

Will More Old Cemeteries Give Way to High Rises?

SUN JUN 16 1968 AD K

Is the decision to lease Kamoiilili Church cemetery as a condominium site the harbinger of a high-rise building at Kawaiahao Church cemetery?

Abraham K. Piianaia, director of the Hawaiian Homes Commission, thinks so. Kawaiahao Church officials had no comment.

Piianaia is opposed to plans by Kawaiahao Church to raze the Kamoiilili Church and move the bodies of several hundred persons from the cemetery to other locations.

Kamoiilili is a branch of Kawaiahao Church.

Piianaia charged that Kawaiahao's trustees have done a "complete turnabout" by leasing Kamoiilili to Rainbow Plaza Development, Inc., as the site for a 37-story condominium.

"Ironically," Piianaia said, "the leaders of Kawaiahao put up a great protest a few years ago against impending legislation which

would diminish the power of large land estates in Hawaii.

"What they are now doing to Kamoiilili Church and the remains of the bodies in Kamoiilili Cemetery is a complete turnabout.

"Certainly the land areas involved are not precisely the same; the principal is identical.

"Perhaps within my lifetime I shall see a beautiful high rise at the mauka-waikiki corner of Punchbowl and South Queen Streets."

(The site presently is occupied by Kawaiahao Cemetery.)

Piianaia said that a high-rise building on the cemetery site "could provide a much more handsome return to Kawaiahao than if all of its branch church sites were to be converted to the earning of revenue."

Piianaia said he didn't want to criticize the trustees of Kawaiahao, or belittle the "spiritual leadership of Kawaiahao."

"I do want, however," he said, "to point out to the remaining branch churches of Kawaiahao and its members that what is happening to Kamoiilili Church should be considered and taken as a warning that they are not exempt from a similar fate."

Piianaia said he grew up in Moiliili and Kamoiilili Church "is a part of my total life."

He said he has relatives buried there.

"Among reasons given for the change in land use," he said, "are that the church building is unsafe for use; that there has been a lack of interest as well as a drop in attendance.

"If this is true, Kawaiahao has failed to meet its obligation to one of its branch churches.

"As a Mother Church it is now unable or unwilling to give aid and to restore strength to this; one of its several branch churches, which for many decades contributed much to making Kawaiahao the church

Piianaia said the first indication he had of plans to disinter the bodies at Kamoiilili came from a newspaper notice. He said he was "stunned."

"More disturbing, however, is the announcement that the land occupied by Kamoiilili Church for over a hundred years has been leased to developers for a condominium site," he said.

Piianaia told of the historical significance of the venerable church, which he said was once the gathering place for many Hawaiian families from Kapaakea to Palolo.

"The seriousness with which they considered the Church was something to behold," he said. "The week-to-week affairs of the Church gave these families the opportunity to develop a cohesiveness which helped to cushion the slow but certain approach of the time when Moiliili would cease to be a native settlement, and hardly any of these families would dare to even venture a guess as to their future."

He said that spectacular exhibitions were held at Kamoiilili, attracting Hawaiians from all over the island. They vied for honors in choral, oratorical and philosophical presentations,

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6/16/1968