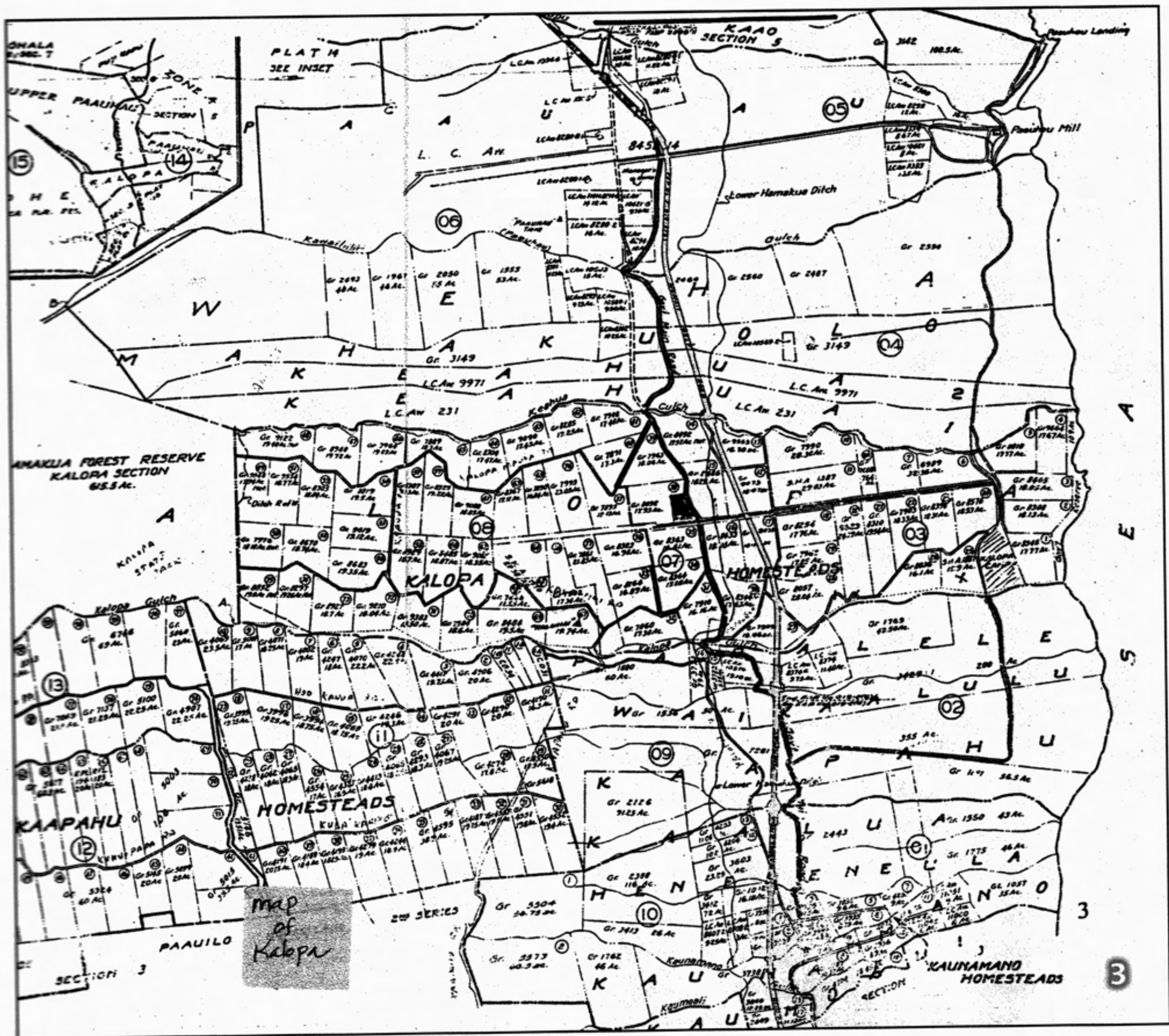
The Way To Kalōpā

If you're driving north from Hilo to Honoka'a on the Hawai'i Belt Highway, slow down when you pass Pa'auilo town. A few hundred feet past the Kalōpā State Park sign, turn left on the old government road. When you get to the first wooden bridge, you will have entered the residential area of Kalōpā. But that is not the only way to get to Kalōpā. If you had continued driving on the belt highway, you would have veered to the left after crossing the bridge past the Kalōpā State Park sign. At the top of the rise on the highway, you could take the off road on the left for a short distance and meet up with the old government road. Turn left, and you'll be in Kalōpā again.

Still another way to get to Kalōpā would be to pass the present post office in the town of Pa'auilo and then turn left to get into the old part of the town where the present Pa'auilo Elementary and Intermediate School is located. At the very end of the town, take the road that



veers left up towards the mountains. It will take you to Pa'auilo mauka and into Kapa'ahu, where there used to be an elementary school in the 1930s. Many people lived up in that area and still do. The drive through the forests is refreshing even though there are many curves in the road. If you continue on that road, it will eventually take you right down into Kalōpā.

History Of Kalōpā

The State of Hawai'i archival records (document no. 364) indicates that King Kamehameha III was the owner of the ahupua'a of Kalōpā. In a letter from the Minister of the Interior to Reverend L. Lyons (recorded in Interior Department Book 3, page 159), dated July 7, 1851, he states that the ahupua'a of Kalōpā belonged to the king.

In Place Names of Hawai'i (1974), Kalōpā is interpreted as tenant farmer. Only those who have lived there or are familiar with the place know that the accent is stressed on the last syllable, KaloPA. What a beautiful sound to my ears!

On October 13, 1917, Lucius E. Pinkham, governor of the Territory of Hawai'i, wrote a letter to the commissioner of public lands requesting that Kalōpā lands be opened for homesteading. Cultivating agreements were made between the plantation and certain homesteaders to plant sugar cane on lands awarded to them. Among the first groups to settle and begin were Meleana Kalili, Manuel Rapozo, Antone Ferreira, Frank Texeira, William Campbell, Annie Lau, Pi'ilani Knight, John Kamauoha, and Lillian Keko'olani (my grandmother). Many others followed soon after.

The homesteaders who were awarded land to plant sugar cane had to buy seed (cane cuttings), fertilizer, and irrigation water from the plantation company who, in turn, would harvest the cane. Contracts required homesteaders to do their own plowing, planting, and cultivation; however, the badly needed water to raise the sugar cane in certain areas resulted in irrigation ditches from other wetter areas of the island. Two young men, S.T. Alexander and H.P. Baldwin, sons of early American missionaries, envisioned a plan to deliver water to dry areas by way of a ditch known later as the Hāmākua ditch, which involved using tunnels dug through the mountains, and wells that were pumped (Vandercook 1939).

According to Hugh Clark (Honolulu Advertiser 1/11/99), the Hāmākua ditch, which ran from Waipi'o Valley to Pa'auilo on the Hāmākua coast once provided 60 million gallons of water a day.

The sugar cane owners who lived below the irrigation ditch tapped into the system to irrigate their fields or relied on the plantation water trucks. Those who had lands high up close to the mountain area could rely on the rain; however, not only was there a problem with the water, but also with transporting the harvested cane to the sugar mills. Where cane was grown on the slopes, heavy trucks or rail cars could not be used.

As the story goes, a lumberman from Oregon visiting the islands suggested that cane could be transported as logs were in the northwest mountainous country. Since water was plentiful there, the lumbermen built v-shaped flumes, let water from the mountain streams flow through, and then threw the logs in to be flumed to the sawmill (Vandercook 1939).

Where neither fluming nor transportation by trucks was possible due to steep grades and remote upland sugar fields, wooden structures that looked like over-sized football goal posts had to be set up at wide intervals in lines down the plantation slopes, from the highest to the lowest fields, and a long wire cable was strung up between them. Workmen harvesting in upper fields would take the cut cane to a trolley by means of mule-drawn sleds. Bundles weighing roughly 175 pounds were attached to the cable by big aluminum hooks fitted with free-running pulley wheels; gravity did the rest. The terminus was a raised platform at the bottom with a stout timber backstop. The bundles of cut cane crashed into it with terrific force. Nimble men had to free the hooks and carrying chains and then jump clear before the next lot came down. Hooks and chains wer laboriously returned to the high fields on mule backs (Vandercook 1939).

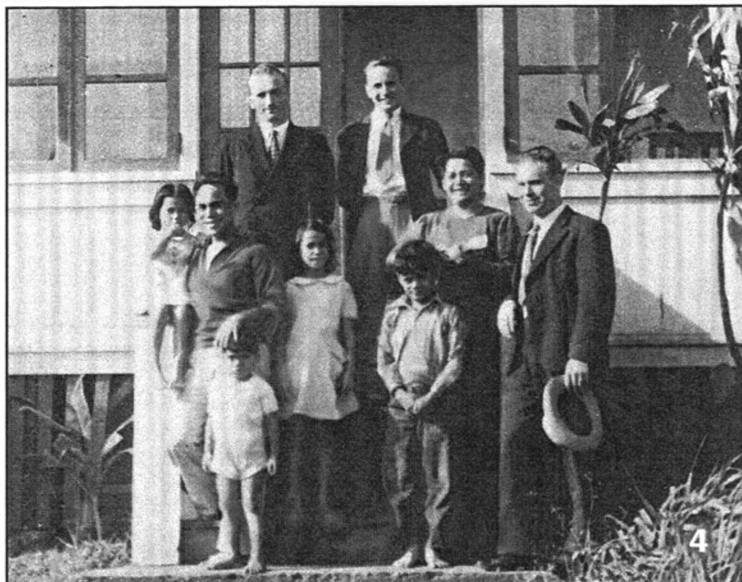
Another trolley system used to transport the cut cane down to the mill was box cars that ran on tracks. A system like this one was set up alongside the Mormon church yard in Kalōpā, two doors from our house. We found it quite exciting to watch each car loaded with cane rolling down the tracks, while pulleys brought empty box cars back up to be loaded again with cane, thus continuing the cycle. Cane stalks brought down by both methods were transferred to waiting trucks and then taken to the mill for processing.

My Life In Kalōpā

I was born in our lovely four bedroom home on July 16, 1929. Dad delivered me like he did the rest of the children in our family. There were 10 children all together: Norman (who died when he was about five months old), Nāwai, Katherine, myself, Pearl (who died when she was about three years old), Charles, Myra, Vivian (who died when she was five months old), Winifred, and Henry.

I remember being seven years old and seeing my mother walking around our house with a big stomach AGAIN. It must have been Vivian in her stomach. One day, I saw her going into her bedroom with my dad, as he was carrying a pan with water, some newspapers, and a pair of scissors. He closed the door so we kids couldn't see what was happening inside the room. Of course, I thought that he was going to cut my mother's stomach open to get the baby out. After a little while, Dad came out of the room to get something and the door was left open a little. I peeked inside and saw my mother lying on the mattress on the floor. I stepped aside when Dad came back to go into the room again. I stayed close to the door wondering how

long it would take for the baby to be born. I could hear my mother moaning and groaning, and it didn't take long before I heard the baby crying. Dad came out of the room with the pan and something wrapped in newspapers in it. He had put the mattress back on the bed and Mom was lying down with the baby wrapped in a clean little blanket. Mom called us into the room to see the new baby. I still didn't know how that baby got out of Mama's stomach.



Kekoolani home in Kalopa (c. 1940). Pictured: Nawai and Emily Kekoolani; children, Wini, Henry, Myra and Charlie. LDS missionaries: Elder Hill, Elder Hunt, Elder Wineberg.

The next time I saw Mama walking around the house with a big stomach, it was with Winifred about to be born. The ritual was the same. Dad carried a pan with water, some newspapers, and a pair of scissors and followed Mama into their bedroom when it was time for her to give birth; there was some moaning and groaning; and then the baby's cry.

I might add here that Dad forgot to register my birth with Dr. Carter, our family doctor in Honoka'a. Consequently, when I needed my birth certificate to apply for a passport to go to Japan in 1952, there was no certificate to be found. As far as the Department of Health was concerned, I just didn't exist. Therefore, I was forced to apply for a delayed birth certificate with the lieutenant governor's office, and my parents had to produce two witnesses who knew that I was indeed born to them. Some of my other siblings also had to go throught this same process.

Our large, off-white colored home with dark green trimmings sat on a half acre lot above the main highway. The concrete sidewalk started in the back of the house where the kitchen was located, came around to the front steps, and continued down about 25 feet to a concrete landing, then turned down the left side of the bank about 15 steps to the main road.

There were three coconut trees just inside the red hedges that lined the front of the property. Along both sides of the concrete sidewalk from the house to the landing, Daddy had planted yellow day lilies and pink 'ākulikuli plants. We always had a Norfolk pine tree growing in the front yard which Daddy cut down at Christmas time. On the side of the house, Daddy had planted a flower garden for Mama. It was filled with dahlias, holly-hocks, phlox, sweet-Williams, carnations, roses, zinnias, Shasta daises, African daisies, pansies, white and purple violets, gardenias and gladiolas.

The back half of the property, behind the two large water tanks, was a large chicken coop

filled with chickens (so we had all the eggs we could eat), some rabbits, and a couple of pigs. Beside the outhouse, above the flower garden and near the fence of the Rodrigues', there was a little shack in which Fung, an old Korean man that we took care of, lived. I remember him gathering the eggs every morning after he fed the chickens. He packed the eggs in shoe boxes, and wouldn't let us have any unless my mother said it was o.k.

Behind Fung's house, Daddy kept his prized vegetable garden – beds and beds of corn, string beans, carrots, tomatoes, head cabbage, Chinese cabbage, beets, bush beans, round onions and green onions, daikons, sweet potatoes, peanuts, strawberries, taro, Irish potatoes, pumpkin, squash, and a few other vegetables that I can't remember. Right in the center of the garden was a sweet guava tree that I liked to climb and hide in and watch Daddy go from bed to bed cleaning his garden. Alongside the fence, Daddy planted different varieties of banana, papaya, and gundudee beans.

We could go out the back of the garden, past Mr. Wachi's garden, and get to the guava field in the back of the Mormon church.

Two Deaths In Our Home

My sister, Pearl Pi'ilani, was born on May 7, 1931, two years after me. As I can remember, she was such a beautiful child; fine light brown curly hair, fair skin, and light brown eyes. We had a large portrait of her in an oval frame in our living room. In one of her hands, she held a little red ball. The one incident I can remember about her was when she became very ill. Mama let her sleep in bed with her. She perspired a lot and constantly asked for water to drink. Mama kept calling me to fill the glass pitcher and I remember how Pi'ilani scared me when she drank the whole pitcher of water at one time. She died shortly after that incident. Dad told us that she died of diphtheria, the same sickness that our oldest brother, Norman, had died of on March 18, 1925 at 5 months of age, and our younger sister, Vivian Shirley, had died of on August 27, 1936, at 5 months of age.

Dad purchased a lovely, tiny, white velvet casket and set it on the coffee table in the living room. Mama laid Pi'ilani in it after she'd been bathed and dressed. Since the closest mortuary was located in Hilo, many people living in the country buried their dead the following day.

That night, after everyone had gone to sleep, Pi'ilani laid in her white casket in the living room. Even though she was my dear sister, I was afraid to pass her coffin by myself in order to get from our bedroom to the bathroom which was on the other side of the house. The following day, Pi'ilani was buried in the old LDS graveyard about four miles away.

The other person who died in our home was Dad's sister, Lillian Kalaniki'eki'e, who was five years younger than Dad. She was sick with tuberculosis. Dad fixed up a large punee on the

glassed-in front porch of the house for her, and Dad and Mom tended to her needs. Her son, Clinton, who was about the same age as me, came to live with us also. I can't remember how long she lived with us until she passed away on April 22, 1933. She was also buried in the Kalōpā LDS graveyard, right next to her mother, Lillian Kalaniahiahi Keko'olani.

My Dad And Mom

As far back as I can remember, I had a very happy childhood in Kalōpā. My Dad, Nāwai Keko'olani, was a wonderful man; he was kind, gentle, and very caring. He was a teacher at Pa'auilo Elementary School, a leader in the LDS church, and well respected in the community. He never raised his voice to us or spanked us, but kept very busy in his huge vegetable garden every day after school was out. On weekends and holidays, he was either in Waipi'o working in the taro patches, or down the steep Hāmākua cliffs below our home picking 'opihi and fishing for the family. Sometimes, my brothers, Nāwai and Charlie, would go with him.

My mother, Emily Ka'elehiwa Hussey Keko'olani, was a housewife but she was active in church and taught the hula. She played the 'ukulele and had a beautiful singing voice. She loved to entertain at church functions, PTA meetings, and political rallies; in fact, she organized her own little band known as the Leilehua Troop composed of family members. The Keomalu cousins, Jeannette, Henry, and George, were part of the group as well as my brother, Nāwai, and Mom's brother, George Hussey. Sister Katy, my cousin Ella Keomalu, and I were the hula dancers. I can still remember the strict training we had to go through with my mother. She made us stand with our arms stretched against the wall, knees bent, and we had to slowly rotate our hips until we got the 'ami perfect. She would also make us squat on our butts, with our two legs stretched on the sides, then lay backwards onto the floor. She would gently step on our thighs to make our legs and hips flexible.

When I was 16 years old, my mother taught me how to quilt. After working on all the pieces together, she set up the quilting sticks in our front porch and started me off by showing me what needles and thread to use and made sure that the stitches were just right. It was painstaking work, but knowing that the quilt would be my very own after it was completed, I spent many long hours after school sitting at that quilting board. I finally finished it but when the house burned down in 1946, it was destroyed.

Pa'auilo School

I started school in the kindergarten in Pa'auilo when I was five. I was scared stiff the first day when sister Katy left me at my classroom even though I could see my dad's classroom close by. I enjoyed going to the cafeteria at lunch time because I knew that I would see my

dad and my sister Katy there, too. First and second grades were not too bad.

Abscess In My Glands

Before I entered the third grade, I developed abscess in my neck glands which prevented me from going to school. My mother and I had to travel by bus to Dr. Kutsunai's office in Pāpa'ikou, about thirty miles away. Since my neck would be swollen with pus, the doctor had to lance it in his office and let it dry under the infrared lamp, then bandage the area. My hair was cut short like a boy's. This made me cry because everyone thought I was a boy.

It was during one visit to the doctor that I recall the following incident. I had been sitting on the front porch of the building, waiting for my mother as she talked to the doctor. There was an old Japanese man sitting in a wheel chair. He called out to me,

"Girlie, you come, I look your hand."

I gave him one of my hands and he began to read my palm.

"Ah, you sebenty (seventy) year, you ma-ke (die)."

Seventy years seemed a thousand years away. Well, guess what? As of this writing, I'm 72 years old! Anyway, I have never been able to forget that old Japanese man.

Nevertheless, my mother and I had to travel to Honolulu by boat to see other doctors there.

I missed the whole third grade, but my dad tutored me at home. The following year I was able to go back to school. My dad was my fourth grade teacher, and I learned so much from him, especially math, which I hated.

The next year, I had a recurrence of the abscess in my glands and had to stay out of school again. But this time, Dr. Kutsunai advised my mother to move me to a drier climate. Dad bought us a large army tent and moved Mom and I to White Sand Beach in Kawaihae. Papa, the Filipino man who lived with us, came to stay with us. Dad and the other kids stayed at home during the week, but came to be with us on the weekends and on holidays.

I was able to attend the one room school house in Kawaihae during my sixth grade year. By the end of the year, my neck had healed up and we were able to move back to Kalōpā.

Working In The Cane Fields Of My Grandmother

My dad took over my grandmother Lillian's 15 acres of canefields after she died in 1923. It was located quite a few miles below our home, in the lower Kalōpā plantation village near the ocean. When we were old enough to work alongside my father, he took us with him on weekends and during the summer months. My grandmother's home was still in good shape so

we could spend the weekends and holidays there while we worked in the canefields. It was not easy work, but we all pitched in.

After the cane was burned and harvested by the plantation workers and hauled to the mill on huge Kenworth trucks, the land had to be cleared and rows plowed to plant the cuttings. A horse was used to pull a low sled filled with cane cuttings. Each cutting was about 36 inches long. Two people standing on the back edge of the sled could pull each cutting and drop it in the two rows where the wheels of the sled had passed over, while the driver maneuvered the horse. Two people followed behind the sled with their backs to the sled and covered the filled rows with dirt, using hoes. With 11 acres to plant, this process took weeks to finish.

When the cane had grown about a foot or so, it was time to fertilize. The plantation trucks would dump the bags of fertilizer at intermittent spots along the road at the edge of the canefield. The adults filled their individual bags with about 25 pounds of the fertilizer. Each bag had a sling to go around their heads, and the bag was positioned in the front of them slightly below their stomachs. That way, they could reach both hands into the bag and walk between the rows of cane to spread the fertilizer - the left hand doing the row on the left, and the right hand doing the row on the right - all the way to the end of the lines, which was about a quarter of a mile.

We kids had smaller bags made for us, but our work was the same, although we had to go back to fill our bags more often. It was no fun, but we had to do our part.

As soon as the weeds started growing in the field, it was "hoe-hana" time. We took our hoes, walked between the lines and hoed the grass from both rows of growing cane, taking care that no centipedes would climb up our legs.

I can't remember how many years we had to do that, but I think my dad finally sold my grandmother's house and land, or it had to be turned over to the plantation. All in all, it was an experience that I will never forget.

Matsunaga Store

The Matsunaga Store was a little general store that was located just before my grandmother's canefields. You could find almost anything you needed in that store, but the thing I remembered most was the delicious ice cakes they sold. It was so sweet and creamy, and it came in various flavors. Of course, the strawberry was my favorite. It was a real treat for us when Dad compensated us for the hard work we did in the canefield.

Only recently did I find out from Richard Matsunaga, a classmate of mine at the Honoka'a High School (class of 1947) and former principal of Hilo High School, that it was not his mother who made those delicious ice cakes; it was his father. His secret was including cream in the recipe.