

Ali'i Gifts to the Missionaries

"We looked into some of the native huts, primitive enough in point of furniture; mats, and tapa in one corner for a bed, a few calabashes in another, hardly suggesting a pantry, were all. Their principal article of food is 'poi,' a paste made of baked taro, which they eat with fish, often raw and seasoned with salt."

"It is the men's employment to cultivate and cook the taro. Housekeeping I should judge to be a very light affair, the manufacture of mats and tapa being almost the sole employment of the women. There are no cold winters to provide for; the continuous summer furnishes food with but little labor, so that the real wants of life are met, in a great degree, without experiencing the original curse pronounced upon the bread winner."

"Such quantities of native presents as we have received to-day, from the natives coming in procession, each one bearing a gift! Among these were fish, lobsters, bananas, onions, fowls, eggs, and watermelons. In exchange, they expect us to shake hands and repeat 'aloha.'"

"Their childish exclamations of delight are quite amusing - as, for example, when they request us to turn around, so that they may examine our dresses and hair behind."

"They all express themselves delighted in having a physician among them, and one man said, on being introduced to Dr. Judd; 'We are healed.'"

"Her Royal Highness dined with us again to-day. She had been sending in nice things for the table all the morning, but did not seem quite satisfied, kindly inquiring if there was not something the strangers would like, not on the bill of fare."

"Mr. Bingham remarked, 'You have been very thoughtful to-day.' She looked him in the face, and asked with an arch smile, 'Ah, is it to-day only?' No mother's tenderness could exceed hers toward Mr. and Mrs. Bingham. As she is an amazon in size, she could dandle any one of us in her lap, as she would a little child, which she often takes the liberty of doing." (Laura Judd, April 2, 1828)

Let's look back ...

In pre-contact Hawaiian culture, cooking was done by men, men and women ate in separate hale, and certain "male" foods were forbidden to women. Everything was based upon the 'ai kapu (eating or food kapu). The 'ai kapu ended in November of 1819 when King Kamehameha II ate with Ka'ahumanu and Keōpūolani and let them eat forbidden foods 'ai noa, free eating, and the kapu came to an end.

Like New England though, there was a gendered division of labor in pre-contact Hawai'i. The labor of clearing fields and digging up the land was done by men, while the actual planting of plants was usually done by women.

Hawaiian food crops included: sweet potato, kalo, bananas, sugar cane, 'awa, yam (uhi), arrowroot (pia) coconut, breadfruit (ulu), mountain apple, and bitter gourds. Other plants that Hawaiians cultivated were 'ie and olona for fiber and cordage, wauke for making kapa, and many other plants and vegetables. The staple food was kalo. Kalo was made into poi and pa'i 'ai. It was also baked, roasted, and fried. Other foods included luau leaf, chicken, pig, and dog. (Smola)

Hawaiian Food

The missionaries had to adapt to a new diet; for the most part, the missionaries had a very Hawaiian diet. Fish (i'a), taro (kalo), poi, pigs (pua'a), chickens (moa), bananas (mai'a), sweet potatoes ('uala) were regular parts of the missionary diet. (HMCS)

In addition, the missionary diet included: melons, squashes, cabbages, cucumbers, green corn, beans, fresh pork, goat, goat's milk, bread, rice, mountain apples, bananas, pineapples, butter, wine, plus spices such as cinnamon and allspice, beef, and fish. Also, the missionaries ate New England foods shipped to them: dried apple rings, sea biscuits, salted beef and pork, and things made from wheat flour. (Smola)

Some food came from the missionaries buying food with money, from trading or bartering items like cloth and books, and from agricultural land given to the mission. The items of New England food that they got came by supply shipments from the ABCFM usually brought out in whale ships or merchant ships that were already headed to Hawai'i or were brought here to be planted once the missionaries landed. (HMCS)

Much of the food came in the form of gifts from the ali'i. According to the account books, these gifts of food from the ali'i occurred virtually daily for over 10 years. (HMCS)

The following, from the account book of Levi Chamberlain in 1825, notes gifts of food from ali'i to the mission members. You will note his inclusion of 'Amt' (Amount) – noting the estimated value of each gift.

Date	By whom Presented	Articles	Amt.
May 11 ¹⁸²⁵	Kapiolani	Fish,	15
13	Governor of Hawaii	Fresh pork,	35
18	Kaahumanu	Fish,	20
19	Kapiolani	Cabbages & taro (1 maro)	27
27	Hoahou	1 goat to Mr Goodrich,	100
June 1	Kaahumanu	Fish,	15
2	Kapiolani	Taro,	20
6	Karaimoku	Fish,	25
12	Naihe	Baked meat,	30
13	do	Taro	20
20	Hoapiri	Fish,	15
22	do	do	15
	Kau'apekuli	do	15
		Potatoes	15

This meticulous listing of 'Donations' (as Chamberlain labeled his list in his account book), shows the regular interactions between the ali'i and the missionaries – as well as the constant conveyance of gifts. The following page shows a later listing of food and other donations to the mission.

Notable names on the prior and following listing include, Kauikeaouli (Kamehameha III), Ka'ahumanu and Kalanimōku (noted as Karaimoku in the account books). You can also see here that others contributed, as did Captain Osborne (10-gallons of cider on November 24, 1825).

List of Donations of a domestic & foreign nature rec^d by Elisha Loomis

Date	Donor	Articles	Am ^t	
			\$	Cts
Nov. 8, 1825	Chiefs	Fish	2	00
8 th	Paulua	A hog	18	00
9 - 11	Chiefs	Fish	4	00
12	Chiefs	do	1	25
19	Boki	3 pints Indian meal		
"	Kaahumanu	10 small Fish		20
24	Pua	a piece of Pork	1	00
"	Kaahumanu	a basket of potatoes		12 1/2
	Capt. Osborne	10 gallons Cider	8	00
25	Kauikeouli	a hog	7	00
"	Pua	three fish		30
26	Kaahumanu	a basket of potatoes		10
29	Kauikeouli	4 Fish		25
Dec. 1	Kaahumanu	1 shawl [to Mrs. B.]	6	00
4	Kaahumanu	a piece of Pork		75
6	Kaahumanu	do.		40
[Nov.]	Hapule	2 1/2 yds cambric	1	50
	Karaimoku	one half tub taro		5
			41	37 1/2

[Check out the Mission Account Books for yourself; click HERE.](#)

“(T)he missionaries described a seemingly endless bounty of provisions. The gifts were undeniably generous; their quantity and abundance attested to this.”

Hiram Bingham recalled, “immediately after receiving permission to establish a Protestant mission in the islands, the missionaries ‘made it a daily object to gain their confidence, to make ourselves acquainted with their language, habits, and modes of thinking.’ Moreover, the missionaries endeavored ‘to adapt our instructions to their capacities and most urgent wants.’ Hiram Bingham judged such tactics ‘as the best means of access to their minds and hearts.’”

“In the first weeks and months after their arrival, missionaries received a host of gifts, ranging from fruit to potatoes and sugar cane to an ‘elegant’ fly brush. The gifts that ali’i provided to American missionaries during the initial stages of contact suggest the political and diplomatic savvy developed in the decades leading up to the missionaries’ arrival. While missionaries had only limited exposure to Hawaiians prior to their voyage, Hawaiians had extensive contact with Westerners and had become quite adept at dealing and negotiating with foreigners.”

“Beginning in the 1780s, the islands became a desirable stopover for fur-trading ships destined for China. Honolulu subsequently emerged as an important Pacific trading center. Indeed, the islands became a ‘hub’ of Pacific travel, bringing Hawaiians into regular contact with western travelers and traders during the later part of the eighteenth century.”

“(G)ift giving and generosity appeared as a means by which ali’i might engage in a display of mana - that is, divine power. In the extension of gifts, Hawaiian royalty provided not just for the needs of their guests but, in the process, simultaneously created a debt between themselves and the missionaries while enhancing their own status.” The missionaries developed a reciprocal gift-giving relationship.

“(M)issionaries were well aware of the ways in which the gift of clothing might allow them to begin in earnest the process of transforming and converting the Hawaiian people. Additionally, they hoped to win the favor of the Hawaiian people through the strategic placement of things”.

“For missionaries, gifts of clothing in particular served to lay the groundwork for what was, to their minds, the much more significant gift of Christian salvation. The missionaries continued to provide gifts of clothing, both because they recognized their ‘obligations of gratitude’ and because they hoped that the gifts would help them achieve their longer-term goals.”

“That is, missionary wives appear to have understood that the relationships established around these exchanges were critical to creating important diplomatic ties with Hawai’i’s royal women. Indeed, these exchange relationships might be understood as an important precondition for the establishment of favorable relations with Hawaiians.”

“If missionaries had been concerned about both the spiritual and physical nakedness of Hawaiians, and if Hawaiians were at first reluctant to take part in religious conversion, the missionaries could at least work to solve the more visible problem before them by providing gifts of clothing in the way of bonnets, dresses, shirts, and suits.”

“(A)s the mission period progressed (the) missionaries developed a close association with ali’i ...“The relationships constituted around gift giving and exchange created a necessary favorable link between American missionaries and ali’i in this period.” (Thigpen)

Common Stock

The mission depository operated under the 'common stock' system, where goods that came in as supplies for the missionaries belonged to the mission and everyone got a fair cut. The supply system from the ABCFM operated under the idea of 'disinterested benevolence.'

Disinterested benevolence is the idea that missionaries were to spread the Word and Kingdom of God while expecting no compensation in return. The rules for the missionaries specifically state that no missionary was engage in any business or transaction for the sake of private gain. The profits from any transaction was to be given to the mission-at-large.

Both the common stock system and disinterested benevolence were important components of how the Depository was operated. The missionaries were not allowed to keep private property, unless it was a gift specifically made to them or the things they brought with them from New England. Donations or gifts were common from members of their churches, folks back in New England, and the ali'i.

These donations were recorded by Levi Chamberlain, reported to the ABCFM, and if they were made to a particular mission station or missionary – deducted out of that station's or missionaries supply allotment. This was the way they came up with to make it fair as not every mission station had the same access to goods, food, gifts, or family back in New England.

Hawaiian Mission

On October 23, 1819, the Pioneer Company of American Protestant missionaries from the northeast US, led by Hiram Bingham, set sail on the Thaddeus for the Hawaiian Islands. Over the course of a little over 40-years (1820-1863 - the "Missionary Period",) about 180-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.

The Mission Prudential Committee 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)

By the time the Pioneer Company arrived, Kamehameha I had died and the centuries-old kapu system had been abolished; through the actions of King Kamehameha II (Liholiho,) with encouragement by his father's wives, Queens Ka'ahumanu and Keōpūolani (Liholiho's mother,) the Hawaiian people had already dismantled their heiau and had rejected their religious beliefs.

Hawaiian Mission Houses' Strategic Plan themes note that the collaboration between Native Hawaiians and American Protestant missionaries resulted in 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)