaainas and longtime residents of Hawaii in order to preserve their experiences and knowledge. In July, Lynda Mair joined the staff as an interviewer.

During the next seventeen months, eighty-eight persons were interviewed. Most of these taped oral histories were transcribed by November 30, 1972.

Then the project was suspended indefinitely due to the retirement of the foundation's chairman, Ellen Jensen Watumull.

In February 1979, the project was reactivated and Miss Allen was recalled as director and editor.

Three sets of the final transcripts, typed on acid-free Permalife Bond paper, have been deposited respectively in the Archives of Hawaii, the Hamilton Library at the University of Hawaii, and the Cooke Library at Punahou School.