

## The Lanai Colony: A Hawaiian Extension of the Mormon Colonial Idea

R. Lanier Britsch

### INTRODUCTION

In August 1854, Elder Ephraim Green (1807–1874), a Latter-day Saint missionary to Hawaii, moved to Palawai Basin on Lanai with the intention of establishing a new settlement. He was an experienced pioneer, a veteran of the Mormon exodus from the States, a participant in the long march of the Mormon Battalion, and a witness of the original discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill in California. To him there did not seem to be much difference between building a city in Utah and doing the same thing on Lanai. The following quotations reflect the initial steps taken by Green and his colleagues in the process of colonizing in Hawaii:

*Sunday, August 27, 1854.* "This morning we attended meeting. . . . There was a large assembly of people assembled. Brother Hammond preached to them on the principle of gathering together in order to gain instructions that they could not gain elsewhere."

*Tuesday, August 29, 1854.* "This morning we started for the valley on the top of the mountain where we intend to make our settlement. This valley is nearly two miles from the sea all the way up hill to it. When you get to the top you descend down another small descent into the valley. This valley is three miles across, of beautiful land washed from the mountain above."

*Thursday, August 31, 1854.* "This morning Brother [Benjamin F.] Johnson and myself took a walk before breakfast, nearly a mile when I came to a spot of ground and stopped all of a sudden. I told him that this was the spot where I intended to build my house. Brother Johnson

---

*R. Lanier Britsch is Associate Professor of History at Brigham Young University. This article is part of a larger work on the history of the LDS in Asia and the Pacific.*

then looked over the valley and said it was the spot. We then returned to the house and reported [our] progress. After breakfast Brothers [Thomas] Karren and [Francis A.] Hammond went with us to the spot. They all agreed with our selection for a location.”

*Monday, September 4, 1854.* “This morning Brother Hammond and myself appointed a meeting. I then appointed two Captains to take charge in my absence. The first is James Palio over the Wailuku [Maui] pioneers; the second Kaolanui over the Kula [Maui] pioneers. Then the men that belong on this Island wished to be counted as pioneers also and give a portion of their time for the same purpose and to assist in building houses for those that would gather this fall. We then appointed one Captain more. This swelled the number to 30 pioneers. Then Bro. Hammond made a dedication prayer to dedicate our selves and all that we do to the Lord. He and Bro. Baker then left for Lahaina and I took the pioneers and went to work. . . .”

*Tuesday, October 3, 1854.* This morning . . . I took my cumpas and commenced to lay out a town. I commenced at the little town at the foot of the mountain and laid out one street running south to the sea three miles to a fine little harbor where we land our boats. . . . I then layed out three more streets turning the town into blocks four acres each with the streets four rods wide. This is a beautiful location for a town.”<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

### *The Opening of the LDS Sandwich Islands Mission*

In September 1850, Elder Charles C. Rich, one of the Church’s Twelve Apostles (the leading councils of the Church are the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles), visited a group of Mormon gold miners who were working on the American River near Sacramento, California. They were from Utah and were working to pay off debts of some elderly residents of Central Utah.<sup>2</sup> Rich suggested to them that it would be well for them to spend the winter, when mining had to stop, on missions to the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) because expenses were smaller in Honolulu than they were in the gold fields of California.

The next day eight miners were set apart (ordained) to fill missions to Hawaii. In course of time two other elders (the term is used to specify a holder of the higher or Melchizedek priesthood of the Church) were added to their ranks, and the whole group sailed for the islands. They arrived on December 12, 1850, the first group of Latter-day Saints missionaries to set foot on that land.

The elders were soon assigned to different islands, and the LDS mission to Hawaii was underway. There were many difficulties to over-

come, but the missionaries who stayed until church leaders released them and called them home, were ultimately successful in converting a fairly large following. Most of these early missionaries remained in the islands for three or four years.

These missionaries came armed with the same religious beliefs that had motivated and guided their colleagues in other parts of the world. Since the 1830's church doctrine had required the saints (members of the church) everywhere to "flee from Babylon" (the sinful world) and come to "Zion," a place where the "pure in heart," i.e. the Latter-day Saints, could dwell in peace. The missionaries who left the Utah center of Mormonism to teach the gospel in Hawaii carried these beliefs and the idea of a separate gathering place with them.

The principle of gathering was developed by the Mormons in New York, Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois, where they expected to dwell together in righteousness and prepare for the Millennium. The concept of gathering was eventually included in the Church's Articles of Faith: "We believe in the literal gathering of Israel . . . [to] this (the American) continent." As Leonard Arrington writes, "The promulgation of this doctrine led to the development in the 1830's of a large and highly effective missionary system, an overseas emigration service, and the establishment of a series of 'Zions' or gathering places."<sup>3</sup> The mission to Hawaii was part of this expanding system.

#### *The Decision to Gather on Lanai*

When the Hawaiian membership grew to 3008, and the antagonism of the government, of Protestant and Catholic missionaries, and of others became strong against the church in Hawaii, the decision was made by the missionaries to find a temporary gathering place there. Plans to take the Hawaiian saints to Utah were not seriously considered because local laws forbade Hawaiian subjects from leaving the kingdom. In fact President Brigham Young suggested this action before it was presented at the mission conference in October 1853. It should be mentioned that proposals placed before LDS conferences where all members are invited to attend seldom receive many negative votes. A committee of elders was then appointed by the mission president to search for a suitable location or locations. They were hoping to find a place that was somewhat removed from the larger centers, one where they could develop strong saints without outside harrassment.

About two weeks after conference, on October 19, 1853, the committee visited the little island of Lanai. They hoped it would be suitable for gathering the Hawaiian Saints. Benjamin F. Johnson (1818-1904), one of the missionaries, described the excursion:

The following morning . . . we started to explore this island, which is nearly circular in shape, and about 20 miles in diameter, and has been upheaved, a melted, dripping mass of rock. . . . In ascending this island mountain about one mile was rugged and rocky, but another mile of smooth and beautiful grasslands brought us to a summit or rim of a basin or valley, which as a concave occupied its whole top; and as we gazed upon it we were charmed with its beauty. Never had we seen a valley of such symmetry and beauty, and as we proceeded, we found the soil very rich, the only question of importance being the needed supply of water to sustain the population through the dry season. . . .

We were told of springs over a high ridge. . . . At the bottom we found a number of small basins dry in the clay banks, filled by the seeping waters. . . .

Exploring the interior portion of the valley we found beautiful fields of sweet potatoes, with melon vines and beans that had grown year after year. . . .

We could not see how to procure water for a settlement as to construct tanks would be expensive and take time. . . .<sup>4</sup>

When the committee members arrived back at Lahaina, Maui, they held a meeting to consider their findings and impressions about Lanai. Most of the group liked the site but felt that a hasty decision should not be made.<sup>5</sup>

Later, after considering sites on Molokai and Kauai, the committee members again turned their attention to Lanai. Possible terms for a lease of some land on Lanai were discussed in February 1854. Elder Francis A. Hammond (1822–1900) met with the owner of the land, Chief Haalelea, in Honolulu, and the Chief made the following offer: “He said he would give us the privilege of going onto his land there for the space of four years and try what we could do, without any charge, and after that if we wanted it longer we should then pay something for it.”<sup>6</sup> No action was taken, however, on the chief’s offer.

In late May or early June, Phillip B. Lewis (1804–1879), president of the mission,<sup>7</sup> received a letter from President Young in which he discussed the concept of “temporary or subsidiary gathering places” and asked the saints in Hawaii to find a suitable location and proceed to settle it.<sup>8</sup>

With this prodding from Brigham Young, the committee decided to use the Palawai Basin, Lanai, as their local Zion. In his next letter to Salt Lake City, Lewis informed President Young of the plan to move on to the Island of Lanai. He described the Palawai Basin or valley, as they often referred to it, in this way: “This valley is supposed to be of sufficient altitude to admit the growth of wheat, corn, sweet potatoes; with many of the tropical fruits, and we hope that it will prove sufficiently moist to admit of the cultivation of the coffee and grape.”<sup>9</sup> He also mentioned that there was serious concern about the availability of water, but that the missionaries were planning to construct large reservoirs to sustain the settlement through the dry season. Lewis felt that this valley

had been preserved for their special use as a place where the “oppressed and dispised” could be exiled to a haven of peace.

Ephraim Green was appointed to superintend the farming and lay out the village. Elder Hammond and Elder Johnson were to help select the best site. Hammond, who was stationed at Lahaina, Maui, fifteen miles away, was then to assist in carrying out whatever measures were necessary to make the new community a success.<sup>10</sup>

According to the final agreement with Haalelea, Lanai was to be used on an experimental basis for four or five years (sources vary on the number of years, but Haalelea finally allowed five years’ use without rent) after which a small rent that amounted to \$175 a year would be charged.

### *Planting and Settling*

When Green, Hammond and Johnson arrived on Lanai on August 28, 1854, they were greeted by twenty-one Hawaiian “pioneers” who had moved there to take part in the gathering, and by fifty saints who were already permanent residents of the island. Where and when the latter group were converted is not clear. (The missionaries reported the total population of the island to be around six hundred, but this number may have been high.) Green and his colleagues usually referred to the Hawaiian settlers as pioneers, in the same tradition as the pioneers who settled the mountain west at the same time. After exploring the Valley of Palawai for two days, Green and Johnson found a satisfactory place for the settlement, and when they took the other brethren there, “all with one voice said, ‘This is the place,’ and joy seemed to fill all.”<sup>11</sup> Elder Johnson then suggested that it should be called the Valley of Ephraim (a name that President Lewis had suggested to Brigham Young a few weeks before), and that the city be called Joseph. All agreed. They knelt together, and Johnson, who was first counselor in the mission presidency, prayed and dedicated the land and people to the Lord.<sup>12</sup>

The pioneers, new settlers, to Lanai came primarily from the Kula and Wailuku areas of Maui. They had been called on missions by Elder Hammond to settle this new and “barren” land on August 17, 1854, and soon thereafter. Hammond told the saints at Kula that they should “commence farming there as pioneers for the Church—building houses, digging wells, making roads, &c. . . .” They were “to get ready in the course of a few days, with all the different seeds they can obtain suited for planting. . . .”<sup>13</sup>

At Kula, Hammond had recruited eleven men with one plow, two yoke of oxen, and one cart, for the “Lanai experiment,” and he did just about as well at Wailuku. Time proved that these two areas were the strongest in the mission; at least the members there were most willing

to move to Lanai. Elsewhere it was not easy to convince the saints to move to Lanai. The recruitment process continued throughout the islands, but generally with slow progress.

About a week after they arrived, Elder Green divided the pioneers into groups of ten with captains at the head of each group. This followed the pattern established by Brigham Young when the Mormons first crossed the Great Plains to the Salt Lake Valley in Utah. Because nine or ten of the Lanai residents wanted to be considered pioneers, they were also grouped together, making a total of three captains and groups. When this was done, Elder Hammond offered another prayer to dedicate them and all they did to the Lord. They then commenced the work of clearing land to plant their crops.

They spent the following day, September 5, clearing land for corn and planting one acre of melons and a few Irish potatoes. The next day Green started digging a well. In these ways the work of creating a settlement was begun.

The work was hard, and the ground did not yield its fruits without a struggle. The first day of plowing took place on October 16. Four head of oxen were brought over in a scow, a flat bottomed boat. Many observers at Lahaina jeered at the project of moving the animals and said it would never work, but Hammond tied the feet of the animals and made the trip anyway. It was hard on the beasts, but they survived to work on the new farm.

Conditions on Lanai were difficult because there was so little food available and water had to be obtained from a spring located more than a mile from the new settlement. Family and friends had to provide food for the pioneers by transporting it by canoe or boat from Maui. It was an almost all-male community for the first eight months or so. Then families came after a good crop had been raised to sustain them.

Over the next year the pioneers planted an amazing variety of seeds, slips, and starts. The list included wheat, oats, barley, grapes, sweet potatoes and Irish potatoes, beans of several kinds, peas, squash, pumpkins, bananas, corn, melons, peaches, plums, quinces, pears, tomatoes, cabbage, and "many kinds of garden seed."<sup>14</sup> The saints carefully planned the process of planting. They ordered seeds and starts from California, Oregon, Maine, New York and Massachusetts. They tested new varieties and did experimental planting at different times of the year to find the best growing seasons for various crops. Some of the seeds died in the ground, and some plants were destroyed by worms. The dry weather heavily damaged some acreage, and heavy rains during January, February, March, and April 1855 caused problems and ruined some crops. But during the first year there was a measure of success, and

the experiment was deemed to be worth the effort. The wheat had produced well, as had the corn. Over fifty acres of crops were planted during the first year.

Settling this community proved to be not very different from doing the same thing in the Great Basin. The same kinds of work had to be done. As was the case elsewhere a decision had to be made concerning how large the community should be and where the roads should run. Because Elder Green was in charge, he made the decision. On Tuesday, October 3, 1854, he wrote:

This morning Bro. Hammon left for Maui I tuck my cumpas and commenst to lay out a town at the fut of the mountain and laid out one stret runing south to the sea three mildes to a fine litle harbour whare we land our boats hear we intendt to build a store hou[se] to leave our produse. I then laid out three more streats thruing [turning] the town in to blocks fore acres each with the streats fore rods wide this is a butiful location for a town.

The next task was to assign lots to the pioneers and properly locate their houses upon them. Timber had to be acquired either in the mountains above the towns or from other islands. Since water was in short supply, cisterns were dug, rock-faced and cemented. The oxen, mules, and donkeys had to be controlled, and so a corral was built. The pigs were penned, but the chickens and turkeys were allowed to forage for themselves.

When the pioneers arrived, they found that the local Lanai members had almost completed a small meeting house. As the population grew, new recruits were arriving from time to time, a new meeting house was needed to replace the first one. Several months of effort were required, but by December 30, 1854 the building was finished and dedicated. The meeting house, as well as their own homes, were of native style.

### *The Lifestyle*

Ajusting to the new way of life was hard for the Hawaiian people and Green. He demanded a certain amount of regimentation, and finding this difficult to achieve, he became less patient with his native pioneers than with other aspects of the project, Repeatedly he journalized about his disappointment with their failure to respond more rapidly. He said that he would have given up on them if they were not descendents of Joseph and Israel and therefore full of promise and favored with the blessings of the Lord.

The matter of how much time should be spent working for the church and how much should be spent on their own land was a serious problem between the elders and their Hawaiian pioneers. In the beginning Hammond and Green asked the pioneers to work for the church full

time. But because some of the saints requested time for themselves it was decided that after they had worked all day they could plant private fields in the evening and at night. This did not work because they worked harder at night than in the day and were too tired to work on the church lands.

By January 1855 Elder Green had changed his demands a bit. He then allowed the natives to work on their own fields two days a week. "They are very busy on them days. I think they plant more in them two days than they do in the other four." He said he did not care how or when they did it, but he hoped they would get all the potatoes "in the ground growing."

All of the missionaries gathered at Lanai from throughout the islands for a conference in July 1855. At that meeting it was resolved that the native pioneers should devote two days a week to the church lands, and the rest of the time would be theirs to do with as they wished.

The process of pioneering the Palawai Basin was difficult. Although other parts of the island were inhabited, this area seemed to present many problems for permanent settlement. Burning, clearing, plowing, hoeing, and digging seldom stopped. But the project had its lighter moments too. A great deal of energy was required to hunt wild goats in the mountains but it was good recreation. On a number of occasions during the first year the natives went hunting and came back with the goats for meat. Fishing was also an important part of their lives as it was for most Hawaiians, but it was also a diversion. Several feasts were held that everyone enjoyed.

Although Green frequently complained about the weather—he wished that the rain would come or that the rain would stop—he loved his island home. On several occasions he wrote about the beauty of Lanai. "This morning the sun has risen clear and spread its golden rays over the Sandwich Isles and all nature seems to rejoice at its appearance." In June 1855, when corn had been harvested and dried, he wrote in the parlance of the Book of Mormon:

This day we have spent in preparing and fitting up for Conference. The boat arived from Maui loded with goats for Conference. This evening Bro Silas Smith and Silas S. Smith made a grater and grated a fine panful of indian meal, and it came to pass that I Ephraim being born of Yanky parentce and som what lurnd in all the arts of that people proceded to make a cake which was choice above all other cakes that I had ever seen even in my own land and thus ended the trutieth day of June 1855.

### *Problems Arise*

The dreams of the elders for the success and prosperity of Lanai were big indeed. In November 1854, Elder Hammond began looking for a

boat to make transportation from Maui to Lanai and back more convenient. He found what he believed was the right boat during the summer of 1855, but the sloop, which Hammond described as the ugliest looking boat he had ever seen afloat, was a financial disaster. Instead of bringing profit and providing convenience, the *Lanai*, as it was called, brought only debt. The decision to buy the boat had been made during the July 1855 conference.

Other important decisions were also made at that conference. The missionaries decided to establish a school at the Lanai colony and to release several elders, including President Lewis and Elders Hammond and Green. (Mission terms seldom lasted more than three or four years.) Silas Smith was appointed mission president. In addition, the mission decided to assume the debts of the Lanai experiment.

The following year, from July 1855 to July 1856, was not as successful as the elders had hoped. The crops on Lanai were poor, and the saints throughout the islands generally refused to move from their homes to the new colony. Strong sermons on the necessity of gathering out of Babylon or out of Egypt were given regularly in all parts of the mission, but with little affect. Only the very strongest converts were willing to move. Concerning this trend, Elder Joseph F. Smith said, "The gathering at the island of Lanai has gleaned out most of the faithful and diligent brethren, and that, perhaps, is one cause why the Saints feel so discouraged on the other islands."<sup>15</sup> This insightful observation captured the essence of the matter.

At the July 1855 conference it was apparent that growth had slowed; there were 4,650 members in the islands at that time.<sup>16</sup> But by April conference 1856, when another census of the saints had been taken, there was a drop in the total. This was credited to unrecorded deaths, apostasy, and the loss of some souls who simply could not be found. The loss notwithstanding, the mission leaders still felt that progress was being made.<sup>17</sup>

Even though strongly committed missionaries were laboring in Hawaii at this time, opposition to their work grew and hindered them and discouragement began to exaggerate problems. After about June or July 1856 the momentum of the mission changed. Efforts that before had yielded converts now seemed to be useless. President Silas Smith tried to be positive but could not hold back these words:

We are forced to acknowledge that despite all our exertions to strengthen, build up and increase the Church on these Islands, there is a very manifest falling away, both in numbers, and in the faith and good works of those who pretend to hold on to the work.<sup>18</sup>

However, during the next year matters became worse. A number of previously active and successful branches suffered from mass apostasy.

Apparently the only area that remained strong was Lanai, and problems arose even there.

From July 1856 on, letters from President Silas Smith were often negative in their tone. In summary he told President Young that the newness of the Church had worn off and that people were no longer attracted to its novel ideas and doctrines. Within the church many “weak” saints, those who didn’t attend meetings regularly, give freely of their means, or support the leaders, were critical of the failure of the sloop *Lanai* venture, which had brought a burden of debt to the church and had served no useful purpose. Some saints were also critical of the church because other debts, such as the costs of seeds and tools for Lanai, had not been paid off. Others complained about the failure of the crops on Lanai, this notwithstanding the fact that people were starving in all parts of the islands because of an extended drought that had begun in 1856 and lasted into late 1857.

During the summer of 1857 another group of elders were called to labor in Hawaii. They, like virtually all of their predecessors, came from Utah. At their head was Henry W. Bigler, one of the first group of LDS missionaries sent to Hawaii. Bigler could hardly believe how much things had changed since his release in 1854. When he attended church in Honolulu he felt like “everything [was] dead or dying.”

On October 4, 1857 a conference was held at which twelve missionaries were released to return home to Utah or California. (Six of the elders sailed two days later, including Silas Smith and Joseph F. Smith.) Silas Smith was released and Bigler was sustained as president of the mission. A number of matters of business were discussed at the conference, including the proper disposition of the Lanai settlement. After considerable discussion it was resolved that Lanai was not adequate for the church’s needs and that a more suitable gathering place should be sought.<sup>19</sup>

### *The Utah Elders Are Called Home*

For the next month the work moved along at a slow pace, with little promise of improvement. Then on November 20, 1857 the mail arrived from San Francisco with several letters of vital importance. One was a letter from President Brigham Young, dated September 4. In part it read:

The reports from the Sandwich Islands have for a number of years agreed in one thing, that is, that the majority of the Saints on these Islands have either been dead or dying Spiritually—it would appear that they occasionally spasmodically resuscitate for a few moments, only to sink lower than they were before. . . . I think it best for all of the Elders (with one or two exceptions) to come home. . . . You had better wind up the whole of your business and return with most of the Elders as soon as possible.<sup>20</sup>

President Young did not mention problems at home in this letter. But in a letter written the same day to his nephew, John R. Young, he went into detail concerning the problems the saints were having with the United States Government and the possibility of war (the Utah War). This did not come as a surprise to the elders. Honolulu and San Francisco newspapers had kept them well abreast of the issues.<sup>21</sup>

President Young said he was willing to withdraw the missionaries because he knew there were some faithful saints there, who were “experienced enough in the work to enable them to stand firm in the faith.” On the other hand he said that those who were “filled with the lusts of the flesh will float off with the current and if at any time it should be thought wisdom to renew the work there, the Church will flourish more rapidly through the testimony of those who are faithful to their God.”<sup>22</sup>

President Young was concerned about leaving the Hawaiian saints without proper leadership, but he rationalized the situation and said that he “presumed that the Book of Mormon [in Hawaiian], the native Elders and one or two now from here will answer on that mission for the present.”<sup>23</sup>

This, of course, raises the question of how many native elders there were and what their status was at the time. The records of the mission do not mention how early Hawaiians were ordained elders, but they were ordained soon after the mission got under way. By August 1854, when the Lanai colony was founded, there were seventy-three Hawaiian elders. Most of these men were presidents over the seventy-five branches. The first Hawaiians called as missionaries were sent out to teach in October 1852. Over the next several years perhaps fifty or sixty native Hawaiians served as missionaries on short-term, usually six month, missions. After 1854 the number of native missionaries declined, but it remained the practice to call them in 1857. By that time some branches had been closed for reasons mentioned before. Unfortunately the records do not reveal how many native elders there were in 1857.

President Young’s faith in the value of the Hawaiian translation of the Book of Mormon also deserves comment. This translation was done primarily by Elder George Q. Cannon (1827–1901) with the help of J. H. Napela of Wailuku, Maui. The manuscript took two years to complete, from January 1852 to January 1854. Although an effort was made to obtain a press and print the work in Hawaii, the Hawaiian Book of Mormon was ultimately printed in California. The first copies were finally distributed in the islands in 1857. But the circulation of the book seems not to have been too extensive. In fact, there is evidence that the

book did not contribute much to the training or indoctrination of the Hawaiian saints in this early period.

This call to return home was not peculiar to Hawaii. Most missionaries in the United States and Europe were also called home. Brother Brigham was concerned for the welfare of the political entity called Utah, but he was also concerned that the men of the church would be home to take care of their wives and children. The majority of the missionaries were married men. Thus it is not surprising that they too became anxious about returning as quickly as possible to Zion.

When the impending closure of the mission was announced to the saints the following Sunday, it was a cause of much grief among the faithful few who loved the church and who had strong testimonies.

On December 9, 1857 the remaining elders who had been released in October sailed from the islands. They had been working at various occupations to earn the money necessary to pay for their passage since their releases. After they were gone, the eleven Zion missionaries who were left were doing their best to earn enough funds to pay their way home. Of these men, Bigler and John S. Woodbury had been there since September 1857. The other nine had arrived one year before. Between December 12, 1840, when the mission began, and the spring of 1858, when the last Utah-California missionaries left the islands, sixty missionaries, fifty-six men and four women (wives of elders), came to Hawaii from those parts.

When the mission closed, i.e. when the non-Hawaiian missionaries were called home from Hawaii, the saints on Lanai had one year left in their experimental period. A better gathering place had not been found since it had been resolved to do so the previous October. However, Haalelea assured the missionaries that the saints were free to stay until the fifth year had passed, and then he would make arrangements to collect rent on the land or sell it to the church.<sup>24</sup>

The annual rent after the fifth year was to be \$175. This amount was large for the times considering the relatively poor crops that had been produced year by year. Not long after the Utah elders departed, Haalelea offered the Lanai saints all of his holdings, around 10,000 acres, for the small sum of \$300. It is probable that he had been willing to lease the land to the saints in the first place not only because of his friendship to the church but also because the land had been considered useless by all observers. He may have felt that it would be to his advantage to unload the property at any cost.

After the Utah missionaries returned home, the records of only one semi-annual conference were submitted to the Salt Lake City headquarters of the Church. That record reveals that efforts were being made

to continue on in an appropriate manner without outside leadership. However, because the last mission president had decided not to appoint a leader for the islands (why he made this decision is not clear from the records), there was some contention regarding who was the leading Church authority. This was a serious error from the standpoint of normal LDS procedure. Mormon government is hierarchical and authoritarian. Every leader has someone over him in a chain of command on up to the President of the Church, who is considered responsible to Jesus Christ. It is very strange and unusual that the Hawaiian native leaders were left without an ultimate authority over their numbers. This appears to be not only improper church governance but also a serious tactical error. Elder Kailehune of Lanai claimed to be the supreme priesthood authority. He did not claim to be president of the mission but believed that because he was president of the Lanai conference (district) he was superior to all other presidents. Apparently he was sustained in his claims by the conference representatives. This, however, was an unusual procedure in church government.

At that time local missionaries were still being called and baptisms were being performed. Prospective settlers were still being encouraged to come to Lanai as pioneers, and the priesthood leaders were trying to maintain a standard of righteousness among the members.<sup>25</sup>

After the above conference report was submitted, the record of Mormon events in Hawaii became silent. Many years later, in 1895, Andrew Jenson, Assistant L.D.S. Church Historian, visited the Hawaiian Islands and through interviews found that the organization of the church had gradually become less and less orderly. Contentions arose that were difficult to settle. Money which had been collected throughout the islands for the purpose of purchasing Palawai was used by President Kailehune for his own purposes. Although he was excommunicated, the money, over \$300, was not recovered.

### *The Era of Walter Murray Gibson*

Three years passed after the Utah elders left Hawaii before an authorized representative from the center of the church visited there. Then, unfortunately, it was the adventurer Walter Murray Gibson who stepped into this divided and disoriented setting to take charge of the church in the islands. The story of "Captain" Gibson is probably the most frequently written about incident in LDS Church history in the Pacific and Asia.<sup>26</sup> His story does not bear retelling here.

### *Conclusion*

The Lanai experiment was a remarkable undertaking. The fact that

between 150 and 200 Hawaiian Mormons did survive in the Palawai Basin colony for ten years when no one else considered the land habitable speaks well for the character of the people who were involved. But the water problem was never solved during the Mormon period. If the missionaries who chose the place had realized that the island would not average more than 21 inches of rain a year (almost one fourth the average for the other major islands of the group, it is highly unlikely that they would have decided to settle there.

Water was the only significant geographical problem. Destructive worms and insects were abundant in all parts of the islands, not only on Lanai. The wind was a problem, but not a serious enough one to cause the settlement to fail. The soil was correctly assessed by the missionaries to be fertile (the Palawai Basin is entirely of oxisol soil, the most important agricultural soil in Hawaii). Water was the real problem. Not until artesian wells were installed did the island prove truly productive, but that was after the Mormons were gone.

The Lanai colony was established at a critical time in the history of the Latter-day Saints in Hawaii. Interest in the church had reached its peak by 1854 when the settlement began, but then the novelty of the church's doctrines and activities began to lose their appeal. This trend continued over the next four years. Between 1854 and 1858 several disappointments caused the saints to wonder about the church.

But one factor stands out as a serious tactical mistake; this, as we have seen, was the establishment of the Lanai settlement. The reasons for its creation were generally good, but there was a hidden weakness in the plan that did not become evident for about three years. Joseph F. Smith observed that the strongest of the saints had been gathered to Lanai and thus they left only the weaker members to lead in the branches. A generally accepted truism among Latter-day Saints is that when the strong are moved from leadership positions, others will take their places who will become as strong as the original leaders, but this did not work out in Hawaii in the 1850's.

The Lanai branch became the strongest in the mission and it maintained this position of leadership until the time of Gibson. But the remainder of the mission began a down-hill course at approximately the same time the settlement was founded. There were over four thousand members of the church in the islands in August 1854. A year later that number had grown slightly, but from that time on the number of members began to drop. Two years later the total number of members had dropped by almost one thousand, to 3,122 members of record in October 1857. A tentative conclusion is that although the saints who

moved to Lanai were strengthened by their associations with one another in the cloistered setting of the Palawai Basin, they gained this strength at the expense of the remaining thousands.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Ephraim Green, Diary, 1852-1856. Special Collections, Brigham Young University Library, Provo, Utah.
- <sup>2</sup> Eugene E. Campbell, "The Mormon Gold-Mining Mission of 1849," *BYU Studies*, 1-2 (Autumn-Winter 1959-60): 19-31.
- <sup>3</sup> Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), pp. 23-28.
- <sup>4</sup> Benjamin F. Johnson, *My Life's Review* (Independence, Missouri: Zion's Printing and Publishing Co., n.d.), pp. 157-158.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>6</sup> F. A. Hammond to William Farrer, February 24, 1854, in Journal and Letters of William Farrer, Vol. 2, p. 81, Special Collections, BYU; also Francis A. Hammond, Journal, February 23, 1854, (Ms f 338) Archives of the Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah; hereafter *HDC*.
- <sup>7</sup> The word mission is used by the Latter-day Saints to designate a geographical area in which they proselyte their form of Christianity. It is also used to specify the act of going forth as a teacher of the gospel, i.e. to go on a mission. Usually missions are the first stage of ecclesiastical organization in any geographical area. The next stage is the stake (the first of which was organized in Hawaii in 1935). Each mission area is headed by a president who is the final authority in a theocratic system. The president may or may not have counselors; he chooses branch presidents who lead local groups or branches. These branch presidents are frequently missionaries but when local members are able they are so assigned. It is also the president's responsibility to assign missionaries to their work areas.
- <sup>8</sup> Brigham Young to Philip B. Lewis and missionaries to Sandwich Islands, April 1, 1854, Brigham Young Letterbooks, Vol. 2 (reel 2) p. 509, (Ms f 219) *HDC*.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, Lewis to Young.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>11</sup> Johnson, *My Life's Review*, p. 182.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>13</sup> Hammond, Journal, August 17, 1854.
- <sup>14</sup> Ephraim Green, Diary, 1852-1856. Unless otherwise noted the following paragraphs on Lanai have been gleaned from his diary.
- <sup>15</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1938), p. 183.
- <sup>16</sup> Hammond, Journal, July 25, 1855.
- <sup>17</sup> John T. Caine to Brigham Young, April 13, 1856; and Silas Smith to Brigham Young, May 13, 1856, (Ms d 1234) *HDC*. Letters to Brigham Young, unless otherwise noted are found in this location.
- <sup>18</sup> Silas Smith to Brigham Young, July 3, 1856.
- <sup>19</sup> Henry William Bigler, Journal, October 4, 1857, *HDC*; and *Manuscript History of Brigham Young*, same date, *HDC*; hereafter *MHB Y*.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, November 20, 1857.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, December 22, 1857.

<sup>24</sup> Bigler and Woodbury to Brigham Young, December 3, 1857, *HDC*.

<sup>25</sup> *MHB Y*, October 10, 1858.

<sup>26</sup> The most important books, articles, and theses concerning Gibson's Mormon years include: Gwynn Barrett, "Walter Murray Gibson: The Shepherd Saint of Lana'i Revisited," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, 49 (Spring 1972): 142-162; R. Lanier Britsch, "Another Visit With Walter Murray Gibson," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 46 (Winter 1978): 65-78; Gavan Daws, "The Shepherd Saint," *Shoal of Time: A History of the Hawaiian Islands* (Honolulu, 1968), pp. 220-225; Frank W. McGhie, "The Life and Intrigues of Walter Murray Gibson," (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1958); James A. Michener and A. Grove Day, "Gibson, the King's Evil Angel," *Rascals in Paradise* (London, 1957), pp. 120-154; Joseph B. Musser, "Walter Murray Gibson—Oceanic Adventurer," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, 52 (September, 1926): 1709-1732; Brigham H. Roberts, *Comprehensive History of the Church*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City, 1930), 5: 97-100; Esther L. Sousa, "Walter Murray Gibson's Rise to Power in Hawaii," (M.A. thesis, University of Hawaii, 1942); Samuel W. Taylor, "Walter Murray Gibson: Great Mormon Rascal," *The American West*, 1 (Spring 1964): 18-27, 77; and Lorrin A. Thurston, *Memoirs of the Hawaiian Revolution* (Honolulu, 1936).