

PREFACE

Why write a history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Tonga that focuses on the first hundred years? Why does it matter? Entrance by Latter-day Saints into the Kingdom of Tonga and their relationship with the Tongan people illustrate vital aspects of global evangelization: respecting local authorities and customs, forming friendships with influential leaders, developing literacy through starting schools, and adapting to ongoing challenges in the modern world. And even though Tonga is unique as the only surviving monarchy in the Pacific, it is a diamond with many singular facets that invites closer attention and understanding.

Tongans are a believing people. They have a great respect for God and for their monarchy. The observance of the Sabbath by the Tongan nation is unequaled in all the world. Tongans have embraced

the Latter-day Saint message of eternal families, as well as the invitation to deepen their discipleship through daily Christlike living. Tonga has the highest concentration of Latter-day Saints per capita in the entire world. In addition, the Tongans have been very mindful of the Latter-day Saint belief that people in every nation should be “subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law.”¹ These factors have helped the Church find a way to permanently settle in the Kingdom of Tonga and have paid rich dividends to the local country in the development of their education and citizenry as well as influencing Tongan communities worldwide. The *Saints of Tonga* is a story of melding the best of the Latter-day Saint and Tongan cultures while enhancing faith on both sides. It is a story worth telling that is much needed in our world today.

This history of the Church in Tonga, especially in the early years, is told largely through the journals of the missionaries who served there and through the manuscript history and historical reports of the Tonga Mission. With the creation of stakes in the 1970s, the mission’s unified history of the Church in Tonga was replaced by individual unit histories.² For the past forty years, unit histories have been sporadic or uneven at best, as has the journal keeping of native Tongan Church leaders. Therefore, the authors have attempted to interview those Tongan mission presidents, regional representatives, Area Seventies, and others who may not have kept journals to get their input.

Because history in Tonga was traditionally passed down from generation to generation orally, it is difficult to access the Tongan viewpoint, especially for the early years. The authors regret not being able to adequately share the “Tongan voice”—instead, they often share the people’s thoughts and responses to the gospel through stories related by the missionaries of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.³

Consequently, this volume becomes more of a history of the institutional Church in Tonga. However, in recent years a younger

generation of Tongan Church members—such as the Wolfgramms,⁴ the Mutis,⁵ and the Sikas⁶—are beginning to record and, in some instances, publish their family histories. Many others are posting their stories on social media and family history websites. All this will be treasured by future generations.

While the history of the Church in Tonga is resplendent with faith-promoting experiences—including authentic miracles—this book is not meant to be a narrative centered solely on the faith of the Saints in Tonga. The incredible amount of faith exhibited by the Saints is certainly prevalent in this narrative, but it is not the focus. Rather, the purpose is to provide a clear and chronological description of the growth and development of the Church in Tonga, interwoven with examples of their great faith.

On a personal note, the authors have a keen interest in Tonga and the Pacific region as a whole. Moffat has been researching and producing books and articles about the Pacific for the past fifty years. He gained an appreciation for Tonga while working as director of library services for LDS Church Schools–Tonga from 1973 to 1976. Woods has also been writing steadily about the Pacific in the twenty-first century and teaches a BYU course on the global Church, which includes a section on Tonga. In addition, his wife’s ancestor, Olonzo D. Merrill, was one of the first five Latter-day Saint missionaries in Tonga. Anderson has had close ties to Tonga for the past half century since he served his first mission to Tonga from 1968 to 1970, where he received the *matapule* title of Ha’elefeke and has taught at Liahona and Saineha High Schools. He has faithfully kept up his Tongan relationships and language skills.⁷

We have combined our experience and passion to record this story with the hope that it will not only increase knowledge about the Tongan Saints but that it will also help others understand and appreciate this unique island of belief. Finally, each of us has been touched and transformed through our contacts with scores of faithful Tongan Saints. It is our desire that this island’s culture of faith

will spread far beyond the reef that encloses it and strengthen members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and others throughout the world.

Finally, this book is a companion to a documentary film with the same name produced by Martin L. Anderson and Fred E. Woods, which is augmented with over forty interviews in both English and Tongan in addition to the main film. It can be viewed online at https://rsc.byu.edu/Saints_of_Tonga.

NOTES

1. This phrase is taken from the Latter-day Saints' Articles of Faith, thirteen statements of belief held by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This particular statement of belief is the twelfth article of faith found in a book of scripture known as the Pearl of Great Price.
2. See Tonga Nuku'álofa Mission Manuscript History and Historical Reports, 1891–1976, LR 9197 2, CHL.
3. Eric B. Shumway has been able to collect many wonderful vignettes in the book *Tongan Saints: Legacy of Faith* by going out and inviting Church members to write down their stories. His collection is a beautiful example of the faith and sacrifice of individual Tongans through years.
4. Tisina Wolfgramm Gerber, comp., *Iohani Wolfgramm: Man of Faith and Vision, 1911–1997* (n.p., 2000).
5. Paula F. Muti and Sisi K. Muti, *A Man of Service: Mosese L. Muti* (Bountiful, UT: Paula Muti, 2016).
6. Sisi Muti and Paula Muti, comp., *The Odyssey of the Sikas of Niua-toputapu, Tonga* (n.p., 2016), CHL.
7. A *matapule* is like a counselor, adviser, or representative to a higher chief, noble, or the royal family. Anderson was vested with the title of *matapule* to His Majesty, Taufa'ahau Tupou IV and given the name Ha'e'elefeke, which was bestowed upon him by Motu'apuaka, the talking chief and highest-ranking attendant and spokesman to the king.