

Lonely Fishhook

By Russ and Peg Apple

NECKER ISLAND is a fishhook shaped volcanic rock, standing alone in an empty ocean, some 400 miles northwest of Honolulu.

Through some legal quirk, it is officially a part of the City and County of Honolulu, although no voters live there.

No one has lived there since the early Hawaiians abandoned it, probably centuries before Cook found Hawaii in 1778.

Necker's steep sides and usually rough water make landings on the island hazardous.

Once on a narrow ledge, there is no way to climb but up.

NECKER'S narrow ridge runs 150 to 200 feet above the ocean, with one point at 278 feet.

No trees. No shade. A little grass grows, just bare rock and sea birds.

No drinking water. Any puddle of rain water that collects is contaminated by bird droppings.

THE FRENCH explorer LaPerouse found Necker in 1786, and since he was heading west, made no direct report back to the Hawaiian people. Necker found its way onto maps made in Europe, and the maps eventually got to Hawaii.

LaPerouse sailed around Necker, decided not to try to land—the seas were too rough, but he named his discovery after Jacques Necker, the French finance minister of the time.

WHAT THE Hawaiians called the island is unknown.

Necker's existence, and the name the early Hawaiians used for it, were forgotten before the time of Kamehameha the Great.

If Kamehameha the Great had known about Necker island, he probably would have included it in the Kingdom of Hawaii he founded.

It was his grandson, Alexander Liholiho, ruling as Kamehameha IV, who first claimed it for the kingdom.

By 1854, the first year of the reign of Kamehameha IV, all the world, including Hawaii, was searching for guano, the "magic" fertilizer formed by the combination of bird droppings, sand, pressure and time.

Guano speeded up the growth of Hawaii's sugar cane, and it was hoped a supply of guano could be found close to Hawaii.

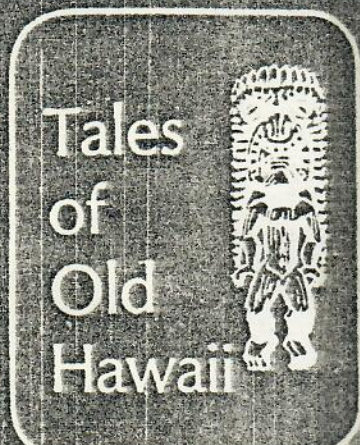
To find out if guano in commercial quantities could be found on the islands northwest of Kauai island, the King's privy council directed the minister of the interior to select a

person to make the survey, and guano or not, to claim the islands in the name of Kamehameha IV.

CAPT. JOHN PATY was chosen.

There's a street named for him in Manoa valley.

Aboard the schooner *Mann-o-kawai*, Paty reached Necker on April 24, 1857, and sailed around the almost



vertical rock ten times in two days trying to find a landing place through the high surf. He finally gave up and sailed on.

Had he been able to get ashore, he had his official notice of taking ready.

PATY HAD made out forms ahead of time, ready to leave on the various islands. All Paty had to do was fill in the dates. The unused forms are still in his log, now safely kept by the Archives of Hawaii.

Paty's forms read:
"Visited and taken possession of, by order of His Majesty, King Kamehameha IV, for him and His Successors on the Hawaiian Throne, by the undersigned in the Schooner *Manuokawai*. This (blank) of (blank) A.D. Eighteen hundred and fifty seven. John Paty, Commander."

His first mate was supposed to sign as witness.

BUT ON NECKER, Paty could not get ashore to leave his official notice.

And the Americans who overthrew the monarchy years later suddenly needed Necker, and were not sure the government they had assumed really had a legal claim to the rocky island 400 miles northwest of Honolulu.

(To be continued)

Laying Claim to Necker

By Russ and Peg Apple

CAPT. JOHN PATY, aboard the schooner *Manuokawai*, had claimed Necker island in 1857 for the Kingdom of Hawaii.

Or had he?

Paty had sailed ten times around the rocky islet some 400 miles northwest of Honolulu, looking for a place to land and deposit his official notice of taking.

High surf beating against the steep sides of Necker during the two days he sailed circles around it discouraged any attempts at even trying a landing.

Paty sailed on.

INTERNATIONAL law in those days required that a notice be placed ashore of any Pacific island claimed by a government.

There was no magic nor legal "taking" in ten turns around Necker in a schooner.

As long as no other nation wanted Necker — and who would want that barren uninhabited volcanic rock sitting alone in a wild ocean? — Hawaii considered it owned Necker through the intention of Paty, and through owning the adjacent islands. These were Nihoa, closer to Honolulu, and French Frigate Shoals, on the other side of Necker.

But when England and Canada started to eye Necker in the 1890s, the government of Hawaii decided to remove all doubt as to ownership by planting an official notice of taking on Necker.

PATY'S TEN circumnavigations of Necker had given Hawaii's throne some claim to Necker. Whatever claim there was transferred at the overthrow of Queen Liliuokalani in 1893 to the Provisional Government.

Two British warships were in Hawaiian waters, and paying attention to Necker island. The ships were making soundings.

England wanted a Pacific cable to tie together her growing empire of Pacific Islands.

As early as 1838, England had talked about using Necker as a cable station.

England might claim Necker. There was no Hawaiian "paper" on the island.

Hawaii must plant the official notice before England did.

THEN ENGLAND made an offer. If the Provisional Government of Hawaii would permit England to use Necker as a cable station between Canada and Australia — New Zealand, then, without cost, England would lay a submarine cable from Necker to Honolulu and add Hawaii to her Pacific communications network.

The American businessmen who had overthrown the Hawaiian monarchy wanted a cable badly. Instant communication with American markets, suppliers and government was a business necessity.

But a tie to a British cable could put Hawaii back under British influence. Hawaii's sheep raisers wanted to sell their wool in America at 20 cents a pound, rather than in London for 10

Tales of Old Hawaii



The United States paid Hawaii sugar planters a \$40 a ton bonus. Many missionary descendants were against royalty and had helped eliminate the Hawaiian variety. Already a British company ran Honolulu's street cars and held an exclusive franchise. British business interests were investing in Hawaii and buying land.

TO ELIMINATE the ownership question, and to get into a bargaining position on a cable to Hawaii, or to use the English offer as a way to force the U.S. to lay its own cable, the Provisional Government acted.

The Hawaiian steamer *Iwa-lani* put a government party ashore on Necker on May 27, 1894. Surf was down, and the group climbed to the highest peak to plant the Hawaiian flag and leave the "paper" near it in a copper cylinder. They posed for a picture doing it.

FOUR MONTHS later, the British landed on Necker, too late to claim it. They found the copper cylinder and added the notation that they were making depth soundings in the vicinity.

The British cable deal? The U.S. Congress told Hawaii not to lease Necker to the British. Hawaii went along — its Provisional Government was promoting U.S. annexation in 1894. England later laid an undersea cable from Canada down under, but dealt Hawaii by then annexed to America, out.