

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 Pahoehoe, 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 Pahoehoe. 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. 9-83-2-81 TR \*

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

FRED IONA (FI)

December 19, 1980

Pāhoehoe, Kona, Hawaii

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 at his home in Pāhoehoe, Kona, Hawaii. Today's date is December 19, 1980.

Mr. Iona, you said that you raised cattle and pigs and sold them. Did you also keep them for your family for lū'aus and other functions?

FI: Yes, we kept some for lū'aus and also for selling.

RE: So if you had lū'aus, you didn't have to buy it?

FI: Yes, we had them right here at home.

RE: How were parties then? Were they like today's?

FI: Ah, parties then were the same.

RE: What kind of food was served?

FI: Poi, beef, potatoes, bananas, taro, and various other things. It was the same. 'Opihi, 'a'ama, salmon salted and lomied, just like nowadays. Chicken, kālua pig, pig lau-lau. Its the same as today.

RE: I thought that maybe today we eat some new kinds of things.

FI: No. The new thing today is long rice. It's from the olden days that we get what we have now.

RE: How was the pig cooked?

FI: It was cooked in the same way. Kālua and lau-lau in the imu [pit or underground oven for cooking]. Most of them were kāluaed. If it

\*Refer to page 1494 for prequel to this interview with Fred Iona.

were a big pig, say two or three hundred pounds, it was only kāluaed. If the pig was big, the imu was big.

RE: You said that you worked with the immigrants that came here, the Japanese, Koreans, Chinese and Filipinos. Do you remember something about them, like their kinds of parties or their way of living?

FI: Yes. It was just like us. They ate rice, but the ones that lived here for a long time ate poi. The ones that married Hawaiians ate poi. They learned from the Hawaiians, eh. But they ate rice and were like us. They would eat fish like us.

RE: So they left their way of living at their native lands?

FI: Yes, but of course they brought some aspects of their own culture, as in food and in cooking. They couldn't just forget that. Hawaiians learned about Chinese food and rice from them [Chinese]. Chinese married Hawaiian woman. While they worked at the stores, [Hawaiian] mothers saw that they [Chinese] had a lot of money and their girls married the Chinese. They ate Chinese food which the Chinese men prepared. They didn't want the Hawaiian woman to cook, they would cook. If a Chinese woman married a Chinese man, then the woman would cook.

RE: Do you remember when the Chinese first arrived here?

FI: I don't know the date, but when I was young the Chinese were living here. Chinese around here were farmers. They planted 'awa, they cut firewood, piled the firewood, and sent it to Honolulu. Only Chinese cut firewood before.

NI: [FI's wife]: I believe that the Chinese were the first to arrive here. My father said the Chinese came in the 1800s.

FI: My aunty married a Chinese man before I was born.

NI: They were the first. They went to Honolulu and from Honolulu they appeared [in Kona]. After the Chinese then the Japanese, Portuguese and Koreans.

RE: Are there any Koreans still here?

FI: No, no more. They all died or went away. I don't see any Koreans anymore. Two Koreans lived here with me before. They planted tomatoes. There were four Chinese here with me.

RE: Did they speak Hawaiian?

FI: Yeah, some did. Some were smart. They spoke partly in Hawaiian.

NI: One guy, Ah Sing, was good at speaking Hawaiian.

- FI: He spoke in Hawaiian, not half-Hawaiian. Better than some Hawaiians.
- NI: Chinese, Japanese, and then, Koreans. After the Koreans came the Filipinos. The Japanese had a lot of children and some are still around today. The Filipinos, some went back to the Philippines and some stayed. Some of those are the ethnic groups that spread among the Hawaiians. So a lot of people are part-Chinese, part-Japanese and part-Filipino.
- FI: Not too many left. You go to Honolulu on Hotel Street and you see some Chinese. They're in Hilo, Honolulu. Most are in Honolulu. Waimea, most are gone. None in Kailua.
- RE: What do you recall about old lady Magoon?
- FI: Oh, the owner of the Magoon Ranch. That was my boss. She was quarter-Hawaiian, quarter-haole, and half-Chinese. Her father was from China and married her mother, Julia, who was half-haole and half-Hawaiian. That's how she [Magoon] got Hawaiian blood, and was able to speak Hawaiian. She married a haole man and they had 13 children. Chinese then had two wives, one in China and one here. Later, Chinese didn't get citizen's rights. Kalakaua didn't give it to them. Because if some got enough money to get citizen's rights they would go back to China and died there. . . .
- RE: While you worked for her, you also started farming your own place?
- FI: Yeah, ever since I was young I farmed. I stayed at the taro patch and farmed. That's how I learned to farm. Children went with parents to the fields to farm. When I went to Magoon's I was used to working. At home I was used to working, milking cows, raising pigs and various other things. I wasn't afraid when I went to Magoon's. Nowadays they [kids] would just be puzzled and not know what to do. They don't know. 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. They would go for 'ōpelu, make palu.
- RE: What did you first plant?
- FI: I planted taro and banana, maia maoli [a type of banana]. Bunches of the bananas were sent to Honolulu on the boats from Ho'okena. All the boats sailed on Wednesdays to Honolulu--Maunaloa, Kilauea, Claudine--all those old boats took baggage to Honolulu. From Punālu'u where it picked up sugar, to Honu'apo--where there were two harbors because there were two [sugar] mills--and picked up sugar, to Miloli'i to pick up baggage, then to Ho'okena, Nāpo'opo'o, Keauhou, Kailua, Kawaihae, Mahukona, and then sailed off [to Honolulu]. That's how things were sent.
- RE: So you sent your things on the boat?

- FI: Yeah, I sent mine. Because they would buy my goods in Honolulu and I'd make money.
- RE: So you sent pigs and cattle on the boats also?
- FI: Yeah, some bought them live, but if not they would be killed first and sent to Honolulu. Before, when I was with Magoon, we would slaughter cattle every week and send them to Honolulu. We would send them to C. Q. Yee Hop market. Then people from Waimea would come to buy beef. They would buy them live. One cow would be \$25 or \$30. Maybe they'd buy five at a time, then buy more and more--up to a couple of hundred--and take them to Waimea.
- RE: Do you remember how they were slaughtered and prepared?
- FI: Yeah, I know because we did that sort of thing, slaughtering cattle in Magoon's slaughterhouse. Just like today. But today you got ice. We didn't have ice before. They were slaughtered at night, and in the early morning they were taken in a bag to the boat. The boat had ice. But today there are a lot of new things. Before, we just had a knife in our hands and turned with a block. Now they have machines and you only press the button. We didn't have machines before. Its easy today.
- RE: So you've seen a lot of new things come in your life.
- FI: Yeah, a lot of new things that weren't around before. A number of different kinds of things.
- RE: You used to walk around everywhere or ride a horse because there weren't any cars?
- FI: No cars, just horse carriages. The automobile came later.
- RE: Do you remember the first time cars came here?
- FI: Yeah.
- RE: What year?
- FI: I forgot the year. Magoon bought one in 1902. In 1912 or 1913 they had that Ford or Lincoln.
- NI: I think it was around 1904.
- FI: When the car came around a lot of people would go to the road to look because there was a lot of smoke. Around 1912 had the Model T.
- RE: And in what year did you get your first car?
- FI: In 1919 I think. Magoon had a steam car--not gas--and solid tires made with chains. It was strong. If you hit the fender with a big hammer, nothing would happen. Not like today. And later the

different kinds of cars came. There were Studebakers, Overlands, Buicks. Before, we didn't have service stations. If you had problems with your car, there was only one garage--Willie Wiki, they called it "Willie Rich." You fix your tire, change it, press it, make it big so it doesn't break easily. We didn't have macadamized road, we had dirt roads. The tires would be cut by the rocks, not like on oiled roads.

RE: What kinds of house did you have?

FI: Wooden house. Some people lived in grass houses. People that lived at the beach had grass houses. But those people in the heavy rain area had wooden houses.

RE: What year was the earthquake?

NI: Nineteen fifty.

RE: The same year as the lava flow?

FI: It was the flow.

NI: There were three flows. Afterwards, people came to look at the lava.

FI: A few days after the lava flow, some children went to see Magoon's place and it was gone. [The land was covered with lava.] Some animals were still living. They were caught with a lasso. Some were killed by the flow. They were stuck in the corral. We went to see the houses and the houses were standing, the doors were open, clothes were hung up to dry, but there weren't any people. The dogs, chickens and cats were still alive.

RE: What were other things that you planted?

FI: Tomatoes, taro, peanuts, ginger. Those were upland. One Chinese guy that worked with me planted 'awa and later he planted peanuts. The Pākē ginger was worth money and it was sent to Honolulu. Banana, taro--I always planted taro. The taro was sold to make poi. All the people around here planted taro. Before, we didn't buy poi. Poi was pounded every week. We planted taro by acres, there was lots of taro.

RE: What kinds of taro were there?

FI: Pala'i'i, 'ohe, and waiākea. These were made into poi. There were many kinds of taro but with some, the poi would bubble and ferment. So, every week we pounded poi, cooked taro. That's how it was when I was with Magoon. Every Friday, my job was to pound poi, one oilcan full. I cooked it and pounded it every Friday. Later you could get poi at Higashi's so that was the end of my poi pounding. Poi was bought there at Higashi's.

RE: So there were a number of different kinds of taro you used.

FI: Yes, the good taro for poi. There were many kinds that we didn't plant. 'Ohe was good for poi.

RE: How about 'ulu [breadfruit]? Was it made into poi?

FI: Yes, it was made into poi. But we didn't have 'ulu. There were only a few trees by the beach. But in Kealia, that was a place where 'ulu grew, not our place. We only had a few trees, but the 'ulu was not used for making poi. We like taro poi, not 'ulu poi.

NI: Some doctors have told people with high-blood pressure that 'ulu poi is good, because there is too much starch in regular poi. Now, poi is not produced. People around here buy poi.

FI: Some plant Mana. I plant mana for eating as taro. I just grow enough to eat, not to sell. Sometimes, if the sun comes, the taro gets dry. That's a problem. It's a lot of work to get the huli [taro top used for planting]. Now, I'm not planting taro, not until March. Now is a time when the huli will die. If you planted now it would have trouble growing. People before would look to see when the ginger would grow and that's the time to plant taro. It means that the warm season is coming. Now it's cold. People don't plant now. If they did plant now, the huli would grow to be thin and skinny and it would be worthless.

In 1959, I began to plant banana and macadamia nut.

RE: Why did you begin to plant those things?

FI: I was told that this was worth some money. I thought, when I finished working for Magoon, I'd have something to do, not just stay at home. In the beginning I planted 20 acres. Little by little, 5 acres till pau, 5 acres till pau. I'd keep moving, planting banana, then the nut. That's how I did it, till now when I have more than 20 acres. The results were good. It's been the same every week--I get about 15 to 20 bags [of macadamia nuts] a week. I bring it home to the machine to be husked and take it to the co-op. The bad ones are taken out and thrown away and the good ones are put through the machine to be sold. There are a lot of people planting the nut now. There's money in it. The people that first planted the nut are the lucky ones because for 20 years they've had fruit every year once the nut started to grow. It usually starts [to bear] after 10 years. That's a long time for some and that's why people didn't start growing it.

I was lucky working for Magoon because I would have income every month to pay my workers to plant banana and macadamia nut. Every week I'd send a ton of banana to Hilo to the market. When that was pau, I'd plant banana again. Once I had 10 acres of banana. I rented a bulldozer for the land before for \$35 an hour. Later, it was \$50, then later \$75, then \$80 an hour. That's a lot of money. For 3 acres I'd get \$4,500. That's a lot. Before I wouldn't get

half that much. The bulldozer went up, gasoline went up. Seedlings used to be \$2 each, now its \$5, some places its \$7.

RE: But before it was \$2. What year was that?

FI: It was 1959. Two dollars. I saw these people planting, so I did too. It was good because it gave me something to do. It's better than just staying around the house.

RE: So you continue to plant the nut and banana today?

FI: The banana is pau. I only grow some to eat. It's a lot of work. The nut is easier and you get a lot. That's why I grow the nut. The banana, you have to cut, carry--a lot of work. The nut, it just falls [to the ground] and you go gather it. You pay the workers \$4 per bag. Some get over 10 bags a day and thats a lot of money. That's the easiest work. But I also keep some cattle. From before till now. They're up in the nut field. They eat the grass up there. Some people use poison to kill the grass, but my cattle make the field clean and the nuts are in the open.

RE: What kinds of cattle were there before?

FI: Before they had po'oke'oke'o [Hereford], and some were Holstein. They gave a lot of milk. Holstein Jensen was the kind that gave a lot of milk. Before we didn't buy milk. Our milk came from our cows. Same with Magoon, one of my jobs was to milk the cows there, every morning.

Work was good. That's why I'm used to work. Since I was a kid, I worked and saved my money and increased my work. I went and got a farm loan. Since I had land, I got money, if not, no money. The same with the bank. As long as you got land. If all you got is your body, the bank won't give you any money.

RE: And how did you get your land?

FI: From my grandparents. My grandfather. From Kahuna'āina.

RE: How did he get it?

FI: He bought it from Bernice Pauahi [Paki Bishop]. More than 5,000 acres. It was \$2,800. So he got the land and divided it among his children. And from my mother, I got mine.

RE: How many acres?

FI: In the beginning, 340 acres.

RE: Today how much do you have?

FI: More than a hundred. I gave some to my children and grandchildren. And I sold some. Before, land was cheap. Some people didn't have land because they lived under Bishop Estate. My grandfather [had



land]. My uncle sold his land to Magoon--the ranch, the horses and cows went to Magoon. His portion of land was more than 300 acres. Some people retained their land and some sold their land. That's why different people came here. There was only one family around here, my family. Then they sold their land and different people came here. It used to be uncles, aunties, cousins, nieces and nephews. My grandfather was smart. He was a merchant. He sold coffee, 'awa and goatskin to merchants in Honolulu--to Jim Dowsett. When the boat came every six months, my grandfather would go get his money in Honolulu.

That was the first house around here, my grandfather's house. A wooden, three-story house. Later, his brother had the second house. Then more houses were built. That's the kind they had before--one above and one below.

The house was torn down and the wood used for firewood. It wasn't used again because it was rotten. When I was young I looked at those huge posts and wondered what kind of posts they were. The windows and doors were kind of new compared to the olden days. The beds, the kūkulu kind, very high above, were made with koa inside the houses. Before at my aunty's house, I saw that kind of house, one above and one below. Now, houses are different.

Before, the area was filled with people who would carve canoes. In the mountains, my uncle made canoes. That's how it was when I was young. We used to climb the mountains to cut the koa. If the 'elepaio came and picked at the tree then there would be holes. I don't see it anymore. The canoe carving experts would watch [the birds peck] and say which tree was good to carve. Then after some months it would be dragged down. Before dragging, people behind would protect the wood and guide it down. Then when finished they would kālua the black pig. That's called the pua'a hiwa. Its all black. Its not spotted white. That's what they did and the canoe carvers would pray to their gods, I guess. Now it's different. When the canoe is done, they don't do that sort of thing.

RE: Do you know how the carving was done?

FI: Yes, I saw my uncle, ma kai. That's what he did. I went ma kai. I saw how the carving was done. Not like today. It was done by hand. Today there's the airplane, the machines, and various other things. But before it was just carving with an adze. One adze for the outside, one for the inside--there were many different kinds. There weren't any power saws then. The kind of adze used for making canoes didn't cut any kind of wood. The one for the canoe wasn't just placed anywhere because it might get broken.

RE: Did you folks have canoe races then?

FI: No, that was much later. Later they had some races at Hōnaunau. The wood good for racing is the cotton tree. If the koa is used for a canoe and is trim and precise, it goes.

- RE: Who are some people from your childhood that were well known? Old lady Magoon?
- FI: Yes, she was one. And Kinue (Greenwell). On this side, only Mrs. Magoon.
- RE: Was she liked by the people around here?
- FI: Yes.
- RE: What was she like?
- FI: She gave work to neighbors. Hawaiians went to her for work before because they didn't have any place to work. Many came to work here and later to live. She gave people work. She didn't like to be called Emmaline, she wanted to be called Mama.
- RE: When you think about your childhood, what is the most important thing that you recall?
- FI: There's a lot of new things now. Hotels have risen. Big cars have come. They weren't around before.
- RE: So you think of the new things that have come?
- FI: Yes, the bulldozer, diesel truck, grader for the street. Before there wasn't any. There are a lot of new things. This machine to make cement. We only had shovels. We used to mix the cement with the shovels.
- RE: What were your thoughts when you first saw these things?
- FI: I thought that it was good because work would be easier. It wouldn't be hard and tedious. Before there was a lot of tedious work. Now its good. There are a lot of hotels. People got jobs. Before there were only two hotels, the Paris Hotel and the Wall Hotel. Only two in Kona. And for Hilo, the Volcano House and the Hilo Hotel. For Waimea, only one, the Nāhiwa Hotel. Now there's many hotels and a lot of work for the people.
- RE: What is something happy that you remember?
- FI: The TV and the radio. Before, we didn't have those. Now, you see, we get stories about the world. My mother told me that an intelligent man once told her that the day will come when the voice would travel through the clouds. When the airplane came and the TV came, my mother said that that man was right.
- RE: Do you remember the first time you saw an airplane?
- FI: Yes, it was a little plane. I think Hawaiian Airlines was the first to come here.

RE: What were your thoughts?

FI: I was surprised. It was a little one. Now they're big. In a few hours you are in California. Before, they used to board it in the early morning and get on a boat and then get on the plane. They didn't have it [airport] in Kailua, it was in Hilo. If not in Hilo, then in 'Upolu. Kona didn't have an airport.

RE: What are your thoughts about the future of Kona?

FI: Well, the future of Kona is going to be like Honolulu, 'Aina Haina. Before there used to be cattle, a dairy. If you look at Kailua, its the same as 'Aina Haina was before. It used to be only a pasture for cattle.

You own the land, but you can't do what you want. There are so many regulations and laws, taxes. Those things are problems for people. They can't pay for the electricity, water, taxes here and taxes there. If you get \$1,000 from the [macadamia] nut, you have to pay a percentage. You got other expenses like fertilizer. It's OK if it's on your net, but they tax your gross. That's no good. Last year I paid more than \$2,000 to Social Security. I'm 81 years old. That's what I think about the land for the future for farmers. What's it going to be like, those who plant the nut? It's going to be difficult.

END OF INTERVIEW

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