IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED: THE BEGINNINGS OF MORMON MISSIONARY WORK ON KAUA'I 1850-54

The story of Mormon missionary work on Kauai appears at first glance to be similar to that on each of the other Hawaiian islands. Ten missionaries, most of them laboring in the gold fields in northern California in 1850, were counselled¹ to spend at least the winter months of that year doing missionary work in the Sandwich Islands. They arrived in Honolulu on Thursday, December 12, 1850 and split up two by two to each of the five main islands. Within days they had found the white population on Oahu, Kauai, Maui, Molokai, and Hawaii unwilling to even listen to their message, let alone accept it. The missionaries were unable to speak Hawaiian, and half of them left for California within three months of their arrival. Other than Clark's conversion of one sixteen year old Honolulu boy, the mission appeared a failure. However, under the leadership of George Q. Cannon, the remaining elders assiduously applied themselves to learning Hawaiian. Before many months had elapsed, beginning, first on Maui, as a direct result of the efforts of the Utah missionaries, significant numbers of the islanders began joining the Church, totaling nearly 500 in April, 1852 after about a year of actual proselyting among the islanders.² In virtually every instance, the primary gospel audience was the Hawaiians and not the caucasians.

While the foregoing provides an account of what occurred on Maui, Oahu, Molokai, and to a lesser degree, the Big Island, it is not the way events unfolded on Kauai and Niihau. To my knowledge this story has never been told but on the windward isles only, among the Sandwich Islands, occurred a different pattern in the initial conversion of the people to the principles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. While there are apparently few, if any, LDS members left on Niihau today,³ a stake was organized on Kauai

¹Eugene E. Campbell, "The Mormon Gold Mining Mission of 1849." Campbell's study suggests that these 1850"calls" to serve missions in the Sandwich Islands were not as formal or binding as some other contemporary ones nor as they are today. Thus the leaving of their mission field by half of the first ten Elders within three months of their arrival does not constitute the transgression some historians have considered it to be.

²Farrer Mission Report and Diary, 10 April, 1854.

³A BYU-H student named Ululani Kanahele joined the Church while on campus during Fall, 1994 and at the time of this research had returned to Niihau. Apparently there was at one time a Mormon chapel and branch of the Church on Niihau, though Sister Kanahele may be the sole Latter Day Saint there as of the date of this paper.
on July 24, 1977. That signal event makes it all the more important that the actual story finally be published.4

It is customary in telling the Mormon story in Hawaii to celebrate those first five haole missionaries who remained in the islands and the additional group who joined them on Sunday, August 10th, 1851.5 But other than Dr. Joseph Spurrier's Sandwich Islands Saints6 little has been written about the equally distinguished activities of the local Hawaiian missionaries. The reasons for this are simple. Some of these remarkably dedicated and hard working Utah missionaries left hand-written accounts which detailed both their Sandwich Islands' experience and the growth of the Church. But records left by the local converts and missionaries are either non-existent or at least, for the most part, uncollected. Such journal accounts, if they exist, suffer from the further challenge of being written in Hawaiian. This researcher is grateful that the Utah missionary records provide accounts of the history of the Church on all the islands. Unfortunately, because of the unique development of the nineteenth century Church on Kauai and Niihau, they can provide only a superficial outline of what actually transpired there during the earliest years of Mormon missionary work.

The truth is, of all the Hawaiian Islands, it was in the windward islands alone, Niihau and Kauai, that the early missionary work took the course it did. There alone, the first producers of convert baptisms were not the Utah missionaries. On Kauai and Niihau the local Hawaiians, who had been taught the gospel elsewhere by the haoles, were the first gospel teachers of their fellow Hawaiians. It was not until hundreds of the local people of Niihau and Kauai had been taught the gospel and dozens baptized and confirmed members of the Church that the Utah missionaries returned to Kauai to share in the responsibility of the missionary work. Supporting evidence for this thesis is found in the journals of the Utah missionaries, themselves.7 After the departure of Elders William Farrer and John

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4 Kauai was the last of the five major islands in the chain to have a stake. R. Lanier Britsch, Moromona, 171.
5 These five missionaries arrived directly from San Francisco at Lahaina. They were President Philip B. and Jane Lewis, Francis Asbury Hammond and Mary Jane Hammond, their eleven month old child, and John S. Woodbury, whose wife remained for the time on the mainland. "Manuscript History of the Hawaiian Mission," 10 August, 1851 (hereafter cited as MHHM).
6 Dr. Spurrier's book is the only book length treatise of the local, or Hawaiian missionaries, in Hawaii and thus is invaluable. Unfortunately, it lacks footnotes or an index, though a bibliography is included.
Dixon following their thirty day stay on Kauai in December and January 1850-51, 8 there is no record of Utah missionaries laboring there before President Philip B. Lewis' arrival, Saturday, July 9th, 1853, accompanied by Elder J. W. H. Kauwahi. 9

What makes the absence of the Utah missionaries on Kauai during this time all the more remarkable is that well before 1853, convert baptisms had expanded dramatically on Maui under Cannon and Keeler, on Oahu under Bigler and Farrer, and to a lesser extent on Hawaii and Molokai under Hawkins and Woodbury, respectively. 10 When the Mormons met on Maui for their first Fall conference, the second to be held in the Sandwich Islands, in October of 1852, the membership of the mission stood at 1,131. 11 Utah missionaries were apportioned to each of the islands but somehow Kauai and Niihau were omitted.

The Mormons were not unconscious of Kauai and Niihau remaining relatively untouched. On Wednesday, March 30, 1853 the following cryptic reference appears in Farrer's journal: Bro F. sailed for Kauai today. Since there were no Utah missionaries whose last name begins with F, except Farrer himself, exactly who this person is, is unclear. Strangely, the Utah missionaries seem to have neglected only Kauai and Niihau in their work. But the work took off in the windward islands despite the missionaries' inattention.

The story at this point has biblical overtones. In Acts 16 Paul describes how the Holy Ghost had forbidden preaching the gospel in Asia. Then, in the night Paul had a vision in which a man of Macedonia (European continent) prayed for him to come over and help them. Paul immediately determined that the Lord had called him to preach the gospel, in Europe for the first time. So it is when

7 Most useful to me in this work has been the journal of William Farrer.
8 William Farrer and John Dixon ages 29 and 32 years, respectively, arrived at Nawiliwili Saturday, Jan. 21 but spent the night on the schooner. After sailing the next day to Koloa and failing to find any interested haole listeners in that area, and not speaking Hawaiian, Farrer sailed alone on the schooner Kainau to Nawiliwili and thence to Honolulu, arriving Friday, January 17, 1851. Dixon tried at least one more time to find an audience around Koloa, but he was summoned by Clark and arrived in Honolulu, Thursday, January 23rd. William Farrer, Biographical Sketch. Hawaiian Mission Report and Diary.
9 MHHM.
10 The Farrer Journal copy in the BYU-H library is illegible in places and who the haole missionary is representing Molokai cannot be determined nor can the exact number of converts. The missionary representing Molokai was probably John Stillman Woodbury.
11 MHHMH.
Phil Lewis, mission president of the Sandwich Isles, described what had occurred on Kauai, at least.

A district judge from . . . Kauai came to this city [Honolulu] and joined the Church; he seemed so full of zeal that we ordained him an Elder and sent him home prophesying good upon his head.

He writes for someone to come and assist him; [like word from Macedonia] he has baptized 39 and many more are believing. He has written an article on our faith, and sent it to be published. We are made to rejoice in the prospect of so much help from the native brethren.\(^{12}\)

When the request for assistance was received from Kauai, the Hawaiian Elder had already baptized 39, with many more believing. By the time the Utah missionaries arrived, his baptismal total was 91!\(^{13}\).

Exactly who this zealous local missionary was is unclear. Brother J. W. H. Kauwahi would seem a likely candidate. Only this brilliant member of the Hawaiian legislature among the Hawaiians who was known to have been on Kauai seems to have had the theological knowledge, language, and writing skills to have authored a Church pamphlet. Of course, the pamphlet was probably in Hawaiian. Of all the Hawaiian converts, Kauwahi's intelligence and grounding in LDS theology would have best qualified him, of the potential authors, to have written the pamphlet.\(^{14}\)

A second possible choice is Elder Kaele. Although my sources attribute no judgeship or pamphlet to him, when the first team of missionaries went to Kauai on July 9th, 1853, the team was comprised of Elder's Lewis and Kauwahi who sailed to join Brother Kaele in his field of labor.\(^{15}\) A third possibility is some fictitious amalgam of the Kauwahi and Kaele, and Elder Lewis may have been confused about identity. Whoever it was, this native Hawaiian is the one who deserves credit for opening Kauai to missionary work by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. All the evidence confirms that a Polynesian, and not a Utahn, deserves this recognition. Nor was he the only Hawaiian to be recognized for the enormous missionary success on Kauai before the Utah missionaries

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\(^{12}\) *MHHM*, Thur 30 June, 1853.

\(^{13}\) *MHHM*, 30 June and 8 August, 1853.

\(^{14}\) Farrer's journal for what appears to be 17 August 1851 briefly refers to Elder Farrer's first baptism in Hawaii, that of J.W. H Kauwahi.

\(^{15}\) *HMMH*, 9 July, 1853.
arrived. As Farrer toured the Kauai Conference over which he presided in the closing months of 1853 he noted: "Elder Kauwahi had done a tremendous work on Kauai, Priest Kimo, and other natives."  

The April 1852 Hawaiian conference of the Mormons was the first held in the islands and met in the Iao Valley. Elder Farrer, the Kauai missionary who later returned to labor there, was absent from this conference but by October 1852 he was present in Wailuku, Maui, with 800 other Saints when Cannon was set apart for his translating of the Book of Mormon, a task he had begun earlier.

At the April 1853 conference, only 300 were in attendance, Farrer and Bigler again remaining on Oahu. Information on this meeting is scanty and one can only speculate on much of what transpired. Subsequent events make it seem likely that with the addition of the nine new Utah missionaries on February 17, 1853, the Elders at the conference agreed to pair the local Hawaiian male converts with the Utah Elders. By April 10 of 1853 Elder Redden A. Allred wrote that he generally took with him a native Elder as co-worker. By April 23rd both Brothers Uaa and Kauwahi had been ordained Elders. Probably because of these developments, interest in the activities of the Mormons, and convert baptisms literally exploded. For instance, at the organization of the Honolulu Branch about the 22nd of April, 1853, 39 were baptized and 1,500 watched the ordinances performed. On May First, 59 were baptized and 1,000 witnessed. Miraculous healings were common and the king called for an audience with Hawaiian Elder Uaa, saying the Mormon missionaries were turning the world upside down. It was noted that "the Calvinists could not give people legs to walk with like the Mormons did."

With this enormous success the brethren finally turned full attention to two somewhat neglected areas, Kauai and Hawaii, as recorded in an April, 1853 entry in the Manuscript History of the Hawaiian Mission. The entry is inserted out of context and explains that in April, no date given, it was determined to give special

16Farrer, 3 December, 1853.
17HMHM, April 1852.
18HMHM.
19HMHM. These nine missionaries were: Ben F. Johnson, Nathan Tanner, Thomas Karren, James McBride, Ephriam Green, James Lawson, Reddin A. Allred, Reddick N. Allred, and Eggerton Snider.
20HMHM.
21HMHM.
22HMHM, 26 April, 1853.
missionary attention to two hitherto quite unattended fields of labor, Hawaii and Kauai.

On July 9, 1853 mission president Lewis with companion Elder Kauwahi sailed for Kauai. To the best of my knowledge, this was the first Utah missionary on Kauai since Elder's Farrer and Dixon left there in January, 1851. A brother Burnham laboring in the islands travelled with them to work on a Kauai sugar plantation and he, too, played an important role in missionary success there. At the end of August between three and four hundred had been baptized by the missionaries on Kauai. Elder Redden A. Allred was also laboring there, probably with an unnamed local Elder, by August, 1853. Finally, the windward isles were accorded full citizenship, the results quickly justifying their new status.

LATER DEVELOPMENTS ON KAUAII AND NIJIHAU

The island of Kauai is distinctive for another significant reason in the story of the early mission history. The Fall 1853 conference, in particular, resulted in several significant decisions impacting directly or indirectly on Kauai. According to Elder Farrer, the first business was to print the Book of Mormon, then "nearly ready for publication," at the earliest period. In conjunction with this, a press and materials for publishing the book were to be purchased, some of the funds, at least, to be raised by the Sandwich Islands Mormons. A place for the gathering of the Hawaiian Saints was to be located. Chief Levi Ha'ali'alea owned land in northern Kauai that at one time was considered the best location Elder Cannon had ever seen for the gathering, and negotiations were initiated to purchase land there. Farrer's journal for October, 1853 also reflects that he was present at the semiannual meeting and was called to preside over the Kauai conference. At last, William Farrer was to return to the place of his original, albeit unsuccessful, labor. It appears that before Farrer could depart for his new assignment, Utah missionary McBride and local Priest Wolverton were appointed and sailed to Kauai. By

23Farrer, Thursday, 6 October, 1853. Elder Cannon appears to have reconsidered his earliest statement that the Book of Mormon was ready for publication. Both MHHM and Farrer indicate some confusion over this. Today the book continues to undergo revision, the latest work being done by three unpaid volunteers in Hawaii who are working to divide the volume into verses and provide diacritical markings. The Hawaiian edition is the very one done by Cannon and was reprinted last in 1992.

24MHHM, 14 December, 1853.

25Farrer, Thursday 6 October, 1853.
December of 1853 Elder Cannon must have had second thoughts concerning his previous idea that his work on the Book of Mormon translation was completed. The two men he thought might help him most to further complete the work were now on Kauai, Elder Kauwahi, with his first language skill in Hawaiian, then English, and Elder Farrer with his in English and secondarily, in Hawaiian. Remarkably, the place chosen for the conclusion of this phase of the project was selected by Brother Samuela, a local Kauaian, whose choice of location has still further biblical and nineteenth century Church history associations. Did Brother Samuela know that some of the greatest revelations recorded in scripture could be called prison literature, some of which were written by Joseph Smith while in prison? Did he know of Paul and other apostles frequent imprisonment in the old world? In any event, some of the finishing touches of the Hawaiian translation of the Book of Mormon, the only translation ever published by the Church and the one still used as of 1995, were done in the former prison in Waimea, Kauai, the prisoners having been transferred to Lihue.26

Both during their December-January 1853-54 translation work and after, Cannon and Farrer went out to preach and baptize in the branches around Kauai.27 During this time considerable of the Utah missionaries’ efforts had to be expended in rebaptizing properly many of those who had been done incorrectly by preceding missionaries. In *MHHM* for 12 February, 1854 Cannon wrote:

This morning [at Hanalei] we went to see one of the Priests here administer the ordinance of baptism. He was so awkward that we had to tell Brother Paku to go in and show him how it ought to be done. We had heard before that the ordinance had been administered improperly, in consequence of the awkwardness and ignorance of the persons officiating, the body not always being covered or immersed in the water; and when we saw this man baptized, it made us feel the necessity of what we had before talked about, the rebaptism of all the branches that had been baptized by others than those we knew to have knowledge and experience in the matter.

26Brother Samuela chose or was chosen to find a home for the missionaries and their work of translation. *MHHM* for Saturday, 10 December 1853 explains that Samuela had prepared a house for the occupancy of the Elders. One supposes that he selected the jail since it was both vacant and available.

27 Farrer’s description of the process is instructive. “... finished today, having read most of it twice through, Bro. C and myself first and Bro. Kauwahi and myself afterwards.” *HMH* 12 Feb, 1853.
Accordingly, we had all the brethren and sisters who were here, assemble on the bank of the river, and there had them covenant again with the Lord. I officiated in baptizing and Brothers Farrer and Paku did the confirming, assisted by two other native Elders. I baptized 93, six of whom were new converts.

By the 17th of February Cannon sailed for Honolulu to finish up the remaining seven months of his mission. Farrer continued to visit the various branches, to try to bail Kauwahi out of prison where he had been sent after being falsely accused of bigamy, and to regulate the affairs of his conference on Kauai. On April 8-9 of 1854 he participated with Elder Tanner of the mission presidency in a conference at Nawiliwili. There were by then a reported 629 members on the island, 170 having been baptized since October conference.

Elders Kamakahonohano and Kalauaia were laboring on Kauai by Thursday, May 11, 1854 and Elder Kalawaiia soon followed, perhaps in anticipation of the original Utah missionaries soon being released. In June on the 25-26 a conference was held at Kalihikai for all branches on the northeast part of Kauai with Farrer presiding and 200 Saints present, including 5 Elders.

On Sunday July 9th-10th, 1854, a conference was held at Mahinauli, near Waimea on Kauai’s southwest side at which Elder George Raymond was present. This Hawaiian missionary was to preside over a district on Kauai with Hosea as assistant and they also proselyted on Nihihau.28 It was reported then that on Kauai and Nihihau there were 17 Elders, 33 Priests, 20 Teachers, 27 Deacons, 654 members, total. Two hundred thirty-four were said to have been added since the October conference.29 Simple math indicates 64 members had been baptized in the last three months.

Finally, the mission of the five remaining original Utah Elders who had arrived in December, 1850 drew to a close. On Monday the 17th of July 1854, Elder Farrer sailed from Koloa to Honolulu in preparation for his trip home. Elder Reddin A. Allred was sent to

28 Farrer, Monday, 10 Jul 1854.
29 Ten Branches of the Church are described by Elder Farrer just six months before he left Kauai. They were: Anahola, with only a few members; Hanalei, 30; Hanapepe, 30; Kahili, 10; Kalihiwai, 30; Kealia, 8; Koloa, 69; Lawai, 66; Nawiliwili, 66; Waimea, 100. Since this totals only approximately 420, even if the converts 11 on Nihihau were included, it is well short of the 654 reported only six months later. For the sources of this information see MHHM, 27 Dec, 1853 to 3 Dec. 1853.
Kauai in his place. Finally, on Saturday July 29th, 1854, Elders Cannon, Bigler, Hawkins, and Farrer sailed from Honolulu, appropriately on the steamer Polynesian, their missions in the Sandwich Islands completed, at least for a time.\textsuperscript{31}

Summing up the feelings of these early missionaries concerning their experience in the islands, George Q. Cannon appeared to be speaking for most if not all of them, when twenty-five years later he concluded his \textit{My First Mission} account.

\ldots my life has been a happy one. I have filled many missions, have seen great varieties of life, and have had exceedingly agreeable and delightful associations; but after making allowance for growth and increased capacity to enjoy, I can truthfully say that, destitute as we were of many things which people brought up as we think necessary to comfort, at no time, or under no circumstances, have I enjoyed more sweet, pure and soul-filling joy than I did on My First Mission.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{31}\textit{MHHM}, Saturday, 29 July, 1854. When Cannon and the others left, there were 4,000 members of the Church in Hawaii. \textit{Moromona}, 116.

\textsuperscript{32} In 1900, exactly fifty years after his first mission, First Presidency member George Q. Cannon returned to Hawaii for the 50th anniversary celebration of the founding of the Hawaii mission. Just four months later, President Cannon was dead.