

A GLIMPSE INTO THE EARLY HAWAII MISSION
AND OAHU STAKE RELIEF SOCIETY
(A Slide Presentation)

by
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As early as 1843, four missionaries were called by Joseph Smith to open a mission among the inhabitants of Polynesia. They sailed from New Bedford, Massachusetts in October of that year. After a long and tedious voyage by way of the Cape of Good Hope, three of these Elders arrived at the islands of Tubuai on May 1, 1844. One of the number died at sea. It was the intention of these missionaries to labor in the Sandwich Islands, but finding the natives of Tubuai anxious to have them stay, they remained and established the Society Island Mission.

The Church history in Hawaii begins in 1850 when Hawaii was called the Sandwich Islands and was little known except to whalers and traders. Ten young men were called to lay aside their work in California and come to these islands to establish a mission. The missionaries took passage on the Schooner "Imaum of Muscat" and after an unpleasant voyage of twenty days, arrived in Honolulu on December 12, 1850. None of the first missionaries left a word picture of what he expected to find, but we do have records of their surprise at the lush beauty of the tropical islands.

This scene in Waikiki welcomed the missionaries. The spot is now graced by the Royal Hawaiian Hotel.

The missionaries sailed to the island of Maui. Because of the indifference of the white people to their message, five of the original ten became discouraged and returned home or went on to other fields. Elder George Q. Cannon and his two companions felt this same discouragement, but agreed that their call was not in vain and if the white people in the islands would not receive them, then their duty was to carry the message to the native Hawaiians.

As they began to mingle with these kindhearted people, they made the acquaintance of Nalima Nui who turned her home over to them and rendered every possible assistance in their work.

Writing of his experiences in Kula, near Wailuku, Maui, George Q. Cannon said:

The only thing eatable was potatoes and molasses. I have never liked potatoes and molasses together since then . . . I well recollect how I enjoyed a meal of poi on one occasion at this time. (It had been grown and packed some distance away in ki leaves. The weather was warm, which made it sour and maggoty. But the people had cooked it over again, and made it into poi.) My potato and molasses diet had removed all my fastidiousness about what I ate and I thought this poi the sweetest food I had ever tasted. (1)

Nineteen persons had joined the Church at Kula and he subsequently felt impressed to go elsewhere. Elder Keeler was in Keanae. The only way in was by horseback. The afternoon of Elders Cannon's arrival they obtained a meeting house and preached. This was on a Wednesday and from that time until Monday "were constantly speaking, baptizing, confirming and counselling the people. During that time there were upward of 130 baptisms. The spirit of the Lord was powerfully poured out, and all rejoiced. I never enjoyed myself so well before in my life. (2)

After three years and eight months of missionary labors on several islands, George Q. Cannon was released and returned to America. Whereas no one had greeted him and his nine companions when they had arrived a few years before, the members of the Church were counted in the thousands when he left. Many came to the boatside to bid him Godspeed and Aloha.

In 1855 another young man was destined to become intimately associated with the history of the Hawaiian Mission. Joseph F. Smith, though only 15 years of age, came to the islands with the unusual blessing that the language would be given to him as a gift and that he would perform a mighty missionary labor. He exhibited with reverence his missionary certificate which was saved from a fire although the book in which it was being preserved was completely burned.

Years later, two former missionaries were assigned the task of finding a gathering site. Both were familiar with Laie, which had recently been sold to a haole named Dougherty, who, they learned, was anxious to resell. The property consisted of some 6,000 acres.

It was not long until the Saints were enthusiastically gathering in Laie. A chapel was built overlooking the village and the sea. The building in the foreground was the first known school house in Laie. It was later used by Avard Fairbanks as his studio while he worked on the friezes that circle the top of the temple.

A serious drought and lack of sufficient water brought discouragement to the settlement. Joseph F. Smith, who had already played a very important role in the mission history, returned again to the islands as a member of the Quorum of Twelve. He surveyed the harsh conditions under which the Saints were living, and heard of their discouragement and of their desire to abandon Laie. He is quoted as saying,

Dear Brothers and Sisters, do not leave this land, for it is the land chosen by God as a gathering place for the Saints in the Hawaiian Islands, as well as in the islands of the sea . . . Be patient for a while, for the day will come when this desolate land will become a land of beauty . . . springs of water will gush up . . .

A large staff of missionaries necessitated the building of a home and "Lanihuli" was the name given to this official missionary residence in Laie.

In 1895 Samuel E. Woolley arrived with his family for his

second missionary term--this time to preside. Under his wise and able leadership, the sugar plantation was expanded and the missionary work in the islands continued to grow.

The turn of the century brought new and faster methods of transportation and to the great delight of the Saints in Hawaii, it brought George Q. Cannon for the Jubilee celebration of the opening of the mission. With him in this photograph are the several members of his party, including W.W. Cluff, who served here 30 years before. Members of President Cannon's family are also shown as well as President Samuel E. Woolley with his wife and child. It is particularly interesting that at that early date the Hawaii Mission already had members of the Japanese origin. On the extreme right we see Dr. Tomizo Katsunuma who had joined the Church in Utah. In front of him are his picture bride and their first child, believed to be the first Japanese baby blessed in the Church.

The Saints of Hawaii began early in the mission history to look forward to the erection of a temple on these islands. In 1915, Joseph F. Smith and a party of distinguished Church leaders, arrived in Hawaii for the purpose of selecting a site for a temple. President Nibley tells a very touching story of an incident which occurred as the passengers disembarked.

As we landed at the wharf in Honolulu the native Saints were out in great numbers with their leis and beautiful flowers of every variety and hue. We were loaded with them . . . It was a beautiful sight to see the deep-seated love, the even tearful affection that these people had for him (Joseph Smith).

"In the midst of it all I noticed a poor blind woman, tottering under the weight of about ninety years, being led in. She had a few choice bananas in her hand. It was her all -- her offering. She was calling, 'Iosepa, Iosepa.' Instantly, when he saw her, he ran to her and clasped her in his arms, hugged her, and kissed her over and over again, patting her on the head, saying, 'Mama, Mama, my dear old Mama.'

And with tears streaming down his cheeks he turned to me and said, 'Charlie, this is Ma Na-ohea-okamalu. She nursed me when I was a boy, sick and without anyone to care for me. She took me in and was a mother to me.' Oh, it was touching--it was pathetic. It was beautiful to see the great, noble soul in loving tender remembrance of kindness extended to him more than fifty years before; and the poor soul who brought her love offering---a few bananas---to put in the hands of her loved Iosepa.

Under the able supervision of President Woolley and his engineers, the temple gradually took shape and his son, Ralph E. Woolley, a professional engineer, returned to the islands to supervise the completion of the temple.

To permit President Samuel E. Woolley to devote his full time to the temple and the plantation, he was released as presi-

dent of the mission in 1919. This is one of the last pictures taken of President Woolley with his missionary group at Lanihuli. He was succeeded as president of the mission by E. Wesley Smith, son of Joseph F. Smith.

The headquarters of the mission was moved from Laie to Honolulu with the appointment of E. Wesley Smith. Although the headquarters was moved, conferences still continued to be held at Laie.

After three and a half years of labor in the land of his birth and among the people whom he loved, E. Wesley Smith returned home with his family and was succeeded by Eugene J. Neff.

Kamehameha Day is celebrated properly by the parading of Hawaiian organizations. Here the Relief Society women are shown passing the Hawaiian Electric Building in Honolulu.

As missionary work continued to grow on the island of Oahu, President Castle H. Murphy organized a district council of twelve local members to administer the affairs of the Church on the island. This council did their work so well that the membership on Oahu was organized into a Stake in 1935.

President Heber J. Grant and J. Reuben Clark Jr. came to Hawaii in June of 1935 to effect the organization of the first stake in the islands. Ralph E. Woolley was set apart as president of the Oahu Stake.

ELIZA N. SALM was appointed at that time as the first president of the Oahu Stake Relief Society (now Laie Hawaii Stake). In March 1939, the Relief Society presidency traveled to San Francisco by ship, then by bus to Salt Lake City, in order to attend the April General Conference. When they arrived at the bus station no one was around to meet them, but before they knew it many people had gathered and among them were former missionaries who served in Hawaii. Shown by the bus are Sister Salm, Lydia Colburn, a counselor; and Luka Kinolau. Second row, Helen Alama; Charlotte Purdy, a counselor; and Sister Fong Hing. During the time of this presidency the women quilted in work meetings. Some lauhala mats were made but quilts were made by everyone and the missionaries always returned home from their labors in the islands with Hawaiian quilts. Relief Society lessons were still taught in the Hawaiian language.(3)

This photo, taken in 1941, shows the Stake Presidency, the president of the temple, and the presidents of the Japanese and Hawaii Missions with their wives.

The construction of the tabernacle was begun in May 1940. President David O. McKay and Bishop Joseph L. Wirthlin, and their wives, came for the dedication.

Malamakoa, as the mission home adjoining the tabernacle was affectionately called, was widely known by the servicemen of the Church as a "serviceman's home" during World War II.

MARY K. TYAU was the second stake Relief Society president, shown here on the front row, fourth from left. She had previously served as the Primary and MIA president for the mission. Lydia Colburn was Mary's first counselor and she states that Mary was "very precise and accurate in fulfilling her responsibilities. She always went the extra mile." Sister Tyau was called to her position during President Woolley's administration in 1942 and

she served until her death, which occurred following a stroke suffered while attending Relief Society at the Tabernacle in March 1949.

KAMAII KAUHINI was the third stake Relief Society president and served from 1949 through 1951. Shown here are: Eliza Ah Loo, 2nd counselor; Annie Doak, secretary; Sister Kauhini, and Lydia Colburn, 1st counselor.

The Centennial celebration, commemorating 100 years of the Church in Hawaii, was held in August of 1950 with President George Albert Smith attending. The Saints from Hilo sent 150 large orchids made into a lei for him but it was too heavy to wear, so it was arranged on the pulpit.(4) Fifteen hundred guests attended this event and more than 1,500 leis were presented to arriving guests. The reception was sponsored by the Stake Relief Society with Sister Kauhini in charge. A Relief Society Bazaar, poi supper, entertainment and general meetings were some of the events which celebrated this occasion for several days.(5)

The fourth president, MIRIAM KNAPP, is shown seated in the center. Irene Cannon, homemaking leader, says of this photograph: "These blouses were made from men's shirts. We wanted to teach the women that something could be made from what was already men's shirts. We wanted to teach the women that something could be made from what was already on hand. The entire stake board modeled their sewing accomplishment."

Members of the Relief Society worked at the Welfare Storehouse every week. Assignments brought to the storehouse from the wards one day included: 47 rolls of lauhala, 14 quilts and 11 layettes.

The Oahu Stake covered the entire island of Oahu, with stake meetings being held in Honolulu. The first division of the stake was effected on August 28, 1955 (20 years after its organization) at a session of conference. Under the direction of President Joseph Fielding Smith the Honolulu Stake was now created.

Succeeding presidents of the Relief Society from 1955 through June 1969 were: EUGENIA LOGAN, LILY KAMA, MARY MAHIAI, ANNE RIVERS and BETTE SKINNER. Here we see the Singing Mothers Chorus in their Spring Concert of April 1968 with Sister Skinner seated in the center. A tribute was given to former Stake President, Howard B. Stone, who had recently passed away.

RITA H. STONE served from 1969 to 1973. During this time the wards in the stake repeatedly achieved 100% visiting teaching--a commendable record! A marked increase in attendance was noted, due in part to the holding weekly second sessions. Long remembered events were annual Visiting Teaching Conventions and Cultural Nights.

A select group of Singing Mothers is shown, having performed during the January 1970 Oahu Stake Conference under the direction of Judith Dick with Adele Feinga as the accompanist.

MARY H. THOMPSON served as president during the years 1973-1976. This is the Stake Board as it existed in 1975. Some of these women you may recognize as most of them still reside in the Laie area.

Visiting Teacher Conventions and Stake Cultural Nights were again highlights of these years. Shown is the stake chorus which

performed in the cultural program "Windows of the World." There were eleven wards and branches and all wards held a second session of Relief Society in the evening for the benefit of the sisters. Five held classes in the Samoan language and four in Tongan.

In January 1974, the stake name changed from OAHU STAKE to LAIE HAWAII STAKE in a church-wide effort to designate stakes by location.

Former presidents were honored at a special program, under the direction of Lela Dalton, in March 1976. All living past presidents but one were in attendance. ANNE RIVERS, EUGENIA LOGAN, MARY THOMPSON, LYDIA COLBURN (counselor to Sisters SALM, TYAU and KAUHINI), LILY KAMA, RITA STONE and MARY MAHIAI (who came from California especially for the occasion). Reminiscing, Sister Logan recounted that in the "early days the Relief Society sisters literally had to 'climb mountains' to do their visiting teaching. She told of the birth of the Hukilau as a source of income, which provided entertainment for the tourists at 'Old Laie Bay' until recent years."(6)

On April 18, 1976, KAPUA SPROAT was sustained as president and less than a year later was released to serve as the first president of the Relief Society in the newly organized campus BYU-Hawaii Stake.

The next appointment was in January of 1977. LILA M. WAITE became president. During this time the IWY Convention election was held in Honolulu and participation from the sisters of the stake was strong.

Tongan, Samoan and Tahitian languages were now eliminated from classes and all sisters were combined into the English-speaking class, with the teachers encouraging all language groups to be involved in their discussions.

Our next president was born on Molokai. She was an airline stewardess who attended BYU in Provo where she was converted to the Church in 1962. She was married in the Hawaii Temple in 1966 and on November 4, 1979, JUNE OZU became the stake Relief Society president. During her term of office new precepts and additional positions on the board took place as directed by the General Board.

At our Stake Conference held February 22, 1981, our Prophet Spencer W. Kimball and his wife, were in attendance, returning from a trip to the South Pacific. It was at this conference that JEANIE BRADSHAW was sustained as the next president. Sister Bradshaw had joined the Church in Korea in August 1960 and came to this country in 1964.

Sister Bradshaw's stake board of 1981 is pictured.

Highlighting Sister Bradshaw's tenure was the visit of General President Barbara B. Smith in February 1982. Sisters island-wide were able to reap the benefit of a special conference which focused on the theme "She's My Sister." At the conclusion of the meeting, Sister Smith was escorted through the international display prepared by sisters of the many ethnic cultures represented in the stake, and presented with a gift from each group. Here she shows her willingness to "try out" a Tongan bed of mats while board member Fane Harris looks on.

The following month, Sister Bradshaw attended the month-long celebration in Salt Lake City commemorating the 140th anniversary of the founding of the Relief Society organization. She took with her many flowers from the islands and made four lovely bouquets which were on display in the Relief Society Building. Two thousand baby vanda orchids from our stake were handed to visitors at a reception. She is shown with the Relief Society General Presidency.

At the division of the Laie Hawaii Stake on January 16, 1983, Sister Bradshaw, a member of the newly organized Laie North Stake, was released and PATIOLA TAUFA was sustained as the president.

Some of the events which took place during her first year in office were: The March Anniversary program which featured "A Portrait of Emma", written and directed by Londa Chase, with an effective look into the life of Emma Smith, first General President of the Relief Society. "Professional Homemaking" degrees were awarded to approximately 80 women at a stake meeting in mid-summer 1983 for completion of certain requirements in the homemaking area. Special firesides were held in the Tongan and Samoan languages. At the end of the year, the Stake Family Relations Seminar, "Enriching Family Life," was carried out with workshops of outstanding topics dealing with every possible need in our homes.

Since this, the first stake in these islands was organized in 1935, sixteen sisters of Hawaiian, Caucasian, Samoan, Japanese, Korean, and Tongan ethnic background have served as president of the Stake Relief Society. "The faces and races of Hawaii fascinate all comers to the islands and everyone asks, in one form or another, 'Does the melting pot really melt?'" Yes, we can truthfully say, in this sisterhood organization, IT REALLY DOES!!!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This presentation would not have been possible without the resources of Rex Frandsen and the Archives of BYU-Hawaii Library. The photographs, and most of information concerning the Hawaii Mission, were obtained from him. I also read the interesting account of George Q. Cannon's experiences and quoted from that writing.

The Relief Society portion is an excerpt from the history which I have compiled over the years, having a deep desire to preserve an account of this organization. The Relief Society photographs I gathered over a long period of time, the earliest of which (dating back to 1939) I owe to Lydia Colburn., The photo of Mary Tyau I owe to LeRuth Tyau, and the stake board photo during Miriam Knapp's presidency, I owe to Eugenia Logan.

REFERENCES

1. George Q. Cannon, MY FIRST MISSION, Juvenile Instructor Office, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1882, p. 42.

2. Ibid, p. 46.
3. Lydia B. Colburn, oral interview with the writer, 1972.
4. Ibid.
5. Oahu Stake History, CR mh #6325 manuscript, Church Archives, Church Historical Department, Salt Lake City, Utah.
6. "Hawaii Record Bulletin" April 1976.