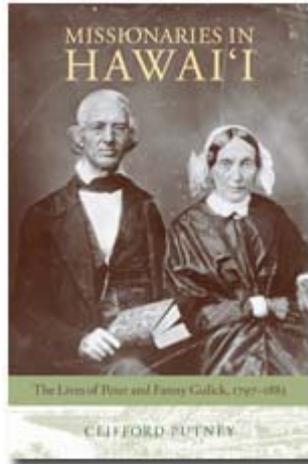


Review

Missionaries in Hawai'i: The Lives of Peter and Fanny Gulick, 1797–1883



Clifford Putney

Clifford Putney. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press / 2010

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I. Francis Kyle III, independent scholar and author-editor of *An Uncommon Christian: James Brainerd Taylor, Forgotten Evangelist in America's Second Great Awakening* (University Press of America, 2008) and *Of Intense Brightness: The Spirituality of Uncommon Christian James Brainerd Taylor* (University Press of America, 2008).

Though one prominent historian advised against the writing of *Missionaries in Hawai'i*, saying that “a less academically fashionable topic than missionaries is hard to imagine,” the author nevertheless pressed on to research and write about the progenitors of whom he argues are one of America’s greatest missionary families and “most important evangelical dynasties” (p. 2). Through learning about the adventuresome lives of Peter (1797–1877) and Fanny (1798–1883) Gulick, the Bentley University Assistant Professor of History and author of *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880–1920* (Harvard University Press, 2001) believes “a unique view of Hawaiian history and the American missionary enterprise” (11) will open up for the reader.

From the 1820s to the 1960s, Putney notes that members of the Gulick clan could be found throughout the world doing missionary work. Only the Riggs clan of Turkey and the Scudder clan of India can rival the Gulick clan concerning longevity of cross-cultural missionary service by one American family and their descendants. Thirty-two Gulicks were employed during the first 150 years (1810–1960) of America’s first Christian foreign mission agency, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM). Putney’s book is the first-ever extensive treatment on the patriarch and matriarch of the Gulick missionary clan.

Beginning with the birth of Peter Johnson Gulick (1797) and ending with the death of Frances “Fanny” Hinkley Thomas Gulick (1883), *Missionaries in Hawai’i* presents a biographical account of the lives of the missionary couple; thus, the simple subtitle and the reason for its specific dates.

The book’s introduction gives an overview of the historical importance of the Gulick clan both to Hawaii and the modern missionary movement. It goes on to give the historical context of nineteenth-century America, pre- and post-W.W. II approaches to the study of the foreign missionary movement and missiology, a list of resources used by Putney, and a summary of each chapter.

Chapter one opens with a condensed account of the early nineteenth-century origins of missionary activity in Hawaii. Since they are largely forgotten figures, Putney then gives a biographical sketch of the pre-missionary (pre-1828) lives of Peter and Fanny.

The chapter concludes by providing a narrative of the couple's 5-month voyage to Hawaii on the ship *Parthian*.

In the bulk of the book, chapters two to six (35–144), Putney chronicles Peter and Fanny's forty-six years of pioneer missionary activity on the Hawaiian islands of Kaua'i (1828–43), Moloka'i (1843–46) and O'ahu (1846–74). He informs the reader about the Gulicks' hardships associated with cross-cultural ministry among the "heathen" while simultaneously raising seven boys and a girl, suffering much themselves with financial and health problems, and dealing with differences with their ABCFM supervisors and co-laborers. While the author admits that the Gulicks are not as prominent as Hiram Bingham and other pioneer missionaries to "The Aloha State," he nevertheless seeks to prove that the story of the Gulicks is worthy of preservation because they were "important catalysts for change on the islands" (13). Putney does this by chronicling the successes and influences of the couple such as their involvement in the formation of many churches and schools (including Punahou School in 1841, U.S. President Barack Obama, Class of 1979) and their interaction with Hawaiian royalty.

In chapter seven, Putney provides details of Peter's three years, and Fanny's nine years, of retirement in Japan. The details surrounding the deaths and legacy of the couple supply the content of the book's conclusion.

Putney's *Missionaries in Hawai'i* endeavors to take a balanced and "empathetic rather than hagiographic or condemnatory" approach in studying the lives of Peter and Fanny Gulick (5). He seeks to avoid the celebratory, saint-like status that some

evangelicals may bestow upon the couple in light of their successful efforts at christianizing the islanders (the majority of the populace converted to American-style Protestantism). He also seeks to avoid the opposite extreme propounded by some Hawaiian nationalists that accuse the “intolerant meddlers” of exploiting the natives by being “advance agents of U.S. imperialism.” Putney argues that the ABCFM missionaries did much good for Hawaii yet they were not without their faults and motives of spreading American capitalism and democracy.

In researching the Gulicks, Putney’s sources are impressive thanks to the large amount of preserved Gulick writings. The family papers are so numerous that Putney can state “that they make the Gulicks one of the best documented middle-class families in American history” (6). The author also spent two summers doing on-site research in Hawaii.

Some of the book’s many strengths are its excellent research, lucid writing, unbiased approach, and skillful interweaving of the Gulicks’ theologically conservative yet socially progressive beliefs with a narrative of their practical “jack-of-all-trades” missionary work. Regarding Putney’s fair-minded approach, an example is how he portrays, through the eyes of their children and grandchildren, Peter and Fanny Gulick as parents and missionaries. While possessing good qualities such as courage, honesty, perseverance, strong faith, and extreme loyalty, as parents they were unaffectionate and a bit emotionally distant. As missionaries who remained true to their calling (other missionaries left to go into real estate and agriculture), Putney believes the historical record indicates Peter and Fanny “did not express a great deal of love for the Hawaiians they converted. . . . [Their] religious zeal and cultural

parochialism acted as blinders, preventing them from seeing much of value in traditional Hawaiian society” (157).

Unless an evangelical Christian is looking for a slanted celebratory work or an anti-missionary Hawaiian nationalist a biased condemnatory one, the weaknesses of *Missionaries in Hawai'i* are scarce. Probably for most evangelicals one weakness or disagreement is Putney's categorizing of Mormonism as a modern-day evangelical group (2, 119). The Mormons began their missionary work in Hawaii in 1850.

According to Burl Burlingame in his review in Honolulu's *Star-Advertiser*, another possible weakness is the book's limited appeal (“Book on Gulicks has limited appeal,” *Star-Advertiser*, 4 July 2010,

http://www.staradvertiser.com/features/20100704_book_on_gulicks_has_limited_appeal.html). Of course, this could be true of any scholarly book written more for academia than the general reader. Maybe Putney will one day write a popular book on the Gulicks?

Hopefully, *Missionaries in Hawai'i* will receive a broad readership and thereby prove false Peter Gulick's belief that his and his wife's life would be of little interest to others: “Our life has been so monotonous in this little pinhole of a kingdom, that if fully written, I think, it could possess, from first to last, very little interest, except to my children, and special friends” (5). The book's main audience, of course, consists of those interested in Hawaiian history and America's modern missionary movement. Students of the Second Great Awakening and nineteenth-century female pioneer missionaries can also benefit from the work. Additionally, there is enough faith-related material in the book to inspire the evangelical reader.

In short, an extremely well researched and written book. Highly recommended.