



**Portrait of Henry Opukaha'ia, First Hawaiian  
Convert to Christianity, c. 1810s**

*From the frontispiece of *Memoirs of Henry Obookiah [sic], a native of Owhyhee, and a member of the Foreign Mission School; who died at Cornwall, Conn. Feb. 17, 1818.**

# Westfield's Hawaiian Missionaries in the Nineteenth Century

ROBERT BROWN AND L. MARA DODGE



**Editor's Introduction:** *On October 23, 1819, a crowd gathered on a Boston wharf to bid farewell to the first Protestant missionaries bound for Hawaii. Among them were seven Massachusetts couples, four of them only recently married. The family, friends, and supporters who gathered that October afternoon knew it was unlikely they would ever see their loved ones again. At the end of their 18,000-mile journey, the missionaries were expected to become permanent residents of Hawaii. If they were successful, they would spend the rest of their lives unimaginably far from home. Their charge was daunting. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions declared: "You are to aim at nothing short of covering those islands with fruitful fields and pleasant dwellings, and schools and churches; of raising up the whole people to an elevated state of Christian civilization."<sup>1</sup> Among these missionaries were several Westfield residents, along with many others over the years who had ties to Westfield. Who were they and what motivated them to voyage halfway around the world, leaving behind all family and friends? What were their lives in Hawaii like and what was their legacy?*

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All these missionaries were familiar with the story of Henry Opukaha'ia, who was born on the island of Hawaii in 1792. When he was ten years old, Opukaha'ia's family was murdered. In 1807, a ship's captain took him aboard and gave him his first English lessons while en route back to New Haven, Connecticut. There the teenager was cared for in a succession of homes and worked summers to help earn his keep. The future Reverend Edwin W. Dwight, a senior at Yale College, met Henry in 1809 when he discovered him sitting on the steps of the college crying and lamenting that no one would teach him. Dwight agreed to help him find tutoring and sent the teenager to live with Dwight's relative, Yale President Timothy Dwight IV, a founder of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in 1810. Dwight Sr. instructed Opukaha'ia in Christian and secular subjects. Opukaha'ia mastered English, Greek, and Latin and created the first dictionary of the Hawaiian language. In 1815, Opukaha'ia, or Obookiah, as his name was also spelled, converted to Christianity during the Second Great Awakening.<sup>2</sup>

He and other Pacific Islanders requested training to spread the Gospel back home. This inspired the founding of the Foreign Mission School in 1816 in Cornwall, Connecticut, administered from Boston by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM). The school had broad support from donors in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New York. During its ten years, approximately 100 students attended: "43 Native Americans, 13 Americans (white), and 20 Hawaiians, and other natives of the Pacific, including 2 Chinese."<sup>3</sup>

At the time, a debate raged over whether "heathens" could comprehend the Bible. Opukaha'ia's intelligence and charisma helped to end that debate. He served as a prize example of how someone who was considered a heathen could be converted. He attracted large audiences when he lectured throughout New England, raising money for the school. His conversion to Christianity inspired many New Englanders to pour money and effort into missionary work in Hawaii. When he died in a typhoid epidemic in 1818, his dream of returning home ended.

However, Edwin Dwight's best-selling account of his life (which bore the unwieldy title *Memoirs of Henry Obookiah, a native of Owhyhee, and a member of the Foreign Mission School; who died at Cornwall, Conn. Feb. 17, 1818*) was sold throughout New England after his untimely death and led directly to the founding of the Hawaiian Mission. Between the years 1819 and 1847, the American Board of Foreign Missions sent twelve ships' companies to the Sandwich (Hawaiian) Islands.<sup>4</sup> On board were 184 officially sponsored laborers for the souls of men. Of these missionaries, 84 were males (72 of

whom were specifically trained for the Mission and ordained just before departure). The majority of the 100 women went as wives and help-mates.

In the Mission's early years, the Islands' reputation as sites of moral depravity as well as the assumption that the realities of distance and disease would isolate the missionaries for years led to the American Board adopting a policy that it would only support married workers. Because only two of the men were married at the time of ordination, the rest had to quickly find wives who were willing to leave home and family for an 18,000-mile voyage into the unknown. It was, in part, this unique requirement of the Hawaiian Mission that prompted Westfield, Massachusetts' nineteenth-century link to the Pacific.

### **SYBIL MOSELEY BINGHAM: WESTFIELD'S FIRST FEMALE MISSIONARY**

In the early nineteenth century, Westfield was still largely a frontier community of 2,500 people. In another twenty years, her isolation would be broken with the advent of the canal and the railroad, but, at the moment, Westfield was like many other small, interior Yankee villages with an agricultural economy. The center of community life was the established Congregational church and the highly respected Westfield Academy next door that attracted young scholars from throughout New England.<sup>5</sup> While legally separate from the church, the majority of the Academy's trustees were local Congregational ministers, and the pastor of the Westfield church was usually the chair of the trustees as well as either the principal, or a member of the faculty, in the school. Orthodox religious instruction was central to the Academy's moral and intellectual climate. Although records are lacking, it is very likely that the story of Opukaha'ia and of the Mission School in nearby Cornwall, Connecticut caught the attention of locals. It certainly caught the attention of Sybil (Moseley) Bingham (1792–1848).

Sybil Moseley was the daughter of one of the town's most prominent families.<sup>6</sup> She was a graduate of the Westfield Academy, where her father had been a trustee. The family belonged, of course, to the Congregational church. Shortly after graduation, Sybil's life took a hard turn; her father died in 1810 and her mother in 1811. At the age of nineteen, she was left to care for four younger brothers and sisters. During the next eight years, she made a precarious living as a teacher, moving from town to town in New York and Massachusetts. The little consolation she found was in a deep Calvinistic piety and an often-expressed desire to dedicate her life to God. At one point,

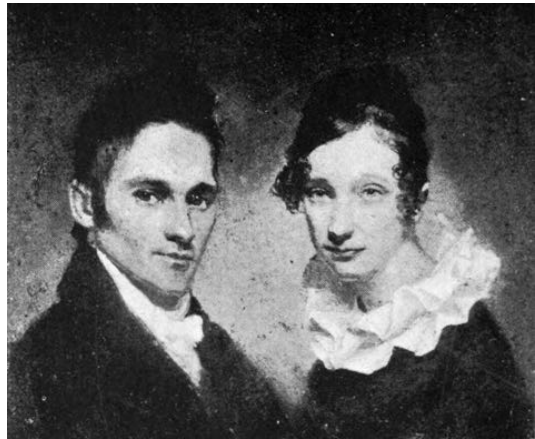
she had agreed to marry a missionary being sent to Asia Minor, but his backers were unwilling to support a wife.

On September 29, 1819, Sybil attended a church meeting in Goshen, Connecticut, where she was introduced to the Reverend Hiram Bingham of the Cornwall Mission School. He was ordained that very day and chosen to lead the first company to Hawaii. They were married two weeks later and sailed just two weeks after that from Boston for the Pacific on October 29, 1819. One-third of the cost of the ship was paid for with the \$800 Sybil had managed to save from her years of teaching.

### **OTHER EARLY MISSIONARY COUPLES: CHAMBERLAIN, THURSTON, GULICK, AND BALDWIN**

On board the *Thaddeus*, the mission's very first ship, were seven other missionary couples, six of whom had similarly met and married within the previous two months.<sup>7</sup> The last and longest-married couple, Daniel (1782–1860) and Jerusha Chamberlain (1787–1877), had five young children with them.<sup>8</sup> Each couple was allotted a 6' x 6' x 5' space below deck for themselves, all their personal possessions, and provisions necessary to keep them for a year. The Chamberlains had to keep four of their five children in the same space. Since none of the Mission families had been to sea before, it was only after weeks at sea when the last of them recovered from seasickness. Four native Hawaiians who had been educated by the Mission Board, along with twenty-three sailors, shared the 85-foot, 200-ton ship. Five months and 18,000 miles later, they reached the Islands to begin their religious vocations.

Four of the newly married women, including Sybil, were pregnant. Some information about this voyage reached Westfield later because Sybil kept up a correspondence for years with Mrs. Elijah Bates, a childhood friend and president of the Westfield "Lady's Association" that did fundraising for the Mission. The whole adventure was portrayed in James Mitchner's novel

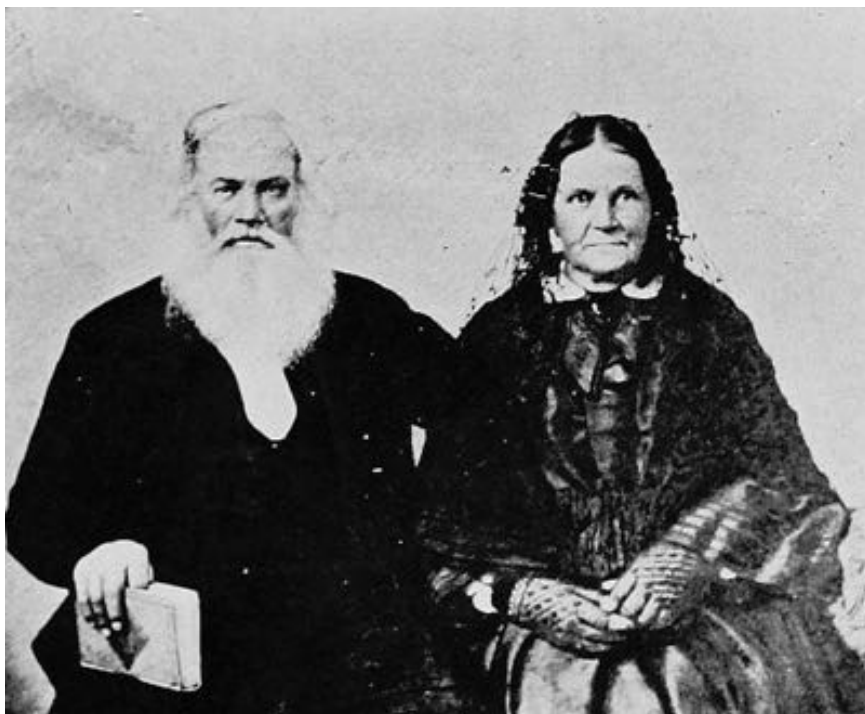


**Hiram and Sybil Moseley Bingham, 1819**

*Hawaii*. In the subsequent movie, Julie Andrews portrayed the story of Sybil Moseley of Westfield.

The Bingham family had seven children, all born in the Hawaiian Islands, and they remained in Honolulu for twenty years until 1841. Sybil wrote in her journal in 1823, "I believe God appoints my work and it is enough for me to see that I do it all with an eye to his glory."<sup>9</sup> She is credited with starting the first missionary school in the Hawaiian Islands. The Bingham family also helped to develop a written Hawaiian alphabet, and some of the first printed materials in Hawaiian were made for use in her classes.<sup>10</sup>

Another couple on the first ship, the Reverend Asa Thurston (1787–1868) and his wife Lucy Goodale Thurston (1795–1876) from central Massachusetts, provide another link to Westfield. Many Mission families chose to send their young children back to the United States to be raised once they reached the age of seven or eight, to keep them from the supposed corrupting influences of Hawaiian culture.<sup>11</sup> When the Thurston's oldest daughter, Mary, reached her teens, she was sent to the Westfield Academy. When she completed her education, she entered the Westfield Normal School, what is today Westfield



Asa Thurston and Lady Goodale Thurston, c. 1866



**Rev. Peter and Fanny Hinckley Gulick, c. 1853**

Courtesy: Hawaiian Mission Houses Historic Site and Archives.

State University, graduating in 1854. She was then hired as the first teacher in the new high school that Westfield opened in 1855.<sup>12</sup>

The Thurstons, unlike most missionary couples, spent most of the rest of their lives in the Islands, over forty years. Lucy compiled her letters and other writings (completed by her daughter and published in 1882 under the title *Life and Times of Mrs. Lucy G. Thurston*) into one of the most vivid accounts of the early Mission days. For example, as treatment for breast cancer, she had a mastectomy in 1855, although anesthesia had not yet been developed. She died in 1876 in Honolulu.

The third company that sailed in 1828 included the Reverend Peter Gulick (1796–1877) and Fanny Hinckley Gulick (1798–1883), who was born in Connecticut but raised in Westfield, where she also attended the Academy. The Gulicks' voyage was supported by the fundraising talents of the ladies of the Westfield Union Society of the Congregational Church, a debt she recognized in one of the first letters she wrote home after landing in Hawaii. At least once in the following years, she sent a gift of wooden Hawaiian goods and other trinkets back to the Academy museum.<sup>13</sup> One



**Charlotte Fowler Baldwin (1805-73)**

of the Gulicks' seven ordained sons ended his career as pastor of a church in Springfield, Massachusetts. Another son, Charles, died soon after landing in New Haven on a trip back from the Pacific and is buried in Westfield.<sup>14</sup>

Charlotte Fowler Baldwin (1805-73), the wife of the Reverend Dwight Baldwin (1798-1886) of the fourth company, was also a graduate of the Westfield Academy. It was her husband, a Harvard doctor, who was the famous fighter of the various epidemics that decimated the Hawaiian population. Like the Thurstons, the Baldwins also lived

out their days in Hawaii. In that same 1831 expedition were the Reverend Reuben Tinker (1799-1854) and his wife, Mary Throop Wood (1809-1895), of Chester. He was a graduate of the Westfield Academy and of Amherst College; his wife was also a student at the Academy for a time. By a strange



**Mary Throop Wood Tinker**



**Rev. Reuben Tinker**



quirk of fate, they died years later at his pastorate in western New York state and are buried in the small town of Westfield, New York.<sup>15</sup>

For many women, youthful idealism was quickly tested by the conditions of life on the Islands. In 1823, Sybil Moseley Bingham wrote in her journal, “My exhausted nature droops. . . . I sometimes grieve that I can no more devote myself to the language & study of my bible.” Family demands and primitive living conditions drained women’s energies and left them little time for missionary work, a situation which many deeply lamented. Full of lively ambition to civilize and Christianize, the reality they found often exhausted them. During her twenty-one year career as a missionary, Sybil, a trained teacher, taught school to the natives when time allowed. However, when she looked back in 1840 on her missionary experience, she expressed disappointment:

My spirit is often oppressed as a day closes, busy and bustling as it may have been, to see so little accomplished. I could never have conceived when thinking of going to the heathen to tell them of a Saviour, of the miscellany of labor that has fallen to my portion.

She felt that some might have been better able to achieve more:

But not a mother of a rising family placed in a post like this . . . . A feeble woman in such circumstances must be content to realize but little of the picture her youthful mind has formed of sitting down quietly day by day, to teach heathen women and children.<sup>16</sup>

### **TRIALS OF MISSION WIVES: CLARISSA ARMSTRONG**

The fifth company, also of 1831, included Alonzo Chapin, M.D. (1805–1876), of West Springfield, Massachusetts, who had attended the Westfield Academy, as well as the Reverend Richard Armstrong (1805–1860) and his wife, Clarissa Chapman (1805–1891). The Armstrongs would maintain a multi-generational and multi-dimensional tie to the Westfield community. Clarissa Chapman was born in Russell and educated at the Westfield Academy.<sup>17</sup> In 1827, she became a faculty member at the school and in 1831 was recruited, like so many other young women, to become a missionary wife. She sailed within six weeks of her wedding day. Richard Armstrong was originally chosen to open a new missionary field in the Marquesas Islands but when that failed, the Armstrongs were sent to Hawaii. There, in 1840,

Richard succeeded Hiram Bingham as the leader of the entire missionary enterprise.

Clarissa's original trip and subsequent life in the Islands was supported by the fundraising exploits of the pupils of the Westfield Academy and the ladies of the Congregational Church. For years, she continued to write to friends in the town (some of the letters were printed in the newspaper).<sup>18</sup> Her private letters, along with journals, letters, and reminiscences of the other Mission wives, paint a vivid portrait of the many challenges they faced. In 1834, Clarissa wrote her husband's sisters that the scenery was beautiful:

But, O, the want of society! Week after week passes and we see none but naked, filthy, wicked heathen with souls as dark as the tabernacles which they inhabit. The darkness of the people seems to destroy the beauty of the scenery around us.<sup>19</sup>

The sense of being in “darkness” and in “heathen lands” permeated many of the women's writings. They often expressed harsh and ethnocentric attitudes towards native Hawaiians. In 1834 Clarissa was delighted to receive a package with new publications from the U.S. She wrote in her journal that it was essential to keep up with the times “or we shall degenerate. There is a greater tendency to it [in] heathen lands than elsewhere—everything around us is in darkness.”<sup>20</sup>

The women's lives were dominated by childbearing, childrearing, and striving to duplicate a typical New England domestic life in a very different environment. Clarissa gave birth to ten children, three of whom died in infancy.



**Mary Chapin**



**Alonzo Chapin**

Historian Patricia Grimshaw offers a compelling picture of Mission wives' experiences of pregnancy and childbirth:

If the women dreaded miscarriages, they also anticipated their actual confinement with some fear and, for those who had narrowly escaped death on a previous occasion, even terror. Childbirth was not uncommonly called “the hour of trial and anguish.” Many women suppressed news of a pregnancy from their mothers back home to spare them months of anxiety. Clarissa Armstrong was annoyed when Richard added news of her pregnancy to such a letter, when she herself had purposely concealed it. Well, Clarissa told her mother, if she survived she would write later with news of the birth; otherwise, her mother would hear of it from others.<sup>21</sup>



**Clarissa Chapman Armstrong (1805–1891)**

Clarissa suffered from chronic fevers, which made pregnancy even more difficult. Many wives suffered from ill health. Some attributed this to their confinement and lack of exercise. Even when wives were ill, they often hesitated to put too many demands on their husbands. Clarissa wrote, "A wife would rather suffer than call upon a husband constantly." However, if the wife was bedridden, husbands often had no choice.<sup>22</sup>

Motherhood was a particular challenge on the Islands. Women had no female relatives to support and assist them. Some were isolated far from other missionaries. In 1834, former Westfield Academy student Mary Tinker wrote that when she first looked at her newborn baby daughter she felt "a gleam of sadness steal over me when I think of her lot, in common with us all, should she live to become a mother."<sup>23</sup>

Shocked by a number of Hawaiian customs, many sought to shield their children from Hawaiian culture. Traditional chants, songs, dancing hula, gambling, and surfing were prohibited. Western dress and cultural norms were imposed. Lucy Thurston took this to the furthest extreme and sought to cut off all communication between her children and the native Hawaiians by restricting them to a separate room and a small yard. She wrote that, "It would break our hearts to see our children rise up and be like the children of Hawaii, and they will be no better if exposed to the same influences."<sup>24</sup>

Although limited to the role of "help-mates," Mission wives were essential to the civilizing mission and to the success of the male missionaries. Clarissa's sharp wit is revealed in another passage:

Mr. Rogers, one of our printers, is going to America, for a wife I suppose, and will then return. You will perceive [sic] that wives are important articles of household furniture here. They cannot easily be sent in boxes so it costs some time and trouble, to obtain them.<sup>25</sup>

However, Clarissa was horrified when she heard that another young American had chosen to marry a native Hawaiian woman in 1836. She wrote to a friend:

O what feelings of sorrow, contempt etc filled my breast. I have done nothing scarcely this P.M. but sorrow, and weep for the folly, of one I watched over as a brother. A member of our family, and we keeping him from temptations, and the[n] without asking even our advice, is going headlong into folly, and I fear

what is worse!! What will his poor mother say, when she hears he is married to a heathen . . .<sup>26</sup>

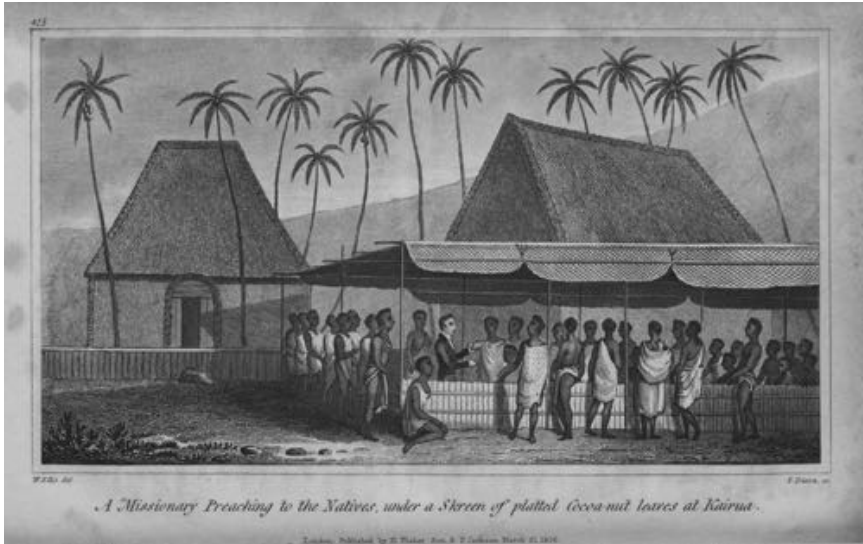
Clarissa Chapman's always-independent nature, which was vividly revealed in her autobiography, put her at the center of religious controversy in the 1840s.<sup>27</sup> The Islanders were going through a period of religious revival without a sufficient number of ordained leaders to direct services. In the absence of her husband, Clarissa began to lead prayer meetings and eventually, to preach. The position of Mission wives had always been ambiguous. They were expected to be model wives and mothers and to "help" their pastor husbands but not assume public religious roles. The orthodox religious community was not yet ready for that. Clarissa's unseemly behavior was suppressed by the male missionaries, and it still rankled her forty years later.

According to Patricia Grimshaw, author of *Paths of Duty: American Missionary Wives in Nineteenth-Century Hawaii*, "it was Clarissa Armstrong who nursed the deepest regret about the women's [limited] lot in the mission experience and she who sustained in later years efforts, frustrated as they were, to engage in work with Hawaiians." After her husband died in 1860, Clarissa again chafed at her restricted role. She was fully aware that the male ministers opposed her teaching. She wrote bitinglly in 1862:

Poor natives! Sins hold them back. Wicked men hold them back. Alas, how many [who] profess to love Christ hold them back... because their prejudices say, women should not lead men to Christ. Better let them stay away, than that a woman should tell [a] poor native how to get a passport to heaven. . . . let women keep silent—they may teach women, but never tell men, how ignorant, hungry or thirsty men may be, never a woman point them to Christ . . .!<sup>28</sup>

During his lifetime, however, her husband Rev. Armstrong had supported her religious activities. In 1880, she wrote:

I knew the Theology was 'let your women keep silence,' yet God has led me on and greatly blessed me in breaking that silence. My husband, like others learned the same Theology, yet never reproached me for what I had done, but encouraged me.<sup>29</sup>



**“A Missionary Preaching to the Natives”**



**Native Hawaiian Missionary Family c. 1878**

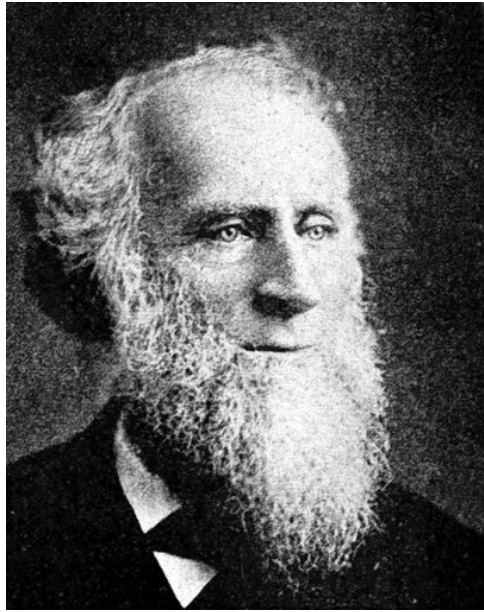
The indigenous population was nearly wiped out in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Native Hawaiians had no resistance to influenza, smallpox, measles, or whooping cough, among other illnesses. Estimates range from a population of 300,000–800,000 in 1778 when British explorer Capt. James Cook arrived. Tragically, the 1890 census listed just over 30,000 native Hawaiians, many of whom had been converted to Christianity.

## CHILDREN OF THE MISSIONARIES: SECOND-GENERATION CONNECTIONS

The Armstrongs' ten children were educated, in part, by others with Westfield connections. These reveal Westfield's strong, "second generation" links to Hawaii.<sup>30</sup> For example, daughter Caroline Porter Armstrong (1832–1905) married the Rev. Edward G. Beckwith (1826–1909), originally from Great Barrington. Valedictorian of Williams College, he had been the assistant principal at the Westfield Normal School (1850–51) and a member of the Westfield Congregational Church. Caroline and Edward met in 1851 right before he sailed to Hawaii.

Caroline had grown up in Hawaii but was sent to Westfield at the age of twelve for education. Her father's journal recorded his "deep personal grief" over the decision to send off his oldest child, but there was no appropriate school for her on the Island.<sup>31</sup> Caroline would graduate from Mt. Holyoke College (as did many other Mission daughters over the years).<sup>32</sup> Her father had sent word to the Westfield Normal School principal, Rev. Emerson Davis, that he was in need of a teacher for the Royal School, which educated the children of Hawaiian nobility.<sup>33</sup> Edward, then an instructor at the Normal School, volunteered. In 1852, Caroline returned to Hawaii and they married the next year. Edward later became the first president of Oahu College in Honolulu and served 1854–59.<sup>34</sup>

Edward's older brother, Morris B. Beckwith (1825–87), married Westfield native Sarah Moseley (1831–70) after he graduated from the Westfield Normal School in 1848. Sarah attended the Normal School in 1856. Morris taught at the Royal School for twenty years. Both died in Honolulu.<sup>35</sup> Edward's younger brother, George, also went to Hawaii and taught at the Royal School. He later recruited Westfield resident Lizzie Fowler to join the faculty.<sup>36</sup> Nicknamed Lucy,



**Rev. Edward G. Beckwith (1826–1909)**

she was the Lizzie S. Fowler who attended the Westfield Normal School in 1858 and then reported that she had “taught in the Hawaiian Islands for three years.”<sup>37</sup> Little more is known of Sarah Moseley Beckwith or Lizzie Fowler’s experiences in Hawaii.

The Armstrongs’ son, Samuel Chapman Armstrong (1839–93), gained a wider fame and a peripheral Westfield connection when he served as the commander of an African American regiment in the Civil War and subsequently founded Hampton Institute in Virginia for ex-slaves. During the second half of the nineteenth century, he sent a number of his African American pupils, including Samuel Courtney, to the Westfield Normal School (Courtney Hall dormitory is named after him). Both daughter Caroline and son Samuel had, as children, been sent back to Westfield to live with their grandparents while they went to school at the Academy.<sup>38</sup> Another missionary son, Samuel Thomas Alexander (1836–1904), also attended the Westfield Normal School. He later became one of the leading sugar plantation barons and industrialists in Hawaii.

From the beginning of their sojourn to Hawaii, both male and female missionaries had expressed deep concern about the lack of proper educational institutions for their children and how this might impact their futures. Hiram Bingham wrote in 1841 that “children over eight or ten years of age . . . ought to be sent or carried to the United States . . . in order that they might escape the dangers of a heathen country.” However, he was also concerned that they be provided the opportunity to “inherit a portion of the civil, religious, and literary privileges which their ancestors had bequeathed them, and at the same time allow the parents more time and strength for missionary work.”<sup>39</sup>

## CONCLUSION

From time to time, the Westfield newspapers printed short updates about Hawaii and the Mission news.<sup>40</sup> Sometimes they included short quotes from letters received from the Islands. In the 1820s and 1830s, the town raised money for the Missions, and boxes of clothing were sent to the Pacific. When Hiram and Sybil (Moseley) Bingham returned from the Islands in 1841, they were welcomed in Westfield, and the annual meeting of the General Association of Congregational Churches was held in Westfield with both Bingham and the Reverend Tinker as featured speakers. The Bingham eventually moved to Easthampton where Sybil’s relative, Samuel Williston, provided a home for them and schooling for their youngest children in his academy. Sybil died there in 1848 from tuberculosis, which she had contracted in the Islands.<sup>41</sup>



Thus, in the first half of the nineteenth century, Westfield was able to break from its rural isolation through vicarious participation in the adventure of the Hawaiian Missions. Of the 184 who sailed to the Pacific, at least sixty came from within fifty miles of Westfield. Four women—including Sybil Moseley Bingham and Clarissa Chapman Armstrong, wives of Mission leaders Hiram Bingham and Richard Armstrong—were from Westfield and left important records of their experiences. At least two other missionary wives, Mary Ann (Tenney) Chapin and Mary Wood Tinker, were educated at the Westfield Academy. Rev. Edward G. Beckwith, his brothers George and Morris, along with Rev. Samuel C. Damon, had Westfield Normal School connections, while Westfield residents Lizzie ("Lucy") Fowler and Sarah Moseley Beckwith also went to Hawaii. There were probably many more connections than these few documented in the limited records of the era, particularly among the children of the second and third generations who continued an emotional, if not physical, association with Hawaii.<sup>42</sup>

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## EDITOR'S AFTERWORD

The role of Protestant Christian missionaries in Hawaii is controversial, and many scholars and historians have written about this topic. Although many prominent white Hawaiian families trace their lineage back to these pioneers and regard them as benign civilizers, others perceive them as conquerors, the first foot soldiers of the subjugation of an indigenous people.

The missionaries brought a staunch New England Protestantism to the Islands and also strove to instill market values. They developed the written form of Hawaiian, translated the Bible, and sought to change indigenous Hawaiian society to what they viewed as a more acceptable Christian way of life. Many missionaries were highly critical of and discouraged traditional Hawaiian cultural practices. Despite this, missionary leaders



### Sybil's Gravestone, 1848

"Missionary to Sandwich Islands,  
1820–40"  
New Haven Cemetery.

became friends with the ruling families of Hawaii, some of whom began to convert to Christianity in the 1820s and 1830s. One of the most powerful converts, Queen Kaahumanu, embraced Christianity in 1824.

The missionaries' impact continued through their descendants, who often became the political, business, and cultural elites of Hawaii, including major landholders and sugar plantation owners. By the late 1800s, 80% or more of private Hawaiian land was owned by Americans. An old Hawaiian adage declared that, "The missionaries came to do good and stayed to do well."<sup>43</sup>

For example, the controversial Sanford B. Dole, who spearheaded the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy in 1893, was the son of missionaries and, like many, had been educated in Massachusetts, at Williams College. Along with a group of American sugar planters, Dole overthrew Queen Liliuokalani, the Hawaiian monarch, and established a new provincial government with himself as president. The coup occurred with the foreknowledge of the U.S. minister to Hawaii. Dole served as first president of the Republic of Hawaii (1894–1900) and first governor after it was annexed by the United States. Thus, the missionaries and their descendants left a contested legacy that remains widely debated by historians today. It would be interesting to research further the roles played by Westfield's missionaries and their descendants in Hawaiian history.

-L. Mara Dodge

HJM

## Notes

1. *Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* (1832), 162. Quote found at the Mass Humanities website, [www.massmoments.org](http://www.massmoments.org).
2. Edwin Dwight, *Memoirs of Henry Obookiah, a native of Owhyhee, and a member of the Foreign Mission School; who died at Cornwall, Conn. Feb. 17, 1818, aged 26 years* (New Haven: N. Whiting Publisher, 1818).
3. Sydney K. Mitchell, *Phases of the History of Cornwall* (Torrington, CT: Cornwall Historical Society 1981), 87.
4. *Missionary Album: Portraits and Biographical Sketches of the American Protestant Missionaries to the Hawaiian Islands* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Mission Children's Society, 1969).
5. See Leon Monroe Orcutt, "The Influence of the Academy in Western Massachusetts," (MA thesis: University of Massachusetts Amherst, 1934), 109–20.

6. Details of Sybil Moseley Bingham's life come from the records of the town of Westfield, the Academy, and her journal (1811–47) and letters located in the Bingham Family Papers (located at Yale University Library's Manuscripts and Archives department) and in Honolulu at the Hawaiian Children's Society.
7. A popular account of the voyage and of the first company can be found in Albertine Loomis, *Grapes of Canaan* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1951). A modern academic account is in Mary Zweip, *Pilgrim Path: The First Company of Women Missionaries to Hawaii* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).
8. A 1935 transcript of Daniel Chamberlain's journal is held at the Massachusetts Historical Society. Author James Michener used this journal as part of his research for his 1954 blockbuster book, *Hawaii*. Typed transcripts of Chamberlain's 1819–23 letters can be read online.
9. Dana Robert, "Evangelist or Homemaker? Mission Strategies of Early Nineteenth-Century Missionary Wives in Burma and Hawaii," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 17, no. 1 (1993): 6.
10. Barbara Bennett Peterson, "Sybil Moseley Bingham," in the online *American National Biography*.
11. The issues faced by the Mission families confronting Hawaiian culture, especially the impact on children, are discussed in Patricia Grimshaw, *Paths of Duty: American Missionary Wives in Nineteenth-Century Hawaii* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989) and Jennifer Thigpen, *Island Queens and Mission Wives: How Gender and Empire Remade Hawaii's Pacific World* (Charlotte, NC: UNC Press, 2014). For more on their children, see Joy Schulz, *Hawaiian by Birth: Missionary Children, Bicultural Identity, and U.S. Colonialism in the Pacific* (University of Nebraska Press, 2017).
12. Mary Thurston (1831–1866) and her Westfield life can be tracked in the records of the Academy, the Westfield High School (held in the Westfield Athenaeum), and the Westfield Normal school (held in the Patterson Archives of Westfield University).
13. *Hampden Register*, "Ladies Union Society," June 18, 1828; *Westfield Register*, "Letter from Mrs. Gulick," Dec. 17, 1828; *Westfield Journal*, "Gulick sends Wooden Gods," Aug. 19, 1834.
14. For more, see Clifford Putney, *Missionaries in Hawai'i: The Lives of Peter and Fanny Gulick, 1797–1883* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012).
15. These details, as in the case of all the missionaries, can be found in the *Missionary Album*.
16. Sybil Moseley Bingham letter published in Mrs. Titus Croan, "A Brief Sketch of the Missionary Life of Mrs. Sybil Moseley Bingham" (1895) quoted in Robert, "Evangelist or Homemaker?," 6–7.
17. Records of the Academy, held at the Westfield Athenaeum.
18. On at least one occasion, she sent the Academy museum a box of Hawaiian feathered objects, bark cloth, and shell and feather "money" along with other souvenirs of the Pacific. *Westfield Journal*, "Academy Donation," Oct. 22, 1833; *Westfield Journal*, "Armstrongs in Marquesas," March 4, 1834; *Westfield Journal*,

“Armstrong Letter,” March 3, 1835; *Democratic Herald*, “Letter from Clarissa,” May 12, 1835.

19. C. Armstrong to Richard Armstrong’s sisters, Mary and Jane, Oct. 25, 1834, quoted in Grimshaw, *Paths of Duty: American Missionary Wives*, 57–58.

20. C. Armstrong journal entry June 24, 1834, quoted in Grimshaw, 70.

21. C. Armstrong journal entry April 31, 1832, quoted in Grimshaw, 95.

22. C. Armstrong journal entry Sep. 12, 1834, quoted in Grimshaw, 112.

23. Mary Tinker to F. Gulick, Nov. 1834, quoted in Grimshaw, 137.

24. Lucy Thurston to W. and A. Goodall, Oct. 24, 1834, quoted in Grimshaw, 133.

25. C. Armstrong to R. Chapman, April 1836, quoted in Grimshaw, 88.

26. C. Armstrong, quoted in Susanna Moore, *Paradise of the Pacific: Approaching Hawaii* (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 195.

27. Clarissa Armstrong, *Reminiscences of a Missionary Chair* (San Francisco, CA: Murdock, 1886).

28. C. Armstrong to L. Lyons, April 26, 1862, quoted in Grimshaw, 187.

29. C. Armstrong to L. Lyons, July 8, 1880, quoted in Grimshaw, 126.

30. Occasional religious instruction for the missionary children came from Rev. Samuel C. Damon, who had been a faculty member at the Normal School when it was located in Barre, Massachusetts in 1840. Damon was in Hawaii from 1842 to his death in 1885. He is thought to be the model for Herman Melville’s Reverend Maple.

31. Quoted in Armstrong, *Hawaii*, 27.

32. According to Schulz, “For mission daughters, the Mecca of female institutions was Mount Holyoke Female Seminary” established in 1837; op. cit., pp. 196–204.

33. Rev. Emerson Davis (1798–1866) was an instructor and then principal at the Westfield Academy, 1822–36. He worked hard to bring the Normal School from Barre, where the citizens were not supportive, to Westfield. He became the first principal of the Westfield Normal School from 1844–46. Rev. Davis was a strong supporter of the Hawaii missions from as early as 1824 when he was elected president of the “Gentlemen’s Association” (*The Missionary Herald for 1824*, 398). In 1826, he became pastor of Westfield’s Congregational Church and served until his death in 1868. From 1861–68 he served as president of Williams College. He published several books, essays and sermons, and left five unpublished manuscript volumes about Congregational clergymen.

34. More on Beckwith’s life can be found in his funeral memorial, “Edward Griffin Beckwith,” 23–30 (available online). His educational philosophy was clearly laid out in his lengthy inaugural address, “Inauguration Edward G. Beckwith President of the Oahu College, Honolulu, Sept. 25, 1854” (Honolulu: Mission Press, 1854). Many Amherst College alumni taught at Oahu after the Civil War. Edward and Caroline were married for over fifty years, despite Caroline’s ongoing poor health.

35. *General Catalogue of the State Normal School of Westfield, 1839–1889*, Alumni Reports, 15. In some sources Morris is spelled Maurice, including on his gravestone.

36. Some details on these Westfield people and their connection to the Hawaiian schools can be found in Mary Armstrong et al. *America, Richard Armstrong, Hawaii*

(Hampton, VA: Normal School Press, 1887). Note that this was a collection of reminiscences compiled by the Armstrongs' children and may contain inaccuracies. It also includes many lengthy excerpts from Armstrong's letters and journals.

37. *General Catalogue of the State Normal School of Westfield, 1839–1889*, Alumni Reports, 54. The *Westfield News Advertiser* noted that “Mrs. Beckwith and family and Miss Fowler arrived from Honolulu” on April 20, 1864.

38. An early, uncritical biography of Armstrong is Edith Talbot, *Samuel Chapman Armstrong* (New York: Doubleday, 1904).

39. Hiram Bingham, Hawaiian Islands Mission, correspondence, June 5, 1841, quoted in Schulz, 24.

40. The first report was in *Hampton Register*, “News from Hawaii,” Sept. 20, 1826. The last was in the *Westfield News Advertiser*, “Mrs. Beckwith and family and Miss Fowler arrived from Honolulu,” April 20, 1864.

41. Hiram Bingham, *A Residence of Twenty-One Years in the Sandwich Islands* (Vermont: C. H. Tuttle, 1981 reprint).

42. In 1999, in recognition of these historic ties, the then Governor of Hawaii proclaimed a Westfield Day.

43. First popularized and quoted in James A. Michener, *Hawaii*.



### Westfield Academy

This photograph (date unknown) shows the old Westfield Academy building. It is at the site of what is now a parking lot next to the fire station on Broad Street.

### THE WESTFIELD ACADEMY (1800–67)

Many of the missionaries and their children profiled in this article attended the Westfield Academy (opposite page), a private, tuition-charging school serving grades 1–12. It was only the seventh such institution to be established in Massachusetts. Its charter was applied for in 1793 and it opened its doors in 1800. From the beginning it was a large institution, serving 187 students during its first year, drawing students from throughout New England and New York and open to both male and female students. Its yearly enrollment ranged from 128 to 432 at its height. In 1833, 186 male and 255 female students were enrolled, with eight full-time teachers and four student assistants on staff. Of the students, 48 boys and 82 girls were from Westfield. The rest came from other towns in Massachusetts and Connecticut, with a handful from other New England and Mid-Atlantic states.

The Academy provided Westfield residents with a unique educational opportunity beyond what was available in most Massachusetts towns in the early 1800s. Its presence fueled the town's economic growth and contributed to its industrial development. It also had a major impact on young women's education, since most elite, private "Latin Schools" (high schools) did not admit females. Moreover, while Latin schools focused on classical and college preparatory studies, the Westfield Academy was designed to offer a broad, modern, "practical" education that included subjects such as math, science, and bookkeeping.

The presence of the Westfield Academy also spurred the town to establish a public, town-supported high school at a relatively early date in 1855. In 1858 the Academy built a new building (shown left) but in 1865 the school closed due to declining enrollment, and the trustees sold the building to Westfield for the Westfield High School in 1867. Meanwhile, the establishment of the state Normal School (today's Westfield State University) in 1844 further contributed to Westfield's place as an educational center.

In 1867 the academy's trustees had hoped to use the money from the sale to rebuild the Westfield Academy in another area of town, to no avail. Instead, the trustees mandated that the money be used to create a Westfield Academy Fund and decreed that the interest be used for educational instruction. Until the 1930s funds were donated to the public high school and supported teacher salaries. This charitable fund has continued to operate. In accordance with the intent of the original trustees, these funds are required to be used to benefit Westfield students.

Leon Monroe Orcutt wrote in 1934 that it was "doubtful" whether the town of Westfield "would have encouraged the building of a high school when it did had it not been for the influence which the old Academy created. [Its]

trustees . . . were all influential men with broad minded views . . . Many of its teachers later became nationally known as men [and women] of wisdom . . . The institution became reputable for science and virtue and afforded an opportunity for acquiring every branch of learning which was useful to the individual and beneficial to the community.” From Leon Monroe Orcutt, *The Influence of the Academy in Western Massachusetts*, (M.A. thesis: University of Massachusetts Amherst, 1934), 120. The Westfield Academy’s records and annual catalogs of curriculum and students are housed in the archives of the Westfield Athenaeum.

The 1850 advertisement reproduced below advertises winter session tuition for \$4.50 for the “common English branches” and \$5.50 for “languages and the higher English branches.” Board was available in “good families” for \$2.00 a week and included “room, washing, and wood.” Principal W. C. Goldthwait promised that, “The village in which the school is located is one of the pleasantest of New England. It is easy access by railroad. It is the design of the teachers to secure a thorough progress and all the branches pursued. We believe that no one will remain here even for one term . . . without securing decided and lasting benefit. Great care is also promised that, in securing intellectual advantage, moral instruction may not be neglected. So far as the Teachers . . . can affect it, the pupils will be brought under a decidedly favorable influence in this respect.”

--L. Mara Dodge

**Westfield Academy.**

**T**HE Winter Session of this Academy will commence on Wednesday, December 11th, and continue 15 weeks. The tuition is, for the common English branches, \$4.50; for Languages and the higher English studies, \$5.50. Board in good families is usually obtained at \$2.00 a week; this is understood to include room, washing, wood, &c. The village, in which the school is located, is one of the pleasantest of New England. It is easy of access by railroad. It is the design of the Teachers to secure thorough progress in all the branches pursued. We believe that no one will remain here even for one term, with a faithful attention to duty, without securing decided and lasting benefit. Great care is also promised that, in securing intellectual advantage, moral instruction may not be neglected. So far as the Teachers and the friends of the school can effect it, the pupils will be brought under a decidedly favorable influence in this respect. W. C. GOLDTHWAIT, Principal.

Westfield, Mass., Nov. 19. 3w18

Source: *The Pittsfield Sun*, Nov. 21, 1850.

**FORTHCOMING BOOK:****A Peek into Westfield's Past: 1669–2019**

This article on Westfield's Hawaiian missionaries is part of an edited collection that will be published in 2022 and is tentatively titled *A Peek into Westfield's Past: 1669–2019*. In 2019 in commemoration of the 350th anniversary of the city's founding, the editor of the *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* began soliciting chapters for an edited volume. Although this has been a slower process than originally anticipated (due, in part, to the COVID-19 pandemic), we now anticipate publication in late spring 2022. The edited volume is expected to be 220 pages.

Chapters will cover the following topics: People of Westfield (immigrant/ethnic groups); Puritan Ministers Revisited; Slavery in Westfield; Westfield in the Civil War; Hawaiian Missionaries; the Interstate Canal; the 1878 Flood; Colonel Alfred Pope and Columbia Bicycles; the Payton Family and African American History; Industry and Economy, 1800–2000; Mayor Alice Burke and City Politics, 1938–70; Stanley Park; Westfield Normal School and Westfield State University; Presidential Voting Patterns; Recent Refugees and Immigrants; and more.

Two chapters have already been published in recent issues of *HJM*:

Robert Brown, "The Payton Family of Westfield: An African American Success Story, 1845–1954," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 48, no.1, (Winter 2020): 69–125.

Joseph Carvalho III, "Slavery in Westfield: The Documentary Record, 1713–1790, 1845–1954," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 47, No. 2 (Summer 2019): 74–97.