

## HALEKOA

by

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Shabby, decaying, and deserted, a toy castle on Hotel Street falters toward its hundredth year. This is Halekoa--"the barracks"--known variously as the Military Barracks, the Royal Barracks, and finally as Iolani Barracks, the name bestowed during Kalakaua's reign, and the name it bears today.

Halekoa was a part of the ambitious building program undertaken by the Hawaiian monarchy in the 1860's and '70's. The buildings which remain today, besides Halekoa, are Aliiolani Hale (the judiciary building), the Royal Mausoleum, the old post office at the corner of Merchant and Bethel Streets, and Iolani Palace. The site occupied by the barracks is doubly interesting, for it first accommodated the Chiefs' Children's School, which was begun in 1839 by Mr. and Mrs. A. S. Cooke, and which was moved in 1851 to the lower slopes of Punchbowl.<sup>2</sup>

Those who cavil at the leisurely pace of modern capital improvements will not be surprised to learn that it took four years to get Halekoa off the drawing boards and onto the ground.

Theodore C. Heuck, a Honolulu merchant and gifted amateur architect from Germany, submitted his original plans on March 14, 1866, to John O. Dominis, then Governor of Oahu.<sup>3</sup> The sketches provided for a structure with a frontage of 70 feet and a depth of 80 feet, built around a 30x40-foot open central court. Heuck estimated a cost of \$10,000, specifying stone walls and a slate roof.<sup>4</sup>

This was early in the reign of Kamehameha V. Years passed. Finally, early in 1870, the project began to move, although slowly. The post office was being built at the same time, and a shortage of proper workmen delayed both jobs.<sup>5</sup>

Halekoa did not appear in the appropriations bills passed by the various legislatures. It was financed by the War Department as a part of military expenses, and cash as needed was deposited with the banking firm of Bishop and Company.<sup>6</sup>

Foundations were being laid in May, 1870.<sup>7</sup> The barracks account sheet, which ran from March 5, 1870 to October 9, 1871, showed a total outlay of \$25,103.78.<sup>8</sup> J. G. Osborne was the builder. Participating suppliers included, among others, such well-known Honolulu houses as E. O. Hall and Son, Dowsett and Co., A. S. Cleghorn, Lewers and Dickson (predecessors of Lewers and Cooke), the Honolulu Iron Works, J. T. Waterhouse, H. Hackfeld and Co. (now American Factors)--and Oahu Prison.<sup>9</sup>

Halekoa was made of the ever-useful coral blocks hewn from the Honolulu reef. As often happened, many blocks were cannibalized from other structures, rather than chopped from the reef. Most of the second-hand building blocks came from the wall fronting the old post office, and from the old printing office.<sup>10</sup> But the reef had to

yield up its treasures too, and Marshal W. C. Parke received credit for 204 man-days of prison labor, at fifty cents a day, for the hauling of blocks therefrom.<sup>11</sup>

By mid-February, 1871, both the barracks and the post office were nearing completion.<sup>12</sup> Finishing touches on the former, however, required several more months.<sup>13</sup> An exotic example of this, among the accounts to be found today in the Archives of Hawaii, is a bill dated May 20, levying a charge of \$12.50 for painting spittoons.<sup>14</sup>

Even before it was completed, Halekoa was rushed into service. At the end of February a considerable number of soldiers were sick, and the new barracks was requisitioned as an infirmary.<sup>15</sup>

Halekoa's cost was, of course, more than double Heuck's original estimate. This is accounted for by certain changes made in his plans. He had drawn but one main entrance facing Hotel Street, then called Palace Walk. However, the completed Halekoa had two identical entrances. Heuck's front approach was duplicated on the Beretania Street side, with an entranceway literally added to the plain back he had designed. Again, a wing was built on the ewa (west) side.<sup>16</sup> Originally it was some 48 feet long. The size of the inner court was increased to approximately 34x54 feet, also.

Jane Silverman of the Archives of Hawaii and this writer, provided with keys and a measuring tape, conducted an exploration of Halekoa in the summer of 1962. The gate and front rooms were found to be exactly as specified in Heuck's 1866 plan, and these rooms were reproduced in the added Beretania Street entrance. The court, however, as completed was larger than originally planned. The side galleries were built longer than Heuck at first specified, because of the lengthening of the court, and about two feet narrower, because of the widening of the court, making them 18 feet rather than 20 feet in width.

Halekoa today differs from the original plans in at least five particulars:

1. The central court has been roofed over, floored, and the veranda that once ran around it has been removed.
2. The ewa, or west, wing has been extended some 22 feet toward Beretania Street.
3. An even more recent addition, a wedge-shaped extension, has been run across the Beretania Street entrance. The angled side follows the fence line of adjoining property.
4. A lean-to shelter roof has been constructed on the waikiki (east) side.
5. The openings in various walls have been changed. On the waikiki side a number of doors have been cut through. The ewa wing, which originally contained three windows, has been cut up to provide additional doors and windows.

Iolani Barracks displays a service record almost as complicated as its building alterations. The barracks was made originally to house the regular standing army of the Kingdom of Hawaii, the small force known in the early 1870's and before as the Household Troops. Their function was to guard the palace, the prison, and the treasury, and to appear at various parades and ceremonies.<sup>17</sup>

In September, 1873, the Household Troops mutinied. They barricaded themselves in Halekoa and from its roof harangued the sympathetic mob below.<sup>18</sup> After the mutiny the troops were disbanded, then later reorganized, and under one title or another they continued to occupy Halekoa throughout the remaining period of the monarchy.

Liliuokalani's Household Guards, Captain Samuel Nowlein commanding, surrendered to the revolutionary Provisional Government about five o'clock on the afternoon of January 18, 1893.<sup>19</sup> The Guards were paid off and disbanded; the Provisional Government took over munitions stored in the barracks and at once occupied the building with a strong force.<sup>20</sup> This government and the succeeding Republic of Hawaii used Halekoa to house their military.<sup>21</sup>

After Hawaii was annexed to the U. S., President McKinley issued an executive order (December 19, 1892) transferring the barracks and the barracks lot to the control of the U. S. War Department.<sup>22</sup> Thereupon, Halekoa was occupied by the Quartermaster Corps of the U. S. Army and used for office and warehouse space.<sup>23</sup> Quartermaster use continued until late in 1917, when the Corps moved out. At that time the War Department planned to preserve Halekoa as a historic structure. For the first time in its long and colorful history, the old barracks ceased to be a station for soldiers.<sup>24</sup>

This dignified retirement was destined to be of short duration. In the summer of 1920 an elaborate remodeling job was in progress. Old partitions came down, the roof was ceiled horizontally, glass doors replaced the thick wooden slabs, and a fine hardwood floor was laid. Halekoa was about to make its debut as a service club.<sup>25</sup> A frame transient dormitory was erected on the waikiki side for visiting service personnel.

The service club phase lasted about a decade. During this time Halekoa was the scene of annual meetings of the Old Guard, composed of veterans of forces supporting the Republic of Hawaii.<sup>26</sup> It was used, also, by the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Spanish War Veterans, and for miscellaneous Army activities, including military funerals.<sup>27</sup>

Early in 1928 the barracks was stripped of the thick covering of vines obscuring it, and the transient dormitory was abandoned. All structures, including a number of lean-tos, were removed from the yard, and at the beginning of 1929 Halekoa got a dazzling finish of white paint.<sup>28</sup>

November, 1929, found Governor Lawrence Judd trying to get President Hoover to issue an executive order returning the barracks to the Territory. The Hawaii National Guard wanted Halekoa for its headquarters, in order to release the Armory to the 398th Infantry.<sup>29</sup> Judd was successful, and the transfer took place officially on March 16, 1931, after an informal turnover of authority in January. But the Hawaii National Guard did not benefit from it. Instead, the barracks became the offices of the supervising school principals for Honolulu and Rural Oahu.<sup>30</sup> Their occupancy ended--reluctantly--in March, 1934; at that time the Guard moved in with obvious pleasure.<sup>31</sup>

Considerable excitement arose in June, 1937, when a dank, sealed

so-called dungeon, guarded by a rusty iron door, was discovered beneath the floor. The finding of this vault revived old rumors of the existence of a tunnel connecting Halekoa and Iolani Palace. A search took place, but it revealed nothing more than a system of crumbling ventilating pipes. Colonel Arthur Coyne, a member of the militia occupying the barracks at the time of the monarchy's overthrow in 1893, recalled that the "dungeon" had been built at that time to store munitions.<sup>32</sup>

Another interior renovation of Halekoa occurred in the summer of 1939.<sup>33</sup> World War II came, and the Guard continued to use the aging barracks. Midway in that war (October, 1943) an imaginative postwar plan for Halekoa was announced. It was to become a military museum. Interested civic groups and individuals pledged to participate in planning and financing the project.<sup>34</sup>

But the plans never materialized. The pressure for office space doomed Halekoa to a series of repairs, renovations, and remodelings as various government agencies succeeded one another in their occupancy of the barracks.<sup>35</sup> During the course of the most thorough refurbishing, in 1948, the old tunnel question was resurrected--and later reburied.<sup>36</sup> About this time rumors made the rounds that Halekoa was to be torn down as part of a beautification program and reassembled elsewhere as a museum.<sup>37</sup>

In November, 1960, Halekoa was embarrassed to find itself encumbering the site of a proposed multi-million-dollar state capitol. Although regarded in some quarters as an antiquarian nuisance, the barracks managed to cling to existence as officials delayed their decision regarding its disposition. On November 4 the late Commission on Historical Sites, in one of its last acts, placed a commemorative plaque on the grounds.<sup>38</sup> The plaque reads:

#### IOLANI BARRACKS

BUILT IN 1870 DURING THE REIGN OF KING  
KAMEHAMEHA V. USED BY THE ROYAL HOUSEHOLD  
GUARDS UNTIL THE OVERTHROW OF THE MONARCHY  
IN 1893, AND LATER BY THE CITIZENS GUARD  
AND NATIONAL GUARD. THE ARCHITECT WAS  
THEODORE HEUCK.

In July, 1961, the State Treasury Department was in command at Halekoa. On the 26th the State Administrative Director declared his intention to ask for its condemnation--but not its destruction.<sup>39</sup> Following this, the State remodeled the former Schuman Carriage Co. premises on Beretania Street for the use of the Treasury Department and other agencies, and on March 15, 1962, Halekoa was abandoned.

Today Honolulu's grizzled fortress is locked and forlorn, used only as a storage place for voting machines. Plans for the new capitol call for the barracks' removal to some unspecified site.<sup>40</sup> But no one can say at this point where Halekoa will be in the decade ahead, or just what it will be. One thing is certain: It deserves a far better fate than to be just a memory at its centennial in 1970.



NOTES

1. Typewritten MS, R. S. Kuykendall, "Iolani Barracks, Site of the Chiefs' Children's School", p. 1. All sources cited in this article are to be found in the Archives of Hawaii.
2. Mary A. Richards, The Chiefs' Children's School... (Honolulu: Honolulu Star-Bulletin, Limited, 1937), pp. 29; 348.
3. Army and Navy File, Kingdom of Hawaii, 1856. Includes Heuck's letter to Dominis and accompanying plans. The letter and plans were filed here mistakenly because of a small mutilation, probably caused by an insect, which made 1866 appear to read 1856. A number of accounts have perpetuated the 1856 date, but there can be no doubt that they are in error. Heuck's scrapbook contains a set of drawings dated 1866. Furthermore, Dominis did not become Governor of Oahu until February 18, 1864. The letter and plans have been re-filed.
4. Ibid.
5. Hawaiian Gazette, February 8, 1871.
6. Numerous account sheets testify to this. See Army and Navy File, Hawaiian Kingdom, 1870 and 1871.
7. See receipts given by J. G. Osborne to R. Stirling, Superintendent of Public Works; dated May 21 and May 28, 1870, in Army and Navy File, January-June, 1870. Apparently there are no existing documents testifying to the actual beginning date of construction.
8. Account sheet, "New Barracks", Army and Navy File, January-June, 1870.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid. See also letter, H. M. Whitney to J. O. Dominis, February 25, 1870, Interior Department Land File, Kingdom of Hawaii, February, 1870.
11. Account sheet, "New Barracks".
12. Hawaiian Gazette, February 8, 1871.
13. See numerous bills and receipts, Army and Navy File, 1871.
14. Bill of Lucas and Wiggins, Army and Navy File, March-May, 1871.
15. C. C. Harris to R. Stirling, February 22, 1871, Army and Navy File, January-February, 1871.
16. Commonly-used directions in Honolulu are: ewa (toward Ewa plain, or west), waikiki or diamond head (toward Waikiki, or east), mauka (inland, toward the mountains), and makai (toward the sea).
17. Pacific Commercial Advertiser, September 13, 1873.
18. Hawaiian Gazette, September 17, 1873.
19. Pacific Commercial Advertiser, January 19, 1893.
20. Ibid.
21. R. S. Kuykendall, op. cit., p. 1.
22. Ibid. See also Honolulu Advertiser, November 6, 1929.
23. Paradise of the Pacific, Vol. XIV, No. 12 (December, 1901), p. 68.
24. Pacific Commercial Advertiser, October 18, 1917.
25. Pacific Commercial Advertiser, September 2, 1920.
26. Honolulu Advertiser, March 27, 1928.

27. Honolulu Advertiser; November 6, 1929.  
28. Honolulu Advertiser, November 25, 1928 and January 13, 1929.  
29. Honolulu Advertiser, November 6, 1929.  
30. R. S. Kuykendall, op. cit., pp. 1-2; Honolulu Advertiser, January 10, 18, and 20, 1931, and March 27, 1931.  
31. R. S. Kuykendall, op. cit., pp. 1-2; Honolulu Advertiser, March 1, 5, and 7, 1934.  
32. Honolulu Advertiser, June 5, 6, and 8, 1937.  
33. Honolulu Star-Bulletin, July 25, 1939.  
34. Honolulu Advertiser, October 8, 1943.  
35. Honolulu Star-Bulletin, May 20 and August 25, 1948;  
Honolulu Advertiser, August 12 and 26, 1948.  
36. Honolulu Advertiser, January 4, 1953.  
37. Ibid.  
38. Honolulu Star-Bulletin; November 10, 1960.  
39. Honolulu Star-Bulletin, July 26, 1961.  
40. Belt, Lemmon and Lo, Architects-Engineers and John Carl Warnecke and Associates, Architects and Planning Consultants, Preliminary Plans of the Capitol Building for the State of Hawaii (Honolulu: Star-Bulletin Printing Co. & Honolulu Lithograph Co., March, 1961), pp. 29-30.