SHIFTING FOCUS
Colonial Australian Photography 1850-1920

Edited by Anne Maxwell & Josephine Croci

AUSTRALIAN SCHOLARLY
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The island group of Samoa underwent near cataclysmic changes during the second part of the nineteenth century, when European and American colonial powers competed for influence and control. John Davis (1831–1903), the first commercial photographer to reside in Samoa, had a unique opportunity to capture the life and times of a community in upheaval during a period of fierce colonial rivalry. Davis’ presence in Samoa, from 1873 to 1903, straddled the period from the emergence of nascent European colonial ambitions up to the final settlement of power relations that witnessed the partition of Samoa in 1900 into the colonies of Imperial Germany and the USA, a period that also incorporated the arrival of beachcombers and individual entrepreneurs ‘on the make’, and the introduction of the formalised capitalism exercised by large trading houses. Indeed, the interpretation to date of Davis’ photographic work has been situated in that specific colonial space. The stereotype of the eroticized, exotic picturesque subjects of Samoa has been widely noted in the literature of this era, with Davis being one of the protagonists. Yet,
as Leonard Bell has argued, although he produced and perpetuated that stereotype, occasionally Davis also created images that stepped outside that frame.

While well placed to observe and record, in his role as photographer Davis was a desirable yet non-essential member of Apia's business community. He had to navigate a fluid social space bounded by pious missionisation, unbridled capitalism and political ambitions on personal and national levels, all set against an Australian backdrop of sexual allures and possible innuendo.

In the absence of diaries and letters, the actual intentions of most photographers can only be guessed at. Hence, the reading of photographs as objects of art or historic significance occurs in an uncontested space circumscribed by scholarly interpretation. It is often overlooked that, unless pursued purely as a hobby, photography was, and still is, at a very fundamental level merely a business: the image creator had to make a living and thus often acted within tight constraints. In order to prosper, Davis had to espouse a diversified business model. This essay shows how Davis' work reflected the difficult political realities of the day and how nonetheless he managed to run a successful business. In the following paragraphs I introduce John Davis by outlining his formative period prior to his arrival in Samoa and situating him as a colonial entrepreneur who ran a photography business in Sydney, acted as an itinerant photographer, settled in Apia as Samoa's first resident photographer and eventually ran a lucrative postal service and stamp business. Then, from the range of photographic work that Davis undertook – portraits, images for the tourist market, documentary images and art photography – I will focus on two documentary images from 1889, when the imperial powers were still jostling for control.

From newspaper reports of the period, we know that in his public persona Davis saw himself very much in the role of the proud British subject with correspondingly strong anti-German tendencies. Yet, because he was a very private man we know comparatively little about his personal life and his antecedents. Born in London in 1831, Davis came from a lower class background. He was working as a lamplighter when he married Jane How in 1851, and they lived
in Sydney from at least January 1856, the time of the birth of the third of his ten children.\textsuperscript{5} He seems to have become progressively estranged from his family from 1873, when he first arrived in Samoa and where he eventually took up permanent residence. He remained married until 1900, when at the age of 70 he successfully filed for divorce, claiming that his wife had ‘wilfully deserted [him] without just cause or excuse.’\textsuperscript{6} Despite his 30 years of residence in Samoa, the expatriate community of Apia was to remain ignorant of his family in Australia until after his death, when his eldest son, Walter John, arrived on the scene and claimed the estate, auctioning off all the assets and returning to Sydney without bothering to erect a tombstone to his father.\textsuperscript{7}

John Davis’ Sydney period is important as it shows him to have been primarily an entrepreneur in the ‘soft’ trades of newsagent, tobacconist and photographer, which account for both his oeuvre and his subsequent dealings in Samoa. It is not known what Davis was doing between 1856 and 1861, when he is listed as a ‘gold smelter at mint’ living in Woollahra.\textsuperscript{8} His name first appears in the advertisements of the \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} of March 1862, when he operated as a tobacconist.\textsuperscript{9} From 1866 to 1869 Davis appears regularly as a ‘newsagent and tobacconist’,\textsuperscript{10} diversifying his business in 1867 by also functioning as ‘rent and debt collector,’ and ‘house and general agent’,\textsuperscript{11} while offering to ‘sell and fill in district court forms’.\textsuperscript{12} By November 1868 Davis had opened a second shop, the ZQHYFDGMP tobacco warehouse.\textsuperscript{13} During early 1869 he again expanded his business profile, advertising as ‘ZQHYFDGMP – Photographic Gallery J. DAVIS, 233 Pitt Street, op. Empire Offices, Cartes, 7s per doz’.\textsuperscript{14} From 1870 to 1873 he is listed as ‘tobacconist’ and as ‘photographer’ at various premises. A perusal of the Sydney newspapers, however, shows that his business interests were not limited to photography and tobacco products, as from mid-1869 to January 1872 we also find him intermittently advertising as a stockist of the Western Kerosene Company’s Standard White Illuminating Oil.\textsuperscript{15}

Sometime in 1873, Davis went to Samoa.\textsuperscript{16} Given that he seems to have sold his Sydney business in that year or the next, it appears that this was not intended as a short return trip but as a business move
that would allow him to become an itinerant photographer intent on acquiring a stock of images. In the absence of any archival records on the subject, we can only speculate about why he embarked on this trip. Whether it was because the photographer’s market in Sydney was becoming too crowded, or he was motivated by personal family issues or by a desire to see a frontier society and exotic locales, it is clear from details about his life before and after that trip that Davis was not driven by wanderlust.

In 1876 Davis advertised in the Tonga Times and in 1877 and 1878 in the Samoa Times, suggesting that he repeatedly travelled between the two island groups. By late March 1878 he decided to return to Sydney, leaving Apia on 8 May, sailing via Wallis Island (‘Uvea’), and arriving back in Sydney on 18 July 1878. At this point he started selling his images by targeting and servicing exclusive markets such as the medical profession, missionary societies and religious institutions by providing photographs of church buildings, mission houses and of natives with conditions such as elephantiasis. While in Sydney, Davis seems to have had several of his photographs lithographed by Messrs S.T. Leigh & Co. It is likely that he was planning to publish a small volume containing Samoan views.

All the while, Davis maintained contact with Apia; in September 1878 the Samoa Times office was able to offer for sale his ‘photographic views of Samoans and Samoan scenery’. In the end, his stay in Sydney was relatively short-lived and he returned to Samoa in mid-April 1879. A year later he is on record as paying rates for a property in Matafele, suggesting that he owned the land by that time and had decided to settle in Apia for good. Even though he had moved permanently to Samoa, it seems Davis continued to financially support his wife Jane and their seven surviving children, who remained in Sydney.

A growing European population, combined with increased control by British and American consuls and with a reasonably peaceful co-existence with the Samoan host communities, brought about gradual affluence to the island group in the 1870s that was manifested, for example, in the establishment in 1877 of locally printed newspapers and a regular mail service that connected
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Apia with the outside world. It also implied a small but viable market for photography. Davis’ return from Sydney in April 1879 encountered a changed political situation in Samoa. While at the time Samoa was according to law an independent country ruled by its Samoan chiefs, the Apia Municipal Convention of 1879 had removed the Samoan government’s jurisdiction over Apia and handed it over to a Municipal Council made up of the consuls of Germany, Great Britain and the USA, or their nominees. While the small size of the Apia expatriate community provided great opportunities for social advancement, it also entailed substantial commitment to the furtherance of Apia. Thus, once Davis had decided to stay in Samoa for good, he had to become fully involved in the local affairs, engaging in regional matters both at a formal municipal and at a community level.

Apart from photography, Davis pursued varied commercial interests in Samoa aimed at diversifying and consolidating his income sources. By August 1885 he had obtained the contract as postmaster of Apia, a privately operated postal service established under licence from the Apia Municipal Board. This monopoly was threatened by the commencement of a subsidised German mail steamer service and post office in September 1886, just after Davis had made a major investment by ordering the printing of stamps to formalise his mail service in the eyes of the world.

While Davis maintained the support of the British and American consuls at this time, it was only too clear to him that the German consul would veto his re-appointment as municipal postmaster. Rather than write off his expenses as a ‘bad investment’, Davis sidestepped the issue altogether. He was well aware that the administrative power of the three consuls was limited to the Apia municipality, while Malietoa Laupepa was recognised as paramount chief (Tupou Samoa) by the Samoans and as ‘King of Samoa’ by the three powers. Having Malietoa appoint him on 20 December 1886 as the sole postmaster of the Samoan government was a masterstroke. It largely removed Davis from the vagaries of the politics of the three colonial powers and gave him a totally free hand. For Malietoa,
the establishment of a post office issuing Samoan stamps meant a further step towards legitimizing his government on the Pacific stage.

The post office business must have been profitable enough, for in 1886 Davis could afford to employ an assistant for his photographic studio, the New Zealander Alfred John Tattersall, who was to acquire the business after Davis' death.

The picture that emerges is one of Davis as a proud and outspoken British citizen who was very active and well respected in the expatriate community in Samoa. In Apia Davis seems to have achieved a social status that doubtlessly would have escaped him in Sydney, let alone in London. He appears to have particularly supported Anglophone community efforts in a non-parochial way, without offending the wider German interests. It is also evident that simultaneously throughout his career he maintained good relations with the Samoans, in particular Mata'afa's faction. Above all, Davis was a shrewd commercial operator who accumulated a substantial income through a diversified business portfolio.

Clearly, after his return to Apia in 1879, Davis had perceived both the local and the overseas markets for Samoan images as being large enough to sustain his business. Primarily, he serviced the needs of Apia's expatriate community for portraiture. A particularly intriguing aspect of at least one of these portraits is the finish of the photograph, which is surprisingly quite careless; the feathering of the background is uneven, the edges of the print are roughly cut and the mounting is sloppy. The finish aside, there is nothing that distinguishes Davis' photograph from any other carte-de-visite portrait produced professionally in Australian or New Zealand studios at the time. On a more mundane level, Davis covered local events as part of his commercial photographic work. A major photographic sideline were the annual Christmas cards he produced from 1892, formatted in the main as collages of images he had shot during the year.

Given the limitations of the local market, Davis secured for himself a reliable income by having a second line of photographs in the form of documentary images. Commercial gain lay in the generation of a steady stream of new images capturing historic events, either as they happened or by way of a staged recreation. And for
this Davis was well placed. Some of the images, such as the wrecks of the German and British warships following the cyclone of the 15th and 16th of March 1889, have become monuments to history. While HMS Calliope (the Australian-based British ship) may have escaped wreckage, the fact that several ships from all three competing powers (Britain, Germany and the USA) were affected, meant that the subject matter held special appeal for German, British and American audiences. The event certainly resulted in many dramatic images of battered ships, which for some people were no doubt symbolic of the shattered hopes of colonial domination and of the bull-headed attitude of colonial powers who had put ambition and desire for status before human lives and property (since allegedly none of the ships' captains wanted to leave in the face of the oncoming storm).

Of all the photographs of the wrecked ships, none is more dramatic and evocative than that of the German ship SMS Adler (figure 28). Shot from the stern and slightly off the symmetrical axis, the image evokes a sense of incongruity; ships are meant to float majestically, with their masts reaching up gracefully towards the heavens. If they are to experience mishap, they are supposed to sink impressively below the waves or crash dramatically into cliffs. Yet here is a gunboat, a symbol of the military might of a great colonial power, resting weakly on its port side in shallow water, out of its element, beached like a dying whale – an emasculated instrument of destruction that only a few months earlier had successfully bombarded strongholds of Malietoa's forces on Manono and Apolima Islands. Taken at low tide, the photograph exposes most of the ship, including its susceptible hull, while also ensuring that the sea can still be seen. While the storm may be over and the water is shown as calm and smooth, the two rocks in the foreground remind the viewer of the danger posed to foreign ships by the menacing sea, one that in this case has thrown the ship onto the reef; a threat that is confirmed by the obviously battered hull and the scarred, broken planking. The tangled mass of ropes, tackle and broken spars of the masts extends downwards in a disorderly fashion, metaphorically tying the ship to the ground, holding it down, never to float again.
The image, which was later also reproduced as a printed postcard, was one of a series of photographs chronicling the destruction of this and other vessels. While some images are more of a purely documentary type, displaying each vessel from various angles at full low tide along with the salvage of guns and other equipment (presumably the respective powers sought verification of their vessels' remains), many other images show evidence of being carefully composed for maximum dramatic effect.

Figure 29 shows salvage from the wreckage of the USS Trenton lying alongside the sunken USS Vandalia. The wreckage of the German gunboat SMS Eber can be seen in the left foreground, while SMS Adler can be made out in the left middle ground, just astern of USS Trenton. The framing employed here uses as a focal point the strong triangle formed by the improvised shear legs and the purchase erected for the handling of the guns, carriages and other heavy weights that required removal from the wrecks. The two boys at the end of the slipway looking out at the wreck, and the two skiffs floating on the water in the centre of the triangle, are well choreographed. Likewise, the angle of the rope running from the top of the shear legs to the right of and outside the frame is echoed by the line of the two masts and the tackle of the sunken USS Vandalia. Yet even here Davis's framing is arguably not perfect as the remains of the Eber are partially obscured by the left shear leg while the funnel of USS Trenton is too close to the right shear leg. A simple step or two backwards before taking the shot would have solved at least the latter issue. On the other hand, all images seem to have been carefully framed to maximise the effect of desolation and destruction. For instance, the wreckage appears disassociated from the shoreline, where the viewer is situated, yet, as another image of the series shows, the whole setting is less than 10 metres from a small boat pier.

Davis' first studio, later the post office, seems to have been a single storey building in Matafele. By 1889 Davis had a building erected with a studio on the first floor and a special mail room on the ground floor. This property burnt down in the great fire of 1st April 1895 that swept through part of Apia. Davis experienced a near total loss of his establishment but managed to save some of
his valuables, such as his camera, which allowed him to continue to work. However, it seems he lost his other belongings, including most of his exposed and unexposed plates.\textsuperscript{42} We can safely assume that the bulk, if not all, of the exposed plates of the 1889 cyclone was destroyed, as was most of the plate stock comprising portraits and early versions of the tourist imagery.\textsuperscript{43}

Davis’ close association with Malietoa also gave him access to the great man himself and thus the opportunity of shooting portraits of him both in a formal studio setting and in the latter’s private \textit{fale}. The image shown in figure 30 is particularly intriguing. Judging from the colour of Malietoa’s hair, it would have been taken in the late 1880s, either just before he was exiled to Jaluit (Marshall Islands) by the German-controlled Mata’a\textsuperscript{a} faction in 1887 or soon after his return in 1889.\textsuperscript{44}

The image is very intimate. It portrays Malietoa as a lonesome figure positioned at the back of his \textit{fale}. He is seated cross-legged on his fine mat, bare-chested and dressed in a \textit{lavalava}, hands in his lap. While he seems comfortably seated, his posture, with his shoulders slightly slumped, exudes a certain air of dejection. The large stretches of empty space all around him, including the distance between him and the photographer, might be read as suggesting the chief’s political isolation. Just above Malietoa’s head are his white European clothes, carelessly draped over a rafter. To the European eye the \textit{fale} shows only sparse furnishing; a makeshift table, some boxes in the back, and some mats in the rafters. To the Samoan eye it is these mats that constitute true wealth.

This not a carefully constructed and choreographed image, but one that has almost a snapshot character, an image where the main character virtually blends into the background clutter of the \textit{fale}. Yet there are other elements that appear at first sight more like considered constructions; the framing of the image shows three centre posts of the \textit{fale} providing a strong diagonal axis that leads the eye to Malietoa, such that one might interpret these three posts as symbolising the three European powers that declared Malietoa King of Samoa. A second reading notes however that Malietoa’s place in the centre of the \textit{fale}’s apex is also his customary position,
Figure 28
Private Collection of Dirk Spennemann.
and the view had to be framed this way so as to have the centre post block out some of the light streaming in from the doorway to his left. And while the European shirt draped over the rafters nicely frames his head, this was an accidental rather than intentional effect, as confirmed by the presence of the rectangular cloth on the right.

One wonders why the image was taken. Was it an opportunistic portrait that Davis shot when visiting Malietoa on other business? Or was it taken at the Chief’s behest, to display him in his Samoan space? It is certainly a private image and not one that was widely distributed, let alone converted into picture postcards.

While local politics in the early 1890s were in turmoil, with the various powers striving for dominance, the economy of Samoa was booming. Copra plantations were thriving and other cash crops, such as cacao and rubber, were being trialled. The expatriate population was growing, not only in terms of planters and traders but also in the form of a support industry such as bakers, hoteliers, and the like. Simultaneously, tourism traffic increased exponentially as evidenced by the number of passengers aboard the Oceanic Steamship Company; steamers running the San Francisco to Sydney route that also stopped at Honolulu. In the perception of the broader public, by the mid 1880s and early 1890s Hawaii had begun to lose its glamour. The sense of the exhilaratingly exotic had given way to the familiar. Samoa, on the other hand, was ‘fresh.’ Samoans were perceived as a group of beautiful people, on the whole receptive to the benevolence of the colonial powers and ready to reap the benefits of Christianity as dispensed by missionaries, yet still imbued with an aura of being strong-willed but no longer treacherous natives. Each steamer delivered some hundred visitors to Apia who had between

Opposite top  Figure 29
John Davis, ‘Improvised shear legs and purchase for handling heavy weights removed from the wrecks, with wreckage of USS Trenton alongside the sunken USS Vandalia in the middle ground’, undated.

Opposite below  Figure 30
John Davis, ‘Susuga Malietoa Laupepa in his fale’, undated.

Private Collection of Dirk Spennemann.
three and ten hours to spend in and around Apia while cargo was loaded. In the main, the visitors were British and British colonials from Australia and New Zealand, or Americans primarily from the West Coast. Throughout the late 1890s the tourist trade continued to expand, driven by steamers from Australia operating the Sydney-Apia-Tonga-Sydney and Sydney-Fiji-Samoa-Tonga-Auckland routes.

Not surprisingly, Apia catered to the tourist market by offering ethnographica and curios for sale. Davis unashamedly targeted and served tourist demand for the exotic by incorporating a range of photographs of cabinet-sized images of semi-clad Samoan women in seductive poses, shot either in the studio and clothed in traditional dress replete with the required accoutrements of material culture, or captured in well-composed, carefully constructed outdoor settings. Davis assiduously selected his models to fulfil the visitors’ imagination by servicing and reaffirming their preconceived views. We can safely assume that while his assistant Tattersall functioned as the ‘eye’ behind the camera in setting up the actual image composition, business decisions such as which images to shoot, which models to use and what paraphernalia to include in the shots would have been made largely by Davis. Davis, Tattersall and another resident photographer from New Zealand named Thomas Andrew produced postcards on photographic card stock and sold them directly to customers. As most of the customers demanded the standard motifs of exotica and ethnographica, Davis advertised these cabinet-sized cards in 1892 at the price of 6 shillings per dozen. At the same time, clients inquiring about the cards could also be offered more ‘intimate’ images sold only as cartes-de-visite.

Simultaneously, Davis began to systematically cash in on his postal business by selling postage stamps to collectors and dealers, servicing the burgeoning interest in stamp collecting, especially among both the resident and touring middle classes. A shrewd businessman, he realised that the philatelic press had to report his stamp issues, whether they approved of them or not, and that any controversy surrounding them could only help sales. The Davis Post Office operated until the 28th February 1900, the very day
before the German Colonial Government took formal control of (Western) Samoa and thus assumed the monopoly on all the postal services. But the end of his post office did not by any means imply an end to his stamp sales; having substantially stocked up with stamps just before his postal service became obsolescent, Davis had built up a sizeable nest-egg. Davis had done very well out of the tourist trade in photographs, but especially so from his post office. From the early 1890s onwards, the stamp sales formed the more lucrative part of the business, with profits invested in real estate in Samoa. Davis could have looked forward to enjoying a relatively comfortable existence for the last decade of his life. Unfortunately, he contracted pneumonia while on a trip to Lake Lanoto'o in August 1903. Aged 73, John Davis died of a pulmonary illness on 13 September 1903, and was buried in Apia.

So, how should Davis' photographic legacy be read? Applying current standards and concepts when comparing his work with that of Andrew and with Tattersall's post-1903 work oversimplifies matters, as it ignores upbringing, education and generational differences. Tattersall, for example, was 30 years younger than Davis when he started in Samoa, while Andrew was 25 years his junior. Both were of a different generation of photographers, apprenticed into established New Zealand firms and well exposed to the more modern modes of thinking and artistic expression that emerged at the beginning of their careers. Moreover, both saw themselves primarily as photographers.

Davis, on the other hand, belonged to the first generation of Pacific photographers. Largely self-taught, he had branched into photography as an additional line of business. By the time Tattersall began working for Davis in 1885, the latter was 55 years of age. He had started life in London, left that life behind when emigrating to Australia and starting off as a goldsmith and employee of the mint, had started up a small newsagency and tobacco shop and expanded it into a successful dual tobacconist and photography business in Sydney. He had then left that life behind to establish a photography business in Samoa - a life that brought with it social status. When
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he hired Tattersall, Davis was ready to expand his stamp, post office
and photography businesses. His recipe of catering for the public's
tastes at the time had served him well, supported by his monopoly
on family and business portraits. Why should he change, especially
once he had found a competent and technologically well-versed
assistant in Alfred Tattersall?

Clearly, Davis was a commercial photographer who should be
situated in the emerging middle classes of the colonial and capitalist
society of the late nineteenth century, not in the arena of its well­
trained studio and artistic photographers. That does not diminish
the value of his imagery; we just have to be mindful not to apply our
modern gaze, but to respect where he came from.

Notes

1 For individual entrepreneurs seeking their fortunes, see Dirk H.R. Spennemann, ‘An
Example of Mail Fraud in Nineteenth-Century Samoa’, *Journal of South Pacific Law*
the trading houses, see for example: Malama Meleisea, *Traditional Authority
and Colonial Administration in the History of Western Samoa* (Sydney: Macquarie
University Press, 1986).

2 Examples include Alison D. Nordstrom, ‘Early Photography in Samoa: Marketing
Stereotypes of Paradise’, *History of Photography* 15.4 (1991): 272–86; and
‘Photography of Samoa: Production, Dissemination, and Use’ in *Picturing Paradise*,
ed Casey Blanton (Daytona Beach, Florida: Daytona Beach Community College,
1995), 11–40; Nicholas Thomas, ‘The Beautiful and the Damned’, in *Pirating the
Pacific: Images of Travel, Trade and Tourism*, ed Ann Stephen (Sydney: Powerhouse
Photographs of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries’, *Tropical Visions
in an Age of Empire*, eds D. Driver and L. Martins (Chicago: University of Chicago
Press, 2006), 156–74; Anne Maxwell, *Colonial Photography and Exhibitions:
Representations of the ‘Native’ and the Making of European Identities* (Leicester:
Leicester University Press, 2000); Max Quanchi, ‘The Euro-American Psyche and the
Imaging of Samoa in the Early Twentieth Century’, *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan

3 Leonard Bell, ‘Pictures as History, Settlement as Theatre: John Davis’s Photo-Portrait
of Robert Louis Stevenson and Family at Vailima, Samoa, 1892’, *Journal of New


5 Data from NSW Births, Deaths and Marriages Registries: John Davis ∞ Jane
How*1829 Middleham, ∞ between January and March 1851 St. Pancras London
(St. Pancras vol. 1, no. 350); divorced Sydney 22 January 1901 (NSW 1900/3751).
Wife: Jane Davis † Parramatta 1902/2661–Children: Anne Jane * 1852, London,
† Kogarah 1914/17342; Mary Jane* bef. 1856 London, † 1856 Parramatta
(1856/2775); male child born in the UK, † by 1862 (see 1862/3466);–Pleasant
Sophia* Sydney 17/1856 † Burwood 1941/12942.–Sarah Jane *Parramatta
1858/3359; † Kogarah 1925/18778.–Lydia *Parramatta 1860/3490.–Walter
John *Parramatta 28 June 1862 (1862/3466) † Ryde 15789/1934...Ada

NSW Divorce Register 3751/1900, Decree Absolute granted 22 January 1901.

Custos (also known as Thomas Trood), 'Island Reminiscences', *Samoanische Zeitung*, 3 August 1907: 10. This may be an indication of estrangement or merely a sign that Walter John Davis was an extraordinarily frugal if not mean-spirited man; the latter seems supported by the fact that instead of engaging the services of a local auctioneer, he took out an auctioneers' licence himself for a quarter year and conducted the auction himself to save on fees (*Samoanische Zeitung*, 9 January 1904, 10). The expatriate community in Apia took offence and his move resulted in a lower return to the estate than otherwise would have been achieved (see *Samoanische Zeitung*, 30 January 1904, 7). See also George Egerton Westbrook, 'Samoan Personages', Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, MS-Papers 0061-064.

* Sands Sydney Directory for 1861, containing Street, Suburban, Alphabetical and Trade Directory. Sydney: John Sands. 157. For references to Davis working at the mint, see also Custos 'Island Reminiscences', Thomas Trood (also known as Custos), *Island Reminiscences* (Sydney: McCarron, Stewart & Co, 1910), 70. Davis is on record as living at John Street, Woollahra from 1858 to 1864: *Sands* (1858), 144; (1863), 167; (1864), 184.

* Sydney Morning Herald, 13 March 1862, 1.

* Sydney Morning Herald, 9 February 1866, 8.

* Sydney Morning Herald, 16 March 1867, 1.

* Sydney Morning Herald, 6 April 1867, 8.

* 477 George Street; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 November 1868, 3.

* The meaning of 'ZQHYFDGMP' is unclear. It has the same number of letters as 'John Davis', but it does not seem to be a Caesar or Vigenère cipher. See Advertisements: *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 June 1869, 1 col. 7 (first); 20 October 1869, 1 (last).

* Also at 477 George Street: for example, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 August 1869, 1.

* See advertisement to that effect in *Samoan Times*, 13 October 1888, 3.

* In 1875 a George A. Tissington is listed as operating the photographic studio at 616 George Street. See Sands 1875, 525.

* *Samoan Times*, 23 March 1878, 3; *Samoan Times*, 11 May 1878, 2; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 July 1878, 4.

* Sydney Morning Herald, 30 August 1878, 12.

* Sydney Morning Herald, 12 October 1878, 17.


* The Mitchell Library holds a copy of a small publication of a panoramic view of Upolu, Samoa, produced by S.T. Leigh which is, according to the credit by-line, based on a Davis photograph: John Davis, *Upolu, Samoa* (Sydney: S.T. Leigh, n.d.).

* *Samoan Times*, 9 September 1878, 3.

* *Samoan Times*, 19 April 1879, 2.

* *Samoan Times*, 26 February 1881, 2.


* 'Photography', *Samoan Times*, 26 April 1879, 2.

* We know very little about Davis' private life. It appears that while in Samoa, Davis never entered into a 'native' marriage. In 1892 he is on record as being cared for by a Samoan housekeeper, Solepa, and several servants. Little had changed in 1899: Fraser, 'In Stevenson's Samoa'. See also *Samoan Weekly Herald*, 7 October 1899, 2.
29 Dirk H.R. Spennemann, 'An Officer, Yes; But a Gentleman? A Biographical Sketch of Eugen Brandeis, Military Adviser, Imperial Judge and Administrator in the German Colonial Service in the South Pacific', *Pacific Island Studies Monographs* Vol. 21 (Sydney: Centre of South Pacific Studies, University of New South Wales, 1998); Spennemann, *Steam to Tonga and Samoa: The Norddeutscher Lloyd Mail Service 1886 to 1893* (Albury: Letao Press, 2002).


31 Davis died intestate. It seems that the otherwise fractious expatriate community banded together and did not bid against Tattersall, allowing him to acquire the Matafele property and going concern at a rock-bottom price (RMk 4,000; see *Samoansche Zeitung*, 30 January 1904, 7; see also Westbrook, 'Samoan Personalities'.

32 Even though he had an ongoing and quite public feud with the German trading house, A.E. Grevsmiil & Co.

33 Collection of Dirk H.R. Spennemann.

34 *Samoa Times*, 12 November 1892, 2; *Samoa Weekly Herald*, 18 November 1893, 2; *Samoa Times*, 1 December 1894, 2; 12 October 1895, 2; *Samoa Weekly Herald*, 23 October 1897, 2; 18 November 1899, 2.

35 *Samoa Times*, 28 September 1889, 2.


37 US Naval Historical Center Photographs.

38 Image found on commercial antique dealer site.

39 John Davis, Photographer, Matafele, $3.00. 'Special Licenses for Quarter ending March 31, 1880', *Samoa Times*, 7 February 1880, 3 col. 3.

40 The *Samoa Times* commented that 'the gallery, on the upper floor, is well-lighted and commands a fine view of the harbour'; *Samoa Times*, 2 November 1889. If we consider the setting of Davis' studio in between two double-storey properties, his move to erect a two-storey structure was in fact only simply keeping up with the neighbourhood.

41 'Fire. Great Destruction of Property,' *Samoa Times*, 7 April 1895, 2. 'Fire in Matafele. Ten Houses Destroyed,' *Samoa Weekly Herald and Municipal Gazette*, 6 April 1895, 2. The absence of a fire brigade and the inability of the commander of a British warship in the harbour to comprehend the need for rendering assistance meant that much of the Matafele town district, an area of 150 by 100 yards, was destroyed. In total eleven properties, ten business houses and a cottage, burned to the ground.

42 In its reporting of the event of the fire, the *Samoa Weekly Herald* commented that 'Mr Davis is undoubtedly the greatest loser – all his negatives – the result of over twenty years hard work having been destroyed'. See *Samoa Weekly Herald*, 6 April 1895, 2.

43 Tattersall, who took over the business after Davis' death, continued to print popular plates shot in the 1890s. As far as can be ascertained, none of the 1889 images, for example, was reprinted by Tattersall, supporting the assumption that they were destroyed in the 1895 fire.
While we can assume that the cabin passengers would have left the ship for a day visit, we do not know whether or how many of the steerage passengers would have been afforded the same opportunity.

See for example, dealer William Barron advertising South Sea curios in Samoa Times 2 December 1893, 1 col. 3, and dealer M. Volkmann, advertising South Sea curios in Samoa Times 24 March, 1894, 4 col. 2.

For example, Union Steam Ship Company, A Cruise in the Islands, plate after page 2, plate after page 22.

From 1887, Davis seems to have sent samples of his stamps to all key stamp magazines, and systematically supplied especially British and American stamp dealers with stock: Philatelic Record IX (February 1887), 8. See also Dirk H.R. Spennemann, 'The 1890s Market for Samoan Stamps', The Samoa Express: Journal of the Fellowship of Samoa Specialists 18.4 (2002): 94–98.

On the contrary; now that both Germany and America formally owned some of the islands, Davis could be confident that German and American collectors would attempt to acquire the predecessor stamps. Moreover, Samoa had now become a closed collection area, which provided many collectors with the opportunity to compile a complete collection of an entire country.

In the six weeks prior to the closure of the post office, Davis ordered over 1.2 million stamps of various denominations and colour variations as well as overprints, with a combined face value of almost of £36, 200 (Robert, P. Odenweller, ‘Samoa: The Palm Tree Issues, 1886–1900’, The Collectors Club Philatelist 57 (2004): 34–48; 95–105). He also took a further step to ensure that his stamp sales remained viable; the very public defacement of the dyes and plates used for the printing of the stamps, thus ensuring that the number of stamps was finite; see Otago Daily Times, 11 December 1900; Australian Philatelist 7.8 (1901), 104.

The German account of his death mentions that he had been ill for five weeks; it also erroneously lists his age as 72 (Samoanische Zeitung, 12 September 1903, 7 col. 4). The Cyclopedia of Samoa, 104, incorrectly states his year of death as 1893.

As demonstrated by Nordström, ‘Early Photography in Samoa’ and Maxwell, Colonial Photography.

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