

The Peacock Gown

In the portrait above, Queen Kapiʻolani wears the Peacock Gown that she commissioned for Queen Victoria's Grand Jubilee in 1887. The painter worked from this photo and chose to concentrate on the queen and her gown.

Iris Viacrusis of Hilo, who recreated the gown for ʻIolani Palace, noted that "The aliʻi (royalty) were very fashion forward for their day, while they sought out the top dressmakers in New York, London and Paris, they put their own Hawaiian twist in the designs with lei hulu (feather leis), peacock feathers and other elements that were rooted in their culture." The 1887 news clipping from the New York Times, at right, describes the dress, which is quite stunning when seen in person.

Visitors are welcome at ʻIolani Palace, please go to Iolani.org to learn more and arrange a visit.



Queen Kapiʻolani and Princess Liliʻuokalani, London, 1887

Photographer unknown, Hawaiʻi State Archives

The queen posing in the Peacock Gown with her sister-in-law, Liliʻuokalani, at Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee Celebration.

A COURT DRESS FOR QUEEN KAPIOLANI.

Queen Kapiolani spent some time while in the city in visiting our palatial dry goods houses, and expressed herself more than delighted with the magnificence of our goods and the artistic elegance of American costumes. Messrs. B. Altman & Co. captured her admiration to such an extent that she ordered from their elegant house a Court dress in which to appear at the reception to be given her Hawaiian Majesty by Queen Victoria at Buckingham Palace. A lady connected with the house, of high artistic taste, aided the Queen in many of her selections, and when giving the order for the dress her Majesty first consulted about the color. Azure blue was suggested, when the Queen expressed herself very happily, saying: "My name in Hawaiian means 'Arch of Heaven,' and, as azure blue and 'Arch of Heaven' are synonymous terms, the color would be most appropriate."

Azure-blue velvet of the very richest quality was selected for the Court train and bodice, the train being adjustable, four yards long, and lined throughout with light blue moire, finished under the edge with a puffing of moire 12 inches wide, which has the effect of raising it from the floor and giving it a most graceful sweep. The train is three yards in width and disposed in plaits. On the outer edge of the train is a band of peacock feathers, 12 inches wide at the end of the train, growing gradually narrower as it reaches the waist, where it is but an inch and a half in width. The bodice is cut low with point back and front, laced in front with silk cord, the neck trimmed with exquisite duchesse point lace, thus adding to the effect of the feather trimming. The corsage is sleeveless, with a band of the feathers and duchesse lace. This gorgeous train will be worn over an underdress of light blue moire with demi-train 60 inches in length, finished with a double ruching of the same over a balayouse of fine Valenciennes lace. The front and sides of the skirt show wide panels of peacock feathers, a band of the same feathers rounding the skirt. The firm also furnished the regulation headdress, which is of feathers and a veil, and her Majesty selected, to be worn with this toilet, a pair of suede gloves of a light fawn shade, which reach the shoulders; and slippers, of blue velvet, lined with light blue moire.

New York Times, May 29, 1887