



Vailoa School, c. 1930

Photo courtesy of South Pacific Division Heritage Centre.

Vailoa Laymen's Training School, Samoa

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Vailoa Laymen's Training School was operated by the Samoa Mission at various times between 1917 and 1986.

An Aborted Beginning

Early in 1917, Harold and Annie Larwood arrived in Samoa to assist missionary Thomas Howse. Up to that time, medical work had been conducted by the Samoa Seventh-day Adventist Mission, but no school work had been

attempted. In March, Larwood hired eight men to help him build a huge structure from native materials, known as a *fale*, to serve as classrooms. It was located overlooking Saluafata Bay, east of Apia, on a property named Vailoa. He also erected two dormitories for young men who would train to be missionaries at his school. All was ready for opening on May 19.¹

During 1917, Larwood attracted 62 students for studies. Annie Larwood taught an elementary division. The promising momentum continued throughout 1918 until Larwood was troubled by the visitations of evil spirits. He and his family fled back to Australia, and the school enterprise collapsed.²

Second Attempt

Raimund Reye, Samoan Mission superintendent, determined that the resurrection of the training school would be his main project. To assist him in restoring the Vailoa property, John Strange came from New Zealand in 1928.³ Food crops for boarding students were planted, and an attractive European-style hall was constructed for school and worship purposes. Classes began on March 3, 1930, with an enrollment of 18 young men. The curriculum consisted of Bible studies, arithmetic, English, geography, hygiene, Samoan history, reading, and writing. All subjects except English were taught by Reye and Afele Atoa in the Samoan language.⁴

In order to release Reye for other mission duties, Stanley Leeder taught the classes during 1933 through part of 1935. For the remainder of 1935, Thomas and Edith Howse served as temporary teachers prior to the arrival of William Petrie.⁵ Edith Howse wrote of the few months she spent at Vailoa, describing her class of 30 elementary pupils and the assistance she had from Samoans Tini Inu and Fa'apoi.⁶

Wartime and Beyond

Petrie remained at Vailoa until the end of 1941. John Howse spent some of 1942 and 1943 keeping some classes active until the arrival of Roy Harrison in July 1943. Those who succeeded Harrison were Hugh Dickens (1946–1947), John Dobson (1948–1951), Ronald Taylor (1952–1955), Geoffrey Helsby (1956), and Stanley Thomson (1957).⁷ Howse, in 1943, had been instrumental in opening a new department to train young women. In the same year, he reported that 40 young men were attending.⁸ During Taylor's term, the academic level was raised, and the institution was referred to as Vailoa College. During his last year, 1955, five young men and three young women graduated.⁹

In 1956, Sanika Afa'ese, a teacher at the school, reported that the principal, Helsby, had introduced carpentry and engineering classes. That same year, there were four male graduates and one female graduate.¹⁰ The institution had provided many graduates who became workers in mission evangelism, but the education dynamic in the Pacific was changing with a preference for Pacific Islanders to train at Fulton College, Fiji. Furthermore, the chief catalyst for the closure of classes at Vailoa at the end of 1957 was the lack of arable land

to supply enough food for the boarding students.¹¹

Revival at Vailoa

During December 22–28, 1968, the Samoa Mission Lay Activities secretary, Elder Tini Inu, organized a congress at Vailoa for the sole purpose of providing some intensive training in evangelism. Approximately 65 young men attended the classes in soul-winning methods, doctrines, and the history of the Samoa Mission. The instruction was given by Elders Archibald Hefren, David Hay, Mervyn Kennaway, Siasosi Neru, Fereti Puni, and Inu himself.¹² The success of this initiative prompted the use of the Vailoa facilities for a further 18 years as a training ground for lay evangelists.

Puni was nominated as the principal of the Vailoa Laymen's Training School, and a three-year program of classes was developed together with plans to conduct regular evangelistic campaigns for practical experience. In 1972, for example, two campaigns were conducted, which resulted in 41 baptisms.¹³ Kitiona Sione was one of the students who was ordained after attending the institution and proving himself in ministry.¹⁴

Tesese Tasi succeeded Puni as principal (ca. 1974–1975),¹⁵ followed by Ta'ala Papaolo (1976–1977).¹⁶ Other principals were Aileone Sefelino (1978–1979), Tautua Lavea (1980–1984), and Kanela Alefeio (1985–1986). "The [Samoa] mission committee closed the educational institution at the end of 1986," confident in the belief that it "had served its purpose well."¹⁷

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NOTES

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2. David E. Hay, *Samoa: 100 + Years* (Newcastle, N.S.W.: WHO Presentation Services, 2005), 131–133.
3. Edith B. Howse, "Vailoa Training School, Samoa," *Australasian Record*, June 8, 1936, 2.
4. R. Reye, "Vailoa Mission School, Samoa," *Australasian Record*, May 26, 1930, 2; Hay, *Samoa: 100 + Years*, 158.
5. Hay, *Samoa: 100 + Years*, 172, 180.
6. Edith B. Howse, "Vailoa Training School," 2.
7. Hay, *Samoa: 100 + Years*, 206, 458.
8. J. T. Howse, "Retrospect," *Australasian Record*, May 29, 1944, 4.
9. Hay, *Samoa: 100 + Years*, 254–256.
10. S. Afa'ese, "Samoa Contributes Teachers," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, March 4, 1957, 9.
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15. "Vailoa Laymen's Training School," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1975), 361.
16. E.g., "Vailoa Laymen's Training School," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1976), 387.
17. Hay, *Samoa: 100 + Years*, 350.

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