

# MĀNOA HERITAGE CENTER

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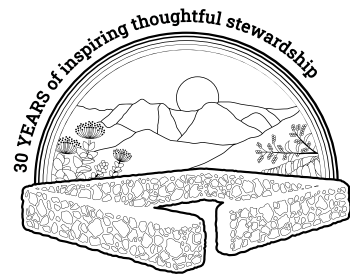
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*E lawe i ke a'o a mālama,  
a e 'oi mau ka na'auao.*

He who takes his teachings and applies them increases his knowledge.


'Ōlelo No'eau #328



## MĀNOA HERITAGE CENTER

Rooted in a deep sense of kuleana to this place, MHC's staff are dedicated to advancing the organization's mission and strategic priorities. We are honored to serve our community, especially as we celebrate MHC's 30th anniversary.



Visit us at [www.manoaheritagecenter.org](http://www.manoaheritagecenter.org)  

# MĀNOA HERITAGE CENTER

## SPRING 2026 NEWSLETTER

Celebrating 30 years



This year marks **30 years since Sam and Mary Cooke, together with community support, founded Mānoa Heritage Center (MHC)**. Their vision continues to shape the preservation and interpretation of this extraordinary place — from Kūka'ōō Heiau to native and Polynesian-introduced gardens and, in the near future, the historic Cooke family home, Kūali'i. From a small nonprofit founded in 1996, MHC now welcomes nearly **8,000 community members each year**, each visit strengthening the bond between people, culture and place.



The future site of the MHC Visitor Education Hale 1993



The Visitor Education Hale opened in 2018 making it possible to expand MHC's school and public programs.

In 1996, the Manoa Valley Cultural Heritage Foundation (MHC's original name) was incorporated and received tax-exempt status. Board members were selected and met for the first time. Given Sam and Mary's individual backgrounds, growing up in Hawai'i, Sam on O'ahu and Moloka'i, and Mary on Kaua'i, it is not surprising that the purchase of the land under the heiau parcel in 1992 would lead to the development of Mānoa Heritage Center. As Sam shared in an oral history interview completed in 2009 by the Center for Oral History at UH Mānoa, "I think being brought up as a kid on Moloka'i, as loving the 'āina, the land. Not wanting to see massive changes. Trying to keep those pristine areas as pristine as possible."

Mary's interest in historic preservation also influenced their choices (from the same oral history project): "Historic preservation has been an underlying interest all of my life. And the environment is certainly one of my passions . . . When we acquired the land under the heiau (in 1992) we said, 'Well now we need to plant native plants around it.' That's what it had originally. So we tried to not only restore the heiau but to restore the garden to what might have been here . . . it's been lots of fun."

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## Dreams Become Realized: What Mo'O School Loves About MHC

"I am so grateful to Mary and Sam Cooke for making such careful and thoughtful plans to transfer this beloved place back to the community," says Mamie Lawrence-Gallagher, Elementary Guide and Director of Montessori of O'ahu (Mo'O), School of Mānoa Valley. Twice a month, Mamie and her 15 students (ages 6-11 years old) walk from Mānoa Marketplace to MHC to learn, to kilo (a Hawaiian practice of in-depth observation), and to build pilina (connection). Reflections of Mo'O students:



"We love MHC because it's a quiet place where you can really think and learn. I love kilo. Just sitting there and observing a single area and its changes over time is super awesome."

- Koa, 11 years old

"We love MHC because we get to celebrate Makahiki. We play makahiki games, we walk to MHC, we chant, we shake the 'upena, and we sit and eat together. That's my favorite part."

- Portia, 7 years old

## When One 'Ōhi'a Became Many

Sam and Mary Cooke planted one 'ōhi'a lehua tree (the red flower) many years ago, sometime around when MHC was founded. Fast-forward to 2017, when our Visitor Education Hale was being built, we planted several 'ōhi'a mamo (the yellow flower) keiki. Today, our 'ōhi'a have grown into the 10-20 foot trees you see surrounding our front office and classroom.

From being a keystone species in our ecological framework to the magnificent lei that are created from its blossoms, 'ōhi'a are the VIP (Very Important Plants) in every sense of the term. As Mary Cooke noted back in 1995, "it is beautiful in the landscape and deserves to be more widely grown."

We gathered seed, and we sprouted, grew and planted a new generation of 'ōhi'a in 2022 following a workshop led by the 'Ōhi'a Legacy Initiative. Many of these trees now live happily at MHC, while others were shared with neighbors and community partners.

Today in 2026, we are excited to announce that, across the valley at Magoon Research Station (across from Long's), some of our seedlings have a home at the Carbon Neutrality Challenge Greenhouse. The trees grown here are eventually outplanted at forestry restoration sites across the island including Waimānalo, Kūkaniloko, Waiakeakua, Wāwāmalu and Kuli'ou'ou Ridge Trail.

*Special thanks to JC Watson, Brenda Lam, and Olivia Taub for their support.*



## The First Ten Years

**April 1996:** Manoa Valley Cultural Heritage Foundation (MV) is incorporated and Catherine Cooke is hired as the first Executive Director.

**April-June 1997:** Myra Tomonari-Tuggle carries out the historical research component of Kūka'ō'ō Heiau project, including compiling existing archaeological reports for the surrounding area. Her grandparents, Kumaichi "Tomo" Tomonari and Taka Jyo Tomonari, worked for Sam's grandparents, Charles Montague "Monte" Cooke, Jr. and Lila Lefferts Cooke and raised their family on the property.

**1997-1998:** The first public visits to Kūka'ō'ō Heiau and the surrounding garden includes educators from Mānoa Elementary School and members of the Historic Hawai'i Foundation, the Nature Conservancy of Hawai'i, National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Garden Conservancy of New York.

**March 1998:** After receiving feedback from stakeholder and content experts, Myra completes the first Interpretive Plan.

**May 2000:** Dr. Samuel 'Ohu Gon III completes his research on Hawaiian religion as related to agriculture and Kūka'ō'ō Heiau.

**2000:** The first Conditional Use Permit is approved granting the organization permission to fulfill its mission and conduct tours.

**2003:** Victoria Kneubuhl is hired as the first Director of Education; the organization's name, Manoa Valley Cultural Foundation, is changed to Mānoa Heritage Center.

**2004:** Led by Board member Nathan Napoka, MHC's Protocol Committee, including Kalena Silva, Randy Fong and Naomi Losch, is organized to advise on the Heiau.

**2006:** Artist Allyn Bromley (1928 - 2026) designs MHC's first logo; Anthony Ortiz is hired to maintain the garden of native plants.



MV meeting 1996 (from L-R) Nathan Napoka, Kozen Kaneshiro, Beryl Blaich, Mary Cooke, Sam Cooke, Scott Power



Kūka'ō'ō Heiau, estimated 500-800 years old, is restored in 1994, two years before MV is incorporated.



MHC Board and staff in 2004 (from L-R) Sam Cooke, Susan Shaner, Deborah Pope, Carol Fox, Kozen Kaneshiro, Victoria Kneubuhl, Nathan Napoka, and Mary Cooke.