

Oral History Program

OH-8B

Box #1

Brigham Young University – Hawaii
Oral History Program

Pita Edwards

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY - HAWAII CAMPUS
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ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

NARRATOR: PITA EDWARDS

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INTERVIEWER: Kenneth W. Baldrige

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Side A

INT ...the home of Bridge Po--Bridge Po, Hastings, New Zealand. December 22. I'm talking to Brother Pita Edwards. Okay, first of all, Brother Edwards, when were you at MAC, and about how long were you there?

PE I attended the MAC for three years, 1922, '23, and '24.

INT Now, were you living here in Hastings at that time before you left to the college?

PE I lived very close to the MAC. I lived about half a mile away.

INT Now, were you a day student or did you board there?

PE No, I boarded at the college.

INT Now, what influenced your decision to go. Was it just the fact it was a Church school or close by?

PE Yes, it was close to the college, and my parents were members of the Church. And my older brother, Sonny, went to the college when the college was first opened. He was there for five years.

INT Then you've got an MAC tradition already in the family.

PE Yes.

INT What type of training did you get, academic and vocational training?

PE My first year, 1922, my father gave me a team of horses—four horses, and then I worked on the agricultural farm for two months. And after completing my term with agriculture on the farm, I started school.

INT Did you continue working on the farm while you were going to school; to help pay off fees or anything like that?

PE No, I just spent the two months. My father was an agricultural man, and he felt that inasmuch as the MAC was the agricultural college for the Maoris, so he felt that I should spend time in learning farming.

INT What happened to the team of horses after the two months?

PE After two months that I spent on working in the college, the horses were returned back to my father.

INT Now, after that, did you do any more work on the farm, or did you have some other work assignments there?

PE Yes, they assigned me to milk cows, and then that was the curriculum that the principal saw fit that every student should participate in.

INT Keep you humble, right? (laughs) What about your classroom work? What type of classes did you have? Were you in the third form at this time when you started in 1922?

PE I was in sixth, what form would that be?

INT Let's see, how old were you when you started there?

PE Sixteen.

INT Sixteen, when you started there. Had you finished primary school?

PE Yes.

INT And then you went straight on?

PE I went to college. In fact, I had loafed around at home for three years before going to college.

INT What classes did you take there at the college?

PE We had English—Elder Harris was our teacher for English and we had Arithmetic.

INT Do you remember Elder Harris's first name? [Frankin H. Harris]

PE I've forgotten. He was a very good teacher in English. And then we had arithmetic, bookkeeping, and then we had religious lessons; we studied the Book Mormon and Geography.

INT Were these classes held everyday, do you remember?

PE The religion part was held every other day, but the rest of the classes were daily.

INT Now, did you graduate?

PE No, I did not graduate.

INT Did you have to stay four years in order to graduate, was that the scheme?

PE Yes, if I spent another two years, I would have graduated. But I didn't complete my schooling.

INT Did you go somewhere else or what? How come you didn't complete the other two years, do you remember?

PE Well, I got married.

INT Ah, yes, that's good reason. Nowadays, married students can go to school, but I guess in those days it was hardly possible. Do you remember what the fees were?

PE It was thirty pounds a year. It covered everything. The only other thing that you had to buy was the books. The Church really made it possible for all students and members to attend because of the low fees.

INT How did you pay off the thirty pounds, did you father just pay for it, or did you work it off while you were there?

PE Our commencement day commenced at round about the fourth of October, and then it gives us ample time to go out and work. And my father was a shearing contractor, and I worked for him. Through that I was able to meet my commitments to the college.

INT So you paid your own way through by working during the summer, right? Do you remember how many students were there?

PE Approximately ninety.

INT Yes. Who was the headmaster at that time?

PE We had two headmasters during the time I spent there. Elder Leo B. Sharp; he was there up to 1924. And then when he left, Elder Stott came, and then he took over as the principal of the college. [sic. Elder Stott(1924-1927) preceded Elder Sharp (1921-1924), then Elder Sells followed (1924-1927)] I would like to speak about Elder Sharp. He was a very, very good man, and the boys were very, very close to him. In the few years after he went back to Salt Lake, he died. And I was privileged to be called to attend the 1962 April conference, and I made my mind up to see Sister Sharp. At the time that I was staying at Elder Glenn Rudd's home, I asked if it was possible to meet Sister Sharp. And one evening, Sister Sharp came, and visited. And I was very, very privileged indeed to meet her.

INT That must have been quite a delightful privilege for her, too. Do you remember any of the other teachers?

PE Yes, Elder Moser. He was our football coach.

INT Do you remember his first name? [Erwin V. Moser]

PE No. He was our football coach, and he was known as the man with the bag. Really, he was the one who fostered the St. Johns Ambulance during the football matches.

INT Is that right?

PE When any one got hurt, whether it be an MAC student or the opponent, he'd rush on to the field with his bag, and he would administer to the injured. If possible, he'd put the man on his back and carried him off the field. And I was privileged to meet him in 1962. I went to Ogden, and I made the inquiry about him. They told me he lived in Ogden. And in about nine o'clock—I was living in the home of Cash Smith—and here came my coach, Elder Moser. We met and then we had a rub-nose, and then shed a few tears.

INT Yes, I'll bet. And there was an Elder Jorgensen.

PE Elder Jorgensen, Elder Jenkins, he was the farm man; Elder Coled, he was in charge of *Te Karere*, and the *Te Karere* was operated at the MAC college at the time. I believe that he works for the genealogy society at the present time. He and Elder Jensen wrote a book.

INT Oh, yes, "Number Israel in the Pacific."

PE Yes.

INT Oh yes, he wrote that did he? Is he still alive? Do you know?

PE Well, in 1962 I met both of them.

INT Oh yes, I'd like to catch up with him too. Do you remember any non-Maori students that were there?

PE Oh yes, out of the ninety students, there were about thirty islanders, two Tahitians, the Mapuhi brothers, they were half-brothers, and the one in Hawaii. His name is David Kaile. Then there were quite a few Samoans and Tongans. We had Lala Leti, Fa Feu. These are Samoan boys, Makalau Pihau, Melila Purcell.

INT Are these boys that were brought over from the islands to go to school here?

PE That's right. They came especially from the islands to receive education, not only education concerning things that they could earn, but also a knowledge of the Gospel.

INT And this boy from Hawaii, came down too, for the same thing?

PE Yes.

INT Kaile is his name?

PE His parents were in the entertaining group that toured New Zealand. Of the Tongan boys, there was Samuela Fakatou. I met Samuela Fakatou in Salt Lake City, 1962. He was in charge of the linen in the Salt Lake Temple. And then Josaia Mateaki, Pikula Paulesi, [sic..reverse] and many other Tongan boys.

INT Well, I may have you write those names down. Now, your dormitory facilities, I understand, they were cubicles, had two or three boys in them.

PE That's right. We had wonderful rooms which comprised of about two to three in a bedroom. And then, my first two years, I spent in room three, and my roommates were Albert Collier, who had graduated from the college but working on the college farm. And Peter Calken, who was also senior to me. And I spent two years with those men. The next year, 1924, I spent two years with the Tongan boys in room fourteen. My companions were Charlie Sanft and Willie Wolfgramm.

INT Charlie Sanft, he'd be Samoan, wouldn't he?

PE No, Sanft is Tongan.

INT He's Tongan, that's right, I remember now.

PE Both of them were Tongans, Schultze, and Sanft.

INT Now, 1922, '23, and '24, I know you had some top-notch rugby team about that time. Did you play football?

PE I did play football. I played football, and then from that institution, two great footballers were selected for the New Zealand All-Blacks team that toured Great Britain. They were George Nepia, known afterwards as the famous Maori All-Blacks, and then Lui Paewai—the five-eighth.

INT Yes, we talked to George Nepia in Masterton yesterday. So he told us about that. What position did you play?

PE I played what they called at the time Break-away. I played in the forwards.

INT Now, 1923—as I remember from what George Nepia said—you just missed out winning the Hawkes Bay Provincial Championship. Were there pretty good teams in 1922 and 1923?

PE We had very good teams during those years.

INT Oh, I didn't realize that he was a Maori. Interesting. I understand some of the sisters took you for dramatics and speech activities.

PE Yes. Not so much during my time, but during Sister Baliff's time. She really was good in theatrical work, in Relief Society. But in my time we never had so much.

INT This next questions here is one—I feel—is one of the most significant. In what way do you feel you benefited from your attendance there?

PE I received a knowledge of the Gospel, and then from that early experience in receiving that knowledge. I still have a testimony of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I served as a member of the bishopric when the stake was first organized in Hawkes Bay, under the leadership of Spencer W. Kimball. On Novermeber 20, 1960, I was ordained and set apart as a first counselor to the Korongata Ward, and I served for four years. And I served five years as high councilman, and then I served three months as supervising high councilman for Korongata ward. Then I served eight months as first counselor to the bishopric, and through illness, I had to be released. But at the present time, I hold the office as first counselor in the superintendency of the Sunday School.

INT So, you feel that the MAC had a definite impact on your spiritual life and in training?

PE I do really believe that the dear old MAC had done a wonderful work. I would like to mention a few names that had come from that institution who are active in the Church still. We had President Southon, [OH-15A] who had been President of the Hawkes Bay Stake for about five years. Then we had Tutu Waritini, [OH-8A] who had been a member of the presidency for about three years. So, through these men, that I that they did receive their early training and their leadership from dear of MAC.

INT How about academically? Do you feel that the knowledge that you gained there about the things of the world has been of help to you?

PE Yes, I received what knowledge I have—the greatest knowledge I have—from attending MAC. I have my own business. I have been in business in partnership with my brother for eighteen years as a shearing contractor. And I have been foreman for the Apple and Pear Board; prior to that, it was known as the Marketing Department, where fruits were brought in and then distribute throughout New Zealand and throughout the world. I have been foreman for the cool store for ten years. And at the present time, I have been privileged to be a Justice of the Peace.

INT Now, you've been a shearing contractor. Are you still working at that now.

PE Yes, I'm still employed.

INT Did you learn any of that at MAC, or did most of that just come through your father?

PE Most of it came from my father. My father was a contractor, and then the contracting world. As far as the Edward's are concerned, it goes to about sixty years in the family.

INT Yes, I should say. All right, I gather from what you've said in citing the names of President Southon, President Crawford, and various ones that you feel that the Church received tremendous impact as a result of the MAC. Do you feel—I wondered how you felt about this—this did provide the leadership for—well, it's still providing leadership as far as that goes, but for quite a period of time, most of the Church leaders here in New Zealand were MAC old boys?

PE During the World War II, all the Zion elders were returned, and the President Cowley remained alone. And the talk of the people throughout New Zealand, "Now, the Church could never have survived, lived, because of the missionaries being sent away." But President Cowley saw fit so that they call leaders in leadership from the Maori people. And then during the World War II, the Maori people became leaders, and they made a good impression to the Church. And today, the Church is stronger than ever.

INT That was quite a proving time, I suppose.

PE Yes, it has been.

INT The leadership is forced upon you and accepted. Good. Are there any other incidents you think might be mentioned that you recall?

PE Well, a very important incident to me that occurred recently, is the building of the Church college in Hamilton. I and several of the MAC old boys, ex-old boys, that went to assist in building the chapel in Queen Street, Auckland. President Young was the mission president, and he called a meeting of the MAC old boys to come to his home and asked for support. That was the building of the Church college in Hamilton. And we gave approval of it. Through his blessings, we have the Church college of Hamilton in existence. It was dedicated April 20, 1958.

INT Yes, I know there was quite an impact there by MAC in getting CCNZ [Church College of New Zealand] established. That was good.

PE And then now, the Church college have sent out graduates, and they have become leaders in New Zealand at the present time.

INT So when you were up in Queen Street, you were there on a labor mission, were you?

PE They called for assistance, so we went.

INT Now, all of those that you named were there?

PE Yes.

INT Had the labor mission program been set up yet? Did you regard yourself as being labor missionaries at that time on the Queen Street Chapel, or was that before?

PE Well, I think that was the beginning. That was the embryo of the missionary, because from then, when we were ready to come home, my son, Sam Edwards, was called to serve to be a “brickie” at the Church college.

INT Yes, I know Sam.

PE Yes, I had three boys to serve as working missionaries—Sam Edwards, David Edwards, and Peter Edwards.

INT Good. Well, you’ve tied a lot of Church history in the last couple of generations.

PE On your journey to the east coast I’d like you to convey my Aroha-nui to Rupert Wihongi, [OH-7] Tipi Kopua, [OH-5B] and Kaiser Rawhiti. Tell them that the dear old MAC are doing wonderful work in publicizing the Church. So I hope that they are active in doing their part in showing the goodness they derived from attending the dear of MAC. Kia ora, Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year.

INT Thank You.

[End of Interview]