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Photographs of Joseph F. Smith and the Laie Plantation, Hawaii, 1899

Brian William Sokolowsky

On January 7, 1899, Joseph F. Smith, then a Counselor to Church President Lorenzo Snow, left Salt Lake City to visit the Church’s plantation in Laie, Hawaii. The main purpose for this trip to Hawaii was to benefit the health of President Smith’s wife Sarah Ellen Richards Smith, who had just passed through a “very severe illness.” They were accompanied by two of his daughters, Minerva and Alice. President Smith’s “loyal friend and former missionary companion” Albert W. Davis and Edna Davis, Albert Davis’s daughter, were also on the trip. They first went by train to San Francisco and on January 11, 1899, “steamed out of [the] Golden Gate” on the SS Australia¹ (fig. 1). The Smiths and Davises arrived in Honolulu on January 18, 1899, and were guests on the Laie Plantation for the next four weeks.

Through a fortunate series of events, Otto Hassing, a soldier from Utah who had learned photography, was stationed in Honolulu at the time the Smiths arrived. When their paths crossed, a segment of Joseph F. Smith’s stay in Hawaii—as well as everyday life on the Laie Plantation—was captured on film. This collection of photographs was housed in a previously unprocessed collection of Smith family photographs in the Church Archives.²

Historical Context of the Photographs

The historical context of these photographs must be examined in four separate but related areas: identification of the photographer, the establishment of Laie Plantation, the Laie Plantation in 1899, and the Smiths’ visit to Laie.

Identification of the Photographer. Until recently, the photographer was unknown. At first the photographer was presumed to have been either

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someone in the Smith party, a local photographer in Honolulu, or perhaps one of the missionaries assigned to the plantation. However, an examination of the photograph compositions reveals that the photographer was not an amateur but was someone who had experience in arranging scenes and people for an aesthetically pleasing photograph.

Fortunately, two diaries from this time period not only identify the photographer but also add insight to the images. Samuel E. Woolley, president of the Hawaiian Mission and manager of the Laie Plantation from 1895 to 1919, wrote in his diary entry dated Thursday, January 26, 1899, “Bros. [Frank] Silver [and Otto] Hasing came from Honolulu to pay us a visit. They are two Salt Lake City boys and are still some of Uncle Sam’s soldiers. Both nice fellows. Silver is an Engineer by trade, the other is a photographer I believe” (fig. 2). A week later, on Friday, February 3, 1899, President Woolley wrote, “We all had our photos taken this evening by Bro. Hasing” (fig. 3). Ellen Cole, a missionary serving on the plantation, also mentioned the photographer, indicating in her February 11, 1899, journal entry that Silver and Hassing left the plantation “at an early hour to return to their post for Uncle Sam.”

Otto F. Hilmar Hassing was born July 12, 1874, in Namsos, Norway. It is not known under what circumstances he came to Utah, but he immigrated in 1891. A few days before his twenty-fourth birthday, he bade his wife, “Lizzie,” good-bye and enlisted in the regular army in response to President McKinley’s appeal for volunteers to fight in the Spanish-American War. On his induction card (filled out at Fort Douglas, Utah, on July 7, 1898), Hassing listed “photographer” as his occupation. He joined Company K, Second Regiment of U.S. Volunteer Engineers, where he met Francis “Frank” Jones Silver (fig. 4), who had enlisted at Fort Douglas a week earlier. Company K was ordered to Honolulu to build permanent barracks for the U.S. Army troops moving to and from the Spanish-American War in the Philippines. The regiment left Fort Douglas on July 10, 1898, and arrived in Honolulu on August 17, 1898.
During the voyage, an armistice was signed, ending the fighting in the Philippines. The regiment remained in Honolulu long enough to build the barracks, located a few miles from Honolulu along the road to Diamond Head. While in Hawaii, Hassing and Silver took the opportunity to visit the Church’s plantation in Laie on a twenty-day furlough (January–February 1899). Their company left Hawaii on April 22, 1899, on board the SS Australia (the same ship that transported President Smith and his companions to and from Hawaii, see figure 1), and the entire company was mustered out of service in San Francisco on May 16, 1899. Hassing returned to Utah and later moved to Idaho, where he set up a photography studio in Blackfoot.

**Fig. 3.** Smiths, Davises, and missionaries, Laie Plantation Mission Home, possibly on February 3, 1899. *Front, left to right*: unknown boy, probably one of the Woolley boys; Jennie Musser; unknown man seated on bottom porch step; Margaret Fifield. *Middle, left to right*: unknown children sitting and standing, probably two of the Woolley children; Sarah Ellen Richards Smith; Joseph F. Smith; Clara Hansen holding unknown child. *Back (standing), left to right*: Elizabeth Williams; probably Edna Davis; Albert Davis; Alice Woolley holding unknown child, probably another Woolley child; unidentified man; Ellen Chase Cole; Alice Smith; and Minerva Smith.
 Establishment of the Laie Plantation. Almost fifty years before Hassing photographed Laie, Latter-day Saint proselyting in Hawaii first began. In 1850, Apostle Charles C. Rich called ten men from the gold fields of California to establish a mission in Polynesia. They landed in Honolulu, and, after initial setbacks, the elders began to meet with some success in Laie, where the natives were ready to hear the restored gospel’s message. In a year’s time, they baptized more than one hundred individuals. As Church membership in the Pacific grew, Brigham Young designated Hawaii as the gathering place for the Polynesian Saints rather than encouraging their migration to America.\(^{13}\) In early 1865, Elders George Nebeker and Francis Hammond purchased a tract of land located at Laie on the northeast coast of Oahu. This land would become a plantation where native Hawaiians could assemble and be taught “the necessary means to keep them employed and . . . principles of industry as well as other principles of life and salvation, that their condition may greatly improve.”\(^{14}\)

From 1865 to 1873, Elder Nebeker presided over the Hawaiian Mission, which was headquartered at the Laie Plantation. During this time a sugar factory was established to employ the native Saints, who raised farm produce as well as sugarcane. One thousand acres of the plantation were
arable; the remaining land was used for woodland and pasture for 500 head of cattle, 500 sheep, 200 goats, and 25 horses. Meetinghouses, schoolhouses, and a number of private residences were erected, including a large frame house on the property known as the "mansion." Laie became a permanent Church settlement and a gathering place for the native Saints.\textsuperscript{15}

**The Laie Plantation in 1899.** The landscape and functions of the Laie Plantation continued to evolve. By 1899, the old mission home was gone and a new one, called the Lanihuli House, built in its place (fig. 5). A new meetinghouse (dedicated in 1882) had been built on the hill where the temple now stands, and a school was in full session (fig. 6). Many of the traditional Polynesian homes had been removed to increase the acreage of the sugarcane fields, although a few remained in 1899 (see fig. 4). The old sugar factory was no longer functioning, and the harvest of the plantation's 450 acres of sugarcane was being processed at the Kahuku Mill. The natives

*Fig. 5. Lanihuli House, Laie Plantation, 1899. Dedicated on October 6, 1894, this house and the surrounding Lanihuli Complex served as the headquarters of the Hawaiian Mission and the home for the mission president's family. The house was described as having a "modern style" and contained eighteen furnished rooms. This building was torn down in 1960. (Manuscript History of Hawaiian Mission, Church Archives, September 29, 1894; "A Brief History of Laie and Related Events," Mormon Pacific History Association, http://www.hawaiireserves.com/History.htm, viewed on January 27, 2003.)*
Elizabeth Williams and Polynesian Latter-day Saints (possibly students), Laie Plantation, 1899. Williams probably served as a teacher at the school on the plantation.

worked to grow fields of sugarcane, fruit, and taro, which is used to make poi (figs. 7, 8, 9, 10). Chinese people, who were likely not Latter-day Saints, rented land (fig. 11). Ellen Cole wrote: “Considerable land [is] rented to the Chinamen on which they raise rice. The rice fields are very pretty. [The rice] grows in water and they get two crops per year.”

Powerful pumps and wells were irrigating much of the higher elevations. On June 3, 1898, the new pump house began pumping water throughout the plantation (fig. 12). Hawaiian Mission president Samuel E. Woolley described the event in his diary:

This has been the most eventful day Laie has ever seen in her history. We started the pump at 12 o’clock noon and in ten minutes she was throwing a good stream of water out of the discharge pipe. Bro. Brinton and I tested all our drain ditches and flumes. The[y] work as nice as can be. The fall is splendid. We ran the water in the new ditches to each end in two hours. We ran water on land today that has never had a stream on before, everything worked satisfactory. I am more than pleased with the results. Taking the facilities and workmen we have had everything is first
Fig. 7 (above). Wilford Cole and Polynesian Saints in sugarcane field, Laie Plantation, 1899. Cole worked as the plantation manager. The Western dress of Polynesians (as seen in this photograph) began with the arrival of Protestant missionaries in 1820. (Edward B. Scott, The Saga of the Sandwich Islands [Lake Tahoe, Nev.: Sierra-Tahoe Publishing, 1968], 30–31.)

Fig. 8. Missionaries Jennie Musser and Margaret Fifield, pictured with bananas and other fruits, Laie Plantation, 1899.

Fig. 9 (right). Taro paddies and plantation buildings, Laie Plantation, 1899.

FIG. 11. Chinese workers, Laie Plantation, 1899. The Caucasian man standing toward the left side of the picture is Frank Silver. The young boy on the right side of the picture is probably one of President Woolley’s sons.

FIG. 12. William Williams, pump house, Laie Plantation, 1899. Williams served as a plantation missionary from March 1897 to October 1900.
class in every particular. I feel that it is something we all ought to be proud of. All the people on Laie were there to see it run, while Sisters and all.¹⁷

In 1899, President Woolley was living on the plantation with his wife, Alice, and their five children. He presided over the five couples and fifteen elders who served throughout Hawaii and on the plantation.¹⁸ The plantation missionaries assisted in operating the plantation and preaching the gospel among the natives. Among these missionaries were Wilford and Ellen Cole. As an engaged couple, Wilford Cole (fig. 13) and Ellen Chase were called on a mission by Apostle George Teasdale in 1898. They were married in the Manti Temple on May 4, 1898, and left three weeks later for the first of their several missions to Hawaii.¹⁹ The Coles arrived at Laie on June 11, 1898, at about 8 o’clock in the evening. Of their first evening, Ellen Cole wrote:

We were introduced to our Mission Home and the inmates thereof of which we are to become a part of—after partaking of supper we all sang

Fig. 13. Wilford J. Cole, Laie Plantation, 1899. Prior to his call to Laie and his marriage to Ellen Chase, Wilford Cole spent the better part of his life as a sheep rancher.
Fig. 14. Missionary quarters, Laie Plantation, 1899. Left to right: Elizabeth and William Williams, Ellen and Wilford Cole.

a hymn and chatted together for a while and were then shown to our room, which is very cozy and inviting, the furniture consisted of a bed, two chairs, small table, washstand, and looking glass. After offering our thanks to our Father in Heaven for our safe arrival at our destination, we retired to rest.20

Wilford and Ellen Cole shared their cabinlike quarters with William and Elizabeth Williams, a married couple from Provo, Utah (fig. 14). The Williams were set apart for their mission in March 1897. William labored as a mechanic on the plantation. Elizabeth assisted with domestic duties and was probably one of the schoolteachers (see fig. 6). The couple left Hawaii in October 1900.21

Other missionaries serving at Laie and featured in Hassing’s photographs include Jennie Musser, Clara Hansen, and Margaret Fifield (fig. 15). Martha Jane "Jennie" Musser and her husband, Parley, were from Payson, Utah, and began serving in Hawaii in summer 1897. Jennie was the assistant schoolteacher and the choir leader, and she served in Relief Society on the plantation.22 Clara and Daniel Hansen arrived in Hawaii from their Springville, Utah, home in October 1898. Daniel returned to Utah in early
January 1899 for business and was not at the plantation during Hassing’s visit. Clara sailed home in May 1899, just a few months after the pictures were taken. Margaret Fifield served as the organist of the Primary association on the plantation. Her husband, Edwin W. Fifield, left for Hawaii in December 1896. Margaret joined him in October 1898, and both sailed for home in August 1900.

The Smiths’ Visit. Upon arriving in Honolulu on January 18, 1899, Joseph F. Smith was greeted by “many of his old friends and associates.” Later that evening, the Smith party was feted with a luau held at the Mission House in Honolulu. Of this event, Joseph F. Smith said, “I enjoyed my poi and fish—I ate nothing else, although we had sweet potatoes, boiled chicken, bread and guava jelly and many other things to tempt the appetite, with oranges and bananas galore.” Before proceeding to Laie, the Smiths stayed with the Abraham Fernandez family for two nights, and Albert Davis and his daughter stayed in the Mission House.

FIG. 15. Sister missionaries, Laie Plantation Mission Home, 1899. Front, left to right: Alice R. Woolley, Clara Hansen, and Elizabeth Williams. Back, left to right: Jennie Musser, Ellen Chase Cole, and Margaret Fifield. These six women were the only sister missionaries serving on the Laie Plantation and in the Hawaiian Mission in January–February 1899.
FIG. 16. View of Laie Plantation, 1899. President Joseph F. Smith would have witnessed such views as this during his various tours of the plantation. This photograph features a stone wall although by 1899 many of the plantation’s stone walls had been removed to increase acreage for sugarcane fields.

The journals that helped to identify the photographer (those of President Woolley and Sister Cole) also help to fill in the details of President Smith’s visit. Ellen Cole wrote in her journal:

Most of the time spent in making preparations for Joseph F. Smith and party. They arrive in Honolulu on the 18th. Bro. Woolley meets them there having gone there the day previous. They arrive at Laie on the 21st [it was actually the evening of the 20th].... The prayer and dining rooms are very nicely decorated with ferns and flowers—the work of the natives. After supper the evening is spent very pleasantly in the prayer room.29

The day after the Smiths and Davises arrived at Laie, Samuel Woolley wrote, “We went and got the saddle horses. I took Bros. Smith and Davis around the place out to see the cane fields and the pump. He was very much surprised to see so much done. This made me feel good.”30 Joseph F. Smith and Samuel Woolley went out again on horses on January 26 (fig. 16). On February 15, Ellen Cole wrote:

After breakfast, Wilford takes a ride in the field with Bros. Smith, Woolley, and Davis. I go to the kitchen very early and make pies before breakfast, do some ironing and then go to the feast which is given in honor of Bro. Smith, ... we attend meeting in afternoon. Bros Smith and Davis are the speakers. They give some very good advice and valuable instructions. The natives come and spend quite a pleasant evening in singing etc.31

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Judging from Samuel Woolley’s diary entries, Joseph F. Smith did not relax or “vacation” while at Laie but was on the go almost daily. He traveled from Laie to Honolulu three different times (figs. 17, 18). The second trip included a visit to Hilo, where he dedicated a meetinghouse on February 8. At the dedication, he spoke in both English and Hawaiian.32 Wherever he went, he was prevailed upon to speak and to give blessings. He also visited a tailor in Honolulu and “was measured for a suit of clothes.”33 During the course of Joseph F. Smith’s stay, Woolley accompanied him and kept notes of their activities; he recorded “fine meal” or words to that effect on nine different occasions. As for the health of Sarah Smith, Woolley noted on February 2, “Sister Smith has been poorly all day, is some better tonight.”34

President Smith and company’s four-week visit to the Laie Plantation came to a close on February 20, 1899. The night before their departure, they attended one last feast, which President Woolley described: “In the evening the people gave a nice feast for the folks, it was very nice. They sang to us until quite late. We blessed quite a lot of people who wished to
Fig. 18. Waiolimu House of Worship (Punchbowl Chapel), Honolulu, 1899. Samuel E. Woolley (wearing dark suit, standing near middle of doorway), Joseph F. Smith (wearing dark suit and hat), and others posed in front of this Latter-day Saint meetinghouse, which was completed in 1888.

have a blessing.” President Smith and company departed the next day. President Woolley wrote:

We went on board the Australia. There was an awful crowd on, a great many passengers. All had a great many leis. There were a great many natives there to see the people off. They pulled the gangway down at 4:20 and they were sailing out of the harbor at 4:30. Bro. Smith left Alice his daughter with us to see if it will do her good. We will all feel lonesome now after having so many with us for such a long time.

The SS Australia “landed in San Francisco in the afternoon” of January 28, and the Smiths and Davises arrived in Salt Lake City on Sunday,
March 5, 1899, “where he [President Smith] found his family, all well and his brethren very glad to see him.”

Provenance of the Photographs

The images printed here were found in an unmarked envelope and are part of a larger collection of family portraits and photographs that belonged primarily to Joseph Fielding Smith, Church President and son of Joseph F. Smith. The photographs are unmounted, measure approximately 4" x 5", and are printed on gelatin printing-out paper, indicating the prints were developed by the same person who took the photographs; that is, Hassing did not use a Kodak camera, newly available at that time.

It is presumed that Hassing made a copy of the Laie prints for Joseph F. Smith. These photographs preserved memories for the Smith family, as well as documented daily life on the Laie Plantation and the development of the Church there.

Brian William Sokolowsky (who can be reached by email at byu_studies@byu.edu) is an archivist at the Church Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Salt Lake City. He received a B.A. in art and design from Brigham Young University and a B.A. and an M.A. in history from Western Washington University.

2. The collection of photographs, PH 5841, consists of a total of thirty-eight images, seventeen of which are featured in this photo document. The collection is housed in Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.
5. Samuel Woolley misspelled Otto Hassing’s name in his journal. Church and other records spell the last name as Hassing, which spelling is used in this article.
7. Family Search Ancestral File, which source I have used in the text, lists Otto Hassing’s date and place of birth as July 12, 1874, Namsos, Nord-Trøndheimsfylke, Norway. Otto Hassing’s Church membership record lists his date and place of birth as July 12, 1875, Tronkjen, Norway. His military service card lists his birth place as Nausas, Norway. The 1900 Census Records list his birth month and year as July 1874.
8. U.S. Census Record, 1900, Salt Lake County, Enumeration District No. 33, Sheet No. 2, Line 68.
9. Hassing married Sarah Elizabeth “Lizzie” Swaner in 1893 in Salt Lake City. Previous to his enlistment, Hassing had been a member of the Utah National Guard.


17. Woolley, Diaries, June 2, 1898.


19. The Coles returned to Nephi, Utah, in September 1901. In May 1903, the Coles were called to go to Iosepa, Utah, and labored for three years among the Hawaiian people living in that settlement. In 1908, the Coles were called on another mission to Hawaii. They left in April 1908, taking their five children with them. Sister Cole returned home in 1915 “for only a visit,” after an absence of nearly eight years. She returned to the islands in December 1915, and the Coles remained there for another five years. Ellen Cole returned to Nephi in September 1920 with the couple’s seven children. Wilford Cole remained on the islands until April 1922. Wilford and Ellen Cole lived in Nephi until Wilford’s death on January 23, 1931. Ellen Cole died in El Cerritos, California, on December 30, 1956.


24. Hawaiian Mission Missionaries, s.v. “Margaret Fifield” and “Edwin W. Fifield.”

25. Smith, Life of Joseph F. Smith, 306. Joseph F. Smith served three missions to Hawaii. At age fifteen, Joseph F. Smith was called on his first mission to what were then called the Sandwich Islands, where he labored for more than three years, 1854–57. He pursued the study of the Hawaiian language with diligence and faith, soon bearing witness “by the gift of God as well as by study,” as promised him when he was set apart by Parley P. Pratt. Smith, Life of Joseph F. Smith, 164. He returned to Hawaii in March 1864 with Apostles Ezra T. Benson and Lorenzo Snow to regulate the affairs of the Church on the islands. The Apostles soon returned to America, leaving Joseph F. Smith in charge of the mission until his return home in December 1864. His third mission to Hawaii was as mission president, 1885–87, during the time Church leaders went into hiding to escape arrest on polygamy charges. During his years as mission president, Joseph F. Smith would have lived in the old mission home (which was replaced by the Lanihuli House) on the Laie Plantation. See Russell T. Clement, “Apostle in Exile: Joseph F. Smith’s Third Mission to Hawaii, 1885–1887,” in Mormon History in the Pacific, 53–59.
26. The Mission House in Honolulu was a lodging house where newly arrived missionaries and visitors could stay until they journeyed to the plantation.
28. Ruth Austin, "Our Lei to You: A Biography of Samuel Edwin Woolley," in Mormon History in the Pacific, 35–40. Abraham Fernandez was an early convert to the Church, and the Fernandez family opened their home to the missionaries and anyone visiting from Utah.
30. Woolley, Diaries, January 21, 1899.
32. Woolley, Diaries, February 8, 1899.
33. Woolley, Diaries, February 13, 1899.
34. Woolley, Diaries, February 2, 1899.
35. Woolley, Diaries, February 20, 1899.
36. Woolley, Diaries, February 21, 1899.
38. See Robert A. Weinstein and Larry Booth, Collection, Use, and Care of Historical Photographs (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1982), 127.