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Far from Home the Sojourns of E. J. Ormsbee in the Samoan Islands

Zackary Gardner
University of Vermont

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FAR FROM HOME
THE SOJOURNS OF E. J. ORMSBEE IN THE SAMOAN ISLANDS

A Thesis Presented

by

Zackary W. Gardner

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts,
Specializing in History

May, 2008
Accepted by the Faculty of the Graduate College, The University of Vermont, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, specializing in History.

Thesis Examination Committee:

Nicole Phelps, Ph.D.

Dona Brown, Ph.D.

Jeffrey D. Marshall, M.A., M.S.

Frances E. Carr, Ph.D.

Advisor

Chairperson

Vice President for Research

and Dean of Graduate Studies

Date: April 1, 2008
Abstract

Historians of US foreign relations have argued that, after the Civil War and prior to the professionalization movements of the 1920s, the State Department was staffed with failed politicians, adventurous lawyers, and bored businessmen through a system of political spoils. An examination of Ebenezer Jolls Ormsbee’s experience as an envoy of the State Department on the Samoan Land Commission from 1891 to 1893, however, demonstrates that the department operated through an effective patronage system. Patrons, with experiential, social, and professional connections to appointees, sought out the best candidates they knew. By examining Mr. Ormsbee’s childhood, Civil War experience, and political career with the Republican Party in Vermont, his various relationships with prominent individuals such as Redfield Proctor, Frank C. Partridge, and Henry C. Ide become evident. Through these relationships, Mr. Ormsbee gained his appointment to the Samoan Land Commission based upon his peers’ belief that he was the best qualified candidate available.

Mr. Ormsbee’s position as a provincial grand bourgeoisie not only determined how he was appointed to the Samoan Land Commission, but also his relationship with and viewpoint of the native and the Euro-American communities in Samoa. For Mr. Ormsbee and his wife, Frances Ormsbee, the natives were often viewed with greater approval because of their perceived authentic barbarity, while the Euro-Americans were often found to have failed to maintain the Ormsbees’ notion of civilization. The Ormsbees’ social and political relationships in Samoa demonstrate the racial and class complexities of the late nineteenth century, especially when those are viewed from such microhistorical subjects as Mr. and Mrs. Ormsbee.
Acknowledgements

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# Table of Contents

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** ......................................................................................................................... ii  
**TABLE OF CONTENTS** .............................................................................................................................. iv  
**LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS** .......................................................................................................................... v  
**INTRODUCTION: A FOOTNOTE EXPANDED** ............................................................................................... 1  
**CHAPTER I: THE MAKING OF MR. ORMSEBEE, 1834-1888** ................................................................. 13  
  - **INTRODUCTION: VERMONT, NEVADA, AND SAMOA** ........................................................................... 14  
  - **THE REPUBLICAN MR. ORMSEBEE** ..................................................................................................... 17  
  - **MR. ORMSEBEE GOES FORTH** .............................................................................................................. 27  
  - **THE WELL-READ MR. ORMSEBEE** ....................................................................................................... 33  
  - **CONCLUSION: PATRONAGE REVISITED** ............................................................................................... 40  
**CHAPTER II: THE SOCIAL MR. AND MRS. ORMSEBEE, 1891 TO 1893** ............................................. 42  
  - **INTRODUCTION: MR. AND MRS. ORMSEBEE GO ABROAD** ............................................................... 43  
  - **EVERYDAY WITH THE ORMSEBEE** ...................................................................................................... 44  
  - **ENTERTAINING SAMOANS** .................................................................................................................. 51  
  - **ENTERTAINING EUROPEANS** ................................................................................................................ 63  
  - **CONCLUSION: MR. AND MRS. ORMSEBEE HOME AGAIN** ............................................................... 71  
**CHAPTER III: THE DIPLOMATIC MR. ORMSEBEE, 1891-1893** ............................................................ 73  
  - **INTRODUCTION: A VERMONT PERSPECTIVE, A SAMOAN EXPERIENCE** ....................................... 74  
  - **THE JUDICIOUS MR. ORMSEBEE AND THE SAMOAN LAND COMMISSION, 1891-1893** .................. 76  
  - **THE DISCONSOLATE MR. ORMSEBEE AND THE STATE DEPARTMENT, 1891-1893** ..................... 93  
  - **CONCLUSION: EVALUATING THE DIPLOMATIC MR. ORMSEBEE** .................................................... 111  
**CONCLUSION: THE IMPORTANCE OF A FOOTNOTE** ............................................................................. 113  
**SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY** .................................................................................................................... 120
List of Illustrations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 1:</td>
<td>TELEGRAMS FROM REDFIELD PROCTOR TO E. J. ORMSBEE.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 2:</td>
<td>BRANDON, VERMONT, C. 1892</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 3:</td>
<td>FRANCES WADHAMS ORMSBEE, C. 1890</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 4:</td>
<td>CARRIE WYCKOFF-ORMSBEE, C. 1890</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 5:</td>
<td>MR. PARKER, DATE UNKNOWN</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 6:</td>
<td>MRS. PARKER, DATE UNKNOWN</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 7:</td>
<td>NEW YEAR’S EVE GREETING CARD FROM SAMOA</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 8:</td>
<td>CHRISTMAS CARD FROM SAMOA, 1894</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 9:</td>
<td>NEW YEAR’S EVE GREETING CARD FROM SAMOA</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 10:</td>
<td>THE SAMOAN LAND COMMISSION, C. SUMMER 1892</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 11:</td>
<td>STEAMSHIP PAMPHLET AND MAP OF PACIFIC</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 12:</td>
<td>TWO VIEWS OF MR. ORMSBEE’S STUDY IN BRANDON, VERMONT, 1904</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction: A Footnote Expanded
Robert Louis Stevenson, the famous novelist and a resident of Samoa, referred to the international entanglement over that Pacific kingdom as *A Footnote to History*. He began his “large pamphlet” hoping that despite “the smallness of the scale and the singularity of the manners […] events and many of the characters […] considered […] in spite of its outlandish subject, the sketch [might] find readers.”¹ Ebenezer Jolls Ormsbee of Brandon, Vermont, was one such character in Mr. Stevenson’s *Footnote*. As yet, Mr. Ormsbee has not been “deemed worthy of a note of a few lines in any general history,” but such negligence should not negate his importance in demonstrating the operation of the US State Department during the 1890s.²

Few have turned scholarly attention to the US State Department. Graham H. Stuart, a professor of international relations, wrote what has remained the definitive chronological narrative of the State Department in 1949. As a reference work discussing the “organization, personnel, and procedure” of the department, nothing has yet surpassed this.³ Historian Robert D. Schulzinger, in his *The Making of the Diplomatic Mind*, examines the “amusing group” of individuals who comprised “the first generation of American career diplomats.”⁴ Although his work principally focuses upon the failure of a professional cadre of foreign service agents to emerge in the United States, his work also provides a valuable assessment of the complexities facing those agents. Perhaps the most provocative examination of the State Department has come from Rachel West. In

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² Ibid.
⁴ Ibid., p. ix.
agreeing with George Kennan that the pre-1914 State Department was really a “quaint old place, with its law-office atmosphere,”⁵ rather than the bureaucratic center of a global information and management system, her work argues that the department could have somehow prevented the Great War if it had been less amateurish and more professional.⁶ Henry E. Mattox, a former foreign service officer and amateur historian, directly challenges Rachel West and others who have viewed the State Department as nothing more then bungling amateurs in the pre-First World War era. In his The Twilight of Amateur Diplomacy, he argues that the citizen-diplomats of the 1890s were “the best America had to offer” and that the patronage system did not merely fill the State Department with sycophantic incompetents.⁷ His examination of the historiographical literature upon the State Department aptly surmises that historians have repeated contemporary judgments of the foreign service from the Progressive Era: that the State Department had by the late nineteenth century become a dumping ground of failed politicians, adventurous lawyers, and bored businessmen. Without professionalization, the argument has gone, there could not possibly have been a competent State Department.

Mr. Ormsbee would most probably have objected to being described as a member of Schulzinger’s “amusing group” and, although he might have agreed that the State Department could have been better managed, he would have certainly objected to claims that a spoils system made the department incompetent. His post-Civil War career within

the Vermont Republican Party was founded on an elaborate patronage system, which sought to elevate the best known candidates through personal and professional relationships, as well as homosocial groups such as veterans associations. At the national level, his appointment to Samoa and his relationship with the State Department demonstrates how the department functioned without mandatory academic degrees, licensure, training, and institutional membership; in short, without the professionalization of the Progressive Era’s reaction to the corporate, industrial capitalism of the Gilded Age.

The late nineteenth century, the so-called Gilded Age and Progressive Era, was a period of rapid and intense social, economic, and political change. Louis Menand’s highly influential work, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America*, posits that for the “generation that lived through it [the Civil War], the Civil War was a terrible and traumatic experience,” from which that generation would struggle to recover—struggle to “develop a culture”—for the next fifty years.⁸ Specifically, the generation that survived the Civil War would create a culture of skepticism “that helped people cope with life in a heterogeneous, industrialized, mass-market society, a society in which older human bonds of custom and community seemed to have become attenuated, and to have been replaced by more impersonal networks of obligation and authority.”⁹ T. J. Jackson Lear similarly investigated cultural reconstruction in the United States in the aftermath of the Civil War and industrial, corporate capitalism. His investigation concluded that antimodernism was “unstable, ambivalent,” and “that old-stock Northeastern elites […]

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⁹ Ibid., p. xii.
kept an extraordinarily tenacious hold on wealth and power [after] the Civil War.\textsuperscript{10}

Although my discussion of Mr. Ormsbee’s sojourns in Samoa does not build upon his reaction to or participation with antimodernism, Menand and Lear’s discussions demonstrate the flux with which he and the State Department were undergoing in the late nineteenth century. To exemplify his argument, Louis Menand analyzes the lives of Oliver Wendell Holmes, William James, Charles S. Pierce, and John Dewey. Mr. Ormsbee never attained the trans-Atlantic notoriety of these gentlemen, great men or near-great men all, but his life, especially his involvement with the State Department, certainly demonstrates Lear’s bourgeoisie.

Lear has defined the bourgeoisie as “the ruling groups in a developed capitalist society” whose circumstances ranged from the wealthy to the “moderately comfortable” and who shared common “kinship ties, education background, and sources of income.”\textsuperscript{11} Furthermore, he argues that they saw themselves, sometimes unwittingly, as the “custodians of culture.”\textsuperscript{12} Certainly, while in Samoa, the Ormsbees saw themselves in this guardian role and were often more disturbed by those Europeans who failed to maintain bourgeois civilization in the tropics then by the natives who, in their opinion, were not supposed to have such trappings. The Ormsbees, though, were part of a very particular subset of bourgeois society: they were provincial grand bourgeoisie. Historian Catherine Kelley provides the most nuanced definition. In her usage, “provincial” refers to a place not simply between the rural hinterland and the cosmopolitan, metropolitan.

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Ibid.}, xvi.
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid.}
center, but a hybrid of these: a center of regional cosmopolitanism informed by rural social practices. The Ormsbees’ hometown of Brandon, Vermont, which they refer to as a veritable biblical paradise in their correspondence home from Samoa, exemplifies her definition of provincial. In the late nineteenth century, the town was a prospering commercial center with a thriving professional class catering to Rutland County’s many industrial concerns, which included a paint factory, a machine-tool shop, and, of course, the marble quarries. Kelly’s definition of bourgeoisie resembles Lear’s, denoting an elite comprised of professionals such as lawyers, doctors, and businessmen. She also notes, though, that regardless of their true economic status, they commanded great social and cultural power. In order to exemplify the disparity between the Ormsbees’ economic status and their social, cultural, and political power, as well as the origins and limitation of that power to Vermont, I refer to them as provincial grand bourgeoisie. The Ormsbees would interpret and judge the islands they were sent to through their worldview as provincial grand bourgeoisie.

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13 The Ormsbees continually refer to Brandon as being in their “loved Green Mountain State of Vermont.” In one particularly demonstrative letter to Carrie, their adopted daughter, after she had returned home from a trip to Oregon, they noted, “you [will now] rejoice with us that our home is in the older and more reverent East, in good old Vermont.” Vermont for them was a paradise on Earth. E. J. Ormsbee to Palepo, 6 January 1893, MSC 35, Folder XVII & E. J. Ormsbee to Carrie W. Ormsbee, 16 August 1892, MSC 188, Folder II, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.

14 No comprehensive history of Brandon has been written to date. A 1961 commemorative history of the town provides some biographical details of the town’s leading citizens, but fails to provide a scholarly narrative of the hamlet. Leon S. Gay, ed., Brandon Vermont: A History of the Town, 1761-1961 (Brandon: Town of Brandon, 1961), pp. 223-224. The comprehensive work of H. P. Smith and W. S. Rann written in 1886 provides a very good idea of what the town was like in the late nineteenth century. Their work details the many industrial concerns, provides a list of professionals and their services, and provides comparative information with the rest of the towns in Rutland County. H.P. Smith & W. S. Rann, The History of Rutland County, Vermont (Syracuse: D. Mason and Company, Publishers, 1886), pp. 494-515.

In December 1891, the grand bourgeois Ormsbees would leave Brandon, Vermont—a provincial commercial center—for Samoa, a peripheral outpost of Euro-American economic and political interest. Historian Edward P. Crapol, in reviewing the historiography of US foreign relations from 1865 to 1900, has concluded that in order to “begin to come to terms with the reality of American empire” studies of the center of power would have to be integrated with histories of the periphery. The twenty-year crisis between the United States, Great Britain, and Germany over the Samoan Islands provides ample opportunities to meld a narrative of cores and peripheries. Histories of the entanglement, though, have failed to move beyond a state level of analysis. George Herbert Ryden’s *The Foreign Policy of the United States in Relation to Samoa*, a 1928 Yale University dissertation, provides a prodigious study of the correspondence between American consular agents in Samoa and the State Department without explaining why and how these agents were there or what their perceptions of the Samoans were. Paul M. Kennedy’s *The Samoan Tangle: A Study in Anglo-German-American Relations, 1878-1900* more adequately explores the Anglo-German relationship over Samoa, but again relies upon government correspondence in explaining the crisis. Neither of these works mentioned Mr. Ormsbee or covered in any detail the Samoan Land Commission, the international governmental agency upon which he worked. Having concluded that the

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1889 Berlin Treaty was a failure in historical hindsight, they failed to analyze any aspect of it, including those that succeeded. For contemporaries, though, the Samoan Land Commission was considered quite successful, especially because of the problems its members surmounted.

Mr. Ormsbee played a vital role in what would result in the 1899 partition and annexation of Samoa by the United States and Imperial Germany. Germany had maintained a commercial interest in the archipelago since the middle of the century, especially regarding the lucrative copra trade. By the 1880s, German mercantile interests were pushing the newly established imperial government to annex the archipelago. American interest, dating to the 1830s, revolved around the island’s location in regards to south Pacific trade and, after 1878, naval rights to the harbor of Pago-Pago. The success of the Webb Oceanic Steamship Company, a San Francisco firm under contract by the British postal service to carry all of the mail from its homeport to Australasia (after it had crossed the Atlantic and the transcontinental railroad), as well as increasing interest in Pacific expansion and anti-German sentiments further discouraged American acquiescence to German plans of annexation. Similarly, the British, especially colonial New Zealand, objected to German control of the group for strategic reasons. By 1887, all three parties found themselves on a war footing over Samoa.

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19 Copra was the dried meat of the coconut used in the manufacturing of coconut oil. Traders would collect copra, which could be easily transported to centralized warehouses where it would then be shipped to Europe and rendered into coconut oil. Coconut oil was used in a variety of European manufactured products. Principal among these was high grade candles, which burned better than either tallow or more expensive wax candles. Coconut oil was also crucial in the manufacturing of non-fat, non-tallow based soaps. By 1875, £121,360 worth of copra was exported annually from Apia on predominantly German ships. Sylvia Masterman, *The Origins of International Rivalry in Samoa, 1845-1884* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1934), pp. 57-81.
Amongst heightened threats of war, the three powers agreed to a conference in Berlin in the spring of 1889. The result, the Berlin Act of 1889, placed the archipelago under a tripartite government, wherein a Samoan constitutional monarchy would govern at the behest of the three powers; however, fiscal power was granted to a representative, to be titled the Chief Justice, agreed to by the Treaty Powers. Furthermore, each of the three powers agreed to appoint a delegate to a Land Commission, which would arbitrate the disputed land claims resulting from the decades-long Samoan civil war. During the conflict, Samoans had, under a vague understanding of European property rights, given large tracts of land in exchange for military provisions often to multiple parties. The result was a chaotic and, given the imperial rivalries, volatile situation, which the Land Commission was expected to resolve.

My microhistorical case study of Mr. Ormsbee examines why he was frustrated in his application of his Vermont-centered worldview and life experiences to his experience with the Apian international community. Chapter I presents two arguments. First, the patronage system worked as a filter through which the best known applicants could be appointed, rather than, as the historiography of the State Department suggests, as a spoils system in which loyalty was rewarded with political offices. Second, Mr. Ormsbee had a particular connotation of politics, originating from his experience within the Vermont Republican Party, which would lead to his frustration with the Samoan Land Commission and the State Department. Through homosocial organizations such as political parties, veterans associations, and professional fraternities, Mr. Ormsbee was able to become a respected and powerful figure in provincial Vermont society. As a leading member of the
Vermont Republican Party, Mr. Ormsbee had a particular connotation of politics. For him, politics were orderly, private affairs conducted by gentlemen for the benefit of the masses, who could not become aware of intraparty dissent. His success within this system was recognized by his peers, most notably Senator Redfield Proctor and State Department Solicitor Frank Partridge, who orchestrated his appointment. As Mr. Ormsbee’s personal correspondence proves, he was quite possibly the most informed and highly qualified candidate for the Samoan posting in late 1891. By examining Mr. Ormsbee from an individual level—his upbringing, his experience of loss in the Civil War, and his political conviction as a Vermont Republican—it is possible to reconstruct how he obtained his appointment to Samoa and the perspective from which he interacted with the Samoan Land Commission and the State Department. Thereby, exemplifying how a State Department patronage appointee was awarded a position, rather than given a position for political support through a spoils system.

Within Chapter II, I explore how Mr. Ormsbee and his wife perceived the foreign and native population of Samoa. As with Mr. Ormsbee’s connotation of politics, he and his wife’s experiences as members of the Vermont grand bourgeoisie determined their perceptions of and interactions with the Apian international community. For the Ormsbees, racial superiority was not guaranteed by being European, but by assuming and maintaining a very specific persona. In failing to maintain that persona, Mr. Ormsbee criticized his colleagues on the Land Commission and became increasingly frustrated with them. When examined in conjunction with his relationship with the State Department, Mr. Ormsbee’s opinions of his colleagues revealed the interaction of his
personal identity—the pro-temperance, liberal Republican Vermonter—with the contemporary Eurocentric international racial hierarchy. Some aspects of the latter—interracial sexual relationships, prolific drinking, and colonial disregard for Victorian domestic values—he rejected, while others, especially the racial inferiority of the Samoans, he accepted. In order to understand Mr. Ormsbee’s frustrating political experience in Samoa, his equally frustrating experience with the international community there must be examined.

Finally, in Chapter III, I explore Mr. Ormsbee’s relationship with the Samoan Land Commission and the State Department. His relationship, marked by increasing frustration and eventual resignation, did not reflect the amateurism of the Department, but rather reflected the increasingly global demands and logistical limitations of the department. Furthermore, Chapter III explores Mr. Ormsbee’s personal and professional relationship with Mr. Partridge. As Mr. Ormsbee’s correspondence with Mr. Partridge demonstrates, they were unable to separate their personal friendship and their professional State Department relationship, despite their recognition of a need to do so. Such identity confusion, though, did not weaken the functioning of the State Department as previous historians have argued. In fact, Mr. Ormsbee’s personal relationship with Mr. Partridge was used to facilitate his relationship with State Department at a time when little official attention could have been granted him. Through Mr. Ormsbee’s many identities as personal friend, professional colleague, provincial grand bourgeoisie, Vermont Republican, and citizen-diplomat, a narrative emerges of one man’s
negotiations with the patronage system, with the State Department, and with the international, multiracial, cosmopolitan community of Samoa.
Chapter I: The Making of Mr. Ormsbee, 1834-1888
Introduction: Vermont, Nevada, and Samoa

On Sunday, September 29, 1891, Mr. Ormsbee sat in the dining room of Nevada House, a dusty, uncomfortable hotel in Wadsworth, Nevada, where, after dutifully notifying his wife that he had bundled up against the damp chill, he wrote her that he “had accepted an appointment upon the Samoan Commission,” which had come “as a surprise to [him]” in the following way: The previous evening, after returning from the reservation agency, he found a telegram from Frank C. Partridge, Secretary for War Redfield Proctor’s secretary and business manager, stating, “Ide resigned. Wife sick. Do you desire appointment if obtainable?” Hoping that she would approve his actions, he had accepted immediately and informed Senator Proctor that by November 1 he could be ready. Mr. Ormsbee admitted that despite having enthusiastically “reenlisted,” he knew “nothing as to how much [remained] for this Samoan Commission to do or whether [he would] have to go away or if so where-when.” He naively hoped that he might be able to consult his colleagues without having “to go away from the East.” Mrs. Ormsbee was not at all happy with his decision.

The above demonstrates not merely the patronage system upon which the US State Department functioned in the latter nineteenth century, but also Mr. Ormsbee’s position within that system of political friendship. Although no adequate scholarly work has yet been done detailing the State Department in the 1890s, Henry E. Mattox has conducted a limited study of American diplomatic mission chiefs during the time period

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20 E. J. Ormsbee to F. Ormsbee, 29th September, 1891, MSC 188, Folder IV, Vermont Historical Society Library, Barre, Vermont.
21 E. J. Ormsbee to F. Ormsbee, 10th October, 1891, MSC 188, Folder IV, Vermont Historical Society Library, Barre, Vermont.
Figure 1: Telegrams from Redfield Proctor to E. J. Ormsbee. Courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society.
in question. Mattox’s portrait of these appointees shows a homosocial group that had been born in the United States, hailed from either the Midwest or Northeastern states, were professionally oriented in careers as lawyers, businessmen, or journalists, and had been active in politics, but were not full time politicians. Furthermore, most had some form of military experience, probably with a state regiment in the Civil War, and had joined some form of post war veterans association, such as the Grand Army of the Republic. By 1890, these citizen-diplomats were, on average, fifty and limited to about three years of active service, or one presidential term. Mr. Ormsbee’s boyhood as a member of Vermont’s agricultural gentry and his service in the Civil War qualified him to enter such a homogenous group.

Before qualifying for national service Mr. Ormsbee gained prominence in the Vermont Republican Party. After the Civil War, Vermont was dominated by the Republican Party. By the 1870s, as historian Samuel B. Hand has noted, there was little perceived difference between the party and state government. Reacting to the perceived chaos of antebellum political discord and failure of partisan politics, especially the collapse of the Whig Party, Vermont’s political elite established a system “cushioned” against disruption. Calm, deliberate gentlemen conducted party and government affairs—which were really albeit interchangeable—as “the best regulated of families.”

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agenda was that of big business, the problems of industrial modernity, and progressive liberalism. Joining the Democratic Party in Vermont was tantamount to complete political, social, and, in some instances, economic exile.\textsuperscript{24}

From his boyhood in Vermont, Mr. Ormsbee developed a worldview well suited to post-Civil War, Republican Party state politics. One account recalled him declaring, “I was born a Republican, and never got over it.”\textsuperscript{25} His biographical narrative demonstrates how Mr. Ormsbee’s lifestyle and worldview allowed him to enter into the patronage system. Through his experiences, his peers judged him the most qualified person to represent the interests and uphold the honor of the United States in Samoa.\textsuperscript{26}

**The Republican Mr. Ormsbee**

Ebenezer Jolls Ormsbee’s preparations for Samoa began in Shoreham, Vermont, on June 8, 1834, as the son of devout Episcopalians, John M. and Polly Wilson Ormsbee. Few sources have survived describing Mr. Ormsbee’s early life. However, an autobiography of Mr. Ormsbee’s early years, written in 1919, detailed his perception of a gentrified, agricultural, provincial Vermont, as well as his place within that world.\textsuperscript{27}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{24} *Ibid*, pp. 15-76.
\textsuperscript{25} Leon S. Gay, ed., *Brandon Vermont: A History of the Town, 1761-1961* (Brandon: Town of Brandon, 1961), pp. 224. Although no reference was provided for this quotation, the works reliance upon the Brandon newspaper suggests that it was probably taken from there.
\textsuperscript{26} This contradicts Rachel West’s argument that American patronage appointees, ill prepared and unqualified for foreign service work, allowed World War I to happen. Rachel West, *Department of State on the Eve of the First World War* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1978).
\textsuperscript{27} As an autobiographical account written nearly seventy years after the events, Mr. Ormsbee’s recollections are necessarily suspicious. However, what he chooses to nostalgically remember insightfully demonstrates what was expected of an idealized Vermonter. His nostalgia demonstrates how he perceived Vermont and what he valued. By reminiscing about his entrepreneurial, agricultural, rugged, individual childhood, Mr. Ormsbee demonstrates those aspects of provincial living he most valued and by which he judged others.
\end{flushright}
From his anecdotal childhood recollections, Mr. Ormsbee saw himself as the product of a rigorous, entrepreneurial youth with limited formal education. After his family settled in the Arnold District of Brandon, Vermont—moving via ox-drawn sled—his father placed him in charge of “an old fashioned saw mill” northwest of the house, at which he “could do everything about the mill with the exception of filing the saw and that came later.” Given that he would have been twelve at the time, such a boast would seem particularly substantial.

In recounting his education, Mr. Ormsbee noted that, from 1852 to 1856, he attended “the winter school,” while in the falls he attended a Baptist seminary. With pride, Mr. Ormsbee recalled,

> In the fall of 1856 when I was 22 years of age, I went for a term to the Green Mountain Liberal Institute […] a then very thriving school for what we might call ‘grown-ups’, and the three months spent there constituted my entire schooling away from home. I ought perhaps to state here, without vanity, that among my personal achievements there, if that word is not too large for the event, was a prize speaking contest which was the event of the year and in which I won first prize—Shakespeare, unabridged—which I now have in my library.  

His success at the Green Mountain Liberal Institute indicates that Mr. Ormsbee may well have received a significant education at home. From 1854 to 1861, Mr. Ormsbee taught school in Brandon while also studying law with the firm of Briggs & Nicholson. In March 1861, at the age of twenty-seven, Mr. Ormsbee was admitted to the Vermont Bar. His legal career was delayed, though, by events outside Vermont.

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29 Ibid.
Mr. Ormsbee conceptualized Brandon as a pastoral paradise. In his letters from Samoa, he repeatedly refers nostalgically to his home town.

*Courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society*

Frank C. Partridge, who was a close friend and Mr. Ormsbee’s primary contact with the State Department, wrote in his obituary that “his full and well rounded life is a good example of the best product of small New England towns.” Mr. Ormsbee saw himself, as his selected childhood anecdotes demonstrate, as just such a character. He had grown-up on a prosperous farm, spent his early adulthood teaching, and aspired to enter into a profession, which after the Civil War would provide an excellent foundation to enter Vermont’s patronage based political system.

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Given the historiographical consensus of the dramatic effect of the Civil War upon American society and culture generally, there can be little doubt of its effect upon Mr. Ormsbee specifically. Mr. Partridge astutely observed the role of the Civil War in Mr. Ormsbee’s life shortly after his death: “Governor Ormsbee was one of the last of that considerable list of Vermonters who became prominent during the Civil War and were powers in the state for many years after.” Between 1861 and 1867, Mr. Ormsbee lost his brother Charles Ormsbee at the Battle of the Wilderness, his first wife to childbirth, and his only son to illness. Although he never directly witnessed combat, the Civil War would become, for Mr. Ormsbee, a period of loss. The Civil War also enmeshed Mr. Ormsbee in a social milieu that would quickly come to control economic and political advancement at the local and the national levels.

In April 1861, Mr. Ormsbee enlisted for a period of three months, at the end of which he re-enlisted for nine months with a commission as captain. The closest Mr. Ormsbee came to combat was at the Battle of Gettysburg, where his regiment, the 12th Vermont Infantry, was left in command of the baggage train. A lack of combat, though, should not hide the impact the Civil War had on him. After returning to Brandon, he

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31 Robert H. Wiebe’s *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* argues that the Civil War precipitated the dramatic shift from an America dominated by the rural small towns of Mr. Ormsbee’s youth to the new, professional, bureaucratic-minded middle class of his old age. Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967). Louis Menand has also explored the effect of the Civil War upon the American psyche, especially in regard to American intellectualism. He convincingly demonstrates the process by which Americans rebuilt a culture to cope with the conditions of modern life. These conditions, such as government bureaucracy and rapidly changing technology, had emerged during the Civil War. Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2001). As Mr. Ormsbee’s memorializing of the war demonstrates, he was not merely attempting to honor his fallen brother, but also creating a new culture of American patriotism.


33 Drew Gilpin Faust has explored the American re-conceptualization of death and the experience of death as a result of the Civil War in her *The Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).
joined Redfield Proctor’s Reunion Society of Vermont Officers, and he was a charter member of the Vermont chapter of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States. He also organized the establishment of the local Grand Army of the Republic Post and had it dedicated to his brother, Charles. Charles would become an epic figure for Mr. Ormsbee, who preserved the last letter he received from his brother, as well as several photographs. Mr. Ormsbee also became a prominent local Memorial Day speaker. His speeches extolled audiences to remember the sacrifices made by veterans and to continue to celebrate Memorial Day as an expression of gratitude for “a service beyond price.” Mr. Ormsbee’s “last communication to the press was a solemn reminder of the significance of Memorial Day.” Mr. Partridge noted that Mr. Ormsbee “was always keenly interested in things relating to the Civil War and in the welfare of his comrades at arms,” especially in his duties as a trustee of the Soldiers Home at Bennington, Vermont. Furthermore, Mr. Ormsbee used his political connections to facilitate the payment of pensions. These political connections, like Mr. Ormsbee’s sense of loss and patriotism, were a result of the Civil War.

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35 Charles Ormsbee to E. J. Ormsbee, MSC 188, Folder XVIII, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.


Shortly after returning to Brandon in 1864, Mr. Ormsbee entered into a law practice with Anson A. Nicholson. Two years after his return, his wife, Jennie Briggs, died, followed a year later by his son, who had been named in honor of his fallen brother. Despite his grief, he quickly remarried; his second wife was Frances Wadhams Devenport, whose first husband had died at the Battle of the Wilderness along with Mr. Ormsbee’s brother. The second Mrs. Ormsbee had been educated at a prominent boarding school in Burlington, Vermont. Her family controlled sizable holdings around Westport, New York, including the Ticonderoga Pulp Mill. Mrs. Ormsbee’s brothers were both successful, one in Boston shipping and the other in the US Navy. As with Mr. Ormsbee’s veterans’ associations, Mrs. Ormsbee was connected to prominent local and national women through such organizations as the Society for Colonial Dames and various women’s reform associations. With his new wife’s connections and the aid of his veteran association friends, Mr. Ormsbee was able to rise to the height of Vermont’s Republican Party system.

A cursory outline of Mr. Ormsbee’s political career through the 1870s and 1880s demonstrates his rise through Republican Party ranks and the path through which he obtained State Department employment. From 1868 to 1872, Mr. Ormsbee served as an assistant US internal revenue assessor. In 1870, he added the duties of the state attorney to his legal practice and tax assessments. While state attorney, Mr. Ormsbee prosecuted the locally infamous case of John P. Phair, who was accused of murdering “a woman of questionable repute” on June 9, 1874, near Rutland, Vermont.\textsuperscript{40} Owing to the

\textsuperscript{40}“Is John P. Phair Innocent?,” \textit{New York Times}, 6 April 1877.
circumstantial nature of the evidence used to sentence Mr. Phair to death, the case generated a considerable amount of publicity and legislative action. Governor Horace Fairbanks appointed Mr. Ormsbee to lead an investigation in Boston to verify Mr. Phair’s alibi. His hanging four years after sentencing and after repeated appeals prompted Redfield Proctor, while governor of the state, to investigate the utility of hangings so long after sentencing. Governor Proctor concluded that appeals should be limited so as to facilitate the impact of the execution on other would-be criminals; he worried that the lesson of the execution was reduced the longer the time from the crime.\textsuperscript{41} Mr. Partridge recalled later that Mr. Ormsbee “made [a] considerable reputation by his hard and successful fight in this case.”\textsuperscript{42} His political career was certainly not hindered by the case.

In 1878, Mr. Ormsbee was elected to the Vermont State Senate for Rutland County. A few years later, he was elected lieutenant governor, which resulted in his election to the governorship in 1886. Despite his political success, Mr. Ormsbee demonstrated his loyalty to the several Civil War veteran associations he belonged to during his governorship. He arranged for the state to support the erection of a Vermont monument at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, as well as at Winchester and Cedar Creek, Virginia. He also encouraged the legislature to increase state support for the soldier’s


home in Bennington, Vermont. Although the Civil War garnered the governor’s attention, he also enacted a series of reforms “looking well to the future as well as to the past.”

As governor, Mr. Ormsbee was comparatively proactive and engaged in a broad array of reformist legislation. Governor Ormsbee oversaw the continued expansion and maintenance of “state beneficiaries,” the “deaf, blind and idiotic and feeble minded children of indigent parents” cared for in state institutions. He recommended the state government “guard” savings banks “with the utmost care in the direction of the greatest possible safety” in order to prevent the loss of the savings of “widows, orphans and the wage earners” through lucrative and unsafe investments. Mr. Ormsbee later served on the board of directors of the First National Bank of Brandon and was in the process of transforming his legal practice into an investment firm. In addition, Governor Ormsbee took a profound interest in reforming the state’s schools, especially those schools “away from places of business and back on the hills […] where more than half the children of the state [attended]” and which were “retro-grading.” The governor strongly encouraged the legislature to take “extreme” action, for “the disease sought to be cured [involved] the good name of the state, and the happiness and intelligence of the children

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44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.
of that commonwealth.” His interest in school reforms might have originated with his trusteeship of the Vermont Reform School from 1880 to 1884. Demonstrative of his belief in reform and expertise, Mr. Ormsbee supported the creation of the State Board of Agriculture—which he deemed a success—the State Agricultural Experiment Station, the State Cattle Commission, the State Board of Health, and a more workable relationship between the University of Vermont and the State Agricultural College. Governor Ormsbee spoke out in favor of temperance, an issue which would become important in Samoa, and upon the government enforcement of railway safety. For good reason, therefore, Mr. Ormsbee would describe himself from Samoa with “ideas habits and practices were quite liberal.”

Several years after his governorship, Mr. Ormsbee was granted the “privilege to render public service outside the state” of Vermont. In September 1891, the secretary of the interior commissioned Mr. Ormsbee to negotiate the relinquishment of a portion of the Piute Indian Reservation at Pyramid Lake, Nevada. The problem before the commission was that the town of Wadsworth, Nevada, had been established and settled within the reservation despite the assertion by the federal attorney general that “the

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47 Ibid.
49 E. J. Ormsbee to F. Ormsbee, 12 October 1892, MSC 188, Folder V, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
50 Ibid.
Central Pacific Railroad Company [had the] only right” to reservation land. Mr. Ormsbee’s instructions were thus:

The tillable lands of that reservation comprise only about 2,000 acres and fully one-half of that amount lying mainly in the southern portion is now in the possession of, and cultivated by, whites. The last mentioned are also far more valuable than any of the bottom lands on the reserve, being easily irrigated, and at the same time safe from serious damage by the overflow of the river, while the bottom lands occupied by the Indians are almost all submerged. In consequence therefore of these facts it appears that applicants for homes on the reserve cannot be furnished with lands upon which to establish themselves and make a living; that the Indians have never derived any benefit from these lands to which they are justly entitled; and that a cession of the same, upon terms and conditions just and equitable to the Indians as well as to the United States, is the proper method to obtain for the Indians a fair compensation for the lands in question, and to avoid further complication in the matter.

Mr. Ormsbee was, therefore, to investigate the claims that the natives had not improved the land, that the whites had done so, and to negotiate a treaty wherein everyone was satisfactorily compensated. Although Mr. Ormsbee was not able to attend the final period of negotiations owing to his appointment to Samoa, he approved the treaty wherein the Paiutes relinquished 18,700 acres, the majority of which were considered improved. He was also pleased with the commissioners’ report that they had worked harmoniously together and that their conclusions had been unanimous. As with the Samoan Land Commission, Mr. Ormsbee was in Nevada negotiating the distribution of land between an indigenous native population and an expanding Euro-American population. In Nevada, he favored the expanding Euro-American population.

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52 Ibid.
Indicative of how Mr. Ormsbee was appointed to the Pyramid Lake Commission was his exchange with then-Secretary of War Redfield Proctor. Mr. Ormsbee dutifully reported the commission’s results to Secretary Proctor, who wryly commented:

I return copy of report and agreement and have read them with interest. There can be no doubt that it is sound and all right. If I had known previous to leaving the War Department that Julius Ceasar, Jeff Davis, Ben Butler and Henry Clay were all combined in one small tribe I should have been alarmed for the safety of the country, but ignorance was bliss in my case.\textsuperscript{54}

Mr. Proctor further noted that he would see that their recommendations were held to as far as he was able. He reiterated this promise two years later, after Mr. Ormsbee had returned from Samoa, as well as guarantees that he would remind the Department of the Interior to more speedily reimburse Mr. Ormsbee for his traveling expenses.\textsuperscript{55} As shall be demonstrated below, Mr. Ormsbee and Mr. Proctor’s relationship was one of patronage support that developed out of their experiences with Vermont’s Republican politics.

**Mr. Ormsbee Goes Forth**

In order to fully understand how Mr. Ormsbee was appointed to the Samoan Land Commission, an understanding of the State Department in 1891 is necessary. Republican President Benjamin Harrison had appointed James G. Blaine for a second term as secretary of state, but political friction with the president over the executive rejection of the appointment of his son, Walker Blaine, as assistant secretary of state, the death of two of his children in early 1890, and ill health for much of 1891 removed Secretary Blaine as

\textsuperscript{54} Redfield Proctor to E. J. Ormsbee, 13 November 1891, MSC 35, Folder II, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.

\textsuperscript{55} Redfield Proctor to E. J. Ormsbee, 10 October 1893, MSC 35, Folder 35, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
a potential source of political patronage for Mr. Ormsbee.\textsuperscript{56} Despite President Harrison’s assurance that “in appointments of every grade and department fitness and not party service should be the essential and discriminating test, and fidelity and efficiency the only sure tenure of office,” in order to garner attention, applicants had to secure a patronage source.\textsuperscript{57} Those sources arose from local- and state-level party political connections with the president, cabinet officers, and members of Congress, with senators, often appointed by governors, having a far larger appointee quota than congressmen.\textsuperscript{58} The patronage system, though, should not necessarily be equated with a spoils system and incompetence.

The origins of Mr. Ormsbee’s appointment lay with his connections with one of the leaders of the Vermont Republican Party, Redfield Proctor. Born in Cavendish, Vermont, he studied at Dartmouth College and trained in law. During the Civil War he rose to command the 15\textsuperscript{th} Vermont Infantry Regiment. Following the war he assumed control of a bankrupt marble concern, which he transformed into one of the state’s largest corporations, the Vermont Marble Company. Having amassed one of the largest fortunes

\textsuperscript{56} Graham H. Stuart, \textit{The Department of State: A History of Its Organization, Procedure, and Personnel} (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1949), pp. 173-177. Stuart notes that “Secretary Blaine was not consulted in most of the appointments in the diplomatic service,” which seems to have been the case with Mr. Ormsbee. Historian Neil Rolde has downplayed Secretary Blaine’s illness in 1890/1891 as the cause of his falling interest in departmental affairs and instead places the blame upon rising political friction between himself and President Harrison. Correspondence between Mr. Ormsbee and Frank C. Partridge, the Solicitor for the Department of State, indicates only health reasons. However, given Mr. Ormsbee’s distance from the Washington political scene and Mr. Partridge’s imminent departure for Venezuela, the former may just not have needed to know of such things. Neil Rolde, \textit{Continental Liar: From the State of Maine, James G. Blaine} (Gardiner, Maine: Tilbury House Publishers, 2006), pp. 302-321.


\textsuperscript{58} Henry E. Mattox, \textit{The Twilight of Amateur Diplomacy: The American Foreign Service and Its Senior Officers in the 1890s} (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1989), pp. 32-33.
in the state—Vermont Marble was awarded the contract for the Library of Congress, as well as numerous other government projects—Mr. Proctor entered politics fulltime. During the 1870s, at the beginning of his business career, he served as a town selectman for Rutland, and was then elected to three terms in the Vermont House of Representatives and one term in the state Senate, where he was president pro tem. From 1876 to 1878 he served as the lieutenant governor of the state, and from 1878 to 1880 he served as Vermont’s thirty-fifth governor. In 1884, he served as the Vermont delegate-at-large to the Republican national convention, and in 1888 he led the Vermont delegation in seconding Benjamin Harrison’s nomination. That year the Vermont House of Representatives unanimously nominated Mr. Proctor for a cabinet position, which President-elect Harrison generously provided in the form of the War Department. With the death of George F. Edmunds, Vermont’s Western senator, in 1891, Mr. Proctor was able to lobby successfully for the vacancy. He would die in office on March 8, 1908.59

Given the proximity of Mr. Ormsbee’s beloved Brandon, Vermont, to Mr. Proctor’s Proctor, Vermont, they probably moved in the same social circle. They were both lawyers by profession, both had been officers in the Civil War, both were members of Mr. Proctor’s Reunion of Vermont Officers and the Grand Army of the Republic, as well as prominent figures in Vermont Republican party politics. A letter form February 12, 1883, though, indicates a level of camaraderie and friendship beyond that of mere acquaintances. After detailing the status of a real estate transaction that Mr. Ormsbee was

brokering on behalf of Mr. Proctor, who was referred to as “My Dear General,” the former commented:

As to Mrs. Ormsbee, she could not get away last week and may not be able to this — she will write you however. I have learned to be cautious as to saying what she will or will not do. — I tried that once, and it did not come out as I expected and for (to me) sufficient reasons concluded I would not indulge in that practice anymore.⁶⁰

Though the above was clearly meant humorously, Mr. Ormsbee did not complain about his wife in his general business correspondence. Such candid humor about his private life clearly indicated an intimacy beyond that of a purely professional acquaintance. As early as 1883, then, Mr. Ormsbee and Mr. Proctor were on close speaking terms. Similarly, a letter from February 1885 discussing the appointment of Henry L. Clark to the Vermont Senate revealed both familiarity and trust. The letter also indicated Mr. Ormsbee’s position in the upper echelons of the Vermont Republican Party by the mid 1880s.⁶¹

That Mr. Ormsbee and Mr. Proctor were professionally, politically, and socially close during the 1880s, though, does not serve to explain why the latter chose the former for the Samoan Land Commission in 1891. Mr. Procter had many connections, and he secured many positions for those connections. For example, in 1889, Secretary for War Proctor intervened with President Harrison to secure Robert W. Welch’s position as the US consul at Carrara, Italy, because Welch had been useful in the recruiting of immigrant quarry workers. Mr. Welch, a resident of New Hampshire, was not even a member of Mr.

⁶⁰ E. J. Ormsbee to Redfield Proctor, 12 February 1883, Papers of Redfield Proctor, Folder XXII, Box XXV, Proctor Free Library, Proctor, Vermont.
⁶¹ E. J. Ormsbee to Redfield Proctor, 3 February 1885, Papers of Redfield Proctor, Folder XXVI, Box XXV, Proctor Free Library, Proctor, Vermont.
Proctor’s Vermont constituency.\textsuperscript{62} Why, then, did Mr. Proctor come to appoint Mr. Ormsbee to the Samoan Land Commission?

Mr. Proctor had a very high opinion of Mr. Ormsbee. In a letter to Mr. E. R. Morse, an official with the Vermont Marble Company, dated September 10, 1890, Mr. Proctor confided that Mr. Ormsbee should be appointed to the company’s Auditing Committee, as “there ought to be one aggressive man on the Committee friendly to us […] and] Ormsbee could block a good deal of their [Mr. Proctor’s opponents’] nonsense.”\textsuperscript{63} Mr. Proctor obviously trusted Mr. Ormsbee. Also, as Mr. Proctor’s recommendation to the secretary of the interior indicated, he felt that Mr. Ormsbee was well suited to work with matters involving disputed land claims. In fact, he claimed he did “not know a man in the state who [seemed] to be better fitted for work of this kind.”\textsuperscript{64} Within his recommendation, Mr. Proctor described Mr. Ormsbee as “one of our [Vermont’s] most successful executives” and “a good sound lawyer, a very safe, practical business man [who] attends thoroughly to every trust confided to him.”\textsuperscript{65} Through his political and professional experience, then, Mr. Proctor felt justified in recommending Mr. Ormsbee for the position in question.

Mr. Proctor, though, was not without his reservations regarding Mr. Ormsbee’s candidacy for postings outside Vermont. In the same letter recommending Mr. Ormsbee to the Pyramid Lake Commission, he cautioned: “I did not suppose he would accept it

\textsuperscript{62} Redfield Proctor to President Benjamin Harrison, 14 October 1889, Papers of Redfield Proctor, Volume I, Box IV, Proctor Free Library, Proctor, Vermont.
\textsuperscript{63} Redfield Proctor to E. R. Morse, 10 September 1890, Papers of Redfield Proctor, Volume XVII, Box IV, Proctor Free Library, Proctor, Vermont.
\textsuperscript{64} Redfield Proctor to John Willock Noble, 20 August 1891, Papers of Redfield Proctor, Volume XIX, Box IV, Proctor Free Library, Proctor, Vermont.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
[the position], but found him quite willing to accept short service of this kind. In a later letter to his son, Mr. Proctor’s reservation about Mr. Ormsbee’s willingness was clarified:

Ormsbee has been appointed in [Henry C.] Ide’s place. I have telegraphed Ormsbee and he accepts. Hope he will be able to finish his Indian Commission. […] Don’t you think this is alright? He had been a friend for a long time and though a disconsolate one and a little cranky is really a good man. Do you think Mrs. Ormsbee will go out to Samoa with the Governor? If you see her talk it up with her; anyway he ought not to come back, if he goes out, until the work is closed up.

By urging his son to convince Mrs. Ormsbee of going to Samoa, Mr. Proctor revealed that he was concerned that Mr. Ormsbee might refuse his patronage. Furthermore, he revealed that he was Mr. Ormsbee’s close, personal friend. Only with a close friend could Mr. Ormsbee have written complainingly about his wife. Only with a close friend could Mr. Proctor allow his son to cajole and entice a reluctant spousal travelling companion.

Mr. Ormsbee’s appointment was far more complex than mere Republican Party patronage. Patronage certainly played a role, especially in Mr. Proctor being able to offer the position to a citizen of Vermont. In recommending a colleague who might have refused the position, though, Mr. Proctor demonstrated that he was concerned with appointing the most qualified person he knew. As historians currently conceptualize the patronage system in the United States during this time period, a patron should have offered the position to a pleading sycophant or as a personal favor for services rendered. But, Mr. Proctor’s personal relationship with Mr. Ormsbee—their shared historical,

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66 Ibid.
67 Redfield Proctor to Fletcher D. Proctor, 30 September 1891, Papers of Redfield Proctor, Volume XVIII, Box IV, Proctor Free Library, Proctor, Vermont.
political, professional, and social experiences—all factored into his decision to appoint the most qualified candidate he knew.

**The Well-Read Mr. Ormsbee**

From Mr. Ormsbee’s naïve belief, voiced in that dusty Nevada hotel, that he would not have to travel to Samoa, Mr. Proctor’s high opinion of Mr. Ormsbee’s suitability for the Land Commissionership might appear misplaced. However, between his acceptance of the position in September 1891 and his departure for Samoa in December, Mr. Ormsbee garnered information from a variety of sources. The first of these was Mr. Ormsbee’s patron, Secretary for War Redfield Proctor, who provided him with minimal information. In his letter formally notifying Mr. Ormsbee of the potential appointment, Mr. Proctor relayed the opinions of Henry Clay Ide, the previous land commissioner, who noted “that an unmarried man [was] preferable, in as much as ‘white women do not thrive there, and the work will take so long a time that a man with a family in America will find it difficult to remain so long absent’.”68 Mr. Proctor continued, though, by adding “that the climate [was] genial and comfortable; healthful for men; scenery attractive, and the work of the Commission not unreasonably burdensome.”69 Countering Mr. Ide’s advice on the matter, Mr. Proctor recommended that Mr. Ormsbee bring his wife along if he accepted. The following month Mr. Proctor forwarded to Mr. Ormsbee a collection of clippings gathered from newspapers from around the United States pertaining to Samoa, which constituted “all the information about Samoa that [he]

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68 Redfield Proctor to E. J. Ormsbee, 28 September 1891, MSC 188, Folder XX, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.  
could find”; sadly, he noted, it amounted “to but little.” These newspaper clippings appear to have been forwarded to Mr. Proctor by Frank C. Partridge, who, aside from being his and Mr. Ormsbee’s close friend and business associate, was the solicitor for the Department of State.

Mr. Partridge, who as discussed below became Mr. Ormsbee’s principal contact with the State Department, also forwarded Mr. Ide’s letter of resignation. Aside from confirming what Mr. Proctor had already noted, Mr. Ide’s resignation recommended that he be replaced by a fellow lawyer and that he meet his replacement upon his return to the United States in early December. What Mr. Ide suggested in his resignation, the secretary of state commanded. Mr. Partridge had the dubious honor of arranging Mr. Ide’s meeting with Mr. Ormsbee; no small task considering that the State Department was unsure whether Mr. Ide had left Samoa on the November 12 steamer or whether Mr. Ormsbee planned, as the department had requested, to sail on the December 10 steamer from San Francisco. Mr. Partridge first arranged for Mr. Ormsbee to meet Harold M. Sewell, the American consul-general in Samoa—then on a temporary leave of absence in Boston—on November 25. Then Mr. Partridge arranged, through Mrs. Ormsbee’s brother-in-law in San Francisco, for Mr. Ormsbee to meet Mr. Ide on Thursday, December 3, at the Midland House in Kansas City. Although neither Mr. Ide nor Mr.

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70 Redfield Proctor to E. J. Ormsbee, 19 October 1891, MSC 188, Folder XX, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
71 Henry C. Ide to James G. Blaine, 17 August 1891, MSC 188, Folder XX, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
72 James G. Blaine to E. J. Ormsbee, 3 November 1891, MSC 188, Folder XXI, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
73 James G. Blaine to E. J. Ormsbee, 16 November 1891; Frank Partridge to E. J. Ormsbee, Telegram, 20 November 1891; H. C. Ide to E. J. Ormsbee, Telegram, 27 November 1891; Frank Partridge
Ormsbee left a detailed record of their exchange at Midland House, a letter from Mr. Ide for his successor composed November 11, the day before he left Samoa, was indicative of what might have passed between them.

Hurriedly left at the American consulate in Apia the day before Mr. Ide’s steamer left for San Francisco, the letter summarized the work of the commission thus far and offered a few points of suggestion. Although Mr. Ide will be discussed at length below, his relationship with Mr. Ormsbee will be briefly described here. Mr. Ormsbee and Mr. Ide were both prominent lawyers in Vermont and had been acquainted probably since the late 1870s. Throughout Mr. Ormsbee’s tenure in Samoa, he would remain a constant source of information about legal precedents, native contacts, and the customs and habits of the European community. In his letter to his successor, he first noted how glad he was of Mr. Ormsbee’s appointment: “I do not know how I would have replaced myself better. It is a good appointment for Samoa.”

Certainly, Mr. Ide seemed to think Mr. Proctor had appointed the best candidate available. Secondly, he cautioned Mr. Ormsbee that “Samoa [was] more full of jealousies and bitterness than any other known spot of equal on God’s earth.” He especially cautioned Mr. Ormsbee of the various national interests, such as the German corporation, in the land claims. Thirdly, he explained the custom of new officials having to call upon the local notables and members of the international community. Finally, he commented upon the members of the commission. The commissioners “had peculiarities, but [were] kindly and considerate gentlemen” that he

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to E. J. Ormsbee, 20 November 1891, MSC 188, Folder XXI, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.

74 Henry C. Ide to E. J. Ormsbee, 11 November 1891, MSC 188, Folder XXI, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.

75 Ibid.

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commended to Mr. Ormsbee. When dealing with the native advocate, though, Mr. Ide recommended caution, as the native advocate might try to delay the dealings in order to increase his salary from petty complaints and petitions. If Mr. Ormsbee felt he needed a guide, Mr. Ide recommended Joe M. Coe, a colorful individual who will be discussed in subsequent sections, as the most knowledgeable source upon native matters. Mr. Ide, though, was not the only source of advice available to Mr. Ormsbee.

While en route to Kansas City, Mr. Ormsbee had the opportunity to familiarize himself with the diplomatic correspondence that led to the 1889 Berlin Conference and General Agreement that established the Samoan Land Commission. Secretary of State James G. Blaine dryly noted to Mr. Ormsbee that “in regard to the nature and extent of your duties, I will simply refer you to the various documents printed in the volume of Foreign Relations of the United States for the year 1889, a copy of which will be sent you.” Secretary Blaine noted that the book contained “a complete record of the events that led up to the treaty between the United States, Germany, and Great Britain under which you have been appointed.” Such correspondence, discussed in part below, would have provided Mr. Ormsbee with a thorough background on the Samoan Crisis of the preceding five years, as well as the American stance on the matter. Having read the diplomatic correspondence, studied the agreement creating the Samoan Land Commission, discussed matters with both Mr. Sewell and Mr. Ide, and read through the State Department’s newspaper clippings, Mr. Ormsbee was certainly more informed.

76 Ibid.
77 James G. Blaine to E. J. Ormsbee, 3 November 1891, MSC 188, Folder XXI, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
78 Ibid.
about the international entanglement over Samoa than all but a very few members of the State Department.

Mr. Ormsbee had not yet exhausted all of his sources, however. In October 1891, Mrs. Ormsbee contacted her brother, Lieutenant Albion V. Wadhams of the US Navy, for information on Samoa. He responded on October 15 with “a very brief digest of the contents” of the Samoan files maintained by the Office of Naval Intelligence, whose director, Commander Charles H. Davis, was a personal friend.\textsuperscript{79} The digest described the location of the archipelago, the favorable disposition and level of civilization of the natives, and the demographic breakdown of the international community. Regarding the climate, Lt. Wadhams concluded that it was “very agreeable and salubrious,” but “foreigners must be careful not to over exert themselves by walking too much or by manual labor.”\textsuperscript{80} He also warned of the humidity, especially during the rainy season. Owing to the humidity, mosquitoes were reported to be numerous, but controllable with appropriate netting. More interestingly, though, Lt. Wadhams attached a list of recommended material on Samoa, as well as the bookstores where those he thought Mr. and Mrs. Ormsbee should read could be procured.

Many of the materials found on Lt. Wadhams’ list would probably have been inaccessible to Mr. and Mrs. Ormsbee before their departure in late November. However, all of the materials, regardless of their accessibility to the Ormsbees, provided a consistent and telling picture of Samoa. In order to gain an insight into the Euro-

\textsuperscript{79} A. V. Wadhams to Frances Ormsbee, 15 October 1891, MSC 188, Folder XX, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.

American perception of the Samoan Islands to which Mr. Ormsbee was exposed, a discussion of all the materials listed by the Navy Department is necessary. *Iles Samoa: Notes pour Servir a Une Monographie de cet Archipel* by A. Marques, listed as “the best book” and in “very easy French,” was reported to be available through a London bookseller, which would not have had time to ship the book to the Ormsbees.⁸¹ Had Mr. Ormsbee been able to obtain W. B. Churchward’s *My Consulate in Samoa*, he certainly would have found an interesting diatribe about the complexities of finding a posting in Britain’s consular service, as well as a description of Samoa as a place where “life was one continued orgie [sic.], and decency very much at a discount.”⁸² Among the other difficult-to-obtain recommendations of Mr. Ormsbee’s brother-in-law was the correspondence of J. G. Kline, a reporter for the *New York World* and the *San Francisco Examiner*, and an article published in the *Hawaiian Planter’s Monthly*.

The article from the *Hawaiian Planter’s Monthly* by Henry F. Poor did not deviate from the racialized interpretation of Samoa as a needful ward of Euro-American civilizing forces. Mr. Poor first described the currency, topography, and climate of the group, and then the natives. Although he considered them to be a physically pleasing race, their evolutionary capacities were questioned. He noted that “Darwinian theorists may find some argument in the following characteristics: They pick up things with their toes, squat when they meet to talk, and pick out lice from each other’s head and eat

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⁸¹ A. Marques, *Iles Samoa: Notes pour Servir a Une Monographie de cet Archipel* (Lisbonne: Impr. National, 1889). Given the scarcity of this publication in contemporary libraries I doubt that Mr. Ormsbee would have had ready access to it, especially given the ease with which he might have obtained other items on Lt. Wadhams’ list.

them.” Mr. Poor clearly considered the Samoans little better than apes. As with other descriptions of the natives, though, Mr. Poor noted that they had great potential, even more so than their “more enlightened brethren in Hawaii”; in general, he spoke well of them, albeit with a strong degree of paternalism and benevolent condescension. Given that Mr. and Mrs. Ormsbee stopped in Honolulu, there was a chance that they might have procured Mr. Poor’s article, but even had they not, the themes outlined therein were consistent with those tracts to which the Ormsbees were exposed.

Mr. Ormsbee was also advised to read two articles from the *Century*, a monthly periodical, both of which he preserved in a scrapbook. The first, “Samoa: The Isles of the Navigators” by Henry W. Whitaker, provided an illustrated description of the archipelago and its inhabitants, for whom “it would be unnatural of the visitor who understands these brave, generous, and noblehearted [sic.] people not to feel great sympathy for their future and welfare,” as “they will never progress to the state of those nations where the reign of personal interest is supreme.” Certainly, the American Mr. Whitaker espoused a benevolent paternalism when compared to the disgusted British account of a land of endless orgies. The second article, “Our Relations to Samoa” by George H. Bates, had originally been written as a report for the State Department in 1886 and had only subsequently been published by the *Century*. From Mr. Bates’ article, Mr. Ormsbee could

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84 Ibid.
85 Lt. Wadhams recommended an article by W. L. Rees published in the *Century* in November 1889, but I have been unable to find such an article and doubt its existence. More probably Lt. Wadhams referred to the three article spread in the *Century* discussed herein. Evident of this mistake is that Mr. Ormsbee kept in a scrapbook the articles discussed herein. Henry W. Whitaker, “Samoa: The Isles of the Navigators,” *The Century*, 38.1 (May 1889), p. 25.
have gleaned a summation of the political discord surrounding Samoa, the hopeless position of Germany vis-à-vis its attempted colonization, and the avowed position of the United States to defend Samoan autonomy.86

Despite the varied origins of Mr. Ormsbee’s literary sources, they conveyed a consistent image of the Samoans. The islands were a tropical paradise unhealthy for white women, but quite comfortable for white men. The natives, the caretakers of this last Eden, were hospitable savages, willing to please, quick to adopt European dress, and doomed by progress. The foreign community varied from irascible German planters bent on colonization to benevolent Americans desiring Samoan autonomy. Such was the picture Mr. Ormsbee would have garnered of that far off archipelago.

Conclusion: Patronage Revisited

Mr. Ormsbee’s worldview was a product of the Vermont he idealized and the Republican Party through which he had risen. However, he was not a product of a negatively connoted spoils system. In appointing Mr. Ormsbee to the position of Samoan land commissioner, Mr. Proctor appointed a close, trusted individual experienced in political maneuvering, familiar with the legalities of land disputes, and, by early December 1891, an individual thoroughly familiar with the situation in the Pacific. Such an understanding, though, did not necessarily mean that Mr. Ormsbee was entirely ready, properly prepared, or suitably equipped for the work that lay ahead of him. Mounting frustration with the Samoan entanglement and the State Department would demonstrate

how Mr. Ormsbee’s worldview and lifestyle clashed with the diplomatic colonial culture in the South Pacific.
Chapter II: The Social Mr. and Mrs. Ormsbee, 1891 to 1893
Introduction: Mr. and Mrs. Ormsbee Go Abroad

Sitting at a small table overlooking the emerald blue of the South Pacific, Ebenezer Jolls Ormsbee wrote to his adopted daughter at Smith College, “I am here to perform a part of my life work […] the work of a lifetime […] and you are left behind in preparation for yours - yours is all ahead of you while […] most of mine is behind me.” Mr. Ormsbee would be fifty-eight in June 1892, the year he wrote to Carrie Wyckoff-Ormsbee from Samoa, and, as has been demonstrated, he had lived an active life.

Through their social activities, it is possible to explain how Mr. and Mrs. Ormsbee perceived, understood, and interacted with the tropical colonialism in which they suddenly found themselves. During their stay in Samoa the Ormsbees attended a variety of entertainments including local theatrical productions and sporting events, native picnics and celebrations, feasts with vice regal visitors and international celebrities, imperial holidays, and Christmas festivities. Throughout these experiences the Ormsbees applied their own preconceptions to the events they were witnessing. By examining their reactions to the various social activities they took part in, it becomes possible to understand those preconceptions and, thereby, comprehend the way in which they constructed, or invented, a means to understand those strange islands of political intrigue, tropical splendor, and exotic imperialism on which they found themselves.

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Everyday with the Ormsbees

Before examining the Ormsbees reaction to the international social life of Apia, a reconstruction of their daily routine, to provide a point of comparison, is necessary.88 Mr. Ormsbee awoke at a half past six every morning, showered, and dressed for breakfast. While Mrs. Ormsbee remained in Samoa, from December 1891 through October 1892, their breakfast was brought to them from Ah Sue’s restaurant across the street, but after she left Mr. Ormsbee took breakfast in the restaurant at seven. As with all of their meals, the table, table cloth, plates, and flatware—and the serving-fanning girl—were all provided by the restaurant. Finishing breakfast at eight, Mr. Ormsbee walked to the barber shop for his daily shave, after which he returned to his rooms. At a half past eight, Mr. Parker’s serving girl—first, Ella and then Emma—pinned Mr. Ormsbee’s Samoan Land Commissioner’s sash to him. Precisely at a quarter to nine, Mr. Ormsbee departed his apartment in Mr. Parker’s building and walked the half mile to the Samoan Land Commission’s Office. From nine until nine-thirty, Mr. Ormsbee dealt with paperwork in preparation for the day’s hearings or information gathering sessions.

Hearings were heard from nine-thirty until twelve-thirty, provided that all of the commissioners were able to attend. At twelve-thirty, Mr. Ormsbee returned to his rooms,

88 The following construction of their daily routines draws on a survey of the Ormsbees’ letters to various relations, especially Mrs. Ormsbee’s letters to her Aunt Jerusha and Carrie Wyckoff-Ormsbee, her adopted daughter. Mrs. Ormsbee wrote to their adopted daughter every month and wrote the letters in a journalistic style, adding a new entry each day. In these entries, Mrs. Ormsbee would recount what she and Mr. Ormsbee had done. After Mrs. Ormsbee departed Samoa in October 1892, Mr. Ormsbee would write to her in a similar style. The approximate daily routine outlined herein draws upon all of these letters and the many others they wrote to various relations. Principally, these letters may be found in Folders I-IX of MSC 188, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont. Mr. Ormsbee’s dairies were of crucial importance in forming an idea of his business schedule while in Samoa. Within his two dairies, Mr. Ormsbee listed the date and time, as well as the names of participants, for all of his meetings. These dairies may be found in Folders XIII and XIV of MSC 35, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
where he changed his shirt—his sash removed by either his wife or the serving girl—before having lunch at Ah Sue’s. After lunch—approximately two in the afternoon—Mr. Ormsbee either retired to his apartment to handle personal correspondence or attended meetings with various individuals concerned with the commission’s work, such as land owners, consular agents, or native delegations. At a half past three, Mr. Ormsbee returned to the office and devoted the rest of the afternoon to clerical matters. An hour and a half later he returned home where he rested and prepared for dinner at six. While Mrs. Ormsbee remained in Samoa, the evening meal was taken in their rooms, but after she left, he dined in the restaurant.

From seven until eight, Mr. Ormsbee would stroll along the beach with his wife if her health permitted it, maintain his expansive personal correspondence, attend to mundane chores like preparing the laundry for the maid, cataloguing the curios they had purchased, or simply read a book. Mr. Ormsbee read Lew Wallace’s *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ*, which he enjoyed so much that Mrs. Ormsbee exclaimed to Carrie Wyckoff-Ormsbee, “Papa reads so much his eyes ache.” Mr. Ormsbee also read a history of England and, of course, the Bible. Mrs. Ormsbee attempted Sir Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe*, but found “it [was] so hot [that] it [was] very hard work to read long at a time.” Mr. Ormsbee maintained a membership in the London Missionary Society’s “Coffee House & Free Reading Rooms” in Apia, which boasted a fine selection of books and the latest magazines, as well as a piano, “tea, coffee, cocoa, […] aerated waters,” and a selection of

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89 F. Ormsbee to Carrie Wyckoff-Ormsbee, 8 January 1892, Folder VII, MSC 188, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
90 Ibid.
light snacks “at very modest rates.”91 No doubt the Ormsbees were able to obtain the above mentioned reading material from here. Around eight o’clock, Mr. Ormsbee would often play cribbage with Mr. and Mrs. Greiner, Miss L. (Mrs. Greiner’s sister), his wife, or another member of the Euro-American community. He never played with any of the local merchants or natives. At ten o’clock he retired.

As long as Mrs. Ormsbee remained in Samoa, she filled her day by attending to Mr. Ormsbee’s needs, writing to her adopted daughter and various other relations, visiting and being visited by the wives of the consular staffs, and complaining of her health in conjunction with the heat. She noted that “there is a great sameness to the days here. We go to bed and getup and eat—play Cribbage some—when my letters are written I try to work a little but it has been so hot I could not do much.”92 Mrs. Ormsbee was principally responsible for making sure that the serving girl cleaned their two rooms adequately during the day. After they first arrived she was quite busy in sending their heavy clothes back to Vermont and in ordering appropriate clothing from a merchant in Auckland, New Zealand. For that reason, Mr. Ormsbee—who, according to the tailor, wore the largest size trouser he carried—could be thought of as “wearing white clothes and a cool summer hat of very light material […] called a helmet” and carrying an


92 F. Ormsbee to A. W. Goss, 29 March, 1892, Folder I, MSC 188, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
umbrella, “either to keep off the rain or sun.” Aside from these tasks, Mrs. Ormsbee had very little to do.

Mrs. Ormsbee devoted herself to socializing, crocheting, and writing of her loneliness to her adopted daughter, Carrie. Through her letters to Carrie, Mrs. Ormsbee

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vicariously continued her life as a provincial grand bourgeoisie. Her letters to and from Carrie demonstrate not only Mrs. Ormsbee’s social position and moral values, but also provide a standard against which all outsiders were invariably compared. The following example, taken from Carrie’s description of Christmas while Mr. and Mrs. Ormsbee were en route to Samoa in December 1891, aptly demonstrates the Ormsbees social and economic position, as well as the moral standard against which all others were measured.

For the Ormsbees, Christmas was a microcosm of their world idealized. Beginning on December 24 and continuing through December 27, 1891, Carrie composed a journalistically styled letter to her adopted mother—reverently referred to as “Mamma”—then en route to Samoa and celebrating in a very different style. Carrie’s first entry demonstrated the rituals the family associated with the holiday:

Darling Mamma,
It is very late but I can not go to bed without writing you on Christmas Eve. I left Northampton as I expected at eight on Wed. morning, had a very nice time in the train thinking over Christmas presents, and found Uncle Albion at the station. Aunt Carrie was waiting for us at White’s. I must not tell you tonight of what I bought. Also I would like to know what you are doing and thinking. […] I have been very busy packing bundles, writing letters, shopping with Aunt Carrie and trying to help a little in trimming the house. Goodnight, darling I will try to write early in the morning.

94 Catherine Kelley provides the best definition of the provincial grand bourgeoisie referred to here. In her usage, provincial refers to a place not simply between the rural hinterland and a cosmopolitan, metropolitan center, but a hybrid of these; a center of regional cosmopolitanism informed by rural social practices. Her definition of grand bourgeoisie is quite similar, denoting provincial elite, often professionals such as lawyers and doctors, but also including successful politicians and businessmen, who regardless of their true economic status commanded great social power. Catherine Kelley, “‘Well Bred Country People:’ Sociability, Social Networks, and the Creation of a Provincial Middle Class, 1820-1860,” Journal of the Early Republic 19.3 (Autumn 1999), pp. 451-479.

95 Carrie Wyckoff-Ormsbee to F. Ormsbee, 27 December 1891, MSC 188, Folder XI, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
As a student at Smith College, testimony enough of the Ormsbees’ financial means and their support of education, the first act of the holiday ritual was travelling to the place of family celebration. In a later entry, Carrie described how her “Uncle Jim” was late Christmas morning owing to a train wreck, which delayed his overnight express by four hours. Traveling was not merely a part of their holiday ritual; it also exemplified the centrality of celebrating with family and their willingness to pay to do so.

The second act of the ritual was the purchasing of gifts. Gifts were an integral part of the holiday ritual as captured in Carrie’s lengthy description of her gifts, which out of sixteen total pages filled two. A third act of the holiday was charity and was revealed by the ritual of shopping. Carried narrated how she purchased “from the woman who sweeps for […] Miss Clark as she is very needy […] two pretty wreaths and some pressed ferns.”96 By using the remainder of her holiday allowance to purchase these decorations, which “Aunt Carrie was much pleased with […] for they were] perfect for trimming the Xmas dinner table,” Carrie was unable to purchase a gift for her cousin Marie.97 For the Ormsbees, gift giving seemed to have been part of a general compulsion toward seasonal charity. In her hope to work with the ladies of the London Missionary Society in Samoa in some charitable regard, such as their school or orphanage, Mrs. Ormsbee expressed a similar vein of charity.98

96 Ibid.
97 Ibid.
Other seasonal traditions—what might be considered the aesthetics of the holiday—included decorating the house, hanging stockings “over the fire place in the sitting room,” wrapping presents, and writing numerous cards to those unable to attend to the family feast. 99 Carrie attended church alone on Christmas morning, owing to her

Uncle Jim’s railway delay. Her description of the church service conveys a certain sense of awe: “I enjoyed the service very, very much. They have choir boys and it seemed very natural to have all the responses sung as at-the-Hall.” The Ormsbees, as evidenced by their haphazard church attendance in Samoa—they often failed to go if it rained—were not devout religious followers and seemed to have treated church as an amiable aesthetic. For them, aesthetics were of paramount importance, whether in the form of comfortable accommodations or holiday ephemera. The Ormsbees’ economic, moral, and aesthetic values—their worldview as shaped by their experiences in Vermont—became more rigidly identifiable when they encountered the exotic inhabitants of the strange islands on which they found themselves.

Entertaining Samoans

Mr. and Mrs. Ormsbee recorded numerous entertainments involving the native peoples of Samoa—entertainments through which the Ormsbees asserted their superiority over the natives. Mrs. Ormsbee detailed at length a “Samoan Picnic” held in their honor upon first arriving in Samoa in a speech written for, though not presented to, the Congress of Women at the Chicago’s World Columbian Exposition in late 1893. Within the description of the “picnic,” discussed below, Mrs. Ormsbee expressed her perceived superiority over the natives and, simultaneously, reveled in witnessing an

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100 Ibid.
101 In later correspondence Mrs. Ormsbee gushed with praise for Robert Louis Stevenson’s mother who every week made the long, hazardous journey down from the mountains to attend church. At no point did Mrs. Ormsbee comment upon the woman’s piety, only her willingness to suffer discomfort to be seen at church. F. Ormsbee to Carrie Wyckoff-Ormsbee, 5 February 1892, MSC 188, Folder VII, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
“authentic” Samoan experience. In conveying the Samoan barbarity—for the barbarity was what made the experience authentic—Mrs. Ormsbee compared the picnic to what was familiar to her and therefore defined it as barbaric.103

A month after the Ormsbees arrived in Samoa, most likely a few weeks after they moved from the American consulate to their rooms in the Parker building in the beginning of February 1892, one “Mrs. Parker (a half caste)” invited her husband’s tenants to a “picnic” at their “little ranch […] about a mile from Matafale.”104 Throughout their correspondence, the Ormsbees condescendingly referred to such “half castes,” a common contemporary invective used disdainfully and derogatorily to describe all children of interracial liaisons. Although her earliest correspondence noted that “the Samoans are poor servants” and that “they do not know what real comfort is,” she was not, in the context of the period, unfavorably disposed toward the native Samoans.105 In letters and lectures she noted that “the Samoans are a fine, tall, handsome race, of a light brown-coffee color. I have never seen finer forms --- one frequently meets both men and


105 Frances Ormsbee to Mrs. A. W. Gross, 2 February 1892, Folder I, MSC 188, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
women who would make good models for the sculptor.” Their beauty, though, did not spare them from allegations of indolence and laziness when “tried or measured by our ideas of life.” But, for all that they may have lacked in Anglo-Saxon efficiency and ambition, they were nonetheless “contented and happy,” “courteous and polite,” and “hospitable even to prodigality.” Mr. Ormsbee conveyed similar thoughts in a comment he was sure his wife would agree with: “The fact is I have yet to see a Samoan do anything the way it should be done [...] They are simply children so far as reason, judgment and what we denominate common sense is concerned.” In one particular aspect, though, Mrs. Ormsbee was dismayed: the intermarriage of Euro-Americans with the natives and the resulting offspring. Throughout her correspondence and various addresses she spoke out against them. In a letter to her Aunt Jerusha, she complained that of “the business men here most everyone [has] native wives and it is not appropriate to ask much of their past history.” For Mrs. Ormsbee the barbarity of the natives was to be expected, but for Euro-Americans to have amorous dispositions towards them and the resulting “half castes” was akin to accepting, if not entering into, barbarity.

107 E. J. Ormsbee to Frances Ormsbee, 10 November through 3 December 1892, Folder V, MSC 188, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
108 Frances Ormsbee to Mrs. A. W. Gross, 24 April 1892, Folder I, MSC 188, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
Perhaps it was the social pretentions and real economic status of the Parkers more than their mixed pedigree that annoyed the Ormsbees. David S. Parker was an American originally from New Jersey who had run away from home as a teenager and was shipwrecked in the South Pacific. In 1860, he established a residence near Apia Bay in the Samoan archipelago and made a sizable fortune as a merchant. By the time of the Ormsbees’ arrival, Mr. Parker was a prominent local merchant and landlord in Apia, as well as being the husband of the younger daughter of an English missionary, who was also a Samoan princess (Mr. Parker had originally married the English missionary’s
eldest daughter, but she died).

Throughout their correspondence regarding the Parkers, the Ormsbees were condescending toward them. Mr. Ormsbee was quite amused when Mr. Parker started calling his wagon, one of the first in Samoa, first a carriage and then a trap. Mrs. Ormsbee found it comical when the Parkers referred to their small home outside of Apia as their “country seat.” Similarly, Mr. Parker’s frequent drunken rows with his wife were evident of their social depravity according to the Ormsbees. The night of November 29, 1892 was of particular note in this regard:

I must tell you [Mrs. Ormsbee] that Mr. Parker was a tara [terror] again last night (on account doubtless of the election news — you knew perhaps that he is a Dem. — you certainly know that he has the usual requisites for or of one) about 11 o’clock and after I had retired I heard the glass rattle — then again and again: out on the Parker end of the front upper veranda: - and then some loud talk which I could not understand. This morning it was plain to see how it was:- the old f- had thrown several things — wall brackets etc. through the window of Mrs. P’s room from the inside: - three panes through the sad and one or two in the upper was missing.

In other words, Mr. Parker was worse than an occasionally violent drunk with a “half caste” wife: he was a Democrat. To accept an invitation to a picnic from the Parkers, Mrs. Ormsbee was interested in more then polite conversation.

Early within her narrative of a “Samoan Picnic,” Mrs. Ormsbee established her perception of superiority over those hosting the picnic in the Ormsbees’ honor. That Mrs. Parker’s “invitations were confined to native and half caste women, my husband and myself being the only foreigners there” was a virtual accusation that the better classes of Apia—namely the European representatives, missionaries, and their families—were

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111 E. J. Ormsbee to F. Ormsbee, 10 November through 3 December 1892, Folder V, MSC 188, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
beyond the reach of Mrs. Parker, despite her husband’s apparent economic success. Why then would Mr. and Mrs. Ormsbee have accepted the invitations of their lowly landlords on such a social venture with so many less than desirable guests? In answer, Mrs. Ormsbee wrote that “a picnic in Samoa is one means of entertainment and the one that native women most enjoy […] and Europeans never think to arrange for a Picnic without including a large number of native girls and half castes in the party for they are necessary for comfort and amusement.” The “Samoan Picnic” was an “authentic” experience consisting of Europeans being “amused” by native girls that one could not miss while in the archipelago.

Accordingly, the “Samoan Picnic” followed an established pattern: first, there was travel to the picnic site; second, there was a banquet; third, there was dancing; fourth, there was the return trip. Mrs. Ormsbee noted that “a Samoan Picnic is never complete without a long ride,” even “if the feast is to be spread nearer home.” The experience was simply not authentic without the “usual frolic on horseback” amongst the plantations. Weather was not a concern, for even in “that hot, tropical sun with a good chance of rain, which did overtake the party,” there was instance that the Ormsbees join the other guests on a ten- or twelve-mile ride. The Ormsbees, though, did accept Mr. Parker’s offer of a “carriage ride,” which involved Mr. and Mrs. Ormsbee “each seated in a chair in the back of this wagon, with a driver on the high seat in front, trying to manage a horse that actually knew no more about being driven than a cow.” With the Ormsbees arriving “safety” and the other guests returning from their ride “wet to the skin but happy as birds,” the experience was ready to progress to the next stage.
The “picnic” feast was normally served out of doors—in this case in a large clearing shaded by orange trees—but because of the rain “it was spread on the back veranda on a carpet of leaves made from branches off the cocoa-nut, covered over with clean banana leaves.” In other words, the back porch of the Parker’s country residence was transformed into a field replete with native verdure, thereby mimicking what the authentic “Samoan Picnic” was supposed to be. Upon this faux field was placed “a large roast pig (whole) [...] in the middle with a small pig at each end, taro and cocoanuts all along the outer edge, and then it was filled with taro, bananas, chickens, beef, fish, shrimps, etc., etc., each tied in bunches in banana leaves, just as it was taken from the oven.” As a beverage, coconut milk was served straight from the coconut, which, according to the hostess, Mrs. Parker, was “the proper Samoan way.” The first course consisted of a dish made from arrow-root and coconut that resembled “our Tapioca.” It was eaten in the native style using a small twig and orange leaves as a spoon. The Ormsbees, though, were told that they could drink the soup if they preferred. After this course the guests were invited to serve themselves from the various dishes placed upon the artificial field. No utensils were used to either carve or serve the various dishes, with each guest rising from his or her mat and helping him or herself. For the final course, a native dish made from the “young leaf of the taro” was served on banana leaves as with everything else. At the conclusion a “finger bowl”—a tin can filled with water—and a towel were passed around. Finally, guests were offered shoots of sugar cane to chew on before the dancing began.
The music for the dancing was provided by Mrs. Parker and her accordion; it consisted of the “Siva” where the natives “waltz and dance a sort of jig, accompanying the dancing with gesticulations, clapping hands to keep time, bowing, turning and twisting their heads in every possible way.” After Mr. and Mrs. Ormsbee joined in the dancing—“much to their [the natives] delight”—the evening concluded with each guest receiving an equal share of the leftover food, for which the British commissioner had recommended she bring several handkerchiefs. Although “this was only a small picnic compared with some,” Mrs. Ormsbee was convinced that she had attended an authentic Samoan ritual that was performed quite frequently for the Euro-American population.\(^{112}\) But, given the numerous activities that were familiar to Mrs. Ormsbee—picnicking had become widely popular in the United States during the latter nineteenth century\(^{113}\)—suggests that the Samoans had not so much invented a tradition as melded their own notions of a feast with those of the Euro-American picnic, which they presented as a necessary, exotic Samoan experience.\(^{114}\) The exotic, and at time comical, “Samoan Picnic” reinforced Mrs. Ormsbee’s perception of her superiority over the natives and half castes through the very attributes that made the experience exceptional and authentic.

A similar example of the Ormsbees assertion of their superiority over the natives while experiencing an authentic Samoan experience was Mr. Ormsbee’s description of a

\(^{112}\) The above quotations are made in reference to: Frances Ormsbee, “Samoan Picnic,” Folder XXVI, MSC 35, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.

\(^{113}\) According to Mary Ellen W. Hern “a striking aspect of the American Victorian picnic ritual was its sensuousness. In addition to singing, dancing, and other frolicking, the picnic offered a feast” (p. 147). Mrs. Ormsbee, therefore, should not have been surprised by any of the aspects of the Samoan Picnic she described with such exotic rapture. Mary Ellen W. Hern, “Picnicking in the Northeastern United States, 1840-1900,” Winterthur Portfolio, 24.2/3 (1989), pp. 139-152.

\(^{114}\) For an exploration of “invented tradition” see its founder: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., The Invention of Tradition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), especially the introduction by Hobsbawm.
“Talolo” on October 29, 1892. From Mr. Ormsbee’s description to his wife of the event the “Talolo” must have occurred annually and consisted of outlying villages bringing tribute to King Malietoa, who then held a feast in their honor. Mr. Ormsbee noted that there was a procession of dancing women who were “nearly naked […]—and these women […] were handsome and in every instance seemingly able to suckle two sets of triplets and then have enough left to satisfy a hungry baby—without any appearance of a sense of the least impropriety or want of modesty.”

A similar description of native nudity appeared in a letter to his wife dated November 18, 1892, when, while he was talking to the German commissioner's wife’s sister on the veranda of his apartment, a wind blew a native girl’s dress over her shoulders “and entirely exposed one of those tremendous bosoms.” Mr. Ormsbee found the entire episode quite amusing.

A series of Christmas and New Year’s Eve greeting cards brought back by Mr. Ormsbee and later donated to the Fleming Museum at the University of Vermont demonstrates his fascination with Samoan nudity. Perhaps these were used to convince doubting neighbors of the Samoan’s risqué attire.

However, by so frankly discussing such morally reprehensible material with his Victorian wife, Mr. Ormsbee indicated his perception of the Samoans as savages who fell

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115 E. J. Ormsbee to F. Ormsbee, 12 October through 8 November 1892, Folder V, MSC 188, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.

116 E. J. Ormsbee to F. Ormsbee, 9 November through 3 December 1892, Folder V, MSC 188, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
Figure 7: New Year's Eve Greeting Card From Samoa

Courtesy of the Fleming Museum
Figure 8: Christmas Card From Samoa, 1894
*Courtesy of the Fleming Museum*
Figure 9: New Year’s Eve Greeting Card From Samoa
Courtesy of the Fleming Museum
outside the moralistic realm of the civilized lady. Such descriptions were in stark contrast to his description of several European women swimming in their shifts off of the Parkers’ wharf. He commented upon the extreme heat and how, although he would greatly like to, he would not go swimming in his undergarments. His description of the European women was particularly puritanical in contrast to his lurid, graphic description of the Samoan women.

The Samoans were not civilized in the eyes of the Ormsbees, but their very barbarity made witnessing their rituals all the more authentic. The Euro-Americans, though, despite their presumed racial equality with the Ormsbees, quite often failed to attain the Ormsbees’ standards of morality and civilization.

Entertaining Europeans

Entertainment was seldom lacking within the Apian Euro-American community, as a lively social agenda of concerts, dinners, sporting events, and variety acts was maintained. Mrs. Ormsbee devoted a significant amount of time to two particular events because of the notoriety of the individuals involved and their frequent recurrence. The first were the Ormsbees’ frequent dinners with the second German commissioner—the first having returned to Germany because he was dying of consumption—Herr T. Greiner of the German Imperial Consular Service. The second were their several visits to the mountain abode of Robert Louis Stevenson. Throughout these accounts Mrs. Ormsbee

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118 E. J. Ormsbee to F. Ormsbee, 8 November 1892, MSC 188, Folder V, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
continually denied these notables social equality, most often because of their allegedly lax morals.

Not all of the Euro-American community’s entertainments were considered reprehensible by the Ormsbees. They enjoyed the various music hall performances they attended, many of which were put on by the crews of the naval vessels visiting Apia. Other appropriately bourgeois activities included visiting the London Missionary Society’s Coffee House and Reading Rooms, which offered “tea, coffee, cocoa, and aerated water,” as well as “bread & butter, with jam or fruits, cakes, biscuits, sandwiches, and eggs” all at “very moderate rates.” With their boast of writing material and “all kinds of Newspapers, and Pictorials, Weekly or Quarterly Magazines, or Books sent to us by Mail Steamers” the missionaries offered only the most wholesome of entertainment.119

There were also frequent “Fagaliis” during the temperate months, which were days of feasting, sporting events, and martial music. One such day, hosted by the Apia Sports Club, was held on Monday, July 4, 1892, in honor of the American holiday. Neither the German or British national holidays were honored with such tribute; the Emperor’s and Queen’s birthdays were restricted to the diplomatic representatives calling upon the celebrant’s consulate and perhaps a formal dinner or ball. The Fourth of July Fagalii, though, was quite a spectacle. Although the Ormsbees particularly enjoyed the boat race, which the American consulate’s boat won, and the tug-of-war, they quite disapproved of the many drunken participants and spectators of the numerous events. The

English commissioner, Mr. Haggand, and the Land Commission’s secretary were both quite inebriated. One can imagine the intoxicated Mr. Haggand participating in the “Cigar Race”—a one mile horse race in which the participants must first saddle their pony, light a cigar, and open an umbrella at the same time, and then keep the cigar lit and the umbrella open until the end of the race—with the Ormsbees watching with bemused disapproval. Mr. Parker had invited the Ormsbees on a picnic at his country ranch, but they refused, fearing a drunken debacle. The Germans accompanied him, though, in “one of the plantation wagons with seats all round it and drawn by 4 large oxen or Bullocks as they call them here and it was all trimmed with flowers and vines and branches of the coconut coming out it.” Given the Greiners’ propensity for drinking, perhaps the Ormsbees rightfully feared an inebriated frolic.

Herr Greiner, as the Ormsbees referred to him, rapidly became symbolic in their imaginations of all that was wrong with the Germans. On November 27, 1892, after Mrs. Ormsbee had departed for the United States, Mr. Ormsbee wrote to her commenting ruefully that the Greiners—Herr Greiner had brought out his young wife—were playing cards, drinking, and singing boisterously on the lower veranda—they occupied the apartment below him—on a Sunday afternoon. Early that week, Mr. Ormsbee had been relieved when Herr Greiner forced his eldest child to return Mr. Ormsbee’s umbrella; Mr.

122 E. J. Ormsbee to F. Ormsbee, 8 November 1892, MSC 188, Folder V, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
Ormsbee was prompted to comment that at least there was not a “sneak thief” about.\textsuperscript{123}

The greatest condemnation from Mr. Ormsbee, though, arose in regard to Herr Greiner’s proposed birthday celebration for Sunday, November 6, 1892. Writing the previous Thursday, October 27, Mr. Ormsbee noted:

Mr. Greiner has a birthday next Sunday—and his German friends are to make the day a festive one—what a strange and Godless people they are! If all Germans are alike—[and] all have seem to be—I darest [dare] not even conjecture what may come to them as a people. I had thought that our ideas [,] habits and practices were quite liberal but in comparison with these people we may be pronounced otherwise — enough — it makes me sick to think of it. No thought of the observance of Sunday or for the day.\textsuperscript{124}

Clearly, Mr. Ormsbee was quite appalled with the idea that Herr Greiner, aside from having thieving children, would be so sacrilegious as to drink and cavort on a Sunday.

Among Mrs. Ormsbee’s personal notes on Samoa was a brief article entitled “An Evening at Herr Greiner’s.” From the context, the piece appeared to have been in reference to a dinner held at the German commissioner’s residence and attended by Mr. Ormsbee, among others. In regard to the evening’s musical entertainment, Mr. Ormsbee dryly noted that at least it provided “a change from this monotony of being alone.”\textsuperscript{125}

After an hour and a half, though, Mr. Ormsbee returned to his rooms, no longer able to “endure it.”\textsuperscript{126} His conclusions bear witness to how he felt about the evening:

I write only to let you know of my conclusion: - they doubtless mean well, and they call it enjoyment to sing a little, then drink a good deal—then have some piano music—then have some German sausage and cheese,

\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{124} E. J. Ormsbee to F. Ormsbee, 12 October 1892, MSC 188, Folder V, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
\textsuperscript{125} “An Evening at Herr Greiner’s,” MSC 35, Folder XXXII, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
\textsuperscript{126} \textit{Ibid.}
enough to drive a dog off the farm—then more beer—then some more sausage—then a song—then more of that awful cheese—then some whiskey—and then repeat—and so it is going on now and will for two hours or more [...]. I did make out to eat some of the sausage and some cold course bread—but that cheese, I could hardly endure to stay in the room after it was brought in.\textsuperscript{127}

The article ended with a note that at least the Germans’ incessant smoking partially masked the malodorous cheese. The Germans—for the Ormsbees conclude that Herr Greiner was representative of them all—were, then, little better than the Samoans, who at least refrained from strong drinks and stronger cheeses, sang less into the night, and avoided filching umbrellas. If the Germans proved a little too Continental for the sophisticates from Vermont, then the British notables, Robert Louis Stevenson and his family, proved to have descended a little too far toward barbarity in their remote mountain hideaway.

The renowned author had purchased several hundred acres on the Samoan island of Upolu in the mountains above Apia, where he proceeded to build a vast estate named Vailima. On January 20, 1892, the Ormsbees made the pilgrimage through the mountains to visit Mr. Stevenson, his wife, daughter, and mother. Mrs. Ormsbee had difficulty understanding why the famed author would spend $25,000 to build a house that was virtually impossible to get to, owing to the complete lack of any roads from the coast inland. She was most perturbed by the dangerous cliffside paths her horse traversed. Similarly, although she was impressed with the two stone fireplaces, the glass windows, and the European furniture, she could “not see how any one can want to live in such a

\textsuperscript{127} \textit{Ibid.}
place or climate as this.”128 Perhaps to her relief, the Stevensons did not offer the Ormsbees strong drinks, as the Germans invariably would have, but they still shocked their provincial sensibilities. Mrs. Stevenson “smoked a cigarette, also her daughter while we were there.” When combined with their being barefooted this was quite shocking to the Ormsbees and clearly evidence of a decline toward barbarity.129 Accordingly,

It was an exception not to find Mrs. Stevenson whenever we were there, in strict accordance with Samoan custom, barefooted, and I have often seen every member of the family in bare feet, except mother Stevenson. They remained so through dinner even when they had invited guests. Mr. Stevenson had a cousin, Mr. Balfour, visiting there during our stay there, and I did feel disgusted one day while calling there, to find him, a visitor of a few weeks, so soon adopting the native custom of bare feet. […] Mr. Stevenson, with all his culture and learning, became and was greatly attached not only to Samoa, but to the Samoans as a people.130

The Stevensons had, then, gone native, much to Mrs. Ormsbee’s distress.

For Mrs. Ormsbee, Mr. Stevenson’s mother was a bright exception in the Stevensons’ general decline in civilization. Mrs. Ormsbee described her as the “dear old mother” who blessed them with her “gifted presence […] her many Christian graces.”131 It was this kind, Scottish woman who braved the treacherous mountain path every Sunday, regardless of the weather, to attend church in Apia; an achievement Mrs. Ormsbee admitted was quite beyond her.132 Here the contrast becomes apparent: Mr. Stevenson, his wife, and daughter were morally reprimanded by Mrs. Ormsbee for

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129 F. Ormsbee to Carrie Wyckoff-Ormsbee, 8 January 1892, MSC 188, Folder VII, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
130 Untitled Manuscript, MSC 35, Folder XXVI, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
131 Ibid.
132 F. Ormsbee to Carrie Wyckoff-Ormsbee, 5 February 1892, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
smoking in front of guests and traipsing about barefooted; Mr. Stevenson’s mother, though, was praised for not doing so and for attending church service.

The Ormsbees praised those whose actions they found familiar—piety, furnishings, and gender roles—while they denigrated those who deviated from their familiar by publicly drinking to excess, cavorting late at night, eating unfamiliar food, and unsettling accepted gender roles and clothing norms. Racial and cultural differences, then, were not the only standards by which the Ormsbees differentiated others; morals, especially amongst their Euro-American peers in Samoa, were of equal importance. The further they seemed to travel from their beloved Brandon—the proverbial Garden of Eden—the more vice they seemed to encounter.133

If the Christmas letter Carrie wrote to her parents in 1891 detailed all of the bourgeois values the Ormsbees used to judge the Greiners and the Stevensons, then, Mr. Ormsbee’s description of Christmas in 1892 detailed all of those values that the Samoan Euro-American community had abandoned. In a lengthy letter to his wife, who had returned to the United States for her health, Mr. Ormsbee seemingly recreated the family-centered ritual described by Carrie. He noted that it “had been the most enjoyable half day since you [Mrs. Ormsbee] left. The news was all good and I heard so much from you and of Carrie—so many loving words:—so many words and sentiments of love, devotion, and solicitude.”134 Here was the family-centered, domestic holiday re-created through letters. Mr. Ormsbee teased his wife in his Christmas Day entry over her lack of a present

133 Throughout their correspondence the Ormsbees write of how they missed Brandon, of how wonderful Brandon was, and of how much better life was in Brandon.
and claimed a bookmark, which arrived in a letter dated earlier that month, as his present. He further teased her over the “very pretty” desk calendar Carrie had sent him as a present.\textsuperscript{135} Rather than spending his leisure time pursuing a publicly centered activity, Mr. Ormsbee was “chatting” with his wife and reveling in the memory of his family within the quiet of his apartment.

Juxtaposing Mr. Ormsbee’s domestic reveries, though, were the vice-ridden Greiners. Having just returned from a Christmas Eve dinner with his German counterpart, Mr. Ormsbee noted, “I have been in to see the Christmas tree in the rooms of the Greiners:—all very nice:—but their ways are not our ways.”\textsuperscript{136} So ominous a beginning was quickly followed by the crux of the matter: Mr. Ormsbee had gone to the theater “for a very short time—only away from [apartment] about an hour.” As he had not gone the previous evening, he felt obligated to attend; he returned about 10:30 pm, having left the Greiners at the music hall. A half an hour after returning home, while Mr. Ormsbee was busy “chatting” with his wife, “Mrs. G [Greiner] came into my room and was considerably excited:—saying to me as she came in ‘Oh, Mr. Ormsbee I must come in here while Jan is so tipsy I cannot stay there’.”\textsuperscript{137} Mr. Ormsbee gallantly acquiesced, and as Mrs. Greiner calmed herself, she told him what had happened:

It seems that he [Mr. Greiner] was full when they went to the hall and then during the entertainment ‘went out’ frequently (to the Zindi [a bar] probably) and was gloriously drunk when they started to come home; and she said they had to help him up and [he] was crazy drunk later: and had quite a scene on a circus in their rooms which had Mrs. G to flee to my room.\textsuperscript{138}

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
Mr. Ormsbee reported that since the incident, Mr. Greiner had sobered, but as “it is Xmas Eve,” Mr. Ormsbee felt he would be “as drunk as a fiddler probably before midnight.” Mrs. Ormsbee was left to imagine her husband’s “disgust over the situation.” The Germans did not disappoint him and repeated the previous night’s transgressions, while a drinking partner tried to quiet Mr. Greiner and “get him to go to bed.” Mr. Ormsbee’s disgust with Mr. Greiner’s drunken debauchery, though, was merely symptomatic of the Ormsbees’ reaction to the Euro-American society in Samoa. For them, the Euro-American society had abandoned the bourgeois values they idealized and replaced them with native practices and loose moral behavior.

Conclusion: Mr. and Mrs. Ormsbee Home Again

Mr. and Mrs. Ormsbee returned to United States, where they spoke before local and national organizations on topics relating to Samoa, many of which have been discussed above. Their bourgeois status made their interpretation upon the matter fiat: they “invented” Samoa. But their Samoa was created through their Vermont, bourgeois values—values which those they encountered failed to enshrine. The native people, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Mr. Ormsbee’s colleagues on the Land Commission all failed in some measure. For the Ormsbees, the world was but a corrupted version of an ideal—perhaps only achieved in their fabled Brandon.

Mr. Ormsbee did not just find fault with his fellow commissioners socially. Politics for Mr. Ormsbee were not the intrigues, public outbursts, and long delays of

\[139\] Ibid.
\[140\] Ibid.
\[141\] Ibid.
Samoa. The Vermont Republican Party, whose ranks he had risen through, was conducted in an orderly manner by “gentlemen,” who might disagree privately, but never publicly. From the moment he arrived in Samoa, Mr. Ormsbee was perplexed regarding the strange political customs operating all around him.
Chapter III: The Diplomatic Mr. Ormsbee, 1891-1893
Introduction: A Vermont Perspective, A Samoan Experience

At six o’clock on the morning of Sunday, December 27, 1891, William Blacklock, US acting consul-general for the municipality of Apia and the Kingdom of Samoa, hailed the S.S. *Mariposa* from the white-washed American consular cutter. From her vantage point on the first class passenger deck of the *Mariposa*, Mrs. Ormsbee noted that “we were very glad to see the Boat with our Flag flying coming, feeling sure it was for us.” Mr. Ormsbee, perspiring heavily in his best black wool morning suit, was more interested with meeting the English and German members of the Samoan Land Commission, but not so much so that he could refuse breakfast with Mr. Blacklock at the American consulate. After breakfast, Mr. Ormsbee was quite shocked when Mr. Blacklock informed him that he would not be able to begin work on the Land Commission until the following week, as it would take most of the next few days for him to make all of the necessary introductions. Mrs. Ormsbee dryly commented that “the custom here makes it necessary for Papa to make the first calls, which seems strange.” The Ormsbees spent the next few days grumbling about the delay, ordering white cotton suits, packing away their wool garments for shipment home, and generally settling into the American consulate, where they would live until late February when Harold M. Sewell, the American consul-general, returned.142

From late 1891 through early 1893, Mr. Ormsbee’s Vermont-crafted worldview came into startling social contrast with the international community. He struggled to find

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someone in Samoa with whom to share his social values of Victorian bourgeois modesty and control. As with these Victorian grand bourgeois social values, his work ethic and expectations of the political system—both with the Samoan Land Commission and the State Department—clashed with the actual situations he encountered. For Mr. Ormsbee, politics, or at least the well ordered proceedings of the Vermont Republican Party to which he was accustomed, were conducted by “gentlemen.” Differences of opinion were resolved privately without recourse to public debate. Tasks were vigorously investigated and concluded by dedicated, hardworking, knowledgeable, and honest statesmen. The very structure of the General Act of Berlin, which created the Samoan Land Commission, precluded any semblance of order. Overlapping power-sharing problems between the chief justice and the Land Commission led to a series of crises, which thoroughly frustrated Mr. Ormsbee. The ungentlemanly conduct of the chief justice—especially his public appeals—further angered him, while the slovenly work ethic of his colleagues on the commission compounded his disgust.

Mr. Ormsbee’s relationship with the State Department was similarly marked by mounting frustration. Over the course of his thirteen-month tenure in Samoa, he became increasingly disillusioned with the department’s ability to operate a global agenda with minimal personnel and logistical support. Technology alone was not responsible for the exceedingly long delays in responding to Mr. Ormsbee’s pleas for instructions. These pleas, written almost exclusively to Mr. Partridge, further demonstrate how personal and professional relationships were essential elements within the State Department. As with the Samoan Land Commission, Mr. Ormsbee’s reactions to the State Department were
determined by his expectations of how politics should have been conducted—
extpectations that had been crafted in Vermont’s orderly gentleman’s club, the Republican
Party.

The Judicious Mr. Ormsbee and the Samoan Land Commission, 1891-1893

Mr. Ormsbee worked with ever-mounting frustration on the Samoan Land
Commission. The work was monotonous, time consuming, and wracked with political
complications, including power struggles with the native advocate and the Samoan chief
justice. As the work progressed, Mr. Ormsbee became increasingly disillusioned with the
work ethic and morals of his European counterparts. In order to understand the origins of
Mr. Ormsbee’s disillusionment with the commission, an examination of the 1889 General
Act of Berlin and those regulations that provided a modus operandi for the commission is
necessary.

The General Act of Berlin in 1889 was prompted by the failure of the 1887
Washington Conference. That failure was due to both the changing balance of power in
Europe, especially between Great Britain and Germany, and burgeoning American
interest in the Pacific. The General Act marked the culmination of nearly twenty years of
consular intrigue, Samoan instability, and compromised imperial ambitions.\(^{143}\) Presidents

\(^{143}\) The consular intrigue included multiple German attempts to annex the islands without either
the United States or Britain knowing, one attempt by an American adventurer who became the first prime
minister of the island monarchy, and a secret treaty between Britain and Germany, which would have given
Samoa to the Germans while guaranteeing Germany’s support for Britain in regard to the Dardanelles and
Egypt. For a detailed study of the controversies that culminated in the General Act of Berlin, see Paul M.
Kennedy, *The Samoan Tangle: A Study in Anglo-German-American Relations, 1878-1900* (New York:
Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1974), especially pp. 51-144. A more American-centered study is provided
by George Herbert Ryden, *The Foreign Policy of the United States in Relation to Samoa* (Hartford,
Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1933, 1975), pp. 445-521. In both of these prodigious studies, the years
Grover Cleveland and Benjamin Harrison supported a position wherein the United States, Great Britain, and Germany would provide for the “neutrality and autonomous government of the Samoan Islands […] and […] for [the] equal rights therein of the three Governments and their citizens and subjects.”

To that end, the American commissioners to Berlin—John A. Kasson, William Walter Phelps, and George H. Bates—were instructed in March 1889 to pursue five objectives. First, the commissioners were to seek a restoration of the status quo prior to the German occupation and declaration of a Samoan protectorate. Second, they were to seek a tridominium, as contemporaries referred to the scheme of governance by the three powers, “whereby native independence and autonomy should be preserved free from the control or the preponderating influence of any foreign government.” Autochthonous sovereignty, though, was provided with a nation-building corollary, wherein “any intervention of the three powers, which the existing complications might make necessary for administering the Government of Samoa, should be temporary merely, and avowedly preparatory to the restoration of as complete independence and autonomy as is practicable in those islands.” The third point was an addendum to the latter and called for a land commission appointed by the Great Powers to remove the source of “continual disputes”

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1891-1893 are not given more than scant attention. Mr. Ormsbee is noted only in passing in the latter account and not at all in the former.

144 Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Message from the President of the United States, Transmitting a General Act, or convention agreement, concluded and signed at Berlin on the 14th day of June, by the plenipotentiaries of the United States, Germany, and Great Britain, in regard to the neutrality and autonomous government of the Samoan Islands, 51st Congress, 1st Session, 1890, Miscellaneous Document, No. 81, p. 1.

145 Ibid., p. 4.

146 Ibid.
between them and the native populace.\textsuperscript{147} Finally, the American commissioners were instructed to argue for a ban on the sale of “fire-arms and alcoholic liquors,” as well as for the creation at Apia of an international municipality defined as “a system of joint municipal government […] through the consular representation of the three powers.”\textsuperscript{148} The Samoans, although far from being autonomous, were, in the American proposal, subjected to a form of joint imperialism.

All of the American demands were agreed to by the representatives of Great Britain and Germany over the course of nine conferences held between April 29 and June 14, 1889. However, within Articles III and IV, an inherent power-sharing struggle was created between the chief justice of Samoa and the Samoan Land Commissioners. Article III, “A declaration respecting the establishment of a supreme court of justice for Samoan and defining its jurisdiction,” contained eleven subsections. The first called for the creation of a supreme court comprised of one judge, a clerk, and a marshal of the court. Section II established that the chief justice was to be appointed by the king of Sweden and Norway and that “he shall be learned in law and equity, of mature years, and of good repute for his sense of honor, impartiality, and justice.”\textsuperscript{149} Section III stated that complaints against the chief justice would have to be brought before the nominating party, while Section IV established the chief justice’s jurisdiction. Accordingly, the supreme court was to have “jurisdiction of all questions under the provisions of this general act, and the decision or order of the court thereon shall be conclusive upon all

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., p. 8.
residents of Samoa.” Section V allowed the chief justice to appoint “assessors, one of the nationality of each litigant,” for informal advice. The following two sections gave the chief justice the power to adjudicate differing claims of succession to the Samoan throne and differences between the three powers, which might lead to war. Section VIII established the chief justice’s power to recommend legislation to the Samoan government. Section IX provided clarification to Section IV, wherein the chief justice was granted “exclusive jurisdiction” in “all suits concerning real property situated in Samoa and all rights affecting the same,” as well as “all civil suits of any kind between natives and foreigners or between foreigners of different nationalities.” Finally, the court was to operate under English common law—with due consideration for the “local circumstances”—and was to in no way impinge upon existing consular jurisdiction. The chief justice, therefore, had jurisdiction over all land claims and could only be reproached by the king of Sweden and Norway or by the three powers. Such broad and vague jurisdictional powers and complex censuring mechanisms foreshadowed a crisis with the Samoan Land Commission outlined in Article IV.

Article IV called for the creation of the Samoan Land Commission, which was both subservient to and independent of the chief justice—a contradiction Mr. Ormsbee was to become all too familiar with. Section I proclaimed that “care shall be taken that the agricultural lands and natural fruit lands of Samoans shall not be unduly diminished” and continued the paternalistic theme of the Powers toward the natives. Furthermore,

150 Ibid., p. 9.
151 Ibid.
152 Ibid., p. 10.
153 Ibid.
Section I placed the authorization of leases within the chief justice’s jurisdiction. Section II declared that “a commission shall be appointed, to consist of three […] impartial and competent persons, one to be named by each of the three treaty powers, to be assisted by an officer to be styled the natives’ advocate, who shall be appointed […] with the approval of the chief justice.” The commission’s expenses also had to be approved by the chief justice. Section III imposed a two-year time limit on the commission and dictated that the minutes and announcements of the commission be in English, German, and Samoan. The subsequent nine sections outlined the operating procedures of the commission. Most importantly, though, Section VI dictated: “All disputed claims to land in Samoa shall be reported by the commission to the court, together with all the evidence affecting their validity; and the court shall make final decision thereon in writing.” Although the commission could “endeavor to effect a just and equitable compromise between litigants,” they were to “report to the court whether the alleged title should be recognized and registered or rejected in whole or in part, as the case may require.” Mr. Ormsbee, the other commissioners, and the chief justice were to debate the connotative meaning of “report” for many months. A literal reading of Articles III and IV would have concluded that the Samoan Land Commission was an advisory body to the chief justice, who had final power in all matters. However, such a reading would have negated the validity of the commission, for their decisions could have been overturned by the chief justice.

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154 Ibid.
155 Ibid., p. 11.
156 Ibid.
Before Mr. Ormsbee attempted to understand the power-sharing entanglements of the 1889 General Act of Berlin, Henry Clay Ide, the first American Land Commissioner to Samoa, attempted to implement them. Despite the fact that Mr. Ide was ten years his junior, he and Mr. Ormsbee were very close friends in Vermont.\textsuperscript{157} Mr. Ide had been born in Barnet, Vermont, and had attended the St. Johnsbury Academy and then Dartmouth College, where he studied law. In 1891, Mr. Proctor recommended him to Secretary of State Blaine for the Samoan Land Commission, commenting that Mr. Ide was a “first-class lawyer.”\textsuperscript{158} Seeing the opportunity as “most beneficial and recuperative, irrespective of the strenuousness of the new field of labor,” he accepted and dutifully reported to Samoa in the late spring of 1891.\textsuperscript{159} Upon arriving in Samoa, Mr. Ide was as shocked as the Ormsbees by the local diplomatic culture, which “was as rigid in its way as that of a European court.”\textsuperscript{160} Before work on the commission could begin, Mr. Ide had to call upon “the king, the chief justice, the president of the municipality of Apia, the consuls general of the protecting powers, the captains or admirals of the warships then in Apia, and my associates on the commission.” Thankfully, though, “the calls were brief,

\textsuperscript{157} Mr. Ide remarked that Mr. Ormsbee was “a long time friend of mine,” \textit{Ibid.}, p. 87.
\textsuperscript{158} Henry Clay Ide, “A Land Commissioner in Far Off Samoa,” ed. Arthur F. Stone, \textit{The Life of Henry Clay Ide} (New York: Privately Published by Anne Ide Cockran, 1935), p. 39. Arthur F. Stone acknowledged that although he wrote most of his biography of Mr. Ide, he found amongst his papers a manuscript describing Mr. Ide’s experience in Samoa. Mr. Ide had apparently fallen ill and died before he could extend the manuscript into a full length book. Arthur Stone, though, transcribed the manuscript as chapters three and four of his biography. He noted: “It was Mr. Ide’s long-cherished plan to write a book of his Samoan experience and he had finished one chapter before ill health compelled him reluctantly to lay down his facile pen. The editor [Arthur Stone] considers it most fortunate that he can present herewith this chapter which covers many interesting details of Mr. Ide’s work on the Samoan Land Commission. But more than this, one gets an insight into the work and play of a brave people; the charm of the tropics allures one, and the whole is really a ‘Foot Note to History.’” (p. 38).
\textsuperscript{159} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 39.
\textsuperscript{160} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 62.
sufficient to make an acquaintance and exchange pleasant civilities.” Mr. Ide approached his fellow commissioners with far greater camaraderie than his successor. Carl Eggert, the German commissioner and son of the German minister of railroads, was regarded as an “excellent friend,” whom Mr. Ide liked very much. He was quite saddened when he learned of Mr. Eggert’s death from long failing health a few years later. As for the English commissioner, Bazett M. Haggard, Mr. Ide merely noted that he was from an old family and well connected. As shall be discussed below, Mr. Ormsbee compensated for Mr. Ide’s terseness regarding Mr. Haggard with ample words of complaint.

Mr. Ide provided one of the most thorough surviving accounts of the daily proceedings of the Samoan Land Commission. As an exemplar of the typical case presented before the commission, Mr. Ide detailed the claim of Jonas M. Coe. Mr. Coe was an American citizen who had at times served as the US consul in Samoa. Accordingly, Mr. Coe occupied two parcels of land close to the American consulate. He presented two deeds to the commission that had been forged. Owing to his residency of over ten years on the parcels, though, Mr. Coe was exempted from disputes by the General Act of Berlin. Furthermore, when queried if he had protested to Mr. Coe, the native objector responded, “No, but I have sat in my house and thought about it many times.” Such frustrations were apparently quite common in dealing with both native and European disputes.

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161 Ibid., p. 63.
162 Ibid., p. 67.
163 Ibid., p. 68.
164 Ibid., p. 82.
Mr. Ide noted that “each day brought before the commission new and interesting cases, involving fraud and deceit, sometimes successful but often so apparent as to be only laughable.”165 For example, he noted that the Godefroy Company, a large German firm also referred to as the D. H. & P. G., at one point presented the American consul “for registration several transfers of land in which the dates, boundaries and considerations were all omitted, leaving the vacant spaces to be filled in from time to time as circumstances might require.”166 Another example from Mr. Ide detailed how a Samoan chieftain rented a large parcel of land in Apia to an American blacksmith who kept a horde of gold coins under his forge. Upon learning of the buried treasure, another man killed the blacksmith, for which he was promptly hanged. The American consul, not knowing of the Samoan chieftain’s claim to the land as the chieftain had been exiled to the far side of the island, promptly sold the land to William MacArthur Company, a London corporation, which built a large warehouse and office building on the site. The Samoan, thereafter, brought the case before the Land Commission. The commissioners ruled that the company had to buy the land from the Samoan at an agreed rate; the company acquiesced and promptly applied the cost of the land to the Samoan’s large company debt.167 As Mr. Ide noted, in “remote frontiers” one could not expect “the standards of a New England Sunday School.”168 Mr. Ormsbee was not Mr. Ide.

Before discussing Mr. Ormsbee’s tenure with the Samoan Land Commission, an examination of the operating principles that guided both Vermonter in their decisions

165 Ibid., p. 86.
166 Ibid.
167 Ibid., pp. 83-86.
168 Ibid., pp. 85, 82.
will serve to illustrate one of the reasons why Mr. Ormsbee often felt frustrated with time wasted. According to the *Samoan Land Commission: Rules of Procedure*, agreed to by Henry C. Ide, Bazett M. Haggard, and C. Eggert on June 1, 1891, there were thirteen guiding principles. First, claims had to be submitted in English, signed by the claimant or “his duly appointed representative,” on forms provided to the claimant by the commission. Second, one claim had to be submitted for each parcel of disputed land and needed to contain a concise statement describing the land. Third, all original “deeds, mortgages, leases, contracts, conveyances, or other written evidence of title” had to be “deposited with the Commission at the time the claim is filed.” Fourth, all claims had to be inspected by the secretary of the Land Commission to ascertain that the above had been complied with. Fifth, the claim had to be reviewed by a member of the commission, signed, dated, and filed. If the claim was amended, the entire process had to be repeated. The secretary was to maintain a registry of all claims, from which he and the commissioners were to compile a public directory. Once these steps had been complied with, the commissioners would schedule a hearing, for which notice had to be given one week in advance. During these hearings all oral evidence had to be transcribed, then reread and signed by the witness. Objections to claims were to be handled in the same manner, although they were recorded in a separate record and public index. For a few hundred claims, four individuals might have been able to complete the elaborate process in the allotted two years, but there were some 3,942 claims registered. It is not surprising that the varying commissioners took twice as long as planned to complete their task.  

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169 Henry C. Ide, Bazett M. Haggard, C. Eggert, *Samoan Land Commission: Rules and*
In early December 1891, Mr. Ide and Mr. Ormsbee met at a hotel near the railway station in Kansas City to discuss the General Act of Berlin, the procedural regulations of the Land Commission, and the two power-sharing crises that had emerged prior to Mr. Ide’s departure from Samoa the previous month.\textsuperscript{170} The first of these crises was the determination of the jurisdiction of the chief justice over the Land Commission. Although Mr. Ide described Swedish Chief Justice Conrad Cedercrantz as “a gentleman, well educated, cultured, with especially gracious manners,” Mr. Ormsbee flatly disagreed.\textsuperscript{171} In a letter to Secretary of State James G. Blaine dated February 29, 1892, Mr. Ormsbee scratched out the following condemnation of the chief justice:

This Chief Justice with his actual and astounding want of ‘learning in law and equity;’ and what is quite deplorable in his great want of tact or gumption in [his] exercise [of] his assumed guardianship and direction over the work of the Commission while it is going on; its usefulness is at an end and the self respect of at least one of its members will compel a vacancy in the latter at an early date.\textsuperscript{172}

In place of such an extreme outburst and threat, Mr. Ormsbee wrote, “I came here with the expectation that this Commission would be a success and I do not want to be disappointed in this.”\textsuperscript{173} Mr. Ormsbee outlined the fundamental problem between the commission and the chief justice as follows.

\textsuperscript{170} \textit{Procedures}, June 1891, Apia, Samoa, MS 35, Folder XII, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont; Claim Reports, 1892-1893, MS 35, Folders VIII-X & MS Size B, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
\textsuperscript{171} E. J. Ormsbee to J. G. Blaine, 29 February 1892, MS 35, Folder IV, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
\textsuperscript{172} Henry Clay Ide, “A Land Commissioner in Far Off Samoa,” p. 66.
\textsuperscript{173} E. J. Ormsbee to J. G. Blaine, 29 February 1892, MS 35, Folder IV, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
According to the commissioners, the problem was owing Chief Justice Cedercrantz’s “position here as a High Official [as] a mere extended courtesy and realizing that our [the Commissioners] wish at the same time […] is for] you to understand distinctly that we do not admit for one moment that the Powers who created your office, as they also created ours, were intended that you should have any controlling voice or right to inquire into the working of our [Commission].” In short, the commissioners questioned the very necessity and authority of Cedercrantz’s office. As Mr. Ormsbee explained to the State Department, the problem arose from the chief justice interpreting Articles III and IV of the General Act of Berlin to indicate that after the Land Commission had reviewed all of the leases and other paperwork of a claim, collected evidence and testimonials at hearings, and finally arrived at a unanimous decision, the chief justice would then conduct a new hearing and trial to confirm or deny the verdict of the Land Commission. Furthermore, the chief justice argued that only land disputed between foreigners and natives was under the jurisdiction of the Land Commission.

Mr. Ormsbee, as the head of the commissioners, was of the opinion, despite his hesitation to voice it, that the chief justice wanted full trials so as to “furnish several years of business for his [office] and carry many thousands of dollars [into] the pockets of [his] offices.” Indicative of his guilt, according to Mr. Ormsbee, was his release of a public announcement that defended his actions and derided the Land Commission. The announcement, circulated through the Samoa Times on February 27, 1892, proclaimed

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that “I, C. Cerdercrantz, chief justice of Samoa, hereby make known to all people whom it may concern that the supreme court of Samoa shall make final decision upon all claims to land in Samoa.”176 As a solution to the deadlock between the chief justice and the Land Commission, Mr. Ormsbee suggested to the State Department that the commission should have “of necessity” the “arbitrary right of construction and interpretation of the treaty [the General Act of Berlin] itself.”177 Mr. Ormsbee also suggested that, while in operation, all land claims in Samoa should fall under the jurisdiction of the Land Commission and not the chief justice. The American consul-general, Mr. Sewell, concurred with Mr. Ormsbee because “the Land Commission has commanded the respect and confidence of the community, and in its work has been by far the most harmonious and successful of the establishments here under the Berlin Act.”178 By September 1892, the chief justice had became so maligned by the consuls and commissioners that he was formally reprimanded by the Powers and instructed to desist in interrupting the

176 “Enclosure 1 in No. 171 — From the Samoan Times, Saturday, February 27, 1892” in “Mr. Sewell to Mr. Wharton, No. 171, March 2, 1892,” Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Message from the President of the United States in Response to Senate Resolution of January 29, 1895, transmitting a report from the Secretary of State, with copies of correspondence, touching Samoan affairs, 53rd Congress, 3rd Session, Executive Document No. 97, pp. 131-132.


178 “Mr. Sewell to Mr. Wharton, No. 171, March 2, 1892,” Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Message from the President of the United States in Response to Senate Resolution of January 29, 1895, transmitting a report from the Secretary of State, with copies of correspondence, touching Samoan affairs, 53rd Congress, 3rd Session, Executive Document No. 97, p. 131. Mr. Sewell reinforced this recommendation several days later with the testimony of Robert Louis Stevenson and a resolution from a public meeting of the municipality of Apia, over which the latter was chair. The resolution recommended that the General Act of Berlin be revised to allow the chief justice to approve all land claims unanimously decided by the Land Commission. “Mr. Sewell to Mr. Wharton, No. 173, March 2, 1892,” Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Message from the President of the United States in Response to Senate Resolution of January 29, 1895, transmitting a report from the Secretary of State, with copies of correspondence, touching Samoan affairs, 53rd Congress, 3rd Session, Executive Document No. 97, pp. 132-136.
functioning of the Land Commission, thereby ending that crisis. In fact, by December 1892, the Powers had begun negotiating Mr. Cedercrantz’s replacement by Mr. Ide.\textsuperscript{179}

On April 2, 1892, the second crisis of the Samoan Land Commission came to fruition with a letter from the Reverend E. A. Claxton, the native advocate, to Malietoa, King of Samoa. Reverend Claxton claimed that “the manifest disregard of native rights hitherto shown by the Commissioners” in violation of the General Act of Berlin forced him to register five complaints against them.\textsuperscript{180} First, he claimed, the commissioners had not publicly notified claimants regarding the trial of their claims, but they had publicly announced their judgment, thereby superseding the opinion of the chief justice. Second, the native advocate had been denied access to the written evidence collected by the Land Commission. Third, the burden of proof had been placed upon the native objector, rather than on the foreign claimant. Fourth, the commission blatantly lied in receiving documents related to case No. 3058. Fifth, “a Commissioner [had] repeatedly advised counsel for claimants to ‘leave well alone’ and desist from putting further questions to a witness, and [had] repeatedly interfered with legitimate cross-examination by the Native Advocate of claimant’s witnesses.”\textsuperscript{181} Furthermore, the commissioners had taken advantage of the “inexact manner of Samoan speech and the scanty knowledge of English

\textsuperscript{179} Ryden fully explores the consular correspondence between the State Department and Samoa regarding the failure of Mr. Cedercrantz and the negotiations surrounding his replacement by Mr. Ide. Ryden, pp. 524-542.

\textsuperscript{180} E. A. Claxton to His Majesty Malietoa, 2 April 1892, MSC 35, Folder IV, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.

\textsuperscript{181} \textit{Ibid.}
on the part of the half caste interpreter.” Robert Louis Stevenson best summarized the problem:

The gentleman appointed Natives’ Advocate shared the chief justice’s opinion, was his close intimate, advised with him almost daily, and drifted at last into an attitude of opposition to his colleagues. He suffered himself besides (being a layman in law) to embrace the interests of his clients with something of the warmth of a partisan [sic.]. […] Having lost some cases […] a sudden cry of colour prejudice went up; and Samoans were heard to assure each other that it was useless to appear before the Land Commission, which was sworn to support the whites.

In a letter to Secretary Blaine, Mr. Ormsbee dryly noted on March 24, 1892, that although the strained relations between the commission and the native advocate predated his arrival in Samoa, he had taken it upon himself to resolve the problem.

For most of the summer, though, the point was moot, as Reverend Claxton had departed for Europe on matters related to the London Missionary Society. Meanwhile, Mr. Ormsbee happily reported, E. W. Gurr, Reverend Claxton’s assistant, was “performing his duty [as native advocate] to the satisfaction of the Commission—and really does what he can to ‘assist’ the Commission instead of begin capacious and obtrusive.” However, Reverend Claxton returned in early October and proceeded to reiterate his complaints. Two days later, the Land Commissioners formally submitted

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182 Ibid.
183 Mr. Stevenson’s account of Samoa remains one of the few published accounts of the Samoan Land Commission during the period in question and as such remains an invaluable resource, albeit one seemingly overlooked by historians. As a leader of the foreign community residing in Samoa, Mr. Stevenson orchestrated a petition to the Three Powers requesting a revision to the Berlin Agreement and outlining those revisions therein. As shall be discussed in the following chapter, Mr. Ormsbee had very definite opinions of Mr. Stevenson. Robert Louis Stevenson, A Footnote to History: Eight Years of Trouble in Samoa (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1900), pp. 317-318.
their protest to King Malietoa, requesting that they “not be further inflicted with the presence of Mr. Claxton in the office of Native Advocate, and that [their] work […] not be embarrassed and hindered by his inefficient services.”186 Their protest was delivered in conjunction with a missive from John W. Foster, acting US secretary of state, which questioned Reverend Claxton’s “adaptability […] to the duties of his office.”187 On October 4 and 5, closure was rendered with a decree from His Majesty Malietoa that Reverend Claxton would not resume his post as native advocate and that Mr. Gurr would continue in that office.188 The situation was perhaps best captured by Mr. Stevenson, who commented that to accuse the Land Commissioners of racial partiality in their decisions was “to keep one eye shut and have the other bandaged.”189 Despite Mr. Stevenson’s praise that the commission had a record “unrivalled among international commissions,” Mr. Ormsbee’s opinion of his colleagues was not entirely positive.190

Never one to soften his opinions, on July 19, Mr. Ormsbee provided William F. Wharton, the assistant secretary of state, a summative opinion of his colleagues:

[I am] not suitably satisfied with the progress of the work since June 1st — according to my ideas there are too many holidays but it is insisted by my associates (the English Commissioner in particular) that for climatic reasons it will not do to work as constantly as argued by me — they (my associates) may be right, but I do not think so: but try to get along without serious friction — without getting into particulars: the climate is used to

186 E. J. Ormsbee, B. Haggard, T. Greiner to His Majesty Malietoa, 3 October 1892, MSC 35, Folder VI, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
187 John W. Foster to His Majesty Malietoa, 28 September 1892, MSC 35, Folder V, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
188 Thomas Meaben, Secretary to H.M. Malietoa, to Members of the Samoan Land Commission, 4 October 1892; Thomas Meaben to E. W. Gurr, 5 October 1892, MSC 35, Folder VI, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
190 Ibid., p. 316.
Mr. Ormsbee expressed to Mr. Wharton his primary concern and frustration with the Samoan Land Commission: no one seemed to want to work on it, or at the very least, the other commissioners failed to conform to his work ethic.

For some, Mr. Ormsbee provided an excuse. The first German commissioner, Carl Eggert, was repeatedly noted as delaying the work of the commission with his illness during the winter and spring of 1892. Mr. Ormsbee reported to the secretary of state in February that the “German Commissioner [had] been in poor health to such an extent that [they had] been able to hold only some half (1/2) day sessions.” But even after the German Commissioner had been replaced by a healthier compatriot, Mr. Ormsbee often complained of his colleagues’ work ethic or lack thereof. Mr. Haggard, particularly, was noted as often in need of holidays and vacations. As demonstrated above, by June Mr. Ormsbee was quite tired of hearing these meteorologically based excuses for not working, regardless of contemporary medical opinion.

The commissioners’ work ethics were compounded by their other flaws. In his letter of resignation to Mr. Partridge, Mr. Ormsbee provided his most detailed professional evaluation of his compatriots. Regarding Mr. Haggard, he noted that the British commissioner was “many times in full accord and sometimes quite determined in applying Section 11, but then he [was] uneven; the truth [was] that while he [was] quite
capable and [meant] to do just and right he [was] frequently not himself.”  

Furthermore, the erstwhile Briton was often the recipient of advance, private knowledge concerning cases through “his particular or special make up and his carousing habits and practices.” Mr. Haggard’s frequent and informative “nips and tips” thoroughly

194 E. J. Ormsbee to F. L. Partridge, 5 December 1892, MSC 35, Folder IV, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont. Underlining original to text.

195 Ibid.
annoyed Mr. Ormsbee.\textsuperscript{196} Although Mr. Ormsbee appeared to have suggested that Mr. Haggard was eccentric or suffering from some sort of psychological neurosis, he was more offended by his exuberant, and often errant, socializing and the subsequent private information he garnered. In regards to Mr. Greiner, the German commissioner, Mr. Ormsbee noted that he was not “given to searching for inherent vice,” but was a extension of the large German mercantile interests in Samoa.\textsuperscript{197} To the American commissioner, Mr. Ormsbee felt, fell the duty of preserving “any interest or watchfulness on behalf of the Natives.”\textsuperscript{198} In short, according to Mr. Ormsbee, the British commissioner was mildly unhinged, the German commissioner was a representative of the German plantations, and the American commissioner was the defender of the natives.

For thirteen months, Mr. Ormsbee worked with the international members of the Samoan Land Commission. Because of the inherent power-sharing problems of the 1889 General Act of Berlin, the commission was often deadlocked, relying upon direction and instructions from distracted home governments many thousands of miles away with whom they had contact approximately every six weeks. Despite Mr. Stevenson’s praise for the commission, by January 1893, Mr. Ormsbee would turn to the patronage system for release from his tropical servitude.

\textbf{The Disconsolate Mr. Ormsbee and the State Department, 1891-1893}

The sun set amidst tropical splendor as Mr. Ormsbee watched from his second floor veranda with sad resignation as the S.S. \textit{Mariposa} left Apia for Honolulu and San

\textsuperscript{196} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{197} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{198} \textit{Ibid.}
Francisco without him. For the previous two months, he had conducted a campaign with various Washington officials to be relieved from his duties in Samoa in hope of an early reunion with Mrs. Ormsbee in Vermont. Apparently no one had heeded his pleas. Two hours after the steamer had left, while its smoke would still have been visible in the rapidly darkening sky, Mr. Blacklock ran up the steps to Mr. Ormsbee and handed him a telegraph. The telegraph, dated January 25, 1893, had been sent by the acting secretary of state via the American consulate in Auckland with instructions to “notify Apia Ormsbee may return February Steamer.”\textsuperscript{199} Delivered the fastest way possible, the telegram had arrived, as Mr. Ormsbee dryly noted on its reverse, “two hours after the steamer left.”\textsuperscript{200} After saying goodnight to Mr. Blacklock, Mr. Ormsbee wrote to his wife that he would be coming home in March.\textsuperscript{201}

As the above indicates, Mr. Ormsbee’s thirteen-month long-distance relationship with the State Department was far from perfect. By the same letter in which he informed his wife of his impending return home he confided, “Mentally, I am sour, cross, and disgusted; and have to simply endure it.”\textsuperscript{202} The Land Commission had proved a frustrating and tiring ordeal for Mr. Ormsbee, but so too had the erstwhile State Department. Mr. Ormsbee’s relationship with the State Department reveals an organization struggling to understand and operate a global foreign policy with minimal personnel and logistical support.

\textsuperscript{200} Ibid., reverse in Mr. Ormsbee’s handwriting.
\textsuperscript{202} Ibid.
Mr. Ormsbee’s relationship with the State Department began in late September 1891 with his official appointment to the Samoan Land Commission. The instructions he was given were vague. Mr. Ormsbee was to meet with Mr. Ide to be briefed in the duties, procedures, and expectations of the Samoan Land Commission, as well as to “depart for [his] post at the earliest practicable moment.” Secretary Blaine further indicated that the “earliest practicable moment” would be the sailing of the very next steamer from San Francisco. With that, and the information already discussed, the State Department gave Mr. Ormsbee $1,000 and sent him to Samoa. Mr. Ormsbee had requested that particular sum after Frank Partridge had forwarded him a copy of Mr. Ide’s travelling expenses approved by the department. In replying to Mr. Ormsbee’s monetary request, Mr. Partridge noted, “I don’t need to tell you, Governor, that I am ready and anxious to do anything I can for you. There is very little business in the Department relative to the Land Commission but such as there is comes into my hands.” Although Mr. Partridge’s assurance that he would serve as Mr. Ormsbee’s point of contact within the State Department might seem a mere bureaucratic nicety, their relationship was far more complex and reflective of the contemporary patronage system.

Frank Charles Partridge was twenty-seven years younger then Mr. Ormsbee. The Civil War would not have even been a conscious memory for Mr. Partridge. He had

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204 Ibid.
206 Frank Partridge to E. J. Ormsbee, 9 November 1891, MSC 188, Folder XXI, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
attended Amherst College and graduated from Columbia University Law School in 1884. Having graduated from law school, Mr. Partridge returned to Rutland, Vermont, where he intended to practice his vocation. Two years after returning to Vermont, though, he moved to Proctor and became a directing manager of Mr. Proctor’s Vermont Marble Company. When Mr. Proctor was appointed secretary of war in 1889, Mr. Partridge was engaged as his private secretary. In 1890, Mr. Partridge was appointed to the position of solicitor for the Department of State, most likely in recognition of his strong interest in international law. This position was technically entitled “Examiner of Claims,” which was the senior position in the Law Bureau and was—theoretically—under the jurisdiction of the Justice Department. As the solicitor, Mr. Partridge was charged with the examination of all legal questions posted by the secretary or assistant secretaries of state. Given Secretary of State Blaine’s failing health and impending resignation, the department’s attention and resources had been directed elsewhere by crises with Great Britain over the Bering Sea seal fisheries and Chile vis-à-vis the USS Baltimore affair. Mr. Partridge’s assignment to monitor Mr. Ormsbee’s correspondence was, therefore, not surprising. Although the Department may have assigned Mr. Partridge to Samoan affairs because of the matter’s international legal ramifications, his close personal relationship with Mr. Ormsbee played an integral role in determining his relationship with the State Department and the nature of their correspondence.  

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Figure 11: Steamship Pamphlet and Map of Pacific

Mr. Ormsbee wrote upon the above pamphlet, “Copy Ship’s Log showing no. of miles each day between San Francisco and Apia, Samoa, Dec. 1891.” The pamphlet demonstrates how conscious Mr. Ormsbee would have been of his isolation from the United States and of the difficulties in communicating with the State Department. Below is an enlargement of the map and mileage chart.

*Courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society*
The time lag on their correspondence proves indicative of the minimal logistical support with which the State Department was operating. Approximately every three weeks, Mr. Ormsbee could either receive instructions from or send reports to the State Department and Mr. Partridge. For Mr. Ormsbee to send a report, he would have to await the arrival of the San Francisco-bound *SS Mariposa* or *Alameda*, the trans-Pacific vessels of the Oceanic Steamship Company. One of these vessels would leave Sydney toward the end of each month and would arrive in Apia approximately ten to twelve days later. From Apia, the mail would be another twelve to thirteen days to Honolulu and then San Francisco. From San Francisco, mail was shipped via the transcontinental railway to New York and Washington, DC, which took another three to four days. Twenty-nine to thirty days after their departure from Samoa, Mr. Ormsbee’s report would be available to the State Department; however, unless the report was read immediately and responded to with equal urgency, it would miss the mail to Samoa. The turn-around time was approximately three to four days, depending on the timeliness of the trans-Atlantic mail packet from London; the governments of New Zealand, Great Britain, and the United States subsidized the entire process as part of the global, colonial mail network. Three weeks later, if the State Department sent an immediate reply and if no mechanical or meteorological delays occurred, Mr. Ormsbee could expect a reply. Given the department’s shortage of personnel, especially with the secretary of state’s resignation, such delays were routine.

When Mr. Ormsbee arrived in Samoa on December 27, 1891, he sent a notice to that effect to Mr. Partridge on January 3, 1892. Mr. Partridge received and wrote a
response between January 30 and February 2, 1892; on February 4, 1892, the Samoan mails left Washington. Mr. Ormsbee received that letter on March 19. For Mr. Ormsbee to report his presence in Samoa to the Department of State and for the latter to acknowledge that presence took eleven weeks or seventy-seven days.\textsuperscript{209} The result of such a delay was that, by the time he had received the State Department’s reply to his first report, he had already submitted two others. A chronological examination of Mr. Ormsbee’s correspondence with the State Department—and more importantly with Mr. Partridge—demonstrates that the American land commissioner in Samoa could only rely upon the State Department for censure; to wait for guidance from the State Department would have caused untenable delays for the Land Commission.

As noted above, Mr. Ormsbee and Mr. Partridge first exchanged missives establishing that Mr. Partridge was aware of his arrival in Samoa. The February 2 correspondence from Mr. Partridge also established the personal relationship through which the two gentlemen were working. Mr. Partridge noted that he had “received your [Mr. Ormsbee’s] letter of Jan. 3d with much pleasure. Senator Proctor and his family also enjoyed this message from yourself and Mrs. Ormsbee. We shall all of us be glad to hear from you often.”\textsuperscript{210} Furthermore, Mr. Partridge noted that “business in Proctor [was] very good. The Sheldon deal [had] been consummated and our people [had] taken possession

\textsuperscript{209} Frank Partridge to E. J. Ormsbee, 2 February 1892, MSC 188, Folder XXI; William T. Wharton to E. J. Ormsbee, 30 January 1892; James G. Blaine to E. J. Ormsbee, 4 February 1892; E. J. Ormsbee to James G. Blaine, 24 March 1892, MSC 35, Folder IV, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.

\textsuperscript{210} Frank Partridge to E. J. Ormsbee, 2 February 1892, MSC 188, Folder XXI, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
of that property.”211 Here Mr. Ormsbee and Mr. Partridge wrote as servants of the State Department, as political and professional associates from Vermont, and as close friends with a common social network.

The following month, though, Mr. Ormsbee wrote to the department directly, rather than his close friend, Mr. Partridge. Perhaps owing to the gravity of the situation, Mr. Ormsbee addressed the report to Secretary of State James G. Blaine. For his “perusal and consideration,” Mr. Ormsbee forwarded a “Memorandum by the Samoan Land Commissioners,” Mr. Cerdercrantz’s public denunciation of the Land Commission published in the Samoa Times, and letters exchanged between the Land Commission and His Majesty Malietoa regarding the crisis of the chief justice. Within his report, Mr. Ormsbee outlined the problem of the chief justice, his interpretation of that problem, and a personal statement to the effect that, unless the problem was redressed by the Treaty Powers, the Land Commission’s “usefulness [was] at an end and the self respect of at least one of its members [would] compel a vacancy in the latter at an early date.”212 To such thinly veiled threats, Mr. Partridge, replying for the State Department, noted that the department was considering the matter and that “the thing [was] for the Commission to go ahead as it judges best and let the future take care of itself.”213 The matter, though, was far from resolved.

211 Frank Partridge to E. J. Ormsbee, 2 February 1892 (II), MSC 188, Folder XXI, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
On March 19, Mr. Ormsbee responded to the State Department’s February 4 inquiry as to why the commission was taking so long. His explanation reiterated the problems with the chief justice, which he also noted had not been a problem since Mr. Cerdercrantz’s “retirement” to the Fiji Islands. Mr. Ormsbee also reported the German commissioner’s return to Europe for health reasons, the difficulties with the native advocate, and the need to organize claim materials before progressing to hearings. The general tone of Mr. Ormsbee’s report to the department was—in marked contrast of what was to come—cordially deferential.

Throughout April and May, Mr. Ormsbee became increasingly frustrated with the department. Secretary of State Blaine’s communiqué to Mr. Ormsbee for April 6 expressed irritation that the department had learned of the crisis with the chief justice through the British minister in Washington. In a mollifying tone, though, Secretary Blaine noted that the American commissioner’s decision was “justified” and that he would “be so instructed.” Perhaps to further emphasize the Secretary’s irritation of being first notified through the British Foreign Office, Mr. Wharton forwarded to Mr. Ormsbee the British conclusions regarding the chief justice. Mr. Partridge’s response to the secretary’s displeasure and Mr. Ormsbee’s February 29 report provide a telling insight into the Department of State’s difficulty in controlling a global network of agents with minimal personnel and logistical support.

On the morning of April 21, the day the mail closed for Samoa, Mr. Partridge wrote to Mr. Ormsbee to explain what had been going on in the department and to offer him counsel as to the further working of the Land Commission. With “reference to the differences with the Chief Justice,” Mr. Partridge noted,

Your [Mr. Ormsbee’s] official communication [of February 29] was duly received. It went to Mr. Wharton and he has had it in his possession since then. I spoke with him about it at once upon receipt of your letter and he told me that he should want me to look the matter over and advise him but he wanted to examine it himself first. As I saw it was likely to be delayed I had a type-written copy made of your letter and I gave him that so that he might take it into consideration in connection with the official communication. Some week or ten days ago he wrote to me that he thought the Commission was right. I have just been talking with him this morning and I find that he has not prepared any reply or in fact decided upon any action and I expect that this mail will not take you any information from the Department on the subject. I am sorry for this as there was no reason why the matter should not have been considered and if anything was to be done have been done at once. […] I know this will not be just the news which you would like to receive but it is what is always likely to happen in the routine of official business.217

The packet of material Mr. Ormsbee had sent appraising the department of the crisis with the chief justice languished on the assistant secretary’s desk, awaiting consideration for so long that Mr. Ormsbee could not hope to receive instructions or guidance until the following month. Problems Mr. Ormsbee reported in February would not receive answers until either June or July. Such delay had, of course, not been the intention of Mr. Wharton, but as Mr. Partridge explained, he had been “so busy seeing callers that he [had] very little time for the examination” of Mr. Ormsbee’s problem.218 Really the only oddity that appeared to Mr. Partridge was Mr. Wharton’s insistence on keeping Mr.

218 Ibid.
Ormsbee’s report on the matter. Mr. Partridge’s description of Mr. Wharton as buried by callers and unable to respond to Mr. Ormsbee further demonstrated the personnel shortages within the State Department.

For instruction on the matter, Mr. Partridge offered “only one suggestion […,] that you [Mr. Ormsbee] continue to use your own good sense just as you have been doing and I [Mr. Partridge] am confident that the Department will support you.” Mr. Partridge emphasized that he took every opportunity he could to reiterate to the Secretary of State and other members of the department that they could “rely implicitly on [Mr. Ormsbee’s] good sense and judgment; that [he] would not chase a rainbow but was in the habit of dealing with matter in a practical way.” Owing to the fact that Mr. Ormsbee was “so far away and the course of events so changing during the time required for an interchange of letters,” which made it “quite impossible to direct much from” Washington, Mr. Partridge advised that “so long […] as you [Mr. Ormsbee] get not contrary instructions there is nothing for you to do but to do as you think best.” In short, Mr. Ormsbee could expect little but delay from the Department of State. He was to continue as best he could or until he was reprimanded from Washington. Mr. Partridge closed his letter with thanks from him and Senator Proctor for the photographs of Samoa, kind regards and remembrances from his mother, and his own best wishes for Mrs. Ormsbee, thereby emphasizing the intermingling of Mr. Partridge’s identity as State Department contact and close friend. Such personal friendships and social networks

219 Ibid.
220 Ibid.
221 Ibid.
allowed for the better management of the State Department, especially in the
dissemination of information. Mr. Ormsbee and Mr. Partridge’s personal encouragements
and assessments of the situations in Samoa and in Washington allowed them to continue
working through friendly inferences rather than departmental directives.

From May until August, then, Mr. Ormsbee’s relationship with the State
Department became a series of explanations for the slow progress of the commission and
requests for clarification. In May, Mr. Ormsbee requested clarification regarding the
Berlin Treaty and the chief justice issue. He also noted, somewhat sarcastically, that “it is
gratifying to be assured that the action of the Commission has the approval of the
Department.” On May 25, Mr. Ormsbee included in his report to the department a note
that he was “not pleased to have to use such inferior paper for my correspondence with
the Department […]. It has occurred to me that the Department might be willing to send
me an assortment of stationery for my use — letter paper and strong envelopes — such
paper as I have seen at the consulate here called I believe ‘dispatch paper’ would be very
acceptable — unruled paper not desired.” Perhaps these were just the grumblings of an
increasingly disconsolate citizen-diplomat working in the far reaches of the Pacific. But
they demonstrate an increasing belief by Mr. Ormsbee that his mission was not of
paramount importance or even routine interest to the State Department.

Mr. Partridge’s note of May 26 emphasized his own continued interest in Mr.
Ormsbee’s affairs. He noted, “I will take time by the forelock and write you considerably

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222 E. J. Ormsbee to William J. Wharton, 25 May 1892, MSC 35, Folder VI, Library of the
Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
223 E. J. Ormsbee to William F. Wharton, 25 May 1892 (II), MSC 35, Folder IV, Library of the
Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
in advance of the departure of the Samoan mail. I have not been negligent of the controversy between the Chief Justice and your Commission and I shall not be.”  

However, Mr. Partridge also noted that the Department of State was no closer on making a decision about the Chief Justice and the commissioners’ complaints against him. His instructions in the May 26 letter to “go ahead with the work of the Commission in your [Mr. Ormsbee’s] own way” were upheld in the two following communiqués from Mr. Partridge. Part of the Department’s problem in coming to a decision on the matter was explained in Mr. Partridge’s next letter to Mr. Ormsbee, dated June 13, in which he noted that there was “much of interest here in the Department in a general way but nothing new with reference to your matter.” Mr. Partridge was referring to Secretary Blaine’s resignation and the confusion over who was to succeed him. In his June 16 communiqué, Mr. Partridge commented that he doubted whether the June mail would bring him “anything from the Department relative to the dispute between the Chief Justice and the Commission.” However, he further noted that Mr. Ormsbee had nothing to fear, for sentiment within the State Department and among the Treaty Powers was that Mr. Cerdercrantz had no business interfering with the progress of the commission. Mr. Partridge sought to pacify Mr. Ormsbee and promised to arrange “an assortment of paper, envelopes, etc., be sent” to him. Furthermore, he could see “no reason why you [Mr.

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224 Frank Partridge to E. J. Ormsbee, 26 May 1892, MSC 188, Folder XXIII, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
225 Ibid.
227 Frank Partridge to E. J. Ormsbee, 16 June 1892, MSC 188, Folder XXIV, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
228 Ibid.
Ormsbee] should not be supplied by the Department in this respect as fully as you desire.”\footnote{Ibid.} Perhaps—as Mr. Ormsbee continued writing his communiqués upon the same paper—Mr. Partridge forgot this promise amongst his many other duties.

Mr. Partridge’s June 16 letter was demonstrative of the conflict between his close friendship with Mr. Ormsbee and his position within the State Department. He concluded that letter with:

I am glad that you and Mrs. Ormsbee are both well and send you both my kindest regards. Senator and Mrs. Proctor have just come back from Vermont. […] I have written you in my letters quite freely regarding the question of the misunderstanding between the Commission and the Chief Justice and also regarding other matters pending before the Department of interest to you. I like to give you such information as will be helpful and relieve your anxiety but I must ask you to treat it all as strictly confidential. I am sure that that course would suggest itself to you anyway but you will bear with me for presenting the necessity of it upon you.\footnote{Ibid.}

Tips about official policy and department gossip were fine amongst friends, but amongst State Department officials tips warranted caution, especially to the young and politically ambitious Mr. Partridge.

For his part, Mr. Ormsbee had very little to report in June, merely noting that the commission was “progressing with reasonable dispatch and without interruption from any source and without friction.”\footnote{E. J. Ormsbee to James G. Blaine, 25 June 1892, MSC 35, Folder V, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.} In July, he commented that the work had slowed because of the large claims of the French Catholic Mission and the meteorological complaints of his companions.\footnote{E. J. Ormsbee to William F. Wharton, 19 July 1892, MSC 35, Folder V, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.} Mr. Ormsbee’s report of August 8 provided his response to the
department’s inquiries regarding the native advocate. He recommended that the Reverend Claxton not be allowed to resume his duties in that position and that Mr. Gurr be allowed to remain as his permanent replacement.\textsuperscript{233} In September, John W. Foster, the acting secretary of state, confirmed Mr. Ormsbee’s opinion and complimented him on his handling of that particular crisis.\textsuperscript{234} Despite the seemingly cordial relations between Mr. Ormsbee and the State Department by September, his correspondence with Mr. Partridge reveals mounting frustrations and a strong desire to return home.

In July, Mr. Partridge noted that “nothing [had] been consummated with respect to the differences between the Commission and Chief Justice,” but that he and Acting Secretary of State Foster were to discuss the matter before he went on vacation.\textsuperscript{235} However, in August, he still reported the matter undecided. He cautioned that “governments move slowly” and that Acting Secretary Foster hoped to resolve the matter in September.\textsuperscript{236} By September, then, Mr. Ormsbee’s correspondence with the State Department became a series of commission progress reports and queries for clarification. His correspondence from the State Department became limited to the acknowledgement of his letters and excuses as to why the department had yet to act upon any of the power crisis. Mr. Partridge, though, proved to have an increasingly difficult time balancing his official identity with the State Department and his personal identity as a close friend of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[235] Frank Partridge to E. J. Ormsbee, 16 July 1892, MSC 188, Folder XXIV, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
\item[236] Frank Partridge to E. J. Ormsbee, 12 August, 1892, MSC 188, Folder XXV, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
\end{footnotes}
Mr. Ormsbee. With Mr. Ormsbee’s consideration of and eventual pleas for an honorable resignation from his position, Mr. Partridge’s identities became even more unbalanced.

The first reference to Mr. Ormsbee’s desire to return home appeared in Mr. Partridge’s letter of October 7, in which the latter expressed sympathy as well as surprise. Mr. Partridge was understanding, but he wished to make clear the full patronage ramifications of Mr. Ormsbee prematurely leaving the commission:

I note all that you say about the desire to get home and your unwillingness to be held in Samoa indefinitely if the work is not to close next summer. I appreciate your position fully and [do] not blame you for feeling so. I do hope, however, that you will see your way clear to fill out the balance of the time stipulated for in the treaty whatever time that may be held to be. Gov. Proctor, as you know, rather begged the privilege to name the Commissioner and so Vermont in some sense is responsible for the place. All that I have been able to learn from independent sources makes me believe that the Land Commission is the one successful instrument created by the treaty and that you and Mr. Ide have been the successful parts of the Commission. In that way, therefore, Vermont has well sustained herself. […] If you can stay there for the time contemplated in the Berlin Act you will certainly have done all that can be fairly expected.  

Mr. Partridge, therefore, began with sympathy, progressed to patriotic duty to Vermont and patronage loyalty to Senator Proctor, and concluded with encouragement to finish out the allotted time of the commission. He also commented that he did not consider the extension of the commission beyond the June 1893 deadline as a likely event.

Although Mr. Partridge’s letter of November 3 did not mention Mr. Ormsbee’s proposed resignation, his December 2 again reiterated his October manifesto. He noted that if Mr. Ormsbee stayed “until next spring,” he would have “done all that anybody
could ask” him to do, especially as both Senator Proctor and Acting Secretary Foster understood his situation vis-à-vis his wife who had left for Vermont. Furthermore, Mr. Partridge counseled him to send in his resignation whenever he thought best. Not waiting for Mr. Partridge’s letter, Mr. Ormsbee forwarded his resignation to him on December 5. His cover letter to Mr. Partridge instructed him to present his resignation to the president at the earliest time he deemed best. He also pointedly noted at the top of his cover letter, “This is not to go out of your hands [...]—there are at least 100 good reasons for this.” Mr. Ormsbee suggested, that as Mr. Haggard, the British commissioner, wished to take a holiday in the first half of the following year, that he might leave Samoa in February, thereby allowing Mr. Haggard a vacation and Mr. Ormsbee’s replacement time to travel to Samoa without seriously interrupting the commission’s work. Mr. Ormsbee also suggested that his departure from Samoa in February be considered a vacation, a distinction that would allow the outgoing President Harrison to leave the matter of Mr. Ormsbee’s successor to President-elect Cleveland. Mr. Ormsbee stressed that these were just suggestions and that he would “leave the whole matter in [Mr. Partridge’s] hands knowing that [he would] not fail to do as [Mr. Ormsbee] would have [done] if [he] was present.”

Mr. Ormsbee’s actual letter of resignation to President Harrison gave as his reasons for departing the need to extend the Land Commission’s deadline by at least four years and his inability to remain so long removed from pressing professional and

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239 Frank Partridge to E. J. Ormsbee, 2 December 1892, MSC 188, Folder XXVI, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
241 Ibid.
financial obligations in Vermont. Regarding the State Department, Mr. Ormsbee noted that he had “frequent occasion to call upon the Department […] and he] received naught but prompt, considerate, and kindly assistance and advice for all of which [he was] very grateful.” Finally, his resignation closed with a description of what qualifications his replacement should have—a description that followed Mr. Ide’s almost verbatim. Mr. Ormsbee’s cover letter and resignation mirrored his general relationship with the State Department in its combination of both the personal and the professional. His resignation was to be delivered at the discretion of a personal contact, while the cover letter to that contact combined Mr. Ormsbee’s professional reasoning for his resignation and his recommendations toward the Land Commission and his future replacement, as well as gossip about Vermont and felicitations for Mr. Partridge and Senator Proctor.

The official State Department reaction and Mr. Partridge’s personal reaction to Mr. Ormsbee’s resignation were identical. In both letters, Mr. Ormsbee was allowed to return at the expiration of the commission’s deadline on June 1, 1893. However, if a member of the commission were to go on vacation or the work of the commission was in some other way to be discontinued beyond Mr. Ormsbee’s control, he could take a sixty-day leave of absence exclusive of travel time to the United States. Mr. Partridge may well have written both missives with that from the State Department having just been signed by the acting secretary of state. They remain, though, demonstrative of the

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243 John W. Foster to E. J. Ormsbee, 30 December 1892, MSC 35, Folder VII; Frank Partridge to E. J. Ormsbee, 30 December 1892 (I), MSC 188, Folder XXVII, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
intermingling of professional and personal relationships in the function of the State Department during the late nineteenth century.

**Conclusion: Evaluating the Diplomatic Mr. Ormsbee**

Was Mr. Ormsbee’s tenure on the Samoan Land Commission a failure? Was his appointment by Mr. Proctor an error in judgment, a failure of the patronage system? As discussed above, the sheer number of claims cleared by the commission during Mr. Ormsbee’s chairmanship would seem to indicate at least a modicum of success. Mr. Ormsbee’s resolution of two crises, that with the chief justice and that with the native advocate, demonstrated his diplomatic prowess, while his correspondence with the State Department proved he was not entirely without patience. Regardless, then, of Mr. Stevenson’s assessment of the Land Commission as a success unrivaled in the history of international governance, Mr. Ormsbee’s diplomatic role in Samoa is more valuable for what it demonstrates.

Mr. Ormsbee’s frustration with the chief justice and the Samoan Land Commission was demonstrative of a clash of opinions and cultures. For Mr. Ormsbee, politics were the ordered affairs of gentlemen. His experiences in Vermont would have convinced him of that. In Samoa, though, Mr. Ormsbee encountered differing interpretations of what was politically permissible. The chief justice’s public announcement defaming the Land Commission was as horrifying to Mr. Ormsbee as Mr. Stevenson’s daughter entertaining barefoot and publicly smoking. The tardiness of the British commissioner and the business ties of the German commissioner were as reprehensible for Mr. Ormsbee as the clothing of the natives, if not more so. His
frustration with the Land Commission represented the clash of two differing perceptions of politics.

An examination of Mr. Ormsbee’s correspondence with the State Department—and more specifically, with Mr. Partridge—demonstrates not only the minimal personnel and logistical support within the department, but also the important function of the intermingling of the personal and professional. Their correspondence demonstrates how such intermingling served to ameliorate the problems of minimal personnel and logistical support within the State Department. Without such overlapping relationships, Mr. Ormsbee, representing the United States in Samoa, and Mr. Partridge, acting for the State Department, would not have been able to make the inferences necessary to continue functioning in the absence of a faster means of communication. Furthermore, their correspondence demonstrates the implementation of the Berlin Act of 1889. The policies of this were reinterpreted through and often clashed with Mr. Ormsbee’s worldview, tinted as it was by his life as a provincial grand bourgeoisie and his experience with the Vermont Republican Party. Within the intermingling of the personal and the professional, within the individual and the international, therefore, lay Mr. Ormsbee’s frustration and his eventual resignation.
Conclusion: The Importance of a Footnote
Figure 12: Two Views of Mr. Ormsbee's Study in Brandon, Vermont, 1904

Courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society
Mr. Ormsbee did not simply leave Samoa behind. Upon returning to Vermont, he remained informed of Samoan events through prolific correspondence with his former colleagues. Mrs. Ormsbee remained involved by giving extensive speaking tours about Samoa. Their study in Brandon was also bedecked with many of the curios they had brought back from the Pacific, including a large ceremonial kava bowl, a grass skirt, and a woven sleeping mat. In 1894, when Robert Louis Stevenson died, the Ormsbees collected and saved numerous eulogies and even composed their own tribute to the famed author and tropical host. Perhaps best exemplifying Mr. Ormsbee’s connection with Samoa after he left was a letter he received in the spring of 1899 from Mr. Blacklock, who had been the first to greet the Ormsbees upon their arrival in Samoa.

On April 19, 1899, seven years after Mr. Ormsbee had left, Mr. Blacklock, the then American consul general at Apia, wrote him of the “lively times” in that distant archipelago. Mr. Blacklock had periodically written to Mr. Ormsbee after his return to Vermont about Samoan affairs, while various members of the island society, especially the female missionaries, corresponded with Mrs. Ormsbee. What made the communiqué of April 19 more then just another gossip filled missive was a short, post-scripted plea on the last page, which read, “The report may interest you and Mrs. Ormsbee. I do not want the papers to get hold of it, but you may have friends who can help us and in this way your are at liberty […], so long as it does not get into print. We are having lively times I tell you.” Throughout the letter, Mr. Blacklock emphasized the need for and benefit of

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244 William Blacklock to E. J. Ormsbee, 19 April 1899, MSC 188, Folder XXXV, Library of the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vermont.
245 Ibid.
the United States annexing the islands with the apparent hope that Mr. Ormsbee might persuade his governmental friends such as Senator Proctor to annex the islands. Many years after leaving the archipelago, Mr. Ormsbee once again found himself enmeshed in the island’s affairs.

Within the report, Mr. Blacklock strongly supported the American annexation of the islands in order to prevent further disorder and threats to private property. Specifically, Mr. Blacklock reported that the tripartite government established by the 1889 Treaty of Berlin had collapsed and that the islands were in danger of descending into civil war. He recommended that a colonial power unilaterally intervene to establish order, and he could not “think of […] more than three foreigners in all Samoa who are not agreed that annexation by either of the powers interested [was] the only definite settlement of the everlasting Samoan trouble.” Mr. Blacklock cautioned against Great Britain and the United States being “bamboozled with [more] diplomacy made in Germany,” and recommended that they no longer “fall into pits dug for them by the wily Teuton.” For the safety of British and American property, then, Mr. Blacklock argued that either of those two powers should annex the group. Furthermore, he cautioned against trusting any German assertions of friendship and goodwill, for “Brutus killed Caesar with just such love.” No native or “triptite government in Samoa [could] ever be a success and […] the only absolute settlement of the question [was] annexation by one or another of the Treaty Powers, which one [was] a matter for them to decide, but

annexation of some sort we must have.” In November 1899, Mr. Blacklock’s plea was answered with the Second Treaty of Berlin, which annexed Western Samoa to Germany and Eastern Samoa to the United States, while Great Britain’s claim to Tonga was secured. If Mr. Ormsbee forwarded Mr. Blacklock’s plea to Senator Proctor, who was part of the imperialist movement to annex Hawaii, the Philippines, and Guam, the record has been lost. However, given his close relationship with the senator, it is possible to speculate that he might have forwarded Mr. Blacklock’s missive.

The letter from Mr. Blacklock and the photographs of the Ormsbees’ study demonstrate more than their continued interest in Samoa. Most obviously, the correspondence with Mr. Blacklock demonstrates the patronage system conceptualized as a political network based upon common historical, economic, and social experiences wherein qualified individuals were offered governmental positions. Although the particular letter in question was not about an appointment, it was about the flow of information, for Mr. Blacklock hoped Mr. Ormsbee, through his political connections, would be able to forward his plea for annexation to those most able to facilitate that process. Furthermore, the letter demonstrates that patronage was not merely about the gaining of government positions, but was also a means through which information and intelligence was passed. Mr. Blacklock could not have forwarded his report to every US senator who he thought might have an interest in imperial expansion, but Mr. Ormsbee could forward his report to his personal friend, the nexus of Vermont Republican politics, and one of the rising stars of the imperialist cabal, Senator Redfield Proctor. By so doing,

\[249\] Ibid.
Mr. Blacklock’s report could avoid the probable delay of the official State Department bureaucracy reminiscent of Mr. Ormsbee’s personal and professional correspondence with Mr. Partridge. Therefore, not only did Mr. Blacklock’s missive exemplify the patronage system through which positions were granted and intelligence communicated, but also the problems the State Department encountered operating with minimal personnel and logistical support in an increasingly global setting.

Furthermore, the photographs of the Ormsbees’ study continue the theme of their reaction as Vermont grand bourgeois to the Apian international community. The study presented a sanitized version of Samoa—a Samoa of finely made wooden bowls, grass skirts, and woven sleeping mats, of rugged loin-clothed Samoan men with dugout canoes, of exotic palm shaded beaches. The Ormsbees did not appear to display the insufferable heat, the scantily clad Samoan women, the carousing and inebriated Euro-Americans, or the racially dangerous half-castes. Here they had created a tropical paradise amenable to their worldviews, to their cultural values. Here Carrie’s Christmas of 1891 and Mr. Ormsbee’s Christmas of 1892 had been reconciled, had been melded, until there was no clash of cultures.

Mr. Ormsbee’s tenure in Samoa was more then a mere footnote to Pacific imperial expansion during the latter nineteenth century. A microhistorical study of Mr. Ormsbee demonstrates the particular political system through which the Department of State operated during the early 1890s. Mr. Ormsbee’s worldview, shaped by his political tenure and social position in Vermont, came into conflict with the social and political system in Apia. Through his personal background in Vermont’s grand bourgeois society
and Republican Party politics, Mr. Ormsbee became frustrated with both the Samoan Land Commission and the State Department. Mr. Ormsbee’s many identities as personal friend, professional colleague, provincial grand bourgeoisie, Vermont Republican, and citizen-diplomat melded into a process of negotiation with the patronage system, the State Department, and the international, multiracial, cosmopolitan community of Samoa.
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