

William Chapman  
with Helen Nakano, Lowell Angell,  
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## Mālama o Mānoa

### Preserving a Historic Residential Community

**M**ānoa is a peaceful, residential area on the outskirts of metropolitan Honolulu. With its outstanding collection of Craftsman, Colonial Revival and Tudor Revival architecture, the neighborhood stands as a striking reminder of the general quality of middle and upper-middle class life in Hawai'i during the early part of the 20th century.

A survey initiated by the Junior League in the 1980s identified over 300 buildings of historic interest. These are distributed among three fairly well delineated separate districts within the Mānoa (Hawaiian for "wide") Valley. In addition, as the League survey and subsequent studies have demonstrated, Mānoa is distinguished by its overall planning features. Houses traditionally were situated on large lots, and the entire valley was (and still is, to some degree) characterized by dense tree coverage, open lawns and mock orange, hibiscus and panax hedges.

As with the rest of Hawai'i, Mānoa has been subject to increasing development pressures in recent years. Many larger lots have been subdivided, larger houses have been constructed in newer sections of the neighborhood, and historic vegetation and open areas are being replaced by paved parking stalls and driveways. Historic

hedges, in turn, have been removed, typically in favor of more permanent masonry walls and wood fences.

Many historic houses are threatened, as they are either replaced by large, often stuccoed buildings in keeping with more contemporary tastes or are simply surrounded—and in fact overwhelmed—by newer buildings.

In 1992, a group of preservation-minded residents formed an organization known as Mālama o Mānoa (roughly translated as "caring for Mānoa"). Inspired by well-known preservationist William Murtagh, former Keeper of the National Register and founder of the Historic Preservation Program at the University of Hawai'i, local residents, including Mary Cooke, one of Hawai'i's National Trust Advisors, Helen Nakano, Lowell Angell, Spencer Leineweber, Tom Heinrich and Kozen Kaneshiro pressed for protection of the valley through National Register listing and the adoption of some kind of design controls at a local level.

By 1995 the organization could claim a membership of 3500 and had sponsored a number of preservation-related events and activities. In order to enlist wide representation, Mālama o Mānoa held public forums on Mānoa's history, engaged in community improvement projects, including collecting litter on the banks of the stream that bisects the community, and had initiated a graffiti clean-up program involving many of its members. The organization also sponsored public lectures on various aspects of architectural history and historic preservation, held community suppers and fundraisers and also underwrote the production of a book on the valley, with contributions from 12 local authors. The book received an honor award from the American Association for State and Local History.

One of the primary activities of the society, however, was drafting and promoting legislation to protect historic buildings, streets, and open-spaces. Given advice by planners, including member and former head of Planning for the City and County of Honolulu, John Whalen, Mālama o Mānoa became a proponent of the special districting for the valley. Emphasizing issues such as lot coverage, canopy trees, parking and open-space preservation, the organization sought to put an end to thoughtless intrusions within the area and to raise community awareness over aesthetic and environmental issues affecting the valley.

While this process seemed seamless and well coordinated, the organization ran up against unanticipated opposition. Led by a vocal group of property rights advocates and others who simply did not understand or accept the potential value of special designation and community and governmental oversight, the steps toward both listing and

*Photo by William Chapman.*



special districting were interrupted during a dramatic series of public forums sponsored by the local neighborhood board. Many residents did not wish to see their own chances to either add to their properties or build new residences impeded by new regulations. Others resented the efforts of what they considered a kind of “cultural elite” to legislate the future of the valley.

Rather than press the issue, the leadership of Mālama o Mānoa decided to reposition themselves and return to community consensus building. Many of the organization’s earlier efforts, especially the outreach activities and community-based environmental work—cleaning and beautification of the stream has remained a priority—have been continued. Mālama o Mānoa has also taken on the local power company in its plans to erect high-voltage electrical towers along the valley rim. The National Trust came to the organization’s aid by declaring the valley rim one of the “Eleven Most Endangered” historic sites in 1997 as a result of Hawaiian Electric Company’s proposal.

In the meantime, Mālama o Mānoa has begun to reconsider the steps it needs to take to gain control over the neighborhood’s future. One possibility is to concentrate on the core historic

areas within the valley and seek designation for both these and individual historic properties. Another is to continue neighborhood consensus building and educational efforts with the hope of changing people’s minds.

What this effort has illustrated is that community control over historic resources, especially in a state still facing strong development pressures (despite a declining economy), is not an easy task. The designation of historic districts and special control areas was perhaps easier 10 or 20 years ago than it is today. Mālama o Mānoa has its work ahead of it if it hopes to enlist broad support for community control over this important heritage.

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Don J. Hibbard

## Hawai‘i The Crossroads of the Pacific

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First time visitors to Honolulu can not help but notice the diversity of peoples on its streets, and the equally variegated architectural forms scattered throughout its neighborhoods. Within less than a block’s walk, a pedestrian can delight to the sight of a complex of Spanish Colonial Revival school buildings focused on a mall lined by Chinese banyans; to a bell tower dramatically fashioned as a pagoda soaring to the sky; and a shogun’s castle with a corrugated metal roof capped by golden dolphins. These wondrous, if not exotic, images cannot fail to incite the mind, and when collaged and congealed, they may relay a message that indeed, here in the middle of the Pacific, there exists a congenial multi-cultural society blessed with harmony and self-respect. If such ruminations are stirred, a major purpose of these designs has been served.

During the period 1914-1939, Hawai‘i’s architectural scene took on a new and distinctive character with the appearance of a number of buildings, the forms and embellishment of which derived from and celebrated Asian antecedents. Blending the building traditions of East and West, the presence of these buildings corresponded with a conscious effort to develop in Hawai‘i a society premised on equal opportunity and respect, regardless of race and culture.

The 19th-century Hawaiian culture had established the foundation for such a harmonious multi-ethnic society. King Lunalilo noted, in his first address to the Hawaiian Legislature in 1873,

This nation presents the most interesting example in history of the cordial co-operation of the native and foreign races in the administration of its government, and most happily, too, in all the relations in life there exists a feeling which every good man will strive to promote.

However, it was not until the monarchy had been overthrown, and the islands were annexed by the United States, when Westerners were securely in political control of the islands, that the question of race relations required reinspection. Tumultuous political changes might have resulted in social realignments as well. Colonialism, already a driving spirit in the plantation-based