

# Partners in Change

## A Biography of ABCFM Missionaries to Hawai'i

The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) was organized under Calvinist ecumenical auspices at Bradford, Massachusetts by the General Association of Massachusetts, on the June 29, 1810. 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.))

In 1812, the first missionary enterprise of the ABCFM (Adoniram Judson, Samuel Newell, Gordon Hall, Samuel Nott and Luther Rice, together with their wives) embarked to Western India; the first station was at Bombay.

“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)

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)

“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)

Among the next targets of ABCFM were American Indians. Their souls, members believed, could be saved by religious conversion and their futures by education. (OKHistory) The ABCFM developed a strong emphasis on missions to American Indians. They first ministered to Cherokees in Tennessee, and then followed displaced southeastern tribes to Michigan, Wisconsin, the Dakotas, Minnesota and Oregon.

The ABCFM was then faced with a decision to bring Indian youth into white communities and teach them there, or go out to them and teach them in their own communities. They chose the former.

The Foreign Mission School, in Cornwall, Connecticut, was founded in 1816 by ABCFM and in operation from 1817 to 1826; the school hosted over one-hundred students from China, India, the South Pacific, Europe and several Native American nations (speaking at least twenty-four different languages.) (NPS) Of the first dozen students, six were Hawaiians.

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)

## ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia

At the beginning of the Foreign Mission School’s tenure, one of the students (a young Hawaiian), ‘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. ‘Memoirs of Henry Obookiah’ (the spelling of the name based on its pronunciation), an edited collection of ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia’s letters and journals/diaries, was assembled. The book about his life was printed and circulated after his death, becoming a best-seller of its day.

‘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.

## Missions to Hawai‘i

The Missionaries to Hawai‘i were sent out in ‘Companies,’ the first leaving Boston on the ‘Thaddeus’ on October 23, 1819. The Missionaries included ordained ministers of the Gospel, physicians, teachers, secular agents, printers, a bookbinder and a farmer.

Most of them were young people, still in their twenties, full of life and enthusiasm. All were pious and accustomed to ‘lead meetings.’ Some were scholars able, when the native language had been mastered, to put into Hawaiian the Scriptures from the original Hebrew and Greek. All were pioneers and versatile. The ministers had to carpenter, the doctors had to plow, the printers had to preach.

The women of the mission taught school (or rather classes of native adults and later of children), in all manner of subjects, besides managing their own households, entertaining guests, taking care of their children, and ministering to the sick. They taught the native women hat weaving and the making of clothes and quilts. The doctors administered to all, both natives and foreigners, and charged no fee to either group.

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)

## **‘Portraits,’ to ‘Album’ to ... ‘Partners in Change’**

First known as ‘Portraits of American Protestant Missionaries to Hawaii’ (1901), then, ‘Missionary Album Sesquicentennial Edition’ (1969), these earlier books were listings of the respective Companies of Missionaries that came to Hawai‘i, illustrations and images of each, and brief biographical information.

As part of the preparation for the bicentennial of the arrival of the Pioneer Company of American Protestant missionaries, another update and re-visioning will be published (the present working title is ‘Partners in Change: A Biography of ABCFM Missionaries to Hawai‘i’).

‘Portraits’ and ‘Album’ have limited information on each person (mostly in bullet-point-like format; they are 105 and 222-pages, respectively. Partners in Change was contracted as a 425-page book, including photos; the draft being worked on now is around 800-pages, without photos.

‘Partners’ will contain an introduction that illustrate the collaboration and positive working relationship between missionaries and ali‘i. The body will consist of approximately 190-individual biographies averaging about two pages each, which is much longer than the two to four paragraphs, or sometimes three sentences given for each in the prior volumes.

The biographies will include information about the individual missionary: some background history about the individual, their reasons for becoming a missionary, times of service, stations served, specific contributions, if they stayed or returned, if and when they became citizens of Hawai‘i, and what they did after they returned or stayed.

The present ‘Partners’ draft also consists of about 150 pages that focus on the Hawaiians and Tahitians significantly involved with the mission’s work (which are left out of the prior publications). This will help illustrate the collaboration and close working relationship between Hawaiians, Tahitians and New England missionaries. Hawaiian Mission Houses recognizes the Hawaiians and Tahitians as major players in the achieving the goals of the mission. In addition, some American missionaries, excluded from the 1969 Edition for undocumented reasons, will be added.

## **There is an interesting side story to the initial ‘Portraits’ book ...**

Jedidiah Morse was a country boy from Woodstock, Connecticut who attended Yale during the American Revolution. In the middle of his college career, a spiritual awakening came to Yale. He gave his life to Christ – this energized him in all parts of his life.

Daniel Webster said Jedidiah was “always thinking, always writing, always talking, always acting.” Jedidiah’s motto was “better wear out than rust out.” (Fisher) Morse was a pastor, a graduate of Yale and a former teacher of young girls in New Haven. (Spoehr)

Recognizing the inadequacy of the textbooks available in America at the time, Morse compiled and published the first American geography book. Morse has been informally accredited by some as being “the father of American geography.”

Jedidiah and his sons started the first Sunday school in New England. (The family continued this kind of work when they moved to Connecticut; his son, Samuel, became the first Sunday school superintendent in New Haven.) (Fisher)

Morse had set up a separate Theological Seminary at Andover in 1805. The Andover Seminary served as the recruitment and educational base of operations for a new American project, international missions to evangelize the world as the “School of Nations”. Out of Andover’s first graduating class came America’s first foreign missionaries, and the school became known as a missionary training ground. (Fisher)

In 1810, a group of Americans (including Rev. Jedidiah Morse) established the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missionaries (ABCFM) at Farmington, Connecticut. (Wesser) ABCFM accounted for 80% of all missionary activities in America; reformed bodies (Presbyterians and Congregationalists, in particular) made up nearly 40% of the participants.

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. With the missionaries were four Hawaiian students from the Foreign Mission School, Thomas Hopu, William Kanui, John Honoli‘i and Prince Humehume (son of Kua‘i’s King Kaumuali‘i.)

Prior to departure, a portrait of each of the company (including the Hawaiians) had been painted by Samuel Morse (Jedidiah’s son); engravings from these paintings of the four native "helpers" were later published as fund-raisers for the Sandwich Islands Mission and thereby offer a glimpse of the "Owhyhean Youths" on the eve of their Grand Experiment. (Bell)

Painting provided Samuel with pocket money to help pay his term bills at Yale. He became one of the small handful of important American painters in his generation, and many famous depictions of notable Americans are his work. The portrait of Noah Webster at the front of many Webster dictionaries is his, as are the most familiar portraits of Benjamin Silliman, Eli Whitney, and General Lafayette. (Fisher)

Eventually Morse accepted many portrait commissions, but even they did not bring the steady income he needed to support himself and his family. At the same time, Morse was also deeply involved in trying to make a go of his newfound vocation as a daguerreotypist. Morse enthusiastically embraced this startling new technology and became one of the first to practice photography in America. (LOC)

Morse the artist also became known as “the Father of American photography.” He was one of the first in the US to experiment with a camera, and he trained many of the nation’s earliest photographers. (Fisher)

Oh, one more thing about Samuel Morse, while he did not invent the telegraph, he made key improvements to its design, and his work would transform communications worldwide. First invented in 1774, the telegraph was a bulky and impractical machine that was designed to transmit over twenty-six electrical wires. Morse reduced that unwieldy bundle of wires into a single one.

Along with the single-wire telegraph, Morse developed his “Morse Code”. He would refine it to employ a short signal (the dot) and a long one (the dash) in combinations to spell out messages. Morse died in 1872, having advanced a practical technology that truly transformed the world. (PBS)