

Oral History of Mary Cooke and Helen Nakano

Today is September 16, 2019 and it is 10 o'clock in the morning. We are at Kualii, 2859 Manoa Road, the home of Mary Cooke. I am Harry Spiegelberg (HS) and this gathering is to record the oral histories of Mary Cooke (MC) and her close friend Helen Nakano (HN) with a particular emphasis on the organizational beginnings of Malama Manoa. We will first have Mary record some remembrances of her early years and then with Helen. We will then get into more Malama Manoa information, so with that I'm going to place the recorder on the table between Helen and Mary and Lowell Angell (LA) who is with me as well and he will ask the interview questions.

(LA) Mary, when did your family first come to Hawaii and where did they come from?

(MC) My grandfather Joseph Hughes Moragne came to Hawaii from Alabama in 1898 during the Spanish American War. He signed up to fight with Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders, and when he got here the war was over in the Philippines. He stayed here and got a job in Hilo to start with and then he moved to Kauai and got a job with the County to be their Civil Engineer. He got all the roads paved from Kokee to Haena. I have pictures of the huge big paving apparatus that they used. These were formerly all dirt roads. That would have been in the early 1900s.

My father and mother (Bill and Jean Moragne) lived in Lihue and built a large colonial style home right across from the Kauai Inn, on Rice Street, which is no longer there. This is where I grew up for quite a few years. Then we moved to the manager's home built by Daisy Wilcox on Kanani Street. It is still there, a beautiful big colonial house. That is why I got interested in and into historic preservation. (All these lovely old historic homes.) My father worked at Grove Farm Plantation; he was the manager and when they acquired Koloa Plantation he took that on too. They built a tunnel between the two plantations because there was a great big Haupu mountain between them. The tunnel still exists and I think they give tours today.

(LA) How many were in your family?

(MC) We had my brother, two sisters and me.

(LA) What was it like growing up on Kauai?

(MC) I went to Lihue School where I was the only haole and I had to work hard to keep up with my Japanese friends.

(LA) What did you do for fun growing up on Kauai?

(MC) Our family had a mountain home in Kokee and we loved driving up there in the plantation truck. Yes we had fun riding in the water in the irrigation ditches or flumes. After Lihue School I went to Kauai High School my freshman year. Next I went to Punahou starting my sophomore year living in the girl's dormitory in Castle Hall that was known as the Hash House. After Punahou I went off to Cornell and majored in Home Economics. I was always interested in sewing and when I was ten my mother had a helper who was taking sewing lessons at Kawakami Store and my mother gave me permission to also take these lessons. I learned to sew aloha shirts and made the Holoku that I wore as the May Queen in 8th grade. I also made my wedding dress and I still have it upstairs.

(LA) While you were at Cornell is that where you met Sam?

(MC) I met Sam when he was 10. He came to Kauai for a family wedding. I was 11 at the time. When my brother and I transferred to Punahou in our sophomore year he and Sam became best friends. Sam had a girl friend named Sue Soloman and when he was buying a gift for her he said to me "I bet I marry you some day!" I said "I bet you don't" and we bet \$5. That was two weeks allowance at the time. When we got married I put a five dollar bill in his pocket. I lost the bet, but overall I was the winner.

(LA) After Cornell what happened?

(MC) Next I went to Cal Berkeley and got my teaching degree. That was my fifth year. At the end of that school year I went back to Cornell to visit my fifth year engineer boyfriend Bruce Marshal who was graduating with Sam. He was writing his thesis and he wanted me to type it for him. I got a hold of Sam and we had a wonderful time riding horseback and other things. We got engaged at Christmas of that year and got married the following August.

When we were first married we lived on Kauai. Sam was the assistant manager at the Kauai Inn. During that time we had Julie and Sam would come home after she was put to bed. We did not like that style of living so Sam got a job at Lewers and Cooke on Oahu. Then Sam got interested in the stock market and went to work at Dean Witter that became Morgan Stanley. During that time we rented a house and then Sam's grandmother gave us a piece of property next to her home where we are today. We built the house for \$45,000.

(LA) I imagine that you used to visit his grandmother?

(MC) Yes, we used to visit her often and then when she died in 1970 Sam's father inherited this large house. Sam's grandmother gave the garden to her daughter who then gave it to her kids. They then sold it to a developer. Sam and I purchased this

house from Sam's father. During this time the property where the heiau is was put up for sale to developers. We did not want it to be torn down so we bought it also. The heiau at the time was disheveled, completely grown over with vegetation and the rocks in piles. We talked with Nathan Napoka who said we needed to hire Billy Fields, an expert stone craftsman from Kailua-Kona. We hired Billy and he came to Manoa with his gang restacking the stones, only using the rocks that were originally used for the heiau, not using a single extra stone. Recently Billy came to Manoa again to repair a stonewall that was falling down.

So we looked at all the property we now owned and said what are we going to do with it all? We thought about the non-profit Grove Farm Homestead property on Kauai and thought that that would work here also. We hired Barnes Riznik from Grove Farm, who had recently retired to be our adviser.

(LA) When you came to live in this house, what condition was it in?

(MC) When we got here the plumber I had hired to do all the jobs on my list for him said "no more end, no?" That has been my motto ever since. With a house like this there is no end to what needs to be done.

(LA) When you lived next door and then in this house, was that the first time you lived in Manoa and did you think it was something special?

(MC) Oh yes we loved being in Manoa.

(LA) Can you tell us how the idea for Malama Manoa came about?

(MC) Bill Murtagh, who started the Historic Preservation Program in the United States, came out here and Bill Chapman introduced us. He started the National Register of Historic Places. I was complaining to him about this horrible structure that went up on the corner of East Manoa Road and Kolowalu going to Noelani School. It was an ugly two story grey building. This was built where a beautiful Victorian historical home was before. I asked Bill what could be done because others like this would also be built. He said "If you don't do something, more of this will happen". We invited him to give a presentation at the next Neighborhood Board meeting.

(HN) I was on the Neighborhood Board at that time.

(MC) At that meeting we passed around a clip board to have people sign to become a part of a new organization to tackle the problem.

(HN) I signed, but thought I was just joining a committee. No, she roped us in!

(MC) Helen and I got together and talked about Manoa with lots of Japanese and lots of haoles. We decided that we needed a Japanese person and a haole person heading this new organization and that is how we got started.

(LA) Before we get too far into Malama Manoa, let's find out from Helen where her family came from.

(HN) My mother and father were immigrants from Hiroshima, Japan. They met here in Hawaii. My mother was educated and actually a woman before her time because she had her own business. She ran a sewing school and at this time also sewed clothes for rich people in Honolulu. So she was independent.

My father was born in 1899 in Japan. He was brought over to Hawaii when he was 18 to help pay off his father's debt. My grandfather had almost gone bankrupt He borrowed money from all these people like Mr. Iida of Iida Store which is still in existence. I saw the promissory note and it was so interesting.

My father was good looking, a very hard working guy with a wonderful personality My mother ended up marrying this man who was uneducated and debt ridden. So I say that she married down instead of marrying up. (Laughter). My sister Vi was the eldest, then my brother Eddie, Henry, Grace and I am the youngest.

First, they lived in Nuuanu. Then they moved the store to King Street. It was called M. S. Tanabe Store. Most Japanese only used their first initial, but they used two initials. My father was a typical Japanese male. It was very unusual for him to allow my mother's initials alongside his. I think he acknowledged her value in helping him pay off his debt, all the while having all these babies. When I think of it, there were eleven years and eight babies between their first baby and me. My mother helped run the store, taught at her sewing school, sewed clothes while pregnant almost the entire time. It must have been a really tough time, a very rough time.

(LA) So Tanabe was the family's last name?

(HN) Yes. She was a Tateishi and married a Tanabe. And so they worked every day of the year except one day. They took New Year's day off.

(LA) Did the store stay in the family for a long time?

(HN) Yes, it stayed in the family. The store they started was on South King Street across from the Board of Agriculture. The park near that building was my play ground. We lived on the top floor above the store. It was founded in 1917, so 2017 was 100 years. We sold the corporation with the store a while before that so we didn't quite make the one hundred years.

(LA) So where did you go to school?

(HN) My eldest sister Vi was the first to attend a private school after attending Washington Intermediate. The other kids attended Iolani, Seventh Day Adventists School and Island Paradise. I was sent to Maryknoll from kindergarten, so I was brought up by the nuns. They wore heavy wool habits that covered their heads with long sleeves and skirts to the floor. When I think of the amount of money my parents spent to send us to school, I can see why they had to work all that time.

(LA) Who are some of your classmates that you remember?

(HN) We have a very active class and we still meet frequently. I know most of my classmates.

After graduating from Maryknoll I went to the University of Hawaii and was an Education major. At the end of my senior year, I transferred to the University of Wisconsin to get my masters in Asian Studies. I chose to attend UW because George Nakano, my boy friend, was studying law at the University of Michigan. We didn't realize how far apart the schools were, so we didn't end up seeing each other often. I went to University of Michigan once and he came over to Wisconsin once.

(LA) What was your first winter like as a local girl?

(HN) Alright, I like the cold and stuff.

(MC) When did you and George decide to get marry?

(HN) He had to complete his military obligation. He was offered a chance to be stationed in Japan. I encouraged him to go to Japan because this was our ancestral home and it would be good for him to have that opportunity. But, I said you are very eligible and all the young Japanese women would love to get their hands on you because you are American, you will have money, you are an attorney, and you are a Nisei. So if you go to Japan we will have to break off our relationship. I cannot stay back in Hawaii and not date. I need to look around for an eligible man to marry myself. You have the advantage of being in Japan, right? with all these women chasing after you. It was not fair so I won't be waiting for you. He quickly said, "Well let's get married then". So we did. Within a few months he graduated, passed the Bar Exam and was commissioned as an Air Force officer. We married in December 1960. He left for Japan in January.

(LA) So you ended up in Japan. Was George fluent in Japanese?

(HN) He had a grandmother living with his family and she only spoke Japanese. In Japan, you can tell everyone's education and prefecture by their speech. His Japanese speech labeled him as from a peasant class in rural Hiroshima.

(HS) What rank did he retire as?

(HN) Colonel.

(HS) Well I will have to salute him as I am only a retired Navy Commander. (Laughter!)

(HS) Did you grow up going to Japanese school?

(HN) Yes in Hawaii.

(HS) So are you fluent in Japanese still?

(HN) I've forgotten most, but because of my schooling, my Japanese is a bit more academic.

(LA) After George retired, when did you move into Manoa?

(HN) My family moved to Manoa when I was ten years old, so I don't know what happened. There must have been an opening of land in the Woodlawn area. Unofficially this area was restricted to Japanese, but Gerry Honda and his family were one of the first to move to Manoa. His father was a respected physician and they lived on Mohala or Beckwith.

And there were Japanese squatters. That's where Noboru Oda lived. I don't think they ever owned the land. But our property was higher up on the Woodlawn side. My parents had five kids that they placed in private schools and they were hard working enough to buy this house. It was built brand new and it had a fireplace. When I think about it this was unbelievable that this happened. So I was ten, and going to Maryknoll and we moved to Manoa.

(LA) What year was that?

(HN) Well let's see, I am 82 so it was about 1947.

(LA) Oh, really.

(HN) I wish you had gotten an oral history of Noboru Oda because he was an amazing man. He was a leader among the Japanese as he started the Japanese School and built a business. He was one of Manoa's squatters. He had to take care of all of his younger sisters despite being uneducated. One of his sons became a physician.

(LA) I remember him very well. He would come up to people and say “my name Oda, O D A”. He was a really nice guy.

(HN) We would sit in the dining room with Mary, “the Queen of Manoa”. She would insist that they we call her Mary, but Mary always called him “Mr. Oda.” He was thrilled. At Mary’s testimonial dinner, Mr. Oda said, “I didn’t know haoles worked hard too”, referring to Mary.

(LA) So getting back to the Neighborhood Board and Bill Murtagh saying that the valley needed to be helped. What happened next? You signed up for a committee?

(MC) Everyone signed up on a clip board and we called ourselves The Manoa Historic Preservation Committee and then we changed that to Malama O Manoa and we got our incorporation in 1992 as a non-profit. I was the first President and Helen was the First Vice President.

(LA) Do you remember who came up with the name Malama O Manoa?

(HN) No. I think we had a contest and somebody from the library suggested Malama O Manoa and we liked that.

(LA) I remember there was a meeting, I don’t recall when, at the Manoa Park, that small building, and I remember being there and signing up.

(HN) Yes, 37 people attended the first meeting. Tom Heinrich had a lot to do with this also because he was so good at creating the first bylaws. And, as Mary said we thought that it was important to have a haole and Japanese leading the organization. I said to Mary that she had to be President because it was her idea. (Laughter) And then she said, well then you have to be Vice President. Although we were in charge, we always tried to have the organization reflect the population of the valley.

(LA) At that time was it primarily thought of as a preservation organization?

(HN) Mary’s passion was historic preservation, but that wasn’t my passion at all; I wasn’t interested in old houses. It was my thought that if this organization was going to build this community and bring this community together for the benefit of everybody, then I would be a part of it. And so one of the questions we had to ask ourselves was “Is this going to be a small group or do we want to have a lot of people join? I said, if you want a lot of people to join, then you have to make it very accessible. One of the smartest things we did was not to charge any dues. Once you sign up you became a member for life. It makes sense because those people who had more disposable income donate more than \$5 a year or \$5 a month and they were very generous. Those who couldn’t could still be a member. People don’t realize it that is why we were able to

have such a huge membership. All that paperwork, keeping track of dues, collecting money, that whole shebang is really not necessary.

(LA) Why did the name of the organization change from Malama O Manoa to just Malama Manoa?

(MC) It was maybe twenty years later.

(HN) No, it was 2011 and due to Kim Birnie, who was very knowledgeable about the Hawaiian language. She was the one who said that the name of our organization was grammatically incorrect.

(LA) So in the early years, what do you remember of how the organization got off the ground, the first activities and the first challenges?

(MC) I can remember being with Bea Krauss who was a good friend who took me all around the valley and pointed out certain houses and I knew she was the only one who knew these things. Then I asked her how her book was coming along and she said that it was finished and down at the publishers and they aren't doing anything. So I went down to Mutual Publishing and asked them why this book wasn't getting published. They said that they needed money and that is when you got involved, Lowell. We had to raise money to pay for the book. We got a lot of pre-orders, and how much did we charge?

(HN) Was it \$15?

(MC) Anyway, lots of people signed up for the book.

(LA) I think it was \$25, but I may be wrong. Bennett Hymer of Mutual said to us if you will sponsor the book then you will have the exclusive right to sell it. We agreed and decided there should be sponsorships at different levels. I think \$500, \$1,000 and \$5,000 to get the book paid for that way. We were fortunate that the Atherton Foundation stepped forward, as did Bank of Hawaii, Henry Clark, Manoa Shopping Center, Marty and Dwayne Steele, and then there were maybe a dozen others with lesser contributions whose names were listed in the book. So it was fully paid for and all the proceeds from the sales were clear profit. Longs Manoa also agreed to sell it without any cost to us; we got 100 % of the sale price. I think that was the first time that ever happened.

(MC) We had all the profits go into an endowment fund and we could only spend 5 % of the endowment fund each year and this keeps Malama in good shape and helps pay for lots of projects.

(LA) We sold out the first printing and then bought the rest of the books that Mutual had printed and we sold those too. I think it totaled 8,000 books. And putting all the money into an endowment fund was a brilliant idea. I have heard since then other organizations would like to emulate what we did.

(MC) Yes, Malama was very fortunate to be financially well off.

(HS) Is this book “Manoa, the Story of a Valley” essentially Bea’s book?

(MC) Yes, a group of about ten of them had met with her regularly. Charles Bouslog was very much involved.

(LA) And wasn’t Miriam Woolsey Reed on the committee? Bennett Hymer hired Glenn Grant to edit it. It wasn’t possible to publish it as written as it would have been over 800 pages, so Glenn cut it down and came up with the format of geographical areas of Manoa. He did a great job!

(HS) Bea Krauss was a colleague of my father’s as they worked together at the Pineapple Research Institute that used to be on Dole Street and were quite close. Toward the end of Bea’s life she went with my brother and me on a jaunt around Manoa pointing out all of the ancient, historical and more recent important sites. That is when I learned that the Ewa side of the valley where I live is known as the Alii side of the valley. A bit mauka from my home is the location where Queen Kaahumanu had her modest home where she would seek rest away from the hot weather in Waikiki.

(LA) Bea knew my uncle very well as he worked for the HSPA in sugar research.

(LA) So what do you look back on as the first big challenge in the valley faced by Malama O Manoa?

(MC) I would say that the first challenge was to establish a historic district. We had a lot of resistance on the part of several residents who strung up a poster where it looked like the haole’s against others where it looked like a racial issue.

(HN) It was good that we had Noboru Oda on our Board at that time. He was a leader among the Japanese in the valley and helped us see the situation from their perspective.

(LA) Yes, one of the big challenges of special preservation districts is the issue of property rights. People don’t want to be told what to do, and they think they can do whatever they want with their house. But there are so many governmental regulations that you can’t just do anything you want. Unfortunately, you can demolish it and that’s a big challenge in preserving these old houses.

(MC) John Whalen worked very hard to get the special district established.

(LA) Do you think there is any way that Malama could establish a special design district elsewhere in the valley like College Hills tract in the valley?

(MC) I don't think so!

(LA) There are portions of this type of housing on Oahu Avenue and portions in Woodlawn, but I don't know!

(HN) We should have started small and then when the residents saw the benefits, expanded.

(MC) That's a very important point that we should have started small instead of trying to affect the whole valley.

(LA) So that would be one of Malama's disappointments. What can you remember about the 138 KV fight on Waahila Ridge?

(MC) That was a ten years fight. Marianna Gerbode said "My mother opposed Chinn Ho about building high rises around Diamond Head. This was the Diamond Head issue of Manoa! You go after them, (HECO) and we will pay your legal fees. It was like \$250,000 over ten years for that fight. We were so very fortunate to have Marianna and the Gerbode Foundation.

(LA) Indeed! And I think this was like a baptism by fire for Malama coming up against the giant Hawaiian Electric and they were surprised to say the least. I remember a lot of the meetings at Church of the Crossroads and other places that people turned out and it was a community effort of support against it.

(HS) I remember all the people getting signatures over at Safeway.

(MC) There was Kelvin Taketa who was on the board of the Nature Conservancy and then became part of the Community Foundation. He was on the board of Hawaiian Electric and he said "Mary Cooke is going to eat you for lunch!" (Laughter!!)

(HN) I used to work at Financial Estates Corporation. Its founder had worked at Bishop Trust while our fight with HECO was going on. He recalled hearing some of their Board members saying, "We give up already!" I don't think the present membership and leadership has the passion and dedication that our board had. That is a common occurrence among clubs and other non-profits.

(LA) Well, I would agree with you. It's just a different mindset now and maybe that is natural when you think that the people involved then were the founders of the

organization and they got together with the passion to see it done. But that is not to put down what Malama does now, because all of it is interesting and useful and helps the valley be a nicer place to live. And people still love Manoa and want to move in here even though prices and property values keep going way up. It's incredible!

(HS) When my parents bought their double side by side lots in 1940, they paid ten cents a square foot.

(LA) Well, the house next door to my family house is up for sale for \$2.1 million. I don't think there is anything under a million dollars in Manoa. The City and County loves the increases in property taxes.

(HS) I think we have covered a great deal of the history of Manoa Valley and Malama Manoa that we all love. I hope those who read this oral history will learn something and be inspired!

(LA) Yes, and thank you Mary and Helen!