

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: KUULEI (WALDRON) HORNE, retired school teacher

Kuulei (Waldron) Horne, Caucasian-Hawaiian, was born on the Big Island in 1901. She never lived in Kakaako, but was the daughter of "Mother" Margaret Waldron. Mother Waldron was a Pohukaina Elementary School teacher from the time it opened in 1912 until her retirement in 1934. She also was a playground director and is credited with having been one of the single, most important positive influences in Kakaako. She passed away in 1936.

Mother Waldron was cited by almost every individual interviewed in the Kakaako project as a person who had had some direct influential contact with them. Therefore, the project staff decided to interview Mrs. Horne to gain more insight and understanding of one of the community's most important and influential yet humble leaders.

Notes from the unrecorded interview follow.

NOTES FROM NEWSPAPER SOURCES  
AND  
AN UNRECORDED INTERVIEW

with

Mrs. Kuulei Horne, daughter of "Mother" Margaret Waldron

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Honolulu, Hawaii

BY: Gael Gouveia

One of the chief organizing forces in Kakaako from 1912 to 1934 was "Mother" Margaret (Powers) Waldron, an Irish-Hawaiian who was a Pohukaina Elementary School fourth grade teacher, who resided near downtown Honolulu but not in Kakaako. Mother Waldron also served as after school playground director and according to a Honolulu Star Bulletin article, "is generally credited with being the individual who had most influence in transforming the so-called 'Kakaako gangs' into law abiding groups and wiping out the unsavory reputation which at one time clung to the district."<sup>1</sup>

She also "taught the little children games, coached older boys in football and baseball, taught the older girls and women how to manage a household more efficiently and economically. She sent little children off on hikes to gather wild guavas which she helped the older girls to make into jellies and jams, and she taught the women to make attractive clothes for their children from old flour sacks and sugar bags."<sup>2</sup>

She also encouraged a number of Kakaako youngsters who would otherwise not have, to continue their education at the University.

Mother Waldron was born August 12, 1873. Her father was a sea captain from Massachusetts. He was lost at sea and she was orphaned at a young age, educated at Kawaihau Seminary, and looked after by the Castle and the Judd families.

After graduation in 1894, she went to Makapala on the Big Island and lived with Doctor and Mrs. Bond. She taught school until she married in 1896 or 1897. She returned to Honolulu with her husband who was a public accountant. In 1899, Mr. Waldron was sent to the Volcano House as manager for three years. During this period, Kuulei (Waldron) Horne, her daughter, and a son were born. Later, two more girls were added to the family.

An unrecorded interview with Mrs. Horne, residing in Nuuanu and now in her late seventies, provided further insight about the woman who had a many-sided influence in Kakaako. There is no doubt that Mother Waldron cared about the community and the individuals who lived there. An existing park in Kakaako is named in her honor.

Mother Waldron returned to teaching after her husband's death. She started at Pohukaina School when it opened in 1912. She taught until she was 60. When the playground first opened in 1914, Mother Waldron, with the help of a few Honolulu society ladies, provided cookies, cakes and ice cream on silver trays served by Japanese cooks and maids in kimonos for the children and the community. She continued to supervise the playground and, in general, served as a "social worker" for the Kakaako area.

Mrs. Horne said she "helped get fathers out of jail, organized things for families and children. She helped unwed mothers, put students through the University of Hawaii, and taught cooking and sewing during summers."

Mrs. Horne also remembers that during World War I, Mother Waldron wanted the playground cleared of rocks, and so to enlist the children's help, she installed a picture of the Kaiser across the street in an empty lot. The kids threw rocks at the Kaiser and thus, cleared the field.

Mother Waldron was also instrumental in getting an open ditch covered. The ditch, about 10 feet deep and 10 feet wide carried warm soapy waste water from the laundries to the sea. "There were broken bottles, dead cats, and debris in that stream. Some people even bathed in it." It was dangerous and a health hazard.

Mother Waldron also provided a free breakfast program for many of Kakaako's youngsters. She was able to obtain flour, rolled oats, and cream of wheat from the Sperry Flour Company, milk from Dairymen's, bananas from people's yards, and bread from Buck's Bakery.

She had an uncanny knack for asking for help for others, but never for herself or her own family. She was able to acquire materials, sewing machines, and sports equipment for the Kakaako youth.

At one time, Matson Lines wanted to bar the coin divers. Mother Waldron went to bat for the boys, obtained swim trunks for them from Davies and organized them. She even built a lean-to shack for them to change clothes in, thus preserving a source of income for the boys.

While attending Normal School, Mrs. Horne taught sewing and folk dancing alongside her mother in Kakaako. Mother Waldron was able to obtain needed supplies and monies to assist Kakaako's people through her connections with the old time missionary families. She had tremendous community support and both newspapers actively supported what she was doing.

The philosophy by which she lived was, "If I do something for you, you do something for someone else." She was strong and a strict disciplinarian, even marched a gang of ruffians to the police station one time because they told her "to go to hell." But she was also soft-hearted, kind, and always had the interests of Kakaako's people in mind.

Even after her retirement, she continued to help Kakaako's people. Mrs. Horne said, "I remember once, a bill arrived at the house for a new stove. I knew we hadn't gotten one. I checked with mother."

She said blithely, "Oh yes, I bought it for a Filipino family who needed it."

Mother Waldron retired in 1934 and passed away in 1936. Another anecdote Mrs. Horne tells is that when her mother was very ill in the hospital and needed blood transfusions, Kakaako's people of all ethnic groups flocked to the hospital, reported to the nurses and said, "We came to give 'Mama' blood." The nurses were dumbfounded, wondering just how many children this woman had and just what her nationality was.

Former Kakaako residents also remember encounters with Mother Waldron.

"When any of the boys or girls get out of line....she would make us hold our hands out with our fists closed and she gets the ruler and hit the hell out of knuckles. We don't complain because we know we wrong....we can't complain to our parents. We go home, complain to them, we get licking." (Sam Kapu)

"....(Mother Waldron) raised some money. I don't know where she got her money but she put some money up for free lunches for certain kids. That was kind of nice. She was pretty akamai and forceful. Very forceful person." (Eleanor Heavey)

"She's a big woman. Big jowls, just like a bulldog. Rough. Big. I would say almost 300 pounds....You got naughty, she'll spank you with the hairbrush." (If the principal couldn't handle you, you got sent to Mother Waldron. "She work you over. So nobody want to go see her....but she took care of people....she took care of the playground....there was wayward girls, eh. Hapai....she taught them cooking, sewing....take care baby. She had a lot of support from the community. (Tai Loy Ho)

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<sup>1</sup>Honolulu Star Bulletin, May 8, 1936.

<sup>2</sup>op. cit.

## DEATH CLAIMS MRS. WALDRON, FRIEND OF POOR

Noted Teacher and Volunteer Welfare Worker Succumbs In Hospital

Mrs. Margaret Waldron, "Mother" Waldron, one of Honolulu's most widely known friends of the poor, died this morning at 8:55 at St. Francis hospital.

She had been confined to the hospital since January of a year ago as the result of an illness which caused her to curtail her work some time previously.

The body was cremated this morning and services will be held at the graveside in Nuuanu cemetery on the afternoon of Sunday, Mother's Day. The exact hour will be announced later. Williams mortuary is in charge of arrangements.

"Mother" Waldron was born in Honolulu August 12, 1873, and had lived here all her life.

She is survived by a sister, Mrs. Helen Marshall of Honolulu; three daughters, Margarite (Mrs. Harold) Horne of Honolulu; Ethel (Mrs. Robin) Pape of Tokyo, and Dorothy (Mrs. Donald) Treddenick, who lives on the mainland, and four grandsons.

### Wiped Out Gangs

When Pohukaina school was opened 24 years ago, "Mother" Waldron went there as a teacher, and her interest gradually spread outside the school walls to all of Kakaako. She is generally credited with being the individual who had most influence in transforming the so-called "Kakaako gangs" into law abiding groups and wiping out the unsavory reputation which at one time clung to the district.

She was retired by the school department in 1934.

For more than 15 years during the period which she taught the fourth grade at Pohukaina school, she spent several hours each day after school hours as playground director and

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### Taught Women, Children

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"Never help anybody who isn't willing to help somebody else," was one of her mottos.

"When I help anyone, I make him promise to pay for it," she used to say. "But they don't pay me directly; they pay by promising to do just as much, or more, for the next person in need they meet."

### Honored With Medal

On her 50th birthday, the boys and girls of Kakaako presented her with a simple bar pin bearing the word "Mother." It was her most prized possession, and she was never without it. Another of her treasures was her medal which duplicated the medals given members of the Kakaako Sons, winners of a barefoot football championship.

Her activities in the district were so outstanding that it was proposed to name the Kakaako playground in her honor, despite the policy of not naming playgrounds after living persons.

"Mother" Waldron sent a communication "declining the honor." She suggested the name Pohukaina. "Workers may come and workers may go but Pohukaina school will go on forever," she wrote. Her name was given to the playground, nevertheless. Later, the "Mother" Waldron health center was named in her honor also.

On her 57th birthday in 1930 she entertained the governor, mayor, board of supervisors and other guests at a luncheon at the "Mother" Waldron playground cottage.

### Made Vigorous Demands

"This is a thank you party," she told them. "I don't want a thing from you. I just wanted you to come to my thank you party to show you what we are doing."

Her announcement amused the guests, for she was noted as a beggar for her people—and proud of it. She frequently wrote vigorous and direct letters to the papers asking for special wants, and a prompt response was usually forthcoming.

"Mother" Waldron was one eighth Hawaiian and seven eighths Irish, but her friendship extended to all races.

"Other, what kind you?" a hospital attendant once asked her. "Everybody come see you. Rich haoles come, plenty Portuguese, Japanese, Filipino, Chinese, Puerto Rican, Hawaiians, every kind come, but I no savvy what kind you."

1873

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1910-1950**

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