

Queen Julia Kapi‘olani Napelakapuokaka‘e



Kapi‘olani was born December 31, 1834, in Hilo on Hawai‘i Island to High Chief Kuhio Kalaniana‘ole of Hilo and High Chiefess Kinoiki Kekaulike of Kaua‘i, the daughter of King Kaumuali‘i, last King of an independent Kaua‘i before its amicable cession to Kamehameha the Great. She was named Kapi‘olani, after her great-aunt High Chiefess Kapi‘olani, who defied the goddess Pele in the name of Christianity. Her name, Kapi‘olani, is composed of three words (ka pi‘o lani) and means “The Heavenly Arch” or “The Royal Arch.”

Kapi‘olani’s first marriage was to High Chief Bennett Nāmākēhā, who was more than thirty years older than Kapi‘olani. He was an uncle of Queen Emma on her father George Na‘ea’s side. This made her aunt by marriage to Queen Emma, who she served as her highest lady-in-waiting. Kapi‘olani was the caretaker of Haku O Hawai‘i, Prince Albert Kamehameha.

Although it had been said that Queen Emma blamed Kapi‘olani for the child’s death as he was under Kapi‘olani’s care at the time, Queen Emma wrote Kapi‘olani a very kind reply in March 1863 to her letter, “Dear Kapi‘olani, my companion in the caring of my son. You were my son’s favorite, your chest must be filled with hurt. You were our third companion.”

On December 8, 1863, Kapi‘olani remarried to Kalākaua in a quiet ceremony conducted by an Episcopal minister. Their wedding was heavily criticized since it fell during the time of mourning for King Kamehameha IV. She and Kalākaua were childless so she and her sister Po‘omaikelani adopted, in the tradition of hānai, their sister Victoria Kinoiki Kekaulike’s three sons. Kapi‘olani took David Kawānanakoa and Jonah Kūhiō Kalaniana‘ole, and Po‘omaikelani adopted Edward Abnel Keli‘iahonui. In 1883, Kalākaua made Kapi‘olani’s nephews princes of Hawai‘i with the style of Highness in honor of his coronation.

In 1887, Queen Kapi‘olani traveled to London to attend Queen Victoria’s 50th Jubilee celebration. Crown Princess Lili‘uokalani, King Kalākaua’s sister, traveled with Kapi‘olani as her interpreter since though Kapi‘olani was brought up understanding English, she refused to speak anything but Hawaiian. The Hawaiian Royal family were treated as dignitaries and were seated with the British Royal family in the front of Westminster Abbey.

Queen Kapi‘olani established the Kapi‘olani Maternity Home, where Hawaiian mothers could receive care, as well as their newborn babies. It survives today as the Kapi‘olani Medical Center. Kapi‘olani Park in Waikīkī was named after the Queen by her husband Kalākaua. One of her noted compositions to Hawaiian music was a love song she wrote for her husband, “Ka Ipo Lei Manu.” Kalākaua died in San Francisco before he could hear the musical composition from his Queen.

After the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawai‘i’s government and her eviction from ‘Iolani Palace, Queen Kapi‘olani retired to her private residence Pualeilani in Waikīkī, dying there June 24, 1899, at age sixty-four. She was interred in the Royal Mausoleum of Hawai‘i along with her husband.