



Chapter 20

History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Fiji

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Fiji's importance in the development of the Pacific Islands revolves around its strategic geographic position, its ethnically diverse population, and its prowess as an economic leader in the region. Centrally positioned, Fiji is often called the gateway or hub of the South Pacific.¹ While the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints begins much later in Fiji than it did in the neighboring countries of French Polynesia, Tonga, and Sāmoa, the history is no less eventful. In this chapter, we examine the colonial backdrop to this history, considering the cultural and religious background of the two main ethnic groups in Fiji—ethnic Fijians and Indo-Fijians. We then look at the influence of several key pioneer families in Fiji that provided the necessary foundation for Church establishment and growth. Missionary efforts, educational expansion, and membership growth are also discussed as the story unfolds. The crowning event in this story is the dedication of the Suva Fiji Temple by President Gordon B. Hinckley amidst the coup in 2000.

The Foundation of Christianity in Fiji

Like many of the Pacific Islands that were arbitrarily grouped together by European colonizers, Fiji is a mixture of diverse cultures, languages, and peoples.² During the nineteenth century, the era when the first Christian missionaries arrived in the Fiji Islands, three *matanitu* (kingdoms) had influence over much of what is now regarded as Fiji: Kubuna, Burebasaga, and Tovata. Forming a geographic periphery around its leader's home island of Bau, Kubuna encompassed much of the central and northern portions of Viti Levu, the Yasawa Group, Ovalau, Gau, and Koro Islands. Led by the famed *Ratu* (chief) Seru Cakobau, Kubuna was the most influential of the three *matanitu*. Yet Cakobau lacked the power to reign over the other two regions, let alone control many of the *Kai Colo* (tribes from the interior regions of the main islands) that were so prevalent in the interior portions of the large islands under his reign. The

next most powerful region, Tovata, was led by the exiled Tongan chief Enele Ma'afu and included the vast region of Vanua Levu and the Lau Group.³ The final *matanitu*, Burebasaga, led by the *Tui Rewa* (king of Rewa), included the Suva and Rewa coastal regions of Viti Levu and the southern Fiji Islands, including Kadavu. Despite Ma'afu and Cakobau's influence, they did not have complete control over their regions. Rather, local chiefs presided over these areas, which is an important aspect in the preservation of Fijian culture and tradition.⁴

During the mid- to late-1800s the Methodist Church—and in a few locations, the Catholic Church—infiltrated the vast expanse of village networks in all of the major island groups of Fiji. The *Lotu Wesele* (literally, the Church of Wesley, or the Methodist Church) counted approximately 90 percent of the Fijian population within its membership by the late nineteenth century and maintained this percentage throughout much of the early and mid-twentieth century. According to John Wesley Coulter, "The connectional spirit of Methodism and its form of church government were found to be suited to the social system of the Fijians."⁵ David Cargill and William Cross arrived as the first European Methodist missionaries to Lakeba Island in the Lau Group in 1835.⁶ Over the next four years, the Methodists expanded their missionary program first to Viti Levu (Rewa), and thence to Cakobau's home island of Bau and Somosomo (Taveuni).⁷ No Methodist convert was more famous than Cakobau himself, who joined in 1854 with the encouragement of King George of Tonga. With Cakobau's acceptance of the *Lotu Wesele* and aided by chiefs who were allied to Cakobau, the spread of Methodist Christianity hastened throughout the Fiji Islands.

Catholic missionaries had generally followed Protestant missionaries into most Pacific Island locations.⁸ The Catholic Church established the Vicariate Apostolic of Western Oceania in 1836 and sent its first missionaries to Lakeba in 1844.⁹ Catholic missionaries soon found con-

verts on the major islands of Fiji—Viti Levu, Vanua Levu, Taveuni, Kadavu, and Ovalau. Although the Catholic missionaries arrived in Fiji less than a decade after the Methodists, they never achieved the level of influence that the Methodists did.

Cakobau came under mounting pressure, and his power in the Fiji Islands was repeatedly challenged.¹⁰ In 1855, a U.S. vessel was enlisted to settle a financial debt dispute through force; when the vessel approached Cakobau's home island of Bau, he was forced to pay the debt or be deported. Cakobau elected to cede the Fiji Islands to Great Britain in hopes that it would help him extricate himself from his current predicament. Britain rejected Cakobau's initial offer. The next two decades proved tumultuous as Cakobau continued to battle with *Kai Colo*, the powerful Tongan chief Ma'afu, and negotiated with American and European governments for power.¹¹ Methodist missionaries repeatedly petitioned the British government to annex the Fiji Islands in an attempt to divert potential cession to the French, which would almost solidify Catholic domination throughout the islands. Finally, in 1874, the British formalized cession of the islands with Cakobau and the leading coastal chiefs, though it took another twenty years or so until all interior and western Viti Levu succumbed to British rule. The chiefs who signed hoped the British annexation of Fiji would solidify Christianity, which was by this time established in much of the Fiji Islands.¹² Shortly after the colonial annexation, the British government established the Great Council of Chiefs as a means of gaining and maintaining control over the masses.¹³

Unlike its neighbors in the Pacific, Fiji had a period of thirty-eight years where indentured servants were brought by the British from eastern and southern India to work in the rich sugar plantations.¹⁴ One of the reasons foreign laborers were recruited by the British was not so much that the indigenous Fijians were not able or willing to work but that the British did not want to disrupt traditional Fijian society with the

instigation of capitalist-oriented agriculture.¹⁵ Thus, between 1879 and 1917, over sixty thousand Indians from all castes were brought to Fiji.¹⁶ Although the indentured system focused on bringing young, single male adults to Fiji, the British Indian government wanted some 40 percent of those leaving for Fiji to be female so that families could be established.¹⁷ Indentured servitude lasted for a period of five years, at which time individuals were given the choice of remaining in Fiji or returning to their Indian homelands. If Indians desired to return to their homelands, they would have free passage return after working a period of an additional five years in Fiji. After seeing firsthand the richness of the land and recognizing other potential economic ventures, most Indians opted to stay and make Fiji their permanent home. At the turn of the twentieth century, an influx of Indian, European, and Chinese merchants catered to the growing Indian population and had established themselves as the leaders in the local business community centers in Suva, Ba, Lautoka, and Labasa.

The Early Years: Pioneer Latter-day Saints

When The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints came to Fiji, a large majority of ethnic Fijians were Christian (see table 1). Of the Indians residing in Fiji, 81 percent adhered to Hinduism, 15 percent were Muslim, and only 4 percent had converted to Christianity. Largely because of the strong Methodist influence in Fiji, 85.7 percent of ethnic Fijians were members of the *Lotu Wesele* and 11.7 percent were Roman Catholics.¹⁸ Most schools in colonial Fiji were owned and operated by these religious institutions.¹⁹

Unlike its Polynesian neighbors—French Polynesia, Hawai'i, New Zealand, Sāmoa, and Tonga—Fiji did not have any Latter-day Saint members until well into the twentieth century. The first known member to live in Fiji was Mary Ashley, who moved with her small family from

Tonga to Suva in 1924.²⁰ Known to friends and family by her Tongan name, Mele Ve'a, Sister Ashley lived a long distance from Church members for nearly thirty years before the Church was formally established in Fiji. Throughout this time period, Sister Ashley paid her tithes and contributions through correspondence to mission leaders in Tonga. Primarily because of her connections with the Church in Tonga, Fiji was included as part of the Tongan Mission from 1924 to 1953. In order to better accommodate the needs of Sister Ashley's family in Fiji, the country was assigned to the New Zealand Mission on June 8, 1953.²¹ Though New Zealand was farther away, the change allowed regular missionary visits to Suva once every three months. During the earlier period of geographic isolation, the Ashleys kept in contact with Church leaders through correspondence and periodic member visits to Fiji. For instance, while journeying to visit members in Tonga, Emile Dunn stopped in Fiji to see Sister Ashley in 1936. The occasion brought comfort to Sister Ashley since she had prayed for a servant of the Lord to come and bless her children.²² On January 23, 1954, Sister Ashley's eleven-year-old daughter Margaret was baptized at Laucala Beach Estate. This is the first recorded baptism of the Church performed in Fiji.

A series of mission boundary reorganizations transferred Fiji from the New Zealand Mission to the Samoan Mission in 1954 and once again to the Tongan Mission in 1958. Positioning

Table 1. Percent of population by religious group, 1956

Religious group	Percent
Methodist (<i>Lotu Wesele</i>)	40.0
Hindu	39.7
Roman Catholic	8.0
Muslim	7.3
Church of England	1.5
Seventh Day Adventist	1.2



Fig. 1. David O. McKay greets Peni Tokailagi Sokia while in Fiji.
Courtesy of Church Archives

Fiji within the Tongan Mission made sense, primarily because of its proximity directly west of Tonga. The first recorded meeting of the Church was held July 25, 1954, in the Matanisiga Hall in Toorak, Suva.²³ Of the thirty-eight people in attendance, ten nationalities were represented.²⁴ Tongan Cecil B. Smith, the only elder living in Fiji at the time, conducted the meeting. President Howard B. Stone, president of the Samoan Mission, assigned Elders Boyd L. Harris and Sheldon L. Abbott as the first two missionaries to labor in the Fiji Islands.²⁵ Elders Abbott and Harris left Sāmoa via boat on August 31, 1954, and arrived in Fiji on September 3, 1954.²⁶ Two days later the Suva Branch was organized with only fourteen people present.²⁷ One month later Elder John H. Groberg arrived in Suva en route to his missionary assignment in Tonga. He labored with Elders Harris and Abbott for a few weeks prior to catching a boat to Tonga.²⁸ Missionary work in Fiji was difficult during the first year, largely because of opposition from local leaders of other Christian churches. Elder Harris wrote how ministers of other faiths would often follow the two missionaries around; some even went into the

homes with the missionaries to try to disrupt them from teaching the gospel.²⁹

Besides the Ashley family, two other families were crucial during the infant years of the Church in Fiji. In the 1950s Brother Smith and his family, and Emma Broederlow Lobendahn and her family joined Sister Ashley's family to form a branch.³⁰ The Relief Society was organized on October 9, 1955, with Sister Lobendahn called as the first president. Two days later the first Relief Society meeting was held with Sister Rita H. Stone in attendance.³¹ Sister Lobendahn was a woman of great faith and had under-

gone a series of trials that helped prepare her for her role as the president of the Suva Branch Relief Society, a calling she would hold for over thirty years (see Emma Lobendahn's testimony in chapter 6).³² Elders Harris and Abbott had approached Sister Lobendahn three times before she accepted the calling as Relief Society president. She felt reluctant at first because of her inexperience and young age.³³

President David O. McKay became the first prophet to visit Fiji when he arrived with his wife and Franklin J. Murdock on January 5, 1955.³⁴ During this stopover en route to Tonga, the prophet arranged a historic meeting with the Saints in Suva, although it was an unplanned meeting. President McKay's party made their way to Suva via the 135-mile Queen's Highway from Nadi to Suva on January 5, 1955, where they had planned to catch a boat to Tonga. Because the hurricane warnings were still in effect, the prophet's party was delayed until Sunday, January 9, 1955.³⁵ On Friday, the McKays had ventured into town to browse through the local shops and stores in downtown Suva. As they were walking down a street, they heard their

names called from behind, “President McKay! Sister McKay!” To their surprise they turned around and were introduced to Elders Harris and Abbott. President McKay responded, “I was unaware that there were missionaries or members of the Church residing here in Suva.”³⁶ President McKay was delighted to learn that a branch of the Church had been established and immediately arranged to hold a meeting prior to their departure to Tonga.

President and Sister McKay and President Murdock met with twenty-eight members and missionaries in the home of Brother Smith in Lami, a suburb directly west of Suva (see fig. 2). Brother Smith “wept tears of joy and thanksgiving” as he introduced the prophet to the small

congregation. President McKay remarked, “Surely God has had a hand in changing our schedule so that we can be with you, the members of the Church here on this island.”³⁷ While speaking with the Saints, President McKay said that this was not his first visit to Fiji. As part of a worldwide tour of the missions of the Church, the then-Elder McKay had visited Fiji in 1921 with Elder Hugh J. Cannon (see chapter 16).³⁸ They had not felt impressed at that time to introduce the gospel in the Fiji Islands, but after visiting with the nucleus of Saints in Brother Smith’s home, President McKay felt the time had arrived for the Church to begin to grow in these islands and explained that unless the local leaders could find African ancestry, the Fijian men were not restricted



Fig. 2. President David O. McKay and Sister Emma Rae Riggs McKay meet with Latter-day Saints in Fiji on January 9, 1955, at the home of Brother Cecil Smith.

Courtesy of Sheldon L. Abbott

from getting the priesthood.³⁹ So he challenged the Saints to make every effort possible to share the gospel with their neighbors in Fiji.⁴⁰

Two adult members attending this meeting mentioned to President McKay that they were present with Elders McKay and Cannon thirty-four years earlier on a boat ride from Tongatapu to Ha'apai in which they witnessed an apostolic miracle. During this voyage, they recalled that a mighty storm arose with tumultuous waves and many of the passengers felt that they would perish. Those in the boat petitioned Elder McKay to offer a prayer that they might be saved from the raging ocean. Elder McKay offered a prayer, and the ocean was calmed.⁴¹

Elders Harris and Abbott had the opportunity to share with the prophet the unusual predicament that faced the Church in Fiji. The

government would not allow the Church to meet in any location in Suva other than the area where the Matanisiga Hall was located, a place that was off-limits even to military personnel. Upon learning about this unique situation, President McKay said to the elders that the Church needed to have a meetinghouse of its own in Suva. "We need to have a school also," the prophet continued, "a place for the young people to go." Prior to his departure to Tonga, President McKay met with Sir Ronald Garvey, governor of the Fiji Colony, and discussed the inappropriate meeting situation for Church meetings in the Matanisiga Hall. The governor agreed with the prophet and arranged for the Church to meet in the Girls' Guide Hall, a downtown Suva location that was more fitting for Church services. President McKay also informed Elders Harris and Abbott that he would allow



Fig. 3. President David O. McKay at the dedication of the Suva Fiji Chapel in 1958
Courtesy of Church Archives

them to buy a place whereby the Church could build a meetinghouse of its own.⁴² The Saints met for a year or so in the Girls Guide Hall, and then in the larger Masonic Hall prior to the completion of their new building.

After President McKay's party departed for Tonga, they returned for another brief layover in Fiji on January 23–24, 1955, before heading on to New Zealand. President Howard Stone and his wife met President McKay's party in Suva and discussed the potential for a chapel in Suva. President McKay then visited several potential property locations in Suva where a chapel could be built.⁴³ Not convinced that any of these sites were the right location for a meetinghouse, President McKay urged Elders Harris and Abbott to strive to obtain land on a hill that overlooked the Grand Pacific Hotel and much of the government buildings of Suva.⁴⁴

With the help of Elders Abbot and Harris, and not more than two months after President McKay's departure from Fiji, President Stone received permission from Church headquarters to obtain property in Suva. President Stone, along with Elders Abbott and Harris, met with Sir Henry Scott, who represented the owners of the one-and-a-half-acre property overlooking the government buildings district of Suva. Since Fiji was at the time a crown colony of the queen of England, U.S. citizens were prohibited from owning land in Fiji. This problem was rectified by placing the land in the name of Elder Harris, a native of Alberta, Canada, who was the legal owner of the property for ten years before it was negotiated to be placed in the name of the Corporation of the Church.⁴⁵

With the purchase of the land successfully arranged, the task remained to obtain a building permit prior to actually going forward with construction. By this time Elders Abbott and Harris had returned to their homes, and another set of missionaries had arrived in Fiji, Elders Willard E. Shingleton and Wayne R. Markham. Negotiating to obtain the building permit proved futile for the young elders, and they informed President Stone

of the Samoan Mission of their difficulties. President Stone informed the brethren at the Missionary Department in Salt Lake City about the situation; they promptly arranged for Elder Hugh B. Brown of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles to come to Fiji and settle the matter. Being a Canadian citizen and a member of the Canadian Bar provided Elder Brown with the necessary credentials to arrange with the local Fiji authorities for a building permit. Upon meeting Elders Shingleton and Markham, Elder Brown said, "Let me go down and chat with them for a little while and see what the difficulty is. I kind of know what their protocol is, and perhaps I can make some headway."⁴⁶ After about thirty minutes, he returned and said, "We will have our building permit, Elders; we got the okay."⁴⁷

The groundbreaking ceremony for the Suva chapel was held on May 3, 1956. A month later, laborers from Sāmoa and supervisors from the United States arrived to help with and oversee the construction of the new chapel.⁴⁸ This was not to be a small chapel, built only to accommodate the thirty-three members on record in 1955. Instead President McKay wanted this to be a stake center-sized building in anticipation of the future growth of the Church in these islands. Beautiful white coral was quarried from a nearby reef and used for the exterior chapel walls. When the cultural hall of the new chapel was completed, the Saints began meeting there on June 9, 1957, even though it was not yet dedicated. Just prior to the completion of the chapel on January 15, 1958, the Fiji District was created.⁴⁹

The chapel was completed a little more than three years after the groundbreaking. It was a marvelous structure that overlooked much of northern Suva. President and Sister McKay returned to Fiji, after the dedication of the New Zealand Temple, to dedicate the chapel on May 4, 1958 (see fig. 3).⁵⁰ The dedication ceremony was attended by government officials, including Sir Ronald Garvey, governor of Fiji; Ratu George

Cakobau, Vunivalu of Bau and paramount chief of Fiji; and Mr. A. C. Reid, colonial secretary.⁵¹

Two other apostles visited Fiji within the next year. The first was Elder Marion G. Romney, who held a meeting with the Suva Saints on May 24, 1958, less than a month after President McKay's party left Fiji. President Joseph Fielding Smith and his wife, Jessie Evans, also stopped in Fiji for one day and met with some of the members and missionaries in Suva.⁵² While meeting with the Saints, he ordained Gideon Dolo to the office of elder, and Dolo became the first ethnic Fijian to receive the Melchizedek Priesthood.⁵³

Missionary work progressed slowly in Fiji as the British colonial government supported only two noncommonwealth visas at a time.⁵⁴ During his visit in 1958, President McKay was introduced to Elder Grover, who was the only missionary serving in Fiji at the time. President McKay immediately said, "So you are the Lone Ranger Elder I've been hearing about—well, Elder, we're here to change that."⁵⁵ President McKay arranged to meet with Governor Garvey on May 5, 1958, to discuss the missionary restriction quota. The meeting resulted in much success since Governor Garvey granted permission for the Church to have six full-time proselytizing missionaries with no visa restrictions. This quota limit remained at six until the early 1980s and was finally lifted following the military coup of 1987.⁵⁶

During John H. Groberg's tenure as mission president of the Tongan Mission (1966–69), the Church was approached by members of the Fiji Police Band who asked if they could use the Suva chapel as a place to practice two times a week. The Police Band was in somewhat of a dilemma because the building they normally practiced in had burned down. President Groberg thought about it for a while and then said, "We will let you use our facilities free of charge if you will abide by two conditions." The first was that there could be no drinking, smoking, or using inappropriate language on Church premises. And second, during practices that coincided with other weekday Church activities,

President Groberg also asked that they attend the opening exercises with the Church members. The police officers happily accepted the conditions and were surprised he had not asked for remuneration for using the facility. While their own building was being rebuilt over the next two years, the Police Band enjoyed practicing within the cultural hall of the beautiful Suva chapel and associating with Church members. Over the years many police have joined the Church, including over twenty officers and their families, as a direct result of the Police Band using the Church's facility in the late 1960s.⁵⁷

The Establishment of the Fiji Suva Mission

Fiji was part of the Samoan Mission for only four years because Church leaders recognized that Fiji's proximity to the Tongan Mission added strength in servicing the small number of Saints in the Suva area.⁵⁸ On January 15, 1958, the Fiji Islands were repositioned once again as part of the Tongan Mission primarily to better accommodate travel to Fiji for the mission president. Distance between mission headquarters and outlying countries and islands has been a continuous obstacle to sustained growth in the Pacific Islands.⁵⁹ To help alleviate this problem, and with a sufficient membership base in the growing Fiji District, the Fiji Mission was eventually created on July 23, 1971, during a Fiji District missionary meeting. Presiding over the meeting was Elder Howard W. Hunter of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and John H. Groberg, then regional representative to the Pacific Islands Region. Sherman A. Lindholm was set apart as the inaugural mission president (see table 2).⁶⁰

At the time of his call as mission president, Lindholm was serving as the president of the Fiji District in the Tongan Mission. The original mission boundaries also included the Cook Islands and Niue.⁶¹ Elder Hunter reorganized the Fiji District at this missionary meeting, calling Josefa N. T. Sokia as the first Fijian president of the Fiji

Table 2. Fiji Mission Presidents, 1954–2005

Name	Years Served	Mission
Howard B. Stone	1953–57	Samoa Mission
Charles I. Sampson	1957–61	Samoa Mission
Fred W. Stone	1955–59	Tonga Mission
M. Vernon Coombs	1959–63	Tonga Mission
Patrick Dalton	1963–66	Tonga Mission
John H. Groberg	1966–69	Tonga Mission
James P. Christiansen	1969–72	Tonga Mission
Sherman A. Lindholm	1971–72	Fiji Suva Mission
Ebbie L. Davis	1972–75	Fiji Suva Mission
Kenneth M. Palmer	1975–78	Fiji Suva Mission
Georges Bourget	1978–81	Fiji Suva Mission
Wilford E. Smith	1981–84	Fiji Suva Mission
Wilbur C. Woolf	1984–87	Fiji Suva Mission
George S. Goble	1987–90	Fiji Suva Mission
Clyde G. Harper	1990–93	Fiji Suva Mission
Howard F. Wolfgramm	1993–96	Fiji Suva Mission
Jean A. Tefan	1996–99	Fiji Suva Mission
Roy G. Bauer	1999–2002	Fiji Suva Mission
La Ron Wooley	2002–5	Fiji Suva Mission
Ian S. Ardern	2005–	Fiji Suva Mission

District.⁶² Within a year, however, Ebbie L. Davis replaced President Lindholm as mission president. As shown in the map (see start of chapter), the Fiji Suva Mission boundaries were extended during Davis's tenure as mission president to include the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Hebrides (Vanuatu), Solomon Islands, Marshall Islands, and Wallis and Futuna.⁶³ Fiji had been for many years a minor and distant part of other missions, and now it was the hub of one of the largest geographic missions in the world.

Distance challenges were significant for the expansive Fiji Mission. President Davis had been instructed to spend a significant amount of time in the Cook Islands to understand the unique needs of the Saints there, yet planning a two- to four-day trip once a month was challenging be-

cause of the erratic boat schedules.⁶⁴ Distance issues have been reduced significantly over the past thirty years, largely due to innovations in communication technology and increased use of air travel in the islands. Several Fiji Suva Mission presidents assigned missionary couples to serve in each of the major countries of the mission, who would act as a liaison between the mission president, local Church leaders, and the missionaries while the president was occupied elsewhere.⁶⁵ President La Ron Wooley (2002–5) tried to regularly visit each of the three countries in his stewardship that had large numbers of missionaries—Kiribati, New Caledonia, and Vanuatu.⁶⁶

Another challenge in the early years of the Church in Fiji was translation of Church scriptures, manuals, and missionary materials in the local languages. From the onset of his tenure as mission president, Ebbie L. Davis noted the linguistic obstacle that impeded making the message more accessible to the two primary ethnic groups in Fiji—ethnic Fijians and Fijian Indians. Serving as president of the Fiji Mission—with its multitude of languages, dialects, and peoples—helped prepare President Davis for his future position as director of the Scripture and Temple Translation Division of the Church Translation Department.

In February 1976, Spencer W. Kimball became the second President of the Church to visit Fiji, and he presided at its first Area Conference. He was accompanied by his wife, Camilla Eyring Kimball, President N. Eldon Tanner of the First Presidency, Elder David B. Haight of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, and Elders Robert D. Hales and Robert L. Simpson, Assistants to the Twelve. Although their visit lasted less than a day, President Kimball held a press conference and attended a cultural program put on by Fiji Saints that included traditional island and Indian dances and cuisine. President Kimball challenged members to build up the Church and share the gospel with others in Fiji.⁶⁷

During this visit, President Kimball called Fiji a “gateway” for the expansion of the Church



Fig. 4. Sister Camilla Kimball receives a gift from a local sister at the Fiji Area Conference in February 1976.
Courtesy of Church Archives

into India.⁶⁸ Although large numbers of Indo-Fijian missionaries have not been sent to India, there have been other ways that Fiji has served as a gateway to India. During his tenure as mission president, Davis arranged for the Book of Mormon to be translated into Hindi by a member of the Church from Nausori.⁶⁹ Just the fact that many Indo-Fijians, primarily from Hindu backgrounds, joined the Church in Fiji and served as faithful Latter-day Saints suggested to Church leaders that expansion of the Church into India should continue.⁷⁰

Expansion of the Church to Western Viti Levu and Outer Islands

Expansion of the Church into other areas of Viti Levu and the outer Fiji islands took time, and was greatly limited by the government-imposed quota restricting the number of expatriate missionaries who were able to serve in Fiji at one time.

Four years after the Church was first organized in Fiji, President Fred W. Stone of the Tongan Mission assigned Elder Grover and the other missionaries serving in Fiji to go to Lautoka and spend two weeks assessing the possibility of opening the area for missionary work. On November 12, 1958, the four elders arrived in Lautoka and sought out Rajendra Chandula, the only known member living in Lautoka. Striving to locate people who would be willing to hear the gospel, the missionaries then went to Viseisei Village and found friendship with several local families.⁷¹ Upon learning that the missionaries were in Viseisei, a Lautoka government official asked if the elders could meet with him to discuss their stay. The government official was a native of England, and after explaining a few particulars, he asked them to leave. The young missionaries finished their two-week assignment by meeting several individuals and families who expressed interest in learning more about the Church. Although seeds

were planted with tracts and distribution of some Church literature, no arrangements were made to establish the Church in Lautoka and western Viti Levu until later.⁷²

Over time, the political climate changed so that by the mid-1960s branches had been created in several additional Viti Levu urban centers, including Ba, Lami, Lautoka, and Sigatoka. The original Fiji District had also been divided, creating the Vualiku District that was headquartered in Lautoka and took in the western portion of Viti Levu and all of Vanua Levu. Taveuni was included as part of the Suva District.

In 1967, missionary work started on Taveuni. Early converts to the Church included several prominent families: the Maiwiriwiris, Bautaruas, Smiths, and Lesumas. There were several different locations on this “garden island” that became hubs for the Church—Somosomo, Waiyevo, and Qeleni. For many years, Walter Smith served as the branch president. His challenge to serve the branch and lead it by himself was considerable since his home was located on nearby Laucala Island. To attend weekly church services, the Smiths would leave on Saturday and take a boat for one hour until they reached Qeleni Point on Taveuni. From there the family would take a one-hour bus ride to Somosomo, where branch meetings were held. They would stay for the day and then return the following day by bus and boat to their home and employment as copra farmers. Such devotion by the pioneer members in Fiji was not uncommon. Joining the Church often meant being ostracized from family and friends. While a social network was available through the local body of Saints, it was often difficult, especially for youth in these outer areas. Branches were later established in Qeleni and Matei, with a unit of the Church established for the Smith family on Qamea Island, located between Laucala and Taveuni islands.

The establishment of the Church on Vanua Levu had its ups and downs. Ilisoni Nate Tilley was called as branch president in the 1970s, but rapid expansion of the Church on Vanua Levu did

not occur until several strong families joined the Church in the region. For example, Ratu Jone Sovasova, a devout Methodist who joined the Church with his family in 1979, became the backbone of Church strength in Labasa. Brother Sovasova was a member of the board of directors for the Fiji Sugar Corporation, which oversaw the development of sugarcane lands on Vanua Levu in the 1980s.⁷³ Around the strength of the Sovasova family, the Labasa Branch was reestablished on March 20, 1983, with Brother Sovasova called as branch president.⁷⁴ The Labasa Branch grew over the next few years and experienced steady membership attendance during President Sovasova’s leadership. When the Sovasovas left Labasa, Church attendance waned but then rose again with the addition of key pioneer families during the 1980s and 1990s—the Singhs, Prakashs, Mudaliars, Morris, Bulamaisolomones, and Lals. Other branches were established on Vanua Levu in Boca and Seaqaqa, near Labasa, and Savusavu, Nasinu Village, and Rabi Island on the Cakaudrove side of the island. Many expatriate couple missionaries have served in Labasa. Among these couples were Richard and Evelyn Henriksen, who served in Labasa from 1988–90 and had a tremendous impact on missionary outreach and membership retention.

As elsewhere in the Pacific, outer island missionary work presented obstacles. Elders often had to confront long periods of time (sometimes months) between zone conferences and between meetings with the mission president. Finding the right fit was often the most important challenge presidents had in assigning missionaries to these newly established areas. Recognizing that it was necessary to have strong missionaries serving on Taveuni and that it was also helpful to have missionaries who were well versed in the local vernacular, mission president Wilbur C. Woolf (1984–87) called Mosese and Jessie Maiwiriwiri as the first local couple missionaries to serve in Fiji. Their impact in the mission field was immense and helped strengthen

the Saints and the Church in Taveuni. During the tenure of their mission assignment, Elder Maiwiriwiri died of a heart attack; Sister Maiwiriwiri stayed on to complete her mission. Recognizing the strength couples like the Maiwiriwiris brought to the Fiji mission field, President Wilford E. Smith observed, "If we could have had more strong [local] couples or even a few more strong American couples who would learn the Fijian language, I felt that the mission would grow rapidly."⁷⁵

Establishing Church Schools and Institutional Developments

Church schools have long been a means of facilitating growth and stabilizing the Church in the Pacific Islands. While visiting Fiji in 1955, President McKay was approached by a local reporter as to the nature of his visit. He responded that one of the goals of the Church was to improve the overall educational opportunities for Latter-day Saints throughout the world. "Here their destiny lies," he said, referring to the Fijian members of the Church.⁷⁶

From the beginning, local leaders of the Church recognized that the large Suva meetinghouse could be jointly used as a Church school. In order to accommodate local educational needs, a primary school to be held in the meetinghouse was approved in February 1969. The Church Educational System brought in Charles Tohara Mohi from New Zealand as the first principal. Most of the local staff and teaching faculty were Latter-day Saints. By 1973, the new school met both the colonial government and Church curriculum standards, and within a few years the Church meetinghouse school could not accommodate the growing enrollment. Soon another chapel school was built in Samabula to accommodate the older elementary students, with the younger students remaining at the original chapel location.

In the early 1970s, representatives of the Polynesian Cultural Center (PCC) frequently visited the Pacific Islands to recruit young college-

aged members of the Church to work at the center. This provided a great opportunity for many young adult members to pay for their education at the Church College of Hawai'i (later, Brigham Young University–Hawai'i, or BYU–Hawai'i) while simultaneously working at the adjacent PCC. There were, however, some unintended negative repercussions. The recurring PCC recruiting visits to Fiji disturbed mission president Ebbie L. Davis. He noticed that sometimes strong members would go to Hawai'i and once there, they would become involved in problems and difficulties that led them either out of the Church or in a direction that caused them never to return to Fiji. Many of the most talented members of the Church were being taken from Fiji at the very time that the Church needed them for missionary work and for filling Church leadership positions. This problem was overcome by careful screening of applicants to the Church College of Hawai'i by local branch presidents, the Fiji district president, and the mission president.⁷⁷

Some of the brightest leaders in Fiji attended BYU–Hawai'i in the 1970s and 1980s. One of these leaders was Meli U. Lesuma, who was the first convert of the Church in his family and the coauthor of this chapter. While working as a policeman in Suva, Lesuma first heard about the Church from a fellow policeman who had joined a few years earlier. Not long after hearing the gospel, Lesuma shared it with his family who resided on the third-largest island of Taveuni. A short time later, the entire Lesuma family was converted. Timilai and Adi Asenaca Lesuma, parents of Meli Lesuma, became stalwart members and were leaders in the Church and the community until their deaths. Despite a promising career in the Royal Fiji Police Force, Meli accepted a call from President Wilford E. Smith to serve a mission for the Church. This he did with dedication, and shortly after his release he was married (and subsequently sealed in the New Zealand Temple) to Irene Lobendahn. Meli and Irene attended BYU–Hawai'i, where Meli became student body president. Following his

graduate studies, Meli returned to Fiji as an administrator in the Church Educational System (CES). Irene worked at the United Nations Development Fund for Women in Suva and visited other Pacific countries in promoting development for women. She also worked as a volunteer for the U.S. Embassy. Meli served as a bishop, as a president in the Fiji District Presidency, and in three stake presidencies in Fiji and the United States. Currently Meli is the advisor for the Fiji Club and the Academic Internship Director at BYU-Hawai'i.

Tipo Tivao Solomone was another alumnus of BYU-Hawai'i who returned to Fiji and provided much-needed leadership. Solomone met a Hawaiian, Armine Kaulani Bregau, and the two were married in the temple while attending BYU-Hawai'i. Although Sister Solomone was a native of Hawai'i and thus a U.S. citizen, the

Solomones were determined to return to Fiji, where they felt they could be of service in the Church and be among the people of Fiji. Brother Solomone is currently the CES Administrative Director for Fiji and president of the Suva Fiji North Stake. President Solomone was the chairman of the three-day, fiftieth year celebration of the Church held in Fiji on December 10–12, 2004.⁷⁸

In considering the educational system in Fiji, President Davis, an educator by trade who had taught at Liahona High School in Tonga, soon recognized the need to expand the Church primary school and establish a secondary school. After discussing the possibilities with Elder Groberg, President Davis was encouraged to do whatever possible to strengthen the primary school and obtain permission from Church headquarters to establish a secondary school in Fiji. The rapid increase in Church membership



Fig. 5. LDS Technical College in the 1990s
Courtesy of LDS Technical College

and the economic hardships that faced a new democratic island nation indicated to President Davis and local Church leaders that there existed a great need for not only a primary school but a secondary school in Fiji.⁷⁹ Both Elder Groberg and President Davis had spent considerable time in Tonga and had seen firsthand the impact that Church schools, particularly a secondary school, had on the growth of the Church in that country. Although the need existed, it did not come to fruition until President Spencer W. Kimball sent Neal A. Maxwell, commissioner of education, to conduct a feasibility study and look into the matter in 1973.⁸⁰ Along with CES Pacific administrator Alton L. Wade, Maxwell agreed with the local Church leaders' recommendation that a secondary school was indeed needed.⁸¹ Following his recommendation to President Kimball, authorization was given to build a secondary school in Tamavua, on a beautiful plot of land overlooking Suva Harbor (see fig. 5).

On July 11, 1976, Jeffrey R. Holland, who was the new commissioner of education, dedicated the Fiji LDS Technical College.⁸² When the school opened, the Technical College offered both a general education program from forms 1 to 4 (basically American grades 7 to 10). In 1977 it was expanded to offer a concentrated technical program in form 5 in 1977. Since that time the curriculum has grown to include forms 6 and 7. Form 7 is close to the equivalent of the first year of higher education in the United States.⁸³ Howard F. Wolfram was the inaugural principal. He later left Fiji for CES assignments in the United States only to return as mission president in 1993.

During the late 1990s, two additional educational programs were implemented in conjunction with Brigham Young University (BYU). In 1997, BYU established a student teacher program that brought in BYU students from Provo to conduct their student teaching under the mentorship of teachers at Samabula Primary and LDS Technical School.⁸⁴ A higher education program was established in 1999 as one of several pilot programs to help meet the educational

needs of Saints in developing countries.⁸⁵ This program was called the Fiji Distance Learning Program and used LDS Technical College facilities after normal school hours. Thirty college-aged adults were able to enroll in BYU Independent Study courses, and those who successfully completed the program earned a business certificate from BYU-Hawaii's School of Business.

The Church schools in Fiji have continued their efforts in providing a quality educational and spiritual experience for the young Saints in Fiji. With thousands of graduates from both the primary and secondary schools, President McKay's comments about establishing schools that would help meet the needs of the members on the one hand while strengthening and building up the Church on the other are being realized.

Steady Growth through Political Strife

Thirty years after the establishment of the Church in Fiji, membership in the Suva region had sufficiently grown to qualify for stakehood. Membership was approximately 3,100 in December 1980. The Suva Fiji Stake was organized by Elder Howard W. Hunter on June 12, 1983, as the first stake in the Fiji Suva Mission. Inosi Naga, who had served as the first counselor to President Smith in the mission presidency, was called by Elder Hunter as the first stake president of the Suva stake.⁸⁶ As the Church continued to grow, political strife racked the island nation in the form of two military coups in 1987. From Fiji's independence in 1970 to the elections of 1987, Fiji had basically experienced a peaceful transition from colony to nation-state. The first political coup began on May 14, 1987, when ten armed men entered a parliamentary meeting of the recently elected government headed by Timoci Bavadra. Parliament members were led out of the parliament building at gunpoint under the direction of an individual who was attending the meeting in street clothes—Colonel Sitiveni

Rabuka, who was then third in command of the Royal Fiji Military Forces. Although Rabuka seized control of the government by a bloodless military takeover, the issue was not settled for another four months.

Because Fiji was part of the Commonwealth of Nations, the government still fell under the British monarchy, which had a local representative and head of state, Governor General Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau. September 28, 1987 is commonly referred to as the date of the second coup and is the time when Rabuka usurped complete governmental control.⁸⁷

The impact the military takeover had on the Church was minimal, except that a curfew was installed that limited travel between major cities during the day and that limited travel within established urban centers after dark. During the immediate weeks following the May coup, gas stations were closed and fuel could only be purchased in small quantities. Banks and currency rates were also in flux as exchange rates had not yet been established by the military-led government. The Church was notified that all missionaries and members who belonged to the Fiji Military Forces in the reserves were to report to the Queen Elizabeth Barracks by 1600 hours, May 14, 1987. Elder Simone Cakau, a missionary serving in May 1987, was a member of the reserve military forces and was forced by the new government to leave his mission and return to military service.⁸⁸ Wilbur C. Woolf, mission president during the May coup, wrote in the mission history that he was contacted via phone by an official in the missionary department that the First Presidency and the Brethren had been trying unsuccessfully to contact him and were concerned about the welfare of the missionaries and Saints in Fiji. President Woolf responded, “We are all well and no harm was done; no shots had been fired and we will be able to con-

tinue.”⁸⁹ A positive result of the 1987 coups was that Rabuka’s government lifted the quota ban that had plagued missionary work for over thirty years.

In 1991, President Clyde G. Harper and local Church leaders consolidated many of its outlying island mission efforts in order to establish “centers of strength” that would hopefully lead to the creation of additional stakes in the more established areas of the mission. The “centers of strength” strategy had been emphasized for at least two decades in Fiji in an effort to build up the Church in central locations, but this had also prevented more isolated individuals and communities from receiving the gospel.⁹⁰ This strategy paid off as several additional stakes were established in the 1990s. Whereas it required thirty years from the organization of the first branch in Fiji to

Table 3. Fiji Church Statistics, 1954–2004

Year	Members	Stakes	Wards	Districts	Total Branches
1954	27	—	—	—	1
1955	33	—	—	—	1
1960	178	—	—	1	1
1965	438	—	—	1	2
1970	1,381	—	—	1	5
1975	2,808	—	—	2	10
1980	3,100*	—	—	3	12
1985	3,396	1	6	1	6
1990	8,592	1	9	2	9
1995	10,792	2	14	2	20
2000	12,163	4	23	2	19
2004	13,901	4	23	2	22

*Estimate

Sources: Church Almanac and Membership and Statistical Records Division of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

create the first stake, by 1997 three additional stakes were added to the island nation.⁹¹ Josefa N. T. Sokia, former president of the Suva Fiji North Stake, said, "The goal is to someday have a temple in Fiji. We know we cannot have that if we don't have a sufficient number of stakes. By lifting the spiritual maturity of the members we will come to the position where the House of the Lord can be built on our shores."⁹² Church membership reached 10,792 in 1995 and 13,901 by December 2004 (see table 3).

President Gordon B. Hinckley became the third prophet to visit Fiji on October 15, 1997, when he stopped for a layover during a five-country tour of the Pacific Islands. President Hinckley was accompanied by his wife, Marjorie, Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Elder Vaughn J. Featherstone, president of the Pacific Area, and their wives. In a meeting held at the National Stadium in Suva, approximately five thousand Saints gathered, attesting to the growth of the Church in Fiji. Many were impressed by the number of Fijian Saints.⁹³

Then, on May 19, 2000, reprising the military coups of 1987, George Speight led an armed band of army rebels and civilians to overthrow the one-year-old coalition government led by Mahendra Chaudhry. Like the previous coups, the rebels used force to render the existing constitution invalid. Holding the democratically elected government leaders hostage, the rebels based their coup on the premise that ethnic Fijians were being deprived of their indigenous rights because of an Indo-Fijian-led government. Unlike the previous coup, where Rabuka received unwavering support from the Fijian military, Speight's movement received no such ratification from the military.⁹⁴ On May 30, 2000, Elder Boyd K. Packer and Elder Merrill Cook endorsed the U.S. Embassy's recommendation to evacuate all U.S. citizens from the Suva region. Roy G. Bauer, Fiji Suva mission president during the 2000 coup, responded to this recommendation

by having all missionaries serving on the eastern side of Viti Levu transferred indefinitely to the western side. Not long after, all non-Fijian missionaries were temporarily transferred to New Zealand until the political tensions ebbed. When the rebels and the government came to a political resolution, the 1997 multiracial constitution was abolished and the Chaudhry government was deemed invalid.

During both the 1987 and 2000 coups, members of the Church made valiant efforts to downplay ethnic and political differences in their interactions with one another. The Church teaches unity among all members, regardless of ethnic background or political position. When asked how the 1987 coups affected Church members, Bishop Timoci Ratu of the Nadi Ward said, "Thankfully, the tension isn't felt much in the Church, even among new members. I suppose it's because the gospel teaches us that there is no difference among all human beings, either through their classes or races or creeds or color."⁹⁵ Although the 2000 coup left Suva and most of Fiji in political and economic chaos, dedication of the Suva Fiji Temple stayed on schedule for June 2000.

The Fiji Temple: A Lighthouse in Suva Harbor

Because of the political tension that permeated the scene in May and June 2000, open house and dedicatory services were significantly scaled back to eliminate any large crowds that could perhaps cause political unrest. President Hinckley called President Bauer on May 31, 2000, and specifically asked about the political situation in Fiji. At the end of their conversation, President Hinckley told President Bauer that he would come to Fiji for the dedication session, even though most members of the Church would not be able to see him during his visit. "It is most important for the Suva Fiji Temple to be dedicated so the work for the living and those beyond the veil can commence," President Hinckley

said.⁹⁶ True to his word, on June 18, 2000, President Hinckley dedicated the Suva Fiji Temple with a record low of eighty members in attendance.⁹⁷ During the dedicatory prayer, President Hinckley said:

No longer will we have to travel far across the seas to do that work which Thou hast established as sacred and necessary for Thy Saints in this latter-day dispensation. . . . We pray dear Father that these beautiful islands may be blessed with peace, that there shall be no abridgement of the great freedom of worship afforded by the government of this land. May Thy Saints be recognized as good citizens and may Thy work grow and flourish in this favored part of Thy vineyard.⁹⁸

On his return from the dedication of the Perth Australia Temple, President Hinckley made a stop in Fiji on May 20, 2001, to speak to the many members who were unable to attend the Suva Fiji Temple dedication. While reflecting on coup events in Fiji, President Hinckley said, "I hope that after the trouble of the coup that there is a more settled feeling here, and that peace will reign in this land, and that the Lord will smile with favor upon you and increase your blessings."⁹⁹

Conclusion

In December 2004, thousands of Saints celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Church in Fiji. Arriving in Fiji as the only member of the Church in the 1920s must have seemed a bit daunting for Mary Ashley. Yet the legacy she and the pioneer families of the 1950s and 1960s left provided the necessary foundation for the Church to take root and flourish in Fiji. In the years that followed a number of prominent civic and business leaders have joined the Church. Alipate Tagidugu, for example, has held various executive positions with the National Fire Authority (NFA). Currently based in Labasa, Vanua Levu, Brother Tagidugu is the chief NFA administrator of the northern region of the country. Paul B. Whippy and his wife, Olive May Hen-

nings Whippy, starred on the Fiji Men's and Women's national basketball teams for a number of years and joined the Church in the late 1970s. At age twenty-one, Brother Whippy became a bishop in Suva and later became a stake president.¹⁰⁰ Litia T. K. Vakarewakobau was a co-founder and inaugural president of the Vanua Chamber of Commerce in 1988. Sister Vakarewakobau later served as the vice president of both the Fiji Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Suva Chamber of Commerce and Industry.¹⁰¹ Other prominent Latter-day Saints include Ratu Meli Vakarewakobau, former deputy police commissioner; Taito Waradi, former general manager of Telecom Fiji and current president of the Fiji Chamber of Commerce; Nemani Buresova, who served as a cabinet minister; Bruce Ferguson, a professional rugby player; Emasi Qovu, a current member of parliament; and Ratu Viliame Volavola, a former senior military officer and prominent Church leader.

While the Church in Fiji developed slowly at first, the 1980s and 1990s witnessed an era of unprecedented growth, culminating in the creation of three additional stakes and the construction of the Suva Fiji Temple. Fifty years after the first branch was created in Suva, the Church has expanded to several of Fiji's prominent islands, including Kadavu, Ovalau, Rotuma, Taveuni, and Vanua Levu. The Suva Fiji Temple now provides the full blessings of the gospel to members of the Church in Fiji. Current and future leaders of the Church will build upon this foundation as a springboard for Church growth in the new millennium.

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Notes

1. With its central location, relatively large islands, and population base, as well as business, education, and transportation centers, Fiji is in many ways the gateway to many nearby Pacific Island countries, including Kiribati, Nauru, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Wallis and Futuna.

2. Much like the hodgepodge drafting of African colonial borders at the Berlin Conference in 1884, Pacific Island borders were arbitrarily established by European, American, and, at times, Japanese governments. Many of these boundaries showed little understanding of Pacific Islander identity and often created divisive ethnic and linguistic boundaries geared primarily to the geographic needs of the Western colonizers. Other studies on Fiji include Thomas Williams and James Calvert, *Fiji and the Fijians* (Suva, Fiji: Fiji Museum, 1982–83); Deryck Scarr, *Fiji: A Short History* (Lā'ie, HI: Institute for Polynesian Studies, 1984); and *The Cyclopedia of Fiji: A Complete Historical and Commercial Review of Fiji* (Papakura, New Zealand: R. McMillan, 1984).

3. Ma'afu was exiled from Tonga to Fiji because of the potential threat he was to then king of Tonga, Tupou I. As a cousin of Tupou, many felt that Ma'afu might rally other Tongan chiefs to his side staging a civil war that could potentially overthrow the Tongan monarchy. Thus, Tupou granted Ma'afu the title *Tui Lau* (king of Lau) hoping to rid Tonga of the internal threat by granting the mighty chief leadership over many of the neighboring islands of Fiji. For more information on Ma'afu's migration to Fiji, see John Spurway, "Hiki Mo e Faliki: Why Ma'afu Brought His Floor Mats to Fiji in 1847," *Journal of Pacific History* 37, no. 1 (2002): 5–23.

4. Though powerful as a warrior, Ma'afu did not always have his way in battle. The huge white cross that today decorates Wairiki, Taveuni, stands as a memorial of the paramount chief on Taveuni and his warriors who stood up to and defended their island against Ma'afu's amphibious assault.

5. John Wesley Coulter, *Fiji: Little India of the Pacific* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), 70.

6. Cargill and Cross were preceded by a small missionary party of other Pacific Islanders who came to Lakeba in 1830. See Albert J. Schütz, ed., *The Diaries and Correspondence of David Cargill, 1832–1843* (Canberra, Australia: Australian National University Press, 1977), 10:59–60.

7. Schütz, *Diaries and Correspondence of David Cargill*, 147. Also see David Routledge, *Matanitu: The Struggle for Power in Early Fiji* (Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific), 74.

8. Ralph M. Wiltgen, *The Founding of the Roman Catholic Church in Oceania, 1825 to 1850* (Canberra, Australia: Australian National University Press, 1981), 290.

9. Wiltgen, *Founding of the Roman Catholic Church in Oceania*, 122. Lakeba Island is located centrally in the Lau Group and is home to several dignitaries in Fiji's contemporary history, including Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna, who was the *Tui Lau* (king of Lau), and Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, former prime minister and president of Fiji (see Sir Alan Burns, *Fiji* [London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1963], 63–64).

10. Although recognized as *Ratu Bau* (Chief of Bau), Cakobau desired to be regarded as *Tui Viti* (King of Fiji), a title that he neither had traditional claim to nor the power to maintain.

11. In addition to the European and American interests in Fiji, Tongan military and political influence was spreading in the Lau Group and northern regions of the Fiji Islands. Under these precarious circumstances, Great Britain nearly agreed to the cession of the Fiji Islands in 1858 in a signed agreement with Cakobau. The signed letter gave Cakobau the right to govern the indigenous population, be granted the title *Tui Viti*, and have Great Britain pay the debt owed to the United States. Yet the government of Fiji declined the letter. Cakobau retained his new title, though not with enough power to actually be king of the Fiji Islands, until the British made Fiji a colony in 1874.

12. Vijay Lal, *Broken Waves: A History of the Fiji Islands in the Twentieth Century* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1992). Lal notes that the British government tried to establish a government that could link to the former indigenous administration and governing social structures so as to appease and treat fairly the indigenous Fijians.

13. Though patterned after traditional Fijian society, the council was actually a colonial structural invention of the British and was accepted and implemented largely through Cakobau's initial influence. See Peter France, *The Charter of the Land: Custom and Colonisation in Fiji* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1969), 103–28.

14. Most Indians entered indentured servitude in hopes of finding greater socioeconomic opportunities.

While nineteenth-century Indian farmers had increased economic opportunities as a whole, periodic flooding, drought, famine, and misfortune of one kind or another led many to seek for better opportunities elsewhere (see George A. Grierson, *Report on Colonial Emigration from the Bengal Presidency* [Calcutta: Government of Bengal, 1883]; and Ahmed Ali, "The Fiji Indian Achievement," in *Pacific Indians: Profiles from 20 Countries* [Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1981], 22–32).

15. For more information, see Lance Brennan, John McDonald, and Ralph Shlomowitz, "Trends in the Economic Well-Being of South Indians under British Rule: The Anthropometric Evidence," *Explorations in Economic History* 31 (1994): 225–60; Brennan, McDonald, and Shlomowitz, "The Heights and Economic Well-Being of North Indians under British Rule," *Social Science History* 18; and Brij V. Lal, *Girmitiyas: The Origins of the Fiji Indians* (Canberra, Australia: The Journal of Pacific History, 1983).

16. For more information on the caste systems in Fiji, see Elizabeth M. Grieco, "The Effects of Migration on the Establishment of Networks: Caste Disintegration and Reformation among the Indians of Fiji," *International Migration Review* 32, no. 3 (1998): 704–36; Chandra Jayawardena, "The Disintegration of Caste in Fiji Indian Rural Society," in *Anthropology in Oceania: Essays Presented to Ian Hogbin*, ed. Lester R. Hiatt and Chandra Jayawardena, (Melbourne: Angus and Robertson, 1971), 89–119; Adrian C. Mayer, *Peasants in the Pacific: A Study of Fiji Indian Rural Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961); Carolyn Brown Heinz, "Demographic Constraints on Caste: A Fiji Indian Example," *American Ethnologist* 8, no. 2 (1981): 314–28; and Barton M. Schwartz, ed., *Caste in Overseas Indian Communities* (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing, 1967).

17. Judith A. Bennet, "Holland, Britain, and Germany in Melanesia," in *Tides of History: The Pacific Islands in the Twentieth Century*, ed. K. R. Howe, Robert C. Kiste, and Brij V. Lal (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), 40–70; and Lal, *Girmitiyas*. While Bennet claims that some 40 percent of the total Fiji indentured servants were female, Lal points out that only one-fourth of the migrants were actually female.

18. Burns, *Fiji*, 64.

19. Fiji gained independence from Great Britain in 1970. Religious schools have maintained a strong influence in Fiji since independence.

20. Sister Ashley was baptized in Tonga on October 31, 1915, at the age of fourteen. After settling in Fiji, she married and had one son and four daughters (see Josefa Sokia, "Highlights of the History of the Church in Fiji," panelist at the Pioneers in the Pacific Conference, Lā'ie, Hawai'i, October 8, 1997; Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, "20th Century Women Strengthen Church," *Church News*, April 26, 1980, 13).

21. Gerry Avant, "Fiji Full of (Unspoiled Charm)," *Church News*, March 27, 1976, 12.

22. Arrington and Bitton, "20th Century Women Strengthen Church," 13.

23. Because of local opposition to the Church, members were restricted as to where they could hold services. Because the Matanisiga Hall was a dance hall throughout the week, the early members of the Church would arrive at the chapel early Sunday morning to clean up leftover beer bottles and to sweep the floor (Boyd L. Harris, *Mission Journal Selections*, 1, copy in author's possession).

24. Rita H. Stone, *Journal*, 1, copy in author's possession. Rita H. Stone was the wife of Howard B. Stone, president of the Samoan Mission from 1953 to 1957. President Stone was succeeded by Charles I. Sampson in January 1957, who was mission president of the Samoan Mission when the Fiji Islands were transferred back to the Tongan Mission in 1958. Fred W. Stone, brother of President Howard Stone, was serving as the Tongan Mission president during the Fiji Island transfer.

25. The first thirteen missionaries to serve in Fiji were Boyd L. Harris (arrived in Fiji on September 3, 1954), Sheldon L. Abbott (September 3, 1954), Willard Earl Shingleton (May 1955), Wayne Renolds Markham (June 1955), Boyd R. Wecker (October 1956), Dennis Dixon (June 2, 1957), Cornell A. Grover (July 23, 1957), Napoleon Empey McGee (February 25, 1958), Mildred Norton McGee (February 25, 1958), Calvin E. Todd (July 4, 1958), Lonnie D. Ayers (July 4, 1958), Paul H. Whittaker (July 4, 1958), and Leon Blacker (March 1959). Elders Harris and Abbott were the two missionaries who came to John H. Groberg's aid when Fiji immigration officers detained him in a warehouse on the Suva wharf (see John H. Groberg, *The Other Side of Heaven* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993], 17–21; and Jerry L. King and Olivia T. King, "Three-day Celebration with Theme, 'Come Unto Christ,'" *Church News*, December 18, 2004, 8–9).

26. When Elders Abbott and Harris first arrived in Fiji aboard the boat *Tofua*, immigration officials gave the missionaries forty-eight hours to leave the country. The elders were taken a little off guard as they had assumed that the Church had made arrangements for their arrival. They met Brother Smith and stayed with him during their first night and visited the immigration office first thing in the morning. After waiting for a few minutes the elders were summoned by an immigration officer to the counter. The gentleman asked for their passports, canceled the forty-eight-hour stamp and replaced it with one indicating the young men could stay an indefinite period of time. Then the immigration officer turned around and left without saying a word (Harris, *Mission Journal Selections*, 1).

27. See Arrington and Bitton, "20th Century Women Strengthen Church," 13; Shirleen Meek, "Fiji: Islands of Faith," *Ensign*, December 1990, 32–37. In his history of the Fiji Suva Mission, Cornell A. Grover records that the actual attendance was thirteen (see Grover, "Fiji Suva Mission—The First Years, 1954–1959," report of the early Church in Fiji, May 20, 1985, 4).

28. John H. Groberg to W. James Jacob, March 28, 2005, correspondence in author's possession. See also Groberg's *The Other Side of Heaven*.

29. Harris, *Mission Journal Selections*, 1. Harris also noted how leaders of the local schools would discourage their members from listening to the Latter-day Saint missionaries and threatened to expel their children if they listened to the missionaries.

30. Brother Smith had four children from his first marriage: Gustav, Anna, Grace Darling Caroline, and Dennis. His second wife, Lorna, bore him two more children (see Litia T. K. Vakarewakobau, "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Suva, Fiji Islands," paper presented at the Pioneers in the Pacific Conference, Lā'ie, Hawai'i, October 8, 1997).

31. Stone, *Journal*, 2.

32. Sister Lobendahn was born in Samoa on August 14, 1921, where her parents taught her the restored gospel. At age thirteen she fell ill and was unable to attend church or school for several years. She was healed through fasting, prayer, a priesthood blessing, and inspiration that her mother received on the use of an herbal cure from a local plant. This helped strengthen her testimony. Sister Lobendahn traveled to Fiji in 1943, where she met and married her husband, Harry Lobendahn, who never joined the Church

despite being very supportive of his wife and children (see Meli U. Lesuma, "Pioneers of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Fiji Islands," paper presented at the Pioneers in the Pacific, Lā'ie, Hawai'i, October 1997, 3–4).

33. Sheldon L. Abbott, interview by W. James Jacob, tape recording, April 2, 2005, St. George, Utah, in author's possession.

34. Murdock served as the prophet's personal secretary during this trip to the South Pacific. The purpose of the trip was to identify a spot for a temple in the South Pacific. Prior to embarking on their flight, they received several warnings about a hurricane. But President McKay was determined to continue as planned, mainly because he received impressions that they would be protected. The hurricane's trajectory was in the direct path of the flight route from Canton Island to Viti Levu; the party had made it as far as Canton Island where they awaited weather clearance to fly to Nadi, Fiji. Unexpectedly, the hurricane reversed its course so that the party was able to leave Canton as planned. This unusual hurricane direction reversal earned it the nickname "The Screwball" (see Francis M. Gibbons, *David O. McKay: Apostle to the World, Prophet of God* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986], 343–44). After arriving safely in Fiji, the prophet reflected on the weather phenomenon that had occurred by saying, "Something very unusual has happened this day!" (see Clare Middlemiss, *Cherished Experiences from the Writings of President David O. McKay* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1955], 43).

35. Harris, telephone interview with W. James Jacob; Lehi, Utah, to Lethbridge, Alberta; February 12, 2005.

36. As quoted in Keith Terry, *David O. McKay: Prophet of Love* (Santa Barbara, CA: Butterfly Publishing, 1980), 130; Abbott, interview.

37. As quoted in Middlemiss, *Cherished Experiences*, 45.

38. See Jeanette McKay Morrell, *Highlights in the Life of President David O. McKay* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1966), 66.

39. Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 232, 236, 262, footnote 3.

40. Terry, *David O. McKay: Prophet of Love*, 131.

41. See Morrell, *Highlights in the Life of President David O. McKay*, 181; and Middlemiss, *Cher-*

ished Experiences, 46. Sister Ashley had met Elder McKay during his 1921 tour of the South Pacific while she was living in Nuku'alofa, Tonga. During this visit, Sister Ashley was asked to mend a small hole in the Apostle's blue cardigan. For more information on Elder McKay's visit to the Saints in Tonga in 1921, see Arrington and Bitton, "20th Century Women Strengthen Church," 13.

42. Harris, interview.

43. Stone, Journal, 1.

44. Abbott, interview.

45. Harris, Mission Journal Selections, 1.

46. Wayne R. Markham, "Highlights of the History of the Church in Fiji," panelist at the Pioneers in the Pacific Conference, Lā'ie, Hawai'i, October 8, 1997, 39.

47. After Elder Brown explained that the Church would purchase local materials to build the large meetinghouse, the local authorities changed their minds (see Markham, "Highlights of the History of the Church in Fiji," 39).

48. When the Church purchased the property, there was an old, colonial-style building that was removed for the construction of the new chapel (see Vakarewakobau, "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Suva, Fiji Islands," 6; and Sokia, "Highlights of the History of the Church in Fiji," 6). In all, ten Samoan young adults and three U.S. carpenters who were called as construction missionaries came to Fiji to build the Suva chapel. Later, six additional Samoan brothers came over to paint the completed chapel in 1957, under the direction of a professional painter who was also serving as a labor missionary (see Grover, "Fiji Suva Mission—The First Years, 1954–1959," 5).

49. Elder Cornell A. Grover was called as the first president of the new district. Elder Grover served as district president until he completed his mission on February 28, 1959, and Elder Calvin E. Todd became the second Fiji District President (see Grover, "Fiji Suva Mission—The First Years, 1954–1959," 12; Fiji Suva Mission, "History of the Church in Fiji," 1).

50. President McKay and his group of distinguished Church leaders spent a total of three days with the Saints in Suva (see Grover, "Fiji Suva Mission—The First Years, 1954–1959," 9). On their airplane trip to the New Zealand Temple dedication just prior to returning to Fiji for the Suva chapel dedication, Elders Delbert L. Stapley and Marion G. Romney of the Quorum of the Twelve, and Gordon B. Hinckley, Assistant

to the Twelve, and their wives accompanied the rest of the group mentioned in Grover's record and made a brief stopover in Nadi (see Morrell, *Highlights*, 194).

51. Vakarewakobau, "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Suva, Fiji Islands," 7.

52. President Smith was the president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles when he visited Fiji in 1959. See Grover, "Fiji Suva Mission—The First Years, 1954–1959," 12.

53. Samoan Mission Record of Members Collection, 1836 to 1970.

54. Although in 1957 the British government had allowed a third missionary to come into Fiji on a four-month visa, this did little to ameliorate the need for more full-time missionaries. Elder Dennis Dixon was the only elder to serve in Fiji on the four-month visa. Due to missionary releases, Elder Grover served for a period of five months without a formal missionary companion. Several local brethren filled his companion void, including Josefa Narabe Tokailagi Sokia, who was a deacon at the time of Elder Grover's mission (see Grover, "Fiji Suva Mission—The First Years, 1954–1959," 8, 12).

55. Grover, "Fiji Suva Mission—The First Years, 1954–1959," 9.

56. Craig K. Manscill, "Fiji," in *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History*, ed. A. K. Garr, D. Q. Cannon, and R. O. Cowan (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 375.

57. John H. Groberg, interview by W. James Jacob, tape recording, February 16, 2005, Salt Lake City, in author's possession; Groberg, *The Fire of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), 56. Elder Groberg was sustained to the First Quorum of the Seventy on April 3, 1976, and to the Presidency of the Seventy on April 3, 2004.

58. Samoan Mission Financial and Statistical Reports (1954, 1958).

59. Fiji Suva Mission Historical Record, July 10, 1972, Archives, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City; hereafter cited as Church Archives.

60. William Keith Stone was called as first counselor and George A. Baker Jr. as second counselor.

61. Fiji Suva Mission Historical Record, July 23, 1971; Janet Bingham and Herbert F. Murray, "The Saints in Fiji," *Ensign*, November 1973, 27–29.

62. Kenneth E. Coombs was called as first counselor and Molimau Tupa'i as second counselor.

63. Groberg interview; Ebbie L. Davis, interview by W. James Jacob, tape recording, February 23, 2005, Salt Lake City, in author's possession. Davis mentioned that when the Cook Islands were transferred to the Tahiti Mission in 1975, New Caledonia was added to the Fiji Mission. After several years, the Marshall Islands and Solomon Islands were later transferred to other missions.

64. Fiji Suva Mission Historical Record, December 30, 1972.

65. Interviews by W. James Jacob in 1996 and 1997 with two former Fiji Suva Mission presidents: Clyde G. Harper (1990–93) and Howard F. Wolfgramm (1993–96). John H. Groberg (1966–69) mentioned that he was grateful for the experienced missionary couples who served in Fiji while he served as mission president of the Tongan Mission, which included Fiji, 1966–69 (see John H. Groberg, *The Fire of Faith: The Memoirs of John H. Groberg* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996], 56).

66. Fiji Suva Mission Historical Record, January 9, 2003.

67. Fiji Suva Mission Historical Record, February 23, 1976; Maraia Sokia, "Conference in Fiji," *Ensign*, April 1976, 77.

68. Davis, interview.

69. The Fijian branch of the Hindi language is categorized as a separate subset of the language. Additional Church pamphlets and tracts were also translated into Hindi in Fiji (Davis, interview).

70. Groberg, interview.

71. Viseisei Village located about four miles southwest of downtown Lautoka City is believed to be the first landing spot of ethnic Fijian ancestors led by Lutunasobasoba. It is also regarded as the point where Lutunasobasoba led ethnic Fijian colonists who went out and populated the rest of the Fiji Islands. The point where this migration started is called Vuda Point (the Fijian word vuda means the source). Whereas this location is the source of the people of the Fiji Islands, it is also the first place that the gospel was preached in Lautoka.

72. Grover, "Fiji Suva Mission—The First Years, 1954–1959," 12.

73. Brother Sovasova later moved with his family to Suva and then to Lautoka, where he was called as the first stake president of the Lautoka Stake on August 11, 1996.

74. Wilford E. Smith and Ruth C. Smith, *Our Fiji Suva Mission*, 1981–1984, n.p., n.d., 63.

75. Smith and Smith, *Our Fiji Suva Mission*, 1981–1984, 63.

76. Gibbons, *David O. McKay*, 345.

77. Fiji Suva Mission Historical Record, September 20, 1972; December 14, 1972.

78. King and King, "Three-day Celebration with Theme, 'Come Unto Christ,'" Z8.

79. Fiji Suva Mission Historical Record, September 21, 1972. At the time of Fiji's independence in 1970, a large majority of schools in Fiji were owned and operated by churches. President Davis mentioned that this dynamic created a particular challenge for members of the Church in Fiji and felt a Church school would help offset these challenges (Davis, interview).

80. Davis, interview.

81. R. Lanier Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea: A History of the Latter-day Saints in the Pacific* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 511.

82. Church Educational System, *Dedicatory Services of the Fiji LDS Technical College* (Suva, Fiji: Church Educational System, 1976).

83. Church Educational System, *Opening Ceremony of the Fiji LDS Technical College* (Suva, Fiji: Church Educational System, 1976), 3.

84. In the 1990s and early 2000s, BYU student teaching or educational internship opportunities were available in six additional international locations: China, Kiribati, Mexico, New Zealand, Tonga, and Western Samoa.

85. The Fiji Distance Learning Program was jointly administered by the Church Educational System, BYU Independent Study, and BYU–Hawaii's School of Business. Two other pilot programs were established by the Church Educational System in 1998 in Sao Paulo, Brazil, and Monterey, Mexico (see W. James Jacob, "Fiji Distance Learning Program: Issues and Potential for Developing Countries" [master's thesis, Brigham Young University]). The Perpetual Education Fund, announced by President Gordon B. Hinckley in April 2001, has since helped members of the Church in Fiji and in many other developing countries gain access to post-secondary education.

86. Semiti Koroï Leqakowaitutu and Meli U. Lesuma were called as counselors to President Inosi Naga. Naga came into the Church in 1974 after meeting with missionaries sporadically for about a year. At the time of his baptism, Naga was the private secretary to Fiji's Minister of Agriculture. In October 1976, he

was asked to join the Church Educational System as the coordinator of its Fiji seminary program, which he accepted after realizing the impact he could have on the youth of the Church (see Shirleen Meek, "Inosi's Golden Book," *Ensign*, August 1991, 64–66).

87. For more information on the political chaos surrounding the 1987 coups, see Michael C. Howard, *Fiji: Race and Politics in an Island State* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1991); "Leader Justifies Military Coup," *Fiji Times*, May 15, 1987, 2; and Ralph R. Premdas, *Ethnic Conflict and Development: The Case of Fiji* (Aldershot, England: Avebury, 1995).

88. Fiji Suva Mission Historical Record, May 14, 1987.

89. Fiji Suva Mission Historical Record, May 15, 1987.

90. Mosese Kalougata and his family are one such example of an isolated family that had been introduced to the Church but were unable to join while residing on their home island of Ono-i-lau in the Lau Group. Upon hearing about the gospel, Mosese proclaimed that "the Holy Ghost had confirmed in his heart that this was what he had been searching for all of his life." His family prepared to travel to Suva to be baptized into the Church. During their journey to Suva aboard the *Uluilakeba*, the vessel was hit by a tropical storm, capsized, and sank, killing all but thirty-five of the approximately 120 passengers. Mosese, his wife, a daughter, and son drowned. One son, Joeli, survived and later joined the Church but only after twelve years when a missionary couple re-introduced him to the gospel (see Joeli Kalougata, "The Only Survivor," *Ensign*, October 2004, 40–43). Ebbie L. Davis and Elder John H. Groberg later performed temple work for Joeli's parents and others lost at sea. Groberg, interview.

91. The three additional stakes in Fiji are Nausori (formerly the Nasinu Stake, created on April 16, 1995) with Vilikesa Ravia as president, Lautoka (August 11, 1996) with Jone Sovasova as president, and Suva Fiji

North (June 15, 1997) with Josefa N. T. Sokia as president. The Suva Fiji North Stake marked the 100th stake in the Pacific Islands. See Sarah Jane Weaver, "Pacific Area Reaches Milestone With 100th Stake," *Church News*, July 19, 1997, Z3.

92. Weaver, "Pacific Area Reaches Milestone With 100th Stake," Z3.

93. "Prophet Visits Isles of the Sea," *Church News*, October 25, 1997, Z8; Gerry Avant, "LDS of Fiji's Island of Vanua Levu Yhrilled to Be among Throng during Prophet's Visit," *Church News*, November 1, 1997, Z6.

94. Robbie Roberston and William Sutherland, *Government by the Gun: The Unfinished Business of Fiji's 2000 Coup* (New York: Zed Books).

95. As quoted in Meek, "Fiji: Islands of Faith," 35.

96. Fiji Suva Mission Historical Record, May 31, 2000.

97. "'Fortress of Faith' Prompts Brotherhood and Tears," *Church News*, June 24, 2000, Z3.

98. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Suva Dedictory Prayer Excerpts: 'May be blessed with peace,'" *Church News*, June 24, 2000, Z6.

99. Members were given only twelve hours notice before the prophet's arrival in Fiji on May 20, 2001. Through communication networks over nine hundred members assembled in the Nadi chapel (see "Gospel Shines in Faces of Members in Fiji," *Church News*, May 26, 2001, Z3).

100. For more information see "New Stake Presidencies," *Church News*, August 30, 1997, Z13; and "Fiji Coaches Are Fulfilling Expectations," *Church News*, June 22, 2002, Z15.

101. Sister Vakarewakobau was awarded the Fiji Medal from then President Ratu Kamisese Mara for her contribution to the private sector and her charity work and the Independence Medal from James M. Ah Koy, former Minister of Youth and Sports, Trade, Commerce and Industry, Public Enterprises, and Finance (see Vakarewakobau, "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Suva, Fiji Islands," 11).

