

AFTERWORD: A BAMBOO RIDGE PRESS LEGACY

WING TEK LUM

PRESERVING BAMBOO RIDGE

On February 13, 2020, at Kapi'olani Community College, Bamboo Ridge Press celebrated the launch of its digital collection in the University of Hawai'i System Repository (found at <dspace.lib.hawaii.edu>). One of the speakers, Wing Tek Lum, delivered the following remarks.

I serve as warehouse manager of Bamboo Ridge Press. I somehow also became de facto archivist of the hard copy publications. Around 1989, founding editors Eric Chock and Darrell Lum dropped off what they had saved of the earliest issues to put in my basement for safekeeping. We had discussed setting up an archive ideally with ten copies of each publication, to save these writings for posterity (or perhaps for Stephen Sumida, Jr. to wade through when he embarks on a new annotated bibliography of local literature a generation from now). However, for a few of the very earliest titles, e.g., issue #1 and some of the unnumbered issues, we could only find 4 or 5 copies to archive.

After we established this hard copy repository, we decided as a matter of policy to remove ten copies from the first printing of each publication for the archives. Moreover, if a title is popular enough to go through more printings, we wanted to save another five copies of each reprint as well.

By my count, the press has published 107 books to date. Plus eleven cassette tapes, four compact discs, twenty different T-shirts, one cap, and three tote bags. The last three accessories are not necessarily included in the archives.

With respect to the books, there may be some confusion. From 1978 to 1985, Bamboo Ridge not only published numbered issues, but also six unnumbered ones as well. The first of course was Eric's chapbook *Ten Thousand Wishes*, which came out during the Talk Story Conference in June 1978. One hundred and fifty copies were printed.

But during those heady initial years the press also released some additional unnumbered titles, e.g., the *Talk Story Big Island Anthology*, Clara Jelsma's short stories entitled *Teapot Tales*, and the most well known, *Poets Behind Barbed Wire*, a collection of tanka by four local poets who were interned during World War II.

In December 1978, Eric and Darrell took the ambitious step to publish numbered issues as a periodical that lovers of local literature could collectively support with subscriptions. Bamboo Ridge was not going to be just a publisher of occasional books—which has the implication that the press had the

freedom to publish but also cease to publish whenever it wanted to. To me, becoming a periodical was their commitment to a disciplined future, a formal promise that there was more to come. Issue #1 was an anthology of 16 authors. There are no specific records of the print run, but on the copyright page for issue #5 it does say that that issue had 500 copies printed. So maybe the founders were already optimistic enough to print the same quantity for their earliest numbered issues.

The earliest *Bamboo Ridge* issues were slim, around 60+ pages, printed in black ink on white paper, except for the single-colored cover, and stapled along the spine. They were 5.5" x 8.5" in size, except for issue #2 which was for some reason double the size. Later, in 1987, with my first book (issue #34/35), the size was enlarged to 6" x 9". Also, starting in 1980, with issue #8 (Darrell's first collection, *Sun*), more and more of the books were perfect bound instead.

To me, one of the most interesting of the earliest issues is issue #17 because of its colorful cover. That was not because of the printing though. I still remember going to Darrell's home one night and his instructing us to physically glue onto the front cover these labels he purchased from Honolulu Broom Factory.

Bamboo Ridge was initially billed as a quarterly publication, meaning that a subscriber was promised four issues for an annual subscription. However, by 1986, coming up with so many issues a year became more of a challenge, and many of our publications turned into double issues, especially our single author collections. So from 1986 to 1995, an annual subscriber might actually receive three books: a regular issue, then a volume of poetry by a single author billed as a double issue, and then another regular issue. Then in 1996, we simplified our publication schedule even more; starting with issue #69, we decided to go back to numbering our issues with a single number but providing an annual subscriber with only two books.

So again, while our latest publication, Scott Kikkawa's *Kona Winds*, is issue #116, it actually is only the 107th publication of *Bamboo Ridge*.

Of these 107 titles, 47 are what we consider our regular issues, an anthology of the best poetry and prose (and sometimes dramatic pieces) being written at that time. For instance, our most recent regular issue #115 contains 57 pieces by 35 writers. These regular issues typically feature a single artist, both for the outside cover and for interior artwork. (Starting with issue #44 we consciously tried to showcase the elder statesmen within our local visual artist community; but more recently the interest among our present editors has been with up-and-coming artists.)

Another 39 books are single-author collections of poetry or prose, or like Scott Kikkawa's, a novel. Juliet Kono, of course, is our favorite, as we have published two volumes of her poetry, a collection of short stories, and her novel

Anshū. Our *Kaua'i Tales* series, the retelling of legends of Kaua'i by Frederick B. Wichman with illustrations by Christine Fayé, also consists of four titles; in fact these latter books have been our best sellers, having sold over time over 40,000 copies in the aggregate.

Lastly, there are 21 titles which are anthologies on a single theme, e.g., #12 *Small Kid Time Hawaii* (a collection of poems written by elementary school students), #42/43 *Paké* (our bicentennial celebration of the arrival of Chinese to Hawai'i), #76 *Intersecting Circles* (which featured writing by hapa women), and #83 *He Leo Hou* (a collection of plays by four Native Hawaiian writers).

A few years ago our webmaster crunched the numbers in our author database, and counted over 1,000 unique authors. This to me is a major testament to Eric and Darrell's vision and perseverance. Over the now 41 years that we have been publishing local literature, Bamboo Ridge Press has indeed tried to live up to its mission statement: to foster the appreciation, understanding, and creation of literary, visual, and performing arts by, for, or about Hawai'i's people. And now through the partnership with the Hawai'i Council for the Humanities and Kapi'olani Community College, we are making these works more readily available in this new digital repository. To date, we have converted into digital files 23 titles out of our 107 hard copy books, so we are well on our way. You will be able to download gratis out-of-print issues, which will appear as permissions from authors are gathered. Check out Bamboo Ridge Press publications in the UH System Repository at <dspace.lib.hawaii.edu>.