

## An Enduring Legacy – The German Influence In Samoan Culture and History

by Misa Telefoni Retzlaff

### Introduction

History judges favourably the German presence in Samoa. The German legacy has endured precisely because it has both a historical and a contemporary context. My lecture today focuses more on the people who made and continue to make this contribution, rather than any historical events themselves.

As your honoured lecturer, I am humbled to be the descendant of a German Post Office employee, Erich Retzlaff, who was born in Stettin (now part of Poland and known as Szczecin) and traveled to Samoa to put up and connect telephone lines. For this reason, our family has always been known as the "Telefoni" family in Samoa. It is Samoan tradition that your matai or chief's title takes prominence, followed by your calling name, hence I am known as Misa Telefoni. (a)

I am Misa Telefoni, Deputy Prime Minister of Samoa. I was born Hermann Theodor Retzlaff on 21 May 1952 in Apia. I try to keep these two alter-egos as separate as I can. I published my novel "Love and Money" as H.T. Retzlaff – but when I attend international fora it is always as Misa Telefoni Retzlaff, and invitations in our name go out from Honourable Misa Telefoni and Mrs. Sarah Retzlaff.

I shall preface any further comments by saying that this lecture is not a history of Samoa. There are many good scholastic histories of Samoa, and they will be referred to in my notes, but the focus is going to be on people and families – both past and present, and their historical and contemporary roles in Samoan society.

German administrators, especially Dr. Wilhelm Solf and Dr Erich Schultz, were both culturally sensitive, intelligent and learned men, who realized that to rule

Samoans successfully you had to understand and practice their fa'a-Samoa or Samoan culture. They also both held university doctorate degrees, which was most unusual in the colonial rule of Europeans in that period.

It was on those rare occasions that German colonial policy failed to recognize this, that there were abject failures in that policy. (b)

### **THE ENLIGHTENED GERMAN COLONIAL RULE OF SAMOA**

#### **Background**

The period 1880 – 1890 saw three colonial powers struggling over a small piece of the Pacific known as Samoa.

The Berlin Act 1889 was passed after a German – USA – British Conference and Samoa was carved up this way.

Nationality	Area claimed (acres)	Area confirmed
German	134,419	75,000 = 56%
English	1,250,270	36,000 = 3%
American	302,746	21,000 = 7%
French	2,307	1,300 = 57%
Others	<u>2,151</u>	<u>2,000 = 95%</u>
	1,691,893	135,300 = 8%

There was subsequently in 1899 a swap of land which gave Germany both Upolu and Savaii, while Germany ceded certain islands in the Solomons that had belonged to Germany until 1899 – Shortland Islands, Choiseul, St Ysabel. Buka and Bougainville remained with Germany, and are still part of Papua New Guinea today.

The Berlin Act failed largely because it provided for forcing an indigenous Samoan king and government on the country, and no other traditional leaders were accommodated in the government's hierarchy. (c)

In order to resolve this impasse, after a while Germany's first governor, Wilhelm Solf appointed Mata'afa Iosefo Alii Sili or Paramount Chief, and abolished the Tafaifa kingship role. Governor Solf's training as a lawyer, and being a linguist, this assisted him greatly in his administration of Samoan affairs.

Solf's main priority as Governor had always been commercial – to protect the interests of Deutsche Handels and Plantagen Gesellschaft (DHPG), formerly known as Goddefroy and Sohn.

Governor Solf also became embroiled in a power struggle with orator Namulau'ulu Lauaki Mamoe who launched the independence "Pule" Movement. Solf actively engaged Mata'afa and Tupua Tamasese to go against Namulau'ulu Lauaki, and in the end, he succeeded, with Namulau'ulu Lauaki being isolated and left out in cold.

Governor Solf has largely been judged kindly by historians as an enlightened ruler, ahead of his time, and sensitive to the customs and traditions of the Samoan people (d) and later referred to Samoa as "the work of my life, of which I am proudest". (e )

He is credited with being the first administrator to support the inalienability of Samoan lands, a principle that has endured to this day. His Lands and Titles Commission survives to this day as the Lands and Titles Court.

Governor Solf's success in Samoa was recognized by the Kaiser's government, and upon his return to Germany he was rewarded for his success by being appointed to coordinate the Emperor's colonies all around the world. He was the Kaiser's last Minister of Foreign Affairs, and was posted as German ambassador to Japan after the outbreak of World War 1.

Chief Justice under Governor Solf, Erich Schultz became the last German governor of Samoa, and managed to persuade the Samoans to go through a token

acceptance of the Kaiser's sovereignty over Samoa on 12 June 1913 before Germany lost control of Samoa. (f)

Governor Schultz was so indoctrinated in the Samoan culture that he had a full body Samoan tattoo, or "tatau" done. This act was more than just symbolic, having a profound impact on the Samoan people, who considered him one of their own.

New Zealand assumed control of Samoa in a bloodless seizing of power at the outset of World War 1, and on 31 August 1914 the British flag was raised in Samoa and Colonel Logan became the first Administrator of Samoa. The New Zealand administration allowed all German men married to Samoan women, to remain in Samoa.

Germany never intended, nor did it in fact, offer any resistance to the assumption of power in Samoa by the British and New Zealanders. The prized possessions of DHPG became the New Zealand Reparation Estates (later Western Samoa Trust Estates Corporation – WSTEC) (g)

### **CULTURAL HISTORY OF SAMOA – Dr. Augustin Kramer's Magnum Opus**

It is just not possible to document the German influence in Samoa without reference to that great Opus in two volumes "The Samoa Islands" by Dr. Augustin Kramer.

Writing his Preface to Volume 1 in Kiel in December 1901, Dr. Kramer wrote:  
**"However that may be, no one will ever regret having devoted time, effort and sacrifice, in the conviction that he has contributed directly or indirectly to the preservation of the cultural heritage of the slowly dying-out peoples of the Pacific, in the evening of their unique culture and philosophy of life." (h)**

Dr Kramer traveled extensively in the Pacific between 1897 – 1899, and completed his detailed research on Samoa from 1889 – 1901.

His scholastic achievement involved documenting history, genealogies, cultural traditions, and even fauna and herbal medicines.

The magnificent achievement of this opus merely mirrors Dr Kramer's great expanse of qualifications and interests. He was not only well traveled, but he was also a noted anthropologist, physician, biologist – indeed he was a scholar in the greatest traditions of erudite scholarship.

Dr. Kramer undoubtedly played a significant role in not only documenting, but preserving both Samoan culture and its social and anthropological traditions.

Dr Kramer's work is recognized as the single, greatest contribution to any in-depth study of all things Samoan, and indeed Dr. Kramer's genealogies are still respected, even if frequently hotly debated in Lands and Titles Court Cases, right up to the present time.

Samoans are generally reticent to share their genealogies. How could Dr Kramer have obtained so much confidential information?

The extent of Dr Kramer's research, and his ability to forge rare and deep personal relationships and friendships with his Samoan counter parts, were indicative of his deep and sincere love of the Samoan people and their faa-Samoa.

This special bond will be immediately obvious to any reader of his classic opus, and I commend this magnificent work to any serious scholar engaged in the study of our Samoan people.

**Professor Hermann Hiery's Contribution to the Influence of War on Indigenous Pacific Peoples**

Professor Hermann Hiery of the University of Bayreuth, published a scholarly work on colonial influences in the aftermath of World War 1 in the South Pacific. (i) This work has received excellent reviews (j).

I do not intend to go into details here, as these issues are not my focus, but I will make the general observation using the English expression – “the proof of the pudding is in the eating”.

German colonization policy directed only men, such as the Chinese indentured workers from Guangzhou, to be taken to a country. This was to ensure that there were no racial tensions. Contrast this with British Indian workers placed in Fiji.

The chaos in East Timor is a direct result of colonial incompetence, and Fiji's current problems can be traced back to flawed immigration policies. Samoa on the other hand is presently perceived as the economic success story of the Pacific (Appendix A)

### **Pictorial History of Samoa by Otto Tetens (1902 – 1905)**

Samoa owes a debt of gratitude to Christiane Niggemann and the Castle Haus Kemnade Museum in Bochum in Germany for bringing into public prominence the photos taken in 1902 – 1905 in Samoa by Otto Tetens.

These historically significant photographs prove once again the Chinese proverb that “a picture is worth a thousand words”. These photographs are available on their website <http://www.samoa1905.de>, and were exhibited in Castle Haus Kemnade in 2004 and in Samoa at the National University of Samoa in 2005.

Born in Rendsburg in 1865, Otto Tetens set up the Observatory in Samoa, and lived next door in Mulinu'u Apia to Paramount Chief Mata'afa Iosefo.

The photographs clearly indicate Otto Tetens passion for the Samoan people and their culture and traditions. They feature traditional Samoan “fale”, kava ceremonies, fine mat weaving, carvings, and prominent German buildings such as the Court House in central Apia, which still stands today and houses the Samoan Museum.

### **Germans in Samoa**

I shall be setting out the brief histories of several prominent Samoan – German families in the context of a recently launched book, but my initial focus will be on the German roots of three contemporary politicians.

### **FAMILY KEIL**

I shall begin with the family of Hon Hans Joachim Keil **III**, currently the Pacific Region’s lead negotiator of the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the European Union (EU).

He is at this very moment in Brussels leading a team to continue these delicate negotiations.

### **Grandfather**

1864                      Han Joachim Keil born 20 April 1864 in Magdeburg – Prussia  
Germany

Parents      Christian Gottlob Keil              Father  
                    Sophie Fredericke Hahn              Mother

1893                      H J Keil (29) marries Johanna Wilhelmine Elise Ronnecke nee Henze  
(23)

1903                      Arrived 5 May by steamer with his wife in Samoa

1908                      Elise passes away

1909                      Married Daisy Ah Mu (17) when he is 45 years of age

1935 Visited by German WW1 hero Count Felix von Luckner

Children of Hans and Daisy Keil :

Ernst Christian Keil - 25 November 1909 in Pesega

Hans Joachim Keil - 22 February 1912 in Lotopa

Egon Maximihan Keil - 15 May 1913 in Vaivase

Bolko Carl Egbert Keil – 5 October 1913 in Vaivase

Wolfgang Rudiger Keil – 22 February 1917 in Apia

Friedrich Egbert Keil – 18 April 1920 in Saoluafata

Wilhelm Viktor Albert Keil – 27 January 1923 in Mulifanua

Victoria Luise Ingrid Keil – 3 August 1926 Mulifanua

Arnulf Lutz Keil – 16 May 1934 Mulifanua

1948 26 May Grandpa Hans Joachim Keil I passes away

Hans Joachim Keil III's father – Wilhelm Viktor Albert Keil - born 27 January 1923 – same birthdate as Kaiser Wilhelm – who he is named after, is the seventh Son of H J Keil I and Daisy Ah Mu. He was the Honorary German Consul in Samoa for over 15 years until his retirement in 2000.

My eulogy delivered at Wilhelm Keil's funeral is attached. (Appendix B)

Hans Joachim Keil III is Wilhelm's second of 7 sons from two marriages.

Hon Hans Joachim Keil III has been a Member of Parliament (MP) since 1988 up to the present time.

He has served over 10 years as a Minister of State, his portfolios including Shipping, Transport, Tourism, Trade Commerce and Industry, and Labour.

He has been a commercial airline pilot, served in the United States Air Force, and has extensive business interests in Samoa, owning McDonalds Family



Restaurant, TV3 Television Broadcasting Station, and is major shareholder in Hellaby Meats Ltd and Lotto Samoa. He has many other successful and lucrative business investments.

The descendants of Hans Joachim Keil I and Daisy Ah Mu now number in their thousands, and is well documented in their Family Reunion Book which is available both in book form, and in commercial CD rom.

### **FAMILY SCHMIDT**

I shall now document the genealogies of our Honourable Deputy Speaker Hon La'auli Leuatea Schmidt, and his even better known late father Hon Polataivao Fossie Schmidt.

Great-Grandfather – Albert Kurt von Schmidt from Hamburg Germany – born 1848. The family soon dropped the “von” and just used Schmidt as their surname.

Albert Schmidt married Serah Clara Smith from Safotu Savaii (Father from Vermont USA, Mother Samoan) in 1872.

Of their 4 children – Bismarck Schmidt married Utu Taofinu'u Peseta Solia of Falealupo Savaii.

Bismarck and Utu had four children including Anselm Schmidt born in 1903.

Anselm Schmidt married Filoi Tu'u of Safune Savaii and had 9 children, the 8<sup>th</sup> was Hon Polataivao Asiata Fossie Schmidt who served as a Minister of State in many portfolios including Health, Lands, Commerce, Tourism. He served Samoa in a long distinguished political career spanning over 30 years.

Hon Polataivao Asiata Fossie Schmidt married Puletiuatoa Fuimaono Ipuniuese of Falelatai and Falealili on 20 October 1958 and they had 6 children,

the fourth is Hon La’auli Leuatea Schmidt who is currently the Honourable Deputy Speaker of Samoa’s Parliament.

He is a distinguished businessman and accomplished musician and was one of the main organizers of the recent Schmidt Reunion held in Safotu, Savaii from 3 – 13 July 2007.

The Schmidt Family Reunion Commemorative Book has been published with many genealogies numbering the descendants of Albert Kurt Schmidt in the thousands of people residing in Samoa, New Zealand, Australia, USA, and throughout the world. Many have had distinguished careers, and there have been ordained Catholic nuns, priests and brothers in the family, as well as pastors of other religious denominations.

### **FAMILY RETZLAFF – TELEFONI**

I shall now finally document the least precisely documented of family genealogies – my own.

Erich Retzlaff was born in Stettin (now part of Poland and known as Szczecin) on 15 February 1878.

Their family farmed a small piece of land at the outskirts of the city, which I was privileged to visit in June 2004. (k)

His elder brother Hermann Retzlaff inherited the farm, so Erich who at heart was always a farmer, reluctantly joined the Post Office and moved to Berlin. He specialized in putting up telephone lines and connecting telephones.

He arrived in Samoa in 1906 aboard the SS Holstein with 30 telephones, accompanied by 75 Chinese workers from the German colony in Guongchou, China.

He became known universally by the Samoans as Telefoni, and our family is still known as the Telefoni Family in Samoa up to this day.

Erich Retzlaff met and fell in love with Elizabeth Purcell and they married in 1913. Elizabeth was of Irish-Samoan ancestry, and had been a divorcee with one daughter Fuatino Leopoldine Ulberg (nee Tuisila). My grandmother Elizabeth Purcell was previously married to Tuisila Faitala of Mutiatele Aleipata.

My father, Hermann Paul Retzlaff was born on 23 March 1914, and my uncle Paul Hermann Retzlaff on 22 July 1924. Paul was at school in Berlin, and was pulled out of school at age 18 and died tragically in the Russian front.

My father married Piliopo Joyce Rosabel Nelson (the third daughter of freedom and independence activist and prominent Samoan businessman of Swedish descent – Taisi Olaf Frederick Nelson).

My mother's eldest sister is Noue Tamasese who is the mother of Samoa's current Head of State, His Highness Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi.

My older brother Erich Paul Retzlaff was born on 19 September 1950 and died in his infancy of pneumonia.

I was born Hermann Theodor Retzlaff on 21 May 1952 in Apia. My full Curriculum Vitae is attached (Appendix C).

I have three "Matai" or Chief titles:

Misa from Matautu Falelatai – 1984

Lesamatauano'u from Malaela Aleipata – 1986

Tugaga from Faletagaloa Safune – 1987

I was Attorney-General (1986-1988) and have been a Member of Parliament since 1988. I have been a Minister of State since 1992 and have served in many portfolios.

I am presently Deputy Prime Minister and Deputy Leader of the Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP). My current responsibilities include the European Union (EU) and World Trade Organisation (WTO); Commerce; Industry and Labour; Tourism; International Shipping; Audit Office; and the Legislative. In brief, I am currently the private sector Minister.

I have published a novel "Love and Money" which sells internationally. I also published "To Thine Own Self Be True" – a book of my writings including speeches in Georgetown University (Washington DC) and my alma mater Auckland University (New Zealand), and a short story and poetry. The second printing of "To Thine Own Self Be True" is now being distributed, and a third printing of 2000 copies of "Love and Money" is underway.

I am married to Sarah Young who is with me today.

### **Lagi Braune – "Samoa – My Second Life"**

I was privileged to speak at the launch of this book (I) earlier this month in Apia.

It is an excellent book which documents Lagi's life in both Germany and Samoa, noting the contrasts between the two.

Lagi's grandfather was August Walter whose parents owned a farm near Halle on the river Saale. He married a beautiful part German – Samoan Marie Gabriel and amongst their children was Grete Walter who was Lagi's mother.

Lagi documents the ravages of the Spanish flu epidemic in 1918 which was allowed into Samoa because of bureaucratic incompetence and decimated the population.

Lagi describes in poignant detail her need to obtain an Aryan certificate (included in p131 of the Book) that certified she was "at least" 70% Aryan.

The unfortunate deeds of a few blatantly racist Nazis, continue to repulse us all. This graphic illustration through Lagi's Aryan certificate is but one example. It does need to be put into its proper historical context.

Lagi has a section of her book dealing with Hon HJ Keil III's family and my family. She also describes the contribution to Samoa of the Von Reiche, Stunzner, Hufnagel, Netzler, Kohlhase, and Thieme Families.

I shall focus here on the contemporary contribution of some of German families in Lagi's book.

The late Dr Hans Thieme's father was from Erfurt and he was the first local Samoan to be made Director-General of Health. He was awarded the Samoa Order of Merit for his services to health by the Government in 1994. He is also my respected and much loved god father.

Klaus Stunzner Jr is presently President of the Chamber of Commerce and is the grandson of Kurt Stunzner born in Apia in 1906. The Stunzner family was originally from Dortmund.

The Von Reiches are a prominent business family in Samoa, and they trace their proud ancestry back to the city of Weimar in 1230. Michel Von Veiche is married to prominent Samoan poet, author, painter, sculptor and curator of the arts

(Madd Gallery) Momoe Malietoa Von Reiche. Momoe's father was the loved and revered late Head of State, His Highness Malietoa Tanumafili II.

Sebastian Kohlhase is descendant from both the Schmidts and Hendrik Kohlhase who arrived in Samoa in 1888. He is a prominent successful business man in Apia and is the President of the Samoan English Cricket Association. Known locally as Seb, he was formerly a representative cricket player in New Zealand and has been a prominent sports administrator in Samoa for many years.

Hon Jack Netzler is a successful farmer and entrepreneur who served Samoa in a distinguished political career as a Minister of State and Member of Parliament for over 18 years. He is a descendent of Carl Fritz Netzler who was born in 1844 in Schleswig Holstein. He traveled to Samoa by way of Sweden arriving at about the same time as his good friend Gustav Nelson, father of my grandfather Taisi Olaf Frederick Nelson.

Lynn Netzler is one of Apia's most prominent and successful business women. She was married to Jack's younger brother Thor Netzler and her business acumen is well recognized throughout Samoa.

It is just not possible to document all the German families in Samoa, but I am grateful to Lagi Braune for giving prominence to the German roots of at least some of those families.

## **Conclusion**

I made the point at the outset that the German legacy in Samoa is an enduring legacy. It is both historical and contemporary because it is a story that continues still and has no end in sight.

We need to continue, our two governments, to celebrate this legacy. We know it will endure by and of itself. But we need to actively work together to both preserve and celebrate this joint legacy!

I truly believe our two governments and peoples can do more to celebrate this legacy, and I urge all Germans everywhere – come visit our beautiful islands.

You will find much to make you proud to be Germans, but you will also find serenity and a special peace. A peace which comes from our strong culture and our steadfast faith in God.

I applaud you Berlin History Museum for this great initiative. May it plant a seed that will lead to greater understanding and cooperation between Germany and all its former Pacific Colonies.

May God continue to bless this august institution. God bless all Germans, all Samoans, and all People everywhere.

Misa Telefoni Retzlaff

**Deputy Prime Minister**

**Samoa**

**Notes:**

- (a) There are two kinds of chief – talking chiefs or “tulafale”; and high or “alii” chiefs. Samoa’s culture is based on a chief’s system, with power vested

in, and service “tautua” due to, chiefs. Chiefs in turn have a duty of care to and responsibility for their family.

- (b) The Berlin Act 1889 is one such example. Here was glaring arrogance being displayed by so-called super-powers, sitting a world away in Berlin, and in total ignorance of what was actually happening on the ground in Samoa, and making leadership decisions that were insensitive to the local conditions and culture, and quite unenforcable

- (c) Meleisea, Malama: *“Lagaga – A Short History of Samoa”* (University of the South Pacific (1987) ).

Paramount Chief King Mata’afa Iosefo wrote his now famous Mata’afa’s cry on 16 August 1891 as a result.

Meleisea, pp. 102-105, has an English translation.

The editors of this work note that prominent residents of Samoa at the time, such as famous Scottish author Robert Louis (Tusitala) Stevenson and H J Moors supported Mata’afa Iosefo who was opposed by the three super-powers.

Meleisea, pp93-98 – quoted is an erudite in-depth report in 1893 by Scottish author (Tusitala) Robert Louis Stevenson on the Consequences of the 1889 Berlin Act.

Meleisea, p101 notes the Berlin “carve-up”

- (d) See Meleisea, pp 101 – 121



- (e) Hawassowitz *"The Lost Man – Wilhelm Solf in German History"*  
Hawassowitz Published by Verlag – Wiesbaden.  
Note especially pp51-82 of this most recent biography of Governor Wilhelm Solf's life which focuses on his service in Samoa.
- (f) Hempenstall *"Pacific Islanders Under Germany Rule"* Australian National University Press (1978)  
Note especially pp. 51 – 72, especially p.69.  
The Fono was called in honour of the Kaiser's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary as Head of State and Malietoa Laupepa and Tupua Tamasese were jointly appointed "Fautua"
- (g) The "Dieu and Et Mon Droit Proclamation" Meleisea, pp 127, 128
- (h) English translation by Dr. Theodore Verhaaren and published by Pasifika Press in 1994 (Paper back edition in 1999). This was the first comprehensive English publication of Dr Kramer's volumes which were originally published only in English and Samoan.
- (i) *"The Neglected War : The German South Pacific and the Influence of World War 1"* Hermann Hiery (1995)  
University of Hawaii Press
- (j) *Hiery's scrupulous review of the evidence, gathered from largely unknown primary sources, reveals a story of masquerades and coverups, negligence and duplicity, leading in some cases to full-blown atrocities. Most of all, he tells the story of Pacific Islanders, how they coped with the*

*dramatic changes brought about by the war, and how they tried to influence its consequences. Many Islanders were fully aware that their political destiny was to be redefined after the war, and a few even saw it as an opportunity to achieve independence. This is also the story of their future.*

Review in "American Historical Review".

- (k) There was a census of the population in Stetin in 1941 and the full list appears in Appendix D. It is clear from this list and there was still only one farmer Erich Retzlaff, and hence we were able to identify the farm. If I had put in my claim on time, I could have reclaimed the land after Communist rule in Poland, as I never was a German citizen. Apparently only German citizens were barred from claiming land in post- Communist Poland.
- (l) ***"Samoa – My Second Life"*** by Lagi Braune Commercial Printers (Apia).

### Appendix A

Public Lecture at the Opening of the Public Policy Institute of the College of the Marshall Islands –

**“What Makes States Work : The Development and Reform Experience of Samoa”** - by Hon Misa Telefoni

Reprinted in book of my Speeches “To Thine Own Self Be True” at pp 88 – 102.

### Appendix B

Published in “To Thine Own Self Be True” by Misa Telefoni Retzlaff  
pp 171 – 173 – **Eulogy for Wilhelm Victor Albert Keil.**

### Appendix C

Hon Misa Telefoni Curriculum Vitae

**Appendix D**

Census Listing - Stetin