

# Kaka'ako Makai

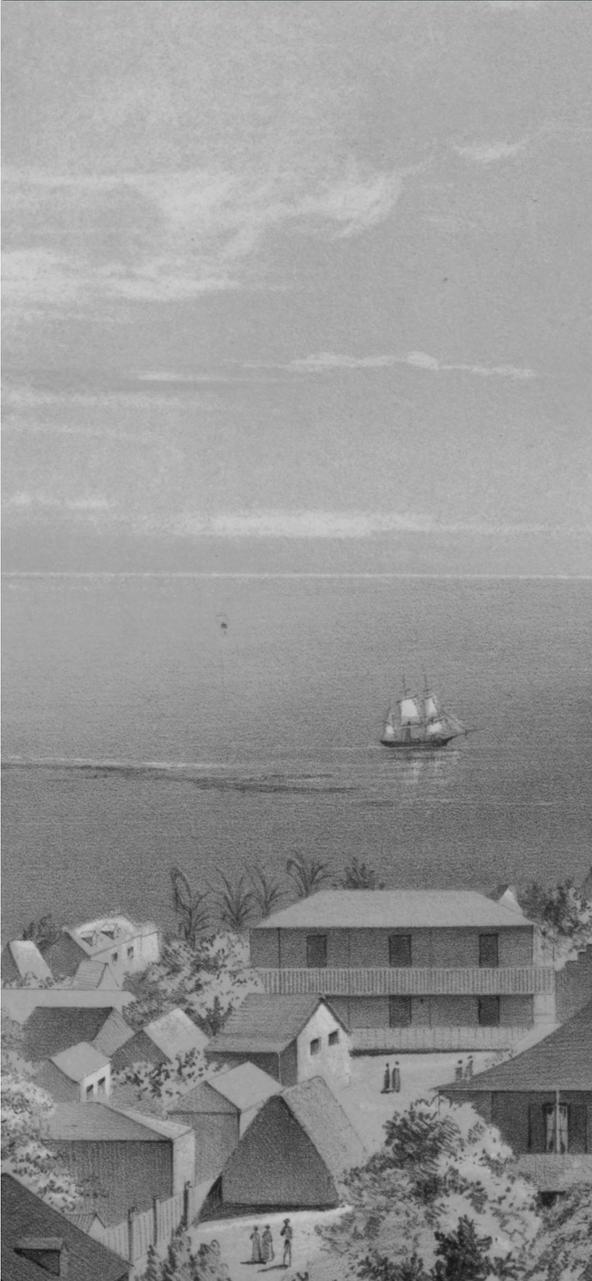
## Kaka'ako, Honolulu, O'ahu.

By Holly K. Coleman

On April 11, 2012, Senate Bill 2783 was signed into law by Governor Neil Abercrombie. The law transferred 30 acres of land on O'ahu in the area known as Kaka'ako Makai from the State of Hawai'i to the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA). This transfer settled claims of back-rent owed to OHA for the state's use of ceded lands at state airports, affordable housing projects, and state-run hospitals from 1978 to 2012. The lands transferred to OHA were valued at \$200 million.

Kaka'ako Makai remains a vital cultural and historical resource for Native Hawaiians and the broader community. The goal of this Information Sheet is to explore some of the cultural and historical narratives surrounding Kaka'ako. OHA seeks to steward these lands in a way that fulfills our *kuleana* (reciprocal responsibility) to Native Hawaiians and honors Kaka'ako as *wahi pana* (storied, noted, legendary place). In particular, the parcels at Kaka'ako Makai represent an important opportunity for OHA to develop and implement strategies that are rooted in traditional Native Hawaiian cultural practices and informed by Native Hawaiian epistemologies to cultivate meaningful and impactful stewardship.

Left: The *makai* (seaward) areas depicted include lands presently known as Kaka'ako. Source: Emmert, 1854.





Honolulu area with grass houses in a coconut grove; Choris, 1816. Source: Hawai'i State Archives Digital Collections.

## The Traditional Environment and Landscapes of the Kaka'ako Area

In the past, Kaka'ako was the name of a point of land and was also known as an *'āpana* (land parcel) and *'ili* (land section) (Kanepuu, 1877). However, the larger area now considered to be Kaka'ako was formerly known as Kukuluāe'o in the east and Ka'ākaukukui to the west. The *mauka* (inland) area was generally known as Kewalo (Pukui et al. 1974).

The coastal areas of Kaka'ako and Kewalo were well known for brackish marshes, fresh water springs, salt pans, and small fishponds (Pukui et al. 1974). Both areas were notable for containing *'ili lele* (parcels that are geographically separated but considered a part of one *'ili*). The fertile *mauka* lands of Nu'uaniu and Pauoa held *lo'i kalo* (irrigated taro fields) and *'uala* (sweet potato), while the *makai* (seaward) areas were rich fisheries (Handy and Handy, 1991).

## Place Names of the Kaka'ako Area

'Auwaiolimu	Kaholoakeāhole	Kuloloia
Honoka'upu	Kaka'ako	Māmala
Honolulu	Kawailumamuma'i	Pākākā
Honuakaha	Kewalo	Pūowaina
Kaaiopua	Kou	Pu'unui
Ka'ākaukukui	Kukuluāe'o	Waikahalulu

## Kaka'ako as a Place Name

Pukui et. al (1974) note that the word Kākā'ako can be translated as dull or slow, which may refer to the large quantities of slow-moving, standing water for which the area was known. Another translation of the name Kākāako could refer to the preparation of thatching; marshy areas like Kaka'ako were often ideal for collecting *pili* grass used for thatching (Thrum, 1922).





Urban Honolulu in the 1850s, with the marshes of Kaka'ako in the background. Source: Emmert, 1854. Hawai'i State Archives Digital Collections.

## 'Ōlelo No'ea

Native Hawaiian scholars Samuel Kamakau and Mary Kawena Pukui (1983) recorded *'ōlelo no'ea* (wise sayings) about surrounding areas which had an impact on life in Kaka'ako.

No Māmala:

*He kai 'au kohana Māmala.*  
A sea for swimming naked is Māmala.

People would travel naked along the reef to avoid meeting an enemy on land. (Kamakau, 1974: 44)

No Kou:

*Hui aku nā maka i Kou.*

The faces will meet in Kou.  
Kou was the place where the chiefs played games, and people came from everywhere to watch. (Pukui 1983, 120)

No Kewalo:

*Ka wai huahua'i o Kewalo.*  
The bubbling water of Kewalo.  
Kewalo once had a large spring where many went for cool, refreshing water. (Pukui 1983, 178)

## Kaka'ako in Selected Mo'olelo

In his travels establishing fishing shrines in Hawai'i, the god 'Ai'ai came to Kaka'ako, where he was befriended by a man named Apua. 'Ai'ai took a woman named Puiwa from Hānaiakamālama for his wife, and they had a son named Puniaiki. Angered by his wife's complaints one day, 'Ai'ai called upon his ancestors and caused a flood, which carried Puniaiki toward the sea. 'Ai'ai departed towards Kaumakapili. Puniaiki was caught as an *'o'opu* (freshwater goby fish) and cared for by Kikihale, the daughter of the great chief Kou (Thrum, 1907).

On her circuit of the Hawaiian Islands with her companions, the goddess Hi'iaka wished to travel to Waikīkī from Pu'uloa. In a chant, Hi'iaka mentions a pond at Ka'ākaukukui, perhaps referencing the salt ponds in the area (Cultural Surveys, 2009).



The Honolulu Waterfront in the 1850s, including Kaka'ako. Source: Moody, 1873.

## The Māhele and Kaka'ako

The areas which make up present day Kaka'ako were parceled out beginning in 1848 during the Māhele, which was a series of laws that created legal mechanisms for land privatization in Hawai'i. The whole 'ili of Kewalo, Kukuluāe'o, and Ka'ākaukukui were awarded to individuals, while other 'ili in the area, such as Kaka'ako, Pualoalo, Pu'unui, Ka'ala'a, 'Auwaiolimu, Honuakaha, and 'Āpua were divided among many applicants (EDAW, 2009).



Hawaiian couple making poi; Biggs, n.d. Source: Hawai'i State Archives Digital Collections.



The extensive reef, dumping grounds and Immigration station at Kaka'ako are depicted, in this map. Source: Wall, 1893. Hawai'i State Archives.



Honolulu at 20 Queen Street, circa 1900. Photographer Unknown. Source: Hawai'i State Archives Digital Collections.

## Urbanization: 1850s to 1950s

Salt-making and fishing activities continued in Kaka'ako during the early and mid nineteenth century. However, increasing urbanization would dramatically alter the landscape from one that was dominated by productive fishponds and wetlands to one that was dominated by large industrial complexes; these changes would negatively affect traditional cultural practices in the area.

## Dredging and Infilling

Extensive dredging in rapidly urbanizing Honolulu occurred between the mid 1800s and the mid 1900s. Dredging activities forever altered the geography and ecology of Kaka’ako. A dumping ground was established on the productive reef at Ka’ākaukukui. Modern Kaka’ako Makai sits on land that was formed by infilling the reef with dredged material, debris, trash, and incinerator ash.

## Tenements in Kaka’ako

Despite the many economic activities occurring in urban Honolulu, Kaka’ako would become known for its poverty. Magoon Block mostly housed bachelors and orphans. Temporary settlements of poor people, most of whom were Native Hawaiian, were established at “Blue Pond” and “Squattersville.”



Above: Aerial view of Honolulu, including Kaka’ako, 1931. Source: Hawai’i State Archives Digital Collections. Bottom: The Kewalo area of Honolulu with Diamond Head in the background. Source: Baker, 1938. Hawai’i State Archives Digital Photo Collection.

## Selected Timeline of Development: 1800s–1900s

1853– A small pox Quarantine Camp and hospital are set up in Kaka’ako.

1857– Honolulu Fort is demolished, an esplanade is created at Waikahalu’u.

1874– The Transit of Venus Observatory is built at ‘Āpua.

1874– Sand Island is formed by covering the tidal island Kahaka’aulana with dredged material from Honolulu Harbor.

1881– A hospital and Receiving Station for Hansen’s Disease patients is set up.

1899– Fort Armstrong is built on Ka’ākaukukui Reef

1905– Kaka’ako Incinerator is built.

1905– An Animal Quarantine Station is built in Kaka’ako.

1905– An Immigration Station is set up.

1911– Cholera outbreak

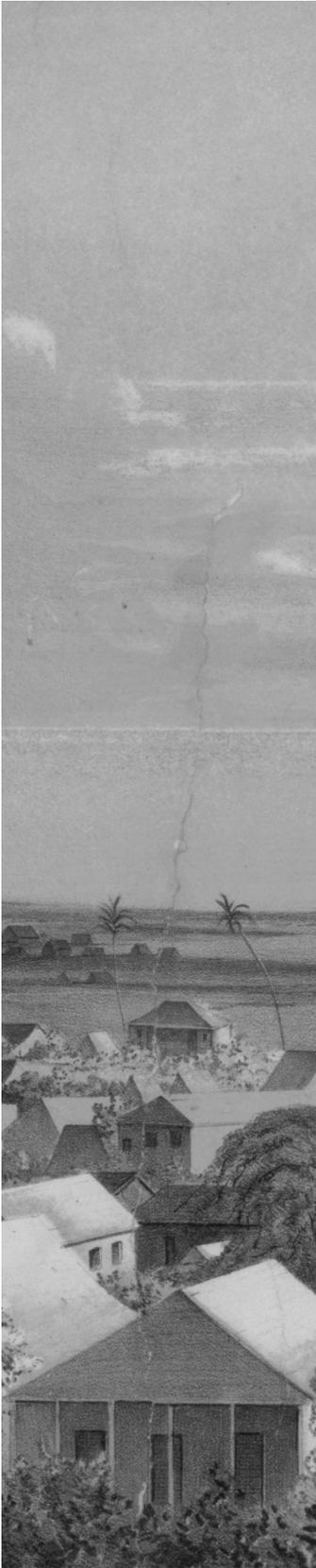
1914– Magoon Block completed.

1920s– The Territory Government razes settlements at Blue Pond and Squattersville in Kaka’ako, forcing inhabitants to move.

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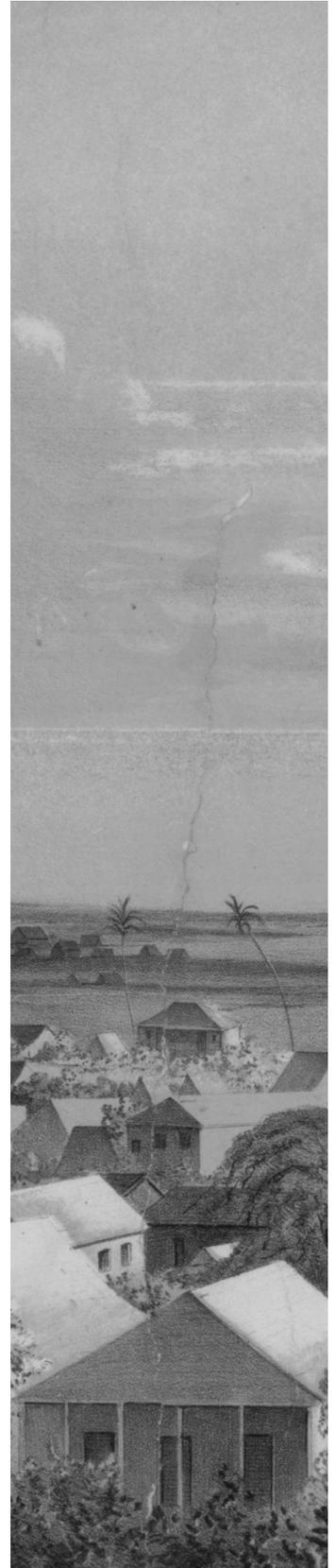
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Source: Emmert, 1854.



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Source: Engraving by Paul Emmert, 1854.