

WILLIAM HARRISON RICE II

THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

William Harrison Rice II

(1901-1975)

Mr. Rice is the namesake-descendant of a missionary teacher who came to the Hawaiian Islands in 1841.

His parents, Mr. and Mrs. William Henry Rice, owned and operated the Fairview Hotel on Kauai, which eventually became known as the Lihue Hotel and his father was also the sheriff of Lihue for forty-three years.

Mr. Rice received his early education on Kauai and was among the first students to attend the Kauai High School. He later attended Punahou School, Thatcher Preparatory School, Yale University, and the University of Hawaii. He has been employed in both the sugar and the pineapple industries and in construction work at Pearl Harbor, the Philippines, and Midway.

His interview contains family history and anecdotes, as well as some explanations of old-time Hawaiian practices and methods of fishing.

Mrs. J. A. Veech, Interviewer

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INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM HARRISON RICE II

At Haena, Kauai

In July 1971

R: William Harrison Rice

V: Mrs. John Alexander Veech

R: William Harrison Rice, the son of William Henry Rice, the Sheriff of Lihue, as everybody knew him.

V: Who was the son of William. . .

R: William Hyde Rice, who was born at Punahou School [July 23, 1846]. William Henry, my father, was born in Lihue.

V: And the first William Harrison. . .

R: William Harrison Rice, born in 1813 at the time of Tippecanoe--Battle of Tippecanoe--and that's why he got the name of William Harrison, after President Harrison. [The battle at Tippecanoe in November 1811 made William Henry Harrison a national hero; and in October 1813, during the War of 1812, he established American supremacy in the West by defeating the Indians and the British.]

V: Oh, I see. I didn't know that.

R: Who was General Harrison at that time, see.

V: But the oldest son is named W. H. Rice and it's William Harrison, William Hyde, William Henry. . .(they say these names in unison)

R: William Harrison, and then William Hyde again.

V: Uh huh, that's your son, William Hyde [II].

R: Yes.

V: Okay, that's straightened out. Now go ahead.

R: You were asking about the hotel in Lihue. Grandfather and

Grandmother [William Hyde and Mary Waterhouse Rice] used to have everybody that got off the boat--came and lived off them--so they said in self-defense they built this hotel. And it was first called the Fairview Hotel.

V: I heard that before.

R: I remember the sign out there said Fairview. And then father changed it to Lihue Hotel and then to the Kauai Inn, wasn't it?

V: That was after it changed hands, though.

R: Yeh. (recorder is turned off and on again) I can tell of Father as the sheriff. Father was presented with this problem as a young sheriff. The Mama-sans that worked for the generation before him complained that they didn't get much money because their husbands were losing at gambling. Now these poor fellows on the plantation didn't get very much money to lose at gambling but the Isenbergs and Father's own father and mother and the Wilcoxes all complained to Father about this gambling. "You must stop it, Willie!" So Willie told Mother one Saturday, "Mary, you're cooking breakfast tomorrow morning." Mother said, "Why?" He said, "Never mind why, you're cooking Sunday breakfast."

The best paid people around Lihue were the various family cooks, so he staged a raid on Saturday night and threw all the cooks in jail, including his own. The Rice cooks, his brother Charlie and his father, the Wilcox cooks, the Isenberg cooks. So on Sunday morning when these good people got up--and their Sunday morning breakfast was a big Sunday meal--they didn't have anybody to cook breakfast and so they had to go and bail their cooks out of jail. They have never complained since about the gambling in the camps. (laughter)

V: I think that's lovely.

R: Huh?

V: That's lovely. Now when was your father elected? Or was he appointed? How did he become sheriff?

R: I'm not too clear. I think county government came in in 1905. We became a territory before that but I think they had a county government and I'm not positive. [The county government was created in 1907 by the Territorial Legislature and became effective on January 4, 1908.] And Father succeeded Jack [John] Coney and prior to that, I think, Old Man Sam Wilcox had been sheriff. [He was appointed at first, then later it became an elective job.]

V: Do you know whether that was by appointment or by election?

R: Well, when county government came in my father was elected.

V: And he was sheriff for how many years?

R: Forty-three years.

V: Besides running the hotel.

R: And he was not opposed too often as sheriff.

V: Yeh, I can imagine. (chuckles) Did he ever get in the senate, or was it Uncle Charlie in the senate?

R: Charlie [Charles Atwood] and Harold [Waterhouse] Rice were the two in the senate. Father never ran for office in town. My grandfather was a member of the House of Nobles.

V: Oh yes, pre-. . .

R: That was during the monarchy. During Kalakaua's reign and Queen Liliuokalani. And apparently they had dual citizenship then because Old Man Paul Isenberg, who was a subject of the Kaiser, was also a member of the House of Nobles.

V: I see. Now let's go back. You were born in 19. . .

R: I was born in 1901.

V: The oldest of the five children.

R: I had two brothers and two sisters. [Paul Girvin Rice, Richard Hans Rice, Mary Dorothea Rice, and Helen Flora Rice.]

V: And you went to school on this island?

R: I went to the first class of Kauai High School.

V: You did?

R: One year. And then I went to Punahou [School] and my family seemed to think that I had a penchant for girls so they sent me to a boys' school in California where I had a horse. (V chuckles)

V: That was Thatcher.

R: Thatcher Preparatory for Yale principally then because the old two headmasters were both Yale men and would not let

us take examinations for any colleges. We had to pass the college boards and then go there. If you passed the college boards, your chances are you went there. If you didn't, you'd have to go to Podunk for all they cared.

V: And you went to Yale [University]?

R: I went to Yale a year and then came back to the University of Hawaii and played around there for awhile.

V: Then you went to H.C. and S. [Hawaiian Commercial and Sugar Company]?

R: No, I went to Pioneer Mill Company. I used to ride horseback all over the country where those hotels are now. When I was a boy here on Kauai, we used to go over to Hanalei and Haena and on the way, I believe at Anahola and Lumahai, we had to go by scow and you grabbed ahold of a rope and went across the river that way.

V: Now were you riding horseback over that or were you riding buggy or car?

R: Buggy, before the cars.

V: Edith [Rice Plews] told me one time about the buggies going down into Anahola Valley being held with ropes as they went down the road, it was so steep. Or was that Moloaa? Do you remember that?

R: Well, it could have been more like Anahola. Moloaa didn't present a problem.

V: No, I think it was Anahola she told me about. They used to, the cowboys, put ropes on the buggies on one side to let them down.

R: Yeh, to brake them down.

V: Well, tell us something about Hanalei and Haena in the days when you were kids out there.

R: My son once asked me, "Dad," he says, "how about the good old days?" "Well," I said, "if you really appreciate the good old days, if you had a toothache our dentist didn't come down from Honolulu but once every two or three weeks and then he could take care of your tooth. Those are good old days." (laughter) Huh?

V: That's right. (recorder is turned off and on again)

- R: In the good old days, though, at Haena we could go fishing and get lobsters. There was no season so we could always have lobsters. And the wana [sea urchin] were easier to catch. You could net them but now you can not.
- V: That's right, illegal nets. There used to be a story about Mama Nakatsuji and your grandmother. Mama calling the household to say that your grandmother was coming. "She go down now." Did she tell you that story? Every time your grandmother would pass the Nakatsuji Store, then Mama would ring the telephone out at the Haena house to tell the servants, "She go down now," so they would be prepared to meet her. Have you heard that? Is that a true story? (both chuckle)
- R: My grandmother, you know, whenever we went to Haena, she plotted the course. We'd get as far as Kealia and somebody would run out from the Kealia Store and stop us; had a watermelon to put in the car. (chuckles) Grandmother was terrible that way, she'd waylay you, you know, along the way because she was one of the few people--she was one of the original holders of the telephone stock and she had the franking privilege. She could call anyplace at anytime without having to pay because she was one of the original frank holders in the Kauai Telephone Company and owned one of the two telephones in Lihue--on the island, I think, at one time. Kauai was not the first one to get a telephone because they had it on Maui. H. P. Baldwin had it to call from his office to his mill, I think. And Grandmother was about next. The family's been talking ever since. (laughter)
- ["The first telephones in Hawaii were installed on Maui in 1878 when a merchant, C. H. Dickey, ran a line between his store and his home at Haiku. Later Mr. Dickey became the agent for Bell telephone equipment in Hawaii," according to Thrum's Almanac, 1968.]
- V: The telephone is still a part of everybody's family.
- R: Well, the change from the horse and buggy days to the car was quite a transitional period, both in the roads and these gasoline buggies.
- V: Now when your grandfather went to Hanalei, they used to stop and have a camp meeting or something at the Kukui Hill. Wasn't he still a wandering minister?
- R: No, he was the governor of Kauai and King Kalakaua and he would go along and take this whole entourage over there, sideboards and everything. Some of them went down fishing and others killed the steer and they had a wonderful time

and they camped out. I think they took a week or so to get there.

V: Just like the queens used to go around Oahu, stopping all around.

R: Yeh. Yeh.

V: Um hm. But I thought he also preached at that point.

R: No. Grandfather was never a minister. He was a lay preacher. He would preach in the Hawaiian Church in Lihue when no minister was present. [He was also a teacher.]

V: Now all that generation spoke fluent Hawaiian.

R: That generation did. The next generation were not encouraged to speak.

V: You mean your father's generation.

R: Were not encouraged to speak too good Hawaiian because they thought that there were a lot of nubile young ladies around that they might chase if they knew the language too well. (chuckles)

V: That generation wasn't allowed to do the hula either, right?

R: The hula, as far as I was concerned, as I understand it, the hula was never done by the alii and nobility. The hula was danced for them and that's why they were not permitted to dance the hula. The time, one time, that Kalakaua was coming to Kauai to visit, the local Hawaiians took my father out as a little boy and tried to teach him the hula but Grandfather caught up with that one and that ended that. (chuckles)

V: Now, to go back to speaking Hawaiian, Uncle Philip [La Vergne Rice] spoke good Hawaiian.

R: No. No.

V: Didn't he? I used to hear him do it.

R: Father spoke pretty good Hawaiian and you know at Haena we were on one party line from Lihue and I think there were fifteen or twenty people on the line and when the phone rang that's the way they got their news, so Father had police affairs he would talk [about] in Hawaiian so nobody would understand except those who knew Hawaiian, like Mrs.



Deverill. (chuckles)

V: Um hm, and his policemen were all Hawaiian, weren't they?

R: Yes.

V: Um hm. We left you riding horseback at Pioneer Mill. After that what did you do?

R: Oh, I went over to the Maui Agricultural Company and switched from sugar cane to pineapples but you still had to get up early in the morning yet. (chuckles)

V: Um hm. And then you came back and worked with construction at Pearl Harbor.

R: Yes and then I went to the Philippines after that.

V: And Midway, was it?

R: And came back to Midway, where there are lots of birds. Now I was just thinking of the early days when we shifted, I remember that a fellow would see a car coming and he'd get out of his buggy and he'd go and hold his horse's head so the horse wouldn't run away and the horse wouldn't pay any attention. The driver was more scared of the automobile than the horse was, you know. (chuckles)

V: You kids used to go to school by horse and buggy.

R: First grade, I rode my pony to school. When I came to the third grade, I had a buggy--a pony cart--and I took my brother Paul, then my brother Richard. And the only anecdote that I have that's worthwhile on that was that when we were leaving school one day, Percy Lydgate stuck a stick in the back wheels of the buggy and it just flatted and scared the pony and as the pony stepped out and turned the corner we were all thrown out. We got the buggy righted but my youngest brother, Richard, was a little stout fella but when he fell out, he fortunately fell on the cushion and so he didn't hurt himself but he started to cry. So I asked him what the trouble was. He said he had to walk home.

V: (chuckling) He didn't want to walk.

R: He didn't want to walk home. It's like the time my father was getting on a horse and kid brother Dick was sitting on the steps--I guess he was about four--and the horse plowed Father off on the mud and he said, "Do it again, Papa!" And my father was of the short fuse-type, you know; it

didn't please the old man a bit. (chuckles)

V: Maybe we should go back more with that. Your father was the oldest.

R: He was the oldest. He was born in 1874.

V: And he was the sheriff and ran the hotel. Charlie was next.

R: Charlie [Charles Atwood Rice] was next. He ran the ranch and was in both houses of the legislature. And then Arthur [Hyde Rice].

V: Who went to Oahu.

R: Went to Oahu.

V: And made his living actually in real estate, right?

R: Stockbroking and real estate. And Harold [Waterhouse Rice] went to Maui and worked at H.C. and S. Company and then married one of the Baldwin girls [Charlotte McKinney Baldwin] and spent the rest of his life on Maui. Then Philip [La Vergne Rice], after being married and not being much of a success as a plantation man, was talked into going away to law school [University of Chicago Law School, 1914-16]. That was later.

V: I didn't know he'd ever been on the plantation.

R: He worked at Koloa [Sugar Company]. On that score, my Uncle Arthur had been one of the Stanford greats of football in his day. It was a cold morning over there at Makee Sugar Company where he was working on the plantation and he had this nice sweater with a great big red S on it and this Portuguese comes along and he says, "Oh, Salvesh!" My uncle never wore his sweater again. (laughter)

V: Uncle Harold played football at. . .

R: Princeton.

V: And then Kipu Ranch belonged originally to your grandfather?

R: Yes.

V: And so then he gave it to Uncle Charlie to run.

R: Charlie was the manager but all the family held stock in

it when my grandfather died. Grandfather divided his property, I think, about 1913 when it looked as if the laws were going to be changed and the [Woodrow] Wilson administration took over in Washington. (the following sentence is indistinct) So you didn't earn it. That would be involved when we did that.

[President Wilson's New Freedom legislation included "a national income tax that was levied according to wealth" and the proposed Sixteenth Amendment was ratified on February 25, 1913.]

(recorder is turned off and on again)

V: Going back until Uncle Philip finished law school.

R: Well, after he got back from law school he hung out his shingle here in Lihue and then he was later on appointed Circuit Court judge in Lihue and from there he went to the Supreme Court and he was chief justice of the local Supreme Court--Hawaiian [or Territorial] Supreme Court, I guess you'd call it--till his retirement at the time of the change from territorial to state status. [1956-1959]

V: Um hm. I see. Who was governor then? Oh, [William Francis] Quinn.

R: Wilfred Tsukiyama followed Philip as chief justice though.

V: Um hm. Um hm. And Philip was a much-loved judge on this island, wasn't he?

R: I never considered my uncle Philip a really successful lawyer because he was too honest. He made a good judge but he was too honest to be an attorney and I have a thing about attorneys. I think there's two things that aint so and that's lashless fishing reels and honest lawyers. (laughter) Well, really, I do feel that way about it.

V: But it is true that as a judge. . . . I remember when Hawaiians would come and he would walk out of his chambers and walk down the hall and talk with the Hawaiians and straighten out their problems without going into court.

R: Oh yes. And I ran into several people--is this (recorder) on?--in Honolulu. I was at an auction one day and [Maurice] Moe Lipton introduced me to people just for the hell of it and somebody said, "Why, it was your uncle that straightened out our affairs in the courts when he was on Kauai. He changed our name and so forth and back to our legal names and your aunt Emily also came in and testified."

- V: Well now, your father. . .
- R: Father was not a judge but many a Sunday morning I've seen a couple come in and get Father out and sit in front and go away smiling or laughing at each other but they were madder than the devil until Father straightened them out.
- V: Um hm. As sheriff the people turned to him.
- R: He said his job was not to put people in jail, it was to keep them out of jail.
- V: Oh now, go back and tell about the famous jail where there were no doors. That was your father's doing too, wasn't it?
- R: No, that's on every island. They've all got that story. People would go out for the evening and find themselves locked out of the jail when they'd get home, they're quite angry about it. It's happened on Maui and here too.
- V: But they were pretty much put on their honor when they were in jail.
- R: I was thinking of the one anecdote that had to do with the jail when it was here in Lihue. Down below the present high school was where the site of the jail was. Well, Old Mr. Bishop, who managed the Lihue Store, used to go down to Mr. Coney's and they'd go fishing but they did some poker playing and a little drinking besides. In fact they did quite a bit of that. But Mr. Bishop one time said, "I've been coming down here fishing and I never bring any fish back. My wife has been scolding me about that so this time I'm going to take some fish home." He had a little sulky so he got this fish and tied it in a sack and stuck it in the back end of the sulky. He got up to the jail and the jailer had been tipped off and he hailed him and brought him in to have a few drinks. And then somebody went out and changed the sack of fish. When he got back up to Lihue, approximately where the Lihue--across the street from the present museum, where he lived, he takes his bag of fish in and spills it out on the kitchen floor and says, "Look what I've brought home." And it's a bunch of dried codfish they'd switched. (laughter)
- V: Now there must be some good stories about your father and the hotel too.
- R: (long pause) Yeh, but I don't think we'd better publish it.

- V: Oh. (chuckles) He was a great cribbage player.
- R: Oh yes. He'd play cribbage all day and all night.
- V: Like Uncle George Lycurgus, [owner of the Volcano House on Hawaii], hm?
- R: And he'd come back at two or three in the morning if somebody'd given him a story and he'd wake me up to tell it so he wouldn't forget it the next day, but those stories are not to be put on the tape.
- V: That's how you got your memory for stories.
- R: That's how I got my memory for the stories. I still remember them.
- V: Um hm.
- R: Turn that damn thing off, honey. (recorder is turned off and on again)
- V: Go ahead.
- R: It was in an isolated area and. . .
- V: This is the ice plant.
- R: Ice plant. Mr. Alfred Hills ran it and he was a Tahitian-Englishman from Tahiti, an American who came here as a young man. It must have been about the turn of the century because he and father were the same age. And the ice would come around Lihue horse-drawn, so you can imagine when a hundred pounds of ice would be about fifty pounds when it hit the Rice street in Lihue, you know.
- V: This was not called Rice Street, was it, till after your father died?
- R: It wasn't called Rice Street till just recently. Rice and Wilcox are a recent idea.
- V: There were none.
- R: There were no names on any streets.
- V: But to go back to the ice plant. You said it was on the stream, but where?
- R: Up past Halepaka on Judge Wilcox's land.

- V: Just freezing the pure water out there.
- R: I think it was because it was clear water, except the pasture of cows.
- V: Um hm. When was the store started and what's the story of the little man on top of the store?
- R: The store was started. . .
- V: This is Lihue Store.
- R: Lihue Store. It was first--well, the dope is up there on the little man that's up there inside the store now. The whole history of it is very interesting.
- V: Oh, I didn't know it was in public 'cause I only heard it from people like you. Did your mother have something to do with that little man?
- R: No, my great-grandmother befriended this sailor and he carved this little man out of one solid log with a spy glass and all and she didn't know what to do with it so she gave it to Lihue Store. So they've been looking for new business ever since with that fool thing and it's their trademark.
- V: It's their trademark. Yeh, I know it is now.
- R: And I'm disappointed they don't have what they used to have, sweatshirts with that fella on the back. I wanted one of those but they don't have them anymore.
- V: Now your mother we didn't go into. Your mother was a Girvin.
- R: She was a Girvin.
- V: How did she get down here and how did she meet your father?
- R: The way that these gals from Honolulu met my father and uncles was that their sisters would invite them down. Aunt Mary and Aunt Daisy and Aunt Emily [all daughters of William Hyde and Mary Waterhouse Rice]. That's how Philip met Flora [Benton]. She came down from Mills [College] with Emily one year.
- V: Oh, school friends brought back for a visit by the sisters.
- R: School friends of the sisters.

V: I see. Um hm.

R: And there was lots of horseback riding and eats were easy because all you had to do was to go and chop a few more chickens' heads off. Everybody ate pretty well, I guess, and had a good time. And the moonlight horseback rides were conducive to romance, I guess. You don't have to hang on to the steering wheel.

V: No, that's right. And weren't there some lovely picnics up the Wailua River?

R: They had lovely picnics up the Wailua River. And there was one thing that my Uncle Charlie arranged at the Hanalei River one time that I was very impressed with. It's a method of fishing by the Hawaiians that's called a kahi. This I do think is a good thing to have in the records. I saw some Hawaiians fishing for 'o'opu [goby fishes] way up back of Wailua the same way. A kahi is either bamboo or saplings of hau stuck into the mud at an angle so that the bottom, of course, is in the bottom of the stream and it comes out at an angle so that what we would do is get upstream a couple of hundred yards and make a lot of splashing around and these fish would go tearing madly down and go up on this kahi and the water would just stay under them, you see, and then they'd pick the fish off.

V: I'll be. . . . Oh, the angle was down, toward downstream.

R: Yeh. [One meaning of kahi is "a comb."]

V: I was thinking it was against the stream.

R: No, no, downstream.

V: And they'd just swim right up it.

R: No, you chase the fish down the stream.

V: Yeh, but I mean then they swam right up to the top of these things and then. . . [they became lodged on this comb].

R: They'd just slide up there on these fool things and they couldn't do anything else.

V: The sticks must have been very close together.

R: Oh yes, just so the water would just drop through, no fishes.

V: How fascinating. I never heard that before.

- R: Yeh.
- V: To go back, where are the Girvins from? California, wasn't it?
- R: The Girvin name comes from Ireland but I think that the Girvins were North Irish like the, everybody says, Scotch-Irish, heh? And they were supposed to have been kicked out of Scotland for stealing sheep, all those people, and that's when they became Northern Irishmen. (chuckling)
- V: Yeh.
- R: I don't know. I think so. That's what I've heard.
- V: But wasn't your mother's brother or someone a ship's captain?
- R: No. One of my mother's grandfathers was a whaling captain. His name was George Washington Wilfong so you can imagine when he was born.
- V: George Washington Wilfong. (chuckles)
- R: George Washington Wilfong was his name. That was her mother's father.
- V: Where did your mother go to school?
- R: My mother went to school at what would be called McKinley [High School] today. It was called the old Fort Street School when she went to school.
- V: Well, she came down fairly young then. Was she born here?
- R: My mother. Where?
- V: In the Islands.
- R: My mother was born in Wailuku, Maui.
- V: Oh, I didn't know that. It was her mother that came down.
- R: Her mother, I think, was born in Hana, Maui.
- V: Oh, I didn't realize it was that late, the generations on both sides. Um hm.
- R: Yeh. Yes, that's a strange thing. The oldest Wilfong child and the oldest Rice child born in the Islands were both born in Hana, Maui.



- V: That's interesting. That's right, because William Harrison's [Rice] first son was . . .
- R: William Harrison's daughter. William Harrison Rice's son was born at Punahou [School] in 1846 and they came in 1841, you see.
- V: Um hm. Um hm.
- R: And there was only one son.
- V: Then the Wilfong came as a whaling captain.
- R: He came as a whaling captain. He sold his ship and decided to locate in Hawaii.
- V: Married a missionary daughter or . . . ?
- R: No, no, no, no. It was somebody else that came in 'cause there were no missionaries on that side of the family. And actually, as missionaries we're Johnny-come-latelys. 1841. Why, there was a whole bunch of them running around here from 1820 on.
- V: That's right. Um hm.
- R: And my great-grandfather was not a preacher.
- V: He was a teacher.
- R: He was a teacher.
- V: A teacher and a farmer.
- R: A teacher and taught the farm school at Punahou and helped Mr. Dole. He was sent to Punahou when Mrs. Dole died and his wife took Mrs. Dole's place in assisting Mr. Dole.

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END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed and edited by Katherine B. Allen, 1979

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## THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

In May 1971, the Watumull Foundation initiated an Oral History Project.

The project was formally begun on June 24, 1971 when Katherine B. Allen was selected to interview kamaainas and longtime residents of Hawaii in order to preserve their experiences and knowledge. In July, Lynda Mair joined the staff as an interviewer.

During the next seventeen months, eighty-eight persons were interviewed. Most of these taped oral histories were transcribed by November 30, 1972.

Then the project was suspended indefinitely due to the retirement of the foundation's chairman, Ellen Jensen Watumull.

In February 1979, the project was reactivated and Miss Allen was recalled as director and editor.

Three sets of the final transcripts, typed on acid-free Permalife Bond paper, have been deposited respectively in the Archives of Hawaii, the Hamilton Library at the University of Hawaii, and the Cooke Library at Punahou School.