

## HAWAIIAN GOVERNMENT SURVEY

1870 - 1915

Histories of the Hawaiian Government Survey were compiled by two long-term members of the Survey Office. First, William D. Alexander, Surveyor-General (1871-1901) wrote in 1889, "A brief account of the Hawaiian Government survey, its objects, methods and results," and later in 1903, C.J. Lyons (then the Director of the Weather Bureau and former head of the Office of Survey) wrote, "A History of the Hawaiian Government Survey with notes on land matters in Hawaii." These two works, along the Reports of the Surveyor-General to the Minister of Finance (1872-1878) and to the Minister of the Interior (1880-1899) and the Reports of the Surveyor (from 1900) provide good detailed information of the work they undertook during those years. The brief history that follows is drawn from the above sources.

The Office of Hawaiian Government Survey was established under the Interior Department in 1870, when the Minister of the Interior, F.W. Hutchison (who had the care of public lands and by law had the authority to have them surveyed), asked the Legislature for \$5,000 for "Government Surveying." Its organization was prompted by the increased public demand for additional grants of government land in the late 1860s and the government's corresponding ignorance of the amount or location of government land still available for lease or sale. It was also surmised that a survey and its resultant maps, besides determining the extent of remnant government lands, would prove useful to private individuals and other government agencies, especially tax assessors, boundary commissioners and the courts, since no district maps then existed and island maps were still based on the charts of Cook and Vancouver. Consequently, an Office of Survey was begun and its primary object was "to account for all the land in the Kingdom by its original title, and indicate such accounting on general maps, and while having no authority to settle boundaries, to require the surveyors to lay down such boundaries on maps to the best of their ability with the abundant information at their disposal." (C.J. Lyons, History, p.6)

Previous surveys in the Kingdom were predominately those initiated by the Land Commission (kuleanas) and the Interior Department (government grants). They were magnetic surveys each made individually with no boundary corners marked and no attempt to fit the many separate surveys into a larger context (i.e., a map of a district or an island). These surveys, because of inconsistencies in methods (non-permanent datum points), instruments and personnel, were often inaccurate and subsequently added greatly to the burden of the new Government Survey.

The new survey team planned to carry out a geodetic survey based on the U.S. Coast Survey methods. They would establish a primary triangulation station and base lines adding subsequent stations until all of a district, an island and ultimately the whole group would be set up under one system. (They succeeded in first triangulating Maui and adding Kahoolawe, Molokai, Lanai, Oahu and Hawaii.) While setting up the stations, they would sketch a map of the area putting in prominent topographical features (to facilitate relocating the stations) and record all of the surveyed kuleanas and Grants on a map of the district. These district maps would later be compiled into island maps. It was to be a survey of "landed property" rather than a purely scientific or a topographic survey.

During the year 1870, the Minister of the Interior appointed W.D. Alexander, Surveyor-General, and C.J. Lyons, assistant surveyor. Alexander (former President of Oahu College) was responsible for developing the methods, format, and procedures of the office of Government Survey. In 1871, work began and two men just out of Oahu College, J.F. Brown and J.M. Lydgate, were added to the staff. Those first two years were spent in procuring instruments and setting up the initial triangulation stations in central Maui and making a detailed survey of the district of Makawao "to exhibit to the coming Legislature the scope of the work, as well as to gain experience and establish precedents in what was then an untried undertaking." (C.J. Lyons, History, p.10) In its early years the Survey Office devoted time and energy to convincing the Legislature that their work was essential to straighten out complex land titles and that their appropriations should be increased to enable them to send additional personnel into the field. From 1871 to 1877 the Survey staff consisted of W.D. Alexander and C.J. Lyons, with occasional helpers. Finally in 1878, additional funding helped the survey office to expand their force. Field work often took more time and money than the Survey Office predicted or than the Legislature could fund because of the nature of the work, the necessity for accuracy, the weather, physical obstacles, the volume of kuleanas and grants to be located and resurveyed, and difficulty keeping field helpers. The "A" (6A-16A) and "E" (1E-4E) series of miscellaneous correspondence are mainly letters from field surveyors to the Survey Office and are filled with their progress and problems in the field.

During the 1870s and 1880s work concentrated on establishing triangulation stations, delineating government lands, drawing maps and resurveying kuleanas on Maui, Hawaii, and Oahu. During 1877 and 1878, Lanai was surveyed by J.F. Brown and M.D. Monsarrat. Molokai was surveyed by M.D. Monsarrat at intervals from 1885 until 1895. By the year 1890 the area of the whole group (with the exception of Kauai whose lack of then recognized government land delayed its detailed surveying) had been covered and elaborated on paper. The passage of the Homestead Act of 1884 (implemented in 1887) had initiated a change in the emphasis of the Survey Office. Between 1890 and 1900 the work of the office was "very largely surveys of homestead tracts, and other public land sub-divisions, re-surveys of tracts that needed much more minute work than was at first possible, and the carrying out of very important department work, viz., the city survey of Honolulu." (C.J. Lyons, History, p.16)

From 1900 to 1915 the office continued to conduct the more detailed surveys as well as providing much needed surveys and maps of lands in the Territory for other government agencies. (See Correspondence "B" series from Public Works, "C" series from Public Lands, and "D" series from Attorney General.)

The Survey Office, prompted by Prof. Alexander (himself an avid scientist), participated in scientific study—"during the survey collections have been made and facts observed, which it is believed, will add to our knowledge of the geology and botany of these islands." (W.D. Alexander, History, p.19) In 1882, the Office took charge of government time for the town of Honolulu. Meteorological service gradually grew into existence as part of the Survey Office with C.J. Lyons in charge of its operations. By 1883, they were systematically recording temperature, barometric pressure, rainfall, wind and weather data. The Legislature eventually recognized the costs of the Meteorologist to the Survey Office and appropriated funds for office expenses in 1895 and funds for a salary in 1898.

Annexation and the 1900 Organic Act authorized a surveyor appointed by the governor with the consent of the Senate to hold office for four years. He "shall have the powers and duties heretofore attached to the surveyor-general, except such as relate to the geodetic survey of the Hawaiian Islands." (Organic Act, section 78)

Below is a list of some of the early surveyors in the Hawaiian Government Survey. The approximate years they worked for the Survey Office are included. Unfortunately these dates are not completely accurate as the surveyors voluntarily (to work for more lucrative companies, to travel, etc.) and involuntarily (shortages of funding for surveys necessitating the withdrawal of field groups) suspended their employment for varied lengths of time and these terminations and reinstatements are not well documented. Some surveyors also contracted themselves to the Survey Office for specific jobs, so were not official employees of the Survey Office. During the course of their careers, most surveyors worked on all of the major islands (excepting Kauai).

- Alexander, W.D. (1871-1901) Appointed first Surveyor-General by the Minister of the Interior in 1871 and retained that position until he resigned in February 1901 to take charge of the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey's new Honolulu branch office.
- Baldwin, E.D. (1882-1908?) One of his first surveys was Manoa Valley, Oahu. Spent time surveying on Maui in the districts of Kipahulu and Kaupo. Later he took charge of the Hilo Town Survey and office.
- Bishop, S.E. (1880-1888) Surveyed in Waikiki, Oahu, Lahaina and West Maui.
- Brown, J.F. (1872, 1878-1886) Surveyed Lanai with M.D. Monsarrat from 1877-78. Left the Survey in 1886 to take charge of Public Lands, a branch of the Survey Office until 1895 when a Commission of Public Lands was created. He remained with Public Lands until 1901.
- Cabot, L. (1878-1879) Railroad surveys in Hilo and Kohala.
- Dodge, F.S. (1877-1898) Primarily city surveys. Resigned in October 1898 to take charge of Bishop Estate Lands.
- Emerson, J.S. (1878-1903) From 1880-1881 he executed a detailed survey of Waipio Valley, Hawaii. He spent a great deal of his career surveying on Hawaii, although he did work on Oahu. In 1904, he is mentioned as a Court surveyor.
- Jackson, Capt. G.E.G. (1881-1884) Employed to survey the different harbors in the islands.
- Kanakanui, S.M. (1890 - ) Field worker, primarily on Maui and Hawaii. Still employed by the Survey Office in 1915.
- Kittredge, C.S. (1878) Compiled a map of Kauai.

**Lydgate, J.M. (1872, 1878-1891)** Field worker, primarily on Hawaii

**Lyons, C.J. (1871-1896)** From 1879 until 1896 he was in charge of the Survey Office with increasing interest in meteorological work in his later years.

**Monsarrat, M.D. (1877-1911?)** Surveyed Lanai with J.F. Brown from 1877-1878. At intervals from 1885-1895 he had a private contract with the government to survey Molokai.

**Sorenson, O.L. (1898- )** Came from the Public Lands Office to the Survey Office in 1898 and became assistant in charge. Still employed by the Survey Office in 1915.

**Wall. W.E. (1884? - )** Succeeded W.D. Alexander as Surveyor-General in 1901. Still Surveyor in 1915.

**See also: Interior Department -- Survey Department  
Public Lands**

**also: Additional records received June 18, 1980 from State Land Surveyor.  
See page 13 of this record.**

**HAWAIIAN GOVERNMENT SURVEY  
RECORDS CONTAINER LIST**

**Series DAGS6**

**Box and Folder**

**Contents**

**Incoming Letters to Surveyor General**

DAGS6-1	1	September 1870 - February 1877, No. 1 - 60 [includes alphabetical index by correspondent and subject - incomplete]
	2	May 1877 - May 1879, No. 61 - 110
	3	June 1879 - February 1880, No. 111 - 150
	4	1877 - 1880, No. 151-190
	5	April - October 1880, No. 191-250
	6	October 1880 - May 1881, No. 251-300
	7	June - December 1881 (some 1880), No. 301 - 304; 405 - 471
	8	November 1881 - April 1882, No. 1 - 60 [includes alphabetical index by correspondent]
	9	May - December 1882
DAGS6-2	1	January - December 1883
	2	January - December 1884
	3	January - December 1885
	4	January - December 1886
	5	January - May 1887
	6	June - December 1887
	7	January - April 1888
	8	1888, No. 1 - 60 [includes alphabetical index by correspondent for no. 1 - 136]
	9	January 1888 - August 1889, No. 61 - 135
	10	January - August 1889, No. 136 - 169
	11	August - December 1889
	12	September 1889 - June 1890, No. 1 - 70 [includes alphabetical index by correspondent]
DAGS6-3	1	December 1889 - December 1890, No. 71 - 139
	2	December 1890 - April 1891, No. 140 - 201
	3	February - December 1891, No. 202 - 251
	4	August 1891 - July 1892, No. 1 - 87 [includes alphabetical index by correspondent]
	5	May 1892 - July 1893, No. 88 - 150
	6	May 1894 - May 1895, No. 151 - 205
	7	1895 (some 1893-1894), No. 206 - 275
	8	May 1895 - September 1896, No. 276 - 330
	9	May 1896 - February 1897, No. 331-385
	10	February - December 1897 (some 1896 and 1898), No. 386 - 450
	11	December 1897 - September 1898, No. 451 - 479
	12	March 1897 - October 1898, No. 1 - 45 [includes alphabetical index by correspondent]

**HAWAIIAN GOVERNMENT SURVEY  
RECORDS CONTAINER LIST**

**Series DAGS6**

**Box and Folder**

**Contents**

**Incoming Letters to Surveyor General**

DAGS6-4	1	March - December 1898, No. 46 - 90
	2	November 1898 - February 1899, No. 91 - 135
	3	February - April 1899, No. 136-170
	4	April - June 1899, No. 171 - 191
	5	May - September 1899, No. 1 -35 [includes alphabetical index by correspondent]
	6	August - December 1899, No. 36 - 90
	7	November 1899 - April 1900, No. 91 -144
	8	May - December 1900, No. 145 -200
	9	November 1900 - April 1901, No. 1 -50 [includes alphabetical index by correspondent and subject]
	10	May - September 1901, No. 51 - 105
	11	September 1901 - January 1902, No. 106 - 195
	12	January - April 1902, No. 196 - 253
	13	March - June 1902, No. 1 -50 [includes alphabetical index by correspondent and subject]
DAGS6-5	1	June - October 1902, No. 51 - 95
	2	September - November 1902, No. 96 - 120
	3	November 1902 - February 1903, No. 121 -172
	4	January - March 1903, No. 1 - 50 [includes alphabetical index by correspondent and subject]
	5	March - May 1903, No. 51 -110
	6	May - July 1903, No. 111 - 170
	7	July - September 1903, No. 171 - 235
	8	March - October 1903, No. 1 - 25 [includes alphabetical index by correspondent and subject]
	9	October - November 1903, No. 26 - 65
	10	November 1903 - February 1904, No. 66 - 120
	11	February - May 1904, No. 121 - 173
DAGS6-6	1	May - July 1904, No. 1 - 50 [includes alphabetical index by correspondent and subject]
	2	July - September 1904, No. 51 - 120
	3	September - November 1904, No. 121 - 150
	4	November 1904 January 1905, No. 151 - 195
	5	January - April 1905, No. 1 - 65 [includes alphabetical index by correspondent and subject]
	6	April - June 1905, No. 66 - 110
	7	June - August 1905, No. 111 - 165
	8	August - November 1905, No. 166 - 225

**HAWAIIAN GOVERNMENT SURVEY  
RECORDS CONTAINER LIST**

**Series DAGS6**

**Box and Folder**

**Contents**

**Incoming Letters to Surveyor General**

DAGS6-6	9	November 1905 - January 1906, No. 1 -55 [includes alphabetical index by correspondent and subject]
	10	January - March 1906, No. 56 - 115
	11	March - May 1906, No. 116 - 170
	12	May - July 1906, No. 171 - 216
DAGS6-7	1	June - August 1906, No. 1 - 35 [includes alphabetical index by correspondent and subject]
	2	August - October 1906, No. 36 - 100
	3	October - December 1906, No. 101 - 167
	4	December 1906 - February 1907, No. 1 - 50 [includes alphabetical index by correspondent and subject]
	5	February - June 1907, No. 51 - 105
	6	June - July 1907, No. 106 - 150
	7	July - October 1907, No. 151 - 206
	8	October 1907 - January 1908, No. 1 -50 [includes alphabetical index by correspondent and subject]
	9	January - May 1908, No. 51 - 110
	10	May - September 1908, No. 111 - 190
DAGS6-8	1	August 1908 - February 1909, No. 191 - 250
	2	January - April 1909, No. 1 - 60 [includes alphabetical index by correspondent and subject]
	3	May 1909 - February 1910, No. 61 - 115
	4	January - September 1910, No. 116 - 165
	5	August 1910 - May 1911, No. 166 - 240
	6	January - November 1911, No. 241 - 315
	7	September 1911 - February 1912, No. 316 - 400
	8	February - May 1912, No. 1 - 60 [includes alphabetical index by correspondent and subject]
	9	April - August 1912, No. 61 - 110
DAGS6-9	1	August - October 1912, No. 111 - 155
	2	October - December 1912, No. 156 - 190
	3	November 1912 - March 1913, No. 1 - 55 [includes alphabetical index by correspondent and subject]
	4	March - July 1913, No. 56 - 125
	5	June - September 1913, No. 126 - 187
	6	September 1913 - February 1914, No. 1 - 60 [includes alphabetical index by correspondent and subject]
	7	February - May 1914, No. 61 - 135
	8	May - November 1914, No. 136 - 202

**HAWAIIAN GOVERNMENT SURVEY  
RECORDS CONTAINER LIST**

**Series DAGS6**

**Box and Folder**

**Contents**

**Incoming Letters to Surveyor General**

DAGS6-9	9	November 1914 - April 1915, No. 1 - 45 [includes alphabetical index by correspondent and subject]
	10	April - June 1915, No. 46 - 92

**Incoming Letters to C. J. Lyons**

DAGS6-10	1	June 1877 - February 1878, No. 1 - 70 [includes alphabetical index by correspondent]
	2	October 1878 - February 1879, No. 71 - 159
	3	February - December 1879, No. 160 - 260
	4	1876 - 1878, [1879], 1880 - 1881, No. 261 - 330
	5	1879 - 1880, [1881], No. 331 - 370
	6	1875 - 1876, [1881 - 1882], No. 371 - 410
	7	1876 - 1877, 1881 - 1882, No. 411 - 439
	8	1877 - 1878
	9	August 1882 - July 1883, No. 1 - 53 [includes alphabetical index by correspondent]
	10	June 1883 - October 1885
DAGS6-11	1	March 1886 - September 1888, No. 1 - 84
	2	1884 - 1887
	3	1889
	4	1890
	5	January - August 1891, n.d.
	6	September - December 1891
	7	January - July 1892
	8	August - December 1892
	9	January - April 1895
	10	May - December 1895
	11	1896 - 1897, 1901

**Incoming Letters from Attorney General**

DAGS6-12	1	July 1905 - April 1906, No. 1 - 50 [includes alphabetical index by subject]
	2	April - November 1906, No. 51 - 95
	3	November 1906 - December 1907, No. 96 - 150
	4	January 1908 - May 1909, No. 151 - 190
	5	June 1909 - December 1910, No. 191 - 218

**HAWAIIAN GOVERNMENT SURVEY  
RECORDS CONTAINER LIST**

**Series DAGS6**

**Box and Folder**

**Contents**

**Incoming Letters from Attorney General**

DAGS6-12	6	November 1910 – June 1911, No. 1 – 25 [includes alphabetical index by subject]
	7	June 1911 – August 1912, No. 26 – 60
	8	August 1912 – April 1913, No. 61 – 85
	9	April – June 1913, No. 86 – 108
	10	July 1913 – April 1914, No. 1 – 35 [includes alphabetical index by subject]
	11	April – August 1914, No. 36 – 60
	12	October 1914 – May 1915, No. 61 – 89

**Incoming Letters from Department of Interior**

DAGS6-13	1	February – December 1886
	2	1888 – 1895
	3	March 1896 – September 1898, No. 1 – 70 [includes alphabetical index by subject]
	4	October 1898 – July 1899, No. 71 – 135
	5	July – October 1899, No. 136 – 175
	6	October 1899 – May 1901, No. 176 – 251 [includes letters to Public Works]

**Incoming Letters from Public Lands**

DAGS6-14	1	August 1898 – May 1903, No. 1 – 80 [includes alphabetical index by correspondent and subject]
	2	May 1903 – January 1904, No. 81 – 155
	3	February – May 1904, No. 156 – 200
	4	June – November 1904, No. 201 – 248
	5	December 1904 – November 1905, No. 1 – 60 [includes alphabetical index by correspondent and subject]
	6	October 1905 – February 1906, No. 61 – 155
	7	March – July 1906, No. 156 – 242
	8	July – November 1906, No. 1 – 60 [includes alphabetical index by subject]
DAGS6-15	1	June 1906 – February 1907, No. 61 – 119
	2	March – July 1907, No. 120 – 185
	3	July – October 1907, No. 186 – 245
	4	October 1907 – January 1908, No. 1 – 30 [includes alphabetical index by subject]
	5	January – July 1908, No. 31 – 105

**HAWAIIAN GOVERNMENT SURVEY  
RECORDS CONTAINER LIST**

**Series DAGS6**

**Box and Folder**

**Contents**

**Incoming Letters from Public Lands**

DAGS6-15	6	July 1908 – February 1909, No. 106 – 185
	7	February – May 1909, No. 186 – 257
	8	May – December 1909, No. 1 – 60 [includes alphabetical index by subject]
	9	November 1909 – June 1910, No. 61 – 150
DAGS6-16	1	June – October 1910, No. 151 – 220
	2	October 1910 – January 1911, No. 221 – 270
	3	January – March 1911, No. 271 – 325
	4	March – May 1911, No. 326 – 370
	5	May – June 1911, No. 371 – 410
	6	June – November 1911, No. 411 – 494
	7	October 1911 – March 1912, No. 1 – 45 [includes alphabetical index by subject]
	8	March – April 1912 [includes some 1911], No. 46 – 95
	9	May – June 1912 [includes some 1911], No. 96 – 130
	10	June – September 1912, No. 131 – 162
DAGS6-17	1	September – December 1912 [includes other months], No. 1 – 45 [includes alphabetical index by subject]
	2	December 1912 – April 1913, No. 46 – 80
	3	April – May 1913 [includes some February], No. 81 – 125
	4	May – August 1913, No. 126 – 185
	5	July 1913 – January 1914, No. 1 – 60 [includes alphabetical index by subject]
	6	January – April 1914, No. 61 – 105
	7	April – September 1914, No. 106 – 160
	8	September 1914 – January 1915, No. 161 – 207
	9	February – May 1915 [includes some 1914], No. 1 – 60 [includes alphabetical index by subject]
	10	May – June 1915, No. 61 – 104

**Incoming Letters from Public Works**

DAGS6-18	1	November 1900 – December 1901, No. 1 – 70 [includes alphabetical index by subject]
	2	December 1901 – March 1902, No. 71 – 135
	3	March – June 1902, No. 136 – 190
	4	June – August 1902, No. 191 – 238
	5	July 1902 – February 1903, No. 1 – 45 [includes alphabetical index by subject]
	6	February – December 1903, No. 46 – 116

**HAWAIIAN GOVERNMENT SURVEY  
RECORDS CONTAINER LIST**

**Series DAGS6**

**Box and Folder**

**Contents**

**Incoming Letters from Public Works**

DAGS6-18	7	January 1904 – March 1905, No. 117 – 180
DAGS6-19	1	April 1905 – June 1906, No. 181 – 242
	2	June 1906 – January 1908, No. 1 – 65 [includes alphabetical index by subject]
	3	January 1908 – March 1909, No. 66 – 150
	4	March 1909 – March 1910, No. 151 – 195
	5	October – December 1909, March 1910 – February 1911, No. 196 – 248
	6	February 1911 – March 1912, No. 1 – 45 65 [includes alphabetical index by subject]
	7	March 1912 – May 1913, No. 46 – 75
	8	September 1913 – June 1915, No. 1 – 81 [includes alphabetical index by subject - Incomplete]

**Incoming Letters from Surveyors**

DAGS6-20	1	October 1907 – April 1908, No. 1 – 35 [includes alphabetical index by subject]
	2	April – August 1908, No. 36 – 65
	3	August 1908 – January 1909, No. 66 – 100
	4	1909 – 1910, No. 101 – 150
	5	June – September 1910, No. 151 – 190
	6	September – December 1910, No. 191 – 225
	7	November 1910 – February 1911, No. 226-248
	8	February – June 1911, No. 1 – 50 [includes alphabetical index by subject]
DAGS6-21	1	June – November 1911, No. 51 – 104
	2	November 1911 – June 1912, No. 106 – 175
	3	April – November 1912, No. 176 – 238
	4	November 1912 – May 1913, No. 1 – 60 [includes alphabetical index by correspondent and subject]
	5	April – November 1913, No. 61 – 120
	6	November 1913 – February 1914, No. 121 – 147
	7	January – July 1914, October – November 1914, and March – April 1915, No. 1 – 21 [includes alphabetical index by subject]

**Correspondence to and from Survey Department**

DAGS6-22	1	1903, 1906, 1911 – 1913
	2	1916, 1919
	3	1920

**HAWAIIAN GOVERNMENT SURVEY  
RECORDS CONTAINER LIST**

**Series DAGS6**

**Box and Folder**

**Contents**

**Outgoing Letters from C. J. Lyons**

DAGS6-22    4                    1875, 1878 – 1879, 1892 – 1894, 1901 – 1902

**Incoming Letters regarding Weather, Meteorology...to C. J. Lyons**

5	n.d., 1872, 1883 – 1884, 1887, 1890
6	January – May 1891
7	June - December 1891
8	n.d., January – May 1892
9	June – December 1892
10	1893
11	1894
12	1895
13	1896 – 1897

**Miscellaneous**

**W. D. Alexander**

14	Notes, drafts, letters regarding: land, instruments, streams, fishponds, etc.
15	Drafts of reports to Minister of Interior, 1871 – 1872, 1874, 1876 and 1880
16	Star notes from latitude readings, 1883 and Sunset/Sunrise times, 1885 – 1886
17	Letters, 1894 and 1904

**C. J. Lyons**

18	Notes and drafts, n.d. 1893 – 1894 and 1903
19	Land documents and camping outfit notes

DAGS6-23

**FRAGILE DOCUMENTS – WITHDRAWN**

**HAWAIIAN GOVERNMENT SURVEY  
RECORDS CONTAINER LIST**

**Series DAGS6**

**Survey Letter Books (\*No Self-Service Copying)**

<u>Volume</u>	<u>Contents</u>
vol. 1	C. J. Lyons: July 23, 1878 – August 11, 1881 Miscellaneous letters and notes of surveys (p.1-24, bk. 13)
vol. 2	C. J. Lyons: August 16, 1881 – October 21, 1887 Miscellaneous letters (bk. 14)
vol. 3	C. J. Lyons: October 28, 1887 – August 28, 1891 Miscellaneous letters (bk. 15)
vol. 4	C. J. Lyons: August 18, 1881 – August 29, 1891 Description of government lands W. D. Alexander: December 3 – December 9, 1885 Letters C. J. Lyons: September 7 – December 31, 1891 Letters (bk. 16)
vol. 5	C. J. Lyons: January 4, 1892 – October 9, 1893 Miscellaneous letters (bk. 17)
vol. 6	C. J. Lyons: October 12, 1893 – March 2, 1896 Miscellaneous letters (bk. 19)
vol. 7	C. J. Lyons: October 28, 1893 - April 10, 1896 Letters to the Interior Department (bk. 18)
vol. 8	C. J. Lyons: September 30, 1901 – April 1903 Miscellaneous letters, includes some from meteorologists (bk. 20)
vol. 9	W. D. Alexander: November 27, 1885 – September 30, 1891 Miscellaneous letters (bk. 10)
vol. 10	W. D. Alexander: October 21, 1891 – March 15, 1900 Miscellaneous letters [in capacity of VP of Board of Education and Surveyor-General] (bk.21)
vol. 11	W. D. Alexander: January 1892 - November 1, 1898 Miscellaneous letters
vol. 12	W. D. Alexander: November 2, 1898 - February 11, 1901 Miscellaneous letters
vol. 13	J. F. Brown: April 16, 1885 - December 20, 1894 Miscellaneous letters
vol. 14	J. F. Brown: July 13, 1886 – July 31, 1888 W. D. Alexander: August 6, 1888 - October 6, 1888 J. F. Brown: October 23, 1888 - October 15, 1889 Miscellaneous letters includes some descriptions of government lands [b] (bk. 11)
vol. 15	J. F. Brown: October 1, 1890 – April 28, 1891 Descriptions of government land survey finished [c] (bk. 12)
vol. 16	J. F. Brown: December 22, 1894 - September 6, 1895

**HAWAIIAN GOVERNMENT SURVEY  
RECORDS CONTAINER LIST**

**Series DAGS6**

**Survey Letter Books**

<u>Volume</u>	<u>Contents</u>
vol. 16	Miscellaneous letters (bk. 22)
vol. 17	F. S. Dodge: April 1, 1896 – December 16, 1897 Miscellaneous letters (bk. 23)
vol. 18	F. S. Dodge: December 15, 1897 - September 23, 1898 Miscellaneous letters [in his capacity as City Surveyor and Captain Commander of the 1 <sup>st</sup> Company Sharpshooters] (bk. 24)
vol. 19	W. E. Wall: October 6, 1898 - September 26, 1901 Miscellaneous letters (bk. 25)
vol. 20	W. E. Wall: September 26, 1901 – April 22, 1902 Miscellaneous letters (bk. 26)
vol. 21	W. E. Wall: April 22, 1902 - December 8, 1902 Miscellaneous letters (bk. 27)
vol. 22	W. E. Wall: December 8, 1902 - November 10, 1903 Miscellaneous letters (bk. 28)
vol. 23	W. E. Wall: November 10, 1903 – May 30, 1904 Miscellaneous letters (bk. 29)
vol. 24	W. E. Wall: June 1, 1904 – August 8, 1905 Miscellaneous letters (bk. 30)
vol. 25	W. E. Wall: August 9, 1905 – June 29, 1906 Miscellaneous letters (bk. 31)
vol. 26	W. E. Wall: July 2, 1906 – May 31, 1907 Miscellaneous letters (bk. 32)
vol. 27	W. E. Wall: May 31, 1907 – May 21, 1908 Miscellaneous letters (bk. 33)
vol. 28	W. E. Wall: May 21, 1908 – March 18, 1910 Miscellaneous letters (bk. 34)
vol. 29	W. E. Wall/Marston Campbell: March 19, 1910 – July 7, 1911 Miscellaneous letters (bk. 35)
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