

Dedication of the Palawai Historical Marker on the Island of Lanai, Hawaii

Riley Moffat

The events of the first weekend in October 2004 held special significance for the Saints of the Lanai, Hawaii branch. Representatives of the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation, along with the Mormon Pacific Historical Society and the Kahului, Hawaii LDS Stake, joined together to dedicate a memorial plaque commemorating the sesquicentennial of the commencement of the LDS gathering to the Palawai Basin on Lanai in 1854.

Events began in Laie on Thursday, 31 September, with a presentation by Dr. Fred E. Woods, professor of Church History and Doctrine at BYU and executive director of the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation. Dr. Woods spoke on the history of the Palawai gathering to members of the Mormon Pacific Historical Society and faculty and students from BYU—Hawaii.

On Friday, 1 October, Dr. Woods and Kim R. Wilson, chairman of the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation, joined the LDS Lanai branch in a cultural event. During this celebration, a special guest, “Aunty” Genoa Keawe, shared her renowned Hawaiian musical talents. “Aunty” Genoa, a living legend in the islands, is eighty-six years “young” and has been performing professionally since before World War II.

On Saturday, 2 October, Dr. Woods made his presentation on the early LDS gathering to the Palawai basin to the Lanai LDS branch so they could

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better understand the early history of the Church on the island. Many Lanai residents have some knowledge that the first place of gathering by early LDS converts in Hawaii was on Lanai—but little more. Dr. Woods shared details about the early gathering to the Palawai Basin from contemporary diaries and letters.

On Sunday, 3 October, the Lanai chapel was filled to overflowing with Latter-day Saints watching conference via the satellite. Following the Sunday afternoon session, the congregation assembled at Manele Bay where the memorial marker had been erected. According to Hawaiian tradition regarding land tenure, each island is divided into land divisions called “ahupua’a.” Each “ahupua’a” includes as many ecological zones as possible so the residents could have access to a wide variety of natural resources. On Lanai, the early Saints negotiated a lease with the chief who controlled the almost six-thousand-acre ahupua’a of Palawai, a strip of land that ran from the sea at Manele Bay up to the summit of the island and down the other side. About one-half to one mile of this strip of land ran through the Palawai Basin, which is basically an ancient volcanic crater where the Saints laid out their settlement. The monument has been constructed on the road that now passes through the ahupua’a. The actual site of the community is about one mile off the road. The Lanai Company, a subsidiary of Castle & Cook, Inc., which owns the property, has landscaped the roadway with Norfolk Island pines, and the monument sits among them on a small rise situated off the roadway.

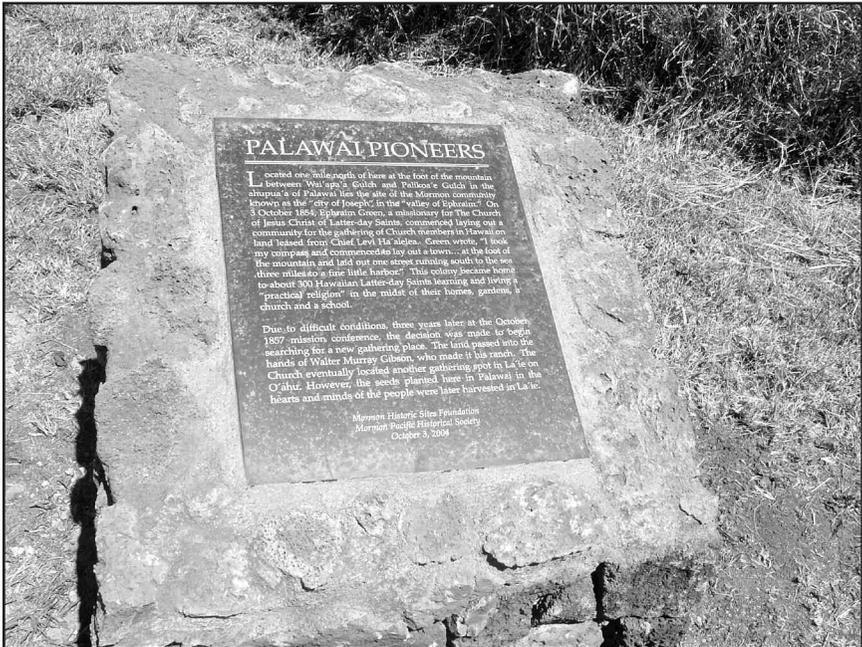
Earlier in the week, Fifita Niu, a high councilor from Lahaina, Maui, assisted by Paul Ngalu, constructed a stone monument using volcanic rock from Manele Bay. Inset into the volcanic marker was a 16 inch by 20 inch anodized aluminum plaque created by Interpretive Designs of Salt Lake City. The monument was funded by the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation in cooperation with the Mormon Pacific Historical Society. The inscription reads:

PALAWAI PIONEERS

Located one mile north of here at the foot of the mountain between Wai’apa’a Gulch and Palikoa’e Gulch in the ahupua’a of Palawai lies the site of the Mormon community known as the “city of Joseph” in the “valley of Ephraim.” On 3 October 1854, Ephraim Green, a missionary for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, commenced laying out a community for the gathering of Church members in Hawaii on land leased from Chief Levi Ha’alelea. Green wrote, “I took my compass and commenced to lay out a town . . . at the foot of the mountain and laid out one street running south to the sea three miles to a fine little harbor.” This colony became home to about 300 Hawaiian Latter-day Saints learning and living a “practical religion” in the midst of their homes, gardens, a church and a school. Due to difficult conditions, three years later at

the October 1857 mission conference, the decision was made to begin searching for a new gathering place. The land passed into the hands of Walter Murray Gibson, who made it his ranch. The Church eventually located another gathering spot in La'ie on O'ahu. However, the seeds planted here in Palawai in the hearts and minds of the people were later harvested in La'ie.

Mormon Historic Sites Foundation
Mormon Pacific Historical Society
October 3, 2004



*Palawai Pioneer marker inscription, Jace McQuivey photograph, October 2004.
Photography courtesy Fred E. Woods.*

About sixty LDS members and guests gathered around the monument for the dedication, conducted by Oscar T. Aguilar, Lanai LDS branch president, and presided over by Arnold K. Wunder, president of the Kahului LDS Stake. Speakers included President Wunder, President Ronald K. Hawkins, president of the Hawaii Honolulu Mission, Dr. Fred E. Woods and Kim R. Wilson representing the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation, and Riley Moffat, president of the Mormon Pacific Historical Society. "Aunty" Genoa led the group in singing "Come, Come Ye Saints" before President Wunder pronounced the dedicatory prayer. During the dedication, a light mist

floated down from the summit of Lanaihale followed by rays from the sun breaking out of the clouds. According to Hawaiian tradition, the light rain indicated the pleasure of the Creator.

Following the dedication, the attendees adjourned and assembled back at the branch chapel for lunch provided by the branch Relief Society sisters. During lunch, “Aunty” Genoa Keawe and Beverly Apana from Kauai continued to serenade everyone with their island-renowned musical talents.

These events and the plaque seem to have the universal support of the community, the Latter-day Saints living on Lanai, and the landowner who sees this memorial as an important part of the history of the island.



Dignitaries at the Palawai marker dedication: (l-r) Arnold K. Wunder, president of the Kahului Hawaii LDS stake; Ronald K. Hawkins, president of the Hawaii Honolulu Mission; Riley Moffat, president of the Mormon Pacific Historical Society; Fred E. Woods, executive director of the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation; and Kim R. Wilson, chairman of the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation, October 2004.

Photograph by Jace McQuivey.



*Palawai basin, first gathering place for the Latter-day Saints in Hawaii, October 2004.
Photograph by Jace McQuivey.*



*Genoa Keawe (center) leads the Saints gathered for the commemoration in the hymn
“Come, Come Ye Saints” on a ukulele.
Photograph courtesy Fred E. Woods.*

