

## HISTORY OF THE OUTDOOR CIRCLE

Those first members of The Outdoor Circle - fifty years ago - were a handful of women who led a more easeful life than most of us are able to today, but they had perceived a vision of a city beautiful and they went about achieving it with astounding will.

Their general purpose was "to work for a more beautiful Honolulu" and they took for their handbook the plan prepared by Charles Mulford Robinson, Civic Advisor of Rochester, New York, who was called to the Islands in 1906 by the Board of Supervisors to outline a plan of development which would be the basis of all future improvement work.

Mr. Robinson's plan considered Honolulu as a natural panorama landscape - the sea its approach, the mountains its background - a city of distinctive, individual charm which did not aspire to be a great industrial center but "that rare thing, a city of delight seeking to give leisure and pleasure, flaunting not volumes of black smoke, but green hills and blue seas, the rainbow and the palm."

The Circle had thirty members at the end of that first year and had set forth their objectives. Their planning was so wise, their understanding of problems of Hawaii so thorough, that the Circle today with its membership of approximately twenty-five hundred is still guided by these aims of its By-Laws - "The objects and aims of this organization shall be to work for a more beautiful city, and cooperating in all efforts towards community welfare, health and sanitation."

The Outdoor Circle has continued through the years the simple, sincere purpose of those leaders - a beautiful Hawaii, free of billboards and other eyesores and covered from mountains to sea with green trees and flowers. Many things have been accomplished during these years and kamaaina and malihini enjoy today the result of work and plantings of fifty years.

An outstanding accomplishment of the Circle in eliminating ugliness was the highly successful campaign against billboards. It is difficult to visualize now that highways of Honolulu were formerly disfigured by huge signs - that billboards on Diamond Head urged you to smoke Bull Durham or buy certain brands of whiskey. An immense pickle sign put up on the road to Waikiki blotted out the lovely view of Mānoa Valley. Even the Pali was not safe from the orgy of billboards.

Fourteen years of hard, uphill work were required to convince local and mainland merchants that billboards were not going to deface permanently the landscape of Hawaii. In 1913 there were 43 local firms and many mainland firms using billboard advertising. The trouble was deepseated and it was necessary to arouse public indignation and recognition that billboards are detrimental to health and beauty in any locality, especially in Hawaii where the area is limited and scenic beauty is part of our stock in trade.

The Circle's first billboard chairman opened the campaign with all guns blazing. Mr. Lorrin A. Thurston, editor of the Pacific Commercial Advertiser and always a friend of the Circle, placed the entire plant of this paper at the disposal of The Outdoor Circle for the publication of an Anti-billboard Edition. This

special edition of May 10, 1913, makes fascinating reading today. Pictures of the most disfiguring billboards in the city were published beside pictures showing the scenery defaced by them; there were interviews with local residents and visitors voicing disapproval of the boards; essays by school children were featured, and Mr. Thurston's unfettered editorial comments denouncing a community evil packed real dynamite. This edition sells for \$10 a copy today, if one can be found.

The next year the report states "When this committee began, 40 local firms and many foreign ones were advertising on billboards all over the island, even Punchbowl, one of our chief scenic points, was desecrated by a soap advertisement in white letters about ten feet high. The use of billboards was steadily and rapidly increasing." Yes, there were many years of hard work ahead!

During this time, a rather amusing bit of concerted pressure was developed called "the rubber stamp campaign." A rubber stamp bearing the word ANTI-BILLBOARD was used for this purpose. It was about two and a half inches long and had letters half an inch high. Members used this with red ink. They stamped checks, receipts, bills, letterheads, and the outside of envelopes with it. As may be imagined, it made an impression on local and mainland merchants.

By 1923 there were only two local and three mainland firms who continued to use billboards for advertising. This reduction had been accomplished by personal calls on local merchants and letters to mainland concerns asking their cooperation, and by so awakening and crystalizing public sentiment against billboards that a boycott was used against firms which would not cooperate. During this year, the Board of Supervisors passed a resolution condemning the use of billboards.

Finally the end was in sight.

By 1927 every local firm had stopped the use of billboards and the only advertisers remaining were Wrigleys chewing gum and various brands of tobacco. The Outdoor Circle renewed efforts to buy out the local billboard firm which finally agreed to the sum of \$4,000 after much discussion. The money was raised by the women of The Outdoor Circle and they owned a business - which they promptly scrapped. From today's viewpoint there is a touch of humor in the fact that the next step was a "gentleman's agreement" formally drawn up with the city's large business firms and kept close at hand for ready reference.

1927 was a legislative year and The Outdoor Circle had a bill drawn forbidding erection of billboards. This bill passed both houses, and was approved as Act 195, and signed by the governor.

A long fight, exhausting and sometimes bitter, was over - the Circle believed. But such work is never finished. Unscrupulous or unthoughtful people who care little for the real good of the islands are a constant menace to the beauty of Hawaii. The price of a beautiful community is eternal vigilance. After the war, large and garish signs, almost as disfiguring as billboards started to appear. The Circle, by diplomacy and gentle coercion persuaded many sign displays to remove their atrocities. One particularly bitter skirmish fought in 1950 in a flurry of postcards, letters to newspapers, personal appeals and mainland communications, vanquished an advertiser who was defacing the Hawaiian sky with a low-flying airplane dragging an immense sign advocating a certain brand of whiskey.

Many store owners agree to remove their most obnoxious signs and many consult The Outdoor Circle before planning their's, but the Signs Committee is continually busy. In 1957 The Chamber of Commerce, The Outdoor Circle, The American Institute of Architects, and the sign manufacturers secured the passage of a Signs Ordinance. This ordinance required considerable compromise by the Circle and today everyone is in agreement that it is neither perfect nor adequate.

### PLANTING FOR BEAUTY

Through all these years The Outdoor Circle has had a two-fold purpose - to remove ugliness and to add beauty through planting. Perhaps these are the two sides to the same picture.

During the past 50 years so many thousands of plantings have been put out on the hillsides, along the roads, and around public buildings and school playgrounds, that it is impossible to imagine Honolulu without clothing it in beauty planted by The Outdoor Circle. Only if you have read the old missionary diaries which speak of the dry dust plains and the barren slopes of Punchbowl and Diamond Head, do you realize that natural Honolulu was far from being a verdant, semi-tropical lovely island. We read in these old diaries and early Mission reports that the dust swirling into the Chamberlain House on King Street, blanketing the food on the table and in the kitchen and "almost choking the babes in the cradle" was one of the hardest crosses early missionary wives had to bear.

We find the first notation on planting for beauty and health in old historical notes. The year is 1912. The Kilohana Art League had disbanded and The Outdoor Circle, one of its committees, had just organized as an independent club. The words are simple, even Spartan - but think of these stately trees which are a glory to Honolulu today! "Planting: Aala Park, monkeypod trees, bougainvillea vines along the stream; Thomas Square, district cross-streets, flowering trees; Alapai Plaza, monkeypod trees; Kalakaua Avenue, coconut trees."

Next we find in the notes that out of the Circle's slender funds two years later they employed a tree-trimmer for public plantings. An ambitious undertaking for a fledgling organization!

Of the thousands of plantings of The Outdoor Circle throughout the years we have space to name only a few. Most visitors who delight at the sight of flowering trees stretching for blocks along the streets of residential districts are unaware that most of these trees were planted under the auspices of The Outdoor Circle. The stately mahogany trees in the medial strip of Kalakaua Avenue and the coconuts throughout its length were planted by The Outdoor Circle. The landscaping of Schofield Barracks and Forts Kamehameha, Armstrong, Ruger, De Russy and Shafter was undertaken by The Outdoor Circle, one of the spectacular results being the fine avenue of royal palms and spreading monkeypod trees surrounding the parade ground at Fort Shafter today.

Through the Circle's efforts, Kamamalu Park was transformed from a dumping ground to an attractive playground. Pauoa Park was planted with showers and poinciana regia trees, Kalihi Park in monkeypods and palms and to Queen Emma Park were added the suitable koa and kukui trees. The Honolulu post office grounds were landscaped with oleanders, palms and ferns. An ambitious undertaking in 1922 and 1923 was the rehabilitation of Iolani Palace grounds, then in deplorable condition, at a cost of one thousand dollars to the Circle.



Assistance was given to the planting of the Kaneohe Hospital grounds, no government funds being available for this work. The Circle also assisted in planting the hibiscus which now stretch along the highway on Windward Oahu.

As the years passed the work of the Circle grew and requests for plants became so numerous that it was necessary for twenty years to maintain a plant nursery with a full-time attendant. Thousands of plants were distributed from the nursery for highways, school grounds, military installations, cemeteries, and other public planting projects and for camouflage during the war. The nursery was maintained until 1946 when the Parks Board took it over.

The Shade Tree Commission was the direct outgrowth of the work of the Circle in Avenue Planting and was formed at the request of this organization, their president being its first chairman. At this time, the Circle participated in the extensive planting of the Kaimuki avenues in which 5000 trees were utilized.

The work of the Landscape and Planting Committee of the Circle continues as vigorously as ever. This committee has a two-fold goal - protecting existing planting and planting new beauty. City officials frequently refer requests to cut down trees on public property to The Outdoor Circle and generally abide by the decision of the organization.

Immediately after the war, most of the 80 public schools requested and received Outdoor Circle assistance. This assistance is of three types: furnishing a landscape plan if none exists, advising improvements for existing planting, and furnishing plant material when needed.

Several years ago The Outdoor Circle launched a campaign which successfully stopped the alarming destruction of coconut trees all over the city caused by the demand for heart fronds for the making of coconut hats.

For many years the Circle has worked for a cleaner and healthier Hawaii. In this work the neighborhood Circles have accomplished much. This well organized group covers the city, trying among other activities to solve their neighborhood clean-up and garbage problems.

Yearly the Circle puts on an intensive campaign (Clean-Up Week) to eliminate unsightly garbage conditions. Prizes have been offered for solutions to the problem and publicity given to good and bad garbage disposal. The Division of Refuse Collection and Disposal of the City has been very cooperative and appreciative of this aid and of the Circle's publicity during the clean-up campaign.

In 1950 the formation of rural branches brought a new vitality to the Circle. Six branches, Aiea-Halawa, Kaaawa, Kaneohe, Lani-Kailua, Wahiawa, and Waialua, now form a chain which encircles the island of Oahu. They also are cleaning up their community eyesores, combating offensive signs, landscaping public buildings and planting highways, schools, and playgrounds.

It was also in 1950 that membership in The Outdoor Circle was first opened to men and its "Kane Kokua" membership is for all those men who wish to show their support of Outdoor Circle work.

Today in the Honolulu headquarters women come and go daily in committee work

which covers all the growth and problems of city planning. Representatives attend City Council meetings, participating in matters which effect the welfare and threaten the beauty of various areas. They supported Manoa residents in their fight for protection; they have worked unceasingly to save Diamond Head from high-rise defacement and the Pali from commercial plans and invasion by souvenir peddlers.

Other current participation in public affairs and island beautification includes State Parks study, Kawaiinui Swamp Park, Urban Renewal and Redovelopment, and representation on the Mayor's Planning Committee of the Theater Concert Hall and on the Oahu Development Conference.

One hundred and forty-four volunteer members of The Outdoor Circle provide the complete public service at Foster Gardens, 363 days of the year.

The Outdoor Circle has active representation on two other islands.

In Kona on the island of Hawaii, a branch was established in 1949 which now has a membership of 120 women. The Kona Outdoor Circle has accomplished many landscape projects including the spectacular planting of the Kona Airport with vari-colored bougainvillea and plumeria. It has also planted Kuakini Highway and is now engaged in landscaping the new Kona Cultural Center, Hale Halawai. This ambitious project was authorized by the County which allotted \$4,000 to The Kona Outdoor Circle for the landscaping.

Another inter-island branch was organized on Maui in 1954. It now has 147 active members who plan and conduct clean-up and litterbug campaigns, plant sales, and the landscaping of public areas and highways. Kauhuanu Avenue was planted with bougainvillea, oleanders, palms and pandanus, following the landscape plan of a professional architect employed by the Maui Outdoor Circle.

This is the story of Outdoor Circle work for 50 years. It is not a complete story, because that would fill endless pages, and it is not a finished story, because new chapters are being written every day by the dedicated work of the women who hope to keep their Hawaii the most beautiful land in the world.

Revised Outdoor Circle History  
by Alice Spalding Bowen  
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