

The Lanai Horror

From the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*

February 17, 1892.

The steamer *Mokolii*, which arrived on Tuesday, brings a strange story from Lanai. At the quiet little hamlet of Awalua, the landing at Lanai, there stood near the shore a grass hut, occupied by a family of about ten persons, one of them an old Hawaiian supposed to be crazy (*pupule*). A female kahuna attended the old gentleman. During the evening of the 12th inst., several bowls of awa were consumed by the family, the children included, to appease the *aumakua* deity.

After the awa, it is conjectured that the entire party went to sleep, with the exception of the female kahuna, the spirit not allowing her to rest until the *aumakua* had brought the desired relief. The story goes that she waited until after midnight, when the *aumakua*, continuing conspicuous by his absence, she lost patience and determined to hasten the steps of the dilatory god by the application of fire to the house. The flames woke the sleepers, who rushed out of the burning hut. When nothing was left but ashes, it turned out that a young man of twenty was missing.

And now comes the strangest part of the story. When the steamer *Mokolii* reached Lanai, an astonishing sight met their gaze. The once well-beloved occupants of the hut at Awalua were running wild on the rocks, clad in nature's attire. The whole family had been seized with real or apparent insanity. When approached, they appeared to have lost all means of communication, and no intelligible account of their condition could be obtained. When the *Mokolii* left for Honolulu, Hon. F. H. Hayselden of Lanai had sent a boat to Lahaina to fetch Deputy Sheriff Makalua to investigate the matter. According to the chief officer's story, it seems that the unfortunate young man who perished in the flames had a pretty wife, to whom another native in the same house had taken a fancy, and the belief is that the rest of the family, not being in sympathy with the husband set the house on fire, with the intention of murdering him.

This is as much of this strange eventful history as has yet reached Honolulu. A family all going crazy at one fell swoop in an event unparalleled since the days of the Bacchic frenzy.

February 22, 1892.

A horrible outbreak of heathenish superstition has occurred on the island of Lanai, leading to deeds of the most frightful violence, to the murder of a man, a woman, and a child, and the savage torturing of still another unfortunate. The first rumors of these shocking events reached Honolulu on the *Mokolii* last Tuesday. Yesterday the *Kinau* brought confirmation of these rumors, together with twelve prisoners, an entire family all charged with murder, some of them on three indictments. The names of the twelve [*sic*] persons are as follows: Kaaaio; Kala; Keliikuewa; Keola; Pulolo (wahine); Nawai (wahine); Kanae (wahine); Kahikina; Kanoenoe (wahine); and Kalakaa.

The murdered persons are the three following: Kula (liilii) [infant], six years; Puni (wahine), sister; and Kaholokai.

There are three charges of murder: (1) Puubolo (wahine) is charged with the murder of Puni (wahine); (2) all twelve are charged with the murder of Kala [*sic*: Kula], (liilii); and (3)

Kahikina, Puubolo, Kakaio ([sic: Kaaaio], Kala, Keola, and Kealake [sic: Kalakaa] are charged with the murder of Kaholokai.

The police are cautious in their utterances, and it is difficult to ascertain the course of the whole dreadful history. Much of it will not be known until the trial; some of it will never be known. The following brief sketch of the facts is derived from the most trustworthy sources accessible.

On Monday, the 15th inst., news reached Lahaina that murders had occurred at Awalua, on Lanai. The deputy sheriff dispatched Mr. Chillingworth, R. P. Hose, and other constables to the scene. They left Lahaina at 10 a.m. Tuesday, reaching Awalua at 12:30, where they found Pulolo (wahine) and Kealaka [sic] tied with ropes. It appears that sometime before the events described below, Pulolo had cured, or was credited with curing, a child of Kaholokai's which had been very sick. This had gained for her the reputation of a kahuna, and she probably was convinced of the reality of her supernatural powers. The *aumakua*, or spirit, which had power over her was called Kihilikini. Acting under the guidance of this spirit, on the night of Thursday, February 11, she beat and killed her sister Puni, beating her to death with a club. Puni, it is said, had expressed disbelief in her power, which had angered her. The following night was marked by events still more bloodcurdling. The furious woman clubbed to death her nephew Kala [sic], a boy of six years, the rest of the family acquiescing or assisting. After this action was completed, the other members of the family held Paa, a young man of about thirty and a brother of the kahuna, while she burned him over the face, body, and arms with a flaming torch made of cloth dipped in oil or lard. Later in the night her fourth victim, Kaholokai, was seized and held while she beat him with a club until he became unconscious. At this point the rest left him and went away, leaving the murderess alone with the dying man, to whom she was supposed to have dealt the finishing strokes. The family returned and went to sleep, and early in the morning the fire was started which destroyed the hut. Into its flame the body of Kaholokai was thrown, the other corpses being left to die on the ground outside, where the sickening horror had been enacted.

Saturday morning a native by the name of Palau, who lived about a mile away, came down and asked questions about what had occurred, but receiving no answers went to the other side of the island, about eight miles away, to in-form the constable. Returning, he with another native, by the name of Kahulu, made some rough wooden coffins in which the three murdered Hawaiians were buried. Some of the family, who by this time may be supposed to have come partially to their senses, dug the graves.

This was on Saturday night. On Tuesday the four police officers arrived from Lahaina, and on Wednesday morning at four o'clock they started back with two boats, in the second of which were the twelve prisoners. They reached Lahaina at 6:30 and were met by an excited crowd, among them women armed with sticks. The face of the burned man, Paa, was covered from sight with a veil, it being feared that his disfigured appearance would incite the people to violence against Pulolo.

The examination of the prisoners was set for the following day but was postponed until Friday owing to the absence of Mr. Chillingworth in Wailuku. All twelve prisoners were sent down to Honolulu and arrived on the *Kinau* on Sunday morning. They were taken first to the station house, and afterwards to the Oahu Jail. It is said that Dr. Davison, of Lahaina, from an examination of the kahuna Pulolo, found no reason to suppose her insane. An officer who had a good deal of conversation with her on the voyage from Lahaina says that she seems perfectly rational. She is a young woman between twenty and thirty years of age, rather slender in figure.

An eyewitness in the Oahu Prison speaks of her as cowering in a blanket, with her head bent down and muttering to herself.

The murders of Kaholokai and the child Kala [sic] were perpetrated, it is believed, in the expectation that the kahuna would bring them to life again. Paa, the brother, who was so horribly burned, is said to be improving, with a prospect of recovery.

The natives have all deserted Awalua, and the scene of this sickening outburst of heathenism and superstition is now a desert.

June 8, 1892

The steamer *Claudine* was detained till six o'clock last evening waiting for the court.

Pulolo, the Lanai murderess, and her band of accomplices in that horrible tragedy were marched from the prison to the steamer by policemen, a crowd of natives following them all the way. Pubic was dressed in a new blue dress but had no shoes on. She wore a native *loulou* hat. Several native women were eager to catch a glimpse of the tragical kahuna, but when they saw her, she being only a small woman, they gnashed their teeth, wishing that she was in glory. The police encountered no small trouble in their efforts to prevent the eager visitors from coming too close to the person of Pulolo.

June 16, 1892

The *Kinau* arrived yesterday and brought news of the conclusion of the famous Lanai murder case, full particulars of which were published at the time. The evidence of the witnesses placed on the stand fully authenticated the accounts previously published and showed that the murders committed were due to what must be regarded as an outbreak of cruelty, animal ferocity, and degraded superstition all combined. A *nol. pros.* was entered as to five of the defendants, and a verdict of murder in the second degree found by the jury in the case of five others, *viz.* Pulolo the kahuna and four of the men implicated with her. Kala, the father of the murdered child, was sentenced to thirty years' imprisonment and Keola Kakaia and Keliikuewa to twenty years' each. In the case of Pulolo, the principal, sentence was reserved, owing to a discrepancy between English and Hawaiian versions, but it will be for life. The cause of the difficulty is the use of the word "term" in English, which led to some doubt in the mind of the court whether a simple sentence for life would be sufficient, or whether a term of years would have to be fixed.

June 20, 1892

Owing to the nature of this extraordinary murder case, it was found impossible to give a full report of it by furnishing the lengthy evidence produced in court, which was the most revolting ever placed on record in this kingdom. The following narrative covers the principal facts brought out in the trial, which, it will be seen, has not been concluded, only one of the several indictments having been tried.

On Thursday afternoon, June 9, after great difficulty in selecting a native jury, occurred the trial of the Lanai murderers before the Circuit Court at Wailuku. A brief abstract of the case, from the testimony presented to the jury is as follows: On Thursday, February 11, the woman Pubic, who claimed to be a kahuna and to have at her command a spirit named Kiilikina, had two of her soldiers, Keliikuewa and Kakaio, seize her husband and hold him, while she beat him

cruelly and cut his feet with broken bottles till he could not walk. Not satisfied with this, she commenced punishing a little boy, six years old, the son of her eldest brother, Kalu.

Another brother, Hoopii, being sceptical as to her supernatural powers, at her command was seized and held by some of her attendants, while this inhuman wretch burned him most horribly with torches ignited from a large fire in the dwelling nearby. While in the witness box, Hoopii brought tears to the eyes of some of the audience, and caused execrations to come from the lips of others, by exhibiting the fearful scars received during this fiendish torturing. At the time he was so exhausted by the pain and punishment that he could scarcely move, only groan with agony.

Her vampire instincts remaining still unquenched, she took the boy, Kaialiili, in hand again, and buffeted him about till he bled profusely at the nose and mouth, while his father and others stood by and silently witnessed this new act of cruelty. The poor stripling cried to his parent again and again for help, but the poor superstitious creature did not dare (or perhaps wish) to move hand or foot to succor his tortured offspring.

This brutal sorceress finally put an end to the boy's sufferings by sitting on his head till it bent to his waist, like a broken reed, and life was extinct. The poor little corpse was then taken and laid out on a mat, and the helpless Hoopii was placed beside it with his face to the wall guarded by the so-called soldiers.

Her next victim was her sister, whom she suffocated with the assistance of Kaholokai, by thrusting her head into hot sand. After this, the body of her dead sister was placed on the matting beside the boy's; she then ordered her satellites to seize her late assistant Kaholokai, and they held him fast while she beat him to death.

During the night the house, which at this time much resembled a morgue, caught fire, but was saved from destruction by the men near at hand. Early the next morning, February 12, a council of war was held to decide how best to cover up the dark deeds of the previous night. Her instructions to her tools were to say, when interrogated, that the boy's death resulted from sickness; that the man, Kahobokai, lost his life in the fire which attacked the house on the night before; that the girl, her sister, died in a fit.

The next move in this frightful tragedy after removing the bodies of the boy and woman was to cremate Kaholokai's corpse, by burning the house, with all its furniture and effects; thus hoping to give an appearance of accidental conflagration. The other two bodies were afterwards burned. After the destruction of the dwelling and the bodies, the murderess and her retinue spent the night at a neighbor's house some distance away.

The jury, on Friday, the 10th inst., brought in a unanimous verdict of murder in the second degree against Pulolo (twenty years in prison) and four of the men, for the murder of the boy. The remainder of the ten persons arrested were discharged on this count, but were held (as well as the five already found guilty) to answer two other indictments—for the murders of the woman and man. Owing to the terrible pitch of popular feeling on Maui, there will probably be a change of venue granted before another trial takes place.

As to the motive for these unprecedented crimes, it is difficult to conjecture. The reason given out generally among Hawaiians is this: that Pulolo and her brother-in-law, one of her willing tools, wished to marry, and in order to consummate their purpose, it was necessary to put the husband of one and the wife of the other out of the way. The other horrible acts were perpetrated to conceal their real intention. The intensity of popular feeling among the natives is not directed against kahunaism as a practice, but against this imposter, who has falsely claimed the powers of a Hawaiian magician.

During Thursday, p.m., the 16th and 17th inst., the foreign jury distinguished itself by rapid and thorough work. The jury is probably the best one, taken as a whole, that has been summoned to try cases on Maui for a number of years. Last night Judge Bickerton excused them until Monday morning. Today some native divorce cases are under consideration.

June 23, 1892

News came by the steamer *W G. Hall* that a native wahine by the name of Kaaiai, of Kailua, Hawaii, tried to imitate the fiendish work of Pulolo, the notorious Lanai murderess. This woman is also a kahuna, and her neighbors are said to have obeyed her commands with superstitious fear. It is said that a few weeks ago, she ordered her sentinels to drag a kanaka about the place, after which a hole was dug to bury him alive. The sentinels were about to carry out her instructions, but were prevented by the timely appearance of others who took him out. The kahuna and her attendants were tried before the district judge of the place and were fined \$100 each and costs.

June 27, 1892

Pulolo, the kahuna murderess, was sentenced to fifty years' imprisonment.