

How were Hawaiian Missionaries Printed?

By Ken Lawrence

I think most theories of Missionary printing are presumptuous. Both the Mission Press and the Polynesian (government) press had Ramage presses, and Whitney used one when he founded the Honolulu Advertiser. That was the only practical equipment available to the frontier before the 1860s. One was later shipped from Hawaii to Oregon, where it served similar duty. They may also have had proof presses, but I have not read of any others. A working replica of the Advertiser's Ramage is here:



To me it's evident that printing a tiny two-subject forme on such a large press would have been cumbersome to the point of absurdity. Also, if that press or one like it had been used, the normal way to print multiple pulls would be to print the corner of the sheet, rotate it 90 degrees, print the next corner, and so forth, in four pulls. But we know that Missionary stamps were printed in horizontal strips. One theory is that the forme may have been laid face up on the galley, inked, and the print pulled with a strike of a mallet, using no press at all, which would probably have been more efficient.

But I do not exclude the possibility that stereos were made of each setting, perhaps more than one stereo of the 5¢ and/or the 13¢, which might have been gang printed and then cut apart into strips. I realize that experts dispute this possibility, but it should not be excluded from consideration.

I asked Dave Churchman to assemble and print the central elements of a Missionary from good type on an antique press, using blue ink and very thin white paper.

His result is here:



The type is not a perfect match. The side ornaments are single, not double. The bottom side ornaments are not shaved. The numeral is slightly different. Dave's Kelsey press wasn't invented until the 1870s. But it's a reasonable study sample. Observe that even though the Kelsey is a small press with finer controls, the corner elements break up. The gaps are not a result of damaged type, but of bear-off. Flyspeck analyses should take that into account.

Compared to that sample, a Missionary print below does not look to me like a first-generation pull, even from worn type, though all the experts believe it is, and maybe they are right.



The next conundrum is, why were the lower side ornaments shaved? The paper was tall enough to accommodate a full setting, and no forme was so small that it could not accommodate a full stamp height. I don't have a plausible answer, but until we do, we won't really understand these printings.

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