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Hawaiian Flag Quilts: Multivalent Symbols of a Hawaiian Quilt Tradition

AS RESEARCHERS HAVE amply demonstrated,¹ quilts are a rich source of historical information. Quilt makers' beliefs, concerns, and emotions are often embodied in quilt motifs and names. Quilt making, bestowal, and use can reflect interpersonal ties and social conventions. Quilts can also convey economic circumstances, political convictions, and social commentary. In every aspect of their creation and use, quilts provide invaluable insights into peoples' lives and a society's history. Among Hawaiian quilts, one tradition in particular has much to tell about Hawai'i's past—the Hawaiian Flag quilt.

Hawaiian Flag quilts are among the best loved and most revered of Hawaiian quilts and have been created, valued, and used in the Hawaiian Islands for more than 100 years. Originating perhaps as early as the mid-nineteenth century, they are identifiable by their common design element of repeated Hawaiian flags. The typical Hawaiian Flag quilt, regardless of its date of creation, displays four Hawaiian flags surrounding a royal Hawaiian coat of arms or crown.² Appliquéd or embroidered Hawaiian words may be a part of the design as well (see figs. 1 and 2).

Hawaiian Flag quilts differ from other Hawaiian quilts, which typically feature large appliqué designs created by cutting sym-

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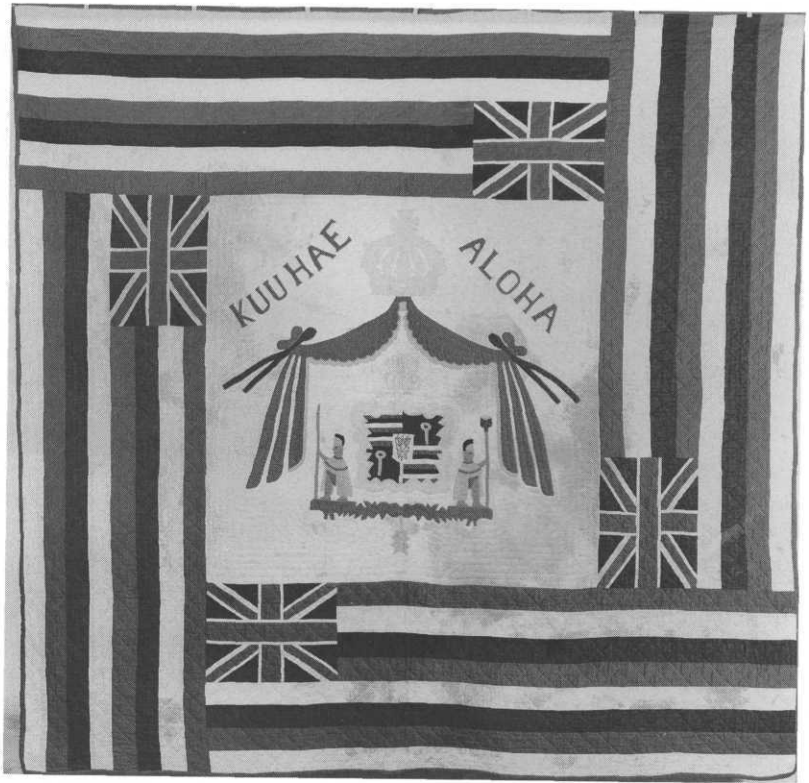


FIG. 1. Attributed name: Ku'u Hae Aloha. Creator unknown. Made before 1918. Collection of the Honolulu Academy of Arts, gift of Mrs. Charles M. Cooke estate, 1938. (Honolulu Academy of Arts.)

metrical designs from fabric folded in eighths. Hawaiian Flag quilts combine the piecework construction of flag designs with appliquéd motifs. They are also distinctive in that the quilting on the flags is done in straight lines; only the center area may be done in the typical Hawaiian quilt's concentric "waves" that follow the outlines of the motifs. Moreover, they are unique among Hawaiian quilts for the "intertextile dialogue" between flag and quilt. Fashioned from fabric first introduced by nineteenth-century Westerners and incorporating Hawaiian flag designs, they intertwine the messages of aloha, or love, conveyed by all Hawaiian quilts with a variety of messages tied to the symbolism of the Hawaiian flag.



FIG. 2. Attributed name: Ku'u Hae Aloha. Held by Mr. and Mrs. Frank Aseu Young; possibly created by Mrs. Young, circa 1935. (A.H.)

To fully appreciate the messages communicated through the creation and use of Hawaiian Flag quilts, it is necessary to understand the period that produced the Hawaiian flag as a symbol of Hawai'i. The nineteenth century was a time of profound change in the islands. The interactions of native Hawaiians with Westerners irreversibly affected Hawaiian political history. The Hawaiian monarchy, established by Kamehameha I at the turn of the century, was modeled largely upon the British monarchy and received both political and economic support from the British. Americans in the islands were also influential and introduced many Western constitutional elements to the Hawaiian government. A number of former American missionaries, in particular, served as cabinet ministers to Hawaiian royalty. International interference with the Hawaiian nation was a constant theme

throughout the century. Struggles with British, French, and Americans finally culminated in the annexation of the Hawaiian Islands by the United States. The Hawaiian monarchy was overthrown in 1893, and the Hawaiian Islands became a United States territory (1900–59) and then a state.

The Hawaiian flag, which first appeared sometime between 1806 and 1816, reflects the impact of the Western presence in nineteenth-century Hawai‘i. To parallel the foreign powers’ use of flags to symbolize their governments, the Hawaiian monarchy adopted a flag whose canton was based on the British Union Jack. The red, white, and blue stripes of the Hawaiian flag may have been modeled on American, British, or French flags’ color schemes. The design of the Hawaiian flag may have undergone some relatively minor changes up until 1845, when it stabilized in appearance (various historical accounts report different numbers of stripes and colors, as well as different arrangements of stripes).³

Significantly, the Hawaiian flag remained a potent political symbol for the various governments of the Hawaiian Islands in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. First employed as the official emblem of the independent Hawaiian nation, the flag later became the symbol of the Provisional Government (1893), the Republic of Hawai‘i (1894), the Territory of Hawai‘i (1900), and the State of Hawai‘i (1959). Since the flag did not change in appearance after 1843, the use of the flag design within Hawaiian Flag quilts could not, in itself, communicate the political sentiments of the quilt designer. However, the identity of the Hawaiian flag in Hawaiian Flag quilts has almost always been presented as that of a sovereign Hawaiian nation, owing to the flag’s juxtaposition with other symbols of the Hawaiian kingdom.

Like the Hawaiian flag itself, the Hawaiian quilt evolved as a distinct Hawaiian form of expression in the nineteenth century. Although fashioned from Western fabric, thread, and needles, the Hawaiian quilt extended many of the uses associated with native *kapa*, or bark cloth.⁴

As prized objects that have always served to display the quilt maker’s creativity and sewing skills, all Hawaiian quilts carry the value placed on countless hours devoted to a quilt’s completion. Perhaps of greatest importance, however, is an acknowledgment

of feelings which inspires the creator of a Hawaiian quilt and guides her or his decisions about the quilt's use. As precious family heirlooms displayed on special occasions in the home or as esteemed gifts to friends, relatives, and associates, Hawaiian quilts have usually signified and celebrated important relational bonds. Within Hawaiian Flag quilts, the value of family ties and strong interpersonal bonds is intertwined with a person's relationship to Hawai'i, symbolized by the Hawaiian flag. Some of the quilts bear the inscription or name *Ku'u Hae Aloha*,⁵ usually translated as "My Beloved Flag," which captures the personal relationship of the creator or owner of the quilt to the Hawaiian flag and that which it symbolizes.

The messages communicated through Hawaiian Flag quilts have ranged from affirmations of loyalty to the Hawaiian nation, protest of political developments, and recognition of individuals' contributions to Hawai'i, to personal and familial identities, pride in Hawaiian cultural heritage, and expressions of Hawaiian uniqueness. Many of these messages have been conveyed simultaneously. While some statements have been specific to particular historical circumstances, others have spanned the years of the entire Hawaiian Flag quilt tradition. Twentieth-century quilt makers have frequently drawn upon and referred to political perspectives conveyed through earlier Hawaiian Flag quilts in order to create messages relevant to their own time.

SYMBOLS OF PATRIOTISM AND PROTEST

As the principal, integrating element of Hawaiian Flag quilts, the Hawaiian flag is central to interpretations and uses of the quilts. Since the Hawaiian flag represented the sovereignty of the Hawaiian nation until the last decade of the nineteenth century, most Hawaiian Flag quilts created in the nineteenth century carried explicit political messages. The most basic message of all, and one that pervades the quilts of the nineteenth century, was a statement of patriotic loyalty to the Hawaiian nation and its ruling monarchy. However, given the ongoing threat of political domination of the islands throughout the nineteenth century, it is probable that any Hawaiian Flag quilt created in the century

reflected, to some degree, the creator/owner's concern with the political future of the Hawaiian nation. As political symbols, Hawaiian Flag quilts could simultaneously glorify and celebrate the Hawaiian nation's sovereignty expressed through its political symbols, convey expressions of loyalty to the independent Hawaiian nation and the Hawaiian monarchy, and communicate Hawaiians' resistance to foreign political domination.

Although no Hawaiian Flag quilts have definitively been dated earlier than the 1870s or 1880s, a hypothetical 1843 origin for the quilt tradition could certainly accommodate the simultaneous messages carried by Hawaiian Flag quilts of the nineteenth century.⁶ In that year Lord George Paulet claimed the Hawaiian Islands for the British and raised the British Union Jack over the islands. Significantly, he called for all Hawaiian flags to be destroyed.⁷ Lord Paulet's unilateral act was not sanctioned by his superiors, however, and five months after the usurpation, the Hawaiian flag and the sovereignty of the nation were restored. During festivities to celebrate the outcome of the events, many Hawaiian flags were displayed.⁸

Whether or not Hawaiian Flag quilts were, in fact, first created at this time cannot be determined from present evidence.⁹ Given the symbolic content and use of later Hawaiian Flag quilts of the century, however, the conjecture is plausible enough to have led some people to accept it as fact. In the fall of 1991, for example, a tour guide to the Bishop Museum paused before two Hawaiian Flag quilts and told visitors that such quilts were first created in 1843.

During the final decade of the nineteenth century, a period to which many Hawaiian Flag quilts have been dated, the meanings associated with the Hawaiian Flag quilt tradition took on heightened significance in light of the manipulation and public redefinition of the Hawaiian flag by those seeking Hawai'i's annexation to the United States. In February 1893, when Queen Lili'uokalani was forced to abdicate the throne, the Hawaiian flag was flown beneath the American flag. In April of that year, the American flag was removed, but the Hawaiian flag was flown by the Provisional Government as the official flag. Later, in 1894, it was reinstated as the official flag of the Republic of Hawai'i.¹⁰

In the 1890s many Hawaiians created Hawaiian Flag quilts to reaffirm the meaning of the Hawaiian flag as the emblem of the Hawaiian nation and to convey their loyalty to the nation and the monarchy. Bernice Piilani Irwin, who was 19 in 1893, reported that,

Ever since the overthrow [1893] a great wave of patriotism had filled the hearts of the Hawaiians. The streets were filled with man [*sic*] wearing hatbands inscribed Aloha 'Aina (Love of Country). Hawaiian women busied themselves making flag-patterned bed quilts. . . .¹¹

While reaffirming the Hawaiian flag as the flag of the sovereign Hawaiian nation, Hawaiian quilters also protested the political events occurring. The Provisional Government's removal of crown motifs and other insignia of the monarchy,¹² for example, was symbolically thwarted in the quilts' appliquéd motifs of royal symbols. In those quilts in which the creator chose to incorporate the motto of the Hawaiian monarchy—*Ua mau ke ea o ka aina i ka pono* (“The life of the land is perpetuated in righteousness”)—a double reference may have been intended. Not only was the statement a symbol of the Hawaiian royalty, it was also a historical reminder of the Paulet episode of 1843 and the restoration of Hawaiian sovereignty. King Kamehameha III delivered the pronouncement at a celebration of Hawai'i's retrieved independent status.

At least one Hawaiian Flag quilt, attributed to 1899, appears to “speak” even more directly of the overturn of the Hawaiian nation with a design element presumably created specifically to symbolize the political events that had occurred. Believed to have been bestowed upon Mr. and Mrs. R. Ford by the deposed Queen Lili'uokalani,¹³ the quilt incorporates four small Hawaiian flags in the center area of the quilt, in addition to the four larger flags on the sides. The four small flags were arranged as two crossed pairs; one pair was placed above a crown and the other pair below. Unlike the cantons of the larger flags which appeared in the upper left-hand corner of each flag, the cantons of the smaller flags were placed at the bottom left-hand corner, suggest-

ing the flags were deliberately hung upside down to signal distress according to nautical practice.

In use, as well as design, turn-of-the-century Hawaiian flag quilts communicated the re-presentation of the Hawaiian flag as that of a sovereign Hawaiian nation inextricably linked to the Hawaiian monarchy. While the Provisional and Republic governments redefined the Hawaiian flag in public, some royalist Hawaiians used Hawaiian Flag quilts within their homes to reaffirm the flag's original meaning.¹⁴ The contrast between the two groups' definitions of the Hawaiian flag served to highlight Hawaiians' rebuke of foreign political domination.

A specific use of Hawaiian Flag quilts associated with the period attests to the synonymy of the quilts with the Hawaiian flag. There are oral accounts of some Hawaiian families hanging Hawaiian Flag quilts on the underneath side of the canopies of their beds during and immediately following the years of the Hawaiian nation's overthrow.

Stories still circulate of one prominent turn-of-the-century family who boasted how their children were all born under the Hawaiian flag—a flag quilt on the canopy of their four-poster bed.¹⁵

By literally raising the Hawaiian flag above themselves, the analogy between quilt and flag could be symbolically strengthened. The practice also allowed for sleeping under the quilt without having to use it as common bed covering.¹⁶ It is also frequently stated that Hawaiians loyal to the nation and its rulers could “rest easier” seeing the flag hung in such a strategic location. Edith B. Williams states that Victoria Ward, the daughter of a high-ranking Hawaiian mother and a close friend of Queen Lili‘uokalani,

. . . hung a Hawaiian flag bed-quilt in the canopy of her four-poster bed. On the flag were inscribed the words, *Ku‘u Hae Aloha* (My Dear Flag). It is said she made the remark that she had been born under that flag and she intended to die under it.¹⁷

SYMBOLS OF PERSONAL POLITICS

Although many Hawaiian Flag quilts of the nineteenth century may have been primarily created or used to communicate loyalty to the Hawaiian nation in the face of a crisis of foreign political domination, the creation and use of some quilts to express day-to-day allegiance to the Hawaiian nation is affirmed through anecdotal information about specific quilts passed down through families. In addition to expressing a quilt maker's own loyal stance, the creation and bestowal of a Hawaiian Flag quilt upon others could acknowledge and celebrate the recipients' political support and, in some cases, service to the Hawaiian nation.

Of special significance, given the prominent involvement of

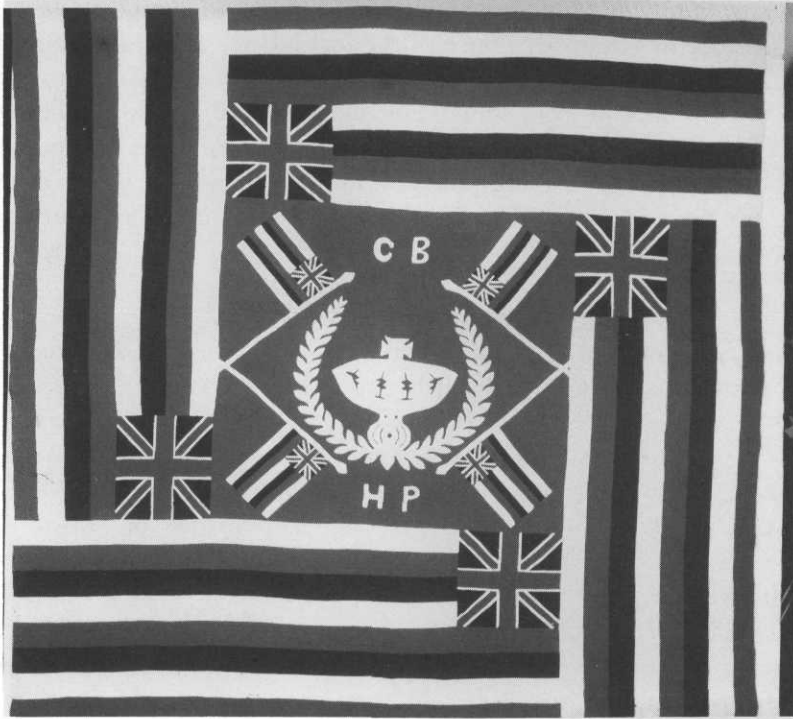


FIG. 3. Attributed name: Hawaiian Flag. Creator unknown; circa 1850s. Owned by Dora and John W. Kaikainahele III.

many haoles (foreigners) in political events that eventually led to the demise of the Hawaiian monarchy, were numerous gifts of Hawaiian Flag quilts to Americans, some of whom worked on behalf of the Hawaiian people and the Hawaiian nation. One quilt, for example, is “believed to have been commissioned by King Kalākaua for his friend and advisor William De Witt Alexander, a member of Kalākaua’s privy council,”¹⁸ presumably before 1891, when King Kalākaua died. Another quilt is thought to have been made for Charles Reed Bishop and Bernice Pauahi Bishop before her death in 1884 (fig. 3). The initials CB and HP (Charles Bishop and the Honorable Pauahi) are appliquéd in the center.¹⁹ As a Hawaiian Flag quilt, the gift probably alluded both to Mrs. Bishop’s status as a descendant of King Kamehameha I (see below) and to Mr. Bishop’s exemplary contributions to the Hawaiian nation in his capacity as a noble of the kingdom, a life member of the upper house of the legislature, and a member of the royal privy council. Even after Hawai‘i’s annexation to the United States in 1898, some Hawaiian Flag quilts appear to have been created and given to people to commemorate a family’s former service to the Hawaiian nation and monarchy. A 1910 quilt made for Lorrin Andrews II by female members of a church congregation

. . . may well have been chosen to commemorate the family’s historic ties with the government of Hawai‘i as well as with the old Mission Church (probably Kawaiaha‘o Church in Honolulu).²⁰

Andrews’s grandfather was appointed under King Kamehameha III to serve as judge of the court of O‘ahu in Honolulu in 1845. He later became the first associate justice of Hawai‘i’s Supreme Court. Lorrin Andrews himself had already served as the attorney general of the Territory of Hawai‘i when he was presented with the quilt.

Among native Hawaiians, genealogical connections could determine political loyalties and positions, particularly for those who were related to the royal families. In the nineteenth as well as the twentieth century, Hawaiian Flag quilts could celebrate a maker’s or recipient’s genealogical ties to the ruling *ali‘i* (high

ranking class) of Hawai‘i.²¹ The quilt given to the Bishops (discussed above) must certainly have carried this message for Bernice Pauahi Bishop. Similarly, when Rosina Georgetta Kalanikauwekiulani Ayers, said to be a descendant of King Kamehameha I, received a Hawaiian Flag quilt as a wedding present in 1877,²² her genealogical link to the first ruler of the Hawaiian nation may have been noted by the decision to include the embroidered figures representing the twin guardians of King Kamehameha. These figures, which are a part of the royal crest, are often omitted in Hawaiian Flag quilt coat-of-arms designs.²³ A tradition among one Hawaiian family specifies that quilt makers should not use a coat-of-arms design in the center of a Hawaiian Flag quilt unless they can trace their genealogies to the royalty whose crest is represented.²⁴

Other relationships of a political nature may have been submerged within the creation of some early Hawaiian Flag quilts. When a Hawaiian Flag quilt was commissioned by someone (e.g., King Kalākaua in a previously discussed example), the relationship of the person commissioning and the person(s) actually creating the quilt may very well have been based on significant differences in status and power. Some nineteenth-century Hawaiian Flag quilts documented in the literature on Hawaiian quilts are thought to have been bestowed upon various individuals by members of the Hawaiian royal family. Since personal creation of such quilts seems highly unlikely, the relationship of the commissioner and the creator(s) was probably one that allowed the quilt maker(s) to express loyalty and, perhaps, service to a member of the political ruling elite.²⁵

SYMBOLS OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

After Hawai‘i’s annexation to the United States in 1898, the significance of creating and using Hawaiian Flag quilts necessarily shifted.²⁶ As Hawaiians realized that annexation was, in the words of one local newspaper, “Here to stay!” Hawaiian quilters created Hawaiian Flag quilts to commemorate the Hawaiian flag and other symbols of the former island kingdom, to express pride in Hawai‘i’s cultural heritage, and to express feelings of loss for

their former nation.²⁷ Significantly, the new messages of twentieth-century Hawaiian Flag quilts were contingent on replicating the same motifs used in nineteenth-century quilts. The Hawaiian Flag quilt tradition continued as a viable expression of twentieth-century emotion and ideology precisely because it recalled Hawai'i's past through the symbols of the past.

From the beginning of the Hawaiian Flag quilt tradition, the quilts carried references to the impact of Westerners on Hawaiian society, inasmuch as the Hawaiian flag and the royal coat of arms themselves were borrowed from Western symbols. At the same time, however, the modifications of the borrowed symbols conveyed historical information unique to Hawai'i. The eight stripes of the Hawaiian flag, for example, signified the eight major islands of the island nation. The *puwahu* (flag of Hawaiian chiefs), *pūo'ulo'u* (tabu sticks), *kāhili* (feather standard), spears, taro leaf, and twin guardians of Kamehameha I (Kamanawa and Kameeiamoku) incorporated into the royal coat-of-arms designs celebrated symbols of the early Hawaiian chiefs.

Yet, despite the historical symbolism internalized within the Hawaiian nation's flag and coat of arms, the motifs of nineteenth-century Hawaiian Flag quilts referred primarily to the (then) present. With annexation and the termination of the Hawaiian nation, the Hawaiian flag, crown, and royal coat of arms were no longer symbols of a sovereign nation. Like the historical symbols they incorporated, they became a part of Hawai'i's historical legacy. The decision to continue using the same motifs of nineteenth-century Hawaiian Flag quilts in twentieth-century quilts allowed quilters to commemorate the symbols of the Hawaiian nation.²⁸

The preservation of the nineteenth-century Hawaiian Flag quilt tradition in twentieth-century replications of earlier quilt designs served not only to honor and preserve the original meanings of the quilts' symbolic motifs, but also, very importantly, commemorated earlier Hawaiian Flag quilts themselves as part of a Hawaiian cultural and political legacy. In some cases, exact duplications of older Hawaiian Flag quilts were created to preserve the original quilt design and meaning of a quilt for a family.²⁹

Although most Hawaiian Flag quilts created in the twentieth

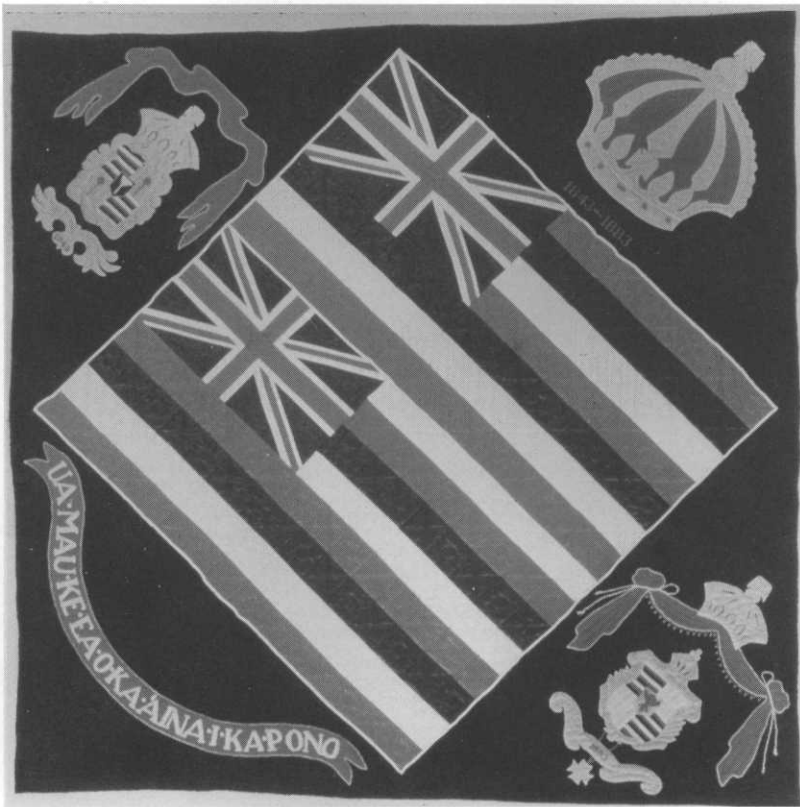


FIG. 4. Hawaiian Flag Quilt/A History. 1983. Designed and pieced by Elizabeth A. Akana. Quilted by Kathie Dallas. Owned by Elizabeth A. Akana. (Photograph by Sharon Risedorph.)

century have commemorated and extended the quilt tradition of which they are a part by replicating the same elements of composition found in earlier quilts, a few recent quilts “speak” visually of the quilt tradition and its history in innovative ways. A quilt designed by Elizabeth A. Akana was part of a 1984 Honolulu exhibit that featured Hawaiian Flag quilts exclusively. The quilt’s motifs include an 1843 Hawaiian crown and the 1845 and 1883 royal coat-of-arms designs respectively. All three motifs surround two Hawaiian flags—one with eight stripes and the other with seven. Titled *Hawaiian Flag Quilt/A History*, the quilt is the artist’s statement of historical changes that might have occurred in the

Hawaiian Flag quilt tradition if it existed as early as the mid-nineteenth century (fig. 4).³⁰ Another quilt created in 1989 by John W. Kaikainaole III commemorates the Hawaiian Flag quilt tradition in composition, even as it introduces changes in motifs. The four Hawaiian flag designs are based on four different versions of the flag reportedly used in nineteenth-century Hawai'i;³¹ an appliqué design of 'Iolani Palace, a royal symbol not used in other Hawaiian Flag quilts, replaces more traditional motifs in the center of the quilt (fig. 5).³²

Since Hawaiians were encouraged to become "American" during the territorial years (1898–1959), the creation and display (public or private) of Hawaiian Flag quilts during the first half of the twentieth century may be interpreted as native Hawaiians' political statement of pride in their ethnic identity and cultural heritage

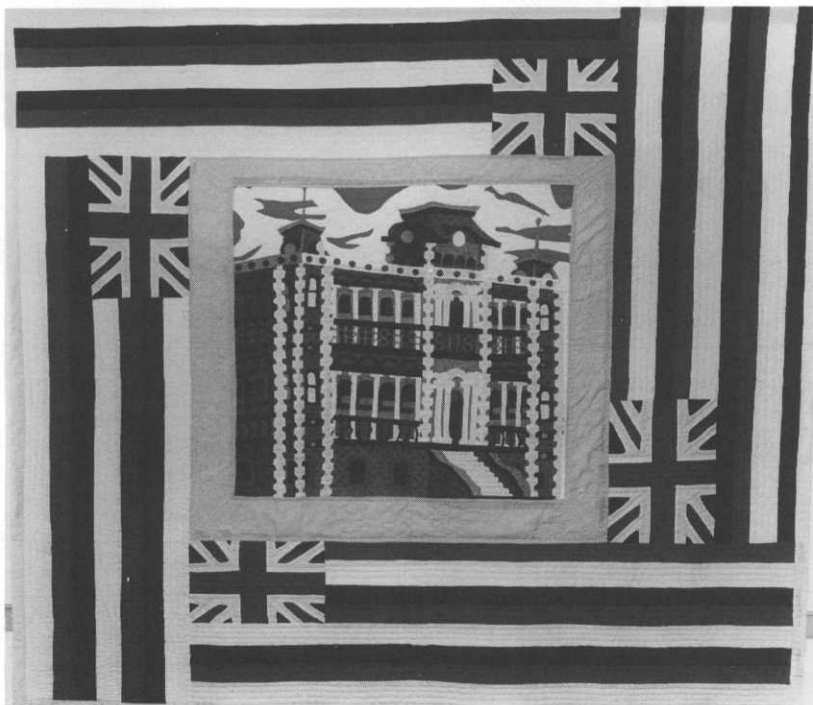


FIG. 5. 'Iolani Palace. 1988. Designed by John W. Kaikainaole III. Pieced and sewn by Dora Kaikainaole (Mrs. John W. Kaikainaole III) and Lei'aloa R. Kaikainaole Holmquist. Owned by Dora and John W. Kaikainaole III.

in the face of public policies of assimilation. As Michael Kioni Dudley and Keoni Kealoaha Agard point out, during the territorial years Hawaiian language was forbidden in the schools, and in many native Hawaiian homes Hawaiian language and culture were not passed down.³³ In light of these circumstances, those Hawaiians who chose to honor the memory of the Hawaiian monarchy, nation, and the Hawaiian Flag quilt tradition itself could express their disagreement with the policies that discouraged “Hawaiianess” through the preservation of old Hawaiian Flag quilts and the creation of new ones.

The earliest documentation of the Hawaiian Flag quilt as a cultural symbol embodying a political history is associated with the 1933 quilt exhibition sponsored by members of the Mokihana Club, a Kaua‘i women’s literary, civic, and social club. Among 108 Hawaiian quilts publicly displayed at the Lihue Parish Hall, at least six (and perhaps more) were Hawaiian Flag quilts (see fig. 6). They and other quilts featuring Hawaiian monarchy coat-of-arms and crown designs were prominently arranged on the stage area of the hall, a location that indicated the esteem in which



FIG. 6. Hawaiian Flag quilts on display at the 1933 Mokihana Club Quilt Exhibit. (Kaua‘i Museum.)

they were held. Quoting from an address delivered in conjunction with the exhibit, the local newspaper reported one organizer's remarks:

First come those embodying the Hawaiian flag, with sometimes the Coat of Arms, and again with a Coat of Arms alone. These were particularly popular at the time of our annexation to the United States, as some people were afraid they might not be able to keep their loved Hawaiian flags, and therefore sought to preserve them in their quilts, hence their general name Kuu Hoe [*sic*] Aloha. These are in many different styles, and we have a few represented on the stage.³⁴

As the political climate changed during the second half of the twentieth century to accommodate tourists' increased interest in Hawaiian culture and the public reclamation of Hawaiian culture through cultural revitalization activities, Hawaiian Flag quilts began to play an even more prominent and public role as symbols for Hawai'i's past. For the past quarter century, Hawaiian Flag quilts have been displayed prominently and proudly in many Hawaiian museums and some tourist sites. Hawaiian Flag quilts are also featured in Hawaiian quilt exhibitions organized for local viewing and sent to the U.S. mainland and other countries. Recently, Hawaiian Flag quilts, along with other Hawaiian quilts, have been the subject of television programs.

One of the most interesting aspects of the ongoing Hawaiian Flag quilt tradition is the role that the quilts, particularly the oldest ones, have come to play in recalling the Hawaiians' past. As symbols for native Hawaiians' struggle to retain autonomy as a nation and a people, the creation and use of Hawaiian Flag quilts of the last decade of the nineteenth century have been emphasized almost to the exclusion of all other periods and messages in the Hawaiian Flag quilt tradition. Moreover, certain fallacies and exaggerations have been perpetuated because they seem "to make sense" in light of the emphasis placed on the quilts as symbols for Hawaiian autonomy.

The element of secrecy figures prominently in many statements made about Hawaiian Flag quilts of the late nineteenth century.

Some writers have suggested that the reason some Hawaiian Flag quilts were hung under canopies of beds was to conceal them and avoid treason.³⁵ Other writers have stated many quilts had floral designs on their reverse sides so that owners could conceal the symbols of the Hawaiian nation.³⁶ Since the display of the Hawaiian flag was never a treasonable act, and only one Hawaiian Flag quilt with a reverse floral pattern has been reported, the stories seem more apocryphal than factual.³⁷ The stories of impending loss (with an emphasis on the flag as object) and concealment are best viewed as the twentieth-century perspective on the consequences of the political events—Hawaiians' loss of political sovereignty and national autonomy.

SYMBOLS FOR HAWAI'I

Encompassing the past within a quilt form of the present, Hawaiian Flag quilts of the twentieth century have come to symbolize Hawai'i and all residents of the Hawaiian Islands. In a manner paralleling the way in which the territory and state of Hawai'i incorporated symbols of the former Hawaiian kingdom into their own political emblems,³⁸ Hawai'i's residents of other ethnicities have joined native Hawaiians in embracing the Hawaiian quilt as a symbol of Hawai'i.

Information about specific quilts suggests that the Hawaiian Flag quilts were beginning to figure as articles valued for their association with the Hawaiian Islands in the early part of the twentieth century. One quilt, for example, was cooperatively created in 1918 by Wilhelmina Eichinger, who arrived in Hawai'i in 1914, and a Mrs. Enos, a Hawaiian woman.³⁹ Miss Lucy Wilcox gave a Hawaiian Flag quilt to Augusta Suder around 1940.⁴⁰ Although not ethnic Hawaiians, both women were *kama'aina* (native-born) residents. Another Hawaiian Flag quilt was willed by Hawaiian Prince Kūhiō to a friend not of Hawaiian ancestry with whom he often played cards.⁴¹ Hawaiian Flag quilts were also sometimes bestowed on missionaries and others who lived in Hawai'i for a time and then returned home.⁴²

Beginning in the 1970s when an interest in Hawaiian traditions began to flourish among native Hawaiians and other residents of

the Hawaiian Islands, Hawaiian Flag quilts played even more prominent roles as symbols of Hawai'i and Hawai'i's past. As classes in Hawaiian quilt-making proliferated and interest in Hawaiian quilts spread among Hawai'i residents of all ethnicities, many non-native Hawaiians made Hawaiian Flag quilts to express their identity as citizens of Hawai'i.

Others' interest in Hawaiian culture and Hawaiian history (tourists' in particular) bolstered the Hawaiian Flag quilt tradition as a unique expression of Hawai'i. In 1976 one prominent hotel on O'ahu, for example, commissioned Deborah Kepola Kakalia, a well-known Hawaiian quilter, to create both a Hawaiian Flag quilt and an American flag quilt for their 1976 bicentennial celebration.⁴³ The political statement conveyed through the juxtaposition of the two quilts was one of a Hawaiian past associated with the former autonomous nation incorporated into and celebrated within an American historical holiday. The commission of a Hawaiian Flag quilt for this bicentennial message emphasized the period before Hawai'i's statehood, rather than the period during which Hawai'i has been part of the United States. A similar statement of the unique character of Hawai'i within U.S. history was expressed in another American celebration. Several Hawaiian Flag quilts, along with other Hawaiian quilts, were displayed at The Great American Quilt Festival, April 24-27, 1986, in conjunction with the rededication ceremonies of the Statue of Liberty in New York.

CONCLUSION

The Hawaiian Flag quilt tradition has remained strong for more than a hundred years largely due to the stability of its motifs and form. As the principal design element of the Hawaiian Flag quilts, the Hawaiian flag has been tied to the associational values placed on the Hawaiian quilt form itself, an object intimately linked with the productive activities and relational values of the family. Hawaiian quilts intrinsically express aloha. When a Hawaiian quilter makes and bestows a quilt on someone in the family, a friend, or an esteemed associate, the quilt conveys the

donor's emotions. The beloved Hawaiian flag of the Hawaiian Flag quilt is embedded within a form that also "speaks" with love.

The vitality of the Hawaiian Flag quilt tradition emanates from the manner in which the stabilized political symbols of the Hawaiian nation, rendered through a medium expressive of deeply felt emotions, have played against the political and attitudinal changes affecting the Hawaiian nation and the Hawaiian people. While Hawaiian Flag quilts of the nineteenth century were used to communicate loyalty and personal service to the Hawaiian nation, political positions, and protests to foreign domination, those of the twentieth century have conveyed messages of resistance to antinative Hawaiian policies, commemoration of the Hawaiian kingdom, celebration of the Hawaiian cultural legacy, and pride in the unique character of Hawai'i. The symbolic significance of the Hawaiian Flag quilts of the twentieth century is based upon the self-referential aspects of the quilt tradition itself (and its associated folklore) as much as the meanings attached to the quilts' motifs.

One indication of the tradition's significance in reflecting Hawaiians' thoughts and feelings about Hawaiian politics and society may be cited in a number of other twentieth-century Hawaiian quilts which have drawn upon the Hawaiian Flag quilts to create other messages. American flag quilts patterned on the compositional arrangement of the Hawaiian Flag quilts may be interpreted as a visual statement of the accommodation of an American identity into the foundational Hawaiian identity, which is rooted in the Hawaiian past. Elizabeth A. Akana's design for a Hawaiian quilt commissioned by the Honolulu Police Department draws from the Hawaiian Flag quilt tradition in both composition and meaning. By juxtaposing Hawaiian law enforcement emblems of the past and present with the Hawaiian flag designs, Akana was able to create a powerful visual analogy. The same respect and honor accorded to the Hawaiian flag, the Hawaiian past, and the Hawaiian Flag quilt tradition itself is extended to the Honolulu Police Department (fig. 7).

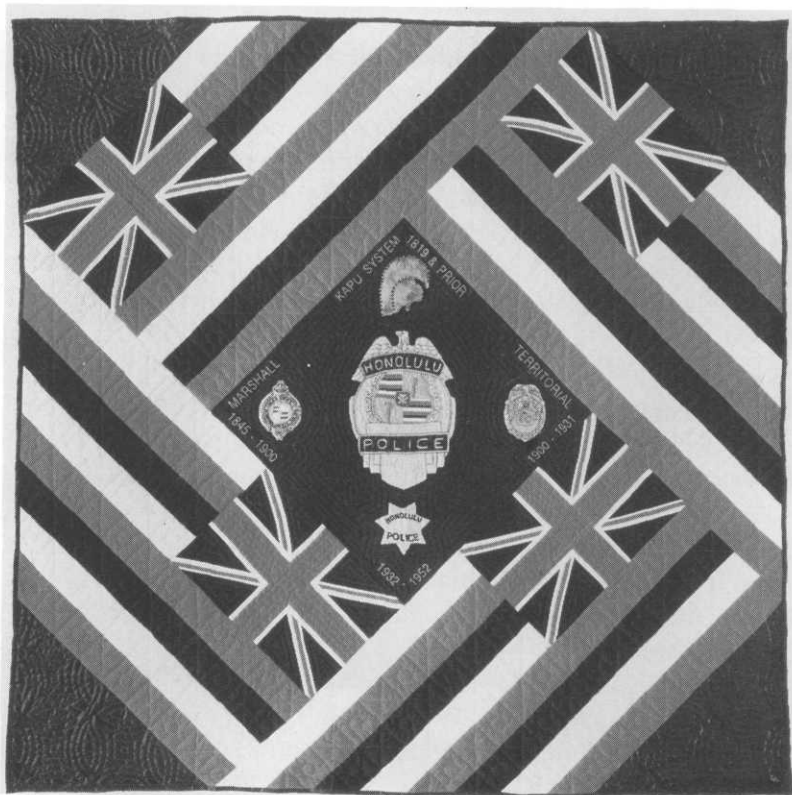


FIG. 7. Police Heritage Quilt. 1992. Designed, pieced, and appliquéed by Elizabeth A. Akana. Embroidered by Harriet Yamaguchi. Quilted by Kathie Dallas. Owned by Elizabeth A. Akana. (Photograph by Sharon Risedorph.)

With its inherent message of pride in Hawai'i's cultural heritage and history, the Hawaiian Flag quilt tradition is as viable today as it was in the past. As in former years, the unique tradition of the Hawaiian Flag quilt provides native Hawaiians and other residents of Hawai'i with the means to express a wide range of ideas and feelings. There is every indication that the tradition of the Hawaiian Flag quilt will undoubtedly continue to thrive. Powerful as a reminder of the past which shapes the present, the Hawaiian Flag quilt, like the history of Hawai'i itself, will undoubtedly be incorporated into Hawai'i's future.

NOTES

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¹ See Pat Ferrero, *Hearts and Hands, The Influence of Women and Quilts on American Society* (San Francisco: Quilt Digest P, 1987); Jan Rindfleisch, ed., *The Power of Cloth, Political Quilts 1845-1986* (Cupertino, CA: De Anza College, 1987).

² Elizabeth A. Akana reports nine variations on the arrangement of the four flags (personal communication, 1992). Variations also exist in the number of flags. In a few Hawaiian Flag quilts there are more than four flags. In some designs the four flags are indicated by four flag cantons accompanied by stripes rather than four distinct flag designs.

³ Colleen Hanai, "Hae Hawaii," *Hawaii Historical Review* 1.5 (Oct. 1963): 93-103.

⁴ See Joyce D. Hammond, *Tifai'ai and Quilts of Polynesia* (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 1986).

⁵ "The use of 'Ku'u Hae Aloha' as a generic name of Hawaiian Flag quilts seems to have first appeared in print in 1930 when author Stella M. Jones was published by the Honolulu Academy of Arts: 'The most loved design, however, is "Ku'u Hae Aloha" (My Beloved Flag),' (*Hawaiian Quilts*, rev. ed., Honolulu: Daughters of Hawaii, Honolulu Academy of Arts, and Mission Houses Museum, 1973, p. 16; originally published in 1930). This concept was reiterated by Edith R. Plews, an admirer of Jones, in a paper presented in 1933 and subsequently published in 1976 by Kauai Museum: 'Notice those embodying the Hawaiian flag, with sometimes the Coat of Arms alone. . . . some people were afraid they might not be able to keep their loved Hawaiian flags, and therefore sought to preserve them in their quilts, hence their general name "Ku'u Hae Aloha," (*Hawaiian Quilting on Kauai*, Kauai Museum Publication, 1976, p. 6). In most publications, the use of 'Ku'u Hae Aloha' as the generic name for a Hawaiian Flag quilt has been inconsistent over the years. If an owner did not know the original name of their flag quilt, it was often arbitrarily named 'Ku'u Hae Aloha' for publication purposes" (Lee S. Wild, personal communication, 6 Feb. 1993).

⁶ Elizabeth A. Akana, "Ku'u Hae Aloha," *Quilt Digest* 2, ed. Roderick Kiracofe and Michael Kile (San Francisco: Kiracofe and Kile, 1984) 70-77.

⁷ Howard M. Ballou, "The Reversal of the Hawaiian Flag," *Papers of the Hawaiian Historical Society*, no. 12 (Honolulu: Hawaiian Gazette, 1905). Akana has also pointed out that the Hawaiian word *ku'u*, incorporated in the words *Ku'u Hae Aloha*, which are sewn on many Hawaiian Flag quilts, may be

translated with meanings other than “my.” Pukui’s *Hawaiian Dictionary* lists “let go” and “to lower” among its first definitional meanings. Mary Kawena Pukui and Samuel H. Elbert, *Hawaiian Dictionary* (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 1971). Akana makes a connection between the loss of the land and the lost flag by referring to the statement of King Kamehameha III to his people: “Hear ye! I make known to you that I am in perplexity by reason of difficulties into which I have been brought without cause; therefore I have given away the life of the land.” Cited in Edith B. Williams, *Ka Hae Hawaii, The Story of the Hawaiian Flag* (Honolulu: n.p., 1963) 14; Akana, personal communication, 8 Nov. 1991.

The lack of concrete evidence for the 1843 “flag loss” origin theory does not detract from its plausibility. However, triumphal reestablishment of the Hawaiian flag in July of 1843 might be similarly cited since the flag was much in evidence at the celebrations of thanksgiving (Williams, *Ka Hae Hawaii* 16), and the Hawaiian people might have embraced the Hawaiian flag as their own (*ku’u* = my) to an extent never realized before. Alternatively, an earlier or later appearance of Hawaiian Flag quilts as a means to commemorate the flag and royal coat of arms in a manner paralleling other Hawaiian quilt designs which feature objects associated with the Hawaiian monarchy (some of which are as old as the oldest extant Hawaiian Flag quilts) has not, to my knowledge, been proposed.

⁸ Williams, *Ka Hae Hawaii* 16.

⁹ It is possible that the ongoing Quilt Research Project in the Hawaiian Islands may uncover quilts with dates from this period.

¹⁰ Williams, *Ka Hae Hawaii*.

¹¹ Bernice Piilani Irwin, *I Knew Queen Liliuokalani* (Honolulu: South Sea Sales, 1960) 46.

¹² Roger G. Rose, *Hawai‘i: The Royal Isles*, Bernice P. Bishop Museum Special Publication 67 (Honolulu: Bishop Museum P, 1980) 213.

¹³ Rindfleisch, *The Power of Cloth* 23.

¹⁴ The Hawaiian flag was also re-presented in its original meaning by royalists in more public ways. Irwin reported that “. . . men fashioned shields of koa wood, painting them with the Hawaiian coat-of-arms surmounted by crossed Hawaiian flags in order to keep their beloved emblem constantly before their eyes.” Irwin, *I Knew Queen Liliuokalani* 46.

Mabel Craft reported that on Hawai‘i’s annexation day, August 12, 1898, native Hawaiians “. . . wore on their hats the twisted golden ilima that tells of love of royalty, and on their breasts the old flag and lettered badges that spoke their aloha for Hawaii to all the world.” *Hawaii Nei* (San Francisco: William Doxey, 1899) 77.

¹⁵ Rose, *Hawai‘i* 214.

¹⁶ Virginia W. Koch, personal communication, 29 Nov. 1991.

¹⁷ Williams, *Ka Hae Hawaii* 50.

¹⁸ Rieko Brandon, ed., *Hawaiian Quilt = Rakuen ni saina nuno no hana: Hawian kiruto ten* (Tokyo: Kokusai Art, 1898) 20.

¹⁹ Sigrid B. Southworth, Hawaiian Collection librarian of the Kamehameha Schools (personal communication through letter, 3 Dec. 1991), thinks it very odd that “the initials used on it would refer to him without the title, but use it in preference to her name for her.” Southworth suggests it might have been made by someone unfamiliar with titles who thought it showed more honor to use a title, “. . . i.e., a Hawaiian attempting to show the greatest respect possible for an *ali‘i*.”

According to John W. Kaikainahaole III, whose family has owned the quilt for more than 65 years, family tradition holds that the quilt expressed a protest to Lord Paulet and the temporary loss of the Hawaiian crown to the British in 1843. Kaikainahaole writes, “Note the reversed Union Jack and the toppled crown. Although the quilt’s designer remains unknown, it is thought that each of the four flags were stitched to represent the three Kamehamehas who had ruled: Kamehameha I, Kamehameha II (Liholiho) and Kamehameha III (Kauikeaouli). The fourth flag signifies the designated heir, Alexander Liholiho, Kamehameha IV.” He also states, “The top flag with eight stripes was adopted by the 1845 legislature. The right flag with nine stripes was documented in 1816 during the reign of Kamehameha I. The bottom eight stripes was documented prior to 1843 during [the reign of] Kamehameha III. The left flag has seven stripes and was documented in 1818.” John W. Kaikainahaole III, personal communication, Apr. 1993.

²⁰ Brandon, *Hawaiian Quilt* 38.

²¹ Today there are those who believe that Hawaiian Flag quilts were originally owned only by royalty. To date, sufficient evidence has not been amassed to determine whether some Hawaiian families expressed political loyalties to the Kamehameha line of the Hawaiian monarchy, as opposed to the Kalākaua line, through Hawaiian Flag quilts postdating 1883. Political factions formed around allegiances to the two royal lines during the late nineteenth century following the death of Kamehameha V, who died without naming an heir to the throne. Since many Hawaiian Flag quilts incorporate either the 1845 Kamehameha III coat-of-arms design or the 1883 Kalākaua revised coat of arms, it is possible that an expression of political support for the Kamehameha line could be communicated over that of the Kalākaua line through the use of the 1845 coat of arms in a quilt design.

²² Doris M. Bowman, *The Smithsonian Treasury, American Quilts* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution P, 1991) 87.

²³ Various reasons have been suggested for their omission in many quilts. As Elizabeth Akana points out (personal communication, 8 Nov. 1991), they may be deleted because they are difficult to make. Deborah Kepola Kakalia, a renowned contemporary Hawaiian quilt maker, made one Hawaiian Flag quilt and did not include the figures because of “the belief that the figures will

make whoever rests beneath the quilt restless" (personal communication, 11 Nov. 1991). Like others' ideas about the appropriateness of using the coat-of-arms design itself, the belief is certainly not universal, as attested by those Hawaiian Flag quilts in which the figures do appear.

²⁴ Mealii Kalama, personal communication, 6 Nov. 1991.

²⁵ I am indebted to Sanna Saks Deutsch for insights which led to these speculative remarks, personal communication, 6 and 14 Nov. 1991.

²⁶ *PCA* 14 July 1898: 1. The shift in the quilt's significance may have occurred rapidly. In 1901 the Reverend W. D. Westervelt wrote:

The Hawaiian flag still floats over many a home in the Islands. Ardent annexationists as well as loving royalists keep the Hawaiian colors flying from the tall poles in their yards. The Hawaiian flag is surrounded by many historical memories which mean much to residents of both native and foreign descent, and they are not yet willing that the dear old flag shall be lost from the nation's history. As one writer says, this feeling shows that "the flag does not represent so much a particular form of government as it does the great heart of the people which throbs beneath."

W. D. Westervelt, "History of Hawaii's Flag," *Paradise of the Pacific* 14.7 (1901): 15.

²⁷ A very few Hawaiian Flag quilts express different message from others of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One quilt attributed to the late nineteenth to early twentieth century incorporated the Republic of Hawai'i's eight stars (used by that government in a revised coat of arms) in the quilt design. Brandon, *Hawaiian Quilt* 26–27. Another quilt, made in the early part of the twentieth century, celebrated the annexation of the Hawaiian Islands to the United States with four pairs of crossed flags. Elizabeth A. Akana, *Hawaiian Quilting as a Fine Art* (Honolulu: HMCS, 1981) 26. Each pair has a Hawaiian flag and the United States flag. Likewise, another quilt, made about 1900, includes both Hawaiian and American flags. Kym Snyder Rice, "The Hawaiian Quilt," *Art and Antiques* (May/June 1981): 106.

²⁸ With a few possible exceptions, the Hawaiian flag depicted in quilts of the twentieth century continued to be the flag of the Hawaiian nation rather than the territorial or state flag (which were the same in appearance), insured through the continued juxtaposition of the Hawaiian monarchy's coat of arms with the flag. Similarly, the coat-of-arms motif was not updated to reflect the minor modifications imposed for the territorial or state seals, and the same Hawaiian epithets such as *Hawai'i Pono'i* (Hawaii's own) and *Ku'u Hae Aloha* (My Beloved Flag) used in nineteenth-century quilts appeared on twentieth-century ones as well.

²⁹ Akana, personal communication, 8 Nov. 1991.

³⁰ A seven-striped Hawaiian flag was used in 1843. In 1845 an eight-striped flag (still used as the state flag) was introduced. The 1845 coat-of-arms design was

modified by King Kalākaua in 1883. Some nineteenth-century Hawaiian Flag quilts created in the latter quarter of the century may have carried the original coat-of-arms design before the 1883 design was introduced. Quilts postdating 1883 which bear the 1845 coat-of-arms design also exist, however.

- ³¹ Two of the flags have eight stripes; one has a red stripe at the top, and the other has a white stripe. One flag has seven stripes and one has nine stripes. These variations represent historical changes in the Hawaiian flag Kaikainahaole cites for the quilt pictured in fig. 3.
- ³² Although other Hawaiian quilt makers have expressed astonishment to Kaikainahaole for using the 'Iolani Palace motif (one said it was *kapu*, or forbidden), Kaikainahaole believes it is justified by the fact that his grandfather was a chief. Further, he is consciously extending the Hawaiian Flag quilt tradition by his innovations and sees this particular quilt as one of a trilogy of significant quilts in his family's possession. John W. Kaikainahaole III, personal communication, 14 Nov. 1991.
- ³³ Michael Kioni Dudley and Keoni Kealoha Agard, *A Call for Hawaiian Sovereignty* (Honolulu: Nā Kāne O Ka Malo P, 1990) 73.
- ³⁴ Edith Rice Plews, "Hawaiian Quilting on Kauai," an address given to the Mokihana Club at Lihue, Kaua'i, *The Garden Island*, 1 Mar. 1933. The celebration of earlier Hawaiian Flag quilts as part of the Hawaiian legacy undoubtedly contributed to the longevity of early Hawaiian Flag quilts themselves. Many older quilts have been passed down to younger generations with accompanying stories of their political histories and the significance of the quilts to their creators. Although Hawaiian Flag quilts were probably always reserved for special occasions and carefully handled, the twentieth-century perspective on the combined significance of the quilts' motifs and the quilts' historical context insured great care for many old Hawaiian Flag quilts. As one writer has observed, "Flag quilts usually are considered sacred and are handed down as heirlooms. In most cases, they were never put to use, therefore, many remain in absolute mint condition." Brandon, *Hawaiian Quilt* 24.
- ³⁵ Napua Stevens, *The Hawaiian Quilt* (Honolulu: Service Printers, 1971) 4.
- ³⁶ Richard J. Tibbets, Jr., and Elaine Zinn, *The Hawaiian Quilt: A Cherished Tradition*, a 16mm film (Honolulu, 1986; "The Hawaiian Quilt, Unique Island Creation," *Waihona* (summer 1975): 6.
- ³⁷ The Hawaiian Quilt Research Project, which had information on at least 50 Hawaiian Flag quilts in 1991, had only seen one quilt with a reversible design, and that was a nine-patch design. In 1988, Moana Tregaskis mentioned a Hawaiian Flag quilt with a reversible floral pattern in the small museum in the Coco Palms Hotel of Kaua'i. Moana Tregaskis, "Hawaii's Expressive Handmade Quilts," *The New York Times*, 5 June 1988: 6.

Numerous accounts document the Hawaiian flag's public presence during the 1890s. At no time was the act of displaying the Hawaiian flag a treasonable crime. The flag was placed beneath the American flag for a two-month period in 1893 but soon raised as the flag of the Provisional and Republic govern-

ments (1893-98). In 1898 the Hawaiian flag was ritually lowered at the ceremony for annexation. However, "Iolani Palace was decorated with both American and Hawaiian flags for the occasion, and small Hawaiian flags were raised shortly after the large American flag was hoisted to commemorate annexation." Craft, *Hawaii Nei* 87-88. As the territorial and state flag, the Hawaiian flag has flown continuously over the Hawaiian Islands since April 1893.

³⁸ An interesting contrast may be drawn with the Provisional Government's rejection of these symbols, as previously noted.

³⁹ Brandon, *Hawaiian Quilt* 34.

⁴⁰ Brandon, *Hawaiian Quilt* 28.

⁴¹ Bishop Museum accession records.

⁴² Russell and Claire Rossiter, for example, missionaries of the Church of Latter Day Saints, received a Hawaiian Flag quilt made between 1915 and 1920. Sandi Fox, *Quilts in Utah, A Reflection of the Western Experience* (Salt Lake City: Salt Lake Art Center, 1981) 46.

⁴³ Mary Cooke. "History Will Make It Sew," *HA*, 9 June 1976.