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Containing Tourism in Historic Hawaii

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# Containing Tourism in Historic Hawaii

Cooperative planning protects the  
fragile resources of a rural landscape



*Hanalei, on the north shore of the island of Kauai, is set within an ahupua'a, a traditional Hawaiian land division comprising multiple ecosystems, from the ocean to the mountains, that historically provided its residents with a variety of resources. This classic view of the valley shows a rural landscape patterned by taro patches, irrigation ditches and farmhouses.*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
LAND AND  
COMMUNITY  
ASSOCIATES

by Robert Z. Melnick  
and J. Timothy Keller

**T**he growing interest in rural landscapes, while most often positive, may also result in a new set of pressures from increased tourism and development, especially for rural areas that are scenically beautiful and historically significant. The Hanalei Project, in Hanalei Valley on the north shore of the island of Kauai, Hawaii, is one such attempt to manage the increased pressures of change and development affecting a significant rural landscape. The project's goal is to protect historic rural and cultural resources—and the associated way of life—while allowing for controlled tourism through cooperative planning. The story of this area may provide a model for others, both in Hawaii and elsewhere.

## **Tourism Comes to Hanalei**

Since statehood in 1959, Hawaii has turned to tourism for one facet of economic stability. While there is no doubt that the visitor industry brings significant

economic advantages, it also carries some unfortunate burdens. The landscape is developed for tourists' needs, often in the name of appreciating it, and the very resources that make these islands special may be destroyed.

Cultural and historic resources in Hawaii are particularly fragile. Since visitors most often appreciate the islands for their natural beauty and recreational opportunities, protecting culture and history gets even less attention than protecting nature. Cultural and historic resources become more vulnerable to uncontrolled change or destruction. When historic and cultural values are considered, they are often relegated to one isolated historic site or building, thereby disregarding the overall history of the landscape.

The history of Hanalei is the history of human settlement within a context of powerful natural elements and forces. It is the history of a succession of extensive wetland agricultural traditions with brief

experiments in other types of agriculture, and it is the history of important cultural groups that have contributed to the development of Hanalei, Kauai and Hawaii.

Hanalei is an area of 2,200 acres set within a traditional Hawaiian *ahupua'a*. This *ahupua'a* is typical of ancient Hawaiian land divisions in that it contains a variety of ecosystems, from the ocean to the mountains, which historically provided its residents with fish and birds for food, *ti*-leaf for wrapping, wood for fire, *olona* for fish line and fresh mountain water for irrigating taro patches (*lo'i*). Today Hanalei continues to provide the people of Kauai with a variety of resources.

As in the past, agriculture is the predominant land use in Hanalei, and so the primary organizing theme of human settlement in Hanalei has been the need to develop and maintain freshwater wetland agricultural systems a short distance from the ocean. From the earliest known cultivation of this landscape in prehistoric times, fresh water was brought from the mountains to the alluvial plains via complex irrigation systems. The use of these systems marks the agricultural continuity of Hanalei, and has resulted in distinct and recognizable primary patterns of spatial organization.

This evolution has resulted in a rural landscape patterned by *lo'i*, irrigation ditches (*auwai*), farm houses, roads, bridges, beach houses, commercial buildings, cemeteries and religious and governmental structures—a landscape that clearly and distinctly reveals its many layers of human history.

Its remote location on the north shore of Kauai has, until recently, left Hanalei relatively free from intense pressures, while tourism on Kauai has increased substantially since 1970. In 1985 more than 835,000 westbound tourists came to Kauai, a 2.6 percent increase from the previous year. In March 1986 more than 87,000 tourists visited Kauai—a number twice the count of permanent residents.

In 1985 a large resort hotel development opened at Princeville, just two miles from Hanalei. This development has brought to the north shore a tourist landscape similar to other areas of the state. Originally opened in 1969 as a second-home development, Princeville now includes a large hotel, condominiums and golf courses. Now that Hanalei has been “discovered” as an “unspoiled” agricultural valley, it has begun to experience the same developmental pressures that have plagued other parts of the island for several years.

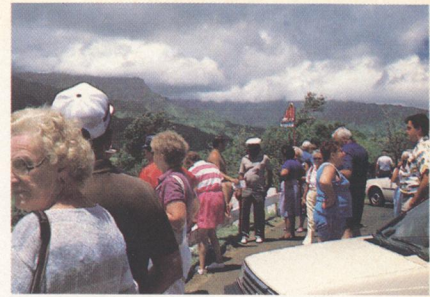
In Hanalei, battles have been waged over tourist helicopters flying over the valley, parking for recreational vehicles, the impact of boat excursions on traditional swimming and recreation areas, commercial development and the preservation of

a number of single-lane bridges. A notable and recent victory for concerned citizens involved the Hanalei Bridge, a 1912 truss structure saved from destruction by an engineer's report strongly urging preservation over replacement.

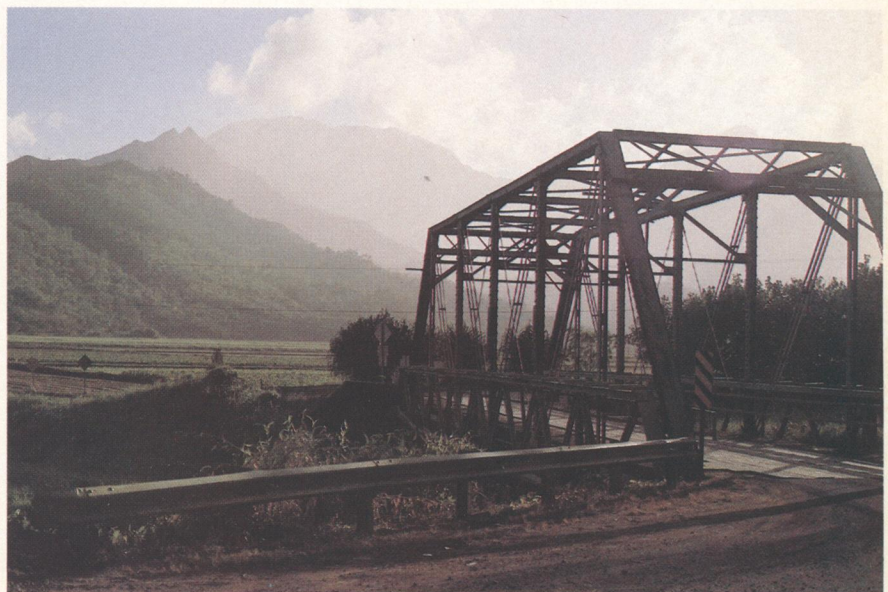
Increased numbers of tourists are regularly being directed to the area based on its appeal as a “less traveled” tourist spot. The complex impacts of increased tourism come in both large and small doses. On the personal scale, residents often look out their windows to find themselves face-to-face with gawking visitors and their cameras. Tour vans are increasingly dominating areas that have been regarded as personal territory. Other violations include walking in taro patches and water-skiing within the Hanalei National Wildlife Refuge. Such violations are not only an affront to personal privacy but also damage fragile earth dikes, bird habitat and crops under cultivation.

On a larger scale, there is the growing sense that the character of Hanalei, along with its significant historic resources associated with a multitude of ethnic groups, is out of control and may be changing at a rate and style that no one will like in a few years—not the residents, not the developers, not the business people and not even the visitors. Hanalei, after all, is desirable because of its unspoiled ambience.

Hanalei represents a model of the classic tourism paradox: frequented by tourists because of its beauty, its natural, historic and scenic resources are threatened by the very presence of large numbers of visitors. The visitor industry challenges land use regulations and brings with it a set of values that place a high priority on short-term gain with only nominal commitment to long-term improvement of the community. Hanalei is not alone; more



Above: Tourists at the Hanalei overlook appreciate this landscape from a distance; their bus is unable to cross the Hanalei Bridge due to weight limitations. Below: The Hanalei Bridge, a 1912 truss structure that has served as the “gateway” to Hanalei, was recently saved from demolition through the cooperative efforts of concerned residents and the Hawaii State Department of Transportation.



and more places will face similar issues and threats.

### The Project's Genesis

Concurrent with Princeville's development, a group of citizens formed 1,000 Friends of Kauai, which has played a pivotal role in mobilizing public opinion on local planning and zoning issues. While Hawaii has been nationally recognized for innovative land use legislation, enforcing and implementing that legislation varies with each county. Statewide laws put a great deal of power at the county level, thereby encouraging the dual, and sometimes conflicting, pressures of citizen involvement and local politics.

1,000 Friends of Kauai is currently working on a long-term planning effort, the Hanalei Project, to conserve the historic and cultural resources of the area while still accommodating growth. The authors of the current article, principals of Land and Community Associates, are serving as consultants to this project. Our role incorporates a cultural landscape survey and the development of a Cultural Resources Protection Plan and Design Guidelines to ensure that change and new growth remain in harmony with local values and agricultural practices.

The cultural landscape survey methodology, initially developed for the National Park Service (NPS), involves identifying significant landscape components through extensive historic research.\* The criteria

\*Robert Z. Melnick, *Cultural Landscapes: Rural Historic Districts in the National Park System* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1984).



Above: Because taro pondfields depend on a regular and continuous flow of fresh water, taro farmers maintain the valley's extensive irrigation systems on a cooperative basis. Archaeologists have found prehistoric remains of these pipes in the heavy clay soil of Hanalei. Opposite page: The 1930 Haraguchi Rice Mill, the last remaining mill in Hawaii, was recently restored and will soon open as a demonstration museum.

for significance rely on the understanding that landscapes embody numerous features—such as field patterns, roads, vegetation, housing sites, buildings and bridges—which, taken in their entirety, represent the history of that landscape's use. Identifying historic spatial organization formed the basis for the cultural landscape survey in Hanalei.

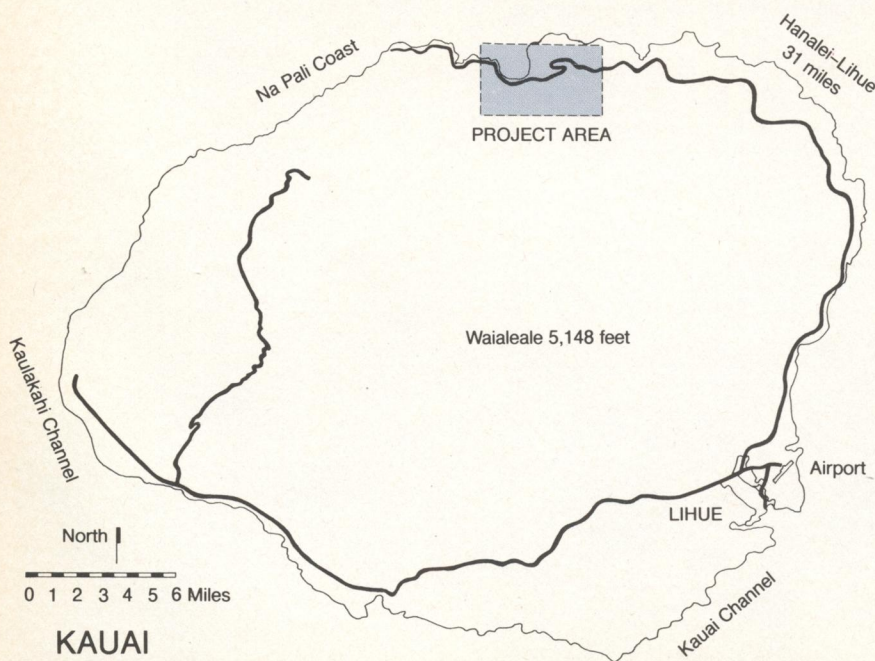
Familiar with the NPS criteria for evaluating rural areas, 1,000 Friends of Kauai retained Land and Community Associates not only because of our previous experience in both cultural resource surveys and rural planning, but also for our willingness to explore various professional/client relationships, including participating and speaking at local conferences and training and using local experts extensively to complete a number of project tasks, such as historic research, some field survey work, and shoppers', residents' and visitors' opinion questionnaires. An important aspect of the project is its comprehensive nature, allowing for all planning efforts to be based on the landscape survey completed in February 1987 and to proceed directly from survey to plan. A local resident serves as project administrator, and there are a number of local advisers. The Hanalei Project, with mediation assistance from the Oahu Neighborhood Justice Center, has created a working partnership to develop a strategy that will make heritage protection feasible.

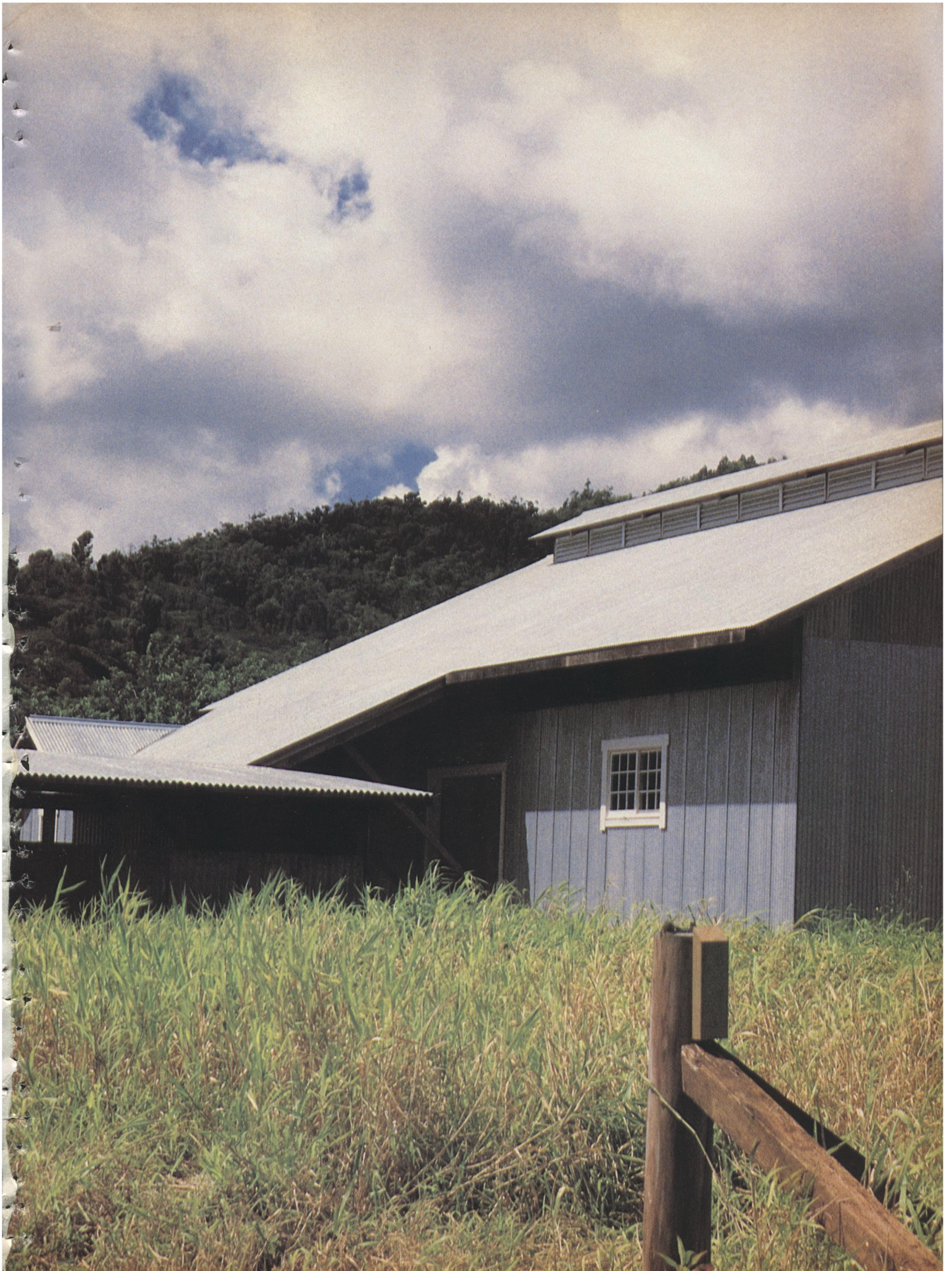
This is a long-term project with extensive community organization of multiple constituencies, including the visitor industry, taro farmers, local merchants, preservationists, architects, lawyers and county planning officials. The project advisory committee of more than 50 representatives is organized into smaller task forces that constantly define and redefine issues and solutions, with assistance from Land and Community Associates. Citizen participation has been critical at all stages of this project.

### The Future of Hanalei

As numerous issues are explored and considered, Hanalei faces varied options. Change is not new to this area, which has evolved and been enriched both economically and culturally with each wave of immigration and development. It appears that the resident population will reach a consensus on managing change and mitigating its most extreme impacts. The questions that remain are those of the direction, nature and rate of change, and the degree to which the valley, as well as other areas, can again incorporate new considerations into existing conditions.

Current statewide land use control mechanisms are inadequate for meeting these pressures. There are questions concerning the extent of regulatory power in these controls, and the economic realities







*Hanalei is a popular tourist destination because of its "unspoiled" beauty, yet its natural, historic and scenic resources are threatened by the very presence of large numbers of visitors. The Hanalei Project aims to protect fragile resources such as the stunning Lumahai Beach shown here, while containing pressures from new developments such as the Princeville resort complex in the extreme distance.*

dictate greater consideration of nontraditional land uses than of significant and meaningful cultural resources.

As part of this preservation planning project, supplementary preservation planning ordinances to the county of Kauai's Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance are being drafted in cooperation with the county planning office, the county planning commission and the county council. These supplementary ordinances can also serve as models for rural areas with similar pressures in other counties. These ordinances will include design standards and guidelines for rehabilitation and new construction that are drafted specifically for Hanalei and take into account both traditional elements and principles of both the local architecture and the landscape identified in the survey.

The issues being addressed by planning are:

**Expanding the traditional market for taro while encouraging its continued viability and vitality as an important traditional food.** At the present time, the traditional taro industry is experiencing economic and ecological pressures directly related to changing land use patterns in the valley. Hanalei is one of the primary taro producing areas in Hawaii, and this project represents an opportunity to address long-term needs of the taro workforce, through the establishment of a local taro task force and involvement with the tourist industry as well as with growers.

**Increasing recreational opportunities that do not damage shoreline, historical and natural resources.** As uncontrolled tourism expands through Hanalei, residents' lifestyles and tourists' recreational needs provide a potentially acrid point of conflict. Recreational space is at a premium and there is strong competition for use by visitors and residents. Increased recreational use of Hanalei Bay has accentuated a variety of problems, the most immediate of which are parking and traffic, which in one summer have far outstripped the area's capacity.

In many cases, traditional and historic fishing and swimming zones are being threatened and severely affected by numbers of people, pollution from excursion boats and the informal storage of equipment on the beach. County and state facilities are used to capacity, and there is an overflow of use onto private lands for camping, jogging, walking, swimming, surfing, shore fishing, reef fishing, net fishing, snorkeling, diving, picnicking and sunbathing. These new activities create environmental stresses on the beach and diminish its powerful scenic quality.

**Decreasing congestion and improving parking, traffic safety and circulation.** Parking overflow and traffic in the Hanalei area, especially in Hanalei town, have reached a point of near chaos due to tour vans and cars. Visitors and residents are in competition for parking and must travel through residential areas to reach the beaches. There are few limitations on parking, even on private property, and

speed of travel is controlled primarily by the roadbed condition and alignment. Residents and visitors experience inconvenience and a certain degree of danger. In addition, the gradual changes in traffic and parking habits have begun to alter the historic patterns of circulation and threaten to have a negative impact on land use.

**Protecting and enhancing the visual quality of the valley.** For the past 150 years, Hanalei Valley has been a source of inspiration to artists, painters, writers and photographers. This visual quality is directly connected to the beauty of Hanalei's historic resources, including agriculture, land use, density and distribution of settlement and architectural styles; natural resources; and the unique combination of historic and natural features.

The cultural landscape survey helped us identify critical areas of both historic and scenic importance that quite literally "define" Hanalei. It is these areas that will receive the greatest attention for potential open-space preservation.

**Protecting areas of special character by establishing one or more historic districts.** It is not sufficient to protect only historic resources in this case. Natural and scenic resources, traffic, agriculture and settlement density must also be integrated into these protection schemes. While historic districts have traditionally addressed urban situations, new attitudes on the part of the National Register of Historic Places allow for and encourage

the nomination of rural historic districts as well. Additionally, the county of Kauai Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance allows for the development of special treatment districts to protect significant or unique historic, scenic or cultural features.

**Educating both residents and visitors about the unique historic, rural, cultural and natural resources and fragile nature of Hanalei Valley.** The Hanalei Project will serve to increase knowledge about the fragile nature of all of the Valley's resources. The project is developing ways to expand knowledge of these resources for residents, visitors and visitor industry employees. The current status of the tourism industry in no way adequately takes advantage of these resources. There is not, therefore, the accompanying appreciation of and care for these resources.

The project includes a local education coordinator who is working closely with residents, merchants and visitor industry representatives to ensure that the project's goals are flexible and meet the needs of Hanalei's various constituencies. This coordinator speaks to local groups, meets with merchants and government officials, and has worked with the consultants to prepare questionnaires and information brochures for residents and visitors. To date, there have also been two community-wide, one-day conferences with both local and "imported" speakers. These well-attended conferences have included discussion of controversial planning issues, as well as the sharing of cultural folk arts, such as traditional food preparation and the hula.

THE HANALEI PROJECT DEMONSTRATES that the visitor industry and rural Hawaii can coexist today; that the economic pressures of the visitor industry, if controlled, need not distort the Hawaiian rural cultural and social environment. Preserving significant historic and natural areas can provide cultural continuity and supply the critical force needed to maintain a balance between resource protection and visitor enjoyment. ■

Funding for different phases of the Hanalei Project has been supplied by the Hawaii State Historic Preservation Office, the Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation of San Francisco, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

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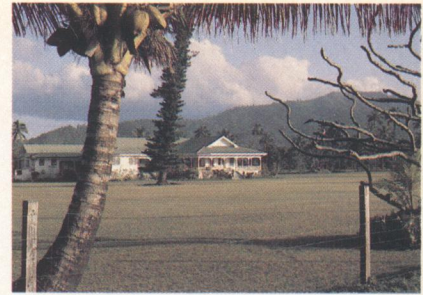
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*The Wilcox Beach House, 1899, was the first built on Hanalei Bay. Its distinctive porches (lanai) are a traditional Hawaiian architectural feature.*



*Hanalei Valley, Kauai, about 1928.*

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