Historical Background

The Kakaako pumping station was created in response to the growing population of Oahu at the end of the 19th century. At the time there were no sewage lines dedicated to expelling and/or treating sewage in Hawaii. By 1898, Hawaii was expelling nearly 2 million gallons worth of sewage per day. This was much more than septic tank excavators could keep up with and the soil was becoming contaminated. In 1896, the Hawaiian Republic hired Rudolph Herring to build a dedicated sewage system for Hawaii. Herring, who had designed sewage systems in New York, proposed a system with sewage lines that could effectively divert sewage and rainwater out to sea. The pipes were laid out in a rectangular fashion and ran along Alapai, River, and South Streets, past Thomas Square, and ended in the Punahou area.

The piping led to the Ala Moana area and converged at the corner of Ala Moana Boulevard and Keawe Street. In this lot, OG Traphagen was contracted to build the main housing for the sewage pumping station. The cost was tremendous for the construction of the lines and construction was stopped several times due to lack of funding. The lack of funding forced the builders to take shortcuts and instead of the requisite 100ft. depth of the line out to sea the Ala Moana facility’s line depth only reached 40 ft. and ran 1200 ft out to open ocean. An outbreak of the bubonic plague in 1898 prompted the necessity of the sewage lines and the project was completed in 1900.

In 1927, a brick addition was added and housed several more pumps to increase the facilities efficiency. In 1939, another addition was made and this housed modern
sewage pumps negating the need for the old steam run pumps. The main house built in 1900 was shut down in 1939 and used as a machine repair workshop. In 1955, the current waste disposal facility used by the city is located directly adjacent to the old facility. It was retired in the same year and was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1978.

Architecture

The main housing of the pumping station was designed OG Traphagen who had also designed the famous Moana Hotel in Waikiki. These are two distinctly different styles of buildings and demonstrated Traphagen’s ability as an architect. The pumping station was made of Hawaiian bluestone. It was built in the “Industrial Romanesque” style. The main house features large Palladian windows and a functional chimney stack to expel excess steam that was generated by the pumps. The station is heavily adorned by arches, especially the “basket handle” arch.

Future Projects

The Kakaako area has seen revitalization as of late. The area that was once strictly industrial has blossomed into largely retail and residential oriented one. Time has not been kind to the historic Kakaako pumping station. It had been neglected and had vandalized numerous times. The Hawaii Community Development Authority (HCDA) has organized several attempts to clean up the site and some progress has been made. However, many of these attempts are short-sighted. There is no permanent plan for the pumping station, but several ideas have been pitched to the HCDA.
Recently, the HCDA has commissioned Clifford Planning LLC to develop a plan for the Ewa reaches of the Kakaako area. Several plans may be in the works for the station. Some of the ideas are a museum, a public gathering place, and a microbrewery. Louis Vuitton, the leather goods maker, had hosted an international gala event there in 2005. For now plans remain dormant for the facility. It would truly be a shame to allow a beautiful building with so much rich history fade into obscurity.

The east face of the main house. Green tiled roof. And arches dominate the building. That is the chimney stack on the left. Dentils also a feature throughout the building.
This is the façade. It features a large Palladian window.
A better look at the chimney
The west face shows the two additions. The newest one built in 1938 is the farthest back.

OG Traphagen's Moana Hotel

