

Quilter Profile

HARRIET SOONG

Native Hawaiian

MMAL-SI (Katherine Fogden)



“Hawaiian quilts have aloha and quilting is a very rewarding experience.”



MSUM (Doug Elbinger)

“Ke Kahi O Ka’iulani” (The Comb of Ka’iulani)
Harriet Soong (Native Hawaiian)
Kailua-Kona, Hawai’i MSUM 1997:67

A member of the Kapa Apana O Waimea quilting group on the Big Island of Hawai’i, Harriet is considered a master Hawaiian quilter. This compliment describes not only Harriet’s quilting expertise but also refers to the enthusiasm and respect she brings to the art. Hawaiian quilts are unique in their design and in their construction. The intricate pattern, or *lau*, is cut out in one piece and appliquéd onto a background, *kahua*, of contrasting color. The stitching, *kuiki lau*, follows the contours of the pattern. Pattern designs are owned by their creators and it is considered dishonorable to use another quilter’s pattern without permission.

Harriet’s quilt, “Ke Kahi O Ka’iulani,” (The Comb of Ka’iulani), is not only beautiful but also rich in Hawaiian history. This pattern tells the story of the last Native Hawaiian princess, Victoria Ka’iulani, who died in 1899 at the age of 23. Native Hawaiians had deep respect for the young princess because she traveled to Washington, D.C., after the overthrow of the monarchy, to plead for the restoration of the Hawaiian throne. This quilt pattern, given to Harriet by her mother, tells the story through symbols of Hawaiian royalty, including crowns, *leis*, and the combs worn in the hair of Princess Ka’iulani. Traditional designs originally imprinted on tapa cloth are also seen on this quilt. The clusters of stars represent the eight main Hawaiian Islands.

Hawaiian quilts record history while encouraging and perpetuating Hawaiian culture. In this way, Harriet is preserving history for future generations. Quilting also offers Harriet times of reflection and calm, whether she is quilting in the early morning or late at night. When Harriet finishes a quilt, she is grateful for the gift of quilting and the warmth and beauty it offers.