

ART

by Jean Charlot



Gratitude

A heartfelt tip of my beret to both Houses of the Legislature for having ratified the carefully weighed choice of the Statuary Hall Commission in the matter of the Damien statue.

Another tip of the same beret for something that may prove a lasting boon for the culture of our Islands. By law, a small percentage of all State building expenses shall be set aside for art purposes.

This in itself is not novel, but monies meant to be spent on art were side-tracked at times to meet general expenses. The wording of the new law makes this impossible.

Having thus doffed my beret twice to publicly acknowledge two good deeds, I shall now pull it down firmly over both ears in the matter of the Kamehameha statue intended as a companion to the Damien statue.

To quote from my only hot line to the Legislature, namely newspaper reports, "Both Houses have agreed that a Kamehameha statue identical to that before the Judiciary Building will go to Washington."

If the term "identical" means what it says, the statue, on arrival, will be returned to us. This is not a question of style but of size.

Size problem

None of the statues in Statuary Hall may exceed, according to the Capitol architect's recommendation, seven feet in height. Our Kamehameha is close to nine feet. Queried for a variance in height, Washington's answer could only be a no.

The offending two feet can hardly be subtracted from either the top or the bottom of the heroically scaled statue. The one solution is to reduce it to a seven-foot height to fit the Federal requirement.

Thus what money seemed saved by commissioning the work from a dead artist instead of a live one will have to be spent anyhow, and on a purely mechanical operation.

Add to this that the pedestal for a Statuary Hall statue may be no higher than four feet, eight inches. The result may be less impressive than the image dreamt of by our legislators!

Planned in 1878

Originally, the Kamehameha statue was planned during the festivities of 1878, that marked the first centennial of Cook's discovery of the Sandwich Islands.

A Monument Committee was formed, the equivalent of our present-day Statuary Hall Commission. Its chairman was Walter M. Gibson, a close adviser to King Kalakaua.

Gibson traveled overseas in search of a sculptor. His choice fell to a Bostonian, Thomas R. Gould, who lived and worked in Italy.

Gibson and Gould met in Boston. As Gibson soon after that returned to Hawaii and Gould to his studio in Florence, the business of the statue proceeded mostly by mail. Their letters are kept today in the Archives of Hawaii.

Oral agreement

After an oral agreement with Gibson, Gould built a small clay model in earnest. In September, 1878, he wrote to Gibson, then in New York: "I am advancing my statue. It begins to look heroic."

By November, Gould was worried for lack of a written contract.

In conversation, Gibson had agreed to a total sum of \$10,000, payable in four installments of \$2,500 each. But Gibson was sailing soon for the farflung Sandwich Islands and no money was in sight!

Writes Gould: "I must believe that you will advance the sum named before you go back. According to my claim, and my need, and your honor."

Sole guide

One must admire the sculptor in that he attempted the impossible. At that date, there were no available original portraits of Kamehameha. Gibson had given Gould as sole guide an engraving from "Voyage Pittoresque" by Dumont d'Urville. It was a poor thing, as it well might be.



MODEL — Robert Hoapili Baker, courtier to King Kalakaua, posed in his underwear for photographs to be sent to the Boston artist working in Italy who made the Kamehameha statue.

"The feather cape in your study is entirely too scant. The chief correction must be in the face—which although designed to represent an earlier period—should conform somewhat more in likeness to the engraved portrait."

Shades of today! Father Damien, in the opinion of some of our contemporaries had better be rejuvenated. King Kamehameha, 90 years ago, had to submit to a similar process!

Nude Kanakas

In the same letter, Gibson promises to send from Hawaii photographs of "nude Kanakas" to help the artist emerge from his Greco-Roman atmosphere.

The photos arrived in January, 1879. Of the nude Kanakas only a fragment is preserved, two legs decorously funnelled into a flannel malo.

Another photograph shows one of Kalakaua's courtiers, Robert Hoapili Baker, clothed in the ancient feather cloak, sash and helmet, that are today in the collections of the Bishop Museum.

To abide by Victorian proprieties, this modest man wears, besides the chiefly paraphernalia, a long flannel underwear that reaches from ankles to wrists. The elegant sideburns and heavy mustache are modeled on those of his Sovereign.

First view

The photograph provided the sculptor with his first sight of Hawaiian antiquities. The helmet was fine, shaped as that of Homeric heroes. The feather cloak, however, was disappointing.

Hesitantly, Gould writes to Gibson: "I think I can manage the royal long cloak without sacrificing artistic elegance, by turning it back over the outstretched arm, and by letting it fall within and then over the other arm that holds the spear."

Thus the lesson learned from the Roman draperies of



MODIFIED — The royal feather cloak of King Kamehameha was made larger by the sculptor to permit it to fold gracefully over the monarch's left arm. The Sash of Liloa, running over the shoulder and to the waist, was lengthened to fall below the waist and modestly cover the malo.

Emperor Augustus would not be entirely lost.

Though the work was much advanced, no money whatsoever had been received.

January, 1879, Gould to Gibson: "I am perplexed and disappointed. These delays delay the statue."

First payment

The first installment of \$2,500 arrived in May. That

same month Gould sent to Hawaii photographs of the full-scale clay statue, to be perused by the Committee.

After a while, having heard nothing from the Committee members, the sculptor made ready to cast his full-scale model in plaster. But King Kalakaua, belatedly, forwarded his own ideas

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ROYAL MODEL? — This statue of Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus, made in the First Century B.C., is in the Vatican Museum. It shows the classical draperies flowing over his left arm. Hawaii's King Kamehameha statue, made in Italy by a sculptor who was an enthusiast of classical art, has a similar pose.



THE KING — This is a copy of a copy of a copy of a drawing of King Kamehameha the Great made from life. This copy is found in a French work, "Voyage Pittoresque" by Dumont D'Urville, an explorer. The original drawing was by Louis Choris, artist with the Von Kotzebue Russian expedition.

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after having seen one of the photographs.

Gould jots down that His Majesty asked for "certain changes in the muscular development of the figure, arrangement of the baldric (known to us in Hawaii as the sash of Liloa), and a feather malo to replace my plain one, and cover navel and privates."

Plaintively the sculptor adds: "These I understand to be the final instructions."

Third payment

On receipt of a third installment of \$2,500, and with the corrected work cast at last in plaster, Gould is jubilant.

In November he writes to Gibson:

"You and I know that you were the prime mover and final victor in the fight for the statue."

Gould died in 1881, while at work on the bas-reliefs for the pedestal. His sons com-

pleted the commission.

Cast in bronze in Paris, the statue was shipwrecked and sank on its way to Hawaii. A second statue was cast from the same mold. It is the one that King Kalakaua unveiled, February 14, 1883, pulling the cord with his own royal hand. (The first one was salvaged and is on the Big Island.)

If His Majesty detected further flaws in the anatomy and the accessories, he wisely kept his thoughts to himself. The people at large admired "the fine physique of Hoapili," Robert Hoapili Baker, whose photograph had been Gould's inspiration.

Doubtless, Robert Hoapili Baker was in his day a citizen of integrity and substance. Decked in borrowed feathers and cast in bronze, he still stands today as a fine figure of a man.

Is this enough of a claim, however, to place his likeness in Washington's Statuary Hall?