

**THE ARTHUR HARRIS
COLLECTION**



Arthur Harris
January 10, 1916 – May 15, 2007

Kamehameha School for Boys. Class of 1937

FINDING AID

**KAMEHAMEHA SCHOOLS MUSEUM
ARCHIVE**

**STACY NAIPO, KSK 1982
ARCHIVIST**

**CANDACE W. LEE
ASSISTANT ARCHIVIST**

MAHALO E

Mr. Arthur Harris
Kamehameha School for Boys, Class of 1937

Mrs. Helen Young Lind
Kamehameha School for Girls, Class of 1931

Mrs. Dannette (Dani) Houghtailing Gardner
Hawaiian / Pacific Collection Library Technician
Kamehameha School for Girls, Class of 1961

FINDING AID

by Candace W. Lee
Kamehameha Schools Assistant Archivist

Contents: The 2002 collection contains 6 porcelain plates on extended permanent loan from Hale Pelikekina, Kamehameha Schools. The 2006 collection contains 2 framed porcelain tiles, 1 wool rug and 5 porcelain plates.

Collection Title: The Arthur Harris Collection

Provenance: 5 porcelains plates and 2 framed porcelain tiles were given to the Kamehameha Schools Archives in November 2002 by Arthur Harris. The wool rug in Midkiff Learning Center came from the Princess Pauahi Coffee Shop Restaurant that opened in 1979 in the Royal Hawaiian Shopping Center. When one of the Kamehameha Schools / Bishop Estate Trustees, "Papa" Lyman, objected to walking on a rug with Princess Pauahi's initials (PP), the Royal Hawaiian Shopping Center gave the carved wool rug to the Midkiff Learning Center.

Bulk dates: 1937- 2002, 2006

Location: The Kamehameha Schools Museum Archive

Box Title: Kamehameha Schools, Arthur Harris Collection. KSB 1937. Porcelain Tiles and plates stamped "Fine Porcelains Made in Hawaii by Harris" Box 2 and Box 2

Size: 2 linear feet

Language: English and some Hawaiian

Collection identifier: 2006-7

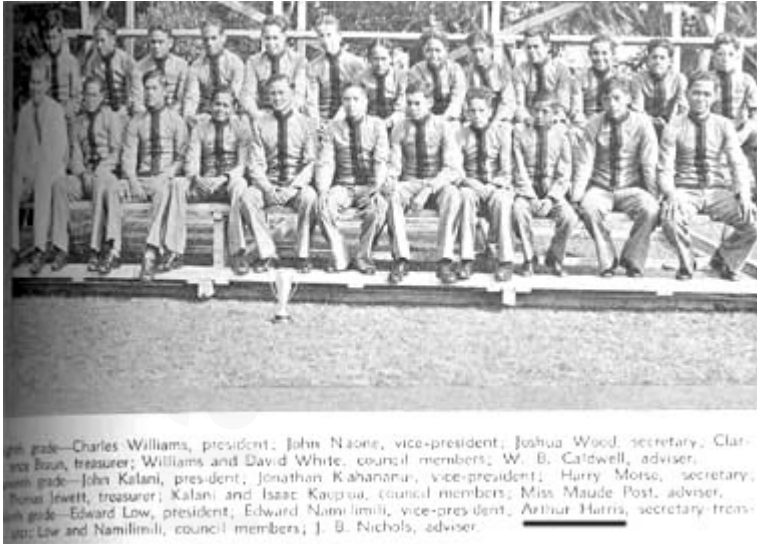
Bibliographic record: Kamehameha Schools Library Catalog.

Historical Note

Arthur Harris a Kamehameha School for Boys alumnus of the Class of 1937 was an entrepreneur and successful businessman. His desire was to create large local industries to strengthen the economy of the islands. In the 1970's his Harris Carpet Mills produced fine, thick Peking-style rugs with Hawaiian themes. Harris was the heir of Walter A.B. Nichols the reknown rugmaker who invented the Peking carpet and introduced it to China. Without an heir himself, Harris closed the carpet mill rather than compromise the quality of its product. He produced fine porcelains to capture the beauty of Hawaiian birds for future generations.

Biographical Note

Arthur Harris was born on January 10, 1916 to Louisa Cathcart and Harry Noble Harris, an 'Iolani School graduate and a local haole. He has one brother. When he was attending the public school as a 7th grader, his father died. He remembers he was invited to attend Kamehameha Preparatory School mid-school year, February to be exact. He dropped back to the 6th grade and his brother dropped back to the 5th grade.



Kamehameha School for Boys was a military institution and Arthur said that many boys had leadership and academic talent. Many wanted to attend West Point. Some did.

At Kamehameha School for Boys, he was in the agricultural division where boys were sent to work on the plantations when they reached the high 11 grade.

Arthur said he wasn't interested in working on the plantations and thought school was a waste of time by then. He had the necessary credits to graduate and when Dr. Barnes encouraged him to find a "new environment", he obliged. He was 20 years old. Arthur received his diploma from Kamehameha Schools years later.

Arthur briefly attended the University of Hawai'i studying sugar technology and dropped out to join the Honolulu Police Department where he spent 25 years at the insistence of his wife, Beatrice. He and Beatrice did not have any children, but he is a proud uncle and grand-uncle.

Arthur was a successful entrepreneur. In addition to his police job, he ran a rug-cleaning business, and a galvanized clothes hanger business that later capitalized his most notable business, the Harris Carpet Mills. When he gave that up, he created a business to produce high quality porcelains with Hawaiian themes.

Mary Cooke wrote in the *Honolulu Advertiser* on March 29, 1974 about Harris,

...first you scrub up and then you jump on the magic carpet...Harris runs the biggest rug cleaning plant West of the Rocky Mountains, a half-acre-under-roof plant at Waipahu where he cleans 3 1/2 million square feet of rugs and carpets a year...Today his

giant operation has a contract to clean carpets from military housing, offices and clubs, courthouses, government offices, 'anything pertaining to the Federal government,' Harris said. ' We also clean for 10 or 15 laundries and have enough private accounts to keep three trucks on the road.'

'I figure the cleaning operation could support the beginning of a new industry,' Harris said, and last year he became the first rug manufacturer in Hawaii...

'The Hawaiians are very artistic, but they don't want certain designs to go on the floor and be stepped on,' Harris said.

'In many Chinese rugs the symbols are religious, but we'll sidestep any kapu (prohibited) Hawaiian designs. They could be made into wall hangings. For rugs, we can take Hawaiian fruits and flowers and tapa designs. These rugs will be for the carriage trade: Individual homes and hotel or apartment lobbies.'



The 1983 *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* article, "A 'Chinese' Rug Made in Hawaii" by Darlene Bowden, tells about the Harris Carpet Mills and how high-quality carved wool rugs were made in Hawaii by Arthur and Beatrice Harris.

Harris and his wife, Beatrice, got into the carpet business when they began a small rug-cleaning operation in 1945. They started by cleaning the rugs at their home and drying them on the lawn...After 25 years...Harris hung up his police cap and put all his energy into his rug-cleaning business.

The cleaning business expanded to include rug making thanks to one man - Walter A. B. Nichols. Nichols was a world-renown master rug maker who went to China in the early 1900s after the Boxer Rebellion to buy wool. He ended up building a carpet mill empire.

Harris met the rug maker in the 1940s...Nichols brought some of his rugs to Waipahu for Harris to clean. The men became fast friends and Nichols taught Harris the fine points of quality rug making. Harris spent a year and a half learning the arts of rug making at Nichols' factory in Tin Jin (formerly called Tientsin).



Mrs. Harris washes rug fringes by hand.

'He treated me like a son. He taught me everything I know and more,' Harris says.

When the Japanese invaded China in the late 1930s, Nichols' 14 factories were looted and the equipment sent to Japan for scrap. After World War II, Nichols returned to China to set up his factories again. The mills were just beginning to roll when the communists took over forcing him to leave the country again. Nichols resettled in Hawaii and opened a silk-screening business.

In his will, Nichols left his designs, color charts and the how-to's of his rug business to Harris. He even willed permission for Harris to use the world famous Nichols name.

Harris never has.

'We haven't reached his quality,' Harris says modestly. 'Besides, we feel we should stand on our own two legs.'

Harris has been doing exactly that since his first major handmade rug order, for the Ilikai established his rug-making reputation...Harris rugs...grace the floors of...the Kahala Hilton, the Wailea Beach Hotel and the lobby of the Bank of Hawaii in Waikiki.

Harris dyes almost all of the rug wool himself using the finest European chrome dyes which resist fading and color changes. Blues come from England, yellows from France and reds from Germany. Each country excels in one color, Harris says. From these primary colors, Harris concocts the shades of dye which color the wool for his rugs...

Harris' handmade rugs usually run from \$10 to \$12 a square foot depending on the intricacies of the designs. Comparable quality rugs coming out of China today cost about \$35 per square foot, according to Harris. The most expensive set of rugs he has made was a series of five which totaled \$26,000...

He spends almost every day at the Waipahu plant supervising. His eight employees do everything from the tufting to the delicate shearing and beveling by hand.

Harris would like to find someone to carry on his business just as he has carried on the Nichols' tradition...'I have my eyes open. Somebody will come along.' March 13, 1983.



An outstanding example of the Harris' handicraft is the PP rug that was commissioned for the Princess Pauahi Coffee Shop at the Royal Hawaiian Shopping Center in 1979. When the Coffee Shop closed, it was hung on the wall at Midkiff Learning Center.

Beverly Creamer wrote in an Advertiser article on April 25, 1979,

With more guts than most people half his age, Harris has launched an extraordinary first-of-its-kind Hawaii business...Peking and Tientsin Chinese carpets from scratch with the best materials, the finest, traditional designs and prices that compete with those in Hong Kong...What it could bloom into he says, is a \$20 million new industry for Hawaii that could make fine individual carpets and wall-to-wall carpeting for use here and for export. Hawaii needs this kind of thin, new industries...At present, most of the carpeting used here is imported...We could make it all here.

The Advertiser article explains the intricate rug-making process.

With a Japanese hand-tufting machine that looks sort of like a large hand-held staple-gun, the two men painstakingly punch the wool onto the backing changing colors for the designs as they go...When all of the wool has been tufted, the carpet is laid on the floor and the 'sculpting' of the design is done, again by hand, with beveling shears. Even the background color is sheared...The final step is backing the carpet with latex and a nylon 'scrim.'

Arthur Harris closed his rug-making business upon retirement rather than compromise the high standards set by his mentor, Walter A. B. Nichols. He continued his fine arts porcelain tiles and plates for awhile thereafter. Harris and his wife, Beatrice, demonstrated the plucky, can-do attitude of the successful, visionary Hawaiian entrepreneur and their businesses were pioneering firsts in Hawaii like no other.

[The accounts of Arthur's experiences at Kamehameha Schools are from a telephone conversation on September 2, 2004 by Candace W. Lee, KS Assistant Archivist. Other information for the biography was taken from newspaper articles provided by Dani Gardner, Hawaiian Pacific Collection library technician in August 2004]

Series

2002 collection






2006 collection









2002 COLLECTION

Provenance: on permanent loan from Hale Pelikekina until 2012 extended thereafter

ITEM #	IMAGE	DESCRIPTION	BACK OF PLATE
AH2002-01	No image available	Porcelain plate Kingdom of Hawai'i Coat of Arms 8" (20.3 cm)	
AH2002-02		Fine Porcelain from Hawaii by Harris Diameter: 8" (20.3 cm)	
AH2002-03		PALILA Fine Porcelain from Hawaii by Harris Diameter: 8" (20.3 cm) Signature: M. Berger © 1985.	
AH2002-04		WEKEULA Fine Porcelain from Hawaii by Harris Diameter: 8" (20.3 cm)	
AH2002-05		AKILOLO Fine Porcelain from Hawaii by Harris Diameter: 8" (20.3 cm)	

2006 COLLECTION

ITEM #	IMAGE	DESCRIPTION	
AH2006-01	 	<p>The Princess Pauahi Rug</p> <p>Carved wool rug by Harris Carpet Mills.</p> <p>Custom size: approximately 10' x 5'</p> <p>Rug Detail</p> <p>This rug was commissioned for the Princess Pauahi Coffee Shop Restaurant located in the Royal Hawaiian Shopping Center in 1979. When the coffee shop closed, the Royal Hawaiian Shopping Center donated the rug to Midkiff Learning Center, Kapālama, which opened in 1977. The rug now hangs high on the walls of the Midkiff Learning Center.</p>	
ITEM #	IMAGE	DESCRIPTION	BACK
AH2006-02		<p>Porcelain glazed tile with porcelain glazed frame Width: 9 7/8" (25 cm) Height: 7 7/8" (20 cm)</p> <p>Porcelain glazed frame Width: 15" (38.1 cm) Height: 13" (33 cm)</p> <p>Weight: 2 pounds</p>	 <p>Paper label on the back. Size: 1 1/2" x 1"</p>
AH2006-03		<p>Porcelain glazed tile. Width: 7 7/8" (20 cm) Height: 9 7/8" (25 cm)</p> <p>Porcelain frame Width: 13" (33 cm) Height: 15" (38.1 cm)</p> <p>Weight: 2 pounds</p> <p>No identifying label or words on the back</p>	

ITEM #	IMAGE	DESCRIPTION	BACK
AH2006-04		<p>Porcelain Plate</p> <p>Po'ouli</p> <p>Diameter: 12 " (30.5 cm)</p>	<p>Blank</p>
AH2006-05		<p>Porcelain Plate</p> <p>Reef Fish</p> <p>Diameter: 8 ½ " (25.5 cm)</p>	
AH2006-06		<p>Porcelain Plate</p> <p>Guava</p> <p>Diameter: 8 ½ " (25.5 cm)</p>	
AH2006-07		<p>Porcelain Plate</p> <p>Ahialoa</p> <p>Diameter: 8 ½ " (25.5 cm)</p>	
AH2006-08		<p>Porcelain Plate</p> <p>Iwi</p> <p>Diameter: 8 ½ " (25.5 cm)</p>	