

# Reminiscences and Reflections



*Courtesy of Church Archives*



**Fig. 1.** President Hinckley speaking at the Pioneers in the Pacific Conference on Saturday, October 11, 1997  
*Courtesy of Network Photos, Lā'ie, Hawai'i*

# Chapter 1

## Address to the Pioneers in the Pacific Conference

*President Gordon B. Hinckley*

**A**loha! How wonderful it is to be with you and with these young people who have entertained us. My, you did a great job! You have been practicing for a very long time and that tells us something, that when we have a plan and when we practice and work at it, then we perform beautifully and get very pleasing results. So it is with all of our lives. I hope you will never forget the experience that you have had today, as you have performed in this great Cannon Center [on the campus of Brigham Young University–Hawai‘i]. You have done such a beautiful job. We have been so richly and wonderfully entertained. You look so colorful. Keep the weeds, keep the bugs out of your lives, as Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin has indicated to you. Stay away from the evil things. Look for the good. Stay away from drugs. Never get involved in drugs. Do not get involved in gangs. They will only tear you down. Live close to the Lord, and, as he has indicated, your lives will be happy and filled with great promise and great opportunity and great accomplishment. I did not know that there were so many beautiful

children in Lā‘ie. You are all here! What a wonderful job you have done. How grateful we are to you for your entertainment this morning. Thank you, thank you, *mahalo!*

Now, thanks to all the rest of you. You are so very, very gracious to us. Thank you for your great kindness. Thank you for your great thoughtfulness. Thank you for your generosity. Thank you for your love. We are deeply grateful to you. We have leis on our necks and flowers in our room and nice things to eat, and we are so very, very grateful. Thank you so very much.

We are going to leave here a little later and fly to Apia, Sāmoa, where we will have meetings. Then we will go over to Savai‘i and hold meetings there, then on to Pago Pago, American Sāmoa, for meetings there. After that, we will go to Tonga, to Nuku‘alofa, and to Vava‘u, and hold meetings in those places. Then we will go to Fiji, then to Tahiti. Then I hope we will go home! But we will be out among the wonderful Polynesian people who have made such a great contribution to this Church and its work.

At conference time a film was shown between the two sessions of conference. Some of you saw it, I guess; I gave the introductory remarks. It dealt with modern pioneers, people who have made great sacrifices and great efforts to build the Church in these latter days. However, I said to the producers of that film, "I'm not very happy with it." Now, I do not wish to spoil your enjoyment of that film, but I did not feel happy with it because it singled out only five or six modern pioneers against the hundreds who have laid the foundation of this work across the world and particularly those who laid the foundation of the work in the islands of the Pacific. We have never had greater heroes in this Church, in my judgment, than those who laid the foundations of the work in Polynesia. They were wonderful men who went out at great sacrifice. Some of them died. They gave their very lives to this work. They stayed for long periods of time, as long as nine years. They were absolutely indefatigable in teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ wherever they went. They were great and good men. Governments moved against them. Other religions moved against them. They were banished. They were prevented from entering some countries. They had a thousand problems to deal with, but they kept the faith and kept laboring, and the work is the stronger for their great sacrifices.

I think of Tahiti and that area of the Pacific. Two names stand out there. I cannot discuss them all, only these two names, and I guess you have mentioned them a hundred times during this *Pioneers in the Pacific* Conference. Right? Do you know the names I am going to mention? Addison Pratt, yes, and Benjamin F. Grouard. Well, you have heard all about them. I just want to say this: They were out there so long. They left in 1843. They did not even learn that the Prophet Joseph had been murdered until a full year after it happened. They did not know very much about things at home generally. Addison Pratt did not receive a letter from his wife for two years. Now you men, how would you get along without a letter from your wife for two years? You would won-

der if she was still alive. Benjamin Grouard's wife never wrote to him. He married another woman in the islands. Nobody knew what ever became of his first wife. Despite these hardships, Elders Pratt and Grouard stayed on and on and on, taught the gospel, went from island to island, and laid the foundations of the work clear back in that early age before the Saints had come west. To me it is a very remarkable and wonderful achievement.

In Hawai'i, the names that stand out among the many, many who did a great and a wonderful work here are George Q. Cannon, of course, for whom this building is named and who was honored yesterday in the exercise that we had in dedicating his statue, and Jonathan Nāpela, who helped Brother Cannon translate the Book of Mormon into the native Hawaiian tongue. These brethren must always be remembered as great pioneers of the Pacific. They held on. Some of Elder Cannon's companions went home, but he and others stayed and worked and worked and worked. Then, of course, there was Joseph F. Smith, who later became the President of the Church, and his dear old Ma Manuhi'i, who loved him and cared for him and nurtured him when he was sick. By the time the Hawai'i Temple was ready for dedication, Joseph F. Smith had passed on and Heber J. Grant came to dedicate it. Steven L. Richards, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, came with him, and Brother Richards himself told me that as they sat in the dedicatory services, Ma Manuhi'i, who was now blind and old and had great difficulty, came up the aisle, crying, "Iosepa, Iosepa," the Hawaiian name of her beloved boy whom she had taken care of.

We were recently in Australia, and while there we attended the opening of an exhibit in the Australian National Maritime Museum honoring the *Julia Ann*, which carried some twenty-eight members of the Church from Sydney to San Francisco. That was the destined route, but when they got out by Scilly Atoll (Manuae) several hundred miles from Tahiti, the boat hit the reef

and capsized. A number of the people were drowned. Yet the captain's account says some very interesting things about the survivors of the *Julia Ann*. After the wreck, the captain decided that their only hope was to sail the ship's salvaged quarterboat to Sāmoa. Though the survivors protested that this would take too long, the captain was resolute. As preparations were being made, one of the elders reported a dream that he had had. He saw the boat successfully launched and making progress at first, but then he saw it capsized on the waters and the drowned bodies of the crew floating around it. The captain was angry that this dream had been discussed in public, but he could not do anything because now all the sailors were against him because of what the "Mormon elder" had said. Well, the elder had another dream, in which he saw ten men rowing the boat eastward, which was contrary to the winds, but they made it to a friendly island in three days and obtained help. The captain decided to try it. When only nine volunteered for the rescue mission, the captain asked the elder if he believed his own vision and if he would come along. "Of course I will," replied the elder, and so, contrary to all the rules of the sea in that part of the world, they sailed east to Bora Bora, where they were rescued and things were put in motion under which the survivors of the *Julia Ann* were picked up and taken to San Francisco. That all happened because of the inspiration of the Lord to a humble priesthood holder.

When I think of the Cook Islands, I think of a missionary couple who was sent there about fifty years ago. I knew them very, very well. They struggled there. They worked there. They did their very best there. The wife became ill and died there, and they could not bring her body back home to the United States. She had to be buried there for at least a year, and he had to come on home. Such has been the great, quiet, unsung sacrifice of those who have pioneered in these great parts of the Pacific.

New Zealand, of course, brings to mind things that do not go back so far, particularly the

temple. I was there for the dedication of the New Zealand Temple. I was there with President David O. McKay and with Brother Delbert L. Stapley and Brother Marion G. Romney. We were the assigned visitors. I had the responsibility of setting up the work in the New Zealand Temple, and before the temple was dedicated, a meeting was held of the Saints who had come over from Australia, and I will always remember this testimony. A man stood up and said, "I live in Perth. I had to come all the way across Australia and all the way across the Tasman Sea to get here. I couldn't afford it. I have a wife and three children. We owned a few dishes. We owned a few sticks of furniture. We owned an old car. I said to myself, 'You'd like to go, but you can't go.'" Then he said, "As we were seated at the table, I looked across the table at my beautiful wife and at our three beautiful children, and I said, 'You cannot afford *not* to go. You will get another job. The Lord will bless you in your work. You'll be able to buy some dishes. You'll be able to buy some furniture. You'll be able to buy another car,' and so we came here." He said, "I'm so grateful we came. I would have been poor indeed had I failed to take advantage of the sealing of my wife and children to me. I'm so grateful." At that time he had nothing. I have known him since. He has prospered. He has occupied high positions in the Church. He has done well in his business. The Lord has poured out His blessings upon him. The faith of that man is all a part of the great fabric of faith which we have seen woven throughout Polynesia, and today we pay them honor for the strength of their faith. God bless their memories to our great good.

Sāmoa and the establishment of the Church there is kind of an interesting thing. Walter Murray Gibson, as you know, came here to Hawai'i. You all know the story of Walter Gibson. He defrauded the people and was excommunicated from the Church. But he sent two missionaries to Sāmoa, and they opened the work there. And they stayed for a long time. Apart from his companion whom he outlived, Elder Samuela Manoa never saw another Latter-day Saint missionary

for twenty-five years. Eventually, missionaries from Utah arrived and embraced him and helped rekindle the work. In Sāmoa we were persecuted. Political troubles restricted our work on all sides. We had great difficulty. The LMS, the London Missionary Society, created great problems for us. But we have to acknowledge that they were responsible for carrying Christianity to Sāmoa and to other lands of the Pacific and that our harvest was based on their earlier efforts in very large measure.

I think of Joseph H. Dean, who pleaded with the Brethren to let him do this work and who arrived in Sāmoa in the late 1880s to continue what Elders Manoa and [Kimo] Pelio had started. In Sāmoa the missionaries found the AhMu family. AhMu was a Chinese man who had married a Samoan woman. Family tradition had it that as a young boy he had been rescued from the Amur River in China and so given the name AhMu. To this day, within that great family who came into the Church, some are known as AhMu, some as Rivers, but they have all been faithful and wonderful and good people.

The missionaries went to Tonga from Sāmoa. There stands out in my mind among the pioneers of Tonga, Brother Vernon Coombs. The First Presidency concluded that it was not worth the fight to have the work go on in Tonga, and so they wrote to President Coombs and told him that he had better close up the mission. He sent back a letter pleading with them to give him the opportunity to work with the people he loved and carry on that great work. The First Presidency rescinded their earlier decision, and he continued and did a marvelous work there as did his son, D'Monte Coombs, who followed him some years later.

Now, Fiji—just a word on Fiji—I want to speak of Pat Dalton, who served on your faculty. Pat did a great job in Fiji, which at the time was part of the Tongan Mission, over which he was presiding. President Henry D. Moyle said to me on one occasion, “Do we have all the mission presidents?” I said, “We have a man for every-

where but Tonga.” And he said, “Well, it’s up to you to find the man for Tonga.” I did not know where to find a man for Tonga. Well, I went to Korea as a part of my regular assignment at that time. I had responsibility for the work in Asia and in Korea. Pat Dalton was working for UNICEF in postwar reforestation of Korea. There we met Pat Dalton. He told me that he had said to the Lord, “Please take out of my heart the desire to go back to Tonga or else let me go.” It was under those circumstances that we found the mission president for Tonga, which in those days included Fiji. He went and did a marvelous work. Pat, thank you for all the great good that you did in the work while you were there. Marvelous. In Fiji, I rode with him once from Suva to Nadi. I thought we would never get there. It was the roughest ride I think I have ever had. I flew back through a storm. It was better than riding with Pat to Nadi.

Now, I have had a few experiences of my own in this great and beautiful part of the world. On one occasion years ago, I was in Nuku’alofa, Tonga, and wanted to go to Vava’u to create the first stake there, and so we booked passage on the little plane to Vava’u. And when we got to Vava’u and had organized the stake, we received a telegram that said the plane would not be flying for a good while. There we were on Vava’u. The plane was not going to fly. There was an old boat, the old mail boat was in the harbor, and we traded our airplane tickets for passage on that boat, and when we went down to the harbor, it was absolutely magnificent. It was beautiful. Then we moved into the open sea and it began to rain. President Paletu’a was with us. He was the mission president.

He and his wife lay on the deck. All of us were up on the deck. We had no place to sleep. We went through the night. Brother and Sister Paletu’a were seasick. One or two others were seasick. I did not get seasick, and my wife did not get seasick until she put her foot on solid ground in Nuku’alofa, and then she let go. We had been onboard for twenty-two hours.

The next day I had an appointment to see the king, and I said to His Majesty, "What happened to the plane? Why couldn't we fly the plane back?" He said, "Well, the chief mechanic had a birthday, and they had a party for him, and he became inebriated. He thought he'd take the plane for a joy ride. He'd never flown a plane before, but he started up the engine, put his friends in and took off down the runway, and pancaked into the trees and broke up the plane." And that is the reason we had to come back on the old mail boat. I will never forget it. I will never forget you, President Paletu'a, and your wife, who made such an interesting picture leaning over the rail.

I had another experience in the South Pacific. I was in Australia, and I received a telegram from the Brethren to go to Tahiti and dedicate a new building on Huahine. So I changed my course and went to Papeete and over to Huahine and there dedicated the building in a wonderful service. People had come from all over those islands. Then we came back to Papeete. We flew both ways.

The next day we had a conference, and we were just starting the conference. The opening musical number was being given when a telegram was handed to President Kendall Young, and he handed it to me, and it said, "The *Manuia* has hit the reef at Maupiti, and many people were killed." He said, "What shall we do?" I said, "I think we had better abandon this conference and get some supplies and try to get a boat to get to Maupiti." President Young looked around and finally found an old PT boat that was owned by a Chinese man who secured fuel enough to fill the engine. All through that afternoon and through the night, we rode that old PT boat from Papeete to Maupiti. In the morning we could see the reef and the boat that had been shipwrecked.

The *Manuia's* captain had come along the reef, parallel to the reef. Some of the men had pleaded with him not to try to go through the pass in the reef but to get out to open sea again. He disregarded their pleas, and a great wave

came and lifted that boat right up onto the reef and tipped it over. It rolled three times. When we finally got on the island, we discovered that almost the entire Relief Society had been drowned. We had taken with us boards for coffins, but the bodies had already been buried because the sun was very hot. We gave the boards to the man who had taken them from his house to provide coffins. Then we walked down the streets of that little village picking up the little children who had been left motherless and holding them in our arms. The French secretary general of the territory flew to Bora Bora and then went over to Maupiti by boat. He was there. We held a funeral service that I have never forgotten, that touching experience in the islands of Tahiti. One of the survivors who was given a blessing was a nonmember nurse by the name of Claire Teihotaata. She later joined the Church and married. She has been stake Relief Society president, and she has done a great and wonderful work.

These are my memories, my brothers and sisters, of pioneers of the Pacific. You have heard the stories of perhaps hundreds of pioneers who have been among the great and the valiant and the true and the faithful and the dedicated of this Church. Their names are not mentioned very much these days, but every one of us owes to them a great debt of gratitude for what they have made possible. And many of you today who have been gathered from those islands and are here because of their efforts, and I hope that you never, never, never forget that.

Well, I have looked around at the people here. It has just amazed me, almost, to see the progeny of those early missionaries who lived in poverty, who had nothing, who lived off the land, who had no income to take care of their needs, who were not sent money from the United States, nothing of the kind. They were poor, but they were faithful, and now I see their affluent progeny who have the money to come here and celebrate their early efforts on this very significant occasion when you celebrate in your way this great pioneer year of 1997. It has been a

wonderful year. Now it is behind us. It is time to turn about, face the future, and work as they worked, and pray as they prayed, and reach out to those who know not the saving principles of the gospel, to extend to them the great love of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is the very lifeblood of that which we believe in and teach.

God bless you, my beloved brothers and sisters, my dear friends, you missionaries who are here. You walk in great footsteps, wonderful

footsteps, of dedicated men and women, and you who have come, many of you, out of the various islands of the Pacific. May you always hold close to your hearts the great inheritance that has come to you, because of faithful and strong and true and great men and women, is my humble prayer as I leave my love and blessing with you, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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