

FALEAPUNA, A SAMOAN VILLAGE

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Social anthropologists have done much reporting on the aspects of primitive village life that are of concern to them. Geographers have done little. The following paper is offered as a study in village geography—micro-geography, necessarily—revealing the patterns of communal and individual use of land and of water within the village area.

Faleapuna is a small agricultural village on the north coast of Upolu Island, the principal island of Western Samoa.¹ It lies about fourteen miles due east of Apia, Samoa's capital and largest town, and occupies the eastern half of a short straight stretch of coast between two broad bays, Salua-fata Harbor on the west and Falefa Harbor on the east (Figs. 1 and 2).

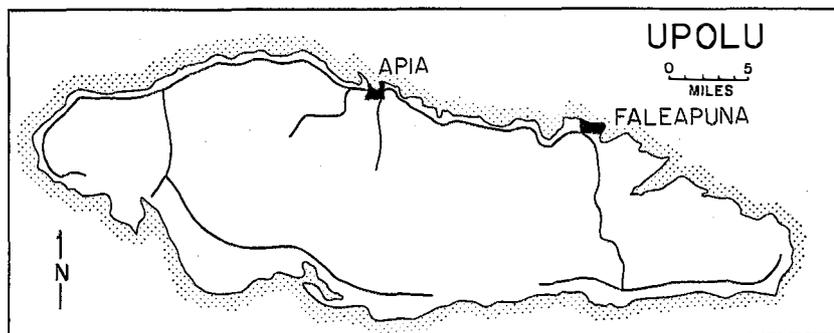


Fig. 1. Upolu Island, Faleapuna Village and its relation to Apia and the island road system.

A coral reef, one mile wide, fringes this part of the island's coast. Much of it shows dry patches at low water (tidal range is about three feet), but immediately along the shore a slightly deeper stretch, one hundred yards in width, provides passage for small boats from one bay to the other.

From the shore a belt of coral debris extends inland for two hundred to four hundred yards to the low bluff marking the edge of the island's volcanic interior. On this coral lowland shallow lagoons with adjoining areas of marsh drain into the sea through narrow outlets. The lagoons, lake-like in appearance, are tidal and brackish.

The volcanic bluff, twenty five feet high in the western edge of the village but lower as it swings east and south, is the seaward edge of the low, flat plain of the Falefa River, which flows into Falefa Harbor.

The surfaced road that follows the coast from Apia winds through the inner part of the village on the edge of the bluff, but here at Falefa Harbor it turns inland along the left bank of the river to climb Mafa Pass and reach the south side of the island.

¹ Faleapuna was not selected because of its particular characteristics. Rather, the author, finding himself there on other business over the course of a year, took advantage of the opportunity to make this study.

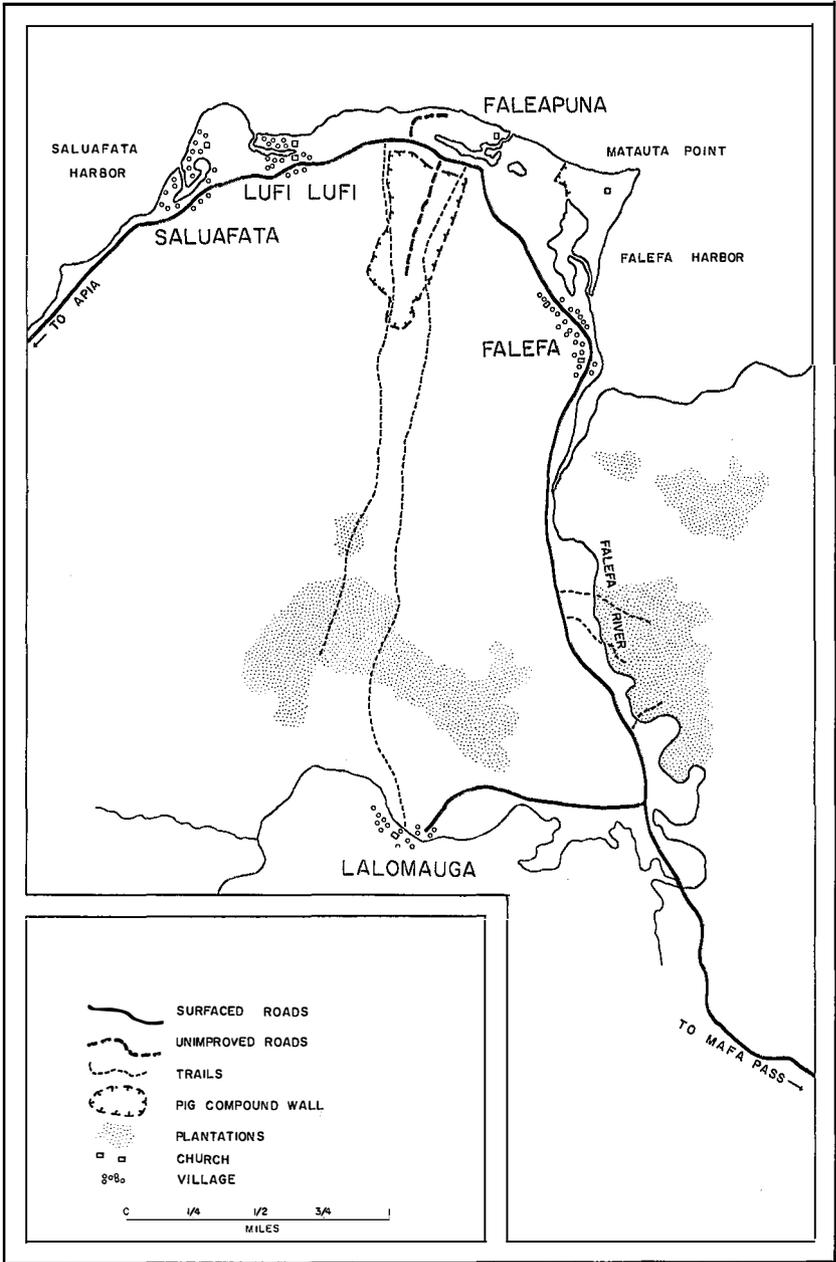


Fig. 2. Vicinity map. Faleapuna plantation lands and neighboring villages.

The greater part of the village is on the coral lowland, the remainder along the road on the edge of the bluff. Four sections, or *pitonu'u* are recognized within the village, each with its proper name, its array of houses, and its own *malae*, or cleared area for ceremonies and games.² From west to east the first three, Falepoulima, Sapulu, and Salimu, adjoin one another, while to the east—beyond a half mile stretch of unoccupied land—lies Matautu on the point next to Falefa Harbor.

The forty-five families of the village³ occupy homesteads consisting usually of three native structures: a round house or guest house (*fale tele*), to its rear a sleeping house (*fale o'o*), and a small cooking hut (*fale umu*). Most of the homesteads are on the stretch of coral sand between the shore and the lagoon-marsh area. Others occupy higher sites along the road, as do a few western style structures, namely, the Pastor's School the three stores, and the cinema (Fig. 3).

The Samoan house, or *fale*, is an attractive structure, oval in shape, with a high "beehive" thatch roof supported by posts set on a raised stone platform. The guest house, in particular, is kept in first class order, while the more utilitarian buildings of each homestead are located inconspicuously several yards to the rear.

An occasional home is located on a site isolated from others, but most of them are grouped around the four *malae* or strung along the trail that parallels the shore. Seldom are the houses closer together than fifty feet, however, and those fronting on the *malae* are usually aligned. The cleared *malae*, approximately football field size, are grass covered and are kept trimmed and cleared of fallen leaves. The village presents a neat and spacious appearance.

Unightly latrines lining the shore—crude scrap-lumber shacks built over the water and reached by short piers—are the only blemish on this otherwise idyllic scene.

Center of population in the village, and also its principal social and recreational center, is the *malae* of Sapulu containing the Government School, the favorite cricket pitch, and the dominant church, that of the London Missionary Society. Falepoulima, reached by a short unimproved road from the highway, contains the chief's home and his *fale tele* which is the official guest house of the village, and was also the site of the Methodist Church before it was razed in 1954. Fronting on the *malae* of Matautu is the Roman Catholic Church.

The churches are western style buildings constructed of whitewashed coral limestone with corrugated metal roofs. Distribution of the village population by religious preference shows no apparent correlation with

² *Malae*, although related to the Tahitian *marae*, does not have the religious significance of the latter.

³ Family, as used here, refers to a single family unit, not to the Samoan *aiga*, or clan, with its elected *matai* chief, a group which may include several biological families. Traditionally about forty *matai* names belong to the village, although currently only thirty-three are represented. Total population in 1951 was 343—185 males and 158 females. Most of the north coast settlements including both of the neighboring villages, Falefa to the south with 747 inhabitants and Lufi to the west with 629, were much larger. *Population Census*, Government of Western Samoa, (Wellington, New Zealand, 1954).

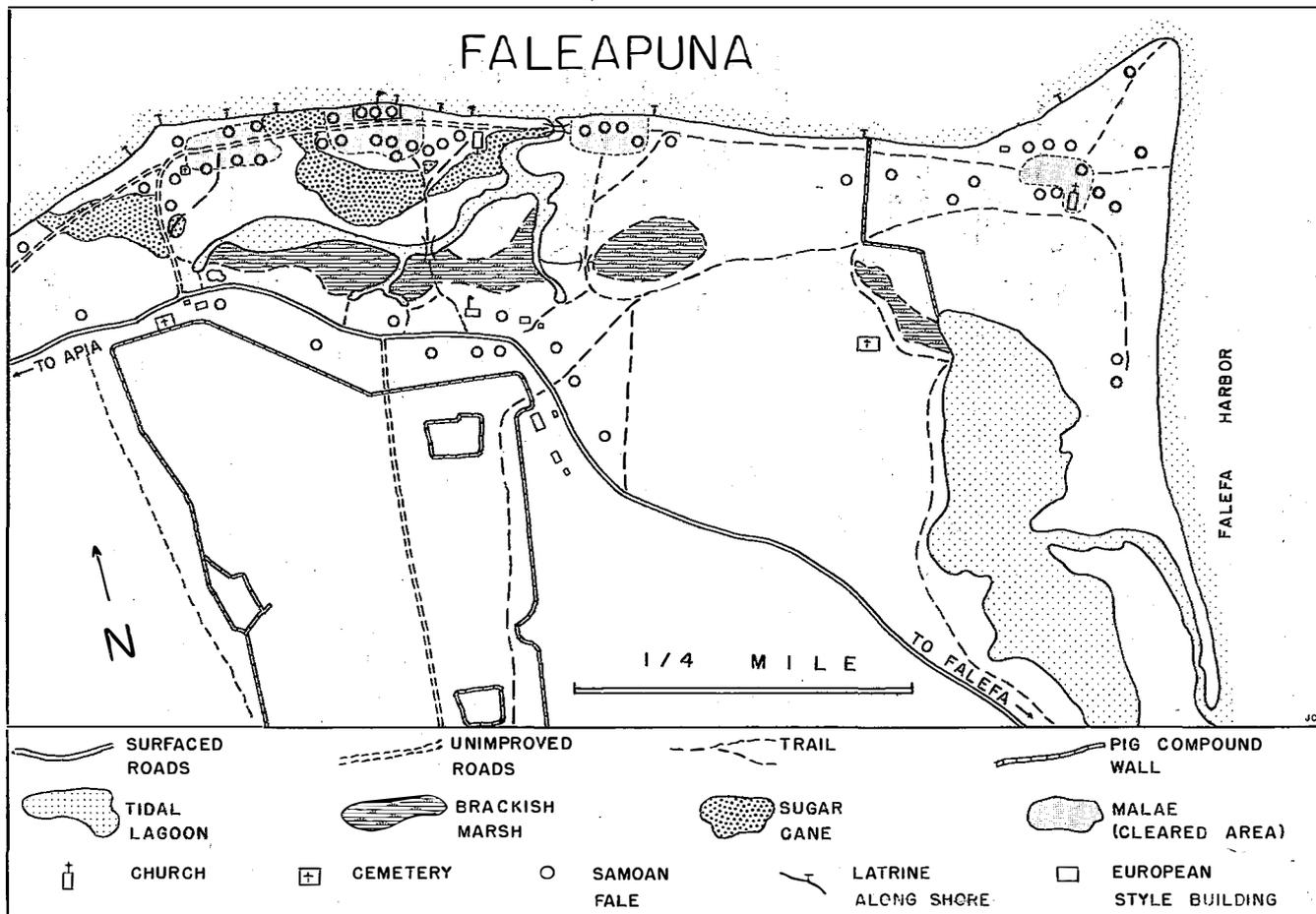


Fig. 3. Faleapuna village.

location of the churches, although the Protestant and Catholic cemeteries are located in the corresponding ends of the village.

The Government School, which must be attended for four years by all children of the village, consists of three Samoan *fales* on the shore. There they are taught the "three R's" in the English language, although Samoan songs and dances are not neglected. In fact classes seem to be held on the adjoining *malae* as frequently as in the school buildings. In addition, the Pastor's School, an important village institution, is attended by the children of all families of the London Missionary Society Church, as well as by a few others. Since most families are L.M.S. adherents, the Pastor's School is also a popular social center.

Along the foot of the bluff are several springs feeding streams that flow into the lagoons.⁴ Stones have been laid around the springs to form small pools one yard across that are used for drinking water. These feed into larger stone-rimmed pools used for bathing and for laundry. With one exception, all are tidal and hence salty at high tide. The one exception, the spring below the pastor's house, is used for drinking water only.

Ordinarily the households make use of the spring within their own section, but they are not so restricted. All are free to use the one fresh water spring when the tide is high, and they frequently do so regardless of how remote their homes may be. Matautu people also have access to a nearer spring in the neighboring village of Falefa which is always fresh.

Likewise the families of each section of the village customarily use the bathing pool within their own area. There are no restrictions on the hours at which pools may be used for laundry or for bathing, nor are there regulations separating the sexes.

Each of the pools and springs, like the four sections of the village, has been dignified with a proper name. Vaialae is the pool for Falepoulima; Punalei, the one for Sapulu and the residents along the road. Levi, used for drinking water only, is in Sapulu and is their special claim but may be used by anyone when needed. Apo'a belongs to Salimu, and Punapuna to Matautu.

Although fishing in the lagoons and the sea is important, Faleapuna is principally agricultural, producing within the village and in the nearby farms various subsistence crops and three cash crops: copra (the dried meat of the coconut), cocoa, and bananas. Scavenger chickens and pigs are owned by every family. The chickens run freely about the village, but by law the pigs must be confined and are enclosed in walled compounds, within which other land use is limited. The location of these compounds is important in understanding the layout and functioning of the village, hence its introduction early in this description.

On the inner side of the road, extending inland for one half mile, is a large compound surrounded by a four foot wall of crudely fitted stones. In it roam the one hundred pigs owned by the families of the three western

⁴ The explanation of the springs "presumably lies in the abundance of relatively young lavas . . . which allow water to percolate freely owing to the abundance of vertical cracks and horizontal hollows which are general features of recently-cooled pahoehoe lavas." J. Allan Thompson, "The Geology of Western Samoa," *New Zealand Journal of Science and Technology*, Vol. 4, 1921, pp. 49-66.

divisions of the village. The fourth, Matautu, is itself an enclosed pig compound with a wall crossing the point of land from the lagoon to the sea (Fig. 3).

Still farther inland are farms that produce much of the food and nearly all of the cash crops. Although known as plantations, they are not such in the usual commercial sense but contain instead small plots of mixed plantings owned and worked by individual families, on some of which are grown commercial crops, on others, food for home use only.

Agricultural patterns differ considerably in these areas—the village proper, the pig compounds, and the plantation lands.

In the village there is a great variety of crops, although the only ones found in quantity are sugar cane for roofing thatch and bananas and coconuts, which, since they are required daily, are associated with every homestead. Coconuts grow everywhere except in the cleared *malae* areas and the immediate vicinity of dwellings where falling nuts and branches would constitute a hazard. Near each cooking hut grows a clump of bananas, and a small grove is found on the higher ground near the road. Each homestead likewise has a few pandanus trees, the leaves of which are used for weaving mats, and is likely to have some bamboo.

Scattered throughout the village without apparent pattern, although each is the recognized property of some family, are breadfruit, mango, paw-paw (papaya), and lime trees. There are in addition small clusters or individual plants of coffee, kava, cinammon, and manioc.

Non-food trees include the *niu'afa*, the coconut that produces the husk used for sennit cord; the candlenut, the kapok, the paper mulberry, and the *moso-oi'*, providing fibre for kava strainers. The most abundant non-food plant is sugar cane. Needed frequently for roof thatch repair, and bulky and heavy to carry, it is grown entirely in the village rather than on the plantation. Large plots between the shore and the lagoon produce a surplus above the village needs. There are a few plants of *lavutalotalo* with medicinal uses, and various ornamentals—fragrant frangipani trees, bushes of ever-blooming hibiscus, and colorful ti and croton plants—are scattered informally, giving a pleasing effect.

In contrast to the village with this rich and varied foliage, within the pig compounds there can be no cultivation, and the only crops are tree crops, usually limited to coconuts and an occasional breadfruit. In the large compound, however, a few landowners have chosen to enclose small plots with additional walls to protect fields of taro, bananas, or sprouting coconuts. The Matautu section, overrun by foraging pigs, presents a barren aspect compared to the rest of the village with its park-like appearance. Matautu families are dependent on other sections for sugar cane and the products commonly grown near the home. Each cooking hut must be surrounded by a protecting wall, and the banana leaves needed for the ground oven can be grown only within these walls.

Inland from the big compound, and extending for another two miles, are the plantations of the three western sections of the village. (Those of Matautu are on the east side of the Falefa River.) Much of the planting appears as casual and patternless as that in the village: coconuts are found throughout and here and there are small patches of bamboo, kava, manioc,

pineapples, and an occasional kapok tree. In the principal cultivated areas, however, there are many sizable plantings of a single crop. One banana grove covers several acres, and there are smaller plots, totalling a few acres, of cocoa, taro, *ta'amu*, and pandanus. Along the road and adjoining the pig compound is a small grove of oranges.

Faleapuna has been favored in the quality of its farmlands but is less fortunate in the total area allotted to its use. Many of the north coast villages are backed by steep slopes, but the territory inland from Faleapuna consists of the easily cultivated plain of the Falefa River. The lands of adjoining villages, however, confine the area to a narrow strip, one half mile across or less than one half the coastal width of the village. The portion nearest the road is entirely occupied by the pig compound. Cultivation begins farther inland, continuing to the edge of the village of Lalomauga. The portion farthest inland is the most intensively cultivated, with the area known as Punapuna (many springs) containing all of the wet taro patches.

The plantations of Matautu, known as Savaiiatea, are on the east side of the Falefa River extending from the river to the top of the divide. Cultivation covers the limited flat land adjoining the river and extends up the hillside onto quite steep slopes, but does not reach the crest. The land is not as good as the Punapuna lands and poorer yields result, but the area is more accessible to the people of Matautu (Fig. 2).

Within the plantation area the complex land ownership pattern comprises small, irregularly-shaped plots belonging to the *aiga* families with title vested in the *matai*, still smaller plots owned by individuals, and a few holdings of families of neighboring villages. Property lines are unmarked or crudely marked by notched trees that are of little help to the Land Office in its ambitious attempt to untangle and settle land disputes.

One section of the plantation area known as Sosaiete (society) represents a grant of the village *matai* to the pastor of the London Missionary Society. It is worked by the children of the Pastor's school, all of the product going to the pastor's family.

Other examples of communal land use are found in the pig compounds and in the village marshlands. The walled area of the pig compound, known as Papu'aa, consists of privately owned plots. With the walled-off exceptions noted above, it is devoted to the run of the pigs. Except for a few small ones kept as pets and allowed to run loose in the village, all of the pigs of Falepoulima, Sapulu, and Salimu families are within the compound. They, too, however, are individually owned and are indentified by ear cuttings—a hole in the left ear, a notch in the right one, etc. After meals they are fed taro and bannana scraps thrown over the wall, each pig knowing his owner's voice and answering his call.

In contrast, the marshlands in the lower part of the village are owned by the community but may be used by individuals. During the drier season some of the marshland is usually planted in *palusami*-type taro of which the young leaves, rather than the tuber, are eaten. In practice, whoever plants and tends the taro can harvest the crop, although the land does not thereby become his permanently. Rows of *ta'amu* are planted to separate the holdings.

The plots of sugar cane in the western end of the village are on private properties, but families in Matautu or others with land unsuited to its production are free to cut leaves without paying. One family has a patch of *u*, the cane of which is used for the rod in roofing thatch, likewise privately owned but shared with all the village.

Growing wild in the village, and free for all, are the *losa*, also producing a cane for roofing thatch rods, and the *sagasaga*, a marsh reed with a seed used for bead necklaces. Finally, regardless of land ownership claims, there are no restrictions on the collection of the useful wood, leaves, or bark of the wild second growth shrubs in the plantation or pig compound area.

The cash crops and some of the food crops are partially prepared in the plantation. Consuming most of the plantation worker's time is the process described as "cutting copra," in which the fallen ripened nuts are hacked in two and the meat scooped out. Husks and shells are discarded, although occasionally some shell is used in the making of charcoal; while the nut meats are carried in baskets to the village for sun drying.

Cocoa is harvested in the pod and also carried in baskets to the village where the beans are shelled, washed, and dried. Taro and *ta'amu* tubers are trimmed and carried in baskets. Bananas, if they are to be used by the family, are cut by the bunch, separated from the stem, and carried to the village. Bananas for sale are cut on boat days only, also separated from the stem, washed in the streams, then carried to the nearest point on the road for crating, usually the store in Lalomauga. Truck crews of Department of Agriculture's "Banana Scheme" deliver the unassembled crate materials, later picking up the packed crates at established points.

Most of the villagers walk the trails to the plantation carrying the produce home on their backs or in baskets balanced on shoulder poles. Some use horses or bicycles, and those with lands far from the village, if also near the road, may use the bus, especially on the return trip with their heavy loads.

Deep in the plantation is a semi-permanent home where one family lives during the week, making copra and drying cocoa beans. For shorter stays a number of families have small *o'o fales*, combination cooking and sleeping quarters on a raised L-shaped platform.

In addition to pigs and chickens, a few families own a cow or a horse which is kept tethered under the coconuts on the higher grounds near the road, or in some instances pastured in neighboring villages. The cows produce but little milk and are kept principally for meat needed when a family member dies and beef must be given to the many visitors. The horses are used to carry produce from the plantation and loads of leaves or firewood from the bush. On boat days they carry bananas to the truck pickup stations. Before the advent of bus service to Apia they were often ridden to town.

Seafoods, of course, supplement the diet of the villagers, but fishing is much less important in Faleapuna than in many Samoan villages; neither boat sheds nor canoe shelters line its shore. The character of the reef in the immediate vicinity of the village appears to discourage some types of fishing, and mullet do not appear as they do along western Upolu. Only one *tolomatu*, or long seine net, is owned by the village; casting nets are likewise seldom used. The women use hand dip nets in shallow water, and the

men spearfish in favorable places, both of these usually representing group rather than individual activities. Use of the large *tolomatu* requires the services of several men and canoes.

The village owns about twenty canoes which are used occasionally for line fishing in the deep water beyond the reef or in the big lagoon where octopus and eel are caught with line and baited hook. At low tide on the reef, women and children gather the edible fauna and flora collectively known as *figota*.

Days are busy in Faleapuna. The village rises with the first light of dawn to take advantage of the cool morning hours. Neighborhood groups, bearing machetes, start for the plantation, separating as they reach the branch paths to their individual plots. Some will spend the day cutting copra or tending crops, some will return after having gathered food for the next few meals. Other groups or individuals go after fish for the first principal meal of the day, which is prepared and eaten before noon.

Before the heat of the day women gather at the pools to wash their clothes and babies, gossiping merrily the while. Others, frequently in groups, weave mats of roofing thatch. The children not in school are busy with the endless tasks of cutting the grass and removing fallen leaves from yards and *malae*. The older men, the *matai* chiefs, if not in council meeting, occupy themselves preparing sennit fiber from coconut, husks and braiding great coils of sennit cord.

During every sunny hour the village becomes one large drying ground as copra, cocoa beans, pandanus leaves for mats, and finished mats are spread out to dry or air. Even the toddlers are kept busy shoeing chickens from the drying copra.

After the morning meal a period of rest is in order, activity resuming only after the warmest hours have passed. When the day's work is done, and before the evening meal, the men, or perhaps the entire family, visit the pools for the daily bath.

School and commuter schedules have altered the traditional routine somewhat, but it remains much as it was. On weekends especially, when all the members of the family are in the village—home from Apia jobs, boarding school, or a stay on the plantation—life is much like that in pre-European days.

Presumably the village was once self-sufficient, but each gain in accessibility from the establishment of the first trading post on the island to the inauguration of daily bus service to Apia has thrust the village deeper into the world of exchange.

Today Faleapuna people are not limited to local produce. The cash crops, copra and cocoa, are sold or exchanged for trade goods in the three village stores. Crated bananas may be sold on the occasion of the visit of the New Zealand boats. About fifteen residents are wage earners in Apia, commuting daily by bus to their jobs as teachers, nurses, or employees of stores, the telephone company, or Public Works.

Additional sources of income for the village accrue from the lower wage rate which prevails compared to that in Apia. One Apia concern frequently sends a truck load of cocoa beans to be sorted by grade. The

task takes some weeks, but the people of Salimu gladly do it for a penny a pound, which is lower than the Apia rate.

Public Works occasionally arranges for the women of the village to make sections of cane roofing thatch needed for schools and other public buildings. The pay, one pound, ten shillings for each one hundred pieces of thatch, goes to the women who sew the sections rather than to the owner of the cane-growing land. Much of the income, like that from the sale of produce or the sorting of cocoa beans, is spent locally in the village stores.

Dependent on truck contact with Apia, the three stores and their adjacent copra sheds are located on the road. So, too, is the barnlike theater whose patrons come by bicycle and on foot from villages three and four miles distant to attend the two evening shows each week. These enterprises occupy western, rather than Samoan style structures, although all are unpretentious, unpainted shacks.

Two of the stores are branches of Apia concerns; the third, "the Chinaman's," is independent and is by far the most popular, thanks to a more varied stock and the liberal extension of credit.

The more conspicuous items on display in "the Chinaman's" are cotton yardage, soap, tobacco, lamps, matches, bread and pies, butter, sugar in one-pound sacks, canned fish and bully beef, and kerosene, which is kept in fifty-gallon drums but sold in small bottles, mostly used beer bottles. A sign on his copra shed reads, "Popo 37: Koko 130-150," indicating that he is currently paying thirty-seven shillings per hundredweight for copra, and for cocoa, 130 to 150 shillings per hundredweight, depending on the grade.⁵

This "commercial core" was not always located here on the bend of the road. A Land Office manuscript map (c. 1928) shows a secondary loop road completely encircling the village along the shore and crossing both lagoon outlet streams, with the leaseholds of Apia merchants, including their stores and copra sheds, located on the shore in Matautu. Population shifts have also taken place in recent years, for a 1924 hydrographic chart⁶ indicates clusters of houses in areas no longer occupied.

As new houses are built and old ones abandoned, it is, of course, possible for village populations to shift easily and gradually without any particular pattern developing or significance being attached. The shift of the commercial enterprises, however, is of more significance and can be associated with changes in road alignment. The coast road from Apia dates from German days. A 1913 chart⁷ shows a secondary road along the coast from Apia to Falefa just beyond Faleapuna. This was surfaced during the 1920's, but the extension of the road south across Mafa Pass is a product of the post-war era.

⁵ The storekeeper declared that he was unable to estimate the quantity of copra and cocoa produced on Faleapuna lands as he also bought much of the product of Lalomauga and Fagaloa as well as some from south coast areas.

⁶ U.S. Hydrographic Office Chart No. 0097, *Saluafata and Falefa Harbors*, based on surveys to 1924.

⁷ U.S. Hydrographic Office Chart No. 2923, *Upolu Island*, based on surveys to 1913.

After the completion of the cross-island road in the early 1950's, shore location became less important, and location on the main road more desirable. Faleapuna was virtually at the end of the road from Apia before its extension, hence attracted boat traffic from villages to the east and southeast—areas then dependent on water transport but now served by the new road. Accessible Matautu Point was the logical landing and transfer point for produce originating on these coasts.

Faleapuna thus lost its importance as the break-in-bulk point where canoe to truck transfer took place and became instead a highway town. The "business center" then moved from the "harbor" to the main thoroughfare.

Even before the days of the road, boat parties from Aleipata and other villages of the east and southeast coasts used to stop on Matautu Point on their way to Apia or other western landings. Stops were made to rest, to spend the night, to eat a meal, or to await more favorable winds. The village built a *fale* for them which is still maintained although such parties are uncommon now. Before bus service was introduced, the village owned a long racing boat (named Fagamea) which was used for trips to other villages, to Apia, and even to the island of Savaii.

The only remaining boat traffic is that from Fagaloa four miles to the east, a mountain-rimmed bay with small coastal villages still without road connection, and with which Faleapuna has had traditional political and family ties. Passengers and trade produce from Fagaloa now land on Faleapuna's beach at the point nearest the road—copra, cocoa, kava, and bananas to be traded in the village stores, or, along with the plaited mats and baskets, to be carried by bus to Apia for sale in the town markets.

With the lessening of boat traffic and the reduced importance of shore locations, the village loop road was neglected. A few years ago a portion of it was destroyed by storm and has never been replaced. Soon thereafter the remainder fell into disuse and decay. The shore trail to Matautu now crosses the stream on a foot bridge utilizing the old foundations of the road bridge. Another remnant of the old road running steeply down the bluff into the west end of the village can still be used by small trucks, while a portion of another road, formerly the only one to the village of Lalomauga, two miles inland, is still passable into the pig compound and is occasionally used by copra-collecting trucks. These and the main road through the village are the only routes passable to vehicles.

But vehicles are few in Faleapuna. There are no private cars and only eight bicycles. One man owns a bus and makes the Apia run daily, spending the night in the village. His bus is favored by villagers, but not to the exclusion of others. Another resident owns a taxi which he keeps in Apia and uses principally for Faleapuna requirements such as hospital visits.

Bus service is frequent in both directions from Faleapuna as connections are maintained between Apia and the populous southeast coast. Buses stop wherever they are flagged on the road, but the favorite gathering places are the stores.

Footpaths form a network throughout the village. Trails connect each section with the others, with its own spring and pool, and with the nearest point on the road. They cross the stream by simple bridges of two coconut

logs laid together and the pig compound walls by crude stiles of leaning notched logs. The most travelled trails are the one along the shore connecting the *malaes* of the four sections and the one from the *malaes* of Sapulu across the narrow neck of the lagoon to the road where it reaches the Pastor's School, two of the stores, the cinema, and the main bus stop. Its continuation across the road enters the compound where the pigs are fed and becomes the trail to the plantations and a route to the village of Lalo-mauga. The Chinese storekeeper has wisely chosen this frequented spot, although each of the stores is located where a busy trail reaches the road.

Faleapuna has functions that are both rural and urban. Although primarily a farm village (its role historically), after European contact it became a trading center of more than local importance, the extent of which changed with alteration of the transportation pattern.

Thus even the tiniest village may illustrate some of the principals dear to the heart of the settlement geographer, as does, in its miniscule manner, Faleapuna through its layout and functions, its reaction to the impact of western civilization, and its subsequent response to the changing factors of site and situation.