

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY - HAWAII CAMPUS  
Behavioral and Social Sciences Division  
Laie, Hawaii 96762

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

NARRATOR: Amoe Meyer

INTERVIEW NO.: OH-264

DATE OF INTERVIEW: 19 February 1985

INTERVIEWER: Palota Purcell

SUBJECT: Laie

## INTRODUCTION

The following is an interview of Amoe Meyer, conducted in fulfillment of an Oral History project, at Brigham Young University-Hawaii Campus. It is focused mainly on her forty-two year career as a school teacher in Hawaii and on the mainland, as well as the growth of Laie in various aspects.

Amoe was born in Akron, Ohio, but spent most of her life in the Hawaiian islands, teaching school. She was first called to teach school in Maui at a very young age. In 1927, she was called to teach at Laie school where she found it very comfortable and exciting. She was very impressed with the atmosphere of Laie and the Mormon Temple as well. In 1933 she was converted to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and has since been very faithful and active, serving in various capacities and auxiliaries. From 1952, Amoe spent the next eleven years teaching school in Utah and California. Upon her return she taught for a few more years until her retirement in 1969. Her entire life has been of value and great learning to the many individuals who have gone out into the world to seek careers of their interest and developing new skills.

This project has come to be a success with the help of Peter Birati who audited it, and the editing being done by myself and also Dr. Ken Baldrige, director of the Oral History Program and my instructor in History 121.

Palota Purcell  
Student

### NOTE

Because we tried to get the transcript into the hands of the participating students and narrators as quickly as possible there may be errors that otherwise would not be permitted. We usually try to clarify statements that may be confusing: in these interview, however, unclear statements may possibly be found. Our apologies for presenting a less-than-perfect transcript, but this does enable us to get interviews that might otherwise be lost.

For most of the students this was their first interview and while they were surprised at how much work was involved they were pleased with results of learning not only about the subject matter covered but the development of a skill at the same time.

Kenneth W. Baldrige, Director  
Oral History Program, BYU-Hawaii

Laie, Hawaii  
May 23, 1985

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PP: This is Palota Purcell and I'm here with Sister  
[000] Amoe Meyer, in her home in Laie. Today is the  
19th of February 1985, and I'm about to  
interveiw her for a history project that I am  
conducting for my history class at BYU-Hawaii  
Campus. I'll be asking her some questions about  
her experiences as a teacher here in Laie, as  
well as the knowledge that she has of the growth  
of the church here in Laie as well. Sister  
Meyer, for some background information here,  
would you please tell me where and when you were  
born?

AM: I was born in Akron, Ohio, on October  
9th, 1907.

PP: Thank you. What were some family circumstances  
that you can remember as a young girl growing  
up?

AM: I came from a large family. We had eighteen,  
twelve girls and six boys. I was number fifteen  
and we had a wonderful home. Our father worked  
very hard and our mother. And we all enjoyed--  
and we learned to work, too. And we enjoyed our  
home, and we really had a wonderful time. My  
father took a picture of us in 1917, of ten  
girls lined up and he only had this one little  
baby boy, and he'd picture himself with the  
little boy, him and my mother. But that picture  
was published in the newspaper all across the  
country, of the ten girls. And we had a  
wonderful time but then, my grandmother who  
lived in Hawaii--she's from Hawaii and she  
wanted us to come to Hawaii to live. So she got  
after my mother, and wrote to them and told them  
to come on over to Hawaii. So we left in  
November, 1917, and came to Hawaii. And I  
remember that we were afraid; the war had  
started already, the first World War. And when  
we were on the boat, we were on the steamboat  
Ventura coming across and we were watching at  
night the blackout. They blacked out the boat.  
They turned the lights out, but we got here  
safely and we enjoyed seeing Hawaii.

PP: Wow! That's one big family.

AM: Yes.

PP: Now, what were some of the places that you lived in as a young girl growing up?

AM: Well, my sister, my older sister, the first of girls, her name was Marguerite, and she was teaching already in Hawaii. She was teaching at Maimai School. And she had gotten a house for us on Puunui Avenue in Honolulu, a nice big house and so we just moved in there when we got off the boat, and we stayed in that house for many years. I left that house when I went to get married.

PP: Thank you. What can you remember from your days in pre-school and elementary?

AM: I did not go to pre-school, but I went to elementary. I can remember from the first grade--I do remember at one time I couldn't say some words on the board. I think it was "baby" and "baba" and something else, and I cried and so they sent for my other sister, one who was next to me in an upper grade. She was in the--I was in the first grade and she was in the second grade.

PP: Was this back in Akron?

AM: That's in Akron, Ohio, and she came in and [100] backed me up and I stopped crying, and I said the words. And I never had any trouble, too. I never had any trouble with teachers; I loved them all. We always had a nice time together and I enjoyed school very much.

PP: That's great. It sounds like you've come a long way.

AM: I do love school.

PP: Yes. Well, now we've talked a little bit about your personal background, where you're from and where you were born. Now let's move on to where you began your career as a school teacher.

AM: When we came here, I went to Maimai School first, one year in the fifth grade. Then I went to Royal School in Honolulu, it was for the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades, and then from there I went to normal school. That's where the teachers are trained, at the normal school in Honolulu, and I went there for four years, and when I graduated from there in 1926, I went to Lahaina to teach. That was my first teaching position, at a big school in Lahaina called Kamehameha III School and I enjoyed that, too. I

always played the piano, see, so I always had company and lots of fun. I lived in the teachers cottage there. We teachers all lived together in the cottage and we really enjoyed ourselves and I loved the teaching there. And I had nice pupils; the children were nice those days.

PP: Yes. Today not any more, right?

AM: [Laughter]. I don't know. They weren't so sassy as they are now.

PP: Sister Meyer, what motivated you to become a school teacher? What made you decide to become a school teacher?

AM: Oh! I think it was because my older sisters were all teachers. Six of us girls were teachers and so I think I could be a teacher too if they could, and I'm the youngest of the sisters who became teachers.

PP: Okay, now what was the competition of becoming a school teacher like back in those days compared to today?

AM: We didn't have such a thing called competition. I don't know why. It was so much more peaceful and everyone worked hard. The girls in normal school, they did their best and really worked to get to be teachers. We weren't looking for raises in salary; we were just looking for a job and we really enjoyed it. And then from normal school I went to Lahaina as I said, and I taught at Lahaina for a year and a half and how I enjoyed that. And that's where I first came in contact with the Mormon Church, in Lahaina. I used to play for their concerts and their programs .

PP: So in comparison, you would say that back during the early times when you were teaching school, it wasn't so much the pay, it was just getting a job, right?

AM: Yes,

PP: Whereas today its a little bit different. Everyone's concerned about how much they're going to be getting. Now you said you first taught in Lahaina?

AM: Right.

- PP: That is where you first taught school.
- AM: And those days we had a supervisor who came out to check on us, you know. I don't know if they do that now or not--I don't think that they do. But we always did our best.
- PP: How was it like teaching in Maui before you came here? Can you give us some experiences of what happened in Maui before you were called to teach here in Laie?
- AM: Well, Maui--that wasn't such a big school. We used to have the children to go down to play on the beach; it was on the beach, too. It was a lovely place, but, I can't remember everything. But we used to have singing. I used to play the piano for the children to sing in the auditorium and we really enjoyed ourselves. Our teachers were nice, and we got together and we had programs and we had carnivals and we just carried on as any normal school would do, you know. And we really enjoyed teaching. I liked it very much. But then I was assigned--when asked for Aiea, I got Laie.
- PP: You asked for Aiea, for a teaching job in Aiea, right?
- AM: Yes [for a] teaching job for the next year. I signed up for Aiea but I got Laie, so that's okay. And the reason why I got Laie was because Laie was just opened. Laie, that year 1927, [200] Laie was turned over to the public instruction, and the first year Clinton Kanahale was our first principal. He was a fine principal and there was Lucy Amana. Clinton had the seventh and eighth grades, and Lucy Amana had the fifth and sixth grades. I had third and fourth grades, and then Mariott Sakamoto, she had second grade, and Mitchie Sakata she had the first grade, so that was the line up.
- PP: Now you mentioned that you first moved here to Laie back in 1927, when the church was first turned over to the...
- AM: Not the church, the school.
- PP: Yes, I mean the school, was first turned over to the public.
- AM: Right.

- PP: Now you also mentioned that you had wanted to teach in Aiea instead of Laie.
- AM: Well, I didn't know Laie. I never heard of Laie.
- PP: Well, what [was] your first thought of Laie when you were told you were going to come to Laie instead of Aiea?
- AM: I was kind of scared and you know what? In Lahaina when I left, some of the people over there said, "Now, you be careful, don't you go there and marry a Mormon!" [laughter] But the trouble was, the year hadn't even passed, the school year didn't even pass, and I was married to a Mormon.
- PP: Is that right?
- AM: Right! And I saw the temple and, oh, that was so beautiful. I used to go there and walk around the grounds in the evening. We had a big two-storey building--well, really three stories, and the missionaries stayed there and then there was a smaller building on the side and that's where we teachers--[on present Lanihuli Place, head of Lanihuli Street] three of us stayed, in that smaller building. And we enjoyed ourselves. We had fun and we'd stay there until Friday, then we would go home on a taxi. Those days they had taxis back and forth to Honolulu.
- PP: Is that right?
- AM: Right. The church was a building, right in the middle.
- PP: Was that the only church in Laie at that time?
- AM: Right, and the beautiful building too, and the school was on the side, was all built around the near the church.
- PP: Yes.
- AM: It was very interesting. But then [in 1928] they moved the school down to the present destination, where it's at now. And that's where they put it and I was there, going with them, along with them.
- PP: Now you had no knowledge of Laie prior to coming here, and you had never been here to



Laie, and to your surprise when you came you saw that beautiful white building on the hill which is the Mormon Temple. Now, by and large, what first impressions came to your mind about Laie when you first arrived here in Laie? Did you think it was going to be a very...?

- AM: It looked like a very peaceful community. And with the ocean outside there, and the trees and that beautiful temple and everything. I liked it very much, and the mountains behind. It was a very, very beautiful spot.
- PP: Now, I reckon that back in those days, there weren't that many people here in Laie?
- AM: Oh no! Absolutely not. Why, I think there was more than 200 people here in Laie, and they only had one chapel and one meeting at a time, you know, not like now-a-days.
- PP: Most of the present Laie now were just plantations, right?
- AM: Yes. Laie had a big taro patch, lots of taro patches.
- PP: That's what I understand.
- AM: We used to have a taro patch of our own, too. And they had two poi factories for where the taro was made into poi and it was really pleasant. You could walk around Laie at anytime of the day or night and not be afraid. It was that peaceful. It was very nice.
- PP: Now, was it very hard for you to adjust from Maui to Laie?
- AM: No. Maui is about the same thing. Lahaina was about the same thing. It was all quiet those days, not like now-a-days.
- PP: With all the rascals running around all over the place.
- AM: And all these machines they have.
- PP: Now as I understand, and as you mentioned a few minutes ago that the school was first located back by where the old chapel was, right on top of that hill, right? [The school and chapel had originally been located almost adjacent to the present temple. When the construction began on

the temple about 1916, the chapel was moved down to the present location of the Laie first, seventh, eighth wards chapel. That chapel burned down in 1941. The school building was used in the temple construction and a new school complex constructed just mauka of the relocated chapel.]

- AM: The school was--I really don't know. I can't tell you that definitely. All I know is that when I came, it was there, where both chapels are now, those two chapels. The school was there and it was a very good school too.
- PP: And then it was moved down to where it is presently?
- AM: Where it is now. About 1929, I believe it was.
- PP: Now as far as you can remember, Sister Meyer, approximately how many students and teachers were there when you first arrived here? I assume it was a very small school.
- AM: Say about thirty--no, there could have been more [300] than that. Say about thirty-five in each classroom and five classrooms, that's 175 students, well, just below 200, I should say. There wasn't too many.
- PP: So the school had just been turned over to the government, right? Then you were called to come from Maui, or were you called to come to teach [i.e., by the LDS Church]?
- AM: Oh, no! When we signed up, this is the school we got. It had already been turned over to the government.
- PP: I see, yes, I see.
- AM: And so we didn't have anything to say.
- PP: Okay.
- AM: At one time there was a flood in Laie. In 1927 I believe it was.
- PP: It was the latter part of 1927, I believe.
- AM: Yes.
- PP: Around November.

- AM: And when we came back, we came back on Monday morning on the taxi. We came up and said, "Where are we going?" All we could see was water all around, and Brother Kanahale came on a boat with oars and everything, and picked us up from the taxi and took us up to the hill--up the hill on the boat. That was really something we'll never forget.
- PP: Now, as much as you can remember, and as far as you can remember back to the early 1900's what do you think were some of the reasons as to why the Church gave the school up and turned it over to the government?
- AM: That I cannot tell you. I really don't understand it. They were doing fine, but I guess they didn't have what they needed to run the school.
- PP: Yes. I understand that the missionaries were teaching the school when it was owned by the Church.
- AM: Yes, the missionaries were the teachers, but it was hard to get the right people all the time, you know.
- PP: Okay, so it had already been turned back to the government in 1927?
- AM: Right.
- PP: Now do you have any idea as far as you can remember, what happened to the missionaries when it was turned back to the government? Did they go back to proselyting?
- AM: Yes, they went back to proselyting. There were some who were still here, although I didn't know them all then. And so I guess they just stayed, some of them.
- PP: Okay. Now besides George Ariyoshi, who is our present-day governor, who else can you remember that you taught that is still around today? I assume that there is a big list of them.
- AM: Yes, there are. But many people have come to me and have said, "Mrs. Meyer, remember me?" And I says, "Yes, and who are you?" "Oh! You taught me in the fourth grade," and I tell them that "Well, what you looked like in the fourth grade is not the same as what you look like now." My

goodness, [laughter] what do they expect me to be, to remember them from fourth grade. But, I had George Ariyoshi in 1931, no '32 and '33. His father was a contractor; he was fixing the road. George was only six years old when he came to my room, he and Susumo Ono.

PP: Susumo Ono?

AM: You hear that name in the government. He's in charge of the lands. And those two were in my room and I enjoyed them. They were nice children. Then others that I had were stake officers and bishops and all that kind.

PP: Is President Alapa and President...

AM: Wait! There is Easter Logan, Harvey Alapa and [Harold] Pukahi and Peter Enos and Kosena Fonoimoana, and quite a number. I can't remember them all. I was glad to see them when they came up.

PP: They're all big boys now.

AM: All big guns now, [laughter]. I'm glad they've showed their true quality in them. They've really developed into fine men.

PP: Now as I understand, there were a lot--not a lot but a few Samoans here before you arrive. How was--

AM: Yes, just a few Samoans.

PP: Now, how was the immigration of the Samoan people here, when you were here?

AM: I don't know. There weren't too many.

PP: As I understand, the [Opapo] Fonoimoana's were one of the first Samoan families here?

AM: That's the main family, and the Su'a's.

PP: Fanene's?

AM: Fanene's, very few and Maiava's and I can't think of anymore. There was a man, I forgot his name now, but they were nice people. We had a nice time; we all could get along fine. Just the Samoans, the Hawaiians and the very few white people. That was just President

[John Q.] Adams; he was here with his family; he took care of the store, the plantation store over there, and he was here with his family. But the Samoan's and Hawaiian's got along very well and we had a nice community. Very nice.

PP: Now you mentioned you joined the Church in 1933.

AM: Right.

PP: Okay. Now can you tell me what motivated you to join the Church? Can you give me some experiences of your conversion to the Church?

AM: I know, I know you want it. I think from the beginning, first when I was a young girl at normal school. Thursday and Friday nights, my sister--youngest sister, she is next to me, almost same age--and other girls from our community would go up to the Mormon hall. That was a popular place to dance and we'd have such a good time there. I remember, Alvin Isaacs [see OH-89] he was the main fellow, he had a band and orchestra, and we used to dance there all the time. And we had a nice time there, and then we met so many people.

And when we came to Laie, better yet, I met more Mormons, and I met my husband and his family. He's got a wonderful family. His mother and his Father and his auntie and his grandfather. His grandfather was a old timer, and he was a real Ali'i because his family, the Apuakehau family, came here from Hawaii. They owned land and you know the Hawaiians who owned land are the Ali'i: they're the ones who got the land, and he still had lots of land left; that's for the family. There were three brothers. There was Joel Apuakehau who was the interpreter for the courts; then there was Joseph Apuakehau, our grandfather. He was the man who took care of the land. He was the [konohiki]; he was the care taker for the land, the one in charge. And then, the other brother William Apuakehau, was a judge at Waianae; he was a judge. So you see, they held important positions.

And Joseph Apuakehau, he had gone to Lahainaluna School; he had been educated at Lahainaluna School, he was a fine man. And when he was dying, I was standing near the bed and the doctor and President Castle Murphy [Hawaiian Mission President, 1931-36, 1944-47] were there too. I heard the doctor say to Castle Murphy said,

"He's a fine old man," and Castle Murphy said, "Yes, he's one of the stalwarts in our church." And I thought to myself, "That's a wonderful thing to say about someone." And I know that our tutu kane [grandfather] heard that too.

But I know that the church is true without a doubt because I saw a vision that some people don't realize, but those things are to be seen. In 1930, I wasn't a member yet, but I was working for the Church. I was playing the piano for this and that, and getting this program, and that program, all kinds of program. I was teaching Sunday School and you know, teaching this and that. We were coming home from Honolulu, we had a big program, [an] MIA program at Mckinley High School and my mother-in-law and her sister were sitting in the back seat and my husband and I were in the front seat. He was driving our big Buick and I was holding my baby boy on my lap, and as we came close to Laie, to the place where the PCC is now, we looked up at where the temple is and we saw a light farther over, coming from the west, and we said, "What's that light?" And someone said, "Oh! that's sugarcane burning; don't worry," and someone else said, "No that's the moon coming up." We couldn't figure out what the light was and pretty soon it burst up above the temple, right above the temple. It went up, clouds and clouds of beautiful white light. Most beautiful sight I ever saw in my life, and we knew it was really something, and my mother-in-law and her sister started singing "The Spirit of God Like a Fire Is Burning." It just thrilled us and we all sang but then, something had to spoil it, you know.

We saw a man walking on the road with a bag on his back. We all turned and said, "Who is that?" "Where's he going at this time of the night?" It was about two o'clock in the morning. And then someone said, "That's Hamana [Kalili], he's going fishing." Then we said, "We are satisfied." And when we looked back again our light was going, disappearing, so my husband sped up the car as fast as he could, up Lanihuli Street. And when we got opposite the temple, we looked over and there was nothing there. It was all dark.

PP: The light was gone.

AM: The light was gone. So we said, "Oh, no use telling anybody; no one would believe us." But I told my friend, like one of my pals, and she happened to tell somebody else, I guess. And it

was mentioned the next day at conference in Honolulu. We all went to the conference. And at Kalihi also, it was mentioned about our seeing something but nobody bothered to tell us or ask anything about it, until Brother [Clinton] Kanahele did in about [the] 50's. He came and asked me to write up a story, and, you know, make a tape of it. And so I wrote it up and he sent it to Salt Lake. So I knew that it was really true. The story is the same; I don't change the story, the same story every time I tell it. It was a wonderful and beautiful sight, that bright light. I just happened to tell the story to the people at Lanakila and they all listened to me telling the story of that beautiful vision.

PP: Now this was back in 19--

AM: This was April 6, 1930.

PP: That's a coincidence because that's the same month, day, and year, a hundred years back, that the Church was organized.

AM: That's the hundredth year anniversary of the Church. That's why we saw it. And we knew without a doubt that it was the true church. And so I became a member in 1933, and I was baptized by my grandfather down at the beach, then President [William A.] Waddoups confirmed me a member of the church.

PP: Now, who was President Waddoups at that time? Was he the mission president, or what?

AM: He was a mission president for many years [1926-1931; also president of Hawaii Temple 1918-1930]. He was a very important person, and in 1936 I believe it was, that he gave me my patriarchal blessing--or 1938, I can't remember. But he gave me my patriarchal blessing, and I'll never forget that. It was a beautiful blessing.

PP: Yes, that's very interesting. So he was the president for the mission during that time. Now, what do you remember about the church at that time? Who was the stake president at that time, can you remember?

AM: There was no stake then. It wasn't a stake. It was just a mission. There was no stake.

PP: But were there wards of branches?

AM: No wards. There were branches, I guess, but I just don't remember or heard about anything like

that in Laie. There was a fellow named Adams, as I told you. He was the store keeper, the main manager. And he also was president of the town, or something of that sort. I really don't know how they carried it on. When did we have or bishop? 1930, I think, we started having bishops, I can't remember, [Oahu Stake was created in 1935].

PP: But during that time...

AM: I forgot our first bishop's name. I know, [Robert] Plunkett.

[505] END OF SIDE A

SIDE B

PP: You mentioned that the school was located right [000] across the street, the Japanese school.

AM: Yes, right over there [opposite the Meyer home which is at 55-649 Loala Street].

PP: Can you tell me who organized that school?

AM: That I cannot tell you. It was there when I came; it was there a long time.

PP: Okay. Now what do you remember about the establishment of the Church College of Hawaii?

AM: I really don't know much because I left here in 1952.

PP: You left in 1952, to go to...

AM: I went as an exchange teacher to Ogden, Utah. And then I stayed there for five years. I lived in Ogden and taught school there and enjoyed it immensely. And then I moved to California, to Port Hueneme, and there I taught six years and we also had a theater there. Mind you, we ran a theater. My husband was a projectionist. Right here in Laie, in this big hall we used to have movies over there sometimes. His father and he were interested in that kind of thing, in movies and projectors. And so he knew the business and we had a good business, but then we gave it all up and we sold everything out and we came to Hawaii, came back home.

PP: Okay. Now, what do you remember about the visit of church leaders, such as Matthew Cowley and President David O. McKay?



- AM: I remember McKay and I remember Castle Murphy.
- PP: Castle Murphy? Who was Castle Murphy?
- AM: He was mission president, too. [1931-36, 1944-47, also Hawaii Temple president, 1930-31, 1938-41, and Central Pacific Mission president, 1944-47] He's still living too. He's about ninety-six years old.
- PP: He is still living?
- AM: He lives in Orem, Utah, I know. And I met Matthew Cowley many times, and I was even at his funeral when he died. [Cowley died 13 December 1953 in Los Angeles, California]
- PP: What year did you return from your teaching in the mainland?
- AM: 1963.
- PP: 1963. That's the same year that the Polynesian Cultural Center was established.
- AM: Yes, and I became the stake president of the MIA at that year.
- PP: Is that right?
- AM: And then in 1966, I got my degree along with my daughter. And then in 1969, I retired. I had enough; I had forty-two years of teaching.
- PP: That's a long time.
- AM: Thirty-one years in Hawaii and eleven years on the mainland. But still I don't mind it.
- PP: When you first got here, back from the mainland, it was 1963. What do you remember about the first year of the Polynesian Cultural Center? How was it like?
- AM: I don't know. I wasn't that close to it.
- PP: You never had a chance to work there.
- AM: No. I never worked there.
- PP: I see. Do you remember who the first general manager was?
- AM: No, I don't. I don't.
- PP: Okay. Now I understand that a lot of the facilities at the Polynesian Cultural Center were

built by labor missionaries?

AM: Right, right.

PP: Do you remember where most of the labor missionaries were from?

AM: No, I don't.

[100] [Long pause as she walked to the kitchen]

PP: One more question before we close. Tell me about any important thing in your life here in Laie that we have not touched on. Any important thing that you can think of that we [never mentioned], that maybe perhaps I should include in the interview?

AM: Of course. My children are very important to me. I had my son [Rudolph Kauhalekua Meyer], born in 1929, and my daughter [Faith] was born in 1944. And I lost my son in 1979, and my daughter is still on the Big Island. She's teaching school. My son taught school, too.

PP: Yes, I know your son because he taught at Kahuku when I was going school there too. Yes, I know him very well. Well, Sister Meyer, thank you very much and I appreciate your time and the information that you have given me to help out my assignment here for my history class.

AM: I hope it helps out in some way. [interrupted by call from outside]

PP: Thank you.

AM: You're welcome.

[145] END OF INTERVIEW