

# SESSION NAME:

Session #404

The Women's Suffrage Movement  
in Hawai'i



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## Speaker

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## Moderator

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## The Women's Suffrage Movement in Hawai'i

Women held positions in government and law at the highest levels before Hawai'i was absorbed into the political structure of the United States.

As an independent county recognized on the international stage, Hawaiian Kingdom government records indicate that conversations and policies impacting enfranchisement, universal suffrage, and women's suffrage in particular were happening in Hawai'i during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in newspapers and constitutions.

This presentation includes historical context with information on women in government in the years leading up to Women's Suffrage in 1920.

## Historical Context

- 1843 –Hawai‘i recognized internationally as an independent country. Subsequently entered into treaties and conventions with countries around the world.
- 1843 –Lord Paulet Affair. British Admiral temporarily attempts to claim Hawai‘i for England.
- 1843 –July 31, La Ho‘iho‘i Ea, Restoration Day.
- King Kamehameha III declares “Ua mau ke ea o ka aina i ka pono.”  
*“Ua mau ke ea o ka aina i ka pono”*  
“The life and sovereignty of the land is perpetuated in righteousness”

## Historical Context

- 1893 – Under President McKinley, U.S. military deposed Queen Liliu‘okalani, known as the overthrow
- 1897 – Kū‘ē Petitions
- 1898 – Joint Resolution – no Treaty of Annexation
- 1900 – Organic Act
- 1900 to 1950 – Provisional Government and then Territorial Government need to Americanize the population of Hawai‘i very quickly to maintain power, majority Asian population in Hawai‘i
- 1959 – U.S. Statehood



## Women in Hawaiian Kingdom Government Pre-1893

### Kuhina Nui Wahine (Female Premier/Prime Minister)

Constitution of 1840 article 22 states

- “the King shall not act without the knowledge of the Premier, nor shall the Premier act without the knowledge of the King.”
- “All Proclamations and business of the kingdom executed by the Premier, shall be considered as executed by the King himself.”

Four out of six prime ministers in Hawaiian history were female.

## Women in Hawaiian Kingdom Government Pre-1893

### Kuhina Nui Wahine (Female Premiers/Prime Ministers)

Ka'ahumanu (1819-1832)

Kīna'u (1832-1839)

Kekāuluohi (1829-1845)

Kamāmalu (1839-1845)

## Women in Hawaiian Kingdom Government Pre-1893

### Kia'āina Wahine (Female Governor)

Constitution of 1840 article 42 states  
“Each of the Governors shall, at their  
discretion, appoint judges for their  
particular island, two or more as they  
think expedient, and shall give them  
certificates of office.”

## Women in Hawaiian Kingdom Government Pre-1893

### Kia'āina Wahine (Female Governors)

Kalākua Kaheiheimālie (1840-1842)

Po'omaikelani (1884-1886)

Ululani Baker (1886-1888)

Likelike (1879-1880)

Kekau'ōnohi (1842-1845)

Emelia Keaweamahi (1839-1842)

Ruta Ke'elikōlani (1855-1874)

Kinoiki Kekaulike (1880-1884)

Women served as governors across the islands. Their names are listed with the years they served.

Women in Hawaiian Kingdom Government  
Pre-1893

Hale 'Aha'ōlelo Ali'i  
(House of Nobles)

Laura Kanaholo Kōnia  
Analea Keohokālole  
Kekāuluohi  
Kekau'ōnohi  
Kalākua Kaheiheimālie  
Kalama Kapakuhaili  
Julia Alapai  
Ke'elikolani



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## Women in Hawaiian Kingdom Government Pre-1893

Kunakānawai Ki'eki'e Wahine  
(Female Supreme Court Justice)

Kekāuluohi (1840-1845)

The Constitution of 1840 article 43 states  
“Concerning the Supreme Judges—The  
representative body shall appoint four  
persons to assist the King and Kahuna  
Nui (Premier), and these six persons shall  
constitute the Supreme Court of the  
kingdom.”

Women had a voice  
and role in the court  
system. Kekāuluohi  
served in the  
Supreme Court  
Justice as a judge  
from 1840-1845.

## Suffrage in Hawai'i

1840 - Constitution creates elected House of Representatives

1842 - first election laws – petitions

1851 - First Ballot Election

1852 - Constitution enacts universal manhood suffrage



## Suffrage in Hawai'i

### Constitution of 1852, article 78

#### 1852 Universal manhood suffrage

“Every male subject of His Majesty, whether native or naturalized, and every denizen of the kingdom, who shall have paid his taxes, who shall have attained the full age of twenty years, and who shall have resided in the kingdom for one year immediately preceding the time of election, shall be entitled to one vote for the Representative or Representatives, of the district in which he may have resided three months next preceding the day of election.”

Women held positions in government, including the highest position of Queen. Women could be nominated and appointed into their seat, but didn't have the right to vote in elections. Elections begin in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in Hawai'i with universal manhood suffrage granted in 1852 under Hawaiian constitution.

## Women's Suffrage in Hawai'i

1890 Hawaiian Kingdom Legislature

- bill submitted to legislature with amendments to the 1887 Constitution, including women's suffrage.
- Petitions and bills submitted calling for a constitutional convention to alter 1887 Constitution.

1892 Hawaiian Kingdom Legislature

- Petition submitted calling for women's suffrage

1893 Hawaiian Monarchy is overthrown, Hawai'i is governed by an oligarchy of self-appointed men calling themselves the provisional government.

1894 Woman's Christian Temperance Union submit a petition to the Constitutional Convention organized by the Provisional Government



## Women's Suffrage in Hawai'i

### Hawai'i Holomua, June 21, 1894, pg 3 "Out of Reckoning"

"The agitation from the woman's suffrage will probably receive a draw-back, and the enthusiasm of the fair advocates will be cooled.

After a careful scrutiny of the tax-books it was found that about 900 taxpaying women would be entitled to a vote under the proposed regulations. Out of that amount, only 120 could be depended on to back annexation and the p.g. The rest were all pronounced royalists. By all means let the women vote, dear *Advertiser*."

The political situation in Hawai'i influenced Women's Suffrage in the islands. If women were given the right to vote, and 90% of them were anti-U.S. Annexation (royalists), the Provisional Government (p.g.) would have lost political power essential to their desire to control economic relations with the United States tied to their private interests in pineapple, sugar, and other plantation-based exports.

Women's Suffrage in Hawai'i doesn't pass under the Provisional Government.

## Women's Suffrage in Hawai'i

### 1899 Wilhelmina Kekelaokalaninui Widemann Dowsett

- Establishes the National Women's Equal Suffrage Association of Hawai'i
- Submits what is referred to as the "Hawaiian Appeal" where Wilhelmina Kekelaokalaninui Widemann Dowsett asks the United States Congress to grant Hawaiian women the right to vote "upon whatever conditions and qualifications the right of suffrage is granted to Hawaiian men."



# Women's Suffrage in Hawai'i

## Organic Act 1900

The right to vote in Hawai'i:

- Must be a male citizen of the United States
- Must be 21 years of age
- Must be able to read and write in English or Hawaiian

This disenfranchises many immigrant communities living in Hawai'i.



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## Women's Suffrage in Hawai'i

December 29, 1914 – Prince Kūhio—who was Hawai'i's Territorial Representative as a delegate in Congress—puts forward a resolution to U.S. Congress to amend the Organic Act and allow women in Hawai'i the right to vote.

1917 – Pitman petitions congress to allow the decision to be made at the Territorial level since suffrage for women was having success at the state level.

1918 – Congress passes Senate bill 2380 and puts the right to vote in the hands of the Territorial Government.

1919 – Dowsett continues to mobilize and brings women of all backgrounds together to support suffrage and lobby legislature.

1920 – Federal Suffrage Amendment on August 26, 1920 granted the right to vote to women, including women in Hawai'i.



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# The Women's Suffrage Movement in Hawai'i

Thank you!

# Questions?

