

Since ancient times, Waipi'o Valley has been blessed with abundant water to cultivate wetland taro, the Hawaiian peoples' staff of life. Taro cultivation was the core of Hawaiian civilization. The 'ohana cooperated in the spirit of ho'olaulima.

In the last 200 years, Waipi'o has experienced many changes: new ownership of the land, assimilation of other ethnic groups into the indigenous Hawaiian population and the shift from subsistence taro farming to market production.

A community of 300 people thrived in the early 1900's. But economic factors, floods and a tidal wave caused an exodus from the valley in the 1940's. Families moved up the pali to Kukuihaele and farmed taro part-time.

Today, although not more than 125 acres are in taro – a fraction of what was cultivated in ancient times – Waipi'o is the second largest taro producer in the state. It is faced with many problems: taro rot, a declining labor force and the need for more cooperation in the agricultural community.

INTERVIEWEES

Gloria Ainsworth	Lance Gravett	Seiko Kaneshiro	Robert Revilla
Sidney Ainsworth	Rachel Hall	Haunani Kanuha	Tom Schreiber
Don Anderson	Ted Kaaekuahiwi	Suei Kawashima	Lanny Takahashi
Tom Araki	Robert Kahele	John Loo	Rachel Thomas
Joseph Batalona	Joe Kala	Bill Luhnnow	Cindi Toko
Ka'ai Batalona	Albert Kalani	Yubon Maehira	Ellaham Toko
Leslie Chang	Cynthia Kanekoa	David Makaoi	Roy Toko
Nelson Chun	Ronald Kanekoa	Samuel Mock Chew	Shirley Toko
Fannie Duldulao	William Kanekoa	Meliton Ngayan	Merrill Toledo
George Farm	Lloyd Kaneshiro	Cheryl Peterson	Ernest Tottori

Patti Zygutis

Interviews were conducted in 1978.



ETHNIC STUDIES

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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waipí'o: māno wai

(SOURCE OF LIFE)



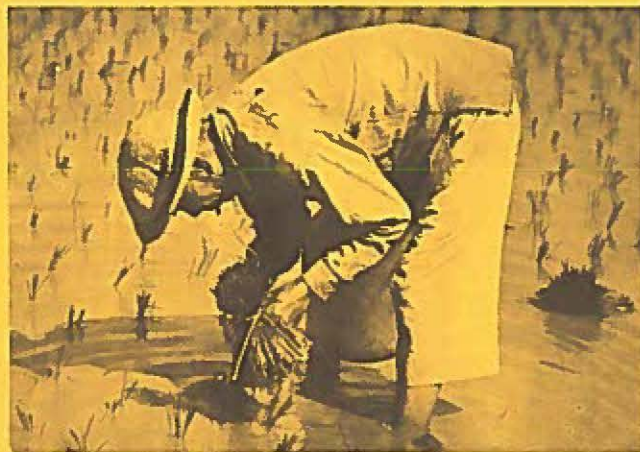
Hawaii State Archives, c. 1880

Old-timers recall taro farming and daily life in this remote Big Island valley and talk about the many changes that have occurred in the last 60 years due to floods, tidal waves, importation of rice, commercialization of farming, and modernization. Young residents and old discuss their visions for the future of Waipi'o and taro.

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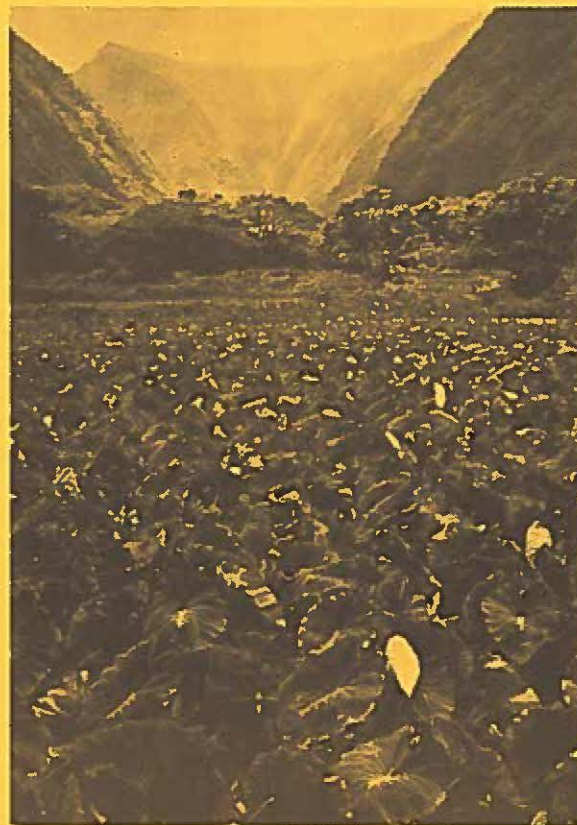
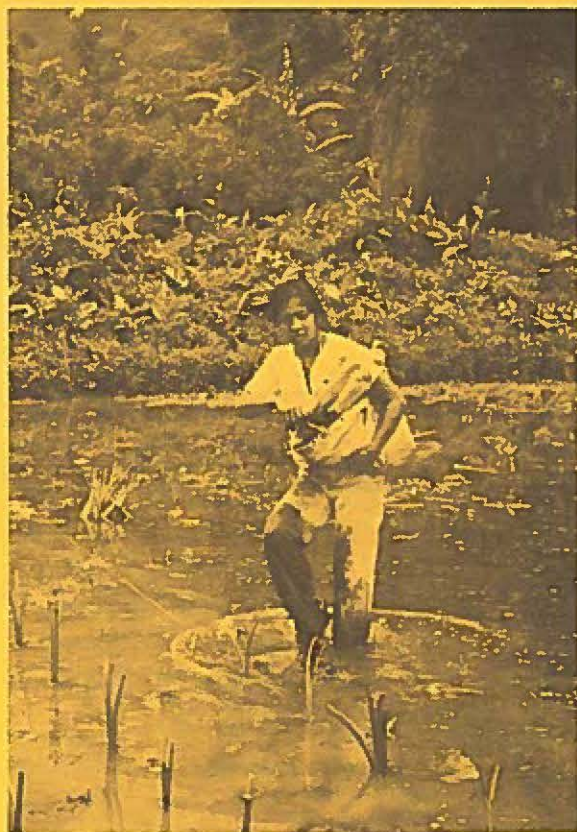
"That's why I say I wouldn't go into rice [farming] again. . . .Gees, when it rains, your heart pounds; when it winds, your heart pounds. Just keep pounding, thinking, 'Gee, how much am I going to lose?' . . .What can you do? Just drop tears, that's all. You can't do anything. Nature's work. And you think the one who finance you is going to pity you? You pay for what you borrow."

NELSON CHUN,
former rice farmer



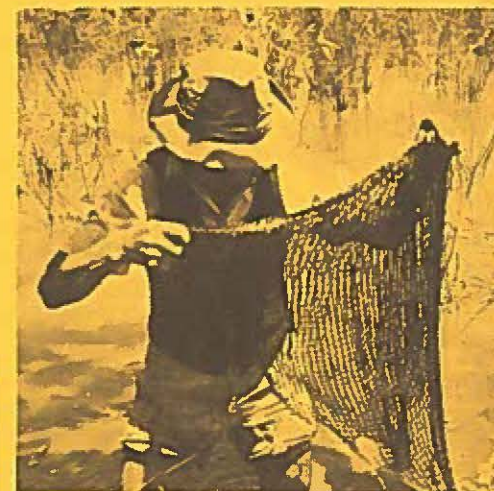
"It's historical [taro in Waipi'o Valley]. It's been there for the past centuries. From grandparents down to their children, from their children down to their other children. It's a generation thing, like. And whatever can you raise in Waipi'o Valley beside taro? . . .If you have younger farmers come in, yes, I can see that [expansion of taro production]. That's why I said, if this disease problem was licked. Lot of these farmers, they're part-time farmers, their children won't go out to work, they would work on their own lands. Would be better income than working outside. That's one thing I can say. Because you your own boss, you do what you want. You work what you want, when you want."

MERRILL TOLEDO,
full time taro farmer



"And you can be tired, tired, dog tired. But you stop, you wash yourself up and you sit for about five minutes. And you not tired anymore. The peacefulness of the valley. It's so quiet and peaceful. And you just sit down there. And you can just look around the mountains and the trees and the clouds moving over. And the rustle of the wind and the rustle of the river. That really builds your morale. And you can go right back to work again. I don't know how long I live, but if God willing that I be able to go into Waipi'o at, say, age 80 or 85, still able to see, I really would like to see taro leaves still shaking in the wind."

ROY TOKO,
County Parks and Recreation
employee and part-time taro farmer



"Lot of fish, Waipi'o. You don't have to go hunt for it. The fish in the taro patches, fish in the ditches, fish in the streams, all over the place."

GEORGE FARM, taro farmer