

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**Establishing Zion in Sauniatu Village:  
A Historical analysis of a Latter-day Saints  
gathering in Samoa**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of**

**Masters of Philosophy  
in  
History**

**At Massey University, Albany  
New Zealand**

**Eipo Junior Tutagalevao  
2003**

## **Abstract**

A feature of Latter-day Saints consolidation methods in the Pacific has been the establishment of gathering settlements for its members designed as a religious sanctuary for the persecuted and untrained. This approach varied throughout the Pacific depending on the steadiness of the missionary programme and success of retaining its members. Apart from Hawaii, Samoa was one of these unique places in which gathering settlements were established for the Latter-day Saints.

The focus of this thesis concerns the in-depth examination of one of these latter-day Saints gathering havens in Samoa, Sauniatu village. The rich unpublished primary sources of this Branch make this a valuable exercise. Within these materials contained valuable insights into the nature of Latter-day Saints community organisation adapted in Samoa as well as understanding the cultural interactions between the Samoan saints and the European missionaries.

Because Latter-day Saint origin was in America, this study indeed begins by examining the social and doctrinal bases of the church and in particular this notion of gathering. Chapter One, therefore, shows this relationship of the gathering in America and its modification in the Pacific context. The Latter-day Saints arrival in Samoa and its difficulties is analysed in Chapter Two. The push to establishing gathering settlements in Samoa is discussed in Chapter Three. In Chapter Four, an outline of the Sauniatu administrative system and local Saints' attitudes towards it are examined. Chapter Five presents an in-depth analysis of the nature of the village in its internal and external interactions. In Chapter Six, it explores the village as a functional mechanism for institutional operations. Chapter Seven will attempt to inquire the village's effectiveness and show its effects on the members, and Latter-day Saints development in Samoa. A conclusion assesses the overall success of Sauniatu village and suggests some of the reasons for its successes and failures.

# Saunatu Village Monument





## Acknowledgements

First and foremost I express my gratitude to Associate Professor Peter Lineham for overseeing my thesis and rendering me assistance when needed. I have thoroughly enjoyed the journey so far and look forward for the next stage. I am also grateful to my family the Tutagalevao's for their support. To the Midway Foundation, I appreciate the financial support in making the research for this Thesis possible. I would also like to thank all the families overseas that assisted me with accommodation namely, the Te'o family, Misa family, Ah-hoy family, Keil family, Polu family and the Peterson family (Lola and Lolani) as well as Athena Ah Chong and Lewis Ng Wun. To the CES co-ordinators that offered their expertise with the direction of this work, James Ah-mu, Brett MacDonald, Richard Aspinall, Meliula Fata and Ian Ardern. Thank you also to the staff at the Brigham Young Hawaii Campus Pacific Islands Studies Library, staff at the Church Archives in Salt Lake City, Harold B. Lee Library in Provo, Utah. I extend my appreciation to Dr Carl Harris and John Hart (via Johansson family in NZ) for rendering me their primary materials. Last but not least I acknowledge Heavenly Father for his guidance and blessings.

This thesis is dedicated to Sauniatu village, my great grandmother Mile Tufuga, parents Eipo and Vai, as well as Sinalei.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	ii
Acknowledgements .....	iv
Map of Samoa .....	vii
Introduction .....	1
General Literature Review of Mormon History Writing .....	1
Mormons in the Pacific .....	4
Purpose of Thesis .....	6
A Note on Sources and Statistics .....	8
Chapter One – Mormon Beginning and Gathering .....	11
Mormon Origins .....	11
Early Mormon Gatherings .....	11
Doctrinal Concept of Gathering .....	12
Earlier Precedents/attempts of Gathering amongst other groups .....	15
The Distinctively Mormon Concept of Gathering (Mode and Method) .....	17
Expansion outside Utah .....	20
Application of the Gathering/Zion concept in Samoa .....	21
Chapter Two – ‘Le Taeao Mamona’: Mormon arrival and the first decade in Samoa 1888-1900 .....	22
Early Mormon Interest/Activity in Samoa .....	22
Background to Early Mormon interest in Samoa and the state of Samoan Society prior to Mormon Arrival .....	26
Official Church Entrance .....	29
Factors to Slow Progress and Effects on Mormon Development .....	30
Chapter 3 – The Gathering Places & Finding a Place .....	43
Early Church Initiatives to tackle steady progress .....	43
Spirit to establish a gathering Place intensifies .....	46
Mormon Administrative Approval of a gathering Place .....	47
Plans for establishing gatherings in Samoa .....	48
Mass gathering and recruitment begins in Sauniatu village .....	51
Chapter Four- The Village Administration .....	55
Laie settlement Administration .....	55
A Unique Village in a Samoan Context .....	55
Sauniatu Village Administrative System .....	56
The effectiveness of the Village Administration .....	59
Residents response/attitudes towards Mormon village Laws and Administration .....	64
Village Administration and External relations .....	69
Influence of Mau? .....	71
Chapter Five- ‘Analysis on the Nature of Village Life’ .....	74
Mormon influence in the Village arrangement .....	74
Residents response and abiding to laws .....	76
Village economic subsistence .....	77
Nature of Mormon life in the settlement .....	78

Chapter Six- The settlement as a strategic function for Institutional purposes .....91

    Concerns in Church Operations .....91

    Settlement Implications .....92

    Settlement Functions.....92

Chapter Seven – Success or Failure? .....100

    What was Sauniatu’s role in Latter-day Saints development in Samoa?.....100

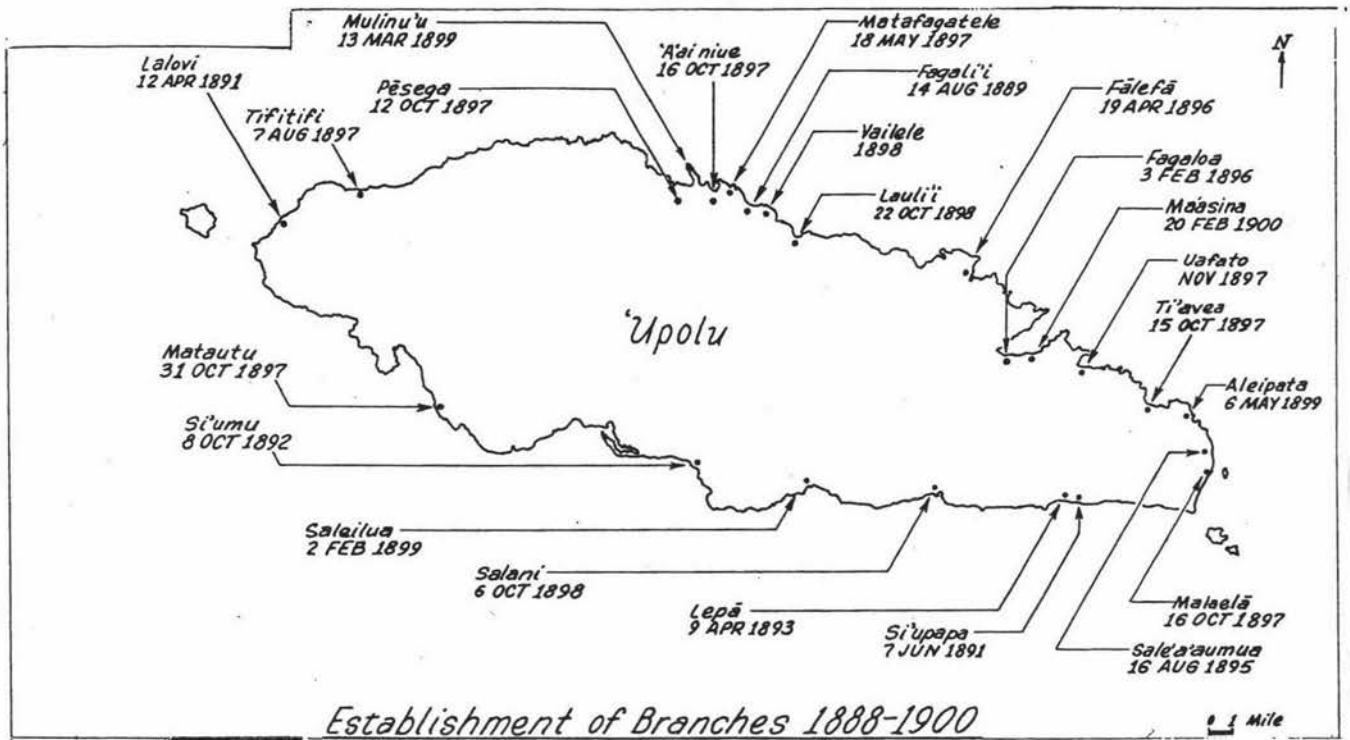
    Possible frailties of the village community.....114

CONCLUSION.....116

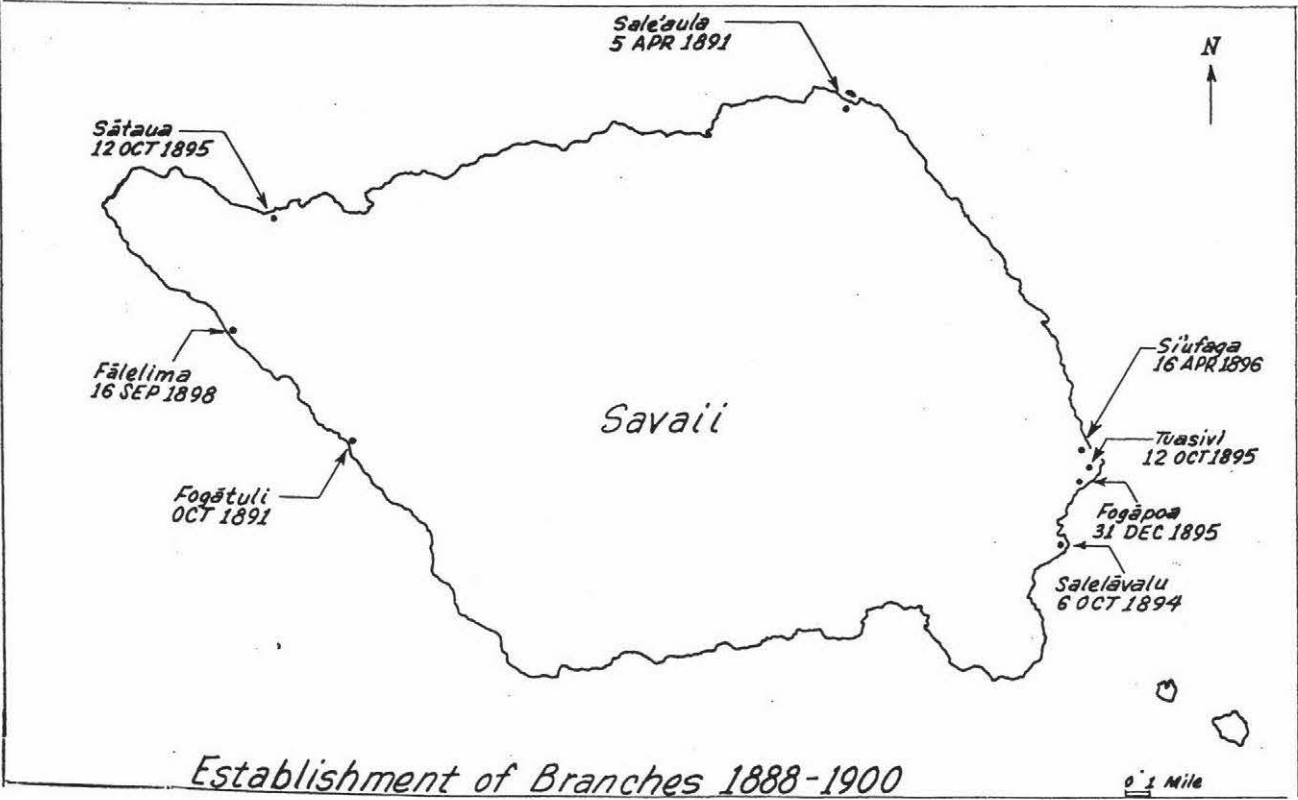
APPENDIX.....119

BIBLIOGRAPHY .....121

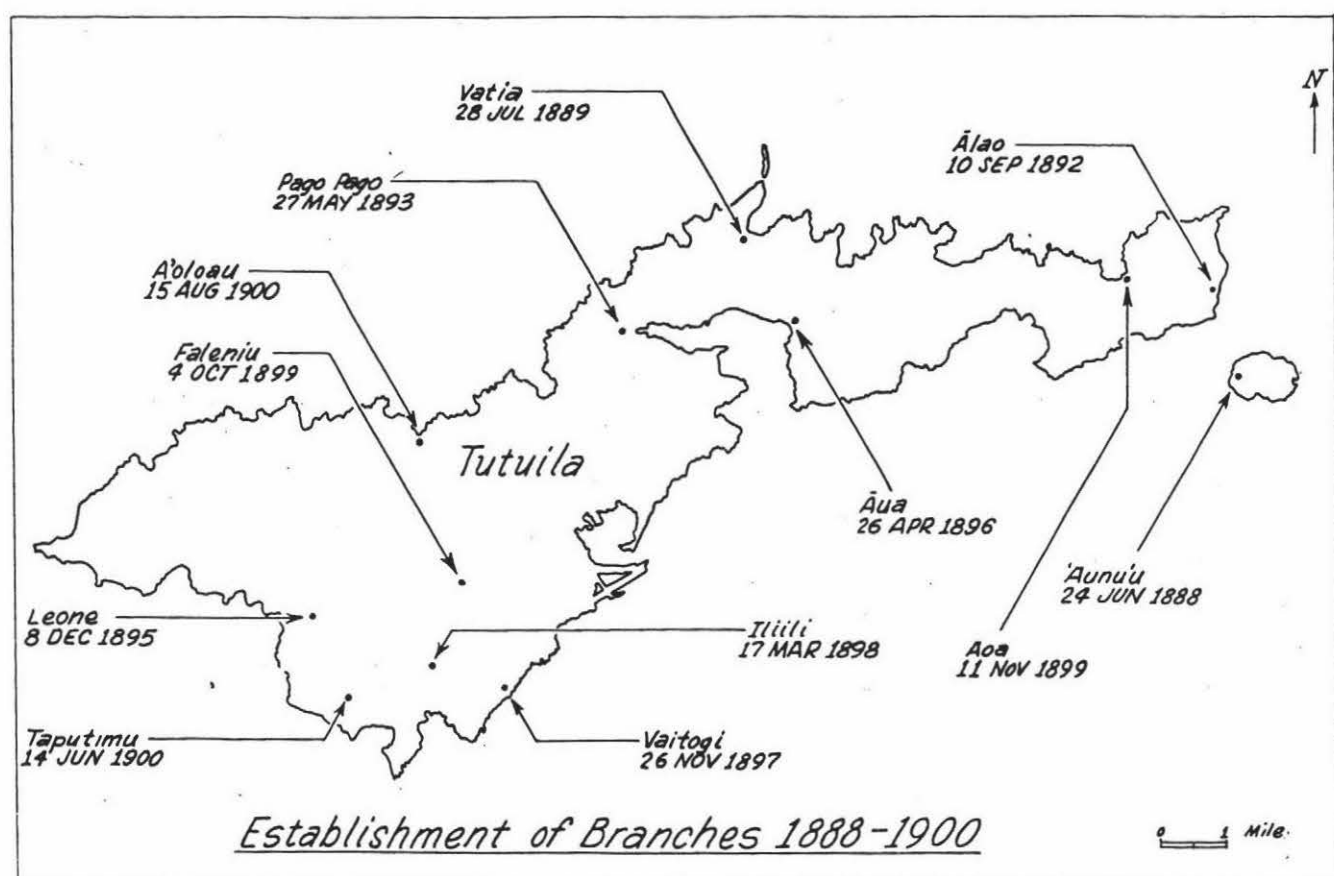
# Map of Samoa



Another map



Another



“The professional in us fights against religious naivete, while the religionist in us fights against secular naivete - believing too little. And if this internal warfare weren't enough, we have a similar two-front war externally – against non-Mormons who think we believe not enough”.

Leornard J. Arrington, Reflections on the founding and Purpose of the Mormon History Association, 1965-1983, in *Journal of Mormon History*, vol. 10, 1983: p. 101.

## Introduction

The story of Mormonism and its remarkable growth in the 1830s is well documented and will forever be part of a celebrated American nineteenth century phenomenon. The trials, tribulations and resilience the church experienced throughout this period in America have attracted attention by scholars both within and outside. There is a 'storybook' feel to the history of the church from a rural-based religion in frontier America to its present-day status as a developing and near global religious organisation generating attention and critical analysis.

### General Literature Review of Mormon History Writing

A feature of scholarly attention has been the nature of Mormon History/historiography and its journey through several stages throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century until the present time where continuing developments point to important and exciting directions. A recent published scholarly work by Ronald Walker, David J. Whittaker and James B. Allen, provided an exceptional and extensive analysis of Mormon History writing from its early beginnings till the present time with full index and biblical references.<sup>1</sup> As they indicate the first phase of Mormon Historiography during 19<sup>th</sup> Century can be characterised as highly partisan and less academic. This was manifested in the scholarly works by both the ardent Mormon defenders and Mormon antagonists. Within all the narratives, one group sought to argue the merits of Mormonism while the other sought to denounce its claims, thus leaving little room for purely academic writing in seeking to understand the nature of the people and its organisation.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ronald W. Walker (eds.), Mormon History, Chicago, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Early Mormon works included Orson Pratt, An Interesting Account of Several remarkable Visions, and of the Late discovery of Ancient American Records, Edinburgh, 1840; BH Roberts, History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 6 vols., Salt Lake City, 1902-1912; There were early Anti Mormon History writing published by Mormon defectors, journalists, rival ministers and so forth with the most notable ones are Eber D Howe, Mormonism Unvailed; or, A Faithful Account of that Singular Imposition and Delusion, Painesville, 1834; Daniel Kidder, Mormonism and the Mormons: A Historical View of the Rise and Progress of the Sect-Styled Latter-day Saints, New York, 1842.



During the early twentieth century up to the 1950s, there was a growing maturity in the history writing of Mormonism as it experienced a progressive stage. Buoyed by its developments in Utah, the Church was no longer isolated in the Rocky Mountains, as their outward emphasis on worldwide expansion allowed them to pursue more national and secular aims by becoming more involved in mainstream society. This was also mirrored in the “new direction” to the writing of Mormon history that emerged from these changes. According to Ronald W. Walker’s extensive bibliographical index on Mormon historiography, studying the past was no longer solely reliant on written sources but other tools were incorporated such as folklore, rural geography and historical sociology reflecting the Progressive and New Deal eras. There seems to be an emergence of a more professional and academic involvement provided by professional inquiry and with new interests. By the end of the period there were increasing attempts to produce more academic and balanced history writing.<sup>3</sup>

This desire was furthered by additional progress since the 1950s; Mormon history writing became more humane and universal. New methods were adopted firmly established in disciplines such as philosophy, social psychology, economics and religious studies. The new crop of historians sought a middle ground, exploring new issues not to discredit Mormonism’s claims but in the hope of broadening the foundation for awareness of Mormonism’s history.<sup>4</sup> The attempt to find a middle ground and broaden the base of Mormon history amongst the contemporary Mormon historians heightened tensions during the later 1970s to the early 1980s. Church historians and several Church leaders (namely Elder Boyd K Packer and President Benson) disagreed on the direction of Mormon written

---

<sup>3</sup> Ronald W. Walker, Mormon History, Chicago, 2001, pp. 31-51. He acknowledge numerous references to published works of this period among them Richard T Ely, Economic Aspects of Mormonism, 1903; Lowry Nelson, The Mormon Village: A Technique of Land Settlement, 1952; Fawn Mckay Brodie No Man Knows my History: The Life of Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet, New York, 1963.

<sup>4</sup> Prominent historians of this period especially within the Church are Leonard J. Arrington, Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900, Harvard, 1958; James B Allen, The Story of the Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, 1976; Then there were Institutional Historians supported by the Church to publish Religious oriented history of the Church, served at the Church University at BYU Institute for the LDS Church History Department There were a large number of articles published in Periodicals such as BYU Studies and Journal of Mormon History;; Ronald W Walker, Wayward Saints: The Godbeites and Brigham Young, University of Illinois, 1999.

output. Disputes centred on contemporary scholarly writings relating to the origins of LDS history. Church leaders supported a more faith-promoting and sympathetic narrative avoiding the secularisation of Church history writing that could escalate into tensions.<sup>5</sup> Historians like Leornard Arrington and James B. Allen questioned the hand of providence in the development of Mormon occurrences. They were willing to explore and present natural explanations by finding the balance in their writings between the outmost religious and secular outlook. Allen's work, 'The Story of the Latter-day Saints' (1977) was an archetype of this new Mormon history exploring the shaded historical issues.<sup>6</sup> The tensions eventually led to the transfer of Arrington and his band of professional Church historians from the Church's History Division to the Church University at Brigham Young University in which they established the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History. There history writing was moderately subdued and kept at a low profile.

In addition to scholarly works supported by the Mormon institution, there was also a quantity of publications by outsiders or non-Mormons written in non-Mormon Institutions. Their contributions broaden the methods and direction of Mormon history writing as sociology and religion was incorporated.<sup>7</sup> Apart from the writing of Mormon history, another development emerging from this has been the social science literature on Mormons. Scholar Armand L. Mauss analysis on Social Science literature in his 'Mormon History', (2001), distinguishes it from the literature that is purely "historical" in nature. This form of writing encompasses historical and contemporary studies of social geography,

---

<sup>5</sup> Ezra Taft Benson, God's Hand in our Nation's History, in 1976 Devotional Speeches of the Year, Provo, Utah, Brigham Young University Press, 1977. President Benson was very critical in this speech of Allen's book, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*. Also Boyd K. Packer, The Mantle Is Far Greater than the Intellect, *BYU Studies* 21 (Summer 1981): pp. 264,268. Other conservative academics also questioned the direction of secularising New Mormon History such as Richard Stephen Marshall, the New Mormon History, senior Honor's project summary, University of Utah, 1977.

<sup>6</sup> Another significant work includes Leornard J. Arrington, The Mormon experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints, New York, 1979.

<sup>7</sup> One of the earliest of scholarly works was Thomas Odea's, The Mormons, Chicago, 1957; Jan Shipps' work also introduced new methods like the "insider-outsider perspective" in a Dialogue and Book, An 'Insider-Outsider' in Zion, *Dialogue: Journal of Mormon thought* 15 (Spring 1982): p.146 and can be found in, Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition, Urbana, 1985, p 143; Armand L. Mauss, The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation, Urbana, 1994.

rural sociology and agricultural economics of Mormonism.<sup>8</sup> In its early days, there was the tendency to look at the past studying themes based on family life starting with Richard T Ely's Marxist explication on the nature of Mormonism's economy.<sup>9</sup> From the 1950s onwards there was more emphasis on quantitative and qualitative research in relation to more contemporary issues facing Mormonism such as Americanisation, assimilation, accommodation, the role of women, secularisation, modernisation and religiosity. For instance this is evident in scholarly works by Jan Shipps and Harold Bloom to name a few.<sup>10</sup> Both Mormon and non-Mormon scholars have acknowledged the importance of the religious experiences as data rather than purely myth.

There are further directions that Mormon history writing is exploring and there remain identified gaps to be ultimately filled. In a combined edited published work by Walker, Whittaker and Allen, they recognised areas to be further developed. They include scholarly biographies, Church expansion beyond Utah and histories of the common Mormon people while in social science literature on the Latter-day Saints. Also there is the need for analysis on the contemporary period and on the establishment of durable Mormon communities in exotic locales just to name a few.<sup>11</sup>

### Mormons in the Pacific

Since the beginning of missionary activity in the Pacific throughout the nineteenth century, the islanders had encountered various forms of Christian missions. The significance of the London Missionary Society landing on Tahiti at Matavai Bay in 1797 had tremendous implications for missionary work in the Pacific. The early and largely

---

<sup>8</sup> Armand L. Mauss, Flowers, Weeds, and Thistles: The State of Social Science Literature on the Mormons, in Walker (eds), *Mormon History*, Chicago, 2001, pp. 153-56.

<sup>9</sup> Richard T. Ely, Economic Aspects of Mormonism, *Harpers's Monthly* 106, April 1903, p. 668.

<sup>10</sup> Jan Shipps, Mormonism: A New Religious Tradition, Urbana, 1984; Harold Bloom, *Toward a Social Science of Contemporary Mormondom*, *BYU Studies* 26, (Winter 1986), pp. 73-121.

<sup>11</sup> Cited by Walker, pp. 95-176.

successful efforts of the London Missionary Society in establishing a permanent foothold on Tahiti paved the way for the influx of missionary societies and organisations eager to taste conversion success. Intense competition amongst them saw efforts to solidify and increase from this favourable foundation while at times others attempted to discredit their rivals.

The middle of the nineteenth century witnessed the arrival of other Protestant groups in the form of the Methodists and Wesleyans, together with the Catholics created a healthy competition. Inevitably there were outlined areas of influence, as competition became territorial. The LMS ventured off to the Melanesian Islands having already established themselves in Samoa and Rarotonga. The Catholics were very influential in central Polynesia and in Tahiti while the Methodists were an irresistible force in Tonga.

Increased competition was furthered by the arrival of additional mission organisations in the form of the Mormons and the Seventh Day Adventist in the second half of the nineteenth century. Rather than pioneering and evangelising unfamiliar territories and islands, the Mormons took a somewhat cautious and less adventurous approach. They targeted already harvested and christianised fields, beginning with Tahiti in 1844 and Hawaii during the 1850s. This general pattern throughout the Pacific was very much applicable to the situation in Samoa. Protestant and Catholic values particularly were noticeably incorporated into Samoan society.

Contrary to these beginnings and similarities in achievement and influences on Samoan society, the Mormon arrival was belated and experienced limited success in its early years. The initial Mormon story was somewhat different as they alienated themselves from island politics preferring to focus on proselytising and religious matters.

Analysing significant scholarly works devoted to Mormonism in the Pacific and in Samoa reveal a paucity of academic research and analysis on any issue. Besides New Zealand and to an extent Australia, where there have been several published and unpublished works throughout the years in the form of theses, there has been less work

done.<sup>12</sup> References are made sporadically on very few topics but the bulk of the analysis has been done by Church academics with the sole intention of providing a more generalised history of the whole area. The scope of Ellsworth and Britsch's works has been vast in scope but thin in analysis.

In terms of in-depth Latter-day Saints research relating to Samoa, Carl Harris and John Hart have produced the lone extensive analysis in their book to celebrate the centennial of the founding of the LDS Apia Mission in 1888.<sup>13</sup> Their book was geared towards a more institutional and religious audience than academic. Along with an article by Kenneth Baldrige, they provide some invaluable historical data and a narrative of early Mormon developments especially the first decade.<sup>14</sup> The concern is that such works are hardly recent and Church centred instead of providing unbiased in-depth analysis.

There are still a large number of unread primary materials available for analysis on the historical developments of the work in Samoa. There are published sources, manuscripts, journals and other materials making such an exercise viable.

### Purpose of Thesis

The literature review of Mormon history writing revealed that neglected topics identified within Mormon history writing in general including scholarly works in the

<sup>12</sup> There has been a fairly extensive historical analysis in the Pacific. Accounts of the church include Brian Hunt, *Zion in New Zealand*, Hamilton, 1974; R. Lanier Britsch, *Moramona: The Mormons in Hawaii*, Laie, Hawaii, 1989; *Unto the Islands of the Sea: A History of the Latter-day Saints in the Pacific*, Salt Lake City, 1986, Ian Barker, *The Connexion: The Mormon Church and the Maori People*, Victoria University of Wellington, M.A. thesis, 1965; Marjorie Newton, *Southern Cross Saints*, Sydney, 1994 (?); Max Stanton, *Samoan Saints: Samoans in the Mormon Village of Laie*, Laie, Hawaii, Dissertation, June, 1973; Kenneth Baldrige, *Sauniatu, Western Samoa: A Special Purpose Village, 1904-34* in *Journal of Polynesian Society*, vol 87, 1978, pp. 165-192. Non-Mormon scholars include Norman Douglas, *Latter-day Saints Missions and Missionaries in Polynesia, 1844-1960*, National University of Australia, PhD Dissertation, Canberra, 1974; Peter Lineham, *The Mormon Message in the Context of Maori Culture*, in *Journal of Mormon history*, vol 17, 1991, pp 62-93. Non-Academic history include Grant Underwood, *Explorations in Pacific History*, Provo, Utah, 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Jennie M. Hart, John W. Hart & R. Carl Harris, *Samoan Mission History 1888-1900 vol. I*, unpublished, June 1988, Sesquicentennial of 100 years of Mormon Apia Mission 1888-1988. Carl Harris also distributed an unpublished work earlier called, *History of the Samoan Apia Mission*, unpublished, 1983.

<sup>14</sup> Cited Baldrige, pp. 165-192

Pacific and social science literature. This study intends to explore Mormon history beyond Utah analysing historical aspects of a common Mormon people in the Pacific Islands, Samoa. The scope of this study will therefore focus on conceptualising the Mormon doctrine of Gathering with particular emphasis on analysing its application to the establishment of Samoan Mormon communities in the earliest years of the Church principally the Mormon village of Sauniatu. The thesis further examines the significance of the establishing of Mormon gathering communities in Samoa. This importance has wide ranging implications to Church development at the time and in the impending years to come. I acknowledge that even such an analysis induces me to speculate and generalise due to the limited nature of other primary sources.

It is hoped that this historical examination will be followed by the opportunity in future research to analyse the contemporary period of Mormonism in Samoa to understand how the past has affected the present. It is plausible that from such a study may spring forth new methods and directions that will hopefully contribute to Mormon history writing, perhaps generating more scholarly research on Mormon issues in the Pacific especially in Samoa. The prospective questions may include the effects of Mormonism on the indigenous population and also Pacific influence on the Church. Also there is a need to understand the nature of retention of commitment and the need for continued maintenance from historical to recent times within the Church in this locale.

The study will be based on unpublished primary material situated at the Latter-day Saints Church Archives in Salt Lake City. Not surprisingly a more in-depth analysis and picture emerges than drawn by previous researches. Similarly to the story of the Church in mainland America and in Hawaii, this study finds evidence of little success in its earlier years and the constant struggles to overcome challenges. There were partly some successes for Mormon development that eventually came into fruition in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup>

---



century, but the events leading up to the gathering and at the time of its discontinuation, there was little success.

Due to the significance of this notion of the Gathering as elementary to Mormon development, there is the common tendency to be tempted into exploring too many streams to make a valid assessment. These aspects will become more comprehensible as they are explored. The conclusion of the thesis will argue that there is an immense potential to expand this study and further analyse the contemporary period involving the contribution of such a community to contemporary Mormon development in such a locale as Samoa. Also did the establishment of such a Mormon community and its aftermath contribute in building a durable Mormon infrastructure while in isolation away from the central Mormon administration at Pesega?

There are challenges to the form of narrative in this research especially to find a suitable structural framework. Because the topic is still in its scholarly infancy I have experimented with a type of narrative that incorporates a balance of both historical narrative and analysis. I acknowledge that the topic may be refined and improved by others in future studies, as more specialist and comparative research is done. A final comment is that this is not a genuinely island-oriented perspective due to the emphasis of the project and the difficulties in sources of obtaining island attitudes and opinions.

#### A Note on Sources and Statistics

It will be noticed that there is an extensive use of Latter-day Saint primary materials in this thesis ranging from missionary journals, diaries, letters, and autobiographies to Branch unit records. The primary sources used are kept at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Church History Office and Archives in Salt Lake City Utah. The

unpublished materials used are missionary journals by Samoan Mission Presidents namely Dean, Merrill and Sanders.

In addition to these unpublished journals there was also missionary letters sent to the Church newspaper *Deseret News* to be published throughout Church circles. It is very useful for analysing the early years of Church development in Samoa especially to get a feel of the atmosphere and picture of Mormon activity, success, failure and attitudes towards the work. The bulk of these letters along with typescript extracts from statistical reports of the Samoan Mission, Mission President reports and newspaper clippings are incorporated in the Samoan Manuscript History kept at the Church History Office and Archives.

Andrew Jensen who later became the Assistant Church historian in 1897 and held this position for a lengthy period of time collected the majority of these records and documents. He made a visit throughout the Pacific amongst the several Missions including Samoa in the mid 1890s with a twofold assignment of gathering historical information and records to assisting in establishing more effective record keeping amongst the Church Missions.

The latter chapters of the Thesis rely heavily on the Sauniatu Branch Records also kept at the Church Archives. The missionaries assigned in Sauniatu were responsible for recording all the events occurring during their tenure there. It consists of the day-to-day entries of village life and activities referring to both secular matters of church village life and spiritual matters concerning people in the Branch. This in-depth analysis of the nature of the village may not have been possible without this invaluable resource. I am aware of the weakness of these sources because of the absence of indigenous Samoan voices and documents, but such materials are almost non-existent. Indeed there is a great deal of "American missionary" bias and this is unfortunate. However it is difficult to avoid, as it is the only ones available. Despite the difficulties of the exercise in reading the silences, perhaps it is still possible to obtain an understanding of indigenous Samoan voices through their responses and actions as recorded in the missionary records.



In terms of statistics and figures, it is very difficult to illustrate at times the impact of a certain argument due to official records not disclosing any exact statistical information during my visit to the Archives. There is no real accuracy in membership numbers in some years. Hence at times data utilised were obtained from published secondary sources, and they have extracted their information from the Church Archives since their works were institutionally based.<sup>15</sup> The statistics used in this thesis is for comparative purposes.

---

<sup>15</sup>

The bulk of the references will be on the works by Baldrige, Hart and Harris.

## Chapter One – Mormon Beginning and Gathering

### Mormon Origins

Prior to any investigation, it may be helpful at the outset to briefly give a historical summary that will provide a context for the gathering pattern throughout the Pacific. The church organisation commenced on 6 April 1830. Its founding prophet Joseph Smith organised the church based on having gained a revelation from God to restore the true church that Christ had organised upon the earth again. His prophetic duty included translating hidden records that has produced the Book of Mormon known to the world as “the Mormon Bible”. The organisation of the church was to be a literal duplicate of the church established by Jesus Christ in the New Testament times. God’s priesthood authority was established with Joseph Smith and exercised amongst all worthy males. There were Apostles set apart or ordained to administer the work and implement other intricate positions that gave the church a distinctive working character.

### Early Mormon Gatherings

The early years of the Church establishment changed from a series of small areas conglomerating into larger solid Latter-day Saint communities. Their doctrines and practices often led to clashes with the locals. In due course they were frequently driven out. The Kirtland, Ohio community was the primary established one, progressive and vibrant. Joseph organised an ordered ecclesiastical leadership that was regarded as divinely inspired while at the same time concentrating efforts on the rigorous Church missionary program that was concentrated in the North American continent and Europe in the mid to late 1830s.<sup>16</sup> Joseph received a revelation by July 1831 appointing Independence, Missouri as

---

<sup>16</sup> The Church regards the Doctrine and Covenants as modern day revelations from god to the Church via the prophet Joseph Smith. Section 107 was a revelation Joseph Smith received in relation to the efficient organisation and administering of the Priesthood Order in the Mormon Church; other sections relevant include sections 20 and 84; B. H Roberts, ed., History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake, 1902-1912, vol. 2, pp. 489-490.

the site for Zion's "centre place". Kirtland became a temporary gathering headquarter or staging post for preparation for this shift. Harassment by the locals eventually drove the Saints out in 1837.<sup>17</sup>

The Saints established another major gathering in Nauvoo, Illinois where the settlement blossomed and became at the time a prominent city in the state. This recuperative period was very fruitful. There was the influx of Mormon Saints from Europe who brought with them the many trades that revamped the swamp settlement into a prosperous community. However a mixture of adversity with growing persecution by the locals coupled with the death of their leader Joseph Smith, convinced the new leader Brigham Young, of the need to relocate elsewhere where the Saints could freely worship.<sup>18</sup> Under his fervent leadership, the saints moved westward, on a spiritual migration.

Following the arduous trek throughout the Midwest, they finally established a sanctuary in the Rocky Mountains of Utah. The barren land became fruitful and transformed into an attractive valley of peace and refuge. These years of isolation were advantageous to Church growth, as the saints were untroubled in their worship and doctrines (including polygamy and ecclesiastical authority) by opposition from non-Mormons in the East. During these years the Mormons settled in other parts of Utah establishing a church network under central supervision from Salt Lake City.

### Doctrinal Concept of Gathering

Examining Mormon gatherings add greatly to the understanding of community building whether secular or ecclesiastical. It is worth considering how far the creation of these communities was a matter of necessity. In view of numerous Mormon gatherings, it is noteworthy to examine the significance of the doctrine of gathering and its changing nature throughout the years.

---

<sup>17</sup> B. H Roberts, vol. 3, pp. 1-4.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 7, pp. 439, 478.

Deeply imbedded in the Mormon gathering concept was the idea of creating Zion which in Mormon terms described in a revelation Joseph Smith received from God as the Kingdom of God established on earth, where divine laws are to be obeyed primarily in conjunction with political or secular laws:

That the kingdoms of this world may be constrained to acknowledge that the kingdom of Zion is in very deed the kingdom of our God and his Christ, let us become subject to her laws.<sup>19</sup>

Subsequent Latter-day Saint leaders further quoted Joseph Smith as saying:

“I teach them correct principles, and they govern themselves”.<sup>20</sup>

This concept is fully embedded in the gathering process. This is evident by the fact that every Latter-day gathering highlighted not only as places of strength and refuge, but education principles and practises. For instance Sauniatu along with the earlier gatherings in mainland America became major schools of religious and secular education for its members. Principles of self-reliance, latter-day belief of religious education referring to education for eternity combined with secular education were implemented. It was expected that such places would eventually produce faithful members and self-supporting.

The concept of Zion in historical terms is often referred to in Biblical times. It has been used with a variety of meanings including a location, an idealistic spiritual condition both as individuals and as a collective group complying with divine laws and as a promised place/land of inheritance. The Biblical prophets often referred to the city of Jerusalem as Zion while prophesying of a future Zion.<sup>21</sup> Mormon interpretation followed along similar

---

<sup>19</sup> Doctrine and Covenants, section 105:32, pp. 213-214.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted by John Taylor, *Millennial Star*, 15 November, 1851, p. 339.

<sup>21</sup> Biblical references to the city of Jerusalem, 2 Samuel 5:7,1; 1 Kings 8:1; to a future Zion in include Romans 11:26; Revelations 14:1.

beliefs with a variety of meanings. Besides following Biblical doctrines, in their modern day scriptures, Zion denoted both past and future geographic locations and a state of spiritual apogee and extremity. For instance there are references to the city of Enoch and the state of the people spoken of in *The Pearl of Great Price* as “one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them”.<sup>22</sup> There was also a contemporary allusion locating the city of the New Jerusalem or Zion in Jackson County, Missouri.<sup>23</sup>

Examining the Mormon application of Zion in relation to its numerous gathering communities in the nineteenth century reveals that it experienced several transformations and generated widespread appeal amongst the Latter-day Saints. The application of the concept often reflected Mormon experiences and struggles at that particular period. The early years of the Church in the Eastern States (New York, Ohio and Missouri) and later Utah were often unstable and troublesome due to unfriendly relations with the locals, constant resettling and an unstable financial program. Interestingly the Zion/Gathering concept denoted a limited geographic entity. This was bound by territory (in this case the Mormon communities in Kirtland, Independence, Nauvoo and Utah), culture (encouraging Mormon industry of work and collective co-operation). Hence there was an influx of saints to gather together for protection and nourishment even from all over the world, most notably Europe. The Mormons were fully committed to gather to central locations and developed utopian communities that were self-sufficient and with the mentality of strength and solidarity.

With the establishment of a solid foothold in Utah, gaining national acceptance and the closing of the American frontier, the Latter-day Saints embarked in broadening its conception of a worldwide Zion. Instead of a limited view and boundary, the concept was more extensive as location was no longer the issue, but rather the sense of spirit and attitude

---

<sup>22</sup> The Pearl of Great Price is also regarded in the Mormon Church as scripture. This verse can be found in *Moses 7:18*, p. 22.

<sup>23</sup> Doctrine and Covenants, section 57: 1-2, p. 102.

in establishing Zion worldwide. The latter years of the nineteenth century (1890s-1900) saw this change of policy beginning with the encouragement of members to remain in their lands and build up Zion.

The period 1890-1900 was a time of transition for the Church. Because of the favourable circumstances the Saints enjoyed in Utah, there was a new emphasis to expand the faith worldwide and encourage the converts to remain in their geographic localities. The extensive meaning of gathering reflected these changes especially in the Pacific. The emphasis on a specific body of gathering was replaced by the more broad outward expansion. There was a changing Mormon emphasis in regard to her establishments such as local Stakes and settlements worldwide as a world Zion. When combined it represented a unified distinct culture for Latter-day Saints globally. So the meaning for gathering in the Pacific was extended to incorporating settling, colonising, consolidating Mormon growth in the hope of changing local attitudes to living the Latter-day Saints principles in its fullest. It was utilised as a nostalgic and idealistic doctrine to motivate expansion. Historian James B Allen remarked that such was the case in Hawaii where the Hawaiian members were advised to remain to build up Zion in their areas even though there was great determination to move and gather to Utah.<sup>24</sup> The gatherings in Hawaii, at Lanai and especially Laie, were established to teach the Hawaiian Saints to grow within the Church system as well as devout in attitude and practical application of church principles. It is against this background that the Gathering concept was to be applied in Samoa.

### Earlier Precedents/attempts of Gathering amongst other groups

Placing this concept of gathering and communal living in a broader sense it indicates greater significance historically and worldwide inasmuch as it reflects similar precedents to other non-Mormon utopian style communities. Establishing Utopian-like

---

<sup>24</sup> James B. Allen and Richard O. Cowan, Mormonism in the Twentieth Century, Provo, 1964, pp. 1-18.

communities was a common practice amongst religious groups throughout the centuries.<sup>25</sup> In the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries, the Second Great Awakening had given rise to numerous Utopian religious community settlements in America. Historians such as Warren commented that there were over two hundred Utopian communities there. The bulk of these settlements practised communal living based on secular theories of social laws such as the Owenites & Faurierist colonies while some embedded in religious perfectionism and millennial purposes like the Oneida community.<sup>26</sup> These were spread out largely in the eastern part of the United States like the Shakers in New York as was other communities nearby Kirtland Ohio where some of Mormons settlers had established themselves. Warren argued that such a fertile religious environment could have possibly influenced the communitarian societies of Joseph Smith and the Mormons, as it contained features of communal living such as economic and social co-operation.<sup>27</sup> Such an argument was characteristic of early Mormon history writing up to the 1950s with one side being the auspicious Mormon writers and on the other the antagonist non-Mormon writers.<sup>28</sup> Touching on this matter induces the mind to wonder and speculate. Could the idea of gathering and Zion practised by the Mormons as doctrine have an earlier precedent? Could God have inspired these early non-Mormon communities at least in part as attempts to create a Zion in their own right? Indeed there are enormous similarities between these religious organisations with that rather introverted and unified spirit of solidarity but will not be discussed in this thesis. Perhaps future in-depth comparative study in understanding these relationships and differences may contribute to expanded evaluation.

---

<sup>25</sup> Frederick J. Reiter, *They Built Utopia: The Jesuit missions in Paraguay 1610-1768*, Potomac, Md, 1995. Refers to the Jesuits in South America in the 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>26</sup> For a brief description and discussion of these earlier communities see David Stanley Warren, *The Mormon Gathering: its origins, Power and Transition as a key concept in Latter-day Saints History*, NorthWestern University, M.A Thesis, 1966, p. 24; Fawn Mckay Brodie, *No Man Knows my History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, pp. 12-15.

<sup>27</sup> Warren, p.24

<sup>28</sup> Providential writers namely Orson Pratt and B.H Roberts. Non Mormon academics were Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*.



## The Distinctively Mormon Concept of Gathering (Mode and Method)

Notwithstanding this likeness to other collective congregational settlements, a distinctive aspect of Mormon practise was the inseparable relationship between physical gathering (establishing congregations or Mormon communities) and this diverse concept of Zion.

In due course, these two inseparable expressions became the driving force as an organising concept for Mormon system of settlement (the assembling of members).<sup>29</sup> Despite the changing nature of its meaning and usage throughout the nineteenth century (time), clearly there was a similar pattern that occurred in all the settlements. Examining the pattern reveals generally distinctively Mormon features of social arrangement.

Several academics have analysed the nature of Mormon organisation and settling. A notable historian has been Arrington. His book 'Great Basin Kingdom: An economic History of the Latter-day Saints 1830-1900' (1958) represented the New Mormon Historian's perspective. His research implied that Mormon's great Basin Kingdom, was the agent of a vast enterprise of centralised decision making and regulation. This involved theocratic social ideas of homogeneity, equality, and totality coinciding with New Deal planners.<sup>30</sup> Charles Edwin Cummings provides a descriptive conceptual overview of this settling model to be utilised in this research in order to understand its nature and the relation of Sauniatu settlement to the colonisation pattern. His research although not recent, is an apt study in relation to this as it deals with the nature of general Mormon colonisation. The Church believed in expansion and establishing Mormon settlement was an instrument

---

<sup>29</sup> Latter-day historians frequently use the term colonisation. When referring to this system they practiced of establishing Mormon gathering communities. In this essay, colonisation will be constantly interchanged with settling and settlement.

<sup>30</sup> Leonard J. Arrington, Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints 1830-1900, p. ix; Other earlier works include Thomas O'Dea, Mormon Values: The Significance of a Religious Outlook for Social Action, Harvard, unpublished Ph. D Dissertation, 1953; June Campbell Haugaard, Some aspects of pioneer Life in Utah 1846-1861, New York city, M.A Thesis, 1950;



to achieving this goal. This expansion was for the purpose of strengthening outnumbered Mormons in areas and countries directed by an effective local leadership, in turn perpetuating a strong central Mormon leadership. Mormon members were encouraged to proselytise in their local areas with the eventual hope of converting non-Mormons and leading to continuing growth.<sup>31</sup> The religious meaning of the gathering doctrine was that the saints were taught it was their mission to inherit the earth. For this reason they were willing to suffer the persecutions in the gathering places in Ohio, Missouri, Illinois and Salt Lake.<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore Cummings argued that the basis of this Mormon colonisation scheme was primarily centred on the power of Mormon organisation. The leaders understood the value of utilising the members by the use of their faith, labour and capital. Its role in gathering the idle, the vicious, unproductive and making them within a short time a productive community, benefited growth as it would strengthen Church hierarchy. On a larger scale it assisted in guiding the economic and clerical ambitions of the Church to be financially stable and to become a world Church.<sup>33</sup> Such a viewpoint may be taken in another way to indicate that a more positive purpose was for settlements and local Mormon gatherings to be more self-sufficient without reliance upon central administration. Further to this positive suggestion is that it was profitable for extensive Mormon Mission development on a broader scale. Having stable and trained members would contribute to assistance with missionary proselytising.

Likewise strong leadership was also a significant element of the colonisation scheme. Cummings stated that this was necessary to wield the people into a cohesive unit. He relates to Joseph Smith as an example of strong leadership. His allegedly divinely inspired wisdom and overall understanding enabled him to recognise the type of people

---

31 Charles Edwin Cummings, *The Mormon System of Colonisation*, Oklahoma, M.A Thesis, 1946, pp. 67-70, 80.

32 *ibid.*, p. pp. 68-69.

33 Note: the Church had experienced early financial difficulties up until the 1890s. *ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

(members) he was dealing with. The Church government was set up in a way to direct the saints in all aspects of their lives. The leaders were ecclesiastical but showed skills and expertise in secular matters. Joseph encouraged this multi-skilled leadership within the Church system to be applied from the central to local administration.<sup>34</sup>

Third, a foundation for the colonisation scheme was the development of a system of finance. Once the members were settled, they were swiftly instructed into the Mormon system of finance. They were expected to subscribe their capital to Mormon enterprises such as Mormon Church buildings and stock. If they had none then their labour (in terms of physical strength), knowledge and expertise in general fields were rendered to the cause.<sup>35</sup>

The customary basis for this system of finance involved agriculture and ranching. It had numerous benefits for the saints. It was to feed them; to serve as a potential profit venture within the larger society they were living in and subsequently be the simplest way of maintaining control of the saints. The uncomplicated rural life rarely caused the leaders any trouble in guiding the well being of the colonists. The agricultural system was to promote individual proprietorship in order that men could provide for their family and a collective program where co-operation was expected especially in the early years when clearing the land and developing a settlement economic enterprise for community survival. In such a scheme, land given to members unmortgaged enabled the Church to comfortably control the member population.

The process of establishment was usually customary in the Mormon system of colonisation. Arriving at a new location they commenced the task of settling in a new area. If the local environment was unfavourable usually due to external conditions (persecutions) there was the tendency to find a suitable location to purchase land. The selection criteria were usually based on its feasibility for long-term economic sustenance of

---

<sup>34</sup>        *ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>35</sup>        *ibid.*, p.72.

a settlement and a geographically safe environment for Mormon practices to be implemented without any harassment. Once it was established, there was the recruitment stage where local leaders and missionaries became the recruiting advocates, and they would travel within the settlement vicinity to encourage other members to gather.

Once they assembled, ecclesiastical authority would supervise such a gathering in accordance with local and central administration approval (usually from the First Presidency of the Church). The nature of such settlements would be rooted in both Church teachings involving principles of service and doctrinal practices, to strengthen latter-day Saints members and building for a greater purpose along with future developments. Expansion from these settlements would only take place when new converts made it necessary and that the external environment was favourable.

It seems that such a method was applied when Mormonism was firmly established in Utah. Cummings argues this was a conventional pattern used in the colonising of territories in the Western United States.<sup>36</sup>

### Expansion outside Utah

During Church expansion throughout Utah and the neighbouring States of Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada and Colorado, there was the decision by Brigham Young and his apostles, the higher authority of the Church to expand Church missionary work throughout Europe, Scandinavia and opening the work in the Pacific. Addison Pratt was sent to the Society Islands while George Q Cannon was appointed to Hawaii in the 1850s.

Mormon penetration was stagnating in Hawaii as the Saints experienced similar hardship like the previous gatherings and there was a decision by the Church leaders of the feasibility to establish a gathering place for the Saints. Britsch commented that this

<sup>36</sup>

Cummings identified this as "desert colonisation". Ibid., pp. 22-28.

antagonism came from the government, rival denominations and the locals in general.<sup>37</sup> The earliest gathering place in the region was in Hawaii on the island of Lanai. Once again the settlement was transitory when the missionaries were called back to Utah to help strengthen the Church. Britsch argued there was mass apostasy and the newness of the church wearied off with the locals.<sup>38</sup> The return of the missionaries further strengthened church progress and a new gathering place was established in Laie on the island of Oahu in 1865. Here the church gradually grew and prospered. Like the gathering in Salt Lake, its geographic location was favourable. According to Britsch, it became an important centre of learning and a refuge for the local Saints.<sup>39</sup>

### Application of the Gathering/Zion concept in Samoa

This same model can be applied to the circumstances that occurred mainly in Hawaii (Laie) and Samoa. The principal objective of this thesis therefore is to analyse the Mormon situation in Samoa, evaluate how the gathering concept occurred and how the pattern fits into the Samoan experience. It also provides a clear understanding of the origins and nature of the early years of the Church in Samoa from 1888 to 1930, while conceptualising the reasons for adopting policies that they embraced and how it affected its early development.

---

<sup>37</sup> Britsch, *Moramona: the Mormons in Hawaii*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 73-75.

## **Chapter Two – ‘Le Taeao Mamona’: Mormon arrival and the first decade in Samoa 1888-1900**

The local Mormon leaders never envisioned the idea of a Samoan gathering. Numerous predicaments caused them to devote attention to the thought, the likelihood of implementing the Latter-day Saint gathering model. Prior to this happening, examining the earliest experiences of Mormons in Samoa often were characterised by hardship and struggle to establish a niche in a religiously transforming and politically unstable society. Early Mormon endeavours to respond to these challenges were to an extent successful but there existed further barriers at the beginning of the twentieth century, which made it highly desirable to investigate the possibility of establishing a Samoan gathering.

### **Early Mormon Interest/Activity in Samoa**

The founding of the Latter-day Saint church began unofficially following an ambitious strategy by an audacious and adventurous convert journeyman. It was a stepping-stone to his ambition and vision of establishing a large-scale political empire in Malaysia.<sup>40</sup> There was the allurement of the prospect of broadening his hegemonic control across the Pacific. Walter Murray Gibson's appointment as a church labourer/missionary to Japan and Malaysia following his visit to Hawaii in 1861 was short lived. There he progressively dominated church proceedings by 1862 and swiftly established a settlement at Palawai solidifying his authority amongst the locals. Using this as a base for his ambitious operations, his strategies included the appointment of two Hawaiian members to Samoa. Gibson fraudulently ordained Kimo Belio an ordained apostle and Samuela Manoa as an ordained seventy member in his ecclesiastical hierarchy without the approval of the Latter-day Saints First Presidency.

---

<sup>40</sup> Walter Murray Gibson to Brigham Young, Letters to Brigham Young, September 2, 1861. (refer to p.546 'Unto the Islands of the Sea')

The two missionaries arrived in Samoa on January 24 1863 at the island of Aunu'u where they established a central base. They did not enjoy any instant success and their influence was confined mainly on Aunu'u. Despite Gibson's excommunication from the Latter-day Saints Church in April 1864, there were attempts by the two Hawaiian missionaries to take the gospel to the bigger islands of Tutuila and Upolu but they were unsuccessful as in the next thirteen years, they only converted around forty-six members. The missionaries established a small following for years without any real accomplishment. A report by the missionary Harvey E. Cluff to the *Deseret News* mentioned the Hawaiian Elders' report to President Heber of the Hawaiian Mission describing the progress of their work there. They reported that they had raised up churches and possessed an overall membership of at least 200 members.<sup>41</sup>

While in Samoa, there were continuous attempts to establish contact with Church officials but there was inconsistent response. This persistency was based on the need for direction and assistance from the church. The two missionaries became concerned with the direction of the work and the need for more missionaries to assist in the branches established and expanding the work throughout the bigger islands. Their work would have been hindered also by several more unfortunate circumstances. As time went by Belio who at the time was the presiding authority excommunicated Manoa for immorality reasons. When Belio died in 1876, there was no presiding authority left. The effects of Belio's absence would have been significant in the expansion of their missionary work. Manoa's excommunication would have limited his authority and persuasiveness to be an effectual leader. Nevertheless Manoa continued to contact Latter-day authorities. Eventually two of his letters reached the Hawaiian Mission President Heber but there was no action taken at that time.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Elder Harvey H. Cluff, 15 Octobers 1871, *Deseret News* 20:484, Church Archives.

<sup>42</sup> Reported to the *Deseret News* on 15 October 1871, *Deseret News* 20:484; 19 August 1872, *Deseret News* 21:310.

Examining Church activities at the time of the Hawaiian elders' appointment and their activities in Samoa offers insights into the possible reasons to why communication was difficult or non-existent. On one side, there is the thought that the church might have ignored the elders for years, because they were unauthorised. It is plausible that the Hawaiian Mission President Nebeker, who was informed by as early as 1871 about the presence of Hawaiian missionaries in Samoa, would have been hesitant to send help immediately. There would have been an uncertainty concerning the activities and motives of these missionaries there since knowledge of their work was only made known through their letters. An attitude of vigilance would have been exercised to prevent the Church from being accused or linked to any negative activities that may have been associated with the two missionaries. Then again it is possible that Church leaders in Hawaii would have been acrimonious towards the missionaries because of their involvement with Gibson.

On the other hand analysing Church activities gives us a different and more rational picture. There seem to be a number of explanations of the Church's slow response. One reason was the ignorance of the Church leaders in Salt Lake of the Hawaiian missionaries' activities in Samoa until they were informed in 1871. The difficulty in communication at the time was an obstacle. The leaders were reluctant to maintain contact with the Hawaiian missionaries because of the uncertainty and unpredictability of communication services between Hawaii and Samoa. For instance President Hebeker expressed this concern in his letter to the Deseret Newspaper. He stated:

We received the other day a letter from our native brethren, who are on the Navigator Islands. They speak of the Church there being alive, and are very anxious to hear from their brethren in Zion....There is as yet no mail carried to those islands, and it makes it difficult to correspond with them.<sup>43</sup>

Another reason was that the Church was still preoccupied with the numerous challenges at home. The thought of expanding to Samoa was never in the immediate plans

---

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, 19 August 1872, 21:310.



of church expansion. The Church was still consolidating its presence in Utah and still undergoing persecution from the U.S government over doctrinal practises like polygamy. This was also the period where they had summoned the entire missionaries home for protection against governmental pressure during the late 1850s-1860s.<sup>44</sup> The effects of this withdrawal aided the rise of Gibson in Hawaii. The Latter-day Saints authorities were cautious but generally supportive of the idea to officially open a mission in Samoa. But the 1860s-1890s was a time of critical leadership shortages in the church. So many capable leaders were in hiding or otherwise indisposed because of polygamy. For instance Joseph Dean who later became the first Mission President to preside over the Samoan Mission was at the time in Hawaii with his second wife to avoid a second prison term.

When Church problems at home eased, they learned of Gibson's activities and promptly sent a delegation to excommunicate him in 1864 and repair the damages he had caused. Following these actions they gradually became aware of other Pacific work and their attention was drawn to the missionary activity in Samoa.

Church historian Lanier Britsch had similar views concerning the unhurried response to the Hawaiian missionaries' letters. He acknowledged that Manoa's letters ending up in places besides Church headquarters might have caused part of the slow response. Britsch also emphasised such a subject needed careful consideration because little information is available in relation to it even in the historical records. He concluded the church leaders took a conservative approach to wait until further information was received and take the matter into careful consideration instead of rushing into a situation that may prove fatal.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Well documented in B.H Roberts, A Comprehensive History of the Church, Salt Lake, 1930.

<sup>45</sup> Britsch, Unto the Islands of the Sea, pp. 350-352.



## Background to Early Mormon interest in Samoa and the state of Samoan Society prior to Mormon Arrival

When one of Manoa's letters finally reached President Taylor (the church leader at the time), he sent it to the President of the Hawaiian Mission to investigate the matter. Following this correspondence, Joseph Dean discovered the letter and requested the First Presidency for authorisation to communicate with Manoa. The momentous event that followed was Dean's authorisation to begin a Mission in Samoa for the Church.

Gibson's activities in Hawaii attracted several discussions. It is safe to say that his appointment of missionaries to Samoa contributed to accelerating Church interest and involvement in Samoa. Even though the response was unhurried until 1888, it alerted the leaders of the need to investigate the situation. It pulled the Church to greater involvement until inevitably led to an officially established presence in Samoa. Historian Douglas acknowledged the contribution of Gibson in drawing the church's attention to the opportunity.<sup>46</sup>

The state of the Church in Samoa prior to Dean's arrival was fragile. It was stagnant with no substantive direction and leadership. Belio had passed away in 1876 and Manoa had ceased to hold meetings by 1882, due to a physical accident, which confined him to the house for over fifteen months. By this time the bulk of the early converts had joined other denominations or had moved back home to their respective islands meaning church influence was restricted only on Aunu'u.

Preceding Dean's arrival it is interesting to examine the political and religious background in Samoa in order to gain greater appreciation of Mormon impact in its early years of establishment. The nature of Samoan political life was often very unstable. There were international players with competing interests that often dictated the mood of Samoan politics internationally and locally.

British presence began with the establishment of the consul in 1842. Their influence was expected especially because of the work of the LMS missionaries present since 1830. Along with their religious works, they also engaged in economic ventures in copra and coconut oil trade. This attracted German interest. By 1857, the Germans made their presence felt with the establishment of a Hamburg firm, trading copra.<sup>47</sup> The United States interests lie in American Samoa where PagoPago harbour was regarded as a strategic naval and trading base.

Meanwhile the local politics can be portrayed as very unsteady. Due to the nature of Samoan politics described by Kerry Howe as “de-centralised and factionalised” there was a constant struggle by the competing chiefs at the time (Malietoa Laupepa, Mata’afa Iosefa and Tamasese) to gain ascendancy over their counterparts by capturing the Tafaifa or four titles.<sup>48</sup> The increasing involvement of the European powers was advantageous as they exploited their presence for their own political purposes.

With the respective European rivals’ interests in Samoa, there was heavy involvement in the background to control the local politics as a means of upholding and strengthening their interests. The local politics was advantageous to the international powers, for factionalism and a de-centralised political structure meant the vulnerability of the locals to outside influence. Consequently this political period can be described as very unstable. Both rival European powers and local chiefs formed short-lived alliances and exploited each other’s benefits. There were seven attempted governments, two major civil wars and two smaller rebellions. The historian Campbell describes Samoan politics in the 1870s-1890s as “...confusing and chaotic as settlers of different nationalities vied for pre-eminence, as appeals to naval captains were made for justice or leverage, and as a

---

<sup>46</sup> Douglas, pp. 101-102.

<sup>47</sup> D.H.P. G is a German Company operating plantation enterprises in Samoa. The Firm was an extension of the Godeffroy and Sons company that existed in Samoa from the 1850s-1870s

<sup>48</sup> Kerry R. Howe, Where the Waves Fall: a new South Sea Islands history from the first settlement to Colonial rule, Sydney, 1984, pp. 11, 243-244.

succession of governments were formed from a temporary alliances of Samoan chiefs, foreign consuls, and influential foreign residents".<sup>49</sup>

The attempt to establish order and peace in 1889 with the establishment of a local government under the dominant guidance of the foreign powers failed miserably and it erupted into the civil wars of 1894 and 1899. By May 1899, a ceasefire was called and the three powers once again congregated to resolve the problems. Arising from these negotiations Samoa was divided amongst them. The islands of Upolu and Savaii were given to Germany while Tutuila and the other Eastern Islands were handed to the United States. So by the turn of the nineteenth century Samoan politics had been stabilised to an extent. Germany had taken political control in the western islands.

During this period, as Samoa was experiencing political transformations, Christianity continued to make considerable inroads into Samoan society. The early years of successful missionary penetration into the local villages with Samoan involvement and approval were now reaping great dividends. The 1880s to the end of the century was a consolidating period for Christianity as the process of revolutionizing Samoan society resumed. Meleisea commented of the continued development in implementing Christian ideas and values into the heart of Samoan traditional institutions such as the local villages and families.<sup>50</sup> The Christian churches in the villages namely the LMS was becoming more Samoan in character as the Samoans internalised the Christian doctrines together with certain traditional concepts institutionalising it as essential aspects of Samoan culture. Perhaps the trained native pastor best illustrates this. He became a dominating individual in the spiritual and occasionally political matters of the village acting as a bridge between the two. The implications were enormous, as future denominational/mission organisations would inevitably find it an uphill struggle to succeed in the villages.

---

<sup>49</sup> Ian Campbell, A History of the Pacific Island, Christchurch, 1989, p.99.

<sup>50</sup> Malama Meleisea, Lagaga: A Short History of Western Samoa, Suva, 1987, pp. 67-70; Malama Meleisea, Change and adaptations in Western Samoa, Christchurch, 1992.

Consequently the spiritual atmosphere in Samoa at the time of Mormon entry through to the end of the century was very settled. The mixture of Christianity blended with Samoan culture was very much accepted and internalised. At the time there were three established denominations in the islands. The LMS church generally was the most influential in the villages as it utilised its local pastors to implement its programs. Garrett commented that the Methodists and Catholics too had also gained a powerful following both as a Samoan religion and in numbers.<sup>51</sup>

### Official Church Entrance

With these conditions, official Church entry into Samoa was in due time challenging. It struggled to find a permanent foothold in the first few years its success slow and unspectacular. There were very few converts and geographically was only confined in certain places. Because of its undersized infrastructure namely the lack of substantial missionaries and local members to support the work, Mormon movements was conservative in accordance to its strength. It was very concentrated as it employed the island of Aunu'u as its launch pad to the larger islands. By late December 1888 they gradually moved to the island of Tutuila based at Alao village. The next few months saw intensive evangelising until they moved to the more politically central island of Upolu by March 1889. The eventual establishment of a Mission headquarters there at Fagalii enabled them to launch further mission operations to the neighbouring island of Savaii.<sup>52</sup>

There has been a paucity of research or academic discussion concerning the early developments of the church in Samoa. A small number of Church academics have touched the surface acknowledging the Church struggles.<sup>53</sup> Until now their investigation and explanations are firmly based on subjective church writing. Their views and findings so far,

---

<sup>51</sup> John Garrett, *To Live Among the Stars: Christian Origins in Oceania*, Suva, 1982, pp. 128-129.

<sup>52</sup> Mormon scholars Hart and Harris presents an extensive account on Mormon movements in their unpublished account, *Samoa Mission History 1888-1890*, Unpublished, 1988. It was launched to celebrate the centennial celebration of the Samoan Mormon Mission 1888-1988.

<sup>53</sup> This includes Britsch, Hart, Harris and Baldrige.

incomplete and thin as they may be nevertheless add greatly to our understanding of Mormon beginnings in Samoa and certainly indicate that their establishment and struggles was far more complex. There is the need to examine intensely the bigger picture, taking into account the internal and external factors of social, religious and political context that would have affected its development in the early years of establishment.

### Factors to Slow Progress and Effects on Mormon Development

Probing through these circumstances it becomes visible that there are numerous explanations to why the church did fail in the early years of development. One reason can be ascribed to the timing of their arrival. Their belated entrance was a disadvantage to their progress. The early Churches took advantage of prime geographic locations on Upolu and Tutuila. The LMS had created a niche on the Eastern part of Upolu at Malua, the Methodists in Lufilufi and the Catholics in Apia. While establishing their footholds there, they were associated with the local political leaders that represented their claims and attracted the locals to join. Malietoa Vainu'upou and his family became an important ally to the LMS; the people of Atua District were friendly to the Methodists while Mata'afa Fagamanu and Iosefo became key supporters of the Catholics.<sup>54</sup> As a consequence the late Mormon arrival on Aunu'u meant they were consigned to a smaller and less influential island where the previous Hawaiian efforts were concentrated. There was a lack of resources to establish a stronger base. Powerful local patrons were non-existent to facilitate the work throughout the other islands. The first fourteen years witnessed the constant movements to find a favourable foothold in order to be more influential and adjacent to political influence in Apia. They moved from the island of Aunu'u to Vatia on Tutuila, followed by the move to Upolu Island. There they established headquarters at Fagalii village and finally shifted to Pesega nearby Apia in 1902, after a member by the name of Ah Mu had donated land to the Church. President Dean expressed this desire to the

---

<sup>54</sup>

Garrett, pp. 128-129.

American consul, in finding a suitable piece of land during his first visit to the island of Upolu.<sup>55</sup>

Furthermore the missionaries were often inexperienced and struggled with the language. The early missionaries were guinea pigs as they were unfamiliar with the culture and often struggled to adapt. They were expected to familiarise themselves with the language and culture taking time to master it. This inability to teach in the language was a barrier and a concern in the early years. Dean expressed this view in his letter to the Church's First Presidency:

We have more invitations from chiefs and villages to come and hold meetings than we can fulfil.... what we need is good elders with the language, but of course it takes time.<sup>56</sup>

In addition an undersized and inexperienced Mormon infrastructure was an impediment to early development. President Dean arrived with his family and later a Hawaiian companion. A small force of four missionaries then followed that gradually increased in the first ten years.<sup>57</sup> Lacking sufficient numbers, it was obvious they would struggle to cover the whole region. So it was reasonable that they restricted their goals to what was compatible with the available resources. Hence beginning with the available resources on Aunu'u, it was a sensible choice to work from and to expand progressively to the bigger islands in conjunction with its missionary numbers.

Still this strategy created more concerns with development, as communication and expansion were often problematic, due to the physical challenges of the time. Distance

---

<sup>55</sup> J.H Dean, *Journal excerpts*, March 13 1889, Unpublished, Church Archives, 1887-1889.

<sup>56</sup> Joseph Deans letter to First Presidency dated September 1889, cited in Douglas p.104.

<sup>57</sup> Cited by Carl Harris, 'History of the Apia Mission 1888-1983, p. 16. He received this information from the Church Archives. The statistics indicated there were 8 missionaries serving in 1888, over 12 by 1894, and dropped to 12 by 1894.



between the small congregations/branches established, members on other islands and Church Headquarters while on Aunu'u, and then in several other places was immense, which would have been problematical for efficient evangelising.<sup>58</sup> The Mission lacked the physical means in terms of adequate transportation and proficient communication to assist them in effective managing of the work. The consequence was rather unfavourable as the general movement of Church converts throughout the other islands often proved difficult to track. Because of this frequent movement members often found themselves isolated in their villages from the few Mormon Branches for a period of time. Considering they were not fully immersed in Mormonism as the process took time, so there was a greater likelihood of changing allegiance to another denomination especially the dominant Church in the village. President Hebecker of the Hawaiian Mormon Mission reported an early suggestion of this concern to the *Deseret News*. Having been informed by the Hawaiian missionaries in Samoa, he expressed a concern that a substantial amount of members had left to join other denominations.<sup>59</sup> This was further demonstrated by an early convert named Ifopo, who was the only member on the eastern part of Upolu prior to official Mormon landing, who had for years requested to be visited by missionaries.<sup>60</sup> Since its opening in 1888 to 1894, out of the 342 baptised, 57 of them had been excommunicated indicating a fairly high number of defections possibly one reason was caused by irregular contact leading to disregard of Mormon principles. This slow but steady growth continued but by 1900, there were only 1044 members in Samoa.<sup>61</sup>

Bearing in mind the external factors affecting early church development, this un-resourceful and ineffectual infrastructure coupled with its assertive ecclesiastical administrative nature ran into a troublesome collision course with the modifications in

---

<sup>58</sup> Other Headquarters were situated in Tutuila and at Fagali'i. Refer to map as cited in Carl Harris, *History of the Apia Mission 1888-1983*, pp. 14-16. The map will demonstrate the long distance in those days between the Branches and Church headquarters.

<sup>59</sup> President Hebecker to *Deseret News*, August 19 1872, Church Archives.

<sup>60</sup> J.H Dean, Journal excerpts, 10 March 1889.

<sup>61</sup> Manuscript history and historical Reports, Statistical report of the Apia Mission 1900, vol 1, 1862-1904, Salt Lake, Church Archives, Unpublished.

Samoan society. The consequences were disadvantageous to Mormon penetration. Christian values, in the form of Protestant and Catholic teachings mingled with traditional faaSamoa culture, were firmly rooted in the culture of local villages. Decision-making for conversion was still a collective one and the bulk of a village was by and large affiliated to a single denomination. The villagers were also accustomed to the acculturated practices that had developed over the years since the first inception of Christianity like the implementation of a single village pastor and one church which functions dually with cultural practices. The likelihood of facing persecution if a local was to join another late coming Church was great, meaning there was no room for other alternatives especially visiting Mormon missionaries. A missionary's description to the *Deseret News* aptly describes this dilemma. Elder Burnham wrote:

Since our last October Conference we have found the natives as a whole much more willing to listen to our message...And with most with whom we converse they say they believe our Church is the true one, but it is hard for them to embrace the truth owing to Samoan custom, which they say is faigata lava (always difficult). In many villages the people are compelled to remain Catholic, Protestant or whatever they are, on penalty of being driven out of the town; with house and property burned and plundered, just as the chiefs of the town see fit.<sup>62</sup>

As a result, Mormonism experienced hardship in the local scene. Native members would experience strong opposition from fellow villagers. The missionaries and local ministers emphasising loyalty to their church supplied the fuel to this opposition. The early Mormon missionaries often experienced this in their proselytising efforts as acknowledged in the descriptions contained in an official report of the Samoan Mission in 1895. In it they give reasons to the disappointing conversion statistics:

The result can largely be attributed to laws interpreted by the rulers of the village, who are influenced by the ministers of different religious denominations, who threaten

---

<sup>62</sup> ibid., Elder Burnham to *Deseret News*, 4 February 1895, vol 1, 1892-1904.



those who otherwise would become members of the church, with expulsion from their homes and the confiscation of all their property...an entrance into the fold (Mormonism) is generally followed by sufficient ridicule or persecution to persuade the average Samoan to rest content with his old form of religion where he is promised salvation without making such a sacrifice.<sup>63</sup>

Furthermore another external reason for slow Mormon progress was the constant local political instability. The ongoing internal governmental contention often provoked civil wars in the last two decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>64</sup> The effects were deeply felt on Church operations. Families in local villages were drawn into the conflicts, making it challenging for missionary work. The locals directly involved were taken away for a period of time while those indirectly involved were affected too as they provided aid and supplies to their loved ones. A negative effect on Mormon operations is illustrated in a Mission report describing how Mormon operations were frustrated in areas on Tutuila Island. Members of the Alao and PagoPago Branches had moved to Apia to fight in the Civil War.<sup>65</sup>

By and large it was difficult to get permission to teach and baptise, as family heads (matais) were away or occupied. The wars also affected Samoan member attitudes towards the Church. Such was the case with Fanene, a staunch Mormon in Salailua village whom on account of suffering personal damages due to participation in the war, became indifferent and opposed the establishment of the Church in his area.<sup>66</sup>

The political hostilities hindered church activity as missionary operations were adjourned for an indefinite period. Hostilities brought about financial damages proving

---

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, Official report of the Samoan Mission from 1 January 1895 to 31 December 1895 Year in Review, 31 December 1895.

<sup>64</sup> Civil Wars occurred in 1887, 1894-95 and 1899. For further reference refer to Meleisea, Lagaga: a Short history of Western Samoa, p.66; Kerry Howe, *Where the Waves Fall*, pp.243-244.

<sup>65</sup> Manuscripts history and historical reports, Mission Record dated 7 May 1899.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*, Mission Record dated 21 February 1899.

costly considering the financial thriftiness of the Mission. Report of the effects of the 1899 Civil War on the Mission was estimated at eleven hundred dollars.<sup>67</sup> The conflict also disturbed missionary flow and momentum. Thus missionary work often was a stop-start affair. For instance later conflicts by 1899 was often characterised by missionaries seeking refuge for their own protection. Missionary work ceased and a telegram was sent from the Samoan Mission President to President Snow (Church President in Salt Lake) via New Zealand to inform them not to send any more missionaries due to the conflict.<sup>68</sup> Elder Stefano's description is a common missionary feeling of the frustrating effects of the political instability on the work:

Our labours here are being very much retarded by the present troubles, as the people, especially the natives, seem to think more about the destroying of their fellowmen than they do about the principles of the gospel.<sup>69</sup>

Matters took a further turn for the worse as denominational opposition provided additional challenge for progress. The Latter-day Saints' threat to the established denominations was real. They were aware of the Mormon reputation and teachings, causing them to protect their own flocks and programs implemented in Samoan society. As a result there were growing efforts and propaganda to quell the influence of the new religion especially amongst the local villages. The local ministers and non-Mormon missionaries became key adherents to this lobby group. From its onset, church opposition was noticeable and resolute as evident in several references to their efforts in Church documents. As early as 1890, a missionary's letter to the *Deseret* newspaper gives a vivid description of this opposition. He writes:

---

<sup>67</sup>     ibid., Mission record dated 27 march 1899.

<sup>68</sup>     ibid., Mission record dated, 12 April 1899.

<sup>69</sup>     ibid., Letter by Elder Stefano to *Deseret News* dated, 27 March 1894.

Messrs Pratt and Murray...members of the LMS have published a tract in the Samoan language entitled, "The History of the Mormon Church". In it they report the old lies about blood atonement, the 'Danites', etc...This tract has been scattered all over Samoa.<sup>70</sup>

Even though it was an unpleasant setting for establishment and early growth, yet there were a number of advantages. The work benefited from the political instabilities as it redirected the people's attention away from opposing this "new" religion. The Samoans' fixation with political wrangles at times made Mormon entry into the villages a great deal less excruciating as locals, government and other denominations were to some extent inattentive. There was no mass movement of any kind to curb Mormon presence and influence as the Mormon record shows throughout the 1890s to the early 1900s. This was even exemplified by Governor Solf's comments throughout the period even as far as the early 1900s, stating the Mormons posing no serious threat while regarding them as "harmless and insignificant".<sup>71</sup>

Furthermore the changing nature of a Christian-Samoan society also provided some benefits for the church. There were traditions and habits developing amongst the villages. Their desire for a complementary preacher and teacher was often sought as a way of guaranteeing their control in the village and providing them with spiritual status and physical advantages. It seems the extra teachers in the village meant more options for them and greater benefits bearing in mind the competitive nature of Samoan villages to gain advantage over their neighbours. For instance Elder Lewis Burnham, a Mormon missionary, described an incident in one of his letters. In his letter he described the

---

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*, Elder's letter to *Deseret News* dated, 15 March 1890. There are several other reported incidents of persecutions in the Manuscript history including Letter by Elder Booth to *Deseret News* dated 31 December 1891; Letter by J. H Carpenter to *Deseret News* dated 4 February 1895; Letter by Elder Burnham to *Deseret News* dated 30 December 1895; Letter by Elder Barrus to *Deseret News* dated 8 February 1896, Letter received by *Deseret News* dated February 1899.

<sup>71</sup> Pacific Manuscripts Bureau, nd, A report by Dr Wihelm Solf, Governor of Samoa, to the Imperial Colonial Office in Berlin, in *Papers Relating to Samoa of H. Neffgen, Sometime Government Interpreter, Samoa, Microfilm 66, Canberra, 1900-1910.*

demands of the locals to provide them with a Mormon teacher even though there already was a presence by ministers from the early denominations in their village:

Since our last October Conference we have found the natives as a whole, much more willing to listen to our message... Those whom we have prevailed sufficiently to wish to join the Church always manage to ask, "Will you and when will you give us a missionary to come and live with us and teach our children who are growing up in ignorance" etc if you tell them that you will come to visit them often, etc, they very soon decide that they cannot join a church that is unable to furnish them a preacher and a teacher free..<sup>72</sup>

In facing the challenges of the first decade of establishment, Mormons formulated initiatives that experienced major problems and enjoyed little success. New programs were often devised to comply with the social changes in Samoan society and governmental policies. Due to the difficulties in converting already established Christian villages, the Church introduced proselytising methods to assist them in gaining success to an already settled Christian society. Church schools and magic lantern visual shows were used as an attraction, there were frequent missionary visits to villages and some became permanently based in certain areas. There was greater involvement of local missionaries. For instance by 1900, there were over twelve missionaries assigned as compared to the eight called in 1888, missionary in terms of numerical numbers was increasing but at a steady pace. In 1900, the number of members had increased from 356 in 1896 to 1044.<sup>73</sup>

Notwithstanding the fruition of such efforts, colonial policies dealt a serious blow to Latter-day Saints' development. It affected its English schools that had achieved steady

---

<sup>72</sup> Manuscripts history and historical reports, Letter by elder Lewis B. Burnham to *Deseret News* dated 4 February 1895, *Deseret News*: 50:562.

<sup>73</sup> Samoan Mission record, Statistical report of the Samoan Mission, 1900.

progress in the 1890s.<sup>74</sup> The early years of success was met by colonial policies unfavourable to Mormon expansion activities. In May 1901, Governor Self declared that beginning July 1, 1901 English schools were to be prohibited in German Samoa. The policy for schools to be conducted in the German language influenced a rethinking to Church approach to how its schools were to be established.<sup>75</sup> This affected missionary work considerably, as the bulk of the missionaries spoke English, therefore negating their influence in the classroom. The effects were fairly significant, as classroom interaction was a potential missionary methodology. There was the despondent reality that Church progress was very much determined by unpropitious German policies. There is the impression of a general feeling of concern amongst the local Mormon administration over colonial policies but they were verbally reserved. The restrictive German policy hindered Mormon penetration and would have appeared as intimidating and threatening to Mormon self-determination in their administration and practices.

Coupled with such concerns was greater anxiety developing within the Church during the 1890s over its internal development. The increasing concern centred on the members' spiritual state and the need to build a more fervent member base. Living in local villages was perceived as challenging in numerous ways. Members in predominantly fervent non-Mormon villages would have been restricted in their desire to freely worship without harassment, while living in "Babylon" would have proved difficult to comprehend proper Mormon teachings. FaaSamoa coupled with extended family influence would have been a constant impediment. A missionary report illustrates this contention of the effects of improperly-trained members and living within an environment that was predominantly non-Latter-day Saints. It was frequently challenging for the saints considering the environment in which they dwelt, to endeavour to pursue a spiritually and socially rounded transition to

---

<sup>74</sup> During the 1890s, the Mormon Church established English schools nearby its Branches throughout Samoa as a way of educating the member children and utilised as a missionary tool to attract non-members. Church schools established are cited by Carl Harris, *History of the Samoan Apia Mission*, pp. 116-117

<sup>75</sup> There was two options available a) either conduct some schools in the Samoan language or b) organise other schools for foreigners and other part Samoans who didn't fall under the Governor's rule. Church initiatives to German policies were commensurate considering its restrictions but it affected the retention numbers/established growth of the church.

Mormonism while at the same time trying to disregard traditional customs. Elder Burnham noted that there were early converts who had challenged missionary authority in Church proceedings. He gave an example:

The old chief Afualo has been trying to lead and dictate the Elders (missionaries) for the past eight months but at last he has found out by sad experience that the lord will not honor and bless those who dishonour those whom he has chosen to lead his cause (a lesson to us all).<sup>76</sup>

These obstacles would have affected moral improvement, a concern very much in the minds of the missionaries and local leaders. Missionary accounts in the 1890s were littered with concerning descriptions and views. Samoan Mission President Beck's letter to the *Deseret News* provides an example. He wrote:

We believe...that so long as Saints are surrounded with idleness and other grievous sins their progress will be greatly retarded. We are pained to report that many who have embraced the truth in this land have again fallen into by the ways forbidden by the laws of heaven, while others are lukewarm by their feelings.<sup>77</sup>

This was reiterated later in the official yearly Mission report describing a frequent pattern in which members revert back to their old ways:

..an entrance into the fold (becoming new members) is generally followed by sufficient ridicule or persecutions to persuade the average Samoan to rest content with his old religion, where he is promised salvation without making such a sacrifice. Again, the sins of adultery, fornication and other grievous offences of less magnitude are so prevalent

---

<sup>76</sup> Manuscript histories and historical reports, Letter by Elder Burnham to *Deseret News*, 6 December 1895.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, Letter by President John W. Beck to *Deseret News*, 21 October 1895.



that the people love darkness rather than light. Quite a number of our flock have become transgressors through yielding themselves to these crimes.<sup>78</sup>

Another concern was an increasing fear on the paucity and frailties of local male members and leaders vital to Church expansion and consolidation. A statistical report for the Mission ending 31 December 1899 reveal a small number of local male priesthood holders.<sup>79</sup> The report also stated that the local Mormon authorities dealt leniently with the offenders involved in the war because of the depleted numbers of leaders in church Branches in the outer villages. This indicated that the outnumbered and over-stretched missionaries were struggling to manage the several Church branches. The untrained locals expected to assist in the ministering, but were spiritually unprepared to officiate. Yet even the untrained members assigned to the different church branches were considered ineffective and unready to undertake greater assignments. From this example, it indicated Latter-day Saints' desperation and willingness to an extent to establish a leeway for minor Samoan Saints rule-breakers in order to maintain a firm core of leadership in the administering of the scattered Latter-day Church Branches throughout Samoa. Apart from the missionaries, local leadership regarded as the future of the church was still improperly trained and weak.

Additional obstacles extended the uneasiness in particular over the ineffectiveness of communication between Pesega the central administration with the outer branches throughout the three islands. The Mormon branches were spread out and there was a significant distance between each one and the central administrative area. The challenges of the time in communication usually by boat would have made contact difficult and a concern, as the remote areas would usually have been awkward to monitor. Apart from the

---

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, Official report of the Samoan Mission Yearly Review 1 January 1895 – 31 December 1895; Statistical Mission reports, 31 Dec 1899, 17 April 1900, 7 July 1900, 18 October 1900. There seemed to be a growing concern in the mid 1890s towards the end of the decade as demonstrated in the records.

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, Statistical Mission reports for year ending 31 December 1899. For instance out of the overall estimated 500 members, the statistics revealed that the potential local leadership was very weak. There was 1 High Priest, 26 Seventies, 8 Elders, 7 Priests and 8 Deacons.

annual General conference held for all members on each island, contact between members and with the administrative centres was sporadic.

Member persecution further caused distress amongst the leaders due to anti Mormon propaganda and village opposition. Village mistreatment was common especially amongst certain communities. Anti-Mormon propaganda and the unusual experience of numerous religious options available to the villagers caused tensions, as denominational loyalty became significant. Such concerns affected Mormon members and their desires to freely worship without harassment. There were occasions when the church relocated its members or had been disadvantaged from aggressive challenges by non-Mormons. Member persecution in villages was common throughout the 1890s such as the examples in the villages of Salailua, and Fusi whose members were exiled to another village for joining the church.<sup>80</sup>

Matters were not improved when President Sears took the issue to Governor Solf. He was conscious of the conceivable tensions and remained neutral refusing any involvement. The Mission report recorded Solf's response:

"...he had been informed that the Elders came to the islands without means and received material support from the natives. That one of their articles included that doctrine, and that they were securing the natives' money".<sup>81</sup>

Solf's response implied the need for the church to sort it out themselves and that the colonial government were uninterested and were not to be involved.

---

<sup>80</sup>     ibid., Mission record, 7 July and 29 July 1900. Other examples in the record include A Missionary letter to *Deseret News* dated 15 March 1890; Letter by Elder Burnham to *Deseret News* dated 4 February 1895 and 6 December 1895; Official Yearly Review report of the Samoan Mission dated 31 December 1895; Samoan Mission Record dated 6 February 1896, 31 December 1896 and 21 February 1899.

<sup>81</sup>     ibid., Samoan Mission Record, 1900.



In looking over Church beginnings in Samoa it can be conceptualised as abrupt. The activities of Gibson in Hawaii and the efforts of his appointed servants in Samoa attracted the attention of the Church to eventually intervene. This involvement was very much a partial commitment but gradually increased during the first decade. Struggles and hardship, belated arrival into a modified Samoan society with the influence of an already established group of religious denominations characterised the first decade. Church development was unspectacular but steady experiencing obstacles in the form of political dissension, denominational and public opposition, unfavourable colonial policies which in turn affected its own internal progress in the consolidation of its administration. By the end of the decade, both these internal and external effects had alarming concerns for the Church. The beginning of the next decade was approaching with concerns and approaches of improvement for the growth of the work. The challenge was to retain the converts in the church despite the disruptions and prepare them for a more active responsibility in church building. The doctrine of gathering and the application of the Mormon settlement scheme seemed a possible alternative.

## **Chapter 3 – The Gathering Places & Finding a Place**

The Church entered the turn of the century with a renewed spirit to deal with its concerns. Apart from concentrating on upholding preaching methods and expanding the physical facilities, the Latter-day Saints' concept of gathering was at the forefront of the leaders' minds. It was seen as a possible remedy to alleviate external and internal problems. The establishment of gathering places occupied the next few years of Mormon thought with mixed reaction from the members.

The stable but unspectacular success of overall Church development especially internal growth in the 1890s raised growing concerns to local Mission leaders. There was the realisation of numerous obstacles that affected internal and external development. This included a smaller missionary force unable to administer to the outer Branches, concerns over the spirituality of the members in the remote areas where there was always the threat of reverting to their old faith, difficulties of communicating and strengthening members in the outer branches and the unfavourable colonial policies affecting Mormon administrative governing and overall growth.

There was an increasing mentality amongst the leaders at the time of primarily focussing on improving internal church development and building a stronger foundation for members. The effects of their belated arrival meant there was a need to safeguard members from unexpected adversities such as apostasy and building better local leaders for the future of church development and expansion in the islands.

### **Early Church Initiatives to tackle steady progress**

Initiatives were developed in order to tackle these concerns. It is possible that there was an early attempt to send Samoan children to Utah so that they could be spiritually nourished as preparation for future leadership roles in the Church and to be with Zion since a gathering was non-existent in Samoa. The missionaries desired to improve the futures of

Samoaan children away from “Babylon” that they may be educated in the ways of Zion. For instance the Samoan Mission President Beck had inquired of the First Presidency leaders in Utah regarding the desirability of the returning Elders taking the native children with them so that they may be educated in Zion. The response was unless the returning missionaries were personally willing to care for them; it was unpractical for such action.<sup>82</sup> Such a response may have been influenced by the experience of the failed Hawaiian colony that had gathered in Utah.<sup>83</sup> As explained in another letter from the First Presidency to the then Samoan Mission President Sears in 1900:

...the conditions that exist today in our midst are such that they tend to disappoint and often discourage such natives as to gather with this body of Saints.<sup>84</sup>

Besides this idea, there was further thought of implementing the Mormon doctrine of gathering and colonisation scheme. The establishment of Church schools was an early indication of gathering members in Samoa although unforeseen in its early stage. Chapel schools were created and later became centralised schools in each area where the Church resided as well as serving neighbouring villages. It was the intention of the local Mission President for Church religious education to be applied in these Latter-day Saints establishments to provide strength for the Samoan Saints. It was expected to changing member attitudes in order to assist them in becoming fully converted to Latter-day principles and to contribute to building up the Mormon Church in their own villages and localities.

A pattern that occurred was of small gatherings of member families settling alongside an established church school. In this manner Latter-day Saints religious education may blend with certain aspects of secular education such as learning English to produce

<sup>82</sup> Manuscripts history and historical reports, Mission Record dated, 18 April 1896.

<sup>83</sup> There are several references to the Iosepa colony. This includes Lanier Britsch, *Moramona: The Mormons in Hawaii*, pp. 108, 111, 122-127, 135, 155; Dennis H. Atkin, *A History of Iosepa, the Utah Polynesian Colony*, M.A thesis, Brigham Young University, 1958; Ken Baldrige, *Polynesian in the Desert: The Hawaiian Village or Iosepa, Utah*, BYU Hawaii Campus, Paper presented at the Convention of Association of Pacific Coast geographers, Hilo Hawaii, 23 June 1977, Church Archives, Utah.

<sup>84</sup> Manuscripts history and historical reports, Mission Record dated 18 October 1900.

stronger and balanced members in order to be comfortable to adapting to living ecclesiastical principles while holding on to their cultural values. Plans for agriculture as a means of self-sustenance and future economic purposes were in place. The initiative was deemed as more feasible to accommodate the lack of missionaries and their local support system. These centralised areas were perceived as areas where children could study and regard as their home away from home while at the same time be away from the influences of the predominantly non-Mormon Samoan society. It seems their motive was to train more solid future leaders for the church. Local members were encouraged to reside there to assist with the operations. For example in the village of Tuasivi members like Tafaoga and Opapo along with their families were stationed there.<sup>85</sup>

Another form of early gathering centered on locating a suitable central place for Church headquarters. By 1901 the Church had decided to move from Fagalii to Pesega as the branch and the area was deemed unprofitable for church growth. Moving the administration to Pesega in 1902 became beneficial for the church for a number of reasons. John Hart's account offered several reasons for such a move. This included the paucity of members in the previous area, the perceived evilness of the location of the Church Mission home in Fagalii being infested with evil spirits, the feasibility of Pesega as economically progressive, as a more central location for the Church and adjacent to the political capital of Apia.<sup>86</sup> Locating there had positive implications meaning the Church would build positive relations with the Colonial government.

Meanwhile the spirit to gather collectively was further aided by the unfavourable circumstances the Church experienced at this time. The local Mission leaders were able to use the adversities they faced as the fuel to their drive and a justifiable reason for determined initiatives. They internalised their despondent situation, associating themselves within the story of a greater biblical and Mormon suffering (in Utah) throughout its existence. Their persecutions and suffering from unfair colonial policies, denominational

---

<sup>85</sup> cited by Carl Harris, *History of the Samoan, Apia Mission: 1888-1983*, p.116. Harris acknowledged other schools established such as Siumu, Malaela, Laulii, Mapusaga, Vatia, Salelavalu, Tifitifi and Fagalii to name a few.

<sup>86</sup> Hart, pp. 123-125.

and public persecutions as well as financial instabilities were regarded as characteristic and expected Mormon dilemmas.

### Spirit to establish a gathering Place intensifies

Consequently the spirit to gather the Samoan saints to a single place was first initiated not by the First Presidency in Utah but the local Mission leaders. The leaders perceived the gathering notion as a possible solution to their predicaments. William Sears was an early initiator for the gathering of local Saints. In 1901 he sensed the season was appropriate for such action and had requested 'the presence of an apostle to direct the location purchase of land, etc'.<sup>87</sup> Having established a feasible location for headquarters, there was a greater drive to establish a gathering for the Saints. The idea developed and filtered down to the missionaries. Before long it was incorporated in the missionary message. Missionary exhortation was common, as members were encouraged to prepare for a future "gathering of Israel". Succeeding Mission Presidents at the time realised the feasibility of the idea. Elder Martin F. Sanders envisaged the possibility of gathering places as a response to the church problems. On 26 July 1901, he conceived the prospect of gathering places as a solution to the church difficulties experienced from colonial policies and the local environment. He played a leading part in the establishment of the gathering places in Pesega, Mapusaga and Sauniatu. President Merrill was another avid proponent as evident in his report following a conference by the Savai'i Saints on April 12, 1902:

The spirit of gathering rested upon the people and many saints expressed their earnest desire to be permitted to gather together at some place where they would be able to free themselves from the bondage of the ancient customs of their people.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> Manuscript history and historical reports, Sears to George Reynolds, Samoan Mission Letters, 25 March 1901.

<sup>88</sup> Joseph Merrill, Journal excerpts, unpublished, Church Archives, 12 April, 1902. Also cited by Hart, p. 123.

These expectations and purposes for a gathering lingered with succeeding Mission Presidents. A few years later the incumbent President, Moody made particular comments in one of his meetings with the Sauniatu Saints:

In regards to the spreading of the Gospel in these islands it was shown that the membership of the church here is not increasing rapidly enough compared to the efforts put forth by the elders. After a lengthy discussion the point reached was the matter of advising the Saints to gather...should not be given rigidly without alternative, but that better results could be obtained by bringing those who are willing and the labouring with the remained in a reasonable consistent manner.<sup>89</sup>

### Mormon Administrative Approval of a gathering Place

When Sanders replaced Merrill as Mission President in 1903, he immediately wrote to the Church Presidency for consideration and support. They approved and offered counsel to how it should be accomplished. The First Presidency replied:

...the question of gathering the members of the Church into one place in Samoa, and their making the headquarters of the Church in that mission is one that requires great consideration. There are so many questions involved that must not be ignored - among others the adaptability of the place to the needs of our people, its helpfulness, its capacity for producing sufficient, to supply, and requirements of those who gather there in, and to make it self supporting. What has been found necessary and desirable at the gathering place Laie, Sandwich Islands will in many respects be found equally desirable in Samoa. It also seems quite consistent that when such a colony is established either in German or American Samoa that the native Saints of the protectorate will urge a supplicate for them also, it will be very necessary to avoid giving offence to either government and there in appears on of the difficulties that will have to be met with great prudence and wisdom. The Presidency are told of suitable places both in Upolu and Tutila, and will be pleased to have you give

---

<sup>89</sup> Sauniatu Branch Record, Samoan Mission, General minutes,, Church Archives, Salt Lake, 1904-1933, unpublished, 2 June, 1908. (hereafter cited as Sauniatu Branch Record)

the whole matter your best thought and study and then report to them with the price and conditions and sale every piece of property that you deem suitable.<sup>90</sup>

The Presidency also suggested in another letter a possible plan for effective implementation:

Regarding the question of colonization, we favour the establishment of two gathering places for native Samoan saints- the one in American and the other in German Samoa. As land under the law, as you inform us, cannot at present be purchased, from the natives, we suggest that two tracts of suitable land be secured under as longer lease as practicable, say, if possible, for forty years. If such an agreement is ever, the land is placed upon the market we have the first chance of purchase. Each of these tracts should contain about 400 acres, less than this amount is undesirable for the Church. ...we desire to obtain as good terms as possible, and in the collection of parcels of land you consider the various wants of the people, and select such as can be best used for their material advancement and in the development among them of a true and stable civilization. Consideration should be had with regards to the adaptability of the sale for those crops that the natives, under the direction of the missionaries, will be most likely to cultivate.<sup>91</sup>

#### Plans for establishing gatherings in Samoa

When given approval, there was an air of familiarity to the Samoan procedure in parallel to other Mormon gatherings. The Latter-day Saints arrival in Samoa experienced unfavourable conditions leading to the execution of this scheme. The process would involve the efforts to locate a suitable land that was economically viable and geographically sheltered prior to the encouragement and recruitment of members. So it was the case in Samoa as the approval generated more efforts to implement and organise a possible gathering. During the period 1903-1904, there was an immense amount of effort and

---

<sup>90</sup> Samoa Mission minutes Microfilm 1888-1916 and 1931-1948, Church Archives, Salt Lake, unpublished, 31 March, 1903. (Hereafter cited as Samoan Mission minutes Microfilm)

<sup>91</sup> *ibid.*, 13 July, 1903.



groundwork especially amongst the Mission President and missionaries. The Samoan Mission minutes reported of the efforts of President Sanders:

In harmony with the instructions of the First Presidency, President Sanders made diligent and expensive researches and investigations regards lands suitable for the work of the Lord in Samoa. Repeated journeys were made over different portions of the island of Upolu, Savaii and Tutuila in researches and investigations as to which were the localities and natural conditions best adapted for our purposes in gathering and colonising the saints in Samoa, in these Islands. A goodly portion of the time of President Sanders administration as President of the Mission was given to careful consideration of these land matters for colonisation purposes in the pursuit and research of these matters. President Sanders never tired in the acquiring of reliable and extensive knowledge pertaining to land and plantation matters and various other conditions that would probably affect our colonisation work here, ever seeking council with competent brethren of the Mission.<sup>92</sup>

A sense of optimism existed because the conditions were appropriate. On Tutuila, the mass conversion in one of the villages Faleniu, was profitable for the establishment of a gathering place. The core for a gathering was already in place with a substantial number of members, the feasibility of fertile surroundings and the departure of the Protestant missionary which meant less disruption by any denominational opposition in the village.

In due course the Mormon pattern of gathering and colonisation was established. There were eventual gatherings on Upolu, Savaii and Tutuila. An attempt to analyse the development of the concept in Samoa may be complex, since the three main gathering locations had different experiences of village administration, everyday life and development. Examining every single one requires an enormous task, so this study will be confine to the gathering place at Sauniatu but comprehensive research is a potential future investigation. This assembled dwelling at Sauniatu provides practicable reasons for examination due to its substantial records. Others were convinced of the place as possessing

---

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*, 2 June 1904. Consequently 2 main gathering Places established in Samoa at Sauniatu on Upolu in 1905 and the other at Mapusaga on the island of Tutuila in 1907.



a sense of spiritual mysticism, a greater historical culture and significance to Samoan Mormon heritage.<sup>93</sup>

The establishment was a meticulous affair in which planning involved church hierarchical consultation and approval. President Sanders made an inquiry to the First Presidency. Before long the reply was with specific instructions for a suitable place:

...adaptability of the people to the needs of our people, its healthfulness, its capacity for production sufficiently to supply the requirements of those who gather therein, and to make it self-supporting.<sup>94</sup>

Judging from the response the Mormon process of establishing settlements was very much applicable. The expected criteria for land selection was for long term economic sustenance of a settlement and geographically safe.

Land was finally located in nearby Manunu owned by the German Company Die Deutsche Handels and Plantagen Gesellschaft der Sudsee Inseln zu Hamburg or simply D.H.P.G. Sanders made a comprehensive report concerning the 800 acres he had secured. Almost immediately the First Presidency posted a draft of \$6,500 to Sanders. They also sent Samuel E. Woolley and Thomas Court his successor to assist in evaluating the proposed sites and purchase arrangements.<sup>95</sup> By October 1904, after evaluating all the proposals, Sanders, Woolley and Court agreed to purchase the area neighbouring Manunu village. They had initially underestimated the Manunu lands as only 488 acres but in reality when surveyed the size was 725.5 acres. It was finally purchased for \$7,170. The land was also quite secluded from any large Samoan village settlement. Besides the neighbouring

<sup>93</sup> Edwin Kamauoha, *Sauniatu Western Samoa: the Village of Love*, unpublished, 28 November 1969, p. 3; Baldrige, *Sauniatu Western Samoa: A Special Purpose Village, 1904-34*, pp. 165-192.

<sup>94</sup> *Samoan Mission Historical Record, 1903-1939*, Church Archives, unpublished, 31 March 1903.

<sup>95</sup> *Samoan Mission minutes Microfilm*, 5 August 1904.

villages of Manunu, Lalomauga and the German-owned rubber plantation, no other settlements existed on that side of the Falefa plains.

### Mass gathering and recruitment begins in Sauniatu village

During this period President Sanders was replaced, but his efforts were not in vain as President Court continued the process from where he left off. As the new Mission President, Court became actively involved with the planning and organisation for establishing the latter gatherings at Sauniatu. Having secured land to assemble the flock, there was the next phase of the Mormon process, the preparation for mass settlement. The approach practised was the appointment of a smaller group to occupy the place and develop it for the incoming members. Before the end of his tenure, Sanders had appointed faithful members who at the time were living in the Church school settlement at Tuasivi to relocate.<sup>96</sup>

Analysing the nature of recruitment of members throughout the island indicate slight contrast compared to the settling of communities in the greater Utah area. Haugaard's study revealed the Mormons in the West had a meticulous systematic program in colonising the locality and the neighbouring Western states. Those assigned to pioneer the settlements were selected into groups based on their skills and their contribution to the settlement. For instance each settlement had skilled people such as carpenters and millers.<sup>97</sup> In contrast the Sauniatu experience conforms to a rather Pacific colonising pattern as also applied in Hawaii. Britsch described the Mormon recruiting experience in Hawaii as a collective effort amongst the Saints and covering an extensive distance throughout the Hawaii islands. In the case of Hawaii, the Lanai colony and Laie to an extent were similar. Their functions as temporary gathering places meant recruitment was not selective.<sup>98</sup> Member recruitment was a collective matter and unrestricted as members and missionaries made constant journeys to the outer branches of the church in the remote areas. The weight of the expected work was delegated to the assigned missionaries of the new settlement and its residents.

<sup>96</sup> Samoan Mission Historical Record, 22-24 October, 1904. The members included Opapo, Tafaoga, Elisala and their families.

<sup>97</sup> Haugaard, p.15-16.

Similarly Samoa experienced this procedure. An elder assisted by a small number of local residents would lead a typical trip. They would usually travel to visit these outer branches for ecclesiastical duties while at the same time persuading them to join the body of Saints. The Sauniatu Branch records refer to the intense recruiting in the early years of the settlement's founding, as frequent visits were evident in the first two years.<sup>99</sup>

In spite of the efforts, it seemed the result was futile. Member response was unenthusiastic throughout Upolu and Savaii. The paucity of members gathered reflected their negative attitudes. Perhaps their refusal was due to the fact that they did not feel persecuted enough to obey the call to gather. But a more central reason was their firm cultural beliefs in relation to the relationship of the individual to his family, land and village. Historians Meleisea and Shore discussed the nature of fa'aSamoa and Samoan epistemology in social and cultural relations.<sup>100</sup> The saints refused to leave their lands, village and ancestral home because overall these represented their cultural identity. In a report by Elder John Q Adams, he described this problem:

Unlike the foreign missionary whose rule decided by his purse, the native domicile descends as a sacred legacy from father to son. Almost invariably, the piece of land occupied by a family at present is the identical spot on which for generations back have dwelt their ancestors. It is apparent what aversion a demand compelling radically opposite changes from the tradition of the forefathers would naturally occasion. Such a preposition faced the Saints when the call came to pull up stakes and journey to a new, wild, uncleared section. As a natural consequence, obedience to the call was not universal by any means.<sup>101</sup>

A missionary assigned to recover those that had left the Church for refusing to gather exemplified these attitudes in his report. Their response was that they refused to go

---

<sup>98</sup> Britsch, *Moramona: the Mormons in Hawaii*, pp. 73-76.

<sup>99</sup> Sauniatu Branch Record, 7, 17, 26, April; 11, 15, 20, May; 19 September; 11, 13 October, 23 November; 15 December 1905; 2 March 1906. There were times when the local missionaries and residents of Sauniatu village travelled without the missionaries, 15 May 1905; 26 April 1905; 2 March 1906.

<sup>100</sup> Brad Shore, *Salailua: A Samoan Mystery*, New York, 1982, pp. 58-68; Malama Meleisea, *Change and adaptations in Western Samoa*, Christchurch, 1992, pp. 12-23.

<sup>101</sup> Manuscript history and historical reports, Elder John Q Adams, 31 December, 1908.

as they had lived on the (their own) land near the seashore for generations. Food was more accessible for them rather than living at a place where it was foreign to them.<sup>102</sup> The Branch record also reported that few desired to move as many were not quite ready to come while for others, the invitation was “trying them”.<sup>103</sup> It seems that there was the anxiety and fear of the unknown amongst these members. There was a lot at stake. Both their faith and cultural factors was a major concern.

Consequently over the first three years, there were approximately 107 members. In a personal account by a former missionary and later Mission President, President Nelson’s account estimated that there were at least 2500 members that refused to gather, and the bulk of them left the church. There were serious implications of member opposition and Church response to the recruiting issue. Member defiance brought about punishment and often chastisement by the Mission President. He was prompted to reprove the disputants by taking away their ecclesiastical leadership positions and dissolving a handful of the Mormon branches in these areas. Member response was negative as many returned back to their old Christian denominations.<sup>104</sup>

Overall recruiting was the major tool used for gathering members although there were instances where some gathered to the village on their own accord. The Branch record reported an instance when non-Mormons gathered to the village for financial motives. Young men from the neighbouring village of Laulii were reported living at the settlement in order to work for the Rubber Company nearby.<sup>105</sup>

Arriving first at Sauniatu, the members took up temporary shelter in the nearby village of Manunu while building their homes.<sup>106</sup> Despite opposition and testing relations

---

<sup>102</sup> History of President John A. Nelson, President of the Samoan-Tongan Mission, 1913-1916, Oral History told to his children, approximately 1963, tape #14, unpublished written account in possession of Dr Carl Harris.

<sup>103</sup> Sauniatu Branch Record, 26 April, 13 October, 1905.

<sup>104</sup> Church attempt to recover these unbelieving souls was left in the shoulders of Elder Nelson and his Samoan companion Filipo in an account given, History of President John A. Nelson, President of the Samoan-Tongan Mission, 1913-1916, Oral History told to his children, approximately 1963, Tape #14.

<sup>105</sup> Sauniatu Branch Record, 1 April, 1905.

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*, 25 October, 1904.

with the locals, crops were planted and tiny huts built. Almost immediately they had constructed two Samoan-style houses for each of the leaders. One of the members offered a dedicatory prayer as a consecration of the place's objective. He constantly petitioned the heavens to bless the land: "to become a choice land and a fit place for Saints to gather and become a choice people of the Lord".<sup>107</sup> The members began to arrive in numbers by March and April 1905 and immediately became involved in clearing the land and contributed in developing the village. The early months were very difficult and discussions held debating whether or not to abandon the site and re-establish the colony at Aleipata but in the end they decided to remain there.

The place was yet to be identified and two names were suggested for the village; Nu'umau meaning "bountiful land" and "Sauniatu" interpreted as "preparing for the things of the Lord" or "Preparing to go forth". Eventually the people chose Sauniatu following a vote. Interestingly the chosen name connotes the purpose of the village. It was intended as a temporary refuge for the members rather than a permanent one. It was to prepare the Saints by means of receiving necessary spiritual and secular training for the Church to develop in the future years both internally and externally.

Having conformed to Mormon procedures for establishing a gathering settlement, there were questions that took immediate consideration during the succeeding years. This involved the type of administrative system would be applied in governing Sauniatu village? How did this Church pattern and ecclesiastical system fare in Samoa, in particular this village? Was it successful? How was the village going to provide temporary sanctuary and strengthen members in order to prepare them for greater Mormon development when they would eventually leave the village? Events would prove that closer examination of settlement activities and experiences provided a greater understanding.

---

<sup>107</sup>

ibid., 25 January, 1905.

## Chapter Four- The Village Administration

There was an air of familiarity about the administrative system applied in Sauniatu to that of a Mormon-gathering model developed in the Pacific, for the nature of the village administrative system suggests its conformity to an earlier gathering in Laie, Hawaii. It was ecclesiastically operated with a particular mixture of traditional Samoan concepts and Mormon values. The nature of the administration was designed to cater for its multi-purpose role as an operative village sanctuary, with a village school while developing an economic enterprise. This unique dual administrative system fared well in Sauniatu for the majority of the gathering duration until the latter period wherein several factors influenced policy changes. The changes eventually persuaded the leaders to discontinue with gathering the Saints and emphasise a more educational purpose for the village.

### Laie settlement Administration

The settlement in Laie when established in the 1860s represented this rather fresh approach to Mormon gathering outside Utah. It was to be temporary in nature with a localised administrative structure. According to Church historian Lanier Britsch, ‘it was to be a multipurpose settlement as a refuge from the world, and as a mechanism for training members of their responsibilities and expectations of Mormonism in the form of creating schools and establishing a viable economic venture to support the settlement’.<sup>108</sup> The administration consisted of missionaries and their wives watching over the settlement. The Mission President was responsible for overseeing the work in Laie and the assigned missionaries were to be the facilitators of the work in the settlement.<sup>109</sup>

### A Unique Village in a Samoan Context

Analysing the church village reveal interesting findings deemed it unique within a Samoan cultural setting. Firstly American Mormon characteristics were evident with the absence of a traditional Fa’alupega, the village set-up described by Shore as:

<sup>108</sup> Britsch, Moramona: The Mormons in Hawaii, pp. 63-75.

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 74-76



...a honorific address recognising directly or by implication all the important constituent families and titles of the village, and by the chiefly titles that have a place in the village council but are primarily associated with the descent group located there.<sup>110</sup>

This absence of a timeless arrangement of village segments including specific rankings of the components of the village's history was replaced in the latter years by an ecclesiastical honorific address. A prominent Church authority, David O. McKay's visit to Sauniatu prompted the locals to establish an honorary village courtyard within the settlement with a formal honorific address.<sup>111</sup>

### Sauniatu Village Administrative System

Unlike the Laie experience, where the settlement was predominantly ecclesiastical in principles and administration, the Sauniatu settlement was had a legal system which was a composite of both ecclesiastical and fa'aSamoan principles. The Mormon features of the administration were located in the overall management and hierarchical leadership. Like the settlement in mainland America and in Laie, the Priesthood (a Mormon ecclesiastical authority) was the presiding influence as the Mission President and missionaries were delegated the responsibility.<sup>112</sup> In Samoa a similar pattern occurred. The Samoan Mission President was the superior authority directing the operations from his headquarters in Pesega. He appointed two missionaries who acted as village and church administrators at Sauniatu. The local Elders in the settlement assisted in forming a governing administrative body. The Mission President acted as the higher authority handling any concerns that were outside of the doctrinal authority of the missionaries. An

<sup>110</sup> Shore, p.71; also see Meleisea, Change and adaptations in Western Samoa, pp.39-40.

<sup>111</sup> Edwin Kamauoha, Sauniatu Western Samoa, Malae o le Alofa (The Village of Love), Unpublished, , 1968, pp. 1-20. This titular address consisted of:

1. court yard - Malae o le Alofa
2. Highest chief - Afioga Alii Makei or any General Authority present
3. Ipu Ava (Kava Cup) - So'otaga a le lagi male lalolagi
4. Ipu ava a le pulega - Alofa I alo o Samoa (love for the descendants of Samoa)
5. Faifeau or Church leaders - Ava fua a le Talalelei (Give the Gospel freely)
6. Taupou (village virgins) - Afioga Losa
7. Manaia (future young chiefs) - Afioga Siliva
8. Alii and Tulafale - The matais of the village Edwin Kamauoha, 'Sauniatu Western Samoa, Malae o le Alofa (The Village of Love), Unpublished, 1968,(pp1-20) p.4)

example of this superior jurisdiction was demonstrated when a disobedient villager's case concerning extreme moral issues and considered beyond village missionary responsibility, was sent to the Mission President's Court.<sup>113</sup> External influence from the colonial government was non-existent unless trouble was beyond ecclesiastical control. Such was the case in 1929 when the church leaders in the village sought government assistance to arrest a troubled resident who refused to leave the village.<sup>114</sup>

The Samoan contribution was characterised by the influence of local elders in important decision-making. This consisted of senior members of the settlement, usually the founding village settlers and those who held highly ranked matai titles from their villages. Men such as Elisala and Opapo were given this respect. The missionaries would constantly take counsel with them when undertaking major projects or in regards to the operations. This influence was formally recognised with the establishment of an official village council that met every Monday with the missionaries.<sup>115</sup> An example of such consultation was over the issue of paying off a village debt for land purchased on the coast.<sup>116</sup> The senior members and council also came into action as substitutes when the missionaries were incapable of fulfilling responsibilities due to misfortunes. On occasion, a native Elder named Opapo attended to the affairs of the village when one of the missionaries was sick.<sup>117</sup>

The ecclesiastical authority in the missionaries chose the council. The conduct changed in 1918 when the villagers elected them.<sup>118</sup> This Fono was the legislative body and appointed a village policeman to enforce the laws. The council's numbers altered from time to time as it changed from a representative group to one involving all matais in the village.<sup>119</sup> A Pulenu'u or village mayor complemented this collective involvement. The

---

<sup>112</sup> Cummings, pp. 68-69; Britsch, *Moramona: the Mormons in Hawaii*, pp. 35-42, 61-108.

<sup>113</sup> Sauniatu Branch Record, 12 August, 1905.

<sup>114</sup> *ibid.*, 7 July, 15 August, 8 October, 1 November, 1929.

<sup>115</sup> *ibid.*, 29 January, 1906; 8 June 1908.

<sup>116</sup> *ibid.*, 29, 31 January, 1906.

<sup>117</sup> *ibid.*, 22 April, 1905.

<sup>118</sup> *ibid.*, 6 April, 1918.

<sup>119</sup> *ibid.*, 9 January 1922.



role is not specifically explained in the records but it indicated as the chairman of the council under the village missionaries' jurisdiction.<sup>120</sup>

Analysing the administrative system, it is clear that the ecclesiastical and fa'aSamoa (secular) authorities complemented each other but had different functions and obligations. The ecclesiastical authority overruled the decision-making in village, school and plantation affairs. The village Fono assisted in operating various secular matters particularly the day to day running of the village. They on the one hand represented a traditional matai village council, but on the other hand did not control the key decision-making. For instance the missionaries' approval was required on the bulk of the laws passed indicating their moral and religious influence. The cases included laws requiring the consent of the family head, before any family member was given a work assignment; forbidding making instrumental band and gun noises after curfew, requiring toilets and hog fences to be erected and holding trials for wayward villagers.<sup>121</sup>

However there were some laws passed by the council that did not require ecclesiastical approval. Such laws required community decision-making and agency in relation to their association with the missionaries. An example was over the issue of the villagers feeding the missionaries. At the time, the missionaries residing in the village relied on the goodwill of the people for daily physical nourishment. The council passed a law stating it was optional for them to feed the missionaries rather than a compulsory rotational requirement by the residents.<sup>122</sup> The issue was brought to the attention of the Mission President. The President (Ernest Wright) compromised with the local village authority, coming to an agreement that the village would revert back to the rotational feeding schedule in return for the Mission not charging the school children one shilling.<sup>123</sup>

Interestingly the relationship of this combined administrative body was for the most part very harmonious and effective. There was very little difficulty and opposition. Besides

<sup>120</sup> *ibid.*, 12 April, 21 June, 1920.

<sup>121</sup> *ibid.*, 4 September, 5 November, 1917, 18 April, 17 June, 17 August 1922.

<sup>122</sup> *ibid.*, 5 September, 1916.

<sup>123</sup> *ibid.*, 10 December, 1917.

a few cases of opposition, the record indicates the willingness of the local Elders and residents in general to abide by the settlement laws. This can be attributed to the faithful local leaders and missionary management. The loyalty shown by local leaders (men like Saimasina, Elisala, Opapo, Tafaoga; more often than not among the earliest member converts and usually highly respected) was advantageous, as their traditional prestige and influence assisted in enforcing the laws. They would often render a supporting voice to strengthen missionary enforcement. For instance the local leaders would regularly exhort the village members to comply with laws of the village and follow church teachings.<sup>124</sup> A situation occurred when the members wanted a holiday and the missionaries refused. The missionaries were defiant and were supported by the local leaders and in the end the missionary decision prevailed.<sup>125</sup>

### The effectiveness of the Village Administration

Examining the success of the village administration in managing members revealed it was reasonably successful. Apart from the later gathering period in the late 1920s, from its inception in 1905, the village experienced continual peace throughout the years with only sporadic tensions and conflict. This attainment may be attributed to its nature of administration. The village Fono, despite playing second fiddle to the missionaries, gave the residents a sense of satisfaction and involvement in the decision-making. Each family head (as a member of the male Priesthood) was represented in the council. The resentment of authority was of a minor nature, as the residents allowed the missionaries to achieve their goals as long as they were prosperous. Later-day Saints emphasis on organisation in terms of the village government co-ordinating social, spiritual and temporal (labour) activities for the residents, kept them from being idle and troublesome. Intimate involvement assisted the administration in directing all aspects of the residents' lives. With this in place they had a tremendous responsibility and influence as formulating their characters, the motivation of their learning, the model and providers of their peace and happiness. The consequences included a greater self-belief in the divine direction in regards to the village, the depiction of success as well as extreme confidence in the leaders and careful direction of the village.

<sup>124</sup> *ibid.*, 21 March, 1905; 5, 12 April, 1907.

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.*, 21 July, 1905.

For instance the Sauniatu Branch Records made numerous references to members' optimism as a consequence of the methodical nature of the administration. They would often share their feelings of happiness at the work and their involvement with the village. During a typical Sauniatu testimony meeting for members to share their feelings about their membership in the Church, members such as Toafa, Avau, Penitala, Salotai, Mele and others would share their testimonies of their happiness in the work of the Lord based on their overall involvement.<sup>126</sup>

Another reason for less trouble in enforcing the law was the missionaries' tactful supervision. The missionaries to a great extent were culturally sensitive and open-minded with respect to Samoan values when they were considered in conflict with village and church rules. They were conscious of the value of utilising fa'aSamoa principles of leaderships in gaining support and conviction amongst the villagers. The missionaries had long appointed faithful members as assistant leaders in the settlement in secular matters and to an extent ecclesiastical. They were to provide by example support for missionary decisions and contribute in managing the village affairs smoothly and orderly. An example was missionary consciousness of the significance of Matais and Elders in fa'aSamoa society. There were numerous reports of missionary consultation with these men in matters relating to village issues and a consensus established in matters relating to roads, village laws and building projects.<sup>127</sup>

Elderly members were usually appointed, for the reason that they would be influential amongst the more recent converts, who may not yet have been fully converted. Men like Saimasina, Tafaoga, Opapo and Elisala were chosen as leaders and they proved helpful in the work. These men became the true bridges between the two cultures. They were able to navigate between the two cultures using their knowledge and understanding to pacify issues that threatened to trigger off conflict in the village. Latter-day Saints historian Britsch also acknowledged their contributions to the village. He commented of the

---

<sup>126</sup> *ibid.*, 6 January, 1906. Other examples cited during this period indicating sporadic hostilities but frequent harmony include 5 April, 1907; 12 May, 1909; 16 March, 1912; Manuscript history and historical reports, History of the Samoan Mission, 28 February, 1925.

<sup>127</sup> *ibid.*, 5 December 1905; 29 January, 1906; 8 June, 1908.

numerous references to their endeavours in latter-day saints' mission records recognising their wisdom, strength and power within the village affairs.<sup>128</sup>

The latter years witnessed the display of this cautious diplomacy by the missionaries. During the 1920s there were changes to the purpose of the village. The changes were influenced by local factors. As in the case in Utah, gatherings in Samoa were primarily brought about as a refuge from persecutions and as a strengthening location for training members to be steadfast in the faith. Once when the local circumstances were favourable with less persecution and opposition in Samoa, inevitably the Mormons were to be encouraged to move back to their villages and families and assist in expanding the missionary programme and Church profile. The Church leaders in Samoa particularly the Mission President, Willard Smith, decided to begin relocating the residents back to their villages but this decision was met by great opposition as the residents refused to leave. Despite hostilities in the village over the resentment of members to requests that they relocate and villagers' disgust at the perceived stricter village laws, missionaries were cautious in controlling the tensions and preventing it from escalating into greater discord. They would often seek the support of the ruling village Fono with influential residents and resorted to extreme desperation and measures by calling upon the support of external influence in the Colonial Government to carry out their policies.<sup>129</sup>

Coupled with this was what Cumming described as "strong leadership".<sup>130</sup> The ability to wield the people together into a cohesive unit was often exemplified in Sauniatu, as missionaries assigned there were resolute. An example of this determination was demonstrated when a missionary showed persistence by refusing despite residents' protests to grant a holiday. He encouraged them to continue to work and attend to other tasks needed. Implementing group-building programs was another method used. For instance the Sauniatu Branch records often described missionaries such as Elder Baird and others conducting weekly meetings of testimony services, training in Church fundamentals, and providing constant counselling. They were prompt to separate the wheat from the tares

<sup>128</sup> Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, pp. 379-380.

<sup>129</sup> Sauniatu Branch Record, 15 May, 4, 9 August, 1929.

when disobedient or infidels in the temple were identified.<sup>131</sup> An arrangement for following-up member progress was also emphasised.<sup>132</sup>

On the other hand at times there was a breakdown in relations within the ruling body. Due to its distinct nature of dual administration, cultural misunderstandings and conflict seemed inevitable. The multiple responsibilities in the hands of the young missionaries would have created a lot of tension. These were combined with the contradictory principles confronting Samoans, first obedience and respect to older members of the community and secondly following Mormon priesthood leadership concepts requiring respect for those that lead regardless of age. This made the situation challenging and complicated. With this in mind it was inescapable that the causes of tensions would come from Mormon cultural insensitivity, un-diplomatic decisions coupled with native stubbornness and resistance to follow ecclesiastical orders.

Throughout this period of the gathering, there were certain instances where missionary insensitivity caused tension. The earliest example in the records occurred when a missionary criticised a family for feeding their children green bananas, a Samoan staple. When the family murmured, the missionaries were impatient.<sup>133</sup> Other infrequent examples followed where the missionaries became overly critical of improper native dancing in relation to farewells, *fiafias* (get together) and celebrations. They also wanted to control the custom of food distribution among the village residents at these celebrations.<sup>134</sup> Years later, attempts were made to modify aspects of Samoan culture deemed “unMormonlike”. Elder Anderson exhorted the members to do away with their Samoan ideas and believe the gospel.<sup>135</sup> Such instances would have brought negative responses and reluctant obedience from the locals, since native food and celebrations were important aspects to their diet and socialisation according to research by scholars Meleisea and Holmes. Meleisea’s study on

---

<sup>130</sup> Cumming, pp. 68-69.

<sup>131</sup> Sauniatu Branch Record, 27 January, 9 April, 14 May, 24 July, 25 November, 1905; 6 October, 1907; 28 February, 1914.

<sup>132</sup> *ibid.*, 12, 16 March, 1912.

<sup>133</sup> *ibid.*, 27 April, 1905.

<sup>134</sup> *ibid.*, 5 April, 1909.

<sup>135</sup> *ibid.*, 22 December 1918.

the nature of Samoan society emphasised the significance of distributing resources within a family and village during occasions such as weddings and funerals.<sup>136</sup> These examples of missionary opposition to several faaSamoa customs practised by village residents insinuated paternalistic attitudes and racism existed and shown on the part of some of the missionaries assigned in the village.

Latter-day Saints scholar Kenneth Baldridge in his study of Sauniatu acknowledged missionary insensitivity and attributed the cause to a touch of inexperience and self-righteous on the part of the American missionaries relying on their "God-given inspiration and faith".<sup>137</sup> Another historian Britsch did not clearly discuss this matter in his work but raised a point that would have triggered tension between the missionaries and Samoan members relevant to the discussion. He mentioned the leadership issue and the reluctance by the missionaries to allow Samoan members greater ecclesiastical priesthood authority during the 1920s, (relevant to the Sauniatu gathering) was a remnant from the paternalistic Latter-day Saints attitudes of the past and had a touch of white supremacy.<sup>138</sup>

On the other hand the local leaders' unwillingness to follow ecclesiastical authority was another factor in this breakdown in relations. Considering missionary age and cultural inexperience compared to the local elders within a Samoan society, occasionally there was opposition directed at the missionaries and their administration, perhaps because of personal pride, stubbornness and convictions. Such is the case of Elisala, a pioneering forefather of Sauniatu. His opposition and unrecorded disagreements caused an unpleasant relationship with the missionaries and consequently he was demoted to a lesser assignment while Opapo, another local leader, became his replacement. Elisala swiftly repented, and was reinstated to his original assignment. Similarly the missionaries also spoke to the stubborn Auelio for being disobedient.<sup>139</sup>

<sup>136</sup> Meleisea, *Change and adaptations in Western Samoa*, pp.16, 23; Lovell D. Holmes & Ellen Rhodes Holmes, *Samoan Village Then and Now*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Wichita State University, 1992, pp. 98-99.

<sup>137</sup> Baldridge, pp. 176-177.

<sup>138</sup> Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, p. 388.

<sup>139</sup> Sauniatu Branch Record, 28 June, 20 July, 1905 (Elisala swiftly repented. It seems he refused to give up his assignment for a lesser one.), 18, 21 October, 1913.



## Residents response/attitudes towards Mormon village Laws and Administration

The village laws provided interesting analysis because of the mixture of Mormon American and traditional fa'aSamoa principles. Mormon influence was apparent in village laws as secular and religious morals were implemented and observed. The advantage for the church was the parallelisms in its laws to fa'aSamoa principles easing and preventing any major contention. Common laws found in both traditional Samoan and in Mormon contexts including prescriptions against stealing, drinking, fighting as well as encouraging chastity and fidelity.

Nevertheless there were some unusual laws which reflected ecclesiastical influence. These laws were non-traditional and based on Mormon American ways of imposing order and ecclesiastical control over the residents. This was rather contradictory to Samoan customs and practices. Some laws restricted travelling throughout the island. This was new to the Samoan as they were accustomed to taking "malagas" or trips to visit extended family throughout Samoa. For instance there were fines issued to those that left the village without permission as a resident named Tasi found out.<sup>140</sup>

In addition there was strict observance of moral and chastity laws, contrary to the rather casual and unconcerned Samoan nature. Compliance with ecclesiastical teachings such as abstinence from bodily drugs (Latter-day doctrine called Word of Wisdom) was extremely important. Several residents were asked to leave because of infidelity.<sup>141</sup> Other reasons for discipline included acting defiantly against authorities and challenging the doctrines of the church. Such is the case of Filiaga, who was asked to leave the village for his refusal to comply with village and Church doctrines;<sup>142</sup> Compliance with doctrinal teachings like the Word of Wisdom was also important.<sup>143</sup>

---

<sup>140</sup> *ibid.*, 11 May, 1929.

<sup>141</sup> *ibid.*, 16 December, 1906; 13 April, 1907.

<sup>142</sup> *ibid.*, 7 July, 2, 4 August, 1929.

<sup>143</sup> *ibid.*, 4 May, 1906.



There was mixed response amongst the residents to village laws. For the most part there was a positive reaction, reflected by generally harmonious relations. Apart from the few troubles, the early years from 1905 to the late 1920s were generally no real opposition to the laws.<sup>144</sup> The people generally abided by the rules, as evident in the common references to this rather peaceful period.<sup>145</sup>

Nevertheless as time went by, members' displeasure became more persistent. The laws impeding on individual agency and cultural courtesy as regards various Samoan traditional customs caused the opposition. The perceived religious restrictions often challenged members' loyalty and faith. At times members did not conform to religious laws in the village. For instance the villagers often ignored a Mission President's prohibition of holding feasts for funeral receptions and continued to hold them.<sup>146</sup>

Analysing such an example of Samoan resistance is perplexing due to the absence of native accounts. The historical process of 'reading against the grain' is seemingly applicable here. Such an incident reflects the significance of the absence of residents' perspectives in the Branch Record. The record was fairly general in its descriptions of the daily activities in the settlement. The ecclesiastical nature and purpose of the record-keeping exercise may have been the reason why Samoan perspective was non-existent. Other reasons may have been missionary ignorance of such cultural matters due to lack of cultural understanding. But then again it was possible several American missionaries were ethnocentric in their mentality lacking empathy of Samoan epistemology and cultural customs in respecting their loved ones.

On the basis of the Branch records, there is the feeling that certain Samoan residents valued the importance of such cultural traditions as holding feasts especially in occasions as

---

<sup>144</sup> *ibid.*, Minor troubles included people leaving under their own accord (24 January, 17 May, 1906); disobedience to authorities (10 December, 1906); infidelity (12 August, 1905; 13 April, 1907); criticism of leaders (14 May, 1906) i.e A lady named Freda disputing with the missionaries in the village concerning food and the way the village operated.

<sup>145</sup> *ibid.*, 1 November, 1905; 25 December, 1906; 1 January, 1907; 7 November, 1908; 7 November, 1909; 7 December, 1909; 10 June, 1921.

weddings and funerals as a form of respect and family hospitality to the people coming to mourn. It is plausible that these members observed the more severe laws such as morality to the letter and spirit while to an extent disregarded the trivial ones where the issue came down to their agency to choose to practice traditional values or church.

Matters took a further turn for the worse in the late 1920s. It seemed that over the course of time the strict Mormon authority and lifestyle became too restrictive and tedious for some to bear. In the late 1920s there were frequent troubles in the village. Tensions occurred frequently due to added laws that were becoming more restrictive.<sup>147</sup> Consequently disputes were common in church records as members showed their displeasure over numerous issues. For instance there was a quarrel between the women and missionaries over what to do with the money they had acquired; a resident was threatened with banishment if he refused to comply with missionary demands to turn over his school children to the missionaries; members took the side of an apostate member (who opposed the doctrine of tithing) and threatened to harm the village missionary.<sup>148</sup>

The problem of the apostate member influenced other residents and escalated into a major dispute. Members joined in the quarrel and displayed their infuriation in various conducts. A member with a prominent assignment in the village as a former manager of the Church plantation and a respected Sunday school teacher was ordered to leave after supporting his fellow resident. He showed his annoyance by joining a few others in a protest walkout from the village.<sup>149</sup>

Another opposing behaviour was a collective and organised protest challenging ecclesiastical decisions and perceived “persecution” of the residents. A dorm parent in the school village influenced and led a protest movement amongst the schoolboys that

---

<sup>146</sup> *ibid.*, 18 July, 1906. Mission President Court during his tenure issued a law not to hold feasts for funerals.

<sup>147</sup> *ibid.*, 15 July, 1929; 5 January, 30 April 1930. Mission President Smith introduced laws that generally restricted village residents. They include: members not allowed to shelter guests, leave the village without permission, infidelity and chastity were dealt with severely, fines imposed on trespassing through church plantation, untidy lawns and refusing to work for the village.

<sup>148</sup> *ibid.*, 14 May, 1929; 16, 21 May 1929; 2, 7, 15, 27, 31 August, 1929.

threatened the life of a missionary.<sup>150</sup> Others continued to cause disruptions to village operations by refusing to comply with village laws and harassing the missionaries and members.<sup>151</sup>

Analysing member resistance reveals that a possible reason may have been their ignorance and inexperience in living at a Mormon American mission settlement. Living strict Mormon laws under the direction of Mormon missionaries proved difficult in contrast to the more flexible Mormon observance practised in their own villages. Fa'aSamoa village life in the late nineteenth century had revolved around a modified religion with continued cultural rituals and values. The gathered residents were generally inexperienced in understanding the importance of living by Mormon values and to an extent underestimated the firmness of missionary and Sauniatu expectations. The gathering village became more or less a sanctuary at which the members were to be assimilated to Mormon western values. This belittling and undervaluing of the mission's intentions and the resultant frustration was exemplified by their continued displeasure at missionary operation of the village.<sup>152</sup>

Hostility was displayed not only to the American missionaries but also towards local leaders. The Branch record describes an incident involving member resentment towards a Samoan church leader. Because the residents were adjusting to obeying ecclesiastical authority, tension was inevitable when native Samoan leaders, sometimes of lesser rank and age, would act as religious enforcers. Such is the case with the village Matai leaders' accusations of a local leader abusing his authority and their dislike of taking orders from a perceived lesser-ranked individual.<sup>153</sup>

Perhaps then again resentment was partly owing to the members' perceptions of overly paternalistic policies by Mission President Smith in the late 1920s that caused contention. With the village's changing role as more of a supporting community

---

<sup>149</sup> *ibid.*, 4, 12 August, 1929.

<sup>150</sup> *ibid.*, 18 September, 1929.

<sup>151</sup> *ibid.*, 7 January, 1930.

<sup>152</sup> *ibid.*, 28 June, 1905; 14 May, 1906; 21 May, 1929; 4, 12 August, 1929.

<sup>153</sup> *ibid.*, 11 September, 1933.

to the school rather than for gathering, new laws were introduced to encourage residents to relocate to build the church in their own respective villages.

Thus it was obvious that implementation of strict laws was an indication of the seriousness of Mormon administration. For instance the villagers were prohibited to leave the village without permission and they were not allowed houseguests. They could be banished for committing adultery or for refusing to pay reparations for theft, fines for uncleanliness in the village and trespassing on the church plantation.<sup>154</sup>

The uncompromising rules probably came across as a direct challenge to Samoan self-determination and cultural values. The records indicated that several members became outraged as they interpreted the new laws as provocative. A few of the residents including Leausa and family left the village in opposition to relocation.<sup>155</sup> A few months later the incident involving Filiaga and other members opposed additional laws introduced.<sup>156</sup>

This, coupled with the constant changes in missionary personnel, would have added fuel to the fire. New arrivals would have affected village chemistry and camaraderie often as a result of inexperience and novelty to the village. In the early years of the settlement, conflict was minor, as missionary and residents relations were harmonious. An example was Elder Baird, a popular figure during his tenure possibly due to the fact that he had been associated with the villagers for an extensive period of time.<sup>157</sup> There was always the possibility of disturbance in established relationships formed between the two due to regular transfers of missionaries, as residents would have re-adjusted to the new personalities. Missionary personalities ranged from the open-minded servants to the inexperienced and paternalistic relying on their God-given inspiration and judgement that

---

<sup>154</sup> *ibid.*, 15 July 1929; 5 January, 30 April, 1930.

<sup>155</sup> *ibid.*, 12, 13 May, 1929.

<sup>156</sup> *ibid.*, 4, 12 August, 18 September, 8 October, 1 November, 1929; 7 January 1930.

<sup>157</sup> *ibid.*, 2, 6 May, 1906.

was often hostile to members. This was the villagers' common perception of the succeeding missionaries in the early 1930s like Elder Stone whom the villagers disliked.<sup>158</sup>

Then again maybe the devitalised state and the unspectacular steady progress of the place may have caused tension in the village. It seems that the village had a sense of newness about it at the first. The villagers were probably content to allow the missionaries to operate without any real opposition, as living in Zion was still a refreshing and attractive idea in their minds. However like any other idea sometimes it may decay and debilitate leading to contempt. This may be due to various reasons from harsher laws to living with other fellow members and missionaries. For instance there were no real troubles in the early years until the latter years when the plantation was unstable and declining. Coincidentally it is unsurprising that at the same time, the contempt was breeding due to over-familiarity with the place. It is plausible that such factors may have cause scepticism amongst the residents in doubting the administrative management of the village and their purpose of living there.

#### Village Administration and External relations

In analysing relations between the village administration and external authorities there were indications that there was lesser interactions or intervention by the Colonial government. It seems that the central Headquarters (Mission president) dealt more with the higher authorities than the local village administration. There is a paucity of details in the Branch records to describe the relations. The few references indicated there was a feeling of incredulity and distrust on the part of the missionaries and settlement administration. The record reported the visit of two government officials to take three men to Apia for a cause not named in the record. The Branch record assumed this as a trick to cause trouble and disturb the peace of the village.<sup>159</sup> The missionaries were later

---

<sup>158</sup> *ibid.*, 24 January, 4, 12, August, 1929.

<sup>159</sup> *ibid.*, 31 October, 1905.

summoned to see the Governor over the matter.<sup>160</sup> Apart from this incident contact with the government authorities was rare and low-key.

However relations with neighbouring village administrations were often marked by animosity and distrust. The tensions often caused by territorial quarrelling and the unique geographical location of the church village in which the neighbours felt in some ways threatened by their presence. The earlier years of the settlement witnessed contention over land disputes and encroachment. An early incident was reported when the village administration received a letter from their counterparts in neighbouring Manunu, to stay clear of each other's business and lands.<sup>161</sup>

Furthermore trivial territorial issues in regards to the neighbouring church schools dominated tensions in the latter years. An incident occurred when schoolgirls from both neighbouring schools quarrelled over a person being offended with the other retaliating. As a result fighting occurred between the girls. Village members joined in as the record described Manunu bringing over fifteen warriors and issuing a challenge.<sup>162</sup>

Tactful diplomacy was very much evident on the missionaries' part as numerous circumstances threatened peace with the neighbours. They acted as peacemakers and pacifists when situations became unsafe. There were instances when they sent messages to neighbouring Manunu authorities voicing their concerns over trespassing (people and animals) affecting village relations. The neighbours swiftly visited the settlement and came to an agreement to pay for the damages and fix the walls to prevent their pigs from intruding.<sup>163</sup> A few years later, the missionaries in return agreed to pay damages amounting to \$5 to their neighbours when church cattle destroyed Manunu lands.<sup>164</sup> In regards to the challenge issued by the Manunu warriors during a schoolgirl brawl, Elder Cahoon (the existing missionary authority at time) was able to quell the

---

<sup>160</sup> *ibid.*, 2 August, 1906.

<sup>161</sup> *ibid.*, 9 August 1905.

<sup>162</sup> *ibid.*, 11 December, 1931.

<sup>163</sup> *ibid.*, 28 April, 2, 8 June, 1905.

<sup>164</sup> *ibid.*, 25 July, 1907.



challenge by controlling their own village discipline and negotiated a peaceful resolution with the Manunu chiefs.<sup>165</sup>

Furthermore this was demonstrated in administrative relations with the neighbouring German-owned Rubber Company. Relations on the whole were harmonious as the missionaries build strong associations with the Company leaders.<sup>166</sup> However there was somewhat a large Chinese population in the area working in the rubber fields and tensions at times flared between them and Sauniatu village members. The record describes several incidents where serious trouble was avoided and cautious diplomacy applied. One such incident was when Chinese workers from the Rubber Company stole from a member's plantation. A village boy confronted them and they were ready to fight with their knives. Fighting very nearly erupted but the missionaries were able to end it by visiting with the Company Boss, Mr Vincent, and he in turn agreed to pay for the damages.<sup>167</sup>

#### Influence of the Mau Movement in the village?

Examining the occasional breakdown in relations between the village administrators (namely the Missionaries and native village leaders) with both the village residents and neighbouring villages invokes several rather theoretical questions. Was there any connection or influence of the Mau in relation to these disharmonies and strife (with the residents and the neighbouring villages)? If not then why wasn't there any? Probing through the Sauniatu Branch records and the primary sources available (missionary journals), indicate there was no reference to the Mau at all. Even as a motive for residents' resistance, it was interpreted as purely personal defiance of village laws and administrators.

Perhaps there maybe some links but future studies in obtaining the natives view may be profitable here. The reason is that the stricter laws in the village came about during the 1920s, at the height of Mau activity and popularity throughout Samoa especially in the Atua District where Sauniatu was located. Were the so-called "troublesome residents"

---

<sup>165</sup> *ibid.*, 11, 12 December, 1931.

<sup>166</sup> *ibid.*, 3, 5 April, 1905.

<sup>167</sup> *ibid.*, 8 October, 1905.



particularly in the late 1920s perhaps caught up in the Mau spirit and excitement at the time since the residents were not entirely isolated from travelling to Apia frequently? Could Mission President Smith's tougher laws introduced and according to academic Kenneth Baldridge intended to 'tighten the mission',<sup>168</sup> not only referred to maintaining Mormon discipline in observance, but to control the growing in-discipline that may have caused by the Mau?

On the other hand, it is conceivable that there are other reasons for the absence of references to the Mau. One reason may involve the nature of the residents. Those that moved to the village during the early years of the village (1905-1907) from the recruitment program were devout and firm in character. The explanation is because they often came on their own terms and free, as a response to an invitation to gather. In contrast the others that refused opted to stay behind in their local areas as evident in the sources earlier cited. With this in mind the residents were the embodiment of the "faithful followers" and it is likely that with the training given within the village became more dedicated in their devotion with no major resentment towards the missionaries and administration.

In addition, with the efficiency of the administrating of the village, there was a possibility that any influence of the Mau was removed or negated. The administration in the form of the missionaries was very firm. The village laws kept the residents honest and controlling any escalating trouble. Those that disobeyed the serious laws as cited earlier were punished or the extreme banished from the settlement. The organised village programs ranging from secular, civil, social and religious also kept the locals occupied avoiding their minds to wonder inviting trouble. The involvement of the residents in the village administration would have also eased a lot of tensions in terms of issues involving leadership.

Furthermore based on the Sauniatu Branch Records, there was even no written record of their neighbouring villages Manunu and Lufilufi becoming involved too, which

---

<sup>168</sup>

Baldridge, Sauniatu, Western Samoa: A Special Purpose Village, p. 182.

would have implied that maybe the Mau movement was more intense in Urban Apia and other provincial areas. It suggested that certain parts of Samoa such as Sauniatu were less interested and committed to Samoan political interests at the time especially the struggle for political independence.

The village administration therefore shows interesting analysis, as the uniqueness of the semi-dual administrative system was very much evident and influential. The events and happenings in the village illustrated that it was exceedingly successful as a method of management and operating the gathered although it had its moments. Several issues dealing with cultural, locality and doctrinal had emanated as a consequence, both internal and external.

## Chapter Five- 'Analysis on the Nature of Village Life'

If the village administration was uniquely Mormon in its set up and function, a more idiosyncratic aspect of the settlement lay in its structure, nature and culture. Throughout the gathering period in Sauniatu, the Mormon settling pattern was evident in village life as it was essentially Mormon with a supplementary blend of fa'aSamoa. This unique characteristic at times prioritised Mormon principles over proper fa'a Samoa cultural values of respecting primarily traditional matai authority and living various social traditions. At times it tested the relations within the Utopian-like community.

### Mormon influence in the Village arrangement

Sauniatu was an embodiment of Mormon gatherings as an idealised and nostalgic refuge. Mormon influence was very much evident in the village layout as a symbol of order, co-operation and cleanliness. Cummings has discussed the importance of physical location and settlement layout in his study as a characteristic of Mormon culture building.<sup>169</sup> He noted that the physical location and layout was as significant as the people that gathered in it. It was to represent a broad base of Mormon culture and devotion. The ordered and meticulous planning gave the place a sense of attraction, self-pride of a legacy of taming the land. The settlement's environment was inimitable, beginning with its physical layout; a reflection of its uniqueness within a Samoan setting. The community design was a mixture of American Mormon influence and Samoan effects. This was apparent in the settlement's physical composition. The surroundings were arranged in a linear fashion where thatched roof houses were built along a single street. There were also some outlying micro settlements like Vaisega, just a mile up the road, where families lived. A meetinghouse was built at the end of the single street ten years after the village was established. The meetinghouse symbolised a new focal point of the members' religious commitment and stood out as a central building in the village.

---

<sup>169</sup>

Cummings, pp. 131-132.

Unlike the focal point of Sauniatu that is the Church, in contrast the traditional Samoan village prioritised its own culture within its village structure and practises. Traditional Samoan villages at the time revolved around a central malae (meeting place) that symbolised the social, political and religious vitality of the village. Besides the important role of the church in everyday life, it was usually internalised into fa'a Samoa thus deeming it as equally as significant as fa'a Samoa culture or if not secondary. Despite the eccentricity of Sauniatu, however there were particular similarities as its layout could be still recognised within a Samoan setting. Like other more conventional villages, the Church building was the focal point of their religious worship.

Furthermore throughout the years there was progressive western influence in its buildings and layout. The increase in European housing, modern buildings and other major projects enhanced its western image, transforming it into a distinctive westernised Samoan village in a rural area of Upolu. The roads were also improving throughout the years and gradually becoming suitable for automobiles. Other improvements attended to were a concrete bridge was built at the village, a new meeting house completed by 1908, a missionary house finished where it was described as a "mansion", a store, police force was set up in 1913 and further modifications to the meeting house.<sup>170</sup>

Even though this strong Mormon influence was present, a Samoan characteristic was very much manifested in the resident housing made of thatched roofs and stones surrounding the settlement.<sup>171</sup> Overall, Island and European style houses were mingled together without any difficulty, as Samoan housing was more suited to the climate.

With time and the increase in community public projects, the settlement became increasingly civilised in western thought. There are references in the Branch records of a completed road and bridge built directly from the coast to the inland settlement,

<sup>170</sup> Sauniatu Branch Record, 4, 6 August, 1908 (improved roads); 26 August, 24-26 October, 16, 22 October, 1911 (building and completion of a concrete bridge); 25 October, 1908 (completion of a church meeting house); 13 February, 21 April 1909 (missionary house completed); 29 June, 1911, 6, 10 January, 12 May, 9 November, 1913 (a store, police force was set up as well as further modifications to the meeting house).

establishment of a village school, fairly modern building structures including the Church chapel, decent sanitation and conventional social and familial arrangements.<sup>172</sup> It is tempting to suggest that such developments were impressive for a rural village at the time. In comparison to neighbouring rural villages, such developments would have been gradual, as Samoa yet was to move towards that direction of establishing adequate road transportation or even standard sanitation.

Despite this progressive nature, at times, the precedents of Western society had little relevance in the settlement. Occasionally the residents rejected western values implemented. There were no “extravagant” buildings for “immoral” socialising such as pubs or brothels to tempt the minds of the residents. Local laws were based on church principles including restrictions on alcohol, profanity, infidelity and other non-Mormon practices. There was an interesting law requiring residents to be fully clothed or covered inside settlement premises as a form of respect. There were other laws where Mormon and Fa’aSamoa values were in accord, mainly concerning respect for leaders and authority. Failure to abide by the laws brought about stern consequences and punishment, usually fines and banishment from the settlement. The Branch record indicated that these offences were a rarity. The usual cases throughout the gathering phase ranged from serious offences requiring immediate expulsion such as infidelity, smoking, drinking and defiance of church authority to minor offences involving disobedience to village and school laws.<sup>173</sup>

#### Residents response and abiding to laws

Throughout the gathering period there was very little opposition to these laws despite the sporadic opposition which increased in the latter years following church policy alterations encouraging members to return home to their villages by the end of the 1920s. There were instances of dissatisfaction with the laws in the early years of the establishment,

---

<sup>171</sup> *ibid.*, 4 April, 17 July, 1905.

<sup>172</sup> *ibid.*, 10 November, 1905; 4, 6 August, 1908; 16-20 October, 1911; 26 September, 1913, 9 November, 1913; 7 July 1929.

<sup>173</sup> *ibid.*, 12 August, 1905; 16 December, 1906; 13, 14 April 1907 (Infidelity); 4 May, 1906 (Smoking); 2, 4 August, 1929 (Defiance of village laws); 18 April, 17 June, 17 August, 1922 (minor offences ranging from aggressive behaviour in school, not wearing a shirt in the village, breaking equipment in village and disrespecting village authorities).

possibly as members were adjusting such as the cases of Luteru and Freda who voiced their displeasure at how things were conducted around the place. Another member Tauoga was reported as deserting the village with his family because of his love of tobacco.<sup>174</sup> The latter period witnessed major opposition from members towards Mission policies of relocation. The consequences were enormous, as members contended with the missionaries, causing a split within the village. The incident with Filiaga and his supporters in the village illustrated the residents' their resentment by refusing to comply with the missionaries initially leading to calls for his expulsion.<sup>175</sup>

### Village economic subsistence

Fundamental Mormon gathering and settling principles practised focused on agriculture and ranching, and evident in the village economy and finance. The set up reflected the church goal of self-reliance for the settlement and generating profit for mission expenses.<sup>176</sup> From the outset the members gathered had no material wealth so their labour and knowledge was employed in which the Mormon idea of 'communal enterprise' was practised. The village engaged in several business ventures often with mixed results. Agricultural labouring marked the first phase. Residents were encouraged to work the lands allotted to them by the church and collectively assist each other in planting coconuts and other crops.<sup>177</sup> There was also high expectation of the potential for a lucrative rubber market as rubber seeds were planted.<sup>178</sup> The crops were usually boxed and shipped to the main township of Apia.

Ranching was another settlement economic venture. The early records indicated village involvement with pig pasture.<sup>179</sup> As early as 1908 there was growing interest and involvement in cattle ranching and rearing.<sup>180</sup> There was the feeling that ranching was

<sup>174</sup> *ibid.*, 2 February, 4, 14 May, 1906.

<sup>175</sup> *ibid.*, 4, 11 August, 1929.

<sup>176</sup> Martin F. Sanders, Sanders to Joseph f. Smith, 20 June, 1903, Sanders Papers, Church Archives

<sup>177</sup> *ibid.*, 15, 20, 21 March 1905 (planting coconuts); 3 July, 8 August, 30 December 1905; 4, 10 May 1915 (other crops were grown such as bananas, breadfruit, arrowroot and sweet potatoes).

<sup>178</sup> *ibid.*, 12 August, 1905.

<sup>179</sup> *ibid.*, 11 September, 1905.

<sup>180</sup> *ibid.*, 13 May, 1908.

more suited to missionary knowledge due to their rural backgrounds whereas they were inexperienced in traditional plantation activities. The practice was discontinued in 1909 due to cattle activities affecting plantations. It was reintroduced in 1916 when the young coconuts were more adequate to resist the danger of grazing. A large number of cattle was brought in from Savaii, reflecting the leaders' commitment to resuming this economic venture.<sup>181</sup> The enterprise to increase Mission revenue was ongoing even beyond the temporary gathering period by the 1930s.

From the beginning, the settlement struggled to financially sustain itself. Early indications in the records described how the village men struggled financially to pay taxes and support their families.<sup>182</sup> This concern continued throughout the whole gathering phase until President Smith's decision to transform the village into a school village and economic venture.<sup>183</sup>

#### Nature of Mormon life in the settlement

In analysing the nature of Mormon life in the village, a conspicuous feature is the social structure. General Latter-day Saints patterns were apparent in familial and labour arrangements. The village consisted of families and individuals from part-member families that wished to come together. The bulk was settled in Mormon family household groups. These settlement groups were focussed upon the dwellings of particular families like that of Elisala, Tafaoga and Opapo. They assembled as families and their housing was grouped together for safety measures both in standards and protection. This operation was extended in the advancing years of the settlement to the establishment of a village school. As the settlement progressed from 1905 onwards, diversity was added to the village social structure with the introduction of boarders and appointed Dorm parents as guardians.

---

<sup>181</sup> *ibid.*, 7, 12-16 September, 1916; 16 January, 18 April, 1917.

<sup>182</sup> *ibid.*, 2 June, 1906.

<sup>183</sup> *ibid.*, 11, 12 May, 1929; Samoan Mission Historical Record, Three Month Report, 31 December 1930, Church Archives. This was a concern during the 1920s. Samoan Mission President Smith monitored the situation when came into office in 1924 but did not make any significant changes until the end of the 1920s as the gathering was discouraged and the Policy of Relocation kicked in.



Examining social distinction in the village revealed that by and large there were certain distinctions and social differences within the Utopian-like village. In fact differentiation was manifested in ecclesiastical terms. Mormon doctrines shaped the differences in gender roles and in religious responsibilities. For instance men were expected breadwinners while mothers the keepers of the home. This was reflected in the Branch records, for men were often described as working their own lands, boxing plantation food and selling it in Apia for profit, and working for the local Rubber Company.<sup>184</sup> They were also expected to assist in collective community projects such as building a new community chapel, other buildings and cleaning.<sup>185</sup> Women on the other hand were engaged in domestic duties from cleaning, washing, catching fish and preparing food for the families to assisting men in the plantation.<sup>186</sup> Children were expected to attend school and help out everyone when they can. In the early years, boarders were assigned to live with village families where they were expected to be part of that family and assist them in their daily work. The boys supported the men on the plantations while the girls helped the women with the domestic chores.<sup>187</sup> This was later changed in 1919, when the village council decided to construct dormitories for the students.<sup>188</sup>

Apart from expected gender responsibility ecclesiastical responsibility was another form of distinction. There was a clear hierarchical order in terms of leadership. The missionaries were the influential decision-makers along with certain local individuals. They became the influential Samoan voices to the missionaries and on the whole administration of the village. Individuals such as Saimasina, Elisala, Opapo and Tafaoga became trusted missionary confidants and perceived as respected Church Elders. This was probably due to their efforts prior to the establishment of the village gaining the Mission President's trust. For instance Elisala, Tafaoga and Opapo were prominent leaders in the settlement at Tuasivi prior to occupying Sauniatu.<sup>189</sup>

<sup>184</sup> Sauniatu Branch Record, 3 April, 17 July, 1905; 7 September, 1916.

<sup>185</sup> *ibid.*, 3-6 January, 1906; 17 January, 1912.

<sup>186</sup> *ibid.*, 5 April, 9 May, 1905; 7 January 1907; 22 February, 1916.

<sup>187</sup> *ibid.*, 31 April, 1905; 9 February, 1907.

<sup>188</sup> *ibid.*, 8, 14 April, 1919.

<sup>189</sup> Samoan Mission Historical Record, 22-24 October, 1904.

Besides the differentiation, it seemed that an obvious one but not mentioned in depth in the Branch records was the cultural aspect. Judging from excerpts of the Branch entries, there were occasions in which cultural intolerance was demonstrated reflecting the differences between missionaries and members. The example of missionaries berating the members of feeding their babies with green bananas illustrated their cultural insensitivity. Such an example inevitably induces the mind to speculate and question that the distinction in a cultural epistemological sense was very much evident in the village; hence naturally personal racism and prejudices would have been present.

Meanwhile village life can be described as fairly harmonious and there was active participation amongst the villagers in daily activities and decision-making. A spirit of co-operation was apparent in the working atmosphere. Members would sometimes help other members in plantations and also would participate in collective work such as village cleaning<sup>190</sup>.

Social relations were generally buoyant and harmonious. This positive interaction and fellowship was evident, as intermarriage was common. There were a steady number of weddings recorded in the Branch records as members from different areas met to find their partners in the village. Such is the case of the wedding of Salu and Alice, a couple representing two different villages.<sup>191</sup>

In addition a spirit of co-operation was common in their interactions. Generally disputes were infrequent as members often described their experiences of working together and being helpful. The record describes many instances where members work together in tasks and participating in social activities without any contention. Members assisted each

---

<sup>190</sup> Sauniatu Branch Record, 9 February, 1907.

<sup>191</sup> *ibid.*, 22 July, 1905; other weddings recorded 25 February 1905; 15 April, 1907; 27 December 1907; 13 July 1918; 29 May 1917.

other in daily tasks such as plantations, village projects like building a new church meeting house, village clean-up, engaged in wedding and holiday celebrations festivities.<sup>192</sup>

Despite this congenial relations and bonding, at times there was contention but rather trivial. The factors causing disagreements varied from communal to public issues. For example President Court and his village missionaries tried to seek a solution to a dispute amongst the village people over land allotments at the time affecting village relations.<sup>193</sup> The Branch record also gave accounts of personal disputes amongst certain members reporting of quarrelling between husbands and wives over unnamed issues. There was an incident involving a couple Fulu and his wife Pisa whom could not come to a consensus on certain issues and were separated.<sup>194</sup> Interestingly there were few separations or divorces in the village.

Work relations was another cause of conflict as an incident described missionary attempts to propitiate an unpleasant situation between two village members: Elder Merrill gathered the village together and tried to fix a problem between members Aumavae and Lua. Aumavae had threatened to do Lua bodily harm after a dispute while both were working. Elder Merrill tried to put a stop to such bad work and bad language.<sup>195</sup>

In contrasting such relations with member-missionary association, there were obvious disputes. Even though there were minor contentions from the beginning, the records indicated its build-up especially towards the end of the gathering. The common cause of this opposition for the most parts was members condemning ecclesiastical measures and dislike of individual personalities. In the early years there was generally positive feeling towards the missionaries personally. The record described members enjoying Elder Baird's leadership tenure and missed him when he left.<sup>196</sup> Early minor incidents of dissatisfaction and contention ranged from trivial matters; Members grumbled

<sup>192</sup> *ibid.*, 22 July, 25 December, 1905; 3-6 January, 1906; 9 February, 15 April, 1907; 25 December, 1925.

<sup>193</sup> *ibid.*, 15 May, 1906.

<sup>194</sup> *ibid.*, 18 May, 1905

<sup>195</sup> *ibid.*, 28 April, 1907.

over perceived missionary racial intolerance in areas such as the “right” food to feed children, unhappiness over food distribution and leadership.<sup>197</sup>

The atmosphere heated up by the 1920s when Mission President Smith’s policies of relocation caused an outcry amongst some members. Members increasingly challenged church authorities and policies of relocation and numerous supporters later joined them. The record indicates constant troubles erupting in 1929 with major disturbances in the village including protest by several members, schoolboys, and threats to beat up the Elder Stone and constant harassment of the village missionaries.<sup>198</sup>

Besides the social relations, a fairly high death rate was an enduring feature in the settlement. Even though the village did not attract a greater Mormon following, nevertheless the community had a substantial figure of 175 residents by 1911. The epidemic in Samoa in 1918 affected the settlement severely.<sup>199</sup> The death rate in the early years was somewhat sporadic with reported deaths of mainly younger children and a mild illness contracted by several residents in 1906.<sup>200</sup> However things took a turn for the worse when the worldwide influenza epidemic hit Samoa in 1918. The bulk of the residents were affected by it and as a result 22 residents were catastrophically stricken and died. It had immediate ramifications for the village as church operations in the outer branches and meetings were called off. Village morale was low and during this time the healthy members were responsible for nurturing their fellow members. The Branch record reported some members participated in organising burials for those who were partially buried and administering food to the sick.<sup>201</sup>

---

<sup>196</sup> *ibid.*, 2, 6 May, 1906.

<sup>197</sup> *ibid.*, 27 April, 28 June, 1905; 14 May, 1906.

<sup>198</sup> *ibid.*, 7, 15, 27 July, 4, 12 August, 18 September, 1 November, 1929.

<sup>199</sup> *ibid.*, 24 April, 1911.

<sup>200</sup> *ibid.*, 9 June, 9 August, 1905; February and March 1906; 3 April, 1907.

<sup>201</sup> *ibid.*, 17, 24 November, 1, 15 December, 1918.

## External relations with neighbouring villages and denominations

During the early years of the gathering, the residents appeared to contend with the neighbouring villages. Examining the external connections of Sauniatu and other villages in the locality and the wider Samoan society provides interesting analysis. The early years were characterised by distrust and constant complaints and quarrelling over encroachment bringing about constant allegations of theft and dishonesty. Due to the uniqueness of the settlement, it doubtless raised a lot of eyebrows amongst the neighbouring villages. Territorial issues and defence were unavoidable issues, as the neighbouring villages would have felt threaten by an “untraditional” settlement present on their border and may have caused suspicion in regards to their activities.

Relations began off very harmoniously as the neighbouring village of Manunu paid their respects to the new settlement and its church leaders by bringing food and kava.<sup>202</sup> The friendly association began to turn bitter when Mormon addressed their complaints to the Manunu chiefs over encroachment. They posted notices forbidding them taking products from their land without permission. The missionaries swiftly tried to repair good relations when they went back the next day to the village and good feelings were restored.<sup>203</sup>

However numerous incidents marred the relationship, as both parties were guilty of trespassing. The Manunu village set it off with not controlling their animals as reported in the Branch records:

Elder Bird went to Manunu for the purpose of talking with them about keeping their hogs off our land as they were doing great damage to our taro and bananas. He told them if they did not keep their hogs at home that something would be done in this regard.<sup>204</sup>

---

<sup>202</sup> *ibid.*, 4 February, 1905.

<sup>203</sup> *ibid.*, 23-24 March, 1905.

<sup>204</sup> *ibid.*, 28 April, 1905.

The residents perhaps in response were guilty of committing offences against the Manunu village such as stealing immediately following this wrongdoing. The record reports:

“There was contention today as some of the boys have been guilty of taking some taro from the Manunu villagers’ plantations causing disturbance. The Elders advised the boys to go make things right.”<sup>205</sup>

The implications were noticeable, as constant incidents of trouble and territorial contention were a feature of the settlement’s external relations with neighbouring villages. Immediately the owner of the hogs, Faifai from Manunu confronted the missionaries. Elder Young, one of the village missionaries wrote to the superior, the Mission President (President Court), requesting to take the matter to the colonial government. However perhaps fearing a harsh Government penalty, the villagers promptly agreed to pay for the damages and to fix the wall to prevent the further intrusion of their animals.<sup>206</sup>

It seems at this time that distrust and resentment on both sides dominated the atmosphere. This was evident with several acts of intimidation and warning highlighting the next few months. The Manunu leaders sent a letter to the settlement pertaining to their agreement to stay off each other’s lands and business. The missionaries replied by warning them to stay on their side of the river and not to fish for shrimps on church land. In response they received a sarcastic and taunting reply from their neighbours.<sup>207</sup> Both sides claimed their innocence and blamed the other for the cause and effects of the problem. The Branch record states:

---

<sup>205</sup> *ibid.*, 27 May, 1905.

<sup>206</sup> *ibid.*, 2-3, 8 June, 1905.

<sup>207</sup> *ibid.*, 9, 18 August, 1905.

We add that we are innocent of any wrongdoing toward the people of Manunu... They have in every case had some ulterior purpose in view when offering us things free.... We believe that we are much better off without their false friendship.<sup>208</sup>

Negative propaganda was common in the next few years, reflecting the animosity between the neighbours. This was demonstrated when missionaries were called to appear before the Governor with two village men to explain why they never paid taxes. The Tax collector had notified the missionaries that there was no need for these men to pay taxes but they were informed by the Head chief (Pulenu'u) of Manunu and so they had to appear before the Governor. Eventually these men had to pay taxes due to notification.<sup>209</sup>

In addition relations with other neighbouring villages were strained at times. This was usually caused by encroachment and by lack of respect. An incident was reported in which the settlement received a complaint from Lufilufi village against taking food without approval. It was later discovered a village member escaped from his relatives in that village, having taken food with him.<sup>210</sup> Then again other villages resented Later-day saints. There were ill feelings shown by villagers on the coast towards the residents during everyday interaction. During a missionary visit with residents down the coast to pay several neighbouring villagers for helping them, they received stern words from the people.<sup>211</sup>

Adding to settlement torment, there was still powerful denominational opposition. The settlement was established near the heart of Protestantism in particular the Wesleyan church. There was strong propaganda within the locality to drive out the Mormons. By the beginning of the 1920's, the Church still struggled to make any significant inroads in the villages of Lufilufi, Falefa and Faleapuna. A typical report in the Branch records gives an account of Wesleyan resentment to Mormonism. Two missionaries reported how they were invited to Wesleyan headquarters in the nearby Wesleyan village school of Piula. The

---

<sup>208</sup>      *ibid.*, 9, 18 August, 1905.

<sup>209</sup>      *ibid.*, 5, 6 August, 1906.

<sup>210</sup>      *ibid.*, 1 October, 1905.

<sup>211</sup>      *ibid.*, 13 July, 1905.



Wesleyan authorities then ridiculed Mormonism, and informed the missionaries that they had warned the neighbouring villages of rejecting Mormons when visited.<sup>212</sup>

Tensions transferred to the schooling atmosphere as the competitive nature of neighbouring schools in some ways reflected village and denominational resentment. Although the unease became less frequent as time went by, it never ceased. The record reports an incident in which schoolgirls from the London Missionary Society and from the village school became involved in an unpleasant brawl over a trivial matter. It was immediately transformed into a bigger confrontation when men from both sides were enticed to support their sides:

War started immediately.... Well, immediately the boys and men began walking around carrying their knives behind them. Sulusi (a resident) gave the alarm that some of the Manunu were down in the Losa taro patch with knives, cubs etc., so the village started out with their weapons.<sup>213</sup>

The confrontation was finally subdued by common sense as leaders on both sides came to a compromise.<sup>214</sup>

Despite the strained external relations, there were positive aspects in the relationship. There were several reports in the Branch records of neighbourly social interactions with other villages. The village men were invited by the village of Saluafata to visit and teach them Church hymns. The reports by the men when they returned praised the village for their hospitality.<sup>215</sup> Perhaps due to the length of time more frequent interaction occurred, leading to improved relations with other villages. By the 1920s there was increased acceptance of the settlement by the bordering villages and all over Samoa. The school played a significant role as interactive sports activities and village band malagas (band tours) alleviated the tensions and improved external relations. For instance there

---

<sup>212</sup> *ibid.*, 10 November, 1917.

<sup>213</sup> *ibid.*, 12 December, 1931.

<sup>214</sup> *ibid.*, 12 December, 1931.

were frequent references to the village school hosting a government school cricket team, social links with other schools, the formation of a village band and their participation in village malagas playing tours in other villages.<sup>216</sup>

Even though there were significant improvements to relations, there was little external influence on the village settlement, for the village administration was vigilant that strict church policies were maintained. From 1905 to the early 1930s, colonial government influence was almost non-existent. Because the Mormons avoided involvement in local politics, they did not see them as a possible political danger explaining the non-disturbance on the settlement. In one of Solf's reports to his government in which he mentioned the Mormons, his view best describes the somewhat neutral Colonial governmental stance and peaceful relations: "The Mormon are decreasing every year....They are harmless and insignificant", he wrote. In his report he referred to the Church operation in Sauniatu "as an agricultural school".<sup>217</sup>

Exploring the nature of the village revealed that it lacked particular services both in a western and traditional sense that made it distinctive. In Western thought, the settlement as a community was very much politically inactive both locally and on a national basis. Perhaps Mormon success and popularity within the vicinity would have increased had they been more involved. The settlement also lacked a successful economic enterprise that would have made it more self-reliant. The experimentation and struggles with different ventures influenced the Mission Presidents to alter policies, eventually leading to the relocation of the members.

Furthermore the settlement in traditional terms lacked cultural features and functions necessary for the socialisation of Samoan members. Due to the religious nature of the village, members to an extent were alienated from their extended families and support

---

<sup>215</sup> *ibid.*, 25-26 September, 1906.

<sup>216</sup> *ibid.*, 27 February, 7 August 1926 (links with other schools); 21 November, 1920; 7 July, 1921; 27 February, 7 August 1926 (Village band and its tours).

systems. Brad Shore (and Meleisea) study discussed the value system of a traditional Samoan society. This consisted of the matai system at the heart of the village political system; the functions of the aiga (immediate and extended family) and village as the socialisation of the individual; and the role of family land and titles which brought about significant stewardship and responsibilities.<sup>218</sup> Because of the purpose and nature of the church village, cultural customs and aspects that they were accustomed to but considered “un-Mormonlike” was often discouraged and modified in the Church village. For instance ecclesiastical authority instead of the traditional matai system was prioritised; traditional member Malaga’s (visits/journeys) to visit their villages was controlled;<sup>219</sup> the sense of belonging to an active customary social community consisting of family and extended family bound by traditional descent titles was replaced by a more unconventional and religious community in which the community were bound by a common religious belief.<sup>220</sup>

The disconnection of Sauniatu residents from their families, villages and lands, a central aspect of their socialisation often affected relations between missionaries and members. There was the need for the residents to maintain constant contact with their families. However at the same time there were missionary concerns to maintain order and control the residents’ movements for settlement operations to function effectively. There was also the fear amongst church leaders of members susceptible to breaking church rules through these constant contacts. For instance the failure of two sisters to heed missionary advice not to leave the village led to dire consequences. Upon their return from Savaii, they were disfellowshipped for adultery.<sup>221</sup>

This somewhat secluded and reserved approach had negative ramifications in the early years. Even though the members had social interaction with others when they travelled during financial visits to town or family visits to their villages, by and large it was

---

<sup>217</sup> Pacific Manuscripts Bureau, nd, *A Report by Dr Wilhelm Solf, Governor of Samoa to the Imperial Colonial Office in Berlin*, in *Papers Relating to Samoa of H. Neffgen, Sometime Governor Interpreter, Samoa, 1900-1910*, held at Canberra, Australian National University, Microfilm 66.

<sup>218</sup> Shore, pp. 58-68.

<sup>219</sup> Members were allowed to leave the village in moderation from 1905 until 15 July 1915 when it became restrictive. This is cited in Sauniatu Branch Records, 15 July, 1915.

<sup>220</sup> Shore, pp. 71, 109.

an isolated community. During the first decade especially, the church village concentrated on its own development and often was uninvolved in community ties. It would have projected a negative clannish and introverted image within the District of Atua where cultural traditions was very strong. This was often demonstrated by the hostile attitude from other villages and those labelling the Mormon village as inferior to them.<sup>222</sup>

Despite the negative breakdown however there were advantages as the nature of the church village set-up to some extent mirrored the traditional villages. There were modifications that primarily prioritised church standards but familiar to residents. Family and community ideals with a religious feel were highly valued. For instance family prayer and community social activities (such as weddings, funerals and socials) continued to be practised but they were under Mormon conventions.<sup>223</sup> It is plausible that experiencing both, Samoan and Mormon principles within the village environment would have been beneficial for the residents. That if expected to leave the village, they would have contributed in Church expansion with their training acquired and subsequently adapt successfully back to their own villages. As the Branch record illustrates, there were no serious complaints from members struggling to adjust to church village expectations. The daily and weekly routine often reflected their traditional upbringing. Additional church regulations and expectations would have prepared the residents to becoming more firm members while at the same time were able to interact with the outside world. It will be interesting if this is explored in future scholarly works.

The nature of Sauniatu village was a typical Latter-day Saints colonial settlement characterised by harmonious relations and rural nature with occasional trouble in administration. The church village provided a meeting place where the Samoan members could participate in economic, social, religious and cultural activities under missionary supervision. Inequalities did arise from religious division of society in terms of hierarchical

---

<sup>221</sup> Sauniatu Branch Record, 10 December, 1906; 13 April, 1907.

<sup>222</sup> *ibid.*, 23 March, 9 August, 1905 (Manunu village); 13 July, 1905 (Lufilufi village).

<sup>223</sup> *ibid.*, 9 June, 1905 (funeral rules forbade a fa'aSamoan ritual and the service was conducted by missionaries); 22 July, 1905 (wedding); 25 May, 1914 (Dance held, usual regulations strictly applied, no money, no profanity, etc..)

appointments. The village to an extent did lack amenities and services disadvantaging the villagers' cultural socialisation but subsequently would have become an advantage giving them the best of both worlds in cultural and religious rearing and development due to the training and experience of living in a Mormon-Samoan environment. Nevertheless despite its interior nature and immediate function within the community, it was to play a more extensive role in Mormon operations throughout Samoa.

## **Chapter Six- The settlement as a strategic function for**

### **Institutional purposes**

Besides Sauniatu's purpose as a refuge and gathering for the Samoan Saints, it had external implications and significance, functioning as a base for assisting outer branches, alleviating the heavy burden from the central interlinked governing base in Pesega. At the same time it developed harmonious relations with the nearby locality for present and future missionary efforts. Analysing the village's role in Latter-day saints operations indicated its significant contributions. The parallel located in the flexibility of the functions of Sauniatu to conform to wider Mormon settlement schemes and immediate needs. It became an important institutional base for Mormon operations in Samoa.

### **Concerns in Church Operations**

Prior to the establishment of gathering places in Samoa, the Church had experienced difficulty in making progress in its missionary programme and in administering to the outer-Mormon branches. Geographically it was arduous to cover such an extensive area, as travel was often limited by boat and on foot. The effects were enormous, as contact with central administration in Pesega was often gradual and tardy. Church operation was laborious and infrequent. Missionary work and member visits to outer Church Branches throughout the island required significant physical effort as travel would require an extensive period of time.<sup>224</sup> There was also a heavy workload on the missionaries responsible for converting souls and administering the work in these areas. This demand led to Church initiatives in appointing local elders to assist in the

---

<sup>224</sup> There were several Mormon Branches on the island of Upolu during the gathering at Sauniatu. See Carl Harris, *History of Samoan, Apia Mission 1888-1983*, pp.14-15. It contains a map and reference to Branches established.

strengthening of Branches. The Church at the time failed to give adequate training for these local Elders or a facility to instruct them.

### Settlement Implications

There were numerous implications for Mormon gatherings in Samoa. Sauniatu's establishment indicated Latter-day saints desire for greater involvement with the rural areas. The lack of missionary numbers was an impediment as both missionary work and Church operations was unspectacular. The leaders viewed Sauniatu whether consciously or not, as feasible to improving Mormon operations and influence within the vicinity. Despite its temporary sanctuary purpose, it was plausible that the administration had intentions of remaining there and to utilise the land for prospective plans conducive to Church growth. This was evident with the search for economic ventures to maintain its survival at the time when the village was first established. It was frequently on the edge of collapse as it struggled to find a profitable venture to sustain itself.

Furthermore the establishment would serve several Church institutional operational interests. It would become a launching base for planned Mormon operations. Such operations included consistent frequent visits to the outer Branches. With this continual contact, it also diversified the range of locals and foreigners intensely with whom the church village would come in contact. Such interaction provided interesting openings because there was a unique opportunity for local Samoan Mormons dwelling in the village to mix with locals in the area. It had potential for establishing positive relations between Mormon missionaries and non-Mormon evangelists.

### Settlement Functions

When the settlement was established it served a tremendous role as a functional mechanism for the church. This role was flexible, in accordance with the needs of the Church. In the early years it had several primary functions. One was to provide a religious safe-haven for the persecuted Saints. As discussed in previous chapters, the settlement served this purpose providing comfort for the afflicted as Saints were



encouraged to dwell there while inside members were in the company of their fellow brethren. .

In addition the settlement served as a training facility for the members to assist in the already established branches. There was concern at the scarcity of firm local leaders in Samoa and the need to increase their number. Because of the paucity of American missionaries, the Church experienced great challenges in evangelising while at the same time managing the established church Branches. It was felt that the native missionary was an apt solution for these concerns. They were to be trained to look after the Branches while the missionaries would focus more on converting. Mission President Moody during his tenure expressed such a view:

“In regards to the spreading of the gospel in these islands, it was shown that the membership of the church here is not increasing rapidly enough compared to the efforts put forth by the Elders. After a lengthy discussion the point reached was that the matter of advising the Saints to gather here at Sauniatu should not be given rigidly without any alternative, but that better results could be obtained by bringing those who are willing and the labouring with the remainder in a reasonable consistent manner. The best method to working to this end was to decide to be gradually stationing out native Elders thus relieving the elders (Americans) sufficiently to enable them to supervise in a general way and in addition do more proselytising”.<sup>225</sup> The temporary nature of the settlement indicated the long term plans for these members to return to their own villages well equipped to assist in Church expansion.

This concern to strengthen the outer Branches was reiterated months later to the missionaries in Sauniatu. The Church leaders in Utah had emphasised the significance of strengthening the “outside work” or outer-Branches.<sup>226</sup> The message was well heeded as the settlement introduced programs to instruct the residents, preparing them for service in the church. The missionaries inside Sauniatu became the instructors and weekly training

---

<sup>225</sup> Sauniatu Branch Record, 2 June, 1908.

<sup>226</sup> *ibid.*, 23-24 October, 1908.

was given usually on a Monday in which everyone were expected to report of their visits. A typical training session is recorded in the Branch records. In it the Mission President Moody personally instructed both the American missionaries and the native Elders. In his training he "...instructed them that diligent effort is expected".<sup>227</sup> The travelling native Elders further learned in the field when they assisted the American missionaries during their visits to the outer Mormon Branches. The Branch record reported Elder Porter and Fulu visiting the Falealili Branch and holding meetings with the village. The opportunity to assist Elder Porter would have been beneficial for Fulu's learning in understanding the procedures of conducting Latter-day Saints meetings and giving training and counsel to the Samoan Saints.<sup>228</sup>

The travelling Elders were selected from the long-serving members and were usually the stalwarts like Saimasina, Elisala, Opapo and Tafaoga. There were also opportunities for new trained Samoan elders to experience such assignments indicating Church intentions of building a resolute and competent long-term local leadership base. Men like Fulu, Moeai and Fasa to name a few were given substantial periods to serve in different assignments.<sup>229</sup> The missionaries in charge of the settlement often were delegated weekly assignments consisting of external to internal duties. The external assignments usually required them to make frequent visits to the outer Branches on the Eastern part of the Island of Upolu.<sup>230</sup> In the Branch records there are frequent references to the Travelling Elders making these weekly visits in the weekends to speak at their Sunday services. Such is the case of Fulu who was assigned to visit the Falealili Latter-day Branch while at another time Opapo along with Elisala was sent to Saluafata Branch.<sup>231</sup>

The internal assignments dealt with administrative work. The settlement provided a comfortable environment for these leaders to gain administrative experience. They were active in the decision-making and running of the village affairs. For instance

<sup>227</sup> *ibid.*, 5 April, 1909.

<sup>228</sup> *ibid.*, 21 October, 1905.

<sup>229</sup> *ibid.*, 23, 28 October, 1905.

<sup>230</sup> The Branches include Lalovi, Fagaloa, Ma'asina, Malaela, Siumu, Sala'ilua, Salani, Aleipata, Falefa to name a few. The Branches are cited in Carl Harris, *History of the Samoan, Apia Mission 1888-1983*, p.15.

<sup>231</sup> Sauniatu Branch Record, 23 October, 1905; 7 January, 1909.

Opapo apart from being a travelling elder was appointed a Pulenu'u (Head of the village) and served admirably.<sup>232</sup>

The utilisation of the settlement as a training facility was also extended to the women residents. Church programs were introduced to educate them of their expected contributions to the Church capacity. The wife of the Mission President usually provided the training and in the village a woman was usually called as a President of the organisation (Women) to watch over it while working closely with the ecclesiastical leaders. The Women program or Relief Society formed in the village in 1905 served an important role in educating the women of Church expectations. They were to promote the importance of domestic responsibilities in the family homes and within the village as well as offering moral support to their husbands.<sup>233</sup> The Branch record reported that training was offered frequently but perhaps none more important than on the week of the two annual General Conference of the Church in Samoa, at which members gathered from around the islands for a week of social and spiritual nourishment. During this week the women would attend a session in which they were instructed of their duties. An example was the General Conference in 1915; during the women session training was given emphasising the importance of order within the village and homes as well as hygiene.<sup>234</sup>

Sauniatu represented a practical model of a doctrine practised in its fullest capacity without any real external coercion. A great advantage for the Church was self-determination within the village to execute its own programs. Church programmes from Utah (Zion) featuring various auxiliary programs as adapted in other settlements were very much implemented. Britsch described the Mormon settlement in Hawaii as containing the establishment of Church Auxiliaries like Sunday Schools, The Women's Relief Society Mutual Improvement Associations and Primary to name a few, concentrated at providing that solid spiritual instruction.<sup>235</sup> Several Church programs and principles such as the Mutual in Action or MIA (for the Church Youth), Primary Association (for the children up

---

<sup>232</sup> *ibid.*, 5 February, 1921.

<sup>233</sup> Sauniatu Branch Record, 10 December, 1905

<sup>234</sup> *ibid.*, 26 May, 1915.

<sup>235</sup> Britsch, *Moramona: The Mormons in Hawaii*, pp. 94-97.

to eleven years old), along with the Priesthood and Relief Society Organisations dominated the religious and secular life of the residents. For instance time was allocated during the week to hold these meetings and gatherings. The MIA programme was held weekly on Tuesday while Primary every Sunday.<sup>236</sup> Mormon Testimony meetings for general members were held on Thursday nights.

Apart from the training, the settlement played an important role as a strategic outpost for Mormon administrative operations. Having provided the necessary training for ecclesiastical service, it also functioned as a launching pad for travelling elders and missionaries to conduct missionary efforts to the outer villages of Upolu Island, as well as ecclesiastical work to the outer Branches and church schools. Prior to its establishment there were difficulties in effective communication with the outer areas. However its presence within the vicinity meant distance was no longer a concern as constant visits were now frequent. The Branch records described the immense change in activities as the settlement was established. Travelling Elders were assigned weekly to the several nearby Branches while the missionaries visiting the church schools and were able to proselyte and keep in constant contact with the villagers without any difficulty. The Sauniatu Branch Records frequently reported weeks when missionaries and the travelling/local missionaries departed to their various Branch assignments and villages.<sup>237</sup>

Moreover Sauniatu served as a central base for greater ecclesiastical gatherings. Because of the nature of the village, it was well placed for collective assemblage as outside interference was non-existent and it had the facilities to hold bigger conventions outside of the Mormon Headquarters in Pesega. Its geographic location was also favourable as a central location to the nearby branches in the outer villages alleviating long distant travelling. Annual Conferences were constantly held in Sauniatu and customarily took four days. The Branch record described an instance of a characteristic Mormon Conference. The May Church Conference in 1915 began with the arrival of several members from the other Branches. The men or Priesthood leaders were given

---

<sup>236</sup> Sauniatu Branch Record, 21 February, 18, 20, 22 June 1905; 16 May, 1907;  
<sup>237</sup> *ibid.*, 17 April, 1905.

training followed by social activities like dancing, choir and school performances, General Church meeting and concluded with general sports on the last day.<sup>238</sup>

During the late 1920s, several factors induced changes in Mormon policies that influenced Sauniatu's role. An improvement in external social relations with non-Mormons was a start. Mormonism was becoming more accepted into the wider Samoan society diminishing the peculiar image and isolation of members. Contact with other schools and villages were now on a regular basis through village band tours and school sporting contacts.<sup>239</sup> Improved relations and exposure within the nearby locality also was a factor. Such interaction and integration increased opportunities for mutual exposure benefited Mormons and non-Mormons to developing more sympathetic perceptions of each other. The Branch records do not indicate any severe troubles during the time. Perhaps the political instabilities of the 1920s with the Mau may have helped given that people in the locality were heavily involved in the political struggles for Samoan independence. Moreover a favourable administration in the form of the New Zealand regime was of great assistance. English was re-established as the primary language in schools, so less trouble was expected with Mormon proselytising efforts while also meaning that more English-speaking missionaries would be sent from Utah. The implications for Church members were great, as there was less possibility of persecution and the shift of focus for the need to strengthen other Church concerns mainly consolidating its established Branches.

President Smith adopted a relocation policy in which members were encouraged to return to their own villages to assist in Missionary work. In one of his reports to the Church leaders in Salt Lake, the Mission President wrote that 'he was a firm believer of Church schools and training young people. He was in favour of the return of the old people to their own villages as the idea of gathering had changed, due to the changes in native life and especially in the change in attitude and heart of the Samoan people themselves towards the

---

<sup>238</sup> *ibid.*, 28-31 May, 1915.

<sup>239</sup> *ibid.*, 21 November, 1920; 7 July, 1921; 7 February, 7 August, 1926.

work in the villages.<sup>240</sup> The educational system became the main priority for the settlement.

Consequently the Church educational programme went through several modifications including a more professional outlook. An attempt was made to establish a more uniform curriculum for Mormon Church schools and another emphasis was given priority on improving teaching standards through teacher certifications. As Church policies shifted directions, the settlement functions also corresponded in harmony with these needs. The flexibility of the settlement meant that no major village reorganisation or reconstruction was required. By means of a smooth transition village housing was transformed into classrooms and dormitories for students. The village became an educational training centre to hold faculty training and teaching conventions.<sup>241</sup> This training centre also became a staging post for trained teachers to be assigned to other Church schools in the outer areas. For instance a resident was reported being sent to an outer Church Branch in Masina, Fagaloa, to serve as a missionary and to teach a school there.<sup>242</sup> Other families soon followed such as Vaelua and Uli assigned to Lona, Ierome and Siniva appointed to Masina.<sup>243</sup>

The multipurpose functions of the village also included the economic aspect. There were several attempts to establish a competitive economic enterprise to sustain the village and build up church revenue. Although there were several different ventures, none of them succeeded. The unique ecclesiastical settlement structure transformed the village into an economic operational mechanism. The operations required the collaboration and co-operation of the village residents, for it was their labour that was required. The Mormon idea of communal enterprise validating a co-operative system was applied where members were given land to till while also expected to participate in a collective effort to get revenue

---

<sup>240</sup> Manuscript history and Historical reports, History of the Samoan Mission for Three Months ending, 31 March 1933.

<sup>241</sup> *ibid.*, Three Month Report, 31 December, 1930.

<sup>242</sup> *ibid.*, History of the Samoan Mission for Three months ending, 31 August, 1925.

<sup>243</sup> *ibid.*, History of Samoan Mission for Three months ending, 31 May, 1929.

for the village.<sup>244</sup> The missionaries supervised collective economic operations under the overall direction of the Mission President. The expected revenue was to primarily support the village and school while the remainder would assist in the overall Samoan Mission expenses. Members were expected to be self reliant in terms of the individual lands given to them. For instance members were reported shipping the fruits of their labours as plantation products to be sold at the markets in Apia.<sup>245</sup>

---

<sup>244</sup> Sauniatu Branch Record, 12, 15, 20, 21 March, 11 September, 1905; 13 May, 12-16 September, 1908.

<sup>245</sup> *ibid.*, 3 July, 8 August; 10 May, 1905.



## Chapter Seven – Success or Failure?

By the beginning of the 1930s, Sauniatu Village was transformed into a Mormon educational operation. The gathering had become nothing more than a pleasant memory to those that primarily experienced it. In placing these early years into a broader perspective, it raises several apt questions worth inquiring. The key question is what was Sauniatu village's contribution to Mormon development in Samoa? Wherein does it fit in the overall pattern of Mormon colonisation scheme?

What was Sauniatu's role in Latter-day Saints development in Samoa?

In evaluating the contributions of Sauniatu to overall Mormon development in Samoa, it was unquestionable that there were significant effects. This value begins with the village's establishment; it served as a Mormon tool in reorienting the members to its principles and expectations. The idea of 'the doctrine in practise' was very much exercised, seeing that the village became the embodiment of Mormon Zion. It was a symbol of Mormon self-determination in which its ecclesiastical authority was practised in its full capacity without external harassment from secular influences whether it is the Colonial government at the time or the neighbouring district administrative of Atua. Church programs were implemented for the purpose of educating the members of their expectations and for future leadership and service in Church capacities. For instance gender roles were highly emphasised. Church programmes such as priesthood and young men's organisation, as well as the Village Administrative Council allowed the men this opportunity to understand their roles. The men were instructed as priesthood holders, given the responsibility as presiding leaders in the families and expected to become the primary breadwinners. Women's expected domestic responsibilities were promoted through Church Organisation such as the Relief Society and doubling as a village organisation for

women.<sup>246</sup> The village contributed significantly to influencing the members to understand their part as Latter-day saints.

Furthermore Sauniatu contributed in instilling and developing principles of the unique Mormon culture within Samoa while developing a distinctive Mormon Samoan flavour of its own. Aspects of the Mormon mentality of 'one heart and one mind' were earnestly stressed and practised. Common Mormon characteristics, including collective co-operation and community building became the repeated settlement battle cry. The Branch records made frequent referrals to village leaders emphasising the importance of this doctrinal principle.<sup>247</sup> The harmonious spirits of co-operation and unity were often acknowledged in the records as members working alongside each other during the week while worshipping together spiritually indicating their desire to live these beliefs.<sup>248</sup>

Education was highly prized and encouraged in the settlement. The Church endorsed the education of its people as a way of better understanding their secular roles and its relation to ecclesiastical responsibilities. The overall goal was that such training would propagate firm members. It was hoped that families would become spiritually steadfast, economically self-reliant in order to perpetuating Church control and member devotion. The leaders regularly stressed the importance of education as evident in the continual references in the Branch records.<sup>249</sup>

The education was generally rounded as leaders adhered to the Mormon principle of prioritising Church tasks alongside civil functions. In schools there was a variety of subjects mixing secular with religious education. For instance the school subjects included language (German and English), arithmetic and vocational training for parents. Future fathers were trained in agriculture while future mothers were trained in their domestic

---

<sup>246</sup> *ibid.*, 10-11 December, 1905.

<sup>247</sup> *ibid.*, 5 December 1905 (Elder Baird); 14 October, 1906 (Kipeni Su'a); 12 April, 1907 (Opapo); 2 June, 1908 (President Moody).

<sup>248</sup> *ibid.*, 31 April, 1905; 8 September, 1906; 30 September, 1920.

<sup>249</sup> *ibid.*, 20 March, 6 November, 1905; 4 April, 1912; 11 February, 1914; Manuscript history and historical reports, Historical Record Three Month Report, 31 December, 1930.

responsibilities.<sup>250</sup> In addition Mormon religious education initiatives were implemented into the curriculum thus expanding the schooling subjects for the strengthening of its young latter-day saints members. This included learning aspects from the scriptures (namely the Bible and Book of Mormon), and church fundamentals were taught like learning to share a Mormon testimony and church hymns and prayers offered during school time.<sup>251</sup>

Moreover music and social activities were fundamental parts of Mormon communities and were manifested in Sauniatu village life. Music was encouraged as a form of socialisation, personal and daily enjoyment. The missionaries often offered music lessons to residents such as the case of Sister Wilcox (a missionary's wife) who held music lesson classes. A village choir was also formed from village members and often performed during annual Church Conferences.<sup>252</sup> The village gained fame as a musical centre and they were requested to perform and help other villages. For instance Saluafata village appealed for help in learning music.<sup>253</sup> Their reputation was further enhanced with the formation of a village Band that was frequently asked to make Tours. The Band was often asked to assist the missionaries during their malagas (proselytising tours) as part of their recruiting tool to promote the social aspect of Mormon culture while also requested to play in other villages. Social activities were regularly held for special occasions and often purely for Mormon association and comradeship.<sup>254</sup> Recreation and fiafia nights (night dances and celebrations) were often cited in the records.<sup>255</sup>

Perhaps an extreme example of Mormon culture expression is visible during the annual Church conference. The gathering of Saints every sixth month of the year had gradually developed into a great social event besides from the customary spiritual instruction. A typical programme incorporated aspects of modified Samoan culture and was highly anticipated amongst the Saints that gathered throughout the island of Upolu. Village Branches of the Church would mix and participate in activities ranging from traditional

<sup>250</sup> Sauniatu Branch Record, 31 May, 6 June, 1905; 26, 29 May, 1915.

<sup>251</sup> *ibid.*, 14 May, 1905; 28 February, 1914.

<sup>252</sup> *ibid.*, 22 April, 1914; 27 May, 1915.

<sup>253</sup> *ibid.*, 23-26 September, 1906.

<sup>254</sup> *ibid.*, 15 October, 1917; 21 November, 1920; 7 July, 1921; 27 February, 7 August, 1926;

<sup>255</sup> *ibid.*, 25 April, 1907; 15 March, 1912; 29 May, 1915.

Samoaan dancing, *fiafia* nights, choir performances, school performances, (Church schools around the island) and concluded with sports games. Mormon support for this event was vigilantly controlled under the supervision of the Mission President.<sup>256</sup>

The physical location further contributed to Mormon development in Samoa as the village structure gave the place a sense of uniqueness in comparison to nearby villages. The Samoan Mormons' search for cultural distinction could be found in its village set-up symbolising an extensive base of Mormon culture. It was distinctively Latter-day Saint because buildings represented both a Samoan (thatched houses) and Mormon flavour with its singular linear street, houses built alongside it adjacent to each other. The first village Chapel in 1908 was regarded as the pride of the village achievements and was later rebuilt for greater spectacle and an indication of true Mormon devotion. It substituted for the absence of a Mormon temple regarded as the pinnacle of Mormon devotion and characteristic of Mormon gathering settlements in mainland America.<sup>257</sup>

Besides this external peculiarity in relation to the wider Samoan society, there was also a sense of village distinctiveness within Mormon gathering places in Samoa. The unique village culture was very much apparent in the celebrations of the fruits of their labours. An annual commemorative Founding day was a chance to celebrate their uniqueness as a church village in Samoa and an occasion to build community pride. By engaging in such celebrations it perpetuated their distinctive identity from other church gathering villages like Mapusaga and Vaiola. The inaugural celebration was held on 7 November 1908. Several traditions were devised to honour the founding pioneers of the village similar to the celebrations in Salt Lake City. Samoan Saints like Opapo and his wife were dressed up in apparel similar to those they wore when they first arrived so that they could take part in a short skit/pageant narrating the beginnings of the village. A village anthem was sung on the special occasion. A small house made of banana leaves and nude poles was erected on the public square as a similitude of the early dwellings of the saints

---

<sup>256</sup> *ibid.*, 26-31 May, 1915.

<sup>257</sup> There were temples built in the principal Mormon gatherings in mainland America in Kirtland, Ohio; Nauvoo, Illinois and Salt Lake City Utah.

prior to the establishment of the settlement and early Saints like Opapo and Elisara often shared their experiences with the residents.<sup>258</sup>

In addition the visit by a Latter-day Saint high authority at the time enhanced the settlement identity exceedingly as it added to the developing character of the village. The Church Headquarters had appointed Elder David O. McKay a member of the twelve apostles of the ruling body of the Church to travel throughout the world to visit the Church missions. His visit to Samoa on May 10, 1921 marked the highest-ranking personnel ever to visit Samoa at the time and his visit generated growing interest amongst the non-Mormons and members in Samoa. During their stay he visited the village in Sauniatu along with his companion Elder Hugh J. Cannon and accompanied by Mission President John Quincy Adams.

The occasion was filled with anxiety and high spirits of emotions were vividly described in several accounts. Elder McKay had described the visit in his diary:

“ As we came out of our room, we found the people standing in double column from our door out across the lawn to the street, the mothers nearest, then the fathers, and last the youth and children”.

They had been informed that we should not have time to shake their hands, so they had prepared a farewell song for the occasion. This they began to sing....sisters began to kiss my hand and cry, I felt a pretty tender feeling take possession of me, which was well defined when their sobbing interrupted their singing.

Finally, the last little boy crowding around had pressed our hands, so with tear-bedimmed eyes, we walked slowly toward the stream beyond our horses were waiting. The band on the porch played “Tofa my Feleni,” and the people stood waving their fond

---

258 Sauniatu Branch Record, 8 November, 1907; 8 November, 1908; Kamauoha, Sauniatu, Western Samoa: *Malae o le Alofa*, unpublished (He provides an in-depth description of the celebrations and traditions).

farewell. As a turn in the road obstructed them from view, I thought I had seldom experienced a more impressive farewell.”<sup>259</sup>

The Branch Record described the occasion:“.. it will be history in Sauniatu for a long time”.<sup>260</sup>

President Adams also reported the farewell:

Elder McKay far in advance, with his party of four horsemen, looking back with tears in his eyes, could bear it no longer – the scene and the spirit and influence of it all were altogether too affecting and remarkable. In shaking voice, he bade us return with him for the third ordeal of the final farewell. There the now silent and expectant groups were standing disconsolate as Israel of old bereft of their Moses; he dismounted in the trail and raising aloft his hands as a patriarch of the past, he pronounced a remarkable and soul-stirring benediction.<sup>261</sup>

An excerpt of the apostolic prayer offered was recorded by Kipeni Sua, a resident in his own account. He described how the apostle had asked for guidance and protection of the saints, to strengthen their families and plantations while also blessing their leaders.<sup>262</sup>

Elder McKay’s visit was beneficial for the village in several ways. It rejuvenated village morale affected by tribulations ranging from the epidemic in 1918 to the economic difficulties and minor internal skirmishes that occurred prior to his visit. The visit also renewed the village’s sense of identity as a chosen place for Latter-day saints to gather with a divine purpose. There was a sense of immense pride and spiritual gratification in the fact that the village was now complete because a divine revelation was fulfilled with a visit by one of God’s direct servants and his departure with a divine blessing. The members were so enthralled that they established monuments and an annual village holiday in

<sup>259</sup> Clare Middlemiss, *Cherished Experiences* (compilation), Salt Lake City, Deseret, 1970, pp. 70-71.

<sup>260</sup> Sauniatu Branch Record, 31 May, 1921.

<sup>261</sup> Middlemiss, pp. 73-74.



commemoration of the founding of the village and the visit by an “apostle of the Lord”. After his departure there was interest amongst the locals in honouring the historical day as a celebration.<sup>263</sup> The decision was unanimously approved and the following year was the start of an annual village celebration. Consequently a small marker was erected to honour the spot he offered the prayer that was later built into a 13-ft marker. The annual celebrations consisted of service held, followed by sports and a feast and dance (fiafia night) at night. Additions were later applied in the latter years to this celebration such as the erecting of a monument, and the establishment of a “Village of Love” (Malae o le Alofa), wherein five houses were built serving as guesthouses and a formal centre for the village.<sup>264</sup>

The enormous implication of his visit for Sauniatu and Mormon folklore was further fuelled by descriptions by Mormon publications of the event, which gave it a sense of mystery and spiritual importance. It was described in the memoirs of David O. McKay, while accounts of the event were acknowledged frequently in Church magazines as a tool for religious fervour and as a distinct symbolism of the faith of the Samoan Mormons. In addition the village had immense influence on the school and its residents. The school provided an opportunity for Mormon missionary work and conversion. The school was set up to attract both Mormon and non-Mormon children in the nearby locality. The educating of non-Mormons students had some reward, with a few becoming converts. The Branch Record reported that three of the boys in the village school were baptised due to attending the school.<sup>265</sup>

The principles and teachings did have effects on the members as several were influenced to recommit themselves fully to live Mormon laws. Such was the case of a member who was disfellowshipped for adultery. The village helped him to repent and was reinstated making a more determined effort to live the Church principles.<sup>266</sup> Another was James Moamoa and his wife Sena, who after living out of wedlock for some period of time

---

<sup>262</sup> Kamauoha, Sauniatu, Western Samoa, Malae o le Alofa, unpublished.

<sup>263</sup> Sauniatu Branch Record, 31 May, 1921.

<sup>264</sup> Kamauoha, Sauniatu, Western Samoa, Malae o le Alofa, unpublished.

<sup>265</sup> Sauniatu Branch Record, 13 June, 1920.

<sup>266</sup> *ibid.*, 22 August, 1907.



were excommunicated but repented and were married in the village by Elder Higgenson. When Elder Higgenson asked the residents to forgive the couple and allow them to return back to the village, the people unanimously forgave them by the symbol of the uplifted hand.<sup>267</sup>

The village also inspired members to appreciate Mormon principles of self-reliance and industriousness. The training of members to be industrious was received favourably amongst several residents. The Branch record reports that the bulk of the people showed more interest in planting food and fixing up the land.<sup>268</sup> Others shared their feelings of happiness at the work and involvement in the village during Church gatherings. For instance the Branch record describes several members such as Toafa, Penitala, Matala, Ciga, Mulinuu and Tuvale bearing their personal testimonies of their happiness in the village and to be part of the work of the Lord.<sup>269</sup>

In addition, this was extended to the travelling Samoan missionaries in the village. They often showed positive attitudes towards the work especially in regard to their own experiences in fulfilling Church assignments to visit the outer Branches. Several shared their feelings on how the work had strengthened their spirits. For instance, during a church meeting, the Branch Record recounts:

“Taulago expressed deep satisfaction at the joy derived from active service and felt that his new field (he was assigned to Malaela and previously was assigned to Vaovai, Falealili) would continue to work. Moeai...also felt like ever shaping the course in his life according to the Gospel requirements”.<sup>270</sup>

Analysing these effects reveal an interesting long-term pattern determining the effectiveness of the influence of the settlement on the residents. There was a positive long-term outcome when these members were asked to leave the village to build up their

---

<sup>267</sup> *ibid.*, 3 August, 1908.

<sup>268</sup> *ibid.*, 25 November, 1905.

<sup>269</sup> *ibid.*, 6 January, 1906.

own local areas. There appears to be a strong core of members coming out of the village that contributed greatly to the building of the Mormon Church in Samoa and throughout the Pacific. The pioneer patriarchs such as Saimasina, Elisala, Opapo, Tafaoga and their families having received substantial training, became the driving force in solidifying Mormon operations in the local areas. Opapo for example played a leading role in building the Church on the island of Tutuila when he left Sauniatu.<sup>271</sup> After his efforts there he moved to Hawaii where he was assigned to do Mormon temple work for the Samoan people.<sup>272</sup> He died in Hawaii, still faithful to his beliefs and his devout legacy is survived by his offspring who are still prominent Mormons in Laie, Hawaii.<sup>273</sup>

In addition Latter-day Saint historian Britsch emphasised the enormous contributions of local missionary couples assigned to look after church branches throughout Samoa. No doubt these couples were the likes of Saimasina, Elisala and Tafaoga trained in gathering places like Sauniatu to conduct church branch affairs and missionary work in the village areas.<sup>274</sup>

Ruby Welch's study further demonstrated this faithfulness recently with a research on the second generation Samoan Mormons living in New Zealand; One of Welch's intentions was to compare those that lived in the Settlement with those (Samoans) outside and endeavoured to point out the effects the different lifestyles had, and still have, on the attitudes of the people involved toward fa'aSamoa and Mormonism.<sup>275</sup> She concluded that there were significant differences between what she labelled as Samoan Mormons (members that refused to go to Sauniatu, usually the majority) and the Mormon Samoans (those gathered-very few). The issues involved leadership, authority, traditional values and ethnic identity.<sup>276</sup> There was a dividing line between the two from the beginning and even

---

<sup>270</sup> *ibid.*, 12 May, 1909.

<sup>271</sup> Carl Fonoimoana, *Opapo: The Power of his Faith*, Provo, 2000, pp. 308-309.

<sup>272</sup> *ibid.*, p. 309.

<sup>273</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 305-309.

<sup>274</sup> Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, pp. 385-387.

<sup>275</sup> Ruby Welch, *Ethnicity Amongst Auckland Mormons*, M.A Thesis, University of Auckland, 1989, p.

68.

<sup>276</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 173-174.

today it is evident as the gap widens even more in relation to the migrants to Auckland.<sup>277</sup> The key elements were education and immersion in the Mormon experience. Those that lived in the village had a religious conversion and raised in a Mormon environment, came to identify themselves as Latter-day Saints first, prioritising Church principles and values before their culture. In contrast Samoan Mormons continue to struggle and are not fully committed to the principles and values of the Church or following ecclesiastical leaders' directions.

Aside from contributions to developing a Church culture and positive influences on the residents, the effect of the church village on other branches was significant as it assisted in creating viable and functioning Branches throughout the western parts of Upolu Island. The utilisation of the settlement as an outer base for Mormon operations paid enormous dividends, breathing life into these branches and schools. Prior to the establishment of Sauniatu, there were fears amongst the leaders of the fruitless nature of a few of the outer Mormon Branches. The record reflects this concern like the Vaovai Branch in the village of Falealili. It was noted that eight members had left the Church. The leaders were overly concerned over these "dead Branches still hanging on the tree" and were anxious to "sift and separate the wheat from the tares" - to take action to begin clearing out their records in order to find out who were for and against them.<sup>278</sup>

The establishment of Sauniatu contributed to the constant nourishment of this Branch. The records reported of continual weekly visits by the American missionaries and local Elders based in the settlement to this Branch during the early years.<sup>279</sup> Visits became less frequent by 1915 obviously as progress and stability was evident in the Branch.

Perhaps another true effect of Sauniatu was to put Mormonism into a steady and healthy position to retain members. The pattern of constant nourishment was applied not only to Vaovai Branch but also to other areas like Malaela, Falefa and Siumu. The visits

---

<sup>277</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 172-175.

<sup>278</sup> Sauniatu Branch Record, 24 September, 1904.

<sup>279</sup> *ibid.*, 21, 28 October, 4 November, 1905; 2 July, 1908.

also became less frequent by 1915 signifying steady progress and no need for constant follow-ups.<sup>280</sup> These Branches are still in operational and none were closed down. The effects of this strengthening work on the outer Branches even had an effect on its locale/villages. The Branch record relates to the example in Falealili village. Elder Kennesce described “an awakening interest by the Falealili locality in the Church”.<sup>281</sup> This interest would have been attributed to the travelling missionaries’ invigorated efforts there.

Even though there was a great measure of success, there were failures too. The overall number that gathered was disappointing, as the majority of Mormon members throughout Samoa refused, due to cultural and personal reasons. The Sauniatu records did not record the exact statistics but based on estimation, there was just over a hundred Saints gathered at Sauniatu throughout the period. This refusal possibly may explain the slow progression during the 1910-1950s in relation to conversions. The paucity of residents in the village would have meant extreme difficulties when they returned to their own villages as they lacked that added support to assist in building the Church in the local areas. The long-term implication for lack of numbers dwelling in Sauniatu is fairly notable as the church have and is constantly experiencing opposition and resistance within its own boundaries. The thorn to the ecclesiastical body was those Samoans that refused to gather and their offspring have provided the same challenge for the Church today.<sup>282</sup>

Moreover the village had negative implications as it affected other Mormon Branches. The establishment of gathering places isolated members who could not assemble with the others. There were notable consequences as a few Branches were either dissolved or were slow in progress. Shortage of leadership was a concern in these Branches as the local Mormon leadership strength moved and became concentrated in the gathering areas. There was a greater probability of these branches either being dissolved due to defections and disillusionment. For instance in a missionary’s account, he described that various

---

<sup>280</sup> In the Sauniatu Branch Records, there were fewer visits to other Branches recorded and less trouble reported.

<sup>281</sup> *ibid.*, 7 July, 1908.

<sup>282</sup> Welch, pp. 173-174.

Branches were dissolved due to lack of leadership and defections while about 2500 members had apostatized.<sup>283</sup>

In addition in terms of the village having external influence on the locality and government, it failed to make any form of impact because of its purpose and nature for the betterment of the members. The consequence for their aloofness from politics and in mainstream society was often negative. They were not in a position to gain political backing for their efforts. External perceptions of the village also were often critical and pessimistic. The Church would often be perceived as too clannish and introverted, which would have fuelled speculations over their activities amongst the locals and rival denominations. For example there was always a sense of mistrust between the local villages and the Church settlement partly to do with its establishment in the neighbouring vicinity and its activities within. The Branch record reported missionary descriptions and feelings gathered from neighbouring villagers' attitudes towards them as they roamed around the area.<sup>284</sup> The strongest rival denominations in the neighbouring area also expressed strong criticism and attitudes of mistrusting Mormon activities in the area. A typical example was a missionary report when invited to the Methodist educational school in Piula. The Methodist missionaries had openly ridiculed and disapproved of Mormon activity in the area especially at the settlement.<sup>285</sup>

Wherein does Sauniatu fit into the overall Mormon colonisation scheme?

On a larger scale, examining the case in Samoa and relating it within the general Mormon colonisation pattern reveal interesting findings. There are similarities and distinct differences. The parallel lies in several aspects: similar experiences and reasons for gathering, the administration within, village function and certain outcomes. Samoan Mormons had similar unfavourable experiences to other gatherings in that persecution was

<sup>283</sup> John A. Nelson, History of President John A. Nelson, President of Samoan-Tongan Mission, 1913-1916, Story told by John A. Nelson to his children, approx 1963, tape #14.

<sup>284</sup> Sauniatu Branch Record, 23 March, 9 August, 1905; 11, 12 December 1931.

<sup>285</sup> *ibid.*, 10 November, 1917.

fairly substantial and progress was stagnant. It gave the local Mission leaders a legitimate reason to apply the principle to gather. (It convinced the local Mission leaders and in particular the Mission Presidents of the need to gather) The decision to gather resulted in the similar pattern of finding a suitable peaceful location with feasible fertile land for economic production. The Mormon economy pattern of individual proprietorship, agriculture and ranching was applied in Samoa, although the latter two experienced little success. The administration of Sauniatu conformed to the priesthood convention of Mormon standards of strong leadership. The ecclesiastical authority or Priesthood was very much the presiding power exercised by the missionaries within the settlement. The village also personified Mormon doctrines and values as exemplified in other places like Nauvoo and Utah described by Warren.<sup>286</sup> Sauniatu attempted and to a great extent successfully practised a very co-operative environment, tight group loyalties, a sense of church-belonging that the Church had instructed and nourished everyone economically and spiritually.

The outcomes were likewise since these establishments led to the emergence of a core of firm Mormon members. They became integral contributors to Mormon plans to colonise and contribute in the growth of the church locally throughout Samoa. One of Cummings' statements on the common pattern in the colonisation of greater Utah during the early years refers to sending out exploring parties usually Church stalwarts, to colonise particular areas, and this can be applied to Sauniatu.<sup>287</sup> Although the situation was in a slightly different context, the purpose was virtually identical to Church building as Sauniatu residents were constantly requested to return to their families and other villages to build up the work there and add greater strength to their own Branches.<sup>288</sup>

Furthermore a distinct local Mormon culture developed in Sauniatu as it did in other gathering-places. Education, music, exquisite buildings, meticulous settlement planning and Pioneer day celebrations were distinctive characteristics of a Mormon settlement. Apart

---

<sup>286</sup> Warren, pp. 132-133.

<sup>287</sup> Cummings, p. 80.

<sup>288</sup> History of Samoan Mission for 3 months ending, 31 May, 1929; History of Samoan Mission for 3 months ending, 30 November, 1929.



from these distinguished features, Sauniatu development was similar to that in other places. It never quite achieved any actual economic significance like Laie due to its unpropitious soil and location in which it was difficult to develop a steady enterprise.

On the contrary, the differences were visible not in terms of abiding by the general pattern but in the experiences of Mormons. The events and directions of the gathering in mainland America was slightly different and complex to the ones in the Pacific. In America, there was a greater mass following with the movement at the peak of its spiritual justifications. The Saints had not yet located a central location (Zion) but established temporary ones in Kirtland, Missouri and Nauvoo. Consequently were in pursuit to fulfil a doctrinal promise while possessing long-term ambitions of establishing “an ensign to the nation” a central place for launching worldwide Mormon operations. Unlike the gatherings in the Pacific namely Sauniatu and Mapusaga in Samoa, they were merely established as temporary sanctuaries and local Church outposts in Samoa as Church Headquarters were located in Pesega. Evidently having served its short-term purpose, there was uncertainty over Sauniatu’s long-term function. Hence Utah continues to perform as the central Mormon administration world-wide while Sauniatu identity is still very much connected to the gathering period rather than its village school and farm today.

Moving on from the differences, analysing the gathering throughout its early practise in America to the Pacific revealed an interesting pattern. The gathering in its latter application had become more flexible and taken on a new meaning as a response to the immediate and modern challenges experienced. The inevitable absorption into the non-Mormon economy, cultural acceptance and integration, end of Mormon isolationism, worldwide expansion, maintaining central control and effective administration have led to the flexibility of its usage. When Utah was finally designated as Mormon’s Zion, the gathering took a different meaning and became a colonisation principle. It was no longer associated with the commitment to gather in exclusively to a present day holy place but loosely applied. This pattern was applied throughout the western part of the United States and further advocated in Hawaii (Laie settlement) and in Samoa (Sauniatu).



Warren is critical on this point commenting that Zion had been relegated to a “strictly eschatological interpretation”, shifting from “an act of faith to a more mundane role of building a greater Utah”.<sup>289</sup> Whether manipulators or passive victims, beneficiaries of its usage for its purpose or victims of a deceptive doctrine, the doctrine continued to survive and served Mormon needs throughout the Pacific. The examples in Laie and Sauniatu reveal that the gathering had become more spiritualised in its application in the Pacific. There was a greater concentration in Church building by assisting in Church evangelisation, bringing in membership of new converts, and training them to assume future leadership and service for the Church locally. Indeed what is interesting and remains to be seen is the direction and future of this doctrine within the Mormon Church.

### Possible frailties of the village community

The different purpose to gatherings in mainland America during the early establishment of the Church to that in the Pacific brought about different expectations in the administration of the settlements and results. With the gatherings in mainland America focussing on searching for a prophetic land of promise and when arriving in Utah establishing a centralised Mormon base for world-wide expansion, the gatherings in Laie and in Sauniatu served a more regional/local role within the vicinity of each island nation and subservient to Utah. Unlike the gatherings in mainland America where the Church President was directly involved, in the Pacific it was in the care of the Mission Presidents. Their annual reports to the Church President were the only source of knowledge of their progress.

Consequences of leaving it too much to the Mission President at times proved fatal. It seems patterns of gathering in the Pacific had slightly different objectives, chiefly as a place of refuge, a place for training members, to strengthen and revitalise, to act as a settling tool. Inevitably this purpose led to numerous concerns as evident in these

---

<sup>289</sup>

Warren, pp. 149-150.

gatherings. The most notable was the irregular quality of direct supervision meaning that leaving it in the hands of inexperienced young missionaries, tensions would have escalated over issues of leadership. The Samoan members coming from a strictly patriarchal and elderly authoritative society would have questioned some missionary decisions. Britsch commented on the concern of uneven quality relating to Mission President supervision of the Laie village.<sup>290</sup> Likewise Sauniatu encountered the equivalent concerns.

The economic situation was at no time ever successful. Because it was not intended to generate profitable earnings for the Church due to the temporary nature of the place, but somewhat to support those that obeyed to gather, it was generally struggling throughout the gathering period to sustain itself. Perhaps if more experienced leadership was directly involved maybe it would have been slightly successful. The Branch Record indicates that the early years were dominated by tensions with the neighbouring villages especially Manunu and Fusi as well as other minor internal skirmishes. It is possible that direct Mission President supervision would have made a difference in the relations with the neighbours as the Mission President would have gained a more swifter respect than the young missionaries both outside and inside the village. Experience in public relations and physical perceptions of a more elderly person are characteristics generally not associated with young missionaries especially when dealing with non-Mormon and Samoan culture.

---

<sup>290</sup>

Britsch, Moramona: The Mormons in Hawaii, pp. 102-104.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to provide an historical analysis of the nature of a Latter-day Saint gathering in Samoa namely Sauniatu village. Having examined the primary sources and scholarly publications concerning this subject matter, one must acknowledge that this study is very incomplete. The bulk of such research has been from an institutional angle, as Mormon academics were responsible for such publications aimed towards a more Latter-day Saints audience. Closer examination revealed such works as lacking academic credibility and even with scholarly recognition too broad in their approach. There are possible reasons to this neglect in scholarly works, including the lack of interest in this subject area, the reluctance by both Mormon and non-Mormon academics to engage in such research due to its fragmentary nature and the difficulties in acquiring access to the Mormon Historical Archives in Salt Lake City. As a result there is a large amount of valuable data that is underused and under-appreciated.

Nevertheless, it is hoped that this research will contribute to encouraging future studies concerning Mormonism in Samoa and throughout the Pacific. This research therefore has attempted to consolidate the value of raw data based on Samoan Latter-day activities as previously recognised by Latter-day Saint writers.

A study based on a Latter-day gathering settlement at Sauniatu revealed several findings. Conceptualising Sauniatu within broader Latter-day Saint history and culture suggest it being part of a distinctive Latter-day Saint pattern and precedent in community organisation. The gathering or settling scheme practised in mainland America amongst the early Latter-day Saint communities was modified and applied in Samoa. There was a shift of purpose for such gatherings in the Pacific becoming increasingly localised in administration and temporary in nature as a refuge for Samoan Latter-day Saints. The decision to implement the scheme was usually brought about by anxiety and desperate

measures to deal with the challenging obstacles brought about by the local environment namely social transformation and political instability.

From the outset Mormon entry to Samoa and the first decade was extremely strenuous, meeting opposition and indifference amongst the rival denominations, officials and the locals in general. As relative late arrivals to Samoa, the Latter-day Saints found the first period highly challenging. Its appeal in terms of membership was somewhat unimpressive and the retention of converts was a struggle. There was the impression that the early converts were also not fully committed to living the principles of the Church. Convert attitudes were at times apathetic most notably from the issues of abiding by ecclesiastical authority to immoral behaviour. Towards the end of the nineteenth century there was an increasing support amongst the local American Church leaders to introduce the Latter-day gathering concept in order to deal with the concerns. There was a realisation for the need of a consolidatory mechanism in order to bring the state of the church into religious maturity as preparation for steady and future development. By the turn of the century the creation of gathering places on the three major islands of Upolu Savaii and Tutuila was in place.

An in-depth analysis of the nature of Sauniatu village can be characterised as unique in a Samoan setting featuring an ecclesiastical Latter-day Saint administrative order but with the display of traditional village council jurisdiction. Village life was generally harmonious although at times there were minor contentions. Certain Latter-day Saint doctrines were practised within the settlement consisting of prioritising ecclesiastical authority over traditional matai jurisdiction, self-reliance, service, fellowshiping, education and religious education. All of this was directed towards changing Samoan Mormon attitudes, training faithful members in secular and religious education with the hope that they would return back to their homes and assist in developing the church in their respective locality.

Interestingly there were several effects and outcomes following the establishment of this village settlement to the development of Mormonism in Samoa. Firstly it served the

purpose that it set out to achieve. To a great extent it produced a nucleus of stalwart Latter-day Saints with a unique Latter-day heritage and culture established in the village. Several became valuable servants in consolidating the church throughout the Samoa islands and the Pacific. In a broader sense, the village itself did contribute to serving as a geographic outpost by strengthening Mormon ecclesiastical operations in the rural areas within the Sauniatu vicinity. On the contrary negative effects of the settlement were evident with the isolation of those Latter-day Saints that refused to gather leading to apostasy. Also the clannish nature of its set-up at times would have caused suspicion, unpopularity and even hostility amongst neighbouring villages and older missionary bodies. Along the way there were failed social and economic endeavours to aid in village self-sustenance and future growth.

Finally perhaps there is the thought in regards to wherein is the value of this thesis to Pacific historiography. This significance lays in the greater understanding of Latter-day Saint developments in the Pacific in general and comprehending its movements within the locality and in this case Samoa. The awareness of programs, patterns and methods of consolidation contributes to understanding the factors to Latter-day Saints accelerated growth towards the latter part of the twentieth century. (1960s to the present time) Perhaps future studies of the Sauniatu residents' activities in the post-gathering period towards the present time may provide exciting findings to this connection.

## APPENDICES

The following are the Mormon mission presidents who have served in Samoa with their terms of service from 1888 to 1936. The records of their tenure were gathered from the Historical records and Quarterly Reports.

President	Date
Joseph H. Dean	June 1888 to Aug 1890
William O. Lee	Aug. 1890 to Jan 1892
George E. Browning	Feb 1892 to Nov. 1893
Ransom M. Stevens	Nov 1893 to April 1894
Thomas H. Hilton	May 1894 to March 1895
John W. Beck	March 1895 to Apr 1896
Orlando Barrus	April 1896 to Nov. 1896
Edward J. Wood	Nov. 1896 to Jan 1899
William L. Worsencroft	Jan 1899 to May 1899
William G. Sears	May 1899 to Jan 1902
Joseph Merrill	Jan 1902 to Jan 1903
Martin F. Sanders	Jan 1903 to Oct 1904
Thomas F. Court	Oct 1904 to Apr 1908
William A. Moody	Apr 1908 to July 1910
Don C. McBride	July 1910 to Jan 1912
Christian Jensen	Jan 1912 to Jan 1913
John A. Nelson, Jr	Jan 1913 to Apr 1916

Ernest Wright	Apr 1916 to Mar 1918
Willard A. Keith	Mar 1918 to Jan 1920
John Q. Adams	Jan 1920 to Oct 1923
Ernest L. Butler	Oct 1923 to Jan 1927
Willard L. Smith	Jan 1927 to March 1934
William G. Sears	April 1934 to June 1936



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Latter-day Doctrine and Theology

The Holy Bible – King James Version

The Book of Mormon

The Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of latter-day Saints

The Pearl of Great Price

### Unpublished Primary Sources

Personal Journals, Diaries and Papers

*Deseret News*                      *Church Almanac*, Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1872.

Dean, J H                              Journal excerpts, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, 1887-1889.

Merrill, J                              Journal excerpts, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, 12 April 1902, unpublished.

Middlemiss, C                      Cherished Experiences, (compilation), Salt Lake City, 1970, unpublished, in possession of Dr Carl Harris.

*Millenial Star*                      *Church Almanac*, Salt Lake: Millenial Star, 1851.

Nelson, J.N                              History of President John A. Nelson, President of the Samoan-Tongan Mission, 1913-1916, Oral History told to his children, approximately 1963, tape#14, unpublished written account in possession of Dr Harris.

Young, B                              Letters to Brigham Young, Ms d 1234, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City, 1853-77, unpublished.

## 2) Mission Record Books

Manuscript history and historical Reports, Statistical report of the Apia Mission 1900, vol. 1, 1862-1904, Salt Lake City, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, unpublished.

Samoan Mission minutes Microfilm 1888-1916 and 1931-1948, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Church Archives, Salt Lake City, unpublished.

Sauniatu Branch Record, Samoan Mission, general minutes, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Church Archives, Salt Lake City, 1904-1933, unpublished.

## 3) Government Documents

Pacific Manuscripts Bureau, nd. A Report by Dr Wihelm Solf, governor of Samoa, to the Imperial Colonial Office in Berlin, in Papers Relating to Samoa of H. Neffgen, Sometime Government Interpreter, Samoa, Microfilm 66, Australia National University, 1900-1910.

## Secondary sources

### Published

- |                |   |
|----------------|---|
| Allen, J.B     | Mormonism in the Twentieth Century, Provo, 1964.<br>The Story of the Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City: Deseret Bookstore, 1976.  |
| Arrington, L.R | Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958.<br>The Mormon experience, A History of the Latter-day Saints, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979. |

- Britsch, L.R           Unto the Islands of the Sea: A History of the Latter-day Saints in the Pacific, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986.  
Moramona: the Mormons in Hawaii, Laie: The Institute for Polynesian Studies, 1989.
- Brodie, F             No Man Knows my History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet, 2<sup>nd</sup> (ed), New York, 1971.
- Campbell, I C         A History of the Pacific Island, Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 1989.
- Davidson, J.W        Samoa mo Samoa, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1967.
- Ely, R.T             Economic Aspects of Mormonism, Harper's Monthly 106, April 1903.
- Garrett, J            To live among the stars: Christian origins in Oceania, Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1982.  
Footsteps in the sea: Christianity in Oceania to World War 2, Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1992.  
Where the nets were cast: Christianity in Oceania since World War II, Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1997.
- Gilson, R.P          Samoa 1830-1900: The Politics of a multi-cultural society, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- Howe, E.D            Mormonism Unvailed; or, A Faithful Account of that Singular Imposition and Delusion, Painesville, 1834.
- Howe, K.R            Where the Waves Fall: a new South Sea Islands history from the first settlement to Colonial rule, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1984.  
Tides of history: the Pacific Islands in the twentieth century, St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1994.
- Hunt, B              Zion in New Zealand, Hamilton, 1974.
- Kidder, D            Mormonism and the Mormons: A Historical View of the rise and Progress of the Sect-Styled Latter-day Saints, New York, 1842.
- Marshall, R.S        The New Mormon History, Senior Honor's project summary, University of Utah, 1977.
- Mauss, A.L          The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation, Urbana, 1994.

- Meleisea, M            Lagaga: a short history of Western Samoa, Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1987.  
Change and adaptations in Western Samoa, Christchurch, 1992.
- Newton, M            Southern Cross Saints: The Mormons in Australia, Laie, 1991.
- Odea, T                The Mormons, Chicago, 1957.
- Reiter, F J            They Built Utopia: The Jesuit missions in Paraguay 1610-1765, Potomac, Md, 1995.
- Roberts, B.H        History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 6 vols., Salt Lake City: Deseret Books, 1902-1912.
- Shipps, J              Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition, Urbana, 1985.
- Shore, B              Sala'ilua : A Samoan Mystery, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
- Underwood, G        Explorations in Pacific History, Provo, Utah, 2000.
- Walker, R.W        Wayward Saints: The Godbeites and Brigham Young, University of Illinois, 1999.  
(ed)                  Mormon History, Chicago, 2001.

#### Unpublished Theses and Manuscripts

- Barker, I              The Connexion: The Mormon Church and the Maori People, Victoria University of Wellington, M.A thesis, 1965.
- Cumings, C.E        The Mormon System of Colonization, Oklahoma, M.A thesis, 1946.
- Douglas, N           Latter-day Saints Missions and Missionaries in Polynesia, 1844-1960, National University of Australia, Ph.D. Dissertation, Canberra, 1974.
- Harris, C              History of the Samoan Apia Mission, 188-1983, unpublished TS in author's possession, 1983.
- Hart, J (ed)           Samoan Mission history 1888-1900 vol. 1, unpublished TS in author's possession and at Church Archives, June 1988.

- Haugaard, J.C        Some Aspects of Pioneer Life in Utah, 1846-1861, New York City, M.A Thesis, 1950.
- Kamauoha, E        Sauniatu Western Samoa: The Village of Love, 28 November 1969, unpublished.
- Stanton, M            Samoan Saints: Samoans in the Mormon Village of Laie, Laie, Hawaii, Dissertation, June 1973.
- Warren, D.S          The Mormon Gathering: its Origins, Power and Transition as a key concept in Latter-day Saints History, North Western University, M.A thesis, 1966.
- Welch, R              Ethnicity amongst Auckland Mormons, M.A thesis, University of Auckland, 1989.

### Articles

- Baldrige, K          Sauniatu, Western Samoa: A Special Purpose Village, 1904-1934 in Journal of Polynesian Society, vol. 87, 1978, pp. 165-192.
- Lineham, P          The Mormon Message in the Context of Maori Culture, in Journal of Mormon History, vol. 17, 1991, pp. 62-93.