Orientation to Hawai‘i’s Plantation Village

GENERAL INFORMATION

The first successful sugar plantation in Hawai‘i got its start in Kula, Maui in 1835. By 1855, the plantation was providing workers housing, some food, some medical care and a wage of $8 a month for men and $6 a month for women.

From the start, sugar plantations did not pay their workers in cash. Instead, workers were paid using coupons or scrips, which were redeemable for merchandise in the plantation store. Workers were not identified by their family name but were given shaped metal disks called ‘bangos’ with numbers stamped on them for identification.

Expansion of Hawaiian sugar plantations occurred in part because of the increased demand for sugar in the United States. This was due to the 1848 California gold rush, the Civil War in 1861 and the 1875 Reciprocity Treaty, which granted Hawai‘i the right to export sugar duty free, to the United States.

All of these factors returned huge profits to the Hawaiian sugar planters who kept trying to capitalize on the situation.

Note: During this time, Hawai‘i was an independent Pacific nation. It had not yet been annexed to the United States.

WORKING CONDITIONS

The work day would start with the sound of the steam whistle at 5 a.m. If the worker did not leave his house by 5:30 a.m. after a quick breakfast, a policeman was sent to the laborer’s home and he was chased out of bed. At 6 a.m. work began. A half-hour break was allowed for lunch at 11:30 a.m. and work ended at 4:30 p.m. In the afternoon, at 8 p.m. the steam whistle would sound again to signal “lights out.”

HOUSING

Plantation housing was situated so that the plantation manager lived at the top of the hill in a large home overlooking the plantation. The “lunas,” or supervisors, lived below the managers and on the lower, flat lands were the laborers in “identical wooden frame houses” or dormitory barracks for the single men. The formation of separate ethnic camps reflected labor recruitment and immigration patterns as new camps were constructed soon after the arrival of a new immigrant group. Generally, plantation laborers lived in crowded and unsanitary camps. But by living with other individuals who spoke the same language and shared the same cultural heritage and practices, individuals in each camp developed community identity. Gradually, as workers became settled and started raising families, they improved their surroundings.

The first immigrant group brought in to work on the sugar plantations were the Chinese who had some experience in refining sugar. Primarily males were recruited and many returned to China once their labor contract was completed.

With the demand for sugar increasing, the demand for cheap labor increased as well. To be able to supply the plantations with much needed workers, the plantation owners began looking to other countries. They sent recruiters to the Azores and Madeira Islands of Portugal, Japan, Puerto Rico, Okinawa, Korea and the Philippines. Each ethnic group would work under a different wage scale and rate; the latest arrival would be paid less.

GUIDED TOURS

Experience plantation life
Hear our bilingual guides “talk story”
Hourly Tours: Monday–Saturday 10 am–2 pm

Welcome to…

Hawai‘i’s PLANTATION VILLAGE

Step back in time when sugar was King
and experience “Real Hawai‘i”

Mission

The Friends of Waipahu Cultural Garden Park, a non-profit educational organization, has as its purpose ensuring that the experiences, lifestyles, struggles, sacrifices, innovations and contributions of our plantation forebears are known, acknowledged, and visible as the cornerstones of Hawai‘i’s successful multicultural society.

The Friends operate and maintain Hawai‘i’s Plantation Village, a collection of historic and reconstructed plantation buildings and adjacent land; and the Okada Educational Centre, an archival collection exhibition, and classroom facility.

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Look for us on FACEBOOK!
What you will be experiencing at Hawai‘i’s Plantation Village is an overview of plantation buildings that could be found on many sugar plantations throughout Hawai‘i in the early 1900’s.

The Village is a collection of buildings, each with its own history and culture. The buildings are arranged in a grid, reflecting the typical layout of a plantation town. Each building represents a different ethnic group that came to Hawai‘i to work on the plantations.

The story that we share with you is our story, Hawai‘i’s story. It is the story of people who came from different lands to work on the sugar farms of Hawai‘i and their struggles, hardships, and adjustment to their new environment. From the Hawaiian people with their open and accommodating culture, which enabled the immigrants from all over to adapt to what was available and to adopt useful customs, tools, food, etc., from other cultures. These immigrants—vaguely in what they wore before they came from their countries and the wonderful vision of who they wanted to become—created the multi-cultural society that we enjoy today.

We’re glad you are here to visit Hawai‘i’s Plantation Village and we’re pleased to share a small part of Hawai‘i’s historical heritage with you. Enjoy your visit and return for another.

Major Ethnic Group Immigration Timeline for Plantation Workforce

- Chinese: 1823 (start) 1852 - 1897
- Japanese (first group): 1868
- Portuguese: 1878
- Puerto Rican: 1900
- Okinawan early 1900’s
- Koreans: 1903
- Filipinos: 1906 (with major immigration taking place in 1910)