

Lynn Ann Davis, with Nelson Foster, *A Photographer in the Kingdom: Christian J. Hedemann's Early Images of Hawai'i*. Bishop Museum Special Publication 85. Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 1988. Pp. 194, 142 plates, notes, bibliography, index. US\$38.50.

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Lynn Ann Davis's book is exceptional among recent publications in its pioneering subject, substantial text, and expert production. I found no typographical errors, diacritical marks are used for Hawaiian, the

reproductions are excellent (photographs are shown in their actual condition), and text and illustrations have been carefully coordinated. The book has been handsomely designed by Barbara Pope.

The text is clearly based on extensive research and personal knowledge of Hawai'i, which Davis distills into remarkably concise and deft descriptions of the political and socioeconomic situations of the different times and places relevant to her subject: life in **Hāna** and Honolulu, the relations between different ethnic groups, the place of Portuguese workers, anti-Asian sentiment, the local Danish community--its closeness in Hawai'i and its changing relation to the old country--and so on. The book provides some intimate looks at Hawaiians of all classes; Kala-kaua warns some ladies that a party with hula dancers might get "too lively" (p. 31), and the king's party shares its large on-deck mattress with Mrs. Hedemann when she gets seasick (p. 39).

The subject of the book demonstrates the power of art to reorder our views of the past. Hedemann's photography was not mentioned in his obituary (p. 173) but is the reason he and his family become alive for us today. We see him working his way thoughtfully and competently through middle management as his family moves into progressively finer homes. We learn about commercial development and labor relations in Hawai'i from a personal perspective. But we also see the inner, artistic life of Hedemann the photographer, a life that had its own development, satisfactions, indeed triumphs.

Davis is able to understand the life of the artist--how art is created by a real person leading a life in his or her community--because she is herself a fine photographer as well as a museum administrator. She knows the technical and aesthetic problems of photography from the inside and can explain them to the reader. For instance, a new type of negative enables Hedemann "to take a relaxed portrait of his family in the parlor, without the assistance of studio lighting or head rests" (p. 56)). Hedemann photographs the **Hāna** mill buildings so that "the early morning sun highlights the whitewashed structures, making the orderly buildings stand out against the canefields" (p. 44). By placing "his subjects off-center rather than squarely in the middle of the frame," he could produce "more complex and aesthetically more interesting compositions" (p. 81). In such sensitive study of the photographs, Davis is able to connect Hedemann's art to his intentions and his feelings.

She connects that art also to the international and local history of photography, using her unequalled knowledge of the field in the islands. Hedemann's portraits of ethnic types are examples of a widespread nineteenth-century interest (p. 54) (Hawaiians were in fact eager to be

photographed [p. 55]. In contrast to photographers elsewhere, Hedemann and his local colleagues emphasized the positive aspects of economic development (pp. 98, 127). Hedemann made the first extended photographic record of **Hāna** "or indeed of any sugar town and plantation in the islands" (p. 40) and the first photographs of mill interiors (p. 47).

Hedemann's photographs are of undoubted historical interest. Everything in them is useful to the student--from clothes, to furniture, to toys. Some photographs provide unique glimpses of politics and culture: Kalakaua giving an audience (plate 13), Lili'uokalani at a tense and important moment (plate 101), the interior of the Honolulu opera house (plate 76).

But Hedemann's work is of aesthetic interest as well, inspired by genuine emotions and informed by a definite artistic impulse (the beautiful "Judd Wharf" [plate 46] was in fact used as a basis for a 1977 mural by Mataumu Toelupe Alisa, "Panorama of Honolulu Harbor," formerly in the Ali'i Bishop Building, downtown Honolulu). Davis is particularly good at showing the links between Hedemann's life interests and his photography.

First and foremost, Hedemann's professional work--both at the sugar mill in **Hāna** and the iron works in Honolulu--was a source of justifiable pride for him, his men, and his employers. This pride included an aesthetic feeling for their products. Theo H. Davies said of the first nine-roller sugar mill that it "seemed a treasured and beautiful thing to many of the men who had to do with its construction" (p. 148; also p. 67). Davis connects this feeling for work and product to the emotions expressed in Hedemann's photographs: "[Those] of the mill reflect personal pride in his accomplishments as well as the prevailing fervor of the steam age and Hedemann's love of 'beautiful things for the sake of their perfection of design and intricate workmanship'" (p. 47).

Davis is able to interpret Hedemann's excellent photographs of machinery and workmen (for example, plates 27, 42, 45, 47, 51-53, 73) on the basis of his own statements and contemporary, optimistic ideas of society and industrialization. The photographs can convey to us such ideas and feelings with immediacy. " 'USS Nipsic' on the Marine Railway" (plate 54) communicates the impression contemporaries must have had of the awesome bulk of the ship; yet even it could be controlled by knowledgeable human beings and lifted into drydock. "Repaired Rudder, 'USS Nipsic'" (plate 55) records an achievement of Hedemann's Iron Works along with a sense of the almost frightening bigness, even grandeur, of their profession connected to the nationwide creation of the modern world.

Hedemann's next great interest in photography was his family. His portraits of his children became unusually straightforward over the years: They are caught going barefoot and spilling his photographs (plate 97); a girl surveys her doll collection like a *châtelaine* (plate 99). In the end, his photographs become almost snapshots, the kids playing despite their bulky swimwear just as we did, growing up in Hawai'i fifty years later. Unusually powerful--one cannot look at it for long--is "Mary Hedemann on Her Deathbed" (plate 91), which shows more than any other photograph I know the anguish of parenthood at that time of widespread child mortality.

Then as now, landscapes were a staple of local photographers, and Hedemann has a few postcardlike scenes (for example, plate 65). But his knowledge of the islands enabled him to choose interesting angles (plate 77) and, in his best photographs, to provide unromanticized views of places that appear physical and inhabited by real people (plates 61, 67). His appropriation of landscapes for picnics connects them to his emotion for his family (plates 112, 113; two particularly successful photographs), an emotion that leads him into the unconscious humor of plate 58. Hedemann's professional sense comes to the fore in "Chinatown After the Fire" (plate 62), in which his eye seems to be giving an expert's view of the damage and calculating the necessary repairs; the men lounging in the foreground seem to be waiting to be conscripted into the effort.

Lynn Davis's *A Photographer in the Kingdom* is one of the very best books written about the arts in Hawai'i. Davis has discovered an interesting artist for whom she has understanding and affection, and she has written--in superior prose--an exemplary description of his work in the social and historical setting of his life. She sets a standard for future work in the field.