

Waioli Church (Waioli Hui'ia Social Hall)
Hanalei
Kauai County
Hawaii

HABS No. HI-52

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3-

PHOTOGRAPHS

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

WRITTEN ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

WAIOLI CHURCH (WAIOLI HUI'IA SOCIAL HALL)

HABS No. HI-52

Location: Hanalei, Kauai County, Hawaii
Owner: Waioli Hui'ia Church
Occupant: Waioli Hui'ia Church Congregation
Use: Social Hall

ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Originally built with a thatched roof, Waioli Church is reminiscent of early Hawaiian architecture. It is also the oldest church building on the island of Kauai. It is an imposing structure, with a main interior space of 35 by 70 feet, to which a small kitchen wing was added in 1934. An open lanai (porch) surrounds the building on three sides, with wood posts supporting the eave of the tall, high-pitched roof. The pitch is broken over the plate line with a lesser slope above the lanai. This type of roof, a modified copy of the type of roof used in early Hawaiian structures, is referred to now as the "modern" Hawaiian roof. The original roof was thatch, later replaced by shingles, then galvanized iron, then back to shingles, which now cover it. The walls are of wood frame with rough textured lath and plaster on the interior and exterior, which is painted white. Roof beams are of native lumber, brought from the mountains surrounding Hanalei, and cut to shape by local carpenters. A wood floor and ceiling were added later.

HISTORICAL SUMMARY

The Waioli Mission was founded in 1834 in the remote valley of Hanalei on the island of Kauai by Rev. William P. Alexander, a missionary sent to the "Sandwich Islands" by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Fourteen years earlier the first Kauai mission station had been established at Waimea, on the more accessible side of the island. So great was the need of the people along the isolated Hanalei coast that it was decided to open another station as soon as sufficient reinforcements were sent by the Board in Boston.

In anticipation of having a missionary reside among them permanently, the Hawaiians of Hanalei erected a grass meetinghouse in 1832, large enough to hold 2,000 persons. When Mr. Alexander arrived at Hanalei two years later, and found that the building had been destroyed by fire, he undertook the construction of a new one. Within three years heavy winds blew it down and although it was set up again, the need for a more permanent structure was apparent.

The whole community united in the effort to erect a frame church and their labor is vividly described in the Memoir of Mr. Alexander:

"In 1839 the Waioli people planted seven acres of sugar-cane, the avails to go for the building of a church. There were two white men on the

WAIOLI CHURCH (WAIOLI HUI'IA SOCIAL HALL)
HABS No. HI-52 (Page 2)

island, who were good carpenters. One of these made a mill to grind by horse-power, and Mr. Alexander furnished them his horse. They boiled the cane juice in iron pots, obtained from a whale-ship, and dried the sugar in mat bags hung up to drain. Part of the money realized (\$413) was applied to building a school-house and the rest to paying carpenters for building the church. 'The lumber for the building was brought from the mountains. The men would go up and cut it; and when it was ready to be brought down, the women would go and help drag it.' It was an exciting time in Waioli, when the whole population, with long ropes, with shouts and chanting, dragged the heavy timbers into place for the church...Coral stone was obtained by divers from the sea, and made into lime for the masonry."

The building measured approximately 70 by 35 feet and was dedicated on or about November 17, 1841. In a letter to her mother, Mrs. Alexander describes it as:

"A frame house covered with grass. It is neatly plastered inside, and on the walls outside as we could not afford to clapboard it. As we have no pews, most of the people sit on settees of their own making, and some on the floor. The preacher has a stand with a table before him. We are obliged to adopt this plan as lumber is very expensive out here. When the house is finished the people will try and raise money to buy a bell."

Mr. Alexander's last report from Waioli (1843) tells of having received the bell, which cost \$150. This bell was hung in a thatched belfry adjoining the church. It was later transferred to the tower of the new church, built in 1912.

That the building still stands today attests to its excellent construction and to the care given it for more than one hundred twenty-five years. In 1846 it was re-thatched with lauhala (pandanus). This covering was replaced by shingles in 1851, after the plaster ceiling had fallen in. The belfry was probably shingled at the same time. Ten years later a pulpit, a board floor, and seats were installed. In 1883 a board ceiling and a galvanized iron roof were added.

In 1912, a new church was built for the congregation by three sons of the missionary Abner Wilcox, who had conducted a school at Waioli for many years. The old 1841 church was therefore used for a Sunday school and other church functions. By 1921, the building was sorely in need of repairs. Through the efforts of three Wilcox granddaughters, it was then thoroughly restored with new lath and plaster and with a shingled roof. To celebrate the 100th anniversary of the arrival of Rev. and Mrs. Alexander, a new kitchen wing was added in 1934. During World II, the building became a U.S.O. center for three years, for the servicemen stationed in the area. In 1950 the roof was again shingled, as was the belfry, though it no longer houses its bell.

REFERENCE

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