STATE FLAG

The flag of the State is the flag designed prior to 1816 for King Kamehameha I. It has served as the flag of the Kingdom, Republic, Territory and State of Hawaii. It consists of eight horizontal stripes, (representing the eight islands) alternately white, red, blue, beginning with the top, with the British Union Jack in the upper left corner. The Union Jack may have been included out of consideration for Vancouver, who gave the islands their first flag when King Kamehameha I placed the islands under the protection of Great Britain. The State Constitution makes it the official State flag.

GOVERNOR’S FLAG

The flag is divided into two equal sections horizontally, the upper half blue and the lower half red. The center contains the word “Hawaii” in white, surrounded by eight white stars placed equidistantly, representing the eight islands of the Hawaiian group. The flag was originally designed by the Adjutant General for the Governor of the Territory. As the flag of the Territorial Governor it had “T H” in the center.

The Hawaiian Flag

In celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Hawaiian statehood, this issue of NAVA NEWS is devoted to the history and evolution of Hawaii's beautiful and unique flag.


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The flag which has floated over the Hawaiian Islands for more than a century is a combination of the “Union Jack” and stripes rather than the “Stars and Stripes,” to which it now gives precedence. The Union Jack in the upper or “halyard” corner, and eight stripes, red, white and blue, constitute the old flag of Hawaii.

This flag has a story worth hearing.

Vancouver visited the “Sandwich Islands” with Captain Cook. Nearly fifteen years later he returned in command of an expedition. February 21, 1794, he entered into an agreement with Ka-meha-meha I and his Council of Chiefs to receive the islands under the protection of Great Britain. February 25, with great ceremony, the English flag was raised over Ka-meha-meha’s royal home on the island of Hawaii. Probably this flag was the first “Union Jack” adopted by King James, 1603-1625, on the political union of England and Scotland.

This flag was succeeded in 1801 by the present Union Jack, which is made by placing three crosses upon a blue field—St. George’s of England, a red cross; St. Andrew’s of Scotland, a white cross; and St. Patrick’s of Ireland. The Irish addition to the flag consisted of St. Patrick’s red cross laid upon St. Andrew’s white cross, and half covering it. This was the second Union Jack. The name “Jack” is said to have come from the red cross on the “jacque”—the coat of mail or outer coat of the soldiers of England.

The second Union Jack was the second flag to float authoritatively over the Hawaiian Islands. The fact that Ka-meha-meha placed the English flag over his government has sometimes been construed as a technical “cession of the islands to the English crown.” But the astute Ka-meha-meha, while looking for English protection from the greed of other nations, stipulated that the Hawaiians should “govern themselves in their own way and according to such laws as they themselves might impose.” The action of Vancouver was not ratified in England, owning to more important European questions, and a real protectorate was never established. Nevertheless, there was a nominal guardianship afforded by the presence of the English flag floating over the Hawaiian grass houses and fleets of boats.

It should be said that during preceding centuries each high
chief had carried a pennant of coloured native cloth at the masthead of his double war canoe, but these were individual and family rather than national banners.

At first the English flag was established only upon the island of Hawaii. Then it passed with Ka-meha-meha from island to island as he conquered the high chiefs and became the sole ruler of the group. When the king made Honolulu his chief royal residence the flag floated over his house near the seashore. On Kauai, the island farthest north of all the group, there was a strong Russian influence. The Russians built a fort at the mouth of one of the rivers. Against their armed possession of any part of the islands King Ka-meha-meha made strong objection, but, according to the statements of sailors, the Russian flag was used by the high chief of Kauai until finally displaced by the Hawaiian flag.

The English flag over Honolulu was a warning to other nations, and also to lawless individuals. No man could tell exactly how far to go in the presence of that flag. The sailors of those days unquestionably ran riot in wickedness, and the early influences of white civilization were absolutely awful. But there was a limit beyond which the lawless element did not dare to pass. The flag would permit England to advance whatever claim might be desired in case of any great trouble.

This continued from 1794 to 1812. Then war broke out between England and the United States. Alexander, in a report to the Hawaiian Historical Society, says that upon the outbreak of this war a friendly American persuaded Ka-meha-meha I "to have a flag of his own."

An English Captain (George C. Beckley) some time near the beginning of the century brought a small ship to the islands and sold it to the chiefs. He then settled in Honolulu and became a friend of the king, who made him a "tabu-chief." He married an Hawaiian woman of high priestly family. Nevertheless, "she had to kolo-kolo or crawl on her hands and knees whenever she entered the house of her husband, the tabu-chief."

To Captain Beckley was entrusted the task of designing and making the first Hawaiian flag. The pattern flag, the first one made, was afterward "fashioned into a child's frock and worn on special occasions by each one of the children in succession, and was long preserved as an heirloom in the family."

This was apparently a compromise between the flags of the two antagonistic English-speaking nations. The Jack was retained to show the king's friendship for England. The stripes were said to represent the red, white and blue of the American flag. They were eight in number, to represent the eight principal islands of the group. It was a combination of Hawaiian with European and American interests.

The old king was very proud of his beautiful new flag, and displayed it from his palace and over the royal homes in other islands. It superseded the Russian flag on Kauai. He built a new coral rock fort, 300 x 400 feet dimensions, with walls twelve feet high and twenty feet thick. In it he placed forty guns, six, eight and twelve pounders, from which thundering salutes were fired on every possible occasion. He gave command of this fort to Captain Beckley, and over it flung his new flag to the breeze.

He sent his flag to China at the masthead of a ship he had purchased for the sandalwood trade. The captain of this ship, Alexander Adams, found trouble waiting for him at Canton, "because the Chinese authorities refused to recognize the Hawaiian flag, which had never before been seen in that port."

We have the statement on good authority that Captain Adams had to pay such heavy harbour dues that the report thereof to Ka-meha-meha taught the Hawaiian king one of the principles of civilized business, i.e., to charge fees for every boat entering his harbour. He lost about 13,000 in this voyage to China, "chiefly owing to the new flag."

The lesson learned concerning the harbour dues was probably worth all that was lost, although the king lived less than two years afterwards to enjoy this new source of income.

The flag has figured prominently in several international episodes.

The Hawaiian Islands were fertile fields to greedy land-loving rovers of the seas. In 1842 and 1843 Mr. Charlton, an English consul, made trouble for the Hawaiian chiefs by laying claim to a very valuable piece of land in Honolulu, which the chiefs claimed could not possibly have been given to him by the rightful owners. This was the foundation of a series of disagreements. The consul was an open advocate of English annexation, and reported a dangerous state of affairs to England. Finally, leaving his consulate in the hands of a friend, he went to England to present his own claims. Meanwhile, a captain of an English frigate, Lord George Paulet, was sent to Honolulu. He seized upon every pretext for advancing his intention of seizing the islands in the name of the English crown. The king, Ka-meha-meha III, meanwhile made earnest protest and planned resistance, but his wise counsellors persuaded him not to give Lord Paulet any pretext for action, but to forestall him by making a provisional cession of the kingdom pending the appeal to the protectorates of the United States and England. On February 25, 1843, the Hawaiian flag was hauled down and the Union Jack was once more raised over a part of the islands. On February 25, 1794, forty-nine years before, Vancouver's flag-raising ceremony had taken place. Like Vancouver, Lord Paulet evidently had little doubt about England's glad welcome of a new colonial possession.

Ka-meha-meha III made a short speech of protest, closing with the words: "I have hope that the life of the land will be restored when my conduct shall be justified." Lord Paulet then took possession of the fort, confiscated Hawaiian ships, compelled natives to enlist to form an English army, and began to increase taxes to meet the expenses of his new government. The king withdrew to another island, and, with his cabinet, disclaimed the authority of Lord Paulet, and continued to appeal to England.

This triumphal flight of the English flag was not at all permanent. In the first part of July, about four months and a half after Lord Paulet's seizure of the islands, Commodore Kearney, in the old U.S. frigate Constitution, entered Honolulu harbour. The native chiefs visited his ship. Lord Paulet had collected all the Hawaiian flags and destroyed them, but a new flag was hastily made and raised over the visitors, and a salute fired in its honour—to Lord Paulet's helpless indignation.

However, in the new flag the colors of the bars were permanently reversed. In this respect the modern Hawaiian flag is different from the flag first made.

A few days later Admiral Thomas, commander of the English navy in the Pacific, arrived in Honolulu, and "in most courteous terms solicited a personal interview with the king."

In a few hours it became known that he had come to restore the independence of the islands.

On Monday morning, July 31, 1843, the admiral issued a proclamation restoring the islands to their king, and incidentally mentioning in high terms the work of the American missionaries. Monday forenoon "a parade of several hundred English marines appeared on the plain of Honolulu (now known as Thomas Square), with their officers, their banners waving proudly and their arms glittering in the sunshine. Admiral Thomas and the suspended king proceeded thither in a carriage, attended by the chiefs and a vast multitude of people. The English standard bearers advanced towards his majesty, their flags bowed gracefully, and a broad, beautiful Hawaiian banner, exhibiting a crown and olive branch, was unfurled over the heads of the king and his attending chieftains. This was
saluted by the English troops with field pieces, then by the guns of Lord Paulet's ship, whose yards were manned in homage to the restored sovereign. Then succeeded the roar of the guns of the fort, Punchbowl battery, the admiral's ship, the United States ships and others.

"Thomas Square" was so named and set apart as a perpetual park near the heart of the city, in honour of this action of Admiral Thomas. Monday afternoon the king and chiefs and several thousand people gathered in the new native stone church, Kawaiahao, and held an enthusiastic praise meeting. The king in an eloquent speech uttered a motto worthy of the highest statesmanship. This was later adopted as the national motto and inscribed on all Hawaiian coins: *Ua mau ke ea o ka aina i ka po'o*—"Perpetuate is the life of the land by its righteousness," or "The perpetuation of the life of the land depends upon the righteousness thereof."

The church was beautifully decorated and on the pulpit was the restored Hawaiian flag. The "army" enlisted by Lord Paulet gladly renounced allegiance to England. The ships were restored and the king's cabinet again took the reins of government. It was not long before word came that Europe and America had, as early as April, recognised the independence of the Hawaiian Kingdom.

Undeterred by this English experience, a Frenchman thought it worth his while to secure the little kingdom. In 1849 Admiral Tromelin sailed into Honolulu harbour and made some emphatic demands, alleging that the king had unlawfully fined a French ship. The king replied that the ship had violated his laws and was necessarily held responsible. The admiral at once landed an armed force with field pieces and scalding ladders and captured the fort. The king, however, had withdrawn his troops, leaving an empty fort with the Hawaiian flag flying from its staff. The Frenchman did not quite dare to pull that flag down in the face of very earnest protests from both the English and American consuls. The French smashed calabashes, spiked the guns, poured powder into the harbour, wrote on the walls of the fort that they were "Les Braves" and then withdrew, turning their trouble over to their home government.

For nearly two years the French made trouble. At last the king, Ka-meha-meha III, became tired and placed his kingdom "provisionally under the protection of the United States," declaring that the protectorate should be "perpetual" if the relations with France were not placed on a better footing. The Frenchmen soon discovered that the difficulties could be easily settled, and the long list of grievances "were reduced to two points, viz., the liberty of Catholic worship and the trade in spirits." This last meant the abundant entrance of French brandy. "Nothing more was heard of the rest of the demands."

Flag episodes after these experiences were limited to ordinary affairs of government. Sometimes it floated proudly over fort and palace, while salutes were fired from men-of-war entering the harbour. Sometimes it hung at half mast over the palace while the body of some member of the royal family or some one of high chief blood lay in state. Sometimes its absence from the palace marked the king's departure for some other island. Its reappearance was the signal of the king's return. It floated over ministers' and consuls' offices in different parts of the world and fulfilled its modest duty as the representative of one of the "little kings."

Then came the turbulent times of international dissension through the reign of Kalakaua and that of his sister, Liliuokalani, resulting in the overthrow of the monarchy in 1893. January 14th, 1893, the queen reigned herself strong enough to abrogate the Constitution of the islands and promulgate a new Constitution suited to her own wishes. She found that she had opened a volcano under her feet. She prorogued the Legislature in the forenoon and attempted to install her new Constitution. Her cabinet objected. A group of prominent citizens strengthened the cabinet. An impromptu mass meeting was held in the afternoon and a committee of public safety of thirteen was appointed. This was Saturday. Sunday was a day of suppressed excitement. Monday, January 16, over 1,300 citizens gathered in the armory and authorised this committee of public safety to take such steps as might be necessary. That afternoon at 5 o'clock 300 United States marines and sailors were landed. The marines were stationed at the American legation and the sailors at Arion Hall.

The next day, January 17, the committee of public safety issued the following proclamation:

"First—The Hawaiian monarchical system of government is hereby abrogated.

"Second—A Provisional Government for the control and management of public affairs and the protection of public peace is hereby established, to which the United States have been negotiate and agreed upon."

This Provisional Government, with President Dole at its head, under the old Hawaiian flag, was at once recognised, under date of January 17, as the "de facto government of the Hawaiian Islands," by Minister Stevens of the United States. January 18, ministers and consuls-general from several nations hastened to hand in their recognition of the new government, and on the 19th English and Japanese ministers practically completed the list.

This continued until February 1, 1893, when negotiations had progressed so far that United States Minister Stevens felt safe in raising the Stars and Stripes over the government buildings and declaring a protectorate. This was the fourth time that a far-away representative of a foreign power had felt certain that his annexation of Hawaii would by joyfully received by his home government. And this fourth act was subject of reversal. Five prominent men went to Washington, empowered to make a treaty of annexation with the United States. March 4, 1893, President Cleveland was inaugurated. He withdrew the treaty from consideration by the Senate. Then came the visit of "Paramount Blount," who arrived in Honolulu March 29.

The Provisional Government was strongly entrenched, and Mr. Blount found that the only thing he could do was to withdraw United States protection.

April 1st the announcement was made in the morning papers that the United States flag would be lowered at 11 o'clock, and the Hawaiian flag restored as the emblem of the Provisional Government. For the brief space of almost two months the Stars and Stripes had floated over Hawaii.

Hundreds of people flocked to the spacious grounds around the government buildings. It was a curious crowd—Orientals, Europeans, Africans and Americans—mingling together. The Stars and Stripes slipped down the rattling lines from the flagstaff when the bugle call was sounded. "There was another gleam of colour and the Hawaiian flag crawled up the now taut ropes and shook itself free, its blue, white and crimson bars floating in their accustomed place. The silence was undisturbed. The troops of the Provisional Government presented arms, but the American men-of-war in the harbour did not salute the restored flag."

As time passed, President Cleveland's desire to restore the monarchy became more and more apparent, and under the same old Hawaiian colours, "on July 4, 1894, the Constitution of the Republic of the Hawaiian Islands was promulgated," and all designs for United States interference were thwarted. The beautiful and loved flag of Hawaii, the royal flag from the times of Ka-meha-meha I, the ensign of the Provisional Government, unchanged, became the banner of the first Republic of the Pacific Ocean.

It remained the flag of the Republic until the news reached Honolulu that President McKinley, on July 7, 1898, had signed the joint resolution of annexation adopted by both houses of Congress.
It was necessary that the officials of the newly annexed islands should take the oath of allegiance to the United States, and that the final change of government should be marked by a new and authorised flag-raising ceremony. Great preparations were made for the solemn exercises attending the transfer of the Republic of Hawaii to the Republic of the United States. On August 12, 1898, thousands of people again crowded into the government grounds. The National Guard of Hawaii and companies of United States marines were drawn up around the former palace. In front of the palace, now the Capitol Building, was a grandstand, about which the Hawaiian and United States colours were intertwined.

The Hawaiian and United States officials, the diplomatic corps and a few friends filled the grandstand. After prayers came the formal transfer of sovereignty. The final salute to the Hawaiian emblem of an independent nation was fired. As the last report died away in echoes among the surrounding hills, the Hawaiian national anthem, "Hawaii Ponoi," in solemn grandeur, stirred the hearts of the multitude. Mrs. Garland, an eye-witness, said: "The music ceased and for one instant the Hawaiian flag still floated, then as it was slowly lowered, utter stillness held everyone mute. A great wave of intense feeling seemed to flow over the people. For the moment we were in a country without a flag. There were few who did not weep. Then a clear sounding call from the bugles of a s.s., Philadelphia, a sudden stir through all the throng, and then with the triumphant ringing strains of the 'Star Spangled Banner,' up rose majestically our own dear flag, reaching the truck with the last grand chord. Three mighty cheers burst forth. Men grasped each other by the hand, and hats and handkerchiefs waved. A group of Hawaiian young women stood behind us. As the Stars and Stripes went up, from one came the repressed exclamation, 'Oh, you beautiful thing.'"

Then President Dole and his cabinet took the oath of allegiance to the United States. The soldiers marched to their barracks to be sworn into their new service. The crowd dispersed, while salutes were fired from the ships in the harbour. The American flag floats in its own influential place over the palace, not as a kingly, but as a republican flag. The Hawaiian flag still floats over many a home in the islands, as well as over the corner posts of the old palace under the American flag, as the permanent flag of the Territory of Hawaii.

The Hawaiian flag is surrounded by many historical memories which mean much to residents of both native and foreign descent, and they rejoice that the dear old flag is not 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."