



By **Bob Jones** Wednesday - August 25, 2010

The Shinto Shrine Near Pearl Harbor

There's a major fuss about building a mosque near New York's 9/11 ground zero despite the fact that Muslims already have a prayer room in that neighborhood and inside the Pentagon, about 80 feet from where that hijacked airliner hit.

A friend e-mailed me: "Bob, I am curious. Do you recall any similar controversy about the building of a Japanese shrine in Honolulu 10 years after the bombing of Pearl Harbor?"

Yep. It involves the Kotohira Jinsha Shinto Shrine at 1239 Olomea St., just makai of the H-1 freeway in Kalihi-Palama. That's five road miles or about 10 minutes from Pearl Harbor.

But that fuss never went national like the mosque matter. And you'd be hard-pressed today to find anybody who remembers it.

Shinto shrines in Hawaii were shut down after the Pearl Harbor attack and priests were sent to Mainland relocation camps. Feelings ran high among non-Japanese Americans because Shinto was the government religion of Japan. It supported the war and gave special blessings to Emperor Hirohito and his top generals and admirals. Its priests taught that Japan was fated to "rule the world under one roof."

The late Bishop Shigemaru Miyao and the church officers of Taishoku Mission on Kukui Street were arrested and spent the war in California camps behind barbed wire. A small site near Taishoku Shrine is thought to be the location of the first Shinto temple build by Japanese sugar workers here.

But back to the Kotohira Jinsha Shrine affair. The shrine started in 1920 in a residence at 1256 N. King St. in Kapalama, and the Rev. Hitoshi Hirota was its first priest. In 1931, the congregation purchased a 50,000-square-foot parcel at 1045 Kama Lane and built a new shrine and gate. By wartime, it was the site of martial arts tournaments and cultural activities for the Japanese community.

After the Pear Harbor attack, federal officials closed it and sent its priest back to Japan. But by late 1947, its adherents started it up again, without any fanfare or New York mosque hollering and posturing. Then a year later, federal officers raided it, shut it down, and Washington confiscated the property as alien-owned.

The law firm Robertson, Castle & Anthony filed suit against U.S. Attorney General Tom Clark, the state of Hawaii and the Federal Alien Land Office. The case was heard in federal court May 18, 1950, and the ruling was that Uncle Sam had to return the land and back off. The high priest, Misao Isobe, was allowed to come back from Japan in 1952 as the Shinto leader.

In 1962, the shrine was torn down and the new one built on Olomea Street land purchased from the state for \$122,250. Again, no tearing of hair and politicians going off the deep end.

On Oct. 31, 1968, members of the Japan Shinto Religious Goodwill Delegation came here for the first time since the war. The four Shinto shrines in Honolulu held a banquet and officially renewed relationships between Shintoism in Japan and Hawaii.

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