
New Public Testimony

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Agenda Item

Docket No. A26-812 Pūlama Lāna'i (Kō'ele Project)

Position

Oppose

Attachment (if any)

- [2025-03-25-Bill-3-FD1-2025-Protect-Koele-Ranch-Houses-In-Place-Maly.pdf](#)

Testimony

July 14, 2026

To: Members of the State of Hawai'i Land Use Commission

Re.: Opposition to approval of Docket A26-812 Lāna'i Resorts dba Pūlama Lāna'i (Kō'ele Project)

We humbly submit this testimony opposing removal of the last two remaining ranch house from the Kō'ele landscape. We also include a pdf attachment "2025 03 25 (Bill 3 FD1 2025) Protect Koele Ranch Houses In Place (Maly)" that was previously submitted to the County of Maui Council Members.

Much of Lāna'i's biocultural landscape has been erased. And the fragments that remain are highly valued. By the mid-1800s, Kō'ele was held as the heart of Lāna'i. While this reflects the emergence of post-contact influences, it is deeply seated in the na'au or "mole" (the very core) of generational Lāna'i residents. It is the piko of Lāna'i and the focal point of many family memories. In your deliberations, we urge you to consider the generational cultural attachment (* see meaning below) of the two remaining historic homes that are all that remains of the pilina 'ohana (family connections) for kānaka and many long-time Lāna'i residents. The culturally detached "preservation" criteria that impose western values of significance and the world view of what is worthy of preservation do not represent the legacy of place. To simply approve the taking of a few pictures and writing an "assessment report(s)" fail the individual uniqueness of

place.

Rather than removing features of the biocultural landscape, they should be protected, maintained, and celebrated. These cultural-historical properties are a part of what makes Lānaʻi unique. These features make Lānaʻi, Lānaʻi, versus just another destination that can be found around the world.

* “Cultural Attachment” embodies the tangible and intangible values of a culture—how a people identify with and personify the environment around them. It is the intimate relationship (developed over generations of experiences) that people of a particular culture feel for the sites, features, phenomena, and natural resources that surround them—their sense of place. This attachment is deeply rooted in the beliefs, practices, cultural evolution, and identity of a people. The significance of cultural attachment in a given culture is often overlooked by others whose beliefs and values evolved under a different set of circumstances. This appears to be the case in the matter that you are considering for the last two remaining Kōʻele Ranch homes.

Our testimony for March 28, 2025, a public hearing of the Maui County Council (Bill 3, FD1 2025), provide you with a sampling of the significance and attachment that ‘ohana hold dear for the last two historic ranch homes at Kōʻele, Lānaʻi. The remaining Hawaiian Church and two ranch homes (originally built in 1899) are among the last physical manifestations of the kamaʻāina presence and cultural attachment at Kōʻele.

Please consider ways to integrate and celebrate Lānaʻi’s rich and diverse history – finding balance between past and future.

Māua no me ka ha’aha’a,

Kepā & Onaona Maly

xx:xx:xx:xx:xx:xx:xx:xx:xx:xx:xx:xx:xx:xx: xx:xx:

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“Pio ‘ole ka ‘oia’i’o”

Hawaiian history is filled with evidence that “colonialism” does not seek to elevate the condition those who are colonized; instead it seeks to subjugate the people. It extracts their resources, demonizes their traditional knowledge, customs, practices and beliefs, and impairs their ability to sustain themselves...

Visit www.kumupono.com and the Hawaiian Digital Library (HDL) at www.ulukau.org to view selected articles and cultural studies prepared by Kumu Pono Associates LLC; and www.lanaichc.org for museum and cultural literacy-place based education work.

March 25, 2025

TO: The Honorable Maui County Council Members
(c/o County Clerk county.clerk@mauicounty.us)

RE.: March 28, 2025. Hearing on County Council Bill 3, FD1 (2025) & Request That The Last Two Historic Residences of the Kōʻele Ranch Complex Be Preserved In-Place (Please Do Not Approve their Relocation).

Aloha mai ʻoukou e nā mea Hanohano,

I waena o ka Pākīpika, aia o Hawaiʻi,	In the middle of the Pacific, behold Hawaiʻi,
I waena o Hawaiʻi, aia o Lānaʻi,	In the middle of Hawaiʻi, behold Lānaʻi,
Aia i ka mole o Lānaʻi, o Kōʻele,	There at the center/core of Lānaʻi, is Kōʻele,
E hoʻokipa mai i Kōʻele!	Be welcome at Kōʻele! ¹

We are submitting this testimony pertaining to the last two historic homes of the old Kōʻele Ranch Headquarters-Community Complex which are the focal point of the action requested by Pūlama Lānaʻi and addressed in Bill 3 before you today.

We must first share that we have great respect and appreciation for much of the work done by Pūlama Lānaʻi, and understand the importance of creating a balanced and fair economic driver for the island. Our fear is that erasing the fragmented remnants of the historical landscape of Kōʻele will further diminish the legacy landscape—that which is significant to generational residents of Lānaʻi, and that is a part of the unique allure for visitors to the island.

Starting in the 1850s with the first western residents, a group of Mormon missionaries (1854-1868); followed by a century of ranching (ending in 1951), failure of the Maunalei Sugar Co. Planation (1898-1901); closing of the Dole (HAPCo) pineapple plantation (1922 to 1991); followed by the D.H. Murdock resort oriented initiatives (1985-2012) which closed the plantation, demolished much of the old Kōʻele Ranch Community/Complex that connected all of the Native Hawaiian Families of Lānaʻi, and also held place of prominence among many of those people who came to work on the plantation. All of these historic activities—multiple efforts to extract and export economic gain failed—and radically altered the biocultural landscape of Kōʻele and significant areas across Lānaʻi.

In the late 1980s Castle & Cook began a major project of ground movement and filling to develop the Lodge at Kōʻele. The process was a painful one for the community

¹ The lines of this mele composed in 1989-1990 by Lānaʻi native, the late Kupuna Irene Kamāhuialani Cockett Perry, born at Keōmoku Village in 1917. They are expressions of this cultural attachment of Lānaʻi's Native Hawaiians to the unique biocultural landscape of Kōʻele.

and native families of Lānaʻi, nearly all of whom were descended from, or were surviving ranch employees and families. The original proposal was to demolish the few remaining ranch homes, cut down the only Norfolk Island Pine tree on the island, remove the historic church, and demolish other remaining features. Lānaʻi families, joined by residents from across the state, fought to preserve some of the historic character of Kōʻele. A glimpse into the impacts of resort development at Kōʻele, and the eventual relocation of the two homes which are the subject of this Bill, along with the relocation of Ka Lokahi Church, is captured in the excerpts from the 1987 article in the Honolulu Star Bulletin—

February 13, 1987 (page 1 & A-6)
Honolulu Star Bulletin
The Day the Sky Wept Over Lanai City
Home is moved to make way for Resort.

...The Islands landowner, Castle & Cooke Inc. was moving ahead with its plan to move the Morita house and another plus the Islands' oldest church to new sites to make way for a \$25 million resort hotel. Two other homes will be demolished... ..It has been unsettling for many Lanaians to see these changes and others coming about as a result of the company's preparation to turn Koele and another area, Manele at Hulopoe Bay, into resorts...

...A ranch settlement back in the 1930s, Koele was where townspeople came to ride or train their horses. Paniolos lived here.

Cattle ranching as far back as the 1870s, when the famous Island politician Walter Murray Gibson leased land here, indelibly left its mark on what Lanaians call "the ranch."

So why are (Castle & Cooke) destroying the spirit of place that I would think they would want to preserve here... ..Kalawaia [Mary Cockett Kalawaia] said the company is moving the church without having first asked the members...

Following public outcry on the Kōʻele development, agreements were entered into which served to mitigate some aspects of the resort development (these agreements were also passed on to Pūlama Lānaʻi). Among them was the relocation, renovation and preservation of the two homes which subsequently became known as the Richardson homes (named for two Native Hawaiian brothers and their native wives). Details of the agreements included protection of the Norfolk Island Pine, planted in ca. 1878 (the seedling given as a gift by King David Kalākaua to his friend, Walter Murray Gibson); (2) relocate the Hawaiian Church, Ka Lōkāhi (and its annex) on the Kōʻele grounds; (3) relocate the last two ranch houses to the north side of the resort (their current position), and allow a life-interest of residency to the last two old cowboy families of Kōʻele; and (4) relocate and preserve the 1916 Kōʻele School House building. The latter commitment was never completed, and the school was subsequently demolished.

Historical View of the Kō‘ele Ranch and Community Complex

In 1938, HAPCo produced a map of the Kō‘ele Ranch-Community Headquarters. An annotated map later in this testimony includes at least 62 features comprising the ranch community—currently all but three sites have been obliterated. These original features included but were not limited to residences, storage houses, outhouses, workshops, stables, refuse pits, hothouses, the slaughter house, fishponds, a reservoir, laundry and bathhouses, and a gas station. Several features are likely to have left subsurface signatures, such as the outhouses, rubbish pits, gas station and air raid shelter—and unknown traditional features which may have survived as subsurface remains.

The built landscape of the ranch dates from at least the 1870s, with major additions having been made through the 1930s. In 1904, as a part of this period, the two houses which are the focal point of Bill 3, FD1 (2025) were dismantled from the old Maunalei Sugar Co. complex at Keōmoku and rebuilt to create additional residences at Kō‘ele under the ownership of Charles Gay. In the 1940s, HAPCo began the process of slowly demolishing the ranch complex. The last roundup of cattle from Kō‘ele took place in 1951 (*Figure 1*). The memories of those who lived there and who recalled what the buildings were varied, depending on the age of the interviewees, and period of time being described. For instance, the old stables and sheep shearing woolshed were replaced by the Quonset Huts in 1947, which were in turn demolished in the mid-1980s.



Figure 1. 1951, Last Roundup at Kō‘ele (HAPCO Collection)

Over the last nearly 60-years we have conducted extensive archival research and oral history interviews for almost all of Lānaʻi (also large areas across the Hawaiian Islands). As a part of the work, we annotated the 1938 copy of the HAPCo map of the Kōʻele Ranch and Community Complex (*Figure 2*). It is likely that there is missing information, and perhaps some errors in who or what was where. But the overall result of the map provides detailed information on the historic landscape. The alphabets coincide with letters on the map in *Figure 2*—

- A Norfolk Island Pine (Planted ca. 1878, gift of King David Kalākaua to Walter Murray Gibson. Tree struck by lightning in October 1903 and survived. The Norfolk Pine now stands approximately 165 feet high, and its base has a circumference of 25 feet.)
- B (1007) Manager's House (Over the years, was home to Walter M. Gibson, Fred. & Talula Gibson Hayselden, Alika Dowsett, Charles & Louisa Pakohana Gay, and Ernest Vredenburg; and also hosted many noted guests and dignitaries.)
- C (1009) Guest House (Residence of Kenneth Emory during the 1921-22 archaeological survey of Lānaʻi.)
- D (1024) *Ranch office; home of Helen Forbes family, Robert Cockett family, James Kauila family, Morita family; George Ohashi family, and Andy & Martha Evans, was also used in the 1970s as offices of Don Rietow and Lanai Company. The house was moved in 1988-1989 to the northwestern side of Kōʻele to serve as the home of John and Hannah Kauila Richardson, where it stands today. This house was originally built in 1899 at Keōmoku Village as a part of the Maunalei Sugar Company venture and moved to its ranch location (indicated on Figure 2), by Charles Gay in ca. 1904.*
- E (1013) *Ranch store, post office and office, later rented out to the Territorial and State Department of Land and Natural Resources, and served as the home for game wardens, Richard Fuller and William Kwon, and as the hunter's check-in station.*

William and Eva Kaopuiki Kwon and family moved out of the house in 1969. In the 1970s, the newly formed Lānaʻi Company renovated the house and used it as a company office, occupied by Swede Desha, Albert H. Morita and others. The house was moved in 1988-1989 to the northwestern side of Kōʻele to serve as the home of Ernest and Rebecca Kaopuiki Richardson, where it stands today. This house was originally built in 1899 at Keōmoku Village as a part of the Maunalei Sugar Company venture and moved to its ranch location (indicated on Figure 2), by Charles Gay in ca. 1904.
- F (1015, 1016, 1017, 1018) This complex included the stable, blacksmith shop, storage room, milk room, and adjoining corrals. In 1947 three Quonset Huts were built and

removed in the mid 1980s.

The roadway indicated between the stable/Quonset Hut complex on the map (formerly lined by rows of trees on both sides) was the road that ran up to the “Ranch Camp” residences, past Ka Lokahi Church.

G (1053, 1054, 1055, 1056)

Complex including the ranch slaughterhouse, hide shed, feed house, piggery and pig pens.

H (1026, 1027) Home of Kunichi Sakamoto; later used by police officer, Maguire and then DLNR Officer E. Sipe.

I (1028) Storage shed maintained by Kunichi Sakamoto and Gi Hong Kwon (Tūtū Kwon), who raised vegetables in a large garden plot in the open area around the shed, for the ranch manager.

J (1029, 1030, 1031, 1032)

Original location of Ka Lokahi Church and Hall, Outhouse (later toilets), and fire house. The church was moved to a new location the under large banyan tree in 1989.

Reservoir made in ca. 1911 as a part of the Kō‘ele Ranch operation (rebuilt in the late 1980s for the resort development). A ranch child, Wilson Kwon drowned in the reservoir in the 1920s.

K Principle’s house, County of Maui, Kō‘ele Public School (1925), later used by the principle of Lāna‘i High & Elementary School.

L (1050) Experimental Hothouse.

Between 1049 and 1050 the Experimental Hothouse was the old underground air raid shelter from World War II.

M (1049) Home of Henry Uyeda.

N (1048) An early home of John and Hannah Kauila Richardson. Later kept as a hunter’s guest house by Ernest Richardson for off island guests.

O (1047) Home of Sam Kanahale; and later, home of Ernest and Rebecca Kaopuiki Richardson.

P (1046) Home of Junior “Biggy” Kaopuiki and younger Kaopuiki siblings (Sammy, Johnny, Harriet and Eva) who relocated from Keōmoku Village to attend school.

Q (1045) Home of the Bento family for a while (others uncertain).

R (1044) Home of Gi Hong Kwon (Tūtū Kwon) and his daughter, Ethel.

S (1043, 1042, 1041)

Kō‘ele School House (ca. 1916). Home of Simeon and Ella Kauakahi, and later the home of John and Hannah Kauila Richardson. In 1988-1989, the building was moved down to the 1948 MECO Power Plant

area below the city for preservation but then left to deteriorate beyond repair by Castle & Cooke. (Because no further action was taken by C&C in restoration of the historic Kō'ele School House, it was destroyed by neglect and demolished in ca. 2018.)

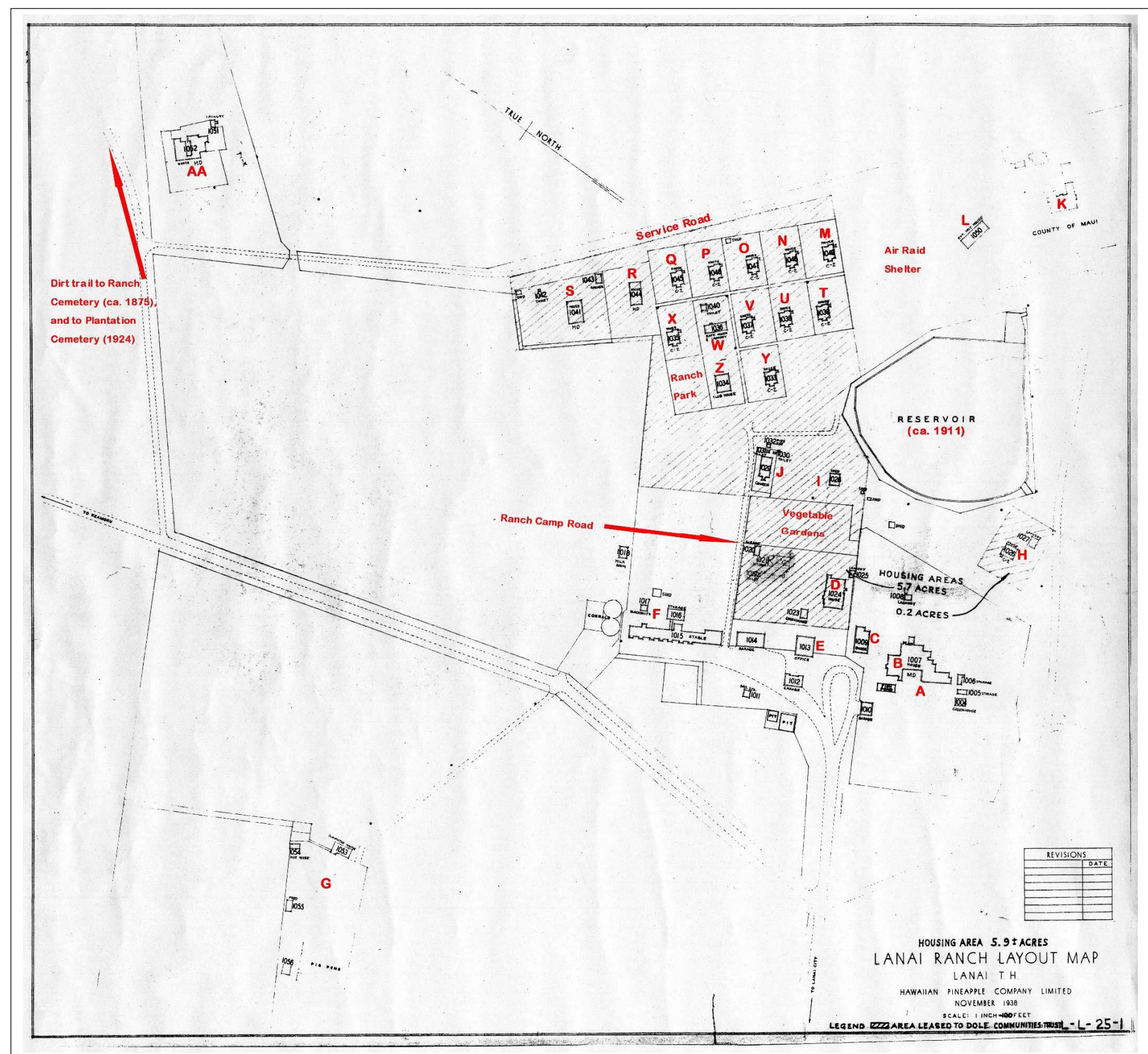
- T (1039) Home of Bernard Gibson and Mary Malia Kwon.
- U (1038) Home of Boon Soon Shin and Anna Napuehu Shin (adoptive parents of Sam Koanui Kwon Shin).
- V (1037) Home of William and Makaleka Nakihei Kauwenaole (Elaine Kauwenaole Kaopuiki).
- W (1036) Half of facility served as the furo (bath) house, and the other half was a laundry room with basins for boiling water and hand scrubbing clothes. Outhouses also on lot.
- X (1035) Home of Ernest and Martha Keliikuli, and later home of the Richard Fuller family when they relocated from the house identified as 1013.
- Y (1033) Once residence of a Puerto Rican family, then by Robert Kauila, and then the Basques family. Had great "pea" (avocado) tree on the lot that was favored by Ernest Richardson.
- Z (1034) Ranch Club House. The company kept a pool table in the house where ranch hands gathered after work. Building also served as a summer school, taught by Ethel Kwon for ranch children.
- The adjoining empty lot was the Ranch Camp park and ball field. It hosted a baseball field, basketball and volleyball courts, and was surrounded by a hibiscus hedge.
- At back of the houses was an old road (indicated on the 1938 map), where grocery deliveries would be made and other supplies delivered to houses.

AA (1051, 1052)

Home of Henry and Matilda Napaepae Gibson. Henry Gibson was one of the grandchildren of Walter Murray Gibson. Matilda Napaepae was an Aunt of Ernest Richardson, who came to work on the ranch in 1926.

The old stone and mortar steps to the Gibson homestead remain visible on the makai side of the home identified above as "E 1013."

Figure 2.
Annotated Map of Kō'ele Ranch Camp (1938 base
map) Key to historic Features.



Recognizing the value of your time, and the likelihood that there are a number of people who wish to share their mana‘o (thoughts), we will stop here, hoping that you have gained additional background on the biocultural landscape of Kō‘ele and the last two houses representative of a significant era in Lāna‘i’s history.

Sadly, a majority of the laws, rules and guidelines for conducting archaeological and architectural surveys tend to be based on non-indigenous values and a western worldview. This approach has been largely disrespectful of traditional and customary practices, cultural attachment and indigenous knowledge. For more than one thousand years Hawaiians sustained themselves in an integrated relationship with their honua ola (biocultural environmental landscape). This type of relationship, of course, causes problems for the western approach to managing lands, resources, and describing boundaries. The tidy little “dot on the map” makes it easy to dissociate less-tangible parts of the landscape—the beliefs, customary practices, living culture, traditions and access—from the larger part of the landscape. In words familiar to those who engage in conducting “traditional cultural properties studies,” these other facets of the landscape are “contributing features” of a larger biocultural landscape that is comprised of both tangible and intangible cultural assets. Regardless of our wealth or ethnic extraction, it is our (ko kākou) responsibility to honor the legacy landscape that we are stewards of.

Māua nō me ke aloha ha‘aha‘a – pio ‘ole ka ‘oia‘i‘o,

Kepā & Onaona Maly

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