

## **The History Behind the Gallant Hawaiian Prince Kūhiō, City & County of Honolulu and the Royal Hawaiian Band**

**By Niklaus Schweizer** - As the March 26 state holiday Kūhiō Day arrives, it is meaningful to relate the interesting connection between this gallant Hawaiian prince, the City and County, and the Royal Hawaiian Band.

To comprehend this special relationship we have to go back in history to the events of the late 1880s and the 1890s.

In 1887 a bloodless coup imposed the Bayonet Constitution upon King Kalākaua, restricting not only the influence of the crown, but also the rights of the mostly Hawaiian subjects, or citizens. In 1893 Queen Lili'uokalani's attempt to promulgate a new constitution to alleviate these problems lead to another coup, and a provisional government, presided over by Sanford Ballard Dole, was installed.

This in turn caused an investigation by James Henderson Blount who reported to President Grover Cleveland that the overthrow was illegal. Cleveland then sent a new envoy to Honolulu, Albert Willis, who on December 18, 1893, on behalf of the president signed an agreement with Lili'uokalani that she would be reinstated and that on her part she would grant amnesty to her opponents.

Such an agreement between heads of state has the force of a treaty, and has to be carried out. According to the concept of estoppel in international law if such an agreement for whatever reason is not implemented, anything that follows contrary to the agreement is null and void.

The Dole government refused to step down, Cleveland for a number of reasons was unable to fulfill his part, and instead of reaching a solution of the crisis, it deepened when on July 4, 1894, the Provisional Government mutated into the Republic of Hawai'i. The Hawaiians, and other citizens of the kingdom, who were thwarted in their hope for restoration, waited and waited, but when nothing came forth, some of them finally took up arms and on January 6, 1895, began military action which is known as the Kāua Kūloko, the Civil War. It lasted for a week.

The opponents of the Hawaiians won, partly at least because they were in the possession of state-of-the-art cannons (Krupp) purchased by Kalākaua in Vienna back in 1881. A large number of Hawaiians were arrested including Kūhiō as well as several Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, British, Germans, and the American Charles Gulick, after whom Gulick Avenue is named.

The Queen was imprisoned as well, in 'Iolani Palace, and she was tried for misprision of treason in a court martial in the Throne Room. She was sentenced to five years of hard labor and a substantial fine. Dole later granted her an amnesty and the other prisoners were also released, Kūhiō after almost a year in jail. He left the Islands in frustration,

went to South Africa, and participated in the Boer War on the British side against the Dutch Calvinist settlers. Eventually Kūhiō was persuaded to return to Honolulu.

In 1902 there would be the election of delegate to Congress, an office held since 1900 by Lopaka Wilikoki, Robert Kalaniahiapo Wilcox of 'Ao'ao Homelula, the Homerule Party, who had organized the Wilcox Rebellion in 1889, and who had fought for Queen Lili'uokalani in 1895.

The people around Governor Dole, the new masters of Hawai'i, who had mutated from the 'Ao'ao Ho'oma'ema'e, the Reform Party, into the Republican Party, were keenly aware of their small numbers and thus looked for a prominent personage as a candidate for this post.

Kūhiō on his part knew that the game of cards was stacked against the Hawaiians, in spite of the fact that they held a majority of the vote. Delegate to Congress was the highest elective office and while its possibilities were limited since the delegate had no voting power, it was at least something. Kūhiō thus met with his brother, Prince David Kawānanakoa, and their reasoning ran approximately like this: The governorship is in the hands of our opponents, the Calvinist annexationists who overthrew our Queen.

The governor, none other than Sanford B. Dole, who had officially headed the Overthrow, was appointed by President William McKinley. The Legislature, dominated by Hawaiians, is constantly stymied by the governor's veto power. We are the ranking ali'i, and if we run for different parties, they will elect one of us.

The Homerule Party is little known in Washington, D.C., and a delegate from such an obscure entity could not achieve very much. We thus have to become candidates for the mainstream parties, i.e. the Democrats and the Republicans.

Kawānanakoa accordingly ran for the first and Kūhiō for the latter. Since Kūhiō won the race, the Republican Party now became a double-headed creature, with one wing represented by annexationists and the other by Hawaiian royalists. The Democrats on the other hand, would gain power only in 1954, primarily on the basis of a coalition between John Burns and the veterans of the 442nd Regimental Combat Group.

How now does the Royal Hawaiian Band fit into these complexities? Kūhiō, while working together with the new establishment on the surface at least, did everything in his power to perpetuate important aspects of the monarchy. In 1903, at midnight and at the statue of the founder king, he reactivated the Royal Order of Kamehameha, founded by Kamehameha V in 1865, and forbidden as a seditious organization by the Republic of Hawai'i. And 15 years later, in 1918, he created the Honolulu Hawaiian Civic Club as an organization for the maka'ainana, the Hawaiian people.

Most importantly, he helped establish the City and County of Honolulu as a counterforce to the Territory dominated by his old opponents. The idea was simple. The position of the governor was not elective, but a mayor, the head of a county, would have to be

elected by the people, and the people were dominated by Hawaiians. Sure enough, the first two mayors, Joseph J. Fern (1909-1915, 1917-1920) and John C. Lane (1915-1917), were Hawaiian royalists. And Mayor John H. Wilson (1920-1927, and serving two additional terms later) was the son of Lili'uokalani's marshal, i.e. chief of police. And this is how the Royal Hawaiian Band, abandoned by the Territory, was saved, and thus became a municipal band. Municipal it was officially, but in reality it continued the traditions of the monarchy, and essentially has been doing so until today.

A brief history of the Band in the contested 1890 bears this out. When the Provisional Government under Sanford B. Dole in the wake of the Overthrow demanded a loyalty oath of all employees, the musicians of the Royal Hawaiian Band, renamed Government Band, refused to do so, an act of courage celebrated in Ellen Prendergast's "Mele 'ai pohaku, also known as Kaulana nā pua. This song is rich in kaona, hidden meanings, and its sweet melody belies the passions embedded in it.

The band members then organized into the Pana Lāhui Hawai'i, The Hawaiian National Band, which under the leadership of José Libornio went to the United States to drum up support for the Queen and for Hawai'i's continuing independence.

Heinrich (Henry) Berger, the long serving bandmaster from Prussia, thus had to find new, mostly non-Hawaiian musicians. During the Civil War of January 1895, he was commanded by the now Republic of Hawai'i to give concerts in order to soothe the agitated mood of the citizenry. As to the Pana Lāhui Hawai'i it was quite successful, but ultimately ran out of money.

On what a high cultural level the bandsmen really moved, we can glean from the message of condolences sent by "na Keiki mai o ka Pana Lāhui Hawai'i" from Denver to San Francisco in the fall of 1896. Signed Nā 'Ōp'u 'u Loke a ka Lāhui (Ka Pana Hawai'i) the text expresses in moving and flowing words in the Hawaiian language the great loss suffered by the death of Josepa Kaho'oluhi Nāwāhi, who had gone to the city on the Golden Gate to cure his tuberculosis developed while in jail in Honolulu for "sedition."

Nāwāhi, veteran statesman and for a brief time foreign minister, had been one of the principal leaders in the fight against annexation, which the Hawaiians likened "to being tossed into the red-hot lava of Kīlauea."

At the annexation ceremony on August 12, 1898, some of the "keiki" had rejoined Berger's band, but when it came to playing *Hawai'i Pono'ī* for the last time as the national anthem, the musicians one by one dropped their instruments and Berger, whose cheeks were soaked with tears, allowed them to go behind the Palace to cry.

As the twentieth century rolled around, things began to normalize, at least on the surface.

The Band regained its former royal name and would perpetuate cherished traditions close to the hearts not only of many Hawaiians but also of a good number of locals and visitors alike.

Over the decades several tours of the Band brought this out, to the continental U.S., to Canada, to Japan. In particular we should recall the highly successfully visit to several European countries in May of 1983. Wherever Bandmaster Aaron Mahi and his musicians appeared, clad in brand new white uniforms and accompanied by the hula dancers of the House of I and three members of the Royal Guard in their nineteenth-century Prussian uniforms and functioning as the color guard, the audiences were enthusiastic. The official report contains the following passage:

*The European tour of the Royal Hawaiian Band turned out to be a journey characterized by beauty, color, and sometimes the dramatic. Beauty and color were present everywhere.*

*There could not have been a more fascinating way to travel through Europe than with the Royal Hawaiian Band, hearing the melodious music, admiring the grace of the dancers and singers, enjoying the colorfulness of the costumes, the gowns, the uniforms, the flags, and observing the smiles on the faces of the audience, and all of this in some of the most charming and attractive settings.*

The Band traveled from Amsterdam to Berlin, then to Frankfurt/Main, Munich, Vienna, Vaduz (Principality of Liechtenstein), Zurich, Heiterbach in the Blackforest, and finally to London. There were standing ovations, millions watched on TV, and many wondered how so much culture could emanate from a group of small islands in the center of the world's largest ocean.

In Heiterbach, Bandmaster Mahi received the "Golden Ring of Honor for Conducting" from the Association of German Musicians, and some twenty years later he was awarded the "Bundesverdienstkreuz", the Cross of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany, a distinction recalling the orders and decorations once bestowed upon Captain Berger.

Prince Kūhiō would have been proud. And he would be glad to know that the partnership he helped build between the City and County of Honolulu, the Royal Hawaiian Band, and himself, has endured and is a going concern in the twenty-first century. Mai pōina kākou mau a mau - let us never forget.

*Niklaus Schweizer wrote this piece for the Friends of the Royal Hawaiian Band, an organization he founded and chairs, and it is reprinted with permission. Log onto the web site [here](#).*