

# HISTORIC HAWAII FOUNDATION

**To:** Gerald Ida, Chair  
Susan Remoaldo, Vice Chair  
Kaua'i Historic Preservation Review Commission

**From:** Kiersten Faulkner, FAICP  
Executive Director, Historic Hawai'i Foundation

**Meeting Date:** Thursday, April 20, 2023, 1:30 p.m.  
Lihu'e Civic Center, Moikeha Building, Meeting Room 2A-2B,  
4444 Rice Street, Lihu'e, Kaua'i, Hawai'i

**Subject:** **Nomination to the Hawai'i Register of Historic Places – Carswell Residence – Princeville, Kaua'i**

On behalf of Historic Hawai'i Foundation (HHF), I am writing with comments and recommendations related to the Carswell Residence at 4241 Kekuanaoa Lane, Princeville, Kaua'i and the proposed nomination to the Hawai'i Register of Historic Places

## **Interests of Historic Hawai'i Foundation**

Historic Hawai'i Foundation is a statewide nonprofit organization established in 1974 to encourage the preservation of historic buildings, sites and communities on all the islands of Hawai'i. As the statewide leader for historic preservation, HHF works to preserve Hawai'i's unique architectural and cultural heritage and believes that historic preservation is an important element in the present and future quality of life, environmental sustainability, and economic viability of the state.

## **Background and Context**

The Carswell residence is located at Princeville. Princeville was founded by Robert Crichton Wyllie in the mid-19th century. Wyllie was a Scottish man who had come to Hawai'i in 1844 and within a year had been appointed Minister of Foreign Relations of the Kingdom of Hawai'i by King Kamehameha III. In 1853, Wyllie acquired a plantation near Hanalei Bay, first growing coffee and then sugar cane. Wyllie named the plantation "Princeville" after Prince Albert, son of King Kamehameha IV and his wife Queen Emma, who had visited the plantation in 1860.

Wyllie died in 1865, and after changing hands multiple times, the plantation was acquired by the Lihu'e Plantation Company in 1916. The company operated Princeville as a cattle ranch and pineapple plantation until the late 1960s. In 1968 Denver-based Eagle County Development Corporation purchased 11,000 acres of Princeville land, roughly 7,000 acres of which consisted of agricultural land and approximately 4,000 acres of which comprised forest reserve conservation land.

“Princeville at Hanalei” was conceived in 1968 as a golf and tennis resort, Kaua‘i’s first master planned resort community. Phase I of the proposed development included 995 acres of resort facilities, condominiums, and single-family residences, as well as a 27-acre golf course designed by golf course architect Robert Trent Jones, Jr.

Donn Carswell, a Hawai‘i born engineer, worked for the Resort Developer from 1969 – 1980. As project engineer, Carswell oversaw the initial grading and subdivision of the land, the construction of roads and underground utilities, and the development of the resort’s water and sewage treatment facilities included under the Phase I development plan.

Constructed in 1972, the Carswell residence was one of the first residences built at Princeville. The property is located atop a bluff with scenic views of Hanalei Bay.

### **Proposed Hawai‘i Register Eligibility**

The nomination proposes Hawai‘i Register eligibility under the following criteria:

Criterion B – *Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.*

- As described in the nomination: “Under Criterion B, the house is significant for its association with Donn Carswell, project manager and chief engineer of the Princeville community’s initial development in the late 1960s and early 1970s”

Criterion C - *Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction*

- As described in the nomination: “The building is also significant under Criterion C for embodying the distinctive characteristics of Regional Modernism through its modernist forms (horizontal emphasis, open floor plan, exposed structural members, extensive glazing) combined with regional features and materials (lava rock, Koa wood, louver windows, careful siting to take in views of natural surroundings)” (emphasis added).

### **HISTORIC HAWAI‘I FOUNDATION COMMENTS**

The nominated property recently achieved the age of 50 years, which is the threshold for consideration for listing in the Hawai‘i Register of Historic Places. Additional criteria for listing include association with one or more of the criteria for significance and retention of sufficient historic integrity to convey the significance of the property.

National Register Bulletin 15 “How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation” notes that “the significance of a historic property can be judged and explained only when it is evaluated within its historic context. Historic contexts are those patterns or trends in history by which a specific occurrence, property or site is understood and its meaning (and ultimately its significance) within history or prehistory is made clear.” See NR Bulletin 15: Understanding Historic Contexts, pg. 7.

One challenge in assessing properties that were constructed in the more recent past is finding sufficient contextual research and academic analysis of the period of significance, its typical or exemplary design characteristics, and how such develops compare to either a local, state or national context. The County of

Kauai Planning Department contacted Historic Hawai'i Foundation to request assistance in locating resources that describe the character defining features, material types and other aspects of this style of architecture.

Historic Hawai'i Foundation has reviewed the nomination and has the following analysis, comments and suggestions. HHF agrees that the property is likely eligible for listing in the Hawai'i Register of Historic Places, but has concerns that the selected areas of significance and description of how they relate to this situation may be marginally applicable. Rather, HHF feels that additional research and documentation would better substantiate the case for listing.

### **Criterion A:**

**“Properties can be eligible for the National Register if they are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.”** See NR Bulletin 15: Understanding Criterion A: Event, p 12.

The Carswell Residence is clearly associated with the development of the Princeville at Hanalei resort development. The nomination describes the context of evolution of the Princeville property from its use as plantation and ranchland, through the acquisition and development of Kauai's first planned resort community centered on golf and tennis. The historic event is the pattern of resort development, especially on the neighbor islands following Statehood.

Donn Carswell is significant to the early development of the resort as project manager and chief engineer of the Princeville community's initial development in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The significance of the Carswell residence to the resort is through Donn Carswell's employment by Eagle County Development to oversee the construction of the community's infrastructure and site plan.

HHF believes that the Carswell Residence is likely eligible for listing for association with Criterion A.

### **Criterion B:**

**“Persons significant in our past refers to individual whose activities are demonstrably important within a local, State or national historic context.... A property is not eligible if its only justification is that it was owned or used by a person who is a member of an identifiable profession, class or social or ethnic group. It must be shown that the person gained importance within his or her profession or group.”** See NR Bulletin 15: Understanding Criterion B: Person, pp 14-15.

The nomination asserts that “Under Criterion B, the house is significant for its association with Donn Carswell, project manager and chief engineer of the Princeville community's initial development in the late 1960s and early 1970s”.

HHF believes that Donn Carswell is a contributing individual to the development, which could substantiate a finding of significance under Criterion A. However, his overall contributions to the history of Hawai'i and as a notable figure are limited and likely do not justify a finding of significance under Criterion B.

## Criterion C:

**“Properties may be eligible for the National Register if they embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction ...”**

HHF considers the residence to be well adapted to the site and situated to take full advantage of the views and prevailing tradewinds. The materials are typical of those used in residential construction of the 1970’s era, i.e. rough-sawn, unpainted plywood siding, lava rock wall and fireplace with chimney, polished concrete floors, wood jalousie windows paired with fixed glass, low-sloped gable roof with exposed eaves, and exposed roof framing and decking throughout the interior.

Where HHF has concern is in the characterization of this subdivision home as exemplary of “Regional Modernism, a subset of Hawai‘i Modernism”<sup>1</sup>. The references quoted as the basis for this designation have not made the case for 1970’s residential construction, but rather emphasize the elements of Modernism present in Hawai‘i from the 1930’s through the late 1960’s. This building is not representative of the clean utilitarian lines of modernism which evolved out of the International Style of architecture imported from Europe “with its rejection of the past and emphasis on regularity, clean lines, and minimal applied adornment.”<sup>2</sup> Rather, it is a well-designed structure utilizing readily available local materials with some distinctive architectural elements (see below).

### **Distinctive Characteristics:**

“Distinctive characteristics” are the physical features or traits that commonly recur in individual types, periods, or methods of construction. To be eligible, a property must clearly contain enough of those characteristics to be considered a true representative of a particular type, period, or method of construction. Characteristics can be expressed in terms such as form, proportion, structure, plan, style, or materials. They can be general, referring to ideas of design and construction such as basic plan or form, or they can be specific, referring to precise ways of combining particular kinds of materials.” See NR Bulletin 15: “Understanding Criterion C: Design/ Construction, p 18.

**Historic Hawai‘i Foundation does not believe that the case for Criterion C “for embodying the distinctive characteristics of Regional Modernism” is adequately substantiated.**

### **Type, Period, and Method of Construction:**

**“A structure is eligible as a specimen of its type or period of construction if it is an important example (within its context) of building practices of a particular time in history.”**

See NR Bulletin 15: “Understanding Criterion C: Design/ Construction, p 18.

**Historic Hawai‘i Foundation does not believe that the case for Criterion C “type of construction” is based on adequate identification of the building practices of Hawai‘i Regional Modernism, as expressed in this structure.**

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<sup>1</sup> Fung/HHF “Hawai‘i Modernism”

<sup>2</sup> Fung/HHF “Hawai‘i Modernism”

**Rather, as described in the Fung/HHF Hawai'i Modernism Study, the subject property more accurately fits within the style proposed as "Hawaiian Ranch House"<sup>3</sup>.**

“In Hawaii, there is a definite style that developed in Hawaii’s tract neighborhoods, in much the same way as the plantation houses are now considered a style. These homes have Mid-Century modern features, sometimes Asian influenced details, but are inexpensively constructed. Most of these tract homes, generally constructed in the early 1960s, have distinctive features as noted below.

- Box- or rectangular-shaped single-story dwellings
- Single wall construction, use of redwood
- Picture windows
- Wood and glass jalousies
- Low-pitched gable roof
- Exposed rafters, ceiling
- Carport

“[E]ntire subdivisions constructed in the early 1960s were built in a modern style such as “Hawaii Ranch House.”<sup>4</sup>

- Blurring of interior/exterior delineation/influence of Hawaii’s benign climate and views with use of large openings
- Sited to take advantage of views or climate situations such as tradewinds
- Influence of cultural diversity in Hawaii

Unfortunately, the academic research and supporting literature does not yet exist on which to base the distinctive characteristics of the era and construction style that embody the 1970’s Hawaiian Ranch Style detached single-family home. A nomination could extrapolate from existing sources, but additional study is needed for a larger and more robust context.

Absent the larger architectural and construction context, HHF’s historic architect was able to develop a preliminary and reconnaissance-level review of the architectural elements of style present in the home. These are characteristics of this property which were employed in the 1970’s, each of which could benefit from a more detailed description in the nomination, and thus form the basis for evaluation.

Characteristics of the Carswell Residence include:

- Large fixed glass windows (picture windows) paired with wood jalousies at one or both sides which served to feature the views while allowing for natural ventilation.
- “Sill vent” detailing, a clever method of incorporating horizontal louvers into the window sill which draws air up vertically under the window while protecting the operable vents from rain. This feature is characteristic of this area of Kaua'i.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, Appendix A, p. A-14

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, Appendix A, p. A-18

- Polished concrete floors which evolved from a unique stained concrete floor (incorporating faux stone floor patterns) patented in 1928 by Robert B. Lammens, of Los Angeles, California. This element was very popular in Hawai'i in the 1930's and 1940's and functional in residences with an indoor/outdoor design.

#### Distinctive Architectural Details:

- Distinctive Ponderosa Pine columns at the asymmetrical entrance and adjacent to the lava rock fireplace, supporting the ridge. This is contemporary with Pole Houses which were briefly popular in the 1970's.
- Copper rain chain at the front entrance, an elegant Japanese feature which guides the rain from the gutter down to the ground into a gravel basin avoiding the use of downspouts and splash blocks.
- Enclosure of the north side of the attached carport with a lava rock wall.

#### Technical Clarifications

- The exterior siding is rough-sawn plywood with applied wood battens, not true "board and batten" construction. This description should be corrected in the nomination as true board-and-batten is made with vertically installed wide boards and narrow battens fastened over the gaps between the boards.
- According to the original drawing schedules, the sliding doors are Fir, not Redwood. This description should be corrected in the nomination.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Based on this analysis, Historic Hawai'i Foundation believes the Carswell Residence is likely eligible for listing in the Hawai'i Register of Historic Places for Significance Criterion A for association with the acquisition and development of Kaua'i's first planned resort community centered on golf and tennis and the pattern of resort development on Kaua'i in the 1970s era; and for Significance Criterion C as an example of the Hawaiian Ranch House style of resort community development of the 1970s.

HHF recommends that the nomination be revised to address the appropriate context, findings and descriptions rather than rely on the earlier period context that does not fit as well.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.