

Yutaka Kimura



Yutaka was born and raised on the Big Island. When he was only 13 years old, he began his adventurous journey with the nationally recognized Parker Ranch, a hereford cattle ranch covering 225,000 acres. His contribution and accomplishments as general herdsman for Parker Ranch included his position as coordinator and director of cattle genetics and breeding. Through the guidance of A.W. Carter, Yutaka studied animal husbandry with specialists from Cornell University, Kansas State and the University of Hawai'i. He was instrumental in the improvement of the cattle operation by selecting replacement stock and establishing a sound and systematic breeding program. His foresight, insight and educated perspective made Yutaka indispensable to Parker Ranch for 49 years. He retired in 1962 and left his son, Charles to follow in his footsteps. At 96 years of age, Yutaka continues to inspire paniolo young and old.

Paniolo Hall of Fame
Yutaka Kimura

Parker Ranch, Waimea, Hawaii

I interviewed Yutaka Kimura for the Paniolo Oral History Project, but also found that much information about him was already available. What follows is a summary of his life story, as found in three sources: Parker Ranch Paniolo: Yutaka Kimura by Jiro Nakama, "Yutaka Kimura" by Patricia Lewi, and "Oral History Interview with Yutaka Kimura" by Clem Lam. The Kimura family was very helpful in providing information.

Today one of the most legendary and respected paniolo Parker Ranch has produced, Yutaka Kimura is more than just a cowboy: he's a true cattleman, with expertise that has been sought as far away as Australia and Japan. He left school and started working for the ranch before he was 15, seeking employment out of necessity, to support his family through the hardship. By the time he retired, he had fulfilled the prediction of his mentor, Parker Ranch manager A.W. Carter, that the knowledge and experience he gained on the ranch would make him as respected as any university man.

Yutaka was born March 22, 1905, at Puuwaawaa Ranch, where his father, Masajiro Kimura, worked as a buggy driver and yardman and his mother, Hisamu, was a housemaid for the Robert Hind family. Back in those days, Puuwaawaa was rugged and rocky, one of the driest areas of the Big Island. The family was happy there, but it was very isolated, far from the civilization of a town and lacking a proper school for the children. When Yutaka was four years old, they loaded him up, along with his older brother and his younger brother and

sister, and started off in a horse-drawn buggy on the gravel road to Waimea, across the arid, cactus-strewn South Kohala plain.

In the early 1900s, Waimea was a “wild-west” style cow town, with five general stores, two saloons, two blacksmith shops and one dance hall. None of the roads were paved, and only a few wealthy families had carriages and buggies to ride in. Everybody else traveled on foot, even as far as the Hamakua or Kohala sugar plantations, carrying heavy sacks on their shoulders and curling up for the night beside the mountain roads.

Yutaka and his siblings and friends used to hang out at the general store or barber shop. For fun they liked to go hiking in the mountains to pick strawberries, ohelo berries, laukahi and fern shoots. Sometimes they'd walk to Kawaihae to spend a week fishing and swimming. Candies were a rare, special treat, and once in a long while they were able to get 15 cents to buy cracked seed – which they had to share.

The Kimura family had rough beginnings in Waimea, with little savings and unsteady work – and the family was still growing. Masajiro leased farmland, and together with his wife worked hard to make some money and put a little away to save. To supplement the family's income he took on outside work, eventually being hired as a handiman for Parker Ranch. In those early days, he and his crew cleared the ground, leveled the terrain and built the ranch's fenced racetrack, among other landmarks.

Yutaka attended the public school in Waimea, originally a two-room building that was renovated in 1916. He also went to Japanese school along with 11 other children. In those days, Japanese parents wanted their children to be taught the language and culture of Japan. A group of community members, including Yutaka's father, started the school in 1909.

Back then, Waimea's public school ended at fourth grade. The Kimuras' oldest son, Masao, wanted to pursue his education further, but Masajiro couldn't afford to send him on to school in Hilo. Masao cried for days and told Yutaka he would do whatever it would take to go to Hilo for school. He ran away and tried to get to Hilo on foot, but Masajiro brought him back on his horse. Seeing how desperately his brother wanted to continue his education, Yutaka, at 13-years-old, agreed to go to work to help raise the money.

On Aug. 1, 1918, he started as a gardener for A.W. Carter, trustee and manager of Parker Ranch. It was the start of a relationship that would shape Yutaka's career and his life. One of his first memories from that period was of falling asleep in the garden beside a rose bush. Surprised by Mrs. Carter, he jumped to his feet and began digging with his hoe as fast as he could, sure he'd be fired. Instead, Mrs. Carter told him to go into the house and lie down.

That evening, Mr. Carter called him to the porch and asked if he wanted to work or go to school. Yutaka broke into tears and said that he had to work, although deep in his heart he wished otherwise. Mr. and Mrs. Carter told him that they would see to it that he got a good job and that he would learn all he needed to know on the ranch. (Lewi)

When school started that September, Yutaka was ordered by his teacher to return to his studies, as he was required to stay in school until age 15. After three days of arguing, Mr. Carter stormed into the schoolhouse and demanded Yutaka be released to work. When the teacher tried to quibble, Carter showed his power.

In a 1983 interview, Yutaka recalled:

He say, "You tell the superintendent if she gonna hold back this boy, I get her out of that job." He was so powerful. They got scared. They let me out. (Lam)

Even though he accepted the responsibility of going to work to support his family and help send his brother to school, Yutaka always wished he had the chance to continue his own education. A few years later, when his former schoolmates sent him letters that they were preparing to graduate, he went back to Carter and said that maybe he'd like to go back and finish his schooling.

"You go to work," Carter scolded him, "Someday you can be a skilled man. You will be just as good as a university man if you will learn the work by experience. I see that you can be a good cattle man." (Nakano)

In his early years on the Parker Ranch payroll, Yutaka took turns working at several different jobs. Still a boy, he struggled with the hard labor involved in working on the land. But he also learned how to push himself and work harder than he thought he could in order to do his job.

He started out in 1919 harvesting corn that Carter had planted up in Waikii as a fodder for livestock. He wasn't able to keep up with the men assigned to his team, and soon they didn't want to work alongside him. Masajiro asked that the boy be reassigned so father and son could work together, and Yutaka understood that he'd need to work harder if he was going to do his share of the job. Over time he became more adept, and eventually, he and his father were working as fast as the other men.

Yutaka's next job on the ranch was at the Humuula sheep station for shearing season. Situated on the tableland between Mauna Kea and Hilo, Humuula supported a spread of 400 horses, 500 cattle and 23,000 sheep at the time. Yutaka was too small to shear, so he supported the workers by preparing meals, sweeping up, cleaning the shorn wool and performing other odd jobs.

Then he was assigned to help a gang of laborers who were building a new road through the mountainous region at Kemole II. He was making more money and supplied with three meals a day, but the job of hammering big rocks into little pebbles was a man's job, and too much for young Yutaka, who was exhausted by the work. His boss, Tommy Lindsey, asked A.W. Carter to reassign him.

Through it all, Yutaka remained a supporter of his family. He received an unpleasant reminder of their hardship one day when his mother sent him to the store for some rice, and the shopkeeper turned him away because his family owed too much money and had gone too long without paying. Yutaka resolved to work even harder to pay off his family's debt. In a single year of hard work, he paid off \$600 in debt. But \$300 remained.

Then in 1924 he had to go to A.W. Carter for a loan of \$50, to pay for a suit for his brother Masao's graduation ceremony. When Carter learned about the Kimura family's large debt, and how much Yutaka was sweating to help his parents, he offered some financial advice. He suggested Masajiro give up farming and sell the family's lease on their land, which cost \$50 a year. If the family moved to Parker Ranch, they would be given a house rent-free.

The plan worked – a Waimea farmer bought the lease for \$350, enough to pay off the last of the debt and to buy a new suit for Masao. The hard work and shrewd decision making earned Yutaka a reputation as an *oyakoko* boy, a fine example of filial piety.

About that time, Yutaka received his first assignment working for Parker Ranch as a cowboy. He worked at the Makahalau station alongside John Kaukokalani Purdy and learned how to work cattle. He only stayed for three years before being reassigned to another job, but it was valuable experience that he drew from later in life. Makahalau was a school in herding and culling cattle, as well as riding and roping. Yutaka astonished his fellow cowboys by his natural skill on horseback.

When he saw Yutaka become a full-fledged cowboy before the age of eighteen, Purdy kiddingly asked him, "Yutaka, you sure you not *hapa kanaka*?" (Nakano)

Yutaka seemed to find his niche at Parker Ranch when he was assigned to work at Puukikoni Dairy in 1919. At the time there were about 75 non-registered Holsteins, and four workers who milked the cows and made butter and cream to be stored in a stone cooler room.

It was at Puukikoni that Yutaka had an experience that would shape his future as a cattleman. When a cattle abortion sickness epidemic broke out at the dairy in late 1919, A.W. Carter asked a veterinarian from Cornell University to come to the ranch to help fight the disease. Yutaka worked alongside Professor William L. Williams, and began his hands-on studies of cattle health and medical treatment. Later in life, Yutaka's practical veterinary knowledge would be one of his greatest assets as a manager of cattle.

Williams was asked to return when a new dairy was built at Puukikoni in 1920, as a consultant on the dairy's daily operations. He ended up staying three years, a long opportunity for Yutaka to work with him and gain experience and knowledge. The young cattleman developed a serious interest in animal science, spent long hours studying and had plenty of questions for his mentor.

(The professor) shared his practical knowledge of many aspects of veterinary medicine, while working closely with Yutaka as if he were a graduate student. Professor Williams showed Yutaka techniques for genital treatment, pregnancy examination, treatment of the infected uterus and cystic ovaries, and removal of fetuses in difficult births and many other veterinary medicine techniques. (Nakano)

He also passed along books on veterinary science and journals of veterinary medicine, for which Yutaka had a voracious appetite. Later on, after the doctor left Parker Ranch, he kept in touch with Yutaka, answering the far-off dairyman's questions about breeding and health by correspondence, and continuing to advise and share his knowledge. Yutaka also sought to continue his scientific study of his animals on his own, for example by performing autopsies on cattle that died. Professor Williams was a big influence on Yutaka's development.

Yutaka worked for stints at the two other dairies on Parker Ranch, Palihooukapapa Dairy and Makahalau Dairy. In 1924, A.W. Carter recognized his hard work and natural abilities by making him a foreman at the new dairy at Puukikoni, increasing his pay from \$60 to \$120 a month.

Production at the dairy improved as Yutaka applied the scientific principles he was learning, instructing workers to improve the sanitation at all levels of the process. The quality of the milk went up, bacterial counts dropped dramatically, and the quantity produced also increased, to an average 24 quarts a day per cow.

The new breeding methods also paid off, with more and more quality cows each year. Yutaka took two Holstein bulls and two Holstein heifers from Parker Ranch to the Maui County Fair in October of 1921 and came back with a handful of prizes, including first prize, junior champion and grand champion for the bulls and junior champion for the heifers.

In spite of his success, Yutaka was demoted to assistant foreman by A.W. Carter in 1926, and a Scotsman from Honolulu was put in his place. It wasn't the last time he experienced disappointment in his career, but it was just one of many turns in his complex relationship with the Parker Ranch trustee and manager.

Nakano writes that Carter was a "benevolent dictator" who was strict but kind to workers and always looked after their welfare – a quality that is certainly seen in his treatment of Yutaka and his family – but also that Carter had an "undeniable racial bias," for example insisting that Japanese and Chinese visitors to his home be served their meals in the kitchen instead of at the table. Yutaka was eventually restored to his position as foreman, but demoted again in 1939 – according to Nakano, because Carter realized war was coming and thought it would be wise not to have any Japanese in leadership positions at Parker Ranch. The incidents only show that race was one of the many hurdles Yutaka faced in his young life.

Shortly after he was demoted in 1926, Yutaka was ordered by Carter to work at Hind-Clark Dairy in Honolulu, where he was to learn more about modern dairy techniques. But Yutaka wasn't happy about the change, especially since he had to leave his pregnant wife in Waimea, and the workers at Hind-Clark dairy were suspicious and unwelcoming of him. A request to return to Waimea was not granted by Carter, and after a while, Yutaka couldn't take it anymore and left Honolulu in secret, returning to his parents house to hide out. Carter discovered him, and ordered him back to work at Puukikoni Dairy.

Meanwhile, the dairy hadn't been doing well under the Scotsman's leadership, and Carter fired him. His replacement also struggled with the job, and Yutaka was assigned to assist him and bring the dairy back up to peak performance. He was promoted to foreman again in 1929.

The dairy thrived under the leadership of Yutaka, who drew on the techniques he had learned from Professor Williams and other scientific men. He kept detailed records of production, learned how to economize when feeding cattle, practiced careful pasture management, performed examinations on breeding cows, tried artificial insemination when a cow had trouble conceiving and assisted when a cow was having a difficult delivery. He delivered more than 200 calves at the dairy.

World War II came in 1941 – Yutaka had already been demoted again to assistant dairy foreman – and the war brought many changes for Waimea and Parker Ranch. Thousands of troops stationed in the area meant a huge demand for beef and large orders for the ranch. The war also meant that Japanese residents were under a suspicious eye. Yutaka was asked to come up with a list of at least 12 Parker Ranch Japanese workers who were suspect and should be imprisoned. After agonizing about the order, he refused, saying that there were no saboteurs or spies as far as he knew. As a result, nobody from Parker Ranch was arrested by the military police.

The same year he was demoted, Yutaka asked A. Hartwell Carter, A.W. Carter's son, to transfer him to another branch of Parker Ranch. He was made assistant foreman of cowboy operations, and two years later, he was promoted to foreman.

From 1940 Yutaka picked all the bull calves and selected replacements for breeding heifers, culling cows and older bulls. He was assigned to rearrange growing cattle and finishing market cattle, and to work on programs like when to brand, when to wean calves, where to place them and watch their growth, and finally to pick the finished animals for marketing in Honolulu and local markets. (Lewi)

Yutaka brought the same knowledge of good health and good breeding to cowboy operations as he did to the dairy. He focused on culling cows to promote a healthy and productive breeding herd, removing cows that had trouble conceiving, nursing or mothering calves, and culling any animals that were unhealthy, weak or unusual.

He was given more responsibilities, and was placed in charge of all the cattle at Keamoku and Waikii stations in 1945. He improved pasture, increased the size of the herd, and raised the quality by culling poor cows. From 1950 to 1960 he was in charge of all cattle operations from Makahalau to Paauhau. He helped the ranch change its bloodlines when he traveled to California in 1951 to select three Shorthorn bulls, five cows, a Hereford bull and a heifer, which were used for cross-breeding.

A big change came to Parker Ranch in 1959, when Parker family heir Richard Smart returned to Waimea to take over the ranch. Hartwell Carter retired that same year and, after a transitional period, Richard Penhallow was named manager. Accompanying the management change was a total reorganization of ranch operations. Penhallow, a retired military man, broke the business into three areas – breeding, growing and marketing – and put Yutaka in charge of marketing.

The ranch had already begun fattening some cattle in feeding pens on Oahu, so Yutaka made trips to the feedlots to see how they were progressing. Eventually, all cattle were put on feed.

But in 1964, after Penhallow had left the ranch, Richard Smart came to Yutaka and told him the ranch was deep in debt, and asked for help pulling out of it.

Yutaka knew full well the causes of the decline of the ranch – he went back to feeding lots of steers and heifers on grass. One year and six months later, at the end of 1965, as these cattle went to market, the debt was gradually reduced, and the ranch was revitalized. (Nakano)

Yutaka retired from the ranch in 1967, at the age of 62. He was frustrated with the decline of the ranch, but more importantly, he was long overdue for a break.

Early in his life, Yutaka had made a vow to himself that he would not work till the mandatory age of retirement because he had begun working so early in his life. (Lewi)

Since his retirement, he has continued to be recognized for his knowledge and experience. He was invited to Japan in 1971 to look at ranches there and suggest improvements. The same Japanese investor asked Yutaka to come to Australia to advise him on ranch lands there in 1972. And in 1973 he starred as a Parker Ranch cowboy in a Japanese television commercial for Cannon cameras, going on to appear in ads for shampoo, bulldozers and even a rice warmer.

Over the years, his contributions haven't been limited to ranching. He was instrumental in obtaining land from Parker Ranch for the site of a Buddhist church, and helped raise \$22,000 for its construction, he coached baseball and football teams formed by Parker Ranch employees, and helped Japanese with dual citizenship renounce their Japanese citizenship before the outbreak of World War II.

Although he struggled early in life, and had to do without many of the basic comforts most children enjoy, Yutaka grew up to be one of Waimea's most respected citizens, and one of Parker Ranch's most valuable assets. Yutaka never had to prove his skill – he didn't hunger after the glamorous, macho side of being a cowboy – and he was never afraid of hard work. Instead, he focused on the things that mattered most – growing healthy, productive cows and raising as many of them as possible. When it came to cattle, he was all business.