

Lost ... Then Found

A sketch of Maui that began on a French ship in 1819 is back in the Islands because of a collector, an Australian book dealer and a secret donor.

BY ROBBIE DINGEMAN

After a journey that reads like an international tale of adventure, two pieces of a 200-year-old drawing of West Maui—mysteriously split up for a century—have been reunited.

This story begins in the summer of 1819 in the waters off Maui when a French artist named Jacques Arago sketched what is believed to be the first drawing of Lahaina by a Westerner. Arago was employed to document French Capt. Louis de Freycinet's worldwide voyage of scientific discovery.

The pencil, pen and ink drawing (seen below) has faded and the paper yellowed a bit but it clearly depicts a scene of thatched homes nestled among coconut palms, kou or milo trees in the Ukumehame area, with the jagged peaks



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF MĀNOA HERITAGE CENTER

Capt. Freycinet helped his 23-year-old wife, Rose, disguise herself as a man to safely stow away on his ship, the *Uranie*, for a three-year voyage, in defiance of social norms of the time.

of the West Maui Mountains rising behind. Loopy cursive labels the island "Mowhee," with the year and the artist's signature.

Kama'āina collector Sam Cooke had acquired the right half of the drawing with the words "Prise du Mouillage de Lahaina," or nearshore view of Lahaina, written as a caption. It's part of the extensive art collection maintained by his widow, Mary, at Kūali'i, the Cooke family's Tudor-style mansion, which will later become a historic house museum as part of Mānoa Heritage Center, the nonprofit that the couple founded to promote an understanding of Hawai'i's cultural and natural heritage.

In 2017, Australian book dealer Derek



McDonnell of Hordern House in Sydney purchased a case of historian David W. Forbes' 2016 book, *Paintings, Prints, and Drawings of Hawai'i from the Sam and Mary Cooke Collection*, which included Sam's section of the Arago sketch. The

lavish volume notes: "If there was ever a continuation of this drawing showing the latter spot, it cannot be located now." Within months, in 2018, McDonnell stumbled upon the second half of the drawing for sale. "I could hardly believe my eyes—what was clearly the missing half of the panorama was there before me, as simple as that," he says. He contacted a friend of Sam Cooke, who bought the drawing for the center in honor of Sam for an undisclosed sum.

"The drawing came wrapped very professionally," explains Jessica Welch, executive director of the Mānoa Heritage Center, so the unveiling "took forever." Mary Cooke stood by watching, along with author Forbes, a no-nonsense historian. When the halves went together, "you could see a tear coming out of his eye, and Mary's eyes welled up, too," Welch says.

No one seems to know how the drawing was separated. "Now the two are together," Forbes says. "That's a very rare thing." And the man who paid to reunite them? He wishes to remain anonymous. [PAU](#)

ABOVE: Mary and Sam Cooke outside their home in 2007. **BELOW:** Jacques Arago's sketch of Lahaina from the sea, circa 1819. At left, the missing piece; right, Cooke's print.

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