

Why Historic Preservation?

by John Enright

During last year's NFL football players' lockout, the Pittsburgh Steelers's All-Star strong safety and *tama Samoa* Troy Polamalu took the opportunity to go back to his alma mater the University of Southern California and finish the course work for his Bachelor's Degree. In History.

Fewer than 4% of the B.A. degrees conferred by American colleges and universities these days are to history majors. As a fellow historian I would like to sit down with Troy and discuss this shared fascination, find out what turned this admirable young man's head toward the past. I remember hearing a student at ASCC during registration say, "History? Why do I have to take history? All that stuff has already happened."

I know that when Troy left American Samoa after his philanthropic visit he took with him at least two gift history books, J. Robert Shaffer's *American Samoa: 100 Years Under the United States Flag* and Joseph Kennedy's *The Tropical Frontier: America's South Sea Colony*. I'll bet in the off-season he read them.

The American historian Walter Havighurst once observed: "The past is not the property of historians; it is a public possession. It belongs to anyone who is aware of it, and it grows by being shared. It sustains the whole society, which always needs the identity that only the past can give."

But the past is not just what is written down in books or passed along as oral tradition. The past can also inhabit space, be captured in historic buildings, and linger in legendary sites and landscapes. At preserved historic sites one can share a space with those who came before, and the past becomes more personal, more real.

In American Samoa we are fortunate to still have some of those historic sites—like Government House and the WWII guns above Blunts Point, the Courthouse and the ancient Tatagamatau quarry site above Leone, among others. Through the efforts of the American Samoa Historic Preservation Office these sites and others in Tutuila ma Manu'a have been granted national recognition as Registered Historic Places or National Landmarks.

For natives of these islands these historic places should have special meaning. Their importance should be taught in our schools, and their protection should be a guiding principle for our leaders. Once lost, there is no redeeming such prizes.

There are also benefits to historic preservation beside cultural enhancement. Here is tourism guru Arthur Frommer on heritage tourism:

“Every study of travel motivations has shown that an interest in the achievements of the past is among the three major reasons why people travel. The other two are rest or recreation and the desire to view great natural sights.... Among cities with no particular recreational appeal, those that have substantially preserved their past continue to enjoy tourism. Those that haven’t receive no tourism at all. It’s as simple as that. Tourism does not go to a city that has lost its soul.”

What do you think, Troy?

Here, I’ve got a future history idea for you. How about establishing a Samoan Football Hall of Fame here? Build it and they will come. Preserve it and it will be here forever.