

March 30, 1820

Pioneer Company First Sees Island of Hawai'i and Arrives off Kawaihae They learn Kamehameha is dead, Liholiho is King and Kapu is Abolished

The coming of Henry 'Ōpūkaha'ia and other young Hawaiians to the continent had awakened a deep Christian sympathy in the churches and moved the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) to establish a Foreign Mission School and a mission to the Hawaiian Islands. Among the other Hawaiian students at the Foreign Mission School were Thomas Hopu, William Kanui, John Honoli'i and Prince Humehume (son of Kauai'i's King Kaumuali'i.)

When asked "Who will return with these boys to their native land to teach the truths of salvation?" Hiram Bingham and his classmate, Asa Thurston, were the first to respond and offer their services to the Board. (Congregational Quarterly)

Bingham and Thurston were ordained at Goshen, Ct on September 29, 1819; it was the first ordination of foreign missionaries in the State of Connecticut.

Although a large part of the motivation for the Hawai'i missionary movement, Henry 'Ōpūkaha'ia unfortunately died of typhus fever in 1818 and didn't return home to teach the gospel. However, his book, "Memoirs of Henry Obookiah," was the inspiration for this and subsequent missionary companies.

On October 23, 1819, the Pioneer Company of American Protestant missionaries from the northeast US set sail from Boston on the Thaddeus for the Hawaiian Islands.

There were seven American couples sent by the ABCFM to convert the Hawaiians to Christianity in this Pioneer 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.

With the missionaries were Thomas Hopu, William Kanui, John Honoli'i and Prince Humehume (son of Kauai'i's King Kaumuali'i.)

The Prudential Committee of the ABCFM in giving instructions to the pioneers of 1819 said: "The present is a moment of deep interest to you, and to us all. You are now on the point, the most of you, of leaving your country, and your kindred, and your father's houses, and committing yourselves, under Providence, to the winds and the waves, for conveyance to far distant Islands of the Sea, there to spend the remainder of your days; and the rest, of bidding a final adieu to this favored land in which they were strangers, but in which they have been blest with a new and celestial birth, and returning to those same — their native isles, where their kindred dwell, but where the shadow of death still broods, and where they know not what unanticipated and untried scenes await them."

"It is for no private end, for no earthly object that you go. It is wholly for the good of others, and for the glory of God our Saviour. ... Your mission is a mission of mercy, and your work is to be wholly a labor of love. ... Your views are not to be limited to a low, narrow scale, but you are to open your hearts wide, and set your marks high. You are to aim at nothing short of covering these islands with fruitful fields, and pleasant dwellings and schools and churches, and of Christian civilization."

“You are to abstain from all interference with the local and political interests of the people. The kingdom of Christ is not of this world, and it especially behoves a missionary to stand aloof from the private and transient interests of chiefs and rulers. Inculcate the duties of justice, moderation, forbearance, truth and universal kindness. Do all in your power to make men of every class good, wise and happy.”

After 160 days at sea, on March 30, 1820, the Pioneer Company of American Protestant missionaries first see the Islands.



Later that day, they learned Kamehameha died, Liholiho was now King and the kapu was abolished. Journal entries from some on the Thaddeus tell of the joy they felt ...

Thaddeus Journal

“March 30, 1820 - Let us thank God and take courage. Early this morning the long looked for Owahyee and the cloud capt and snow spt Mauna Keah appear full in view to the joy of the animated multitude on board (11 o'clock A.M.)”

“We are now coasting along the north-east part of the Island, so near the shore as to see the numerous habitations, cultivated fields, smoke rising in different parts, fresh vegetation, rocks, rivulets, cascades, trees &c. and with the help of glasses men and women,, immortal beings purchased with redeeming

blood. We are much pleased, not to say delighted with the scene and long to be on shore. (4 o'clock - P.M.) Pass Mowe on the right."

"Having turned the Northern extremity of O. Capt. B. (Blanchard) this afternoon sent off a boat to make inquiries respecting the king &c. Mr. Hunnewell, a mate, Thos. Hopoo, J. Tamoree and others, went nearly to the shore and fell in with 10 or 12 native fishermen in their canoes, who readily gave the important information ..."

"... that the aged King Tameamaah is dead - that Reehoreeho his son succeeds him - that the images of his Gods are burned - that the men eat with the women in all the Islands, - that one chief only was killed in settling the affairs of government, and he for refusing to destroy his Gods. - that Reehoreeho the young king, and Kiimokoo the first chief, sometimes called Billy Pitt, both reside at Owhyhee."

"If these are facts they are interesting facts, and seem to show that Christ is overturning in order to take possession and that these Isles are waiting for his law, while the old and decaying pillars of idolatry are falling to the ground."

"The moment seems favorable for the introduction of Christianity and the customs of civilized life, and our hopes are strengthened that there will be welcome. Whatever be the moral character and habits of the young king, we believe that these important particulars may with some confidence be rested on; 1st that he is specially desirous for improvement in learning; 2nd that he has long been indifferent to Idol worship, that he is not unfriendly to the whites."

"Our hearts do rejoice, though we are disappointed in not being allowed to preach Christ to that venerable Chief, - and tho' we believe we shall have trials enough to give exercise to faith and patience, yet our hearts do rejoice to hear the voices of one crying, "In the wilderness prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for your God".

"March 31 ... Sing, O Heavens for the Lord hath done it."

Hiram Bingham Journal

"March 30 - ... at early morning, March 30th, to the joy of our expectin little company, the long looked for Hawaii appeared in the West. The lofty Mauna Kea lifted its snow crowned summit above the dark and heavy clouds that begirt its waist."

"Our natives eagerly watching, had descried it in the night, at the distance of eighty miles. As we approached, we had a fine view of about sixty. miles of the N. E. coast of the island-the districts of Hilo, Hamakua, and part of Kohala; and as the sun shining in his strength dissipated the clouds, we had a more impressive view of the stupendous pyramidal Mauna Kea, having a base of some thirty miles, and a height of nearly three miles."

"Its several terminal peaks rise so near each other, as scarcely to be distinguished at a distance. These, resting on the shoulders of this vast Atlas of the Pacific, prove their great elevation by having their bases environed with ice, and their summits covered with snow, in this tropical region, and heighten the grandeur and beauty of the scene, by exhibiting in miniature, a northern winter, in contrast with the perpetual summer of the temperate and torrid zones below the snow and ice. The shores along this coast appeared very bold, rising almost perpendicularly, several hundred feet, being furrowed with many ravines and streams."

“From these bluffs, the country rises gradually, for a few miles presenting a grassy appearance, with a sprinkling of trees and shrubs. Then, midway from the sea to the summit of the mountain, appeared a dark forest, principally of the koa and ohia, forming a sort of belt, some ten miles in breadth - the temperate zone of the mountain.”

“As we approached the northern extremity of Hawaii, we gazed successively, upon the verdant hills, and deep ravines, the habitations of the islanders, the rising columns of smoke, the streams, cascades, trees, and vestiges of volcanic agency: then, with glasses, stretching our vision, we descried the objects of our solicitude, moving along the shore-immortal beings, purchased with redeeming blood, and here and there, the monuments of their superstition. Animated with the novel and changeful scene, we longed to spring on shore, to shake hands with the people, and commence our work by telling them of the great salvation by Jesus Christ. As we passed round the northern extremity of Hawaii, Maui rose on our right, at the distance of twenty-five or thirty miles.”

“Having gained the lee, or western side of Kohala, an officer with Hopu and Honolii, was sent by a boat, at 4 P. M., to make inquiry of the inhabitants respecting the state of the islands, and the residence of the king. Waiting nearly three hours, we hailed their return, eager to catch the sound of the first intelligence; and how were our ears astonished to hear, as it were, the voice divine, proclaiming on their hills and plains,

‘In the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord,
Make straight in the desert, a highway for our God.’

“How were our hearts surprised, agitated, and encouraged beyond every expectation, to hear the report ‘Kamehameha is dead - His son Liholiko is king - the tabus are abolished – the images are destroyed, - the heiaus of idolatrous worship are burned, and the party that attempted to restore them by force of arms has recently been vanquished!’ The hand of God! how visible in thus beginning to answer the prayer of his people, for the Hawaiian race!” (Hiram Bingham)

Sybil Bingham Journal

“March 30th, 1820. - Memorable day - a day which brings us in full view of that dark pagan land so long the object of our most interested thoughts. Between twelve and one this morning, the word was from Thomas who was up watching, ‘land appears’.”

“When the watch at four was called, Honoree came down saying, ‘Owhyhee sight!’”

“There was but little sleep. When the day afforded more light than the moon we were all out, and judge you, if possible, what sensation filled our breasts as we fixed our eyes upon the lofty mountains of Owhyhee! O! it would be in vain to paint them. I attempt it not.”

“A fair wind carried us by different parts of the island near enough to discern its verdure, here and there a cataract rushing down the bold precipice—some huts, natives and smoke. I would I could put my feelings, for a little season, into your bosoms. No boats coming off as usual, Capt. B (Blanchard) thought it advisable to send ashore to inquire into the state of things, and where he might find the king.”

“Our good Thomas and Honoree, with Mr. Hunnewell and a few hands, set off. Our hearts beat high, and each countenance spoke the deep interest felt as we crowded around our messengers at their return.”

“With almost breathless impatience to make the communication, they leap on board and say, Tamaahmaah is dead! The government is settled in the hands of his son Keehoreeho-Krimokoo is principal chief—the taboo system is no more--men and women eat together! - the idol gods are burned!!”

“How did we listen! What could we say? The Lord has gone before us and we wait to see what He has for us to do.”

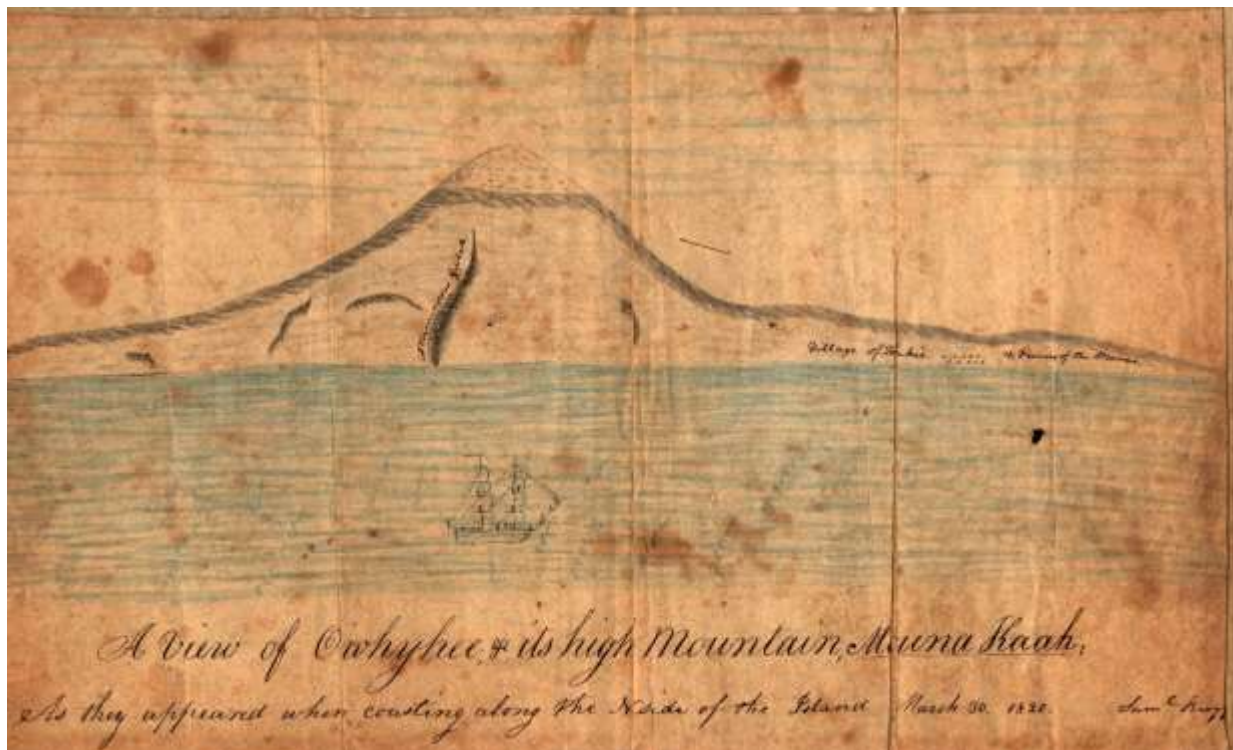
Samuel Ruggles Journal

“March 30th. Last night about 1 o'clock brother Hopoo came to my room almost in an ecstasy of joy and told me to get up and see Owhyhee (Hawaii); I went on deck and by the bright moonlight could just discover it 60 miles from us.”

“At daylight we could see plainly the high mountain Mahoon- ah Kaah (Mauna Kea) clothed in a thick mantle of snow.”

“I will leave it to my friends to imagine what our feelings are at the sight of land, that land which we have long wished to see, and in which we hope to plant the standard of the cross and labour for Christ. This afternoon we sent a boat for the shore, but it was met by some canoes of natives, who gave us information that Tamahamaha (Kamehameha) the King was dead; Oreoreo (Li ho liho) his eldest son succeeded him to the throne.”

“They also informed, us that their Taboos were all broken their Harais burnt to ashes and their idols destroyed. They had been at war, but now, all was peace and prosperity; and the men and women ate together and enjoyed equal privileges. We could, hardly credit all this, but were constrained to exclaim in the language of our hearts, ‘What hath God wrought.’”



Lucia Ruggles Holman Journal

“March 30. Lat. 20d Long. 155 W. The long wished for Owhyhee is now in full view on our left. We made the snow topt mountain of Mauna-Noa about 2 Oc. this morning. You may well suppose that after a voyage of 160 days, we were not a little glad. Our feelings cannot be realized but by those in like situation. The joy manifested by the native youth, is such as we should any of us feel to behold the land of our birth, after so long an absence.”

“9 Oc. We are now 8 miles from shore, and can see streams and rivulets of fresh water issuing from the mountain. Empty themselves into the sea. The country before us is beautiful, wearing the appearance of a cultivated place - with houses and huts. and plantations of sugar cane and Tarrow.”

“2 Oc. Sent off a boat to make discoveries. and hope they will return bearing an ‘Olive branch in their mouth.’”

“4 Oc .P.M . boat returned with news of King Tamahamaah’s death; that the worship of Idolatry and other heathenish customs are entirely abolished. Such glad news we were not prepared to receive. Truly the Lord hath gone before us in mercy.”

“We have not yet ascertained whether we may be permitted to land.” (Lucia Ruggles Holman)

Samuel Whitney Journal

“30. Last night at 3 oclock I was awaked to look at the long expected island of Owhyhee. Joy again fills my heart. At 9 we were opposite Mouna-Keah said to be one of the highest mountains in the world.”

“Its top is covered with snow which descends apparently about half of the way. Beautiful cascades are seen pouring over its cliffs & the clouds float along its sides. At 12 we were off the northern point. This is said to be the pleasantest part of the Island.”

“The boat has now gone ashore & we are waiting to hear the news. 4 oclock The boat has returned. King Tamaamaha is dead, his son Rehoreho has succeeded to the throne, idoltry is destroyed & both sexes eat together. We have now about 50 miles farther to go in order to see the King. Eternal thanks to God the Lord of the whole universe. He hath broken down with his own hand the greatest barriers to our work.”

Mercy Partridge Whitney Journal

“March 30th. I awoke this morning at an early hour, and heard one of the officers say, “Owhyhee is to be seen.” I arose though but half past 2, & by moonlight could plainly see the Island. It was about 40 miles distant.”

“When the morning came and the sun dispelled the shades of night, we saw the mountain of which you have heard much said. Its appearance was truly sublime reaching even above the clouds. Streams of water were seen running from it in torrents while its top was covered with perpetual snow. This mountain is Volcanic. As we sailed along and came near to the shore, green grass and cultivated land appeared. About 12 o'clock we saw several persons on the shore and not far distant a Morai, or Idol Temple.”

“4 o'clock. We have been sailing today within a few miles of the Island expecting to see the natives come paddling in their canoes; but none have yet visited us. Thomas Hopoo and John Honoree with several of the ship's crew, have been near the shore in a boat, but did not land.”



“Several of the natives were out a fishing, of whom they enquired for King Tamaahamaaha, who informed them he was dead, and his son Rehoreho had succeeded him and burnt all his Father's idols. They likewise informed them that they had now no Taboos or religious laws, & that men & women eat together.”

“I understand that a few years since it was thought such a disgrace for a man to eat with a woman, no one would ever eat with him afterwards; and for the woman the punishment was death. Well may we exclaim “what hath God wrought.” It seems as if the Lord had verily gone before us, and that the Isles are even now waiting for his law. Have we not occasion to rejoice we do indeed rejoice, but it is with trembling.”

“Though the idols of Owhyhee are burnt we do not expect that idolatry is utterly abolished. We probably shall have to struggle with many difficulties and meet with much opposition before the standard of the cross will be erected in this heathen land. I am much fatigued with the labors of packing my things today and must bid you good night.” (Mercy Partridge Whitney Journal)

Missionary Period

Over the course of a little over 40-years (1820-1863 - the “Missionary Period”), over 200-men and women in twelve Companies (as well as some who arrived independently) 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)