

# Common Stock

An often-repeated statement is, “The missionaries came to do good, and they did very well.” (Suggesting the missionaries personally profited from their services in the Islands.) It is simply not true.

A review of the facts shows that the missionaries were forbidden to “engage in any business or transaction whatever for the sake of private gain” and they did not, and could not, own property individually.

To supply the mission members, a Common Stock system was initiated, a community-based economic system designed to enable the missionaries to accomplish their goals without having to worry about finding sustenance and shelter. It was a socialistic, rather than capitalistic, economic structure.

The missionaries were constantly reminded of Matthew Chapter 6, verse 24: “No one can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (money.)” (Woods)

## Economy

“Today ‘economy’ primarily means ‘the wealth and resources of a country or region, especially in terms of the production and consumption of goods and services’ or ‘a particular system or stage of an economy.’”  
Secondarily it means ‘careful management of available resources.’”

“In 1828 ‘economy’ meant, ‘primarily, the management, regulation and government of a family or the concerns of a household,’ and then eight other definitions involving management, frugality, and arrangement or system, but nothing truly like today’s primary definition.”

“Assuming that past and present peoples speak the same language in these regards often leads to a gross distortion of the past.” (Kelleher)

“The economy (using the word in its modern sense) of early America was cash-poor, i.e. there was not enough currency in circulation for all the business people needed to do. The only legal tender (money that everyone had to accept) was scarce gold, silver, and copper coins.”

“Both coins minted in the United States and abroad (especially Mexico) were used, since it was the value of the metal in the coin and not who minted it that gave it its value. Printed paper notes issued by private banks circulated even more widely as cash, but these notes were only as good as the reputation of the bank that issued them. (Foreign coins remained legal tender in the U.S. until 1857.) (Kelleher)

## Laws and Regulations of the ABCFM

“Though in many cases (missionaries) married to hastily found mates shortly before sailing, they lived marital lives that were exemplary in their fill of love and devotion; their families’ parents and children were models for affection and mutual helpfulness ...”

“... with mere pittance of salaries or rations, often unable to obtain suitable food, living at first for years in cramped, leaky, floorless thatched houses, with little privacy, often ill or child-bearing with no doctor available, and no end of calls for self-sacrificing services, they were marvels of patience and faithfulness.”

“They had to be all-round mechanics and farmers, building houses and churches of stone, adobe or wood and thatch, making furniture, and raising fruits, vegetables, flowers, and dairy and poultry products, not to mention surveying, doctoring, and peace-making; in their ministering they had the courage of their convictions, not hesitating to discipline chiefs especially when the latter oppressed the common people, for they were very democratic champions of the rights of man.” (Frear, 1935)

The Laws and Regulations of the ABCFM stated, “The missionaries and assistant missionaries are regarded as having an equitable claim upon the churches, in whose behalf they go among the heathen, for an economical support, while performing their missionary labors and it shall be the duty of the Board to see that a fair and equitable allowance is made to them, taking into view their actual circumstances in the several countries where they reside.” (Laws and Regulations of the Board, 1812)

So missionaries could devote their entire energies to developing a written language for the Hawaiian people, translating the Bible into Hawaiian and teaching native men, women and children to read it, the ABCFM supplied all the Hawaiian mission’s domestic needs through a Common Stock system administered by appointed secular agents for the mission.

The origins of the common stock system for the Sandwich Islands Mission are in the bylaws of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), established in 1812:

5. No missionary or assistant missionary [a missionary not ordained as a reverend] shall engage in any business or transaction whatever for the sake of private gain; nor shall any one engage in transactions or employments yielding pecuniary profit, without first obtaining the consent of his brethren in the mission; and the profits, in all such cases, shall be placed at the disposal of the mission.
6. The missionaries and assistant missionaries are regarded as having an equitable claim upon the churches, in whose behalf they go among the heathen, for an economical support, while performing their missionary labors; and it shall be the duty of the Board [ABCFM] to see that a fair and equitable allowance is made to them, taking into view their actual circumstances in the several countries where they reside.

### **Mission Property Held Jointly**

The Mission was supported by donations to the ABCFM on the continent, “The free-will offerings of many churches, and many thousands of individuals are cast into one treasury, and committed, for application to the intended objects, to persons duly appointed to the high trust.”

“Upon these sacred funds and under this constituted direction, approved persons, freely offering themselves for the holy service, are sent forth to evangelize the heathen.”

“Your economical polity will be founded on the principle established by the Board, ‘That at every missionary station, the earnings of the members of the mission, and all monies and articles of different kinds, received by them, or any of them, directly from the funds of the Board, or in the way of donation, shall constitute a common stock ...”

“... from which they shall severally draw their support in such proportions, and under such regulations as may from time to time be found advisable, and be approved by the Board or by the Prudential Committee.” (Instruction to the Missionaries, October 15, 1819)

The Minutes of a meeting of the Pioneer Company on their way aboard the Thaddeus reinforced these instructions, “That the property furnished by the Christian public, either in money or other articles of any kind, for the purposes of the Mission shall be at the disposal of the members jointly and subject to their vote.”

“The property acquired by the members jointly or by individuals of the body either by grant, barter, or earnings shall also be subject to the disposal of the members jointly.”

“The property thus furnished or acquired, either divided or undivided, shall be devoted to the general purposes of the mission, according to the tenor of our Instructions from the A. B. Com. F. M. and according to our own regulations, not incompatible with those instructions.”

“No member of this mission shall be entitled to use or allowed to appropriate such property divided or undivided, in bying [sic], selling, giving, or consuming, etc. in any manner incompatible with our general Instructions, or contrary to the voice of a majority of the members.” (Minutes of the Prudential Meeting of the Mission Family, November 16, 1819)

Mission family members were allowed to keep personal gifts from family and friends as private property, but those gifts were subtracted from what they would otherwise be entitled to receive from the Depository. (Woods)

In essence, except for the gifts of individuals to individuals, virtually no private property was actually held by the individual missionaries.

### Equal Distribution of Goods

The Mission’s secular agent, Levi Chamberlain, kept track of everything mission families received from the Depository, gifts from mainland friends or family members, and any presents from Native Hawaiians. Everything was counted against the equal distribution of goods.

“It pleased the body to appoint me as the general agent to superintend the Depository to be established at this place from which the different stations are to receive supplies. The duties of this office are arduous & important, for the right discharge of which I need wisdom, judgment, prudence, discernment, patience, perseverance & especially dependance on God.” (Levi Chamberlain Journal)



*The coral structure Chamberlain House (still standing at Mission Houses) was the Mission’s storage and depository (LOC, 1902)*

“No one has any salary; but things are sent as the funds of the Board allow, and they think our necessities demand. But it is a heavy tax upon them to supply the means of procuring plain food for so many, at a place where every article of provision we consume, is bought at a rate double to what it would cost in Boston. Much of our daily support will probably be sent us by ships from Boston and Nantucket, especially as it can so often come to us without freight.” (Sybil Bingham, October 4, 1822)

As the mission got going and had been in the Islands for a couple of years, it was thought best to clarify the division of goods amongst the missionaries, especially since a reinforcement had just arrived in April, 1823. At the Annual Meeting in 1823, the issue of distribution of the means of support was taken up and submitted several resolutions dealing with the issue:

- Res. 1<sup>st</sup> That a depository be established at this place [Honolulu], to which shall belong all the earnings of the different members of the mission, all the supplies sent out by the Board [the ABCFM], and all the undivided and common property of the Mission.
- Res. 2<sup>ndly</sup> That an agent shall be appointed, whose duty it shall be to superintend the depository, to procure supplies for it & distribute said supplies, according to rules to be hereafter adopted.
- Res. 3<sup>dly</sup> That it be the duty of each station to transmit to the agent a quarterly account of the state of its supplies, of its wants & its prospects. This quarterly report shall embrace in separate [sic] items, an account of expenses for building, and repairing houses, making fences, labour not embraced in the foregoing particulars, fuel, purchases from ships, fresh meat of every kind, vegetables, and miscellaneous articles. In the same report shall be embraced a list of all necessary articles of support received from the natives & from foreign visitants designed for the use of the station.
- Res. 4<sup>thly</sup> That whenever supplies shall be received by any station, unless such supplies are necessary for the immediate use of the station, an account shall be transmitted to the general agent, and the supplies shall be considered as belonging to the depository, although they may not be removed, unless directed by the agent for the necessary supply of other stations.
- [insert] Resolved 5<sup>th</sup> that all donations made to individuals of the mission in money, clothing, merchandize, furniture, and utensils, necessary articles of provision, comforts, & luxuries, may be enjoyed by the individuals for whom they were specially designed and applied to any purpose, not incompatible with the rules and instructions of the Board or Pru[dential] Com[mittee] and the members this receiving donations shall give our general agent such an account of them as may be needful to guide him in the due distribution of the general means of support – making a distinction between articles intended as general support and more tokens of personal regard. [end of insert]
- Res. 6<sup>thly</sup> That it shall be the duty of the general agent after receiving the quarterly reports of the several stations, to send immediate supplies so far as he is able, and at all other times it shall be his duty as far as possible to anticipate the wants of the several stations, so as to preclude the danger of any stations being left destitute.
- Res. 7<sup>thly</sup> That whenever supplies are received from America or are purchased here, of whatever kind they may be, the agent shall as soon as he is able, make a general & equitable division of the articles, having respect to the supplies previously sent to the different stations, to the wants of the stations & to the means which they have of supplying themselves. In all cases where the agent is unable to make such a division with satisfaction to himself, it shall be his duty to inform the station what is in the depository [and] transmit annually to all stations a particular account of the depository also an account of the general expenses of the different stations and of the pecuniary state of the whole mission.

*List of Donations of a domestic  
& foreign nature rec<sup>d</sup> by Elisha Loomis*

Date	Donor	Articles	Am.	
			\$	Cts
Nov. 6, 1805	Chiefs	Fish	2	00
8 <sup>th</sup>	Paulua	A hog	8	00
9-11	Chiefs	Fish	4	00
12	Chiefs	do	1	25
19	Boki	3 pints Indian meal		
"	Kaahumane	10 small Fish		20
24	Pia	a piece of Pork	1	00
"	Kaahumane	a basket of potatoes		12 1/2
	Capt. Osborne	10 gallons Lides	3	00
25	Kauheoule	a hog	7	00
"	Pia	three fish		30
26	Kaahumane	a basket of potatoes		10
29	Kauheoule	4 Fish		25
Dec. 1	Kaahumane	1 shawl [to Mrs. B.]	6	00
4	Kaahumane	a piece of Pork		75
6	Kaahumane	do.		40
[Nov.]	Hopule	2 1/2 yds cambric	2	50
	Karaimoku	one half subit taro		5
			41	37 1/2

Page from Mission Account Book noting donations to the Mission by various Chiefs (Mission Houses)

Res. 8<sup>thly</sup> That in fixing the price on the articles sent to the different stations, no reference shall be had to the estimate made in America, but to the cost or value here.

Res. 9<sup>thly</sup> Each station shall have the privilege of purchasing its own supplies when destitute, and it shall be the duty of each station to improve all highly favourable opportunities to

procure supplies for the mission, provided however that whenever the business can be referred to the general agent it shall be done, and no drafts shall be made on the Board except by the agent unless it is absolutely necessary and whenever orders are given by others the agent shall be immediately informed thereof. (1823 Annual Meeting Minutes)

These rules and regulations of the depository determined the distribution of the articles of support, trade and consumption of the mission.

## Barter

As commerce came to Hawai'i, initial transactions included trading – sandalwood became the initial medium of exchange for Ali'i, who traded it for western goods. Western goods were a major component in the barter system of exchange that predominated in the early to mid-1800s in Hawai'i. The missionaries used cloth, oil, foodstuffs, paper, books, slates, pencils, pocket knives, and other finished goods to trade for native Hawaiian labor, Hawaiians produced foodstuffs, and other desirable items. (Smola)

There was one market the missionaries had cornered, though, the Hawaiian language book market and educational/writing materials such as slates, slate pencils, and paper. The missionaries and its Hawaiian successor, the Hawaiian Evangelical Association, were nearly the sole printers of Hawaiian language books in the Hawaiian Islands. Roman Catholic missionaries began printing in 1840, but never reached the volume of the Protestant Mission.

## Move from Common Stock to Salary

By 1832 the Hawaiian missionaries were already discussing a move from the common stock system to fixed salaries. Realizing the increased expense the Board would incur from such a measure, the missionaries resolved that each family should estimate not only their current expenses but what their expenses were “likely to be in (the) future.” (Schulz)

In 1842, the ABCFM aided the missionaries by transitioning to a salary system. The Board allotted each couple \$450 per year and granted children under 10 an additional \$30 and children over 10, \$70 annually. The Board abolished the common stock system but retained the depository at which missionaries could now purchase goods. Missionary parents could now give their children a New England education in the islands and save their personal incomes for their children's futures. (Schulz)

## Missionary Period

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.

Hawaiian Mission Houses' Strategic Plan themes note that the 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)