THE LDS HAWAIIAN COLONY AT SKULL VALLEY, UTAH 1889-1917
by Leonard J. Arrington
Prepared for the Polynesian LDS History Association Conference, Laie, Hawaii, August 2, 1980

One of the most solidly established principles of the early Church was the gathering. The Lord instructed the Saints as early as 1831 that "the elect" should gather out of "Babylon" to live, work, and worship together as a community of Saints. This principle was applied as the body of the Church moved from New York to northeastern Ohio to Jackson County, Clay County, and Caldwell County, Missouri, and to Hancock County, Illinois. It continued after the migration to the Salt Lake Valley, and tens of thousands of Saints gathered out of Scandinavia, the British Isles, Germany and Switzerland, and from elsewhere in the world into the Great Basin region.

The principle of gathering was likewise extended to the Saints in the Pacific, and a principal responsibility of Church leaders in the nineteenth century was to establish places of gathering for those who accepted the gospel in the countries and islands of the Pacific.

The first missionary activity resulting in a gathering occurred after ten LDS gold miners in California were assigned to go to Hawaii to introduce the gospel. Their place of destination at that time was referred to as Sandwich Islands. The idea was to preach the gospel primarily to the whites who went there for the winter. But they didn't have much success with the whites, and didn't seem to be able to learn Hawaiian. So most of the missionaries left. But one of the young gold missionaries, George Q. Cannon, was determined to learn Hawaiian, was very sharp, and did so. Finally he and some others began to make some converts. Brigham Young then suggested they set up a temporary gathering place where they could all live together. A committee investigated all of the islands. After a careful survey, they finally decided on Lanai, an island which was almost uninhabited. Riding to the interior, the committee found what they were looking for and selected the crater of Palawai. This crater was about three and a half miles wide. An important obstacle was the lack of water, but the committee thought this could be overcome by building reservoirs. The owner of the land, Hailele, agreed to let the Saints experiment with it, rent-free, for four years. It was a 200-acre site which they called the City of Joseph in the valley of Ephraim.

In 1854 the gathering became a reality. By that time there were about 5,000 members of the Church in Hawaii. Directing the laying out of the city was Ephraim Green. The plowing of the first furrow was a moment of great rejoicing, and soon there began to appear plots of wheat, oats, potatoes, onions, and beans among the keawe trees. The crops were sold in the markets of Honolulu to supply whaling vessels. An English language school was established, with morning classes for children and evening classes for adults. Leading the colony were Silas Smith, F. A. Hammond, and John T. Caine. After a year, they decided the experiment was successful and leased the land for fifteen years at $175 per year and the privilege of purchasing if they wished. The lease was to commence January 1, 1858.

But the gathering began to decline due to lack of water, an invasion of pehua worms, and the lack of building materials. So the mission decided to find another gathering place. But then occurred the Utah War and
all the elders were called back during the winter of 1857-1858. Although
the mission was left in charge of native elders, converts gradually
drifted away, and the Palawai colony went along without any help from the
headquarters of the Church.

A flamboyant adventurer now comes into the picture--Walter Murray
Gibson. Born on the sea, raised in South Carolina, Gibson had lived in
Sumatra, and indeed conducted a war to liberate Sumatra from Dutch rule.
He was caught and jailed for a year. Later, he became an admiral in the
Guatemalan Navy. He was ambitious, he wanted to be a savior of the
downtrodden Pacific peoples, he wanted to build a great Pacific kingdom.

Gibson had visited with Brigham Young in Salt Lake City, he had
converted to the Church and been ordained an elder, and he had been set
apart as a kind of roving missionary to Japan and southeast Asia. But on
the way he stopped in Honolulu and visited the Mormon colony at Palawai.
Nailing a ribboned document written by himself, signed and sealed by Brigham
Young, he proclaimed his call to be Chief President of the mission. The
members of the Church in Hawaii were overjoyed at his arrival and gave him
their support. He was eloquent in Hawaiian and unscrupulous as a leader.
He ruled with an iron hand, forced members to work under conditions equal
to that of slavery, collected gifts of goats, fowl, cattle, donkeys, and
furniture which he sold for cash to make payments on land, and even sold
priesthood certificates. He raised $3,000 to pay the king for the Palawai
lands.

Rumors began to reach Salt Lake City about his unorthodox conduct,
and a group of three apostles and two others were appointed to go to Hawaii
to investigate. Gibson was excommunicated, but by then (1863) he controlled
6,000 acres of the island. He refused to turn this over to the Church.
The Church, under the direction of Joseph F. Smith, then hunted for
a second gathering place. The place chosen was Laie, where stand today
the temple, the college, the cultural center, and other properties here.
The land was bought in January 1865, some 6,500 acres. It cost $14,000
in gold and had been owned by Thomas T. Dougherty. It was thought to be
a good buy. The land had produced tobacco, cotton, and sugar cane; and
the Saints were particularly interested in sugar cane, so that was the
principal product.

The plantation was now more of a business enterprise to produce sugar
for Utah than a gathering place. At Laie cane was growing wild when the
missionaries took over the plantation. In 1868 a mill was erected to mill
cane. The mill cost about $9,000 and had a daily capacity of 3,000 pounds
of sugar. Natives were employed. Some seventy native Saints were employed
on the farm, growing corn, rice, kalo, and other crops in addition to
sugar cane. A total of 200 Saints were gathered at Laie. Some five acres we
planted in 1868, forty-five acres in 1869. Some of this was sold in Utah.
George Nebeker left in 1869 with 130 bags of sugar and 80 barrels of choice
molasses, all produced at Laie, all taken to San Francisco, then Sacramento,
then Ogden, then Salt Lake City. The plantation did well, and entirely paid
its own way. In 1870 they produced 80 tons of sugar and 200 barrels of
molasses, some of which was sold in San Francisco and some in Salt Lake City.
A school was opened, enrolling seventy-five students. About 300 members
were at Laie--Hawaiians, 7 Caucasians, and 1 Scotsman. They gradually
diversified, obtaining Cashmere goats, doing hay-making, and so on. The
king gave the project his sanction.
Under the management of H. H. Cluff, 1879-1882, they built a new mill at a cost of $24,000, dug some artesian wells, began to produce rice. Still later, under the management of Samuel E. Woolley, they developed an improved irrigation system. But with the passing of time the operation proved to be unprofitable because of low prices and the competition of other plantations. The milling at Laie was abandoned and the cane was ground at Kahuku Plantation. In 1931 the land at Laie was leased to Kahuku Plantation, ending the Church's great experiment.

This brings us to the desire on the part of some of the Hawaiian Saints to gather with the Saints in Utah and work in the temple, about to be completed in Salt Lake City. The place set aside for them was at Skull Valley, Tooele County, on the edge of the Great Salt Lake desert, seventy-five miles southwest of Salt Lake City. Far from the sparkling surf of Waikiki, this desert wilderness was the home for more than a hundred Hawaiian Latter-day Saints from 1889 to 1917, when they abandoned it after the completion of the temple in Hawaii.

Skull Valley was inhabited by the Gosiute Indians at the time the pioneers entered the valley of the Great Salt Lake in 1847. Although Porter Rockwell had established a ranch there in 1850-1851, the first permanent white settlers in the area went there under the direction of Elder William Lee in 1869 to live and work with the Indians. Elder Lee and his associates established Indian ranches at Skull Valley and Deep Creek and eventually succeeded in converting more than a thousand Indians in Tooele County. In the 1880s, however, most of the Indians were moved, under the auspices of the federal government, to reservations in Juab and Uintah counties. After this, some of the land was homesteaded or purchased by Latter-day Saints.

In order to provide a gathering place for Hawaiian Saints who wished to come to Zion, the First Presidency of the Church, in May 1889, appointed a "Hawaiian Colonization Committee" to arrange for the purchase of a suitable site and to supervise the immigration of Hawaiian members. This committee, which consisted of William W. Cluff, Frederick A. Mitchell, and Harvey H. Cluff—all of whom had been missionaries to Hawaii—arranged for the purchase of a ranch in Skull Valley belonging to John T. Rich, son of Apostle Charles C. Rich.

Upon the request of the Hawaiian colonization committee, the Church agreed to endorse their note to make possible a loan which would take care of the down payment on the ranch. This loan was made in July 1889 and an additional loan, also guaranteed by the Church, was made the following month. Later, seven notes signed by the committee and the First Presidency were given to Brother Rich, promising to pay the purchase price of the real estate in seven yearly installments.

The ranch thus secured, the committee took steps to organize a joint stock company to operate it. The group incorporated as the "Iosepa Agriculture and Stock Company." Iosepa is the Hawaiian name for Joseph. (The colony was named after the Prophet Joseph Smith.) The American incorporators, W. W. Cluff, F. A. Mitchell, H. H. Cluff, John T. Caine, Albert W. Davis, and Henry P. Richards, subscribed for stock, which was held by them in trust for the Church. The leader of the prospective Hawaiian colonists, I. W. Kauleinamoku, also subscribed for some stock. These incorporators then joined with the First Presidency in a meeting in August 1889, at which it was decided that H. H. Cluff would be president, manager, and superintendent of the colonizing company, and F. A. Mitchell, secretary.
Elders Cluff and Mitchell were later set apart for these responsibilities by the First Presidency. (The First Presidency also set apart Elihu Barrell to serve as the schoolteacher and storekeeper, and F. W. Marchant to supervise the care of the livestock.

It was also agreed that each of the stockholders would be given a city lot when the new town was surveyed; that the lots fronting on the town square would be reserved for possible public uses; that a combination meetinghouse-schoolhouse, twenty feet wide and thirty feet long, would be built; that arrangements would be made to homestead lands adjoining the ranch under the Desert Land Act and Tree Culture Act; that negotiations would be entered into to buy a sawmill which was located in the Stansbury Mountains immediately east of Skull Valley; that the company would render such aid as it could to the colonists in building their houses, as a loan; and that the company would obtain a seal with the motto, "The Rising Sun," in Hawaiian characters.

Company officers managed to buy the sawmill and appurtenances for $1,500.00, paying for it with funds received from the sale of property of Hawaiians who had signified their intention of participating in the venture. Elder Mitchell surveyed the townsite. Everything thus arranged for the reception of the colonists, the First Presidency requested the president of Tooele Stake to call upon the Saints of his stake to furnish teams and wagons to take the Hawaiian Saints and their effects from Salt Lake City, to which they had previously gathered, to the newly established Iosepa, in Skull Valley. On August 28, 1889, forty-six Polynesian Latter-day Saints arrived in Skull Valley to begin a new life.

The land was apportioned, as in ancient Israel, by drawing lots. Each adult male and each widow were permitted to draw, and two weeks after their removal to the Hawaiian colony, all were reported to be "feeling well" and happy. A branch of the Church was set up, and the various quorums and auxiliary associations were organized. A short time later the land was dedicated by President Wilford Woodruff in the English language and by President Joseph F. Smith in the Hawaiian language. Houses were built; the schoolhouse was completed; and a general store was constructed.

An irrigation system was soon constructed, using water from springs in the Stansbury Mountains. Lucern, beets, wheat, oats, barley, corn, potatoes, and squash were all raised. A reservoir was built and the water piped for house and garden use. The homes soon sprouted lawns, with borders of flowers and trees. After the first harvest, the Saints counted 1826 bushels of wheat, 1837 bushels of barley, 2267 bushels of corn, and an unspecified quantity of potatoes and squash. This production was divided among the laborers at the rate of $30.00 a month for each person.

Within three years after the initial settlement of Iosepa, the Deseret News published the following report of the president on the condition of the colony:

The colony is in a prosperous condition. Our crops are abundant, there being four hundred acres under cultivation in hay and grain. We have now gathered our first crop of lucern, amounting to over three hundred tons. . . . Our crop of wheat, oats, barley will reach about six thousand bushels. . . . We enclosed with cedar posts and wire fencing, last spring, 1600 acres, cleared off the sagebrush, and planted the new land with grain, vegetables, and vines. This to the extent of about seventy-five acres. . . . The water supply has been abundant this season.

There are some few cases of sickness in the colony, but nothing of a serious character.
This is the first mention of the problem of sickness and disease, which was to cause a high mortality rate among the people during the years to come. But apparently it was no serious worry in 1892, because in that year plans were made to purchase and homestead some of the surrounding lands to make expansion possible.

By 1901 there were about eighty Hawaiian Saints in Iosepa, all employed on the ranch and demonstrating, according to the report, "thrift, industry, and prosperity." Their granary on one occasion held 14,000 bushels. A decade later, when a prominent Utah historian, J. Cecil Alter, made a study of the colony, he wrote:

There are 1,120 acres practically all in use, and half as much more that is being brought under the magic wand of the Hawaiian irrigator. . . . Every Hawaiian in the United States who had come here to be nearer the Mormon people was given the opportunity to go there and Ind to a house that was built for him, and his family, and work on the ranch at good wages, and have, besides, a large garden patch for his own use.

Suffice it to say that to-day the several hundred folk there have water in their houses just as we have in Salt Lake City, and a power plan will sometime give them their electric lights. Their school and meetinghouses are as good as the best . . . and since they grow their own food and raise their own animals, they are far better off than many farmers who have lived in this country all their lives. The Mormon people conceived the plan for them, and the Church made its perfection possible.

At a recent annual celebration there by Hawaiians, when President Joseph F. Smith, Governor William Spry, and other men of prominence attended, Lorenzo D. Creel, a government Indian official from Washington, who was studying the Indians in Tooele county at the time, rose before the great Hawaiian, uniformed audience, after having been shown all over the place, and with much feeling, said: "My friends, if this is a sample of the Mormon colonization work, the best thing the government of the United States could do, would be to assist them in every way possible."

Despite these generally favorable reports, it appears that the colony was never fully self-supporting. And the Church found it necessary to make several appropriations to pay the salaries of the local Latter-day Saints who assisted the islanders.

The financial outlook of the colony became so poor by 1897 that serious consideration was given to a plan to rent the farm to a prominent stockgrower and have him hire the people. However, this was not done. The extent of Church aid, of course, was not known by such observers as J. Cecil Alter. They commented on the brilliant colonization efforts of the Hawaiians and their leaders.

Apparently, there was no market for the shares of stock in the company. It is probable that the disastrous depression of the 1890s, with its long period of declining farm prices, was responsible for most of the financial problems of the colony and the need for Church help. Other Church colonies required similar assistance. Certainly, the Hawaiian Saints did not lack the qualities of industry and frugality.

The eventual disbandment of the colony seems to have resulted in part from problems of health. The prospects of the colony took a serious turn for the worse in 1896, when the county physician found three cases of leprosy. Two or three other cases developed later. The local history indicates how this problem was handled.

A house was built about 1 1/2 miles south of the ranch house near a fresh water supply, and those afflicted with the disease were quarantined there. A flagpole was set up, and when something was needed from the outside a flag was raised. The leprosy victims were treated at intervals by a doctor, but all died.

The outbreak of leprosy was undoubtedly one of the reasons for the lack of enthusiasm of some of those participating in this colonization experiment. Even more serious from the standpoint of the production record of the colony, however, were the frequent outbreaks of milder forms of
illness among the natives. Accustomed to island conditions, the constitutions of the Hawaiians, despite a fierce faith, did not adjust readily to the rigors of the burning heat of the summer sun and the driving winds and zero temperatures of the Skull Valley winters. The high rate of mortality is indicated by the large number of markers in the village cemetery.

Great sadness broke out when I. W. Kauleinamoku, mentioned earlier as leader of the natives, died in 1899, at the age of sixty-two. His grave, enclosed in an iron grill fence, and covered by a white marble tombstone, may still be seen at the Iosepa cemetery.

When Church officials announced to the group in 1915 that a temple would be built in Hawaii, that cash would be paid for all personal and corporate holdings in the colony, and that the Church would provide transportation back to the Islands for those unable to pay for their own, most of the colonists decided to return to their homeland. Most of the returnees settled on the Church plantation at Laie, Oahu. Many faithful Church members today are among the descendants of the Skull Valley Hawaiian pioneers.

The Church sold the ranch in 1917 to the Deseret Livestock Company, which moved some of the original buildings away and razed others to obtain materials with which to construct a ranch headquarters near the site of the old village. The ranch now produces hay and serves as a center for livestock grazing. The story of Iosepa is a story of hope, courage, and hard work.

FAMILY LIFE IN HAWAII DURING THE HAWAIIAN MONARCHY
Joseph H. Spurrier

The Hawaiian Monarchy was formed when the Hawaii-island chief, Kamehameha united the islands by conquest. This task was completed by 1810. It ended when Queen Liliuokalani was overthrown in 1893. In this span of eighty-three years, family life in Hawaii underwent severe changes as it was transformed from the native 'ohana (family) to the Euro-American, Christian pattern. That the family was significant among the islanders is attested by the number and frequency of terms and phrases in the language which refer to it. The Hawaiian word which is commonly translated as family is 'ohana. In casual usage, 'ohana can mean an institutionalized, corporate body—the extended family—or it may simply designate a kinsman or relative. Most commonly it meant the general grouping of persons related by blood, marriage or adoption. Others might live in the household though they were not 'ohana. These were the 'ohana, which signifies retainers, sojourners, or those likened to passengers in a canoe.

The derivation of the word is in the symbolism of the 'ōhā (buds) which occur on the corn of the taro plant (Colocasia esculenta). These buds sprout at the top of the corn, which is that root-like portion of the plant that is propagated. The phrase is, then, 'ohana, or the springing of off-shoots, as children springing from a single pair of parents. The contraction is 'ōhāna. To go farther and express the idea of the primary or nuclear family in modern usage, the phrase, 'ōhāna pono i (the true family) was required. This stipulated a father, mother and the children born to them.