

GUEST: SAM COOKE

LSS 325 (LENGTH: 26:46)

FIRST AIR DATE: 7/20/10

And it was wonderful in the old days. And it's changed, but ... we've tried to keep a little of it here, what we're doing with the Manoa Heritage Center. So we plan to be around for a while.

He bears the name of a *kamaaina* family and he's related to other prominent families who came to Hawaii when it was still a kingdom. Sam Cooke shares his passion for the preservation of historic and cultural treasures of the islands. Next on LONG STORY SHORT.

Open billboard:

Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox is Hawaii's first weekly television program produced and broadcast in High Definition.

***Aloha Mai Kakou*, I'm Leslie Wilcox. Anyone who's lived in Hawaii for any length of time has seen the name Cooke, with an E, in many contexts. In the islands' missionary history, in the evolution of big business here, in the many philanthropic gifts supporting the arts, environment, education and human services. Samuel Alexander Cooke is a descendant of early missionaries who taught the children of the *alii*. Over time, family members established a business empire with the company Castle and Cooke. In more recent years, Sam Cooke and his wife Mary have saved a *heiau* from development a stone's throw from their historic home in Manoa. And they've created the Manoa Heritage Center to preserve the Kukao Heiau and an all-native garden they've grown around it. The Cooke family dynasty began with the arrival in the early 1800s of Sam's great-great grandparents, Juliet Montague and Amos Starr Cooke.**

He was a teacher, and he wanted to come out and be a missionary in the Hawaiian Islands, but he had to have a wife, and he didn't have a wife. So the mission said, You can't go unless you have a wife. So he posted the bonds in the church, and a few weeks later, Juliet Montague joined him as his wife. They were on the boat for a hundred and eighty-eight days, and they arrived in Hawaii in April of 1837. He was asked by King Kamehameha V (sic) to start the Chief's Children's School, where he educated—she and he educated all the Hawaiian royalty, including Bernice Pauahi, who was married to Charles Reed Bishop in our house, which is still behind the Kawaiahao Church.

With the evolution of Hawaii, there's new thinking about missionary contributions. You know that expression about missionaries came here to do good, and they did very well.

M-hm.

What are your thoughts about that?

Well, it all depends who you're talking about. James Campbell wasn't a missionary, and he did the best. But the missionaries did start the industry with sugar, which they started, and then it grew to be much bigger than the missionaries. And most of the people that ran those industries, sugar and pineapple, were not missionaries, they were brought in from the continental United States. And they're the ones that really put those companies on the map. But now, they're all gone. Except for Alexander and Baldwin and the Bank of Hawaii, there's no large missionary engendered company left here in the State of Hawaii.

When your original forebear came here, do think ... Christianity or education was foremost in his mind?

Both; both, yeah. And then the mission went broke. And so they couldn't afford to keep the missionaries out here, so they said, We'll take you home back to the East Coast, or you can stay in Hawaii. And that's when Amos Starr Cooke and Samuel Northrup Castle started a ship chandler they called Castle and Cooke.

It did ag, it did shipping.

It did ag, it did—

Pineapple

—shipping, it did construction. And in its heyday, it just did about everything that had anything to do with land, and agriculture.

What are some of the other things your family got involved with?

My great-grandfather, Charles Montague Cooke, married Anna Charlotte Rice Cooke, or Anna Charlotte Rice. And she's the one that started the Academy of Arts. And then so there's where I get my Rice blood. And I get my Lyman and Wilcox blood from my mother, who was from Kauai, and whose great-uncle, G.N. Wilcox, founded Grove Farm. My grandfather, who built this house, was a scientist. He was a malacologist; he studied Hawaiian land shells. He was a PhD at the Bishop Museum for forty years; became very famous. And then my Uncle George, who was his brother, was a rancher on Molokai. My family had the Molokai Ranch, and George Cooke was the head of it. It was a cattle ranch. It was big; it was about seventy-seven thousand acres. But the thing that made it click was the pineapple leases. We leased to Castle and Cooke, and we leased to California Packing Company, and McNeill and Libby. And pineapple, I think, was great, but in about 1985, we lost the pineapple, because they all went to the Philippines and to Taiwan. So our income just dried up. So in 1986, we sold the ranch to a New Zealander by the name of Birely, and we haven't had anything to do with it since then. It's been very controversial, but we've exited the ranch, and it's been the Birely's that have had all the trouble, because they've tried to run it absentee. That doesn't work.

It must have been hard to give up the ranch, although—

It was.

—it was a financial decision, right?

Well, it's a financial disaster. M-hm.

But it did support, in good times, many people.

Oh, in good times the pineapple lease, it was a wonderful place. It had deer, it had fish, and it had everything, and we could go there and have fifty thousand acres to ourselves to go do what we wanted to do. I took all my buddies up there; Curtis Laukea and Gilbert, all those guys. They loved the place. M-hm.

Sam Cooke spent many summers on Molokai, but he grew up on the same Manoa Valley land where he continues to live. After majoring in hotel management at Cornell University, he had every intention of pursuing a career in the hotel industry and took a job with Interisland Resorts on Kauai. But with marriage to the woman he'd met when they were children and with the demands of a new family, he redirected his profession, becoming a stockbroker and senior executive with Morgan Stanley here. One of his clients was the late great Harry Weinberg, who was famously frugal and exacting. Sam Cooke had a long career in a competitive industry. Even back at Punahou School, he didn't shy away from the fray.

Who'd you play football with?

Oh, with guys like Gilbert Ane, and Curtis Laukea, and—

All the small guys.

—all the—

[CHUCKLE]

All the small guys. I wasn't any good, but I made the team.

[CHUCKLE]

[CHUCKLE]

What were they like—what was Curtis "The Bull" Laukea, the future wrestler, like in high school?

Good guy; really good. Still is a good guy. I mean, very successful wrestler. I could never believe that he would do what he did, but he did, and he became very good at it. **[CHUCKLE]**

He was always the bad guy—

The bad guy.

—on the air, but the—

Yeah.

—nice guy behind the scenes.

Right. And he lives up in Papakolea now. I've seen him occasionally. Gilbert Ane was a terror.

M-hm.

Boy, he was a hell of a football player. And Danny, his brother, and David, his brother, and Harry Pacarro, and A.K. Espinda, and Punahou was always thought

of as a *Haole* team, but I think there was only one *Haole* on the team, and that was me.

[CHUCKLE]

Well, tell me; I noticed your grandfather had a very vibrant scientific career, your father was in the finance business, trust, you worked for decades in hotel and for Dean Witter and Morgan Stanley.

M-hm.

Couldn't you all have just said, I've got a trust fund, I have wealth, no need.

Never happened that way.

You could have, though.

Well, yeah. I've had cousins that did that, but not me. Mm-mm; mm-mm.

What got you up every morning to go to work?

Oh, I don't know. I guess I wanted to prove myself. I've never been that way. Neither has my wife. So we've been very, very active.

So you made money, and now you spend your life giving money.

We do.

In your philanthropic—

We do.

—efforts.

We do here, but we do. We do a lot of philanthropic work. M-hm.

Did you always know you were gonna do that?

No; no. I thought I was gonna be a hotel manager. Mm. [CHUCKLE] Lots to eat, always have a bed.

As a businessman, when you look at people applying for grants, you probably have a different eye than many people do.

Well, we do. And then you really get to know who your friends are.

'Cause you say no. [CHUCKLE]

You have to say no every once in a while. At Cooke Foundation, we hire the Hawaii Community Foundation to research all the grants. And so we have a pretty good idea of who we want to give our money to. We do twice a year. You're not taxed when you're an eleemosynary foundation; you don't pay taxes. So the IRS takes a very, very strong look at how you give your money away. And if you start giving it away to people that don't really qualify, you could lose your tax status. And so we're very careful about that.

Sam Cooke is an avid collector of Hawaiiiana that includes paintings, rare books and artifacts. His ongoing philanthropic efforts reflect the Cooke family tradition of sponsoring arts and preserving the cultural heritage of the islands.

Well, principally, my great-grandmother started the Honolulu Academy of Arts. And I was the chairman of the Academy of Arts for sixteen years, and got to know most of the major art people in the United States. And I've been told by many of those people that the Honolulu Academy of Arts is probably the finest small museum in America. So it's a real treasure.

It's such a legacy, but I sense that for you, it wasn't a family obligation. You love art.

Yeah, I love art. And it wasn't an obligation, but it was a very necessary part of the soul of Honolulu, I think. That without it, we'd be wanting. It's a beautiful museum.

Has it faced challenges that threatened it along the way?

Yes, mostly monetary. My great-grandmother founded it, endowed it, built it, and left her collection there. And then she moved up to where the Contemporary Art Museum is; that was her home. But the challenges that the Art Academy really faced were expansion and growth, and collecting.

I believe you helped to raise, what, fifteen million dollars—

Thirty.

—for a wing. Thirty?

M-hm.

And which people said at the time couldn't be done.

Right; right. M-hm.

How'd you do it?

Mostly on the mainland, and tremendous support from the local people here in Hawaii, especially the foundations and the corporations. But there's just not that kind of money here in Hawaii, so we went to the mainland and got support from the Henry Luce Foundation, and all sorts of foundations all over the country that had been here and seen the Academy, knew what we were talking about, and were very happy to help us out.

What kinds of art do you like the best?

Hawaiian.

I know ... Hawaii?

Yeah. Kind of things you see on my wall. M-hm.

I see lots of books about voyages—

Voyages.

—to the islands.

M-hm; m-hm. It's a fascinating story. The books start with the collection of Cook, and go all the way through the end of the 20th century. After Cook discovered Hawaii, all the European nations came here, and they all published voyages and did beautiful atlases with drawing. Of course, there was no photography in those days, so they all brought artists with them, and the artists did beautiful drawings.

And why are you fascinated with those voyages?

Well, that's when we all got started, I guess. It really brought Hawaii to the fore in the world. I mean at one particular time, Hawaii was the most literate country in the world; everybody could read.

After the missionaries came.

After the missionaries came.

But Hawaiians were literate in their own language too.

Yes, they were; they were, very. They had a tremendous culture. And on the property here, we have a Hawaiian *heiau*, which we have rebuilt, and it's a beautiful piece of work, gorgeous piece of work.

So you live in a nice suburban area of Honolulu, with a *heiau* in your back yard.

M-hm.

How did that happen?

Interesting. My grandfather moved here in about 1901. He built the house in 1911. There was a *heiau* out there, and the architects wanted to put the house where the *heiau* was, because that's where the best scenery was. He said no; no. His life had been saved by a Hawaiian, so he was very, very true with the Hawaiian people. And he would not let them build a house on the *heiau*. So he built a fence around the *heiau*, and it stayed that way up until 1994 when Mary and I bought it from a developer, and saved it and then rebuilt it. So we brought a stonemason from the Big Island by the name of Billy Fields, who is an outstanding mason, and he built it and put it back in shape.

And that's, I believe, an agricultural *heiau*.

It's an agricultural *heiau*; right, m-hm.

What's the story about it, and what's its name?

Well, it's name is Kukao. And there are all sorts of interpretations of Kukao, but the one we like the most is of a chief who stood on the mountain in back of us, and threw his oo stick, and it landed there. And that's where they built the *heiau*.

Standing oo, step—

Standing oo. And oo is a digging stick. And Kenneth Emory, who was the archaeologist at the Bishop Museum, did a radiocarbon test out there, and with some ashes, and determined that it was very, very old, perhaps back to the Norman conquest, which was 1088. So it's been there for a long time. Billy found three different stages of rebuilding in the *heiau*, so it had been rebuilt. And then we dedicated it in 1994 with Bill Kaina, who was the *kahu* at Kawaiahae Church. And he came up here; he had a very difficult time, giving a little talk about the *heiau*, because the *mana* was coming from the *heiau* bothering him. But he got through it. [CHUCKLE] It's a beautiful *heiau*. And it's the only one on this side of the island, and it's the only one I've seen that has been restored this way.

So you mentioned that a family member had been ... his life had been saved by a Hawaiian woman, and he was very indebted to the Hawaiian people as a result, and the Hawaiian culture.

M-hm.

This was your grandfather.

It was my grandfather. He was born down at Kawaiahae Church, and he was not expected to live. He was two and a half pounds, and Western medicine couldn't take care of him. So my great-grandfather went to Hilo, and got a *kahuna lapaau* who was named Kaaina. Brought her to Honolulu, and she saved the baby; he lived. And she wrapped him in kukui leaves, and massaged

him with *lomi lomi*, and did all the old things, and he lived. And so he took care of her for the rest of his life. And I have an obituary that talks about her when she died. She was a hundred and fourteen years old when she died. And she went on to say that she had been a *kahuna lapaau* and had saved many lives. And she never married, but she had a son, a *Haole* boy by the name of Montague Cooke. So lots of the old-timers around here still remember her. My mother was very perplexed by it, because she was very striking looking and had blue eyes, for a Hawaiian. And her whole name means, the last supper. Because she was born in Kona on the same day that Kamehameha died in 1819. And her parents were converted to Christianity, and when she was born, they named her this big, long Hawaiian name, that meant, the last supper. M-hm. He would take care of her. It was like a mother and a son relationship.

The name of your home is Kualii?

Kualii; right. Kualii was the chief who lived here, and that's his *heiau* out there. And Kualii is a big name; it's like Smith in the English name. There are Kualii's everywhere, I found out afterwards. [CHUCKLE] But he was a chief, and he was the chief of Oahu, a very powerful one. It's is a great house. It was the first house of its kind in the valley. And there was a dairy up here. My grandfather's hobby was dairy, so he got a tiny dairy. It went from Cooper Road there, all the way up to Waioli Tea Room. But after the war, people moved into the valley, and they objected to the smells and the sounds of the dairy, so we moved the dairy over to where Olomana Estates is now. And then we started selling off the property. But this has a great, great history, this house. And when Pearl Harbor was bombed in 1941, all the able-bodied people went to Pearl Harbor to help, but the women and children and the older people came here. There must have been between eighty and a hundred people in this house, and they were sleeping on the floor, and upstairs; there are four stories.

Here, because it's stone.

It's stone; it looks like it could handle itself. But a word went out from the authorities that the water had been poisoned, so we filled our bathtubs up. We have three big porcelain bathtubs upstairs. We filled them up with water, and we drank out of the bathtub for three days. So it has many, many fond memories. We had bomb shelters out here. And I think growing up here in the 50s, we all—and the neighborhood gang would come here and play football and baseball, and there was a lot more property in those days, so we had the room to do things like that.

How much more property did you have then?

Well, we had quite a bit more property. I think the place was about eight acres. Now, it's three. And it was all the way down to the Manoa Road.

And the stones, which surround you, are neighborhood stones.

Yeah. They were quarried here, right where the circle is out in front of the house. And when Mary and I moved in here in 1970, we really had a feeling that we wanted to save the place. Because I think my father, who lived on Maui, would have knocked it down and subdivided, and sold the property off. So we had to

bite the bullet, and I made a deal with him, and the house was in terrible shape, awful shape. But over the years, we've painted and used chewing gum and everything else I can [CHUCKLE]

The home is now on the National Register of Historic Places. Sam and Mary Cooke established the non-profit Manoa Heritage Center and the Kualii Foundation to secure the future of the home and the nearby *heiau* site. As long as the couple lives here, the house is not open to the public—but the heritage center offers guided tours of the *heiau* and native garden.

And I've opened the garden up, not the house, but the garden to tours; small tours. And we've done—we do about three thousand kids a year. And I think we can do a little bit more than that, but we're growing, and we'll get there soon. But we can't do much more than that, because of our size.

You've restored the *heiau*, and you've replaced the original plantings with all native Hawaiian—

Yes.

—plants.

Right; m-hm.

What have you learned about the Hawaiian plants and—

Well, when we—

—in the process?

—first started doing it, we had to get special permits from the State to plant these plants, because they were endangered, and they were protected. And so Mary, my wife [CHUCKLE], had a lot of sessions with the State in bringing monroidendron trees in, and like all these other things that we put in the garden. Now, you can buy them at Home Depot. [CHUCKLE] But we have some very unique things out there that we got from Kauai.

Like, for example?

Well, the monroidendron; it's such a rare tree. It grows on Kauai. It's such a rare tree that we've forgotten the Hawaiian name; nobody knows the Hawaiian name for it.

I heard there's one out there that ... there's nothing left in the natural to pollinate it.

Oh, yeah; that's the brighamia. It looks like a cabbage on the end of a big stalk. And that was found on Kauai and on Molokai, and there was a special insect that pollinated it. And that insect has become extinct, and it can't pollinate itself by itself, so it has to be pollinated by man. There's the native Hawaiian hibiscus, which is the State flower, the yellow one.

M-hm.

And then there's Hawaiian cotton out there. And then there's akia, the fish poison plant.

How does that work?

You take the leaves and you make it into a poultice, and then you throw it in the tidal pools. And it stuns the fish, and the fish come floating up. And then you grab them and put them in a bag. I've never tried it, but it's something that does work. Well, there's about sixty different plants out there, all sorts of exotic, rare Hawaiian plants that are kinda fun to see, because you don't ever see them anywhere. And one of the things that has been so interesting is that when the native people come here to see the *heiau*, they're much more interested in the plants than they are in the *heiau*.

What do you think happened in that *heiau*? I mean, did you know, right now, it's an empty enclosure.

Right; right.

What was there? Was anything in there before?

We don't really know. We speculate that there were some images in there. There was one person who came out to the University of Hawaii who said it was built much like that big stone thing in England called Stonehenge, where it lined itself up to the solstice, the different seasons.

M-hm.

And that you could see the sun coming over this part of the *heiau*, and that's where this particular plant was planted.

Oh; that would be so nice to know.

Yeah; it would be nice to know. But there's nobody to tell us. We have a protocol committee, different local people who come and advise us about once every other year. And we decided that we weren't going to let anybody walk in there, out of respect to the place. And if you know a chant, it's very appropriate to chant. We've had many chanters out there. But it's very refreshing to take these kids who are studying Hawaiian history, and all of them know chants, and so they come out there and they do their chant at the *heiau*. It's just chicken skin. I mean, it really is. I was terrified that we'd have some sort of reaction from the Hawaiian community, but we have nothing but positive vibes from them. And we've tried to include them. Our board has several native Hawaiians on it, and Nathan Napoka has been very, very helpful to us. A wonderful guy. So I think we're doing the right thing. I mean, I think my kids think I'm crazy, because they don't get it. [CHUCKLE]

They're not into the Manoa Heritage Center?

Not really. Cathy is the one that lives here, but they'll be okay; they'll be okay. M-hm. They're not setup such that they could take care of books like this, and paintings, and that type of thing. And we're going to leave an endowment, hopefully, that will take care of it for the foreseeable future, but these places always need more, more, more, more, more.

Have you ever considered moving away?

No; I would never move away. I would never move away. We go on trips, and it's always nice to come home.

And you've never moved away from the property—

No.

—where your family has lived for generations.

Right; right. No; no, we're gonna stay here.

Kukao was restored in 1993 and survives as the last intact Hawaiian temple in the greater *ahupuaa* of Waikiki. That's right, Waikiki. The Cookes' Manoa Heritage Center gives tours of the *heiau* and native garden by reservation only. Our guest Samuel Alexander Cooke could have let his family achievements support him, but instead, he enjoyed a long successful business career and created his own legacy of philanthropy in Hawaii. Mahalo, Sam Cooke for sharing your "Long Story Short," and thank YOU for listening and supporting PBS Hawaii. I'm Leslie Wilcox. A *Hui Hou Kakou*.

For audio and written transcripts of this program, and *all* episodes of **Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox**, visit pbshawaii.org.

We were very much involved with Molokai. We did a lot of fishing. My dad caught the world's record oio, bonefish.

Bonefish.

And he also held the marlin record that he caught at Lanai. And Mother held the world's record in the Allison tuna. And so when Dad died, he went in the Fishing Hall of Fame with Herbert Hoover; he was a very famous fisherman. So most of my time was fishing, when I was a kid. I didn't—I don't play golf; never been on a golf course. I miss the old ways; I do, I really do. I remember going to *luaus* at Laie, and seeing my father's great friend, Haumana Kalili, in a tug-of-war, pulling six Filipinos. I mean, it was this incredible background. Going fishing with him, and going to the *koa* and praying in Hawaiian, and going out and catching akule by the boatload. And you don't see that anymore. Mm-mm. We'd go to lobster holes, and out of maybe thirty lobsters in the hole, we'd take two, all we could eat. Now, you go out to the lobster hole, there's nothing left.