

# The History of the Democratic Party of Hawai`i

By Marsha Rose Joyner

The Democratic Party in Hawai`i has a humble beginning. Many of the early founders were jailed after their attempt to restore the Queen and the Nation of Hawai`i failed. Then in 1900, with no clout or power and very little promise of ever having any, the Democratic Party of Hawai`i was formed. In the years following the turn of the century the party was near extinction, however through its' rebirth within the ranks of organized labor and federal expansion of the electorate, the party grew into power in 1954. The history of the Democratic Party is inextricably interwoven within the history of Hawai`i - and until the story is told of our beginnings we only see a portion of the whole.

## Part One

Because the winners write history, the definitive early history of the political parties in Hawai`i has only been half told. Lorrin A. Thurston, editor of the Bulletin, publisher of the Gazette, owner of Pacific Commercial Advertiser, Republican, has been the voice and interpreter of the early political events that ushered in the new century. However, It is only now when people are reading non-English newspapers and documents that we get a truer picture of the events.

The events and the people that ushered in the 20th century totally transformed Hawai`i nei. Political structures and entities that we take for granted today were crafted from 19th Century dreams into our current reality. Hawai`i's turn of the century history has been overlooked by most of Hawai`i's noted historians.

During the last years of the 19th century, Hawai`i was somewhat incongruous, having one foot in the old Hawai`ian traditions and the other in new foreign economic enterprises. The barefoot taro farmers competed with the well-capitalized, sugar planters for land and water. Hawai`ian families went to sea in outriggers for fish to feed their families, as foreigners relied on steamships to bring imported goods to Honolulu Harbor. On these ships was finely crafted continental furniture, while the Hawai`ians built thatched roofs for their homes. In contrast, Iolani Palace had telephones and electricity before the White House did. At the same time, The Honolulu Iron Works was using whale oil. Foreign intrigue and financial rivalries were at a fever pitch at this time and all segments of society were vying for the favor and control of the monarchy's assets.

1896 one year after an attempt to restore the Queen and the Nation of Hawai`i failed, the Republican Party of Hawai`i was christened. The Missionary Party became the Committee of Public Safety, which became the Provisional Government, which became The Republican Party. In concert with the U. S. Navy and the "Big Five," members of the Republican Party controlled every facet of life in the Hawai`ian Islands.

The Spanish/American War in 1898 gave America possession of The Philippines, Guam, Samoa, Wake Island, and Islands in the Caribbean. That same year Annexation of the Hawai`ian Islands occurred as a direct result of the armed invasion by American Naval personnel at the behest of some members of the Republican club.

By the beginning of the 20th century, the entire world was under the domination of various colonial powers. There was not one continent on the globe that was not controlled by a western imperial power. Their names, language and culture was superimposed on all indigenous people; British Hong Kong, French Indochina, Dutch Indonesia, French Polynesia, Belgian Congo, American Samoa, Portuguese Azores, Dutch East Indies, French Martinique, British Rhodesia, American Virginia Islands, Dutch Guiana, French Algeria, Portuguese Guinea, French West Africa, French Morocco, German East Africa, Anglo-Egyptian-Sudan (British), Italian Somali, Tripolitania, Kaiser Wilhelm's Land (Papua New Guinea).

For Hawai`i, the new century was ushered in with the arrival of the worst plague in our history. The bubonic plague or Black Death - as it had been known for centuries in Europe - was a frightening malady that had no cure. Health officials of the new Hawai`i government cordoned off sections of Chinatown and set them afire. Unfortunately this ill-fated decision to burn buildings in Chinatown did not take into account the wind.

Thousands of people were made homeless. Throughout the city homes and businesses were destroyed either through the fire or the fear of catching the plague. The displacement of people and the Territorial Government's inability to meet promptly the needs of the populace added to the anguish, miseries and heartache inflicted on the people of Hawai`i by the Republican oligarchy.

One of the founders of the Hawai`i Democratic Party, Johnny Wilson, became a democrat because of President Grover Cleveland, who had supported the Queen. Wilson wrote "Those who actually profited in sugar were the ones who benefited the most in the overthrow of the Queen . . . The real object of Annexation was not so much due to their love and devotion to their country, as it was for the two-cent bounty placed on a pound of sugar under the terms of the McKinley Tariff Bill. Hawai`i could only enjoy this privilege as part of the United States and not otherwise."

The patriots, the founders of the Democratic Party, understood the dire consequence of being loyal to the Queen. They shrewdly moved from the well-organized Hui Kalai`aina, which was formed as a political party and Hui Aloha Aina, formed as the annexation resistant party to the larger political arena. The early members of the Democratic Party grasped that the only way left for them to regain their nation was through the American political system. Taking the lead from Teddy Roosevelt, they "had to sit at the table of real power".

April 30, 12:40 pm Washington, D.C. President McKinley signed the Organic Act or what was popularly called the "Hawai`i Bill", making Hawai`i a Territory of the U.S. changing Hawai`i's government operations, institutions and money. Now, the major political parties became legal entities in Hawai`i. So on the evening of April 30, 1900; Johnny Wilson, (loyal to the Queen) hosted a small meeting. Dr. John S. McGrew, (supporter of King Kalakaua), Charles J. McCarthy, Prince David Kawanakoa (supporter and cousin to The Queen) and Delbert Metzger led the valiant little congregation of Democrats.

May 16, 1900, Dr. John S. McGrew was elected chair of party, Charles J. McCarthy his assistant. Among the 500 people who attended the first meeting of the newly formed party were Prince David Kawanakoa, E. P. McClanahan, John E. Bush, J. K. Kaulia and John Wise. The Democrats would claim to be the party of President Grover Cleveland who opposed the "Overthrow" and supported Queen Liliuokalani.

May 19, 1900 William Marshall Editor of The Volcano, was found guilty of Libel, in the First Degree, and sentenced to 6 months of hard labor. He had dared to print a derogatory remark of Supreme Court Judge Judd. This signaled the end of an opposition newspaper, as well as setting the example of what journalists could expect if they were to write against the ruling elite.

May 27, 1900 the cabinet of the Republican territorial government requested a meeting with Johnny Wilson on the premise of reviewing his contract to develop a sewer system.

"Was it possible?" Johnny pondered. Pacing up and down, "Had they changed the specs in the middle of the project, as they had been known to do?" "Is there a question of my finances since L. Ahlo, my backer had lost a notable part of his income in the Chinatown fire?"

The next day Johnny asked for an extension; he was refused and the contract taken away from him. Johnny discovered that politics under the Republican territorial status was to be considerably more restrictive and punitive than he had thought. Even John Wise lost his pulpit for being a supporter of the Queen.

In June of that year, exercising their newly found muscle, (the right to vote and no property restrictions, which the Republicans had lobbied against); the Hawai`ians founded the Home Rule Party. Robert Wilcox became the Home Rule candidate for Delegate to Congress. The immensely popular stalwart of the new party, the handsome, debonair, Prince David Kawanakoa, became the first Democratic candidate for Delegate to Congress. While Sam Parker was the standard bearer for the Republicans. Because Hawai`i was a territory, the Delegate would have no voting rights. That did not lessen the fight for the position of the first Delegate to Congress from Hawai`i.

“Sam Parker, the winner of the election”. The Pacific Commercial Advertiser declared on November 7, 1900 the day after the election. Five days went by before all of the votes from the Neighbor Islands were tallied. Much to the embarrassment of the PCA, the Home Rule candidate Robert Wilcox was the winner.

In spite of “campaigning hard” all over the territory, the Democrats could not overcome the strength of the Independent, Home Rule Party. They won the major races throughout Hawai`i in 1900. In spite of the Home Rule win and some Democratic milestones, from 1893 at the time of the overthrow until 1954, Republicans held the reigns of power. Samuel Crowningburg-Amalu was quoted from his best seller JACK BURNS A Portrait in Transition. “For over half a century, The Republican Party dominated Island politics. The Democrats at best were only able to offer token opposition. Republicans were the ones who paid the salaries. Vote Against them, and you were out of a job. Campaign against them, and you lost your living. It was as simple as that. From 1902 until 1954, Republicans held the helm and ran a tight ship.”

“There was one all important factor that made it possible for the Republican Party to wield unlimited control over politics in the Islands. Not until the ends of the Second World War were, Oriental people allowed to become citizens. They were barred from naturalization. In 1946, racial barriers were let down for Chinese and Filipinos. In 1952, Japanese, Koreans, and Samoans became eligible for citizenship. Almost overnight as it were, the electorate changed. No longer could the whites, and part-Hawai`ians control the elections. The base upon which the Republican Party had stood for so long was no more. It had broadened far beyond the expectation of any Republican. And the Democrats took over.”

In the 1950s the “Local People” began to throw off the yoke of racism. The development of the Democratic Party as a major force in Hawai`i's politics occurred at the same time that Hawai`i became a state. From 1900 “...when the Democratic Party was formed, it was a hindrance to be anything but a Republican. In order to be a Democrat in those days you had to be a maverick with enough toughness in your soul to fight the powers that were,” said Thelma Monaghan

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