

Fay Alailima, *Aggie Grey: A Samoan Saga*. Honolulu: Mutual Publishing, 1988. Pp. xiv, 342, illus. US\$13.95 paper.

Reviewed by Paul Shankman, University of Colorado--Boulder

Fay Alailima is perhaps best known for her autobiographical work, *My Samoan Chief* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1961), written

under her maiden name, Fay Calkins. That book was a light-hearted yet perceptive look at the many surprises encountered by a young American woman married to a Samoan chief. Her new work is a biography of Aggie Grey, one of Western Samoa's great personalities. Like her first book, the second is lively yet reflective, building on Alailima's broad knowledge of the islands.

Aggie Grey: A Samoan Saga is a popular book about the life and times of a woman who became a legend. Aggie was a part-Samoan born near the turn of the century. Her life mirrored the general predicament of the "half-caste" community in Apia, and one of the strengths of the book is that it provides the reader with a feel for this small but influential enclave. Aggie's career saw poverty and wealth, community scorn and approval. Her fortunes initially waxed and waned with those of her father and her husbands. Later she became a small-scale entrepreneur and eventually the very successful proprietress of Aggie Grey's Hotel. Her life also reflected the tumultuous periods of recent Western Samoan history--the colonial struggles for control of the islands, the great influenza epidemic of 1918-1919, the Depression, World War II, and the post-independence era since 1962. These touched Aggie personally and the book includes accounts of the early deaths of some of her children and her two husbands, Aggie's experiences as a woman in a male-dominated colonial society, and her close personal relationships with some of the islands' most renowned leaders.

Aggie's business career is also included. The hotel she built is a Western Samoan landmark, made even more famous by the rumor that Aggie was the real-life model for the fictional character of Bloody Mary in James Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific*. The rumor was untrue and caused Aggie great personal pain; Michener himself denies any resemblance in his introduction to *Aggie Grey: A Samoan Saga*. But Aggie's life is no less fascinating for not being Bloody Mary.

Alailima has an appreciation of Aggie's individuality as well as the Samoan and European communities that Aggie negotiated with greater and lesser degrees of success. While the book is historically grounded, Alailima does engage in imaginative reconstruction. She interviewed Aggie, her sisters, and many other well-known Western Samoans to capture not only fact but tone and mood as well. The book therefore reads like a novel, a sympathetic celebration of Aggie's life. For readers curious about this Pacific heroine, *Aggie Grey: A Samoan Saga* is entertaining and informative. Aggie died on 26 June 1988 at age ninety.