

Hawai'i's Plantation Village

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Hawai'i's Plantation Village is an outdoor museum developed to foster a better understanding of the origins of Hawaii's cosmopolitan society as it evolved during the later part of the nineteenth and the first part of the twentieth century. The story told is about Hawaii's immigrant plantation labourer and the differing cultural values and traditions that form the basis of Hawaii's multi-ethnic society. The Village was the idea of a group of retired plantation workers concerned that the plantation camps and the story they held would disappear from the record. They feared that their grandchildren would learn of the common man's place in Hawaii's history only through textbooks when the last of the plantation camps was destroyed for new development.

Their dream of a place to tell the story of their own roots began over twenty years ago with the \$1 per year lease of a 50 acre parcel of land from the City Department of Parks and Recreation. All except five acres of the parcel were within a federal government designated flood zone which forbid construction of any buildings.

The early energy of the group was consequently on the development of gardens filled with ethnic plants and vegetables that were brought to Hawai'i by the immigrant workers. This passive recreation space, the Waipahu Cultural Garden Park, fulfilled a great need for park space for the crowded community. In early 1990 the focus shifted to the development of Hawai'i's Plantation Village, an outdoor museum located within the Park. The Village opened in September of 1992 with a celebration of more than six thousand people.

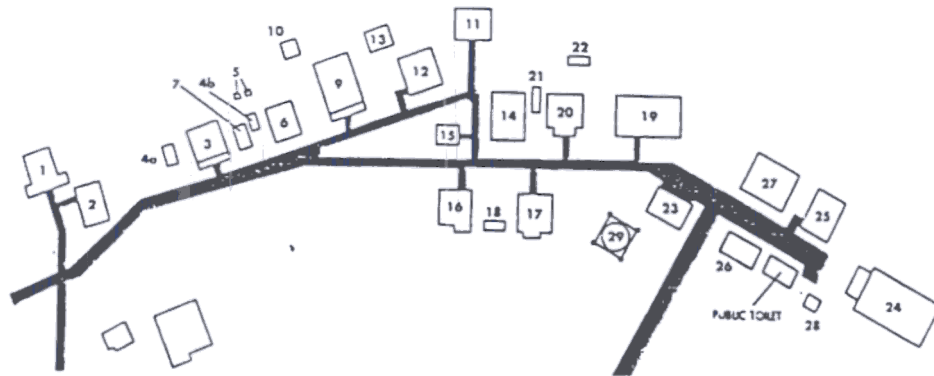
The outstanding success of this museum is dependent on two primary considerations – first, the flexibility of the approach to the “authentic” context, and second, the ability to adjust to the variety of grass roots based input to the educational content of the museum. Although the United States does not have as strong a history of outdoor museums as Europe, there is still good precedent in Greenfield Village, Sturbridge Village and Williamsburg. Most of these outdoor museums are life-size exhibit cases for collections of artifacts from a history that no longer exists. At Hawai'i's Plantation Village the history that is told in the buildings is just at the borderline of extinction. It is still possible to extensively research this history to provide an accurate context.

Development of the appropriate physical context for the Village, involved construction of a climatically controlled new museum building, restoration of a historic structure on the site, construction of additional replica buildings, and relocation of a threatened historic structure. Each approach was necessary to provide for a complete experience of the cultural history of Hawai'i's multi-ethnic society.

The overall multi-cultural orientation is presented by audio visual means in a modern museum building before visitors begin the tour of the museum collection and the Village. There is a wealth of donated objects from Hawai'i's plantation period and the Museum contains the largest collection of plantation era artifacts in Hawai'i. As in the case of most museums, the majority of the collection is not on display. The artifacts that are unique or have an association with a specific historical figure will be displayed in this climatically controlled museum

The Chinese Society Building is a reconstruction on the original site of the 1906 *Tsoong Nyee Tongg*. Research indicated an identical Society Building had been built at the same time in Kula on the island of Maui. Detailed measured drawings of the Maui building, *Kwock Hing Tongg* were used for the reconstruction of the building.

The Village structures are organized chronologically into ethnic "camps" by the date of immigration of each group to Hawai'i. While the interpretive plan is monitored by Museum staff, the interpretive plan and the maintenance of each Village structure is undertaken by individual heritage societies with trained volunteer docents.



Site Plan of Hawaii's Plantation Village

The first major immigrant group imported to work on Hawai'i's plantations were the Chinese, starting in 1852. A portion of the Village site was once the center of the *Tsoong Nyee Tongg* fraternal society, a thriving Chinese community until the 1960s. The Chinese site is interpreted with the restoration of one existing building on the site, as well as the rebuilding of a structure where only the foundation remained. The original complex provided group living and eating facilities for the single men in the fraternal society, as well as meeting and worship space for all the members. Many of the Chinese labourers in the *Tsoong Nyee Tongg* worked either for Oahu Sugar Co. or the various rice plantations in Waipahu.

Also within the Chinese complex is the original 1909 Chinese Cookhouse, a restored structure on its original site. This kitchen was used to prepare communal meals for the single male residents of the fraternal organization. The Cookhouse, the oldest remaining wooden structure in Waipahu, is one of the few remaining intact Chinese cookhouses in Hawai'i. The large woks, heated by firewood are still intact within the structure. This building is listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Restoration involved hydraulic jacking of the building more than four feet vertically after installation of a city sewer line in the 1950s had caused the building to sink substantially into the ground.

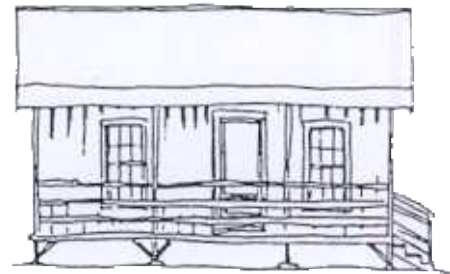
The leadership of the group responsible for the interpretation of the Chinese site is focused within a single family that has lived on the site since the fraternal society structures were built. The fact that this group was still active and could relate directly to this specific site provided opportunities and challenges to the management of the interpretation. The Chinese Heritage Group could relate directly to the restorations and reconstruction since they were part of their own personal experiences.

However, they had a hard time grasping the relationship of the Chinese site to the overall chronology of the Village, and the need to tell a story appropriate to the early immigration of the Chinese rather than a mixture of stories down to the present. In addition, they were desirous of rebuilding all seven structures originally on the site. This task was impossible in an accurate relationship due to road construction across a portion of the original site. It took a great deal of education to stress the importance of not compromising the interpretation of the restored and reconstructed building by including others in non original relationships. The overall historic interpretation of the site is successfully done with a large scale model of the original configuration.

Spanish Camp is the next area within the Village and is entirely reconstructed buildings based on measured documents of buildings existing elsewhere within the Hawai'ian Islands. Although not related by language or customs, the Portuguese and the Puerto Ricans were housed together in Spanish Camp because they were the only imported labour that was not oriental.

The Portuguese immigration to Hawai'i started in 1877 and included many families, rather than a preponderance of single males. The plantation homes used for this group were quite small and simple, consisting of two rooms used for both living and sleeping. An early single-family house with out-buildings and Portuguese bread oven was built to represent this building type and ethnic group.

The white-washed Portuguese' House was a reconstruction, built from measured drawings of an early single-family house still existing in Poamoho Village in central O'ahu. The house that was documented and measured has since been remodeled to be almost entirely unrecognizable. The exterior wall was built of 1.25" x 12" rough sawn boards overlaid with a wide 1" x 2" batten. No additional structural system supported the roof. It was one of the few remaining examples of true single wall construction found in Hawaii.



front elevation



left side elevation

The Portuguese Camp was built with assistance from the Hawai'i Council for Portuguese Heritage. Interest of this heritage society focused primarily on one of the out-buildings, a bread oven or *forno* rather than the single family house. The main staple of the Portuguese families' meals is still bread, rather than rice – which was the preference of immigrant workers from Asia. Sweet bread, one of the delights baked for special occasions, is now a favourite Island delicacy. The usefulness of the oven was immediately apparent. The educational value of the single family residence to tell the complete ethnic story was a more difficult process for the group to embrace. It was not until the *forno* was constructed and the group began to gather around the Portuguese

House that the interest in providing historic artifacts within the building blossomed.

Approximately 5,000 Puerto Ricans were brought to the islands as labourers for the sugar plantations in 1900 and 1901. The devastating 1899 hurricane in their home island was one of the factors inducing them to move to Hawai'i. The Puerto Rican House with two rooms and a six-foot-wide *lanai*, or porch, was one of the typical quarters at the turn of the century. The wide plank board and batten walls are made of rough-milled wood similar to the Portuguese House. A structural sophistication occurred with the single wall of this building as the ten foot high wall was reinforced by an interior horizontal belly-band at the mid point. The Puerto Rican House is a reconstruction, built from measured drawings, of a 1900 house, since demolished, which was located in Mana, Kaua'i.

The out-buildings were also important to tell the lifestyle of the early immigrants. The kitchen building contained a wooden wash basin, screened cupboards for food storage, and either a kerosene or charcoal stove. Although these kitchens seem crude by modern standards, they were an improvement over the earliest pattern, which was to cook outdoors over an open fire or brazier. The reconstructed kitchen structure was built from measured drawings of a kitchen building in Waipahu's Nishii Camp, within a half mile of the Village. The entire Nishii Camp has since been completely bulldozed by Oahu Sugar Mill "for safety reasons".

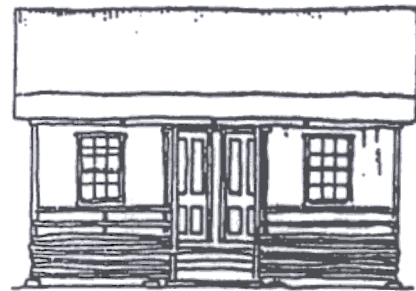
The Puerto Rican Heritage group was by far the most cohesive organization in developing an interpretative plan for their buildings. This is likely due to the limited numbers of both immigrants as well as descendants. They easily grasped the importance of exhibition appropriate to their period of immigration and did extensive research on what would be appropriate to exhibit in the buildings. None of the artifacts within the Puerto Rican structures came from the existing collection. All were specifically donated

by members of the Heritage Group for the buildings and documented as to correct location within the buildings by historic photographs to the 1900 period.

The largest ethnic group in Hawai'i today is the Japanese. They were also the largest group to immigrate as plantation workers. The first group of Japanese came to Hawai'i in 1868, but large numbers of immigrants started in the mid 1880s due to an economic crisis in Japan. Over 200,000 Japanese migrated to Hawai'i between 1884 and 1924. Several buildings in Hawai'i's Plantation Village present the history of this ethnic group.

Early Japanese families were housed in converted dormitory-style accommodations. Often crowded and lacking privacy, these lodgings proved inadequate for family life. After the 1909 strike in which the workers demanded better work and living conditions housing began to be more standardized. The first standardized unit was a duplex residence with an attached kitchen.

Reconstruction of a typical early period Japanese Duplex was based on measured drawings of a building in Pa'auhau Camp, on the Hamakua coast of the Big Island of Hawai'i. This building had been vacant for many years but was spotlessly maintained "for her grandchildren" by an elderly woman who lived next door.



front elevation



left side elevation

Japanese Duplex

In an effort to upgrade the camps, the plantations recognized the need to build family-oriented communities with separate yards and facilities provided for each household. This period marked the transition from plantation camps to plantation villages. The Hawai'ian Sugar Planters Association (HSPA) generated standard house plans in 1919 that were distributed in booklet form to member plantations to encourage replacement of the substandard accommodations which contributed to the labour strikes.

Three examples of a standard HSPA residence, Plan 11, were reconstructed within the Village. These HSPA plans were further documented by measured drawings of examples of this house type found in Pa'auilo on the Hamakua coast of the Big Island. The Hamakua Sugar Company has recently closed and the fate of several of these villages of Plan Type 11 is uncertain.

The Japanese plantation villages were by far the most developed in social structure and building type. Consequently, a number of supplementary structures were also constructed within the Village to allow for a variety of interpretation programs. The Japanese ethnic groups were not organized into heritage societies. So although the number of potential supporters was quite large, the organization of the groups was not centralized. The strategy that worked for interpretative planning within this group was to break up the Japanese camp into several separate stories, with one building per group. Consequently, the Japanese Christian story is told in one residence while the Okinawan story is told in another. All of the individual interpretation plans are coordinated by the museum educational staff.

One important aspect in the interpretation of the Japanese story is religion. The Wakamiya Inari Shrine, relocated to the Village when its existence was threatened by demolition, is a minor Shinto sect shrine associated with the working classes. This building

was the last active public shrine of its sect on O'ahu. The shrine was constructed in 1914 in the Kaka'ako section of Honolulu and moved to Mo'ili'ili in 1918. The shrine was moved again in 1979 the twenty five miles to Waipahu Cultural Garden Park after the priest that built the Shrine died. Interpretation of the Inari Shrine is undertaken by a "Friends" group, primarily accidental, that was interested in preserving this structure that is listed on both the State and National Register of Historic Places.

Each of the different ethnic groups living in the plantation villages had a desire for foods from their home country. Those with an entrepreneurial spirit started businesses within the camps to earn extra money. One of the enterprises started by Japanese families was the manufacturing and sale of *tofu*, a bean curd made from soybeans. The *tofu-ya* was reconstructed from measured drawings of a Kahuku, O'ahu building originally operated by Shinasuke and Nui Miota. This building was recently destroyed for a low income housing development. The *tofu*-making equipment from the Kahuku *tofu-ya* was donated by the Shiro Miota family.

Barbering was one of the earliest of the professions to develop in the plantation communities. In the earliest years the barbering service was performed with minimal equipment, often outdoors. Eventually, a barber shop could be found in every plantation camp with more than 25 houses. The Japanese were dominant in this trade. Reconstruction of the barber shop was based on measured drawings and historic photographs of a barber shop in Waipahu's Nishii Camp before it was demolished. The barbering equipment was donated to the Village and is displayed within the controlled environment of the new Museum building. Interpretation of the Barber Shop has been undertaken by descendants of the Nishii Camp barber.

The Hawai'ian Sugar Planters Association heavily recruited immigrants from the Philippines from

1906 to 1946. The Filipino House is a fine example of the larger homes built for plantation families in the pre-war period. With indoor kitchen and bathing facilities, these homes were similar to those in typical American suburb. This house is a reconstruction, based on measured drawings, of the 1939 Juan family's home in Pa'auhau on the Hamakua coast of the Big Island.

The Filipino group had the most active role within the development of the Village because they had the closest ties to the existing plantation system. There was quite a bit of "jealousy" within the heritage societies when the Filipino House began to be constructed because it was decidedly bigger and better. The chronological interpretation of immigration was easy to understand on paper; the reality of the different living conditions when the actual structures began to be built was more difficult to accept. Again, extensive education was the key to an effective interpretation plan.

A number of the Filipinos also focused on the practicality and usability of the out-buildings. Raising chickens, whether out of economic necessity or for recreational purposes, is closely associated with the rural lifestyle of the plantation camps. Chicken coops were an integral part of the camp landscape. The hen coops are reconstructions based on drawings in *Hawai'i Farm and Home* magazine (March 1938). The cock sheds were reconstructed from oral history accounts and measured drawings of numerous surviving examples from Waipahu and Ewa. Cock fighting, a highly illegal but still prolific activity, is explained in an educational manner by a local Cock Fighting Society.

After the 1920 strike, recreation facilities were developed by the plantations as an inducement to keep workers and their families constructively occupied. Japanese immigrants performed *sumo* matches for King Kalakaua when he visited the

immigration compound in February 1885. This vigorous and highly ritualized tradition was carried by the Japanese into the plantation camps. Indeed, many non-Japanese enjoyed the matches and young men of other nationalities participated in the training and competition. An example of the success of this tradition is the recent elevation of Hawaii's own Chad Rowan, *Akebono*, to the highest *sumitori* status, *Yokozuna*.

The educational role of this outdoor museum has been clearly shown. Over twenty five thousand school children are scheduled to visit the museum in its first year of operation. A like number of tourist/visitors is also expected. The State Department of Education has provided a full time resource specialist for the Village to coordinate the educational experience for these students. The history of immigration to Hawai'i has been integrated into the curriculum of the public school system at both the elementary and secondary school levels in a very "hands on" manner.

These buildings have also allowed for a substantial oral history of plantation life to begin. Elderly visitors to the Village cannot help but remember stories from their own childhood and how they lived in buildings similar to what have been constructed. These stories are recorded and an archive has been started for future research work in this area. In addition, a measured and photographic record of more than forty plantation buildings was made and is stored at the State Preservation Office. This is particularly important since more than half of the measured structures have been destroyed since they were documented.

The early founders of Waipahu Cultural Garden Park do not have to worry that their grandchildren will be reading about plantation history only in textbooks. They will experience this still living history at Hawai'i's Plantation Village.