

MPHS explores old Laie cemeteries

About three dozen people, including kupuna, gained new appreciation for the aloha of families and volunteers during the **Mormon Pacific Historical Society's** November 24 tour of five small and previously completely overgrown cemeteries in Laie. In fact, many community residents are still not aware of at least three of the five cemeteries, which have all been partially restored.



That's one of the reasons the MPHS—which since 1980 visits, studies and compiles history associated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Pacific—chose to focus its latest field trip on the five sites.

MPHS board member and historical author **Riley Moffat** explained at the outset that the five cemeteries were all used prior to Zions Securities establishing the current Laie Cemetery about 1922. "We have so many precious ancestors buried around the ahupua'a that it's important the community be aware of them," he said.

The MPHS also invited family descendants to "talk story" about their kupuna's final resting places.

The group first drove about a half-mile up Egg Farm Road to a now-cleared graveyard on the Kahuku side. Most of the graves are outlined with rocks, but only a few have markers. A relatively new sign identifies the place as Pa'akea Cemetery, but Aunt **Dawn Wasson** [pictured in green in the photo on the right], who lives nearby and is related to many of those buried there, said the correct name is Mahunalii Kauaiomano. She also explained the name Pa'akea refers to the nearby 'ili or sub-division of the larger ahupua'a.



"What we're trying to do is preserve the name of the place, because it's not lost," she said.

Aunt **Nellanette Kamauoha Young Araki** [pictured in white in the photo immediately above], 80, whose great-grandfather once owned adjacent property and is buried in the cemetery, recalled years ago her mother warned her nobody could find the place because it would get overgrown. "There's [also] supposed to be a burial cave around here, and different people were buried underground there," she said.

Another relative, **Gladys Pualoa Ahuna**, recalled when she and her first husband lived nearby, "my children were always playing in the graveyard." She added that as a young girl, "we never knew where my grandmother was buried." Another relative directed them to the general area and they cleared the site, "but we're not absolutely sure that's where she is."

Ahuna's sister, **Merren JoJo Au**, told of how she and her husband, **Ben Au**, cut back a big tree and chose what they believed is her grandmother's grave site. "Like my sister said, it doesn't matter where, as long as you're honoring that person. I felt good about it, and selected that site where we put the headstone, because I want my grandchildren and great-grandchildren to know that they need to take care of the grave when I'm gone."

Au noted that when she, **Randolf Kekauoha** and his wife, **Donnette Kekauoha**, started clearing the site, "there were only about 60 graves...and I want you to know we have been good caretakers of this place." She added she would be glad for help, "because it takes a lot to take out one [haole] koa [shrub]."

"There are now 93 graves here, and I'm sure there's more," she continued, pointing out that one of them is entertainer Palani Vaughn's great-grandfather, a Kamauoha descendant. "That's the only other one of about five that we know... A lot of the Apuakehau family are [also] buried here."

"Hawaiian style, you don't only clean your grandmother's grave, you clean everything. Donnette and Randy [Kekauoha] cleaned everything. When I saw it, I cried, and I thought, now I have to come and help take care of it, too. It's a lot of hard work."

Keawe Ka'i'o Stone Miller, who is originally from Laie and whose great-grandparents are buried in the cemetery, also told a little of her family history and the difficulty of identifying their grave sites. "It was all overgrown with haole koa."

Randy Kekauoha, who is originally from Laie but lived for many years in Texas, told of returning home and his increased interest in the cemeteries. "I had a feeling within me to come here and clean this area up, although I didn't know who was buried here. We started in February 2006 and completed this in May of 2006. We spent about four or five hours here each day." He also credited his cousin, JoJo Au, "for really beautifying this area," and thanked Cackle Fresh Egg Farm for helping clear away a lot of the trimmings after they had been cut.

Grace "Maka" Ah Quin Obina of Hauula, a Kamauoha descendant, also pointed out her great-grandmother's grave, and recalled how her mother told her, "when I die, you have to come and clean the grave. We used to come up here all the time and clean... Dawn used to come, too."

"I'm so thankful for JoJo, Randolph and Donnette for cleaning this place. You did a wonderful job, and I'm pretty sure our tutu really appreciate you all."

Before leaving Mahunalii Kauaiomano, Wasson noted that her grandmother, who died in 1917, "was the second to the last person to be buried here."

The MPHS tour next moved on to Mokoiki, the small section of land on the Kahuku-side of Kawainui Stream about 100 yards mauka of Hukilau Surf Shop, where some of **Lucy Kela Kuhia Miller's** [pictured on the right in the photo at the right] ancestors are buried. Before the current Kamehameha Highway was built, the main road and former bridge were closer to the site.



Miller, pointing out the graves of her great-grandmother and her grandmother's children who died when they were small, explained that her ohana were buried in the cool, shady place "because they were very serene...and quiet people" who lived in that area. She added that some of her ancestors were originally from Kohala on the island of Hawaii, and were originally named Naihe. Moving to Kipahulu, Maui, "they heard the gospel from none other than the Hawaiian who joined the [Mormon] Church first, **Jonathan Napela**. This is how they came to Laie."

Miller described her grandmother as "a legend to us, who married the most handsome man in Laie... He knew there was going to be a big school in Laie, but he died before it was built." She also said her family was very committed to maintaining their Hawaiian culture.

"In our line, we have hula masters. They taught hula here," Miller continued, noting that **Pua Ha'aheo** and Tutu **Luika Ka'i'o** were among them. "Every two years we have family reunion, and we come here every time."

She also explained that there are over 200 people buried in the area, which is more properly called LaieWai.

The final three cemeteries, or perhaps more correctly three parts of the same burial area, are located on and by Temple Hill, behind the Laie Hawaii Temple: one on the Kahuku side of the hill, one on the Hauula side, and another most recently cleared graveyard at the base of the hill on the Hauula side. Few people know the last one.

Joaquin Chang of Laie explained how former temple president **D. Arthur Haycock** "with funds generously provided by Honolulu developer **Herbert Horita**" asked him to voluntarily help clear the hill. "I started with my family to assist me to clear this hill in 1994. It was a terrible mess, with nothing but rocks and trash. One of my best assistants was **Warren Soh** [of Kahuku], a retired fire captain who gave me all kinds of help." He added that the 5th Samoan Ward was also "very generous in helping me to landscape."

"I felt this work was like a mission to me, not a church mission, but a mission to assist the spirits placed here and forgotten. I did this work especially for the community and for the pioneers who are buried here," Chang continued. For example, he noted that he and Soh made 300 cement markers, and placed 289 of them "where there were rocks to indicate grave sites."

He also explained that the Kahuku-side cemetery is mostly Latter-day Saints, but the Hauula-side one includes "many, many Orientals and the children of some missionaries."

"I still come up here at least once or twice a month, just to weed-whack around the headstones," Chang said.

Pointing to the most prominent grave on the site, Gladys Ahuna explained that Judge **Lyons Baldwin Nainoa** was named for "two missionaries on the Big Island of Hawaii," hence the Hawaiian name *nā inoa* "the names." She also explained how the Nainoa family is related to the Apuakehau and many of the other Hawaiian families in Laie. "Our Apuakehau family was here before the Church bought the land," she added. "They lived up in the foothills where the streams are. When Laie was first habitated, everything down there [pointing makai] was sandy."

"On that side of the temple [pointing toward Hauula] were the Kekauohas, the Ka'i'os and the Kanahelles; and on this side [pointing toward Kahuku] were the Apuakehaus, the Kamauohas, KaHawaiis and Pukahis."

Another relative, Uncle **Joe Ah Quin** pointed out his great-grandmother's grave. "She died in 1919, and according to my mother was the last one to be buried here." He explained the underlying coral was so hard, "they had to blast to open up the grave, which [noise] interfered with the temple. The temple president then told them this was to be the last burial up here on the hill."

He recalled coming to the area as a child with his mother, when the area was all covered with haole koa, "but we didn't realize there were graves all through the back. This was basically a cow pasture." He also said some of the graves were "multiples" and contained as many as 10 or 12 people. He recalled that his grandparents' nearby grave had been "torn up in 1941 by the Army lookout, which had built in the tall pine trees that were over here... so I came and put the grave back together just this past summer."

He said when they were fixing the grave, another one nearby "was so broken up, and looked really pitiful. I was standing by it when I received an impression, 'you fixing them up. What about me?' So I told Waha Elkington, we've got to fix up this grave, too. It seemed like a woman, and it touched my heart."

On the other side of Temple Hill, **June Kekauoha Chang** of Laie talked about the grave of her great-grandfather, Hosea Nahinu Kekauoha, who came to Laie from Koloa, Kauai, and died in 1912. She also explained that he and over 20 members of the family moved to Iosepa in Skull Valley, Utah and later returned to Laie.

Chang's cousin, Randolph Kekauoha, then told about looking for his great-grandmother's grave, which led them to the site at the bottom of the hill. A bulldozer trying to clear brush in the area accidentally uncovered some of the graves.

"In 2004 I started looking in this area, and I got lost," he recalled. "I had to tie small strips of cloth just to tell me where I'm at, and I still got lost." Later he found four graves, but soon figured out they belonged to the Kalili family.

Kekauoha explained he and his wife, with permission from then-Temple President **Wayne Ursenbach**, "started cleaning that area in January 2005, and in May 2005 we completed it. We found a lot of graves," he said, but noted he still hasn't found his great-grandmother's final resting place.

He thanked the BYU-Hawaii Samoan Club for helping, and also the Polynesian Cultural Center, which loaned its new shredder to chip the haole koa.



His wife, Donnette [pictured second from the right, in the photo on the left], also explained they know one person who was buried there as early as 1896, and the latest in 1912. "They were all Hawaiians, not plantation workers," she said.

There are altogether about 67 graves here." "No one knew about these graves, not even the temple," he said, adding when they were finished the Laie Elementary School 6th graders came to help lay flowers on each grave. Before leaving, "they all sang 'Aloha 'Oe,' the only Hawaiian song

they knew," she said.

Randolf said he believes this is the oldest cemetery in Laie. He also mentioned there may be another "lost" cemetery near the large kamani tree on the mauka side of Kamehameha Highway between the Polynesian Cultural Center and Pounders Beach Park.

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