

**KAKAAKO FIRE STATION, HOOK AND LADDER BUILDING**  
**620 South Street**  
**Honolulu**  
**Honolulu County**  
**Hawaii**

HABS No.

HI-520

HABS

HI-520

**PHOTOGRAPHS**

**WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA**

**Historic American Buildings Survey**  
**National Park Service**  
**Department of the Interior**  
**San Francisco, California**

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### KAKAAKO FIRE STATION, HOOK AND LADDER BUILDING

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- Location:** 620 South Street, located on the north corner of the intersection of Quinn Lane and South Street, Honolulu, Honolulu County, Hawai'i.
- The UTM coordinates for this building are: 04.618040.2356420.
- Present Owner:** The owner of the property is the City and County of Honolulu.
- Present Occupants:** The contractor preparing the site for conversion to a museum is using the building for storage.
- Present Use:** Vacant.
- Significance:** The hook and ladder building is significant for its association with the Honolulu Fire Department and for its Spanish Mission style architecture which was popular in the 1920s for public buildings in Honolulu.
- Description:** The hook and ladder building is a single-story, 69' long and 16' wide structure, oriented perpendicular to South Street. It is located at the east side of the main fire station building. It has a flat roof with a parapet and metal flashing at the eaves. The building is set away from the main fire station building, separated by an alley that is 5' wide at the north (rear) end and 9' wide at the south (front) end. The wall of the main building of the fire station which faces the ladder building is stepped, accounting for the changing width of the passageway. A tile-roofed section of wall with an arched gate opening attaches the hook and ladder building to the main building of the fire station along the South Street façade.
- The hook and ladder building is constructed of concrete block and reinforced concrete block with a stucco coating on a concrete continuous wall footing foundation. At the south façade, the building has a plinth, topped with a molded water table, which is 2'-10" above grade. Also at the corners of the south façade are acroteria, or "pedestals at the corners of a roof to support an ornament" (Harris, 5). Below are short sections of ornamental bands which mirror the belt course on the main building. These bands have small round ornaments which are identical to ones on the main fire station building, called "rosett" on original drawings. Below the rosettes are short bands of flat molding which wrap around the building corners.
- On the narrow sides of the building, each of the large entry doorways are formed into a basket-handle arch. The larger doorway, on the South Street façade, is 10' wide by 12' high, with the arch springing line at 10'.

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This doorway has a two-leaf sliding wood door which operates on overhead tracks inside the building. Each leaf slides to an opposite side of the doorway. The doors are each four-panel with the horizontal rail dividing the two upper and two lower panels at about 7' from the bottom. Although the wood doors are rectangular, the top rails on the exterior face are contoured to follow the curve of the arched opening and give the impression that the doors are arched. The smaller doorway, on the opposite (north) end of the building is also 10' wide but only 10' high, with a springing line at 8'. At this opening there are rounded concrete hub guards, 1'-4" high with a 9" radius, at the bottom corners of the doorway. The opening currently has plywood infill with plywood hinged door and hasp. This has replaced the original doors, which were similar to the ones at the opposite end of the building.

The south wall of the building extends across the alley between the hook and ladder building and the main building of the fire station, joining the facades of the two buildings. Here there is a semicircular-arched pedestrian doorway which is 4' wide and about 10' high with a springing line at 8'. A hinged gate of galvanized metal bars set in a galvanized metal frame fills this opening. This has replaced the original which was a double gate of widely spaced metal bars. Seven metal bars topped with circular ornaments radiated from the center of the span, filling the arch above the double gate. On the wall above this portal is a hip-roof projection which spans the connector wall between the two buildings. This is roofed like the main building of the fire station, with green-glazed terra cotta tiles, contour-cut rafter tails, and a molded fascia board.

As the parapet extends back from the south façade along the long sides of the building, its top edge dips down about two feet in a series of two slopes with a horizontal section between them. The east side of the building still has six metal framed, four-light pivot windows. Most of these windows are boarded with plywood on the exterior. The lights in these windows are obscure wire glass with a fine textured ribbing on the interior. The west side of the building has five wood frame one-over-one-light double-hung windows. These windows are boarded over on the exterior with plywood. There is also a two-panel wood frame door with a two-light transom on the west side which is located opposite the entry door to the main building of the fire station. The upper panel of this door is filled with plywood, and the transom is boarded over on the exterior with plywood.

On the interior, the original open space is now divided into two rooms by an added wood partition 23'-6" from the south wall. The partition has a two-panel wood frame door with an opening where the upper panel has been removed. Above the level of the door, the partition is screened, but boarded over on the south side by plywood. The building has open 2" x 12" rafters spaced approximately 16" on center. The walls are stucco-coated with two courses of concrete block exposed at their tops, between the rafters. The floor is a concrete slab.

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**Historical Context:** Honolulu's full-time paid fire department was created by the provisional government after the overthrow of the Hawaiian Monarchy in 1893 (Smith, n.p.), with three fire houses on Maunakea Street, King Street, and Union Street (Hibbard and Napoka). In 1905, with the creation of the County of Oahu by the territorial legislature, the fire department came under county authority (Johnson, 48). It eventually passed to the City and County of Honolulu with the City and County Act of 1907 (Johnson, 58). As the Fire Department grew other stations were added and the original three closed. The 1920s was an important period in the expansion of the department, with four stations added: Kaimuki and Kalihi in 1924, and Makiki and Kakaako in 1929.

The Makiki and Kakaako stations were built from the same plans, by architect Solomon F. Kenn. The Kakaako station was finished on October 1, 1929, less than 6 months after the Makiki station at a cost of \$37,224. Engine Company No. 9 moved into the building (Smith, n.p.).

The hook and ladder building at the Kakaako fire station was built just after the main fire station building. It was put into service on March 1, 1930, six months after the main building at a cost of \$4,652 for the addition (Smith, n.p.). Original plans for the hook and ladder building are dated June 1929. The building was constructed to house a 1925 Seagrave ladder truck (Honolulu Fire Department, 40) which carried a 75' aerial ladder (Camara). Until the building was completed the "apparatus, which was bought in April 1925 [and has] languished unused for lack of salaries for its personnel" (Honolulu Star Bulletin, January 28, 1930). Apparently, the truck was unable to fit into the 55' length of the main building and the 69' long hook and ladder building was constructed to accommodate it. A 1937 photo at the Bishop Museum Archives shows the South Street façade of the building with the front of a fire truck visible through the open door (Bishop Museum). Notes on the original drawing for the building state the hook and ladder building is "to match main building in finish. Material to match present outbuilding not otherwise noted on this plan." Drawing notes indicate that the walls were to be constructed of "extra heavy type" tiles, with "tile piers reinforced with 4-½" steel bars and filled with concrete." In Hawaii, "tiles" or "hollow tile" refers to concrete blocks, "what is called cinder block in the western Mainland and hollow tile in Hawaii" (Neil, 11). It is also noted that the building is to receive "3 coats stucco finish to match main building."

During the first week of March, 1930, just after the new hook and ladder building was put into service, Honolulu was visited by Robert E. Andrews, the assistant chief engineer of the National Board of Fire Underwriters. He was here to survey the city's fire department and remarked that he was pleased with the "new aerial ladder company at Kakaako. That is probably the most important of all the improvements in the department" (Honolulu Star Bulletin, March 7, 1930).

In June the Hawaii Rating Bureau, which represented fire insurance companies doing business here, authorized an approximate 15 percent reduction in fire insurance rates for properties within the city limits of Honolulu. The bureau cited "improvements made in the water supply

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and distribution system...consideration also being given to improvements and additions in the fire department" (Honolulu Star Bulletin, June 6, 1930).

A new fire station for Company No. 9 was built in 1973 adjacent to the 1929 fire station, fronting Queen Street. In August 1973 the ladder building was still being used as dining facilities (Fox), but after the move into the new quarters, the old fire station and ladder building no longer housed active firefighters. The Honolulu City Ballet occupied the upper floor of the main building of the fire station from 1979 (Hibbard and Napoka) through the early 1980s. In 1989, the 1929 Kakaako fire station was being utilized by the Honolulu Fire Department to store fire equipment and a training ambulance (Morrison).

The hook and ladder building is included in the National Register of Historic Places inventory as part of the Historic Fire Stations of Oahu, Hawaii State Historic Preservation site number 80-14-1346. The property was entered in the National Register in December 1980.

**Sources:**

ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS

Original architectural drawings, dated June 1929 by the Building Inspector's Department with the name of S. (Solomon) F. Kenn, Inspector, are located at the City and County of Honolulu, Department of Design and Construction Archives (file 9, drawer 8, folder 1), 650 South King Street, Honolulu, HI.

EARLY VIEWS

Bishop Museum collection, Honolulu. Photograph of the South Street façade ca. 1937. Doors to hook and ladder building are open, showing the truck inside. Located in file: Organized Society/ Fire Department/ folder 1 – neg # N109451.

Honolulu Fire Department. Pride, Service, Dedication: 150 Years of Service, Honolulu: n.p., 2001. Photograph on page 40 showing a 1925 Seagrave ladder truck pulling out of the hook and ladder building.

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Honolulu Star Bulletin, "Fires Cost Us \$3 Per Person in Year of 1929," January 28, 1930, p. 3.

Honolulu Star Bulletin, "Expert Gives Praise to Fire Department," March 7, 1930, p. 5.

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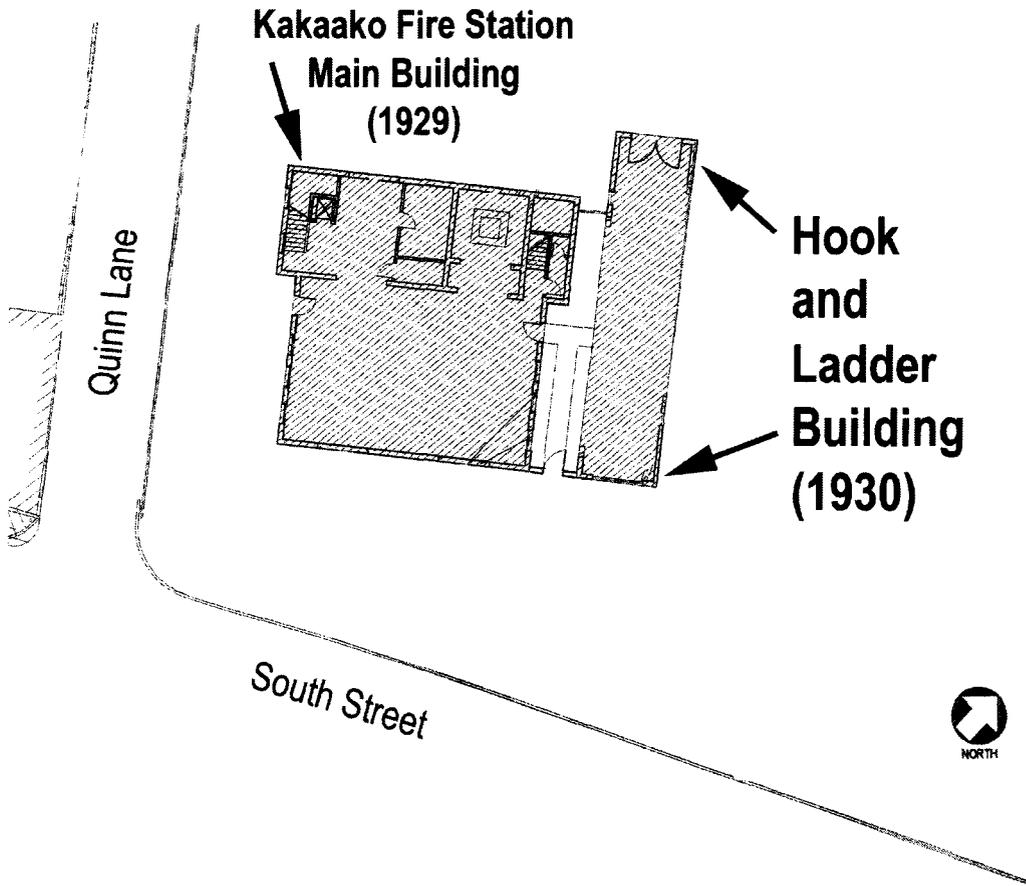
Neil, J. Meredith. "Paradise Improved: Environmental Design in Hawaii," in The American Association of Architectural Bibliographers, Papers, VIII, William B. O'Neal, ed. Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1972.

Smith, H. A. History of the Honolulu Fire Department, Honolulu: n.p., 1930.

**Project Information:** This report was initiated in preparation for the partial demolition of the ladder building at the Kakaako fire station. The site will be used as part of the Fire Department Museum that is planned for the adjacent main building of the Kakaako Fire Station. This report is being produced for Okada Trucking Company, who is prime contractor of the museum project in conjunction with the City & County of Honolulu. This report was researched and written in January 2005 by Dee Ruzicka, architectural historian for Mason Architects, Inc. Photographs were taken by Augie Salbosa in January, 2005.

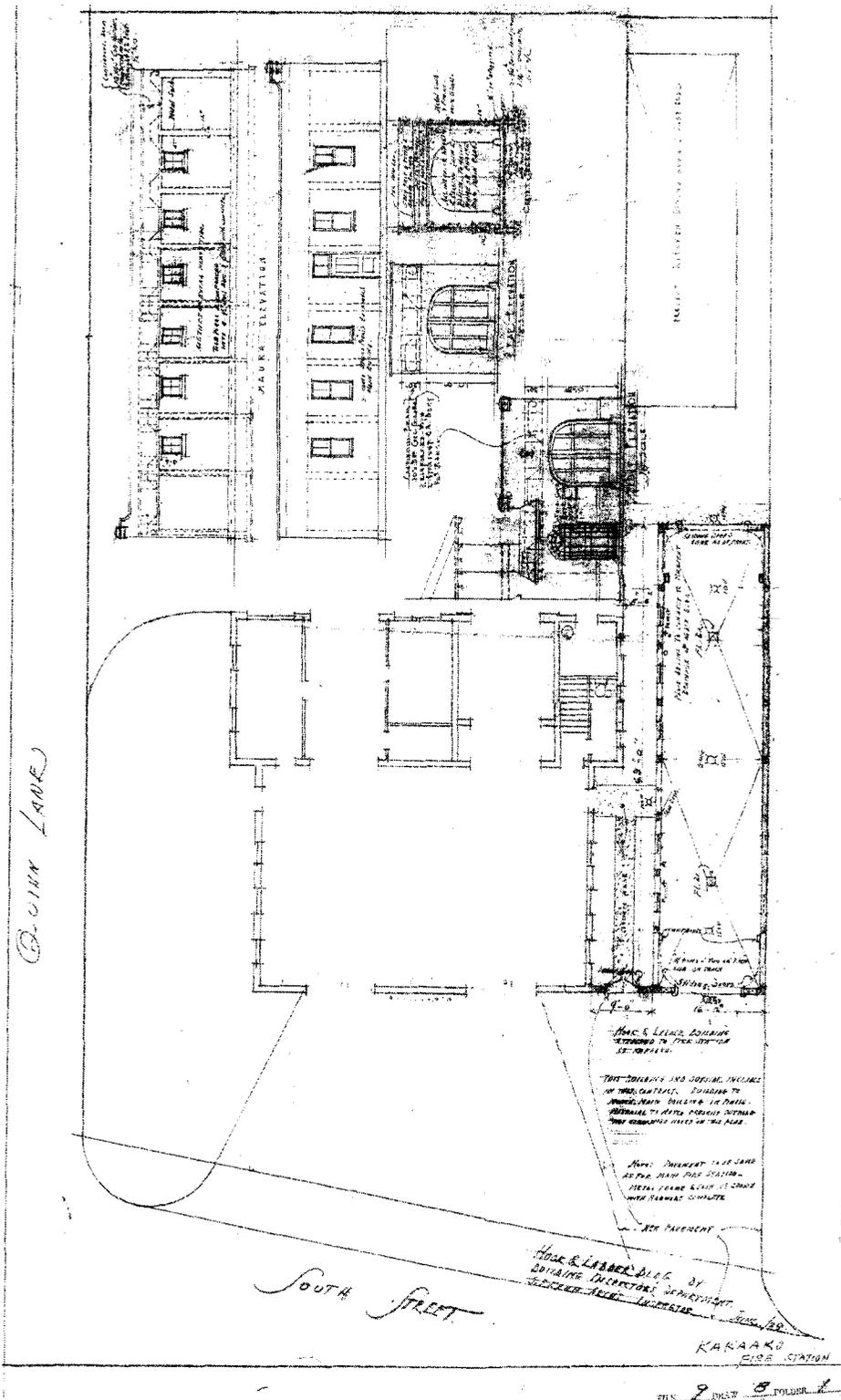
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Location map of hook and ladder building at the Kakaako fire station. (reduced, not to scale)



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Original Drawing: Hook and ladder building at the Kakaako fire station.  
 (Original elevation and floor plan, June 1929) (reduced not to scale)  
 From the City & County of Honolulu, Department of Design and Construction archives.  
 (See following pages for enlargements of this drawing)





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Portion of Original Drawing: Hook and ladder building at the Kakaako fire station.  
(Original elevation and floor plan, June 1929) (reduced not to scale)  
From the City & County of Honolulu, Department of Design and Construction archives.

