

led to Waikīkī becoming a backwash of civilization, or to use Twain's words, "historic Waikīkī." From the 1860s onward the district emerged as a popular ocean-side retreat, a day use recreational area that existed side by side with the revival of wetland agriculture by the Chinese. With the completion of the trolley line to the beach in 1904 and the destruction of the wetland agricultural fields in the 1920s, Waikīkī became an increasingly resort-oriented, suburban residential area. From the mid-1950s onward it has developed into an urban resort that now attracts more than six million visitors a year.

The recently rehabilitated Moana Hotel (1901) stands as the oldest building in Waikīkī. Built on the heels of the United States' annexation of Hawai'i as a territory, it was Waikīkī's first successful hotel endeavor, and the third attempt at establishing a seaside hotel at the beach. Today it is dwarfed by the successful visitor industry it anticipated.

Other turn-of-the-century Waikīkī hotels such as the Seaside, the Waikīkī Inn, and later the popular Halekulani Hotel (1917), were characterized by a cottage atmosphere. These have either disappeared with time or were consumed by more ambitious hotel projects during the 1920s and 1930s. Despite a seeming boom in hotel openings in Waikīkī during the first decade of the 20th century, the 300-room Alexander Young Hotel (1903), situated in downtown Honolulu, boasted more hotel rooms than all of Waikīkī.

The construction of the Ala Wai canal in the 1920s presaged a dramatic shift in the Waikīkī landscape. The canal diverted the three major streams that ran through the district. In turn, this led to the demise of the wetland agriculture and duck farming that dominated the area, and banished the voracious mosquito from the ocean front.

The subdivision and suburbanization of Waikīkī followed, and Hawai'i's first world class hotel, the Royal Hawaiian (1927) appeared on the scene. The construction of the hotel coupled with the introduction by Matson Navigation Company of new ocean liners, including the Malolo, the world's fastest at the time, and the improvement of Honolulu Harbor, including the erection of Aloha Tower, led the *Honolulu Advertiser* to declare by 1938 that Waikīkī had made the "transition from a once rural community into a smart center visited and enjoyed by the great and near great of the world."

Establishments supporting the "glamour" of the district included Gump's (1929), a branch of the San Francisco store, which specialized in *objets d'art* from East and West, and the beautiful tropical-deco Waikīkī Theatre (1936), with its lush landscaped courtyard and fountain and an interior decorated with artificial foliage and a "rainbow" proscenium. These still remain along Kalākaua Avenue, but in transmogrified forms. The interior of the latter was gutted following the Hawai'i Historic Places Review Board's 1979 rejection of its nomination on the grounds that the building was "neither over 50 years old nor of exceptional significance."

World War II brought thousands of servicemen to the islands, and they returned to the mainland with glowing tales of paradise. Visitation to the islands increased after the war and by the mid-1950s hovered around the 100,000 mark. In 1955 the Waikīkī Biltmore Hotel, Rosalei Apartments and Princess Kaiulani Hotel succeeded each other as the tallest buildings in the territory in a matter of less than six months, marking the commencement of Waikīkī as an urban resort.

The impetus for new development was accelerated in 1959 when the jet airplane reduced the flight time from the west coast from an uncomfort-

## Buckminster Fuller Dome

The Hilton Dome Auditorium in Waikīkī, a geodesic dome designed by R. Buckminster Fuller, who pioneered the exploration of lightweight architectural design and materials, passed its life expectancy of 40 years in January of 1998. Erected in 22 hours building time in 1957, the 145-foot diameter aluminum dome remains a direct link between today



View of the R. Buckminster Fuller-designed Hilton Dome Auditorium, Waikīkī. Used with permission of R. Buckminster Fuller, Carbondale, IL., and supplied by Leco Photo Service, New York, NY.

and Fuller's groundbreaking engineering and design methods of the 1950s, which introduced architects to sophisticated geometric concepts and innovations in construction. The Hilton Dome Auditorium is the first production of Hawai'i developer Henry Kaiser's license to mass produce Fuller's design at his Oakland, California aluminum works. Fuller's lightweight, low-cost dome in Waikīkī was the first of many prefab Kaiser domes and has proven to be durable for today's development climate. As with many other buildings of the "recent past," this structure is threatened presently by new development plans.

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