

From the Past to the Future: Our Responsibility to Perpetuate Heritage with Written Documents

Tokiko Y. Bazzell, University of Hawaii at Manoa Library

I am honored to be part of the 2011 Worldwide Uchinanchu Festival (Taikai), where Uchinanchus and Uchinanchus at Heart gather here from around the world every five years. My heartfelt appreciation goes to all the staff at the Okinawa Prefectural Museum & Art Museum, Taikai Executive Committee (Jikko Iinkai) Team, and members of the Okinawa Genealogical Society of Hawaii (OGSH), who worked so hard to create this first international symposium. Thank you so much.

As the Japan Studies Librarian, my role is to develop, manage, preserve, and provide access to resources about Japan and Okinawa. You may wonder why a librarian would be involved in this symposium. So, I am here to share the story behind how this symposium relates to Okinawa, Hawaii, and the University of Hawaii and how written documents connect us across time and locations. My hope is to serve as an opening act for the other exciting speakers that will follow.

The Okinawa Genealogical Society of Hawaii (OGSH) and its predecessor organization, Okinawa Heritage Club, began its activities in 1993 and they meet every month in Honolulu. They are very involved in research on genealogy but they are also engaged in special activities such as the Short Stories Project. They publish short stories about their family members, neighbors, and friends. I found the following passage in the “Forward” section of the 2nd volume:

...The *Short Stories* project is meant to “link with the past to perpetuate our heritage.”

(Shinsato, Terry Masateru, In “Foreword,” *Our Legacy Continues.... 2005 Short Stories II*, p. v)

Based on this guiding principle, OGSH began the short stories project to encourage its members to share personal values, memories, experiences, and to compile and publish them. A project like this is farsighted and invaluable. Writing down real life memories, feelings and experiences helps ensure that unfiltered heritage and knowledge can be passed on to future generations.

The most important thing is for things to be written down so that there will be tangible documents for future generations to draw upon. The second most important thing is to make sure that these documents do not deteriorate, become lost, or get destroyed. If these documents are eventually held by libraries, museums or archives, these institutions must accept responsibility to preserve them, make their existence known, and make them accessible to the public. I am fortunate to have the opportunity to work on these very tasks at the University of Hawaii for more than 10 years. I LOVE this work. I not only love the process but I am fascinated with the chance encounters that occur as part of all the activities.

I am able to enjoy what I am doing now because of those who went before, who had the foresight and vision to see the value of written documents. More than a half century ago, scholars, the local Okinawa community in Hawaii, and supporters in Okinawa had this same vision, determination, and passion. They worked together to achieve their dream of creating a center for Okinawan studies at the University of Hawaii. To begin, they were determined to develop high quality resources on Ryukyu and Okinawa. Their determination and perhaps fate brought more than 2,000 items on Okinawa to Hawaii when the Frank Hawley Collection was purchased.

The Hawley Collection was developed before WWII by English journalist Frank Hawley, with help of his Uchina wife and several Okinawan friends. Since so many documents were destroyed during the war, it was very fortunate that these materials were in Mr. Hawley's possession. Mr. Hawley passed away on the very day when UH history professor, Dr. Shunzo Sakamaki, arrived in Japan. He was on a mission to find quality resources on Okinawa for the University. Because he was onsite in Tokyo, Dr. Sakamaki was in a position to purchase the Hawley collection with the financial support of local Uchinanchus back in Hawaii. Their dream of a new study center would not be realized at that moment, but they built a solid foundation for Okinawan studies. For the past 50 years, the Hawley Collection has attracted researchers from around the world. Thanks to the collections and the efforts of many individuals, the relationships between institutions in Hawaii, Okinawa, Japan and the other parts of the world have never stronger.

The actors changed as time passed but the same vision, passion, and determination continued on and the long time dream came true on July 1, 2008, when the Center for Okinawan Studies was formally established at the University of Hawaii. The Center is the first of its kind outside of Japan and I do not believe it would have been possible without the resources developed by our predecessors.

Partnership with the Hawaii Okinawan community lives on today. In November 2010, the Library was gifted an important family lineage document from a local Okinawan family. The Uchima family had safeguarded the document since the time their great grandfather emigrated from Okinawa to Hawaii. The families are now 4th and 5th generations of the Uchimas, and the members still live in Hawaii but also on the U.S. mainland. They protected this family treasure for generations but decided to donate it to the Library to ensure its preservation and availability to future generations. Their decision aligns perfectly with the mission of the University of Hawaii research community, the Center for Okinawan Studies, and the UHM Library.

Because the Uchima family document needs some restoration work, the Library is collaborating with the Okinawa Prefectural Museum. I delivered it to Mr. Takumi Toma, a museum conservator, this past June. I hope everyone will see the beautifully restored document as you enter the Museum today. If you miss it, please stop by and see it before you leave.

It turns out that there is a more exciting story behind this project. The Okinawa Prefectural Museum has identified the document, commonly called "Mōsei Kafu (Family Lineage Document of the Mō Clan)." Members of the Mō Clan of Shuri were involved in matters related to the Ryukyu Kingdom. This particular document starts from Uchima the 8th, Uchima Anhan. The existence of the document was mentioned in the 1960s and a copy of the document is in the collections at the Naha City Museum of History, but its whereabouts was unknown until now. Moreover, further investigation showed that the father of Anhan, Uchima Antai, Uchima the 7th, was a member of Prince Misato and Prince Tomigusuku's Procession to Edo Castle in 1710.

The Hawley Collection I discussed includes a rare scroll called "The Procession of Ryukyuan en Route to Edo Castle (Ryukyujin Tojo no Zu)," which depicts this very 1710 procession and in 2006, the Library had restored and digitized the scroll in collaboration with the National Museum of Japanese History. Sure enough, when we examined the scroll, Uchima the 7th, Antai was illustrated as one of the musical envoys. It is an amazing turn of events that after so many years, the Uchima document donated to the Library has been reunited with their ancestor in the Hawley Collection in Hawaii. In Hawaii we say "this is a true chicken skin moment."

There is one more discovery that I would like to share. The UHM Library and the Museum did our first collaborative project in 2008. The Museum helped restore and digitize another scroll depicting the 1671 procession "Procession of Prince Kin, Ryukyuan Envoy, En route to Edo Castle (琉球使者金武王子出仕之行列)" While Mr. Toma was restoring this scroll, he was working on another family lineage document. He found out this family's ancestor participated in this very procession. Again we can see him nicely illustrated in the Hawley Collection scroll.

What can we learn from these documents? Why is it important to record our family lineage? Most of us probably do not have such an official family lineage document. How can we start researching our family roots? I will leave these interesting questions for Prof. Dana and Mr. Hokama. We should be thankful to all these ancestors for documenting their lineage and to their families for safeguarding the documents. The University of Hawaii has taken over the responsibility to ensure their documents and cultural heritage will be passed on to the future. I am sure the Okinawa Prefectural Museum shares the same commitment. We will make the digitized document available on the web soon, which, we hope, will provide more opportunities for new discoveries.