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ECHOES FROM EWA'S PAST

Ed. Note: Five years ago in commemoration of Ewa Sugar Company's 75th anniversary the Hurri-Cane printed a weekly column entitled "Echoes from Ewa's Past," which chronicled the company's history

1890 Commenced work January 6th, 1890 with 5 white men, 2 natives and 8 Chinese, 4 horses and 8 mules; clearing land and plowing," reads the first recorded start of work on sugar production at Ewa as reported by William J. Lowrie, Ewa's first manager. After clearing a good piece of "kalu" and lantana, Lowrie reports, "started the first plow at 1 o'clock and plowed the first furrow myself."

The actual site where the plow turned the first furrow is lost in the dim recesses of history, but it was in the makai area of what is now Field 32 that Ewa Plantation Company saw its birth.

While Lowrie was busy laying the physical foundations for the then projected 10,000 to 12,000 ton plantation, others moved quickly to organize the company. Reads the company's first annual report:

"Mr. Castle still retaining faith in his conclusions that a successful plantation could be developed upon the lands, ultimately submitted a proposition to the firm of Castle & Cooke, under the general terms of which a corporation was to be formed for the purpose of establishing and operating a sugar plantation. Castle and Cooke were to act as general and financial agents of the Company. His proposition was accepted and what is now known as the Ewa Plantation Company was formed. The charter was granted on JANUARY 29, 1890, and, at a subsequent meeting of subscribers to the capital stock of the Company, the first officers were elected."

Ewa's first officers were C. M. Cooke, president; J. B. Castle, vice president; E. D. Tenney, secretary; J. B. Atherton, treasurer; and J. H. Paty, auditor.

The company organized and officers elected, Lowrie proceeded with his work. Excerpts from his notes that first year read:

January 28 - First load seed cane received from Lahaina.

February 6 - Commenced planting.

February 13 to 27 - No plowing on account of rain.

March 17 - Commenced work on Well No. 1, made 20 feet by John McCandless.

April 15 - Finished planting 74 acres seed cane.

July 9 - Commenced on pump foundations at Station No. 1.

September 13 - Commenced planting for crop of '91 and '92.

September 17 - Commenced watering. Pumps work well.

October 6 - Our own locomotive arrived and began work.

December 30 - Finished planting on Honouliuli side, 760 acres."

Also... "The contract for the mill has been made with the Union Iron Works Co. of Honolulu, and work on the foundations has already begun. Other buildings had to be put up --- "Including the house my family occupies. The office, stable, blacksmith shop, 8 large houses accommodating 470 Chinese workers, 2 Japanese camps of 4 houses each, and 32 laborers' houses accommodating 2 families each, 2 windmills, 3 tanks and all the water pipe used on the place."

1891 An early chronicle reported that the period from 1890 to 1895 saw the company struggle through one dramatic crisis after another which threatened to bankrupt Ewa, and Castle & Cooke, the agents, along with it.

The first mill finally came into being as the year 1891 drew to a close. Manager Lowrie noted:

* **Plantation Duty Roster** *

* March 16 - March 22, 1970 *

* W. L. McCleery 681-3178 *

* March 23 - March 29, 1970 *

* J. Wakatsuki 681-3352 *

* TO REPORT FIRES 681-1047 *

Dec. 12 - "Commenced trial run of mill at 1:15 p.m., ran till 4 p.m.; cut 5 cars cane, nearly 20,000 lbs., but carriers did not work very satisfactory."

Dec. 14 - "Took off first strike of sugar this a.m., boiled in small pan; polarized by Mr.

Williams, 96 deg. Dec. 19 - "Made about 33 tons No. 1 sugar."

Williams, 96 deg.

Dec. 19 - "Made about 33 tons No. 1 sugar."

1892-1897 Ewa's first full crop was harvested in 1892. Manager Lowrie reported, "We took off 691 acres of cane, and bagged 2,867 tons."

Regular factory operations began on January 19, 1892, and when begun, introduced all manner of new difficulties. Mr. Lowrie's exasperation is expressed eloquently in his notes that year: June 27 - "Mill doing same as usual -- nothing..." and later - "That factory couldn't grind the yolk of an egg."

After struggling through three crops, the diffusion process was abandoned and a nine-roller crusher-type mill was installed in 1895, "revolutionizing the crushing system in vogue throughout the Islands."

With the "growing pains" of 1890-1895 eased, Ewa paid its first dividend in 1896. Areas under cultivation increased steadily and sugar production mounted rapidly, reaching 18,284 tons in 1898.

Ewa had then grown to a plantation community of some 2,000 employees. A Japanese chapel had been "dedicated with Dr. Hyde and Mr. Fisher officiating," on January 11, 1891. The plantation store was opened in July of the same year and Ewa boasted a kindergarten founded early in 1897.

1898-1902 In 1898 began an era in Ewa history dominated by the two Rentons - father and son - who, in turn, managed the Company until 1937. Where Manager Lowrie struggled to give the plantation life, his successors had the less spectacular but equally demanding job of establishing Ewa as a going concern. Upon taking over the helms of the plantation, George Renton, Sr. placed the potential output of the lands then under cultivation at 30,000 tons of sugar. Capacity of the mill was inadequate for any such production, so plans were drawn for a new mill building and installation of new machinery. Manager Renton undertook the formidable task of making these improvements at the same time that the 1901 crop was being ground. Production that year totalled 32,371 tons of sugar! The project was efficiently completed and this 1901 mill, enlarged and improved since that time, still serves Ewa today.

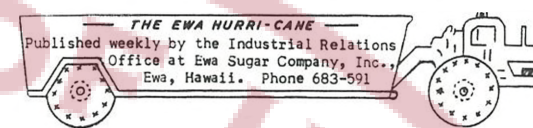
With the new mill operating successfully and all other conditions favorable, Ewa set a new production record of 10.29 tons of sugar per crop acre in 1902 and produced a banner crop of 34,737 tons sugar.

The elder Renton's far-sighted emphasis of sound employee relations was certainly as important to Ewa and the community as any of his technical contributions. His convictions are well expressed in the following passage from his annual report for 1900-- "...each cottage and garden, however humble, will become a center towards which its members will look with attachment. The houses of the workers represent homes with families for the present well-being of the workman and the future well-being of the plantation."

Construction of houses was stepped up. The Ewa kindergarten, begun three years before, was expanded to take care of the growing number of plantation children. And in that same year Manager Renton reported, "...a free hospital capable of accommodating 30 patients, has been erected, being in immediate charge of the resident physician and three assistants. Owing to better food and care, it certainly saved life and caused more rapid recovery in ordinary ailments."

As early as 1900, in the heyday of "hapaiko," Manager Renton commenting on the "high rate of labor" noted, "...it will result in the loading of cane cars by machinery. That much is certain. Whether the cutting of cane can be done by some mechanical device is regarded as doubtful. And yet when we consider what human in-

(Continued on next page)



1898 - 1902 (continued) genuity has been capable of in other industries, the case should not be set down as impossible."

In 1901 when about 800 men were employed in these two branches of harvesting, Mr. Renton wrote, "It is a regrettable fact that a successful cane loading machine is not yet in operation. Various devices have been tried and abandoned, and, so far, the severe labor of loading is all done by hand. Nevertheless, the time is coming, must come, when manual labor will be reduced in this department."

1903 The Cuban Reciprocity Bill of 1903 depressed the price of sugar. The Leaf-Hopper scourge also began to make itself felt about this time, and Ewa faced a double "pilikia" threatening its existence. But "pilikias" or no, the plantation grew and along with it the community. National cultures and religion brought to this land by those who came from foreign shores flourished amid the hustle and bustle of earning a living.

Ewa Hongwanji Temple stood resplendent at the Japanese Village in 1903, a haven of worship for the many Buddhist souls of the community.

1904-1907 Manager Renton wrote in his annual report for 1904, "Grinding season ended October 19th. Owing to an insufficiency of labor, especially that of cutters and loaders, it was unduly prolonged."

To cope with the harvesting of 1905's 3500-acre crop, 3 cane loading machines were purchased during that year. Although far from being the perfect answer to the problem, these crude fore-runners of today's mechanical harvesting equipment did much to relieve the labor shortage of that day.

But, mules were, of course, the main work horse of infield operations of that pre-tractor era as they pulled everything from stone-boats and plows to loaded cane cars. A passage in the 1905 report says, "Twenty mules were bought to replace animals that had become worn out in service." Many a plantation old timer recalls the noisy confusion of half-a-hundred mules being harnessed at the stables in the pre-dawn dark.

The leafhopper scourge spread, raising havoc with Ewa's crop. While the entomologists of the Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association worked hard to find parasites to combat this pest, it was estimated that during 1904-1907 the uncontrolled leafhopper cost Ewa 8,500 tons of sugar.

During the long-drawn-out battle against the bug, another "pilikia" struck the plantation. Early in 1907 Manager Renton observed that the Lahaina cane was not doing so well in certain Ewa fields. From 1907 on it became increasingly apparent that Lahaina was failing miserably in large areas on the plantation.

Search for disease resistant varieties led to the discovery of H-109, a cane which Renton was to nourish to a spectacular success and leadership among all varieties planted in the islands.

1908-1911 In 1908 the crushing plant was altered so that it could operate either as two 9-roller mills or as one 15-roller mill. The latter arrangement was followed for the entire crop of 1910 when an average sugar extraction of 95.53 per cent was obtained. This accomplishment led Manager Renton to report, "For an entire season's run this is certainly the best milling ever obtained in Hawaii and perhaps the world." The crushing was modified still further after this success and ran as an 18-roller mill for the crop of 1911, establishing a new Hawaiian record of 96.35 per cent extraction.

Year by year production climbed steadily, and in spite of the leaf-hopper and sick cane "pilikias" the 1911 crop was a proud 34,397 tons of sugar. But there was no let-down in the relentless pursuit of new ideas and techniques to build a bigger and better Ewa. Arable lands were put into cane as quickly as conditions permitted. By the end of Renton's first decade as Ewa's manager, Ewa had grown to a sprawling 7500-acre plantation.

1912-1914 As the dark clouds of World War I hovered over Hawaii's sugar industry and Ewa along with it. The "Free Sugar" Act was passed by Congress in 1913 removing the protective tariff on sugar.

When the war burst into flame in 1914, Manager Renton wrote in his report for the year, "...sugar is to be placed on the Free list May, 1916. While it is well to be optimistic in the hope of its repeal, it is better to strenuously endeavor, as the Plantation Managements are now doing, to meet the conditions to be im-

posed on us by this law, not only by thrift in every department of management, but in the higher economy of scientific production, so that those members of Congress, who are unfriendly to tariff protection, may know that the sugar interests of Hawaii are not sitting idly by awaiting their destruction but are doing all that is humanly possible to avert disaster."

The dark clouds, however, were somewhat silver-lined, for the price of sugar sky-rocketed with the progress of the war, giving Ewa additional time to prepare for the rough years to come.

1915-1918 In 1915 began a sugar "boom" induced by World War I. The spectacular rise in the price of sugar more than offset the poor yields due to the leaf hopper and sick cane scourges. Profits made possible many improvements that further established for Ewa the reputation of being a good place to live and work. Also, the fantastic bonuses the plantation paid the employees during that "boom" period are still remembered by old timers, many of whom today enjoy the fruits of wise investments made with the bonus dollars.

New equipment installed in the boiling house included an evaporator, centrifugals and crystallizers. (The crystallizers are still in use today). In 1915 the 150-foot concrete smokestack was completed to form with the 130 foot brick stack, built in 1891, the twin-spire landmark dominating Ewa's skyline unto this day.

The battle fields of World War I were far-removed from the peaceful Ewa scenes. Yet it was inevitable that the grim effects of the war would strike close to home. As the nation joined the Allies against the Central Powers in 1917, Ewa also mobilized.

The manpower sorely needed to keep up the flow of sugar to the front lines, factories and tables of the Allied World had to be sacrificed to the needs of our armed forces. Manager Renton wrote in his report for 1918 - "There has been a labor shortage which was manifest immediately upon the mobilization of the National Guard and the induction of draftees into the U.S. Army of which the Plantation furnished its full share, 164 officers and enlisted men. With the return of these men to industrial life, conditions will again be normal."

Ewa devoted itself wholeheartedly to the war effort. Uncle Sam's pleas to increase food production were met with renewed efforts to produce more sugar. Production short-cuts were devised and cultural practices improved. Production in the year 1917 rocketed to 34,748 tons of sugar, the record crop for Ewa since its founding in 1890. In 1918, although production fell off slightly to 33,340 tons, the average per acre yield of 8.29 tons was the highest since 1911.

1919-1920 Ill health forced the retirement of Renton Sr. at the close of 1920 after 22 years at Ewa's helm.

Outstanding among the accomplishments of his administration were the great improvement in milling technique, the fight against the leafhopper and the remarkable development of H-109. To this must also be added his unremitting attention toward the building of Ewa, not only as a successful agricultural, enterprise, but as a community steeped in human warmth as well.

Although the twilight years of the elder Renton's management were beset by labor problems caused by the 1919 strike, the last year of the decade saw Ewa produce a record 37,405 tons of sugar, averaging 9.62 tons per acre.

1921-1923 When the younger Renton took over the managership from his father in 1920, he had long been schooled in Ewa affairs. Added to his background of a childhood spent on a plantation was the sugar "know how" acquired while working for the Company. As early as 1914 he had evolved the "U" system of irrigation, then a departure from island-wide practice.

His first full year as manager was a trial by fire, indeed, for the effects of the 1919 strike were still being felt. In his report for 1921, he wrote, "The past year has been a very hard one for all concerned. During the early part of the year, this Company was carrying on operations with a labor shortage of over 400 hands. The total number of persons on the payroll during January, 1921 was 1631, when normally there should have been 2066. The number continued to decrease, and by July when the need for men was greatest, there were only 1498 persons on the payroll. Conditions were critical. The Crop of 1921 was being harvested as fast as possible. Men who were physically able loaded cane manually (Hapaiko). Weaker ones loaded by aid of the Wilson-Webster cane loaders. The Crop of 1922 was being irrigated by flooding, and the Crop of 1923 was practically neglected."

Shortly after assuming authority at Ewa, Renton Jr. established a Department of Agricultural Research and Control. This unit began immediately to analyze many of the old established methods in the culture of sugar cane, such as cutting back and hilling up, and to scrutinize carefully irrigation and fertilization practices. Considerable work in the propagation, selection and trial of cane seedlings was also undertaken.

(To be concluded next week)