GEORGE Q. CANNON: A LOOK AT A GIANT
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As we contemplate the history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Hawaii we quickly become aware that Maui is a land of giants. Among the main Hawaiian saints that are associated with this island—about one of whom Joseph Spurrier will tell us tomorrow—the name of Jonathan Napela must rank near the top. Among the haoles George Q. Cannon is the man whose name comes first to mind. It is my intention to tell about the man—off Maui perhaps even more than on—so that we can all gain a more accurate picture of this man who has figured so prominently in the Church here in the islands.

We had initially hoped to have this be a family-type presentation with his grandson, George Q. Cannon III, presenting a paper. Between the challenges of health and travel arrangements that did not prove possible, nor were we able to get his son, Vance. When I mentioned to the MPHS board that I was related by marriage, someone replied, "Well, it looks as if we're stuck with you!" And that, of course, means that now, you're stuck with me!

George Q. Cannon was not a giant physically. He was described as being of medium height, well rounded and erect, with a shapely head and high broad forehead. In his youth he had black hair, but his gray hair and square-cut beard became his hallmarks in later years. An outstanding speaker he combined intellect and emotion with a clear, resonant voice. Andrew Jenson says that, "When warmed to his theme he occasionally reached the highest flights of oratory, thrilling and captivating his hearers by the forcefulness of his thought and the persuasiveness of his address."¹

The traditional home of the Cannon family was the Isle of Man in the Irish Sea and it was here that George Cannon married Ann Quayle about 1825 and soon thereafter moved to Liverpool where he worked as a cabinet maker and carpenter. Of the eight children born there, our George, born Jan. 11, 1827, was the eldest. One of the other boys died soon after birth, still unnamed, and a second, John Quayle, lived only three and one-half years.

Leonora, the sister of George the father, left the family's membership in the Church of England, became a Methodist, and made plans to migrate to Canada with the family of a friend. Soon after her arrival
she met and married John Taylor, another English native who had arrived about the same time. The Taylor's were subsequently baptized into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by Parley P. Pratt and before long John Taylor was returning to his homeland, this time as a missionary for the recently-established church.

Arriving in Liverpool, he called on the family of his brother-in-law and in February, 1840, the parents--George and Ann--joined the Church. The older children, George and Mary Alice, also wanted to join but thought it presumptuous to request so did nothing until Elder Pratt also arrived in England and suggested the children be taught as well. This provided an opportunity for not only George and Mary Alice, but also eight-year old Ann to be baptized on June 17, 1840.

On joining the Church, the Cannon family began making plans for relocating to America. The mother Ann, naturally a very frugal individual, began a savings account on her own with the surplus money she saved from household expenses and shared her secret only with her son George to whom she gave the responsibility of banking the money. Their grandson, John Q. Cannon, later told this story.

Sister Cannon took great delight in contemplating the surprise she would have for her husband when she would tell him how much money she had saved. One day when young George was about to receive a well-deserved whipping, he threatened to expose her secret: "If you whip me, I'll tell father about the savings account and tell him how much there is of it!" Desiring to guard her secret, she let the little blackmailer go unpunished. This lever served him so well that he tried it again but with less success--[this time] he received the thrashing anyway.2

In September, 1842, the family sailed from Liverpool, Ann pregnant, and expressing her thought that she would never see their new home. Sure enough, she died at sea, and it was a most unhappy family that arrived in New Orleans November 11 after fifty-six days of a stormy crossing. Our George was now fifteen, the eldest of the three boys and three girls.

The company could continue no closer to Nauvoo than St. Louis, Missouri, where they were forced to spend the winter. The Cannon's lived in an abandoned cabin; fortunately sympathetic women in the company helped the motherless family during those trying times and they all went on to Nauvoo the following April, 1843. This was a troublesome period in Nauvoo, but George quickly found
employment as a joiner and tried to support his young family. In February, 1844, he married Mary Edwards White, a young emigrant who had come over on the same ship.

Then occurred the terrible events of June, 1844. George went to Carthage to bring home his severely wounded brother-in-law, John Taylor, who was with Joseph and Hyrum Smith when those two met their deaths. George's craftsmanship was also called upon as he not only built the coffins but also made the molded plaster death masks for the two martyrs. Soon after that George, still trying to support his young family, went to St. Louis seeking employment and there took violently ill and died leaving behind a pregnant young widow—who seems to drop out of the Cannon history at this time—and six orphaned children.³

The oldest girl, Mary Alice, not quite sixteen, moved her plans for marrying Charles Lambert forward slightly in order to provide a home for the three younger children. George and his sister, Ann, moved in with their Aunt Leonora, and her recuperating husband, John Taylor, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve.

Young George was seventeen when the historic event of August 8, 1844, took place as Sidney Rigdon tried to persuade the Latter-day Saints that he should become the guardian of the Church. George then listened attentively as Brigham Young spoke and later recorded his impressions in these words.

If Joseph had risen from the dead and again spoken in their hearing, the effect could not have been more startling than it was to many present at that meeting. It was the voice of Joseph himself, and not only was it the voice of Joseph which was heard; but it seemed in the eyes of the people as though it was the very person of Joseph which stood before them.⁴

Living in the Taylor household it was only natural that young George become an apprentice to his uncle who made his living as printer and publisher of *The Nauvoo Neighbor* and *Times and Seasons*. George's activity in the Church was demonstrated when he was ordained an elder in the Melchizedek Priesthood and a Seventy on the same day, February 9, 1845. The time remaining in Nauvoo was to be short, however, and one year later, February 16, 1846, George helped the Taylor family cross the Mississippi River on the ice to begin the trek west. They stopped at Sugar Creek, then went on to Council Bluffs, and eventually to Winter Quarters. When the Mormon Battalion was mobilized, nineteen-year old George was among the volunteers, but
when his Uncle John was called on a mission to England, George had to stay back and look after the family.

Brigham Young's pioneer company had already left by the time John Taylor returned to Winter Quarters in 1847 so Apostles Taylor and Parley P. Pratt led what was known as the Main Company, a few weeks behind the first group. The trip was not without mishaps. One day George was driving the steer and the heifer he had trained and they bolted for some reason, upsetting the wagon. On another occasion, his sister Ann was driving the wagon when George, having spotted something worth shooting, came up hurriedly to get his rifle. Ann reached for the gun but George had it by the barrel and was pulling it out when it discharged, grazing his side and putting a hole in his coat.\(^5\)

George's first year in Utah was spent making bricks and helping his Uncle John--actually, they called him Uncle Taylor--with his sawmill.\(^6\) He was there, of course, for the experiences fighting off the crickets that threatened the crops of the new settlers. He left home for the first time when he was called to California as one of twenty "gold missionaries" to the American River in northern California. His sister Ann, incidentally, continued to live with the Taylor family until she married Orin Nelson Woodbury February 17, 1853, and eventually became the great-grandmother of my wife. And as our genealogists know, of course, that made George my wife's great-grand uncle.

George, by this time, had fallen in love with a young woman and wasn't sure whether he wanted to spend a year away from her in the California gold fields or not. She was of a similar mind and between the two of them they agreed that being separated for three years if he were preaching the gospel would be better than being separated for one year panning gold.\(^7\) However, he dutifully answered the call and soon was on his way southwest across the desert. He started with two horses but neither one survived the tortuous trip in which the party fell victim to both dry marches and heavy rainstorms and George himself became quite ill.

Panning gold quickly became tiresome and the rough environment of the mining camps discouraged the young man, especially when a group of toughs seized him and forced him to break the Word of Wisdom by pouring liquor down his throat.\(^8\) He was most relieved when Charles C. Rich and Amasa Lyman called him to join nine others in going to the Sandwich Islands and set up the first mission in that kingdom.
Many people here are familiar with the Hawaii aspects of the life of George Q. Cannon, the beloved Pukuniahi who was so very responsible for the success of the mission here in Hawaii. His assignment to Maui, his selection of James Keeler as his companion, his determination to stay on and preach to the Hawaiians after five of the original ten—including the mission president—had decided to go elsewhere. These are familiar to many of you and Brother Frank Bruno will be mentioning some of these in his paper tomorrow morning. Tomorrow afternoon we'll hear more about the faithful Nalimanui who housed the homeless missionaries at Lahaina. Let me share just a couple of incidents that he mentions in his book My First Mission.

First, about his encounter with poi.

Before leaving Lahaina, I had tasted a teaspoonful of "poi;" but the smell of it and the calabash in which it was contained was so much like that of a book-binder's old, sour, paste-pot that when I put it to my mouth I gagged at it, and would have vomited had I swallowed it. But in traveling among the people I soon learned that if I did not eat "poi" I would put them to great inconvenience; for they would have to cook separate food for me every meal. This would make me burdensome to them, and might interfere with my success. I, therefore, determined to learn to live on their food, and, that I might do so, I asked the Lord to make it sweet to me. My prayer was heard and answered; the next time I tasted it, I ate a bowlful, and I positively liked it. It was my food, whenever I could get it from that time as long as I remained on the islands. It may sound strange, yet it is true, that I have sat down to a table on which bread was placed, and though I had not tasted the latter for months, I took the "poi" in preference to the bread; it was sweeter to me than any food I had ever eaten.9

In the same book he speaks of his love and respect of the Hawaiian people and tells of several characteristics he admires. One such characteristic was their sense of humor and I quote again from his book.

A story was told me by Brother Napela of a trick which he and some other natives played off on some white men at a feast which they partook of at a place called Waikapu on the island of Maui. The white men were merchants from Lahaina, and had been invited over to this feast. They had meats and fish of every kind nearly, and among the rest had a number of roasted pigs and
roasted dogs. One of the natives suggested, as a good trick to
play on the white men, that they sever the heads of the pigs, and
put them with the dogs, and take the dog's heads and put them
with the pigs. They did so. Of course the merchants did not
want to eat dog meat, and would not touch any of the meat
where the dogs' heads were, but ate heartily of what they
supposed were pigs. The natives tried to persuade them to eat
the other meat. "Oh no," they said, "these delicious pigs are good
enough for us," and they would not touch the other.

I may say here that the native method of cooking meat is
superior to ours. They contrive to preserve all the juices of
the meat in it while it is being cooked. Nothing was said to the
merchants about the trick that had been played upon them until
the feast was ended, and they could not be persuaded that they
had eaten dogs, until the bones were shown to them, which they
knew to be not those of pigs. They tried hard to be sick at the
thought of having eaten dog meat, but had to confess that it was
as good meat as they ever ate.10

Some of the greatest joy he experienced on his entire mission was in
translating the Book of Mormon with the help of Jonathan Napela on
Maui and later with Elder Kauwahi on the island of Kauai. He spent
the closing days of his mission collecting funds and making plans for
its publication and then just 135 years ago tomorrow, July 29, 1854,
he left Hawaii to return to the United States.11

One of his first assignments after closing the door on his Hawaiian
experiences --temporarily, at least--was to be called as one of the
presidents of the 30th Quorum of Seveny. He had little time to
function in that capacity, however, as he returned very shortly to
San Francisco to complete the publication of the Book of Mormon in
Hawaiian. He had his wife and two missionaries to help him but
since none knew the language their help was limited. He checked the
proofs by having his wife read the Book of Mormon in English while
he read the proofs in Hawaiian, making corrections as he went.

He returned to Utah in January, 1858, during the height of the
troubles with Johnston's Army. When it looked as if Salt Lake City
might be abandoned and possibly burned, Brigham Young directed
him to take the Deseret News press and a few printers to Fillmore
and continue publication of the paper. Six months later, his
assignment completed, he was returning to Salt Lake City when he
was met by a messenger just south of Provo with a note from
President Brigham Young. Elder Cannon was to leave "the next day"
with some other brethren on a mission to the eastern states. Since "the next day" was already THAT day, he had forty-five minutes to get ready, leave his family along the road with his younger brother, David, and be on his way. He was gone just under two years. 12

Part of his mission was political in nature as he tried to undo some of the damage done by the falsehoods and misunderstandings that had resulted in the dispatch of the army to subdue Utah. He also supervised branches in the east and served as the Church's emigration agent in New York. He also went to Florence, Iowa, getting supplies, equipment, and people ready to cross the plains to Utah.

While on his mission he learned that he had been called to fill the vacancy in the Council of the Twelve created by the death of Parley P. Pratt. Completing his mission he returned home and was ordained an apostle by President Brigham Young on August 26, 1860. Soon after that he was named to the presidency of the European Mission, along with Amasa M. Lyman and Charles C. Rich—coincidentally the two men most responsible for Cannon's call as a Hawaii missionary. The early sixties saw impressive results in the European Mission in the number of converts and emigrants to America. 13

In mid-1862 he was sent briefly to Washington, D.C. where he began his long involvement with the struggle for Utah statehood. Returning to England in July, he resumed his presidency over the European Mission until 1864. He returned home almost fifteen years to the day after he had departed on his first mission in 1849. Except for about nine months during that time he had served continuously one mission after another.

On arriving home he served three years as President Young's personal secretary. He also began teaching a Sunday School class and soon was involved in the revitalization of the Sunday School movement. He provided a uniform program of gospel instruction for the youth of the Church and in 1866 he utilized his publishing skills in setting up the *Juvenile Instructor*, which eventually became the movement's official publication. In 1872 was named as general superintendent of the Deseret Sunday School Union, a position he held for the rest of his life. 14 He also served several years as publisher and editor of the *Deseret News*.

On April 8, 1873, Elder Cannon became part of President Young's presidency of multiple counselors, a situation that was changed only slightly when he was sustained as an assistant counselor May 9, 1874. Although he was released at the death of President Young in
1877, he was subsequently called as first counselor to the next three presidents, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and Lorenzo Snow, serving continuously until his death in 1901. Joseph F. Smith, of course, like Cannon a former Hawaiian missionary, served beside him as second counselor during all that time and succeeded him as first counselor to President Snow. Six months after Elder Cannon's death President Snow passed away and Joseph F. Smith then followed him as President of the Church.

During the 1870's and '80s Elder Cannon spent most of his public life either in Washington, D. C. as Utah's representative to Congress trying to fend off the attacks of that body on polygamy, or working with Utah leaders in the drafting of a state constitution that might be acceptable to Congress without destroying completely the concept of celestial marriage, or hiding from federal marshals on the underground.

And with all this going on in 1882 he still took time to write a preface for the second edition of My First Mission, a book that had originally come off the press three years before as the first in a series of faith-promoting books for children.

During the mid-1880s, federal harassment and arrest of Church leaders was stepped up considerably. In February, 1885, Pres. John Taylor and his first counselor went into hiding and eluded federal marshals for the following year. Indicative of federal interest in President Cannon's arrest, the reward for his capture was $500, $200 more than for President Taylor. On February 13, 1886, Cannon was arrested in Nevada and returned to Utah for trial. Following President Taylor's instructions, President Cannon jumped the $45,000 bail and returned to hiding but surrendered voluntarily September 17, 1888, when it appeared a newly-appointed judge would hand down a less harsh sentence. As a result he spent nearly six months in the Utah penitentiary and paid a $450 fine as a prisoner for the sake of conscience. He put his time to good use completing a book on Joseph Smith and continuing to administer the affairs of the Sunday School from the confines of the penitentiary.

One of his most discouraging trips to Washington took place in 1890 when he again went to defend the Church. Seeing that Congress was poised to pass the Cullom-Strubble Bill which would completely disfranchise all Church members—even those innocent of any association with polygamy—the group returned home very discouraged to report to President Wilford Woodruff. As a result, on September 25, 1890, convinced that only discontinuance of plural marriage would satisfy the government—and having received divine
confirmation that this was the proper course--Pres. Woodruff announced the Manifesto. The law was not passed, but polygamy was officially ended.

With polygamy out of the way as a political stumbling block, Utah leaders gathered again to write a constitution that would finally be acceptable to the United States Congress. This time they were successful and on January 4, 1896, Utah was admitted as the forty-sixth state and the long battle was over.

In his doctoral dissertation, "The Mormon Quest for Utah Statehood," Edward Leo Lyman, described Elder Cannon as "a dominant figure of the Mormon hierarchy and from [Brigham Young's death] until after Utah statehood had been achieved in 1896, he was the central figure in the political affairs of the church." Indeed, says Lyman, "Cannon's rivals referred to him as the premier of the Mormon kingdom or the power behind the throne" and that ". . .there is no question that most of the strategy and activity aimed at statehood emanated from him." 

In fact he was the power behind many thrones and a wide variety of strategies and activities emanated from him. He was a director in the Union Pacific Railroad Company, vice president and director of ZCMI for many years; he was founder and president of the publishing firm of George Q. Cannon and Sons; president of Utah Sugar Company; vice president and director of Zion's Savings Bank and Trust Co.; president of of the Utah Light and Power Co; and several others which I won't mention or we'll never get to Pulehu!

But his life was winding down. Although only seventy-three, his health had not been the best since his days on the underground and a serious bout with pneumonia in 1879. In December, 1900, George Q. Cannon returned to Hawaii to help in the jubilee celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Church here in the islands. In his journal which he dictated to his son Clawson he describes the six weeks of his visit.

It was on exactly the fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of the original ten missionaries that he recorded this thought, Wednesday, December 12, 1900. He stated there were two things he especially dreaded about the trip: one was the sea voyage on which he thoroughly expected to get seasick and the other was his inability to speak the language after being away from it for forty-six years.
The sea voyage through the blessing of the Lord and the prayers of the Brethren was a most pleasant one and furnished no cause for dread. The language, also through the favor of the Lord, came to me in a manner to surprise me. When I was called upon this morning to speak, I did so principally in English and spoke with great power. The Spirit rested powerfully upon me but while speaking in English, the Spirit of the Lord would bring the native language back to me and I would break out in it to the surprise of myself and the delight of the people, for it was a great cause of wonder to them that I should be able to speak in their language at all after so long an absence from the Islands. I was made to feel very happy through this blessing of the Lord upon me for He removed all my causes for dread. It was so every time I spoke during the two days of the celebration.19

The next day he spoke again, starting in English but then, as he said, breaking out in Hawaiian. Ex-queen Liliuokalani attended the meeting in the afternoon and requested that he not only speak to the congregation but converse personally with her, both of which he did.20

His account of the events of Monday, Dec. 17, 1900, are especially interesting.

The ex-queen Liliuokalani sent me word that she would like to see me at one o'clock today as she expects to sail for Hilo. Sister Fernandez took me to the ex-queen's residence in her carriage. She welcomed me very cordially and expressed the pleasure it gave her at meeting me. She also dwelt on the good my visit had done and would do, how the peoples' feeling had been aroused and their love awakened and strengthened by my visit. Many more remarks of this character were made by her and when I arose to bid her goodbye, she said she would like me to give her a blessing, then she led the way to another room. Before I was aware of what she was doing she was on her knees before my feet to receive the blessing. I felt very free in blessing her and the Spirit rested upon us both.21

After spending several days in Honolulu President Cannon and his party traveled by carriage out to Laie where they spent a delightful week, returning to Honolulu by train on Christmas Day. The day following they came over here to Maui and his journal indicates his feelings on that occasion.
Thursday, Dec. 27, 1900

I had many reflections this morning upon my first residence in this place. It was here where the Lord revealed to me the good that should be accomplished if I should stay and work with this people. So clear was I upon this point that I was resolved to stay here if I had to do so alone. My feelings are indescribable when I see how fully the Lord has fulfilled His words to me concerning that which should be accomplished.

I started out this morning to find if possible the place where Nalimanui lived when she gave us shelter. I wanted to find the site of this house and the garden where I sought the Lord in secret prayer and where He condescended to commune with me, for I heard His voice more than once as one man speaks with another, encouraging me and showing me the work which should be done among this people if I would follow the dictates of His Spirit. Glory to God in the highest that He has permitted me to live to behold the fulfillment of His words.

I found the place that I thought must have been the site but great changes have been made. I made inquiries about Nalimanui and Kealakai Monua. Discovered that the house where we stopped was the house of her grandson. His father was Chilean and his mother a daughter of Nalimanui. We all felt that this was an extraordinary coincidence and the natives called it Kupaianaha. Before leaving, a number of folks assembled and I addressed them. The spirit of God was poured out upon us.22

That afternoon they traveled by carriages to Waikapu and spent the night. The next day, Friday, December 28, he met a brother of his old friend and colleague, Jonathan Napela. They held a gathering there in a Calvinist meeting house, followed by a luau. An interesting note to many folks here, both from Maui and Oahu. "At the request of the relatives I blessed a baby eight days and gave it the name of Arthur Enos." (However, don't jump to conclusions. A conversation with Mom Enos brings to light the fact that this baby Arthur passed away soon after that and that the parents of her husband gave him the name when he came along two years later.)

Leaving Waikapu they drove on to Wailuku, spent the night and returned to Lahaina where they caught the ship back to Honolulu. Continuing their stay with the Abraham Fernandez family they remained in Honolulu until leaving for the mainland January 5, 1901.
Nine days later he arrived in Salt Lake City where, by request, he addressed a livestock convention to great applause. About six weeks later, however, he fell ill, suffered complications, and his doctors decided a change of climate might be beneficial. In mid-March he left for Monterey, California, but the change was of no avail. Early one morning one month later, April 12, 1901, he passed away. His body was returned to Salt Lake City for burial. He left four wives and twenty-eight children.23

Before beginning the research for this paper I had always thought of George Q. Cannon as "ours." Now, however, I'm forced to admit that although we here in Hawaii have a great claim to him, in reality he belongs to the entire Church. His experiences were so vast—not only in Hawaii, but in California, Utah, Washington, D.C., New York, Iowa, and England—that no one area can lay complete claim to him.

Nevertheless, he spent many years here, carrying out a most productive assignment; and aren't we glad he did!

Thank you.
NOTES

(1) Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Andrew Jenson History Co., 1901), 51.


(4) Flake, 27.

(5) Woodbury, 113.

(6) Flake, 41.


(11) Jenson, 45.


(15) Jenson, 50. A doctoral student has more recently stated the sentence was $200 and imprisonment for seventy-five days. Edward L. Lyman, *The Mormon Quest for Utah Statehood*, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, 1982), 205.


(17) Lyman, 29.


(19) Journal of George Q. Cannon dictated by him to his son, Clawson Y. Cannon while on his trip to Honolulu, Hawaii on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Founding of the Hawaiian Mission, November 29, 1900 to January 16, 1901 (mimeo. copy in author's possession), 12


(23) Jenson, 51.