

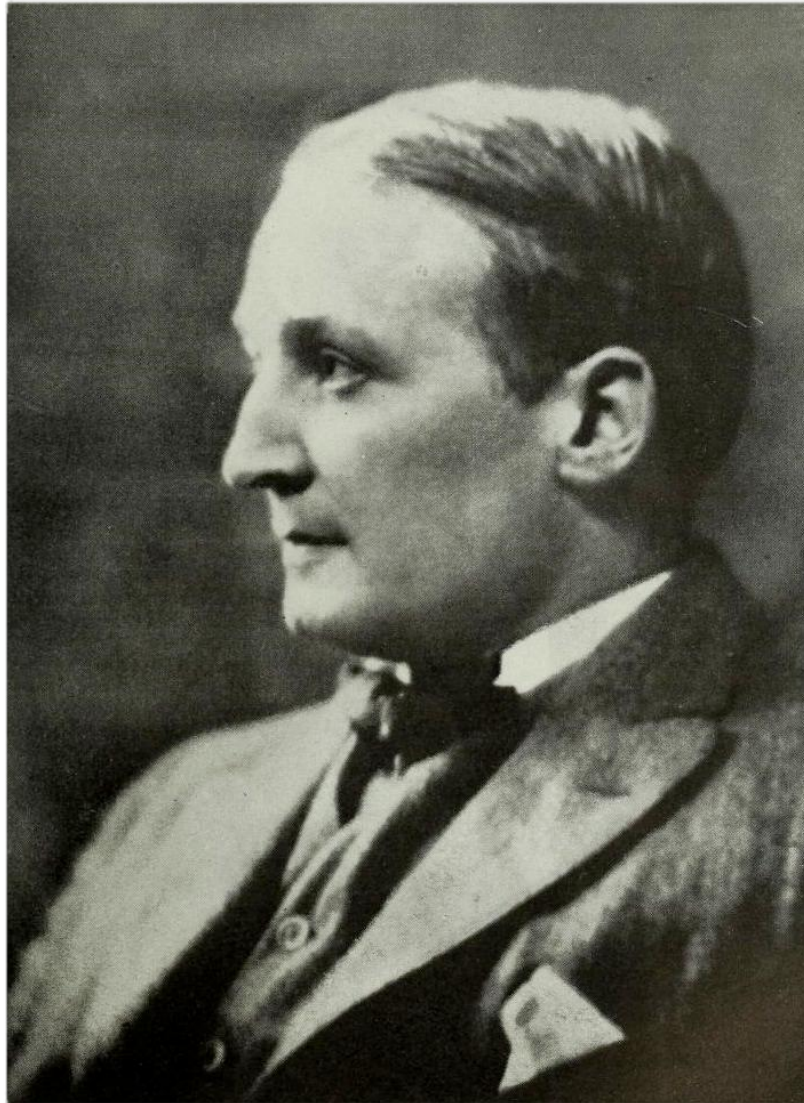


MOANA

ROBERT
FLAHERTY'S
*1926 Movie depicting life
in Samoa and its Culture*

*Story told by Su'a Siaposu'isu'i Faiga
Compiled by Alice Hunt*

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Robert Flaherty

1884—1851

American Filmmaker

His full-length documentary
Nanook of the North (1922) was followed
by
Moana (1926)

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NGĀ TAONGA

SOUND & VISION

Moana with Sound is a “living panorama” of everyday life in Samoa in 1926. The original *Moana*, created by Robert Flaherty before the advent of sound film, would have been shown with live musical accompaniment. In 1980 Flaherty’s daughter, Monica, produced a sound version of this historical film and then, in 2014, the sound version was fully restored.

Flaherty was expecting to make a South Pacific version of his earlier box office success *Nanook of the North* (1922). To that end he was looking for action stories of sea monsters. He was offered giant stingrays (according to Monica Flaherty), but he rejected that and opted instead to create a “living panorama” to film everyday life. At the film’s centre is Moana, the son of a tribal chief, who journeys towards manhood as he spends a week being tattooed. The film captures the villagers as they fish, hunt, make clothes, feast and dance and is the first feature-length film to be noted as having “documentary value”. Though critically well received, and a commercial success in Europe, *Moana* was not a box-office hit in the US.

The History of *Moana with Sound*:

1926: *Moana* was released as a silent film. *Moana* had been filmed by husband and wife team Robert and Frances Flaherty during 1923 and 1924 on Savai’i.

1975: Flaherty’s daughter, Monica Flaherty, returned to Safune, and recorded authentic audio, creating a synchronized sound track for the previously silent film.

1980: *Moana with Sound* was released.

2014: Independent film archivist, Bruce Posner, completed a 2K digital restoration of the film with the sound digitally restored by Posner and Sami Van Ingen (great-grandson of Robert and Frances Flaherty).

Special screenings have been held in Wellington and Auckland in 2017 and 2018.

Information from Ngā Taonga, host of the Moana Symposium, 2016, which led to this story being written.

Introduction

Su'a Siaposu'isu'i Faiga was attending Wesley Broadway Church, Palmerston North, when I first met her. There she was known as Helen Lepou. We became close friends and found we had much in common in our ancestry in Samoa. The names of the Samoan/palagi families she talked about were familiar to me as I had heard my mother and aunt (born in Samoa) refer to these families in their conversations (often in their native tongue — Samoan). Siapo told me about the Flaherty film in which her mother (Fa'agase) had taken part, and I was able to view her video which was produced for American video recorders. When this film, now digitised with added sound effects, became a subject of research and discussion, I asked Siapo to tell me more and write up her mother's story. This is Siapo's story, first in a phone call which she expanded on, and then her notes about her mother, and family life in Samoa.

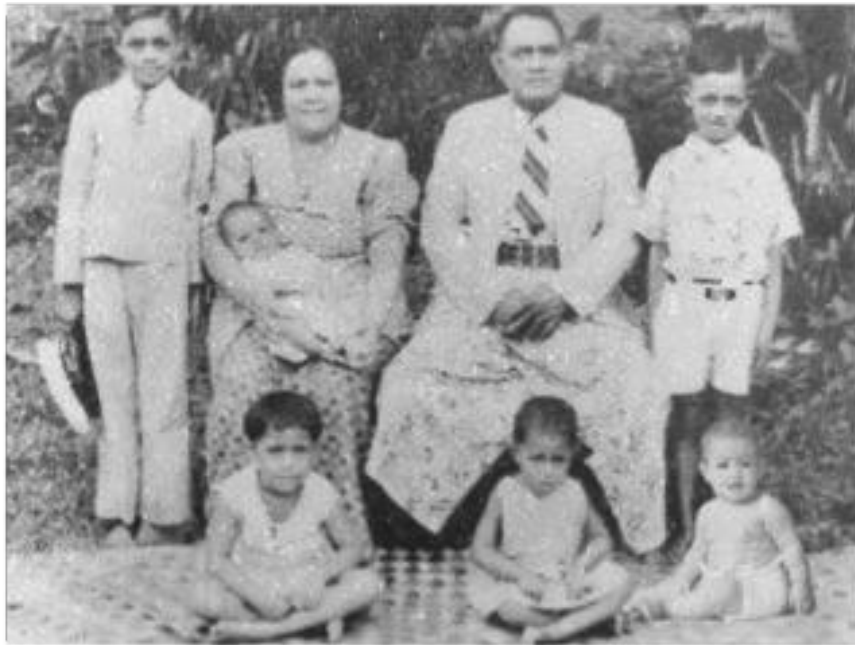
The Flaherty Film, *Moana* (1926) was the subject of a Symposium arranged by Nga Taonga Sound and Vision, Wellington, in November 2016. The silent movie had been up-dated with added sound, and in a version available to present-day viewers.

This reminded me that my friend Su'a Siaposu'isu'i Faiga (Siapo) had shown me a copy of the original video, and that her mother was the young Samoan girl in the movie. Some of the facts brought to the symposium were in conflict with Siapo's knowledge.

Between us, we have put together the story of the film as it affected Fa'agase and her descendants.

Alice Suisana Hunt

June 2018



Fa'agase and her husband Filoitumua Ripley, and their children.
 Standing: (left), Paogaoui Manuele, (right), Fogālēpolo Paul
 (baby) Ifi'ele'ele,
 Seated on mat: Siaposu'isu'i Helen, Sina Luana (adopted), Moana Sasilafaigā.



Frances Hubbard Flaherty/Paramount Pictures
*"Moana, Robert Flaherty's true picture romance
 of life and love in the South Seas"*
 Film poster, about 1925
 Colour half-tone, 42 x 34.5 cm
 Claremont, California: The Robert and Frances
 Flaherty Study Center (M 452)

Poster in collection at Vailima, Apia, Samoa
 Photograph taken in 2003 by Hunt family



Fa'agase in the 1926 movie,
Moana

and

the mature woman she
became in Apia, Samoa



*For my special friend
Su'a Siaposu'isu'i Faiga
known to some as
Helen Lepou*

Moana, the Movie, 1926, Produced by Robert Flaherty

PART ONE

*Telephone discussion with Siapo Lepou,
September 2016.*

Siapo's Grandfather — Mose, became chief of the family

Title — Pesefeaomanaia

Lived at Safune, Savai'i.

Grandfather Mose took the title because his elder brother became a Methodist minister. There were two brothers in the family, and four sisters, Sina, Su'e, Saline and Fipe. His daughter, Fa'agase, was eighteen when Flaherty stopped at their village with Father Dill (German Roman Catholic priest from Apia) who was his interpreter. Flaherty's three year old daughter, Monica, was with him.

They came from Apia to Savai'i in a 'kerosene boat', a small motor boat, and landed at Fagamalo old wharf. They were looking for a place in Savai'i to film the Samoan way of life, and its culture.

Fa'agase related the story to her daughter, Siapo, and she gave me the details which I now record.

Fa'agase was cutting the grass under the watchful eyes of her father, who was sitting on the rocks surrounding their fale. There was a sudden commotion from village children following the palagi visitors.

Fa‘agase and her father went to see what was happening, and Flaherty saw this beautiful young girl. He asked Father Dill to ask her father if she could have her photo taken. The father had no idea about moving pictures, and thought that photos would be taken with a camera. He was a strict man, and did not want his daughter to go, but Father Dill promised to look after her, and so it was arranged.

Fa‘agase was the third girl Flaherty had picked for the part in the movie. The first girl eloped with one of the travelling group, and the second girl was in trouble for disobeying her father. So Fa‘agase was chosen for the part.

There was no road to the site they had in mind, so they cut their way through the bush and walked past a pool, Mata‘ole‘alelo, with a cave. This pool was for men only who bathed by the cave. The women had to go further down the end of the stream to bathe. It was a beautiful, cool, clean pool.

(Siapo says she went to this site in 1977, to see where the movie was made, and swam in this beautiful pool.)

The party continued to walk towards Itu o Tane and found a spot there. The sea looks almost like a beach.

(Siapo noticed, when she first saw this silent movie, there were some shots of Fa‘agase and Moana paddling a canoe and fishing for turtles.)

The filming began, and Fa‘agase did as she was told, though she was not happy about taking off her blouse. She tried to arrange her

necklaces to cover as much as possible. She looked down all the time she was being filmed to cover her embarrassment.

Some days later her father, no doubt wondering what his daughter was doing, loaded up a canoe with vegetables, fruit and a big bunch of bananas, and sent his youngest son with these gifts for the filming group. The boy paddled across the water, and being curious, climbed up the cliff to see what the palagi were doing. He saw his sister, bare to the waist, and was so horrified that he went back to the canoe quickly and paddled home, with all the fruit and vegetables still in the canoe.

He told his father what he had seen. Father was furious, unloaded the gifts and paddled across to the filming site, said nothing, but took his daughter away. Next day she was sent to a boarding school in Upolu, Avoka Girls' College, Faleula, where she stayed for two or three years. Her father told her never to return home. Fa'agase was so sad and disappointed because Flaherty had promised to take her with him to be a sister to his little girl, Monica.

In Apia, Eugen Paul and three cousins had a transport business where the fire station is now, by the old market. Eugen was a catholic. One Sunday he met up with Father Dill and asked him to look out for a nice girl suitable to be his cousin's wife.

Fa'agase was on holiday from school, staying with an uncle on her mother's side, who was married to a Catholic woman. Fa'agase went to church with them one Sunday, and Father Dill saw this same girl who had been in the movie, now mature, and even more beautiful. He thought this girl was suitable for the marriage and started the arrangements.

They had to send for her father in Savai'i to plead with his daughter who kept saying "No, no, no," and cried, cried, and cried. Her father told her she would not be his daughter any more if she did not marry this man who would respect her and take care of her. Fa'agase always respected her father.

In later years Fa'agase told her daughter, Siapo, that she cried and cried, as she did not want to marry this man who was over 40 years of age. 'Old and so ugly,' she said. Her father consulted with her again, and she obeyed.

Her husband was Filoitumua, surname Ripley. He was given this surname when his mother left her marriage and went back to her home in American Samoa, taking her three month old baby, Filoitumua, with her. Ripley, the grandfather, was from Boston USA, and had married a village girl, and had four daughters and one son.

(Siapo writes - my father was a humble man, he might be ugly and old but he was generous and wise. He did not drink or smoke, or say anything to upset my mother. She 'wore the trousers' in our home, and I felt sympathy for my father.

After he died my mother, years and years later, re-married, and the marriage lasted two years. She could not handle the man, they were both alike. He was nothing like my father. She walked out.

Fa'agase was a young widow and was stressed out.)

Fa'agase and Filoitumua Ripley lived in a fale in Tauese village in Apia. Siapo has many memories of life in this home. Her father worked for the family transport business, which also included the Tivoli movie theatre. Several cousins were involved in the business.

Fa'agase was employed as a housekeeper for Dr Malone at Mato'oteua Hospital in Upolu, and there she learned European ways and manners. She was keen to learn, and became very accomplished in business and household matters. She took authority in all things. This was the outcome of her brief time with the Flaherty movie-making.

To get her husband his chiefly title, Fa'agase took him to his biological father's home village of Salelavalu in Savai'i so that he could claim his father's land. It took six months service and sacrifice in the village, but he was given the title Su'a which has now been passed down to Siapo.

They had seven children.

Filoitumua Ripley died in 1949, when Siapo was fourteen.

Her mother did catering for 'Gold Star' functions. A brother had taken up a scholarship to New Zealand, preparing young men for the independence that was to come. When he returned he worked for the Government Lands and Titles Dept. The other brother managed the family companies until he moved to Hawai'i in 1969.

Siapo says her mother showed her how to survive in new situations. From an early age she had to help with the household, and many of the tasks she did not enjoy at all. Her father taught her to do jobs, cleaning the taxis from the age of eight, for threepence. It was a hard existence, but many of life's lessons were learned, and stood her in good stead for the future. This was Siapo's upbringing.

Siapo set out for New Zealand in 1953. She was on the last TEAL seaplane on that route. She stayed at the YWCA Hostel in Queen Street, Auckland, her brother paying her fare and expenses.

Two weeks later she moved to Wellington, staying at the YWCA Hostel in Brougham Street. There were seven other Samoan young women there, who worked for Bonds Hosiery Factory. Siapo started night school lessons in the basic subjects — English, Maths, History etc but when her friends took her to see the factory she was offered a job, and took it. School was forgotten, and Siapo became

very dextrous at working the machinery, and was pleased to earn money, and not depend on her brother for paying expenses.

There were dances and other entertainments they enjoyed together, then one year later Siapo met and married a Samoan man from Lepea village, Etuali Aukustono Lepou. They rented a house in Brooklyn, and in 1958 they were allocated a State House in Porirua. They brought up nine children, giving them a good education. It was necessary for them both to work, so life was very busy and sometimes difficult.

Siapo researched her heritage, finding confirmation in the NZ Archives (brought from Samoa) that she should hold the title, and claim the family land. She achieved this in July 1988.

A son has now returned to this land, Ifi‘ele‘ele, Fasito‘o-Uta, and has developed it into a superior resort. Other family members are thinking of joining him.

So much has happened since the film *Moana* was made in 1924-25, but many good things have come from this.



Siapo and her husband, Etuale Aukuso Lepou, with eight of their children. The eldest boy, Paul, is not in this photo. The children all grew up and were educated in Porirua

Back row: Mark, Eugen, Edward

Front Row: Amy (with Terina on her knee), Verna, Siapo, Michael, Etuale, Suzanne

PART TWO

Following the telephone conversation, Siapo wrote up the story again, with more details. Some parts are in the first section, but she covers more of their family's life.

This has been transcribed and edited, but many of the colourful descriptions remain, as they add a special atmosphere to the text.

Siapo's grandfather — Mose Pesefeaomania Sipua'a

Title— Pesefeaomanaia of Leagiagi Safune Savai'i

He became Chief of the family instead of his older brother, Peleti Sopua'a, who chose to be a Methodist minister.

As well as these two brothers, there were four sisters in this family – Fipe, Su'e Fina and Saline.

Mose married Fali Fuinaono (another chief's) daughter, who was a very sincere, humble, down to earth woman from another street nearby.

They had two children — Fa'agase and brother Sa. Years later after the movie was made, Sa died. He was the young boy who paddled the canoe over to the movie site.

Grandfather Mose was a proud, hardworking, confident man, alert and strict, with a green thumb. Everything he planted grew. On his plantation he had a piggery, fruit trees, oranges, guavas, lemons, mangoes as well as coconut trees, yams taro etc. He had a chicken pen at home with chickens all over his backyard. He was also a great fisherman.

He was very independent. He could be aggressive sometimes.

He was a very generous man and shared all his produce with the village in the harvest season. The whole village looked up to him. He was a very clever man with his fingers.

I always looked forward to visiting my grandparents in Savai'i. He was truly blessed in knowing how to survive and he shared with those who could not work and had no land.

His daughter Fa'agase was about 16 years old when this 'millionaire man', as they called the palagi, arrived at their village with Father Dill, the German priest who travelled with them and explained to the chief's village what this man wanted.

This palagi man (Robert Flaherty), Father Dill and the group travelled from Apia by kerosene motor boat and landed at Fagamalo wharf and started to search for a suitable spot to film the documentary about the Samoan way of life and its culture.

So I am Su'a Siaposu'isu'i Faiga, Helen, daughter of Fa'agase, and she related to me how she got her part in this movie.

(I now give to my dearest friend, Alice Hunt, all the details I can remember to record on my behalf.)

Fa'agase was cutting the grass with her father's watchful eye on her. He was sitting on the rocks surrounding their fale. There was a sudden commotion from the village from children who were following the palagi visitors.

Fa'agase and her father went to see what was happening. Flaherty spotted her beauty, but she was young. Flaherty asked Father Dill to ask the girl's father if she could have her photo taken.

The girl's father had no idea about making a movie, but gave his permission. Father Dill promised to look after her. Fa'agase was the third girl who auditioned. The first girl eloped with one of the travelling group. The second had her long hair cut short because she disobeyed her father or something. So Fa'agase got the part.

The travelling group continued their search along roads, and tracks through trees and bushes until they found a spot at Itu o Tane district where they passed a beautiful pool called Mata'ole'alelo. This pool has a cave in which only men can bathe, and the women bathe at the end of the pool.

In 1997, my sister Moana and her son Charles Crismon and myself and a niece or relation swam there when we went to find out where the movie was made. It was a very clean, cool pool. Our hope is that it will still attract tourists.

The filming began and Fa'agase did everything as she was told only she was not happy when her top had to be taken off. She tried to arrange her necklace and beads to cover as much as possible and she looked down all the time when she was being filmed to cover her embarrassment and shyness.

Fa'agase's father sometime later, no doubt wondering what his daughter was doing, loaded up their canoe with all the good fruit, vegetables and beautiful ripe bananas, and sent his 12 year old son to where the film was being made. He paddled across the water and, being curious, climbed up a cliff to see what the palagi were doing. He saw his sister, bare to the waist, and was so horrified that he went back to the canoe quickly and paddled home with all the fruit and vegetables still in the canoe.

Their father was furious, unloaded the gifts and paddled across to the filming site, said nothing, but took his daughter home. Next day she was sent away on the kerosene boat, which had just landed on the Safune wharf the day before. She was sent to a girls' Methodist boarding school called Avoka at Faleula village. This boarding school was for the girls to prepare themselves spiritually, physically, and emotionally to be wives for Methodist ministers.

Her father told her never to return home to Savai'i.

Fa'agase was so disappointed and sad because the man making the movie had promised her a future life on his return to the States, for his little girl, Monica, needed a sister.

In Apia, there were four men who were first cousins on their mother's side, the 'Ripleys'. They had a transport business, with buses and taxis called 'Gold Star', and they were located where the fire station is by the old market. This was a very successful and well known business, and it was the only one of its kind at the time.

When the *SS Matua* made its monthly visit to Samoa, these men, who spoke English with an American accent, met the visitors who travelled to Samoa. They paddled their canoe out to the ship to meet the visitors, presenting them with lei.

These men were educated in American Samoa when they were young. Their surname was Ripley, except for Eugen Paul. These three men looked up to Eugen Paul because of his palagi name, but the three worked hard to get the business going. One of them was a brilliant engineering mechanic.

However, Eugen Paul was disappointed with one of his cousins for not having a permanent wife. He also disapproved of this cousin's choice of women.

So one day he went to see his friend the priest, Father Dill, asking a favour — if Father Dill saw any suitable respectable girl for his cousin would he please let him know. At this time, Fa'agase was on holiday from school, staying with a catholic family behind the catholic parish. This family also worked at the parish taking care of the priests. Fa'agase went to church with the family.

Father Dill noticed that this girl in church was the same girl he saw in the Flaherty movie and she had grown into a beautiful young woman. Father Dill was so excited letting his friend know about the girl.

Straight

away the marriage was arranged. Fa'agase objected, cried and cried and refused to marry an older 'ugly man'. Eugen Paul sent for Fa'agase's father from Savai'i to talk to his daughter.

Fa'agase's twelve year old brother died a year after the movie, and left Fa'agase an only child for her parents. They were so important to her, especially her father, who worked hard and wanted the best for her. She always obeyed and loved him. Her father said to her, "If you don't marry this man you're not going to be my daughter anymore". He also told her that his man came from a good family, he would respect, honour and take care of her. So they married with tears, and Fa'agase didn't look at him.

Later, I said, "Really he's not all that bad is he? But you had six children with him".

(Alice, my memories about my father, Fa'agase's husband) —

He was a humble, sincere, loving, caring, generous, and humorous man who worshipped the ground my mother walked on. She was

hard on him, but she always made sure my father's clothes were really neat and ironed for work and church, and his meals had to be perfect. She 'wore the trousers' all right. My father hardly said anything. He might have been 'old and ugly', but he was full of wisdom which made him a noble man. He died at an early age of 56 years. Many years later she re-married but this lasted only two years. She couldn't handle the stress from this marriage so she told her husband she was going to visit her children in Hawai'i. She never returned. She mailed the wedding ring back.

She told me later, when I asked her, the second marriage was not the same as the first. My father was her best husband.

(There you go, jolly good, her father was right.)

Fa'agase's first husband was Filoitumua Ridley which was his mother's surname. His mother walked out on her marriage and took her three month old baby boy with her back to her parents in Leone, Pago Pago, American Samoa. She was so upset and furious she wrapped the baby, put him in a canoe and paddled with coconut husks to Apia where there was a yacht ready to sail at Apia wharf (which is now an agriculture store) back to Pago Pago, America Samoa.

Filoitumua's mother was Serai Edward Ripley named after Ripley from Boston, USA. Serai arrived with her baby and her parents registered the baby under their family name Ripley. They also gave him an education. He married an American Pago Pago woman and had a daughter Ali'itasi and a son Enos (Enosa) and an adopted son named Filo.

Years later Filoitumua learned about his biological father, and decided to go back to Western Samoa to claim his identity and heritage. On his arrival he became employed in the small business

‘Gold Star Transportation’ which became successful. There he was involved with a village woman and had three girls, and one boy who was an adopted son. His cousins disagreed and were disappointed with this affair.

(Me too, Alice, because I am working on my genealogy at the moment. Our Mormon church does family history and I am so confused trying to get details of each ancestor. So I can see why this marriage was arranged.)

My parents were really good role models for us. Though we were young, they taught us how to work in Samoa in their business. My older brother, who gained a scholarship in 1946, used to count the money for the business from 13 – 15 years old. My second brother pumped the petrol for the cars at the age 10 – 11 and myself from age 7 – 8, I was taught to clean and shine the taxis with a star on them for threepence. My brothers both got one shilling (12 pence) each. I asked why I got threepence and my brothers got more than me. My father said they have heavy and hard work. I was always overjoyed with my threepence to buy my lunch at Burns Philp Store which is now the building taken over by Chan Mow Company.

My father also managed the Tivoli Theatre as part of their ‘Gold Star’ business and since we lived next to the theatre, my brothers worked there after school selling tickets. They were theatre ushers at matinées and at night. My father made sure he was upstairs at nights. And, of course, I was the sweeper and coco-cola bottle collector after school. Our family was responsible for running this Tivoli theatre which helped to pay for our schooling etc. Then there was the New Year Ball which was a nightmare experience. The Ripley women were responsible for the decorations, cleaning, menu, and to make sure every thing was perfect. I have wonderful memories of all the half-caste young ladies

and their escorts, men in their tuxedos, ladies in their beautiful ball gowns, their corsages and their glittering high-heeled shoes.

It was a beautiful experience to see all this as I was growing up, not knowing that one day I would wear a ball gown, which I did here in New Zealand as a young mother of three, still slim and looking good at the time. Gosh what a life.

Fa'agase really played her part well along with the rest of the Ripley women. She was well liked by this family and she really learned and educated herself from them, both good and bad — which is good for her or anyone to learn, bad and good which is part of life learning. She was a fast learner for a girl from the island of Savai'i.

Fa'agase took a housekeeping job for Dr Malone at Mato'otua hospital so that she could earn money to help her parents in Savai'i.

There she also learned European ways and especially table manners. My mother would come home and teach us how to eat at the table with good manners. She was keen to learn and became very accomplished in business and household matters. She took authority in all things.

In 1957 Fa'agase travelled from Apia in Western Samoa on *SS Matua* to New Zealand. She landed in Auckland to visit us (her children).

The Samoan girls who travelled with Fa'agase told me later how my mother helped them in preparing themselves to meet with the rest of the passengers, and how to dress and look good, also how to use knives and forks at meal times. They were really grateful to Fa'agase with her talent and experience in helping them, without which they would not have been able to come to the ship's dining room. And it was a fortnight trip. These girls never forgot their wonderful trip with Fa'agase.

My mother, when working for the Malone family, learned about the fashion, colours, fabrics, and styles of the season. On September 7th 1953 I was leaving for New Zealand, so I needed to prepare a few clothes, as I did not inherit my mother's looks and beauty.

Anyway, my few clothes really matched the colour and fashion when I arrived in New Zealand. My table manners, my attitude and personality were really 'A Okay' where I stayed in Auckland Queen Street Y.W.C.A. hostel. I stayed there for two weeks and then travelled by train overnight to Wellington to another Y.W.C.A. hostel, Brougham Street behind the Basin Reserve. The matrons were really impressed with my table manners, tidiness and how I dressed.

There I shared my room with two Samoan girls, Losalili Pouesi and Luli Vasa. Other Samoan girls shared with others. Matron promised me a room of my own as soon as one was available, and so my brother insisted on making a request for a single room for my study. The old museum across from Alice Street where Brougham Street branches off is where I attended night school. School was all good until one day I asked my room mates if I could go with them to their work because I was scared of staying by myself in the room, also lonely. And Luli Vasa said it was okay.

This went on for a week and one of the male supervisors asked Luli if I wanted to work on one of the machines as they were short staffed.

Gosh! I was so keen and excited to try, and next day I was hired.

Gosh! and I couldn't believe I knew how to operate this weaving machine for fine stockings in a short time. Schooling was not bad for me to cope with, but this machine gave me no problems. Getting paid didn't enter my mind at this time. It was an overwhelming feeling of how I learned so quickly and picked up the idea of how to weave this fine, fine thread through those fine, fine machine needles.

My room-mates were so surprised how well I did. The second excitement was the pay, which I was overjoyed with. So much money in an envelope. What an overwhelming experience of having so much money. My room-mates helped me sort it. What it meant to me was that I shared with sending money home to my mother and started a bank account, and of course paid my rent. I told my brother I would take care of my rent. Gosh, straight away I got a telling off for avoiding school as my priority, which was the reason for coming to NZ. My pay envelope was the priority and education was avoided which I regretted later.

(I'm still living and looking back now when, where and how Fa'agase's life began as a young girl.)

Upbringing was strict and protective as an only child after her little brother died, while she was at Avoka boarding school at Faleula village run by the Methodist-Presbyterian church. Fa'agase also learned to support her husband in making morning refreshments for the drivers at the 'Gold Star'.

In 1980, I too did the same, to take care of my husband and me while we searched for our land.

Now my son Fagalepolo Pesefeaomanaia Lepou (Paul, Fa'agase's grandson) is taking care of our land. Ifi'ele'ele Plantation, Faseto'outa, has been developed into a superior tourist resort.

And Paul now demonstrates exactly what his grandmother did in the documentary-movie *Moana*, for his tourist guests.

I now have an 18 year old grandson learning the same experience here in Auckland, working full-time at the Blue Rose Cafe.

(You're right, my dearest Alice, many good things come out of life experience.)

I include an article Flaherty wrote with comments,.

(Origin unknown)

Moana and the Pacific

Flaherty himself wrote of this period from the location itself.

During my first few weeks in Samoa, I was disgusted. The drenching heat did not help my feeling for the charm and spirit of the country; the natives I could only see as mobs and rabble. The fortunes of the film seemed low indeed. These reactions, however, were simply those of any superficial traveller hovering around Pago-Pago or Apia, the two ports of call. Only when I left the white man's settlements in this incredible spot, became acclimatised and began personally to know the Samoans, to live amongst them, to have them in my house, to journey with them, did my interest and enthusiasm revive....

We are living in one of the finest native villages in all Samoa.... It stands within the shelter of the tall rocking coconuts. Beyond the screen of trees and the outline of the chocolate-topped thatched fale (house of the village chiefs), is the strip of sea, blue as blue, save for the single thin line of white which is the booming, grumbling reef (without which no South Sea island is complete).

It has been no easy task to get the right characters for the film. Like the Eskimo, the photographable [sic] types are few. Taioa, the taupou (village virgin) of Sasina was my first find. Here should follow the inevitable picture- raven hair, lips of coral, orbs (meaning eyes) etc., etc. But to you, not knowing the fine type of Polynesian, such a passage of words would mean nothing. I can only say that when, after a feast of pigs, taro, breadfruit, wild pigeons, mangoes and yams, to the accompaniment of sita sivas and Ta'alola,; hours and hours long, I bargained for and bought her face from the proud and haughty albeit canny chiefs of Sasina, and she and her handmaid came up the palm-lined trail to Safune, the old women here told her between their teeth that they would see she was killed by dawn. (Flaherty 1924:9-13)

He tells us elsewhere that when he met the chiefs of Safune, he

found that they were so proud that their village had been chosen as the location for the film that they boasted of it to every other village on the island. [13] Every morning the Flahertys could see from their veranda all the chiefs walking in a solemn procession to their meetinghouse, wearing lava-lava round their waists, their torsos gleaming in the sun from the coconut oil with which they had been anointed, fly-switches over their shoulders, and a big, blazing, red hibiscus tucked behind each ear, as was the custom in Samoa. They would go to their fono-fae and begin their ceremony for the day with the drinking of the kava.

The taupou in Samoa is a village's principal maiden, not only because of her rank but also, theoretically, because of her beauty. She is treated like a princess. She officiates at all ceremonies, especially the making of kava when visiting chiefs arrive. The higher the chief, the more important is the ceremony. All the chiefs plan one day to marry off their taupou to a visiting chief, the higher the better so that she may bring great prestige to her village.

Flaherty searched the village of Safune for a girl suitable to play the heroine in his film but without any success. The chiefs then came to him and offered him their taupou for the part—the highest honor they could pay him. Special arrangements could be made, they said, to make her available to Lopati. But Flaherty had already noted the taupou of Safune, who was far from young or even attractive. He solemnly thanked the chiefs for their offer but courteously declined to accept it.

Shortly after, he found the ideal girl for his film. She was the taupou of the nearby village of Sasina. He did not know, of course, that no two villages on the island of Savaii were as jealous of one another as Safune and Sasina. He knew only that he had made up his mind that Sasina¹'s taupou, whose name was Taioa, was perfect for the part. The chiefs of Safune received this news with a marked lack of enthusiasm. Flaherty turned to Trader David to solve the problem.

Two days later, the chiefs of Sasina brought the beautiful Taioa and graciously presented her to Flaherty for his film. He expressed gratitude but noticed none of the local Safunes were in sight. The blinds were drawn on their huts, and the village was as empty and still as a graveyard. After the Sasina chiefs had left, Flaherty asked Trader David how he had arranged for the girl to be brought. "It

was simple," said Felix, I just asked the chiefs of Safune if they wanted you to go and make the picture at Sasina. They were so infuriated by this idea that they at once agreed to allow you to bring her and use the taupou from Sasina" (Flaherty 1924b).

Taioa was given a space for her sleeping mat on the Flahertys' veranda. There she sat by the hour, strumming her guitar and smiling. Camera tests were made, and Flaherty was delighted. He set about solving other problems. But one month later there was a vacancy on the veranda. All that was left was a piece of green velvet. Soon it was discovered that one of the boys from the village was gone, too. "And," said Flaherty, "the Safune chiefs just laughed and laughed."

Undismayed, the Flaherty's found another girl, Saulelia. She had less fascination than Taioa, admitted Flaherty, but she had beautiful long black hair. They began filming with her and were happy with the results. As time went on,

Flaherty became more and more enthusiastic about Saulelia and shot some twenty thousand feet of film on her. But one morning she arrived for work with her hair cut as short as that of a man. Flaherty could not believe his eyes. Weeping, Saulelia revealed that she had been deserted by her lover and, fa'a Samoa, she must cut off her hair.

Finally, Flaherty had success with a third girl, Fa'angase. She had followed him around shyly wherever he had been filming. Occasionally she would bring him a flower. She was very young, almost a child when they had first arrived at Safune, but as the months went by she was growing up.

Fa'angase came from the other end of the village. Her father was a high chief. He agreed that his daughter should take part in the film but insisted that Lopati must treat her as if she were his own daughter. He explained that his end of the village was very high in rank, but the end where the Flahertys had their house was low and always had been so. Therefore the boys around the visitors house were not high class, and Flaherty must be very careful how they behaved when Fa'angase was around. Promises were given and filming began again with the new heroine.

Two boys had been trained to work in the laboratory that had been constructed in the cave. They had to work in semidarkness, and they made up jokes and sang and laughed to keep away the evil spirits. When Fa'angase was cast in the picture, the boys couldn't control their excitement. They teased her unmercifully. When they emerged from the cave laboratory, having helped to process some film that had been shot of the young girl, they shouted, "O Fa'angase, her legs are

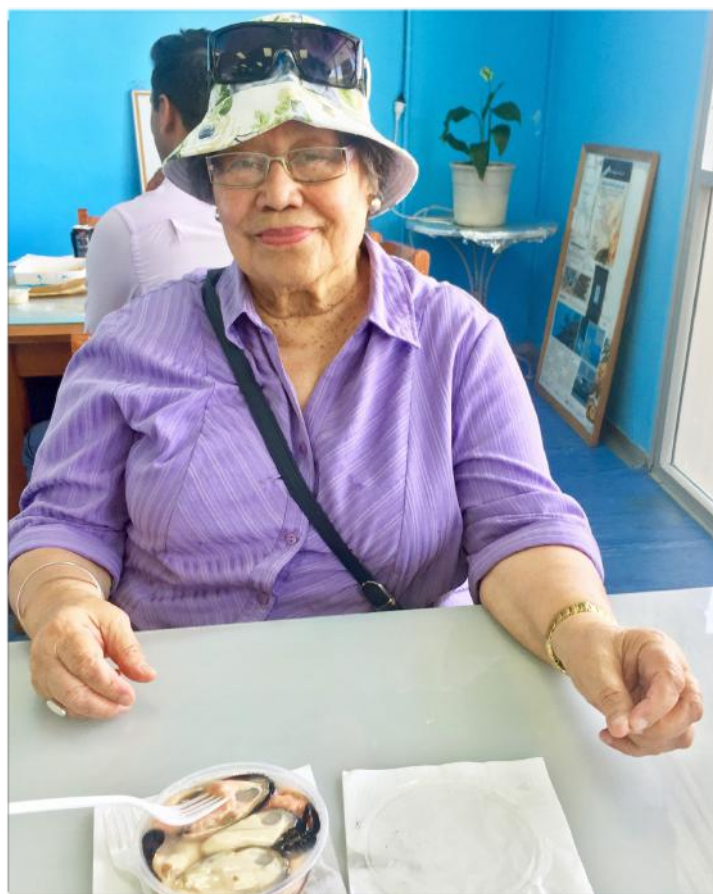
bowed, and her eyes-one looks one way and the other looks the other way." Happily, Fa'angase took it all in good humor.

One day, however, the joking and high spirits were missing. Wondering what was wrong, the Flahertys saw that the chiefs from their end of the village were huddled together in a meeting. Alarmed, Flaherty asked Trader David what was happening. The chiefs, it seemed, were angry. Trouble was brewing between the two ends of the village. The chiefs from the highclass end were coming to take Fa'angase away from the film. All work was stopped until the matter should be settled.

That night a procession of chiefs from the high-class end of the village approached the Flaherty house. Flaherty was dismayed at the prospect of losing his leading lady, upon whom he had spent thousands of feet of film. At that moment, Fialelei [14], the woman who acted as an interpreter for the visitors, arrived in great agitation. All the chiefs from the low-class end of the village, she said, were hiding among the coconut palms with knives in their hands. But by this time the procession of high-class chiefs had arrived at the house. With grave courtesy, they said they wished to ask a favor of Lopati: would he go with them down the path to the bridge across the river, which divided the village into its two halves, so that they could return in safety to their homes?

Fa'angase was not mentioned. Flaherty hesitated a moment. Then he and Frances stepped forward and, with the chiefs between them, led the way down the path in the half-light to the bridge, over which the chiefs filed to their own end of the village. Not a sign or sound came from the men waiting with their knives in the shadow of the palm trees.,

Recent Photos



Su'a Siaposu'isu'i Faiga



Su'a Siaposu'su'i Faiga with her sister's family in Las Vegas , USA, May 2017



With relations at a wedding, Gold Coast, Australia, 2017





Wherever she goes, descendants
want to find out more about their
family history



Fa'agase's great-great-grandchild may lead the
way in the future, with determination and alofa



February 2018

Siaposu'isu'i with three of her family - Verna, Paul, and Terina. There are very few occasions when family members get together.

Edward lives in Australia, Suzanne in Wellington and Amy is presently in Japan.

Etuale (father), Mark and Michael have died. There are many grandchildren and great-grandchildren in the family.



Ifi'ele'ele Plantation Resort, Faseto'outa, on the family land developed by Paul Lepou and Joan Macfarlane

