

## HOW THE WOMAN'S BOARD OF MISSIONS FOR THE PACIFIC ISLANDS BEGAN

The roots of the Woman's Board of Missions for the Pacific Islands go all the way back to Henry `Opukaha`ia, the first educated and Christian Hawaiian person. His death in 1818 caused the people of New England to travel to west to tell the Good News of Jesus Christ to Henry's people in his stead.

WBM's first president was Clara Brewster Bingham, daughter-in-law of the Reverend Hiram and Sybil Bingham, members of the pioneer company of missionaries to arrive in Hawaii.

The people of Hawaii responded so spectacularly to the gospel message that in 1852 they sent their first missionaries to the Caroline and Micronesian islands. The gospel spread rapidly there as well. Dr. Benjamin and Mrs. Lydia Snow were among the missionaries. In July of 1871, Mrs. Snow was the guest at the weekly prayer meeting of the women of the Fort Street Church in Honolulu. That small group of women listened soberly yet eagerly as Mrs. Snow spoke of the problems, opportunities, and achievements of the mission she and her husband had helped establish in 1852. The Snows had just completed a two-year furlough, and Lydia snow was "glowing with the enthusiasm enkindled by .....working with Woman's Boards in the "homeland'." With zeal and fervor, she had gone from town to town, and state to state, speaking about missions, and now she pleaded eloquently that the Christian women of Hawaii would form an organized band, to which missionaries in the other Pacific Islands might look for aid and sympathy. Equally enthusiastic for the plan was Mrs. Hiram Bingham II, who had served in the Gilbert Islands and soon would return there.

Before Mrs. Snow and others bound for Micronesia had sailed away in the Morning Star on July 22, and within three weeks, the new Woman's Board had had adopted a Constitution, elected officers (Clara Bingham was the unanimous choice for president), and determined its immediate purpose; to secure a single woman missionary to send to Micronesia to teach the children there. It was not until 13 years later, however, that the Woman's Board had secured a missionary, Annette Palmer, who left to serve as a teacher of girls on Pohnpei, and on Kosrae, until her death in 1906.

Meanwhile, almost from the start, the Woman's Board of Missions for the Pacific Islands enlarged its purpose: to give aid at home wherever there was human need. When people of many nations began coming to Hawaii, the Board helped establish Sunday Schools, clubs, and classes for newcomers. When one reads the annual reports he or she will find reports of Bible Women going to the Hawaiian women, Chinese and Portuguese women. They would find a kindergarten for Japanese children, secondary education for Hawaiian girls, and tutors for Samoan, Vietnamese, Filipino and Micronesian children. Many of Hawaii's United Churches of Christ owe their beginnings, at least in part, to the Woman's Board of Missions for the Pacific Islands, as does the now independent Kindergarten, Children's Aid Association, and the Mid-Pacific Institute.