

Chapter 1

Latter-day Saints in Tubuai, French Polynesia, Yesterday and Today

Arnold K. Garr

The island of Tubuai, French Polynesia, has the distinction of being the first place in the world where Latter-day Saint missionaries taught the gospel in a language other than English. It is a small island (about three by six miles) located in the beautiful South Pacific approximately 350 miles south of Tahiti. Missionaries set foot on the island in 1844 while the Church was headquartered in Nauvoo, Illinois, and Latter-day Saints have been there ever since. This chapter has three purposes: first, to briefly retell the story of the first missionary and converts on the island; second, to highlight the most significant developments in the Church on Tubuai during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; and third, to report on how the Church and its members are doing on the island in the early twenty-first century.

The story of the Church in Tubuai actually began with a patriarchal blessing given in Nauvoo on March 28, 1843. On that day the Prophet Joseph Smith's brother Hyrum placed his hands upon Addison Pratt's head and prophesied, "You shall go out and come in and go forth upon the face of the earth, . . . and your acts to be written in the chronicles of your brethren; . . . your name shall be perpetuated . . . from generation to generation . . . and had in honor until the latest generation."¹ A few weeks later, on May 11, 1843, the Quorum of

1. Hyrum Smith, in *The Journals of Addison Pratt*, ed. S. George Ellsworth (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990), 114–15.

the Twelve Apostles voted to call “Addison Pratt, Noah Rogers, Benjamin Grouard, and Knowlton F. Hanks . . . on a mission to the Pacific Isles.”²² They were the first Latter-day Saint missionaries ever sent to Polynesia. Twelve days later, on May 23, President Brigham Young ordained Pratt a seventy and set him apart to go specifically to the Society Islands (French Polynesia). In the blessing, President Young prophesied that the people in Pratt’s mission would say to each other, “Hearken ye . . . to this man,” and they would “give presents, etc.”²³ These blessings would be fulfilled within the next few years. Elders Rogers, Grouard, and Hanks were also set apart on this occasion. Rogers, the eldest and most experienced, was called to be president of the mission.⁴

On the Way to Tubuai

On June 1, 1843, the four adventurous missionaries departed from Nauvoo on the steamer *Sarah Ann*.⁵ They made their way east across the United States and arrived at New Bedford, Massachusetts, on September 21, 1843.⁶ At the time New Bedford was considered the very center of America’s whaling industry. Within days Pratt arranged for their passage to the Society Islands on the whaler *Timoleon*.⁷ The ship set sail on October 9 and had been at sea less than a month when, on November 3, Hanks passed away.⁸ Even before Hanks left Nauvoo, he had been seriously ill with consumption, now known as tuberculosis.

2. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1964), 5:386.

3. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:404.

4. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:405.

5. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:417.

6. Pratt, *The Journals of Addison Pratt*, 121.

7. Pratt, *The Journals of Addison Pratt*, 121.

8. Pratt, *The Journals of Addison Pratt*, 125.

Unfortunately, his condition became even worse with each passing day until his death. Hanks became the first Latter-day Saint missionary to be buried at sea.⁹ Nevertheless, the *Timoleon* pressed on, “searching out whaling grounds in all waters, [making] its way across the Atlantic, around the Cape of Good Hope, across the Indian Ocean, along the southern coast of Australia and into the Pacific.”¹⁰ The ship touched land only twice during its far-reaching, monotonous, seven-month journey.

Tubuai was the first Polynesian Island that the *Timoleon* visited. At about two o’clock in the morning on April 30, one of the sailors shouted, “Land ho!” Pratt went on deck and beheld for the first time the beautiful island that he would soon come to love so dearly.¹¹ For Pratt, this historic sighting was a rendezvous with destiny. From that moment on, his name would forever be associated with the island of Tubuai in the history of the Church. Originally the missionaries did not plan to initiate their proselyting activities in Polynesia at Tubuai. The *Timoleon* had merely stopped at Tubuai to replenish its supplies. It was then supposed to take all three missionaries to Tahiti, where they were to begin their labors. This all changed, however, soon after Pratt went ashore at Tubuai.

Pratt was well suited to preach the gospel in this part of Polynesia because as a young man he had worked as a seaman on a whaler for ten years, spending about six months on the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii).¹² It seemed as if he bonded with the people of Tubuai almost immediately after he came into

9. 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), 4.

10. S. George Ellsworth, *Zion in Paradise: Early Mormons in the South Seas* (Logan, UT: The Faculty Association, Utah State University, 1959), 7.

11. Pratt, *The Journals of Addison Pratt*, 150.

12. S. George Ellsworth and Kathleen C. Perrin, *Seasons of Faith and Courage: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in French Polynesia, A Sesquicentennial History, 1843–1993* (Sandy, UT: Yves R. Perrin, 1994), 2–3.

contact with them. In his journal Pratt recorded, “When I saw their canoe and their faces were precisely like those I had been familiar with in the Sandwich Islands, my heart did leap for joy, for they looked like old acquaintance.” Pratt continued, “I jumped onto the rail as one of them mounted the chain plate. I said to him ‘Aroohah,’ and held out my hand. He caught hold of it with great warmth, and shook it with a cordiality peculiar to themselves. . . . I said to him, ‘herry my oh’ [*Hele mai oe*, come over here]. He understood me and jumped on deck.”¹³

The people of Tubuai were kind and hospitable to all three missionaries, but they were especially fond of Pratt. He quickly won them over because of his engaging personality and willingness to try and communicate with them using the Hawaiian language. Almost immediately they began to plead with him to stay on the island and preach the gospel. This was an extremely difficult decision for Pratt because he had planned to go to Tahiti with the others. However, after the king himself prevailed upon him to stay, Pratt decided to make it a matter of prayer. He was soon convinced that if he left Tubuai, he would be “running away from duty” and therefore “resolved at once to stay.”¹⁴ The *Timoleon* stayed at Tubuai a total of ten days and then, on October 9, set sail for Tahiti, taking Rogers and Grouard along.¹⁵ Pratt was the only passenger to stay behind. He was about to embark upon a life-changing, nineteen-month adventure.

The First Missionary and Converts, 1844–45

There were only about two hundred people living on Tubuai in 1844.¹⁶ These residents were normally a loving people, but

13. Pratt, *The Journals of Addison Pratt*, 151–52.

14. Pratt, *The Journals of Addison Pratt*, 154.

15. Pratt, *The Journals of Addison Pratt*, 158.

16. Pratt, *The Journals of Addison Pratt*, 189.

if exploited they could also be fighters. For example, in 1789 when the mutineers from the famous ship *Bounty* tried to establish a colony on Tubuai, the islanders went to war against the rebellious sailors and forced them off the island.¹⁷ Prior to the early nineteenth century, the religion of Tubuai was primarily paganism, including cannibalism. However, in 1817 William Ellis of the London Missionary Society began to preach Protestant Christianity to the people. He was followed, in 1822, by native Tahitian missionaries who taught Christianity and brought literacy to the island. By 1840 the London Missionary Society “had recorded the spoken language in writing” and “printed a complete translation of the Bible.”¹⁸ When Pratt arrived in 1844, basically all the people on the island considered themselves Christians, but the older generation could still remember their former traditions.

For Pratt to be a successful missionary, he had to learn Tahitian. He knew a few Hawaiian words that were similar to Tahitian, but sometimes that was more frustrating than helpful: “They often laugh at me for talking Owyhe [Hawaiian] to them,” he wrote on May 12, “and I fear this in some degree will be a disadvantage to me.”¹⁹ A turning point came on July 11, 1844, when King Tama-toa (sometimes Tomatoa) gave Pratt “a pamphlet containing the English and Tahitian languages.”²⁰ Thereafter his ability to speak Tahitian increased rapidly. By February 1845, Pratt could “explain almost any passage of scripture” in Tahitian. He was also quick to point out that his ability to speak the new language came “by hard study, and not by the *‘gift of tongues.’*”²¹

17. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 5.

18. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 5–6.

19. Pratt, *The Journals of Addison Pratt*, 159.

20. Pratt, *The Journals of Addison Pratt*, 175–76.

21. Pratt, “News from Our Mission in the Pacific,” *Times and Seasons*, November 1, 1845, 1021; emphasis in original.

Although Pratt eventually had tremendous success in teaching the indigenous population of Tubuai, many of his first converts actually came from a small group of American shipbuilders who were living at the town of Mataura. Normally one would not expect a hardy band of sailors-turned-shipbuilders to be receptive to the gospel, but they were. From the time they first met Pratt they were friendly to him, and they soon became his proselytes. The first person to convert to the Church in all of the Pacific Isles was Ambrose Alexander, one of those shipbuilders. He was baptized on June 16, 1844, approximately six weeks after Pratt arrived on Tubuai.²²

Pratt also taught all of Alexander's American friends, but it was a few more weeks before they were ready for baptism. In the meantime Pratt, whom the islanders called "Paraita," preached the gospel to the indigenous population of Tubuai. His favorites were Nabota and his wife, Teli. These two took Pratt into their home right after he arrived on the island. He lived with them the entire time he was on Tubuai, and they were totally devoted to him. "The native family with whom I live are much attached to me," wrote Pratt to his wife. "Where I go, they go, and where I stay, they stay; they consider all they have is mine. . . . It is a spiritual feast to me to meet them in prayer meetings, and hear them pray for Brother Joseph [Smith] and the church, and with all simplicity thank the Lord for sending me among them."²³

On July 22, 1844, Pratt baptized nine people. Four of them were natives of Tubuai: his dear friends Nabota and Teli, along with two others named Pauma and Hamoe. These were the first Polynesians to be baptized on Tubuai. In addi-

22. Pratt, *The Journals of Addison Pratt*, 169.

23. Pratt, "Extract of a Letter from the South Seas," *Millennial Star*, August 1, 1845, 59.

tion, Pratt baptized five more of the foreign shipbuilders living on the island: Charles Hill, John Layton, William F. Bowen, William Carrington, and James Clark.²⁴ On one occasion Pratt rhetorically asked the question, did these sailors' conversion "hammer the rust off them any?" Pratt answered his own query: "Could you see them on their knees, and hear their humble petitions, and the sincerity with which they thank the Lord for so ordering events, that I have been so casually thrown on this Island, and have been instrumental in his hands of showing them the way of life and salvation, I doubt not but you would say, 'there has been a great change wrought some how.'"²⁵

July 29, 1844, is an important date in the history of the Church for Tubuai. On that day Pratt organized not only the first branch of the Church in Tubuai but also the first branch in all the Pacific Isles. On that occasion Pratt ordained Charles Hill an elder and chose him as a companion to take the place of Knowlton Hanks, who died at sea. Pratt then ordained John Layton a priest, William Carrington and James Clark as teachers, and Joseph F. Bowen and Ambrose Alexander as deacons.²⁶ The little branch had a total of eleven members, including Pratt.

Certainly the most high-profile person to join the Church in Tubuai was Repa, King Tamatoa's oldest daughter and heir-ess to the throne.²⁷ In fact, one of the Protestant missionaries from Tahiti had actually crowned her queen before Pratt arrived on the island.²⁸ This coronation had possibly taken place after

24. Pratt, *The Journals of Addison Pratt*, 178.

25. Pratt, "Extract from a Letter from the Island of Tooboui, Society Group," *Times and Seasons*, May 1, 1845, 882–83.

26. Pratt, *The Journals of Addison Pratt*, 179.

27. Pratt, "News from Our Mission to the Pacific," 1020.

28. Pratt, *The Journals of Addison Pratt*, 228.

King Tamatoa's wife died and before the king married his next wife, Toupah.²⁹ Nevertheless, Pratt baptized Repa, the queen or crown princess, on January 5, 1845.³⁰

During Pratt's first nine months on Tubuai, missionary work went extremely well. On February 20, 1845, he wrote a glowing report to Brigham Young: "I have baptized fifty-seven persons on this island. . . . Among them are the queen, who is heiress to the crown, a deputy king and his wife and daughter, . . . the head chief and his wife, these are the adopted parents to the queen, and several of the subordinate chiefs." Pratt then explained, "So you see the reins of government are within the church, and it has blundered me into a very awkward position, for if you will allow me to speak jestingly, I am *prime minister of the island*. My counsel is sought for in most law cases, though it is my endeavor to keep clear of them as much as possible."³¹ Three and a half months later, Pratt had baptized three more people, making sixty converts altogether.³² This was approximately 30 percent of the island's population. "His success on Tubuai anchored the mission," wrote one historian, "guaranteed its perpetuity, and also encouraged Elders Rogers and Grouard to persist in their efforts" on other islands of French Polynesia.³³

Unfortunately, after that first year, missionary work on Tubuai slowed down to almost a standstill. However, when the work stalled in Tubuai, it started to accelerate in another part

29. Pratt, "Extract of a Letter from the South Seas," 58.

30. Pratt, *The Journals of Addison Pratt*, 228.

31. Pratt, "Extract from a Letter from the Island of Tooboui, Society Group," 1020; emphasis in original.

32. Pratt, *The Journals of Addison Pratt*, 237.

33. Kathleen C. Perrin, "Seasons of Faith: An Overview of the History of the Church in French Polynesia," in *Pioneers in the Pacific: Memory, History, and Cultural Identity among the Latter-day Saints*, ed. Grant Underwood (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2005), 204.

of French Polynesia. Grouard began having incredible success on the island of Anaa, east of Tahiti, in the archipelago of Tuamotu. In less than five months, between May 1 and September 21, 1845, Grouard baptized a total of 620 people and organized them into five branches.³⁴ It was a phenomenal achievement, but it left Grouard feeling overwhelmed. He desperately needed Pratt to help him, so Grouard sailed to Tahiti and from there sent a letter to Pratt requesting that he come to Anaa and assist him in the work.³⁵

Pratt could not refuse Grouard's emotional plea for help. He left American convert Charles Hill in charge of the Tubuai Branch and made preparations to leave the island.³⁶ The Saints on Tubuai were sad to say good-bye to their beloved "Paraita." They showered Pratt with gifts, including "a large pile of [coconuts], [bananas], plantains, native cloth . . . etc."³⁷ After several tearful farewells, Pratt and his devoted friends, Nabota and Teli, sailed to Tahiti, thus ending the first chapter of the history of the Church in Tubuai.

Through the Years

Missionaries Pratt and Grouard labored successfully on Tahiti and the Tuamotu Islands from December 20, 1845, to March 28, 1847. Then Pratt sailed to America, leaving Grouard behind to administer to the affairs of the Church on the islands (Rogers had already returned to America in December 1845). Pratt was determined to recruit more missionaries in America to serve in French Polynesia, after which he planned to return to the islands himself. During the years Pratt was gone from the

34. Ellsworth, *Zion in Paradise*, 15; Pratt, *The Journals of Addison Pratt*, 253.

35. Pratt, *Journals of Addison Pratt*, 253–54.

36. Ellsworth, *Zion in Paradise*, 15.

37. Pratt, *The Journals of Addison*, 257.

islands (1847 to 1850), Grouard faithfully carried on. He called John Hawkins, one of his converts, to help him supervise the work. Hawkins spent most of his time in the Tuamotus while Grouard split his time primarily between Tahiti and Tubuai. One of the great needs of the mission was to have a boat to transport the elders from island to island. Therefore, during the next three years, Grouard devoted much of his energy to “building and selling boats.”³⁸ In fact, in 1850, when the next group of missionaries arrived in Tubuai, Grouard was in the process of constructing a large ship.³⁹

By the time Pratt reunited with the Saints in America, the Latter-day Saints had migrated from Nauvoo to Salt Lake City, and President Brigham Young was leading the Church. Pratt gave a report on his mission in the October 1848 general conference and requested that the Church please send more missionaries to the islands. The conference voted unanimously to send Pratt back to French Polynesia with additional missionaries.⁴⁰ Church leaders eventually decided to send two groups to the islands: one to Tahiti and the other to Tubuai. The first group was comprised of only two elders: Addison Pratt, who was called to be mission president, and James Brown, a veteran of the Mormon Battalion. They left Salt Lake City on October 2, 1849, and arrived in Papeete, the capital of Tahiti, on May 24, 1850.⁴¹ They originally planned to sail from there to Tubuai, after a brief stay, but unfortunately the local government would not allow the two missionaries to leave Tahiti for the next eight months.

The second company of missionaries participated in something historic. This was the first time the Church called wives

38. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 16.

39. Ellsworth, *Zion in Paradise*, 25.

40. Ellsworth and Perrin, *Seasons of Faith and Courage*, 18.

41. Ellsworth and Perrin, *Seasons of Faith and Courage*, 18.

and children to accompany their husbands and fathers on missions.⁴² There were twenty-one missionaries called to serve in this group, including Pratt's wife, Louisa, and their daughters Ellen, Francis, Lois, and Ann Louise; Hiram E. W. Clark, a fourteen-year-old boy for whom Sister Pratt was caring; Louisa Pratt's sister and brother-in-law, Caroline and Jonathan Crosby, and their son Alma. In addition, there were two other families: Brother and Sister Thomas Tompkins and their two children, and a Brother and Sister McMerty and their child. There were also four single men: Joseph Busby, Simeon A. Dunn, Julian Moses, and Sidney Alvarus Hanks (the brother of Knowlton F. Hanks, who had passed away during the initial sea voyage to Tubuai).⁴³ This company left Salt Lake City on May 7, 1850, and arrived at Tubuai on October 21. Therefore, when Louisa Pratt and her group dropped anchor at Tubuai, her husband, Addison, and his companion, James Brown, were still detained in Tahiti. Finally on January 28, 1851, Pratt was allowed to join his wife and the other missionaries at Tubuai.

There was such a need for a mission ship that this new band of missionaries made it their highest priority to build one. They worked diligently for months and finally completed the project in April 1851. They proudly named the new vessel *Ravaii* (the fisherman). They used the ship primarily to transport missionaries between islands, but they also used it in business ventures to help finance their missions.⁴⁴

After the completion of the *Ravaii*, the missionaries were appointed to preside over various island congregations throughout French Polynesia. President Pratt and his brother-in-law, Jonathan Crosby, were appointed to preside over Tubuai, but they also had responsibilities for other islands and were gone

42. Perrin, "Seasons of Faith," 206.

43. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 15.

44. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 17.

from Tubuai much of the time.⁴⁵ For example, Pratt was away on one occasion for forty-one days and on another for seventy-three days. In addition Jonathan Crosby was gone for 103 days while on assignment in the Tuamotus.⁴⁶ Also, soon after the ship was completed, all the brethren who were there with their families (except for Pratt and Crosby) went back to America.⁴⁷ As a result of these circumstances, Louisa Pratt, Caroline Crosby, and their children were left on Tubuai alone for long periods of time. Living on the island when their husbands and fathers were gone was not easy, but Sisters Pratt and Crosby, along with their children, accomplished much good during their stay on Tubuai. They taught school, held prayer meetings, and sang hymns. They also taught the women of the island how to garden, quilt, sew, and knit. In general, they introduced many of the customs common to the Latter-day Saint women in America.⁴⁸

When the elders finished their work on the *Ravaii*, they were finally able to focus their efforts on proselyting. This accelerated missionary activity brought more converts into the Church, but the increased attention also caused more persecution. This adversity reached a high point when the government passed a law in March 1852 essentially placing all churches under state control. The government also decreed that only Polynesians could preach Christianity. This made it virtually impossible for foreigners to serve as missionaries. As a result, the Latter-day Saint elders from America left French Polynesia.⁴⁹ When they departed, there were about sixty Latter-day Saints in Tubuai and approximately 1,500 to 2,000 living on

45. Ellsworth and Perrin, *Seasons of Faith and Courage*, 22.

46. Ellsworth and Perrin, *Seasons of Faith and Courage*, 26.

47. Ellsworth, *Zion in Paradise*, 27.

48. Perrin, "Seasons of Faith," 206.

49. Perrin, "Seasons of Faith," 207.

other islands.⁵⁰ After the Americans left, Polynesians administered to the Church throughout all of French Polynesia for the next forty years, from 1852 to 1892.

In 1867 the government modified the laws so that there was religious toleration throughout all of French Polynesia.⁵¹ However, Church leaders were so preoccupied with pioneering and colonizing the Intermountain West in America that they did not send missionaries back to the islands at that time. In the 1870s and 1880s, missionaries for the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS) came to French Polynesia and were successful in persuading large numbers of Latter-day Saints to join the Reorganization. The RLDS missionaries taught that Brigham Young and the Mormons living in Utah were the ones who had apostatized from the Church. They also taught that Joseph Smith III, the RLDS president, was the one who had the authority to lead the Church.⁵² That approach turned out to be extremely successful. One Latter-day Saint mission president determined that only about five hundred Latter-day Saints in French Polynesia did not join the Reorganized Church.⁵³ That meant that approximately 1,000 to 1,500 Latter-day Saints probably changed their allegiance to the RLDS Church. In Tubuai, according to some historians, “all but one . . . had joined the RLDS group.”⁵⁴

Fortunately, this era was followed by a period of time when the original Latter-day Saint Church reclaimed many of its former members. In 1892 Church leaders finally began

50. Ellsworth and Perrin, *Seasons of Faith and Courage*, 31.

51. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 21.

52. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 22.

53. Kathleen C. Perrin, “150th Year of Church in Tahiti,” *Church News*, May 7, 1994, 12.

54. Perrin, “Seasons of Faith,” 209; Ellsworth and Perrin, *Seasons of Faith and Courage*, 40.

sending missionaries back to French Polynesia. First, William O. Lee, president of the Samoan Mission, sent William A. Seegmiller and Joseph W. Damron Jr. to Tahiti. They arrived at Papeete on January 27, 1892, and within a short time were surprised to discover that the RLDS Church had “drawn [many Latter-day Saint] people into their organization.”⁵⁵ Seegmiller and Damron therefore recommended that the Church call “experienced elders who knew the people and the language.”⁵⁶

As a result, the First Presidency called James S. Brown to return to the islands, after being away for forty years, to “help reestablish the Church.”⁵⁷ By this time Brown was sixty-five years old, missing one leg, and in rather poor health. Nevertheless, he accomplished a remarkable amount of good in a rather short period of time. He was called to be the mission president and was accompanied to French Polynesia by his son, Elando, and an elder named Thomas Jones Jr.

Brown visited many islands and found several people who remembered him from when he served four decades earlier with Addison Pratt, or “Paraita,” as the locals had called him. Brown convinced many former Latter-day Saints that he and his companions were the true followers of Joseph Smith and that the RLDS missionaries were the apostates.

Brown’s activities on Tubuai were especially impressive. He and Seegmiller arrived at Tubuai on September 20, 1892, to a cool reception. But after about two weeks several people on the island who remembered Brown from his former mission came to him with many concerns about the Reorganized Church.⁵⁸ Brown clarified that priesthood authority, held by

55. Ellsworth and Perrin, *Seasons of Faith and Courage*, 39.

56. Ellsworth and Perrin, *Seasons of Faith and Courage*, 39.

57. Ellsworth and Perrin, *Seasons of Faith and Courage*, 39.

58. Ellsworth and Perrin, *Seasons of Faith and Courage*, 40.

Joseph Smith, continued in the Latter-day Saint Church.⁵⁹ After that meeting, numerous people requested baptism and between October 4 and the end of November, sixty-five people joined the Church.⁶⁰ Two months later, on January 6, 1893, a missionwide conference was held at Faaite in the Tuamotus. There were 425 Saints present from ten different branches. All sixty-five members of the Tubuai Branch were in attendance, more than any other branch except one.⁶¹ President Brown's mission lasted fourteen months. When he sailed back to America on July 8, 1893, he had reestablished the Church on a firm foundation upon which others would build.

Through the years the Church in Tubuai continued to expand but sometimes at an uneven pace. From 1893 to 1900, it grew from 65 to 159 members.⁶² Missionary work received a boost in 1904 when the Church published the first Book of Mormon in Tahitian.⁶³ However, there were also times of frustration and discouragement. From 1913 to 1918, there were no American missionaries on Tubuai, and evidently during that time the branch became dysfunctional. Fortunately the missionaries returned in 1918, and by 1919 the branch was reorganized.⁶⁴ In 1938 the government passed a law which "forbade any nonresident from going to the island of Tubuai or the Australes."⁶⁵ As a result, no American missionaries served on the island from 1939 to 1948. Nevertheless, during that time a local elder named Teag a Nauta continued proselyting on Tubuai.⁶⁶

59. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 26.

60. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 26–27.

61. Ellsworth and Perrin, *Seasons of Faith and Courage*, 41.

62. Perrin, "Seasons of Faith," 210.

63. *2007 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Morning News, 2006), 359.

64. Ellsworth and Perrin, *Seasons of Faith and Courage*, 73–74.

65. Ellsworth and Perrin, *Seasons of Faith and Courage*, 74.

66. Ellsworth and Perrin, *Seasons of Faith and Courage*, 74.

In April 1951, a memorable conference was held on Tubuai that was attended by Church members all the way from Tahiti. By this time there were three branches on Tubuai, and the members and missionaries beautifully renovated all of their chapels for the occasion. At the conference “all three Tubuai branch presidencies were reorganized with local members as leaders.”⁶⁷

In 1956 the Church organized the first elders quorum in French Polynesia. The quorum included all 125 elders living on the islands of Tubuai and Tahiti. On September 9, mission president Ellis V. Christensen called Taumata Mapuhi to be president of the quorum. Mapuhi chose Tinomana Hauata and Joseph Benalek to be his counselors. One of the quorum’s first undertakings was to prepare the members to go to the New Zealand Temple.⁶⁸ This was a Herculean task that took years of preparation, but finally in 1963, sixty-nine Church members from Tubuai and Tahiti received their endowments in New Zealand.⁶⁹ Considering what a tremendous sacrifice it was for the French Polynesian Saints to travel to the temple in New Zealand, one can only imagine how thrilled the members were when the Church built a temple in Tahiti in 1983. President Gordon B. Hinckley, then First Counselor in the First Presidency, dedicated the Papeete Tahiti Temple on October 27, 1983.⁷⁰ Thereafter, Saints at Tubuai could get to the temple in one hour by plane.

Eight years after President Hinckley dedicated the temple in Tahiti, the Church built a beautiful chapel in Tubuai. The new building served as the Taahueia Chapel as well as the district center. In October 1991 mission president Yves R. Perrin and many other Church members traveled from Tahiti to

67. Ellsworth and Perrin, *Seasons of Faith and Courage*, 135.

68. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 73–74.

69. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 77.

70. *2007 Church Almanac*, 359.

Tubuai for the occasion. Of course, the loving members in Tubuai gave presents to all the visitors. The event turned out to be a four-day celebration that included a talent show, an open house, a baptismal service, and district conference meetings. Perrin gave the dedicatory prayer with over six hundred people present. He later declared: "I truly felt the spirit of Addison Pratt. . . . I felt he was watching us and is pleased to see the progress the Church has made in Tubuai."⁷¹

In 1994 the Church celebrated the 150th anniversary of Addison Pratt and his companions' arrival in Tubuai. Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles visited the island on that occasion. He also spent time in Tahiti, where he met the territorial president and all the members of the cabinet. As a result, the president and other high government officials attended several Church-sponsored events.⁷²

Tubuai in the Twenty-first Century

In December 2006 Professor Craig K. Manscill and I decided to visit Tubuai and learn what the contemporary island, the Church, and its members are like. Our stay on Tubuai turned out to be three of the most memorable days of our lives.

Tubuai is a picturesque tropical paradise that has somehow kept itself a secret from the tourists of the world. It is a small, oval-shaped, volcanic island that is dominated by a lofty, tree-covered mountain that seems "to rise immediately out of the sea."⁷³ Tubuai is surrounded by a white coral reef island with a few breaks in it that allow ships to pass through. Inside the coral reef is a beautiful turquoise lagoon that is as calm as a

71. Ellsworth and Perrin, *Seasons of Faith and Courage*, 312.

72. *2007 Church Almanac*, 359.

73. Andrew Jenson, *Encyclopedic History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1941), 804.

lake and an excellent place for fishing. Tubuai is just as attractive as some nearby islands that have become famous vacation retreats. However, it has not become commercialized like those places. Therefore, it is much more traditional, although not primitive. The major source of income is agriculture, not tourism. The population is about 1,700.

The island has a small airport. Planes fly in from Tahiti only four times a week: Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday. There are basically only two major roads on Tubuai: one circles the outside of the island, and the other cuts through the middle of Tubuai, connecting the villages of Mataura and Mahu. The public school provides education through the tenth grade. The students who go beyond the tenth grade must attend school in Tahiti, which is paid for by the French government. Students either board at the school in Tahiti or live with relatives. The school year is from August to June with a month holiday in December.

Tubuai does have three television stations that originate in Tahiti, but it does not have a movie theater. The island has one gas station but no car dealerships. Residents buy their cars in Tahiti. Tubuai does have three nice guest houses but no hotel that is in operation. There is a restaurant with twenty-five seats that is open for lunch and dinner. There are also at least three small general stores. In addition, there is one hospital with two doctors, eight nurses, and a dentist.

Most of the people on Tubuai are bilingual: all speak Tahitian, and about 80 percent speak French. Many can read some English, but few speak it fluently. Virtually all the people on the island are Christians. There are approximately six hundred Protestants (from the London Missionary Society), five hundred Latter-day Saints, two hundred Catholics, one hundred members of the Community of Christ (formerly RLDS), eighty Adventists, and fifty Jehovah's Witnesses.

If I were asked, "What is the most distinguishing feature of the Church in Tubuai today?" I would reply, "The members!" I

have never known a group of people who are as spontaneously affectionate, hospitable, and generous as the Tubuai Saints. Manscill and I had never met anybody from the island before we arrived. We were told that we would be met at the airport by a sister named Brigitte, who would be our interpreter. However, when we stepped off the plane, to our great surprise, we were greeted by Brigitte and the entire district presidency. Each of them welcomed Manscill and me with a warm embrace and a kiss on both cheeks. They also placed several beautiful leis around our necks.

The district president was a relatively young man named Jacques Tumarae. He had served a mission in Tahiti and currently worked as a policeman on Tubuai. His first counselor was Bérode Harevaa, who worked as a carpenter specializing in roofing. He was also probably the finest young spearfisher on the island. In addition, Bérode was married to our interpreter, Brigitte. The second counselor was Stéphane Turina, who was a heavy machine operator. Our interpreter, Brigitte Harevaa, had served a mission in the Philippines and had traveled to Utah in the past to visit former mission companions. She spoke English better than most on Tubuai.

We were invited to attend a family home evening that first night. We expected to be hosted by one family with perhaps six or eight people present. Instead it was held on the beach and hosted by the district presidency. There were scores of people in attendance from all four branches of the Church. The students were home from school in Tahiti for Christmas vacation, and the youth from each branch performed native dances for us.

The next day we went on a tour of the island. Once again we thought that Brigitte would be our only guide. It turned out quite differently, however. The members had arranged to drive us around the island in an open-air bus, and dozens of local Saints accompanied us. Our tour guide was the charismatic

Titaha Temarohirani, Brigitte's father and a sixth-generation Latter-day Saint. Titaha was also a descendent of King Tama-toa. He had served in the district presidency and was currently on the district council. He was also the unofficial Church historian of the island. The tour lasted all day, and the Saints on the bus sang the whole time except for stops. We drove past the airport and later found out the head administrator there was Karine Tahuhuterani, a member of the Church. We also drove past the public school and learned that Jacques Turina, a Latter-day Saint, taught Tahitian there.

During our tour, one of the Church members asked if I was thirsty. I said yes. I expected him to open an ice chest and offer me a can of soda. Instead he stepped off the bus and picked a coconut off a tree at the side of the road. He cut off the top of the coconut and offered me the milk. Later that evening our guide, Titaha, invited us to his home for dinner and entertainment. On that occasion Jacques Turina formally bestowed honorary names upon Professor Manscill and me, a rare distinction given to few visitors. Obviously we were grateful and humbled.

By 2007 the Church in Tubuai was well organized. There were three modern, well-kept chapels on the island, in Mahu, Taahueia, and Ziona (Zion). There were branches meeting in each of those buildings plus a fourth branch at Mataura that met in the Taahueia Chapel. There were 187 members in the Mahu Branch, 91 in Ziona, 127 in Taahueia, and 110 in Mataura. The entire membership on the island was 515 out of a total population of approximately 1,700. That means the island was about 30 percent Latter-day Saint (about the same percentage as in the days of Addison Pratt). The seminary and institute program ran very well on Tubuai. The coordinator for the Church Educational System was Richard Williamu, a large, athletic man with a jovial personality. He was a well-respected former stake president who resided in Tahiti but visited Tubuai at least twice

a year. The district seminary supervisor was Marjorie Tepapa-tahi, Brigitte's sister. There were three early-morning seminary classes: the Mahu Branch with eight students, Ziona Branch with five, Mataura Branch with eleven, and Taahueia Branch with seven (the students from the Mataura and Taahueia Branches were combined into one class). The seminary classes were taught in the chapels. There was one institute class taught by Brigitte in the Taahueia Chapel.⁷⁴

Tubuai is part of the Tahiti Papeete Mission, presided over by President Marama Tarati and his wife, Christiane. Both are from Raiatea Island, French Polynesia. At the time of our visit, there were two full-time missionaries serving in Tubuai: Tem-auri Tiaehau from Tahiti and Danny Crosby from the United States. They were living in the Taahueia Chapel and working diligently to continue the legacy of Addison Pratt.

After our three-day visit to Tubuai, Professor Manscill and I said an emotional good-bye to our new friends, wondering if we would ever see them again. We were escorted to the airport by about fifteen members who placed nineteen leis on our shoulders. As I think back on our trip, I am reminded of the statement Yves R. Perrin made in 1991: "I truly felt the spirit of Addison Pratt. . . . I felt he was watching us and is pleased to see the progress the Church has made in Tubuai."⁷⁵

74. All these statistics were provided for the author by Richard Williamu, the coordinator for the Church Educational System and former stake president in Tahiti.

75. Ellsworth and Perrin, *Seasons of Faith and Courage*, 312.