

## Hawaii's Capitol Historic District – a Visitor's "Must-See", by Senator Will Espero

In my opinion, we have the most beautiful capitol building in the entire U.S. It's the only one that is not a replica of the one for Congress, and it is the "youngest" of the capitol buildings.

As the only island state, the only state not on the North American continent, and the only state whose population came primarily from Asia not Europe, the designers of the Hawaii State Capitol beheld a richness of possibilities. What they drew up was a unique building that captures the character of Hawaii layer by layer. The moat represents the Pacific Ocean that surrounds our islands. The volcanoes that formed the Hawaiian archipelago are shown in the two rising forms that contain the official chambers of the Senate and House of Representatives. The plentiful, lovely palm trees which Hawaii is famous for are denoted by the pillars along each side. The warm, blue sky and white clouds that we enjoy each day are embodied in the upward blue slopes of the fifth floor. The mosaic "Aquarius" adorns the Capitol rotunda, filled with colors that signify the ever-changing colors of the ocean which gives us life and warmth.

Dozens of artists labored roughly two years to beautify the interior of each chamber. In the Senate, the azure carpet stands for the Pacific Ocean, while the tapestry above depicts the ocean voyage of the first Polynesians. The chandelier symbolizing the moon is made of 620 nautilus shells. In the House, the earth is signified by the warm, sienna carpet, while the gold-plated copper and brass chandelier stands for the sun. The geometric tapestry epitomizes the warrior's cape, symbolic of the bravery and strength of the Hawaiian people. The amphitheater design of each chamber, with its gallery in the upper portion, separated from the legislative floor seating, is another distinctive feature of our Capitol.

The State Capitol is the most prominent building in Honolulu's Capitol District. Rich in architectural distinction, monuments, and history, its many "contributing properties" and National Historic Landmarks form a United States Historical District. Several buildings are on the National Register of Historic Places: Iolani Palace, Washington Place, Aliiolani Hale, Kekuanaoa (Territorial) Building, Hawaii State Library, Kawaiahao Church and Mission Houses, Honolulu Hale, and the Cathedral of Our Lady of Peace. Like many capitol districts in highly visited areas, it also features several monuments: statues of King Kamehameha the Great, Queen Lili'uokalani, and Father Damien; the Liberty Bell, the Korean/Vietnam War Memorial, and the Eternal Flame. Surely, our Historical District is one that visitors to our islands should have on their list of sights to see while vacationing in Hawaii.

Famous around the world as the headquarters of "Hawaii 5-0" police chief Steve McGarrett and his team, Iolani Palace is one of only three, still standing, royal palaces in the United States and the only one used as an official residence of a reigning monarch. King Kalakaua and Queen Lili'uokalani both governed from Iolani Palace until the overthrow of the Hawaiian kingdom. Prominent for its role in Hawaiian renaissance architecture, it is designed in the American Florentine style. (It is actually the second Iolani Palace and replaced the original, wooden structure. The other two palaces are not in the Capitol District: Queen Emma's Summer Palace in nearby Nuuanu and Hulihe'e Palace on the Big Island. Kaniakapupu is the ruins of King Kamehameha III's summer palace.)

Across the street from Iolani Palace is the Kekuanaoa (Territorial) Building, designed in Classical Revival style, where the original "Hawaii 5-0" filmed in season 9 when Iolani Palace was undergoing renovations.

The future Queen Liliuokalani, then Princess Lydia Paki, lived in Washington Place as the wife of John Owen Dominis, whose father had the home built. President James Polk's Commissioner, a boarder in the house, established the American Legation there, and called it "Washington Place" in celebration of George Washington's birthday. King Kamehameha III subsequently approved the name. Isaac Hart, who built the

original Iolani Palace, designed the home in French Creole Greek Revival. Queen Liliuokalani was arrested at Washington Place during the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy. She was moved to and imprisoned in Iolani Palace.

Designed as a palace for King Kamehameha V, ornate Aliiolani Hale reflects its original purpose. Recognizing the need for more quarters for the growing Hawaiian government, King Kamehameha commissioned it as a government office building instead of his royal residence. The Hawaiian legislature, courts, and most of the executive departments were situated there until 1893. It now houses the Hawaii Supreme Court.

Did you know that steel tycoon Andrew Carnegie provided the original funding for the Hawaii State Library? Look for a commemorative bust of him amidst its 20-foot high Tuscan columns and 18-foot arches. Started as a local reading room for sailors, it will celebrate its centennial on February 1, 2013. Hawaii's public libraries are the only statewide library system in the country, making it one of the largest in the U.S. More than half a million books are shelved in the library, which is roughly 17% of the entire system's book holdings

Across from the State Library is Honolulu Hale (or Hale Honolulu in Hawaiian word order), seat of the Honolulu City Council. Honolulu's first Mayor, Joseph J. Fern, envisioned a permanent home for the newly created government of the City and County of Honolulu. After he died, Mayor John H. Wilson saw the dream through to its completion in 1928, with the help of the city's major architects. Built in an Italianate Spanish Colonial Revival style, it features frescoes, intricate stonework, and an interior modeled after the famous Bargello Palace art museum in Florence, Italy.

Facing Honolulu Hale are Kawaiahao Church and the Mission Houses. The experiences of American Protestant missionaries who brought the Gospel to Hawaiians are told in the small collection of buildings within its white, stone-walled premises of the Mission Houses Museum. Kawaiahao Church was once the national church of the Hawaiian Kingdom and chapel of the royal family. It became affectionately known as the "Westminster Abbey of Hawaii" because it was the site of Hawaii's royal coronations, christenings, and funerals. It is one of the oldest Christian sanctuaries still in use in Hawaii.

Our Lady of Peace Cathedral holds the distinction of being the oldest cathedral in continuous use in the United States. Just a few short blocks from Kawaiahao Church, it derives its name from its original French name, the Cathedrale de Notre Dame de la Paix. Its Romanesque style reflects its role as the mother church of the Roman Catholic Diocese for Hawaii.

The splendid architecture and deep, historical value of the many fine buildings make the Capitol District a "must-see" for the visitors to our islands. We should be very proud of and showcase this distinctive, nationally recognized part of Hawaii's heritage.