

MEDIA CONTACT:
Bonnie Louise Judd
bjudd@missionhouses.org
808-447-3916, cell: 808-256-5991



Hawaiian Mission Houses
Historic Site and Archives



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DR. THOMAS A. WOODS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF HAWAIIAN MISSION HOUSES
HISTORIC SITE AND ARCHIVES TO RETIRE ON MAY 1, 2017

HONOLULU, HI (OCTOBER 5, 2016)—Dr. Thomas A. Woods, Executive Director of Hawaiian Mission Houses Historic Site and Archives, has led Hawaiian Mission Houses (HMH) through a re-branding that included a comprehensive overhaul of its bylaws, programs, and a new focus on a main theme that emphasized collaboration between the ali'i and ABCFM missionaries. He will retire as the organization's executive director on May 1, 2017.

After leading Old World Wisconsin and serving as Head of the Minnesota Historical Society's Historic Sites Department, Woods became executive director of HMH in April 2010. He had consulted with several Hawai'i museums since 1992, developing expertise in Hawaiian history through years of working with the Kona Historical Society, the Lyman Museum, Paniolo Preservation Society, Mānoa Heritage Center, and several other museums. The HMH Executive Transition Team will lead a transition and search process to find Woods' successor and ensure the organization continues moving forward in a positive direction.

According to Woods, "It has been an honor and privilege to serve as executive director of Hawaiian Mission Houses Historic Site and Archives. The Archives contains one of the most important collections in the Pacific, and through the staff's hard work and generous donors and grants, we have been successful in digitizing a significant portion of the collection, making it widely available to the public. It has also been a joy to work with staff and community advisors to re-think programming and develop theatre components and affective learning opportunities that provide emotional connections with our stories."

Woods led a 2011 strategic planning process that resulted in a name change, from Mission Houses Museum to Hawaiian Mission Houses Historic Site and Archives, a new vision that emphasized creating a dialogue about the missionary role in the history of Hawai'i, and a main theme that stated, "Collaboration between Native Hawaiians and the American Protestant missionaries resulted in, among other things, the introduction of Christianity, the development of a written Hawaiian language and establishment of schools that resulted in widespread literacy, the promulgation of the concept of constitutional government, the combination of Hawaiian with Western medicine, and the evolution of a new and distinctive musical tradition." Hawaiian Mission Houses continued to evolve under his leadership as the board updated the organization's articles of incorporation and revised its bylaws, redefining eligibility for board membership and the composition of the board to better reflect the community, among other important changes. Annual strategic planning retreats have kept the organization focused and moving forward.

Woods is credited with making the organization's programs innovative, entertaining, and more community-focused, through its mele program, Cemetery Pupu Theatre, outdoor summer Shakespeare plays, more engaging tours, and a variety of other programs. He has provided strong support for digitizing the organization's exceptional archival collection. Most recently, the organization digitized and made available to the public a large collection of letters written by the ali'i. He also oversaw an 85% increase in school tours since 2010, most within the past two years after the historic site introduced a redesigned school program that was created by teachers for teachers.

He has helped prepare the organization, founded in 1852, to reflect on the missionary role in nineteenth-century Hawai'i and rejuvenate the collaboration of that era for the upcoming 2020 bicentennial commemoration of the arrival of the Protestant missionaries. Woods led the organization to publish David Forbes' important book, *Engraved at Labainaluna* and engaged Mr. Forbes to "re-envision" the 1969 *Missionary Album* as a new missionary biographies book now in manuscript with a working title *Partners in Change: ABCFM Missionaries to Hawai'i* that includes significant inclusion of the role of individual Hawaiians and Tahitians in the Sandwich Island Mission. He has also begun working with invited authors for a second book for the bicentennial that includes chapters on the role of missionaries collaborating with ali'i to introduce Christianity, literacy, constitutional government, medicine, and polyphonic music.

Martha Morgan, president of HMH, commented, "Tom has been a huge blessing for this organization. From the beginning, he understood the challenges and the opportunities faced by the organization. His creativity in developing programs that appeal to the public has invigorated interest in our collections and programs, setting us on solid ground. His management and organizational skills are exceptional, and his ability to develop relationships with the broader community has set us in a positive and refreshing direction. He will be sorely missed."

Upon retirement, Dr. Woods plans to move back to Wisconsin to be with his family, and perform consulting work through his business, Making Sense of Place, Inc.

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Hawaiian Mission Houses Historic Site and Archives is located in Honolulu's Historic Capitol District and is the leading authority on Protestant missionary history in Hawai'i. It is known worldwide as the place where the Hawaiian written language was developed through the collaborative efforts of the missionaries and the ali'i (the Hawaiian royalty) and the Hawaiian people. It preserves the two oldest documented houses in Hawai'i, which were built and used by missionaries in the early nineteenth century, and the largest collection of Hawaiian language books in the world.

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