

Voices from the Past

The 1868 Hawaiian Earthquake

Reminiscences of Frederick S. Lyman in a letter written to his cousin, Josie Sperry Lyman, on March 31, 1912.

You ask where we were living at the time of the great earthquake in 1868? We were living on our Stock Farm, in Kau 30 miles south west of the Volcano, at the foot of Mauna Loa (long mountain) some 4 or 5 miles from the sea shore. About sun rise Friday morning, March 26 the boys who were milking the cows, called out "see the fire on the mountain" -- we saw a column of thick smoke rising rapidly on the top of the mountain, and soon a second column, a little South of the first, and then a third, and a fourth column . . .

Rev. Mr. Kauhane, our Pastor, was at Punaluu, at the sea shore, in the morning when the eruption started, and could see the top of the mountain plainly, being a little away from it -- and he saw the molten lava running on the surface towards the South East, where the smoke was rising that we saw, but the fire soon disappeared, finding an underground channel, which caused the earthquakes . . .

We had to keep on with our usual duties -- but the earthquakes kept on too -- every few minutes, often we could hear it coming from the South, then give us a good smart shake and pass on towards Kilau-
ea, North East from us -- at night it made the house rock and creak like a ship in a heavy sea, and we could not sleep . . .

April 2nd Thursday afternoon . . . at home, I went to work outside the door yard, hewing some logs about 10 or 12 inches thick, and

20 or so feet long, for gate posts, for our place was new and unfinished -- two of the children were with me, sitting on some of the logs, -- about 4 o'clock it shook as usual, but did not stop -- shook East and West, North and South, round and round, and up and down -- lessen, then increase in violence; the logs we were on rolled back and forth -- I called to the children to keep their feet up, so as not to get caught under the logs, the stone walls were all shaken down, not one stone left on another, no wind was blowing, but the mulberry trees we had planted for a breakwind thrashed about as if with a mighty wind -- while this was going on, we heard a rushing sound North of us, and on looking up in that direction, saw, on the side of the mountain, about a mile and a half away, what we took to be red hot lava spouting up higher than the tops of the trees, 50 feet or more, then ripped open the side of the mountain about 1/2 mile wide and rushed down the steep side, 45 degrees, to the bottom over 100 feet, then across the level plain below about 2 miles, and ceased -- it must have gone about a mile a minute; we could see droves of cattle running before it on the plain but were soon overtaken and covered up, as it came like the great combers on the sea beach, and swallowed them in an instant. At the foot of the steep mountain at that place, was a Hawaiian village, where 31 people were covered many feet deep in it.

Just after the hard shaking had ceased at home some one called out, "look at the sea," -- all along the coast it was surging and boiling furiously. . .

The Pastor's cousin was out on the plain below, and passed thro a grove of Koa trees when the shake came -- he held on to a tree so as not to be thrown down -- and a storm of mud, stones, and water, came flying all about him, and a

Earthquake Report

Back-to-Back Quakes Rattle New Zealand

A magnitude 6.3 quake struck off the southern coast of the South Island of New Zealand on August 10, 1993. About nine hours later, on August 11, a magnitude 6.4 quake hit the east coast of the North Island. Neither event caused significant injuries or major structural damage, although non-structural damage, such as fallen ceiling tiles, broken glass, and scattered contents was reported to be common.

The August 10 quake was felt strongly in Te Anau, Queenstown, and Wanake, and was noticeable in Christchurch and Wellington. Power was disrupted in Te Anau, and two avalanches were triggered. (August is the heart of winter in New Zealand.) The August 11 quake cut off power and communications in some parts of the city of Gisborne and in surrounding towns.

Compiled from reports in the Otago Daily Times and the New Zealand Herald.

great bank of earth mixed with rocks, logs, ferns, etc. 20 feet high, stopped a little before it reached him (we saw it the next day, passing by on our way to Hilo); so from the reports of these people we found out that it was *earth* and mud we had seen spouting in the air at the top of the hill, where there are springs of water! not lava!

From "The Lymans of Hilo, A fascinating account of life in 19th century Hawaii," edited by Margaret Greer Martin, revised edition 1992, Lyman House Memorial Museum, Hilo, Hawaii.