

# Samuel Amalu

Samuel Amalu, Hawaii's renowned dean of lighthouse keepers, glanced into his binoculars one afternoon in the early 1900s and saw blackness sweeping across a blue sky, with waves crashing on gray, rugged rocks at Kilauea Point on Kauai, Hawaii — the first Hawaiian lighthouse seen by ships on their way to the West Coast from the Orient. A storm was approaching. Quickly, he tended to the light and remained awake all night keeping his light bright to guide seafarers safely to shore. For Amalu, devotion to duty and discipline was a way of life.

Kilauea Light, the northernmost lighthouse in Hawaii, was built in 1913. The last manned light in the Hawaiian Islands, it guided the first transatlantic aviators to the islands in 1927 and was the first light to operate a radio beacon. Surrounded by Kilauea Wildlife Refuge, it now hosts thousands of visitors each year.

Amalu, who had the longest tenure of any light keeper at Kilauea, took charge of the light April 9, 1915, and served there for 10 years. Back then, efficiency pennants were awarded to the best kept station in each district, and Amalu was recipient of one in 1920, according to Colin MacKenzie, librarian of the Nautical Research Center in Petaluma, Calif.

In 1906, Amalu joined the the U.S. Lighthouse Establishment, which took over jurisdiction of Hawaiian navigational aids in 1904. A veteran by the time he reached Kilauea Point, he had already served as a keeper at Kawaihae Light on the island of Hawaii and at Barber's Point on Oahu.

Seeing lightkeepers as masters of all trades, Amalu, like other Hawaiian keepers, was hardworking and versatile.

In a 1939 interview with the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, he said "Lighthouse keeper is a good job. I'm my own boss. A lighthouse keeper is master of all trades. He works with pick and shovel in the garden. He is a machinist to keep the timing mechanism of the light going. And he is carpenter, painter and engineer."

A trailblazer among Hawaii's light keepers, Amalu laid a path of devotion to duty and discipline for Kilauea Point's successive keepers.

After the Coast Guard took over the nation's navigational aids in 1939 — and Hawaii became the 14th District — Hawaiian lighthouses were automated to operate without keepers. In 1974, the last Hawaiian keeper was relieved of duty.

Although the era of lighthouse keepers is gone, Hawaii's seafaring heritage is strong. And the devotion to duty shown by Amalu and other Hawaiian keepers remains a beacon of pride for Pacific islanders in Coast Guard history.

PA3 Sharon Wilkerson, USCGR, G-CP-4



Courtesy Honolulu Star-Bulletin



Kilauea Point Light Station, Honolulu  
June 30, 1913