

John Enright

## American Samoa Prepares its Historic District for Centennial

**O**n April 17, 2000, the Territory of American Samoa will commemorate its centennial of association with the United States of America. It was on April 17, 1900, that the American flag was first raised on the island of Tutuila, on a hill above spectacular Pago Pago Bay.

In preparation for the centennial celebration, Governor Tauese Sunia has initiated a campaign to beautify and refurbish the historic “downtown” area in the village of Fagatogo. A central feature of this town area is the U.S. Naval Station Tutuila Historic District, which was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1989.

The historic district in Fagatogo is comprised of 10 buildings constructed by the U.S. Navy during the period of its administration of the Territory (1900-1951) and a central parade ground. The major buildings were all constructed prior to 1920. While a number of historic district buildings facing the old parade ground are being repaired and restored to various degrees, the most extensive and impressive restoration has been to the old Naval Administration Building (Navy Bldg. No. 21), which now serves as the High Court of American Samoa.

Built in 1904, the two-story High Court building is a classic example of tropical Naval Colonial architecture of the period, with broad verandas surrounding it on both floors. Like all wooden structures in the tropics, the building had a long history of deterioration and periodic



patchwork repair. Over the years, as the function of the building changed, much of the once spacious interior had been haphazardly turned into warrens of offices. There was extensive termite and rot damage, especially to the ancillary additions.

Working closely with the American Samoa Historic Preservation Office, the architect, contractor, and project manager carefully deconstructed the building’s interior, salvaging for reuse all possible original material. The building was then lifted four feet off the ground so that new footings and foundation structural units could be emplaced and the building lowered again. The entire building was structurally hardened to meet modern standards of hurricane resistance.

Work on the building’s exterior included the removal of decades of paint and the matching and replacement of damaged pillars, windows, and veranda railings and flooring. Pains were taken to identify and match the original paint colors of the walls and trim. Working from old photographs supplied by the Historic Preservation Office, the ornate woodwork that had originally embellished the porch pillars and railings were replicated.

The restoration took 12 months and cost \$1.2 million. The project was funded through a U.S. Congressional appropriation with additional funding from FEMA for hardening. At the ceremonial dedication of the restored building, the project contractor and architect proudly claimed that the building was ready to last another 90 years. Its restoration sets a standard and an example for the rehabilitation of the rest of the historic district buildings and other structures in the surrounding town area.

*John Enright is the Historic Preservation Officer for American Samoa.*

*American Samoa High Court Building before and after restoration. Photos courtesy American Samoa Historic Preservation Office.*

