

Kauai Sugar Plantation Tours

History of Sugar at Gay & Robinson, Inc.



Click on photographs to see larger images. Many of the black and white photos shown here are from a 1931 photo album from Hawaiian Sugar Co (aka Makaweli Plantation).

Development of Sugar at Makaweli

The land between Hanapepe and Waimea Rivers was purchased by Elizabeth McHutcheson Sinclair in 1865. Two sugar plantations and a cattle ranch developed on the property. Elizabeth McHutcheson Sinclair, her daughters and grandsons Aubrey Robinson and Francis Gay formed a partnership, Gay & Robinson, in 1889 to raise cattle and grow sugar on their family's Makaweli lands. Also in 1889 Sir William Renny Watson, a representative of the world-famed Scottish firm of Mirrlees, Watson & Yaryan Co., secured a lease of 7,000 acres at Makaweli from Gay and Robinson to form Hawaiian Sugar Company (HSCo). Gay & Robinson retained 4,000 acres to plant in cane with processing to be done at HSCo's mill. The Hawaiian Sugar Co.'s share of the first crop at Makaweli was approximately 11,500 tons of sugar.

By 1928, the annual yield increased to 27,057 tons of raw sugar and the company was noted as one of the most profitable and progressive in the Territory. It was one of Alexander & Baldwin's star performers.

C. Brewer Co. negotiated a lease with Gay & Robinson and bought the HSCo. assets in 1941 and made many improvements both to the plantation and to the living conditions of its labor. Olokele Sugar Co. developed rapidly into one of the highest yields-per-acre producers in Hawaii.

Increasing costs and a cap on the price producers could receive for their product made very little profit available for maintenance of factories. Olokele Sugar Co.'s lease was coming to an end and the assets depreciating. Gay & Robinson, Inc. made the decision to purchase the assets of Olokele Sugar

Co. in 1994. It was the first time that Gay & Robinson farmed all of their land. Crop yields have improved under Gay & Robinson, Inc's stewardship and today it is the highest yielding plantation in the world.

Sugarcane has been synonymous with Hawaii. Once sugar plantations were found all over the Hawaiian Islands. This is the last family-owned plantation in Hawaii and the first to offer regular tours in decades.

The Plantation Community

Hawaiian Sugar Company (1889 -1941) was a self-contained community of close to 1000 employees (3,000 counting dependants) that looked after the health, safety and general welfare of its employees without outside funding. After WWII and the rise of labor unions, the money used for community welfare was directed more and more towards the individual paychecks of labor. Still, the good things remembered about plantations are the sense of community and closeness that, although diminished from its pre-war heyday, existed until the 1970s.

Clubhouses

There were 8 clubhouses maintained for the 10 camps (residential areas) for leisure time. This building was one of them. They were equipped with pool tables, phonographs, table games, canteen and have theaters and playgrounds adjoining and open every evening and all day Sunday, supervised by an employee living in the camp. The clubhouses were used as community centers for holiday activities, dances and programs.

Sports

Plantation sponsored athletic teams in 1931 consisted of basketball, soccer, volleyball and, the most popular, baseball. Intense rivalries developed between plantation teams and with game results reported weekly in *The Garden Island Newspaper*.

Schools

Schools were an integral part of growing up on plantations in pre-war Hawaii. There were the public schools consisting of grades 1 - 6 in which all children were required to attend. The school buildings mauka of the highway are still used by the Kamehameha School system. There was the English Standard school in which only children who passed equivalency tests in English were allowed to attend. For the west side of the island, that school was located here on the avenue next to the tennis courts. There were also language schools that children would attend after their regular classes.

Medical Facilities

Makaweli has the distinction of building the first hospital outside of Honolulu for its plantation laborers in 1886. Until recently, plantations funded employee dispensaries and paid the salaries of doctors, nurses and staff.

Sugar Facts

There are only three sugar plantations remaining in Hawaii.
Gay & Robinson is the last family-owned sugar plantation.

There are three purposes for burning sugarcane fields prior to harvesting:

- Boosting the sugar content in the stalks.
 - Sweetening the acidic soil (ash).
 - Ridding the fields of vermin.

In 1999 Gay & Robinson's average yields of raw sugar was 14.13 tons per acre, the highest in the world on about 7500 acres.

Hawaii's subtropical climate allows sugarcane to be planted and harvested throughout the year. Since Hawaiian planters grow sugarcane for about two years to achieve maximum sugar content, they only harvest half their canefields each year to provide a steady year-round supply of sugarcane for processing.

An acre of sugar produces 100 tons of harvested sugarcane

- 3.5 tons of molasses
- 14 tons of raw sugar at G&R
- 22,465 pounds of refined sugar
- \$4,500 new dollars for Hawaii's economy

It also removes 95 tons of carbon dioxide from the air releases 60 tons of pure oxygen into the atmosphere and provides scenic beauty

Other facts

- The Polynesians introduced sugarcane to Hawaii.
- There are only sixteen calories in a teaspoon of sugar.
- The juice in a stalk of sugarcane is equal to a cube of white sugar.
- One ton of cane fiber equals one barrel of oil when it is burned to power the factory generators.

Facts from the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association, 1985

Sugar Processing

