Book Review from the Associate Editor

100 Years of Healing: The Legacy of a Kauai Missionary Doctor


reviewed by:
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A ward-winning Kauai-based journalist-author Evelyn Cook has crafted a collection of comprehensively researched and engagingly written historical sketches of three generations of Koloa’s Smith-Waterhouse family detailing its role in shaping modern Hawaii. Her intent is that “by acquainting the reader with one New England missionary doctor, his family, and some of his descendants, a more accurate picture of the missionaries in general will emerge”. The saga spans a century, from the 1840s to the 1940s.

Medical missionary Dr. James W. Smith (1810-1887) and his wife Melicent, progenitors of over 200 direct descendants worldwide today, made the five-month brigantine voyage from New England to the Sandwich Islands in 1842 and settled on Kauai in Koloa 64 years after the first non-missionary haole had landed at Waimea. He was the only Western-trained physician on the island for three decades and spent much of his 45 years there battling epidemics and ministering to spiritual needs of kanaka maoli. He vaccinated everyone on Kauai and Niihau against smallpox, sparing the population from the onslaught on other islands of the 1853 epidemic. Dr. Jared Knapp Smith (1849-1897), one son, was murdered by the distraught relative of a mother and daughter exiled to Kalaupapa for leprosy. Another son, attorney William Owen Smith, played a leading role with childhood friend Sanford B. Dole in the 1893 overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy. Queen Liliuokalani labeled Smith a traitor, yet 16 years later she chose him to create her Trust benefiting Hawaiian orphans. Dr. Albert H. Waterhouse (1877-1949), grandson of James W., returned after a stint as Navajo Indian Reservation doctor on the mainland to Koloa where he was company physician for the first successful commercial sugar operation in the Islands, Koloa Plantation, organized in 1835. He enabled countless Asian Plantation laborers to better their minds, their lives, and their futures.

Vignettes in bas-relief to the Smith-Waterhouse genealogy include glimpses into one of Kauai’s most shocking missionary scandals; tales of betrayal and suicide; the extraordinary life of Henry Obookiah, the Native Hawaiian who persuaded the missionaries to come to Hawaii; and the remarkable story of George Hume Hume Kaumualii, son of Kauai’s last king, whose tumultuous life rivaled that of any Hollywood hero. The volume includes the story of a little-known legal battle between Kauai’s favorite prince, Jonah Kuhio, and the Hawaiian Kingdom’s last reigning sovereign, Queen Liliuokalani as well as a new look at events leading to abolition of the monarchy.

100 Years of Healing challenges the perception about missionaries as “despoilers of paradise” with facts about one clan and their times which prompt reappraisal of this perception. A general audience will enjoy reading this book; professional historians will treasure it as a departure point for further research into interpreting events that have made Hawaii nei what it is today.