

# Nā Lama Kukui

## Iwilei, Honolulu, O'ahu

By Holly K. Coleman

In August 2012, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) acquired the 4.98 acre parcel, (which included a 185,787 square foot building) known as the Gentry Pacific Design Center at 560 North Nimitz Highway in Honolulu. In December 2013, OHA relocated its Honolulu Office to the Center. The building was re-named Nā Lama Kukui ("The Kukui Torches").

Nā Lama Kukui is in the middle of the industrial sector known as Iwilei, an historically important coastal area. Iwilei is described as both an *'āpana* and an *'ili* (small land divisions) and is commonly thought to belong to the *makai* (seaward, coastal) areas of the *ahupua'a* (large land division) of Kapālama. More contemporary accounts include Iwilei in the *ahupua'a* of Honolulu. However, as a coastal area, Iwilei also shares its history with the surrounding *ahupua'a* of Kalihi, Nu'uānu, and Kewalo.

The goal of this Information Sheet is to explore some of the cultural and historical narratives of Iwilei and the surrounding areas, particularly as OHA transitions into the role of caretaker of Nā Lama Kukui. This Information Sheet will also strengthen the agency's foundation of knowledge for this *wahi pana* (storied, legendary place).

Left: The expanse depicted in the middle of this engraving is Iwilei, with Mount Ka'ala and Āliamanu (Salt Lake, seen as two dark peaks). Source: Emmert, 1854.



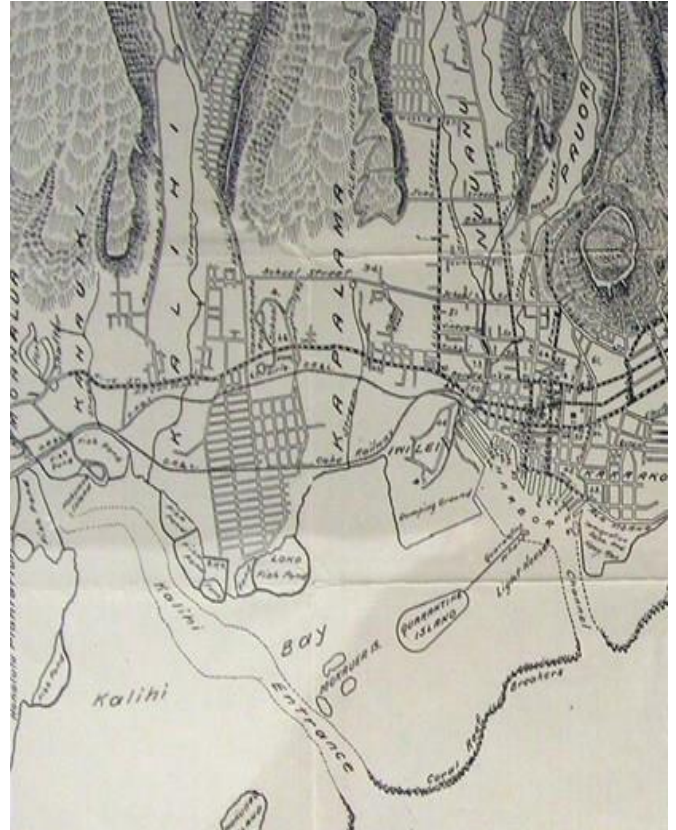
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## Background of Iwilei

The history of Iwilei is also very closely tied to the harbor area; although it is now known as Honolulu Harbor, it was once known as Māmala. Nu‘uanu Stream flowed into the bay, creating rich marine environments and diverse flora and fauna. The village of Kou also stood on the Kewalo banks of the harbor.

### Selected Place Names of the Iwilei Area

‘A‘ala	Said to be named for the fragrance of soap from the Government Laundry, which was formerly in the area
Hauhauko‘i	“Swelling of the Groin,” an area <i>mauka</i> of King Street and ‘ewa of Liliha Street
Kou	A village on the eastern shore of Honolulu Harbor, famous for recreation
Kaholaloa (misspelled Kahololoa)	Productive reef (especially for <i>limu</i> ) fronting Kawa; site of lighthouse. Mostly filled in after dredging
Kamakela	An area north of ‘A‘ala, between Vineyard and Beretania Streets
Kanāueue	A fishpond once located near the old O‘ahu Railway Station in Iwilei
Ka‘uluwela	Area north of Vineyard Street
Kawa	The name of a pond and fishpond. Later the site of the O‘ahu Railway
Kō‘iu‘iu	“To be far off, distant”; an area <i>makai</i> of ‘A‘ala
Kūwili	Reef and fishpond, once at the site of the old O‘ahu Railway Depot
Leleo	Area ‘ewa of Nu‘uanu River, near ‘A‘ala Park
Māmala	Honolulu Harbor. Named for a <i>kōnane</i> -playing goddess
Moku ‘Ākulikuli/ Kahaka‘aulana (rare)/ Mauiola	One of many tidal islands offshore of Iwilei (Mokauea, now associated with Ke‘ehi Lagoon, was a similar island). Renamed Quarantine Island, now known as Sand Island



Map of Honolulu. Source: Southworth, 1914.

## ‘Ōlelo No‘eau: Wise Sayings

Native Hawaiian scholar Mary Kawena Pukui (1983) recorded many *‘ōlelo no‘eau* (wise sayings) about surrounding areas which had an impact on life in Iwilei.

*Ola ke awa o Kou i ka ua Wa‘ahila.*

Life comes to the harbor of Kou because of the Wa‘ahila rain.

*Ho‘ā ke ahi, kō‘ala ke ola. ‘O nā hale wale no ka i Honolulu; o ka ‘ai a me ka i‘a i Nu‘uanu.*

Light the fire, for there is life-giving substance. Only the houses stand in Honolulu; the vegetable food and meat are in Nu‘uanu.

(An expression of affection for Nu‘uanu, which supplied much of the agricultural foodstuffs for the surrounding land areas, including Iwilei).

## A Mo'olelo of Iwilei: Historical and Legendary Accounts

One *mo'olelo* (history) centers on the amazing skill of Puniaiki, who was the son of Aiai and the grandson of Kū'ula, who were both famous fishing deities. Puniaiki went fishing one morning with the men of his father-in-law, the chief Kou; Kou was known to be an unrivaled fisherman of *aku* (bonito) using *pā hī aku* (pearl fishhooks). Paddling out with Kou's men to the mouth of Māmala near the breakers of Pu'uiki, Puniaiki instructed



the paddlers to turn their canoes shorewards. Despite not seeing any fish, the men did so, and Puniaiki took out his own fishhook (named Kahuai) when they reached 'Ulakua. An unprecedented number of *aku* leapt into the canoes and the canoes sank in the water until they reached Kapu'ukolo, where the men jumped onto the beach. There were so many *aku*, they choked the harbor, so that even the stream at Kīkīhale was filled. The fishing prowess of Puniaiki was a source of humiliation and affected Kou's fame as a fisherman, but he was neither jealous nor angry and had only kind thoughts toward Punaiki (Thrum 1907).



Top: Engraving of Honolulu Harbor. Source: Emmert, 1854. Bottom Left: Honolulu Harbor, 1898 and Right: Honolulu Harbor n.d. Source: Hawai'i State Archives Digital Collections.

A shark guardian named Makali'i was known to frequent the waters of Kalihi Kai, particularly near Kahaka'aulana (Moku 'Ākulikuli/ Mauiola, later known as Quarantine Island and Sand Island), which was one of the little tidal islands off the shore of Iwilei. Makali'i had a cave at Kahaka'aulana. Ethnographic accounts note that when Makali'i's was in his cave, the sand patterns above his residence changed. Fishing for *akule* (big-eyed scad) in this area was especially good when Makali'i was in his cave. Kahaka'aulana was also noted as one of places that was used as a passage for travelers going from the village of Kou in Honolulu toward Pu'uloa (Pearl Harbor). Native Hawaiians would swim through a series of channels in Kapālama, Kalihi, and Moanalua instead of walking (Sterling and Summers 1978).



## A Cultural History of Iwilei and Its Resources



A spearg fisherman standing on the reef at the entrance to Honolulu Harbor in Iwilei in the 1890s. Source: Hawai'i State Archives Digital Collections. Bottom: A watercolor of the Honolulu coastline. Source: Moody, 1873.

### Winds and Rains of Iwilei and the Surrounding Areas

Winds	Rains
'Ao'aoa/ 'Aoa— A sea breeze of Honolulu/ Māmala that blows gently towards land	Kauakūkalahale— A rain of the Honolulu area that announces itself by pattering on rooftops
Moa'e— A north wind	
Mū'ululū— A wind	

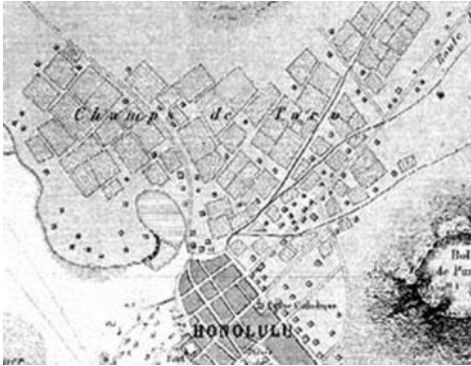
### The Many Resources of Iwilei

The lands of Iwilei are bordered and watered by two streams, Nu'uanu and Kapālama: these streams, in addition to extensive *'auwai* (irrigation ditches), fed vast stretches *lo'i kalo* (taro patches) throughout the inland areas of Kapālama and Kalihi (Handy et. al, 1972).

The coastal area of Iwilei was part of a large complex of fishponds, reefs, and extremely productive fishing grounds that once ran from 'Ewa to Maunaloa. For example, Māmala was well noted for its *aku* (bonito) fishing. The reef Kaholaloa was known for lobsters, crabs, and *limu* (seaweed), particularly the seaweed known as *manauea* (*Gracilaria coronopifolia*) (Stannard, 2005).



## A Changing Island: Iwilei Becomes an Industrial Center



During the late 1800s and 1900s, Hawai'i began rapidly urbanizing. While Honolulu became known as a business and banking center, Iwilei would become known as an industrial center. The harbor became an increasingly busy port. The completion of various types of infrastructure, including buildings, storefronts, and transportation stations, would forever change the nature of Iwilei and surrounding areas.

One of the biggest influences of change was the construction of a rail line in Iwilei. In 1889, Benjamin Dillingham of O'ahu Rail and Land opened a rail line connecting sugar plantations in 'Ewa to Honolulu. The rail terminus and depot was built in Iwilei, and a rail track was built across Kūwili fishpond. It was said to have only been 2 feet above the water mark at high tide (Burlingame, 2003). The rail's roundhouse was built on the Kanāueue Fishpond; it was here that the train was rotated on a turntable so that it could travel between the Iwilei and 'Aiea stations of the rail. The roundhouse and surrounding areas were called by Hawaiian place names that referred to swirling and rotating (i.e. Kūwili and Kanāueue) and the area's notoriously seedy reputation may have been inspiration for the extremely *kolohe* (mischievous) song "Kūwili."

The Hawaiian Fertilizer Works was also established in Iwilei in 1898 by Amos F. Cooke, the son of the missionary Amos S. Cooke. The company primarily serviced the sugar and pineapple plantations in the 'Ewa plains (Ware Bros., 1915).



Top: Map showing extensive fishponds and *lo'i kalo* in Iwilei, Nu'uanu, and Kapālama. Source: La Passe, 1855. Bottom: Rain falls in the upper Kalihi Valley; By the 1930s, Iwilei was heavily developed and industrial. Source: Hawai'i State Archives Digital Photo Collection.

## Loss of Place Names

Among the many effects of the rapid industrialization of Honolulu and Iwilei was the loss of traditional Native Hawaiian place names. For example, the influx of non-Hawaiian immigrants to the area led to the mixing of cultures, languages, and the overlaying of histories. Names like “Hell’s Half Acre,” “Tin Can Alley,” “Cunha Lane,” “Mosquito Flats,” and “Blood Alley” replaced Hawaiian names (Stannard, 2006). It is also difficult to date and provide context for some Hawaiian names; for example, ‘A’ala was said to have been named for the fragrance of soap from the Government Laundry in the area (Pukui et. al, 1986).



Top: Low and mid-tide exposed reefs and flats of Iwilei and Honolulu Harbor before the harbor was dredged and the reefs were infilled. Honolulu Harbor, n.d. Source: Hawai'i State Archives Digital Collections. Bottom: A Fishpond in Iwilei. Source: Otto Von Kotzebue, 1816.

## The Dredging of Honolulu Harbor

The dredging and infilling of the harbor and reefs forever altered the geography and ecology of Iwilei. These activities occurred for various reasons. Marshy areas such as Iwilei were believed to cause the outbreak of disease. The silting of Honolulu Harbor from Nu‘uanu Stream was another reason for dredging. Real dredging efforts began in the 1850s, when a dredging machine (named Kaulu), pile driver, and steam tug (named Pele) were purchased by Chief Justice William Little Lee for the Kingdom.

From there, dredging and infilling activities in Iwilei increased over the years but accelerated after the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy during the late 1800s and into the 1900s. A number of fishponds in Iwilei, including Kawa and Kūwili, were infilled. At one point,



Kaholaloa Reef was used as a dumping ground; it was eventually infilled with materials obtained through the dredging of the harbor. The mouth of Nu‘uanu Stream was narrowed by dumping and infilling. A channel (Kalihi Channel) was cut into the reefs that spanned the harbor. Further dredging activities occurred during the world wars and subsequent militarization and urbanization of Honolulu; for example Sand Island was enlarged by dredging in the 1940s.



## A Prison and a Lighthouse

Appropriations for a prison began in the Kingdom Legislature in 1855. By 1857, O'ahu Prison was completed for \$27,000. Built from coral blocks on a part of Kawa Fishpond in Iwilei, the prison was sometimes referred to as the "Reef" (Ruby et. al, 2012). Bonfires were said to have been lit by prisoners as a tribute to Kalākaua in the late 1800s, and were immortalized by an *'ōlelo no'eau* (wise saying) "*A ma'amau pinepine ke ahi o Kawa* (Fire of consistency is the fire of Kawa; unwavering fire)" (Pukui & Korn, 1979).

In 1869, a lighthouse was completed on Kaholaloa Reef at the entrance to Honolulu Harbor; it remained there for many years.

## The Red Light District of Iwilei

The growing importance of Honolulu Harbor greatly increased the presence of whalers, sailors, American soldiers, immigrants, and plantation workers in the Honolulu area. Over time, locales within Honolulu like Iwilei and Chinatown became known for high rates of crime, poverty, gambling saloons, disease, and prostitution (Greer, 1973).

## College of Saint Louis

Growing enrollment and the death of a student at the Beretania Street location of the College of Saint Louis (precursor to today's Saint Louis School) resulted in the campus moving to Kamakela, near Iwilei, in the late 1880s. However, the proximity of the Catholic all-boys campus to the red light district of Iwilei led to another move (Ruby et. al, 2012).



Honolulu Harbor from the O'ahu Prison, 1865. Source: Hawai'i State Archives Digital Collections.

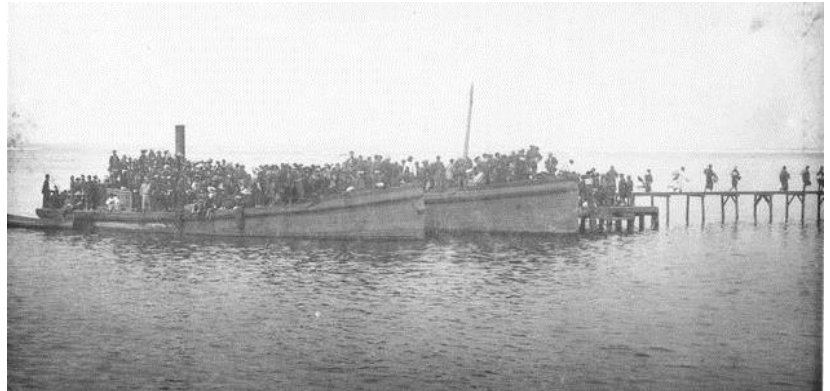
## Disease Outbreaks and Plague in Iwilei

Much of Iwilei's history is marred by the proliferation of disease. As a hub of industrialization and a commercial port, the influx and rapid spread of disease was common. In fact, efforts to control disease shaped much of the geography of Iwilei.

An outbreak of Asiatic cholera in 1895 and 1896 was concentrated in Iwilei; most of the deaths occurred among Native Hawaiians (Mohr, 2005). The causes

for the outbreak were uncertain, and medical science and public health practices were not as advanced as they are today; part of the discourse surrounding the outbreaks of disease was economically, politically, and socially (especially racially) charged. At the time, it was rumored that the deaths could be attributed to the cultural practices of *kahuna anaana* (experts in sorcery) and specifically the events surrounding a stolen horse. One theory put forth by Territorial Government officials and the general public for the outbreak attributed the disease to the Native Hawaiian practice of eating shellfish, fish, and *limu* (seaweed), particularly if it was consumed raw: it was thought that crabs and fish were feeding on the bodies of cholera victims. As a result, a complete ban on all forms of fishing (including the gathering of *limu*) was enforced for all of Honolulu (from Mānana in what is today Pearl City to Maunaloa in what is today Hawai'i Kai). The outbreak also led to the infilling of Kawa Pond in Iwilei between 1895 and 1901.

Bubonic Plague broke out in Chinatown in 1899; victims were burned in a furnace at Honolulu Iron Works on the Kewalo side of Honolulu Harbor until a crematorium was built on Quarantine Island. Chinatown was placed under a strict quarantine and "sanitary fires" were set (Mohr, 2005). When one fire got out of control and destroyed much of Chinatown, many of its residents moved to Iwilei, both of their own will and through detention camps (Stannard, 2006).



Japanese contract laborers arrive in Iwilei from the S.S. Miike Maru, 1893. Source: Hawai'i State Archives, Digital Collections).



Top: Quarantine Island and Iwilei. 1887 Hawaiian Government Survey of Honolulu and Vicinity, W. A. Wall.

## From Kahaka'aulana to Sand Island

In the early years, ships were quarantined offshore of Iwilei on Moku 'Ākulikuli (Kahaka'aulana), which became known as Maui Ola and Quarantine Island after a quarantine station and crematorium was established there. Quarantine Island became known as Sand Island after the dredging of Honolulu Harbor and the infilling of the reef in the 1940s (Stannard, 2006). Sand Island was used for an internment camp for Japanese people immediately following the bombing of Pearl Harbor and prior to the establishment of another camp at Honouliuli. 200 internees were estimated to have been held here (Okimoto, 1992).



## The Hawaiian Pineapple Company and Iwilei



Young women work at a cannery in Iwilei. Edgeworth, taken for Katakura & Company. November 20, 1928. Source: National Archives.

Between the 1920s and early 1990s, Iwilei was particularly known for its canning industry.

The Hawaiian Pineapple Company was one of the businesses that transported pineapples from its farms in Wahiawā to Iwilei using the railway. It was founded in 1901 by James Dole, a cousin of the president of the Territory of Hawai'i, Sanford B. Dole.

The company was acquired by Castle & Cook in 1932. They consolidated the Hawaiian Pineapple Company and the Standard Fruit Company and renamed the business the Dole Food Company. The Dole Cannery was located in Iwilei and operated until 1992. In addition to providing substantial jobs for the laboring class, working in the cannery was a common summer occupation for young men and women of Hawai'i for decades.

### The American Can Company and Nā Lama Kukui

Nā Lama Kukui in Iwilei was formerly the cannery and factory building for the American Can Company. It was completed in the early 1930s and made cans for Coca Cola and Del Monte. Although the industry thrived in the area for a number of years, the American Can Company stopped making cans at its Iwilei factory in the early 1970s. Sales of the building and land parcel were stalled in court until 1985, when a real estate development firm known as Gentry Pacific purchased it; the old cannery became known as the Gentry Pacific Design Center. In 2012, OHA purchased the property for \$21 million.

## Gentry Pacific Design Center becomes Nā Lama Kukui



Above: Nā Lama Kukui, formerly the Gentry Pacific Design Center in Iwilei. Below: The OHA office in Nā Lama Kukui. Source: Holly Coleman, 2014.

OHA moved its operations from Kaka’ako to the Gentry Pacific Design Center in Iwilei in December of 2013.

The name “Nā Lama Kukui” was selected by a committee of OHA staff members from suggestions given by employees as the new name for the building. The name Nā Lama Kukui is translated as “the kukui torches.” In ancient Hawai’i, traditionally, the nuts of the *kukui* tree (*Aleurites moluccanus*) were used as candles (known as *ihoiho*) and torches (known as *lama*).

Figuratively, the *lama kukui* represents enlightenment. The name is inspired by generations of *ali’i*, and recalls those who lived as guiding lights for the Hawaiian *lāhui* (nation). The name also evokes the memory of those who continue to motivate the Office of Hawaiian Affairs and its staff to *ho’oulu lāhui aloha*, to build a beloved nation.



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