

## **Introduction**

In 1997, the Kaua'i Historical Society received a gift of 165 photographic negatives made by one of the island's successful early 20th-century commercial photographers and businessmen, Tsutomu Fujii. Other than a few other photographs in the family's personal collection, it is probable that few other Fujii photos exist. It is known that when he sold his Hale Nani Studio in Lihue in 1972, many of his photographs and negatives were destroyed. The present group of negatives were later found for sale in a Kaua'i thrift shop, and is not known how they ended up there.

Support for the preservation and indexing of the Tsutomu Fujii Photograph Collection has come, in part, from a preservation grant by the Hawaii Committee for the Humanities to whom grateful acknowledgement is made.

Original negatives, modern contact prints and copy prints are in archival storage at the Kaua'i Historical Society. Arrangements can be made to access the collection by contacting the Society at (808) 245-3373.

Prepared by Barbara Robeson and Barnes Riznik  
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## **Biographical Sketch of Tsutomu Fujii (1907 - 1995)**

Tsutomu Fujii was born in 1907 in a Lihue Plantation camp formerly located on Haleko Road. He worked on Kaua'i as a commercial photographer for over 50 years. Fujii opened his first studio, Fujii Art Studio in Kapaia in 1929. Twenty years later, the studio moved to Lihue, where he opened Hale Nani Studio on Rice Street. He operated Hale Nani Studio until he retired in 1972. Fujii died in 1995.

Fujii was a self-taught photographer whose early photos include landscapes, streetscapes and buildings. He later, expanded his work to encompass portraits, various businesses and groups.

It was significant, as part of Kaua'i's pre-World War II and postwar, that Fujii was Kaua'i's Eastman Kodak Co. agent and wholesaler. From the 1930s to the 1960s, he supplied other Kaua'i photographers and also distributed information about Kodak's new film, cameras and lighting advances. Fujii attended at least one Eastman School of Photography class in Honolulu in 1939, along with more than 60 other photographers of Japanese ancestry.

**Interview with Mrs. Fusavo Fujii and sons, Arnold and Stephen Fujii, with Carolyn Larson and Barbara Robeson from Kaua'i Historical Society, August 29, 1997.**  
**Additional interview November 156, 1997**

### **Tsutomu Fujii - the Early Years**

Tsutomu was born in 1907, the second of eight children. Born in Lihue, in the Lihue Plantation camp on the current Haleko Road. Both of his parents immigrated from the Hiroshima, Japan area, and came to Kauai to work for Lihue Plantation. His father was the head of a gang of workers for LP.

Tsutomu stopped attending Lihue School at 15, and in order to help out the family, went to work for LP for about \$30 per month. In addition, he also worked part time for the Senda Photography Studio as an errand boy. Feeling that the pay was not enough, when Tsutomu was 20 years old, he decided to open his own photography business in Kapaia, and borrowed \$400 from a Mr. Kawasaki [who lived in the Nawiliwili area near the park] to do so.

### **Fujii Art Studio - Part I**

Tsutomu opened his photography business 1929 by renting space in Kapaia from Mr. Fernandes [father of Billy Fernandes]. A listing in the 1929-1930 Polk-Husted Directory indicates the Studio did "Kodak Developing and Printing, Picture Framing, Enlarging, Etc." The Studio was located on the mauka side of Kuhio Highway next to where Kapaia Stitchery (the former Kapaia Store) stands today. The two story building housed a chop *sui* restaurant and barber shop downstairs, and a Filipino tailor shop upstairs along with the Fujii Art Studio. Mrs. Fujii said that,

“little by little, he was able purchase additional equipment, and his business grew.”

Tsutomu had no formal training as a photographer but was self taught and took a correspondence course on photography at home.

One specialty of the Studio was taking pictures for Filipino men to send home to the Philippines to get a picture bride. Mrs. Fujii said her husband was good at “touching up” the pictures. These customers were mostly Plantation people living in the Wailua Falls area. Mrs. said that Tsutomu went around to the Plantation on payday and collected what he was owed for his portraits.

Judging from the photos available in this collection, Mr. Fujii became interested in photographing landscapes in the 1930s. Some of these photos were made into postcards for sale. They are identified by the handwritten name of the location on the photo negative.

Most of the photography was done in the Studio by appointment. However, Mrs. Fujii mentioned Tsutomu took photos on site at Japanese funerals. The photos were then sent home to families in Japan.

#### Mr. and Mrs. Tsutomu Fujii

Fusayo was 20 years old when she met Tsutomu (he was 26 years old). They married the following year. She worked at a Singer sewing shop in Kapaia, where she worked in sales and as a seamstress. They did their courting at O Bon dances and other socials where young people gathered. Fusayo's father came from Hiroshima and her mother from Yamaguchi. [Mother spoke a different dialect from father. Mother came as an individual, worked in fields, saved money, brought brother here. She was very independent.]

For her wedding, Fusayo wore the traditional Japanese kimono - in fact, had 5 or 6 which were changed during the day. They were married in 1934 at the Lihue Hongwanji in Kapaia in a traditional Buddhist ceremony performed by Rev. Miazaki. The reception was held in the Hall.

After their marriage, the young couple lived with his parents for six months, while their new home in Kapaia was being built. Fusayo said that during these six months, the elder Mrs. Fujii “trained” her about cooking, serving, when the women ate, and bathed (after the men). Fusayo called her mother-in-law “something special” - son Steve said “authoritative.” The new Mrs. Fujii said she was happy when they “moved fast” into their new home.

Their new home was built by the contractor, a Mr. Hiranaka, on Lihue Plantation land on the present site of the American Cancer Society office [*mauka* of the Highway] - It was leased in 10 year increments.

## Fujii Art Studio - Part II

Fusayo worked in the Studio alongside Tsutomu, and as their family grew to include four boys and one “foster” son, they too helped out. Son Roger, owns Roger’s [Photography] Studio on Oahu.

In the 1930s, a new Studio was built in Kapaia on the lot where the American Cancer Society is located today. They often worked late at night, and hardly took any holidays. They did all of the work themselves. Fusayo made the proofs, and developed them by hand, and did the “finishing.” The Studio had a couple of painted backdrops - Waikiki and a beach background. Some customers posed with their own clothes, although some used clothes were also provided by the Studio. At that time, the photographs were mostly single portraits, generally of young people.

According to Mrs. Fujii all of the other photographers on Kaua’i during the 1930s were Issei Japanese. Mr. Fujii was the first Nisei Japanese photographer on Kaua’i. See attached list.

During World War II, business was better, as there was only one other photography studio nearby, in Lihue. Tsutomu was able to purchase more equipment. There was a military base nearby ( now Wailua Golf Course), and young men came in truck loads to have their pictures taken and sent home and to have their film developed. Because of his citizenship status, Tsutomu had a pass to go on the base, and went out both day and at night (with a flash) to take pictures. Fusayo recalled that during the war years, many people of Japanese ancestry burned anything cultural - dolls, photos, flags, kimono.

## The Move to Hale Nani

In about 1948, the decision was made to move the studio to Lihue where it was expected that business would be better, because it would be more convenient. The new building was constructed on Rice Street on what was formerly the Rice family front lawn. To the east of the building was a pasture [where the Rice Shopping Center/Big Save/Bowling alley is now]. The new studio was named Hale Nani [Beautiful Building] Studio. Mrs. Fujii couldn’t recall if there was reason her husband named the studio Hale Nani. A wedding shop now occupies the former Hale Nani space.

Construction materials were hard to get, and often the contractor had to wait for them. The tile was made in Kapaa by Mr. Keoki Aquiar. A Mr. Nobriga did the design/construction plans, after Tsutomu gave him an idea of what he wanted. It took about six months to a year to complete.

At Hale Nani, business continued to improve. More customers came, from as far as the Westside, and the Fujiis were able to build an addition to the building.

Hale Nani was an official Kodak wholesale store, and purchased Kodak supplies from the company representative, Alex Weir. Hale Nani sold supplies wholesale to hotels and gift shops. Mrs. Fujii indicated that eligibility to become a Kodak dealer was based on sales of Kodak supplies. Mr. handled the wholesale, while Mrs. worked the retail side of the business. The wholesale side of the business was very profitable. Orders were called in, and picked up from the warehouse in back of the store. In the store, retail sales included film, cameras, and the like. They did some small camera repairs as well. On a limited basis, Hale Nani used their own photographs and made postcards to sell.

In the photography studio at Hale Nani Tsutomu, now called Tom, mainly did portraits, weddings, first communions (for the Catholic Church next door in Lihue), funerals and graduations. The steps and columns in some of the portraits were Hale Nani Studio props. The Studio took photos exclusively in black and white until shortly before the sale of the business in 1972.

Along with other Japanese photographers during the 1940s and 50s, Tom took photographs with a panorama camera during the 1940s and 50s [the panorama camera was left at the Studio when sold]. The popular photos were primarily purchased by Japanese and Filipino's who sent them home to their families.

Tom helped others learn the art of photography - son Roger (now living in Kailua) and particularly Dennis Fujimoto now with The Garden *Island* newspaper. Tom was the official photographer for the newspaper working with editor Charlie Fern; and mug shots for the Police Department under Chief William Crowell. He was often called away at night to take photographs. Mr. Fujii continued to photograph landscapes and went out occasionally with real estate agents in a helicopter with Jack Harter and shot aerial photographs in the 1950s and 60s.

When Mr. Fujii retired in 1972, he sold the business to Mike Miyake who ran it for about five years before it closed.

### After Hale Nani

Mr. Tsutomu Fujii retired at age 65. Although he said he wasn't ready to retire, his "retirement" days were spent fishing, bowling, and playing horseshoes and golf. He passed away in 1995.

### **Scope and Content of Collection**

The original donation included 72 nitrate (covering the period of 1929 - 1939) and 93 safety negatives (1930s - 1960s). Archival prints were made from the nitrate negatives; resin coated copy prints were made from the safety negatives. Computer catalog data indicates original source of print. Upon completion of the project, all nitrate negatives were destroyed as recommended by project consultant, Lynn Davis; safety negatives were preserved and filed.

The prints have been identified by subject, indexed and filed under seven general headings:

Aerials	3 prints
Buildings	48 prints
Businesses	14 prints
Groups	8 prints (some restrictions)
Landscapes	52 prints
Portraits	33 prints (restricted)
Streetscapes	7 prints

### **Restriction Note**

At the request of Mrs. Fujii, a duplication restriction has been placed on all individual photo and some of the group photos. Photo envelopes are marked with the appropriate restriction note.

## **Historical Significance**

Although the Fujii Collection represents only a portion of the work of the individual photographer, what has survived provides many useful and beautiful visual images. For those interested in historical interpretation of the growth and development of Lihue before Statehood as the island's county government and small, urban center, Fujii's photographs are a useful record. Equally significant are Fujii's accomplished scenic landscape views. He made up many of these into black and white photograph postcards, and these were, according to his wife, sold at their store in Lihue, in Kaua'i's hotels, at popular parks such as Kokee and at tourist-oriented attractions like the Fern Grotto. In a low-key way, his photographs clearly helped to promote the many exceptional coastal, beach and mountain scenery and hiking trail appeals of Kaua'i.

Fujii's photographs of individuals and groups are part of everyday social history on Kaua'i showing weddings, family, children and baby portraits, and anniversaries of the predominately Japanese-American and Filipino-American population in Lihue. His group portraits of such post-war organizations of the Catholic Altar Society of Immaculate Conception Church, the Rosemund Hula Class and Kapaa Little League are revealing documents of multi-cultural activities and show the layers of meaning in the images.

## **Photographs of the Development and Growth of Lihue**

By 1930, it has been said, Lihue became Kauai's dominant town with its three sugar plantations and ranches, County seat and new deepwater harbor at Nawiliwili. The Fujii collection includes significant images of the Lihue Hongwanji and its additions, the A.S. Wilcox Memorial Library, Kaua'i High School gymnasium, Bank of Hawaii, steamer "Waialeale" at Nawiliwili Harbor Pier #1, Lihue Post Office, the Hanamaulu Service Station, Standard Oil Baseyard at Ahukini, Kapaia Store, and the Yoshida Bus #1 "Joe" from Kapaia.

There are later photographs from the 1960s of such Lihue businesses as Kauai Sales Co., Beneficial Loan Co., Seaboard Finance, Nishimura Fish Market, and Lihue Central Service Station.

## **Photographs of Scenic Landscapes on Kaua'i**

The following views were reproduced as black and white postcards in the 1930s: Haena Cave, Lumahai, Hanalei Valley, Waipake "Sliding Pool," Wailua River and Bridge, Opaekaa Falls, Alekoko Fishpond, Koloa tree tunnel "Driveway," Spouting Horn, Lawai Kai Beach, Hanapepe Valley, Barking Sands and Na Pali Coast.

## Photographs of Social History on Kaua'i

Fujii photographic portraits are characterized by the simplicity of backgrounds. There are photos of weddings, including one-interracial marriage in the 1960s, anniversaries, infants and children, and first communion. His group photographs document the growing social and cultural integration of Kaua'i. Especially interesting are his photo of Rosemond Hula Class in 1956 and pictures of the Kapaa Little League and the Catholic Altar Society at Immaculate Conception Church.

**Other Commercial Photographers on Kaua'i 1913 - 1954**  
**Courtesy Lynn Ann Davis, Head, Preservation Department**  
**Hamilton Library, University of Hawaii**  
**March 5,1998**

**Takemoto Studio**

Yutaro Takemoto  
b. 1886 (Japan) - d. 1972 (Hawaii)  
Active: 1915 - 1941. Kapaa Photo Studio.

**Fujimoto Studio**

Ryuichi Fujimoto  
1931. Kauai  
1937 - 1941. Koloa.

**Fujimura Studio**

Kuichi Fujimura  
1924. W.J. Senda  
1925. Lihue Store  
1926 - 1946. Lihue.

**Senda Studio**

W.J. Senda  
b. 1889 (Japan) - d. 1984 (Hawaii)  
1910 - 1913. Honolulu. Yamamoto.  
1913 - 1915. Kapaia.  
1916 - 1939. Lihue. Tip Top Building [former building]

**Nakamura Studio**

Nobutaka Nakamura  
b. 1899 (Japan) - d. 1985 (Hawaii)  
1920. Hilo. Kilauea Art Studio.  
1935 - 1954. Kalaheo. Kalaheo Art Studio.

**Takasawa Studio**

Shigefusa Takasawa  
b. 1891 (Japan) - d. 1963 (Hawaii)  
1913 - 1942. Hanapepe.

**Morishige Studio**

**Ihei Morishige**

**b. ca 1866 (Japan)**

**1907 - 1909. Hanapepe**

**1910 - 1941. Waimea.**