

## DAVIS, ISAAC ('Aikake') (c. 1756 - 1810), mariner and royal advisor

**Name:** Isaac ('aikake') Davis  
**Date of birth:** 1756  
**Date of death:** 1810  
**Spouse:** Nakai Nalima'alu'alu Davis  
**Spouse:** Kalukuna Davis  
**Child:** Sarah Kani'aulono  
**Child:** George Hū'eu Davis  
**Child:** Elizabeth (née Davis)  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** mariner and royal advisor  
**Area of activity:** Gwleidyddiaeth a Mudiadau Gwleidyddol  
**Author:** Noah Hanohano Dolim

Isaac Davis was born about 1756 in Milford, Pembrokeshire. He became a key figure in the unification of the Hawaiian Islands and the formation of the Hawaiian Kingdom under the *ali'i* (chief) Kamehameha I.

In 1790, Davis made his way into the Pacific Northwest aboard the schooner *Fair American* commanded by American Thomas Metcalfe as part of a fur expedition led by the latter's father, Simon Metcalfe, who commanded the *Eleanora*. The father-son duo decided to make a stop in the Hawaiian Islands and the formation of the Hawaiian Kingdom where things quickly spiralled out of control.

At Hawai'i Island, an unknown transgression resulted in Simon Metcalfe's order to flog a high-ranking chief named Kame'eiamoku. The chief pledged to retaliate on the next foreign ship. Metcalfe then traveled to Maui to trade with Kānaka 'Owi (Native Hawaiian) residents. After a small boat was stolen from the *Eleanora*, the vengeful captain opened fire on civilians in Olowalu Bay, killing and injuring dozens of Natives.

The *Fair American* arrived at Hawai'i Island a month later, where it was ambushed by Kame'eiamoku and his warriors. The lone survivor was the severely injured Isaac Davis, who had shot at the chief but missed. Davis, along with the firearms and ammunition, were taken to Kamehameha, a battle-tested chief who was just beginning his military campaign to conquer the archipelago.

Wondering what happened to the *Fair American* and his son Thomas, Simon Metcalfe sent Englishman John Young ashore to investigate. However, Young was subsequently captured by Kamehameha who made use of Davis and Young as military advisors to help incorporate Western technology into battle.

Later in 1790, Isaac Davis and John Young assisted Kamehameha against the chief Kalanikūpule in the great battle in 'Iao Valley on the island of Maui, manning two cannons taken from *Fair American*. The many corpses of warriors restricted the flow of the river, resulting in the battle being named Kepaniwai ('the dammed water').

Davis and Young again fought in the naval battle of Kepūwaha'ula ('red-mouthed gun') against the forces of Kaua'i and Maui. This was the first battle to feature Western military technology on both sides. Over the next few years, Kamehameha won decisive battles and gained control of half the islands.

British explorer and trader George Vancouver met with Isaac Davis and John Young in February 1793 when he landed at Hawai'i to restock his vessel. Vancouver, who had become friends with Kamehameha, noted that Davis (born in Milford and aged 36) was treated well by Kamehameha. Both Davis and Young became important to Vancouver as interlocutors between the chiefs because of their fluency in O'lelo Hawai'i (Hawaiian language). Vancouver noted that they informed him about the characteristics of various chiefs.

In 1795, Kamehameha sailed his fleet of war canoes to the island of O'ahu to attack Kalanikūpule once more. Among Kamehameha's warriors were musket-wielding *ali'i wahine* (chiefess) sharpshooters who had been trained by Davis and Young. As Kamehameha funnelled the O'ahu forces into Nu'uanu Valley, his two advisors rained down cannon fire from their positions on the ridges. Pinned on the edge of the 1,000 ft (304m) cliff, many of the O'ahu warriors chose to jump to their death. This battle is referred to as Ka Lele a Ka 'Anae ('the leaping of the mullets').

Kamehameha made two failed attempts at taking the island of Kaua'i, the final obstacle towards unification. In 1796, a violent storm destroyed his canoe fleet, and in 1804 an epidemic referred to as *ma'i 'ō'ku'u* (possibly cholera) ravaged his forces before departure. Kaua'i eluded Kamehameha's grasp until 1810. Over the years, many emissaries, including Isaac Davis, were sent to persuade its ruler Kaumualii to acquiesce. Finally, Kaumualii ceded Kaua'i to Kamehameha but was allowed to continue ruling as its chiefly governor. This agreement marked the beginning of the Hawaiian Kingdom (1810-1893) and Kamehameha's ascendancy as the *mō'i* (sovereign) of the archipelago.

This peace treaty did not sit well with a faction of Kamehameha's men. These chiefs had anticipated receiving lands on Kaua'i as the spoils of war; instead they were left empty-handed. Dissatisfaction led them to plot Kaumualii's death by poisoning his food at a feast. However, Isaac Davis warned Kaumualii, allowing him to avoid his fate. Because Davis had thwarted the plan, the chiefs secretly poisoned him instead.

Isaac Davis had a profound impact on the political formation of the Hawaiian Kingdom as one of Kamehameha's most trusted advisors over the course of two decades. Both Davis and Young were considered to be *punahele* (favorites) of the great chief. Davis was referred to as 'Aikake', a Hawaiian transliteration of Isaac.

Kamehameha elevated Davis to a status equivalent to a chief; at one point he even served as Governor of O'ahu. The chief gave Davis lands in Kawaihae, a seaside village in the district of South Kohala on the island of Hawai'i. Davis was allowed to marry into the chiefly lines and thus his progeny were *ali'i* of Welsh-Native Hawaiian descent. With his first wife, Nakai Nalima'alu'alu, he had a daughter Sarah Kani'aulono Davis (1797-1867). With his second wife, Kalukuna, he had a son, George Hū'eu Davis (1800-1873), and another daughter, Elizabeth Davis (1803-1860), known as 'Peke' (a transliteration of Betty).

In the 1820s, Elizabeth Davis married Kaumualii's son, George Hume Hume; thus, her father had unknowingly saved the life of his daughter's father-in-law. They had three children, including Harriet Kawahinekipi (1823-1843). The Davis family greatly multiplied through George Hū'eu who had a multitude of children. His granddaughter, Lucy Kaheiheimalie Kaopulu Peabody, became a lady-in-waiting for Queen Emma Kaleleonālani Rooke, the wife of *mō'i* Alexander Liholiho (Kamehameha IV, a grandson of Kamehameha I). Queen Emma was the granddaughter of John Young; the two families continued to remain close throughout the 19th century.

In the early twentieth century, Peabody and her niece, Lucy Kalanikumaikekie Davis Henriques, willed land and a trust to establish a medical center in their rural community of Kohala. The Lucy Henriques Medical Center opened in 1977 and has since merged with the Queen's North Hawai'i Community Hospital. This is a branch of the larger Queen's Health System, which began with the establishment of the Queen's Hospital by Queen Emma in 1859. The two women are also remembered for their contributions to Native Hawaiian culture and history; they left behind a substantial archival collection at the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum in Honolulu, Hawai'i.

The prolific Davis family has many offshoots and continues to thrive in contemporary Hawai'i.

### Author

Noah Hanohano Dolim

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'Lucy Kaheiheimalei Kaopauli K. Peabody', Bishop Museum

## Further reading

'Descendants to beautify Kale Kaniaulono Davis' grave site', Lahaina News, 21 March 2013

'Historical Events', Herb Kawainui Kāne

Wikipedia Article: Isaac Davis (advisor)

Wikipedia Article: Elizabeth Peke Davis

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