

King David Kalākaua

In 1874 the Kingdom's legislature elected David Kalākaua to the throne when his predecessor King William Charles Lunalilo died without naming a successor.

King Kalākaua reigned for 17 years. He is credited with reviving the traditional dance form, *hula*, that missionaries had banned as immoral in the 1820's. As well, he is credited with negotiating the Reciprocity Treaty with the United States, which secured important trade advantages for Hawaiian sugar. The Reciprocity Treaty resulted in rapid expansion of the sugar plantations, and the importation of approximately 55,000 foreign contract laborers during Kalākaua's reign.

Kalākaua's reign also saw the enactment of the so-called Bayonet Constitution in 1887. Prior to the enactment, sugar planters and businessmen blamed Kalākaua for the Kingdom's growing debt and accused him of being a spendthrift. Some wanted him to abdicate and name his sister Lili'uokalani to the throne. Others sought to end the monarchy with annexation by United States. Those in favor of annexation formed the Hawaiian League. Many Hawaiian League members belonged to a volunteer militia, the Honolulu Rifles, which officially served the Kingdom, but secretly acted as the league's military arm.

While seeking medical attention in San Francisco for his ailing health, Kalākaua died in 1891 at the age of 54. At the time of his death, the 1890 census counted approximately 35,000 native Hawaiians, who represented 38 percent of the population. In contrast, the 1853 census counted approximately 70,000 native Hawaiians, who represented 96 percent of the population.

1. An undated photo of King Kalākaua.
2. A photo from a party in 1889, honoring the writer Robert Louis Stevenson's visit to Hawai'i. Among those attending were, seated from the left, Robert Louis Stevenson, Princess Lili'uokalani (King Kalākaua's sister and successor to the throne), King Kalākaua, Mrs. Thomas Stevenson (the author's mother).

