

Literacy

“It was like laying a corner stone of an important edifice for the nation.” (Bingham)

“I think literacy was ... almost like the new technology of the time. And, that was something that was new. ... When the missionaries came, there was already contact with the Western world for many years.... But this was the first time that literacy really began to take hold.”

“The missionaries, when they came, they may have been the first group who came with a [united] purpose. They came together as a group and their purpose was to spread the Gospel the teachings of the Bible.”

“But the missionaries who came, came with a united purpose ... and literacy was a big part of that. Literacy was important to them because literacy was what was going to get the Hawaiians to understand the word of the Bible and the written word became very attractive to the people, and there was a great desire to learn the written word. ... Hawai‘i became the most literate nation at one time.”

[Click HERE for a link to comments by Manu Ka‘iama and Jon Yasuda.](#)

“The Ali‘i Letters project “changed my perspective on the anti-missionary, anti-Anglo-Saxon rhetorical tradition that scholarship has been produced, contemporary scholarship, and it is not to discredit that scholarship, but just to change a paradigm, to shift the paradigm, and it shifted mine.” (Kaliko Martin, Research Assistant, Awaiaulu)

[Click HERE for a link to comments by Kaliko Martin.](#)

“The missionary effort is more successful in Hawai‘i than probably anywhere in the world, in the impact that it has on the character and the form of a nation. And so, that history is incredible; but history gets so blurry ...”

“The missionary success cover decades and decades becomes sort of this huge force where people feel like the missionaries got off the boat barking orders ... where they just kind of came in and took over. They got off the boat and said ‘stop dancing,’ ‘put on clothes,’ ‘don’t sleep around.’ And it’s so not the case”

“The missionaries arrived here, and they’re a really remarkable bunch of people. They are scholars, they have got a dignity that goes with religious enterprise that the Hawaiians recognized immediately. ...”

“The Hawaiians had been playing with the rest of the world for forty-years by the time the missionaries came here. The missionaries are not the first to the buffet and most people had messed up the food already.”

“(T)hey end up staying and the impact is immediate. They are the first outside group that doesn’t want to take advantage of you, one way or the other, get ahold of their goods, their food, or your daughter. But, they couldn’t get literacy. It was intangible, they wanted to learn to read and write”. (Puakea Nogelmeier)

[Click HERE for a link to comments by Puakea Nogelmeier.](#)

Many Are the People - Few Are the Books

“Having just begun to learn to read, Ka’ahumanu, about this time (1822), embarked with her husband, and visited his islands with a retinue of some eight hundred persons, including several chiefs, and Auna, and William Beals, whom the queen requested us to send as her teacher.”

“They left Honolulu harbor in four vessels, three of which belonged to Kaumuali’i, but which, with their possessor, were probably counted by the Cleopatrian pride of Kaahumanu, as all her own.”

“On their arrival, the next day, at Waimea, they gave a new impulse to the desire among the people to be instructed, much to the surprise and gratification of Messrs. Whitney and Ruggles, who said their house for several days was thronged with natives pleading for books.”



“They immediately took three hundred under instruction. Their former pupils were now demanded as teachers for the beginners. Ka’ahumanu, spurring on these efforts, soon sent back to Kamāmalu at Oahu the following characteristic letter.”

“This is my communication to you: tell the puu A-i o-e-o-e (posse of Long necks) to send some more books down here. Many are the people - few are the books.”

“I want elua lau (800) Hawaiian books to be sent hither. We are much pleased to learn the palapala. By and by, perhaps, we shall be akamai, skilled or wise. Give my love to Mr. and Mrs. Bingham, and the whole company of Long necks.” (Ka’ahumanu; Bingham)

Printing Press

“The first printing press at the Hawaiian Islands was imported by the American missionaries, and landed from the brig Thaddeus, at Honolulu It was not unlike the first used by Benjamin Franklin, and was set up in a thatched house standing a few fathoms from the old mission frame house”. (Hunnewell; Ballou)

Without the printing press, the written Hawaiian language, and a learned people of that time, we would know little about the past. (Muench)

“Perhaps never since the invention of printing was a printing press employed so extensively as that has been at the Sandwich islands, with so little expense, and so great a certainty that every page of its productions would be read with attention and profit.” (Barber, 1833)



The members of the Sandwich Islands Mission sent from Boston by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) had in their collective mind it was absolutely essential to have printed material available as soon as possible to reinforce their efforts in disseminating the gospel across the Islands.

The missionaries began their printing activities even before they had settled on a standard alphabet and spelling for the previously unwritten Hawaiian language.

Only after prolonged discussion among the members of the group and their native informants. Agreement was reached in

1826, when the Hawaiian alphabet was established with twelve letters: a, e, i, o, u, h, k, l, m, n, p and w.

The First Printing – January 7, 1822

“On the 7th of January, 1822, a year and eight months from the time of our receiving the governmental permission to enter the field and teach the people, we commenced printing the language in order to give them letters, libraries, and the living oracles in their own tongue, that the nation might read and understand the wonderful works of God.”

“The opening to them of this source of light never known to their ancestors remote or near, occurred while many thousands of the friends of the heathen were on the monthly concert, unitedly praying that the Gospel might have free course and be glorified.” (Bingham)

Standing beside a printing press in a grass-roofed hut, and observed by an American printer, shipmasters, missionaries, and traders, Chief Ke‘eaumoku put his hand on the press lever, exerted pressure, and printed wet black syllables in Hawaiian and English. (HHS)

At this inauguration there were present his Excellency Governor (Ke‘eaumoku (Gov. Cox,)) a chief of the first rank, with his retinue; some other chiefs and natives; Rev. Hiram Bingham, missionary; Mr. Loomis, printer, (who had just completed setting it up); James Hunnewell; Captain William Henry and Captain Masters (Americans.) (Ballou)

These were the first printed pages created in Hawai‘i for an eight-page speller to be used in Hawaiian schools sponsored by the Protestant Mission. (None of which now survive.)

“We are happy to announce to you that, on the first Monday of January (1822), we commenced printing, and, with great satisfaction, have put the first eight pages of the Owhyhee spellingbook into the hands of our pupils”.

Native Hawaiians immediately perceived the importance of “palapala” – document, to write or send a message. “Makai” - “good” - exclaimed Chief Ke’eaumoku, to thus begin the torrent of print communications that we have today. (HHS)

Thereafter, printing on the first press, a second-hand Ramage, went on continuously for six years, until in 1828 an additional press was sent from Boston. The original press was acquired by the missionary school at Lahainaluna on Maui in 1834.

“... until March 20, 1830, scarcely ten years after the mission was commenced, twenty-two distinct books had been printed in the native language, averaging thirty-six small pages, and amounting to three hundred and eighty-seven thousand copies, and ten million two hundred and eighty-seven thousand and eight hundred pages.”

“This printing was executed at Honolulu, where there are two presses. But besides this, three-million three-hundred and forty-five-thousand pages in the Hawaiian language have been printed in the United States (viz. a large edition of the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John) ...”

“... which swells the whole amount of printing in this time, for the use of the islanders, to thirteen-million six-hundred and thirty-two thousand eight hundred pages.”



“Reckoning the twenty-two distinct works in a continuous series, the number of pages in the series is eight-hundred and thirty-two. Of these, forty are elementary, and the rest are portions of Scripture, or else strictly evangelical and most important matter, the best adapted to the condition and wants of the people that could be selected under existing circumstances.” (Barber, 1833)

In the meantime, a Wells-model press arrived at Lahainaluna in 1832 and it carried the major load of the printing there. Elisha Loomis, a member of the Pioneer Company, was the first printer of Hawaiian material. With the help of native apprentices, he worked at his trade in Honolulu until 1827, when, health failing, he returned to America.

The presses of the Sandwich Islands Mission in Honolulu and Lahainaluna were the major printers of books in Hawaiian in the Islands until 1858, when the work of printing for the Mission was handed over on a business basis to Henry M. Whitney, a missionary son.

He continued to handle the Hawaiian language books for the Hawaiian Evangelical Association, which had superseded the Sandwich Islands Mission in 1854.

The Bible was translated from the original Greek and Hebrew by the combined efforts of Hiram Bingham and Asa Thurston of the Pioneer Company, Artemas Bishop and James Ely of the Second Company, William Richards, Lorrin Andrews, Jonathan Green, and Ephraim Clark of the Third Company, and Sheldon Dibble of the Fourth Company.

Although the work was begun in 1822, the first segment of the Bible, the Gospel of Luke, did not come off the press until 1827. The rest of the New Testament was completed by 1832 and the Old Testament in 1839 (although the date given on the title page is 1838).

The mission press printed 10,000-copies of Ka Palapala Hemolele (The Holy Scriptures). It was 2,331-pages long printed front and back.

The mission press also printed newspaper, hymnals, schoolbooks, broadsides, fliers, laws, and proclamations. The mission presses printed over 113,000,000 sheets of paper in 20 years. (Mission Houses)

Literacy was Sought by the People

“One young man asked (a missionary) for a book yesterday, and (he) inquired of him who his teacher was. He replied, ‘My desire to learn, my ear, to hear, my eye, to see, my hands, to handle, for, from the sole of my foot to the crown of my head I love the palapala.’” (KSBE)

“Not long after the passing of Kamehameha I in 1819, the first Christian missionaries arrived at Kailua, Hawai‘i on March 30, 1820. Their arrival here became the topic of much discussion as Liholiho, known as Kamehameha II, deliberated with his ali‘i council for 13 days on a plan allowing the missionaries to stay.

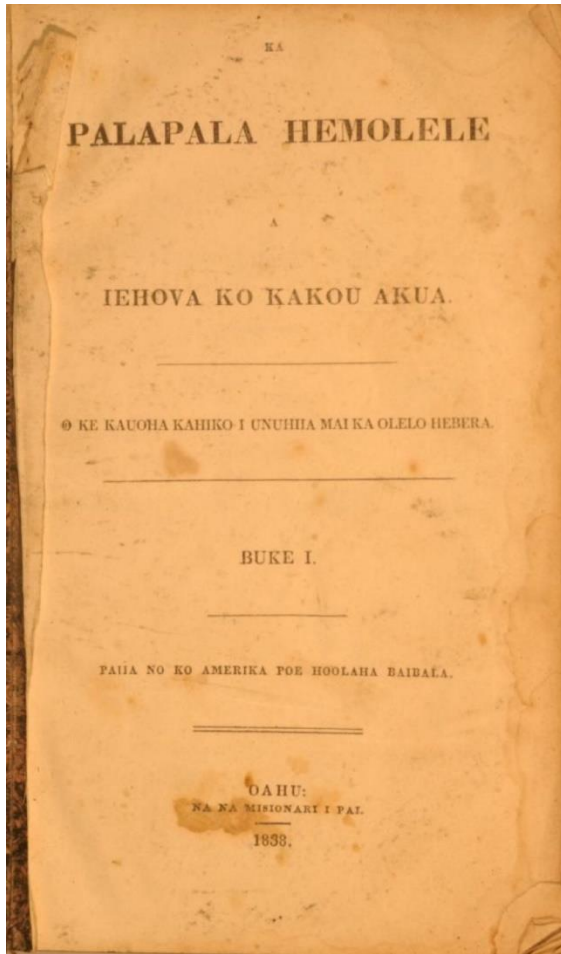
“Interestingly, the missionaries promised a printing press and to teach palapala, or reading and writing. Because Liholiho had learned the alphabet prior to the missionaries’ arrival, he had a notion of the value of a printing press and literacy for his people.”

“A key point in Liholiho’s plan required the missionaries to first teach the ali‘i to read and write. The missionaries agreed to the King’s terms and instruction began soon after.” (KSBE)

The arrival of the first company of American missionaries in Hawai‘i in 1820 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.

“That the sudden introduction of the Hawaiian nation in its unconverted state, to general English or French literature, would have been safe and salutary, is extremely problematical.”

“To us it has been a matter of pleasing wonder that the rulers and the people were so early and generally led to seek instruction through books furnished them by our hands, not one of which was designed to encourage image worship, to countenance iniquity, or to be at variance with the strictest rules of morality. It was of the Lord's mercy.”



“With the elements of reading and writing we were accustomed, from the beginning, to connect the elements of morals and religion, and have been happy to find them mutual aids”. (Hiram Bingham)

“The initiation of the rulers and others into the arts of reading and writing, under our own guidance, brought to their minds forcibly, and sometimes by surprise, moral lessons as to their duty and destiny which were of immeasurable importance.”

“The English New Testament was almost our first school book, and happy should we have been, could the Hawaiian Bible have been the next.” (Hiram Bingham)

“In connexion with this general mode of instruction, we could, and did teach English to a few, and have continued to do so. We early used both English and Hawaiian together.”

“For a time after our arrival, in our common intercourse, in our schools, and in our preaching, we were obliged to employ interpreters, though none except Hopu and Honolii were found to be very trustworthy, in communicating the uncompromising claims and the spirit-searching truths of revealed religion.” (Hiram Bingham)

As the missionaries learned Hawaiian, they 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.

“By August 30, 1825, only three years after the first printing of the pī‘āpā, 16,000 copies of spelling books, 4,000 copies of a small scripture tract, and 4,000 copies of a catechism had been printed and distributed.”

“On October 8, 1829, it was reported that 120,000 spelling books were printed in Hawai‘i. These figures suggest that perhaps 90 percent of the Hawaiian population were in possession of a pī‘āpā book!

“This literacy initiative was continually supported by the ali‘i. Under Liholiho, ships carrying teachers were not charged harbor fees. During a missionary paper shortage, the government stepped in to cover the difference, buying enough paper to print roughly 13,500 books.”

“In fact, while Liholiho was on his ill-fated trip to England, Ka‘ahumanu, the kuhina nui (regent), and Kalanimōku reiterated their support by proclaiming that upon the completion of schools, ‘all the people shall learn the palapala.’”

“During this period, there were approximately 182,000 Hawaiians living throughout 1,103 districts in the archipelago. Extraordinarily, by 1831, the kingdom government financed all infrastructure costs for the

1,103 school houses and furnished them with teachers. Our kūpuna sunk their teeth into reading and writing like a tiger sharks and would not let go.” (KSBE)

“This legendary rise in literacy climbed from a near-zero literacy rate in 1820, to between 91 to 95 percent by 1834. That’s only twelve years from the time the first book was printed!” (KSBE)

It was through the cooperation and collaboration between the Ali’i, people and missionaries that this was able to be accomplished.

“(I)t is an important point to make and to remember is that their mission was very different, that first generation of missionaries. Their mission or their reason to be here, and the assistance that they provided the ali’i goes without saying. I guess these letters probably pretty much show that.”

“You can see the relationship and you can see how they worked together and that they learned from each other. And, I would assume that is so and I think we are hard on the missionaries because of maybe the next generation of missionaries ...”

“We do, many times, kind of just brush over that earlier history, and we shouldn’t make that mistake, because the fact that these letters show a relationship that you think is honorable....” (Manu Ka’iama)

Rise in Literacy

The arrival of the first company of American missionaries 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. The missionaries established schools associated with their missions across the Islands.

In 1820, missionary Lucy Thurston noted in her Journal, Liholiho’s desire to learn, “The king (Liholiho, Kamehameha II) brought two young men to Mr. Thurston, and said: “Teach these, my favorites, (John Papa) Ii and (James) Kahuhu. It will be the same as teaching me. Through them I shall find out what learning is.”

With the vigorous support of the Queen-Regent Ka’ahumanu, attendance in mission schools increased from about 200 in 1821 to 2,000 in 1824, 37,000 in 1828 and 41,238 in 1830, of which nearly half were pupils on the island of Hawai’i. (Canevali)

Common schools (where the 3 Rs were taught) sprang up in villages all over the Islands. In these common schools, classes and attendance were quite irregular, but nevertheless basic reading and writing skills (in Hawaiian) and fundamental Christian doctrine were taught to large numbers of people. (Canevali)

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.

“Throughout the islands, the schools prospered ... At Lahaina, 922 pupils were present at one examination, of whom 500 could read, and 300 had read all the books in the language. At Honolulu, 600 pupils were examined in April.”

“As early as February, about 40 schools were known to be in operation on Hawaii, and the number was greatly increased during the year. In October, 16,000 copies of elementary lessons had been given out, and it was supposed that there were nearly that number of learners on the islands.”

“The people were not allowed to wait in ignorance for accomplished teachers. Everywhere the chiefs selected the most forward scholars, and sent them out to teach others. Such of these teachers as were conveniently situated for that purpose, were formed into classes for further instruction.” (Tracy, 1840)

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. The proliferation of schoolhouses was augmented by the printing of 140,000 copies of the pī-‘āpā (elementary Hawaiian spelling book) by 1829 and the staffing of the schools with 1,000-plus Hawaiian teachers. (Laimana)

By 1832, the literacy rate of Hawaiians (at the time was 78 percent) had surpassed that of Americans on the continent. The literacy rate of the adult Hawaiian population skyrocketed from near zero in 1820 to a conservative estimate of 91-percent - and perhaps as high as 95-percent - by 1834. (Laimana)

From 1820 to 1832, in which Hawaiian literacy grew by 91 percent, the literacy rate on the US continent grew by only 6 percent and did not exceed the 90 percent level until 1902 - three hundred years after the first settlers landed in Jamestown. By way of comparison, it is significant that overall European literacy rates in 1850 had not risen much above 50 percent. (Laimana)

“The Missionaries have been the fathers, the builders and the supporters of education in these Islands”. (Lee, December 2, 1847, Privy Council Minutes)

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 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)