FROM JOEL TURRILL¹

Dear Sir

Honolulu March 25th 1847

Shortly after writing you last Dec² an effort was made by certain individuals to bring about a compromise in the case of Ladd & co.³ When the matter came before the King⁴ and Council, they refused to entertain the proposition, until the commissioner⁵ should either with draw or make good certain charges made by him against this Government and which had been printed in the proceedings of the Arbitration.⁶ Some correspondence ensued, and the proposition was finally entertained, or rather rec’d, but it is matter of doubt whether any compromise will be effected.

I was informed by one of the Kings Ministers the latter part of last month that the Commissioner, had, a few days previous to that time submitted a draft of a treaty. He enquired of me whether I had seen it, to which I answered in the negative, adding that I was not aware that any draft had been prepared. He stated to me that, he had ascertained that the draft had been in the hands of three or four individuals, naming them, several weeks before it was submitted and that in his opinion and in the opinion of his associates many of the provisions contained in it, were either drawn up, or suggested by some one or all of them. The persons named by him are the most prominent and active leaders in the controversy with this Government. He expressed much surprise and regret at the whole proceeding, and after he had communicated to me, the contents of the treaty I remarked to him that this whole matter was peculiarly, and if he chose so to consider it, exclusively within the province of the
Commissioner, and that I did not feel myself authorised to interfere in this matter or to express any opinion in relation to the same, farther than to assure him, that the US were always disposed to deal liberally with all and especially with the Hawian Governt &tc.

Although for obvious reasons, not disposed to express an opinion to the Minister, I have no hesitation in saying to you that I regret, that such a draft, has been submitted as in my judgment it neither reflects credit on its author or the United States. I have not space in a letter to notice even in a brief manner the objectionable parts of this proposed treaty, which consists of between twenty and thirty long Articles.

By the local laws, a sailor, discharged from a vessel must obtain permission to remain on shore and give security to leave the Islands in Sixty days. For good reasons, this time, is often extended, and when an individual proves himself a worthy member of society, without limit. In case sailors desert, they are apprehended and put into prison there to remain until they [ . . . ] ship or give security to leave. It is the policy of this Govt. not to allow sailors to remain permanently on the Islands, having learned from sad experience that they make bad citizens, disseminating vice and disease among the Natives. I do not believe that the U.S. wish to force such a population upon this, or any other community—besides this place is so inviting to sailors and the whaling business so unpopular with them, that but for these local laws, it would be impossible to keep the whole fleet maned.9

A Danish officer arrived here a few months since, and proceeded in a frank straightforward way to negociate a treaty, which he found no difficulty
in accomplishing during his brief stay here; the treaty consisted of a few short articles, and was entirely satisfactory to both parties upon whom the whole proceedings made a most favorable impression. I was in hopes the U.S. would have taken the same course. I do not believe that any good will result from our attempt to encircle this Government with a long treaty, resembling a penal statute. The American Missionaries, a body of men possessing unblemished characters and a large fund of practical good sense are located in different parts of the Islands and have great influence with the Natives. The Atty General is from the U.S. also Judge Andrews who came to the Islands some 15 or 20 yeas since as a Missionary, a man whose character for integrity is above suspicion. Judge Lee the other Judge was from the state of, N.Y. He is a young man every way well qualified for his important office, having been in successful practice as a lawyer, in the highest courts in that State. The Editor of the Governmt paper is a Bostonian, and Doct Jud Minister of Finance and who has more influence than any other individual on the Island is a native of the state of N.Y. After making this statement, I deem any argument to shew that the U.S. has a due share of influence here, unnecessary. It is true that a number of American residents have been dissatisfied with the existing state of things here, and are waging war upon this Government. I deem their course suicidal. Is it asked what shall be done? I answer, have, at no time, agents of the U.S. at this place, who will directly or indirectly countenance this war. If you have such agents it is more than probable that Navy officers and others visiting these Islands, will be drawn into the controversy and induced to take up the cudgel in favor of the “American side.” This controversy ought to have been and
I believe would have been terminated long ago, had the agents of the US. take the right course in relation to it.

I write you this confidential letter in order that you may understand the situation of things here, and regret that neither time nor space will permit me to allude to many other important matters. I mark it confidential because I do not wish to have my name used in connexion with this matter, as I am obliged to write in great haste and have not room to explain fully.

J TURRILL

ALS. DLC–JKP. Probably addressed to Washington City; marked “(confidential).” From Washington Curran Whitthorne’s

1. A Vermont native and a Democrat, attorney Turrill (1794–1859) served as U.S. representative from New York, 1833–37, and as U.S. consul to the Kingdom of Hawaii, 1845–50.

2. Turrill to Polk, December 21, 1846.

3. Ladd and Co., a mercantile firm, in 1835 founded Hawaii’s first commercially successful sugar cane plantation.

4. Kamehameha III (1813–54), king of Hawaii from 1825 until his death, was the kingdom’s longest reigning monarch. During his reign, Hawaii evolved from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy.

5. Anthony Ten Eyck (1810–67), a Detroit Democrat, was appointed by Polk as commissioner to Hawaii in 1845 and served until 1849.

6. Arbitration sought to redress grievances and resolve lawsuits filed by Ladd and Co. against confiscatory actions taken by the Kingdom of Hawaii in November 1844. The company argued that the Kingdom’s actions were illegal.

7. Commissioner Ten Eyck had been instructed by Polk and Buchanan to negotiate a treaty by which the United States formally recognized the Kingdom of Hawaii in exchange for
recognition of rights of U.S. citizens living on the islands. Owing to delays, the treaty was not signed until December 1849, during the administration of Pres. Zachary Taylor.

8. Word or words illegible, ink smudge.

9. Hawaii during that era became an important port for whaling ships—mainly U.S. vessels—bound for the western Arctic, the Japanese coast, and the South Pacific. Many would stop twice a year to purchase provisions, recruit new crew-members, or transfer whale cargoes to other ships. About one hundred ships stopped in Hawaii in 1824; by 1846, that number had swelled to over seven hundred.

10. Capt. Steen A. Bille (1797–1883) of the Danish navy went to Hawaii in 1846, commanding the corvette Galathea. On October 19, 1846, he and Hawaiian foreign minister Robert C. Wyllie signed a treaty between the two countries that, among other stipulations, accorded Danes residing in Hawaii all rights guaranteed to other foreigners as well as native subjects.

11. Christian missionaries, many of them New England Congregationalists, had been arriving in Hawaii since the early nineteenth century.

12. New Jersey–born lawyer John Ricord (1812 or 1813–1861) arrived in Hawaii in 1844 and served as attorney general for the Kingdom of Hawaii, 1844–47. Prior to that, he had, in 1836, relocated from Buffalo, N.Y., to the Texas republic, where, among other public offices, he served as chief clerk in the republic’s state department and as a district attorney. In 1837 he left Texas, never to return, and spent the rest of his life moving among far-flung locales such as Florida, Arizona, California, New York, Oregon, and Hawaii.

13. Connecticut native Lorrin Andrews (1795–1868) sailed for Hawaii in 1827 and spent his first few years there performing missionary work. In 1831, he founded the Lahainaluna Seminary, part of which later evolved into the University of Hawaii. He also founded Hawaii’s first newspaper, translated portions of the Bible into Hawaiian, wrote several books on Hawaiian antiquities, and compiled a Hawaiian-English dictionary. In 1845, he was appointed a judge by the Hawaiian government.

14. William L. Lee (1821–57), a lawyer from New York, arrived in Hawaii in 1846. That same year, he was appointed a judge. In 1847, he became chief justice of
became Hawaii’s Supreme Court.

15. Boston native James Jackson Jarves (1818–88) sailed for Hawaii in 1838. In 1840, he established the Honolulu Polynesian, a weekly newspaper that in 1844 was designated the official organ of the Hawaiian government. In 1849 he returned to the United States and for several years served as a commissioner for the Hawaiian government during treaty negotiations with the United States, France, and the United Kingdom. Jarves was also a noted author and art collector.

16. A native of New York, physician Gerrit P. Judd (1803–73) sailed for Hawaii in 1827. He served as a missionary physician in Honolulu before becoming, in 1842, an advisor in several posts and a translator for Kamehameha III. In 1841, he helped to found a school in Honolulu that later evolved into the Punahou School, a noted college preparatory school whose alumni include Barack Obama, elected in 2008 as the forty-fourth U.S. president.

17. The term “war,” so far as can be determined, is not literal but rather refers to discontents among Americans engaged in commercial enterprises in Hawaii.

18. Tennessee-born Whitthorne (1825–91) was a clerk, during Polk’s presidency, in the office of the auditor of the Post Office Department. As in the circumstance that occasioned his AE on this letter, he often filled in as Polk’s private secretary when Joseph Knox Walker was away. Whitthorne had read law in Polk’s law office in Columbia; after Polk’s presidency, he returned to Columbia and established his own law practice. He later served, as a Democrat, in the state senate, 1855–58; the state house, 1859–61; the U.S. House, 1871–83 and 1887–91; and the U.S. Senate, 1886–87.