



THE FORESTRY STORY

There was significant impact on the Makiki-Tantalus forest due to its proximity to the growing shipping and trading port of Honolulu. Introduced livestock such as horses, cattle, goats and pigs began to destroy the forest understory and compact the soil. From 1815 to 1826, the sandalwood trade with China virtually eliminated this native tree from the area. A single ship's hold could carry more than 6,000 trees.

Still visible in Pauoa Valley, is a pit off the trail which was used to measure the cut sandalwood. Its dimensions were that of a ship's hold and when full, it represented one ship load. The wood was then removed, hauled to the harbor and the pit refilled with more sandalwood.

During the 1830's to 1860's the whaling industry had a great demand for wood, readily accessible from the Makiki-Tantalus forests, for fuel to render the whale blubber into oil. Numerous other trees were harvested for the ever increasing construction of houses in the Honolulu area, as well as supply for numerous industries. For example, the tree fern "pulu" was used to stuff pillows and mattresses and shipped to Australia and America.

By the late 1800's most of area was bare, denuded of trees. Not only the trees had disappeared from Makiki-Tantalus but also the vast ecosystems and habitats that the trees are a part. Many native birds as well as the endemic kuhuli tree snails were once abundant in the forest but have since become extinct due to habitat destruction, and (in the case of the snails), over collecting.

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The following is an excerpt from an 1901 essay appearing in The Pacific Commercial Advertiser. "Land shells, which are of special interest to boys and collectors, can be found on almost any of the trees around Maluhia. They are green, brown or white, all having stripes. They live mostly on the kukui and lehua trees and the 'ie'ie vine, hidden by the stems and leaves."

In the early 1900's the valleys and flat areas were so denude of trees that many residents referred to them as meadows. Prior to the planting of windbreaks (cook and Norfolk Island pines), the windstorms blew down several houses. Others had to be anchored with concrete blocks and cables.

The Pu'u 'Ualaka'a area was cleared and planted with sweet potato, (the plantation is said to have belonged to Kamehameha I). Pu'u 'Ualaka'a means rolling sweet potato hill. One story suggests that it received its name from Kamehameha rolling sweet potatoes down to the poor people at the bottom of the hill. Another story says that instead of carrying the heavy sweet potatoes down the hill after harvest, they were rolled down to the bottom of the hill for collection.

Yet a third story states that a famous bow and arrow expert rested on Punchbolw, a mile or so away from the potato field, looked over that way and spied a mouse eating one of the potatoes. He shot his arrow and the mouse fell dead but the potato which it had been eating rolled down the hill. In commemoration of the feat, the Hawaiians gave the name of "rolling potato" to the district.

During the Great Mahele of 1848 several land awards were made in Upper Makiki Valley. Many parcels along Moleka and Kanealole streams were purchased between 1864 and 1876 by J.M. Herring. He built a carriage road to his property and tried growing coffee but the valley proved to be too wet. The remnants of the carriage road, house structures and coffee plants can still be seen along Maunalaha Trail and in Moleka Valley.

Prior to this, upper Makiki, Moleka and Kanealole Valleys (the two smaller valleys within Makiki Valley), were terraced into taro lo'i. Taro, along with some rice, continued to be grown in lower Makiki into the 1930's. Several of the lo'i along the Maunalaha Trail were restored in 1984 but most of the old lo'i walls are still visible although they are often covered with vines.

Despite all the use of the Makiki-Tantalus forests, as far back as the mid-1800's, the people of Hawaii recognized the value of the forest as a watershed and took measures to insure future water rights. In 1848 the Act organizing the Executive Department of the Hawaiian Islands, stated that, "The forest and timber growing therein, shall be considered as government property and under the special care of the Minister of the interior.

In 1876, the Legislature enacted a law "for the protection of the woods and forest" including the provisions for acquisition of the forests between the easterly side of Palolo and the Westerly side of Kalihi.

In 1880 the Legislature passed a law to protect all watershed areas contributing to domestic water supplies from trespass by domestic animals and made provisions to include in the Honolulu Waterworks, "all the water of Makiki and all lands necessary from and including Round Top and Pauoa".

In 1882 the Minister of the Interior reported the establishment of a government Nursery as part of the inauguration of a forestry program. The reports of 1888 show the nursery and forestry program at Makiki Valley and Tantalus being very active.

Unfortunately, the continuing battle to protect and improve the Honolulu Watershed lands was set back on many occasions. On one such occasion, the 1890 Legislature gave way to pressure exerted upon it when "66 leaders of Honolulu's financial, social and political circles" were granted rights to acquire tracts for house lots in the Tantalus-Round Top area.

The grants were made with the intention that only one house would be built per tract and that forest cover be preserved by having not less than twenty-four trees per acre. Thirty-nine grants were made before the further sale of government lands were terminated.

During this time we saw the ridiculous spectacle of one group of officials under the Minister of Interior, working to protect and improve the Makiki-Tantalus forest while another group under the same office were surveying out house lots.

One of the first house in what is now the MTRA, was completed in 1891 (the H. W. Schmidt house called "Maluheha"). Schmidt allegedly won the land in a poker game with King David Kalakaua. The lumber for the construction of the house is said to have been carried up from

Punchbowl on the backs of Portuguese, from the Makiki Reservoir, to Makiki Falls and onto the ridge above the falls and through the forest to Maluhia.

The path made by the Portuguese eventually became a carriage road (perhaps the present Forest Ridge Way) and in 1901 was "made by the government, and connected with the new carriage road to Honolulu. "The Tantalus road was built in 1904 and the Round Top section in 1916. In 1922 they were connected. The wood for the Cooper house, built between 1897 and 1900, was supposed to have come from a circus which had left town. Another early home was built around 1902 by the Waterhouses.

In the 1920's E. S. Van Tassel organized the Hawai'i Macadamia Nut Company Ltd. to develop the industry in Hawai'i. The company had approximately 2,000 trees growing in the Nut Ridge grove on Round Top. This is reportedly the first Macadamia Nut Plantation in Hawai'i.

In 1903, the Hawai'i Division of Forestry was created. It's principle task initially was to reforest the lands that had been so badly abused by humans and their browsing animals. Millions of trees, shrubs and other plants were grown in the Division nurseries and planted in the forest reserves. Most of these plants were exotic species which were found to be more successful on the degraded sites than the native plants. However, large numbers of native plants were also used.

The cement slabs on the ground behind the Hawai'i Nature Center are the remnant of the first "experimental garden" of the Division of Forestry. At this site, plants thought to be of economic importance, new to the Territory, were started and propagated for distribution through out the islands. Part of the original nursery is still being utilized.

As you can see, the reforestation projects for the Makiki-Tantalus area are a success although sometimes criticized for having planted so few native trees. Strong support for the reforestation and conservation efforts was provided by the Hawai'i Sugar Growers' Association (HSGA). The Association's Department of Botany and Forestry established nurseries, imported and tested many different trees, and hired foresters to assist plantation owners. They recognized the forest water resource as vital to their industry.

In the 1930's the Civilian Conservation Corps participated in other reforestation projects. At the peak of this program 1,400 boys were engaged in planting trees, building roads and trails. After this program ended, tree planting activities were negligible between 1942 and 1958.

All sale of government lands were halted until the 1940' when pressure was brought once again for release of some 20 acres at the lower edge of the forest on the Klawahine ridge for house lots. Due to several factors, such as "the relatively low elevation and general formation of the area", it was felt that this area did not have too high a value as watershed. The 1940's and 50's saw the removal of a considerable amount of land from the reserve some by exchange of lands and some by purchase. However, land exchanges, in order to secure ridge top locations for home sites ~~was~~ discourage.
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A 1961 forestry report states that "In the past 75 years about 52,000 acres have been planted including 25,000 acres on State forest land. Because the native forest trees are usually of slow growth and poor timber form, almost all planting has been with trees from other regions. Several hundred species from all over the world have been tested. Some of these are eucalyptus, Norfolk-Island-pine, mahogany, Australian red cedar, tropical ash, silk-oak, redwood and pine."

About this time multiple use management of the State forest lands began. This more holistic approach provided for conservation of the "basic soil resource, while at the same time producing high-level sustained yields of water, timber, forage, recreation and wildlife, harmoniously blended for the use and benefit of the greatest number of people."

In 1970 the legislature created Makiki Tantalus State Park Complex (about 2,000 acres from the base of Makiki Valley to the Tantalus peak). Today known as Makiki-Tantalus State Recreation Area or just Makiki-Tantalus Recreation Area (MTRA).

As far back as 1894, there was an interest in creating a park in the Makiki area. Archives of Hawai'i show that a member of the Legislature wrote the Minister of the Interior suggesting that the top of Tantalus be retained as a public reservation with "a large fine flat... with a cluster of fine old shade trees and much used for picnics and camps...". Other recommendations for the area came in 1906. "Tantalus park should be... the one great park;... for Honolulu that bit of God's world that cities now are learning to secure and save for the people, that they may get close to nature...".