"A UNITY OF MANY ISLANDS: THE BUILDING MISSION PROGRAM IN HAWAII"

A Panel Discussion—Barbara Elkington, moderator

The Building Missionary Program in Hawaii involved men and women from the islands of Hawaii as well as Latter-day Saints from other islands of the Pacific in a construction effort which resulted in the physical complex of the Church College of Hawaii (now Brigham Young University—Hawaii Campus), numerous chapels, and additions to the Hawaii Temple and Visitor’s Center, and the Polynesian Cultural Center.

Six men who participated in this program participated in the panel. They were: Tom Kaleo, building phases one and two, the first Hawaiian called to the building mission; Percy Tehira, phase two, New Zealand; William Kanahele, phases one and two, Hawaii; Savaina Sa’utu, phase two, Samoa; Sione Feinga, phase two, Tonga; and Glade Jaspersen, phase two, mainland U.S.

Addressing themselves to the progress of the mission, the factors of food, finances, housing, personal growth and commitment, the six participants shared experiences and emotions with the audience. Cultural differences, the novelty of being in Hawaii, Church organization and leadership were mentioned.

Bro. Jaspersen stressed the strength of testimony he encountered in the Polynesian building missionaries. Bro. Kanahele told how his participation turned him from an inactive to a committed Church member. Bro. Tehira and all the others were in agreement on the important role of Joseph E. Wilson, supervisor of the two phases of the Hawaii Building Mission. Wilson’s dedication to the tasks and his concern for the missionaries he led were still alive in the hearts of the six panel members. Under his leadership almost 200 men, and often their families, worked together under often trying conditions to turn the swampy land of Laie into a college campus and the grounds for the Polynesian Cultural Center. It was pointed out how he overcame cultural variances and almost any kind of building problems imaginable to bring the project to reality.

All the participants were in agreement on the personal growth as well as professional knowledge they had gained through their participation.

(The moderators husband, Waha Elkington, was also a building missionary from New Zealand. Phase one lasted from 1955 to 1958; phase two from 1960-1963)