

American Samoa's Government Archives

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Abstract: American Samoa is a United States Territory in the South Pacific Ocean. It is the eastern part of the Samoan Archipelago, the west being the Independent Nation of Samoa. The Samoans were annexed by the United States and Germany in 1900. While Western Samoa regained independence in 1962, America has overseen the Eastern Samoans since 1900. Upon achieving self-government in 1978, the American Samoa Legislature enacted laws to protect their archives and records. Archivists were contracted from the mainland and established record management schedules and an Archives and Records Center was built in 1991. Government workers and the general public became aware of archives and record services via workforce memos and trainings and, by occasional newspaper articles, tv shows and several NHPRC strategic plan grants and genealogy workshops held between 1992-2006. The Archives facility developed alongside adjacent government offices and commercial tourism businesses, and more community outreach was via joint Humanities Council and National History Day Contest projects. Research requests on traditional Matai land titles; language and culture; vital records; and/or Village Census reports for U.S. National Passport applications expanded over the years. Eventually, the first American Samoa Archives Month Proclamation and celebration was held in 2016 and again in 2017 and 2018. The American Samoa Government Archives story from 1984-2019 is therefore a valuable research resource for archival history and advocacy and, for Samoan cultural continuity and change studies.

About the Author:

James Himpill has provided archives and records management services for the American Samoa Government for nearly 20 yrs. Most recently, he contributed towards an OCLC CALLAM Collective Wisdom White Paper publication; was an FAIC liaison for the University of Puerto Rico; secured a FEMA Hurricane recovery grant; and helped establish a new Museum of American Samoa due to open this fall. James is a 1977 Harry S. Truman Scholar and has been a Certified Archivist since 1997. He holds an MA in Anthropology and Museum Studies from the University of Iowa.