

**THE BIOGRAPHY OF
HON. ROBERT WILLIAM WILCOX**



BY

THOMAS K. NAKANAELA

TRANSLATION AND INTRODUCTION

BY NANCY J. MORRIS

EDITED BY

NIKLAUS R. SCHWEIZER

Honolulu
1993

Translator's Introduction

The publication of Nakanaela's book coincided with a brief period of optimism for those who believed that Hawaiians should control their own affairs. Represented by the National Reform Party, Hawaiians running on a platform for native-rights had just succeeded in achieving an effective majority in the Hawaiian legislature and moreover had managed to turn out a domineering cabinet set in place by the 1887 "Bayonet Constitution." For years this cabinet led by Lorrin Thurston had whittled away at the prestige and authority of the Hawaiian monarchy. Wilcox had his detractors, then as now, but few would argue that much of the credit for the achievements of the National Reform Party belongs to Wilcox. In 1890 he was the man of the moment.

A complex mix of American, Hawaiian and Italian cultural values found expression in Wilcox's life. His father, William S. Wilcox, was a New Englander, a descendant of a patrician family from Tiverton, Devonshire, England, "British offsprings of the Teutonic race mixed with the ancient Roman blood from the time of Caesar," according to the Wilcox genealogy.¹ Two of the Tiverton clan immigrated to New England but later the elder, Daniel Wilcox, returned to England. The younger immigrant settled in Connecticut and his descendants spread through Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New York. The Wilcox clan of Kaua'i founded by eighth missionary company member Abner Wilcox descended from the Connecticut branch of Wilcoxes. William S. Wilcox, father of Robert W. Wilcox, came from a Rhode Island branch of the family.²

Most sources, including Nakanaela, claim that the elder Wilcox came to Hawai'i in 1843 as a sea captain. More accurately, according to New England sources, after tiring of the carpenter's trade, he arrived as first mate on the whaler *Menkar*, under the command of Captain Joseph Sherman.³ When Captain Sherman announced his intention to put into the Hawaiian islands to sell some trinkets, Wilcox objected, wanting to get on with the whaling. The captain suggested that Wilcox leave the ship, since he had no liking for the way it was run. Wilcox made the best of his situation, joining the crew of another New Bedford whaler. With his share of the proceeds of a

¹ "Ka Mookuauhau o Robert Kalanihiapo a Ikeia ma ka Inoa Robert W. Wilcox, Honuaula, Maui." (The Genealogy of Robert Kalanihiapo, also Known by the Name Robert W. Wilcox, Honuaula, Maui). *Ka Loea Kalaiaina*, July 29, 1899.

² Ibid.

³ "Wilcox's Family History." *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, Feb. 21, 1895, p. 3. Reprinted from an unnamed New Bedford, Mass. newspaper. A log of the *Menkar* held by the Newport Museum is available as Pacific Manuscripts Bureau PMB 768.

successful voyage, Wilcox returned to Hawai‘i and went into the cattle ranching business with L. L. Torbert. He did not entirely abandon seagoing life, and in 1849 took Torbert's schooner *Josephine* to San Francisco with a cargo of gold seekers and Irish potatoes.⁴ Later Wilcox invested his capital in land on Maui, and in 1854 married Kalua Makoleokalani, a descendant of Maui royalty. According to some genealogies, the line of Kalua's father has been traced back to Lonohonuakini, mō‘ī of Maui, and on her mother's side to Umi-a-Liloa, (not to be confused with the more famous Umi-a-Liloa of the island of Hawai‘i.).

William and Kalua Wilcox had six children. Robert was the oldest, followed by Caroline Haupa, Albert Richard Ke-pa, Edward Makole, Charles Kauakahiakua, and Nancy Kalua. After Kalua's death in 1865, William Wilcox returned periodically to New England, and remarried there, but was drawn back to Hawai‘i. He wanted his children to have a voice in the “reorganization of Hawaiian society,” and expressed concern that because of their mixed blood they would not be fully accepted in either Hawaiian or in haole society.⁵ Undoubtedly William Wilcox communicated his aspirations to his children: certainly determination to have a voice in Hawaiian affairs was to be a vital character trait in William's oldest son, Robert. William Wilcox outlived most of his children, and at the time of his death in 1910, was still overseeing and farming his land holdings at Ulupalakua, Maui.⁶

Robert Wilcox was given a Hawaiian name, Kalanihiapo, but seems not to have used it, preferring to be known as Robert William. He grew up on the rain-swept slopes of Haleakalā. Nakanaela nicely isolates behavior patterns in the youthful Wilcox that were to figure prominently in the character of Wilcox, the man: a scrappy and athletic disposition and an inquisitive intelligence. As Nakanaela hints, young Wilcox was well aware of his ali‘i heritage. He mastered a knowledge of Hawaiian genealogy and in later life once dared to correct several genealogical points in Lili‘uokalani's publication, *A Queen's Story*.⁷

After a few years in the common school of Makawao, Maui, Robert's father packed up the required “four suits of clothes, one Sunday suit, one warm coat, two sleeping suits, three bed

⁴ Janion, Aubrey. *The Olowalu Massacre*. Norfolk Island: Island Heritage Press, 1976, pp. 39-41.

⁵ "Wilcox's Family History." *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, Feb. 21, 1895, p. 3.

⁶ Obituary of William Wilcox. *Maui News*, Jan. 4, 1910, p. 1.

⁷ "Some Genealogy: R. W. Wilcox Corrects Statements in Ex-Queen's Book." *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, May 25, 1898, p. 5.

covers, one blanket, two pillow cases, and two hats,”⁸ paid the \$75 annual tuition, and enrolled his son Robert in Haleakalā Boarding School situated in an isolated area near Makawao. His classmates, in addition to his three brothers, included Lorrin Thurston and Hezekial Aea. Both Thurston and Aea figured in Wilcox's later life. Thurston was to become a bitter political enemy. When Wilcox was elected as Hawai‘i's first representative to the United States Congress, he intended that Aea's son be the first Hawaiian to attend West Point. The West Point appointment, however, seems not to have materialized, and Aea's name does not appear in West Point enrollement records.

Operated by the Bureau of Public Instruction, Haleakalā School experimented with a “manual labor” curriculum. The boys contributed to their keep by milking cows, pounding their own poi, and farming the school's fields. The school was not a success and closed in 1878 after only ten years of existence. The Bureau of Public Instruction cited a difficulty in retaining headmasters as the principal reason for closing the school.⁹ Robert Wilcox, however, remembered the school and his teacher, Mrs. Sarah Thurston, with affection. He also responded with enthusiasm to the military-school regime instituted at the Haleakalā school by headmaster F. L. Clarke.

After graduating from Haleakalā, Wilcox spent four years on Maui teaching school and tinkering with sugar cane processing equipment. As Nakanaela details, he began to speak out and write on public issues of the day and after an unsuccessful bid in 1878 was elected in 1880 as Wailuku's delegate to King Kalākaua's Legislative Assembly.

The Kalākaua court, to which Wilcox arrived to take his place, presaged new vigor and dignity for the Hawaiian Kingdom. Kalākaua proposed to place more Hawaiians in important government posts. The kahuna, the chanters and the dancers came out of hiding, having been driven underground by the missionary influence. Luxurious appointments appropriate to a world-class monarchy replaced missionary austerity. The “mission boys” viewed these moves as a threat to their long-established and comfortable roles as the real power base of the Hawaiian monarchy. American merchants and planters were similarly uneasy. There was disunity even among Hawaiian ranks, and supporters of the Dowager Queen Emma, who, having lost to Kalākaua in the 1874 election, worked behind the scenes against him.

Kalākaua, whose concern for his native people seems to have been genuine and sincere, took

⁸ Bureau of Public Instruction. Correspondence files, Maui. State Archives of Hawai‘i.

⁹ Bureau of Public Instruction. Minutes, 1845-1879, p. 368, 444, 445. State Archives of Hawai‘i.

respite from these tensions in his court amusements, and for a time no one pleased the King as much as silver-tongued Celso Caesar Moreno, an Italian born “adventurer,” as the press of the day liked to term him, who arrived in Honolulu in 1879 with visions of a cable to connect America and Asia, a steamship line from the American western coast to China by way of Hawai‘i, and a plan to increase the numbers of Chinese immigrants to the islands. All of Moreno's schemes harmonized with Kalākaua's own dreams of Hawai‘i as a Pacific world power. Moreno was in the Kingdom for only nine months, but during that time managed to stir up a number of whirlwinds. His influence on Hawaiian affairs was substantial, and this dashing Italian remained a factor in Wilcox's fortunes until after the turn of the century.

Wilcox arrived in Honolulu with a characteristic contentious flourish. His seat in the Legislature was contested by M. Kealoha, who also claimed to have won the election on Maui. Finding that the total number of votes cast in the Wailuku district exceeded the number of authorized voters, a legislative judicial committee reviewed the situation, ultimately deciding in Wilcox's favor. Although Wilcox was fairly quiet as a freshman legislator, he did introduce a bill for tax relief for large Hawaiian families, and proposed that neighbor-island hospitals and roads be built. He became known as an advocate of education for Hawaiians and supported a bill to send Hawaiian youths abroad to be educated.¹⁰ As Wilcox himself was chosen as one of those youths, this last appropriation, brought before the Legislature by Kalākaua probably at Moreno's suggestion, served as a turning point in Wilcox's life.

Before Wilcox's selection as one of the scholars, however, he figured in an episode that allowed him to cast off his identity as Mr. Wilcox from Wailuku and to enter Hawaii's larger political scene. At the close of the Legislature, Kalākaua precipitously dismissed his cabinet and appointed a new group. Moreno, who had just been naturalized as an American citizen, was appointed to the powerful post of Minister of Foreign Affairs. Yielding to public pressure against this step, Kalākaua reversed the appointment before a week had passed. Wilcox took the position that the King had the right to appoint whomever he chose, and he posted placards around town proclaiming “Way up Moreno!”, defending Moreno as a champion of the native Hawaiian people.

In times of trouble Hawaiians chose to gather not at haole-dominated Kawaiaha‘o Church, but rather at the “second church”, Kaumakapili. Here Wilcox in “stentorian tones,” (so mocked the

¹⁰ Journal of the Legislative Assembly. State Archives of Hawai‘i.

haole press¹¹) delivered an impassioned speech opposing “na keiki o na misionari” (the children of the missionaries), and reasserting Kalākaua's royal prerogatives. A mob scene erupted as hats flew into the air and the audience tramped to and fro in the church aisles, shouting and crying.¹² Honolulu was witnessing for the first time the charismatic force of a new leader. When calm was restored, the gathering passed a resolution quietly thanking Kalākaua for his reconsideration of Moreno. A disgruntled Wilcox presented Kalākaua with his own minority resolution.

Several days later Wilcox received news that he was to be included in the European study-abroad program, along with the considerably younger boys, James Booth and Robert Boyd. The three were the first of 18 young Hawaiians sent to six foreign countries during 1880-1887.

Kalākaua appointed Moreno as guardian and escort for Wilcox, Booth, and Boyd, thereby allowing Moreno a more graceful exit than might otherwise have been possible. The choice of European schools for the boys represented an affront to the Calvinistic Americans in Hawai‘i, who mistrusted what they perceived as European pomp and aristocratic pretensions.

The question arises as to the choice of Wilcox. No longer a youth, Wilcox in 1880 was a man of twenty-five, with several years as a teacher and elected official already behind him. Agnes Quigg, who had studied the full history of the studies-abroad program, notes a larger motivating force behind the study-abroad program: Kalākaua's wish to enhance the prestige of the Hawaiian monarchy by educating the children of Hawaiian chiefs for responsible positions in governmental and professional affairs of the Kingdom.¹³ Through such means, the reins of government could be placed where they belonged, in the hands of native Hawaiians. Wilcox met the chiefly criteria through his mother's lineage. Undoubtedly there were other factors in Wilcox's selection. His Kaumakapili speech attracted attention, and both Kalākaua and Moreno had reason to thank Wilcox for the support Wilcox had demonstrated for the two.

Nakanaela supplies fresh details on the travels of these Hawaiian tourists as they sampled famous sites in the United States and in Europe. In the American capital city Moreno carried out a secret mission for Kalākaua by presenting letters of complaint against American authorities in Hawai‘i to future President James A. Garfield. Kalākaua believed that American diplomats had schemed against Hawaiian royal authority. Also in Moreno's pocket were letters of introduction

¹¹ *Hawaiian Gazette*, August 25, 1880, p. 3.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Agnes Quigg, "Kalākaua's Study Abroad Program." *Hawaiian Journal of History*, v. 22, 1988, pp. 170-208.

bearing Kalākaua's seal, which, as Nakanaela details, gained the group entree to a number of international notables. Nakanaela fails to reveal the source of his information on the American and European tour, and some of the details are in error. (These problems as they are known to the present editors are considered in footnotes to the Nakanaela text.) Perhaps Nakanaela embroidered his tale, or it may have been that he was given incorrect information.

Moreno attempted to carry out the original plan of enrolling the boys in German schools, but German authorities questioned the boys' lack of German language skills, and ultimately the Hawaiians were placed in Italian academies. Boyd enrolled in the Royal Naval Academy at Leghorn, Booth in the Royal Military Academy in Naples, and Wilcox in the Royal Academy of Civil and Military Engineers in Turin.

At this point, in 1881, Kalākaua himself arrived in Italy, on his own grand tour. Kalākaua was shepherded about by his bossy attorney general and commissioner of immigration, William N. Armstrong along with Chamberlain Charles H. Judd. Finding that Moreno was still involved with the affairs of Kalākaua and the study-abroad program, Armstrong summarily dismissed Moreno and placed the boys in the charge of Michele Cerulli of Naples, also appointing Cerulli as Hawai'i's Italian consul. For his part, Kalākaua remained loyal to his old friend Moreno, believing him not to be the devil he was painted,¹⁴ but he chose not to challenge Armstrong on this point. Kalākaua found the boys “wonderfully improved in physic [sic] and manners.”¹⁵

In Turin, the ancient Alp-ringed city cluttered with remnants of a Roman, medieval and Renaissance past, Wilcox “became Italianized,” as Honolulu critics put it. Immersing himself for the first time in the history of the world outside of Hawai'i, he read of the exploits of Italian patriots Count Camillo Benso di Cavour and Guiseppe Garibaldi, and found application in these histories to problems existing in Hawai'i. When he happened upon Machiavelli's *The Prince*, Wilcox discovered surprising parallels between Machiavellian philosophy and his own views. Wilcox agreed completely with Machiavelli's analysis of the desperate time of men when salvation can only be expected through the intervention of a powerful leader. Excited by his revelations, Wilcox mailed a copy of Machiavelli to Kalākaua. Kalākaua, however, wearily replied that of course he had already studied Machiavelli but found “half of the the instructions antiquated and

¹⁴ Richard A. Greer, ed. "The Royal Tourist — Kalākaua's Letters Home from Tokio to London." *Hawaiian Journal of History*, v. 5, 1971, pp. 75-109.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 91

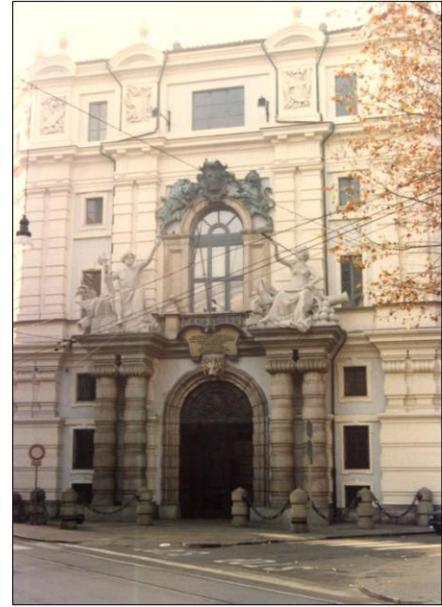
inconsequential in these times of Higher Learning.”¹⁶

Wilcox graduated from the Turin Military Academy, and then enrolled in the Royal Training School of Artillery and Engineering (Scuola d'Applicazione d'Artiglieria e Genio). The school, housed in a massive stone structure that in Renaissance years was Turin's Armory, still functions today as a military school now called Scuola d'Applicazione d'Arma. Wilcox acquitted himself well, ranking in the top half of his class, no mean feat for a Hawaiian expatriate.

The trappings of aristocratic Italian life pleased Wilcox, and he was excessively proud on the day he earned the right to wear the elaborate uniform of an Italian army officer.

Rationalizing the expense of the outfit to his guardian, Wilcox wrote that he would probably make use of the uniform at home in Hawai'i. Make use of it he did, in two revolutions, and the uniform was destined to become part of the lore of Hawai'i's revolutionary era. The Nakanaela book includes a chant, noting the admiring popular response to the sight of Wilcox so splendidly clad. “Behold Wilcox,” goes the chant, “in the glittering apparel of Italy, he resembles a yellow-striped bird!”

The cloud on the Italian sky was Michele Cerulli, a niggardly, mean-spirited guardian who kept the Hawaiian students on an unnecessarily austere budget. By now Wilcox was moving in upper-class Italian society, and he chafed against Cerulli's tight-fistedness. Wilcox complained to Cerulli, who promptly forwarded Wilcox's angry letter to Kalākaua. Kalākaua wrote a scolding letter to Wilcox, whereupon Wilcox apologized to some degree. A certain credibility must be accorded Wilcox's complaints against Cerulli. When Cerulli, by this time bankrupt, was replaced, he refused to render a final satisfactory accounting of the boys' expenses, and Walter Murray Gibson, acting as Kalākaua's financial minister, commented unfavorably on Cerulli's handling of the accounts.¹⁷



¹⁶ Kalākaua to Wilcox, April 9, 1883. State Archives of Hawai'i.

¹⁷ Correspondence between Wilcox, Cerulli, Kalākaua, and Gibson is in the "Hawaiian Students Abroad" file. State Archives of Hawai'i.



Nakanaela omits the above difficulties, but does spin a pretty tale of Wilcox's romance with a titled young Italian woman, Louisa Maria Carolina Elizabeth Isabella Sobrero, known familiarly as Gina Sobrero. From the Nakanaela narrative readers learn something of what Wilcox said and what Gina said during the wooing, but the source for these passages remains a mystery. Perhaps Wilcox shared memories with Nakanaela, perhaps, enticingly so, Nakanaela had access to a private journal, or possibly Nakanaela experimented here with fictionalized biography. In outline, however, the passages relating to the courtship follow the corresponding account included in Gina Sobrero's published memoirs, *Espatriata; Da Torino ad Honolulu* (Rome: Voghera, 1908).

On her mother's side, Gina Sobrero claimed connections to the aristocratic Colonna di Stigliano family of Sicily. Her paternal grandfather was named baron in 1844 in recognition of his military services for the House of Savoy.¹⁸ Gina's father Lorenzo Carlo Giuseppe Sobrero inherited this title and was also a military officer, for a time acting as one as Wilcox's instructors.

Gina had a literary bent. She wrote poetry, and in later years, an etiquette book that went through several editions.¹⁹ Of most interest to Hawaiian historians is the travelogue Gina published in 1908 under the pseudonym "Mantea."²⁰ In this book, Gina adds her memories of the romance in Turin when Wilcox wooed her as his "little lehua blossom," conjuring up all the romance of far-off Hawaii, land of the volcano goddess Pele and her sacred flowers. Gina reveals that Wilcox promised her she would be a "queen" in Hawai'i. Wilcox's faults had more to do with pride rather than dishonesty, and quite possibly Wilcox, rightfully proud of his own genealogy, saw little difference between Italian nobility and Hawaiian ali'i. Aside from his way with words, Wilcox was an extremely handsome man, over six feet tall, with burning dark eyes, the "noble Roman nose" of his father's family, as one observer noted, "and the exotic Hawaiian features of his mother."²¹ In his impressive Italian uniform, he undoubtedly caught the eye of many a young lady.

¹⁸ Manno, A. "Il patriziato subalpino." Unpublished typescript held by Biiblioteca Reale, Turin, pp. 450-451.

¹⁹ Gina Sobrero. *Casi della Vita*. Torino: S. Lattes. 1911. Also, her *Le Buone Usanze*. Firenze: A. Salini, 1918. Rev. ed., 1923.

²⁰ Gina Sobrero. *L'espatriata: Da Torino ad Honolulu*. Roma: E. Voghera, 1908.

²¹ *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, July 25, 1891, p. 1.

On their wedding day Gina and Wilcox were received by Cardinal Alimonda at the archbishop's palace. The ceremony itself was a civil one, conducted at the Palazzo di Citta, Turin's magnificent town hall. Now Wilcox stood with his bride near the site where medieval kings had dazzled the countryside with nuptial displays of fireworks, "burning heaps a-fire set off by a dove with wings ablaze."²²

A second ceremony followed at a Protestant chapel. Bearing a lavish wedding gift from Kalākaua, Colonels James Boyd and Samuel Nowlein, along with Nowlein's daughter Maile, who was studying art in Turin, represented the Hawaiian court at the ceremonies. The Italian press expressed a hearty liking for "these pleasant and amiable gentlemen, whose manners are polished and whose conversation is highly intelligent." They were pleased that Wilcox "should have chosen one of the most beautiful flowers of the garden of Italy to transplant to those far away regions, where reigns an eternal spring."²³ In reporting on the ceremony, Honolulu newspapers, with customary Yankee suspicion of Old World pretentiousness, decried the "great pomp" of the ceremony.²⁴

The newlyweds left for a honeymoon in Switzerland. Wilcox had learned several months earlier of the "Bayonet Constitution" imposed upon Hawai'i which severely restricted the powers of the monarch. "Had I been on the spot," Wilcox angrily wrote, "I would have the place of chief commandant." This would have prevented, Wilcox thought, the "silent rabbit" response of the populace.²⁵ To his dismay, Wilcox soon learned that the Reformists, in a move to trim government expenses, had halted the studies abroad program and ordered Wilcox's immediate recall.

The romance of Wilcox's Italian sojourn stirred the imaginations of Hawaiians who took pride in the accomplishments of one of their native sons. For Hawaiians, Wilcox's alliance with Gina strengthened his claims as a nobleman, as is evident in the Nakanaela text in the several references to "Prince Wilcox — half Hawaiian royalty, half Italian."

Disillusionments came rapidly to both Wilcox and Gina when the couple returned to Hawai'i. Penniless, Wilcox accepted Lili'uokalani's offer that he and his wife share her Kapālama residence. Lili'uokalani moved from her own bedroom, taking a "colder" room, to accommodate the

²² Marziano Bernardi. *Turin and its Environs*. Turin: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, Libreria dello Stato, 1961, p. 93-94.

²³ *Gazzeto Piemontese*, June 15, 1887, quoted in *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, July 27, 1887, p. 3.

²⁴ *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, November 18, 1895, p. 1. This is a retrospective view of Wilcox's marriage.

²⁵ Wilcox to Foreign Office, August 27, 1887. State Archives of Hawai'i.

newlyweds.²⁶ Gina found the “islands of eternal spring” not to her liking. Despite Lili‘uokalani's graciousness, Gina considered the Princess as “ugly as a ape.”²⁷ The poi Gina thought abominable and Honolulu society equally raw. Her new husband occupied himself with political intrigue, and refused to confide in her. Within weeks, Gina confessed to Lili‘uokalani that she had made a terrible mistake.²⁸

Believing that he had been educated to take his place in the upper ranks of government in Hawai‘i, Wilcox was outraged at his treatment by members of the Reform Party who had pledged themselves to end Kalākaua's alleged corrupt and extravagant policies. He joined other conspirators in “the Dominis affair,” an event that Nakanaela slides over, and one that complicates Nakanaela's portrayal of Wilcox as Kalākaua's unwavering advocate.

With the “Dominis revolt,” the graduate from Italy turned against Kalākaua. Wilcox's pride had perhaps been injured by Kalākaua's scoldings during the days in Turin, but more fundamentally, as a man of action he faulted Kalākaua for yielding too easily to Reformist pressures. In January of 1888 he and other discontents organized as many as three hundred armed men, positioned the troops at the Royal Barracks, and went to Kalākaua with the demand that the King abdicate in favor of Lili‘uokalani. Promising to think the matter over, Kalākaua dismissed the callers. Nothing came of the affair. Minister of the Interior Lorrin Thurston gathered signed statements and prepared charges of treason. But Gina came to Thurston in tears and promised that if charges were dismissed, she and Wilcox would go away. According to Thurston, Wilcox also came to him to plead for mercy, saying that he had been desperate, living as he was on charity. Thurston said Wilcox was at that time willing to return to Italy and join the Italian forces then fighting in Arabia.²⁹ Thurston declined to press charges against his old schoolmate of Haleakalā Boarding School days, and Wilcox and Gina hastily left the islands for San Francisco. Lili‘uokalani assisted a drive to raise a thousand dollars to assist the couple. The grateful Gina, by then pregnant, fell on her knees before Lili‘uokalani and asked how she might repay the Heir Apparent for her generosity. Lili‘uokalani thought perhaps, if Gina's child were a daughter, Gina

²⁶ Lili‘uokalani diary. State Archives of Hawai‘i and Bishop Museum.

²⁷ *L'espatriata*.

²⁸ Lili‘uokalani diary. State Archives of Hawai‘i and Bishop Museum.

²⁹ Speech of Minister of Interior Thurston in Reply to Imputations of Attorney-General Ashford, Hawaiian Legislative Assembly, June 6, 1890.

might name the child after Liliuokalani's home, Mu'olaulani.³⁰

In San Francisco Wilcox found employment as a surveyor and Gina as a teacher of Italian and French to the young ladies of San Francisco. Their daughter was born in the Palace Hotel. The hearts and minds of both were elsewhere, and early in 1889 Gina left for Italy. Wilcox knew that she would not return. The baby daughter died soon after Gina's return.

According to a government official of the day, Lili'uokalani wrote to Wilcox urging him to return to restore the rights of the Hawaiian chiefs,³¹ and in April of 1889 Wilcox was back in Honolulu preparing for revolution.

Armed resistance represented a departure from past patterns for nineteenth-century Hawaiians. Gun-running, violence and strong-armed tactics had been the province of foreigners. Wilcox's participation in the 1889 revolt bears out the truism holding that it is not the poor and downtrodden commoners who revolt; it is the unemployed educated class. Of additional significance in the revolt is Wilcox's selection of his co-leaders from the foreign element of Hawaiian society: several Italians, one German, a Belgian, and a number of Chinese men, none of whom had much fondness for the American oligarchy in control of Hawaiian affairs. Wilcox also called on his friend from his Italian school days, hapa-haole Robert N. Boyd.

The facts of the 1889 revolt are well known. Setting up base at Lili'uokalani's Pālama home, Wilcox organized revolutionary meetings, gathered arms, and collected forces, then in the early morning of July 30 led some one hundred men in several military formations to 'Iolani Palace. Arrayed in his Italian officer's uniform and drawing on his Italian lesson-books, Wilcox occupied the Palace grounds and trained four small cannons at the four gates of the Palace. Wilcox steadfastly insisted that his goal was to support the King and pave the way for a new constitution. Throughout the evening Wilcox dispatched messages to Kalākaua, who had strategically retreated first to Queen Kapi'olani's private residence at Honuakaha, near Queen and Punchbowl Streets, and later to his royal boathouse on the edge of Honolulu Harbor. Confrontation was not Kalākaua's style. Looking back on the revolt a number of years later, Wilcox regretted his deference to Kalākaua. Had he led the revolution as a "Hawaiian Napoleon Bonaparte" instead of a "Hawaiian

³⁰ The notes on Gina Sobrero are taken from Lili'uokalani's diary and the memoirs of Lydia Anola, as cited in Helena Allen's *The Betrayal of Lili'uokalani* (Glendale, Calif.: Arthur H. Clark, 1982).

³¹ Testimony of V. V. Ashford to Blount Commission, (U. S. 53rd Congress. 3d Session, 1894-1895. House. *Affairs in Hawaii*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1895, p. 671.) Hereafter cited as Blount Report.) According to Ashford, Lili'uokalani's letter to Wilcox was found in a pocket of his clothing during the investigation of the 1889 revolt against 'Iolani Palace. The letter however is not cited in the official trial proceedings following the 1889 revolt.

Garibaldi,” Wilcox said, he would have carried the day.³² As it was, even V. V. Ashford, in charge of the government's defense against Wilcox, believed that the revolt came breathlessly close to success.³³ But packets of dynamite, thrown by a local baseball star, flushed out the rebels in the royal bungalow where they had made their last stand. In the eyes of the haole oligarchy the affair had its comic opera aspects, but in the end seven of Wilcox's men lay dead for the cause of Hawaiian rights.

“Hang him!” cried some government partisans. Instead, Wilcox was tried under the ethnic jury system then in effect, providing that Hawaiians and part-Hawaiians were to be tried by their own countrymen. The system was an outgrowth of the consular courts of early contact days which had shielded fearful foreigners from native justice. The system had its built-in problems for the haole inasmuch as those who had their own courts were then compelled to respect verdicts handed down to Hawaiians by Hawaiian juries. The outcome of the Wilcox trial, outrageous to many haoles, was to prove the ultimate irony of the system.

Giving the haoles an opportunity to demonstrate the terrible swift sword of western justice, the Wilcox trial was preceded by that of Belgian co-conspirator Albert Loomens before a jury composed of foreigners. Loomens was convicted of treason and sentenced to hang. With this example before them, members of the a Hawaiian jury convened to try Wilcox on the lesser charge of conspiracy, government officials having obviously decided that a native jury would refuse to convict Wilcox of treason, a capital offense. The Nakanaela version of the trial, drawn almost verbatim from newspaper accounts, reveals an arrogant, unapologetic Wilcox, secure in his conviction that he acted in the best interests of the Hawaiian Kingdom. Wilcox's testimony at the Loomens trial was read into the record with its suggestions that Wilcox had the approval of Kalākaua in his efforts to proclaim a new constitution and oust the Reform Cabinet. At the conclusion of the evidence, Judge A. Francis Judd instructed the jurors, leaving them little option in the face of the evidence other than to find Wilcox guilty. The jury disregarded Judge Judd's stern injunctions, and returned a verdict of not guilty, finding in effect, that the guilty parties were those who had wrongly seized power from the monarch. Legal scholars have a term for such verdicts: “jury nullification,” a term useful in understanding those situations when a higher social justice

³² "Wilcox Autobiography for the Congressional Record." *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, December 1, 1900, p. 1.

³³ Ashford, as quoted in Nakanaela text.

may with cause override strict legalities. Those participating in the trial were by no means unaware of the complexities involved, and the trial transcripts document the court's struggle to define the thin line dividing patriot and traitor, a line that can shift with today's election or tomorrow's coup.

Nakanaela conveys an element lacking in most accounts of the Wilcox trial: a sense of the great adulation Hawaiians of the day held for Wilcox. A sculptor issued bronze medallions showing his likeness and these were bought up by the hundreds. When Wilcox was jailed, Hawaiians flocked to visit him, crowding into every inch of the courtroom to witness the trial, and pressing about him, straining to touch his hand. Fearing a riot, government officials were forced to convey Wilcox in a closed coach to and from the court. Supporters raised the substantial sum of two thousand dollars for Wilcox's bail, and the verdict of not guilty brought shouts of joy.

Wilcox's popularity swept him into office as representative to the State Legislature from the Pālama district. He ran as a candidate for the National Party, a group pledged to undo the work of the Reform Cabinet. As Nakanaela details, National Party adherents in the Legislature succeeded in accomplishing that which armed revolt had failed to do. In June of 1890 a dispute in the Legislature, which began with a somewhat minor argument as to where the Militia was to be quartered, expanded to larger issues having to do with lack of confidence in the Reform Cabinet. As a result of this chain of event, the Ministers of the Reform Cabinet were compelled to resign.³⁴

On this note of hope for the royalists, the Nakanaela account closes. *Ka Buke Moolelo o Hon. Robert William Wilikoki* is typical of a number of nineteenth-century Hawaiian language books. In format, it is a collection of separately-authored works loosely strung together into a whole by an editor. Nakanaela's creative voice is heard most clearly in the first four chapters, covering Wilcox's childhood and years in Italy. Thereafter, Nakanaela serves more as a translator of previously-printed English language documents. Appended to the text are some twenty mele composed by the Hawaiian community in honor of Wilcox; these fall into the genre of Hawaiian political songs analyzed and described by such authors as Ellie Williamson and Amy K. Stillman.³⁵

Some three hundred copies of the Nakanaela book were sold at two dollars a copy. Sales

³⁴ Ralph Kuykendall has a complete account of the 1890 legislative fray in his *The Hawaiian Kingdom*, v. 3. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, pp. 455-469.

³⁵ Ellie Williamson. "Hawaiian Chants and Songs Used in Political Campaigns" in *Directions in Pacific Traditional Literature*. Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 1976. See also Stillman, Amy. "History Reinterpreted in Song: The Case of the Hawaiian Counterrevolution." *Hawaiian Journal of History*, v. 23, 1989, pp. 1-30.

diminished with the appearance of a rival publication about Wilcox, *Ka Duke Hao o Hawaii* (The Iron Duke of Hawaii), a work which seems to have disappeared from the libraries and private collections of Hawai‘i. Both books capitalized on the avid interest of the Hawaiian people in Wilcox, a man committed to turning back the wave of haole domination in Hawaiian affairs. Nakanaela was quick to bring suit against the authors of *Ka Duke Hao* on grounds of plagiarism against one such similar work. A judge however found that defendants Samuel K. Pua and Thomas P. Spencer had as much right to prepare an account of Wilcox as did Nakanaela.³⁶

The drama of Wilcox's life was far from over. As the climactic and tragic events of the 1890's unfolded — the death of Kalākaua, the troubled reign of Lili‘uokalani, the overthrow of the Monarchy, and eventually, the annexation of Hawai‘i to the United States — Wilcox remained at storm-center. In response to the chaos of the times he at times discarded his royalist beliefs, and became in turn a radical terrorist, once more a royalist, astonishingly an annexationist, and then a republican.

To return to the point where Nakanaela ended his narrative, the early days of the 1890 Legislature and the dissolution of the Reform Cabinet: Wilcox was disappointed that he was not named to a post in the new Cabinet, but pressed on determinedly with the next goal of National Party adherents, revision of the Bayonet Constitution. Progress here was slow, and Wilcox threatened to “wash the streets with blood and to bomb Honolulu's finest buildings.”³⁷ His rhetoric placed him in the radical wing of the National Party, and when he ran again for the Legislature in 1892, it was as candidate for the newly-formed Liberal Party.

The Liberals, made up of radical elements of several Hawaiian political factions, dared to oppose some of the policies of Queen Lili‘uokalani, who had succeeded to the Throne after the death of her brother Kalākaua in 1891. Most Hawaiians looked on the Queen with a deeply-rooted loyalty and reverence, and the Liberals as a group did not attract broad-based support in the Hawaiian community. Wilcox's appeal as a popular hero, however, carried him to reelection.

As he prepared for the upcoming legislative session, Wilcox was arrested for treason. He and his Liberal Party associates had gone too far with their accusations against the Queen's “rotten” administration. “No woman ought to rule,” railed Wilcox. “They have no brains. They are

³⁶ The plagiarism case is summarized in the *Hawaiian Gazette*, December 9, 1890.

³⁷ *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, Sept. 6, 1890. p. 6.

generally weak.”³⁸ Disillusioned with the Monarchy, Wilcox spoke out in favor of a United States of Hawai‘i and let it be known that he was not adverse to serving as the proposed republic's first president. By now a master orator, he manipulated a large crowd gathered:

“And who shall be president of this new republic,” shouted Wilcox.

“Wilcox,” roared the crowd.³⁹

His goal was “ultimate annexation to the United States.”⁴⁰ This was too much for the Queen, and Wilcox, along with sixteen other Liberals, was arrested for treason. When the government considered the slim chances of convicting the prisoners, a decision was made not to prosecute, and Wilcox was released to take his place in the Legislature. The affair assisted the cause of those arguing for annexation of Hawai‘i to the United States on the grounds of the political instability of the kingdom. All this agitation was bad for business, explained the annexationists.

The Monarchy fell on January of 1893, but not as Wilcox had hoped, as a change from within, but as an act of American gunboat diplomacy. Alienated from Sanford Dole's Provisional Government administration, Wilcox withdrew for a time from the public arena.



He found a new love, Princess Theresa Owana Kaohielelani, who claimed direct descent from the Kamehamehas. Theresa came from a long line of beauties. Of particular note was her lovely mother with thick, black hair falling to her ankles and with cheeks “like the lehua, whereon the color came to stay about eleven in the morning and gradually faded away at about eleven at night.”⁴¹ By 1892 Theresa was a survivor of a failed marriage to Alexander Joy Cartwright, the son of the famous “father of baseball.” She was a spirited, contentious woman, well acquainted with lawyers and courtrooms. Her lifetime legal adventures included two divorces, a skirmish with the mainland department store Woodward and Lothrop, a suit against the Arlington Hotel, another for her recovery of Hawaiian crown lands, and in the post-Wilcox years, a spectacular fraud case involving Theresa's alleged forgery of the Queen's will. This was a woman with a fire to match Wilcox's own.

In Italy Baroness Gina Sobrero had begun divorce proceedings. Wilcox was in San Francisco

³⁸ *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, May. 6, 1892.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Wilcox to J. H. Blount, April 6, 1893. Reprinted in *Blount Report*, p. 1062.

⁴¹ Obituary of Princess Theresa, *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, Jan. 6, 1944, p. 1.

to consult with his brother-in-law in the summer of 1891, undoubtedly about the divorce arrangements. Divorce in Italy, then as now, was not taken lightly, and a civil court, in a case that dragged on for two years, denied Gina's claim that Wilcox had misrepresented himself. The case was appealed to a higher court and an annulment was granted. Following Gina's appeal to Pope Leo XIII, an ecclesiastical annulment was also granted, the first such appeal to be approved since Garibaldi's annulment in 1880. The bitter outcome of the romance of Wilcox and his Italian baroness caught the attention of European and American newspapers, who welcomed at the same time the occasion to recount the equally dramatic details of Garibaldi's dismissal of his bride, the countess Raimondi, moments after their wedding (Garibaldi having suddenly learned of Raimondi's indiscreet past). With headlines announcing "The Baroness is Free!" the Honolulu press eagerly brought Hawai'i's readers up to date.⁴²

Wilcox and Theresa did not wait for the final divorce formalities, and their son, Robert Kalanikupuapaikalaninui Keoūa, was born on January 16, 1893, the day American marines from the *Boston* came ashore to assist in Lili'uokalani's dethronement.⁴³ That afternoon Wilcox put public duty before his private affairs and walked to the Palace grounds (which once he had stormed), to join the proceedings of a mass meeting of Hawaiians gathered to try to make some sense of the events of the day. He spoke in a subdued manner, urging calm.



Having deposed a queen, the United States was uncertain as to what to do with the Hawaiian island kingdom. For a while Wilcox continued to speak out for annexation, arguing that annexation was "perhaps the salvation of the native race."⁴⁴ He joined the haole Annexation League as one of the League's six vice-presidents. But soon he did an about-turn, and returned to the ranks of the royalists.

Wilcox's defection from the annexationists confounds historians and contributes to his reputation as an erratic opportunist, bending like a willow with every wind. It seemed for a while during President Grover Cleveland's administration that the United States intended to restore

⁴² *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, Nov. 18, 1895.

⁴³ *Home Rula Repubalika*, Jan. 22, 1902, p. 3.

⁴⁴ Albertine Loomis, *For Whom Are the Stars*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, p. 51.

Lili‘uokalani. Wilcox then realized, he explained later, “that the United States meant to do what was right and just,” and accordingly he “decided to become a strong adherent to the queen.”⁴⁵ Despite Wilcox's earlier attacks on the Queen, he retained a personal affection for her, and the Queen, who regarded Wilcox as a naughty but harmless hothead, forgave easily. Wilcox's criticism of the Queen had always centered on her advisors, that “half-Tahitian blacksmith,” Charles Wilson and “half-caste cowboy,” Samuel Parker,⁴⁶ the implication being that had the Queen listened to wiser counsel, much of the turmoil of her reign could have been avoided. Certainly, Wilcox was totally at odds with the “mission boy” Provisional Government established after the overthrow. In this light, Wilcox's return to the royalist camp has its rationale.

No longer a legislator and out of favor in government circles, Wilcox considered other options. Chinese friends recruited him as a mercenary for the wars in China, and he booked passage for Peking. But then arose another opportunity to change the course of Hawai‘i's destiny. “I am a revolutionist,” he had announced as his manifesto,⁴⁷ and in 1895 he took up arms, not for China but for Hawai‘i.

“There are revolutions, and revolutions,” wrote the compassionate friend of Hawaiians, Nathaniel B. Emerson, as he reflected on the years he had witnessed in Hawai‘i. “A broad distinction is to be made between the factional pulling and hauling [in Spanish America] and that earnest protesting uprising which makes for a broader justice.” Emerson classed the 1895 revolt in the latter category.⁴⁸

The revolt was conceived by others, Samuel Nowlein, in particular, and Wilcox, questioning the military soundness of the plan, at first hesitated to join. Four hundred rifles and a hundred pistols were to be landed secretly, Nowlein explained to Wilcox, and buried in the sand at Waimānalo until needed. Hawaiian forces were to gather and march on the Provisional Government. Provisional Government President Sanford B. Dole, National Guard Commander J. H. Fisher and Minister of the Interior James A. King were to be arrested. The Queen would be restored. She would have a new constitution and a new cabinet, with Robert Wilcox as Minister of Foreign Affairs.

⁴⁵ *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, December 1, 1900, p. 1.

⁴⁶ Liberal Party rhetoric as quoted by Kuykendall, *Hawaiian Kingdom*, v. 3, op. cit. p. 528.

⁴⁷ Wilcox to Blount, *Blount Report*, p. 1015.

⁴⁸ Nathaniel B. Emerson papers on 1895 revolution, Robert Van Dyke Collection, partial copies at HMCS, including interview with Wilcox. Albertine Loomis's *For Whom Are the Stars?* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1976) is the standard secondary account of the revolution.

“What of cannons?” Wilcox asked.

There were none, said Nowlein, and Wilcox concluded that the scheme had scant chance of success.⁴⁹ Wilcox kept the plan a secret from Theresa as he had once concealed a revolutionary plot from his first wife, but did seek counsel from his friends.

“They want to make you a cat's paw,” advised one friend, and went on to despair for the Hawaiian people, “who talked but never did anything.”

“What would you advise me to do?” asked Wilcox.

“You are in a bad position,” said the friend, “being a Hawaiian, to stand aside and look on while your countrymen are going into it.”

“That stirred my heart,” said Wilcox. “It made me feel as if my honor were touched.”⁵⁰

He enrolled in the revolt. Throughout the engagement he remained true to his conception of a military officer. His first act was to row out for the guns brought in close to shore by the *Waimānalo*. There had been delays, and the panicked *Waimānalo* captain was all for dumping the guns overboard. Wilcox insisted on proceeding as planned, thereby saving the plan from an early abortion.

On the afternoon of January 6 Wilcox rode to Ka‘alāwai near Diamond Head to take up his command. He was dressed in a business suit, with the long cloak of his Italian uniform slung over one arm. Some two hundred Hawaiians had converged at Ka‘alāwai. Trying to bolster their courage for battle as they cleaned their weapons, many of the men had been at the gin bottles. Outraged, Wilcox smashed the bottles with his cane and endeavored to muster the men into disciplined squads. The rebels' secrets had not been well kept and shortly government police and national guard forces were on the scene to rout the Hawaiians. The rebels made a stand on Diamond Head for a time. Firing was fierce on both sides, but miraculously only three men were killed during the skirmishes. It was soon obvious that the rebels' cause was lost. Wilcox and a group of some fifty left the scene and, using ancient and secret trails, made their way to Pālolo Valley and from there over the ridge to Mānoa Valley. Government forces pursued them, and in the haste to escape, Wilcox let fall the Italian cape from his shoulders. It lay in the dust of Mānoa Valley, until it was claimed later as a war trophy by government soldiers.

Wilcox and his gradually diminishing forces hid out in the upland ridges above Honolulu for

⁴⁹ Nathaniel. B. Emerson papers. Interview with Wilcox.

⁵⁰ Ibid. Interview with Wilcox.

two weeks, living on wild fruit and occasional donations of food from supporters. One camp follower cooked her pet dog for the half-starved men.⁵¹ In Honolulu government forces were filling the jail with captured rebels and royalist sympathizers. When all hope was lost, Wilcox came down through Nu‘uanu Valley to surrender. He expected that he would be shot on sight.

The Provisional Government had declared martial law and now proposed to try the rebels by military tribunal, to prevent the chance that an ethnic jury might refuse to convict the Hawaiian rebels. Many of the rebels spouted fountains of information in a play for clemency. Wilcox declined to play this game. An impressive list of citizens, including a number of haoles and the Queen herself, were tried and convicted of treason. The tribunal sentenced Wilcox and five other ringleaders to be hanged.

The final decision in capital cases rested with President Dole, and after much consideration Dole commuted the sentences of the ringleaders to long terms of imprisonment at hard labor. By the end of the same year, yielding to popular sentiment that the uprising was a political and not a criminal act, Dole released all the prisoners. Wilcox pledged the government that he “would not abet or join any more to any move of any sort against the Republic.”⁵² He kept his word. So ended his career as a revolutionist.

Released, Wilcox turned to peaceful pursuits. He opened a surveying office, appealing to a native Hawaiian clientele by advertising in the Hawaiian language press.⁵³ His domestic affairs were now also at peace, and Honolulu residents commented on his touching devotion and attention to his two children. Politics however remained as a controlling force of his life, and in 1900 he traveled to Washington to lobby for the rights of Hawaiians.

Hawaiians feared that the old “mission boys” would influence framers of Hawaii's Organic Act to retain the property qualification for voting rights. Prince Jonah Kalaniana‘ole and others raised nine hundred dollars to send Wilcox to Washington to fight for fairness for Hawaiians. “W. O. Smith and A. S. Hartwell were on the spot before me,” Wilcox recalled, “working tooth and nail to shut out the native Hawaiians from the right of franchise. ... I was asked by members of Congress what I should like done in the matter of qualification, and I said I would rather see an

⁵¹ Towse, Edward. *The Rebellion of 1895: A Complete History of the Insurrection against the Republic of Hawaii: List of Officers and Members of the National Guard of Hawaii and the Citizen's Guard*. Honolulu: Hawaii Star, 1895.

⁵² Loomis, *For Whom Are the Stars*, p. 220, quoting Wilcox's appeal for release to Attorney General Smith.

⁵³ *Oiaio*, March 6, 1896, p. 3.

educational qualification.... What happened? My advice was followed.”⁵⁴

In 1900 Wilcox, representing the newly formed Home Rule Party, ran successfully as Hawai‘i's first representative for the United States Congress, the highest elected office in the newly-formed Territory. That Wilcox won this high honor is an indication of the enormous popular esteem with which he was held despite his several reversals. The pride his Hawaiian supporters demonstrated at the outcome of the election was matched in intensity by the indignation and shock of his opponents in Hawai‘i's haole community. Readers of Lorrin Thurston's *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, which had run a venomous campaign against Wilcox, could scarcely believe the headline: “Bob is off to Washington!”⁵⁵

On the night before Wilcox's departure, two thousand Hawaiians marched with torches down King Street to Kaumakapili Church. The old church had burned down in the Chinatown fire of 1900 leaving only blackened walls. Wilcox and his wife sat on a platform erected for the occasion in the midst of the ruins. The torch bearers stood around the platform shining fire-light so that Wilcox could be seen from the far reaches of the crowd. In front of the platform dancers sat cross-legged wearing leis and the colors and mottoes of the Home Rule Party.⁵⁶

The next day Wilcox sailed on the *Rio*. To the mission boys' displeasure, there was a final round of hulas. Wilcox wore a business suit, strands of ilima victory leis, “and his usual smile.”⁵⁷ Theresa wore a black holokū. Their entourage included servants and his personal secretary. Wilcox's elation dimmed when he learned that his old political enemy Lorrin Thurston was to be a fellow-passenger on the *Rio*, whereupon “Wilcox was furnished with an anti-sulphurous concoction,” as the *Independent* observed.⁵⁸

Arriving in San Francisco enroute to Washington, he found that Gina Sobrero plotted a woman's revenge against him. “I can never forgive the man who ruined my young life and who also deceived me into marrying him by wicked and false stories as to our future in Hawaii,” Gina wrote to an American friend in a letter widely reprinted in both the mainland and Hawaiian press.⁵⁹ “The post of honor to which he aspires in the Congress of America shall never be his, if I can stop

⁵⁴ *Independent*, July 9, 1902, p. 1, 4.

⁵⁵ *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, December 1, 1900, p. 1.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Independent*, Dec. 1, 1900, p. 2.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Quoted in *Independent*, Dec. 22, 1900.

it, and for this reason I shall soon visit your country.”⁶⁰

Gina charged bigamy, a technically correct complaint since Wilcox had remarried before the Italian divorce proceedings were final. Wilcox's enemies, led by Mr. Loebenstein of Maui and his attorney George Gear, added to Gina's petitions with charges of treason and election irregularities. Washington residents had earlier listened to miscellaneous claims of fraud and swindle registered against Wilcox by Moreno (he of the Kalākaua court) in the *Washington Bee*. A congressional committee investigated all charges but voted to clear Wilcox.⁶¹

As Hawai‘i's delegate to Congress Wilcox could introduce but not vote on bills. During his term of office, 1901-1902, Wilcox sponsored four major pieces of legislation related to Hawai‘i, none of which passed final readings. The first was a land bill which would have made Hawai‘i's public lands subject to the general land laws of the United States. Second, he proposed legislation providing for part of the island of Moloka‘i to be placed under control of the United States government and to become a reservation for all persons afflicted with leprosy, not only from Hawai‘i but also from the entire United States. A third bill addressed the problem of arid land areas in the north and south Kohala districts on the Big Island; the Kohala Water Bill would have granted the Kohala Ditch Company an exclusive commission to build the ditches, canals, reservoirs and dams that would bring new life to the Kohala area. Wilcox's final bill proposed the establishment of a system of free schools in the Territory of Hawai‘i patterned after the school system of the eastern United States. All of the proposed bills reflected Wilcox's vision of a modernized Hawai‘i destined someday, Wilcox hoped, to be an American state, but one governed internally by educated Hawaiians.⁶²

Theresa recorded Wilcox's Washington political and social doings in the Honolulu newspaper she founded, *Home Rula Repubalika*. She also used the paper to set Honolulu straight on matters of genealogy. The *Independent*, for one, was relieved that Mrs. Wilcox had taken on that particular task, observing that “few of the printing offices here are large enough to deal with Hawaiian genealogy with names of twenty two thousand words.”⁶³ Mrs. Wilcox took on another of her favorite causes in the paper, women's suffrage, inciting the *Independent* to add in the same

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ U.S. Congress, 56th, 2d session. House. Report no. 3001. Washington Government Printing office, 1902.

⁶² A detailed analysis of the Wilcox bills is in Roberta Nose's "Robert W. Wilcox, Hawaii's First Delegate to Congress," *Hawaiian Historical Review*, January 1967, pp. 346-356.

⁶³ *Independent*, November 4, 1902, p. 3.

above-mentioned editorial, “We have suffered enough from the dear ladies.”

His first term as delegate concluded, Wilcox ran for re-election in 1902. He stumped throughout the islands on a platform calling for land for Hawaiians, Hawaiian as a language of instruction in island schools, and statehood for Hawai‘i. His contemporaries called his program unrealistic,⁶⁴ yet today statehood is a reality and the Hawaiian language is alive and well in many island classrooms. Land reform programs for Hawaiians, incomplete and imperfectly administered, remain an issue.

Prince Jonah Kūhiō Kalaniana‘ole defeated Wilcox at the polls and Wilcox retired with Theresa to their home on the slopes of Punchbowl. While in Washington he was beset by a serious illness. His doctors diagnosed the trouble as an inflamed ulcer of the stomach. After treatment in a Washington hospital, he recovered to a degree, but he had confided to Theresa: “Mama, I am not going to live much longer.”⁶⁵

In 1903 urged by his friends to run for sheriff of Honolulu, he did so. On the evening of October 22, 1903, political associates came to his door to fetch him for a speech at a political rally. He was ill and Theresa protested. “Let him give his speech first, and then come home,” she insisted. “But,” said the friends, “in that case, no one would stay for the rest of the rally. They want only to hear Wilcox!”⁶⁶ Wilcox gave his speech, but when he came home, suffered another attack of the internal bleeding that had afflicted him in Washington. By morning he was dead. Theresa wailed for him in the old way on the wide lanai of their home. His death was a major news event of the day. Rumors mongers in Honolulu let it be known that he had been prayed to death by his enemies, or perhaps had been fed glass. With considerable hypocrisy, the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, his old foe, announced his passing with a large first-page portrait of Wilcox and a eulogy.



Three years earlier he had been baptised a Catholic in Honolulu's downtown Catholic cathedral. In this sanctuary his funeral was conducted with all the imposing features of a royal ceremony.

⁶⁴ See, for example, editorial comments in *Maui News*, August 30, 1902, p. 2.

⁶⁵ *Independent*, October 24, 1903, p. 3.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*



A century now has passed since the revolutionary days of the Wilcox era. It is an appropriate time for a reassessment of the man. Interest in Wilcox endures, and in 1993 a bronze commemorative statue by Jan Gordon Fisher (left) was unveiled at Fort Street Mall. The statue now stands prominently in downtown Honolulu at Wilcox Park (on Fort St. Mall), named in his honor. In 1988 Ka Lāhui Hawai‘i, a separatist group advocating Hawaiian sovereignty, invested a Wilcox descendant, six-year-old Noa De Guair, as their “ali‘i nui.”

The history books of Hawai‘i have not been kind to Wilcox. Too many of them depend heavily for sources on the nineteenth-century haole press which waged an unconscionable campaign against Wilcox throughout his career. Wilcox “fancied himself the Garibaldi of Hawaii,” writes Hawaiian history dean Ralph Kuykendall⁶⁷; to pause on the phrase “fancied himself” is to sense the ridicule intended. Gavan Daws in *Shoal of Time* sees Wilcox as a malcontent of “exotic” talents and impractical, confused dreams.⁶⁸ More specialized historians of the era, Albertine Loomis and William Russ, for example, echo the unflattering assessments of Kuykendall and Daws. Nakanaela's tribute, by conveying the sense of veneration Hawaiians held for Wilcox, tells another side of the story.

In many respects Nakanaela's book is a period piece. Modern readers are likely to react uncomfortably to such similes for Wilcox as a “blinding flash of light” or an “angel from heaven.” The similes reflect Nakanaela's belief in Wilcox's supernatural *mana*, an attribute of his ali‘i heritage. Beyond this analysis, the reader will find few clues in Nakanaela to the complexities of Wilcox's character, nor does Nakanaela solve the greatest puzzle of Wilcox's life, his role reversal from royalist, to annexationist, royalist once again, and finally, American Republican. The obvious key to the puzzle is the interplay between this particular man and the events of his era. Until 1887 the circumstances of Wilcox's life led quite naturally to his convictions as a royalist. He was born into the most secure years of the Hawaiian monarchy. An elitist European education and his marriage to an Italian aristocrat strengthened his loyalties to monarchical government. After

⁶⁷ Kuykendall, *The Hawaiian Kingdom*, v. 3, p. 427.

⁶⁸ Daws, Gavan. *Shoal of Time: A History of the Hawaiian Islands*. New York: Macmillan, 1968, p. 255, and generally.

the 1887 'Iolani Palace revolt, Kalākaua and Lili'uokalani disappointed Wilcox, and as a realist, he came to believe that the best hope for Hawaiians lay with union to the United States. His participation in the 1895 revolt seemed less motivated by loyalty to Lili'uokalani than by a sense of honor, and quite possibly, by a promise of high office in a restored constitutional monarchy.

Although his portrait of Wilcox is incomplete, Nakanaela does offer a wealth of fresh biographical detail, and a good sense of Wilcox's pre-1890 political ideals. Also, he reproduces a number of important nineteenth-century documents not easily accessible elsewhere. These include a partial transcript of Wilcox's 1887 trial, several samples of Wilcox's fiery speeches, and a little-known account of the 1887 revolution told in the words of a participant on the government side, Volney V. Ashford. Perhaps most importantly, Nakanaela tells from a Hawaiian's perspective the story of these bitter years, when a race weakened physically by waves of introduced diseases and psychologically by foreigners who boasted of the innate superiority of the white race, found in Wilcox a source of renewed energy and strength.

Ka Buke Moolelo o Hon. Robert William Wilikoki is representative of an important and relatively little known body of Hawaiian literature. Other works of this genre are Joseph M. Peopoe's *Ka Moolelo o ka Moi Kalākaua I* (Biography of Kalākaua I, Honolulu, 1891) and James W. L. McGuire's *Ka Moolelo Pokole no ka Huakai a ka Moiiwahine Kapiolani, ame ke Kamaliwahine Liliuokalani i ka Iubile o ka Moiwahine Victoria o Beretania Nui* (A Short History of the Voyage of Queen Kapi'olani and Princess Lili'uokalani to the Jubilee of Queen Victoria of Great Britain, Honolulu, 1938). The above listed honor the ali'i of Hawai'i, but others such as John Sheldon's *Ka Buke Moolelo o Hon. Joseph K. Nawahi* (Biography of Hon. Joseph K. Nawahi, Honolulu, 1908) and Sheldon's *Kaluaikoolau* (Honolulu, 1906) depict the exploits of more ordinary Hawaiian citizens. These works, only now becoming more accessible through translations, depart from the retellings of ancient legends or recastings of western stories into the Hawaiian language, and instead show Hawaiians claiming their places in a larger, multicultural world, while at the same time holding to their own traditions.

Aloha i ka 'āina, aloha i ke ali'i, aloha i ka lāhui. Love and respect for the land, love and respect for the ali'i, love and respect for the nation of Hawaiian people. These are the underlying themes of Nakanaela's tribute to Wilcox. The values have endured, and are central to the vocabulary of many in modern Hawai'i who continue to work for the perpetuation of the Hawaiian cultural identity.

Translator's Note

Included in *Ka Buke Moolelo o Hon. Robert William Wilcox* are many place and personal names, some in the traditional Hawaiian forms, others in Hawaiianized English. In an effort to convey the flavor of the Hawaiian text as well as to document this aspect of nineteenth century Hawaiian linguistic practice, I have retained Nakanaela's renderings and have included the English names in brackets. Wilcox is sometimes called by his English name, but often by his Hawaiian one, Wilikoki. As does Nakanaela, I have used both forms.

The concepts of aloha 'āina, love for the land, and lāhui Hawai'i the nation of Hawaiian people, are part of the shared vocabulary of those who live in modern Hawai'i. I have preferred to leave these terms in their Hawaiian forms.

Many other Hawaiian words are now a part of the English vocabulary. Among these are hula, kahuna, ali'i, and haole. In this translation I have italicized only the more specialized and less familiar Hawaiian terms.

photo credits:

cover photo. Wilcox statue (detail). Tom Brown, University of Hawaii photographer.

p. vii. Turin school photo, Morris family collection.

p. viii. Gina Sobrero. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gina_Sobrero_with_daughter.jpg

p. xv. Theresa Laanui. http://www.wikiwand.com/en/Theresa_Laanui

p. xvi. Robert Kalanikupuapaikalaninui Keoūa Wilcox. Ibid.

p. xxii. Pacific Commercial Advertiser, October 24, 1903, p. 1.

<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85047084/1903-10-24/ed-1/seq-1/>

p. xxiii. Wilcox statue. <http://www.pacificworlds.com/nuuanu/onwards/ceremony.cfm>