

*“Kūpuna are a wonderful reality,  
They link us with our physical roots, our spiritual roots,  
Our sense of place and our sense of psyche balance.”  
by Edward Kanaha*

Hui Mālama i nā Kūpuna o Hawai‘i Nei is an organization which was born because of the unearthing of over a thousand Hawaiian iwi (skeletal remains) from a sand dune at Honokahua on Maui. It is an organization whose sole purpose is to repatriate Hawaiian iwi and moepū (funerary goods) and re-inter them wrapped in kapa and hala. The re-interment process is done with ceremony giving honor and respect back to our ancestors who were a vibrant, intelligent and industrious people. “La‘i ke keha o kou moe loa. The dignity of your long sleep will be peaceful.” That is the promise made by Hui Mālama to each of the iwi and moepū which they kanu (bury).

The practice of reburying is new because we didn’t make it a habit to dig up our dead when the land became prime real estate or when we found it necessary to find out more about ourselves by sending the iwi and moepū to museums where “experts” would grind the iwi. However, the practice of kanu is old, simple, morally correct and natural.

Moepū literally means; *put to sleep with*. Mrs Kawena Puku‘i says: “*Mai lawe wale i nā mea i ho‘omoepū‘ia, don’t wantonly take things placed with the dead*”. She also goes on to say something about iwi: “*The bones of the dead, considered the most cherished possession, were hidden.*” Mrs. Puku‘i was a Hawaiian scholar who shared a lot of wisdom and practice of her kupuna with all of us. Ironically La‘akea Sukanuma, one of the plaintiffs wanting to recall the moepū is Mrs. Puku‘i’s grandson. He learned nothing from his grandmother.

Samuel Kamakau, a Hawaiian scholar of the 19<sup>th</sup> century reveals the burial practices of his time; “*They searched for lua meki (deep pits) in the mountains, and for lua huna (hiding pits) and ana huna (secreted caves of the ancestors) to deposit the precious bones of their beloved one. They did this with no other thought but to carry out the last will of the departed one. They were well hidden from the eyes of men, and unknown to the “kupua o ka pō” (wizards of the night) who might reveal them. These caves hold treasures and other hidden things.*”

On November 7<sup>th</sup>, 1905 Mr. David Forbes wrote to the director of the Bishop Museum, Mr. William T. Brigham: “*Two friends and I have been fortunate enough to uncover a cave in this neighborhood. Explorations are not complete and we have not given the matter publicity. In the main artery of the cave we found a fine specimen of human skeleton wound up in tapa and laid in a shell or coffin apparently part of a canoe with a surf board as a cover, this shell lay on numerous mats and on top of the shell there were many sheets of various colored tapa surmounted by one of jet black color.*” Mr. Forbes continues to list the moepū(s) he found in with the iwi and after each accounting his question to Mr Brigham was: “*What should they be worth? or What do you consider a fair value for those?*” Mr. Forbes, of course, is talking about the Honoko‘a cave at Kawaihae. He wantonly took the iwi and moepū out with the intention to keep or sell them. Is this a crime that went unpunished or were they above the law, the same law that is punishing Hui Mālama for putting back the items.

In a letter back to Mr. Forbes on Nov. 11, 1905, Mr. Brigham replies: “*Ship the whole lot to me and we will carefully examine the collection and Mr. Stokes and I will put a fair price on the lot. Then if you should wish to sell anything to the museum we will raise funds for it. In the meantime keep the matter quiet for there are severe laws concerning burial caves, and I shall not make the matter public, of course, until you say so. If you should wish to keep the collection or part of it, the cos (unrecognized word) from this place would throw any suspicious persons off the scent.*”

Dear public you be the judge, Hui Mālama has done their research and is named by the federal law to repatriate, have done their task and am now being persecuted by that same federal law and the doubting public for doing exactly what they were organized to do, repatriation and re-interment of iwi kupuna and moepū.

Above all else I am Hawaiian, I am this land, I am my ancestors.  
Pualani Kanaka‘ole Kanaha