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Tina Koeppé

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, tinakoeppé@yahoo.com

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Women in History— Queen Liliuokalani

Tina Koeppe

In 1982, a bronze statue of Hawaii's last monarch, Queen Liliuokalani, was placed on the state capital grounds in Honolulu. The dedication brochure created for the event, describes Liliuokalani as the "Polynesian chieftess of olden times, in whom centuries of tradition had bred a belief in the sacred bond between a people and their land; the strong-willed, well-educated Victorian monarch who valiantly defended her inherited sovereignty and made it her overriding duty to safeguard and preserve Hawaiian independence."

Liliuokalani was born in Hawaii in 1838 into the family of a high chief. She attended the Royal School, run by American missionaries and received a high quality education and learned to love music, writing and politics. Liliuokalani was given the Christian name "Lydia" as a child. Her brother, Kalakua reigned as king in the late 1800's. During his leadership, Kalakua gave governing power to a cabinet composed of non-Hawaiian members. To Liliuokalani's dismay, this cabinet had succeeded in passing a constitution that gave voting rights to foreign residents but denied the vote to most Hawaiian natives. When Kalakua died in 1891, Liliuokalani inherited the throne and became the Queen of Hawaii.

During her reign, Liliuokalani was determined to restore the power and authority of the crown and saw it as her mission to preserve the islands for the native residents. Many American missionaries and businesspeople had settled in Hawaii during the nineteenth century and as their population grew, they tried to weaken the monarchy and gain political power. Although beloved by the native Hawaiians, the new queen had several factors working against her, including an economy severely damaged by tariffs on Hawaii's sugar industry. The American media at this time was highly political and religious and humiliated the native Hawaiians and Queen Liliuokalani and depicted them as barefoot, uncivilized savages. At various times in her life, Liliuokalani was accused of sorcery, adultery, promiscuity and treason.

Queen Liliuokalani's strategies and tactics included a series of formal written protests that contested how she and her people were represented in the news stories of the time, which were directed at the American public and politicians. All of her forms of resistance were non-violent and sought to express that she was the champion of her people. In 1893, when Queen Liliuokalani tried to institute a new constitution; American businessmen in Hawaii called upon the United States government to intervene. John L.

About the Author

Tina Koeppe is a master's student of textile history specializing in quilts and costume at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She has a BA in English from UNL. Her areas of research include clothing of the 1930's and 1940's, issues of gender and craft, social history, pop culture, art, and ethnography and their relation to textiles. She works as a research assistant in the Department of Clothing and Textile Design at UNL, assisting with the care of the school's historic textile collection." Email: tinakoeppe@yahoo.com.

Stevens, the American minister in Hawaii at the time, ordered troops from the USS Boston ashore, to protect American businesses and property. In 1894, the last reigning monarch of the Hawaiian Islands was forced to give up her throne when Hawaii became part of the United States. A provisional government was established which later became the Republic of Hawaii.

Following an arrest for an alleged uprising, Queen Liliuokalani spent a total of 21 months imprisoned or confined, primarily in conditions where she was prevented from receiving visitors or news. During this time, Liliuokalani spent her days composing traditional style Hawaiian songs and lyrics, as well as beginning to write her book, *Hawaii's Story by Hawaii's Queen*. During her life, Liliuokalani would write more than 200 songs, including the anthem, "Aloha Oe" (also known as "Farewell to Thee").

In 1898 Hawaii was annexed to the United States by a joint congressional resolution. Queen Liliuokalani was released as a private citizen and lived in Honolulu. After her imprisonment, Liliuokalani failed in her attempt to regain the throne, and formally renounced her royal claims. Much of the remainder of her life was spent in the United States, where she unsuccessfully entered against the federal government claims totaling \$450,000 for property and other losses. The territorial legislature of Hawaii finally voted her an annual pension of \$4,000 and permitted her to receive the income from a sugar plantation.

Liliuokalani remained an indomitable spirit, honored and revered by her people as a queen to the end. She died in 1917 at the age of 79 due to complications from a stroke, still waiting for justice. Queen Liliuokalani remains a popular symbol of Hawaiian character and spirit and is a cherished connection to the island's past.

In 1993, U.S. President Bill Clinton signed Public Law 103-150, the "Apology Resolution" to acknowledge the 100th anniversary of the January 17, 1893 overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii, and to offer an apology to Native Hawaiians on behalf of the United States.

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