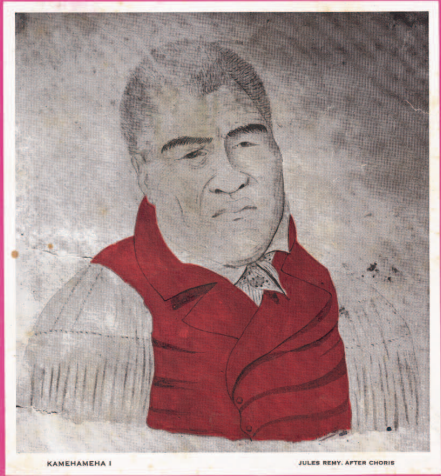


KAMEHAMEHA'S RED VEST
(SHORTENED VERSION)

PARADISE

JUNE 1955 • THIRTY-FIVE CENTS

of the PACIFIC *Hawaii*



KAMEHAMEHA I

JULES REMY. AFTER CHORIS

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Paradise

HAWAII'S FAVORITE MAGAZINE

KING KAMEHAMEHA'S

Red Vest

by Jean Charlot



KING KAMEHAMEHA was painted from life by Louis Choris, draftsman of the von Kotzebue expedition, November 24, 1816. Of the three sketches known to have been made on that day, most famous is that of the monarch in a bright red vest.

Landing just at dawn, Choris and his companions were received on shore by the king, imposingly dressed native fashion, in red malo and wide black tapa cloak.

Kamehameha the Great rates special tribute on his special day, June 11th, when five islands parade their most beautiful maidens, handsomest men, loveliest blossoms, sweetest music, finest dancing. "Princess" is in traditional pa'u riding dress; native island colors. Photos by Lu Diamond, courtesy of Kamehameha School



Later that same morning, portrait probably in mind, the king changed to European clothing.

Says Choris, "Imagine my surprise on seeing this monarch display himself in the costume of a sailor. He wore blue trousers, a red waistcoat, a clean white shirt and a necktie of yellow silk."

A native king, strutting for his portrait in the non-descript attire of a sailor, makes good reading. It conjures a picture of a savage, innocent of culture, prizing, above his own royal attire, whatever scraps of discarded foreign attire had fallen his way.

An amusing picture, but deceptive. At the time Kamehameha posed for Choris, he had been wearing European clothing when and as he saw fit — for more than twenty years! Thus, the celebrated sailor's costume could not have been, as, on the surface it appeared to be, an awkward faux-pas.

Perhaps the first article of European clothing Hawaii's great king possessed was a printed linen gown. Originally a gift from Captain Cook to Kalaniopuu, it fell to Kamehameha among the "spoils of war" in the 1780s.

In 1793, Vancouver presented Kamehameha with at least three cloaks. Most splendid of the three (doubtless specially concocted for its bartering value in savage lands) failed remarkably in the decorous good taste expected of an English tailor. "The king . . . was presented with a scarlet cloak that reached from his neck to the ground, adorned with tinsel lace, trimmed with various coloured gartering tape, with blue ribbons tied to it down the front."

On receipt of this dubious gift, the owner of the most splendid feather cloaks in all creation behaved as he knew was expected. "The looking glasses being placed opposite each other displayed at once the whole of his royal person; this filled him with rapture and so delighted him that the (ship's) cabin could scarcely contain him. His ecstasy produced capering."

In 1796, the king boarded Broughton's ship dressed in European clothes — not, however, the gaudy cloak from Vancouver but his own magnificent yellow one.

In 1812, England's Prince Regent sent, together with more practical gifts of hardware, "a tri-corner hat adorned with plumes, a full-dress uniform of red cloth, embroidered with gold." Though years in transit, this gift reached Kamehameha in 1816 — ample time to permit wearing it at the time of his meeting with the Choris party, had he wished.

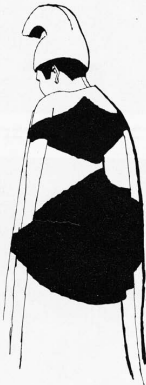
In 1819, Golovnin saw the king dressed in the uniform of an English naval captain: dark blue coat with yellow lapels. It is probable Kamehameha had owned this costume since the earlier period when British influence was ascendant.

Thus his dealings with the English substantially increased Kamehameha's wardrobe — and his dealings with the Alaska-Russian American Company proved equally fruitful. In 1809, he appeared aboard Hagenmeister's ship "dressed as a European, in a blue coat and gray pantaloons . . . A handsome, scarlet cloak, edged and ornamented with ermine, was presented to him as a gift from the Governor of the Aleutian Islands."

But the time was long past when such a cloak, especially one designed for bartering purposes, could interest Kamehameha. Campbell, an eye-witness, notes, "After trying it on, he gave it to his attendants to be taken on shore. I never saw him wear it afterwards."

In 1816, Doctor Scheffer, acting for Baranov, clothed Kamehameha in the uniform of a Russian naval officer: green with gold collar and gold frogs. Attached was a large silver medal of the order of Saint Vladimir — and a shrewd suggestion that uniform, medal and all, "be worn on all occasions of public gathering, and upon the arrival of all foreign or Russian ships."

In November, 1816, the visit of von Kotzebue was doubtless such an occasion of public gathering. Was it ignorance or careless whim that prompted Kamehameha to wear, instead, indifferent attire?



There is faint puzzlement in what the Russian captain wrote of the episode, recalling this day after Kamehameha had died. ". . . even Tameamea himself, for his usual attire, wore only a shirt, trousers and a red waistcoat, without a coat. He possessed, however, many richly embroidered uniforms, but kept them for grand occasions."

From the 1870s, the king had been courted, fawned over and, at times, deceived by rival powers who coveted his lands. He quickly saw that scarlet cloaks and pretty

uniforms . . . green, blue or red . . . were more than the mere baubles they appeared to be. Had not the red uniform been linked by haole magic to the cession of Hawaii to England? Had not the green uniform implied a similar surrender, this time to the Russian crown? Kamehameha was soon cautious of such symbolism. Past experience with it doubtless influenced his choice of costume for receiving the von Kotzebue mission. If less perceptive, he would certainly have selected the Russian uniform with its splendid silver medal.

He received the group in native dress—red malo and black tapa cloak—thus emphasizing his political independence! After preliminary talks and peace assurances, he changed to European clothing—not to Russian uniform, relic of the distasteful Scheffer episode—not to formal English attire which might have held, for the Russians, aggressive overtones—but to a sailor's vest, disarming in its simplicity.

The following year, in September, 1817, von Kotzebue stopped once more for provisioning in Hawaii and paid what was to be his last visit to the aging king. This time, Kamehameha had been tuna fishing and, on alighting from his canoe, received the Russian stark naked. "His

wardrobe was now fetched, which consisted of a shirt, a pair of old velveten small-clothes, a red waistcoat, and a black neckcloth, and without any ceremony, he dressed himself in my presence," wrote von Kotzebue.

By that time the Russian voyager well knew that here was no savage king, aping manners in hit-or-miss fashion, but a truly great man.

As a key to the king's eccentric sartorial habits, von Kotzebue quoted the monarch's own words to his trusted advisor, Elliot de Castro:

"The uniforms which King George wears shine very much, but can be of no service to me because Tameamea outshines everything!"

