

Hawaiian Mission Children's Society (HMCS)

“Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. Psalm 133:1”

So says the heading on the original official certification of membership into the Hawaiian Mission Children's Society (sometimes called the 'Cousins' Society').

“The name 'Cousins' Society' was given by Mr. Orramel Gulick, who said that as the fathers and mothers spoke constantly of each other as 'brother' and 'sister,' their children were cousins - hence 'Cousins' Society' became the common name.”

“The children of missionaries on these islands have formed an association among themselves which they call the 'Cousin's Society.'” (Anderson) “The society was organized on June 5, 1852, by the young people of Honolulu. These young folk had assembled informally two weeks before, on May 22, at the old adobe school house - still in Kawaiaha'o Lane”. (Andrews, Mid-Pacific Magazine, December 1913)

It Started as a Social Society

In 1852, the initial Constitution of the organization noted in its preamble, “We the children of the American Protestant Mission to the Hawaiian Islands, desiring to strengthen the bond of union that naturally exists among us, and to cultivate the missionary spirit among ourselves ... do hereby organize ourselves into a Social Missionary Society ...”

That initial constitution noted that, “The design of this Society is to cherish and promote union among its members, to cultivate in them an active missionary spirit; to stir them up to good works, and more especially to assist in the support of those children of Missionaries who may go forth from these islands on Christian Missions.”

“At the time our Society was organized June 5, 1852, there were no places of entertainment, for social enjoyments or organized mission work, or any society for the missionary children, no uplifting influences at their disposal. The family rules were strict. Native prayer meetings at five o'clock in the morning and long Sunday services, mostly in Hawaiian, were the only change the poor children had, and the formation of the HMCS was a beautiful and wise undertaking. It has done its work faithfully and well.” (Cooke, 1900)

“Meetings were appointed for 'the last Saturday evening of each month,' which time was soon changed to 'the Saturday evening of each month nearest the full moon.' These meetings were opened by prayer and singing, and closed with the missionary hymn, 'Waft, waft ye winds His story,' and a collection for their missionary was taken up. Otherwise the meetings were social, literary and musical.”

“The first entertainment consisted of essays ... The social attractions were perhaps even greater than the literary, as the 'veranda brigade,' men and women now in middle life, then belonging to the younger set, can aver. Lifelong friendships were made, and at least one marriage, that of OH Gulick and Annie Clark occurred at a 'cousins' meeting' in that same adobe schoolhouse ...”

“At the time of the organization of this society there were perhaps not more than twenty white families outside the mission circle. As the monthly 'cousins' meeting' was about the only social function in Honolulu society, other people of refinement were very glad to receive invitations to these meetings. Many of them became annual members, and some secured a life membership and became, and are still, as devoted adopted cousins, as loyal as are those born into the mission.” (Andrews, Mid-Pacific Magazine)

“In the year 1863, Rev. Rufus Anderson, D. D., senior Secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, visited the Hawaiian Islands on official business connected with the missionary work of that institution. He was accompanied, in that visit, by his wife and daughter, the latter of whom preserved some memoranda of the journey and the scenes to which it introduced her, for the gratification of her friends. From these notes the present volume has been prepared.”

The children of missionaries on these islands have formed an association among themselves which they call the ‘Cousin’s Society.’ There was to be a meeting of this society on Saturday night at Oahu College, Punahou; so we all went, starting about dark.

After driving up a winding carriage road, there burst suddenly upon us a fairy scene. The principal building was low, with trees and vines about it, and it seemed one blaze of light. The rooms were decorated with exquisite flowers and ferns, and the young ladies and gentlemen were in their gala dresses.

Forty ‘Cousins’ were present that night. Grandpa made an address to them, after President Mills had welcomed us. They edit a paper in their society called the ‘Maile Wreath.’ Maile [My-le] is a beautiful vine that grows on the islands, and is often used for wreaths. We had some fine music that evening; for many of the “Cousins ” sing and play beautifully.

One day we occupied in making wreaths and mottoes to decorate the schoolhouse, where the annual meeting of the Cousins’ Society was to be held in the evening. Over the middle window, opposite the door, were the letters ‘X L C R’ [Excelsior], and below were a wreath and festoon, with pendants intermixed with beautiful flowers.

On either side, was ‘Unity, 1852’ [when the society was formed], and ‘Harmony, 1863.’

In the arch of each window hung a wreath of maile, a pretty green vine. Between each window was a tin candle-stand, trimmed with the vine and flowers. Over the door were four small American flags intertwined with one Hawaiian flag.

The reports of the officers were read and various addresses made, and ‘Unity’ and ‘Harmony’ were the watchwords of the meeting.

We had one more meeting at the schoolhouse, when grandpa addressed the Cousins, reminding them of the responsibility resting on them; that as their fathers laid the burden down, they must take it up, and be to the Hawaiian people a help and support. They answered that they were ready and willing, and, God helping them, they would try and be faithful to the people committed to their care. (Anderson)

HMCS Transitioned into an Educational Institution

“But the years went by. The original members were scattered. A new generation arose. Society’s demands were many and moonlit Saturday nights were wanted for other meetings. The missionary work of the society, also, seemed to be duplicated by the Hawaiian Board, and the ‘cousins’ found they were contributing twice to the same object. The society seemed to have outgrown the purpose for which it had been organized, and there was talk of disbanding. (Andrews, Mid-Pacific Magazine, December 1913)

In the 1900 annual meeting of the HMCS, retiring President, AF (Amos Francis Cooke, known as A Frank) Cooke gave his 'To Be Or Not To Be' address. In it, he challenged, "Having fulfilled its original design, let us now form a new society with broader aim, and with a more extended scope for membership, and plan to become a historical centre for all missionary efforts in the wide Pacific."

"A historical or commemorative society offering occasion for missionary intelligence and personal reminiscences of the lives of our fathers and mothers on special or appointed days, would give to us and to our children and to the Christian world, a most valuable record and much history might be preserved that would otherwise remain unknown.

In 1904, the Constitution was changed, and the purpose expanded, "The design of the Society shall be to perpetuate the memory of the missionary fathers and mothers who brought Christianity to these Islands, also to promote union among its members, to cultivate in them an active missionary spirit, stir them up to good deeds, and to assist in the support of Christian work." (Noted in the HMCS Annual Report 1904)

"Today (amended in 2015) the Society, preserves the memory and spirit of the original mission, promoting union among its members, stirring them up to good deeds, assisting in the support of Christian work, collecting, preserving, and interpreting archival and library materials, buildings, objects, historic fencing, and the grounds, at a historic site and library relating to the history of American Protestant Missionaries to Hawai'i and their descendants and relationships with the peoples of Hawai'i, and caring for, regulating and preserving the Mission Cemetery at Kawaiaha'o." (HMCS Constitutional Provisions 2015)



A National Historic Landmark, Hawaiian Mission Houses preserves and interprets the two oldest houses in Hawai'i through school programs, historic house tours, and special events. The archives, English and Hawaiian, are available on site and online. Together, these activities enrich our community "by fostering thoughtful dialogue and greater understanding of the missionary role in the history of Hawai'i." (Vision Statement)

With one of the most significant collections of manuscripts and photos of 19th-century Hawai'i, and perhaps surprisingly, the largest collection of Hawaiian language books in the world, the collection includes results of the recent Letters from the Ali'i translation project which can be seen on our website. The geographic reach of Hawaiian Mission Houses has increased dramatically both abroad and within our own state.

Hawaiian Mission Houses collections are critical to understanding the dramatic changes in the 19th-century Kingdom of Hawai'i that helped shape contemporary Hawai'i.

Hawaiian Mission Houses Historic Site and Archives

A 501(c)3 non-profit educational institution, Hawaiian Mission Children's Society was founded in 1852, incorporated in 1907, and has no religious affiliation. It acquired the 1821 Mission House in 1906, restored and opened it in 1908. Mission Houses Museum was established in 1920, and in 1974, the museum was granted full accreditation by the American Association of Museums (AAM). The property was designated as a National Historic Landmark in 1965.

The historic site, one acre in the middle of downtown Honolulu, includes Hawai'i's two oldest houses, the 1821 Mission House and the 1831 Chamberlain House, a bedroom annex interpreted as the Print Shop (1841), the Mission Memorial Cemetery, and a building which houses collections and archives, a reading room, a visitors' store and staff offices.

A coral and grass stage, Kahua Ho'okipa, was added in 2011; addition of a reconstructed grass dwelling is in permitting process. This was the headquarters for the American protestant Sandwich Island Mission established here from 1820 through 1863.

The organization developed a professional staff in 1970 and named the public program component Mission Houses Museum. An extensive strategic planning process culminated in early 2012 with a new name, Hawaiian Mission Houses Historic Site and Archives.

Three main structures and an extensive archives collection make up the facility:



Frame House (Hale La'au) (1821)

The oldest wood frame structure still standing in the Hawaiian Islands, it was shipped around Cape Horn from Boston in 1820. It was used as a communal home by many missionary families who shared it with island visitors and boarders.



Chamberlain House (Ka Hale Kamalani) (1831)

This house bears the name of the Mission's first secular agent in Hawai'i - Levi Chamberlain. In 1831, Chamberlain contracted for the building of this structure, which was to be used as a depository. The building is made of coral blocks cut away from the ocean reef, which were dried and bleached by the sun. From this location, Levi Chamberlain was able to plan out and undertake the disbursement of provisions for the entire Sandwich Islands Mission. It now serves as the Museum's temporary Exhibition Gallery.



Printing Office (Ka Hale Pa'i) (1841)

Also built from coral blocks, this structure was completed in 1841 and contains a replica of the first printing press to be brought to Hawaii. Here, some of the first books and printed materials in Hawaii were produced. The restored printing office shows how early Protestant Missionaries and native Hawaiians collaborated on the production of numerous books and other printed materials first printed in the Hawaiian language.



Library and Archives

Hawaiian Mission Children's Society (HMCS) Library is a research Library containing rare books, Manuscript Collections and other special collections. The general focus of the Library's collections is on the history of Hawai'i from 1778 to 1900.

In addition to the aforementioned buildings which are part of the collection, the object collection contains over 7,500 artifacts, including furniture, quilts, bark cloth, paintings, ceramics, clothing, and jewelry.

The archival collections include more than 12,000 books, manuscripts, original letters, diaries, journals, illustrations, and Hawaiian church records. HMH owns the largest collection of Hawaiian language books in the world, and the second largest collection of letters written by the ali'i. The size and scope of these collections make Hawaiian Mission Houses one of the foremost repositories for nineteenth century Hawaiian history.

Maile Wreath

Initial meetings of the HMCS included reading of essays and anonymous contributions. “The anonymous communications, which have heretofore been an index to the literary growth of the Society, have been done away with during the past year, and their place supplied by a paper, published monthly, entitled the Maile Wreath, which is conducted by four editors - two ladies and two gentlemen who are elected every six months.” (HMCS Annual Report 1861)

In 1861, a new departure was made, and the Maile Wreath, a monthly paper was edited and became the chief literary feature of the meetings until the close of 1896. The Maile Wreath contains articles of value written by men who have since won world renown and included essays, poems, treasurers' reports, editorials, death notices, miscellaneous authored by Society members. (Andrews, Mid-Pacific Magazine, December 1913)

“The Maile Wreath ... is informal and very picturesque. It contains articles on commerce, history, mythology, philosophy, and every department of science. Many of its articles are of a high degree of literary merit and would do credit to the higher class of publications in any country. While it has not yet accumulated much of ancient Hawaiian history, customs, or religion, yet it has enough to make its pages valuable as a reference of authority.” (HMCS Annual Report 1893)

Today, the HMCS Maile Wreath provides current information about the Society and activities and coming events at the Hawaiian Mission Houses.

Missionary Period

On October 23, 1819, the Pioneer Company of American Protestant missionaries from the northeast US set sail on the Thaddeus for the Sandwich Islands (now known as Hawai'i.) There were seven American couples sent by the ABCFM to convert the Hawaiians to Christianity in this first company.

They first sighted the Islands and stopped at Kawaihae on the Island of Hawai'i on March 30, 1820. Here they learned that the kapu was abolished, Kamehameha was dead and Liholiho was king. They then went on and finally anchored at Kailua-Kona on April 4, 1820.

Over the course of a little over 40-years (1820-1863 - the “Missionary Period”), about 220-men and women in twelve Companies, independent missionaries, Tahitians and Hawaiians 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)