

THEODORE FREDERICK TRENT

THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Theodore Frederick Trent

(1905 - )

Mr. Trent, a retired corporation executive, came to Hawaii from Michigan with his family in 1916 after the death of his father, Alfred Ireland. When his mother, the sister of Mrs. Lorrin Andrews Thurston, married Richard H. Trent in 1918 he assumed his stepfather's name.

He graduated from Punahou School in 1924, attended the College of the Pacific for two years, and graduated from Stanford University in 1928.

From 1928 until he retired in 1970, he held executive positions in the Trent Trust Company and the Mutual Building and Loan Society, both of which his stepfather founded; the Federal Savings and Loan Association, which he co-founded; and the Hawaiian Trust Company. He married Ruth A. Steventon in 1933.

During World War II he received a lifesaving medal from the United States government for saving a soldier from drowning.

Mr. Trent recounts personal and business experiences in Hawaii and relates some amusing anecdotes about prominent persons.

Lynda Mair, Interviewer

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2051 Young Street, Honolulu, Hawaii 96826

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INTERVIEW WITH THEODORE FREDERICK TRENT

At his Kailua home, 810 K. North Kalaheo Avenue, 96734

August 16, 1971

T: Theodore Frederick Trent

M: Lynda Mair, Interviewer

M: Yeh, so maybe the best thing is for you to just sort of start. . . . If you could, for instance, tell me where you were born and your parents' names and get a little hard facts to start with.

T: I was born in Evanston, Illinois and my family moved when I was one year old to the little town of Belding, Michigan which is located about twenty miles from Grand Rapids.

My own father [Alfred Ireland] died in Belding in 1914 and at that time my mother's sister, Mrs. Lorrin A. Thurston, wrote to her and suggested that she visit in Honolulu to get away from the scene of sadness occasioned by my father's sudden death. So in February 1916 my mother, my sister, brother and I arrived in Hawaii.

We came across from California on the ship Great Northern which later had its name changed to the H.F. Alexander and plied up and down the West Coast. I recall that the trip across the Pacific [Ocean] was exceedingly rough and all of us were seasick. The Great Northern was a very fast ship but did roll a great deal. I recall very vividly that we stopped first of all in Hilo and, during the one day we were there, traveled up to the volcano area and saw Kilauea in full action--a mighty inspiring sight. In those days, Kilauea was continually active. Our family finally arrived in Honolulu and lived in the Lorrin A. Thurston home at the end of Bates Street in Nuuanu valley.

M: Could I back you up just a bit?

T: Sure.

M: What was your mother's maiden name?

T: My mother's maiden name was Marcia Potter and my own father's name was Alfred Ireland, so my name was originally Ireland. My mother was the youngest of ten children

and my father was in the hardware business in Belding, in case that's of any interest.

M: So anyway, this Mrs. Thurston was a sister. She was a Potter too.

T: Mrs. Lorrin A. Thurston, that's correct. [Harriet Potter was the second wife of Lorrin Andrews Thurston. His first wife was Margaret Clarissa Shipman who died in childbirth.]

M: And where was the Potter family from?

T: St. Joe, Michigan. St. Joseph, right on Lake Michigan next door to Benton Harbor. There were ten children in that family. My mother was the youngest and Mrs. Thurston was one of the ten. And then there was also another sister living here in Honolulu, Mrs. Stella Pearson, and a brother, Mr. Frederick A. Potter, who was the manager of the Aquarium at Waikiki.

M: How did it come that all these got to Hawaii, as it just happened?

T: It all came about as a result of Harriet Potter getting a job selling tickets at the Chicago World's Fair in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Mr. Lorrin A. Thurston visited the World's Fair in Chicago, he liked the looks of this ticket-taker, Harriet Potter, and arranged to get introduced to her and they were ultimately married. And of course his home was in Hawaii so he brought her out here to live and as a result of that her brother, Fred Potter, and her sister, Stella Potter Pearson, also came to the Islands and, eventually, my mother arrived as a result of my Aunt Harriet living here.

M: I see. Well, that's interesting.

T: The Thurston home on Bates Street was a lovely two-story structure with a typical Hawaiian-style lanai and it was just high enough so that you could get a view of the Pacific Ocean all the way down from Nuuanu. This home burned several years later.

I attended school, when I first arrived, at the Valley School located on the corner of Nuuanu Avenue and Pauoa Road, just two blocks from where I was living with the Thurstons on Bates Street.

M: Was that a public school?

T: The Valley School was a private school operated by Mrs. Edward Dekum and Miss Louise Lucas. Mrs. Dekum's husband

was affiliated with the Honolulu Advertiser for many years. The school went from the first grade through the eighth grade and I, after completing the eighth grade, transferred to Punahou [School] and graduated from there in 1924.

Now is that the kind of stuff you want?

M: Right. Who else was in your graduating class at Punahou?

T: Among those [seventy-nine] in my class at Punahou were Marjory Atherton [Mrs. Chauncey Beech] Wightman, Louise Erdman [Mrs. Charles J.] Henderson, Charlotte McLean [Mrs. J. Russell] Cades and the late Billy [William] Worthington, as well as the Peck brothers--Philip [W.B.] and Jack [John Broderick].

My mother married a widower, Richard H. Trent, in 1918, as a result of which I changed my name from Ireland to Trent. Richard H. Trent met my mother through his connection with the First Methodist Church at the corner of Beretania and Victoria [streets]. My mother was a great music lover and thoroughly enjoyed playing both the piano and organ. It developed that the First Methodist Church needed a new organist and my mother learned of this and let the church officials know that she was interested in taking the position. She then became the organist at the church, as a result of which she met Richard H. Trent and Richard H. Trent was really a pillar in the church and they were subsequently married.

Prior to that time we had lived in three different places in Nuuanu. The last one before my mother's marriage to Mr. Trent was again on Bates Street--on the makai side of Bates Street--just a short distance from the old Thurston home. After the marriage we moved to the Trent home on Alewa Heights. (dog barking in the background) Mr. Trent owned three and a half acres on Alewa Heights which he had purchased for six hundred dollars when the property was auctioned by either the Territory of Hawaii or the City and County of Honolulu--I've forgotten which--in the early part of the twentieth century.

At that time there was no road leading up Alewa Heights and to reach the property, which he had purchased at auction, it was necessary to follow a trail. He developed this property and later constructed his home there. Many of the oldtimers recall the fact that Mr. Trent, my stepfather, had a zoo on his property on Alewa Heights. He had several monkeys in this zoo as well as two wallabies and two koala bears.

M: In cages or just running around?

T: In cages. My stepfather was a staunch Democrat. At one time he was elected City and County treasurer and was the

only Democrat in the entire City and County administration. (Lynda chuckles) Because of his Democratic leanings he named the koala bears Woodrow Wilson and Grover Cleveland. (Lynda laughs) Children from all over Honolulu used to visit the Trent zoo on Alewa Heights. The zoo received a good deal of publicity when a dog broke into the cage containing the male and female wallabies. The wallabies escaped and apparently ended up in Kalihi valley, as on many occasions wallabies were spotted in that area. And even at the present time I occasionally receive a phone call from an individual who has spotted a wallaby and somehow has learned of the history of how we happened to have them on Oahu.

M: Good grief! That's fascinating. You mean they got loose and they reproduced evidently?

T: Yeh. I was going to say--the ones spotted, of course, during the past many years have been descendants of the original two which escaped from my stepfather's zoo. Only one of these wallabies has ever been spotted on Windward Oahu and that was by--I've forgotten this guy's first name; I think it was Richard--Sedgwick, who was manager of The [Honolulu] Medical Group and spotted the wallaby near Kahana Bay when he was driving around the island one day. He telephoned me the following day to inform me of this fact.

My stepfather started the Trent Trust Company and the Mutual Building and Loan Society of Hawaii, Limited in 1904. The trust company's largest account, I recall, was the Richard Smart Guardianship. I went to work in the rental department of the Trent Trust Company and as assistant secretary of the Mutual Building and Loan Society after graduating from Stanford University in 1928.

M: Could you explain a little bit what the Mutual Building and Loan was?

T: It was a regular savings and loan association.

M: Mortgage type?

T: Mortgage and savings. Well, we might right there say that the Mutual Building and Loan Society applied and received a federal charter in 1936 and became the First Federal Savings and Loan Association of Hawaii.

During World War II [WW I], Richard H. Trent was the local representative of the Alien Property Custodian and his responsibility, of course, was to take over property owned by German interests here in the Islands.

M: How do you mean "take over"? Just hold it in trust for them until hostilities were over?

T: Yes, that's right. That's right.

M: They got it back?

T: Included among these German alien interests was the Hackfeld and Company, now AMFAC [American Factors Incorporated]. Also the interests of the Isenberg family. Without going into details concerning the complicated matter with reference to the Isenberg interests, suffice to say that the Isenberg family brought suit against my stepfather and the Trent Trust Company. This case went all the way to the Supreme Court of the United States and the Supreme Court refused to review the adverse ruling of the Circuit Court of Appeals in California. As a result of this, Trent Trust Company had to pay a large judgment to the Isenberg family and, in the opinion of the Territorial Bank Examiner, the payment of this judgment impaired the capital of the company.

As to whether or not the capital was actually impaired was determined by the appraisal at that time, 1931, of a large parcel of land fronting on Kapiolani Boulevard just beyond the Advertiser Building. Real estate values at that time were, of course, exceedingly low as a result of the Depression, so the appraisal made by the office of the Territorial Bank Examiner was extremely low, which led to the claim that the capital of Trent Trust Company had been impaired by the payment of the Isenberg judgment. It is ironic, of course, to realize that the property is undoubtedly worth now fifteen or twenty times what it was appraised for forty years ago.

After the adverse decision in the Isenberg case, the Cooke family--primarily Clarence H. Cooke, president at that time of the Bank of Hawaii, and his brother, Richard Cooke of C. Brewer & Company--got together with my stepfather and decided to take over the remaining assets of the Trent Trust Company, except for the stock and bond department which had been sold immediately to the Hawaiian Trust Company.

In the transaction with Hawaiian Trust Company, two of the Trent Trust Company employees transferred to Hawaiian Trust Company; a Chinese by the name of King Wai Ching and H.W.B. (Hod) White who had come from southern California to work for the stock and bond department at Trent Trust Company. Also there was one other Trent Trust Company employee who transferred and that was Rolla K. Thomas who was head of the department. Rolla K. Thomas came to Hawaii originally as a YMCA secretary and subsequently was employed by my stepfather at the Trent Trust Company.

When the Cooke interests took over Trent Trust, my stepfather moved the Mutual Building and Loan Society across the street to the Austin Building which occupied a portion of the present Financial Plaza site. I moved across the street with him and my business career continued in the savings and loan business until 1945 when Peter K. McLean, who was then president and manager of Hawaiian Trust Company, persuaded me to take a job with his company as an assistant vice president in the trust department.

Well, do you think of anything else?

M: I'm writing questions down I want to ask you before I forget.

T: You want to ask me something else?

M: Yeh, but right there, what you were just saying about McLean. That was 1945 then that you went to Hawaiian Trust.

T: Right.

END OF SIDE 1/1ST TAPE

Is this the kind of stuff you wanted?

M: Yeh, great. Really. You've told me more things than just about anybody I've talked to.

T: One of the first employees of the Cooke Trust Company, other than those who were taken over from Trent Trust Company, was Ruth A. Steventon . . .

M: I don't know that name at all.

T: . . . who later became Mrs. Theodore F. Trent.

M: Oh! (laughs) Yeh, we haven't got up to your wife yet. Well heavens, by 1945 you were married, right?

T: Yes, I was married in 1933. (dog barks loudly nearby)

M: And she was working for ...

T: Cooke Trust Company. And Cooke Trust Company handled the fire insurance on properties mortgaged to the Mutual Building and Loan Society and as a result of that I often had to go into the Cooke Trust Company office and I rather liked the looks of Judge Steadman's secretary. We should get in here too at some point that Judge A. E. Steadman, a son-in-law of Clarence Cooke, became the first



president and manager of the Cooke Trust Company and he employed Ruth A. Steventon as his secretary. Ruth A. Steventon had come here from Hartford, Connecticut, where she had a position as a secretary in Hartford's largest and most prominent law firm, to visit her sister who was married to an Army officer at Schofield Barracks. She brought with her a letter of introduction to Judge Albert [M.] Cristy of our local circuit court and when she decided to stay in Hawaii for awhile rather than return to Hartford, she presented her letter of introduction to Judge Cristy, and it was just at the time when the Cooke family had taken over Trent Trust Company. Judge Cristy, who was a good friend of Judge Steadman who was formerly a circuit court judge before he became president of the Cooke Trust Company, told Ruth that he knew Judge Steadman was looking for a secretary. So she went to see Judge Steadman and he, after giving her a shorthand test, employed her on the spot. As a result of that, I met her and we were subsequently married.

M: Is that S-T-E-V-E-N . . .

T: . . . T-O-N.

M: That's an unusual name, isn't it?

T: English.

M: Okay, let's see what else did I want to ask you about? Who did your father go into business with in 1904?

T: Just on his own.

M: Pardon me?

T: No, he just started the company cold.

M: Just on his own.

T: On his own, right.

M: What had he done before that, that he had the capital?

T: He was a bookkeeper. He came to Hawaii in the year 1901 after his wife passed away. He came from Los Angeles on a sailing vessel and it took one month for the trip and when he got here he took a job as bookkeeper at the Henry Waterhouse Trust Company, which has gone out of business since. So that's the way he became familiar with the trust business and decided to start his own company.

- M: That must have been pretty hard to do for somebody that new here, huh?
- T: Yeh.
- M: Didn't know all the old families and no connections.
- T: That's right, and being a Democrat and the Establishment being predominantly Republican, it was a tough row to hoe. But of course when the circuit court saw fit to appoint Trent Trust Company as guardian of Richard Smart's estate, why, that was quite a help to them because you of course know about Richard Smart.
- M: Um hm, just a little bit.
- T: It was really a large account.
- M: Um hm, I see. Okay. When he bought that land up on Alewa Heights, whose land was it?
- T: Well, either the Territory of Hawaii or the City and County of Honolulu, I've forgotten which. They owned lots of land that they auctioned off. You know all that land behind Diamond Head was auctioned off by the State of Hawaii where all those nice new homes are. You go along Kahala Avenue and look up to the left--all those new homes in there.
- M: Yeh, I've seen them.
- T: They have from time to time auctioned off land.
- M: How do you spell this Rolla Thomas that you mentioned?
- T: R-O-L-L-A. Rolla. I brought him into it, Lynda, because he is a well-known oldtimer. The oldtimers would remember him.
- M: Yeh, I don't know the name. I know Hod White's name of course. Now let's see, you have how many children?
- T: None.
- M: None? No children.
- T: Two silver-gray Persian cats (laughter), a brother and sister, ten years old.
- M: What happened to your stepfather and mother then? He continued with the Cooke Trust.

T: Well, he continued with the Mutual Building and Loan Society. It later became First Federal. In 1936 it became First Federal Savings and Loan, and he was right with them up until the time he died in 1939. My own mother died in 1929.

M: Oh, I see. And what happened to your brother and sister that came over?

T: Well, my brother died about twelve years ago; my sister lives outside of Philadelphia. And Richard H. Trent and my mother had one child, my half sister Mary Belle, who lives back in Long Island. [She married Henry J. Clay.]

M: What was your brother's name?

T: Robert R. Trent.

M: What did he do?

T: His career was in sugar. He was in the HSPA [Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association] office and in Manila and later he was with Waiakea Mill Company on the Big Island and another of the plantations on the Hamakua Coast. I can't remember the name of it. And then he was in the HSPA office here in Honolulu. And then later he was manager of the McCandless Ranch over on the Big Island.

M: Hm. What were your sisters names, so I'll have them down?

T: Helen, who is now Mrs. Karl B. Hoepfner, and Mary Belle-- that's two words with an E on the end of Belle--is Mrs. Henry J. Clay. She's still Mrs. Clay although she and her husband are divorced.

M: We got up to about 1945 when you went over to Hawaiian Trust as an assistant vice president. Is there anything since that time that you could continue on?

T: Well, I don't think so. Of course I've been involved in lots of extracurricular activities. You've got a copy of Men and Women of Hawaii, haven't you?

M: Yeh.

T: And Who's Who in America? I'm listed in Who's Who also and you can get all that dope there if you want to use any of it.

M: Okay. Yeh, right. (long pause) Were there any other people that you worked with or that worked with your fa-

ther in the Trent Trust Company and later Cooke Trust Company that would have . . .

T: Well, the head of the trust department of Trent Trust Company when I went to work there was Mr. Clinton Medcalf, and one of his children is Mrs. David R. Owens. Her name is Evelyn [Leialoha]. The head of the rental department was Mr. John Taylor Gray.

M: What year was this now that you started?

T: This is the Trent Trust Company. The time I started working for them?

M: Yeh, which was 1929 or so.

T: Nineteen twenty-eight. The fall of 1928. Mr. Charles R. Frazier was closely affiliated with my stepfather in real estate and they were instrumental in opening the Lanikai Tract. Half of the Lanikai property was purchased from William G. Irwin and the other half from Harold K.L. Castle and they're the ones that started that development over there in Lanikai.

The real estate department of Trent Trust Company was active and one of their most successful developments was Bingham Park.

M: Doesn't mean a thing to me. What is that?

T: Which is the area Diamond Head side of--how can I describe this? It's not immediately Diamond Head of Punahou Street, it's a little further toward Diamond Head and mauka of Beretania [Street]. Let's see, what is the nearest street? Well, McCully [Street] is Ewa of it. Well, mauka of Beretania in the McCully Street area. It was called Bingham Park and that was opened and developed by Trent Trust Company and was very successful.

Now I've got to run because I've got to be in town for a noon meeting.

M: Oh.

T: Now if you need more let me know. (counter at 219)

END OF FIRST INTERVIEW

BEGINNING OF SIDE 1/2ND TAPE

Second interview, March 1972

M: I've read over your interview after I got it typed, and

you gave me a good kind of an outline.

T: Yeh. (there is a loud surface noise throughout this tape)

M: So this morning maybe you could give me more in detail about your earliest years here and your childhood.

T: More detail about my earliest years here?

M: Um hm.

T: Well, I guess I told you I was in the fourth grade when I came. You don't have what I said before so you don't know whether I'm repeating or not.

M: Well, you know, I typed it and I read it a couple of times so I've got--I'll steer you along. So you just go ahead if you can. What you told me was that you went to this Bates Street school . . .

T: Well no, I lived on Bates Street and I went to the Valley School on the corner of Pauoa Road and Nuuanu Avenue.

M: Yeh, and you went on from there. What I'd like is more about just what you did as children; any events that you can remember that involved you or your friends or family.

T: You mean events on Bates Street?

M: Yeh, beginning there.

T: Did I mention the fact that my aunt and uncle had this place up on Tantalus?

M: No. You told me about your stepfather's place and the zoo and all that.

T: Well, one of my recollections during my grammar school days is the many visits we made to the Tantalus home of my aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. Lorrin A. Thurston. Mr. Thurston was an avid land shell collector and he took me on many excursions with him throughout the Tantalus area looking for land shells. Incidentally, when he passed away his entire land shell collection was given to the Bishop Museum.

M: What would you do, go camping?

T: No, they had a home up there.

M: Oh, you'd just go hiking.

T: From their home.

M: How did you get up to Tantalus? Was there a road at that point?

T: In going to the Thurston home we either hiked from the end of Makiki Street or drove up in the family's cars. I have no other particular recollections concerning my four years at the Valley School other than the fact that shooting marbles was one of our principal pastimes and also playing baseball in the park directly across Pauoa Road. And that's about it as far as that's concerned. I can't think of anything else that would be of particular interest.

M: Um hm. Did kids have to wear shoes and did you dress up more than kids do now?

T: No, it was quite usual for the children to go barefooted in those days.

M: Were most of the kids in your school Caucasians?

T: They were mostly Caucasians but I do recall particularly the Chung Hoon boys, Gordon and William, who were Chinese-Hawaiian. I don't think anything else would be of interest as far as my grammar school days are concerned.

M: Did the kids at your school come mostly from your Nuuanu neighborhood?

T: Yes, that's correct. Among the students were the three daughters of John Mason Young whose family home was on Alewa Heights, and whenever I see any of those three we talk and reminisce about our childhood days at Valley School. One of these [Rosalie Leslie Young] is the wife of Admiral [H. Stanford] Persons who was formerly commandant of the 14th Naval District. He's now retired. Her name was Rosalie Young.

M: Is this the John Young that was a contractor?

T: I think it was another Young that was a contractor. John Mason Young was an engineer. Another fellow student in those days was [Edwin Kane] Eddie Fernandez Jr. who later became a great football star at the University of Hawaii.

M: Is that the E.K. family?

T: Son of E.K. Fernandez, [noted circus entrepreneur].

M: He was your contemporary.

T: (no audible response) [E.K. Fernandez, Jr. graduated from Punahou School with the class of 1923, a year ahead of T.F. Trent.] It was rather ironic that Mrs. Dekum became quite senile when she reached an advanced age and it became necessary for a guardian of her estate to be appointed by the court. Hawaiian Trust Company was appointed as guardian and I happened to be the trust officer to handle that guardianship.

M: Hmm!

T: Do you want to talk about high school?

M: Yeh, I wanted to ask you--I gather that your stepfather and mother went to church, that you were active churchgoers--your whole family.

T: Right. We attended Sunday School at the Methodist Church and shook hands with the pastor. The family pew was in the second row; that's where we all sat--my father and mother and the kids.

M: Uh huh. Was the Methodist Church at that time a large church?

T: About medium in size.

M: Not as populous as the Congregational or Episcopal really.

T: No.

M: Well, why don't you go on and see if anything comes to mind about any of the people you knew.

T: I think I told you everything about my high school career and going away to the Mainland to Stanford, didn't I?

M: Um hm. You went to the Valley School until seventh grade.

T: Through the eighth grade. (long pause)

M: I don't think I asked you why your parents wanted to send you away (the rest of the sentence is inaudible).

T: Well, they thought it might be interesting to me (the rest of the sentence is inaudible).

M: Um hm.

T: And I think I told you that particular high school was selected because it was located on the campus of the College

of the Pacific [now the University of the Pacific], a Methodist school, and that's how that came about.

M: Yeh. Had you been traveling before as a child?

T: That was my first trip to the Mainland after arriving in Hawaii.

M: Did your folks take trips around to the outside islands and that sort of thing?

T: Oh no. I just don't think of anything else. I think we covered just about everything the last time we sat down together.

M: When it came out it was only about five pages long type-written and that seemed more like an outline and I sort of thought maybe you could fill in a little.

T: Well, I haven't lived a very plentiful existence. (laughter)

M: Well, maybe not but sometimes people that sit quietly in the corner are the ones that are really full of the information about things.

T: Did I tell you when I was in the ROTC at Punahou?

M: No. You mentioned ROTC before.

T: I was a member of the ROTC at Punahou and I marched in Queen Liliuokalani's funeral procession.

M: Oh, you did?

T: Yes.

M: Would you describe that for me?

T: I recall that it was a very hot day and that the funeral procession, as they proceeded up Nuuanu Avenue toward the Royal Mausoleum where Queen Liliuokalani was to be buried, the various units in the funeral finally started lining up at about Bates Street. And I recall that the Punahou ROTC unit lined up on the Ewa side of Nuuanu between Bates Street and Judd Street and we stood there in the hot sun. Well, the casket finally went by the reviewing line and on up to the mausoleum. In fact, it was so hot that I remember clearly one of our ROTC members keeling over in a dead faint, causing a great deal of consternation among the rest of us. (laughter)



- M: Did the funeral coffin come up in a carriage or something and you were all standing on the sidelines?
- T: Yes, we were standing on the sidelines in a review line. In fact, I don't even remember. I think it was on a horse-drawn caisson or something like that.
- M: What was the kind of attitude towards this whole thing among people you knew? Did they feel anything about it one way or another?
- T: I think we were too young to think about it particularly.
- M: I've discovered she was quite a controversial figure. Many people feel . . .
- T: That's what I've discovered too in reading about her (the rest of the sentence is inaudible).
- M: Yeh. People usually, if they were old enough to know her, have studied about her. I mean if she was charming one way or another, you know.
- T: Yes.
- M: And usually just mentioning her name starts off a tirade almost (the rest of the sentence is inaudible).
- T: Yes.
- M: What other sort of outfits were there [at the funeral] along with the ROTC; do you remember any of the others?
- T: Well, the Royal Hawaiian Band, I remember, participated and they were playing funeral-type music. (long pause) I recall how extremely I disliked ROTC. I'd wake up in the morning and realize that it was ROTC day and I had to wear my uniform and I felt that I didn't want to get out of bed. (Lynda laughs) The uniform in those days included the campaign hat and high-necked khaki coat and rolled leggings.
- M: Hmm. And you had to go to school in that all day?
- T: Yeh. We went to school in the morning and then we had ROTC drill in the afternoon.
- M: That must have been hot, huh?
- T: (response inaudible but Lynda laughs twice) I wasn't cut out for the military.

M: Did all of the boys go through ROTC?

T: It was compulsory.

M: Oh, it was?

T: In fact I hated it so that probably the greatest shock in my life was when I got notice shortly after the start of World War II that I had been drafted and was ordered to report immediately to the induction center. I appeared at the center at the prescribed time on the prescribed date and received a physical examination. I remember clearly that one of my good friends, a doctor who assisted in the physical examination of all the possible inductees, spotted me and he said, "What do they want with a baldheaded bastard like you in the Army?" (laughter) I was balding even in those days.

However, I never became a member of the Armed Forces because at that time I was the president and manager of the First Federal Savings and Loan Association of Hawaii and we had no one else in the company to take my place, so the Selective Service decided that I should stay on the job there and, needless to say, it was a tremendous relief to me. (laughter)

M: I think they kept ROTC. It's still going strong at Punahou but I don't think it's compulsory anymore, is it?

T: I don't believe it's compulsory anymore.

M: Donald [Mair] was in it but I don't think that even when he was there that he had to, because I think that he dropped out when he got fed up with it. Hmm. That must have been a sight, though--tenth and eleventh-grade boys running around in (laughs) sort of Teddy Roosevelt outfits.

T: Our ROTC commander was Colonel Adna G. Clarke.

M: What was his first name?

T: Adna. A-D-N-A. Adna [Girard] Clarke. Did I tell you about the fact that my name was originally Ireland?

M: Yes.

T: My own father was Ireland, and then later when my mother married Richard H. Trent I changed my name to Trent.

M: Um hm.

T: For some reason or other they had my name listed in the

ROTC records at Punahou originally--the original record when I first went there--under both the name of Ireland and under the name of Trent. So at the very first meeting of the ROTC group, Colonel Clarke called the roll and he called Theodore Ireland and I said, "Here!" And then later he called Theodore Trent and I said, "Here!" (laughter) with the result that there was one more than there should be. So I had to explain the confusion to him and I never saw Adna Clarke after that, even when I was in business, that he didn't recall that incident and laugh about it. (laughter)

M: He was advertising the Army right off the bat.

T: It was just about that time, you see, that my mother and Richard H. Trent were married, so I think I registered at Punahou originally as Theodore Ireland and then changed it to Trent, but I assume that the registration of Theodore Ireland and Theodore Trent were on the ROTC list. (laughter)

To go back to Admiral Persons, I never see him but what he calls me Teddy due to the fact that in grammar school days I was always known as Teddy and his wife, Rosalie, always referred to me as Teddy and that is why Admiral Persons, when he wants to humiliate me, calls me Teddy. (Lynda laughs)

Well, let's see if there's anything else. Did I mention that during my Punahou days we put on that show "The 58th Variety"?

M: No.

T: Well, that was my senior year at Punahou. I was obliged to dress up as a girl and sing in a falsetto voice the number "Sittin' in a Corner." (laughter) And the 1924 yearbook had a cartoon of me in my costume singing "Sittin' in a Corner." You can see that it was a very low-class production. (laughter)

M: Yeh, yeh. Was it sort of an all-class project that you put on?

T: Yes.

M: Did all the kids at Punahou when you were there take about the same kind of courses?

T: In general. (long pause) You were away on the 5th [of March], Sunday, but did you see that picture of Bob [James Robert] Judd's class with Sammy [Samuel A.K.] Amalu in the

front row?

M: Um hm. (laughter) Yeh, I did.

T: Some of them in that class who used to live right on our (the rest of the sentence and what follows is inaudible).

M: Bob, in that picture, looked just like he does now.

T: Yeh.

M: I didn't even have to look through the names, just spotted him.

T: Right, I did the same thing.

M: I thought, my gosh, some people never change; they look just about the same; they have a few wrinkles but basically . . .

T: Bob doesn't have too many wrinkles actually.

M: No, hm um.

T: Sammy Amalu didn't look very much like he does now.

M: No. (both chuckle) I think the only time I've seen him in person was at Friends of the Library meeting, that time that they had the panel.

T: Yes, that's the only time I've laid eyes on him. (to one of his cats) Hello, Muffin. What are you doing here, hm? What are you doing, you nice old girl? She's ten years old.

M: Is that fat or is that all fur?

T: Oh, we call her pudgy sometimes. She's pretty fat. (Lynda laughs)

M: Is that a purebred type of cat?

T: You'd think she is full-blooded Persian, wouldn't you, looking at her.

M: She has the face.

T: Yeh, she looks exactly like a full-blooded, silver-gray Persian. And her brother, which we also have around--he doesn't stay close to home like she does--he doesn't look anything like her. He has very short fur and he's got

different markings. He's silver-gray, all right, but decided stripes, you know, which gives us some inference of the father. The mother was a full-blooded Persian; in fact, a show cat. She got out one night and that resulted in Muffin and Tiffy Boy being born. (laughter) We've had them ever since they were a month old so they're really a part of the family.

M: Yeh. She's pretty and such green, green eyes.

T: Yeh, I know. Her brother's eyes are just as green. (to Muffin) You want to go away, do you? Where do you want to go?

M: You don't keep dogs.

T: Well, we've had them in the past. We had a German shepherd once. We had to keep him in at night because he'd bark otherwise. And you know, one night--you wouldn't believe this, but apparently he heard something outdoors and he made a leap and went right through the screen in one of those windows right there--that big screen--with just absolutely such force that it pushed the screen out and he went right through and on his way. (Lynda laughs)

M: Then you were out chasing him around.

T: Oh yes. One way we found sometimes helped to catch him when he'd get out that way: we'd stand under a tree and make out there was a cat up in the tree (Lynda laughs) and we'd call, "Kitty, kitty, kitty," you know, and he'd come over and look up in the tree and we'd grab him. (laughter)

M: I'll have to try that. Our dog won't mind a bit when he gets loose.

T: She was a beautiful dog--her name was Hula--but she got to be such a nuisance that we finally gave her away to an Oriental family that lived way up in Maunawili. Then we had a little Sealyham and he was the cutest little thing. And we had a Portuguese girl who worked for us in those days quite soon after we moved into this house and she loved that Sealyham dog and even without our suggesting it she would scrub him regularly and she'd scrub him so hard that he was just always as white and pretty as could be.

The maid's name was Mercie. M-E-R-C-I-E. We expected any day to come home sometime and find that the Sealyham dog was hung up on the line that day to dry out (laughter). She used to do all our laundry as well as the other work around the house. Those were the days. We hired her

through the Y.W.C.A. and she came from Kauai.

END OF SIDE 1/2ND TAPE

(surface noise on tape continues but not as loud)

. . . came across with that barbed wire through our lawn not far from our home. [This refers to World War II when barbed wire was strung on Oahu's beaches.]

M: Oh, way up here on the lawn?

T: Way up here--ten feet high, you know, spans of barbed wire --and so you couldn't get through to the beach here; you had to go up to the next lane and at the end of that lane they had a maze through the barbed wire so you could get through this maze to get to the beach.

One day I came home from work. We had a machine gun nest along the beach, you know, and one machine gun unit was right out there near the end of the L'Orange Place in the next lane. Well, one day I came home from work and I was sitting in my big green chair in the living room and all of a sudden I heard the most ungodly yells for help I have ever heard in my life and I jumped up and I could see somebody out there in the ocean thrashing around, you know, yelling for help. So I realized he was drowning and naturally I wanted to help him so I ran out the back door, cut through the next lot to L'Orange Place and went down and through that maze to get to the beach. Then I came right up here because he was directly opposite our house.

Came up there on the beach and I took off my shirt and my pants so I had nothing on but my underdrawers and I swam out there to where he had been but there was no sign of him by the time I got out there. Meanwhile, there was a navy officer and his wife who were renting a place in L'Orange Place. They had heard the calls for help and so both of them ran down to the beach. He saw me just as I went into the water and I yelled to him, said there was a man drowning out there. So he stripped down but the darned fool, instead of running down here and going straight out, he started swimming from over here so he had a long ways to go. (Lynda laughs)

Well, I got out there about where I thought I'd seen this fellow thrashing around and this navy officer finally arrived too after his long swim and I said, "Well, this is just about where he was. We'll just have to dive down and see if we can locate him." And so we both did. We dived down and looked all around and finally, just luckily, this navy officer's foot happened to hit against this guy. Here he was, down on the bottom, and when he dove down his

foot hit him. So he came to the surface and he said, "Here he is! Help me pull him up!" So the two of us dove down and brought him to the surface.

Well, meanwhile the people in L'Orange Place and the end of this lane realized somehow that something was going on, so everybody in the neighborhood was down there on the beach while we were bringing this chap in. We finally got him up on the sand and he was such an ungodly purple that I thought he was dead. There was just no sign of life whatsoever. We got him on the beach and fortunately there was a Red Cross fellow who lived on L'Orange Place and he was among those who came down to the beach, so he gave this chap artificial respiration and that's what saved his life actually. Of course I knew how to do it too, but this Red Cross man was a professional. He spread him out and made sure his tongue was not going to choke him and gave him artificial respiration and the water just came out of him.

Well, in any event, after all of this excitement some of the neighbors came and we were sitting there in our living room, you know, discussing the whole thing. Everyone was all excited about it. Meanwhile, they dispatched an ambulance from the Kaneohe Naval Air Station. They sent an ambulance over and picked this fellow up to take him to the hospital. Well, there were about twelve neighbors gathered there in our living room and all talking about the event. Mercie was in the kitchen at the time we were talking but she came out and she stood in the doorway of the living room. Of course she had gone down to the beach like everybody else, so Ruth said, "Mercie, when did you arrive on the beach?" She said, "Oh, Mrs. Trent, I got there quick. Just when Mr. Trent was taking his pants off." (laughter) Everybody roared.

Well, I got a Treasury Department lifesaving medal from Washington as a result of that little episode and it was written up in the local newspapers. I remember Homer Barnes, former president of Kamehameha Schools, was the president of Rotary then. As a result of all the publicity I got from the newspapers over that lifesaving feat I got fined by the Rotary ten dollars by Homer Barnes. (Lynda laughs) Well, that's getting off the subject.

Well, honestly, I don't think of anything else. You use what you've got (the rest of the sentence is inaudible).

One more thing, speaking of the lifesaving medal, I got this letter from Washington saying that I had been honored for bravery while lifesaving. At that time, General [Robert C.] Richardson [Jr.] was the commanding officer here and it said that the medal would be sent to him and that he would arrange to present it. Well, his headquarters were at Fort Shafter, so I had great visions of

being summoned out to Fort Shafter and perhaps I'd be up with General Richardson on the reviewing stand while the Army band went by and with great ceremony, why, he'd present me with this lifesaving medal. You know our human nature, being what it is, we like to think of those things.

M: Yeh. (laughter)

T: About two weeks later I was in the office and this Army private came in and went up to the receptionist and said, "Anyone named Trent work here?" And I said, "Yes," whereupon he came back and tossed this package on my desk (Lyn-da laughs), so I opened it up and here was my lifesaving medal. (both laugh)

M: Oh no. What a letdown. That's amazing that somebody would live that long who'd been down.

T: I know it.

M: I thought that you were dead if you were down for, you know, so many seconds.

T: I thought he was dead. I really did.

M: After all the time it took for you to get there and diving and diving.

T: He was a soldier, you see, stationed there in one of these machine gun units.

M: Oh.

T: He was from Nebraska and he'd never been near the ocean before and he was newly assigned here and he just got out too far and couldn't swim, you know--the darned fool.

M: Oh, he couldn't swim out?

T: He got out too far and then he found his feet couldn't touch bottom and he got panicky and that's when he started to yell for help. But you know, I never heard from that fellow. His commanding officer did come over one evening later to thank me for him, but the soldier himself who was rescued--we never heard a word. He recovered all right, we learned from his commanding officer, although he was in pretty bad shape for the first few days.

M: He never thanked you.

T: No, he never did. (pause) Well I'll tell you, when you



go through your stuff again, if there's any particular thing you want clarified or . . .

M: Yeh. Well, yours was very clear the last time. It was just like you were dictating a letter or something. I just typed right along. I think I'm going to take this and just sort of insert it in the right places.

T: When you get it typed up you can let me have a look at it.

M: Yeh.

T: If I think of anything else I'll let you know.

M: Have you found a lot of these on your own beach? [This probably refers to the glass balls used by fishermen.]

T: Oh, we found many more than that.

M: Really?

T: Well, we've lived here since 1935.

M: Yeh.

T: Of course in the old days there was practically no one else over here. Well, the time when they used to come in was when we'd have a rather protracted Kona weather and the ocean was like glass and no wind would come in; and then all of a sudden it would turn trade wind weather and the trade wind would be heavy--a real stiff wind with big surf coming in--and we'd know there would be many glass balls and invariably we'd go out and look. Mercie was great in finding them. She found, I think, most of the big ones we have like that around the house. But we must have found a dozen of those big ones and scores of these little ones. We'd walk up the beach and Mercie would take a gunny sack (laughter) and pick them up.

M: Well, how did you get from here into town in 1936? That must have been a struggle, huh?

T: Oh, we drove over the Old Pali Road. Did you ever drive over that?

M: Yeh, just once in 1957 before they put in the new one.

T: Well, that was the road we followed and of course there was so little traffic that we made each trip far more rapidly than we do now during the rush hour in the early morning.

- M: Yeh, it was just a little scarier ride, as I recall.
- T: Well, there was a concrete wall along the side. (his other cat enters) Now there's Tiffy Boy.
- M: Oh my goodness, he hasn't much fur at all.
- T: No. (long pause) I drove over that road, Lynda, when there wasn't any pavement or any wall and it was just a dirt road, when we first came here in 1916. It was a dirt road with a fence.
- M: That must have been an experience with that wind coming up there.
- T: I remember driving over to Kailua. And you had to be sure you didn't try to do it on a rainy day because that dirt road was very slippery. So we'd come over and, of course, we didn't own this place then so we'd go anywhere on Kailua Beach to swim. If it looked like it was going to start raining--if we'd see it clouding up on the horizon, the possibility of rain squalls--we'd hurry up and get in the old car and head for town, you know, before the rain hit the Pali because we were afraid we couldn't get home.
- M: Oh yeh.
- T: The only other way you could have gotten back to Honolulu --there was no road around Koko Head then--was the long way to Waialua, then through Wahiawa.
- M: You went over the dirt road in a car.
- T: Yeh.
- M: That must have been quite a ride. .
- T: I'll say it (laughter) was. Well, I'm delighted you came over.
- M: Yeh, I think this will help--added color. (counter at 164)

END OF INTERVIEW

Re-transcribed and edited by Katherine B. Allen

NOTE: Mr. Trent attended College Park Academy on the campus of the College of the Pacific his junior year of high school only and attended Punahou School the other three years.

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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.