

Ordination of the Missionaries

“Visiting the Foreign Mission school, during a vacation of the Theological Seminary, at Andover, and feeling a new impulse to become a pioneer in the enterprise of spreading the Gospel in that dark portion of the Pacific Isles, I freely offered myself to the American Board for that purpose, and was accepted by their Prudential Committee, in the summer of 1819; and soon after, Mr. Thurston, my class-mate, offered himself for the same work, and was likewise readily accepted.” (Hiram Bingham)

“We completed our course of Theological studies, at Andover, Massachusetts, in September, 1819. On the 29th of the same month, we were, at the request of the Prudential Committee, solemnly set apart, at Goshen, Connecticut, for the work of this ministry.”

“An unusual degree of enthusiasm prevailed there among the friends of the Hawaiian race as many remember, and the missionary zeal of many was awakened or greatly increased. The language of the impulses of the Spirit seemed to be, ‘Go quickly to the rescue of the dying heathen, and I will go with you,’ and the Church responded, ‘Go quickly.’ Nearly simultaneously, twelve others, sons and daughters of the Church, offered themselves, and were accepted as assistant missionaries for that field. Their earnest language was, - ‘Here are we, - send us.’” (Hiram Bingham)

Ordination of Hiram Bingham and Asa Thurston

“It was on September 29, 1819, that people interested in the starting of the Sandwich Island mission gathered in the Goshen Congregational church to witness the ordination of Hiram Bingham and Asa Thurston.”

“In 1809 two native boys, Obookiah and Hopu, had come from the Sandwich Islands to study in this country. It was during a visit at the mission school in Cornwall, where these boys were studying, that Mr. Bingham and Mr. Thurston became interested in this work and began to think these people who were really ‘in the dark places of the earth.’ They graduated from Andover Theological Seminary in the spring of 1819, and in October of that year they sailed away to foreign lands.”

“The day of the Ordination was lovely, as Dr. A. C. Thompson says, ‘Never did the sun look down more brilliantly on our ample woodlands and our little lakes.’ Many strangers came to witness the inspiring scene, and the homes of all the old families of Goshen were hospitably thrown open to receive these guests.”

“Among the most distinguished visitors were Governor Treadwell, president of the American Board; Dr. Worcester, first corresponding secretary, as well as many other important members of the Board. Nor was the journey from Boston as easy in those days, as it is today. The sermon was preached by Rev. Dr. Heman Humphrey afterwards president of Amherst College upon the text, ‘And there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed’ (Joshua, xiii:l).

“Rev. Mr. Perry gave the charge very impressively, holding out the large pulpit Bible, and enjoining the young missionaries to follow the instructions of the great book. Rev. Mr. Porter, of Farmington, gave the right hand of fellowship. ‘That saintly man’ Jeremiah Hallock of Canton, offered the consecrating prayer.”

“Father Mills led in the opening devotional exercise, Dr Worcester in the closing. ‘Jesus shall reign where’er the sun’ was one of the hymns sung on this occasion. One of the most exalted moments of the service was attained when the two young men stepped into the aisle and, in clear, ringing voices, sang Melton Mowbray’s ‘Head of the Church Triumphant.’” (The Friend, November 1919)

Address by Dr. Thompson September 28, 1869, 50th Anniversary of the Ordination

“Of the Sandwich Islands’ mission, Goshen may not improperly be said to be the birthplace. Before the death of Obookiah, Dr. Harvey was one of those who became instrumental in giving form to the idea and purpose.”



Hiram Bingham (1819)

“The Executive Committee of the agency, having in charge the Cornwall school, requested him to prepare a petition to the American Board, that they would send out a mission to the islands in question. Such a petition having been written accordingly, and signed by the committee, was duly presented.”

“In process of time the undertaking was resolved upon, and the Prudential Committee of the ABCFM, having appointed two young men as missionaries, requested the North Consociation of Litchfield County to perform the service of their ordination. ...:

“Father Gillett (Rev. Alexander of Torrington) conducted the examination. The candidates, Hiram Bingham and Asa Thurston, who had pursued the usual three-years course of study at the Theological Seminary in Andover, were examined and approved. Other preliminaries to the public service received attention. Then came the day (September 29th 1819), to which so many had been looking forward with eager interest. It had been the theme of conversation in the house and by the way.”

“Old and young were on the qui vive. Town pride was stirred in the matter of entertainment. Many were the friendly contests for favorite guests. Doors were thrown wide open — doors of the Baldwins, the Bartholomews, the Beaches, the Beechers, the Brooks, the Buels, the Collinses, the Gaylords, the Griswolds, the Hales, the Harts, the Hendersons, the Iveses, the Lucases, the Lymans, the Mileses, the Nortons, the Parmelees, the Stanleys, the Starrs, the Streets, the Thompsons, the Towners, the Wadhams, and I know not how many others.”

“‘Nor ought we to forget,’ wrote Mr. Evarts afterwards, ‘the unbounded hospitality of the people, to which the great number of clergymen and others from a distance afforded opportunity.’ A large choir of singers had with great pains been rehearsing the pieces to be sung. More thoughtful and serious-minded persons had been praying and longing that spiritual benefits might be reaped by the church and community; and that helped to give an elevated tone to the occasion.”

“Providence smiled noticeably in all circumstances of the ordination. The day was singularly clear, and the air unusually exhilarating. Never did the sun look down more brilliantly on our ample woodlands and our little lakes. The very brooks seemed to leap and foam in special excitement, Mohawk and Ivy Mountains, retouched with autumnal splendors, rose more majestic than ever. The hills clapped their hands.”

“A larger assembly than had ever congregated here thronged the old meeting-house. There were many outside who could find no accommodation within. Nearly all the Foreign Mission School were present; as also several students from the Andover Seminary, who afterwards became missionaries.”

“Strangers, too, from a distance were here, the honored and the excellent. There was Governor Treadwell, president of the American Board, firm and dignified. There was Doct. Samuel Worcester, the first Corresponding Secretary of the Board. Far-seeing, of sound judgment, and sound theological views, he was accounted one of the giants. There was Jeremiah Evarts, treasurer of the American Board, and afterwards secretary; sagacious, statesmanly, earnest, Pauline in person and with the pen. The Prudential Committee of the Board also came on from Boston — quite a different journey then from what it is now.”

“The sermon was preached by the Rev. Dr. Herman Humphrey, who had been a theological pupil of Mr. Hooker in this place, and was afterwards President of Amherst College, from the words: ‘And there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed.’ (Joshua xiii: 1.) It was quite in advance of the general spirit and sentiment of the times.” (Hibbard, History of Goshen)



Asa Thurston – around 1860s

Humphrey “was also an early and an enthusiastic supporter of Christian Missions. He enjoyed the honor of preaching the sermon at the ordination of the first missionaries of the ABCFM to the Sandwich Islands— Rev. Hiram Bingham and Rev. Asa Thurston. ... He was identified with almost every prominent organization in his day for the spread of the Gospel.” (Neill)

“Rev. Mr. Perry gave the charge in a manner peculiarly impressive, holding out the large pulpit Bible, and enjoining upon the young missionaries faithfully to follow the instructions of that book. Rev. Dr. Porter of Farmington gave the right hand of fellowship. That saintly man, Jeremiah Hallock, of Canton, offered the consecrating prayer. Father Mills led in the opening devotional exercise, and Dr. Worcester in the closing.”

“Of the pieces sung on that occasion one was ‘Jesus shall Reign,’ one that will not become obsolete or distasteful till the predictions of Psalm seventy-second are fulfilled. But the tide of rising interest culminated at the close of the service. Without previous intimation the two consecrated young men stepped into the broad aisle, and with clear, strong, ringing voices — Thurston, tenor; Bingham, base; sung Melton Mowbray (‘Head of the Church Triumphant’).”

“The effect was electrical. Those young missionaries were looked upon as martyrs. Some pictured them as finding their graves in the bottom of the ocean; some as meeting with death at the hands of savages; some as the welcomed heralds of glad tidings to isles waiting for God's law, and for the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Enthusiasm rose to the highest pitch. There are junctures when nothing but the voice of sacred song can either lift the soul to heights unattained before, or give utterance to its exalted emotions.”



Goshen Congregational Church, Schoolhouse and Parsonage-1890 (later rebuilt) (Hibbard)

“Such a moment was that. The whole occasion is spoken of, by those now living who were present, as one of thrilling interest. For this region, at least, it was altogether novel. The children of some who were there have caught enthusiasm as they have seen the countenances of fathers and mothers almost transfigured with lofty feeling, while rehearsing that scene and noteworthy occurrences at the Sandwich Islands.”

“The ordination of those first missionaries to the Sandwich Islands, with its antecedents and results, furnished in no inconsiderable measure the staple of conversation among religious circles throughout the county, but more especially here. Hearts and hands before closed were then opened. It was a temporary Christian normal school, an effective missionary institute. Goshen was that week one Bethel.”

“The sentiments and feelings of the community were toned up to a level they had never reached before. It helped to make and keep this the banner town in missionary interest. In proportion to its number of inhabitants and valuation, more was at that time contributed here to the cause, and had been for ten years, than in any other town of the county, and perhaps of the country.” (Hibbard, History of Goshen) (Asa Thurston had died on the field of his mission in 1868, and Hiram Bingham died a little over a month after the 50th anniversary celebration.)

“Within two weeks after the ordination in Goshen, the missionary company assembled in Boston, to receive their instructions and embark. There, in the vestry of Park Street Church, under the counsels of the officers of the Board, Dr. S. Worcester, Dr. J. Morse, J. Evarts, Esq., and others, the little pioneer band was, on the 15th of Oct., 1819, organized into a Church for transplantation. The members renewed their covenant, and publicly subscribed with their hands unto the Lord, and united in a joyful song.’ (O Happy Day That Fixed My Choice)”

“In these solemn and memorable transactions, the parties cherished the delightful expectation, that the prayer then offered by one of the Missionaries, ‘that this vine might be transplanted and strike its roots deep in the Sandwich Islands, and send forth its branches and its fruits till it should fill the land,’ would not only be heard in Heaven, but ere long, be graciously answered to the joy of the Hawaiian people, and of their friends throughout Christendom.”

“The object for which the missionaries felt themselves impelled to visit the Hawaiian race, was ...

- to honor God, by making known his will, and to benefit those heathen tribes, by making them acquainted with the way of life
- to turn them from their follies and crimes, idolatries and oppressions, to the service and enjoyment of the living God, and adorable Redeemer
- to give them the Bible in their own tongue, with ability to read it for themselves
- to introduce and extend among them the more useful arts and usages of civilized and Christianized society, and
- to fill the habitable parts of those important islands with schools and churches, fruitful fields, and pleasant dwellings.”

“To do this, not only were the Spirit and power of the Highest required, - for, ‘Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it,’ but, since he will not build his spiritual house, unless his laborers build it, the preacher and translator, the physician, the farmer, the printer, the catechist, and schoolmaster, the Christian wife and mother, the female teacher of heathen wives, mothers, and children, were also indispensable.” (Hiram Bingham)

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.

These included two Ordained Preachers, 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; and a Farmer, Daniel Chamberlain, his wife and five children.

Missionary Period

Over the course of a little over 40-years (1820-1863 - the “Missionary Period”), about 180-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)