

Letters from the Ali'i

Practically every vessel that visited the North Pacific in the closing years of the 18th century stopped at Hawai'i for provisions and recreation; then, the opening years of the 19th saw the sandalwood business become a recognized branch of trade. Sandalwood, geography and fresh provisions made the Islands a vital link in a closely articulated trade route between Boston, the Northwest Coast and Canton, China. At the same time, the Hawaiian demand for American goods was rapidly increasing, owing to the improved standards of living.

The central location of the Hawaiian Islands brought many traders, and then whalers, to the Islands. A new era opened in the Islands in 1820 with the arrival of the first missionaries. "The Hawaiians had been playing with the rest of the world for forty-years by the time the missionaries came here."

"(T)hey end up staying and the impact is immediate. They are the first outside group that doesn't want to take advantage of you, one way or the other, get ahold of their goods, their food, or your daughter. ... But, they couldn't get literacy. It was intangible, (the Hawaiians) wanted to learn to read and write". (Nogelmeier)

Shortly after the Pioneer Company arrived, missionary Samuel Ruggles notes in his Journal entry on May 8, 1820, "The inhabitants treated me with all the attention and hospitality which their limited circumstances would afford; and even carried their generosity to excess ..."

On May 10, 1820, Ruggles notes, "This afternoon the king (Kaumuali'i) sent to me and requested that I would come and read to him in his bible. I read the first chapter of Genesis and explained to him what I read as well as I could."

"He listened with strict attention, frequently asking pertinent questions, and said I can't understand it all; I want to know it; you must learn my language fast, and then tell me all - No white man before, ever read to me and talk like you."

The missionaries developed an alphabet and started to teach the Hawaiians to read and write – in the Hawaiian language. This marked the beginning of Hawai'i's phenomenal rise to literacy. The missionaries established schools associated with their missions across the Islands. By 1831, Hawaiians had built 1,103 schoolhouses. This covered every district throughout the eight major islands and serviced an estimated 52,882 students. (Laimana) The proliferation of schoolhouses was augmented by the printing of 140,000 copies of the pī'āpā (elementary Hawaiian spelling book). (Laimana)

By 1853, nearly three-fourths of the native Hawaiian population over the age of sixteen years were literate in their own language. The short time span within which native Hawaiians achieved literacy is remarkable in light of the overall low literacy rates of the United States at that time. (Lucas)

The ali'i wrote letters to the missionaries. Hawaiian Mission Houses Historic Site and Archives (Mission Houses) collaborated with Puakea Nogelmeier and Awaiaulu Foundation to digitize, transcribe, translate and annotate over 200-letters written by 33-Chiefs.

The letters, written between 1823 and 1887, are assembled from three different collections: the ABCFM Collection held by Harvard's Houghton Library, the HEA Collection of the Hawaii Conference-United Church of Christ and the Hawaiian Mission Children's Society. These letters provide insight into what the Chiefs were doing and thinking at the time, as well as demonstrate the close working relationship and collaboration between the ali'i and the missionaries.

Puakea Nogelmeier Comments on the Chiefs' Letters

Puakea Nogelmeier gave a talk at Hawaiian Mission Houses related the translation project he worked on associated with letters from the ali'i to missionaries. The following is a transcript of portions of his talk. He speaks of the missionaries and the ali'i, and their relationship

"The missionary effort is more successful in Hawai'i than probably anywhere in the world, in the impact that it has on the character and the form of a nation. And so, that history is incredible; but history gets so blurry ..."

"The missionary success cover decades and decades becomes sort of this huge force where people feel like the missionaries got off the boat barking orders ... where they just kind of came in and took over. They got off the boat and said 'stop dancing,' 'put on clothes,' don't sleep around.'"

"And it's so not the case"

"The missionaries arrived here, and they're a really remarkable bunch of people. They are scholars, they have got a dignity that goes with religious enterprise that the Hawaiians recognized immediately. ..."

"They (possessed) three really important things; they come with a set of skills that Hawaiians are really impressed with. Literacy, they had been waiting for it for forty years, basically. And so for forty years Hawaiians wanted everything on every ship that came. And they could get it; it was pretty easy to get. Two pigs and ... a place to live, you could trade for almost anything."

"But, they couldn't get literacy ... Kamehameha sets up a school for his sons in 1810. It doesn't work very well because (his sons) aren't particularly good students. So it lasts for only about a week or two. "Kamehameha tries, he signs his name to letters ... they wanted, but nobody can really settle it down."

"The missionaries were the first group of a scholarly background, but they also had the patience and endurance. So that's part of the skill sets. ... That's really the more important things that are attracted first. But the second thing is they are pono."

"They have an interaction that is intentionally not taking advantage. It's not crude. They don't get drunk and throw up on the street ... and they don't take advantage and they don't make a profit. So that pono actually is more attractive than religion."

"They start in on the skill set and the pono, and those two that lead Hawaiians into religion. But I have students who say the missionaries brainwashed the Hawaiians. Well then, how dumb were the Hawaiians?"

"The remarkable success here is that Hawaiians are given a new technology and what they started to put out in writing, they are transitioning from a ... very sophisticated stone age culture into a very, very modern world. And now they're empowered to write all that, and document it."

"Hawaii becomes more literate than America or England because the two things, actually Liholiho starts it Kauikeaouli takes it off and says 'mine will be a nation of literacy.' When he said that he could already read and write in both languages."

"It's not that he's saying we should learn to read and write.' He's saying 'let my people' ... That notion that they appreciated the skill set and they appreciated the pono, and that led to appreciation of Christianity...."

Here's the audio of Puakea Nogelmeier's full presentation: <https://youtu.be/TseC3SClrNE>

Examples of Letters from Ali'i

As examples, the following are translations of three letters written by chiefs that specifically relate to that positive, close working relationship.

Chiefs' Request for American Missionaries to Teach the Chiefs' Children

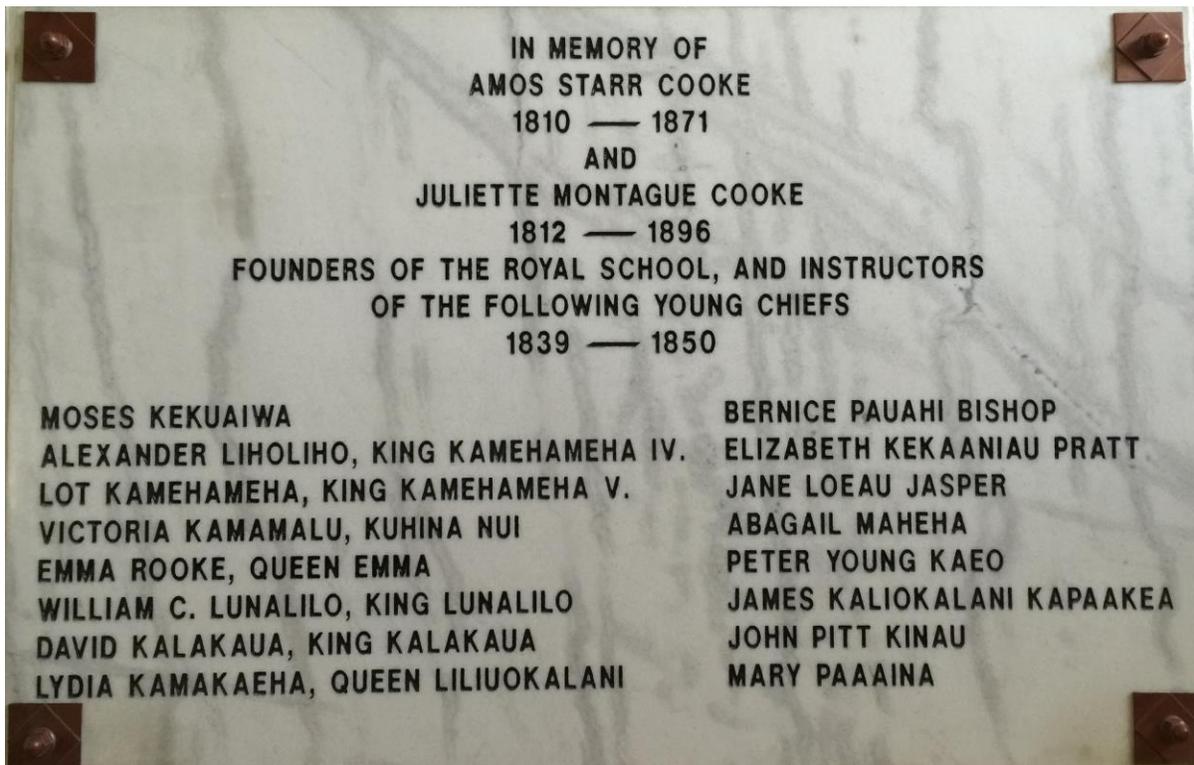
This letter, sent in 1839, was signed by three chiefs, Kamehameha III, Hoapili Wahine and Kekāuluohi; it was directed at the missionaries, specifically Amos Starr Cooke (teacher) and Gerrit Parmele Judd, a physician. The missionaries were asked by the King to teach and care for the next generation of the highest-ranking chiefs' children of the realm and secure their positions for Hawai'i's Kingdom.

"We ask Mr. Cooke to be teacher for our royal children. He is the teacher of our royal children and Dr. Judd is the one to take care of the royal children because we two hold Dr. Judd as necessary for the children and also in certain difficulties between us and you all.

Kamehameha III
Hoapili Wahine
Kekāuluohi"

This resulted in the formation of O'ahu's first school, the Chiefs' Children's School (The Royal School.) Seven families were eligible under succession laws stated in the 1840 Constitution of the Kingdom of Hawai'i; Kamehameha III called on seven boys and seven girls to board in the Chiefs' Children's School.

The Chiefs' Children's School was unique because for the first time ali'i children would be brought together in a group to be taught, ostensibly, about the ways of governance. The School also acted as another important unifying force among the ruling elite, instilling in their children common principles, attitudes and values, as well as a shared vision. No school in Hawai'i has ever produced so many Hawaiian leaders in one generation. In this school were educated the Hawai'i sovereigns who reigned over the Hawaiian people from 1855.



Aloha oukou
e na kumu.

Auhea oukou e
na kumu a pau loa.

Ke noi aku nei makou
ia Mi. Tuke i kumu
nana keiki Alii a
makou. Oia ke ku-
mu ad. a na keiki Alii.

A me Kauka hoi ka
mea nana e malama i na
keiki ali. Ito ka mea, e
paa loa na no manaia
Kauka i mea e pono ai na
keiki, a me na pilikia ke-
kahi i waena o makou a
me oukou.

Kamehameha # Hoapili

Kekauluohi

(Copy of Kalaimoku's letter to Mr. B.)
Honolulu, [Oahu] (Oahu) 28th 1866

Aloha oe e Mr. Bingham

Eia kau manao ia oukou e
ka pae Mianati kumae a makou ke
hai aku nei au ia oukou, aole au i ke
i na ka e ike au i ko oukou hewa
i ko oukou hewa, hai aku no la wau
ia oukou, aole e pona wale no oukou
e haumei mai oukou ia makou i ka
palapala ae aku no ^{hai} makou a haumei mai
ia makou, a makou no i ka olelo a ke Akua
ne, aia oe no i ka olelo a ke Akua
oukou e ka olelo a ke Akua, a hii mai
nei no ka haole hana iho nei i ko
makou aia, ka made o Malaka a me
ko Benitania, o huike mai oukou
au nei, na makou ko oukou hewa,
aole na oukou haole no. Eia no kau
manao ma ka olelo a Iehova Ua ha-
aui au i kau manao i ke Akua a me
kau hana, a me kau uhaue. Ua hoo-
lilo wau i au iho i Iesu Kristi
no Iesu Kristi. He nana iho oukou
e Mr. Bingham ma i kau manao,
i ike oukou, a i make make oukou e ka-
lapala oukou i kau manao ma Malaka
i ke olelo o kakou, a ia oukou aku ia.

Aloha ke olelo o kakou ma Malaka. Aloha ia
Na Kalaimoku

Kalanimōku Noting Problems are Not Being Caused by Missionaries

The second letter (above) is from Kalanimōku to Hiram Bingham, written in 1826; that letter translates to,

“Greetings Mr Bingham. Here is my message to all of you, our missionary teachers. I am telling you that I have not seen your wrong doing. If I had seen you to be wrong, I would tell you all. No, you must all be good. Give us literacy and we will teach it. And, give us the word of God and we will heed it. Our women are prohibited, for we have learned the word of God.”

“Then foreigners come doing damage to our land. Foreigners of American and Britain. But don’t be angry, for we are to blame for you being faulted. And it is not you foreigners, the other foreigners. “Here’s my message according to the words of Jehovah, I have given my heart to God and my body and my spirit. I have devoted myself to the church and Jesus Christ.”

“Have a look at this letter of mine, Mr Bingham and company. And if you see it and wish to send my message on to America to our chief (President,) that is up to you. Greetings to the chief of America. Regards to you all, Kalanimōku.”

Chiefs’ Request for More American Teachers

This last sample letter was sent August 23, 1836 to the American missionaries; the Hawaiian chiefs asked that more American teachers be sent to the Islands.

“Regards to you, our friends in America. Here is our hope for the improvement of the lands here in Hawaii. Give us more instructors like those you have in your land, America. These are the kinds of instructors we are considering:”

“A carpenter
A tailor
A house builder
A cobbler
A wheelwright
A paper maker
A make of lead printing type
Farmers who know the planting and care of cotton and silk, and sugar refining
A maker of fabric, and
Carts suitable for heavy work
A teacher for the chiefs in matters of land, comparable to what is done in enlightened lands
And if there are others appropriate for those endeavors, those as well.”

“If you agree and send these teachers when we will protect them when they arrive, provide the necessities to make their professions viable and give our support those needed endeavours.”

(The letter is signed by 15-chiefs, including Kauikeaouli (King Kamehameha III.)

Na Kauikeaouli	Liliha
Nahi’ena’ena	’Aikanaka
Na Hoapili Kane	Leleiōhoku
Na Malia Hoapili (Hoapili Wahine?)	Kekūanā’o’a
Gov Adams Kuakini	Kana’ina
Na Kaahumanu 2 (Kīna’u)	Kekauōnohi
Kekāuluohi	Keli’iahonui”
Paki	

While missionaries with various skill sets had been in the islands since 1820, this letter identifies the kingdom's need for teachers in new fields of industry and business. The letter is signed at Lāhainā, the national capital until 1845, by the king and most of the leading chiefs of the time.

In response, shortly after, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) sent the largest company of missionaries to the Islands, that included a large number of teachers.

The Eighth Company left Boston December 14, 1836 and arrived at Honolulu, April 9, 1837 on the Mary Frasier from Boston. Among the missionaries were:

- Physician Seth Lathrop Andrews (1809–1892) and wife Parnelly Pierce (1807–1846)
- Teacher Edward Bailey (1814–1903) and wife Caroline Hubbard (1814–1894)
- Rev. Isaac Bliss (1804–1851) and wife Emily Curtis (1811–1865)
- Samuel Northrup Castle (1808–1894) and first wife Angeline Tenney (1810–1841)
- Rev. Daniel Toll Conde (1807–1897) and wife Andelucia Lee (1810–1855)
- Amos Starr Cooke (1810–1871) and wife Juliette Montague (1812–1896), (Later asked by Kamehameha III to teach the young royals at the Royal School)
- Rev. Mark Ives (1809–1885) and wife Mary Ann Brainerd (1810–1882)
- Teacher Edward Johnson (1813–1867) and wife Lois S. Hoyt (1809–1891)
- Teacher Horton Owen Knapp (1813–1845) and wife Charlotte Close (1813–1846)
- Rev. Thomas Lafon (1801–1876) and wife Sophia Louisa Parker (1812–1844)
- Teacher Edwin Locke (1813–1843) and wife Martha Laurens Rowell (1812–1842)
- Teacher Charles MacDonald (1812–1839) and wife Harriet Treadwell Halstead (1810–1881)
- Teacher Bethuel Munn (1803–1849) and wife Louisa Clark (1810–1841)
- Miss Marcia M. Smith (1806–1896), teacher
- Miss Lucia Garratt Smith (1808–1892), teacher, later married to as his second wife Lorenzo Lyons
- Teacher William Sanford Van Duzee (1811–1883) and Oral Hobart (1814–1891)
- Teacher Abner Wilcox (1808–1869) and wife Lucy Eliza Hart (1814–1869)

Here is a link to view the Ali'i Letters Collection at Hawaiian Mission Houses:

<http://hmha.missionhouses.org/collections/show/178>

Here is a link to a discussion on the Chiefs' letters by Kapali Lyon:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-BqfQvuMD4>

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.

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)