

# Jeremiah “Jerry” Seigafo Scanlan

Community Leader and Census Interpreter

The U.S. Census Bureau has always highlighted American diversity through its decennial snapshots of the population. As the United States grew and the population became more diverse, the Census Bureau’s workforce adapted to represent the country’s people and needs. As immigration from non-European countries increased in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Census Bureau tried to hire census takers that lived in the neighborhoods and spoke the language. Others became a part of the operations in Washington, DC. From the first surges of Chinese immigration into California in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to the last territorial acquisitions of the U.S. in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, immigrants of Asian and Pacific Islander heritage have long contributed to the Census Bureau’s mission, both at headquarters and in the field.



Jerry, c. 1940, in one of his only existing photographs

Courtesy of Trisha Pereira, his great-granddaughter

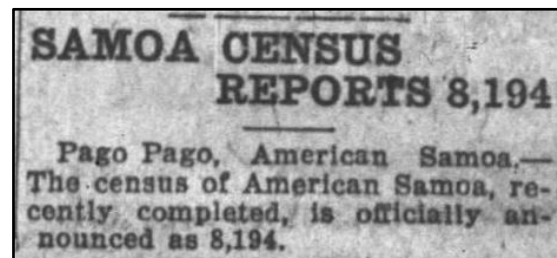
Jeremiah Raphael Seigafo Scanlan, known as Jerry, was born on January 19, 1895, in the village of Faleula on the Samoan island of Upolu. Jerry’s grandfather and namesake, Jeremiah Scanlan, had immigrated to Samoa from the United States in the early 1800s, married a local woman named Fa’ate’i Tagaloa, and settled on the islands. His son—Jerry’s father, Charles—worked as a merchant, ran a taxicab company, and occasionally served as an interpreter for the government. Jerry’s

NAME	SEX	AGE	BIRTHPLACE	CITIZENSHIP	EDUCATION	INDUSTRY	RELIGION	REMARKS
Jeremiah Scanlan	M	25	U.S.	U.S.	U.S.			
Charles Scanlan	M	20	U.S.	U.S.	U.S.			
...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...

Scanlan family 1920 Census

mother, La’ala’ai Alapapa Te’o of Upolu, passed away soon after his birth, and his step-mother, Pipii’imale’ele’ele Mulipola, was the daughter of a prominent chief from the island of Savaii, making her a *taupou*, or princess. Charles and Pipii’s status meant that Jerry and his eleven siblings received a better education than most Samoans at the time, and also had an opportunity to learn from their father’s businesses. Jerry’s family background also enabled him to fit in among both Americans and Samoans, a valuable ability when the United States gained control of the area that would become American Samoa in 1899.

Western exploration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had influenced the local relations and dynamics of Samoans, leading to both international strife and civil war in the late 1800s. In order to resolve this, Germany and the United States convened the Tripartite Convention in 1899, which divided the islands into two parts. The United States annexed the eastern islands, including Tutuila, Aunu’u, and Rose Atoll in 1900, with the Manu’a Islands joining in 1904 and Swains Island in 1925, and named the area “American Samoa” to distinguish it from the western islands, simply known as “Samoa”. The islands fell under the governance of a U.S. naval governor, with Samoan chiefs and *matais*, or heads of households, deciding local matters.



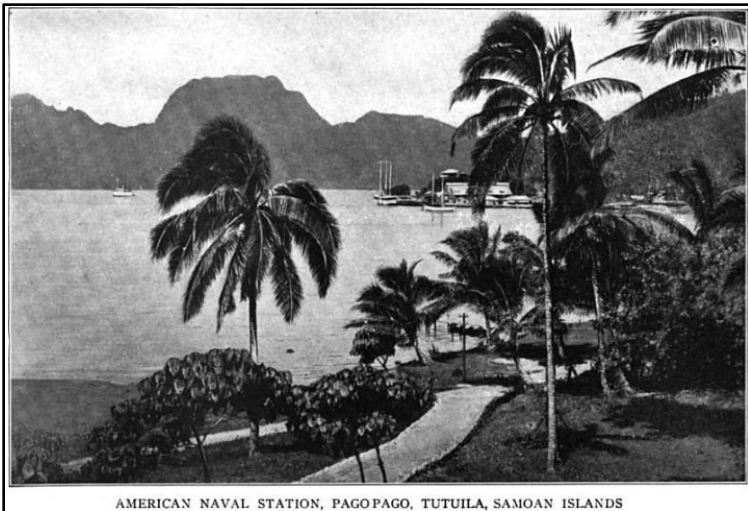
The Rock Island Argus (Rock Island, IL) June 20, 1923

Although there was friction between the new government and the Samoans, the naval governors also greatly aided the islands. During the 1918 influenza pandemic, Governor John Martin Poyer immediately instituted a strict quarantine, making American Samoa one of only three places in the world that did not suffer from the disease. On neighboring Samoan islands under the direction of New Zealand, there was no quarantine and over 7,500 Samoans died from the disease—more than 20% of the population. Another way the new U.S. government helped the islands was by conducting a complete census, which provided information about their populations and economies and enabled both local and U.S. officials to help plan community services, such as schools, clinics and hospitals, and distribute resources to places and people who needed them.

9-2917		DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE—BUREAU OF THE CENSUS		[113] (21-509)	
<b>FOURTEENTH CENSUS OF THE UNITED STATES: 1920—POPULATION</b>					
DISTRICT <i>Tutuila</i>		<b>THE ISLAND OF SAMOA</b>		SHEET No. <b>1 A</b>	
COUNTY <i>Lea'ua</i>		ENUMERATED BY ME ON THE <i>FEB 8</i> DAY OF <i>1920</i>			
NAME OF PLACE <i>Village of Aloalo</i>		INTERPRETER <i>Jerry Scoulou</i>		ENUMERATOR <i>William B. Barrow</i>	

A 1920 Census form with Jerry's signature as interpreter

While there had been partial censuses, none had depth and accuracy beyond rough counts of the population total. In 1920, following annexation and the chaos of World War I, American Samoa had its first census taken under the auspices of the U.S. Census Bureau. The 1920 census included village counts, as well as classifications of sex, race, age, and marital condition, data on school attendance, illiteracy, and occupations. A census of agriculture, a normal part of the decennial census at this time, also counted livestock and copra (coconut meal) production.



AMERICAN NAVAL STATION, PAGO PAGO, TUTUILA, SAMOAN ISLANDS

**The American Naval Station at Tutuila, c. 1920**  
Coffee, Frank, *Forty Years on the Pacific* (1920)

The naval governor, Warren Jay Terhune, appointed two enumerators, with one interpreter each. Jerry worked as the interpreter for William Barrow, a U.S. government court clerk. Starting mid-January and working into early February, William and Jerry worked on both Tutuila and the Manu'a Islands. The final count came in at 8,194 people, and showed that there had been a steady population increase since the U.S. had first annexed the territory. This population increase not only proved the effectiveness of the naval governor's 1918 quarantine, but also helped dispel unfounded predictions about the decline of Polynesian populations when exposed to outsiders.

Following his census work, Jerry traveled to the United States, leaving Pago Pago on April 23, and arriving in San Francisco on May 6, 1920. Several other family members took advantage of their ability to travel to the U.S., including a brother, Leo, who toured and spread Samoan culture with the vaudeville troupe of "Prince Lei Lani and His Royal Samoans." Jerry soon returned to Tutuila, where he continued working as a storekeeper and in his father's taxi business, as well as a bookkeeper for the Government Supply Depot, a position he held for 12 years.

In 1918, Jerry married Musaesae "Mu" Taito, with whom he raised a large family, and he had another child later in life after Mu passed away in 1938. Three of his surviving adult children lived in Samoa, and four others settled in the U.S. In addition to his service to his community and his family, Jerry was also a boxing enthusiast who often acted as referee or judge. Jerry passed away in Pago Pago on December 20, 1964. Less than three years later, on July 1, 1967, a new Constitution of American Samoa went into effect, and established more positions in the government of American Samoa for Samoans, following the trail which Jerry had blazed. The Census Bureau is grateful for Jerry's contributions to his community, his islands, and his country.



**Jerry, left, with family, c. 1960**  
Courtesy of Trisha Pereira, his great-granddaughter