

Park Street Church

The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), based in Boston, was founded in 1810, the first organized missionary society in the US.

“When the time came for establishing the mission (to Hawai’i), three Hawaiian youths in the Foreign Mission School at Cornwall, named Thomas Hopu, William Tenui (Kanui), and John Honuri (Honoli’i), were described, in a Report of the Board, as instructed in the doctrines and duties of Christianity, and made partakers, as was charitably hoped, of spiritual and everlasting blessings. These youths became connected with the mission as native helpers.”

“Messrs. Hiram Bingham and Asa Thurston, from the Andover Theological Seminary, were ordained as missionaries at Goshen, Conn., on the 29th of September, 1819. The sermon was preached by the Rev. Heman Humphrey, afterwards President of Amherst College, from Joshua xiii. 1: ‘There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed.’”

“Besides these, the mission contained a physician. Dr. Holman; two schoolmasters, Messrs. Whitney and Ruggles; a printer, Mr. Loomis; and a farmer, Mr. Chamberlain. All these were married men, and the farmer took with him his five children.”

“The members of the mission, at the time of receiving their public instructions from the Board in Park-Street Church, were organized into a mission church, including the three islanders. There existed then no doubt as to the expediency of such a step.” (Anderson, 1872)

“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 (Happy Day).”

O happy day that fixed my choice
On Thee, my Savior and my God!
Well may this glowing heart rejoice,
And tell its raptures all abroad. [Chorus]

'Tis done-- the great transaction's done;
I am my Lord's, and He is mine;
He drew me and I followed on,
Rejoicing in the call divine. [Chorus]

High heav'n that hears the solemn vow,
That vow renewed shall daily hear;
Till in life's latest hour I bow,
And bless in death a bond so dear. [Chorus]

Chorus:
Happy day, happy day,
When Jesus washed my sins away!
He taught me how to watch and pray,
And live rejoicing ev'ry day;
Happy day, happy day,
When Jesus washed my sins away.



Boston – 1814; Park Street Church noted (green) – (Library of Congress)

“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 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.”

“Nor could this work be reasonably expected to be done by a few laborers only, at few and distant points, and in the face of all the opposition which Satan and Wicked men would, if possible, naturally array against them.”

“In conformity with the judgment of the Prudential Committee, the pioneer missionary company consisted of two ordained preachers and translators, a physician, two schoolmasters and catechists, a printer and a farmer, the wives of the seven, and three Hawaiians.” (Bingham)

Instructions from the ABCFM

The Prudential Committee of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM,) In giving instructions to missionaries headed to the Hawaiian Islands, noted (in part:)

“Dearly Beloved in the Lord, 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 day ; 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 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; of bringing, or preparing the means of bringing, thousands and millions of the present and succeeding generations to the mansions of eternal blessedness.”

“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.”

“The points of especial and essential importance to all missionaries, and all persons engaged in the missionary work are four: — Devotedness to Christ; subordination to rightful direction; unity one with another; and benevolence towards the objects of their mission.”

1. Devotedness to Christ—the vital principle of the Christian character. The eminence of sacred devotedness must lie maintained. You will find Christ in Hawaii as in this land, a sun and shield. His gracious word, "Lo, I am with you always" will lie sufficient for you.
2. Subordination to rightful direction. You will find it convenient and necessary to form yourselves into a body politic, having rules and regulations of your own, but comfortable to the direction of the Board or Prudential Committee. To regulations and assignments, as well as to the directions proceeding immediately from the Board, every member will hold himself bound to give heedful observance.
3. Unity one with another. To maintain brotherly love in its requisite purity, constancy, strength and tenderness; that you may all be inseparably one, as Christ and the Father are, will require much vigilance, much prayer, much crucifixion of self, much sanctifying grace.
4. Benevolence towards the objects of your mission. Your mission is a mission of mercy and your work is to be wholly a labor of love.”

Park Street Church

The beginnings of Park Street Church date to 1804 when a ‘Religious Improvement Society’ began holding weekly lectures and prayer meetings in Boston. (Congregational Library)

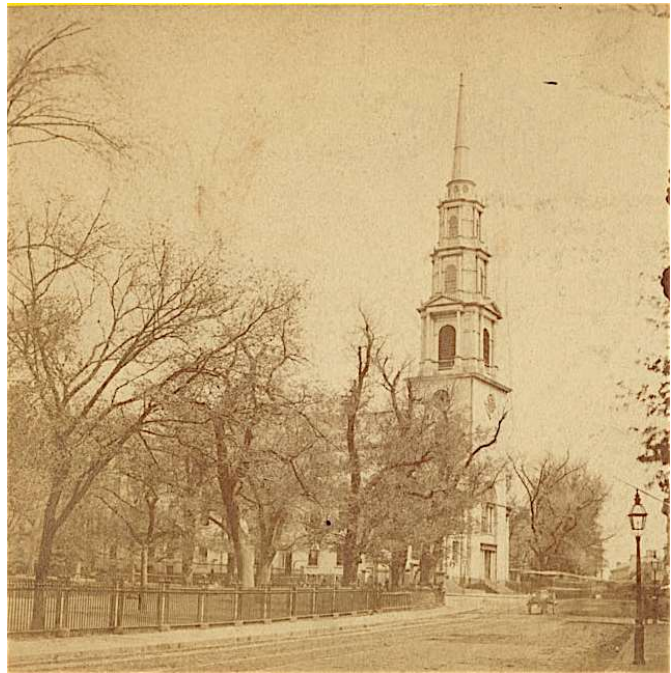
In 1809, fourteen men and twelve women founded the Church. At that time, Thomas Jefferson was completing his second term in office, many other heroes of the American Revolution, including Paul Revere and John and Abigail Adams, were still alive. Only 15-states, all east of the Mississippi River, had joined the Union. The population of Boston was not quite 34,000. (Rosell)

Cows were still being driven to the Boston Common for pasture, and only two houses on Common Street (later renamed Tremont Street) were more than a single-story high. The fastest mode of travel was by horse. The train was not commercially viable until the late-1820s. Samuel Morse, whose grandfather was among the three pastors who helped form the constituting council for Park Street Church, had not yet invented his ‘code’ for the telegraph. (Rosell)

After meeting for 6 years, the society formed the Park Street Church in February 1809 whose 26-charter members “hereby covenant and engage ... to give up ourselves unto the Lord ... to unite together into one body for the public worship of God, and the mutual edification one of another in the fellowship of the Lord Jesus: exhorting, reproofing, comforting and watching over each other, for mutual edification; looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of ... our Savior Jesus ...” (from the Park Street Church Articles of Faith and Government, adopted on Feb. 23, 1809)

“Though they faced opposition from all sides ... this small group acted in faith that God would use their efforts to accomplish no small task. And he did. By April of 1809, our location in the center of town was chosen to serve as a beacon of the hope we have in Christ. By 1810, the small congregation had grown and raised over \$100,000 to complete the construction of our current meeting-house.” (Park Street Church)

Park Street Church was the tallest building in the city from the time it was built (1810) until 1867 (prior to that, the Old North Church was taller). Before the water surrounding Boston was filled in to create Back Bay and other neighborhoods, someone arriving by water could see the steeple from all directions. (Park Street Church)



Park Street Church, 19th Century

Park Street Church quickly became the site of significant historical events including the founding of the Handel and Haydn Society in 1815, the American Temperance Society in 1826, the Animal Rescue League in 1889, and the NAACP in 1910. It also served to host William Lloyd Garrison's first anti-slavery speech in 1829 and Charles Sumner's famous address, 'The War System of Nations', in 1849. (Congregational Library)

On July 4, 1831, Park Street Church Sunday school children performed America (My Country 'Tis of Thee) for the very first time. The tune - which you might recognize also as God Save the Queen - was adapted by Park Street organist, Lowell Mason, to fit the lyrics penned by Samuel Francis Smith. Listen here to the congregation of Park Street Church sing this hymn.

<https://soundcloud.com/parkstreetchurch/my-country-tis-of-thee>

'Missionary Period'

On October 23, 1819, the Pioneer Company of ABCFM missionaries set sail from Boston on the Thaddeus to establish the Sandwich Islands Mission (now known as Hawai'i). 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 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)