

The Amazing Building of Kawaiaha‘o Church

Rarely has a more thrilling story ever been recorded than the amazing and miraculous account of the building of the great stone church named Kawaiaha‘o.

With the burning of several grass meeting houses (pili) at Kawaiaha‘o, Kalanimoku’s practical, prophetic vision gave entree to the dream of a building in stone. Young King Kamehameha III furthered this dream when in 1835 he named three things he desired:

- 1) a ship for war for his service,
- 2) a palace for his residence, and
- 3) **a new church for the worship of God.** (*p.37*)

Today we have little conception of the immense planning and incomprehensible labor undertaken by King Kauikeaouli, Governor Kekūanaō‘a and the people of Oahu for a project so vast as the building of the Stone Church. (*p. 44*)

King Kauikeaouli (Kamehameha III) chose the spot for the church building because it was the site of an ancient well -or spring- belonging to Chiefess Ha‘o. He was the primary benefactor of the building project, with his gift of \$3000 for building supplies “with the best materials which the country can afford for a temple of worship for the living God.” Added to that, over 1500 commoners and chiefs gave \$6000 toward building the church. The eventual cost at completion was estimated to be \$30,000.

Dr. Gerrit P. Judd worked closely with 2 successive pastors, Mr. Bingham (who designed the church building and guided the builders) and Mr. Armstrong, in this gigantic undertaking.

Over one thousand people engaged on the work of the new meeting house. Different parts of the island were given different tasks in building the church. The first task, started on May 23, 1837, to quarry rocks (from a nearby reef) by people from Waikiki to Moanalua. (*p. 44*)

It was reported that the Hawaiians dove down 10-20 feet and hand chiseled blocks of coral (some weighing 1200 pounds) from the great coral reef. They then placed them into canoes and ferried them to shore. (<https://imagesofoldhawaii.com/kawaiiahao-church/>) **14,000 stones** were required for the Hale Pule to be built! (*pp. 46 & 48*) The missionary children’s memories were of crude trucks with creaking wheels loaded with coral blocks cut from the reef at low tide being dragged into the churchyard. Each truck was fitted with ropes, which were manned by 12-16 stalwart Hawaiians with strong willing hands. Then with a great deal of shouting or chanting song, they pulled together at the command of their luna (bosses) until they brought their loads within the church’s grounds. With great effort 5 or 6 Hawaiians could move a single stone. (*p. 51*) The people then cut and smoothed the stones. Kekūanaō‘a offered the 20 stonecutters 25 cents per stone and people who would construct the church at 50 cents each. Four stones were laid at both corners of the church. Governor Kekūanaō‘a proposed “laying the foundation of the House of worship” to a depth of 6 feet. Minister-translator-teacher, Hiram Bingham and colleague, Levi Chamberlain, spent considerable time in fitting a machine for hoisting these large stones.

The town of Honolulu was assigned to quarry lime. The King, Ministers, and town people **(933 people)** started to build nine lime kilns dug on the church property. Native men worked patiently day after day laying the stones, thoroughly mixing the mortar, sand, and lime burning in kilns.

“The Pali Road was begun in the 1830s so lumber could be transported from the Windward side to build Kawaiaha’o church. Canoes brought logs from Ko’olauloa to Kaneohe and were then hauled over the Pali by hand.” (p.187, “The Companies We Keep 3” by Bob Sigall).

On June 5, 1838, the cutting of wood was assigned to those who owned woodlands from Waikiki to Moanalua. (p. 44) Then on July 30, 1838, grounds were broken to build the church.

Dr. Judd, helped supervise the details of the building of the stone church. When **14,000** massive blocks were finally laid square and plumb, Dr. Judd climbed to the top, surveying high above the ground before commencing with the roof. Fitting of the long ridgepole of the great roof was the most anxious, perplexing and dangerous item of the undertaking. 4000 *Mamaki kapa* and 200 cattle from the king were exchanged for 100,000 wooden shingles for the roof. (p. 52)

“One of the largest blocks in the walls was the great “*stone of the corner*”, a fine-grained sandstone weighing perhaps a half a ton. High Chief Paki, father of Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop, had it cut from a ledge at Wai‘anae and supervised its removal. It was floated on a canoe and hauled to the site on rude block wheels by a gang of shouting natives headed by Dr. Judd riding his horse.” (p. 55) On June 8, 1839, the basement walls, 44 inches thick had reached a height of 12 feet, the building proprietors and missionaries assembled and laid the cornerstone accompanied by a copper plate with the inscription: “This is a house of worship for Jehovah the God of Heaven, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: a house of prayer erected by the first church and congregation of Honolulu, a place for them to worship the true God. The people who had been very helpful in this work are Kamehameha III, Kaahumanu, Auhea, Liliha, Kekauonohi, Kekuanaoa, Governor of Oahu; Paki and Keohokalole.” (p. 57)

Recollections of building of the stone church by the missionary children in 1895:

“And we know that many prayers went up to the Great Architect of the experienced workmen and the overburdened fathers. “It was always recalled with thanksgiving that no life had been sacrificed in the erection of the great church”. (p. 52)

“At the urgent request of Brethren Chamberlain and Judd in Honolulu, Mr. Bingham talked with friends and secured the sum of \$1499 toward the building of Kawaiaha’o from Centre Church [where ‘Ōpūkaha’ia attended] in New Haven the donation of a pulpit, table, stairs and railing, all having cost a thousand dollars.” (p. 60)

Finally on July 21, 1842, after the completion of the Stone Church, the church was dedicated. “The King.....holding in his hand the nature of a Deed of Dedication, giving the house to God for his worship and making over the property for the use of the church and congregation....” (p. 63)

On October 12, 1842 Kawaiahao's new pastor wrote from Honolulu: "On the 21st of July our new meetinghouse was dedicated to the worship of God. The concourse of people was very great, probably not much short of 4 or 5000; among whom was his Majesty the King, his Premier and all the high chiefs. During the exercises the King arose and before the vast assembly presented a deed of the house and premises to the church which assisted him in building the house and to those of like faith who may come after." (p.72)

"Brother Lowell Smith recorded the unforgettable picture of the lunas, or section overseers, of the five apana, or branches of the church people, each rising in his turn as he was called upon to state his reason for building this house and declaring in a loud voice that it had been built for Jehovah. And in answer to each luna came the joyful response of all his apana,

'To Jehovah we have built this house.'" (p. 63)

Historian James Jarves wrote:

"The most conspicuous, if not the most ornamental, edifice in the town, is the stone church, erected at the order of the King, but by the joint labor of the whole island. Ten years were employed in cutting the stone, procuring the timber, etc. Meanwhile the despotism of the chiefs became restrained by a written constitution. Tyranny and exactions laid its foundations and raised its walls, but voluntary labor and contributions completed the work. The manner of its erection and its slow progress furnish an epitome of the history of the nation and all its varied phases, from its darkest period of slow progress furnish an anarchy and confusion to joyous and epoch which marked its dedication." (p. 65)

Referenced pages are from: *The Stone Church of Kawaiaha'o* by Ethel Damon, Published by the Trustees of Kawaiaha'o Church "Honolulu Star-Bulletin Press Honolulu 1945 and *The Companies We Keep 3* by Bob Sigall