

Lili'uokalani Morris



Helen Lydia Kamaka'eha Lili'uokalani Morris was born on June 22, 1905, the youngest child of Prince David Kawānanakoa (named heir to the Hawaiian throne) and Princess Abigail Wahiika'ahu'ula Campbell Kawānanakoa.

She was known mostly as Lili'uokalani or affectionately as "Lilio." Her family and close friends also called her "Baby." She would also be publicly known for much of her life as Lili'uokalani Morris or Mrs. Morris.

She was born into a royal family and a royalist family. Her grandfather James Campbell was an ardent supporter of the Queen and paid for her trips to Washington D.C. to attempt to get the United States to restore the monarchy.

She was also born into wealth as a member of the Campbell family and attended private schools here and in San Francisco. She was known as the "Flapper Princess" in the 1920s and was part of the old kama'āina social and political structure of pre-World War II Hawai'i. Besides her father who passed away when she was very young, her uncle Prince Jonah Kūhiō Kalaniana'ole spent nearly 20 years as our Delegate to Congress and her mother was Republican National Committeewoman for over a decade. Both were very powerful in a territory dominated by the Republican Party and were part of its leadership.

She married twice as a young woman, one marriage producing her only child, Abigail. And then at age 31, she met the love of her life, Clark Lee, a newspaperman. They were together through the war and afterwards moved to Pebble Beach, California where he passed away at the much too young age of 46.

Lilio then returned to Hawai'i, and with her mother's passing in 1945, easily assumed a major leadership role in the Hawaiian community.

Community Activities

Lilio was a very active community volunteer, and not surprisingly, the core of her activities honored her heritage.

The Hawaiian Civic Clubs were created by her Uncle Prince Kūhiō as a way of preserving Hawaiian culture and knowledge. She herself founded the Prince Kūhiō Hawaiian Civic Club and the Kona Hawaiian Civic Club. She was also a leader in the Statewide Association of Hawaiian Civic Clubs, She was very much involved in their activities, especially in Kona where she lived for many years.

She was also a regent of Hale O Na Ali‘i, the Hawaiian Royal Society associated with the Kawānanakoa family. In the picture for an article about her entitled “To Hawaiians, She’s Their Ali‘i,” she choose to wear her Hale O Na Ali‘i regalia. The Lahaina Maui Chapter is named in honor of her.

She was a life member of the Ahahui Ka‘ahumanu and of the Daughters of Hawaii, the two royal societies composed of women.

She was also a strong supporter of Hulihee Palace in Kona, the Bishop Museum and the Hawaiian Canoe Racing Association.

She was a leader in Hawai‘i’s society of the day both in Honolulu and in Kona where she maintained homes as evidenced by her frequent appearances in the society pages and columns of the day. At special events like the visit of Queen Elizabeth II to Hawaii in 1963, she was part of the group who had tea with the Queen.

She was on the Hawaiian Homes Commission and served in a number of different capacities as Hawaii formed its new governmental structures in the 1960s and 1970s.

One such service that undoubtedly was kind of fun involves those ubiquitous Kamehameha signs that mark the location of historic and cultural sites throughout Hawai‘i.

Lilio was appointed as a member of the group that set up the program, came up with the criteria on which sites to note, and come up with a six year plan to add at least ten sites a year to an initial eight.

The committee included notables like Dr. Kenneth Emory, Mrs. Richard Summers, Agnes Conrad, Thelma Hadley (Kauai), Beatrice Savage (Maui), Charles Murray and Liliuokalani Morris (Hawaii Island.)

Their first eight:

‘Iolani Palace, the Royal Mausoleum, Lahainaluna School, Wainee Church, Hulihee Palace, Mookini Heiau, the Old Graveyard and Beach Trail in Puna, and the Kalaupapa Lookout.

It must have been both exciting and joyful to launch this program, and to use her knowledge of Hawai‘i’s history to acknowledge the key places to see.

And of course, the community activity which has come to define her, the saving and restoration of ‘Iolani Palace.

Saving ‘Iolani Palace and Restoring Its Glamour

The work to save the Palace from being torn down, and to restore it to the grandeur it had during King Kalākaua’s reign, was the work of hundreds of dedicated professionals and community volunteers. And there is one whose presence and contributions stand out among the others that were there at the critical beginning days, and that is Liliuokalani Morris.

In the heady days after Statehood in 1959, there was a tremendous desire to show off the latest member of the United States and to show to the rest of the country and to the world, just how special a place Hawai‘i was. One aspect of that was a stunning new capitol building resembling a volcano, open at the top, and surrounded by water. It was a truly bold design, different than any other capitol building in the U.S. While not without its critics, most saw it as a symbol of a new day for Hawai‘i and embraced it.

What then would be done with the old state capitol building? It may have been a palace, but it did not look like one. Grey, worn out, with wood structures on its decks and its sides to provide office space; it truly showed its age. So perhaps not surprisingly, the original thought was to tear it down to use the space as a parking area for the new capitol building. And this is where Mrs. Morris’ friendship with then Governor John Burns first came in to play and any talk about tearing it down stopped largely out of deference to her.

There is a related story that her close friend Governor John Burns had called her into his office one day and as she sat down to talk to him, he handed her the keys to ‘Iolani Palace and said, “it’s yours.” While that exchange (literally) may never have taken place, the truth is not that far off.

As Aaron Levine, a key planner and leader of the modern civic center of Honolulu describes its’ beginning days:

“In 1964, several community-spirited citizens became concerned about the future of the palace, and its environs, as plans progressed to move the state government across the street to a new capitol building designed by John Carl Warnecke. We convinced the Governor of Hawaii and the Mayor of Honolulu to jointly appoint an advisory committee to help Warnecke prepare a master plan for the new Hawaii Capital District. This writer was elected to chair the committee

“One of our first decisions was to ask Mrs. Lili‘uokalani Morris, the acknowledged successor of Hawaiian royalty, to chair a committee to help restore the Palace to its original grandeur.”

Mrs. Morris accepted and jumped right in to get the work moving.

At the committee’s urging, Charles Peterson, a noted preservation architect who had headed the work to restore the Independence Hall complex in Philadelphia, was brought to Hawaii to advise on the restoration of the Palace.

He recommended, among many things, that a Commission on ‘Iolani Palace be created in State Government to manage the Palace, and that an auxiliary group, the Friends of ‘Iolani Palace, be created to provide ongoing community support for the Palace. Mrs. Morris was the first President of the Friends, and among other steps, the Friends came up with recommendations for the Governor on individuals to be appointed to that Commission.

At a dinner at the Kahala Hilton on January 19, 1967 to celebrate the first anniversary of the founding of the Friends, Governor Burns was invited to be the keynote speaker. Everyone in the room expected that he would use the occasion to name the new Commission members and they were all hoping that he would take at least

some of their suggestions on its members.

Instead, to a stunned audience, Burns said that he had absolutely no intention of creating such a governmental commission to run the Palace, and that the best people to restore and to manage the restored Palace were sitting right in front of him, the Friends of 'Iolani Palace. And that is exactly what happened.

And so, Mrs. Morris did get the keys after all.

As Levine would later say, “[i]t was a daring concept, only a decade later and several million dollars spent in restoration, would anyone know whether a volunteer citizen organization could accomplish the task.”

And they did, thanks heavily to Mrs. Morris. Sadly, she was only able to see that beginning of the restoration prior to her passing. After her passing, it was her daughter Abigail Kawānanakoa, who assumed the mantle from her mother and finished the initial restoration.

Along the way, and it was over ten years and over seven million dollars before the Palace opened for its first tours, there were lots of stories about the journey. And while Lilio would only have a couple of years on that journey, she started it and set the leadership standard that carried through.

Among the stories.....

The actual organization of the Friends began in July 1965 when five individuals gathered to form the Friends: Lilio, Senator George Ariyoshi, John Carl Warnecke, Warnecke's local partner Ty Sutton, and Aaron Levine. Ariyoshi offered to do all the paperwork on forming the Friends, which he did. Senator Ariyoshi of course became Governor Ariyoshi and was a true friend to the Palace throughout his time in office and after as well.

Another story involves the premiere of the movie “Hawaii” based on the very popular book by James Michener and starring Julie Andrews and Max Von Sydow. Even though that movie is not well-regarded by today's standards, at the time it was a very big deal. Consolidated Theaters allowed the movie's premiere at their flagship Waikiki Theaters to be a fundraiser for the Friends. The movie made them \$3,500 but even more importantly gave them priceless publicity for their work.

When the restoration began, the immensity of the task ahead was not imaginable which was probably just as well though Mrs. Morris and those who formed and started the work of the Friends, and the Junior League of Honolulu, and all of those who did get involved, would have seen it through no matter what.

For example, no one had any idea how bad the termite damage was. When they pulled off the plywood walls, removed the drop ceilings, took out the window air conditioners and got a good look at the underlying palace, the damage was stunning. They found live termite infestations, a smoldering fire where the wiring had been eaten by the termites, and places where the wood pieces were down to a veneer. The answer, the largest termite tenting in the history of Hawaii,

Once the treatment was done, all the wood in the Palace, literally tens of thousand of pieces, had to be removed, one by one, treated or replaced, and then reinstalled.

Some of what needed to be done was more controversial. When the decision was made to build the new State Capitol and the site on which it stands today was chosen, there was one big problem. There was already a significant historic structure on the site which the Native Hawaiian community, and others did not want torn

down or even moved. That structure was the ‘‘Iolani Barracks, built by King Kamehameha V to house the Royal Guards. Designed to resemble the castles of Europe and constructed with 4,000 coral blocks from the same source as the blocks used to build Kawaiaha‘o Church, it held an important place in the history of the Kingdom. The decision on the site of the new Capitol had however been made and was not going to be changed. The only question that now remained was what to do with the Barracks.

Mrs. Morris was the one who, subject to more than a little criticism, made the difficult choice to take the Barracks apart piece by piece and move it the Ewa Mauka corner of the Palace grounds, where it remains to this day. Her view was that if it could not remain where it was, we still needed it to be preserved and moving it on to the Palace grounds was the only proper option given the relationship of the Guards to the Palace

And on and on the work went.

One comment that was made about the Palace restoration work was that everyone who came to work on this project, from the most sophisticated master plasterers who came from around the world to restore the stunning plasterwork on the ceilings, to master carpenters to restore its deep rich woods, to the day laborers; all found that the Palace got under their skin and that the work became a passion and getting it right, a deeply personal commitment.

In the end, the ‘Iolani Palace was beautifully restored and tells the story of the days of the Kings and Queens in a way that allows you to really feel and understand what it was like to be there in those royal days.

And it remains Lilio’s most enduring achievement.

Her Personal Life and Loves

Lilio was married five times, though the last two were to the same man.

The first marriage in 1925, when she was nineteen years old, was to William Ellerbrock, an automobile salesman. They had a daughter the next year, Abigail Kawānanakoa, who turned out to be Lilio’s only child. They divorced in 1927.

Her second marriage was to Charles Brenham, Sr., who she married in 1928. They divorced in 1935.

In 1936, she met Clark Lee who had come to Honolulu to be the Associated Press Bureau Chief. Abigail found the love of her life in Clark, and they remained together until his passing.

As the world moved towards war, Clark was assigned to the Far East, first to Hong Kong and then to China, for the Associated Press and later for the International News Service. Lilio followed him and they were married in 1938 in Hong Kong. A young Abigail went with her mother. In those pre-war (for the U.S.), she attended the American School in Shanghai. (Lilio and Abigail returned to Honolulu in 1941 as war was imminent.)

Lee’s reporting on the war in the Asian and Pacific Theaters was legendary for its realism, seeming to take you right into the battles. He wrote three books, the most well known of which is *They Call It Pacific* about the battles to retake the islands in the South Pacific. He was also at the landings on D-Day and at Anzio, and is regarded as one of the greatest war correspondents of all time.

After the war, Lilio and Clark moved to Pebble Beach, California where he continued to write and they lived happily together until his way-too-young passing of a heart attack in February 1953 at age 46. She returned to Hawaii soon after Clark's passing. She brought Clark with her and he was laid to rest in the Kawānanakoa Family Plot at Oahu Cemetery in October 1953, the first burial in the plot.

Initially she lived on Oahu on Wailupe Circle. And then in June 1956, she acquired 100 acres and a beautiful home in Kona on the Big Island which became her home for most of the rest of her life. As she described it herself: “[i]t all happened very fast. We were vacationing in the Kona District and I went to call on Lalia Ordenstein one afternoon. I fell in love with the house and bought it that afternoon.”

The house was built in 1928 by Mrs. Charles King and Lilio loved the big rooms and high ceilings. She collected the koa furniture of her mother's house which had been scattered and had it brought to the Kona house. “This house reminds me of the one I grew up in and I want some of my mother's things around me.”

The house would have many visitors, and many distinguished visitors, some of whom even stayed overnight, all receiving her special hospitality and aloha. For her it was a place for great company and immense joy.

She married Charles Morris in 1954 and shared the house with him for many years. They divorced in 1958 and remarried again in 1968.

Charles and his brother Wilmer (Bill) both played important roles as friends and advisors throughout these years, as they later did for her daughter Abigail. In her will, Charles was left all of her possessions not specifically bequeathed to others, including the Kona home which they had enjoyed so much.

Lilio Passes

In 1967, she was diagnosed with cancer. She did not let that slow her down and carried on with work to the very end, especially the work on 'Iolani Palace.

She died on May 19, 1969 at her home on Waiholo Street in Kahala. She was 63 years old.

There had been talk of creating a space, most likely a new tomb for her at Mauna 'Ala, as her family tomb, the Kalākaua Crypt was full.

Instead she requested that her funeral be private, without pomp and circumstance. It was at grave site in Nu'uanu Cemetery, three days later on Thursday May 22nd at 11am. She also requested that there be no flowers and that instead that if people wanted to honor her, that they do so with a contribution to 'Iolani Palace.

That request of course was only partially honored. She did not lie in state, there was no big church service for her, and the services were at grave site; all as she requested.

And there were flowers everywhere.

Her copper urn “reposed on a blanket of pansies and violets gathered by the Friends of 'Iolani Palace.” An orange ilima lei (the flower of royalty) rested atop her urn, on her grave strands of pikake and in a fan mauka of the grave site, in her favorite color white, chrysanthemums, anthuriums, orchids, calla lillies, cameillias and peonies.

In attendance were her close friend Governor Jack Burns, Myron Thompson, Kenny Brown, Hebden Porteus, Herman Von Holt, Frank Midkiff and others with her family; her husband Charles Morris, her daughter Abigail, her niece Po‘omaikelani and nephew Edward, and her aunts Alice Kamokila Campbell and Beatrice Wrigley.

The graveside service was conducted by Episcopal Bishop E. Lani Hanchett (a friend and of Hawaiian ancestry) who said “we gratefully recall all that she was and all that she stood for – this child of Hawaii and daughter of royalty, her love for her land and her concern for her people.”

He went on to say “we give thanks for all that she has done to preserve the culture and traditions of Old Hawaii, and for her efforts on behalf of the people of Hawaiian ancestry.”

The Honolulu Star-Bulletin, under the heading “The Queen’s Niece,” noted the “one of her final contributions was to found the Friends of ‘Iolani Palace and to take the lead in the effort to see that the Palace is restored as a fitting memorial to our past.”

And that “[h]er death on Monday night ends this personal link to the royal past and is a cause for statewide sadness.”

In death she now rests with other members of the Kawānanakoa Family, and next to that most special man – the love of her life – Clark Lee.

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