

## Interpreting Women's History

Three national parks on the Big Island of Hawai'i, Pu'uhonua o Hōnaunau National Historical Park (NHP), Pu'ukoholā Heiau National Historic Site (NHS), and Kaloko-Honokōhau National Historical Park (NHP), are currently developing Comprehensive Interpretive Plans. The interpretation of women within the context of Hawaiian history and living culture is considered a primary concern.

Pu'uhonua o Hōnaunau NHP is the oldest park, established in 1955. It has a visitor center, amphitheater, trails, and other visitor facilities. Pu'ukoholā Heiau NHS, established in 1972, has "temporary" facilities, but a 1989 Development Concept Plan calls for a new visitor center, trails, and wayside exhibits. Kaloko-Honokōhau NHP is the newest park, established in 1978, and has a recently approved visitor center facility, recreated Hawaiian village, and a center for the practice and perpetuation of Hawaiian culture.

In spite of differences in levels and amounts of visitor services, visitor experience and interpretive challenges face all three parks. These include

- Providing opportunities for visitors who are not Hawaiian to gain an appreciation for Hawaiian culture
- Providing opportunities for native Hawaiian visitors to renew or strengthen their cultural tie through the perpetuation of Hawaiian culture (language, dance, music, crafts, games)
- Promoting respect for living culture
- Meeting the needs of visitors who have only cursory knowledge or understanding of Hawaiian history, culture or language
- Promoting safe and responsible visitor actions, especially appreciation and protection of the sacred nature and "spirit" of the archeological sites (especially temples and burials) and cultural landscape

Part of the current planning effort involves the development of interpretive themes. Themes are ideas that are critical for visitor understanding and appreciation for the park's purpose and significance. Interpretive themes are the key stories that every visitor needs to know while visiting the park. An additional challenge, then, is the integration of Hawaiian women's history into each park's interpretive program.

The following aspects of women's roles and contributions to Hawaiian society (economic, reli-

gious, social) provide context and are common to interpretive themes at all three parks.

- Hawaiian society was complex with strictly defined economic, religious and social roles for women.
- Goddesses, *Akua Wahine*, of which Hina is the prototype representing the attributes of women, are part of Hawaiian theology.
- All genealogies of Hawaiian *ali'i*, or the ruling class of chiefs and royalty considered to be of divine origin, go back to an original couple, *Wākea* (the man) and *Papa* (the woman).
- The most crucial aspect of a woman's station in life was her social rank.
- *Kapu*, meaning both "sacred" and "forbidden," referred to the Hawaiian system of tabu and prohibition. This system contained sanctions regarding behavior between individuals (including men and women) and among classes (royalty and commoners); among other sanctions, men and women did not eat together and lived apart most of the time. This system provided social control and conservation of resources in Hawai'i.
- Several royal men and women were the instigators of the overthrow of *kapu*, the indigenous religion, in 1819. These women promoted the subsequent spread of western ideas and Christianity throughout the Hawaiian kingdom.
- Generally, Hawaiian women were not involved primarily with the production of food; they made mats and *tapa* cloth and personal ornaments.

Each of the three Hawaiian cultural parks on Hawai'i have the cultural and natural resources to illustrate individual stories, as well as provide broader contexts regarding Hawaiian culture.

### *Pu'uhonua o Hōnaunau NHP*

The Hawaiian concept of sanctuary, *pu'uhonua*, that offered people a second chance at life is the primary story at this park. In the centuries before 1819, Hawaiian people—men, women, and children—caught in circumstances such as being on the losing side in war, or being defeated in battle, or inadvertently breaking *kapu*, could escape a death sentence if they could physically get to the *pu'uhonua*. A priest, *kahuna pule*, would perform a ceremony of absolution and the defeated warrior or law breaker could return home safely. In addition to being the site of a *pu'uhonua*,

the *ahupua`a* (traditional Hawaiian land division) of Hōnaunau was the residence of ruling chiefs of Kona. With its bountiful food and drinking water supplies, Hōnaunau supported both royalty and commoners.

There is a stone in the park that is associated with a female member of the Kamehameha family. Ka`ahumanu stone served as a hiding place for Ka`ahumanu after she quarreled with her husband, Kamehameha the Great. After the death of her husband in 1819, Ka`ahumanu proclaimed herself *kuhina nui*, or regent. She shared rule over Hawai`i with her stepson Kamehameha II (Liholiho), the son of Kamehameha and Keopuolani. Ka`ahumanu and Keopuolani, together with Liholiho, initiated the abolishment of the *kapu* system. Beginning with breaking the restriction against men and women eating the same foods at the same table, and followed by the destruction of temples and images throughout the kingdom, the traditional religious practices of Hawai`i were abandoned.

Ka`ahumanu and Keopuolani also played crucial roles in the admission and acceptance of American missionaries in the Hawaiian kingdom. Keopuolani, the highest-born woman in Hawai`i and the mother of two kings, converted in 1823. After Ka`ahumanu's conversion to Christianity she enforced many of the religious dictates of the missionary cause. The Reverend Hiram Bingham, a missionary originally from Vermont, taught her to read and write. After Ka`ahumanu's death in 1832, Hawaiian leaders were unsuccessful in an attempt to regain native Hawaiian control of the islands, and foreigners continued to influence the Hawaiian government.

Another park resource, the Hale o Papa, or *Heiau No Na Wahine*, was used by royal women who were not permitted to worship the gods of the men, or to touch or eat foods which were acceptable offerings to the male gods. There are different

interpretations regarding how this feature was used, either as a women's *heiau*, or as a place of seclusion for chiefly women during menstruation.

The opportunity exists at Pu`uhonua o Hōnaunau NHP to interpret women's worship, the strictures of *kapu* regarding women, the penalties for women who break *tabu* and how they could receive absolution in the *pu`uhonua*, and the activities of women in the abolishment of *kapu* and the adoption of Christianity in the Hawaiian kingdom.

#### *Pu`ukoholā Heiau NHS*

The founding of the Hawaiian kingdom can be directly associated with one structure in the Hawaiian islands—Pu`ukoholā Heiau. Built in 1790-91 by Kamehameha the Great together with chiefs and commoners, the temple was to incur the favor of the war god Kūka`ilimoku. As stranded British sailor John Young looked on, the temple was built and dedicated, a chief rival was sacrificed, and the war god Kū was pleased. Kamehameha the Great waged several subsequent battles using Western military strategy and weapons to extend his control over all Hawaiian islands. The monarchy he established lasted 83 years.

John Young became a trusted advisor and associate to Kamehameha, who named him governor of the island of Hawai`i from 1802-1812. Young advised the ruler on military, economic, and commercial matters, and he supervised trade with ships at Kawaihae Bay for foreign goods. Young, his wife Ka`oana`eha, and their children lived in the first Western-style house in the islands, built in 1798.

Pelekane is the site of a royal compound on the shore to the northwest of Mailekini Heiau. The area contained the royal residence and housing for nobility comprising the royal court for generations of Hawaiian ruling chiefs. The second Hawaiian monarch, Kamehameha II (Liholiho) had a royal residence in Pelekane in 1819. Pelekane is also the birthplace of Queen Emma (granddaughter of John Young and wife of Kamehameha IV) who founded the Queen's Hospital and introduced the Episcopal Church into Hawai`i.

There are several opportunities for interpreting Hawaiian women's activities at Pu`ukoholā Heiau NHS. The historic site is principally associated with a "great man," but the John Young household and the royal residences illustrated facets of women's lives as well.

#### *Koloko-Honokōhau National Historic Park*

Composed of pre- and post-contact lava flows from Hualalai Volcano, the landscape at Kaloko-Honokōhau NHP looks harsh and incapable of supporting life. But there is plant and animal life here, and this land and its physical spirituality supported human life for a thousand years. The

*Pu`uhonua o  
Hōnaunau NHP*



Hawaiian people who settled at the *ahupua`a* of Kaloko and Honokōhau adapted to their natural surroundings, maintained a balance in their use of food sources, and conducted their lives with respect for survival.

Each *ahupua`a*, moving from sea to mountain, contained areas for fishing, living spaces with inshore marine resources and underground springs, crop production, timber cutting, and hunting. The Hawaiian people lived in self-sustaining communities with fresh and brackish water supplies, sea and fishpond harvests, and upland cultivation of sweet potatoes, taro, breadfruit, and coconuts. Early Hawaiians practiced environmental adaptation through the construction of the fishponds, agricultural planters, and walled enclosures, and took advantage of the natural food sources. Subsistence activities were balanced with creative and religious activities.

Archeological evidence of Hawaiian habitation and cultural activities throughout the park is extremely rich and varied. There are more than 205 recorded archeological sites within the boundary and another 200 sites noted. Two fishponds were built circa 1400-1600, and the Kaloko area supported a large population of both commoners and royalty, including members of the Kamehameha family. But more than just a collection of archeological sites, as a whole the park consists of tangible, physical expressions of past culture with numerous intangible associations of ongoing living culture. These associations include

language, religion, dances, crafts, family systems and a socio-economic system of sharing and cooperation.

The activities of both royal and common Hawaiian women at Kaloko and Honokōhau are linked to the landscape and to the living culture. Interpretive opportunities at the park are almost limitless concerning women's life cycles, religion, clothing, genealogy, production of utilitarian items, and cultural values, status, interpersonal relations with men, and other topics.

Scholarly analysis and discussion of women's ideology and behavior is ongoing. Still unknown or debated is the extent to which Hawaiian women participated in agriculture, the amount of freedom women had in practice, the level to which women pursued their own personal and political interests, and the extent of men's control over women. As interpretive planning at the three parks is finalized and recommendations implemented, it will be the responsibility of interpreters to evaluate and incorporate scholarship about pre- and post-contact Hawaiian women into personal services programs and media. Hopefully, the interpretation of Hawaiian women's history at Pu`uhonua o Hōnaunau NHP, Pu`ukoholā Heiau NHS, and Kaloko-Honokōhau NHP will stimulate the creativity and imagination of all visitors.

#### Sources

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## Preserving Hawai`i's Traditional Landscapes

The University of Hawai`i at Mānoa's Historic Preservation Program, in cooperation with the National Park Service (Pacific Great Basin Support Unit) has completed an edited set of proceedings from the 1995 conference "Preserving Hawai`i's Traditional Landscapes." Including talks by leading cultural resources experts Samuel Stokes, Elizabeth Watson, and Charles Birnbaum, the proceedings also include panels by many local preservationists and others interested in the problems implicit in preserving cultural landscapes. Those interested in receiving copies should contact:

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