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The History of HPG

February 1967 to November 1968 - Ellen Nishi, Historian

The Hawaii Potters' Guild began a group of potters, who with much faith and hope and lots of hard labor and with help from friends, organizations and institutions, transformed a church's backyard and a caretaker's shack into a Ceramic Center.

Because of her pleasant experiences with the Ann Arbor Potters' Guild in Michigan, Lucille Anderson dreamt of a similar guild in Honolulu. A group of potters who also felt that there was a need for such a cooperative organization. The increasing enrollment at the University of Hawaii (UH) made it difficult for unclassified students to register in Ceramics classes. There was a growing interest in ceramics among the people of the community. Setting up private studios was very expensive.



For two years this group inquired for a place to start a cooperative center. The potters asked around the Kakaako Industrial Area for reasonable rental space. They asked about the facilities in the Parks and Recreation Department. they did not meet with success. Then in early 1967, the Education Director of the Church of the Crossroads, Mrs. Kikue Takagi, suggested to Lucille Anderson and Eleanor Cooper, who were both church members, that Ceramics could be part of the Church's Culture and Arts program. The Board of Directors of the Church of the Crossroads approved the inclusion of Ceramics in the Culture and Arts Program of the Church and set aside \$1000 for it and an area in the back of the church and part of the caretaker's shack.

Roger Lintault, a young ex-Peace Corps Ceramics instructor at the UH who was president of the newly organized Hawaii Craftsmen, was consulted about the church's offer. He was asked if he could give a course in Kiln Building so that the most necessary and the most expensive equipment of a pottery center could be built. Roger thought it was a good idea and a course in Kiln Building was offered the second semester, February 1967. Eight enrolled in the class - Lucille Anderson, Edith Carlsmith, Eleanor Cooper, Ellen Nishi and a group from the university ceramic department - May Chee, Lisa Chuck, Bob Flint and Murray Holt. The group was divided into two and each group was to spend half a semester at the Church of the Crossroads' grounds and build a kiln.

The second week after the Kiln Building class began, Roger heard that fire-bricks were available for free at the Waipahu Sugar Mill. The old boilers were being dismantled and fire-bricks could be gotten for the taking and carting. The whole UH Ceramic Department, including the women in the Kiln Building class, went to Waipahu Sugar Mill for two weekends and worked like beavers, digging, loading, carting, piling bricks which became heavier and heavier as the hours went by.

It was a most inspiring sight to see the young undergraduates, master's degree candidates, instructors, and the older women working so very hard. The manager of the Waipahu Sugar Mill was very impressed. Never had he seen such a group of hard-working 'laborers'. He offered plantation trucks for free to deliver the bricks to the UH Ceramic Dept. and the Church of the Crossroads.

With the wonderful gift of fire-bricks, and with cash donations from potters, friends, the church; and with the instruction and help of Roger, the kiln building began in earnest. From surplus lumber which Eleanor Cooper scrounged from the UH Ceramic Dept. and her own lumber pile, and with borrowed tools - mostly Dr. Cooper's - the amateur kiln builders began making frames for the cement bases and the form for the kiln. Then the brick-laying began. The used bricks had to be cleaned individually. The bricks had to be chiseled to fit. Dr. John Cooper again came to our assistance. He bought an electric power saw and built a form so we could cut bricks efficiently and with safety. The modern equipment helped tremendously! But even with such help, the work was tedious and hours and hours of labor were required. The project was taking too long. The university group could no longer put in the time at the Church of the Crossroads. The four women determinedly carried on because to them the building of the kiln was not just a class project but the beginning of a Ceramic Center.

Fortunately, a new volunteer, Philip Wulff, joined the women 'laborers.' With Seriako, the Cooper's handyman as assistant, he began the necessary construction work planned by Edith Carlsmith for converting the caretaker's shack into a classroom. They did most of the heavy work until funds became available to hire outside help. David Chun, a member of the Church of the Crossroads, spent many weekends putting in electrical fixtures. Masawo Tanaka, business manager of the C.C., took care of the accounts and business matters from the beginning.

In the meantime through the efforts of Roger Lintault, funds from the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts were made available for classes and workshops to upgrade ceramics. Lucille Anderson, who was in charge of supplies and organization, had ordered clay and other necessary supplies. Hence, even before the kiln or other facilities were ready, she arranged for teachers, announced classes, registered students, and scheduled classes from June to December 1967. The SFCA gave a grant for \$1250 for this period. This advance money was great boon to the embryo guild. The grant money was used to assist payment of teachers and to get supplies. The fees collected from students for classes were used for other needs such as: lumber for shelves and storage, containers for storage of clay and glazes, tables and stools for working, kiln shelves, labor for grading of dirt area and other necessary work too heavy for the volunteers.

The first classes were held under the freeway under the most adverse conditions. However, to keep standards high the best teachers available were employed and paid the same pay rate as the UH. Some of our pioneer teachers were Roger Lintault, Shige Yamada, Sally Fletcher, and Orville Clay, all with master's degree in Ceramics.

Finally in July, six months after the start, when the finishing touches - the chimney and burners - were put in by Bob Flint and Murray Holt, one 54 cubic feet Solder downdraft gas kiln was completed. The building and completion of the kiln was an achievement! It was an achievement not only because it took persistence and faith and cooperative labor of many; but because it was the first concrete step toward making a dream into a reality. After the Church of the Crossroads included Ceramics in their Arts Program, it was up to the potters to get started. Because of the kiln we were able to start classes; because of the classes we were able to get more guild members; because of the classes we were able to receive financial aid from the SFCA; because of this assistance we were able to improve our facilities sooner, keep class fees to the minimum while maintaining a high standard, and provide workshop for guild members.

With the addition of new members we were ready to organize officially. On January 3, 1968, the first organizational meeting of the Hawaii Potters' Guild was held. Edith Carlsmith was elected President; Eleanor Cooper, First Vice-President; May Chee, Second Vice-President; Ellen Nishi, Secretary; Alberta Yamada, Registrar; Lucille Anderson, Kiln Director; Philip Wulff, Grounds and Equipment Director. By-laws submitted by Lucille Anderson were accepted. The official name of the Guild was Hawaii Potters' Guild; our Center; the Crossroads Ceramic Center.

At the next meeting which was two weeks later on January 15, 1968, the following became charter members: Lucille Anderson, May Chee, Edith Carlsmith, Eleanor Cooper, Ellen Nishi, Sara Preble, Philip Wulff, Louise Wulff, Alberta Yamada, Virginia Oudufaly, Ayako and Masawo Tanaka.

Another SFCA grant for \$2625 was added to the January 1, 1968 to June 30, 1968 budget. Three 8-week morning classes in Beginning Ceramics were offered from January 22 to July 15. Mrs. May Chee was the instructor for two of those classes and Hideo Okino taught the third. Three 8-week evening

classes in Advanced Ceramics were scheduled for the same period and were taught by Miss Sally Fletcher. Steve Hill, a master's candidate in Ceramics taught two 4-week classes in Raku. Later in May, a slide and lecture workshop was given by Mr. Harry Davis of New Zealand. Hideo Okino gave a workshop on Firing one afternoon. Eleanor Cooper and Lucille Cooper gave Saturday morning classes to church members. May Chee and Masawo Tanaka helped the Crossroads Boy Scouts with their Ceramic project for the Makahiki.

In February 1968, in conference with Mr. Price's office (SFCA), Edith Carlsmith, then president of HPG, found out that money from the SFCA could not be granted to a church program. A member of the Hawaii Potters' Guild, preferably the president, who would be legally responsible, was asked to sign the contract with the SFCA for the money to be received. Mrs. Carlsmith's lawyer, Mr. Wichman, advised her against signing the contract accepting money from the Foundation for the set-up. He suggested incorporation. Since money from the SFCA was not available until our status was satisfactory, the members, with the consent of the church, voted to incorporate. The Church of the Crossroads graciously made an agreement with the Hawaii Potters' Guild that as long as the part of the church property used by the Guild was for non-profit purposes, and remained harmonious with the goals of the church for human enrichment and community service, and as long as we met our other obligations, the church was willing for the guild to operate independently from the church program. The Guild also made an agreement with the CC that all improvements on the property belong to the church and all removeable property to the Hawaii Potters' Guild.

Mr. Charles Wichman, of Carlsmith, Carlsmith, Wichman, and Case generously offered to help with the incorporation. In the meantime work was progressing on revising our original By-laws and Rules and Regulation and Policy and Procedure. The amended By-laws, etc. were submitted to Mr. Wichman so his office could put them into legal form. On March 20, 1968 the Petition of Incorporation was signed. We were granted a charter to operate as a corporation.

On April 17, 1968, a meeting of incorporation was called to order by Edith Carlsmith, presiding officer. All the charter members, with the exception of Louise Wulff who resigned prior to the meeting of incorporation, became trustees on the Board of the newly formed HPG, Inc.

The first meeting of the Board of the Trustees of the HPG, Inc. was called to order on April 17, 1968, immediately following the adjournment of the meeting of incorporation. The following officers were elected: Chairman, Edith Carlsmith; Vice-Chairman, Eleanor Cooper; Secretary, Ellen Nishi; Treasurer, Masawo Tanaka. The following were approved by the Board to be officers of the Ceramic Center: Director, Eleanor Cooper; Registrar, Alberta Yamada; Kiln Director, May Chee; Supplies Director, Virginia Poduflay; Grounds and Building Director, Philip Wulff.

On April 30, 1968 Edith Carlsmith, chairman of the Board of Trustees, and who had been with the group since the beginning, resigned. She had contributed much in organizing and planning of the Center, the beautification of the grounds, and the incorporation of the Hawaii Potters' Guild. Eleanor Cooper served as acting chairman and vice-chairman until July when Alberta Yamada was elected viced-chairman and Eleanor elected chairman of the Board of Trustees.

Unfortunately, because of lower appropriations from Congress, the SFCA grant of fiscal year July 1, 1968 to June 30, 1969 was reduced to \$2000 from the \$3000 approved earlier. In September two 10-week classes were offered. The evening class was taught by Miss Sally Fletcher; the morning by Mr. Hideo Okino.

In October five new members were welcomed into the membership. They were Florence Griffin, Victor Kobayashi, Dorothy Murakami, Mimi Okino, and Lucille Cooper.

Like any new organization, the Hawaii Potters' Guild has had it's share of growing pains. This organizing period had been a very difficult year. During the period from January 3 to November 1, 1968 we have had eighteen official meetings. We have spent hours and hours thrashing out amendments to amendments to our By-laws and Rules and Regulations that would be adequate and satisfactory to all. On October 25, 1968 an amended By-laws was submitted to the Department of Regulatory Agencies, State of Hawaii.

From it's humble beginning in February 1967 to November 1968 the Crossroads Ceramic Center has

developed rapidly. There is a roof over the area. (Partly financed by the Church and partly by the Guild.) The ground is leveled, graveled and fenced. There is adequate lighting, running water, sinks, and even a cesspool to take care of the water from the sinks. There are counters, shelves, cupboards, tables. There is a shed to store the bags of clay. There is a clay mixer and surplus refrigerators for storing mixed clay. There is a 54 cubic feet gas kiln and a used electric kiln, donated by the Honolulu Art Academy. Six electric wheels are on order. Improvements go on constantly. From November 1968 the Guild voted to start paying rent to the Church of the Crossroads for the use of their property. Although we are no longer a part of the Church's program, we maintain a good relationship with the church which gave us a home and assisted in many ways during our difficult year.

There are thirteen members at presents. They are: Lucille Anderson, May Chee, Eleanor Cooper, Lucille Cooper, Florence Griffin, Victor Kobayashi, Dorothy Murakami, Ellen Nishi, Mimi Okino, Philip Wulff, Alberta Yamada, Ayako Tanaka, and Masawo Tanaka.