This paper traces changes in population and leadership in a Samoan village since 1976, when significant numbers of people began to emigrate. A number of changes are noted, including changes in residence patterns, location of houses, and a shift to ‘nuclear family’ households. Despite significant social transformation, there has been little change in leadership, few men who held minor matai titles in the 1970s emigrated, and most of these titles are still held by those who held them in the 1970s, or by close relatives. However divisive contests over the two highest ranking titles of the local polity (which incorporates five villages) that began in the 1970s continue to the present day. As a result the village has lost the premier position in the district that it enjoyed from 1900 to the 1960s. The causes of this situation are analysed in relation to changed processes of title succession, the problems of the lands and titles court, and the increasingly ineffective role of the court in dispute resolution.