

**PIONEER MILL COMPANY:
A Maui Sugar Plantation Legacy**

**Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

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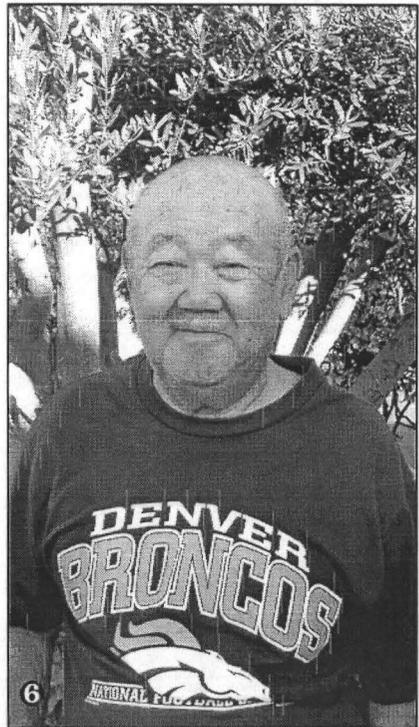
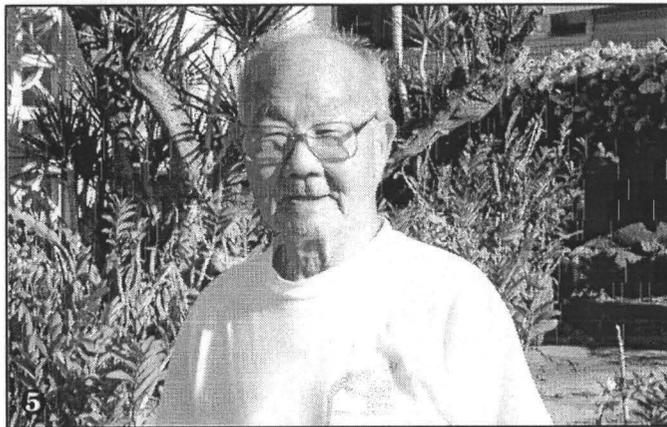
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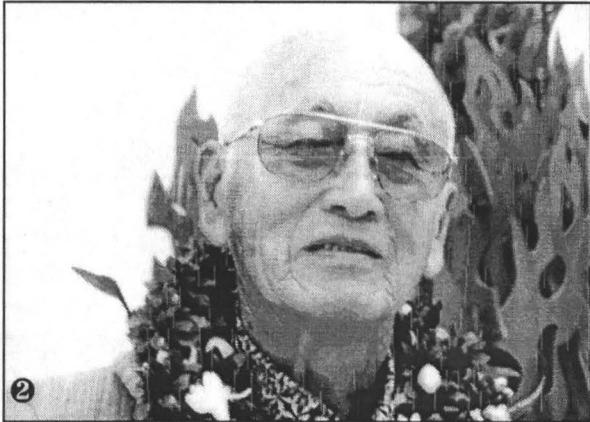
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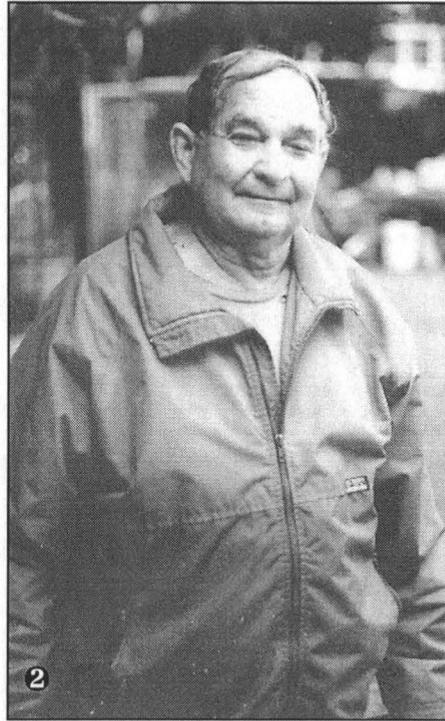
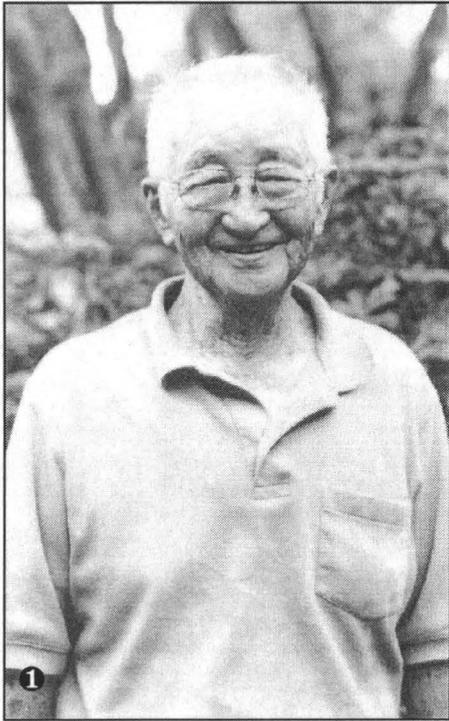


- ❶ Ben Bedoya (COH photo)
- ❷ Theresa Delos Reyes (COH photo)
- ❸ Harumi and Doris Fujii (COH photo)
- ❹ Myrtle Hashimoto (Photo courtesy Myrtle Hashimoto)
- ❺ Sueto Hayashida (COH photo)
- ❻ Fred Higuchi (COH photo)

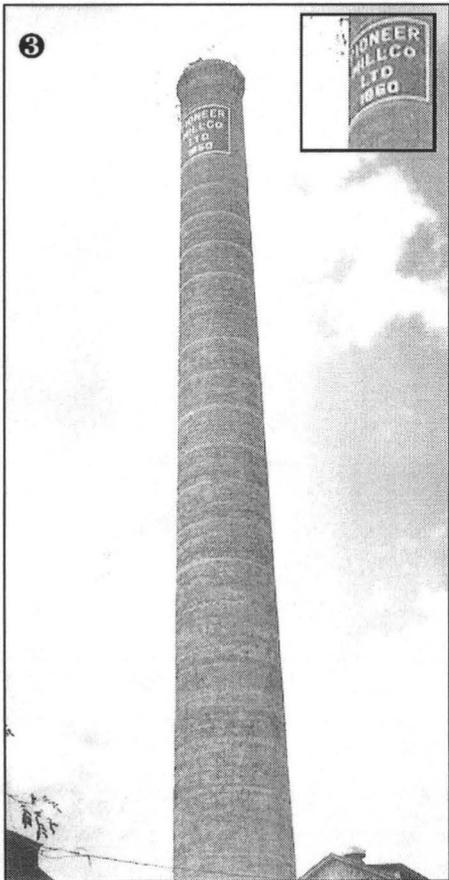


- ① James Higuchi (COH photo)
- ② Minoru Hinahara (Hinahara family collection)
- ③ Edward Hussey (COH photo)
- ④ Trudy Kiyota, Allen Kiyota, and Amy Kiyota Kimura (COH photo)
- ⑤ Jiggs Kuboyama (COH photo)
- ⑥ Frances and Donald Rickard (COH photo)





❶ Susumu Sodegami (COH photo)
❷ Anthony Vierra (COH photo)
❸ Pioneer Mill smokestack, Lahaina, Maui, 2003. Inset: close-up of sign on smokestack. (COH photo)
❹ Pioneer Mill, Lahaina, Maui, 2003 (COH photo)



INTRODUCTION

The Center for Oral History (COH) is a unit of the Social Science Research Institute, College of Social Sciences, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. The only state-supported center of its kind in the islands, COH researches, conducts, transcribes, edits, and disseminates oral history interviews focused on Hawai‘i’s past.

Since its inception in 1976, COH has interviewed more than 600 individuals and deposited in archives and libraries a collection of over 25,000 transcript pages.

In addition to providing researchers with first-person, primary-source documents, the Center for Oral History produces educational materials (journal and newspaper articles, books, slideshows, videos, dramatizations, etc.) based on the interviews. The Center also presents lectures and facilitates discussions on local history, conducts classes and workshops on oral history methodology, and serves as a clearinghouse for oral history research relating to Hawai‘i.

This volume focuses on oral history interviews with retired workers and residents of Pioneer Mill Company, located on Maui’s west side. Founded in 1860, Pioneer Mill Company was one of Hawai‘i’s last remaining sugar plantations at the time of its closure in 1999. At the time of the interviews, the abandoned mill, fallow fields, and plantation-era homes seemed to be all that remained of the sugar company’s once-dominant influence on West Maui life. Plantation camps, or villages, developed to house workers and their families, were once scattered among the cane fields from Olowalu to Honokōhau. Modern subdivisions now stand on these lands. Nearby Lahaina, the Hawaiian Islands’ former capital, served plantation residents as West Maui’s center of commerce and entertainment.

While Lahaina and the surrounding area are expanding tourist destinations, the mill, fields, and camp lands are visible and noteworthy reminders of an earlier era, as are the area’s longtime residents, whose stories are a part of this oral history project.

“I [started working] for Pioneer Mill [Company] when I was fourteen years old. Outside [in the] field, cut grass. All of us. Mr.[John T.] Moir told our teacher that whoever likes to work out in the field to apply for the job. [I made] thirty cents a day. I gave [my pay] to my mother. You know what, when I ask her, ‘Can I have some money that I earned?’ She say, ‘Okay.’ She put down my money and say, ‘This is for your clothing, this is for your food, this is for your shoes.’ Was left nothing. (Laughs)”

—Theresa Delos Reyes, former Pu‘ukoli‘i Camp resident

“I never regretted working for Pioneer Mill. And I only wish, if they were still available, people, the younger workers, would be able to work for them. So that they may be able to have a diversified field if they wanted to learn anything within the plantation, you was able to learn it. . . . It’s up to the individual if you want to learn and you want to advance yourself. . . . You want to work in the mill, there’s welding, there’s electrical work, there’s everything you can think of in the mill. And there’s carpenter shop, there’s tractor shop, mechanical shop. You name it, the plantation had. Every field that you want to learn. And sometimes it depends on the individual, too. If you like to learn, you got to accept some of the conditions, yeah. . . . Sometimes when you doing a mistake or don’t like take orders and stuff like that, sometimes you deprive yourself of learning little bit more.”

—Anthony Vierra, former Lunaville resident; Pioneer Mill Co. cane truck driver

“My mom and dad used to buy small baby pigs. Every two or three years, they would slaughter 'em and then sell the meat. Just to make extra money. And my chore was to feed the pigs in the morning before I go school. You see, our pigs were kept in a pigpen. And where my house used to be, used to be a stream above us. And there used to be a bridge across the stream, to where the pigs are kept. And we would cross the bridge to go there and feed the pigs. We would wash them down and then feed 'em, and then go school. What we used to feed 'em was, we used to go out into the plantation fields where they would just recently harvest the fields. They called that pig grass. We used to go pick, dig 'em out, put 'em in the barley bags, as much as we can, get two or three or four bags, and bring 'em home. And my mom would be waiting with a big fifty-five-gallon drum, half-cut, with the water boiling. We would throw that pig grass in there to cook 'em with the barley and all that, mixed up. We feed that to the pigs. I used to do that, shee, since the time I started grade school to the time I graduate from grade school, we were doing that. And we used to go collect from our neighbors, the slop. We just collect 'em in the bucket, and we bring it home. We would carry it just like the old Chinese people when they would go around and sell things as peddlers.”

—Ben Bedoya, former Mill Camp resident

“The best part about swimming was when the navy boats, or marine boats, or whatever boats come in, they line up at the pier. Where the Pioneer Inn hotel was, in front, the wharf there. They would come in, and we would dive for quarters, whatever they throw in the water, we would dive for it. That would be during the summertime that they would come. And whatever we collect, time to go home, we would go to the shave ice store, called Yamamoto Store. And we would buy shave ice with the money. On our way home, the same time, we would go to the Morikawa Restaurant. We would buy noodles. The nickname for that is 'fry soup.' But the noodles, you know, is [actually] chow fun. You know, the fat [noodles]. They would [serve] it in a [paper] cone-like thing. The cheapest one was five cents, fifteen cents, and then the quarter one was the big one. And the Morikawa family restaurant was famous for that.”

—Ben Bedoya

“The future of Lahaina is not my time. I'll be gone by then. But this area over here, all around Maui, millionaires, multi-millionaires will be owning land over here. And their summer vacation or winter vacation will be over here, whichever they choose. And the only jobs available will be working at the hotel or servicing the people living up here, the rich guys. That's the only two types of work. No agriculture, no nothing else. You going be working for them. So the local guys going be struggling along.”

—Donald Rickard, Kelawea Camp resident; Pioneer Mill Co. crane operator; International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union business agent

The preceding quotes are excerpted from transcribed interviews found in this volume. The interviews were conducted by the Center for Oral History in 2002 and 2003 to help document the social history of West Maui's Pioneer Mill sugar plantation. They illustrate the range of lifestyles, work experiences, and values associated with Hawai'i's plantation era. They also represent the plantation residents' personal recollections of West Maui's past and their views on the island's post-sugar social, political, and economic future.

The transcripts of these oral histories with former workers and residents of Pioneer Mill Company are deposited in libraries throughout the state and will serve as reminders of the impact the plantation had on West Maui's people. It is hoped that these oral histories will inspire as well as inform present and future generations of landowners, planners, and West Maui residents as they struggle to determine future use of the vast sugarcane lands.

Methodology

Planning for this oral history project began in May 2001. Officials from Pioneer Mill Company and Amfac Development Company met with COH Director Warren Nishimoto to discuss a comprehensive oral history project focusing on lifestyles, work experiences, and cultural backgrounds associated with sugar plantation life in West Maui. After a contract was drawn up, Nishimoto made several trips to Lahaina to locate potential interviewees. Following untaped preliminary interviews, eighteen individuals were selected for taping. Selection was based on the interviewees' depth and breadth of knowledge, their ability to articulate life experiences associated with the plantation, and their willingness to participate as interviewees. Interviewees also were located on O'ahu to obtain perspectives of those who left the plantation for other livelihoods and lifestyles.

The interviews by Nishimoto, COH research associate Holly Yamada, and cultural/historical researcher Maria Orr were conducted at various sites on Maui and O'ahu between April 2002 and June 2003. Each individual was interviewed in at least one ninety-minute session. All were interviewed individually, with the exception of siblings Amy Kiyota Kimura, Trudy Kiyota, and Allen Kiyota, who were interviewed in a group setting at Kimura's O'ahu home.

Because interviewees were asked to comment on experiences and incidents oftentimes specific to their own lives, no set questionnaire was followed. Rather, a life history approach was taken, creating biographical case studies centered mainly around the cultural backgrounds of the interviewees and the many historical forces which shaped their lives and their plantation community. The interviews cover such topics as childhood activities, schooling, ethnic relations, family dynamics, food, camp housing and other facilities, chores, union and community involvement, and plantation employment. The interviewees were also asked their views on the decline of the sugar industry in Hawai'i, the closing of Pioneer Mill in 1999, and what, if anything, should be preserved as legacies of Pioneer Mill Company, the camps, and historic Lahaina in general.

The interviews were transcribed almost verbatim by COH-trained student transcriptionists. The transcripts, audio-reviewed by the researchers/interviewers to correct omissions and mistranscriptions, were edited slightly for clarity and historical accuracy.

The transcripts were then sent to interviewees for their review and approval. Interviewees were asked to verify names and dates and clarify statements where necessary. COH incorporated the interviewees' changes in the final version.

Prior to publication, the interviewees read and signed a document allowing the University of Hawai'i Center for Oral History and the general public scholarly and educational use of the transcripts.

While not always entirely accurate, the aim of an oral history interview is the creation of a reliable and valid primary-source document. To achieve this objective, the researchers/interviewers corroborated interviewee statements with available documentation, selected interviewees carefully, established rapport, listened carefully and with empathy, asked thoughtful questions, and obtained permission from the interviewees to use their real names, rather than pseudonyms, in this publication.

Transcript Volume Usage

This volume of transcripts includes: a glossary of all italicized non-English and Hawai'i Creole English (HCE) words and a detailed subject/name index.

There is a series of numbers at the beginning of each transcript. This series includes, in order, a project number, audio cassette number, session number, and year the interview was conducted. For example, 39-10-1-03 identifies COH project number 39, cassette number 10, recorded interview session 1, and the year, 2003.

Brackets [] in the transcripts indicate additions/changes made by COH staff. Parentheses () indicate additions/changes made by the interviewee. A three-dot ellipsis indicates an interruption; a four-dot ellipsis indicates a trail-off by a speaker. Three dashes indicate a false start.

The transcripts represent statements the interviewee wishes to leave for the public record. After reviewing and approving publication of the transcripts, the interviewee signed the following agreement:

In order to preserve and make available the history of Hawai'i for present and future generations, I hereby give and grant to the University of Hawai'i Center for Oral History as a donation for such scholarly and educational purposes as the Center Director shall determine, all my rights, title, and interest to the tapes and edited transcripts of interviews.

Short excerpts from the transcripts may be utilized in unpublished works without obtaining permission as long as proper credit is given to the interviewee, interviewers, and the Center for Oral History. Permission must be obtained from the Center for Oral History for published excerpts and extensive use of the transcripts.

Transcript Availability

These transcripts are the primary documents presently available for research purposes. The audio cassettes are in storage and not available for use, unless written permission is obtained from the Center for Oral History.

Copies of this transcript volume are available at the following locations:

Hawai'i

Hilo Public Library
Kailua-Kona Public Library
Kealahou Public Library
University of Hawai'i at Hilo Library

Kaua'i

Līhu'e Public Library
Kaua'i Community College Library

Lāna'i

Lāna'i Public and School Library

Maui

Kihei Public Library
Lahaina Public Library
Wailuku Public Library
Maui Community College Library

Moloka'i

Moloka'i Public Library

O'ahu

Bishop Museum Library
 Hawai'i State Library
 Kaimukī Public Library
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 Leeward Community College Library
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 Hamilton Library
 University of Hawai'i-West O'ahu Library
 Hawai'i State Archives

COH Publications

Center for Oral History publications include:

Transcript collections

Waialua and Hale'iwa: The People Tell Their Story (1977)
Life Histories of Native Hawaiians (1978)
Remembering Kaka'ako: 1910–1950 (1978)
Waipi'o: Māno Wai (Source of Life) (1978)
The 1924 Filipino Strike on Kaua'i (1979)
Women Workers in Hawai'i's Pineapple Industry (1979)
Stores and Storekeepers of Pā'ia and Pu'unēnē, Maui (1980)
A Social History of Kona (1981)
Five Life Histories (1983)
Kalihi: Place of Transition (1984)
Waikīkī, 1910–1985: Oral Histories (1985)
Ka Po'e Kau Lei: An Oral History of Hawai'i's Lei Sellers (1986)
Perspectives on Hawai'i's Statehood (1986)
Kōloa: An Oral History of a Kaua'i Community (1988)
Lāna'i Ranch: The People of Kō'ele and Keōmuku (1989)
Oral Histories of African Americans (1990)
The State Foundation on Culture and the Arts: An Oral History (1991)
Public Education in Hawai'i: Oral Histories (1991)
'Ualapu'e, Moloka'i: Oral Histories from the East End (1991)
An Era of Change: Oral Histories of Civilians in World War II Hawai'i (1994)
Hawai'i Political History Documentation Project (1996)
The Closing of Sugar Plantations: Interviews with Families of Hāmākua and Ka'ū, Hawai'i
 (1997)
Presidents of the University of Hawai'i: Harlan Cleveland (1997)
Presidents of the University of Hawai'i: Fujio Matsuda (1998)
Reflections of Pālama Settlement (1998)
I'i/Brown Family: Oral Histories (1999)
Tsunamis Remembered: Oral Histories of Survivors and Observers in Hawai'i (2000)
An Oral History of Robert Richards Midkiff (2001)

Books

Uchinanchu: A History of Okinawans in Hawai'i. Published in cooperation with the United Okinawan Association (1981)

Hanahana: An Oral History Anthology of Hawai'i's Working People (1984)

Finding Aids

Catalog of Oral History Collections in Hawai'i (1981)

Catalog of the ESOHP Collection, 1976-1984 (1984)

Master Index to the ESOHP Interviews, 1976-1983 (1984)

Other Publications

How To Do Oral History (Second Edition, Revised 1989)

Oral History Recorder newsletter (1984-.)

The staff of the Center for Oral History, Social Science Research Institute, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, believes that researching, recording, and disseminating the experiences of Hawai'i's people will stimulate further research and foster a better understanding of our islands' history. COH is responsible for any errors in representing or interpreting the statements of the interviewees.

Honolulu, Hawai'i
December 2003