A FORGOTTEN LA’IE CEMETERY
by Donette and Randolph Kekauoha

Today, I want to talk to you about the work we have been doing to locate, clean up and restore several small old-time cemeteries in Laie. This work began a couple years ago when my husband, Randolph Kekauoha, expressed an interest in finding his grandmother’s grave. We knew it was near the temple grounds but we couldn’t find it in the two cemetery areas that are currently clean and visible behind the temple up on the hill. We began looking in the woods to the south of the temple, near where someone remembered there being other graves, and we soon came across a few cement slabs. There was some writing on them, but hard to read. But, on this one (see photo below), you could see “K.H. Kaleohano” (early LDS Church leader) and further over, there was a stone with “Kalili, Nahuina” written on it. And, when I saw the names, “Kealalaina”, “Kalili Nahuina”, and “K.H. Kaleohano” I said to Randolph, “These are Hamana Kalili’s (famous fisherman of La’ie and community leader) family,” and he said “how do you know?” and I said “Because that’s his mom and dad, his mom is Kealalaina”

And so we got really excited and he said “Where do you think grandma’s grave is?” and I said “I don’t know.” We went home and started telling people that we found these graves and we went to tell his family and they too got all excited and he said “I think that I found grandma’s grave site.” We couldn’t go with them the next day, but we told them where it was, so three of his cousins went up and surveyed, looked all through the bushes and everything, and came home and said “We have to clean that place” and we said, “We know.”
So, a couple of days later I went down to HRI to tell them about the cemetery and I told them, “When you go up and clean, will you please let us know? Because, my husband and I would like to help you because we are looking for his grandma’s grave.” And they said “OK” and we waited. I called a descendant of Hamana Kalili and told him and he said “Oh, we’re going to have a family reunion. Yes, we can clean it.” And I said, “Please call us when you have your family reunion.” So we waited but we didn’t hear anything from HRI or the family. Then my husband went and he’s the home teacher for the Compton family so he told Sister Compton and Brother Compton about it and they said “Could you go show it to us?” and we said “Sure” and we took them up to the area and the Comptons were more excited than all of the other people we told and they started pulling the grass and we said ‘wait, wait, we can’t do anything. We have to wait for permission from HRI.” So, they said “OK, you let us know and we’ll come and help you” and we said “OK.” When we went to do research we tried to do it on Hamana Kalili’s family because as you saw on the slabs it only had their names and there was no dates. So then, Matt Kester, BYUH archivist, found out about the graves so we took Matt up there and he got excited about it and he said, “Let me know, we can get our elders’ quorum to come up here and help,” and we said “OK” and we waited and this was in August, 2004.

August, September, October, November, December, and January came. And right after New Years on January, 4th my husband said “I’ve waited long enough. I’m going to clean the place.” So I said “OK” I couldn’t go with him the first day. What we did, you see here all the koa? All my husband had was the machete and all I had was the sickle. So I would go in between the bush and the koa trees and I would cut all the grass so when my husband came in he could cut it down with the machete. We’re showing you in this slide how tall the koa trees were. My husband is about 5’10, 5’11 and my grandson is about 4 feet tall and the koa was about 25 feet tall. So he would chop it this way. After working up there for about two weeks, I told my husband “You know what? We cannot do this job all by ourselves, we don’t even have the right equipment.” If you look over here, you can see rocks here. That will tell you that there’s a grave here and a grave there. In some areas maybe it was rocks here, rocks here, maybe one or two rocks on the side so we knew that spot was a grave.

So I told him “I’m going to call HRI.” This time, I asked for Jeff Tyau and Jeff never got the message that we found the cemetery. So, Jeff said “Let me go check out the area. I know about what you are saying but I never knew there was a cemetery.” So, Jeff went up there and when he looked at the area he found out that the area belonged to the temple and that HRI wasn’t in charge of that area so he told the temple president.
The temple recorder, Wayne Yoshimura, called me and he said “We didn't know the temple owned that property that you folks have found. We went up there yesterday and we saw that you and your husband had done lots of work there.” I said “May we continue cleaning?” and they said “Yes” and so I said “But only one thing, we don’t have the right tools. Can your men help us?” and he said “What do you need?” and I said “Chainsaws.” We wanted to do the initial cleaning because we didn't want anybody moving the rocks. So I said “If your men will come in and cut all of the koa, my husband and I will do the cleaning. But, we don’t want them to go ahead of us. We want them to wait and only cut these stumps here.” And so they said, “OK, we can do that.” So, I’m talking to him in the morning, he’s calling me at 8 o’clock in the morning, and he said “What time do you plan to go up there?” and I said “About 8:30,” and he said “OK, we’ll be there.”

By the time my husband and I got up there, they had cut all the stumps that we had already trimmed and we were so thrilled; you could really tell that it was looking like a grave. And President Ursenbach told us, “When Wayne and I came up,” he said “as we climbed up that hill,” he said “we could feel just like something rushing to us,” he said “it was such a wonderful feeling.” Then, I turned to Wayne and I said “We need to clean this place. This is a sacred place.” We were so excited my husband and I had tears in our eyes.

So, anyway, they had trimmed it all so my husband and I kept on cutting and cutting but the other groups never showed up. You know, when you’re doing something and you want to get it done right away and someone doesn’t come all week, that’s a long time to you.

So, one day as we were going up, we saw Aunty Gladys (Pualoa) Ahuna and Uncle Joe (“Tarzan”) Ahuna, and they said, “Where are you going?” and we said, “We’re going to go clean cemetery” and they said “Oh, what cemetery?” So we told them and they said, “We want to go up and see it.” Well, my uncle was getting along in age and so is Aunty Gladys
and we didn’t want them climbing that hill. But Aunty Gladys and Uncle insisted that they wanted to go. So we helped them through the bushes climbing up to the hill and when Aunty Gladys saw it she said, “Only you two are cleaning this?” and we said, “Yes, and sometimes the men from the temple will come and help us,” and she said, “No, you need more help than that. I’m going to organize somebody to come up and help you.” I got kind of worried because the temple president had already told us to keep it low-key because he didn’t want lots of people rushing there. I thought, “What are we going to do? Aunty Gladys has ten people coming up with chainsaws. They probably won’t listen to us and go in the bushes and cut all the trees.” Well, we said a prayer and everything and it rained and Aunty Gladys was on another island and the people that she had asked didn’t show up.

So, the next week Aunty Gladys was still off-island but we needed to have it done. Aunty Gladys is related to all these people here but we called them to come and help us and that’s my son and one of our cousins, Larry Au, back here is Sister Logan and they came with their chainsaw and they started cutting. That’s my grandson and some of the temple workers heard all these buzzing going on so they came up with their chainsaw and started cutting. If you look real careful you can see the piles of rocks and stones all over showing where the graves are.

Now, when we came in, we came in through here. The Hauula side of the cemetery and when we came in, I think Sister Compton will remember this plumeria tree because I pointed that out to her, there wasn’t one leaf on the plumeria tree and we thought, “oh, we’ll trim it” but then she said, “No, just leave it” and after the leaves started coming out because now it could get sunlight.

You can see the cemetery here and here and the temple people said, “Just pile all the cuttings over to the side and we’ll get our men and they’ll take it out.” and we said “Good deal.” See, this is the flume so the sugar cane fields were all down here but this was the flume that brought the water to all the sugar cane fields. This is on the Kahuku side, the temple side, of that cemetery and you can see more rocks here indicating graves. Now right here is a grave that is just covered with lots of rocks. There were several that had rocks all over but this had the most rocks right here. You can see more in here. Each time that we uncovered, we got more excited.

We went during the day when everybody else was at work because my husband and I are retired and sometimes we spent as much as six hours; this was like a full-time job for us. You can see the koa bushes but all in here are all the shrubs and I got them all out so Randolph could cut it down. Then one day, the temple president, and Wayne, and all of the men came up and gave us a hand. They said “Sister Kekauoha, you rest while we’re here.” So I sat down as they did all the work.
If you look, you can see that fence right here and that’s the temple, the temple grounds. You can see a grave here, this is a big rock right here like a marker for the grave. And right here is a big plum tree which I want you to remember this scene because we’re going to show you after it’s all cleaned up.

Only in this area, it looked like somebody came in with a bulldozer and had bulldozed one whole section of the cemetery but came straight up to where Hamana Kalili’s slabs were and said “Hey, this is a grave.” He probably saw all those rocks around but wasn’t sure and then because this whole section was the only place that had California grass in – that’s me pulling it out. Then the temple people said, “Instead of you climbing up that hill, we’re going to put in a fence and a gate so that you can go in and out.” and we thought “Wow, that’s really great.” Well, after we started cleaning and everything, the temple people said “You know what, do you think that you can bring all of that shrubbery out here so that we can get a shredder so we can shred all these things?” And I looked at that pile of rubbish that we had all along that side of the fence and said “You must be kidding!” and they said “Oh, maybe we can get groups of people coming in.” and I thought “Who’s going to come?” Well, it just so happened that that weekend the Tongan club called the temple presidency and said “We want to give service.” so they helped to haul all the rubbish out. Then we got some Scouts to come up, one of them is my cousin, my grandson, and a boy from our ward to come up and help us to pile all the rubbish. Even my grandchildren came; right now they’re just sitting here resting so I took a picture of them, but they helped to pull all the shrubbery out. The Hawaiian club came out, the Samoan club came out, the Tongan club came out - not the Hawaiian – the Samoan, the Tongan, and the Fijian and the Hawaiian club didn’t come out to help at all – they were still in the taro patches. But, anyway, the found this shredder from BYU and then after we got, when we started I told Randolph “Are you sure you want to clean this cemetery?” he said “Yes” I said “This whole thing?” and he said “Yes” and I said “OK, we’re going to finish it” this is January by now “and by Memorial Day, this place should be cleaned.” he said “OK, we’ll get it clean.”
This is around the first of April and so they got the shredder from BYU and then we shredded a whole bunch of rubbish.

Here, where the plum tree is here, you can see all the graves here. Some of them were divided into three plots; they had sections for three graves. And, I swear, maybe it’s because I really want to find a grave that this rock says “Nalika Kekauoha” but I guess you would have to be a forensic scientist, I guess. But you could see some kind of writing on there but you could make out an “N”, some you can see an “E”, some you can really see a “K”, an “E”, an “M” but you can’t really make out the name. Then somebody says “Why don’t you go look through your Hawaiian list and maybe you can’t make out the name. Everybody then had a name with a “K”, an “E”, an “N”, an “A” so you couldn’t tell. But, as we continued cleaning, I would tell my husband “Why don’t you just pick a grave? Nobody knows. Just say that this is grandma’s grave.” But, anyways, we started getting Aunty Gladys (Ahuna), Uncle Tarzan (Ahuna) Aunty Sissy (Adolpho), Uncle Samuel (Kekauoha), and other friends and relatives and the president of the temple to come up and help us identify where the graves are – where do you think the grave is? If two people say “That’s a grave, I can see it right there.” I would tell Randolph “Peg it.” and so we started pegging all of the graves along here. Then we thought “Give the Hawaiian club one more time – one more chance.” so we asked them if they could come and help us outline all the graves with the rocks and we would go down the hill, go to the bushes to find rocks, or borrow some from some of the graves to place around them and they said “OK, we’re going to come up.” and they still didn’t show up. Out of all the people who didn’t work, there were many people who were retired and everything who would walk around the temple for exercise they all would say “Oh, we’ll be back one day. We’ll help you!” nobody came but Mavis Coleman and she came and she helped me pull all the weeds and everything.

Then, by the first week of May we were through cleaning the whole cemetery so we asked the president of the temple if we could bring in the sixth-graders and have them decorate all of the graves. They said “Well, you know, for liability we’re afraid.” And I said “Don’t worry we’ll have just like an excursion slip the kids will write, we’ll send off permission slips and the temple won’t be liable for anything.” so they agreed and we made sure all the kids had on shoes, that all of the kids brought a drink of water so that none of them would faint or fall or trip over the roots and we gave the children all the rules. We got $100 from HRI, $100 from Laie Community Association, we went to buy the small, little vases that were 99 cents apiece and we went to Wal-Mart and bought flowers – one bunch of flowers for 86 cents, and we got enough for all the graves. We identified 87 graves and the temple said “Yes, you may bring in the kids”. So the kids came in and helped us pull whatever koa was growing around the graves and then on Christmas Eve, my husband and I, before Christmas, went and we brought all of the flowers for the cemetery and we had my grandchildren come and decorate all of the graves with a flower.
This is the plum tree I told you to remember, you know how ugly the rocks looked but in the sun they all turned white. This is where my husband’s great-grandfather is buried, Hosea Nahinu Kekauoha, and down here is that cemetery that we found and up on the top is the gazebo. The gazebo is right here and that’s where the cemetery is. See, that’s the same plum tree – we’re just showing you all of the graves. You can see that plumeria tree. These are the roots of the trees that the president is afraid for people to go. We’ve had Mike Foley, here, who wanted to interview us about it but we said “You go get permission from the president first because we don’t want to do anything that the president don’t want us to do.” But, when Brother Riley Moffat went, they said, “OK.”

Even though we didn’t find grandma, we’re still really happy that we did this. Now we’re so happy that my husband went to look for another cemetery for us to clean! This was across the river, HRI buildings are here and it’s across the stream we’re showing you there’s a coconut tree somewhere here, I can’t picture it but it’s in here. You come on the side of Tashiro camp but this cemetery was easier to clean.
They had this tall grass here, I mean the grass was hard to get out but it was easier than haole koa, and again Mavis Coleman, we saw her walking down the street and said “Mavis, we’re going to go clean another grave.” and she said “OK, come get me,” and we went to get here; she came up a couple of times. It took us about a month to clean up this cemetery. We found about seven slabs here and then you can see rocks here and there but we’re leaving it. We told the family about the cemetery and told them “We cleaned it now you keep up with the cleaning.” They are related to Kela Miller, you know Kela Miller, this is their great-grandmother’s cemetery. When we got through Randolph said, “There’s one more cemetery that we need to clean on the Cackle Fresh Road.” Now, there was a lot of koa, when Randolph first took me up to see it and I said, “You must be kidding,” and he said, “No, I want to clean it.” and I said “OK.” I had spoken to Dawn Wasson and told her that we were planning to come and clean the cemetery because this is actually their family land. Maybe two, three weeks before we got through with Mokuiki, she and her husband and her son came and cut down all of the koa so when we came we saw all the California grass starting to grow and the koa starting to grow again so we decided that wasn’t clean enough for us.

Cackle Fresh graveyard before . . . and after

So, this is how we’re cleaning it now and Randolph is poisoning all the Koa, like the ones up at the temple, and today if you go up there we’ve already gone all back there and all in here is all clean. But, we just feel that this is important because even though we do not have family here when we hear the older people in Laie say, “You know, my grandma is buried in there but I’m getting so old that I cannot go through the bushes to go and decorate their graves and I really want to go.” Aunty Gladys’ grandma is buried on this corner of it and it’s all clean now Aunty Gladys, you can go up there. This is one of the reasons that gives my husband and I the desire to go and clean it and even though we don’t know who all the people are. Mahalo.