

Pacific island traders and merchants are not generally remembered in their own right, excepting those who established large scale companies. Practically all the traders who are now well-known outside their immediate locale achieved this distinction only because they engaged in some other activity, such as H. J. Moors, the writer friend of R. L. Stevenson.⁹

So too with Westbrook. As a friend explained, 'some devil prompted him to take up political matters'¹⁰ and goaded him into becoming a most persistent and crotchety critic of the New Zealand Administration in Western Samoa. Even in his early days there, in the 1890s, Westbrook, in common with many of his contemporaries, was difficult in his dealings with the authorities. Having not been subjected to the presence of constituted European authority whilst a station trader, he did not take to this kindly once settled in Samoa. He considered himself to be an English resident in Samoa, endowed therefore with an Englishman's rights and privileges, and resented these liberties being interfered with. Notwithstanding minor flare-ups, an uneasy peace existed between Westbrook and the various administrations for over thirty years, but in 1926 he and the New Zealand Administration completely fell out with each other. The Administration, it seems, took exceptional umbrage to statements made by Westbrook in a newspaper interview in Auckland.¹¹ This was followed by a decade of intense bitterness between Westbrook and the Administration that went far beyond mere difference of opinion. Westbrook, for his part, hit out with sustained criticism and when one official called Westbrook 'an interfering [sic] old bastard'¹² he was merely voicing the feelings of the rest. Using more conventional language, the officials described Westbrook as a 'disaffected' person.

But even before this confrontation began in earnest, Westbrook was an active belligerent in the political arena. During the 1920s, he was twice elected a member of the Legislative Council and was an energetic member of the Citizens' Committee, a small group that directed and articulated dissident opinion in Western Samoa. He became so engrossed in public affairs, and later in his writings, that his business suffered badly. He had mainly himself to blame for becoming bankrupt which also meant he forfeited his seat in the Council. This, plus other setbacks, soured him and his final ten years were spent in ill-health and harsh circumstances. During this period he remained as politically active as he could, wrote voluminously on Samoan matters and made strenuous, but often pathetic, attempts to reinstate his fallen reputation.

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The Westbrook Papers, which are catalogued as MS Papers 61, take up five feet of shelf space and are divided into several sections: official papers (folders 1-11) and correspondence (12-25); personal correspondence (26-40) and papers (41-47A); manuscripts (48-88); and news-