

Robert Louis Stevenson And The Pearl Harbor That Didn't Happen

Contributed by Admin
Tuesday, 21 October 2008
Last Updated Thursday, 04 December 2008

The photo was grainy, as most newspaper photos were in 1941. The fact that it had been reproduced from one printed in a Honolulu daily two weeks before may have contributed to its poor quality. However, there was no mistaking the man and woman who stood in regal finery, hands raised in that half wave royalty seems to favor-hesitating to award a complete gesture of friendliness.

The caption barked its message in capital letters: THE CROWN PRINCE AND PRINCESS KAIULANI GREET THE PILOTS RECENTLY RETURNED FROM JAPAN'S SUCCESSFUL 7 DECEMBER AIR ATTACK ON SAN FRANCISCO.

Unbelievable? Of course. It never happened. But it might have.

Only the strong will of a beautiful young woman may have kept such a photo op from occurring. And perhaps some advice from Robert Louis Stevenson had stiffened that resolve.

The American government reconstructed the South after the Civil War and began to flex the muscles of westward expansion. And the Hawaiian monarchy, under pressure from its own Caucasian advisors and external foreign siege, looked for an alliance with a foreign power that would protect the Island nation from a predatory European or American take over.

Amid the political turmoil, Stevenson arrived in Honolulu from his first South Seas sojourn in January of 1889, ill and under pressure from his London publisher to finish *The Master of Ballantrae*.

His reputation having preceded him, many new friends made demands on his time and health. King Kalakaua, known as Hawai'i's 'Merrie Monarch', a writer of poetry and song lyrics himself, became an early friend and introduced Stevenson to a fellow Scotsman, Mr. Archie Cleghorn.

Cleghorn, a wealthy merchant, like several at the time, had married into Hawaiian Royalty and upon the birth of his first legitimate daughter named her Victoria Kawekiu Lunalilo Kalaninuiāhupāhupā Kaiulani. To the world she was to be known simply as Kaiulani. She was the last hope for the Hawaiian Monarchy. The only male heir had died as a child.

The King, running a monarchy long under duress, had looked early on in desperation to the East for the one nation that might be able to stand against the Imperialism of the West. It was the growing Imperialism of Japan. Consequently he had made diplomatic inquiry about the possibility of a marriage between the Japanese Crown Prince and the child princess, Kaiulani.

The Japanese replied that their infant prince was already betrothed.

When Stevenson came to visit the Cleghorn home in Waikiki, Kaiulani was almost 14 years old. His entourage at that time included his wife, Fanny, his mother, her maid and his stepson, Lloyd. After six months in the crowded confines of the yacht *CASCO* and the stress of ocean voyaging, the relative peace of the huge banyan tree in the Cleghorn yard became a regular refuge. There Stevenson sat enthralled the young princess with stories about the great world that was beyond her limited experience, but not her imagination. And knowing that she was to go soon to London for school, he took a lot of time to prepare her for that much wider world.

Kaiulani also had the experience of meeting two very independent women. Mrs. Stevenson, Fanny, had met the writer in Paris in 1876 while in mourning for a lost child and estranged from her husband. She was an art student escapee from the Indiana frontier. After their marriage in San Francisco in 1880 she brought her frontier survival skills into making RLS's literary goals a reality. Stevenson had been ill from the moment they had met and the efforts of she and his mother made possible his subsequent successful trip to Polynesia. And perhaps they were indirectly responsible for his growing literary success in that they provided the locus that allowed him to work. Between 1880 and 1887 his reputation had blossomed with the publication of *Treasure Island*, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *Kidnapped*.

Kaiulani probably had a crush on this strange pale man who spoke like no one had ever spoken to her. She had learned to read early and had had more than competent tutors--so poetry in that Romantic era was not new to her. To have had a personal poet was not lost on her.

Kaiulani departed for school in England in May 1889. She was still saddened by her Mother's early death in 1887 and the prospect of being away from family and friends in a strange country weighed heavily on her. Stevenson's famous poem

was intended to assuage her concerns*.

With the death of King Kalakaua in 1891 the threat to the crown was even greater.

Queen Liliuokalani wrote Kaiulani urging her to make contact with the Japanese Crown Prince, for the two royal children were both at school in England. She hoped that a personal relationship might work where diplomacy had failed.

Kaiulani, an independent woman before her time, a very modern well educated, and by now well traveled woman of 17, insisted that she could never marry a man she did not love. And no amount of royal pressure made her change her mind.

Is it a stretch to think that Stevenson's early influence might have begun to shape that independence? Or how about that of Fanny? Or Stevenson's gutsy mother, who always insisted on being referred to, in the Victorian manner, as Mrs. Thomas Stevenson?

The American government, needing a coaling station to refuel its fleet-which now had oppressive obligations in the new American colony in the Philippines-seized control of the Hawaiian Islands in 1898. The widowed Queen Liliokalani was placed under house arrest and the Hawaiian Monarchy was at an end.

Kaiulani returned to the Islands, became ill, and died in 1899.

The rest-as the unfortunate saying goes-is history.

But, what might have been a 'Pearl Harbor' of San Francisco, had Kaiulani married into the Japanese royal family, was prevented.

*Forth from her land to mine she goes.

The island maid, the island rose,
Light of heart and bright of face:
The daughter of a double race.
Her islands here, in Southern sun,
Shall mourn their Kaiulani gone,
And I, in her dear banyan shade,
Look vainly for my little maid.
But our Scots islands far away
Shall glitter with unwonted day,
And cast for once their tempests by
To smile in Kaiulani's eye.