

Mission Memorial Building

“Impressive ceremonies marked the laying of the cornerstone yesterday afternoon of the Mission Memorial building in King street, ews of the YWCA Homestead, being erected at a cost of \$90,000 as a monument to pioneer missionaries and to be the center of the missionary work in Hawaii in the future.” (Hawaiian Gazette, July 20, 1915)

Designed by architect H.L. Kerr and built between 1915 and 1916, these structures were commissioned by the Hawaii Evangelical Association in preparation for the centennial commemoration of the arrival of the American Protestant missionaries to Hawaii in 1820. (C&C)

“Various forms of memorials have been suggested, but instead of some monument of beauty, perhaps, but which could be put to no practical use, why not something which would be of lasting value and usefulness ...”

“... and what would combine all so well as a building which would be the center of activity for the Hawaiian board, where work along the lines of those whose memories are now being revered, should be directed!”

“Then came the idea of combining the old with the new in a building which would honor the work of those who had gone before and provide place for the workers of the present.”

“The object met with a hearty response from our friends and we were offered free of charge two sites, one from the Atherton estate and one from the Mary Castle Trust. Both were in the section of the city formerly known to all as the ‘Mission,’ but this one which was chosen by the board was the one offered by the Mary Castle Trust and was ground which had been hallowed by actual missionary work.”

“The main building is to provide offices for the secretary and the treasurer, the superintendents of the various branches of the work, the book rooms for the board as well as the rooms for its regular meetings; provision as mentioned for the Mission Children’s Society; a meeting place for the Christian Endeavor Society, etc.”

“The building in the rear and connected with the main building will provide an auditorium with a seating capacity of 600, and this we believe will be the center of much active Christian work in the future.” (Lowrey, Hawaiian Gazette, July 20, 1915) (A third building, the Christian Education Building, was added in 1930.)

“It will only be a short time before this building, in red brick, on old colonial lines, will be up and from the street you will see across the front the words ‘Mission Memorial.’”



“This will bring to the attention of many people in years to come the work which was commenced on these Islands in 1820, and may the work which shall be done in, and directed from this building, in all time to come be worthy of what it commemorates and may the work extend on all lines to the bringing in of all races to the melting pot from which shall issue a happy, contented, God-fearing and God-serving community.”

“Among the documents placed in the metal box which, was encased in the cornerstone is an album of portraits of Hawaiian missionaries presented by the Hawaiian Mission Children's Society, reports of the Hawaiian Evangelical Association, year book of Central Union Church, ...”

“... copies of The Advertiser, Star Bulletin, the Friend, Ka Hoaloha, Ke Kuhunaa, Tomo; facsimile of contract with owners of brig Thaddeus made in 1819, list of donors and financial statement, copy of deed of building lot, program of this year's conference of Hawaiian Evangelical Association and copy of program of cornerstone laying.” (Hawaiian Gazette, July 20, 1915)

“The handsome new Mission Memorial Building of the Hawaiian Board of Missions was dedicated July 16th (1916), with interesting ceremonies.”



“The event was of unusual significance. It celebrated the 96th anniversary of the beginning of Christianity in Honolulu, when Hiram Bingham and other missionaries of the American Board landed there. The dedication reviewed in a striking manner the progress civilization has made in the Hawaiian Islands.”

“An organization called ‘The Cousins’ Society’ met in the new building for its 64th session. This society is composed of the descendants of the early missionaries, and receives its unique name from the fact that the first Christian workers in Hawaii always addressed one another as ‘brother’ or ‘sister.’”

“Hence their children call themselves very appropriately ‘cousins.’ This name, used universally through Hawaii, is a nickname for the Hawaiian Mission Children’s Society which ...”

“... in 1907, was formally incorporated for the purpose of perpetuating the memory of the missionary fathers and mothers who brought Christianity to these islands, of promoting union among its members, of cultivating in them an active missionary spirit, stirring them to good deeds, and of assisting in the support of Christian work.” (Missionary Review, 1916)

“(Peter Cushman Jones) was the prime mover in the raising of the fund for the new building to provide the Board with adequate headquarters as a fitting memorial to the work of the missionary fathers and mothers. He contributed \$33,000 to the fund, besides making large annual gifts to the regular work of the Board for its general work.”



“Mr. Jones was the prime mover in the raising of the fund for the Mission Memorial Building to provide the Board with an adequate headquarters as a fitting memorial to the work of the missionary fathers and mothers, giving a sum amounting to more than one-third of the entire cost of the Mission Memorial, its office building and auditorium.” (The Friend, May 1922)

In 1944, Honolulu city officials felt that procuring the Mission Memorial Buildings, adjacent to Honolulu Hale, would offer a simple and convenient way to ease the congestion of office space in city hall. In July 1945, condemnation procedures commenced and in September 1945, at a cost of \$162,000, the City and County of Honolulu acquired the Mission Memorial Building Complex.

The Hawaii Board of Missions, the outreach program of the HMCS continued to occupy office space in the complex until 1947. After the acquisition of the building complex, two years of renovations were required before it could be occupied by various City agencies. (C&C Honolulu)

The large, red-brick, neoclassical structures are the only example of Jeffersonian architecture in Hawai‘i. In 2003, after decades of use as city office space, the auditorium was renovated back to its original state.

While it is now primarily used for City and County of Honolulu departmental activities (and generally referred to as City Hall Annex), local, non-profit organizations can also use it, especially for cultural and arts events. All events must be free and open to the public.

As for the Mission Memorial Building, the city renovated it in 2010. It currently houses the Mayor’s Office of Culture and the Arts, the Neighborhood Commission Office, and the Information and Complaints branches.