

Hawaii

# Denby Fawcett: A Ceremony For A Hawaiian 'Princess' Unlikely To Be Repeated

Abigail Kawananakoa's public viewing at Iolani Palace drew some 1,600 people.

By [Denby Fawcett](#)

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There are few sounds as sad or chilling at the Hawaiian funeral dirge, the wailing of the words “Auwe, Auwe” — meaning to cry, to weep, to lament — a translation that fails to convey the depth of the words when chanted by a human being.



Hailama Farden of the royal order of Hale O Na Alii O Hawaii cried the mournful dirge at the gates of Iolani Palace Sunday as a hearse carried the body of Abigail Kinoiki Kekaulke Kawananakoa through a human passageway of members of four royal Hawaiian societies, the black vehicle slowly advancing toward the front steps of Iolani Palace.

Once there, Kawananakoa's koa coffin was carried into the throne room on the shoulders of an honor guard made up of law enforcement officers and Bo Kanekoa, her favorite Iolani Palace guard.

She died in her Nuuanu home at age 96 on Dec. 11.

About 1,600 people lined up patiently from 2 to 8 p.m. to pay respects to Kawananakoa, who lay in state in the palace throne room in the closed coffin.

A special red carpet had been installed in the room so nobody had to take off their shoes as normally required during palace visits.

Kawananakoa's wife, Veronica, stood by the coffin for the entire six hours of the ceremony.

The importance of the event could be measured by the fact that so many people showed up on a day when much else was happening on Oahu, including the Eddie Aikau Big Wave Invitational and Chinese New Year's festivities.



Abigail Kawananakoa's wife Veronica stood by her koa casket for the six-hour ceremony at Iolani Palace. (Denby Fawcett/Civil Beat/2023)

It had been advertised for days with full-page newspaper ads to invite mourners and to inform them of the protocols for attending.

Many who came had never met Kawananakoa but wanted to be there for a moment in history unlikely to ever be repeated.

“I don’t think there is anyone who fits the bill coming down the line,” Iolani Palace Executive Director Paula Akana said before the gates opened for the public viewing.

Akana said Kawananakoa had requested permission for the ceremony in the throne room and that it had been granted in gratitude for her service, including donations of more than \$2 million to help pay the palace’s electricity bills and other needs.

She was the great-granddaughter of James Campbell, a major Hawaii landowner, inheriting a fortune from his estate now estimated to be \$300-\$400 million.

Akana said Kawananakoa’s mother Lydia Liliuokalani Kawananakoa Morris was the central figure most responsible for saving the 130-year-old royal palace, which “at one time had been considered for destruction to make way for a parking lot.”

There has not been such a lying-in-state ceremony at the palace for a century — since the death of Prince Jonah Kuhio Kalaniana’ole in 1922.

Akana said she hoped Kawananakoa’s public viewing in the palace would bring people together and perhaps spark an interest in younger Native Hawaiians in the monarchy.





The public viewing of the casket of Abigail Kawananakoa is an event unlikely to be repeated in Hawaii. (Denby Fawcett/Civil Beat/2023)

That is the power of such large services: to unite strangers in common purpose and to remind us Hawaii was once a sovereign nation with royal rulers respected by the royalty and elected officials of other countries.

The service offered an opportunity to momentarily feel as if one were back in those days in Honolulu before high-rises, traffic, noise and the pressures of modern life.

Kawananakoa was of alii descent, related to Kauai's last king Kaumualii and Queen Kapiolani and a granddaughter of royally decreed Prince David Kawananakoa. Yet she was not an officially titled princess as required by the laws of the Hawaiian Kingdom — a fact that did not stop many from addressing her by the honorific.

Political analyst Neal Milner said, "Attending the viewing does not mean everyone there forgot her flaws but they also realized she was someone good."

On Sunday, some who came knew little about Kawananakoa especially very young people.

In [a TV interview](#), Elena Farden spoke about why she brought her daughter, Hosana.

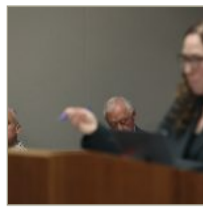
"This is something at your age you might not realize the significance but in years to come you will remember you were part of this day," she said.

Others who waited in line to view the coffin knew Kawananakoa and had been recipients of her generosity, including four orange-clad Buddhist monks from Lao Sithammaram Temple of Hawaii.

Kawananakoa had attended services at the temple out of respect for her Laotian housekeepers and her own appreciation for their customs and beliefs. Over the years, she made significant donations to help the temple. The monks gave her a carved Buddhist home altar she cherished.

A private funeral service for Kawananakoa was held Monday afternoon at Mauna Ala, Hawaii's royal mausoleum in Nuuanu Valley. In 2013, Kawananakoa received permission to have her own tomb there where her remains will rest when the construction of the black granite edifice is completed.

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### About the Author



#### Denby Fawcett

Denby Fawcett is a longtime Hawaii television and newspaper journalist, who grew up in Honolulu. Her book, *Secrets of Diamond Head: A History and Trail Guide* is available on Amazon. Opinions are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect Civil Beat's views.



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