



The South Seas Missionary Ships, by D. Rodlie.

With the object of spreading "the knowledge of Christ among heathen and other unenlightened nations," leaders of independent churches joined Anglican and Presbyterian clergy and laymen to form a Missionary Society in 1795. In 1818, the society was renamed the London Missionary Society (LMS) which first sent missionaries to Tahiti, Tonga, the Cook Islands and other parts of the South Pacific.

There are three permanently inhabited atolls in the Tokelau Group, which lie in a line running southeast to northwest. The land area of each atoll is small, and consists of a number of islets surrounding a lagoon without any reliable boat passage.

Fakaofu, about 612 acres of land, is the most easterly island, and is 270 miles north of Upolu in Samoa. Nukunonu, about 650 acres, is the central island, about 35 miles to the northwest. And Atafu, about 502 acres, is the western island, another 45 miles away. The best estimate of the population in 1863, immediately before the Peruvian raids, is 261 for Fakaofu, and 140 each for Nukunonu and Atafu.

Approximately half-way between Samoa and the three atolls is a fourth island, Olosenga (also called Olohega, Quiros or Swain's Island), which geographically, though no longer politically, forms part of the Tokelau Group. Although regarded by the Tokelau people as under the suzerainty of Fakaofu, an American, Eli Hutchinson Jennings, settled there in 1856 and developed the existing coconut plantations for his own benefit. (Known as Ilae, or Ilai, by the islanders, he was described in a Fakaofu account as being "cruel and exceedingly brutal.")

People in these islands traditionally live together in a single village on each atoll, probably to facilitate control over their limited food resources. The proximity of the three atolls to each other resulted in a good deal of inter-island canoe sailing. But not all voyages were successful due to sudden storms or changes of wind.

The first missionary ship to visit these islands was the **DUFF**, which contained artisans and ministers.

The most famous among those early missionaries was John Williams, who spent years living among the islanders and was murdered on Erromanga, in the New Hebrides, in 1839. Born on June 29, 1796, he apprenticed with a London Ironmonger by the name of Tonkin and became a skilled blacksmith.

One Sunday the wife of the Ironmonger took him to church, and there he made the decision that was to take him from his life at the ironmongers to a missionary. John offered his services to the Missionary Society and at the age of 20 he married Mary Chauner and they left for Sydney in the **HARRIET**. The voyage took a year and he spent his time learning all he could about sailing ships and seamanship.

At Rio two other missionaries Mr. and Mrs. Threlkeld joined the ship and on arrival at Sydney, they all took passage on the **ACTIVE** going to New Zealand and Tahiti arriving in November 1817. On an adjoining island Eimeo, Williams found a ship's hull, just the keel and ribs that had been started and never finished. They finished her in eight days and named her **HAWEIS** after the founder of the Missionary Society.

Their maiden voyage was to Huahine where they were welcomed and asked to stay. There were other islands round Raiatea that Williams wished to visit so he decided to build another boat, it was to be 16 feet long. As there was no forge or iron on Raiatea the boat was held together by fibre cord. Nails were only used to fix the planks to the stem and sternpost.

Soon he needed a larger ship and during a trip to Sydney bought a new schooner of 80 - 90 tons which he named **ENDEAVOUR**. When the ship arrived Tamatoa who by now was a staunch friend said the islanders would pay for it and as they had no money he filled her with coco-nut oil and arrowroot to be sold to the merchants of Sydney. The name of the ship was later changed to **THE BEGINNING (TE MATAMUA)**.

While on Rarotonga, Williams had no ship of his own and wanting to visit distant islands he decided to build a larger ship than the ones he had built at Eimeo and Raiatea. Within fifteen weeks of laying down the keel the ship was finished and named **MESSENGER OF PEACE**. On the first trip the mast broke and they limped back where a new mast was soon fitted and Williams made many voyages to distant islands travelling as far as Samoa.

A whole line of missionary ships was later named **JOHN WILLIAMS**, after him.

The South Seas Missionary Ships

DUFF (missionary)

French Polynesia #498 (1988) 80fr, #701 (1997) 43fr; Palau #52 (1984) 40c; Tuvalu #355 (1986) 50c; Tonga #957, 961a, 962a (1997) 10s – 80s

1794 - J. Cox & Co.; London. Draft, 14'; 10-6 pdrs.



Tuvalu #355 (1986) 50c ↑ ↓ Palau #52 (1984) 40c



The London Missionary Society, founded in 1795, sent out its first missionary vessel, the **DUFF** between Aug. 10, 1796 and July 11, 1798, under the command of Capt. James Wilson. There were 39 preacher - tradesmen on board who were expected to relay the religious message, but also stimulate economic interests. She stopped at Rio de Janeiro for provisions, then proceeded to Tahiti by way of the Cape of Good Hope. She anchored in Matavai Bay on March 5, 1797. Eighteen missionaries went ashore, among them Henry Nott, a bricklayer (see WP 35:67).



The **DUFF** called into Tonga and other islands, but was not welcomed at Gambler's Island. Two missionaries were landed at Marquises Island. She arrived in Palau on Nov. 5, 1797. Attempts to trade manufactured goods for food were not very successful, but the visit marked the beginning of English missionary work in the islands.

The ship returned to Tahiti at the end of 1797 to disembark the remaining missionaries. On the way back to England, **DUFF** called into Micronesia and China.

Source: C. Gaden; Mauer, *L'Eglise Protestante a Tahiti; Decoux, Stillages dans les mers du Sud*; Rydell, *Cape Horn to the Pacific*; LRS 1900; Crown Agents; *Scott Stamp Monthly*, December 1991; *Australian Stamp Monthly*, July 1984; WP 36:05, 31:28, 42:52.

MESSENGER OF PEACE (schooner)

Cook Is. #133 (1949) 2d; Tuvalu #353 (1986) 15c

1827 - Rev. John Williams, Rarotonga, owner and builder; 70-80 ton, 60' x 18'.



Marooned on the island of Rarotonga, Rev. John Williams, a missionary of the London Missionary Society, had never seen a boat built, but he set out to build a 70-80 ton, 60-foot schooner.

The **MESSENGER OF PEACE** took 15 weeks to build using local materials and native help. His tools were a pick axe, a hoe, an adz, some hatchets, and hammers. Nails, bolts, and iron fittings were made from a chain cable abandoned on the beach by an earlier ship. He devised an air pump for a crude forge, and used stones for anvils. Timbers were outlined on trees of proper shape, which natives felled, split, and axed to size. Hibiscus fibers were twisted into ropes and sails were made of matting woven by the natives. The anchor was a wooden crate filled with stones. She made some remarkable voyages during her six years of service, after which she was sold.

Sources: *HS-M 13*.

JOHN WILLIAMS III (barque)

Gilbert & Ellice Is. #167 (1970) 10c

Kiribati #689 (1996) 60c; Niue # 727 (1999) 1,20d

1869 - London Missionary Society, Sydney; Alexander Hall & Sons; 200 tons; 106' x 24.6' x 13.6'.

When the **JOHN WILLIAMS (II)** was lost on a reef on Savage Island, Jan. 8, 1867, she was luckily insured, and the money received from the underwriters permitted the London Missionary Society to buy another vessel.

(*South Seas Missionary Ships, continued on page 76*)