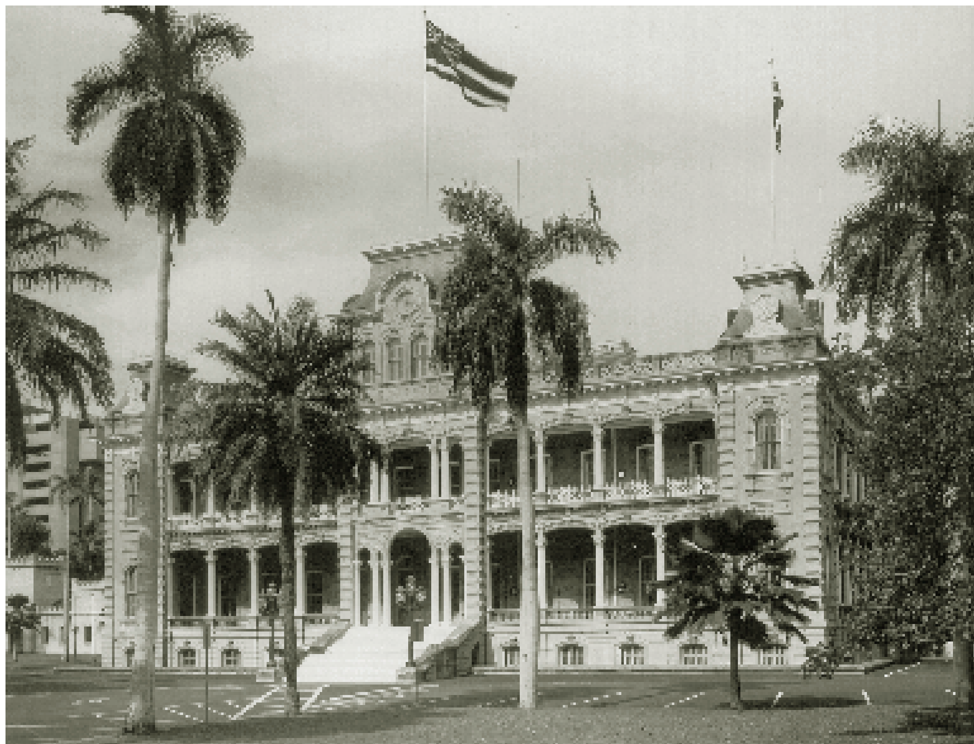
Barnes Riznik

Overview of Historic House Museums and Parks in Hawai`i
Changing Ideas of Preservation and Interpretation

Criteria for establishing historic property museums continue to evolve in Hawai`i, from early memorials to powerful groups such as the 19th-century royalty and American missionaries to concerns over the past 25 years for culturally-inclusive interpretations. Examples of these interests are indigenous, pre-western Hawaiian habitation settlements, the role of sugar plantations and multi-ethnic immigrants in the shaping of modern Hawai`i, and the historical plight and social stigmatization of Hansen's disease patients sent to live in isolation on Moloka`i at Kalaupapa. Clearly, criteria for preservation and interpretation of history museums and parks are being remade continually, and as Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig have said of American history museums as a whole in their critical appraisal, *History Museums in the United States,* diversity demonstrates that "museums cannot be isolated from the complex, social, cultural, and historical contexts in which they are situated."[1]

`Iolani Palace is located in the urban capitol district of Honolulu and was restored as a historic house museum memorial to the late-19th-century monarchy. The grandiose, high Victorian building has been returned to the appearance of the royal residence of King Kalakaua and his successor, Queen Lili`uokalani. The palace shows their Euro-American tastes and lifestyle in the years before the monarchy was overthrown and the Hawaiian islands annexed by the United States.

After annexation, `Iolani Palace was converted to offices and legislative chambers for the territorial and then the state government. When the state capitol was built adjacent to the palace grounds in 1968, a full-scale restoration of the palace was launched by Friends of the `Iolani Palace, with on-going financial help from the state. A large number of the palace's original furnishings and works of art were acquired and restored; they had been exhibited or stored in government archives and the Bishop Museum, or cared for by Island families, including descendants of the royalty, or discovered in other places around the world. As part of a well-researched furnishing plan, these palace objects include part of an opulent coronation regalia, portraits by American and European artists, furniture, vases, china, glass, and silver.



`Iolani Palace, Honolulu,O`ahu. Photo courtesy The Friends of `Iolani Palace.

The restoration continues. Now in the 16th phase of the project, the Friends group has been able to restore the Palace's front gate and entry drive and its ornamental flower beds by removing 70 automobile parking stalls and parking signs and by closing vehicular access through the front gate.

In contrast are *in situ* examples, remote in time, of pre-Western Hawaiian habitation settlements. The State Department of Land and Natural Resources maintains Lapakahi State Park on the leeward side of the Big Island's Kohala Mountains; it and other preserved sites represent the direction Hawaiian archeology has taken since the mid-1960s toward the survey and interpretation of large land units to uncover habitation

patterns. Lapakahi shows how ancient Hawaiians adapted to environmental conditions: along the coastline is a concentration of residential sites, burial platforms, fishing shrines, canoe houses, and other structures dating from 400 years ago; the fishing zone was connected to agricultural areas inland which contained habitation shelters.

Also on the Big Island, the National Park Service at Hönaunau *(Pu`uhonua o Hönaunau* National Historical Park) has reconstructed native Hawaiian pole and thatch houses, *hale pili,* and provided technical preservation guidelines for other Hawaiian house reconstructions at Makaha, Kailua-Kona, and Waimea Falls. (See p. 15.)

Uchida coffee farm in Kona, Hawai`i.Photo by Sheree Chase.

The preservation and interpretation of sugar plantation history has become more important as plantations on the Big Island and O`ahu have gone out of business and the remaining ones struggle for survival on Maui and Kaua`i, facing overwhelming foreign sugar competition. The *New York Times,* in reporting the closing down of two more Hawaiian sugar plantations, noted recently that "For mill workers thinking about restaurant work and field hands seeking construction work there is a pervasive feeling of slipping slowly into the history books. Already, there is an educational sugar plantation village on O`ahu and a preserved homestead on Kaua`i..."[2]

Grove Farm, one of these museums, was founded by George N. Wilcox in 1864. His homestead was the day-to-day center of plantation operations until Wilcox's death in 1933, and it was used continuously as the family's home until 1978. The homestead was a small, general farm operating in the middle of the surrounding plantation canelands. It is an 80-acre site operated today by a non-profit educational institution and belongs to a cultural landscape category known as a preserved rural historical area. It conserves and interprets home life, land-use, gardens, orchards and pastures, and buildings, including rehabilitated plantation workers' homes. Grove Farm has followed the U.S. *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* and focuses on preservation that maintains and repairs existing historical materials and retains the property's form as it has evolved over more than a century.

As part of its public program, Grove Farm has documented plantation operations—field work, irrigation, and the factory processing of sugar—in Koloa on Kaua`i before the plantation was shut down in September 1996. The video project produced 14 hours of archival tape and interviews. A one-hour historical documentary about Koloa will be presented on broadcast television.

Waipahu Cultural Garden Park is a non-profit museum on O`ahu that has recreated a sugar plantation camp on a three-acre site near the defunct O`ahu Sugar Co. mill. The park tells the story of Hawaiian, Chinese, Portuguese, Japanese, Puerto Rican, Okinawan, Korean, and Filipino camp life in class-conscious, formal exhibits, and in reconstructed houses based on plantation standardized plans, photos, and other records. The newly-constructed Waipahu camp houses are cared for by members of ethnic groups who have given artifacts to furnish the exhibit and homes, who have planted house gardens and who help to interpret the re-created village.

Another example of the preservation of the traditions of immigrant culture is at the Kona Historical Society. Interpreting the role of immigrants in defining the cultural character of the Kona region of Hawai`i is the central idea behind the Society's plan to restore the six-acre Uchida family coffee farm in Kealakekua as a "living history farm," typical of Japanese *Nisei* (second-generation Japanese Americans) in Kona from 1925 to 1945.

With an interpretive planning grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Society worked with a team of community members, scholars from the University of Hawai`i at Mänoa, museum staff from Old World Wisconsin and local museums, and a preservation architect. They discovered that the Uchida's house and other significant vernacular coffee farm structures remained relatively unchanged since 1920, and, like most other small Kona farmers, their property was on leasehold land held by a handful of corporations and individuals. There were at one time more than 1,000 such coffee farms in the Kona "coffee belt" in that period; there are still several hundred farms in operation. Unlike sugar, Kona

Grove Farm Homestead.Main house, c. 1860 with 1915 addition.Lihue, Hawai`i.Photo by the author.

coffee continues a strong place in the world market, and the restored coffee farm can compare and contrast today's family life, farming and technology with the ethnic community of 50–75 years ago.

As one museum manager has written, "The historic house's greatest asset is its personal history; its greatest potential lies in its ability to engage the public and sensitize it to the larger social context that has shaped that history and is in turn reflected in it."[3] Although the earliest examples of house museums in Hawai`i memorialized royalty at palaces on O`ahu and the Big Island and commemorated missionary families at different former mission stations, the public programs at several of these museums reflect growing, popular interests in material culture and landscape; active, close ties with communities; and issues of historical perspective.

In 1915, the Territorial Governor leased Hanaiakamalama, Queen Emma's former summer palace, to the Daughters of Hawai`i as part of the creation of Nu`uanu Park (and to prevent the demolition of the modest royal residence by park planners in Honolulu). The Daughters repaired the house and collected objects associated with Queen Emma. The furnishing plan emphasizes formal exhibition and the museum's decorative arts focus. This has lead to a survey, documentation, and cataloguing of Hawaiian furniture and cabinetmakers. The Daughters' sponsorship of research and a subsequent furniture-study publication in 1983 presented the Queen Emma Summer Palace collections and those in Hawai`i's other museums and private collections to a wide audience.[4]

Wai`oli Mission House, built in 1837 in Hanalei on Kaua`i, was the first house restoration in Hawai`i to recreate original room uses when the house was preserved in 1921. The furnishing plan was based on oral memories of the children and grandchildren of the Wilcox missionary family who returned original objects to the house. As one re-examines the letters and other records of the Wilcox family's involvement in preservation of the house, it becomes obvious that the property in the Hanalei Valley was preserved for more than sentimental reasons.

The restoration was also a means of serving the Hanalei community. The meetinghouse was restored in 1921 for the Protestant Church, which has used it as a religious community center. The large pasture in front of the former mission house was made over into a community recreation park, and the wetlands behind the house were leased to taro and rice farmers. The restoration also showed the importance of scenery and vegetation in preservation. Wai`oli is part of a visually dramatic setting, the house located in the center of a large lawn with outward views to the mountains and to the sea. The landscaping protected a special relationship to nature and the out-of-doors in its unpretentious Arts and Crafts treatment.

Later, the playing fields were leased to the county and a non-profit museum set up to receive the house and surrounding property. In recent years the museum body bought an additional 20 acres of wetlands to help keep land in taro farming and to protect viewsheds from the park for house

The Mission Houses Museum. These three historic houses served as the family homes, printing offices and storehouse. Originally built between 1821 and 1841. Honolulu,Hawai`i. Photo by Norman Shapiro.

for public benefits much as a conservation land trust might do.

In Honolulu, the Hawaiian Mission Children's Society began in the 19th century as a hereditary membership and genealogical organization. In 1907, the old mission house in Honolulu, built in 1821, was rescued from decay to be used by the Society as its headquarters and library. In successive restorations, including current revisions, the three historical structures on the site, now known as the Mission Houses Museum, have come to look much as they did in the early-19th century. In the last decade, museum programs have confronted stereotypes of missionaries by presenting different perspectives of western influences on indigenous culture. In 1985, the Mission Houses Museum staff introduced bi-cultural perspectives in public forums throughout the Islands to discuss the lives of missionaries and other Hawaiian residents in the 1820s. It also provided new educational opportunities for visitors to explore the theme of "Where Two Worlds Meet" in a number of interpretive media and forms of learning and experience. Mission house tours, an orientation gallery and "living history" presentations invited visitors to explore documentary sources and points of view in other museums and libraries. In sum, visitors experience changing ideas as historical and cultural perspective continue to be redefined. There are many fresh views of the richness and conflicts of culture to be discovered and shared by wider audiences.

Notes

[1] Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig, eds. *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment.* Urbana and Chicago, 1989, p. xix.

[2] The *New York Times,* August 9, 1996.

[3] John A Herbst, "House Museums," in *History Museums in the United States,* p. 112. See also pp. 106–109 for discussion of Mission House Museum.

[4] Irving Jenkins, *Hawaiian Furniture and Hawai`i's Cabinetmakers,* Honolulu, 1983.

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Dean Alexander

Managing Historic Resources in an Evolving Hawaiian Community

Kalaupapa NHP

Kalaupapa is a place of paradoxes. Upon arrival at the airport a visitor is greeted with a sign forbidding entry without a permit. Persons without permits are subject to arrest. Down the road a mile or so is a friendlier sign welcoming you to Kalaupapa National Historical Park.

Kalaupapa is remembered as the place of forcible exile for suffers of Hansen's Disease (leprosy) with all the painful memories of illness, separation, and confinement. At the same time it is also remembered as a place of beauty and a touchstone to the "Old Hawai`i" of small villages and plantation camps. The place of exile from which escape was desired has now become a pu`uhonua, or sanctuary from which to escape the hectic, modern life. Kalaupapa became a place of exile due to its isolation and difficult approaches. This isolation is a burden to all residents, but it is also a highly prized commodity actively defended by the community. It is also one of the reasons that so many significant natural and cultural resources have survived here.

Kalaupapa is one of the more interesting and unusual park management assignments in the National Park Service (NPS). Unlike most historical parks, Kalaupapa National Historical Park is still a living and evolving community. At this point in time, the primary resource of the park is not the land, nor the buildings, but is the Hansen's disease patients themselves. Some 70 patients still have rights to reside in the settlement, and they are the aspect that most distinguishes Kalaupapa from other units of the national park system. Removed from their families, often at an early age, and sent to an isolation settlement on an inaccessible peninsula on the north shore of Moloka`i, they have lived lives that are different than most Americans. Most have seen their once healthy bodies disfigured by the disease. Many of the older patients were sent here only after the doctors had given up hope of arresting the disease.