

‘Ōpūkaha‘ia

The Inspiration for the Hawaiian Mission

Hostilities of Kamehameha’s conquest on Hawai‘i Island supposedly ended with the death of Keōua at Kawaihae Harbor in early-1792 and the placement of the vanquished chief’s body at Pu‘ukoholā Heiau at Kawaihae.

The island was under the rule of Kamehameha. However, after a short time, another chief entered into a power dispute with Kamehameha; his name was Nāmakehā.

In 1795, Kamehameha asked Nāmakehā, who lived in Ka‘ū, Hawai‘i, for help in fighting Kalanikūpule and his Maui forces on O‘ahu, but Nāmakehā ignored the invitation. Instead, he opted to rebel against Kamehameha by tending to his enemies in Ka‘ū, Puna and Hilo on Hawai‘i Island.

Hostilities erupted between the two in 1796. The battle took place at Hilo. Kamehameha defeated Nāmakehā; his warriors next turned their rage upon the villages and families of the vanquished. The alarm was given of their approach.

A family, who had supported Nāmakehā, the father (Ke‘au) taking his wife (Kamoho‘ula) and two children fled to the mountains. There he concealed himself for several days with his family in a cave. (Brumaghim) The warriors found the family and killed the adults.

A survivor, a son, ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia, was at the age of about ten; both his parents were slain before his eyes. The only surviving member of the family, besides himself, was an infant brother he hoped to save from the fate of his parents, and carried him on his back and fled from the enemy.

But he was pursued, and his little brother, while on his back, was killed by a spear from the enemy. Taken prisoner, because he was not young enough to give them trouble, nor old enough to excite their fears, ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia was not killed.

He was later turned over to his uncle, Pahua, who took him into his own family and treated him as his child. Pahua was a kahuna at Hiki‘au Heiau in Kealakekua Bay.

When Captain Vancouver visited the islands in the 1790s, he provided the following description of Hiki‘au:

“Adjoining one side of the Square was the great Morai (heiau,) where there stood a kind of steeple (‘anu‘u) that ran up to the height of 60 or 70 feet, it was in square form, narrowing gradually towards the top where it was square and flat; it is built of very slight twigs & laths, placed horizontally and closely, and each lath hung with narrow pieces of white Cloth.”

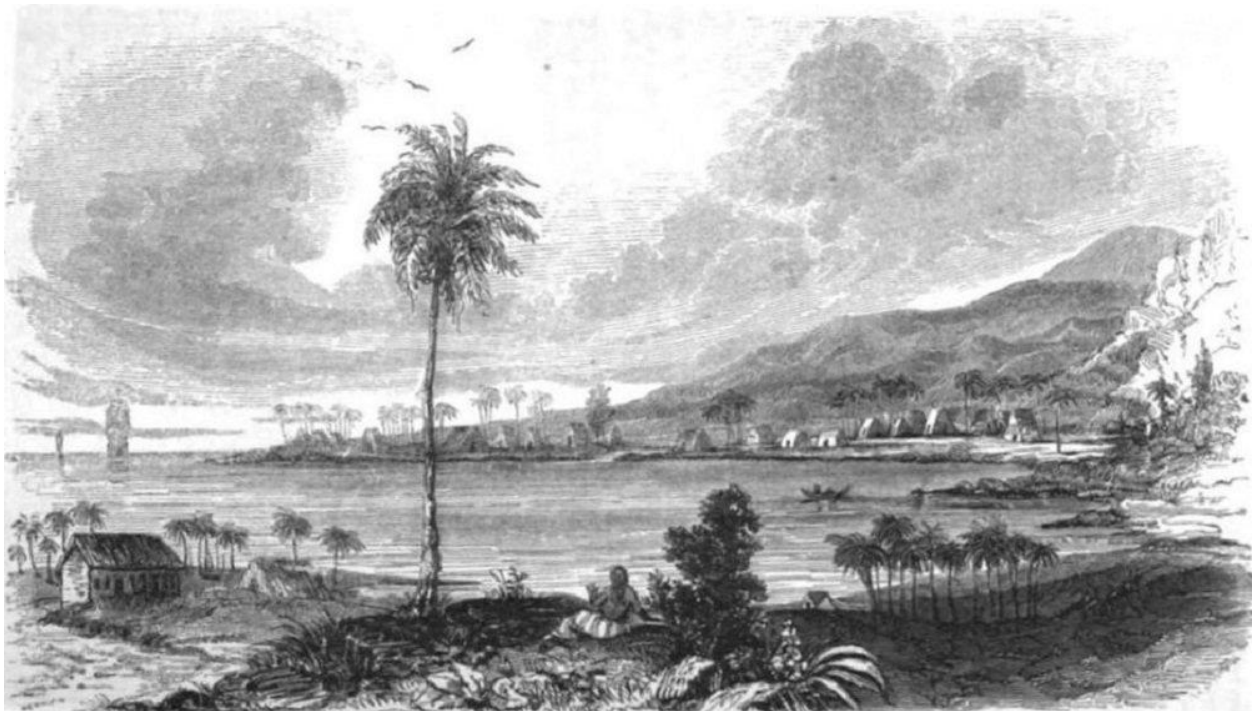
“... next to this was a House occupied by the Priests, where they performed their religious ceremonies and the whole was enclosed by a high railing on which in many parts were stuck skulls of those people, who had fallen victims to the Wrath of their Deity. In the center of the Morai stood a preposterous figure carved out of wood larger than life representing the ... supreme deity... .”

John Papa 'I'i wrote that in ca. 1812-1813, shortly after Kamehameha's return to Hawai'i, the king celebrated the Makahiki and in the course of doing so he rededicated Hiki'au, "the most important heiau in the district of Kona".

This is the same place where Captain Cook landed on the Island of Hawai'i, across the bay from Hiki'au Heiau is where Cook was later killed.

'Ōpūkaha'ia's uncle, wanting his nephew to follow him as a kahuna, taught 'Ōpūkaha'ia long prayers and trained him to the task of repeating them daily in the temple of the idol. This ceremony he sometimes commenced before sunrise in the morning, and at other times was employed in it during the whole or the greater part of the night.

'Ōpūkaha'ia was not destined to be a kahuna.



The Triumph Comes to Kealahou Bay

Scrawls on a hand-drawn map by Brintnall told of the murder of his supercargo, brother-in-law and close friend Elihu Mix, who died aboard the seal hunting ship Triumph in Honolulu Harbor after allegedly eating a poisoned fish dinner sent to the ship. Family tradition suggests Mix was not the target – rather, the Triumph's ship captain, Brintnall was intended to be killed; "Luckily for Brintnall, he was ashore and missed the dinner." (Chris Cook)

It seems, in about 1807, Kamehameha made arrangements with Captain Caleb Brintnall, Master of the Triumph out of New Haven, to take his 12-year old son and heir apparent, Liholiho, to New England for his education. (A few years earlier, Kaumuali'i of Kauai had sent his son Humehume to New England for school and Kamehameha wanted his heir to equal to his rival's in Western education.)

However, Ka'ahumanu saw Kamehameha's plan for the boy (she was his guardian) as a threat to her influence and political hold. So Ka'ahumanu was likely the unnamed 'Queen of the Sandwich Islands' who Brintnall reported had sent an outrigger canoe with a fish dinner out to his ship in Honolulu Harbor - a gift for the Captain and Mix.

In the Hawaiian tradition of 'apu koheoheo (the poison cup) the fish had been basted with the deadly toxins of the keke (puffer fish), which swam in nearby fish ponds.

However, Brintnall was on shore at Honolulu. Mix ate the dinner and died from the poisoning.

From Hiki'au, 'Ōpūkaha'ia made a life-changing decision – not only which affected his life, but had a profound effect on the future of the Hawaiian Islands.

"I began to think about leaving that country, to go to some other part of the globe. I did not care where I shall go to. I thought to myself that if I should get away, and go to some other country, probably I may find some comfort, more than to live there, without father and mother." ('Ōpūkaha'ia)

American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM)

At this same time, there was a movement developing on the North American continent. Samuel John Mills Jr (1783-1818) was the key instigator of American foreign missions. He grew up in Torrington, Connecticut, where his father, also named Samuel John Mills (1743-1833,) was pastor of the Congregational Church.

In the early-1800s, the US was swept by religious revivalism and many people were converted in the wake of the newly born religious fervor. 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 1806, Mills headed off to Williams College in Massachusetts; he shared his thoughts on a missionary life with a few friends at college.

In the summer of 1806, in a grove of trees, in what was then known as Sloan's Meadow, 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.



Sloan's Meadow – Williams College

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.

This led to the formation of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM). 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.))

"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."



Samuel John Mills Jr

"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 may be considered under two divisions, - its Home Department, and its Foreign Missions."

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.

"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)

"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)

"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 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.”

“Mission Among the Cherokees of the Arkansaw”

“Commenced in 1820. There is only the station of Dwight – On the west side of Illinois Creek; four miles north of the Arkansaw river, 200 miles above the Arkansaw Post; and 500 miles from the junction of the Arkansaw with the Mississippi.” (Missionary Herald, January 1823)

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)

‘Ōpūkaha’ia Heads to the Continent

The convergence of the Triumph sailing to Kealakekua, and ‘Ōpūkaha’ia desiring to leave Hawai‘i, set in motion a chain of events key to the sending of missionaries to Hawai‘i, a decade later.

“About this time there was a ship (the Triumph) come from New York; - Captain Brintnall the master of the ship. As soon as it got into the harbour, in the very place where I lived, I thought of no more but to take the best chance I had, and if the captain have no objection, to take me as one of his own servants and to obey his word.” (‘Ōpūkaha’ia)

‘Ōpūkaha’ia swam out to and boarded Brintnall’s ‘Triumph’ (a China fur trading ship) in Kealakekua Bay.

“After supper the captain made some inquiry to see if we were willing to come to America; and soon I made a motion with my head that I was willing to go. This man was very agreeable, and his kindness was much delighted in my heart, as if I was his own son, and he was my own father. Thus I still continue thankful for his kindness towards me.” (‘Ōpūkaha’ia)

“My parting with them (grandmother, aunt & uncle) was disagreeable to them and to me, but I was willing to leave all my relations, friends and acquaintance; expected to see them no more in this world.”

“We set out on our journey ...” (‘Ōpūkaha’ia)

Russell Hubbard Teaches ‘Ōpūkaha’ia ‘the letters’

Another young Hawaiian, Hopu, was on board. Also on Board was Russell Hubbard, a son of Gen. Hubbard of New Haven, Connecticut. Hubbard is said to have studied for the ministry after graduation from Yale, but a fondness for travel drove him abroad. (Dexter; Yale) Hubbard had gone to sea following his graduation in 1806, hoping that a change of air and climate could resolve some unspecific health concerns.

“This Mr. Hubbard was a member of Yale College. He was a friend of Christ. Christ was with him when I saw him, but I knew it not. ‘Happy is the man that put his trust in God!’ Mr. Hubbard was very kind to me on our passage, and taught me the letters in English spelling-book.” (‘Ōpūkaha’ia)

After travelling to the American North West, then to China, they landed in New York in 1809. They continued to New Haven, Connecticut. ‘Ōpūkaha’ia was eager to study and learn - seeking to be a student at Yale.

‘Ōpūkaha’ia Meets Edwin Dwight at Yale College

“In this place I become acquainted with many students belonging to the College. By these pious students I was told more about God than what I had heard before ... Many times I wished to hear more about God, but find no body to interpret it to me.”

“I attended many meetings on the sabbath, but find difficulty to understand the minister. I could understand or speak, but very little of the English language. Friend Thomas (Hopu) went to school to one of the students in the College before I thought of going to school.” (‘Ōpūkaha’ia)

‘Ōpūkaha‘ia “was sitting on the steps of a Yale building, weeping. A solicitous student stopped to inquire what was wrong, and Obookiah (the spelling of his name, based on its sound) said, ‘No one will give me learning.’”

The student was Edwin Dwight, a distant relative of the college president. “(W)hen the question was put him, ‘Do you wish to learn?’ his countenance began to brighten. And when the proposal was made that he should come the next day to the college for that purpose, he served it with great eagerness.” (Dwight)

‘Ōpūkaha‘ia was taken as a servant into the family of the Rev. Dr. Dwight, President of Yale College, where he was treated with kindness, and taught the first principles of Christianity. At length, Mr. Samuel J. Mills Jr., took him under his particular patronage, and took him to live with his father, the Rev. Mr. Mills of Torrington.

‘Ōpūkaha‘ia Goes to Live with Samuel Mills

The Mills family invited ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia into their home. Later Mills brought ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia to Andover Theological Seminary, the center of foreign mission training in New England. Mills is noted as a founder of the American foreign missions movement.

The following are portions of a December 20, 1809 letter written by Samuel J Mills to the Rev. Gordon Hall, then a student in the Theological Seminary at Andover (he was later a Missionary in the island of Bombay.) It speaks of ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia and his influence in establishing the Hawaiian Islands Mission.

“Very Dear Brother, I received your kind letter, and feel much indebted to you. I have been in this place about two months. When I came, I found my worthy friend E. Dwight here ...”

“... I roomed with him about two weeks, and then removed my quarters to the Rev. Mr. Stewart's, with whom I have lived to the present time. As every day is not so singularly spent by me as this has been, I will notice something not a little extraordinary.”

“To make my narrative understood, you must go back with me to my first arrival in this place. Mr. Dwight, I then found, was instructing a native Owhyean boy. Two natives of this island arrived here five or six months ago, and this was one of them.”

“As I was in the room with Mr. Dwight, I heard the youth recite occasionally, and soon became considerably attached to him. His manners are simple; he does not appear to be vicious in any respect, and he has a great thirst for knowledge.”

“In his simple manner of expressing himself, he says, ‘The people in Owhyhee very bad - they pray to gods made of wood. Poor Indians don't know nothing.’”

“He says, ‘Me want to learn to read this Bible, and go back then, and tell them to pray to God up in heaven.’ (Not having a place to stay,) I told him he need not be concerned; I would find a place for him. ...”

“I told him he might go home with me, and live at my father's, and have whatever he wanted. He then came with me to my room. I heard him read his lesson, and attempted to instruct him in some of the first principles of Christianity, of which he was almost entirely ignorant. ...”

"I told him further, that as my father was one of the Missionary Trustees, he would no doubt obtain for him a support, if it was thought best to educate him, which is my intention to attempt so far as that he may be able to instruct his countrymen, and, by God's blessing, convert them to Christianity. To this he could hardly object. ..."

"He had been talking with the President of the College, and I told him I would see him on the subject ... (and I) related to him a part of my plan, which was that Obookiah should go with me to my father's, and live with him this winter ..."

"... and be instructed in the first principles of reading and writing, as well as of Christianity, where he would be abundantly furnished with the means of acquiring both. ..."

"The President came fully into the opinion that this was the most eligible course which could be pursued, if Obookiah was willing to go. Obookiah is his Indian name, and he is seventeen years old, I told him he would be glad to go; he was without a home - without a place to eat, or sleep."



'Ōpūkaha'ia

"The poor and almost friendless Owhyean would sit down disconsolate, and the honest tears would flow freely down his sunburn face; but since this plan has been fixed upon, he has appeared cheerful, and feels quite at ease."

"I propose to leave town in two weeks, with this native of the South to accompany me to Torrington, where I intend to place him under the care of those whose benevolence is without a bond to check, or a limit to confine it. Here I intend he shall stay until next spring, if he is contented. Thus, you see, he is likely to be firmly fixed by my side."

“What does this mean? Brother Hall, do you understand it? Shall he be sent back unsupported, to attempt to reclaim his countrymen?”

“Shall we not rather consider these southern islands a proper place for the establishment of a mission?”

“Not that I would give up the heathen tribes of the west. I trust we shall be able to establish more than one mission in a short time, at least in a few years; and that God will enable us to extend our views and labours further than we have before contemplated.”

“We ought not to look merely to the heathen on our own continent, but to direct our attention where we may, to human appearance, do the most good, and where the difficulties are the least. We are to look to the climate - established prejudices - the acquisition of language - the means of subsistence, &c. &c.”

“All these things, I apprehend, are to be considered. The field is almost boundless; in every part of which, there ought to be Missionaries.”

“In the language of an animated writer, but I must say, ‘he is of another country – O that we could enter at a thousand gates, that every limb were a tongue, and every tongue a trumpet to spread the Gospel sound!’”

“The men of Macedonia; cry, Come over and help us. This voice is heard from the north and from the south, and from the east, and from the west.”

“O that we might glow with desire to preach the Gospel to the heathen, that is altogether irresistible! The spirit of burning hath gone forth. The camp is in motion. The Levites, we trust, are about to bear the vessels, and the great command is, Go Forward.”

“Let us, my dear brother, rely with the most implicit confidence, on those great, eternal, precious promises contained in the word of God: ...”

“‘And Jesus answered and said, verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake and the Gospel’s, but he shall receive an hundred fold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come, eternal life.’”

“Be strong, therefore, and let not your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded. ‘Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty; and in thy majesty ride prosperously, because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things.’” Let us exclaim with the poet:

Come then, and added to thy many crowns,
Receive yet one, the crown of all the earth.
Thou who alone art worthy! It was thine
By ancient cov’nant, e’er nature’s birth,
And thou hast made it thine by purchase since,
And overpaid its value with thy blood.”

Formation of the Foreign Mission School

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.



Foreign Mission School

In October, 1816, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) decided to establish the Foreign Mission School in Cornwall, Litchfield County, Connecticut, for the instruction of youth like 'Ōpūkaha'ia. By 1817, a dozen students, six of them Hawaiians, were training at the Foreign Mission School to become missionaries to teach the Christian faith to people around the world. Initially lacking a principal, Dwight filled that role from May 1817 - May 1818.

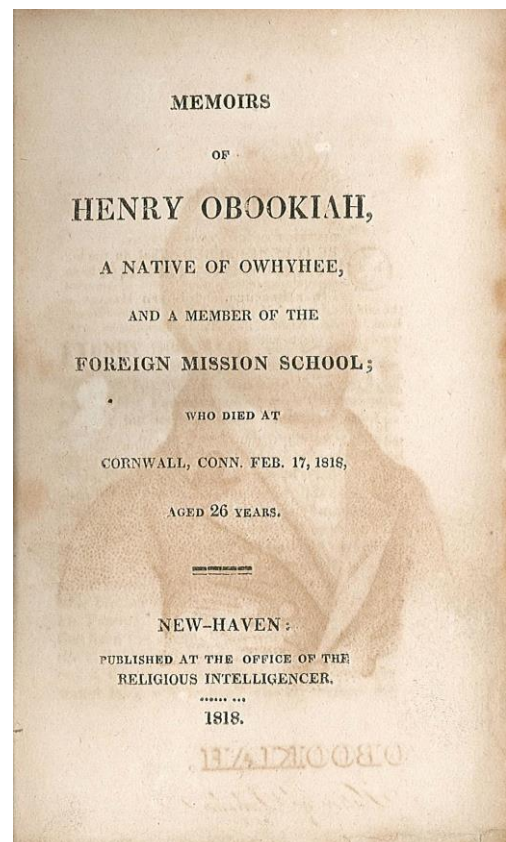
The object of the School as set forth in its Constitution, was "The education in our own country of Heathen Youths, in such manner, as, with subsequent professional instruction will qualify them to become useful Missionaries, Physicians, Surgeons, School Masters, or

Interpreters and to communicate to the Heathen Nations such knowledge in agriculture and the arts, as may prove the means of promoting Christianity and civilization." (Missionary Herald, January 1821)

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's Grammar Book

A manuscript was found among Queen Emma's private papers (titled, "A Short Elementary Grammar of the Owhihe Language"); a note written on the manuscript said, "Believed to be Obookiah's grammar".

Some believe this manuscript is the first grammar book on the Hawaiian language. However, when reading the document, many of the words are not recognizable. Here's a sampling of a few of the words: 3-o-le; k3-n3-k3; l8-n3 and; 8-8-k8. No these aren't typos.

In his journal, 'Ōpūkaha'ia first mentions grammar in his account of the summer of 1813: "A part of the time (I) was trying to translate a few verses of the Scriptures into my own language, and in making a kind of spelling-book, taking the English alphabet and giving different names and different sounds. I spent time in making a kind of spelling-book, dictionary, grammar." (Schutz)

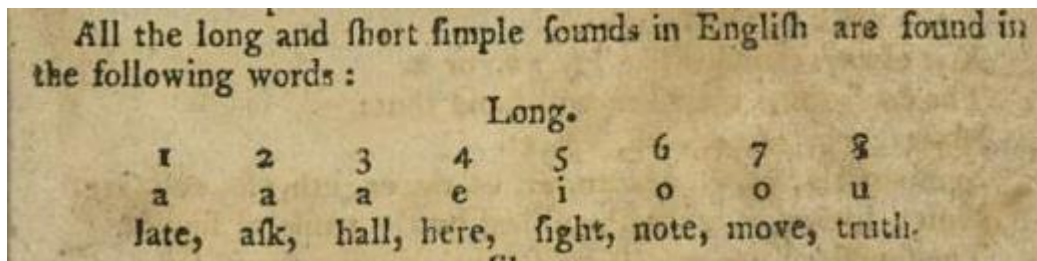
To help decipher 'Ōpūkaha'ia's spelling, we need only look at Webster's Spelling Book. Noah Webster (1758-1843) was the man of words in early 19th-century America. He compiled a dictionary which became the standard for American English; he also compiled The American Spelling Book, which was the basic textbook for young readers in early 19th-century America.

Webster's works were the standard for American English. References to his 'Spelling' book appear in the accounts by folks at the Foreign Mission School.

English letters have different sounds for the same letter. For instance, the letter 'a' has a different sound when used in words like: late, ask and hall.

Noah Webster devised a method to help differentiate between the sounds and assigned numbers to various letter sounds - and used these in his Spelling Book. (Webster did not substitute the numbers corresponding to a letter's sound into words in his spelling or dictionary book; it was used as an explanation of the difference in the sounds of letters.)

The following is a chart from Webster's Spelling Book for some of the letters related to the numbers assigned, depending on the sound they represent.



Using 'Ōpūkaha'ia's odd-looking words mentioned above, we can decipher what they represent by substituting the code and pronounce the words accordingly (for the "3," substitute with "a" (that sounds like "hall") and replace the "8" with "u," (that sounds like "truth"). So:

- 3-o-le transforms to 'a'ole (no)
- k3-n3-k3 transforms to kanaka (man)
- l8-n3 transforms to luna (upper) and
- 8-8-k8 transforms to 'u'uku (small)

It seems Henry 'Ōpūkaha'ia used Webster's Speller in his writings and substituted the numbers assigned to the various sounds and incorporated them into the words of his grammar book (essentially putting the corresponding number into the spelling of the word.)

"Once we know how the vowel letters and numbers were used, 'Ōpūkaha'ia's short grammar becomes more than just a curiosity; it is a serious work that is probably the first example of the Hawaiian language recorded in a systematic way. Its alphabet is a good deal more consistent than those used by any of the explorers who attempted to record Hawaiian words." (Schutz)

"It might be said that the first formal writing system for the Hawaiian language, meaning alphabet, spelling rules and grammar, was created in Connecticut by a Hawaiian named Henry 'Ōpūkaha'ia. He began work as early as 1814 and left much unfinished at his death in 1818." (Rumford)

"His work served as the basis for the foreign language materials prepared by American and Hawaiian students at the Foreign Mission School in Cornwall, Connecticut, in the months prior to the departure of the first company of missionaries to Hawai'i in October 1819." (Rumford)

It is believed 'Ōpūkaha'ia classmates (and future missionaries,) Samuel Ruggles and James Ely, after 'Ōpūkaha'ia's death, went over his papers and began to prepare material on the Hawaiian language to be taken to Hawai'i and used in missionary work (the work was written by Ruggles and assembled into a book – by Herman Daggett, principal of the Foreign Mission School – and credit for the work goes to 'Ōpūkaha'ia.)

'Ōpūkaha'ia Inspired the American Protestant Mission to Hawai'i

'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.

In giving instructions to the first missionaries, the ABCFM, noted: “You will never forget ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia. You will never forget his fervent love, his affectionate counsels, his many prayers and tears for you, and for his and your nation. You saw him die; saw how the Christian could triumph over death and the grave; saw the radiant glory in which he left this world for heaven. You will remember it always, and you will tell it to your kindred and countrymen who are dying without hope.”



Hiram Bingham

Asa Thurston

On October 23, 1819, the Pioneer Company of missionaries from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) from the northeast United States, set sail on the Thaddeus for the Hawaiian Islands.

There were seven couples sent in the Pioneer Company of missionaries to convert the Hawaiians to Christianity. These included two Ordained Preachers (note: Bingham and Thurston were ordained as missionaries at Goshen, a more complex position than preacher), Hiram Bingham and his wife Sybil and Asa Thurston and his wife Lucy; two Teachers, Mr. Samuel Whitney and his wife Mercy and Samuel Ruggles and his wife Mary; a Doctor, Thomas Holman and his wife Lucia; a Printer, Elisha Loomis and his wife Maria; a Farmer, Daniel Chamberlain, his wife and five children. They landed at Kailua-Kona, April 4, 1820.

Among the other Hawaiian students at the Foreign Mission School were Thomas Hopu, William Kanui, John Honoli‘i and George Prince ‘Humeume’ (son of Kauai’s Kaumuali‘i).

By the time the Pioneer Company arrived, Kamehameha I had died and the centuries-old kapu system had been abolished; through the actions of King Kamehameha II (Liholiho), with encouragement by former Queens Ka‘ahumanu and Keōpūolani (Liholiho’s mother), the Hawaiian people had already dismantled their heiau and had rejected their religious beliefs.

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. 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)

On August 15, 1993, ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia’s remains were returned to Hawai‘i from Cornwall and laid in a vault facing the ocean at Kahikolu Church, overlooking Kealakekua Bay.