

Notes & Queries

The Journal welcomes responses to previously published articles, statements on Hawaiian and Pacific history, and queries for information that will assist research. Opinions expressed here and elsewhere in the pages of the Journal are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Editorial Board or the Hawaiian Historical Society.

AUTHORSHIP OF THE 'ŌPŪKAHA'IA HAWAIIAN GRAMMAR

For the past six months I have been involved in printing a limited edition of the manuscript titled "A Short Elementary Grammar of the Owhihe Language," which has generally been attributed to Henry 'Ōpūkaha'ia (?1792–1818).¹ This manuscript, now in the possession of the Hawaiian Historical Society, has long attracted the attention of scholars for its curious alphabet, a mixture of letters and numbers, and for the fact that no one has been able to identify the handwriting.

The day after the last book was bound, perhaps as a consequence of spending long hours setting the manuscript in type, I recognized the handwriting as belonging to Samuel Ruggles (1795–1871) from a letter he had written to his sister in March 1819.² This letter proved his authorship and mentioned, fortunately for those of us who believe that tradition has some basis in fact, 'Ōpūkaha'ia's contribution.

We have much labour to accomplish before we can be equipped as we wish to be. Brother [James] Ely is engaged in making a spelling Book and vocabulary and I in forming a Grammar and reading book in the Owhyhian Language. I have nearly completed the Grammar for the press, having been much assisted by one which Obookiah attempted to form.³

'Ōpūkaha'ia had begun work on creating a writing system and grammar for Hawaiian as early as 1814.⁴ In 1817, he attended the

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Foreign Mission School in Cornwall, Connecticut, where he met two fellow classmates, Samuel Ruggles and James Ely (1798–1890).⁵ After ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia’s death in 1818, they apparently went over his papers and began to prepare material on the Hawaiian language to be taken to Hawai‘i and used in missionary work. When Hiram Bingham visited the school in May of 1819, he noted that “. . . as to elementary books in the language of O[whyhee], something has been done & some passages of scripture have been translated.”⁶ In September, the principal, Herman Daggett, listed the language materials prepared by him and the Hawaiian students at the school. Apparently these were gathered into a book and consisted of “a spelling department, numerals to 1000, and the following translations: Short and Easy Sentences, Account of Obookiah, Short Account of Creation, First Chapter of Genesis, Parable of the Prodigal Son, the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, etc.”⁷ By these accounts, it is clear that the missionaries left New England well provisioned to undertake the study of the Hawaiian language.

Unfortunately, none but the Ruggles manuscript has come down to us. As a consequence, ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia’s work can only be viewed through the lens of his classmate, whose imperfect knowledge of Hawaiian may have caused the errors and inconsistencies in the manuscript. We cannot now know whose idea it was to use Noah Webster’s *ʒ*s and *ʒ*s to capture the Hawaiian vowel sounds *a* and *u*.⁸ Further, our picture of ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia’s original writing system is even more clouded when we read that by early summer a *ʒ* had been added to the alphabet.⁹

In view of this new information, it might be said that the first formal writing system for the Hawaiian language, meaning alphabet, spelling rules and grammar, was created in Connecticut by a Hawaiian named Henry ‘Ōpūkaha‘ia. He began work as early as 1814 and left much unfinished at his death in 1818. Although not extant, his work served as the basis for the foreign-language materials prepared by American and Hawaiian students at the Foreign Mission School in Cornwall, Connecticut, in the months prior to the departure of the first company of missionaries to Hawai‘i in October 1819. Of this work, only a manuscript titled

“A Short Elementary Grammar of the Owhihe Language,” written by Samuel Ruggles in March 1819, has survived.

Submitted by James Rumford
Manoa Press

NOTES

- ¹ *A Short Elementary Grammar of the Owhihe Language* (attributed to Henry Obookiah) with an introduction by James Rumford (Honolulu: Manoa Press, 1993) (109 copies).
- ² I am much indebted to Marilyn Reppun, who placed a copy of Ruggles’s letter before me. Further confirmation of the identical nature of the handwriting of the manuscript and that of Ruggles comes from a letter Ruggles wrote to Levi Chamberlain, May 7, 1824 (HMCS).
- ³ Samuel Ruggles to Lucia Ruggles Holman, March 1819 (original in the Bishop Museum, copy in HMCS, Missionary Letter Collection, Lucia Ruggles Holman, letters received).
- ⁴ Edwin W. Dwight, *Memoirs of Henry Obookiah* (Honolulu: Women’s Board of Missions for the Pacific Islands, 1990) 35.
- ⁵ Although they are not mentioned in *Memoirs of Henry Obookiah*, they were greatly influenced by him and later came to Hawai‘i as missionaries: Ruggles in 1820 and Ely in 1823.
- ⁶ Hiram Bingham to Samuel Worcester, May 11, 1819 (Bingham Family papers, copies of which are at HMCS).
- ⁷ Typewritten extracts from Oscar P. Bollman, “The Foreign Mission School of Cornwall Connecticut,” an essay presented to the faculty of the Divinity School of Yale University in candidacy for the degree of master of sacred theology, 1939, 9. Bollman’s reference is a letter: Herman Daggett to the American Board, Cornwall, Sept. 1, 1819.
- ⁸ Albert Schütz at the University of Hawai‘i has clearly outlined the connection between this early writing system and Noah Webster’s number–vowel system in “‘Op8k3h3‘e3’s Grammar of H3wie,” *Honolulu Magazine*, November 1989.
- ⁹ Bingham to Worcester, May 11, 1819.

CAPTAIN HENRY BARBER—A GERMAN (FURTHER EVIDENCE)

As I stated in a previous note, it is likely that Captain Henry Barber, of Barbers Point, O‘ahu, was born as Heinrich Barber in Bremen, Germany, on August 11, 1756.¹

A linguistic analysis of one of Barber’s journals, as it appeared

in the *Sydney Gazette* of November 18, 1804,² further supports the "German connection." This English text gives evidence of German substratum influence: "I would say there is a good chance that he might be originally a German speaker, or at least have lived long enough in a German-speaking place. . . ." ³

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NOTES

- ¹ *HJH* 22 (1988): 256-57.
- ² Reprinted in Wilfried Schuhmacher, "Aftermath of the Sitka Massacre of 1802," *Alaska Journal* (winter 1979): 58-61.
- ³ Personal communication, Dr. Sheila M. Embleton, Department of Languages, Literatures and Linguistics, York University, North York, Ontario, Canada, 1992.

ERRATA

In "Albert Edward Kauikeaouli Leiopapa a Kamehameha, Prince of Hawai'i" by Rhoda E. A. Hackler, *HJH* 26 (1992), the date of death and place of consecration of Bishop Thomas N. Staley were incorrectly stated in note 11, page 43. The note should read: "The Bishop referred to was Bishop Thomas Nettleship Staley (1823-1898). He was consecrated as the first Bishop of Honolulu in Lambeth Chapel on 15 Dec. 1861."

A number of typographical errors appeared in "The *Duke of Portland*, the *Traveller*, and the *Prince Regent*: Three Little-known Vessels from Australia" by Frances Jackson, *HJH* 26 (1992).

On page 47, the sentence beginning at the end of line 4 should read: "The problem was exacerbated by the unfortunate personality of this governor, one William Bligh, of *Bounty* fame."

Note 23 should have been keyed to the last line of text on page 52.

All references to *Historical Records of Australia* (Sydney: Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament, 1914-), cited as *HRA*, are to series 1 of that publication. The numbers given in the notes refer to volume and page of that series.

Note 6 should read: “*HRA*, ser. 1, 7: 131; *HRA*, ser. 1, 9: v-vi; Kenneth S. Allen, *That Bounty Bastard* (New York: St. Martin’s P, 1977) 208-14.”

Note 21 should read: “*HRA*, ser. 1, 9: 63; *HRA*, ser. 1, 10: 184 and 822; *Shipping Arrivals* reports a transport of the same name which arrived from London in Jan. 1820. Under coastal vessels ‘Prince Regent, HM Col Sch’ is listed six times between 29 May 1820 and 16 Oct. 1821.”

In note 23, the reference to Daniel Tyerman and George Bennet, *Journal of Voyages and Travels* . . . (London, 1831), should be to 11 and 16 Apr. 1822.

