

Queen Emma



January 2 marks the anniversary of the birthday of Queen Consort Emma, wife of Kamehameha IV and one of the most influential figures in Hawaiian history. Once a candidate for the royal throne, Emma became known and loved for her humanitarian efforts throughout the Islands.

Emma Kalanikaumakaamano Kaleleonālani Naea Rooke was born on January 2, 1836, the daughter of High Chief George Naea and Chiefess Fanny Kekelaokalani Young. Her maternal grandparents were John “Olohana” Young, Kamehameha I’s British-born royal advisor and companion, and Ka’oana’eha, the niece of Kamehameha I. Emma’s paternal grandfather was Keli‘imaika‘i, the half-brother of Kamehameha I.

In accordance with the traditional Hawaiian custom, Emma was given at birth as a *hānai* to her maternal aunt, the High Chiefess Grace Kamaikui Young, and her husband, Dr. Thomas Charles Byde Rooke, an English physician who served in the court of King Kamehameha III and was a member of the Church of England.

While Dr. Rooke raised Emma to be very British, her aunt Grace raised her to be Hawaiian as well. She learned about the world from her scholarly father, with the help of many letters from her paternal grandmother in England, who instructed Dr. Rooke on how to raise Emma properly. The British did not indulge children, while the Hawaiians did. Dr. Rooke did his best not to allow Emma to be spoiled rotten by her *hānai* mother, whom she affectionately called “Kiawai.”

Emma grew up speaking both Hawaiian and English, the latter “with a perfect English accent.” She began her formal schooling at age 5 at the Chief’s Children’s School, which was later named the Royal School, where she was quick and bright in her studies. When Emma was 13, Dr. Rooke hired an English governess, Sarah Rhodes von Pfister, to tutor her. He also encouraged Emma to read from his extensive library. As a writer, he influenced Emma’s interest in reading and books. By the time she was 20 years old, she was a beautiful and accomplished young woman.

In 1856, she married Alexander Liholiho, who ascended the throne one year earlier as Kamehameha IV, in an Anglican service at Kawaiaha’o Church. Two years later, in 1858, Emma gave birth to a son, Albert Edward Kauikeaouli Leiopapa a Kamehameha. In 1862, Emma was baptized into the Anglican faith as “Emma Alexandrina Francis Agnes Lowder Byde Rooke Young Kaleleokalani.”

Following the death of both her son and husband, Queen Emma took a new name, “Kaleleonālani,” which means “flight of the heavenly chiefs,” and dedicated herself to many worthy causes, among them, organizing a hospital auxiliary of women to help with the ill. She also established two schools for girls, St. Andrew’s Priory in Honolulu and St. Cross on Maui. Emma’s work also included the capital development campaign of St. Andrew’s Cathedral, where she even journeyed several times to England where she and her friend, Queen Victoria, raised \$30,000 for the construction of the cathedral.

When King Lunalilo died in 1874, Emma became a candidate for the throne. Lunalilo had wanted her to succeed him, but he failed to make the legal pronouncement before he died. Had he done so, she would have reigned as sovereign queen. Instead, an election for a new sovereign was held. Although she campaigned actively, she lost the throne to David Kalākaua.

Queen Emma died on April 25, 1885, at the age of 49. She was given a royal funeral and was laid to rest in Mauna Ala, next to her husband and son. Emma Kaleleonālani left the bulk of her estate, some 13,000 acres of land on the Big Island and in Waikīkī on O‘ahu, in trust for the hospital that honors her name.