MORMON BEGINNINGS IN SAMOA: KIMO BELIO, SAMUELA MANOA AND WALTER MURRAY GIBSON
by Spencer McBride

Imprisoned in a Dutch prison in Malaysia, the young American adventurer Walter Murray Gibson claimed to have received a profound revelation. He writes, “While I lay in a dungeon in the island of Java, a voice said to me, ‘You shall show the way to a people, who shall build up a kingdom in these isles, whose lines of power shall run around the earth.’ My purposes of life were changed from that hour.”¹ This, he felt, was confirmation of his previously imbedded ideas that he was indeed destined to create and lead an empire in the islands of the Pacific Ocean. When Gibson’s path crossed those of Kimo Belio, Samuela Manoa and the Mormon Church in Hawaii and Samoa, the results of his imperial mindset would have a significant effect.

The arrival of the first “Mormon” missionaries in Samoa, and their 25 year stay in those islands without correspondence or assistance from the church’s headquarters, is a fascinating account worthy of being related in the most complete form possible. The calling of two native Hawaiians to serve such a mission helps to uncover the motivations of the politically ambitious man who had entwined his aspirations for empire with the building up of the Mormon Church. The unauthorized dispatch of Kimo Belio a Manoa to Samoa by Walter Murray Gibson was an attempt to further his own political aspirations by spreading the Mormon faith in the Pacific. However, the resulting missionary service of Belio and Manoa failed to grant Gibson greater political influence, but did successfully lay the foundation of a lasting Mormon presence in Samoa.

The chain of events leading to Samuela Manoa and Kimo Belio’s [alt. Pelio] mission to Samoa has its beginning in 1850 as the first Mormon missionaries reached the Sandwich Islands. At this time, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had a limited presence in the Pacific Islands, but in December of 1850, ten elders of the church arrived in Honolulu to open the Sandwich Island Mission. The group, presided over by Hiram Clark and including George Q. Cannon, arrived with the intent to preach to and convert the white settlers living on the islands. However, they soon found the task to be far more difficult than anticipated in that the population of white settlers was smaller than expected and there was very little religious interest among them. Describing the situation, Cannon wrote, “We soon became satisfied that if we confined our labors to the whites, our mission to those islands would be a short one.”² Thus, the focus of the ten Mormon elders shifted from

¹ Gibson to Brigham Young, May 30, 1859, Gibson Name File, Church Historians Office, Salt Lake City.
² George Q. Cannon, My First Mission, (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1882), 22.
the whites to the native Hawaiians requiring them to learn the language and the culture of the people.

The work was slow and success virtually non-existent at first for the elders, leading to severe feelings of discouragement among several members of the party. Half of the contingent, including Clark, opted to leave their ministry and return home, leaving only five of the original ten missionaries. They worked diligently to master the difficult Hawaiian language and soon began preaching to the natives. The church sent several missionaries to the islands in 1852 to take the place of the departed brethren and the work soon began to prosper as evidenced by 50 organized branches of the church at the time of Cannon’s departure in 1854.

The most proficient among the elders in learning the language was Elder Cannon, who within a few months was conversing fluently with the native people. Previous to the departure of five of his brethren, Cannon had been assigned to labor on Maui, where he returned and remained for much of his mission. It was on this island that he met Kimo Belio and Samuela Manoa.

Belio was a resident of Wailuku, Maui when the first ten Mormon missionaries arrived in 1850. Once the decision was made to preach their doctrine to the natives, Elder Cannon returned to his ministry on Maui, spending a large amount of time in the village of Wailuku. It has been stated in some accounts that Manoa and Belio were taught, baptized and ordained elders by Cannon in that village. There are no records found confirming this, but because Cannon’s labors in that area were extensive and Belio and Manoa were living in that place at that time, the claim of Cannon introducing them to the faith ought not to be dismissed. Elder Cannon arrived in December 1850 and made his first converts in Wailuku in the latter part of 1851. Thus, one can estimate that if Cannon was the missionary that baptized Manoa and Belio, then they were baptized and confirmed members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They were ordained elders between 1852 and 1854; at which time Cannon returned to Utah at the close of his mission.

However, in examining the family life of Kimo Belio, evidence suggests his entrance into the Mormon Church came by way of a different missionary at a later time. Belio married a woman named Kaolelohou and resided with her in Wailuku. On 25 December

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4 Britsch, 107 and 110.
7 Britsch, 101.
1858, Kimo and Kaolelohou Belio had their first son, Alamakamika. Almakamika translates into English as “Alma Smith.” Alma L. Smith served three missions in the Sandwich Islands, the first of which was from 1856-1858. The naming of his first son after Smith is convincing evidence that he was a greatly influential missionary in Belio’s life and likely the one that baptized him. The naming of children to honor others is a common practice found in several cultures throughout the world and in this case it provides insight to the influence the church had on Belio and his family. It is unknown exactly when, but Belio and his family left their home in Maui and joined fellow church members in establishing the “City of Joseph” in the Palawai valley, where they could to gather together and practice their religion without the criticism and persecution that had been coming from the government and other Christian sects.

Samuela Manoa, according to an account aging him at 27 years when called on a mission to Samoa, was a young adult at the time of his baptism. Manoa moved to Lanai along with many other church members and settled with them in the Palawai valley.

To understand the unusual event that was Belio and Manoa’s mission call, one must understand the man that issued the call to them, namely Walter Murray Gibson. Born in England, raised in Canada, married and widowed at a young age in South Carolina, Gibson fancied himself as an explorer destined for political power and greatness. He specifically dreamed of Malaysia and a vast empire consisting of all the Pacific islands. A few years after an attempt to begin his political empire in Malaysia was stopped before it could even commence by the Dutch colonial authorities, Gibson joined the Mormon Church, his baptism occurring in Salt Lake City on 15 January 1860 by Heber C. Kimball. Though his initial motives for joining with the Mormons were likely pure, it is clearly evident in his actions that soon followed that Gibson lacked the capacity to separate his spiritual pursuits from his political ambitions and the Mormon Church became a vehicle by which his Pacific empire could come to pass.

Even before his baptism, he attempted to persuade Brigham Young to bring the saints to the Pacific Islands, specifically naming Malaysia and Papua New Guinea as possibilities. In a letter written to Young and sent from St. Louis to precede his arrival, Gibson refers to the aforementioned revelation he claimed to receive while imprisoned by the Dutch in which he was told he would “show the way to a people, who shall build up a

9 Andrew Jenson, Latter-Day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia, Vol. 4, (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson Memorial Association 1936), 341.
10 Harris, Building the Kingdom in Samoa (Heber City, Utah: Harris Video Cases, Inc., 2006), 27
12 Gibson to Brigham Young, May 30, 1859, Gibson Name File, Church Historians Office, Salt Lake City.
Kingdom in these isles” and he tells Young that “it has been in [his] heart...to propose to you and your people, emigration to the islands of Oceania.”

His ideas were heard, but there is no evidence that they were ever considered realistic possibilities by church leaders. Nevertheless, Gibson was respected by Young and fulfilled a mission, serving for a brief time in the Eastern United States. Upon his return to Utah, all the Elders that had been serving abroad had been brought back to Utah with the threat of war that came with the arrival of Johnston’s army. His presence in Utah was not viewed as a necessity and he was sent on another mission. On this occasion he was sent into the Pacific with a charge to deliver official messages of good will to the government officials of far eastern nations. He departed with three official documents from Brigham Young and other church officers, adorned with ribbons and seals to verify authenticity. One was intended for the potentates of Malaysia, another for the Japanese Emperor and a third serving as a letter verifying Gibson’s commission to preach the gospel as a missionary. He was instructed by Young to check in on the church members in the Sandwich Islands while en route to these other destinations. Gibson began his journey from Salt Lake City to the islands of the Pacific that had for so many years been present in his dreams and among his thoughts on 21 November 1860 and awaited passage to the Sandwich Islands in San Francisco from December until 15 June 1861.

His stay in San Francisco while awaiting passage to the Sandwich Islands presents early evidence of Gibson’s political ambitions taking precedence over his church responsibilities. With his reputation as a lecturer of Malaysia known to several of the cities residents, he was prevailed upon to present the subject in lectures open to the public. His lectures caught the attention of local government authorities potentially interested in economic ventures in the region spoken of by Gibson and he accepted an invitation to address the state legislature on the matter. His lecture led to a motion to send a commissioner to Malaya to open up trade with the state, a post for which Gibson was the likely candidate. However, the motion failed to receive enough votes in the affirmative and the idea was dropped, much to Gibson’s dismay, who felt the motion’s defeat was due to “anti-Mormon prejudices.” Important glimpses of Gibson’s character in relation to his spiritual professions and political ambitions are displayed in this incident. Gibson seemed to be more than willing to lay his commission as a missionary aside had he been appointed a commissioner in the California state government. This is not to suggest that he was not sincere in his professions of religious faith, but rather demonstrates his ultimate

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13 Ibid.
14 Adler, 49-50.
15 Ibid. 53.
16 Ibid. 51.
17 Ibid.
motivation of fulfilling his dream of gaining great political power and influence in the Pacific.

Eventually he left San Francisco, with plans of traveling to the Sandwich Islands on his way to Japan and Malaya. When touring the islands in order to accurately report the condition of the church and its members to Young, he discovered a decline in the activity and number of the native membership.\(^{18}\) Despite the declining status of the church on the islands, Gibson was greatly attracted to the place and decided upon remaining there and foregoing the trip to Japan and Malaya. It is at this point that Gibson’s actions became influential on Manoa and Belio. He did not present himself to the church members as merely a missionary, but showed the Hawaiian saints his fancily adorned letters and certificates (which the natives did not know were intended for heads of state elsewhere) and claimed he had been sent by Young to be the president of the church in the Sandwich Islands.

The façade developed further, and soon the members were told by Gibson that the church in Utah had been destroyed by the US Army, which was generally believed in connection with the knowledge that the American elders had left them three years prior due to the approach of an army.\(^ {19}\) He then took it upon himself to ordain native brethren to priesthood offices for substantial fees. These offices included apostle, seventy, bishop, and “priestesses of temples.”\(^ {20}\) The last on the list was non-existent in the Mormon Church and the first three listed were positions only appointed by the governing body of the church, the First Presidency.

His desires for political power and empire in the Pacific also began to come forth. The natives that followed him to Lanai not only worked under his direction to build the “City of Joseph” in the Palawai Basin, but were drilled by Gibson in military formations and tactics. He had taken his call as a missionary farther than his commission allowed, and further than any in Salt Lake City could have possibly realized at that time.

As stated previously, evidence leads one to believe that Samuela Manoa and Kimo Belio moved to Lanai under Gibson’s leadership in 1861-62 with some 185 others.\(^ {21}\) Though his actions seemed somewhat irregular in comparison to the missionaries that had first established the Mormon faith in the islands, one might assume that the Hawaiian brethren were untrained enough in procedures of church government and leadership due

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\(^ {18}\) A summary of Gibson’s reports to Young is given in Adler, \textit{The Fantastic Life of Walter Murray Gibson}, 57, and is taken from letters from Gibson to Young dated July 10, 14, 16 and Sept. 2, 1861, and are found in the Gibson Name File, Church Historians Office, Salt Lake City.
\(^ {20}\) Joseph F. Smith to George Q. Cannon, May 4, 1864, as quoted in Britsch, 122-123.
\(^ {21}\) Raymond Clyde Beck, “Palawai Basin: Hawaii’s Mormon Zion,” M.A. Thesis, University of Hawaii, 1972, 87. This number is based on adult members of the church and does not include children.
to the church having only existed on the islands for less than a decade that they followed
Gibson as an ecclesiastical leader, dismissing these irregularities. Thus, when Gibson
offered apostleship to Belio and the office of Seventy to Manoa, the two native brethren
accepted and paid the fee.²²

Gibson, having taken upon himself the role of ecclesiastical leader of all the
Mormons in Hawaii, soon assumed the role of royalty. Such self-views are found in his
journal entries at that time in which he states, “The people are poor; in pocket, in brain, in
everything. They are material for a very little kingdom...But they are thorough...They bring
a chicken or some yams to make up for their deficiencies in courtesy in approaching me. It
is a little kingdom of love and worship.”²³ The first few lines of the statement reveal that
the “worship” he is referring to is of him. It can be said that he was attempting to convert
the native Hawaiians to “Gibsonism” more than Mormonism. These notions of royalty
continued as he trained and drilled the men he had organized into military companies in
military tactics.

Yet another statement made by Gibson that assists in revealing his true motives for
playing the role of church president in Hawaii came in a letter to Brigham Young in January
of 1862.

“...it is the desire of my heart to establish a centre stake for all the Oceanicans. The
Hawaiians rejoice in the idea...I rejoice in the hope that the fruits of my labour here
will enable me to push on next season to Japan, or Malaysia in company with a few
intelligent Hawaiian Saints. They will be invaluable aids in advancing the gospel in
Oceanica.”²⁴

Though not speaking in terms of political empire, the way he conducted himself as a
religious leader implies that he desired to be more than an ecclesiastical leader in the
regions his Hawaiian subjects were sent. He was likely entertaining these kinds of thoughts
a month before writing to Young when he sent native Hawaiians on missions. In a letter to
George A. Smith of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, he made mention of “Some brethren,
who were sent out to the Navigator Islands [Samoa], and to Central Polynesia, have sent me
very interesting accounts of their mission.”²⁵

Those brethren were Kimo Belio and Samuela Manoa. On 17 December 1862 the call
was extended to Belio and Manoa to depart on a mission to the Navigator Islands (Samoa),

²² Britsch, 350.
²³ Gibson Diary, Nov. 5, 1861, Historical File, folder 48, Hawaii State Archives.
²⁴ Gibson to Young, Jan. 16, 1862 Gibson Name File
²⁵ Gibson to George A. Smith, March 13, 1864, Gibson Name File
even though he had no authorization from church leaders to direct missionary labors. The two brethren appear to have shown no hesitation in accepting and acting upon this call, as evidenced by their departure to Samoa from Honolulu aboard the whaling vessel *Massachusetts* on 23 December, allowing only 6 days to travel to this port on the south shore of O’ahu from the Palawai basin of Lanai. The voyage lasted 31 days, with the ship arriving at the island of Aunu’u on 24 January 1863.

The first task at hand was for the two native Hawaiians to learn the Samoan language, which appears not to have taken too long and the work commenced. The pair labored briefly on Aunu’u baptizing one person, before moving to Tutuila, which became the place of their residence as missionaries and the main focus of their labors.

The political and religious conditions of Samoa at the time were already strongly influenced by a noticeable western presence. At the time of Belio and Manoa’s arrival, Samoa was witnessing an increase in the number and influence of foreigners, especially British, Germans, and Americans. Mission leaders of the Protestant sects as well as other European settlers “felt that it was essential to establish a central government which could make laws and conduct courts” in place of the traditional Samoan way of governing themselves by the Matai over each village and district. European imperialism had already led to centralized governments throughout much of Polynesia. However, the establishment of a centralized monarchy did not come easily for Samoa. A local leader named Malietoa Laupepa attempted to place himself over a confederacy of districts and was challenged by another local leader named Malietoa Talavou. The division led to civil war in 1869 (six years after the arrival of Manoa and Belio). On top of this, the British, Germans and Americans began to strongly consider the colonization of the Samoan Islands amid the conflict and disorder. Needless to say, Belio and Manoa entered a Samoa whose political situation was anything but stable as its system of government experienced numerous changes.

Manoa and Belio arrived in Samoa at a time when the islands were not only changing politically, but religiously as well. Christian missionaries had first arrived in Samoa in 1832 from the London Missionary Society (LMS), an arrival that was anticipated by the Samoans from what they heard from neighboring Polynesian nations like Tonga that began to embrace Christianity several years before it came to Samoa. This first group was protestant, associated themselves with the Congregationalist church (called “Lotu Ta’iti” by

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26 Joseph Dean, “Sketches From the Samoan Islands” *The Juvenile Instructor*, Vol. 24 No. 2 (15 January 1889), 6. This article appeared serially in no. 2, 17 and 18 of the same volume. Hereafter, notes will read as Dean, issue number, page number.


29 Ibid. 78.

30 Ibid. 79
the Samoans), and was led by John Williams. In that same year, the Methodist sect (Lotu Toga) arrived in Samoa from Tonga under the direction of Peter Turner at the request of several Samoans and against an informal agreement between the two churches that had reserved Samoa for the LMS. The third Christian sect to arrive was the Catholics (Lotu Pope) who established a Samoan mission in 1845. Despite the difficulty the sect faced in obtaining a membership while in competition with the Methodists and Congregationalists, when Belio and Manoa introduced the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Lotu Mamona) to the islands in 1863, the Catholic church was firmly established along with the two Protestant sects that had preceded it. Thus, Manoa and Belio arrived in Samoa experiencing similar political and religious changes as those in Hawaii upon the arrival of Cannon and his party of missionaries in 1850; the government was being influenced and centralized by westerners and the Samoans had already been exposed to Christianity for nearly 30 years. In 1863, Samoa and its people could be considered Christians with the beginnings of a "western style" central government.

In all, Belio and Manoa baptized between 50-60 individuals, most of who were converted in the first three years of their missionary labors. After the first few years of devoting their time to missionary work, they received word from Hawaii of Gibson’s exposure as a fraud and his subsequent excommunication from the church. This must have been received as a shock, and possibly a sign that no new elders would arrive until the church was reorganized and strengthened in the Hawaiian Islands. This is suggested in an account stating that they “discontinued the missionary work and began making money.” On November 24 1868, Manoa married a Samoan woman named Faasopo and the two missionaries became more and more settled in Samoa. Manoa and Belio turned to trading copra, an endeavor in which they appear to have been quite successful as attested by a description of Manoa's financial status and living condition upon the arrival of Dean. Dean states that “He has done considerable trading in copra and made a good deal of money. He has a nice lumber house the material of which cost $1,200.”

Though they were not actively seeking new converts after hearing word of Gibson’s downfall, Belio and Manoa kept the congregation together and continued to meet and worship together. Much credit, however, is due to Belio. On 30 September 1869, Manoa was excommunicated for committing adultery by a council assembled by Belio. The latter

31 Meleisea, 54-56.
32 Ibid. 60.
33 Ibid. 62.
34 Dean, No. 2, 6.
35 Ibid.
36 Harris, The Expanded Samoan Mission History 1888-1988, 2, for the marriage date and Dean, The Juvenile Instructor Vol. 24 No. 18 (15 September 1889) 18 for the name of Manoa’s wife.
37 Dean, No. 17, 18.
38 Harris, The Expanded Mission History, 8.
was then left to lead the church alone, a task he took upon himself until his death on 3 June 1876, at the age of 64.\textsuperscript{39}

The small group of Samoans that considered themselves Mormon was not left without a leader. Manoa had repented of his transgression and had written to the church in Laie, Hawaii to receive permission to be baptized again and readmitted as a church member. Coincidentally, permission was received the day after Belio’s death and Manoa was baptized by a church member and the principle chief of Aunuual, Miomio Lemafa on 4 June 1876.\textsuperscript{40}

During the time following news of Gibson’s dismissal and prior to Belio’s death, the two Hawaiian elders wrote frequently to friends and church leaders in Hawaii, reporting their progress, inquiring after the state of the church in Hawaii, and requesting more elders to be sent to assist them in their labors.\textsuperscript{41} The mail system between Hawaii and Samoa was somewhat unreliable. Letters would be sent aboard ships traveling between New Zealand and Hawaii. The ships would not enter any ports in Samoa, but would make stop at a spot nearly a mile off the shore of the island of Tutuila, where it would be met by a schooner sent from the shore so enabling the passengers, letters and other cargo traveling to Samoa to make it to their destination. If the winds were especially strong, or the seas excessively rough, no stop would be made, Samoa would be bypassed and the passengers and mail still aboard would remain aboard until the ship arrived in New Zealand.\textsuperscript{42} The unreliable mail system is part of the reason information of Gibson’s excommunication was delayed, and also provides a partial explanation of why many letters to and from Manoa and Belio were never replied to or even received.

Despite the lack of a reliable postal system, many letters were received by the people to whom they were addressed, records of which have survived. On 12 October 1872, Harvey E. Cluff wrote to the *Deseret News* (published in Utah) from Laie, Hawaii to report progress made in the Sandwich Islands Mission, as was the common practice of missionaries serving abroad at that time. He writes, “We learned from a communication to Brother Nebeker from the Samoan or Navigator Islands that the two Hawaiian brethren who were sent from here (Hawaii) nine or ten years ago are doing a good work among the people there in Samoa. They have raised up churches, built meeting houses and they now number upwards of 200 members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”\textsuperscript{43} This letter obviously reports a higher number of converts than it had in any other source and

\textsuperscript{39} Dean, No. 2, 6.
\textsuperscript{40} Harris, *Building the Kingdom in Samoa*, 6 for information on the rebaptism of Manoa and Dean, No. 18, 18 for the chiefly status of Lemafa.
\textsuperscript{41} Dean, No. 2, 6.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{43} Harvey Cluff quoted in Harris, Expanded Samoan Mission History, 8.
can be deemed as likely inaccurate on this basis, but the exact number of converts remains unknown.

Another similar report was made in the same newspaper the following year, this time by the President of the Hawaiian Mission, George Nebeker. His letter under the date of 19 August 1872 reads:

We received the other day a letter from our native brethren, who are on the Navigator Islands. They speak of the Church there being alive, and are very anxious to hear from their brethren in Zion, as they have heard that there is a great deal of trouble there. There is as yet no mail carried to those islands, and it makes it difficult to correspond with them.44

Thus, from these two letters to church leaders in Hawaii, we learn of the growth of the church under the direction of the two Hawaiians.

The question naturally posed is why the church did not send other missionaries to Samoa to help Manoa and Belio. Other historians telling this tale as a preface to larger histories of the Mormons in Samoa have suggested that the church was honestly ignorant of their being there.45 However, there is ample evidence to show that this was not the case. The letters from George Nebeker and Harvey Cluff regarding the missionary pair’s presence in Samoa were written to the Deseret News, which was a Utah-based publication. In addition to these, Gibson, in another letter previously quoted, told George A. Smith of the Council of the Twelve Apostles that he had dispatched missionaries to Samoa. The church was most likely aware of their being in Samoa, but is impossible to know why no one was sent to aid Belio and Manoa before Joseph Dean arrived in 1888. Speculation with no factual basis brings one no closer to an answer in this regard.

As with missionary labors of all sects and creed, not all that are converted stay converted, and this was certainly the case with the congregation of Mormons in Samoa. According to Manoa, many passed away while others returned to their former denominations. It is likely that there were some who left after Belio’s death in 1876, he having been the strong and faithful leader that held the group together during Manoa’s absence. In a letter written while on a mission to Samoa in 1893, Elder Wood, a man well acquainted with Manoa, describes the condition of the church members that were baptized by these two Hawaiian missionaries. Describing a period of time not long after Belio’s death, Wood writes that “By this time Manoa had almost become a Samoan himself, and the

45 Britsch, 350.
old church members said they would no more believe his promises, and that there was no church called ‘Mamona’ (Mormon).”46 This statement describing why many of the Samoans that Belio and Manoa baptized returned to their former denominations reveals that in addition to their teaching of gospel principles, the two Hawaiian missionaries promised the Samoans the arrival of more Elders, specifically white or papalagi Elders, to further establish the church in those islands.47 Having no reason to think otherwise, Belio and Manoa were clearly under the impression that their missions would soon be followed by others, and that they would be assisted in their labors. After years of waiting, the last few church members left the faith and returned to their former religious practices.

After a serious injury sustained by Manoa deemed him unable to resume work as a missionary, he devoted himself to the copra trade in which he had become involved in some time after learning of Gibson’s deceitful activities and excommunication from the church. Joseph Dean, a missionary serving his second mission in Hawaii, in speaking to a local merchant who had traveled to and spent a considerable amount of time in Samoa learned that “Manoa, our Hawaiian that was sent there in 1862 is quite well to do and is considered to be a Mormon.”48

In 1887, Manoa was hired to pilot a ship into the harbor at Pago Pago. In the course of things, he was invited below deck to eat breakfast with the ship’s captain and while crumpling newspapers to build a fire he came across an article mentioning church president John Taylor. It became evident to Manoa that Gibson’s claims of the church’s end in Utah were false and proceeded to write a letter to Taylor requesting assistance. The request was forwarded to Hawaii from where Joseph Dean would be dispatched to officially open the Mormon mission in Samoa.49

Dean had developed an interest in Samoa after learning of Manoa and Belio’s mission there from local members with which the two Hawaiian elders maintained occasional contact. After corresponding with Manoa by mail to inquire after the land’s potential to become a prosperous location for missionary labors, Dean was officially sent to Samoa and left Hawaii on 10 June, 1888. He arrived in Samoa on 18 June on the island of Tutuila.50

47 Ibid.
48 Dean, Journal Entry, 25 October, 1887, quoted in Harris, Building the Kingdom in Samoa, 8.
49 Harris, 9.
50 Dean, No. 2, 7.
Manoa proved to be a valuable assistant to the newly arrived mission president. He served as a translator for Dean until he obtained a sufficient understanding of the Samoan language. Records also indicate that Manoa was often called on to pray and speak in meetings and often served as a guide and traveling companion to Dean and others, though in this last capacity he was somewhat limited from his accident several years prior. Manoa remained actively involved in building the Mormon Church in Samoa for the remainder of his life.

Though all 50 or 60 Samoans baptized by the two “Gibson-sent” Hawaiian missionaries had either died or returned to their former churches, Manoa and Belio did prove extremely successful in laying a foundation for a much stronger presence in Samoa. More missionaries were subsequently called to the islands and the work expanded to the entire island chain from Tutuila and Aunu.
The growth of the church in Samoa can be attributed to the first two missionaries for a couple of reasons. First, correspondence after the arrival of Dean and the official establishment of a Samoan Mission reveals that "it wasn't long before a number of those who had believed in the principles once taught by Belio and Manoa applied for baptism." The number of people belonging to this group is unknown, but it likely consisted of many who had lost faith in Manoa’s promise of more missionaries. It certainly did include the aforementioned principle chief of Aunuu, Lemafa, as well as a man named Ifopo that would greatly assist in the work after rejoining the church. Thus the missionaries under Dean’s direction were able to find success more quickly because of the labors of Manoa and Belio during the preceding 25 years.

In addition to the return of previous church members, the foundation of a strong Mormon presence in Samoa also resulted from the efforts of Belio and Manoa due to the fact that many who they baptized on Tutuila and Aunuu had homes and family on the island of Upolu. Through their interaction, teachings of the newly arrived ‘Lotu Mamonaha’ became known in that place and provided for greater ease in teaching the people there when

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52 Wood, 10.
Mormon missionaries finally arrived. It is also recorded by a former church historian, Andrew Jenson, that Belio had some interaction and success with the people on Upolu in Apia, baptizing several in that place. That report contains an extra sense of reliability because Jenson met with Manoa in 1895 to acquire details from the journal kept by Manoa during his missionary years. Sadly, this journal has not been located, but it certainly would provide a treasure trove of information and enlightenment regarding the subject at hand. Though it seems clear that the two Hawaiians were sent by Gibson to spread the Mormon faith primarily to further his political influence, the activity of missionaries after the official opening of the Samoan mission reveals that they had been successful in spreading it with great religious, and not political, consequences.

At this point in the account of the unauthorized, yet significant and sincere service of Belio and Manoa as Mormon missionaries, the attention again turns to the mission’s origin, Walter Murray Gibson. After his excommunication from the church, he retained the lands on Lanai and soon thereafter began editing a newspaper and threw himself into the political circles of the Hawaiian Islands.

Walter Murray Gibson at the height of his political power

(Courtesy Hawaii State Archives)

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53 Harris, Building the Kingdom in Samoa, 6.
54 Jenson, Encyclopedic History of the Church, (Salt Lake City: Deseret news Publishing 1941), 765.
That Gibson’s interest in sending Hawaiians to Samoa was backed by political aspirations is made extremely clear by his actions a little over 20 years after his departure from the Mormon faith. In the late 1880s, Gibson was appointed Prime Minister in King Kalakaua’s cabinet and the two created an ambitious foreign policy that was labeled “Primacy in the Pacific.” It included the kingdom of Hawaii corresponding with western nations regarding Pacific Islanders and their continued independence from foreign rule. It also included the creation of Gibson’s longed dreamed of Pacific Empire with the nations of Polynesia united as one.\(^{56}\) A telling quote to this end came from Gibson in an editorial in which he states, “The Hawaiian State is in all respects fit to take upon itself the responsibilities of an advisor, a referee, or a mediator in the affairs of the weaker but still independent divisions of the Polynesian race.”\(^{57}\) Gibson’s motives were as clear at this point in his history as they had ever been before and it was at this point that he attempted one last time to bring his empire together by sending men to Samoa.

In 1887, acting as Secretary of the Navy, Gibson purchased an older British ship once used for trade and refitted it with six small cannon and two Gatling guns. Naming the ship the *Kaimiloa*, he put it under the command of a retired member of the British navy named George Jackson and sent a detachment of the King’s Guard to serve as marines. He then ordered the warship to travel to Samoa under the Hawaiian flag with the purpose of strengthening relationships and eventually creating an alliance with the Samoan government. It arrived at Apia’s harbor 15 June, 1887.\(^{58}\) According to Gibson’s diary, the crew was also “to take possession of Necker Is. and other small islands by and by.”\(^{59}\)

This plan failed miserably as German suspicion of the “homemade battleship” led to the *Kaimiloa* being followed by German warships and the drunken and disorderly conduct of the Captain and crew embarrassing the Hawaiian government more than assisting it in its attempts at diplomacy. The ship was recalled and Gibson’s plans of a Pacific Empire were finished.\(^{60}\)

The timing of this incident bears coincidental significance to the tale of Manoa and Belio. It was around this same time that Manoa was writing the church in both Salt Lake City and Laie, Hawaii requesting assistance. The boldest of Gibson’s attempt to fulfill his political ambitions of a Pacific Empire under his command came as one of his earliest actions in this regard came to its close.

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\(^{57}\) Gibson, *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 3 December 1881.

\(^{58}\) Adler, Jacob. *The Fantastic Life of Walter Murray Gibson*, 179-180


\(^{60}\) Ibid. p. 180
Though Manoa and Belio were sent to Samoa as missionaries for the Mormons, it is clear by his actions that Gibson hoped they would also become ambassadors for him and his ideas of political unity in a pacific empire. He clearly realized that increasing his political influence was directly tied to the spread of the Mormon Church in the Pacific. But his subsequent excommunication foiled the plot and his failed attempts at uniting Samoa and Hawaii as a government official left him without the Pacific Empire of which he had dreamt his entire life.

In regards of the success these two Hawaiians had in building the membership of the church for which they labored, regardless of the unauthorized nature of their call, the foundation they laid for the official establishment and growth of the church in Samoa is primarily displayed in events occurring after the arrival of Dean in 1888. The church grew more rapidly and with greater ease because of their service between 1863 and 1888.

Thus, having knowingly been sent to Samoa as “ambassadors for Mormonism” and unknowingly as “ambassadors for ‘Gibsonism,’” Samuela Manoa and Kimo Belio’s missionary service in Samoa only fulfilled the former purpose as they laid the foundation for a lasting and growing Mormon presence in those islands.

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