
The Chock Inn Store: A Living Landmark in Waimea



For more than a century, the Chock Inn Store has stood as a quiet witness to the social, commercial, and cultural life of Waimea (Kamuela), Hawai'i. Established around 1910, the store was founded by **Inn Chock** and his wife **Ah Chin Luke**, both natives of North Kohala, who brought with them experience gained while working at family- and locally owned businesses such as Chock Hoo Store in Kawaihae and the H. Akona Store in Waimea. Their decision to open their own store marked the beginning of a mom-and-pop enterprise that would become deeply embedded in the daily rhythms of the community.

The early decades of the Chock Inn Store reflected the realities of rural Hawai'i in the early twentieth century, where general stores functioned not only as places of commerce but also as informal gathering spaces. This role became even more evident following the death of Inn Chock in 1934, when Ah Chin Luke assumed responsibility for running the store with the help of her children. Her stewardship ensured continuity during a period of personal loss and economic uncertainty, reinforcing the store's identity as a family-run business sustained through shared labor and resilience.

In 1953, ownership and daily operations passed to the couple's son, **Richard Chock**, marking a second-generation transition. Richard's long tenure—lasting until his death in 1997—coincided with the period most vividly remembered by Waimea residents. Community recollections speak less of transactions and more of relationships: children stopping by for candy, neighbors exchanging news, and a storekeeper who understood his place within the fabric of the town. One oft-repeated memory recalls Richard opening the candy counter to students from the nearby Hawai'i Episcopal Academy around Statehood Day in 1958, an act remembered as both generous and emblematic of the store's community-centered spirit.

Physically, the Chock Inn Store distinguished itself through features that survived decades of use and change. The building retained its antique safe, original wood-plank floors worn smooth by

generations of footsteps, and an unusual pulley-driven ceiling fan system that remained operational long after such mechanisms disappeared elsewhere. Old counters and glass-front cabinets from the store era endured, transforming everyday commercial fixtures into tangible links to Waimea's past. These elements would later become central to the building's historic identity.

By the late twentieth century, as retail patterns shifted, the building entered a new phase of life through adaptive reuse rather than abandonment. In 1998, chef **Daniel Thiebaut** opened his flagship restaurant within the former Chock Inn Store, intentionally preserving and showcasing many of the original features. Diners encountered the antique safe at the entrance, sat at counters that once served customers buying dry goods, and looked up at the same ceiling fan system that had cooled the store decades earlier. Planned renovations during this period aimed to modernize the kitchen and expand banquet facilities while retaining the historic character of the structure, demonstrating that preservation and reinvention need not be mutually exclusive.

Following the restaurant era, the building continued to evolve, housing establishments such as Mama's House and later a Habitat for Humanity operation. Community members frequently remarked that the structure had "many lives," yet remained instantly recognizable and emotionally resonant. Even as uses changed, the building's identity as the former Chock Inn Store persisted, anchored by memory and material continuity.

In more recent years, public discussion has centered on the future of the property. Rumors of sale prompted community concern, but multiple voices clarified that the Chock family retains ownership and has expressed interest in finding a long-term tenant rather than selling. The end of the Habitat for Humanity lease renewed both uncertainty and hope, sparking conversations about preservation, stewardship, and the responsibility that comes with caring for historic structures.

What emerges from both the historical record and community commentary is a shared understanding that the Chock Inn Store is more than a building. It is a repository of lived experience—of family enterprise, childhood memory, adaptation, and continuity. Even when its doors are closed or its purpose shifts, the store continues to occupy a central place in Waimea's collective memory, standing as a reminder that history endures not only through architecture, but through the stories people continue to tell about it.

Chock Inn Store

An Annotated Historical Timeline

Waimea (Kamuela), Hawai'i

c. 1910 — Founding of the Chock Inn Store

Inn Chock and **Ah Chin Luke**, both born in North Kohala, establish their own store in Waimea after working at Chock Hoo Store in Kawaihae and H. Akona Store.

Annotation: The founding reflects early 20th-century patterns of family enterprise and immigrant entrepreneurship that shaped Waimea's commercial core

1934 — Death of Inn Chock

Inn Chock dies at age 52.

Annotation: This moment marks a critical transition for the business and the beginning of a woman-led period of operation.

1934–1953 — Ah Chin Luke Continues Operations

Ah Chin Luke runs the store with the help of her children.

Annotation: Her stewardship underscores the importance of family labor and resilience in sustaining rural businesses during the mid-20th century.

1953 — Second-Generation Leadership

The store is turned over to **Richard Chock**, son of the founders.

Annotation: This generational transition solidifies the Chock Inn Store as a long-term, family-run institution.

1958 — Statehood-Era Community Memory

Around Hawai'i Statehood, Richard Chock opens the candy counter to students from nearby Hawai'i Episcopal Academy.

Annotation: Frequently recalled in community comments, this event illustrates the store's social role beyond commerce, particularly for local children.

1953–1997 — Long-Term Operation Under Richard Chock

Richard Chock operates the store until his death in 1997.

Annotation: This era forms the core of living memory for many Waimea residents and represents the store's most enduring period of daily use.

Late 20th Century — Preservation of Historic Features

The building retains original elements, including an antique safe, wood-plank floors, original counters, glass cabinets, and a pulley-driven ceiling fan system.

Annotation: These features later become defining markers of the building's historic character and cultural value.

1998 — Adaptive Reuse as Daniel Thiebaut Restaurant

Chef Daniel Thiebaut opens his flagship restaurant in the former Chock Inn Store, intentionally preserving many original features.

Annotation: This reuse demonstrates how historic commercial buildings can be adapted while maintaining architectural and cultural continuity.

Early 2000s — Renovation Plans

Plans include kitchen reconfiguration, banquet facilities, and energy improvements, while retaining historic fabric.

Annotation: These plans reflect a balance between modernization and preservation rather than replacement.

Post-Restaurant Period — Multiple Community Uses

The building later houses Mama's House and Habitat for Humanity.

Annotation: Community members note the building's "many lives," reinforcing its ongoing relevance despite changing uses

2023–2024 — Ownership and Lease Clarifications

Public discussion confirms the Chock family still owns the property; Habitat for Humanity's lease ends, and long-term tenants are sought.

Annotation: These conversations highlight strong community interest in preservation and responsible stewardship.

Present — Enduring Community Landmark

Residents, descendants, and community members continue to advocate for preservation and reuse.

Annotation: Even when inactive, the Chock Inn Store remains a cultural landmark defined as much by memory as by structure.

The Chock Inn property passed into the stewardship of St. James' Episcopal Church in 2026, and is presently undergoing repair and renovation, with ultimate uses of the property as yet undetermined. A discernment process, including both parishioners and the wider community will be undertaken later in 2026 to gather ideas about uses that are consistent with the church's mission and values.

Sources noted in the document for further research:

Ke Ola Magazine; Ethnic Studies Oral History Project; Thelma Parker Memorial Public / School Library; Paniolo Press and other cited historical works.

- Chock, Richard. "Welcome Back Marines." *Paniolo Press* (July 1984): p.3-8.
- Lam, Clem. "Kimura, Yutaka " *Ethnic Studies Oral History Project*. Kamuela, Hawaii: February 1983 (Thelma Parker Memorial Public/ School Library).
- Pagliaro, Emily. Interview: "Kimura, Hisao" Kamuela, Hawaii: January 2003
- Tabor, James. "A.W. Carter" *A Centenary Celebration: 1882-1982*. Honolulu: Social Sciences Association of Hawaii, 1982: p. 213-222.

- Tabrah, Ruth M. *Hawaii's Incredible Anna*. Tennessee: Kingsport Press, 1987.
- Yamada, Holly. "Oral History Interview with Elizabeth Lindsey Kimura." Honolulu, Hawaii: August 1993 (Thelma Parker Memorial Public/ School Library).
- **Ke Ola Magazine** articles on the Chock Inn Store and Daniel Thiebaut era