Volume 1 of Loyal to the Land: The Legendary Parker Ranch, 750–1950 chronicled the remarkable lives and exploits of three generations of Parker men and how they laid the foundation for the ranch’s progress through the years. There were others, of course, but a quick look back at the Parker legacy provided a perspective for the changes and innovations that were to come through some extraordinary efforts.

The Parker men deserve credit for building, maintaining, and moving the ranch forward. The first John Palmer Parker clearly holds a place in Hawai‘i’s history as not only ranch founder but as a true visionary and builder. Standing alone after the tragic loss of his brother, Ebenezer, John Palmer Parker II assumed responsibility for managing the ranch. Upon the death of the first John Parker, ranch assets were equally divided between his grandson Samuel Parker and John Palmer Parker II.

John Parker II carried the burden of managing the Parker Ranch through increasingly difficult times, dealing with weather and livestock transportation woes—but most significantly with the contrasting values and pressures of his nephew Samuel Parker. As John Parker adeptly continued his father’s quest for property acquisition, he secured strategic parcels surrounding the village of Waimea. Although land acquisition to expand ranch pasturage was a secondary priority, it was nevertheless significant. Top priority was given to maintenance of existing holdings, caring for a growing cow herd, and controlling the hordes of wild cattle. During this period, Sam Parker imposed his conflicting sense of values, using the ranch as a cash cow despite the diminishing returns from a struggling livestock operation. These were difficult times, when drought-ridden rangelands went without water service while Samuel Parker pursued his involvement in building the Kohala Ditch Trail that served North Kohala, a district with no significant land holdings at that time.

The disparate roles of both Parker men reached tragic proportions as the ranch entered into trusteeship when Samuel Parker’s Pa‘auhau sugar venture collapsed, leaving the ranch in 1887 exposed to severe financial crisis.

While these problems were brewing, John Parker II died and left his half of the ranch to his adopted son, John Palmer Parker III, who was a son of Samuel Parker. The family experienced one of many tragedies to follow when John Parker III, a young father, died.
leaving his half ownership of Parker Ranch to his only child and young daughter, Thelma Kahilu'onāpua'api'ilani Parker. Her mother, Elizabeth Dowsett Parker, had withdrawn her dower position in deference to her daughter. In his book, The Parker Ranch of Hawaii, Joe Brennan notes how this came about:

The reason for the inheritance might seem a little vague without some explanation. John Parker II had adopted his grandnephew (Sam Parker’s son), John III, who automatically became John Parker II’s natural heir. Then, with John Parker III still a minor at the time of his death, in addition to the fact that he had made no will, one-third of the inheritance would, under ordinary circumstances, go to his widow, Elizabeth Dowsett Parker (Tootsie), and two-thirds to the child. Tootsie, however, had relinquished her dower right in favor of little Thelma. Consequently, in 1894 the little girl came into full ownership of her father’s half-share of the estate.

Extensive ranch operations and holdings built by hard work of Parker men and a handful of foundation families were handed over to A. W. Carter to manage and expand when he was appointed trustee for Thelma K. P. Smart, great-great-granddaughter of the founder.

The widowed Parker’s decision in 1899 to place her daughter’s holdings in the capable hands of A. W. Carter, a prominent Honolulu attorney, was a pivotal move that had far-reaching impact on the growth and direction of Parker Ranch. Little did she realize her action would create one of the largest ranching enterprises in the country and set the standard for cattle ranching in the Territory and State of Hawai‘i and the nation as well.

A. W. Carter (A. W.) left a burgeoning law and business career to tend to the needs of his ward, Thelma K. Parker. A builder like John Parker I, he took on management of the historic spread at its lowest ebb in stewardship and built it into an expansive cattle empire. At the time, ranch holdings included 37,000 acres of deeded land, 12,000 head of cattle—of which 5,000 were considered wild—and
Richard K. Smart (with Aunt Tootsie) as a seven-year-old attending a cattle branding at Waikōloa Corral. PPS.

nearly 2,500 head of horses, a third of which were owned by private parties who grazed them on Parker lands.

Between 1899 and 1949, A. W. made enormous strides. Thelma Parker had grown into a young woman. Her star-struck marriage—after the birth of an only son—was beset with tragedy. Her death in 1912 was followed by that of her husband Henry Gaillard Smart three years later. A. W. then redirected his allegiance and devotion from mother to son, when Richard Palmer Kaleioku Smart became the sole heir to his mother’s share of the estate. Fortunately for young Richard, his grandmother Elizabeth Dowsett Parker continued to provide him with devoted care.

In the half century that A. W. managed the Parker holdings, his role as builder and visionary was extraordinary, embracing his ward with fierce loyalty while attending to the obligations of trusteeship. With each decision he applied a basic test: Was the proposal in the best interest first of Thelma K. Parker and later of son Richard Smart? Beyond the basic test, A. W. then called upon his own character, research, and dogged attention to business detail in developing Parker Ranch into a world-renowned institution.

Concentrating his efforts on land acquisition, improvement, utilization, and stewardship, he paralleled these efforts with goals of excellence in animal husbandry, stewarding this campaign with profound emphasis on human and animal health and welfare. To achieve this, he called upon the human resources of the foundation families of Lindsey, Purdy, Bell, Stevens, and many others to serve alongside him in institutionalizing Parker Ranch as one of America’s greatest success stories.