

Population Trends on Kahoolawe

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Kahoolawe is a demographic anomaly: among the eight major islands of the Hawaiian Archipelago, it is the only one without a resident population. This fact was attested not only by the 1980 decennial census but by every census since World War II. Out of 21 all-island population counts made in the past century and a half, Kahoolawe appeared in the published results of only six. By 1980, Kahoolawe lagged behind not only the seven other large islands in population but also behind such inhabited insular specks as Sand Island, Mokauea Island, Ford Island, and Moku o Loe, all offshore of Oahu, and French Frigate Shoals, Laysan Island, the Midway Islands, and Kure Atoll, in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.¹

Given this unprepossessing record of non-growth, a demographic history of Kahoolawe may seem eccentric if not completely bizarre. Such, however, is not necessarily the case. A careful review of the evidence indicates that the island was indeed populated, more or less continuously, from pre-contact times until 1941, and as recently as 1965 had 75 inhabitants. Newly uncovered information from the 1866 census has, moreover, provided the basis for a broad (if rudimentary) analysis of population characteristics for that date, published here for the first time. Omitted from most statistical sources and barely mentioned in others, Kahoolawe has unsurprisingly escaped until now the analytic scrutiny of Island demographers.

Hawaiians obviously occupied the 45-square mile island before 1778. An archeological survey published in 1933 reported: "Remains of former habitations are comparatively numerous. A population estimate is not feasible, as the sites undoubtedly represent different periods of time, and as it is impossible to determine the dates of

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occupancy.”² These remains revealed “at least a semi-permanent population on the island” in pre-contact times. However, “even if all the dwelling sites noted had been occupied at a single period, there would hardly have been 150 people on the island.”³

None of the men who accompanied Captain Cook to Hawaii in 1778–1779 reported any population on Kahoolawe at that time. Both King and Bligh assumed the island to be uninhabited.⁴ Samwell’s journal stated that “Ca-how-ra-we is a small low Island without any trees or any Inhabitants upon it.”⁵ A modern authority, Kenneth Emory, has concurred with this conclusion.⁶

The Europeans who followed Cook were not so sure. Dixon, a visitor in September 1787, observed that “Tahoarua and Morokinne . . . are mere garden spots, and I cannot say whether they are inhabited.”⁷ After seeing Hawaii in 1791, Quimper reported that “Taurabe [Kahoolawe], Ranay [Lanai] and Mortotay [Molokai] have scarcely sufficient fruits to maintain their inhabitants; and the tiny islands Morrotine [Molokini], Taurea [Kaula] and Orejua [Lehua] are sterile and consequently deserted.”⁸ At least three observers saw fires on Kahoolawe, suggesting human habitation: the anonymous author of the journal of the *Chatham* in March 1792, and both Kotzebue and Chamisso in November 1816.⁹ Vancouver, describing Hawaii in March 1793, stated that, because of “*Tamaahmaah’s* wars . . . Rannai and Tohowrowa, which had formerly been considered as fruitful and populous islands, were nearly over-run with weeds, and exhausted of their inhabitants.”¹⁰

Assessments made early in the 19th Century varied widely. Shaler’s account in 1804 simply included “Tahowroa” among the inhabited islands of the archipelago.¹¹ In 1805, George Youngson, an English carpenter who spent several years in the Islands, estimated the population of “Tahourowe” at 160.¹² On February 18, 1811, Franchère “sailed close by Mowi and Tahourahah, two islands of this group which are also well populated.”¹³ Golovnin, visiting Hawaii in October 1818, stated that “Tahoorowa is uninhabited because of its unproductive, rocky soil.”¹⁴ Arago sailed near the island on August 15, 1819 and concluded that “‘*Taouroé sera éternellement déserte, ça la vie y est impossible*’—Kahoolawe will be forever uninhabited, because life there is impossible.”¹⁵

C. S. Stewart, a missionary who lived in Hawaii from 1823 to 1825, reported that “Ta-hu-ra-we . . . has but few inhabitants.”¹⁶ Jarves, basing his figures largely on Stewart’s data, later presented a “loose estimate for 1823” of 50 for Kahoolawe.¹⁷ Morrell’s list of islands with

resident populations as of 1825 included Kahoolawe but reported no estimate.¹⁸ Three years later, on April 14, 1828, William Richards, the missionary at Lahaina, wrote that Kahoolawe had one school with 28 "scholars."¹⁹ This enrollment total probably included many of the island's adults.

Soon thereafter, the government decided to use the island as a place of banishment, a common punishment at that time for theft, adultery, and other offenses. In order to clear Kahoolawe for this new use, the government "wished to induce the people of the island to quit it; but no persuasion could prevail on them to do so; and it is said that this feeling has existed to such an extent there, that the young women have refused to marry, unless under a pledge that they shall not be required to remove."²⁰ Whether any residents eventually heeded the officials' request is unknown, but around 1830 the convicts began to arrive.²¹

Thus augmented, the population increased appreciably. The 1832 census, conducted by the American missionaries, reported 80 persons living on the island. The 1836 census, likewise made under missionary auspices, repeated this total.²² Both figures may have represented estimates rather than actual headcounts, however.

The most complete description of Kahoolawe during this period dates from March 1841, when Wilkes sent several of his men ashore to explore the island. They found it to be "uninhabited, except by a few poor fishermen, and . . . used as a place of exile." The single village consisted of "a collection of eight huts, and an unfinished adobe church. . . . All the inhabitants are convicts, and receive their food from Maui: their number at present is about fifteen. Besides this little cluster of convicts' huts, there are one or two houses on the north end, inhabited by old women."²³ The total population, fishermen, convicts, and old women combined, could hardly have exceeded 25 or 30.

The use of Kahoolawe as a place of exile declined sharply soon thereafter, and in 1843 the remaining prisoners were removed. The last person placed there as a convict was George Morgan, who in 1847 was sent to Kahoolawe in the company of one or two females, but five years later he was returned to Lahaina for medical treatment.²⁴

When W. F. Allen visited Kahoolawe in May 1858, he reported: "I found on the Island about fifty natives men, women and children, the men are engaged in fishing. . . . The natives do not live here all the year, but are here most of the time except during the rainy season. . . ." Allen had gone to Kahoolawe to inspect it for Robert

C. Wyllie and Elisha H. Allen (no relation), who had leased the island for 20 years to raise sheep.²⁵

The Hawaiian government conducted ten full-scale censuses during the 19th Century, the first one in 1849 and the last in 1896, but none of them included separate statistics for Kahoolawe in their published findings.²⁶ This omission seems to have resulted from a conscious decision to combine the Kahoolawe data with those for Maui (specifically, with Lahaina District before 1890 and Wailuku District thereafter), and not from any absence of population.²⁷

Fortunately, the original schedules for Kahoolawe returned during the census of December 7, 1866 have survived.²⁸ Each of the schedules from that island was so labeled, a circumstance only recently noted. The schedules from other 19th Century Hawaiian censuses either have vanished or have failed to identify Kahoolawe as a separate geographic entity.

Eighteen persons resided on the island in 1866. There were 11 males and 7 females. Five persons were under 15 years of age, 5 were in the 15-to-40 group, and 8 were over 40; the median age was thus about 35 years. By place of birth or nationality, 7 had been born on Kahoolawe, 6 came from other parts of the kingdom, 3 were designated simply as "Hawaiian" (2 of whom were also described as "half-caste"), and 2 were Americans. The 18 persons lived in 5 households, one with two members and the rest consisting of 4 persons each; the average household size was 3.6.

Nine of the 18 inhabitants were classified by occupation: 2 shepherds (the Americans), 5 *hana lima* (manual laborers), and 2 *malama ohana* (housewives). The 9 persons without any reported occupation included one adult male, 3 adult females, and the 5 children under 15.

Information for individuals appears in Appendix Table I.

King Kalakaua's visit to Kahoolawe late in 1875 produced the next set of statistics. As described by the *Advertiser*, "The *Lahui Hawaii* of this week has an interesting account of the recent visit to this island by His Majesty and suite. It is estimated that the island contains about 20,000 acres. There are now upon it, 20,000 sheep, 10 horses, under charge of two foreigners, who with their wives and children are the only human inhabitants."²⁹

Another quarter of a century elapsed before the next figures became available. The first U. S. Census of Hawaii, conducted in 1900, omitted any reference to Kahoolawe.³⁰ A year later, however, a representative of the U. S. Commission of Fish and Fisheries reported that "The raising of sheep is the only business of the island,

10 persons being employed." It is not clear whether this figure referred to the total population or only to gainful workers.³¹

Subsequent census reports recorded a small and fluctuating population: 2 in 1910, 3 in 1920, 2 in 1930, and 1 in 1940.³² These residents were presumably employees of Angus MacPhee, who leased the island from the Territory in 1917 and over the following 24 years operated it as a cattle ranch.³³

There is some evidence that the census totals understated the actual population of Kahoolawe. In 1931, only a year after census enumerators reported only 2 persons on the island, Coulter wrote, "The population is now about half a dozen."³⁴ McAllister recorded an even higher figure: "There were (1931) nine people on the island: Manuel Pedro, who is caretaker, his wife, their four children, and three men assistants. . . . They live in the few houses located at Kuheia Bay."³⁵

Whatever the correct prewar count, permanent human habitation ended soon after December 7, 1941. The Kahoolawe Ranch was abandoned, and the U. S. armed forces put the island to use as a bombing target. By 1945 much of Kahoolawe's surface was covered by undetonated explosives.³⁶

The 1950 decennial census reported the population as zero, and so did the 1960, 1970, and 1980 counts.³⁷ Whatever resettlement has occurred since World War II has been quite temporary. In April 1958, for example, "the population of Kahoolawe reached a peak of 80 inhabitants when Navy Seabees landed to build new targets and rehabilitate access roads to the island's two simulated airfields."³⁸ Seven years later, on April 1, 1965, the Navy reported having 75 of its officers and men stationed on Kahoolawe, but this reoccupation likewise proved to be temporary.³⁹ Except for these occasions, and infrequent visits by small groups of civilians, Kahoolawe has remained generally uninhabited for more than four decades.

What, then, can we conclude about the demographic history of Kahoolawe?

First, that the literature is fairly rich in references. Approximately three dozen population estimates or counts have been published over the past two centuries, ranging from zero to 160 and even "well populated."

Second, that most of the figures are suspect. Many of the early judgments and estimates were based entirely on hearsay. Even the most reputable, like the 1930 census count, were contradicted by private surveys made at almost the same time.

Third, that virtually all of the published figures, both good and bad, are limited at best to simple headcounts, and lack any meaningful detail by age, sex, or race. The only exception is the previously unpublished 1866 census excerpt.

Fourth, that, notwithstanding the impression of demographic desertion, Kahoolawe for many years had a small, fluctuating but more or less viable population. Even though often described as "semi-permanent," these residents managed to maintain a relatively continuous human presence on the island from pre-contact times to the onset of World War II.

And finally, that these population swings have reflected the varied (but limited) carrying capacities inherent in Kahoolawe's changing economic bases, from fishing community to penal settlement to sheep station to cattle ranch to bombing target. The island's future role—and the population it will support—remain unclear.

NOTES

- ¹ For census totals for both the major and minor islands of the Hawaiian Archipelago, 1940 to 1980, see the Hawaii State Department of Planning and Economic Development, *The State of Hawaii Data Book 1983* (December 1983), table 4, p. 16.
- ² J. Gilbert McAllister, *Archaeology of Kahoolawe* (Bernice P. Bishop Museum Bulletin 115, 1933), p. 11.
- ³ *Ibid.*, p. 58.
- ⁴ Robert C. Schmitt, *Demographic Statistics of Hawaii, 1778-1965* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1968), pp. 19, 20, and 42.
- ⁵ J. C. Beaglehole, ed., *The Journals of Captain James Cook on His Voyages of Discovery*, Vol. III, *The Voyage of the Resolution and Discovery, 1776-1780*, Part Two (Cambridge: University Press, for the Hakluyt Society, 1967), p. 1219; also noted on p. 1235.
- ⁶ Schmitt, *Demographic Statistics*, p. 42.
- ⁷ George Dixon, *A Voyage Round the World; but More Particularly to The North-west Coast of America* (London: Geo. Golding, 1789), p. 262.
- ⁸ D. Manuel Quimper Benites del Pino, *The Sandwich Islands. A Brief Description of this Archipelago . . .* (Madrid: E. Aguado, 1822); trans. Clark Lee, TS., 1937, p. 7, HMCS Library.
- ⁹ Anon., *Journal of the Chatham* (microfilm, Hamilton Library, University of Hawaii at Manoa), p. 123; Otto von Kotzebue, *A Voyage of Discovery Into the South Sea and Beering's Straits*, vol. 1 (1821, London; facs. rpt. Amsterdam, N. Israel, New York: Da Capo Press, 1967), p. 318; Adelbert von Chamisso, *Excerpts from Chamisso's Werke*, Vol. 3, trans. Maria and Helmuth Hormann, TS, 1970, p. 12, AH.
- ¹⁰ George Vancouver, *A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean and Round the World . . . 1790-95* (1798, London; facs. rpt. Amsterdam, N. Israel, and New York: Da Capo Press, 1967), vol. II, 180.

- ¹¹ William Shaler, *Journal of a Voyage Between China and the Northwestern Coast of America, Made in 1804 by William Shaler* (1808; facs. rpt., Part 1, vol. III, *The American Register*, by Claremont, Calif.: Saunders Studio Press, 1935), p. 85.
- ¹² Cited in Louis Claude de Saulses de Freycinet, *Hawaii in 1819*, trans. Ella A. Wiswell (Bernice P. Bishop Museum, Department of Anthropology, Pacific Anthropological Records no. 26, October 1978), p. 66.
- ¹³ Gabriel Franchère, *A Voyage to the Northwest Coast of America* (Chicago: Lakeside Press, 1969), pp. 61-62.
- ¹⁴ V. M. Golovnin, *Around the World on the Kamchatka, 1817-1819*, trans. Ella Lury Wiswell (Honolulu: Hawaiian Historical Society and University Press of Hawaii, 1979), p. 218.
- ¹⁵ C. S. Judd, "Kahoolawe," HAA 1917, pp. 117-125, at p. 117. Arago's sweeping judgment may have lost some of its force in its first English translation, his dire prophecy rendered simply as "The island is desert and uninhabited"; see J. Arago, *Narrative of a Voyage Round the World in the Uranie and Physicienne . . .* (London: Treuttel and Wurtz, Treuttel, Jun. and Richter, 1823), Part II, p. 118.
- ¹⁶ C. S. Stewart, *Journal of a Residence in the Sandwich Islands During the Years 1823, 1824, and 1825* (London: H. Fisher, Son, 1830; 3rd ed., facs. rpt., by Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press for Friends of The Library of Hawaii, 1970), p. 26.
- ¹⁷ James Jackson Jarves, *History of the Hawaiian Islands*, 4th ed. (Honolulu: Henry M. Whitney, 1872), p. 197.
- ¹⁸ Benjamin Morrell, *A Narrative of Four Voyages . . .* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1832), p. 214.
- ¹⁹ *Missionary Herald*, February 1829, p. 54.
- ²⁰ Charles Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition, During the Years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842*, vol. IV (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1845), pp. 256-257.
- ²¹ Anon., "Kahoolawe an Early Place of Banishment," HAA 1903, pp. 117-122 (see p. 118); C. S. Judd, "Kahoolawe," p. 117.
- ²² Robert C. Schmitt, *The Missionary Censuses of Hawaii* (Bernice P. Bishop Museum, Department of Anthropology, Pacific Anthropological Records, no. 20, May 1973), pp. 8, 9, 36, 38 and 39.
- ²³ Charles Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition*, vol. IV, pp. 244-245.
- ²⁴ Anon., "Kahoolawe an Early Place of Banishment," pp. 120 and 122; C. S. Judd, "Kahoolawe," p. 118.
- ²⁵ Alfred L. Lomax, "Geographic Factors in Early Sheep Husbandry in the Hawaiian Islands (1791-1870)," *48th Annual Report HHS* (1939), pp. 29-54, at pp. 46-47.
- ²⁶ Robert C. Schmitt, *Demographic Statistics*, pp. 42 and 70.
- ²⁷ For a history of district boundaries, see Robert D. King, "Districts in the Hawaiian Islands," in John Wesley Coulter, comp., *A Gazetteer of the Territory of Hawaii* (University of Hawaii Research Publications, no. 11, 1935), pp. 214-230, especially pp. 216, 218, and 219.
- ²⁸ "Lahaina (includes Kahoolawe) 1866," file, AH.
- ²⁹ "Kahoolawe," *PCA*, 1 January 1876, p. 3. The land area is now estimated at 28,800 acres; see *The State of Hawaii Data Book 1983*, table 132.
- ³⁰ U. S. Census Office, *Twelfth Census of the United States*, Census Bulletin No. 15, "Population of Hawaii by Islands and Districts" (November 16, 1900).
- ³¹ John N. Cobb, "Commercial Fisheries of the Hawaiian Islands," in the U. S. Commission of Fish and Fisheries, *Report of the Commissioner for the Year Ending June 30, 1901, Part XXVII* (Washington: GPO, 1902), 381-499 (see 469).

- ³² U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1910. Abstract of the Census . . . with Supplement for Hawaii* (1913), p. 569; *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920, Bulletin, Population: Hawaii, Number of Inhabitants, by Islands, Counties, and Minor Civil Divisions* (1920), p. 2; *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Outlying Territories and Possessions* (1932), p. 44; *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Population, First Series, Number of Inhabitants, Hawaii* (1942), p. 2.
- ³³ Inez MacPhee Ashdown, *Recollections of Kaho'olawe* (Honolulu: Topgallant Publishing Co., Ltd., 1979), pp. 8 and 65.
- ³⁴ John Wesley Coulter, *Population and Utilization of Land and Sea in Hawaii, 1853* (Bernice P. Bishop Museum Bulletin 88, 1931), p. 26.
- ³⁵ J. Gilbert McAllister, *Archaeology of Kahoolawe*, p. 25.
- ³⁶ Peter MacDonald, "Fixed in Time: A Brief History of Kahoolawe," *HJH*, vol. 6 (1972), 69-90 (see p. 76).
- ³⁷ U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population: 1950*, vol. II, *Characteristics of the Population*, parts 51-54, *Territories and Possessions* (1953), p. 52-6; *Census of Population: 1960*, vol. I, *Characteristics of the Population*, part 13, *Hawaii* (1963), p. 13-7; *1970 Census of Population, Number of Inhabitants, Hawaii*, PC(1)-A13 (April 1971), table 9; 1980 Census of Population, unpublished data for census tract 303.02, enumeration district 200, filed in Hawaii State Data Center, Hawaii State Department of Planning and Economic Development.
- ³⁸ Peter MacDonald, "Fixed in Time," p. 77.
- ³⁹ Hawaii State Department of Planning and Economic Development, *The Population of Hawaii, April 1965* (Statistical Report 31, June 21, 1965), pp. 1, 7, and 9, and *Military Personnel and Dependents in Hawaii, April 1965* (Statistical Report 32, July 12, 1965), table 3.

APPENDIX TABLE I
CHARACTERISTICS OF KAHOOLOAWE RESIDENTS: 1866

<i>Name (grouped by household)</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Age group</i>	<i>Marital status</i>	<i>Owens kuleana</i>	<i>Place of birth</i>	<i>Occupation</i>
Mamaawa . . .	M	15-40	M	Yes	Kahoolawe	Hana lima
Nahinu . . .	M	15-40	S	—	Kahoolawe	Hana lima
Kamoka . . .	F	15-40	M	—	Wailuku	Malama ohana
Keliikipi . . .	M	< 15	S	—	Honuaula	—
Hau	M	>40	M	Yes	Kahoolawe	Hana lima
Honohina . . .	M	>40	S	—	Hawaii	—
Luachu . . .	F	>40	M	—	Hawaii	Malama ohana
Hau opio . . .	M	< 15	S	—	Kahoolawe	—
Ho	M	>40	M	—	Kahoolawe	Hana lima
Nahooikaika .	M	< 15	S	—	Kahoolawe	—
Makaikolani .	F	>40	M	—	Olowalu	—
Kahihi . . .	F	>40	S	—	Kahoolawe	—
Mr. Marston .	M	>40	S	—	America	Shepherd
Kekoolani . .	F	15-40	S	—	Maui	Hana lima
I. Cook . . .	M	>40	M	—	America	Shepherd
Mrs. Cook . .	F	15-40	M	—	Hawaiian	—
E. Cook . . .	F	< 15	S	—	Hawaiian*	—
I. E. Cook . .	M	< 15	S	—	Hawaiian*	—

* Half-caste.

Source: Census schedules in AH file, "Lahaina (includes Kahoolawe) 1866."