



# Notes from the Field

## A Dispatch from the Aloha State

By Dr. Libby O'Connell, Chief Historian, History Channel

A few weeks ago I went to Honolulu on a business trip. Nobody feels sorry for me about this, but honestly, it's a long way to travel from the east coast for just three days. I had several meetings and events that kept me busy, and lacked significant blocks of free time, so I couldn't go far from my hotel in Waikiki. I try to sneak in an historic site whenever I can, even on an overbooked business trip. Most tourists in Honolulu just want to lie on the beautiful beaches and enjoy the perfect weather,.. sounds normal, I know, especially when it's been chilly and dank in the northeast. However, I wouldn't be a professional historian if I didn't hear the siren song of old places and museums wherever I go. I had been to Pearl Harbor and the USS Arizona Memorial on two previous visits - profoundly moving experiences, but I was ready for something different. So this time, I took my new friend and A&E colleague, Barry Rosenberg, to the Iolani Palace and the Mission Houses Museum, both in the Capitol District on South King Street. (Two people thought I was traveling around with my son, which was only forgivable because Barry really does have a baby face. Also, Barry is smart and funny.) There is great history everywhere, and Hawaii is no exception.





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One thing I love about local history is that it accentuates the unique qualities of a place within a chronological framework. The audio guide of the Iolani Palace was really well done – I learned a lot about the Hawaiian monarchy and the overthrow of the throne by Americans, with which I had only a passing familiarity prior to my visit. The architecture is sort of tropical Victorian. You can take a look at [www.iolanipalace.com](http://www.iolanipalace.com). A couple blocks down South King Street (or up South King Street) lies the Mission Houses Museum. There are three buildings on a grassy, New England setting, built between 1820 and 1841, built by the first missionaries here. The wooden frame house from 1820 was shipped around Cape Horn, an early example of prefab architecture, so it is an authentic example of a simple Massachusetts house of that era. It is fascinating to see how these Congregationalist missionaries lived, striving endlessly to maintain their New England culture and identity in a such a different environment. While today many of their assumptions would be rejected, they were certainly well-intended... I just think this juxtaposition of Hawaiian and New England traditions is really interesting. Our well-informed docent explained that the houses were very helpful in teaching local children about early American life on the East Coast, where most of their textbooks begin the story of our country. You can learn more at [www.missionmuseum.org](http://www.missionmuseum.org) . (continued on next page)





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If you are lucky enough to travel to Hawaii, go see these museums. They are cultural goldmines – lots of great information. The Capitol District is interesting in itself, and not jammed with tourists.

**FYI:** Barry and I are such New Yorkers that we assumed we could catch a taxi back to our hotel at the end of our visit. The museum staff looked dubious, but we eventually managed to flag one down and got back in time for our next round of business meetings.

