

Princess Kaʻiulani

October 16 marks the anniversary of the birth of Her Royal Highness Victoria Kawēkiu Kaʻiulani Lunalilo Kalaninuiahilapalapa Cleghorn, the daughter of Scotsman Archibald Scott Cleghorn and Miriam Kapili Likelike, the sister of King Kalākaua and Queen Liliʻuokalani, and designated by her aunt Liliʻuokalani in 1891 as the heir to the throne of the Hawaiian Kingdom.

Born on October 16, 1875, Kaʻiulani was named after Queen Victoria of England, a long-time friend to Hawaiian royalty. The young princess was beautiful, intelligent, gracious, an accomplished musician, artist, horsewoman and swimmer who had a fondness for peacocks and the fragile, fragrant pikake (Chinese jasmine) blossoms. She was considered everything one imagines a princess would be.



When her mother Princess Likelike died in 1887, Kaʻiulani was just 11, placing her second in line to the throne, after her aunt, Liliʻuokalani. Both King Kalākaua, her uncle, and Liliʻuokalani had no children, and it seemed very likely that Kaʻiulani would one day be Hawaiʻi's queen. She was named heir apparent to the throne by Liliʻuokalani. To prepare her for that important role, her father sent her to London to be educated.

While she was in London, a telegram arrived on January 30, 1893, informing her that her aunt, Queen Liliʻuokalani, had been forced to abdicate the throne. Saddened, Kaʻiulani left for Washington DC the next month, and she reportedly told the British press that she was going to Washington “to plead for my throne, my nation and my flag.” Unsuccessful in her plea, Kaʻiulani returned to Hawaiʻi. Although the princess was grief-stricken because of the tragic event that had taken place, one of her few joys was relaxing among the peacocks and pikake at ʻĀinahau, the Victorian-style estate built on 10 acres in Waikīkī that was given to her at birth by her aunt, Princess Ruth Keʻelikōlani. Today, the Sheraton Princess Kaʻiulani Hotel stands on the former entrance to Kaʻiulani's beloved ʻĀinahau.

Unfortunately, the life of the young princess would end too soon. While Kaʻiulani was visiting the Island of Hawaiʻi, she and a close friend went horseback riding and got caught in a heavy rainstorm. As a result, Kaʻiulani suffered from a lingering cold and fever and remained bedridden for sometime. She seemed to have gotten better but then had a relapse. Although she was treated by the best doctors in the islands, her health deteriorated.

In the early hours of the morning on March 6, 1899, the peacocks at ʻĀinahau abruptly began to scream, causing alarm among the residents nearby. Princess Kaʻiulani died at the age of 23. Some say her death was due to pneumonia; others insist she died of a broken heart because of a lifetime of losses—her mother, beloved half-sister, godmother, uncle, but most of all, the Hawaiian nation. She had made gallant efforts to save her nation only to face defeat, ill health, and death.