UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
1977 Update - National Historic Landmark
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME
HISTORIC
Mo'okini Heiau (and Kamehameha I Birthplace)

AND/OR COMMON
Mo'okini Heiau (and Kokoiki)

2 LOCATION
STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN
x VICINITY OF 'Upolu airport Kohala District

STATE
Hawaii

CODE
15

COUNTY
Hawaii

CODE
5000-001

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY
DISTRICT
BUILDING(S)
STRUCTURE
OBJECT

OWNERSHIP
PUBLIC
PRIVATE
PUBLIC ACQUISITION
BOTH

STATUS
OCCUPIED
UNOCCUPIED
WORK IN PROGRESS
ACCESSIBLE
YES: RESTRICTED
YES: UNRESTRICTED
NO

PRESENT USE
AGRICULTURE
COMMERCIAL
ENTERTAINMENT
EDUCATIONAL
PRIVATE RESIDENCE
PRIVATE
GOVERNMENT
RELIGIOUS
INDUSTRIAL
TRANSPORTATION
SCIENTIFIC
MILITARY
OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
State of Hawaii

Mr. Susumo Ono, State Historic Preservation Officer

STREET & NUMBER
Dept. of Land & Natural Resources

P.O. Box 621

CITY, TOWN
Hilo, HI 96720

STATE
Hawaii

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC
State Tax Office or State Tax Office

STREET & NUMBER
75 Aupuni

425 Queen St.

CITY, TOWN
Hilo, HI 96720

Honolulu, HI 96813

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
National Survey of Historic Sites & Buildings, Theme XVI, HI Aboriginal Culture

DATE
1962

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
National Survey of Historic Sites, National Park Service, USDI

CITY, TOWN
Washington

STATE
D. C.

Designated Natl. Historic Landmark by Secretary of Interior 12/29/62
Mo'okini Heiau: This masonry structure is an irregular parallelogram in plan, about 267 feet (81 meters) on the west side; 250 feet (76 m) on the east side; 135 feet (41 m) on the north side; and 112 feet (34 m) on the south. This ancient Hawaiian temple features an open paved stone court that is enclosed on four sides by stone walls, which in 1977 vary in height from about seven feet (2 meters) to 14 feet (4.3 m). The original walls may have been as high as 20 feet (6 meters). The walls are of basalt boulders; stacked and without mortar; with bases as thick as ten feet (almost 3 meters). The enclosing walls have tapered sides, both exterior and interior. Hawaiian oral tradition says that the boulders were passed hand to hand from Niulii'i, about 10 miles (16 kilometers) distant for the construction, possibly involving as many as 15,000 men standing in line. The ground-level entrance, wide enough to pass one person at a time, is in the middle of the west wall. Inside and across the northerly end is a raised stone platform, three or four stones high, which once held images, fires, the altar and perhaps wooden towers. Detached stone platforms, one or two stones high, are scattered within the courtyard and once held thatched temple buildings. Non-native grasses now grow between the courtyard stones and obscure the walking surface. Some of the paving stones have been removed.

On the ground outside the north end, perhaps 25 yards (22 meters) from the wall, is the named stone Papa-nui-o-leka, on which human flesh was separated from bones after the body had been used for sacrifice; and another named stone, moved there from the shore for safekeeping. In the fields east of the temple may be the named stone Pohaku-holehole-kanaka (stone for stripping human flesh), although this stone may have been moved and be the same stone as Papa-nui-o-leka. The area surrounding the heiau was used for decades for sugar cane cultivation, most recently for mechanical planting and harvesting. In 1977 the land is used for grazing cattle and is fenced.

Kamehameha Birth Site: About 2,000 feet (610 meters) west of Mo'okini Heiau and near the ocean is the birthplace of Kamehameha the Great. At the time of his birth, ca. 1753, the site was occupied by one of the thatched housing complexes of Alapa'i-nui-a-Kauaua, ruling chief of the Island of Hawai'i. The birth itself took place late at night within one of the large thatched houses reserved for royal women. The named stone Pohaku-hana-alii may have been his mother's couch inside the house. Alapa'i's housing complex would have included a number of thatched houses as well as the canoe landing "harbor" along the shore. The complex, with "harbor" was called by the place name of Kapakai, within the larger Hawaiian land division (an ahupua'a) called Kokoiki.

The named stone was one of several large (3-4 feet diameter) waterworn basalt boulders in a scattered group on the level site in the 1960's. Sugar cane was cultivated for decades on all four sides of the site, but the site, including the stones, was untouched, unplowed and uncultivated. Sometime in 1977, the group of stones including Pohaku-hana-alii was stolen by unknown persons and means, much to the consternation of the local Hawaiian community. In 1977 the level site is overgrown with weeds, low bushes and a few stalks of volunteer sugar cane.
**SIGNIFICANCE**

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<td>OTHER (SPECIFY)</td>
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**SPECIFIC DATES**

| 10th Century/ca. 1370 |

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Mo'okini Heiau: The centuries-old standing walls and enclosed courtyard of this temple mark one of the largest physical evidences of the ancient Hawaiian religion. The well-preserved walls and interior paving and platforms, built without mortar, testify to skills of ancient Hawaiian stonemasons and their ability to assemble unworked basalt rocks into massive and complex structures. Hawaiian oral literature and Western historical accounts indicate Mo'okini was the principal temple for centuries in the Big Island district of Kohala; associated with ruling chiefs and their high priests; and was of the class of temples called luakini, the highest class, and which required regular human sacrifices.

It's traditional builder was a high priest named Mo'okini (perhaps Kuamo'o Mo'okini), who lived according to some accounts as early as the fifth century, but more likely the tenth, and who served and accompanied the high chief Mo'ikeha, famous for his trip and sojourn to another Polynesian island group in the South Pacific and who returned to Hawai'i to become the ruling chief of Kaua'i Island and whose numerous descendants became famous in their own rights. More reliable tradition indicates the original temple on the site was rebuilt (ca. A.D. 1370) by the high priest Pa'ao, who came from a South Pacific island group, probably the Society Islands, and who founded a lineage of priests which served the ruling chiefs of the Big Island down through Kamehameha II. After building the temple, Pa'ao lived near it and officiated in it. Pa'ao is also credited with the building of Waha'ula Heiau, Puna District, Hawai'i Island, which has a similar architecture. The name Mo'okini (meaning many lizards, or many lineages) may have been the name of the original temple and transferred by Pa'ao to the second. Pa'ao is credited with introducing innovations, such as human sacrifices, temples with enclosed walls and new rituals to the Hawaiian religion.

Mo'okini temple was last active as a war temple for Kamehameha the Great in the last two decades of the 18th century. It is said to have housed the Kamehameha family war god, Ku-ka-'ili-moku, and this feathered god transferred to Pu'ukoholā Heiau, Kawaihae, Kohala District, Hawai'i Island, in 1791, when Kamehameha the Great built this new war temple to assure his conquest of all the Hawaiian Islands. Mo'okini Heiau was one of the luakini and other state temples used regularly by Kamehameha the Great's son and heir, Liholiho, in the second decade of the 19th century. It was Liholiho, who as Kamehameha II, abolished in 1819 that part of the ancient religion that depended on such temples as Mo'okini. He ordered the destruction of the temples. The walls and platforms of Mo'okini were not destroyed. On all islands, platforms of a number of temples as important as Mo'okini were not disturbed in spite of royal orders. Mo'okini and the others had acquired a spiritual significance (mana) which protected them against human destruction, a significance which has been retained, in part, through today.
See continuation sheet

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 116 (38 acres water; 78 land)

UTM REFERENCES

ZONE EASTING NORTHING ZONE EASTING NORTHING
A 0.5 119.9 9.8.0 2.214.314.9.0 B 0.5 119.9 3.4.0 2.214.219.1.0
C 0.5 119.8 4.5.0 D 0.5 119.8 2.9.0 2.214.28.5.0

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION
Beginning at Point B, which is approximately 105° east of true north and approximately 500 feet from the southeast corner of Mo'okini Heiau, and proceeding approximately 250° east of true north for a distance of approximately 3,100 feet to Point C; then proceeding approximately 328° east of true north for a distance of approximately 1,000 feet to Point D, which is approximately 500 feet offshore; then proceeding approximately 50° east of true north for a distance of 3,100 feet to Point A, which lies approximately 600 feet offshore; then to the point of

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Russell A. Apple, Pacific Historian

ORGANIZATION State Director's Office, National Park Service

DATE August 10, 1977

STREET & NUMBER 300 Ala Moana Blvd., Suite 6305, Box 50165

TELEPHONE 808/546-7584

CITY OR TOWN Honolulu, Hawaii

STATE Hawaii

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL X STATE ___ LOCAL ___

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

KEEPRER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER
Juxtaposition of Mo'okini Heiau and Kapakai Royal Housing Complex: It was
typical of ancient Hawaiian settlement patterns for a ruling chief's housing complex
to be near and associated with a Luakini class heiau. This is one of the few cases
in Hawai'i when the exact locations of the temple and its associated housing complex
are known. Over the centuries, Kapakai as a royal housing complex served as the
residence of ruling chiefs and their associates when ceremonies were conducted in
Mo'okini Heiau. Nothing would have been permitted to intrude visually between
these two associated areas of sacred land. Temple ceremonies lasted several nights
and days. During this time, ruling chiefs and high priests would leave the temple
for short periods to return to their housing complexes, still under some restrictions
as to their behavior. What trails existed between the heiau and Kapakai have been
plowed under in recent decades, but the sight lines between them were only
blocked in recent decades by a thick field of sugar cane. The 1977 use of the area
between the heiau and birthsite for cattle grazing is more compatible for each
can be seen from the other.

Alapa'i probably conducted pre-war ceremonies in Mo'okini before his invasion of
Maui ca. 1753. It was during this ceremonial period that Kamehameha was born in
the Kapakai housing complex. Later, Kamehameha, and still later his son
Liholiho, probably stayed at Kapakai while they led rituals in Mo'okini.

Thus the sightline and land between Mo'okini Heiau and the site of the Kapakai
housing complex is important and included within the boundaries.
Kamehameha Birth Site: Kamehameha the Great was the Hawaiian ruling chief who conquered rival ruling chiefs to unite by 1795 all islands but one to found the historic Kingdom of Hawaii. Kaua'i Island voluntarily joined the kingdom in 1810. The kingdom founded by Kamehameha the Great lasted through 1893 and is the political ancestor of the State of Hawaii. Kamehameha remains the hero of Hawaii. He is almost as well known today as he was during his lifetime of leadership. His birth-site along a rocky coast of the Island of Hawaii was sacred through association with Polynesian royalty long before his birth ca. 1753; and remains sacred to the Hawaiian people today, more especially because Kamehameha the Great was born there.

After the death of high chief Keawe-i-kekahi-ali'i-o-ka-moku (ca. 1700, great grandfather of Kamehameha), ruling chief of the Island of Hawaii, unsettled political conditions permitted a ruling chief from Maui Island to invade and conquer the Island of Hawaii. Alapa'i-nui-a-kauaua became the resident ruling chief of the Big Island. With Alapa'i absent from his home island, rival high chiefs there took over and were eventually strong enough to attack Hawaii Island. Alapa'i successfully repulsed the Maui forces from the Big Island districts of Kona and Kohala. He then prepared to invade and reconquer his home island of Maui. The north Kohala coast was directly across the Alanuihaha channel from Maui. His invasion force of canoes and warriors occupied the coast, from south of Mahukona to Pu'upea, within which land section Mo'okini Heiau lies. Alapa'i, with his staff chiefs and retainers, and their women, occupied his royal housing complex at Kapakai in the land of Kokoiki. In the royal party was the high chiefess Ke-ku'i-apo-iwa, wife of high chief Ka-lani-kupu-a-pa-i-ka-lani-nui-keoua, and who was due to deliver a royal child at any time.

Ke-ku'i-apo-iwa, the expectant mother, occupied the lanai of a large thatched house. Because she was about to deliver a first-born royal child, an event of importance and of religious significance, she was surrounded by guards and by high chiefs who were to witness. Due to rain and the cold, the guards and chiefs were asleep near day-break when the time came for delivery. Ke-ku'i-apo-iwa entered the house, and perhaps lying on the royal birth stone named Pohaku-hanau-ali'i, and apparently unattended, braced her feet against the posts and purlins of the thatched wall. At the sound of the last "bearing-down" pain (kuakoko), a high chief outside (who perhaps was not an official witness and uninvited), parted the thatch and made a hole. As soon as the child was born and laid down on soft pieces of bark cloth (kapa), he reached inside, wrapped the newborn in the cloth, extracted the package through the hole and carried it away undetected. Nae'ole was the chief. He was the high chief of the Kohala district. There was much puzzlement at the child's absence when the chiefs and guards awoke after daybreak.
This apparent kidnapping has been explained several ways. The popular explanation is that the child was taken because he was male, and a royal heir to the once-ruling family of the Island of Hawai‘i. As such he posed a threat to the continued rule of Alapa‘i. It was feared that a male child might have been killed by Alapa‘i, his great uncle. This is apparently the imposition in recent times of the Biblical Herod story to the birth. However, the explanation offered by the native historian Kamakau was that Nae‘ole wanted the honor of raising the royal child. It was customary for a royal newborn to be given at birth by the mother to a relative or close associate. Nae‘ole wanted to be the one so selected and acted to insure this. There were also political advantages in raising a royal child from another family.

Alapa‘i landed on Maui, found that his rival ruling chief there had just died and established friendly relations. He went on to battles on Moloka‘i and O‘ahu Islands. After an inconclusive campaign to unite the major islands he returned to Hawai‘i to continue as its resident ruling chief.

Probably before he left Kapakai, Alapa‘i appointed Nae‘ole as guardian (kahu) of the newborn Kamehameha. Nae‘ole’s younger sister, Ke-ku-nui-a-lei-moku became the "foster mother" and probably principal wetnurse. Kamehameha grew up in the Halawa area of the Kohala District, according to Kamakau, not in Waipi‘o Valley as is popularly believed. When Kamehameha was five years old, he was taken into the court of ruling chief Alapa‘i to begin his training for leadership. Ke-aka, Alapa‘i’s wife, became his new guardian. Any ceremonies, for Hawaiian-style circumcision, or a rite of passage into manhood for Kamehameha, may well have been conducted by Alapa‘i in Mo‘okini Heiau.
Alexander, Mary, Dr. Baldwin of Lahaina, Berkley, 1953, pp. 50-51.


Ii, John Papa, Fragments of Hawaiian History, Honolulu, 1959, p. 3.

Verbal Boundary Description (Continuation)

beginning, Point B, which lies from Point A a distance of approximately 2,200 feet at approximately 148° east of true north.