



# The James Shaw Family A Hawaiian Musical Dynasty



## Part 1

By Gregg Miner

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In 1893, the Chicago public – and mainland America – got their first tangible

Hawaiian “history lesson” at the Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition. Smack in the middle of the segregated outdoor “Midway Plaisance,” native Hawaiians were put on display – along with other “cultures of the world” – by the museum’s Anthropology Department. In the Hawaii exhibit area, visitors were treated to live entertainment by a genuine hula dance troupe, a native vocal quartet, and an “active volcano” in the elaborate *Kilauea Cyclorama*.

Continental Americans ate it up. The Cyclorama itself was such a hit that it was dismantled, packed up and shipped off to San Francisco, where it would next entertain visitors for the California Midwinter International Exposition in the first half of 1894.



Twenty-seven-year-old James Edmonds Shaw of Honolulu was a painter by occupation and a part-time musician with a beautiful falsetto tenor voice who played the taropatch. He had been slated to travel with the quartet of singer-instrumentalists for the Chicago World Expo engagement but was passed over for reasons unknown. And so, he regretfully bid *bon voyage* to his replacement and the other musicians – all four his musical colleagues and friends.

When the cyclorama next traveled to the San Francisco fair, the same Chicago quartet followed, performing in the building as before. But in addition, for *this* extravaganza, an entire “Hawaiian Village” complete with grass huts and small “lake” had been built adjacent to the cyclorama building, where a few dozen native Hawaiians would live while entertaining the public full time.

How delighted James Shaw must have been to have been selected as one of the village musicians! Joined by his wife and two-year-old daughter, he would take up residence for the five and a half months of the fair in the small Hawaiian Village that his fellow natives would help construct.

In the 125 years since, little has been written about this event – the second Fair appearance of Hawaiian musicians on the mainland – which would make such an impact on our musical culture. Similarly, the musicians who performed at each subsequent World’s Fair have been under-researched by today’s scholars, and musicians at this key, early San Francisco event had never been identified.

James Shaw became a professional musician at a young age singing for the king himself. He would go on to perform in several Hawaiian groups that played the mainland at subsequent World Fairs and Expositions. Eventually he would lead his own family in full-time performing, with several of the Shaw children finding success on their own (one of them becoming a Hollywood movie star). Many of Shaw’s and the family’s fellow band members and friends include important names and groups known and popular today. Yet virtually no Hawaiian music fan – nor few scholars today – have ever *heard* of James Shaw, nor his wife and their seven performing children.

This is their story.

## Out of the Attic

One day in early 2020, ukulele collector and researcher Tom Walsh looped me in to news of a recent discovery of rare historical images of early 1900s Hawaiian musicians. His reason for alerting me was the inclusion in some of the photos of unusual instruments including harp guitars, my particular specialty. I was anxious to identify the instruments and learn of their provenance, but I quickly became much more interested in learning about the fascinating musicians in the images. *Who were they?* I had barely heard of or recognized a single one.



I asked Tom for more information and any additional images, while simultaneously forwarding them to Hawaiian music expert Les Cook for help in identification, career info and dating. What started out as an enjoyable little personal project of “identify that instrument” with simple notations of “who played them” quickly turned into a much bigger project – the story of the musical Shaws. When I discovered that they had crossed paths and performed with many important Hawaiian musicians – yet were virtually unknown to Hawaiian music scholars – I knew I was sitting on a gold mine.

And so, I soon found myself on the phone with the owner of this priceless trove, Winifred (Wini) Matteson. It turned out they these musical performers were her great-grandparents, great-uncles and aunts, along with her grandmother, Wini Shaw – the movie actress whose name she shares and whose life and career she has researched. Winifred has worked hard to ensure the family is well-represented on Ancestry.com, and continues to investigate all questions and leads. She proved indispensable for providing records along with identification of her ancestors, relatives and some of their many friends and colleagues. Meanwhile, a growing team of Hawaiian music experts helped identify performers in the images and fill in some of their history.

I began to wonder if the Shaws had escaped notice simply because they never recorded.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, today’s interest in Hawaiian music and musicians stems primarily from the *music* itself – from the most popular recordings to the most obscure 78s. Identifying these musicians and their recorded output comes next in the research, with career details and images following. Thus, with no existing 78 records to trigger fans and scholars to “work backwards,” the story of the Shaws remained almost completely off the radar, with any and all photographs and ephemera passing down through the family’s descendants, where it was long-lost in a garage attic until miraculously rediscovered in 2017!

Here then, are the illustrated highlights of their story, arranged into three separate articles. Part 1 includes background on this project, the early World’s Fair appearances by Hawaiians, and James Shaw’s place within these musical circles as a soloist. Part 2 will explore the entire Shaw family as they make music together and separately. Finally, Part 3 will explore their many musical friends and colleagues and conclude with an Appendix that examines some of the rarer stringed instruments.

I’d like to continue now with some personal acknowledgments and notes about sources.



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<sup>1</sup> Actually, one of the sons – Eddie – did eventually record, and under his own name. See Part 2.

## Preface

The moment I realized the size of this windfall, I knew I had to call in the big guns. I was simply out of my element. My main connection to the network of Hawaiian music fans and scholars is Les Cook, a wonderful gentleman who runs Grass Skirt Records. He and friend John Marsden (both with decades of experience and amassed photographs and ephemera at their command) proved indispensable with identification help, while uncovering numerous new threads to expand this research. Les also introduced me to Kilin Reece, whose recent research into Mekia Kealakai (a key Shaw colleague) and other help proved indispensable. Finally, Les recommended a couple of critical books that I was missing in my library – the updated 2012 *Hawaiian Music & Musicians: An Encyclopedic History* by Kanahelo/Berger and 2016's *Kika Kila: How the Hawaiian Steel Guitar Changed the Sound of Modern Music* by the Smithsonian's John Troutman. I also dug out my copy of *Ukulele: A History* by Tranquada and King (2012) and anything else that covered steel guitars or ukuleles. All were amazingly helpful, offering different and numerous clues and connections, though none were remotely complete and all extremely sparse and cryptic on any "Shaw" references.

Along with the challenging musician research, I also soon found myself grappling with the psychology and politics of the early period of 1890-1910 Hawaiian music. I simply hadn't paid enough attention to or remembered the cultural tribulations of that period. All the Hawaiian music books necessarily include the salient points (the overthrow of the monarchy and ultimate annexation), as the evolution of the musical instruments and their use, along with the careers of the singers, dancers and instrumentalists were inextricably tied to this complex history. The majority of Hawaiian musicians sided with their traditional culture through the King and then Queen (though even this culture was already becoming rapidly Westernized).<sup>2</sup> Determined to wrap my head around this era, I found additional books to be extremely helpful. The following books (there are many other written histories of course) enabled me to better comprehend this critical period: *America Goes Hawaiian: The Influence of Pacific Island Culture on the Mainland*, by Geoff Alexander (2019); *Johnny Wilson: First Hawaiian Democrat* by Bob Krauss (1994); and *Aloha America: Hula Circuits Through the U. S. Empire* by Adria Imada (2012). All three books detailed and clarified the "overthrow" years and all included the stories of Johnny and Jennie Wilson. The latter provides much background and depth to the world fairs that are such a large part of the Shaw story, while Johnny is directly tied to the circle of key musicians surrounding the musical world of James Shaw.

Hoping to give the reader just a bit of that history and "local color," I thus begin this story with the fascinating object that at the time overshadowed *all* of our musicians: that fake volcano.

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<sup>2</sup> The topic of mixed race added further complexity to my understanding of this subject. So many musicians (including the entire extended Shaw family) and other key persons in this story were *hapa haole* (half-Caucasian). "Haole" literally means any "foreigner," but in this case, it is understood to mean white Europeans/Americans. Depending on the context, it was and is typically a derogatory term.

## How to Build a Volcano



The volcano cyclorama building at the Chicago World's Fair.

Though “cycloramas” have been around since the late 1700s, they really hit their stride in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when they would often travel from city to city in the United States and Europe. Famous battle scenes seemed to be the most popular theme. By this time, three-dimensional diorama foreground components were added for more realism, blending into the painted canvas. The visitors would stand or sit in the center and take in the 360 degree view. The concept survives today in the form of Disney’s various Circle-Vision attractions at the parks and similar entertainments.

In 1888, French painter Jules Tavernier captured “the largest volcano on the face of the earth” in his “Panorama of Kilauea.” Displayed on the Islands, his 11-foot-tall canvas was arranged into a circle 90 feet in circumference. This became the inspiration for a new presentation four times the size at the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893. Lorrin A. Thurston – a volcano enthusiast whose real claim to infamy was as a major participant in the conspiracy to overthrow the Hawaiian monarchy and in helping push annexation through – was the instigator for Hawaii’s exhibit at the Chicago Exposition. He and his cronies’ goal was no secret: promote tourism, white settlement and ultimately annexation of the Islands.

Their cyclorama was indeed inspiring: 50 feet high and 400 feet in circumference. They hired Chicago artist Walter Burridge as the painter and builder, who first went to Hawaii for an alleged two-year study of the real volcano. Back home, he and his team then painted, sculpted and engineered a host of novel affects to bring the experience he remembered to life. It consisted of an incredibly huge circular painting of the mountain and 360-degree horizons (created on a dozen polygonal walls), with a sculpted 360-degree landscape containing real lava rocks brought over from the island. The spectator would walk out onto the platform smack in the middle over a “bubbling pit of lava.” Fascinating!

*The Chicago Times* said the “observation platform...places the visitor in the same position that he would occupy if he stood on the brink of the pit in the vast crater of the volcano. Beneath his foot will be the lakes of fire, liquid lava, foaming, dashing, leaping in the wildest confusion.”<sup>3</sup> The illusion was accomplished by various electric lights and “mechanical contrivances,” and had widely mixed reviews. Without schematics or more photos, it’s hard to fully imagine the visuals. Below we see a portion of the exhibit in its second location in San Francisco. Here, visitors hoped to feel like they were standing at the mouth of Kilauea.



<sup>3</sup> "Hawaiian Cyclorama." Accessed June 21, 2020. <https://chicagology.com/columbiaexpo/fair052/>

### Hawaiian Volcano.

Kilauea, translated into our tongue means, "The house of everlasting fire." That comes very near the definition of the inferno, but the title is rightly given, for that this name exactly suits that famous Hawaiian volcano, is recognized at once by those who are visiting the perfect reproduction in the old Gettysburg building, at 541 Tremont st.

It contains from one to 20 lakes and fountains of molten lava, part or all of which are in continuous action. The changes are constant. Old lakes vanish and new ones form. Fountains and blow holes appear and disappear, and lava flows turn night into day. To stand on the brink of a white-hot, boiling, surging, roaring lake of molten lava when the great heaving mass dashes itself against the sides of the pit, throwing 10,000 jets of red-hot liquid lava into the air like the waves of the sea, dashing against a rocky coast, is the sublimest, most awe-inspiring scene on earth. And all this is most vividly portrayed in the Hawaiian exhibition at 541 Tremont st.

The effect was cheesy to some, but spectacular to others, as in this eyewitness account from the cyclorama at its 1895 Boston location (above). Then there's the reality of the "behind the scenes" as hilariously told by this Boston reporter, with artist's renderings of the inner workings (at right).

Note at the end of the article how the writer describes the musicians having to live down in this space held up by two-by-fours, surrounded by the constant noise and junk.

From the various accounts, it's not clear if one of the quartet played the "priest," then quickly doffed his robes to come out with the quartet.

The volcano was the draw, but the enchanting strains of the native music was what visitors seemed to take home with them. In fact, the Hawaiian music was invariably singled out as a highlight and one of the most popular experiences at each fair that included the cyclorama and/or Hawaiian villages and pavilions. It is also important to note that this music was heard by *millions* of visitors.<sup>4</sup>

### MAKING A VOLCANO.

#### How it is Managed at the Hawaiian Exhibit.

#### Something of a Mechanical Puzzle as Well as a Work of Art.

#### Realistic and Picturesque Effects Produced by Odd Devices.

The representation of Hawaii's famous volcano, Kilauea, at the cyclorama building on Tremont st is quite as interesting as a mechanical puzzle as a work of art. Its construction is not kept a secret, and so far as its attractiveness goes there is no reason why it should be, because the scene is such a perfect optical delusion that to know how it is done only enhances the charm. To understand this it is necessary to go below the observation platform into the chaotic regions on the floor of the building. Here the scene appears to be a travesty on nature with disjointed cliffs and top-sided lakes looming up in the air. The details, so awfully beautiful before, become really amusing for

convince one that there is science even in the hencoops.

The lava formations illustrate the truth of the saying that simplicity of materials produce the best effects. They are built on rough wooden frames, some of them 25 feet from the floor. These are built in the most irregular shapes and covered with wire and bagging which is smirched with plaster to represent the cooled lava.

The entire foreground of the scenes is built on the wooden frames which suggest coops. One can walk around under them but it is like going through a gruesome labyrinth.

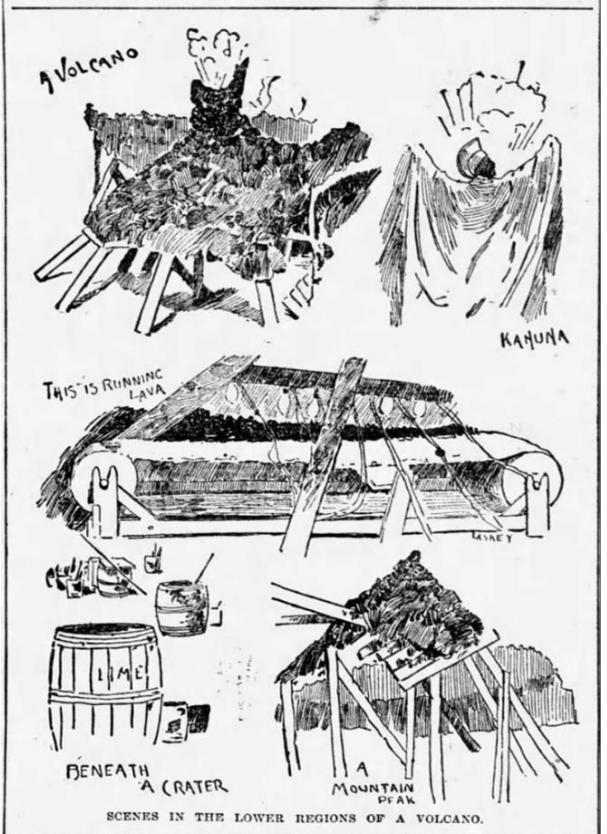
The effect of molten lava is produced by electric lights in red globes, which are operated by an alternating dynamo, giving the light a flickering appearance, as reflected above.

A most ingenious device is that by which the crevices are made to appear as though they led into the heart of a volcano. Niches are made in the sides of the structure, in which red lights are placed, and at the bottom is a quantity of gilt paper, covered with gauze, on which a bright light is thrown. The gauze gives an effect of distance, so that the crevice, which is really but eight feet deep, looks 25 feet deep.

The outside covering of the framework in the foreground is entirely of plaster, though it appears to be of various kinds of material. The variety is produced by different colored lights thrown upon it and by different colors used in the formation of the plaster.

The "lake of fire" is but a painted lake, which appears very small and uninteresting at close range. The work is so perfect in perspective that even its builder cannot tell where the real and the canvas join.

An interesting feature of the show is Kahuna, who does the chant to Pele,



SCENES IN THE LOWER REGIONS OF A VOLCANO.

their ugliness. At first the place reminds one of a mammoth hennery, or possibly a village of Congo huts with unequal hatches.

There is neither order, shapeliness nor symmetry, but apparently a quantity of rubbish thrown about promiscuously with electric lights here and there.

Mr W. F. Sesser, the manager and builder of the exhibit, can very easily

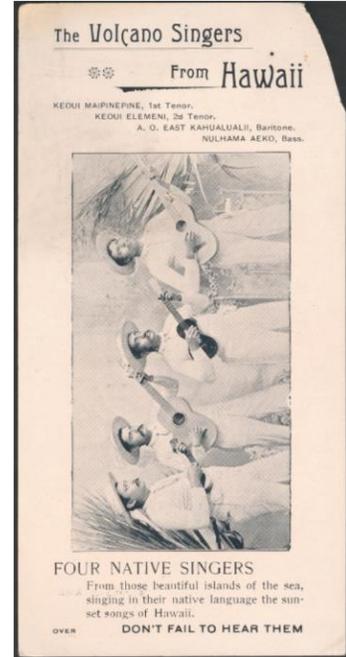
the goddess of war, on the brink of the lake. Kahuna is a full-blooded Hawaiian, and a descendant of a long line of priests, who formerly were devoted to the worship of this goddess. He has become Americanized to the extent of playing poker and dressing in the best of store clothes. Kahuna and his companions have a comfortable room fitted up inside one of the "coops."

<sup>4</sup> In its six months of operation, the Chicago Expo saw 27 million visitors – out of the entire country's population of 62 million! San Francisco's Midwinter Fair was a "mere" 2.5 million. Omaha would see only 845,000 in 1899, but Buffalo had over 8 million in 1901.

# The Volcano Singers

As the Boston quartet was the same group that made their historic 1893 American debut as “The Volcano Singers” with the cyclorama in Chicago, let’s see if we can figure out who they were.

Hawaiian names are notoriously difficult to transliterate and spell – especially when jotted down by non-native reporters. I’ve seen the Volcano Singers’ names spelled in so many completely different ways that it’s almost impossible to say which is “correct.” As James Shaw’s new biographer, it was important for me to dive into this once I felt the first nagging feelings that what had started out as an obscure, unrelated curiosity (the “Volcano Singers”) might be something more. Indeed, it turned out that my suspicions were right, and the four entertainers were Shaw’s close friends and musical partners...and would continue to be for the next decade or two. Let’s meet them.<sup>5</sup> From left to right:



<b>Hawaiian name</b>	Keoni Elemen	A. O. East Kahnalualii	Keoni Maipinepine	Nulhama Aeko
<b>Vocal part</b>	Second Tenor	Baritone	First Tenor	Bass
<b>Instrument</b>	Ukulele	Guitar	Taropatch	Guitar
<b>Anglicized name</b>	John Edwards	A. East	John Bright	W. B. (Ben) Jones
<b>Alternate names/ misspellings/ errors</b>	Keoui Elemen Elewene Eleune	A. O. East Kahualualii East Kahulu Kahuna	Keoui Maipinepine Maipine	Nulhama Aiko Leko William Aeko

<sup>5</sup> *The Honolulu Advertiser*, July 20 1893; *The Hawaiian Gazette*, Oct 10 1893; *Evening Bulletin*, July 14 1894; *The Boston Globe*, April 25 1895; *The Honolulu Advertiser*, Jan 25 1931; Tranquada, 203,n.6.

It seems I may have been the first to deduce and corroborate the English names of all four Volcano Singer members. It was fairly tricky; originally, I had Edwards and Bright switched in the image, as the sole indication of their instruments had them “swapped” (listed in error in the 1893 *Gazette* piece). I was only able to figure this out by recognizing and confirming Edwards in several later images. More problematic was when this next image was found. The rare and remarkable photograph at right was taken at the Chicago Fair in 1893 and appeared in a book of images titled *Oriental and Occidental Northern and Southern Portrait Types of the Midway Plaisance* put out by the Chicago Museum’s Department of Ethnology the following year.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, somewhere along the way the editors got their captions and images mixed up! Note the name “William Aeko,” another Anglicized variant of Ben Jones’ his given Hawaiian name.<sup>7</sup> However, this is not Jones, but rather is clearly John Bright.<sup>8</sup>



Right: Ignore the caption; this is actually a beautiful photograph of John Bright. “William Aeko” (Ben Jones) is shown below.

With enough correlation, I was eventually able to identify and corroborate Ben Jones in other images, as this series from 1893-c.1912 illustrates.<sup>9</sup>



<sup>6</sup> Thanks to Kilin Reece for the discovery of the book, held in the Library of Congress and also a digitized copy from Bryn Mawr College at this link: <https://archive.org/details/PortraitTypesOfTheMidwayPlaisance/>. This is the only Hawaiian among the ~75 half tones of “other races.”

<sup>7</sup> “William” presumably being here the equivalent of “Nulhama” – and similarly the “W.” in “W. B. (Ben) Jones.”

<sup>8</sup> This only became clear after I received a high-resolution scan of the Volcano Singers card from Jeff Carr after my initial article was published. These two are the only known images of John Bright.

<sup>9</sup> Besides my own identifications, those who have weighed in include Winifred Matteson, Kilin Reece, Les Cook and John Troutman.

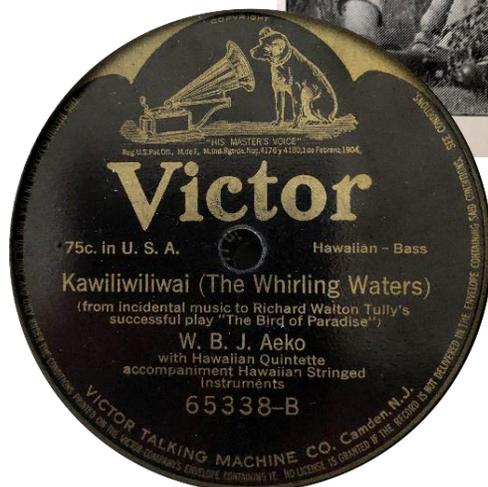
Of the four original Volcano Singers at the Chicago Fair<sup>10</sup>, Ben Jones had the bigger career; as Hawaii's most famous "basso," he was always in demand, his name appearing constantly with the top musicians, bandleaders and tours of the 1890s and 1900s.

In 1912 Jones became part of the historic Broadway show *Birds of Paradise*, the long running show that was the first to feature the steel guitar. Due to the huge popularity of the band in the play, the musicians were signed by Victor and given the name "(the) Hawaiian Quintette." In 1912 or 1913 they recorded a couple dozen tunes; three of the group appeared as soloists with the group backing them. Note Jones' artist name on his own recording below.

In this image from a Victor Records catalog, Jones is sitting with the standard guitar second from right.



Hawaiian Quintette



Jones, John Edwards, John Bright and A. East would all appear with James Shaw from time to time into 1907. John Edwards especially was one of Shaw's oldest friends; they remained frequent duo and quartet partners until Edwards passed away prematurely in 1906.

<sup>10</sup> Nearly lost to history is the fact that a second quintet later appeared at the Chicago Exposition in addition to the Volcano Singers. Hired by George Beckley of the Cyclorama Co. (Tranquada, 203, 6), this group consisted of Joseph K. Kanepau, Duke K. Kahanamoku, John Moses, William Olepau and Dibble K. Eli. Other than Duke K. (the father of the famed surfer of the same name), I never ran across these musicians' names again.

## Kini and Johnny

Before we leave the Chicago fair, there is a final topic worth discussing. To historians of Hawaiian culture and politics at the turn of the last century, there are two names of possibly greater importance and impact than the musicians in this article. They are Johnny Wilson and Kini Kapahu, later to become Jennie Wilson.<sup>11</sup>

The newly elected King David Kalākaua envisioned his 1883 coronation to serve as a call for a Hawaiian cultural renaissance. That day, sacred *hula* was performed publicly for the first time in fifty years. Though secretly practiced, it had been forced to go underground from censure by the Islands' true power – white (mostly Mormon) missionaries. The king is still celebrated today for single-handedly re-introducing the hula and initiating hula training schools. He wasn't just stuck in the past; Kalākaua was also said to be the instigator of the more modern *hula kui*, which used western string instruments accompaniment (including guitar and ukulele) in place of traditional chanters and *umeke* (gourd) players.<sup>12</sup>



One of the King's favorite dancers was Kini Kapahu who joined his troupe as a court dancer around 1888 at about age sixteen. She was one of four of the eight young dancers in the King's court that would form the group to travel to the Chicago Fair to make history.<sup>13</sup>



Kini Kapahu (Jennie Wilson) on the right with ukulele. Dancer Pauahi Pinao plays the guitar.

The Hawaiian exhibit was part of a mile long "Midway Plaisance" meant to showcase the world's non-Western so-called "cultures" – a characteristically racist affair that necessarily still warrants comment these dozen decades after the fact. Author Adria Imada said it fairly succinctly: At the Chicago Expo "a panoply of colonial trophies" was put on display. Such "human showcases of foreign and indigenous people" were a blatant means to "champion racial difference and the civilizational superiority of Euro-America." The "contrast was instructive...nonwhites were barbaric and disorderly, whites were capable of the highest technological achievements." Hawaiians, then, were simply the latest "indigenous trophies and souvenirs in a long chain of New World curiosities."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Her full name was Jennie Ana Kini Kapahukulaokamamalu Kapahu (Kanahele, 185).

<sup>12</sup> Imada, 44.; Alexander, 56.; Tranquada, 50.; Troutman, 41.

<sup>13</sup> While the Chicago fair was indeed the event that introduced the hula to America, Kapahu and her friends had actually done a short West Coast tour previously in 1892 after a San Francisco jeweler visiting Honolulu happened to see them, became instantly enamored, and then arranged the bookings himself (Alexander, 58-59).

<sup>14</sup> Imada.

Kini Kapahu was an incredibly intelligent and independent young woman who well understood her “role” in her nation’s presence at the fair.<sup>15</sup> She served as her own barker at the entrance to the Hawaiian Village, playing the ukulele and singing these lyrics to draw in the crowds:

*On the Midway, Midway, Midway Plaisance  
Where the naughty girls from Honolulu do the naughty hula dance  
The married men with their wives cast about a glance  
At all the naughty naughty doings at the Midway Plaisance*

With this, she filled their 300-seat theater five times a day. Against all odds, aware that the hula would now be about the eroticism of their bodies rather than their sacred, spiritual training, the women managed to keep all of their clothes on for the duration of the fair, while still managing to perform their sacred and semi-sacred hula repertoires.<sup>16</sup> This was of course in addition to the Volcano Singers performing their own quartet songs throughout the day in the cyclorama building. Meanwhile, each of the hula troupe’s 10-minute shows included vocals, ukulele pieces, and five styles of hula with traditional male chanter, gourd and rattle accompaniment. During the fair’s six-month run, author Geoff Alexander estimated that a quarter of a million visitor saw the show.<sup>17</sup>

At the close of the Chicago Exposition, L. A. Thurston had the entire cyclorama exhibit shipped off to San Francisco to become the centerpiece of a more elaborate “Hawaiian Village” at the Midwinter Fair. Meanwhile, the Volcano Singers and hula troupe had become so popular during the fair that they were offered a lengthy European tour. However, one of the male quartet members declined, so they instead met up with the cyclorama in San Francisco to repeat their act there. The hula troupe took advantage of the tour offer, spending 1894 in Europe, where they performed in theaters and private showings for royalty, dancing for Kaiser Wilhelm, King Oscar of Saxony and the czar and czarina of Russia.<sup>18</sup>

Back in the States, the troupe worked their way west along the dime-museum and vaudeville theater circuit. During this return tour, by utter coincidence while in Chicago in 1895, Kini Kapahu ran into an old childhood friend – Johnny Wilson, who was in town in the aftermath of managing his very own first tour – the first appearance in America of the National Hawaiian Band.<sup>19</sup>

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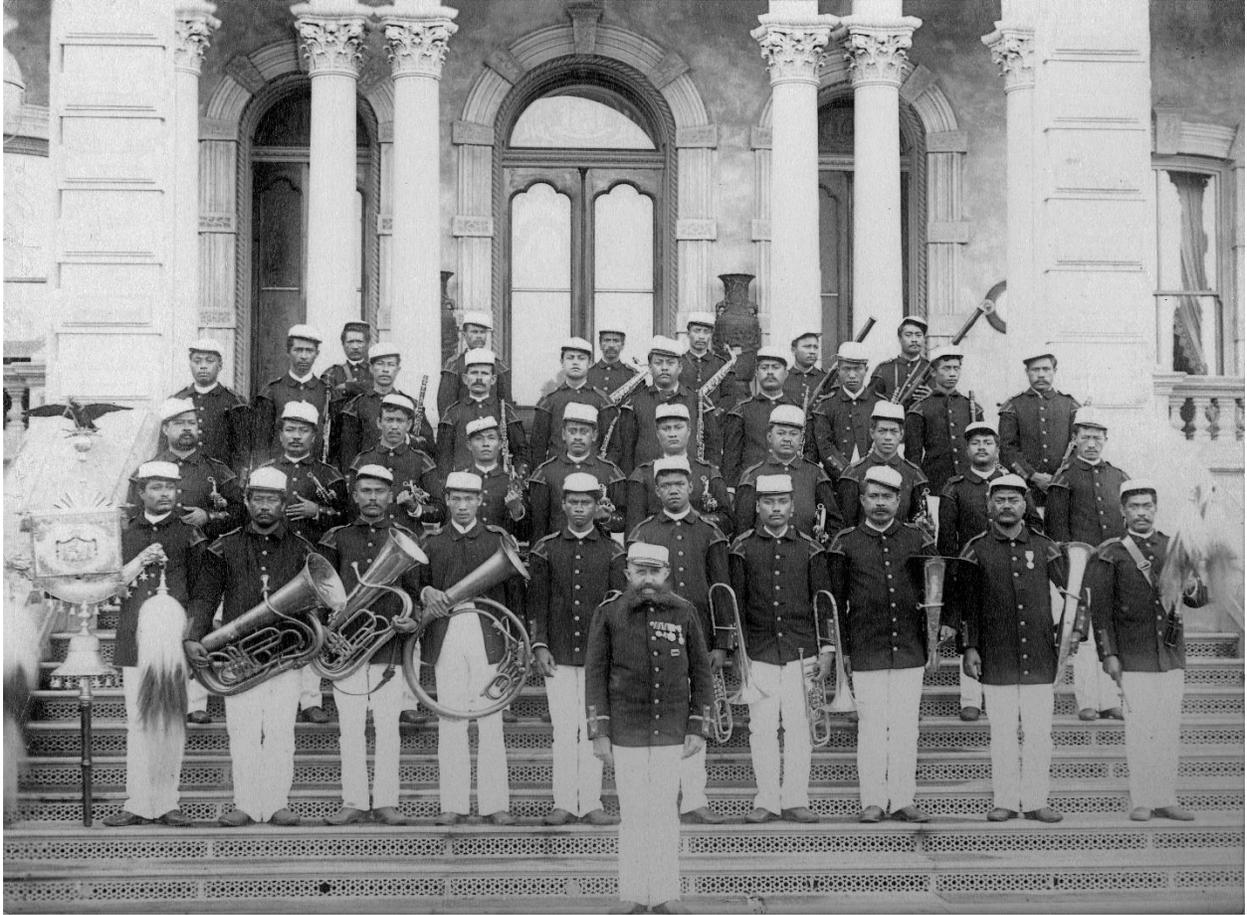
<sup>15</sup> She was said to be arrogant and imposing, with a “proud, graceful carriage” (Krauss, 20). She insisted on controlling her own destiny even as her white “landlords” were taking over her country back home. Interestingly, Kini was half-white, while her future husband Johnny Wilson was three-quarters white. Both strongly – if sometimes privately – opposed the takeover of their home and the loss of their culture.

<sup>16</sup> Imada.

<sup>17</sup> Alexander, 60.

<sup>18</sup> Krauss, 44.

<sup>19</sup> Imada, 101. The two knew each other as children and occasional playmates at the palace, where Johnny’s mother was consort to the future Queen Lili’uokalani, with Johnny growing up playing with the royal staff. The National Hawaiian Band (Hawaiian National Band, or *Banu Lahui*), was the group formed by the ex-Royal Hawaiian Band members upon the overthrow of the Monarchy in 1893 (Krauss, 40).



The Royal Hawaiian Band under the direction of Henry Berger in 1889. After the overthrow of the Monarchy in 1893 the band's loyal members would quit in protest and form the new National Hawaiian Band – the one Wilson would manage.

The two were both immediately smitten and soon became lovers – even during Wilson's brief, ill-advised marriage to a white Hawaiian society woman in 1899.<sup>20</sup> Johnny would next manage the Hawaiian Village musicians at the world fairs in Omaha and Buffalo, while Kini managed the hula troupes (though not dancing herself). The two "lived in sin" on the Village grounds at these fairs, though back home, Kini would live apart on her own island farm in Hawaii until they eventually got married in 1909 – after which she took the name Jennie Wilson.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, have many notable Hawaiian characters begun to converge: Jennie & Johnny Wilson; Johnny – as a childhood friend of Mekia Kealakai and David Nape, important musicians we'll meet soon – and in Wilson's management role of the Hawaiian bands and musicians present at the world fairs and tours afterwards. Wilson, Kealakai, Nape, the Volcano Singers members and other future Fair band members would all continue to intermingle both in Hawaii and in America...and – back to the subject of this article – James Shaw was often a common sight...and voice.

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<sup>20</sup> Krauss, 67.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 103.

## James Edmonds Shaw



Born on Maui in 1865, James Edmonds Shaw was one of seven children of John Merrill and Elizabeth "Becky" Kahaunaele Edmonds Shaw.<sup>22</sup> A *hapa haole* of English/Irish and Hawaiian ethnicity, his Hawaiian name was *Kimo Ko*, which he would occasionally use for his professional career. In 1890, he married Esther Pua Kinamu Stephenson (below), the half-English/half-Hawaiian daughter of George William Henry Stephenson and Pakekepa Batasepa Mo'o.<sup>23</sup>



Of additional interest is Esther's half-sister Rose Tribe, at left (1890–1934), the musical protégée of Queen Lili'uokalani who became a famous soprano in Hawaii.

James Shaw's listed occupation was "painter,"<sup>24</sup> but he eventually made a living – as would his entire family – performing. Growing up in pre-annexation Hawaii, *music* – singing, chanting, and notably, the Spanish guitar (the ukulele following later) – was simply part of the natural order of things. Shaw would occasionally enjoy being referred to as the



<sup>22</sup> John Merrill Shaw was once owner of the Waihee Plantation on Maui (*Seventieth Annual Report of the Hawaiian Historical Society for the Year 1961*, 50).

<sup>23</sup> Their seven children thus shared the same ancestral blend, and they and their father often appear distinctively "white" alongside their purer Hawaiian/Polynesian friends and fellow musicians. I was happy to learn that *ohana* ("family") held no color or ancestral bias among Hawaiian musicians.

<sup>24</sup> Entered on his 1900 and 1910 census forms.

“Hawaiian Caruso,” though sadly, no recordings of his highly regarded tenor voice are known.<sup>25</sup> He also participated in instrumental numbers and accompanied his own singing, originally playing taropatch, then guitar, and finally, harp guitar.<sup>26</sup>

By the age of twenty-two Shaw had made his public debut as a feature in an elaborate June 28, 1887 concert by the Iolani Glee Club. It was presented at the Hawaiian Opera House “under the patronage of His Majesty the King” Kalākaua, and included both music and costumed tableaux. Shaw performed in a quintet which included John Edwards (who would perform with the Chicago quartet a few years later), then in an instrumental trio with Edwards and a Mr. Waialeale, and finally in a vocal duet with Waialeale.<sup>27</sup> It was likely around this time that young James became a regular entertainer at the king’s court, undeniably a prestigious start to his career.<sup>28</sup>

By the early 1890s, and for years afterward, Shaw would perform with many of the Island’s most popular performers; specifically, he would become a major component of the Kawaihau Glee Club, revered in Hawaii as the finest group of its time.

1893 was a pivotal year, as the Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition would be mainland America’s first major exposure to Hawaiian culture and Hawaiian music. James Shaw was twenty-seven years old and living in Honolulu when he was announced as one of the four Exposition entertainer candidates.<sup>29</sup> In the end, however, he was not chosen. Was it due to “not being of pure Hawaiian blood”?<sup>30</sup> While this at first appeared to have been the case, the sequence of the newspaper clippings does not track, nor were all the Hawaiians ultimately chosen pure-blood themselves.<sup>31</sup> In the end, another original candidate for the quartet – “H. Ulukoa” – was turned down, with the remaining two – John Edwards and A. East – subsequently joined by John Bright and Ben Jones, as seen earlier.

Thus, Shaw *just* missed being part of history – the first appearance of Hawaiian native singers on the mainland!

But he was soon to join his friends.

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<sup>25</sup> He was actually one of three Hawaiian singers to receive that quote; John H. Ellis seems to have been more associated with it.

<sup>26</sup> He was also photographed with a mandolin and (possibly) a banjo.

<sup>27</sup> *The Honolulu Advertiser*, June 23 1887. His partner may have been the Robert Waialeale who played the 1915 San Francisco Fair with Jonah Kumalae’s group in the Hawaiian Building (Tran p. 94).

<sup>28</sup> Shaw’s presumed royal court appointment only gradually became clear from various clues. Besides the listed performance, a 1915 trade card of Shaw’s group would include the claim “lately Chief Court Entertainer.” In the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, March 17 1904, the reporter mentions that Shaw and his quartet partners achieved “no little fame during the past twelve years, and even back into the days of the monarchy.” The smoking gun was found in the *Seventieth Annual Report of the Hawaiian Historical Society for the Year 1961*, page 50, where the librarian’s report includes “We worked on such early residents as James E. Shaw, a court singer during Kalakaua’s reign...”. Finally, a photograph in the collection of the Iolani Palace appears to show the youngest image of James Shaw yet seen, playing a banjo (private correspondence with anonymous source).

<sup>29</sup> *Evening Bulletin*, July 18 1893: “Mr. T. H. Hobron is negotiating with H. Ulukou, E. Kahaulu, J. Shaw and J. Edwards, a company of native vocalists, to go to the World’s Fair...”

<sup>30</sup> *The Hawaiian Star*, July 17 1893: “Many applications have been made, but the applicants, not being of pure Hawaiian blood, have been rejected.”

<sup>31</sup> Ben Jones was the son of an American lawyer (Tranquada, p. 203) so presumably half-Caucasian. John Edwards similarly has *hapa haole* features. Additionally, the star hula dancer Kini Kapahu was also half white (though the hula troupe was possibly booked through a different agent).

## At the Midwinter Fair

On December 14, 1893, “three of the leading members of the Kamehameha Glee Club” sailed for San Francisco “to sing at the Midwinter Fair.” The names are as obscure to us today as James Shaw’s but they were undoubtedly similarly popular at the time: Matthew Kane, J. Wahinemaikai and Wm. C. Manoele, “the favorite warbler” of the Kamehameha Club.”<sup>32</sup>

Of the three Kamehameha Club singers, we know the most about Matthew Kane (right). He was born on Moloka’i in 1872, graduated from the Kamehameha School for Boys and became a successful singer/composer. He remained a popular baritone on the islands, often singing his own compositions, until his death in 1920.<sup>33</sup>



Their departure date is curious, as the fair didn’t officially open until January 27<sup>th</sup>, 1894, a full six weeks later. As announced by the Hawaiian Exposition Company, a total of ten “native singers” was planned – after these three another seven were to “follow by the next steamer.”<sup>34</sup> For reasons unknown, these next performers were delayed several weeks, sailing instead on February 3, 1894, just after the fair had opened.<sup>35</sup>

James Shaw was one of seven “Hawaiian natives” who left Honolulu for San Francisco on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1894 for the California Midwinter International Exposition. All but one had their passage paid by the Hawaii Exposition Company. Though these are the assumed seven remaining singers, all were listed by their daytime occupations.

In addition to “24-year-old James Shaw, Painter,” the others were 61-year-old B. Kanealii (farmer), three young “cowboys” Sam Kolikoli and Luther and Arthur Kaihumua, their widowed sister Emily, and James B. Pakele, a 26-year-old carpenter. Again, while not verifiable, these were likely the remainder of the ten hired musicians and dancers that were selected to replace the Royal Hawaiian Band, who had refused the request.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *The Honolulu Advertiser*, December 15 1893

<sup>33</sup> Kanahele, 475, 548. *Honolulu Star Bulletin*, July 29 1912.

<sup>34</sup> *The Honolulu Advertiser*, December 14 1893.

<sup>35</sup> Ship manifest and *Hawaiian Gazette*, February 6 1894. Curiously, the Gazette clipping specifically states “six natives” and names all but James Shaw. Yet on the ship manifest, Shaw’s name appears with the others. A final clipping lists all seven ([www.nupepa-hawaii.com](http://www.nupepa-hawaii.com)).

<sup>36</sup> *The Honolulu Advertiser*, December 14 1893: “The ten native singers will provide all the music in place of the Hawaiian band.” The Royal Hawaiian Band members were boycotting the event since the request came from L. A. Thurston, who was at that very moment helping to overthrow the monarchy. The fact that the other singers (including Shaw) seem to have jumped on the Fair opportunity is a complex topic. It’s clear that musicians, singers and dancers all seemed to side with their Queen, but are thought to have seen this as both a way to escape the situation at home, while “owning” their own destiny and presenting themselves to America without direct interference.

Confusion remains as to the whereabouts of the original Chicago “Volcano Singers” quartet during this time. Other than a notice of their return from the Midwinter Fair acknowledging that they “sang at the cyclorama,” they don’t appear by name or image in any other Midwinter Fair records. Is it possible that they were four of the “ten native singers,” rather than some of those listed above?<sup>37</sup>

Another puzzle comes from various mentions of the “Pele Quartet” – Pele being the goddess representing the cyclorama’s volcano. Nowhere is it made clear whether this quartet was the same Chicago Volcano Singers under a new name or whether it might have been an ad hoc quartet made up of the three Kamehameha Glee Club members and James Shaw, just to name one possibility. The obvious conclusion is that the original Chicago group became here the Pele Quartet.<sup>38</sup> At one point during the fair, the “nattily attired” Pele Quartet played to a crowd estimated at ten thousand, singing the English comic song “The Midway Plaisance” for an unusual encore. Regarding this appearance, *Paradise of the Pacific* reported on the success of the “sweet strains from the ‘taro patch fiddle,’ banjo and guitar skillfully played.<sup>39</sup> Additional singers believed to have been at Midwinter include the names Papahinu, Kapua and D. Kahanamoku; the latter being one of the additional singers that had performed at the Chicago Exposition.<sup>40</sup>

Lastly, one final musician needs special mention: John “Jack” Ailau. In 1893, Ailau was a newspaper printer by profession, and leader of the “Hawaiian Quintet Club” said to be “one of Honolulu’s top ensembles in the early 1890s.”<sup>41</sup> His wife Mary was hired to run the craft-making demonstrations and curio sales at the Fair, and Jack sailed with her, taking his taropatch with him.<sup>42</sup> One news clipping suggested that Ailau’s entire musical group would “probably” go as well.<sup>43</sup> It’s not yet known who his fellow musicians were, nor if any of them made the trip.<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately, Ailau – already in poor health – passed away on the ship just as they arrived in San Francisco. His taropatch was put on display and later offered for sale to the public at the close of the fair.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> If so, they would had to have sailed from Honolulu at a different time. The alternative is that they may have been a completely separate entertainment in addition to the ten village singers, as they were meant to perform in the cyclorama building – where they might have lived as they would in Boston. In that case, they could have arrived directly from Chicago. Complicating this puzzle further is that the “ten singers” were said to be replacing the Royal Hawaiian Band, but in a separate news clipping (*Evening Bulletin*, September 7 1893), Thurston was said to have been trying to get the Band to play in his cyclorama.

<sup>38</sup> Clippings with cryptic clues include the Pele Quartet singing in a parade (*San Francisco Chronicle*, March 13 1894) and singing “in front of the Hawaiian Village” (*San Francisco Chronicle*, July 8 1894). Elsewhere are references to “the cyclorama quartet” and “native male quartet.”

<sup>39</sup> Tranquada, 64. While the banjo would seem to indicate the native “Opu,” shown and discussed below, one of the Volcano Singers members could easily have doubled on the instrument.

<sup>40</sup> *Evening Bulletin*, July 14 1894.

<sup>41</sup> Tranquada, 72.

<sup>42</sup> *Evening Bulletin*, December 13 1893.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* They planned to sail on January 7th.

<sup>44</sup> Could they possibly have been any of the members of the Volcano Singers/Pele Quartet?

<sup>45</sup> *The San Francisco Examiner*, June 17 1894, p. 13 (taro patch sale); *The Hawaiian Star*, January 27 1894 (death). Honolulu Advertiser, December 12 29 1893: “Mrs. Ailau will be in charge of natives manufacturing mats, fans, leis, seed and shell work to offer for sale with other curios.”



The incredible recently-discovered image above shows four musicians inside the Hawaiian Village at the Midwinter fair, and we are virtually certain that we are looking at the earliest-known photograph of James Shaw, standing second from the left, holding his large 5-string taropatch.<sup>46</sup> I believe the seated guitarist is baritone Matthew Kane, while the banjo player is the colorful character named Opu who was also the resident “shark fighter, swimmer and diver.” The ukulele player is unknown, as are the roles of the other two gentlemen. Fascinated musical San Franciscans would frequent the Hawaiian Village for weeks to learn how to play the ‘taro patch fiddle’ from the “dusky player” – James Shaw?<sup>47</sup>

I wonder how much Shaw and the other Village musicians managed to mingle with the more formal quartet just next door in the cyclorama. Were they managed under different agents? Were they allowed to get together to entertain themselves or the public? So far, we have no real indication of any interaction, which is surprising, since Jim Shaw was a friend of all four quartet members.



Right: An original 1890s taropatch.

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<sup>46</sup> The 5-string taropatch (originally spelled as two words, and before that known as the “taro patch fiddle”) was a new Hawaiian instrument developed from the introduced Portuguese *raja*, just as the more commonly known ‘ukulele came directly from Portugal’s *machete*.

<sup>47</sup> Tranquada, 64. The taropatch player *could* have been Bright or Edwards from the cyclorama quartet, but it seems to make more sense that it would have been Shaw, who was hanging out in the village full time for his role in the fair.

We also don't know if the volcano singers – now the “Pele Quartet” – lived in the village with their friends or had their own space in the adjacent large cyclorama building, as they would the following year in Boston. The other couple of dozen native denizens would all live in the small pseudo-village that had been shipped over in pieces and constructed and decorated with their help. The elaborate village consisted of several grass huts, a performance theater and bandshell, a craft demonstration and sale building, and even a miniature lake for swimming, diving and canoeing demonstrations (but apparently no shark fighting). Over several weeks, the Hawaiian Exposition Company – led by L. A. Thurston – had been sending the finished huts and vast amounts of other building and raw material for some time. This (paraphrased) list from Thurston to his government described in some detail the plans and elaborate elements:<sup>48</sup>

- Utilize two acres of the Fair's grounds.
- Constructed on the general principle of the Chicago Fair village exhibits.
- The Kilauea Cyclorama from Chicago reproduced even more elaborately.
- A lake 100' x 60' x 4' deep for swimming and canoe exhibitions.
- A village of grass and coconut leaves with about ten houses.
- 200 ferns, royal and sago palms and 1000 bamboos.
- A coffee and refreshment stand with capacity for 300 people facing both the village and outer court.
- A main exhibition hall 50' x 35' with veranda on three sides for general exhibits.
- A live fish aquarium for exhibition of Hawaiian fish. “Over 50 varieties have been procured and are now thriving in captivity and a contract has been made for the catching and delivery of a man-eating shark not less than ten feet long”<sup>49</sup>
- A hall for music and dance performances and a bandshell.
- Sleeping and eating accommodations for up to 60 villagers who will live on the grounds.
- Installation of dedicated electric lights of 800 bulbs along with 500 decorative oil lamps.
- Loans of additional exhibit items such as paintings, fish, fruit and flowers, a coffee growing exhibit, a lava collection and an 800-photograph collection.
- Loans from government offices of additional exhibition material such as foreign documents, maps, stamps and money, school books, portraits, furniture, apparel and other relics of “past kings, etc...more particularly the feather cloak.”

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<sup>48</sup> *The Honolulu Advertiser*, December 29 1893.

<sup>49</sup> (Presumably a playmate for Opu; it does not seem to have made the trip.)



**ENTRANCE TO HAWAIIAN VILLAGE.**—Of the many independent concessions at the Midwinter Fair, there is none that in point of outward appearance is so suggestive of what may be seen within as the Hawaiian Village. The main entrance to the inclosure is, in itself, a sight well worth the seeing, embracing as it does a fine example of the style of the native builder's art, and an idea of the people and products of the far-away island kingdom. Recent events have created a desire in the public mind for a more intimate knowledge of the Hawaiian people, and the visitor to the Fair is here given an opportunity to gratify a very natural curiosity. The great arch, or gateway, that forms the main entrance to the Village, is built of native woods and bark, and is purely rustic in its general effect. Bamboo poles of great length are placed across the front of the supporting pillars, and project on either side a distance of at least thirty feet. The fence, like the gateway, is built of bark, but is surmounted by a blind made of woven leaves of the fan palm. The weaving or plaiting of these leaves is done so ingeniously that they form as complete a barrier to the sight as a light board wall. In front of the entrance is a saddle ox, bearing on his back a gray-bearded native, the patriarch of the Village. Until quite recently, oxen were used in the Hawaiian Islands for all purposes for which the horse is used by Americans. The picture also shows two of the native girls who perform the now celebrated Hula Hula dance, a form of amusement to which the late King Kalakaua was extremely partial.

The entrance to the Hawaiian Village, which reads "NOW OPEN."

Many permanent denizens of the village – including three toddlers and a pair of Hawaiian "saddle oxen" – can be seen in a dozen photographs taken during the fair.

The Exhibit Hall included appropriated belongings of the royal family, which surely must have been difficult for the islanders to stomach. Indeed, in the heart-wrenching 1894 caption to the photograph of the exhibit collection, the author writes:

"Relics of Hawaiian Royalty. – There are two empty 'throne' chairs in the Hawaiian Village at Sunset City that formerly were owned by Kamahameha and Kalakaua, and that a little over a year ago were wrested from the possession of Liliuokalani by the Provisional Government of Honolulu. In permitting the transportation of these idle baubles of a deposed dynasty to a foreign land, the new rulers of the Sandwich Islands evidently intended to give notice that these things would never again be needed at home. The native islanders who serve as attendants in the Hawaiian

Village at the Midwinter Exposition hold to a different view. They look hopefully to the time when their queen will be re-enthroned on one of these chairs, while the other is occupied by her chosen successor. In the engraving may also be seen some of the regal furnishings and the royal *kahilis* and standards, together with the marvelous feather cloak worn by the ancient kings, priceless in value. These treasures are carefully guarded by the Hawaiians who were brought hither to illustrate the conditions of life in the South Sea Islands."



Matthew Kane and Opu on either side of the hut, with two unknown musicians at left (one holds a guitar).



Left: Opu, wearing a grass skirt, plays a Hawaiian 'umeke, a gourd used as a percussion instrument.

Below: Opu the "shark-fighter" paddles his canoe. Note the Cyclorama building adjacent to the small rectangular "lake."



**I**N THE HAWAIIAN VILLAGE.—This scene in the Hawaiian Village at the Midwinter Fair is truly representative, showing as it does so many bits of the life and surroundings of the people who inhabit the far-away tropical islands in the midst of the Pacific Ocean. Back against the panorama building at the right is a native hut built of the trunks of the tree fern. Near it is an ancient war canoe capable of carrying two dozen warriors. In olden times, before white men invaded the palm groves of the South Sea Islands, bringing with them firearms and the art of modern warfare, these war canoes were used to carry native invading forces from one island to another of the Hawaiian group. They formed the navies of the savage kings. In the center are Opu and Lukia in their native canoes. The outrigger on the canoes is peculiar to the water craft of most of the island tribes. It prevents the round-bottomed canoe from being "cranky," and at the same time makes the craft easy to steer with the broad-bladed paddle which is used as a means of propulsion. The pieces of ordnance in the background are two long-range rifled field-pieces from the defenses surrounding the Queen's Palace at Honolulu, loaned to the exhibit by the present Provisional Government. The piles of sand-bags are from the same defenses. Here also is the Exhibition Hall, containing many things that help to make the Hawaiian Village one of the most interesting features of the Fair.

**From the Fair.**

**SAN FRANCISCO, CAL., Midwinter Fair,  
Hawaiian Village, April 14, 1894.**

**EDITOR BULLETIN:—**

This is to certify that we the undersigned (Hawaiians), most positively deny the assertion published in the *Holomua*, stating that we are ill treated, poorly fed, and badly housed. Far from suffering any inconvenience, we are greatly pleased with our manager, and would be happy if the Midwinter Fair would last a year or two. Had we suffered privations, we would not have remained in San Francisco this length of time. We wish it known that our manager, Mr. W. F. Lesser, is a man of honor, integrity and justice, having treated each and every member of the village with uniform kindness, more as a father than a manager:

Mrs. Mary D. Cook, Mrs. Mary Ailau, Mrs. Mary Victor, Miss Annie Reuter, Mrs. Emily Broughton, Mrs. Keoni Eluene, Keoni Eluene, John Moses Ulunahela, J. B. Cook, William Chas. Elia, H. Matthew, L. P. Kahumua, Nunu, William Vida, Mrs. Sarah Opu, Opu, Bill Kamali, Miss Rebecca Naapuawai, Annie Hila, V. B. Wahie, Hanapolapola, Pua Kahumua, James E. Shaw, Mrs. E. Shaw, Mrs. J. M. Ulunahela.

Almost two months into the fair, James Shaw felt comfortable enough to send for his wife and 2-1/2-year-old daughter.<sup>50</sup> It's difficult to ascertain the true number of Hawaiian volunteers who spent five-plus months living in their tiny "recreation" of an environment that most of them probably didn't actually come from; by my calculations, their numbers may have indeed reached the five dozen planned.

Conditions at the fair seem to have come under criticism, prompting those there to sign this testimonial to their fair treatment (see left). For better or worse, the Shaws apparently found no difficulty raising a child in this environment.<sup>51</sup>



"Little Mileka," the oldest child that lived in the Hawaiian Village during the Fair.

After the California Exposition closed in early July 1894 the Shaws returned to Honolulu, where their third and fourth children would be born – Edward (1895) and George (1897).

Meanwhile, James returned to his regular non-musical work, but his musical status continued to grow.

<sup>50</sup> Harriet, born 8/19/1891 arrived with her mother on April 7<sup>th</sup>, 1894 (S. S. Australia ship manifest). Charles, who was born 4/21/1893 must have stayed behind with family. Although six photos of the very young children who lived at the Village exist, we don't know if any of them show Hattie. All we know is that "Little Mileka," the oldest child that appears in different images was living in the village before Hattie's arrival.

<sup>51</sup> *Evening Bulletin*, April 24 1894.

## The Kawaihau Glee Club

By 1895, and perhaps as early as 1892<sup>52</sup>, a new musical organized began making public appearances in Honolulu. The “Kawaihau Glee Club”<sup>53</sup> was likely named after an earlier choral society organized by the late Prince Leleiōhoku, a talented guitarist and composer and brother of the King. The story goes that the group’s name – meaning “ice water” – was in honor of an American missionary woman who would drink only ice water (while the men drank gin).<sup>54</sup>

News clippings of the club, which occasionally appeared with Berger’s Royal Hawaiian Band, soon included the familiar names of James Shaw and his Volcano Singer friends Jones, Bright, and Edwards.<sup>55</sup> By 1897, a new name appeared; leading the Club was Solomon Hiram.<sup>56</sup>



Biographical details on Hiram are unknown. Versed in all the stringed instruments as well as trombone, he had become a popular singer by July 1898, when his life-size portrait was famously painted by Dutch artist Hubert Vos and displayed in a store window for some time.<sup>57</sup>

Solomon Hiram, painted by Hubert Vos in 1898.

By the end of 1899, the “club” appears to have settled into a stable quartet, going by the name “The Kawaihau Quintet.”<sup>58</sup> The permanent members were Solomon Hiram, W. B. (Ben) Jones, James Shaw and John Edwards.<sup>59</sup> Thus, Shaw formerly re-joined two of his old Volcano Singer friends to appear in the most highly regarded group in the Islands.

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<sup>52</sup> *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, March 17 1904. The reporter mentions the “fame” of Hiram, Jones and Shaw “during the past twelve years” (which would have been 1892).

<sup>53</sup> “Glee clubs” typically consisted of both singers and instrumentalists of any number.

<sup>54</sup> <https://evols.library.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/10524/978/OP16.pdf>. Though I haven’t come across any direct mention, I suspect that King David Kalakaua resurrected the name for the musicians – including James Shaw – that he began employing at his palace.

<sup>55</sup> *The Independent*, January 15 1897 (Jones); *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, April 5 1898 (Bright); *Independent*, April 18 1898 (Edwards); *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, April 20 1898 (Shaw, Jones and Edwards).

<sup>56</sup> *The Honolulu Advertiser*, May 15 1897. Note that Hiram did perform with other quartets and/or singers that may or may not have been officially denoted as the Kawaihau unit.

<sup>57</sup> *The Hawaiian Star*, July 1 1898. The painting was set in the window of the Pacific Hardware Company. Curiously, the reporter described Hiram with “of the old National band.”

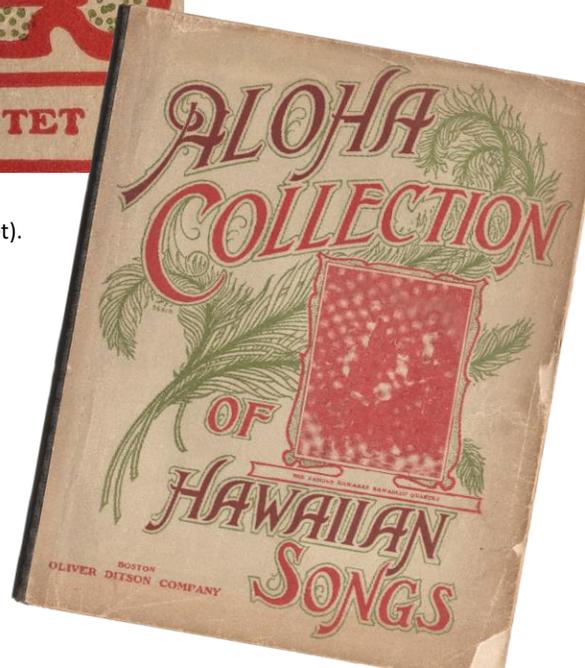
<sup>58</sup> Curiously, the term used was always “quintette” (“quintet”), whether it had four, five or six members. See the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 3-17-04.

<sup>59</sup> *The Independent*, December 29, 1898. Two other papers listed Edwards as “Will Edwards.”



**THE FAMOUS HAWAIIAN KAWAIHAU QUARTET**

From c.1899, a rare image of the Kawaihau Quintet (here, more logically called a Quartet). Seated are Ben Jones on guitar and Solomon Hiram with 5-string banjo. John Edwards is standing on the right, James Shaw is on the left. Both the latter appear to be holding larger taropatches. (Identifications are my own.)



## The 1899 Omaha Expo

After San Francisco's Midwinter Fair, the next big American fair with a Hawaiian presence was the Omaha's 1899 Greater American Exposition. By all accounts, it was something of a disaster, a money-losing attempt to re-use some of the buildings from the previous and more successful 1898 Omaha fair. Nevertheless, it included another large Hawaiian village, complete with lagoon and canoe, and 28 full-time native residents. The fair officially opened on July 1, 1899 and within two weeks had run out of money. New management kept it afloat but the event continued to deteriorate.<sup>60</sup> Though the Hawaiians had left home on July 6, they wouldn't arrive until mid-August, the material for their huts and displays following behind.<sup>61</sup>

For this occasion, the musical troupe was managed by Johnny Wilson and included eight of the top Hawaiian musicians of the time. Three of them – James Shaw, Ben Jones and John Edwards – were from the Kawaihau Quintet, who were still performing up to the end of April.<sup>62</sup> For some reason Solomon Hiram stayed behind. Others selected by Wilson included his friend, flute virtuoso Mekia (Major) Kealakai, Tom Silva, Tom Hennessey, W. H. Sea and A. East.<sup>63</sup> Also included were several hula girls and women and their chanter/umeke player accompanists, managed by



Kini Kapahu.<sup>64</sup> Shaw and Edwards brought their wives, with Esther Shaw put in charge of booths and Mrs. Edwards in charge of music. The Shaws brought along two of their children (presumably Hattie and Charles, the two oldest) while the Edwards had a daughter in tow.

Though the villagers arrived long after the four-month fair had already opened, they soon had the public enthralled with their singing, instrumental music and hula dancing.<sup>65</sup> As in San Francisco, the villagers lived on the grounds and were "fairly content, but most of them long for home."<sup>66</sup>

Left: Ben Jones, "claimed to be the handsomest man in Hawaii."<sup>67</sup>

<sup>60</sup> <https://northomahahistory.com/2015/10/09/a-history-of-omahas-greater-america-exposition-of-1899/>

<sup>61</sup> *The Independent*, July 7 1899; *The Independent*, August 15 1899. They traveled in "their special car on the Union Pacific from the west," arriving on August 13<sup>th</sup>. The material for the village followed about a week later.

<sup>62</sup> *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, April 25 1899.

<sup>63</sup> With the inclusion of East, three of the four original "Volcano Singers" – Jones, Edwards and East – were back together at another Fair, this time with James Shaw able to join them.

<sup>64</sup> Kapahu being the future Jennie Wilson. For this and the next fair, Johnny and Kini lived together ("in sin") on the premises with the other musicians and dancers.

<sup>65</sup> Tranquada, 93. "Ever since the evening the Hawaiian musicians were heard on the lagoon, they have been the talk of the town and hundreds visit the Hawaiian Village every evening for no other reason than to hear the beautiful instrumental and vocal selections of this company."

<sup>66</sup> *The Honolulu Advertiser*, September 12 1899. Whereas they had prepared their own food in San Francisco, surprisingly, here they employed a "negro cook."

<sup>67</sup> *The Buffalo Sunday Morning News*, December 9 1900.



Back row, L-R: Tom Silva, Tom Hennessey, A. East, James Shaw, John Edwards, Ben Jones. Seated: Mekia Kealakai (flute) and W. H. Sea (cello).<sup>68</sup> In front are five hula dancers and a male chanter/umeke player.

During the expo, a swimming race was held somewhere on the grounds, with entries from the various fair factions. Though “Captain Billie, one of the champions” of the U.S. competed, he was bested by Jack Inana, the Hawaiian’s umeke (gourd) player, who won the 150-yard open.

The Fair’s last day was October 31, 1899. Presumably, the musicians stayed until the end, then made their way back to San Francisco, perhaps performing there for a short time. Finally, just before Christmas, the Shaws returned to Honolulu, along with the Edwards family, Jones, East, Kealakai, Johnny Wilson and fellow musician James Kulolia.<sup>69</sup>

The 1900s saw some of the group back in California, where they played over six months around San Francisco, Sacramento and Stockton. Shaw and his friends were likely part of this ensemble.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> The Hawaiian troupe was at the Omaha Fair from late July until the end of October 1899; however, this rare image undoubtedly taken at the Fair appeared over a year later, in an article about the future appearance of Hawaiians at the 1901 Buffalo, New York Fair (*The Buffalo Sunday Morning News*, December 9 1900). The photo was likely used because Johnny Wilson would again manage the band and would utilize some of the same musicians. My new identifications are based on the known instrument of Silva (violin), the main instrument of Hennessey (mandolin: Kanahale, 619), and Sea on cello by process of elimination. The others are easily identified. It’s interesting to see the three Kawaihau Quartet members together (Shaw, Edwards, Jones) next to A. East (Edwards’ and Jones’ original Volcano Quartet partner). Only John Bright is missing! This also marks the first appearance of James Shaw and Mekia Kealakai together in an ensemble, a crossing of paths with beginnings back in the Royal Court where young Johnny Wilson played with Mekia and Shaw and Edwards and likely Jones would later sing.

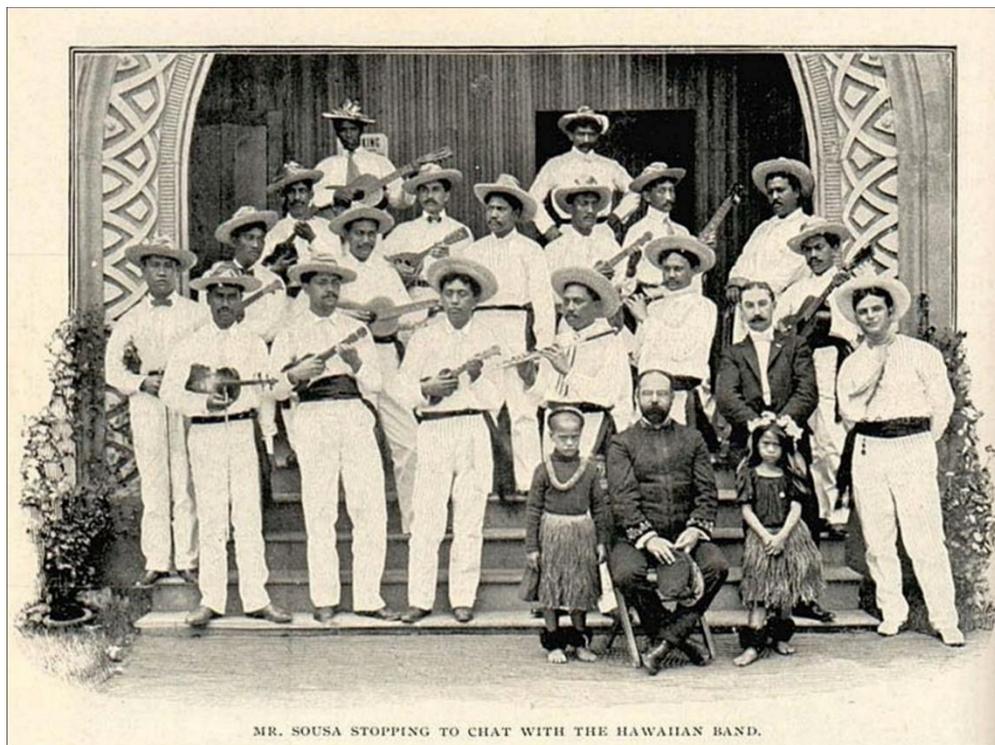
<sup>69</sup> *The Hawaiian Gazette*, December 22 1899. They sailed from San Francisco on December 22, 1899. Kulolia wasn’t part of the Omaha group; perhaps they met up with him while performing briefly in San Francisco. He would join the next Johnny Wilson tour.

<sup>70</sup> *The Honolulu Advertiser*, August 9, 1900. The article gives two names for the group, the “Hawaiian Quintette Club” and the “Hawaiian Glee Club,” while mentioning that “they” were previously at the Omaha fair. As there are otherwise no other accounts for James Shaw and his Kawaihau Quintet partners for 1900, it’s likely that they formed the core of the ensemble.

## The 1901 Buffalo Expo

Surprisingly, as 1900 ushered in the new century, America did not put on a major exposition. Instead, the country represented itself at the Paris World Fair where a small Hawaiian exhibit was part of the displays; no musicians were in attendance.

America next featured Hawaiian musicians at the 1901 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York, where once again, young Johnny Wilson managed the band. The exact number of musicians is unclear (17 are shown below), but their names collated from various sources total up to 19. Add to that the many additional participants that included hula dancers and male chanters, along with spouses, children and management. Surprisingly, while the troupe included many of their friends and musical colleagues, neither James Shaw nor any of the Kawaihau Quartet were present at the Buffalo Fair. Perhaps they had had enough of conditions in the World Fair villages and were finding better success and pay in Honolulu. The event's roster nevertheless read like a "who's who" of their friends.<sup>71</sup>



John Phillip Sousa's band also performed at the Fair, and he sought out the Hawaiian band for a visit with his favorite flautist, Mekia Kealakai, seen in front. Other faces recognizable (or guessed at) here include past and future friends and colleagues of the Kawaihau Quartet, such as David Nape (second flute), James Kulolia, July Paka, Joseph Puni and Bob Nawahine. Johnny Wilson is in costume lower right.

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<sup>71</sup> Kanahale includes a photo of ten of the members with the following names: Mekia Kealakai, July Paka, Jack Heleluhe, Dick Reuter, William McComber, Anthony Zablan, James Kulolio, Charles Baker, William Alohihea and David Nape. The Buffalo Enquirer (November 22 1901, p5) gives a different and/or additional set of names, "managed by" Joseph Puni. They include W. H. Kai, John Helehule (= Jack Heleluhe), George Kia, James Haiku, Robert Nawahine, Thomas Hennessey (and wife), George Kamakee (and son), William Holoua and Miss Abbie Clark ("instructor and the chief of the dancing girls"). Additionally, Kilin Reece identified another as William Coelho (pers. communication).



Additional rare images from the Buffalo Fair came from the estate of Johnny Wilson's wife Jennie/Kini, who managed the dancers. Above, left-to-right: James Kulolia, David Nape, William Coelho, Mekia Kealakai, William Alohihea, with July Paka on floor. Below, left-to-right: Anthony Zablan, James Kulolia, July Paka and Charles Baker.



## A 1900s Glee Club Proliferation

Shaw, Jones and Edwards continued to spend the next few years with Solomon Hiram, as popular as ever. At the end of December 1901, they travelled to San Francisco at the request of Prince David Kawanakoa, just to play at a birthday party for Abigail Campbell, daughter of a wealthy



Hawaiian industrialist.<sup>72</sup> A more elaborate production that three of the quartet took part in was a March 1902 musical costume drama put on at the Honolulu Opera House.<sup>73</sup> Also during this period, a “Kawaihau Double Quartet” was managed by Johnny Wilson<sup>74</sup>

When I first began my study of the Shaws with Wini Matteson, she only had images of James Shaw from 1915-1924, nothing before that. We’ve since unearthed the several additional images of James in earlier years. This delightful photograph was only recently discovered by Wini’s sister, who found it sitting in their father’s old desk drawer since the 1980s! It’s from about 1900 and shows James Shaw, not with an ukulele or taropatch, but an American-made *mandolinetto* (a guitar-shaped mandolin). The inscription on the back says it is “Jas. Shaw, Tenor of The Kawaihau Double Quartet, John H. Wilson, Manager.”

For James Shaw, music was still a part-time occupation. With his family continuing to grow (a total of five by 1901) he volunteered for public service as the Republican candidate for

Representative in the Fifth District, and in mid-1903 he joined the Honolulu police force, which seems to have become his permanent daytime occupation – if only temporarily.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> James Campbell, who died in 1900. The occasion was indeed special, as the Prince would marry Ms. Campbell the next week. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David\\_Kaw%C4%81nanakoa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Kaw%C4%81nanakoa); [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abigail\\_Campbell\\_Kaw%C4%81nanakoa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abigail_Campbell_Kaw%C4%81nanakoa); [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James\\_Campbell\\_\(industrialist\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Campbell_(industrialist)).

<sup>73</sup> *The Honolulu Advertiser*, March 15 1902. The play was “founded on a Hawaiian legend.” Dialog was in English, and the singers included principal actors Ben Jones, Solomon Hiram and James Shaw, with Mrs. Shaw listed as an additional actor.

<sup>74</sup> Inscription on the back of the James Shaw photograph shown above.

<sup>75</sup> *The Independent*, July 24 1903.



As we've seen, there were always a number of popular singers and musicians spread throughout the Islands. In March 1904, Hiram and his quartet saw their most serious competition arise when the Ellis brothers – William (left) and John (right) – announced a “trust” of quintets. William was an aggressive promoter, while John, just a few years into his career, was quickly becoming Hawaii’s highest-



rated tenor. By this time, the Ellis brothers were already booking three separate quintet clubs, with rumors of stealing away the island’s greatest basso, Ben Jones.<sup>76</sup> That didn’t happen. In fact, just three months later the Kawaihau Glee Club was reorganized into an 18-member group, under one Charles Hopkins, though Solomon Hiram would still be leading the musicians.<sup>77</sup>



From *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, June 8 1904.

<sup>76</sup> *Evening Bulletin* and *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, March 17 1904.

<sup>77</sup> *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, June 8 1904, *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser* and *The Sunday Advertiser*, June 19 1904; *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, July 29 1904.

In the photograph on the previous page, James Shaw can be seen holding a guitar just in front of the upright bass. The writer singled him out: “Even handsome Jim Shaw the sweet-tenored police officer will lend his voice to the club whenever possible.”<sup>78</sup> The group includes a who’s who of popular and talented Hawaiian musicians of the early 1900s: Solomon Hiram, John Edwards, Major Kealakai, Charles Palikapu, John Bright, Ben Jones and others.<sup>79</sup>

Confirmation of Shaw’s identification in the Glee Club photo was helped by this similar, captioned image from September 1904, where Shaw is shown as one of the “proposed Republican law makers from the Fifth (District).”<sup>80</sup>



In February 1905, Sam K. Nainoa, “a member and the manager of the Solomon Hiram Kawaihau Glee Club,” had his first composition published, which he dedicated to the Hawaiian Hotel. He illustrated the sheet music cover himself and included small photographs of eleven members, with their names inscribed.<sup>81</sup> While the names unfortunately can’t be seen in the newspaper image, they were listed: Hiram, Shaw, Jones and Edwards (the four members of the original quartet), Mekia Kealakai, George and John Nahoolelua, W. H. K. Keawe, Sam Kaili, James Kulolia and Nainoa.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>78</sup> *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, June 8 1904.

<sup>79</sup> I have only managed to tentatively identify a small number of the performers in the image. Complicating matters is that the members fluctuated quite a bit, so some of the well-known members named may not have been present when the photo was taken.

<sup>80</sup> *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, September 28, 1904

<sup>81</sup> The manager of the Hawaiian Hotel, Mr. Church, was also included. The inscriptions were said to be on the lei surrounding the border.

<sup>82</sup> *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, February 17 1905. I have seen the spelling of Kulolia as “Kulolio” equally in newspaper searches.

Note in the sheet music image on the previous page the white outfits. This was the debut of the group's new costumes which featured red silk sashes tied around all-white shirt and slacks with a long tie<sup>83</sup> – an iconic look soon to be featured by Hawaiian musicians all over for decades to come.

Many of the Kawaihau Glee Club members, including James Shaw, were or became occasional songwriters. At a luau at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel in March 1905, the group performed “many new waltzes and two-steps.” Several selections were by Solomon Hiram, while Sam Nainoa, John Edwards, David Nape and Sonny Cunha were each represented by a recent composition.<sup>84</sup> At their next week's gig, announced songs included two by Major Kealakai and one each by Hiram and Shaw.<sup>85</sup> On the same newspaper page, it's announced that the Ellis brothers were concurrently playing across town.

Another popular club at this time was Tom Silva's Hawaiian Quintet Club that had started playing on the mainland's west coast around mid-1904.<sup>86</sup> Interestingly, Silva – who was in the 1899 Omaha Fair band – was one of five musicians who had gone to San Francisco in 1899 with bandleader William Ellis to record the first commercial cylinder recordings of Hawaiian music for Edison.<sup>87</sup>

Summer gigs in Honolulu were said to be slow, so the Ellis contingent was happy to get a three-month hotel booking in Santa Cruz, California, arranged by Sonny Cunha. By this time, John Ellis was being referred to as “probably the finest singer in the Islands.” The group of five or six was in flux, and once again they were trying to recruit Ben Jones.<sup>88</sup> The booking was presumably successful, and they stayed in California to perform at Techau's Tavern in San Francisco in September.<sup>89</sup>

Here, I must briefly describe the remarkable and extremely varied career of Sonny Cunha, mentioned above.<sup>90</sup> Born Albert Richard Cunha on October 1, 1879 in Honolulu, he was simultaneously a student of law, star football and baseball player, golfer, tennis champ, composer, bandleader, pianist, singer, dancer and publisher – and that was all before he went into politics! At nearly six feet and 250 pounds, he was an imposing and skilled Yale athlete; after an incomplete college stint, he returned to Honolulu, where he became a popular figure in both baseball (catcher) and music. He is said to have been the first Hawaiian to compose and popularize *hapa haole* songs.<sup>91</sup> His many hits included



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<sup>83</sup> *The Sunday Advertiser*, February 19 1905.

<sup>84</sup> *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, March 24 1905.

<sup>85</sup> *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, April 2 1905.

<sup>86</sup> *Evening Bulletin*, September 21 1906 (“some past years”) and *The Honolulu Advertiser*, May 16 1907 (“has been playing the mainland for three years”). Of course, Silva himself may have remained on the west coast after the 1899 San Francisco recording sessions.

<sup>87</sup> Kanahele, 131. The other musicians of this key historic event were July Paka, Tom Hennessey, Tony Zablan and David Makuakane.

<sup>88</sup> *The Honolulu Advertiser*, May 18 1905.

<sup>89</sup> *The Honolulu Advertiser*, September 13 1905.

<sup>90</sup> Cunha sources include Wikipedia, discogs.com and selections from the over 2500 newspaper entries on “Sonny Cunha” alone.

<sup>91</sup> *Hapa Haole* (“half-white”), meaning Hawaiian music with (predominately) English lyrics.

“My Honolulu Tomboy,” “My Hawaiian Maid,” and “Honolulu Hula Girl.” From 1898 to 1903, he was a commonly seen singer, composer and piano player – but he does not seem to have met up with James Shaw or any others in that orbit. In April, 1904 he led the singers in a Henry Berger-conducted engagement of “Pirates of Penzance” at the Opera House. Finally, in June, 1904 he became floor manager of the dances put on by the newly-expanded Kawaihau Glee Club discussed previously. Cunha would



*Announcement*



**“Sonny” Cunha**  
the man who has written the songs that have brought fame to Hawaii, has joined the staff of the

**Bergstrom Music Co., Ltd.**  
Mr. Cunha will gladly greet all his old patrons at Bergstrom's and aid them in the selection of PIANOS, VICTROLAS, RECORDS or SHEET MUSIC.

In the choice of UKULELES, Mr. Cunha's knowledge of the instrument should be of greatest aid.

*For anything Musical see “Sonny”*

BERGSTROM MUSIC CO., LTD.  
1020 Fort Street Phone 2320

subsequently team up with Ellis and others as a bandleader on the mainland,<sup>92</sup> but afterwards returned to Honolulu to continue with sports and run his music publishing business.

Curiously, despite Cunha being perhaps the biggest name of those yet discussed, there are extremely few known images of him.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>92</sup> *Ke Aloha Aina*, 21 April 1906 shows Cunha having left Seattle with a band to play at the Louvre Restaurant in San Francisco in early 1906.

<sup>93</sup> The Yale catcher image is from *The San Francisco Chronicle*, August 9 1900. The Bergstrom ad is from *The Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, June 23 1917.



In June 1905 the Kawaihau Club made an appearance at an interesting event. Ernest Kaai (at left) – a name familiar to most Hawaiian music and ukulele scholars – was then running a Guitar and Mandolin School in Honolulu. This occasion was his yearly concert of students and teachers. It's interesting to note that Kaai and his students weren't then playing ukuleles, but guitars and mandolins – and that their repertoire included new American pieces. Specifically, they were playing compositions by the leading composers of the continental (and strictly white) BMG movement.<sup>94</sup> How interesting it must have been to hear Hawaiians playing American pieces by the likes of Herbert Odell and William C. Stahl juxtaposed with purely Hawaiian music by the Kawaihau Club.<sup>95</sup>

Ernest Kaai with an early 1900s Gibson mandolin, the favorite of America's BMG crowd.

As we've seen, not only were there multiple glee clubs on the Islands, but each of them appears to have had revolving members and size. Indeed, the members all knew each other or at least knew of each other, and they did have to also hold on to their various day jobs. Case example: The Kawaihau Glee Club/Quintet started under nebulous leadership, then was a quartet under Solomon Hiram. By mid-1904, it had become a large group under the direction of one Charles Hopkins, though it was still referred to as Hiram's club. In early 1905 Sam K. Nainoa was briefly manager (and would take over again later). Later that year, another reorganization took place.

On Sept 7, 1905, the Glee Club members met and voted James Shaw in as President. The other officers were W. B. Jones, Secretary; Mekia Kealakai, Musical Director; Solomon Hiram, Treasurer; and John Edwards, Manager.<sup>96</sup> It was also announced that in less than two weeks, several of the group would embark on a "grand tour of the world."<sup>97</sup>

It's interesting to note that the original four Kawaihau quartet members were given positions. But note that Hiram was relegated to Treasurer while Kealakai now took over as Musical Director. His name has come up a few times in this study; let's take a closer look.

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<sup>94</sup> "BMG" refers to Banjo, Mandolin and Guitar, the triumvirate of fretted instruments that captured the hearts and minds of serious players in America at the turn of the last century.

<sup>95</sup> Even more interesting is that a c.1907 photograph of Kaai with his students shows most of them to be young Chinese men of the Islands (shared by Kilin Reece on the "Hawaiian Music from the Golden Age Facebook page). By 1912, Kaai had become the top leader in Honolulu and included much more traditional Hawaiian music in his repertoire. *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, January 16 1912. Solomon Hiram and many other popular musicians would play with or for Kaai over the years. Kaai also led the band that played the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition in Seattle in 1909.

<sup>96</sup> *Evening Bulletin*, September 11 1905.

<sup>97</sup> *The Hawaiian Star*, September 20 1905; *Hawaiian Gazette*, September 19 1905.

It was when he was sent to reform school at the age of 12 that Mekia (Major) Kealakai (below) learned the trombone and flute during his three years there.<sup>98</sup> Under the strict discipline of Henry Berger, the German director of the Royal Hawaiian Band, Kealakai became the youngest player to tour with the 40-piece ensemble.

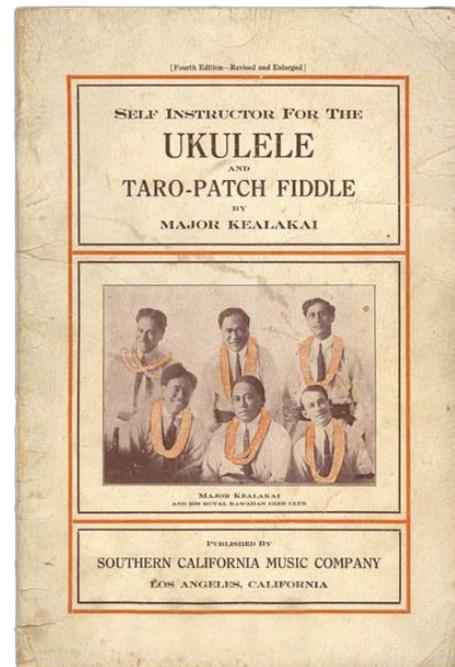
On a U.S. tour in 1895, the then-27-year-old played for none other than John Philip Sousa, who invited Kealakai to join his band, proclaiming the triple-tongue phenomenon “the greatest flutist I have ever heard.”<sup>99</sup> Kealakai turned him down, choosing to remain in Hawaiian string bands, where he could dedicate his life to helping preserve Hawaii’s culture and music.



He soon left the Royal Hawaiian Band, and was one of those chosen by Johnny Wilson to play the 1899 Omaha fair, as seen in the previous chapter. Following the close of that fair, Wilson led him and a few of the others on an Orpheum circuit tour of the States, the first Hawaiian band to play Vaudeville.<sup>100</sup>

Kealakai later also took up the guitar and ukulele, publishing a ukulele method book in 1914, and in 1934 custom ordering a set of groundbreaking Martin guitars for the Royal Hawaiian Band.<sup>101</sup>

Mekia appears front center in a photo of his band, used for his tutor’s cover.



<sup>98</sup> He was named “Mekia” – Hawaiian for “major” – after his father’s rank (sergeant major within His Majesty’s Royal Guards), Kealakai is someone whom an entire book could be written about.

<sup>99</sup> Kanahale, 459. Imada (p.303) suggests that Kealakai may not have met Sousa until the Buffalo Fair in 1901, as captured in the photo shown earlier.

<sup>100</sup> Tranquada, 80.

<sup>101</sup> *The Fretboard Journal*, #42 (2018).

And now it was planned that Kealakai would lead his fellow musicians and old friends on a long and grand world tour. Alas, they fell far short; the band instead played the West Coast from San Francisco to Spokane on a sporadic basis with rotating members from the fall of 1905 into 1907. The valuable image below<sup>102</sup> shows us the visages of the ten announced famous members; unfortunately, I am at a loss to match up more than half of them.

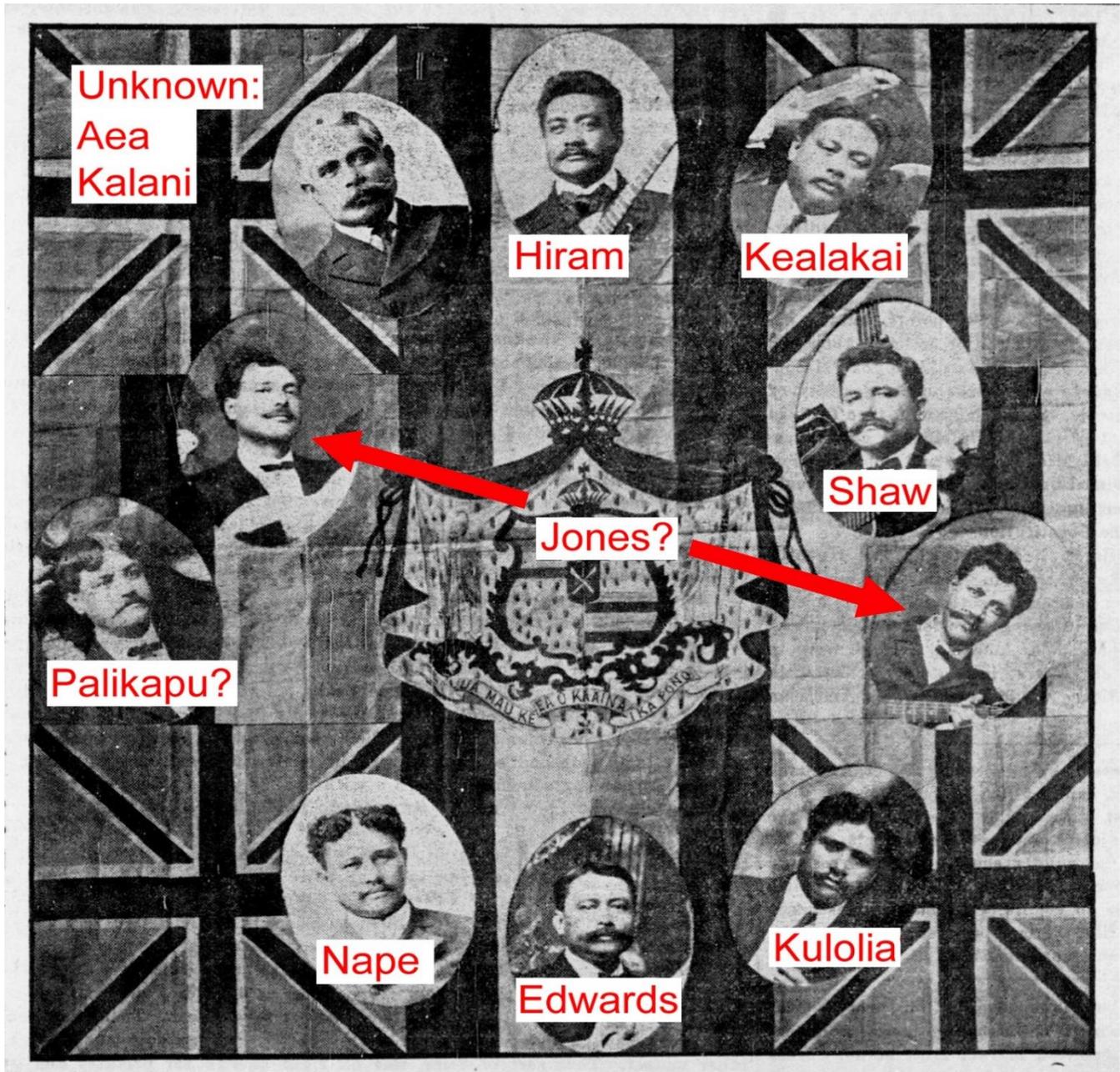


Ten names were given and ten faces are shown here. I can only assume that each must have a match. Eight of the images come directly from the June 1904 Glee Club photograph and are somewhat clearer here. The names are Mekia Kealakai, David Nape, James Kulolia, James Shaw, John Edwards, John Aea, W. B. Jones, Solomon Hiram, Charles Palikapu and Henry Kalani.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>102</sup> *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, September 17 1905.

<sup>103</sup> *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser* and *The Hawaiian Gazette*, September 19 1905.

I am hoping to eventually identify all ten musicians when additional photographic corroboration is found.<sup>104</sup> Meanwhile, my choices are:



While identifying these faces may yield future rewards, the identification of all ten immediately becomes somewhat irrelevant when the next question arises:

***Did all ten actually make the trip?***

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<sup>104</sup> Kilin Reece is working with others on a Hawaiian identification database using Apple's facial recognition software, which could provide crucial help in the future.

The first news clipping in San Francisco listed nine instruments: violin, cello, double bass, flute (Kealakai), saxophone (Nape), two guitars, ukulele and taro-patch (the latter likely Shaw and Edwards). Three singers were named: Jones was of course the basso profundo and Shaw and Kulolia were the listed tenors.<sup>105</sup> But this information could have come from a news release for the planned trip. A week later, the first concert is heard and we see the names of soloists Kealakai, Nape, Kulolia, Kimo Ko (Shaw), Keoni Eluene (Edwards), with bass solo by...James Kamakani?<sup>106</sup> Indeed, *Jones* – along with others – seems to have missed the trip. This is corroborated by a letter Kealakai wrote to friends back home from Spokane on October 7<sup>th</sup> (they had taken the train directly after the San Francisco concerts on the 6<sup>th</sup>). Kealakai lists just *nine* members, including a new one – the bass singer James Kamakani; Jones is *not* listed. Others names are from the original line-up (Shaw, Edwards, Nape and Kulolia), while others may be new or, possibly, gross misspellings: (C. P. Kaleikoa (= Charles Palikapu?), Kalani Peters (= Henry Kalani?) and H. Kaeo (= John Aea?).<sup>107</sup>

Within two months, the nine-member group was back in San Francisco, opening a short engagement at the Louvre Restaurant on December 20, 1905.<sup>108</sup> Soon after, the official “world tour” ended and the band broke apart, though its various members would often see themselves back together up and down the west coast. But tracking the movements of James Shaw and his many musical cohorts during this – or any – period remains extremely hit-and-miss with multiple contrary reports. To wit: In latter 1905 Ben Jones was listed on his own in Seattle, then with Sonny Cunha and John Ellis. Meanwhile, Shaw worked with Palikapu, Kalani and Kulolio (from the Glee Club) and James Kahali in a smaller quintet.<sup>109</sup> And things continued to get complicated!

Tom Silva’s Hawaiian Quintet Club had also been playing up and down the west coast continually since about 1904. By January 1906, Silva had landed a permanent gig at the Portland Hotel, quickly expanding the group to include nine members.<sup>110</sup>

The newcomers included James Shaw, David Nape and Mekia Kealakai.



<sup>105</sup> *The San Francisco Call*, October 1 1905.

<sup>106</sup> *The San Francisco Call*, October 7 1905.

<sup>107</sup> <https://nupepa-hawaii.com/2012/03/21/kawaihau-glee-club-performs-in-washington-state-1905/>

<sup>108</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 20 1905. The nine members may or may not have been the same roster from Spokane. A similar lineup would also play the second Louvre restaurant in Portland.

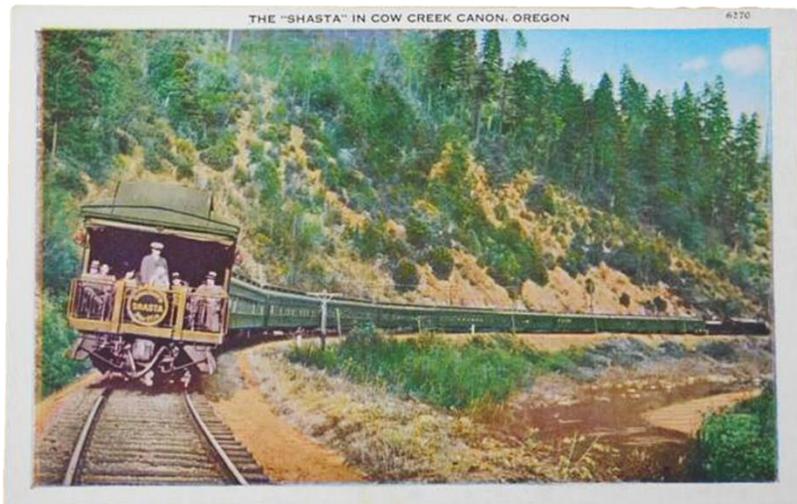
<sup>109</sup> *The Honolulu Advertiser*, January 14 1906. *Hawaiian Star*, November 10 1905 (Jones with Ellis).

<sup>110</sup> *The Hawaiian Star*, April 5 1906.

The band took other gigs as well whenever available. The rare image shows Silva's group at the nearby Louvre restaurant inside Portland's Belvedere Hotel. This was probably taken in early April, 1906, and is likely the same line-up that performed at the other hotel at the same time.



Standing, left-to-right: Tom Silva on violin, David Nape on bass fiddle, Mekia Kealalai on flute, S. Santana on cello. Seated, l-r: James Shaw (with teardrop-shaped ukulele?), John Heleluhe (Paoakalani) on guitar, Tony Zablan on 10-string guitar, and Bob Nawahine on guitar.<sup>111</sup>



As James Shaw's family was still in San Francisco, he presumably traveled back and forth, as many of these Hawaiian musicians were now routinely doing.

Left: Travel between Portland and San Francisco on Southern Pacific's Shasta Limited on the Siskiyou line in the early 1900s was both a regular and a beautiful trip for Hawaiian musicians juggling gigs in the two hotspots.

Indeed, after the Silva band photo above was taken, James must have returned to San Francisco, for he was there with his family when the Great Earthquake struck on April 18<sup>th</sup>.

Meanwhile, back in Honolulu, perhaps the most audacious musical undertaking yet was in the works: an ambitious mainland tour planned and managed by a fellow named J. C. Cohen. He organized a sixty-member ensemble consisting of Captain Berger and his Royal Hawaiian Nation Band along with a Glee Club headed by the increasingly popular Ellis brothers. The majority of

<sup>111</sup> This is a tricky period as it occurs around the time of the San Francisco earthquake on April 18 1906, where Shaw was present with his family. Evidence come from various sources, including a letter Mekia Kealakai wrote from the Portland Hotel that appeared in *Ke Aloha Aina*, April 21 1906, though may have been written weeks earlier. It suggests that Ben Waiwaiole was both taropatch player and general manager of the group (Silva is elsewhere listed as the leader). While the Louvre photograph shows 8 members, Waiwaiole was a 9<sup>th</sup> member (per Kealakai), and was perhaps behind the camera. All the names otherwise match up from other sources, so, while the 10-string player in the Louvre photo doesn't seem to match the Tony Zablan seen earlier in Buffalo, it is likely him (5 years later). Silva, too looks different from his prior 1899 photo. *The Hawaiian Star*, April 5 1906 gives the Portland Hotel band's three new members' names as Shaw, Nape and Kealakai. *The Honolulu Advertiser*, May 19 1906 gives 8 names: Silva, Kealakai, Nape, Santana, Nawahine and Heleluhe, with Tony Zablan on 10-string guitar and B. Waiwaiole on taropatch. Shaw was not listed in May.

the group left Honolulu together on May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1906; they next picked up many additional musicians in San Francisco. These included not only the Ellis musicians but several from the Kawaihau Glee Club – specifically, Solomon Hiram, Ben Jones, David Nape, Charles Palikapu and John Edwards. While Nape – and perhaps others - raced down from Portland, Berger’s disciple Mekia Kealakai remained behind, choosing not to join his old band.<sup>112</sup> Neither did James Shaw join the group. As the new star tenor was John Ellis, Shaw was likely uninterested in merely appearing in the chorus with his friend John Edwards. More importantly, he surely felt a responsibility to remain behind with his family, as the tour began in Oakland just five weeks after the devastating earthquake across the bay.<sup>113</sup> His old friend Ben Jones would become the bass soloist, while William Ellis (above) and Solomon Hiram would be the featured baritone soloists. Interestingly, reviews soon listed Hiram as “comedian” or “comedian vocalist.”<sup>114</sup> One wonders what that might have entailed! Some of the musicians performed double duty; Hiram played trombone in the band while W. S. Ellis played Saxophone and Nape did double duty on clarinet and flute. The Glee Club was co-directed by W. S. Ellis and Sonny Cunha, who also played piano. Lastly, the tour featured a young soprano named Lei Lehua.<sup>115</sup>



Playing Canada and across the west as far as Kansas City, the tour was a popular success, but apparently not a commercial one. Conditions for the sixty musicians and attendant spouses were miserable and salaries were not forthcoming. An additional tragedy occurred when John Edwards passed away in August and his friends had to write desperate letters to have his body shipped back home.<sup>116</sup> By November 1906 the band was stranded and freezing in Denver with no way to continue and no way to get home. Solomon Hiram had already left with his wife and was performing in the Portland Hotel. Ben Jones had left to try the northern vaudeville circuit with Cunha and John Ellis.<sup>117</sup> Unsurprisingly, the Honolulu Chamber of Commerce refused to help and it fell to Sam Nainoa (once again managing the Kawaihau Glee Club) to hold a benefit ball to help his fellow musicians and their wives, who eventually arrived home by Christmas.<sup>118</sup>

In 1907, Shaw, Jones and others found themselves back once again with Mekia Kealakai. As in the earlier 1900s, all these friends would continue to play “musical chairs,” forming *ad hoc* groups and sitting in with or for each other depending on their commitments.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> *Ke Aloha Aina*, May 19 1906, reprints a letter Shaw wrote to his friend Mekai in Portland from San Francisco on May 7 1906.

<sup>113</sup> Mr. & Mrs. Ben Jones, who suffered through the earthquake with the Shaw family both left with the tour, having lost their lodgings as well.

<sup>114</sup> *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, June 8 1906; *The Hawaiian Gazette*, October 9 1906.

<sup>115</sup> Not to be confused with another Lei Lehua who would dance with the Shaws at the 1915 San Francisco Expo.

<sup>116</sup> *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, August 8 1906. Edwards was only about 38 years old.

<sup>117</sup> *The Hawaiian Star*, November 10 1906.

<sup>118</sup> *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, November 16 1906 & December 22 1906.

<sup>119</sup> A “Royal Hawaiian Quintet” had begun an engagement at the San Francisco Louvre in December 1906 (*The San Francisco Call*, December 17 1906). There is as yet no way to know who comprised this particular entity, though Shaw and his colleagues could very well have been members.



The “Kawaihau Club Orchestra” at the “Oregon Grille in Portland, c.1907.” James Shaw, at left, holds another 5-string taropatch. Kealakai is sitting at left with his flute. Ben Jones is the guitarist at far right and the guitarist next to him is Jack Heleluhe.<sup>120</sup> Again, I believe the banjo player is Solomon Hiram.

1908 was a transition period for James Shaw as he and his family moved permanently to Portland. Many of his friends remained in the area and they’d continue to perform together in various combinations over the next several years in Portland and Seattle. John Edwards was gone, and in 1910 others of the core group (namely Hiram, Jones, Shaw, Nape and Kulolia) sang at the funeral of bandleader Thomas Silva.<sup>121</sup> Ben Jones would soon wind up on Broadway in *Birds of Paradise*, while Solomon Hiram, Shaw’s old quartet leader from back in the 1890s, remained in the area until 1912 or 1913, then disappeared.<sup>122</sup> Mekia Kealakai went off on his own, joined by his wife, still using for a time the “Kawaihau Glee Club” moniker. He would go on to continued success leading various ensembles in New York, Idaho and elsewhere in America and Europe – until returning to Honolulu to lead the Royal Hawaiian Band at Mayor Johnny Wilson’s in 1920.

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<sup>120</sup> Tranquada, 71. The date and location of this image appears to be from a notation on the back; however, the Oregon Grille was in the Hotel Oregon, which didn’t open until February, 1913. Thus, the photo could have been from any number of other venues. Kilin Reece puts the image in 1906, and identified Heleluhe. He also gives the violinist as “Thomas Sylvester, not to be confused with Thomas Sylvester Kalama,” and says the two others are “the two *haole* boys Mekia hired in Portland during his early years there.”

<sup>121</sup> *The Hawaiian Star*, May 31 (from May 3) 1910. Silva is misidentified as “Thomas Kiliwa” and “James Kulaha” listed in the clipping is surely James Kulolia. *The Sunday Advertiser*, May 1 1910 accurately gives Silva’s name and his age at death, 37. It mentions that the Portland Hotel gig had been ongoing for five years.

<sup>122</sup> *Ke Aloha Aina*, January 11 1912 and *The Hawaiian Star*, January 4 1913: The same cryptic clues about an unusual lineup appeared one year apart and have yet to be resolved. The exact time frame aside, Hiram was apparently performing in Seattle with Shaw, David Nape, James Kulolia, and renowned steel guitarist Frank Ferera (Ferreira) who was leading the group.



Left: A 1911 news clipping of Kealakai and band, including his wife, in San Francisco for a few months before heading to New York and a continental tour.<sup>123</sup>

**MAJOR KEALAKAI'S  
 ROYAL HAWAIIAN SEXTETTE**  
 VOCALISTS AND INSTRUMENTALISTS  
 Of Honolulu, Hawaiian Islands  
 SINGING THEIR NATIVE SONGS, PLAYING THEIR NATIVE INSTRUMENTS  
 APPEARING IN HAWAIIAN COSTUMES

UNDER THE MANAGEMENT OF  
 LORO GOOCH MUSICAL-DRAMATIC BUREAU  
 52-53 AUDITORIUM BUILDING, CHICAGO

As for James Shaw, from 1908-on, he would remain based in Portland on the West Coast. He would, however, also remain somewhat of a musical vagabond – as would his entire family, now seven musical children strong!

## ***END OF PART ONE***

[See Part 2 for the Shaw family story](#)

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<sup>123</sup> *The Honolulu Advertiser*, July 28 1911. The John Paoakalani in the group is Jack Heleluhe from Kealakai's earlier Portland band (and image) above – full name John Paoakalani Heleluhe (provided by Kilin Reece via Wini Matteson).

## Thanks!

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## About the Author

**Gregg Miner** is, at various times of the day, a plucked stringed instrument collector, scholar, recording artist and performer. He is widely considered the world's leading authority on harp guitars. His web sites include *Harguitars.net*, *Harpguitarmusic.com* and *Minermusic.com*.



**Winifred Matteson** is the proud granddaughter of Hollywood actress Wini Shaw and great-granddaughter of James Shaw, who sang for King David Kalākaua, the second-to-last monarch of Hawaii.

