

## Chapter 4

# The Last Tabernacle: A Refuge on Oahu

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In December 1847, Henry W. Miller, a bishop and one of the first settlers in the Council Bluffs area, was asked to build a tabernacle to accommodate a conference where Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Willard Richards would be presented as the members of the First Presidency. In only two and one-half weeks, two hundred men built a log structure at Miller's Hollow, Iowa, measuring forty feet by sixty feet that accommodated one thousand people. On December 24, 1847, the first tabernacle of the Church was dedicated by "Orson Pratt as a house of prayer and thanksgiving."<sup>1</sup> Two days later, during a conference held in this tabernacle, Brigham Young was sustained as the second President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. During the general conference held on April 6, 1848, the tabernacle was named the Kanessville Tabernacle.

Biblically, tabernacles were usually constructed as sacred places of worship. Andrew Jenson, assistant Church historian in the early 1900s, clarified that modern tabernacles, while considered places of worship, "are not models of . . . temples."<sup>2</sup> Tabernacles, at least for the Latter-day Saints, were built so the members of a specific geographical area had a place to

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1. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980), 7:623.
  2. Andrew Jenson, *Encyclopedic History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1941), 859.

assemble. Initially, there was very little difference between a tabernacle and a meetinghouse, which were also sometimes called tabernacles.<sup>3</sup> It was not long, however, before the differences between meetinghouses and tabernacles became more apparent. The primary difference was the size of the building. Jenson described a tabernacle as “large assembly rooms or halls, where the saints, who have smaller meeting houses for their branch or ward meetings, might gather together in conference, or to receive general instructions.”<sup>4</sup> It appears from a functional standpoint that the tabernacle was essentially the precursor to what is now called a stake center. There was, however, another difference between meetinghouses and tabernacles that should be recognized. Allen Roberts, an architectural historian, believed there was a “qualitative” difference between a tabernacle and a meetinghouse. He wrote, “Any building that was especially large in scale and seating capacity and *was spectacular in form and detailing* might be called a tabernacle.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, in addition to size, many tabernacles were different from other buildings in form and detailing.

The steady pace of building tabernacles continued until 1926 but slowed to an eventual stop by 1938. From 1847 to 1938, seventy-six tabernacles were constructed.<sup>6</sup> Richard W. Jackson, retired Church architect, dubbed the last tabernacle built as “the most dramatic tabernacle built by the Church.”<sup>7</sup>

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3. Richard W. Jackson, *Places of Worship: 150 Years of Latter-day Saint Architecture* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2003), 443.

4. Jenson, *Encyclopedic History of the Church*, 859.

5. Allen D. Roberts, *A Survey of L.D.S. Architecture in Utah, 1847–1930* (Salt Lake City: Cornerstone, Mormon Architectural Heritage; State of Utah, Division of State History, 1974); emphasis added.

6. Richard W. Jackson provides a complete listing of all tabernacles in an appendix of *Places of Worship*, 443–54.

7. Jackson, *Places of Worship*, 228.

This notable tabernacle—the last of its kind—is located on Oahu in the Hawaiian Islands.

During the 1930s, Church membership in Hawaii exceeded 13,000 members and was mostly concentrated on the island of Oahu.<sup>8</sup> Due to the growth and activity of the Saints in that area in 1933, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles gave “casual attention” to the possibility of forming a stake on the islands.<sup>9</sup> By 1934, there was a “favorable attitude among all the brethren towards the establishing of a stake” in the Hawaiian Islands. After discussing the possibility of a stake with local leaders in 1934, the First Presidency decided to go ahead and create a stake on Oahu.<sup>10</sup> In a letter from President Heber J. Grant and David O. McKay dated March 23, 1935, Castle H. Murphy, president of the Hawaiian Mission, was informed that “some of the leading brethren will be visiting Hawaii soon to consider the advisability of organizing a Stake there.”<sup>11</sup> With very little warning, President Heber J. Grant, J. Reuben Clark Jr., First Counselor in the First Presidency, and others arrived in Hawaii. On June 30, 1935, Presidents Grant and Clark organized the 113th stake of the Church, which was also the first stake outside the continental United States.<sup>12</sup> They named Ralph E. Woolley president of the

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8. *One Hundred Years of Mormonism in Hawaii, 1850–1950* (Honolulu: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1950), n.p., L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
  9. First Presidency letter to Castle H. Murphy, November 20, 1934, MS 5191, Frame 101, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.
  10. First Presidency letter to Castle H. Murphy, November 20, 1934, Church History Library.
  11. First Presidency letter to Castle H. Murphy, March 23, 1935, MS 5191, Frame 101, Church History Library.
  12. R. Lanier Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea: A History of the Latter-day Saints in the Pacific* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 167; Comfort

new Oahu Stake. Six wards comprised the new stake, together with three dependent branches and five independent branches.

Although Hawaii had eighteen small chapels built on the islands in the 1920s, the newly formed stake lacked a building large enough for stake meetings, gatherings, and activities. According to J. Frank Woolley, Ralph E. Woolley's nephew and bishop of the Waikiki Ward at the time the tabernacle was constructed, he felt that the Church in Hawaii needed "some forceful direction" in providing the Church with greater "visibility" and a more prestigious "image."<sup>13</sup> The catalyst for giving Woolley's direction some momentum was, in part, a new Churchwide welfare program introduced in 1935 that provided employment for members. This program centered on a campaign to beautify, revive, and remodel existing Church properties.<sup>14</sup> Although the chapels on Oahu were no more than fifteen years old at the time, the visionary Woolley quickly devised a program for building a new complex that would accommodate the needs of the stake. On June 26, 1936, Woolley submitted a bold proposal to the Church administration in Salt Lake City, calling for a new tabernacle as well as sites for two additional meetinghouses rather than improvements on existing structures.<sup>15</sup>

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Margaret Bock, *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in the Hawaiian Islands* (master's thesis, University of Hawaii, 1941), 93–94.

13. J. Frank Woolley, "Reminiscences of the Construction of the Honolulu Tabernacle," in *Mormon Pacific Historical Society Proceedings*, sixth annual conference, March 2, 1985, Honolulu, Hawaii, 1.
14. "Building Program Stretches Until 1943—Covers Islands," *Honolulu Advertiser*, August 17, 1941, 8.
15. While the welfare program was the impetus for submitting the original proposal for the tabernacle, there were other improvements made in the Oahu Stake and the Hawaiian and Japanese missions under provisions of the welfare program in 1941 ("Building Program Stretches Until 1943," 8).

In addition to his construction company, Woolley also owned Home Factors, which he used to acquire and develop land.<sup>16</sup> By 1935, Woolley had become interested in a parcel of land located on the main thoroughfare near the Pawa Junction Station, which was the main station for public transportation into Waikiki. Sometime during that year, Woolley coordinated with Castle H. Murphy, president of the Hawaiian Mission, to purchase the property located at the intersection of Beretania Street and Kalakaua.<sup>17</sup> They bought it from the Campbell family for \$24,000.<sup>18</sup>

With a vision, property in hand, and Church approval, the work continued to move forward. The Church quickly engaged the architectural firm Pope and Burton of Los Angeles to design the tabernacle and create the building plans. This particular firm was no stranger to the Church, having designed at least twenty-four meetinghouses, including four tabernacles.<sup>19</sup> Hawaii was not unfamiliar to the firm either, for they designed the temple in Laie just over twenty years earlier. Harold W. Burton, a partner in the firm and a member of the Church, became the chief architect for the tabernacle and desired to conceive a design that would “create a feeling of simplicity and

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16. Woolley, “Reminiscences of the Construction of the Honolulu Tabernacle,” 1.

17. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 163–64. While the purchase of the property is reported to have taken place in 1935 in multiple accounts, one source reported that a part of the parcel was actually purchased in December 1934 (“Honolulu Hawaii Stake Tabernacle: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” Church History Library).

18. Woolley, “Reminiscences of the Construction of the Honolulu Tabernacle,” 2.

19. Pope and Burton designed tabernacles in Montpelier, Idaho (1918), Blackfoot, Idaho (1920–21), Hollywood, California (1927), and Huntington Park, California (1929). A comprehensive listing of all tabernacles and architects is found in Jackson, *Places of Worship*, 443–54.

dignity in keeping with the purpose of the building.<sup>20</sup> Burton was interested in creating a building that was more than just simple and functional. He wanted a design that considered and reflected all the physical characteristics of the location and property.<sup>21</sup> To accomplish this, Burton returned to Hawaii and actually lived in a small shack on the building lot to seek inspiration for the project. This unorthodox approach caused J. Frank Woolley, who was a teenager at the time and had spent time talking with Burton about designing the project, to comment, “I was very impressed that an architect would go to that extreme to get the sense and feel of a piece of property before designing a building to go on it.”<sup>22</sup>

While living on the site, Burton gained a particular sense and feel for the site that was key in designing the new complex. When the Church first purchased the property, there was a home located on a corner of the site. Burton felt the location of the home would not interfere with his designs, so the home was left intact even though it was “riddled with termites.”<sup>23</sup> By living on the property, Burton quickly determined that “three very large and stately trees” would need to be preserved to reflect the character of the property.<sup>24</sup> As such, Burton incorporated his initial concepts of simplicity, dignity, and functionality, but now he cleverly worked the idea around a large

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20. Harold W. Burton, “New Building Follows No Known Style Hence Is Unhampered with Forms of Past,” *Honolulu Advertiser*, August 17, 1941, 9.

21. “Tabernacle Was Designed to Fit Hawaii’s Climate,” *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, August 16, 1941, 2.

22. Woolley, “Reminiscences of the Construction of the Honolulu Tabernacle,” 2.

23. Edward Lavaun Clissold interview, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1976, Church History Library.

24. Burton, “New Building Follows No Known Style,” 7.

banyan tree whose span was believed to be the largest in the islands, a Loong Ngan tree, and a mango tree.<sup>25</sup>

It was soon clear that Burton's designs for the tabernacle would be "somewhat original in church design."<sup>26</sup> "The design of the Honolulu Tabernacle," Burton later said of his work, "follows none of the generally known architectural periods or styles, therefore it is unhampered with sentimentality of forms and traditions of the past."<sup>27</sup> While Burton felt that the design had a unique architectural style, Paul L. Anderson, an architectural historian, observed that "the building derives its power from its skillful exploitation of the traditional imagery of religious architecture."<sup>28</sup> Anderson's assessment that Burton was not a pure modernist, pointed out that Burton's designs, while unique, were actually based on "traditional elements of church architecture" that "were simplified in detail." This was not intended as a criticism, for Anderson felt Burton's design was "cleverly contrived" and "composed with great sensitivity."<sup>29</sup> J. Frank Woolley, who was also an experienced engineer, felt that Burton's designs bore resemblance to ancient Incan and Mayan cultures.<sup>30</sup>

As Burton was working on the design of the tabernacle, the Oahu Stake started raising funds for the project. The cost for the project was projected to be \$300,000, with 75 percent

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25. David W. Cummings, "A Mormon Center in Honolulu," Honolulu Stake of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 3, Church History Library.

26. Woolley, "Reminiscences of the Construction of the Honolulu Tabernacle," 2.

27. Burton, "New Building Follows No Known Style," 7.

28. Paul L. Anderson, "Mormon Moderne: Latter-day Saint Architecture, 1925–1945," *Journal of Mormon History* 9 (1982): 78.

29. Anderson, "Mormon Moderne," 78.

30. Woolley, "Reminiscences of the Construction of the Honolulu Tabernacle," 2.

or \$225,000, to come from the Church's general fund and the remaining 25 percent, or \$75,000, from the Hawaiian Saints. On October 27, 1936, the Oahu Stake formed a committee to raise money for the tabernacle.<sup>31</sup> Getting the local funding for the tabernacle was a difficult task.<sup>32</sup> But the Hawaiian Saints used a variety of methods to raise sufficient funds to meet their financial obligation for the tabernacle. For example, they initially used tabernacle pledge cards. Recipients wrote a pledge for a donation on a printed card and returned it to the committee. According to Castle H. Murphy, the first donation for the tabernacle was given by the Saints with Hansen's disease at Kalaupapa.<sup>33</sup> Enthusiasm for building the tabernacle was evident as Saints pledged nearly \$40,000 as soon as the campaign began, but they only actually gave \$25,000.<sup>34</sup> Other methods were employed, like using the tabernacle site and the talents of a local member of the Church and successful circus impresario, E. K. Fernandez. He set up his circus on the site to raise money for the building projects.<sup>35</sup> President Woolley did his best to solicit donations from members of other faiths, and the committee also sponsored concerts, luaus, dances, and entertainment in hopes of meeting their assessed commitment. Since both the Hawaiian and Japanese missions

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31. Ralph E. Woolley was appointed chairman of the committee, and his counselors in the stake presidency, E. L. Clissold and Arthur K. Parker, were named vice chairmen. Eugene Clissold, Henry Aki, Fred E. Lung, Arthur Keawe, George Knapp, Clinton Lunt, J. Frank Woolley, William Kelii, and W. Fancis Bailey were members of the committee ("How Building Was Financed," *Honolulu Advertiser*, August 17, 1941, 9).

32. Clissold interview, 29, Church History Library.

33. Woolley, "Reminiscences of the Construction of the Honolulu Tabernacle," 4.

34. "How Building Was Financed," 9.

35. Woolley, "Reminiscences of the Construction of the Honolulu Tabernacle," 3.



would use parts of the new building, each were expected to help raise funds. The Hawaiian Mission was assessed \$12,000, and the Japanese Mission was assessed \$2,000. While it may appear that the Japanese Mission was given an easier task, this was actually a heavy commitment considering the mission had less than forty members at the time.<sup>36</sup>

With fund-raising well under way, Burton's architectural designs and plans were completed and sent to Salt Lake City in 1937 for approval.<sup>37</sup> Burton called for a complex rather than a single building. The proposal consisted of five principal buildings that were connected by covered walkways or lanais. The main building was the tabernacle itself. This 120-foot-by-45-foot chapel was designed to comfortably seat one thousand people. A choir loft, located behind the off-centered podium at the front of the tabernacle, seated 150 people and housed both a piano and an organ.

Connected at a right angle to the tabernacle chapel was a cultural hall with a hardwood floor. This 120-foot-by-40-foot hall would be separated from the chapel by heavy curtains. When the curtains were opened, chairs could be set up in the cultural hall, and seating for the tabernacle chapel would be doubled. The cultural hall was to be used for games and dances and would also have a stage at its far end for plays and entertainment.

The remaining buildings proposed for the complex included a long row of classrooms designed to flank outside courtyards, a building housing offices for ecclesiastical leaders, another chapel large enough for four hundred people to be used for local ward services, and a 141-foot tower to be built at the intersection of the two main structures to "balance the ensemble."<sup>38</sup>

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36. "How Building Was Financed," 9.

37. Anderson, "Mormon Moderne," 78.

38. Burton, "New Building Follows No Known Style," 9.

Burton designed the buildings so they could be opened on three sides to “take full advantage of the cooling trade winds and the shade of the fine old trees.”<sup>39</sup> The buildings were to be situated in a way to capture the natural environment by facing beautifully planted courtyards whose view could be enhanced by the fact that the doors of the buildings folded back to create “an intimate relation between the interiors of the building and the garden.”<sup>40</sup>

The First Presidency approved the plans on April 22, 1938, and named Ralph E. Woolley as the contractor for the job. His selection was no surprise. Woolley was a successful businessman and was active in politics and in the community.<sup>41</sup> Most important, Woolley was an experienced contractor. At the end of his career, for example, it is estimated that he oversaw the construction of 2,300 buildings in Hawaii. Besides the temple and the tabernacle, some more notable buildings built by Ralph E. Woolley include the Royal Hawaiian Hotel, the Hawaiian Electric Company, and several banks.<sup>42</sup>

In 1940, Elder Charles Callis, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, visited Hawaii to participate in the groundbreaking ceremonies and offer a dedicatory prayer. Some of the Saints in attendance later said that during the meeting they saw Brigham Young standing behind Elder Callis as he offered the prayer.<sup>43</sup> It is also interesting to note that in the dedicatory prayer, Elder Callis said that “the building

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39. Burton, “New Building Follows No Known Style,” 9.

40. Burton, “New Building Follows No Known Style,” 9.

41. Woolley, “Reminiscences of the Construction of the Honolulu Tabernacle,” 1.

42. “Honolulu Hawaii Stake Tabernacle: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” n.p., Church History Library.

43. Woolley, “Reminiscences of the Construction of the Honolulu Tabernacle,” 3.

would be completed in peace.”<sup>44</sup> Obviously there was general concern with the rising tension in world affairs. After all, it was in September 1939 that world war seemed likely as Germany began its invasion strategy and Japan’s power tactics continued to escalate.

After the groundbreaking ceremonies, construction on the tabernacle began in 1940. Nearly the entire building was constructed of 2,000 cubic yards of concrete that was poured in such a way as to “achieve a design expressing the plastic quality of poured concrete.”<sup>45</sup> The desired appearance was not easily achieved, nor was it accomplished by ordinary means of pouring concrete. Alfred V. Roberts, an engineer with the Engineering Association of Hawaii, was impressed with the “outstanding excellence” of the concrete workmanship. Roberts described the work: “Poured monolithically with walls and ceilings is delicate scroll work—and no blemish appears!” He then described the quality of the workmanship by saying there is “no evidence . . . of segregation, no disfiguring, no tell-tale cover up with mortar wash, no bubbles on surfaces amazingly smooth.”<sup>46</sup> Roberts was not alone in his praise of the workmanship used to build the tabernacle. In fact, the *National Society of Engineers of America* described the concrete columns of the tabernacle as “perfectly poured concrete workmanship” and even sent a delegation to the tabernacle to view the columns.<sup>47</sup>

To achieve such quality, Woolley employed finish carpenters to finish and smooth the inside of the concrete forms and then

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44. Tabernacle Open House program, November 14, 1987, Honolulu Hawaii Stake, Church History Library; see also Woolley, “Reminiscences of the Construction of the Honolulu Tabernacle,” 3.

45. Burton, “New Building Follows No Known Style,” 9.

46. “Beautiful Tabernacle is completed for LDS Church,” *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, August 16, 1941, 1–2.

47. “Honolulu Hawaii Stake Tabernacle: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” n.p., Church History Library.

made a single (monolithic) pour rather than making several different pours as is typically done. This process made the surface texture incredibly smooth right out of the molding and did not require additional finishwork.<sup>48</sup> J. Frank Woolley pointed out that the monolithical process not only produced a beautiful finish but also “avoided the usual joints and axes” that appear in typical concrete construction. This required pouring concrete from sunup to sundown “to avoid having to cold joint or joint any of the pours.”<sup>49</sup> Woolley felt that the construction of the tabernacle is “without any question the outstanding single example of concrete construction in the state of Hawaii.” He continued, “There hasn’t been a concrete job before or since that has exceeded this one. It is truly a labor of love and an exercise of skill on the part of the builder.”<sup>50</sup>

The interior of the building was constructed with equal care and perfection. It was intended that the interior would accentuate the natural foliage in the area. Native woods or woods well known in Hawaii were carefully selected for both form and function. The most prevalent wood used throughout the complex is apitong wood.<sup>51</sup> Apparently this wood was selected not only for its beauty but for its durability as well. Apitong is a very hard wood that has a creamy texture and was selected largely because the tabernacle site had a history of termite problems.<sup>52</sup> The distinctive doors for the main entrance of

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48. “Honolulu Hawaii Stake Tabernacle: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” n.p., Church History Library.

49. Woolley, “Reminiscences of the Construction of the Honolulu Tabernacle,” 2.

50. Woolley, “Reminiscences of the Construction of the Honolulu Tabernacle,” 2.

51. May Day Lo, “New Mormon Tabernacle Has Many Attractive and Modern Features,” *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, August 16, 1941, 2.

52. Woolley, “Reminiscences of the Construction of the Honolulu Tabernacle,” 2–3.

the tabernacle are carved monkey-pod wood (*Pithecellobium saman*). This hard wood named by the locals (who also call it *ohai*) is actually native to South America but was introduced to the islands in the 1800s. It is a popular wood typically used for making furniture, ukuleles, and carvings. The carved bowls so popular and famous in Hawaii are made of monkey-pod wood.<sup>53</sup> Rather than using hardwood for the tabernacle floor, craftsmen fitted it with cork.

In addition to the careful use of woods, pastel shades of green, gray, and complementary tones were used throughout the complex to create a cool and soothing atmosphere. Silvery-blue colored glass was used throughout the tabernacle and is accented by four chandeliers of bronze and opal glass that provide lighting in the evening. Every structure was built in such a way that louvers or doors could be opened to create an astonishing visual and natural effect. It was later said that the “masterly blending of outdoors and indoors is a distinguishing feature of this [tabernacle] edifice.”<sup>54</sup>

Another unique feature of the Oahu Stake Tabernacle is its acoustical properties. Burton designed the building to have natural acoustics and because of the precise standards of construction, his design was realized. J. Frank Woolley, for example, said that when standing in the back of the tabernacle, he could hear a person whose back was turned toward him praying in the choir loft some 120 feet away. Ralph E. Woolley’s wife, Romania, called the acoustics in the tabernacle “marvelous” and compared them to “the Tabernacle in Salt Lake City.”<sup>55</sup>

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53. Elbert Luther Little Jr. and Roger G. Skolmen, *Common Forest Trees of Hawaii* (Washington DC: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Forest Service, May 1989), 148, 150.

54. “Honolulu Hawaii Stake Tabernacle: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” Church History Library.

55. Woolley, “Reminiscences of the Construction of the Honolulu Tabernacle,” 4.

Today the acoustics are electronically controlled, and the tabernacle no longer relies solely on its natural acoustics.

On August 16, 1941—the night before the dedication—crews were scrambling to complete the finishing touches on the tabernacle.<sup>56</sup> There were only a few glitches with the construction; the most glaring was the absence of the twelve-foot mosaic of Jesus Christ that was to be placed over the entrance of the tabernacle. Designed by Eugene Francis Savage, a noted artist and head of the Art Department at Columbia University, the image of Christ in benedictory pose, with His head erect, arms outstretched, and a friendly expression, was to be made of over 100,000 Italian colored-glass tiles (*tesserae*). Savage had designed the picture and then pasted the *tesserae* on sheets of heavy paper in the proper order at his studio in New York. He then shipped them to Honolulu to be set by a mosaic tile setter. Because of rising tensions created throughout the world with war, delayed shipping on the West Coast made it impossible for the mosaic to arrive in Hawaii and be set before the dedication ceremonies. Finishing the mosaic was further delayed when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor just months after the tabernacle's dedication. The mosaic was finally installed and dedicated in 1943. Eugene Savage actually declined payment for his work on the mosaic of Christ because he felt it was an “honor and the peak of an artist's career to be commissioned to do the Christ.”<sup>57</sup>

Another unique part of the tabernacle's design was the 141-foot tower. Upon its completion in 1941, the tower was the second tallest structure in Honolulu. Burton designed the tower to have a sound system with chimes and loudspeakers

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56. Woolley, “Reminiscences of the Construction of the Honolulu Tabernacle,” 3.

57. “Honolulu Hawaii Stake Tabernacle: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” Church History Library.

so that organ music, announcements, or the proceedings of the meetings in the tabernacle or cultural hall could be heard by the general public in the courtyards.<sup>58</sup> Unfortunately, water leaked into the tower and into conduit containing the electrical wires for the loudspeakers, shorting out the sound system. Sadly, the system never worked very well and was eventually abandoned altogether. The tower was, however, quickly put to other uses. For example, some Boy Scout troop members affiliated with the Church thought the tower would be an ideal place to hold their meetings. They petitioned President Woolley and received permission to use the tower for their troop gatherings. After seeing the Scouts climbing up and down the ladder inside the tower, however, President Woolley rescinded permission to use the tower due to safety concerns.<sup>59</sup>

On Saturday, August 16, 1941, President David O. McKay, then Second Counselor in the First Presidency, officially laid the cornerstone on the southeastern corner of the tabernacle. A time vault inside the stone contained thirty-eight objects. Included was a list of the 2,720 individuals and organizations that contributed funds to build the tabernacle, a set of scriptures, coins, local Church directories, pamphlets, newspapers, magazines, histories, manuals, tapa cloth, and photographs of the groundbreaking ceremonies picturing Elder Callis, Bishop Richards, President Woolley, and President Clissold.<sup>60</sup>

The dedicatory services began the next day on August 17, 1941, with President McKay and Bishop Joseph L. Wirthlin of the Presiding Bishopric. The tabernacle was not only filled to capacity, it was overflowing and people stood in the corridors

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58. "Modern Tower Omits Bell," *Honolulu Advertiser*, August 17, 1941, 9.

59. Woolley, "Reminiscences of the Construction of the Honolulu Tabernacle," 4.

60. Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration Program, Tabernacle Anniversary and Rededication Files, 1991; 1998, Church History Library.

and entryways.<sup>61</sup> During the dedicatory prayer, President McKay specifically prayed that the tabernacle would be preserved from missiles in the event of any war.<sup>62</sup> While world conflict had already begun, the United States had not yet entered into the war when the tabernacle was dedicated. Just over three months later, however, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, less than ten miles away from the tabernacle. Apparently the concern for the tabernacle's safety was its high visibility. The tabernacle was lighted at night, and its size and the height of the tower made the complex an easy target. In addition, the complex was used as reference marker by both the Coast Guard and the military for entering and leaving Honolulu Harbor.<sup>63</sup> Elder David E. Sorensen, a member of the Seventy, later explained, "There was extensive bombing all around the area, and there is a large light on the tabernacle. . . . At that time it was the second tallest steeple in Honolulu. Yet the building was never targeted or damaged in any way."<sup>64</sup>

Although the tabernacle was not involved in the Japanese bombings, it was directly connected with the war during the 1940s, serving both the Church and the community. It was a blessing that Burton decided to leave the original home intact during the construction of the tabernacle, for it became a gathering place for Latter-day Saint servicemen stationed in Hawaii. Under the direction of the Oahu Stake presidency, a married couple was called to maintain the building, manage the prop-

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61. Woolley, "Reminiscences of the Construction of the Honolulu Tabernacle," 2.

62. Woolley, "Reminiscences of the Construction of the Honolulu Tabernacle," 2; "Hawaii Tabernacle: A 'Spiritual Refuge,' Rededicated," *Ensign*, April 1998, 79.

63. "Honolulu Hawaii Stake Tabernacle: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," Church History Library.

64. "Hawaii Tabernacle: A 'Spiritual Refuge,' Rededicated," 79.



erty, and cook meals for the servicemen and their friends.<sup>65</sup> Locals named the home *Malamakoa*, which means “take care of the soldier.”<sup>66</sup> In addition to being a rest and recreation center for servicemen and their friends, *Malamakoa* served as a dormitory for those on leave. During the war years the tabernacle and its properties attracted thousands of servicemen who “thronged to the Tabernacle and its grounds.”<sup>67</sup> The signatures of hundreds of soldiers who visited the tabernacle and *Malamakoa* during the war years filled a guest register and included the name of Boyd K. Packer, a young airman during World War II. When considering the contribution that *Malamakoa* and the tabernacle made during the war years, Elder Sorensen called the tabernacle a “sacred edifice for many men and women in the armed forces who have taken spiritual refuge in the building over the years.”<sup>68</sup> Elder Donald L. Hallstrom, also a Seventy and the former Honolulu Stake president and regional representative for Oahu, felt that during those years, the tabernacle was “a special place that has been a spiritual haven to countless numbers . . . passing through the islands during World War II.”<sup>69</sup> *Malamakoa* later became the mission offices for the Japanese Mission until it was necessary to raze the home altogether.

The tabernacle complex cost \$250,000 to complete. Both the design and construction of the building received “widespread approval.”<sup>70</sup> In fact, the complex “did much to enhance the image of the Church both among members and

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65. Clissold interview, 12, Church History Library.

66. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 175. According to Clissold, *malam* = keep and *kos* = soldier (Clissold interview, 6, Church History Library).

67. *One Hundred Years of Mormonism in Hawaii*, August 9–August 20, 1950.

68. “Hawaii Tabernacle: A ‘Spiritual Refuge,’ Rededicated,” 79.

69. “Landmark edifice 50 years old,” *Church News*, August 17, 1991, 7.

70. Cummings, “A Mormon Center in Honolulu.”

nonmembers,” and tourists often mistook the tabernacle as a Latter-day Saint temple.<sup>71</sup>

A centennial celebration of the missionaries coming to Hawaii was held at the tabernacle on August 9–20, 1950. At that time, the Daughters of Utah Pioneers placed a plaque on the tabernacle grounds to commemorate the first Latter-day Saint missionaries’ arrival in Hawaii.<sup>72</sup>

Not many changes to the tabernacle occurred until 1974 when Markling and Yamasaki, architects from Los Angeles, designed new additions to the complex to accommodate the growth in membership and the changing needs of the Saints.<sup>73</sup> The area that once contained an outdoor baptismal font and patio was converted into a gymnasium, family history center and library, classrooms, meeting rooms for Scouts, a kitchen, and an indoor baptismal font.<sup>74</sup> To accommodate the new construction, the mango tree—one of the three original trees—was removed. The open baptismal font was filled in with soil and made into a planter for tropical foliage.

After forty-four years of service, the wear on the tabernacle sparked talk of renovation. Two years of discussion and planning followed and finally renovation of the tabernacle began in 1987 and lasted ten months. In addition to general upgrades and renovation, the smaller chapel was converted into two floors of classroom space, and offices flanked the largest outdoor patio. Donald L. Hallstrom, Honolulu Stake president at the time, said, “We are proud of the work accom-

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71. R. Lanier Britsch, *Moramona: The Mormons in Hawaii* (Laie, HI: Institute for Polynesian Studies, 1989), 151.

72. *One Hundred Years of Mormonism in Hawaii: 1850–1950*.

73. Jackson, *Places of Worship*, 228.

74. “Honolulu Hawaii Stake Tabernacle: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” Church History Library.

plished in restoring this premier building and its grounds.”<sup>75</sup> An open house for more than eight thousand visitors was held on November 14, 1987, with guided tours, presentations, dinner, and music.<sup>76</sup>

In 1991 a celebration for the fiftieth anniversary of the tabernacle was held on November 30. During the celebration, the cornerstone was removed and the time capsule was opened. After each ward in the Honolulu Stake submitted keepsakes, the capsule was resealed in August 1992.<sup>77</sup>

Additional interior renovation took place ten years later beginning in 1997 in hopes of “restoring the building to its former stature and glory.”<sup>78</sup> The renovation improved the landscaping, added air-conditioning, and enlarged and modernized the family history center. The extensive renovation was completed by January 1998, and the 47,000-square-foot complex was rededicated by Elder David E. Sorensen, President of the North America West Area, on January 18, 1998.<sup>79</sup> About one thousand people attended the ceremony.<sup>80</sup>

After more than fifty years, the assessment made on August 17, 1941, by the *Honolulu Advertiser* still holds true: “The Tabernacle is an imposing monument to religion. Distinctive in design and located in spacious, beautifully landscaped

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75. “Renovated Honolulu Tabernacle Opens Doors to the Public,” *Church News*, November 14, 1987, 7.

76. “Open House Held in Renovated Honolulu Tabernacle,” *Ensign*, February 1988, 80.

77. Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration Program, Tabernacle Anniversary and Rededication Files, 1991; 1998, Church History Library.

78. “‘Sacred Edifice’ Rededicated: Hawaii Tabernacle long a spiritual refuge,” *Church News*, January 24, 1998, 10.

79. Program from the Tabernacle rededication service held January 18, 1998, Tabernacle Anniversary and Rededication Files, 1991; 1998, Church History Library; see also “‘Sacred Edifice’ Rededicated,” 10.

80. “‘Sacred Edifice’ Rededicated,” 10.

grounds, it is likewise an impressive addition to the architecture of Honolulu.”<sup>81</sup> While the building has changed names from the Oahu Stake Tabernacle (1937–55) to the Honolulu Stake Tabernacle (1955–present), the impressive stature of building really has not changed much at all. For over a half century the building has been a haven for those seeking comfort and inspiration. Perhaps Richard W. Jackson said it best: “It seems appropriate that among the last of the tabernacles should be one having been accomplished on such a grand scale.”<sup>82</sup>

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81. “\$300,000 Total Expenditure in LDS New Building Program,” *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, August 17, 1941, 9.

82. Jackson, *Places of Worship*, 228.