

## THE REFOUNDING OF THE LDS MISSION IN FRENCH POLYNESIA, 1892

by R. Lanier Britsch

On 30 April 1844, the whaler *Timoleon* dropped anchor off the island of Tubuai, 350 miles south of Tahiti. On board were Latter-day Saint (LDS) Elders Addison Pratt, Benjamin F. Grouard, and Noah Rogers who had sailed from New Bedford, Massachusetts. These men had been called by Joseph Smith, Jr., leader of the Latter-day Saints, to open the first Mormon mission in the Pacific area.<sup>1</sup> During the next eight years, Pratt, his companions, and other missionaries who later joined them succeeded in baptizing fifteen hundred to two thousand people (mostly Tuamotuans) and in establishing a number of branches of the church. Unfortunately for the LDS, their entry into these islands was almost simultaneous with the French ascendancy there. The French government made Tahiti, Tubuai and most of the Tuamotu Islands a protectorate by 1848, and restricted missionary activities for all non-French groups such as the London Missionary Society and the Latter-day Saints, after that time. Because of conflicts between the Latter-day Saints and the French Roman Catholic priests, the French government made matters so uncomfortable for the LDS missionaries, deporting some of them and restricting the activities of others, that in 1852 they left the islands.

After the expulsion of the missionaries in 1852, the Tahitian, Tuamotuan, and Tubuaian saints (as Latter-day Saints call themselves) were left to fend for themselves and keep the church alive for forty years. President Brigham Young, who succeeded Joseph Smith as leader of the faith, suggested to Walter Murray Gibson, a missionary who was sent to the Pacific in 1861, that he might call on the saints in the Society Islands if it was convenient, but Gibson became involved in the church in Hawaii and never visited French Polynesia.<sup>2</sup> No other LDS missionaries were sent to French Polynesia until 1892.

<sup>1</sup>S. George Ellsworth, *Zion in Paradise: Early Mormons in the South Seas* (Logan, Utah: The Faculty Association, Utah State University, 1959), 34 pp. Professor Ellsworth discusses this first period of the LDS French Polynesia experience from 1843 to 1852, in a thoughtful, scholarly manner.

<sup>2</sup>Young to Gibson, 5 March 1851, Brigham Young Letterbooks, Archives, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah; hereinafter cited as HDC.

The story of the saints from 1852 to 1892 is sketchy at best. Persecutions continued for many years.<sup>3</sup> Government and Catholic harrassment of the saints on Ana'a and other Tuamotu islands was so serious that it became dangerous for one to espouse Mormonism openly. This fact, in combination with an absence of an appointed authority who could resolve differences regarding doctrine and procedure, allowed dissensions to arise which ultimately broke the church into factions--Mormons, Israelites, the Sheep, Abraham's Church, Darkites, and the Whistlers. Not until 1867, when the government extended general toleration throughout the protectorate, were any of the factions allowed to worship openly. By that time the LDS church in French Polynesia was in a thoroughly disorganized state.<sup>4</sup>

James S. Brown, who served as an LDS missionary in French Polynesia from 1850 until he was expelled in 1852, returned as a missionary to Tahiti in 1892, after an absence of forty years. (More about him later.) He concluded that the various sects had taken different names in order to avoid persecution. But, he also observed that many unusual or erroneous doctrines had been adopted such as holding daily meetings (which was not the accepted LDS pattern) and allowing only one man (or woman) to conduct services, lead the hymns, pray, and preach.<sup>5</sup> How early these changes occurred is not known.

Several island saints stand out, however, as stalwarts in the faith. Elders Tihoni and Maihea are known to have withstood imprisonment and many other ordeals rather than deny what they knew to be true. Each of them tried to keep the saints in their areas active and faithful to the gospel.

John Hawkins, an interisland sailor and trader who was converted to the LDS Church by Addison Pratt, and who worked as a missionary while the Utah elders were in the islands, also tried to keep the church going. He later joined with the Reorganized LDS Church (an offshoot of the LDS Church which was organized in 1860), but for many years he served

<sup>3</sup>James S. Brown, *Giant of the Lord: The Life of a Pioneer* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, Inc., 1960 [first published in 1902]), pp. 279-80; Andrew Jensen, "Manuscript History of the French Polynesia Mission," typescript, 31 December 1953 (but written in the 1890s), HDC, hereinafter cited as MHFP; F. Edward Butterworth, *The Adventures of John Hawkins: Restoration Pioneer* (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1963), pp. 203 ff. Andrew Jensen served as assistant LDS Church Historian for almost five decades. He visited Tahiti in 1895 and gathered historical data. He also interviewed many missionaries and read many missionary journals in an effort to document the development of the LDS Church in French Polynesia.

<sup>4</sup>MHFP, 1867; Ellsworth, p. 31.

<sup>5</sup>MHFP, 1867; Ellsworth, p. 31.

well. According to F. Edward Butterworth, an RLDS missionary and historian, Hawkins continued to work as an interisland trader after the missionaries left. In order to move freely from place to place he kept his relationship to the church a secret from the government, but appointed five local brethren to work with him in the ministry. Each of the others established a store where Hawkins could supply goods and church support without being suspected by the gendarmes. He remained active as a missionary until at least 1864. After that other concerns occupied his time.<sup>6</sup>

It is known that two island Zions, "gathering places," were established. The saints on Tubuai called Mahu "Tiona," or Zion. The saints in and around Pape'ete gathered in a little mountain sanctuary near Fa'a'a, three and one half miles west of the city. They too called their place of refuge "Tiona." Exactly how many members of the church lived there is not known, but they did conduct schools as well as regular church meetings. In the early 1870s this little community was under the care of local Tahitian elders, along with the help of an East Indian (or part East Indian) member named David Brown.<sup>7</sup>

It was into this branch of the LDS Church that two missionaries from the Reorganized Church happened to come. Charles Wandell, an apostate Mormon who had joined the RLDS Church, and Gloud Rodger arrived at Tahiti on 13 December 1873. A leak in their ship brought about their unscheduled landing. After several days in Pape'ete they learned about and visited the Tiona settlement. Unfortunately, from the LDS perspective, they convinced most of the saints that they represented the church which had inherited the authority of the Prophet Joseph Smith after his martyrdom in 1844. They claimed that Brigham Young and the Utah Mormons were apostates and that the authority to lead the remnant of Joseph Smith's church had been given to his son, Joseph Smith III, who was the figurehead leader of the Reorganization. Before they departed they baptized fifty-one people into their church. Having accomplished this, they went on to Australia to fill their missions.

The next RLDS missionary to claim authority over the saints in the islands was William Nelson who arrived in 1879. He was followed by Thomas W. Smith, an apostle in the Reorganized Church, who arrived as an assigned missionary in 1884. Before Utah Mormon elders returned in 1892, Nelson and Smith had led a fairly large number of members into their church.

<sup>6</sup>Butterworth, *Adventures*, pp. 203 ff; and *Roots of the Reorganization: French Polynesia* (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1977), pp. 92-94. Butterworth hardly footnotes, but he supplies information that is unavailable elsewhere.

<sup>7</sup>MHFP, by date.

There are several possible reasons why the LDS Church did not take better care of the Tahitian saints. One was the problems that were raised in Utah during these years (1851-90) by the polygamy issue, which brought so much persecution the church had to fight for survival. Another and better explanation is that the church simply forgot about the existence of these saints. Whatever the cause of the negligence, it is tragic that the saints were left alone.

After the closing of the LDS mission in French Polynesia in 1852, the mission in Hawaii (founded 1850) was the only one to remain active for the next several decades. In 1888, however, missionaries were sent from Hawaii to Samoa to establish the LDS Church there. By the summer of 1891 the mission in Samoa was well established. Headquarters had been set up at Fagali'i, a few miles outside of Apia, Samoa's principal city. Even though the mission was only three years old, President William O. Lee decided it was time to open new fields of labor. In June he sent missionaries to Tonga. Then, with the blessings of the church's First Presidency, who were headquartered in Salt Lake City, he began making plans to send elders to Tahiti. Soon after Elder William A. Seegmiller of Richfield, Utah, arrived in Samoa on 4 October 1891, President Lee asked him whether he would be willing to help with the reopening of church work in Tahiti.<sup>8</sup> He accepted the call and eleven days later, when Tahitian Bibles and a dictionary arrived, he set to work trying to learn the language. President Lee acted as instructor, even though he too did not know the language.

Elder Joseph W. Damron, Jr., was selected to go to Tahiti with Elder Seegmiller. Damron arrived in Samoa on 28 November, and was given his new assignment the next day. Between late November and 22 January 1892, when they sailed for Pape'ete, the companions were busy memorizing words and studying what bits of grammar they could figure out. When the steamer *Richmond* left Apia harbor, both men were apprehensive concerning their future, but they wrote of their conviction that they could succeed in this new assignment.<sup>9</sup>

The natural beauty of Tahiti added to the feelings the young elders shared as the ship *Richmond* glided to its mooring. How would they be accepted by the people, the government? Could they find any Mormons from the early era? They wished one friendly face would emerge from the noisy, jostling throng at the port. "But in all that crowd," wrote Elder Seegmiller, "not one did we know; it seemed strange, and we were indeed

<sup>8</sup>William A. Seegmiller, Journals 1891-1895, dates as given, HDC.

<sup>9</sup>Seegmiller; Joseph W. Damron, Jr., "Missionary Labors of Joseph W. Damron, Jr.," in his own handwriting, HDC.

strangers.” It was 27 January 1891--the Tahitian Mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was open again after a hiatus of forty years.

The elders could not easily find inexpensive living quarters, but after looking the first day and spending the night on the *Richmond* they finally found a small room without much furniture, supplied with cobwebs and mosquitoes but priced low enough for self-supporting Mormon elders--six dollars a month. A week or two later they found something more to their liking, a three-dollar-a-month room.

As soon as they were settled, Elders Damron and Seegmiller began carefully studying the local situation. Through visits to Mr. Turnball, manager of a local firm, and Mr. William F. Doty, US consul, they learned a little about the governmental situation. First, the territory was officially called *Établissements Français de l’Océanie*. The Protectorate, as it had been known to earlier LDS missionaries, was now a colony. Between the 1840s and 1880s the French had laboriously assembled the five archipelagos of the area (the Society Islands, the Marquesas, the Tuamotus, the Gambiers, the Australs, and the isolated island of Clipperton) into one governmental entity headed by a governor and council. Although the French had hoped the islands would bring economic advantage to the home country, by this time these hopes had not materialized.<sup>10</sup> The islands proved to be of little economic value to France, then or later, except for their romantic appeal. The elders learned that the government was still concerned with the steady decline of the population because of disease. But Mr. Doty assured the elders that there were no restrictions concerning preaching the gospel or “carrying out our duty.”<sup>11</sup>

Their initial fears concerning the local people were quickly swept away as they became acquainted with them. Even while the elders were at their first home they were almost literally adopted by a Tahitian neighbor and his family. Daily, Amaro brought fish, fruit, cabbage, breadfruit, and other foods. He voluntarily ran errands and helped in many other ways. The Tahitian people were especially warm and friendly. Both Damron and Seegmiller observed the Chinese segment of the population. They later learned that in 1865 a planter imported a fairly large number of Chinese to work on his cotton plantation, which did not survive. But the

<sup>10</sup>In 1838 the Colombian government gave France the right to construct a canal through the Isthmus of Panama. From then until the French attempt to build a canal failed in 1889, there was considerable discussion of the economic advantages that could be had in the Pacific. See C. Hartley Grattan, *The Southwest Pacific to 1900* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), p. 217.

<sup>11</sup>Seegmiller, 28 January 1892; Damron, same date; see also C. Hartley Grattan, *The Southwest Pacific Since 1900*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), pp. 411-12.

Chinese did, and by 1892 they owned hotels and stores and were an important part of the populace. White people, mostly French by birth, numbered less than a thousand. Most of them were traders and merchants or government employees.

One day, shortly after they arrived, Elders Damron and Seegmiller learned about a group of Mormons who lived only three and one half miles outside of Pape'ete at Fa'a'a. On 8 February, Amaro took them there but when they arrived, they soon discovered that the supposed Mormons were actually RLDS. The presiding elder who was in charge of this group was away on other islands. His assistant Tupuni explained that there were over two thousand members of their church in the various islands.<sup>12</sup> This meeting was the first of hundreds of encounters between elders of the two churches. During the 1890s the problems between the two churches were of major importance; more on this later.

In mid-February the elders made shoulder bags for their belongings and started on an extended walk around the island of Tahiti. Their purpose was two-fold: to learn the language faster and to get better acquainted with Tahitian customs. The thirteen-day walk taught them much. After returning home to Pape'ete, they decided to remain there until they had better fluency in the language; they had been frustrated in not being able to preach.

Because they could not speak Tahitian or French, their work as missionaries moved slowly in the early months. Both elders were troubled by this and so informed the First Presidency in letters home. In order to improve communications between Salt Lake City and Tahiti (all communications had previously been sent through the mission president in Samoa), the First Presidency appointed Elder Damron to be president of the newly organized Tahitian Mission. The elders were told to report directly to Salt Lake City on a monthly basis. Damron learned of his appointment on 29 April 1892.<sup>13</sup>

The First Presidency listened to the elders' pleas for help and called Elder James S. Brown, now sixty-five years old and missing one leg, to go to Tahiti and preside over the new mission. He was the only living member of the earlier mission group. Brown's son, Elando, and an Elder Thomas Jones, Jr. were called to accompany the veteran elder.<sup>14</sup>

By 1 June, when the three reinforcement elders arrived, Damron and Seegmiller had not accomplished much that was visible. They were beginning to use the Tahitian language fairly well, however, and they did know

<sup>12</sup>Damron.

<sup>13</sup>Damron: First Presidency to Damron and Seegmiller, 29 March 1892, First Presidency Letterpress Books, CR-1-20, vol. 24, HDC.

<sup>14</sup>First Presidency to James S. Brown, 14 April 1892, HDC.

the lay of the land. What they wanted now was to get some converts and especially to find members of the church who had remained faithful since the early mission closed.

Even with President Brown as leader, the work did not immediately show much progress. A friend of Brown's, Mr. Dorence Atwater, who had been US consul for twenty-five years, allowed them all to stay in a very comfortable home in Pape'ete; a number of RLDS members who knew Brown visited him and renewed old acquaintances. But still the work was not moving. In fact, for a short time it appeared that James S. Brown might be a greater detriment to the mission than a help, for reasons that will follow.

Not long after his arrival, President Brown was invited to use Mr. Atwater's hall for religious services. Atwater, however, suggested that the elders should obtain the governor's permission before going ahead. Mr. Atwater introduced Brown to the Director and Secretary of the Interior, actually a functionary position, "who immediately asked me if I was not the same Brown who had difficulty with the government many years ago." Brother Brown said he was the same man. Three days later the elders were informed that they would not be "permitted to labor as ministers" among the people of the colony. After consulting the American consul, writing letters, and seeking French legal counsel, they learned that they could legally preach if they notified the appropriate authorities, the mayor or local magistrate, in writing before holding services. Brown said that because of this restriction they were "practically shut out from holding meetings."<sup>15</sup>

Government restrictions notwithstanding, all of the missionaries remained busy by talking to small groups in the market places, studying the language, sending letters to other islands in an attempt to locate members of the church who had remained faithful since the 1850s, and walking around the island on preaching tours. Then, on 22 August, President Brown received a letter from an old church member named Tehahe, or Opu, who lived on Tubuai. It proved to be the opening the elders had been hoping for. Tehahe warmly invited the elders to come to Tubuai, as he said "they had been left in the dark many years without one ray of light."<sup>16</sup> But this letter was not the only encouragement the missionaries received that day. They were also visited by an employee of a wealthy part-Tahitian named Mapuhi, who lived in the Tuamotu Islands. Mapuhi claimed to be a member of the church and wanted to see the missionaries. He later proved to be a true Latter-day Saint. He shared his home, which

<sup>15</sup>MHFP, 3 June 1892.

<sup>16</sup>Damron.

the missionaries described as a seven-room mansion, larger than the fine homes of Pape'ete, and his three schooners with the elders and saints. Mapuhi had joined the church as a small boy when S. Alva Hanks ministered in the Tuamotus. As a young man he learned the trade of ship-building and by trading with the island people he had become known as the "pearl king" of the islands, that is, he traded in pearls and pearl shell and was very successful at it.

As soon as transportation could be arranged, President Brown, in company with Elder Seegmiller, sailed to Tubuai. When they landed at Mata'ura on 20 September, the elders soon learned that representatives of the RLDS had preceded them. The people were obviously cool toward them; in fact, President Brown reported that for several days very few people were at all hospitable. If a boat had been available to take them back to Tahiti, they would have gone. But they had to persevere. About a week after their arrival, they moved five miles around the island to Mahu. It was here that "the clouds over the mission began to break." Many of the Polynesians began to talk openly with President Brown and to bring food. The next Sunday Brown and Seegmiller met with a number of people in an open-air meeting; understandably they were not allowed to use the RLDS chapel because the minister forbade it. It was at this time that Seegmiller gave his first public address in the Polynesian language. In that meeting Elder Brown "explained how the authority had continued in the church from the Prophet Joseph to the present organization." Following the meeting several people asked for baptism, and two days later, on 4 October, Elder Seegmiller had the satisfaction of baptizing twenty-four persons. Brown's journal entries noted numerous baptisms over the next few weeks: October 10th, "nine baptized"; October 14th and following, "baptized several"; November 8th, "baptized eight"; November 14th, "eight members were added to the Church"; November 16th, "added five more souls to the Church by baptism." On 23 November, Elder Seegmiller baptized the school teacher at Mata'ura and two of the governor's daughters.<sup>17</sup> Before the end of November, sixty-five Tubuaians claimed membership in the Church.

On the twenty-fourth, President Brown sailed from Tubuai. But before he left he placed Elder Seegmiller in charge of the branches there. The difficulties Seegmiller had to handle were not easy. Serious problems remained to be settled regarding property ownership, and some of these matters were not resolved for many years. Seegmiller and the re-established church also had frequent conflicts with the Catholics, Protestants and RLDS. These problems notwithstanding, when President Brown left

<sup>17</sup>Brown, pp. 511-16.



the island he was convinced that the Lord had blessed them for their perseverance, prayers, and hard work. After a rough and extra long seven-day voyage, in which sixty-five year old Brown had been forced to remain seated on a two-by-three-foot space on deck in sun and rain, day and night, the little interisland transport vessel finally put into port at Pape'ete on 1 December.

Elder Brown had scarcely landed again when he learned from his son Elando that Elders Damron and Jones were having success in the Tuamotu Islands. A conference of all the saints in that area was planned for early January 1893, and Brown's help was needed.

Meanwhile, after Brown and Seegmiller sailed for Tubuai, Brother Mapuhi had come to Tahiti. The elders were eager to sail with him to Takaroa, his home island, and see the saints of that part of the colony. They sailed from Pape'ete on 26 October in Mapuhi's 105-ton schooner, *Teavaroa*. After stopping briefly at a couple of islands where the RLDS were in the majority, the *Teavaroa* docked at Takaroa on 1 November.<sup>18</sup>

On this island Elders Damron and Jones found a branch of one hundred church members who had resisted the RLDS missionaries. After the elders met with these saints, these faithful island people concluded that authorized messengers had finally come from the church in Salt Lake City. On 6 November, they officially accepted Damron and Jones as their missionaries. By early December, thirty-three people had been added to the Church by baptism.<sup>19</sup> The Takaroa Branch was organized and holding regular meetings. When the missionaries arrived there, the people were building a stone meeting house thirty-five by seventy-nine feet in dimension. Brother Mapuhi was the motivating force behind this effort.

Gradually a more complete picture of the church in the Tuamotus began to emerge. One day Elders Damron and Jones heard about saints on Ana'a, and another day they learned of saints in Katiu. In December they discovered that all the Tuamotu saints were led by an old man, now blind, named Maihea. He claimed to have received his authority while Pratt and Grouard were in the islands. This venerable leader from Ana'a had called a conference of all Tuamotu saints to be held on the island of Fa'aite beginning 6 January. When Damron and Jones learned about this they wrote to Tahiti and asked their mission president to make every effort to join them at the scheduled conference. By leaving Pape'ete on 15 December, Elders James S. and Elando Brown arrived at Takaroa on the 26th. Several days later, they, in company with Damron and Jones and six boatloads of local saints, sailed for Fa'aite.

<sup>18</sup>Damron.

<sup>19</sup><sup>9</sup>*Deseret News* (Salt Lake City) 46:557, Letter from Damron, 15 January 1893.

The fleet of Takaroan Latter-day Saints arrived at Fa'aite on 31 December. Others had already arrived as was evident from the large number of canoes and boats in the lagoon. Elaborate preparations had occupied the local members for weeks before the gathering. Foods of all kinds that were available--pigs, coconuts, fruits, fish, canned goods and so forth--were amassed for the anticipated throng. But more exciting than the anticipated feasts, the renewal of friendships, and the exchange of information and gossip, was the joy of having men among them who were missionaries of what they believed to be the true church.

According to Elder Damron, not many minutes after they came ashore Elder Brown and companions were visited by a delegation of older men who were led by Maihea. Maihea came almost immediately to the point by asking a series of questions:

His first question to President Brown was this: "Are you the real Iatobo (James) that brought us the Gospel forty years ago? Second, Are you now representing the same Gospel as before?" Various were the questions propounded, and finally to satisfy himself that it was the real "Iatobo" he asked the location of different villages on Anaa, the island where Elder Brown labored while on his former mission. Being convinced, he said with unspeakable joy: "We receive you as our father and leader, but had you not come back personally we would have refused to receive any foreign missionaries, as so many false teachers have been in our midst and decoyed many from the Gospel of Christ."<sup>20</sup>

Maihea then related how he and his people had prayed constantly that God would again send them missionaries with the light of truth and the Holy Spirit to bless them. Their prayers had been answered after forty years of waiting.

During the conference meetings, the elders learned that there were ten branches with 425 members. This number included the recent baptisms on Tahiti and Tubuai. Of these members only seventeen veterans of the early mission were known to still be alive or faithful to the church. In order that all members of the church could be properly ministered to, the missionaries ordained Tehina of Ana'a and Karere of Katiu as elders. A number of other Polynesian elders were sustained in their positions as branch presidents.

Following the January conference the Browns, father and son, sailed for Ana'a, where they taught the gospel until April. Elders Damron and

<sup>20</sup> *Deseret News* (Salt Lake City) 46:557, Letter from Damron, 15 January 1893; Brown, pp. 518-19, MHFP, 1-7 January 1893.

Jones remained in the vicinity of Takaroa, and Elder Seegmiller remained on Tubuai.

During the absence of the missionaries from Tahiti, a new group of elders arrived from church headquarters in Salt Lake City. They had sailed into Pape'ete on the brigantine *Galilee* on 21 March 1893. The new recruits included Frank Cutler, Thomas L. Woodbury, Eugene M. Cannon, Carl J. Larsen, I. Frank Goff, Fred C. Rossiter, Jesse M. Fox and Edward Sudbury. Upon finding no leaders in Pape'ete when they landed, the new missionaries rented a home and set to work studying the Tahitian language. Finally, in early May, President Brown returned to Tahiti and gave the missionaries their teaching assignments.

The method of doing missionary work that the elders established during the next few months became a regular procedure for many years to come. Basically the program consisted of from one to four elders traveling alone or together from island to island, meeting with the people, living with them in their huts or homes, eating local food, blessing the sick, organizing the branches, baptizing an occasional convert, arguing with leaders of other denominations (particularly the RLDS), trying to escape the inconsistent but heavy hand of the government, and in general attempting to leave the saints morally and spiritually stronger when they, the elders, left than when they arrived. Local Tahitian elders generally presided over the branches.

In July 1893, about thirteen months after he had arrived in the islands, James S. Brown turned the leadership of the now firmly established mission over to Joseph W. Damron. On the eighth, Brown, accompanied by his son Elando and Elder Edward Sudbury, whose health was poor, sailed from Tahiti.<sup>21</sup> From this time on the mission was in the hands of a new generation of workers.

When Brother Brown arrived home in Salt Lake City, he reported to the First Presidency of the church and made several suggestions, specifically that ten more missionaries be sent to Tahiti by the next spring, that these missionaries should be prepared financially to support themselves and avoid living off the members, that the mission should have a ship, and that a headquarters building should be obtained in Pape'ete. Concerning the ship, he explained that interisland travel was so unpredictable and dangerous that a vessel of one hundred tons should be procured to serve the mission's needs. Many decades passed, however, before such a boat was purchased by the mission. (An eighty-two foot, two-masted schooner was purchased by the church in 1950 and used by the mission until about 1960.) Brown's request for a mission headquarters, fortunately, was met much sooner.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Brown, pp. 526-28.

<sup>22</sup>MHFP, July-August 1893.

After James S. Brown left the islands, the work proceeded without any serious problem until the time for the release of President Damron and his assistant, Elder Seegmiller. Unfortunately, in late March 1895, a relatively new French administrator of the Tuamotu islands, E. A. Martin, decided to create difficulties for the Mormons and, later, for all of the non-French religious groups, specifically the RLDS and the Seventh-Day Adventists. Martin accused the Mormon elders of being “beggars, spongers off the natives, idlers who had nothing to do in our own country.” These accusations were leveled at Elders Eugene M. Cannon and Carl J. Larsen on 30 March, while they were en route to Takaroa for semi-annual conference. On that same day, Martin dispatched an order that the regular conference not be held. In pompous words, according to Elder Cannon, Martin declared that he had not sanctioned the conference and that those who had called it would be “taken to judgment” if his order was not followed. Martin also ordered the missionaries in the Tuamotus to cease teaching the gospel. His orders were followed. During the next six months, President Frank Cutler spent countless hours in writing legal petitions, meeting with Mr. J. Lamb Doty, US consul (who was a great friend to the Mormons), and arguing the church’s case directly before Governor Martin of the Tuamotus and Governor Papinaud of the French Establishment or colony. He used every device he could employ to accomplish his objective, which was to obtain assurance that the Mormon elders could teach the gospel and hold meetings and do so with the sanction and even the protection of the government. Cutler assured Governor Papinaud that Latter-day Saints “obey, honor, and sustain the law,” and support the local government. His main request was for a license to preach. This, Governor Papinaud told President Cutler, would have to be requested from the government in France and would take many months to obtain. Such a license was never granted, but because of pressure applied through Consul Doty, Governor Papinaud ordered his subordinate, E. A. Martin, to desist from his unfriendly acts and to allow the Mormon elders to continue their work. The missionaries were of course very happy to have the obstacles removed from their way, but six months had been lost.<sup>23</sup>

When this affair was over, the missionaries realized that the entire problem was the doing of one man in a position of power, E. A. Martin. In the beginning, Governor Papinaud had followed normal governmental procedure and supported his subordinate. When it became evident that Martin’s position was neither just nor responsible, Papinaud reversed his stance and ordered Martin to stop harassing the Mormons, RLDS and Adventists.

<sup>23</sup>See MHFP, 30 March 1895 to 9 November 1895. Details of the day to day encounters with Martin, *et. al.*, are given.

It is an accepted fact that the colonial administration of the *Établissements* was incredibly topheavy. There were over five hundred paid officials during this time to administer a colony of less than fifteen thousand people. Indeed there was a persistent “tendency of the French to use Tahiti as a ‘dumping ground’ for bad officials.”<sup>24</sup> Governors were frequently changed. The gendarmes or police were seemingly ever-present. During the 1890s and the years following, the quality of government was highly inconsistent and seldom satisfactory to anyone, particularly the Mormon elders. Their feeling was that the officials did not have enough to do and thus turned to harassing the missionaries. This is probably an overstatement that contains an element of truth.

An unhappy sequel to Martin’s story was that his last act prior to his death in 1897 was to discharge a Tahitian Mormon elder from his position as school teacher and replace him with a Roman Catholic. Aside from this, a truce had existed between Martin and the Mormons since November 1895.<sup>25</sup>

One positive result of the Martin affair was that President Cutler found it necessary to reevaluate and assess the status of the church in the islands in order to write convincing letters to the government. President Cutler learned that Mormons made up one-fifth of the total population of the Tuamotu Islands. There were at that time 255 Mormon families. He also found that the RLDS and Roman Catholics each had approximately one thousand followers in the Tuamotus and that the Protestants and Mormons each had about seven hundred. At the end of 1895, there were sixteen LDS branches in the Tuamotus and two branches on Tubuai, but only five members on the island of Tahiti where over ten thousand people lived. There was a total of 984 church members including children. It now seems ironical that the LDS mission was called the Tahiti or Society Islands mission during this era. It might well have been called the Tuamotu mission.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>F. J. West, *Political Advancement in the South Pacific* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 86; see also Stephen H. Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy, 1870-1925* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1963), [first published in 1929 by P. S. King and Company, Great Britain], pp. 511-16.

<sup>25</sup>MHFP, March 1895.

<sup>26</sup>MHFP, 31 December 1895.