

HAWAII NEWS

First printing of Hawaiian language commemorated

By [Rosemarie Bernardo](#) • Today • Updated 12:44 am

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An intimate ceremony was held Friday at the Hawaiian Mission Houses Historic Site and Archives to commemorate the bicentennial anniversary of the first mass printing in the Hawaiian language.

Members of the royal society 'Ahahui Ka'ahumanu were among those celebrating the historic event that took place Jan. 7, 1822, in a hale pili (grass house) at the downtown site, which was then known as the Sandwich Island Mission.

On that day, missionaries Elisha Loomis and the Rev. Hiram Bingham invited Keeaumoku, governor of Maui, to make the first "pull" of the printing press for the first copy of the Hawaiian Primer. More than 2,500 copies were printed over the next nine months, according to the Hawaiian Mission Houses.

Loomis made the second pull, followed by mission benefactor James Hunnewell, a first mate on the ship Thaddeus, which carried a group of missionaries from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions from Boston to Hawaii in April 1820. The ship also brought over a Rampage printing press made of iron and mahogany.

Hawaiian and Tahitian scholars collaborated with missionaries to develop the written Hawaiian language.

"With the alii's guidance and insistence that all kanaka maoli learn how to read and write, and with the ability to mass-produce the written Hawaiian language, Hawaii became one of the most literate nations in the world in the mid- to late 1800s," said Elizabeth Lentz-Hill, director of development and executive team member at the Hawaiian Mission Houses.

"During this time the development of the written language was paramount in the minds of both the alii and the missionaries. For the missionaries, it was to be able to translate the Bible into olelo Hawaii so that Native Hawaiians could read the Bible in their own language. For the alii it was also because they saw an additional way of education in the world of the 1800s," Lentz-Hill said.

The guests at Friday's ceremony included Barbara Loomis North, who represented the Loomis family and took her turn pulling the large wooden handle on the replica printing press that uses wooden typeset blocks, producing an 17-by-11-inch flyer marking the bicentennial.

"I was very honored to be there today," North said.

Lentz-Hill said the event also was a celebration of the Hawaiian language and "how we share it and the connection we have between people, between members of our ohana and with our past, because our past tells us about our present so we can build a better future."

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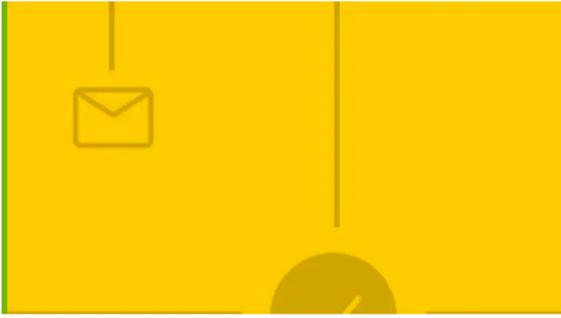
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