

Kona Heritage Stores Oral History Project

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

August 2006

Copyright © 2006
Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa
and
Kona Historical Society

These are slightly edited transcriptions of interviews conducted by the Center for Oral History, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. The reader should be aware that an oral history document portrays information as recalled by the interviewee. Because of the spontaneous nature of this kind of document, it may contain statements and impressions that are not factual.

People are welcome to utilize, in unpublished works, short excerpts from any of the transcriptions without obtaining permission as long as proper credit is given to the interviewee, interviewer, Kona Historical Society, and the Center for Oral History. Permission must be obtained from the Center for Oral History for published excerpts and extensive use of transcriptions and related materials. Transcripts and cassette tapes may not be duplicated or reproduced by any party without permission from the Center for Oral History, Social Science Research Institute, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, 2560 Campus Road, George Hall 212, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96822.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
PROJECT STAFF	vii
INTRODUCTION	ix
TRANSCRIPTS	
Tsukao Ashihara	1
Kaneyo Higashi.....	33
Gloria Higashi Okamura	73
Kenneth Komo	111
Madeline Fujihara Leslie.....	135
Shirley Onizuka Matsuoka.....	227
Makoto Morihara.....	265
Norman K. Okamura	299
Susumu Oshima.....	323
Kazuo Ota	375
Sukeji Yamagata	405
Alfreida Kimura Fujita	433
Martha Akana Keli'ia'a	475
APPENDIX	
Glossary	A-1
Index	B-1

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to acknowledge the Kona Heritage Stores Committee, comprised of dedicated longtime Kona residents who preserve the contributions of these unique institutions.

Yash Deguchi
Alfreida Fujita
Kenneth Komo
Madeline Leslie
Shirley Matsuoka
Makoto Morihara
Susumu Oshima
Richard Tanaka

We also thank the staff and membership of the Kona Historical Society, led by Executive Director Jill Olson and Maile Melrose, for conceiving of this oral history project and securing funds to make it possible.

PROJECT STAFF

Interviewers/Researchers

Warren S. Nishimoto

Michi Kodama-Nishimoto

Maile Melrose

Nancy Piianaia

Holly Yamada

Transcript Indexer

Holly Yamada

Publications Specialist

Cynthia Oshiro

Student Transcribers

Marilyn Marquez

Karen Matsuda

Stephanie Teves

Jen Yamamoto

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 700 individuals and deposited in archives and libraries a collection of over 27,000 transcript pages.

In addition to providing researchers with first-person, primary-source documents, the Center for Oral History produces educational materials (e.g., journal and newspaper articles, books, slideshows, videos, and dramatizations) 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 CD, *Kona Heritage Stores Oral History Project*, documents the history of general stores in Kona Mauka. The stores dotted Māmalahoa Highway in coffee country, in small towns from Keōpū, in North Kona, to Keālia, South Kona. Many of these family-run stores had been in operation for over fifty years; some still continue a lively trade. Their longevity is indicative of family cohesiveness and perseverance, as well as coffee's survival as a local industry. For many decades of the last century, some stores acted as go-betweens that acquired coffee from farmers and facilitated the processing of coffee. As go-betweens in the coffee trade and as providers of goods to communities who relied heavily on the success of the coffee industry, stores played an important role in Kona. The stores provided residents with everyday essentials. These establishments were also popular gathering places.

The development and maintenance of these stores on Hawai'i Island tell a story of change and continuity in Kona Mauka. In the late nineteenth century, Chinese immigrants and Native Hawaiians comprised the majority of merchants in the area. In the early twentieth century, Japanese immigrants who left sugar plantations for coffee farms took over much of the storekeeping. The proliferation of these stores paralleled the growth of small towns along Māmalahoa Highway.

These businesses were mainly family-run general stores; some families added barbering and taxi services, gas pumps, and billiard tables. Many sold specialty items, such as homemade *poi*, dried fish, or *lau hala* crafts. With coffee as the region's main commodity, several Kona storekeepers took on the function of coffee brokers, allowing customers to pay their bills with cherry coffee. The storekeepers, in turn, sold the coffee to local millers, or milled the coffee themselves as a second business.

This oral history project was undertaken in conjunction with the Kona Historical Society (KHS). The original KHS plan was to write a history of the historical society's Kealakekua

headquarters, the former H. N. Greenwell Store. The Kona Historical Society later decided to document all of the area's stores, using available store records, newspaper articles, and oral history interviews.

The result of this effort was a *Guide to Kona Heritage Stores*. Brief histories and the locations of eighty-three establishments, some of which have long closed, are shared in this publication. Seventeen surviving stores earned "heritage" status because they housed businesses continuously for over fifty years.

Project Background and Methodology

This oral history project was conceived by the Kona Historical Society, which formed a Kona Heritage Stores Committee in 1999. This committee was comprised mainly of individuals whose families started stores, and/or those who currently ran stores. Members included lifelong Kona residents Yash Deguchi, who chaired the committee, and Richard Tanaka. They were joined by present and former storekeepers Alfreida Kimura Fujita of Kimura Lauhala Shop in Hōlualoa; Shirley Onizuka Matsuoka of Onizuka Store in Keōpū; Madeline Fujihara Leslie of Fujihara Store in Keālia; Kenneth Komo of Komo Store in Keōpū; Susumu Oshima of Oshima Store in Kainaliu; and Makoto Morihara of Morihara Store in Kēōkea.

The committee met with COH Director Warren Nishimoto at the Kona Historical Society to discuss the project's purpose as well as the focus and scope of interviews. After a contract was finalized between the Kona Historical Society and the University of Hawai'i, COH staff researched written materials: newspaper articles, books, and other oral history interviews relating to Kona's history.

Prior to formal interviews, untaped preliminary interviews were conducted with potential interviewees. The preliminary interviews helped establish rapport between interviewers and interviewees. Following the preliminary interviews, a list of thirteen interviewees for audiotaping was compiled. Interviewees' depth and breadth of knowledge—in particular, knowledge of their families' stores, clarity of memory, ability to articulate life experiences, and willingness to participate were considered in the final selection.

Project interviewers Warren Nishimoto of COH and Nancy Piianaia and Maile Melrose of Kona Historical Society conducted interviews at the interviewees' homes. Because interviewees were asked to comment on experiences and incidents oftentimes specific to their own lives, no set questionnaire was used. Instead, a life history approach was followed, creating biographical case studies centered mainly on the backgrounds of the interviewees and the events that shaped their lives. Interviewees were asked to describe and comment on daily life experiences such as family and home life, community life, childhood experiences, cultural upbringing, schooling, values, and coffee farming. Detailed questions on the origins, daily operations, and changes in the interviewees' family businesses, were posed.

Six women and seven men were interviewed for this project. With the exception of a few years spent in school, military service, or work, all thirteen are lifelong Kona residents.

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

The transcripts were then sent to the interviewees for their review and approval. The interviewees were asked to verify names and dates and to clarify statements where necessary. COH incorporated the interviewees' changes in the final version—the version that includes all statements the interviewees wish to leave for the public record.

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.

The aim of an oral history interview is the creation of a reliable and valid primary-source document. To achieve this end, the researchers/interviewers selected interviewees carefully, established and maintained rapport, listened carefully and with empathy, asked thoughtful questions, encouraged interviewees to review their statements with care, corroborated interviewee statements when possible, and obtained permission from the interviewees to use their real names, rather than pseudonyms, in this publication. Despite these efforts, readers should be aware that oral history documents are based primarily on memory, and therefore susceptible to occasional inaccuracies. Readers are urged to evaluate interview statements against existing documentation (e.g., journals, letters, photographs, and secondary accounts in books and magazines).

Transcript Usage

This CD of transcripts includes: a glossary of all italicized non-English and Hawai'i Creole English (HCE) words, and a subject/name index. A biographical summary precedes each interview.

There is a series of numbers at the beginning of each transcript. This series includes, in order, a project number, audiocassette number, session number, and year the interview was conducted. For example, 35-15-1-00 identifies COH project number 35, cassette number 15, recorded interview session 1, and the year, 2000.

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.

Short excerpts from the transcripts may be utilized in unpublished works without obtaining permission as long as proper credit is given to the interviewee, interviewer(s), the University of Hawai'i Center for Oral History, and the Kona Historical Society. Permission must be obtained from the Center for Oral History and the Kona Historical Society 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 CD are available at the following locations:

Hawai'i

Hilo Public Library
 Kailua-Kona Public Library
 Kealahou Public Library
 Kona Historical Society
 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

Kahului Public Library
 Wailuku Public Library
 Maui Community College Library

Moloka'i

Moloka'i Public Library

O'ahu

Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum Library
 Hawai'i State Library, Main Branch
 Kaimukī Public Library
 Kāne'ohe Public Library
 Pearl City Public Library
 Honolulu Community College Library
 Kapi'olani Community College Library

Leeward Community College Library
 Windward Community College Library
 University of Hawai'i at Mānoa
 Center for Oral History
 Department of Ethnic Studies
 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)
Waikiki, 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)
Tsunamis In Maui County: Oral Histories (2003)

Pioneer Mill Company: A Maui Sugar Plantation Legacy (2003)
An Oral History of Sidney Kosasa (2004)
The Oroku, Okinawa Connection: Local-style Restaurants in Hawai'i (2004)
Hui Panalā'au: Hawaiian Colonists in the Pacific, 1935–1942 (2006)

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)

Other Publications:

How To Do Oral History (Third Edition, Revised 2000)
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.

Honolulu, Hawai'i
August 2006