

Hawai'i Once Ran on a Half-Hour the Continent Forgot

How longitude, law, war, communications and software built the time displayed on Hawai'i's clocks.



Photo: Jack E. Boucher, HABS/NPS

Frame: Mattes, public domain, cropped

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● REC TFW HI C14-14

02/16

Hawai'i once had a time zone your phone probably cannot show you today.

For more than fifty years, Hawai'i occupied a temporal position that would look strange on most American phones today: the equivalent of UTC-10:30.

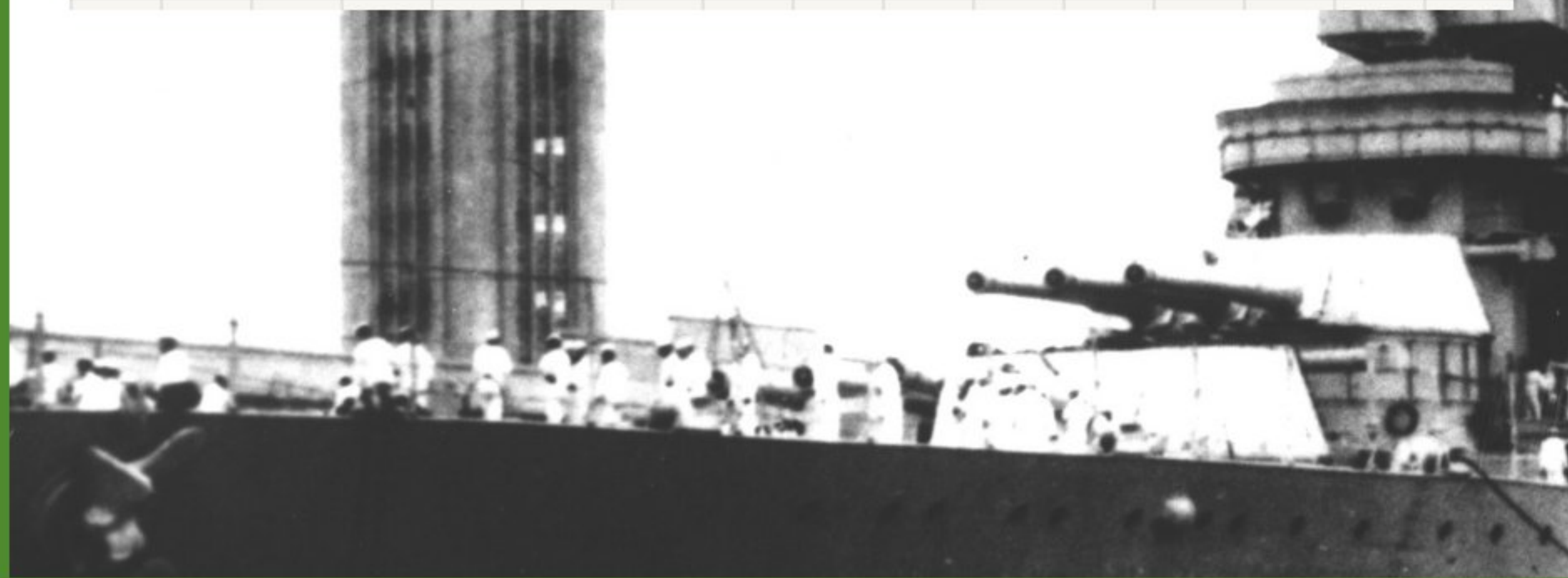


Photo: National Park Service

Frame: Mattes, public domain, cropped

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03/16



Standard time began in 1896 under the Republic of Hawai'i.

At noon on Monday, January 13, 1896, all public timepieces under the Interior Department's control were to be set to Hawaiian Standard Time.

Source: Hawaiian Gazette, Jan 10, 1896

Frame: Mattes, public domain, cropped

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04A/16

In January 1893, a group of American and European businessmen and planters,

backed by United States troops who landed from a United States warship, deposed Queen Lili'uokalani and set up a Provisional Government.



Source: Hawai'i State Archives

Frame: Mattes, public domain, cropped

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In 1993 a joint resolution of Congress (Public Law 103-150) apologized to Native Hawaiians

for the overthrow, which it said took place with the participation of agents and citizens of the United States. Its preamble calls it the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy.

Photo: White House, NARA

Frame: Mattes, public domain, cropped

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05/16

The Provisional Government declared itself the Republic of Hawai'i on July 4, 1894.

On January 8, 1896, the Republic's Minister of the Interior announced Hawaiian Standard Time: ten and one-half hours behind Greenwich mean time. It was signed by J. A. King.



Photo: Frank Davey (HSA)

Frame: Mattes, public domain, cropped

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06/16



**Annexation followed in
1898,**

**and the Territory of Hawai'i was
created by the Organic Act in
1900.**

Photo: Frank Davey (HSA)

Frame: Mattes, public domain, cropped

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A common hour is an infrastructure of coordination.

It lets a departure printed in one place correspond to an arrival in another. It makes a telegraphed observation comparable.

Source: Hawai'i State Archives

Frame: Mattes, public domain, cropped

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Before agreement, a clock answers to the sun where it stands.

After agreement, it answers to an authority that has selected a meridian. Hawai'i's 1896 choice used the half step between two such zones.

Source: Library of Congress

Frame: Mattes, public domain, cropped

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09/16

In 1933, the Territorial Legislature approved daylight saving on April 26

and repealed it on May 21, less than a month later, leaving Hawai'i on standard time for the rest of the decade.

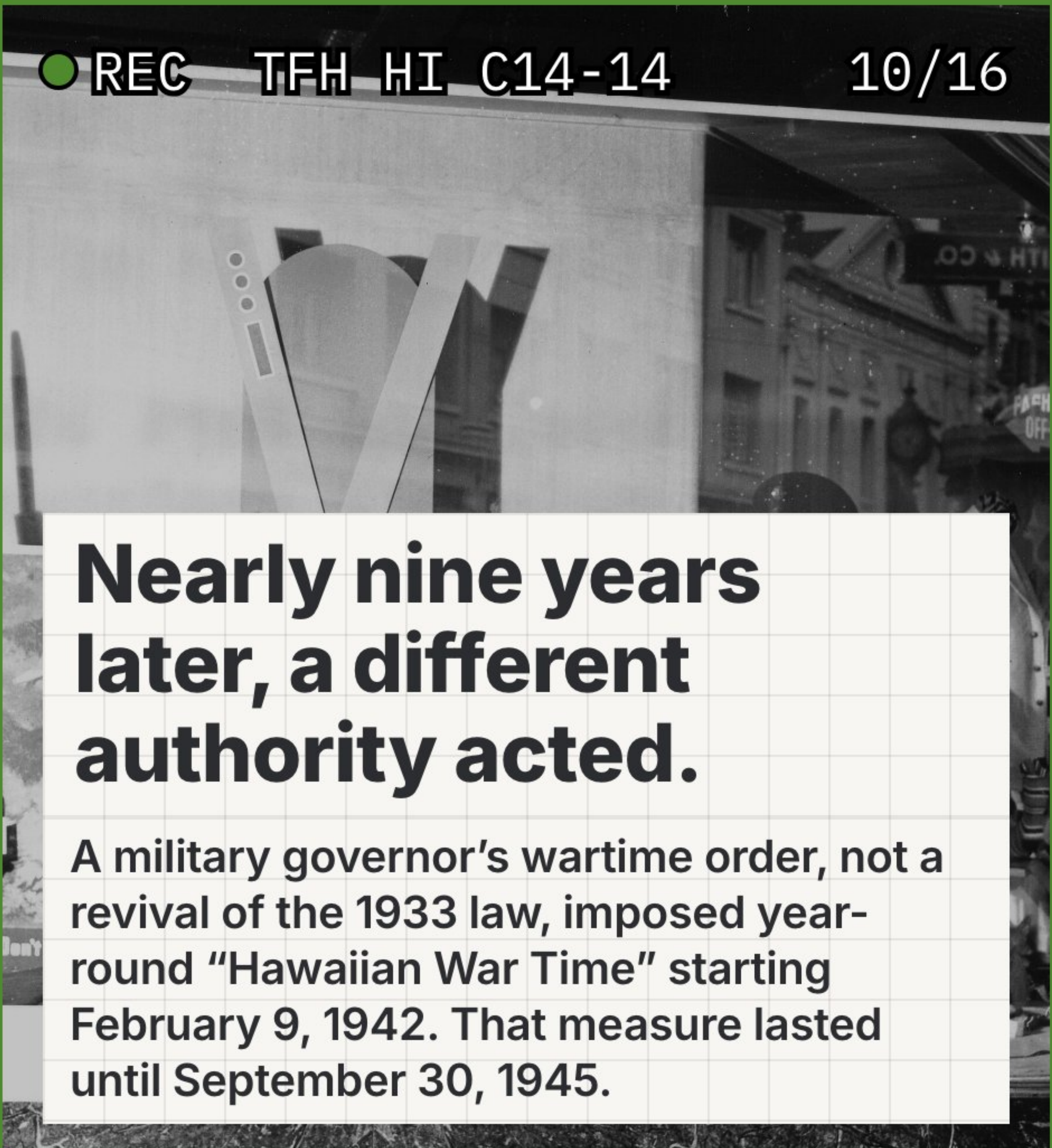
Photo: Harris & Ewing, LOC

Frame: Mattes, public domain, cropped

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10/16



Nearly nine years later, a different authority acted.

A military governor's wartime order, not a revival of the 1933 law, imposed year-round "Hawaiian War Time" starting February 9, 1942. That measure lasted until September 30, 1945.

Photo: U.S. Army Signal Corps

Frame: Mattes, public domain, cropped

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REC

TFH

HI

C14-14

11/16



When wartime practice ended in 1945, the old half-hour standard returned.

In 1947, Territorial Act 161 (Session Laws of Hawaii 1947) moved Hawaiian Standard Time thirty minutes ahead. The change took effect on Sunday, June 8, 1947.

Source: Hawai'i State Archives

Frame: Mattes, public domain, cropped

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12/16

The act replaced Hawai'i's half-hour reference meridian with a whole-hour one.

The adjustment sounds tiny. At the moment of change, thirty minutes of local civil time disappeared from the clock.



Photo: Gerald Watanabe

Frame: Mattes, public domain, cropped

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REC

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C14-14

13A/16



The record, in dates

Jan 13, 1896, noon

Hawaiian Standard
Time, UTC-10:30

Apr 26 to May 21,
1933

Daylight saving
approved, then
repealed

Feb 9, 1942

Hawaiian War Time
begins, UTC-9:30

Photo: HABS/NPS

Frame: Mattes, public domain, cropped

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13B/16



Sep 30, 1945

Hawaiian War Time ends

Jun 8, 1947

Act 161 takes effect,
UTC-10:00

Photo: w_lemay (Flickr)

Frame: Mattes, public domain, cropped

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The IANA Time Zone Database records rules for named jurisdictions, including historical transitions for Honolulu.

That history matters whenever a computer converts an old local timestamp, calculates elapsed time across a change, or schedules something in the future.

Photo: fw190a8

Frame: Mattes, public domain, cropped

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● WHAT WE ACTUALLY KNOW 15A/16



What We Actually Know

What we know

Standard time began in 1896 under the Republic of Hawai'i. In 1947, Territorial Act 161 (Session Laws of Hawaii 1947) moved Hawaiian Standard Time thirty minutes ahead.

Source: Hawaii State Archives

Frame: Mattes, public domain, cropped

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What we don't

The sources used here do not record the precise implementation, but the mechanism is clear. The sources used here do not name the people who performed that work in 1947.

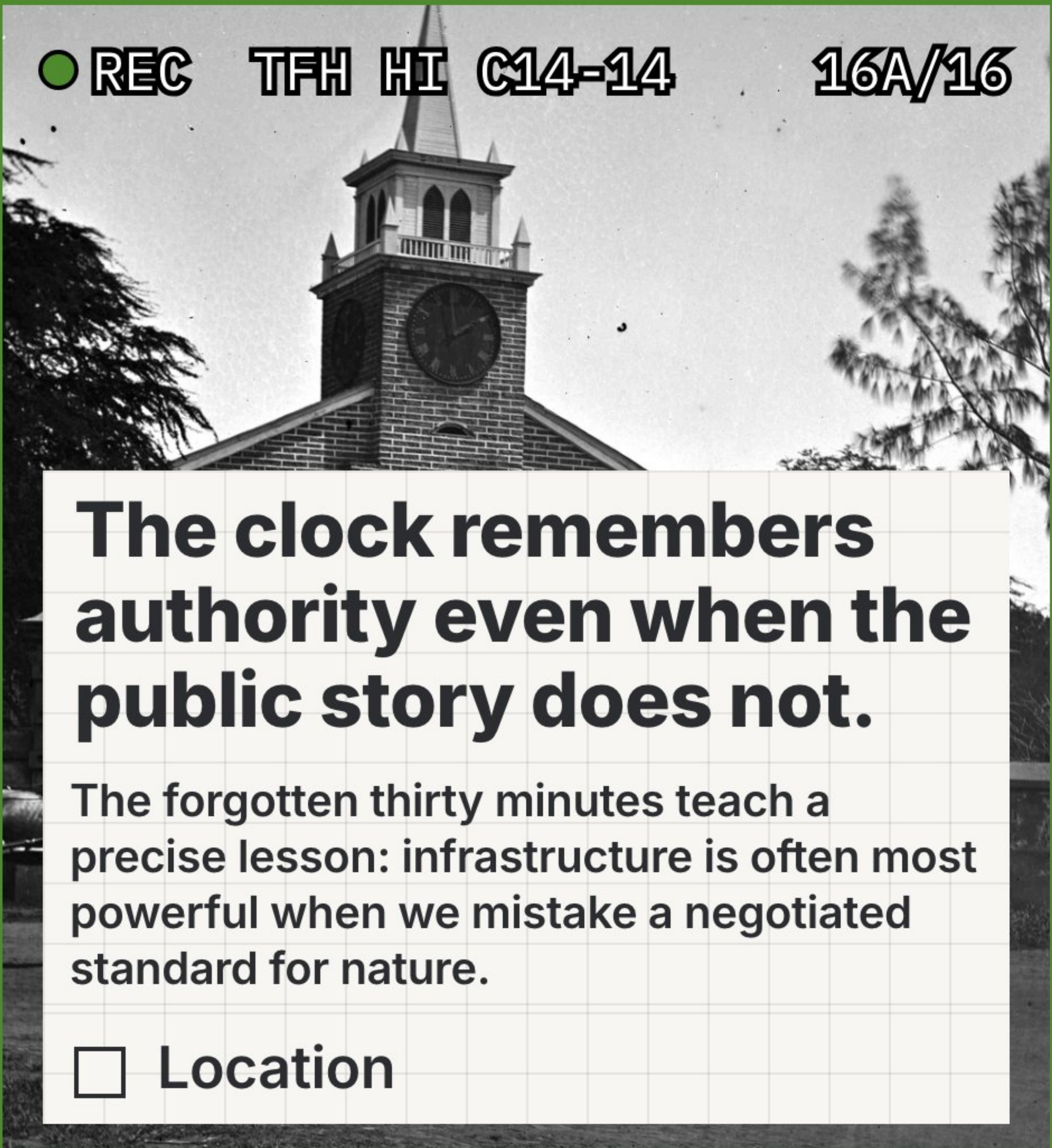
Source: Hawai'i State Archives

Frame: Mattes, public domain, cropped

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16A/16



The clock remembers authority even when the public story does not.

The forgotten thirty minutes teach a
precise lesson: infrastructure is often most
powerful when we mistake a negotiated
standard for nature.

☐ Location

Source: Hawai'i State Archives

Frame: Mattes, public domain, cropped

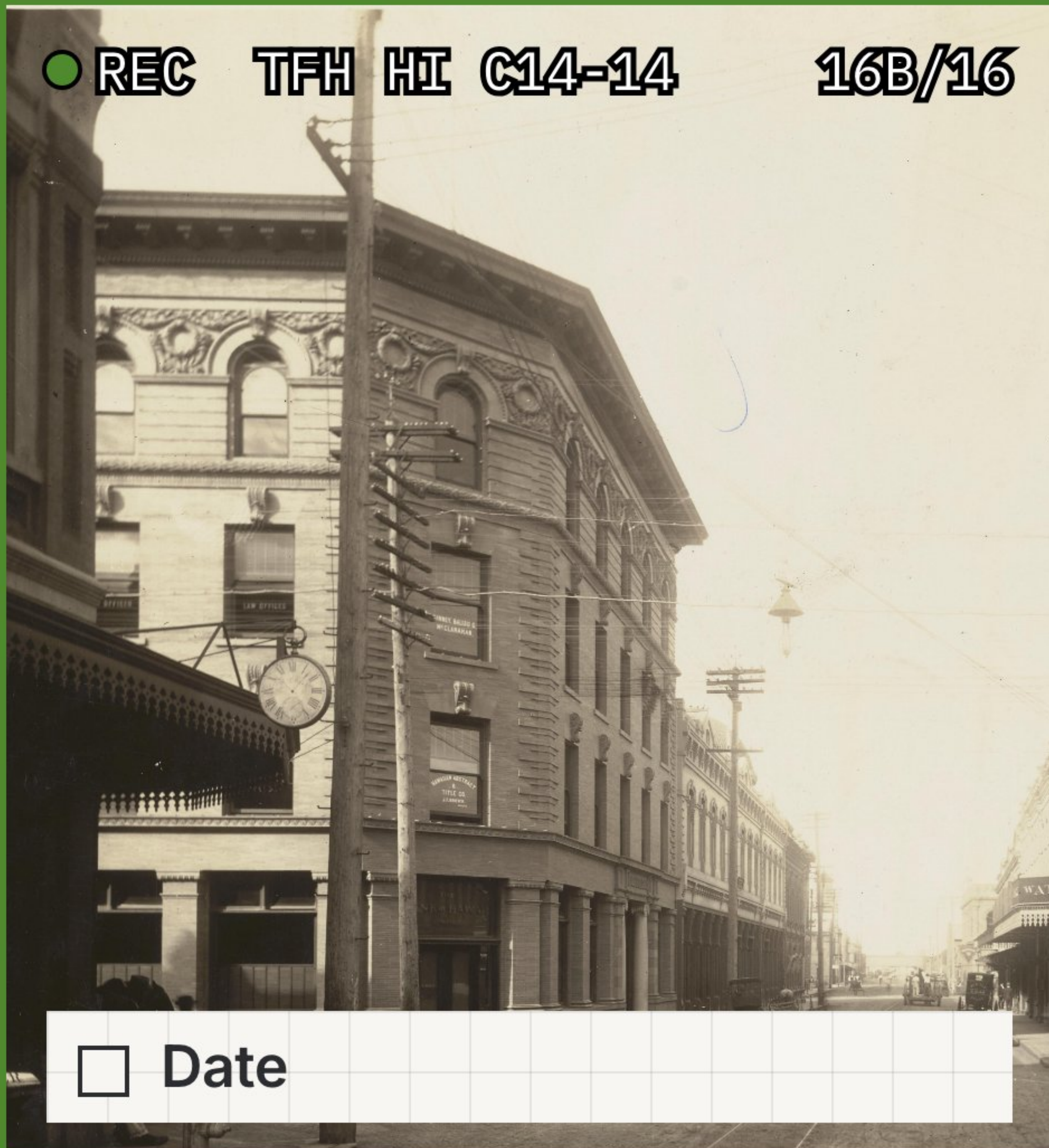
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16B/16



☐ Date

Source: Hawai'i State Archives

Frame: Mattes, public domain, cropped

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TFH

HI

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☐ Offset

Photo: Jack E. Boucher, USNPS

Frame: Mattes, public domain, cropped

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● REC TFH HI C14-14 16D/16

- ☐ Governing time rule
- ☐ Read the complete edition and Source Desk

Photo: Mordomo (Commons)

Frame: Mattes, public domain, cropped

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