

Foreign Mission School

The Second Great Awakening spread from its origins in Connecticut to Williamstown, Massachusetts; enlightenment ideals from France were gradually being countered by an increase in religious fervor, first in the town, and then in Williams College.

In the summer of 1806, in a grove of trees, in what was then known as Sloan's Meadow, Samuel John Mills, James Richards, Francis L Robbins, Harvey Loomis and Byram Green debated the theology of missionary service. Their meeting was interrupted by a thunderstorm and they took shelter under a haystack until the sky cleared.

That event has since been referred to as the "Haystack Prayer Meeting" and is viewed by many scholars as the pivotal event for the development of Protestant missions in the subsequent decades and century.

The first American student missionary society began in September 1808, when Mills and others called themselves "The Brethren," whose object was "to effect, in the person of its members, a mission or missions to the heathen." (Smith) Mills graduated Williams College in 1809 and later Andover Theological Seminary.

In June 1810, Mills and James Richards petitioned the General Association of the Congregational Church to establish the foreign missions. American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was formed with a Board of members from Massachusetts and Connecticut.

"The Board was instituted in June, 1810; and was incorporated, by the Legislature of Massachusetts, June 20, 1812. Its beginnings, as is well known, were small, and the anticipations of its supporters not remarkably sanguine:"

"but its resources and operations have regularly increased, till, in respect to the number of its patron - the amount of its funds - and the extent of its influence, it is entitled to a place among the principal benevolent institutions of the earth."

"The American Board of Foreign Missions, however, can neither claim, nor does it desire exclusive patronage. There are other Foreign Missionary Societies, for whom there is room, for whom there is work enough, and for whose separate existence there are, doubtless, conclusive reasons."

"Christian charity is not a blind impulse but, is characterized in Scripture, as 'the wisdom from above', such wis - as is in heaven, - which is 'pure, peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.'"

"The system of operation of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) may be considered under two divisions, - its Home Department, and its Foreign Missions."

ABCFM had its origin in the desire of several young men in the Andover Theological Seminary to preach the gospel in the heathen world. (The term 'heathen' (without the knowledge of Jesus Christ and God) was a term in use at the time (200-years ago.))

“Christians have wanted some grand object to seize their hearts and engage all their powers ... The spread of the gospel and the conversion of the world constitute the very object wanted – the common cause which ought to unite ... the great family of Christians.” (Leonard Woods; Wagner)

Letters from Bombay convinced the ABCFM and friends of the mission that “the missionary work is great, painful and arduous, and requires primitive self-devotion, invincible perseverance and bounteous liberality; but they made it appear that if the work be conducted with the true spirit, in the right manner, and with adequate means, accompanied with the promised influence and blessings of Heaven, the Gospel ... may spread through the heathen world.” (Wagner)

“The general purpose of these devoted young men was fixed. Sometimes they talked of ‘cutting a path through the moral wilderness of the West to the Pacific.’ Sometimes they thought of South America; then of Africa. Their object was the salvation of the heathen; but no specific shape was given to their plans, till the formation of the American Board of Foreign Missions.” (Worcester)

Early Missions of ABCFM

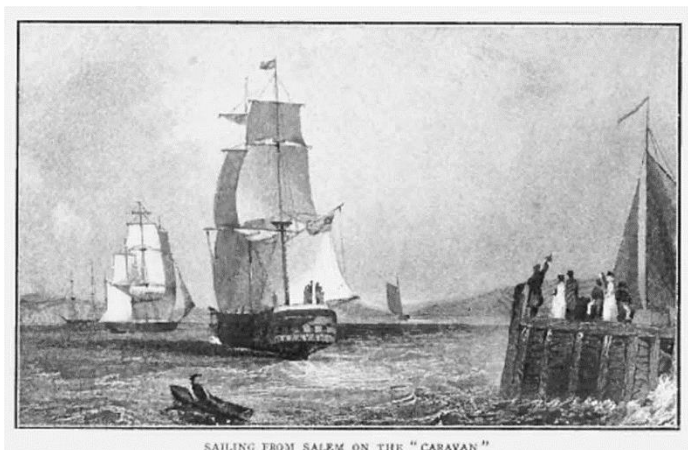
“The Board has established missions, in the order of time in which they are now named at Bombay, and Ceylon; among the Cherokees, Choctaws, and the Cherokees of the Arkansaw” (Missionary Herald)

“Mission to Ceylon (Sri Lanka)”

In 1812, the ABCFM sent its first missionaries - Adoniram and Ann Hasseltine Judson; Samuel and Roxana Peck Nott; Samuel and Harriet Atwood Newell; Gordon Hall, and Luther Rice - to British India.

When they reached Calcutta in June 1812, they and their fellow missionaries Adoniram and Ann Judson, Gordon Hall, and Samuel and Rosanna Nott, were ordered to leave by the British East India Company.

Samuel Newell sailed to Ceylon, where he spent a year preaching and investigating mission opportunities. Learning that Hall and Nott had succeeded in establishing residence in Bombay, he joined them in 1814, inaugurating the first American mission station overseas. (Boston University)



“Mission at Bombay”

“This mission became fixed in 1814. It was commenced by Messers. Hall, Newell, and Nott. Messers. Bardwell, Graves, Nichols, and Garrett, joined it at different periods since that time. ... The mission has three stations – Bombay, Mahim, and Tannah.”

“The missionaries are engaged in three principal objects – the translation of the Scriptures, the superintendance of schools; and the preaching of the Gospel.”

“Mission in Ceylon”

“The mission is established in the district of Jaffna, which is in the norther extremity of the island if Ceylon, October 1816. The original missionaries were Messers. Richards, Warren, Meigs, and Poor. ... The mission has five stations – Tillipally, Battcotta, Oodooville, Panditeripo and Manepy.”

“The Mission Among the Cherokees”

“On the 13th of January, 1817, Mr Kingsbury arrived at Cbickamaugah, since called Brainerd, and commenced preparations for an establishment there. “The weather was extremely cold for this climate,’ says Mr K, ‘and I felt the want of comfortable lodgings, having only a skin spread upon the floor, and a thin covering of blankets; but my health was kindly preserved.”

“Messers Hall and Williams soon after joined him. Several have been united to this mission, and, for various reasons, have left, whose names do not appear in this survey. his mission has three stations, Brainerd, Creek-Path, and Taloney.”

“Mission Among the Choctaws”

“The mission among the Cherokees being in successful operation, Mr. Kingsbury and Mr. Williams left Brainerd, about the first of June, 1818, for the Choctaw nation.”

“They selected a scite for their station, and about the 15th of August, felled the first tree. ‘The place was entirely new, and covered with lofty trees; but the ancient mounds, which here and there appeared, shewed, that it had been once the habitation of men.”

“The station was named Elliot, in honor of the ‘Apostle of the American Indians.’ – The mission has now four stations, - Elliot, Mayhew, the French Camps, and the Long Prairies.” (Missionary Herald, 1823)

It is important to note that in the early nineteenth century all land west of the Ohio Valley was considered foreign territory. Westward continental expansion bled into the Pacific and beyond. (NPS)

The ABCFM developed a strong emphasis on missions to American Indians. They first ministered to Cherokees in Tennessee, and then followed displaced southeastern tribes to Michigan, Wisconsin, the Dakotas, Minnesota and Oregon.

“It is not to be forgotten, that the Board desire to establish, as soon as possible, a mission, or missions, among the Indians of our wilderness. The committee have this subject constantly in view, and hope they shall soon be able to engage suitable agents to explore this field, and to collect such information as will lead to an immediate prosecution of the design. Missions to the heathen on our own continent, if conducted on the proper scale, will not be less expensive than any other.” (Worcester)

During Indian uprisings, missionaries attended to Indians in jail or sent on exile. They produced Bibles, dictionaries and schoolbooks in Dakota and Ojibwe when there were no print versions of these languages. They trained indigenous preachers and leaders. (Philanthropyroundtable)

The mission field in Indian Territory proved fertile. The ABCFM concentrated on establishing permanent educational centers. Although the early competition included the Baptists, Methodists and Moravians, the ABCFM established more mission stations and branches in Indian Territory than the combined number established by those three denominations. (OKHistory)

Importance of a School to the Cause of Missions

By 1816, contributions to the ABCFM had declined. There were several reasons including post-War of 1812 recession and the fact that India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) were too remote to hold public interest. (Wagner)

Folks saw a couple options: bring Indian and foreign youth into white communities and teach them there, or go out to them and teach them in their own communities. They chose the former.

“From the extent of our commerce, the Natives of almost every Heathen Country, influenced by curiosity and various other motives, leave their country, and, directed by the Providence of God, are conveyed to this land of Gospel Light.”

“The number of such Youths in the United States it is impossible, at present, to determine. That it is very considerable, may be inferred from the fact, that there are now in New-England no less than ten from the single island of Owhyhee, When they arrive here, strangers to all around them—unacquainted with our language, with the manners and customs, the arts and employments of civilized life—destitute of property and of friends, they often embrace the first opportunity to return to their native country; or, if they remain, it is only to become more wicked, and consequently more miserable in this and the future world.”

“If the proper means were employed, no doubt can be entertained, that many of these Youths would become the instruments of good, to themselves and to the nations to which they belong. From the declarations of providence of God, it is reasonable to hope, that some, if favoured with a religious education, would become the subjects of divine grace.”

“The great object in educating these Youths, is, that they may be employed as instruments of salvation to their benighted countrymen. Should they become qualified to preach the Gospel, they will possess many advantages over Missionaries, from this, or any other part of the Christian World.”

1. “They are acquainted with the manners and customs, the vices and prejudices, of their countrymen. From ignorance of these, other Missionaries have often failed in their attempts to Christianize the Heathen.”
2. “They will be free from suspicion. Most Heathen Nations, from their intercourse with those who bear the Christian Name, but whose conduct is totally inconsistent with the precepts of the Gospel, have contracted strong prejudices against their more enlightened brethren. To gain their confidence has been as difficult, as it is important. By employing Natives, this great obstacle in the way of propagating the Gospel would be removed.”
3. “Being united to them by the ties of blood and affection, they must feel peculiarly interested in their countrymen; and, having themselves experienced the evils of Paganism as well as the blessings of Christianity, they will be able to recommend the latter with peculiar force. To see

their kindred forsaking the religion of their fathers—the religion with which are interwoven, as they imagine, their dearest interests—and embracing that of foreigners, cannot fail powerfully to affect their minds, and excite them to inquire and examine for themselves.”

4. “Their constitution is suited to the climates of the various countries, in which they will be employed. Owing to a change of climate, the health of many Missionaries has been impaired, and their usefulness either greatly diminished or entirely prevented.”
5. “They are acquainted with the language of their countrymen. A Foreign Missionary, when he arrives at the place of his destination, in consequence of being unacquainted with the language of the Heathen around him, is unable to enter immediately on the appropriate work of the Mission. He must first acquire a knowledge of the language of those to whom he is sent: to do this, is often exceedingly difficult; and much time is spent, and much money is expended, without any immediate advantage to the Mission. A Native Missionary, it is obvious, would not be subject to these difficulties.”
6. “Students can easily be obtained for this School from almost any part of the Heathen World, and to almost any extent.”
7. “Those Native Instructors and Interpreters, which must be had in considerable numbers, before any Missions among Heathen Nations can make much progress, can be educated and fitted for their work, at a much less expense in this country, on the plan proposed, than to send out Missionaries and their families to Heathen Lands for the same purpose.”
8. “This Institution will be of very great advantage to those Missionaries who are going among the Heathen. By spending a season at the School, they might learn something of the manners and language, perhaps, of the very nation to which they are going: and often will find some, from among the Pupils, who will be their companions and interpreters on the Mission.”

“We would not be understood, by these remarks, to intimate, that our own countrymen ought not be employed as Missionaries of distant Heathen Lands. Our only object is, to specify some of those advantages which are peculiar to Natives. Our Missionaries, in their turn possess many advantages, which they do not. By united both, we may with more confidence calculate on the success of the exertions.” (A Narrative of Five Youths, ABCFM)

Formation of Foreign Mission School

“(W)e have a school at Cornwall, Connecticut, instituted for the purpose of educating youths of Heathen nations, with a view of their being useful in their respective countries. This school commenced in May, 1817. The number of pupils is at present about thirty; fifteen of whom are Indian youths, of principal families, belonging to five or six different Indian tribes ...”

“... several of these last receive an allowance from the government; and I beg to commend them all to the favor of the President, as very promising youths, in a course of education, which will qualify them for extending influence, and for important usefulness, in their respective nations. They, as well as the pupils in the schools in the nations, are exercised in various labors, and inured to industry; and the school comprises most of the branches of academical education, and is under excellent instruction and government.” (Morse, 1822)



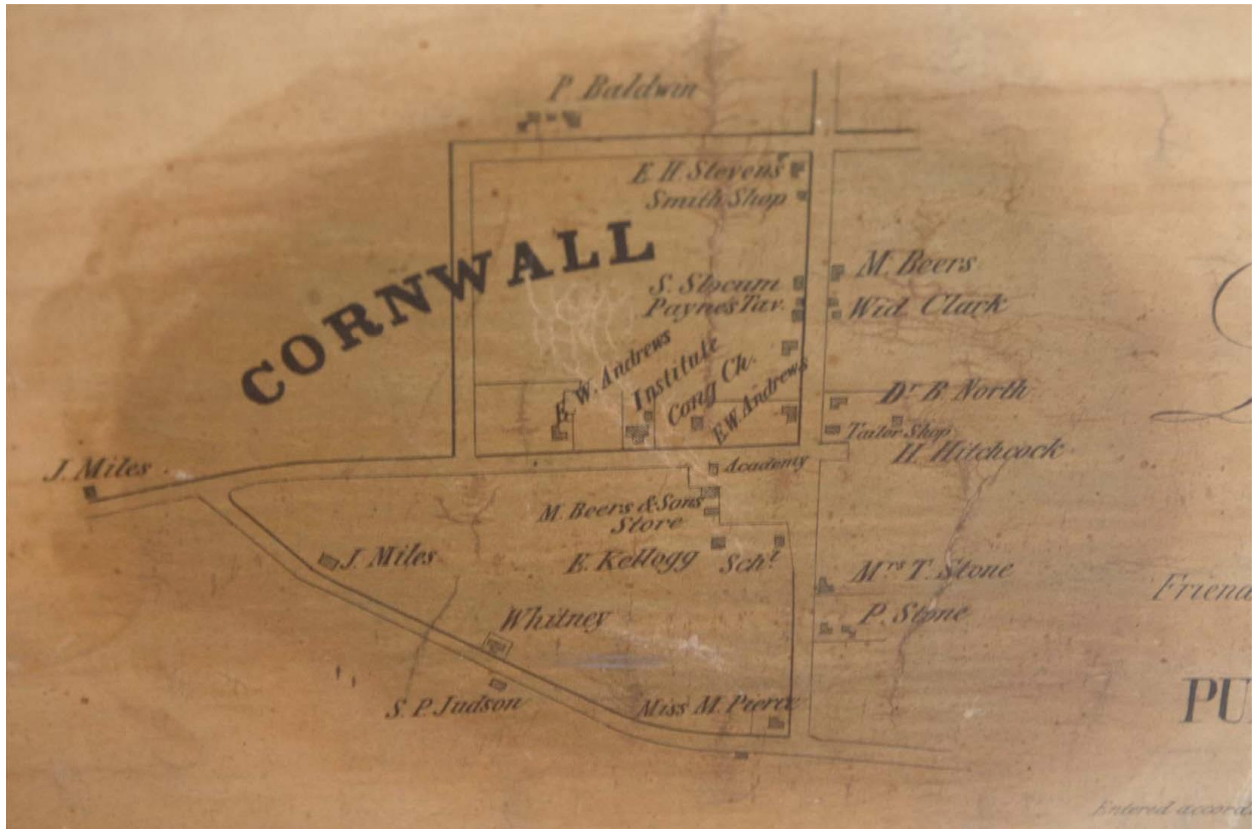
“The school at Cornwall, Connecticut, on the east bank of the Housatonic River, which was established in the autumn of 1816, with the Rev. Doctor Daggett as its principal, was seemingly more freely patronized by prominent Indians than any other North or South. Elias Boudinot, John Ridge, John Vann, McKee, and Folsom were all educated there.” (Abel, 1908)

The object of the school was the education, in the US country, of heathen youth, so that they might be qualified to become useful missionaries, physicians, surgeons, schoolmasters or interpreters, and to communicate to the heathen nations such knowledge in agriculture and the arts, as might prove the means of promoting Christianity and civilization. (ABCFM)

Cornwall’s Foreign Mission School exemplified evangelical efforts to recruit young men from indigenous cultures around the world, convert them to Christianity, educate them and train them to become preachers, health workers, translators and teachers back in their native lands.

Initially lacking a principal, Edwin Welles Dwight filled that role from May 1817 to May 1818; he was replaced the next year by the Reverend Herman Daggett. In its first year, the Foreign Mission School had 12 students, seven Hawaiians, one Hindu, one Bengalese, an Indian and two Anglo-Americans.

The school’s first student was Henry ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia (Obookiah,) a native Hawaiian from the Island of Hawai‘i who in 1808 (several years after his parents had been killed) boarded a sailing ship anchored in Kealakekua Bay and sailed to the continent. In its first year, the Foreign Mission School had 12 students, more than half of whom were Hawaiian.



Cornwall Village Detail, Cornwall Map of 1854
Courtesy of the Cornwall Historical Society

The school increased its number of pupils the second year to twenty-four; four Cherokee, two Choctaw, one Abenaki, two Chinese, two Malays, a Bengalese, one Hindu, six Hawaiians and two Marquesans as well as three American. By 1820, Native Americans from six different tribes made up half of the school's students.

Curricula operated at various levels, as some of the pupils were more advanced in their studies while others were just learning basic literacy - the more advanced students helped teach the others.

Once enrolled, students spent seven hours a day in study. Students studied penmanship, grammar, arithmetic, Latin, Greek, rhetoric, navigation, surveying, astronomy, theology, chemistry, and ecclesiastical history, among other specialized subjects.

Students rose around 5 or 6 am and ate breakfast together at 7 am in the dining room of the steward's house. Daily classes ran from 9 am to noon, and again from 2 to 5 pm, with all sessions taking place on the first floor of the main school building just across the street from the steward's house.

Academics were balanced with mandatory outdoor labor. Students were tasked with the maintenance of the school's agricultural plots and assigned to labor in the fields "two (and a half) days" a week and "two at a time." Additionally, the school enforced strict rules for students' social lives and study times.

They were also taught special skills like coopering (the making of barrels and other storage casks), blacksmithing, navigation and surveying. When not in class, students attended mandatory church and prayer sessions and also worked on making improvements to the school's lands. (Cornwall)

The months of May and September included scheduled vacation times for the school's boarded students; however, only certain pupils were authorized by the administration to "go abroad."

School Facilities

Much of the Foreign Mission School's campus buildings were acquired through donations. The citizenry of Cornwall donated fourteen acres of land as well as the building that would become the main educational site, which had been built in 1797 as a school house.

The ground floor of the school building housed one large classroom, while the second floor was refurbished for students' quarters. Located near this school building was the Principal's house. Purchased in 1815, the Principal's house was acquired before the establishment of the school was complete.

The third of the main campus buildings, and certainly the most social and vibrant, was the Steward's house. This building was constructed in 1814 by architect Eber Maxfield and was sold to the school. The exchange of property included 18-more acres that were used for agriculture by the students and staff.



As a site for regular and informal interactions between students and Cornwall residents, the Federal-style farmhouse (built 1814) served as the steward's family home, the school dining hall, a boarding house and a nurse room for sick students. (Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation)

According to the school 'constitution,' the role of the Steward was to "superintend the agricultural interests of the school," though the actual responsibilities necessitated far more involvement with both the school's operations and the students' daily lives.

Over time, the Steward's role expanded to include counseling and skills training. The Steward was expected to reside in the Steward's House on the school campus. Thus, because of the consistent level of daily activity that mixed different communities within this house, the Steward remained abreast of the major events and social issues happening within the student body.

Steward's duties were broadened to include supervising the school's landed properties, training the scholars in the art of agriculture, bookkeeping and managing the FMS accounts, assuring a steady supply of firewood, buying and selling livestock, arranging travel for staff and students, providing the students with clothing, and hosting visitors, among others tasks.

Over time, there was an increased the level of care given to the students outside of their academic activities and instituted greater involvement between the steward's family and the student body. For example, the steward's wife was in charge of the kitchen and cooking.

Daily, she prepared bread and meals for all of the students. She also outfitted the students with new clothes and tended to the laundry and repair of these items. And, she was also primarily in charge of the students' medical care.

Whenever one of the students fell ill, "he was moved into the Steward's house" to live with the family for as long as was necessary for recovery. These duties also fell to daughters of the steward, who were effectively housewives in training.

Inspiration for Hawaiian Islands Mission

At the beginning of the school's tenure, 'Ōpūkaha'ia was considered a leader of the student body, excelling in his studies, expressing his fondness for and understanding of the importance of the agricultural labor, and qualifying for a full church membership due to his devotion to his new faith. 'Ōpūkaha'ia yearned "with great earnestness that he would (return to Hawai'i) and preach the Gospel to his poor countrymen."

'Ōpūkaha'ia was being groomed to be a key figure in a mission to Hawai'i, to be joined by Samuel Mills Jr. Unfortunately, 'Ōpūkaha'ia died at Cornwall on February 17, 1818, and several months later Mills died at sea off West Africa after surveying lands that became Liberia.

Dwight is remembered for putting together a book, 'Memoirs of Henry Obookiah' (the spelling of the name based on its pronunciation), as a fundraiser for the Foreign Mission School. It was an edited collection of 'Ōpūkaha'ia's letters and journals/diaries. The book about his life was printed and circulated after his death, becoming a best-seller of its day.

‘Ōpūkaha‘ia, inspired by many young men with proven sincerity and religious fervor of the missionary movement, had wanted to spread the word of Christianity back home in Hawai‘i; his book inspired missionaries to volunteer to carry his message to the Hawaiian Islands.

From Andover Theological Seminary, Hiram Bingham wrote in a letter dated July 18, 1819, to Reverend Samuel Worcester of the ABCFM that “the unexpected and afflictive death of Obookiah, roused my attention to the subject, & perhaps by writing and delivering some thoughts occasioned by his death I became more deeply interested than before in that cause for which he desired to live ...”

“... & from that time it seemed by no means impossible that I should be employed in the field which Henry had intended to occupy ... the possibility that this little field in the vast Pacific would be mine, was the greatest, in my own view.”
(Bingham noted by Brumaghim)



The coming of Henry ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia and other young Hawaiians to the US, who awakened a deep Christian sympathy in the churches, moved the ABCFM to establish a mission at the Islands. When asked “Who will return with these boys to their native land to teach the truths of salvation?”

Bingham and his classmate, Asa Thurston, were the first to respond, and offer their services to the Board. (Congregational Quarterly) They were ordained at Goshen, Connecticut on September 29, 1819; several years earlier from Goshen came the first official request for a mission to Hawai‘i; this ordination of foreign missionaries was the first held in the State of Connecticut.

On October 23, 1819, a group of northeast missionaries, led by Hiram Bingham, set sail on the Thaddeus for the Sandwich Islands (now known as 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 Kaua‘i’s King Kaumuali‘i.)

Foreign Mission School Later Years

In the fourth and fifth years, enrollment rose to twenty-nine and thirty-five students, respectively. By the seventh year, however, the student body dropped to twenty-four. The school experienced another spike in enrollment in its eighth year with thirty-six pupils from seventeen different nations. In its ninth year, the school’s population once again decreased, this time to twenty-five.

“The introduction of students from so many diverse cultures into an environment with a rich Anglo-Saxon and Puritan history was not without its controversies. Local residents were wary of having largely dark-skinned, non-Christian individuals living among them. Many of these concerns involved fears of miscegenation, a term used to describe a mixing of the races. Romances that evolved between two students and two local residents provided a ready outlet for a violent expression of these fears.”

“In 1824, John Ridge, a student at the Foreign Mission School and the son of a Cherokee leader, began a courtship with Sarah Northrop, the white daughter of the school’s steward. A year later they married.”

“After the ceremony, the couple hurried into a coach for protection from an incensed local citizenry and, as they journeyed to Cherokee territory in present-day Georgia, they faced angry mobs of people during the entire length of their trip.”

“A year later, another Foreign Mission School student, Elias Boudinot (John Ridge’s cousin), fell in love with a young Cornwall girl named Harriet Gold. Despite protests from Harriet’s family and the local clergy, the two became engaged:

“Once the announcement was made public, Boudinot and Gold had to seek refuge at Harriet’s parents’ house to avoid angry local citizens. On the town green, Harriet’s own brother set an effigy of his sister on fire. Despite all of this, Harriet and Elias married in 1826.” (Connecticut History)

Of this, Jeremiah Evarts observed, “Can it be pretended, at this age of the world, that a small variance of complexion is to present an insuperable barrier to matrimonial connexions? or that the different tribes of men are to be kept forever and entirely distinct?” (Evarts)

“The outrage that these two marriages caused among the local populace led to significant pressure to close the school. In addition, the families of some students grew concerned that the New England climate was harming the health of their children. The “climate-related” deaths of three students from islands in the Pacific only exacerbated this fear.”

“These concerns, along with other factors such as the expense of such educational undertakings and failing enthusiasm for the prospects of indigenous missionaries, led the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions to close the school in 1826.”

“During its brief existence, Cornwall’s Foreign Mission School taught over 100 students. More importantly, however, it connected a small town in Connecticut to larger, international events, such as the flourishing Christian missionary movement. Additionally, it reveals the boundaries of tolerance in the early 1800s.” (Connecticut History) By the time the school closed in 1826, only fourteen students remained.

Missionary Period

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)