

1881 – NORWEGIANS IN HAWAII  
CONFLICT IN PLANTATION SOCIETY

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# 1881 – NORWEGIANS IN HAWAII CONFLICT IN PLANTATION SOCIETY

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## **Abstract**

The study of Norwegian emigration often focuses on the three main waves of Norwegians leaving their country for America, the journey that brought them there, and their experience in their newly adopted land.<sup>1</sup>

One little discussed part of Norwegian emigration history involves ships sailing to Hawaii in 1881 with Norwegians hired to work on the sugar plantations of Hawaii. This was not purely “emigration”, as they were hired under contract to work for a specified period and then were free to leave. Some stayed, and many traveled to other new homes outside of Norway.

Immediately on arriving in Hawaii, the Norwegians found conditions other than what they believed they were promised. The mismatch in expectations only increased across time as was cited in an 1882 article titled “The Norwegian, what to do with him?”<sup>2</sup>

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# Introduction

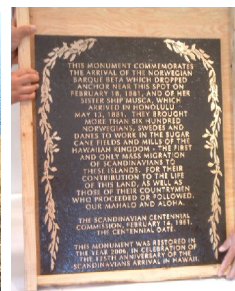
A limited number of books or papers have been written about this topic or at least referenced it. This paper is intended as an overview of what transpired at that point in Norwegian emigration history and perhaps as an impetus for the reader to search further. While researching available documents, I noted discrepancies in previously reported “facts” including dates of events, numbers of people, and even conclusions regarding the events. Especially with dates and numbers, if there was a difference I attempted to use the one most commonly used by others. Also many of the references relate to the experience on Maui although the other islands are mentioned as well.

Ingen nevnt, ingen glemt - No one mentioned, no one forgotten. As soon as you single out a source for additional focus you are open to criticism for not mentioning others. The footnotes in this paper reference multiple sources but it is still worthwhile to mention two sources that may be of interest to the reader.

- Torbjørn Gripsland’s book “Aloha from forgotten Norwegians in Hawaii - From life in slavery to life in a vacation paradise”. Written in Norwegian, with an additional 62 pages in English, Gripsland’s book takes a much broader view of Hawaii.
- Eleanor and Carl Davis’ paper “Norwegian Labor in Hawaii – The Norse Immigrants”. While written for the Industrial Relations Center of the University of Hawaii under the umbrella of understanding labor-management problems it is one of the most concise “recaps” of this part of Norwegian history. Referencing only this source, the reader would have the essential facts regarding Norwegian emigration to Hawaii in 1880-1881.

This paper was created as a submission for the Norwegian-American Historical Association in Norway’s Norwegian-American Seminar XI, June 14-17, 2011.

A plaque on a cliff on the island of Maui sets the stage for this paper. Its inscription gives us the initial framework.



*“This monument commemorates the arrival of the Norwegian barque Beta which dropped anchor near this spot on February 18, 1881, and of her sister ship Musca, which arrived in Honolulu May 13, 1881. They brought more than six hundred Norwegians, Swedes and Danes to work in the sugar cane fields and mills of the Hawaiian Kingdom - the first and only mass migration of Scandinavians to these islands. For their contribution to the life of this land, as well as those of their countrymen who proceeded or followed, our mahalo and aloha. The Scandinavian Centennial Commission, February 14, 1981, the centennial date. This monument was restored in the year 2006, in celebration of the 125th anniversary of the Scandinavians arrival in Hawaii”.*

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# Conditions in Hawaii

William Dorrance's book *Sugar Islands* highlights conditions that led to foreigners purchasing land in Hawaii, expanding the production of sugar, and creating an increased need for labor.

*"The years before 1850 were especially difficult because all land was owned by the Hawaiian Kingdom. The best a sugar manufacturer could do was win a rare lease, or rely on cane grown by natives. Finally, in 1846, King Kamehameha III (1813-1854) formed a land commission leading to the Great Mahele. Titles to the Kingdom's lands were apportioned among the royal family, the government, and the chiefs. An 1850 act broadened the Mahele to include land titles for commoners. The way was opened for foreigners to purchase land to cultivate sugarcane".<sup>3</sup>*

In the period from 1852 to 1868 the Kingdom unsuccessfully tried laborers from China and Japan and by 1873, 50% of able bodied Hawaiian males were working in the plantations. There was still a labor shortage and the demand for labor was about to increase dramatically.

As a result of the 1875-1876 reciprocity treaty between The Kingdom of Hawaii and the United States, the kingdom gained tariff-free access to U.S. markets for sugar, creating further demand for labor. This need for more workers occurred at the same time the Hawaiian population was in serious decline and had dropped to approximately 300,000 people. Without enough workers, sugar cane was left rotting in the fields.

Having already acquired workers from the Marshal Islands, the Marquesas, China and Japan, as well as South Sea Islanders, in 1880 the Kingdom decided to bring workers from Europe. These workers would come mainly from Portugal, Germany, and Norway.

This use of Norwegian workers had been proposed earlier by Norwegian Captain Henrik Christian L'Orange and is discussed further in the section on L'Orange. Captain L'Orange was ultimately selected as the representative who would go to Norway to recruit these laborers.

Of great importance to the Kingdom of Hawaii, the search for more workers would continue with King Kalākaua's 1881 trip around the world, which had as one of its main objectives the study of possible sources of immigrants.<sup>4</sup>

# Conditions in Norway

Much has been written about the reasons why people left Norway at various points in history. This paper mentions only a few that relate to who was prone to leave at this particular time and why they chose Hawaii as their destination.

In 1881 Norway was suffering from an industrial depression with high unemployment and much poverty. Thousands were leaving for other lands. This occurred at a time when there was actually a local demand for more farm laborers. These circumstances partially determined who would be in the mix of people signing contracts as Hawaiian plantation workers.

The following advertisement was placed in the newspapers of Drammen.

“To the Emigrants for the Sandwich Islands”

“Contracts with those who will go to the Sandwich Islands are drawn up and signed on Wednesday, Sept. 23, and the following days at the office of Hans P. Faye at Drammen from 11 to 3 o’clock. The parties must be provided with good recommendations, and attestations for good and faultless behaviours. Parties under obligation of military service must bring release from service. Signature of minors must, to be valid, be confirmed by guardian.

“The conditions are now regulated, and thus fixed:

Laborers over 30 years, 9 dollars; under 20 years, somewhat less, per month, with free board, or board-money and free lodgings, families may bring two children with them. Free passage and board, which is not to be worked out afterwards.

“Chr. L’Orange, Agent  
For the Hawaiian Bureau of  
Immigration, Sandwich Islands”

Free passage and board was a key factor for some who signed contracts to go to Hawaii. They may not have had the money to allow them to leave Norway, and others may not have wanted to risk the money they did have on the possibility of a better life elsewhere. The fact that L’Orange, Knudsen, Anton Faye and other Norwegians from Drammen were already in Hawaii also made it an easier decision for some of the emigrants.

The contracts the emigrants signed were specific as to the number of hours to be worked and what would be provided. They also provided for penalties if the contracts were not fulfilled. These penalties included paying the employer for loss of time worked, serving double the time lost and the possibility of being sent to prison and having to pay court costs.

When all was agreed to, the emigrants signed two contracts - one in Norwegian for the Bureau of Immigration and one in English by the planter and the worker. A worker was allowed to break the contract by repaying the costs of the sea voyage. Differences in contract wording between these two versions would later become part of the conflict arising between the plantations and the workers.

Mentioned earlier, Norway actually had a local need for farm workers at this time and yet those were the very people the planters needed. With not enough of these individuals, L'Orange started recruiting from other groups to fill his ship. Later in the discussion of conflict between the workers and the plantation owners, this mismatch between the type of worker needed and the type of worker recruited will come into play.

The planters were anxious for the new workers to arrive. From the time of the first advertisement until the Beta sailed was only 6 weeks.

# Impact of Norwegians already in Hawaii



**Valdemar Emil Knudsen**, known to the Hawaiians as “Kanuka”, had a significant connection to the Kingdom of Hawaii. Having turned down an appointment by King Kalākaua to a seat in the House of Nobles, Knudsen did eventually serve as an elected representative in 1860 using his knowledge of law and his fluency in the three Hawaiian languages. Knudsen also served as a member of the House of Representatives under the Monarchy and joined the Provisional Government after Queen Liliuokalani was deposed in 1893.

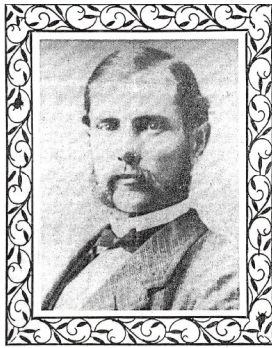
Born in Kristiansand, in Vest-Agder County, Norway, he was college-trained in botany and science in Copenhagen. Knudsen was successful both as a publisher in New York City and as a merchant during the California gold rush of the 1840s. He learned the languages of the local Indians and helped them with advice in legal matters. In November 1849, he was part of the California Constitutional Convention.

Knudsen arrived in Kekaha, Kaua’i, Hawaii, in 1856 where he managed the Grove Farm Plantation. Subsequently he bought a 30-year lease on Hawaiian crown lands in the Waimea district where he established a ranch and later became one of the largest land holders on Kaua’i.

The signing of the Reciprocity Treaty of 1876 between the Kingdom of Hawai’i and the United States opened a huge market for sugar on the mainland. A gold rush of sorts began, with sugar plantations expanding and opening across the kingdom. With the end of the whaling industry in the Pacific, the market for his cattle dried up and Knudsen turned to sugar growing. As he was too old to accomplish the hard work of building up a plantation, Knudsen enticed a group of young men who were then all about 20 years old to Kaua’i. The group included his nephews Anton Fayé, Hans Peter Fayé, Christoffer Fayé and, a bit later, Andreas Fayé. Also arriving with the group was Captain Henrik Christian L’Orange.

Caroline Fayé, niece of Valdemar Knudsen, later married Captain Henrik Christian L’Orange.

While this paper focuses on those of Norwegian heritage, it is worth noting the importance of the inter-connections of L’Orange and Knudsen to other influential families in Hawaii at this point in history. In 1867, Knudsen married Anne McHutcheson Sinclair, daughter of Elizabeth Sinclair. Elizabeth Sinclair had, in 1864, purchased the entire island of Ni’ihau from King Kamehameha V. This private ownership was passed on to her descendants. Sinclair also purchased major parcels of land on the island of Kaua’i.



## Captain Henrik Christian L'Orange

L'Orange is clearly not a Norwegian name. The L'Orange families were French Huguenots. Along with approximately 200,000 other Huguenots, the family had to leave France after the Edict of Nantes, which guaranteed French citizens freedom of worship, was repealed in 1685. Most likely going to Copenhagen in the late 1600's, members of the family eventually came to Norway and settled in Vestfold. Captain Henrich Christian L'Orange was a master ship pilot in Halden.

L'Orange's connection to Valdemar Knudsen and arrival in Hawaii was established earlier in the discussion about Knudsen. This connection continued after L'Orange left Kaua'i in 1880, when he sold his interests on Kaua'i to Anton Fayé and W. Meyer so he could start a sugar plantation on Maui. His first crop in 1880, when it matured, was sold to Fayé and Meyer.

In 1878, even before he was established on the island of Maui, and recognizing the need for more plantation workers, L'Orange proposed that the Kingdom of Hawaii bring workers from Scandinavia. To help resolve the labor shortage, King David Kalākaua commissioned Captain L'Orange to travel to Norway and recruit more workers. In 1880 he received a letter of appointment from the Bureau of Immigration of the Hawaiian Islands and a letter of credit for \$20,000 from the firm of Castle and Cook for expenses and advances to go to Norway to recruit more workers.

His instructions were to hire not more than 400 adult workers, in a ratio of 35 to 40 women to each 100 men. These people were to be of "proper class" and good workers, and no family was to bring more than two children. The Hawaiian government agreed to pay one-half the cost of passage for women and children between the ages of two and twelve years with those younger travelling free. The rest of the transportation charge would be paid by Castle and Cooke.<sup>5</sup>

L'Orange's arrival in Drammen and recruiting of plantation workers was discussed previously in the section on Conditions in Norway.

The success of L'Orange's efforts is reflected in the rest of this paper.



## The sea voyage

The preparation and provisioning for a long sea journey was similar in nature to other immigrant journeys at the same period of time. The main differences were the distance, the duration, and what they experienced on the journey as they traveled a route much different from those who traveled the North Atlantic to Quebec or New York.

The majority of the Norwegians came to Hawaii on two ships, the Beta and the Musca, with a few more coming later on the ship Cedar.

### The bark "Beta"

The Norwegian bark "Beta", 846 tons, sailed from Drammen for Hawaii, October 27, 1880. Its master was Captain C. Rist-Christensen, and it carried 327 adults, including 49 married people and 69 children aged 12 and under.<sup>6</sup>

A description of the journey of the Beta, and what the Norwegians experienced on their arrival, is discussed below.



Christmas Eve

Just past the Strait of Magellan

Submitted to [www.norwayheritage.com](http://www.norwayheritage.com)

by Walter Rist-Christensen, descendant of Captain C. Rist-Christensen

## The bark “Musca”

The German bark, "Musca", 700 tons, sailed from Drammen for Hawaii, November 23, 1880. Its master was Captain D.W. Oltman, and it carried 237 passengers, including 29 married and 57 children 12 and under.<sup>7</sup>

Arriving in Honolulu on the island of Oahu, most of the workers were assigned to a variety of plantations.

The ship's passenger list is available at <http://digitalarkivet.no>. At the time of this writing, the full URL to the first web page of the passenger list was at <http://digitalarkivet.no/cgi-win/webcens.exe?slag=visbase&filnamn=em06021880mu&metanr=3228>.

A description of the journey of the Musca and how that voyage varied from that of the Beta, is discussed below.

## The bark “Cedar”

The German bark, “Cedar” arrived in Hawaii on July 18, 1881, primarily with Germans hired to work in the plantations of Hawaii, although there were ten Norwegians and four Swedes on the ship as well. One child was also born during the voyage.

Those wishing to learn more about the passengers on these ships can find additional information from the following two sources:

- The Immigrant Ships Transcribers Guild (ISTG) has passenger lists for Musca and Cedar. [www.immigrantships.net/](http://www.immigrantships.net/).
- The Norwegian Digital Archive has lists for BETA and MUSCA. [www.digitalarkivet.no/](http://www.digitalarkivet.no/).

Later in this paper we learn about the conflicts between planters and Scandinavian workers. Learning from those conflicts, the Germans more carefully selected their workers, paid higher wages, and more carefully controlled the wording of their contracts, hoping to “avoid the trouble they had had with the Norwegians”. Even with the potential risks, they wanted to take advantage of generous financial aid promised to those who would bring workers from Europe.

In an 1884 report to the legislative Assembly, the description of the success of importing German laborers gives us insight to the problems associated with the Norwegian workers – “ *There has not been any trouble or revolt of any kind. I consider the success of the Germans at Lihue is attributed to their being agriculturists and the interest taken in them by their employers*”.<sup>8</sup>

## The journey of the “Beta”

While there were the typical preparations for an emigration sea voyage from Norway, the journey of the Beta, and later the Musca, were different in the distance they travelled and the time they would be at sea. With a journey of almost four months, sailing approximately 15,000 sea miles, the emigrants had to allow for greater provisioning to be able to provide for themselves and their families. Many Norwegian emigrants only had to cross the North Atlantic. Without the Panama Canal, the Beta had to sail the North Atlantic, South Atlantic, and South Pacific oceans, and through treacherous waters not normally experienced by other emigrants.

Their journey started poorly with rough seas and heavy storms. While still in the North Sea, the emigrants spotted another ship which had overturned with all passengers lost. They discovered later that it had been reported back in Norway that the sunken ship was the Beta. Their friends and relatives believed those who had barely left the shores of Norway were now gone.

Like other emigrant journeys, there were births, deaths, times of desperation, times of solitude, times of gathering together. Bands were created, music played, and with a minister on board, religious services held. It appears they spent the entire journey on board the ship even when re-provisioning was done. “There was a break in the voyage somewhere along the coast of Peru where barrels of water were brought out in barges; but to their disappointment the passengers were not permitted to land”.<sup>9</sup>

After eight weeks of sailing they arrived at the Strait of Magellan. Although the original plan was to sail around the southern tip of South America and Cape Horn using the Drake Passage, the Captain decided to sail through the Strait to save time. For the sailing ships of the 1800’s the Strait’s narrow channels, variable winds and currents made it a dangerous choice. Sailing ships generally preferred the Drake Channel as they had more room to maneuver.

At the first attempt winds pushed them back out of the Strait. The Captain made a second attempt over the protests of the passengers. He sailed through the narrow passages at night to take advantage of lighter winds and to avoid being seen and attacked by cannibals. Whether real or imagined, the cannibals were known to the passengers and feared by them. Passengers reported that they could “almost touch the rock walls as they passed through”.

Leaving the Strait, more problems occurred. Storms washed many emigrants’ bedding overboard. A fire in the hold on New Year’s Eve made the journey more miserable.

The view that greeted them on arrival at Ma’alea Bay on the island of Maui was in stark contrast to what they had expected. While much of the island was lush and green, on the leeward side in the shadow of the volcano Haleakalā in those days it was dry and barren. While no documentation has been found describing the reactions of the Norwegians on arriving here, a description from two years earlier gives us a sense of their disappointment.

“As seen from the sea, this isle certainly presents an appearance of unmitigated and hideous barrenness, Its lava-bound shores are the very type of ghastly desolations – vast flows of the roughest, blackest lava, as hard as iron, jutting into the sea, and giving horrible suggestions of the fate which would await any luckless vessel that might be driving on to that cruel coast. The isle appears to be one vast cinder heap, with groups of small craters . . .”<sup>10</sup>

Nine children died during the voyage, most from lack of nourishment. Two belonging to a young couple died a week apart.<sup>11</sup>

These initial impressions, how they were treated on arriving, and their actual experience working on the plantations, set the stage for conflict that would involve the Norwegians, the plantation owners, the legal system of Hawaii, the populace of Norway and the relationship between the Kingdom of Hawaii and the United Kingdoms of Sweden and Norway.

## **The journey of the “Musca”**

Worse than the journey of the Beta, three months later the bark Musca arrived with another 230 Norwegians. A description of their journey mentions “. . . the voyage of the Musca turned out to be even more stormy and uncomfortable than that of the Beta. In was in fact a nightmarish trip. The emigrants complained of bad food, bad water, and general bad treatment”.<sup>12</sup> “We had not progressed further than the North Sea when we got bad meat. . . .” “All of this had been well enough if the water had been fresh and clean, but the most of it was damaged, the water was to that degree rotten that it stunk all over the deck when it came out of the hold; it had been filled in old, dirty casks, and it looked like a soup made of rye bread and beer (dark brown). With this nasty water the meat was cooked, and was thereby made very bad”.<sup>13</sup>

One passenger went insane; fifteen people died eleven of them children from one to nine years old. Two babies were born, one to a mother whose other three children died.

The Musca landed at Honolulu on the island of Oahu on May 13, 1881. The plantation agents found the passengers “half starved” and the passengers filed complaints about their treatment with their consulate. While many of the passengers of the Musca wanted to stay together, after a 3-month bad experience of dealing with the passengers of the Beta, the planters decided to scatter the new group as widely as possible, even sending them to other islands.

# The plantation experience

As the Beta sailed into Ma'alea Bay, instead of the land of “perpetual Norwegian summer” they expected, they were greeted by a hot, harsh, barren landscape. The emigrants were taken by smaller whale boats from the Beta to the shore. Once they were there, numbers were pinned on each of them and a corresponding number was placed into a container as part of the selection process of who would go to which plantation. Some viewed this as a slave auction.

Husbands, wives, and younger offspring remained together, but in some cases older members of the same family went to different plantations or even to different islands. Those not selected for the plantations of Maui were shipped later that week to the island of Hawaii.<sup>14</sup>

The impersonality of the distribution caused much resentment among the emigrants, some of whom felt they were being treated like cattle. A letter sent by one of the immigrants was translated and sent by the Consul General for Sweden and Norway to the Minister of foreign affairs in Honolulu describing the treatment of one group of immigrants.

“On 14 February 1881 we arrived after much suffering, to the Sandwich Islands, to a place called Lahaina situated on the island of Maui, on board come Chr. L'Orange the slave traders mediator. . . the same day we proceeded further to a place called Bombaireikea [sic], situated far from inhabited places. Here the trading should go on and so it did. The following day our salesman went ashore and returned with two natives and six white planters. When they came on board we were told that they were our owners. Immediately our contracts were taken from us. In the evening the lottery of us helpless emigrants began and went on for a day and a night. The following day we received our contracts back but they had undergone a great alteration during the time they were in the hands of these men”.<sup>15</sup>

Treated impersonally, the emigrants finally started their journey to their assigned plantations. They were placed in ox carts and traveled for many hours from Ma'alea through the central plain that is the isthmus joining the two volcanoes that form the island of Maui. The journey would have been uncomfortable in crude carts travelling on rough roads and paths, but they would have started to see a different view of the island with lush green fields and vegetation. Their journey stopped briefly in Wailuku before the group continued to their final destinations.

While there were other Maui plantations and mills, including the Pioneer mill near Lahaina, emigrants on the Beta went primarily to Haiku, Paia and Bailey plantation near Wailuku. Leaving Wailuku, as they traveled to these destinations their view changed once again to rutted roads and blowing sand. The irrigation that later changed the landscape from a sandy waste land to the green fields of today had not yet been started. One writer described it as a “Sahara in miniature”.

They arrived at the plantations before their housing was ready and some were temporarily placed in warehouses. Later they would have simple houses with open gables and no windows. In contrast to their homes in Norway, these simple structures must have seemed like shacks.

When work started in the fields, the Norwegians bitterly complained about working conditions. Work under the Hawaiian sun in the cane fields was hard and physically demanding. Many of the Norwegians were unprepared for these conditions, but an even bigger problem was their treatment by the foremen who were accustomed to treating workers impersonally, complete with kickings, beatings, and unreasonable deductions from their wages for minor infractions. Previous groups of imported laborers put up with this – why wouldn't the Norwegians?

Used to taking direct action to change things, the emigrants resorted to letter writing to state their case, taking complaints to L'Orange and others. They went on strike and refused to work more hours than their contracts stated, or to take any action outside of the bounds of the contract. Many were jailed. Those who left work without permission to act as witnesses for the accused found themselves facing charges of rioting, and other illegal behavior and were fined, imprisoned or both.<sup>16</sup>

## **Conflict, awareness, and resolution**

While they viewed their treatment on the plantations as poor, mismatches in contracts made things worse. Contradictions in the English and Norwegian language versions of the contracts signed by the emigrants, created even more tension. Issues ranged from things like expecting bedding to be provided, especially for those whose bedding was lost during storms at sea, to more fundamental things like having enough food for their families. The planters felt obligated to only provide food to contract laborers and their children, and also their wives if they worked. The Norwegians' contracts called for food for children and wives whether they worked or not.

This excerpt from Edward Beechert's book "Working in Hawaii, a Labor History" highlights some of the causes for conflict between the workers and the plantation owners and the actions taken by the workers.

"Hastily recruited by Christian L'Orange from the Planters labor and supply company, the Norwegians were almost all unemployed craftsmen and artisans and townspeople. Pushed by poverty in Norway and the word by extravagant tales of the warm lush subtropical paradise these people were thoroughly ill-suited to the harsh realities of the industrial plantation.

Trouble began immediately upon arrival. The immigrants quickly decided they resented working for \$20 a month on the plantation when they could be earning up to \$100 a month using their skills in town. The food was strange, the housing probative, and the

working conditions harsh. The brutality of the overseers was a shock to these independent-minded immigrants. On Maui, they were told that their contracts would be extended for each day of sickness objected that this amounted to indefinite peonage according to the laws of Hawaii. Those who refused to work were jailed. When they objected to being worked longer than the ten hours called for in their contracts they were fined and threatened with imprisonment. The District Judge was not moved by their demand that the contract be enforced. Those who refused to accept his rulings were jailed.

The immigrants sent a flow of letters to Norway and filed official complaints with the Swedish government. Many of their letters found their way into the press. They were translated and reprinted in the San Francisco Chronicle as part of the newspapers' campaign against the Hawaiian sugar producers and the reciprocity treaty. Allowing for exaggeration, the letters of the Norwegians made it abundantly clear that Europeanizing the labor supply would not be very easy".<sup>17</sup>

Long letters describing the terrible condition during the Musca's voyage, abusive treatment by plantation owners, unjust rulings in the courts, and strikes by the Norwegians, were sent to family and friends in Norway and to English and Scandinavian language newspapers. Articles in Scandinavian newspapers in the American middle west were often sent on to Norway and often re-published there. The letters would often use words or phrases referring to "slavery" or "bondage". One article was titled "The Hawaiian Hades" and was thought to be a moderate article at the time. The result was an outcry for action. Some proposed an investigation backed up with a war ship be sent to Hawaii.

The view of the Norwegians by some was that the Norwegians were "too good for the position of plantation workers".<sup>18</sup>

Multiple sources in this paper's reference section cite words and phrases the locals used to describe Norwegian plantation workers: "Lacked the ability to submit to passive obedience", "Would not put up with conditions of which they disapproved", and "Too individualistic". One published article was "The Norwegian - What to do with him?" Using those descriptions of the Norwegians seems fair. In my view that is who they were. The problem was that who they were was a mismatch with what the plantation owners wanted - a submissive work force that would just do what they were told and not complain about it.

If Norwegian workers did not honor their contracts and left the plantation before completing them, they were considered deserters as referenced in Ronald Takaki's book "Pau Hana".

“Three Norwegians who were under contract to the Haiku Sugar Co. left on the *Kate Sudden* for San Francisco. . . The Norwegians do not seem to be a very satisfactory kind of laborer; these sudden departures are becoming too frequent”.<sup>19</sup>

The awareness of the problem grew as the volume of correspondence grew.

The level of complaints continued to escalate to the point that the Norwegian Home Office requested the Minister of Foreign Affairs resolve the matter, and by early 1882 there were demands to send out one or two men-of-war. Things continued to get worse. Public meetings were being held, Parliament was being petitioned, and there was a demand for an investigation. This had effectively become an international incident.

The complaints and attendant publicity prompted the Swedish government to dispatch an investigator to Hawaii. Foreign Minister Anton Grip was appointed to resolve the issue.

His journey was delayed however because a newspaper article quoting Valdemar Knudsen stated that the situation was overblown. Knudsen, considered knowledgeable and trustworthy, stated in a lengthy article that much of the problem was due to selecting the wrong people to be plantation workers in the first place. He defended the legal system’s ability to resolve many problems, and while acknowledging that some plantation owners may have improperly treated their workers, and some tribunals may have made mistakes, the emigrants had little to complain about. He stated that the workers had freely entered into their contracts and understood that they would gain less during the contract period than those who paid their own passage.

First, Grip traveled to Christiana and made himself available to anyone who had information about the treatment of friends and relatives in Hawaii. By the fall of 1882, Grip headed to the islands of Maui and Hawaii to personally investigate the complaints of the Norwegians.<sup>20</sup>

By the time Grip arrived much had been done by the planters to make the situation better including making accommodations that were not in their versions of the contract. This included providing board for non-working wives and putting skilled workers in jobs that better matched their abilities. Grip spent ten weeks in the islands and met and interviewed workers, both in their homes which he inspected and even in the jail cells if they were incarcerated. He inspected hospitals, plantation quarters, food being provided, and reviewed other aspects of the emigrants lives. In some cases Grip negotiated a range of changes including conditions of the contracts, where people would work, and even reduced jail sentences.

When he was done, he had visited nearly every plantation employing Swedes or Norwegians, having interviewed 256 men and some of the women, as well as government officials and health care providers.



Grips findings were not the resolution the emigrants had hoped for.

Grip, like many diplomats from other countries who investigated workers' complaints, found them to be largely ill-founded. He was amazed at the amount of meat available to the workers compared to the scanty meat ration of the Norwegian and Swedish soldiers. Declaring their working conditions, food, and housing all acceptable, he concluded that the immigrants were townspeople and artisans unsuited for agriculture. Moreover, he added, there were "a great many bad people" among the immigrants. It is evident that this group of Norwegian workers did not agree with Grip's conclusions, as most of the 613 men, women and children left the plantations at the end of the contracts. Five years after their arrival only 52 could be found there. There were so few remaining, in fact, that they were not listed as a separate entity in the ensuing censuses.<sup>21</sup>

Some in the Hawaiian Kingdom saw the value of independent, self-reliant people and how they might actually help Hawaiian society as it already had some Anglo-Saxon aspects, but that view was in conflict with the demands of the plantations. The European values of independent people who wanted to better themselves were a mismatch with the demand for low cost workers who would continue to labor in the fields and mills of Hawaii.

A paragraph from "Problems in Paradise - Norwegians in Hawaii in the 1880's" by Ingeborg Kongslien originally available on-line in 2005 from Det digitale Nasjonalbiblioteket [www.nb.no](http://www.nb.no) highlights many of the key reasons for the conflict.

"As we have seen, there were several reasons for conflict. Few of the emigrants had ever been agricultural workers and were therefore not very skilled or happy about doing field work. In addition, after they arrived on the islands and learned they could have earned much more outside the contract system or in other types of jobs, frustrations mounted. A central and more adequate explanation as to why the conflicts became so bitter and aroused such strong emotions is that there was a conflict of cultures: The planters wanted and needed workers, but the workers objected to conditions that were considered acceptable at that time and place. These workers came from a country where labor movements were under way and would not tolerate conditions they considered unacceptable. These disturbances arose, even in the potential paradise".<sup>22</sup>

The pressure for cheap and permanent labor won the day. Except for several shipments of Germans brought in largely for Lihue Plantation on the island of Kaua'i, there were no more mass importations of North Europeans. The Azores, Japan, and the Philippines became the major sources for labor, and the social and economic pattern of life in Hawaii was fixed for decades to come.<sup>23</sup>

L'Orange became unpopular with his fellow sugar planters, disbanded his operations, and moved to Florida to plant tobacco.<sup>24</sup>

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# About the author

## JON SATRUM

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### **NORWEGIAN HERITAGE:**

100%. His parents' families emigrated from the Trøndelag region of Norway in the 1860's and 1870's (75% - Skatval /25% - Hegra).

### **EDUCATION:**

Mankato State University, Mankato, Minnesota  
BA - Business Administration and Economics, 1966

### **PUBLISHED ARTICLES:**

Since 2000, Jon has published dozens of short articles for a variety of organizations focused on Norwegian culture, genealogy and immigration. His 2009 article "Å vokse opp som Norsk i America" was published in Årbok Nr. XIX of Skatval Historielag.

### **MEMBERSHIPS:**

Multiple genealogy and Norwegian Heritage organizations in the U.S. and Norway including:

- Trønderlag of America
- Sons of Norway
- Nordmanns Forbundet
- State, County, and Local historical associations

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