

A Walking Tour of Historic Fagatogo

Tutuila
American Samoa



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(Front cover)

A member of the Fita Fita Guard
ca. 1907. (ASHPO: Dwyer Collection)

(Back cover)

Main road U.S. Naval Station Tutuila, looking east
(Administration Bldg. behind sailor). ca. 1907.
(ASHPO: Dwyer Collection)

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Tutuila, American Samoa

by John Enright

American Samoa Historic
Preservation Officer

The village of Fagatogo is the center of American Samoa. As the administrative headquarters of the U.S. Naval Station Tutuila from 1900 to 1951, it was for many decades the most westernized village in the Territory. It is still today the seat of government and the shipping, financial, and commercial center of American Samoa.

The United States' interest in Tutuila began with the American-Samoan Treaty of 1878 that provided the non-exclusive right for the U.S. to establish a naval station on Pago Pago Bay. The U.S. recognized the need to establish a naval coaling station on the Hawaii-New Zealand shipping route and shortly after the treaty rented land in Fagatogo at \$10 a month to be used for a coal depot. The coal lay in the open and during rainy weather discolored the waters of the bay.

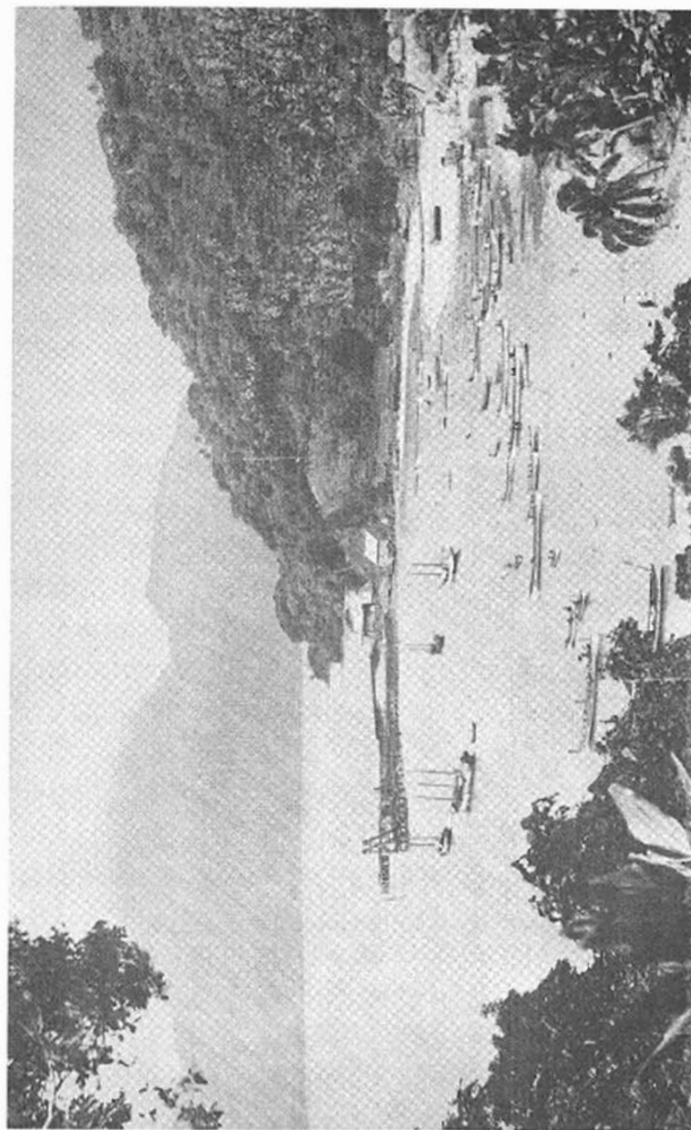
In 1889 Rear Admiral L.A. Kimberly USN visited the island and selected the site of the future naval station. Seven initial tracts of land, totaling roughly 17 acres, were purchased for a total price of \$3,241.79.

Construction of a wooden-floored steel dock, corrugated iron coal shed, storehouse, and manager's dwelling did not commence for another ten years. None of these structures remain today. A water reservoir in the hills behind the station was also built, and expansion of the site by filling in the bay to the edge of the fringing reef was begun. By 1907 more than 8 acres of shorefront facing the Naval Station would be thus "reclaimed."

Official U.S. Naval occupation of the station started with the signing of the Deed of Cession by the High Chiefs of Tutuila and Aunu'u and the raising of the American flag on April 17, 1900.

By the end of the Navy's administration, in 1951, the station occupied 216 acres of land (including 24 acres of "reclaimed" reef), and there were approximately 105 structures on the station. Today only twelve structures remain. In 1988, most of the remaining Naval buildings both in Fagatogo and in the neighboring village of Utulei were entered onto the National Register of Historic Places as part of the **U.S. Naval Station Tutuila Historic District**. (*Map inside back cover.*)

Our walking tour begins at the main dock. The first Navy buildings erected here were of

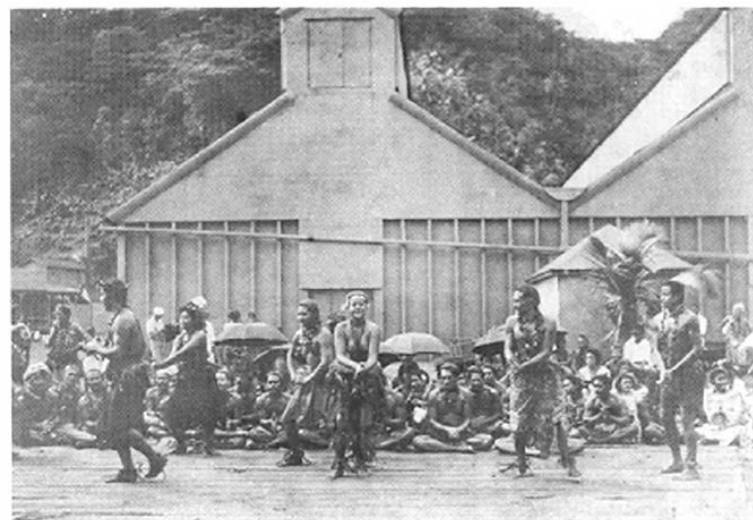


Site of the Naval Station Tutuila, showing Fagatogo beach and the coaling dock, looking east, 1900 (U.S. Archives).

slight frame construction. The commandant, officers, and ship's crew all lived on board the station ship. In 1902, a small concrete building was erected near the station dock to serve as the first custom house. This building was replaced in 1920 by the present large customhouse along the waterfront to the southwest of the station dock (Customhouse, Navy Bldg. No. 67).

The **Customhouse**, measuring about 150 feet by 80 feet, is situated directly on the waterfront. As with other Naval Station buildings of this period, it is constructed of locally manufactured concrete blocks molded to imitate rough-cut stone. Within eight years after construction, the building had settled severely, and large vertical and diagonal cracks occurred. The cracks were repaired, but the building today needs extensive renovation and is not open to the public. Historically - before the introduction of commercial air transportation in 1959 - the Customhouse was the point of entry for all visitors to the Territory. The only execution by hanging in the Territory - of a condemned native murderer - took place here in 1939.

Turning right on the main road (officially the William McKinley Memorial Highway), we pass the main fire station and come to the building that currently houses the **Jean P. Haydon Museum**. The front portion of this building was originally the Commissary Store (Navy Bldg. 43) and was constructed in 1919. The rear portion was originally a garage (Navy Bldg. No. 24)



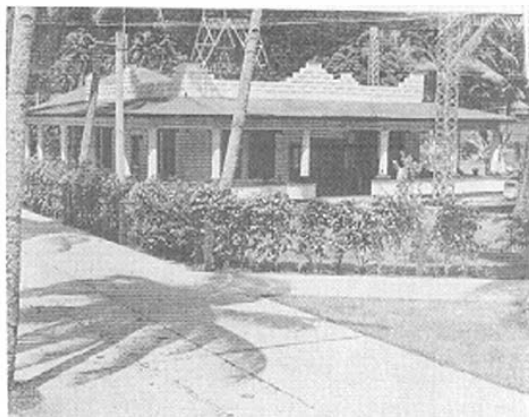
A siva dance performance on the main dock, Fagatogo; coal storage sheds in background, ca. 1907. Such performances were a highlight of both the arrival and departure of vessels. (ASHPO: Dwyer Collection)

(date of construction unknown).

After the Department of the Interior took over governance of the Territory in 1951, the former commissary became the Pago Pago Post Office. Then, in 1971, the new Post Office across the street was constructed, and then Governor Haydon decided to convert the commissary and the garage into a single structure to house a museum (named after his wife who was instrumental in starting a collection of Samoan art and artifacts).

The west wing of the building was extended to add exhibit space. The mural on front of the west wing, by local artist Sven Ortquist, depicts a scene from Samoan mythology. In front of the entrance to the museum is a traditional Samoan *fale*.

Continuing westward we pass the small Historic District Pedestrian Park, where once one of two 450-foot high radio towers was situated, and come to the **Radio Station** (Navy Bldg. No. 38), which now serves as the Territorial Registrar's Office. This building was constructed in 1917 during World War I. The building, sixty feet square, was the first to be constructed with the faux-rock cement blocks. The building was altered in the 1970s to accommodate the Amerika Samoa Bank (now in its new headquarters across the *malae*).



Radio Station, with its original roofline, 1938. Note base of radio tower in background. (National Archives)

The *malae* is the large grassy area on the south side of the road. Every traditional Samoan village has such a *malae*, which serves as the ceremonial center of the village. Each *malae* is named; the Fagatogo *malae* is *Malae o le Tala*. In Navy days it was also known as the **Parade Ground**. Here the all-Samoan Fita Fita Guard and Band trained and performed. There was a band shell at the far end of the *malae*. The Parade Ground's overall dimensions are 210 feet by 500 feet. The Parade Ground is on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Naval Station Historic District.

Looking across the *malae* you will see a large two-story white building with an arched Mission Revival-style first-floor veranda, which now houses the Department of Public Safety. This building was formerly the **Fita Fita Barracks** (Navy Bldg. No. 31). The building was constructed in 1908 by the Fita Fita Guard itself. The feast that followed its dedication ceremony was one of the largest ever given in Samoa. Guests consumed over 25,000 articles of food.

Immediately to the west of the barracks is the old **Samoa Jail** (Navy Bldg. No. 72), now the local offices of INTERPOL and the regional law enforcement agencies SPICIN and OTICIDE. The construction date of the island government's jail for Samoan prisoners is uncertain. It appears to have been in existence in 1917 when the United States went to war with Germany.

The Fita Fita Guard

The first commandant of the naval station was Commander Benjamin F. Tilley USN. One of Tilley's first requests to the Navy Department was for permission to enlist Samoans as landsmen in the U.S. Navy. He was authorized to enlist 58 men for four years, and the Fita Fita Guard and Band was begun. By World War II the Fita Fita (Samoan for soldier) counted 100 men in its ranks.

Samoans regarded the Fita Fita as an elite group, and the men served with pride and dignity. Most reenlisted, making the Navy their career. They served as seamen aboard the station ship, radiomen, crews for small boats, on guard and orderly duty. The Fita Fita Band held concerts four times a week on the parade ground.

When the Navy left American Samoa after World War II, most of the Fita Fita and their families transferred to Hawaii - the first significant out-migration of American Samoans to the U.S.



Fita Fita Guard Bandshell on the Parade Ground, ca. 1907.
(ASHPO: Dwyer Collection)



Fita Fita Guard in formation on the Parade Ground, ca. 1907.
(ASHPO: Dwyer Collection)

At that time the commandant seized two German ships in Pago Pago harbor and reported that he had placed the enlisted crews in the jail. It is a one-story structure of poured, reinforced concrete, similar to the first floor of the Fita Fita Barracks. The building measures about fifty feet square.

Immediately to the west of the Jail and also facing the parade ground is the old **Bake Shop** (Navy Bldg. No. 45). As early as 1913 the commandant called for the construction of a new bakery, saying that the existing bakery was unsanitary and a disgrace to the station. But not until 1919 did the Navy construct this small, one-story building. The walls are constructed with the same imitation rough-cut stone concrete blocks as we saw in previous buildings from this period. The original building measured about forty feet square. Its front veranda continues the covered sidewalk of the barracks and the jail. Today it houses Western Union and Samoa Photo Express.

As we continue walking down the bayside of the main road we come to the **Maota Fono** complex. This is the home of the Legislature of American Samoa. The legislature is bicameral on the American model, with a lower house of elected *faipule* and a Senate whose members are chosen by traditional district chiefs from among themselves. The original home of the Fono was across the *malae* in a former Naval barracks that occupied the site of the new Amerika Samoa



View of Fagatogo looking west, ca. 1907.
(ASHPO: Dwyer Collection)

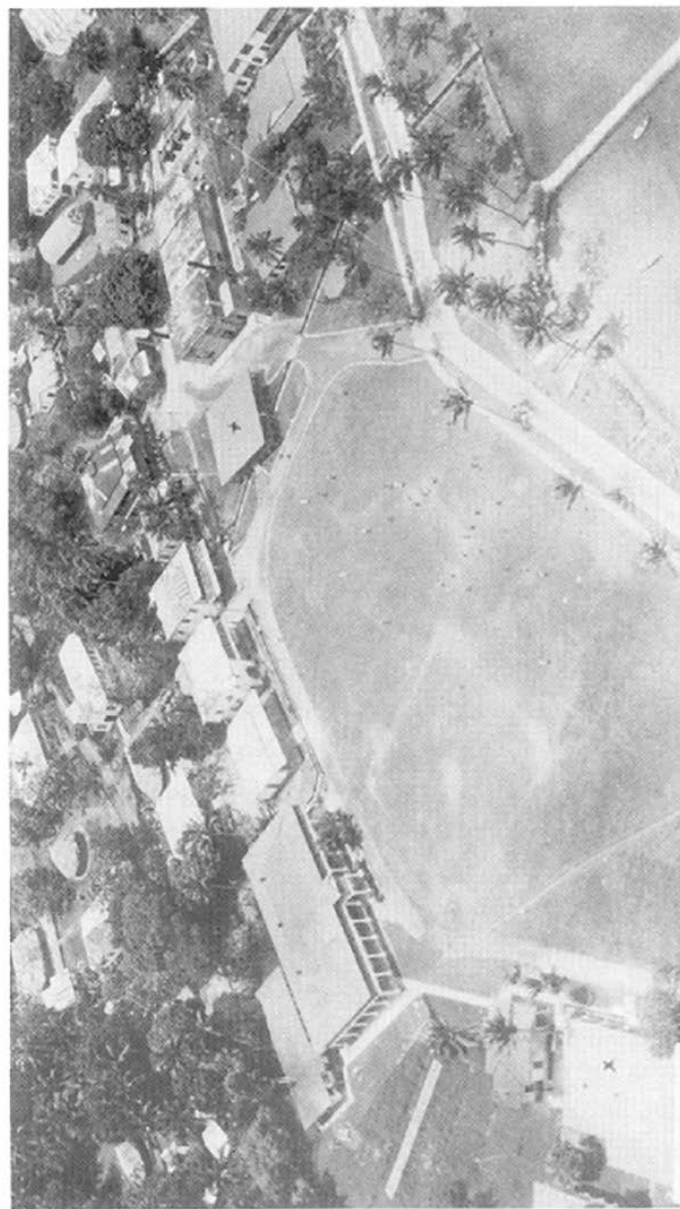
Bank. That building burned down in 1970, and in 1973 the Fono moved into its new buildings, designed to honor traditional Samoan architecture. The Fono celebrated its Golden Jubilee in 1998.

Now, take the crosswalk beyond the Fono to the *malae*. *Malae o le Talu* is still the ceremonial center of American Samoa - the traditional venue for Flag Day (April 17) and holiday festival performances. It is also the village rugby field. If there is no rugby in progress, walk across the *malae* toward the square church steeple that rises beyond the jumble of store fronts.

This short stretch of old and often-altered buildings facing the *malae* was once the business district of American Samoa, where the first few American and European merchants set up shop, on the edge of the Naval Station and as close as possible to the main dock. For many decades the Naval Station's electrical generator (the Territory's sole electrical generator) occupied the site where the square tan block of a building that houses the Communication Offices now sits to your right, behind the new performance pavilion.

Between Scanlan's Inn and T & K General Merchandise is a cement path with a deep rain gutter running down one side. It is just a short walk up this path to the **Catholic Co-Cathedral of St. Joseph the Worker**. The Co-Cathedral, built in 1959, is a good example of Samoan church architecture from the mid-century.

Now that you are in the inner streets and



View of Fagatogo *malae* taken from eastern radio tower, 1928.
(American Samoa Archives: The Eileen Delmore Papers)

alley ways of Fagatogo Village, you should feel free to explore a bit, visit some of the shops.

Back on the *malae*, you will see another, even larger white church slightly to the west. This is the Congregational Christian Church **O Le Ki O Le Malo O Le Lagi** (Key to the Kingdom of Heaven). It is built on the site of an older London Missionary Society church, which was built around 1904. The cornerstone to this church was laid in 1933, but construction was interrupted by World War II and the building was not completed and dedicated until 1949. An extensive two-year renovation of the church was completed in 1994.

In front of and slightly to the east of the church is the newly refurbished High Court Building, but the best view of the building is not from the rear. Let's cross the main road again at the crosswalk in front of the Court House and view it from the park across the street. When the Court House - then the **Naval Station Administration Building** (Naval Bldg. No. 21) - was built in 1904, you would now be standing on the original beach front of Pago Pago Bay. All the land behind you is filled in. The flag pole in front of you would be there, but the road between the flag pole and the Court House would be but a sleepy sandy track.

From here the Court House looks very much as it did when it was built. When the building was carefully restored in 1998 (at a cost of US\$1.2 million), great care was taken to replicate the original exterior design and color scheme. The



Naval Station Administration Building, ca. 1907
(ASHPO: Dwyer Collection)

Court House interior deserves a visit - much of the original interior woodwork was also preserved and restored, including the central staircase and skylight.

On the west side of the park across from the Court House is a long, low, open-sided building that houses the Fagatogo *fautasi* "Isula."

Our hiking tour ends with a stroll further west, toward the bay-end village of Pago Pago, past the central market, which is also the terminus and departure point for all outer village buses. A little further on, a two-story gray building is squeezed between the roadway and the cliff face.

Fautasi

It was the French explorer DeBougainville (1768) who first referred to the Samoan Islands as the Navigator Isles, because he was so impressed by the sailing skills of Samoans, whose native craft sailed circles around his European-state-of-the-art square riggers.

Aside from the native outrigger canoe, the paopao, the craft for constructing traditional vessels has been lost. The arrival of European boats, however, did inspire the design and construction of a new type of vessel, the fautasi. Fashioned along the lines of a stretched longboat, fautasi were once built and used by every major village. (There are a dozen fautasi along the Fagatogo beach in the 1900 photograph of the Naval Station.)

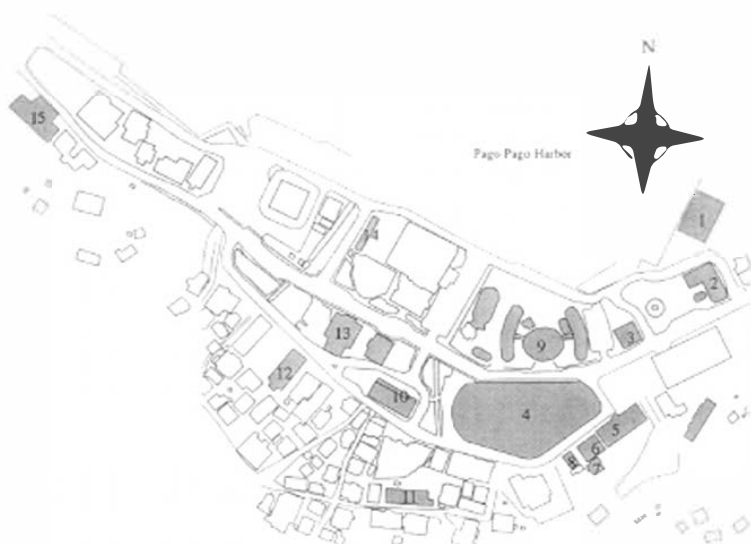
Today only a handful of villages on Tutuila still build and maintain such boats as the Iseula. They are no longer used for basic transportation but for highly competitive races on special occasions such as Flag Day. Contemporary fautasi, like the Iseula, are 92 feet long and hold 45 rowers and a captain/steersman.

Currently the site of a Transpac store and Sadie's restaurant, this building was the setting of W. Somerset Maugham's famous short story (and later play and movies) "Rain," about "that woman" Sadie Thompson.

On your walk back, take the promenade along the harbor. It is the harbor that brought Westerners here a century ago, and still does. But the jungled cliffs of Mt. Alava ridge across the bay have changed little since even the first Samoans arrived here three millennia before.

Soifua.

For further information about historic American Samoa contact the American Samoa Historic Preservation Office at (684) 633-2384 (phone) (684) 633-2387 (fax), check our website at www.ashpo.org, or write to ASHPO, Executive Offices of the Governor, American Samoa Government, Pago Pago, American Samoa 96799, U.S.A.



Map Key

- 1 Custom House
- 2 Commissary (now Jean P. Hayden Museum)
- 3 Radio Station (now Territorial Registrar's Office)
- 4 Malae o le Talu
- 5 Fita Fita Barracks (now Dept. of Public Safety)
- 6 Samoan Jail (now INTERPOL/SPICIN headquarters)
- 7 Magazine
- 8 Bake Shop (now Samoa Photo/Western Union)
- 9 Maota Fono
- 10 Generator House (now American Samoa Telecommunications Authority)
- 11 St Joseph the Worker Catholic Co-Cathedral
- 12 Congregational Christian Church O Le Ki O Le Malo O Le Lagi
- 13 Administration Building (now High Court of American Samoa)
- 14 Fautasi long boat shed
- 15 Sadie's Restaurant

