

## **The Heathen School Makes Connection with Hawaii**

by Don Sevetson

In his book, *The Heathen School*, John Demos shares the important telling of the story of the Foreign Mission School (FMS) at Cornwall, Connecticut, that brings that short-lived institution richly deserved attention. His massive research delves into local records, family histories, and the archives of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM).

The school opened in 1817, under the auspices of the ABCFM, which had been organized seven years earlier. The idea of the school developed because several young Hawaiian men had come to New England as hands on sailing vessels. Among them was Henry Opukaha'ia (identified as Obookiah in New England), who was welcomed and tutored at Yale University.

During its nine years, the school drew 95 students (42 Native American, 19 Hawaiian, 12 others from the U.S., with the rest from Europe, East Asia, Mexico and other Pacific Islands). The official name of the school was soon joined by the name given it by locals, which serves as the book's title: The Heathen School.

Demos describes in fine detail the school's founding and development. The guiding vision was to become a place where young men from many nations could be inspired and trained to return to their homelands as Christian missionaries. The founders felt that concentrating such efforts in a single school would have numerous advantages over establishing multiple schools at mission settings. The book will be especially valuable in Hawai'i, as it adds much to what has been published about Opukaha'ia.

The focal point of the book, though, is a series of events which aroused bitter controversy in the Cornwall community and across the region, ultimately leading to the school's closure. Two young women from the local community married Cherokee men who were, or had been, students at the FMS. Sarah Northrup married John Ridge in 1824, and Harriet Gold married Elias Boudinot in 1826. The thorough detail in Demos' account of these events adds much to our understanding of both the foreign missionary movement and New England life in the early nineteenth century.

Demos chooses to label the FMS a "failure" (p. 271) because of its short life. However, the Cornwall school is best seen as an experiment through which the young ABCFM clarified its views about training indigenous leadership. The reality "on the ground" at Cornwall was that differences of language, culture, behavior, and educational background were much too vast to be overcome in one small school. As a result of the FMS 'experiment' the ABCFM realized that training would best be conducted in the diverse and farflung locations where mission was carried out. Soon missionaries were founding schools and academies in Lahaina and Wailuku and Istanbul and Ahmednagar, and continued to do so for a century.

The latter part of the work follows the two newly married couples back to the Cherokee reservation. This was at the time that the new Jackson administration was embarking upon its horrendous policy of "Indian removal", pressuring Cherokees to give up their lands and move west of the Mississippi, culminating in the "Trail of Tears". The Cherokee tribe was deeply divided over the issue of removal. However, Demos' sympathetic account of the Boudinots and

Ridges, which includes the assassinations of both men in 1839, gives us the perspective of only one side of the controversy, the “Treaty Party”.

The high value of the book’s telling the story of the school is diminished by its sketchy treatment of surrounding actors in the story, especially missionaries. This is especially noticeable once the focus shifts to the Cherokees, where its stereotypical picture of missionaries and the ABCFM is especially misleading. The book portrays the ABCFM and its agents as interested in little other than saving heathen souls.

Actually, at least two of the ABCFM agents who figure prominently in the book, Samuel Austin Worcester and Jeremiah Evarts, were tireless workers on behalf of justice and dignity for the Cherokee people, using the press, rallies, petitions and ultimately lawsuits. This is barely acknowledged. Samuel Austin Worcester (1798-1859), was a missionary to the Cherokees for more than three decades. He met Elias Boudinot during their time together at Andover Seminary. Worcester’s memory is still honored within the Cherokee Nation as “The Messenger”. Among his many activities, the case before the U. S. Supreme Court, Worcester v. Georgia (1832), in which John Marshall and his court ruled in his favor, perpetuates his memory into modern times.

Andrew Jackson flouted the Court’s ruling, resulting in many writers declaring Worcester’s suit a failure. However, Marshall’s ruling in the case was rediscovered in the mid-twentieth century and is Worcester v. Georgia is now a central part of the foundation of the U.S. policy that affirms Native American tribal sovereignty.

The book also does not distinguish Samuel Austin Worcester (1798-1859) from his uncle, Samuel Worcester (1770-1821). The latter was a pastor in Salem MA, who became the first corresponding secretary of the ABCFM and was influential in that board’s decision to send missionaries to the Cherokees. The elder Worcester is buried at the first mission site, in Brainerd, Tennessee.

Jeremiah Evarts, who succeeded the elder Worcester as ABCFM Corresponding Secretary, was the prime mover in a national campaign opposing Pres. Jackson’s legislative proposal to authorize Indian removal. Despite Evarts’ heroic efforts the House of Representatives passed the President’s bill by five votes, 102-97. Evarts had written pseudonymous articles – under the name William Penn - in the *National Intelligencer*, organized rallies and petitions, and visited the Cherokees annually.

*The Heathen School: A Story of Hope and Betrayal in the Age of the Early Republic*, by John Demos (Knopf, 2014).

For further information about the missionaries and Cherokee Indian removal, see:

Andrew, John A., III. *From Revivals to Removal: Jeremiah Evarts, the Cherokee Nation, and the Search for the Soul of America*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992.

Bass, Althea, *Cherokee Messenger*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1936, 1996.

Hicks, Brian, *Toward the Setting Sun: John Ross, the Cherokees, and the Trail of Tears*. Atlantic, 2011.

Prucha, Francis Paul, ed. *Cherokee Removal: The "William Penn" Essays & Other Writings by Jeremiah Evarts*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1981; (containing essays originally published as *Essays On The Present Crisis. American Indians* in 1829).

VanDevellder, Paul, *Savages and Scoundrels: the Untold Story of America's Road to Empire Through Indian Territory*, Yale, 2009.

P. 231 of *The Heathen School* states that there were, in all, nineteen Hawaiian students (p. 231). Of the nineteen, the names of ten are listed in the book.

Henry Opukaha'ia

Thomas Hopoo

John Honoree

Tennoe

Tamoree

William Kummoolah

George Nahemah-hama Sandwich

John Paru (Samuel Mills)

John Cleaveland Irepoah

John Phelps