

# Memories of Honohina Mauka



by

Helen Hatsue (Hirata) Yoshida

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## Preface

On July 17, 2015, Helen Hatsue (Hirata) Yoshida, at the age of ninety-two, visited her childhood home in the Honohina Mauka plantation camp. Honohina Mauka was part of the Japanese camp along with Honohina Upper and Honohina Lower camps (see Appendix, page 21 for locations). They were just a few of the many plantation camps that were part of the Hakalau Sugar Plantation on the Hamakua Coast on the Big Island of Hawaii.

Hatsue Hirata was born in Honohina Mauka on August 4, 1922 to Kisaku and Tome Hirata. She lived there until the age of sixteen. In 1938, she travelled to California with a missionary, Reverend Bachelor, and his family. She lived with the Bachelor family for three years and graduated from Centralia High School in Washington State, returning to Honolulu in 1941, prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor. Her father, Kisaku, had moved the family from the Big Island to Honolulu in 1940, where he took over a business that included a general store, okazuya (Japanese food shop), and a restaurant that provided meals to single men. Hatsue attended the Margaret Dietz Commercial Business School and, upon graduation in 1943, began working at the Honolulu Paper Company.

In 1948, she married Teruo Yoshida, remaining by his side until he passed in July 1988. They had four children. In 1955, the family moved to Kaneohe on the island of Oahu. Helen resided in Kaneohe until she passed on August 8, 2017.

She was survived by her four children, Colleen Smith (Richard), Stephen Yoshida (Lorraine), Ronald Yoshida (Dona) and Dean Yoshida (Glory); nine grandchildren, Robert Smith (Rebecca), Sean Yoshida, Scott Yoshida (Lauren), Nathan Yoshida, Joy Yoshida, Faith Duenas (Dural), Aaron Yoshida, Malia Piimauna (Kaipo), and Lehua Markpol (Charles); and four great-grandchildren, Hope Duenas, Kailey Piimauna, Kekoa Piimauna and Landon Markpol.

Family photos of her legacy are included in the appendix.

She had many fond memories of her first sixteen years growing up in the sugar plantation camps. She often talked of her life during those years, reliving her memories with her children and grandchildren. The trip back home to Honohina Mauka renewed many of those memories. This book is a compilation of some of them as told to her family. As these are her memories, some of the locations and names may not be exactly correct but again, this is as she remembered them.

### Acknowledgements

I have so much appreciation for the creators and contributors of the website *HakalauHome.com* and to the University of Hawaii-Manoa Hamilton Library's Hawaiian Collection, and the Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association Plantation Archives for the pictures, sketches, and histories found on this website.

As I listened to my mom tell us the stories of her childhood, it became clear that many were tied to specific sites and locations in the Honohina plantation camps. The book of her memories then took on an effort to find the exact locations of these sites. However, Honohina was not listed on any map that I could find. How fortunate that a search on the internet for Honohina led to the *HakalauHome.com* website.

I was excited to see sketches of each of the Honohina camps showing all the houses and buildings, including roads and streams. These sketches made it possible to locate my mother's plantation camp, house site, and the other locations she often mentioned. The identification of the Nanue Stream on the sketches gave me a landmark to locate the Honohina camps on Google Earth aerial photos (see Appendix, page 21). Very little of the camps remain today but an overlay of the camp sketch on the aerial photo showed that after all these years, the roads and streams still matched almost perfectly. The photos and sketches in the appendix were developed to provide us with directions we used to take my mother back to visit the sites and locations of her childhood. Without the information on the website this trip would not have been possible. The locations, referred to by number, can be found on these sketches and photos.

I would also like to thank the Honohina Hongwangi Mission for taking the time to research and locate the gravesite of my mother's brother in the Honohina Cemetery. Although they were not able to find the gravesite, their effort is appreciated.

Thank you to my Uncle James (Takashi), Aunty Chieko, and Aunty Mildred (Mieko) for sitting with my mother and helping her remember their childhood house and property layout. Thanks also to my Uncle Minoru from California for talking about his memories with me over the phone.

Thank you to Colleen, Ronald, and Dean, and our spouses, and our children, for input into this book and for always encouraging Mom/Grandma to tell us the stories of her life. Special thanks to Colleen, Glory, and Lehua for proofreading and editing.

Thank you to my brother Dean for doing the driving as we travelled over dirt roads, grass fields, and through farms and pastures to take my mother back to visit the sites of her memories.

Special thanks to my wife, Lorraine, for always encouraging me and giving me her full support.

Finally, I would like to thank my mother. She was the most humble, generous, and kind person I know. She always put the needs of her husband, family, and others ahead of her own. She really did enjoy talking about her life experiences, not only of her life in the Honohina plantation camps, but also of her teen years on the mainland, and her experiences during the bombing on Pearl Harbor. She never tired of sitting with me as we delved into her past. I regret that I wasn't able to finish her book before she passed. But, she did read early drafts, and, I know she is in Heaven reading this final copy. Thank you mom.

Stephen Yoshida  
November, 2020

My Family Home  
(Location 1, Appendix Pages 21, 22, 23)



My childhood home was located to my right. In the background is the bamboo patch I remember. The river where I learned to swim runs just to the left and behind the bamboo. My uncle's house and the Tawara's house were located behind me.



In 1977, I visited the site of my house with my mother. My house was unoccupied and overgrown with trees and bushes, but still standing.

I remember being told that our house and grounds were built and developed by my grandfather, Kiyosuke Hirata, at the Honohina Mauka Camp. My grandfather was an ambitious man who obtained 15 acres of land to grow sugar cane and establish his business. He brought my father from Japan to Hawaii when he was only fourteen.

An interesting side note is that when my grandfather got married, he took my grandmother's surname. Apparently, my grandmother had no brothers to carry on the Hirata name. If she did, my grandfather would have kept his family surname and my name would have been Hatsue Tanaka.

My father, Kisaku, was ambitious as my grandfather had been. I remember he wanted to learn English so badly that after dinner, he would walk two and a half miles down the rocky dirt road to the Honohina Upper camp to learn English from Mr. Irinaka, who worked at the Honohina plantation store.

It was late at night when he finished the lesson so he would sleep over at Mr. Irinaka's house. Early in the morning, he would walk back up the hill in the dark to get home by 4:00 am, just in time to go to work in the cane fields.

In 1920, my father went to Japan to bring back his picture bride, Tome, and they were married. They had six children. Their first child, Mamoru, died during birth in 1921 and was buried at the Honohina Cemetery in the Honohina Lower Camp. I was born on August 4, 1922, the eldest of the five other children. I had two brothers, Takashi and Minoru, and two sisters, Chieko and Mieko. We were all born and delivered in this house.





Back left to right: Me, Chieko (sister)  
Front left to right: Takashi (brother), Kisaku (father),  
Minoru (brother), Tome (mother), Mieko (sister)



Back left to right: Me, Nobuko (cousin), Chieko (sister)  
Front left to right: Takashi (brother), Minoru (brother),  
Mieko (sister), Hideyo (cousin)

My father took over operations of the 15 acres of sugar cane from my grandfather. My father was a perfectionist. I remember one of my jobs was to “hoe hana” or dig out the weeds between the rows of sugar cane. My father always grumbled



about the way I did it as it was never good enough. Another one of my jobs was to “hole hole,” or remove the dead leaves from the cane just prior to harvesting. I pulled off the brown leaves and just left them on the ground to decompose. The fields maintained by the plantation never did “hole hole” their cane, but my father required it on his fields.

Our house had several rooms (see Appendix, page 24). There was a large kitchen, living room, one very large bedroom, and a sewing room. As I was the eldest child, I got the sewing room as my own bedroom. My parents, brothers, and sisters all slept together in the big bedroom. As was typical for a Japanese house, the floor of the living room was raised above the entryway and was covered with “goza” (straw mat). Everyone would leave their shoes and slippers at the entryway and step up to get to the living room. I remember, we often just sat on the edge of the raised floor and “talked story.” Every New Year, it was tradition to replace the goza so we would start the year with a clean, fresh living room floor.

My father had a desk in the living room where he kept the financial books. He also kept an “obutsudan” (Buddhist altar) in the living room as we and most of the other Japanese people in the camp were Buddhists. We used kerosene lanterns, which we placed in wooden boxes mounted on the walls. During earthquakes, I remember we raced around the house to collect the lanterns before they fell.

Initially, there was no electricity so we had a wood-burning stove. My mother used a “hagama” (cast iron pot) to cook our rice every day. We had a dining table in one corner of the kitchen with benches covered with goza.

Since there was no refrigeration, we kept our fresh food in a “food safe,” which was basically a hutch with a cloth curtain covering the front. A vendor selling fresh fish and meats would come by once a week. The vendor would slice off only what we needed from a slab of fish or meat.

My mother ordered other foods from the plantation store, which were then delivered to our house. The store occasionally delivered a 100-pound bag of rice. Every year for the New Year’s celebration, she would have them deliver two cases of soda. She was a good cook and made the most of what we had. My mother and the other neighboring women learned how to cook American foods, like beef stew, from a cooking instructor who visited our homes. The instructor came to our

home and held a class in our kitchen. After the class was over, all the families came over and enjoyed the just-prepared meal in our house.

Outside of the house, on one side, we had a small building with two wash tubs and a “furo” (hot tub). Next to that was another building for an outhouse. The tubs were used for washing clothes and other general uses. We used a wash board to wash clothes. For very dirty clothes, like my father’s work clothes, my mother would boil the clothes in a large pot over a wood fire.

There was a wooden floor between the tubs and furo where we washed ourselves before soaking in the furo. My father would start the wood fire beneath the furo to heat the water and he was usually the first to bathe. For some reason, the building was open to the road. Anyone walking on the road in front of our house could see us taking a bath so we had to be quick.

Water was piped to the wash tubs and furo from a small ditch running just in front of the house. The water flowing in the ditch was clean, clear, and suitable for drinking. Today, the ditch is no longer there but clear water still flows over the area. We also got drinking water from a barrel, located right in front of the house that we used to collect rainwater. We covered the barrel with a piece of cloth to keep leaves and other rubbish out.

Next to the furo was the outhouse. In the outhouse, there was a wooden platform with two holes. The large hole was for the adults and a smaller hole for us children. For toilet paper, we used old newspapers and magazines which we wrinkled up before using. My father used some of the waste from the outhouse to fertilize the vegetables in the garden. I recall he used a can to collect urine, which he then also used as fertilizer. At night, we were afraid to walk in the dark to the outhouse so my mother kept a “chimba” in the house. A chimba is similar to a hospital bedpan which we used to “shishi” (urinate) into it at night. My mother would empty the chimba in the morning.

On the other side of the house, my father kept a large chicken pen. We always had fresh eggs and chicken. The pen was fenced in and the area was larger than our house. In those days, all the plantation homes had chicken coops. Within the pen, there was a chicken coop and I remember two very large peach trees and a couple of other trees. Next to the chicken pen, we had a vegetable garden where we grew dikon, cabbage, green onion, and other vegetables; my father also maintained a

small fishpond where he raised koi. My mother would make koi soup to feed us when we got sick.

In the back of the house, there was a large patch of bamboo and behind that, a small stream. I was told that in the event of a large earthquake, the safest place to be was within the bamboo patch. Luckily, we never had the need. I learned to swim the dog paddle in a small pond in that stream. We often swam nude.

A sugar cane flume also passed by behind our house. I remember an incident while walking to school with my friend Sumichan. We had taken a shortcut to school and were walking along the flume. The flume was a wooden trough with fast running water used to float sugar cane stalks down the mountain to the mill. Sumichan slipped and fell into the flume and was washed down the trough with the sugar cane. The plantation workers had to stop the flow of water so Sumichan could be rescued. This disrupted and delayed the harvest. I got a good scolding from my father. We never took that shortcut again.

### My Uncle's House

(Location 2, Appendix Pages 22, 23)

My uncle, Isami Hirata, was my father's younger brother. His family lived next door to us and he had his own fields of sugar cane to manage. I suppose my grandfather also set him up in the business. My uncle had three children: two girls, Hideyo and Nobuko, and one son, Motomu. He hunted pigs and also raised a few. When he caught a pig or slaughtered one of his own, he would divide up the meat and give it to all the neighbors. What a treat! He also loved to fish and often went fishing alone. He died while fishing alone somewhere on the Hamakua coast years later.

None of us had cars, but some had horses or mules, which were used in the cane fields and for transportation. My uncle had a mule which my father used occasionally. One day, my father and I rode my uncle's mule down the hill to pick "ohi'a" (mountain apple). My father climbed the tree and dropped the apples to me. I caught them and placed them in a basket. Unfortunately, I didn't realize I was standing next to a beehive. The bees started swarming and stinging me on my

legs. I jumped up and down and cried loudly. My father kept yelling at me to move away but all I could do was jump and cry. He finally came down from the tree and carried me away. At home, I couldn't walk for several days. I remember crawling on my stomach on the goza-covered floor to get around. Still, we collected enough mountain apples for everyone but that was the last time I went ohī'a picking.

Tawara House  
(Location 3, Appendix Pages 22, 23)

The Tawara family lived two houses away, next to my uncle's house. Mrs. Tawara was a midwife and delivered me and all my brothers and sisters. In those days, no one went to hospitals to give birth. In fact, I don't ever remember going to a doctor. Every family had a medicine kit. Although I don't recall exactly what was in the kit, I do remember someone coming occasionally to replenish the items in the kit. The Tawaras had two daughters and one son named Makoto. One of these daughters married Yasushi "Scotch" Kurisu, who wrote the book *Sugar Town*, which described his life growing up on the plantation. Makoto played the violin and I often heard him practicing. Hearing him playing got me interested in the violin, and my father went to Hilo and bought me one for \$15. That was a huge amount of money in those days. That was the beginning of my love for the violin which, years later, got me to play with the Honolulu Symphony Orchestra.

Hamada House  
(Location 4, Appendix Pages 22, 23)



Through this gate is the “mauka” (toward the mountains) end of the old Honohina Mauka Road. Mr. Hamada’s house was located just behind me to the left.

Mr. Hamada lived in the first house as you entered the Honohina Mauka camp. He was a “luna,” the boss of the plantation. His house had the only telephone in the camp and was available to be used by the camp residents. I recall he had two daughters and one son named Minoru. Mr. Hamada also had his own fields of sugar cane. He hired us children to hoe hana his fields, for which he paid us 45 cents a day. This was pretty good pay considering the adults only got \$1 per day. It was hard work since we worked all day in the hot sun. The highlight of the day was eating lunch. My mother made us a bento lunch of musubi (rice balls) and okazu (side dishes). I really enjoyed sitting in the cane fields eating that bento lunch.



Honohina Mauka Community Hall  
(Location 5, Appendix Pages 22, 23)



Just past the old covered bridge was the site of the community hall that was located near the trees in the distance.

We watched silent Japanese films in the community hall. There was always a person there called a “benshi” who provided narration of the action on the screen. The hall was also used for church service on Sundays. The nearest church was two and a half miles down the hill at the Honohina Upper camp. No one had cars, so the Buddhist priest would come up to the camp to hold service at the hall.

Swimming Pond  
(Location 6, Appendix Pages 22, 23)



My brothers, sisters, and I, along with the other neighborhood children, enjoyed swimming in this large pond behind me in the Nanue Stream.



### Covered Bridge

(Location 7, Appendix Pages 21, 22, 23)



This bridge over the Nanue Stream, just above the swimming pond, was covered at one time.

### Honohina Mauka Road

(Location 8, Appendix Pages 22, 23, 25-27)



Through the gate behind me is the “makai” (toward the ocean) end of the old Honohina Mauka Road. The Honohina Store was located to my left and the old Government Road (Old Mamalahoa Highway) is just in front of me.

I remember walking 2 ½ miles down a gravel road, barefoot, to get to the main road on my way to school every day. Today, the road runs through pastureland.

Honohina Store  
(Location 9, Appendix Pages 21, 25-27)



Honohina Store -Upper Camp (Building # 71)

Source: Hakalauhome.com



The Honohina Store once stood here. The Honohina Mauka Road is to my right and the Aoyagi Store was to my left. Mr. Yoshimura's house was located in front of me, across the road and to my left.

Honohina Store was a plantation store that provided for all the needs of the camp residents. My parents purchased everything they needed and the cost was then charged to their account. If an item was not in stock, the store would mail order it. Cash was not necessary. Every two years, when the sugar cane was harvested, the plantation would take what was owed to them to pay off the balance on my father's account. What a good deal! I don't know if they even charged interest.

### Aoyagi Store

(Location 10, Appendix Page 25, 27)

The Aoyagi Store was located on the main road, close to the Honohina Store. I believe it was a bakery because I remember buying manju (Japanese pastry). The owners had a daughter named Emiko.

### Mr. Yoshimura's House

(Location 11, Appendix Pages 26, 27)

We walked barefoot 2 ½ miles down the Honohina Mauka road to school every day. Once we reached the main road, we would go to Mr. Yoshimura's house, which was the first house in the Honohina Lower camp from the Nanue Stream side. Here, we would wash our feet and put on our shoes which we kept at his house. We would then continue our long walk along the main road to school. On the way home from school, we would leave our shoes at his house and walk barefoot up the hill to our home.

Mr. Yoshimura was a taxi driver. I remember that occasionally he would drive up the hill to pick up my family, all seven of us, and take us to Hilo for the day. For this, he only charged my father \$1. To us, it was a good deal until you realized that the plantation workers only got \$1 for a whole day of work in the fields. He also had a "thing" about eating in the car. I recall he would always yell at us, "No eating ice-cream in the car!" He would drop us off, park, and wait for us the whole day.

My father would often take us to Mamo Street in Hilo to buy sushi for lunch. Today, Mamo Street is the site of a very popular open market. On these trips, I would often get very carsick as the main road to Hilo was winding as it crossed over many streams and rivers. Much later, when I was living on the mainland with the Bachelor family, Reverend Bachelor suggested I try taking a brown paper bag and placing it on my chest to prevent carsickness. I did this and never got carsick again. I used the same paper bag for the whole three years I was on the mainland and, even though it was wrinkled and sweaty, I brought it back to Hawaii. I can't remember what happened to it. I wish I had known of this cure on our trips to Hilo.



Honohina Cemetery  
(Location 12, Appendix Page 27)



The beautiful landscaping at the entrance to the cemetery is nicely maintained by the Honohina Hongwangi Mission in Ninole.



I believe my brother Mamoru's grave is located in this area but, unfortunately, I couldn't find it.



I remember walking past this cemetery every day on my way to school. The cemetery is still there and my brother Mamoru, who died at birth, is buried there. Presently, the cemetery is maintained by the Honohina Hongwangi Mission located in Ninole. They do a great job of keeping the cemetery neat and landscaped. I was very happy to see that. We were not able to locate my brother's grave as many of the headstones are weathered and the kanji characters are illegible. My parents used to bring me to visit my brother's grave and it was nice to do that again after 77 years.

Large Curve in Road to School  
(Location 13, Appendix Page 27)



The walk to school included this long curve in the road over the Nanue Stream.

After we walked 2 ½ miles, barefoot, down the Honohina Mauka road and put on our shoes at Mr. Yoshimura's house, we then continued our walk to school on the main road. I remember the main road making a long curve inland to get over the Nanue Stream. This curve seemed to make the walk to school much longer. Today, it seems a little shorter than I remember.

John M. Ross School  
(Location 14, Appendix Page 27)



The John M. Ross School once stood in the field behind me.  
Nothing remains of the single-building school.

The John M. Ross School was located on the mauka side of the main road, just after the large curve. The school was named after the Hakalau Plantation manager. Initially, I attended “receiving grade” at Ninole school. In those days, you had to be six years old to start school. As a result, I was one year older than my classmates from Honolulu. I transferred to the John M. Ross School when it was newly opened and attended it up till the 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

I still remember some of my teachers: Mrs. Kamakaiwi, Mr. Kamakaiwi, Mr. Nishimoto, and Mr. Toledo. Mr. Toledo was a very strict teacher. He was a big “haole” (Caucasian) man and would have the naughty children hold their palms up as he walked by and slapped them with a ruler. I think I had my palms slapped once. I’m sure we all deserved it.

I also remember there was an especially naughty boy whose name I have forgotten. He would bring chili peppers to school and, without warning, shove them into girls’ mouths. It was awful and really burned. I often wonder what happened to this boy.

The Japanese School  
(Location 15, Appendix Page 27)



The Japanese school was located behind me in the distance.

The Japanese school that I attended was located just across the main road from the John M. Ross School. Every day after school, we crossed the road to attend the Japanese school.

Laupahoehoe Intermediate and High School

I attended Laupahoehoe School from 7th grade until I left for the mainland, two months into the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. During this time, I was taking violin lessons from Reverend Bachelor, who was a missionary from the mainland. The Bachelors lived very close to Laupahoehoe School and asked if I would stay with them and do housework in exchange for free violin lessons. I accepted.

In 1938, Reverend Bachelor invited me to return with them to live on the mainland. Looking back, I am still surprised that my father allowed his 16-year-old daughter to leave Hawaii for the faraway mainland. As a missionary, Reverend Bachelor moved often, so before I left, my father made him promise that wherever he went, he would always take me with his family and never leave me behind. We boarded the cruise ship *Lurline* at the Hilo harbor for the trip to California. I have many memories of my time on the mainland as I lived with this very strict but loving missionary family, moving frequently and attending several high schools, before finally returning to Hawaii in 1941. That story is another chapter in my life, “Memories of Life on the Mainland.”

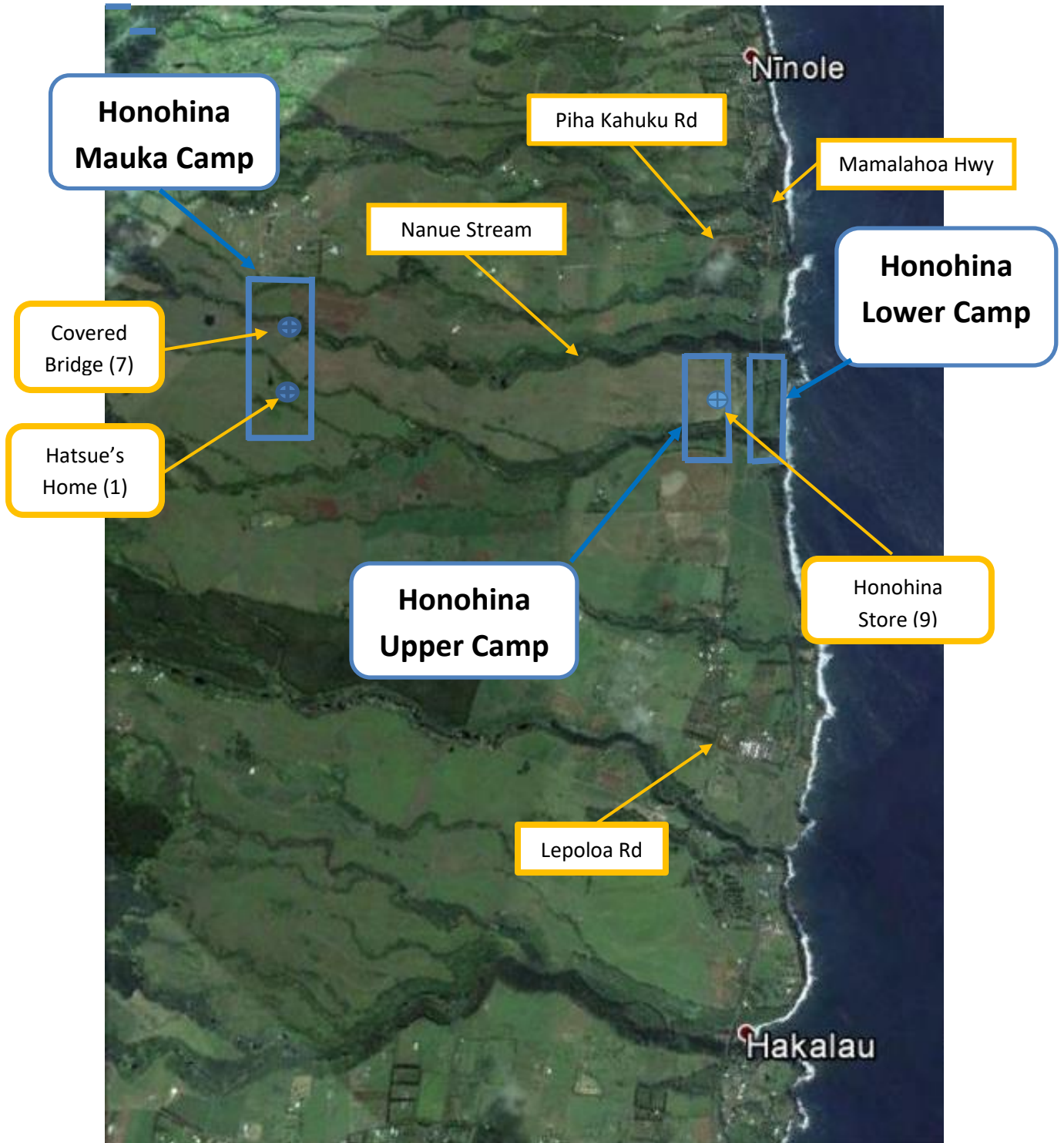
# APPENDIX

## Photos and Sketches



# Photo of Honohina Camp Locations

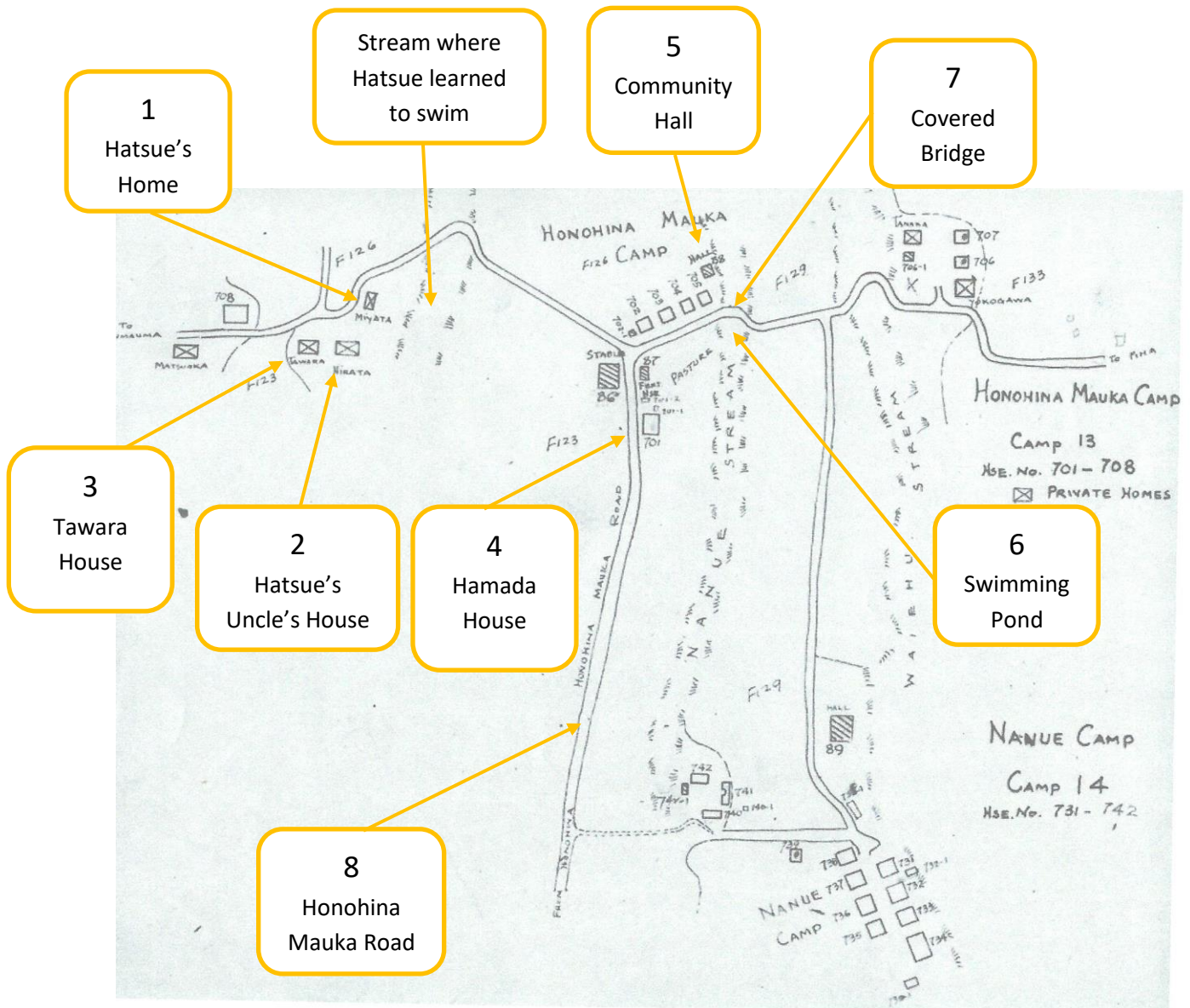
Source: Google Earth





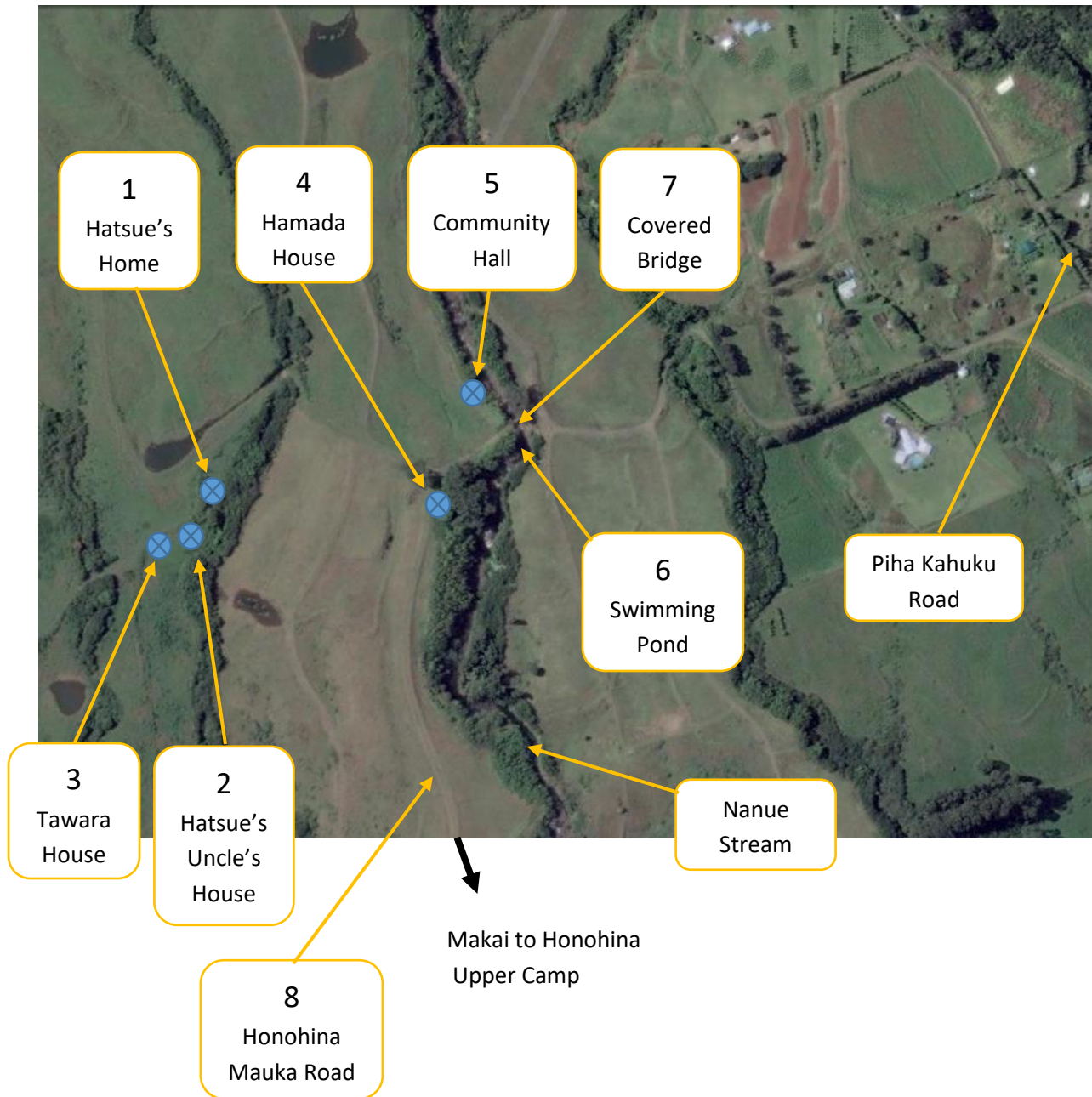
# Sketch of Honohina Mauka Camp

Source: HakalauHome.com

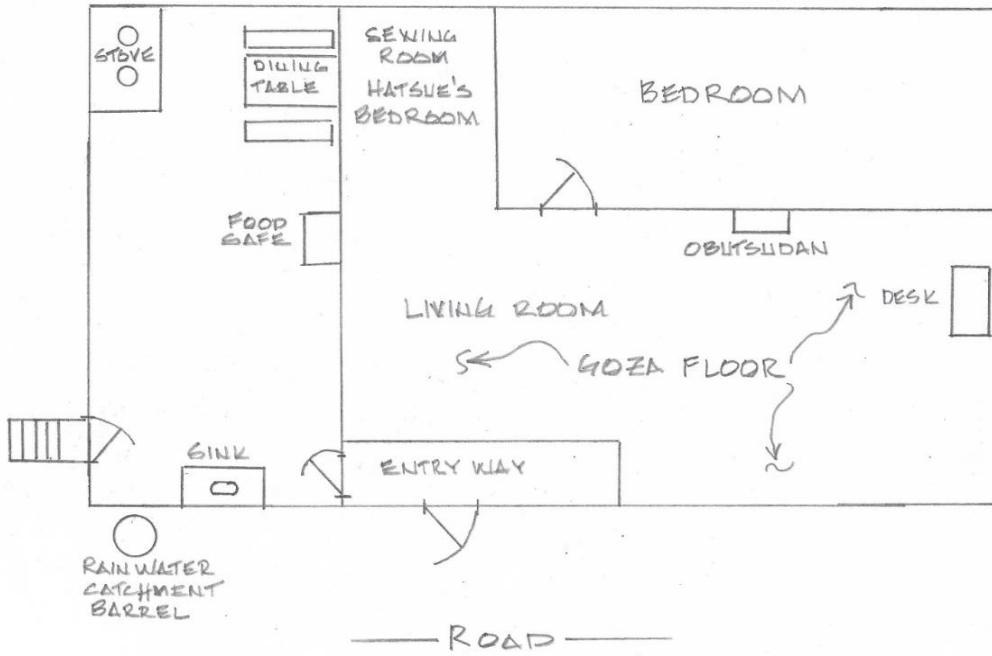


# Photo of Honohina Mauka Sites

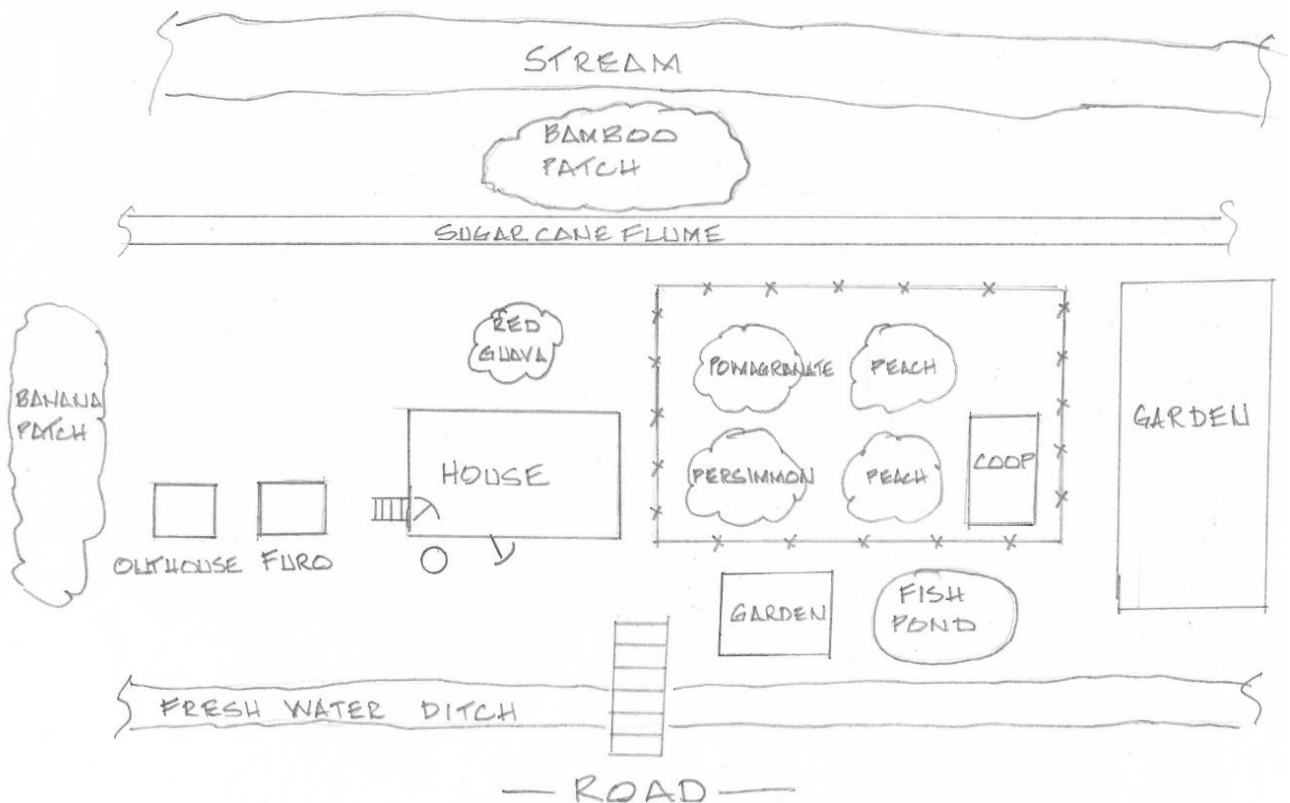
Source: Google Earth



# HATSUE'S HOUSE LAYOUT



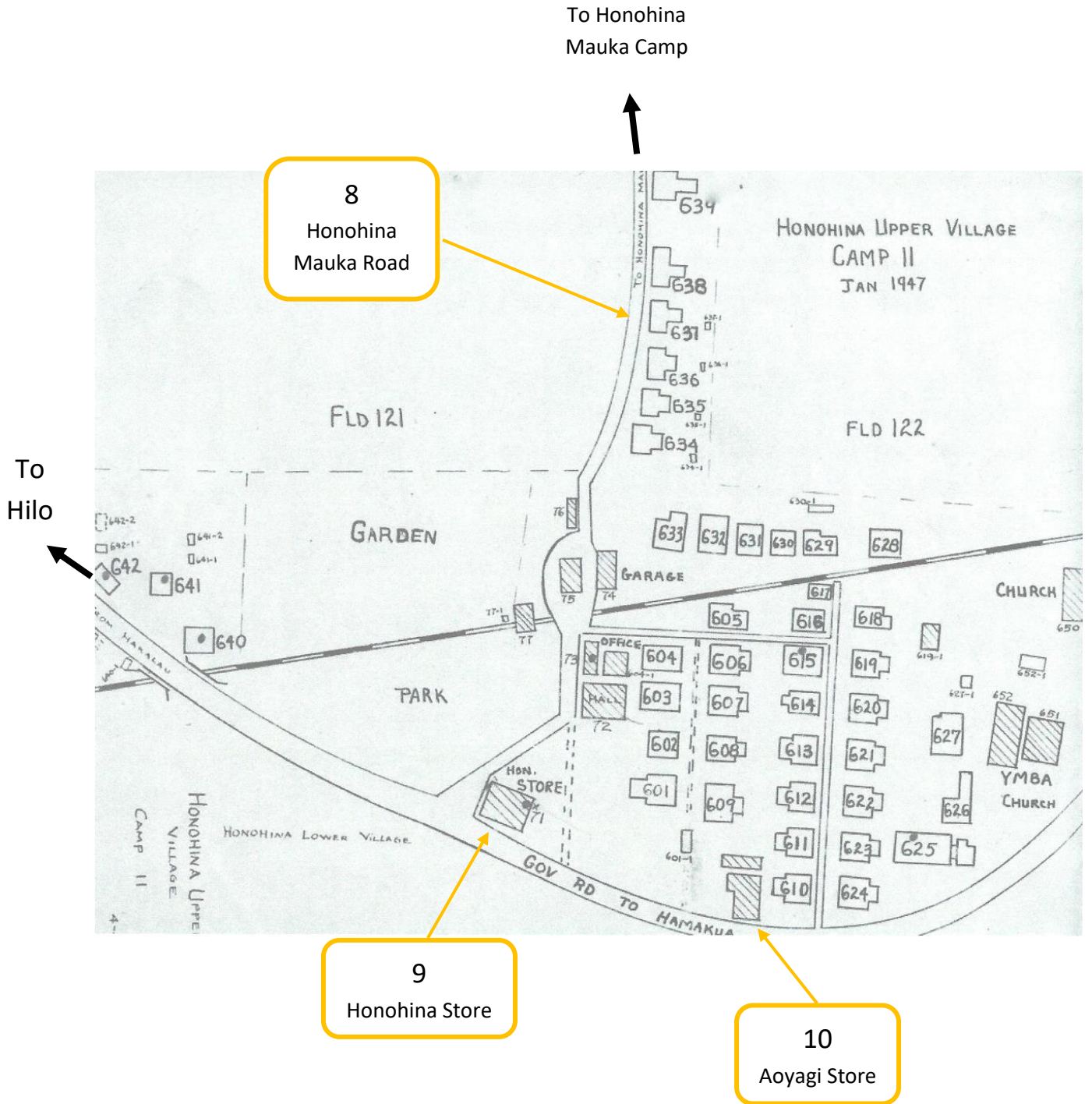
# HATSUE'S HOUSE PROPERTY LAYOUT





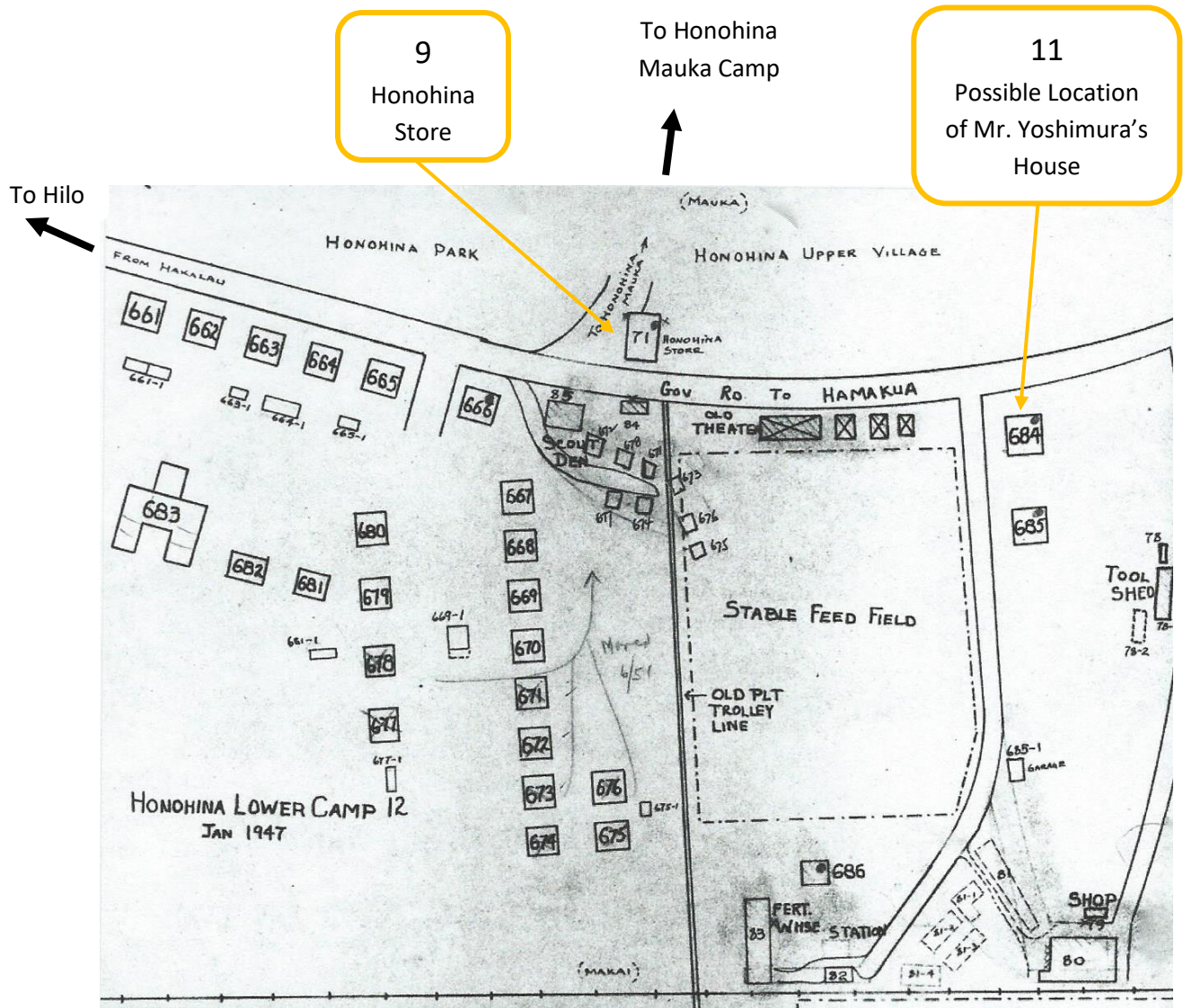
# Sketch of Honohina Upper Camp

Source: HakalauHome.com



# Sketch of Honohina Lower Camp

Source: HakalauHome.com





# Photo of Sites Along Coast

Source: Google Earth

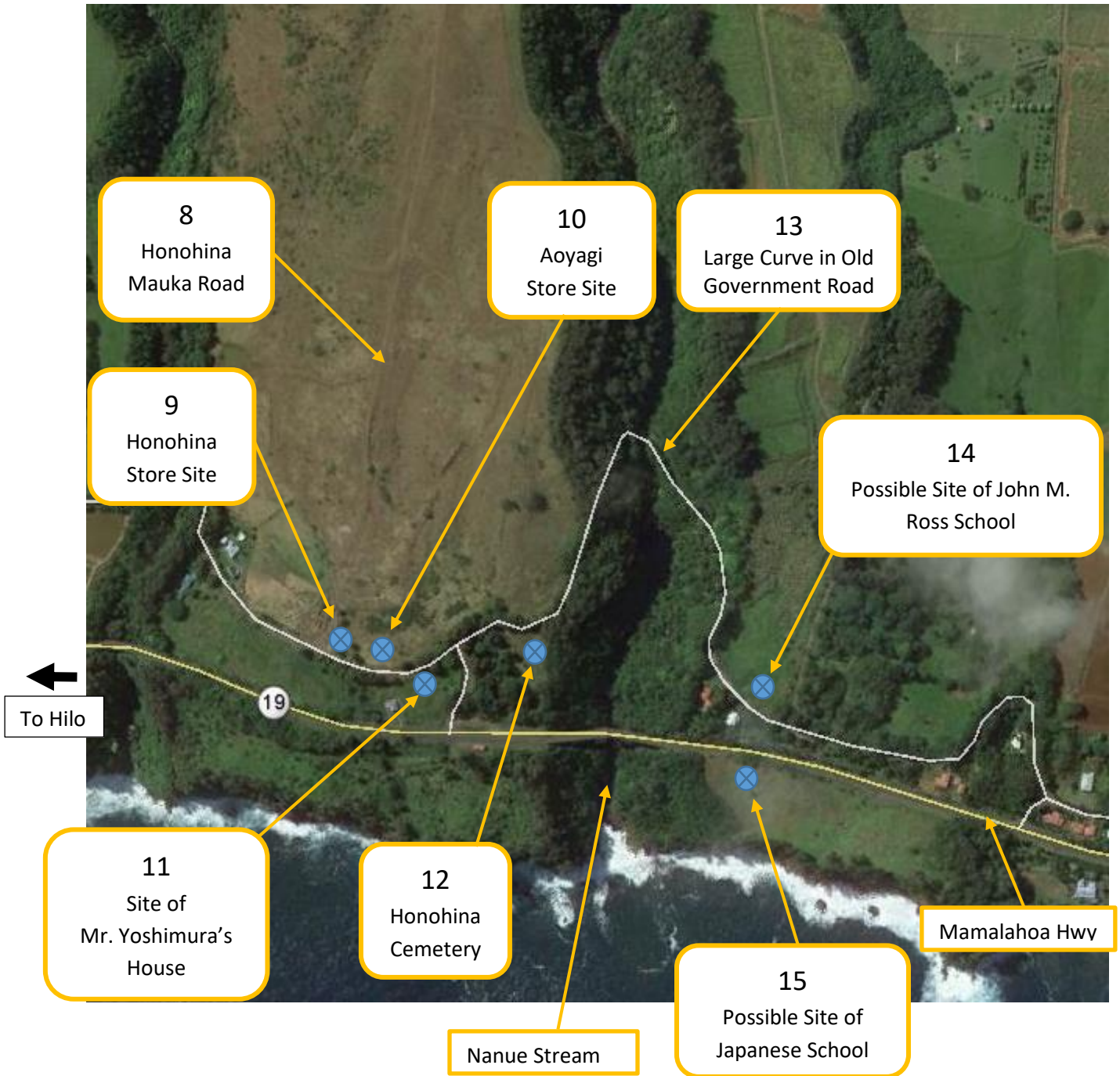


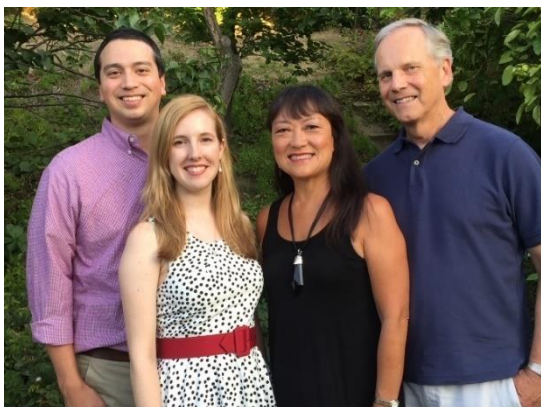
Photo of Helen's Family (2017)



Family photo during trip to Honohina in July, 2017.

Location: Old Honohina Store site.

Left to Right. Back Row: Scott, Dean, Charles, Joy, Kaipō, Ronald, Nathan. Second Row: Lauren, Landon, Glory, Lehua, Helen, Faith, Dona, Hope, Lorraine, Stephen. Front Row: Kailey, Dural, Kekoa, Malia, Sean.



From Left: Robert, Rebecca, Colleen, Richard



Aaron



Helen's Wedding Photo (1948)



Teruo and Helen