

A Brief History of Waimea

By Christine Fayé



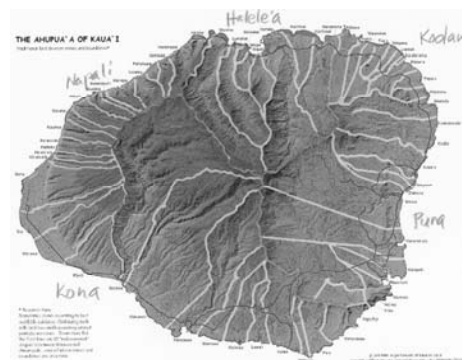
Historic Waimea

Long a center of Hawaiian government and commerce, Waimea is an ancient settlement with beginnings shrouded in mythology. Captain James Cook landed here in 1778, marking the anchorage on maps, the first accurate maps published in Europe of the Pacific. During the years of Kamehameha's wars, traders in fur, sandalwood and guns made Waimea a provision stop. Many of Kaua'i's historical highlights of the time took place here—the Russian fortifications, the first Protestant missionaries, the Rebellion of 1824 and more. Waimea continued as an important port town with cattle, taro, rice, sugar and other products transported by ship from the Waimea Landing. In 1930, deep harbors at Nāwiliwili and Port Allen replaced Waimea as a port of call, diminishing the town's political and economic role over the years.

This legacy is reflected in its many historic buildings and its rich history is worth exploring. In fact Waimea has the most registered historic sites in the Hawaiian Islands. Waimea remains a special community well-known for its active community reflected in its high level of volunteerism, sense of family and aloha spirit.

Land Divisions in Ancient Kaua'i

An *ahupua'a* is a land division that usually extended from the mountain to the sea on a *mokupuni*, island. The island of Kaua'i was made up of five *moku*, districts, including the island of Ni'ihau. The boundaries of the Waimea ahupua'a were Makaweli, Kanekula, Pohakuwa'awa'a, Pu'ukapele, and Pōki'ikauna. Each ahupua'a was often divided into areas called *'ili* which were, in turn, subdivided until each tenant farmer had his *kuleana*, farm land. The rich, varied ecosystem and mild climate with ample water made Waimea Valley an ideal area for settlement. The *mahi'ai*, farmer, shared his produce with the *lawai'a*, fishermen, and his *'ohana*, extended family. The tenants of the ahupua'a paid a yearly tax that was collected in the *makahiki*, harvest season. The collected *ho'okupu*, tribute, was distributed to the *ali'i*, chiefs. The *ali'i* were the gods' representative on earth, the chiefs, ranging from the *konohiki*, administrators, up through the *ali'i nui*, king.



For centuries, Waimea Valley has been an important agricultural center. Centuries-old ditch systems provide water to the agricultural terraces that grow taro, the food staple of the Hawaiian people. The favored way to eat taro was *poi*, mashed cooked corms using stone pounders on a board. Only on Kaua'i were women allowed to make poi. The unique Kaua'i-style ring and stirrup shapes were easier for women to use with two hands.

From the Waimea Canyon Drive, overlooks of Waimea taro cultivation can be seen just beyond the houses perched on the Cliffside. The terraces and ditches are centuries old. Most of Hawai'i's taro crop is cultivated on Kaua'i, principally at Hanalei, but it is found in many of the river valleys as well. The deeds for these taro lands require each landowner to maintain their portion of the ancient ditch system. Many of these fields are accessible only on foot as the deeds were made in a time when vehicles were not used in farming. Rice supplanted taro as a crop beginning in the 1850s. The taro loi were suited for conversion to rice. Taro is again a viable crop for farmers but it is a very laborious crop due to the wetlands needed to grow it.

Menehune Ditch, Waimea Valley

According to Hawaiian legend, Chief Ola directed the *menehune*, stonemasons, to build a watercourse up and around a cliff to provide water to the lower valley of Waimea. According to mythology, the menehune built the Pe‘ekaua‘i ditch in a single night. Each menehune was paid in ‘opae, a freshwater shrimp that Ola had his people gather. Portions of this watercourse still exist. Today a road obscures much of the original 24 foot high stone wall near the “swinging bridge”. It is one of the few sites where the Hawaiians used dressed stone. It is a nationally registered landmark.

Vehicular access to the valley is on Menehune Road between the Waimea Fire Station and Big Save Market. The road narrows the deeper into the valley you travel, so use caution while driving. The taro fields are barely visible through the residential houses lining the left hand side of the road. Most of these accesses are little more than driveways. Just as you see the cable footbridge crossing Waimea River, look for parking and walk around the steep cliff on the left to the ditch and footbridge. Just beyond the ditch is a small turn around in the road. If you park there, no one can turn around. Please be courteous as this is a well-traveled residential road. In cases of heavy rain, please stay out of the valley due to possible flooding conditions.



Photo: View of Waimea Valley, 1926. At the top photograph can be seen the branching of the river. To the right is Makaweli River and to the left is Waimea River and to the left of the branching of the river is the ridge that Menehune Ditch wraps around. The result is fertile fields below. The bridge and Waimea Town itself are located in the lower section. The road into town is Waimea Road. The Russian fort is at the river mouth to the right under the trees.

Captain Cook's Landing

There is a nationally registered site marking Captain James Cook's landing at Waimea in 1778. The site is accessed from Kaunali'i Highway (50) to Lucy Wright County Park. A boulder with a bronze plaque is located on the beach near the Waimea river mouth. This marker was placed at the site in 1928 by the Kaua'i Historical Society to commemorate the 150 anniversary of Cook's arrival in Hawai'i.

The site marks a significant historical point in Hawaiian history. Cook's ships, *Resolution* and *Discovery*, anchored off Waimea on January 10, 1778. According to journals it was near the western side of the river mouth as gathering fresh water was a priority for the ships.

Acquainted with the Tahitian language, the crew was able to converse with the people of the "Sandwich Islands", as Cook chose to call them. In all, they spent two weeks on Kaua'i and one week on Ni'ihau provisioning their ships for their journey north. The British explorers were amazed at finding the Polynesian race on these remote islands, thousands of miles from any other inhabited land. Westerners had only recently learned how to travel across oceans and it was obvious to them that the Pacific islanders had been masters of long distance ocean travel for a long time.

Remarkable for the era in Europe, Cook's voyages in the Pacific carried scientists, artists and trained observers. The lands encountered by the voyagers were described and commented on as few had been done before. Each isolated culture "discovered" by the westerners would drastically change, almost overnight. At the time of Captain James Cook's landfall, Hawaiian civilization was complex and highly stratified, with the land heavily cultivated. Some of the cultural artifacts from the collections of the crew, were unique.

Sadly, on the ships return to Waimea and Ni'ihau in 1779 following the death of Captain Cook, they found evidence of the spread of western diseases, before unknown in the islands.

When Cook's journals with accurate maps were published eight years after the voyage, fur traders followed by sandalwood traders and whalers eagerly sought the Waimea anchorage. Waimea was used as a ship landing until 1930 when the deep harbors at Nāwiliwili and Port Allen were built.

Waimea, Kaua'i has been the international focus of many of the anniversaries marking Cook's landing. Most recently, in 1999, the town hosted the exhibition of the *Endeavour*, an Australian built museum replica of Cook's flagship in his first Pacific voyage. The *Endeavour* anchored off Waimea for 3 hours to honor Cook and pay homage to the people that welcomed him. Cook's birthplace, Whitby, England, is Waimea's sister city and her mayor paid a visit to Waimea in spring 2000. The site is not only significant in Hawaiian history, but also internationally along with other sites that are related to Cook's voyages.

A local canoe club, Kilohana Canoe Club, can be seen practicing at the river mouth after school during the canoe racing season from February to October. The club appreciates visitors learning about one of the Hawaiian cultural practices described in Captain Cook's journals.



Photo: top right shows the 1978 statue of Captain Cook located in Hofgaard Park. At the bottom, and the the "Endeavour" anchored at Waimea Bay, Kauai in November 1999. Kilohana Canoe Club gifted the visitors with traditional gifts of raw sugar and Hawaiian salt.

1815 Russian Fort

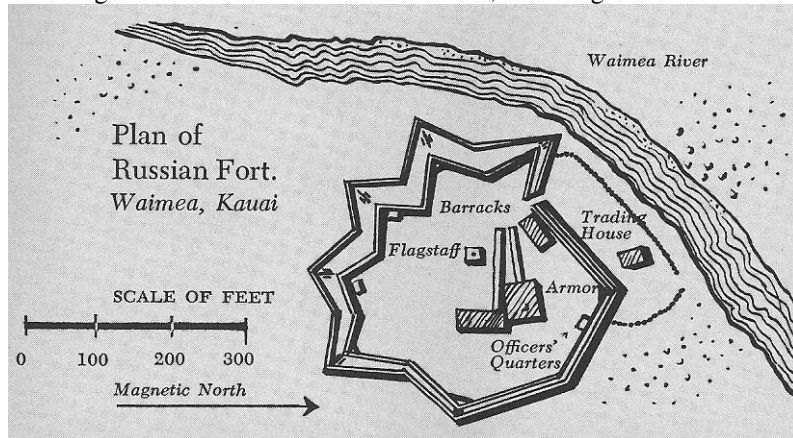
Located on the east bank of Waimea River. State Park interpretive panels are located on the pathway leading to the site. The site is designated a landmark on the National Register of Historic Places.

Kamehameha, a chief from the island of Hawai'i, through his amassed arsenal of western armament, succeeded in conquering all the islands but Kaua'i by 1810. Twice Kamehameha raised huge forces and twice he was defeated; not by the Kaua'i warriors, but by the winds and currents of Ka'ie'ie Waho Channel and the second time by a plague of typhoid fever that struck his fleet. Finally in 1810, Kaua'i King Kaumuali'i promised allegiance to Kamehameha. This uneasy alliance lasted until 1824.

In attempt to protect, Kaua'i from Kamehameha, Kaumuali'i, believing that Russia was a mighty western power, allowed the Russian-American Trading Company emissary, Dr. Georg Schafer to build a fort at Waimea in 1815. Kaumuali'i, distrusting Schafer's motives, expelled the Russians in 1817 before the fort was completed. Their cannon and other weapons were left behind. Kaumuali'i had the walls completed by Hawaiians. His house was built outside the fort, mauka of the walls. Kamehameha was true to his word, and Kaua'i remained a separate kingdom until his death in 1817.

One day in 1821, King Liholiho, Kamehameha's heir, without warning ordered the captain of *Ha'aleo O Hawai'i*, a small, open yacht that he was on to take him to Kaua'i, an island his father had never set foot on. Kaumuali'i, surprised at the visit, received his new liege lord graciously at Waimea. After a long visit, Liholiho invited the Kaua'i king to dinner on his yacht. While they were eating, the yacht set sail for Honolulu. Kaumuali'i was kidnapped. Ka'ahumanu, taking advantage of Liholiho's coup, married Kaumuali'i, cementing her control over him and his kingdom. A short time later, Ka'ahumanu made Keali'iahonu, Kaumuali'i's son and heir, her husband as well. The island was left in control of Kahekili Ke'eaumoku, a brother of Ka'ahumanu. Kaumuali'i lived in exile until his death in 1824. While he was alive his island remained orderly.

Upon his death, rebellion ensued, led by some Kaua'i chiefs along with Humehume, one of the sons of Kaumuali'i. Troops from O'ahu and Maui scrambled aboard ships to attack the rebels at Waimea. Their motive was vengeance and the result was a massacre, including women and children. For over three weeks, the superior



forces of the Kamehameha routed the rebels and continued killing everyone associated with the rebels. Bodies were left for the pigs to eat as a further insult. The remaining Kaua'i chiefs, many innocent, were removed and exiled from Kaua'i for their lifetimes. The island was finally under the sole control of the Kamehameha family and the lands given to family members. Kaikioewa, a loyal general under Kamehameha I, was made governor. The fort was dismantled as a military outpost in the 1880s.

Photos: Top: portrait of King Kamehameha by Choris in 1816. Although there are many descriptions of Kaumuali'i, there are no known portraits. Bottom: diagram depicts what the Russian fort was to look like upon completion. The star points face the ocean with a canon on each.

Waimea's Missionary Heritage



family and a church on the western bank of the Waimea River in 1829. Until his death in 1839, Kaikioewa provided his support in making the mission a success.

Reverend George and Malvina Rowell arrived at Hanalei, Kaua'i in 1843. In 1846 the Rowells were transferred to the Waimea Station on the southern side of the island. Even after 18 years of missionary work and western trade, the area was described at the time as one of great isolation.

On coming to the Waimea Mission, George Rowell found he had inherited a disorganized, demoralized congregation, a dilapidated house and falling down church. His first order of business was rebuilding and finishing the house for his family, which he did with his own labors. Once his home and furnishings were done, Rowell began plans to build a church in place of the collapsed original, a stone and mud meeting house built in 1834 by Rev. Peter Gulick. It took nearly 10 years to gather the materials. The Waimea Church was the last of the great stone churches to be built in the kingdom by the early Protestant missionaries.



Photo: **Top:** Rowell Family 1874, George and Malvina on the far left. **Bottom:** limestone church, rebuilt and refurbished over the years after hurricanes and termites, but still a monument to Rowell's industry in Waimea.

For more information

Visit the exhibits at the Kaua'i Museum in Lihue. 808-245-6931 Admission.

Take a walking tour held 9am Mondays departing from the West Kaua'i Technology & Visitor Center.

Reservations 808-335-1332.

Order a copy of [Touring Waimea](#) from the Kaua'i Historical Society <http://www.kauaihistoricalsociety.org>

Old Waimea Landing



The landing fronts the Waimea Pier State Park. It is easily accessed via Pokole Road, a county road that turns makai off Kaunualii Highway (50). There are parking and restroom facilities available. The park has been recently expanded through land purchased by the State and cleared by the Rotary Club of West Kaua'i and the West Kaua'i Business & Professional Association. There are views of the old landing site from the park and the coastline from the pier.

Waimea became an important port with Cook's visit in 1778. The original wharf was built in 1865 to compete with Kōloa landing as a port-of-call for whaling ships. Products exported

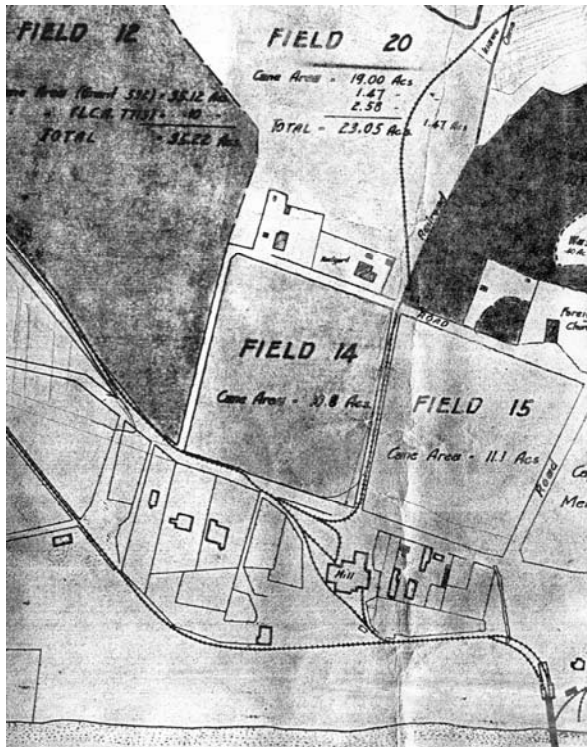
from west Kaua'i at the time were raw sugar, cattle, goats, oranges, taro, sweet potatoes, yams and rice. Small businesses catering to the port trade were built along the shore.

The wharfs' facilities expanded with the rise of the sugar and rice industries after the Reciprocity Treaty with the U.S. in 1876. The rapid growth of Waimea and the new plantation towns at Kekaha and Makaweli made weekly visits by the inter-island steamships feasible. In 1898, a railroad was constructed with its route from Polihale to Waimea Landing. It served the rice and sugar plantations along the route, bringing the milled products to the warehouse that once was located to the left of the pier where cement foundations still remain.

Waimea continued to be a scheduled port-of-call until the deep harbors at Port Allen and Nāwiliwili were constructed in 1930. The pier continued to serve a fleet of local fishing boats, called sampans and now it serves as a popular fishing spot.

The economic decline of Waimea after WWII, is tied in part to relocating transportation centers at Līhue; first the shipping and then the airport. These changes helped shift the once large populations of west Kaua'i to the eastern side of the island.

Facing the ocean, to the left of the pier was the traditional Hawaiian canoe landing. Mauka of the park on the left was the Rice Mill and directly behind is the original Kawakami Store and Yamane Camp. To the right there is a cement pad where the sugar storage warehouse was and to the left of the park was the old lumber yard. Several hotels, liquor stores, dry goods stores and other small businesses were located on La'au Road.



Sugar Plantation Heritage – Waimea Sugar Mill Company

Sugar cane was grown by Hawaiians, brought with them on the long migration voyages from the central Pacific. Missionary Samuel Whitney, in 1821, manufacturing small quantities of sugar from the native cane growing along taro field borders.

In 1835, William French experimented with a crude Chinese sugar mill in Waimea. At the time the Chinese were considered experts at producing granulated sugar. The millstones were imported from China. He couldn't find land to lease and returned to Honolulu. In 1837, under sponsorship of Governor Kaikioewa, a group of Chinese settlers at Waimea set up a sugar factory. An ox powered crusher plant, consisting of two cylindrical granite rollers placed on a granite slab produced up to 300 pounds of raw sugar a day.

Although Waimea had seen the first manufacture and export of sugar on Kaua'i, it had a gradual and continuous growth in a small scale from 1821 to 1853 when a 5,000 pound export of sugar was made by Rowell. The plantings were chiefly in small, individually owned plots. A more rapid growth followed construction of a mill at its present Waimea site in the

early 1860s. The Reciprocal Trade Treaty with the United States in 1876, gave the boost needed to start large scale developments. Arrivals of Portuguese in 1878, Germans, English, Scots and Norwegians in 1880s supplemented the Chinese who had been arriving since 1852. Japanese labor arrived starting in 1885. They helped the fledgling industry expand. The Puerto Ricans and Filipinos came in starting in 1905.



Waimea Sugar Mill Company was incorporated in 1884. The first official records in 1884 show annual production of 500 tons from 200 acres harvested, a yield of 2½ tons an acre.

The plantation was in financial difficulties from the start and in 1902 was ready to liquidate. In an unsuccessful effort to save the company, a ditch bringing water from Waimea River was constructed between 1901 and 1905. Hans Peter Fayé, the manager of neighboring Kekaha Sugar Company, became interested in securing the Rowell dairy lands for free railroad right-of-way to the Waimea wharf and the cane land for consolidation with Kekaha Sugar to make a single operating unit. Fayé purchased the Rowell dairy lands in 1904 and gained controlling interest in Waimea Sugar Mill Company in 1905. The company's debts were paid in full by 1909. Kekaha Sugar stockholders declined purchasing the Waimea lands so that eventually Fayé became the sole owner of Waimea Sugar Mill Company.

Expansion of sugar on the dry west side plantations of Kekaha, Waimea and Makaweli was not successful until extensive development of irrigation water was completed. Between 1911-12, George Ewart, then Waimea Sugar manager, reconfigured the Waimea Ditch, replacing the iron flumes with tunnels and increasing its flow capacity. Over the years the mill and ditch systems were renovated, operations transitioned from hand to mechanized operations with average yields of 5.20 tons of sugar per acre in 1900 to 14.73 in 1957.

The plantation shop yard was taken over in World War II by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as their headquarters. The plantation had to mill its sugar crop at Kekaha Sugar for the duration of the war. The arrangement continued after the war and the milling equipment was sold and the mill building was used as grain storage for the dairy.



The mill site was also used during filming of the first Hollywood movie made on Kaua'i in 1933 – *White Heat/Cane Fire*. It is surrounded by the historic the Waimea Mill Camp with 1900 vintage laborers' housing, the Waimea Higashi Hongwangi, Japanese School, and Field Office. In 1969, the company ceased operations, leasing its cane lands to Kekaha Sugar. Today the old sugar mill, still a landmark, is the site of the annual Waimea Town Celebration. Kekaha's sugar lands have been taken over by Gay & Robinson, Inc and a consortium of seed corn research companies including Pioneer Hi-Bred and

Syngenta along with other farming enterprises.

Waimea Plantation Cottages represent architecture from three Westside plantations. The oldest houses are from H.P. Fayé Company at Mana and date from 1884. The H.P. Fayé house was used in the filming of *The Thorn Birds* (1981) at its original location in Mana. The relocated building now serves as the Administration Building. The 48 vacation rental complex is arranged from the oldest houses, original Waimea Sugar camp houses built between 1900 and 1920 to Kekaha Sugar houses from 1918 through 1938. Plantations provided wood burning cement stoves and water heaters, with garden plots for each house. The complex has retained plantation idiosyncrasies such outbuildings for washing machines, chicken wire fences and food safes. Inside, the amenities are comfortable and modern.



Photos: Top: 1898 inaugural run of the Kekaha Sugar railroad. Middle: photograph of Waimea mill during filming of "White Heat", the truck to the right is a sound truck. Bottom: H.P. Fayé home at Waimea Plantation Cottages.