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REVIEWS

TITLE INFORMATION

PICTURES OF CHANGE IN PARADISE

At the Turn of the 20th Century

Wheat, Karen

Manuscript

BOOK REVIEW

A recovered family photo album showcases the early days of American Samoa under a naval administration from 1907 to 1913.

Wheat's debut collection is a passionate combination of the personal and historical, culminating in her investigations into a family album of 52 black-and-white photographs and tales of an "Uncle Dwyer" who spent time in the American Samoa islands. Uncle Dwyer was in fact Joseph L. Dwyer, secretary to the commandant in American Samoa (among other titles) in the early 1900s. He worked closely and respectfully with the Samoan people in the early days of the U.S. territory. Along with Wheat's own thorough yet not overwhelming research, these restored and cleaned images—collected but not taken by Dwyer—present a rare look at a civilization before tremendous change. Samoan chiefs appeared in an amalgamation of native and colonial fashions, their beautiful daughters adorned with handmade jewelry of soapberry and pandanus fruit. Traditional *toa* warriors still received full-body tattoos to signify rank, only to be contrasted with the Western dress assigned to locals in the Navy-established Fitafta Guard. Despite their age, the black-and-white photos and accompanying captions beautifully depict the Samoan people, figures of interest, dress, activities, and their breathtaking tropical homes. The book provides a concise primer of the islands' history before the territory's creation, detailing the natives' origins, their roles as warriors and sailors, the eventual arrival of Western missionaries, and the warring for the area between the German, British, and American forces. The author comments little on the effects of colonialism, offering only the history, to accentuate but not co-opt the photos with editorializing. Some will find the collection somewhat conservative in the history it chooses to share, yet ultimately that is part of its charm, making this enticing snapshot an excellent starting point for those readers it grabs.

A simple, uniquely intimate gateway resource into the early history of American Samoa as well as the influences of colonialism.

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