

Hawaiian Centenarian Kaapu Kolo (1801-1920)

By [Hank Soboleski - Island History](#) | Sunday, January 27, 2019, 12:05 a.m.



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Born on Niihau in 1801, Kaapu Kolo was a young girl when she, her parents and others would sometimes stand on the beaches of Niihau to watch with wonder as strange foreign vessels with great sails glided past their island home.

It was not until she'd reached her teens that she first went to Kauai aboard an outrigger canoe to become a member of King Kaumualii's retinue, and she was at Waimea in 1819, when Liholiho (Kamehameha II) broke a sacred kapu by allowing men and women to eat together at a feast in his court on the Big Island.

When others saw that Liholiho and the members of his court went unpunished, they found that they, too, could break kapu without retribution, and the breaking of kapu without fear of punishment quickly led to a complete breakdown of the kapu system that had governed Hawaiian conduct for centuries.

On Kauai, Kaapu witnessed wooden idols being toppled and burned and heiau being demolished and, for the first time in her life, she was free to eat with men and to enjoy bananas, roast pig and other foods previously forbidden to women.

The following year, on May 3, 1820, she was on the beach at Waimea, watching the ship Thaddeus, with missionaries Samuel Whitney and Samuel Ruggles aboard, being anchored offshore.

They were the first Protestant missionaries to visit Kauai, and Kaapu greeted them at the water's edge, while about her were assembled thousands of curious Hawaiians — an event she later considered to be the greatest of her life.

Kaumualii's son, Humehume, also arrived with the missionaries after having been some years abroad in the United States.

Kaapu was baptized a Christian, married, and made her home in Kekaha, where for many years she practiced the art of makaloa mat-making.

Shortly before she passed away in 1920 at Waimea at the venerable age of 119, she credited her longevity to the wearing of only one garment at a time, either a mu'umu'u or a holoku, and to the Hawaiian foods, especially poi, that had been her staff of life.