

A Day in the Life

“June 29th. A busy day. - - - -”

In part, the sole entry for that day in Sybil Bingham’s journal (1820) helps to describe what life was like for the families of the early missionaries in Hawai’i.

The Prudential Committee of the ABCFM in giving instructions to the pioneers of 1819 said: “Your mission is a mission of mercy, and your work is to be wholly a labor of love. ... Your views are not to be limited to a low, narrow scale, but you are to open your hearts wide, and set your marks high. You are to aim at nothing short of covering these islands with fruitful fields, and pleasant dwellings and schools and churches, and of Christian civilization.” (The Friend)

Over the course of a little over 40-years (1820-1863 - the “Missionary Period”), about 184-men and women in twelve Companies served in Hawai’i to carry out the mission of the ABCFM in the Hawaiian Islands.

One of the first things the missionaries did was to learn the Hawaiian language and create an alphabet for a written format of the language. Their emphasis was on teaching and preaching.

The missionaries were scattered across the Islands, each home was usually in a thickly inhabited village, so that the missionary and his wife could be close to their work among the people.

In the early years, they lived in the traditional thatched houses – “our little cottage built chiefly of poles, dried grass and mats, being so peculiarly exposed to fire ... consisting only of one room with a little partition and one door.” (Sybil Bingham) The thatched cottages were raised upon a low stone platform. Later, they lived in wood, stone or adobe homes.

The missionaries did not bring much furniture with them (and there were no stores or lumber yards,) so boxes in which their goods had been packed coming to the Islands served as tables and chairs.

However, “To-day I have been presented with what I may call an elegant chair My husband, I believe, was never a chair-maker before, but happy for me and the Mission family that he is every thing.” (Sybil Bingham, June 22, 1820)

(When the Bingham’s left the Islands in 1840, they took the chair with them; Sybil refused to part with it. Her wish was that when the last summons came she might be found in that chair, and her wish was granted when she died in 1848. (Bingham Journal))

The missionary family’s day began at 4 am (... it continued into the night, with no breaks.)

The mission children were up then, too; in the early morning, the parents taught their children. “We had one tin whale-oil lamp between us, with a single wick.... Soon after five we had breakfast.” (Bishop)

By 9 am, after accomplishing all domestic duties and schooling of the children, the wives would begin the instruction of the Hawaiian children – and taught them for six solid hours, occasionally running into the house to see that all was straight.

“Very soon I gathered up 12 or 15 little native girls to come once a day to the house so that as early as possible the business of instruction might be commenced. That was an interesting day to me to lay the foundation of the first school ever assembled”. (Sybil Bingham)

These early missionaries taught their lessons in Hawaiian, rather than English. In part, the mission did not want to create a separate caste and portion of the community as English-speaking Hawaiians. (In later years, the instruction, ultimately, was in English.)

“It has been a busy day - have done fitting work, of gowns, for two or three native women, - attending to the reading of others, - instructing our school children, entertaining Mr. Allen, and his little Peggy who has been with us through the day, writing a little, etc., etc. The days glide smoothly with us inwardly.” (Sybil Bingham)

Mission Stations

By 1850, eighteen mission stations had been established; six on Hawai‘i, four on Maui, four on O‘ahu, three on Kauai and one on Molokai.

Meeting houses were constructed at the stations, as well as throughout the district. Initially constructed as the traditional Hawaiian thatched structures; they were later made of wood or stone.

The following listing of Mission Stations begins at the north-west end of the Island chain and notes the year it was established, as well as the present Congregational church in the area of the initial Station.

Kauai **Waimea**, Established 1820 – Waimea United Church of Christ
Kōloa, Established 1834 – Kōloa Union Church
Waioli, Established 1834 - Wai‘oli Hui‘ia Church

O‘ahu **Honolulu**, Established 1820 – Kawaiaha‘o Church
Waialua, Established 1832 – Lili‘uokalani Protestant Church
‘Ewa, Established 1834 – Pearl City Community Church
Kāne‘ohe, Established 1834 – Kāne‘ohe Congregational Church
Punahou, Established 1841 – O‘ahu College (Punahou School)

Molokai **Kalua‘aha**, Established 1832 - Kalua‘aha Congregational Church

Maui **Lāhainā**, Established 1823 - Wai‘ola Church (Waine‘e)
Lahainaluna, Established 1831 – Lahainaluna High School
Wailuku, Established 1832 – Ka‘ahumanu Church
Hāna, Established 1837 - Wānanalua Congregational Church

Hawai‘i **Kailua**, Established 1820 – Mokuaikaua Church
Ka‘awaloa, Established 1824 – Kahikolu Congregational Church
Hilo, Established 1824 – Haili Congregational Church
Waimea, Established 1832 – ‘Imiola Congregational Church
Kohala, Established 1837 - Kālahikiola Congregational Church
Waiohinu, Established 1841 - Kauaha‘ao Congregational Church

Life on the Neighbor Islands

Artemas Bishop and his family were first permanently stationed at Kailua, Hawaii, in 1824, being transferred to Ewa, Oahu, in 1836, and to Honolulu in 1855, where Mr. Bishop died, Dec. 18, 1872. Mrs. Bishop died at Kailua, Feb. 28, 1828, the first death in the mission band. She left two infant children, including Sereno.

“Visits To Kaawaloa ... Our nearest missionary neighbor outside of the town of Kailua were the Ruggleses, who lived at Kaawaloa, twelve miles south. Their dwelling was at Kuapehu, two miles up the mountain, a most verdant and attractive spot.”

“It later became the residence of Rev. John D. Paris. Kaawaloa proper was a village on the north side of Kealakekua Bay.”

“I was born there at the house of Mr. and Mrs. Ely, only a few rods from the rock where Captain Cook was slain and where his monument now stands.”

“We often visited Kaawaloa, probably twice a year, going by water in a double canoe, generally starting two or three hours before daylight, so as to carry the land breeze a good part of the way.”

“There were a number of paddlers in each of the two canoes, who would make the long craft fly swiftly through the sea. The steersman in the stern would give the signal by a slap of his paddle against the canoe, and all the rowers would shift their paddles in unison from one side to the other.”

“We children generally laid upon the raised platform with the mother, though sometimes in the bottom of a canoe. We were apt to be seasick, and then go to sleep, sometimes awaking to see the waves dashing on a coast of black lava cliffs.”

“We would run up the little bay and step ashore upon Cooke's rock, whence it was only a few rods to the nice premises of the good Princess Kapiolani.”

“These were prettily thatched cottages on a platform of white masonry which was studded with black pebbles. Kapiolani's quarters were neatly furnished within. She was generally there to receive us with the most cordial hospitality.”

“Immediately behind the house was a precipice perhaps two hundred feet high. This seems to have been caused by a former breaking off of the coast line for many miles. Great lava flows had subsequently poured over the precipice to the north and south, so as to enclose the bay, leaving half a mile of the precipice at the head of the bay untouched.”

“The Ruggles Family And Home ... The next thing was to surmount the formidable pali. There were plenty of natives to carry up the lady and children in the lack of animals.”

“From the summit, two miles of slope brought us to the delightful home of the Ruggleses, where we were again lovingly welcomed. Mrs. Ruggles was a tall, sweet-faced woman of kindest character.”

“Mr. Ruggles was a pleasant man of small stature, who was often absent from home touring among the natives, his health requiring such activity.”

“There was a luxuriant garden, with luscious grapes and figs and coffee trees in fruit. There were also orange trees, and in the vicinity many old ohia trees with the ripe apples bestudding their gnarled trunks.”

“The mission dwelling was a large thatched house, with several glass windows. A matter of special delight was the company of two very agreeable children of our own ages, named Huldah and Samuel, of whom we were always very fond.”

“How Past Days Were Kept ... The Ruggles family returned to America about 1834, and we saw no more of them. Mr. Ruggles had done good service as a teacher and preacher for fourteen years.”

“Their places were taken by Mr. and Mrs. Cochran Forbes, four of whose grandchildren now reside in Honolulu. Mr. Forbes was a forceful and zealous missionary. There are memories of pleasant visits with them also, both at Kuapehu and at Kailua. On one occasion a fast day is remembered, such as we observed at Kailua four times a year by omitting the noon meal.”

“The Forbes were more rigid, and no breakfast was served. Discovering this, Mrs. Bishop made for the safe, and seizing some cold chicken and taro, enabled her hungry family to break their fast. She was always to be relied on in the commissariat.”

“Missionary Visits To Kailua ... Some mention should be interesting of memories of visits at Kailua from various missionaries. Such visits were always delightful to us.”

“Yet the ladies and sometimes the children were apt to be landed from their schooners in sad plight, after the hardships of the voyage. I remember two fair young women being brought in in fainting condition in the litters which they had occupied on the deck of the vessel.”

“These were Mrs. Dr. Chapin and Mrs. Ephraim Spaulding. The Spauldings made us a long visit, during which I formed an intense childish attachment to Mr. Spaulding, who was a sweet and devout man. An earlier visit is recalled made by the Bingham family about 1833. Most of their time was spent on the upland above us.”

“Mrs. Bingham was much of an invalid. Father Bingham was a somewhat stately, courteous gentleman, for whom I had much liking and a little fear. The Baldwins repeatedly visited us from Waimea. Dr. Baldwin we all liked. He was personally active, even breaking into a run, something rarely seen in grown men in Kailua.”

“My childish impressions of all these friends was wholly favorable, accompanied by the utmost reverence for their spirituality and devoutness.”

General Meetings

Very prominent in the old mission life was the annual “General Meeting” where all of the missionary families from across the Islands gathered at Honolulu from four to six weeks. “Often some forty or more of the missionaries besides their wives were present, as well as many of the older children. ... Much

business was transacted relating to the multifarious work and business of the Mission. New missionaries were to be located, and older ones transferred.” (Bishop)

“That was an annual assembling at the capital of all the missionary families, occupying from four to six weeks. The hospitality of the missionaries residing at Honolulu was severely taxed in entertaining their rural associates.”

“Many of the latter families secured native cottages and kept house in them. Our experiences at these times were varied and noteworthy. Especially so were the voyages to Honolulu and return.”

“In these days of rapid transit from port to port in large and comfortable steamers, no idea can be gained of the wretched miseries of those early and protracted voyages in small schooners.”

“As a child's experiences I recall them as among the severest physical sufferings of a fairly comfortable life. They must have been much worse to the lady missionaries.” (Bishop)

“The design of their coming together would naturally suggest itself to any reflecting mind. They are all engaged in one work, but are stationed at various and distant points on different portions of the group, hence they feel the necessity of occasionally coming together, reviewing the past, and concerting plans for future operations.”

“Were it not for these meetings, missionaries at extreme parts of the group might never see each other, and in some instances we know that persons connected with the Sandwich Island Mission, have never seen each other's faces, although for years they have been laboring in the same work.” (The Friend, June 15, 1846)

The primary object of this gathering was to hold a business meeting for hearing reports of the year's work and of the year's experiences in more secular matters, and there from to formulate their annual report to the Board in Boston.

Missionary Period

On October 23, 1819, the Pioneer Company of American Protestant missionaries from the northeast US set sail on the Thaddeus for the Hawaiian Islands. They first sighted the Islands and stopped at Kawaihae on the Island of Hawai'i on March 30, 1820. Here they learned that the kapu was abolished, Kamehameha was dead and Liholiho was king. They then went on and finally anchored at Kailua-Kona on April 4, 1820.

Over the course of a little over 40-years (1820-1863 - the “Missionary Period”), about 184-men and women in twelve Companies served in Hawai'i to carry out the mission of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) in the Hawaiian Islands.

Collaboration between Native Hawaiians and American Protestant missionaries resulted in, among other things, the

- Introduction of Christianity;
- Development of a written Hawaiian language and establishment of schools that resulted in widespread literacy;
- Promulgation of the concept of constitutional government;
- Combination of Hawaiian with Western medicine; and
- Evolution of a new and distinctive musical tradition (with harmony and choral singing)