

McINERNEY FOUNDATION

Bank of Hawaii, Trustee

Historical Note

The McInerney Foundation is one of the largest charitable foundations in the State of Hawai'i. Its funds originated from the estates of twin brothers, William and James McInerney, and their older sister, Ella McInerney, whose wealth was generated in large part by a distinguished clothing establishment in the city of Honolulu.

The story starts in 1857 when Patrick Michael McInerney, an Irishman by birth and a ship's carpenter by trade, landed in the Hawaiian Islands after a long voyage from his native County Clare. In Honolulu he found a number of fellow countrymen working in the building trades. He also found a lovely Irish girl, by the name of Mary Brady. On July 29, 1860, Patrick and Mary were married at the Fort Street Catholic Church.

Marriage apparently changed Patrick's life, in two ways. He and Mary settled down to raise a family. Ella was born in 1861, Edward in 1864, and the twins, William and James, in 1867. Also, Patrick switched jobs. In 1864 he obtained, from the Kingdom of Hawai'i, a retail license to operate a store on Beretania Street, just off Maunakea. From that and expanded quarters at the corner of Beretania and Maunakea, McInerney provided every sort of clothing for ladies and gentlemen, from caps and bonnets to work boots and dainty slippers. His merchandise was good, his prices were fair, and he acquired an envious reputation for selling only quality goods and always standing behind his merchandise. It was an unbeatable combination, and by its second decade in business, McInerney was patronized by everyone, including the King of Hawai'i. When Patrick McInerney died in 1896, he left his family well endowed with a thriving business, extensive parcels of land, and stock in Honoka'a Sugar Plantation.

Meanwhile the children grew up to be healthy, hard working and, perhaps because they were constantly relating to the public during business hours, valued their privacy. Ella, William and James did not marry, but they were not the recluses. Their annual holiday parties were among the major events on Honolulu's social calendar, and they frequently entertained and were entertained. When it came to charity and assistance to those in need, however, they insisted on anonymity.



William



James

Ella led a quiet life within her circle of close friends, raising a *hanai* Japanese daughter, and traveling extensively. When Ella died in 1942, her will provided for a number of private bequests, but the bulk of her considerable fortune went into a newly organized trust she and her twin brother had set up in 1937.

The twins, William and James, were identical twins who delighted in the possibility of fun and mystification by wearing similar suits, ties and shoes, and sporting matching close-cropped mustaches. They were so alike in appearance that even their closest relatives could seldom tell them apart. When they were in the store, friends and customers had a better chance of telling them apart, for James specialized in haberdashery and William in shoes.

Although the twins could generally be found at work in the store, they did have other civic interests. Both being golfers, James went to bat with the City to provide golfing facilities for low income golfers. He also contributed his time and considerable energy to the promotion of tourism throughout the Islands. William was elected to the Territorial Legislature where he made an impact on a variety of health and welfare issues. Both twins, in their business and civic relationships, exhibited a particularly valuable ability – they could take a stand, not always a popular one, yet avoid making enemies.



McInerny Foundation, which was set up in 1937, reflects the lessons William and James learned in their lives as merchants and as community leaders. They placed the control of the foundation in the hands of an organization they knew and trusted (Bishop Trust Company, now Bank of Hawaii) and left it up to the trustee to handle investments and to choose, as the three members of the Distribution Committee and three alternates, members of the community who were aware of a broad range of educational, social and welfare needs and had the energy to investigate proposals and the ability to fairly judge the results.

The McInerny brothers did express certain definite guidelines for the Distribution Committee. The income from the three combined estates was to be distributed exclusively to charity, but they specifically excluded contributions to politics and religion which they considered were adequately supported by their own constituencies. The twins indicated their wish to help people rather than build institutions, and they gave the Distribution Committee flexibility to recognize and respond positively to innovative programs, to be free to sow seed money when and where it would be most productive, rather than routinely support long-standing charities or entrenched organizations.

Today, McInerny Foundation is honored for its generous contributions to education and social services to which most of their grantmaking is allocated, while the balance of their funding is distributed for arts and culture, health, environment, and other projects.

(Note: Portions of the above excerpt were written by Rhoda E. A. Hackler)