

Abraham Kaleimahoe Fernandez:

A Hawaiian Saint and Royalist, 1857-1915

by Isaiah Walker



As the sun neared the horizon after a beautiful summer day in 1906, two Hawaiians entered the Hamohamo river in Waikiki. Elder Abraham Kaleimahoe Fernandez baptized and then confirmed Queen Lydia Kamakaeha Liliuokalani a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Although technically she was no longer the queen of Hawai'i in 1906, Elder Fernandez recorded and reported to President Samuel E. Woolley that he had baptized Her Majesty Queen Liliuokalani.¹

Abraham Fernandez was both a friend and former employee of the Queen. From 1891 to 1893 he served the Kingdom of Hawaii as a member of the Queen's Privy Council.² According to oral family tradition, prior to becoming a member of the LDS church himself, the Queen assigned him to monitor Mormons in the islands and report on their activities and aspirations.³ Although he was first exposed to the church while spying on it, Abraham was eventually baptized a Mormon on October 22, 1895, after Peter

Kealaka'ihonua, a Hawaiian elder and Fernandez family friend healed Abraham's dying-19-year-old-daughter, Adelaide.

Shortly after his conversion, Abraham began filling important church leadership callings in the islands. He served as a full-time missionary in Hawaii, became a member of the Hawaiian mission presidency under Samuel E. Woolley, and adopted or hanai'd missionaries, prophets, and apostles who regularly visited the islands (including and most notably President Joseph F. Smith).

In this presentation I will recount the history of Abraham Fernandez, his family, and his service in the church here. However, this story is more than just a narrative about an important man. It is also a story about a woman. Minerva Fernandez, Abraham's wife, was just as prominent a leader as he was. Like her husband she was both an ali'i of Hawai'i and a Mormon leader. Furthermore, this presentation is more than simply a narrative plump full of historical tidbits about an important and under-explored person in our local history. With this story of my great grandparents I make two key arguments. First, that the Fernandez family, like many other Hawaiian families, was strong believers in both the church and the Native Hawaiian Monarchy. They not only fought to preserve the kingdom as it was under attack, but continued to support the Queen years after she was forced from her throne. Many Hawaiian royalists found a comfortable place to be both Christian and Hawaiian in the church. Thus my second contention is that in the late 1800s and early 1900s the LDS Church was a healthy alternative to Calvinist Christianity which at that time became associated with those who deposed the Queen and pushed for annexation to the United States.

In a 1955 Honolulu Star-Bulletin series called Tales about Hawaii, Clarice Taylor explained that "Minerva and Abraham lived like ali'i. There was not question of "who are you?" Other ali'i knew of their ancestors and that was sufficient. No one in those days dreamed that the genealogies of the ali'i would ever be forgotten."⁴ Since genealogy was so important to them, and to Hawaiian mo'olelo or histories in general, I will briefly explain their Hawaiian lineage.

It is unclear who Abraham's real father was. In most accounts, he was the adopted son of Peter Fernandez, a Spanish gentleman of Bombay India and third husband of Abraham's mother, Kalama Kalei Mahoe. Not much is known of his real father, other than the fact that he was a Hawaiian and first husband of Kalama. In one version his father was Ah Hoy, who was either a full-blooded Hawaiian or Hawaiian-Chinese. Others have speculated that David Kalākaua was Abraham's biological father. Other than family rumor, such speculations are supported by the fact that Kalākaua made regular visits to Abraham's mother's family in Lahaina even prior to Abraham's birth. Kalakua remained close to Abraham and the Fernandez family up until his death in 1891. When Abraham's first son, Edwin Kane Fernandez (otherwise known as EK Fernandez) had his first birthday in 1884, King Kalākaua threw a week-long-luau for the child. Kalākaua provided everything from flags, to a massive fireworks display. He also provided the food—several pigs, pounds of fish, opihi, salmon, and barrels of poi. Cases of Kalākaua's favorite Champagne were given out, and the royal Hawaiian band, under the direction of

Henry Berger, was one of the many musical groups to entertain the guests. Although hula was frowned upon by many non-Hawaiians in the nineteenth century, a hula competition was held at this party where many of Hawai‘i’s best hula halau’s vied for accolades. It is no wonder that E.K. Fernandez established Hawaii’s greatest entertainment venues throughout the 20th century.⁵

Abraham’s mother Kalama Kalei Mahoe was named after and by Queen Kalama the wife of Kauikeaouli, or Kamehameha III. Whereas family names were held sacred and often *kapu*, this honor most likely meant that she was a close relative of the Queen. As a close relative her lineage would have stemmed from the Moana line, a chiefly line descended from King Keawe II. But Abraham’s mother also claimed Mahi-o-pelea, a fourth generation descendant of Umi-a-Liloa, as an ancestor.⁶

Abraham was born in Lahaina, Maui and like many ali‘i was educated in mission schools. He was a good student and acquired a profound knowledge of the Bible. However, after his mom, Kalama, married her third husband, Peter Fernandez, the family relocated to Kapalama on O‘ahu and lived in a large house built by Mr. Fernandez—on what is now the upper section of Asylum road.⁷ Peter adopted all of Kalama’s children and became very fond of Abraham, and even later made him his partner in a lucrative hardware business.

While on O‘ahu, Abraham became friends with Andrew Johnson Davis, a half-Hawaiian and half-haole boy also from Maui. Shortly before Abraham turned twenty, Andrew convinced Abraham to travel back to Maui and court his older sister Minerva.⁸ During his voyage to Maui, the commuter vessel encountered extremely rough seas and Abraham was tossed overboard. Although he recovered a rowboat which the ship captain cast overboard on his behalf, the boat sprung a leak and Abraham found himself in a precarious situation. Legend tells us of his miraculous escape: After praying for assistance a great shark appeared, lifted the boat on his back and pulled Abraham safely onto a beach in Hana. He arrived on Maui sooner than the big ship did.⁹

Abraham married Minerva Eliza Davis on December 31, 1877 at Makawao, Maui. Minerva Eliza Davis (Fernandez), was also an ali‘i. She was the daughter of Keumikalakaua and William Lyman Davis. They had twelve children. Although each of the Davis children were given proper English names, their mother, Keumikalakaua, also gave them hidden Hawaiian names—missionary law by the late 1800s required all Hawaiians to have English names.¹⁰ Keumikalakaua’s grandfather Mahihelelima was a lead warrior of King Kalaniopu‘u. Most likely a member of the King’s elite Keawe guard, Mahihelelima became the governor of Hana, Maui in about 1777, just prior to Captain Cook’s first visit to Hawai‘i. Mahihelelima was also the brother of Kanekapolei, King Kalaniopu‘u’s favorite wife. Mahihelelima was also known as a spiritual man and gifted fisherman. He worshipped the fish gods Ku‘ula, Hina and Aiai. Hawaiian Mo‘olelo (histories) explain that he could call forth great schools of fish to his nets.¹¹ Mahihelelima descended from the famous Mahi family line of Kohala, and traced his ancestry back to King Umi.¹²

Although Minerva Davis was trained, as ali'i were in those days, in Congregationalist mission schools, her teachers concentrated on teaching her "womens work," or domestic and household duties. This was a drastic change for Hawaiian women since in years prior women of Hawai'i engaged in rigorous activities later deemed to masculine for a proper woman to participate in—these included surfing, boxing, wresting, and even fighting in warfare.



Left to Right: Minerva Umiaemoku, Hatty Davis, Minerva, EK, Abraham, Clara, Lyman Parker, Adelaide, Madeline Fernandez Parker

Shortly after the two were married they moved to their family home in Honolulu, on King Street. They had four daughters, Adelaide, Madeline, Clara, and Minerva and one son (EK was the third oldest). As the hardware business continued to prosper, Abraham built a second home on a 12 acre lot in Kalihi, 2001 Beckley street. Called the country house, it was large enough to accommodate their many friends and visitors.

The Fernandez family Kalihi home, 2001 Beckley street



As they raised their young family the Fernandez's still made time to associate with other Hawaiian ali'i, including King Kalākaua and his wife Kapiolani. Minerva had a close relationship with Kapiolani and supported her efforts at preserving the health of the Hawaiian people. Minerva became a charter member of Kapiolani's birthing center and served as chairman of the board at that hospital.¹³ When Kalākaua died in 1891, Minerva came to the Queen's aid, and Abraham was appointed Privy Council member under Hawaii's new Mo'i, Queen Lili'uokalani.

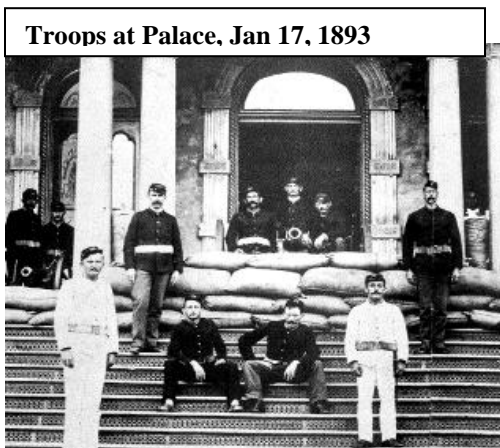


Abraham's new job was most-likely very stressful. Lili'u inherited a torn and tense administration in 1891. In the decades preceding her inauguration Sugar had rotted more than just the teeth of Calvinist missionary grandchildren. Sugar had become a big business that thrived in Hawaii as the Gold Rush in California provided demand, and boycotts on southern sugar during the American Civil War enabled Hawaiian sugar



to enter the US tax free. But when the war ended and this tax-free agreement was on its way out, haole businessmen (now led by the grandkids of the early Calvinist missionaries) were willing to make great concessions to keep that tax exemption. While the United States wanted Pearl Harbor, and the business community was ready to give it to them, Kalākaua refused. In 1887 he was convinced, while guns were pointed at him, to see things their way. But not only that, the king was forced to sign a new constitution, dubbed the bayonet constitution, which yielded much of his executive powers to them. One of the first things they did was appoint themselves cabinet and council members of the Kingdom of Hawai‘i.¹⁴

Thus, when Lili‘uokalani came into office she had a bold agenda; ratify a new constitution and replace haole politicians with more Hawaiians. The bayonet constitution made it difficult to appoint new people since legislators could now shut down her selections. She did however manage to appoint six new Privy Council members (there were about 25 members in total) during her first few weeks in office. A young 34-year-old Abraham was one of them (so was Prince David Kawananakoa). Although it took a little over a year, the queen, with the help of advisors like Abraham, drafted a new constitution, one that restored the executive powers of the Monarch and weakened foreign influence in government (for example the constitution stipulated that foreigners couldn’t vote, unless they were married to a Hawaiian).¹⁵ However, when the queen tried to promulgate the new constitution on January 14, 1893 those cabinet members still aligned the with the business community refused to sign it. Then, they ran off and leaked her plans to the opposition. Led by Lorrin Thurston, Sanford B. Dole, and others the opposition now organized into a gang called the committee of safety and secretly planned to oust the Hawaiian Monarch.



After convincing US minister John L. Stevens to support their coup, this committee, with the help of a company of US marines ransacked Hawai‘i’s government building, pointed guns and cannons at the palace, and forced the queen to surrender on January 17, 1893. Despite the exhortation by US President Grover Cleveland to return Hawai‘i’s administration back to Native Hawaiians, the perpetrators declared Hawaii a Republic and Sanford B. Dole as its first governor.¹⁶

But the Hawaiian community didn’t just roll over. The queen and her supporters sought ways to restore her throne. Huge rallies were held and thousands of Hawaiians signed petitions protesting the idea of annexation. In 1895 some Hawaiians even attempted a covert operation to restore the queen to power through force. The attempt failed. The new courts blamed the queen for this insurrection and imprisoned her in a small upper-room in the palace. Few were allowed into her chambers during her sentence. But as the queen explained in her book, *Hawaii’s Story*, Minerva Fernandez was one of them.

Minerva smuggled forbidden Hawaiian newspapers into her chambers and bolstered the Queen's hopes in a political restitution.

As Abraham and Minerva prayed for the Hawaiian kingdom, they found spiritual support in the LDS Church. After Peter Kealaka'i healed their eldest child, who previously found no remedy to her ailment from the best doctors in Hawaii and San Francisco, the family, including Minerva's sister, Hattie, was baptized in Kewalo Stream and confirmed members of the church in Auwaiolimu on Oct 22, 1895.

But 1895 was a crazy year in Hawai'i. The queen was just released from prison, rumors were spread that Abraham was on a secret hit-list drafted by the opposition, and the family was struggling to define its place as ali'i under a haole run government.

Well, the Church provided a place for the Fernandez's to help Hawaiians in more ways than one. Months after his baptism, Abraham became a key speaker at many church meetings. Samuel E Woolley wrote of one such meeting: The new convert spoke with Peter Kealaka'ihonua, the meeting was packed, a full house.¹⁷ Abraham became a traveling guest speaker at many meetings thereafter. Soon, he was called as a missionary and later a member of the Hawaiian mission presidency under Samuel E. Woolley. Minerva became the President of the LDS women's organization, the Relief Society in all the islands—a calling she held for nearly 30 years. As family friends of the queen, Abraham and Minerva occasionally brought Lili'uokalani out to Laie where she



was warmly received. While on such visits Lili'uokalani came to admire several church members there. The Queen also made at least two trips to Salt Lake City, Utah. On at least one of these trips, she accompanied the Fernandez family and friends. In the "Liliuokalani and Party" photo, it is speculated that the purpose of the trip was to send off



EK to his first year of college at BYU in Provo, Utah. While accompanying the Fernandez's on various Mormon visits, the queen gained an appreciation for the Latter-day saints. Speaking to a close friend Lydia Aloho, Lili'uokalani said, there was an affinity between the old Hawaiian aloha and the practices of the Mormons, "they always take care of their own."¹⁸

The Fernandez's did just that. Within days of their conversion, they hosted LDS gatherings where they housed and entertained church leaders

**Relief Society President,
Minerva Fernandez, Seated**

and missionaries. Samuel E. Woolley's journals are heaving with entries about having dinner and a good time at the Fernandez home. Their house was not only a place where church was discussed, but where music, hula, and food were in abundance. They loved to have guests and they were very good hosts.

The Fernandez's found in the LDS church a vehicle to help the Hawaiian people. Whereas his Privy Council position was stripped from him, these callings provided a forum for him and his wife to address the Hawaiian community. As the church provided spiritual sanctuary from the tense political scene in Honolulu, they began sharing that solitude with other ali'i. Minerva began teaching the Queen lessons learned in the Relief Society and they together gained a testimony of things like priesthood blessings. W.W. Cluff recorded an incident where the queen asked Minerva to send George Q. Cannon to her Palace to give her a priesthood blessing. Although spiritual solutions were sought by many Hawaiians at this time, the fate of the Hawaiian Kingdom still enveloped Hawaiians, including the Fernandez's.

In August of 1898 their fears became a reality. Hawaii was Annexed to the United States. The new McKinley administration, with its uniquely aggressive and colonial-like foreign policy pushed the annexation bill through a divided congress through a joint resolution. Puerto Rico and the Philippines also came under United States control in 1898.¹⁹ While the death toll of Filipino nationals grew by the tens of thousands, the Queen's resolve to fight lessened. On August 12 the new regime celebrated in Honolulu with a Hawaiian flag lowering ceremony. During this party the Fernandez family, along with the vast majority of Hawaiians, hibernated at home. A journal entry by Samuel E Woolley allows us to peer in on this community of sorrowful saints.

On August 12th, 1898 he wrote "This is an important day as the American flag was raised at 12 noon after the Hawaiian flag was lowered. When the flag was lowered it was more like a funeral than anything else...Everything was quiet. No great demonstration. I did not go. I thought it best not to go as the saints are nearly all opposed to the flagraising so I concluded not to show them that I was rejoicing at their downfall."²⁰

Abraham continued to serve in the LDS church and found lesser roles in Hawaiian politics under the new government. He was a member of the board of health under the territory and in 1914 was a Republican candidate for city treasurer. In 1915 Abraham died at his Honolulu store (Abraham Fernandez and Son). He was 58. Minerva continued to labor in the church and helped the Hawaiian community through Kapiolani Hospital. Their children raised families of their own, many of whom remained active in the Church. As seen through the example of Abraham and Minerva, many Hawaiian saints found in the LDS church a place to be both Christian and Hawaiian. As they were stripped from political positions under the Hawaiian monarchy, the church also provided an avenue to serve the Hawaiian people as leaders.

Endnotes

¹ Baptismal record archived in BYU-Hawai'i Archives, also document attached in appendix here

¹ Kingdom of Hawaii Pricy Council Minutes in *Honolulu Archives* vol. 14, pg. 307, 313, 321, 333, 329, 335.

¹ Conversation with Uncle John Helekunihi Duke, October 2005.

¹ Clarice B. Taylor, “Tales about Hawaii: Mahihelelima; Minerva and Abraham—vol. 17 ,” *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, Apr. 12, 1955.

¹ John Helekunihi Duke, “The Abraham Fernandez Family of Hawai‘i,” pg. 7. This is an unpublished family history and genealogy book (see author or John Duke for copy).

¹ Clarice B. Taylor, “Tales about Hawaii: Mahihelelima; Abraham Fernandez—vol.16 ,” *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, Apr. 11, 1955.

¹ Duke, pg. 3

¹ Clarice B. Taylor, “Tales about Hawaii: Mahihelelima; Minerva Eliza Davis –vol. 15 ,” *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, Apr. 10, 1955.

¹ Taylor, “Tales,” Vol. 15.

¹ Taylor, “Tales,” Vol. 15.

¹ Clarice B. Taylor, “Tales about Hawaii: Mahihelelima; Governor of Hana—vol. 9,” *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, April 2, 1955.

¹ Taylor, “Tales,” Vol. 7.

¹ Clarice B. Taylor, “Tales about Hawaii: Mahihelelima; A Knight of Old Hawaii—Vol. 1,” *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, March 24, 1955.

¹ For a more thorough history of this time period in Hawai‘i see: Jonathan Osorio, *Dismembering Lahui: History of the Hawaiian nation to 1887* Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i press, 2002; Ronald Takaki, *Pau Hana: Plantation Life and Labor in Hawai‘i 1835-1920* Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i press, 1984; Sally Engle Merry, *Colonizing Hawai‘i: the Cultural Power of Law* Princeton, 1999; or, Noenoe Silva, *Aloha Betrayed* Duke University Press, 2004.

¹ See the 1894 draft of her constitution at <http://www.hawaii-nation.org/constitution-1893.html>

¹ The President of the United States, Grover Cleveland, sent a special commissioner, James Blount, to investigate the overthrow. He interviewed various people and parties and came to the conclusion that what happened was immoral, illegal, and not cleared by US channels. He ordered the Queen to be restored to power. A full record of his report can be seen in the Blount Report, *Executive Documents of the House of Representatives*, 53rd Cong., 3 sess. (1894-1895) found online at:

<http://libweb.hawaii.edu/digicoll/annexation/annexation.html>


¹ Samuel E. Woolley, *Journals of Samuel E. Woolley*, pg. 73. These are archived in BYUH archives, Joseph F. Smith Library.

¹ Helena G. Allen, *The Betrayal of Lili ‘uokalani: Last Queen of Hawai‘i* Mutual Publishing, 1991, pg. 388.

¹ Kēhaulani Kauanui has explained that the joint resolution was for domestic policymaking only and, according to U.S. law, a treaty was required for such an act. Thus, annexation was unconstitutional and illegal. See J Kēhaulani Kauanui, “Precarious Positions: Native Hawaiians and US Federal Recognition,” *The Contemporary Pacific*, 17 (2005), 34.

¹ Woolley, *Journals*, pg. 215.

Appendix

HARDWARE, CUTLERY, STOVES, LEATHER, SKINS, SHOE FINDINGS, FISH NETS, LINEN AND COTTON TWINE, ROPE, STEEL AND GALVANIZED WIRE CLOTH, POULTRY NETTING, RUBBER HOSE, PAINTS, OILS, COLORS, VARNISHES, BRUSHES AND GENERAL HARDWARE	ABRAHAM FERNANDEZ Abraham Fernandez and Son IMPORTERS AND DEALERS IN General Merchandise 44-50 KING ST. BLY, HUMAN AND SMITH STS. KATSEY BLOCK Honolulu, Hawaii 190	EDWIN S. FERNANDEZ ONLY ADDRESS "ZION", HONOLULU TELEPHONE MAIN 124 P. O. BOX 148
		Honolulu, Hawaii 190

Memo. Record.

Her Maj. Queen Liliuokalani was born on the 2nd day of Sept. 1838 at Honolulu, Island of Oahu one of the Hawaiian Islands. Her mother, C. Kapaemāhā was father of Mrs. Keohokulani Kapaemāhā her mother, she was baptized & confirmed by Elder Abraham Fernandez, at Kamohāno, Waikiki, Oahu, on the 7th day of July 1906 at 6 P.M. before two witnesses Mrs. Kamei Aea & Mrs. Lizzie A. Kapaemā. Both intimate friends of Her Majesty. Liliuokalani was in your father in the hospital. Abraham Fernandez

*Memo stating Abraham Fernandez
 baptized & confirmed
 Queen Liliuokalani
 July 7, 1906 in Oahu*

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1. Baptismal Record of Queen Lili'uokalani's Baptism by Abraham Kaleimahoe Fernandez.

The First Presidency
Church of Jesus Christ
Salt Lake Temple

31 p. 2

Salt Lake City, Utah, June 25th 1904

Elder Abraham Fernandez,
Honolulu, Oahu, H. I.

My Dear Brother Fernandez:-

I have recently returned from visiting the Union State quarterly conference in Oregon, and found your esteemed favor of May 25th with P. O. Order for \$5.00 for Sister Minerva Apuron. It was my wife, Sarah, who sent the slip, and she did not expect any pay for it, she did not say so to me when I sent it for her, so I did not mention it in my letter. However she would be glad to remember your wife in some other way whenever there may be an opportunity.

We were pleased to hear from you, and hope sincerely that you will prosper in your new business venture. I see your firm name is "Abraham Fernandez and Son". May you succeed to your fullest anticipation.

My families are all usually well, and all come with me in sending aloha nui ia Ouhou apan. We hope Sister Fernandez' health is good, and that all the family are well and happy.

We think of you often, and frequently express

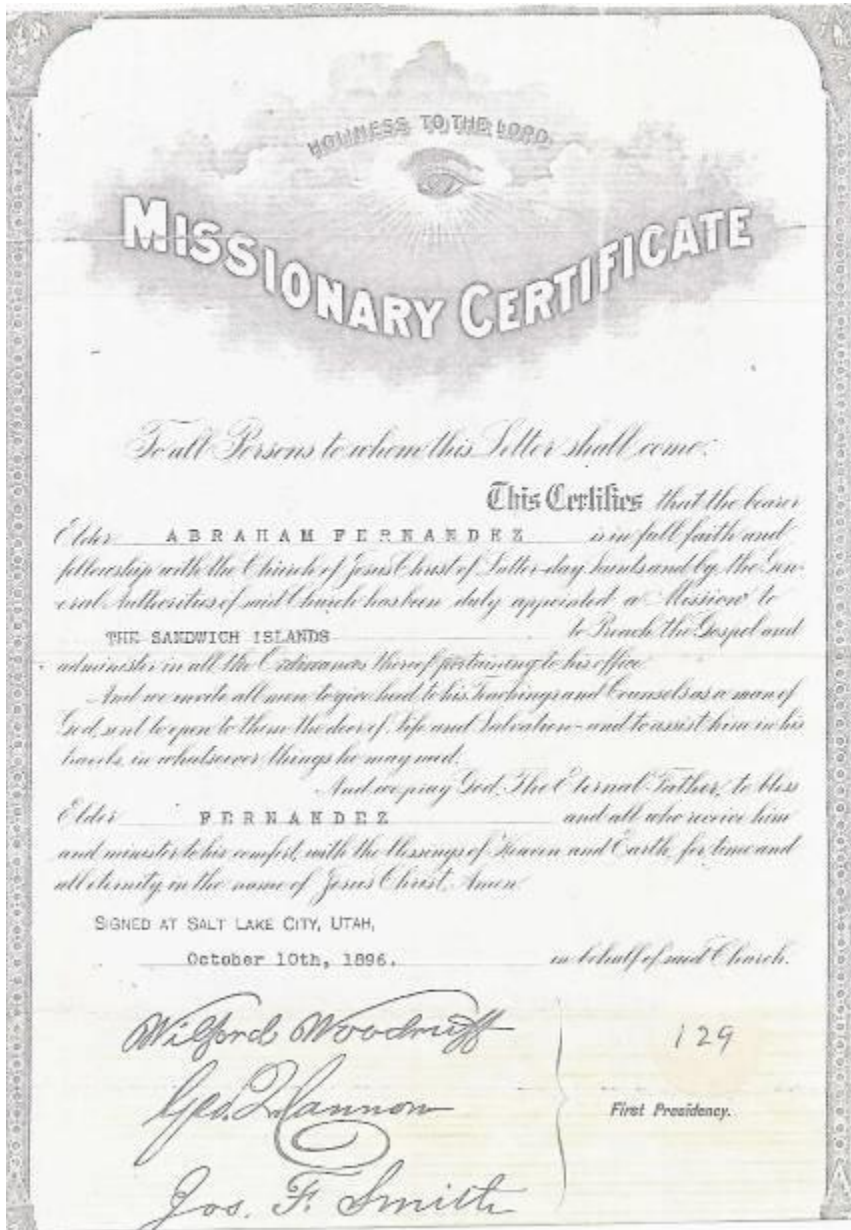
of your visit among us, and as often express our regrets and sorrow for Sister Fernandez' long and serious illness while the family were here. And I have always felt sorry I was not at home when they started on their long journey home. I should have liked very much to have seen them before starting and, if possible, to have rendered them some assistance on their departure, but my duty called me away from home just as they were about to leave. I was very happy when I heard they had all reached their home in safety.

I send with this mail a copy of our last Annual Conference Report which I hope will reach you safely. We would all like to be remembered kindly to Sister Fernandez, Sister Hattie Davis, Adelaide, Madalena, and Minerva, and all the rest of the family.

We have just sustained the great loss, by death of Elder Abraham O. Woodruff, one of the Twelve, and also his wife Helen. They both died of small-pox, contracted in the City of Mexico. Their loss has cast a great gloom and sorrow over the family of Bro. Woodruff, and over the whole people.

We will hold Memorial Services in the Tabernacle next Sunday in their honor. Praying God to bless you all, I am affectionately your brother, Joseph L. Smith

2. Letter from Joseph F. Smith to Abraham Fernandez, June 23, 1904.



3. Missionary Certificate signed by the Prophet Wilford Woodruff and his councilors October 10, 1896. Abraham was on paper as a missionary until he died in 1915.