

## KEEP HAWAII HAWAII

# Mausoleum preserves royal history of Hawaii

By Robert M. Fox and David Cheever  
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It is hard to imagine any other historic site in the islands that preserves the history of the monarchy more than the Royal Mausoleum. Besides kings, queens, chiefs and other royals, this sacred burial site also includes a few nonroyals like John Young, Robert C. Wylie and Charles Reed Bishop, all of whom, however, had strong ties to the Hawaiian monarchy.

The true importance of the Royal Mausoleum, however, also known as Mauna Ala (Fragrant Mountain), has to do with it being the final resting place of the two most prominent royal families of Hawaii: the Kamehameha and Kalakaua families.

King Kamehameha IV and Queen Emma provided the impetus for building Mauna Ala, which they planned as the burial site for their beloved son Prince Albert, who died in August 1862 at age 4. The royal couple were reportedly devastated when Albert died, and to honor their only son, they acquired a site on Nuuanu Avenue and hired architect Theodore Heuck to build a monument for him.

Those plans were disrupted when King Kamehameha IV himself became ill and died just 15 months

after Albert. He was succeeded by his brother Lot Kamehameha, who immediately started construction of the mausoleum. The west wing (or Ewa wing) was completed in 1864.

It was here in February 1864 that Kamehameha IV was laid to rest after a solemn procession from Iolani Palace. Prince Albert's casket was brought to Mauna Ala that same day and laid alongside his father. It is reported that Queen Emma was so grief-stricken that she "camped on the grounds and slept in the mausoleum."

WHEN THE OTHER three wings of the building were completed, the remains of kings and chiefs were transferred to Mauna Ala from their first tomb on the Iolani Palace grounds. They included the iwi (bones) of chiefs originally buried at Hale o Keawe, the City of Refuge, at Honaunau on the Big Island. Subsequently, other members of the Kamehameha and Kalakaua families were buried at Mauna Ala as well. The only two kings not buried at the Royal Mausoleum are King Kamehameha I and William Charles Lunailo, the latter with his own mausoleum on

the grounds of Kawaiaha'o Church. The site of the remains of Kamehameha I are unknown.

The designer of Mauna Ala, Heuck, has been called Hawaii's first professional architect. He also designed Iolani Barracks. Author Nancy Bannick, the historic preservationist, wrote: "Mauna Ala is considered Gothic Revival designed in the shape of a Latin cross. The building's walls are of cut coral blocks with raised mortar joints. Its steep gabled roof was covered with English slate and surmounted by bronze and gilded crosses. Buttresses were added to the structure and later, in 1904, the walls were stuccoed and scored to represent mortar joints."

*Keep Hawaii Hawaii is a monthly column on island architecture and urban planning. Robert M. Fox, president of Fox Hawaii Inc., studied architecture in California and Japan. He was one of the founders of the Historic Hawai'i Foundation in 1974. David Cheever, owner of David Cheever Marketing, has served on the boards of the Historic Hawai'i Foundation and the Hawaii Architectural Foundation. Send your comments to [keephawaii@staradvertiser.com](mailto:keephawaii@staradvertiser.com).*



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In 1887, after the death of Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop (she was the last royal descendant of Kamehameha I), her husband, Charles Reed Bishop, decided that open storage of the caskets in the mausoleum was unfitting as the final resting place for Hawaii's royalty. He had an underground vault constructed for the Kamehameha family where the caskets of 21 of the line are entombed. In 1904, a second underground vault was built to house nine of Queen Emma's relatives and close associates.

Over the years, bodies were gradually moved to family crypts — the most influential of which can be found on the museum

grounds. Thus the building became vacant in 1918, and, as Queen Liliuokalani had suggested years before, according to Bannick, it was dedicated as a house of prayer in 1922. That makes Mauna Ala both a mausoleum and a chapel. The koa-lined chapel is mainly used for celebrations of the birthdays of the royalty of Mauna Ala.

IT IS SAID that in 1900, a joint resolution of the U.S. Congress removed Mauna Ala from the country's public lands. But this has been discussed and debated, with some saying there is no mention of this specific removal in the resolution. Nevertheless, the 3.5 acres of land that comprise Mauna Ala is under the Hawaiian flag and when you enter through metal gates, "the western world with its laws and customs are left behind on Nuuanu Avenue."

A caretaker, traditionally a descendant of Chief Hoolulu, who hid the bones of Kamehameha I, lives on the grounds. The whole site is in meticulous condition supported by state Department of Land and Natural Resources budgets with some funds from the Charles Reed Bishop Trust. Mauna Ala was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1972.

The grounds are open to the public from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday except on some national and state holidays.

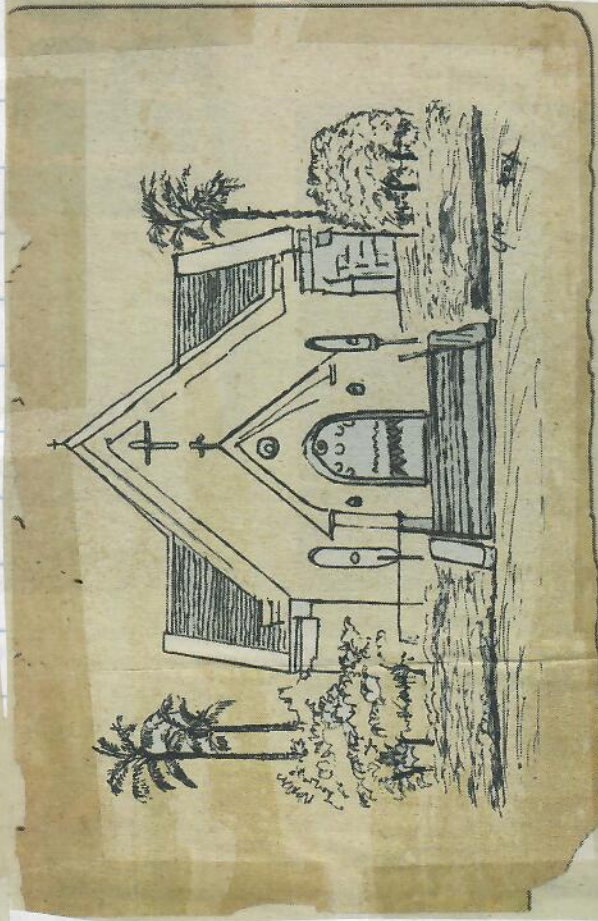


ILLUSTRATION BY ROBERT M. FOX

The Royal Mausoleum, also known as Mauna Ala (Fragrant Mountain), is the final resting place of the Kamehameha and Kalanikaʻōpale families.