

# Chapter 16

## An Apostle in Oceania: Elder David O. McKay's 1921 Trip around the Pacific

*Richard O. Cowan*

During the fall of 1920, Elder David O. McKay of the Quorum of the Twelve received a surprising and significant assignment—to tour the missions of the Pacific with the possibility of going on to Africa and Europe, thus “entirely encircling the globe.” An announcement on October 15 indicated that through these travels he would “obtain general information in order that there may be someone in the deliberations of the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve thoroughly familiar with actual conditions” in the Pacific.<sup>1</sup>

Elder McKay was instructed to “observe the operation of the Church in remote areas while strengthening and motivating members and leaders alike; to study the administration of the Church school system in the Pacific; and, if he felt inspired to do so, to dedicate the formidable land of China for the preaching of the gospel.”<sup>2</sup> At the same time he would make valuable contacts with government officials and “enhance the image of the Church.”<sup>3</sup> Hugh J. Cannon, editor of the *Improvement Era* and president of the Lib-

erty Stake in Salt Lake City, was appointed to be his traveling companion.

The travelers were set apart as “missionaries” on December 2, in the regular weekly meeting of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve held in the Salt Lake Temple. When blessing Elder McKay, President Heber J. Grant prophesied: “You shall be warned of dangers seen and unseen” and will “return in safety to your loved ones and to the body of the Church. We bless you with power over disease, not only in your own person but with power so that when you lay your hands upon the sick and the afflicted . . . many shall rejoice in the blessings of the Lord that shall come to them through your administrations. . . . We bless you with great wisdom, with a retentive memory, with capacity and ability to comprehend and understand the needs of the various missions that you shall visit. . . . We bless you that you may have the spirit of love and fellowship and good will.”<sup>4</sup>

The missionaries left home on December 4, 1920, and traveled by train to Vancouver, British

Columbia, where three days later they set sail aboard the *Empress of Japan*. When Brother Cannon was set apart, President Grant's First Counselor, Anthon H. Lund, made him an unusual promise—freedom from seasickness, an ailment that had plagued him in the past. Elder McKay undoubtedly wished that he might have received the same promise, as the voyage across the North Pacific was anything but smooth. In the spirit of good humor, Brother Cannon sent the following to the *Deseret News*:

Elder David O. McKay would have joined me in writing this letter but other things came up and prevented it. To tell just what came up, it would be necessary to look over the menu cards furnished at the various socials and banquets given in his honor before leaving home, as well as those placed before us on this trip, and these cards, like that which came up, have not been preserved. Brother McKay does nothing by halves. He treats every subject exhaustively, going to the very bottom of it, and this occasion was no exception. Sea sickness is undertaken with the same vigorous energy which is displayed when he leaves a meeting in the Church office building with only two minutes to catch a Bamberger train [an inter-urban rail line between Salt Lake and Ogden]. In neither case is it safe to get in his way.<sup>5</sup>

## The Different World of Asia

Following their voyage across the stormy Pacific, the travelers arrived in Japan two days before Christmas. At that time of the year, Elder McKay particularly missed association with his family. After describing to his wife some of the fascinating things he had seen in Japan, he added, "It's all very interesting, Sweetheart, but I should be far happier at my humble though ideal home enjoying the loving companionship of the sweetest and best of women and the loveliest children in the world, and I shall be the happiest man on this old globe when my encircling trip is over and I'm with you once again."<sup>6</sup>

On Tuesday, January 4, 1921, after about two weeks in Japan, the elders took a ship to the Asian mainland. They then journeyed by train

through Korea and Manchuria before arriving at Beijing the following Saturday. Brother Cannon described how they stepped out into a "horde of ragged and revolting mendicants, grimy porters and insistent jinrikisha men, who fought noisily for possession of us," a scene which would not "inspire a feeling of affectionate brotherhood."<sup>7</sup> Despite this clamorous reception, Elder McKay felt impressed that "the land should be dedicated and set apart for the preaching of the gospel of the Master." The brethren felt that as the next day was the Sabbath, that would be an appropriate time to do so. "But," they wondered, "where in the midst of that clamor and confusion, could a suitable spot be found?"<sup>8</sup>

Sunday, January 9, dawned sunny but cool; as the companions left their hotel they walked "with no definite goal in mind," and entering that portion of the Imperial Palace grounds known as the "Forbidden City," they felt guided to a spot in a cypress grove where they could be alone.<sup>9</sup> "A reposeful peace hovered over the place which seemed already hallowed," Brother Cannon recorded. "One felt it was almost a profanation to tread thereon with covered head and feet. Two men were in sight, but they seemed oblivious to our presence, and they soon left the grove. There, in the heart of a city with a million inhabitants, we were entirely alone, except for the presence of a divinely sweet and comforting Spirit."<sup>10</sup> Elder Cannon continued:

Elder David O. McKay, in the authority of the Holy Apostleship, dedicated and set apart the Chinese Realm, for the preaching of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, whenever the Church authorities shall deem it advisable to send out missionaries for that purpose. Never was the power of his calling more apparent in his utterances. He blessed the land and its benighted people, and supplicated the Almighty to acknowledge this blessing. He prayed that famine and pestilence might be stayed, that the government might become stable, either through its own initiative, or by the intervention of other powers, and that superstition and error, which for ages have enveloped the people, might be discarded, and Truth take their place. He supplicated the

Lord to send to this land broad-minded and intelligent men and women, that upon them might rest the spirit of discernment and the power to comprehend the Chinese nature, so that in the souls of this people an appreciation of the glorious gospel might be awakened. It was such a prayer and blessing as must be recognized in heaven, and though the effects may not be suddenly apparent, they will be nonetheless real.<sup>11</sup>

## Three Glorious Weeks in Hawai'i

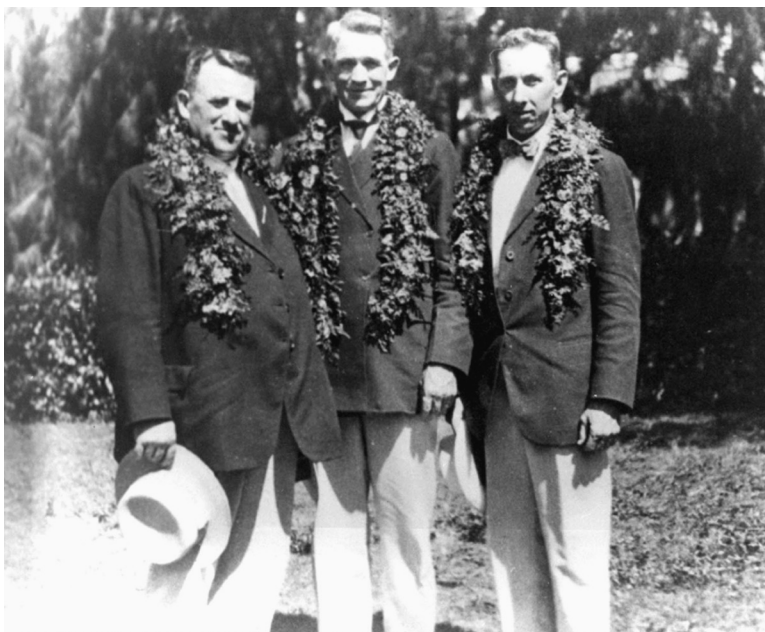
David O. McKay and Hugh J. Cannon sailed from China on January 16, 1921. After spending a few days in Japan, they arrived at Honolulu on Friday, February 4. The following day they traveled to Lā'ie. The tropical scenes in the islands stood in sharp contrast to the landscape the travelers had seen in East Asia. "This was truly a fairyland," exclaimed Brother Cannon. "Palms, ferns, flowers and luxuriant tropical foliage, all contribute their part toward making this a terrestrial paradise."<sup>12</sup>

Because Elder McKay had been assigned to visit Church schools in the Pacific, he took parti-

cular interest in witnessing an elaborate flag raising ceremony Monday morning at the small mission school in Lā'ie. Seeing students of Hawaiian, Caucasian, and Japanese backgrounds participating together was impressive and inspiring to him. He appreciated the potential of education to unite peoples of diverse backgrounds and prophesied that Lā'ie would one day become an educational center for the Saints in the Pacific.<sup>13</sup> On Tuesday, February 8, the travelers arrived on the island of Maui. Following a missionary meeting, the group then went to Pulehu on the slopes of Haleakala. Both McKay and Cannon were eager to go there because this was the place where (as tradition had it) Hugh J. Cannon's father, George Q. Cannon, and judge Jonathan H. Nāpela, a faithful Hawaiian convert, had preached "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Corinthians 2:4) to dramatic effect, much like the ancient Apostle Paul had done.<sup>14</sup>

As the travelers, accompanied by mission president E. Wesley Smith and missionaries Samuel Harris Hurst and David Keola Kailimai, stood on that spot in 1921, the mission president

noted that Elder McKay sensed the sacredness of the location and that the Apostle "felt impressed with a desire to offer a prayer to the Lord in the spirit of thanksgiving for the privilege they had of being there, and for the many . . . who had embraced the Gospel."<sup>15</sup> The day being quite hot, the group gathered in the welcome shade of a nearby pepper tree. Later that evening, Elder Hurst recorded in his diary what happened: "We bowed in humble reverence in prayer to God and then I listened to one of the grandest prayers it has ever been my privilege to listen to. At its close Elder Keola test[i]fied he saw a hand and arm extended to me in an attitude of shaking hands.



**Fig. 1.** Hugh J. Cannon, David O. McKay, and Hawaiian Mission president E. Wesley Smith

*Courtesy of BYU–Hawai'i Archives*

In speaking of this later Bro. McKay said 'Bro. Keola, I do not know the significance of the hand you saw, but I know this that the veil between us and the other world was very thin.' Bro. Cannon then said 'There was no veil at all.'"<sup>16</sup>

From Maui the travelers sailed to the large island of Hawai'i, arriving early in the morning on Thursday, February 10. After a day of inspiring meetings with missionaries and Saints in Hilo, a night trip to the Kilauea Volcano was organized for the visitors and some of the missionaries. A sister missionary who was present later penned her recollections of that evening:

We stood on the rim of that fiery pit watching Pele in her satanic antics, our backs chilled by the cold winds sweeping down from snow-capped Mauna Loa, and our faces almost blistered by the heat of the molten lava. Tiring of the cold, one of the elders discovered a volcanic balcony about four feet down inside the crater where observers could watch the display without being chilled by the wind. It seemed perfectly sound, and the railing on the open side of it formed a fine protection from the intense heat, making it an excellent place to view the spectacular display.

After first testing its safety, Brother McKay and three of the elders climbed down into the hanging balcony. As they stood there warm and comfortable, they teased the others of us more timid ones who had hesitated to take advantage of the protection they had found. For quite some time we all watched the ever changing sight as we alternately chilled and roasted.

After being down there in their protected spot for some time, suddenly Brother McKay said to those with him, "Brethren, I feel impressed that we should get out of here."

With that he assisted the elders to climb out, and then they in turn helped him up to the wind-swept rim. It seems incredible, but almost immediately the whole balcony crumbled and fell with a roar into the molten lava a hundred feet or so below.

It is easy to visualize the feelings of those who witnessed this terrifying experience. Not a word was said . . . the whole thing was too awful, with all that word means. The only sound was

the hiss and roar of Pele, the Fire Goddess of old Hawaii, screaming her disappointment.

None of us who were witnesses to this experience could ever doubt the reality of revelation in our day!<sup>17</sup>

The party then returned to Honolulu, where another week and a half was occupied with meetings and other official business. On Tuesday evening, February 22, Elder McKay dedicated the renovated mission home in Honolulu, which was replacing Lā'ie as mission headquarters. Five hundred guests assembled at 7:30 for the festivities. The Hawaiian Municipal Band played until 9:00, and they were followed by a series of vocal groups. After elaborate refreshments, Elder McKay dedicated the home, and then both he and his companion gave brief farewell talks. They were not in bed until 1:00 a.m. Their sleep was interrupted after only an hour and a half: "Strains of enchanting music were wafted through the open windows," wrote the mission president. "Serenaders! Hawaiian serenaders, under Hawaiian palms, through whose branches filtered Hawaiian moonlight! Powers of description stand abashed at the beauty of it all."<sup>18</sup>

The next day the travelers boarded the *Maui* for a voyage to the mainland—the only place from which they could get passage for the next leg of their journey.

## A Brief Interlude

After six days at sea, the travelers arrived at San Francisco on a foggy and gloomy Tuesday morning, March 1. While other passengers were cheerfully embracing loved ones at the dock, no one was there to greet Elder McKay and Brother Cannon. Of course, they did not expect anyone. After spending several hours trying without success to make arrangements for a timely departure to Tahiti, they received word at 4:30 p.m., much to their surprise, that their wives, together with President Heber J. Grant and Elder Anthony W. Ivins, were in town and had been looking for them most of the day. After a joyous reunion, the travelers and the visiting General

Authorities spoke at a special meeting in Oakland that evening. The next day the group received word that President Grant's First Counselor, Anthon H. Lund, had just passed away. Because Elder McKay and Brother Cannon had experienced problems in obtaining needed visas and would not be able to sail for at least three weeks, they were given permission to return home.<sup>19</sup> This enabled them to attend President Lund's funeral, see Elder Ivins called to the First Presidency, and spend a few welcome weeks with their families.

## A Quick Stop in Tahiti

After this brief interlude at home, the travelers resumed their journey. On March 26, they left by train for San Francisco, where they sailed for Tahiti three days later. After a voyage of 3,660 miles from San Francisco aboard the *Marama*, McKay and Cannon arrived at Papeete, Tahiti. The mission president, who had not been told exactly when the visitors would arrive, was away holding a conference on the island of Tubuai. (He would meet Elder McKay later in New Zealand.) Rather than spending \$1,500 to make a trip to the Tuamotu chain of islands, Elder McKay decided to put the money in a fund to help the mission satisfy its greatest need—to acquire its own schooner.<sup>20</sup> Realizing that nothing more could be accomplished in Papeete, the travelers decided to continue their journey. The *Marama* would sail the next day.

When they had landed on Saturday evening, however, Tahitian officials had collected their passports with the understanding that they could be returned only after forty-eight hours. On Sunday morning, Brother Cannon accepted the assignment to get the passports back sooner so they could sail that evening. Success seemed impossible because offices were closed on the Sabbath and because a reception for the newly appointed governor was to be held that day at the very hour the ship would sail. When Elder Cannon returned during the afternoon sacrament meeting, Elder McKay knew from the look on his

face that the “impossible” had been accomplished. Remarked the Apostle, “Some men would call it *chance*. We call it *Providence*.”<sup>21</sup>

## Divine Assistance in New Zealand

After arriving in New Zealand on April 21, McKay and Cannon conferred with government officials concerning the Church's work in that country. The Colonial Minister of Native Affairs “praised the excellency of the results of Mormonism among the people” and added, “I wish all the New Zealand Maoris were Mormons; if they were, they would all be good citizens.”<sup>22</sup> The following day the party traveled to the Waikato district for the annual mission conference, the *Hui Tau*. Along with the usual religious meetings, this multiday event included unique cultural performances, athletic competitions, and plenty to eat. “Boiled meat, potatoes, spinach, bread, butter, jam, and cheese, made the principal eatables,” Elder McKay reported, “but cake, watermelons, and other fruit and delicacies were also served. . . . As the women peeled the potatoes, it seemed by the ton, or washed the dishes, literally by the hundred, they worked in unison to the rhythm of some song, hummed as gleefully as though they were having a Jubilee. Sometimes the young girls having ‘finished the dishes’ would wind up with a touch of ‘Kopi Kopi’ or ‘Hulu Hulu.’”<sup>23</sup>

The heart of the *Hui Tau* was gospel preaching. Hundreds gathered in a large tent, eager to hear the first Apostle who had ever come to their land. Elder McKay spoke several times during the conference. He later described one of those occasions:

When I looked over that vast assemblage and contemplated the great expectations that filled the hearts of all who had met together, I realized how inadequately I might satisfy the ardent desires of their souls, and I yearned, most earnestly, for the gift of tongues that I might be able to speak to them in their native language.



**Fig. 2.** David O. McKay high-jumping at the 1921 New Zealand *Hui Tau*  
*Courtesy of Kia Ngawari Trust*

Until that moment I had not given much serious thought to the gift of tongues, but on that occasion, I wished with all my heart that I might be worthy of that divine power.

In other missions I had spoken through an interpreter but, able as all interpreters are, I nevertheless felt hampered—in fact, somewhat inhibited—in presenting my message.

Now I faced an audience that had assembled with unusual expectations, and I then realized, as never before, the great responsibility of my office. From the depth of my soul, I prayed for divine assistance.

When I arose to give my address, I said to Brother Stuart Meha, our interpreter, that I would speak without his translating, sentence by sentence, what I said. Then to the audience I continued:

“I wish, oh, how I wish I had the power to speak to you in your own tongue, that I might tell you what is in my heart; but since I have not the gift, I pray, and I ask you to pray, that you might have the spirit of interpretation, of discernment, that you may understand at least the spirit while

I am speaking, and then you will get the words and the thought when Brother Meha interprets.”

My sermon lasted forty minutes, and I have never addressed a more attentive, a more respectful audience. My listeners were in perfect rapport—this I knew when I saw tears in their eyes. Some of them at least, perhaps most of them, who did not understand English, had the gift of interpretation.

Brother Sidney Christy, a native New Zealander who had been a student at Brigham Young University, at the close of my address whispered to me, “Brother McKay, they got your message!”

“Yes,” I replied, “I think so, but for the benefit of some who may not have understood, we shall have Brother Meha give a synopsis of it in Maori.”

During the translation, some of the Maori corrected him on some points, showing that they had a clear conception of what had been said in English.<sup>24</sup>

Meha himself later described the event in these words: “The spirit of God was in that great

audience, for the hearts of men and women melted—men and women whom I knew did not understand English, shed tears with those who did understand. They understood the message Elder McKay gave in that meeting. I remember after the meeting Bro. [Sid] Christy came up and said, 'Bro. McKay the people understood you even before Bro. Meha interpreted.'"<sup>25</sup>

Elder McKay was particularly grateful for the way in which he was physically sustained by the Lord during the *Hui Tau*. He was nursing both a cold and a serious toothache, and on Sunday afternoon, during the early part of "the greatest assembly of the Conference," he "turned so sick" that he had to excuse himself and step outside.<sup>26</sup> "After a vomiting spell," he wrote, "I rested a moment or two, prayed for strength to do my duty, and returned just as the last of a long list of local names were being voted upon. After a song, I arose to speak. My voice was husky, and the tent large, and people standing in circles on the outside!"<sup>27</sup> This was an intimidating prospect in the days before microphones and sound systems. As he recorded in his diary, "Then happened to me what has never happened before. I entered upon my discourse with all the earnestness and vehemence I could command, spoke as loud as possible, and when 30 or 40 minutes later, I concluded, my voice was clearer and stronger than when I began!"<sup>28</sup>

## Tonga and Sāmoa

Elder McKay and Brother Cannon had planned to stay in New Zealand longer, but they were informed that they needed to sail on April 30 in order to avoid spending three months in Tonga and Sāmoa. With some difficulty they obtained passage on the *Tofua* but had to share a room right over the engines, with two other passengers, as far as Fiji. The roommates turned out to be two Catholic priests who became strangely silent when they learned that they were traveling with two Mormons.<sup>29</sup>

After spending a night in Suva Harbor, Fiji, the *Tofua* reached Nuku'alofa, Tonga, before noon

on Sunday, May 8. "Not a derrick has moved, nor a box or sack been unloaded," Elder McKay wrote in his journal, "neither will there be any sign of work until midnight! That is how the Sabbath is observed among the converted Christians in Nuku'alofa!"<sup>30</sup> Because the ship's passengers had been exposed to measles in Fiji, they could not go ashore without being quarantined. On Monday they were joined by Tongan Mission president M. Vernon Coombs, who accompanied the brethren to Sāmoa.

## A Month in Sāmoa

The *Tofua* entered Apia Harbor on Tuesday evening, May 10, but the passengers remained onboard for the night. After describing a beautiful tropical sunset with vivid pinks being reflected in the blue water, Elder McKay wrote the following in his journal:

Charming as it is, it doesn't stir my soul with emotion as do the innocent lives of children, and the sublime characters of loved ones and friends. Their beauty, unselfishness, and heroism are after all the most glorious!

I then fell asleep, and beheld in vision something infinitely sublime. In the distance I beheld a beautiful white city. Though it was far away, yet I seemed to realize that trees with luscious fruit, shrubbery with gorgeously-tinted leaves, and flowers in perfect bloom abounded everywhere. The clear sky above seemed to reflect these beautiful shades of color. I then saw a great concourse of people approaching the city. Each one wore a white flowing robe and a white headdress. Instantly my attention seemed centered upon their leader, and though I could see only the profile of his features and his body, I recognized him at once as my Savior! The tint and radiance of his countenance were glorious to behold! There was a peace about him which seemed sublime—it was divine!

The city, I understood, was his. It was the City Eternal; and the people following him were to abide there in peace and eternal happiness.

But who were they?

As if the Savior read my thoughts, he answered by pointing to a semicircle that then

appeared above them, and on which were written in gold the words: *These Are They Who Have Overcome The World—Who Have Truly Been Born Again!*

When I awoke, it was breaking day over Apia harbor.<sup>31</sup>

The day after arriving in Sāmoa, the travelers were officially welcomed by chiefs from the islands of Upolu and Savai'i. They were treated to a lavish Polynesian feast that included 105 roasted pigs, twenty-five chickens, an abundance of fish, and one whole beef. The menu also included a pudding of coconut oil and taro, a dish made only on the most special occasions.<sup>32</sup> Every place the visitors went they were treated with great deference and honor and were showered with an array of material gifts.

A round of official visits and Church conferences followed as Elder McKay and Brother Cannon traveled from one island to another. In American Sāmoa the local chiefs presented them with a letter addressed to "His Excellency, the Prophet, of the Church," greeting him as "Your Highness" and respectfully asking him to send teachers for the school at Mapusaga.<sup>33</sup>

The travelers observed a special interest in religion. In Church meetings, Hugh J. Cannon noticed that "when the speaker refers to a passage of scripture, there is a keen race to see who among the congregation can find it first, the winner reading it aloud."<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, while some Westerners view religion as restrictive, Polynesians correctly view sin as confining and the gospel of Jesus Christ as liberating.<sup>35</sup>

On May 31, near the end of their month-long visit to Sāmoa, the elders participated in a particularly spiritual time at Sauniatu, the secluded Latter-day Saint gathering place on Upolu. At its conclusion the brethren spent over an hour blessing babies, as well as the afflicted of all ages. Afterward, the Saints formed a double line through which the visitors would pass. Even though the people had been told that Elder McKay would not have time to shake their hands, they still wanted the opportunity of singing their beautiful farewell song, "Tofa my [mai] Felini [Fe-

leni]." "When those kindhearted sisters began to kiss my hand, and cry," Elder McKay recalled, "I felt a pretty tender feeling take possession of me, which was well defined when their sobbing interrupted their singing." Opapo Fonoimoana, the village chief, "sobbed like a child" as he clung to the visitors "as though [they] were his sons."<sup>36</sup> Reaching the end of the line, the brethren crossed a stream and mounted their horses.

Before riding off, however, the brethren noticed the people were walking forward, eager to prolong their contact with an Apostle of the Lord. As the brethren rode slowly away along a grassy trail through "tall native trees and tropical vines," Elder McKay said, "I think we should return and leave our blessing with them here in this beautiful grove." "I think that's inspiration," responded mission president John Q. Adams. The brethren rode back to where the group was. Elder McKay hung his folded umbrella on an overhanging limb and dismounted. "Their sobs were louder than my voice when I began the prayer," the Apostle recorded, "but they became more subdued as I continued and their 'Amene' was distinct and impressive at the close."<sup>37</sup> "As he prayed for and blessed the multitude," Brother Cannon observed, "one was unconsciously reminded of that touching farewell which the Savior took of the people, as recorded in the Book of Mormon, Third Nephi chapters seventeen and eighteen."<sup>38</sup>

After the visitors had departed, the brother who had translated wrote the words of Elder McKay's prayer as he remembered them. Others conceived the idea of burying a copy on the spot where Elder McKay had stood. The village bell was rung, and a group quickly gathered. The copy was sealed in a bottle, and a representative from each family participated in throwing dirt into the hole. Some stones were then piled to mark the spot. The branch where Elder McKay's umbrella had hung was taken to the village "to be kept as a souvenir."<sup>39</sup> Both Elder McKay and the villagers regarded the spot as sacred, and the following year on the anniversary of this event a permanent stone marker was erected commemorating the apostolic blessing. Each year there-



after, a celebration known as “McKay Day” was held on May 31.<sup>40</sup>

Reflecting on the impact of Elder McKay's visit, President Adams was pleased to report that “the spirit of the Saints and strangers and government officials is becoming better. The blessings pronounced upon these islands by [Elder McKay] cannot but be fulfilled. Their month here was a foretaste of heaven for us missionaries, and is the greatest event Sāmoa will see until the Savior comes.”<sup>41</sup>

## Trials in Tonga

On June 6, the brethren sailed from Apia aboard the *Tofua* and arrived at Nuku'alofa five days later. Brother Cannon stayed on the ship because he needed to go directly to New Zealand to care for some important business there. As had been the case a month before, Elder McKay was not permitted to land because of the measles scare. He was one of thirty-one passengers taken to a small island offshore, where they would be quarantined until June 22. Hugh J. Cannon described how the Apostle reached the decision to take this course:

It was interesting to watch the struggle through which Brother McKay had passed. The work awaiting the brethren in New Zealand furnished ample excuse for his going on and leaving Brother Cannon to visit these islands. To his restless spirit the thought of remaining almost in complete idleness for two weeks was well nigh maddening. . . . Naturally the desirable and comfortable thing to do was to proceed with the *Tofua*. But he knew these people, as those of the other islands, had been expecting to see one of the Twelve and would be bitterly disappointed with a substitute. Resisting his own personal inclinations, therefore, he decided to remain and have Brother Cannon go on to New Zealand to which point he would follow as soon as possible.<sup>42</sup>

After working hard to keep his mind occupied during these two weeks, Elder McKay was grateful to finally be allowed onto the main island, where he received what by now had become the accustomed elaborate welcome. Fol-

lowing the equally customary series of meetings on the main island, the party set out for the Haapai island group. Later that night, Elder McKay sensed that the captain had been drinking: “My seasickness was replaced by actual horror when I detected him hugging a full quarter bottle of whiskey—*full* excepting what he had drunk of it! Then flashed through my mind a combination of evils that would be difficult to duplicate for danger—a *mad sea*, *midnight* and pitch darkness, seventy people aboard a small vessel, sixty-eight of whom were exposed on the open deck, dangerous reefs ahead—and the commander intoxicated!”<sup>43</sup> For over twenty-four hours, the passengers were at the mercy of angry seas and a captain without his full abilities, but they finally arrived at their destination safely at 6:30 in the evening. “Notwithstanding our sickness, sleeplessness, and exposure, we held meetings from nine P.M. to ten-thirty P.M. with 116 people in attendance.”<sup>44</sup> The next day they commenced another overnight voyage to Vava'u. This time the captain remained sober. On the evening of July 3, and again the next day, conferences were held at Vava'u, which concluded Elder McKay's visit to the Tongan Mission.

## Farewell to the Pacific

In order to rejoin Brother Cannon in New Zealand and continue their tour, Elder McKay boarded the *Tofua*, which would be stopping once again in Apia before continuing on to Fiji and New Zealand. As the ship crossed the international date line, the American Apostle had a second Fourth of July but, he lamented, not even one celebration.<sup>45</sup> At Apia Elder McKay was able to spend three more days visiting with the Samoan Saints. Stopping once again at Suva, Fiji, he saw a newspaper headline from the *Pacific Age* that read, “Mormon Missionaries—Many in Nuku'alofa—Not Wanted by the Tongans.” (In June of the following year, the Tongan government did pass a law restricting the entry of Mormon missionaries.) He immediately sought the editor of the *Pacific Age* and informed him that

the article contained some insinuations that were not true. The editor invited him to write a reply, and Elder McKay did so in the few minutes he had before hurrying back to the ship. He believed the editor was a fair-minded person who, like many others in the Pacific, unfortunately lacked accurate information.<sup>46</sup>

On July 18 Elder McKay arrived in Auckland, New Zealand, and happily rejoined his traveling companion. For almost two weeks they participated in a series of “huis,” or meetings, before sailing to Australia on August 1. Arriving in Australia August 7, the travelers spent the next three weeks holding meetings with missionaries and the Saints and seeing points of interest as their schedule permitted. Unfortunately, they discovered that “Mormonism in Australia generally is about as popular as the measles in Tonga.”<sup>47</sup> Over a period of eleven months in one district, missionaries had put in 2,213 hours tracting and had only one convert baptism to show for their efforts.<sup>48</sup> This must have been a disappointing contrast from the glorious receptions and experiences in Polynesia.

As the travelers were preparing to leave Australia, they needed to obtain visas from the British to enter India and Egypt, and from the Dutch to enter Java. At Sydney they were told by officials of these governments that this could not be accomplished in time for them to sail aboard the *Marella*. Nonetheless, with unquestioning faith, Elder McKay left for a conference in Brisbane, instructing his companion to remain in Sydney, take care of the paperwork, and sail on the *Marella* to Brisbane, where he was fully confident they would together embark for Java. “Brother McKay’s principle,” Cannon observed, “is to go as far as he can, trusting in the Almighty to open the way further.” Elder McKay’s faith was rewarded, and they successfully departed as planned on September 6 for Java.<sup>49</sup>

When Brother Cannon and Elder McKay sailed from Brisbane for Southeast Asia en route to the Holy Land, Europe, and home, their nine-month tour of missions in the Pacific came to a

close. Many lives of faithful Saints had been changed forever. For the most part, Elder McKay’s visits led to greater respect on the part of government leaders for the Church and the Latter-day Saints. In the future, Elder McKay would provide a firsthand perspective to discussions among Church leaders about these areas. This experience helped prepare him to give leadership as the Church entered the period of its greatest international expansion, during the second half of the twentieth century. During his near half century of Church service that followed this world tour, David O. McKay was able to witness the fulfillment of many of the dreams and hopes that first came to him in 1921 as he sailed around the Pacific.

*Richard O. Cowan, emeritus professor of Church History and Doctrine, has taught at Brigham Young University since 1961.*

## Notes

1. *Deseret News*, October 15, 1920, 5.
2. Francis M. Gibbons, *David O. McKay: Apostle to the World, Prophet of God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 100.
3. Cited in Gibbons, *David O. McKay*, 100.
4. Cited in David Lawrence McKay, *My Father, David O. McKay*, ed. Lavina Fielding Anderson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 111.
5. *Deseret News*, January 15, 1921, 7.
6. Cited in McKay, *My Father*, 119.
7. Hugh J. Cannon, “The Chinese Realm Dedicated,” *Improvement Era*, March 1921, 443.
8. Cannon, “Chinese Realm,” 443.
9. Cannon, “Chinese Realm,” 443–45; see also Clare Middlemiss, comp., *Cherished Experiences from the Writings of President David O. McKay, Revised and Enlarged* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 47–50.
10. Cannon, “Chinese Realm,” 443–45; see also Middlemiss, *Cherished Experiences*, 47–50.
11. Cannon, “Chinese Realm,” 443–45; see also Middlemiss, *Cherished Experiences*, 47–50.
12. Hugh J. Cannon, *Around-the-World Travels of David O. McKay and Hugh J. Cannon*, 55, Archives

of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City; hereafter cited as Church Archives.

13. R. Lanier Britsch, *Moramona: The Mormons in Hawaii* (Lā'ie, HI: The Institute for Polynesian Studies, 1989), 176–77.

14. Hugh J. Cannon had heard that his father and Nāpela preached “with such power that 97 of the 100 people who came to hear them were converted. The tradition is that Brother Cannon was not standing on the ground on this occasion, but was in the air and that a great light shown about him” (Cannon, *Around-the-World Travels*, 63). However, no such episode is recorded either in George Q. Cannon’s missionary diary or in his later summary of his experiences in Hawai’i, entitled *My First Mission*, nor is it corroborated in any other contemporary source. Moreover, Nāpela was not baptized until months after this episode was said to have taken place.

15. Cited in Britsch, *Moramona*, 149.

16. Samuel Harris Hurst, Diary, February 8, 1921, quoted in Lavina Fielding Anderson, “Prayer Under a Pepper Tree: Sixteen Accounts of a Spiritual Manifestation,” *BYU Studies* 33, no. 1 (1993): 57–59. Over the years, David O. McKay reported this incident several times. Anderson shows that McKay’s earlier accounts agree with Hurst’s diary entry but that later retellings identified the two persons who shook hands as Joseph F. Smith and George Q. Cannon, suggesting that McKay’s “intense attachment to and affection for Brother Cannon reshaped the experience into greater symmetry and logic (McKay, *My Father*, 62). See, for example, McKay’s 1955 account as quoted in Middlemiss, *Cherished Experiences*, 115–16.

17. Cited in Middlemiss, *Cherished Experiences*, 52–53; both McKay and Cannon described visiting Kilauea Volcano during the night of February 10–11, but neither mentions either the “balcony” crumbling or the prompting to move out of harm’s way at this critical moment.

18. Hawaiian Mission Manuscript History, February 22, 1921, Church Archives.

19. David O. McKay, Diary, March 1–2, 1921 (copy of selections in possession of the author).

20. McKay, Diary, April 9, 1921; R. Lanier Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea: A History of the Latter-day Saints in the Pacific* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 56.

21. McKay, Diary, April 10, 1921; emphasis in original.

22. McKay, Diary, April 21, 1921.

23. David O. McKay, “Hui Tau,” *Improvement Era*, July 1921, 773–74.

24. Middlemiss, *Cherished Experiences*, 54–55. Marjorie Newton in “Mormonism in New Zealand: A Historical Appraisal” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Sydney, 1998), 202–28, pointed out that such accounts of a dramatic manifestation of the interpretation of tongues during one of Elder McKay’s talks date from at least thirteen years after the event and that details vary between accounts.

25. Stuart Meha, “A Wonderful Manifestation of the Gift of Interpretation of Tongues,” May 17, 1934, as cited in Newton, “Mormonism in New Zealand,” 213. Years later, Meha added these details: “When Elder McKay stood up to speak, a great silence fell and I stood beside him ready to translate. He then turned to me and said: ‘Brother Meha I’m going to ask our Heavenly Father to bless this great gathering with his Spirit so that the people will understand what I am going to say, just as it was on the Day of Pentecost, when people . . . who had come from many countries, heard and understood what the Apostle Peter and the others were saying in their respective mother tongues. I pray that this be another Day of Pentecost.’ Then he spoke. It was the Spirit of God which gave him utterance. After a few moments I looked around the audience and noticed the effect of that discourse upon the people. What I saw convinced me that the people knew and understood clearly what was being said by another apostle of the Lord, for I perceived old men and women with heads bowed and tears running down their faces. . . . I knew those aged people did not know English, but here, on this occasion, they knew—for a servant of God had blessed them that they might have the spirit of interpretation of tongues” (Stuart Meha, “Reminiscence,” n.d.; tape recording in possession of author).

26. David O. McKay to Emma Ray Riggs McKay, May 4, 1921, as cited in McKay, *My Father*, 129.

27. David O. McKay to Emma Ray Riggs McKay, May 4, 1921, as cited in McKay, *My Father*, 129.

28. McKay, Diary, April 24, 1921.

29. McKay, Diary, April 30 and May 2, 1921.

30. McKay, Diary, May 8, 1921.

31. Middlemiss, *Cherished Experiences*, 59–60; see also McKay, Diary, May 10–11, 1921; emphasis in original.

32. McKay, Diary, May 11, 1921.

33. McKay, Diary, May 24, 1921. It is unclear whether this was a letter Elder McKay was to convey to President Grant or whether the Samoan leaders mistook him for the prophet.

34. Cannon, *Around-the-World Travels*, 123.

35. Cannon, *Around-the-World Travels*, 137.

36. McKay, Diary, May 31, 1921; compare with Middlemiss, *Cherished Experiences*, 65–66.

37. McKay, Diary, May 31, 1921; compare with Middlemiss, *Cherished Experiences*, 65–66.

38. Cited in Gibbons, *David O. McKay*, 116.

39. Cited in Gibbons, *David O. McKay*, 116.

40. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 391.

41. John Q. Adams, Samoan Mission Report, n.p., in Annual Mission Reports, 1921, Church Archives.

42. Cannon, *Around-the-World Travels*, 146.

43. David O. McKay to Emma Ray Riggs McKay, July 4, 1921, as cited in McKay, *My Father*, 141–42.

44. David O. McKay to Emma Ray Riggs McKay, July 4, 1921, as cited in McKay, *My Father*, 141–42.

45. McKay, Diary, July 4, 1921.

46. McKay, Diary, July 13, 1921. On the exclusion of missionaries from Tonga, see R. Lanier Britsch, “Mormon Intruders in Tonga: The Passport Act of 1922,” in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 121–48.

47. McKay, Diary, August 17, 1921.

48. McKay, Diary, August 21, 1921.

49. Cannon, *Around-the-World Travels*, 169.