

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

## NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Government House, U.S. Naval Station Tutuila  
other names/site number Building No. 1

### 2. Location

street & number \_\_\_\_\_  not for publication  
city, town Pago Pago  vicinity  
state American Samoa code AS county Eastern code 010 zip code 96799

### 3. Classification

<b>Ownership of Property</b>	<b>Category of Property</b>	<b>Number of Resources within Property</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<b>Contributing</b>	<b>Noncontributing</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	_____ buildings
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>1</u>	_____ structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	_____	_____ objects
		<u>2</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: \_\_\_\_\_  
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 2

### 4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet

*Stan Sorensen*  
Signature of certifying official Stan Sorensen, Historic Preservation Officer Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Department of Parks and Recreation, American Samoa Government, Pago Pago, American Samoa 96799  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

### 5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/single dwellingGovernment/diplomatic buildingDefense/military facility

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/single dwellingGovernment/diplomatic dwelling**7. Description**

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Military Greek Revival(Tropical Victorian)

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation concretewalls weatherboardroof iron

other \_\_\_\_\_

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

National Historic Landmark Study Thematic Framework

## VII. POLITICAL AND MILITARY AFFAIRS, 1865-1939

## D. America Becomes a World Power, 1865-1914

1. Military Affairs
2. Politics and Diplomacy

## E. World War I, 1914-1919

## VIII. WORLD WAR II

## B. War in the Pacific, 1941-1945

Having secured an appropriation of \$15,000, the commandant of U.S. Naval Station Tutuila, Captain U. Sebree, directed Ensign Claude Bloch to supervise the construction of a residence suitable for the naval governor of American Samoa. Observatory Point at the east end of the station and which overlooked magnificent Pago Pago Harbor was selected as the site. Bloch reported in November 1902 that the ridge had been graded down from eighty-five feet to sixty-five feet in elevation in order to provide a sufficiently large, level site for the building.

Two first-class carpenters arrived from California who, with locally-available labor, completed the house in June 1903. It was a frame, weather-boarded, two-story building, cruciform in shape and standing on concrete piers. An attic contains two dormers. Corrugated iron covers the roof. As first constructed, two-story, covered verandas extended along both sides and parts of the front and back. Portions of these verandas remain; others have been enclosed with windows. Because of the tropical climate, windows (both jalousies and two-over-two double hung) extend almost continuously around both floors. There are no chimneys and heating is not required. The overall dimensions of the house and a connecting storage shed to the rear are 124 feet by 76 feet. The eaves are 24 feet above the ground. Not counting the attic, the residence contains approximately 10,400 square feet of floor space. Because the building stood on an exposed hilltop where hurricanes could strike, hand-knurled metal rods were sunk ten feet into the lava rock and fastened to the underpinnings of the house.

The Navy painted nearly all the station structures, including Government House, white. At first the trim on the buildings was painted red, but the Navy changed this color to green in 1930. Today the house and all trim are white.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally     statewide     locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A     B     C     D    NHL Criteria 1

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A     B     C     D     E     F     G    NHL Exception 8

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)  
Politics/Government

Period of Significance  
1903-1951

Significant Dates  
1903

Military

\_\_\_\_\_

1905

NHL THEMES:

\_\_\_\_\_

1941-42

VII:Political & Military Affairs, 1865-1939

D:America Becomes a World Power, 1865-1914

Cultural Affiliation

1:Military Affairs

\_\_\_\_\_

2:Politics & Diplomacy

E:World War I, 1914-1919

VIII:World War II, B:War in the Pacific

Significant Person

Architect/Builder

U.S. Navy

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The U.S. Navy constructed Government House at U.S. Naval Station Tutuila as a residence for the naval governor of American Samoa in 1903. Until 1951 the naval governors and their families occupied the imposing residence as they administered the affairs of the Samoans. The naval station became, in fact, the capital of American Samoa. Government House became the United States' sole diplomatic outpost in the South Pacific in peacetime and through two world wars. The residence received governors, diplomats, and distinguished visitors from various dominions and colonies in the South Pacific. It also hosted foreign officers from navies across the seas. The impressive house, by far the largest in American Samoa and located high on a ridge, was important in the eyes of the Samoans who were intensely aware of rank and privilege in their society. It symbolized the prestige of the United States in this part of the world. During World War II the residence served as quarters for the Marine Corps military governor, the naval governor, and some of their staff officers of the headquarters for the defense of American Samoa, Western Samoa, and the Wallis Islands, these islands being critical to the defense of the lifeline to Australia. Since 1951 it has been the official residence of the civilian governors of American Samoa.

Samoa Becomes American

In 1839 Lieutenant Charles Wilkes, U.S. Navy Exploring Expedition, entered Pago Pago Harbor and undertook the first scientific investigations of Tutuila Island in the Samoas. Forty years later the United States and the chiefs of Tutuila made a treaty of commerce and friendship and for a coaling station in the superb harbor. The U.S. Congress had appropriated \$100,000 with which to build a permanent coaling station at Pago Pago Harbor. The Navy purchased land on the waterfront at Fagatogo village on the south side of the harbor in 1891 and 1892. Construction of a steel wharf, a coal shed, and other structures did not get underway until 1898, about the same time as the annexation of the Hawaiian Islands and the beginning of the Spanish-American War. On February 19, 1900, President William McKinley signed an executive order that placed the eastern Samoa islands under the control of the Navy Department. That same month Secretary of the Navy John D. Long appointed Commander Benjamin F. Tilley, U.S.N., as commandant of "U.S. Naval Station Tutuila," which included all the eastern islands.



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Two conditions in Samoa had a negative effect on wooden buildings: the tropical climate and white ants (termites). The records show that early on and continuously frequent repairs were made to the station buildings. In 1930, for example, the public works officer wrote that he had directed extensive repairs to Government House including repairs to the woodwork, painting, and construction of a new bathroom. Just four years later, rotted posts and stringers had to be replaced. At the same time the metal roof was repaired and painted. At some time after 1949, a one-story room was added to the house in the east corner of the cruciform. Its roof serves as a balcony. Regular maintenance has kept the residence in overall good repair.

There are five public rooms on the ground floor of the house: a formal sitting room, a twenty-four-seat dining room, a large sun room, a reception room, and a unique Samoan room which is lined with tapa cloth and which contains a large number of historic Samoan artifacts.

The grounds of Government House are modest in size. The level ground extended only ten feet or so beyond the sides of the building. Beyond that the slope of the ridge was quite precipitous. Frequent rains caused serious erosion to these slopes. By 1908 erosion became serious enough to cause the naval governor to have a sixty-foot-long retaining wall built along the southeast side of the house. To the rear of the building there is a larger area of level land. Directly behind the house a small storage shed was constructed at an unknown date, but before 1934. A roof covered the open space between the shed and the house. By 1949 this space had been enclosed, joining the shed to the house. A high lattice fence separates this shed from a long, open-sided carport which was also constructed before 1934. Still farther to the rear is a small stretch of lawn, at the far end of which is a Samoan ceremonial guest house, or fale tele. This oval-shaped structure is built along traditional Samoan lines except that the roof was shingled rather than thatched. A hurricane destroyed the structure in 1933, but it was rebuilt in 1936 at a cost of \$325. A fish pond once located in this lawn has disappeared.

A 480-foot driveway, enclosed with vegetation, leads from the main road up to Government House. In the opposite direction a flight of concrete stairs zigzagged down to the highway. The stairs remain but today there is no access from the highway to them. A bandstand, no longer extant, stood adjacent to the stairs. In 1914 the naval governor ordered the station grounds beautified. Over 1,500 trees and shrubs were planted, including mango, papaya, kapok, candlenut, avocado, coconut, breadfruit, and native shade trees. This vegetation covers the slopes of Observatory Point almost completely obscuring the house from view.

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(Not until 1912 did President William Howard Taft sign a commission that named the islands "American Samoa.")

Commandant Tilley also served as captain of the station ship, U.S.S. Abarenda, and maintained his quarters aboard the vessel while a small room on shore became his office. He quickly organized the government, allowing the traditional chiefs to continue to administer the islands as they always had.

## Government House

Captain U. Sebree, U.S.N., succeeded Tilley as commandant in the fall of 1901. He too lived aboard Abarenda. In April 1902 he received orders relieving him from command of the ship but to continue his duties as commandant of the station and as "Governor of Samoa." Sebree replied that he had no orders or commission as governor, but he thought that the title was a good idea. Should he be appointed governor he should have a rank at least equal to that of the governor of German Samoa who was entitled to a thirteen-gun salute. Also, he should have a proper residence, with servants and all that went with the position.

The necessity for a proper residence became clear in 1903 when the naval station received its first foreign guest. Germany had sent a new imperial governor to German Samoa. His Excellency Dr. Wilhelm Solf arrived at Pago Pago on board S.S. Ventura from New Zealand in January. His staff consisted of an army lieutenant, a secretary and his family, a nursemaid, and three servants. The station's guns fired a salute, and Sebree welcomed the governor aboard the new station ship, U.S.S. Wheeling. That evening dinner was served on board, following which the ship sailed for German Samoa taking the new governor to his post.

While Sebree did not become governor, he received authority to construct a most imposing residence. He selected a site on Observatory Point, a jungle-covered ridge near the east end of the station. From here one had dramatic views of both the inner and outer harbors. When completed in 1903, it came to be called Government House (navy number 1) which was the name applied to governors' residences in other colonies, particularly those in the British Empire. Certainly, the Samoans had never before seen such an imposing house.

The third commandant, Commander E.B. Underwood, entertained another German diplomat in the summer of 1903 when the German consul-general to Australia, Mr. von Buri, and his wife stopped by en route from German Samoa to Australia. Now that Government House was completed, Underwood entertained his guests royally on their overnight visit. He had dinner guests again in November when the French warship Meurthe arrived for a five-day visit. Then, in April 1904, Imperial Governor Solf paid Underwood an official visit. The station received him with a thirteen-gun salute. Following dinner at Government House, the governor enjoyed a concert performed by the band from Wheeling. The next foreign visitor was the Duke of Abruzzi, commanding the Italian cruiser Liguria.

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Before he left Tutuila, Underwood too recommended that the title of commandant be changed to that of governor. This would put him on a par with the governors of the various colonies in the Pacific. Also, it was important in the eyes of the Samoans who were intensely aware of rank and privilege. They noted, for example, that Governor Solf received more rounds from the salute guns than Underwood did when he first came to Samoa. Early in 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt signed a commission appointing the commandant as the governor. From then on, the commanding naval officer was commandant of the naval station proper and governor of the Samoans.

Not all governors maintained records of guests received at Government House. In 1911, however, Governor W. M. Crose entertained the new German governor, Dr. Erich Schultz. A year later the French gunboat Zelee arrived at Pago Pago. In 1914, the commandant directed the beautification of the station grounds. Among other projects, over 1,500 trees and shrubs were planted. This jungle-like vegetation today covers Observatory Point surrounding the residence.

During World War I New Zealand seized German Samoa. Following the war, diplomatic and naval visits to Pago Pago increased. In 1919, the commander-in-chief of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet, Admiral Albert Gleeves, on board U.S.S. South Dakota, visited for four days in October. Governor Warren J. Terhune entertained the captain of the French cruiser Aldebaran a few months later. The French were followed by the New Zealand governor of Western Samoa and the American consul-general at Auckland, New Zealand. The summer of 1920 brought the Earl of Liverpool, the governor general of New Zealand, and the Countess of Liverpool. Governor and Mrs. Terhune gave a dinner for them and fourteen other guests. After dinner a general reception was held for the distinguished guests.

New Zealand's new Governor Ferguson and Lady Alice Ferguson paid a visit in 1926. A nineteen-gun salute greeted them. A five-man congressional committee on board U.S.S. Omaha arrived in Pago Pago Harbor in 1930. A salute of seventeen guns greeted the party and it was escorted to Government House for the first evening's dinner. The commission remained at Pago Pago for eleven days examining the naval administration of American Samoa. Even as the world drifted toward war, visitors kept arriving. The year 1939 saw the noted British actor and author Noel Coward arriving at Pago Pago for a month's visit. Governor General and Lady Galway of New Zealand, on board H.M.S. Achilles, visited in July and enjoyed the hospitality of Government House. One last visitor before war interfered was W. Forgan Smith, the premier of Queensland, Australia, who arrived in April 1940.

The 7th Defense Battalion, U.S. Marine Corps, arrived on Tutuila in March 1941 and, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, it was followed by the Second Marine Brigade in January 1942. All American women and children were evacuated from the naval station. Once on shore, the marine commander, Colonel (later, brigadier general) Henry L. Larsen became military governor of American Samoa, and Captain Lawrence Wild, U.S.N., remained the governor under Larsen. Although the record is not clear, it is probable that the large

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Government House housed both governors and members of their staffs. The Marines left American Samoa in 1944 and the naval governor took control of the Samoan Defense Group.

The last naval governor, Captain Thomas F. Darden, U.S.N., turned over the administration of American Samoa in an elaborate ceremony in 1951 to the Honorable Phelps Phelps, U.S. Department of the Interior.

The U.S. Navy's records do not disclose if the naval governors entertained the high chiefs at Government House. But for nearly fifty years U.S. naval officers occupied Government House during their successful administration of American Samoa. From Captain Tilley's regulation that Samoa was for the Samoans and foreigners were forbidden to purchase land, through Sebree's removing the copra trade from devious foreign traders, to the successful efforts of the Navy to install health standards among Samoans, Government House came to be the symbol of the U.S. Navy's administration of this lone outpost in the South Pacific, and a house of hospitality for diplomats from the surrounding colonies and dominions and for naval officers from across the seas through the first half of the twentieth century.

Government House continues to be the official home of the elected governor and his family of American Samoa. It remains the symbol of a continuing history of government in these enchanting islands.

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Summary

The most visible and enduring land-based symbol of the projection of American naval and diplomatic might in the South Pacific, Government House, the commandant's house of the U.S. Naval Station, Tutuila, was built in 1903, shortly after the partition of Samoa and U.S. annexation of Eastern (American) Samoa in 1900.

In accord with turn-of-the-century naval strategy, Samoa, along with the bases secured in Hawaii, the Philippines, and Guam at practically the same time, was a strategic Pacific naval base, or "coaling station," for the Navy that was critical to America's ascendancy as a world power.

Untested in World War I, American Samoa proved its exceptional value in World War II, because, though not the focus of military action, Samoa formed the critical link in the Allies' Pacific lifeline to Australia and New Zealand. The magnificent harbor of Pago Pago was a safe haven for the Allied armada and the island's airfield formed an unsinkable aircraft carrier. The United States Marines who spearheaded the battles that secured Guadalcanal from the foe trained and staged out of Samoa.

Because the naval commandant was also, until 1951, the Governor of American Samoa and because Government House has continuously been the residence of Samoa's Governors, the building is, in addition, of exceptional importance in the history of the administration of Samoa as a U.S. Territory.

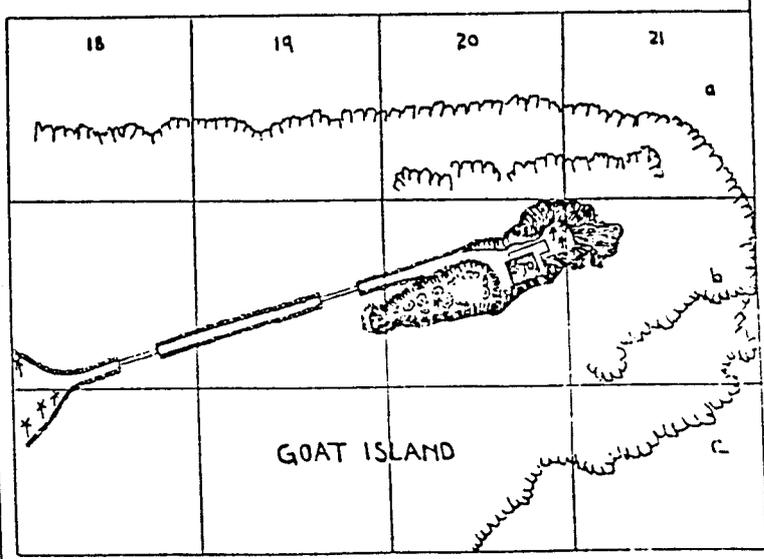
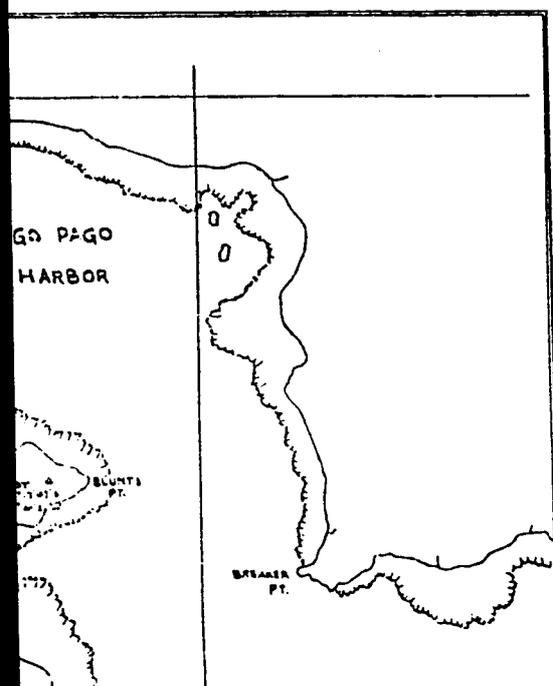
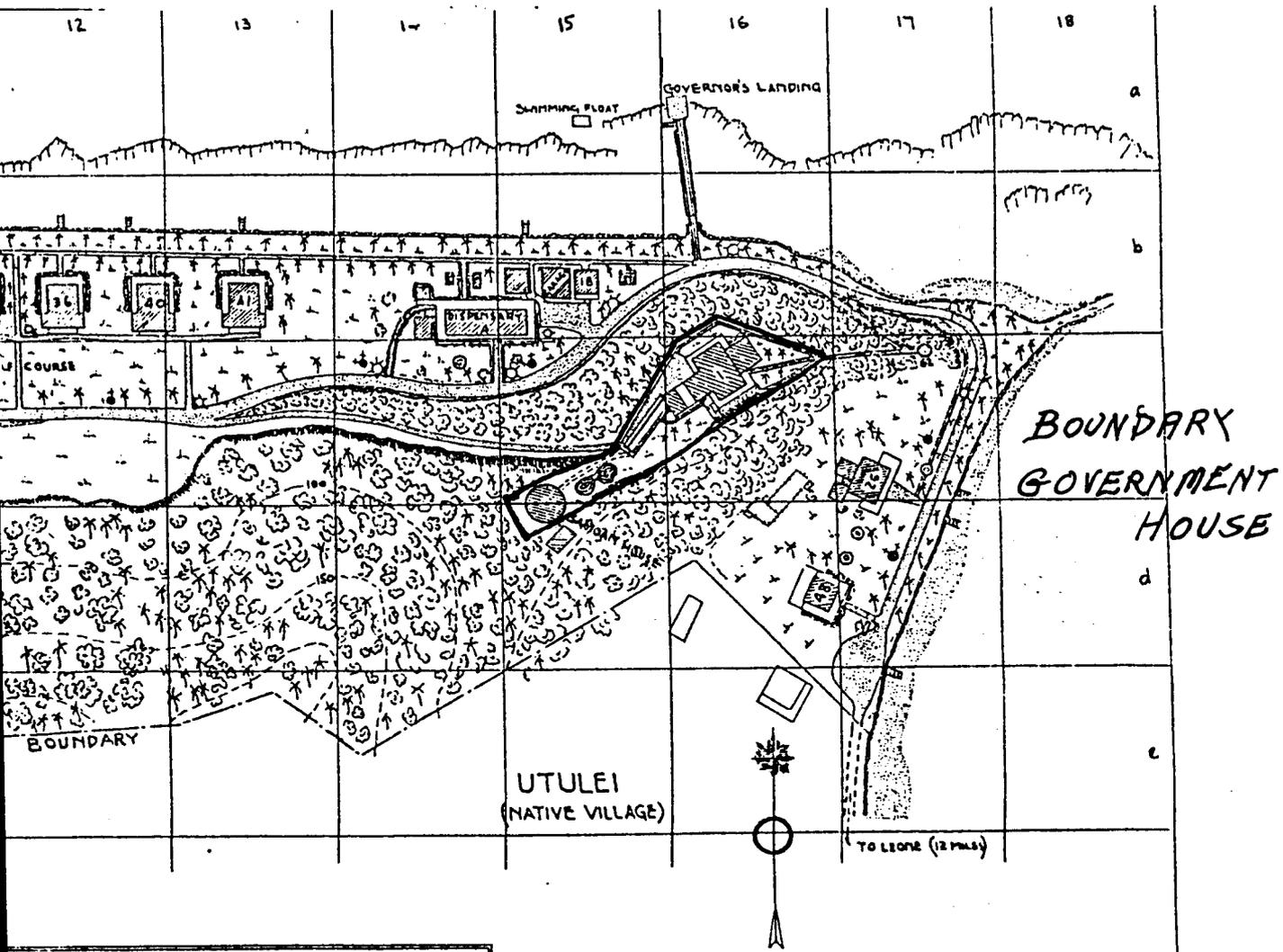
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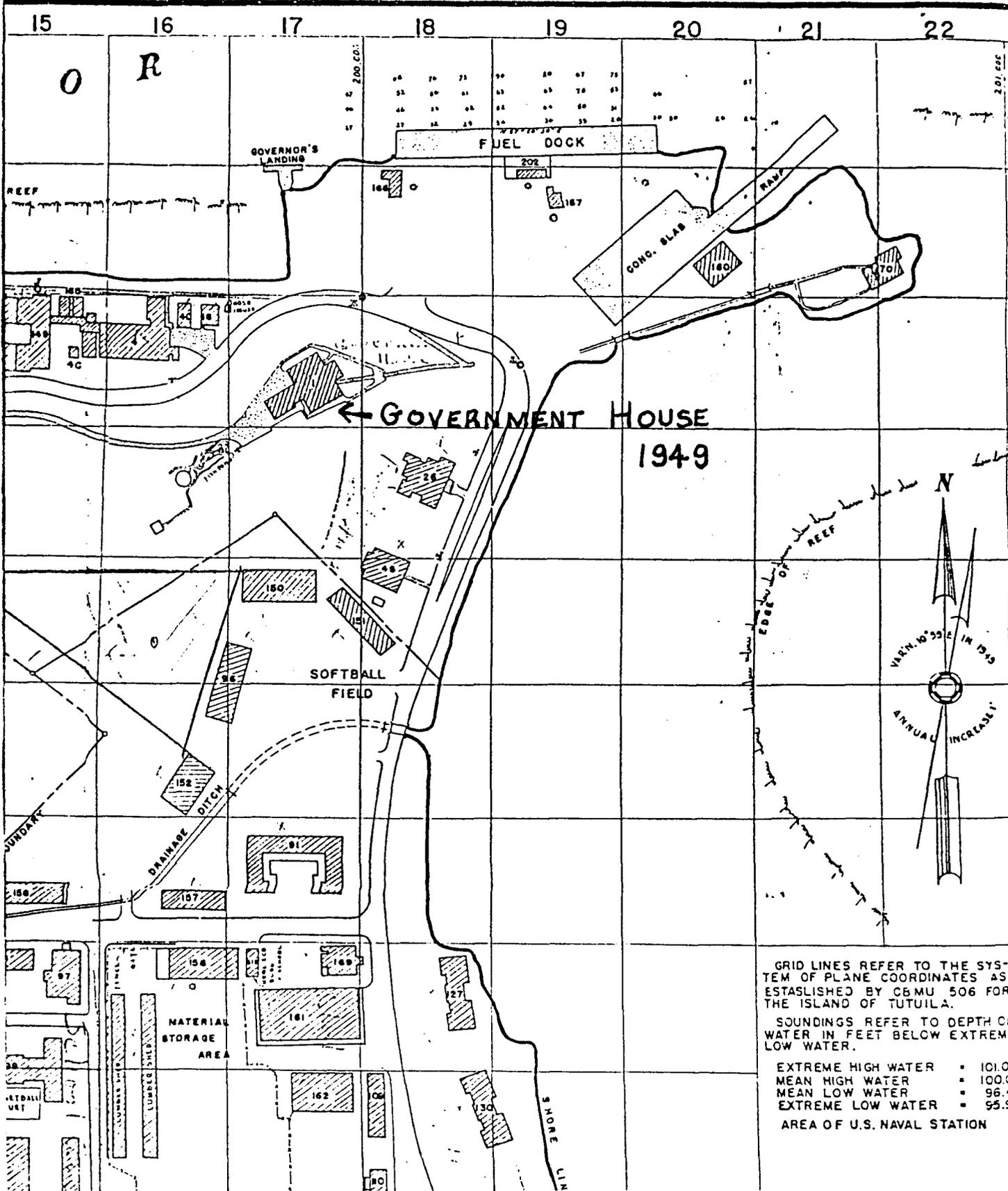
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house, then along the outside edge of that wall to a corner, then in a straight line northwesterly along the outside edge of the low stone wall behind the guest house to a corner, then in a northeasterly straight line along the outside edge of the low stone wall to its end, then continuing in the same direction to the beginning of the driveway, then in a straight line in a northeasterly direction along the outside edge of a sidewalk along the northwestern side of Government House, following along the outside edge of that sidewalk bending around to the point of beginning.



RESTRICTED

DECLASSIFIED  
E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.3  
NND Project  
By NAVA, Date 3/1/88



GRID LINES REFER TO THE SYSTEM OF PLANE COORDINATES AS ESTABLISHED BY CBMU 506 FOR THE ISLAND OF TUTUILA.

SOUNDINGS REFER TO DEPTH OF WATER IN FEET BELOW EXTREME LOW WATER.

EXTREME HIGH WATER = 101.0  
 MEAN HIGH WATER = 100.0  
 MEAN LOW WATER = 96.4  
 EXTREME LOW WATER = 95.9

AREA OF U.S. NAVAL STATION

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## Photographs, Government House, American Samoa

Unless otherwise stated all photos were taken by Erwin N. Thompson in 1988.

1. Aerial photo of Government House, 1925, on Observatory Point. The small pier was the governor's landing. An officers club stood on Goat Island (now the site of the Rainmaker Hotel). Of all the navy structures in the photo, only Government House remains. Photographer unknown. Photo courtesy National Archives, 80G-63292.
2. Eastern end and southeast side of Government House. The near, one-story room with a balcony over it is an addition to the house. It was built sometime after 1949. Note the rows of windows along the side. These were originally a two-story veranda.
3. Another view of the eastern end of the house. Thick vegetation close to the house prohibits an overall view.
4. The rear of the building. Note the verandas that are still open. The shed beyond the lattice fence is now attached to the house. To the right is a long carport. The lawn and the guest house are behind the camera.
5. The main sitting room in the public portion of the Government House.
6. The inviting sun room. Ceilings in the public rooms are about ten feet high.
7. A corner of the dining room which seats twenty-four at four tables.
8. The Samoan room. Tapa cloth lines the walls. Historic Samoan artifacts are on display.
9. The ceremonial guest house, or fale tele, at the rear of Government House grounds. The chiefs of American Samoa each had one of these oval structures for entertaining distinguished guests. The higher the chief, the larger the structure.