

Lāhainā Banyan Tree

Over the course of a little over 40-years (1820-1863 - the “Missionary Period,”) the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission (ABCFM) sent twelve Companies of missionaries – 184-missionaries; 84-men and 100-women - to the Hawaiian Islands.

By the time the Pioneer Company arrived (1820,) Kamehameha I had died (1819) and the centuries-old kapu system had been abolished, through the actions of King Kamehameha II (Liholiho, his son,) with encouragement by his father’s wives, Queens Ka’ahumanu and Keōpūolani (Liholiho’s mother.) Keōpūolani later decided to move to Maui.

A few years later the Second Company arrived; “On the 26th of May (1823) we heard that the barge (Cleopatra’s Barge, or "Ha’aheo o Hawai’i," Pride of Hawai’i) was about to sail for Lahaina, with the old queen (Keōpūolani) and princess (Nāhi’ena’ena;) and that the queen was desirous to have missionaries to accompany her”.

“A meeting was called to consult whether it was expedient to establish a mission at Lahaina. The mission was determined on, and Mr S (Stewart) was appointed to go: he chose Mr R (Richards) for his companion ... On the 28th we embarked on the mighty ocean again, which we had left so lately.” (Betsey Stockton Journal)

Keōpūolani is said to have been the first convert of the missionaries in the Islands, receiving baptism from Rev. William Ellis in Lāhainā on September 16, 1823. Keōpūolani was spoken of “with admiration on account of her amiable temper and mild behavior”. (William Richards) She was ill and died shortly after her baptism.

The tenth ABCFM Company arrived in the Islands on September 24, 1842 on the Sarah Abigail from Boston. On board were Rev George Berkeley Rowell (1815-1884) and wife Malvina Jerusha Chapin (1816-1901) and Physician James William Smith (1810–1887) and wife Melicent Knapp Smith (1816–1891.) They were assigned to the station on Kauai.

Born in Stamford, Connecticut in 1810 to a farm family, James William Smith became a school teacher at 17, and had a religious conversion at 19. He studied religion for about 3-years until he became ill in 1834 and was unable to complete his studies to enter the ministry.

Turning to medicine, he attended the College of Physicians and Surgeons of New York, and proceeded to practice there for about five years. He applied for missionary work in 1840, and married Melicent Knapp. The couple would provide missionary, educational and medical help to the islands for the next 45 years.

Their son, William Owen Smith, born at Kōloa, Kauai, was educated at Rev David Dole’s school at Kōloa, later attending Punahou School in Honolulu; Smith left school to go to work on a sugar plantation for three years to learn the sugar industry, working in the boiling house in winter and in the fields in summer.

Smith was Sheriff of Kauai for two years and Maui for two years. He later became a lawyer and state legislator.

The Banyan Tree

On April 24, 1873, while serving as Sheriff on Maui, WO Smith planted Lāhainā's Indian Banyan to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the first Protestant mission in Lāhainā.

After settling in, the tree slowly sent branches outward from its trunk. From the branches, a series of aerial roots descended towards the earth. Some of them touched the ground and dug in, growing larger until eventually turning into trunks themselves.



Over the years, Lahaina residents encouraged the symmetrical growth of the tree by hanging large glass jars filled with water on the aerial roots that they wanted to grow into a trunk. In time, what was once a small sapling matured into a monumental behemoth.

It now stands over 60 feet high, has 16 major trunks in addition to the massive original and shades nearly two-thirds of an acre. Maui County Arborist Committee carefully maintains the health and shape of this majestic tree.

It is the largest banyan tree in the entire United States. In recent times, the courthouse square was renamed 'Banyan Tree Park' in its honor. Lāhainā Restoration Foundation takes care of the park grounds. (Lāhainā Restoration Foundation)



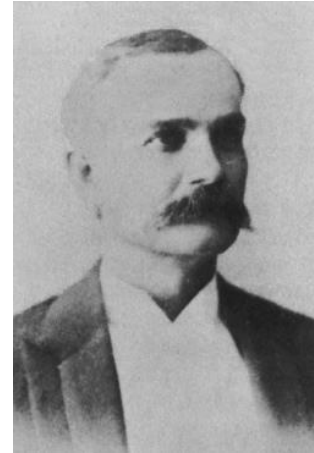
WO Smith and Lili'uokalani

An interesting side note to Queen Lili'uokalani's legal matters relate to the role and relationship she had with WO Smith.

During the revolutionary period, Smith was one of the thirteen members of the Committee of Safety that overthrew the rule of Queen Lili'uokalani (January 17, 1893) and established the Provisional Government.

He then served on the executive council of the Provisional Government and was sent to Washington DC when the proposed Organic Act for the Government of Hawai'i was pending before Congress.

When not filling public office, Mr. Smith had been engaged in private law practice and was affiliated with various law firms during his long career.



WO Smith

Smith and his firm wrote the will for Princess Pauahi Bishop that created the Bishop Estate. As a result of this, Pauahi recommended to Queen Lili'uokalani that he write her will for the Lili'uokalani Trust (which he did.)

On the November 30, 1915, Jonah Kūhiō Kalaniana'ole, on his own behalf filed a bill in equity averring mental weakness on the part of Queen Lili'uokalani. (Hawaii Supreme Court)



“In his petition to set aside the queen's trust deed, Kūhiō claims that Lili'uokalani, who was seventy-seven years old last September, is a widow without issue and that by virtue of a royal proclamation of February 10, 1883, issued by 'His Majesty Kalākaua, then King of the Hawaiian Islands ...”

“... the said Jonah Kūhiō Kalaniana'ole was created a prince, with succession to the throne, and that since the death of his brother, Prince David Kawānanakoa, on the second day of June, 1908, the said prince had been next in succession to said queen and the heir preemptive.”

“The trust deed which Kūhiō would have broken by action of court was signed by Queen Lili‘uokalani on December 2, 1909 and Kūhiō claims that, although at that time he was in Honolulu, he was kept away from the queen so that she could not consult with him as to the terms of the trust deed.” (Hawaiian Gazette, December 17, 1915)

The queen and her representatives fought the claims ... “Queen Liliuokalani will oppose the suit institutes in her name, in the circuit court here on November 30, last, by delegates J. K. Kalaniana‘ole, as her next friend and in his name, to break the trust in which the queen’s property is held. In other words, Queen Lili‘uokalani wishes the trust to continue.” (Hawaiian Gazette, December 17, 1915)

The case made it to the Hawai‘i Supreme Court and noted, the matter relates to “the execution by the Queen of a certain deed of trust, on the 2d day of December, 1909, under which the said laukea and Dominis were among the beneficiaries, and certain subsequently executed instruments purporting to confirm and supplement the trust deed.” (Supreme Court)

“The Queen then applied to this court for a writ of prohibition to restrain the circuit judge from taking any further steps in the case until after making an inquiry into and determining the question of her present mental capacity. (The Supreme) court held that the presumption of competency prevailed in favor of the Queen”. (Supreme Court)

The Supreme court also found, “We think it is clear, therefore, that Kalaniana‘ole, as sole complainant, may not maintain the suit since he has no interest in the subject-matter.” The queen won the case.

Speaking of his relationship with the Queen, Smith said, “One of the gratifying experiences of my life was that after the trying period which led up to the overthrow of the monarchy and the withdrawal of Queen Lili‘uokalani, the Queen sent for me to prepare a will and deed of trust of her property and appointed me one of her trustees”. (Nellist)

Smith was also a trustee of the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Estate from 1884-1886 and 1897-1929, the Lunalilo Estate, the Alexander Young Estate and the Children’s Hospital.

The land that Kūhiō made claim to helped to form the Lili‘uokalani Trust, “a private operating foundation founded in 1909, for the benefit of orphan and destitute children with preference given to Native Hawaiian children.

“A diversified portfolio of real estate, marketable securities and private investments provides the resources to support mission-related programs and activities.” (Lili‘uokalani Trust)



Author Evelyn Cook noted in a newspaper interview related to the book she wrote about WO Smith’s father, ‘100 Years of Healing: The Legacy of a Kauai Missionary Doctor’, “Today, the prince is worshipped, and WO Smith is vilified. But who is the hero and villain? People don't know their own history.” (Command)