

Good Times, Good Works

A new hotel, instant messaging, a public health crisis, and a crime wave.

Hawaii 2020? No, Hawaii 1900: Moana Hotel built, Bubonic Plague ravaged the islands, wireless Marconi telegraphy connected Hawaii to the world, and a crime wave of “stabbing affrays, murders, and assaults” was “traced to liquor...and the unruly class ... among the increasing immigration our new political status is attracting¹.” New political status? Hawai’i was now a Territory of the United States of America. This allowed a fraternal order, with membership restricted to American soil, to open an island lodge.

April 1901 saw the initiation of a lodge of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks in Hawaii. Hawaii’s 32nd degree Masons create the Aloha Lodge of the Mystic Shrine. The Order of Eagles and Chapters of the Eastern Star also were opened. The new orders joined several U. S. and international benevolent societies already active in Hawaii.

April 13, 1901: Two ships appeared in Honolulu harbor, both from California. The *Kilpatrick*, a transport, has cases of small pox and measles in the U. S. troops and the Board of Health refused the Captain permission to land passengers. The *Mariposa*, with everyone in good health, was allowed to land passengers. Among the arrivals was Judge Jerome B. Fisher, Grand Exalted Ruler of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, here to open a lodge for Hawai’i.² GER Fisher traveled with a party of BPOE officers to preside at the initiations.

In their monthly diary *The Friend*, a religious and news magazine, reported two important events occurred on April 15: the Order of Elks is officially opened in Hawaii, and the Governor vetoes a bill proposing to reduce the Territory’s tax on dogs. The BPOE candidate initiation was front-page news for *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*. *PCA* predicted that “initiation into the mysteries of the herd” would give members access to the “good times associated with its meetings,” but at a price. “The incoming herd being so numerous, the proper amount of attention cannot be given to all, but it is rumored that ten unfortunates have been selected who will serve as examples of how it should be done.” *PCA* noted visiting Elks were “burnishing and sharpening their hoofs and antlers in anticipation of a glorious gluttony of gore.” Fearful members-to-be “are requested to take comfort in the statistical showing that no one has, up to date, been actually killed outright at an Elk initiation.”³

Progress Hall⁴ at the corner of Fort and Beretania Streets was the site of the first installation of officers and members of the Elks in Hawai’i. Reports paint a vivid picture of the promised ‘good times’. “A wild herd of...Elks donned the antlers... From 8 o’clock last evening until a late hour this morning the Elks grazed and drank of the pure mountain waters of the ranges. As the night wore on the Elks capered and performed antics that amused the onlookers, especially during the initiation ceremonies. ...at the conclusion of this ceremony, the pianist ...struck up a cake-walk⁵...The Elks pranced and marched ...and thus the fun continued until the herd was admonished to find their respective sleeping places in the forests of Honolulu.”⁶

The Elks joined an active social and club life in Hawai'i. By 1901, the Knights of Pythias, American Legion of Honor, American Order of Foresters, Daughters of Rebekah, Sons of St. George, and others had chapters in Hawai'i. Also present were many home-grown relief groups, many founded in the mid-1800s: Hooulu Lahui Society, German Benevolent Society, Portuguese Ladies' Benevolent Society, Hawaiian Relief Society, Hawaiian Sons of the American Revolution, the American Relief Fund, and many others directly association with churches. Prominent in Hawaii's business and social life were men's clubs where membership was a matter of financial and social status, and ethnicity. Clubs provided a comfortable base where home-country food, language, and patriotism were accepted. Among these were The British Club, Scottish Thistle Club, several Hawaiian and Chinese societies, and sport groups like boating and rowing clubs. Many clubs kept a restaurant and bar, held social gatherings, and some maintained residential rooms for members' use when 'in the city'. Hawaii's Elks would grow into an organization that combined aspects of the benevolent and relief associations with those of the social and patriotic groups.

1901 closed on a Hawai'i that sounds not unlike our own times:⁷

- street widening and roadwork congest the city
- drought is a serious problem
- controversies raged over the court's release of criminals on technical grounds
- two political parties, Home Rule and Republicans, are blamed for legislative gridlock
- debate is hot over public transportation; Honolulu Rapid Transit goes into regular service, and has a collision in 7 days
- laborers strike for higher wages

Several improvements in the life of the islands begin to take hold in 1901- home delivery of mail, an 8 hour day for laborers, and the 'good times' and good works by which Hawaii's Elks will be known for 100 years.

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¹ "Retrospective for 1900," *Hawaiian Annual for 1901*, pp. 166 ff.

² "Calendar", *The Friend*, 1901, V: 90

³ "Arrival of the Grand Exalted Ruler of Elks" *PCA*, April 15, 1901, pg. 1

⁴ Progress Hall, façade close to its 1921 look, today anchors the mauka end of Fort Street Mall. Hawaii Pacific University uses it for offices and classrooms.

⁵ A cakewalk called for quick stepping, strutting dances with music to match, often a cake was awarded for the best dancer. Perhaps a rum cake inspired the Elk's dancing?

⁶ "Herd of Honolulu Elks Rounded Up Last Night," *PCA*, 16 April 1901

⁷ "Retrospective for 1901," *Hawaiian Annual for 1902*, Honolulu, pp. 158 ff.