



# Biography Hawai'i: Five Lives

*A Series of Public Remembrances*



## PRINCESS RUTH KE'ELIKŌLANI HAWAIIAN ALI'I

*by Kalena Silva*

Princess Ruth Ke'elikōlani Keanolani Kanāhoahoa was born in Pohukaina, O'ahu on February 9, 1826, to High Chiefess Pauahi and High Chief Kekūanā'oa. The Princess was a descendant of senior royal lines on both sides of her family, and a great granddaughter of Ka Na'i Aupuni ("The Conqueror of the Nation"), Kamehameha the Great.

Despite her illustrious background, Princess Ke'elikōlani had an extremely trying and difficult personal life. Her mother, Pauahi, died while giving birth to Ke'elikōlani, who was then cared for by Kamehameha's wife, Ka'ahumanu, who herself died six years later. The Princess was then sent to live with her father, Kekūanā'oa, and her stepmother, Kīna'u.

At the tender age of sixteen, Ke'elikōlani married William Pitt Leleiohoku. While serving as governor of Hawai'i Island, Leleiohoku died, only twenty-two years old. His union with the Princess had produced two offspring, only one of whom—William Pitt Kīna'u—survived childhood. Tragically, Kīna'u died at the age of seventeen in an accident on Hawai'i.

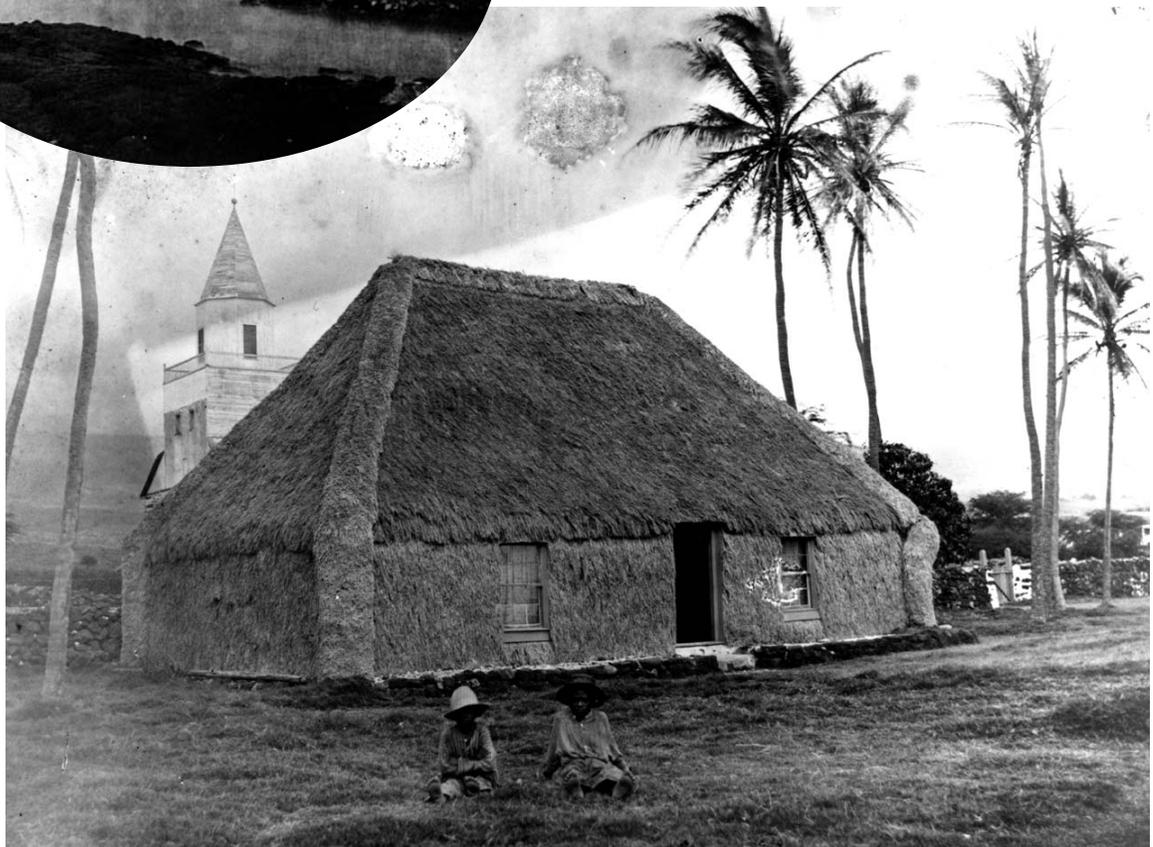
Ke'elikōlani's second husband was the part-Hawaiian Isaac Young Davis, grandson of Isaac Davis, a haole advisor to King Kamehameha the Great. The two had a son, Keolaokalani, whom Ke'elikōlani gave as a hānai to Bernice Pauahi. Ke'elikōlani's husband and her half-brother, Prince Lot Kapuāiwa (Kamehameha V),

strongly objected, but the Princess insisted because of her great fondness for Pauahi. The two men urged Ke'elikōlani to adopt as a legal heir Leleiohoku (named after the Princess's first husband), the youngest of Nā Lani 'Ehā ("The Four Nobles," which also included Kalākaua, Lili'uokalani, and Likelike). Leleiohoku died of pneumonia in 1877—yet another tragic loss for Ke'elikōlani.

During the Princess's lifetime, large numbers of Hawaiians were converting to Christianity, reflecting in part a traditional Hawaiian response to increasing deaths caused by foreign diseases against which Hawaiians had little or no immunity. As traditional Hawaiian worship of the major deities Kū, Kāne, Lono, and Kanaloa had been officially abolished in 1819, Christianity was now the religious means to attain spiritual and physical harmony that, from a traditional Hawaiian perspective, could restore good health to those who were ill. Despite the pressures from haole missionaries and Hawaiians alike, Ke'elikōlani saw value in traditional ways. Determined to uphold the honor of her ancestors, she retained many traditional religious practices. Although she learned English among other subjects at the missionary-run Chief's Children's School, she was a staunch supporter of the Hawaiian language and traditional cultural practices. She insisted that she be addressed only in Hawaiian, requiring non-Hawaiian speakers to use translators if they wished to communicate with her. And despite owning Hulihe'e, a Western-style house in Kailua, Kona, she chose to live in a large, traditional grass home on the same oceanfront property.



HALE'ŌLELO, KE'ELIKŌLANI'S TRADITIONAL HOME IN KAILUA, KONA; INSET: HULIHE'E PALACE IN THE 1860s, PHOTOGRAPHED FROM THE SEASIDE.

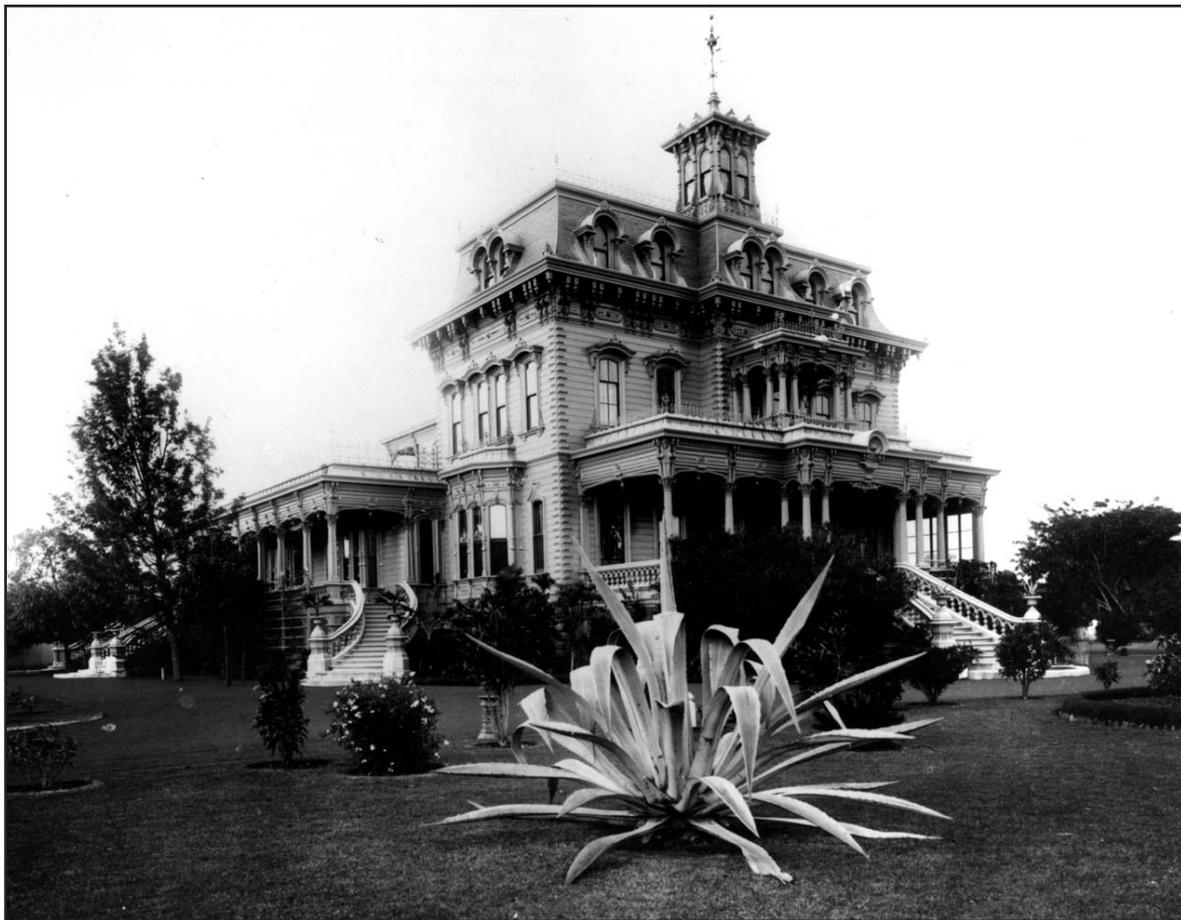


The Princess's adherence to and love for traditional Hawaiian ways was well known among the general Hawaiian populace. In 1881, the people of Hilo town requested that Ke'elikōlani intercede on their behalf by appealing to Pele, the volcano goddess, who was angrily hissing her way to the ocean, threatening all in the way of her fiery lava flow. Hawaiian language newspaper articles of the time reported that the high-born Ke'elikōlani captured the goddess's attention with chanted prayers and offerings, and when these were completed, slept the night in front of the now slowing flow. The next morning, to everyone's great relief and delight, the flow had stopped—in front of the sleeping princess!

In 1883, two years after her miraculous intercession in Hilo, Ke'elikōlani built Keoua, a large, ornate mansion on her land in Honolulu, called Ka'akopua. After the home's celebratory opening later that year, the Princess became very ill. Her doctors strongly recommended that she return to Hulihe'e, her Kailua, Kona residence, where they believed she would more quickly regain her health. It was not to be. On May 24, 1883, Ke'elikōlani died at the age of fifty-seven, in her traditional grass home in Kailua. After her death, Keoua was demolished, and eventually replaced with what is now Central Intermediate School.

Having inherited all of the substantial landholdings of the Kamehamehas from her brother, Lot Kapuāiwa, at her death Ke'elikōlani willed the majority of those lands to Bernice Pauahi, the dearly beloved cousin to whom Ke'elikōlani had also given her child, Keolaokalani, as a hānai.

Many have highlighted Princess Ke'elikōlani's generosity to Pauahi as the Princess's great life achievement, which eventually led to the establishment of the Kamehameha Schools. Increasingly, many also take great inspiration from Ke'elikōlani's personal courage and largeness of spirit, reflected in her unwavering ancestral loyalty, and in her deep and abiding love for the first language and culture of these islands.



KEOUA HALE: "A HANDSOME STRUCTURE OF TWO MAIN STORIES ON A HIGH BASEMENT WITH AN ATTIC STOREY AND A TURRET ABOVE."



# RUTH KE'ELIKOLANI, PO'OLUA CHILD

by *Rubellite Kawena Johnson*

Ruth Ke'elikolani was the *po'olua* ("two heads") child of Kahalaia and Matthew Kekuanaoa. Her mother was Pauahi, who married not only Kahalaia and Kekuanaoa, but also Liholiho, the son of Kamehameha I by Keopuolani. Pauahi had no children by Liholiho.

While Kekuanaoa recognized Ruth Ke'elikolani as a child of his by his first wife, Pauahi, and while Ruth Ke'elikolani is considered the true half-sister of Kekuanaoa's children by Kina'u, daughter of Kamehameha I's marriage to Kaheiheimalie, the sister of Ka'ahumanu, Ruth Ke'elikolani was regarded by her half-brother, Lot Kamehameha, as the daughter of Kahalaia.

Who was Kahalaia, husband of Pauahi, if he was the true father of Ruth Ke'elikolani? Kahalaia was the son of Kahoanoku and Kahakuha'akoi. Kahoanoku was the son of Kamehameha I and Peleulinui. Kahoanoku married Kahakuha'akoi, and had Kahalaia, and a daughter, Kekau'onohi. Kahalaia married Pauahi.

If Ruth Ke'elikolani was the daughter of Kahalaia and Pauahi, she was a great-granddaughter of Kamehameha I. Her half-brother Lot Kamehameha was grandson of Kamehameha I.

On the side, then, of her would-be father Kahalaia and Pauahi, Kalani-pauahi, Ruth Ke'elikolani was directly connected to the Kamehameha ancestry going back to Kaoleioku, *po'okolu* son of (1) Kalaniopu'u, or (2) Kalaimamahu, half-brother of (3) Kamehameha I, with Kanekapolei. Kaoleioku, younger half-brother of the district chief of Ka'u and Puna, Keoua-ku-ahu'ula, is regarded as the first son of Kamehameha I and Kanekapolei. Kanekapolei, wife of Kalaniopu'u, was of the Mahi clan, descended from Liloa.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: KAMEHAMEHA I, KEKUANAO'A. LOT KAMEHAMEHA, RUTH KE'ELIKOLANI WITH HER SON LELEIOHOKU, BERNICE PAUAHU, AND WILLIAM PITT KINA'U.



# RUTA KEANOLANI KAMU'OLAULANI KE'ELIKŌLANI KANĀHOAHOA

## A VIEW FROM HER TIME

by *Puakea Nogelmeier*

Ke'elikōlani was an important figure during her lifetime, known for her high rank in the Kamehameha lineage, her social position as a governor and woman of means, and for her character as a woman of dignity, both strong-willed and kind. She was held in high regard by the general populace, and treated lovingly or respectfully by the ranking chiefs, government officials, and the people of her time.

A great-granddaughter of Kamehameha, a grand-niece to Kamehameha II and III, and a half-sister of Kamehameha IV and V, Ruth Ke'elikōlani was born to Pauahi and Kekūanā'oa. After Pauahi's death, Kekūanā'oa married Kīna'u, and they became the parents of Lot Kapuāiwa, Alexander Liholiho, and Victoria Kamāmalu, making Ke'elikōlani a half-sister to these three. Her two half-brothers each took the throne as adults, with Alexander becoming Kamehameha IV, and Lot following his reign as Kamehameha V. Ruth was the *hiapo*—first born—of the four children of Kekūanā'oa, but in the Kamehameha lineage she was a generation below her three siblings, the children of Kīna'u, through their respective mothers' lines.

Ruth's heritage was controversial. Her mother, Pauahi, was said to be carrying the child of Kāhalai'a when she married Kekūanā'oa. Kekūanā'oa claimed Ke'elikōlani as his own in court, and the matter was officially settled, though it would be debated again in later years, even by her own half-brother, Lot. Her descent from Kamehameha Pai'ea was also contested, and some genealogists claimed that her grandfather, Ka'ōleio kū, was not the son of Kamehameha. Settlement of that question hinged on a quote from Kamehameha that Ka'ōleio kū was "*ka'u keiki o ka wā heu 'ole*—my son from the time of my beardless youth."

As a Kamehameha descendant, Ke'elikōlani was part of the royal family and the court for as long as the Kamehameha dynasty ruled. Following the death of Kamehameha V, William Charles Lunalilo ascended the throne by election in 1873. A Kamehameha through his mother Kekāuluohi, he proclaimed the royal family to consist of himself, his father Kana'ina, Dowager Queen Emma Kaleleonālani, and Ruth Ke'elikōlani. His official royal court included the same four, along with the king's treasurer, H. G. Crabbe. During the subsequent reign of David Kalākaua, Ke'elikōlani was excluded when the royal family and royal court members were announced, a slight that was highly contested in the newspapers of the time, and that was not forgotten by Ruth.

Ke'elikōlani was respected as one of considerable rank, and as time passed, she was said to be "*Ka Pua Alii Kiekie pili pono i ko Kamehameha Hale*—the highest-ranking descendant of Kamehameha's line . . . *ke Alii kahiko aku i ko na Alii e ae a pau*—the chiefess with the most historic lineage of all" (*Ka Nupepa Kuokoa Me Ke Au Okoa I Huiia* 06/02/1883). Throughout her life she was regularly addressed by all as *Ka Mea Ki'eki'e*—Highness. Chiefs and chiefesses who corresponded with her addressed Ke'elikōlani by that title and other honorifics, such as *Ku'u Lani*—My Royal One, *Ku'u Haku*—My Leader, *Ke Ano Lani*—Heavenly Reverence, or *Ke Ali'i*—Chiefess. When mentioned in the press, Ruth was usually listed as *Ka Mea Ki'eki'e*, *Ke Ali'i Ruta Ke'elikōlani*—Her Highness, Chiefess Ruth Ke'elikōlani. Foreigners knew her as "Princess Ruth." Her lineage and position assumed such titles of respect.

By the time King Kalākaua was elected, Ke'elikōlani was the richest woman in the kingdom, having inherited the estates of her parents and siblings. Her relations with Kalākaua were distant, although she had close friendships with his sister, Lili'uokalani, and their mother, Keohokālōle. She was also the adoptive mother of Leleiōhoku, the king's younger brother and heir apparent, whom she had renamed in honor of her first husband. On the death of her adopted son in 1877, she demanded that Kalākaua and his family relinquish all rights to the estates she had bequeathed their brother, and that they be returned to her by deed.

As a ranking chiefess, a Governor of Hawai‘i island, and a woman of wealth and power, her personal retinue was sizable. She often toured the islands with a large entourage, hosted by the people of each district she visited. Such *huaka‘i māka‘ika‘i*—touring journeys—were very much in keeping with traditions of her chiefly ancestors, something that Ke‘elikōlani emulated in many ways. Able to speak and write English, she chose not to. Trained in the Christian religion, she held fast to practices and beliefs that were considered pagan, including her patronage of chanters and hula dancers. After the death of her son, William Pitt Kīna‘u, in 1859, she kept his lead coffin in her house for weeks, with mourners chanting dirges night and day. She insisted on traditional protocols, and took umbrage when they were breached. She questioned Likelike’s right to bear kāhili, or feathered standards, in her presence, and quickly rebuked or dismissed anyone in her sphere who she felt had insulted her. Such a character did not endear Ke‘elikōlani to all, but fascinated many foreigners and Hawaiians of her time. She became an icon to many people, especially the *maka‘āimana*, or common folk, who saw her as a mainstay of tradition in a time of sweeping changes, diminishing population, and loss of customary practices.

Newspapers sporadically made mention of Ke‘elikōlani’s travels, and sometimes included stories about her business affairs or personal life, but the coverage about Ruth was minimal considering her position in Hawaiian society. Huge *‘aha‘aina*, or feasts, like one she hosted in 1859 to honor the birth of Haku o Hawai‘i, were newsworthy but infrequent. Even her famous visit to the volcano in 1881 resulted in only general descriptions, announcing the *makuahine ali‘i*—the royal matron—had gone to visit Pele and to *‘ōlelo kaukau*—offer counsel, later crediting her visit as the likely cause of Hilo’s salvation. The building of Keōua Hale, a mansion larger than King Kalākaua’s new palace, received more press coverage than most of the events in her life.

When she died in 1883 at Hale‘ōlelo, her large native-style home on the grounds of Hulihe‘e Palace in Kailua, Hawai‘i, the news was announced by every paper in the islands. Letters of condolence from her close royal friends were submitted for publication, but no *kanikau*—poetic dirges—appear in the extant newspapers following her death. Unfortunately, many newspaper issues from the last months of her life are missing; more material may have appeared at the time than what exists today in archival sources.

Much of the chiefess’s life was documented outside of the public sphere, and many glimpses of her are found in her correspondence with friends and business agents, or through journal accounts and observations by visiting foreigners. She was an active writer of letters, and encouraged friends and peers to keep up their letters to her. Although she didn’t mingle much in foreign society, she was often mentioned in journal accounts of missionaries, traders, and travellers as a unique and sometimes problematic example of the old chiefly ways. It is mostly through a collage of these private kinds of documentation that the life of Ke‘elikōlani comes to be known.



### *Mele Inoa no Ke‘elikōlani*

*A ka la‘i au i Hulihe‘e  
Nānā nā maka i ka ‘ōpua ua  
I ka la‘i aloha a nā kūpuna  
Noho ana ‘o Kalani lā i ka ‘olu  
I ka ‘olu kāhela a ke Kēhau  
Ka makani aloha ia o ka ‘āina  
‘Āina ua nohoa ke aloha  
A kupa kama‘āina i lāila  
I ka pō mahina la‘ila‘i  
Ka i kāua mai ia‘u  
Ha‘ina ka pua i kaulana  
‘O Keanolani nō he inoa.*

### A Name Song for Ke‘elikōlani

I was in the quietude of Hulihe‘e  
All eyes were drawn to the billowing rain clouds  
There in the beloved solace of the ancestors  
Where the Royal One dwelt in comfort  
In the refreshing sweep of the Kēhau breeze  
That venerated wind of the land  
Land where the beloved one has come to reside  
Becoming a familiar presence there  
Like the still calm of a moonlight night  
That is what causes me to tarry there  
Tell of the descendant that is renowned  
For Keanolani indeed, a name song.

One oki, or section, of fourteen oki printed as a single mele in *Kuokoa & Ke Au Okoa Hui Ia* (06/16/1883). The same mele, with minor variations, was printed in *Ko Hawaii Pae Aina* on the same date. An earlier printing in *Kuokoa & Ke Au Okoa Hui Ia* (06/09/1883) did not contain the full text.

# *Ke'elikōlani Nui*

Words & Music by Kahauanu Lake

Composed for Princess Ruth Ke'elikōlani, daughter of Pauahi, grandchild of Kamehameha the Great, who bequeathed to her cousin, Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop, lands inherited from the Kamehameha family. The estate was founded to support the Kamehameha Schools for boys and girls of Hawaiian ancestry. Bernice Pauahi Bishop was the daughter of Konia and granddaughter of Kamehameha I. Konia and Ruth's mother (also named Pauahi) were sisters. This is the only song ever composed for Princess Ruth.

- |    |   |  |
|----|---|--|
| 1. | O Ke'elikōlani nui<br>'Auhea 'oe<br>'Eia ku'u mele<br>Ho'onani nou.           | Great Ke'elikōlani<br>This is to you<br>Here's my song<br>Of praise for you. |
| 2. | He ammo o na mō'i<br>E hi'ipoi 'ia<br>He mea lokomaika'i<br>A ka lehulehu.    | A descendant of kings<br>Cherished<br>A benefactor<br>Of the multitude.      |
| 3. | Ka wahine o Hulihe'e<br>I Kailua-Kona<br>Ka home o na lani<br>O Hawai'i nei.  | The lady of Hulihe'e<br>Of Kailua-Kona<br>The home of royalty<br>Of Hawai'i. |
| 4. | He makana o ka 'āina<br>No Pauahi kaukini<br>I ho'ona'auao<br>Na kamali'i nei | A gift of land<br>For cousin Pauahi<br>To educate<br>The children here.      |
| 5. | E Ke'elikōlani nui<br>E o mai 'oe<br>'Eia ku'u mele<br>Ho'onani nou.          | Great Ke'elikōlani<br>Respond<br>Here's my song<br>Of praise for you.        |



"KE'ELIKŌLANI NUI" MAY BE HEARD ON NA MELE 'AUHAU—SONGS OF TRIBUTE, FEATURING THE KAHUANU LAKE SINGERS. THE SONG APPEARS HERE BY KIND PERMISSION OF MR. LAKE AND HULA RECORDS.

## CONTRIBUTORS

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*Biography Hawai'i: Five Lives* gratefully acknowledges the Hawai'i State Archives as the source of the photos appearing in this guide.

More information about Ke'elikōlani can be found in the following publications:

Kanahele, George He'eu Sanford. *Pauahi: The Kamehameha Legacy*. Honolulu: The Kamehameha Schools, 1986.

Stokes, John F. G. "Kaoleioku: Paternity and Biographical Sketch." *The Hawaiian Historical Society Forty Third Annual Report* (for 1934). Honolulu: 1935: 15–44.

Zambucka, Kristin. *The High Chiefess Ruth Keelikolani*. Honolulu: Mana 1977.

# Biography Hawai'i: Documentary Lives & Public Events

*Biography Hawai'i* is a television documentary series that focuses on residents whose lives have had a lasting impact on these islands. Featuring people from different ethnic groups and walks of life, but with an emphasis on Hawaiian subjects, *Biography Hawai'i* will appeal to a statewide and national audience through the informative and engaging format of visual biography.

The primary sponsoring organizations are Hawai'i Public Television and the Center for Biographical Research of the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. For more than a quarter of a century, Hawai'i Public Television has produced and provided programs that enlighten, enrich, and entertain the island community. The Center for Biographical Research is dedicated to the interdisciplinary and multicultural study of life writing through teaching, publication, and outreach activities.

The first six subjects will be Margaret Maiki Aiu Lake, Harriet Bouslog, Koji Ariyoshi, Princess Ruth Ke'elikōlani, Prince Jonah Kūhiō Kalaniana'ole, and Sanford B. Dole.

*Biography Hawai'i: Five Lives* is a series of life history presentations cosponsored by the Center for Biographical Research and the King Kamehameha V—Judiciary History Center. These events commemorate people from diverse backgrounds, time periods, and cultural positions who have had lasting impacts on Hawai'i's history, culture, and society. The subjects for these biographical explorations are Harriet Bouslog, Prince Jonah Kūhiō Kalaniana'ole, Princess Ruth Ke'elikōlani, Sanford B. Dole, and Margaret Maiki Aiu Lake. The public events feature discussions and commentary enhanced by readings, performance, and audiovisual material. Historical displays and informational guides complement the public events, which encourage a look at Hawai'i's history, culture, and society through the lens of biography.

For more information about either program, contact the Center for Biographical Research, 1800 East-West Road, Henke Hall 325, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96822; telephone/fax: 808 956-3774; [biograph@hawaii.edu](mailto:biograph@hawaii.edu).

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Humanities



*If you enjoyed this evening,  
please join us for*

**Sanford B. Dole**

Thursday, October 3, 7:00–9:00

The King Kamehameha V —  
Judiciary History Center

UPCOMING NOVEMBER 14:

*Aunti Maiki Aiu Lake*

Center for Biographical Research  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96822 USA