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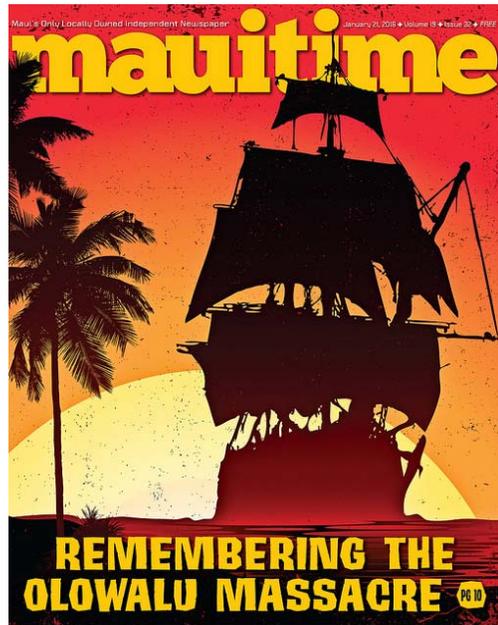
Maui - Rich

‘Hawaii’s Wounded Knee’ – Remembering the Olowalu Massacre

<http://mauitime.com/culture/history/hawaiis-wounded-knee-remembering-the-olowalu-massacre/>

Kalolopahu. It’s a Hawaiian word meaning “the spilled brains.” Until I began researching the history of Olowalu, I had never heard the word.

Olowalu, a tiny coastal town just a few miles south of Lahaina (pop. 80), has been in the news a lot lately because of the grand development plans from Olowalu Town LLC (a hui owned by Peter Martin, Jim Riley, David Ward, Glenn and Alice Tremble and a few smaller investors). The project seeking to build 1,500 homes (which would raise Olowalu’s population to around 4,000) is both enormously controversial and currently on hold, given the state Land Use Commission’s recent rejection of the project Environmental Impact Statement.



But missing from much of the island’s talk of the future of Olowalu is the fact that a few centuries ago, Olowalu was a big Hawaiian village. Many people lived there. And almost exactly 226 years ago, an American named Simon Metcalfe who was in command of the small fur trading brig Eleanora ordered the brutal murder of more than a hundred Hawaiians there—what survivors came to call Kalolopahu. Contemporary historians refer to it simply as the Olowalu Massacre, but Clifford Naeole, the Ritz-Carlton Kapalua’s Cultural Adviser, thinks of it in even stronger terms: as Hawaii’s **Wounded Knee**.

Naeole is, of course, referring to the U.S. Army’s 7th Cavalry Regiment’s notorious killing of more than 200 men, women and children of the Lakota Sioux tribe in South Dakota on Dec. 29, 1890. Though nearly as bloody as Wounded Knee—and certainly every bit as horrific—the Olowalu Massacre is largely unknown, even in Hawaii.

“[The term ‘Hawaii’s Wounded Knee’] came to me after 24 years of driving back and forth from Wailuku to Lahaina, sometimes seven days a week,” Naeole told me. “You tend to think about things when you’re driving. I knew that something there was wrong. There’s an energy there that’s never been cleared, never been released. I was thinking about it a lot more with the talk of development.”

According to the historian Ralph Simpson Kuykendall, what we know of the Olowalu Massacre comes from three primary sources, the most detailed of which is an anonymous account from an officer about the ship, published anonymously in *Gentleman's Magazine* in London in April 1791—roughly a year after the events had taken place. Since then it's been reprinted a number of times, most recently in the Sept. 3, 1928 *Honolulu Advertiser* (which is where I found it), and it provides much of this history that follows.

By the time the *Eleanora* reached Maui, Hawaii had been in contact with the western world for just a dozen years. Kamehameha was pretty much in control over the Big Island by then, but he hadn't yet successfully conquered Maui or any other island. Guns, and metal of any kind, were great prizes.

What we call the Olowalu Massacre was actually a series of bloody events that started many miles down the coast from Olowalu. On Jan. 30, 1790, says the officer's account, Metcalfe's ship (which is sometimes also referred to as the *Eleanor* or the *Snow Elinora*), anchored in South Maui. There the crew traded with local Hawaiians for hogs, fruits and fish, but Metcalfe didn't like the area so they sailed two miles further up the coast, coming to rest in a bay near the old Hawaiian village of Honua'ula at about 4pm.

The incident that started all the trouble took place that night, around midnight. "Some of the natives swam off, and cut away the cutter from astern," the *Eleanora*'s officer recalled. An hour later, the crew discovered the cutter—one of the brig's small boats—was missing. Metcalfe "immediately called all hands after on the quarterdeck."

Everyone was present save for one—the cutter's keeper, who'd been asleep in the cutter when it vanished. The crew hoisted a small boat to search, but it leaked so much they had to call off the search.

Though they didn't know it at the time, the boat was already broken up for its metal and the boat keeper—who had been sleeping in the boat at the time of the theft—was already dead. The boat thieves had killed him after he drew a knife on them.

The *Eleanora* officer recorded that the Hawaiians "cut his head off, and took him on shore, and, the next night, burned him, for a sacrifice to their gods," but the Hawaiian historian Kamakau disputes that, saying the boat keeper's body was thrown into the sea after he was killed.

In any case, the crew saw no canoes at dawn, which the *Eleanora* officer wrote "confirmed our suspicions that they had cut the boat adrift." But that afternoon, two or three Hawaiian canoes showed up, their paddlers bearing hogs and fruits—"presents from the chief."

Apparently still highly suspicious, Metcalfe refused the food offerings. Things went bad very quickly. "The last [canoe] that came we ordered immediately away, but they payed [sic] little attention to it, until

we fired, by order of the captain, five or six musket shots at them, which killed or wounded three or four,” the officer wrote.

The Hawaiian historian S.M. Kamakau’s *Ruling Chiefs of Hawaii*—which drew on the only known first-hand Hawaiian account of the massacre—*Ka Moolelo Hawaii*—says that among the dead from this first attack was a “peddler from Wailuku named Ke-aloha, who had come to Honua‘ula to peddle his wares.”

That night, a Hawaiian man with a knife swam to the ship. He swam under the hull, then tried to pry loose a piece of copper from ship’s bottom. Metcalfe, fearing that the man could pull the copper loose and seriously damage the ship, “fired a pistol at him from the cabin window, but missed him.” Three or four crewmembers then went after the man in a small boat and caught him.

Enraged, Metcalfe prepared his ship for an execution. “Capt. Metcalfe fully determined to hang him, ordered a rope to be rove at the fore yard-arm, and the rope greased, but by the persuasion of Mr. Charles [another officer], and myself, he concluded to save his life, and keep him prisoner,” stated the *Eleanora*’s officer in his 1791 account.

They may have stayed Metcalfe’s hand, but the next day brought more bloodshed. According to the officer’s account, “four or five thousand people” showed up, “all armed with spears, slings, and arrows.” By 10am, the *Eleanora* had moved to about a quarter-mile from the shore when Metcalfe ordered his crew to open fire. The *Eleanora* “fired round and grape shot at them, and dislodged them all from the village,” the officer wrote.

Round shot are simply the large cannonballs most people associate with wooden 18th century warships. But grapeshot—a canister filled with musket balls, much like a shotgun shell, designed solely to kill and maim individuals—was in many ways an even nastier weapon.

At noon, the author and six men went ashore to burn the village and “a place of worship” and fired upon the natives, “but by the constant firing from the ship, they did not attempt to attack us.”

Then the author wrote that he went back to the ship to get water casks. But this time, “The natives came down in great numbers, throwing their spears and stones, which obliged us to go on board again, our object unaccomplished.” The *Eleanora* rained down more fire on the Hawaiians. “They then all went up the summit of a hill, thinking the shot from the ship would not reach them there, but we fired two guns with such good aim, that they were soon convinced of their error,” the officer wrote. Only when the Hawaiians fled to low ditches did the ship finally cease firing.

Relations between the ship and the Hawaiians settled down over that evening. In fact, the *Eleanora* officer wrote that the next morning, a couple canoes showed up “and were well-treated.”

The *Eleanora* remained at anchor near Honua‘ula for three or four days, then sailed north. Everything changed shortly after they got moving. “We had been under way about an hour and a half, with a light breeze, when the natives in canoe alongside, informed us that the chief of the people that had stolen the boat, lived behind a point, to the northward, we then hauled our wind, went round the point and came to anchor,” the officer wrote.

The next day, Chief Kaopuiki came aboard, saying he could deliver both the stolen boat and the missing boat keeper—if Metcalfe would give him a reward. According to his officer, Metcalfe offered a musket, eight cartridges, a bar of iron and a piece of Bengal cloth for the man, and the same again for the boat. Kaopuiki agreed, and delivered the boat keeper’s thigh bones to Metcalfe. Amazingly, Kaopuiki got his reward.

The next day, Kaopuiki showed up again, this time carrying the keel of the stolen cutter. He then asked for his second reward.

According to his officer, this threw Metcalfe over the edge. “I will now give the reward they little expect,” Metcalfe said, according to his officer. Metcalfe’s officers tried to calm him down, but failed.

Metcalfe’s reaction was pure treachery. First, he secretly told his crew to man the *Eleanora*’s starboard guns, which were loaded with musket balls and nails. Then he told the 170-212 canoes, which that day had surrounded the *Eleanora* to trade, to move to the ship’s starboard side.

Again, his top officers pleaded with Metcalfe to calm down. Again, they failed. Metcalfe ordered his crew to fire a full broadside into the canoes. At least a hundred people were killed outright, with at least the same number wounded—many of whom died soon after. The scene was every bit as bloody and horrible as you can imagine.

“To attempt to describe the horrible scene, that ensued, is too much for my pen,” Metcalfe’s officer later wrote. “The water alongside continued of a crimson colour for at least 10 minutes; some were sinking, others lying half out of their canoes, without arms or legs; while others lay in their canoes weltering in their blood. Although the appearance was so horrid, the people after firing wished to get into the boat, and use boarding spikes to kill those in the water; but by severely punishing two or three, they desisted from their dreadful purpose.”

Writing from the Hawaiian perspective, the historian Kamakau described the aftermath. “Even those who swam away were shot down,” he wrote. “At noon that day the *Eleanor* sailed, and the people went out and brought the dead ashore, some diving down into the sea with ropes and others using hooks; and the dead were heaped on the sands at Olowalu. Because the brains of many were oozing out where they had been shot in the head, this battle with the ship *Eleanor* and her captain was called ‘The spilled brains.’ It was a sickening sight, as Mahulu and others have reported it; the slaughtered dead were heaped

upon the sand; wives, children, parents, and friends came to view and mourn over their dead; and the sound of loud wailing arose.”

And then the *Eleanora* sailed away to the Big Island.

At the conclusion of his account, the anonymous officer put the blame on the massacre squarely on Metcalfe, then warned other Americans from returning to Hawaii. But by the time that account was published in Great Britain, the aftermath of the massacre had already sent shockwaves throughout Hawaii. The Olowalu Massacre was, for lack of a better term, a trigger event that set in motion very rapid changes for Maui and Hawaii.

Six weeks after the *Eleanora* shot up Olowalu, Hawaiians captured the *Fair American*—commanded by Simon Metcalfe’s son Thomas—in Kona and killed the entire crew save a crewmember named Isaac Davis. Kamehameha himself spared Davis’ life, in exchange for him becoming his military adviser.

Along with John Young—the boatswain of the *Eleanora* who was also captured at Kealakekua Bay around the time the *Fair American* was taken, and who later gave his own account of the Olowalu Massacre to the English explorer George Vancouver—the two men instructed Kamehameha in the tactical deployment of two new cannons that the king also obtained. Later in 1790, they used those guns to great effect at the bloody Battle of Kepaniwai, which allowed Kamehameha to conquer Maui once and for all. Metcalfe’s massacre at Olowalu had brought western warfare to Hawaii, changing the islands forever.

Today, there’s no monument or marker at Olowalu to tell people what had happened there. For people like Clifford Naeole, this must change.

“Olowalu is special,” Naeole says. “Olowalu is a place with significance. But Olowalu as a place is not really recognized. It needs to have its own sense of place. There needs to be an altar, a temple erected there, just like Wounded Knee.”

BRIEF HISTORICAL TIMELINE

1736? – Kamehameha born

1778 – Royal Navy Capt. James Cook first lands in Kealakekua Bay on the Big Island

1779 – Capt. Cook killed

January, 1790 – The brig *Eleanora*, commanded by American Capt. Simon Metcalfe, arrives on Maui

February, 1790 – Olowalu Massacre takes place

March, 1790 – The brig *Fair American*, commanded by Metcalfe’s son Thomas, is captured by Hawaiians in Kona. Hawaiians kill everyone aboard save Isaac Davis, who is spared by Kamehameha in exchange

for him providing military assistance; Eleanora boatswain John Young is similarly captured in Kealakekua Bay, and given same deal as Davis.

Later 1790 – With the assistance of captured cannons and Davis and Young, Kamehameha routes Maui warriors at the Battle of Kepaniwai (Iao Valley); Kamehameha conquers Maui

1795 – Kamehameha conquers Oahu

1796 – Kamehameha aborts invasion of Kauai

1819 – Kamehameha dies