

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Hawaiian Mystery**

From the Bancroftiana, published occasionally by the Friends of the Bancroft Library, University of California, we were interested in reading the history of Hawaii's own flag.

The admission of Hawaii as the 50th state has occasioned numerous newspaper stories about the change in the Stars and Stripes, but little mention has been made of Hawaii's own historic flag. With the recent acquisition of the Bowring Collection by the Bancroft Library, it seems appropriate to recount briefly this colorful story.

As early as 1880, Thomas G. Thrum, the principal publisher in Hawaii, confessed he was unable, to establish the flag's background with any real certainty. He did ascertain that in 1808 King Kamehameha I was flying the Union Jack from his royal residence. Eight years later J. J. Jarvis noted that the Hawaiian flag combined the "English Union, with seven alternating, red, white, and blue stripes." In 1825 Lord Byron, visiting the Islands, reported seeing this emblem with only red and white stripes.

This flag served until February 1843, when Hawaii was forced by threat of British arms to fly the British colors as evidence of cession to England, and all earlier banners were ordered destroyed. Later the same year, when independence was restored, not a single Hawaiian flag could be found, but a British admiral ordered his own sailmaker to manufacture one. In two days, it was ready, and on July 31, 1843, Hawaii's own emblem again flew from the royal palace.

Another account, which may be as apocryphal as it is charming, relates that the design was the outgrowth of Kamehameha's friendship for both the United States and Great Britain during the War of 1812. Legend has it that an American captain chided the King for flying the Union Jack while he professed loyalty to the United States. The monarch hauled down the offending flag and hoisted Old Glory, only to be again taken to task, this time by the commander of a British man-of-war, for flying the colors of England's' enemy.

In a quandary, Kamehameha is said to have suggested flying both banners simultaneously, but was dissuaded; and if the story can be credited, he finally resolved the

dilemma by fashioning his own out of those of his good friends, England and the United States. Whatever the truth may be, the flag's design combined the Union Jack and eight red and white stripes, representing the number of Islands.

Though obscure in its origin, this historic pennant recalls Hawaii's remarkable past as Polynesian kingdom, British possession, independent republic, and territory of the United States.