Kakaako Fire Station

In 1929 the Kakaako fire station opened its doors for the first time. Located at 620 South Street, the building was home to Honolulu’s bravest until the late 1970s. Honolulu has had a very distinguished firefighting history and the Spanish mission style fire house serves as a constant tribute to the men and women of Honolulu’s Fire Department. The Kakaako station housed company nine until the company was moved to 555 Queen Street. The original Kakaako station was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1980. Currently, renovations to the original Kakaako station are underway to turn the station into a museum/headquarters for the Honolulu Fire Department. The original Kakaako fire station is not most commonly known for its architecture, but rather for its remarkable ghost stories. Nearly every firefighter station there has a ghost story to tell.

The Kakaako fire station was built in the Spanish mission style that was very popular in the 1920s. A two story box like structure composed of reinforced concrete with a stucco veneer and a green tile hipped roof makes the fire station one of the most beautiful stations in Hawaii. “At the rear is the hose-hanging tower decorated with long, thin arched louvers and surmounted with a decorative window treatment and its own green-tile roof. The Kakaako station is unusual in that the big fire doors slide to the side
rather than up. On the mauka side, a ladder-truck building was added a year later and connected to the main building by a one-story stucco wall and arched entry.”

The city of Honolulu’s firefighting history dates back all the way to the monarchy. First implemented in 1850 under King Kamehameha III, the Honolulu Fire Department is the oldest fire department west of the Rocky Mountains. Because the Fire Department was signed into being under a King, it is the only fire department sponsored by royalty. The department was originally headed by Alexander Cartwright. Cartwright was also president of the Chamber of Commerce and the stock board as well as the administrator for the estates of Hawaii’s king and queen. Cartwright has also been credited as being the father of baseball.

Honolulu’s unique firefighting history flourished well beyond the rule of King Kamehameha III. History tells us the King Kalakaua actively fought fires alongside Honolulu’s bravest.

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2 http://www.adml.com/acbio.htm
On December 7, 1941 Pearl Harbor and neighboring Honolulu came under attack from Imperial Japanese planes. Over two thousand soldiers, sailors and marines were killed on that historic day. The military was not the only active participant in the battle. The Honolulu Fire Department maintains a fire truck that shows the scars of the attack. Bullet holes are riddled across the front fender of the 1935 Seagrave pumper.

The Kakaako fire station is not most notably known for its architecture or vivid history, but rather its ghost stories. Almost every firefighter stationed with company nine has a story to tell. Fire Chief Attilio Leonardi, who was stationed at the historic fire station during the early 1970s, declined to say whether he had seen any unusual sightings, but said, “I can verify it’s a haunted station.”\(^3\) Others went on to say, “Another firefighter refused to walk up to the dorm area on the second floor unless he was accompanied by another. No matter how tired he was, he wouldn’t go up by himself.”\(^4\)

According to an article published by the *Star Bulletin* in 2002, the ghosts of the Kakaako station are predate its opening in 1929. The station was built adjacent to a burial ground for over 1000 small pox victims of the mid 1850s. According to a report compiled by AM Partners and the city Department of Design and Construction,

archaeological records revealed the buildings were constructed over a portion of a
cemetery for victims of the smallpox epidemic between 1853 and 1854. More than 1,000
bodies were buried in shallow graves at the Honuakaha Smallpox Cemetery, located near
a hospital, based on the report. Though there is no record of burials being encountered
during the construction of the Fire Department's maintenance building behind the fire
station, this structure rests directly over a part of the cemetery."

In the late 1970s the firefighters of company nine moved out of their old station
on South Street into their new home on Young Street. After the move was complete
there were growing questions about what to do with the old Kakaako station.

Since 1991, the Fire Department has been renting space at the Airport
Industrial Park on Koapaka Street for about $330,000 a year, said Fire
Chief Attilio Leonardi. A new fire headquarters, an educational museum
and a new or renovated three-bay Kakaako Fire Station No. 9 are being
planned. 6

Construction is presently under way to turn the original station into a
museum/headquarters for the Honolulu Fire Department. The station at Kakaako


will make the perfect home for Honolulu’s Fire Department headquarters and museum.

The original Kakaako fire station is a very unique building coupled with interesting historical facts and ghost stories. The Spanish mission style transports the viewer back to the late 1920s when Honolulu’s landscape was vastly different. The original Kakaako station has been at the epicenter for Honolulu’s Department since it opened in 1929. It is a fitting tribute to such a unique building that it is to be used for the headquarters and museum.

The original Kakaako Station

The current Kakaako Station