

88 Block Walks

a case study for Monumental Baptist Church in
West Philadelphia

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district
Kaka'ako (commercial retail district)

Honolulu, Hawai'i

dates of operation
2014- present





goal and mission

88 Block Walks seeks to “provide greater public access to archival materials and other diverse histories of the neighborhood” by way of a series of walking tours which explore “themes of gentrification, displacement, urbanization and generational change within Kaka’ako’s cultural, historical and physical landscape.”¹

theory of change

The program aims to “remove the lens through which landowners and developers present Kaka’ako’s narrative to the public and invite the community to create their own.”

1 <http://www.88blockwalks.com/read-me>

abstract

Carried by the principle of psychogeography, a term for the playful exploration of urban environments as a way to make pedestrians more aware of the urban landscape, 88 Block Walks intends to promote awareness of the “socio-spatial inequality” within the urban environment of Hawaii’s downtown district of Kaka’ako. Since its conception, the program has hosted six walks, with an average of one to two walks per year. The focus of the walks thus far have touched upon different topics related to ecology, society, and infrastructure – specifically, streams, oral histories, parking lots, university student compositions from the 1920s through the 1970s, historical theater performances, and mission house sites. Through these focused walking exhibitions, 88 Block Walks intends to shift the way people interact with the area.

keywords

public archive; living archive; walking tour; urban history



size of community

(circled in red)

16,363 people

59.1% Asian

22.2% White

9.5% Mixed

4% Other

3.5% Hispanic

1.4% Black¹



The geographic focus for 88 Block Walks is anyone who is interested to learn about the history of Kaka'ako. However, most of the attendants probably reside in urban Honolulu, which has a population of 350,395 people.²

1 Compiled by Statistical Atlas, 2010 US Census Bureau data.

2 Ibid.

founder

Adele Balderston is the founder and sole organizer of 88 Block Walks. She is a place-based storyteller from Kailua, Hawai'i, and holds an MA in geography from Hunter College (CUNY) and a BA in new media communication studies from New York University.

Adele started the organization because she felt concerned for the inequality in the Kaka'ako area. In an interview with Hawaii Public Radio, she expressed,

It was a really poor area. It was razed because it was urban blight. Urban planners thought it was ugly, so they got rid of it. But now we're having the same problem, they're building all this luxury housing," spoke Adele, "But you know, there's still people who live here, and there are business here. And the businesses are their own communities in this similar way [...] it's just this cycle of displacement."¹



sources of support

Hawaii Council for the Humanities

A 503(c) non-profit, which a private nonprofit organization that supports and promotes the exchange of ideas, stories, and traditions to improve communities and to encourage participation in civic life.¹



Interisland Terminal

A charitable organization which promotes the cultural and socio-economic life of Honolulu through year-round programs in Contemporary Art, Design, and Film that explores the intersections of creativity, innovation and civic engagement.



1 <http://hihumanities.org/>

2 <https://www.missionhouses.org/>

3 <https://hawaii-futures.com/>

4 <https://dashophnl.com/>

external partners

The external partners of 88 Block Walks are individuals, shops, and organizations. Listed are a few examples of the entities:

Hawaii Mission Homes Historic Site

Hawaii Mission Homes Historic Site and Archives "preserves the heritage and interprets the stories of the American Protestant Missionaries, their descendants, and their relationships with the people and cultures of Hawai'i, connecting with contemporary life, and encouraging a deeper understanding and appreciation of the complex history of Hawai'i."²

Sean Connelly

Sean Connelly is the author of Hawai'i' Futures, an online resource for sustainable urbanism in Hawai'i.³

da Shop

da Shop is a community bookstore and events space.⁴

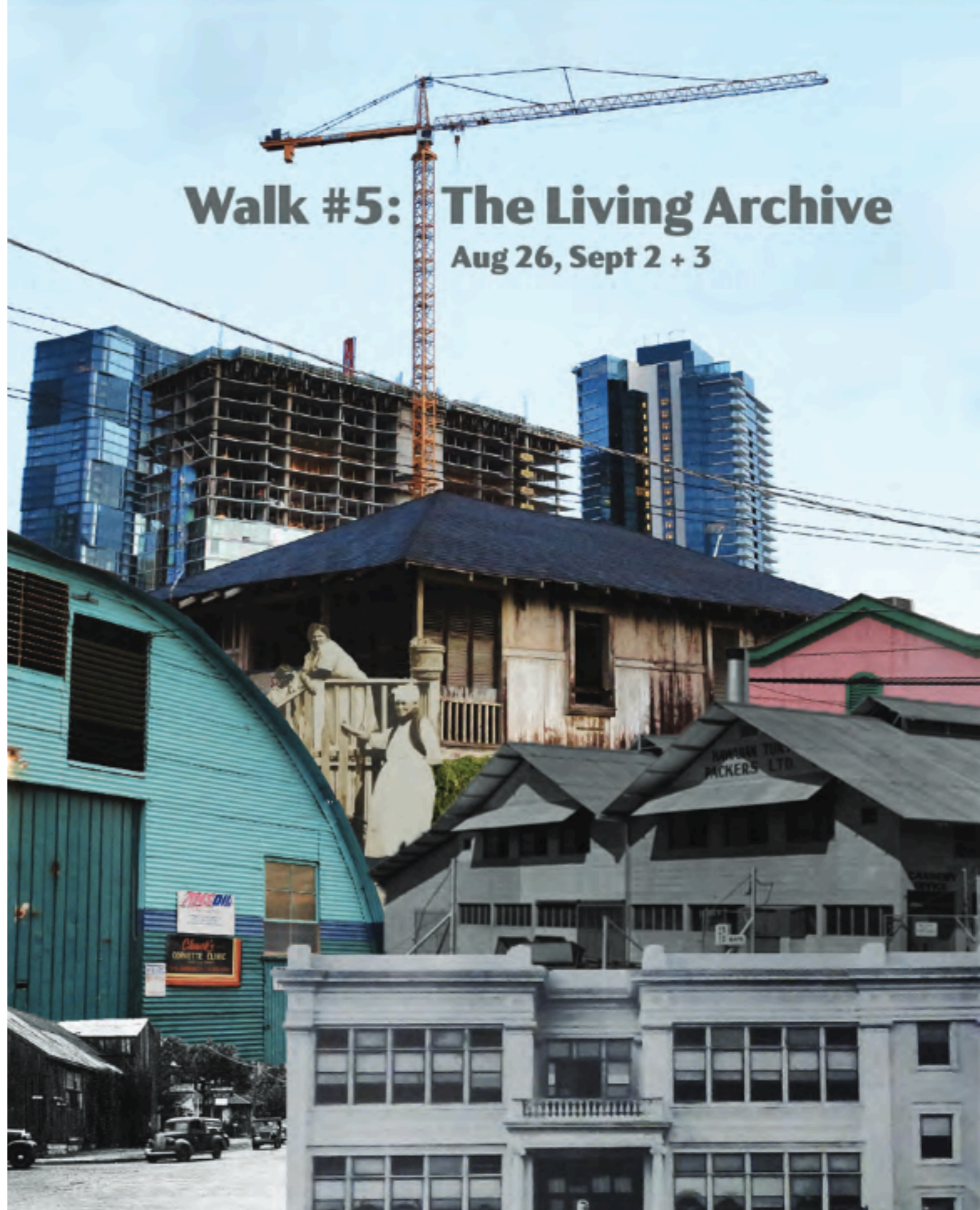
“A lot of people talk about the Ala Wai that runs under the Blaisdell now. So other people are becoming aware of different, you know, things that are less visible in the neighborhood. And they’re trying to bring them to the surface in different ways through their actions and their stories.”

– Adele

programs

Since its conception, 88 Block Walks has hosted a total of 6 walking tours. The tours are listed on the website under the “walks” section.¹

The following two pages highlight Walk #5: The Living Archive, depicted in the poster to the right, with Kakaako’s evolving architecture throughout the ages. Older buildings in black in white linger at the bottom while the blue glass development complexes of the current day loom at the top.





A story teller performs in front of a public audience for 88 Block Walks. The image is from a short film, "88 BLOCK WALKS: The Living Archive" which showcases these tours. Access the film at this weblink: <https://vimeo.com/233774839>.

A map of the Walk #5 tour route.

According to the 88 Block Walks site,

"Walk #5: The Living Archive is a walking tour and multimedia experience featuring actors in period costumes and multiple outdoor projections of historical images. Narratives stem from ten essays archived as part of the Romanzo Adams Social Research Library Collection (RASRL) at the University of Hawai'i."

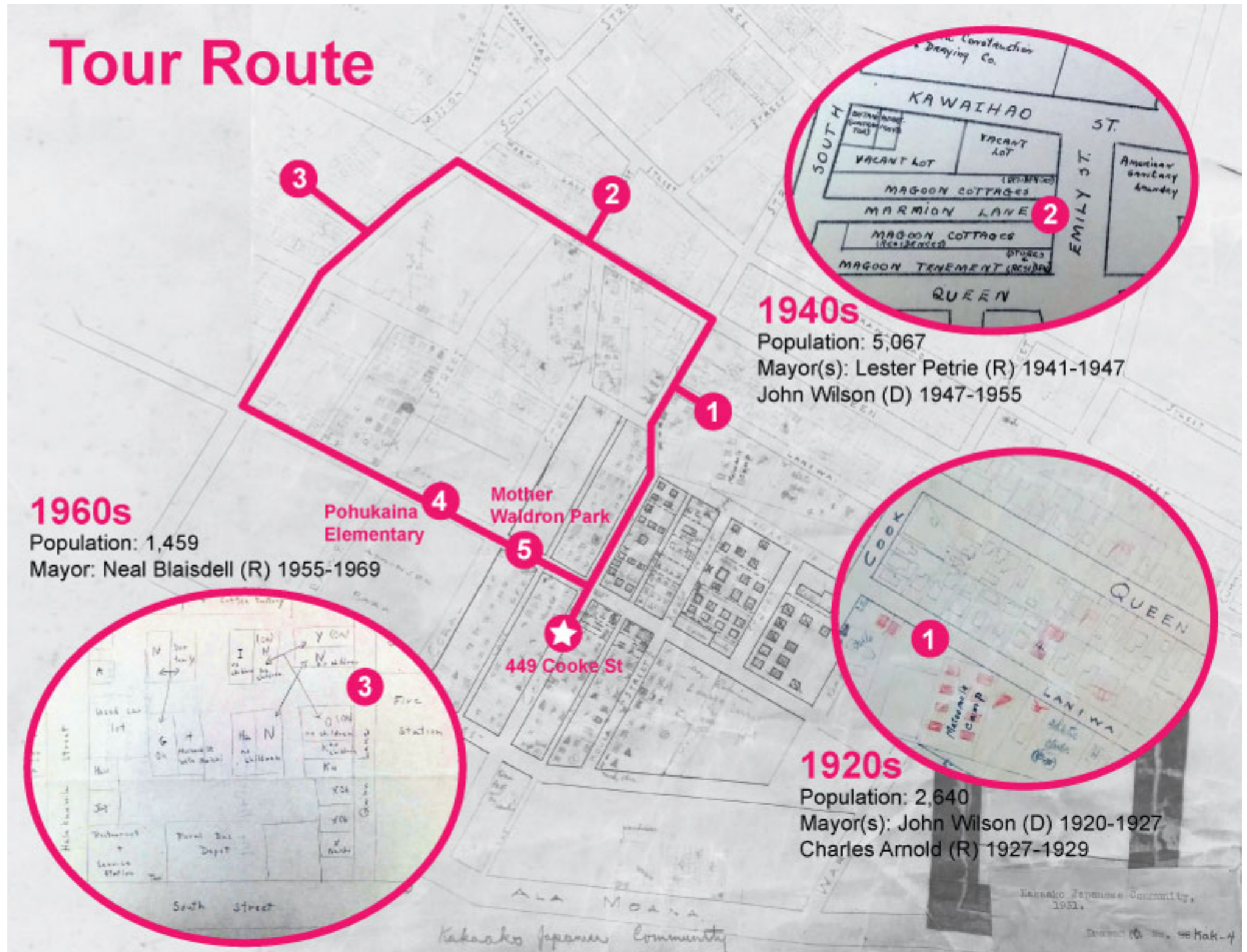




Image: a storyteller performing in Walk #5.

strengths

88 Block Walks prospers as a public engagement program, which shares archival work in a meaningful and impactful way through stories and performance art. The diverse range of partnerships add to the program's success.

weaknesses

It is difficult to identify significant weaknesses in the program. However, one suggestion would be for the program to do more work to further articulate the inequality and displacement of previous Kaka'ako residents, perhaps by tracing the effects of developers such as Howard Hughs.

opportunities

The program could do more public outreach to schools, youth programs, and businesses. For businesses, 88 Block Walks could pitch for companies to take walking tours as a "retreat" in which employees, such as those in the downtown district can learn about the urban history of Honolulu. These areas of outreach could even enrich developers' knowledge of the spaces where they live and work.



threats

A major threat to the continuation of the program is that there is only one individual, Adele, who appears to sustain the program with small grants. Because of this small-scale leadership and investment, it is difficult to predict how long the program will last.

lessons for West Philadelphia

This case study of 88 Block Walks may offer ways in which to honor and recognize the living history of West Philadelphians. An adaptation of the program has the potential to stir vigor and pride among community members and the neighborhoods they live in. One idea is to partner with an organization such as Hakim's Bookstore & Giftshop (210 S 52nd St.), which is one of Philadelphia's last black-owned bookstores.¹



Yvonne Blake holds a photo of her father Dawud Hakim, in front of the store in the 1970s (Philadelphia Inquirer, 2017).

¹ Russ, Valerie. "Last of Philly's black-owned bookstores looking for a comeback." *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. Dec. 26, 2017. <https://www.inquirer.com/philly/news/hakims-bookstore-black-and-nobel-close-survive-20171226.html>