

STATE GUIDE

HAWAII

BY DAVID A. FRYXELL

🦋 **IF YOU DON'T** have ancestral ties to Hawaii, you might be tempted to invent some just for an excuse to research in paradise. But before you pack your pedigree charts and sunscreen, you'll need some historical background on the 50th US state.

Hawaii's first residents arrived about 2,000 years ago, probably from the Marquesas Islands north of Tahiti. Spaniards stumbled across the islands as early as the 1500s; then in 1778, British Capt. James Cook rediscovered Hawaii and dubbed it the Sandwich Islands. That trip turned out to be anything but a vacation in paradise: Cook was killed at Kealahou Bay in 1779 during a quarrel with Hawaiians over missing boats. Undaunted, Great Britain laid claim to Hawaii in 1794.

Hawaiians had their own ideas, however. In 1810, King Kamehameha established a monarchy that lasted most of the century, despite invasion attempts by the Russians in 1815 and the French in 1849. Christian missionaries' religious incursion, beginning in 1820, would prove more lasting: They codified the Hawaiian language and began converting islanders, especially after Mormon missionaries came on the scene in the 1850s. Chinese laborers began arriving in 1852 to work on sugar plantations. The Japanese followed in 1865, and Hawaii's vibrantly multiethnic character started to take shape.

Modern Hawaii, with its focus on sugar, pineapples and tourism, emerged for the most part after the monarchy ended in 1893. A brief republic ensued

before the United States annexed the islands in 1898; the US government made Hawaii a territory two years later. The Hawaiian sugar industry had already begun to boom after the Reciprocity Act of 1876 opened US markets to the islands' agricultural goods. The pineapple industry blossomed, too, after James Drummond Dole started a plantation in 1901. Tourism soon followed: The Royal Hawaiian Hotel opened its doors in Honolulu in 1927, and the first airplane from San Francisco landed—after a 21½-hour flight—in 1935. The same year, the “Hawaii Calls” radio program began to lure mainland

listeners, starting a media “aloha” that would eventually include the TV shows “Hawaiian Eye” and “Hawaii Five-O,” and movies such as “Blue Hawaii.”

After the Dec. 7, 1941, Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii became the spearpoint of US retaliation across the Pacific. Hordes of American servicemen and support personnel arrived, and many vowed to return for good after the war. They helped Hawaii achieve statehood in 1959.

Hawaiian language and naming customs

Finding your ancestors in Hawaii can be as easy as lying on the beach—or as challenging as keeping the sand out of your swimsuit. It all depends on your ancestry. Early missionaries (who came mainly from New England and New York) and Hawaiian royalty are documented in well-preserved records. Traces of Hawaiian commoners and early Asian immigrants, however, can

FAST FACTS

- ★ **Statehood:** 1959
- ★ **First federal census:** 1900
- ★ **Available state censuses:** Partial censuses dating back to 1840 available at the FHL
- ★ **Statewide birth and death records begin:** 1842; most date to 1896
- ★ **Statewide marriage records begin:** 1826; most date to 1896
- ★ **State-land state**
- ★ **Counties:** five
- ★ **Contact for vital records:** Hawaii State Department of Health, Office of Health Status Monitoring, Issuance/Vital Records Section, Box 3378, Honolulu, HI 96801, (808) 586-4539, <health.hawaii.gov/vitalrecords>

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be tough to find. You'll have to hurdle a language barrier, for starters: The traditional Hawaiian alphabet contains only 12 letters—the vowels *a, e, i, o, u* and consonants *h, k, l, m, n, p, w*. See <hawaiiandictionary.hisurf.com> for an online dictionary of 5,000 words, as well as a link to a pronunciation guide. Plus, despite an 1860 law that required adopting the father's name as the family name, the practice of using a single name continued among Hawaiians and Chinese for many years. But there are still plenty of records to be had in the Aloha State.

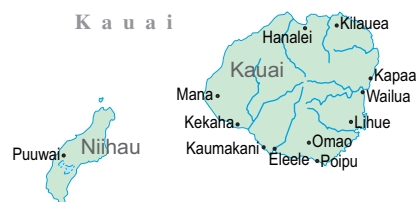
Vital records

Don't let Hawaii's relatively recent statehood discourage you: Its vital record-keeping practices predate those of many older states, beginning with missionary records as early as 1826. Official birth records began in 1842 and death records in 1859, though they're spotty until 1896, when the health department took over recording vital events. See <health.hawaii.gov/vitalrecords/genealogy> for instructions on submitting a genealogy request. You'll need to establish a "direct and tangible interest" to get records less than 75 years old.

The Hawaii State Archives <ags.hawaii.gov/archives/about-us/hawaii-state-archives> has older vital records (1832-1949), and you also can find some of these on microfilm through the Family History Library (FHL) <www.familysearch.org>. Find them by running a Place search of the FamilySearch online catalog <www.familysearch.org/catalog/search> for *Hawaii*, and then click on the vital records heading. You can order relevant films to rent through an FHL branch Family Search Center near you <www.familysearch.org/locations>. Search name indexes to vital records (mid-1800s to 1920s) on websites of the Hawaii State Archives (click on Genealogical Index), Honolulu County Genealogical Society (HCGS) <rootsweb.ancestry.com/~hihcg> and FamilySearch (on the map at <www.familysearch.org/search>, click the United States, then choose Hawaii).

Besides these regular vital records, you can find a wealth of information in delayed birth records, created

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beginning in 1911 for Hawaiians who'd never gotten birth certificates. Typically, the applicant submitted paperwork such as baptismal records, and relatives, friends and neighbors provided testimony of the person's birth date. Accompanying paperwork may be several pages long and contain pictures of the applicant. Files focus on the applicant but often include information on immediate family, so seek records for ancestors' siblings. The FHL has microfilm of delayed birth records from 1859 to 1938 (most records apply to those born between the 1890s and 1920s).

The state archives holds Hawaiian marriage records (1826-1929), with many of them on FHL microfilm. Two overlapping databases on FamilySearch index marriages, from 1826 to 1922 and 1826 to 1954; for the former, you can view the original records on FHL microfilm. You also can browse information from marriage, divorce, will and probate (among other) records indexed by state archives staff in the Ulukau Hawaiian Electronic Library <ulukau.org/algene/cgi-bin/algene>.

Censuses and city directories

Census records for Hawaii also go back further than you might guess. The FHL has microfilm of early local enumerations including 1840 to 1843 (index only), 1866 (fragment), 1878 (just the island of Hawaii), and 1890 and 1896 (Oahu).

The 1900 census was the first US enumeration to cover Hawaii. You can search for family in this and other federal

timeline

1794

Great Britain claims Hawaii as a protectorate

1810

King Kamehameha unites the Hawaiian islands and establishes a monarchy

1828

Rev. Samuel Ruggles begins growing coffee on Kona

1840

Hawaii adopts its first fully written constitution

1873

Catholic missionary Father Damien arrives at Molokai's Kalaupapa leprosy settlement

1893

American plantation owners, with US military help, stage a coup that ends Hawaii's monarchy

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Immigration records

Hawaii's diverse population means chances are you have relatives who arrived on the islands from elsewhere. Honolulu was the principal port of immigration (arrivals at Maui and Kahului are included in Honolulu passenger lists). The HCGS offers online guides to researching various immigrant groups and a sizeable research library. Immigration records include passenger lists from 1843 to 1900, and various naturalization documents dating from 1838. Look for the earliest passengers in published sources such as *Voyages to Hawaii Before 1860* by Bernice Judd (University Press of Hawaii), on FHL microfilm, and searchable at Ancestry.com.



censuses on major subscription genealogy websites including Ancestry.com <ancestry.com>, Findmypast <www.findmypast.com> and MyHeritage <www.myheritage.com>, or on the free FamilySearch.

Hawaii's state archives also holds two groups of files loosely labeled "census," which actually contain a mixed bag of listings such as vital-records summaries, school censuses and census statistics. These cover 1840 to 1867 (available on FHL microfilm) and 1847 to 1896. And if your ancestors were in Hawaii when it began to transition from a monarchy, check the register of voters covering 1887 and 1888 on FHL microfilm.

Being mostly rural for much of its history, Hawaii doesn't offer much by way of city directories, except for Honolulu, for which the FHL has variable-quality microfilmed copies of 1883 to 1936, 1938 to 1939, 1940 and 1941, 1959 and 1960, 1963 and 1964, and 1977. Ancestry.com has a transcription of an 1890 Honolulu directory listing more than 32,100 names (mostly heads of household).

1903

The Joint Tourism Committee is created to promote island tourism

1946

28,000 workers on 33 plantations launch the Great Sugar Strike

1946

A 7.4 earthquake off Alaska causes a tsunami that kills 173 in Hilo and 14 in Maui

1959

James Michener publishes *Hawaii*, which becomes the basis for a 1966 motion picture

1999

Surfer Magazine names Olympic swimmer Duke Kahanamoku Surfer of the Century

2010

A re-imagined "Hawaii 5-0" debuts on CBS; businesses featured on-screen enjoy the "5-0 Effect"

TOOLKIT

Websites

- **Center for Oral History** <www.oralhistory.hawaii.edu>
- **Cyndi's List: Hawaii** <cyndislist.com/us/hi>
- **Hawaii GenWeb Project**
<rootsweb.ancestry.com/~higenweb>
- **Hawaii Tombstone Project**
<usgw.tombstones.org/hawaii/hawaii.html>
- **Ulukau Hawaiian Electronic Library**
<ulukau.org/algene/cgi-bin/algene>

Publications

- **Atlas of Hawaii, 3rd edition**, edited by Sonia P. Juvik and James O. Juvik (University of Hawaii Press)
- **The Peopling of Hawaii** by Eleanor C. Nordyke (University of Hawaii Press)
- **Hawaiian Genealogies: Extracted from Hawaiian-Language Newspapers** by Edith Kawelohea McKinzie (Institute for Polynesian Studies)
- **Lost Kingdom: Hawaii's Last Queen, the Sugar Kings and America's First Imperial Adventure** by Julia Flynn Siler (Atlantic Monthly Press)
- **Place Names of Hawaii** by Mary Kawena Pukui (University of Hawaii Press)

Archives & Organizations

- **Brigham Young University Hawaii**
Joseph F. Smith Library, 55-220 Kulanui St., Laie, HI 96762, (808) 675-3211, <library.byuh.edu>
- **Hawaii State Archives**
Kekauluohi Building, Iolani Palace Grounds, 36 King St, Honolulu, HI 96813, (808) 586-0329, <ags.hawaii.gov/archives>
- **Hawaii State Library**
478 S. King St., Honolulu, HI 96813, (808) 586-3500, <hawaii.sdp.sirsi.net/custom/web>
- **Hawaiian Historical Society**
560 Kawaiahao St., Honolulu, HI 96813, (808) 537-6271, <hawaiianhistory.org>
- **Honolulu County Genealogical Society**
Box 235039, Honolulu, HI 96823, <rootsweb.ancestry.com/~hilhcs>
- **Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii**
2454 S. Beretania St., Honolulu, HI 96826, (808) 945-7633, <jcch.com>
- **Kauai Historical Society**
Box 1778, Lihue, HI 96766, (808) 245-3373, <kauaihistoricalsociety.org>
- **University of Hawaii at Hilo, Edwin H. Mookini Library**
W. Kawili St., Hilo, HI 96720, (808) 974-7344, <guides.library.uhh.hawaii.edu>
- **University of Hawaii at Manoa Library**
2550 McCarthy Mall, Honolulu, HI 96822, (808) 956-8264, <library.manoa.hawaii.edu/departments/hp>

FamilySearch has several online databases of Honolulu passengers, include separate lists of Filipinos. You can search Brigham Young University's Filipino Laborers collection of records (1906-1949) kept by the US Department of Labor and the Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association at <lib.byu.edu/collections/filipino-laborers-collection>. You'll also find Chinese, Japanese and Portuguese immigrants in individual records and indexes on FHL microfilm. Find these by searching the online catalog for the place Hawaii and looking under the headings for emigration and immigration. The Honolulu immigration office maintained case files of Chinese—both from China and from the US mainland—investigated under the Chinese Exclusion Acts. You can search an index to these on Ancestry.com and order case files from the National Archives at San Francisco <archives.gov/san-francisco>.

Land records and more

Other records you should consult for answers about your Hawaiian ancestors include:

- **LAND RECORDS** begin after 1840 (before then, the king owned all the land). To handle the influx of foreigners wanting pieces of the islands, Hawaii created the Board of Commissioners to Quiet Land Titles. This land commission recorded almost 12,000 claims between 1848 and 1852. Those whose claims that were granted received royal patents from Hawaii's Minister of the Interior, many of which are held by the state archives. The FHL has microfilmed these and subsequent land records, including deeds (1844-1900), as well as probate records from circuit courts (1814-1845, indexes only, and 1848-1916). You can search free, growing online indexes to land records at <www.waihona.com>.

- **ALOHA STATE NEWSPAPERS** are available at the Hawaii State Library <www.librarieshawaii.org> and some are searchable at websites such as the free Chronicling America <chroniclingamerica.loc.gov> and subscription-based GenealogyBank <genealogybank.com> and Newspapers.com <www.newspapers.com>. The FHL has the Hawaiian-language *Ka Nupepa Kuokoa* (which published some genealogies) on microfilm (1861-1927), as well as an index to births, marriages and deaths announced in newspapers prior to 1950. Read more about newspapers published in Hawaii at <libweb.hawaii.edu/digicoll/nupepa_kuokoa/kuokoa_html/kuokoa.html>.

- **COMPILED FAMILY HISTORIES** and local collections are excellent places to start looking for early Hawaii families. Some have transcriptions of traditional oral genealogies. The FHL has many family histories on microfilm; look for digitized versions at <books.familysearch.org>. The University of Hawaii at Manoa's Center for Oral History <oralhistory.hawaii.edu> gathers stories on Hawaiian lives and has a searchable database.

With some persistence and a little luck, you may soon be saying "aloha!" to an islandful of newly found ancestors. ■