

# “Finding Family Roots and Missing Relatives in Okinawa”

Okinawa Prefectural Library

And

Okinawan Genealogical Society of Hawaii:

WORKING TOGETHER

## OPL, Who We Are

The Okinawa Prefectural Library (OPL) is considered the “heart of Okinawa”. Iha Fuyū, its first director was a scholar who is known for his many writings on the origins of the Okinawan people, its culture, traditions, and language. He is called the “Father of Okinawan Studies” as his leadership led the way for documentation, exchange of ideas, and teachings of Okinawan evolution under the influences of Japan.

OPL was established in 1910, over 107 years ago, and its 750,000+ holdings are immense with foundations for diversity of issues and subjects. The rules and regulations for use of the many libraries it oversees in Okinawa reflect an open minded, people-oriented system which supports expansion of people’s knowledge through its resources.

A new 12-story library with a capacity of 2 times more than the current library is scheduled to be completed in late 2018 or early 2019. The goal of this new library is to create an “internationalized library” to take advantage of its geographical and historical backgrounds. Part of the new library’s master plan is to promote usage by local and foreign clientele by accumulating references from all parts of the world. A special section on the 4th floor is called the *International Cultural Exchange Corner* which will include immigration history, records and a variety of references to make it a major resource for Okinawan studies and genealogy research.

The work initiated by the “Uchinanchu Diaspora” International Scholars Forum in 2000 and the “First Worldwide Uchinanchu Conference” in 2003 along with the Okinawan Taikai Festivals held every 5 years are examples of the search for a world-wide Okinawan identity. Social changes and economical, environmental and political influences require Okinawans, here and abroad to keep pace with knowledge and thinking skills in order to maintain our unique identity. Thus, the library will serve as an on-going stimulus and a valuable resource for carrying on the ideas and ideals of Iha Fuyū.

OPL is currently seeking donations of books, magazines, photos, Okinawa Kenji Kai annual and anniversary documents especially those printed prior to 1945 to add to the Cultural Exchange Corner. *Contact: Hiroaki Hara, OPL Supervisor/Librarian at email: [shiryoun@library.ref.oknawa.jp](mailto:shiryoun@library.ref.oknawa.jp).*

## OGSH, Who We Are

The Okinawan Genealogical Society of Hawaii (OGSH) was established in March 1993 for individuals interested in Okinawa and its culture. Four years later, the club clarified its purpose for assisting members in researching their family lineage and in the process learn about Okinawa and its culture.

OGSH’s mission is to serve the Okinawan community by: 1) encouraging and supporting members in their search for family histories and lineage and in documenting their findings; 2) providing educational programs on Okinawan history and culture especially as it influences genealogy understanding; and 3) engaging in activities which allow for sharing of information among club members and the community-at-large (local, national and international).

## Our Activities:

- **Monthly meetings** are held to share information, participate in work groups, and engage in guest speakers’ presentations with question and answer periods.

- **Annual outreach activities** include an exhibit at the Okinawan Festival which promotes Okinawan culture and history. A genealogy search section allows the public to inquire about their Issei family using the immigrant data base developed by OGS. OGS assisted with/coordinated genealogy symposiums at the 2011 and 2016 Taikai in Okinawa. Upon request by HUOA and member clubs, exhibits and public information are given at activities such as the Shinnen Enkai parties, Senior Fair, and City Hall.
- **Short Stories Books:** An ongoing project is the collection of short stories written by Okinawans (OGS members and non-members) on life experiences in Okinawa or as an Issei or Nisei in Hawaii. Stories range from humorous, historical, hardships, joys, and information on Okinawan history, culture and traditions. To date, there are six Short Stories books with the first being printed in 2004 and the last in 2016. Some copies of these Short Stories are available for purchase.
- OGS celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year and has plans for a special tour to Okinawa in 2018.

### **Genealogy Network Project**

During the October 2016 Taikai, OPL had an immigration booth to provide service for family history research. An outcome of this service revealed that of the 273 cases, 143 (52.4%) were requests from Hawaii. This serendipitous fact prompted OPL to approach OGS for collaborative work. OPL and OGS began network communications via Skype in January 2017. By June 2017, plans were being made to have OPL staff join OGS volunteers at the 35th annual Okinawan Festival in September, working as partners to assist the public in finding relatives in Hawaii and/or in Okinawa.

The group identified family research needs by the respective entity, and these included:

- OPL needed more information on 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> etc. generation of Issei immigrants;
- OGS needed methods for obtaining information on relatives prior to the 1900 period;
- Both entities wanted to identify ways to improve genealogy search services for individuals;
- Need to overcome the barrier/obstacle of Japanese versus English communication (reading, written, spoken); and
- Need to identify strategies to increase public awareness of genealogy search services which are available from OPL and OGS.

Several “test cases”, using forms drafted by the team (OPL-OGS) have been tried. One case where a granddaughter was searching for relatives of her grandfather’s younger brother in Hawaii came to a dead-end. There had been no contact between these 2 families for over 76 years. A second case is of a female in Peru searching for relatives in Okinawa but also has relatives in Hawaii and Argentina. A third case was of a new OGS member who sent a “test form” to OPL who identified his yago and family in Okinawa. The above case examples show the wide range of requests, the broad spectrum of countries that may be involved, and the success stories.

### **OPL-OGS Registration Forms**

The forms are designed to collect as much information as possible to serve as clues in finding the “right” person. It is not expected that all spaces are filled in but information that is *most useful include: full name, kanji (if possible), age or date of birth, banchi (address) or village and immigration date (“about” is useful too).*

Three basic forms are available:

Form 1: Obtaining information on 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrants to Hawaii;

Form 2: Finding relatives in Okinawa;

Form 3: Finding relatives in Hawaii

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