

A BELL RINGS IN PARADISE
by Donene Olmstead

On April 6, 1854 at a General Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Eli Bell was called to serve a mission in the Sandwich Islands. The Mormon church, not yet twenty-five years old, was eager to spread its teachings. It was ready to send this nineteen year old man on his mission and Eli Bell went willingly. This account was taken from the journal kept by Bell on his three and a half year mission.

Eli Bell was born in Illinois on November 12, 1834. He moved west to Utah with his family in 1851. He doesn't record his thoughts or feelings at receiving such a call. He simply wrote that he received it. The journal starts May 6, 1854 when he bid his parents farewell and began his journey across the desert to the west coast. On June 9th, the group of missionaries that Bell was traveling with reached San Bernardino. Here Bell discontinues his journal until July 1st, saying that his time would be occupied in working to try to earn passage for his trip. On July 4th, the group continued its journey to Los Angeles. Bell wrote the day he reached Los Angeles:

This morning we started on again, our roads are good this morning. We traveled some 15 miles and came in sight of the fathers [sic] of all waters for the first time in my life. The Pacific was quite a sight for me.

From Los Angeles they took the "Southerner" to San Francisco; on September 8th they took the clipper "Restless" to Honolulu. Bell wrote:

At 3 p.m. we left the wharf for San Francisco and at 5 p.m. we passed through the Golden Gate and launched out into the mighty ocean. . . . Now I bid farewell to the land of America for a season and how many I know not and little do I care if I can only do the will of the Lord while I am gone.

On September 9th, the ship hit a calm and moved only slowly. The captain blamed in on the Mormons, saying that he never had any luck when he had Mormons on board. But the wind again picked up and on the 26th they sighted Molokai. On the 27th they were between Molokai and Oahu, and later in the day dropped anchor in Honolulu harbor, allowing the new missionaries the chance to go ashore. On the 29th, Bell received his first assignment. He was to go to Honokane Valley on the Big Island, where he was instructed to learn to converse with the people as quickly as possible. He reached Honokane October 27th. He wrote:

This place is about one rod from the sea. This place is in a low valley, the bluffs on each side is about a mile high, (in actuality it is only about 800 feet high). This

valley is about 10,000 yards wide. Sometimes vessels put in here but not often.

Today Honokane is an almost forgotten valley with few if any inhabitants. Bell wrote every day of his studying and of his determination to learn the language. On November 3rd he records: "The day is fine and pleasant. I spent the same in studying the language in which I make just tolerable good progress, as it is very hard to get hold of some of the words." And again on November 26th: "This day did not attend meeting as I was troubled with a headache which is caused from ardent study." The next day he said: "I am still engaged in studying the language which goes rather slow, but I hope sure." In time Bell learned the language well and used it effectively.

In the middle of April Bell took a trip that even today captures the fancy of many. He, with several of the other brethren, trekked to the volcano. He described it in awestruck wonder:

. . . arrived at the top or summit of the crater [sic] about 4 o'clock p.m. Here was a scene that I had never before beheld with my natural eyes, here it appeared as if the whole earth was on fire. The smoke was a bursting up through fishers [sic] in the ground for some twelve miles around. While down in the pit the smoke is a bursting forth all over and in all quarters.

For several more days he goes on to describe the volcano and land about. He seemed quite impressed.

For the first year he remained optimistic about his mission and the prospects that lay ahead. On May 6, 1855 he wrote optimistically: "I returned home in the evening and spent the time in studying over things that had transpired through the past year, as it is one year today at 10:00 a.m. since I left home and friends and took up my line of march for California on my way to these islands. I do consider that the Lord has blessed me in the getting of the language of this people for I can now begin to speak to them in their language and converse with them on principles of salvation. I feel greatly to rejoice and to press forward at all times." By this time he had performed baptisms in Hawaiian and in only a few days gave his first family prayer in the language. He would record that the natives, a term he used constantly, said he did it "first rate."

It appears from his journal that Bell relied on the members for more than language lessons. Several times he records incidents that show his dependence for material things, such as food, shelter, clothing and even shoes. In one entry he wrote: "I did not attend meeting today as my shoes was so bad that I was ashamed to be seen out of the house." About a week later he wrote: "A man gave me a pair of shoes this evening which came in time of need."

Bell experienced his first Hawaiian fourth of July in 1855. At the time he was on Maui working, earning his passage to Lanai for the mission conference. This is his account:

This morning guns fired at daylight then the bell rung, we got up and prepared ourselves and went and partook [sic] of a hearty breakfast, all labor was layn[sic] aside for this day as the men all wished to have a bit of a spree. Brother Pack, Speirs and I was very politely invited to participate with them in their drinking, etc. but we as politely refused as we possibly could. We went out and took a game of ball with them and when that was over we retired to our room and spent the day there studying, talking, etc. After candle-lighting Mr. Townson and family came in to our room and wished us to join them in a family dance. We could not well refuse them as he had treated us like gentlemen since we come to this place. So we spent the day very agreeable together, but no drinking nor curosesing [sic] on our part all day.

On July 18th the elders arrived at Lanai. Of the City of Joseph, Palawai Basin, where the saints would gather he wrote: "This is a very pretty valley, situated four miles from the sea. This valley has some resemblance of an old crater that has been blown out some years since and is now filled up with dirt, the ground is very rich and I do believe that it will produce well."

At the mission conference a report on membership indicted that there were 4,220 members in the islands. Bell's comment was: "The reports say the saints in some places were alive to the work and were progressing in faith and knowledge while in other places they were lukewarm and careless." At this conference Bell was assigned to the island of Molokai. Here he found the reputed "lukewarm and careless" members. Immediately after arriving at Molokai he learned that some of the people had left the Church, a fact which grieved him greatly. On the 6th of August he wrote that he had tried to gather the members together but could not. On the 9th he decided to postpone meetings until he could persuade the saints to gather for meetings.

While on Molokai he recorded his first of many discussions about the Mormon faith. On September 13th he said:

Then in the cool of the evening we walked down towards the sea when a native called us in to talk. We went in and told him a part of what we knew and they got so mad that we could not tell them anymore, they called us slayers going among the sheep, etc.

October 1, 1855 proved to be a tremendous day for Eli Bell. In the morning after the normal meetings he was faced by some Catholics who started an argument and as Bell wrote: "soon wound themselves up so that they ordered me out of the house and to hold my tongue in their house." If that was not enough, Bell faced a moral dilemma. He and his traveling companion had walked a distance of about ten miles when they decided to stop for the night. As was common they asked for lodging among the villagers. Bell wrote:

I asked the woman of the house if we could stop with them, the man of the house not being at home, so she said if you

can sleep with a woman. I told her we would rather be excused as to the woman for we was not used to sleeping with the female sect [sic] as we had been on the Isles for some time but had not found one yet that we could afford to pass the night with as yet. By this time the old man of the house had got home, he made us welcome to sleep at his house, without sleeping with the wahine if we did not want to and I well assure [sic] I did not.

Bell experienced a change of pace when he was asked to go to Lanai so another missionary could spend time on Molokai and become more acquainted with the language. Here Bell worked as a labor missionary, using his hands in cultivating the Church's farms. His biggest problem here was not the dissenting ministers, but the worms. He became quite distressed when worms began to eat away at the crops. On November 15, 1855 he wrote:

. . . after breakfast I went down into the farm to see how the peelus are a getting along. I find them still at work as busy as possible. I took a walk up to the field of the natives to see if the worms was a troubling their things any, but I found to my sorrow that they were destroying all of their corn, potatoes and everything else and even begging to come into their houses in the night. What they will come to after a while we know not.

Yet his stay on Lanai was not all work. On November 10, 1855, Bell, his companion Johnson and some Hawaiian guides left Palawai on a Kao hunting trip. Bell wrote:

We found the Kaos or goats very wild and the hills very steep and high, we had not been there long before Brother Johnson shot one Kao then I shot one, but my gun being rather bore or good for nothing I did not get my Kao, so I soon concluded that my gun (as it was a shot gun) would do best for turkeys. . . . After a while we got after a drove and followed after them till I shot three of them.

Eli Bell turned twenty-one on November 12, 1855. On his birthday Bell wrote: "This makes two birthdays I have spent here on these islands and how many more I may spend I know not. But the Lord's will be done in all things." It appears from Bell's journal that he started feeling some loneliness and homesickness.

While on Lanai Bell had the duty of solving the problems that faced the members of the Church. One such problem arose on December 6, 1855. He wrote: "Early in the morning I went up to settle a difficulty with a Native that belonged [to the] Calvinist Church. An oxen had got on to his crop and destroyed some, he fined us three dollars." Then again on December 12th: "This day I went up for to see a man's potatoes as he came and complained this morning against one of the saints, he said that their Kaos had eat up his Uola Maoli, but I found out that he had made more of it than it naturally was."

On December 27, 1855 Bell returned to Molokai where he again faced Calvinist antagonism. One such discussion was held on

January 1, 1856. Bell related it this way:

In the evening the Natives that belong to the other church came in and we had an argument on Mormonism till about two o'clock in the morning. On the natives was the priest of the Calvinist Church, another by the name of Kohoena, another was Oluloa. They thought they was very smart men, after we got tired we told them we would leave the subject till another time."

The exciting and sometimes strange events of mission life never ceased. On January 3rd, Bell faced yet another female problem. He wrote:

He then went over to a small settlement about two miles off, by the name of Kaanu, here we met with a very harty [sic] welcome from our native friends and put up with Pukiki, the Luna of the branch of the Calvinist Church, spent the evening in talking till quite late, then retired to rest. After we had been to bed a short time a woman came and offered herself for a candidate for magistrate tonight, we refused, so the young woman was obliged to return to her own home a single woman as she came.

On January 4th, Bell recorded another confrontation with some Hawaiians:

Then, after dark the natives gathered in for another argument on Mormonism. So we set in and kept it up till about one o'clock in the morning when Brother King and I got so tired that [we] was forced to stop the thing and go to bed. Those that opposed was Kohoena and company, one of them got so far gone as to tell me that I was a liar, which was the first time since I left home, but I am willing to suffer all things for the sake of Christ.

Bell also had to contend with falsehoods circulated about the Church and its members. On March 6, 1856 Bell wrote: "We stoped [sic] at a native's house who put out a falsehood about us a few days ago, by the name of Paheana. He stated that he was attacked by two Mormon elders a few days since and narrowly escaped as he was little the strongest. The old man stood out for some time that it was so, but we explained the law of the kingdom on the subject, so the old man found that he was a getting into a fus that he could not well get out of very soon and acknowledge the corn. We then give the old man a little council and went on."

At the April 6, 1856 conference of the mission Bell found that things were looking good for the mission. There were no longer any debts and a number of people had been baptized. But there was also bad news; the crops in Lanai had been virtually destroyed despite all their efforts, and the elders had been denied recognition as ministers, authorizing them to solemnize marriage. At this conference Bell was officially assigned to Lanai. Although some of the records are not legible, from Bell's

later journal entries it appears that he spent some time manning the mission sloop Lanai.

While on the Lanai Bell celebrated his second year as a missionary. On May 5, 1856 he wrote:

This morning my mind reflects back to the scenes that have passed over my head for the last two years. I can see many changes and many trying circumstances I have passed through, but the Lord has been with me at all times of need and will still be my protector [and] benefactor.

Bell spent many of his nights teaching English to the Hawaiians. Several of his journal entries include things such as, "helped teach school," "school in the evening as usual", "teaching the natives English language," "helped with the school all night", and "I spent the forenoon in schooling the natives, also a portion of the evening." In one respect he was repaying a favor. The Hawaiians had taught Bell their language; he in turn taught them his.

Eli Bell spent his twenty-second birthday in Hawaii on November 12, 1856. As with the previous years he spent the day in reflecting. He wrote:

This morning I arose a little after daylight and the wind was blowing a nice breeze from the mountains, which reminded me much of my lovely [sic] mountain home in Deseret. . . . retired to myself to muse over the scenes that have passed through the last year of my life, the many changes and the many different callings I have been called to act in and my heart is constrained to say God, the Father be glorified forever and ever more. This brings me to the age of 22 years of age and now set out with a new determination to serve the Lord this coming year if possibly better than I have done in the past year with the assistance of the spirit of the Heavenly Father.

While in Kula, Maui, Bell had a most interesting discussion with a Mr. Brook. This is the account of that:

Arrived at Mr. Brook's a few minutes after five o'clock p.m. As soon as I entered the house I was presented with the London Times which contained a most ridiculous account of Elder E. Snow and P.P. Pratt, giving a description of their families, their character, etc. After I had read the scandalizing sheet, Mr. Brook bantered me for a talk on Mormonism which I consented to although in somewhat of a hurry. Mr. Brook is a member of the Church of England. He asked me why we believed in Mormonism. I told him that the man who had the reestablishing of this church, Joseph Smith, was a follower of Christ. 'Yesen' was his reply, 'after he had stoled two dollars of a Dutchman. I told him to prove his assertion. He said he had it in print. I asked him to produce the same. He then said he could not do it. I then asked him again to prove his assertion or else take it back. He said that it was out of his power to prove it. I told

him if we (the Mormons) was all thieves and robbers all he had to do was prove the same and then I was ready to go. He then enjoined it upon me to make it convenient to stop when I passed again and stay all night with him. He told me that he thought he could convert me over to his faith, also he thought he could get around a Mormon. I told him perhaps he could but when he got around a Mormon, he would have to get up before day to do it.

The discussions were not only with Calvinist and Anglicans but also with Catholics. On April 1, 1857 Bell had a heated discussion with a Catholic priest:

In the evening there was a Catholic priest passed by our house, seeing Brother Kauau (who we are stopping with) he asked him if he was not ashamed to be keeping those lazy Mormons laying around him. Brother Kaluau told him no because he expected to be blessed in so doing. Then they got in an argument, when the priest sent for us . . . Brother Pack and him talked for some time about the use of this church. He then finding that this was something new on the earth in these last days, he then quoted the 20th verse of the 28th chapter of Matthew. He seemed to think that their church is the true one by it being so old. . . . Brother Pack tried to get to speak when Mr. Priest jumped up and ran for home. . . . The conversation continued till we run him into the house, he went to close the door on us but we went in [and] talked there a short time, when we all went out again, not long till they went into the house again, we followed them a second time. They fetched a little child of ten years of age for to talk with Brother Pack, it not suiting Bro. Pack very well he got a little rathey (sic). The priests which now number some three besides natives undertook to put us out by violence. They found that way harder to do than the other things they had undertook. They then sent for the police, we finding it out soon took our departure, they agreed to meet us in the morning if we would come under the power of a company of police. We told them that we would get the police to come with us if they would pay for their service and so the thing stopped for the day.

According to Bell's journal they went to the assigned meeting place but the priests refused to talk.

In April 1857 a general mission conference was held again. The total membership for the Hawaiian islands was reported at 3,325. At this conference Bell was assigned to preside over the Hilo, Hawaii Conference, and he arrived May 2. He recorded his first impressions as: "This place, Hilo, is a nice little place, it has some where about 100 inhabitants, has a nice harbor and is well situated for a small place."

While taking a trip around the island, visiting old and new sites, Bell found himself in financial trouble. He wrote:

This morning we prepared to start when the [man] of the house, Kila, being his name, asked me for pay for the

accommodation with which they had accommodated us with. I asked him how much the bill was, when he replied \$2.00. I told him we had no money, that we was Mormon missionaries, etc. but nothing would satisfy him but the pay. I told him that if he would take one of our shirts that we would give it, he said that he would take it. I took a shirt from one of our sacks and I gave it to him. He took it and we went on our way.

During Bell's three and one half year stay on the islands he coped with many unusual circumstances and many unusual requests. One of these he recorded on July 5, 1857:

This morning meeting with the saints, as I was going to the meeting house a young man, that was baptized into the Church a sort time since, met me and said unto me that he was baptized into the Church and he wished me to baptize his dog so that he could go with him into the church. We had a very good meeting, but I did not baptize Mr. Dog.

At the October 1857 mission conference Bell, with several of the other elders, was released and directed to make immediate arrangements for his return to Utah.

Bell spent about two months in Honolulu before his departure. During this time he tried to make arrangements to take a few Hawaiians to Utah. He first mentioned these intentions on October 14 when he wrote: "Brother Kaliki arrived today bound for Salt Lake with me if he can get away." He would find that this was not such an easy matter. On November 30th he wrote:

Brother Molen and I waited upon the Governor to day for papers liberating our natives which are with us so they can go with us. He granted our request and wrote to George Young. He was to write to the custom house officer to give the passports, etc., but did not through some mistake or intentionally.

Again on December 1st, he wrote:

The governor recalled his permit to the Natives . . . we went to see the governor but to no satisfaction. We then went to Haleka who informed us that there was no law to keep them from going.

On December 4th, he again faced the governor. He wrote:

Brother Cluff and I went down to see the governor about the same business as yesterday. We had a long talk with his highness, Mr. Wiley, [the Minister of Foreign Affairs], during which he expressed much sorrow for our being put to so much trouble in regard to this matter, saying at the same time that it was the intention of the authorities of this kingdom to keep the Natives from going to Utah as the governor had wrote to him to that effect before our arrival. We

then asked him why the governor did not tell us so in the first place instead of putting us to so much trouble.

This discussion continued for some time until Bell finally returned to the governor. He wrote:

I went to see the governor for the last time and told him how he had acted in regard to this matter and that he had the rule now but it could not stand so forever, for it was not the will of the Lord that it should be so, therefore, the time will come when the people will be permitted to go where they wish or desire in righteousness before the Lord. And would by saying this is what I have to say now so good bye, and left him to take upon himself the sins of this people for keeping them from keeping the commandments of the Lord and may God reward him with all those who wish to keep back the course of truth according to their works.

This ended Bell's attempt to take Hawaiians to Utah. It would not be tried again for many years. This also ended Eli Bell's mission in Hawaii.

On December 5, 1857 Bell engaged passage on the Yankee bound for San Francisco. On December 9, 1857 he wrote:

At 20 minutes to 11 we set sail on board the Yankee for San Francisco, steerage passage \$30. Bidding the brethren good bye for a short season, we left with light hearts bound for Zion. We sailed from the Harbor under full sail, with a good wind, with no detrements[sic]. We sailed a north east direction all day till night fall came on, at dark we was very near out of sight of the Island of Oahu."

Bell returned to Utah where he married Louisa Jane McCallan. He returned to Hawaii in 1865 with his family as a labor missionary to Laie, where he stayed until 1871. He died on July 31, 1895 in Logan, Utah.