

FIRST CHRISTMAS: December 19, 1912

Written by Jo Piltz

Imagine Waimea without electricity, without telephones, without cars, or paved roads. Imagine saddling three horses, packing up vestments in saddlebags, dressing in oilskins against the driving rain of December, and starting the 29 mile ride from Kapa'au over the Kohala Mountains with your wife and daughter to bring that first service to the brand new little chapel called St. James'. That was the task that faced Father Frank Merrill on 21 December 1912, the Saturday before Christmas.

The trip probably would have taken three hours or more, but when they reached the Woods' ranch at Pu'uhue on the North Kohala side of the mountains, Mrs. Beckley had arranged for her family at the ranch to provide a horse and trap to bring the Merrill family the rest of the way over the summit, "the hardest part of the trip," and down into the center of Waimea to Mrs. Sharratt's hotel. There the family was welcomed with warm rooms and lunch before Father Merrill walked across the road to the little chapel.

The new chapel was a "ready to put up building" that had been purchased from the American Portable House Company of Seattle, and it was located in the center of the village. The interior was finished in "mission staining" and the exterior was painted an olive green with white trim. When Father Merrill arrived, the altar was neatly tucked into the sacristy alcove, the new folding chairs were arranged in rows, the little organ bought by the Women's Auxiliary of the Diocese was set in its place. With help from their husbands and sons, who cut green boughs and set the swags in place, the women had beautifully decorated the chapel with red floral arrangements.

Father Merrill described the simple service the next morning, the first service in the "little gem of a mission chapel. . .as a celebration of Holy Communion and sermon for a congregation numbering eighteen. There were five communions made, and Miss Merrill played the organ."

After lunch at the hotel, the Merrill family bundled up, climbed into the trap, and headed back up the mountain to North Kohala in order to provide an evening service for either the Korean congregation near Kahua, or for St. Augustine's, or perhaps for St. Paul's at Makapala. It is no wonder that a year later, Father Merrill wrote "that the greatest need of the Missionary at Kohala is an automobile. The trip to Waimea is getting almost beyond me and beyond the horse. We ought to be doing something at Niuli'i, but my poor horse cannot do another lap."

Although the Waimea Mission had long had a thriving Sunday school, there is no record of the children's service before or after the first service on 22 December, but the children were not forgotten. On Christmas Eve, members of St. James', Mrs. Henry Beckley, her sister Miss Maud Woods, and Miss Nora Keawe, began a tradition part of which is still continued in Waimea today; they provided a Christmas tree and a Santa Claus in the town hall to distribute gifts for the children of the town. "It was a wonderful success, over a hundred children being provided with gifts and as much ice cream and cake as they could

eat. People came for many miles to see the first Christmas Tree ever given at Waimea. A moving picture company most generously gave a fine entertainment for the children free of charge." In the years that followed, there were no moving pictures, but the gifts and the tree continued, thanks to Parker Ranch.