

Dr. Estelle Pau-On Lau

1924-2019

(IH 1942-45, 1951-52)



Estelle Pau-On Lau was born in Honolulu, Hawaii in 1924. Her parents had journeyed from Zhong Shan, Guangdong, China to Hawaii as teenagers, and began creating a successful business and a grand family. Estelle was the second youngest of 11 children – 9 girls and 2 boys. Her given name is Pau-On Lau, and her personal name On means peace. But when she went to first grade the neighbor said she needed an “American name” - and thus she became known as Estelle, which means star.

Estelle’s application to live at the I-House described her “extreme interest in meeting and becoming acquainted with all peoples.” While majoring in American and Chinese history, she participated

in all aspects of I-House life, including performances of traditional hula dances she had learned in Hawaii. She is pictured with her roommates in the I-House historical display featuring the Daily Cal article describing student life during World War II, when GIs were housed at the I-House and students moved into fraternity housing: “A Chinese girl from Hawaii, a black girl from the South, and a white girl requested to live together, and their room was always a center of activity.” The I-House team would later describe her as a “charming and attractive girl, vivacious, active, deeply interested in I-House.”



She went on to do graduate work at the University of Chicago and Columbia University – at both universities she lived at the International House. Indeed, the mailing tube for her Cal diploma shows her next address upon graduation was the International House at the University of Chicago, where she continued to perform at I-House events.

When she returned to the Bay Area as a young historian for the 1951 signing of the peace treaty between the United State and Japan, she stayed at the I-House. Upon returning to Moorhead, MN where she was a professor at the time, the local paper wrote up her story as front page news. Growing up in Hawaii, she witnessed the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and so when she attended the signing of

the peace treaty with Japan, she became one of the few people – indeed, perhaps the only person – to have personally witnessed both the beginning and the end of the war in the Pacific.

During that stay at the I-House in 1951, she met a graduate student, Mason Gaffney. As he was playing guitar in the Great Hall while another student sang, Estelle appeared on the balcony, and their eyes met. They married the following year at the I-House in 1952, in a beautiful ceremony written up in the Daily Cal.



Graduate Students Wed at International House Rites; To Make Home in Berkeley

Married at International House recently were Estelle Lau of Honolulu, T.H., and Merrill Mason Gaffney of Winnetka, Ill. The Rev. Lester McAllister of University Christian Church presided at the 4:30 p.m. rite, at which the bride was given in marriage by Prof. John D. Hicks, chairman of the history department at the University of California.

The bride, who wore white lace over net and satin floor shirt, held a bouquet of white orchids with a single white orchid in her hair. Her attendant was her sister, Mrs. Richard Walter (Patricia) Lau of Berkeley, who wore white, organza and lace tied with a wide blue sash, and carried a pink bouquet.

Best man duties were performed by Robert J. Bowman of Berkeley while ushering were Lester C. Rogers Jr., Jack Garrison, Joseph Hippie and Martin Stern, all of Berkeley. George Swigart, violinist with the San Francisco Symphony, was the soloist.

The bride is the daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. T. Lau of Honolulu, T.H. She studied at Honolulu schools and Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, before taking her B.A. at U.C. Later she received her M.A. at the University of Chicago, and was an instructor at Roosevelt High School, Honolulu, T.H. at Moorhead State Teachers College and a teaching assistant at the University of Michigan before returning to U.C. where she was granted a graduate scholarship by the University of Chicago. She is a member of several history honorary societies.

The bridegroom, son of Mr. and Mrs. M. P. Gaffney of Winnetka, Ill., attended Harvard, where his studies were interrupted for military service as a communications officer in the USAF. He later took his B.A. from Reed College, Portland, and has been doing graduate work in economics at U.C.

The husbands are now "at home" at 2333 Ridge Rd.

As they moved across the country and raised a family together, she maintained her lifelong commitment to the I-House mission "to foster intercultural respect, understanding, lifelong friendships, and leadership skills to promote a more tolerant and peaceful world." She received her PhD from Marquette University and became an acclaimed professor at the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California, where she specialized in cross-cultural education and women's studies. Upon retirement in 2000, she received the university's highest honor, the Order of Pacific, in recognition of her lifelong commitment to social justice and cross-cultural understanding.

Estelle spent her retirement in Albany, California, where she could be near her children Brad, Ann and Stuart, their spouses Tom and John, and her granddaughter Meredith, as well as the loving extended family of nieces, nephews, and lifelong friends. Living in Albany also made it possible for her to participate once more in I-House events, and she attended the I-House annual gala in 2017. We all miss her very much, and are deeply grateful for the opportunity to celebrate her life together with the I-House community at her memorial held in the Auditorium in May 2019.

The Beginning and The End

Miss Lau Recalls Pearl Harbor Attack

By HOWARD BINFORD
Daily News Staff Writer

Shortly after 7:55 a.m., 10 years ago today, Miss Estelle Lau stood outside her home on Oahu, largest of the Hawaiian islands, to witness the start of the greatest war in history. What she saw was several puffs of black smoke climbing against a bright blue sky while two planes, last of a fleet of approximately 350 Japanese aircraft, disappeared in the distance.

LAST SUMMER, she was in San Francisco for the signing of the Japanese peace treaty which finally ended the tragic conflict.

Thus Miss Lau, whose parents were both of Chinese ancestry and who was born and raised in Hawaii was one of a very few persons to have seen both the beginning and the end of the struggle between these two great powers which developed into World War II.

Now a social studies instructor at MSTC, Miss Lau recalls watching with disbelief this greatest sneak attack in 3,000 years of military history. She first learned of the Pearl Harbor raid when a friend of her sister called their residence.

WAR WAS CLOSE on that beautiful December morning, however. One bomb crashed at

Monilili, only 20 minutes from the Lau home. The attractive young teacher recalls that everything seemed very unreal at the time—so much so, in fact, that she even went to a choir practice scheduled that Sunday afternoon.

The mood and temperament of the half-million Hawaiian citizens following the Dec. 7 attack are most vivid in Miss Lau's memory.

After martial law had been declared and the Islands swarmed with military personnel, she recalls the 6 p.m. curfew, air raid drills, gruesome blackouts, the complete disruption of school work and carrying gas masks at all times.

WITH SCHOOL disrupted, Miss Lau worked in a communications office until the following April when she came to the United States to attend college. She recalls that practically nobody thought of Christmas in Hawaii during 1941 since all were employed in some type of Red Cross or civil defense work.

The Islands were constantly anticipating follow-up attacks after the Dec. 7 raid. At one time, a bomb fell near Roosevelt high school where Miss Lau was a student and later taught for two years. For the most part, alarms resulted from rumors of falling Jap paratroopers, evidences of sabotage or the general wave of hysteria.

SHE RECALLS that the Japanese who comprise about one-third of the Islands population were not troublesome following the attack, most of them moving into the cities to white collar jobs while white citizens took defense positions.

From her brother who was working at Hickam air force base, Miss Lau got first-hand reports of ravages of the attack—2,086 American seamen dead and 749 wounded, 240 dead and 360 wounded in army ranks, five battleships sunk, along with three destroyers, a target ship, a repair ship, a minelayer and a floating drydock, and three battleships, three cruisers and a seaplane tender badly damaged.

Miss Lau was in San Francisco last summer, expecting to return for a visit with her family. She was fascinated with the peace conference and the handiwork of John Foster Dulles and decided to remain for the actual signing of the document.

WHILE LIVING at International house, she also had an opportunity to meet Japanese Premier Yoshida.

Miss Lau is proud of her American citizenship and grateful for the opportunity to teach here. Her father emigrated to the Islands from China at the age of 10 in 1883. Estelle is second to the youngest of 11 Lau children.

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