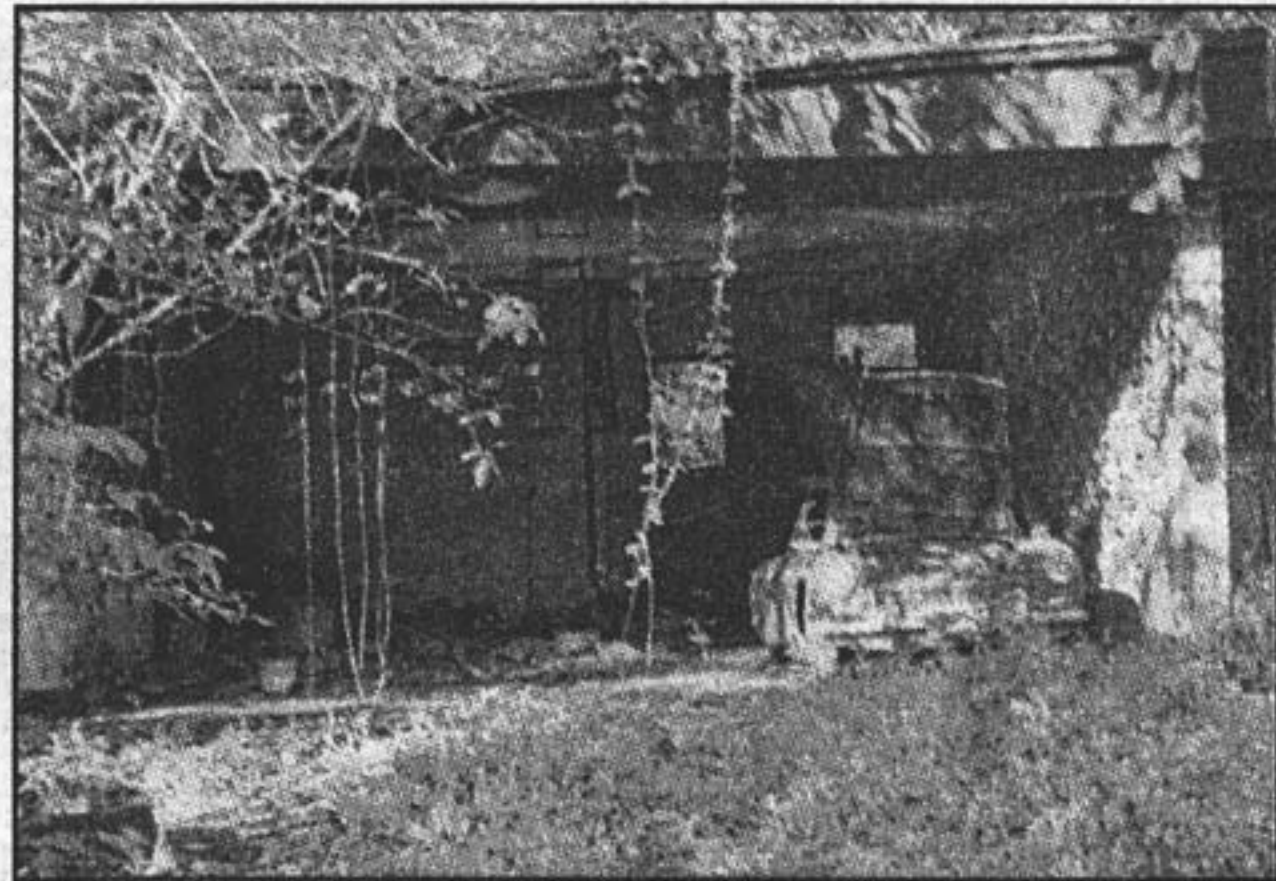


Honolulu Star-Bulletin

Y 4, 1994

THE PULSE OF PARADISE

ON OAHU 50 CENTS



Mystery shrouds this old house

□ Teen-agers call it haunted and the city hunts its owner

By Ian Y. Lind

Star-Bulletin

WINDWARD teens call it the haunted house of Ahuimanu.

"They say you can hear dogs howling if you climb over the fence at midnight," recounts Reyna Souza, a 23-year-old Kaneohe resident who made the late night trek with a group of friends a few years ago.

The abandoned and dilapidated house stands on an acre of land on Ahuimanu Loop overlook-

ing Kaneohe. A black wrought-iron fence blocks a driveway that has been overgrown by weeds and shrubs.

Grass and trees, some now more than 10 feet tall, grow from the gutters and on the roof of the garage and main house, where three fires have been set in the last two years. A once-sporty MG convertible, now reduced to a rusted and burned hulk, squats in the garage alongside a mound of charred rubble.

Neighbors told the Star-Bulletin the last recorded owner, Alan K. Moon Jr., has not been seen since the early 1980s, and the house has not been occupied for more than a decade.

Someone has paid the real property taxes regularly. The current tax of \$1,318 is based on a total assessed value of \$394,000. The tax has been

See **HOUSE**, Page A-6

HOUSE: Vandalized and burned, property is a dangerous eyesore

Continued from Page A-1

paid although the assessed value includes \$110,000 for the shell of the once gracious home.

Grace Nakamura, head of city real property tax collection and accounting, said tax payments were made by someone who comes to the counter without one of the "card bills," mailed to property owners.

Nakamura said the tax bills are being mailed to the address of the house, which does not have a mailbox. Felice Cook, a representative of the U.S. Postal Service, said that no special forwarding instructions exist and mail addressed to the house is returned.

"When I found that out, I said that was really strange," said Heidi Ho, deputy corporation counsel assigned to enforce citations issued by the Building Department. She said the disappearance of the owner and other complications make the situation "very unique."

The house has become a potential danger, according to the Building Department, as well as a legal quandary for city attorneys. Neighbors wonder why anyone would walk away and allow a valuable home to fall into ruin.



"It was beautiful, really, a huge, well-built house," said Peggy Arita, who has lived next door for more

than 35 years. City records show it was built in 1953 with four bedrooms, two baths, and a covered lanai. A swimming pool was added in 1967.

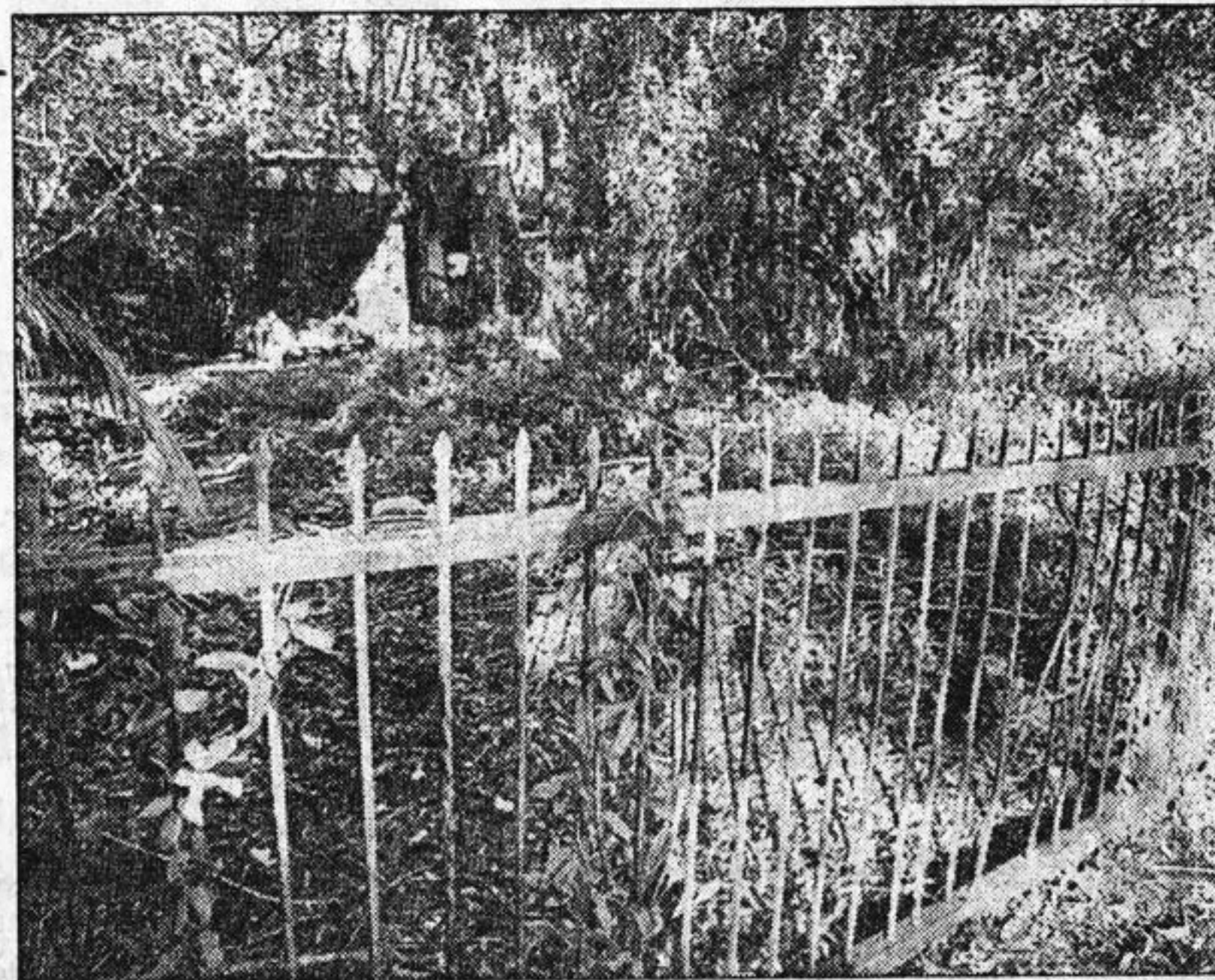
One corner of the living room was dominated by a huge fireplace built like a fine rock wall, while picture windows running the length of the room provided a commanding view down the valley and across Kaneohe to Kualoa Point.

Moon, a 1963 graduate of Kalani High School, was just 24 years old when he bought the house in 1969. The purchase was apparently made with the assistance of his mother, Alicia L. Lee, a friend of the previous owners.

Records on file with the Bureau of Conveyances show the house was purchased through an agreement of sale for \$57,500. The agreement called for a \$10,000 down payment and monthly payments of \$430 until the balance, along with 6 percent interest, was paid in full.

State records show Lee is a real estate broker first licensed in 1967. She still has an active real estate license. The Star-Bulletin was unable to contact Lee for comment.

Moon's parents were divorced when he was 2. His father, Alan K. Moon Sr., worked for the Teamsters Union and the affiliated organization, Unity House.



By Dean Sensui, Star-Bulletin

A wrought-iron fence surrounds the burned-out house on Ahuimanu Loop.

In 1968, the elder Moon was named to a 12-member blue-ribbon committee of prominent Honolulu residents formed to advise newly elected Mayor Frank Fasi on his first Cabinet appointments. Alan Moon Sr. died in 1987.

David Campbell, who lives directly across Ahuimanu Loop, says he last saw Moon 12 or 14 years ago. Arita says it has been "at least 10 years."

Electrical service to the Ahuimanu house was cut in June 1982, said Jane Inouye of Hawaiian Electric.

City efforts to locate Moon started soon after neighbors began complaining in 1986. Building De-

partment records indicate that inquiries to relatives, Social Security, the post office and the bank where house payments had been sent have yielded no trace of him.

Moon's sister, Shelley, who lives in Honolulu, spoke briefly with the Star-Bulletin but asked that her full married name not be used to avoid "harassment" from neighbors and others interested in the house. "It's not my property," she said.

Shelley Moon said she has not had word from or contact with her brother for many years. She has made similar statements to city officials in the past.

Asked whether she worries something might have happened to Alan, she said, "Yes, of course we have, definitely, as family. But the mere fact that we haven't heard from him doesn't mean that something has happened to him."



One of those who was in the house before it was destroyed was Martin "Marty" McClain, owner of a Honolulu auction business. McClain says he "hopped over the fence" in mid-1988, hoping to find clues that would allow him to purchase the property.

McClain says the car in the garage, a green MG convertible, needed to be waxed but "looked like someone had driven it recently."

Inside the house, "appliances were pulled out from the wall just enough to see behind them. Dresser drawers were pulled out. The furniture had been cut open. Couches, chairs, even the beds had been sliced down the center," McClain says.

"Someone had obviously searched the house," he said, but McClain also noted that a number of valuable items remained in the house and had not been stolen.

McClain said there were upholstered chairs and couches in the living room along with a television set and baby grand piano. There was clothing in the closets, a set of sterling silver in a dining room drawer and full bottles of liquor in a poolside bar. "It didn't look right, so I took some quick pictures and left."

Over the next few years, neighbors say, the house was vandalized. Finally, early on the morning of May 16, 1992, the house was gutted by fire. Two smaller fires followed in December 1992 and May 1993.

City building inspectors now consider both the house and the unsecured swimming pool dangerous. But more than seven years after the first complaints from neighbors, the city has made little progress in removing the hazards.

When Moon could not be found, city attorneys contacted Robert Fountain, the previous owner, who now lives in Australia. Fountain is considered to have a continuing legal interest in the house because the final payments were never made on the agreement of sale.

In a 1990 letter to the Building Department, Fountain declined to take any action to correct the problems. "I suggest that the county use its authority if Mr. Moon is unresponsive," Fountain wrote.

Fountain also has rebuffed offers to purchase his remaining interest in the property, according to McClain and others who have contacted him in Australia.

Fountain is traveling on the U.S. mainland and could not be reached for comment. His wife, reached in Australia, said he "had a lot of respect" for Alicia Lee "and didn't want to do anything to make it difficult for her."

Ho said the city has "been trying to give someone a chance to correct it before proceeding through the courts." She said "we will now be proceeding through the legal system."

City levels a 'haunted' vacant house

■ The owner was last seen in '82 and walked away from a once-lovely home

BY IAN Y. LIND
Star-Bulletin

A bulldozer has begun clearing away the remains of an abandoned and burned house above Kaneohe.

The city-directed demolition leaves a nagging mystery: Why did the owner walk away from the once-beautiful four-bedroom, two-bath home on a one-acre lot, leaving behind a sports car, a baby grand piano and other furnishings, along with clothing, books and personal items?

After nearly a decade of complaints from neighbors on Ahuimanu Loop, the city gave up its attempts to find Alan K. Moon Jr., the last known owner, and instead hired a company to remove the remains of the house and fill in the swimming pool. The job began yesterday and was expected to be completed today.

"It was a pleasant surprise to see the bulldozer this morning," said Peggy Arita, who lives next door. Arita first complained about the abandoned house in 1986, according to city records. "I kept getting the runaround," Arita said, but she kept calling the city at least once a year.

The city's job was complicated because Moon could not be located, although property taxes have been paid by someone over the years as the house slowly fell into ruins. Moon's sister, who lives in Honolulu, has refused to take



any responsibility for the property, as has Robert Fountain, who sold the home to Moon in 1969 on an agreement of sale and may have some legal claim on the property.

In September 1994, the city published a legal notice declaring the property dangerous and directing Moon or any other owners to demolish the remaining

structure. Deputy Corporation Counsel Heidi Ho said no response was received.

A permit for the demolition was issued to Transcend Inc. last month. The permit application estimated the cost at \$9,800. Ho said the city will pay and then try to collect the money. Eventually, the property could be sold to recover the costs.

Moon's last publicly recorded appearance was in early 1982, when he was in court during a lawsuit involving a condominium dispute.

Electrical service to the house was cut off in June 1982, and neighbors say Moon has not been seen since.

Vandalism started about 1988. Then a series of fires in 1992 and 1993 reduced

Kamehameha Hwy.

Mystery house demolished

Ahuimanu Road

N

Ahuimanu Loop

Map area

Star-Bulletin

A city-contracted bulldozer clears the mysterious Ahuimanu Loop property where a four-bedroom house, its contents, and a sports car have quietly deteriorated since 1982.

BY TERRY LUKE, Star-Bulletin

the home to ruins. "Kids would go in there at night," Arita said, drawn by rumors that the house is haunted.

Even after the fires, property taxes were quietly paid on the value of the land and the former structure, city records show. Property tax officials told the Star-Bulletin last year that city records do not show who has been keeping tax payments up to date.

Nothing in city records explains why Fountain and others, including members of Moon's family, have not tried to claim the property, which is assessed for tax purposes at more than \$300,000.

"We're still wondering what happened," Arita said. "Some of the people in the neighborhood say, watch out, you might find some skeleton up there."