

Rural Sociology – Frank E. Midkiff
Hawaii Territory – Waialua Community Association

ORGANIZED RURAL LIFE IMPROVEMENT IN HAWAII

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Notes

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The Hawaiian Islands, comprising the Territory of Hawaii, are looked upon by great many persons as only a tourist resort and a defense outpost. They are far more than this. True, the arm, navy, and tourist have helped make the principal port, Honolulu, a modern city of the islands is rural and most of the wealth is agricultural. These islands ship away approximately 70 million dollars' worth of raw sugar each year, and 50 million dollars' worth of canned pineapples. Besides these two crops there are substantial shipments of coffee, hides, honey, early potatoes, asparagus, and other minor agricultural products. The transportation of these agricultural products is also a creditable business in itself. Economically Hawaii is an area that depends upon agriculture. Moreover, it will remain basically agricultural. There are no minerals, metals, or fuel in the Territory. Urban industry is an impossibility. Yet the recent Statehood Commission found Hawaii far advanced economically and socially and, judged by a wide variety of indices, more than able to hold her own with the least one-third of the existing states.

Despite this agricultural base the lure of the city is as strong in Hawaii as it is on the mainland. Since the days of the early whaling and fur trading ships the Hawaiians have tended to leave their *Kuleanas* in the rural districts and to crowd into the port cities. Whole districts became depopulated, and today stone walls, *heiaus*, and villages in ruins can be found all over the islands. This cityward movement has been continuous throughout the years.

Today because of her limited industrial projects, Hawaii's cities, particularly Honolulu, are overcrowded and many people lack employment. The result is an increase in idleness, want, restlessness, delinquency, and crime in the city.

The rural social scientist finds in the Territory a fascinating laboratory. Not only is there the familiar problem of a rural-urban migration and its attendant results, so different from those on the mainland; but there is also a determined effort on the part of the leaders to solve this problem in terms of their own situation, which is discussed in this article.

Before considering this effort, however, it is necessary to sketch in some of the background.

The islands have semitropical climate and excellent soil, which was found to be suitable for growing sugar and, later, pineapples. Because sugar and canned fruit are highly competitive agricultural products, it was found that only the most efficient form of agriculture would serve adequately in world competition. This most efficient form is held to be industrialized agriculture.

Hawaii has 40 industrialized sugar farms or plantations and 10 industrialized pineapple farms. These organizations work together in the voluntary co-operatives. The Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association, organized 70 years ago, is one of the most successful co-operative in the world.

Industrialized agriculture found the Hawaiians disinclined toward disciplined and routine labor on farms; so it brought in laborers from all over the world: from mainland America, from Europe, from the South Seas, but chiefly from Asia – Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, and Filipinos. These imported laborers were expected to stay not longer than three years; then they were to receive free transportation back to their homelands. However, most of them found Hawaii to their liking; and carrying on Hawaii's agriculture, they married and raised families, and have given the Islands' populations higher figures than actually ever known before.

Today immigration is stopped just as it is on mainland America. The last Asiatics to come were the Filipinos in April, 1932. It is judged that Hawaii now has enough people to carry on her necessary work – and fortunately there is enough work here for all if the rural districts absorb their share.¹

The problem therefore has become one of making rural life attractive enough to induce young people already on the land to remain and to induce many in the cities to return. The sugar and pineapple farms need more men. And then there are unused areas, which might produce some of the 22 million dollars' worth of foodstuffs now imported into Hawaii each year. There are vast areas that would provide subsistence farms near to existing and potential agricultural processing plants. On the basis of production of what is already grown in insufficient quantities, it is estimated that Hawaii's rural districts can comfortably provide happy homes and livelihood for 50,000 more people than now live there. No one can predict what the future may be for Hawaii should she develop new tropical products of use in mainland America but not producible in any other part of America. For besides sugar cane and pineapple, Hawaii now grows in rather limited quantities a very wide range of tropical fruits and plants. It is believed that production of all of these can be expanded easily with increased rural man power. Already, considerable expansion is under way in taro and avocado production and in the processing and manufacturing of alpha cellulose from sugar cane bagasse in certain rural areas.

Replacements and expansion in agriculture are now carried on only by young citizen labor. To cause these young people to volunteer to carry on the industrialized agriculture and the small farming upon which Hawaii depends, requires the co-operation of the schools, the industrialized farms, and all other agencies that tend to render public and private service. This co-operation is being advanced by proper organization.

It must be admitted that in the past our schools have headed students toward the city; and our public governments, local foundations, and social service agencies have dealt too largely with Honolulu, the disadvantage of the rural districts. The attempt is now being made to develop an awareness of the undesirability of this cityward movement, and to enlist all concerned in the improvement of rural life, so that it will successfully compete with the attractions of the city.

One of the first things being tried is centralization, in recognition of the basic desire for sociability. By consolidation rural villages are being developed to a size to make practicable all the really desirable features of the city with none of the disadvantages that come from crowding and unemployment.

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Excellent roads and well-lighted streets, water and sewer systems, health services, social halls, amusement places, movies, radio, telephones, electricity and electric conveniences, gymnasia, swimming pools and beaches, modern houses, libraries, home and farm demonstration services – all the things heretofore found mainly in the city are being established generally in the rural districts. These improvements are being accomplished through co-operation. Industrialized agriculture itself is spending in rural Hawaii about four million dollars a year to improve rural social facilities. This amount is exclusive of taxes for social utilities. Additional tax money roughly allocated to social service of all sorts, amounts to about ten million dollars.²

To cause all agencies to aid and work toward the desired objective, the outstanding agency of co-operation and planned activity is the Community Association of Hawaii. This organization, which is sponsored financially by the Juliette M. Atherton Trust of Honolulu, was first started in a five-year experiment in the large Waialua district of Oahu (populations about 9,000 of whom 4,200 are connected with the Waialua Agricultural company, LTD., a sugar farm). The experiment has been in operation three years, and it is so successful that several other active rural community associations have been formed elsewhere in the Territory.

The Waialua Community Association is composed of 32 member organizations and many individual members. Schools, churches, firms, clubs, etc., unite to improve their community. Quarterly meetings are held for the association as a whole. Between these meetings the work is carried on by an Advisory Committee composed of the officers, chairmen of standing committees, delegates-at-large, and two delegates from each member organization.

The organizations and individuals present the needs of the community as seen by them. These needs are discussed and plans are made to solve the needs. Either a committee composed of representatives of the various organizations and racial groups, or some member organization is designated to handle each problem. The association backs up the work of its committees and its member organizations. Duplication is discussed and eliminated; needy voids are filled with suitable planned activities.

The scope of the work is indicated by the names of the several standing committees: Advisory, Adult Education, Community Beautification and Art, Crafts, Community Center, Health and Sanitation, Home Demonstration, Kindergartens, Library, Music, Public Programs, Recreation, and Women's Exchange.

The Community Association endeavors to have all persons in the district take part in improving the life of the community and become engaged in various suitable activities. All persons are urged to join through their organizations, or as individuals; or if they are not already in the suitable organization they may organize themselves if they desire and thus join the community association.

The Waialua Community Association has secured land and has erected a fine community center building for one non-plantation area of the District. The Waialua Agricultural Company, Ltd., has been most co-operative in improving conditions for its people; it has erected clubhouses, gymnasia, swimming pools, game courts, etc., and has developed bathing beaches. The community association has a full-time man

and full-time woman with suitable part-time assistants employed, and the plantation has a large staff to handle the social, recreational, and health features of its personnel.

Excellent health clinics have been sponsored by the community health committee. The library committee has established a branch of the Library of Hawaii and two substations thereof. The home demonstration committee sponsors three cottages with groups of women. The Woman's Exchange teaches crafts and has a sales market. The kindergarten committee sponsors two kindergartens.

Other projects carried out so far by the Association include: international music nights; heirloom exhibit; classes for adults in English, mathematics, automobile mechanics, chorus, instrumental music, band, lahala weaving, cooking, art, and shop work; an average of more than one public entertainment each month; lectures; boxing bouts; Thanksgiving musicales. May Day-Lei Day festivals; Washington's Birthday celebrations; a two-day cooking school, and a course in recreation leadership. The University of Hawaii, the Honolulu Academy of Arts, the Library of Hawaii, the recreation commission, the Board of Health, the Department of Public Instruction, and other agencies have lent a helpful hand. Plans are well along to provide a mobile dental unit for needy rural areas.

An illustration of the regard the people of the community have for the Association is furnished by the case of the Waialua Civic Club (composed of young American citizens of Japanese ancestry, most of them non-plantation people). This club cut across all racial and group lines and gave \$3,000 from its funds to aid the community-wide drive to raise a community center building fund. Prior to the influence of the community association this group had planned to use its funds for its own racial work.

There is nothing basically new in the program of the Waialua Community Association. Things, which this association is doing, are being done elsewhere by other communities in Hawaii. However, the whole field of social needs is considered and plans to meet these needs are made by the co-operative efforts of all firms, churches, schools, clubs, etc. This is the essence and the strength of the community association. Organization is proving to be the proper method of securing rural life improvement.

There is a growing community spirit. The plantation and non-plantation people of the district are becoming more friendly and more co-operative. There is a wholesome tone of community interest and accomplishment.

Other associations in addition to that at Waialua, and about half a dozen others, may start later; but the main thing is that there is a great increase of interest in rural life: All over the Territory the rural districts are becoming true competitors of the city, and a reversal of the cityward movement in Hawaii has begun.

¹ The American citizens, born in Hawaii of immigrant laborer parents, are forming a "neo-Hawaiian race" of great attractiveness, ability, and promise. The social scientist from the mainland listens to his colleagues at the University with indulgent incredulity as they discourse about the "neo-Hawaiian." The longer he remains, the more he observes, the more likely he is to recognize that the case is arguable. And nowhere will he find less racial prejudice.

² The details of this program will appear in part in the rest of the article. It has been charged that the enterprise is paternalistic. The degree of paternalism varies with the sponsoring company

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but it appears to be on a very much higher level than the type of paternalism found in even the better industrial villages on the mainland, as described in Harriet Herring's *Welfare Work in Mill villages: Study of Extra-Mill Activities in North Carolina, or Industrial Village Churches*. The interesting thing is that the plantations accept the dictum that efficient social utilities pay, and they bear the bulk of the social costs. One case more or less of measles affect their profits. But those I observed, with one exception, are also sincerely trying to build a democratic society. Officers and directors of the various local organizations are not overloaded with foremen and executives. In at least one case C. I. O. organizers were allowed to use a community house to present their case (unsuccessfully) to plantation employees. Moreover, this experiment is being tried with a heterogeneous group of Asiatics and their native-born citizen children. To attempt to build in rural Hawaii a democratic society and a rich civilization from these groups with varying traditions and taboos requires high skill in social engineering. Certainly there is now more democracy and less paternalism in Waialua than there was. The enterprise may fail, but whether it succeeds or fails, it hold much of interest in the practical synthesis it is making, in ways far more varied than can be described in a single article, or rural sociology, theoretical and applied, and of general and agricultural economics. – E. DES. BRUNNER.