

From Cook to the 1840 Constitution: The Name Change from Sandwich to Hawaiian Islands

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Most everyone knows that Hawaii was once called the Sandwich Islands. Today that name is used infrequently to evoke a certain nostalgia and quaintness. During the early and mid-19th century, however, the name Sandwich Islands was used extensively, particularly by foreigners. The purposes of this paper are: 1) to trace the use of the name "Sandwich Islands" up to about 1840 when the name "Hawaiian Islands" gradually began to take precedence; 2) to analyze its official use in treaties, laws, and constitutions; and 3) to examine the major factors and influences underlying the name change.

Foreign Usage of the Name "Sandwich Islands"

Captain James Cook's name for the Hawaiian Islands, the Sandwich Islands, was widely accepted and commonly used by foreigners and foreign governments for well over fifty years after his arrival. Cook first sighted Oahu on January 18, 1778. His lengthy journal entry for Monday, February 2, 1778 centers particularly on "Atooi" or Kauai.¹ On this day he also named the island group after his patron:

Of what number this newly-discovered Archipelago consists, must be left for future investigation. We saw five of them, whose names, as given by the natives, are Woahoo [Oahu], Atooi [Kauai], Oneeheow [Niihau], Oreehoua [Lehua], and Tahoorā [Kaula]. . . . I named the whole group the Sandwich Islands, in honour of the Earl of Sandwich.²

Cook's name for the islands spread with news of the discovery. Early visitors and explorers unanimously refer to them as the Sandwich

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Islands. For example, Captain Portlock recorded arriving at "Owhyhee" [Hawaii], the principal of the Sandwich Islands"³ on May 24, 1786. Etienne Marchand referred to the group as the "Sandwich Islands"⁴ in October, 1791, as did Captain Vancouver in March, 1792.⁵ Later, in November, 1816, Kotzebue recorded visiting the "Sandwich Islands."⁶ Lord Byron's *Voyage of the H. M. S. Blonde to the Sandwich Islands in the Years 1824-1825*⁷ is another example of the common use of the name.

Early recorded correspondence throughout the reigns of Kamehameha I (1795-1819) and Kamehameha II (1819-1824) attests to the wide use and general acceptance of Cook's name for the islands. Letters concerning trade, treaties, missionary activities, and shipping matters are replete with references to the Sandwich Islands.⁸

Similarly, foreign-based organizations sprang up bearing the name Sandwich Islands. On October 15, 1819, for instance, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions organized its influential Sandwich Islands Mission. The first English language newspaper printed in the islands was appropriately named the *Sandwich Islands Gazette and Journal of Commerce*, published in Honolulu from July, 1836 to July, 1839. Another early Honolulu newspaper was entitled the *Sandwich Island Mirror*.

During the early 19th century, then, foreigners used the name Sandwich Islands predominately. Most likely, this was out of convenience and convention. Visitors and the first foreign settlers had no conceivable reason to change or debate Cook's name for the islands. Consequently, early histories of Hawaii nearly always contain the name Sandwich Islands in their titles.⁹

Laws, Treaties, and Constitutions

More official and better documented are the early laws, treaties, and constitutions of the Hawaiian Monarchy. Very few written laws were enacted before Kamehameha III began his long reign (1824-1854). Possibly, Hawaiian rulers and chiefs were mistakenly waiting for Great Britain to send a code of laws for the islands.¹⁰ In addition, with the *kapu* system in effect until 1819, there was little need for written laws before the 1820s.

The first printed laws of the Kingdom were published on March 8, 1822, only two months after Elisha Loomis introduced printing in Hawaii. These two early laws dealt with unruly and riotous seamen and mention neither the Sandwich Islands nor the Hawaiian Islands.¹¹

When the Kingdom is named in later laws, however, the name Sandwich Islands appears until about 1840. An early harbor law, for example, concludes: "Oahu, Sandwich Islands, June 2, 1825."¹² A liquor

law of 1838 begins: "Be it enacted by the King and Chiefs of the Sandwich Islands. . . ."¹³ Laws of May 29, 1839 and September 10, 1840 both use the name Sandwich Islands. A law of May 17, 1840 uses the names interchangeably.¹⁴

Treaties of the early 19th century between the Hawaiian Kingdom and foreign powers also refer to the islands as the Sandwich Islands. Hawaii's first treaty, signed on December 23, 1826, concerned American shipping rights. The name Sandwich Islands is used throughout. A British treaty signed in 1836 also uses the name Sandwich Islands, as does the French treaty of 1839. Later, in 1844, the name appears in a treaty with Great Britain.¹⁵ Not until the 1849 treaty between the United States and Hawaii does the name Hawaiian Islands appear in an official treaty. Of all official documents, foreign influence was probably strongest in treaties. It seems logical that these early treaties reflect the foreigners' penchant for the name Sandwich Islands.

More authoritative than laws and treaties are the constitutions of Hawaii. The first major step toward a formal, constitutional government came in 1838 when former missionary William Richards entered the service of Kamehameha III. By June 7, 1839, the well-known Declaration of Rights or Hawaiian Magna Charta was presented. The Declaration, which borrowed heavily from John Locke and the United States Constitution, contains the following phrase:

Whatever chief shall presevering act in violation of this Constitution, shall no longer remain a chief of the Sandwich Islands.¹⁷

One year later, on October 8, 1840, Hawaii had its first constitution. The preamble is an amended version of the 1839 Declaration of Rights. However, a significant change was made regarding the name Sandwich Islands. Factors influencing this change will be discussed in the last section of this paper. The phrase quoted above from the Declaration reads as follows in the 1840 constitution:

Whatever chief shall act preseveringly in violation of this constitution, shall no longer remain a chief of the Hawaiian Islands.¹⁸

The name Hawaiian Islands is repeated three times in the first constitution and the name Sandwich Islands never appears.¹⁹ The change had to be conscious.

Later constitutions follow the pattern of the first by calling the islands the Hawaiian Islands whenever the Kingdom is named. In the 1852 constitution, for example, Articles 12, 61, 96-98, and 101 include the name Hawaiian Islands.²⁰

Two articles of the 1852 constitution go further in officially establishing the name Hawaiian Islands. Under the subheading "Of the Legislative Power," Article 61 names the legislature "the Legislature of the Hawaiian Islands."²¹ Article 101, under the subheading "General Provisions," is explicit in regards to proper elocutionary force for legislation: "The enacting style in making and passing all Acts and Laws, shall be:—'Be it enacted by the King, the Nobles and the Representatives of the Hawaiian Islands. . . .'"²²

The constitutions of 1864 and 1887 also refer to the Kingdom as the Hawaiian Islands. The 1864 constitution begins, "Granted by His Majesty Kamehameha V, By the Grace of God, King of the Hawaiians Islands. . . ."²³

Officially, then, the 1840 constitution named the islands the Hawaiian Islands. The 1852 constitution reinforced the name and later laws and constitutions consistently follow the 1840 precedent. After 1840, the name Sandwich Islands was slowly replaced by the name Hawaiian Islands.

Factors Underlying the Name Change

The important change to "Hawaiian Islands" in the 1840 constitution appears to be based upon at least three identifiable factors. First, Hawaiians disliked the name Sandwich Islands. Second, government under Kamehameha III was asserting itself. The Hawaiian Kingdom was moving from external, foreign controls to internal self-government. Third, growing American influence and preference of the name Hawaiian Islands was increasing at the expense of British power.

Firstly, native Hawaiians seem to have rejected the name Sandwich Islands whenever it became a matter of concern. Apparently, Cook's appellation for their islands was ignored, or most Hawaiians were simply ignorant of the name. In any case, they preferred the name Hawaii. Thrum's *Hawaiian Annual for 1923* states: "It may be safely said that the term 'Sandwich Islands' was never accepted by local authority, or had official use."²⁴ In 1872, James J. Jarves wrote:

. . . the Sandwich Islands were so named by Cook. . . . Their legitimate appellation and the one by which they still continue to be distinguished by the aboriginal inhabitants is "Hawaii nei pae aina," a collective term, synonymous with "these Hawaiian Islands."²⁵

There is some evidence that both Kamehameha I and Kamehameha III protested the name Sandwich Islands. In October, 1818, Captain Vasilii M. Golovnin of the Russian Navy visited the islands and was well-received by old Kamehameha I.²⁶ In regards to the name Sandwich Islands, Golovnin related the King's reaction:

Europeans, who have lived here more than twenty years, told me that Kamehameha [I] could not hear without indignation that the English claimed any jurisdiction over his land. He even goes so far as to object to the name "Sandwich Islands," which was given them by Capt. Cook, insisting that each one should be called by its own name, and the group—that of the King of Hawaii.²⁷

King Kamehameha III also reportedly voiced his dislike of the name Sandwich Islands. Again the source is secondhand, this time from Captain Finch of the U. S. Navy. Finch visited Honolulu in 1829 with official Navy Department letters addressed to Kamehameha III. He reported that the King explained:

. . . the Government and natives generally have dropped or do not admit the designation, of "Sandwich Islands" as applied to their possessions; but adopt and use that of "Hawaiian Islands"; in allusion to the fact that the whole group having been subjected by the first Kamehameha who was the chief of the principal island . . . and also in contradiction of the assertion made by some persons that Kamehameha had ceded sovereignty to Capt. Vancouver for and in behalf of the British Government.²⁸

Finch's record of Kamehameha III's statement could be the first recorded use of the name Hawaiian Islands.²⁹

The second factor influencing the change from Sandwich to Hawaiian Islands was the movement toward formalized, internal government in the late 1830s and 1840s under Kamehameha III.³⁰ David Malo, writing in 1837, captured Hawaiian anxieties about encroaching foreign domination:

If a big wave comes in, large and unfamiliar fishes will come from the dark ocean, and when they see the small fishes of the shallows they will eat them up. The white man's ships have arrived with clever men from the big countries, they know our people are few in number and our country is small, they will devour us.³¹

On the political front, Malo's "large and unfamiliar fishes" were at least temporarily averted by the 1840 constitution and subsequent governmental strengthening.³² By early 1843, the United States had officially recognized the Hawaiian Kingdom. A few months later, both Great Britain and France followed suit.³³

In regards to the name change and the emerging independent Kingdom, Thrum states:

That confusion for a time may have prevailed as Hawaii gradually developed in the scale of civilization to demand recognition in the brotherhood of independent nations is not strange, but gradually the legitimate native name gained supremacy and the English given name died from disuse.³⁴

The third influence was the growing presence of Americans in Hawaiian government and their apparent dislike of the name Sandwich Islands. The influence and advisory functions of Americans William

Richards, Gerrit P. Judd, and Richard Armstrong has been widely researched.

Another important American, James Jackson Jarves, may have had the most direct influence on discontinuing the Sandwich Islands name. Jarves was editor of *The Polynesian* during this time. (In 1844, he was named director of the Hawaiian government press as well as editor of *The Polynesian*, then the official government journal). On October 3, 1840, one week before Hawaii's first constitution, *The Polynesian* carried a timely editorial entitled, "Hawaii, versus Sandwich Islands." The editorial strongly advocated the names Hawaii and Hawaiian over the "awkward compound adjective, 'Sandwich Islands.'"

Stating, "We give preference to Hawaii for the group," and claiming "the natives have ever used 'Hawaii nei' as applicable to the islands," the editorial concludes:

Nothing tends more rapidly to denationalize a people than to change their language. . . . In a race like this, struggling for a political existence, every thing which tends to incite a spirit of patriotism, to arouse the "amor patriae" should be studiously encouraged.³⁵

Taylor, writing in 1931, also believes that American and British tensions were involved. He states: "the change of name came about as a gradual evolution, quite likely because American influences desired use of 'Hawaiian Islands' as opposed to English designation of 'Sandwich Islands.'" ³⁶

In conclusion, Cook's name for the islands was commonly used until the 1840s. Native dislike of the name, formalized government, and American influences were important factors in initiating the gradual name change to the Hawaiian Islands. Although the first use of the name Hawaiian Islands may have been as early as 1829, the official change appeared in the 1840 constitution, with a period of transition from about 1840 to 1865.

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Some early indications of the name change from Sandwich Islands to Hawaiian Islands:

1. After the newspaper *The Polynesian* was purchased by the Hawaiian Kingdom in May, 1844, it was soon announced as "the official journal of the Hawaiian Government."³⁷
2. *The Friend; a Semi-Monthly Journal Devoted to Temperance, Seamen, Marine, and General Intelligence* printed its address prior

- to 1846 as "Honolulu, Oahu, S. I." Beginning with Volume IV, Number 1 (January 1, 1846), the address reads "Honolulu, Oahu, H.I."
3. Minutes of an interview in 1848 between James J. Jarves and U.S. Secretary of State James Buchanan use both names interchangeably.³⁸
 4. In 1853, the Hawaiian Evangelical Association replaced the Sandwich Islands Mission.
 5. In 1852, the Hawaiian Mission Children's Society was formed.
 6. The Honolulu English language newspapers in the late 1830s and 1840s are entitled *Sandwich Islands Gazette*, *Sandwich Islands Mirror*, and *Sandwich Islands News*. Later, in the 1860s, the *Hawaiian Gazette* began. An exception is *The Hawaiian Spectator*, which began publication in 1836.
 7. Early histories of Hawaii refer to the Sandwich Islands. With few exceptions, histories after the 1850s generally use the name Hawaiian Islands.³⁹

NOTES

- ¹ James Cook, *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean* (London: W. and A. Strahan, 1784), II, 219-252.
- ² Cook, II, 221-222.
- ³ Nathaniel Portlock, *A Voyage Round the World* (1789; rpt. Amsterdam: N. Israel; New York: Da Capo Press, 1968), p. 68.
- ⁴ Charles P. C. Fleuriu, *A Voyage Round the World, Performed During the Years 1790-1791, and 1792, by Etienne Marchand* (1801; rpt. Amsterdam: N. Israel; New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), II, 1.
- ⁵ George Vancouver, *A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean, and Round the World* (1798; rpt. Amsterdam: N. Israel; New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), I, 153.
- ⁶ Otto von Kotzebue, *A Voyage of Discovery, Into the South Sea and Bering's Straits* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, et al., 1821), I, 290-358.
- ⁷ *Voyage of H. M. S. Blonde to the Sandwich Islands, in the Years 1824-1825* (London: J. Murray, 1826).
- ⁸ For numerous examples see Ralph S. Kuykendall, *The Hawaiian Kingdom* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1968), I, 66, 76, 81, 93, 99, 101, etc.
- ⁹ For example, Hiram Bingham, *A Residence of Twenty-One Years in the Sand-Islands* (Hartford, Connecticut: H. Huntington, 1847).
- ¹⁰ See *Voyage of the H. M. S. Blonde*, pp. 133, 154-157.
- ¹¹ Kuykendall, I, 120-121.
- ¹² W. D. Westervelt, "Hawaiian Printed Laws Before the Constitution," Hawaiian Historical Society, Annual Report no. 16 (Honolulu, 1909), pp. 41-42.
- ¹³ *The Hawaiian Spectator*, October, 1838, pp. 390-392.

- ¹⁴ Lorrin A. Thurston, *Fundamental Law in Hawaii* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Gazette Co., 1904), pp. 36-38, 404, 126.
- ¹⁵ Kuykendall, I, 98-99, 148, 235-236, 166-167.
- ¹⁶ Charles I. Bevans, comp., *Treaties and Other Agreements of the United States of America, 1776-1949* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1968-1976), VIII, 864-879.
- ¹⁷ *The Hawaiian Spectator*, July, 1839, pp. 347-348.
- ¹⁸ Robert C. Lydecker, comp., *Roster Legislatures of Hawaii, 1841-1918* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Gazette Co., 1918), p. 8.
- ¹⁹ Lydecker, pp. 8-15.
- ²⁰ Lydecker, pp. 36-48.
- ²¹ Lydecker, p. 42.
- ²² Lydecker, p. 47.
- ²³ Lydecker, p. 88.
- ²⁴ Thomas G. Thrum, *Hawaiian Annual for 1923* (Honolulu: Thrum, 1923), p. 70.
- ²⁵ James Jackson Jarves, *History of the Hawaiian Islands*, 4th ed. (Honolulu: H. M. Whitney, 1872), p. 5.
- ²⁶ Golovnin's account of his world travels was first published in St. Petersburg in 1822. The first complete English translation, *Around the World on the Sloop "Kamchatka," 1817-1819*, was published by University Press of Hawaii in 1979 (translated by Ella Lury Wiswell).
- ²⁷ "Golovnin's visit to Hawaii in 1818," *The Friend*, July, 1892, p. 52. See also pages 50-53 and 60-62.
- ²⁸ A. P. Taylor, "Islands of the Hawaiian Domain," TS, Hawaii State Archives, January 10, 1931, p. 27.
- ²⁹ Thrum, p. 70.
- ³⁰ Kuykendall, I, 153-169.
- ³¹ Gavan Daws, *Shoal of Time; a History of the Hawaiian Islands* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 106.
- ³² Kuykendall, I, 167-169. See also Neil M. Levy, "Native Hawaiian Land Rights," *California Law Review*, 63 (July, 1975), 851-853.
- ³³ Kuykendall, I, 185-205.
- ³⁴ Thrum, p. 70.
- ³⁵ *The Polynesian*, October 3, 1840, p. 66. Compare footnote 25 for Jarves' later paraphrase.
- ³⁶ Taylor, p. 28.
- ³⁷ *The Polynesian*, July, 1840.
- ³⁸ Kuykendall, I, 378. See also Bingham, pp. 586-587 for similar correspondence using the names interchangeably in 1842.
- ³⁹ An important exception is Samuel L. Clemens' popular *Letters from the Sandwich Islands*, published in 1866.