

"A Ceremony at Pu'ukoholā Heiau" by Herb Kane

The Temple on the Hill of the Whale

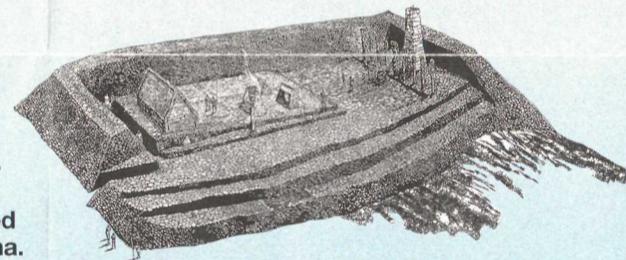
The stone heiau at Pu'ukoholā is one of the last major sacred structures built in Hawaii before outside influences altered traditional life permanently. Constructed in 1790-91 by Kamehameha I, this heiau, or temple, played a crucial role in the ruler's ascendancy. By 1790, Kamehameha, whom many believed destined to rule all of the Hawaiian islands, had invaded and conquered Maui, Lanai, and Molokai. Yet he was not able to lay full claim to his home island of Hawaii because of opposition from his chief rival and cousin, Keōua Kūahu'ula. While on Molokai, Kamehameha learned that Keōua was invading his territory. Kamehameha sent his aunt to seek direction from the prophet Kāpoūkahā, who told her that Kamehameha would conquer all the islands if he built a large heiau dedicated to his family war god Kūkā'ilimoku (Kū) atop Pu'ukoholā—"Hill of the Whale"—at Kawaihae.

Kamehameha set to work immediately. According to the prophecy, the builders had to follow rigid guidelines in order to please Kū the war god. To ensure perfection, the prophet Kāpoūkahā served as the royal architect. Thousands of men camped out on the hills for nearly a year to work on the massive structure. Since the heiau had to be constructed of water-worn lava rocks, it is believed that rocks came from the seaside valley of Pololu. Workers formed a human chain at least 20 miles long and transported the rocks hand to hand to the top of Pu'ukoholā. Kamehameha himself labored with the others.

When news of the war temple reached the rival chiefs, they decided they must attack while Kamehameha and his warriors were occupied. At best, the invasion would eliminate Kamehameha and the threat he posed to his rivals. At the least, the rivals would interfere with the ritually specified construction process, and Kū would be displeased. The chiefs of Maui, Lanai, and Molokai reconquered their islands and, joined by the chiefs of Kauai and Oahu, sailed to attack Kamehameha. Kamehameha counterattacked, routed the invaders, and resumed work.

In the summer of 1791, the heiau was finished. Kamehameha invited his cousin Keōua Kūahu'ula to the dedication ceremonies. Perhaps awed by the power of the heiau and its god, perhaps resigned to his cousin's ascendancy, Keōua Kūahu'ula came willingly to what would be his doom. When he arrived there was a scuffle and, whether Kamehameha intended it or not, Keōua and almost all of his companions were slain. The body of Keōua was carried up to the heiau and offered as the principal sacrifice to Kū.

The death of Keōua Kūahu'ula ended all opposition on the island of Hawaii, and the prophecy began to come true. By 1810, through conquest and treaties, Kamehameha the Great, builder of Pu'ukoholā Heiau, was the revered king of all the Hawaiian Islands.



Illustrations above and right by Herb Kane

Pu'ukoholā Heiau measures 224 by 100 feet with 16- to 20-foot-high walls on the landward side and on the ends. Three long, narrow terraced steps cross the side that faces the sea, opening the interior to view from canoes floating offshore and, presumably, intimidating any attackers. At the time the temple was in use, there were thatched houses and an altar for the ruling chief

and his priests. Wooden images of Hawaiian gods stood on the platform and terraces. After Kamehameha I died in 1819, his son Liholiho abolished the religious traditions of the past. Most temples, including Pu'ukoholā Heiau, were abandoned. Only heiau that served as mausoleums were maintained.

Above: Pu'ukoholā Heiau as it may have looked during its use. Left: Kamehameha is shown in ceremonial feathered cape and headdress. His necklace is braided human hair acquired from ancestors. The carved whale-tooth pendant is shaped like a tongue, symbolic of "one who speaks with authority." Below: The war god Kū. This image is carved in the Kona style from 'ōhi'a lehua wood.

Illustration below by Karen Barnes



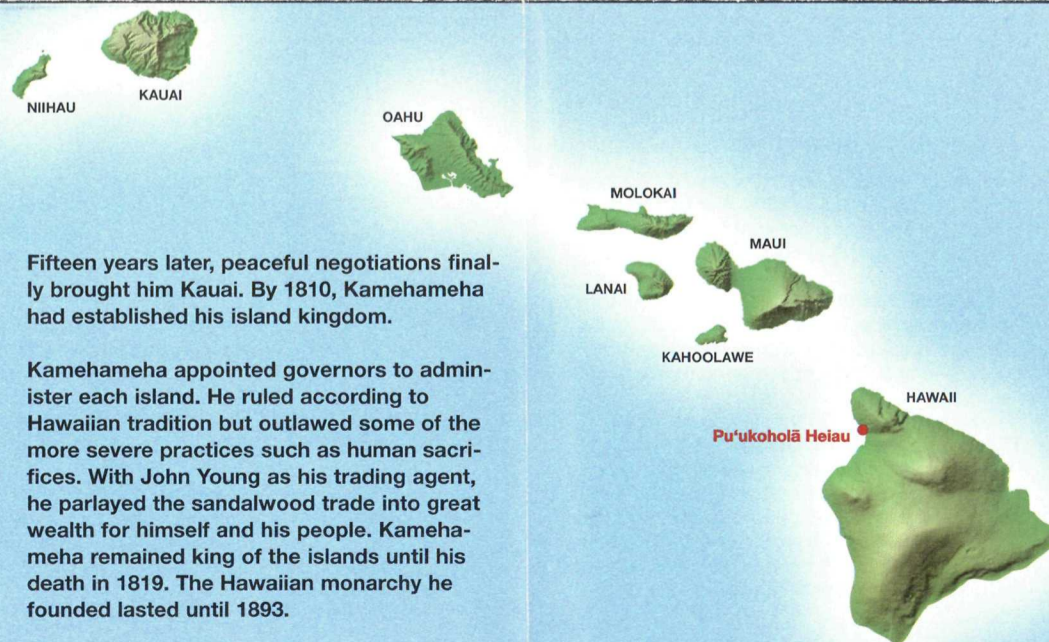
The Island Kingdom of Kamehameha

From childhood, Kamehameha seemed destined for greatness. With the appearance of a bright, white-tailed star in the year 1758 (possibly Halley's Comet), Hawaiian seers predicted the emergence of a great leader. Kamehameha, "The Lonely One," was born around that time in the Kohala district on the northwestern tip of the island of Hawaii.

Son of a high chief and a princess, Kamehameha began training as a young child to join the ranks of nā ali'i koa, the chiefly warriors. By young adulthood he was tall and muscular—every bit the powerful warrior his family had expected. In 1782, at the death of his uncle, Kalani'opu'u, who ruled the island of Hawaii, Kamehameha inherited land on the northern part of the island and was given custody of his family's war god, Kūkā'ilimoku. As he gained power, he intended to one day rule

all of the Hawaiian Islands. Unification, in his view, would bring peace to the continually warring chiefdoms throughout the islands. His rival for control of his home island was his cousin Keōua Kūahu'ula, with whom he battled indecisively in the 1780s. In 1790, Kamehameha successfully invaded Maui, Lanai and Molokai with the aid of John Young and Isaac Davis, stranded British sailors who became his close advisors. The next year he returned to Hawaii and defended his lands against the chiefs of Oahu and Kauai in a naval battle off the coast near the Waipou Valley. The island of Hawaii finally came under his full control when his cousin Keōua was slain on the beach below Pu'ukoholā Heiau.

In 1794, Kamehameha reconquered Maui, Lanai, and Molokai. Victory in a bloody battle on Oahu ended opposition there in 1795.



Fifteen years later, peaceful negotiations finally brought him Kauai. By 1810, Kamehameha had established his island kingdom.

Kamehameha appointed governors to administer each island. He ruled according to Hawaiian tradition but outlawed some of the more severe practices such as human sacrifices. With John Young as his trading agent, he parlayed the sandalwood trade into great wealth for himself and his people. Kamehameha remained king of the islands until his death in 1819. The Hawaiian monarchy he founded lasted until 1893.

The Chiefly Warriors of Hawaii

Hawaiian chiefs, who attained their ruling status by heredity, nevertheless were often required to defend their territory by force. During his rise to power, Kamehameha I had four main battle chiefs from his home island in addition to his foreign advisors Young and Davis. These chiefs led armies composed of nā ali'i koa and nā koa.

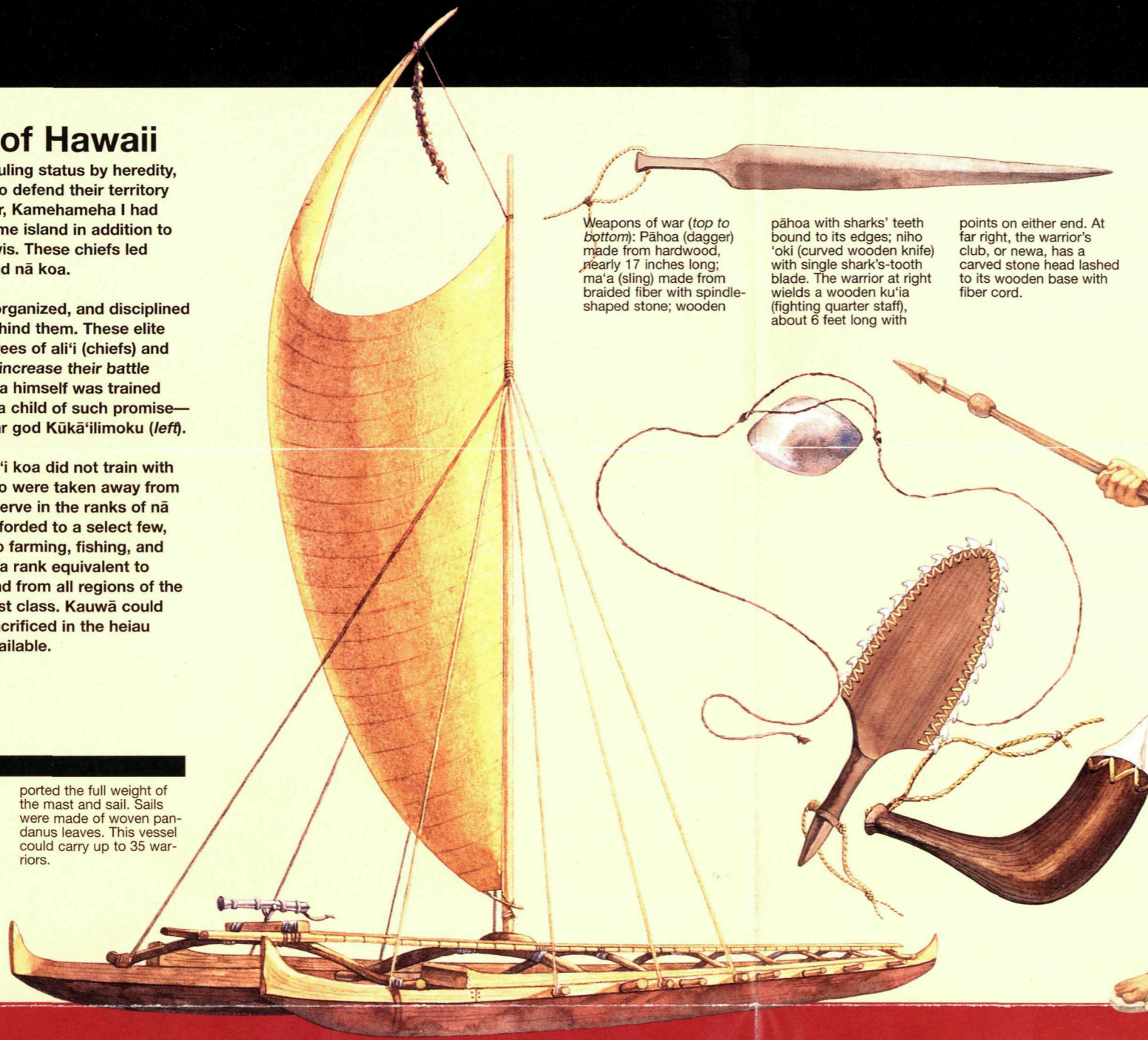
Nā ali'i koa were a highly trained, organized, and disciplined force with centuries of tradition behind them. These elite warriors were sons of varying degrees of ali'i (chiefs) and were trained by personal tutors to increase their battle skills and proficiency. Kamehameha himself was trained from age 7 or 8, not surprising for a child of such promise—and whose family deity was the war god Kūkā'ilimoku (left).

Because of their high status, nā ali'i koa did not train with the maka'āinana (commoners), who were taken away from the land and their tasks only in time of war to serve in the ranks of nā koa. Organized military training was a luxury afforded to a select few, and for most young men, duty meant tending to farming, fishing, and other daily needs. At the call of the kālaimoku (a rank equivalent to prime minister), nā koa rose from all classes and from all regions of the islands except from the kauwā, society's outcast class. Kauwā could not mingle even with commoners; they were sacrificed in the heiau when no lawbreakers or war prisoners were available.



Above: The war god Kū, shown in the form of a feathered deity with dogs' teeth and mother-of-pearl eyes. Right: A double-hulled canoe, with an English swivel gun mounted at the bow, was a formidable war vessel.

These crafts were based on traditional Polynesian designs dating back several centuries. The boat's two hulls were individually constructed of wood, then connected with crossbeams. The heaviest and strongest crossbeam supported the full weight of the mast and sail. Sails were made of woven pandanus leaves. This vessel could carry up to 35 warriors.



Weapons of war (top to bottom): Pāhoā (dagger) made from hardwood, nearly 17 inches long; ma'a (sling) made from braided fiber with spindle-shaped stone; wooden

pāhoā with sharks' teeth bound to its edges; niho 'oki (curved wooden knife) with single shark's-tooth blade. The warrior at right wields a wooden ku'ia (fighting quarter staff), about 6 feet long with

points on either end. At far right, the warrior's club, or newa, has a carved stone head lashed to its wooden base with fiber cord.

Like high chiefs, warriors usually had body tattoos. Patterns signified the wearer's family ties, loyalty to a particular chief, and 'aumakua (family guardian spirit). Warriors usually wore headgear indicating military rank and social status, along with providing protection.



As part of their training, and to maintain constant readiness for attack or defense, nā ali'i koa routinely fought mock engagements called kaula Kio. An impressive showing in one of these fights would bring a youth to the attention of his superiors and even to the chiefs. In 1793 Kamehameha him-

self put on a demonstration where he dodged six spears hurled toward him.

Though blunted spears were usually used in these mock encounters, even the most accomplished warriors were sometimes killed.

Illustrations by Karen Barnes



At the cultural festival held at the park each August, native Hawaiians and other Polynesian peoples celebrate their centuries-

old tradition through ceremonies, demonstrating ancient crafts, and the wearing of traditional dress.



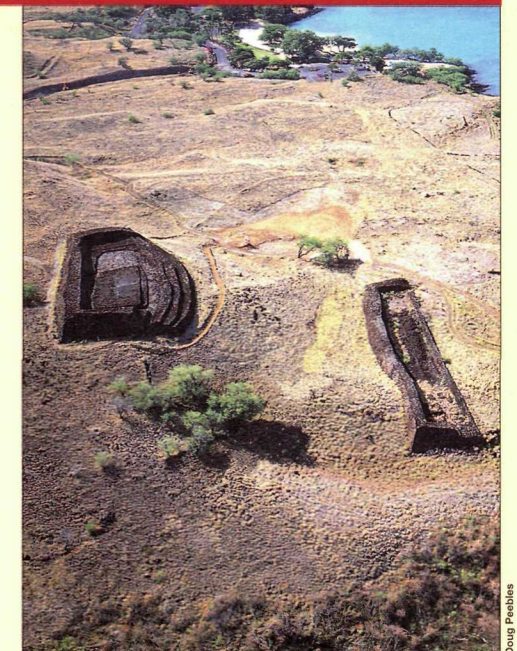
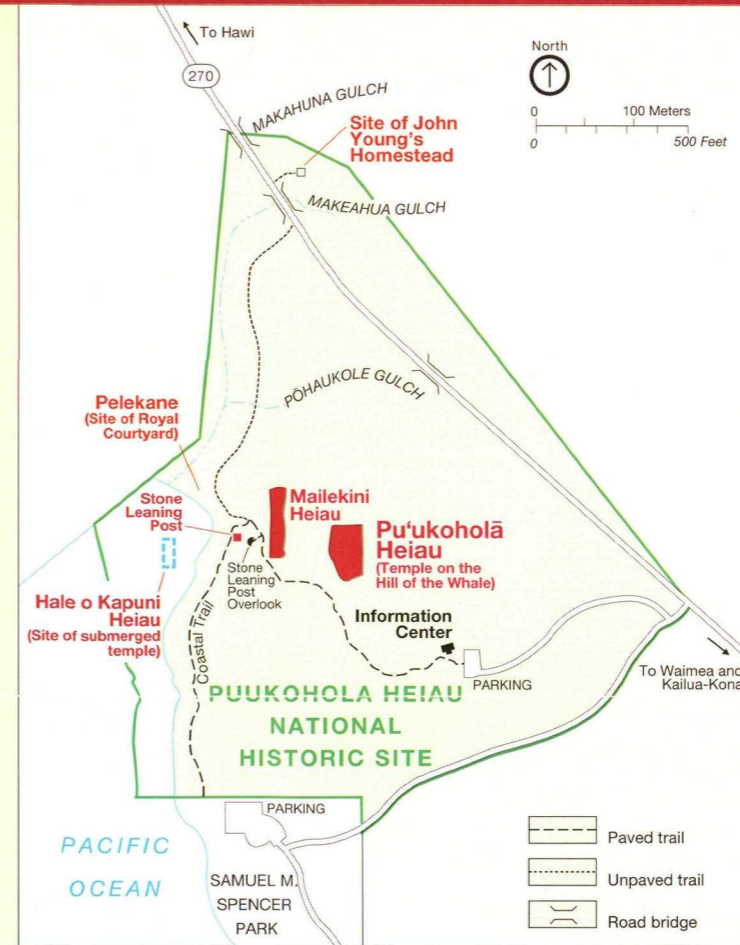
The rocks used to build Puukohola Heiau are volcanic debris rounded by the erosive action of water. No mortar was

used to construct the heiau; its walls slant inward and spaces are filled with smaller pebbles.



The stone leaning post, or kikiakō'i, was used by Chief Alapa'i Kūpalupalu Manō. The rock stood at least 6 feet high and was

originally closer to the ocean. In 1937, the post was accidentally damaged and was broken into three pieces.



This aerial view of the temples is computer-enhanced to eliminate the old park road. An important restoration goal is to

recreate the historic landscape of the late 18th- and early 19th centuries, when the heiau was in use.

General Information

Administration Puukohola Heiau National Historic Site is a unit of the National Park System, which consists of more than 360 parks representing our country's natural and cultural heritage. For information, write to the Superintendent, Puukohola Heiau National Historic Site, P.O. Box 44340, Kawaihae, HI 96743-4340; or call 808-882-7218.

Getting to the park The park is located on the northwestern coast of the island of Hawaii, one mile south of Kawaihae off Hawaii 270. The island is served by Keahole-Kona International Airport, 27 miles south of the park, and Hilo International Airport, 68 miles east. Waimea-Kohala Airport, 12 miles east of the park, has commuter flights from points on the islands.

For your safety and the park's protection All natural and cultural features are protected by federal law. •Stay on designated trails. •The trails to the major features in the park are long, hot and rugged. Carry drinking water to prevent dehydration; wear proper clothing, footwear, hat, and sunscreen; do not attempt hikes if you are not in good physical condition. •Do not smoke in the park; this region is prone to grass fires. •Camping, picnicking, and swimming are not allowed within the park. These activities are permitted at nearby Samuel M. Spencer Park. •Use caution while entering and exiting the park road, and when visiting the John Young's Homestead site. Traffic on the main road is heavy. •Because both temples are fragile and because they are sacred to native people, they are closed to the public. You can view them from below.

A Walking Tour of the Park

The visitor center is open daily from 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. A self-guided walking tour begins here; allow about one hour for your tour and note that the park road gate closes at 4 p.m.

Pu'ukoholā Heiau This temple was built by Kamehameha I in 1790-91. At the time, its platform was crowded with ceremonial structures. Today, it is the scene of cultural events.

Mailekini Heiau On the hillside between Pu'ukoholā Heiau and the sea are the ruins of Mailekini Heiau, possibly a war or agricultural temple used by the ancestors of Kamehameha. This older temple was nearly equal in size to Pu'ukoholā Heiau but was not so finely crafted. During the rule of Kamehameha I, John Young helped the king convert this temple into a fort.



The vines of the pōhūehue, or beach morning glory, were used to make fish baskets and to chase fish into nets. They were also slapped on the water's surface as part of a ritual to rouse the surf.

Hale o Kapuni Heiau Dedicated to the shark gods, this heiau lies submerged just offshore. The temple was last seen in the 1950s, when the rock platform was visible during low tides. The **Stone Leaning Post** overlooks the site of the shark temple.

Pelekane On the coast below Pu'ukoholā and Mailekini is the site of the royal courtyard at Kawaihae. Kamehameha II returned here after the death of his father to prepare for his role as king.



Black-tipped reef sharks frequent the bay in front of the heiau year-round. Sharks were believed to be 'aumakua, ancestral deities.

Site of John Young's Homestead John Young was a British sailor who was stranded on Hawaii in 1790. Young soon became a close associate of Kamehameha who named him 'Olohana and made him governor of the island from 1802 to 1812. Young also supervised trade with ships at Kawaihae for various goods including foreign weaponry. He was a trusted advisor on military matters. Little is left of Young's housing compound. The stone-and-mortar house he lived in was probably the first European-style house in the islands. His wife, Kaona'eha (niece of Kamehameha), children, and servants probably lived in nearby houses of more traditional style. John Young is one of only two foreigners buried on the grounds of the Royal Mausoleum in Nuuanu, Oahu. •You may walk or drive to the site; be very careful of the heavy traffic on Hawaii 270.

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