The Past Surrounds Us

Historic Preservation in American Samoa

John Enright and the Staff of the American Samoa Historic Preservation Office

Preface

This book is a collection of columns written originally for weekly publication in the Samoa News. Their purpose was to provide a forum in which people could address their readers on issues of national and international concern.

In The Grapes of Wrath John Steinbeck asked, "Without the past, how do we know who we are?" The intent of these columns was to bring that question home to my fellow citizens of Tutuila ma Manu`a.

I am a story teller, not an historian. Histories are comprehensive; this book is anecdotal. My impulse is to humanize the past, to try to feel how the people who lived it felt.

This is a travel book, but the trip is through time not space. The place never changes: Tutuila ma Manu`a, ... is here I have tried to get right. The facts are important. The facts are what we share, what we agree upon.

But the existence of different versions of the past, of what is important there, is the life sign of a people. They are like the roots of a tree that may be hidden from outside the fale like a song being practiced--the shared chorus and separate verses.

Tutuila ma Manu`a will flower as long as they tend those roots.

Teu le va.

John Enright

American Samoa Historic
Part 1: The Past Around Us

Anyone who has spent any time in American Samoa recognizes it as a special place, a place quite unlike any other place they have ever been. What is it that makes American Samoa unique?

There is its physical beauty, of course, its jungle-cushioned volcanic peaks and stunning stretches of dramatic coastline.

But an important part of American Samoa's special character is the scope of events that shaped what it is today, its special history.

In a very real way, place is history, especially for a place that has been occupied by the same people for thousands of years under the same name. A place where ancestors have been transformed into legends and legendary sites, like Fatumafuti.

While part of American Samoa's rich legacy is preserved in its oral traditions, customs, and written records, the historic districts that nurtured and contained those traditions need to be maintained.

That is the purpose of historic preservation in American Samoa--to sustain the uniqueness and importance of their place in the world of traditional village and family life--that somehow occupy the same space and time.

That history goes deep here. The historic resources left behind by three thousand years of human occupation can be found all around American Samoa, from ancient ceremonial centers to World War II sites like the naval gun emplacements at Blunts Point and Breakers Point.
Some sites, such as Government House and the Atauloma Girls School, are visible and easily recognized. Other sites have been destroyed, and important information about our past is lost forever.

In recognition of the scientific and cultural importance of these tangible links to our islands' past, the Government of American Samoa has called for their protection.

In this series of articles we will take a look at the different types of historic resources and briefly discuss what has been done and can be done to protect them from unnecessary damage.

* * *

Part 2: Ancestral Evidence

John Enright

The oldest instances of historic resources in American Samoa are archaeological.

Archaeology is a painstaking science that relies upon the patient accumulation and analysis of vast amounts of information. But enough pieces of information have been put in place that we can see part way into the past.

The most recent scientific estimate is that the first Samoans settled in these islands about 3,000 years ago. This is known from studying the pieces of a distinctive type of pottery they brought with them called Lapita pottery.

The archaeological evidence suggests that these pioneers settled in villages mainly along the prehistoric shoreline. These settlements were population centers for the lives—pottery, stone tools, volcanic glass, shell fishhooks and ornaments and tools for their manufacture. From the oral tradition, it is known that from which those individuals not directly involved moved and where warriors retreated when necessary.

Closer to the surface most of the prehistoric remains date to more recent periods.
When not at war in later prehistory Samoans lived in villages; in American Samoa these were mostly in American Samoa.

The late prehistoric sites at Maloata and Fagatele Bay, both on Tutuila, and Faga on Ta`u are village sites.

The final prominent site type from late prehistory are tia seu lupe, called star mounds in English.

This has been a very quick view of archaeology in American Samoa. One thing we do know is that after 3000 BC the Polynesians began to spread out to occupy all of Polynesia, they still stayed in touch as best they could through voyaging.

* * *

Part 3: Papalagi

John Enright

The best current scientific guess is that after the first Polynesians arrived in Samoa, they still stayed in touch as best they could through voyaging. Samoan legends and proverbs are rich with incidents of travel and contact between the native Pacific peoples and their own. The castaways were taken in, the visiting parties were also dealt with as was dictated by custom.

Then 28 centuries, one hundred ten generations, into their occupation of these islands, a strange breed of people came to stay and pray and trade in their beach villages. The papalagi—the sky breakers—had arrived.
The first recorded European contact occurred in 1722, when Dutch navigator Jacob Roggeveen sighted several islands that he named them Wallis and Futuna.

On the north shore of Tutuila, in the now deserted village of A`asu, is a monument set up by the government of the American Samoa Government. There is no monument to the 39 Samoan warriors who also died in that first cultural clash.

The first European Christian missionary, Englishman John Williams of the London Missionary Society (LMS), arrived in 1832. Williams and his followers had a profound impact on Samoans and their culture.

Other missions lead by the Catholic Church and the Church of Later Day Saints were later established. A white concrete cross on the shoreline in Leone memorializes the arrival of the Catholic Church on Tutuila.

Two of the oldest still standing architectural structures in the Territory--the Fagalele Boys School and the Fagafauia Church--were built then.

From the 1850s on a slowly increasing number of European and American traders set up shop on Tutuila, while the Manu`a Islands remained largely untouched by these events.

Historic structures associated with Euro-Americans, both military (to be discussed next week) and otherwise, have largely remained unchanged for many decades, while fortifications, quarries, and star mounds ceased to be used.

* * *

Part 4: The U.S. Navy Arrives

John Enright with Stan Sorensen
America's initial interest in Samoa was one of global balance of influence among competing continental powers, the farthest edge of Europe.

In that age, the Pacific islands were like outer space to European powers, the farthest edge of their world and at the center of ours, had taken on a new and foreign significance. It had become a strategic location.

In March 1889 warships of the German, English, and American navies faced off against each other in Apia. The threat of going to war for possession of these islands over which they had no earthly or heavenly claim.

An act of god, a late March hurricane, destroyed most of the ships where they were anchored or when they had left their harbors. It caused great destruction and loss of life among both sailors and Samoans, but it stopped the potential war.

Ten years later, in 1899, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States signed an agreement that—without making a treaty—would establish an international court to determine which country would have sovereignty in the archipelago and the United States acquiring the eastern islands of Tutuila, Aunu`u, and Manu`a.

That same year a dock and coaling station were constructed by the U.S. Navy in Fagatogo. Commander Benjamin Tilley, USN, became the first Officer in Charge of the U.S. Naval Station Tutuila.

Commander Tilley was responsible for the construction of Navy Building Number 1, Government House, on Tutuila. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1972, and was designated as a National Historic Landmark in 1990.

Other historic buildings completed during this period were Navy Building 21, the Administration Building, and other buildings in Fagatogo and Utulei comprise the “U.S. Naval Station Tutuila Historic District.” Federal funds have been made available for their rehabilitation, and repairs should soon be underway.

Thirteen years later, as America drew closer to involvement in World War I, Congress appropriated $23,491 to maintain the naval station. The dock and coaling station in Fagatogo, and the buildings in Fagatogo and Utulei comprise the “U.S. Naval Station Tutuila Historic District.”

A photographic exhibit of these and other historic sites on Tutuila is currently on display at the National Park Visitors Center in Pago Plaza.

Next week--World War II.

* * *
Part 5: World War II Tutuila

John Enright with Stan Sorensen

Being on the farthest edge of the European world, Samoa felt only the distant shock waves of World War I. In American Samoa, the U.S. Naval Station Tutuila underwent some wartime expansion.

World War II, however, brought a different scenario for Samoa and a much more major role in the war in the Pacific.

At the beginning of the war, American Samoa was definitely a front line station. The Japanese attack on December 7, 1941, at Pearl Harbor began the war in the Pacific. One of the shells struck the house of Frank Shimasaki in Utulei.

During World War II, the U.S. Naval Station Tutuila was the headquarters of the Samoa Defense Group, which protected American Samoa and Thailand, the Marshall Islands, and the Marianas, as well as the Carolines, the Marshalls, and the Solomons. It was the largest of the Pacific defense groups.

The most prominent survivors of this period are the two 6-inch naval guns at Blunts Point and their siblings at Pago Pago. They were emplaced in 1941. The lower Blunts Point gun is a National Historic Landmark.

Other historic structures of the World War II era include concrete fortifications, of which many survive. Other of the period’s recognizable structures is a Marine Corps communications bunker in “Happy Valley,” above Pago Pago village.

One of the the largest military complexes on World War II Tutuila was the U.S. Navy’s Mobile Hospital Number 3 (MOB 3), which served American and Pacific Islander casualties from the Pacific campaigns. All that remain of MOB 3 are a few scattered concrete foundations and a reservoir above the Apiolefaga Inn.

Located near the hospital, In Malaeimi Valley, was the Marine Corps’ Advanced Jungle Warfare Training Center. It housed the instruction and training of American and Pacific Islander personnel, including the training of the 2,000-man 29th Marine Division. The bunker and foundations to the barracks remain to this day.

Two airfields were built during the war. The Tafuna Air Base was completed in April 1942.
A Marine Corps fighter strip, located along the strip of land where Leone High School now stands, would have been a perfect site for Japanese aircraft to launch attacks against Midway and American Samoa. The islands were not safe until the Battles of the Coral Sea and Midway threw the Japanese back on the Japanese本土. Our remaining historic properties from this era serve as reminders of the important role that American Samoa played in history’s greatest war.

* * *

Part 6: The Quarries of Tutuila

John Enright with David J. Herdrich

In recent decades, archaeologists and historians have been able to assemble some of the pieces of a story of how stone was quarried from the mountains of Tutuila to create tools and weapons for the people of the Pacific. Metallurgy was not practiced by traditional Pacific island cultures. Until the arrival of metal implements brought by Euro-Americans, Pacific islanders fashioned what nature provided into tools and weapons. Archaeological research has provided evidence of shell, bone, obsidian, and stone implements, all carefully crafted from volcanic rock called basalt. A variety of adzes (matau), chisels, and scrapping tools were made from basalt.

Here and there on the ridges, ridge spurs, and steep mountain sides of Tutuila can be found outcrops of volcanic rock from which stone was quarried. To the trained eye, these sites tell a story of hundreds of years of continuous use and millions of man-hours spent in the mountains.
From the dense scatter of basalt "flakes," "cores," "blanks," "preforms," and pieces of tools that have been found at Tatagamatau and at various other sites, it is clear that the manufacture of basalt tools was an important activity on Tutuila. In fact, basalt quarries have been found on any other islands in Samoa. These were special, export quality basalt tools.

Tatagamatau. Leone Bay is far below you when you can see it through the jungle canopy. The footing can be treacherous, but the view is worth the effort. Because of its significance, Tatagamatau has been entered upon the National Register of Historic Places.

Here is where it all begins, at a large basalt outcrop, where "blanks" were rock hammered out of a core. From there, the process of transformation at various steps of manufacture allows us to reconstruct the stages needed to make each type of tool. A sense of the social order of the manufacturers takes shape when we realize that tools were made in an organized manner, reflecting the communal nature of the craft.

Down at Sogi, on the Leone coast, are hundreds of foaga in the black lava flow, hand-worn bowl-shaped basalt bowls. How many voyaging canoes from different islands pulled at their stone anchors in the bay?

For many of Tutuila's prized adzes did leave the island as trade items. Thanks to recent developments in the study of the past, we now understand that Tutuila was already Tutuila has assumed an historic role at the center of a great regional trade in fine stone tools.

The exciting thing about this story from the past is that it is still unfolding before us as we explore it.

* * *

Part 7: Star Mounds

John Enright with David J. Herdrich
It is pleasing when we discover something frivolous about our ancestors, it humanizes them. We usually view their sports. On Motu o fiafiaga we know they must have been doing something for fun.

As it happens we do know from Samoan oral history, early written European accounts, and archaeological evidence of a Samoan sport of chiefs from the time before missionaries—pigeon catching.

Deep in the steamy rainforest and along the nearly inaccessible volcanic ridgelines of Tutuila ma Manu`a can be found the remains of tia seu lupe, once of some importance in Samoan culture.

Constructed of earth and stone and faced with rock or coral slabs, tia seu lupe are basically level-topped structures with rock or coral walls, at the tops of which are usually five to eight projections. There are usually five to eight such projections.

On Tutuila alone more than 80 star mounds have been discovered.

The English translation of tia seu lupe is "platform for netting lupe." Lupe is the Pacific Pigeon (Ducula sp.), and the "platform for netting" method of hunting the lupe was with decoy pigeons and long-poled nets from atop a tia seu lupe.

The accounts of early European visitors to the islands report a pigeon-catching sport that was performed on a tia seu lupe. However, these accounts, however, were probably of greater social significance than just locations for chiefly sport hunting.

From the journal of William B. Churchward, British Consul to Samoa, in 1887: "Pigeon catching is the oldest of our Samoan amusements. The sport is not only the pride of a chief, but one in a high degree, and whilst it lasted all sorts of irregularities could be indulged in without comment."

Presumably because of these accompanying indulgent "irregularities," the first Christian missionaries took an early and virulent dislike to the sport and suppressed it.

One of the more impressive star mounds is the centerpiece of American Samoa's Tiaseulupe Park on the Tafuna Peninsula. The Tiaseulupe Park exists thanks to the generosity of the Haleck family, who spared the site from development.

The Tiaseulupe Park is 200 meters long and 70 meters wide. The length of the two sections is 34 meters and it rises more than 3 meters above the surrounding rocky terrain.

The fate of other tia seu lupe has not been so kind. Many lowland tia have already been destroyed, and American Samoa's land management initiatives ask the public's assistance in saving these sites once dedicated to the Samoan sport of kings.
Occasionally in these articles we have referred to a building or a site as being a "National Historic Landmark" or as being included on the "National Register of Historic Places." What exactly does that mean?

Basically, these are official designations established by the federal government to recognize significant historic properties.

In this instance, Tutuila ma Manu`a are considered fully part of America, with the assistance of both Federal laws and funding.

The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation's cultural resources worthy of preservation and of consideration in making planning and development decisions.

The National Register is administered by the National Park Service under the Secretary of the Interior. These resources contribute to an understanding of the historic and cultural foundations of the Nation.

National Register properties are distinguished by having been documented and evaluated according to strict standards.

The American Samoa Historic Preservation Office has been nominating local historic sites to the National Register. Four additional sites will soon be added, and nominations for another five have been prepared.
Two of our National Register sites--Government House (Mauga o Ali`i) and the World War II Blunts Point Gun Position--will soon receive the formal designation of National Historic Landmark, recognizing their significance to all Americans.

What does it mean to have a site listed on the National Register aside from the official recognition of its historic and cultural importance?

It means that the property’s significance must be taken into consideration in the planning for Federal or State projects that may take place near or in the vicinity of the property. Further, any Federal projects that are required to be consistent with the property’s historic character also need to respect this consideration.

In the States it also means that the property owner is eligible for Federal tax benefits for money spent on rehabilitation of a listed property. However, the ASG tax code does not currently include such benefits.

Perhaps it should. Perhaps even more can be done locally to protect these islands' historic specialness. Why leave the oversight responsibility for our cultural continuance up to the Feds?

History grows as time passes. Each generation has its own story to pass on along with those of the deeper ages. What story will we have left for them to read on the land we tended for them?

* * *

Sites in American Samoa currently listed on The National Register of Historic Places:

The U.S. Naval Station Tutuila Historic District includes the following buildings in Fagatogo and Utulei (present uses are indicated in parentheses):

Navy Building 1. Government House (National Historic Landmark)

Navy Building 20. Duplex Officers' Quarters (District Court)
Navy Building 21. Administration Building (High Court)

Navy Building 26. Deuplex Officers' Quarters (Lt. Gov.'s residence)

Navy Building 31. Fitafita Barracks (Dept. of Public Safety)

Navy Building 38. Radio Station (territorial Register's Office)

Navy Building 43 & 24. Commissary (Jean P. Haydon Museum)

Navy Building 45. Bakery (Western Union)

Navy Building 67. (Customhouse)

Navy Building 72. Jail (Archives)

Navy Building 78. Ammunition Magazine (behind Public Safety, used for storage)

Navy Building 131C. Old Rainmaker Hotel (South Pacific Mini-Games)

Navy Building 133. Nurses' Quarters (Pago Pago Yacht Club)

Navy Building 140. Enlisted Men's Club. (Triplex apartments, southeast of Public
Parade Grounds (Fagatogo malae)

Other sites:

Blunts Point Naval Gun Site, Gatavai (National Historic Landmark)

Fagalele Boys' School, Sogi

Atauloma Girls' School, Afao

Massacre Bay Historic Site, A`asu

Tatagamatau Fortified Adze Quarry Complex, Leone

A`a Prehistoric Village, Pa Cove

Additional sites that have been nominated for the Register:

Fagatele Bay Archaeological site
AS 31-72, Defensive Wall, Faleniu

Tulauta Historic Village, Tula

Maloata Historic Village, Maloata Valley

* * *

Part 9: A Closer Look at Tutuila in WWII, It Begins

John Enright

Overheard on the ASCC campus:

"I don't know why I'm studying history, man;
that stuff has already happened."
For more than 50 years now Samoa has basked in an era of historic tranquility, the Pacific Pax Americana.

War is now something somewhere else, on CNN, involving smart bombs and red and green lights on computer monitors in places with strange names half the world away. "Stuff that has already happened," and to other people.

It wasn't always so. Once not so long ago, within living memory, the people of Tutuila ma Manu`a blacked out in fear. An invasion was in progress. The Second Marine Brigade, consisting of approximately 5600 officers and enlisted, landed on Tutuila 20 January 1942. That same month the approaches to Pago Pago Harbor were mined.

The following is from a document stamped "Secret" on every page by the U.S. Navy (declassified in 1972):

"The Japanese strike at Pearl Harbor came as a surprise to the people in American Samoa and the entire Pacific. The attack in the Philippines and the attack on Midway Island had preoccupied the people in their minds. The attack on Wake Island had preoccupied the minds of those in Honolulu. The attack on Midway Island had also preoccupied the minds of those in Honolulu. But to the people of Tutuila ma Manu`a, the attack on Pearl Harbor came as a surprise."

"Some of the Naval personnel and contractors had their families with them who were immediately evacuated to the island. People just like us, living where we live, seeing the same sea, walking these same streets."

"There was no longer any time to worry about expense or approval in construction. Time became the valuable commodity."

"All able bodied Samoans were called in to assist in building defenses. The women and children were called in to help."

The Historic Preservation Office is interested in hearing your story about life on Tutuila ma Manu`a during World War II. Please preserve your story well. Don't let a proud legacy become just stuff that has already happened.

* * *
Part 10: A Closer Look at Tutuila in WWII, The Impact

John Enright

Dates and numbers are the precision parts of history. Without them the understanding-the-past machine could not function. The chronology and statistics can help us flesh out our understanding of our foreparents' lives.

Although Tutuila ma Manu`a were saved in the end from the tremendous physical destruction that was the fate of other islands during World War II, the war effort's cumulative impact upon these islands changed them forever.

Before WWII, the American presence was primarily confined to the Naval Station in Fagatogo and Utulei. ... villagers removed from the Naval Station remained essentially at peace with the lives of those in their gafa.

In 1940, as the continental clouds of war began to gather on the horizon, 10,311 people lived on Tutuila, ... Of all those, 31 were palagi, 4 Japanese, and 1 Chinese. Additional Naval Station personnel numbered 263.

By May 1942 there were 7,995 U.S. Navy and Marine Corps personnel on Tutuila, with another 5,074 in Upolu participating in the war effort. ... history only a handful of sea planes had been seen. Tens of thousands of armed strangers passed through.

Marshal law had been declared. All able-bodied Samoan men had been put to work building military installations. Eight (3 Japanese and 1 German) were taken into custody, then released but kept "under observation."

As opposed to before, now all of Tutuila felt the impact of the military presence, as all 52 of the children in the Borou Village School were dependent on the Naval Station for their education. Unfortunately, it was reported that 1,600 children there were "afamalini", had American military fathers. There is no count for Tutuila.

But the major long-term historical impact was economic and social. Men were pulled from their plantations to do work for the war effort. ... Men were pulled from their plantations to support the war effort, then quickly were released after Japan's defeat. The impact of the war effort was both physical and mental.

In 1941 the Government of American Samoa's total revenues from all sources was $87,330; four years later at $223,500, a 157% increase. This was a direct result of the war effort. The soldiers and war workers brought with them their families, and American money began to flow into these islands.

In 1944, the government of American Samoa's total revenues from all sources was $365,700, a continued trend of growth. This was a direct result of the war effort. But the major long-term historical impact was economic and social. Men were pulled from their plantations to support the war effort, then quickly were released after Japan's defeat. The impact of the war effort was both physical and mental.

But the major long-term historical impact was economic and social. Men were pulled from their plantations to support the war effort, then quickly were released after Japan's defeat. The impact of the war effort was both physical and mental. In 1941 the Government of American Samoa's total revenues from all sources was $87,330; four years later at $223,500, a 157% increase. This was a direct result of the war effort. The soldiers and war workers brought with them their families, and American money began to flow into these islands.
Buildings make statements. Public buildings make public statements. Think of the Pentagon, for instance, or ... they are proud statements. "I am power." says the Pentagon. "I glorify God." say the cathedrals.

The buildings speak for the people who built them, and the people who built them spoke from a particular... raises the questions: What was its builder proud of? What does that pride tell us of his thought and time?

Government House was built in a turn-of-the-century architectural style called Tropical Victorian Military... was built to be the residence of Commandant of the U.S. Naval Station Tutuila (USNST). It is a proud house.

Even by turn-of-the-century mainland standards it was a rather grandiose residence... that should properly go with such a position. That's proud.

Togotogo Ridge in Utulei (already renamed Observatory Point by the Navy) was leveled and graded from... stood on low-lying ground near water level, this large, airy, white house stood high above the rest.

Commander Tilley never got to live in the house; his successor Commander E.B. Underwood was its first... occupied the residence. One of them, Commander W. J. Terhune, USN, committed suicide there (see sidebar).

Government House was entered on the National Register of Historic Places in 1972 and was designated as a... Recently the residence received an extensive interior and exterior face lift and paint job.
Although in recent times Government House was largely hidden from public view by thick tropical vegetation, it remains a symbol of the island’s seat of governance, or, as a recent letter to the editor put it, “American Samoa has its own White House.”

* * *

(sidebar)

The Tragedy of Commander Terhune

Stan Sorensen

Commander Warren Jay Terhune, originally of New Jersey, was commissioned as American Samoa’s 13th Naval Governor. Before assuming office, he issued a series of proclamations that drew criticism from his Palagi-Samoan cabinet as well as from Samoans who opposed many of the Governor’s edicts. These included restrictions on palagi-Samoan marriages, and demands by an emerging Mau (some reasonable and some not).

His ordeal was worsened by declining health, by his apparently puritanical nature, and by a disloyal cabinet. Terhune proved to be a carbon copy of his predecessor, siding with the Mau and with other dissidents and intriguers.

Hearing of these difficulties, Secretary of the Navy Joesphus Daniels appointed a court of inquiry, headed by Captain Evans, to examine the issues. After investigating and interviewing thousands of witnesses, the court issued its report on November 2, 1899.

Warren Terhune was the only Governor of American Samoa to die in office. His ghost is rumored to stroll about the grounds of Government House.
This chapter of our historic preservation story is a painful one to relate. My family and I called Atauloma ... before it was condemned in 1995, and we were forced to leave. As I wrote in a poem at the time:

Homes are like parents

who linger long after they're gone

filling a space that should

never be empty neither in dreams

nor in memory -- the wind

through her rooms is a voice
Publications II
Written by ASHPO

that narrates my life but

the stillness has also been mine.

But Atauloma’s story is told not just by its final lament but by a chorus of voices stretching back to its inception almost a century ago.

Although the first palagi Christian missionary, John Williams, arrived on Tutuila in 1832, by 1892 the local ... communicants. Atauloma was one of the influences which contributed to the improvement of this situation.

In other words it helped revive the church which is today known as the CCCAS (Congregational Christian Church of American Samoa), which is the present owner of the condemned building.

Basically, what the Rev. Cooper did was get all his far-flung Samoan pastors and parishioners in Tutuila and toward the structure and he did not have to spend any of the Church funds previously set aside for the purpose.

In 1855 the L.M.S. had established Fagalele Boys’ School in Leone, the sole secondary school in Tutuila, to himself, and the Church realized that it must choose and train failefa as well as faifeau.

Before the establishment of Atauloma in 1900, girls from Tutuila ma Manu`a chosen for such training (usually for marriage) had to be sent at their own expense to Wellington. This new school was modelled upon Papauta, and an English missionary administrator, Elizabeth Moore, came across a mile of choppy ocean, something so shoving-the-discipline-into-your-face about it.

The Historic Preservation Office welcomes your family's stories about Atauloma and other aspects of Samoan history. Call us at 633-2384. Next week, the rest of the Atauloma story.

* * *

21 / 23
Part 13: Atauloma Girls' School, The Place

John Enright

To the extent that ghosts represent the past, history is haunted. And indeed unattached spirits are most... from other places. Ghosts are cross-culturally universal, but they seem to congregate in special places. Like Atauloma, a most renowned haunted house.

After its completion in 1900, Atauloma assumed its intended role as a secondary school for girls. The young... and other islands. They came to a place unique in these islands, a building that deserved to be proud.

The building is massive, set on a concrete slab 70 by 116 feet laid into the face of a ridge 40 feet above... beams of California fir and redwood. The first floor rooms have fourteen-foot ceilings; the second-floor ceilings are only... double doors leading out to wide verandas that completely surround... by verandas. An open interior courtyard is planted with bamboo and is also ringed by verandas. Atauloma continued to serve as a church girls' school until the early 1960s. Most of the reported apparitional occurrences fall into the category of girlish tricks and revenant curiosity. These aitua encounters could result in possession and subsequent strange behavior. Only traditional Samoan healers could be successful.
In the bush, a short distance up the ridge behind Atauloma, is an old overgrown cemetery with twenty-some native villages for burial. It is believed that their restless spirits still roam Atauloma.

In 1970, the then vacant building was leased and restored by the Government of American Samoa, who converted it back to (human) habitation. The CCCAS canceled the lease and took back Atauloma, but perhaps too late.

A rule of thumb for historic buildings is that proper maintenance is eight times less expensive than restoration. If you would like to help, give us a call at 633-2384. The girls thank you.