Mausoleum of Lunalilo

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Located on King and Punahou Streets, the Mausoleum of Lunalilo is a sacred piece of architecture that cannot be ignored. It is nestled on the grounds of Kawaiaha’o Church to honor the life of King Lunalilo and his family. Who was King Lunalilo and why is he buried in this Mausoleum? Where is the exact location of this building? What style of architecture is it and how does it compare to those surrounding it? All of these questions will be addressed and discussed. The history behind this building is what gives us such interest and importance to this structure and is where we will begin our discussion.
King William Charles Lunalilo was the last descendant to reign from the Kamehameha line. People more commonly know him as “Prince Bill.” He reigned over Hawai‘i from January 8, 1873 – February 3, 1874 (Sandler).

During the time of his election he was aware of his popularity and to be fair, he democratically issued a proclamation calling for a mass vote. He was therefore elected by a large majority. Through his reign he persuaded the legislature to abolish property qualifications for voting in the constitution of 1874 (Fuchs). Towards the end of his rule Lunalilo fell ill due to his alcoholism and developed tuberculosis. He was a bachelor whose dying wish was to be buried at the mausoleum that was built by his father and not in the traditional location of the Royal Mausoleum where his predecessors can be found. He stated while in his deathbed that he wanted to be buried “among his people,” which was among his mother and where later his father’s remains were also laid to rest. He died on February 3, 1874. Lunalilo left in his will the funds to build the Lunalilo Home, which was finished in 1887 (Fairfax).

Locating the mausoleum is not too difficult if you are wandering the streets of downtown Honolulu near Iolani Palace. If you are walking off the palace grounds and looking diagonally to the left you will see the Mausoleum of
Lunalilo on the grounds of Kawaiaha’o Church. The church is of Hawaiian Royalty that was used for weddings, funerals, and weekly services. It opened in July 21, 1842 for worship and is still used for daily multiple weddings as well as mass services (Guide to Architecture). The architect for the church was Pastor Bingham. This structure faces the mausoleum’s right side and is directly to your right once you enter through the gates onto the grounds. The mausoleum is also enclosed within its own gates.

-Kawaiaha’o Church
Lunalilo’s father, Kanaina, was the architect of this coral black Gothic Revival-style chapel. The Hawaiian Kingdom’s superintendent of public works, Robert Lishman was an additional overseer and designer of this creation, as well as the construction of Ali‘iolani Hale and the original Lunalilo Home (Fairfax). It is on the National Register of Historic Places, as well as the Hawaii Register of Historic Places (Fairfax). Characteristics that give it the Gothic Revival name are the pointed arches that can be found at the entrance to the building as well as on both sides of the porch as you walk up to the structure. Over the front arch are the words Lunalilo Ka Moi, which means Lunalilo the King. As you walk around the grounds and peek through the gates on the sides that run along Punchbowl you can see the lancet windows that are on each side of the structure. There is also some ornamentation around the roof, but not overdone. This small structure also has the focus of pointing upwards adding to the gothic feel and the fact that it was
also a chapel places it directly into that category. It is very similar looking to the Royal Mausoleum where you will find the tombs of earlier Kings with the same pointed arches, masonry, and lancet windows.

- Royal Mausoleum

Comparing the mausoleum to its surroundings of the church, they are two different styles, but work together in that it is enclosed and looks comfortable in its environment. It is also very fitting for the context that it is put in as that of a mausoleum that is entombing a legacy. As an onlooker it does not look threatening or sad in any way, but as a beautiful piece of architecture that should not go overlooked.

Overall, I thought that the mausoleum was a very beautiful piece of architecture that I am happy to have the chance to see. Although it is such a small structure, looking in through the gates it has its own sense of monumentality. The
style and characteristics give it that feeling of power and beauty. As I looked through the gates to the structure, it gave me a sense of peace and pure beauty. The plants that surround the building give it this feeling of being a part of Hawai’i and you can see that it is a sacred place that should not be disturbed as there are people laid to rest there. The design of the building is unlike any other that I have seen in Hawai’i, other than the Royal Mausoleum. If you were to see this structure in any other location here in Hawai’i it would look out of place. This is purely a wonderful piece of architecture that can only be fully appreciated when seen in person.
Bibliography:


