Kūkaniloko

Kūkaniloko, Wahiawā, Oʻahu

By Holly K. Coleman

O Kapawa, o ke alii o Waialua	Kapawa, the chief of Waialua,
I hanau i Kukaniloko	Was born at Kukaniloko;
O Wahiawa ke kahua	Wahiawa the site;
O Lihue ke ewe	At Lihue the placenta,
O Kaala ka piko	At Kaala the navel cord,
O Kapukapuakea ka aa	At Kapukapuakea (Heiau) the caul,
O Kaiaka i Maeaea	(Heiau) of Kaiaka at Maeaea

The verses above are part of a traditional *mele inoa* (name chant) honoring the *aliʻi* (chief) Kapawa, for whom Kūkaniloko, the famous birthing stone site, was said to have been constructed (Kamakau, 1867). Kūkaniloko has been described as one of the most sacred Native Hawaiian places and is found within a rich cultural historical landscape of the Wahiawā Plateau. At one time, this area was thought to have encompassed a chiefly center of power for Oʻahu *aliʻi*.

In late 2012, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) received over 500 acres surrounding Kūkaniloko as a result of the efforts of the Trust for Public Land and the State of Hawaiʻi to purchase 1,732 acres of land from the Galbraith Estate. These lands may only be used for agricultural and cultural preservation purposes.

The goal of this Information Sheet is to explore some of the cultural and historical narratives of Kūkaniloko and the surrounding areas, particularly as OHA transitions into the role of caretaker of this sacred place. This Information Sheet will also strengthen the agency's foundation of knowledge for this *wahi pana* (storied, legendary place).

Left: Kūkaniloko in Wahiawā, Oʻahu. Source: Bacon, 1972.

OHA
OFFICE OF HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

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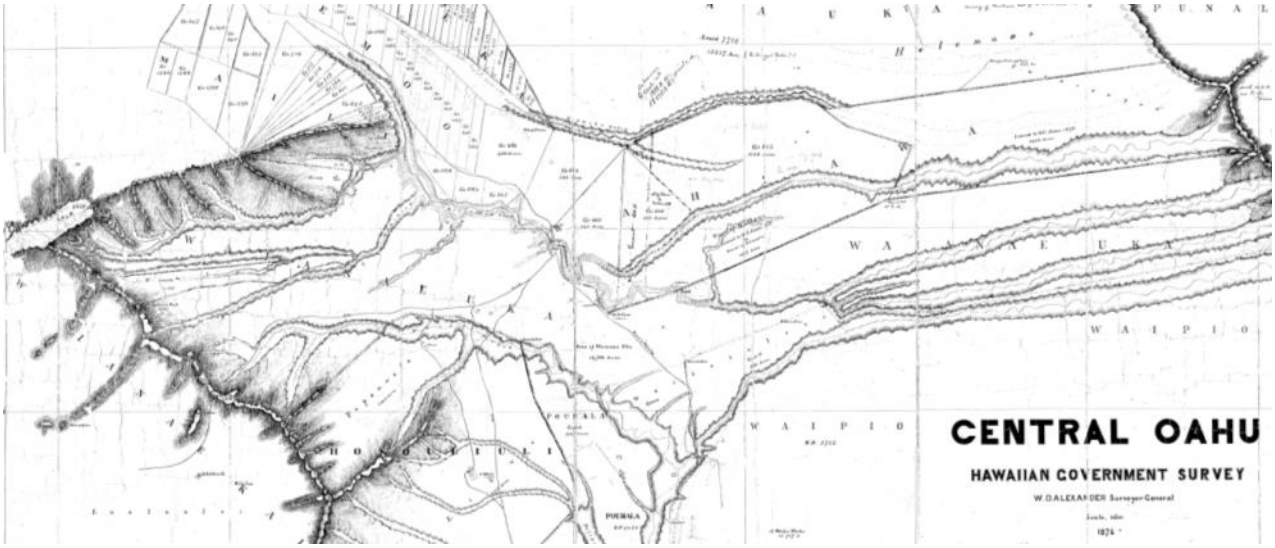
The Wahiawā Plateau: Traditional Landscape

Source: Kai Markell for OHA, 2014.

Kūkaniloko is seated within the broad pass between the Koʻolau and Waiʻanae Mountains known as the Wahiawā Plateau (also referred to as Leilehua or Central, and alternatively called a plain or plateau) (State of Hawaiʻi, 1998). Traditionally, this area encompassed lands known as Wahiawā, Līhuʻe, Helemano, Waiʻanae Uka, and Waialua. The places surrounding Kūkaniloko were well-populated and three major trails crossed the area: small clusters of houses, farm plots, *heiau* (places of worship), and other sacred sites were scattered throughout the plateau.



The Wahiawā Plateau; Alexander, W. D. 1876. Source: Hawaiian Government Survey.

Resources and Use

Extensive dryland forests covered the edges of the plain and flanked the Waiʻanae mountain range; Native Hawaiians traditionally used these areas to collect resources such as *ʻōhiʻa, kauila, wiliwili, ʻiliahi, lama, hau, uhiuhi, hala, kupukupu,* and *kukui* (Cordy et al., 2011).

Historical evidence suggests that there were productive *loʻi* (irrigated *kalo* fields) in the bottoms of gulches throughout the Wahiawā Plateau with major *ʻauwai* (irrigation ditches) that also carried some water to the *kula* (plain). *ʻUala* (sweet potato) had been cultivated by Native Hawaiians on much of the plain (Handy, 1991).

Winds of Wahiawā and Līhuʻe

Waikōloa and Waiʻōpua (also known as Kēhau) were two cooling winds of Wahiawā and Līhuʻe and were known to blow from the Waiʻanae mountain range across the plateau, often reaching to Puʻuloa (Pearl Harbor). These winds were famous for bringing the fragrance of the forests, especially that of the *kupukupu* fern and *nēnē* grass (Keamoku, 1862). Another wind associated with the area is known as Kiu, which brought the fragrance of the *nēnē* grass and dew (Hooulumahiehie, 2006).

General History of Kūkaniloko

Kūkaniloko was described as "*kahi i make-make nui ia e naʻlii o Oahu nei*," or "a place the chiefs of Oʻahu greatly desired," (Kalanikuihonoinamoku, 1865). Although there is some academic debate about the accuracy of dating the site, Kūkaniloko was said to have been constructed as early as 1100 CE by the *aliʻi* Nanakaoko and the *aliʻi wahine* (chiefess) Kahihikalani for the birth of their son, Kapawa, of the Ulu Hema genealogies (Kamakau 1867). Kūkaniloko served as a revered and sacred place for chiefly births until the mid-1600s; the *aliʻi* Kākuhihewa is the last chief known to have been born at Kūkaniloko. The site has remained sacred to Native Hawaiians through the years. For example, Kamehameha wanted Keʻōpūolani to give birth at Kūkaniloko in the late 18th century, and the site remained an important place to visit in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Hāwea and ʻŌpuku

Hāwea and ʻŌpuku were two of the most famous and sacred *pahu* (drums) in ancient Hawaiʻi, and were prominent in many important religious ceremonies on Oʻahu; the use of Hāwea and ʻŌpuku has been recorded at Kūkaniloko and they were said to have sounded during birthing and chiefly rituals there (McKinzie, 1986). Both drums had strong ties to the Maunalua area; there is a possibility that Pahua Heiau once housed ʻŌpuku. ʻŌpuku also became tied to the chiefly families of Oʻahu (Kamakau, 1867).

Holoholohokū

Kūkaniloko is one of the most sacred birthing sites in Hawaiʻi. Another sacred birthing site, known as Holoholohokū, is located in Wailua, Kauaʻi (Kamakau, 1867). Both *wahi pana* have birthstones with similar layouts and may have had spiritual connections in ancient times. Both sites were thought to have been larger royal centers or compounds that included birthing sites.

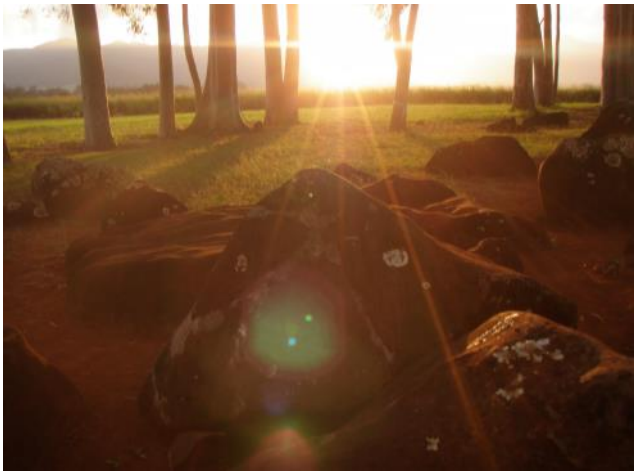
Birthing Practices at Kūkaniloko

In ancient times, Kūkaniloko consisted of stones, many with man-made *poho* (basins), which were used to support a chiefess while she gave birth. Historical sources also record 2 rows of 18 stones for 36 chiefs who witnessed the birth (Kamakau, 1867). Immediately after birth, the child was taken to Hoʻolonopahu, a *waihau heiau* (a temple dedicated to the god Lono) which was located on the grounds of Kūkaniloko for the cutting of the *piko* (umbilical cord) and purification. Sacred drums were sounded to announce the birth, and the *piko* of the *aliʻi* were left at Kūkaniloko (Kalanikuihonoinamoku, 1865).

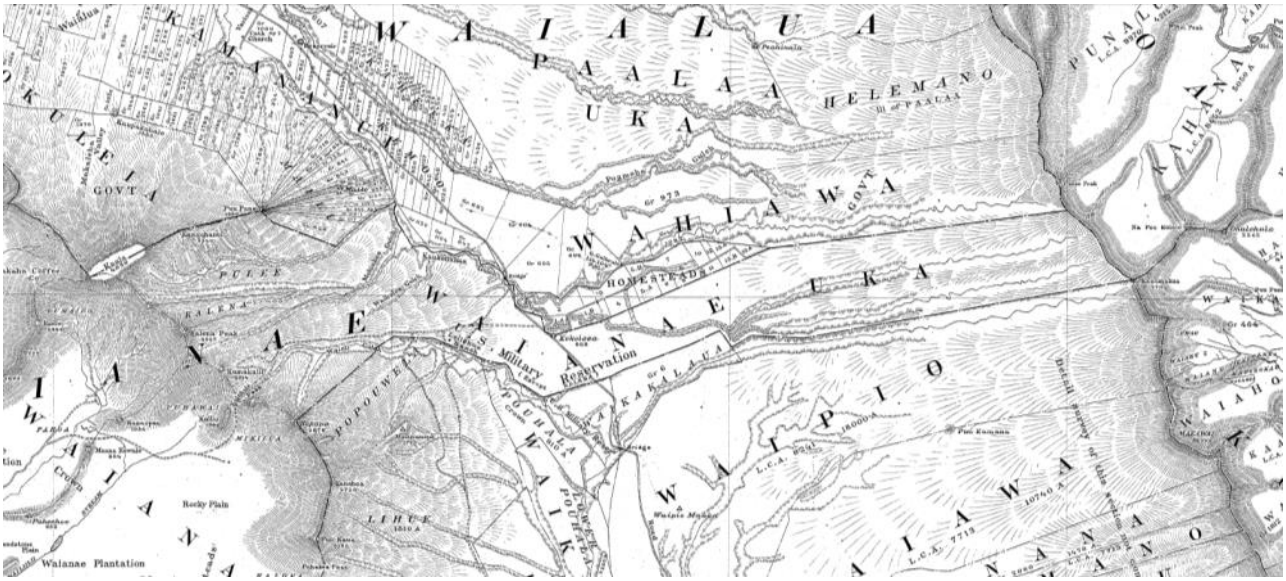
Scholars believe that Kūkaniloko was a place where a chiefess and the child could recover for a period after the birth (Cordy et al., 2011).

An *aliʻi* born at Kūkaniloko with the proper rituals and in the presence of the other *aliʻi* was described as *he aliʻi* (a chief), *he akua* (a god) and *he wela* (a blaze of heat) and was therefore given a number of the highest *kapu* (restrictions), indicating the high level of *mana* (spiritual power) associated with this place (Kamakau, 1867).

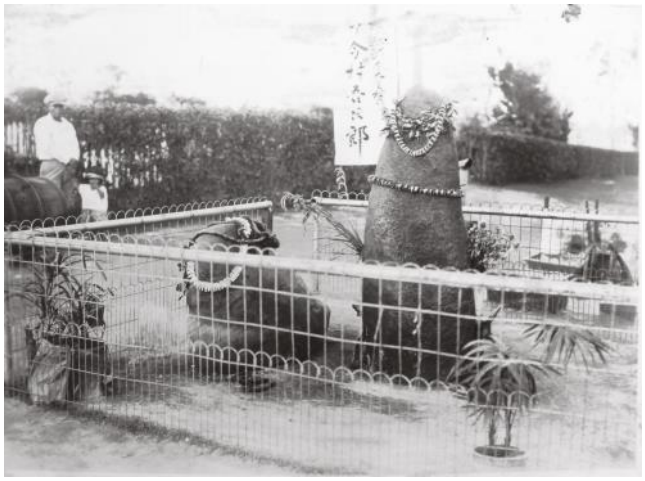
Aliʻi Born at Kūkaniloko
Kapawa
Laʻamaikahiki
Māʻilikukahi
Kalanimanuia
Kākuhihewa



Sunset at Kūkaniloko: Source: OHA Land Management, 2013.



Source: Wall, W. (1902). O'ahu: Hawaiian Islands. Hawai'i Territory Survey.



Top: The Keanini Stones, 1927. Source: OHA files and the Hawai'i State Archives. Bottom: The Keanini Stone. Picher, O. S. 1931. Source: OHA files and the Hawai'i State Archives .

Sites of Significance

Scholars have suggested that Kūkaniloko was actually a focal point of a much larger network of sacred sites and of the cultural landscape in the Wahiawā–Līhu'e area; these places are said to be of similar sacredness and importance as Kūkaniloko. Unfortunately, many of these sites have been damaged or destroyed by ranching or pineapple growing activities. Native Hawaiian historian John Papa Ii (1959) described a number of these sites: a sacred pond had ties to the Kūkaniloko and the chiefly center; a *maika* (traditional sport) field was at Kapalauauai; Kawa at Kuaikua Stream was another famous birthing site; and the O'ahunui Stone was a popular stopping point for Hawaiian travelers.

A stone known as Keanini (possibly associated with an *akua or ali'i* of the same name) was found in the 1880s by George Galbraith and moved to Kūkaniloko; a companion stone was also moved to the site. By 1925, the stones were known for their healing powers and were moved to Wahiawā Cemetery in 1926 because visitors were causing damage to Kūkaniloko. The stones were secretly relocated in 2010 (Cordy et al., 2011).

Location of Kūkaniloko

There are many theories pertaining to the location of the birthing stones at Kūkaniloko.

Kūkaniloko is thought to be the geographical and spiritual center of Oʻahu, and is also believed to be spiritually connected to other sacred sites in Hawaiʻi and in the Pacific (Cordy et al., 2011). According to Kamakau (1992), the group of chiefly families known as Lō and Kumuhonua are often identified with Kūkaniloko and the surrounding areas.

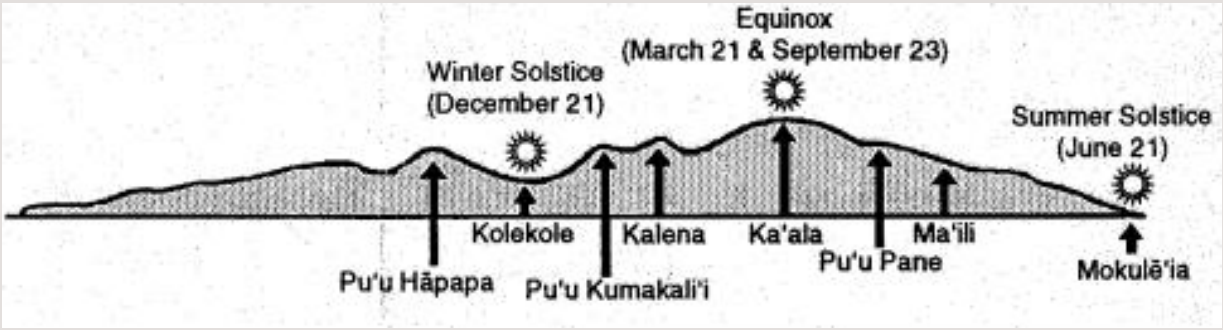
The mountains of Kaʻala, Kānehoa, and Maunauna cradle the landscape. It has been suggested that the profile of the Waiʻanae mountains form the image of a *wahine hāpai* (pregnant woman).

These mountains are also believed to be geographical markers used to measure the seasons (State of Hawaiʻi, 1998).

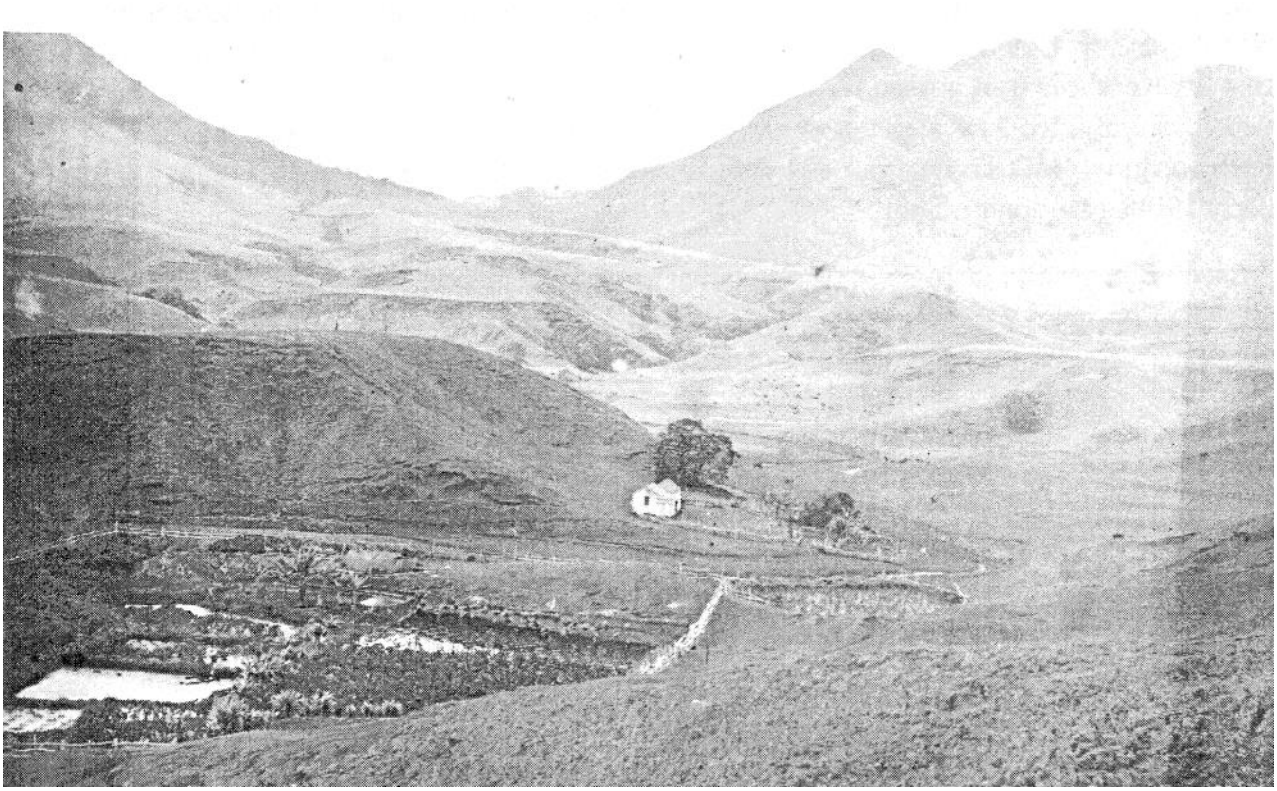
Source: Bacon, G. Historic Site– Kūkaniloko Royal Birthstones near Wahiawā, Oʻahu (1972).

Other Uses of Kūkaniloko

Based on oral histories and other studies of the site, scholars believe that Kūkaniloko and surrounding areas were used as a place of learning for *kahuna* (priestly experts), *lua* (martial art) practitioners, and *kilo* (astrologers). It has also been suggested that Kūkaniloko was considered a *puʻuhonua* (place of refuge) (Cordy et al., 2011). Unfortunately, the destruction of sites that may have been associated with Kūkaniloko, such as Hoʻolonopahu Heiau, has made the determination of other uses of Kūkaniloko more difficult.



Source: State of Hawaiʻi, 1998.



Kalo and other traditional Native Hawaiian crops continued to be grown on a small scale in the Wahiawā Plateau in the late 1800s and early1900s, although depopulation altered the cultural landscape of the area. House and irrigated *kalo* plots dot the landscape, possibly along Waiʻeli Stream. Kolekole Pass is in the background. Source: Cordy et al., 2011; Bishop Museum P86220.

The Changing Culture and Landscape of the Wahiawā Plateau

Historical accounts indicate that in the early 1800s, there was still a dense forest on the slopes of the Waiʻanae Mountain range which descended into the Wahiawā Plateau. By the end of the 1800s, however, the forests were dramatically reduced by the sandalwood trade and from the whaling industry (which extracted trees for firewood) (St. John, 1947).

By the late 1800s, significantly fewer Native Hawaiians lived in the areas surrounding Kūkaniloko. The introduction and spread of highly infectious diseases decimated the Native Hawaiian population (Bushnell, 1993). Many previously farmed land plots, *loʻi* patches located in the deep gulches, and housing sites were abandoned by 1840 (Cordy et al., 2011).

The greatest social and environmental changes in the Wahiawā Plateau resulted from the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy in 1893. For example, Hawaiian Government and Crown lands passed to the Provisional Government and eventually to the Territory of Hawaiʻi at annexation in 1898. Conversion of these lands to private landholdings allowed for the development of ranches and plantations in the area.

"Mōʻī Stone" at Kūkaniloko in the 1980s. These petroglyphs are not visible today. Archaeologists have concluded that these are modern era petroglyphs. Source: Edward Stasack, 1980s.

Ranching: 1840–1900

Ranching in the Wahiawā Plateau began in the early 1840s on lands in Honouliuli and Līhuʻe that were leased by the American merchant John Meek (Cordy et al., 2011). The privatization of land that occurred during the Māhele and during the second half of the 19th century led to the generation of leases for great tracts of land to private individuals, including the lands surrounding Kūkaniloko. This in turn allowed for a rise in intensive ranching operations in the area, many of which continued until the early 1900s.

Pineapple: 1900–2004

Pineapple grew better than sugar in high elevation areas like Wahiawā. Beginning in 1900, Oʻahu's pineapple industry was centered in the Wahiawā Plateau and resulted in the importation of plantation labor (Miller, 1990). With a lease to the Waialua Agricultural Company, pineapple was grown on much of the land surrounding Kūkaniloko until 2004, when Del Monte halted its operations in Hawaiʻi (Trust for Public Land, 2012).

Top: Pineapple, Wahiawā, Oʻahu. Source: University of Chicago Department of Botany Records. Bottom: Scene on a pineapple plantation, with harvested pineapples, Hawaiʻi, 1910–1925. Source: Frank and Frances Carpenter Collection, American Environmental Photographs.

C. H. Judd and Cowboys on Kalākaua's Leilehua Ranch (1886). Source: Cordy et al. 2011; Bishop Museum SP 205517.

Irrigation Activities

The rise of intensive ranching, sugar, and pineapple in the Wahiawā Plateau led to the construction of irrigation systems to supplement natural rainfall levels. Between 1904 and 1906, a major dam was built at Wahiawā near the North and South forks of Kaukonahua Stream. This formed the Wahiawā Reservoir, also known as Lake Wilson (Cordy et al. 2011).

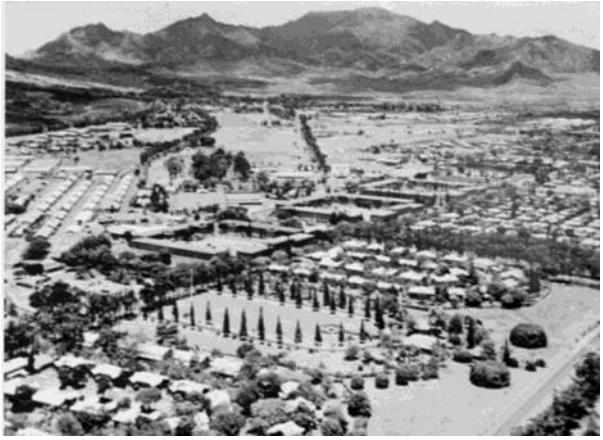
Pineapple, Wahiawā, Oʻahu, Hawaiʻi, n.d. (1910–1930) American Environmental Photographs.

Demographic Shifts

In 1895, lands which had been administered by the Kingdom of Hawaiʻi's Board of Education known as "school lands" in Wahiawā became homesteads under the Republic of Hawaiʻi and were taken out of the lease system. Non-Hawaiian families from the US, particularly California, were encouraged to move to the Wahiawā Colony Tract between 1898–1899. Each settler received a 5-acre parcel in the town with a house and farm land nearby. This area became Wahiawā Town (Cordy et al., 2011).

The U.S. Military and Schofield Barracks

The lands for the Waiʻanae-uka military reservation were formerly Hawaiian Crown lands and consisted of 14,400 acres on an area that was known as the Leilehua Plain in Central Oʻahu. The area was ceded to the US Government on July 26, 1899 shortly after the Republic of Hawaiʻi was annexed to the US. A temporary cantonment that included tents and wooden barracks was completed in 1909. The reservation was named Schofield after General John M. Schofield, a former Commanding General of the U.S. Army who had identified Hawaiʻi's strategic value to the U.S. and had encouraged annexation after the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy. The military continues to have a significant presence and impact in the area, which now includes 16,602 acres of land, encompassing Wheeler Army Airfield and the Helemano Military Reservation (Tropic Lightning Museum, 2008).



Left: 21st Infantry, Wahiawā Junction, Hawaiʻi, 1925. Right: Schofield Barracks Military Reservation, Wilikina Drive & Kunia Road, Wahiawā, Honolulu County, HI. Both photos from the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

Galbraith and Care of Kūkaniloko

George Galbraith moved to Hawai'i from Ireland in the mid 1800s and partnered with cattle ranchers in the Wahiawā Plateau of O'ahu in the 1870s. In January 1882, Galbraith purchased approximately 2,000 acres of land for ranching in Wahiawā and Kemo'o from William Hillebrand. This land acquisition included Kūkaniloko (Cordy et al., 2011). Galbraith sought to protect and preserve the Kūkaniloko site; he prohibited plowing around the site and frequently fenced the area to protect it from cattle. He was said to have dreamed of the spirit of the Keanini Stone, which he had moved to Kūkaniloko in the 1880s (Sterling and Summers, 1978).

Kūkaniloko: Source: OHA Land Management, 2013.

In 1900, Galbraith leased the lands around Kūkaniloko to the Waialua Agriculture Company for pineapple production. William Goodale, who managed the plantation from 1898 to 1923, continued to care for the site. Following Galbraith's death in 1904, the Hawaiian Trust Company (now a part of the Bank of Hawai'i) managed his assets and administered his estate, which included the lands surrounding Kūkaniloko.

The Galbraith Trust and Estate: Sale of Lands and Preservation Efforts

The 1,732 acre tract of land remaining in Galbraith's estate in the late 20th century represented one of the largest undeveloped plots on O'ahu. Galbraith's trust had grown to include an estimated 600 beneficiaries worldwide. The valuable land parcel had been sought for residential and luxury home development for a number of years. In 1992, a trustee of the estate proposed the development of an 18-hole golf course and 3,100 homes (Carlton, 2012). The trust began dissolving the estate in 2007 to meet a state deadline. A contract was signed with a real-estate developer for $40 million to start residential development on the land, although this attempt at sale and development was also unsuccessful (Carlton, 2012).

Following these attempts, the Hawai'i State Legislature set aside $13 million to buy the land. The Trust for Public Land, a non-profit land conservation organization, worked with a number of financial collaborators and was able to raise an additional $12 million for the purchase of the property. In 2012, the land was sold by the Galbraith Estate for $25 million (Carlton, 2012). The land was transferred to two Hawai'i public agencies. More than 1,200 acres from the acquisition was transferred to the Hawai'i State Agribusiness Development Corporation (ADC). OHA received over 500 acres surrounding Kūkaniloko. These properties may only be used for cultural preservation and agriculture (Trust for Public Land, 2012).

Contributions to the 2012 Purchase of the Galbraith Estate Parcel

State of Hawai'i general revenue bond	$13,000,000
U.S. Army Garrison Hawai'i/DOD Buffer Program	$4,500,000
City and County of Honolulu Clean Water & Natural Lands Fund	$4,000,000
Office of Hawaiian Affairs	$3,000,000
D.R. Horton-Schuler Division	$500,000
	Total: $25,000,000

Source: Trust for Public Land, 2012.

Caretakers of Kūkaniloko

Kūkaniloko was said to have been abandoned as a birthing place and chiefly center of power sometime after 1600 CE, although Native Hawaiians continued to visit the area for its special significance in the generations after. Many individuals and groups continued to care for Kūkaniloko from the late 19th century.

George Galbraith protected Kūkaniloko after he acquired the surrounding lands in 1882. Plantation manager William Goodale continued care of the site from 1898 and after the lands were leased for pineapple in 1900. In 1918, Goodale wrote to the Daughters of Hawai'i and they assumed official care of the site through a lease in 1925. The Waialua Civic Club officially cared for the site from 1950 to 1960, and the Hawaiian Civic Club of Wahiawā assumed care from 1960 to 1992. The site was placed on the Hawai'i Register of Historic Places in 1972 and the National Register of Historic Places in 1973. Kūkaniloko became a State Park in 1992 when the state purchased the 0.5 acre birthstone area and the 4.5 acres of land immediately around the birthstones. In 2003, the site name was changed to Kūkaniloko Birthstones State Historic Site (Cordy et al., 2011).

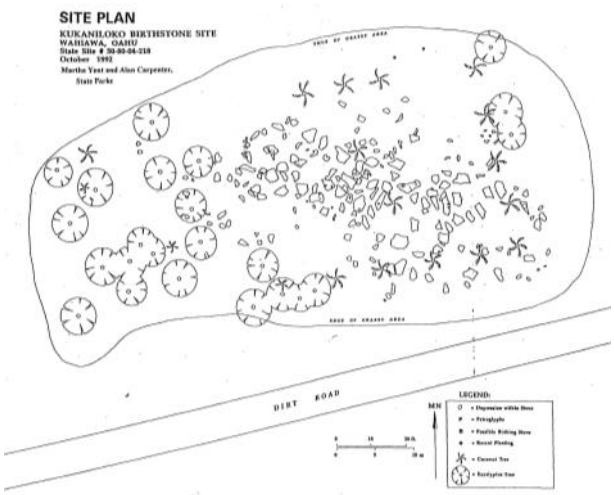
Family groups have also likely unofficially maintained care of the site for generations.

Known Caretakers of Kūkaniloko under the Galbraith Estate	
1882-1900	George Galbraith, William Goodale (beginning in 1898)
1900-1918	Waialua Agriculture Company: William Goodale
1918-1950	Daughters of Hawai'i
1950-1960	Waialua Hawaiian Civic Club
1960-1992	Hawaiian Civic Club of Wahiawā
1992-2012	Division of State Parks in the Department of Land & Natural Resources, Hawaiian Civic Club of Wahiawā, Friends of Kūkaniloko (beginning in 1997)

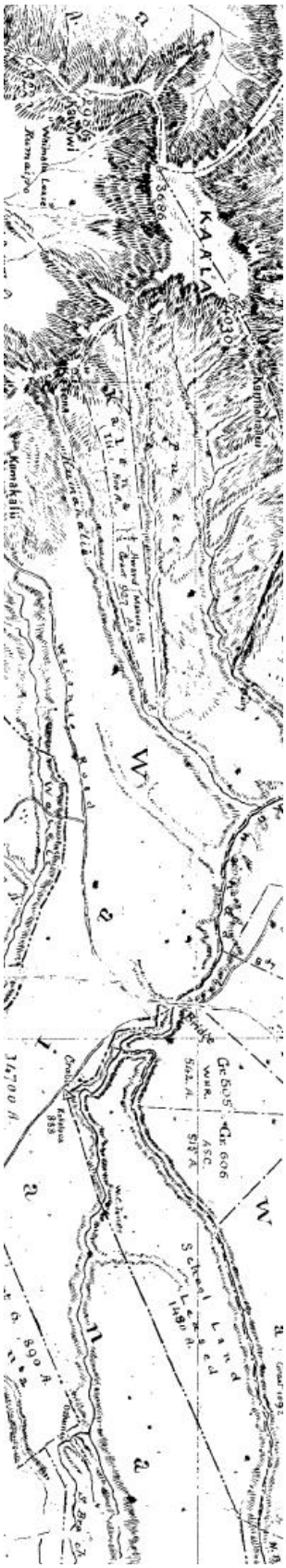
Source: Kai Markell for OHA, 2014.

Contemporary Concerns

Proper care and stewardship of Kūkaniloko remains a priority of the community, the State of Hawai'i, and of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs. Today, the site remains vulnerable to vandalism and improper or excessive use. Long-term, *pono* (proper, balanced) solutions to these challenges are being explored for implementation. In particular, cultural preservation and land management plans for this sacred and important site are being developed.



Source: State of Hawai'i, 1992.



Source: Lyons, L. (1875). Oahu: Government Survey. Hawaiian Kingdom.

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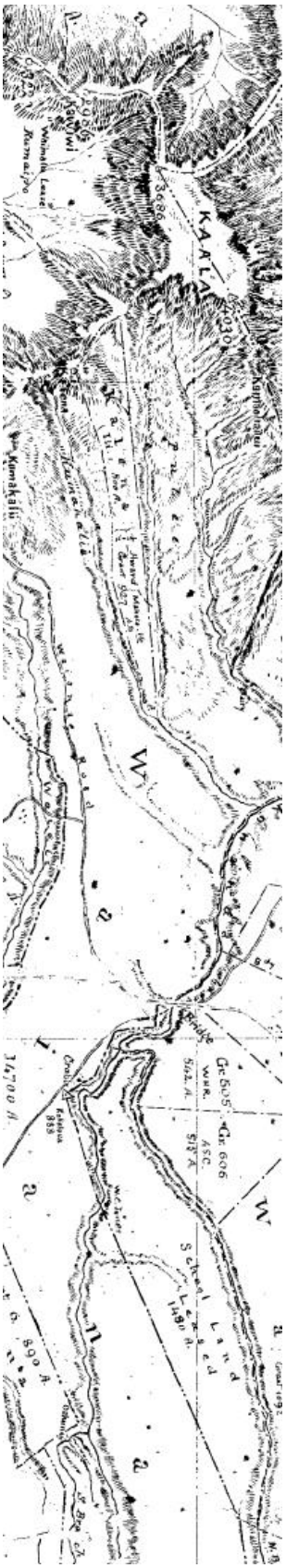

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