

from Beneath the Shacks and Out of the Fields

A coffee shack, and its attached fields are like time capsules. Buildings established before 1984 can be restored in Hawaii County without needing a building permit or inspection. Therefore, the landscape is dotted with old shacks, which would otherwise be taken down. The rocky coffee fields have crevices and cracks, boulders and weeds. Once something drops smaller than a hand saw, chances are high that it will be gone for good. We still look for one the previous owners engagement ring in vain. Yet under our, and friends houses, and in the coffee-fields, we come across wonderful artifacts. Here are some of the finds and their stories.

The Shoe of a Nightingale

Before the old army jeeps, and modern ATV's roamed the Kona lands and forests, much of the work of carrying, dragging, pulling was done by the classic beast of burden, the donkey. Mules were too tall, horses too finicky, so the donkeys were just right for the job to deal with 200+ LBS of freshly picked coffee cherry (or its equivalent in fertilizer). All to be yanked up, or down slopes, on sharp, abrasive lava rock.

Donkeys are social animals and like to greet each other when in shouting distance, or to figure out if there's a fella donkey around. So they bray—a lot. They also bray when an intruder comes onto the farm, or if the dog chases the cat. Or a thick mango drops and bangs onto a tin roof, scaring the chickens and children. All that braying for various reasons gave them the nickname of 'Kona Nightingales.'

A once lost, iron shoe of one of these 'nightingales' was found while building a rock wall. Rusty, and disintegrating, but telling the story of a long dead donkey, and a long gone farmer coming home after picking coffee on these very hills. There was probably a noisy bray when this shoe was lost, and the farmer cursed loudly, while searching between the lava rocks for the lost iron. Apparently the search was in vain, resulting in a trip to the blacksmith.

Fisherman's Treasure



Handmade lures from the 1940s

An old wooden toolbox, riddled with termite holes, its lid disintegrating when I pried it open. And then there were a myriad of hooks, an array of shapes and sizes of lead weights, fishing lines on spools, rolled up, wrapped around sticks, hand carved baits out of ivory, bone and wood. Hand painted lures of minnows, feathers and pearls, manufactured into pieces of fishing art. Things that only gilled animals can fully appreciate. Underneath were brochures from the 1940's, touting top fishing destinations around the US States. Also, pictures of the monster fish that folks had caught in Oregon rivers, Lake Erie, or along the Galveston coastline. There were also long expired medication bottles, with the owners names still written on them, now harboring small hooks. The old fisherman's heart wasn't so good anymore, based on the stuff he had to swallow. I envision him throwing out a long line from a cliff on the Kona coast, getting a nice grouper, then putting his fishing gear (all cleaned up and organized), away for the last time under that shack. Hoping somebody else may enjoy it. We certainly do!

The Saxophone of the Century

Fritz, from Germany is a gifted saxplayer. Jazz is in his blood and he can talk a mile a minute once the instrument is out of his mouth. He was visiting us sans his sax for a month, and rather cranky about that. Then there's Charlie, who is an ex-surgeon, turned neighbor coffee farmer, who also plays in a band. When the moon is right, he beats the drums on his coffee drying deck, till the whole hill is bopping along. Fritz heard that Charlie had recently found some old saxophone under his coffee shack. So, suffering for not having blown, or touched a horn in a month, he ran over to inspect the rusty object. Jokingly, he said before he sprinted off, that he hoped it might be a [USA CONN](#) sax. Which is the Holy Grail of saxophones, especially when an early serial number is imprinted.

Fritz stayed away for hours, and I heard Charlie's barreling laugh getting louder and louder. Upon later inspection, I found the two dudes happily sitting amongst beers, and a rusty saxophone propped on a coffee bag, and the two dudes hunched over a laptop, celebrating the early registration number of a real USA CONN sax, manufactured in the 1910s. A century old saxophone (in unrestored condition) worth many thousands of dollars! Maybe left by a retired army musician, band member from a Waikiki hotel, or Hawaiian steamship.

Wherever it came from, here's to Charlie and his CONN!



Now that's a CONN-artist in the making!

A Full Month in Kona of 1952

In a rather humid climate like Kona, one shouldn't wonder when leather belts get moldy and the shiny refrigerator doors begin to rust within a few month of buying them. But despite the moisture, there was a pristine stack of newspapers resting beneath a little house that was overgrown with vines, and had young trees shooting through the roof. 'The Hilo Tribune' is the name of the paper from the other side of the island of Hawaii, and this was every daily issue from July 1952! Slight mildew, a few boring insects took a bite, yellowing around the edges and a tad brittle. Yet, still readable from front to back. There were births celebrated, and worried departures to the Korean war announced. The Lureline steamers were expected to arrive, and reports from travelers returning from Europe were narrated. The lava flow had blocked the highway, and then forked before it reached the ocean at the Yee Hop Ranch in South Kona. A bunch of cows, and a farmer were trapped in between the fiery lava tongues, and had to be rescued by boats. People complained about too much traffic, and too many tourists. There were a whopping 1,240 visitors for the year—so it's all relative! Ford brought out a new pickup truck, and they ran the ad in both Japanese and English. On Sundays, there was a whole Japanese language section added, with a strong focus on weddings. Much concerned about who married whom apparently, as the reader of these pages had circled a few names and faces in pencil. Little hearts were drawn next to some men, so one can assume these issues were studied in detail by a lonely young girl waiting for her big day to arrive as well.

The Story of the Two Pestles



Unfinished, broken poi pounders on taro leaves

Polynesians were amazing navigators and had figured out ways of sustaining an economy for tens of thousands of people, on rather small islands, and without outside contacts, or wrecking their environment. Something we have lost in our world. Many of their tools were made of stone. And one of the most important kitchen utensils were pestles used to mash the root of taro—the plant where in Hawaiian mythology, all life came from. The mushy, semi-bland tasting, light purple paste is called 'poi,' and packs a lot of carbs. What we have in potatoes, pasta or rice, is 'poi' for a true Hawaiian. Buried on our hill, we found the handle of a broken pestle, with well worn-off edges around the break line. Historians have determined that our area was populated from the 1400's onward, and at the depth we found it, we can easily imagine it has been down there for that long. Yet, there was another pestle, unfinished in its sculpting. One can only imagine how much work already had went into it, and how much more was yet to come. We found it in close proximity to where the broken handle was buried. We wonder what stopped the sculptor in the midst of its manufacturing? And why was it not taken with him, or finished by someone else? Did Captain Cook's arrival interrupted life that dramatically?

The Lost Meaning of a Spoon

Between rocks, a clump of rusty metal stuck out. It served as a corner marker at the northern edge of our property, and that was that. Until a worker used it to scrape mud off his boots, and the accumulated dirt on it showed that it was something like a ladle. After much filing, sanding, steel brushing, a peculiar shape could be seen. Even Japanese Kanji letters appeared on its solid, flat bottom. Roughly eleven inches long, the spoon has two compartments, and a tiny groove in its tip. Hearts were punched in its handle, as a pattern, or to make it lighter. Eleven inches long, the shape is very elegant, and despite its weight, it is well balanced in the hand, like a Samuiri sword. What was it for, we wondered?



I consulted a Japanese archaeologist in Tokyo, who debated the origins of the piece with colleagues, but to no avail so far. The Kanji mark is that of a woman, yet it is serious metal work to cast an iron piece like this, he said. This lady certainly knew what she was doing, and this makes it even more mysterious. If you have any idea what this might have been used for, please, let us know!



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