

Hawaiian Registered Vessels

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Vessels were owned by Hawaiian citizens and were flying the Hawaiian flag for many years before a formal registry law was enacted by the Hawaiian Legislature. Even before there was a Hawaiian flag to fly, European-type vessels were owned by Hawaiians. As early as 1794, Captain George Vancouver had his carpenters assist in the construction of the first foreign style vessel for Kamehameha I, the *Britannia*, a vessel with a 36-foot keel and a schooner rig. Vancouver does not state whether he presented a flag to go with this ship, as he had done a year earlier when he rigged one of the king's largest canoes "with a full set of canvas sails, sloop fashion, to which I added a union jack and a pendant."¹ Vancouver offered his assistance in building the vessel for Kamehameha, as the king hoped that "his people would hereafter be able to build boats and small vessels for themselves."²

Among the white men working for Kamehameha at that time was an Englishman named Robert Boyd, who claimed to have been a ship's carpenter before settling in the islands, and it was under his direction that the Hawaiians were to carry on the shipbuilding. It apparently was a successful training course for by 1810 another visitor could report that the king had a fleet of more than thirty vessels, "chiefly sloops and schooners, under forty tons burden, and have all been built by his own carpenters, principally native, under the direction of an Englishman of the name of Boyd."³

The king had other vessels besides those built in his own shipyards; one of them, the *Lelia Byrd*, is described by Campbell as being of 200 tons.

The first ship to fly the Hawaiian flag was undoubtedly the *Kaahumanu*, which had been known as the *Forester* when it sailed the Pacific for John Jacob Astor.⁴ According to the log of the captain of the vessel, Alexander Adams, it was purchased "by the king of these islands Rihorihori [footnote identifies as Tamehameha] by name" and "call'd by him *Kaahumanu* in honor of his step-mother [footnote: queen]." This would indicate that it was the son of Kamehameha I, not the king himself, who purchased the vessel.⁵ Other accounts state that it was the King, however, who sent the vessel to

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