

WAIKIKI BEACH, PUBLIC OR PRIVATE?

Editor The Advertiser:

Once in a while a person finds here some custom which jars him—perhaps greatly disturbs him. That sometimes happened to myself some forty-four years ago upon exchanging Connecticut for Hawaii.

It almost goes without saying that whenever one of us really fond of the Islands sees what seems to be an opportunity to placate an honest critic and dispel a misunderstanding, an effort should be made to do that.

The writer of a letter published this morning in The Advertiser, "Private Property on the Beach," clearly is not a malihini. However, he has not come to know—what indeed many kamaainas do not know—that all beach spaces between high and low water marks do not belong to the public.

Annexation of the Hawaiian Islands to the United States took place with careful provisions for respecting what were termed "vested rights." Certain land rights were vested and fixed under old grants from the former governments. In many such grants property rights were granted—as generally on the mainland—down to high water mark. However, there were a few grants where title passed to the land way down to low water mark. In other words, title passed to the strip of land between high and low water marks. That was legal when done and hence could not be undone.

One such exceptional instance concerns the land of Hamohamo, at Waikiki, embracing, roughly speaking, the beach in front of the Moana Hotel, that in front of the old Steiner home, and all in between. That is why years ago the Moana Hotel and the late Mr. Steiner built and maintained concrete columns on the beach between high and low water marks.

For many years I was a member of, and a daily visitor at, the Outrigger Canoe Club. My recollection is that their property is not a part of the land of Hamohamo and that the title of the land occupied by the club has never been claimed as extending makai farther than high water mark.

I have not seen the present setup at the beach as to which Mr. Ford complains, but it seems likely that—quite apart from the question raised by him as to who in Hawaii owns the land between high and low water marks—there is also now another question raised by him as to just where exactly is high water mark at the Outrigger Canoe Club premises.

Really there should be no acrimony in a matter of this nature. Hana malie! Hoomanawanui!