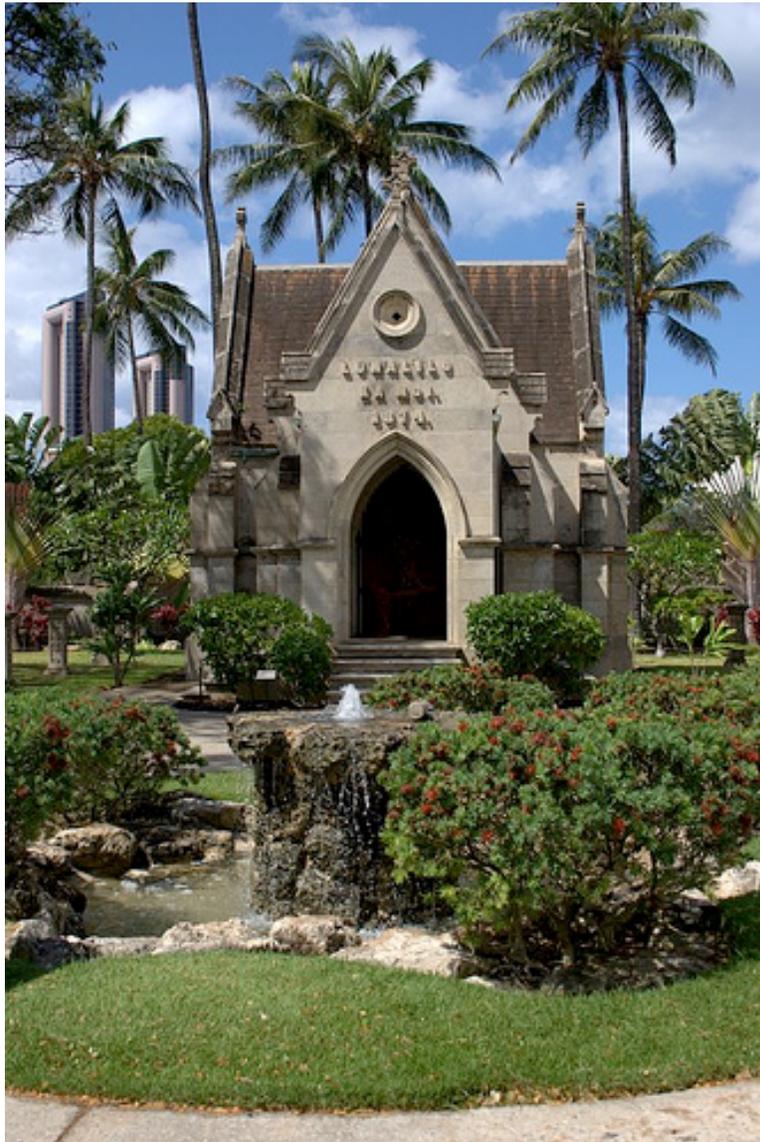


P L E N A R Y S E S S I O N S P E E C H
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*for the Historic Hawai`i Foundation
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Why Historic Preservation

First, Mahalo Kiersten for inviting to share some mana'ō this morning and to all of you please know that it's an honor and a privilege to be in your company. I think that the work you do is so vitally important to the quality of the human condition, in Hawai'i, and across this country. And yet, while historic preservation is work that I think is generally appreciated – it is usually appreciated when it applies to the other guy – and turns out to be at best a grand nuisance to most property owners – and of course the devil himself if it's your building, or landscape, or your political problem to deal with. So, I thought today I'd spend some time talking a little bit about why historic preservation and reminding ourselves why we do what we do.

In Hawaiian culture there is what we refer to as the three piko. The three parts of the body into which and from which flows our past to our future. The head or Po`o connects us to the heavens, our past, and our ancestors – where we've been. The central core or na`au capped with the navel represents the present. And finally our lower extremities – thru which we procreate and produce our future by bearing the children of the next generation. Past, present, and future connected in a belief system that governs our daily behavior which is acted out by honoring our past as a way to provide a quality future and in fact provides each generation with an immortality that connects all of us. There's a Hawaiian proverb –Ke Ala I Ka Wa Ma Mua, Ka Wa Ma Hope – the road to the future leads thru the past. It's a piece of Hawaiian wisdom that says it's important to know where we've been in order to navigate our future in ways that provide for quality of life. As part of a Hawaiian value system it's a proverb that – in contemporary times – assigns a very high priority to preserving our history and keeping our past connected to our future that as a matter of public policy that should drive our community planning at every level, and at every opportunity to weigh in as we manipulate our built environment – whether it be measuring the value of an existing historic environment or a matter of new construction design that might either diminish the historic value of a landscape or contribute to the perpetuation of the community history.

It's so interesting to me that dolphin intelligence is measured as equal to human thinking processes but that one huge difference that separates the species is that – no matter their intelligence – dolphins have no ability to alter their environment in any significant way. So, unlike humans, they are not able to construct monuments that can tangibly capture their history and have to rely on memory as the sole carrier of their past. Humans however, for good or bad, are capable of constructing environments that stand as living testament to our need for comfort, safety, sustenance, entertainment, and artistic expression. And in exercising our ability to construct, arrange, and develop our human habitats, we create a time tunnel of human history that stretches across the ages as a collective body of cultural landscapes, structures, objects,

and artifacts of where we've been and when the pieces are connected and stacked they form an incredible and spectacular time wave upon which rides our community memory, pausing briefly in the present, and tumbling us forward into the future. To be caretakers of these historic corridors of human existence is among the noblest of human endeavors for to not preserve our past is to be without a reflection in the waters of time. And although the import of our work too often doesn't pencil out well on corporate spreadsheets or government budgets it makes it makes our work even more important. For if not now, when – if not us, who – if not here, then where?

Ironically, while we act as advocates of preserving moments in time, time itself becomes our enemy. For each day that passes and our historical landscapes become compromised because another artifact disappears or an important cultural landscape is altered in ways that disconnect it from the past – each day that passes and we say aloha to another piece of our history – so are we diminished as a society and a piece of our soul is unretrievably lost. Sometimes, I'm not sure that even those of us who are engaged in historic preservation feel the urgency of our work. We are sometimes too patient. Too system adaptable. Too resigned to the status quo of business as usual. This past weekend, I traveled to Alaska with a Hawai'i contingent to an Indigenous People's Planning Conference where the central theme was about planning a future from behind an indigenous people's cultural prism. I sat in on a workshop by my colleague, Olohe Tommy Kaulukukui, who besides being the CEO of the Queen Lili'uokalani Trust, is also one of a handful of Lua Masters. Lua is the Hawaiian Martial Arts that dates back to the tenth century. And it was interesting that Tom, who was also an ex-judge in the Hawai'i judicial system – while explaining the warrior arts as a system of conflict resolution – he advocated the notion and need to perhaps bring a warrior's mentality to resolving civic issues and as a useful, practical art form toward quality community growth. That a warrior mentality is more often than not needed – to first, get someone's attention, and second, to press for results in a timely manner. Of course, he was not advocating violence. But he was advocating bringing a higher level of intensity – a renewed sense of urgency – perhaps even a militant fervor to endeavors that are important to us. Historic preservation, as a public issue, and a matter of quality of life for generations yet to come I think needs to attract more warriors to the field who are strident in the cause and unrelenting in the press for preservation.

I would end my remarks by opening a road less traveled window of opportunity for the cause of historic preservation. Historic preservation should be as much about new development as an ally as it is about preserving existing historic sites. New development can rise as powerful statements through creative design that celebrates the history, traditions, and customs of the surrounding cultural community. If we can thread public policies governing land use planning, zoning, and permitting that reward and encourage preservation as important – not just to our sense of place – but as a measure of success of good plan-

ning and quality of life as well as a strategy that brings market value to our communities as vibrant places to live where our histories are celebrated and reflected in the habitats we construct then we all win. We win our souls back. People who visit us win an experience that finds us in celebration of ourselves. The economy wins because it begins to resonate in far more sustainable growth. And the value of our existence is heightened.

Thank you for listening. Thank you for your commitment to historic preservation. And know that your work, however unheralded it may be at times, is noble work and that each day you spend at your job is another day at making the world a better place.