

Finding a Bride

The Prudential Committee of the ABCFM announced that all overseas missionaries were required to have a wife before departure; their reason, the temptations for inappropriate relations were too great on the Polynesian islands.

Stories circulated about failed London Missionary Society stations where single male missionaries “went native” among South Sea islanders. (Brown)

Of the seven men in the Pioneer Company of missionaries to Hawai‘i, only Daniel Chamberlain was married, the other six men had a little over a month to find brides before the October departure date.

Fortunately for the awkward seminarian men unaccustomed to courting women, the American Board kept an informal list of potential female candidates – all of them in their twenties – who expressed interest in missionary work in the past. (Brown)

At first, Hiram Bingham thought he had the hand of Sarah Shepard ... but her father, the Rev Samuel Shepard, refused to allow his daughter to go to the Islands.

To which Sarah asked, “Is not this a plain intimation that providence desires to employ another and not me in the good work of Owhyhee?” (Shepard; Wagner)

Now, finding a wife was an unexpected obstacle.

A fellow missionary, Levi Parsons, had been engaged to a teacher - Miss Sybil Moseley ... they were headed for a mission in Palestine.

However, at the last minute the ABCFM decided it was not safe for women there; so, Levi had to leave alone. Levi heard of Hiram’s dilemma and mentioned her to him.

On September 29, 1819, Hiram and Asa Thurston were ordained as missionary ministers. However, the occasion was more than just church protocol – as noted by Reverend Thompson ...

“there was a touch of romance. ... when Hiram met Sybil lingered most vividly in the recollections of the people in which they rightly regarded as a marked interposition of God's good providence.”

He met Sybil there; “I gave her some account of myself, put into her hands a copy of my statement to the Prudential Committee in offering myself to the work, asked her to unite with me in it, and left her to consider till the next day whether she could give me encouragement, or not.”



Hiram then states, “the result you know”. Hiram and Sybil were married October 11.

In perhaps a testament to the matchmaking abilities of the Board, the missionary journals – especially by the women – indicate a pleasant sense of suitability among the couples and even early signs of infatuation.

After a month with Hiram on the ship Thaddeus, Sybil wrote about her growing affection for the young preacher,

“O, to be what he would persuade himself I was! O, to profit by such an instructor, counselor, guide and friend!”

Halfway into their journey Hiram wrote,

“I have everyday had occasion to bless God, with admiring gratitude and joy, for the comfort and aid of such a companion.”

Like all of the couples, the Bingham’s whirlwind courtship continued as they blew out to sea. (Brown)

“Asa Thurston's early marital career, like his collegiate career, paralleled that of Hiram Bingham.” (Andrew) He thought he was to marry Miss Clapp ... however, he notes in a September 7, 1819 letter to Rev Worcester of the ABCFM:

“In compliance with your request I send you a short statement of the business which called me to this place. I handed the letter which I brought with me to Mrs Clapp early on Wednesday morning & left her to reflect on the subject till afternoon when I had some further conversation with her on the question which was before her.”

“It appears, sir, that the good woman is decidedly opposed to have her daughter engage in the mission to Owhyhee. She seems to think it improper for females to go to the heathen as missionaries at all. No reasons however were offered except such as were stated in that letter which you read.”

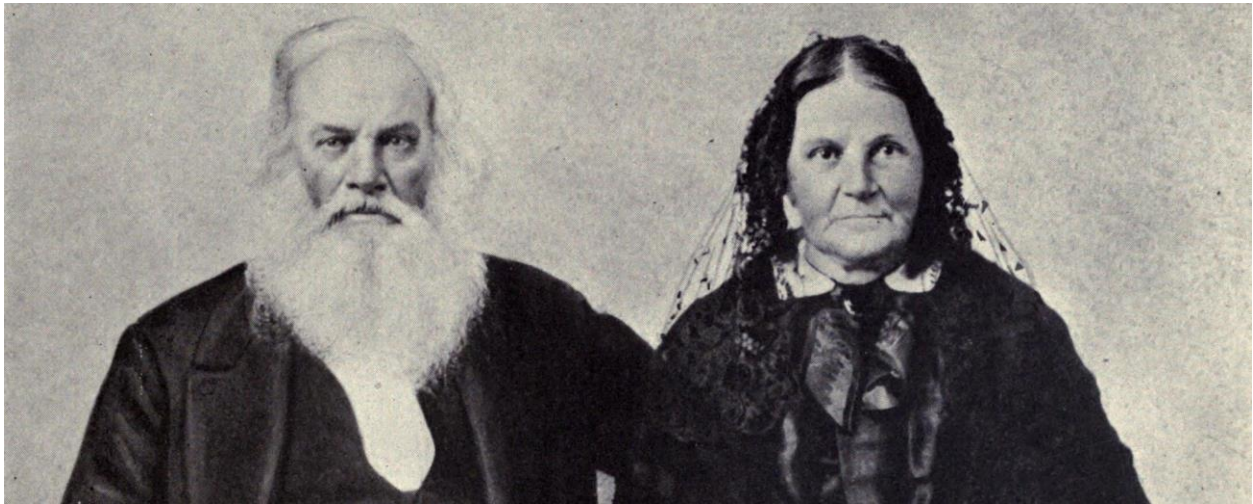
“Mr Clapp was not at home though I inquired respecting his opinion on the subject, & Mrs Clapp observed that his opinion was if possible more decided than hers that females should not engage in missions to the heathen.”

“I did not think it proper to urge the matter. I found that the letter from yourself & Dr Woods had no influence to change her opinion on the subject. She seemed to think that if Dr Worcester or Dr Woods was placed in her situation, that they would decide as she had done. – I think, sir, I can cheerfully say respecting this whole affair, ‘The will of the Lord be done.’”

“PS I shall make proposals to no other on without some degree of certainty as to success.” (Asa Thurston to Rev Samuel Worcester, September 7, 1819)

Asa Thurston eventually married Lucy Goodale Thurston from Marlborough, Massachusetts, and graduate of Bradford Academy. Years later, Lucy remembered their first family-arranged meeting as a shy-yet-playful occasion, “Then one by one the family dispersed, leaving two of similar aspirations, introduced at sunset as strangers, to separate at midnight as interested friends.”

The Thurstons proved to be a devout couple that famously grew old and died together on the desolate missionary station of Kailua and were fondly remembered as the “grandparents” of the Hawai’i mission by Americans and Hawaiians alike.



The marriages of the assistant missionaries were equally hasty, yet oddly fitting and felicitous.

Samuel Ruggles found a bride in Nancy Wells Ruggles from East Windsor, Connecticut, Samuel, who suffered a long bout of seasickness on the Thaddeus, thanked God for the pairing:

“Dear girl she has been severely tried with her sick husband...I cannot forbear to mention how greatly the Lord has favored me in a companion. She is all and more than I could reasonably ask.”



Thomas Holman conveniently married Samuel’s attractive older sister, Lucia Ruggles Holman. Lucia, at twenty-six years of age, was an independent and strong-minded woman. She was not indifferent to religion or the cause of foreign missions.

Her brother, Samuel, was a teacher at the Foreign Mission School at Cornwall, Connecticut, and she had been active in the Society of Butternuts, a fund-raising organization for the Cornwall school, prior to opening a girls’ school in Cooperstown, New York.

There Miss Ruggles met Dr. Thomas Holman, a recent graduate of Cherry Valley Medical School in New York. The couple fell in love but could not marry due to the debts incurred by the doctor’s unsuccessful practice.



Then a solution appeared in the guise of becoming missionaries. Reportedly refusing his father's offer of three thousand dollars to clear his debts, Dr. Holman signed with the American Board. (Wagner-Wright)

Dr. Holman, the physician, conveniently married fellow Pioneer Company member Samuel Ruggle's older sister and joined the mission.

After only four months in the islands, the Holmans had not adjusted to the spirit of the mission. (Kelley) He withdrew from the mission on July 30, 1820 and returned to the US with his family (including Lucia Kamāmalu Holman born in 1821).

On October 2, 1821, Dr. Holman and family accepted free passage home on the *Mentor*, a whaleship, via China and the Cape of Good Hope. Mrs. Lucia Ruggles Holman is believed to be the first American woman to circumnavigate the globe. (Portraits)

The youngest in the mission, Elisha Loomis, found a bride in Maria Theresa Sartwell Loomis from Hartford, New York, who was three years older than the teenager. Elisha was in charge of setting up a printing press for the mission. Maria Loomis gave birth to the first white child born in Hawai'i three months after they arrived (Levi Loomis July 16, 1820). (Brown)

Samuel Whitney joined in matrimony with Mercy Partridge Whitney from Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Halfway through the journey on the *Thaddeus*, Mercy pledged in her journal:

"He is worthy of my sincere and lasting attachment. It shall ever be my constant study to make his life pleasant and useful. And should I be a means of lightening his cares or contributing in any measure to his happiness, I shall be doubly compensated."



Maria Kapule Whitney, the first white girl born in the Islands, was born October 19, 1820 at Waimea, Kauai.

The oldest in the group was thirty-seven-year old Daniel Chamberlain, a captain in the War of 1812, was a New England farmer of independent means, but of a deeply religious turn of mind. He decided to bring his entire family to Hawai'i.

“Mr Chamberlain and his wife, in the prime of life, feeling the claims of the heathen on them, were willing to leave their friends, their pleasant home and farm in central Massachusetts, and embark for the islands, with their five children, three sons and two daughters, rather than to withhold their personal labors from the heathen.” (Bingham)

The Chamberlain family included Daniels wife, Jerusha Burnap Chamberlain and five children: Dexter Harrington (1807-1887;) Nathan Burnap (1809-1878;) Mary Morse (1811-1887;) Daniel, Jr (1814-1884) and Nancy Elizabeth (1818-1864.) (Alfred White (1821-1891) was born in the Islands.)

“I consider it an unspeakable privilege that I am allowed thus to administer comforts to those who are laboring in the cause of Christ. I have reason to be daily thankful that Mrs C is so calm and contented. She appears to be as contented as she ever did at home on our old farm.” (Chamberlain; Taylor)

Mr Chamberlain was supposed to teach agriculture and mechanical arts to the Hawaiians, but no real progress could be made until horses and cattle were domesticated and this required the consent of the chiefs which had not yet been obtained. (HMCS)



Chamberlain discovered that while there was fertile soil and thousands of acres of lands to till, modern agricultural methods did not take hold upon the people, and his efforts to introduce New England methods were largely in vain. (Taylor)

“The principal food of the natives is poi; it is made from taro which grows here in great abundance. The principal part of our family are very fond of it. It is a good substitute for bread.”

“Wood is hard to be got here, as there is none to be had short of going three miles and no way to bring it only on their shoulders. With a little labour a road might be made to the wood ... Bananas a rich fruit, is plenty here. Cotton grows here and might be raised here in any quantity. Figs and pineapples are also found here.” (Chamberlain, July 19, 1820)

Farming by mainland standards was not feasible and Chamberlain turned his efforts to building houses and caring for mission property. (Kelley) Chamberlain rendered valuable service to the Mission by assisting with the initial construction of houses and caring for the Mission's property. (HMCS)

“Mr. Chamberlain is well spoken of in the correspondence of the early missionaries as a man of rare good judgment and as rendering much help in the early settlement of the missionary company. But the bringing up of the children in close contact with the benighted people about them, soon became a matter of grave solicitude.” (Gulick)

On October 23, 1819, the Pioneer Company of American Protestant missionaries from the northeast US set sail on the Thaddeus for Hawai'i. With the missionaries were four Hawaiian students from the Foreign Mission School, Thomas Hopu, William Kanui, John Honoli'i and Prince Humehume (son of Kauai's King Kaumuali'i.)

After 164-days at sea, on April 4, 1820, the Thaddeus arrived and anchored at Kailua-Kona on the Island of Hawai'i. Hawai'i's "Plymouth Rock" is about where the Kailua pier is today.

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 former Queens Ka'ahumanu and Keōpūolani (Liholiho's mother,) the Hawaiian people had already dismantled their heiau and had rejected their religious beliefs.

Thomas Holman was Hawai'i's first missionary doctor. On April 11, King Kamehameha II gave the missionaries permission to stay.

However, "The King gives orders that Dr. H(olman) and our teacher must land at Kiarooah - the village where he now resides, and the rest of the family may go to Oahhoo, or Wahhoo."

"(H)e wanted the Dr. to stay with them, as they had no Physician and appeared much pleased that one had come; as to pulla-pulla (learning), they knew nothing about it. Consequently it was agreed that Dr. H. & Mr. Thurston should stay with the King and the rest of the family go to Oahhoo." (Lucia Ruggles Holman) The Holman's left in 1821.

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

On July 14, 1826, the missionaries selected a 12-letter alphabet for the written Hawaiian language, using five vowels (a, e, i, o, and u) and seven consonants (h, k, l, m, n, p and w) in their "Report of the committee of health on the state of the Hawaiian language." The report is signed by Hiram Bingham and Levi Chamberlain.

The arrival of the first company of American missionaries in Hawai'i marked the beginning of Hawai'i's phenomenal rise to literacy. The chiefs became proponents for education and edicts were enacted by the King and the council of chiefs to stimulate the people to reading and writing.

By 1831, in just eleven years from the first arrival of the missionaries, Hawaiians had built 1,103 schoolhouses. This covered every district throughout the eight major islands and serviced an estimated 52,882 students. (Laimana)

Interestingly, these same 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.

Within five years of the missionaries' arrival, a dozen chiefs had sought Christian baptism and church membership, including the king's regent Ka'ahumanu. The Hawaiian people followed their native leaders, accepting the missionaries as their new priestly class. The process culminated in Hawaiian King Kamehameha III's adoption of Christianity and a Biblically-based constitution in 1840. (Schulz)

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.