



Letter of Support for HPCo Warehouses National Historic Registry Nomination

Date: 8/1/2025

To:

Ms. Jessica Puff, Administrator
State Historic Preservation Division
Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources
601 Kamokila Blvd, Room #555
Kapolei, HI 96707

From: Susanne Kurisu, Executive Director and Board Director Hawaiian Legacy Reforestation Initiative

RE: Support for the Nomination of Hakalau Plantation Warehouses to the National Register of Historic Places

Dear Members of the State Historic Preservation Division

I am writing to express my strongest support for the nomination of the Hakalau Plantation Warehouses to the State Register of Historic Places. I submit this letter not only in my capacity as Executive Director and Board Director of the Hawaiian Legacy Reforestation Initiative, but also as someone with deep personal and familial connections to this historically significant site.

Personal and Family Heritage

My relationship with the Hakalau Plantation extends far beyond professional interest—it is woven into the very fabric of my family's history and identity. My grandfather, Susumu Kurisu, was among the original immigrant owners of the Wailea Milling Company, representing the entrepreneurial spirit and determination of Hawaii's immigrant communities. In 1943, the Wailea



Milling Company, which had initially served the local homesteader community, merged with the Hakalau Sugar Plantation. This pivotal merger brought Wailea's operations under the Hakalau Plantation umbrella, forever linking our family's legacy to this site.

The stories passed down through my family paint a vivid picture of plantation life and the rigid social hierarchies that defined that era. My father, working as a plantation hand, would dutifully deliver food to the C. Brewer managers who lived across the street from the warehouses. Yet despite his essential service, he was never allowed or invited inside their homes—a stark reminder that he was viewed as merely a "servant" in the plantation's social structure. This personal family experience reflects the broader story of thousands of immigrant families who built Hawaii's sugar industry while navigating complex systems of inclusion and exclusion.

My father, uncle, and cousins all devoted significant portions of their lives to working at Hakalau Sugar Plantation. My grandparents, uncle, cousins, and father committed themselves to serving the Hamakua coast community with dignity and perseverance. Remarkably, my cousins continue this tradition of community service today, carrying forward a legacy that spans multiple generations.

Connection to Contemporary Conservation Efforts

Today, I have dedicated my professional efforts to revitalizing Hawaii's native and endemic forests through the Hawaiian Legacy Reforestation Initiative. This work directly connects to the historical significance of the Hakalau Plantation site. The forests we work to restore provide immeasurable benefits to Hawaii's economy and serve as guardians of the land that supplies essential resources for every single resident of Hawaii. The preservation of the Hakalau Plantation Warehouses would create a meaningful bridge between Hawaii's agricultural past and its environmental future.

Historical and Cultural Significance

The Hakalau Plantation Warehouses represent far more than agricultural infrastructure—they stand as monuments to the multicultural foundation of modern Hawaii. These structures witnessed the convergence of Native Hawaiian land stewardship traditions with immigrant labor and entrepreneurship, plantation-era economic systems, and the complex social dynamics that shaped island communities. The warehouses embody the stories of countless families like mine who built their lives around the rhythms of plantation agriculture while maintaining their cultural identities and community bonds.

The historical narrative preserved within these walls includes the experiences of Native Hawaiians, Japanese, Portuguese, Filipino, and other immigrant communities who worked together despite systemic inequalities. These structures tell the story of resilience, adaptation, and the gradual transformation of Hawaii's social landscape.

Community Benefit and Future Impact

I firmly believe that formal recognition of the HPCo Warehouses through Historic Register designation would benefit Hawaii in ways that extend far beyond historical preservation. Such recognition would:

- Honor the contributions of immigrant and Native Hawaiian communities to Hawaii's development
- Provide educational opportunities for future generations to understand their heritage
- Support cultural tourism initiatives that celebrate Hawaii's authentic history
- Create opportunities for community healing and dialogue about our shared past
- Strengthen connections between historical preservation and contemporary environmental stewardship

The recognition returning to our community would validate the experiences of families like mine while creating space for broader conversations about Hawaii's complex history. It would acknowledge that the stories of plantation workers, immigrant entrepreneurs, and their descendants are integral to understanding Hawaii's identity.

Conclusion

The Hakalau Plantation Warehouses deserve recognition as a Hawaii Historic Places because they represent the authentic, multifaceted story of Hawaii's development. They stand as witnesses to both the hardships and triumphs of the immigrant experience, the evolution of Hawaii's agricultural economy, and the enduring strength of island communities.

As someone whose family's blood, sweat, and dreams are embedded in the history of this site, I cannot overstate the importance of preserving these structures for future generations. The original plantation homes which surrounded the Mill site no longer exist – today they are multi-million dollar estates. The warehouses are not merely buildings—they are repositories of memory, symbols of resilience, and bridges connecting Hawaii's past to its future.

I respectfully urge the Hawaii Register Review Committee to approve the nomination of the HPCo Warehouses. This recognition would honor the legacy of my grandfather Susumu Kurisu, my father, and countless other families who built Hawaii with their hands and hearts.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this nomination.

Respectfully submitted,



Susanne Kurisu

Executive Director and Board Director
Hawaiian Legacy Reforestation Initiative