

Historic paddle finds its way home

*Duke Kahanamoku's koa blade broke
in an outrigger canoe race 71 years ago*

By **Cindy Luis**
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W

aikiki, July 4, 1943.

In the midst of America's involvement in World War II, some 15 miles away from where the unsalvageable superstructure of the USS Arizona still rested visibly in Pearl Harbor, there was catharsis and respite to be found in the soothing "spouting water" fronting the Moana and Royal Hawaiian hotels.

Barbed wire and military supervision notwithstanding, the neighboring Outrigger Canoe Club sponsored the Walter J. Macfarlane Regatta. It was a memorial to its late club president who died of typhoid months earlier; a show of patriotism from the territory some 16 years away from statehood; and a revival of outrigger canoe racing that had been waning.

Interest in the sport had been somewhat on the decline since the last major

race in Kona in 1938, despite the efforts of Hawaii's legendary watermen John D. Kaupiko, Dad Center, Charlie Amalu and, of course, Duke Kahanamoku. Wartime restrictions were perhaps the greatest deterrent.

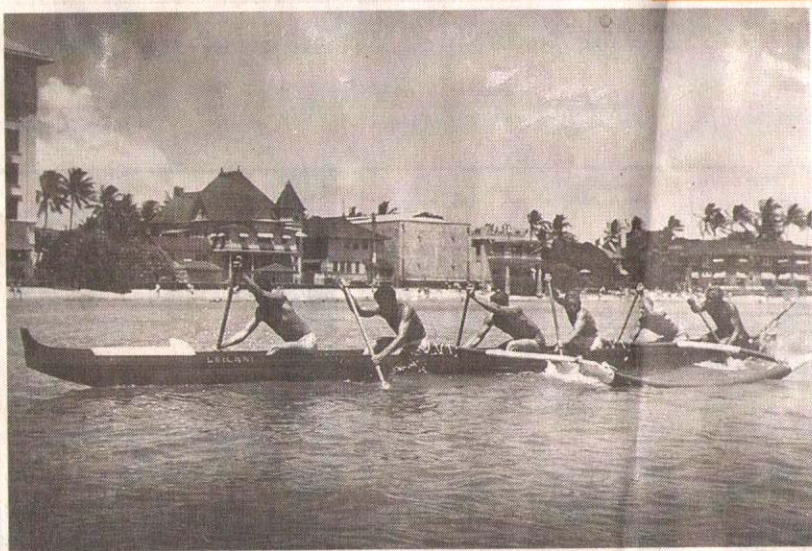
Few realized then that the Macfarlane Regatta would be the sport's salvation. It has gone on to become the longest continually run outrigger canoe paddling event in the world.

And 71 years later a priceless piece of regatta history has returned home.

The koa steering paddle broken during the inaugural senior men's race will be on display Friday. The

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Duke Kahanamoku steered for the winning senior men's crew in the first Walter J. Macfarlane Regatta on July 4, 1943.



PADDLES UP!

71st Walter J.
Macfarlane Regatta

>> **When:**
8:30 a.m. Friday
>> **Where:**
Waikiki Beach



COURTESY MACFARLANE REGATTA

PADDLE: 1943 regatta revived outrigger canoe racing

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blade is signed by the winning Outrigger crew — Bob Bush, Tom Arnott, Jack Beaumont, Thad Ekstrand, Jim Fernie and Duke P. Kahanamoku — as well as coach Tommy O'Brien and others known at "Duke's Boys."

The inscription reads that it was a 3-mile race. Historic accounts say it was more like 4.5 miles, with three turns around an offshore buoy, no designated lanes for the six crews and a finish line parallel to shore.

It was the last of 13 events that day — the first of six consecutive victories for the Outrigger senior men — and a far cry from the 40 that will be contested Friday at the 71st Walter J. Macfarlane Regatta.

One thing that hasn't changed is the desire by senior men's crews to drink Champagne from the large perpetual trophy and have their names inscribed on it a la the Stanley Cup.

Kahanamoku's blade now can be added to the storied tradition, on loan from

Johnna Cotton, niece of the crew's stroke Bob "Buck-aloose" Bush. It had been in the family's possession since 1943, given to Bush by Kahanamoku.

"Our family has had a long history with Duke," Cotton said in a phone call from her Oceanside, Calif., home. "My aunt (Jeanne) and uncle hosted Duke's 75th-birthday party (in 1965) at their Kaha home."

"Nobody really knew of its existence. This paddle is historically significant. It's time to get it back to where it belongs."

Bob and Jeanne Bush later moved to California in 1988. Bob died in 1990; Jeanne, last November.

It was when Cotton brought Jeanne's ashes back to Hawaii to be scattered that serious discussion of the paddle's return began.

"I had heard the stories, knew of the broken paddle and, even though I don't recall meeting him, the significance of Duke's influence was never lost on me," said Cotton, who is moving back to Hawaii. "He pretty much let the whole world know about Hawaii."



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Johnna Cotton, left, Wink Arnott and Bill Pratt show off the broken paddle signed by the winning senior men's crew — including Duke Kahanamoku — from the inaugural Walter J. Macfarlane Regatta.

"It would have been nice to have brought it back for the 70th (Macfarlane). But sometimes things happen in their own time. This is a good time."

The paddle's ownership will be shared between Cotton and Wink Arnott, son of the late Tom Arnott and godson of Jeanne Bush. Cotton said it will be available to be loaned out to interested organizations — one of which is the modest Kahanamoku museum at the Hilton Hawaiian Village, located on the Kahanamokus' ancestral homestead of Kalia.

"The paddle idea was spawned by Wink," said Bill Pratt, president of the Outrigger Duke Kahanamoku Foundation. "We are looking at bettering the museum with more elements, and this is a good opportunity to do so."

"What stands out to me is the significance of it, the paddle and the race. This is about sharing the aloha spirit that Duke was all about. It's a fun race; there are no points scored to qualify you for the state race. The only thing that is on the line is pride."

Wink Arnott will take the paddle down to Friday's race, and it will be put on the table with all the trophies and awards.

"I have a very real connection to this," Arnott said. "My dad and my godmother's husband were in the canoe. I knew Duke Kahanamoku very well. He and (wife) Nadine always

were at our house for the Thanksgiving dinner my mother (Marian) cooked.

"This is a part of the tradition that I grew up with."

There is no record of when the paddle broke during the race. The shaft may have splintered on the course, perhaps as Kahanamoku was trying to hold on a wave when surfing in or when paddling to get out and over to beat a breaking set.

It may not even be the paddle that finished the race since, as any veteran steersman will affirm, there is always a backup paddle behind seat 6.

The beauty of history is in the word itself. There is a "story."

This one is being told 71 years later, written on koa.