

On the trails of the first missionaries in Hawaii

Christine and Thomas Schirmmacher from the leadership team of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) visited the Hawaiian islands of O‘ahu and Hawaii/Big Island on the trails of the first Christian missionaries.

“Since my work on my dissertation about Theodor Christlieb (1833–1899) and his role model, Rufus Anderson (1796–1880), whose main work was a historiography of the beginnings of the mission on Hawaii, at that time still called the Sandwich Islands, it has been a dream of mine to visit the places of the beginnings of Christianity on Hawaii one day,” says Thomas Schirmmacher.

[Rufus Anderson](#) was director of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM). Schirmmacher published some writings by and about him in German in 1993.

On Hawaii/Big Island, the German visitors visited the oldest church in Hawaii in the coastal town of Kailua-Kona, the [Mokuaikaua Church](#), built by local Christians between 1835 and 1837, whose preceding building was built in 1820 by the first missionaries on the Sandwich Islands.

In Honolulu, they visited the [Kawaiaha‘o Church](#), O‘ahu, built in 1836–1842 by the first Christians with 14,000 slabs of coral rock from an offshore reef, surfaced by divers.

They also visited the third oldest church of Hawaii, the catholic cathedral built in 1840–1843.

The headquarters of the first Sandwich Islands Mission 1821–1863, whose three houses were built in 1821, 1831 and 1841, are now known as the [Hawaiian Mission Houses \(Historic Site and Archives\) Museum](#). The journey of the missionaries by boat took 165 days in 1819/1820.

“Most impressive to me,” said Schirmmacher, “was the old printing press on which the first Bible translation was printed.”

Today about three quarters of the inhabitants of Hawaii are Christians, roughly one quarter are Catholics, one quarter Evangelical Protestants, one quarter other Protestants.

Literature on Rufus Anderson and Theodor Christlieb:

- Rufus Anderson. [A Heathen Nation Evangelized: History of the Sandwich Islands Mission](#). Congregational Publishing Society: Boston, 1872.
- Thomas Schirmmacher. [Theodor Christlieb und seine Missionstheologie](#). EgfD: Wuppertal, 1985.
- Thomas Schirmmacher (ed.). [“Die Zeit für die Bekehrung der Welt ist reif”: Rufus Anderson und die Selbständigkeit der Kirche als Ziel der Mission](#). Mit Beiträgen von Rufus Anderson, Theodor Christlieb, Josef Josenhans, Hermann Gundert. VKW: Bonn, 1993 (reprint 1996).

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