

# A (Very) Brief History of (Modern) Time...as Seen From Hawaii

First Mission Home on Kauai, Circa 1834

NOT by Stephen Hawkins –  
or even close

It is timely to consider the history of the State of Hawaii, because there is historic legislation being considered by Congress. There are international movements to seek the “Return of the Kingdom,” and Congressional movements to establish an American Indian type existence, and to seek reparations. Like the



decimation of the American Indians, the pure Hawaiians now number fewer than 6,000 from a population of about 300,000. The (Senator) Akaka Bill has passed the House and awaits Senate action. That Bill will place Hawaiians in a similar position to American Indians, a controversial position at best.

I have spent time reading well-researched books on the history of this beautiful island chain, and there can be little doubt that, by today’s standards, we stole the Kingdom. U.S. Hawaiian activity was as blatant as the slave trade that marred our nation, or our treatment of the American Indian – but all three terrible activities, by today’s standards, were well within the norms of that day and the previous centuries.

First, the Hawaiian Kingdom, populated with a stone-age people was first seen and partially settled by merchant sailors. They stopped to provision, and sometimes settled, for 30 years before the first cussed and discussed Missionaries ever set sight of Hawaii. Before the first Missionaries, and a hundred years before America “stole” Hawaii, the King of Oahu signed allegiance to Britain, and the King of Kauai announced the island belonged first to Russia and then to Britain!

Fifty years before America “stole” the Kingdom, British warships threatened Honolulu harbor, destroyed all Hawaiian flags, and ran up the Union Jack for 5 months over the entire Kingdom! French warships, Japanese warships – and Spanish warships for that matter, routinely threatened the Island Kingdom a hundred years before America finally

## Mission Parlor with Original Furniture



took control. It was routine for all countries to protect their citizens, and their citizen's financial interests until the middle 1900s. Had America not taken the Kingdom, Britain would certainly have done so – although a Japanese warship arrived a few days after America had acted and might have taken control had not the U.S. already acted!

And, by the way, the Hawaiian Kingdom had also sent their armed “warship” to Samoa to take control of that island in the name of the Kingdom. That failed because the crew of the warship was from a Kingdom reform school, mutinied, and could not organize a one-car parade.

Before the arrival of the first Missionaries, American and British sea Captains had convinced the Kings of the Kingdom to abandon their ancient Gods in favor of the Christian God. The superstitious Hawaiians thought that their Gods were not as powerful as the white man's God, because the white man had huge ships, and guns. The Hawaiians were perfectly willing to trade in their impotent Gods.

You have heard all the jokes about the Missionaries arriving with a Bible and the Hawaiians owned the land, but soon the Hawaiians had the Bible and the Missionaries owned the land. True. You have heard the Missionaries “did well by doing good.” True! The machinations by the Missionaries and their children were absolutely illegal and immoral – but hardly different from the activities in Chicago, New Jersey, the New York waterfront, Louisiana or Mississippi during the same period.

Well, there were a few differences – the Missionaries were supposed to be men of the cloth, and their merchant children finally lied to get the local U.S. Navy and Marines, absent communications capabilities with Washington, to intervene on their behalf under the guise of “protecting American interests.” Even Tammany Hall never did that.

But before that, the Missionaries didn't EXACTLY have a free hand. It appears that the hula was a good indicator. The Missionaries worked for a long time to convince the

various Kings to make the Kingdom in their Puritanical ways. The Kings banned the hula, along with “inappropriate” sex (such as with sailors), and drinking in general. The sailors would riot, whaling vessels would promptly shell the town of, say, Lahaina — the King would relent, and things went back to open bars and open arms. And the hula was again danced. But the Missionaries would again work on the King, and the cycle would repeat.

But, while the Missionaries were bringing their harsh New England Puritanical views to the very fun-loving Hawaiians, they were also bringing reading, writing and modern knowledge to a stone-age people who would eventually have to face a world different from their own. The ships Captains could have done this education, but they did not have any interest in doing so – they just looked for a safe harbor, fresh water, and food for their further voyages into blue water.

To the Missionaries credit, they succeeded in bringing both education and the Christian religion, as they had been instructed to do. Then they insinuated themselves into the cabinet of the King. As the King’s advisors, they both gave advice to make all manner of previous Hawaiian activities illegal, but they also made it possible for themselves, and their heirs, to buy huge plots of the very best land – including Waikiki Beach.

(Note: The photographs of the Mission House are from the Hanalai Mission, where Abner Wilcox built this home in 1834. In his day, this was only four rooms, two upsatirs, and was not so nice as it seems today. That post in the bedroom is actually a mast off a ship, and with a wheel in the attic is used to keep the second floor level! The Wilcox children became the richest family on Kauai and still own more than 22,000 acres of sugar cane. The Wilcox family are also the greatest philanthropists and their family is held in the highest regard by everyone on Kauai.)

And therefore their children became wildly successful. And, in a plot orchestrated between the sons of the Missionaries who were business owners, and the sons of the Missionaries who were in the government of the Kingdom, they engineered their bloodless coup. They had the help of the U.S. Navy



Mission Bedroom with mast

and Marines, whose commanders were their friends. A nice cozy arrangement.

Almost every U.S. President since has expressed their regrets at how the Kingdom fell to American interests, but in the end the residents of the Islands voted to become our 50<sup>th</sup> state. Overwhelmingly!

Partly, it was because Hawaii needed the kind of sugar subsidy that was available only to states; partly it was ideology and recognition of the coming greatness of America; and partly it was excessive labor union power.

Post WWII, the Longshoreman's Union had shut down the Hawaiian ports, virtually isolating the islands – and as only a territory of the U.S., the federal government was less than responsive. Many people thought that being a state was a safer because the government would respond to the plight of a state, where it might not to a territory.

Now, the Sovereignty Movement wants their Kingdom back, and they want only their opinions to count. They do not want a vote where anyone's votes count but theirs – and they have gone to the World Court in the Hague for a ruling. They want the World Court to award them huge reparations from the United States, and the restoration of the Kingdom. There are something like 110 “sovereignty movements” around the world, all seeking some World Court ruling giving them back their land. Obviously, any such rulings from the World Court would set a terrible precedent, and throw the world into chaos.

That is unlikely to happen, but there is still room for plenty of trouble. Fortunately, there is much noise from the leaders of the Sovereignty Movement but their rallies draw fewer than a good mainland garage sale.

The subject keeps the imperialist activities of the 1800s before the public... a public that has never understood the insanity of placing today's standards on historical activities.

Apparently there is a human need to be victims, and remembering the past through

4 modern lenses can make each of us a victim.



Kitchen at the Mission House. It was detached in Rev, Wilcox's day, but several rooms were subsequently added that attached this kitchen.