

Kaumuali'i Returns to Waimea

By Léo Azambuja

Nearly two centuries after being kidnapped from his home island, King Kaumuali'i returned home to Waimea, Kaua'i's Westside. He is now forever watching over his kingdom, which once encompassed Kaua'i, Ni'ihau, Nihoa, Lehua and Ka'ula.

“Beloved by his people, respected by foreigners, Pā'ulu'ula is his legacy. Dedicated 2021 by the Friends of King Kaumuali'i,” said Native Hawaiian linguist Keao NeSmith, reading the plaque on the pedestal of an 8-foot-tall bronze statue of King Kamuali'i unveiled at Pā'ulu'ula (next to Russian Fort Elizabeth) in Waimea March 20.

Kaumuali'i's statue was a long-time-coming project envisioned by the Friends of King Kaumuali'i, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to honor Kaua'i's last king by building awareness of his reign and his role in Hawaiian history, creating educational and cultural programs for locals and visitors, and also erecting a statue of the king.

The statue rests on a six-foot stone pedestal, and faces the ocean, aligning exactly with the spring and autumn equinoxes.

“He is facing where we should be facing, he is facing the setting of the sun,” said Native Hawaiian linguist Keao NeSmith, adding an old ʻōlelo (Hawaiian tale) refers to Ni'ihau as “the island that snatches the sun.” On the day before the statue's unveiling, it was spring equinox, and the sun sank behind the Forbidden Island.

“This is the beginning to correct the story of Pā'ulu'ula, the Hawaiian story,” said Kumu Kehaulani Kekua, who along with NeSmith helped to emcee the unveiling ceremony attended by about 50 dignitaries, including the Friends of King Kaumuali'i Board of Directors, a few hula halau, a representative from the



Left to right, Friends of King Kaumuali'i Board President Aletha Kaohi, sculptor and Board Member Saim Caglayan and Board Treasurer Maureen Fodale. Photo by Léo Azambuja

governor, Mayor Derek Kawakami, former Mayor Bernard Carvalho Jr. and many others who contributed to make the statue a reality.

Kaumuali'i was born in 1778 or 1780 (historians differ on the exact year) to Chiefess Kamakahelei and her husband, Ka'eokūlani. His lineage gave him the strongest mana, or divine power, among all chiefs of his time.

Kaumuali'i's father was the younger brother of Maui high chief Kahekili (short for Kane-hekili, or God of Thunder), who once controlled all islands, except for the Big Island. With half his body tattooed in black, Kahekili instilled fear on his enemies. He was known for skills in war, statecraft and oratory, and also for his cruelty to his enemies, including roasting them in an oven. Kamehameha never defeated Kahekili in battle, and suffered heavy losses trying. Maui only fell to Kamehameha after Kahekili's death of old age.

On his mother's side, Kaumuali'i also inherited a strong mana. Kamakahelei was the great-granddaughter of Kualii, once the ruling ali'i of Kaua'i, O'ahu, Molokai, Lāna'i and Maui. Kualii's son, Pelei'ōhōlani, ruled Kaua'i, reporting only to his father. When Kualii died, Pelei'ōhōlani moved to O'ahu, leaving behind his daughter, Ka'apuwai, as the governor of Kaua'i. Ka'apuwai married Kaua'i chief Ka'umeheiwā. Both were direct descendants of high chief Kalanikukuma, so their daughter, Kamakahelei, inherited a strong mana.

Before Kaumuali'i's father returned to Maui in 1791, summoned by Kahekili, he named Kaumuali'i as his rightful heir. Ka'eokūlani would die in battle on O'ahu



Kaeo Bradford's hula halau was one of few halau that honored King Kaumuali'i during the unveiling of the king's statue in Waimea. Photo by Léo Azambuja



King Kaumuali'i's statue at Pā'ula'ula faces Ni'ihau. Photo by Léo Azambuja

in December 1794, after being betrayed by two of his men, Ki'ikikī and Kai'awa. Kamakahelei is believed to have died in mid-1794. Not much is written about the circumstances of her death.

Still a young teenager and already an orphan, Kaumuali'i was too young to rule, so a chief named Inamo'o was placed as a regent to govern Kaua'i. Inamo'o's rule, too, was short-lived; he died in 1794. Soon after Inamo'o's death, Kaumuali'i was kidnapped by his older half-brother, Keawe, who proclaimed himself ali'i nui of Kaua'i. Keawe sided with Ki'ikikī, who had settled on Kaua'i and was in possession of western guns. Ki'ikikī would also betray Keawe, shooting him dead in Kapa'a. Ki'ikikī's brother, Kāne'eku, tried to persuade him to shoot and kill Kaumuali'i as well, but he decided he would rather keep the chief alive and control him.

Knowing Ki'ikikī was a threat, the king convinced Nākaikua'ana, one the traitor's friends, to steal his guns while he surfed in Makaweli. Powerless without his weapons, Ki'ikikī and his brother fled to O'ahu, where they were followed and killed by Nākaikua'ana. It was 1796, and Kaumuali'i was finally free to govern Kaua'i.

However, Nākaikua'ana returned from O'ahu with bad news: Kamehameha — now ruler of the Big Island, Maui, Molokai, Lāna'i and O'ahu — was about to invade Kaua'i. In the spring of 1796, Kamehameha sailed with a large army to Kaua'i. But a powerful storm sank many canoes in mid-channel, and the surviving warriors returned to O'ahu. There are accounts of a few warriors — or as many as a thousand — landing on Kaua'i and being quickly defeated.

A rebellion on the Big Island forced Kamehameha to abandon his plans to conquer Kaua'i, but only temporarily. By 1804, he put together the largest warring fleet ever in Hawai'i, with several large peleleu — long, double-hulled canoes fitted with Western sails and guns — and many smaller schooners. However, a Western disease (either typhoid, dysentery, bubonic plague or smallpox) swept through O'ahu, killing many of Kamehameha's warriors. Kamehameha himself got sick, but survived. To Kaumuali'i, this wasn't luck, but an answer from the Hawaiian gods to his prayers, regarded as very powerful throughout the entire archipelago.

“After the pestilence a single thought occupied the mind of Kamehameha and that of all the people, that was the adding of Kaua’i-o-Mano to the kingdom. Kaua’i was noted for the religious character of its people, hence the name “Kaua’i of strong prayers” (Kaua’ipule’o). Kalaunuiohua, the ambitious chief of Hawai’i who had attempted to seize Kaua’i, was routed in battle outside Ka’ie’iewaho and taken prisoner to Kaua’i by Kukona. Kamehameha had heard these old stories and about the powerful prayer called ‘Ane’ekapuahi belonging to Kamakahalei, mother of Kaumuali’i,” the late historian Samuel M. Kamakau wrote in his book, *The Ruling Chiefs of Hawai’i*.

Hawaiians believed Kamakahalei used the ‘ane’ekapuahi to pray people to death, usually by burning. Even after her death, Kamakahalei’s reputation continued to protect her people, as her prayer still haunted those who intended harm on Kaua’i.

Kamehameha never again sent troops to Kaua’i. In 1810, he met with Kaumuali’i, who agreed to serve as a vassal king to Kamehameha, thus avoiding war and bloodshed. Some historians, however, question Kaumuali’i’s full loyalty to Kamehameha. He paid tributes when pressed for it, but also acquired an arsenal of Western weapons, and forged a short-lived alliance with a foreigner that resulted in three forts being built on Kaua’i.

In November 1815, Russian-speaking German physician Georg Anton Schaeffer, a stockholder of the Russian-American Company, arrived on O’ahu aboard the Russian ship *Isabella*. The crew were to bring back the cargo of the Russian-American Company ship *Bering*, which had sunk near Waimea, Kaua’i the previous winter. While on O’ahu, Schaeffer won the trust of Kamehameha and Queen Ka’ahumanu. He was even given land that included the entire Waikīkī area and more. By May 1816, however, Schaeffer’s welcome on O’ahu was completely extinguished, and he sailed to Kaua’i. On the Garden Isle, Schaeffer quickly befriended Kaumuali’i and became the king’s advisor. He was given land



Mayor Derek Kawakami is seen here presenting a mayoral proclamation to Friends of King Kaumuali’i President Aletha Kaohi in Waimea, March 20. Photo by Léo Azambuja

extending from Ke'e Beach to Hanalei, and renamed that entire land as Schefferthal.

During Schaeffer's time on Kaua'i, Kaumuali'i built three forts: Fort Alexander in Princeville overlooking Hanalei Bay; Fort Barclay, close to Hanalei Pier; and the biggest one, Fort Elizabeth, on the east bank of Waimea River.

Kaumuali'i was born at a sacred birthsite in Wailua, Kaua'i's Eastside, but he ruled Kaua'i mostly from Waimea, where he kept his main residence at Papa'ena'ena, on the hillside of Waimea Village.



Saim Caglayan is seen here in 2014 working on a maquette of King Kaumuali'i's statue, while Keao NeSmith poses. Photo by Léo Azambuja

Fort Elizabeth was built in late 1816 adjacent to Pā'ulu'ula o Hipo Heiau, an important heiau (sacred site), giving the fort the same mana the heiau had. Rocks from the heiau were used in the construction of the fort's walls, towering at 12 feet. More than a thousand Hawaiians and at least two of Kaumuali'i's queens participated in the construction.

The fort was about 300 feet in diameter, and was equipped with six or seven canons around its perimeter. A building outside the fort was used as a trading house to store sandalwood. Inside the fort, there was a flagstaff, a guardroom, an armory enclosing an underground pit, an officers' quarters, a large barrack measuring 80 feet by 30 feet, and a couple other buildings.

The friendship between the king and Schaeffer came to an end in late May 1817, after a string of events showed Kaumuali'i — still a vassal king to Kamehameha — that it would be wise to disassociate himself from the German doctor. Things got worse for Schaeffer in early July after Russian Navy Capt. Otto von Kotsebue arrived on the Big Island and told Kamehameha that Russian Czar Alexander had no plans for territorial claims in Hawai'i. Kotsebue also lied to Kamehameha that Czar Alexander had never heard of Schaeffer. Furthermore, British and American captains spread false rumors that the United States and Russia were at war, and American troops would come to Kaua'i to evict the Russians.

Discredited and isolated, Schaeffer fled to O'ahu aboard the badly leaking Russian-American ship Kadiak. Schaeffer was rescued along with two of his closest men by an American captain whose abscessed tooth he had once extracted. The rest of his crew were rescued a month later by a Russian ship, which also delivered an official apology to Kamehameha for Schaeffer overstepping his authority.

Kamehameha died in 1819. Two years later, his son and successor, Liholiho, Kamehameha II, cunningly kidnapped Kaumuali'i aboard his luxury schooner. After spending 42 days touring Kaua'i alongside Kaumuali'i, Liholiho invited the king aboard the Ha'aheo o Hawai'i. After dinner, Kaumuali'i was locked in a room, and the ship sailed to O'ahu. There, Kaumuali'i was given the option to marry Ka'ahumanu, Kamehameha's widow and now co-ruler of Hawai'i, or be killed and have his kingdom taken over.

Kaumuali'i didn't have much of a choice. He would return to Kaua'i for a brief visit a few months later, in the company of Ka'ahumanu, but remained loyal to his deal. He went back to O'ahu and never returned to Kaua'i. He died May 26, 1824, and was buried four days later at Waine'e Church (now Waiola Church) in Lahaina, Maui, at the feet of Queen Keōpūolani, according to his wish.

The Russian fort was only dismantled in 1864, by order of the Hawaiian government. The area was later used for cattle grazing and sugar cane fields. In the second half of the 20th century, the state Department of Land and Natural Resources took over the fort, and it was included in the National Historic Registry. Dr. Peter Mills, who was present at the unveiling ceremony, conducted an extensive archaeological study on the fort, and wrote a book about it, *Hawai'i's Russian Adventure*. For many decades, the West Kaua'i Business and Professional Association has helped to maintain the fort and its surrounding land.



Painting of Kaumuali'i by Brook Parker

The Friends of King Kaumuali'i was formed in 2004, with the goal to erect a statue honoring Kaumuali'i. But there are no known portraits of him made while he was alive, and the idea was eventually put in the backburner. In 2012, author Lee B. Croft sent a file to For Kaua'i Newspaper owner Barbara Bennet — who was with the group from its very beginning — containing a painting of King Kaumuali'i made by artist Brook Kapūkuniahī Parker. That painting inspired Bennett and board president Aletha Kaohi to reorganize the group and fundraise for the statue. Late board member Stu Burley asked world-renowned sculptor and Kalihiwai resident Saim Caglayan to sculpt a statue of the king. NeSmith, who posed for the painting, also posed for the statue.



Governor's liaison Carrice Caspillo-Gardner is seen here reading a proclamation from Gov. David Ige through his liaison, while Keal NeSmith listens. Photo by Léo Azambuja

For Kaua'i Newspaper made an initial push by fundraising for the statue, and published at least three cover stories about the project. Former Mayor Bernard Carvalho Jr. proclaimed 2013 the Year of King Kaumuali'i. The Hindu Monastery in Wailua printed and donated 3,000 posters of King Kaumuali'i, portraying Parker's painting, that were distributed by the state Department of Education to every single classroom on Kaua'i. All this contributed to bring awareness to the project.

At the unveiling ceremony, Kekua recognized all who helped the statue to become a reality, including state Rep. Dee Morikawa and state Sen. Ron Kouchi for securing a \$220,000 grant for the statue.

Among so many people involved in the project, Kaohi was instrumental in bringing the project to fruition, putting a lot of effort and time since the beginning. As the board president of Friends of King



The Friends of King Kaumuali'i Board right before the statue's unveiling. Photo by Léo Azambuja

Kaumuali'i, she accepted a proclamation from Gov. David Ige through his liaison, Carrice Caspillo-Gardner, during the ceremony.

NeSmith also recognized Kaohi's journey and dedication.

"Auntie Aletha Kaohi has been very busy all of her life dedicating herself to the heritage of Kaua'i, particularly Waimea. She comes from a lineage of kupuna who are also very much invested in their community here in Waimea," NeSmith said.

Visit www.kauaikingkaumualii.org for more information.