

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

A Royal Palace in America

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<http://www.AmericasLivingHistory.com>

September 25, 2007 – When asked about Hawaii’s Native Peoples, what do you envision? Lilted music? The hula? A flower necklace? Few outside of Hawai’i would think of an elegant, European-style palace. And yet, kings and queens ruled the former island nation until their monarchy was overthrown in 1893. The last two lived like European royalty, gaining international respect and maintaining their independence longer than many thought was possible. Today their former Honolulu residence welcomes tourists every Tuesday through Saturday, except major holidays.

The Palace is called ‘Iolani – pronounced ee-oh-LAH-nee – which means “heavenly hawk” in the Hawaiian language. Set back from the main street and surrounded by a tree-shaded park, it might not catch the average tourist’s attention. But anyone who visits Honolulu and does not stop here has missed something grand.

Hawaiian Royalty

‘Iolani Palace was built in 1882 by King Kalakaua (kah-lah-COH-ah), who came to the throne in 1874. Descended from a very powerful royal family, Kalakaua was courted by world leaders and became active in the international community. He was the first ruling monarch (from anywhere) to visit an American President and the first to take a world tour.

Inspired by the palaces he saw while traveling, King Kalakaua decided to construct his own grand residence, blending European designs and Hawaiian culture. While the building was smaller than its counterparts, the stately elegance and fine craftsmanship were noteworthy. In addition, ‘Iolani Palace contained the most up-to-date amenities, including indoor plumbing, telephone communications and electric lighting (years before electricity was installed in the White House or Buckingham Palace). It became the primary residence of the royal family and the center of both social and political life for the Kingdom of Hawai’i.

After the King’s death in 1891, his sister, Lili’uokalani (lee-lee-oo-oh-KAH-lah-nee), ascended to the throne. However, a short but successful revolution led by non-Hawaiians removed the Queen from office two years later. The resulting

republic ended the long reign of Hawaiian royalty, and the new leadership took 'Iolani Palace as its headquarters. The Palace continued to serve as a government building until the late 1960s, when the state of Hawai'i finally vacated it.

Today's Magnificent Palace

A remarkable restoration in the 1970s brought back the opulence of America's only official royal residence. Although most of the royal possessions had been sold at public auction long ago, the historical society has managed to recover a substantial number of original furnishings and personal items. Individual pieces have come from donations and purchases in 38 states and four foreign countries. They include glassware from Australia, a table from the Iowa Governor's mansion, and even a chair discovered in a local thrift shop. Today, as the quest for original furnishings and artifacts continues, the Palace is nearing the completion of its latest restoration.

Take a docent-led Grand Tour or a self-guided Audio Tour, both of which include the ancient regalia and crown jewels displayed in the Palace Galleries. The main floor of 'Iolani Palace includes the Throne Room and public spaces where the King and Queen engaged in government affairs, dined and entertained. The Grand Staircase leads to private quarters on the second floor and is a work of art in itself, carved of Hawaiian Koa wood. Upstairs is King Kalakaua's bedroom, decorated with some of his favorite possessions. It connects to his library of books and correspondence with important people in Europe, Asia and America. Also upstairs are the rooms of his wife, Queen Kapi'olani (kah-pee-oh-LAH-nee), and his sister, the future Queen Lili'uokalani.

'Iolani Palace is located at South King and Richard Streets, in what is now the capitol district of downtown Honolulu on the island of O'ahu. Admission is charged for the building tours. Entry to the park grounds is free. For further information, go to <http://www.iolanipalace.org/>

Nearby Bishop Museum

We recommend also taking a short drive from 'Iolani Palace to the Bishop Museum at 1525 Bernice Street. Here you'll see priceless artifacts, royal heirlooms and cultural objects representing Native Hawaiian, Pacific Island and Hawai'i immigrant life. Among them are the feather capes and royal standards of Hawaiian kings as well as items made of tapa "cloth" (a papery material created from the inner bark of the Mulberry tree).

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