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Loomis, Elisha, 1799-1836. Journals, 1819-1827.

Reels 2+3

Elisha Loomis and his wife were among the first missionaries sent by the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions to begin work in the Sandwich Islands. The Board called for missionaries with varied occupations: the Loomises went as printers. The original company consisted of 17: two missionary couples, two teacher couples, a farmer couple, a physician couple, the Loomises, and three Hawaiian helpers.

The Loomises immediately commenced a thorough study of the language and an acquaintanceship with the natives. Loomis began to prepare primers for publication. He bought a press and several fonts of type from America, but nothing was printed for nearly two years, until Jan. 7, 1822. The first printing house was made of grass; a newer and sturdier one was built in 1823. In 1825, 59,000 copies of tracts were printed in the native language. Loomis returned to America in Jan. 1827 to regain his health. In Rochester, N.Y. he printed and issued the first, second and fourth Gospels in Hawaiian. For two years he was a missionary to Indians at Mackinac, Michigan. He died in 1836. (From an introduction in the microfilm)

Journals

1819: The journals begin Oct. 23, 1819. Loomis tells of his decision to help the heathen and his departure for the islands. Some description of his voyage is included.

1820: The missionaries first sight the island, and are told the idols of "Owhyhee" are no more. The priesthood and taboos have also been destroyed: the missionaries are overjoyed that this barrier to Christianity has been removed. Although foreigners oppose the missionaries, the King permits them to land, with promises of protection and partial support; Levi Loomis is the first white child born on the islands (July 16); Loomis teaches Scripture to the King and natives; a native member of the missionary group is excommunicated for bad conduct; Loomis prepares alphabets of the Hawaiian language; he begins his school; George Crown-inshield's "Cleopatra's Barge" is given to the King and is used to convey the missionaries from island to island; thefts by natives become a problem.

1821: Some chiefs on the coast request missionaries; the excommunication of Holman, the American doctor-missionary for bad conduct (Jan. 16); Loomis cites the difficulty of translating Owhyhee because there is no interpreter who understands English grammatically; the missionaries fear the Hawaiians will relapse into idolatry because they hold the hoodah hoodah dances, performed on the Sabbath and with idols; Loomis notes Hawaiian children are brought up without discipline; the Loomises build a frame house and begin constructing a new church in the native style; earthquakes are frequent; the dissipation of the foreign traders makes it impossible to curb drinking among the natives; Loomis criticizes the immorality of the white men, who usually live with native women while at the islands; dedication of the new church (Sept. 15); unruly sailors and captain quarrel with the missionaries; chastity is "hardly known", and polygamy is legal though infrequent; the violent antipathy of the white traders to the missionaries: a daughter born (Dec. 24).

Elisha Loomis Journals cont.

1822: Loomis does the first printing on the islands (Jan. 7); he puts out a spelling book; the King sends a handbill of laws he wishes promulgated for Loomis to print; students are learning to read and spell Hawaiian and English; a second edition of the spelling book is necessary--12,000 copies; welcome news that many of the Society Islanders are Christianized; Brother Bingham performs the first service in the native language (Aug. 25).

1823: About 2-1/2 pp. of notes for the whole year.

1824: A visit to the island of Hawaii; an account of the reminiscences of an eyewitness to the death of Captain Cook; a discussion with the chiefs of the wickedness of brother-sister marriages; a visit to a volcano; a list of proper names mentioned in the journal, with their correct pronunciations; a native uprising on Tauai; the printing of a handbill forbidding native females to visit the ships (Nov. 27).

1825: A new spelling book is commenced; prostitution loses prestige among the native women; because of a law against prostitution, many seamen threaten the missionaries; the general attendance of natives at school and church offends the foreigners; a son and third child is born to the Loomises (Nov. 9); eight natives, most of them high chiefs, are baptized.

A typed copy of the Loomis journal May 17, 1824-Jan. 27, 1826. "Louisa Lewis Clark, Honolulu, Sept. 13, 1927" is handwritten on the journal. On the frontispiece is typed: "originally owned by Dr. William D. Westervelt and placed in University of Hawaii." Compiled by Westervelt, assisted by Emil A. Berndt and Lili P. Berndt, 1937. Also listed is the Loomis Journal Committee of the University of Hawaii, consisting of Carl G. Stroven, Ralph S. Kuykendal, and Andrew W. Lind. Also included are a reproduction of one page from the spelling book issued in 1825 and an index of the names of natives and foreigners. Part of a journal in Hawaiian follows this typescript (Sept. 17, 1823-?).

1826: Loomis finishes 3,000 copies of tracts of the Ten Commandments, Lord's Prayer, and expositions of Baptism and the Lord's Supper (Jan. 30); he begins the first edition of hymns in Hawaiian (10,000 copies); following an attack by the seamen, the prohibition against prostitution is partially lifted; the missionaries consider their lives in danger; Captain Percival of the Dolphin incites a riot; Loomis cites growing success with missionary work: his health is failing; he translates an "article of arrangement" he hopes will be agreed to by the U.S. and Hawaii (Nov. 2); the young King is influenced by hostile foreigners; Loomis cites the dissipations of the royal court.

1827: Loomis leaves for America on the brig Convoy; he spends a week at the Society Islands, where he finds a great falling-off in religion; brief descriptions of the Society Islands; Loomis reaches Fort McHenry (June 20).

Fair copies of letters to the missionaries written on trip back to America, with some description of life and the mission on Society Islands, Feb.-May 1827.

Elisha Loomis Journals cont.

Typed extracts (Mar. 29, 1820-Feb. 6, 1824) from the journals of Elisha Loomis and his wife Maria T. Sartwell Loomis. A handwritten copy is in the archives of the Hawaiian Board, Honolulu. Nearly all is written after the Loomis' arrival in the Hawaiian Islands. A note reads that the part written by Mrs. Loomis seems to be substantially the same as corresponding parts of the typewritten manuscript Journal of Mrs. Maria Southworth [sic]* Loomis in the Library of the H.M.C.S., Honolulu." Only about 1 page from Mrs. Loomis' diary is included. The remainder of the extracts, from Mr. Loomis' journals, can be found in their entirety in the microfilm of the original journals (handwritten) #2309. As the original journals are often somewhat difficult to read, the typescripts ²²⁷⁵ may be of great help to researchers.

- * NOTE: Microfilm note is in error. Mrs. Loomis' maiden name was Sartwell, not Southworth. Per Robert Moody, 3/65.