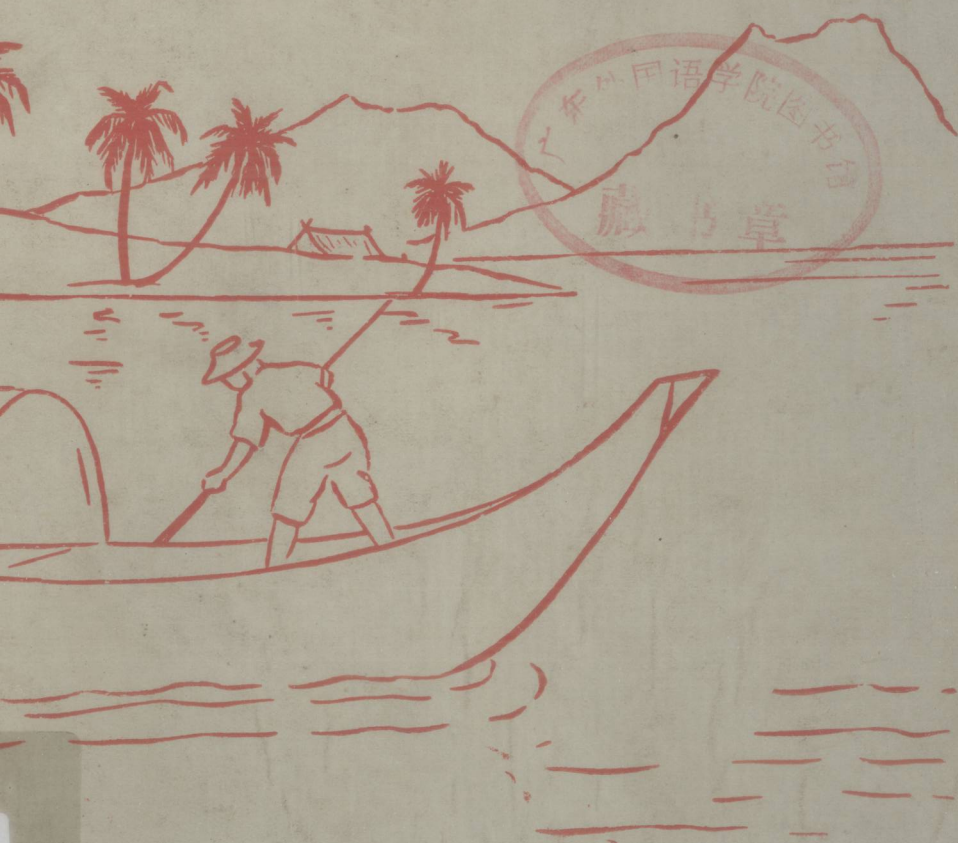


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# HISTORY OF PROTESTANT WORK IN THAILAND



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HISTORY OF PROTESTANT WORK  
IN THAILAND

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1828 - 1958

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TO MY WIFE

for whom all names make news.

## PREFACE

This book, which is to appear in Thai also, was written primarily for those living in Thailand who wonder when or how their school or church got started. The writing of this condensed narrative came to me in line of duty rather than from any special fitness for the task. By an accident of history, however, one attribute of a chronicler befell me, — proximity to the events.

My wife and I arrived in Siam October 10, 1927, and we have witnessed many of the changes that have occurred in this land since then. It was our privilege to meet Mae Esther Pradipasena in that first year, she was then eighty-three, and thus to meet the first Thai woman ever to become a Protestant Christian, and that in 1860. I also visited Miss Irene Bradley in Thonburi in the house where she was born, she who was the daughter of Dr. Dan Beach Bradley who came to Siam in 1835. From such contacts, and from missionaries such as Mrs. William Harris who was born in Chiangmai in 1868, we caught echoes of the footfalls of missionary pioneers. We also followed their steps in some instances, to Chiang Tung, Burma, and to Chiang Rung, China, by horse caravan; to Muang Tern where Dr. House was gored by an elephant, and to Nan where Mrs. Perkins riding to a reception in her honor, dressed all in white, was thrown from her horse into a buffalo wallow.

But anecdotes must be discarded in favor of significant events. Fortunately my wife's memory of historical dates is better than mine, and she has given counsel when it was most needed. Reviewing the past has been fun; seeing so many come and go has made us grateful for the years allotted us.

The spelling of Thai names in this volume follows no rational system, but is based on current usage modified by whimsey.

Bangkok, July 20, 1958

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# PROTESTANT CHRISTIANITY IN THAILAND

## Chapter I INTRODUCTION

\* \* \* \* \*

In 1928 Dr. and Mrs. George B. McFarland edited and published their *Historical Sketch of Protestant Missions in Siam, 1828-1928*, Bangkok Times Press, 386 pages, 130 illustrations. Friends of Thailand are deeply indebted to them for compiling and preserving so much historical information. But their book is now out of print.

A new generation is asking questions about the early history of Protestant Christian work in Thailand and developments since 1928. Drawing heavily upon the *Historical Sketch* of the McFarlands, *Protestant Christianity in Thailand* is an attempt to answer some of these questions.

Into the founding of Protestant churches in Thailand went courage, devotion, and sacrifice to a degree far greater than the size of this book would indicate. To understand the difficulties involved, the reader should recall that the year 1828 was in the pre-modern era, both in Siam and in the United States of America. It was before steamships and planes, telegraph and radio, and before preventive medicine, DDT, antiseptics, antibiotics, and all the means now available to treat illness and injury. Siam had a population of about 4,000,000 in 1828. Cholera, typhoid, dysentery, smallpox, tuberculosis, and malaria were among the many diseases that kept the number small. An estimated 35,000 people died of cholera in Bangkok in 1849. Cholera has continued to be a scourge, even in the present century; at least seven missionaries, including the Rev. Boon Itt, succumbed to it.

The appalling incidence of illness and death among early missionaries must have taxed the courage of new recruits. Six American Board missionaries to Siam died between 1840 and 1845 after terms of work averaging less than six years. Some deaths were accidental, both then and later, as those of the Rev. N. S. Benham in 1840, Mary M. Campbell, 1881, and D.C. Nelson, M.D., 1941, all by drowning, and that of Charles E. Park, M.D., in 1933 following a fall from a mule. Some missionaries indeed lived to great age. But many of the pioneers soon died or were invalided home. In a number of cases the men continued to work in Siam while their wives recuperated in America. For a time the average length of service for all missionaries to Siam was less than five years. Mrs S.G.McFarland, describing her voyage on the sailing barque "Maury" from New York to Bangkok in 1860, in company with five other missionaries, said, "No one of this party ever expected to see his native land again." In all, sixty-one Protestant missionaries to Siam died on the field.

The record of Christian work in Thailand necessarily begins with missionaries because, prior to their arrival, no Thai or Chinese Protestant Christians existed. The twenty-two Congregational or American Board missionaries, in a period of eighteen years, 1831-1849, made not a single Thai convert. The Presbyterians worked from August 1840 to August 5, 1859 before they baptized the first Thai convert, Nai Chune. In thirty years, 1833-1863, the American Baptists made only forty-five converts, chiefly among the Chinese. In 1860 Esther Pradipasena, sixteen years old, became the first Thai woman convert. She was then in the U.S.A. where she had spent three years in the home of Mrs. Stephen Mattoon.

The Thai asked why the missionaries came and continued to work despite such difficulties. Was it to make merit? Or to serve political ends? They came primarily from a sense of

duty, religious duty, based on the commands of Jesus Christ to, "Love your neighbor as yourself", (Matthew 22:39) and "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations," (Matthew 28:19). They felt that all men had a right to know of the love of Christ, and that such knowledge was vital to their eternal welfare. As for the financial support of the missionaries, it came from the private and voluntary contributions of other Protestant Christians.

In the period 1828-1860, why were conversions so few? The reasons were many, and some of them doubtless elude us. Many of the difficulties were rooted in the fact that missionaries shared the misconceptions and disabilities of their day. They knew little or nothing about the land to which they came, and there was none to inform them. Mission Boards were new and inexperienced. Travel from the U.S.A. to Siam by sailing vessel, with delays in port, sometimes took a year. Missionaries wore the Victorian clothing to which they were accustomed, long, heavy, dark stuff suited for northern climates. They knew little of tropical diseases. Illness and death so shortened the terms of service of many that there was not time to learn the language and customs of the people, or to form deep friendships. And if Prince Damrong Rajanuphab's observation is valid, their approach was wrong. They "were not well-advised in picking out and criticising severely what they thought were the faults of Buddhism."

As for the Thai of 1828, their culture was ancient and Buddhistic. Their way of life, according to Dr. Walter F. Vella, had not altered appreciably in 400 years. Buddhist metaphysics, ethics, doctrine of man, and religious goals all differed so greatly from Christian teachings that the latter, for a time, seemed entirely alien and incomprehensible. And tradition, custom, family ties, and the socio-political structure all served to curb individualism and independence of thought. Few

individuals, therefore, were inclined to study Christianity seriously, and fewer still were willing to accept it and in doing so break with the traditions and mores of their society. Today few concepts, religious or secular, are considered alien in the sense of strange, so familiar are the Thai with current thought and world opinion.

In the pages that follow, certain individuals will be high-lighted to the exclusion of others who were, perhaps, even more devoted and exemplary workers. For such inequities, wrought by human frailty, no justice is to be had save at the Last Assize.

---

*Before 1939 Thailand was known as "Siam" to the rest of the world. All documents and letters used the terms "Siam" and "Siamese" except those written in the language of the country. The people referred to themselves as "Thai" (Tai) and to their country as "Pratate Thai" i.e. "Thailand." Because the people have always been Thai, but known as Siamese prior to 1939, historical references to them can be expressed in either term.*

## Chapter II

### THE FIRST MISSIONS

\* \* \* \* \*

French Roman Catholic priests began work in Siam in 1662, and by 1688 had established a seminary and a number of chapels. Upon the death of King Narai that year an anti-French reaction swept the capital of Ayuthia and the French priests and monks were driven from the country or jailed. Their work among the Thai languished during the following 140 years; in 1828, however, they still had four churches in Bangkok, one in Ayuthia, and one in Chantaburi.

Protestant work for the Siamese was really begun in Rangoon by Ann Hazeltine Judson, the young and brilliant wife of Adoniram Judson. Becoming interested in a colony of Siamese war captives in Moulmein she began to study their language. She translated her husband's Burmese catechism into Siamese, and, in 1819, had it printed by a press in Serampore, India. This crude machine with a font of Siamese type was later purchased from the Rev. Robert Burn in Singapore by Dr. Dan Beach Bradley and brought to Bangkok in 1835, Siam's first press.

The first two Protestant missionaries reached Siam August 23, 1828. They were the Rev. Carl Augustus Friedrich Gutzlaff, M.D., a German, and the Rev. Jacob Tomlin, an Englishman, of the London Missionary Society. Dr. Gutzlaff had severed his connection with the Netherlands Missionary Society and was on his own. This distinguished man, who had studied Chinese in Europe, later became a naturalized citizen of China by adoption into the clan of Kwo, in the Tung-an district of Fukien, took the name of Shik-li, wore Chinese dress at times, spent twenty years along the China coast, and died in 1851.

Upon arrival in Bangkok in 1828, Dr. Gutzlaff and Mr. Tomlin were given a house in which to live by the Portuguese Consul, Seignior Carlos de Silveira. This was on the consulate grounds, about 50 feet above the present boat-landing of the Portuguese Consulate. The two men received permission to work among the Chinese, which they did with such diligence that within two months their stock of Chinese Bibles was exhausted. They also threw themselves into the study of Siamese. Within six months of their arrival they had translated from Chinese into Siamese the four Gospels and the Epistle to the Romans. Imperfections could be laid to the method of translation they had to use: their Chinese assistant Mr. King would read a passage from the Chinese Bible and express this verbally in very halting Siamese; the Burmese assistant, Mr. Hon, whose Siamese was somewhat better, would then rephrase and write down what he understood. Not content with translation, the two missionaries attempted an English-Thai dictionary and proceeded as far as the letter "R."

Mr. Tomlin left for Singapore on May 14, 1829 to get a fresh supply of books and medicines and to recover his health. He did not return to Bangkok until June 30, 1831, where, away from his family, he continued to work until January 7, 1832 when he left Siam for the last time.

In the meantime Dr. Gutzlaff remained alone in Bangkok from May until December 1829, applying himself with customary vigor to the translation of other portions of the New Testament and to the preparation of a tract, "View of the Christian Religion." Then he went to Singapore to get this material printed on the press that Ann Judson had used in 1819. Losing no time, in Malacca Dr. Gutzlaff married Miss Maria Newell who had been sent out by the London Missionary Society. Together they arrived in Bangkok February 11, 1830. Plunging at once into work, in one year they finished translating

the entire Bible into imperfect Siamese, and translated portions of the Bible into Lao and Cambodian. They also produced a dictionary and grammar of Siamese and Cambodian.

Mrs. Gutzlaff gave birth to twin daughters February 16, 1831, dying a few hours later. One twin died at birth, and she and the mother were buried at the the upper side of the Portuguese Consulate. Dr. Gutzlaff, worn down by his labors and almost too ill to walk, boarded a junk for Tientsin June 3, 1831. He nearly died before reaching the bar at the mouth of the river below Bangkok, and while anchored there he learned of the death of his remaining daughter who had been left behind with a nurse.

Dr. Gutzlaff's labors in Siam were not wholly in vain. In 1829 he and Mr. Tomlin sent a letter to the churches in America appealing for additional missionaries to join them. The letter was carried by Captain Coffin of the trading vessel that also carried the famous "Siamese Twins" Chen and Chang, who were, in fact, Chinese. In response to this letter the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, at that time maintained by both the Congregational and the Presbyterian Churches, and the American Baptists, took steps to send help. Moreover Dr. Gutzlaff had baptized one convert, a Chinese named Boon Tee, who in 1832 gave assistance to the first Congregational missionary to Siam, the Rev. David Abeel, M.D. In 1833 Boon Tee became the chief assistant of the first Baptist missionary to Siam, the Rev. John Taylor Jones, but in 1836, falling victim to opium, he gave up his Christian profession. Dr. Gutzlaff's dictionary proved more enduring. Mrs. J. T. Jones, Eliza Grew Jones, used it as a guide in preparing her more complete Siamese dictionary.

## THE AMERICAN BOARD (A.B.C.F.M.)

1831-1849.

\* \* \* \* \*

The first American missionary to Siam, the Rev. David Abeel, M.D., reached Bangkok June 30, 1831, in company with Mr. Tomlin who was returning from Singapore. They resided in the house at the Portuguese Consulate which Dr. Gutzlaff had just vacated.

Dr. Abeel felt challenged by the difficulties of the work which confronted him, and he appealed to his Board for aid. "My fellow laborer," (Mr. Tomlin) he wrote on August 25, "is not likely to continue long in Siam. He has left Singapore now without a missionary, and his family are still there." In the rainy season of that year Bangkok was completely inundated for two months. Dr. Abeel contracted a lingering fever which induced him to leave with Mr. Tomlin for Singapore January 7, 1832. On May 19 he returned alone and was welcomed by his friend Seignior de Silveira. He distributed Christian literature on the junks making ready to sail for China of which there were about fifty at anchor, and he dispensed medicines. Assisted by Boon Tee he conducted services on Sundays for small groups of Chinese. Ill health again forced Dr. Abeel to leave for Singapore on November 5, 1832. He continued there, his health gradually failing, until May 25, 1833, when he took ship for America, never to return.

The next American Board missionaries brought their wives with them, the Rev. Charles Robinson and the Rev. Stephen Johnson, the two couples reaching Bangkok July 5, 1834 after a journey from Boston of over thirteen months. They rented a small plot of ground just above Wat Koh, at the foot of



the market, and there built two rough dwellings. They were evicted October, 5, 1835 through no fault of their own. Captain Wellar, an Englishman, had strolled into temple grounds near by and shot several pigeons. The Buddhist monks, outraged at this, attacked him injuring him severely. Mr. Hunter, a prominent English merchant, took Captain Wellar's part and confronted the Siamese Government with demands and threats. In the resulting tension it was recalled that the missionaries living near by, whom Captain Wellar had visited, had not received royal permission to rent land. They were told to move within five days, which they did, the Robinsons going to a small house owned by the Portuguese, and the Johnsons moving into a floating-house moored in front of the Santa Cruz Roman Catholic Church. Mary Johnson, the infant daughter who was critically ill, died the following day. Mr. Johnson worked among the Hokien Chinese, while Mr. Robinson worked among the Siamese.

To Mr. Robinson goes the distinction of printing the first publication in Siam, in 1836, using the ancient press of wood and stone brought from Singapore, with the old type cast at Serampore, India. The first print job consisted of 1000 copies of an eight-page tract containing the Ten Commandments, with an introduction and explanation, a short prayer, and three hymns.

Mr. Robinson died in 1845 at St. Helena, on the way home. In 1838 Mr. Johnson baptized a Chinese teacher, his Mission's first convert. In 1844 he baptized a second convert, Ki-eng Qua-Sean (กีเอ็ง ก๊วยเซี่ยน) a Chinese teacher of great ability, about whom much more is to be said. In 1846 Mr. Johnson was transferred to China. Mrs. Johnson died in 1841 of brain fever.

One of the most influential American Board missionaries was the Rev. Jesse Caswell, who with his wife reached Bangkok early in 1840. He was really a Presbyterian, a member of