Genevieve Magoon, Caucasian, was born July 29, 1895, in San Francisco, California. She came to the Islands as a school teacher in 1915. She taught at Makaweli, Kauai.

In 1917, she married Eaton Magoon. The Magoon family were property owners. In Kakaako, they leased small business establishments, cottages, and other residences. When her husband became very ill with pneumonia in the early 1930's, Genevieve went to work in the family business. She held a variety of positions, including clerk, rent collector, secretary, assistant manager, and in 1978, retired as a director of Magoon Estate, Ltd.

TIME LINE
1895 birth: San Francisco, California
1915 graduated from San Jose Normal School; moved to Makaweli, Kauai
1917 married Eaton Magoon in California
1920 returned to Hawaii
1930's started to work for family business
1978 retired as director of Magoon Estate, Ltd.
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Mrs. Genevieve Eaton Magoon (EM)

October 4, 1977

Magoon Estate Ltd., Office, Honolulu

BY: Gael Gouveia (GG)

GG: This is an interview with Mrs. Eaton Magoon in the Magoon Estate Limited office at 910 Alakea Street, Honolulu. The date is October 4, 1977. Okay, first of all, I think I'd like to ask you how you decided to come to Makaweli to teach.

EM: I lived with my parents in San Jose, California, about 50 miles southeast of San Francisco. I was graduated from San Jose High School, February 1913, and from San Jose State Normal School (now San Jose State College), February 15, 1915. For several months following my Normal School graduation, I was quite ill with measles, of all things.

I was a member of a high school sorority, Omega Nu, a social-charitable organization with chapters (or clubs) in six California cities, a chapter in Portland, Oregon, and one in Reno, Nevada. Conventions or conclaves with delegates from the various chapters were held annually. The 1915 conclave was held in Alameda and San Francisco, California. I was president at that time, feeling important.

The final function of the 1915 conclave was a lovely ball held at the Illinois Building of the 1915 exposition (or fair) in San Francisco. After the ball, a group of us stood in the portico of the Illinois Building, waiting for our escorts who had gone for their cars. I stood near one of the tall columns and looked up to the stars above. By the time I saw the stars, I felt about 6 inches tall, instead of important. The incident has colored my thinking and my life since then.

In a few days I returned to my home in San Jose, at a call from my mother, where I learned that Dr. Dailey, the president of San Jose Normal School, had called to offer me one unassigned teaching opening in the Hawaiian Islands.

My parents consented. We listened to our parents in those days. And so, in a few days I found myself on a small ship, the Manoa, bound for the Hawaiian Islands.

The night before I sailed, I met by chance, a young man from Honolulu, whose name was Marmion Magoon. He said he would ask an older brother,
Eaton Magoon to meet me at the ship, when it docked, I didn't take the idea seriously, but thanked him.

GG: Did you know very much about Hawaii at that point?

EM: I'd read a little, and it sounded interesting. And also I had a friend who was teaching at Makaweli, Kauai. I'd gone sailing, but I'd never taken an ocean voyage. On the Manoa, it turned out, were three young girls (I was one) and a great many young men. But I found out I'm a seasick one.

GG: What was the name of the ship?

EM: The Manoa. It smelled awful.

GG: How long did your journey take?

EM: About seven days. Anyway, I was miserably seasick for several days. My roommates were two older women who were Christian Scientists (I think). They kept reminding me that seasickness was a matter of mind. Anyway, they would offer me candy, and I would say, "No thank you." All right, their turn came.

(Laughter)

EM: I just turned over in my bunk and didn't say, "Isn't it a matter of mind?" But I was sorry for them.

In several days I was well enough to go on deck (upstairs). And there were a number of attractive young men swarming around two girls. Also nearby was an older man. His name was Henry Kinney. He kept asking me where I was going. I said I was going to teach school somewhere in the Hawaiian Islands, but I didn't know where, though I knew where I wanted to go. I could spell it, but I couldn't pronounce it.

(Laughter)

EM: And so I spelled M-A-K-A-W-E-L-I, K-A-U-A-I. Mr. Kinney asked me the same question several times, but nothing further was said. Eventually we landed in Honolulu, and as I was in a hurry to get to the school office, I left the ship immediately.

GG: Where was the school office, at that time?

EM: Somewhere near Iolani Palace, but I don't remember the building. I was shown into a large room, and had quite a wait. But finally, a door opened, and out came the older man who had been on the Manoa. He introduced himself as "Henry W. Kinney, Superintendent of Public Instruction."

GG: Oh, for goodness sake.
EM: He asked, "Do you still want to go to M-A-K-A," etc. And I said, "Yes." Mr. Kinney said, "It's all arranged."

GG: What was your impression of Hawaii when you landed?

EM: Warm. I had on a wool suit. But I was excited about Honolulu.

GG: Can you describe what Honolulu was like at that time in 1915?

EM: Well, there weren't any high rises, that's for sure. And it was lovely, green and quiet. Then Mr. Kinney explained, "If you go to Kauai today, you will be paid at the rate of $60 a month for the coming holidays, Saturdays and Sundays."

I said "I'd better do that." So I did, that very afternoon.

Mr. Kinney then said, "I have a car and a driver for you. Is there anything special you want to do?"

I said, "I would like to go shopping for gifts to be sent home." (Because it was getting towards Thanksgiving.)

And so the driver helped me to decide where to go, and I was able to complete my shopping. Finally, I became tired. The driver took me to the ship. On the ship, I sat near the railing, watching some men, probably Chinese, loading crates, boxes, trunks on the little ship. The men were lined up, and they passed the crates, etc., from one to another, toward the ship's hold and onto the ship. I was sitting there watching when a man's voice said, "Where the....have you been?" It was Mr. Eaton Magoon, who became my husband. That's how we met.

GG: (Laughs) Oh, for goodness sake. That was a nice greeting, huh?

EM: Well, it seemed appropriate, because he explained that he missed me at the ship, and then traced me from the ship to the D.P.I., and to different places I had said I wanted to go, and everywhere he went, I had just left.

(Laughter)

GG: You mentioned, now, a car and a driver. Was this an automobile at that time? Did they have automobiles here?

EM: Yes, it was an automobile.

GG: And then where did the Manoa dock? Was that near the Aloha Tower, right there?

EM: More or less, but there wasn't any Aloha Tower that I can remember.

GG: And then, do you recall the name of the little boat that you went to Kauai on?
EM: Let me see. (Possibly it was the Kinau.) It was quite small.

GG: Now, Mr. Magoon was here on the Island (Oahu). How did your courtship go with you on another Island?

EM: Well, he liked to hunt and he liked to fish. He came over to Kauai several times, and we had lots of fun.

GG: When were you married?

EM: In 1917. I had taught out the school year at Makaweli, and my mother wrote, "Think you'd better come home." And so I did.

GG: So you did go home?

EM: Yes. (I taught the next school year at Gonzales, California.)

GG: And were you married on the Mainland, or here?


GG: When did you come back to Hawaii?

EM: June, 1920.

GG: What did your husband do then, the three years that you were on the Mainland?

EM: He was attending Hastings College of the Law, in San Francisco. That's University of California (but in San Francisco, near the courts. He was graduated from U.C. Berkeley with the degree, L.L.B. in June 1920).

GG: So then, you came back to Hawaii in 1920. Now, I need to get the Magoon family a little bit straight, too. I've already talked to Mr. Jack Magoon. How are Eaton and Jack related?

EM: My husband, Eaton, was Jack's uncle. Jack is the son of my husband's eldest brother, John Henry Magoon, Sr., whom we called "Lani." Now this book is...

GG: Men of Hawaii. I'm going to get that down.

EM: 1921. You know these books are published every few years by the Honolulu Star-Bulletin. Here are pictures of the four Magoon brothers in 1921. This is my husband, Eaton. This is his brother, Alfred. This is Lani, Jack's father. And this is Marmion, the one I met the night before I left California. There were also three sisters, Kamakia, Catherine and Emeleen.

GG: Now, which was the first Magoon to come to the Islands? Do you recall?

EM: As far as I know, it was John Magoon, sometimes referred to as John C.
Magoon. As a matter of fact, I am now working on the history of the J. Alfred Magoon family. If you would like to look at the wonderful volume (the Family Bible) you will see that J. Alfred Magoon, the father of the four Magoon brothers, and the three sisters, son of John (C.) Magoon and Maria Sofia Eaton Magoon.

GG: You are in the process then of writing a family history?
EM: That's right.
GG: It's a big job, that's for sure.
EM: It really is. John (C.) Magoon was from Litchfield, Maine. He went to California in 1867.
GG: How did he happen to come to Hawaii? Was he a missionary?
EM: No. Nothing like that. He was married in 1857 to Maria Sofia Eaton. My husband was named after her. (They came to Honolulu in 1876, probably because they believed it would be good for John Magoon's poor health).
GG: And do you have any recollection of how they happened to acquire land in Kakaako?
EM: I believe John (C.) Magoon and his son, J. Alfred Magoon were always interested in land. Now we're talking about Kakaako. Really, this is our subject. John Magoon was given two land patents by King Kalakaua. I have here xerox copies of the original documents.
GG: All right. Let's keep them together.
EM: These are xerox copies of Royal Patents to John Magoon. The first one covers 15,800 square feet. This is signed by King Kalakaua, dated January 1978. And this is the big one which contains 82,330 square feet.
GG: Almost two acres.
EM: It's called Puunui, but it is actually...
GG: Kakaako area? Is that this area?
EM: Right. (Looking at map.) And this is the big piece running on Queen Street. The cross street is Emily. Paralleling and mauka of Queen Street is Marmion Lane. (Three small streets, or lands were named after J. Alfred Magoon's youngest children). And this is South Street.
GG: South Street, right. So then this is the area that was known as Magoon Block.
EM: It was so called, I believe. Now this (pointing to another sketch) is a copy of a Sanborn Insurance map of the area. Years ago, I made a tracing of the big Sanborn Map of the area, and had it copied.

GG: And this map is this date here? It is dated 1930 and 1936. So this is what it looked like at that time?

EM: Yes. These cottages were all rented. And when I first came to work (1936) it was very confusing to me. I couldn't sort out the tenants.

GG: Okay, let's see. I see there's a soda works and "moving pictures." Is that a theatre, perhaps?

EM: Yes. The building still stands, but it is not on land belonging to the Magoon.

GG: So then, part of your job was to more, or less, keep straight the properties and who had what, and why?

EM: Well, my husband (who was then attorney and manager of the Magoon interests) had pneumonia. He was in the hospital. I had never done anything but school-teaching. Dr. Fred Alsop, who was my husband's doctor, and our next door neighbor (at Kaalawai, Diamond Head), came over and suggested that I go down to the office because my husband was worrying about it, and that I try to answer pending letters by explaining, that my husband was very ill and in the hospital, and that the office would get around to the pending matter as soon as possible.

My husband's excellent secretary was a navy wife and her husband was ordered away at once. Also the head of our insurance department had quit. Well, I did as Dr. Alsop suggested, and I continued to work after my husband became well enough to return to the office. I said I'd work at first for $50 a month, provided that if my two sons needed me or were ill, I would not work.

I soon learned that the office took care of the properties owned by Magoon Trust Estate (and Mother Magoon); later Magoon Estate, Limited; and another corporation, Magoon Brothers, Limited. The Kakaako property was owned by Magoon Trust Estate (later Magoon Estate Limited). By that time my husband was able to return to the office. I had become deeply interested in the work, and arrangements were made for me to continue working, which I did.

To me the office records were confusing. I was soon charged with seeing that our rents were promptly paid. Take the land, Kakaako, for instance. We had many tenants there in "Magoon Block," and the cottages. I didn't even know where Kakaako was located. But I found someone to drive me there, and with a yardstick and a tape measure we made these little maps traced from the Sanborn Insurance Map (which gave buildings and street numbers). Then I found out who was staying where. This was also true in the tenant area, often referred to as "Magoon Block."
GG: Now Jack, I believe, mentioned that he thought Grandfather Magoon--part of the property, I guess a lot of it, was swampy, wet land originally, and that he had done some kind of fill work. Are you aware of that at all?

EM: I believe history records that the ocean came up to the present Queen Street, therefore, it was all filled after about 1890, but that was before my time. I have no personal knowledge of the filling. It sounds plausible, though.

GG: I believe that Grandfather Magoon had his house in Kakaako, too?

EM: If by "Grandfather Magoon," you mean John Magoon, that is correct.

GG: I see. (Pointing to map.) Is this the house?

EM: John Magoon had a house there; as far as I know that is the location of the house. Whether it is the same house, I'm not sure. I'm a lawyer's wife, you know.

I was telling you about the tenement. One of the saddest thing that ever happened to me in my life, happened when I was trying to figure out who lived where, in the tenement. Every once in a while, someone would come into the office and give a name I couldn't correlate with the office records. And so, I decided to go down with paper and pencil and interview all these people.

Finally, a large Hawaiian lady, holo'oko'o, hibiscus in the hair (she was gentle and darling) said to me, "Well, I got two names." I asked what she meant, "Well, my real name is such and such. That is the name on your books."

In those days, we had collectors in charge of collections for various areas, where the company owned property. Well, we had a collector in Kakaako who was a favorite. And so I called him in and said, "I'm trying to find out (I had a map something like this) who stays where. And I went down there and talked to some of the people, and they said they had two names. What does this mean?"

The nice old man broke down and started to cry. I said, "Why do you feel so bad about it?"

He said, "Mrs. Magoon, all my life I been cheating J. Alfred Magoon (who died in 1916), and now this office. And I can't stand it any more. I got to tell you."

So he cried, and I cried. We both cried.

I learned he had a separate account book of his own, (where he charged each of say, a 100 Kakaako tenants under their fictitious names,
a dollar, or so more a month, than monthly rents shown on our books under their correct names, pocketing the difference each month, over many years. He was so old and so broken, that he was given a chance to return to his homeland. (I never heard from him, after that. But the sadness remains in my memory to this day).

GG: It really is a shame.

EM: All right. Now what?

GG: Did you get into the Kakaako area yourself very much at all?

EM: Oh, sure. Frequently, to inspect the property, after I learned about it, and to see the tenants.

GG: Oh! You actually had to go and do it?

EM: No. I elected to go, mainly to see if the office records were correct.

GG: Okay. One of the things that we have heard about Magoon Block, was that evidently a lot of young men lived upstairs. Some of the divers and some of the football players, they seemed to congregate in that area. I wondered if you had knowledge of that?

EM: No. Well, when I was there—of course, what happened before that, I don’t know. But there were mostly women. Maybe husbands and wives with children. Of course, I thought the living conditions were pretty terrible, and decided we’d have to fix this over and put more baths in, and all that. That was unheard of.

GG: Can you describe—since you said you went down there to talk to the people, can you describe what the building was like and all? The upstairs section?

EM: Well, it was an old wooden building. Just a tenement.

GG: Like, did they have two rooms and a kitchen area or....

EM: One kitchen area for three or four families. And this, to me, was no good.

GG: And then, what about the bath facilities? Were they outside or....

EM: Well, they were up there. But like the kitchens, they were community affairs. But we fixed it up a little bit in the late thirties. And about then, we decided eventually to demolish it. Well, there was a fire. Did you know about this? I’ve got pictures of the fire if you’d like to see...

GG: Now, so far, we haven't been able to find out whether there were very many Filipino people living in the area at that time. Are you aware...
EM: Well, mauka of the tenement is a street or lane, Marmion Lane. Along
either side of this street there were little cottages, some were duplex
cottages. We had many applications from Filipinos. I would interview
them and decide whether they would be suitable tenants. One day an
attractive Filipino boy made an application. I asked this boy, "Now how
many people going to stay in this house?"

"Only me and sometime one friend."

Well, I went down a week or so later, and there were about 16 Filipinos
lying all over the place. Our tenant said, "I couldn't help it because
my friends had no place to stay, so they came and stay with me." He
was asked to vacate at once, and he and his friends left immediately.

GG: We wondered if that was the kind of thing--because as I say we had
heard that that's where the divers congregated, and sometimes some
of the football players. And a lot of these boys--I guess they were
young, single men who lived together. So maybe that was the kind
of thing then. But we haven't run into anybody that actually stayed
there, or wants to admit that they stayed there in groups, to this
points.

EM: Well, those fellows didn't look like football players to me. They just
looked like immigrants. But I have no knowledge of any other kind of
relationship... (our tenants were mostly Hawaiian or Japanese).

GG: Do you recall approximately what the rents were in those days?

EM: Around 1937, probably about $10 a month for an unfurnished house. I may
be incorrect in this guess.

GG: And was that sort of the prevailing rate at that time in that area?

EM: I think so.

GG: And most of the people, were there more of one ethnic group than another
or...

EM: I don't understand.

GG: Well, did you have mostly Hawaiians renting from you, or Japanese?

EM: Well, in the big tenement /Magoon Block/ most of them seemed to be
Hawaiians. (My observations were made during our office hours, when the
men were not at home). In the cottages, there seemed to be more Japanese.
They all seemed to have both the units in the tenement and the little
cottages. The air was cool, the location was quite near work, there
was a school nearby, shops, etc. It seemed to be a happy place, at that
time. Then too, the rents were low.

GG: How often did you see the tenants at their places?
EM: Depends. Probably once to twice a month I went down to see a tenant or two; and to look things over. Occasionally, I went to the American Sanitary Laundry, also in the Magoon Estate property in Kakaako.

The tenement was demolished in 1950.

GG: I guess I should ask what was then put on this property, when the tenement was demolished.

EM: More or less what's there now.

GG: Which is?

EM: Little shops or commercial establishments. As the economy of the area began changing, applicants to rent, or lease, portions of that property came in very fast.

GG: Of the, say, original two properties---now I assume you have increased the amount of land holding, and do you still have the two original properties pretty much intact?

EM: Yes, except for street widening.

GG: And then, have you acquired more property in that area also?

EM: A few small pieces in the block we have been discussing. But in the area across Emily Street, where the American Sanitary Laundry was operated, I believe, we acquired a number of square feet. I do not have the dates of these acquisitions in mind.

GG: At this point or over time, now you mostly just rented out or did you lease parts of the property for things, too?

EM: The leasing was handled in the office by others, but the renting was often referred to me. (We tried to handle each application on its merits). We would lease on condition that the lease would demolish whatever was there and construct certain new buildings.

GG: Do you recall the area that was dubbed Squattersville, or was that still there when you started?

EM: No, I don't recall.

GG: I wonder if you can tell me about how the land turned over, or what improvements—you know, somebody would come in and lease the property for a while, and then another person would come and want to lease that same property?

EM: Most of the leases were for 25 or 30 years. The original lease would stand if the rents and taxes were paid promptly, and other terms of the lease were observed. Most of the leases contained a processing that the leasee could assign his lease with the landowners' (own)
consent. Each matter was handled as it occurred. The rents were usually increased from time to time.

GG: And can you say, from your vantage point tell me about the transition from residential to primarily business? When did that take place, or can you account for why it took place?

EM: It seemed to happen gradually between 1945-1955. I believe the increase in the value of the land and the corresponding increase in property taxes were at least partly responsible.

GG: How did the people react?

EM: Everyone hates to move, but our tenants were mostly reasonable people, with whom we had no serious trouble. Often I talked with them at the office, and aside from their reluctance to move, there was no trouble, or very little trouble if any.

GG: Well, how did the people react? You said you had very old files of letters of people not wanting you to tear the tenement down. Do you know where they went or how at that time did you react? Were letters sent back to them trying to explain how it was, you know, not economically sound?

EM: I can't really explain. Often I went to see the people. But my impression is that most of these people had lived there, most of our tenants had lived in these little houses, and in the block for a long time and by 1940 or so, they had grown sons and daughters. And there was beginning to be the trend where the sons and daughters no longer felt they wanted to take care of their parents. You're aware of that change?

GG: Oh, right.

EM: But my impression is that the sons or daughters found other places for the old people. See, our business isn't only Kakaako. We had property in different locations including Waikiki, Kaimuki, etc.

GG: Can you, I guess, elaborate a little bit further about the economic changes over the years. It's my impression from what I've been able to read so far that much of this took place after the war. Was there much of that going on before the war?

EM: Not too much. You see, we had rent control. Now I don't remember exactly when that came into being, but a property owner couldn't do anything with his property. He was stuck.

GG: Did land get into the political picture at all in Kakaako or what was happening there?

EM: There were wonderful political rallies in the old days, with leis and hulas and music. And the candidate spoke at length on the issues of
the day. But I do not recall that land, as such, was as prominent as it is today.

GG: Well, I'm aware that it is new. But I wondered back in those times in terms of...

EM: Now when are we talking about?

GG: Well say the 1930's. Or the 1940's.

EM: The war (World War II) of course made things complicated. And all this, I thought, had bearing on the attitude toward landowners. There are two sides to this question.

GG: Surely.

EM: And I think that politically, it may have been important, but not at all so important as it is today, with all the new laws.

GG: But in terms of the economics, now the organization has evidently held on to most of its original, and you said gained a little. I'm talking about Kakaako.

EM: Yes, except for street widening. This is a legally documented subject what I prefer not to discuss without the facts before me.

GG: Well, I tell you what. I wonder if maybe we can stop now as far as the interviewing, and I would like to look at some of the documents that we could take if your company is willing, to be photo copied, etc.

END OF INTERVIEW.
REMEMBERING KAKA‘AKO:
1910–1950

Volume I

Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

December 1978