Samuel Munson

Clan Joel

Misadventure in Sumatra

by Lori Hahn

Samuel Munson (b. 1804) was the youngest of Samuel Dickerman Munson and Elizabeth Lombard of New Sharon, Maine. Samuel was a devout boy and attended college at Bowdoin and then attended Andover Seminary (a Congregational school) for his education. He became a pastor with American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), a non-denominational group, in his young adulthood. In 1833, he married Abigail Waldo Johnson of Massachusetts.

Henry Lyman (b. 1809) also attended Andover Seminary and along with Samuel was offered a mission to Sumatra in early 1834. Abigail and Samuel decided, as a couple, to accept the mission. They joined Henry Lyman and his wife, Eliza Pond, boarded a ship, and set sail.

Christian missionaries were still a relatively new thing in this part of the world, and most white men had little understanding of the cultures of the indigenous tribes of the islands—especially, the still-mysterious Batak tribe, which held the land in north central Sumatra.



The two couples arrived in Sumatra and secured housing. Then, the two men set sail in April of 1834 for Padang on the western side of the island and then moved on to coastal Sibolga. With "a cook, an interpreter, two natives and ten coolies," the group plotted out their move inland to Batak territory and began the last leg of their journey.



Batak Village



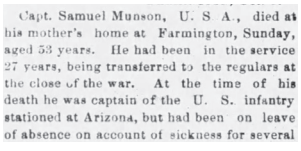
The Batak were a mysterious people, known to be violent, territorial, and who committed ritual-related cannabalism when celebrating the defeat of an enemy.

On 23 Jun 1834, the group first met up with a series of friendly Batak and even stayed in their villages. One Batak chief warned them to wait before going further until he could ascertain if it was safe. The missionaries disregarded the chief's offer and moved ahead anyway.

Five days later, the group came to a barricade defended by armed Batak. The group was suddenly encircled by 200 armed warriors. The coolies and interpreter managed to flee into the jungle. The rest were killed. The warriors fatally shot Lyman to death, and Munson died by spear. According to reports, the bodies of the missionaries were removed to the village of Si Sakkas and consumed.



Abigail returned to Maine after this horrific event. The couple had a young son born shortly after their arrival in Feb 1834. He was the first American child born on Sumatra: Samuel Munson, Jr. He would grow up in Maine and at the start of the Civil War would enlist as a sergeant. He would have a long military career but would die at a relatively young age of an illness in 1887.


Capt. Samuel Munson, U. S. A., died at his mother's home at Farmington, Sunday, aged 53 years. He had been in the service 27 years, being transferred to the regulars at the close of the war. At the time of his death he was captain of the U. S. infantry stationed at Arizona, but had been on leave of absence on account of sickness for several

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