

THE KANAKAS

The Kanaka Story
will be told at the season's first
meeting of the Salt Spring Historical
Society, to be held at Central Hall
on Tuesday, Sept. 10, 1985 at 2
pm. Visitors welcome.

The original cause of many events in the history of British Columbia can be traced to the fur trade. One such event was the migration of natives of Hawaii, or the Sandwich Islands as they were called at the time, to the coast of North America. Ships coming from the east coast and from Europe to trade for furs often used to winter in Hawaii before sailing to China to sell their cargoes.

A British ship, the Imperial Eagle, was the first vessel recorded as carrying an Hawaiian crew member. This was a woman named Winee, who was taken on in May of 1787 as the personal servant of the captain's wife. When the ship reached China, the captain's wife decided to continue westward to England, so Winee had to find her own way home. She got passage on the Nootka, under John Meares, which had left Hawaii in August and was heading back. Also on board were an Hawaiian chief named Tianna and two other Kanakas who had travelled to China in different ships. Meares, whose name we often hear to-day when Meares Island is discussed, said of Winee that she had "virtues that are seldom to be found in the class of her countrywomen to which she belonged; and a portion of understanding that was not to be expected in a rude and uncultivated mind."

After Meares, Captain George Vancouver reached Hawaii from the Far East and went on to northern California with two Kanaka women on board. Soon it became a regular practice for ships to sign on

KANAKAS... 2

Kanakas as replacement crew members, since on the long voyages round the Horn or across the Pacific it was an exceptional vessel that did not lose a few men to sickness or accident. They were good seamen in canoes, and adapted well to larger ships. Their local chiefs favoured their going to sea, as they got a percentage of the wages paid to each islander contracted for. When Astor in the Tonquin sailed to the Columbia River to build Fort Astoria, some Kanakas enlisted in Honolulu for three years' service. Their wages were room and board, clothing and \$100 in merchandise.

After 1821, when the Hudson's Bay Company and the Northwest Company merged, the Hudson's Bay Company employed Kanakas on a larger scale. There were 35 at Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River, 32 at Fort Walla Walla and others at Fort Simpson and Fort Colville. The company preferred them as crews for the canoes and York boats carrying furs to Fort Vancouver, since they were better workers than the halfbreeds and Iroquois, and cheaper than the French Canadians. They were also employed in the Hudson's Bay sawmill a few miles above Fort Vancouver. By 1836 28 Kanakas were working there, for an annual wage of 17 shillings plus food. At the outside this would have had the purchasing power of \$25 to-day.

In 1842 Hudson's Bay governor Sir George Simpson told Dr. John McLoughlin, chief factor at Fort Vancouver, that the company had too many Kanakas in its employ. McLoughlin, however, had just requested 50 more to replace employees who had died and French Canadians who

KANAKAS... 3

had retired. Presumably he got his way, as by 1849 a native minister and a school teacher had been hired especially for the Kanakas.

However, soon afterwards, white settlers in Oregon began to dislike and reject the Kanakas, as holding jobs that they wished for themselves. The Kanakas were denied citizenship privileges and were discriminated against as much as were the Chinese, Indians and Negroes. Some followed the Hudson's Bay Company in its withdrawal to British Columbia, others moved to northern California where their skills were still in demand, and a few accepted a passage home.

This cycle of emigration, employment and eventual rejection was repeated in Australia, where large numbers of Kanakas had been engaged to clear farmland and work gold mines. Here too there was conflict with the white settlers because Hawaiian labour was so cheap. The political impact of the situation was so great that the government was forced to send nearly all of them back to Hawaii.

One of the Hawaiians who worked for the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Vancouver in 1840 was William Naukana. Born in 1813,

he was of great value to the company because he quickly learned the Indian language and was able to act as interpreter at Fort Vancouver and later at Fort Victoria. When the west end of the international boundary was being surveyed, he was on the survey ship. His name is listed in HBC records in Beaver House in London. He had been close to the Hawaiian royal family of King Kamehameha IV and had leadership abilities. William Naukana was also a peacemaker;

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KANAKAS. . . 4

when Governor James Douglas was confronted by an Indian chief demanding the hand of one of Douglas' daughters in marriage, to which the governor was resolutely opposed, Naukana was sent to tactfully decline the proposal. He managed to persuade the chief to depart without his intended bride, but the chief was very angry and the incident almost resulted in an uprising.

Naukana returned to his homeland but later came back to the Pacific coast with 17 others, mostly family members, to settle on San Juan Island. When San Juan was ceded to the United States, the group moved to Portland Island on the Canadian side of the border. Land registry records in Victoria show that William Naukana owned Lot 3 in 1877. He built a large home there.

He and the other three Kanaka landowners sold the island to Sir Clive Philips-Woolley about 1900 and established farms on Isabella Point on Salt Spring Island. On both Portland and Salt Spring the Kanakas held luaus according to the tradition of their Hawaiian birthplace. These were week-long parties that moved from house to house until all the food and drink -- a potent home brew -- had been consumed. The endurance of the singers and dancers set a worthy precedent for that of celebrants at gold rush parties at Christmas at Dawson City.

On their Salt Spring farms, one of the Kanakas' crops was tobacco, which they cured in their own special way. They would cut a round off a log, a foot or two long, and bore a hole down the middle.

KANAKAS... 5

They then filled this hole with tobacco leaves, molasses and rum, packed in sequence and repeated until the hole was full. A few days later the log was split open and a stick of rich tobacco was ready for smoking or chewing.

In 1895 the Reverend Edward Wilson compiled his well-known pamphlet on Salt Spring Island, in which he listed the population by national origin. William Naukana was one of the six Sandwich Islanders. Naukana had five daughters. His only son was drowned in the Fraser River. One of the daughters married Peter Roland, who had worked in the Bremerton shipyard before coming to Salt Spring as a logger and fisherman. The Rolands had nine children. It was Mrs. Roland's second marriage. By her first husband she had six children.

Many of the Hawaiian names were changed over the years, because the white settlers found them hard to pronounce. Palua, for example, became Pallow.

Other Kanakas whose names are well known on the island were Pevine, whose house still stands, and Tahouney, who had arrived as Nawana. A child born in 1864 to one of the Kanakas on San Juan Island was Mary ^{KAHANA} Nawana, who married an Englishman named William Lumley, whose parents were London costermongers. The Kanaka Restaurant in Ganges is now run by one of the Lumley grandchildren, Jackie Hembruse^{ff}.

Another Salt Spring Hawaiian was David Fredison. He pioneered a farm at the head of Long Harbour, later acquired by Thomas Mansell. Besides farming, Mr. Fredison occasionally preached at the Methodist church at Central, which used to stand where the Highways Department

yard is now.

I cannot conclude this brief glimpse of the Salt Spring Island Kanakas without going back to the story of William Naukana. He spent his final years before his death in 1909 in a shack on the Isabella Point waterfront, near where Ruby Alton's house is to-day. Here in his shack he loved to tell stories of his ten years with the Hudson's Bay Company. One of them is recorded in Bea Hamilton's history of the island and deserves to be told in her own words:

Naukana went with several Hudson's Bay Company men on a fur hunting expedition that took them far into unsurveyed territory. He spoke of their many days of cold and starvation as they were caught by a sudden storm with only horses for transportation, which were useless as snow fell and piled around them in deep drifts and as they ran out of feed for horses and men. Camped beside a small plot of bushes, they managed to light fires, and when they finally decided to kill a horse for meat, they found their horses had all wandered off and were lost in the blizzard. Frostbite and hunger nearly drove the men mad and they finally decided to draw lots to see which of them should pay the price as horsemeat.

That really alarmed Naukana as he wasn't in on the bizarre draw and he figured they would naturally choose him to be sacrificed as he was the servant -- the only native amongst them. To him this was a normal procedure, as in his native land in far off days he knew that for any sacrifice, a slave or servant was always the choice.

And Naukana didn't relish the thought of being served up as an entree for anyone, he told his people, who had gathered around him to listen breathlessly to the old Kanaka's tale. "What did you do?" they asked. "I ran away," said the old man simply.

Into the cold snow he had floundered at dusk for he knew that if the deed was to be done, it would be after dark -- and Naukana wasn't waiting around to find out. In the back of his mind he was hoping for a miracle that would get them all out of the trouble but he was not very optimistic as he cut his way deep into a snow bank when he figured he was far enough away from the camp to be safe. He didn't have to go far as he knew no man in the party was fit to come after him.

As he dug down with his hunting knife, he came upon a mound that was pretty solid and he dug quickly hoping that this might be a log where some sleeping grubs would ease the gnawing hunger in his stomach. Suddenly he shouted aloud in his joy -- he had stumbled onto the dead and frozen body of one of their poor horses! This was his miracle indeed!

Naukana managed to hack off a chunk of meat and he hastened to retrace his steps before they became obliterated by the still falling snow. Armed with the frozen meat, Naukana almost caused hysterics when he suddenly stumbled into the firelight out of the dark, holding out his peace offering. Tears, laughter, all the emotions of men under stress bubbled over in hilarious abandonment as the men hardly waited

KANAKAS... 8

for the meat to thaw over the hot fire before they tore into it with their teeth.

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Perhaps this introduction to Hawaiians who put down new roots on Salt Spring will inspire some of you to research more fully this interesting aspect of our history. Who were the people who put themselves on the map at Kanaka Creek and Kanaka Bar? Let's find out.