

HAWAIIAN SUGAR PLANTERS' ASSOCIATION

PLANTATION ARCHIVES

Register of the

MAUNA KEA SUGAR COMPANY  
(ONOMEA SUGAR COMPANY)  
Papaikou, Hawaii

1885-1947

Accession: 84-05  
4.5 cubic feet  
January 1990

Processed By  
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## ONOMEA SUGAR COMPANY HISTORY

Onomea Sugar Company was situated in the Hilo district on the Island of Hawaii. The plantation property extended along the ocean front a distance of six miles and was at one point three miles deep terminating at the forests. The elevation ranged from 20 to 1,500 feet. The rainfall in the vicinity was extremely heavy, from 200-250 inches per year, so no irrigation was required. Water from Honolii, Pahoiho, Kapue, Kaieie, Hanawi, Kahalii, Kawai-Nui and Waiaama streams was used for fluming and electrical power. Onomea was probably one of the most beautiful plantations with its abundance of streams, waterfalls, forests, ferns, and tropical plants.

Onomea Sugar Company was a consolidation of three smaller companies—Onomea, Paukaa, and Papaikou plantations—that were reorganized into the Onomea Sugar Company in 1888. Papaikou Plantation was originally owned by Charles Whetmore and E.G. Hitchcock and Paukaa Plantation was owned by Jonathan Austin. Onomea Plantation was started in 1863 by Judge S.L. Austin and E.H. Allen. Onomea Plantation had a reputation for being one of the most advanced and best-equipped estates in Hawaii during its time. J.M. Lydgate described Judge Austin as “a man in the forefront of the sugar business....always on the lookout for better things.” In 1874, C. Brewer & Co. became the agency.

During the early days, Onomea’s crushing plant was water driven. A metal water wheel and boiler had been shipped from Glasgow, Scotland in 1862. Water from the flumes provided the power to turn the wheel, which in turn moved the sugar cane crusher. The water-driven crushing plant was much larger and heavier than those of other mills. The mill was situated just below Papaikou at the foot of a gulch, which opened out to the ocean. It was the first nine-roller mill erected on the island. The mill was connected by rail to one of the best landings and loading devices on the coast. The sugar cars were hauled to the landing by a cable and sugar could be sent over the main cable to the hold of a ship without rehandling. By means of this device about 1,600 bags of sugar could be loaded in an hour.

A distinctive feature of Onomea was its system of flumes, which spanned gorges and carried cane down the slopes to the mill. Fifty-five miles of stationary and portable flumes were constructed. The trestle, which carried the main flume across Hanawainui Gulch, was the largest wooden bridge in the territory and the one spanning Kawainui Gulch was the highest, 176 feet. Onomea’s location in a heavy rainfall belt made it difficult to mechanize cane harvesting and transportation easily. Onomea was one of the last plantations to stop hand cutting cane. However, progress was made and the extensive road building program begun in 1903 was finally completed in 1956.

The heavy rainfall also tended to wash topsoil away and leach it out. Onomea was the first Hawaiian sugar plantation to use commercial fertilizer on its fields. In 1879 (1897?), bone meal fertilizer was used to improve the soil. Later on Manager John T. Moir’s protective efforts towards Onomea’s topsoils resulted in the invention of a plow which

was adapted to the peculiar topography of the county and the nature of the soil. The shallow, clay-like soils were subject to washing unless properly cultivated. It is to Moir's credit that no field was washed out to sea during his 20 years of management. He was also considered one of the leaders in the conservation of waste products and the use of them to build up the land.

Onomea developed into one of Hawaii's major producers of sugar cane. By 1926, the plantation had grown from 300 acres to 27,427 acres. Since it owned most of the land, its future was not dependent on the favorable extension of leases. Onomea employed workers who came from China, Japan, Portugal, Philippines, Puerto Rico, and other countries. By 1941, over 3,000 men, women and children were living in six villages on the plantation. There were 450 company owned houses, which included garden space. Free medical services were also provided. The advent of the labor unions also helped to improve the working conditions of the workers.

After World War II, the company experienced financial problems due to labor scarcity and later to high wage raises. During the course of time, C. Brewer & Co. had acquired controlling interest in the company. In May of 1965, a proposal was made to merge Onomea Sugar Co. and Hilo Sugar Co. into a single C. Brewer subsidiary to be called Mauna Kea Sugar Co. The goal was to achieve greater operating efficiency and cost savings. On July 26, 1965, the two companies were merged and the new Mauna Kea Sugar Co. became the third largest in acreage (13,000 acres) on the Big Island.

#### MANAGERS

Wm. McKinney	1878 – 1887
W.W. Goodale	1888 – 1898
John T. Moir, Sr.	1899 – 11/1933
William Silver	12/1933 – 9/1936
Frank M. Anderson	10/1936 – 2/1940
Royden Bryan	3/1940 – 5/1947
Richard Penhallow	6/1947 – 11/1948
Ray L. Walker	12/1948 – 8/1951
Martin J. Black	9/1951 – 6/1956
J. Nairn Campbell	7/1956 – 12/1962
Laurence S. McLane	1/1963 – 7/1965

#### AGENTS

Castle & Cooke	1899
C. Brewer & Co.	1900 –

Mauna Kea Sugar Co.

Accession #84-05  
4.5 cu. ft.

## HSPA PLANTATION ARCHIVES

### Onomea Sugar Company Scope and Content Note

#### BACKGROUND, UNPROCESSED RECORDS

During January 1990, the nine boxes of Mauna Kea Sugar Co. records were removed from storage, fumigated, and brought into the Archives. Processing was finished and the records were ready for use by researchers later the same month.

#### PROCESSED RECORDS, NOTES

Mauna Kea Sugar Co. records consist of materials generated by two predecessor companies: Papaikou Sugar Co. and Onomea Sugar Co. The records are organized in the following series or major categories:

- Correspondence
- Financial Records
- Production Records
- Miscellaneous

##### Correspondence

1913-1930. There are three correspondence titles in this series: 1. HSPA Labor and Statistics correspondence contains material, which in other record groups has been, labeled "HSPA Filipinos" or "Filipino Affairs". The majority of the letters between HSPA and the plantation are relative to Filipino employees returning to the Philippines. Because the Onomea Sugar Co. materials contain no payroll records, the Labor and Statistics correspondence is the best source for names of employees. 2. HSPA Circulars – 1925-1930, contains notices and letters from HSPA to all plantations largely relative to Filipino labor contracts, vacations, and bringing relatives to Hawaii. 3. HSPA General Correspondence – 1921-1924 contains a good deal of reference to striking employees through HSPA circulars, copies of speeches, and plantation letters to HSPA.

##### Financial Records

1885-1945. The Authorization and Job Books (V.26-31) contain identifying job numbers and the expenses charged to each job, i.e. new houses, mill buildings, machinery, roads, water system, livestock, and vehicles. The Depreciation Book (MKC 1/9) documents the value of plantation property and improvements from acquisition, or

1906, to 1933. General Ledger – 1885-1888 (MKCV.1) is the only record in this collection from Papaikou Sugar Co., which merged with Onomea in 1888. MKCV.2-12 continue the run of ledgers to 1938. The Sundries Books (V.14-19) describe plantation expenses and note the names of companies doing business with Onomea Sugar.

#### Production Records

1915-1940. The Sugar Records provide information about milling, prices, expenses, and shipping of sugar.

#### Miscellaneous

1913-1947. The Rent Book (V.32) lists leases, lease and rent amounts, and property improvements rented from Onomea Sugar Co.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Mauna Kea Sugar Co. records:

Weaknesses – Lack of correspondence other than with HSPA.

Complete lack of payroll records

Only one general journal in the financial records.

Strengths – HSPA circulars – 1925-1930.

Trial balances – 1904-1940.

General ledgers – 1892-1938.