

A Vermont-born *Citizen's* History

From Republican to Democrat to waving the flag for a Communist to Being elected office in Sacramento as a Democrat to a surprise in Hawai'i

By Tom Whitney

The Daughters of the American Revolution annually give Good Citizenship Medals to thousands of eighth graders. I received one when I left the eighth grade in 1954 at South Burlington Central School in Vermont.

At a young age I had taken an interest in politics. I wrote a little article in the fourth grade after responding to Mrs. McGrath's challenge to do one about the 1948 presidential election being held the next day.

I got up early on the morning after election day, ran to get the paper, listened to the radio and typed up a half a page. I closed with a note that Arthur Godfrey, a popular morning radio host, had received four votes. She had me read it to the class and also to a bunch of uninterested sixth graders. I didn't care that they didn't care, I was hooked. And I have addressed many disinterested audiences since, in addition to a some that emphatically agreed with me. 1948 was the famous election in which one newspaper incorrectly declared that Truman had been defeated. Interesting to me, my sweetheart Betsy has a photograph of her shaking Harry Truman's hand, when she traveled the country with the Los Angeles Foundation for the Junior Blind when she was about 13 and their bus stopped in Independence, Missouri to see the former President.

In 1952 when I was 13 my father took me to the South Burlington Town Meeting where all the citizens debated the issues facing the town and voted on the budget for the next year. I remember especially well that Mrs. Shepard, our rather tall, portly and direct-speaking school bus driver stood up and said that those potholes on Spear Street need to

be fixed because they were making her "butt all black and blue." Everyone laughed, and she got what she needed.

Then during the 1952 presidential election I suggested to a teacher that our junior high school should vote using the voting booths that were assembled in the auditorium for the general election. This was easy to accomplish, so we did that.

I think it was this, being captain of the safety patrol, plus my good sportsmanship in not venting my frustration when I was nominated, but not seconded, for three different class offices. Forty years later I would succeed in becoming elected to something. My good friend Frank Suitor was a



My grade school bus driver gave me a lesson in democracy with her butt! Here a school bus leaves South Burlington Central School. Lots of kids from farms attended Central.

more suitable candidate and became our eighth grade class president. He was much more personable, always. One other thing may have been a factor, I say with a smile. We had intramural basketball and I was the leader of a team that I had named the MIGs after the Russian jet fighter. This was during Korean War time. Perhaps the teachers were trying to head off an ironical, unpatriotic attitude. At graduation, at any rate, I received the medal.

I liked the idea of it, “Good Citizen,” and have sincerely tried to be one through the years since - with a capital “C.” I always voted, watched the quadrennial political conventions, talked about politics, became involved in helping people run for office, have done precinct work walking from door-to door, and finally was successful myself in becoming elected, and now like to watch Charlie Rose on PBS, Chris Matthews and Keith Olberman and Rachel Maddow on MSNBC, and dislike the Fox Network. I also am a CSPAN junkie; all three channels, especially Book TV on the weekends.

From Republican to Democrat

Reading Russell Kirk in 1960 was my introduction to conservative political philosophy. Conservatives hallow Kirk today. In 1960 I took a sociology class and the professor talked about Kirk and recommended his books, although they were not part of the curriculum. I found his ideas attractive. Coming from “rock-ribbed Republican” Vermont, where my parents had voted Republican and everyone else had as well since Vermont became a state, Kirk helped to put some intellectual muscle on that way of thinking. I was in Philadelphia attending classes at the University of Pennsylvania in the daytime during my last few months in the Navy working night duty at the Navy psychiatric hospital there. This awakening led me to vote for Richard Nixon in the 1960 presidential election.

Beyond 1960, however, I married a woman of African descent and became aware of the vast numbers of people who were being discriminated against because of their skin color. I also found out something unsettling about the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and my medal began to figuratively tarnish. I learned that the DAR had supported a segregationist policy and refused to allow the famous Negro singer Marian Anderson to sing in Constitution Hall in Philadelphia in 1939. How could patriotic people do that? They did change their policies within a year or so, helped by Eleanor Roosevelt who resigned from the organization, and it now forbids discrimination. But the bitter taste still lingered twenty years later in the minds of Black folks I talked with, including my wife. In 2006, 67 years after 1939, I asked a woman of African descent who has a PhD what she knew about the Daughters. The first thing she mentioned was the Marian Anderson exclusion.

Democrat John Kennedy was leading the charge against segregationist policies and then Lyndon Johnson gave one of the most rousing speeches any president ever has against racial discrimination after Kennedy had been shot and Johnson was pushing through the Civil Rights Bill. People were dying in the south over civil rights and had been for centuries in this land of freedom! Martin Luther King with his uplifting moral leadership was calling the country to account! I had tears in my eyes when Johnson, as I was

listening to it with Elvie during his speech, quoted the words that had become the theme of the Civil Rights movement, "We shall overcome!"

I was a democrat after that.

Illegal marriage

When Elvie and I were married in 1962 our marriage was illegal in many states. It is interesting that Vermont was the *only* state never to introduce such legislation against "miscegenation," marriage between people of different races. Interesting also that Vermont in its first constitution was the first state to outlaw slavery. I just learned this a few years ago listening to film maker Ken Burns give a talk on CSPAN, the cable network that covers and public affairs programming. Anti-miscegenation laws were finally struck down in 1967, although 13 states still had laws against interethnic marriage, and these were not struck down until 2000!

The words in the Constitution and Bill of Rights, written by slaveholders yet promising freedom, toleration and full citizenship to all are the most precious and liberating political words ever written. But they can take a long painful time to exert their power. I remain passionate about those words. They have helped create the longest continuously surviving political system in the world today.

It is amazing more than two centuries after our country was founded as the united States tried to impose democracy instantly on Iraq, to consider how long it took this country to end slavery, give women the vote and *begin* to end discrimination. The job is still not done.

Moving toward radical politics

I met the mysterious John M. Weatherwax in the mid 1960s. A thin, very courtly person, he lived near Los Angeles City College where I was taking some courses in the evenings. He had been involved in producing little booklets about Black history that he said had been used in the Freedom Schools in the South during the civil rights activity in the summer of 1964. He intended to produce more booklets that contained less text and more illustrations. Their format and production was very simple. A complete booklet was contained on a single legal size sheet printed on both sides. Printed with black ink, the booklets were easily reproducible on the small offset presses then becoming popular. Copy machines were not at that time readily available. The booklets could be easily folded using desktop folding machines, or they could be hand-folded as part of a community education effort. Take a legal size sheet, 8.5"x14," and fold it in half along the 14" dimension, then in half again. Then staple it in the center with a commonly available stapler and use a butter knife to cut the fold for the back two pages. I helped him to design, typeset and lay out a half a dozen booklets of which I don't have any copies.

Weatherwax's wife Sema had formerly worked for Ansel Adams as a darkroom assistant, he was quick to tell me. Whenever I visited his house and Sema would come into the room, he had told me beforehand that we would stop whatever we were talking

about and talk about something Sema might be interested in, revealing nothing about our conversation. I found that behavior curious. There was a solicitous and quiet spoken manner about this thin older guy who was a major league name-dropper.

He told me stories about how earlier in his life he had lived in Mexico and had entertained the writer D. H. Lawrence at his house. He said he knew Diego Rivera and had collaborated on a book with him. Weatherwax showed me a few original Rivera sketches. And here we were working together. Interesting.

John had found a fine black artist named Arthur Smith to do many illustrations for a couple of his booklets. I produced those for Weatherwax. And after that we drifted apart.

John knew of a perfect place where we could print them. He took me one day to an apparently run-down shack at the corner of Century Boulevard and Figueroa in Watts, near the heart of the poor Black community in Los Angeles. Its well-weathered outside walls had not been painted since it was built at least fifty years before.

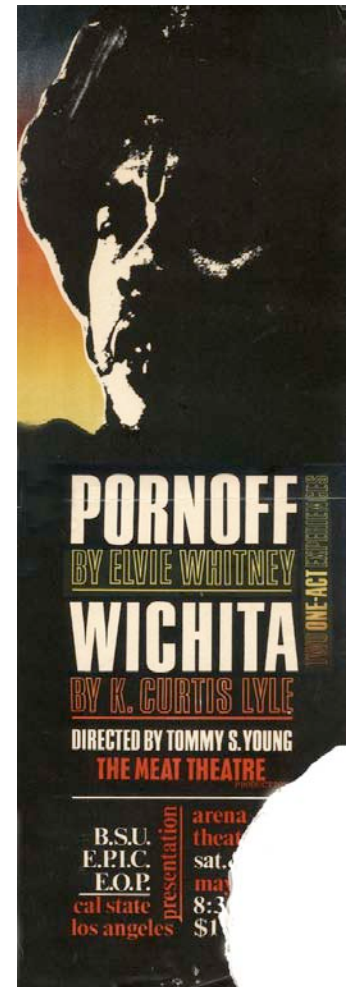
Inside was O'Neil Cannon, the man of African descent who owned the unlikely structure that housed a neat printing operation. He had some typesetting equipment and a 17"x 22" MGD offset press that was perfect for printing the booklets. He also had one of the early Addressograph-Multigraph tabletop typesetting machines. O'Neil explained one day that the lack of paint and on the outside was a camouflage defense against anyone thinking there was something valuable inside. And it worked for him. The shop had not been robbed.

He also mentioned to me after we got to know each other that he had been involved for a long time with the Communist Party, which made me wonder about Weatherwax, but he didn't tell me any details and I did not ask Weatherwax about that.

I did a lot of printing there for various good causes after my relationship with Weatherwax ended. One of the projects I printed were posters and flyers for a play about Angela Davis, the Black Communist professor, written by my wife Elvie Whitney.

The playwright and her family put it on the line

Elvie became a playwright, and named her itinerant company the Meat Theatre. Her first play was named Pornoff about an enigmatic character who couldn't seem to fit in anywhere. She found a fine director named Tommy Young, who directed three



My wife became a playwright. Above is one of the first posters I ever designed and printed at O'Neil Cannon's shop. Later I did posters for Elvie's courtroom drama "Angela is Happening," about Angela Davis, a Black philosophy professor who at the time was on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list. You could call it non-electoral politics. We had 40 actors; some had been in movies and others never on the stage. They were seated throughout the audience and would jump up when their turn came. It was great theatre for a year. Angela was found to be not guilty of anything. And Elvie and I and dozens of others had stood up for freedom in a time of turmoil.

of Elvie's plays.

Elvie's most memorable production was "Angela is Happening," a courtroom drama about black professor Angela Davis who had fled underground and was hiding from the FBI at the time because they thought she had assisted in a bank robbery in Marin County, California, in which four people were killed including a judge. She was on the FBI's Top Ten Most Wanted list, and there was nation-wide F.B.I. search underway for her during the entire run of the play.

The play had thirty actors: some had never acted before; others were experienced in the movies like William Marshall who took the role of Frederick Douglass (I think it was his best role ever); and some became regulars in movies and television in future years. It brought to life various historical "friends of the court" who were seated in costume



Members of the jury in the courtroom drama "Angela is Happening," written by Elvie Whitney and staged at the Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles in the late 1960s.

throughout the audience where the action was. They would jump up when their turn came. It was great theatre that played to packed houses of the most politically radical people in Los Angeles – old white Communists, young Black communists and activists, socialists and other assorted radicals - at the Olympic Auditorium, then toured local college campuses.

Our boys were four and five at the time and recall being somewhat frightened by the action in the audience: guns going off, people running, etc. Elvie's play was printed in "The Disinherited; Plays" edited by Abe C. Ravitz, published by the Dickenson Publishing Company, 1974, Encino, California. ISBN: 0822100487.

Were we paranoid? You bet.

We were certain we had had undercover agents from a few police agencies trying to get involved in the play. For example, we had put out the word for a folk singer. A white guy came by the house one day with his guitar and sang us a social action folk song that sounded like he had made it up special. We listened, nodded our heads, and then were

shocked to hear him turn and ask me “Where are the guns?” Oh boy! “We don’t have any guns,” I told him. We quickly thanked him for coming, ushered him out and never heard from him again. Our weapon was our art.

A white woman said she had been vacationing on the coast of Spain with her husband who was an art dealer, and figured she wanted to come back to Los Angeles and get involved. This woman was Swedish, smart, beautiful, an excellent writer and was centrally involved in producing the play. In my paranoid moments I figured she was the perfect CIA plant.

Then another day a few people came by. One Black guy in the group expressed interest in becoming involved. I distrusted him for four reasons: the ineptness of his questions and comments, his perfectly neat and ironed clothes, his short haircut and his spit-shined army shoes.

In addition, whenever there was a public event, there was some black guy who was a photographer who was always snapping pictures we never saw printed anywhere. He would take them so they showed buildings in the background that made it easy to identify the locations of the shots.

All this was happening during a time in the Nixon administration when it was denied that there was domestic spying going on. Yet here we were dealing with odd characters like these. It turned out in later years that the federal government admitted that there had been spying going on during the very months we had been doing the play. They called “COINTELPRO,” an acronym for the secret Counter Intelligence Program that the Federal Bureau of Investigation was running to investigate and disrupt dissident political organizations in the country. Wikipedia has a good discussion of it. And within the state of California it was revealed in newspaper articles that there had been agents who would float from one jurisdiction to another. We were not surprised. We had experienced them.

We were not doing anything illicit or illegal. We did stand up on the social frontlines and called out the message loud and clear that this is a free country and people should speak up for their rights. There were big issues at stake here and people have to be willing to speak out for what is right. It was a thrilling chapter in our lives. We were artists promoting social change. Angela Davis was caught in New York City in August 1970, and freed eighteen months later, and was subsequently cleared of all charges in 1972 by an all-white jury.

There were big issues at stake here and people have to be willing to speak out, to stand up for what is right. It was a thrilling chapter in our lives.

Democratic Political Campaigns

In Los Angeles I became involved in helping to elect Black candidates to the state legislature. We were successful in helping Frank Holoman go to the Assembly. Primarily I would design brochures and other campaign pieces. During that time I became aware of one man who was fortunately on our side who specialized in campaign hit pieces. These

would feature rumor, smears and half-truths that would be put out in flyers and distributed door to door or mailed in the last week of a campaign to attempt to swing an election. This specialist was informally and fondly nicknamed named "Willard the Rat." Eventually he successfully ran for the California Assembly after at least twenty years of precinct work in Central Los Angeles.

I worked in John Dalessio's unsuccessful campaign for Congress. And I worked in the campaign of Tom Braden, a former CIA operative who was running for Congress. He lost. Later he became a radio commentator.

Who is more conservative than an environmentalist?

I did not leave conservative ideas in the dust, I embraced them. I became an environmentalist! I met Ray Tretheway in Sacramento in the early 1980s when he and I and a few dozen other people were starting the Sacramento Tree Foundation. Ray had what I think was the perfect political self-definition. He said that he was a Republican but he had hardly found any good candidates to vote for, so he usually voted democratic.

Most conservatives today are *not* environmentalists. They are the opposite, which shows that you have to watch people's behavior closely, not what they call themselves, in order to make smart decisions about whom to support in the political arena. With a nod to George Orwell in his book "1984," political words today often mean their opposite.

For those of us who take words seriously – who have not caved in to George Orwell's doublespeak, I offer the following analysis. What is more conservative than preserving the capacity of the environment to provide bountifully for us in future years? How about to the seventh generation, as some Native American groups plan for? What is more conservative than getting government to help keep our air clean by making our automobiles more efficient since the auto companies will not do it. What is more conservative than funding the development of energy alternatives to Middle East

ob-
and
ited
irst-
do
Jarn
You
walk
ople
inc-
next
und
ible
nto.
wn-

ing
ome
and

ush
r or
and
big
re-
l its
o of
een
and
, he
that
ree
ice-
can
ena
rm-
, of
that
ent
tal-
lan
any
; of
>go
eli-
> be
nty
part
: its
I EI
her
e a
on,
nas
ing

l of
the
eat
ve-
/ho
i R

ese
, or
05,
64-
rg.

For action on improving flood control, elect

Tom Whitney
Trustee, American River Flood Control District

- ✓ Overdue flood safety improvements are urgently needed at Folsom Dam to release water earlier during storms
 - lowering the spillways, and
 - enlarging the river outlets.
- ✓ Raise the American River levees.
- ✓ Support consistent 200-year flood protection from rivers and streams in newly developing areas.
- ✓ Allow communities in flood plain to make their own flood protection decisions!

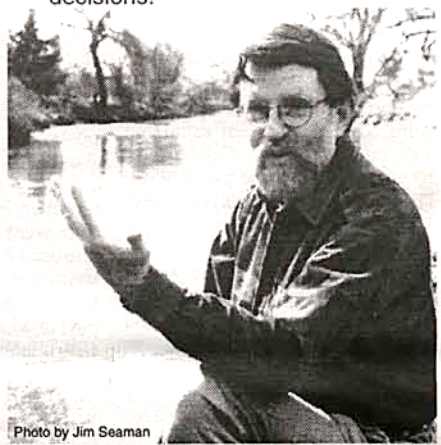


Photo by Jim Seaman

- ☛ Was a consultant in the preparation of the City's Comprehensive Flood Management Plan.
- ☛ Helped develop levee and bank protection policies as a member of the Lower American River Task Force, created by SAFCA.
- ☛ Early advocate of construction of slurry walls for levee reliability along the American River, which is now included in pending federal legislation.
- ☛ Member of the Water Forum, which is developing regional water supply solutions that will also protect the American River fisheries & Parkway.
- ☛ Co-Chair of the Environmental Council of Sacramento.
- ☛ The News & Review in an article about Tom said: *"Tom Whitney has a deep sense of commitment to his community and a seemingly boundless supply of energy."*

Tom Whitney
for Trustee, American River Flood Control District

Endorsed by: Marc Brown, Eva Butler, Bea Cooley, Heather Fargo, Tom & Glenda Higgins, Phil Isenberg, Jim Jones, Jennifer Jennings, Peter Keat, Kay Knepprath, Ann Kohl, Vicki Lee, Clyde Macdonald, David Mogavero, Alan Owen, Steve Sanders, Carolyn Simon, Jim Seaman, Darrell Steinberg, Alta & Del Tura, Brooks Truitt, Tom Winter, Linda Whitney

Paid for by Friends of Tom Whitney

oil? What is more conservative than *not* running up the national debt more than any other presidents before them and obligating future generations of grandchildren to pay as Reagan and Bush have done, all the while mouthing rhetoric about small government.

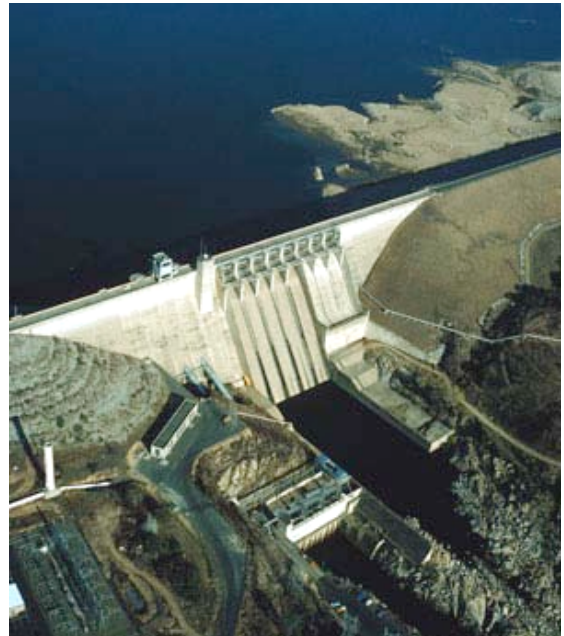
I am a fiscal conservative, environmental conservative, civil rights conservative (meaning I will protect them fiercely) – and a social democrat.

Running for public office

Flood control is a huge issue in Sacramento. The land is flat and bisected by two major rivers. The City is protected by an extensive system of levees, like New Orleans. After the Katrina flood in New Orleans there was analysis that Sacramento is the next most likely city to flood because of its levee system. The Sacramento River runs north to south in the great Central Valley of California. The American drains west from Sierra mountain streams and merges with the Sacramento at the point near the first settled area in the region, the present city of Sacramento.

Having spent much time testifying before relatively uninformed people on many elected boards, councils and commissions, I felt it was time more authentic environmentalists were represented on them. So I decided to take the plunge.

It was a tremendous experience for me. Mr. Citizen goes for it. Throughout my adult life I had helped various candidates for public office, including Heather Fargo, then Sacramento's mayor. In Heather's last election to the City Council before successfully running for mayor, I designed her campaign literature. In Sacramento I had become acquainted with many elected people and I had a good feeling about them as honest, well-meaning people, as I was. You hear people complaining about politics as being corrupt. Not in Sacramento!



Folsom Dam, that protects Sacramento from floods on the American River. I was elected and became a board member of the flood control agency that controlled the dam.

I had studied the flood control issues there for years. I ran and was elected as a Trustee of the American River Flood Control District with the highest vote total among five running for that office. It has responsibility for maintenance of levees in an urban area potentially affecting a couple of hundred thousand people if they should fail.

I had little to spend on the campaign. I ended up spending approximately \$1,500 putting ads in the Bee and other local and neighborhood papers. I was very surprised how much assistance I received from the Democratic Party organization. They distributed my flyers district-wide to every voter's house. That was a tremendous help. I had been a registered Democrat: on that basis they gave me help. It was that simple.

Through the experience I learned the value of helping to do precinct work for your political party. This meant to me walking door-to-door distributing literature. It really

helps to make the electoral system work. It greases the wheels of democracy. You don't see much in the papers about it. But without it the political system wouldn't function.

Virginia Moose has for decades played a largely quiet and unsung role in facilitating environmentalists getting into Democratic politics. I am grateful for her tremendous assistance to me. She followed me on to the American River Flood Control District Board.

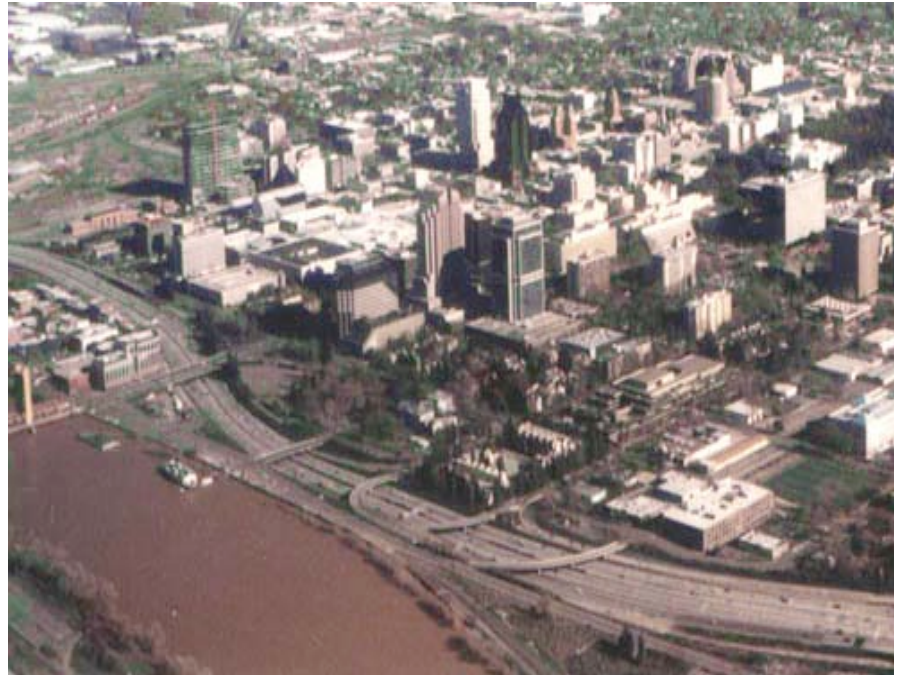
Appointed to Sacramento Flood Control Agency Board

The District appointed Clyde Macdonald and I as their representatives on the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency Board. That was thrilling. I had a vote that counted as much as each County Supervisor and City Council person who sat at those monthly-televised meetings. Here we were responsible for very big life and death decisions. I was ready for the task.

Do we go for a billion dollar Auburn Dam, or fix the levees and beef up Folsom Dam? My research had shown that we must fix the levees first. I was an early advocate for putting slurry walls in the levees.

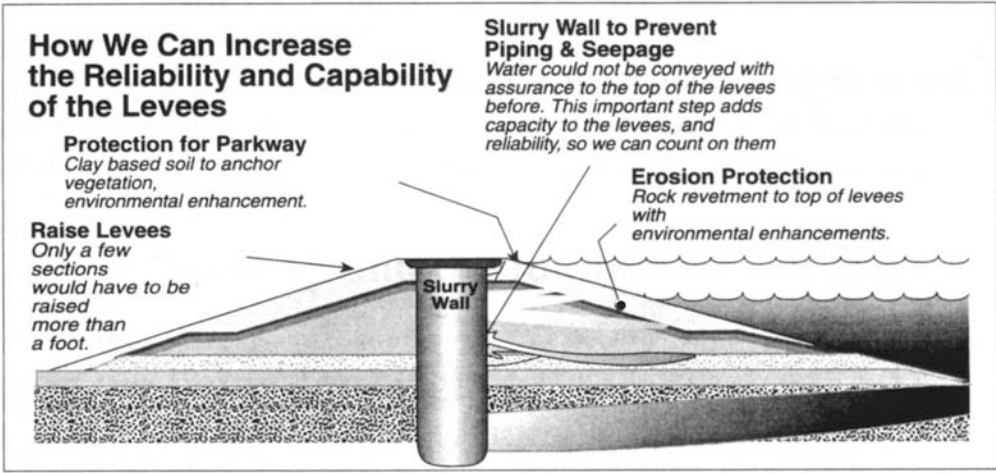
Do we take steps toward responsible environmental policies in the American River Parkway and the Sacramento River, or should we let Fish and Game handle it, as the Sutter county representative recommended. I was very proud to support what I felt was an excellent, though not perfect, record that SAFCA built in its environmental initiatives.

I was on the board during the high water time of 1997. The emergency command center at the top floor of the convention center was activated. There was round-the-clock monitoring of the river and briefings a couple times a day. Those greatly enlarged flood maps were mounted on the walls. It was a time of high drama. But we were spared.



Sacramento development began at the waters' edge near the confluence of the two major rivers that bisect Sacramento – the American, draining from the Sierra mountains, and the Sacramento, in the midst of the great Central Valley. The urban area is kept dry by levees. The photograph above was taken during the time of high water in early 1997, and you can see that levees are close to overtopping at the lower left of the photograph.

What was needed, in my view, was a systemic solution: fix all the levees bordering urban development and strengthen Folsom Dam.



Tom Whitney, Environmental Council of Sacramento



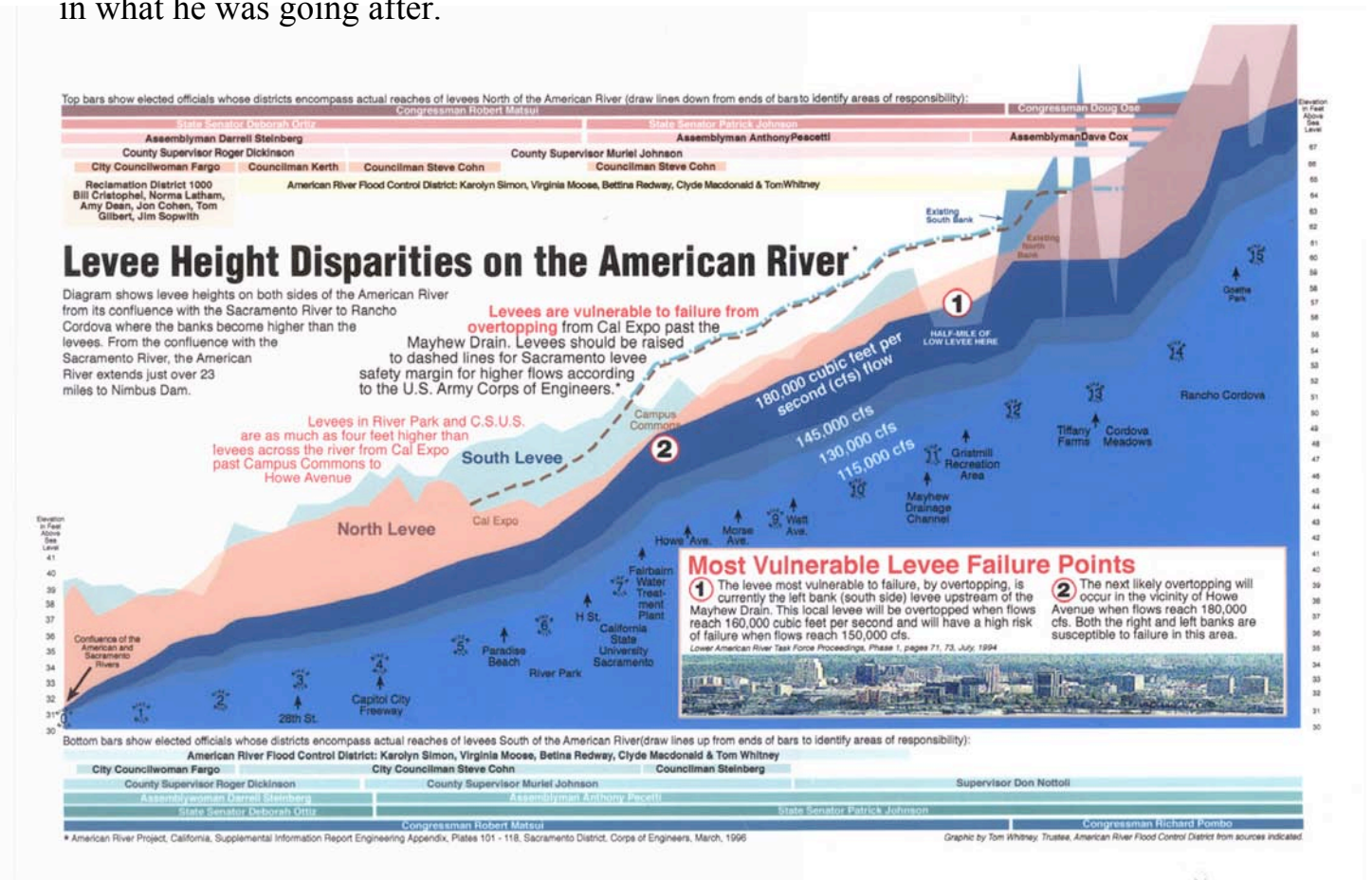
One issue I pursued was the idea of slurry walls in the levees, shown in a diagram above. Sacramento is the second most likely city to flood after New Orleans due to its extensive levee system. The idea was floated in a Lower American River Task Force meeting and I did what I could to support it vigorously in the community. The photograph on the lower right shows the slurry slots being excavated and filled. The upper photograph shows the slurry being created. The slurry is a mixture of water, bentonite clay and dirt that form a barrier that is impervious to water. It was a thrill to study the issue, promote it in the community, and become elected by the citizens to deal with it and vote for and watch millions of dollars being spent to do the right thing before disaster had happened. In 2006 there are concerns that the slurry walls were not deep enough; that water is seeping under them.

I found it to be an exhilarating experience sitting on public agency boards. As an advocate sitting in the audience one can boil over at times hearing public officials saying things that made little sense, or that showed a lack of understanding of the issues. Sitting among the elected people, then when I heard such comments, I was able to ask for the floor to confront what they had said and offer an alternative view. Butch Hodgkins, SAFCA Executive Director at the time, said that having me on the SAFCA Board, because I was at that time also the Environmental council of Sacramento Chair, made it easier for him in talking with people



The emergency operations center at the Sacramento Convention Center that was activated in December 1997.

in Congress and various State and Federal agencies because he was able to point to the solid environmentalist presence on his Board and explain that he had to include our issues in what he was going after.



Telling the flood danger story with diagrams

My most effective contributions were in graphic design. Over a three-month period on my own time I interpreted a set of huge maps, each showing only a few miles of one side of the American River, and reduced 29 miles of levees to fit a single 8.5 x 14 piece of paper! This and walking the levees led me to discover that the height of the levees running through the urban area were many feet different in height at points across the river from one another. Packed on the same legal size sheet I put bars that showed each elected person's district as it related to each mile of the American River. It graphically portrayed the collective responsibility of them all, including myself

I introduced the diagram at a SAFCA executive committee meeting as I sat next to Supervisor Muriel Johnson, a Republican who had been a supporter of the Auburn Dam that we felt was the wrong solution. She was also the SAFCA Board Chair. When I explained that one part of her district would get flooded at a time of high flow but the other side would not, I think in that instant she became a born-again levee-strengthening advocate contrary to what the Republicans wanted. Subsequently when she went to Washington to lobby, Butch Hodgkins, the SAFCA Executive Director, said that she supported funding for levee strengthening and equalization because she had to protect her

constituents equally on each side of the river. This was a definite advantage of having been elected.

It was still a pretty complicated graphic, and hard to read here. It was laid out lengthwise on the legal size page, and also enlarged to about 3 feet by 4 feet and used in public meetings. SAFCA used an aerial photograph of the levees with text labels to show where the differences in heights were when they prepared a brochure to focus public attention on the importance of the levee work.

Victory on Dry Creek



Dry Creek after the victory. On the left the levee is being finished at its original location.

Land use politics could get nasty in Sacramento. I worked with many other advocates as a minor player in defeating what I now saw as an unfortunate proposal to build housing in the Dry Creek floodway. Developers there wanted to move the levees inward and restrict the floodway to accomplish this. It had been a ten-year battle.

At one point during the fight Bob Slobe, then North Sacramento Chamber of Commerce President called me a racist in his Chamber newsletter because I opposed his development that would provide housing for seniors and people with low incomes many of whom were of African descent. I was amazed at his lack of civility. He was desperate, I guess. The charge was absurd on its face. My first wife was a person of African descent, and my two sons are. I didn't go hat in hand to Slobe asking for equal time in his precious newsletter. You win some you lose some. You have to develop a thick skin. I later made sure I was quoted in the News & Review, a weekly paper of much larger circulation, as saying, "Mother Nature isn't racist; she will flood black and white people indiscriminately, and she will have the last laugh about this year's engineering calculations." Anyway, that battle was won, finally.

Politics: work with your opponents to hammer out acceptable solutions.

I came to recognize how essential it is to listen to diverse points of view. You have to be willing to challenge your own beliefs and learn from real world criticism.

One of my proudest moments in Sacramento was when I stood up with Kim Dellinger of the Building Industry Association (B.I.A.) two times together at the podium on one afternoon in the Board of Supervisors' chambers: once to read the Land Use Policy #14 (LU14) and again for the urban services boundary policy text. Both were extremely contentious issues.

LU14 was a negotiation that I initiated. I was a vigorous advocate as a representative of the Environmental Council of Sacramento (E.C.O.S.) of land use policies that would concentrate higher density housing along public transit corridors. Because I had been involved in County-sponsored meetings where new General Plan policies were discussed

but citizen input was never incorporated, I decided to try a new tack. I, while working for Sacramento Regional Transit in the marketing, not the planning department, set up meetings with Regional Transit Planning, the B.I.A., the Labor and Business Alliance and Sacramento Open Space to negotiate density numbers to include in LU14. Without numbers to measure against, and “shoulds” in policy language I feel that vague policies are meaningless. The B.I.A representative was Mike Winn. We came up with numbers we could all live with.

So this particular meeting at the Board of Supervisors was highly unusual – unheard of! - because Kim and other B.I.A. people and I had so often opposed one another publicly, at times heatedly. Before this particular General Plan meeting started, Kim and I talked with a few of the Supervisors. Jim Streng, who tended to vote with developers, being a former developer himself, saw us and said: “I hear you two have come to some agreement. That’s good. Anything the B.I.A and E.C.O.S. can agree on has my vote!” Jim Streng was a very good man. A little later Kim and I stood up together and supported the LU14 policy. They approved it. Bang!

Subsequently through the years, as each development has come to the Board of Supervisors, there has been a paragraph on the face sheet that tells the consistency of the proposed development with policy LU14. After I left Sacramento I felt it was a legacy I had left behind. An E.C.O.S. or Sierra Club person did not have to be there every time pointing out that a proposed development was inconsistent with an important County policy. This policy was intended to sculpt the densities near public transit over the decades so people could walk to buses and light rail as they do in Europe.

The Urban Services Boundary policy took some hasty effort at the last minute. Originally county staff proposed the element that called for the boundary. When I heard about it I was again very pleased with senior County Planning staff. Their sensible rationale was that we needed to be able to rationally plan costly infrastructure like sewer and water supply lines, which often take decades in planning, funding and construction. Thus land needed to be built up within reach of this costly infrastructure before extending into farmland further.



Here I am standing up with Kimberly Dellinger of the Building Industry Association promoting a land use policy limiting urban sprawl in front of the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors. Both environmentalists and developers agreed on the policy and I was the primary promoter of the unprecedented agreement. In a hushed session immediately before this, I had taken the lead and knocked down a number of points B.I.A wanted included at the last minute. When we got up to speak to the supervisors, Kim took the lead, which was fine with me.

What made it acceptable to the development community was that there really was plenty of capacity within the line for the next twenty years.

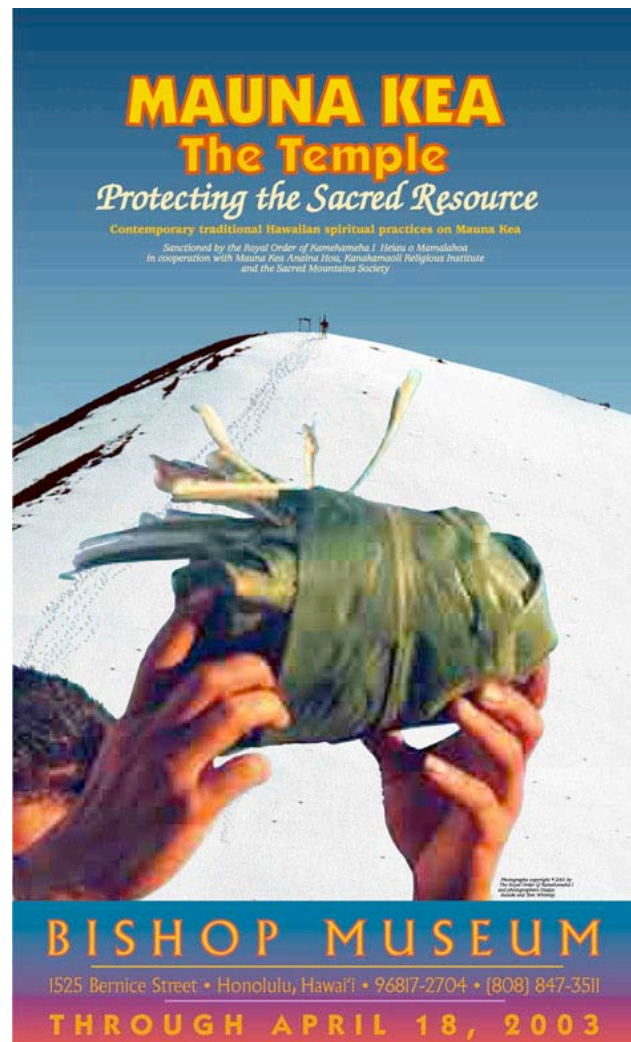
But our side thought there needed to be more guarantees in the text that the boundary would not be breached. We talked about it among ourselves and added some language, then talked with B.I.A and made some adjustment and came to agreement. So I had thought we had it settled.

But the day before this Supervisors' meeting, B.I.A had sent a letter outlining some other policies they wanted ECOS to agree with. I had glanced at the letter but had not read it until Kim, upset, gave me a copy there in the back of the Chamber while the Supervisors' meeting was going on after our LU14 victory. I had to talk her out of getting our agreement on *three* policies as we were crouched down whispering behind the back row of seats. At one point we got up and had a hushed conversation with one developer whom I knew who confirmed my rationale why one of their policies was not a big issue. And we had a few more words about changes in the boundary policy. During this fierce hushed conversation in whispers I was taking the lead. When it got to be time for the Urban Services Boundary presentation, we went to the podium, and Kim spoke up assertively, taking the lead. Kim read off what we had fashioned. There was a little awkwardness in the language. But the Supervisors approved our language immediately. Our words! Such an important policy! It was a satisfying feeling.

So imagine my shock coming to Hawai'i, having just been elected and served two exhilarating years in public office within the great U.S. democratic system – to find that many Hawaiians are actively hostile against the United States! Why? It is an old story often repeated but not well taught in high school history books. The U.S. unceremoniously took over Hawai'i and locked the queen in her room for five months in 1895 while the schemers perfected their nefarious plot, which was successful.

The U.S. has done to Hawai'i, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Panama and the Philippines what our forebears in Vermont did to the Abenaki, the Missisquoi/ Sokoki, the Kokasec and possibly the Winnepesaukee and the Owasuck: just rolled right over them!

I met a Native Hawaiian named Kimo Pihana. He liked my photographs and invited



me to accompany him and other Hawaiians as they performed sunrise ceremonies on solstice and equinox days on their sacred Mauna Kea. The Hawaiians were asserting their spiritual hegemony over the highest mountain in Hawaii where under University of Hawai'i auspices for forty years 13 nations had built eleven telescopes. The 13,796-foot peak is one of the best sites on the planet to look at the stars. But according to a State Auditor's report in 1998, the university had not met its obligations to respect the Hawaiian community. And the university and NASA, the national Aeronautics and Space Agency, wanted to expand the number of telescopes!

I started photographing the thrilling ceremonies regularly. A few years later I consulted my political crystal ball. The Hawaiians kept making the point that they had a spiritual connection to the mountain. But the various university, state and federal agencies involved could not understand it. They were talking a different language. My crystal ball said: do a museum exhibition. Immerse people, especially those administrators and officials, in a spiritual experience. With dozens of friends, we did that! Subsequently some of the negotiations about the mountain between Hawaiians and the University were held in the museum. So that was thrilling: attempting to inject a spiritual dimension into politics. 🌸



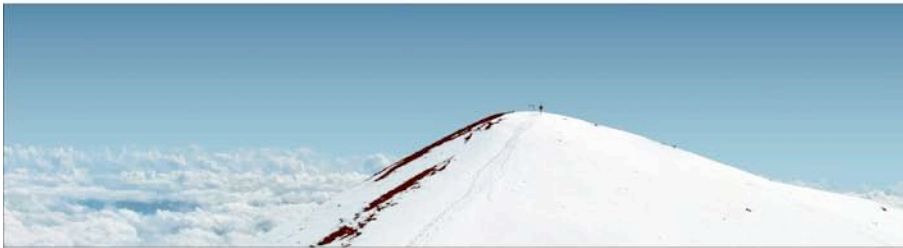
During a sunrise ceremony on a winter solstice morning in 2004 Hawaiians are placing offerings called ho'okupu on a wooden altar called a lele that was placed by Hawaiians on the top of 13,796 foot Mauna Kea.



The Honolulu Advertiser

MORNING FINAL
Circulation: 10,000
Neighbor Islands: 750
© Copyright 2003

WEDNESDAY / January 8, 2003 / HAWAII'S NEWSPAPER / honoluluadvertiser.com



A Hawaiian warrior stands watch after ho'okupu, or offerings to the ancestors, were placed on the lele (altar) on the highest part of Mauna Kea on winter solstice day Dec. 21, 1999. This highest point was named Kukuhau'ula by ancient Hawaiians, honoring the god Ku. The summit is now called Pu'u Wekuu.



Cultural practitioner Harold Kaula participates in a winter solstice ceremony at dawn on December 21, 2000, the last spiritual gathering of Hawaiians on Mauna Kea during the previous millennium.

Spirit of Mauna Kea

By Michael Tsai
Advertiser Staff Writer

It's a photography exhibition about a uniquely Native Hawaiian subject, shot by a person who is neither a photographer by profession nor, for that matter, a Native Hawaiian. What then to make of California transplant Tom Whitney and the powerful images he has collected for "Mauna Kea, the Temple: Protecting the Sacred Resource," opening Friday at Bishop Museum?

First, Whitney stresses, the content - the essential stuff of the photos - comes from Native Hawaiian groups who have conducted ceremonies in the upper regions of the 13,796-foot volcano as a way of asserting the legitimacy of their native beliefs in the face of technological encroachment.

For members of the exhibit's sponsors - Mauna Kea Anaina Hou, the Royal Order of Kamehameha I, Kahakamaoli Religious Institute, Makaainana Foundation and the Sacred Mountains Society - Mauna Kea is central to Native Hawaiian beliefs about creation.

Frustrated by what they saw as cultural insensitivity in the expansion **See MAUNA KEA, E3**

'Mauna Kea, The Temple: Protecting the Sacred Resource'

- ◆ A collection of photographs, art, audio, video and text depicting contemporary traditional Hawaiian spiritual customs practiced on Mauna Kea
- ◆ Second floor, Castle Hall, Bishop Museum
- ◆ Friday through April
- ◆ Adults, \$14.95; children ages 4 through 12, \$11.95; children younger than 4, free, special rates for kama'aina, seniors and military
- ◆ Information: 847-3511 or www.bishopmuseum.org

Mauna Kea: Exhibit honors values

of astronomical equipment on the volcano. Hawaiian groups erected a wooden altar at the summit in 1998 and have been conducting solstice and equinox ceremonies there ever since.

The exhibit depicts these ceremonies with particular emphasis on the ways in which they represent an ongoing relationship between native peoples and native lands.

The photographs and accompanying text - based on conversations with and between Hawaiian practitioners - were supplied by Whitney, 63, a retired graphic designer and environmental activist. The effect, exhibit sponsors say, is authentically Hawaiian.

"This is about Hawaiians, by Hawaiians," says Paul Neves, Ali'i amoku of the Royal Order of Kamehameha I, one of the groups presenting the exhibit. "If you want to know how Hawaiians think, read our words on the walls of the exhibition."

Whitney, who headed the Environmental Council of Sacramento, an environmental lobbying group, moved to the Big Island four years ago to reunite with his ex-wife, Betsy. He said he spent his first six months in Hawaii reading and exploring the island with his camera.

"Mostly it was pretty scenery," he said. But other aspects of what he saw raised troubling questions. "There were some fascinating footprints of ancient Hawaiians in the lava at the Ka'u desert, and petroglyphs of Hawaiian

warriors at Volcanoes National Park - but where were the Hawaiians?"

Whitney eventually came across Pamela Frierson's book, "The Burning Island," and became interested in the author's observation that the modern environmental movement too often disregarded the connection between humans and the land.

Shortly after, Whitney watched the Merrie Monarch Parade in Hilo and was intrigued by a man he saw in a traditional Hawaiian malo.

"He was neither smiling nor frowning," Whitney said. "He looked like he had been deposited here by a time machine. Fascinating."

Whitney snapped a picture, and later tracked down the man, Kimo Pihana, to ask permission to use the photograph.

Pihana "said he felt the picture showed how he sees himself as (he) pursues his own journey to recover his Hawaiian roots," Whitney said. The two became friends, and Pihana invited Whitney to document the Royal Order of Kamehameha I's ceremonies on Mauna Kea.

Whitney's first visit to the volcano sparked an interest in the personalized ways in which Native Hawaiians expressed their spirituality.

"The exhibit arose out of a series of accidents, but it also included an intent on my part," Whitney said.

Aware of the implications of his work, he took special care to ensure that his images and

words maintained the integrity of his subjects.

"Typically, I would take a bunch of pictures and show them to the people I came to know," he said. "They would critique the photos. There was a long period of coaching that I received. This is a very sensitive issue in Hawaii. ... By showing these pictures, maybe people will understand the depth of feeling Hawaiians have for the land and for the ancient values."

Whitney said he developed a particular interest in alu and lele, traditional altars for Hawaiian offerings, called ho'okupu.

"I did a lot of research, and there's virtually nothing written about alu and lele, yet they are in constant use by a lot of groups," he said. "There's no organized Hawaiian church or bible, and people tend to approach their spiritual beliefs on a personal basis. It's difficult for outsiders to get a glimmer of that."

Whitney said he was careful not to filter too much of the experiences through his own perspective. The lengthy texts that accompany his photographs largely are based on the words shared by his hosts on the volcano.

Guy Kaulukukui, Bishop Museum vice president of cultural studies, cautions that the exhibit reflects the beliefs and customs of specific groups with which Whitney worked, "not the totality of the Native Hawaiian people."

Yet, Kaulukukui said, "The exhibit is stunning. They're really good photos."

If you would like a copy of the 12-page document describing the Hawaiian spiritual values we documented in the exhibition, please email me at <whitneye001@hawaii.rr.com>.

If you are interested in my 65-page story of environmental political involvement in Sacramento, on a CD, ask for that, send your address and five bucks to cover the time to copy and mail it. Print version \$20

Tom Whitney
137 Kuakolu Place
Hilo, HI
96720
(808) 933-1198