

Oral History Program

John Elkington



Polynesian Cultural Center

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LAIE HAWAII

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Interviewer

8/5/82 Thurs. 3:30pm at his
Date home

Polynesian cultural center history
Subject of tape(s)

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INTERVIEWER: Kalili Hunt
INTERVIEWEE: JOHN ELKINGTON
August 5, 1982
No. 029

INT: I am at the home of Brother John Elkington who had a great deal to do with the building of the Polynesian Cultural Center and later on stayed as the coordinator and Chief of the Maori Village... so much more than that...and Brother John Elkington will elaborate on that in detail. John, during what period of time and in what capacities were you involved with the Polynesian Cultural Center?

JE: Well, in the early part of 1963, Kalili, I was building a chapel in Wellington, New Zealand. I received an urgent call from President Wendall Mendenhall. He was at that time in charge of the building committee, the Chairman of the Building Committee for the whole Church. He told me that I had to catch a plane to go to Hamilton to meet with him. This I did.

On arrival, we had a meeting that he called with some of the Maori leaders and he informed us that he was forming a committee to build a building for the Polynesian Cultural Center which was in the planning stages. And he wanted a carved Maori meeting house authentically built and in doing this, he called me as chairman. With a number of others we formed a committee with a crew of between sixteen and sometimes thirty people. We started the project that included all the carving, woven panels, and everything that was necessary to build this building. That started right from the planning stages. We had to draw plans for the carved houses and we found out that there was to be three at the Center. When we had the plans drawn, it was necessary to get a crew of carvers to carve all the carvings, the panels, the popos and then a crew of ladies to do the weaving. Even before that, it was necessary to get the necessary materials and so we got different people, too numerous to name, but from all over New Zealand. This was done. The crews went into the forest to get the material for the woven panels and along the beaches into the sand we used to get the _____ for the colored materials to also do the weaving. And then as we collected the materials out of the bush, they were dyed and prepared and dried for the weavers. And then, when all the material was done, including the timber for the logs for the tofu carvings, they were dried and tannelized and prepared for the carvers. And then, when this was all done, the work went forward until the completion in New Zealand of all the preliminary part. It was only left then, of course, to take things and crate them up and send them over to Hawaii and to build the buildings there. While this was going on, it was determined that it would be a wonderful thing if we had a Maori workman to be on display at the Center the people could actually see what the size of the logs that these large canoes were made of and a little bit of history about the voyaging of our people as they traveled from island to island.

Fortunately, I remembered as a young missionary, probably in the northland of New Zealand, that they were carving a large canoe and this was back in 1949. As a missionary up in the northland, I used to pass through on my bike through all different areas and I saw them working on it and I knew it had never been finished. And so I traveled up to Kikua in the northland, and there I met the different people and all of them had forgotten about it. I contacted the old Chief of the area, Henry Witihera and with him and some of the local construction people, we went into the forest and sure enough, there lay this canoe in the forest and we were able to get permission to take this down to Hamilton. They had been using it there as a watering trough for the cattle and it was decayed in some areas. In Hamilton we repaired it and then we tannelized it to make sure that there wasn't any rotten pieces in the hull. They were cut out and new pieces put in. And we were fortunate in being able to get Princess Tepura, who was alive at the time. to come and supervise the actual carving in front and back of the canoe and around the sides. This was all done by our carvers under the direction of an experienced carver that the Queen had sent to us.

INT: Do you remember his name?

JE: No, I cannot at this point. I'll have to look in my records and find it, which I will do for you. He has since passed away and this is, I believe, one of his last canoes he was responsible for completing. And though not a member of the Church, he worked on that project for six or seven months without any remuneration at all. When this was presented, his time was given to the Church. And when it finally came that the canoe was completed, there had been some talk that it was wrong for the old north monopoly chief to give it to the Church and there was some talk that they wanted to be paid for it, wanted a remuneration. And so, with this in mind, Henry Witihera, the Chief, and his eldest son came to see me and we discussed the problems involved in giving this to the Church or the Church buying it. I mentioned to the old Chief that to me it would be more "banga", more power, if he made the gift to the Church. The people would always say that this great Chief actually presented the canoe to the Church, and so he made the statement, "Katikeo", or "that is right." He told his son that there would be no charges against the Church. But there had been some expenses that were owed to the various committees that prepared this canoe, which was originally intended as a gift to King George V of England on his visit, which, owing to his death, didn't eventuate. And so these were all paid and the canoe finally was sent on its way to Hawaii.

My wife and I and one daughter, Kara Moana -- she now lives in Hawaii, married a Hawaiian boy -- we stayed in Hawaii and arrived in 1963, along with others that had already been here, missionaries from all over the Pacific. We joined with them in assisting to

build the Maori village -- putting the buildings up, attaching the carvings, placing the woven panels and then doing the roofing and all the work that was necessary to complete the building, including the fence around the outside. While we were doing this, of course, each of the other villages --- Samoa, Tonga, Tahiti, Hawaii, Fiji -- they had groups that were doing the same as we were and I could readily see that this was going to be a tremendous project.

Even in those stages, it created a lot of interest. People would come in to view the buildings and to see the carvings. And so it was a great day, finally towards the end of 1963, the Dedication of the Polynesian Cultural Center. It finally came, and of course, we had a group from New Zealand. There were a hundred and forty dancers and singers came up especially for the Dedication of the Center and they performed for the Dedicatory services. I had the privilege of giving the closing prayer and there is an amusing part to this. The Polynesian speakers, of course, are known for their oratory and it took so much time that by the time I came to give the closing prayer, everyone had been sitting in the hot sun for a few hours and a lot of them were ready to faint. So I just said in my prayer, "Thank Thee, Lord, for this occasion, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen." And some of the General Authorities and others that were there in the hot sun said that's the sweetest prayer they'd ever heard and I can remember that with a smile.

And, of course, we were privileged to go on with the choir from New Zealand. We sang in the tabernacle in Salt Lake City. The Tabernacle Choir came off from their seats in the tabernacle and sat down and were our audience. And we went up and Alexander Schreiner, the great organist, actually played the organ for us as we sang three or four numbers. It just so happened, as a young Branch President in New Zealand, I called a sixteen-year-old boy named Gerry Ottley to be the first choir master and the choir director of our branch choir. He happened to be the Mission President's son at that time, so he actually knew many of the singers because they happened to be labor missionaries at the temple and college projects in New Zealand. Of course, now Gerry is the conductor of the Tabernacle Choir. And so, with tears streaming down his eyes, he told the choir who we were and that we were instrumental in his taking an interest in music. And so from that humble beginning in a little branch choir in New Zealand, he was to become one of the great conductors of the choirs of the world. He's still conductor of the Tabernacle Choir, and so that was a very wonderful experience that I had through our work with the Polynesian Cultural Center.

I was asked by President Von Clissold if I'd like to stay in Hawaii and work for the Center and I agreed to this. He told me, "If you have permanent residency, you can live here." And when President Mendenhall got to hear of this, he said, "John, above other things, we need to have you go back to New Zealand. However, we want you to serve on the Board of Directors with others who have been

called." So I went back to New Zealand. I was privileged to come to Hawaii at various times for our meetings, until the death of President McKay, when I was released from the Board. But ever since those days, I felt a very, very deep affection and love for the Center and have a real interest there.

One of my responsibilities was, of course, in those days, to select all the Chiefs and it was never hard to find a chief from New Zealand to come and serve at the Center. We had people that would leave just about anything to be a Chief at the Polynesian Cultural Center. And so they came here and served two, three, four years and made their contribution. Tylie Davis was one of the early chiefs and his wife, Patricia. And then we had Joe and Millie TeNgaio who helped us in the original building and were on the original committee. They were also chiefs and served at the Cultural Center three or four years. Then we had Dan and Hazel Ruruku and their daughter, Roma, who was a very beautiful girl and she made a very big impact. Her picture was on posters throughout Hawaii. I had seen some of them almost everywhere I went, including New Zealand. And my brother, Madsen and his wife also served for a period of time as a chief. They brought their family and made a great contribution. Actually, he became a village coordinator and stayed here for five years. And the later ones that came were Lillian and Tom Kursel, and Barney Christy and his wife, Marjorie, came back as carvers. Sid Crawford, one of the great leaders of the Church in New Zealand, great Stake President and Bishop, and now counselor in the Stake Presidency, he came and served in an advisory capacity at the Cultural Center. And my father, who is now eighty-four or eighty-five years old came and spent three years here, also with his wife, and worked on the history and all aspects of the Center. He has contributed a lot to the Center through his writings and research. It's been very helpful. This is all being done, of course, because of their love for their culture and for the Church, which is the prime influence in getting these people to come here. It's been great and wonderful to see how close the different cultures have become. We've all learned to appreciate each other's contribution and that we're all related and that we're all one people, united together under the Church. The Gospel has brought us together here and I feel that this is one of the great missionary programs of the Church. From its humble beginnings, it has fulfilled all of the expectations that those men that were inspired, and I'll mention a few I feel that did much to bring this about.

Of course our Prophet, President McKay; then there was Matthew Cowley who was one of those who actually had the inspiration and vision and was given that direction. And he passed this mantle on to Wendall Mendenhall and Von Clissold, who he knew personally and, of course, these two men got behind the whole program and we have this beautiful Laie Temple and the Polynesian Cultural Center which is, along with the University, the heart of this great community. Without these three great institutions, I suppose it would still

be a sleepy little town in the middle of the cane fields. But today it's known throughout the world. It's been an instrument in training hundreds, I'd even say thousands of their young men and women, giving them higher education through being able to go to Brigham Young University. And as they worked at the Center, they were able to pay for their schooling. This is a wonderful thing. I think this is really why the Lord has been so kind to us, because it has been for the benefit of His sons and daughters. I heard many of my brothers and sisters, our own children have had an opportunity to work in the Center and have been helpful. My wife has worked in the Center for many years, She is still working there and we are able to support our son on a mission through her efforts at the Center. So I've got a lot to be grateful for, even though I put probably the best years of my life in the building of the Center and I came back and took part in it when the Center was developed further and the size is nearly, of course, over doubled to what it originally was. And I came back again and worked in building the additions to all the villages.

INT: John, what year was that?

JE: That was in October of 1973 when I returned with my friend. The two of us had earlier served missions and we were the two that came back to Hawaii to work on the extensions to the Center. Of course, I stayed until this was completed. This was two or three years later -- two years later -- and I worked for a short time in construction, maintenance construction for the Cultural Center and then I had the privilege -- even though I had served and worked at the Center, I had never been a Chief of the village. So I had the privilege of serving a short time, two years, as the Chief of the Maori village. And so, Kalili, as I talk with you this afternoon, there have been some highlights in my life that I will never forget in my association with the Center. One was that one time I had five of my children dancing in the night show and they were going to school or their husbands or wives were going to school. They were dancing and that was a thrill to me to go and see the night show and see them there.

Also, it was a privilege to be selected by President Cravens to be the Chairman of the welcoming committee for the President of the Church on his first visit. I was the carpenter in the construction part of the Center and he called me in and said, "Look, we've got President Kimball coming. I want you to be the chairman of the committee. Now this is a little bit out of the ordinary, but I feel that you should be the man to set this committee up."

And so I worked with all the chiefs at the Center and assisted them in welcoming President Kimball in his first visit to the Center. This to me, was one of the great experiences of my life when the Prophet came, because I knew after meeting him that he had a special place for the descendants of Lehi and that he had a great love for them. At the banquet, as he sat down with the workers,

as they sat on the floor and kneeled Polynesian-style with Sister Kimball, I knew that we had a Prophet of God in our midst and that the Lord approved of the Center and that there's a great purpose and plan.

This was reaffirmed a few years later when President Kimball came back to Hawaii to dedicate the Hawaiian Temple. And I was one of the fortunate ones who happened to be serving on the High Council at the time and we were assigned to stay with the Prophet during the time that he stayed here in Hawaii and for the area conference that was later held in Honolulu. He stayed in the hotel and on two or three occasions I was able to actually sit and talk to the Prophet. He called me into his room once at the Kuilima and sat down and he spoke to me about the Center for about a half an hour, and after speaking with the Prophet, I knew that the Center had a great purpose to perform in the Gospel plan in these latter days. And then we moved to Honolulu and at the hotel in Waikiki where we stayed, we were just a room away from the Prophet. After one of the area conferences, he came out of his room and I happened to be standing in the corridor and he said, "Brother Elkington, how would you like to walk with the Prophet along the sands of Waikiki?" So we went downstairs, and Sister Kimball did not feel like walking along the beach, but I went on with the Prophet and we spent three-quarters of an hour walking along the beach. Apart from his secretary, there was no one else there. And I can truthfully say that my life hasn't been quite the same since that experience.

I was selected, along with two other policemen from the Honolulu Police Department, and went to a beach party. It was a banquet that was put on by friends of President Kimball and President Tanner. All the General Authorities and the First Presidency were there with their wives. There were three of us there and as we sat out in the cars waiting, these two Honolulu policemen said to me, "Do you think they're going to give us anything to eat?" I said, "Look Brethren, we're here with the Prophet of God and he'd never, ever leave us out here while he ate in there." And I'd hardly finished these words when a messenger came and said, "You're invited inside to the banquet." So we went inside to the banquet and a terrific dinner was put on. Actually, it was the beach home of the President of the Temple. He owns the place and I think it's still there.

After the big dinner was over, he said, "Brother Elkington, I love Polynesian music. I know you can sing." I don't know how he knew, but he said, "I know you can sing, so we'll get you to entertain us." I said to the two Hawaiian policemen that were with us, "Look, I've never known a Hawaiian that can't sing. If you boys don't know how to sing, you're in trouble."

One of them said to me, "Look, I am one of the few Hawaiians that can't sing, but my buddy used to be an entertainer in Waikiki and he can sing Maori songs, all the songs, Hawaiian songs." And so

I asked the host if he had any ukuleles or guitars and they brought out two beautiful Martin ukuleles and a guitar and, of course, we played and sang for the Prophet. And, of course, there were quite a few good singers that were there and it lasted for about an hour. When we got through, President Tanner mentioned to me that the Prophet should return home and bring the meeting to a close and I announced this. President Kimball said, "Have you got a couch that I can recline on?" Of course they said, "Yes." So they brought it out. He laid back on this and he said, "Now, Brother Elkington, I want you to start all over again, and don't miss a song." So with the Prophet there and the beautiful moon over the beach there at...I can't think of the name of the place...

INT: Koikai?

JE: No, it's out the other way where the oil refinery is.

INT: Makaha?

JE: No. They had a great football team out there.

INT: Oh, Waianae.

JE: Waianae. It's on the Waianae coast and it's a little village before Waianae. It was a beautiful night and the moon was up there and we were singing to the Prophet. Because of that one meeting that he had there with us, it's because of this trip to Hawaii that at Christmas, he always has a party and a little group of Polynesian singers in Salt Lake and Utah that always go there and sing for the Prophet. It's an annual thing and my daughter is a member of this group and every year she says the Prophet says to her, "Now you tell your Dad I love your music." And even though he's been ill recently, they still went last Christmas and had the opportunity to sing for the Prophet.

So, Kalili, these are some of the highlights, things that I remember. Some are so wonderful that I couldn't help but marvel at. The visit of the Tongan King and we enjoyed that, and then the Prime Minister of Samoa and his visit to the Center. There were terrific ceremonial occasions.

We saw Polynesian culture at its best. And I had the privilege of hosting our own Queen, Queen Kalihikahi through the Center on two occasions. She loves the Center.

And so, from very small beginnings, Brothers and Sisters and friends, as we make this recording you're listening to, my mind goes back through the mud and the brush and the rain to get the materials for the carved house and it's been worth it. Of course my life has been more or less tied up with the Center and it's an association that has contributed greatly to my children and my grandchildren. My wife and I will be eternally grateful for the

time we spent at the Center and the help that they've given our children of getting an education and being able to go to the Brigham Young University-Hawaii. There's not much more that I could say. I'll be happy to research some of those people and give them to you. You could write to them and make this narrative a little bit more complete. Well, thank you very much and aloha.

INT: Thank you.

(Transcriber's notation: The following is a separate interview with John Elkington with regard to tape recorded interviews he made in New Zealand with several older Church members.)

JE: Another part of this we had completed, actually, the program at Hawaii and it was suggested to me that some of the old and original members of the Church who joined the Church way back when the Church first came to New Zealand, that remembered the missionaries traveling two by two and arrival and a lot of the old history. These people were getting quite old and within a few years were going to pass on. And so, with this in mind, I purchased a tape recorder and I traveled throughout the main branches of the districts of the Church in New Zealand and interviewed some of these old stalwarts.

For instance, there was Stewart Meha who was one of the first in New Zealand to go to Salt Lake to the Temple. He went with a group. He was a young man at the time. It was while he was there that he mentioned to the Prophet that perhaps there was a group of descendants of Lehi through Hagoth the great voyager who had come back to the Temple, to the land they'd left. And, of course, during the welcoming speech by the Prophet Joseph Fielding Smith, who had spent some time in Hawaii as a missionary, he informed Brother Meha and all the Maoris that were there in that first group that they were the descendants of Lehi and that they were some of those, along with their early ancestor, Hagoth, who had gone out into the Pacific and were preserved by the hand of the Lord until this, the day of the restoration of the Gospel.

And so I actually interviewed these people and talked to them and they put their memories down on tape and we have them in the archives now at the Brigham Young University.

There's Polly Duncan, the first Polynesian in New Zealand or Maori to be the President of the Relief Society for the Mission. We have her testimony. She also was the mother in the home where the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants were translated by Matthew Cowley. It was in her home and she told us about this in her remarks.

And James Prury from Hawkes Bay. Of course, we all know that Hawkes Bay is where the Church really grew. There was the first Maori College or the first college in the Pacific, and my father and my wife's father were actually students at the, they called it the MAC. It was destroyed in, I think it was 1924 earthquake, but a lot of the leaders in the Church in New Zealand actually went there as students. Of course the present schooling developed out of the accomplishments of what that school did for the Church. It would be interesting to know --- I'm a rugby man --- one of the greatest rugby players of all times was a student there --- George Nepia, a great all back. And also, we had some of the great football players who came to the school from Samoa and Tonga. They all went to MAC. And I think that was the first relationship that was actually intercultural there at that school. We had a Chief there from Tahiti who actually played football with George Nepia and he was a Chief here at PCC for many years.

INT: Brother Mapui? *mapui*

JE: Yes, Brother Mapui.

INT: He said he was a fullback for that team.

JE: Yeah. And so, it had its place in the development of the Church.

Then at the home of Brother Provicini we taped his testimony.

Just down the road, of course, was the ruins of the old school destroyed by the earthquake. My dad was the President of the Old Boys Association when the new school was developed. I remember at the annual conferences that they used to meet, they used to call them Hui Tau or "annual conference." Most of them were held at Hawkes Bay and a special morning was given and we'd march down, and all the children and grandchildren of the students of MAC would march down to the ruins of the old school and have a sunrise service and then sing a few songs. That was implanted on my memory as a young boy, attending those meetings.

One of those that were associated with the old school was Ariel F. Baliff. He was on the staff of the Brigham Young University up until recently. I think he just retired. But he was a teacher there and came back as Mission President.

President Sydney Gerald Ottley --- he was a teacher there that became Mission President. It's his son that's conducting the Tabernacle Choir now. He actually taught school at the old MAC College.

And there were others. Walter Smith, who wrote a lot of Maori music and songs that became very popular in New Zealand, taught my Dad. He wrote the song, "Beneath the Maori Moon," and a lot of the

wonderful tunes that became very popular in New Zealand, not only amongst the members, but nationally. He was a great school teacher.

I don't know if I mentioned it, but my wife's father was the first student who enrolled there at the school. And while he was there, of course, he met my dad. They used to always kid me later that they'd planned that I would marry his daughter. It's been a tremendous union and I am grateful for those students in those days who had these dreams and dreamed these dreams for their children and descendants to come.

It's also interesting to note -- and I just put this as a sidelight -- maybe of interest. It was my father-in-law's youngest son who was born blind and deaf. It was at a visit by Matthew Cowley to our little ward that he brought his son in and he asked my father, the Branch President, to get President Matthew Cowley to bless the boy. And I happened to be the usher at the door and I carried this little kid up and President Cowley said, "Oh, this is a big baby. Did he give you a name?" The Branch President said, "This is ^{Te Kōwhiri} ~~the Wiaerā's~~ son and he wants you to give him a name and a blessing and while you are blessing him, President Cowley, he wants you to give him his eyesight. He's blind." President Cowley, telling the story later, mentioned that like an electric shock went through him. He said he had enough faith because of the faith of the father of the boy, and he gave him, Brother Cowley gave him a blessing and blessed him that his sight would be restored. Of course that boy grew up to be the first of the children to go through the Temple and hold the Priesthood. So what a tremendous thing. And so Matthew Cowley was one of the great General Authorities, and all that we're seeing now I think he envisioned a lot of this.

INT: Can I ask you a question about the carved house? So many of the BYU faculty members say that Brother Cowley envisioned the carved house for people to travel over to do the Temple work here in Laie.

JE: Well, I think they got this brought about by his original statement. I can remember reading this. He dedicated the old chapel, Laie chapel here, as a General Authority and in his remarks that he made he said that he envisioned having a Maori village here where people could come and stay and go to the Temple. And, of course, having their own Temple in New Zealand constructed, this hasn't been necessary. I think in his original statement it was to that effect. It would be a place where the people could actually live while they were here from the different islands. I think he envisioned, the original concept was that it would be a living center where the people would actually live, stay, sleep, cook, and something like that. They have a similar thing in New Zealand, in Rotorua. It's very similar to that. They actually live. They have hot coals and do their cooking right there. The

visitors and tourists, as they come through, can actually see it. I understand that at one time that was thought of, but the government department concerned in Honolulu did not look too kindly upon that sort of a program. If they wanted to do that type of thing here it would have to be upgraded quite a bit. So that's never happened.

INT: So you feel that Matthew Cowley did see a Cultural Center?

JE: Well, I think that what he saw was along villages, and that's what we have today.

Brother Clissold was the Stake President here and Temple President and Mission President in Japan and he had quite an influence in this area. So he was willing to help Mendenhall immensely in selecting personnel and calling the labor missionaries, not only to do the Center, but also the University. Of course, Brother Mendenhall at that time was the Chairman of the Pacific Board of Education, and it was his working under the direction of President McKay that we got all the schools in the Pacific and the chapels. That all came under the great labor missionary program. When we heard that President Cowley died I was working as a labor missionary in Hamilton where the Temple and college is. And I'd heard that the last New Zealander that talked with Matthew Cowley was Kurner, Brother William Kurner. His son Stan lives here in Hawaii and is a teacher. Brother Kurner and his wife happened to be visiting Salt Lake at the time and they had spoken to Matthew Cowley not long before he died -- maybe a day or two before. And so when he arrived back, I thought to myself, "I wonder, President Cowley must have said something to him."

So I made a point of going to see Brother Kerner and I asked him, "Brother Kurner, I understand you are the last New Zealander to see Matthew Cowley before he passed away in Los Angeles." He said, "Yes." I said, "I have had a strange intuition that President Cowley said something to you before he died that was of interest to the work we're doing." He said, "Yes, he did. The one thing that he said was 'Brother Kurner, I may not see you again, but don't be afraid. You tell my people in New Zealand don't worry because a man by the name of Wendall Mendenhall will be assigned to carry on the work.'"

And so, I hadn't even met Wendall then, but it was that testimony that I knew that someday Brother Mendenhall would turn up in New Zealand and would spearhead this. Well, it was about two years later that he actually came. He was on a world tour, he and his wife, just travelling around all over. They stopped at the college and the project there and we put a welcome out for them. We'd had trouble in getting support for that project at general headquarters and so he promised us that he would go and see the Prophet when he

got back. And so he did. He went there and it wasn't long before he arrived in New Zealand with the Prophet. It was during that visit that he eventually got his assignment as the Chairman of the Building Committee and was responsible, not only for the Pacific, but for the buildings throughout the world. And so that's my testimony of Brother Mendenhall.

So working at the Center was just part of this great program and so as I see it today, we have a lot to be grateful for. I would like to see one day that this recognition be given to Brother Mendenhall. We erected, we had a scroll that used to be on the island where the musicians played at the Center and it stated there of his contributions to the Cultural Center. I would like to see that go back because his wife and family are still alive.

I remember that when we finished the new addition to the new theater, he actually came here and stayed and worked night and day along with us who were workers to see that it was completed. You know, he died shortly after its completion, but one of the great loves that he had was the Polynesian Cultural Center. I talked with President Clissold on his last visit here. He actually talked with you, too, I understand. He came here and met with us and he reaffirmed that. They also did something and I'm going to mention this so it can be kept for later years.

They wanted to build a monument someday to the labor missionary program. With this in mind, they took a picture of selected different ones from different cultures with their working clothes on just before they finished the last stage of the Center. They had the Hawaiians there. They had the Tongan plumbers, the brick layers, painters.

They were all represented with their work, their hard hats, some with hard hats and trowels in their hands. I remember when they were taking the photo, President Clissold said, "Wendall, why don't you go and join this group here. They've been like your family for so long." And so he did. He came and walked over and stood there and they took a photo of that group. When I was talking to Brother Clissold, I said, "Brother Clissold, when will we get to that project?" He said "You tell Brother Anderson over there, that it's going to be done someday. I'll pay for all the preliminary work that needs to be done."

And I know, Kalili, that one of the early teachers here was a fellow by the name of Avard Fairbanks, that sculptural family, you know. He was a printer, but he was a teacher here and he would catch the vision of that because he knew the boys as they were working in building that. Avard knew them. A fine man. And I think that would be something that the old missionaries would get behind, and pay for that, and contribute to its construction because it was an outstanding phase in the life and the development of the Church. They were called the "labor missionaries" then.

And some of the best carpenters, the best brick masons, and that we have here in our community were young boys back then and they learned their trade there.

They fulfilled what President McKay said when he dedicated the school for the learning in New Zealand. He made the remark that it had started before, the educational process, when the school was started. That was, of course, when the boys first came as fifteen, sixteen, and eighteen years old and picked up a trowel and got a hammer or a saw in their hands and they began to build. So those men today, of course, a lot of their children have gone to our University and they are great tradesmen. I know it's going to be done someday because President Clissold made the statement that it would be. But sometimes we've got to nudge it along and help it along, Kalili. I think that would be a tremendous thing to have that because this was the first thing that really brought us together again as children of Lehi, as one people. And we've got a lot to contribute to each other and we can help each other, different groups can help each other, love each other, learn to live and work together and these are the fellows that first brought it about. That's how I feel about it, Kalili.

INT: A question on artifacts that some of your family has contributed to the Center.

JE: Yes, well when I was a boy growing up I lived on an island off the northern coast of New Zealand there. According to information that had been passed on, the great chief Taropruha used that as an outpost during his raids down to the southern part of New Zealand and my family's ancestors lived there on my grandmother's side. While I was a boy living there, we used to pick up all these artifacts -- stones for axes and warheads, and greenstones, fish hooks, and everything along from the different bays that were there. And you could see by the mounds and the hills that there had been forty-five pass there at one state. So there was a lot of artifacts. Well, when we came to Hawaii we brought a lot of these over. My Dad said, "Why don't you take them with you and give them to the Center." Which we did and now some of them are on display, some of them are still there. A lot of them are missing.

When we came over and brought the canoe and brought the crew over to assemble the carved village -- I call that the marae--"I'm the Maori King". Princess Tipura, who was instrumental in establishing that place, gave me this cloak with her name on it. She appreciated what the Church was trying to do. And so we brought this along with other artifacts that we collected in a different party. Tylie Davis from up north, who later became the Chief, helped me gather the kia kia and other materials from the forests up north. He gave me a lot of the old digging implements that they dug out of the swamp, out of his farm. That swamp, when they drained it, he found all these things. And so those were in the

village there. I don't know how much there is left of them, but those came from Tylie David' collection. So we had some greenstone, some of my family's. Those were presented to me to bring over. I brought these all over with about six feather cloaks. Their value is thousands and thousands of dollars and so that has given me some concern that we have lost some of those from the Center. I hope those of them that still have them, that one day they will realize that they should be back where they belong. Some were stolen out of there and taken. I do have pictures of the cloaks. And I do have pictures of some of the artifacts so they can be identified.

INT: Maybe I could get some copies of those?

JE: I have them on slides. I'll show them to you the next time you come. I'll get them out.

INT: John, possible the last question and I know you have answered that already so many times and so often, but what is the role of Divinity in the building of the Center? You mentioned that already, you know, and I just want to know maybe you knew some inside stories of the role of our Father in Heaven in the building of the Center? Because you knew that there were great opposition in many things.

JE: Yes. Well, I think I was born with a testimony of the Gospel, Kalili, and I've always known the Church was true and I don't think there is a time in my life where I've ever doubted that. And I've always felt that Heavenly Father has been kind to the Polynesians who've been blessed and been taken out into the islands to protect us.

INT: Isolated.

JE: And isolated from other peoples. And when I came to Hawaii, I saw the statue of Lehi blessing his son, Joseph. Actually, it's in the Book of Mormon, the blessing of that son, where he promised his seed that they would not be utterly destroyed and that they would be protected. And so that statue there reaffirmed to me the value of the Temple, the Hawaiian Temple, and its part in restoring the truths of the Gospel to our people. I feel that this whole program and its history, the part it's played with our ancestors, leading the missionaries to our people, and all these Temples, that's Heavenly Father answering those promises he made to Lehi and Joseph. Not only them, but to our own ancestors who first accepted the Gospel. I have had in New Zealand, as I'm sure there are others in different cultures, some of our old people are great people, great people with spirit. They have great testimony of the Gospel, probably stronger than ours, and they knew that Heavenly Father would bless their children and descendants.

I cannot see this could have been all brought about without the

hand of the Lord establishing the college first; and while it was being built, the Polynesian Cultural Center. Now I've heard witnesses that have told me, the old people in Hawaii -- now Brother Kanahale was one and President Clissold -- they said they saw the vision of the Savior. And I heard the testimony of Joseph Fielding Smith when he said the Savior walked the beaches and sands of Laie. Now with all this, Kalili, how can we allow anything to stop the might and strength of the Church today? How can we, in our own humble way, sit back and not fight for the growth of the Church and do everything in our power to see the fulfillment of all those prophecies and statements? And we can feel close to the Lord.

Now we know there's been a lot of opposition in Laie and we know that where the Gospel is, that we get a lot of opposition, that Satan will work and do everything in his power to tear it down. But as long as there are some who live the Gospel and lead our people in righteousness, we're just seeing the beginning.

President Kimball made the remark, and I read it in this book when he said that he saw in a vision. He said, "I dreamed a dream." That was his exact words. He said, "I dreamed a dream. In my dream I saw lawyers, and I saw doctors. I saw businessmen. I saw great leaders of nations, of countries. I walked in front of these and they were all members of the Church." And now, as we can see, that feeling is in South America and more of this is going to come. We know that the greatest missionary program today is amongst the descendants of Lehi; that's the Lamanites. They're down in South America. And so from out of those countries, from out of the Pacific, that great stick of Joseph had been set aside when Heavenly Father moved Lehi and his children, the Jaredites, moved them over to America.

And here we are, Kalili. I am here. I don't know why I am here, really, except that I feel the Lord has moved us. We have a home, a nice home in New Zealand. I love my country, and yet, here I am, struggling here as I am. But we are here for a purpose, and this is where the Lord wants us.

And so in your contribution, Kalili, remember that. Remember that your assignment has come to you because of the Center, through your activity with the Center and that you've got a mission to perform. And if you'll stay close to the Lord, He'll inspire you to do the things that are necessary.

And sometimes, Kalili, now I can see the vision to know what the Lord wants for our people. If they'll but live the Gospel, if they'll build their Temples, if they'll go and work in their Temples and do the work for their kindred, when this whole thing, this whole program -- our chapels throughout the Pacific, the Polynesian Cultural Center, Brigham Young University -- all of these things and now the beautiful Temples that are being built in

Tahiti and Samoa and Tonga, what a great and wonderful blessing.

And this is being brought about by two things, I feel: One is because Heavenly Father loves us, His children, today and He wants them to be saved in His Kingdom; and the other one is that He is answering the prayers of those stalwarts, our ancestors who lived perhaps hundreds of years ago, but who accepted the Gospel and joined the Church.

Father Lehi -- He loved him and is blessing his children. Nephi, the great son, his great son, sent back to get those records, they're all for a purpose -- the Book of Mormon. And so, you know, we're tied up in this whole thing. Our people are tied up in the restoration of the Gospel, in God's Church.

When you think of the millions of people, I wonder sometimes how we could go away from the Church, how our people can go and fall away from the Church. How silly can we be? And we've got all these blessings, and we know that Heavenly Father loves us. We have the Priesthood, and yet, of course, some of us will still turn our backs on it.

My mother was a great woman. She was a sister, of course, to Stewart Meha, as I mentioned before. She said to me, she said, "Son, if you'll serve Him with your life, when you pass on, there is only one thing, one statement that you will be worthy of. If you get that, you don't need to worry." And I said, "What's that, Mother?" She said, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." And I thought of that. And, of course, she's been passed on many years ago. My old mother knew what the Gospel is about. She even told me that she had the privilege of seeing the Three Nephites as a young girl and she had a great testimony. Matthew Cowley loved her and Mackleby and President Hardy, some of the early Mission Presidents. They knew my mother and really, she was a woman apart. And a lot of this, I guess, I may have inherited from my mother, the love for the Church.

Kalili, that's how I feel. After all, when the chips are down, you can count out everything else. All you've got is family, the Church and your friends. And that's all that life's about. If we can do that here in Laie, and so bring this place up to where, you know, it would be like the City of Enoch. Laie could be just the same. We can weed out, and we were weeded out because the Lord's not going to stand for a lot of this nonsense that goes on. Good people come in and live here with the influence of the college, this will be an Eden alright.

And that's what my dream is for Laie, that we can walk down our streets here and be safe and free to go to Church and sing on Sunday and let the Polynesian spirit come out and the Aloha spirit

come out, which is only this fruit of the Gospel anyway. That's what our people are known for. And that's our contribution to make to the world is that Aloha spirit, which is the Spirit of the Gospel.

So, Kalili, thank you very much.

INT: Yes, thank you, John. Thank you for helping. This will be very interesting.

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