
REMEMBERING 'ŌPŪKAHA'IA

A Resource Packet



'Ōpūkaha'ia
February 17 1818
February 17, 2018

State Council of Hawaiian Congregational Churches

What can we say about 'Ōpūkaha'ia? It may be said that he became an “eloquent writer and speaker (*Nā Hīmeni O Ka 'Ekalesia*, Hawai'i Conference, United Church of Christ, Honolulu, Hawai'i, 1999, page 31). It may also be said he was the first Hawaiian convert to Christianity and that he inspired the first company of American missionaries to set sail out of Boston Harbor for Hawai'i two centuries ago.

It was at a meeting of the State Council of Hawaiian Congregational Churches on October 28, 2017 that a Working Group was established to develop a resource packet for the member churches of the State Council. This was to be done in anticipation of the 200th anniversary of 'Ōpūkaha'ia's death.

Toni Bissen, Executive Director of the Pū'ā Foundation, Honolulu, O'ahu; Della Kua'ana, a member of Kahikuonālani United Church of Christ, Pearl City, O'ahu; and the Rev. Kealahou Alike of Keawala'i Congregational Church, Mākena, Maui agreed to serve on the working group. An effort was made to compile a listing of suggested hymns, Scripture readings and other materials for churches to use in preparation for 'Ōpūkaha'ia Sunday, February 17, 2018.

“The Service of Thanksgiving & Remembrance” for 'Ōpūkaha'ia Sunday outlined on pages 31-34 in *Nā Hīmeni O Ka 'Ekalesia* provides a comprehensive outline for hymns, scripture readings, and prayers. What follows in this resource packet is information on written materials and more recent events and activities.

THEN & NOW

1819 - 2015

For many, many years Edwin Dwight's memoirs on 'Ōpūkaha'ia was said to be the definitive account of his life. *Memoirs of Henry Obookiah a native of Owhyhee and a member of the Foreign Mission School: who died at Cornwall, Connecticut, February 17, 1818, aged 26 years* was published in 1819, one year after 'Ōpūkaha'ia's death and the departure of the first mission company to Hawai'i.

In 2015, Christopher L. Cook, a graduate of the University of Hawai'i and a former editor of *The Garden Island* newspaper, provided a new account of the life and times of 'Ōpūkaha'ia in his book, *The Providential Life & Heritage of Henry Obookiah*.

In the Preface to the book, Cook points out, “In writing this book I have undertaken careful and persistent primary research in Hawai'i and New England. This labor has brought to light new episodes in the life of Henry Obookiah ('Ōpūkaha'ia as he was known in Hawai'i), and fresh insights into events that determined his fate, and the fate of Hawai'i once Christianity arrived in the Islands.”

Cook adds, “There are many viewpoints that can be taken, especially on the impact of the Sandwich Islands Mission in Hawai'i – this is just one account.”

Taken together, Dwight's memoirs and Cook's account provides the reader with what Cook refers to as an understanding of “the incredible achievements of Hawai'i's peoples, and of the problems they have faced, especially the travails faced by Native Hawaiians.”

THE PAST

Manuscripts & Archives Yale University Library



*Yale University Library - Manuscripts & Archives
New Haven, Connecticut*

“E Ho‘omau I Ka Ho‘oilina” “Continue the Legacy”



*Kaumakapili Church
Honolulu, O‘ahu*

Toni Bissen, Executive Director of the Pū‘ā Foundation, noted that the Manuscripts and Archives Blog at Yale University Library posted an update on July 24, 2017. “Papers and Publications on Hawaiian Youth Henry Obookiah and Early Missionaries to Hawai‘i in the Yale University Library” includes a post written by Judith A Schiff, Chief Research Archivist at the library.

Schiff notes, “In 2020, the Hawaiian Mission Houses Historic Site and Archives (HMH) in Honolulu will celebrate the Bicentennial of its founding, by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) to bring ‘literacy, Christianity, constitutional government, polyphonic music, and Western medicine’ to Hawai‘i.”

Schiff provides an overview of ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia’s life. The blog includes a bibliography of materials Yale University Library.

Of particular interest is the founding of the Cornwall Indian School in Cornwall, Connecticut in 1817. It is said that ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia inspired its founding. According to the Cornwall Historical Society, the school was “a bold new venture in evangelism: “to find in this country, convert, and educate young men, predominantly people of color, from indigenous cultures around the world, and send them home to be native preachers, translators, teachers and health workers.”

“The most important . . . document at Yale is a long original personal letter [written by ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia] describing the life and studies at the Indian School. It is interesting that the school thrived until 1926 when it was closed largely due to the concerns raised when marriages of two Cornwall girls with Cherokee students became known.

Della Kua‘ana, a member of Kahikuonālani Church in Pearl City, O‘ahu, remembers the day the O‘ahu Council of Hawaiian Congregational Churches gathered at Kaumakapili Church on April 25, 2015 for “*E Ho‘omau I Ka Ho‘oilina - Continue the Legacy.*” The event recognized the founding of ten churches beginning with Kawaiaha‘o Church in 1820 to Ka Hana O Ke Akua in 1977.

The gathering included a *hīmeni* tribute to ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia featuring a quartet that included Christina Randolph, Johnnie Ku, Helen Kaowili and Buddy Maunakea. The *hīmeni*, “*Aloha Au Kou Aupuni*” was written by Timothy Dwight and translated into Hawaiian by Lousie Tolles.

In 1795, Timothy Dwight was named as president of Yale University. In time, he would come to know ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia through his son Edwin Welles Dwight who encountered ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia on the steps at Yale University weeping “because nobody gives me learning.”

It was Edwin who introduced ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia to his the elder Dwight, a distant relative. Dwight took him into his home and taught him privately in secular and religious subjects. ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia accepted employment at the university and became “a servant for the Dwight family living in the servant’s quarters, an annex located to the rear of the President’s mansion (*The Providential Life & Heritage of Henry Obookiah*, Christopher L. Cook, Pa‘a Studios, Waimea, Kaua‘i, Hawai‘i, 2015, page 50).

THE PRESENT

The *Mo'olelo* of 'Ōpūkaha'ia 'Ōpūkaha'ia: His Life and Inspiration



Thurston Memorial Chapel
Honolulu, O'ahu

The Hawaiian Studies at Kuaihelani, Bishop Learning Commons, Middle School Drama and Thurston Memorial Chapel presented an evening event “‘Ōpūkaha'ia: His Life and Inspiration” on Friday, January 26, 2018. The event in recognition of the life of 'Ōpūkaha'ia was guided by Malia Ane, Co-Director of Hawaiian Studies at Kuaihelani; Lauren Buck Medeiros, Chaplain, Thurston Memorial Chapel and Dita Ramler-Reppun, Librarian, Bishop Learning Commons.

In addition to a special exhibit in three parts focusing on 'Ōpūkaha'ia's life, the event culminated with a “Hip-Hop Retelling of the Life of 'Ōpūkaha'ia.” Writer Marion Lyman-Mersereau, a 1970 Punahou alum noted: “When I was invited to create a performance piece that could educate Punahou students about 'Ōpūkaha'ia and commemorate the bicentennial of his life, I was shown a narrative script which I suggested could be ‘Hamiltonized.’”

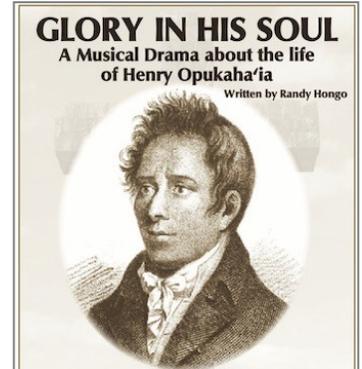
“I knew,” she continued, “how popular Lin Manuel Miranda's musical was, especially among our students. I thought if I could put a beat to the story, it might be more engaging for both the performers and their audiences. Thus was born the hip-hop retelling of 'Ōpūkaha'ia.”

Jonathan Clarke Sybert, Director of the performance piece added: “My heart leapt with joy when I was asked to take elements of the groundbreaking musical *Hamilton* and apply them to the life story of Henry 'Ōpūkaha'ia. We hope the combination of elements borrowed from *oli* (chant), *mele* (melody), rap, spoken word, and the polyrhythms of *hula* and hip-hop music help to reinforce the idea that our hero's story can be viewed as a personal mixing of experiences and ideas that led to the legacy we are celebrating . . . ”

“Glory in His Soul” A Musical Tribute to 'Ōpūkaha'ia

“Glory in His Soul” is a musical that was composed by the late Randy Hongo in remembrance of 'Ōpūkaha'ia. The musical is scheduled to be presented at Kalihi Union Church on O'ahu every Saturday and Sunday between February 11 and February 25, 2018.

Gay Hongo will be directing the musical.



Hawaiian Mission Houses & Kawaiaha'o Commemoration of the Life of Henry 'Ōpūkaha'ia



Mission Houses Museum
Honolulu, O'ahu



Kawaiaha'o Church
Honolulu, O'ahu

Kawaiaha'o Church will conduct a special commemorative service beginning at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, February 17, 2018. The day-long event will include a choir, directed by Aaron Mahi, comprised of students from schools whose histories date back to the life of 'Ōpūkaha'ia. Participating schools will include Punahou School, Kamehameha Schools Kapālama, Kamehameha Schools Maui, Mid-Pacific Institute and Lāhaināluna High School

An open house will follow at the Hawaiian Mission Houses with free tours every half hour beginning at 11:00 with the last tour at 3:00 p.m.

'Ōpūkaha'ia will tell his own story, as a historic theater character portrayed by actor Moses Goods. A “talk back” session with the audience will follow the performance.

The event sponsored, in part, by the Office of Hawaiian Affairs is free and open to the public.

**STATE COUNCIL OF
HAWAIIAN CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCHES (SCHCC)
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Mākena, Maui, HI 96753**

THE FUTURE

***Kumu Waiwai
Resources***

If you are willing to share any resources on the life and legacy of 'Ōpūkaha'ia, please send them to: keawalai@hawaii.rr.com. These may include sermons, hymns, anthems, *oli*, *hula*, books, photographs, paintings, Scripture readings, poems and other materials.

We welcome your *kōkua* and will make them available for your future planning. *Mahalo!*

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