

The tale of Max Schlemmer is powerful, compelling non-fiction. Max is a "renaissance" man who survives the danger of whaling in the frigid North Pacific, works on various Hawaiian sugar plantations, captains sailing vessels, pioneers the guano business on Laysan Island, takes on the duties of mid-wife, is a Honolulu Police captain, and a motorman with Honolulu Rapid Transit Co., and always a man devoted to family and country.

Max is also an entrepreneur. In his early years in Hawaii, he gained "squatter's rights" to Laysan Island. Later he established his home on this tiny, distant, and isolated island. Though many business ventures failed, he dreamed of a "kingdom" on Laysan Island. Perhaps he dreamed and schemed also about the vast riches to be gained in the bird plumage trade.

*Max Schlemmer, Hawaii's King of Laysan Island* takes place during an interesting period of Hawaiian history. Max is involved in rioting which leads to the overthrow of the monarchy and to Hawaii becoming the Territory of Hawaii. Max is a constant gadfly to the local authorities; his actions often lead them into uncharted waters and reverberates finally in Washington D.C.

*Max Schlemmer, Hawaii's King of Laysan Island* is also the story of the life and death of an island.




Tom, a native of Hawaii, saw action during the Pearl Harbor attack as a civilian rescue worker. He received a Purple Heart and a Combat Commission during three Italian campaigns. Today, Tom volunteers at the Arizona Memorial. As a Pearl Harbor Survivor, he gives the lecture before the film about the attack and acts as a guide at the Visitor Center.

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# MAX SCHLEMMER, HAWAII'S KING OF LAYSAN ISLAND



Tom E. Unger

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HAWAII'S KING OF  
LAYSAN ISLAND**



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**Max Schlemmer, Hawaii's  
King of Laysan Island**

*Aloha George  
Tom & Ursula*

**Max Schlemmer,  
Hawaii's King of Laysan  
Island**

*Tom E. Unger*

iUniverse, Inc.  
New York Lincoln Shanghai

## **Max Schlemmer, Hawaii's King of Laysan Island**

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This book is dedicated to my late Aunt Tess, Therese Julia Schlemmer Bredelehoft. It was her idea and wish to write the story of Max Schlemmer, her beloved father.

*"The evil that men do lives after them. The good is oft interred with their bones."*

—Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, Act III, Scene II

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## INTRODUCTION

This is the story of my grandfather, Maximilian Joseph August Schlemmer who dreamed of establishing a "Kingdom" on the island of Laysan.

Laysan is a tiny island about 1½ miles by 1 mile wide, about 800 miles northwest of Honolulu. The island is located in the center of the Northwest Hawaiian Islands which extend about 1200 miles into the northwest Pacific.

Max's life was intimately involved with the island of Laysan from 1893 through 1915. Max established his home there in the early years. Five of his children were born there including my Mother, Otilie Laysan Schlemmer Unger in 1897.

This is also the story of the life and death of an island.

## MAX'S EARLY LIFE

My grandfather, Maximilian Joseph Schlemmer, was born in Scheibenhart, April 13, 1856, to German parents in the French province of Alsace Lorraine. From his earliest days it was apparent that this gangly auburn haired kid could not get along with his family. There were many disputes as to how he should go about preparing for his future. Attending school was not a priority for young Max. What was a priority was how he could find his way to America. He was prepared to handle whatever lay ahead.

In the year of 1871, as the Prussian army stormed across the French border to claim the province of Alsace Lorraine for the greater glory of the German Empire, fifteen-year old Max Schlemmer boarded a sailing vessel bound for New York.

New York was a shock to Max, the young immigrant. He had never experienced the impact on his senses from such an overwhelming mass of humanity. Not just the sights, sounds and smells but the babble of strange tongues confronted him wherever he went. He at last found German-speaking people from whom he rented a room in a German boarding house. He then proceeded to tramp the streets looking for work.

Max soon realized that America was the land of golden opportunity for those people with a skill who could also converse in the English language. His assets included neither. As the days slipped by and his money began to run out and as panic began to grip his soul, Max was able to get a job in a butcher shop as a delivery boy.

Being a delivery boy for a German butcher was not what Max had in mind when he escaped from the old country. Each night he dragged himself back to his room and poured over the want ads in the New York German newspaper, *Staat Zeitung*.

After several weeks of searching he was rewarded. Rather than a want ad, it was a small article that caught his attention. The article stated that if a young

man wanted to see the world on sailing ships he was to contact John O. Spicer. The address was near the port city of New London, Connecticut.

John Spicer was the skipper of the bark *Nile*. He welcomed the young immigrant with warmth and geniality and invited him aboard his ship. Shortly thereafter they set sail for whaling grounds along Greenland's Icy Mountain. When they returned, Max discovered exactly what Captain Spicer had in mind for him. Captain Spicer offered Max a job on his farm. In exchange for Max's labor, the captain would teach him English and navigation. This did not sit well with Max. He refused the offer.

Once again the rebel Max was on the road. This time he headed to New Bedford, Massachusetts. From there, he was launched on a whaling career that lasted fourteen years.

The hunting and slaughtering of whales was a dirty and dangerous business. Making matters worse was the fact that by the time Max signed aboard his first whaling ship, whale herds in the Atlantic were depleted as were those in the warm waters of the Pacific. As a result of this mass slaughter, the hunt for the whale was focused on the frigid North Pacific.

There were few men like Max, who were willing to expose themselves to such harsh elements. So it was not unusual for Max to wake up aboard ship in the morning on the high seas to find a new member of the crew in the bunk below him. The poor fellow had been "shanghaied." "Shanghaiing" was a crude but sometimes effective means for recruiting seamen. They were slugged or drugged and brought aboard ship at night. Once on the high seas they had little choice other than to sign aboard as members of the crew.

One day in the early 1930's while "talking story" with grandfather Max on the large, spacious veranda of his "plantation green" house on Wilder avenue, in Honolulu, I was enchanted as he told me about the hazards of whaling in the far northwest Pacific. He said there were times without warning that white foam would burst over the bow of the ship. You were chilled to the marrow of your bones. Riggings froze and men froze with them. Giant waves rolled over the ship washing men overboard. Max himself had been lashed to the wheel housing of the ship while steering through many a raging storm. Howling wind would rake the ship, shredding sails while splintering the ship's masts.

But there were hazards beyond the natural disasters aboard a whaling ship. Max went on to say that after he had been at sea for several years he became a crewman on a whaleboat. There, danger was vastly increased. His task was to steer the boat at the direction of the harpooner, who stood at the bow of the boat while the four-man crew rowed toward the whale.

There were times when a harpooned whale would dive (with a loud swish), taking the boat and crew to the bottom. At other times a whale in its agony might thrash about with its massive tail (fluke) and shatter the fragile boat leaving its crew abandoned in icy water. Max considered himself lucky. He was often taken on a wild ride by the harpooned whale over the waves, known as a Nantucket Sleigh ride. It ended when the whale died.

I was twelve years old when Grandpa Max passed away. Over the years I have heard many tales and half-truths about him. I believe I have uncovered his real life. So my story continues.

Max first saw Hawaii in 1876, when the ship he was on, the *Cleone*, made its way from San Juan Fernandez Islands off the coast of Chili, bound for Honolulu. It had been a long and arduous voyage.

James Stanton, the ship's captain, became ill and the ship's first officer now in charge, altered course because of a serious shortage of water and rations and docked at Hilo Bay on the Big Island of Hawaii. My Aunt Tess always told about how proud Max was to say that he had visited Robinson Crusoe's island on his way to Honolulu, on the island of Oahu.

Once in Honolulu, Captain Nye took over the helm of the *Cleone* and sailed into the sea of Okhotsk, Russian territorial waters, where he decided to do a little cod fishing. It wasn't long before a Russian man-of-war arrived to interrupt his plans.

The *Cleone* was able to escape the Russian ship but as it sailed into the Arctic Ocean by way of the Bearing Sea it ran into a powerful storm. The *Cleone* was disabled and had to be abandoned. Fortunately the *Progress* was close by and Captain Nye and his crew were transferred aboard and taken to San Francisco.

In the early 1880's Max signed aboard the *Mount Walraston* out of San Francisco. Also aboard ship was another seaman with whom Max soon became a close friend. Klaus was a young swashbuckling Prussian who had apparently been exiled to the sea for reasons known only to him and his parents.

Besides both being German, Max and Klaus had another thing in common; they both hated the *Mount Walraston's* First Officer. He was drunk and surly most of the time. When he strode on deck there were crew members that would shudder with fear as he approached them.

If a seaman were ever to address the First Officer without removing his hat the poor fellow would be knocked down from a blow struck by this powerful and vicious First Officer. The same was true if a seaman failed to remove the pipe from his mouth when he addressed the First Officer.

Klaus, whose face bore a few scars from fencing duels, was a person whom the First Officer had somehow overlooked. This could have been a fatal mistake on his part. For the wily Prussian Klaus had set the time and place at which the assassination of the First Officer was to happen. After a long and serious discussion that lasted late into the night, Max convinced Klaus that his plan was too radical. They agreed that it would be best if they both quietly disappeared some night. And so they did just that.

On a quiet moonless night while the *Mount Walruson* lay anchored at Tres Marias Islands off the coast of Mexico, Max tells us that he, Klaus and two others, went over the side of the ship and boarded a small whale boat loaded with valuable whaling gear. Stealthily they rowed away and disappeared into the night. By early morning they had stashed the boat, well camouflaged in a cove, set up camp, and waited.

Several days later, the *Mount Walruson* set sail and the self-imposed castaways were free. Tres Marias was a port of call and two of their crew members were able to sign aboard ships and sail away.

Max and Klaus were willing to wait and barter for their passage to the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii). By the end of the week, they learned that the *Newton Booth* was preparing to sail to Hawaii. So the two castaways went aboard the ship and offered Captain Carrel a whaleboat and a large quantity of whaling tools and equipment in exchange for their passage. The *Newton Booth* was low on supplies and the Captain was reluctant to take on additional crew members. Nevertheless, after giving it some thought, Captain Carrel apparently realized that he could replenish his larder with the money he would receive from the sale of the boat and equipment. With this in mind, he agreed to take Max and Klaus aboard. The Captain had then become part of the conspiracy.

As Max explained the following episode to my Aunt Tess, he maintained that it was the cleverest and one of the most daring feats he had ever witnessed at sea.

The weather was bad and the ocean was rough as the *Newton Booth*, directed by Max and Klaus, made its way along the coast to where the booty lay hidden. With due concern for an encounter with a submerged reef, Captain Carrel dropped anchor somewhat further from shore than Klaus had anticipated. Klaus now feared that the small whale boat in such high surf and rough water would either swamp or capsize when loaded with so much loose and heavy cargo. He devised a plan that would allow the cargo to be hauled aboard the *Newton Booth* separately from the boat.

With little concern for his safety, Klaus climbed under the ship's rail and with a light rope tied about his waist, plunged into the angry sea. With powerful strokes he made his way through waves that at times hid him from view.

Once on shore he hauled in from the ship the light rope that had been about his waist. On the end of the rope was a heavier rope to which he tied at various intervals, the many lances, harpoons, oars, and masts. Max and the crew on the *Newton Booth* quickly hauled these aboard. Klaus then seated himself on a bundle of sails and rowed back through the pounding surf to the waiting ship and a hero's welcome.

When the *Newton Booth* docked at Honolulu, Captain Carrel became concerned that the *Mount Walruson* might also dock at Honolulu. He suggested that both Max and Klaus falsify their names on the ship's manifest.

Klaus took no chances. He hurriedly shipped out on the *Martha Davis* bound for San Francisco. Max wanted to remain in Hawaii. But it was not long before word got out in Honolulu about what happened at Tres Marias.

Max realized it was just a matter of time before he would be apprehended. He could change his name on the ship's manifest but he had to admit that he could not change his appearance. There was no doubt. He was that tall "haole" with auburn hair. In a crowd of local citizens, he stuck out like a carrot in a taro patch. It was time to leave Hawaii but by then he knew that Hawaii would be his home some day.

Max, now a fugitive from justice, took passage on the *Edward James* bound for Tahiti and the South Seas. With regard to his trip aboard the *Edward James*, Max recalls that the owner, who was aboard when the ship sailed from Honolulu, died when the ship was three days out.

The ship's captain had little control over the crew. He was usually drunk and the crew spent most of their time brawling and fighting. Max was unscathed and thankful to depart the ship once it reached Tahiti. Max decided to stay in Tahiti until things cooled down in Hawaii. Other than the fact that he had a miserable trip to Tahiti, as he told the story, nothing is known about Max until he returned to Hawaii.

Max returned to Hawaii from the South Seas in 1885. He went directly to the island of Kauai. He had heard about the German settlement there. Lihue was known as "German Town." H. Hackfeld, a German company, owned and operated the largest sugar plantation here.

Most of their workers were recruited from Germany. Before leaving Germany, the workers signed a contract stipulating their wages and benefits. Workers were to be paid \$16.00 a month for the first year and \$17.00 a month the second year.

Each family was provided housing and a half-acre lot where they could raise fruits and vegetables. They were to have a monthly allotment of 100 lb. bag of taro and of flour.

The life of the German immigrants making their home in Lihue, Kauai, revolved around the Lutheran Church. Its structure was prefabricated in Germany and shipped around the Horn to Lihue where it was reassembled. The German school established in Lihue was known for its excellence throughout the Kingdom of Hawaii.

On the *Ehrenfels*, one such German recruit was August Bomke, (Max's future father-in-law), born in 1837, in West Prussia and christened Johann August Bomke. Making the voyage with him were Julianne, his wife, and their six daughters and two sons. The five oldest children were from August's first marriage to Julianne's cousin, Juliana Draheim. Among these five children was Auguste Mary who later became Max's first wife. The three younger children included Therese Juliana who was three years old when they arrived in Hawaii. She later became Max's second wife and my grandmother. The family left Germany February 18, 1883, and arrived in Hawaii, May 2, 1883.

August Bomke probably didn't fit the strict category of a "worker." He had been in the Prussian army for six years and saw combat against Denmark, Austria and France. Among his injuries, he had lost three toes from frostbite. Now forty-six years old, Bomke soon became a Luna (overseer) at the Lihue Plantation on Kauai. As we would say in Hawaii, my maternal great-grandfather was "one tough bugga."

Max came to Kauai two years after the Bomke family. He went to work for the Eleele plantation, established in 1884 and later absorbed by McBride Sugar Company. Eleele had its own mill, a harbor, later known as Port Allen and an electric railway, which transported the sugar cane to the mill. Max took a special interest in the railway and soon became skilled in its maintenance and operation.

August Bomke took a special interest in Max and greatly admired the adventuresome life that had finally brought him to Kauai. He was invited often to the Bomke home. Early in 1886, Max began to court August's eighteen-year-old daughter, Auguste. She was a shy, quiet girl and had finished school in Germany. Since coming to Kauai, Auguste had stayed home and helped her stepmother, especially in caring for the younger Bomke children.

Max and Auguste were married in the Lihue Lutheran Church on September 5, 1886; he was thirty and she was nineteen. A year later, their first child, Mari- anne, was born at the Eleele Plantation.

Shortly thereafter, Max was offered a job involving a railroad project on the island of Hawaii. The family moved to Pahala on the Big Island. Their second daughter, Auguste was born here in 1888. About a year later, the family moved again. Max found a job with Hana Sugar Plantation located on the extreme eastern tip of the island of Maui. At this time, Auguste was expecting their third child within the next month.

Before the family settled in Hana, Auguste, along with the two small children, went home to Lihue. Here in the large Bomke household, she would have lots of care and help. Max Jr. was born in 1888 at the Bomke home. Auguste, with the three small children, joined Max shortly thereafter at their home in Hana. From all the accounts, Auguste was a strong person of sturdy German stock, but she contacted typhoid fever and died at their home in Hana on October 6, 1891. A grieving Max, with three youngsters under four years old to care for, turned to the Bomke family on Kauai. The grandparents, August and Julie, took the children to live with them. Max returned to Hana and continued with his job at the sugar plantation for several more years.



August Johann Bomke  
Julianne Draheim Bomke

## 2

### ABOUT LAYSAN ISLAND

In late 1892, George N. Wilcox, President of the North Pacific Phosphate and Fertilizer Company offered Max the job as foreman of their guano mining operation on Laysan Island. This company had been formed in 1890 and began the guano mining operation on Laysan Island that same year. After one and a half years of operation, the company was losing money and heavily in debt. Wilcox felt that the company could become profitable if it were to replace the German foreman, William Weisbarth and the work force he had brought with him from the Gilbert Islands.

During negotiations with the Kingdom of Hawaii concerning the lease of Laysan Island in 1890, Wilcox recalled hearing about a young German whaler who had attained some sort of legal rights to the Island of Laysan. This person was paid a small royalty on the profits of the mining operation on Laysan.

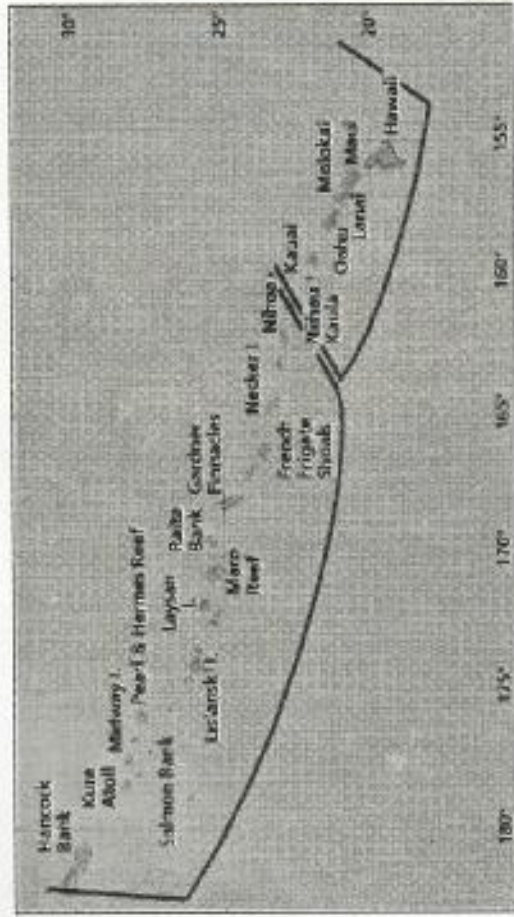
The only record of this fact is to be found in *The Sales Builder* for January 1939. This was a monthly publication by the Star Bulletin Printing House "for the advancement of industry, commerce and agriculture." This issue featured the history of fertilizer and the history of Pacific Guano and Fertilizer Company, commonly known as PG&F. An excerpt from this publication reads:

He (Maximilian Schlemmer) saw Hawaii first on a whaling cruise, returned in 1885 to settle, soon took squatter possession of Laysan Island, enthusiastically boosted for exploitation of its guano deposits, and, when operations started, claimed, got, a modest royalty as "King of Laysan." ... He was PG&F superintendent from 1896 to close of operations.

Wilcox learned that Max was presently employed at Hana Sugar Plantation and went there to meet with him. After a short interview with Max, Wilcox was impressed with Max's strong character, his spirit of adventure, his knowledge of guano and the ingenuity he had shown in obtaining squatter's rights to Laysan Island. Furthermore, Max was German; a fact that should please the German

Company, Hackfeld, which was the financial backer of the North Pacific Phosphate and Fertilizer Company.

It became apparent that Max had never been to Laysan Island. When he accepted the job offer from Wilcox, Max realized he must learn more about Laysan Island if he was going to live there. Much of what he learned would dispel many of the fantasies he held about living on an island paradise in the Pacific.



Northwest Hawaiian Islands and main islands of the state of Hawaii

Laysan was officially discovered by Captain Stanikowich aboard the Russian ship, *Moller*, on March 24, 1828. He named the island, Moller, after his ship, not knowing the island had already been discovered and named Laysan. There appears to be no certain record of when it was first discovered and why it was named Laysan. However, according to the *Atoll Research Bulletin, No. 171*, examination of logs of whaling ships in the Pacific, reveal that "the only ship listed as whaling in the Pacific prior to 1828, and with a captain named (John) Briggs, was the *Wilmington* and *Liverpool Packet* of New Bedford which made two voyages, on either of which Laysan may have been discovered.... Briggs' discovery of Laysan must have occurred no later than 1826 and possibly as early as 1821 or 1822."

While exploring among the Pacific islands known today as the Northwest Hawaiian Islands, Captain John Pary landed on Laysan Island on May 1, 1857.

He subsequently annexed the island to the Kingdom of Hawaii. In his published account, Captain Pary describes Laysan as follows:

Laysan Island—W. by N.  $\frac{3}{4}$  N. from Honolulu 808 miles. This is a low sand island, 25 to 30 feet high; 3 miles long and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  broad.

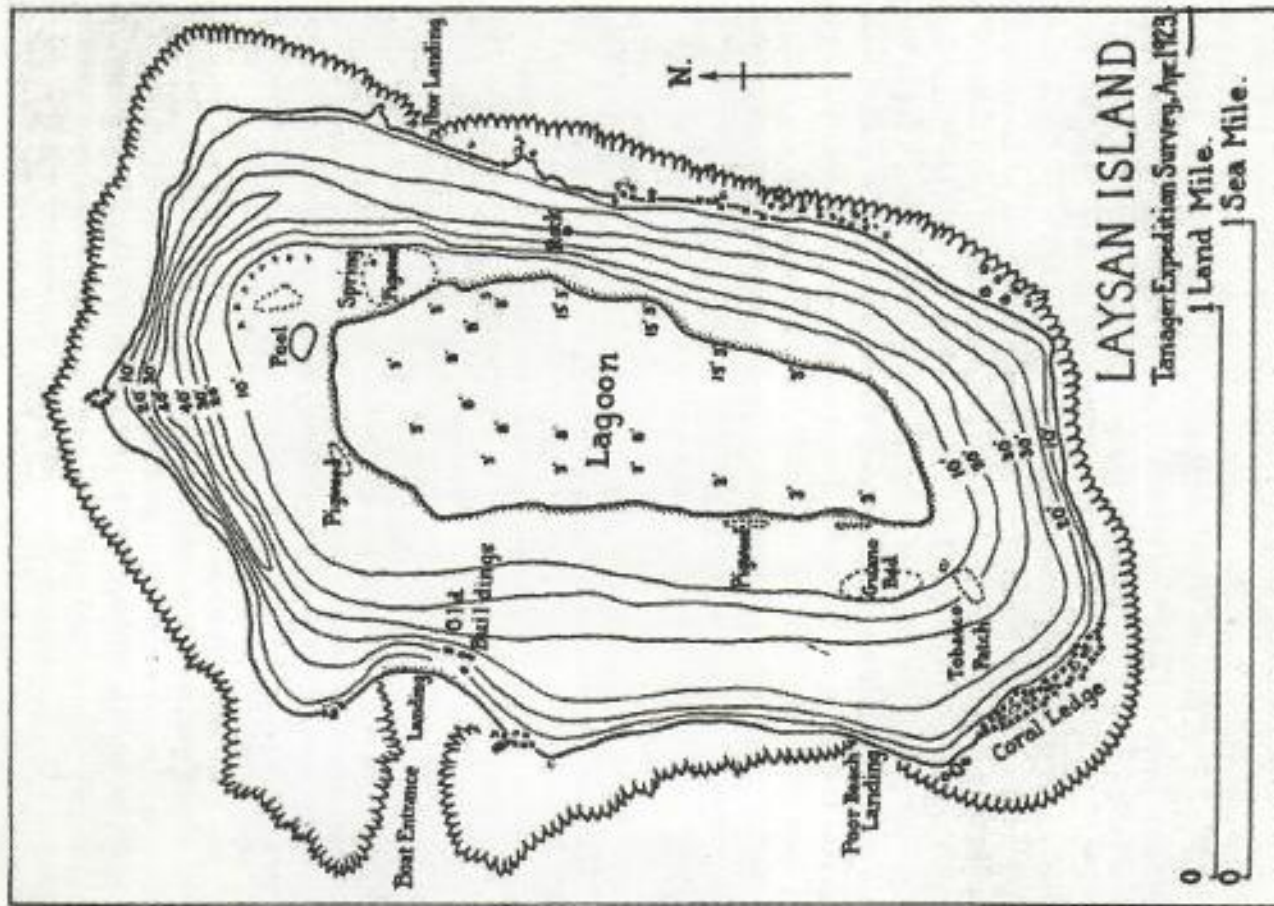
The surface is covered with beach grass, and half a dozen small palm trees were seen. It has a lagoon in the centre (salt) 1 mile long and half a mile wide, of salt water and not a hundred yards from the lagoon, an abundance of tolerable good fresh water can be had by digging two feet, and near the lagoon was found a deposit of guano. The island is "literally covered" with birds; there is, at low estimate 800,000. Seal and turtle were numerous on the beach, and might be easily taken. They were evidently unaccustomed to the sight of man, as they scarcely move at our approach, and the birds are so tame and plentiful, that it was difficult to walk about the island without stepping upon them. The gulls lay enormous large eggs, of which I have a specimen. A bank of rocks and sand extends off to the South and West 6 to 8 miles or more. Good anchorage can be found on the West side of the island in from 4 to 20 fathoms, by selecting a sandy spot to anchor upon, half to 2 miles from the beach.

The best landing is about one-third of the distance from the Northern to the Southern point of the island, where there is a very smooth sand beach.

Although Laysan Island is just over 800 miles from Honolulu, it is perhaps one of the most isolated places in the world. It lies about 2,000 miles from the North American land mass as well as this same distance from the Asian continent.

Laysan is a volcanic island that erupted from the floor of the ocean some 18 million years ago. It was a lofty mountain pinnacle that was worn down over the ages to a speck of an island set atop a giant undersea mountain range. Over millions of years, this mountain range rose above the water and formed pinnacles, islets, shoals, reefs, and low sand bars slightly above the tide. It sweeps 1,300 miles as a dragon's tail, northwest in the Pacific from its beginning with Kauai, the northernmost of the main Hawaiian islands. Sometimes this group of islets, islands and shoals is called the Hawaiian Archipelago, but it is best known today as the Northwest Hawaiian Islands.

Laysan is the largest of the Northwest Hawaiian Islands. It is a low-lying coral island ringed by sand dunes. Its highest point is forty feet. The island is roughly rectangular in shape. There is a saltine lagoon in the center of the island, which takes up about one-fifth of the total land area. The latitude is about the same as Monterey, Mexico and Miami, Florida.

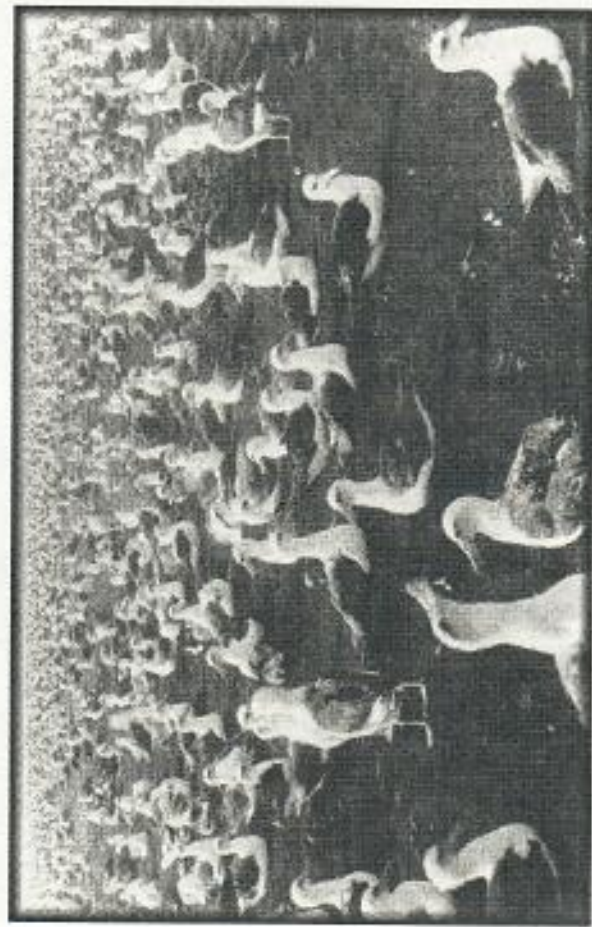


Laysan Island, principal source of fertilizer for Hawaiian plantations.

Although Laysan lies outside the tropic zone, summer heat averages 90 to 100 degrees. The lack of shade trees makes it seem even warmer. Sand storms are a constant threat. Northwest winter storms thrash the island with heavy surf, rain and at times, hail.

Laysan Island has an asset not shared by others in this northwest island group. It has an abundance of fresh water. This gave rise to a unique bird population; giant seabirds living side by side with fragile land birds.

The following is an excerpt from a lecture given by Dr. Hugo Schauinsland, an eminent German scientist and professor who visited Laysan Island with his wife Adele in 1896. This lecture was masterfully translated by Miklos D. F. Udvardy of the National Museum of Natural History.



Albatross on Laysan Island

Laysan is a true bird paradise; nowhere on earth is there another place like this. The land birds occupy an inferior position, enduring their role of barely being tolerated by the seabirds who are the dominant and ruling class here. Next to the seabirds, all others take second place, and their character has a marked influence on the island. Seabirds rush here from the vast expanse of the North Pacific, to carry out their breeding duties. The island is ideally suitable for this, with its sandy soil. Many other uninhabited islands have a rocky substrate which makes them unsuitable to the shearwaters and diving birds



who often require meter-deep burrows to make their nests in. Huge masses of birds come to breed here! During our arrival here when we first approached the island, we could see from quite a distance away, a veritable cloud of birds looming over the island. The flocks of storm petrels (*Haloplana fuliginosa* Peale) that were milling around in the distance, looked like a swarm of bees.

It is difficult to estimate the numbers in such a multitude. The numbers making up those bird clouds, however, were probably in the several tens of thousands, perhaps even hundreds of thousands. There are some locations on Laysan where literally every square foot of land is occupied by breeding birds.

It is virtually impossible, even for a cautious person and especially at night, to take a step without his foot endangering the birds. Moreover, the breeding birds are not only distributed *horizontally* on the island but also *vertically*, since they live not only next to one another but also over and beneath one another. There are wide expanses that are literally undermined by the burrows of the different species of shearwaters, especially where the sand is rather loose and the vegetation sparse. Nothing is more difficult than crossing such a place! The thin sandy covering over the burrows breaks through all the time, leaving you with every step to sink knee-deep with one foot, and then with the other. Where the shrub-like goosefoot forms thickets, there are not two, but four parties living above one another.

The booby and the frigate bird make their nests on top of the shrubbery. Some of the land birds prefer to nest deeper below in the branches (mostly *Acrocephalus*, but at times *Himatione*). Below them, shaded by the branches at ground level, is where the gorgeous tropical birds breed over the burrows where the black shearwaters raise their young in underground apartments. And so, with the birds living in four vertically stacked levels (stories), the comparison of these bird cities to tenement houses is easy to see. Just as a lack of enough living area forces people to build vertically and live over one another, the crowds of birds overpopulating Laysan are similarly forced into selecting available vertical space as suitable living quarters.

What an admirable drive the bird has, a drive which directs it as it flutters over a thousand miles of ocean, with an overwhelming, heartfelt compulsion to rush back to the place where its cradle once stood, in order to fulfill its parental role and duties. One is awestruck by the bird's ability to accurately schedule its arrival time, almost to within an hour; where is the compass that guides its flight through the storms and hurricanes over the vast ocean toward this tiny speck of land?

A few months later, the appearance of the island was again changed by the immigration of an even more impressive bird than the one just described. In the last days of October, the first outposts of the magnificent albatrosses appear, and a few days later, from a higher vantage point, the island looks as if it were covered by large snowflakes. There is hardly a spot from which the dazzling white plumage of an albatross does not reflect back. There are often so many of them that many must be satisfied with inferior sites, and even more are forced to move again.

Of the invasions of the other birds, I shall only mention the terns, because of the sheer magnitude of their invasion. During the first few days, when most of the birds are still busy searching for a suitable nest site, the fluttering multitude of these birds cause the island to look, from a distance, as if a heavy smoke curtain lay above it.

In the late 1880's, Laysan Island became well known to a variety of interest groups. Members from the scientific community around the world visited Laysan Island to study the unique bird life, and the unique marine life. They collected specimens that even today, have a prominent place in museums. Leaders in the fast growing sugar cane industry in Hawaii, looking for a cheap source of fertilizer, became aware of the rich guano deposits on Laysan and set up mining operations. And then there were the bird pirates, coming mostly from Japan. These bird pirates ruthlessly exploited the birds for their beautiful plumage over a ten to fifteen year period.

## 3

A SHORT STAY IN  
HONOLULU

In late 1892, Max Schlemmer was offered a job by George W. Wilcox to become foreman at a guano digging operation on the island of Laysan.

Max accepted the job at Laysan. However, while passing through Honolulu to visit his orphaned children at Lihue, Kauai, he decided to join the Honolulu Police Force.

Shortly after joining the force, he was promoted to the rank of Captain in their mounted police. He was assigned to Honolulu's China Town. In those days the immigrant Chinese wore their hair in braided "pony-tails" that hung down their backs. These were known as queues. These queues provided Max with an effective tool for riot control.

At the height of an opium riot, Max rounded up the ringleaders, tied their queues together and marched them to jail. Thus he put to rest a nasty situation with little or no bloodshed. For this expedient use of force in the face of dire hostility, Max received a commendation and was presented a gold watch.

Shortly after Max had received this commendation, he and his fellow officers became involved in Hawaii's most serious political crisis, the revolution of 1893. Queen Liliuokalani refused to abide by the "Bayonet Constitution" of 1887, which her late brother, King Kalakaua, had been forced to adopt.

The haole (Caucasian) planters and businessmen of The Reform Party were bent on destroying the monarchy and annexing Hawaii to the U.S. Their leader Lorrin Thurston formed the Committee of Public Safety. In a show of force, he called out the Honolulu Rifles (a secret haole militia) and installed a provisional government headed by ex-Supreme Court Justice Sanford Dole.

Max, along with the police force and soldiers, was loyal to the Queen. They were well-armed and ready to fight. However, when boat loads of U.S. sailors and

marines landed to reinforce the Honolulu rifles, Queen Liliuokalani capitulated; not to the revolutionaries but to the superior forces of America.

The following day, to the complete surprise of Marshal Wilson and the rest of the police force, Max abruptly quit the police force and continued on to Kauai to visit his children.

From Kauai, Max wrote to the Marshal's office asking if they would make an effort to retrieve his watch that had been stolen prior to his departure.

The reply to Max's letter from the Marshal's office follows:

---

Marshal's Office

Honolulu, HI

June 20, 1893

Mr. Max Schlemmer

Kiluea Plantation, Kauai

Dear friend Max,

I received your letter last Sunday morning. I was sorry it wasn't you in its place. Somehow or another I believed you would return. Not only I, but also the old man. He asked me first thing Sunday morning if you had shown up. Your Lieutenant was made captain somehow or another. It's strange Klemme couldn't get there.

Up until now, your horse has not appeared. I forwarded one letter to you the other day, from Maui.

Well, Max, I hope you are satisfied in your new job. The boys are all sorry of your departure. As far as they, or even the old man are concerned, you could come back and get your Captaincy anytime. I will close now, hoping to hear from you often. The boys all send their "Aloha Nui."

I remain yours sincerely,

Captain H A Yuen  
Honolulu, Hawaii

P.S. About that watch that was stolen up there. We will keep an eye open for it.



Police Captain, Island of Oahu  
Kingdom of Hawaii 1893

In mid-summer, 1893, Max visited with his children in Lihue and spent most of his time with the Bomke family. Therese Juliana, Auguste's half sister had become a "lirle mother" to Mary, Gussie and Max Jr. Therese cared for the three children most of the time and they adored her. She seemed mature for her age, with a healthy dose of common sense and a no-nonsense attitude.

Max soon realized that he loved Therese as the children did. He proposed marriage. Therese accepted and agreed to wait for his return from Laysan Island. Max planned to get started with his new job in the guano mining operation on Laysan before bringing a bride and his three children to live there.

## 4

## MAX ARRIVES ON LAYSAN

It was late summer, 1893, when Max finally arrived on Laysan as foreman of the guano digging operation. The North Pacific Phosphate and Fertilizer Company had hired him. This company had been formed in 1890 when George D. Freeth and George N. Wilcox persuaded H. Hackfeld and Company, a German company in Honolulu, to finance their company, which was to mine the guano deposit on Laysan Island.

Freeth was an Englishman who had sailed from Honolulu to Laysan Island in February 1890. It was reported in *The Friend*, April 1890, that he had taken possession of the island, hoisted the Hawaiian flag, and left two men there to hold possession.

On 13 March, he returned to Honolulu and reported that there were good guano deposits on the island. He knew George Wilcox only slightly, and knew that he had at one time, managed a guano operation on Jarvis Island. In mid 1890, the two men got together and formed a business partnership. They were able to get the Hawaiian Kingdom to grant them the right to mine guano deposits on Laysan and Lisiansky Islands for a period of 20 years.

Freeth was appointed general manager for the operation and was to live on the island. With this appointment, he was given the title of "Governor of Laysan and Lisiansky Islands." With supplies and equipment, a foreman and eight laborers aboard, he sailed on the *S.S. Pele* for Laysan Island in November 1890.

After only part of the cargo had been landed, the party was driven from the island by one of the notorious winter storms, common to the area at this time of year. They returned to Honolulu; it was late December before they were able to land successfully on Laysan. The guano digging operation began in early 1891.

In April 1891, the first shipment of guano, 80 tons, was sold in Honolulu at \$50 a ton. By November 30, 1891, the company had shipped 1,017 tons of guano to Europe, 200 tons to California and 200 tons to Hawaii. But it soon became appar-

ent that this was not a profitable operation. The company was \$39,949.91 in the red.

In November 1892, the Hackfeld Co. chartered the schooner *Libolibo* and hired Dr. W. Averdram, a noted German chemist. His mission was to determine if the mining of guano on Laysan Island could become a profitable operation. Dr. Averdram returned with the recommendation that the guano operation on Laysan should be shut down and that a modern chemical fertilizer plant be built in Honolulu. It would be some years before H. Hackfeld and Co. acted on this recommendation.

When Freeth established the guano operation on Laysan, he hired laborers and their foreman, Captain William Weisbarth, from the Gilbert Islands. (Today these islands are known as the Republic of Kiribati.)

Weisbarth was a somewhat arrogant German married to a native woman from the Gilbert Islands. He was a swarthy, stout barrel of a man with short clipped hair and mustache. His dress was a gaudy pair of striped pajamas. It seems that striped pajamas were the royal garb of the King of the Gilbert Islands.

Robert Louis Stevenson, in his book, *A Tale of Tapu*, writes that while visiting Makin in the Gilbert Islands, "The King was there in striped pajamas."

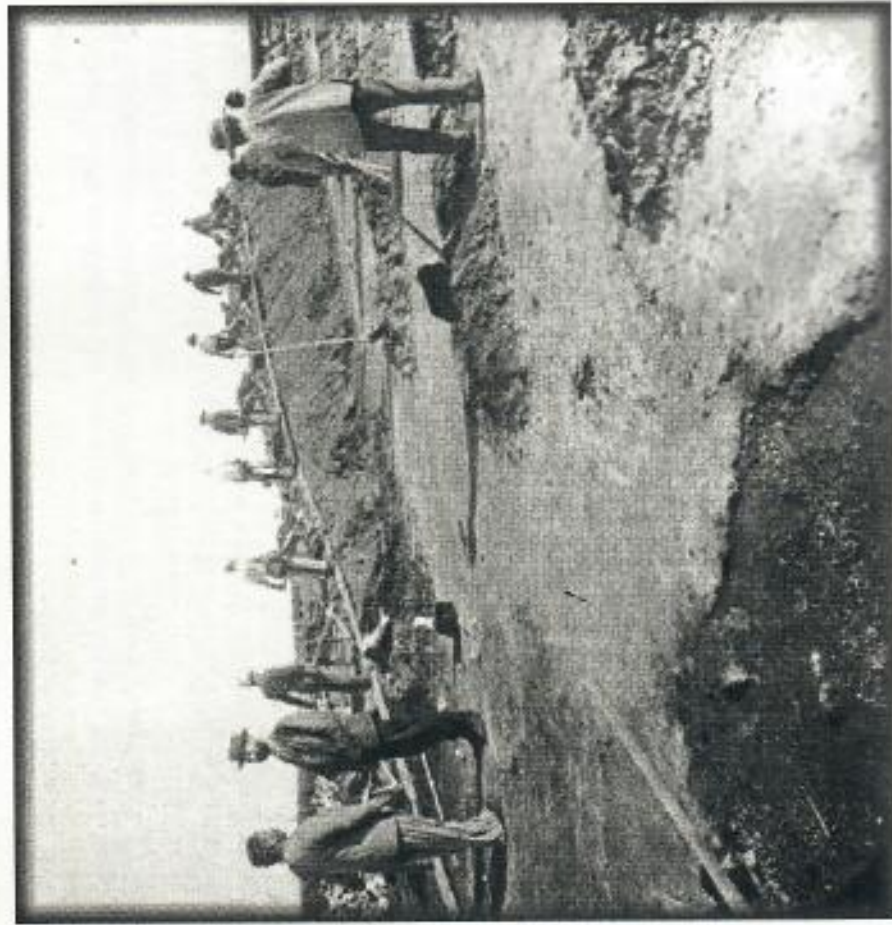
Although Weisbarth, in his royal garb, seemed to be doing a good job, his boss, Captain George Freeth, together with George N. Wilcox, president of the company, decided the Pilipati, as they were known to the Hawaiians, were to be replaced by laborers from Japan. Further, Max Schlemmer would replace Captain William Weisbarth. As could be expected, this situation created much animosity between the two Germans.

Weisbarth left Laysan Island but remained in Hawaii. With his schooner, *Lavinia*, he hauled cargo between the Hawaiian Islands. Sometimes he had a guano shipment from Laysan. Whenever the two Germans met, an explosive argument was sure to ensue. Until the day William Weisbarth left Hawaii, he was Max Schlemmer's nemesis.

Laysan was fast becoming a "guano island." A Captain of one of the schooners chartered to take the guano to Honolulu gives a detailed description of guano operations as follows:

Laborers mined the guano, consisting mostly of a hard, conglomerated, phosphate of lime, with picks, crowbars, shovels and sledges. This material was placed on cars on the narrow gauge railway and pulled by mules to storage sheds where the guano was kept until a ship arrived. A small amount of brown guano (bird droppings and soil) was also collected and sifted, but it was a small proportion of the total amount of guano shipped from the island.

When ships came in, the guano was carried from the storage sheds in barrels holding about a ton out onto the wharf that extended from the west side of the island. At the end of the wharf the guano was dumped into a chute, which deposited the material into lighters. These lighters in turn transferred their cargo to the clipper ships that were anchored between two buoys off shore. As much as 100 to 125 tons per day could be loaded under favorable conditions.

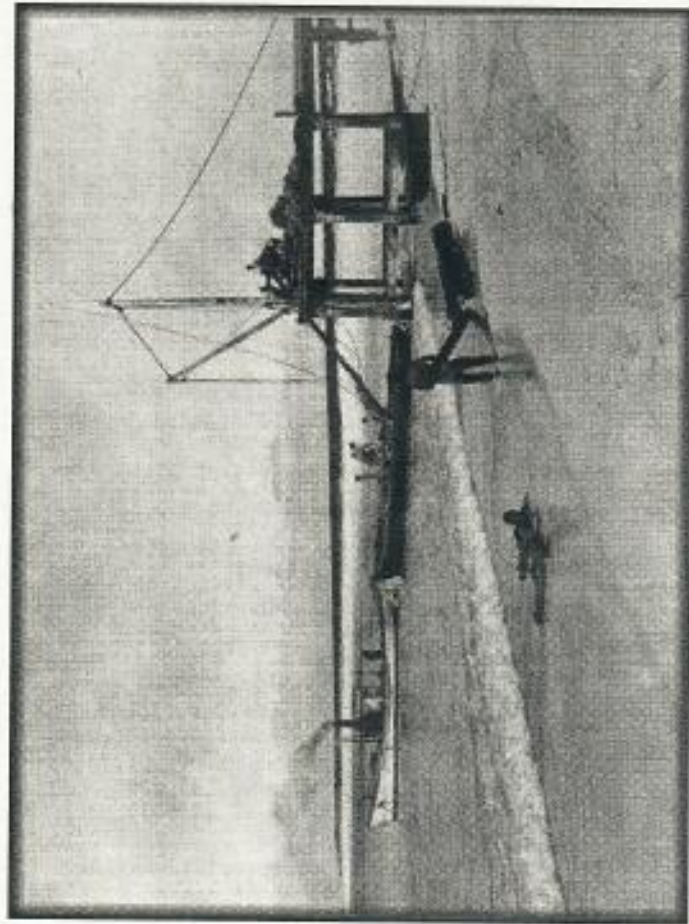


Captain William Weissbarth and Dr. W. Averdam conferring about the guano mining operation.

The guano-shipping period lasted only from April through September. If ships arrived during times of high surf, a "winter landing" was possible on the

north coast of the island. During the early days of the guano operation, only a caretaker remained on the island during the winter months.

Once Max established his home on Laysan, he and his family usually remained there the year round.



Loading guano from the dock at Laysan Island 1892.  
Photo from Collection of J. J. Williams, at Bishop Museum

At the same time, the economics of Laysan's fledging guano industry was of no interest to the natural scientists throughout the world. Laysan's true value lay in its pristine ecosystem. Because of the presence of fresh water on Laysan and because of its extreme isolation in the Pacific, the discovery of land birds existing among a multitude of seabirds was of particular interest to the scientific community.

During the 1890's, a number of scientific collecting expeditions were carried out. The first, most extensive expedition was one sponsored by Walter Rothschild in 1891. During their visit on Laysan Island, conditions were recorded and a bio-

logical survey made. They collected numerous birds, including four species new to science.

Henry Palmer, leader of the expedition, declared that Laysan was the "greatest bird island in the world."

It should be noted that during the years Max lived on the island, he collected a small number of birds. Records exist that show 39 specimens of 9 species. All but two of these specimens are now housed in the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard. He also collected a small number of fish specimen.

After receiving "a fine collection of nests and eggs," William Y. Bingham wrote to Max, on Bishop Museum stationery, "I am directed by a vote of the Trustees of the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, to acknowledge the receipt of your Gift to the Museum, and to return to you their thanks for the same."

## 5

## THE LONELY BRIDE HAS A VISITOR

Max and Therese were married on March 22, 1895, in the Lihue Lutheran Church. Max was thirty-eight. Therese was not quite sixteen. They sailed to Laysan Island on their honeymoon, accompanied by Max's three children who were Therese's nieces and nephew that she had been raising: Marianne (now called Mary), age 8, Gussie, age 7 and Max Jr., age 5.

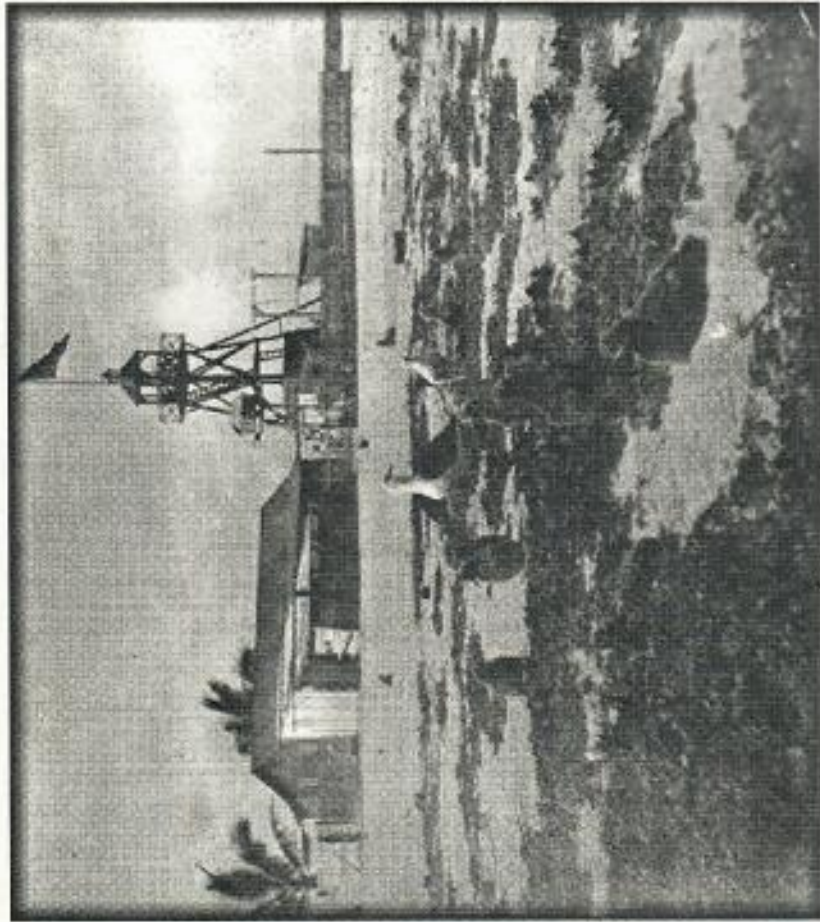
They were greeted by dismal and meager surroundings; a wretched little mining camp that had sprung up to house laborers from Japan. A narrow rail track ran from the guano fields to the dock. A stalwart mule drew carts along the track. Several other animals were on the island, including a milk cow. It died suddenly. A feather ball was found stuck in its gullet.

Their quarters had a kerosene stove and a few wicker chairs, Pots and pans and work clothes hung about. Quilts and cots to sleep on were in another room. Insects of various sizes were everywhere. A hurricane lamp sat on a table in the corner of the entry room with old copies of newspapers: *The Friend*, *Honolulu Commercial Advertiser*, and *The Honolulu Star*.

As night fell, the glow of the sunset was replaced by the reflection of their oil lamp on the walls of their hovel. From among the Japanese laborers, a cook was provided for the family.

The young bride had never expected a honeymoon nor a mansion. She was bewildered but not disappointed. In these strange surroundings, Therese had difficulty sleeping. The birdcalls at night were disturbing and frightening, especially that of the Black Shearwater. They would emit horrible cries much as a human lamenting a terrible tragedy.

It was especially difficult to wander about at night without stepping through a nest. Birds were so numerous, they built their nests vertically one atop the other. Still, there was not enough space on the island for the birds to breed.



The Schlemmer's home and lighthouse at Laysan Island

Huge masses of birds would approach the island from the sea like a cloud on the horizon. As their breeding cycle ended, another mass of birds would arrive. It was a breeding cycle that was developed over thousands of years, the timing of which would rival Japan's train schedules today.

The feeling of isolation was quite intense. There was no "pony express" that came on a regular schedule to bring mail, medical supplies, provisions, supplies and the like. Perhaps two or three ships per month stopped at Laysan, stopping only if the ship's captain decided to do so, depending somewhat on wind, weather and other conditions. It was a 6 to 8 day trip to Honolulu. Growing a garden was impossible. Often, a ship would surprise them with a gift of fresh fruits and vegetables.

The Black-footed Albatross eggs were preserved by the barrel.



Ottillie and friends with a collection of Albatross eggs.

One visitor found them "fresh and also very palatable if allowed to remain in boiling water for twenty-five minutes. In fact, they had a much better flavor than the similar product from the hen."

Therese was overwhelmed by the harsh atmosphere. Added to an already difficult adjustment, she and Max were further distressed and saddened by the loss of their son Adam, at birth. However, the gloom that hung so heavy about Max and Therese began to lift when they received word that Hackfeld and Company was sending their flagship to Laysan. Aboard was one of Germany's most eminent scientists, Dr. Hugo H. Schausinsland and his wife Adele.

At last Max's young bride would be able to enjoy the company of another woman. The Doctor and his wife set up their laboratory and workshop next to the Laysan lighthouse. They proceeded to process, label, and pack 15 trunks of specimens from land and sea.

Busy as she was, Adele found time to visit with the lonely bride Therese. They became fast friends and corresponded until the outbreak of World War I. Eric Schlemmer, my uncle, kept two of these letters.

Before the Shauinsland's departed from Laysan Island, Max presented the Doctor with the remains of a Hawaiian Monk Seal. When the Doctor presented this animal to science, it was declared a new species and today bears his name: *Monachus Schauinslands*.

It must be noted that during the fifteen years Max spent on Laysan, he had rarely seen a Monk Seal. He had, however, discovered one of their skeletal remains and preserved it. Seals had been slaughtered almost to the point of extinction. Much like whales, they were slaughtered for their skins and oil. When the Hawaiian bark *Gambia* docked at Honolulu in 1859, 1500 sealskins and 240 barrels of oil were aboard. With the coming of the 20th century, petroleum reduced the need for whale and seal oil. The age of the sea hunters ended.

Although few in number, the Hawaiian Monk Seal continues to exist in the Northwest Hawaiian waters. It is the rarest mammal in the world and has a most unusual feature; it sheds its skin like a reptile. Were it not for Max Schlemmer and Dr. Shauinsland, the Hawaiian Monk Seal might have disappeared from the face of the earth.

The time had now come for the Shauinslands to leave the island. From the Doctor's journal we have an excellent description of their departure from Laysan Island:

It was now September and darkness came early. Along with the beginning winter months, came the wild northwest storms. The proud ship *Harkfeld* arrived only to be forced to tack back and forth in front of Laysan in boiling seas in an attempt to retrieve my wife and me.

On the third day, the Captain succeeded in maneuvering the ship into a safe spot where he dropped anchor. The weather did not improve. A mighty Western swell caused the ship to roll so much that its yardarms almost touched the water. On the evening of September 22, word reached shore from the ship that we must board at once. The ship needed to sail immediately before the masts were ruined in the extreme rolling action of the ship.

We rushed to get ready. After bidding a hasty farewell to Max and his family, we departed for the ship in a small boat. As the last rays of the sun set over the island, we climbed a rope ladder up the side of the violently rolling ship. It was an experience we prayed we would never have to repeat. Unfortunately, our departure was again delayed. The storm passed and the wind died completely. We were forced to sit there for two more days. We were seasick as the ship rolled lazily in the dead calm. Sleep was impossible. Then, on the third

day, a favorable trade wind sprang up. The ship's lines were released from the buoys, the anchor was raised and the ship sailed away from the menacing reef.



The Hawaiian Monk Seal Shown here on South Point Laysan Island in 1923.

It is considered to be the rarest mammal in the world.

From atop the Laysan lighthouse, Max dipped the flag in a farewell salute as Therese waved a sad goodbye. At the ship's rail, the Shauinslands watched as the two solitary figures faded from view. They now understood the kind of courage it took to stay in solitude for six to eight months totally separated from the rest of the world.



## 6

## MAX ESTABLISHED AS "KING OF LAYSAN ISLAND"

After the death of Adam, Max had a trying time dealing with the fact that he had brought his family to such a God-forsaken place. He envisioned other tragedies that could lie ahead. His confidence had been shattered with Adam's death. Could he successfully bring more children into the world?

He wondered aloud if his efforts on the island were appreciated by Hackfeld. Why had he not been appraised of the fertilizer plant they were building on Oahu?

Max was working himself to the point of exhaustion in an effort to forget the loss of their child and the job insecurity he was beginning to feel. He was also gravely concerned about Therese and their second child she was expecting soon.

Meanwhile, a ship, the *C.D. Bryant*, stood offshore for thirteen days, taking on 1100 tons of guano for the *H. Hackfeld Company* in Honolulu. During this time, the ship's captain, A.J. Simpson, spent some of each day visiting and talking with Max. He soon became aware of Max's struggles and concerns about his job and life for his family on the island.

Captain Simpson decided that the company would best be served in the long run if Max and his family were to take a vacation to Kauai. They could stay with Therese's parents, the Bomkes. And he had just the man to leave on Laysan, August Toeller who had been brought to Laysan to man the ship's launch. He was now to be in charge on Laysan during the absence of Max.

On June 11th, while Hawaii commemorated the birth of Kamehameha the Great, Max and Therese welcomed my mother into the world on Laysan Island; Otilie Laysan Schlemmer. Otilie's birth gave Max a new lease on life. Now, with the birth of a healthy child, his confidence was restored. Shortly after my Mother's birth, Max and his family left for Kauai.



The Max Schlemmer family 1898. The infant is my mother, Otilie with her half siblings: Max, Mary and Gussie.

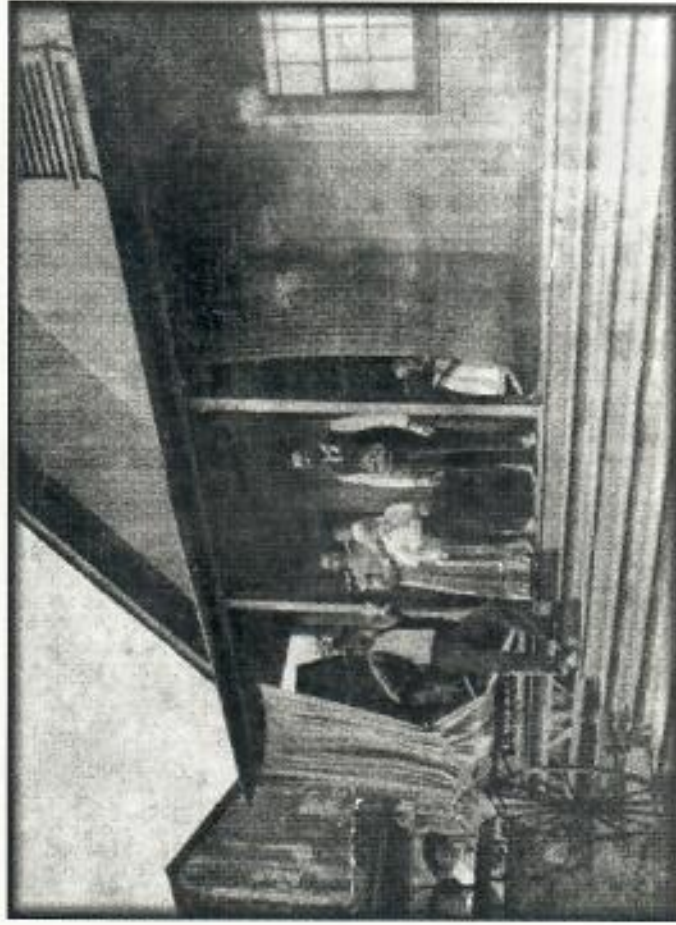
Mother was baptized Otilie Laysan Schlemmer, August 16, 1897 by Pastor Hans Isenberg at the German Lutheran Church at Lihue, Kauai.

The Schlemmer family returned to Laysan and were most grateful for the help August Toeller had given them. He had been a good manager during Max's absence. But he had also proved to be a strong and compassionate person whom they had needed to see them through one of the most trying times of their lives. He stayed on for about six months; then returned to his home in Washington State.

After Toeller's departure, Max returned to his job with renewed vigor. His enthusiasm soon waned however, due to the behavior of Captain Spencer, the company's manager for the island.

Often Spencer displayed a menacing attitude toward the Japanese workers. This made it difficult for Max to do his job.

By 1899, Max's distrust of the Captain had grown to the point where he had to do something.



BAYVIEW SALOON with Max, Therese, family and friends.

In addition to the growing animosity between Max and Captain Spencer, Max worried again about the wisdom of raising a family on Laysan Island. A second child was soon to be born. Max could no longer see raising a family at Laysan under present conditions. He decided to leave Laysan Island.

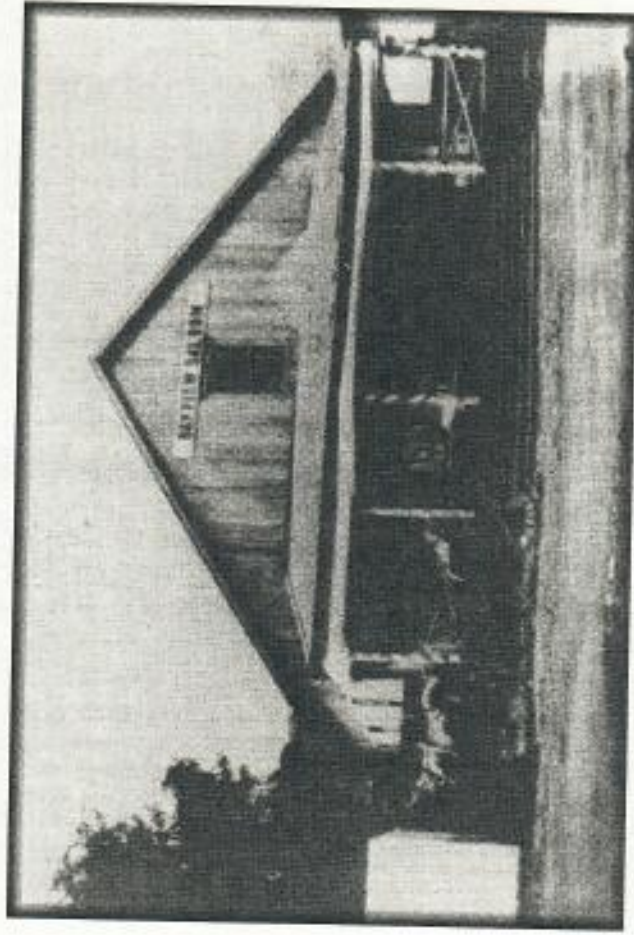
The Schlemmer family moved to Kauai in late 1899. Another daughter, Therese Julia, was born, January 13, 1900 in Waiimea.

With the financial backing of his father-in-law, August Bomke, Max opened the Bayview Saloon and Billiard Parlor in Waiimea.

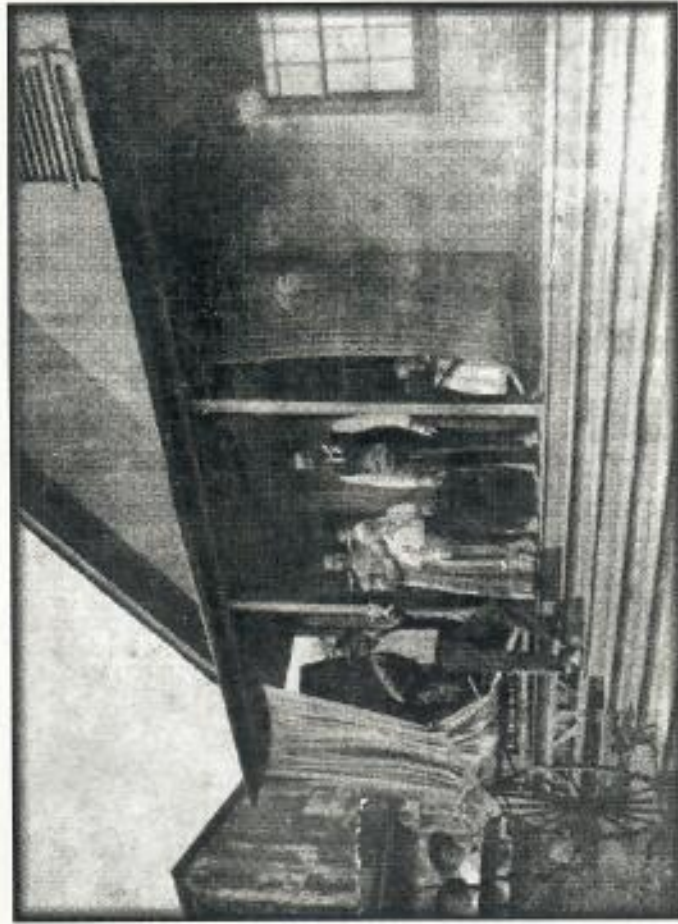
Since Max had become a businessman in the Territory of Hawaii, which was now part of the United States, he decided it was fitting and proper that he should become a U.S. citizen. In September 1900, Max appeared at the Circuit Court of the Fifth Judicial Circuit of the Territory of Hawaii and received his papers that declared him a citizen of the United States of America. They were signed by Judge Gilbert F. Little and Harry D. Wishard, Clerk of the Court. Max carried these papers wherever he went and displayed them to whomever he thought might be interested in his newfound glory as an American citizen.



Max's Business Card



Bayview Saloon decorated for the holidays



BAYVIEW SALOON with Max, Therese, family and friends.

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*Bay View*

SALOON AND BILLIARD PARLORS

WAIIMEA, KAUAI

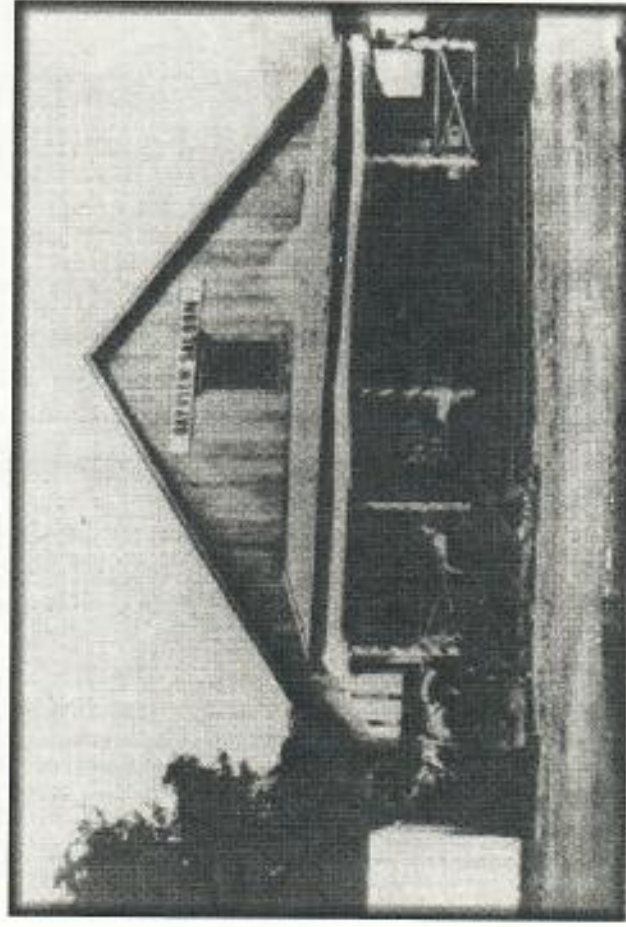
Only the Choicest Wines and Beers on Hand

MAX SCHELEMMER, Proprietor

FINEST ACCOMMODATIONS  
FOR TRAVELERS

ONE OF THE BEST AND MOST  
UP-TO-DATE RESORTS

Max's Business Card



Bayview Saloon decorated for the holidays

At about the time Max was becoming a citizen in Honolulu, violence was breaking out at Laysan Island. Although this news came as no great surprise, the level of violence disturbed him a great deal.

On August 11, 1900, a bloody riot took place on Laysan. The Japanese laborers rebelled against the overseers of the guano mining, demanding better working conditions and increased wages.

On September 8, 1900, headlines from the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* read, "Laysan Island's Story of Blood." The following is an excerpt from the article:

War had been declared, waged, and ended on Laysan Island. Four against forty: those were the odds. Four white men fighting desperately against forty infuriated Japanese. And the white men conquered. On the evening of Saturday, 11 August 1900, The forty Japanese rose in a body, determined to annihilate all the white people and run things to suit themselves. Captain Spencer, the manager of the bird guano mining operation, called his son and Captain Spilner, late of the Honolulu Mounted Patrol, and the engineer Luhrs together. They went out to talk to the mob, which had gathered between the white men's house and the Japanese quarters. Captain Spencer asked what the trouble was, whereupon the leaders of the mob answered defiantly. Cursing and shouting, they threatened the white men's lives. They carried flags and were waving them excitedly. They were armed with knives, stones, clubs, and cutlasses made of sharpened hoop iron. They made a movement toward the platform and old Captain Spencer raised a six-shooter in either hand. "The first man who steps up onto this platform shall die!" shouted Captain Spencer. "Shoot away!" cried the mob. At the signal from their leader, they charged all together for the platform. Though they moved quickly, Captain Spencer's trigger finger moved quicker. Eight times his revolvers spoke and they spoke to the point. The pistols in the hands of the other white men also had something to say. Two of the Japanese leaders dropped dead. Three others fell helpless, sorely wounded.

The following day, the 39 surviving Japanese were rounded up at gunpoint and taken prisoner aboard the *Ceylon*. The two dead Japanese were buried. On August 16, the *Ceylon* set sail for Honolulu with Spencer and Spilner aboard, along with the Japanese. The ship arrived in Honolulu on Sept 7. Spencer and Spilner were arrested by police and questioned.

After a ten-day trial, it became obvious that it was difficult to determine who did the actual killing. As a result, all charges against Spencer and Spilner were dropped. In the final analysis, there was reason to believe Spilner was the culprit. It was known he held a deep-seated hatred for the Japanese. Although during the trial he testified he fired one shot into the air, and one into the house, Spencer

later testified that Spilner had told him after the incident, "My two shots counted alright. They got their man."

It was a time of quiet crisis on Laysan. Except for the bird activity, the landing and taking off of 17 varieties of about two million birds, Laysan Island lay like a beached whale. Who would, or could, go out there and bring the island back to life, or at least shut down the guano mining operation in an orderly fashion?

These were the questions raised at an emergency meeting of the company that had now changed from North Pacific Phosphate and Fertilizer to Pacific Guano and Fertilizer Company.

The unanimous choice was Max Schlemmer. The powers-to-be were well acquainted with Max's history on the island. Earlier he had acquired squatter's rights to the island and claimed a small royalty from the sale of guano to Pacific Guano and Fertilizer Company. Though this royalty was small, Max's ego was large. The royalty was to be paid to Maximilian Schlemmer, King of Laysan. His title was usually Captain Schlemmer, and this was correct; not only for his rank as Captain on the Honolulu Police Force, but also for being a Captain of sailing vessels.

The newspapers in Hawaii picked up on his title of "King of Laysan" and never dropped it. When writing about Max on a routine subject, he was given the title "Captain." When he was involved in an event that could be parlayed into something sensational, he was "The King of Laysan."

The *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* never missed a beat when it was announced that Max Schlemmer would be sent to Laysan as the new manager. Following up on their story of the bloody incident on Laysan, they implied that no person other than one with the stature of a King would be sent to ease troubles on that island.

The *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* article, dated September 20, 1900, read:

There is to be a King on Laysan Island. Max Schlemmer will go there and become monarch of all he surveys. Captain Joseph Spencer, the former ruler of that interesting little spot will not return to Laysan. Schlemmer has been to Laysan before. He will return to manage affairs for the Pacific Guano and Fertilizer Co. He will take along with him a new party of Japanese laborers to work the guano. He expects to set sail in a few days on the bark *Ceylon*, which will carry a large quantity of stores and supplies for the island. Before Capt. Spencer took charge of Laysan, Schlemmer was superintendent there for five or six years. For the past few years he has been conducting a hotel and saloon at Waimea on Kauai. He returned to Honolulu last week and was re-engaged by the fertilizer company to look after their interests on the little island. There is still a large quantity of guano left on Laysan Island, enough to last for several

years to come. It is expected that the schooner *Aloha*, which left for Laysan several weeks ago, will return to Honolulu any day unless its Captain Frey decides to stay on the island until more laborers are sent from here.

King Max with his family, set sail for Laysan Island in the early part of October. He was also bringing along a new Japanese work force. But it was not a good time of year to venture into the Northwest Pacific. Powerful seas churned and huge waves crashed into Laysan and other small atolls.

Max bided his time offshore on the schooner *Aloha*. As the tide subsided, the workers slipped their light boats through the sandy inlet and unloaded supplies that were to last six months.

Meanwhile chemical fertilizer was being produced on Oahu. However it was agreed that guano would continue to be received from Laysan Island until such a time as Pacific Guano and Fertilizer Co. decided what to do with that bothersome little piece of real estate.

Once again, the population on Laysan was increased when the Schlemmer's welcomed their third daughter, Ida Anna. She was born on the 1st of June, 1901.

On September 14th, America was shocked by the assassination of President McKinley. His Vice President Theodore Roosevelt took over the reins of government. Even tiny Laysan Island would be affected by the new president's micro-management of the island's ecology.

The following year, the *USS Albatross* appeared offshore at Laysan. It was commanded by Captain Chauncey Thomas. He had been hired by the U.S. Commission of Fish and Fisheries to land a party of scientists on Laysan for the purpose of making a general biological survey of the island and to collect a variety of specimens.

When Max was notified that the *Albatross* was to visit Laysan, he sent word to the Commander that he would arrange to have the ship piloted to a safe landing. His offer was accepted. When the *Albatross* approached Laysan through poorly chartered waters, Max dispatched a skiff and brought her safely in. Several handwritten notes from Commander Thomas to Max attest to a close relationship between the two.

In one especially chatty letter, Thomas related to Max that Professor Nutting had told him of Max's patriotic feelings regarding the American flag and how those feelings were much appreciated. The Commander went on to explain, "In our service we hoist our colors in port at 8 o'clock in the morning. The Army hoists them at sunrise."

The scientific party that landed at Laysan from the *Albatross* was headed by Charles H. Gilbert of Stanford University. Also from Stanford were Walter K. Fisher and John O. Snyder. Iowa State sent Charles C. Nutting. Fisher and Snyder spent eight days as guests of Max Schlemmer, who assisted them whenever necessary.

Fisher's report, published in 1903, was of immense value as a basis of comparison with regard to the drastic changes in bird populations that occurred in the next twenty years.

As the *Albatross* prepared for its departure Max received the following handwritten note from the Skipper:

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Dear Sir,

We will sail at 6:30 this evening. If you have any commands for Honolulu or any letters, please do not hesitate to let me have them. I wish to express my personal and official thanks for the many courtesies you have shown me and all attached to the ship. It would have been hard to accomplish all we have been able to but for your kind assistance. Good Bye.

Very sincerely yours,

Chauncey Thomas  
Commander, U.S. Navy

A second note was received by Max the same day, once again from the Skipper.

---

Dear Mr. Schlemmer,

Will you accept the accompanying box of cigars and smoke them with a memory of Mrs. Thomas' pleasure in all the pretty things you gave her.

Sincerely yours,

Chauncey Thomas

For Max, the box of cigars was a good beginning but he was after more. He wanted to be appointed warden for the islands of Laysan and Lisianski with

police powers to protect the birds as well as advance his own interests. He was in effect collecting IOU's from people in authority from whom he would be requesting letters of recommendation at the appropriate time.

After the departure of the *Albatross*, scores of scientific expeditions continued to visit Laysan. The many specimens collected can be found in major American museums. Others were exchanged to foreign museums, while an unknown number are in private collections.

On July 3, 1902, disaster struck when his main carrier the *Ceylon* was caught in heavy weather ten days out of Laysan, and began to leak badly. The ship was abandoned and soon sank with a full load of guano aboard. It took four days for the officers and crew to return to Laysan in two small boats.

Another problem now arose to add to Max's woes. The management at Pacific Guano and Fertilizer Co., had dispatched Count A. Von Graevemeyer to assist Max Schlemmer.

It soon became obvious however, that the Count was not at Laysan to assist, but rather to take command and rule the island. Max told the Count his presence was not needed nor wanted on the island, and that he must leave at once. The Count refused and a heated argument took place while the Count was astride his horse.

Max grabbed the horse's reigns and with a solid blow to the Count's body, knocked the proud German unceremoniously to the ground.

Von Graevemeyer brought suit against Max for injury to his person and character. He demanded \$5,000 dollars, a sum unheard of in the courts of Hawaii. During the trial in Honolulu, Max pleaded guilty and made a brief statement to the court. He denied kicking the Count, but admitted to striking him and unhorsing the wearer of the Iron Cross.

Judge Wilcox warned the defendant against violence, but admitted that the history of the island showed the necessity of a determined spirit to rule it. Still, it was not right for the "King" to hit the Count. The matter was ended with Max being fined \$10 dollars.

After the Graevemeyer incident, Max had time to focus on operational problems on the island. First and most important, he was confronted with how he was to ship guano to Honolulu after the loss of the *Ceylon*. Unfortunately there was no choice other than to charter ships for that purpose, further adding to losses to PG&F.

In spite of the financial difficulties of the guano mining operation on Laysan, the baby boom continued with the birth of the Schlemmer's fourth child. A son Eric Laysan Schlemmer, the little "Prince," was born on Laysan, March 22, 1903.

Therese became very busy with her brood of growing youngsters. Besides her own four children there were her stepchildren, Mary, Gussie and Max Jr. Mary and Gussie were old enough to help, especially with the babies. There were also a Japanese cook and a Japanese houseboy who helped with household chores and laundry.

The children spent many hours of the day playing along the sandy beaches. Part of the memorabilia I grew up with in our house, was a prominently displayed jar of seashells which Mother had gathered on Laysan's beaches.

My Mother told me stories about playing in the ocean. Even though the little ones stayed near the shore, her mother tied a rope around each child's waist. She did this in the event a shark appeared nearby. Therese could "reef" the children in quickly. My grandmother discovered that the albumin of the gooney bird egg whites was a wonderful shampoo.

Max wrote in his journal about the baby bird with one leg he found near a work shed. He took the bird home and the family cared for it until it could fly and "hop along" on its own. The bird became a family pet and Max's constant companion. It followed him everywhere he went.

In 1903, a little over a hundred miles north, at the island of Midway, the Trans Pacific cable was laid connecting Hawaii to the Far East. The cable from Midway was the final link in a worldwide communication system.

On July 4, 1903, President Teddy Roosevelt celebrated America's independence by sending a message around the globe in nine and one half minutes from his mansion in Oyster Bay, N.Y. to Governor Taft in the Philippines.

Now that the cable company had been established on Midway, Max decided to purchase a ship the next year and start a mail and cargo route to serve both his needs on Laysan and the cable company's on Midway.

By September the mining season was over at Laysan. The *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* noted the arrival of the ship *Robert Lewis* in Honolulu where she discharged her last load of guano for the season.

The ship also brought back Max Schlemmer, "The King of Laysan" with his family. With his growing family the King could never afford any down time. During this off-season, the family lived in Honolulu. Max went to work for the Honolulu Rapid Transit Company as a motorman.

As guano deposits on Laysan began to dwindle, Max, always the entrepreneur, spent much thoughtful time trying to devise schemes whereby he could make a living on the island for himself and his family.

Max enjoyed life on Laysan. Its solitude afforded him a medium for his thoughts to roam free. He was fascinated by the royal title the newspapers in

Honolulu had conveyed upon him. He would lose it all if he abdicated his throne on Laysan and became exiled to Honolulu.

In March 1904, the *Sunday Advertiser* announced that Max Schlemmer had applied for leases of Necker and Gardner Islands. He offered \$25 dollars a year for each island on a 21-year lease. This sent the phones ringing in Commissioner J. W. Pratt's Territorial Land Office. Among the callers was John N. Cobb, Commissioner of the Fisheries Bureau of the U.S. Dept. of Commerce and Labor, Washington D.C. He was curious to know what species of fish Mr. Schlemmer wished to catch in the vicinity of the aforementioned islands.

Max's request had thrust Pratt into "uncharted waters." There he thrashed about a bit before coming up with some answers. First, the Territory of Hawaii must establish jurisdiction over the islands. Second, it had to be determined if the U.S. had surveyed them. Then, once leaseholds were available, they would be put up for public auction with stipulations covering modes of fishing, the protection of birds, and such things.

This was all too complicated for Max, and he abandoned his plan. He couldn't understand why others could not be a "straight shooter" like himself.



Max as a motorman for the Honolulu Rapid Transit Company, 1903.

## 7

## MAX THE ENTREPRENEUR

By the latter part of April, there were subtle indications in the press that the Hackfeld Co., was about to take over the Pacific Guano and Fertilizer Co., (formerly the North Pacific Phosphate and Fertilizer Co.) Hackfeld had financed the company with George Wilcox as President, but the operation on Laysan was a dismal failure, and continued to lose money.

Not only was it an economic disaster, but it was an embarrassment. The crowd along Merchant Street referred to it as "Wilcox's folly." Workers on the island had rebelled and their manager was brought to trial for murder. The next manager was also brought to trial, for assaulting a Count of the German Empire. The H. Hackfeld Co. was a prominent member of the emerging Big Five sugar factors in Hawaii. As a German company, its board of directors was not about to be involved in a controversy over a small, isolated, useless piece of bird infested real estate.

On April 27, 1904, Hackfeld instructed Pacific Guano and Fertilizer Co. to sell everything except the buildings on Laysan to Max Schlemmer. A memo of that agreement of May 6, 1904 read in part: "Pacific Guano and Fertilizer Co., agrees to sell all of its boats, tools, supplies, railroad track, anchors, chains, etc, located on said Island of Laysan for the sum of \$1,750.00 U.S. gold coin to Max Schlemmer."

On the same date, Max received an Agent's Commission. This gave him a license to act for Pacific Guano and Fertilizer Co., within terms of the contract and lease, which the company had with the Hawaiian Government. This authority covered both Laysan and Lisianski Islands.

With this document and bill of sale, the King of Laysan was certain all rights and powers what-so-ever on Laysan Island had been bestowed unto him. To this, the temporal powers in Hawaii and Washington D.C. looked askance. They tried to keep his conduct under close surveillance. But this proved to be a difficult task.

The "King" envisioned Laysan to be his castle and remote fortress, with a hazardous reef as its rampart. This rampart was surrounded by a mote of wild ocean. For watch dogs at the gates there were the wild, unpredictable storms that could attack at any time. However, the King also had to be aware of his foreign enemies. These enemies were bird pirates from Japan, who had been raiding these northernmost Hawaiian Islands including Laysan and Lisianski.

A skipper of a bird pirating operation could become wealthy beyond his wildest dreams. The birds were literally worth their weight in gold. After the birds were killed, their feathers and parts were preserved for shipment to such fashion centers as London, Paris and New York. It was all the rage for ladies to wear hats adorned with bird wings, feathers, and in some cases, bird breasts. Max was very much aware of the value of these wild birds.

Once Max gained control of Laysan Island, Captain William Weisbarth, Max's old nemesis, appeared on the scene. He began making overtures to Max regarding a business partnership. After much discussion, a deal was struck; Max would give to the partnership, a share in his rights on Laysan Island to include the railway, moorings, the wharf, steam launches and such. All this was valued at \$5000.00.

Weisbarth was to contribute his schooner, *Lavinia*, valued at \$1000.00. Max would now have the means to haul his guano cargo to Honolulu. Two-thirds of the expense of the partnership were to be borne by Schlemmer; one-third by Weisbarth. The profits were to be apportioned at the same ratio. The agreement was due to be signed at a later date. This never happened.

Up to the time of the arrival of the guano diggers on Laysan, the extent of the bird pirating was unknown. But Max knew that this was going on, especially on Lisianski Island. On May 14, 1904, Max wrote a letter to E.R. Stackable, U.S. Collector of Customs. He called attention to the fact that an unauthorized encampment of Japanese was on the island of Lisianski, a U.S. possession.

Max's concern was probably not so much prompted by a wish to report foreign encroachment on a U.S. possession, but rather by his wish to protect any business interest he might have in the future. Stackable responded to the letter and forwarded the complaint to the U.S. Secretary of Treasury.

A month later, the Coast Guard cutter *Thetis* was dispatched to Midway with supplies for the garrison of Marines that had been established to protect the cable company personnel against marauders. After discharging its cargo at Midway, the *Thetis* headed for Lisianski. There it captured 77 Japanese who were hastily taken aboard, leaving behind the priceless catch of dead birds.



Word of the abandoned booty soon reached Captain Weisbarth, the skipper of the *Lavinia*. Even though Weisbarth and Schlemmer had a tentative agreement to become business partners on Laysan Island, the birds left behind by the Coast Guard proved too much of a temptation for Weisbarth.

He left word with Max's wife Therese that he was no longer partners with her husband. He was on his way to Lisianski to retrieve the abandoned birds and take them to Nova Scotia. There he would sell them and become a rich man. Unknown to Weisbarth, the *Tangi Maru* was racing toward Lisianski to recover the same precious loot. It is believed the Japanese won the race and took the prize.

Now that Weisbarth and his ship, the *Lavinia*, had deserted him, Max was without a means of transportation for his enterprise on Laysan Island. Once all guano had been mined from Laysan, his plans were to work the guano on Lisianski and establish a shipping route that would link Laysan, Lisianski and Midway with the main port of Honolulu.

It was apparent the Marines would remain at Midway for a long time. Heavy guns had been put in place and a lighthouse built on Sand Island. The Marine garrison and cable company personnel had to be supplied and the King had plans to do just that once he acquired his flagship.

In the fall of 1904, Max took passage aboard the *Robert Lewis* for Port Townsend, Washington. There he purchased the schooner *C. Kennedy* in Seattle. Soon after his arrival at Port Townsend, news began to filter back to the local press in Honolulu regarding the marvelous exploits of Max Schlemmer. The following article was from the *Times Special Service*, Port Townsend, Washington dated Monday, Oct. 31, 1904:

It falls to the lot of but a few mortals to be styled Kings or Governors of island domains, but such is the good fortune of Max Schlemmer, who arrived in this city recently as a passenger on the American schooner *Robert Lewis*. Mr. Schlemmer, or Gov. Schlemmer as he is known in the little group of islands where he handles the reins of government to suit his own fancy, is German by birth, but American by adoption. More than twenty years ago he left the Pacific Coast for Honolulu, seeking to make a competency for himself. He remained there for some years, working at many things, until he became an employee of the Pacific Guano and Fertilizer Co., which has a lease on the Laysan group of islands from the Hawaiian government. The Laysan group lies 900 miles northwest from Honolulu and 300 miles distant from Midway Island. There are three islands in the group and the formation is coral. The annual output of guano from Gov. Schlemmer's domain amounts to 45,000 tons. It is shipped in vessels chartered for this purpose to Honolulu where the

guano is used as fertilizer on the sugar plantations. As the stuff brings in from \$55 to \$60 per ton, the profit can well be imagined. The cost of transportation amounts to less than \$5 a ton and labor is cheap.

The feathered inhabitants of the islands are numbered by the thousands. They furnish down to Gov. Schlemmer and his family, but he never allows any wanton killing of the birds. Eggs there are without number according to Gov. Schlemmer, they are even more palatable than the chicken variety. They constitute a goodly portion of the rations of those on the island. The last time eggs were gathered, 6,000 of them were secured by the men in three hours. They were salted to prevent spoiling. Gov. Schlemmer has no palace, no uniformed staff officials, and neither Army nor Navy. Despite all this he gets along charmingly. He is a married man and his wife and seven children reside with him in this lonely island group. He has a comfortable residence of large dimensions, no lack of servants, and lives in style becoming a ruler, albeit a small one. His subject's number but 100, and they are all under his supervision and his pay as his laborers in the guano deposits. They are all coolies from the Orient. There is not a single white person on the three islands aside from the Gov. and his family. Schlemmer is now a rich man, although no one would ever know it from his appearance, talk, or demeanor. He is unassuming to the degree and reluctantly speaks of his achievements. Laysan Island, which is the larger of the three, and the one from which the group derives its name, is now nearly worked out, all the work of extracting guano having been confined to it. In the near future one of the other islands will be worked and they will last a great many years as neither one of them has yet to be touched.

After his triumphant tour of the Pacific Northwest, Max returned aboard the *C. Kennedy* to Laysan Island, where he was prepared to conduct some serious business. He wished to further confirm his legal title to Laysan and Lisianski Islands. Presently, his only lease was the one which Pacific Guano and Fertilizer Company had had with the Hawaiian Government. This had been passed along to Max at the time of his purchase of the guano mining operation from P.G. and F. Co.

In March 1904, Max wrote to the Hawaiian Land Commissioner with a lease proposal. As time went on, Max received no response from the Land Commissioner. Later that year he wrote a letter to Hawaii's Governor Carter in which he again proposed that he be granted a 99-year lease for the islands of Laysan, Lisianski, and the French Frigate Shoals.

For this expansion of his "empire" he promised to plant 1,000 coconut trees each year and to pay 55 cents per ton of guano taken. He would protect the birds but wanted the privilege of killing the numbers of birds as per an attached list he sent along with the letter. He proposed that the skins be turned over to the Territorial Government to sell; they would retain 10 percent of the proceeds. He

would maintain his residence on Laysan Island, keeping someone there to aid shipwrecked sailors when it was necessary for him to be away. He further proposed to maintain a schooner of not less than fifty gross tons register, which would be of service to the Territory to bring shipwrecked people to Honolulu at a reasonable price to be agreed upon.

It was also proposed that no rent would be paid for the first ten years; for the balance of the lease he would pay fifty dollars per annum in advance. He would employ laborers with families if possible, giving preference to Polynesians.

Included with his letter to Governor Carter was the following list of birds that Max proposed to kill each season as recorded in Smithsonian's Atoll Research Bulletin 171:

Variety	NUMBER
1. Black Widacks (Wideawakes-Sooty Terns)	5,000
2. Blue Widacks (Gray-backed Terns)	2,000
3. Large Black Birds (Brown Noddies)	200
4. Small Black Birds (Black Noddies)	200
5. Tropical Birds (Red-tailed Tropicbirds)	200
6. Love Birds (White Terns)	none
7. Four large kinds Mutton Birds (Bonin Petrels, Christmas Shearwaters, Wedge-tailed Shearwater)	5,000
8. Two small kinds of Mutton Birds (Sooty Storm Petrels and Bulwer's Petrels)	500
9. White Albatross (Laysan Albatross)	5,000
10. Black Gummies (Black-footed Albatross)	1,000
11. Frigate Birds (Great Frigatebirds)	All there could be killed
12. Large Bubbies (Blue-faced Boobies)	100
13. Small Bubbies (Red-footed Boobies)	100
14. Wingless Birds (Laysan Rails)	1,000
15. Canary Birds (Laysan Finches)	1,000
16. Red Birds (Laysan Honeyeaters)	100
17. Miller Birds or insect killer (Laysan Miller-birds)	100

Should the aforementioned proposition not be possible, he suggested submitting it to the President of the United States to secure a special Act of Congress to confirm his rights. As references, Max gave the names of H. Hackfeld and Co., F. A. Schafer and Co. and C.L. Wight.

He sent accompanying documents, six letters from Commander Thomas of the Albatross, mainly of a personal nature, but indicating that Mr. Schlemmer had rendered good service to the vessel and the personnel in their work.

The Governor's reply to Max Schlemmer was as follows:

Dec. 23, 1904

Captain Max Schlemmer  
c/o Hackfeld and Co., Honolulu

Dear Sir,

Herewith, I return the letters received from you on Dec. 19th.

I have submitted the question as to whether or not it is possible and proper to give you some sort of police authority to prevent poaching on the leeward islands, to the High Sheriff.

If this is done, you can readily understand that you will be responsible to the Territorial Government and under its control and direction, so far as the exercise of your authority is concerned.

In reference to your proposition to lease the right to take a reasonable number of birds from Lisianski Island and the French Frigate Shoals, you introduce a new element by offering to plant no less than 1,000 coconut trees each year for ten years. And further, that you desire the privilege of taking guano from all three islands, paying a royalty of fifty cents a ton.

I am at a loss to know how many birds it would probably be safe to kill without affecting their numbers. I gathered from our conversation that you thought about ten thousand a season. Your proposition involves 21,800, exclusive of the French Frigate Shoals birds, which I assume are birds of prey.

One suggestion you make it seems to me not at all practicable—that the Territorial Government go into the question of the sale of birds. The policy of the Territorial should be, I believe, to keep out of business.

Naturally, I should refer the whole proposition to Mr. Pratt, the Commissioner of Public Lands, and when it is in shape, I would like to forward it to the Interior Department in Washington for its approval.

Very sincerely yours,

George R. Carter  
Governor

Max never received confirmation that his lease proposal was accepted or approved. Not to be deterred, Max went ahead with his plans anyway.

## 8

### HOLOCAUST AT SEA

By January 1905, the Schlemmer family had moved to Honolulu. During their early years, the family had stayed on Laysan Island the year round. But as the children got older and needed to be in school, the Schlemmer family usually took up residence in Honolulu during the off season winter months.

Max was in Honolulu harbor with his schooner, the *C. Kennedy*. He was taking supplies aboard for the cable company personnel and the U.S. Marine garrison. His plan was to stop at Laysan for a day or two, to attend to some business then go on to Midway Island with the supplies for the cable company and the marines there.

His departure was delayed for a time, awaiting the birth of their fifth child. On January 21, 1905, Therese gave birth to a daughter Regina Diana. On February 9th Captain Schlemmer was at the helm of his schooner on the high seas heading for Laysan Island. It would be the last voyage of the *C. Kennedy*.

On March 28, 1905, headlines of *The Hawaiian Star* read: "THE KING OF LAYSAN WRECKED." The paper carried a full account of the disaster on its front page.

According to the story, the ship encountered rough weather two days out, just after clearing the main islands. The *Kennedy* arrived at Laysan March 2nd, after 21 days out. She was tied up to a buoy on the west side of the island about a mile from the reef. Max completed his business ashore.

The following day, March 3rd Max weighed anchor for Midway. Under full sail, the *Kennedy* was cut loose from the buoy and was headed out to sea when suddenly a tempestuous wind and boiling surf came piling in from as far out as the eye could see. The small craft was helpless in the teeth of the storm. A riptide set in from the west. The combination of forces swept the schooner with irresistible force, stern first onto the reef.

She was a staunch little vessel and withstood the first shock and subsequent pounding for some time, but the *Kennedy* slowly broke apart. The lifeboats were

launched and Captain Max and the crew started for shore, about 600 yards away. One of the boats capsized before reaching shore. The seas continued to pound at them, making their landing on shore quite perilous.

The storm had struck at 2:30 in the afternoon. Had it occurred at night, not a man would have reached shore alive. Fortunately, a few Japanese laborers had remained on Laysan to prepare a shipment of guano for the *Kennedy* on its return from Midway. Max and his companions were housed and fed. When the weather subsided, the work of trying to save as many of the stores as possible from the vessel began.

The mail for Midway was taken ashore. A considerable amount of the Naval and cable company's stores destined for Midway was also taken ashore. Much of the cargo was damaged. The ship was not insured. Max lost everything as did his mate J.C. Green who had purchased an interest in the venture. Both small boats were lost.

For Max, the contrast of his plight with the possibilities of a profitable cruise was heartbreaking. Twelve hundred tons of guano sat in the warehouse at Laysan. Another 500 tons sat in the field waiting to be collected. There was more than enough guano on Laysan to keep the little schooner running to Honolulu for months.

On March 17th, while Max and the crew moped about trying to cope with a bad situation, the gunboat *Petrel* came into sight and passed within two miles of Laysan. All ashore were certain the *Petrel* would stop and pick them up, but it steamed on past and went on to Midway. The ship's crew saw nothing of the wrecked craft and they had no reason to stop at Laysan. Besides there was a strong swell running at the time and it would not have been safe for the vessel to land.

The *Petrel* arrived at Midway March 19th, starting to unload its cargo at once even though it was Sunday. They had to lay off shore on Monday due to a heavy swell, but resumed work on Tuesday.

They sailed for Laysan the same day. The vessel arrived at Laysan to pick up a cargo of guano, March 28th and found the wrecked crew. That same evening, *The Hawaiian Star* newspaper hit the streets with the headlines, "The King of Laysan Wrecked"

Captain Max Schlemmer, J.C. Green, a second Mate Charles Krohn and six Japanese from the shipwrecked crew were taken aboard and the *Petrel* set sail for Honolulu. Max was united with his wife Therese and their five children. Whenever Max was at sea, Therese was especially worried. She knew that Max couldn't swim.

**THE HAWAIIAN STAR.**  
For Sale, Ads, etc. Sent Post Paid 25 Cents

**THE KING OF LAYSAN WRECKED**

**DRIVEN ASHORE**

**Mystery of The Maine Is Solved**

**A NEW MILL FOR WAILUKU**

It was now April and the beginning of the guano mining season on Laysan Island. With the loss of the *Kennedy*, the King of Laysan was now in desperate need of a ship that would take him and his family back to Laysan Island. Shortly thereafter he was able to charter the schooner *Levi Woodbury*.

Before he left for Laysan, Max received a letter from the Commander of the U.S.S. *Iroquois*, a Navy tug. The Commander offered to tow the *Levi Woodbury*, with the Schlemmer family aboard, to Laysan by way of Midway.

The family and the schooner, *Levi Woodbury*, would be left at Laysan after the run to Midway. The Commander of the *Iroquois* needed extra cargo space to store supplies bound for Midway. Captain Harris of the *Woodbury* agreed. The seagoing tug, *Iroquois*, with the *Woodbury* in tow set off with the Schlemmer family tucked safely below.

The waters off the Kauai coast were extremely rough that evening. The cargo on the deck of the *Woodbury* was piled up even with the ship's rail. The supercargo, a fellow in charge of the freight, was named Clark. He came out of the cabin and sat atop the cargo. An enormous swell lifted the tug so it towered over the little schooner. It came crashing down with a solid thud. The *Woodbury* shuddered from bow to stern. Clark was thrown overboard by the force of the collision and was never seen again.

The *Woodbury* weathered the storm and the Schlemmer family arrived safely at their home on Laysan Island. There the schooner took aboard 90 tons of guano and sailed for Honolulu.

Meanwhile though, as the Schlemmer family was ensconced at home on Laysan Island, the Honolulu newspapers were chronicling a story of yet another Max

Schlemmer disaster. Captain William Weisbarth, skipper of the schooner, *Lavinia*, was reporting the possibility that the *Woodbury* with Max aboard, had been lost at sea.

In mid July, about the time the *Woodbury* left Laysan bound for Honolulu, there was a terrible 3-day storm in the area. Captain Weisbarth with his schooner *Lavinia* was also caught in the storm. It took Weisbarth 27 days to make port in Honolulu and the little schooner was badly damaged.

One of the Honolulu papers reported that *Levi Woodbury* and her master, Max Schlemmer were lost and Captain Weisbarth, aboard his schooner *Lavinia*, set sail to search for the *Levi Woodbury*.

At 1:45 yesterday morning, the schooner *Lavinia*, with Schlemmer's old companion in arms, Weisbarth in command, left the harbor and started for Laysan.

If Schlemmer is to be found, Weisbarth believes he can do the job. Schlemmer and Weisbarth are like Damon and Pythias, when they are not squabbling over little matters of navigation, but, when danger besets one, the other is willing to sacrifice his all to rescue him.

In early August, the *Woodbury* docked in Honolulu, a bit overdue with some damage but otherwise intact. The Schlemmer family remained at Laysan, never in real danger.

Things were quiet on Laysan in 1906, except for the birth of their sixth child, Otto Paul Conrad Schlemmer. He was born Sept. 30, 1906. Otto was not to play a significant role in his Father's life. It was his older brother Eric who was to become "The Prince of Laysan."

As Otto grew older, he and Max never saw eye to eye on much of anything. Max thought Otto was incorrigible. As a last resort, he sent Otto to the Coast Guard station in Honolulu. He strongly suggested to the Commander that they enlist Otto. Perhaps they could make something out of him. Otto found his niche in the Coast Guard. Shortly after World War II, he returned to Honolulu. He was the first person born in Hawaii to command a Coast Guard ship in Hawaiian waters.

## 9

## INTRIGUE IN HIGH PLACES

In May 1907, Max was low on supplies. He waited anxiously at Laysan for the arrival of either the *Iwalani* or the schooner *Lavinia*, which often called at Laysan to pick up a cargo of guano. Although Max bore a grudge toward Weisbarth, the skipper of the *Lavinia*, he still had a great deal of admiration for Weisbarth's skill and seamanship.

To Max's surprise, however, the *Annapolis* arrived, skippered by Captain Clark. The ship had both mail and supplies for them. When Max inquired about the *Iwalani* and the *Lavinia*, the Captain told him the *Iwalani* was not coming and the *Lavinia* had been shipwrecked.

Max made inquiries about the possibility of passage on the *Annapolis*, bound for Honolulu, for himself and his daughters, Mary and Otrilie. The most pressing matter for Max was to tend to the business of chartering a ship to haul guano to Honolulu. Mary and Otrilie needed to attend school in Honolulu. While there he would settle the girls with family. He was able to secure passage on the *Annapolis* for himself and two young daughters Mary and Otrilie, and they departed for Honolulu May 18, 1907.

On the *Annapolis*, they were treated like royalty. It was a memorable trip for all. My Mother, Otrilie, the first born on Laysan, was registered to attend school at St. Andrews Priory in Honolulu. The letter she wrote from Honolulu to her mother on Laysan Island is evidence, however that she had learned well from home schooling and from sketchy formal schooling.

When Max arrived in Honolulu, he had with him a letter giving him power of attorney to draw money from his wife's bank account. With this money he was to buy or charter a schooner in her name. After several unsuccessful attempts to charter a ship, one day Max wandered into downtown Honolulu where he ran into an old acquaintance, Alex Dowsett, outside the Union Grill on King Street. Alex had a small fleet of schooners.

Kalihū Honolulu,  
May 15<sup>th</sup> 1907

Dear Mamma;  
 We arrived here safe and well but Mary and I were sea-sick. We are all well and hope you are well too. We are eating lots of papais and bananas and are getting whiter. Gussie is fat and a little bigger than Mary. We have been visiting lots of people. On the steamer we had ice-cream and we were offered on silver-trays we ate with silver spoons we all call ourselves the three Princesses and papa the king. We enjoy our selves quite much here are no mangoes so we cannot send any we have eaten lots of candies and are just sweet. Kiss the little ones for me Mildred and Cathrine are glad that they have a little sister two weeks old. I play with Mildred and Cathrine and my other friends. Here I see no Guinies but sparrows have little nests with eggs. Here are lots of maguetaes here. Auntie Julia has more moquitos than we have. Papa will tell you all the news with lots of loves and kisses. I remain  
 Your loving Daughter  
 Otilie Schlemmer.

Otilie's letter from Honolulu to her mother on Laysan Island.

However, Alex had no schooner available to be chartered, all were needed for his own use. During their conversation, they discussed the bad luck Max had

encountered over the past two years. Then Max launched into a tirade against the Territorial Government that allowed Japanese pirates to make thousands of dollars stealing birds at Laysan and especially at Lisianski Island, both U.S. possessions.

He complained that this was occurring even while Governor Carter had on his desk a letter from Max Schlemmer proposing to pay the government a percentage for the privilege of slaughtering a certain number of birds a year. Alex Dowsett was now giving Max some serious attention.

He asked what Max would give the government. Max replied, "For every ten, one." Max meant for every ten birds he killed for plumage, he would give the government one. The King of Laysan was warming up to his favorite subject, the vast amount of money that could be made from bird skins.

Suddenly, their conversation was rudely interrupted by Arthur Brown, the ex High Sheriff of Honolulu. Brown had overheard the conversation. He loudly announced that Max was "just the fellow I've been looking for." Max excused himself from Dowsett and was spirited away down the street by his new acquaintance.

In his journal account, Max tells the following story. He calls it, "intrigue in high places." At dinner in Brown's Waikiki home the following evening, Brown explained to Max that A.L.C. Atkinson, the acting governor was his brother-in-law. He told Max that the two of them had discussed at some length the profit that could be made in the bird business. Max was questioned late into the night regarding all aspects of the trade in bird parts and skins. They agreed to meet the following morning at Brown's office.

When Max arrived the next day, the ex-sheriff got right to the point. Brown told Max that while indeed there was a fortune to be made, Max was going around town talking too much. Max agreed. He was glad he had finally found a friend, knowledgeable about the potential bird business and with whom he could discuss plans.

Brown told Max that Governor Carter was going to be away and that Atkinson was to be the acting Governor. Brown also felt that Atkinson would soon be appointed Governor to succeed Carter. He went on to say that Atkinson, Gilman, Pratt and himself were interested in forming a company to engage in the bird trade with Schlemmer as manager and shareholder.

The first order of business, Brown further explained, would be for Atkinson to obtain a long-term lease for Laysan as the present lease had been cancelled. Max was furious. He asked who had cancelled the lease. Brown told him Hackfeld had cancelled it. Max told Brown that he had the lease for Laysan. He had been told

that it had expired, but now Max was hearing for the first time that the lease had been cancelled. Brown suggested to Max that if he had lease papers, they would go after Hackfeld to have the lease reinstated.

But the lease documents were on Laysan Island. Max decided to leave at once to go to Laysan to get them. But before this scheme became too involved, Brown wanted Max to understand that the names of Atkinson and Pratt should be kept quiet. It would not look good for the Governor and the Land Commissioner to be involved in such an enterprise.

Before leaving for Laysan to retrieve the lease documents, Max must attend to the business for which he had come to Honolulu. A schooner had to be purchased, for his own use as well as his potential business partnership. Max had inspected the *Lukoa* and thought she was what they needed. Brown wanted a second opinion. He got it from Lyle Alex. Alex claimed it was a bargain for \$2,500.00 or \$3,000.00.

Max drew the money from Therese's account and made a down payment for the purchase of the *Lukoa*, in his wife's name. The balance of the agreement of sale was to be paid the following day by his partners.

When Max arrived at Arthur Brown's office the next day, he was told that Mr. Brown was sick. Max left the office and headed up Fort Street where he was stopped by a friend of Brown's, a Mr. Gillman. Gillman told Max that Brown did not want him to buy the ship. If Max went ahead with the purchase, he would have to take the responsibility for payment in full.

When Max finally caught up with Brown at his office, Brown denied having agreed to the purchase of a ship. After a long and heated discussion it was agreed that Max would pay the balance owed on the *Lukoa*. Brown would then pay all the expenses to outfit the ship, purchase supplies and hire a crew with power of attorney from Max Schlemmer. With that understanding they formed a partnership. Max was now prepared to leave for Laysan Island.

Max sailed to Laysan with three men aboard the *Lukoa*. His mission was to send the lease document back to Brown together with a sample collection of bird skins. At Laysan, they loaded the *Lukoa* with guano and sent her back to Honolulu with the lease documents, and bird skin samples.

By late summer 1907, Max realized he must get to Honolulu and find out what was happening with the partnership he had formed with Arthur Brown and A.L.C. Atkinson. Meanwhile, he had learned that Atkinson had not been appointed Governor; Frear was Governor.

When he reached Honolulu, Max's first order of business was to visit Atkinson at his office. Atkinson's enthusiasm remained high about the prospects of a

lucrative business. He had gotten word recently, through the Japanese, about the enormous sum of money to be made on these northwestern bird islands.

In one season, a Japanese schooner Captain wrote that, he "took 157,000 skins that amounted to \$65,000.00."

Atkinson told Brown and Max that they had to get control of Laysan and Lisianski Islands at any cost. Max's lease had expired and would not suffice for their purpose. Atkinson went on to say that they would try for a lease from the Territorial Government, but failing this, they would try to purchase the islands outright.

Atkinson had property in Honolulu that could be exchanged and a wealthy Colonel friend with money to back him up. Big plans were swirling about him but Max began to feel that the scheme was slipping away from him and into the hands of those in "high places." He quietly departed and decided that if anything were to come of such a venture, he would probably have to make his own deal.