

Posted on: Sunday, November 9, 2008

OBAMA'S BOYHOOD HOMES IN HAWAII

# Obama's Hawaii boyhood homes drawing gawkers

- Much to do before transition to White House
- Reality will test Obama's rhetoric
- Girls about to be swept up in a princess whirlwind
- Obama kids will have to wait months for their puppy
- Former White House butler served as a witness to history
- Obama's favorite suits, snacks might become yours, too

By Will Hoover  
Advertiser Staff Writer

Birthplaces and boyhood homes of U.S. presidents have been duly noted and honored for nearly as long as America has been a nation. In the case of such towering figures as Thomas Jefferson, Abe Lincoln and Teddy Roosevelt, those early locations have been deemed national treasures and historic sites, visited annually by the multitudes.

The discovery and identification this year of George Washington's boyhood home in Virginia has been hailed as the "best available window into the setting that nurtured the father of our country."

In the case of the historic election of Barack Obama on Tuesday as the next president, there's more than one boyhood home in Honolulu to celebrate and enshrine.

Stories surrounding Obama's youth tend to focus on his birth in Hawai'i, his time in Indonesia, his time living with his grandparents on Beretania Street in lower Makiki and his high school years at Punahou School.

However, a view of the various homes where Obama dwelled in Honolulu reveals a broader, diversified beginning. Other than his four years in Indonesia between 1967 and 1971, Obama spent his time from birth to high school graduation in half a dozen Honolulu residences with one or more of his relatives. A look at those homes also shows that Obama's grandparents probably played a larger role in his infancy and early years than is usually reported.

The future president's first boyhood home is still standing on Kalaniana'ole Highway, in the Kuli'ou'ou area between 'Aina Haina and Hawai'i Kai.

The yellow, four-bedroom, single-story home was built in 1948. Nani Smethurst, who has owned the home since 1979, said the place is essentially the same as it was when it was built, although it has been upgraded and landscaped by Smethurst, who is an architect.

The property also has a 450-square-foot cottage in the back that was built in 1953.



Kapiolani Medical Center is where Barack Obama was born in 1961, according to his family.

Photos by BRUCE ASATO | The Honolulu Advertiser



The cottage behind the house at 6085 Kalaniana'ole Highway may have been Obama's parents' rooms when they lived with the Dunhams.

ADVERTISEMENT

ADVERTISEMENT

## Top Ranked MBA School

Forbes Top 5% of Best U.S. Colleges Several Campuses. Apply Now!



Smethurst said she recently noticed people coming around to peer at her home. Then she began receiving calls from local and Mainland newspapers inquiring about Obama's first home.

"I didn't know," Smethurst said. "And then we got a call from someone saying did you know your home is Barack Obama's first home. It seems that somebody knew. A lot of people, when passing through, would come take a look and maybe take pictures."

She said someone posted the address on the Internet. That July posting contained a photocopy of what is most likely the first mention of Barack Obama ever published — a tiny, one-line birth notice in the Sunday, Aug. 13, 1961, edition of The Honolulu Advertiser:



The announcement of Barack Obama's birth appeared in The Honolulu Advertiser on Aug. 13, 1961.

"Mr. and Mrs. Barack H. Obama, 6085 Kalaniana'ole Highway, son, Aug. 4."

The exact same notice appeared the following day in the Honolulu Star-Bulletin. The numerous birth announcements above and below the Obama listing also were identical in both papers, which were unaffiliated, competing publications.

Advertiser columnist and former Star-Bulletin managing editor Dave Shapiro was not at either paper in 1961, but he remembers how the birth notices process worked years later when both papers were jointly operated by the Hawaii Newspaper Agency — which no longer exists.

"Those were listings that came over from the state Department of Health," he said. "They would send the same thing to both papers."

#### **BABY'S FIRST HOME**

Fringe theorists who insist Obama was born in Kenya are left to ponder how two independent Honolulu daily newspapers and the state Department of Health could be part of conspiracy half a century ago to thwart the truth about the future president of the United States.

The first mention of that future president in the announcement was the word "son." The Barack H. Obama referred to was the newborn's father and the husband of the former Stanley Ann Dunham, the boy's mother. She and her parents, Kansas couple Stan Dunham, a furniture store operator, and Madelyn Dunham ("Toot," to Obama), a bank cashier, had come to Hawai'i in 1960 and moved into the Kalaniana'ole location.

The senior Obama came from Kenya to the University of Hawai'i in 1959, where he met and later married Stanley Ann Dunham, 18, also a UH student.

It's feasible the couple occupied the back cottage at 6085 Kalaniana'ole. Public records from the time show that Barack H. Obama, 25, also had a residence at 625 11th Ave. in Kaimuki.

Since those records show that Obama Sr. had the 11th Avenue dwelling at the same time he and his wife were living on Kalaniana'ole Highway, it's possible the young Barack also visited that residence. The 11th Avenue address is now occupied by a larger dwelling that was built in 1990.

By 1963 the Dunhams had moved into Apartment 110 of a six-year-old building at 1427 Alexander Street, records show. A year before, Obama Sr. had separated from his wife and child to attend Harvard University. In 1963, when she was a UH sophomore, Stanley Ann Obama's address was listed in a university directory as 2277 Kamehameha Ave. She filed for divorce in 1964. It can be assumed that she and young Barack also spent time with the Dunhams at the two-bedroom apartment on Alexander, which is also still there.

#### **BACKYARD IN MANOA**

By 1964 the Dunhams, along with young Barack and their daughter, who was now going by the name Ann Dunham, were living together in a four-bedroom home at 2234 University Ave., records show. This single-story Manoa home with its wide-open veranda and sprawling front and back lawns, was within walking distance of Noelani Elementary School, which Obama attended. The family remained there together for more than three years. It represents what might have been the most traditional home life of Obama's childhood. Built in 1947, the house remains in a neighborhood that's little changed since the '60s.

Today, Virginie and Brian Ching and their two toddlers live at that residence along with a nanny. The couple found a photo of the home for rent in a want ad and were taken by the old-style home with hardwood floors and vertical board walls. Since April the family has been living in the rental house, which is owned by a neighborhood church.

But they were unaware that Obama had lived there as a child.

"I can't believe I'm standing on the floor where Barack Obama once walked," said Virginie Ching after learning she lives in the boyhood home of the president-elect. "I'm very happy to know that. I voted for him. Maybe he'd like to come back and visit."

Obama, his mother, and his grandparents were still living at the home in 1967 when Ann Dunham married another man she met at UH, Lolo Soetoro. The couple, with 6-year-old Barack in tow, moved to Jakarta, Indonesia, that same year.

In 1971, at age 10, Barack Obama was back in Honolulu with his grandparents, who had moved to Apartment 1206 at 1617 S. Beretania. Two years later, the Dunhams and Obama settled into Apartment 1008 in the same 96-unit building, built in 1965. This was Obama's primary residence until he left Hawai'i in 1979 after high school graduation.

In 1973, Ann Soetoro returned to Hawai'i to study anthropology at UH. She and Lolo Soetoro had separated and she brought along the couple's 3-year-old toddler, Maya Soetoro. She and the child took up residence at a nine-unit walk up apartment at 1839 Poki Street. Years later Obama's sister recalled Obama staying with her and their mother at the Poki Street apartment, built in 1970.

But Ann Soetoro's friend, Alice Dewey, a UH professor who chaired Soetoro's doctorate committee, said that after Obama's mother returned to Hawai'i she stayed at several Honolulu locations, though she never strayed far from the orbit of her son and her parents.

"She would get a place around the corner from her parents, so I suspect she spent as much time there as at her place," said Dewey. "She lived on Spreckles Street. I helped her carry her books up there. And I remember the Poki Street place, which was about two blocks away from her parents. She stayed for a while in my household at 2828 Kahawai St.

"Barack would always come and go."

Now, Dewey is amazed and delighted that people across the world are anxious to celebrate Obama's birthplace and enshrine his boyhood homes.

#### **BORN AUG. 4, 1961**

While most Obama residences can be traced, the hospital where he was born is difficult to document. The desire of historians to pinpoint where Obama's life began has crashed head-on with the modern American propensity toward confidentiality. The federal Health Information Privacy Act of 1999 — a law passed to protect medical records from public scrutiny — prevents hospitals from confirming births, administrators contend.

"We don't have plans to do anything," said Kapiolani Medical Center spokeswoman, Claire Tong, when asked how the center plans to commemorate the soon-to-be 44th U.S. president, who, according to Obama's family and other sources, was born at that hospital on Aug. 4, 1961.

"We can't confirm or deny it — even though all the information out there says he was born at Kapiolani Hospital. And that's because of the HIPA law."

Tong acknowledged that the center has received daily inquiries from news agencies far and wide asking for confirmation of Obama's birthplace. Much as she wishes she could do it, Tong said it's not possible.

"Our hands are tied," she said.

Reach Will Hoover at [whoover@honoluluadvertiser.com](mailto:whoover@honoluluadvertiser.com).

• • •



©COPYRIGHT 2010 The Honolulu Advertiser. All rights reserved.  
Use of this site signifies your agreement to the Terms of Service and Privacy Policy/Your California Privacy Rights , updated March 2009.