

## KOHALA, A RURAL MICROCOSM

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Well known to Hawaii Nei, but perhaps not to the world, is the unique northwest corner of Hawaii known as the Kohala district. This point of land, an area of roughly 325 square miles, is indeed a little world containing a rich variety of industries, population groups, and social patterns.

Three features in Kohala determine the division of land for productive uses - altitude, rainfall, and prior ownership. As in much of Hawaii Nei, large areas of Kohala are held by the Territory\* for lease purposes. The close control by large estates and corporations, in leasing and owning the available land, largely determines the type of industries that exist; these in turn are dependent on wide micro-climatic differences throughout the Kohala area. There is virtually no free market in land exchange, in agriculturally important areas and on beach lands. There are those who feel that this limits potential economic development, but, on the other hand, skillful management of a few industries by large operators with capital and skillful marketing techniques probably brings more economic gain to this area now than would scattered marginal endeavors by individuals.

The Kohala Sugar Company, a large well-organized corporation, grows cane and mills and ships raw sugar. Its holdings are a large part of the arable land in Kohala, as well as an appreciable portion of the major watershed windward of the Kohala mountains. This company employs about 690 men of various racial extractions whose wages and working conditions are purportedly the best of all sugar workers in the world. This was not always the case, but since World War I, enlightened management has largely atoned for the excesses of the past, while maintaining a reasonable balance between efficient production and the demands of labor leaders - incessant demands which could conceivably destroy the sugar industry. The Kohala Sugar Company is wisely endeavoring to tap wider markets by including in its plantings considerable Macadamia nut acreage, and has under investigation many tropical plants that would serve to diversify its operations if it becomes desirable to de-emphasize sugar production.

Besides the Kohala Sugar Company, other sugar producers exist, whose economy is directly linked to that of the Kohala Sugar Company, a fact that became painfully apparent to them during a recent sugar strike. With some assistance from the plantation, these growers cultivate cane on leased or privately-owned land. Their cane is harvested and milled by the plantation. The income from this endeavor has made many independent planters wealthy. However, during labor strife, they face the same problems as plantation management but have no voice in labor relations; curiously enough, some independent growers, as plantation laborers, at times have had to strike against their own interests.

Next in importance to sugar production, cattle ranching dominates the Kohala economy. Kahua Ranch, a division of Parker Ranch, and several smaller cattle operations use almost all of the land on the Kona side of the Kohala Mountains. The cattle are shipped to local and Honolulu

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\* Editors' note: this article was written prior to statehood.

markets mostly on the hoof by barge out of Kawaihae harbor, a newly developed installation of major importance to the future of this area. Kohala ranches are owned by individuals or partnerships and are operated by the owners or hired managers. An interesting contrast in labor problems exists between the sugar and ranching industries in Kohala. Big labor organizers have achieved universal control of the multi-racial sugar workers - yet not one Kohala ranch has any form of union.

On the contrary, a social system reminiscent of the European feudal economy at its best exists on the ranches, and it is doubtful whether a union organizer would survive an attempt to unionize these Hawaiian cowboys, who seem to enjoy a mutually harmonious relationship with their employers. On one ranch, all the workers and their families receive in addition to their cash income, free and complete medical care, housing, fuel, an acre of land for gardening, free milk (any amount), practically free meat, and occasional use of a jeep, with pig-hunting and fishing privileges. This paternalistic relationship, almost extinct in the business world, still provides an abundant and happy life for many laboring people within the framework of our economic system.

Fishing and general farming are activities in Kohala which, although small, are important. Although most fresh fish is brought from Kawaihae by fish peddlers with small trucks, one commercial fisherman, a Japanese, works out of Mahukona, a small port no longer in operation.

Farming in leased gulches - the raising of taro, bananas, pigs, chickens, geese and other farm products - occupies only a few people as a full-time occupation, but many Kohala people of all levels on the economic and social scale do a little farming - raising vegetables, fruits, Macadamia nuts, and farm stock. Two very successful small agricultural ventures are a Macadamia nut processing plant, and a kim chee (a Korean condiment) factory whose operator, a Korean school teacher, has developed an astonishingly successful business, shipping his product by the plane-load to Honolulu and California. More such small businesses might be successful, but the cost of transportation has been a deterrent. However, new roads to Kawaihae and surface transportation to Honolulu will change this situation.

Kohala stores amaze the malihini. Scattered along the populated area from Hawi to Niulii are many general stores, mostly operated by Japanese or Filipino families. The range of goods, foods, hardware, feed, furnishings and clothing in each store is unbelievably complete in stocks of products from Japan as well as the USA, particularly in foods and utensils. One can easily purchase a Japanese umbrella, a jar of bagoong (a Filipino condiment, consisting of fermented salt fish), a Coleman lantern, Betty Crocker cake mixes, dried lily flowers, chun pi moi (a Chinese preserved orange peel), Portuguese codfish, New Zealand apples, poi, caviar and an electric mixer - all wrapped and delivered to one's door. The stores are rarely closed, service is continuous - nights, Sundays and holidays, a retailing practice which is only recently coming into the life of the mainland cities. These stores are the meeting place for many of our people - time spent browsing, sitting on the front steps discussing the affairs of the day, is reminiscent of the cracker-barrel storekeeping of the old West.

Kohala has theaters, electrical suppliers, barbers (one a girl), a shoemaker, builders, garage facilities, seamstresses, a photography studio, a tailor, and most of the enterprises essential to daily living.

The few products and services not available in the district are readily found in Hilo, about three hours away in time and to which daily truck and passenger service is available.

One Hawaiian industry that is absent in Kohala is the tourist trade. It is doubtful that a dozen tourists a year see Kohala, beautiful as it is. Development in this field will come in time, but there are many Kohalans who feel that at present the affairs of the district are better without the additional problems of the tourist industry.

The public school system in Kohala is excellent. There are three elementary schools, good bus service, and a central high school of modern construction and operation. It is interesting to note that the quality of instruction in the elementary schools is considerably superior to that of most Mainland schools. The level of achievement in basic schooling - reading, writing, and arithmetic - is in some instances above that of comparable age groups in West Coast schools. This fact astonishes many Island people who have not experienced the changes of Mainland education in the past twenty years. Kohala schools are still teaching with the dedication of a generation ago - most of the older teachers are Orientals, middle-aged people who give all they can of themselves to their work for the benefit of their classes. Older children find difficulty in securing college entrance work in high school because there is a serious lack of science teachers; music and art teachers are also scarce, and other more intellectual disciplines are often missing in the curriculum for want of instructors and students. It is hardly practicable to provide teachers in these more specialized fields since enrollment in the sciences, languages and arts tends to be small. Thus many Kohala children contemplating college enrollment are sent away to secondary schools.

Kohala medical services care for about 3,500 people - most of these families live on the plantation - some are not sugar workers, but all use the plantation medical facilities as either private or pre-paid patients. Patients come to the plantation medical offices from more distant parts of the island as consultation cases, or for other reasons. A rather free exchange of patients occurs between plantations in emergency care, and consultations are easily arranged with suitable specialists. A union medical committee confers with the company and its physicians in case of conflicting interests, but it is rare that such problems arise.

The two doctors employed by the Kohala Sugar Company have private practices in addition. A long-term study of the effects of tablet flouride ingestion on dental decay rates in Kohala is in progress, financed by the Kohala Sugar Company, which makes every effort to provide the district of Kohala with the latest medical techniques and equipment. Pleasant dispensary facilities are provided and maintained by the plantation. Hospitalization is available in a well-equipped, clean hospital of fifty-six beds which is county-operated and staffed by competent nurses and technicians. The hospital acts as a clearing point for all calls outside of office hours, an arrangement that insures 24-hour emergency service.

Much Hawaiian medicine is still practiced by kahunas or skilled laymen who use ancient remedies, massage, and bonesetting techniques of early Polynesian times. Many of these old practices are most effective.

Crime and delinquency in Kohala is largely limited to pilfering from the plantation, occasional "sex" offenses which are usually committed with the full cooperation of the "rapee", and an occasional cock fight. The latter occupation of the citizenry, however, accounts for

much of the police activity in the community. An astonishing array of men and radio-equipped vehicles are dedicated to eliminating this pastime of the Filipino men - few of whom are ever found on the public relief rolls from gambling. Court is held weekly in a small frame building that also serves as a police station. A judge from Hilo hears the occasional case that comes to trial. Sentences, particularly for serious driving offenses, are so light that local police find traffic law enforcement difficult. The police station is closed at night, but 24-hour protection is virtually unnecessary in the district, and the police chief can be called at his home if needed.

Fire protection in Kohala is minimal. The Kohala Sugar Company operates a small engine, but because of the great distances it must cover, and the lack of hydrants, its use is limited to minor fires, and the protection of property surrounding them. A centralized call system is in operation however, which enhances the effectiveness of the equipment.

The most colorful characteristic of Kohala is its people. Seven ethnic groups are present in pure and mixed forms. Each brings to the community novelty and cultural richness that is unique, and demonstrate by working together in harmony and mutual respect that peaceful and intelligent cooperation in community affairs can effectively cut across ethnic and religious differences. Population statistics of the portion of North Kohala in which the plantation is located reveal the following number of residents by ethnic origin in 1950:

	Number	Per Cent
Hawaiian	952	22.7
Caucasian	357	8.5
Chinese	126	3.0
Filipino	954	22.8
Japanese	1398	33.3
Others	413	9.7
Total	4200	100.0

As compared with the population distribution throughout the Islands, this portion of Kohala had a decided over-representation of Filipinos and a marked under-representation of Chinese and of Caucasians. The distribution of the males employed within the major occupational groups is as follows:

Professional, technical and kindred workers	56
Farmers and farm managers	35
Managers, officials, proprietors (except farm)	43
Clerical, sales, and kindred workers	76
Craftsmen and kindred workers	200
Operatives and kindred	310
Private household workers	2
Service workers, except private household	34
Farm laborers and foremen	377
Laborers, except farm and mine	113
Occupations not reported	12
	<u>1,258</u>

The Kohala workers are over-represented as operatives and farm laborers and are under-represented in all other occupation groups as compared with the rest of the Islands.

Most of Kohala's working people live in "camps" or small aggregations of rental houses owned by the plantation. These camps are the vestiges of housing sites of five previous plantations, now merged into the Kohala Sugar Company. Some of the camps are largely occupied by one ethnic group; others have tenants of various ancestries. Often a large family will account for nearly all the members in one camp - several generations living in the modernized equivalent of a true clan society. In the near future, these colorful camps with their pigs, chickens, gardens, and flowered hedges will be replaced by more modern housing, under an individual ownership program planned by the plantation. Some families, particularly in Makapala and Niulii, live in picturesque gulches, heavily planted with banana groves, coconut, taro and ti. Most of the pure or nearly pure Hawaiians left in Kohala live in these two truly beautiful spots, closer to the ways of their fathers than other areas of the district would permit - fishing, gathering opihi, weaving lauhala, and enjoying life in general.

Most Kohala families have TV sets, deep freezers, cars (often the shiniest and newest models), and are fairly solvent. They are rapidly becoming enthusiastic consumers in the Madison Avenue sense. Drinking and smoking is the rule among all except the Mormons and certain other religious sects. Although sometimes a problem, chronic alcoholism is not limited to any ethnic group, but is rare among Orientals.

The wide variety of ethnic groups in Kohala invites extensive comparisons, but for the purposes of a shortpaper such as this, the comparison of reactions to emotional stress has been selected to display some of the interesting ethnic differences in our people. Puerto Rican and Portuguese members of the community often show a very low threshold of emotional homeostasis. "Nervousness", a mild but universal complaint, ranges through various manifestations to the most agonized hysterias in times of public stress such as a death in the neighborhood. It is not unusual to find, in such a situation, two or three mourners (not necessarily the immediate kin of the deceased) sprawled semi-conscious on the floor, their stupor interspersed with loud howls. This makes an interesting contrast to the quiet dignity of death in Japanese families. Whether this results from the basic differences between their respective philosophies of death or habit patterns of other derivations is difficult to determine locally.

Chinese burial customs with their elaborate ceremonies and paid mourners are well-known, but exhibit a degree of sophistication that is inherent in Chinese activities generally. The Filipinos also suffer their difficulties in silence - little is said, and a practical resignation to fate prevails. The widely held notion that Filipinos are poor citizens and often "run-amok" is largely a myth - here, at least, the Filipino people are a stable and valuable part of the community, although many of the older men do not have families in Hawaii. Hawaiian and Haole alike show little emotional instability, but there is an interesting corollary to this observation - many frank psychoses occur in these groups.

The question of racial tensions arises in any consideration of a mixed population. Over the years Kohala has treated its racial relationships with humor, understanding, and a sense of human values that has dissipated most socially damaging tensions. That tensions do exist there is no question, but often the cause, if carefully traced, is not racial at all, but the result of misunderstanding due to difficulties of communication. As time goes on, it is likely that even less tension will exist.

Nearly all social functions in Kohala at present are inter-racial, ranging from the Parent-Teachers' Association carnivals to the annual Japanese Bon Dances. These are attended by people of all the different ethnic groups and religions, without any trace of hostility, suspicion, superiority or bigotry. On the contrary, the varied costumes, foods, and observations are shared and enjoyed by everyone. The negating effect of the few die-hards who do not join in the experiences of the community is lost in the general feeling of well-being among the people of the district.

Vestigial organizations of a racial nature still exist, but these are rapidly losing community importance. There is a "Puerto Rican Club", a "Social Club" of Caucasian membership, the "Kaahumanu Society" composed of Hawaiian ladies, the "Chinese Benevolent Association", and the "Filipino Brotherhood". Most of these organizations exist mainly for some specific purpose, such as charity, or burial insurance, or simply for an occasional party. Little interest or animosity is generated by the activities of these groups.

A number of service organizations which are open to everyone are operative in Kohala. The Lions Club supports eye-care for indigents and a blood-bank. The American Legion has an active post. Scouting and Cub Scout programs are well-supported. The Young Farmers, 4-H Club and University of Hawaii Extension services are excellent. It is difficult for many strangers to Hawaii to understand that all these social activities exist in a completely tension-free atmosphere, although seven ethnic groups are intimately involved. It is indeed a singular situation on American soil, and one that should lend encouragement to the proponents of racial equality everywhere.

There are many temples and churches in Kohala. Several Buddhist sects are represented. The Christians have a number of schismatic churches, some of which exist as missions, and many citizens simply have no religious affiliation. Children of Buddhist parents often attend Christian Sunday schools, partly for social reasons and partly because Buddhism wisely encourages the study of other religious philosophies. The lack of English-speaking Buddhist priests is a serious problem for Japanese families who wish to retain their religion. Most of their children do not know enough Japanese to find it useful in religious instruction and hence the drift to English-speaking Sunday schools. Japanese language classes are taught at one temple, and are open to anyone, and people of all faiths are cordially welcomed to the religious festivals.

An interesting facet of the religious life of Kohala is the fact that individuals of almost all ethnic and religious groups divide their loyalties between old religions and new. It is not unusual for a "good" Mormon Hawaiian, for example, to keep his beliefs in the old gods; an occasional Japanese still worships the fox; and many "Christianized" Oriental people are not certain if they have gained or lost in changing religions.

This paper has discussed several features of the Kohala district, its people, industries, and economy; first, its isolation, contrasting with the multiplicity of available goods, services, and activities; second, a brief comparison of ethnic groups, outlining the rather typical reactions to stress; and third, the picture of Kohala's ethnic variety matched by deep harmony, colored by some observations on the religious life of the area. Admittedly much of importance, sociologically, must remain untouched, but a community of this type might well serve as source material for valuable research in resolving racial problems on the Mainland.