

MISSOURI  
MASTERS  
AND  
THEIR TRADITIONAL ARTS

# Halau Hula O Missouri:

Hawaiian *Hula* and *Lei*-making in Missouri

*Featuring master artist: John Kaleiowaiapua Kumia*



Dana Everts-Boehm  
*Missouri Folk Arts Program*  
*Missouri Arts Council • Museum of Art and Archeology*  
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# Introduction

When Hawaiian *bula* and *lei-making* were funded by the Missouri Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program in 1995 and 1998, the question arose, "Are there *really* Hawaiians in Missouri?" The answer is yes, Hawaiians form a small but growing segment of the state's population. Despite their relatively small numbers, Hawaiians in Missouri have high visibility because of their interest in teaching and performing their distinctive folk arts.

The number of native Hawaiians relocating to the mainland is increasing everywhere, not just in Missouri. As is often the case in any significant ethnic migration, the underlying reason is socioeconomic. In his 1983 study, *Hawaii: Islands Under the Influence*, Noel

Kent observes:

During the past two decades tens of thousands of young people have left the islands. It is doubtful whether young people who have a choice will be willing to remain on their home islands to work in hotels.<sup>1</sup>

Native Hawaiians, meaning individuals of full or part Hawaiian ancestry, belong to the lowest socioeconomic stratum on the islands. They receive the poorest education, least access to health care, and represent the highest percentage of prison inmates. As of 1981, 39.9% Hawaiians worked in service occupations (i.e., tourist hotels) as opposed to 12.8% Caucasians and 9.5% Japanese. The cost of housing was triple the national average that same year. By 1983, wages in Hawaii were 8.9% below the national average, hotel workers among those lowest paid. Not surprisingly:

Massive speculation has driven at least 95% of the locals out of the housing market. It has now become virtually impossible for most local residents to purchase a house.<sup>2</sup>

*Hula* master John Kaleiowaiapua Kumia, who left Hawaii a few years ago to resettle in Missouri, confirms the daunting situation facing his fellow Hawaiians. He states:

People are being laid off of work. Homes are getting very, very expensive. It's getting to be a place for the rich. You can't afford to live in

Hawaii anymore, so you have to go somewhere else.

These factors explain the increasing presence of Hawaiians in Missouri, where the overall cost of living is far less prohibitive than on the islands. Ironically, this forced economic exile from their homeland is coupled with an increasing passion and determination on the part of Hawaiians to revitalize and maintain their cultural heritage. Even far from home, Hawaiians are more likely to be active tradition bearers now than they were ten or twenty years ago.

John Kumia is no exception to this pattern. A *kumu hula* (master dancer), chanter, gourd-player and *lei-maker*, John arrived in Boonville, Missouri in 1994. By 1995 he had founded the state's first *bula* school, *Halau Hula O Missouri*. To date he has taught *bula* and *lei-making* to two apprentices of Hawaiian descent through Missouri's Apprenticeship Program, in addition to numerous students outside the program. His *bula* school is gaining popular acclaim as the group is invited to perform at educational festivals and events throughout mid-Missouri.

What is exceptional about John is his degree of mastery of *na bula* and *na mele* (dance and traditional chanting). Apprentice Leilani Heywood says proudly:

Johnny Kumia has been trained by one of the foremost progenitors of the Hawaiian Renaissance movement. Johnny not only possesses some of the finest training, but a heart for Hawaiian history and culture.

Within the few short years he has been here, John has already made, and continues to make, an invaluable cultural contribution to the state. ■



## COVER PHOTO

John Kumia and his dance group, *Halau Hula O Missouri*, perform at "Tuesdays at the Capital" in Jefferson City, April, 1996.

Note: All photographs by Dana Everts-Boehm unless otherwise noted.

Apprentice Leilani Heywood and other members of the halau demonstrate the eloquent hand gestures so characteristic of hula.



# Hawaii in Historical Context

To understand the significance of *hula* and *lei*-making, one needs to glimpse these art forms in their historical contexts.

A thumbnail sketch of Hawaiian history follows:

In the years following Cook's arrival and increasing European presence on the islands, the native Hawaiian population was drastically reduced to one sixth of its pre-contact size by disease. Chinese and Japanese laborers were brought in to meet the rising need for agricultural laborers on the sugar plantations. By 1890, Hawaiians/part Hawaiians were only 45% of the population; Asians were 32%; and Caucasians were 22%. John comments:

I don't know if it's a big thing, but we're the survivors of a race that has kind of disappeared. A lot of Hawaiians died when the foreigners came over, through all kinds of illnesses. So we're just lucky. There's hardly any pure Hawaiians left.

During the second half of the twentieth century, sugar plantations were gradually supplanted by tourism and the military as the



Penny Pihana Shaw dances a hula puili (split bamboo rattle dance) for an audience at Jefferson City. April, 1998.

major industries in Hawaii. Between 1963 and 1977, tourism grew enormously, coupled with the stagnation of other industries and a twenty-five percent cost of living increase.<sup>4</sup>

Today, Hawaii is economically dependent on tourism. The kind of tourism rampant on the islands has been identified as destination resort tourism—a particularly virulent variety that offers the least eco-

nomic gain for the local populace, while being the most blatantly exploitative of local culture. Profits from destination resort tourism go chiefly to multinational corporations—not to native Hawaiians.

Hawaiians concerned with this state of affairs respond:

"Tourism means the end of our Hawaiian lifestyle."

"This is a sorry existence for a once proud people."

"The culture of the plastic *lei* is a debasement of Polynesian culture."<sup>5</sup>

Tourism *has* offered *some*, albeit underpaid, employment to dancers, musicians, and traditional artisans. But these artists have had to struggle to maintain the integrity of their cultural traditions in the face of massive economic pressure to popularize and commercialize them. The response to decades of such struggle is a renewed grassroots determination to reclaim and protect Hawaiian arts, language, and heritage.

This remarkable resurgence of cultural expression is reflected by the changing rhetoric of Honolulu's Bishop Museum, which as far back as 1926 grimly predicted the complete and imminent demise of Hawaiian culture:

What the people who are still living recall...reveals more of the breaking down process which is at work in all of the phases of the original Hawaiian culture."<sup>6</sup>

By 1980, however the same Museum had changed its tune:

Traditional Hawaiian worldviews, philosophies, arts and crafts still flourish in Hawaii.<sup>7</sup>

Central to contemporary expressions of Hawaiian culture and ethnic identity are song, dance, and body adornment: the *mele* (chant), *hula* (dance) and *lei* (garland). ■

<b>600 A.D.</b>	Hawaii is populated by sea-faring Polynesians from the Marquesas Islands
<b>1200</b>	Tahitians populate Hawaii. Contact with the rest of Polynesia ceases for 500 years
<b>1778</b>	Captain James Cook visits Hawaii
<b>1819</b>	Breakdown of indigenous state religion due to European pressures
<b>1820</b>	Arrival of Calvinist Missionaries initiates century-long effort to suppress Hawaiian customs, including hula
<b>1848</b>	Hawaiian subsistence economy replaced by exploitative sandalwood trade, whaling trade, sugar plantations <sup>3</sup>

# Hula: Then and Now

Among the first Europeans to view Hawaiian dance and write about it, Chamisso (1815-18) described the *bula* in glowing terms:

The spectacle of the hura, the festive dances of the Owheeeans, filled us with admiration. The words mostly celebrate the fame of some prince. In the varying dance the human form represents itself in a constant flow of easy, unrestrained motion, in every natural and graceful position. The dancer moves with composure. His body, his arms, all his muscles are expressive, his countenance is animated.<sup>8</sup>

Dance scholar Adrienne Kaeppler further describes ancient *bula*, emphasizing the variety of percussive implements used to enhance the chanting and dance:

*Mele bula* texts honored the gods and chiefs and were intoned in specific styles of chanting, in conjunction with a variety of drums and rattles that furnished a rhythmic setting. One, two, several or many men and women dancers sat or

stood in rows facing a human audience and performed *bula*, dancing as an expression of joy.<sup>9</sup>

Prior to 1819, Hawaiian dance fell into two categories: *ha'a* (a sacred dance performed by men only, honoring the *akua* or state gods, at the *beiau* or outdoor temple, accompanied by the *pahu* or sharkskin drum) and *bula* (a dance performed by both men and women often for formal entertainments, honoring the *aumakua* or ancestral gods and chiefs, accompanied by an *ipu* or gourd drum and other percussive instruments). With the overthrow of the *akua* (state gods) in 1819, however, *ha'a* disappeared. Scholars postulate that elements of *ha'a* became amalgamated into *bula*, including the use of the *pahu* (sharkskin drum) for certain dances, and significant spiritual or religious practices belying the notion that *bula* is strictly a secular dance form.

Even today, traditional *bula* training retains sacred elements in the creation, for example, of a *kuahu* (altar) before each practice session. Up to the 1930s at least, some *bula* initiates were raised from birth observing *kapu* (sacred taboos/restrictions imposed by Laka, patron god/goddess of *bula*).<sup>10</sup> John describes the ancient *bula* training:

Candidates for the honor of *bula* were required to enter the *halau* (school) of an expert leader, much as an initiate to a sacred order. Every step of the training was accompanied by many *kapu*/restrictions. During their novitiate, they were seldom allowed beyond the school enclosure, and no villager could speak to them. All that they learned were the ideas and religious attitudes instilled in them by the *bula* masters. Only after the *uniki* (graduation) were they allowed to mingle with outsiders.

The missionaries, far less enamored of *bula* than their adventurous

predecessors, made fervent efforts throughout the nineteenth century to suppress it:

Soon after becoming entrenched in the 1820s, Calvinist missionaries from New England made persistent but ultimately unsuccessful attempts to eradicate *bula* from Hawaiian culture. As a consequence, public *bula* performances disappeared from locations near mission stations (and) vanished from residences of Christian chiefs. Embracing religion with devout fervor, Queen Regent Ka'ahumanui went so far as to ban public performances altogether in 1830.<sup>11</sup>

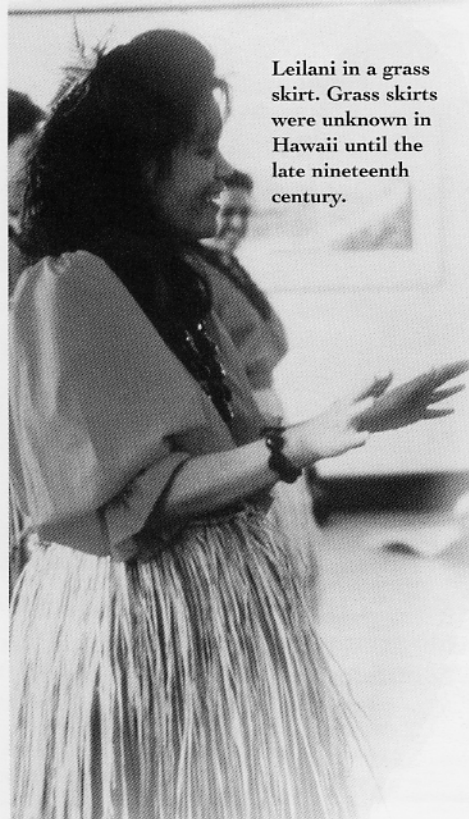
Public *bula* performances were not reestablished until the reign of King Kalakaua (1874-1891), who "made a daring stand to stimulate and reinstitute official court and public support for the ancient Hawaiian customs,"<sup>12</sup> according to Edith McKinzie. For this, King Kalakaua is still publicly thanked by modern-day *bula* dancers. The first thing John told an audience of seventy-five fourth graders at a performance in Jefferson City was:

Today we teach *bula* because of King Kalakaua, one of our last kings, who decided to revive *bula* and bring it back.

And he makes sure that the students in his *halau* know about it, too. He gives them this handout:

It was the last King of Hawai'i, David La'amea Kalakaua (the Merry Monarch) who left us a great heritage. After his election to the throne, he revived the arts of chant, music, and the dances that were so dear to him. Kalakaua made a promise to his beloved Chieftess Ha'aheo on her death bed, "By our Gods of Hawai'i, I will make your way of life, Ha'aheo, our way." And so it was at his coronation that the elders, the young, chanters of old, famous singers, and experts in *bula* rejoiced with King Kalakaua. The islands lived again...

Contrary to popular belief, grass skirts are not native to Hawai'i. Traditionally, women dancers wore



Leilani in a grass skirt. Grass skirts were unknown in Hawaii until the late nineteenth century.



skirts made of bark cloth with no upper garment other than *lei*. Missionaries introduced the voluminous Mother Hubbard dress which later evolved into the *muu muu*.

Grass skirts, brought to Hawaii in the 1870s by Gilbertese contract laborers, were not actually made from grass but from shredded ti leaves:

During the Kalakaua period, when traditional bark cloth was becoming obsolete, *bula* costumes were normally fashioned from foreign cloth and covered the performers in billowy skirts and blouses, not infrequently over long underwear. The grass skirt did not come into general use until tourists and later movie patrons learned to expect and demand the revealing attire in *bula* entertainments.<sup>13</sup>

Despite Kalakaua's best efforts, public *bula* performances again declined in the early twentieth century. By mid-century, bolstered by the new tourism industry, *bula* started to make a comeback. In the 1950s through the 1970s, *bula* was adapted for mass tourist consumption, ushering in the era of the plastic *lei* and the cellophane grass skirt. But in the last twenty years Hawaiians have been making a concerted effort to reclaim *bula kabiko* (ancient, traditional) from the *balaus* (dance schools) that have kept it alive all these years. John muses about the contemporary attitude of many Hawaiians toward their native dance:

What's happening now is that they're enjoying both (traditional and contemporary *bula*). As much as they're reviving the old, they still appreciate the new. And there's a lot of groups over there that are really good. They're doing contemporary things but they're doing nice motions...They're not doing it so Hollywood.

The Bishop Museum concurs: Today the *bula* is in the full bloom of a renaissance that shows no sign of abatement. While many features of the dance seen today bear faint resemblance to *bula* of the late 18th century or even the 1880s, the tradition has shown a remarkable ability

to adapt to changing tastes and pressures. A fusion of 20th century aspirations and forces rooted in ancient traditions, Hawaiian dance persists today as living *bula*.<sup>14</sup>

### Na Mele (Chants)

*Hula* is best understood as a complex of art forms: chanted poetry, percussive instrumentation, and an extraordinarily communicative dance involving facial expression, hand, body, hip and foot movements. *Hula mele* or chants are characterized by *kaona*, poetic, allusive language rich in metaphor and multiple meaning. According to Kaepler,

*Hula mele* conveyed messages in an indirect way through *kaona*, veiled or layered meaning. *Kaona*...was thought to have a power of its own which could honor or harm. *Kaona* laden texts were phrased in metaphor and allusion, and their hidden meaning had to be deduced from cultural knowledge.<sup>15</sup>

John explains:

*Hula* chants were intricately worded and held multiple meanings beyond the literal word for word. Secret meanings were hidden in a use of language known only to the royalty or the initiated. Many of these meanings have been lost because of the failure of modern scholars to understand the subtle, ancient intention of

the words, and also because of inaccuracies in handing down lengthy passages through word of mouth.

Body movements in the dance elaborate on the text, clarifying, alluding to, or perhaps adding a fresh interpretation. Such a highly sophisticated art form requires an educated audience to pick up on the nuances of its multi-layered meanings. It is easy to see how the complexity of *bula* is lost in adapting it to mass tourist audiences, who are more interested in the revealing grass skirts than the sophisticated interplay of allusive text, hand, hip and foot motions.

### Spirituality

*Hula kabiko* or traditional *bula* retains elements of ancient beliefs. The Hawaiian gods originally associated with *bula* belong to the *aumakua* (ancestral gods), which survived the 1819 downfall of the *akua* (state gods). According to Hawaiian mythology, Laka (god/goddess of *bula*), Pele (goddess of fire/volcanos), Hi'ake and Hopoe combined forces to create *bula*:

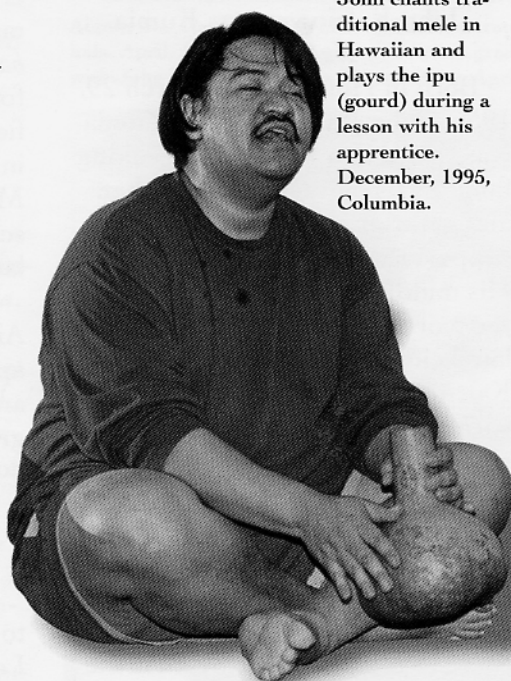
Laka is the patron of dance. Hi'aka is said to have been the first dancer, at the bidding of Pele, after having been taught by her friend, the goddess Hopoe.<sup>16</sup>

John includes a *bula kabiko* in his repertoire that honors the volcano goddess Pele, and frequently refers to Pele in connection with both *bula* and *lei-making*. He introduces this dance thus:

This particular dance is a *bula kabiko*. A *bula kabiko* is an ancient dance. And if you notice, the dancer does not smile because it's an ancient Hawaiian dance. And this dance is a tribute to Pele, the Goddess of Fire. Hawaiians believe that Pele is our creator. She is the one that created Hawaii. From a volcano, she created the islands that we live on. It's titled "*Aia la o Pele*." (Chants while playing the *ipu* or gourd drum):

*Aia la o Pele i Hawaii ea*  
Pele is in Hawaii

*E ha'a mai la i Maukele ea*  
She is dancing at Maukele



John chants traditional mele in Hawaiian and plays the *ipu* (gourd) during a lesson with his apprentice. December, 1995, Columbia.

Another manifestation of the spirituality inherent in *bula* is the presence of the *kuahu* (*bula* altar) during training and performances. Kaeppler describes the *kuahu*:

Training of the performers took place under restrictions imposed by Laka, the patron god/goddess of the *bula*. Laka was a manifestation of the god Ku, and the *obi'a lehua* plant was sacred to Ku. The *hala-pepe* was the plant form of his sister, the female Laka. These plants were included on the *bula* altar (*kuahu*) along with maile, other greens from the mountains, wild breadfruit, wild ilima and pili grass from the lowlands.<sup>17</sup>

John discusses the significance of the *kuahu* in his training:

In our *halau*, whenever you came to *bula*, you always brought either the ti leaf or *maile*. To me that was sacred to Pele, it was *kabiko* (ancient, traditional). There was an area like an altar, it would be maybe a basket. And you would put the greenery in it. And it was so you would embody the greenery, the spirit of the forest, when you dance. So you would move like a leaf. We don't do that now. It's just so hard for me to say, "You guys, you have to pick some leaf before you can come in!"

Though he omits it during lessons, John generally brings an altar (a basket of fresh greenery) with him when he performs in public. He describes *bula* as a spiritual discipline:

A *bula* dancer strives to improve himself physically, emotionally, and spiritually. A *bula* dancer constantly strives to attain peace, love, and compassion for self and fellow man.

## Types of *Hula*

There are several ways to classify *bula*, the most basic being *bula kabiko* (ancient, traditional) and *bula auwana* (contemporary). One of the subcategories of *bula kabiko* is *bulu nobo* (sitting down/kneeling dances). Kumia identified these three categories as examples of what he intended to teach his apprentice.

*Hula* is classified more specifically according to the kind of percussive instrument used to accom-



John chants for the Halau Hula O Missouri at the Columbia Country Club in 1997. Seated on a mat woven from the lauhala plant, he wears a fern lei po'o (head lei) and leis made of marigold around his wrist. The ipu or gourd is decorated with feather and cloth leis. Photograph courtesy of John Kumia.

pany particular dances, i.e.:

*bula pahu* (sharkskin drum)

*bula pa ipu* (gourd drum)

*bula ka'cke'eke* (bamboo stamping tubes)

*bula puili* (split bamboo rattles)

*bula ili ili* (smooth stone castanets)

*bula uliuli* (feathered gourd seed rattle)

John Kaleiowaiapua Kumia,  
*Kumu Hula*

Born in Honolulu on March 29, 1956, John Kaleiowaiapua Kumia was raised in a Hawaiian-speaking family. His mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother all helped support the family by making *leis*. His middle name, in fact, includes the word "*lei*" which can be translated either as "garland" or "child." Kaleiowaiapua means "child of the spring waters." His mother is seven eighths Hawaiian and one eighth Chinese, his father is half Hawaiian and half Filipino.

John was immersed in Hawaiian music and dance from an early age. His uncle, John Mendiola, was Band Master for the Royal Hawai-

ian Band, and his family frequently attended Hawaiian music and dance performances. He began to study *bula* seriously as a teenager from one of Hawaii's most celebrated dance instructors, Ma'iki Aiu Lake. Ma'iki Aiu, in turn, was one of Lokalia Montgomery's proteges. Lokalia Montgomery is credited with incorporating elements of *bula pahu* (a descendent of *ba'a*, the ancient sacred dance form) into mainstream *bula*. Identified as "the student most important in passing on Lokalia's traditions,"<sup>29</sup> Ma'iki founded *Halau O Ma'iki*, a school of Hawaiian dance that lasted thirty-three years.

Lokalia Montgomery and Ma'iki Aiu, both Catholic, took a creative approach to retaining elements of ancient Hawaiian belief as an integral part of *bula*. John explains:

Lokalia Montgomery told her, "It's okay! Laka is the goddess of forests and flowers and she's the same as the Blessed Mother."

Lokalia thus encouraged Ma'iki to keep traditional homages to Laka, the ancient patroness/god-



ness of *bula*, without contradicting her Catholic faith.

Following Ma'iki's death, John continued to study *bula* with her daughter, Coline Kaualoku Aiu Ferranti. He also attended *bula* workshops with famous instructors Lokalia Montgomery, Kauai Zuttermeister, and Edith Kanakaole. Kauai and Edith both performed *bulas* dedicated to Pele, which may account for the special attention Kumia pays to Pele in his repertoire.<sup>18</sup>

John moved from Hawaii to Boonville, Missouri in 1994. By April, 1995, he had already organized the state's first *bula* school: *Halau Hula O Missouri*. The school began with three dancers, quickly grew to five, and now has a waiting list of twenty-five. To date, John has taught *bula* and *lei-making* to two apprentices in the Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program: Leilani Heywood of Columbia, and Penny Pihana Shaw of New Franklin. *Halau Hula O Missouri* now performs all over central Missouri.

John describes *bula* as "the art of Hawaiian dance, of all you see, feel, smell, hear and taste." In his teaching method, every physical technique is accompanied by a cultural explanation. In emphasizing the importance of being physically centered, Kumia notes:

One of the things we believe is that life started from the bellybutton. So that when you dance it's always from the center of your being, of your body.

John's lesson plan is comprehensive. It includes the history of *bula*, an introduction to the Hawaiian language, learning the thirteen foot movements, breathing, foot, hand, head coordination, learning about *mana'o*: the meaning, translation of *mele* (chants), use of traditional implements including the *ipu beke*, *uli'uli*, *pu'ili*, *ili'ili*, and finally *lei-making*. Each new dance is accompanied by a hand-out explaining how the foot and arm movements



Above: The Halau Hula O Missouri demonstrate the characteristic bent-knee stance of traditional hula. April, 1996. Below: A group of fourth graders from Jefferson City learn to dance the hula with John Kumia and Penny Pihana Shaw, April, 1999.



coordinate with the chanted text. An example of a handout of the text to the dance "Kalakaua (Sun Warrior)" illustrates his teaching method:

text: *KALAKAUA HE INOA*  
 feet: *kawelu kawelu* (step backward and forward)  
 hands: *Kalakaua* motion  
 text: *KA PUA MAE OLE I KA LA*  
 feet: *lele uwebe* right *lele uwebe* left  
       (*lele uwebe*: step with right, point with left 45 degrees)  
 hands: flower motion sun motion

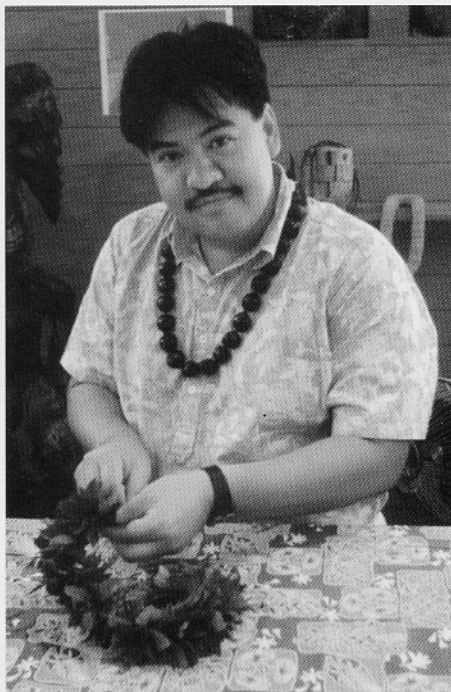
The students are taught the meaning of the *mele* text so they can coordinate foot and hand motions that illustrate or allude to the text.

John generally teaches a neophyte one year of *bula auwana* (contemporary) before introducing *bula kabiko* (traditional), because the latter is so much more difficult. In teaching Leilani, however, John decided to introduce *bula kabiko* sooner. During the apprenticeship Leilani learned a total of fourteen dances by attending lessons once a week for forty-eight weeks.

In performance, Kumia presents the audience with a combination of ancient and contemporary dances. He sets up the *kuaka* (altar) with fresh green leaves and flowers in a basket, puts mats on the floor. He plays the *ipu* (gourd drum) and chants for the dancers performing *bula kabiko*, and uses CDs for *bula auwana*. He educates his audiences about Hawaiian history and folklore. This introduction to a dance about the *lehua* flower is typical:

After Pele came and exploded, and the volcanos and the Hawaiian islands were formed, the very first flower was called the *lehua* blossom. And it's a bright red flower. And some people say that if you pick the flower it will rain, there will be a misty rain. This dance talks about the *lehua*, the precious flower that grows up high in the mountain and it's caressed by the misty rains.

Most of the *bula kabiko* he per-



John makes a *lei liko lehua* (made of buds of the lehua plant) for a *bula* workshop in Japan, 1992. He is wearing a *kukui nut lei*. Photograph courtesy of John Kumia.

forms are *bula ipu* (accompanied by the gourd drum). In addition his repertoire includes *bula puili* (split bamboo rattles), *bula ili ili* (smooth stone castanets) and *bula uliuli* (feathered gourd seed rattle). *Hula auwana* performed include numbers such as "Sway it *Hula Girl*," "Mele Kalikimaka e Nei" (Merry Christmas to You,) and recent compositions in English such as "Maile Lei" ("Oh lovely maile lei, oh how I love you so).

*Halau Hula O Missouri* performs throughout central Missouri in a variety of venues. A listing of 1995-1996 performances includes: Paul Pepper and Friends, a Columbia television show; "Tuesdays at the Capital" in Jefferson City, a series of folk arts presentations cosponsored by the State Museum and the Missouri Folk Arts Program; Concerned Citizens for the Black Community in Boonville; Earth Day in Columbia; Staff Advisory Council, University of Missouri-Columbia; International Night, Russell Blvd. Elementary School, Columbia; The Bluenote: Night for Healing of

Racism, Columbia; Columbia Fall Festival.

Given the remarkably successful resurgence of Hawaiian traditional arts in the past two decades, John is guardedly optimistic. But he is concerned about the pervasive impact of commercialization:

You have Hawaiian arts that are for shopping centers, really ritzy stores. And then you have Hawaiian arts and crafts at the *bula* festivals, where the *real* arts are. And so they go to the *bula* festivals and steal ideas and make it big and commercial.

His apprentice, Leilani Heywood, concurs:

I subscribe to this online newsletter. It had a story about the governor (of Hawaii) calling Disney World to pitch this idea of making this historic area into an entertainment park. It's like, it's *Coco Head Crater*! I mean this place has intrinsic historic value! And he's trying to sell it off to be an entertainment park! I'm like, *what* is this guy *thinking*? It's a national treasure!

And while state involvement has helped to bolster the *bula* revival, John wonders about the impact of state-sponsored *bula* contests on the dance tradition. Folklorist Deborah Bailey, who interviewed John in 1996, paraphrases him:

John was concerned about preserving certain aspects of the traditional *bula* which he feels could be endangered. For example, there are increasing numbers of *bula* contests that he feels are slowly changing performance style. The contests focus on groups being perfectly in sync with one another. He says traditional *bula* is freer in form and improvisation than what is performed in a contest context, where synchronized movement takes precedence over fluidity of form. He is afraid that with the burgeoning popularity of these contests in Hawaii, teaching will change its focus to meet the requirements of the contests.<sup>19</sup>





"The Lei Maker,"  
by Theodore Wores,  
1902. This print,  
which is on the wall  
in John's home,  
reminds John of his  
mother and grand-  
mother, both lei  
makers.

## Lei-making

*Leis* (garlands fashioned out of a variety of fresh and durable natural materials) are as much a symbol of Hawaiian cultural identity and tradition as *hula*. Clothing and adornment were identified as pivotal areas of cultural retention, along with dance and food, in a 1980 exhibition on Hawaiian traditional arts at the Bishop Museum.<sup>20</sup> Body adornment has long been a dominant area of artistic expression in Hawaiian culture. According to Rose:

Hawaiians possessed a richer variety of adornments for the body than other Polynesians. Besides facial and body tattoos, they wore ornaments of feathers, ivory, teeth, bones, seeds, and shells, not to mention numerous

*lei* strung or woven from flowers and fragrant leaves for festive occasions.<sup>21</sup>

The stunning variety of *leis* was described in nineteenth-century travel journals:

Their costumes were in conformity to their actions; garlands of flowers, necklaces of shells and *leis*, beautiful wreaths fabricated from red or yellow feathers, encircled the limbs of the females.<sup>22</sup>

*Lei*-making, like many other Hawaiian traditional arts, fell into decline in the early twentieth century, before it was rejuvenated as a much-admired tourist art. It was retained by a few devoted artisans during this period, such as part-Hawaiian *lei* maker Johanna

Cluney (1895-1978). Cluney, referred to as "the savior of the once nearly extinct art of feather *lei* making," was quoted by the Honolulu Advertiser in 1978:

I tell a story with my needle and thread. The feather *leis* I make are the symbols of the expert toil of people of long ago, of *leis* that decorated chieftess's heads, of magnificent cloaks and helmets that warrior chiefs wore into battle.<sup>23</sup>

John emphasizes the social significance of *lei*-making in his description:

The art of Hawaiian *lei*-making: the gathering of flowers, ferns, herbs, nuts, seeds, pods, shells, feathers or any object that can be fashioned into a *lei* (garland) to be worn around the neck, encircle the head, around wrists, ankles, to be hung from the arm, draped on an altar, coffin, attached to a flower arrangement, added to a bouquet, etc., to mark the most memorable moments of a life.

Fresh *leis*, those made of leaves and flowers, are most frequently made to mark a special occasion, particularly rites of passage such as marriage, graduation, arrival, departure, death. Kumia describes the *lei kabiko* or traditional types of *leis*:

Traditional Hawaiian would be just the green. Traditional would be *maile*, *palapalai* ferns, *lauki* (ti leaf), *pili* grass. The *lehua*, which is a red blossom sacred to Pele, the *obelo* berry...and that's basically it. *Maile* is a leaf, fern, it's like a stem. It looks like a stem but you have to pound the stem and take the heart out, you debone it, and so you're still left with the leaves and they're connected to the branch. And any part of the *lehua* can be used, not just the flower—the branch or the leaves, too.

Apprentice Penny Pihana Shaw observes:

A *lei* that's just a string of leaves, a *maile*, where the leaves kind of stick out and it's very plain looking...To me, those are the most beautiful.

Durable *leis*, some of which are used as percussive elements in *hula* (i.e. clacking anklets and bracelets), are made of *kukui* nuts, *wiliwili* seeds, shells, pods, feathers,

and human hair. The rarest and most highly valued *lei*, worn only by royalty, was the *lei niho palaoa*: a necklace made of human hair with a walrus or whale's tooth in the center of it. In modern times *leis* are made of a variety of new materials including non-native flowers such as carnations and roses, cloth cut with pinking shears to resemble carnations, construction paper, and the ultimate symbol of tourism, the plastic *lei*. As noted above, *leis* have had a very active role in the Hawaiian social world since ancient times. John explains:

In old Hawaii, the *lei* appeared in the fields with the farmer when he invoked the blessings of the gods upon his fields; it was worn by the nursing mother; used in the healing rites of the priest; it was the mark of chiefly rank; it was offered to the Gods, and it belonged to the festivals and it brightened up the routine of daily life as well.

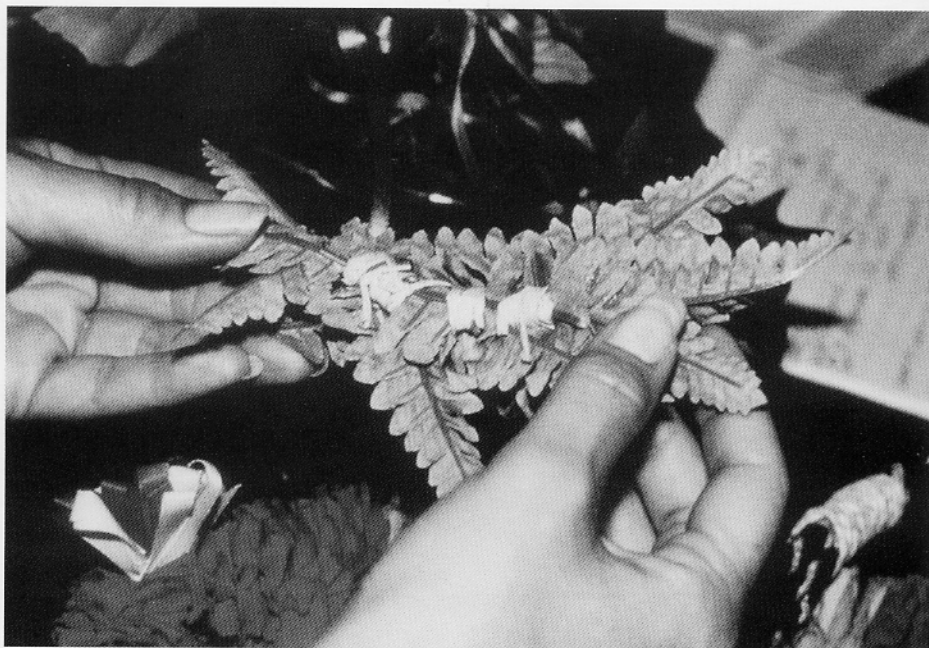
For me today, it is a vital and necessary ornament as a *bula* dancer—the gathering, creation and adorning of one's self. *Lei*-making has always been a part of my life. It is in my name, "John Kevin Kaleiowaiapua Kumia." I have made, given, and received a *lei* for every memorable occasion in my life, even for no special reason except to say, "I love you and am thinking about you."

The beauty of a *lei* is valued not for what it is made from but for what it represents. The *lei* is a physical expression of love and affection. The whole thing is to make something and to give it with a lot of feeling.

Much of the social power of a fresh *lei* lies in its ability to evoke memory. Memory is intimately associated with the sense of smell, and fresh *leis* have a beautiful scent as well as appearance:

A lot of flowers in Hawaii have a strong scent. And some things just smell green. Every time you break the leaf, it smells so pungent. So that flower or leaf will always remind you of the birthday or wedding or funeral what you were making that *lei* for.

On a deeper level, *leis* symbolize life, relationship, children, nature,



Detail of a fern lei, showing how the stems are tied together in back.

and spirituality. According to Puakea Nogelmeier, some *leis* still retain ancient mythological connotations:

Certain traditional *leis* have significance to Hawaiians beyond inherent beauty or fragrance. Many native plants are considered to be body forms representing the gods and demigods of ancient times. *Palapalai* fern and the *maile* represent Laka, the goddess of *bula*, *kukui* embodies Lono and Kamapua'a, and *obi'a lehua* symbolizes Pele. The *lei hala*, made from the cut kernels of the pandanus fruit, is considered a reference to closure or passing, the *lei maile* connotes family or personal ties and the *lei la'i* (ti leaf) extends protection to the wearer.<sup>24</sup>

John is eloquent about the complex symbolism of the *lei* and its connection with *bula*:

As a *bula* teacher in Missouri, I share the meaning of a *lei* and what it represents. Hawaiian poets sing praises of the *lei*, *bula* is the dance of this poetry. As a *bula* dancer you learn about Laka. Laka is the goddess of *bula*, but we also believe Laka is in nature, she's in the rain forest. There's a chant for when you pick your ferns. As you're creating your *lei po'o* (head garland) you're thinking about how this beauty is being twined around your head and asking for the gracefulness of hands and

feet and good thoughts. You chant as you adorn yourself, to protect yourself, to ward off evil.

A *lei* is compared to life, we weave our *lei* each day in the things we do. Our *lei* of life is woven with happy and sad moments, in the end our *lei* is passed on to those we have loved and touched in our lifetime.

Penny talks about the *lei* as a symbol for children:

My daughter's name is Kalei. It means "the *lei*" but it also means "the child." You notice how when you hold a child, they put their arms around your neck? Like a *lei*.

John also talks about *lei-making* as an art which teaches one to love and respect nature. Referring to Penny, he notes with pride:

She has learned the Hawaiian phrase, *Aloha Aina*, which translates, "Love for the land." It means respecting the land and taking only what she needs, pruning carefully, not destroying.

He explains the role of *lei-making* in his family:

I've always made *leis* since I was a little boy. From the time I was born my mom worked at the airport. She made *leis* to support us. She tells me stories that her mother made *leis* at Aloha Tower. My grandmother



would go to the mountains and pick flowers, and when the boats came in, she would be sitting on the pier. Mom said Grandma would spend hours and hours making a *lei*, then somebody would buy it for a dollar. 'Cause that's how the prices were. And *her* mother made them. I guess in my mom's and my grandmother's time, that's when it wasn't so great to be Hawaiian. You made *leis* that you could sell to the tourists.

Building on skills passed down from his mother, John studied *lei*-making in the *balau* (*bula* school):

I have studied Hawaiian flora extensively with my *bula* teacher and mentor, Aunti Ma'iki Aiu. We hiked the mountains and valleys studying native flowers and plants. Learning about plants for medicinal purposes, flowers, plants and vines sacred to Laka. How to pick, when to pick, learning chants associated with picking the flowers. Chants while making the *lei* and chants while adorning oneself.

John's approach to teaching *lei*-making is as comprehensive as *bula*. John feels that learning to make *leis* is an integral part of his *bula* school. He selected Penny, one of his dance students, to apprentice in this art. Penny had already learned the rudiments of *lei*-making from a visiting Hawaiian aunt. When she asked John to help her make *leis* for her son's graduation, he noticed that she had an aptitude for it.

Over the period of a year, John taught Penny the five basic *lei*-making techniques: *k'ul* (stringing), *wili* (winding), *humupapa* (sewing), *bili* (braiding), and *kipu'u* (knotting). Lessons also focused on learning about Hawaiian and Missouri flora, the proper way to gather wild flowers, chants for picking leaves and flowers and chants for adorning oneself. Missouri wildflowers and greenery were substituted for Hawaiian plants because of the lack of availability and prohibitive cost of the latter. Penny learned how to care for a fresh *lei*, extending its longevity by sprinkling it with water, placing it in a *pu'olo* (container to store and trans-



Penny shows a lei kukui to the audience at Jefferson City. She is wearing a lei po'o (head lei) made of green leaves and several strands of lei Ni'ihau (made of white shells on the island of Ni'ihau). April, 1999.

port *leis*, which she learned to make) in the refrigerator. Finally John taught his apprentice about the annual celebration of *Lei Day* each May first:

The first *Lei Day* in Hawai'i was celebrated on May 1, 1928, at the suggestion of Don Blanding, an American poet. Shortly afterward, the City of Honolulu inaugurated a *lei*

pageant and exhibition at City Hall. The pageant focused on the eight island *leis* and the selection of a *lei* queen and court. Today's *Lei Day* includes a *lei*-making contest, divided into six styles of *leis*.

During public demonstrations of *lei*-making, John also performs *bula* and chanting. He prepares a luxurious display of fresh and durable *leis*

# Apprentices

John's apprentices, Leilani Heywood of Columbia and Penny Pihana Shaw of New Franklin, are both of Hawaiian descent. Leilani and Penny are clearly overjoyed to have met John and to have this opportunity to become active practitioners of their artistic heritage. They share John's belief that:

It doesn't matter what culture you are—Hawaiian, German—it's important that you know about your culture.

John and Leilani met by chance on an elevator in Jesse Hall at the University of Missouri-Columbia. Glancing at each other, they quickly asked, "Are you Hawaiian?"

Leilani's parents were born and raised in Hawaii. Her grandfather, Paul Pua, was a professional entertainer who traveled with the merchant marines. Her mother was Hawaiian and English, her father Filipino, Chinese, and Spanish. Leilani grew up in California but returned to Hawaii as an adult, where she lived for ten years. She says:

My grandmother was a professional dancer. My mother learned *bula* from her peers and relatives. My mother and elementary school teacher taught me some *auwana* (modern) *bulas*. When my mother taught me, it was a form of play. My fourth grade teacher's lessons were more formal; I ended up leading the class in our *bula* lessons. I learned bits and pieces from roommates in Hawaii who danced.

*Hula* plays an extremely important role in our family for it is a reminder of who we are and where we come from in a society dominated by Caucasians. I want to learn not just the dance, but the history and folklore behind the movements. Each dance is a glimpse into the history of Hawaii. I hope to learn the values of my ancestors. I also hope to preserve this dying art and pass it on to other Missourians, most of all, my son.

Penny Pihana Shaw is the



John and Penny working on leis at his home in Boonville, December, 1998.

in baskets and draped on tables. At a recent demonstration in Jefferson City, Kumia began with a chant:

*Aloha e e*: greetings to all of you. That chant, "*Ona Ona*," means to breath in and smell the sweet, fragrant flowers. In Hawaii flowers remind us of special people, of a grandmother, a grandchild, somebody you love, somebody who's passed away. So whenever you smell lilacs or you smell a carnation, it reminds you of that special person.

John shared the following *leis* with the audience: *lei bulu* (made from the feathers of the mamu bird), *lei pui* (carnations), *lei ilima* (bright orange blossoms native to Hawai'i), *lei Ni'ihau* (shells from the island of Ni'ihau), *lei kukui* (*kukui* nuts), *lei wili wili* (seeds that look like kidney beans), and a variety of flower and leaf *leis* made with Missouri flora such as lilacs.



A lei kukui belonging to John. The oil of the kukui nut was also used to light lamps in the home, so John tells the dancers that they are enlightened while they're wearing lei kukui.



daughter of a Hawaiian Marine and a New Franklin, Missouri woman of German/Irish descent. She describes her family:

My father's mother was Samoan and his father was Hawaiian. *His* dad was a *paniolo*, a cowboy. He was raised on Maui. He came to California to be in the Marines. And he befriended someone from Missouri and came back to Missouri for Christmas, and met my mother. My mother's people are train people, they worked on the railroads. And they were married, so he moved to Missouri and has been here ever since.

This was the first interracial marriage for a lot of people (in New Franklin). And my mother had red, red hair, and so it was kind of like Lucy and Ricky Ricardo! When my mother had me, people came to see what color I'd be. And my mother said one lady came to see, and she said, "Why, she's pretty!"

I've always been interested in my heritage. My dad's been gone (from Hawaii) since 1950, and he didn't bring a lot of his heritage with him. When I named my oldest boy "Makai," my dad said, "I don't know! Makai! I don't know!" But now he's glad.

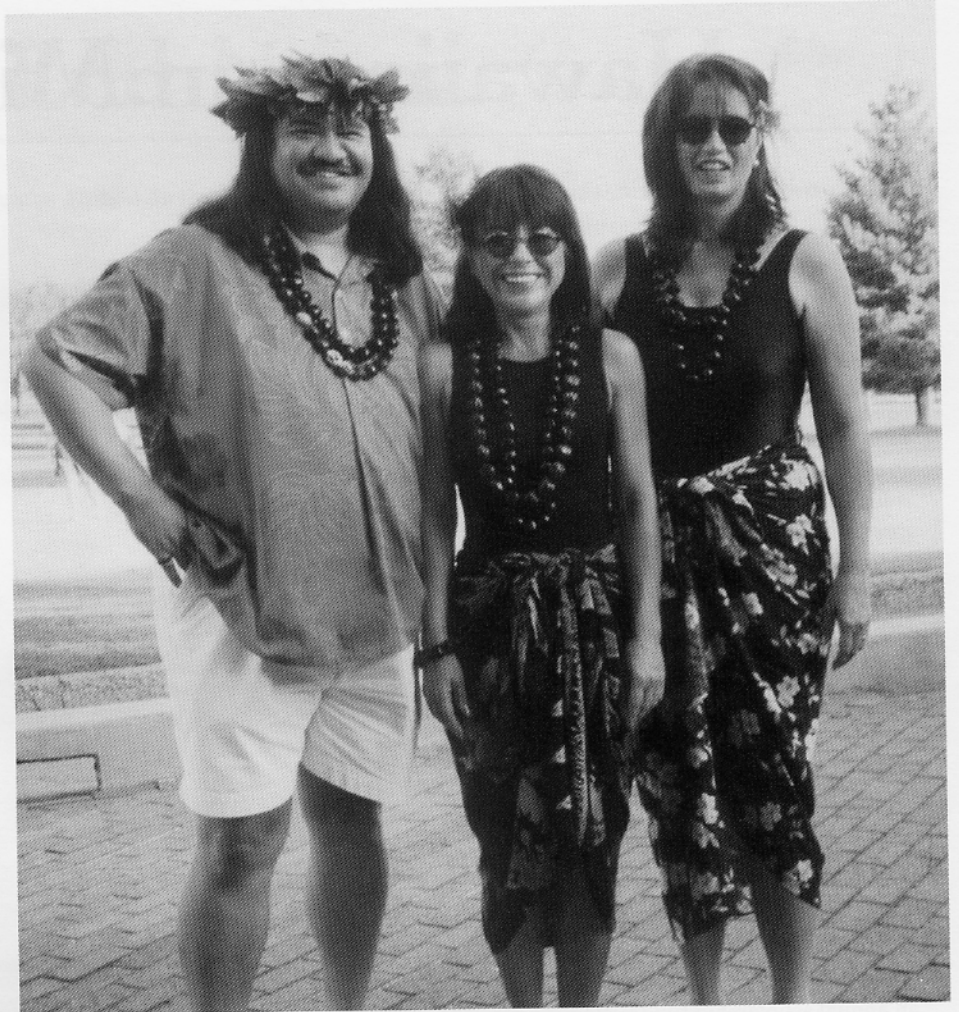
John reports how he first became aware of Penny's presence in New Franklin:

When I first moved to Boonville, we were driving around and we went to New Franklin. And in front of her mom and dad's house is a Hawaii Visitor's Bureau sign. So I says, "There's gotta be a Hawaiian that lives there!" And then later on we're reading the newspaper and it said this basketball player, "Makai Shaw"! "Makai" means "towards the ocean" in Hawaiian. And I says, "There's some Hawaiian here!"

Penny talks about her name:

My dad wouldn't let my mother name any of us Hawaiian names. I've been big all my life, and then to have a name like Penny! It's tiny, one cent! And people'd ask me, "Are you...Indian?" "No! I'm Hawaiian!" But anyway, I *am* very proud of it, and that's why I kept my maiden name: Pihana.

We have a friend that's a priest in



John with two members of Halau Hula O Missouri: Penny Pihana Shaw (right) and Teru Morton (middle). Penny and Teru are wearing pareau skirts, a style borrowed from Tahiti. All three wear lei kukui (leis made of kukui nuts). Photograph courtesy of John Kumia.

Hawaii. He looked my birthdate up in the Bible and found my Hawaiian name. It's *Kamaluokalani*, which is "Heaven's Peace." So I use that, too. It's not on my birth certificate, but it's mine!

Despite the love of her Hawaiian heritage, Penny is firmly rooted in Missouri. She describes a recent trip to Hawaii:

It's beautiful and it's lovely but I just get so homesick for Missouri, it's not even funny.

John notes that the strong connection to one's home turf is, in fact, highly characteristic of Hawaiians:

She's a typical Hawaiian girl, because a lot of people in Hawaii don't want to go any place else but

just stay on the island. So she just happened to be born on the island of New Franklin (laughs).

Penny agrees:

I have the best of both worlds because I get to do it here. Before I met John, the only way I could study *bula* and *lei-making* was to go to Hawaii. And now I've got my very own teacher and he's teaching me my very own Hawaiian culture!

Penny expresses how much rediscovering her cultural roots has meant to her:

I love it. I told my husband, "I'll never stop!" It's like breathing to me. You can never learn too much. It's everything I ever wanted to know.

# Hawaiians in Missouri

John and his apprentices agree that the Hawaiian population in Missouri is growing. Leilani comments:

Despite the distance between Hawaii and mid-Missouri, there is a small yet enthusiastic and viable community in mid-Missouri interested in Hawaiian dance and culture. Providing opportunities to mid-Missourians with a Hawaiian background will solidify the importance of the islands in the cultural tapestry of Missouri.

John and Leilani discuss the lack of educational opportunities for native Hawaiians and how they would like to help:

John: It's a combination of poverty and subtle discrimination. Hawaiian children should have the opportunity to get educated, whether we have money or not. And there should be some kind of a program for that.

Leilani: A mid-Missouri Hawaii club could be created that could sponsor an annual scholarship fundraising luau (traditional Hawaiian feast and dance performance) for Hawaiian students interested in attending MU.

John and Penny comment on the presence of Hawaiians in Missouri:

Penny: There are more Hawaiians here than you'd think. When my son and daughter were getting their driving licenses, I went to the license bureau to get the personalized license plates. I was kind of smug. I filled out the form and said, "I want Makai and Kalei." And she said, "Sorry—that's taken!"

There's a lot of Hawaiians in St. Louis and at Kemper Military College. For some reason Hawaiians and Samoans come to this Military College (near New Franklin).

John: When I moved to Boonville I found out that two houses down was a big white house that this Hawaiian family bought!

Penny: That gentleman is a Rachel, the Rachels are auctioneers here in

Boonville. He moved to Hawaii fifteen years ago, met his wife, they got married and moved here. Then she brought her mother here, and then her sister and her brother-in-law, Jeff Koa. And now his mother is coming! So there's more and more Hawaiians coming.

John: They've learned that Missouri is a neat place, if you like seasons.

## Conclusion

As our state continues to grow more ethnically diverse, it behooves us to recognize and appreciate the newcomers' rich cultural contributions, and to accord them their rightful place in the "cultural tapestry of Missouri."



Kamaluokalani (also known as Penny Pihana Shaw) in John's home in Boonville. December, 1998.



# End Notes

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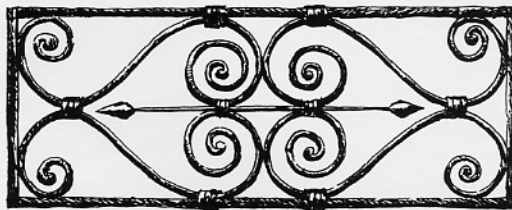
Note: Quotes from John Kaleiowaiapua Kumia, Leilani Heywood and Penny Pihana Shaw are from the following sources: Missouri Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Applications FY1996 and FY1998; taped interviews on 11/30/95 and 12/5/98; taped performances on 4/23/96 and 4/2/98.

- 1 Noel J. Kent, *Hawaii: Islands Under the Influence* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1983): 1789
- 2 Ibid: 177
- 3 Ibid: 28, 312, 39, and Adrienne L. Kaeppler, "The Persistence of Tradition," in Roger G. Rose, *Hawai'i: The Royal Isles* (Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, Special Publication 67, 1980): 57
- 4 Kent, op cit: 147
- 5 Ibid: 17, 179, 183
- 6 Helen H. Roberts, *Ancient Hawaiian Music* (Honolulu: Bernice P. Bishop Museum, Bulletin 29, 1926): 3
- 7 Kaeppler, op.cit: 53
- 8 Roberts, op. cit: 164
- 9 Kaeppler, op. cit: 12
- 10 Ibid: 345
- 11 Roger G. Rose, *Hawai'i: The Royal Isles* (Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, Special Publication 67, 1980): 185
- 12 Edith McKinzie, "Hawaiian Performing Arts Traditions," in *Folklife Hawaii* (Honolulu: The State Foundation on Culture and the Arts, 1990): 16.
- 13 Rose, op. cit: 190
- 14 Ibid: 185
- 15 Adrienne L. Kaeppler, *Hula Pahu: Hawaiian Drum Dances* (Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 1993): 12
- 16 Ibid: 7
- 17 Ibid: 134
- 18 Ibid: 26
- 19 Deborah Bailey, Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program Evaluation on John Kumia and Leilani Heywood, 7/31/96
- 20 Rose, op. cit: 60
- 21 Ibid: 196
- 22 Linda Paik Moriarty, *Ni'ihau Shell leis* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986): 19. Moriarty is quoting James Jackson Jarves' 1843 publication, *History of the Hawaiian or Sandwich Islands*.
- 23 Rose, op. cit: 23
- 24 Puakea Nogelmeier, "Hawaiian Crafts," in *Folklife Hawaii*, op. cit: 20.

MISSOURI  
**MASTERS**  
**AND**  
THEIR TRADITIONAL ARTS

## MISSOURI MASTERS AND THEIR TRADITIONAL ARTS

"The Masters and Their Traditional Arts" is an essay series associated with Missouri's Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program. Missouri's Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program was initiated in 1984 by the Cultural Heritage Center at the University of Missouri-Columbia in collaboration with the Missouri Arts Council, with funding from the state and the National Endowment for the Arts. The Apprenticeship Program is now part of the Missouri Folk Arts Program, a program of the Missouri Arts Council that is administered by the Museum of Art and Archaeology at the University of Missouri-Columbia. The object of the Apprenticeship Program is to document the state's master traditional artists and encourage them to pass their skills on to aspiring apprentices, thus conserving the state's cultural heritage for future generations. Master folk artists learn informally through observation or imitation. Their apprentices are most often members of the same folk group as the master. The art form, whether it be Hawaiian hula, African American gospel music or Mexican embroidery, is deeply embedded in community history, values and daily life. The Missouri Folk Arts Program is funded by the Missouri Arts Council, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the University of Missouri.



MISSOURI FOLK ARTS PROGRAM



Folk Arts Program  
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MUSEUM OF ART AND ARCHEOLOGY

