

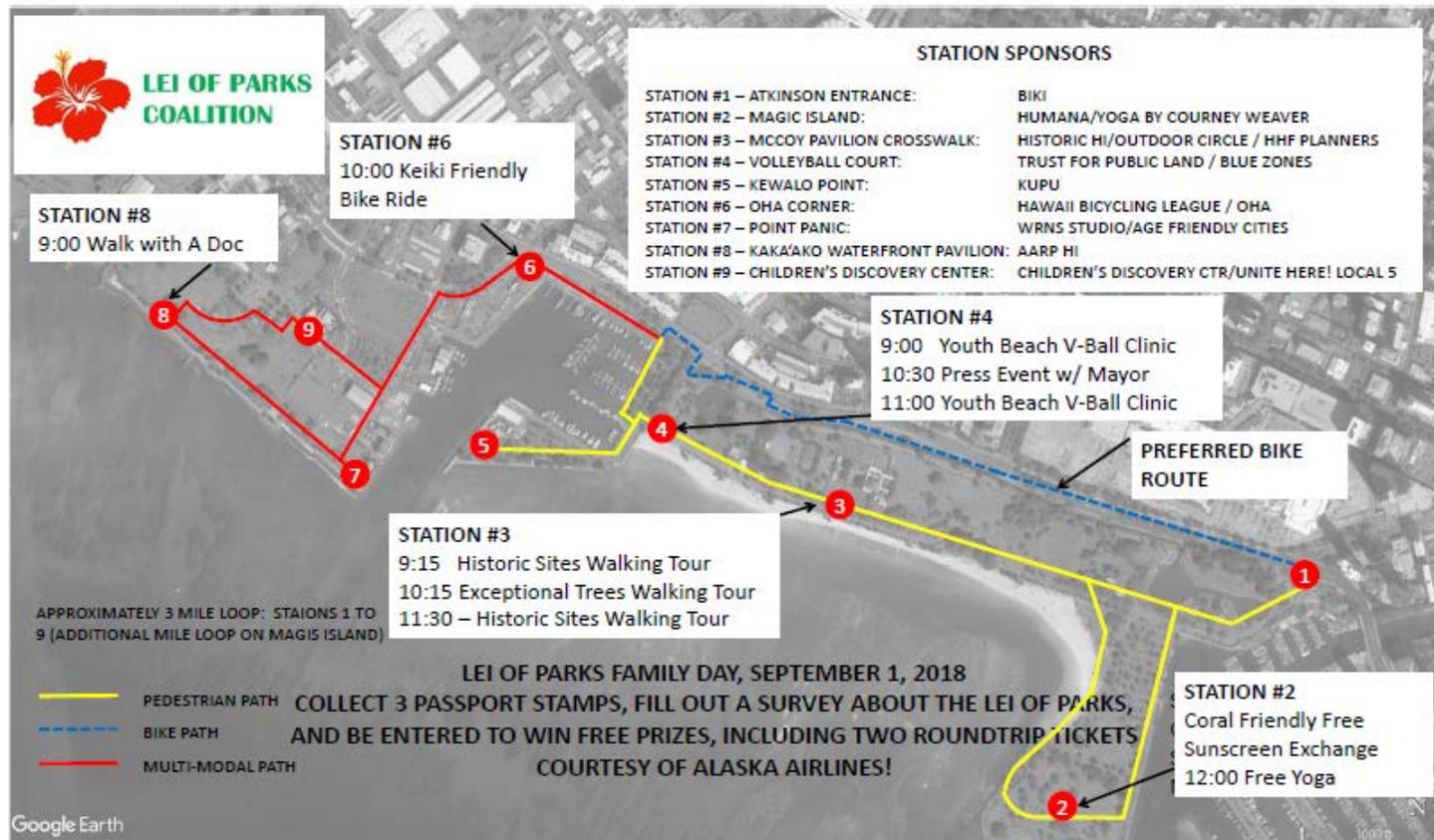
# Ala Moana Park – Key Historic Features

## HISTORIC HAWAI‘I FOUNDATION

### ALA MOANA REGIONAL PARK HISTORY WALK

Prepared for Lei of Parks Family Day

September 1, 2018



# Ala Moana Park – Key Historic Features

## Concept

The site is among the lands of the Hawaiian Kingdom transferred by the Republic of Hawaii to the United States Government after annexation.

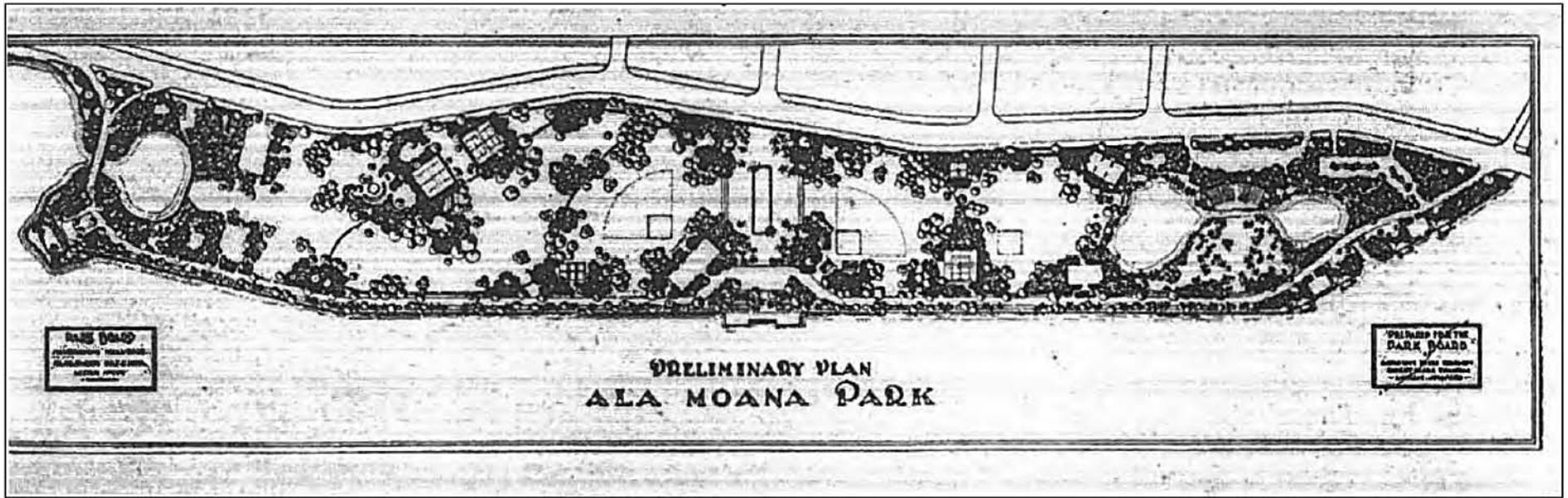
- The area was deeded by the Federal Government to the Territory of Hawaii (October 25, 1927)
- Then from the Territory to the City and County of Honolulu (January 16, 1928)

The city received the site on the condition that the property “be used wholly as a public park”.

The idea for a park on this site can be traced to the 1920’s and an interest in “civic beautification”. It was promoted by the Outdoor Circle, led by Mrs. Louise Gaylord Dillingham, president from 1929-1931.

Originally it was called the Moana Park (literally “ocean park). In 1947 the city recognized popular usage and renamed it Ala Moana Park (the name means “ocean street”)

Shortly after the creation of the Honolulu Park Board in 1931, the city employed professionals to plan the park. One of the first actions of the Board, in July 1931, was to approve the designs of two landscape architects, Catherine Jones Richards and Robert Thompson, later the firm of Thompson and Thompson.



**Preliminary Plan for the Park Board, 1931**

by Catherine Jones Richards and Robert Thompson

# Ala Moana Park – Key Historic Features

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## Landscape Architects

The team of Catherine Jones Richards and Robert Oliver Thompson became among the most prolific landscape architects in the late 1920s and 1930s.

Large specimen trees, open spaces, and the use of indigenous plants were the chief hallmarks of their work during this period.



Among their most notable interwar projects were

- The grounds for the C. Brewer Company's new headquarters on Fort Street,
- Thomas Square,
- Honolulu Academy of Arts,
- Washington Place,
- Irwin Park,
- Ala Moana Park and
- the grounds of the Honolulu Water Supply Pumping Stations in Makiki.
- Professional guidance to Doris Duke in her designs for Persian gardens at her 1930s home in Diamond Head



# Ala Moana Park – Key Historic Features

## Wholly Man-made Landscape

The Park was developed on fill created by the dredging of the Ala Wai Canal and the reef fronting the original beach road (now Ala Moana Boulevard). Shortly after the city acquired title in 1928 the firm of Hawaiian Dredging, owned by Walter Francis Dillingham, was awarded the dredging contract. The work was completed by October 1930.

Early Construction, 1932 (Hawai'i State Archives)



By 1932 five key features of the design have taken shape:

- Hawaiian Lagoon (Diamond Head)
- Japanese Lagoon (‘Ewa)
- The Canal connecting the Lagoons
- The Park Loop Road
- The Central Terrace opposite Pi‘ikoi

### Charles Lester McCoy

As chairman of the Honolulu Park Board for ten years, Charles Lester McCoy presided over the creation of the Ala Moana Park in the thirties, coordinating federal relief, the designs of professional planners, and the views of fellow board members like Louise Dillingham.

A wealthy man with an interest in public service, McCoy had retired at age 42 from the wholesale grocery business and moved with his wife to Honolulu from Peoria, Illinois. Between 1931 and 1941 he chaired the newly created park board at a salary of one dollar per year.

# Ala Moana Park – Key Historic Features

## Architect – Harry Sims Bent



In 1933, Honolulu Park Board Chairman, Charles Lester McCoy, employed Harry Sims Bent as Park Architect, to supplement the landscape proposals of the Richards and Thompson Plan.

Bent came to Honolulu to supervise construction of Honolulu Academy of Arts for the New York firm of Bertram Goodhue and Associates.

It is Bent's work that give the 1930s parks their architectural distinctiveness.

His significant work can be found in several major parks:

- Ala Moana Park
- Mother Waldron Playground
- Kawānanakoa Playground
- Hale'iwa Beach Park
- Ala Wai Park Clubhouse

Design Elements Include:

- Angular zigzags
- Curvilinear shapes
- Repetitive patterns
- Smooth concrete surfaces
- Flat roof lines
- Open pergolas
- Influenced by Art Deco and Moderne design styles
- Incorporated playfulness into sturdy, utilitarian structures



## Depression, Federal Assistance and “Boulder Concrete”

It was Federal assistance beginning in 1933 that facilitated the construction of the park during the Depression Years.

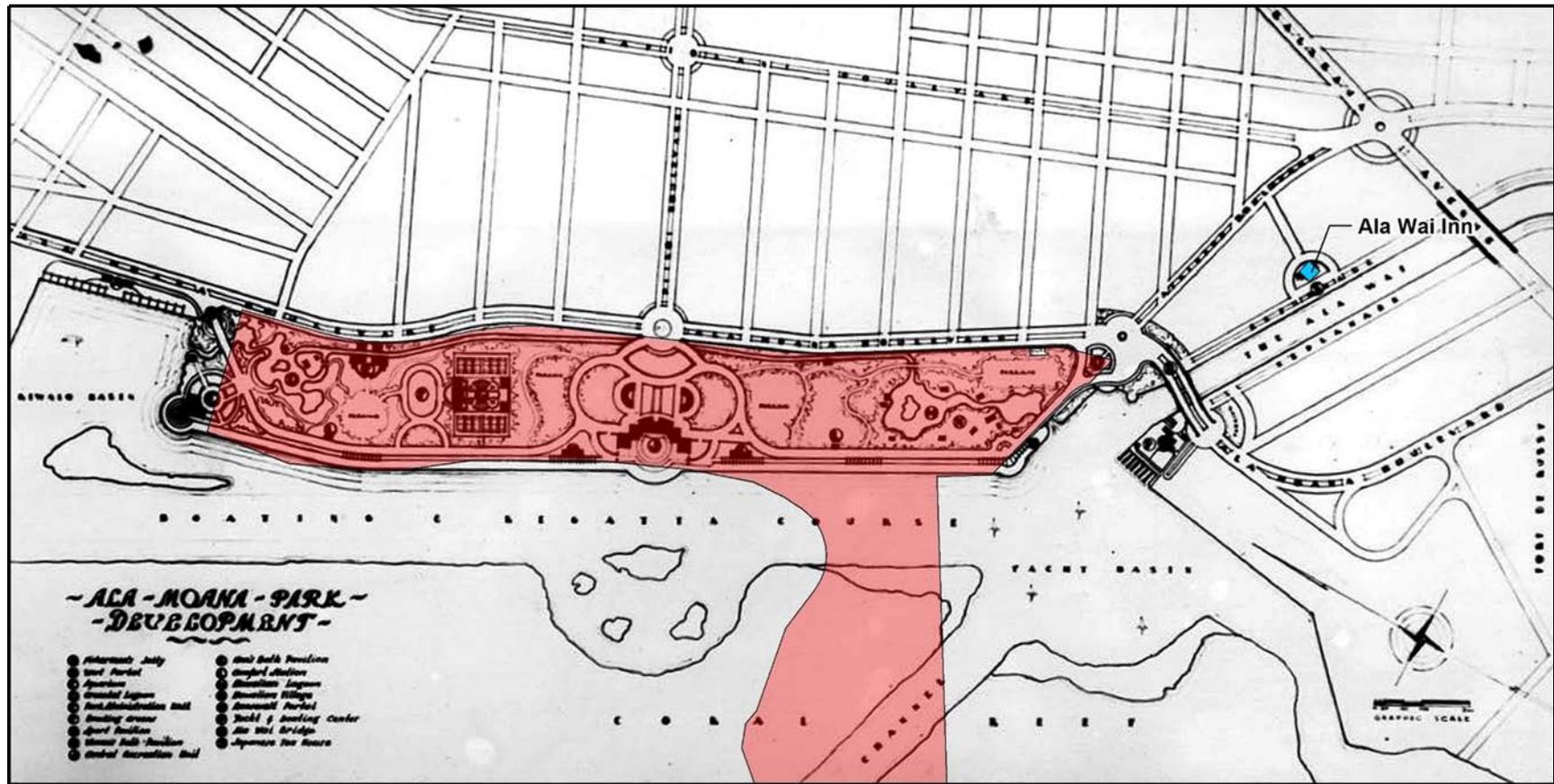
The Federal Employment Relief Administration and the short-lived Civil Works Administration provided the resources for the park board to undertake a major construction program in the thirties. At its peak, the daily labor force reached 800-900 workers in the park.

Faced with willing but unskilled labor, Bent and McCoy adapted a construction method called “boulder concrete” for the construction of the concrete walls and features. In the method, a thin gruel of concrete was poured into wooden forms packed solid with boulders of coral and lava rock (in lieu of the normal small aggregate). This saved 1/4 to 1/3 of the cost of regular concrete construction because the park board simply collected the rock debris from its properties.

# Ala Moana Park – Key Historic Features

## Lei of Parks

In 1935, the park board planned to acquire land on the *mauka* side of Ala Moana Boulevard so that a continuous parkway and promenade would connect Ala Moana Regional Park and Kapi‘olani Park, as shown on the 1936 park plan map.



Essentially a “Lei of Parks”

## Ala Moana Park – Key Historic Features

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(Hawai'i State Archives)

### Bridle Path Bridge

Completed in 1934 as a Civil Works Administration Project



K. Kido, 2014

Bent's first design in Ala Moana Park was for an equestrian bridge to span the park's drainage canal (where the canal feeds into the Hawaiian Lagoon). We have no idea what inspired the whimsical design. The element of surprise and fun evident in the canal bridge became hallmarks of Bent's park architecture.

## Ala Moana Park – Key Historic Features

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Completed in 1934 as a Federal  
Employment Relief Administration  
Project

Roosevelt Portal Dedication  
(State Archives)



(K. Kido, 2014)

The Roosevelt Portals provide a grand entrance into Ala Moana Park at its Waikīkī end. The combination of curved and angular shapes, scalloped walls, and wedge indentations at the Roosevelt Portals is seen in many of Bent’s other park designs. Dedicated by President Roosevelt in 1934, it is at this dedication that Roosevelt referred to Ala Moana Park as “The People’s Park”

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**Banyan Court and Sports Pavilion, 1935**

**(State Archives)**

The Sports Pavilion and Banyan Court were officially completed in 1937, although much of the sports pavilion had been finished by 1935 as shown in the photo above. The rock wall adjacent to the Canal is also completed in this era.

## Ala Moana Park – Key Historic Features

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(State Archives)

### Sports Pavilion



The simple concrete exterior walls of the sports pavilion do not suggest the exotic richness of the banyan court hidden behind. The pavilion itself was designed to be a recreation center, offering rooms for crafts and games and, across the courtyard, locker facilities for men and women.

Inside, artist Robert Lee Eskridge painted two wall-size murals depicting the Hawaiian makahiki (sports festival)

## Ala Moana Park – Key Historic Features

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(State Archives)

## Banyan Courtyard



(K.Kido, 2014)

The character of the banyan court is different from Bent's other park designs because its motifs are neither Art Deco or Streamline Moderne. Bent saw the design as having essentially a "Pacific" inspiration. In a conversation with Mr. McCoy, he produced a battered postcard of an old Balinese garden wherein stone tree boxes were used adjacent to shaded reflection pools. "This germ of an idea was adopted for its suitability and character and also because of its simplicity and the fact that it seemed to offer a mode of construction that would fit with our labor-material ratio" (*Bent, Paradise of the Pacific article, Christmas 1947*)

Marble sculptures on the Mauka and Makai walls depicting stylized Hawaiian Figures are the work of Marguerite Blasingame.

## Ala Moana Park – Key Historic Features

### Promenade and Central Terrace

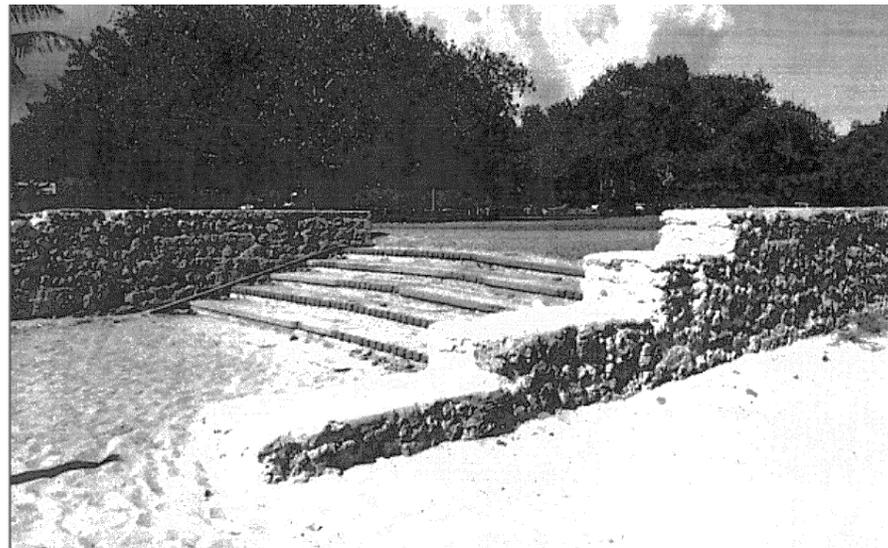
The boulder concrete process produced sturdy, functional construction exemplified in the Central Terrace area with its pair of pergolas. The rough concrete walls with their exposed rock are unfinished. In other areas (i.e. the Canal Bridge and the Portals) the concrete is finished off smooth with stucco.

“As much as any other park feature, boulder construction stands as a monument to the moment in time when the park was created, an imaginative response to pressing practical considerations.

Through the use of indigenous materials and simple building techniques, park officials were able to stretch scant resources and create architecture whose minimalist design symbolizes well the aesthetic of hard times.” (*Weyeneth p. 24*)



*Promenade 1934-1938*



Central Terrace Steps to the Beach

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### Lawn Bowling



Constructed in 1939, the lawn bowling green was the last of Harry Sims Bent's designs for Ala Moana Park. It remains today the only lawn bowling green in Honolulu.

### McCoy Pavilion

The most significant change in the original design of the Banyan Court and Sports Pavilion occurred in the early 1970's when the McCoy Pavilion was added to the Diamond Head side of the courtyard, removing several structures from the thirties.

When Lester McCoy's widow, Hazel Corning McCoy died in 1968, she bequeathed \$1.2 million – the largest gift ever given the city – for construction of a pavilion in Ala Moana Park as a memorial to her husband. The McCoy Pavilion, designed by architect Charles J. W. Chamberlain and completed in 1975, is a sympathetic addition that does blend well with the older sports pavilion, even though its placement on the Diamond head side of the Banyan court destroyed some of the original historic fabric.

## Ala Moana Park – Key Historic Features

ALA MOANA BEACH PARK: CHRONOLOGY			
		1947	Name changed from Moana Park to Ala Moana Park
1897	U.S. government assumes title to site from Republic of Hawaii	1948	Village of Ulu Mau opens
c. 1900	Use of portion of present site as a dump begins	1948	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers feasibility study of reef development
1920	Shade Tree Commission established	1949	Waikiki Beach Improvement Study by Law & Wilson recommends off-shore development
1925	Outdoor Circle discusses idea of park on site with Governor Charles McCarthy	1949	Park roadway paved
1927	May 3. Territorial legislature authorizes \$200,000 Kewalo reclamation project through Act 271	1950	Plans approved for remodelled Oriental Lagoon
1927	Oct. 25. Presidential proclamation deeds site to Territory	1951	Ala Wai entrance channel dredged
1928	Jan. 16. Territory deeds site to city for use as park	1952	City planning commission proposes off-shore island for use as park
1928	Permit issued to Hawaiian Dredging Company for channel fro. Kewalo to Waikiki (Ala Wai)	1954	Children's Center in pavilion opens
1930	Jan.-Oct. Filling of site with 400,000 cu yds. of fill	1954	Kaiser proposes \$50 million resort on Ala Moana Reef
1929	Shade Tree Commission discusses features of park	1954-5	Sand beach constructed
1931	July 7. First meeting of Honolulu Park Board	1955	Park board orders study of offshore island
1931	July 10. General plan by Richards & Thompson approved	1957	Concession stand built on Diamond Head side
1931	Landscape work begins with territorial relief labor; nursery established	1958	Aug. 18. Federal government deeds reef to territory
1933	FERA and CWA assistance begins	1959	Statehood
1933	Harry Sims Bent hired as park architect	1959	Department of Parks and Recreation established
1934	Canal bridge completed	1959	Bathhouse built on Diamond Head side
1934	July 27. President Roosevelt dedicates entrance portals	1960	Ulu Mau renovated
1936	Lester McCoy describes progress on park	1961	Belt Collins comprehensive plan
1937	Sports Pavilion, Banyan Garden, Eskridge murals completed	1961	Phase one (eastern peninsula) approved
1938	Proposal to divide park into 335 residential lots	1961	Bathhouse and concession stand built on ewa side
1939	Bowling green completed	1962	Kaiser builds phase one (Magic Island)
1941-6	Military occupation of park	1966-7	Bowling green renovated.
1946	Board of Parks and Recreation established	1968	Bequest by Hazel Corning McCoy to city to build McCoy Pavilion in memory of her late husband
48	1975	1969	Lifeguard towers built
	Wilson Okamoto master plan	1970	Decision that Magic Island is to be used only for recreation
	1975		
	Completion of McCoy Pavilion		
	1976-7		
	Beach reconstructed with North Shore sand		

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Figure 5. Figure comparing the shoreline of 1893 and the present shoreline in the vicinity of the project area (1893 Wall map of Honolulu overlain on a 2013 aerial photograph); note majority of project area is *makai* of “Beach Road” (Ala Moana Boulevard) in the former shallow reef area that was submerged at high tide

# Ala Moana Park – Key Historic Features



Figure 55. 1970 Kakaako/Waikiki Coast Aerial Photograph (UH SOEST) showing the project area

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