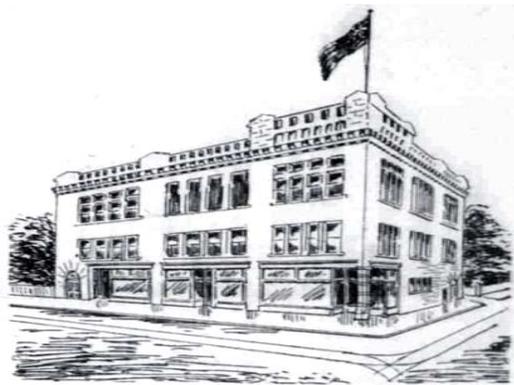


THE 1ST NEW YORK VOLUNTEERS ON THE BIG ISLAND: NEW YORK MEETS HILO

Fred Greguras
fgreguras@hotmail.com

The Spanish American War in Cuba had ended by late summer 1898 but fighting continued in the Philippine Islands. Hawai'i had been formally annexed to the U.S on August 12, 1898 and was strategically important because of its geographical position relative to our new Pacific possessions, Guam and the Philippines. Honolulu was the stopover point for the expeditionary forces on the long voyages from San Francisco to the Philippines. The first U.S Army unit garrisoned in Hawai'i was the 1st New York Volunteer Infantry regiment ("*1st N.Y.*") which arrived in Honolulu between August 15 and September 3, 1898. A U.S. Army headquarters for the 1898 period was in the Progress Block building shown below in Honolulu that still stands at the southwest corner of Fort and Beretania Streets. See my article [Spanish-American War Sites in Honolulu](#) in *The Hawaiian Journal of History*, p19, Vol. 39, 2005 which provides more details on this period in Honolulu.



"PROGRESS" BUILDING, CORNER FORT AND BERETANIA STREETS.
Ripley & Dickey, Architects. C. S. Desky, Proprietor.



On Tuesday morning, November 8, 1898, approximately 200 men of the 1st N.Y. comprised of Companies K and M, and a small number of soldiers from Company I, sailed from Honolulu to Hilo on the island of Hawai'i aboard the inter-island steamer Kinau. The detachment was under the command of Captain John K. Sague who was promoted to major during the time the detachment was on the Big Island. The purpose was to inspect sites for a possible permanent military post and to provide some relief from the unhealthy conditions at Camp McKinley in Honolulu.¹ The highlight of their visit was a hike to the Kilauea volcano. Most of the detachment left Hilo for Honolulu on Friday, November 25, 1898. Some of the sick soldiers stayed in Hilo until early December. The initial plan may have been for the New York soldiers to stay longer but the regiment received orders to return to the U.S. during the visit to the Big Island.

While there was no grand global importance to this visit, this brief interlude at a time of unprecedented expansion brought together Americans from New York and Hilo, two far distant

¹ Nineteen soldiers of the regiment died in Honolulu primarily from typhoid fever. Two others died of disease soon after their return to the U.S.

and very different places in the country. One wonders how much of the conversations were about the Philippine war and expansion rather than simpler topics like home and family. I became interested in learning more about the New Yorkers visit and exploring the sites in Hilo and at the volcano after reading through the scrapbook of Benjamin C. Boyce, a private in Company K of the 1st N.Y. who went to the Big Island on the Kinau.

The voyage to Hilo was rough and many of the men were seasick even though an advertisement in the 1899 Guide² states that the Kinau was the “largest and fastest steamer in the Hawai’ian Islands”. One of the other passengers on the Kinau was a young woman from Hilo named Anna Rose (referred to as “Queen Anna” in the Tribune) on her way back from Topeka, Kansas where she had reigned as queen of a carnival. She befriended the soldiers and helped those who became seasick.

The Kinau arrived at Hilo about 7:00 pm on the evening of Wednesday, November 9, 1898. The New Yorkers debarked in morning daylight on November 10 in the Waiakea area of Hilo. The Kinau did not usually dock at a wharf. Passengers would go ashore on the steamer’s side boats or smaller boats that came out from shore. The boats took the soldiers to the “new wharf” which was on the west side of present day Liliuokalani Gardens, south of Coconut Island and north of the Waiakea Bridge. Kuhio Wharf and the breakwater to the east did not exist in 1898.

Warehouse Camp in Hilo

The soldiers “camped” at a warehouse at the “new wharf” north of where present day Highway 11 and Kamehameha Avenue intersect. The warehouse would have been in today’s Liliuokalani Gardens near the shore of the bay. There are still pillars from the new wharf that can be seen in the water along the shoreline west of Lihiwai Street. The north fishing pier closest to Coconut Island was built on part of the entry way onto the wharf. The 2012 photo below looks west toward the starting point of the wharf.



² See the primary sources list at the end.

The warehouse billet was about a quarter mile from the Waiakea Bridge over the Wailoa River. The 1900 Map shows the Matson line and Theo. H. Davies & Co. shipping warehouses located immediately north and west of the Waiakea Bridge but no warehouses near the “new wharf”. There were other warehouses in the vicinity including a warehouse owned by the Wilder Steamship Co. which operated the Kinau. The warehouses were likely destroyed by one of the tsunamis that have hit Hilo.

Hilo 1898

The people of Hilo welcomed the New York soldiers and hosted meals and other events for them. The Hilo Chamber of Commerce played a major role in organizing the hospitality for the soldiers. The regimental band performed several concerts. The New Yorkers appreciated the graciousness and friendliness of the people of Hilo, which was very different from how they felt they had been treated in Honolulu.

The city of Hilo slopes upward to the southwest. Homes of many early businessmen, the hotel and hospital were located on the hillside since it was slightly cooler and there was a better view of the harbor. The tropical weather, termites and tsunamis have limited the life of most buildings from the 1898 period. The only buildings in Hilo surviving from when the soldiers visited in 1898 are likely the Haili Church, Lyman House and Central Christian Church.

Reed’s Island is currently a neighborhood area in north Hilo between the past and present stream beds of the Wailuku River. It is shown below in the center in a recent Google Earth photograph. It was also known as Riverside Park in 1898. The site was inspected by Captain Sague on Thursday morning November 10, as a possible location for a permanent garrison. The Tribune also reported that other sites were inspected though no specific locations are identified. No military post was ever established in Hilo at that time.



A flag raising ceremony was held at Reed's Island on November 10, 1898. The regimental band performed at the ceremony and Queen Anna was a guest of honor who raised the flag. Because there was no bridge to the island at the time, the New Yorkers, along with Queen Anna, crossed the dry river bed and scaled the hill. The island had limited access which can be helpful to locating a military post but was likely considered too small and hilly. The northwest side has a high and steep cliff down to the river. The south east side of the island is steep but not as deep. Development on the island began in 1899 after the Ka`iulani Street bridge was built. This bridge is still the only way to drive on and off the residential area of Reed's Island. The river bed that was crossed is generally not dry and looks like a tropical jungle today.

On Saturday afternoon, November 12, a "grand lunch and reception" was held for the soldiers on the grounds of the Hilo Hotel which was located on Kino'ole Street just south of Waiuanue and west of Kalakaua Street. The reception and commemorative ribbon from the Boyce Scrapbook are shown in photos below. The 1898 period hotel buildings survived until about 1960 but are now gone. The photograph of the 1898 reception below is looking west from about Kino'ole and Kalakaua Streets.

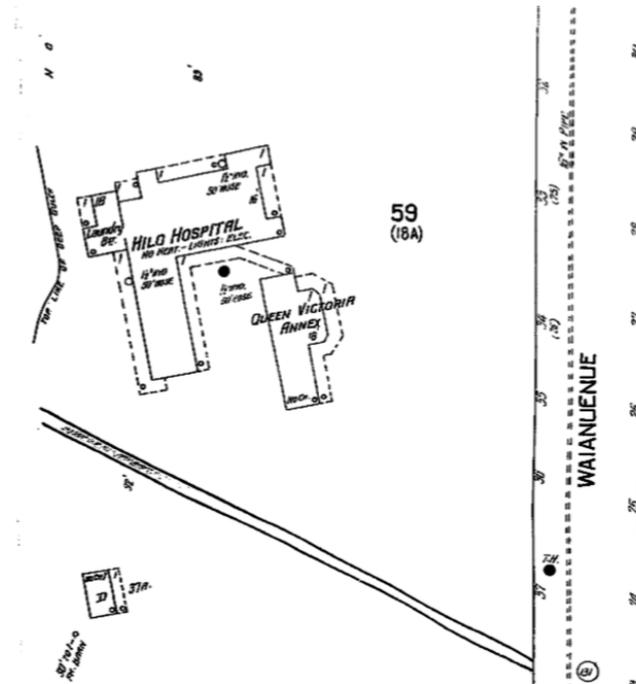




On Sunday, November 13, the soldiers attended special services at the First Foreign Church and listened to a sermon on “the Ideal Soldier” by Rev. Cruzan. Church Street, now Haili Street, is shown looking west about 1900 in the above photograph. The First Foreign Church where the special services were held is the church in the background at the southeast corner of Haili and Kino’ole. The steeple of the Haili Church can be seen peeking over the top of the First Foreign Church. The church building in the foreground is the current Central Christian Church building at 109 Haili Street built in 1892 as the Portuguese Christian Church. The First Foreign Church is now named the First United Protestant Church and has moved away from its 1898 site. The original church building no longer stands. The site is a gas station. Below is a 2015 view from about the same location.



The newly opened Queen Victoria Annex of the Hilo hospital was used for the men who were sick, likely as a result of the conditions in Honolulu. The annex was located on the north side of Waianuenue Avenue west of Kaiulani Street at about 448 Waianuenue and is shown below in the 1914 Sanborn map. The hospital buildings are gone and school buildings are on the site.



The Tribune indicated it was “peculiar circumstances that American soldiers should be the first to occupy a hospital erected in honor of the Queen of England.” The first death in the new annex was Sgt. Walter Van Gaasbeck of Company M of the 1st N.Y. who died of typhoid fever on December 20, 1898. He was among the group of sick men who were too ill to take back to Honolulu when the detachment departed. Rev. Cruzan conducted a funeral for him at the First Foreign Church and then his body was sent back on the Kinau to Honolulu. The sergeant is buried at the Wiltwyck Rural Cemetery in Kingston, New York.

Hike to the Kilauea Volcano

The 31 mile hike to the Kilauea volcano started on Monday morning, November 14, and the soldiers returned to Hilo a week later on Monday, November 21. The distance today on the current Volcano Road, Route 11, is 30.2 miles according to MapQuest. It was a very rainy hike both on the way up and back. In 1898 the Volcano Road started at Haili Street in downtown Hilo rather than the route of present day Highway 11 from Kamehameha Avenue. Volcano Road was today’s Kilauea Avenue until it runs into Highway 11 just north of Stainback Highway, about 7 miles from Kamehameha Avenue in Hilo.



While Volcano Road begins at an altitude of about 59 feet in Hilo and rises to 4000 feet at the volcano summit, there is no point on the road where a mountain raises up in front of you. There are short stretches of the Old Volcano Road (so-named in many cases) along Highway 11 on both sides of the road. The most interesting section of Old Volcano Road is at Mountain View Village where the narrow width of the road provides a feel of the old road that the soldiers experienced. The photos below were taken in 2015. The one on the left is looking southwest at the end of the road in the village of Mountain View and the one on the right is also looking southwest on Old Volcano Road at a location just before you get to Mountain View coming from Hilo.



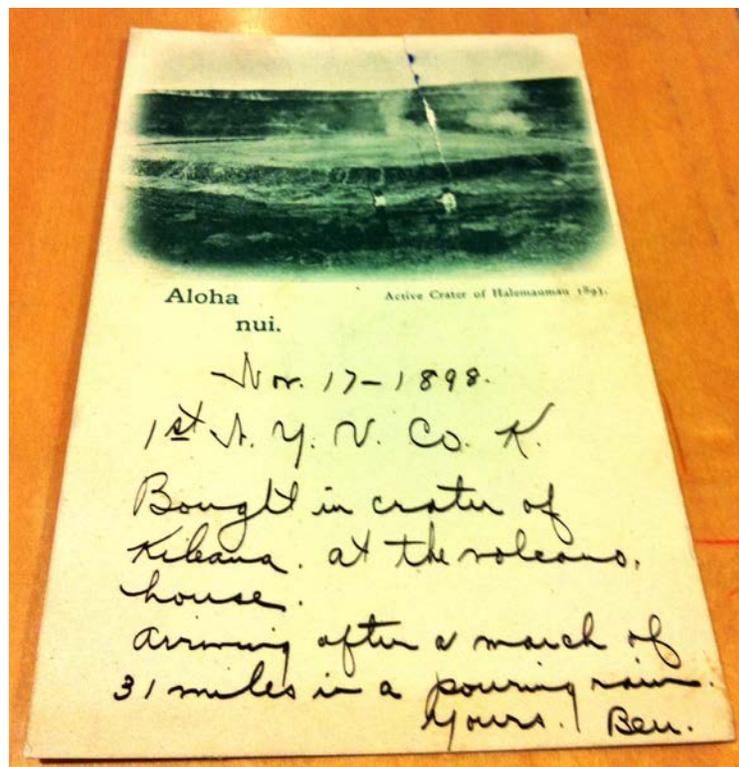
The Volcano Road was dirt in 1898 and would have been very muddy as the soldiers tramped along it. Their boots and clothing must have gotten very dirty and uncomfortable in the rain. The road gains altitude in stages with uphill stretches then level then uphill, etc. Just southwest of Kurtistown is a long uphill stretch that would have challenged the conditioning of the soldiers, particularly in the mud.

There were two overnight stops on the way to the volcano. The soldiers camped at the “11 mile house” or “Kilohana” the first night, Monday, November 14, and at the Hitchcock plantation on the second night, Tuesday, November 15. The “11 mile house” was near the site of present day Kurtistown along the Volcano Road which is about 10.8 miles from Hilo according to MapQuest. The soldiers were hosted by Peter Lee who operated the “11 mile house”. He had

other businesses as well including a coffee plantation. Because of the wet weather, the men slept in Mr. Lee's large barn and in other nearby buildings including a small Catholic Church. Another account places the first night's bivouac at Kilohana but with the same description of the men sleeping in buildings, including the church, so the location was the same. The plantation coffee dryer was put to use to help dry off the men.

The "Mountain View House" was a brief rest stop on the second day. The manager, Mr. Hambly, provided refreshments to the men. The Mountain View House was 14 miles from Hilo, according to the 1899 Guide. The building is gone but Mountain View Village is still a community along the Volcano Road about 15.8 miles from Hilo, according to MapQuest.

One account states that the bivouac for the second night was the "Captain Hitchcock" coffee plantation, about 8 miles from the Volcano House. The Hitchcock residence is called "Waililili" or "Waililili" in the Boyce Scrapbook and Tribune. This was probably near Glenwood which is about 21.4 miles from Hilo along Route 11 according to MapQuest. The island was a single police jurisdiction and Captain Edward G. Hitchcock was the long time sheriff of Hawaii headquartered in Hilo. His brother David H. Hitchcock was a prominent lawyer and judge in Hilo. Edward Hitchcock had died on October 9, 1898 so the Tribune indicates his brother David hosted the soldiers. The house no longer stands.



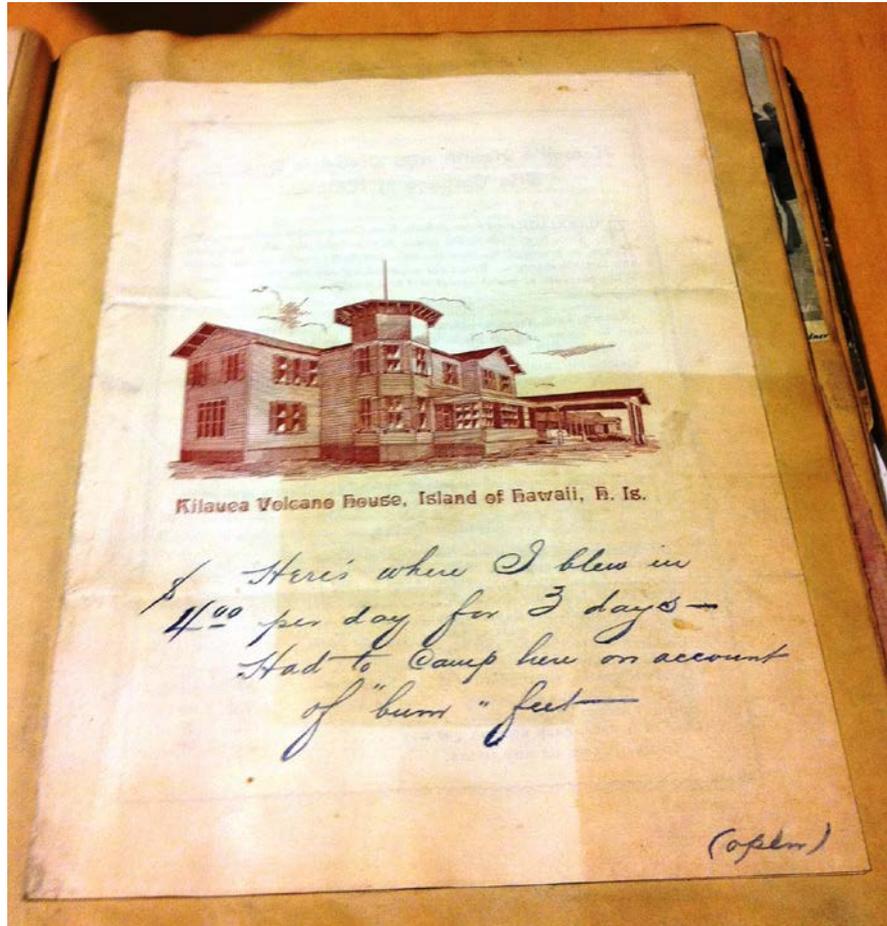
From the Boyce Scrapbook

Volcano House

The soldiers were welcomed at the Volcano House early in the afternoon of Wednesday, November 16 with a hot lunch and coffee served by the operator Fred Waldron. The Tribune reported that Mr. Waldron and his wife made the amenities of the hotel available to the soldiers during their stay and were very kind to them, particularly the sick men. The Volcano House in existence in 1898 had been constructed in 1891 and was owned by the Wilder Steamship Co. The 1877 Volcano House building, which was the west wing of the 1891 hotel, has survived and is now used as the Volcano National Park Art Center Gallery. The building is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. It has been moved north from its original location. The crumbling August, 1887 geological survey marker shown below is just west of the current hotel and is also a survivor of the 1898 period.



From the Boyce Scrapbook



The 1891 hotel was located north across Crater Rim Drive from the current Volcano House which was built in 1941. The 1891 hotel was just slightly west of the current hotel and east of the survey marker. This 2012 view of the empty rectangular grassy area west of the visitor center parking lot is likely where the 1891 Volcano House was located.





This 1902 photo shows the road the New Yorkers took to the site of Camp Sague. The surviving part of the volcano house is to the right above and in the 1910 view below.

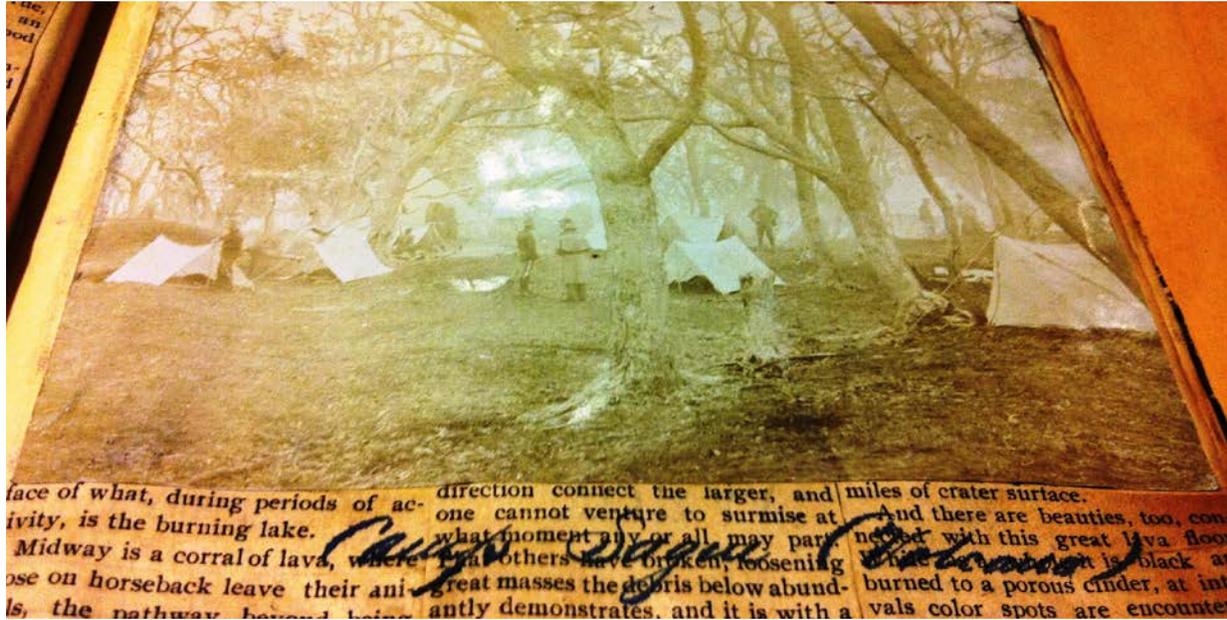


2014 photo of surviving part of 1891 volcano house



Camp Sague

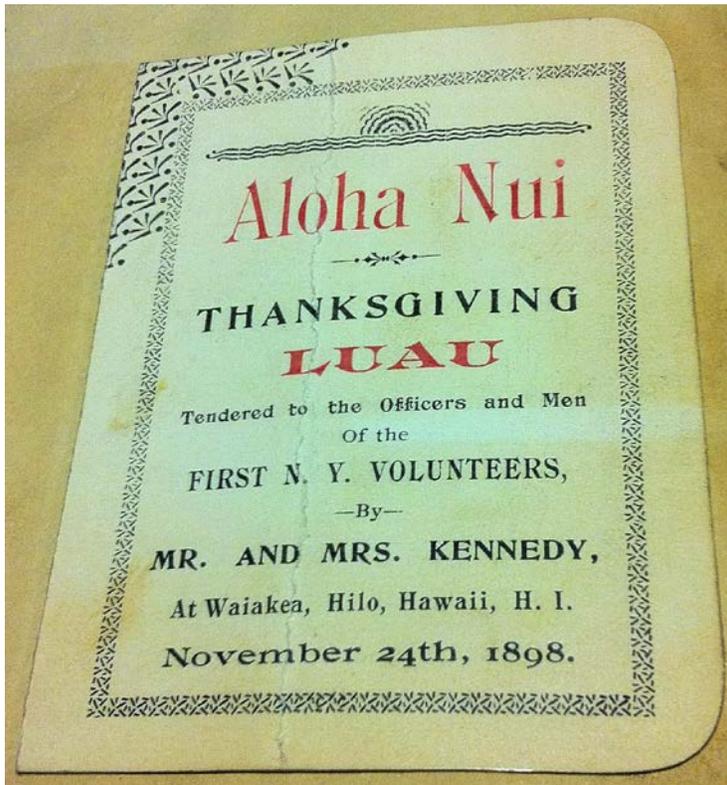
A letter from a soldier in Company I indicates the soldiers established their camp near the volcano crater, about 2 miles from the Volcano House “in a large [koa] grove with lots of dead wood on the ground”. Another account places the camp as 1-1/2 miles from the Volcano House “on a knoll of rolling ground covered by a koa grove.” The soldiers were in this camp for only 3 nights.



The camp was named Camp Sague after John Kelsey Sague, who was in command of the detachment. Sague later was a politician in Poughkeepsie, New York who served as mayor several times. A United Spanish War Veterans Camp was named after him in Poughkeepsie. He was born January 30, 1866 in Poughkeepsie and died November 9, 1957 in Miami, Florida.

The Boyce Scrapbook contains a photo of Camp Sague and several photos of the soldiers posing in the volcano lava beds. The photo of the camp shown above shows tents in a grove of trees without any other landmarks. The soldiers went down into the crater and lava beds on Friday, November 18. I have looked for the sites where the photos were taken and concluded that the lava beds scenes have changed because of subsequent eruptions.

According to MapQuest, the mileage on Crater Rim Drive from the current Volcano House to present day landmark, the Kilauea Military Camp (“KMC”), is about 1.3 miles and to the Jagger Museum about 2.7 miles. This places the site of Camp Sague in between the two current landmarks, probably closer to the KMC. Today, there are trees where Camp Sague could have been located on both sides of Crater Rim Drive but there are fewer and more scattered trees on the crater (south) side of the road. I have driven Crater Rim Drive south and west looking for any knoll and koa grove which could have been the camp site but couldn’t identify any obvious location. The camp was likely close to the road for supply reasons. The photograph on the next page shows the KMC and surrounding terrain in 1923.



Return to Hilo, Honolulu and San Francisco

The soldiers started the return hike to Hilo on Saturday morning, November 19. There were two overnight stops on the way down from the volcano at the same locations. The first night, Saturday, November 19, was at the Hitchcock residence near Glenwood and the second night, Sunday, November 20, was at Mr. Lee's "11 mile house". The pace going downhill should have been much faster.

When the soldiers reached Hilo on Monday, November 21, they were treated to lemonade and cake at the W.H. Shipman House

on the Volcano Road at the corner of Kilauea Avenue and Lanikaula Street. Shipman was a prominent rancher and merchant. The house is gone. The W.R. Shipman house on Reed's Island, currently a bed and breakfast inn at 131 Ka'iulani Street, was built later.

On Thursday, November 24, the soldiers were guests of Charles C. Kennedy for a Thanksgiving Luau in the "sugar room" at the Waiakea Sugar Mill. About 175 of the soldiers attended. The Boyce Scrapbook contains an invitation to this event shown above. Kennedy was the manager of the mill which was owned by the Theo. H. Davies & Co. The mill was located at the intersection of Kilauea Avenue and Kekuaaoa Street, north of the W.H. Shipman House. All of the mill buildings are gone.

Social events continued after the return from the volcano. The Kennedys also hosted an officers dinner and a card game for “a dozen or so of the boys” and Captain Sague hosted a dinner at the Hilo Hotel shown below in a view looking southwest from Kino’ole Street. The distinctive tree in the hotel grounds east of the main building has disappeared under an asphalt parking lot that covers the area. The bottom left view is from about 1950 and the right view of site was taken in 2014.



The soldiers were billeted in the warehouse at Waiakea until they left for Honolulu on Friday, November 25, 1898. Upon their departure, the Tribune stated “Their presence in town has added much to the social life of the place, and has lent animation to Hilo’s rather prosaic existence....The men are the kind of people we like to have around, and with uniforms or without are good people to have in the community.” The 1st N.Y. returned to San Francisco from Honolulu beginning in late November, 1898 with the last units departing on December 10,

1898. Some of the sick soldiers did not return to the U.S. until January, 1899. New York was a very long way from the Big Island in those days but one wonders if any of the soldiers ever returned to visit their gracious friends in Hawai'i.



The arrival of the 1st New York Volunteers, from Honolulu Dec 6, 1898.

Primary Sources:

Big Island Chronicles Blog-Dispatches from Curt

Godfrey's Handbook of Hawai'i, Guide to Hilo and the Volcano, 1899 ("**1899 Guide**")

June Hitchcock Humme, Almeda Eliza Hitchcock-Wahine Loio, or Lady Lawyer, *The Hawaiian Journal of History*, p137, Vol. 20, 1986

Interviews of Leslie Taylor Cockerham, Curtis Narimatsu, Don Pakele

Leslie Lang, *Exploring Historic Hilo*, 2007

Newspapers including the Hawaiian Gazette and Hilo Tribune ("**Tribune**"). The Tribune was published only on Saturdays in late 1898. The most helpful editions were November 5, 12, 19, 26

and December 3, 10 and 24. Mary Louise Haraguchi and Jaci Jacobs at the Mookini Library at the University of Hawaii-Hilo graciously provided access to the Tribune as well as Sanborn maps.

Gunder E. Olson (editor), *Story of the Volcano House*, 1984 edition

Sophia V. Schweitzer, *Big Island Journey*, 2009

Scrapbook of Benjamin C. Boyce, a private in Company K of the 1st NY, in the Spanish American War personal items collection at the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center at the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania (*"Boyce Scrapbook"*).

Scrapbook of Walter S. Foster, a corporal in Company M of the 1st NY. Scrapbook is in the author's collection. Newspaper clippings and other items were pasted into a 1902 edition of *Done in the Open* by Frederic Remington.

Volcano National Park archives. Helen Wong Smith, Laura Schuster and Tracy Laqua graciously provided access to photos, maps and other materials

Kent Warshauer, *Memories of Hawaii-Big Island: Riddle of the Relic*, January 1, 2007

Maps:

Group of 1890s period maps at the Lyman Museum. Miki Bulos graciously provided access to these maps and photos of Hilo.

1891 Map of Hilo in digital form provided by Leslie Taylor Cockerham

1900 Map of a Portion of Hilo Town, House Doc. 357562, Oct. 1900 (*"1900 Map"*)

1914 Sanborn insurance maps of Hilo

1916 Map of Hilo from *The Island of Hawaii*, revised edition issued by the Hilo Board of Trade in 1917

1919 City of Hilo Map and Guide

Various later maps of Hilo and the Volcano National Park including topographical maps