

Special Edition

A N A N N I V E R S A R Y

I N M I C R O N E S I A

This special edition of An Anniversary in
Micronesia has been prepared for free distribution with the 25¢ pamphlet REPORT ON MEXICO. The regular edition contains, besides the mimeographed text, a map, data about missionaries, pictures of mission life and work, and other features. It sells for 5¢, discounts for quantities.

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For information about the regular
edition of this pamphlet, see back
cover.

i.

In July 1852 a group of missionaries - American and Hawaiian - sailed from Honolulu for Micronesia. They carried with them a letter from a Hawaiian king. Addressed to the chief of the islands where they wanted to work, the letter read:

Here is my friendly message to you all: There are about to sail for your islands some teachers of the Most High God, Jehovah, to make known unto you His word for your eternal salvation. A part of them are white men from the United States of America, and a part of them belong to my islands. Their names are as follows: B.G. Snow and wife; L.H. Gulick and wife; A.A. Sturges and wife; E.W. Clark; J.T. Gulick; Opuni and wife; Kaaikaula and wife; and Kokela; H. Holdsworth is captain of the vessel. I therefore take the liberty to commend these good teachers to your care and friendship, to exhort you to listen to their instructions, and seek their acquaintance. I have seen the value of such teachers. We, here on my islands, once lived in ignorance and idolatry. We were given to war, and we were very poor. Now my people are enlightened. We live in peace, and some have acquired property. Our condition is very greatly improved on what it was once, and the Word of God has been the great cause of our improvement. Many of my people regard the Word of God Jehovah, and pray to Him, and He has greatly blessed us. I advise you to throw away your idols, take the Lord Jehovah for your God, worship and love Him, and He will bless you and save you. May he make these new teachers a great blessing to you and your people, and withhold from you no good thing. Kamehameha.

The missionaries settled at Kusaie and Ponape - islands in the Carolines. They presented the king's letter. They began to work. The American Board mission to Micronesia had begun.

ii.

Take 1260 square miles of land. Break it up into 1500 pin point islands. Scatter them over an expanse of water 3 million miles in size. That will give you an idea of what Micronesia is. The islands are grouped in five clusters (several as far apart as Boston and Chicago) called the Marshalls, the Carolines, the Palaus, the Mariannas, and the Gilberts. The total population of all of Micronesia is a little more than 50,000 people. They are like the South Sea Islanders one reads about in current fiction. They are a fascinating people.

Most of the islands are coral reefs - rims of land around a central lagoon, with one or more openings to the sea. The soil on the reefs is thin and barren, though most of the atolls are covered with trees. There are no springs or streams on these islands, no hills, few birds and flowers. A few islands, however, are volcanic in origin. These islands are richly fertile; fruits and vegetables grow in abundance; birds and flowers are everywhere. Kusaie and Ponape and Truk are this latter sort of island. Kwajalein and Majuro and Bikini and Eniwetok are examples of the former sort, the atolls. It is estimated that there is no church in all of Micronesia today which is more than 25 feet above sea level.

iii.

The American Board's Mission to Micronesia has had a varied history. At first it included the Carolines only, though in 1857 its work spread to the Marshalls and Gilberts. From the beginning it was a "successful" mission: the people were most receptive to its message. By 1865 Micronesian pastors had been ordained. By 1875 there were churches on most of the smaller Marshall and Caroline islands. Morning Star I, missionary ship provided by the gifts of American

church school children, was of immense help in this process. In 1871 a training school was established on Kusaie, and about then the spoken languages of the islands had been reduced to writing and the Scriptures translated into the local tongues. More and more missionaries were sent to the area, and more and more Micronesians were trained and ordained.

In 1900 there were 26 American Board missionaries in Micronesia, and the mission covered all five of the island groupings. In 1907, however, the work in the Palau and Carolines (except at Kusaie) was turned over to the missionaries of the German Liebenzeller Mission, and two years later American Baptists assumed responsibility for the Marianas. In 1917 the London Missionary Society, British Congregational counterpart of the American Board, took over the work in the Gilberts. From then until after World War II the American Board worked in the Marshalls alone, with headquarters on Kusaie. Part of the time (1935-1941) the mission was administered by the Japan Commission of the American Board. In 1941 only two missionaries were left in the islands, though Christian witness was everywhere. Micronesian pastors and teachers carried forward most of the work.

World War II decimated the islands, of course. Hundreds of Micronesians lost their homes, their churches, their means to livelihood. One missionary (who, when war came, chose to remain in the islands) was killed. When the war was over and a United Nations commission surveyed the islands to discover how best their reconstruction might be begun, the Commission discovered that in the minds of the Micronesians themselves, the most important thing seemed to be that the American Board should return.¹ With the help of the Postwar Emergency Program, the Micronesia Mission was reopened. It is thriving once more today.

iv.

There are now 10 missionaries of the American Board in the islands, and the American Board is responsible under the UN trusteeship for Protestant work in the entire Micronesia area. The missionaries are stationed at Majuro, Truk and Kusaie and Ponape. Morning Star VI, which on July 27, 1947, left Boston Harbor for Micronesia (like its predecessors paid for by the gifts of church school children) is on the job. As has been true in the past, however, most of the work of the mission is under Micronesian leadership; more than 90 national leaders are in positions of responsibility throughout the area. Their number includes several former kings, now called "headmen" under the US's UN trusteeship. There are six schools in the mission area. Those at Kusaie and Truk and Ponape (all called Christian Training Schools) are under missionary leadership. The others have been established, supported and largely maintained by associations of Micronesian churches. 125 churches (which minister to a Christian community equal to one third the population of all of Micronesia) are the principal centers of Christian influence, of course. They are found on nearly every atoll or island of more than 200 population.

v.

1952 is the centennial year of the Micronesia Mission of the American Board. Throughout the islands, celebrations will be held. In little churches on scattered

1. This in some respects surprised those who had made the study, and their surprise was evidenced in many ways. The American Board got a host of letters urging it to reenter Micronesia in force; secular journals (as well as the journals of other Protestant denominations) carried stories about the American Board's work there. Had it not been for the overwhelming call for the American Board to resume its work, and the availability of special funds through the Postwar Emergency Program, the American Board might not have returned to Micronesia.

atolls, in little schools staffed by loyal Micronesian Christians, everywhere throughout the area, there will be occasions of rejoicing, thanksgiving and prayer. Not that the work of the Mission is finished - new, cheap idols (best symbolized by Hollywood's grade B pictures) have invaded the islands, and the battle with them is joined. But foundations for a Christian Micronesia have been laid, and for them the thanks shall be given. Reported an admiral after inspecting the islands:

I cannot get away from the idea that if mankind were foolish enough to have another war and wipe out western civilization... it might be that right in these islands would be found the roots of a new civilization that will be better than what we have been able to build up to now.

In our American Congregational Christian churches, too, there will be celebrations of this anniversary. Suggestions for them will appear in denominational publications in coming months. 1952 can therefore be, for us, as well as for our colleagues and fellow Christians in Micronesia, a year of commitment and commemoration. The American Board invites you to make it so, as, together with our co-workers around the world, we go forward in the work of Our Christian World Mission.

The Missions Council has made available other materials on Micronesia, among them the following:

Leaflets and Pamphlets:

This is the good ship Morning Star - introductory folder with photo of Morning Star VI. Free.

Morning Star News Bulletins. Single copies free, additional copies 2¢ each.

God's Little White Ships - history of all six of the Morning Stars - by Dorothy Cushing - 10¢.

Visual Aids:

Pacific Island - black and white film - good background on Marshall Island people. 18 minutes. \$5 rental.

We Too Receive - black and white film - an interdenominational film - 15 minutes. 50¢ rental.

Land of the Morning Stars - 2 x 2 Kodachrome sound slide set, produced for use during the Postwar Emergency Program but still useful and valuable - free from Conference Offices or Missions Council depositories.

4 x 5½ print of the Morning Star VI in full sail - 5¢.

For a complete list of materials available on our work in Micronesia, write to the Missions Council, 14 Beacon Street, Boston 8, Mass.