EARLY CHURCH HISTORY OF WAIMANALO

by

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You have all heard of the LDS missionaries coming to the Hawaiian Islands in 1850. This is when we begin our church history in Waimanalo, but to my knowledge no one has ever tried to search back to this early period.

On December 12, 1850, a group of ten men arrived in Hawaii as LDS missionaries for these Hawaiian Islands. They felt they were called to bring the truth of the gospel only to the white people. When this wasn't possible, five of them became discouraged and went home to Utah.

Of those who stayed to preach to the Hawaiian people, Elders William Farrer and Henry W. Bigler had chosen to make Oahu their missionary area. By the following year, in August 1851, they had made several trips around the island of Oahu, staying with the natives and trying to learn the Hawaiian language. Brother Bigler was backward in the language; Brother Farrer was a little more forward; so Elder Farrer probably converted and baptized most of the members.

The Hawaiian people are quick to recognize and accept the Mormon doctrine as the truth. There were Hawaiians living here, and I find it inconceivable that the missionaries would by-pass Waimanalo and all these potential Hawaiian members. Hence, my search for the early history of the Waimanalo area.

Waimanalo was once a beautiful and peaceful Hawaiian settlement, heavily populated with hundreds of grass huts dotting the valley floor. In the old days Waimanalo was a very secluded area. There were no easy roads in or out of the valley. One trail was over the Makapuu Saddle; horses could be led, but not ridden, it was so steep. The other was a trail from Nuuanu Pali, through the winding roads of Maunawili, and then up over the ridge to Waimanalo. This pass was called Aniani Ku which means, "standing mirror", and this trail was impassable during winter months. Waimanalo was a favorite vacationing spot for our ali‘i, and members of the Royal Family were frequent visitors at the Cummins estate. John Cummins started the Waimanalo Sugar Plantation back in 1879.
The Waimanalo Branch consisted of the saints residing in and near this sugar plantation. This is in the district of Koolaupokō and is near the south eastern extremity of the island of Oahu.

There are numerous references in the missionaries' journals and the history of the early church that "the elders traveled often and boarded with friends in the Koolau region. We can only conjecture that some of these activities must have taken place in our Waimanalo area.

On Monday, April 12, 1852, Elder Farrer had labored zealously in the Koolau district to keep life in the branches organized on that part of Oahu.

At the October, 1852 Conference at Wailuku, Maui, Elder Farrer reported and represented Koolau Branch on Oahu--sixty members, two Seventies, two Teachers, two Deacons, and three died. Elder Bigler also spoke at this conference, "wishing the prayers of the Saints that he may obtain a knowledge of this language."

Wednesday, October 27, 1852, Elder Farrer resumed his former labors in the Koolau district of Oahu, holding meetings, baptizing and instructing the Saints in their duties, and thus he was kept very busy till the close of the year.

February, 1853 found Elders Farrer and Bigler preaching and baptizing in the Waialua area. Leaving Elder Bigler there, Elder Farrer returned to Koolau February 24th. After Farrer had held meetings in the Koolau district, both elders proceeded to Honolulu. New elders had come from Utah, so they held a special conference there. Elder Farrer reported that the branches in Koolau were not very prosperous.

On March 16, 1853, Elders Bigler and Karren left Honolulu for the Koolau district. A few days later Elder Farrer left Honolulu for the same district, but after holding a number of meetings, he returned to Honolulu.

Sunday April 24, 1853--about this time Elder Bigler, assisted by Elder Paku (a native elder) and Priest Isaaka, caused quite a revival in the Koolau district, and baptized some seventy persons.

Being joined by Elder Farrer from Honolulu, Elder Bigler and Elder Paku went to Kaneōhe, where about a hundred native Saints from different parts of the Koolau district assembled on Sunday, June 19th. Very interesting meetings were held. After this, the elders, accompanied by native brethren, visited the other branches of the Koolau district.

Up until this time in 1853, nothing of Waimanalo is specifically mentioned. Then, a vivid and descriptive narrative lets us know there was a branch of the Church here in Waimanalo, as follows:

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Elder Bigler continues to preach and baptize in the Koolau district. After a visit to Honolulu in the latter part of July, 1853, he went to Waimanalo to visit a branch of the Church. On his arrival there July 28th, he visited several houses where the former occupants had either died from smallpox or fled to other places, leaving their household goods, hogs, dogs, and fowls to take care of themselves. (There was a widespread smallpox epidemic throughout the islands at this time.)

At another place where there were six houses, or families, close together, all the inhabitants had died except three, who had fled. It appeared to Elder Bigler that many died for lack of care and proper nursing. He writes:

"On Friday, September 2, 1853, I was called to visit a sick boy who was down with the smallpox. His condition was so critical that I had hitherto seen nothing so awful. The stench was almost unbearable, and the poor boy seemed one mass of corruption. His mother was a member of the Church. I administered to him and told his father to rub him with consecrated oil; give him some ginger tea, and keep him out of the wind."

Elder Bigler continues--

"When the smallpox first broke out, I dreaded to go near it; but that fear soon left me, and I felt that, provided I had plenty of oil, I would visit the sick fearlessly, anoint them with oil from head to foot in the name of the Lord and command that they should not die. Sometime afterwards, on September 19, I saw the little boy who had recovered. But he told me his father had died."

Another notation regarding this situation, on Monday, November 28, 1853--Elders Bigler and Hawkins arrived at Honolulu from the other side of the island. The smallpox had made sad havoc among the people, and many of the Saints had been carried off; in two or three branches nearly all the members died with the dreadful disease.

The first five missionaries to the Islands were released in July, 1854 and returned to Utah.
Records have been found of fourteen people baptized in Waimanalo in the 1850’s. I have listed them on the bulletin board [in the Waimanalo Meeting House] if you care to examine the list.

May 15, 1857, Elder Smith B. Thurston returned to Honolulu from a tour around the island of Oahu and reported the branches in a poor state.

On the 25th of May, 1857, the Elders Thurston and Henry P. Richards continued their journey down the Pali to Waimanalo; here only two Saints were left of the large branch that was once there; on to Hanaka, three Saints there, to Mokapu on the 27th, and so forth. They returned to Honolulu on June 12th and reported the Saints in a very weak and backward state; many had apostatized, leaving the Church almost daily because their Calvinistic friends wished them to. Also, many were led away by ancient dancing.

On October 16, 1857, President Brigham Young wrote a letter instructing the missionaries to come home because of impending trouble in Utah.

William W. Cluff writes at this time, dated December 9, 1857--

Our labors during these six months was principally among the native Saints, many of whom to all appearances [are] dead, and we found it necessary to sever off many of the old dry branches; in fact, there seemed to be a falling away among the branches generally. It was about this time that [Elder] John Hyde apostatized and published a catalogue of lies against us. The Hawaiians, not naturally having much stability, are easily biased.

A second letter from Brigham Young arrives April 1, 1858, instructing the Elders to return home as soon as possible.

From Elder Bigler’s journal [this was his second mission to the islands]:

There was the necessity of appointing native Elders to take charge of the mission. Elder J.W.H. Kou was appointed over the Oahu Conference, with Elders Keanu and Kalua as has first and second counselors. Thus the affairs of the LDS Mission of the Hawaiian Islands were brought to a close for the time being, so far as the foreign elders were concerned.
With the American elders gone, this further weakened the poor state of the branches. Elder Kou had made a tour of the island, but was unable to hold any meetings in consequence of the apathy of the Saints. They manifested indifference to that which pertained to their spiritual welfare.

The Oahu Conference embraced all the Saints residing on the island of Oahu, outside of Laie and Honolulu.

Walter M. Gibson arrived in Honolulu June 30, 1861 and managed to convince the Church members that he had been sent here by President Brigham Young. On May 31, 1862, collections were made to Walter M. Gibson's Lanai Colony from the branch at Waimanalo. Three men gave fifty cents each; four men and one woman gave twenty-five cents each; and one man and three women gave 12 1/2 cents each. So twelve people contributed a total of $3.25. This was collected by Enoch H. Kamailepolepo. [The donors are also listed on the bulletin board.]

After the authorities of the Church from Utah exposed Gibson's fraudulent practices, the Hawaiian members who wished to remain members of the Church acknowledged their transgressions and were rebaptized. Perhaps this can account for some of the duplications of the membership records listed on the bulletin board.

The American Elders returned to Hawaii to preach in the 1860's and four new members were baptized in Waimanalo.

Saturday, March 24, 1877, Elders Richards (on a second mission) and John S. Woodbury left Honolulu and traveled eleven miles to Waimanalo, where Kimo presided over the branch. A meeting was held at this place.

There was a flourishing branch in the 1870's in Waimanalo, with records of thirty-seven new people being baptized. The Saints owned a lumber (or wood) meeting house which was near the foothills, several miles inland and in the outskirts of the town. Exact location is unknown. Under date of Thursday, April 18, 1878, the spiritual affairs of the mission are prosperous; baptisms being quite frequent in various parts and the meetings are largely attended.

In the 1880's, thirteen people were baptized in Waimanalo. But then in 1885 Waimanalo was reported at October Conference as containing only ten members. Ioane Kim was branch president in October 1886, and he was succeeded in 1894 by Waialeale.

On September 1st and 2nd, 1890, Elder Samuel S. Hammond visited Waimanalo and held meetings for two days. On September 2nd he
organized a Mutual Improvement Association with Hooipo [as] President, L.P. Kuhewa first counselor, Auhau second counselor, Kaehu [as] secretary, and B.K. Waialeale treasurer. President Hooipo was cut off for transgression June 9, 1895, which virtually ended the Mutual. They had had Mutual for about five years.

Again, Elder Hammond, accompanied by the president of the Honolulu Relief Society and her counselor, visited Waimanalo and organized a Relief Society in the branch with Pe as president and treasurer, Noanoa first counselor, Milo second counselor, and Annie [as] secretary. Milo was released in 1891 and in 1893 Kapehe was chosen second counselor. Pe was still president in 1894, and the Society was doing well. Of those persons listed, only Pe and Kapehe are listed on the membership records, so we know this list is incomplete.

There was also a Sunday School at Waimanalo in September 1890. The statistical report of December 31, 1894 showed Waimanalo, Koolaupoko had a total of twenty-one souls, one meeting house, one Sunday School, one Relief Society, one Mutual Improvement Association and no Primary.

In 1895 Elder Andrew Jenson, a historian for the Church, arrived in the islands. This was after the overthrow of Queen Liliuokalani, and he records on May 29, 1895:

Our brethren [meaning the American elders] are taking no part in political affairs, but they have suffered under the suspicion that they were in sympathy with the other white people. On this account, whole branches of the Church have withered away or died spiritually. The natives, generally speaking, are opposed to the change of government.

On June 9, 1895 Elder Jenson writes,

The Kahana Branch is perhaps a good sample of a genuine native branch of the Church on the Hawaiian Islands. In dress, manners, conversation and general deportment, they exhibit the characteristics of the race to which they belong. Both men and women came to meeting barefooted, but otherwise their persons
were properly protected. The women all wear loose dresses of the Mother Hubbard style; the men's clothing consists of shirt and trousers.

Samuel E. Woolley recorded in his journal that Kimo, from Waimanalo, spoke in their meeting in Laie on November 20, 1896. This is after he was released as branch president, and according to the membership list, he was in his sixties at this time.

Through the next few years there is activity in Waimanalo, taken from bits of information. Even as now, conference was held twice a year. Conference at Laie was continued on Tuesday, October 5, 1897. At the evening session a general report of conditions in the Kealia, Kapaia, Hanalei, Waimanalo, and Kaalaea branches was made. April 6, 1898 General Conference at Laie - In the afternoon meeting the following branches were reported: Kahuwa, Kalapana, Weloka, Waikiki, and Waimanalo. At the General Conference at Laie on Friday, October 7, 1898, the Sunday School of Waimanalo participated in the afternoon session. April 9, 1899 - General Conference at Laie. In the evening session - reports from the Kahana, Waimanalo, and Kaluanui branches were reported.

From Samuel E. Woolley's journal:

On Saturday, June 24, 1899, Elders Pardoe and Farr go to Honolulu via Waimanalo. Again, Brother Fisher and I [meaning Samuel E. Woolley] went to Honolulu. Brother Farr rode with us to where the Waimanalo road turns off. On April 22, 1900, Elders Farr and Smedley were sent to Waimanalo. Elder Farr was the district leader, and he returned the next day; Elder Smedley comes back May 5, 1900.

Sunday, October 7, 1906, at Honolulu, the Relief Society held their conference Saturday morning, which consisted of lectures and speeches. There were representatives from Laie, Waialua, Waialae, Hauula and Waimanalo.

Throughout these early years of our Church History, the spirituality of these people prospered or died, much like that in the Book of Mormon. I really enjoyed doing this research paper, and through it all, I feel I have come to know some of these people, and they have become my special friends.
Sources

1. Elder Andrew Jenson's History of the Church in the Hawaiian Islands, found on Film #128, 868.

2. LDS Early Church Membership Records, Film #128, 843.

3. Information from the Church Historical Department in Salt Lake City.


6. Samuel E. Woolley's journal (through Ruth Austin)

7. Continuation of History of the Church in the Hawaiian Islands, Film #128, 869.