

HAWAII EQUAL RIGHTS COMMISSION

1935 - 1947

The establishment of the Hawaii Equal Rights Commission was authorized by Act 212 (S.L.H. 1935) to compile and disseminate information to support equal political rights for Hawaii, prevent discriminatory federal legislation, assist in obtaining amendments to the Organic Act, and make a study of statehood and the advisability of submitting the issue to plebescite. Similar functions had previously been performed by various legislative commissions (1919, 1921, 1923, 1925, and 1932); the Legislative Commission of 1932 had recommended that the legislature act to have the people of Hawaii correctly represented before the mainland reading public.

The commission was to be composed of five members, four appointed by the governor, with the governor presiding as ex-officio chairman. A provision, deleted in 1939, permitted the appointment of members of the legislature. The commission was empowered to employ an executive secretary. On September 27, 1935 Governor Poindexter appointed Lawrence M. Judd, Victor S. K. Houston, James L. Coke and Louis S. Cain as commissioners. In order to prepare for the anticipated visit of the Joint Congressional Committee on Hawaii in October, John Snell was hired as executive secretary in June, 1937.

The Hawaii Equal Rights Commission was primarily engaged in informing the people on the mainland about Hawaii. For the information of the members of the Joint Congressional Committee, a pamphlet "Hawaii Integral Part of the United States of America" was prepared. Also compiled and distributed were "Statehood for Hawaii and the Visit to the Islands of the 1937 Joint Congressional Committee on Hawaii" (1937) and "Legislative Action Relating to Statehood and Equal Rights for Hawaii, Sessions 1903-1937" (1938). Among other activities, at the request of Governor Poindexter the commission prepared a series of formulae for the reapportionment of the legislature in accordance with the recommendation of the 1937 Joint Congressional Committee. It sponsored a bill (Act 243) to conduct a plebescite on the statehood issue with the general election in 1940. Routine activities were: writing letters to editors of mainland publications, commending favorable articles or correcting misconceptions about Hawaii, and furnishing material for speakers.

In 1939 (Act 218) the Hawaii Equal Rights Commission was re-authorized with the same number of members to serve for staggered terms. The dissemination of information was consolidated in a bureau of information which was to function under the supervision of the executive secretary. As soon as practicable the governor was mandated to appoint a new commission; on July 15, 1939, Acting Governor Charles M. Hite reappointed Louis S. Cain, Victor S. K. Houston, and James L. Coke.

In 1941 a bill (H.B. 62) was introduced in the legislature that would create a statehood commission, but was defeated in the Senate on the recommendation that the Equal Rights Commission be continued with the added powers necessary to effectuate H.B. 62. In the special session of the legislature that year, the Equal Rights Commission Act was so amended. The membership of the commission was expanded to seven, five to be appointed by the governor for staggered terms and the governor and delegate to congress to serve as ex-officio members. Act 90 stipulated that the members be known supporters of

statehood and that the commission compile and disseminate material intended to support the granting of statehood to Hawaii. The commission was to assist any bona fide citizens' organization formed to further the statehood movement.

A new commission was not appointed, however, until September 1942. When John Snell, executive secretary, became deputy war bonds administrator in July 1941, routine activities were performed by a clerk until January 1942. Thereafter the commission was without a staff until John Snell was reappointed executive secretary in June 1942. In September 1942, Marguerite K. Ashford, Joseph R. Farrington, Lester Petrie, and Arthur Trask were appointed commissioners. Delegate King, however, refused his commission on the grounds that it violated the Organic Act. In November, Riley H. Allen, succeeding Joseph Farrington (elected delegate to congress), and A. G. M. Robertson were appointed; Fred Patterson was appointed in April 1944, succeeding Lester Petrie whose appointment was not confirmed by the Senate.

The bombing of Pearl Harbor resulted in the printing of rumors of sabotage and fifth-column activities in the mainland press, so when the commission resumed its activities, the necessity of establishing a branch office on the mainland in order to correct the gross misrepresentation was discussed. In December 1942, the commission approved a plan to establish a bureau of information in Washington, D. C. under the supervision of the executive secretary and cooperating with the offices of the delegate. In January 1948 John Snell was sent to Washington to establish the office, and in March, John B. Terry was hired as the Washington representative. The Washington representative was to be the source of authentic information about Hawaii by answering inquiries or issuing press releases concerning the civilian war effort, but before the office made much headway, appropriations for its operations were cut off.

The Honolulu office, under Mrs. Clara West, prepared press releases, compiled "Civilian Hawaii at War," and a history of Provost Courts in Hawaii during the year following the outbreak of the war.

In 1943, the legislature, by House Bill 300, sought to include members of the legislature on the Equal Rights Commission. By a rider attached to the general appropriations act, funds for the general expenses of the commission were eliminated when H.B. 300 did not become law. This reduction in operating funds necessitated the termination of the Washington bureau. The legislature, again in 1945, attempted to make certain members of the legislature members of the commission (H.B. 130). The measure died by pocket veto, nullifying the entire appropriation for the 1945-1947 biennium. Thereafter, the commission was forced to release its staff.

The drive for statehood was renewed with the introduction of a new statehood bill in the Seventy-ninth Congress in June 1945. When a subcommittee of the House Committee on Territories conducted investigations in Hawaii in January 1946, the Hawaii Equal Rights Commission, led by A. G. M. Robertson as chief counsel, presented the case for statehood. Spurred by favorable comments and optimistic of the passage of the bill, legislative pressure mounted for the calling of a special session to create a statehood commission to mobilize mainland support for immediate statehood. At a meeting on January 25, 1946 the Equal Rights Commission urged a publicity drive, financed by contributions from

friends of statehood, to marshal local support for statehood; but awaited word from Governor who was to consult congressional leaders.

Following the receipt of a letter from Governor Stainback in February, suggesting the organization of a citizens' committee to enlist mainland support for the statehood movement, the Equal Rights Commission approved such a plan, and authorized Acting Governor Corbett to consider means of financing the program. The committee would be separate from the Equal Rights Commission which would merely organize the group. Circular letters were sent to all organizations in the Territory inviting their cooperation.

On May 10, 1946, by executive order, Governor Stainback set up the Citizens' Statehood Committee, and appropriated \$10,000 from the Governor's Contingent Fund. The committee was divided into five sections: legislative section composed of all members of the Twenty-third Legislature; Equal Rights Commission section, of members of the Equal Rights Commission; county government section, of the mayor of the City and County of Honolulu and chairman of the Board of Supervisors of the counties; the organizations section, of persons nominated by various organizations; the individual citizens section, of individual citizens of the several counties. The Citizens' Statehood Committee was to be headed by a fifteen-member executive board, with the governor as chairman. The governor had the authority to appoint an executive secretary. The committee would serve in an advisory capacity, and was to be dissolved at the next session of the legislature.

The following members were appointed to the Executive Board: Senator Eugene Capellas, M. B. Carson, William H. Heen, Representative Charles Kauhane, A. T. Longley, Mrs. Harriet Magoon, Representative A. Q. Marcalleno, Katsuro Miho, Representative Manuel Paschoal, Fred Patterson, Senator Harold W. Rice, A. G. M. Robertson, David Trask, Farrant L. Turner, and Roy A. Vitousek.

At the first meeting of the executive board on May 18, A. G. M. Robertson was elected vice-chairman; George McLane was hired as temporary executive secretary, and Roy A. Vitousek and David Trask were named to a special committee to assist the executive secretary in formulating a plan of action. The board also voted to contact Delegate Farrington to ascertain his views on any necessary action.

In June, a sub-committee, chaired by Senator Heen, was appointed to prepare and formulate a national campaign. The program, approved in September, included opening an office in Washington, preparation of an official statehood handbook, and retaining a public relations counsel.

Another sub-committee, chaired by Judge Robertson, was empowered to revise H.R. 3643 and develop an enabling act to be introduced in the next session of Congress. It was approved in December 1946.

With the convening of a new congress and hopeful of the immediate passage of the statehood bill, in December 1946, the Citizens' Statehood Committee, under George McLane, opened an office in Washington. The opening of such office was discussed at the first meeting of the executive board and was urged by Delegate Farrington. In February, the Washington office issued the first of a series of newsletters.

By the governor's action in December, and approved by the Hawaii Equal Rights Commission in January, the staff of the Citizens' Statehood Committee was transferred to the Equal Rights Commission in order to make disbursements legal. For publicity purposes, the paid staff continued to use the name of Citizens' Statehood Committee.

The Hawaii Equal Rights Commission was abolished on July 1, 1947, pursuant to Act 115 (S.L.H. 1947) which authorized the creation of the Hawaii Statehood Commission. All records, personnel, and contracts of the Hawaii Equal Rights Commission were transferred to the Hawaii Statehood Commission with power to complete unfinished business.

The records of the Hawaii Equal Rights Commission consist primarily of correspondence and various compilations made by the commission. They are divided into two sub-series, the division in most instances is the period Mr. Snell served as deputy war bonds administrator. Some records of the Hawaii Equal Rights Commission are included in those of the Hawaii Statehood Commission.

FILES:

Box
Numbers

1935 - 1941

Advertiser, 1937-1941

Army and Navy Letters, 1938-1940

Cartoons, 1939-1940

Chamber of Commerce, 1938-1941

College Students, 1939-1941

re Discrimination, 1939-1940

Dual Citizenship, 1940-1941

Fortune Magazine Survey XXVI, 1940

re "Handbook on Hawaii", 1940

Hawaii Equal Rights Commission

Commissioners, 1937-1941

Annual Reports, Minutes, 1935-1941

"Legislative Action . . ."

Miscellaneous

Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association, 1937-1941

King, Samuel, 1940-1941

Legislature.

Correspondence, 1935-1941

Reapportionment

Letters to:

Mainland Magazines (sample file), 1937-1941

Mainland Newspapers

General (sample file), 1940-1941

Statehood (sample file), 1940-1941

Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1938-1941

re Misconceptions, 1938-1941

Outside Islands, 1938-1941

Requests for Information, 1940-1941

Snell, John (personal), 1939-1941

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Tax Commissioner, 1937-1940
 Territorial Offices, 1939-1941
 U.S. Department of Interior, 1938-1940
 U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1935-1941
 Works Projects Administration, 1937

FILES:

1942 - 1947

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Advertiser, 1942-1943
 Aliens, 1941
 City and County of Honolulu, 1943-1944
 Citizens' Statehood Committee - Organization Plan, 1946
 Farrington, Joseph R., 1940-1945
 General Information
 Governor's Office
 Correspondence, 1941-1945
 Annual Reports, 1942
 Hawaii - Historical Data
 Hawaii Equal Rights Commission
 Correspondence, 1942-1945
 Letters by J. Snell in Washington, 1943
 Washington Representative, 1942-1943
 Minutes, 1942-1947
 Miscellaneous Reports
 Hawaii War Records Depository, 1944-1945
 re Japanese, 1942
 King, Samuel Wilder, 1942
 Legislature, 1942-1943
 Miscellaneous, 1942-1945
 Newspapers, Magazines, 1942-1945
 Provost Courts, History of, 1941-1945
 Snell, John (personal), 1942
 Star-Bulletin, 1942-1945
 Statehood Data
 Statehood Hearings, 1946 - Exhibits 1-94
 Index
 Minutes of Sub-committee hearing
 Territorial Government Offices, 1942-1945
 War Bonds and Stamps, 1942-1945
 War Effort (Civilian)

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COM16-4

Citizens' Statehood Committee--Executive Board, 1946-1947 to Report:
 SEE ALSO:

Printed Material:

See catalog of government publications: Hawaii Equal Rights Commission
 Statehood Hearings, January 1946 (U.S. Congress, House Committee on
 the Territories)

Call No. 353.9 U576s 1946

Subject Index:

Equal Rights Commission, Hawaii
Hawaii Legislative Commission
Reapportionment
Statehood
Statehood Commission, Hawaii
Statehood Committee, Hawaii Citizens'
Statehood Plebescite

Name Index:

King, Samuel Wilder
McLane, George H.
Snell, John
Terry, John
see Names of commission members

Other Files:

Delegate to Congress:
King, Samuel Wilder
Farrington, Joseph R.

Governor:

Poindexter, Joseph B.
Equal Rights Commission
Stainback, Ingram M.
Citizens' Statehood Committee
Hawaii Equal Rights Commission
Hawaii Statehood Commission

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