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Moloka'i Ka'ahumanu chapter is 75

By Anna Sajecki  
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When people reach the age of 75, thoughts of the golden years often enter into their heads. Leisurely mornings, mellow afternoons; the years of being active and outspoken drift into the river of youth. Not so, however, for the Moloka'i chapter of the Ka'ahumanu Society, nearing its 75th year. Members are digressing from their chapter's quiet upbringing and are ready to be heard.

"A lot of people don't really know about the Ka'ahumanu Society; all they know of us is we're the women in black with the yellow leis," said Moloka'i chapter secretary Carolyn Takeuchi.

The 'Ahahui Ka'ahumanu, or Ka'ahumanu Society, is one of four royal societies in Hawai'i and is named after Queen Ka'ahumanu, who brought much change to her people and religion in Hawai'i. The society is both benevolent and historical; its primary goal is the respect of Hawaiians and Hawaiian culture.

There are nine chapters across Hawai'i. The mother chapter is in Honolulu, while Moloka'i's is the eighth chapter.

'Ahahui Ka'ahumanu is similar to a Hawaiian civic club because it promotes Hawaiian culture, but royal societies are more symbolic and secretive. All members have a Hawaiian background and were invited to join.



Three generations of the Ka'ahumanu Society are profiled in this cameo. Ka'ahumanu is one of four royal societies in Hawai'i.

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In August, members of the Moloka'i chapter attended a Sunday Mass presided over by Honolulu Bishop Clarence Silva.

BRENNAN PURTZER | Molokai  
Island Times

"We have an unbroken chain of members," said Hailama Farden, a teacher at the Kamehameha Schools and member of the royal society Hale O Na Ali'i. "A tie to the monarchy belongs to all formal societies."

Direct descendants of the monarchy belong to the societies, Farden said, such as the Kawanānakoā family, descended from King David Kalakaua.

"We have living heirs to the throne," said Farden. "In Hale O Na Ali'i, they make up our super-in-council."

The councils of royal societies promote the groups' main objectives, including preserving cultural ties by giving proper burials and representing the monarchy at events.

"Our people have always been taken care of in times of need, and we make sure our members are buried and handled properly," said Farden. "Societies have been burying members with ritual since the beginning."

The first function of 'Ahahui Ka'ahumanu was to take care of the sick and dying, a mission that remains strong in the society.

Each society has emblems, and some wear feather capes, like the Royal Order of Kamehameha I, Farden said.

"The societies serve as a reminder. They are the reminder of our noble chiefly existence of people," said Farden.

"We have our ties because of loyalty."

While each society is loyal to the monarchy, there are special ali'i, or royal figures, who are given emphasis. The 'Ahahui Ka'ahumanu Society celebrates King Kamehameha, Queen Lili'uokalani and its namesake, Queen Ka'ahumanu.

The 'Ahahui Ka'ahumanu chapter I in Honolulu is the oldest chapter of the society. It celebrated its 100th anniversary in June during a three-day event at The Royal Hawaiian hotel. The celebration marked the forming of the Honolulu chapter in 1905, but the society was originally conceived in 1863 by Ka'ahumanu's niece, Princess Victoria Kamamalu.

#### **NOTED BY MARK TWAIN**

Kamamalu named the organization, a women's movement, after her aunt Ka'ahumanu, who was the favorite wife of King Kamehameha I.

Ka'ahumanu was a source of inspiration: She used her position to abolish kapu set on women and was granted the power of pu'u honua, allowing her to spare

anyone from execution and to protect women and children. After Kamehameha died, Ka'ahumanu became joint ruler with Kamehameha's son by another marriage, Liholiho. Later, she dedicated herself to Christianity and forged close bonds with missionaries. Just before she died on June 5, 1832, she was handed the freshly printed first edition of the New Testament in Hawaiian.

Because the women's society was supported by Catholics, Kamamalu found Ka'ahumanu's devotion, additional to her activism and Hawaiian loyalties, to be fitting.

The society quickly added members across Hawai'i and was noted by Mark Twain, who wrote, "Its membership was exceedingly numerous and its ramifications extended over the several islands of the group."

However, when Kamamalu died in 1866, the society went under.

"When she died in 1866, ... they just kind of closed everything up, turned everything over to the church and it closed," said Hono-lulu chapter president Donna Lei Smythe, who has held the position since July 1.

In 1905 Lucy Peabody reinstated the Honolulu chapter.

Chapter I in Honolulu is the largest Ka'ahumanu chapter, with 320 members out of the total 450. One must be 18 to be initiated.

Smythe has been a member of the society for about 15 years. Margaret Stafford, the former president, has belonged for 43, making her a life member. Chapter I meetings are still held at the Kawaiaha'o Church in Honolulu, where Kamamalu had her first meeting in 1864. Members still discuss fundraising, aid to families with funeral expenses and ali'i celebrations.

"We do little projects like helping families get children to the summer exploration program through Kamehameha Schools," said Stafford. "We also visit the elderly and help them at the Lunalilo Homes, which we've done for a long time."

A traditional event the chapter celebrates is Ali'i Sundays, a ceremonial event at the church where members pay tribute to a royal figure on the Sunday before the birthday.

At these events, members must wear the official regalia. It includes a yellow feather lei representative of royal birth, a yellow ribbon with " 'Ahahui Ka'ahumanu" written on it and an emblematic pin fashioned after a traditional coin.

"Almost everything we have has some sort of symbolism," said Smythe.

The ladies are recognizable by their all-black ensembles, including hat, dress and shoes.

"Ka'ahumanu was a missionary lady, and she saw the missionaries wearing all black," said Smythe. "They had bolts of black material, and she decided to wear the same for the rest of her life."

Members of the society once had the option of wearing white, but rules on dress changed in 1977, and ever since, wearing black has been mandatory.

Otherwise, the society remains much unchanged since its inception.

### **WOMEN'S STRONG BOND**

Members of Chapter VIII on Moloka'i are proud of this tradition and link to the past. "This is a society for women of Hawaiian ancestry," said Takeuchi, the Moloka'i chapter secretary. "My grandmother was a member, and my mother, and I just felt it would be an honor to become a member."

Members meet during the second week of the month; each meeting begins with an opening song and the Lord's Prayer, and ends with the "Lei Ka'ahumanu," an aloha ode to the queen.

Ka'ahumanu started on Moloka'i when Lucy Malu Crane brought two officers from Maui and 17 other members helped her form a club under the umbrella of the Maui chapter. The chapter became independent in 1932.

"My fondest memory in the club is the acceptance within it, all over Hawai'i," said Jacques Hill, the chapter's marshal.

For Moloka'i members, gaining more exposure is a matter of importance.

"We want to explain to the young girls of the junior and senior classes what our role is," said Takeuchi. "We're trying to encourage young women to join."

Dignitaries come to Moloka'i only rarely, meaning members are less busy. However, when the new Roman Catholic bishop of Honolulu, Clarence Silva, came to Moloka'i in September, the Ka'ahumanu Society was there. "Christianity was brought into Hawai'i when Ka'ahumanu abolished many harmful beliefs and taboos," said Hill. "The women in the society have a very strong bond and are proud of their roots."

Hill said she looks forward to reuniting with members when the Moloka'i chapter has its 75th anniversary. "There will probably be a large gathering, with people from the other islands," she said.

The women of Moloka'i want the 75th anniversary to show the true spirit of Ka'ahumanu.

"To be part of this club is like keeping the memory of Ka'ahumanu alive," said Hill. "I enjoy being in the society and learning from the other members, and I just hope everyone can learn to understand the virtues of our ali'i."