

# Transition Through Time: From General Store to Resource Center

By Anne Fojtasek

When the North Kohala Community Resource Center (NKCRC) made its recent move into new quarters, it gained more than extra space. The center is now wrapped in a piece of Kohala's colorful history.

The NKCRC's "new" home first made the scene during a building boom in North Kohala in the 1930s. Built by Kichigoro and Sei Fukada, originally from Hiroshima, Japan, the building was constructed to house the Fukada General Store. Joyce Fukada Kobayashi, whose first husband Richard was the grandson of Kichigoro and Sei, explains that it was also a tailor shop; the shelves along one side originally held bolts of fabric.

In an age that lacked easy access to shopping malls and all their diversity, small stores like this one played an important role in the life of the community. "It was a little bit of that, a little bit of this," says Gladys Nanbu, who remembers the store from childhood visits with her grandfather to the Fukada family home next door. Gladys found an ad for the store in her uncle's Kohala High School yearbook for 1933. The ad offers "pure island honey, ice cakes and general merchandise."

As a child in elementary school, Joe Carvalho found the Fukada General Store to be a source of income. He and his friends often played in the Hawi Dump, then located directly across the street. The dump was a good place to dig up old bottles, which could be recycled at the Fukada Store for two cents each. Since a movie cost "25 or 30 cents" at the time, a little work could add up to the price of admission—if the money didn't get spent first on sodas or ice cream from the store. Nice to know that recycling played a part in daily

life in Kohala's past.

Joe also remembers having fun in the gulch next door. Mrs. Fukada watched out for the neighborhood children as they played in the area.



—photo courtesy of Bond Memorial Library

"The Fukadas used to really take care of us," he says. Lucy Pasco, who babysat Joe and other kids, confirms his recollection. Mrs. Fukada sat on a little chair on the store's front porch, she says, and scolded the children who were careless about running in front of cars. But what really worried her, according to Lucy, was the kids who liked to slide down the sides of the gulch on sheets of cardboard.

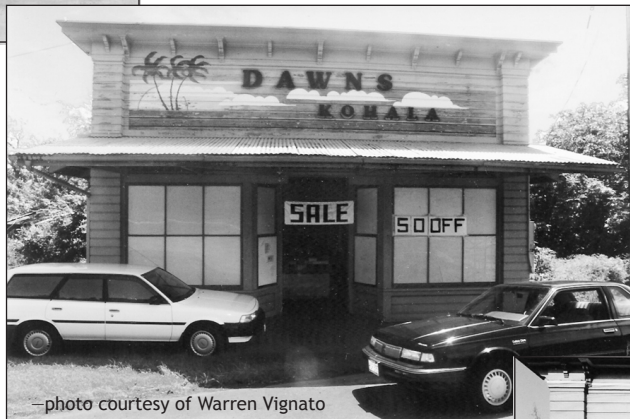
While his wife minded the porch and the youthful customers, Mr. Fukada spent most of his time in the back of the store, Lucy recalls, where he sold bentos and ran what amounted to a deli. Lucy compares the place to a country store, "similar to the old Takata Store" when it was located in what is now the Bamboo Restaurant in Hawi.

Although the building is still owned by Joyce Fukada Kobayashi, it has accommodated several different businesses over the years. Operated as the Fukada General Store until 1971, it continued under the same name but with a different proprietor, Route Van Sugimoto, from 1971 to 1981. Sumi Kawasaki took over and changed the name to Dawn's Kohala, still basically a general store, from 1981 until 1996. Named after Sumi's daughter Dawn, the store sold dry goods, work clothes and shoes, tee shirts, aloha shirts, children's clothing and toys.

The building's next incarnation came in the

form of the Hawi General Store, run by Warren and Maribel Vignato. That business was widely known as the Filipino store because Maribel was Filipino, and the store carried Filipino foods and other goods. A sign of more modern times, the business also offered faxing and copying services. A large section was devoted to the musical instruments, hula supplies and carvings of Ike Ve'a. And we sold ice cream, Warren says: not ice cream cones, but bulk ice cream.

Like Joe Carvalho, Warren also recycled old bottles. These came from a Japanese camp up Pineapple Road,



—photo courtesy of Warren Vignato

just past Pua Kea Bay but mauka of the highway, and he sometimes sold them through his store.

When he moved in, Warren and his brother, an ex-contractor, repainted and repaired the building. He says they cut out a 4-foot by 6-foot section of the floor that was badly damaged by termites and noticed boxes tacked underneath the surface. Investigation found the boxes filled with invoices for the Fukada General Store from the time of World War II. "We were hoping for some money but didn't find any," he says.

The Hawi General Store stayed in business for about four years and was succeeded by Island Community Lending, which marked the first time in the building's long history that it held something other than a general store. Now the racks of clothes and dry goods gave way to the desks and cubicles of a realty and mortgage company. The owner of that business, Marcel Estes, generously allotted part of the space to an office for the Kohala Mountain News, which operated out of the area for about six months until the newspaper folded in January of 2001. Island Community Lending continued in the building until late 2008—paving the way for the North Kohala Community Resource Center to move in. The Center's executive director Christine Richardson says they



—photo courtesy of Warren Vignato

The interior of Dawn's Kohala was crammed with the trappings of everyday life.

had noticed the building before and thought about what a perfect office space it would make for their organization. When Island Community Lending moved out in October 2008, the people at the NKCRC "saw their opportunity and jumped on it really fast."

Preparing the space for the transition took some hard work. After all the money that Marcel Estes had put into fixing up the building, the team from the NKCRC found that it needed a lot of cleaning and repairing to be ready for use. "We literally washed it from stem to stern and painted the whole interior," Christine says.



The NKCRC sign, newest of the bunch, hadn't gone up yet when this story was published in March 2009.



—photo courtesy of Warren Vignato

Top: Fukada General Store under the proprietorship of Route Van Sugimoto; Middle: Dawn's Kohala; Bottom: Hawi General Store; the building hasn't changed a lot over the years except for the signs and the posts in front.

Future plans include a series of storyboards with pictures showing the links between enterprises from Kohala's past and enterprises and

**FUKADA STORE**

Dealer in PURE ISLAND HONEY  
ICE CAKES — GENERAL MERCHANDISE

Phone 3 White 629 Hawi, Hawaii

This ad appeared in a Kohala High School yearbook in 1933.



—photo courtesy of Warren Vignato

Warren Vignato inspects the interior of the building prior to setting up the Hawi General Store.

projects from the present day, many of which are sponsored by the resource center. The NKCRC team is delighted to be making the effort. "We have a lot of respect for the place of this building in Kohala's history," Christine says. "It's a perfect match for what we do here in the community."

Digging out information about a history that extends back to the 30s took the help of a number of generous people, who told me, "You should talk to so-and-so," and sometimes even supplied phone numbers! Special thanks go to Gladys Nanbu, who called members of the Fukada family on O'ahu to help me track down details. —A.F.