

Hawaii's Unique "Pottery" from Birth to Death in Older Times - Gourds and Decorated Gourds

Talk Description:

Remotely, in the middle of the vast Pacific, Hawaiians developed the most diverse and finest gourds the world has probably ever known. From tiny whistles to medicinal use to dance and ritual instruments to giant storage and carrying gourds, the variety is remarkable. Gourds were a vital part of life from birth to death. Why - because there was no pottery. In Hawaii there was almost no clay, and knowledge of pottery-making had died out in eastern Polynesia.

Hawaiians also developed a unique and stunning art of gourd-decoration that, along with the renewed growing of the fine old-time gourds, has been resurrected by the speaker, B. Ka'imiloa Chrisman, M.D.. He is the expert on these gourds and decorated gourds.

The fascinating story of Hawaii's gourds and their many types and uses, as well as the lost art of Hawaiian decorated gourds and its difficult resurrection over 15 years of trial and error will be thoroughly presented in this talk, allowing time for questions at the end.

Biography of B. Ka'imiloa Chrisman, M.D.

B. Ka'imiloa Chrisman, M.D. spent thirty-one years in Hawaii, leading a dual life before moving to Arizona in 2003 for health reasons and bringing Hawaii with him.

Professionally he was a Cosmetic Surgeon in Honolulu and culturally he was so deeply involved that he slowly became an expert in old time Hawaiian culture, arts and values. Having to retire early gave him all the more time for cultural pursuits after moving to the Big Island of Hawaii. Since that time twenty-five years ago, he has been known by his Hawaiian name, Ka'imiloa, which fittingly means "always seeking".

After fifteen years of trial-and-error work he resurrected the unique and lost art of Hawaiian decorated gourds, and over many years became greatly expert at growing these superb gourds - which are essential to the former culture from birth to death due to its absence of pottery.

Vast amounts of research, talking with Elders, crafting and "experimental archaeology" has made him also expert in a great many of Hawaii's arts such as stone-work, featherwork, instruments, wood and bone working, weaponry, dyes, and the bark-cloth called Tapa. He is very well known in Hawaii for these skills and for his many years of teaching.

His wife, Kēhau is a Kumu Hula (Hula Master) in their home area of Cottonwood and the surrounding region. Together or separately they continue to teach and demonstrate Hawaiian arts, crafts and hula in many public, art and scholarly venues both here in Arizona and in Hawaii.