Joseph H. Spurrier

THE HAWAII TEMPLE: A SPECIAL PLACE IN A SPECIAL LAND

Aloha Kakahiaka ia Oukou a Pau:

I think I have been conscious of the temple in Hawaii even longer than I have been associated with the Church. Before my baptism in 1942, I saw and admired photographs of this "Taj Mahal of the Pacific." On coming to Lai in 1955 to live and teach, we went to the temple often and I was asked, in 1957, to become an ordinance worker. From that time until the present, with time off for a couple of sabatical leaves, I have worked in the temple. A year and eight months ago I was called as second counselor in the Presidency. It is a very real pleasure, therefore, to share with you some history of this special place.

The Hawaii Temple was dedicated in November, 1919, closed for renovation and remodeling in 1976, and reopened and rededicated in 1978. To begin the story, however, it is necessary to look back many years before 1919. By way of a general statement, the beginning occurred in Nauvoo in 1843 when Joseph Smith called the first elders of the Sandwich Islands. They never arrived here but went to the Society Islands instead. That is another story, already told capably by George Ellsworth. In the summer of 1850, Elder Charles C. Rich visited the gold diggings on the Middle Fork of the American River in California and called ten more elders from that temporal mission to the Sandwich Islands. These did arrive, on December 12, 1850, but only half stayed. Within six weeks, five of the ten, including the Mission President, had left the islands. The five who stayed, however, began preaching, teaching and baptizing.

The account of the establishment of the mission with the stories of Elder George Q. Cannon, Napela, and others, again has already been told by myself and others in gatherings like this.

It was in the early years—the years of the Sandwich Islands Mission—that the first reference to a temple in Hawaii is made. In October of 1852, after their October Conference of the Mission, the elders gathered in the home of David Rice, a haole convert, at Waihee, Maui to share their testimonies before resuming their regular work. As Elder John Stillman Woodbury arose to express himself, he spoke in tongues. As is required on such occasions, one stood to interpret—Elder Frances A. Hammond. As recorded in the journals of Elders Hammond, Bigler, and Farrer, Elder Hammond interpreted as follows:

...part of which ran, 'the Lord is well pleased with the labors of his servants on the islands and angels of the Lord are near us, that the people we are laboring among are a remnant of the seed of Joseph, that they would be built up on these islands, and that a temple will be built in this land.'

This statement would be remarkable, even if the temple had not been mentioned. In a day when the Hawaiians were dying like flies, with almost no children being born, and with prospects so...
poor that consideration was being given to closing the mission, to say they would be built up on the land sounds somewhat less than reasonable, especially then. But they were built up on the land, and that also is another story. The statement, so far as I can determine, is the first mention of a temple in Hawaii. It is regarded by many as prophetic, and as a prophetic statement, it does not stand alone.

In connection with the public announcement regarding the temple, the Improvement Era for September, 1916 printed an article by Elder John A. Widtsoe entitled, "A Remarkable Fulfillment of Prophecy." He cited a quotation of Brigham Young made at the time of the laying of the cornerstone for the Salt Lake Temple, April 6, 1853. In reply to the question, "What will the temple look like?", President Young answered that it would have six towers and that the brethren should not apostatize because Joseph built only one. He went on to say that a temple would shortly be built with no towers at all but with an elevated central portion on which would grow plants and shrubs. This account was "buried" in the Journal of Discourses and unknown to the architects who drew the plans for the Hawaii temple. But, the plans called for concrete plants to be placed atop the central section of the building, anyway. And, this was the first of three temples built with no towers.

A second supporting statement was made during the mission of William W. Cluff in 1864. He was one of the elders who was assigned to survey the mission and to try to revitalize the Church in Hawaii after the Gibson experience. He visited the branches on Windward Oahu, including the small branch at Laie. He stayed overnight at the ranch house after his visit, and early the next morning, in leaving he retired to a small grove of hau trees nearby for this morning prayer. As he prayed, he reports that Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball appeared to him, showed him the boundaries of the ahupuaa of Laie, and told him that this would be the central place for the Church in Hawaii and that a temple would be built here.

This event is recalled in the dedicatory prayer of the Temple given by President Heber J. Grant in 1919. It runs as follows:

"We thank thee, O Father, this that the promise made in a dream to thy servant, William W. Cluff, by the prophet, Brigham Young, that the day would come when a temple should be erected in this land is fulfilled before our eyes."

By the time Elder Cluff had reported his mission in Salt Lake City, Elders Frances A. Hammond and George Nebeker had been dispatched to Hawaii to secure a site for the establishment of a colony in Hawaii as had been done in a number of places in the intermountain West. Elder Hammond, without further communication with Salt Lake City, purchased the Laie property in January of 1865 for the sum of $14,000. The 6,000 acres with its three and half miles of beach frontage contained an inventory of five buildings, 500 head of cattle, 500 sheep, 200 goats, 26 horses, several thousand centipedes and an undetermined number of cockroaches.

Even before the discovery of Hawaii, Laie had been a significant place; a puuhonua, or sanctuary, for the Koolauloa area; the largest settlement of Hawaiians between Waimea and Lanikai on this coast in the 19th century; it now became the headquarters for the Church in Hawaii. In June of 1865, forty
colonists, including children, came to Laie, led by Elder George Nebeker. The colonists were joined shortly by a number of Hawaiian families who had been defrauded of their hopes and homes in the Gibson experience on Lanai. Conditions at the settlement were less than ideal. The place was barren—not a tree in sight except in the hills. The winds were salt-laden, the soil was sandy, the water supply inconstant, few crops would grow well, and insects were numerous and voracious.

By 1885, times had become even harder and many of those who had gathered were ready to leave for other pastures which might seem greener. Joseph F. Smith, formerly a young missionary to Hawaii returned to Laie, now as a member of the First Presidency of the Church. He urged the residents to endure and to remain, saying that "upon this place the glory of the Lord will rest to bless the Saints who believe....". Many have interpreted this as prophecy—a temple would be built at Laie. This is not a clear statement but the interpretation does seem likely, especially since when George Q. Cannon, also of the First Presidency, returned for the Golden Jubilee of the mission in 1900, he spoke in very clear terms with Mission President Samuel E. Woolley about a temple to be built here.

There is a scripture which says, "after much tribulation cometh the blessing." And so, after the hard times at Laie and the desolation of Skull Valley, Joseph F. Smith, once again in Laie and this time as President of the church, stepped out behind the historic old chapel, I Hemolele, and dedicated that site for the building of a temple. He was accompanied by Charles Nibley of the Presiding Bishopric and Patriarch Reed Smoot but had not consulted with the rest of the First Presidency or the Council of the Twelve. On his return to Salt Lake City, President Smith secured the unanimous approval of the Twelve providing that the proposition by presented to the Church in conference assembled.

Three months later on October 3, President Smith proposed to the October Conference that a temple be built in Hawaii and called for a sustaining vote. The Liahona, a Church periodical, reported in the next day's issue:

"The decision reached at the General Conference of the Church yesterday to proceed with the erection of a temple in the Hawaiian Islands is one of the most interesting and significant events in Church history in many a day. The great forest of uplifted hands which gave affirmation to the proposal was also a most impressive and eloquent feature."

Work commenced three months later on January 12, 1916. First the old chapel had to be moved from the site. The ninety by thirty foot, nine-ton wooden I Hemolele was moved under the direction of the architects with Brother Hamana Kalili as foreman. It was located at the present site of the Laie North Stake Center where it stood until 1941 when it was destroyed by fire.

Ground was broken for the temple on the 8th of February, 1916, but curiously, there were no cornerstone laying ceremonies. The construction proceeded under the supervision of President Samuel E. Woolley with the firm of Spaulding Construction Company of Honolulu as contractors. Pope and Burton of Salt Lake City were the architects and Ralph E. Woolley was superintendent of construction. Ralph was the son of the Mission
President.

The construction presented a number of problems. The ground was coral and sand—poor foundation. A large excavation was necessary to provide the necessary footing for the building. Modern earth-moving equipment was as yet, unknown so the work was done with picks, shovels, and blasting powder. These were handled by men with names like Kalili, Kaleahano, Nawahine, Forsythe, Haili, Keawemauhili, Kahawaii, Kaio and Broad. The pay was $1.25 per day, the days were ten hours long, and there were six of them each week. Another problem was the shortage of building material in the local area. It was finally decided to use crushed lava as aggregate in the concrete and to pour a concrete building. The pouring went day by day until, upon completion, the building stood, a monolith of artificial stone.

During the April Conference of the mission, the members were asked to donate $5.00 each for the building of the temple. The total donation from local members tripled that figure. The entire cost of the building and the grounds is variously quoted at between $215,000 and $265,000. The sculpture work in and around the temple was done by Leo and Avard Fairbanks—Latter-day Saint artists who had achieved national acclaim. The murals in the ordinance rooms were by A.B. Wright, L. Ramsey, and LeConte Stewart. In April of 1917 the Deseret News printed a story which said that all was done on the Hawaiian Temple except the landscaping. That was done under the careful direction of Joseph F. Rock, a botanist from the then, College of Hawaii, now the University of Hawaii.

William Waddoups, who had served as a missionary to Hawaii and later as manager of the Iosepa settlement, was called in July of 1918 to serve as the first President of the Temple. He had a double task—to prepare the people for the temple and to prepare the temple for the people. By the fall of that year, all was ready. Word was expected momentarily scheduling the dedication. Instead, on November 18, 1918 the message came that Joseph F. Smith had died. Dedication of the temple was set aside for a year.

In September of the following year, the building was opened for public visits and hundreds of persons toured the rooms and grounds of the temple. The grounds had the beauty of a formal garden and the building was likened to a jewel. It had the general shape of a Greek cross which may make it one of the only buildings the Church had built in that form. The four sides of the upper, central portion are graced by four relief sculptured friezes representing the four epochs in time as depicted in the Old Testament, the New Testament, The Book of Mormon, and the period of the emergence of the Church in modern times.

Many were interested to discover that the building bore some similarities to the ancient temple of Solomon. A statement from the architects indicates that this was so.

"The extreme dimensions of the building from East to West are 102 feet, from North to South 78 feet. The central portion of the edifice arises to a height of 50 feet above the upper terrace. In this connection it may be interesting to state that if the now generally accepted equivalent for the cubit is correct, then the principle portion of the famous edifice of antiquity had about the same cubic contents as the temple in Hawaii."
Finally, on November 19, 1919, a telegram arrived for President Waddoups. It read, "Dedication thirtieth. Inform Wesley." Wesley, in this case was E. Wesley Smith, a son of the late President Smith. As it actually turned out, the dedication occurred on November 27, 1919—a Thursday, Thanksgiving Day. Services began at 2:30 p.m. and were repeated on Friday and Saturday. An interesting feature was a special service for children held on Sunday morning. The capacity of the upper room where the services were held was only 310 persons which allowed 1,239 to participate in all of the services.

Some fifteen hundred persons had come to Laie, on horseback, in wagons and carriages, in the novel new means of transportation—the automobile, by train—the old O.R. & L. line which came around Kaena point to Laie, and others walked. The proceedings were conducted by the First Presidency of the Church—Heber J. Grant, Anthon H. Lund, and Rudger Clawson. Elder Stephen L. Richards of the Council of the Twelve, Presiding Bishop, Charles W. Nibley, and an Elder Arthur Winter were also in attendance.

In the remaining one month of 1919, fifty-six persons received their temple blessings and seven families, including over thirty children were sealed. The ordinance schedule of the new temple was an ambitious one. It called for work Tuesday through Friday of each week. Baptisms for the dead were performed on Mondays and sealings on Fridays. The schedule was implemented by ordinance workers such as Elders Ross Taylor, Edward Forsythe, Robert Plunkett, Henry Reuter, and Sisters Ivy Kekuku Apuakehau, Violet Meyer, and Tsuni Nachie.

Beginning in the second year of operation, neighbor island groups began to come in on excursions. Those from Maui arrived in the April Easter recess; from Molokai, they came at Thanksgiving; from Hawaii they came in July and from Kauai, in June. These saints came by ship—a real adventure. It usually took overnight but there was little sleep, even if one had a stateroom. These excursions have remained remarkably constant though they were discontinued during World War II. This year we expect Kauai in June, Maui in April, Hawaii in July, and Molokai at Thanksgiving though now they come more prosaically, by air. Groups have come from other areas of the Pacific as well. As early at 1924 the first group came from New Zealand and saints have come from Samoa, Tahiti and other places in the Pacific.

In 1930 President Waddoups was released and there began a sequence of presidents, each of whom have made particular contributions to the operation and history of the temple. Castle H. Murphy presided for a year after which he was called to preside in the mission and President Waddoups returned for five more years, until 1936. In a case of "musical presidents" Castle Murphy returned to the temple from 1936 to 1941. President Murphy felt a strong kinship with the Hawaiian people and reported proudly the three brethren of Hawaiian ancestry who had received the Sealing Authority in the temple and the fact that many sessions were handled entirely by local workers. He began an unauthorized translation of the ordinances to the Hawaiian language but it was never completed and the endowment was never given in the language.

Albert H. Belliston became president when Murphy was released and was serving as Hawaii led the
United States into World War II. He saw the work in the temple drop by over 80% in Hawaii's first year under martial law. By 1943, when President Edward L. Clissold was installed it required a real act of faith to keep the temple open at all. One endowment session per week and an occasional marriage was about all that could be managed. Ralph E. Woolley was called to preside following the war years and under his direction some physical changes were made in the building. A glassed-in entrance-way was added to accommodate Hawaiian weather and two wings were added, one at either side of the entrance to provide more office space.

Benjamin L. Bowring came in 1953 to replace President Woolley and during his administration two significant developments occurred. First, he enlarged the temple ordinance schedule to provide work on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday evenings and two sessions on Saturday mornings. Baptisms were to be done on Saturday afternoons. This was rewarded by nearly a three-fold increase in the volume of work done in that year. The second occurrence was the lighting of the temple by night. The building was illuminated for the first time on December 18, 1954, with special services just after sunset. The temple, world famous for its beauty by day was now even more beautiful by night. President Bowring was called to preside in the Los Angeles Temple in December of 1955 and was replaced by Ray E. Dillman.

During the years of President Dillman's administration, the temple was given a new coat of paint—a pale green. Originally white, the new shade was intended to blend better with the landscaping. The effect, however, was shock for most who saw it. Eventually, however, the green faded to an even paler shade and in a year or two the glistening white, to which most are accustomed, was restored. Another improvement occurring at this time was the installation of air conditioning. This was a marked improvement, not only for cooling, but for noise control and humidity. The Visitor's Center was also enlarged somewhat to provide for increased numbers of tourists coming to visit.

Most of this work was done by labor missionaries who had come to Laie to put up the buildings of the college and the cultural center. Many of these men and their wives became ordinance workers in the temple and the remainder were regular patrons in special Monday night sessions each week. Their contribution to the temple, therefore, was three-fold.

Work was begun in 1961 on a much needed new Information and Visitor's Center. The number of visitors arriving had increased dramatically and the facilities were totally inadequate to properly invite them to the temple grounds. Elder Hugh B. Brown of the First Presidency of the Church dedicated these buildings on October 13, 1963. President Brown returned again in 1969 to preside at the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the temple. President Dillman, after witnessing these events, was in 1963 replaced by Roland Tietjen, who in his own turn, was replaced by a third term of service in the office by President Edward L. Clissold. President Clissold had, by this time, presided over almost everything around.

Translation of the temple ordinances to Japanese was begun under President Clissold's direction as plans began to emerge for excursion of Saints from Japan.
to Hawaii. This work was done by Elder Tatsui Sato. The translation was not complete when a crash course of training was begun to prepare local Japanese to perform the ceremonies in that language. The workers were still in training and the translation was completed on July 1, 1965. The first excursion arrived two weeks later.

More translation was done under President Harry V. Brooks who succeeded President Clissold later that year. This time Elders Tautua Tanouai and Peagalmaali Galiai translated the ordinances to the Samoan language. President Lloyd Walsh replaced President Brooks in 1971 and served until the temple was closed in 1976 for extensive remodeling. It was two years later that the First Presidency of the church, led by President Spencer W. Kimball, came to Laie to rededicate the temple. The first services were held in the upper room of the temple with subsequent services being held in the nearby David O. McKay Auditorium of the university campus.

The original 10,500 square feet had been increased to the present 34,000 which houses 163 rooms. The hours of operation were increased to include both mornings and evenings four days a week with a full schedule of work set for Saturdays mornings. The number of ordinance workers required increased to nearly 300 and the volume of work has grown apace. Max W. Moody was called as president as the temple was reopened and served for four years to be replaced by President Robert H. Finlayson. President Finlayson will leave on June 15 of this year after just under four years of service.

Elder Arthur D. Haycock, former missionary and Mission President in Hawaii will be installed at that time as Temple President. The Hawaii Temple today is one of over forty the church has in operation or under construction. With the addition of temples in the Pacific and Asia, it is no longer necessary for church members to travel the great distances to receive their blessings and to do work for their departed kin. Correspondingly however, the Hawaii Temple District has been reduced to include now only thirteen stakes, which by all considerations is quite small. The temple in Laie is a first in several ways. It was the first to be erected beyond the continental limits of the United States, the first of three temples of its peculiar design, the first to be put up in a mission area of the church, and the first wherein living endowments were received by the peoples of Asia--Japanese, Chinese, and Korean.

I feel that I must say, in conclusion, that the history of the Hawaii Temple has yet to be written. I have only scratched the surface but I am in the process of doing more. However, much more needs doing. There is yet much more source material to be uncovered. There are many reported occurrences which must remain folklore for lack of supporting evidence. Writing about the temple, to this point, has tended to be journalistic rather than historical and to lean toward the emotion rather than the factual. There are undoubtedly countless experiences of a spiritual nature which have happened in the temple and some use them as fodder for talks and papers. My feeling, however, is that they are likely to be sacred to those whose experience they are, and therefore inappropriate to a paper such as this. Thank you.