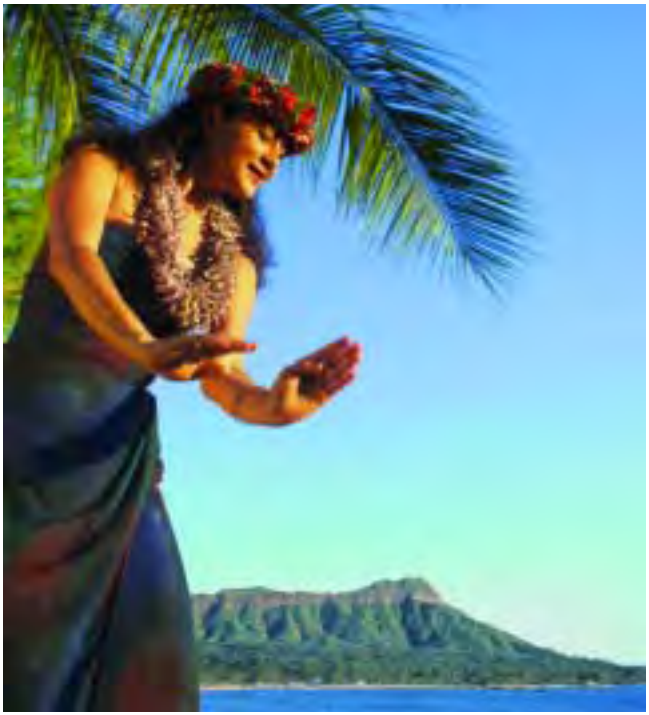
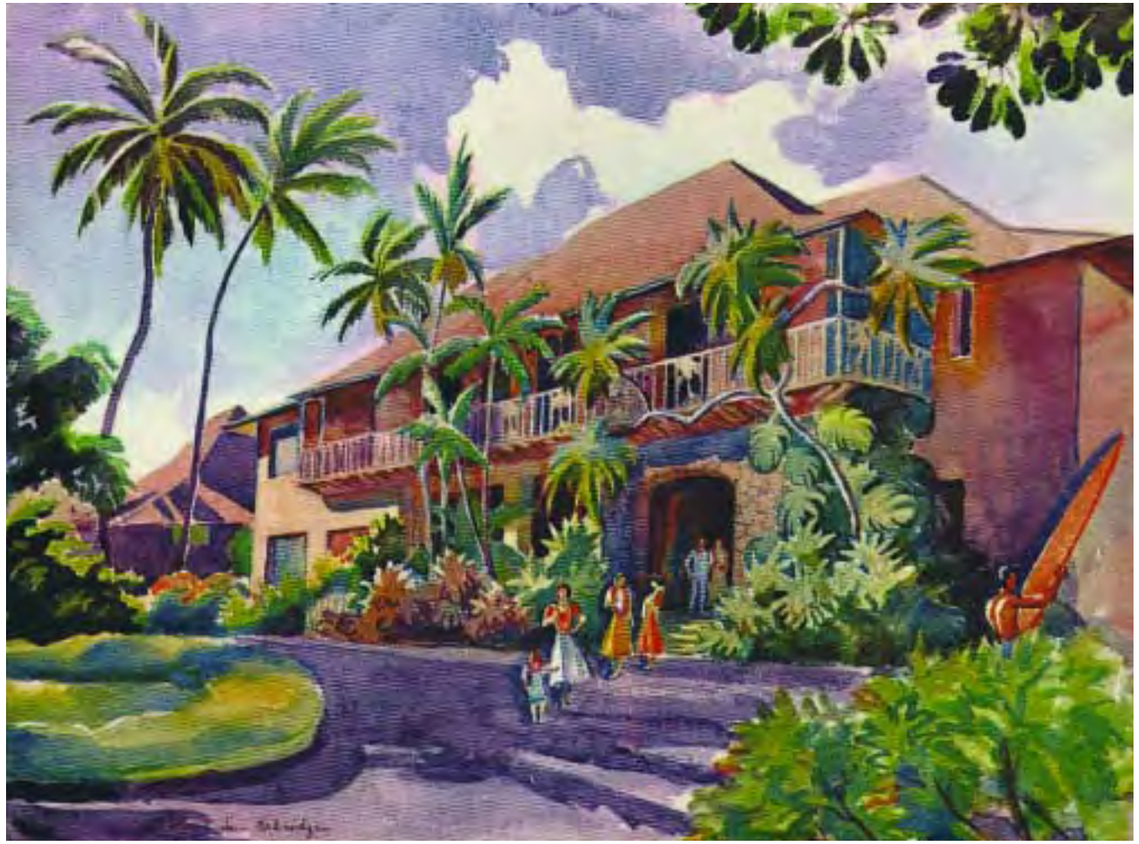


Halekulani®

On the Beach at Waikiki



HALEKULANI

Celebrity quotations used throughout the text are from Halekulani archives.

Photographs and illustrations are from Halekulani archives unless noted otherwise. This collection includes the work of several photographers, including Samuel Todd Dyess, David Franzen, Ric Noyle, Eugene Kam, William Waterfall, Jonathan Chuck, and Werner Stoy.

Photographs on pages i, 3, 12, 69, 70, 73, 74, 79, and back cover are copyright © Barbara Kraft. Used with permission.

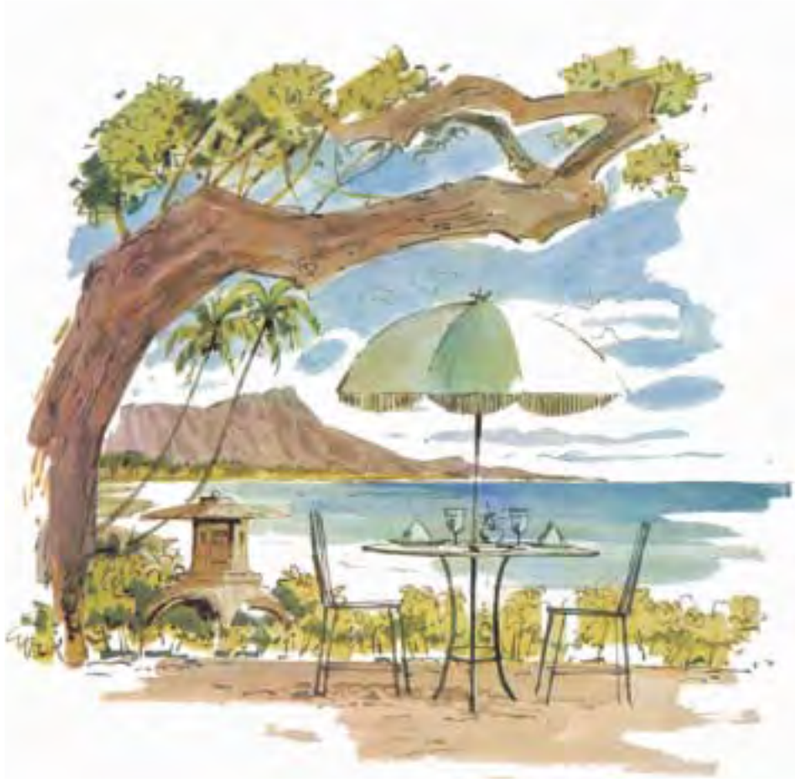
Illustration on page vi is courtesy of Hawaiian Antiquities, Inc.; photograph by Bruce Erickson. Used with permission.

Photographs on pages 14, 18, 24, 30–31, are from the collection of Bishop Museum. Used with permission.

Photograph on page 26 is from the collection of Hawai'i State Archives. Used with permission.

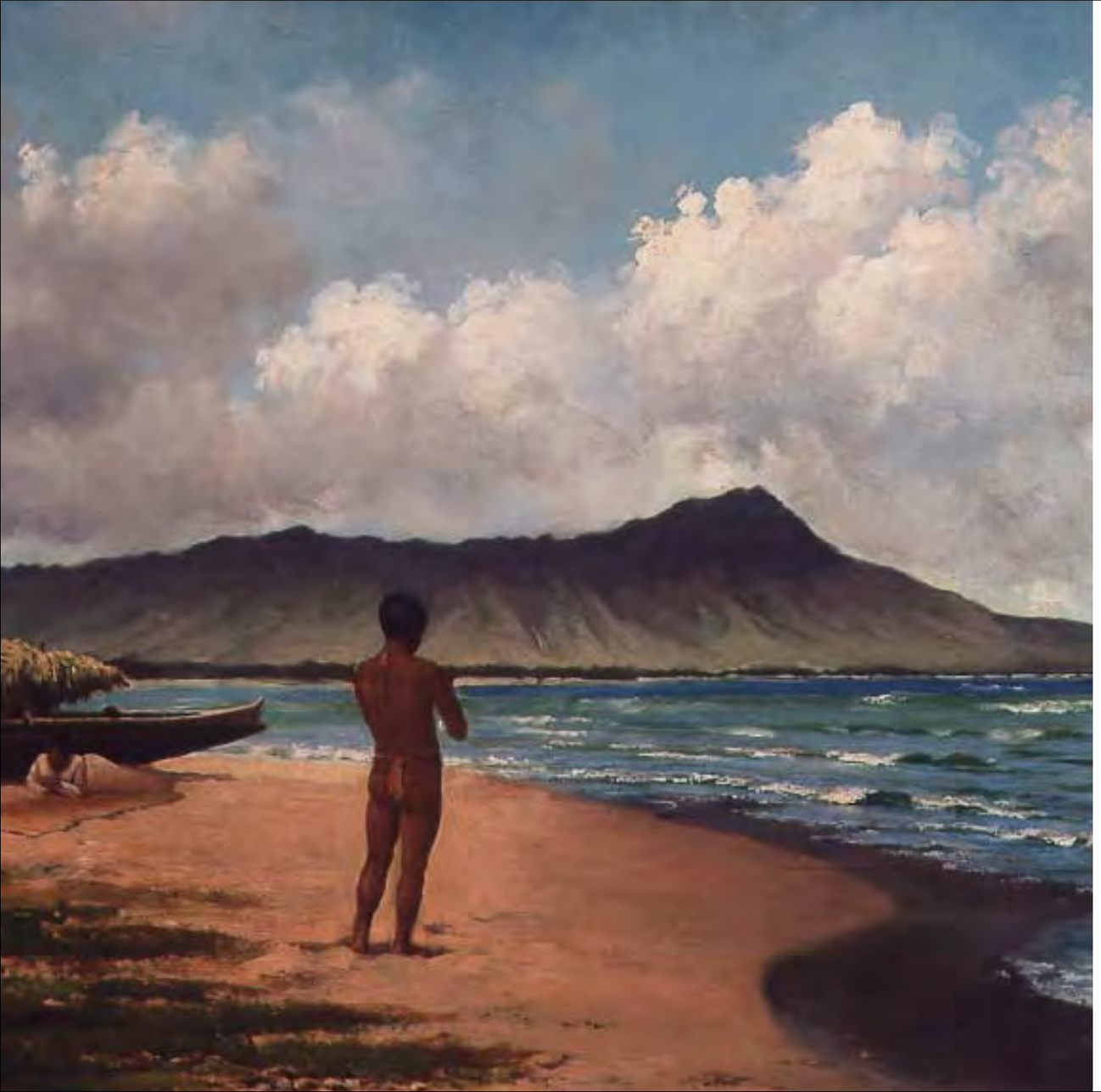
Designed and produced by Barbara Pope Book Design.

Printed in China.



A Gracious History

by Thelma Chang



The Loveliest Spot by the Sea

The earliest known radiocarbon date for settlement in Waikīkī, at the beginning of the second century, comes from the site of the Halekulani Hotel.

Once Polynesians strolled through Waikīkī and settled in the loveliest spot by the sea. They recognized quality.

Once native Hawaiians relaxed under shade trees that graced that site and stored their canoes near a businessman's private retreat. They appreciated the peaceful haven.

Once an enterprising couple erected quaint cottages and a main building on those lush grounds to create a resort that would become renowned as "Halekulani." They had courage.

And once visionaries imagined a Halekulani serene and spacious, reflecting the ocean in shades of blue and white, mirroring the Islands in tropical gardens of green, symbolizing an era when guest service shone in every detail. They created elegance.

opposite
Hawaiians at Rest, Waikiki (section). Oil on canvas by Joseph Dwight Strong, circa 1884.

Since ancient times, Hawaiians have enjoyed the natural beauty around them, from Diamond Head to the open ocean. Here, native Hawaiians appear in harmony with nature's bounty.

Halekulani continues its grand tradition of unsurpassed service. This five-acre resort offers guests of the twenty-first century the same timeless tranquility that guests of long ago found here. It's easy to see why.

This has been the most magical place to visit
and we loved every moment.
Thank you for caring for us so well.
John Major, former prime minister, Great Britain

Situated in the heart of Waikīkī, the 455-room Halekulani is an oasis of calm amidst the hustle and bustle of the city. You feel soothed from the moment you're welcomed by the doorman at the hotel's porte cochere. There, an ocean view appears like a framed painting.

opposite
Designed in the early 1980s, Halekulani's swimming pool became a trendsetter in aquatic art and beauty.

A short stroll through the lobby takes you to the Gatehouse, where two majestic *mahiole*—seven-foot-tall stone sculptures, weighing seven tons each—grace each side. As symbols of the crested feather helmets worn by Hawaiian nobility, the *mahiole* serve as fitting landmarks for an area that was originally intended as the gateway to Halekulani.

The sculptures represent the Halekulani experience as well, a regal ambiance enhanced by the resort's floral gardens, palm trees, open courtyards, skylights, waterfall, views of Diamond Head, and the cool ocean breezes that greet the senses. Guest rooms, most with ocean views, are located in terraced towers surrounding a spacious courtyard. Strolling through the grounds of Halekulani, you may find yourself a chance witness to an outdoor wedding, or happen upon a celebration hosted by residents and guests who want to share Halekulani's gourmet delights and gracious service.

Other ways of enjoying the Halekulani experience include exercising in the resort's fitness room, using the business center, and indulging in the spa. A highlight: Halekulani's signature swimming pool, where an attendant escorts you to a covered lounge chair and offers you a towel, sunscreen, magazines, and CDs, as you take in the splendid view of the ocean.

The pool itself is a work of art, glistening with more than a million glass tiles of varying hues of blue—from midnight to turquoise—and fading or darkening, depending upon the water's depth. A cattleya orchid graces the pool's center; the entire pool deck is covered with terrazzo. Many visitors get their first view of the pool from their aircraft as it approaches Honolulu's airport. From the sky, Halekulani's swimming pool glistens like a jewel.

Such distinction is also evident in Halekulani's historic Main Building, located on the site of the former Lewers home. This is a place where residents and guests may enjoy Lewers Lounge for music and cocktails, gather in the Living Room, or dine at Orchids, Halekulani's seaside restaurant where guests enjoy extraordinary cuisine. Breakfast, for instance, features Halekulani's legendary "popovers"—light-as-air rolls that have delighted guests for generations. And that's just for starters.

La Mer, the premier restaurant situated on the second floor of the Main Building, presents a feast for the senses. La Mer is known for its dazzling ocean views, romantic atmosphere, and dinners of fine French fare and fresh Island ingredients prepared

the La Mer way. So it's no surprise that La Mer has earned worldwide accolades, including the prestigious Five Diamond Award for fourteen consecutive years (1990–2004) from the American Automobile Association (AAA). It's the equivalent of the travel industry's Oscar, the coveted prize of the movie world.

The Main Building is worthy of its own Oscar. Originally designed by Island architect Charles Dickey, the Main Building was completed in 1932, and soon became a familiar landmark for generations of residents and visitors. However, age and deterioration took their toll over the decades, and the structure underwent major renovations during the early 1980s.

Today's elegant Main Building shows off that important effort, preserving the site's rich history in numerous areas: The open verandas. The columns. The fireplace. Lewers Lounge. The eucalyptus flooring in the living room. "The railings outside the building are the original ones," says an engineer who was part of Halekulani's renovation team.

The building is crowned by the refurbished and distinctive South Pacific high-pitched roof—known as the "Dickey" roof—which helps to keep the interiors cool. "Made of fire-proof asbestos slate and is steep like the Hawaiian grass huts," noted a Honolulu city inspector in 1966.*

Among the lovely spaces inside the Main Building is the Veranda, located next to the expansive green courtyard. Noted for its mid-afternoon tea service, the Veranda serves today as a popular spot for conversation, light refreshments, or simple reflection.

In the midst of busy Waikīkī, suddenly you see this very pristine hotel . . .
and the whole feeling changes. It does for me.
Suddenly you feel a sense of calm, of well-being and peace.
Kanoe Kaumeheiwa Miller, hula artist, House Without A Key

Enjoy a short walk from the Veranda and enter House Without A Key, another serene space that inspires feelings of a "picture postcard" time long ago. If Hawai'i's sunsets are stunning, sunsets at House Without A Key are spectacular.

As you sip your cocktail, the sun's last rays dance through the branches of the *kiawe* tree, cast a red-orange glow on Diamond Head and highlight a sparkling ocean. The tranquil mood certainly whets the appetite, shown by the fact that

opposite
Once the front porch of the Main Building, the Veranda today serves as an idyllic spot for meetings and conversation. Afternoon tea time is a Veranda highlight, when guests may indulge in a variety of refreshments and light snacks.

*From the 1966 City and County of Honolulu report "Significant Buildings Inventory."

overleaf
Designed to maximize the cool trade winds that breeze through the grounds, the Main Building maintains the charms of the past.

guests typically consume as much as 20 pounds of Maui-style potato chips a night and about 3,000 mai tai cocktails a month. (That's 7,300 pounds of chips and 36,000 mai tai drinks a year!)

The allure of the place surely sparked the creative juices of author Earl Derr Biggers, who stayed at the beach house during the World War I era.

"The House was actually 'Gray's Hotel' at the time and Biggers was living there, then stranded when the war broke out," wrote Richard Kimball in archival notes. (Richard was the younger of two sons of Clifford and Juliet Kimball, owners of Halekulani from 1917 through 1962.) "He used to come over by the *kiawe* tree and talk to Honolulu Sheriff Arthur Brown, who owned the house. . . . Biggers, Brown and my dad used to have a drink and talk."

According to Kimball's memoirs, Honolulu Police Department detective Chang Apana visited the trio's chat sessions by the sea and shared his experiences as well. The detective was a colorful character—a man who used to break up gambling sessions and attend football games at the old Honolulu Stadium carrying a whip and wearing a campaign hat. (Similar to today's "status" hat for bosses or supervisors.)

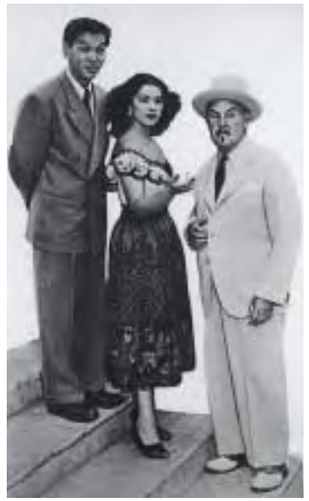
Chang Apana regaled the group with crime stories, including the opium scourge. "The Chinese plantation workers smoked opium," noted Kimball's journal. "They'd talk about this and the smuggling in front of Biggers and because he wasn't a local guy, Biggers' ears just wagged. So he created the fictitious character Charlie Chan, based on Chang Apana."

Biggers' Charlie Chan novel, *House Without A Key,* became a hit and led to a successful series of mystery books and movies. The inscrutable Charlie Chan, with his trademark mustache, has become part of movie history, racial stereotyping and all.

House Without A Key, named after the novel, is reminiscent of a time when Hawai'i homes needed no locks and keys. The restaurant's locale has long provided guests with a favorite seaside spot for a light breakfast, lunch, or cocktails in an informal setting. At twilight, guests delight in the hula performed by such graceful dancers as Kanoe Miller, who has entertained six nights a week, fifty weeks a year, since 1978. Miller performs twelve hulas an evening (four sets of three dances each) and dons a different costume and lei for each set. (That's more than 31,200 costume changes and 93,600 dances thus far.) She is accompanied by The Islanders trio, who offer Hawaiian songs of old under the natural canopy of the *kiawe* tree's long, slen-

opposite
Like Diamond Head, the sunset setting at House Without A Key has become a Waikīkī landmark, complete with live Hawaiian music and dance under the old *kiawe* tree.

below
Fictional Honolulu detective Charlie Chan was inspired on the grounds where Halekulani now stands. This scene is from *The Red Dragon,* one of dozens of Charlie Chan films made before 1944.



der branches, which bend with the wind. The scene illustrates the Hawaiian meaning of *kiawe:* "to sway."

Known widely as algaroba or mesquite, the *kiawe* literally spread its roots in Hawai'i when a Father Bachelot of the Catholic Mission in downtown Honolulu planted a seedling on O'ahu in 1828.

As for Halekulani's treasured *kiawe* tree, different versions of its origins exist. One of the more credible stories from a letter in the hotel archives tells of Florence Hall, who was born in 1884 in a building that was situated close to today's House Without A Key. She was about three years old when her father, William Wisner Hall, planted a tiny *kiawe* sapling held securely by a bamboo stake in the yard facing the ocean. This was a time when the yard extended thirty feet beyond the tree toward the ocean, and beyond that, another twenty-five feet of sandy beach.

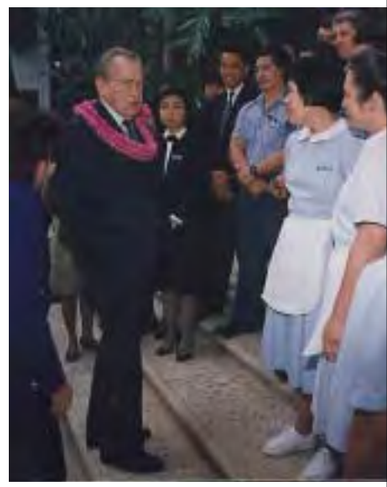
Regardless of who planted the sapling in the late 1800s, it is amazing to imagine that this tree has touched the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. This natural wonder has been a silent witness to generations of people who have visited one of Waikīkī's most inspiring spots, as well as to countless local residents. Recalls Sonny Kamahele, a longtime entertainer at House Without A Key: "We kids used to dive from the branches into the ocean. There was no cement walkway. When the tree was younger, it used to grow toward the ocean."

The intense, brilliant colors of Hawai'i dazzle the eyes when viewed from a room's lānai—from the blues and whites of the ocean and skies, to the reds and oranges of the sunrises and sunsets. Hawai'i's scenery is rich, complex, and sometimes overwhelming. Halekulani's guest rooms offer visitors a soothing contrast. Presenting a pale canvas of layers of white, the guest rooms are uncluttered and filled with harmony and light.

Thought I'd already been to "heaven" until I came to Halekulani. . . .

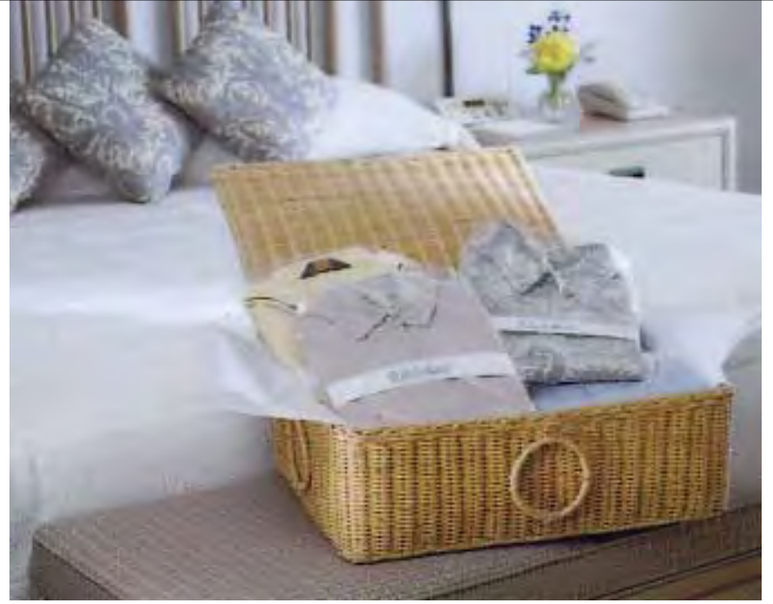
Eugene Cernan, commander of the last mission to the moon, Apollo 17,
and the last man to have left his footprints on the surface of the moon

Halekulani was a trendsetter back in the 1980s when it distanced itself from other hotels, whose rooms typically greeted guests with the silhouette of a television set



Former U.S. President Richard M. Nixon shared a Halekulani moment with hotel employees in the 1980s.

opposite
Members of royalty, celebrities, business tycoons, and individuals who sought a special kind of privacy were pampered at the hotel's own West Wing, which encompassed the grand Royal and Presidential suites.



Quality and thoughtfulness are behind Halekulani's personal touches. A guest's laundry and dry cleaning are returned in a basket, the items carefully folded in crisp tissue and binding.

opposite
A typically well-appointed room with a view includes fresh plants or flowers, three telephones, refreshments, plush bathrobes, and a lānai where guests may enjoy their meals and savor the panorama of Diamond Head and the ocean.

sitting on a desk. A Halekulani guest room, on the other hand, featured an armoire that hid the television, an amenity that soon became standard in other hotels.

Other furnishings and designs have been carefully selected by the architect, such as the Island-contemporary chairs and tables, shuttered lānai door, European bathroom fixtures, and a custom interwoven carpet. Then there's the ingeniously designed closet doors that slide open to showcase a view of Diamond Head and the Pacific. Guests relaxing in the bathtub are treated to a feast for the eyes.

That level of thoughtfulness extends to the Kohler deep-soaking tub, the separate glass-enclosed shower, the table mirror from France, the plush rug, three conveniently placed telephones, and other luxurious touches. Bed sheets, for example, come with the highest thread count.

Quality of employees. Quality of design. Quality of place. Quality of materials. And especially a time-honored quality of service that is constantly improving to uphold Halekulani's high standards and to accommodate the ever-changing expectations of guests. Quality is a prevalent theme throughout Halekulani's history.

opposite
Long ago, residents and visitors enjoyed a serene and uncluttered view of Diamond Head as seen from Halekulani's beachside.

On the shores [of Waikīkī] the villages appeared numerous, large and in good repair . . . the plains near the seaside presented a high degree of cultivation and fertility.

Captain George Vancouver, sailing on the HMS *Discovery,* 1792

Oral history handed down through the ages tells us that early Hawaiians viewed Waikīkī as a place of hospitality and healing. Gray's Beach, Halekulani's beachfront, was known for its "healing waters"–an area Hawaiians once called *Kawehewehe,* or "the removal." According to local legend, they brought their sick or injured here for treatment in the sea. An aromatic seaweed, *līpoa,* once flourished at this stretch of beach, so it is not surprising to hear age-old stories of sick or injured people who wore lei of seaweed and left them in the ocean as tokens of repentance.

From the air, you can see Gray's Beach and a freshwater channel streaming through the reef, all of which enhance Halekulani's oceanfront as one of the finest in Waikīkī.

Waikīkī's beaches, including Gray's Beach, offer far more than a beautiful setting. At the time of European contact (A.D. 1778), Hawaiians living in Waikīkī were flourishing primarily along the coastline, receiving sustenance from nature's bounty from the ocean and the mountains. Waikīkī was once the seat of power for O'ahu, and a significant region for the growing of taro, the nourishing staple food of native Hawaiians. Waikīkī also provided Hawaiians with a reef-protected beach that accommodated their canoes.

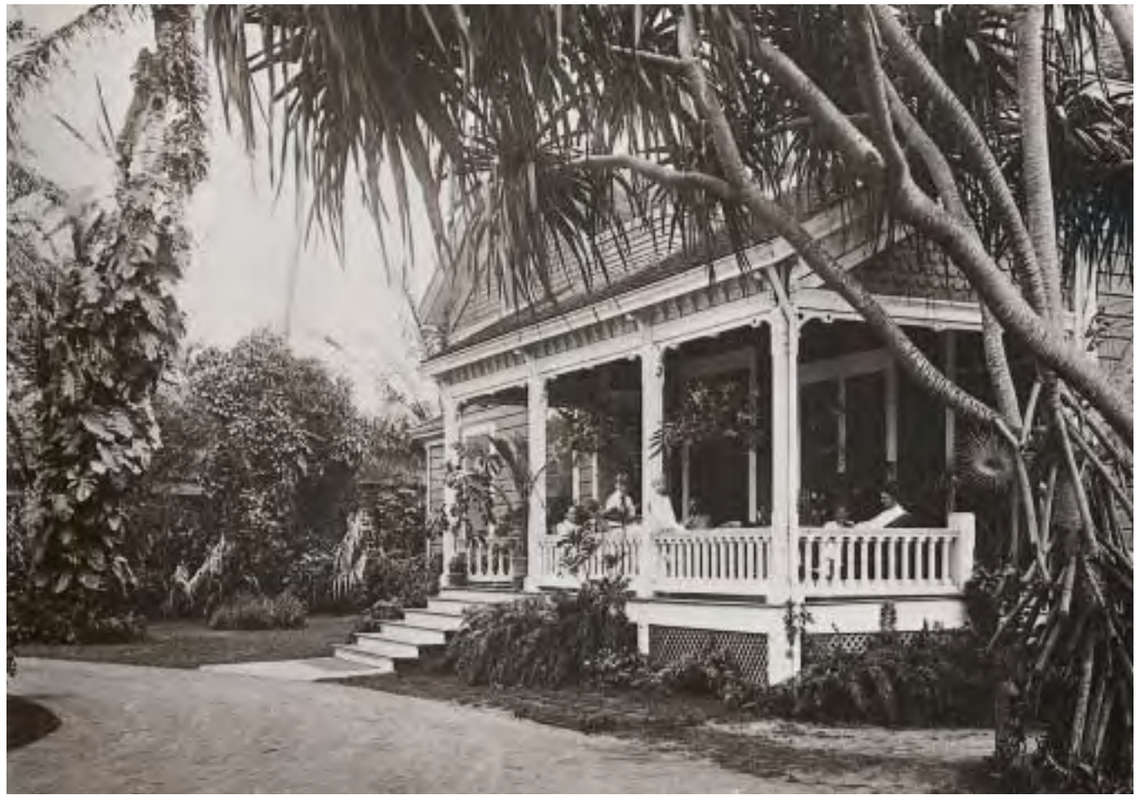
An early observer provided this snapshot of Waikīkī:

Artificial fishponds extend a mile inland from the shore . . . the ponds are several hundred in number and are the resort of wild ducks and other water fowl.

Andrew Bloxam, sailing on the HMS *Blonde,* 1825

Bloxam's view could easily have described the site of the future Halekulani, located at the base of today's Kālia Road, named for a district particularly rich in agriculture.

By the mid-1800s, Bloxam's snapshot of Waikīkī had changed dramatically. Recently arrived visitors could see only the remnants of an earlier time. Waikīkī's ancient *heiau* (sacred places of worship) were disappearing; fewer and fewer farmers tended their taro patches; the former coral rock home of King Kamehameha I was falling into ruin.



Built in 1883, the original Lewers House was a weekend retreat for family and friends. Decades before, Robert Lewers had listened to a cousin's stories about the "Sandwich Isles," left the East Coast, and built a thriving shipping and lumber business in the Islands. The Lewers House was razed in 1929 to become the site of the Main Building.

Native Hawaiians now shared their spaces with well-to-do foreigners, who built weekend retreats and mansions.

The drastic transformation ensured disaster for the native population by the third and fourth decades of the nineteenth century. Increasing American and European settlements, for instance, brought diseases such as smallpox to a previously unexposed people. Soon after the disease came to Hawai'i in 1853, killing vulnerable native Hawaiians by the thousands, a smallpox hospital appeared in Waikīkī.

Other foreign influences, including economic interests, different values, a new belief system, and a Western approach of privatizing land (the *Mahele* of 1848) further contributed to the decline of a people and the food sources that had nourished them for centuries. By the late 1800s, foreigners owned most of the estimated 260 formerly native holdings in Waikīkī.

Waikīkī had thus shifted from agriculture to residential—private retreats for Hawaiian royalty and Westerners alike. The latter in particular built weekend retreats and elegant mansions along Waikīkī's sandy beaches. One of them was Honolulu businessman Robert Lewers, whose firm, Lewers & Cooke, supplied much of the lumber for O'ahu homes.

"He was a very handsome gentleman and had an absolutely beautiful beard, very white," recalls Frederick Lowrey, whose grandfather was a partner and executive at Lewers & Cooke. "And the one thing I remember most was that he smoked a cigar. In those days, the men chewed cigars and had a spittoon. Mr. Lewers never missed."

Lewers built a two-story bungalow in 1883. Pictures of the day show a spacious wooden frame home with an open veranda overlooking a coconut grove on the *mauka* (mountain) side of the property.

The Lewers home was adjacent to property owned by Edward O. Hall, a member of King Kalākaua's cabinet, who had purchased his land in 1873 from Joseph U. Kawainui, a prominent native Hawaiian. Hall and his family eventually built cottages near the beach.

The area was especially beautiful, a fact that did not escape the notice of Hall's daughter-in-law, who had been born and raised in Wisconsin. She called the green expanse "Oneonta," an Iroquois Indian name that meant "place of peace."

opposite
Halekulani's grassy courtyard was once a dirt path that led the way to the Lewers House. After the Kimballs purchased the property, the family kept a horse and pasture at Lewers Road.

As for the name "Halekulani," one enduring story tells of Lewers extending his hospitality to fishermen, inviting them to beach their canoes and dry their nets under the sheltering *hau* trees along the water's edge. Grateful fishermen dubbed the spot "Halekulani," widely interpreted as "House Befitting Heaven." Another source, Edna Williamson Stall, describes Princess Likelike (1851–1887) as dubbing the lovely site "Halekulani," or "House Befitting Nobility."* The princess kept a Waikīkī family home, "Ainahau," a short distance from Halekulani.

**Historic Homes of Hawaii,* a book by Edna Williamson Stall, 1937.

The Lewers, Hall, and royal families were part of an elite neighborhood that included numerous other notables. Among them—Queen Lili'uokalani, King Kamehameha V, and Sanford B. Dole. The latter became Hawai'i's first president of the Republic of Hawaii in 1894, following the 1893 overthrow by American businessmen of Queen Lili'uokalani, the Islands' last reigning monarch.

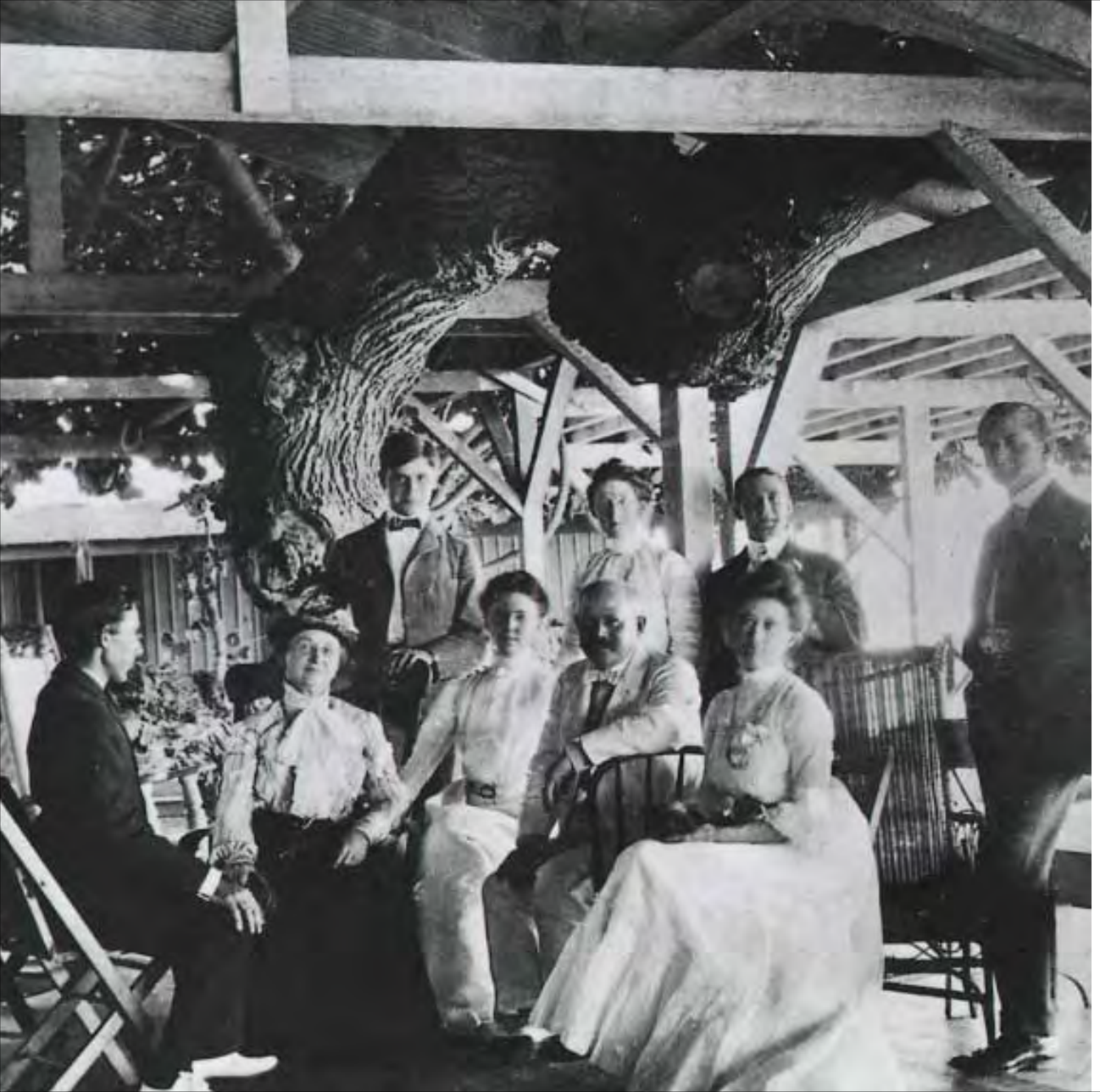
People traveled throughout Waikīkī during this era by means of horse-and-buggy, mule-drawn wagons, bicycles, or bare feet. From 1903, Honolulu Rapid Transit's electric cars carried people along "Waikiki Road," now Kalākaua Avenue.

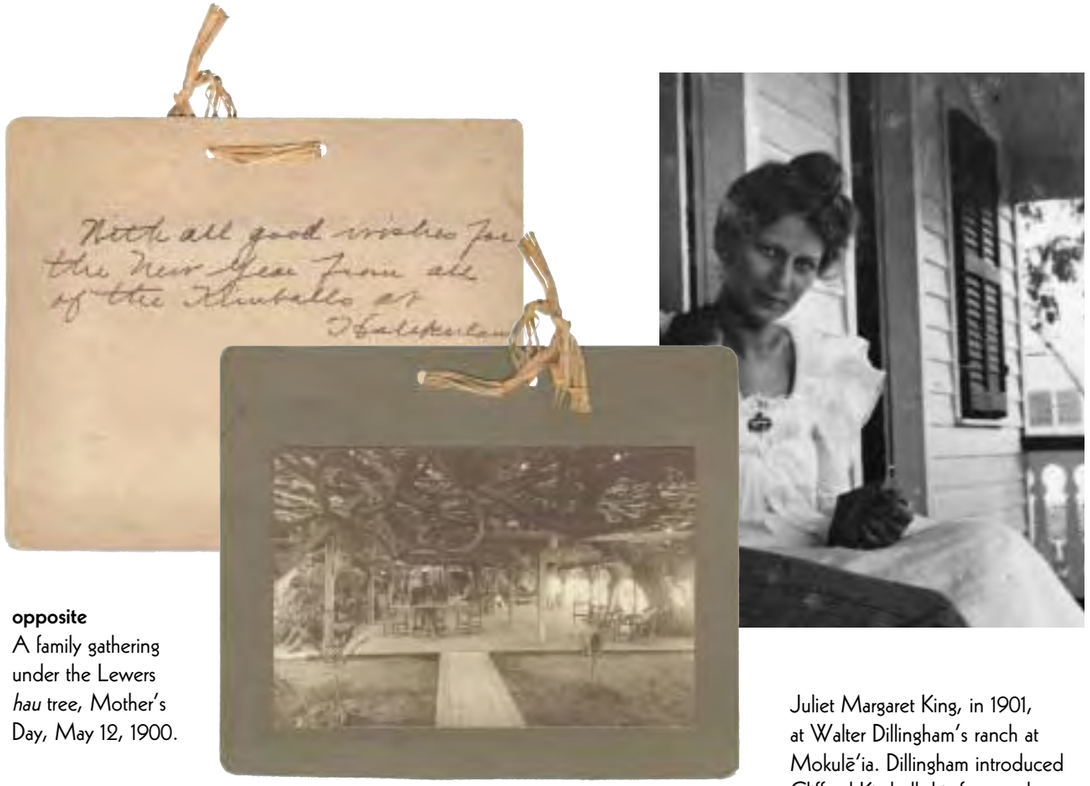
Non-native "sunbathers" reflected their Victorian times, paradoxically shunning Waikīkī's sun by wearing hats, heavy bloomers, and stockings that literally covered their bodies, while proper Victorian ladies strolled Waikīkī, clad in hats and gloves, and carrying umbrellas.

Honolulu journalist Edwin Irwin became part of this Waikīkī scene in 1907, when he leased the Lewers house and converted the structure into a small hotel called the Hau Tree, in honor of the many trees that shaded the beachside lawn. However, Irwin's enterprise faltered, his lease expired, and Lewers ran an ad for new tenants.

> *Despite its location and modest rent, the business they took over was little better than a boarding house. There were three guests the day they moved into their 40-guest capacity hotel.*
>
> From the 1979 booklet, "Hali'a Aloha o Halekulani," describing the start of the Kimballs' enterprise

In 1917, Clifford Kimball was managing the renowned Haleiwa Hotel on O'ahu's North Shore when his wife, Juliet, noticed the ad for a new lessor. The couple made the trek to town, saw the possibilities, leased the property for $150 a month, and





opposite
A family gathering under the Lewers *hau* tree, Mother's Day, May 12, 1900.

promptly restored the Halekulani name. The couple's humble start included the Lewers home, five bungalows, and a bathhouse—a total of twenty-one rooms for forty guests. Along with their two young sons, George and Richard, the Kimballs thus laid the foundation for a significant resort.

"I was six," wrote Richard Kimball in his journal of reflections. "A guy from the piggery in Kapahulu picked up our swill in a wagon pulled by a mule. The milk man came at 6 A.M. and made such a racket on the paved driveway, we arranged to have them leave the milk bottles by the entrance. Each employee, when he arrived, carried two glass bottles to the kitchen."

Juliet Margaret King, in 1901, at Walter Dillingham's ranch at Mokulē'ia. Dillingham introduced Clifford Kimball, his former classmate from Massachusetts, to Juliet. The Kimballs managed Dillingham's Haleiwa Hotel before taking over the lease of the small Hau Tree hotel in 1917.

A New Year's greeting from the Kimballs featured the restored name Halekulani and a picture of the Coral Lanai shaded by a *hau* tree.

Through the years, the senior Kimballs juggled their finances, obtained credit to construct new bungalows, and advertised in Mainland publications. Word-of-mouth brought the local community to Halekulani's doors, including a youth who "parked" his surfboard on the property.

"There was a wealthy man from the East Coast, who had a stroke, living in a seaside cottage at Halekulani and he said, 'Come out anytime, keep your surfboards out here,' so my brothers and I kept our boards at the cottage for many years," recalls Lowrey.

Lowrey, born in 1911, remembers that he and his brothers reached Waikīkī from the suburb of Mānoa by means of a circuitous route on the streetcar. "You had to go all the way out King Street to Kapahulu, then all the way down Kapahulu Avenue till you hit the beach. . . . Then you headed back west about a mile to get to Halekulani."

By the 1920s, the hotel and the owners' two sons—George and Richard—were flourishing under the guidance of the Kimballs. Guests from near and far dined under the shady *hau* trees on the seaside lānai and savored the picturesque sunsets that continue to inspire us today.

Thanks to Juliet Kimball's "green thumb," hotel staff members, plant donations from friends, and the work of her sons, the grounds blossomed with flowers, ferns, trees, and other foliage. Tropical gardens surrounded the resort's walkways, which wove throughout the property, providing guests with a feast for the senses—from fragrant plumeria and colorful hibiscus to numerous palm and breadfruit trees. Later, the Kimballs even managed to grow a grapefruit tree.

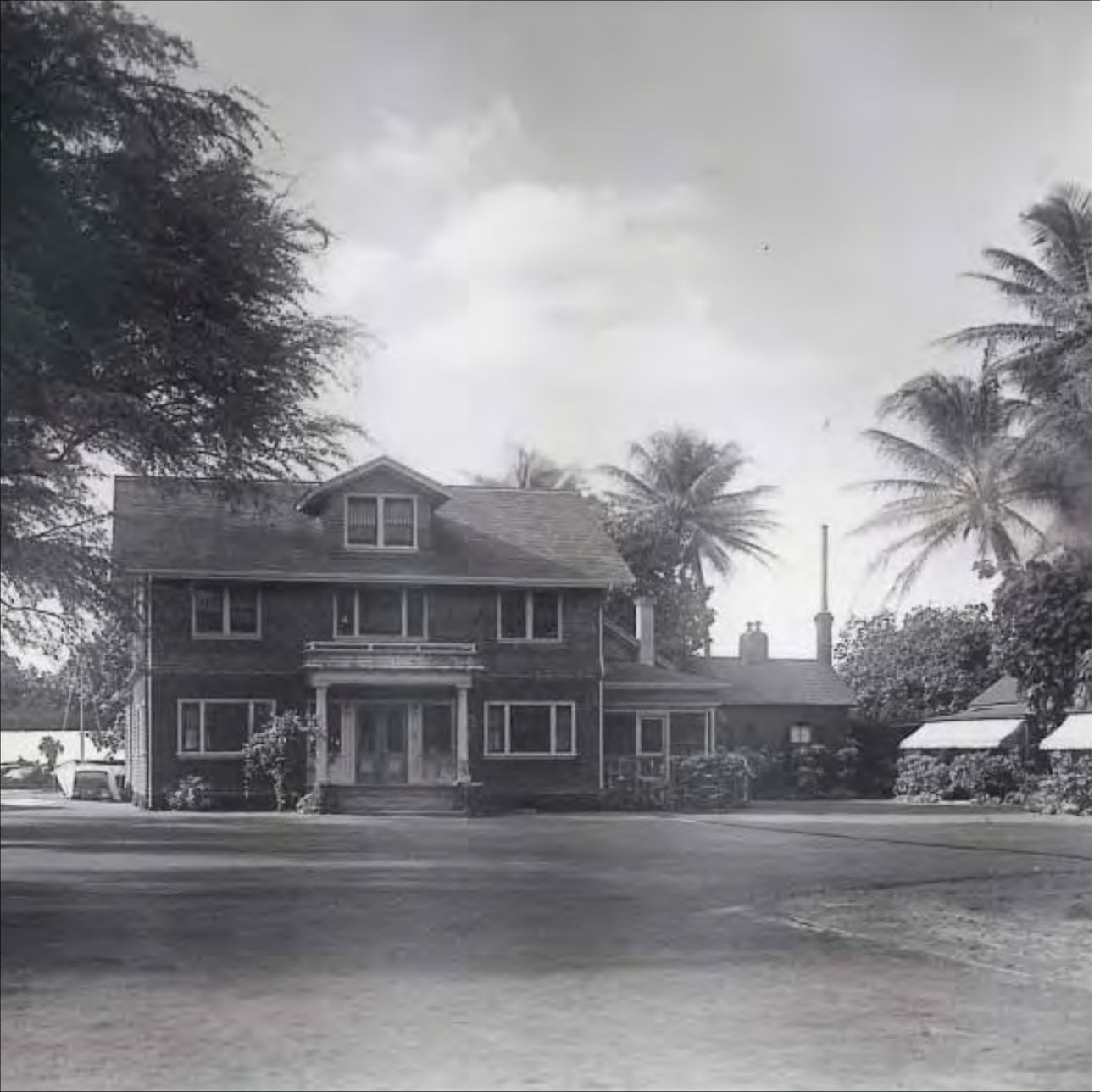
Juliet Kimball's grit and determination were an integral part of her character. Affectionately called "Mother Kimball" by her Halekulani family, she was usually dressed in white, including her trademark "sensible" white shoes. Old-timers speak of an observant, no-nonsense woman who patrolled the grounds with her cane, taking care of minor annoyances and keeping her eyes and ears open.

Recalls one former staff member: "One night, two young women from New Zealand were up in the breadfruit tree, drinking martinis, chattering, and giggling. Mrs. Kimball must have heard them from her cottage, for pretty soon the women heard a 'shuffle, tap, shuffle, tap.' The women shut up and she stood right under the tree for a while. They were up there, holding everything in and Mrs. Kimball couldn't find them."

A fashionable gathering under the *kiawe* tree, a silent witness to decades of human experience. Visitors of the era sailed to Hawai'i on luxury liners, sometimes with their own cars and staff.

As the Kimballs' gardens and business grew during the optimistic Jazz Age of the 1920s, so did the neighborhood. More of Waikīkī's ponds, wildlife, and agriculture disappeared with the construction of the Ala Wai Canal between 1921 and 1924. The new canal—three miles long and 250 feet wide—intercepted three streams from the inlands of Makiki, Mānoa, and Pālolo Valley, and provided a visible boundary between Waikīkī and the rest of the city.

By 1930, the Kimballs had acquired the Lewers property, nearby residences, and an adjacent site fronting a small pocket of white-sand beach. Previously, in 1912, La Vancha Maria Chapin Gray had rented a large beachfront house on the present-day



site of Halekulani, converted it into a boardinghouse and called the home "Gray's-By-The-Sea." The small white-sand beach soon became known as "Gray's Beach."

Gray's-By-The-Sea closed for business in 1928, when the Kimballs purchased the property for $150,000 from owner J. Atherton Gilman.*

The Arthur Brown home, today the site of House Without A Key, was acquired in 1926; visitors back then met for tea, card playing, snacks, lūʻau suppers, and other recreation. "There was funky furniture in the original House Without A Key at one time, carved Chinese hardwood furniture that proved daunting to young, amorous lovers," recalls Mary Webb Kimball, who married the Kimballs' son, Richard, in 1940.

Sunset time at House Without A Key became an especially glamorous place to be during the 1930s, when the exotic and "things Hawaiian" were popularized by entertainers such as Dorothy Lamour, Bing Crosby, Harry Owens, and Dolores Del Rio. Del Rio was cast in the original movie version of *Bird of Paradise,* released in 1932. Many other films followed—*Waikiki Wedding* (1937), *Honolulu* (1939), and *Hawaiian Nights* (1939)—to name only a few.

Visitors were attracted to the mythical romance of the Islands that the films presented—the smiling "hula girls," grass huts, exotic customs, swaying palm trees, and friendly native people. At the same time, such movies perpetuated simplistic fantasies about Hawaiʻi and its complex history.

Film industry magnates were attracted to Hawaiʻi's renowned beaches, especially Waikīkī. Photos from those times show famous celebrities posing with another lure of the Islands—Waikīkī's fun-loving beachboys.

Talented and athletic, beachboys could strum a smooth baritone ʻukulele, tell tall tales, glide the waves on gigantic redwood boards, while flirting with admiring young ladies. Hawaiʻi's beachboys also knew and respected the ocean. Like fish in the sea, the beachboys understood its depths, marine life, beauty, and dangers.

Exactly when or where the first beachboys appeared remains a mystery; however, we do know that their sharp ocean skills and generous, carefree way of life have become legendary through time. "Beachboys are a window to old-time Waikiki, for they were intimately connected to almost every aspect of it—the music, the water, the romance, the grand hotels and their celebrity guests," wrote Grady Timmons in his book *Waikiki Beachboy.*

Beachboys were well-established by the 1920s and 1930s, winning customers

**Thrum's Hawaiian Annual,* 1929.

opposite
The J.A. Gilman home in the early 1900s. It was converted into a hotel named Gray's-By-The-Sea, then became a series of cottages and stores after the Kimball family added the property to Halekulani.

with their charm and colorful nicknames. "In 1921, it cost $1.50 to hire a beachboy for one half of an hour of surfing and swimming; 35 cents to rent a swimsuit at the beach; 50 cents to rent a surfboard for an hour or longer."*

Exceptional surfers and swimmers such as Olympic gold medal recipient Duke Paoa Kahanamoku, Charles "Panama Dave" Baptiste, Molokai Horner, "Gabby" Makalena, John "Nabox" Napahu, Joseph "Scooter Boy" Kaopuiki, Chick Daniels, "Steamboat" Mokuahi, "Rabbit" Kekai, "Buffalo" Keaulana, and Harry Robello were some of the beachboy greats of Waikīkī.

Their reputations spread far beyond Hawai'i's shores. For example, Duke Kahanamoku, widely respected as the "Father of Surfing," introduced the sport to Australia. "Rabbit" Kekai, who used to surf with his famous "poi" (mixed breed) dog, Sandy, was honored in Costa Rica with a tournament named after him: "Toes on the Nose, the Rabbit Kekai Longboard Classic."

Other faces were part of the lively beach scene—Halekulani's own enterprising night clerks filled their daytime hours with ocean activities. Known for their prowess in the water, veteran employees such as the late Kenny Tosaki and Ralph Soong assisted Halekulani's beach attendants, offered canoe rides, and served as surfing, swimming, and sailing instructors. Those were glory days for Waikīkī's beaches.

Halekulani, meanwhile, was showing its age. Time, termites, and deterioration had taken their toll on the old Lewers house, so in 1931 a new, distinctive building—topped with the high pitched roofline suggested by Clifford Kimball to architect Charles Dickey—replaced the original house at a cost of $169,000. The public took notice.

"The building contractor was George Junji Oda, a Japanese, who has been twenty years in Hawai'i . . . The lobby has flagstone floor, walls of redwood and the desk in tapa design. [The Living Room] is a typical Hawaiian room, decoration in tapa designs and tapa colors, *lauhala* mats, wicker and cane furniture and the columns and beams redwood, sandblasted. . . . The furniture is Simmons, termite proof. The mattresses are Beautyrest, inner-spring."*

Inside, guests congregated in the spacious living room, relaxed on the open veranda, dined under the shade of the *hau* trees, and enjoyed a panoramic view of Diamond Head and the ocean. The Main Building's roofline theme was extended to the bungalows. On the surface, all looked serene in 1933.

The timing could not have been worse.

*Bishop Museum exhibit, *Walking Through Waikiki,* May 2000.

opposite
Tobacco heiress Doris Duke and crew members (left to right) Sam Kahanamoku, Bill Kahanamoku, and Sarge Kahanamoku await the start of a canoe race. Late 1930s.

**Hotel Monthly,* March 1932.

Before major renovations in the early 1980s, the grand tropical living room served as a main lobby. The fireplace and original eucalyptus floor remain.

Proud as the Kimballs were of their 115-room hotel, Hawai‘i did not escape the harsh effects of the 1930s Depression that economically devastated the Mainland.

Plan on meeting the payroll. I'll borrow money from the bank.

From a conversation between Clifford Kimball and Walter Crandall, Halekulani treasurer

Some of the wealthy continued to travel—anywhere, anytime. “It took four or five days to cross the continent by train before taking another five days on a boat to Hawai‘i, so about eighteen days would be taken up by travel alone,” remembers Gary Uchida, who started at Halekulani’s front office in 1932, when the hotel was only fifteen years old. “I recall a Mr. Hunt of Hunt Foods, who came here to see if there was a possibility of canning poi for baby food, since poi is very good for babies.”

Those visitors usually sailed from the Mainland aboard Matson Navigation Company’s luxury liners the S.S. *Matsonia,* and S.S. *Lurline.* Some brought along their own staff, private cars, and chauffeurs. Upon reaching Hawaiian waters, visitors were greeted by a view of Diamond Head, where the ship anchored for about two hours before a tugboat guided it for docking at Honolulu Harbor.

By that time, Halekulani employees had already picked blossoms from the hotel gardens and strung numerous flower lei. They would paddle a canoe out to the ship to personally greet every arriving guest by name and present each with a fresh, fragrant garland.

“Certain seasoned Halekulani front-desk clerks who provided beach activities for guests—surfing lessons, canoe rides and such—also took a motorboat to the liner, greeted the tourists leaning over the railing,” recalls Lawrence Chang, a former Halekulani Corporation executive who has witnessed the hotel’s changes since the Kimball years. “When tourists tossed coins into the ocean, the employees dove for them and displayed their ‘catches’ to the smiling visitors.”

By 1940, Halekulani was a 115-room property that consisted primarily of guest cottages with room rates that ranged from $6 to $9, including three meals. Guests also enjoyed a weekly lū‘au at a time when the gathering was mainly a celebration for family and friends. “The *imu* [underground oven] was prepared off property—everything else was handled on site,” recalled Jack Pearse, Halekulani’s assistant manager in 1940, who later returned to Halekulani frequently as a hotel guest.