

Hale Leka No Lanikai, 1928

Lanikai Post Office? Not Everyone was Pleased

Charles Frazier began work on his beach lot subdivision in Ka‘ōhāo in 1924. Within a year, Harold Castle did the same along what is now the Kalāheo Ave. shoreline between ‘Ainoni and Makawao streets.¹ Frazier gave his development the not-quite Hawaiian name *Lanikai*. Castle, who may have been less inventive (or more observant of Kailua’s past), named his venture *Kalama Tract* after Hakaleleponi Kalama, wife of Kamehameha III and original recipient of these and other Kailua lands during the Mahele of 1848. The two subdivisions, the one catering mostly to week-end vacationers from Honolulu, the other to O‘ahu’s wealthiest, estate-building elite, wielded enough political clout, by the end of the decade to see the establishment of the Lanikai Post Office at the junction of the road that led to Lanikai on the south and Kalama Tract to the north. Not everyone was happy with the prospect of a beach-side post office, not when the majority of Kailua’s maka‘āinana population was still clustered in Maunawili, Kūkanono, and Ka‘elepulu, and certainly not when other rural districts of O‘ahu were equally neglected.

Ike wale iho la no ma na nupepa namu e manaoia ana e weheia i hale leka no Lanikai malalo ae nei o Kallua. He mea maikai no keia, aka pehea hoi kekahi mau apana kuaaina e ae o kakou i oi aku ke kupono maoli e weheia i mau hale leka a i ole e laweia paha na leka a na hoamakaainana e noho paa mai nei ma ia mau wahi.

We see in the English language newspapers that the opening of a post office is being considered for down in Kailua at Lanikai. This is a good thing, but what about our other outlying districts where there is greater justification for opening post offices, or where letters might be delivered [directly] to the permanent residents of these places?²

Thus begins the editorial “Hale Leka no Lanikai” in the Hawaiian language newspaper *Ke Alakai o Hawaii*, on August 9 1929. The writer argues that the actual number of permanent residents in Lanikai is very small, that the majority of these noho pa‘a residents consists, not of home owners, but of those who work for them, and that the owners, for the most part, are respite-seekers who arrive on Saturday afternoon and return to Honolulu on Sunday evening or Monday morning: “auwina la Poaono iho aku la ilaila e hoomaha ai, a ahiahi Lapule a i ole kakahiaka Poakahi no hoi mai la no ke kulanakauhale.”

Since they head back to town after no more than two-day weekends in Lanikai, why – asks the writer – can’t they just get their mail there, ma ke kulanakauhale, rather than in a new and presumably unnecessary Lanikai post office. The editorial goes on, in its remaining paragraphs, to describe several other inequities:

- the fact that the actual hoamaka‘āinana (beloved commoners) of rural O‘ahu must drive many more miles to pick up their mail than do the privileged of certain areas

- the fact that mail was delivered more reliably in the past, under terrible road conditions, than mail is delivered today when the roads are much improved. “He ko peki o Kauanoē,” the editorial exclaims in frustration: “we’ve gone backwards, not made any progress at all.”
- the fact the residents of some districts – Honolulu, for example – have put up mailboxes and are now getting their mail delivered to their own homes. But as for our rural districts, “he oki loa” – nothing at all.

The piece concludes politely with a request that the post master general look into this “hemahema,” a word that can mean negligence, incompetence, and shortcoming, and which, in this case, carries all three connotations.

Despite these protestations, the Lanikai Post Office was established a short time later in what was then a small store run by Mrs. Elizabeth Akai.³ As remembered by John F. Collins, the store sold mostly canned good and candy, but it was also the post office for the community:

The left front of the store looked like an egg crate, with one or two hundred small square holes opened from outside the store, each with its combination lock inside the store, the holes were open so you could ask a child or a friend to pick up your mail from Mrs. Akai.⁴

The Lau family bought the place in 1941, renamed it Lanikai Store, and continued to provide postal services there until the early 1950s when the Kailua Post Office was established in Kailua Town, first at Hughes Pharmacy in Kailua Tavern, then at Kailua Shopping Center, then in back of the old First Hawaiian Bank, and finally, in 1971, at its current Hahani St. location.⁵ The Lau’s daughter Joanna married Maurice Sullivan; together they founded a chain of more than twenty Foodland supermarkets,⁶ the fourth of which was built on what was “originally” Mrs. Akai’s candy and canned-goods shop. Kailua Beach Center – home of kayaks, bikinis, pizza, and shave-ice – now occupies the site, its various out-buildings attached to the curved dome vestige of the older Foodland.

Originally, like *hemahema*, is a weighted word. In this case, the one bumps awkwardly into the other, reminding us that “original,” when applied to these communities and the services they spawned, can do considerable disservice to the storied lands that came before. Once there was a place named Kalapawai. It could be found at the delta of Kamokawa‘a at the edge of the plain of ‘Ālele. On one side were Kawailoa, Alāla, and Ka‘ōhao, on the other, Keahupua‘a-nui, ‘Ahulili, Kea, and Oneawa. Mail may not go to these addresses, but understanding should.⁷

We find broken bits of her in May 2023. Parts of a cranium, a mandible, and several vertebra, but mostly tiny shards of bone sifted out of eighth-inch box screens during phase 2 of the Kalapawai Roundabout project. An adult female – as indicated by jaw and teeth – buried centuries ago and scattered more recently by road construction of perhaps the 1950s and ‘70s.

There is often evidence, when iwi kūpuna are discovered in Kailua sands, of a cultural layer and burial pit in the sidewalls of the excavation, but not here. Only much-disturbed sand and the fat roots of a tree. Near her, we find whispers of a story: a dog's canine with a hole drilled through its base, a water-worn pebble, and most of a beautifully shaped bone fishhook. More often than not, Kailua Hawaiians buried their dead where they lived. This was probably one of those places, and she is one of those long ago Hawaiians now under our wheels as we drive by, some of us rolling down our windows to yell "Hewa"⁸ at the teary-eyed Hawaiian archaeologist and the three very bothered Hawaiian construction workers who have turned off their big machines to engage in the most cautious shoveling of their lives. It takes 18 days. What we find barely fills a lauhala basket the size of P.O. box.

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He kakaikahi loa na poe e noho paa nei malalo o Lanikai. O ka hapanui o ka poe e noho mai nei malaila oia na kanaka hana a na ona no lakou na home malaila. O ka hapanui of na ona home, aia no a auwina la Poaono iho aku la ilaila e hoomaha ai, a ahiahi Lapule a i ole kakahiaka Poakahi no hoi mai la no ke kulanakauhale nei; a ina e noho ana kekahi o ia poe malaila a pii mai i ke kaona nei i ka lakou mau hana, e loa ana no ka lakou mau leka iluna nei.

Aole hoi pela na hoamakaainana e noho nei ma na apana e ae, e laa o Kahaluu ma, o Waiahole ma, Waikane, Kahana, Waiialua e kokoke la i Haleiwa. He mau mile ka loa o kahi a na hoamakaainana o keia mau wahi e kii ai i ka lakou mau leka, eia nae aole he noonoo ia ka pono o keia poe.

Kupanaha no paha, i ka wa inoino loa o ke alanui, he lawe ia ka leka e ka luna leka a hiki i keia mau wahi, a i ka manawa hoi i palahinu mai nei o na alanui o kakou e maalahi ai ka laweia ana o na leka a keia mau hoa, ko peki iholo o Kauanoë,

Pela no hoi kekahi mau wahi o ke kaona nei.

Ma kekahi mau apana kuaaina a'u i hele aku nei, he lawe hele ia ka leka a ka poe i ka lakou mau wahi e like me Kona. Kuku na kanaka i na pahu leka mawaho o ko lakou mau puka, a laweia na leka a hookomo iloko o ia mau pahu e ka lawe leka o ke aupuni, a ma ko kakou mau apana kuaaina hoi he oki loa.

Oluolu hoi ka luna leka nui o kakou e nana mai i keia hemahema.

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NOTES

¹ Peter Young, *Images of Old Hawai‘i: Kalama Beach Club*, <https://imagesofoldhawaii.com/kalama-beach-club/>.

² My translation.

³ Another small store – Kalapawai Market – was also established in the mid-1920s in response to the needs of the two new communities. J. F. Collins remembers that it was Chinese-owned and nicknamed *Richard’s*, after the owner’s son. “The two important things that they sold there, that I remember, were ice and sometimes good sirloin steaks. The ice came rumbling out of a big square box after you fed quarters into a slot in its side” (John Francis Collins, *The Manoa Gang: Remembrances of Old Hawaii and Observations on Life in General*, Trafford Publishing, 2015; excerpted from ch. 1: “Kailua, Oahu in the ‘20s and ‘30s”: <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/the-manoa-gang-george-francis-collins/1121455755>). W. Thomas Hall, however, identifies Elsie Kalapawai as the owner of Elsie’s Store which was the original Kalapawai Market (*The History of Kailua*, Dolphin Printing, 1998, p. 137). The trouble with Hall’s work is that he does not cite his sources.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ This sequence of locations and dates is a bit sketchy and is cobbled together from Collins and Hall (n.1, above), Peter Young (*Images of Old Hawai‘i: Foodland*, <https://imagesofoldhawaii.com/foodland/>), and Paul Brennan (*Kailua*, Kailua Historical Society, 117). I am most unsure about Hall’s uncorroborated statements that Lee was the store’s original owner, that it was bought by Mrs. Elizabeth Akai Akui who sold it, in turn, to the Lau family, and that it was at Lau’s Lanikai Store (later named Lanikai Drugs) that the post office first opened (*History*, 136-7, 168). More investigation is obviously needed to determine the actual chronology of owners, sales, and store names.

⁶ Young, *Images of Old Hawai‘i: Foodland*.

⁷ My granddaughter recently received, in our mailbox, a birthday card on whose stamped envelope was written her name, our street address, and “Ka‘ōhao, Hawai‘i, 96734.” It arrived on time, without apparent difficulty, so there is still reason for hope.

⁸ Hewa: Mistake, fault, error, sin, blunder, defect, offense, guilt, crime.