

Notes & Queries

The Journal welcomes responses to previously published articles, statements on Hawaiian and Pacific history, and queries for information that will assist research. Opinions expressed here and elsewhere in the pages of the Journal are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Editorial Board or the Hawaiian Historical Society.

THE HAWAIIAN SYLLABARY CIRCA 1830

Recently at the Hawaiian Mission Children's Society Library I came across a notebook dated 1828 that once belonged to the chiefess Kina'u Kamamalu¹ and was used by the missionary Hiram Bingham for his first draft of *He Ninauhoike* (1830).² The notebook had lost its cover, and its large pages were tattered and worm-eaten.

Apart from Kina'u's awkward penmanship and Bingham's practiced scrawl, there appeared on a few pages deliberate marks in an unknown alphabet, curiously Phoenician, hauntingly South Arabian, the doodling of a classically trained preacher, seemingly of little consequence.

A week later, I had a different assessment. I came across a fragment of Bingham's final draft of *He Ninauhoike* in another folder.³ In one corner was the same curious writing, in the other, a few lines of the Lord's Prayer in Hawaiian. Believing this to be a Rosetta stone of sorts, I returned to Kina'u's notebook. Suddenly the strange writing made sense. On one page was a list of forty characters. Too big to be an alphabet of Hawaiian, it had to be a syllabary. I counted out the five vowels and five vowel+consonant forms for each of the seven Hawaiian consonants. Turning back to the fragment, I could read: *e-ko-ma-ko-u-ma-ku-a-i-lo-ko-o-ka-la-ni*, "our father who art in heaven." Following a hunch, I matched the worm holes in the fragment with those in Kina'u's notebook and saw an even closer connection. The fragment had once been folded and placed between the flyleaf and the title page!

But why a syllabary? Perhaps the time was right. For several years,

Fragment of a document containing the Lord's Prayer in Hawaiian script. The text is arranged in vertical columns and includes various symbols and characters, likely representing the Hawaiian alphabet.

The text is written in Hawaiian script, which uses a unique set of characters including 'A', 'E', 'I', 'O', 'U', 'K', 'L', 'M', 'N', 'P', 'Q', 'R', 'S', 'T', 'V', 'W', 'X', 'Y', 'Z', and various diacritics and symbols.

The fragment is heavily damaged, with significant portions missing, particularly along the left and bottom edges. The text is arranged in several vertical columns, with some lines appearing to be part of a larger, now mostly illegible, document.

The text is written in a dark ink on a light-colored, aged paper. The characters are somewhat irregular and show signs of being hand-drawn or printed in a less formal script.

The fragment is a piece of a larger document, as evidenced by the torn edges and the presence of other text fragments scattered around the main body of the page.

FIG. 1. The Lord's Prayer. Fragment found in Hawaiian Translation Workbooks, Hawaiian Mission Children's Society.

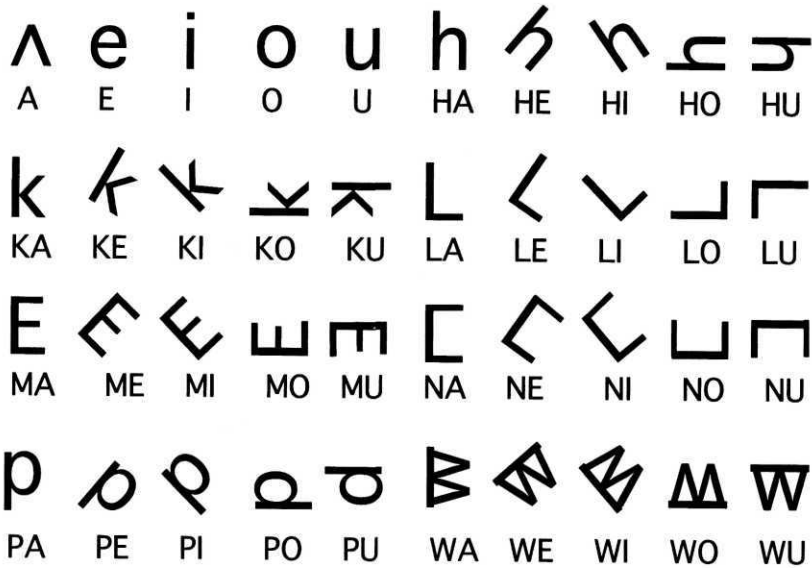


FIG. 2. Hiram Bingham's Hawaiian syllabary.

Bingham had read in the *Missionary Herald* about the phenomenal success of the Cherokee syllabary invented by Sequoia, an illiterate Indian.⁴ Types had been cast for it, and newspapers and books were being printed in it. Attempts to introduce a Latin-based alphabet by the missionaries had failed. In the *Missionary Herald* comparisons were even made between the Hawaiians and the Cherokees. Both were learning to read at a rapid rate, and a lively debate broke out as to which system, syllabary or alphabet, was superior. Perhaps Bingham wanted to try out his own experiments, hoping to increase the tempo by inventing a syllabary. If he ever did, he was missing the point. The Cherokees, unaided by foreigners, were proud of their achievements and excelled in the years before their Trail of Tears. The Hawaiians, reeling in shock from contact with the outside world, would hardly have embraced yet another *akua*⁵ or incomprehensible invention of the foreigners.

As much hard work as Bingham had put into his syllabary, little became of it.⁶ A strange writing system would have alienated the Hawaiian people from the European world. The Latin system was already firmly in place. Bingham was too late.

Submitted by James Rumford
Mānoa Press

NOTES

The research for this essay was funded by the Committee for the Preservation and Study of Hawaiian Language, Culture and Art.

¹ Perhaps Elizabeth Kina'u (?1804–1839), mother of Kamehameha V.

² Translation Workbooks, folder 28, HMCS.

³ Translation Workbooks, folder 29, HMCS.

⁴ *Missionary Herald* 22 (1826): 47–49; 23 (1827): 212–13, 382.

⁵ Literally, “god.” This rare definition of *akua* appears in a manuscript by Maria Chamberlain (MS 499 M68), HHS.

⁶ Bingham mentioned the possibility of a syllabary in his memoirs (Albert Schütz, personal communication, April 1997). See also Albert Schütz, *The Voices of Eden* (Honolulu: U of Hawai'i P, 1994) 102–103.

THOMAS SPENCER AND “A VISIT TO KĪLAUEA”

The publication of original archival material is always to be welcomed, offering as it does an authentic glimpse into the past. The particular appeal of such material often lies not in the main subject of the piece but in incidental observations that bring up long-forgotten names and details and allow us to look backward with a perspective unclouded by what is today regarded as “history.” “A Visit to Kilauea” by Winslow Upton, which appeared in volume 29 of *The Hawaiian Journal of History* (1995), is an excellent case in point. While his description of an 1883 visit to the volcano covers ground that was familiar even then and is pedestrian in the extreme, Upton introduces the colorful figure of Thomas Spencer, American consul at Hilo. As described by Upton—“What a hindrance to missionary effort must be the presence in official position of such as he!”—Spencer seems to be a raffish, ne'er-do-well semifictional character in the mold of Bully Hayes, straight from the pages of Louis Becke. The truth of the matter is very different indeed. Thomas Spencer and his

brother Charles were prominent figures in the kingdom from the 1850s onward, leading lights in that group of haole monarchists whose very existence has been largely written out of history.

Thomas Spencer came from a distinguished New England family that had been established at East Greenwich, Rhode Island, since 1660, when its ancestor, John Spencer, had been among the founders of the town. Joseph Spencer, Thomas's father, was a ship's captain, and his eight sons followed him to sea, five becoming captains of whaling ships at the same time. Aged thirty-one and captain of the whale-ship *Triton*, one of the Howland fleet out of New Bedford, Thomas Spencer was in 1848 involved in one of the most notable sagas in the South Seas whale fishery. Having made landfall off Sydenham Island in the Kingsmill Group, Captain Spencer and some of the crew were lured ashore by a renegade castaway who, with the assistance of the natives, detained them on shore, seized the ship, murdered a number of the remaining crew, convinced the survivors that their captain was dead, and obliged them to sail the ship away. Held prisoner on shore, Captain Spencer was about to be executed by the natives when he was rescued by the dramatic invention of a woman chief, in the manner of Pocahontas. After a number of attempts to escape, during which the hapless captain and crew stole canoes and paddled out to sea in pursuit of passing ships who set sail away as fast as they could, believing them to be hostile islanders, the castaways were rescued by the *Alabama* out of Nantucket.¹ Thomas Spencer later wrote a stirring account of the incident² which is one of the finest examples of "captivity literature" on record, an unknown classic of Pacific writing that ranks alongside Herman Melville's *Typee* and *Omoo* for narrative pace and literary style.

Captain Spencer then made his way to Honolulu, which he had visited on previous voyages, to await reports of the still-missing *Triton*. Deciding at length to give up the sea, he started a ship's chandlery on Queen Street, which under his guidance served as the headquarters of the Pacific whaling fleet. In 1853 he was joined by his brother, Charles Nichols Spencer, and by 1855 William L. Lee, the close friend of Charles R. Bishop, reported that Captain Spencer was "making more money than anyone else in town."³ Thomas Spencer's prosperity is indicated by the fact that he had both his home and his ship's chandlery depicted in Paul Emmert's 1853 lithographic prints

of Honolulu life, but although he was prominent, his manner set him apart from some other leading foreign inhabitants. He did not, for example, patronize the ice cream socials and picnics favored by his missionary compatriots. His skill at cards was renowned, and he was not an upholder of the Hawai'i Temperance League.

Thomas Spencer embodied many of the Yankee virtues, notably industry, enterprise, and patriotism, but his love for the Islands surpassed that of his birthplace. He was committed to the survival of Hawai'i as an independent kingdom, and he was an arch opponent of annexation. Yankee reserve found no place in his robust character, fulsome manner, and great personal warmth, nor did Yankee frugality, for his generosity was legendary. He was fluent in Hawaiian and was known everywhere by his Hawaiian name, Poonahoahoa. It was later to be said of him, and of his brother Charles, that "they were on terms of social and political intimacy with the last six Hawaiian sovereigns."⁴ Private collections hold many warm letters to him from members of the Kamehameha and Kalākaua dynasties. His greatest *ali'i* friend was David Kalākaua, to whom he remained close until the end of his life.

In 1861, in the full tide of success, Thomas Spencer sold the Queen Street chandlery and moved to Hilo, purchasing the house and sugar plantation at Amaulu (Puueo) of Benjamin Pitman, whose wife, Kinoole-o-Liliha, was the hereditary high chiefess of Hilo.⁵ His departure had the unhappy effect of removing him from the mainstream of Honolulu political life, where his support for the monarchy was greatly missed. In Hilo, he removed stones from the *luakini* heiau on the shore opposite Coconut Island (Mokuola) to make a boat landing near the mouth of the Wailoa River,⁶ an uncharacteristic act that some believe cast a shadow over his subsequent endeavors on the island. He also became United States commercial agent and consul at Hilo.

For the next twenty-three years, Thomas Spencer struggled to achieve success in sugar planting, but the venture was to prove disastrous, and while the plantation continued to operate, by the time of his death it had consumed nearly all of his fortune. Despite the later difficulties, life in Hilo was pleasant. The Spencer house—on the site of what was later the Hilo Hotel—was the social center of the area, drawing many noted visitors. Charles Spencer was also engaged in

sugar planting, and the *Pacific Coast Commercial Record* observed "Many are the gorgeous banquets that in years past the Spencers have given in honor of the Royal family or the distinguished representatives of foreign countries."⁷ And it was in Hilo that Thomas Spencer finally found personal fulfillment. Like many before him, he had discovered that a marriage made in New England was quickly unmade in the Islands. His youthful marriage to Lydia Marshall proved a failure and they separated, although she would never agree to a divorce. On his arrival in Hilo, Thomas Spencer encountered Makaleka Robinson, daughter of Robert Robinson of Hamakua and his Hawaiian wife. A notable beauty with a character as strong as the captain's, she became his partner although she was thirty-six years his junior and remained with him for some two decades, bearing him two sons and six daughters.⁸ King Kalākaua took a close interest in the Spencer offspring, reporting in one letter on the eldest boy's progress at his school in California and sending "Kind Aloha's to Margaret (Makaleka) and the Children."⁹ In this letter, as in several others, he begins "My Dear Friend Sir Thomas," referring to the fact that Thomas Spencer had been made a Knight Companion of the Royal Order of Kamehameha I¹⁰ for his actions in sending, at his own expense, boats filled with food to relieve Big Island inhabitants faced with starvation when they had been cut off by a lava flow.¹¹

Winslow Upton, the author of "A Visit to Kilauea," was in Hilo in May 1883. Just over a year later, Thomas Spencer died in the Hawaiian Hotel in Honolulu after a short illness. On his death, flags were displayed at half-mast for two days and his funeral, as reported by the *Pacific Coast Commercial Record*, was "the largest ever witnessed in Honolulu except those of royalty."¹²

In memoriam, the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* had this to say:

Few men were better known on these islands than the subject of this brief sketch. Captain Spencer was a native of Rhode Island and that patriotic little state never gave birth to more devoted lover of the Stars and Stripes. His dying request was that he be wrapped in the flag he loved so well, a wish complied with by his sorrowing and devoted friends. His reputation for open-handed generosity and hospitality was unbounded. He has entertained princes, dukes and plebians, and all found a hearty welcome at Captain Tom's board. . . . His honesty was of the most sterling character, and Captain Spencer's word was his

bond in all commercial transactions. He loved Hawaii, and was a devoted friend to His Majesty, an affection his Sovereign returned, visiting his old friend frequently during his last illness. Her Majesty the Queen was also much attached to Captain Tom, and paid him several visits while he lay on his death bed. His name will long be remembered in Hawaii as one who had the strongest affection for his people. His charity knew no bounds; no deserving case of distress ever came to his notice that he did not immediately relieve.¹³

Here there is not the slightest trace of the “character” described in “A Visit to Kilauea.” Setting Upton against the weight of the contemporary sources cited above and others, there can be no doubt where the truth lies. It is tempting to speculate what provoked such a personal, misguided, and wildly inaccurate attack. Nonetheless, although it would not please him, we owe Winslow Upton a debt of gratitude for bringing my great grandfather, Thomas Spencer, back to life, if only on the printed page, and for reminding us of his brother Charles, minister of the interior under King Kalākaua and Queen Lili‘uokalani, a dedicated monarchist until the end of his days.

It has often been said that the greatest prize in war is the victor’s right to rewrite history, or to erase it. That is certainly the case with the Spencer brothers and many others, their names, faces, and points of view swept from the pages of history by the annexationists who were victorious in overthrowing the kingdom. A full and balanced history of Hawai‘i has yet to be written, and it is only when the forgotten ones, like Thomas Spencer, are restored to their rightful place in the rich tapestry of the past that we can begin to understand the nineteenth-century history of Hawai‘i and, through it, the Hawai‘i of today and of tomorrow.

Submitted by Kaori O’Connor

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Kaori O’Connor, a Hawai‘i-born anthropologist who studied at Oxford, runs an international publishing company in London and is a great-granddaughter of Thomas Spencer. She is working on a full-scale biography of Spencer and would welcome further information from readers.

¹ P 25 Mar. 1848.

² *A Narrative of the Events Attending the Masacre of Part of the Crew Belonging to the*

Whaleship Triton of New Bedford by the Natives of Sydenham's Island: by Thomas Spencer, Master. Privately published and published in *The Friend*, September 1848 and October 1848.

³ Harold Winfield Kent, *Charles Reed Bishop, Man of Hawaii* (Palo Alto: Pacific Books, 1965) 44.

⁴ *Pacific Coast Commercial Record*, May 1892.

⁵ David W. Forbes, *A Pictorial Tour of Hawaii 1850–1852: Watercolours, Paintings and Drawings by James Gay Sawkins* (San Francisco: The Book Club of California, 1991) 66.

⁶ John R. K. Clarke, *Beaches of the Big Island* (Honolulu: U of Hawai'i P, 1985) 19.

⁷ Clarke, *Beaches of the Big Island*.

⁸ The children of Thomas Spencer and Makaleka (Margaret) Robinson were Thomas Spencer, Jr., and Charles, Lucy, Jennie, Lily, Helen, Margaret, and Kaliko Spencer.

⁹ Manuscript letter, private collection.

¹⁰ H. W. Nicholson, *From Sword to Share: A Fortune in Five Years at Hawaii* (London: W. H. Allen, 1881) 283.

¹¹ *The East Greenwich Packet* (East Greenwich, Rhode Island) 5.4 (November 1981): 14.

¹² *The East Greenwich Packet* 5.4 (November 1981): 14.

¹³ *PCA* 30 June 1884.

HAWAI'I, RESIDENCE OF PRESIDENTS

When it comes to producing presidents, Hawai'i is hardly in the same league as Virginia, birthplace of eight U.S. presidents, or Ohio, with seven. No U.S. presidents to date have been born in the Fiftieth State, and only one president of any country was an Islander by birth. That person, of course, was Sanford B. Dole, president of both the Provisional Government and the Republic of Hawai'i.

As a *residence* of presidents, however, Hawai'i may be one of the nation's leading states. At one time or another, at least seven men (but no women) who served as their homeland's president have lived in the Islands—not just visited, but actually resided there. Five of these men could moreover claim another distinction: they were the *first* presidents of their respective nations. Three of the seven died in Hawai'i.

The first Island resident to achieve the presidency was Sanford B. Dole, born in Honolulu in 1844. A member of the cabal that deposed Queen Lili'uokalani in 1893, Dole was named president of the Provisional Government and a year later, following approval of

the new constitution, was designated president of the Republic of Hawai'i. In 1900, when the Organic Act took effect, he became the first governor of the Territory of Hawai'i. None of these posts required winning a popular election. Dole died in Honolulu in 1926.¹

Sun Yat-sen, born in Kwangtung Province, China, in 1866, arrived in Honolulu in 1879 to join an older brother. He studied for three years at Iolani School before returning to China in 1883. Fleeing Chinese authorities, he returned to the Islands briefly in 1894 and for six months in 1896. He was a leader of the revolutionaries who overturned the Manchu dynasty in 1911 and became the first president of the newly formed Republic of China at the end of that year. Six weeks later, on 12 February 1912, he resigned, hoping to mollify his opponents. He died in Peking in 1925.²

Hawai'i's third resident president-to-be was Syngman Rhee, who was born in Hwanghae Province, Korea, in 1875. The bearer of a Ph.D. from Princeton, he moved to Honolulu in 1913 to be the principal of a Korean-language school. After a contentious quarter of a century in the Islands, he became a Washington lobbyist. Rhee returned to Korea in 1945 and in 1948 became the first president of the Republic of Korea. He resigned the presidency in 1960 and flew back to Honolulu. He died at Maunalani Hospital in 1965 at the age of ninety.³

The only president of the United States to live in Hawai'i was Jimmy Carter. A native of Plains, Georgia, born in 1924, Carter resided with his wife Rosalynn at 318 6th Street, Hale Moku (then called NHA 1), from 1948 to 1951, while serving in the U.S. Navy and stationed at Pearl Harbor. He was president from 1977 to 1981.⁴

Tosiwo Nakayama, born at Piserach, Truk, in 1931, was a student at the University of Hawai'i and the East-West Center in 1955–1958 and 1967–1969. In 1979 he became the first president of the Federated States of Micronesia.⁵

Lon Nol deposed Prince Sihanouk, ending the 1,100-year-old Cambodian monarchy, in 1970. Two years later he proclaimed himself that nation's first president. Fleeing the Khmer Rouge in 1975, he and his family and entourage flew to Hawai'i and lived successively at Hickam AFB, two different homes in Hawaii Kai, and a house in Wai'anae. They moved to Fullerton, California, in 1979. Lon Nol died there in 1985, aged seventy-two.⁶

Ferdinand Marcos, born at Sarrat, Philippines, in 1917, was that country's president from 1966 to 1986. Accused of election fraud (and much, much more), he abandoned the presidency in the latter year and, accompanied by his wife Imelda, fled to Hawai'i. The two lived initially on Kalaniana'ole Highway in Niu and later in Makiki Heights. Marcos died in Honolulu in 1989, and his widow eventually returned to Manila.⁷

These seven presidents were obviously a mixed lot. Several became famous, at least one was notorious, another is little known, and some are still awaiting history's verdict. But all seven for varying periods in their lives called Hawai'i home.

Submitted by Robert C. Schmitt

NOTES

- ¹ Lorrin A. Thurston et al., "Sanford Ballard Dole 1844-1926," 35th Annual Report, HHS, 1926, 14-16; Ethel M. Damon, *Sanford Ballard Dole and his Hawaii* (Palo Alto: Pacific Books, 1957); A. Grove Day, *History Makers of Hawaii* (Honolulu: Mutual Publishing, 1984) 36; *All About Hawaii* 90 (1968): 294.
- ² Allen F. Damon, "Financing Revolution: Sun Yat-sen and the Overthrow of the Ch'ing Dynasty," *HJH* 25 (1991): 161-186; Henry B. Restarick, *Sun Yat Sen, Liberator of China* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1931) 1, 12, 105, 110, 113, 152; Bob Krauss, "Exploring mystery of Sun Yat-Sen's birth," *HA* 9 Jan. 1995: B5.
- ³ Richard C. Allen, *Korea's Syngman Rhee, An Unauthorized Portrait* (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle, 1960) 21, 40, 54, 61; Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea, 1942-1960* (Seoul: Panmun Book Co., 1978) 4, 489, 491; *The McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of World Biography* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1973) 9: 163-64.
- ⁴ Lyle Nelson, "Carter Home Identified," *HSB* 4 Dec. 1976: A-1; Robert C. Schmitt and Ronn Ronck, *Firsts and Almost Firsts in Hawai'i* (Honolulu: U of Hawai'i P, 1995) 147; *Encyclopedia Americana* (Danbury, CT: Grolier, 1995) 5: 721a-721d.
- ⁵ *HSB* 15 May 1979: A-14; *HSB* 11 May 1983: A-11; Robert D. Craig and Russell T. Clement, comp., *Who's Who in Oceania 1980-1981* (Lae: Institute for Polynesian Studies, Brigham Young University-Hawai'i Campus, 1980) 142.
- ⁶ *HSB* 26 Apr. 1975: A-3; *HSB* 6 Mar. 1979: A-4; *Almanac of Famous People*, 5th ed. (Detroit: Gale Research, 1994) 1: 1141; *Encyclopedia Americana* 17: 700.
- ⁷ *Encyclopedia Americana* 18: 305-306; *HSB* 26 Feb. 1986: A-1, A-3; *HSB* 27 Feb. 1986: A-8; *HSB* 25 Mar. 1986: A-1, A-6; *HA* 4 Sept. 1986: A1, A4; *HSB* 28 Sept. 1989: A-1, A-1A, A-1B.

HOW THE HAWAIIAN JOURNAL OF HISTORY BEGAN

In the summer of 1962, Richard Dillon, librarian of San Francisco's Sutro Library (now part of the California state library system), came to the University of Hawai'i to teach a course in the writing of local history. Papers completed by the five or six students faced extinction; at that time there was no local outlet for such products. The need inspired me to found the *Hawaii Historical Review*. It ran through twenty-four issues beginning in October 1962. By 1964 the founding editor was looking for a convenient but graceful exit; the one promising prospect was the Hawaiian Historical Society. On 4 March 1964, in a letter to Edward Joesting, society president, I suggested that the HHS consider publishing a quarterly of its own.

This matter the HHS trustees considered, without acting, in their April 1964 meeting. A year later the same group offered the opinion that the society should concentrate on diversifying its activities, and the desirability of issuing a quarterly publication "figured in these discussions." Then in January 1966, the editor of the *Hawaii Historical Review* became an HHS trustee; the publication project, favored by his colleagues and by the society's president, continued to receive attention.

Thus the Editorial and Publications Committee on 6 October 1966 resolved unanimously that the HHS should issue yearly (and more often if justified) a "publication that will make original research material available to the membership and to the general public," that a subcommittee be appointed to screen suitable manuscripts, and that an editor be appointed. In the event of the trustees' approbation, it was suggested that Richard A. Greer be chosen assistant editor, it being presumed that material currently destined for his *Hawaii Historical Review* would be considered for inclusion in the papers of the society.

A trustees' meeting on 11 October received the committee's recommendations: (1) HHS publications should be divided into two categories: (a) an inexpensive annual report, and (b) a series of papers to be published yearly—and to be "worthy, scholarly productions." Mr. Greer was to be given a chance to act as editor of the series, if he desired. The trustees approved, accepting in principle the proposed

division. Further study was left to a subcommittee of the Publications Committee.

In February 1967 the Publications Committee reported a firm decision to revise the annual report's format and to issue later a separate publication of papers, thus breaking away from the long-standing custom of publishing only papers presented at meetings. This would let the editor pick and choose. At the same time, Greer's acceptance of the editorship was announced, and he presented a page of points for preliminary consideration.

Another trustees' meeting a month later approved a board of assistant editors to aid in screening manuscripts: Agnes Conrad, society president and state archivist; Robert Sparks, director of the University of Hawai'i Press; and A. Gavan Daws, assistant professor of history at that institution.

On 20 June 1967 the Publications Committee informed that the new journal's editors had drawn up a prospectus. Proposed names for this publication were to be submitted at the next trustees' meeting. Meanwhile, the possibility of having the Cathay Press in Hong Kong do the printing was being investigated.

So it was that on 8 August *The Hawaiian Journal of History* got its title, and the Cathay Press bid was accepted. Manuscripts for volume 1 went forward to Hong Kong on 21 September; one thousand copies of the *Journal* arrived just five months later. An unexpectedly large demand led to a five-hundred-copy reprinting, received in June 1968. The *Journal* was off and running.

Submitted by Richard A. Greer

