

(6) The 1950's: Growing Together

Sugar production with some modern improvements was probably at its height on the Aiea plantation in the 1950's. With statehood looming, not only Oahu, but every Hawaiian island was a jewel waiting for good ole American capitalism to develop. Even though the Aloha Tower was the tallest building in Honolulu, the onset of the infrastructure formation for tourism was taking shape all across Oahu. Aiea began to feel the pinch of postwar expansion as slowly sugar land went into subdivisions, and military quarters into civilian housing. New retail establishments and the growth of industrial and commercial enterprises began to infiltrate the greater Aiea region.

The home front of the 50's was rather simple, and something generations since find unbelievable. Not many homes had phones, and if they did they were probably hooked to party lines. TV was just coming into being, though Hawaii lagged a bit behind the mainland. Cars were just becoming affordable. Streetcars were just starting to be replaced by buses. Ocean liners were just giving way to airplanes. Homes were still visited by the ice truck, the milkman, the paper boy on his bike, the ice cream truck, and the *buta kau kau* man collecting his "treasure" from square cans hanging on the clothes line post.

Those who attended Aiea church in the 50's remember the sabbath as being an all day affair. Families would come for sabbath school and church service, lunch at someone's house, and then afternoon and evening programs. The afternoons would be taken up by activities such as singing bands, literature distribution bands, MV programs, and sometimes hiking. Saturday evening after sundown was Pathfinder meeting time followed by games on the church grounds. Choir practice was also added for some after the Kiilehuas joined Aiea.

The Pathfinder program in Hawaii in the 1950's and 60's was nothing close to what it has become today. Most churches had large clubs, and each was very active. Even though Aiea's membership then was less than half of what it is today, the Pathfinder club usually had upwards of 20 young persons. Each club worked diligently to prepare for the yearly Pathfinder Fair that included an on street parade with police escort. Each club would march into Thomas Square for a dignitary greeting by such as Police Chief, Dan Liu (an HMA alumnus), and competitions in "pathfinding skills" from fire starting, knot tying, flagpole pitching, and off course inspection and drilling.

Aiea's club of the 50's was first rate. The skills and organization of the Aiea club made them and their leader, Bill Villegas, receive many honors; and even the Honolulu Advertiser had an article picturing Bill receiving the top honor. The 50's club which some have said were made up largely of Kakazu relatives and Kaeka siblings took part in mission wide camporees, and their own camps and trips. A trip to Kauai in the 50's is well remembered. The Pathfinder club met the needs of that age and put the little Aiea church on the map.

In the 1950's Aiea's pastors were Walter Barber, Gordon McLafferty, Lester Bennett, Don Lee, and Harold Rich. Some of the prominent names of the 50's were Shige Arakaki, Hideo Oshita, Bill Villegas, Minoru Azama, Gerald Ishihara, James Miyashiro, and Shige and Masao Kobashigawa. Family names included the Tabalis, Sorianos, Ihas, Yamanuhas, Ishikawas, and the Kiilehuas. Other unique names were Leslie Tyau, his Model A brought 9 passengers to church on sabbaths, and the "Three Musketeers" made up of Kazu Kojima, Thomas Carter, and Alec Kiilehua who became famous for giving Bible studies.

What appeared to be happening the 1950's was the influx of other races and professions to the largely Okinawan/Japanese base of plantation workers' children. The charter members began to raise their own children in the church, and with the coming of other families, a more typical church dynamic was beginning to be seen beyond the "bunch of kids." In short, the little Aiea church was beginning to look like your typical Hawaiian melting pot church. Aunty Kay Kaeka has summed it up this way:

"Though I was Hawaiian and many of the young members were Japanese, we were family. . . We were a working church. . . There were no high *makamaka* people in this church."

Though the landscape of Aiea was changing, and sugar may have been on its last leg, the dream of Ken Kakazu, Pastor George Kiyabu and friends was just beginning to flourish. It could be said that now there was a "real" church. The Spirit of God had gifted Aiea with award winning Pathfinders, lay Bible workers, and most of all a strong family base. Alec Kiilehua, Aiea's first head elder, and his wife Grace have called the Aiea church of the 50's the "high point of our Adventist experience." The founding fathers of Aiea knew that positive comments and successful programs were the working of God, but above all, they knew that a true church was more than just a building and successful programs. A true church is people, families and individuals working together. . . together because they share the same Spirit.