Manoa's "Puuhonua": The Castle Home, 1900-1941

Peggy Robb and Louise Vicars

In our youth we lived in the sloping afternoon shadows of a great Manoa Valley house, which we were told was "the Castle," and we doted on it, imagining crenelations, embrasures, keeps, cellars that could be dungeons; it was fabulous, and long brassy autos climbed to its fastnesses, perhaps carrying the lost kings and queens of a lost Hawaiian kingdom. We crept in the meadows among cows to spy on what seemed a complete manorial village dropped from the heavens. But "Castle" was really a family name, we came to know. The magic remained—and until central Manoa filled with competing houses, "Puuhonua" was a glamorous mystery to many a child; it was always part of one's ewa (our western) skyline, transforming a hillside.

The Castles of Hawaii were as prodigious as was their house. There is a common and perhaps slightly envious remark in Hawaii that the missionaries came to do good and did well. The Castles did a lot of both. They had a veritable headstart in participating in the financial development of the Hawaiian kingdom. Samuel Northrup Castle (1808-1894) had been a cashier in a Cleveland, Ohio, bank, then a bookkeeper "in a commercial establishment" when he volunteered for missionary service. He arrived as part of the "seventh reinforcement" missionary group in 1837, the seventeenth year of the Protestant Sandwich Isles Mission. He was not ordained as a minister. He was to be the "financial agent" for a suddenly expanding Christianity. But in 1850 he severed his formal relationship with the mission in order to carry on a general mercantile business and to develop the new firm of Castle and Cooke (with fellow missionary Amos S. Cooke). The firm in its secular role continued to

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Hawaii-born Mmes. Robb and Vicars, of the Manoa History Group, have lived at the Puuhonua scene for more than fifty years. Both are residents of Puuhonua Street, amid the original foundations and bluestone steps of a vanished house.
act as agents for the mission until 1868, including handling supplies and accounts for the Micronesian missions. Castle and Cooke (eventually one of the “Big Five” of Hawaiian management agencies or “factors”) became uniquely powerful as agent, manager, banker, and then landowner for much of the expanding economy of both kingdom and territory. Castle had very early foreseen the possibility of a large sugar export business and the need for a supportive banking system.

The Castles soon became numerous. Castle’s first wife, Angeline Tenney, died in 1841 of tuberculosis; there was one daughter, Mary (b. 1838). Castle returned to New York and married Angeline’s sister, Mary Tenney (1819–1907), who is the “Mother” Castle of our history. She was the mother of nine children (six of whom are pictured in the carriage scene of Figure 4). The influence of their wealth and their talents was large. “Mother” Castle became a revered benefactress of many charities and causes. She was an early supporter of women’s rights, in particular to higher education. She was a sedulous student of theories of education. Of special relevance to our story, she helped to start and then heavily supported the “Free Kindergarten and Children’s Aid Association” (FKCAA), which obtained the use of two of her own homes, one of these eventually being Puuhonua, the “Castle Home” of Manoa.

It was indeed a special place of importance with a three-tiered variety of use. It was the first really large and modern house in Manoa valley, and it at once became a social and cultural center. Much of its importance came after the death of “Mother” Castle, when for sixteen years it harbored the FKCAA. Then for another sixteen years it was the nurturing center for the amazing and pioneering Pan-Pacific Union, which in the period after 1924 made Honolulu an intellectual center for scholars and government officials from the mainland United States and from Asia in particular.

The house and its land were of another, more urban, importance. They may be seen as a stimulus to three waves of urbanization in Manoa Valley—in 1900, 1924, and 1941. By its pioneering presence (see Figures 1 and 6) other large homes were attracted; and by the subdivisions of its lands in 1924 and 1941 the development of Manoa valley was signalled.

The location chosen in 1898 was on the western side of the valley, high above what is now Cooper Road and at the end of what would eventually become Ferdinand Street (see Figures 2, 3 and 4). This is the alii (or noble’s) side of Manoa, rich in legend and folklore, known to Hawaiians as Kaulumalu (breadfruit shade). Thrum in 1892 reached back to pre-history to locate a menehune fort on the rocky hill called Ulamalu (a little above our arrow in Figure 1). One of the Castle sons,
FIG. 1. The 1882 map of Manoa (the first of all the valley), the ʻewa side. Note that there are no "named houses" above "Oahu College" (Punahou School). The arrow at the top right points to the future location of Puuhonua. Source: Bureau of Maps, State of Hawaii.
George (1851–1932), recalled “there being a beautiful grove of breadfruit and ohia trees where native birds congregated in great numbers. The man who planted the grove was very old and I was a boy. Sand [volcanic cinders] came down . . . and choked the trees.”

Had this been a holy place to those ali‘i who took over from the menehunes? Castle told of “the sacrificial stone and some ruins of the heiau to Kuula and above it on the hillside the Pohaku Kuula, a rock on which the watchman stood to command a view of the entire valley from mountain to the sea.” But none of this has been found.

Another son, William (1849–1935), gave the name Puuhonua to the property. Puu—hill or protuberance, and honua—of earth; but also meaning a place set apart for refuge and safety.

“Mother” Castle was 81 when in 1900 she moved into the great house with two middle-aged daughters. Her children, who by now all had homes of their own, thought to “add to the happiness of her few remaining years by building her a beautiful home.”

The pictures do not point to beauty; but it was indeed large and outstanding. In this heyday of the Victorian Gothic, the exterior was simple and functional, plainly enclosing a complex interior, as though influenced by the Chicago school of Louis Sullivan.

There were a porte-cochere, an entrance way, a great hall, a library (15 by 21 feet) with 5-foot wainscoting, a music room (19 by 26), and a lanai (20 by 20). These looked out over all the wide valley. The dining room (15 by 20) had its own fireplace. And also on the ground floor were sewing room, bath, laundry, pantry, kitchen, and storage rooms. A hydraulic elevator rose to the second floor, where there were six bedrooms, a sitting room (its outlook to waterfalls and rainbows up the valley), a septet of linen closets, and one supportive bathroom. Here were also covered balconies to the south and east, and an open balcony on the mountain side. A third floor had two bedrooms (16 by 19), a third (19 by 21), and a loggia to the east.

This comes to more than 6,000 square feet, without counting the balconies. Foundations were of cut basalt (bluestone), siding of cedar shingles, roof of slate tile. C. B. Ripley and Charles W. Dickey were the architects. It led its time with electricity and a telephone.

The 8.16 acres had been purchased at auction on May 12, 1898, for $6,250. A government survey station on the site had already been given a name from the past, Ulumalu. Many stone walls had to be erected. One

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**Fig. 2.** The Castle home about 1902–3, after the carriage road was built. See the text for analysis of this photo. Source: Manoa History Files, Lyon Arboretum.
at the mauka end was built by a young engineer named John Wilson (long-time mayor of Honolulu), on his first job in Hawaii after graduating from Stanford. (In this same year he would be engineer in charge of the first carriage road over the Nuuanu pali.) A large roomy barn was constructed first (“room enough for three carriages”), and here Mrs. Castle with her daughters Harriet and Caroline, and Isabella Fenwick, their housekeeper, moved in March 1899 while the house was emerging. They had come from the Castle homestead at Kawailoa on King Street.\[12\]

Most of the domestic staff were probably brought from there. Figure 2 shows some sixteen workers, a number of whom must have lived on the grounds, in a structure adjacent to the barn. These quarters seem to have contained ten rooms on each of two floors, with a bath on each floor. There was a kitchen. After the streetcar line came to Cooper Road in 1904, commuting would have been easier for the women.

Figure 2 is a very formal picture of some elegance. The four Japanese women are pretty and seem very young. One, in the lighter-colored kimono, has no apron. She may be a personal maid. The two children held in laps are Caucasian; an oriental child is being held by a man at the rear of the group. An older child in white sits on the distant hillside.

There are twelve men, only one of whom is in field worker’s clothes. All the others have white shirts and neckties (most bow). At the far left may be the luna; he seems older, and he sports the only moustache, also the only felt hat in a panoply of straws. Two in the center (one holding a child) have wing collars. They may be waiters or butlers. All sleeves are held up by elastic bands. The groom has a wing collar, a vest with gold watch chain, and white knickers. Most of the men seem to be in their early twenties.

The landscape gardening is sparse and unimpressive. At the upper far left is a papaya, then two clumps of orphis palms, and a grove of bananas heading downhill. At the house can be seen the start of a cat’s claw vine. Along the road are bushy castor beans, a California pepper, at far right a hibiscus, and there seem to be gardenias. Just below the orphis palms is a clipped oleander hedge.

Manoa valley itself was a grand landscaping. It could be seen from three different sides of the house, on every level, through large plate-glass windows—no leaded or diamonded glass panes—outlook made the style. The three Castle ladies, living in the carriage house during the planning

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**Fig. 3.** A postal card view of Puuhonua, looking mauka. The card was mailed to Japan in 1902. Reproduction by Thelma Greig of original in Manoa History Files, Lyon Arboretum.
and construction, may have intervened in the plans. The final product does seem more grown than designed. (Many years later daughter Caroline told John Stokes that this was “the happiest year of my life.”)

The house commanded the valley. Caroline wrote, “The only family I can remember as living in the valley at that time was that of Maryjane Montano and a few other Hawaiians living on the edge of their taro patches on the floor of the valley . . .; white poppies called Mexican thistles covered the hillside. I rode a bicycle to and from town but the road was too steep to pedal up.”

A carriage way was needed. In 1902 the “S.N. Castle Estate” exchanged some Waikiki lands for eleven adjoining acres. Now a road could be built and new water reservoirs installed above the house, where there was pasture land. Caroline said that they had planted “most of the trees.”

The social life expanded in 1904 when the electric trolley advanced along Oahu Avenue to Cooper Road. From there the climb to Puuhonua was steep and narrow, described by Jane Winne as “just like a narrow cow Path.” There were Sunday afternoon musicals, with the guests as the performers. Ellen Williams Tucker remembers coming up once with her Punahou class, probably in the fall of 1905, for ti-leaf sliding down the muddy slopes; it was “swift and wet.” (After some fourteen years she would return to live there.)

THE ORPHANAGE

In 1898 there was set up the “Mary Castle Trust” as a vehicle for her charity and many interests. One of these was the support of a kindergarten and school for young orphans. The old Kawaiola home (at 610 S. King Street, where the Castles had lived since 1838) was now available. In January 1900 it was offered to the FKCAA. A matron’s salary was pledged for five years. By April three orphans were present.

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**Fig. 4. Puuhonua and Castles on June 20, 1903.** Note the large rock holding the carriage in place. The small white dog at the right must have remained as still as the rock. The crouching groom at the left seems to be offering his straw hat (perhaps as pacifier?) to the horse.

“Mother” Castle’s tenure of the Manoa house was not long. She died March 13, 1907, at 88 years. The next and different life of the house and area now commenced. It became the “Castle Home for Children” on May 7 (see Figure 5). During the original construction period in 1898–1900, several cottages had been built—with such names as Lodge, Gables, Chalet, Lanai (in one of which lived Miss Frances Lawrence, who was superintendent of FKCAA for many years). Between Chalet and Lanai, in 1903, Frances Gould built a two-story house; she later became “Matron” of the hillside orphanage.

The annual reports of the FKCAA describe a worthy charitable effort as well as an era. Moving-in day was February 19, 1908. Mrs. Harriet Castle Coleman, who headed the association, lent a horse and wagon; two more were found. George Castle paid for the move—$13.50. Two of the cottages were rented for a total of $27 a month, providing money for the children’s carfare, almost the only extra expense.

By the end of the year three cottages were rented, bringing in $45. Farming was well along. There was a surprising variety: sweet potatoes (which long before had grown above and then rolled down the same slopes, having been planted to feed the army of Kamehameha I), popcorn, peanuts, cabbage, lettuce, onions, beans, carrots, beets, radishes, parsnips, squash. Roselle (for jelly) had already produced two crops. A “wonderberry” had been sent for, but this is not heard of again. The students invested their Christmas gift money in chickens, and at year end there were fifty, “which keep us in eggs.” There were four ducks, all gifts.

The “Rules and Regulations”, contain some precautions. Ages for admittance were from 3 to 12. The youngest attended school on the premises. Those going out to school were expected to return immediately and to report then “to the Matron.” “Regular duties should be given each child . . . which will serve to educate the child in domestic work.” Parents and friends must telephone in advance and may visit once a week. “The father of an illegitimate child should not be allowed the privilege on the premises of seeing his child.”

Now we move to the years after World War I. Frances Gould had become Matron. Ellen Williams (Mrs. C. V. Tucker) came in 1919 “as Horticulturist and Shopteacher. I organized the lessons by appointing the children to different jobs out of doors—vegetable garden, rabbits,

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Fig. 5. The orphans at Puuhonua, about 1910. The carefully posed pictures appeared in an annual report of FKCAA. By permission of the trustees, Kindergarten and Children’s Aid Association—Pre-Schools of Hawaii.
Wonder Rabbits—Belgian Hares—very big—dairy, and flower garden. . . . I liked that job very much.” She writes (in 1978) that Mrs. Coleman was “the person behind the home—the money person.” Once she was supported by Mrs. Maude B. Cooke (a director of the FKCAA) for having spanked an impudent boy. They were “under the Dewey system—no one should spank. We had to study John Dewey books to get the feel of how to treat the children.” Miss Williams became the matron (at a doubled salary) for the last year and a half that the school was open, after the resignation of Frances Gould, who had become ill.24

Among those teaching in the last years was Geltrude Mazzarella (from Capri), who said she had been a fellow student of Dr. Maria Montessori and had worked with her in California. She was married at the home in 1920 to Willie Diem, a Swiss engineer with the Honolulu Iron Works. They were married by moonlight in front of the house. Eventually they lived in one of the cottages for some fifteen years. Mrs. Diem remembers there usually being about 20 girls, all orphans. “The Salvation Army had the boys and ran a Boys’ School.”25

In 1924 Mrs. Coleman died. The FKCAA was told to close the orphanage. Miss Williams spent three months trying to find homes for the children, then left to start her own nursery in Palolo.26

The “Mary Castle Trust” officers had already referred to the new United Welfare Campaign as the reason for discontinuing the support of the parent FKCAA. The 1923 announcement had made a passing reference to “the responsibilities entailed by the ownership of this valuable property.”27

Manoa valley was suddenly ready for more development. Puuhonua was no longer the only large house. Now a subdivision loomed on its very grounds. Percy M. Pond, a well-known realtor, was asked to make suggestions for the best use of the property.28 (See Figure 6.)

On May 23, 1924, Pond himself bought it, paying $66,500 for the lower half. He would put in two new streets parallel to and above Manoa Road, the top street named Puuhonua, the other Kaulumalu (this eventually became an extension of Ferdinand Street). Pond made 40 lots on 3.2 acres. The new world of urban growth had overtaken this sanctuary, now to be called Castle Terrace.29

Suddenly the charitable mission of the home was given a new and quite different direction. By a streetside encounter and a friendly snap decision, the house and its remaining acreage became the supportive center for the Pan-Pacific Union, which until then had been mostly known of as the sponsor of savant talks at luncheon time. It had been created in 1908 by a forward-looking Southerner, Alexander Hume
FIG. 6. The 1920 map shows the private carriage road around the Castle home and the streetcar route to Cooper Road.
Ford (1868–1945), who had also organized the Outrigger Canoe Club in that same year and also the Trail and Mountain Club. He was indeed a doer. Ford, in 1933, told how Pan-Pacific obtained the use of Puuhonua:

“One day during the holding of the 1st Pan-Pacific Union Food Conservation Congress in 1924, I stopped George [Castle] on the street and jokingly said, ‘Say, George, what do you mean by cutting up that magnificent property in Manoa Valley and selling it, when I wish it?’

‘Ford, you want it for the Pan-Pacific Union? Wait a minute,’ and he rushed to the nearest telephone and rang up a number. I heard him as he called ‘Oh! That you Percy [Pond]? I say, how much of the Manoa property have you cut up into lots? What, all but seven acres and the big homestead? Well, don’t cut up any more. I have given it to Ford for the Pan-Pacific Union.’ William [Castle] grinned and said, ‘Good,’ when he heard of it, and that is how we acquired a quarter of a million dollars worth of property for the work of the Pan-Pacific Union. This gave us a prestige about the Pacific that I truly believe will someday result in the building by all the nations of the Pacific of a Pan-Pacific Palace in Honolulu.”

William R. Castle wrote to Ford on December 25, 1924, offering a 2-year lease without rental and with possibility of renewal. There was to be no cutting of trees or changes to buildings and grounds. Ford had already reported to the Castles of ongoing experiments in radio, and the shipment “of the largest telescope in the world for the use of the Pan-Pacific Research Institute.”

In the following sixteen years the union became a sort of early “think tank” capable of providing “perfect quiet for study, remote from disturbances, with ample room for visiting scientists to live and work.” Many other institutions were happy to cooperate. The Bishop Museum lodged research fellows there, often for a year at a time. There was one charge for the lodgers: a visitor was expected to give at least one of the weekly public lectures. A Junior Science Council was added. In 1933 Ford wrote that “twenty students of all races and from many localities, members of the Pan-Pacific Student’s Club who are attending the University of Hawaii, are occupying the barn and carriage house [3-carriages big] in a cooperative housekeeping arrangement and working out in their own way ideas which may promote happier international relations.”

The Pan-Pacific Union fostered the Pan-Pacific Research Institution, which was allotted space in the quarterly magazine of the Union. The research arm described its interests as follows: “Problems of Food
Production, Distribution, Conservation and Consumption, as well as on Public Health, and Race and Population Problems as Related to the Countries Bordering on the Pacific.”

There were Friday night suppers, for which often the main dish was an okra soup prepared by Ford. When David Starr Jordan, first president of Stanford, came, Mrs. Louis Henke was asked to prepare a more palatable meal. Dr. and Mrs. Jordan stayed for three months in 1925. The list of distinguished and to-be distinguished visitors/lodgers is very long: Burton Holmes, on a lecture tour; Dr. Martha Jones, nutritionist at Queen’s Hospital, who stayed for a year; Dr. Wilhelm Krauss, biologist from Sweden, who stayed five years; French oceanographers Eric de Bisschop and Joseph Tatibouet; a young student of Hawaiian named Sam Elbert, who would become a distinguished linguist and a chief lexicographer of the Hawaiian language; Harold Stearns of the U.S. Geological Survey, who would be lured away by the University of Hawaii; Dr. Hachiro Yuasa, entomologist and later president of Doshisha University in Kyoto; Dr. P. J. S. Cranes, head of the Dutch East Indies Agriculture Department; some debaters from Australia; and forty delegates to the 1st Pan-Pacific Women’s Conference in 1928, with women “of all races.”

There were usually twenty to thirty students, each occupying a small bedroom (and a bath to each floor); some were in the barn. They hired their own cook and launderer. Such lesser scholars came to the big house only twice a year; they complained that they were not allowed to explore it. Student artists stayed here, two preparing themselves for a career in Walt Disney’s world.

It is apparent that the ambience of Puuhonua combined with the diligence and charisma of Ford to make the Pan-Pacific Union an important intellectual center in Hawaii from 1924 to World War II. Ford died in 1945.

In the mid-thirties the Depression affected the external support, so that ample living space and spacious grounds could no longer guarantee success and survival. Then that base itself was lost. Manoa Valley was at last surrendering to the next wave of residential development all its vegetable and flower gardens. In June of 1940, as John Stokes explained (in 1941), “A policy of conservation, no doubt, adopted by the Castle Foundation, has decided it to resume this valuable property. . . .” The Honolulu Advertiser of November 3, 1940, reported that an “old landmark . . . in Manoa Valley, one-time show place of the islands,” was purchased by Home Factors, Ltd. for $25,000 for a subdivision. This was the 7 and 1/2 acres rescued by Ford and George Castle in 1924.
The big house was finally torn down in 1941. The other associated structures lay empty, and gradually they disintegrated. Termites had long been a problem. Today there still remain many dry stone walls, the original massive stone foundations, and the hand-hewn steps leading to different levels. It is still possible to dig up pieces of the slate roof. In recent years there have been unearthed a charcoal-burning iron and a miraculously intact light bulb dated 1898.

Thirty houselots were made available in this inner area, connected by further extensions of Puuhonua and Ferdinand Streets. Some of these lots could be divided. There are now 39. At first, sales were slow. World War II was in progress; the future seemed uncertain. Today 79 owners share the original and lasting wonders of the legendary area: mountain and ocean views, a cool climate, just enough rain, frequent rainbows and sun-glinted waterfalls—all that Mother Castle had come to live with and enjoy in her last years.

NOTES

Unpublished materials not otherwise located are in the Manoa History files at Lyon Arboretum. We received much support from the Manoa History Group, whose director is Miss Beatrice Krauss; general editor, Charles S. Bouslog.

2 Ibid., p. 18.
3 Ibid., p. 83.
4 Ibid., pp. 82, 93.
5 Ibid., p. 120. Castle quotes his grandfather as saying in the PCA in 1856: "... with the requisite capital these isles are capable of producing 50,000 tons of sugar, instead of 550 tons which was the record of 1856."
6 Jane Winne, "Fifty Years in Manoa/By a Child of the Valley—Maka," unpublished notes on conversations with Maka (Harris) Woolsey.
7 "Manoa Valley," HAA, 1892, p. 112.
8 "Castle Home in Manoa," HSB, 5 May 1934.
10 John F. Stokes, "Puuhonua: the Castles in Manoa," Pan-Pacific Magazine, 5 (1941), 1. This 5-page article is an elegy for Puuhonua.
11 "Beautiful Homes in Hawaii," PCA, 1 January 1900.
12 HSB, 5 May 1934.
13 Stokes, "Puuhonua," p. 2; HSB, 5 May 1934.
14 Land Grant 4635 for 4166, HBC.
15 HSB, 5 May 1934.
16 Winne, "Fifty Years."
17 Letter, Mrs. C. V. Tucker to the authors, 29 November 1978.
"Annual Report" (for 1900), Free Kindergarten & Children's Aid Association. Annual reports of the FKCAA may be found at the main office on the grounds of the Mother Rice Kindergarten in Moiliili. The reports (bound with those from other centers) are used by permission of the trustees of the successor organization, "Kindergarten and Children's Aid Association—Pre-Schools of Hawaii."


Tax Records, Castle Foundation Papers, 1890–1935, HMCS.


Ibid., p. 31.

Ibid., pp. 33–4.

Letter, Tucker to the authors.

Personal interview with Geltrude Diem, August 1979, by Rachel Day Henke. The first name appears twice as "Gertrude," but at all other times with the middle "l".

Letter, Tucker to the authors.

"Annual Report" for 1924, FKCAA.

Percy Pond, letters written to the Mary Castle Trust, Castle Foundation Papers.

Ibid.


Letter, W. R. Castle to Pan-Pacific Union, 29 July 1924; letter, Pond, December, 1924, Castle Foundation Papers. (It was a 6-inch telescope which was noted a few years later set in a window where it was used for looking at ships off Waikiki.)


Interview with Beatrice Krauss; Stokes, "Puuhonua," p. 5.

Ibid., p. 4.

Ibid.