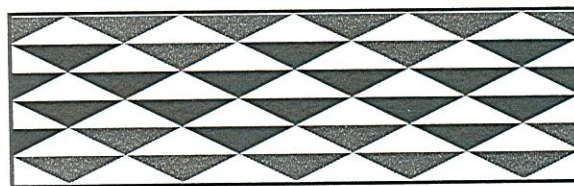


Pukui and Green. Folktales of Hawai'i.  
Honolulu: Bishop Museum, 1995.



*Mary Kawena Pukui at age fourteen*



## INTRODUCTION

This book honors both the Hawaiian storytelling tradition and Mary Kawena Pukui, whose birth one hundred years ago, on April 20, 1895, we may rightly celebrate as a turning point in the history of Hawai'i. A profound devotion to Hawai'i—the people, the language, the land—characterized Pukui's entire life, and she stands alone in the history of Hawai'i for her contributions to the preservation and revitalization of Hawaiian language and culture.

Born in the rural district of Ka'ū on the island of Hawai'i, Kawena grew up in the Hawaiian culture of her mother as well as the cultural sphere of her father, an American from Salem, Massachusetts. At the time, Hawaiians had become a minority in their own islands. Foreigners had overthrown the Hawaiian Islands' last monarch and were petitioning for annexation to the United States; writers were referring to Hawaiians as a "dying people." Pressure to adopt the newcomers' ways was tremendous, but Kawena's father, Henry Nathaniel Wiggin, who spoke Hawaiian fluently, and his wife, Mary Pa'ahana Kanaka'ole Wiggin, decided to raise Kawena—their only child—to be fully bilingual and bicultural.

Kawena spent the first six years of her life with her Hawaiian grandmother, Nālī'ipō'aimoku (Pō'ai), as a *hānai* or foster child. Grandparents in Hawai'i often raised a grandchild, and Grandmother Po'ai reared Kawena as a *punahele* (favored child), entrusting her with traditional Hawaiian knowledge, customs, and beliefs. Grandmother Pō'ai, who had been a *hula* dancer in the court of Queen Emma, instilled in young Kawena a lifelong passion for her Hawaiian heritage. She taught the little girl the Hawaiian language and countless chants, *hula*, sayings, and stories. Some of the tales in this volume Kawena first heard from her grandmother.

For a fuller account of Pukui's life, see the Introduction written by Eleanor Williamson in *'Olelo No'eau: Hawaiian Proverbs and Poetical Sayings* (Bishop Museum Press, 1983).



After the death of her grandmother, six-year-old Kawena returned to her parents' home, where her dual education accelerated. Her mother spoke to her only in Hawaiian and her father only in English. While Mrs. Wiggin continued to teach Hawaiian traditions to her, Mr. Wiggin passed on the cultural legacy and folklore from his side of the family, ranging from Aesop's Fables to the story of Ichabod Crane and the legend of Paul Revere's ride.

Both English and Hawaiian were spoken at the little Catholic school in Ka'ū where Kawena had her first taste of classroom instruction. But during the next few years, as the Wiggin family moved from Ka'ū to Puna to Honolulu, Kawena found Hawaiian language and culture less and less respected or even tolerated. Ka'ū was remote, on the political and economic periphery of the islands, but in Honolulu the Euro-American way of life was being aggressively advocated. The Wiggin family had lived in Honolulu only a short time when Kawena—then in her early teenage years—was punished at school for speaking to a classmate in Hawaiian. She did not return to school the following term.


One who loved learning, Kawena began her self-directed studies early and never abandoned them. Barely into her teens, she began to collect the stories and traditions of her Hawaiian culture, fearful that they might be lost in the sea of change swirling through Hawai'i. She jotted down sayings and stories given to her by family and friends. Her notes became the foundation for this book and many others, as well as for precious files of chant texts and ethnographic data now preserved in the archives of Bishop Museum.

In 1910, in the Book Room of the Mission Memorial Society, a chance meeting between Kawena and a neighbor, Laura C. Green, led to a friendship that helped begin Kawena's writing career. Born to missionary parents on Maui, Laura Green had an understanding of the Hawaiian language and a keen appreciation for Hawaiian culture. She was impressed by Kawena's interests and noticed her remarkable memory and talent for expressing complex Hawaiian concepts in English. Green encouraged her young friend to record her stories. They spent many hours together, Kawena dictating her tales in Hawaiian and assisting her friend with the translations. Theirs was a long and warm friendship.

Green marveled at Kawena's abilities: "She is really wonderful with so much knowledge of Hawaiian in such a young person." She sent

Kawena's stories to her cousin, Martha Warren Beckwith, Professor of Folklore at Vassar College, in New York. Beckwith edited the stories and published them, along with material from other sources, in three small volumes: *Hawaiian Stories and Wise Sayings* (1923), *Folk-Tales from Hawaii* (1928), and *The Legend of Kawelo and Other Hawaiian Folk Tales* (1936). The stories Kawena contributed to those books were the foundation for this collection, and we are pleased to publish them in her name, acknowledging her as the principal partner in their collection, translation, and preservation.

Kawena married Kalolii Pukui in 1913, and no one knew Mrs. Pukui the storyteller better than her three daughters, two of whom were *hānai*. "We grew up being taught without realizing it," recalls Patience Nāmakaauhoakawena Wiggin Bacon, her second child. "We used to walk to town together to pay bills. We could have taken the streetcar, but on the way she would point out some tree and tell us the Hawaiian name and the English name. The next time we came, she'd play a little game for us, to see if we could remember. You learn history and lore that way."

During World War II, Pukui often gathered her children together in the living room at sundown. "We started going to bed with the chickens because we couldn't have any lights," Pat Bacon remembers. "We'd lie down on quilts, and we'd discuss the day. And then she'd go into a story of this or that until we all fell asleep." Pukui took scrupulous care to tell and record *mo'olelo* (stories) just as she had heard them. "Some people heard stories and then rewrote them in a Western sense," Pat Bacon notes. "As a result, a lot was lost. That was not my mother's style. She always said, 'I'm speaking from my own doorway and not anybody else's.' You speak only of things that you know. You don't take from elsewhere." This fidelity, which characterized all of Pukui's scholarship, makes her stories especially valuable. 

The publication of her folktales was the beginning of a distinguished writing career for Pukui that would greatly enrich the field of Hawaiian scholarship. With Samuel Elbert she laid the cornerstone of Hawaiian-language studies with the publication of the *Hawaiian-English Dictionary* in 1957 and its revision, the *Hawaiian Dictionary* (1971, 1986), an extraordinary achievement that is still the standard today. The two also published *Hawaiian Grammar* (1979) and teamed with Esther Mo'okini to write *Place Names of Hawaii* (1974).



Working with other collaborators, she contributed substantially to both scholarly and public understanding of Hawaiian cultural practices and beliefs, producing such seminal works as *Native Planters in Old Hawaii*, *Nānā i ke Kumu (Look to the Source)*, *The Echo of Our Song: Chants and Poems of the Hawaiians*, and *The Polynesian Family System in Ka-'u, Hawai'i*. The crowning event in her career came in 1983, three years before her death, with the publication of her treasury of Hawaiian expressions, *Ōlelo No'eau: Hawaiian Proverbs and Poetical Sayings*. By that time Pukui was a highly sought-after *kumu* (source or teacher) of Hawaiian knowledge. She was held in high esteem as a cultural expert, a translator, a genealogist, a *kumu hula*, and a teacher and lecturer. For more than five decades she worked with Bishop Museum—translating, compiling research, and conducting anthropological field work. She entrusted her knowledge to be a part of the legacy preserved and shared by the museum.



In old Hawai'i, storytellers were accorded a position of honor. Storytelling served as a principal source of entertainment while simultaneously providing instruction in the many interwoven aspects of life—ancestry, history, religion, human relations, crafts, and the natural world. Throughout her life, Pukui was an ardent practitioner of the art of storytelling. She told stories to everyone—to schoolchildren, to researchers and visitors at Bishop Museum, and, above all, to her family and friends. She knew the importance *mo'olelo* held in old Hawai'i and recognized their importance in conveying information and values that remain meaningful and necessary for people in Hawai'i today, whether of Polynesian ancestry or not.

Unfortunately, we cannot receive these stories as Pukui's daughters and Laura Green did—in her own voice. Most folklore is better heard than read, since much is lost in the transfer from oral telling to the written word. While taking down these stories from Kawena, Laura Green

lamented the inadequacy of writing to convey what she was hearing: "I wish an instrument was in my possession," she wrote in a letter to Martha Beckwith, "to take the intonations of her sweet Hawaiian voice—boast, scorn, humility, anger—that the stories might be reproduced thus."

Though nuances of the oral tradition have escaped, this book furnishes the next best thing to a live telling, presenting many of the tales in Pukui's original Hawaiian as well as in her English translation. Gifted Hawaiian speakers may be able to restore some of the missing emotional shading by taking cues from Pukui's choice and arrangement of Hawaiian words. Unfortunately, a number of the stories were originally published solely in English and without explanation; it is not known if the Hawaiian-language versions still exist.

These stories were set down long before it became standard practice to use *'okina* to indicate glottal stops or *kahakō* to designate long vowels. Readers of Pukui's day could satisfactorily discern the intended pronunciation and meaning of a word from its context, but most Hawaiian-language authorities today employ *'okina* and *kahakō*, and we have followed that practice. (There are a few exceptions, for example, the Pukui name is printed without an *'okina* between the two final vowels because Mrs. Pukui preferred to remain faithful to the spelling that her husband's family used, and under which she always published.)

M. Puakea Nogelmeier, the first recipient of the Mary Kawena Pukui Scholarship at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, and now a Hawaiian-language instructor at the university, generously assisted in reviewing the manuscript and standardizing the Hawaiian spelling. He also organized the stories in a sequence that reflects the order of traditional *hula* presentations, placing stories of the gods first, followed by those of chiefs, and then tales of ordinary people.

Some of the English phrasing in the tales has been edited slightly for a modern audience, but care has been taken to retain the cadence of Pukui's original English. Footnotes have been added or amended to clarify references and explain matters of context. New footnotes are designated "Ed." (editor), those written by Martha Beckwith carry her initials, and the remainder are from Laura Green or Pukui.

The stories in this collection range across a broad spectrum of subjects and styles. They are full of veiled and double meanings. Readers are



invited to interpret these texts for themselves, but it is important to remember that these *mo'olelo* are part of the culture that engendered them, and the more one learns about that culture, the more alive the stories become.

Pukui's was, at times, a lonely road. Pat Bacon recalls that some people objected to her efforts, questioning her right to interpret Hawaiian culture, while others resented the recognition she came to receive. "Writing gave her great pleasure," her daughter says, "but a lot of heartache went into it. People would rant and rail at her. When she was doing the dictionary, people would call her up and curse her. She would come back in tears. But she kept at it. She'd tell us, 'If I don't do it, who's going to?'"

Mary Kawena Pukui gathered and told the stories that appear here out of a deep devotion to Hawaiian culture, a love her family instilled in her as a child and to which she devoted her entire life. She and her ancestors are perpetuated in these *mo'olelo*.

W. Donald Duckworth  
*President and Director, Bishop Museum*  
*Honolulu, Hawai'i*  
1995

