A New View of Kaua‘i as “The Separate Kingdom” after 1810

This article has grown out of an attempt to reevaluate the history of Russian Fort Elisabeth State Historical Park in Waimea, Kaua‘i. The construction of the fort occurred in 1816 following an agreement between Kaumuali‘i, paramount chief of Kaua‘i, and Dr. Georg Anton Schäffer, a representative of the Russian-American Company (RAC). The agreement involved establishing the sovereignty of Kaua‘i and Ni‘ihau, independently of Kamehameha, as well as plans to conquer other islands. The history of the fort’s construction has been explored primarily through Russian-American Company documents published under the title Russia’s Hawaiian Adventure. A premise in this account is that the arrival of the Russian-American Company prompted Kaumuali‘i to renege on an agreement he had made with Kamehameha in 1810. This premise has been generally accepted by Hawaiian historians. In Edward Joesting’s Kaua‘i: The Separate Kingdom, the construction of the fort is presented in a chapter titled “An Interesting Diversion,” suggesting that the event was atypical of Kaua‘i’s political history. This premise is also supported by a statement attributed to Kamehameha in 1817 by a Russian naval officer, Otto Von Kotzebue:

But what was the consequence of my hospitality? Even before he [Schäffer] left Owhyee, he repaid my kindness with ingratitude, which I bore patiently. Upon this, according to his own desire, he travelled from one island to another; and, at last, settled in the fruitful island of

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Woahoo, where he proved himself to be my most inveterate enemy;
destroying our sanctuary, the Morai; and exciting against me, in the
island of Atooi, King Tamary [Kaumuali‘i], who had submitted to my
power years before. Sheffer is there at this very moment, and threatens
my islands.  

If this quotation is an accurate representation of Kamehameha’s
words, Kamehameha clearly portrayed Schäffer as the initiator of
change. I suggest, however, that this account cannot be taken at face
value. Kamehameha had much to gain in his negotiations with Kotze-
bue by portraying Schäffer as the initiator of a rebellion on Kaua‘i.
In so doing, he held the Russians responsible for destroying peace in
a unified kingdom and placed a diplomatic responsibility on Kotze-
bue to restore that peace.

The idea that Schäffer excited Kaumuali‘i against Kamehameha
also may have been fabricated by Kotzebue. In 1817, the Russian
navy and the Russian-American Company were at odds with each
other over the management of the company. While the navy gained
little by openly undermining the efforts of the company, it had its
own agenda of proving that the RAC was poorly run under private
management and should be taken over by the navy. By making
Schäffer the destroyer of peace, Kotzebue justified his lack of action
in support of Schäffer.

Kaumuali‘i’s Meeting with Kamehameha in 1810

Kamehameha I controlled all of the Hawaiian Islands with the excep-
tion of Kaua‘i and Ni‘ihau by 1795 and led failed attempts to con-
quern these last two islands in 1796 and 1804. This was followed by a
period of diplomatic posturing between Kamehameha and Kaumu-
ali‘i that resulted in a face-to-face meeting on O‘ahu in 1810. Nathan
Winship, an American merchant, went to Kaua‘i to transport Kaumu-
ali‘i to O‘ahu, leaving a hostage in his place. Kaumuali‘i was accom-
panied on this trip by a retinue that included his nephew, Kamahole-
lani, a wife named Kekaiha‘akulou, a high chief named Ha‘upu, and
a young son of his named Kahekili. Upon arriving at Honolulu,
Kamehameha came off shore to greet Kaumuali‘i, and at this first
meeting of the two greatest living chiefs of Hawai‘i, Kamehameha
asked for Kaumuali‘i’s hand and the two “greeted each other kindly and with true affection.” Upon landing, shots were fired from canons in salute, and the delegation from Kaua‘i was taken to Kamehameha’s houses at Pākākā.

While Kaumuali‘i was at O‘ahu, however, Isaac Davis warned Kaumuali‘i that there was a plot to kill him among Kamehameha’s chiefs:

This startled Kaumualii and caused him to shorten his stay in Honolulu. When he asked Kamehameha’s permission to go home, they discussed the reason for his request, the matter of each maintaining his individual position until death and the question as to what heirs would succeed them. Kalanimoku was there to discuss these matters with them and said to Kaumuali‘i, “Take care of the chief Liholiho, who belongs to you and to your cousin Kaahumanu. Liholiho shall be the heir.”

Shortly after Kaumuali‘i returned to Kaua‘i, Davis died. Some have suggested that he was killed in retaliation for warning Kaumuali‘i. Thus, Kaumuali‘i returned to Kaua‘i still serving as the paramount chief, but with an apparent understanding that Liholiho was to be recognized as the heir to all the islands. Others have reported that Kaumuali‘i agreed to pay an annual tribute to Kamehameha. Kamehameha, however, also gave extensive gifts to Kaumuali‘i upon his return to Kaua‘i:

The canoes were filled with brown pa‘ikukui tapas from Halawa, Molokai, and with nets and fish lines. From Waipio in Ewa and from some lands of Hawaii came tapa made of mamaki bark, ‘ouholowai tapas from Olaa, and so forth. After all was ready, Opunui, Kuaena (the father of Ii), Kaulapohu, and their canoe men left. When these people reached Wailua on Kauai where Kaumualii was then living, enjoying the large streams of that watered land, all the things brought by this second company were displayed.

Due to these events, 1810 is often cited as the date of the final unification of the Hawaiian Islands under Kamehameha I. Kamehameha appears to have considered the Islands unified at this point as is recorded in a letter he sent to King George III of England dated August 6, 1810, in which he stated, “Temoree [Kaumuali‘i], king of
Attoi [Kaua’i] has delivered his island up, and we are now in possession of the whole of the Sandwich Islands.\(^{11}\)

**The Collapse of the Agreement**

In the published accounts of Hawai‘i in 1811 and 1812, little mention is made of Kaua‘i except that an annual tribute was paid by Kaumuali‘i to Kamehameha in 1811.\(^{12}\) Trading vessels continued to stop directly at Kaua‘i during this period, but few accounts of these visits are available. Stephen Reynolds was there in October 1811 on the *New Hazard* in company with the *Hamilton*, under Captain Lemuel Porter. They met another ship there, the *Enterprise*, under Captain John Ebbets. The ships were provisioning with hogs and water. When Reynolds returned to Kaua‘i on the *New Hazard* in July 1813, the *Isabella*, *Albatross*, and *O‘Cain* were all there stowing pork and cutting firewood.\(^{13}\)

Several documents suggest that the concept of a unified Hawaiian kingdom after 1810 is a misrepresentation of the degree of political tension and economic competition that continued between Kaumuali‘i and Kamehameha. For example, the American merchants Jonathan Winship, Jr., Nathan Winship, and William Heath Davis signed a contract with Kamehameha in 1812 for the procurement of sandalwood in his domain. This contract, however, did not cover Kaumuali‘i’s territory, where a separate contract was drawn up with Kaumuali‘i for Kaua‘i and Ni‘ihau.\(^{14}\)

Several sources also indicate that Kaumuali‘i broke his agreement with Kamehameha before the arrival of Schäffer. An article published in the *United States Gazette for the Country* in Philadelphia on December 7, 1816, stated:

> It is true, that Tamoree [Kaumuali‘i] went down several years since, and made a surrender of his island to Tamaamah [Kamehameha]; but he has since thought better of it, and has concluded not to yield without a struggle.\(^{15}\)

For this to refer to Kaumuali‘i’s treaty with Schäffer, it would require the transmittal of information from Kaua‘i to the eastern United States in four and a half months, an unlikely occurrence. Portions of
the same text can be found in a slightly later text published by Samuel Patterson:

Tamoree, king of the island of Atooi, is the rightful sovereign of all the Sandwich isles, and Tamaamah is an usurper; and though it has been reported that Tamaamah has conquered all these islands, yet it is not the case. Atooi, which is at one extreme of the group, and is more than 300 miles from Owhyhee, still preserves its independence. It is true, that Tamoree a few years since, went down and made a surrender of his island to Tamaamah; but he has since thought better of it, and concluded not to yield without struggle: he is a generous noble minded man, about forty-five years of age, and has a son [Humehume] now in America, who is converted to Christianity, and fitting to return and preach the gospel to his countrymen.16

The most compelling evidence for a breakdown in Kaumuali‘i’s and Kamehameha’s relationship between 1810 and 1814 is contained in the “Log of the Atahualpa.”17 The writer of the log parted with the ship and remained in Waimea for the entire year of 1814 looking after furs that had been stored there following the sale of the Atahualpa to the Russian-American Company. Ironically, it was this same ship that wrecked in Waimea in 1815 and began “Russia’s Hawaiian Adventure.” The Atahualpa returned in early 1815 as the Bering under Captain James Bennett, and the author of the log was present for the wreck. Frank W. Howay published the last portion of this log in his article on the wreck,18 but the earlier portion of the log is only briefly discussed in the opening pages of Howay’s article.

In January of 1814, the log’s author was on O‘ahu with the furs. The brig Forester, under the control of mutineers, was cruising the waters off the island of Hawai‘i, and since the island of Hawai‘i was the only place where Kamehameha promised to safeguard the pelts, the author took them to Kaua‘i. On January 17, 1814, he arrived in Waimea, Kaua‘i, on the schooner Tamaahmaah. Upon landing, the pelts were stored temporarily in grass houses owned by a Mr. Caldwell. The writer of the log met with Kaumuali‘i on January 23rd and requested that he assign men to build two houses to store the pelts. He gave Kaumuali‘i five muskets, a keg of gunpowder, a keg of shot, two cutlasses, and some gun-flints, upon which Kaumuali‘i assigned
some men to the task. Shortly thereafter, Kaumuali‘i left for Hana-
pepe, where he was staying at the time. The houses were built at least
a slight distance “up the valley” and were probably built with stone
walls as the author stated, “I did not think the property safe in the
straw House.”19 The author had difficulty getting the men to work
and complained that he had to buy his provisions from the natives. It
wasn’t till the 25th of February that one of the two houses was fin-
ished and pelts were stored there. Kaumuali‘i also decided to build
his own stone storehouse, at an unstated location, that was finished
by the 16th of May.

The log makes several references to Kaumuali‘i’s “head chief” or
“prime minister,” who is variably referred to as “Tamahaw-ra-ran-nu,”
“Tamahawralany,” or “Tamahawnalany.” This is most likely Kamaholelani, the chief that Kaumuali‘i first sent on a mission of diplo-
macy to Kamehameha and who accompanied him to O‘ahu in 1810.
The writer of the journal took a considerable dislike to this chief and
at various points in the log suggested he was responsible for nearly
killing Mr. Caldwell by poisoning, plotting to kill the American resi-
dents, and setting fire to their houses.20 The writer suggests that
Kamaholelani and Kaumuali‘i had different dispositions toward the
American presence because Kamaholelani was allied with Kameha-
meha. The log clearly suggests that Kaumuali‘i had broken his ties
with Kamehameha. The following is an entry in the log from Friday,
March 18, 1814:

...at 9 A M arrived the Ships Isabella & Pennsylvania Packet[,] Capt[ains] Davis & Meek, last from Woahoo. Capt. D. informd us that Tamahamaah, King of the Windward Islands was making every prepa-
ration for invading this Island[,] As of late Tamaree, King of this place
has refused paying him a Tribute which was granted him by the King
at the last settlement of National affairs which was concluded through
the intercession of Mr. Thos. Robinson, in 1810.21

On February 8th, the log recorded that a flagstaff was erected in
Waimea and a flag, presumably American, was given to Kaumuali‘i:

...Erected a Flag staff in front of the House for the purpose of dis-
playing the Flag which his donors presented him with (the King) as a
token of Respect for his full & faithful adherence to his engagements & for his Friendship & protection which he has shown for Americans at this place.

Over the year, Captain Isaac Whittemore on the Charon, Captain Robert McNeil on the O'Cain, Captain William Heath Davis on the Isabella, the Winship brothers (Nathan and Jonathan), Captain William Smith on the Albatross, and Captain Joseph Meek in the Pennsylvania Packet (on his return from Canton) all visited Kaua'i on American vessels. Captains Whittemore and Jonathan Winship both stored furs and sandalwood on the island, and Captain Meek continued to trade in sandalwood obtained from the island with Canton. With the large supply of American furs on the island, the following entry, dated April 1, 1814, one day after a kapu (taboo) was declared on the island, demonstrates how the Americans were drawn into protecting Kaumuali'i's kingdom:

This day a council of War was held at the House (at which all the Nobility attended) for the purpose of adopting some effectual means, for the present & Future safety of this Island from the invasion of Tamahamaah King of Owhyhee. The plan adopted was to send all the Men from this Island which belonged to the Windward Islands [Kamehameha's islands] & to keep them selves in constant readiness for defence. Capts. Davis, Winship & Whittemore at the same time proferd their friendship & protection as far as lay in their powers, at all times[,] thinking it not only Requisite for the Safety of their property, but Justice to Tamarree [Kaumuali'i], the King, for his friendly disposition & protection for Americans.

Two days later (April 3), the ships Isabella and Albatross left Kaua'i carrying seventeen people with political ties to Kamehameha. On April 11, Waimea was placed under a kapu by the Kaua'i chiefs. On April 12, the following entry was made:

This Morning was a public exhibition [sic] of the Pu [Ku?] gods at which the King presided[.] These Idols of the unenlightened Natives of this place are huge Uncouth carved pieces of Wood habited in Tapers [tapa cloth] of this country[']s manufactors of variagated collours
which present to view a most pictureske [sic] appearance [...] Ridiculous as this kind of worship may appear it has the desired effect of keeping the natives in perfect subjection & were it not for this the place would [not] only be troublesome but dangerous to remain with them.

Until the middle of May, things remained relatively calm, with the writer of the log checking on the pelts in storage and finding them in good order. Mr. Caldwell sailed for California on the Albatross. Jonathan Winship and William Heath Davis arrived with a team of men to cut wood, and Kaumuali‘i and retinue left on the ship Charon under Captain Lathrop for Hanalei, where they intended to stay for twelve to fifteen days. The writer noted throughout the journal his frustration in obtaining provisions; he had to buy his food or rely on handouts from Jonathan Winship and Isaac Whittemore.

While Kaumuali‘i was still away on May 17th, there was an attempt to burn down one of his houses in Waimea:

Last night there was an attempt made by some incendiary to set fire to the King’s House but fortunately was discovered but made his escape before the man on Guard to obtain assistance. Strong suspicions are entertained that the prime Minister [Kamaholelani] was accessory to the plan which should it be the case I am in hopes that he will be removed from office as there is no doubt but this Man is friendly displaced towards Tamahamahama King of the Windward Islands & hopes by his unremitted attention, to gain that ascendancy over this King that shall enable him to bring Tamaree into subjection to Tamahamaha which however he will not be able to effect so long as American Ships remain about the Islands as they at all times will protect him against any invasion which may be attempted by the King of the Other Isles.

On the 27th of May, there was another attempted arson:

At 12 AM an alarm of Fire was made; it proved to [be] Messrs. Davis & Winships’ Sandall Wood House but fortunately it was extinguished before it made any great progress. It is evident that the House was intentionally Set on fire by some person for the purpose of the fires communicating from house to house until [sic] it consumed the King’s & thereby affording them an opportunity for plundering & we have strong suspicions that Tomahowralany the Prime Minister is one
of the incendiaries but we expect the King will return this Evening which I am in hopes will put a stop to any further attempts of the Kind...

Crises on shore continued into mid-June, with the writer growing more suspicious of Kamaholelani and suspecting him of undermining Kaumuali‘i’s government for the benefit of Kamehameha. Jonathan Winship and Whittemore appeased growing discontent over the month of June by distributing gifts to the petty chiefs and thereby restoring favor to the American residents.22

On the 19th of June, the British sloop of war Cherub, under the command of Captain Tucker, was sighted off Waimea with a captured American ship, Sir Andrew Hammond, that had been under the command of Lieutenant John Gamble. The Charon was captured at this time, and Captain Whittemore went out to the ships to keep Kamaholelani from being the one to speak to the British.23 Whittemore was taken prisoner and Captain Tucker attempted for two days to get Kaumuali‘i to come aboard, but failed.24 The American residents told the Waimea residents that Whittemore was going to return with a ship to assist the Americans, which assisted in quelling any plans of aggression against the Americans for a while.

The log entry for the 3rd of July is a series of thirteen patriotic American toasts, mostly praising American heroism and condemning the British. The fifth toast, however, is to Kaumuali‘i: “may he ever respect the confidence repos’d in him.” The thirteenth toast is to “the Ladies of the Sandwich Islands—While embracing their charms let us not forget the Yankee fair ones at home.”

On July 15th, the Cherub returned to Waimea disguised with a false poop and displaying an American flag. Captain Tucker once again tried to get Kaumuali‘i or Jonathan Winship to come on board, but failed. Shortly thereafter, the Cherub sailed for Valparaiso.25

In late August, there were continued threats to the safety of the American residents on Kaua‘i:

At 7 PM received a message from the King, that for some reason which he would here often inform us of he thought it advisable for all the white men to be upon their guard & during the night to keep a watch as he was apprehensive of some outrages being committed [sic]. During
the Night kept watch. At 7 AM another message arrived from the King informing us that by his orders Poiety the former prime minister had been murdered together with Tytooyhuna, a blind inoffensive old man.

These men no doubt have met with this untimely end for manifesting a friendly disposition for white men & I am fearfull [sic] that this outrage commit'd upon two powerful men will cause great trouble on the Island. A number of reports are in circulation that all white men upon the Island are in danger of loosing [sic] their lives.26

On September 2, Captain Smith returned to Waimea on the Albatross. He reported that if it weren't for the presence of Jonathan Winship and the other Americans on Kaua'i, Kamehameha would have come to Kaua'i to conquer the island on the Cherub. Kaumuali'i appeared to be in a difficult position. Many of the Kaua'i Islanders were discontent with the American presence, possibly due to the intensification of sandalwood collection, and the American residents were feeling little support in the protection of their property and lives. Furthermore, Kaumuali'i claimed the property of the absent Captain Whittemore and refused to let it leave the island.27 It was during these conditions that the writer of the log recorded a human sacrifice:

About 12 O'Clock at night was heard the screeching [sic] of some Native & in the morning we were informed that it came from a man as they draged [sic] him to the Morai & sacrificed him to their Idols.28

This may have been an attempt of Kaumuali'i to maintain social control through the practice of traditional ritual. It appears, however, that Kamaholelani continued to gain power and Kaumuali'i was losing support among the islanders:

From various circumstances which have taken place of late we have great reason to believe that the power of Tamoree, the King is very much diminished & that of Tamah华尔街any very much increased & that shortly he will be King of this Island. I believe Tamoree to be a good man & it is not the want of a disposition to make evry [sic] thing agreeable, but the deficiency of saying no to the bad men about him. . . .29
The writer of the log shipped the furs in his care with Captain Smith on the *Albatross* to Norfolk Sound on September 5th. On September 26th, a Russian Ship identified as the *Orina*, arrived in Waimea Bay. This is apparently the earlier name for the ship *Isabella*, which was another ship sold to the Russian-American Company during the War of 1812. William Heath Davis was the captain and had been on the California coast with her, returning to Honolulu sometime before September 2. In company with the Russian ship at Waimea was the *Mercurio*, which was under a Portuguese flag. Nathan Winship, Jonathan Winship, William Heath Davis, a Mr. Pole, Mr. Mestre, and Joseph Navarro all came ashore from the two ships. Davis and the Winships had arrived from O'ahu. They were frustrated because Kamehameha had refused to fulfill his sandalwood contract with them.

Upon arriving in Waimea, the Winships and Davis were preparing to take their goods from the island and at the same time wanted to obtain loads of sandalwood from Kaumuali'i under their previously mentioned contract. Kaumuali'i was to be left without American ships and munitions to protect his island and was asked to provide a resource that would severely tax his remaining popularity with the people of Kaua'i. He reasonably refused to deliver any more sandalwood to the American merchants, leading to a near confrontation between Davis's ship and the shore:

At 2 PM Capt. Davis ordered his ship to be hauled close in shore at the same time sent a message on shore to know if they intended delivering the Wood. At 3 Received an answer in the Negative. At the same time saw the Natives making evry [sic] preparation for action. As Capt. Davis did not think proper to Risk the lives of his People in action with the natives, at 8 haul'd ship off to her former berth.

Two weeks later, the *Bering*, under Captain Bennett, arrived at Waimea Bay for a visit of four days and then headed to Honolulu with the *Mercurio* on October 18th. The writer of the log took passage on the *Mercurio* for Honolulu and from there joined Bennett on the *Bering* in hope of proceeding to Norfolk Sound. By late January 1815, the *Bering* was in Waimea Bay again and wrecked in the early morning hours of February 1, 1815.
Conclusion

The events recorded in the Log of the *Atahualpa* and other brief statements in American publications contain overlooked details on the nineteenth-century political dynamics in the Hawaiian Islands. Historians have placed a degree of finality on the unification of the Hawaiian Islands in 1810 that does not adequately reflect the continued resistance of Kaumuali‘i to Kamehameha’s claim to sovereignty over the entire Hawaiian group. According to the texts presented here, Kaumuali‘i was committed to breaking his tenuous alliance with Kamehameha well before the arrival of Georg Anton Schäffer of the Russian-American Company in 1816. Kaumuali‘i’s use of political disension among the Americans, the British, and the Russians was a successful tactic for maintaining Kaua‘i sovereignty between the War of 1812 and the departure of the Russians in 1817. American residents at Waimea supported Kaumuali‘i’s resistance to Kamehameha for most of the War of 1812. As the war was ending in 1814/1815, the difficult relationships that developed as a result of the sandalwood trade resulted in the disintegration of the American-Kaua‘i alliance.

Given the events of the War of 1812, “Russia’s Hawaiian Adventure” can be seen as a creative adaptation of Kaumuali‘i’s continued agenda rather than as an “interesting diversion” initiated by Russian fur-traders. All previous histories suggest that it was the arrival of the Russians in 1816 that prompted Kaumuali‘i to rebel against Kamehameha. That perspective is erroneous for it presents the Russians as the initiators of change and relegates Kaumuali‘i to the role of a “dupe.” The long-term perspective is that Kaumuali‘i constantly sought to align himself with any European power that would assist him in maintaining his sovereignty distinct from that of Kamehameha.

Notes


6 I'i, *Fragments* 82.

7 I'i, *Fragments* 83.

8 I'i, *Fragments* 83–84.


10 I'i, *Fragments* 83.


12 Franchere, *Narrative* 63, 75.


14 William Dane Phelps (attrib.), “Solid Men of Boston in the Northwest” (handwritten ms. at the Bancroft Library, U of California at Berkeley, written in the 1850s[?]) 63–65, 68.


16 Samuel Patterson, *Narrative of the Adventures and Sufferings of Samuel Patterson* (From the Press in Palmer [Mass.], 1817) 70.

17 Anonymous, *Log of the Atahualpa* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society). Handwritten manuscript that appears to be by an American who was on the ship *Atahualpa* before it was sold to the Russian-American Company. Massachusetts Historical Society files attribute authorship to William Sturgis, but this seems unlikely since the log notes that Sturgis took passage to Canton at the beginning of January 1814 while the writer of the log remained behind.


19 Log of the *Atahualpa*, entry for 28 Jan. 1814.

20 Log of the *Atahualpa*, entries for 20 Feb. 1814 and 15 June 1814.

21 The reference to a Mr. Thos. Robinson is interesting because Nathan Winship is the one, mentioned by I'i, Kamakau, and others, who served as the mediator between Kamehameha and Kaumualii in 1810. Winship, however, left a hostage on Kaua‘i during Kaumualii’s absence, and this may have been “Thos. Robinson.”

22 Log of the *Atahualpa*, entry for 28 June 1814.

23 Log of the *Atahualpa*, entry for 20 June 1814.

McClellan, “John M. Gamble” 49.

Log of the *Atahualpa*, entry for 24 Aug. 1814.

Log of the *Atahualpa*, entry for 2 Sept. 1814.

Log of the *Atahualpa*, entry for 16 Sept. 1814.

Log of the *Atahualpa*, entry for 24 Sept. 1814.

Pierce, *Russia’s Hawaiian Adventure* 236.

Phelps, “Solid Men of Boston” 68.

Log of the *Atahualpa*, entry for 1 Oct. 1814.