

0. The Coming of Missionaries to Hawaii - Story Preface

1. Coming of Age, "Kuleana", In the Times of Change in Hawaiian Culture

2. The Land—The "A'ina"

3. Hawaiian Royal Traditions

4. Clothing

5. The Coming of Missionaries to Hawaii

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7. Author's Profile



Because the arrival of Protestant missionaries into the spiritual void caused by the 'lifting of the kapu,' the destruction of the native religion is as large a part of Lehua's story as the outside encroachment of the political and economic forces. Several points of view need to be considered.

Among the first group of young people who volunteered to shoulder the mission to Hawai'i were several newly married couples. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions felt that a married team would provide mutual support as they faced their task.

Initially, the *Kanaka* population was as fascinated by the 'long necks' appearance as they were skeptical of the worth of their teachings.

Having arrived immediately after the jarring edict from Queen Ka'ahumanu that the old religion was to be abandoned and destruction had already begun of the *heiau* [sacred places] the declaration that these newcomers were bringing the word of a new God was met with fear and caution.



A *Kanaka* had never seen a Caucasian woman before. Their very appearance covered from top to toe--her face buried deep inside her sunbonnet--bordered on the eerie. The men in woolen suits and celluloid collars in Hawai'i's heat (2), made their 'good sense' suspect. Hence, the 'news' they brought was questionable as well.

Both King Liholiho and the Queen were slow to give the missionaries permission to stay. The Most Sacred High Chiefess, Keopuolani was ironically a prime instigator of the destruction of the native religion. She immediately took the Rev. Bingham and his wife under her protection and eventually into her home.

The joint urge by Keopuolani and Ka'ahumanu to overthrow the old religion may have been primarily to free wahine from the limits imposed on women by the rigid kapu system. However, there is some evidence that foreigners may have provided constant advice to free the entire society from the constant fear of death that accompanied the myriad kapus. America's winning of the recent second war of independence from England, the French Revolution, and a vague general Christian anti-totalitarianism were prevalent news at the time.

Ka'ahumanu was slow to convert. She finally embraced the missionaries, if not the religion, when the clerics developed a written *Kanaka* language and began to teach everyone to read. The bible was the primary reading material.

Suddenly, one of the main problems brought by the plagues of foreign diseases was solved. Among the *Kanakas* who died by the thousands were the keepers of the sacred genealogies guaranteeing the right for *ali'i* to rule. Now those genealogies and the exploits of the ancestors could be written down.

For countless generations, *Kanakas* had to learn everything about their culture by rote memorization: everything from how to grow sweet potatoes to how and when to pray. They quickly learned to read and write

and assimilated the essence of the new religion by listening to the sermons. A missionary reported that an 80-year-old woman memorized the entire New Testament upon hearing it read three times.

By the end of the 19th Century, the population of the Republic of Hawaii could boast a 98 percent literacy rate--higher than most other countries of the world at that time. Finally, there were twelve companies of missionaries to arrive and they drove the native religion underground.

Later when sons and grandsons of the missionaries brought Yankee ingenuity to the exploitation of Hawaii's resources and necessarily became strong influences on Island politics and government, they became targets for well-deserved criticism. (4) But the original groups lived in as much poverty as the *Kanakas* they strove to convert.

The reader of "Lehua" shares her difficulty in straddling the ever-widening gap between the pono (righteousness) of the old religion and the preachings of the newcomers.

Initially, all the missionaries were protestant with sharp puritanical leanings. But gradually the Catholic Church made inroads, and then the Anglicans won favor of the *ali'i* and finally came the Mormons in great numbers (5).

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/The-Coming-of-Missionaries-to-Hawaii-Lehua-the-Story-of-an-Hawaiian-Girl>

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Questions 2 Ponder

What might missionaries have changed first?

What impacted the Kanaka most?

Why convert slowly to Christianity?

What Kanaka religious sites remain?

What happened to all the sacred sites of the Kanaka religion? What happened to the Hawaiian people when outsiders reached their islands?

Media Stream



Kukao'o Heiau

Kukao'o Heiau, Manoa Heritage Center Photographed by Author Gene Parola.

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Father Damien

Maritime Heritage Project

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The Coming of Missionaries

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