

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Fred Iona, 82, farmer

"Ever since I was young I farmed. I stayed at the taro patch and farmed. That's how I learned to farm. . . . At home I was used to working, milking cows, raising pigs and various other things. Before, kids would go farm. If they lived near the ocean, they would go fish, they would go on the canoe--but not me, because I lived ma uka."

Fred Iona, Hawaiian-Portuguese, was born on March 19, 1899 in Pahoeheo, South Kona, Hawaii. He is the youngest of eight children. His father was a teacher at Alae School.

Fred left school after the fourth grade to work on the Magoon Ranch in Pahoeheo. He eventually acquired his own land and cultivated 'awa, banana, macadamia nuts, and peanuts.

Today, he still farms his own land and is an active member of the Macadamia Nut Growers Association.

Tape No. 9-69-1-81 TR

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Fred Iona (FI)

December 18, 1980

Pāhoehoe, Kona, Hawai'i

BY: Ray Kalā Enos (RE)

[NOTE: Interview conducted in Hawaiian. Translation done by Ray Kalā Enos.]

RE: This is an interview with Mr. Fred Iona. Today is December 18, 1980. We are at his house at Pāhoehoe, Kona, Hawai'i.

Mr. Iona, Could you please tell me about your origin, where you were born, when you were born and who your parents were?

FI: I was born at Pāhoehoe.

RE: Pāhoehoe, on this land here?

FI: Yes, Pāhoehoe, Lumilumi. Pāhoehoe, Lumilumi, that's this place where I was born.

RE: And in what year were you born?

FI: March 19, 1899. That's when I was born.

RE: Who were your parents?

FI: My parents were Malia Iona Kahuna'āina Kauahi, my mother, and my father was Iona, Iona Kauahi.

RE: And where were they from?

FI: My mother was from right here in Pāhoehoe. They were from here.

RE: They were both from here.

FI: Yes.

RE: What did they do?

FI: Iona was a schoolteacher at Ala'ē [school] ma uka, a Hawaiian school-

teacher. That's what he did, he was a teacher.

RE: How many children did they have?

FI: Eight children--that child that was born and taken by Keola folks, don't count that do you? Well, that which I know, three girls and four boys.

RE: And which one were you?

FI: I was the last one.

RE: Did you live in Pāhoehoe?

FI: Yes, in Pāhoehoe, just below there [i.e., below the present house] is where I lived.

RE: Where did you go to school?

FI: Ala'ē [School].

RE: Until which grade?

FI: Until the fourth grade.

RE: Why didn't you continue . . .

FI: Education? Afterward, I went to work. I began to work. Fifty cents a day then. Three dollars a week. Yeah, 50 cents a day.

RE: How old were you then?

FI: Fourteen [years old].

RE: What were the schools like then?

FI: Well, schools were haole schools [FI probably meant the schools were taught in English]. The teacher was difficult, hard. He hit. If you were ignorant, you were hit. There were many children then. The teacher, he hit. If you were ignorant, you were hit. You stood at the corner of the schoolhouse on one foot, at the corner with a rock in your hands. You stood there, that was your punishment.

RE: What was the language at the school?

FI: English.

RE: But you were raised in the Hawaiian language?

FI: Yes, I was raised with the Hawaiian language, but in the school, English. (Phrase inaudible.) When you go to school, you speak English. Some children spoke hapa haole, and when they leave they

speak only Hawaiian. They return to the street and speak Hawaiian. Because the parents of these children spoke only Hawaiian. They didn't speak English except when they went to school.

RE: Were the people on this land only Hawaiians?

FI: Yes, only Hawaiians. There were a few foreigners. Chinese, they came here first and set up a store. And their children were half-Chinese because the [Hawaiian] women married the Chinese. And they had children . . .

RE: And what language did they speak?

FI: English. The Chinese and the Japanese that first came here, they were very competent in speaking Hawaiian, more so than the Hawaiians at that time; they were smart. Because they were taught. They married Hawaiian women and were taught the Hawaiian language. They were smart.

RE: How about the Chinese and Japanese, did they become friends of yours?

FI: Yes, they became friends, they lived among us, went among us. They conversed with Hawaiians. They lived together, ate together, they ate poi with Hawaiians, they ate raw fish with Hawaiians. They resembled Hawaiians. They were very good at speaking Hawaiian. These foreigners, you look at their faces, they're Japanese, but in speaking, Hawaiian. Smart--those Chinese and Japanese, before. Smart, because they married Hawaiian women and they knew the Hawaiian language.

RE: Just like you, you're half-Hawaiian, half-Portuguese . . .

FI: Yes, that's how I became competent in the Hawaiian language. Because my mother only spoke Hawaiian, and my brother and sister were my schoolteachers.

RE: So you all spoke in Hawaiian at . . .

FI: At home. And when we went to school, English, and when we return, we spoke only Hawaiian to my mother. She didn't know how to speak English. She only spoke Hawaiian to me, to us. The same with my brother and sister, they spoke Hawaiian, but when they went to school, they spoke English.

RE: Then, you left school after the fourth grade?

FI: Yes.

RE: And you began . . .

FI: To go to work.

RE: Where?

FI: Magoon, Pāhoehoe ranch. I first went to work on Saturdays. There wasn't any school on Saturdays, right? So I went to work on Saturdays. Every Saturday, I went to work. And then I saw that maybe it was better that I go to work. Then I first started going work, to clean yard.

RE: That's your first job?

FI: Yes, pick up rubbish. That's why I left school to go to work. My brother and sister were angry at me for leaving school, but I didn't listen. They said to me, "You are ignorant."

RE: What other jobs did you do?

FI: Later, I worked with Magoon until my pay reached \$15 a month, then \$20 a month, then raised to \$25. That's how it was raised. Later I worked. I saved my money. At \$25 a month, I saved half. At that time, food was cheap, cheap. So I saved and saved and got money. The change began to add up. I acquired workers. They cut lantana, farm taro, plant bananas, plant 'awa. And that's what I did until my place increased to seven acres for work with the workers. That's how I did it. I worked with Magoon and I worked at home doing various things, planting peanut, planting tomato.

RE: Those are the things . . .

FI: Yes, the things that I first did. I planted peanut, that kind of ginger ['awapuhi-Pākē, lit. Chinese ginger, *Zingiber officinale*]. Because the Chinese were skillful at planting peanut. It was sold at Honolulu at the market. That's what I did, beginning with that work.

RE: So you sold these things?

FI: Yes. Sent them to Honolulu. On Wednesdays the boat anchored. We sent them on the ship. That Japanese guy took them on his truck and sent them to Honolulu to the Chinese market. And later I planted 'awa. Everybody around here planted 'awa. Nineteen eighteen, I planted 'awa. Nineteen eighteen was the war [World War I], right. The 'awa was taken by Hackfeld. He was the agent buying 'awa. It was purchased by American Factors, all Germans.

Before, the people's work over here was farming 'awa, farming coffee, [and] sell [coffee] to (phrase inaudible) Alike, he had a mill. Coffee was \$1.50 per bag. It was cheap. People went and gathered it and sold it.

RE: Did you plant coffee?

FI: I planted two acres. And then, I bulldozed it and planted the nut.

RE: Macadamia nut.

FI: Yes. I thought the nut was better. And banana. I planted bananas. Fifteen acres of banana. I planted them, sent them to Honolulu, and worked for Magoon. I got some Filipino workers. At that time farmers [hired farm workers] were cheap.

RE: You hired Filipino workers?

FI: Yes, I did hire Filipinos. I did a number of things. I raised cows, raised pigs, and various other things. Yes, I raised cows before. Until today. From the time when I was young until today I've had cows. They're out in the nut field. Before, the land was large, the land where the lava flowed. Ever since I was young I raised cows. Then I would sell them and get some money.

RE: Where did you sell these cows?

FI: Oh, at the market. At the slaughterhouse. People came to buy cows, Waimea, Lindsey folks bought cows. Only \$30 for a big cow. Today, a hundred [dollars]. (Laughs) Only \$30 for a steer, a large one. Yes, \$25. Now you pay a hundred [dollars]. So I sold them, saved my money. I raised pigs. I used to have a lot of pigs before, 70 or more pigs. The Filipinos were the ones who cared for them and raised them. I sold them. Pigs were cheap, you know.

RE: You planted 'awa, right? What was the value of 'awa then?

FI: At that time, the value of 'awa was to make medicine. To make medicine and send it to Germany. It was made into powder. It was chopped up and dried. It was sold to Hackfeld and Company [later called American Factors] and sent to Germany because Hackfeld was German. This was done for the duration of the war [World War I]. When it ended, Germans didn't buy it, right, because Hackfeld ended and American Factors came. Before, the people farmed 'awa, everyone did. That was the value of 'awa, one ton for \$250. You see.

RE: Didn't you folks drink 'awa?

FI: Drink, sure. Some people drank and weren't used to it. They drank until intoxicated and stayed in one place. They couldn't stand up. Their feet were limp just like they were paralyzed. Kā! [exclamation of disapproval, often pronounced as "sah!"] It was bitter. Yes, some people pounded the 'awa and some people chewed it and then they were nauseated. Some people drank. If they drank until intoxicated, they just stayed in one place. Not like alcohol or 'ōkolehao [liquor distilled from ti root], this whiskey, lightning. Their manner was crazy. They just stayed in one place. The feet were paralyzed. The body was paralyzed. They had a numbed, dull-witted look.

RE: Yesterday you mentioned various kinds of alcoholic drinks. Can you explain some of these?

FI: Oh, that's not going to be good in the book, is it?

RE: It's okay.

FI: No, bumbai the children. (Laughs) That kind of stuff isn't good. (Laughs) The children will think, that man--that's not good. (Laughs)

Before, people used to distill their own alcohol. They used potato and put it into a pot with water and then left it to sour, one week, I think. Then they drank the potato [drink] and that drinking of the potato made them full. But you became drunk. The pūpū [hors d'oeuvre or relish] for that was the 'a'ama [a large, black, edible crab]. If you drank that potato drink, it was 'a'ama.

And 'ōkolehao also was a lot of work. You have the ti plant, you cook it three days and it's done. Beat it [the ti root] until it is flattened and put it into a barrel. The making of 'ōkolehao is a lot of work. You dig up the ti plant. You look at the ti to see if it's growing well and if so, then it's good. If you look at the ti and it's bad--the ti flower is bad--if you dig it, it's gummy, tough and watery just like taro. If you braid it it's brittle. It's not potable. That potable ti is fuzzy. That's the good ti. It's a lot of alcoholic drink. Put it in a container, put in water, beat it, cook it, three days and it's done. It's a lot of work. If the oven is small it won't be done. Three days inside, take it out, beat it, put it in a pot or maybe a barrel. Beat it, put it in water, and in three or four days, or one week, it's bubbly in fermentation.

Maybe two weeks, you see, 12 days, the drink will be good. Too quick is not good. There won't be a lot of drink. Because it's not good, right. If you distill it, the ti emerges and the water flows. It's like you're distilling it. The pot, the water tub, make a pipe for the steam to flow. That's what make the 'ōkolehao. If not for the steam, you wouldn't have 'ōkolehao. You'd have water. It rises and then drips, and that's 'ōkolehao. That's how it's done, the making of 'ōkolehao.

When I was young, I went with my uncle to help him distill; I watched him work. And that's how I know. People before used to distill 'ōkolehao, made potato drink. And when a holiday came, the drink was ready. They didn't buy. Because there weren't saloons. Saloons were gone, and they couldn't buy alcohol. That's how they did it. Some people also made a drink from rice. That's how the people were before.

RE: While you were working with Magoon, you began by cleaning the yard, and later you became a cowboy?

FI: Yes, I was a cowboy caring for the cattle, but I did all kinds of jobs. Later, that old lady moved here, and I lived with that old lady. I stayed at the house of the old lady, with the Chinese cooks. Because I drove a car, I was the one to drive the car where she wanted to go, Hilo, Waimea. I stayed at the house and drove the car. I worked too, not only driving the car and sit. I worked and when that was done I drove the car. When the lady called, I went. I got dressed and went. That was my job until the death of that old lady. I worked.

At that time the children who owned the ranch came and they had various types of things. A bulldozer, diesel truck, various other things. They made a road. Before, there wasn't one. They got new cattle and raised them. The white headed cattle. I went to California and bought these cattle. They're good cattle so they have good offspring, not that kind of wild cattle. They were thoroughbred. I went to California to get them and returned on the boat. That's what I did until 1972 when I retired.

And after that my boss went to California and died, and the ranch ended. It was going to close. He went to California to grow nut and plant rice. Some of the children went there. The workers were taken. I didn't go. I stayed and watched. I couldn't go because who would look after the house, right here?

RE: With whom did you work, what kind of people were they, were they only Hawaiians?

FI: Oh, there were many different kinds--Korean, Filipino, Chinese. They all worked on the ranch before for the old lady. Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, and Hawaiians also. Hawaiians worked on the fences. They made the wire fences. Those people that lived on the side of the ranch, the old lady gave them work for one dollar a day. They made fences and various other things. They farmed 'awa, taro, made charcoal. That was their work. There weren't any Koreans left, and they were the ones that made the charcoal. They worked for the old lady. There was a lot of work. The old lady gave them work because those people were kama'āina [native born, familiar], right.

RE: So by that time, the various groups of people had moved here?

FI: Yes. Chinese and Koreans. Chinese were the first. There were many Chinese. Only Chinese, and later the Japanese, I think. And later, Koreans. Before, this place used to have a lot of Koreans, and now no more. They're all gone. The Japanese came first though [before the Koreans] for the sugar plantations. After that, they left the plantations and went to work.

RE: How was it living together and working together with them? Were there any problems?

FI: No, there weren't any problems. Just listen to what the boss said to do and do it. Those people from the farms weren't any problem. They weren't lazy. Because they worked on the sugar plantations. And when they were done there, they went out. There wasn't any problem.

RE: You said that in your youth, the children went to school and were taught in English, but how about the Japanese children, were they also taught in English and . . .

FI: Yes, [they were taught Japanese] and in a Japanese school. We didn't have a schoolhouse around here. Their place down below had a Japanese school.

RE: Were there a lot of Japanese then?

FI: Yes, there were a lot. But the most I think was the Chinese. Because before, there were only Chinese who had stores around here, not Japanese. But the Japanese were later.

RE: What did they do?

FI: Farmers. Just seaward is a Chinese store. That's our big store, Asing. The children worked until they were grown. And the children died. Perhaps there are some still living.

RE: So you worked with Magoon folks and you began working at . . .

FI: Yes. I worked and then I had my workers. I was farming. I worked for the old lady, and when that was done, I farmed at home. I didn't tell them. I didn't tell them that I had workers. I didn't tell anyone. Bumbai if they knew, maybe they would think that I didn't work there, just at home. I didn't bring them here because that was my own. After work hours was my own.

RE: Do you remember something good or bad from your youth? (Pause) What is something real good that you remember?

FI: Well, at that time, it was like now. At that time, before, the children worked. They worked. Before, I didn't eat candy. Only once a year I'd eat candy. Once a year when you go to church you eat candy. The rest of the time you didn't eat candy like nowadays. In those days you didn't have any money. It took a lot of work to get money. Only once a year, at Christmas, we went to a different church. [There was] a Christmas tree, we ate ice cream. People made their own ice cream. And we ate candy. That's the only time. When that was over, no. That's it for the year. Unless you went to the store and you had money, you could get candy. If you didn't have money, it was difficult to get any.

RE: Do you remember something not so good? Something not good concerning work or living in general.

FI: No. People before were just fine. They didn't do mischievous things, steal, or other foolish things. People were good and friendly. If you were seen walking along, you would be called in to eat. They lived together and worked together. There wasn't any fighting and stealing like nowadays. Today they steal your car and burn your car, but they didn't do that before. (Pause)

People that lived by the ocean were fishermen. I couldn't swim because I hardly saw the beach. My parents would get mad at me and tell me not to go to the beach because I couldn't swim. Now children are taught to go swimming. Even the little children can swim. That's good.

RE: You were a farmer, but did you know anything about fishing?

FI: No, I just knew about one kind of fish (laughs) po'opa'a [a type of fish, lit. hard head]. Soon as the hook goes in, I get one of those. Before, I used to go down and fish with palu [chum consisting of head and stomach of fish], palu with 'āla'āla [squid liver]. I don't go down anymore because there isn't any 'āla'āla, no hooks. I only get po'opa'a. If the ocean is calm, I go down and get po'opa'a. Just put the hook in and you got it. You get them on the flat coral reef. I don't know too much about fishing.

RE: So did you get your fish at the store or did you trade for it?

FI: No. Now I go to the store for fish because I'm not a fisherman. You get whatever kind you like at the market. But before, the fishermen sent all kinds of fish to Honolulu by mano, ka'ao, and lau. Ka'ao is 40. Mano is 40 ka'ao, I think. And lau is the most. When I heard those fishermen using those terms, I didn't know what they were since I wasn't a fisherman.

RE: Do you remember the volcano flow?

FI: Yes. In 1950, but I forget the month. I was staying at Keālia when it happened. It was at 10 [o'clock] or 11 o'clock, I think. It [lava] went all the way to the ocean, and houses were destroyed around here. Around 14 around here were destroyed by the flow and the people all fled.

RE: Where were you then?

FI: At Keālia. With my sister and cousins. After that, this house here was built. This house is about 20 years old, I think. After the lava flow was another. This one [near FI's house] was the first. Next came another branch and went down and destroyed all the houses by the Magoon place. Then there was another flow towards the uplands, and it stopped about two miles before getting to the road. But a branch came down to Kapulau. This was the third branch.

RE: Were you all afraid?

FI: Oh yes, everyone fled. They were afraid.

FI's wife: People around here weren't afraid. They were used to the lava. Because when the flow came, some would just watch it. Since Pele [volcano goddess] would go where she wanted to go. If you are in the way, you just go and move.

FI: That's what happened with the flow of Alikea, we went to watch. And the same with Ho'opuloa. We went down to the street and watched.

FI's wife: You could stick a stick in and stir it around.

FI: When the sticks disappeared, rocks were left. Some flows are different, though. Pāhoehoe is just like lead. But this one was rocks. The flow would just come by and lift trees, and when it entered the ocean, kukui trees would be standing with its branches and fruit. The corrugated iron from houses here were carried over a mile.

RE: What are your thoughts about Pele? And the thoughts of others that live around here.

FI: Well, some are scared. Some lost their houses.

Some haole tourists came over here and said, "Oh, beautiful. Oh, how nice and beautiful."

And the people said, "To you it's beautiful, but my three houses are gone and that's not beautiful to me. This is my land destroyed by lava, that's not beautiful to me because my land is gone, my houses are gone, everything. That's not good to me. It's only rock."

They didn't say anything else.

They asked, "Oh, is that your place?"

I said, "Yes, this is my place."

My graveyard ma kai [seaward] was covered by the lava. My mother, brother, sister, grandparents were there, but it's gone.

So they say, "Beautiful" and I say, "Yeah, to you folks." A lot of people around here lost their houses and were without a place. They wandered about and went to the school to stay. They lost everything except what they had on their bodies or in their hands.

END OF INTERVIEW

(See page 1246 for sequel to this interview with Fred Iona.)

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OF KONA**

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