

Chapter 6

HAWAIIAN MONARCHY

An examination of the Hawaiian government that was operating during the tumultuous changes of the 19th century is now required. Liholiho, who replaced the past unifier of the islands, Kamehameha, called himself Kamehameha II. As stated previously the wife of the original monarch, Ka`ahumanu, in her role as Kuhina Nui, was very much running things upon the death of her husband. Liholiho became caught up in the pretenses of royalty and cut quite a handsome figure in his English finery. His wife, Princess Kamamalu, was equally impressive in her ornate gowns and jewelry. Not having much to do in running the government, they decided to take a trip to England to meet the king. Unfortunately, they failed to inform King George of their intended visit and landed without fanfare in Portsmouth in the spring of 1824. Their manners were in serious need of improvement if they were to enter the high style world of life in the English court. While undergoing tutoring in the British social graces first Kamamalu and then Liholiho caught the measles. The disease, to which the Hawaiians had no natural immunity, often proved fatal in the islands. Even with the advanced medical practices of the British, both king and queen died in the span of a few days. Liholiho drafted a hasty will on his death bed and stated that the throne should go to his younger brother, Kauikeaouli, the last living son of Kamehameha the Great.

Kauikeaouli, Kamehameha III, took over but Ka`ahumanu remained very much in power. She and other ali`i had petitioned for membership in the church. Hiram Bingham, the minister of Kawaiahaeo church in Honolulu, placed them on six months probation but finally admitted them to membership. A large number of commoners quickly followed suit and in a short while Bingham was preaching to crowds of over a thousand. Kauikeaouli, unenthusiastic about church membership, set about undermining the Christians in earnest when Ka`ahumanu died in 1832. He lifted the penalties for adultery and slept with his sister, following ancient tradition. He had already been a saloon keeper and supposedly forced some Christians to drink. He was a patron of the traditional Hawaiian arts and brought back the hula, condemned by the missionaries as a heathen dance. All of these actions caused an uproar among the Christian ali`i. They forced Kamehameha III to renounce these actions and return to the Christian values of Ka`ahumanu in 1835. He took this as a repudiation of his authority and

abandoned caring about affairs of state. This allowed foreigners, particularly the missionaries, to greatly increase their power in the kingdom. Little changed in day to day morality however, which led Mark Twain to state in the 1850's, "sin no longer flourishes here in name, only in reality".

Due to the influence of his haole counselors, Kamehameha III issued the Declaration of Rights which gave the foreigners a stronger legal foothold in the Islands. Such inside pressure also led Kamehameha III to proclaim the Great Mahele which gave foreigners a mechanism for owning land outright in the islands for the first time. Many who had acquired land through intermarriage with prominent ali'i could now greatly expand their holdings by means of purchasing additional acreage.

It was during this period that the British, French, Russians, and Americans were all vying for influence over Hawai'i. A group of Americans pushed for annexation in the late 1840's. This first of many attempts was successfully resisted by Kamehameha III but a treaty creating a most favored nation status between the two countries was signed on December 20, 1849. Kamehameha III died in 1854 having overseen the erosion of Hawaiian sovereignty in terms of both domestic and international affairs during his reign, which was the longest of any Hawaiian monarch.

The next king was Alexander Liholiho, Kamehameha IV. An adopted relative of Kamehameha III, he had traveled to the United States and Europe with his brother under the tutelage of Dr. Judd while still a teenager. (As a side note, Dr. Judd who arrived in the islands as a medical missionary was probably the most influential and trusted advisor of the monarchy. He held the position of Prime Minister for many years as well as serving as financial manager for several kings.) Kamehameha IV and his wife, Emma, were great admirers of all things British. They went so far as to try to make the Anglican Church the main religion of Hawai'i. You can imagine how well this was received by the well entrenched Congregationalist missionaries. They created the currently popular jewelry style known as Hawaiian Heritage jewelry. With its old English lettering amid Hawaiian floral patterns it is most distinctive.

He was succeeded by his brother Lot, Kamehameha V. King Lot, the last of the Kamehameha line, was a much more forceful ruler than his brother. He wished to restore the power of the monarchy and set out to achieve this goal. Unconcerned with haole influence, Lot's immediate goal was to replace the Constitution of 1852 with a new constitution that would rein in the power of the foreigners, or at least slow down their drive for control. The Hawaiian Legislature

during this time period was operating under a particularly unfavorable set of circumstances. Haole members refused to learn Hawaiian while Hawaiian members refused to speak English in the legislative chambers, although they were fluent. It is hard to imagine a less efficient way to run the government. King Lot broke the stalemate by removing power from the legislature altogether and assumed complete control himself. He was, however, careful to create a political climate favorable to business interests. The sugar plantations started to import Asian workers under his reign and profits soared. He was prudent in financial matters and made sure that the government was adequately funded. During his reign Hawai'i reached a favorable balance of trade for the first time in its history. By walking this delicate tightrope, he was able to benefit both the monarchy and haole business interest.

Like so many kings before him, Lot died young. A life-long bachelor, he died on his 40th birthday in 1872. With no clear successor the job of picking the next monarch passed to the legislature. The two leading contenders were David Kalākaua and Prince William Lunalilo who was derisively called "Whisky Bill" by his detractors. Lunalilo was a charming man who was beloved by Hawaiian commoners. He was elected and promptly appointed Americans to three of the four major cabinet positions. He appeared to be more interested in a good party than in running the government and Hawaiian interests were further undermined. He died after less than two years in office and the process of succession again fell to the legislature.

The main contenders were Queen Emma, Alexander Liholiho's wife, and again David Kalākaua. This time Kalākaua was victorious. This touched off riots by Emma's supporters and the British marines were called in to restore order. Eventually things quieted down and King Kalākaua was able to take up his role as monarch. By this time the haole sugar interests were exerting ever more governmental control both directly and indirectly. Kalākaua saw this as a threat to his power and tried to exert more autonomy.

He was a great champion of Hawaiian arts in all of their forms. His patronage of the hula in particular was not to the liking of the Christian missionaries who had been trying to stamp out what they viewed as lewd dancing since their arrival in the islands. The resurrection of the hula from near extinction was viewed as such a personal crusade of the monarch that the most prestigious hula festival in the islands, the Merrie Monarch Festival was named after him. One of Kalākaua's projects for improving the status of the monarchy was the creation of a palace worthy of royalty in Honolulu. Iolani Palace, which still stands

next to the Hawaiian State Capitol, was the end result of his efforts. The palace, which is the only palace on U.S. soil, has undergone a major renovation during the past decade and is being restored to its previous glory. Many of the sugar planters saw this as an enormous waste of resources, but the Hawaiians clearly disagreed. Along with the trappings of royalty the king traveled widely with his wife, Queen Kapiolani, to spread knowledge of his kingdom. There were none of the clumsy attempts at social sophistication of earlier monarchs. King Kalākaua was a truly cosmopolitan man who traveled easily in the ranks of royalty. He was particularly well received in the United States which he saw as the country most integrally involved in the future welfare of his country.

Since the 1840's the power of the monarchy had been limited by a constitution of one form or another. These constitutions varied in both scope and power depending on the nature of the monarch in power, and the relationship of the monarch with the moneyed interests who saw the constitutions as giving at least a measure of security to their Hawaiian investments. Kalākaua's luxurious taste dictated the necessity of maintaining a reasonable relationship with the moneyed interests. Against his better judgement he agreed to a new constitution in 1887 that transferred more power from the king to the legislature. Hawaiian resentment against this constitution, called the "Bayonet Constitution" for the force used to get the King to sign it, caused an escalation of tension that would come to a head under the next monarch. King Kalākaua died while on a trip to San Francisco in 1891. He was succeeded by his sister, Queen Liliuokalani, the last of the Hawaiian monarchs.

Upon coming to power Liliuokalani made the abolition of the 1887 constitution and restoration of power to the monarchy her major goals. She was far less willing to compromise than her brother had been. Her interests were diametrically opposed by a growing number of haoles who were interested in Hawai'i becoming a U.S. territory. She was overthrown in a largely bloodless revolution in 1893. This revolution will be covered in detail in the next chapter.