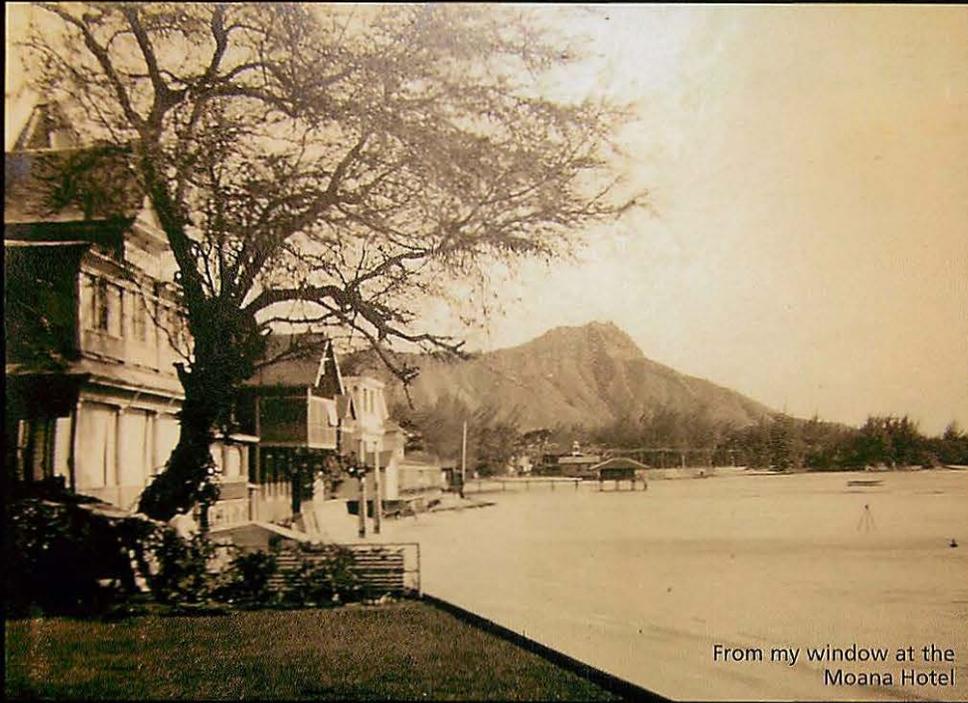


# the **Outrigger**



MAY 2006

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From my window at the  
Moana Hotel



Marian, Dorothy  
Chapin, et al



OCC from water



*On the Cover: Outrigger Canoe Club celebrates its 98th birthday this month. This panoramic photo was taken of the Club in 1910 two years after its opening and shows the Club's original grass shacks and the Apuakehau Stream. Founder Alexander Hume Ford is shown in a suit with his hands in his pockets (center). For a story and more photos of the early Club see pages 1-4. Photo: Hawaii State Archives*

# *Humble Beginnings* A Visit to Hawaii 1914



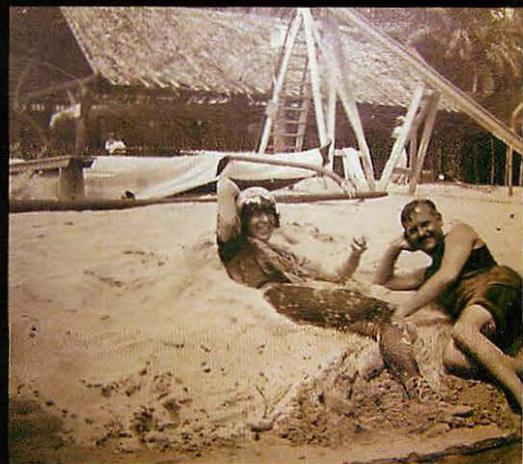
OCC 1914



Outrigger Club Waikiki Beach



OCC Club and pond from Hotel Moana Gardens



Marian Rice and SHC



OCC Waikiki Beach



Japanese carpenter at Outrigger Club



Diamond Head, Moana, Waikiki from Outrigger Club Lanai

# Humble Beginnings

The Outrigger Canoe Club Grew ... But is still the Place ...

Where Men and Boys (and Women!) ... Can ride upright on the Crests of Waves

By Barbara Del Piano

The Outrigger Canoe Club is renowned throughout the state of Hawaii, and around the world as a venerable institution devoted to the traditional water sports of surfing and outrigger canoeing.

As the Club approaches its 100th anniversary, it can be justly proud of its efforts to preserve, perpetuate and promote the noble Hawaiian water sports which were on the verge of extinction when the Club made its debut on the beach at Waikiki in 1908.

Tracing Outrigger's early history through the images of an extensive photo collection newly acquired by the Hawaii State Archives and never before published, brings to life a vibrant image of another time and place so altered by "progress" as to be unrecognizable to even the oldest of the "old-timers."

Waikiki, at the turn of the 20th century, was a far cry from the popular area we know today. Once a playground of Hawaiian royalty, their spacious grass houses set amid groves of towering coconut trees dominated the beachfront while acres of swampland *mauka* of dusty Waikiki Road were cultivated as taro fields.

Just three years before the formation of the Outrigger, the legislature had renamed the main thoroughfare Kalakaua Avenue in honor of Hawaii's last king. A tramcar traversed the three mile route to Waikiki from down-town Honolulu.

By 1908, most of the grass houses were gone; palatial mansions had sprung up along the beach and two hotels provided accommodations for the growing number of visitors who flocked by the dozens to the quaint village by the sea.

One was the Seaside with its quaint cottages sprawled across spacious grounds where the Royal Hawaiian Hotel now stands. The other was the newly built Moana, dubbed "The First Lady of Waikiki." It

was a magnificent pillared structure four stories tall plus roof garden and observation deck.

Completed in 1901 to meet the needs of the emerging visitor trade it featured the most modern equipment available including private baths, telephones and the first electric elevator in the Islands. A 300-foot pier that extended into the ocean was popular with both visitors and locals who loved to gather at the charming pergola located at its end.

Across Kalakaua Avenue, the former taro fields had been replaced by duck ponds tended by Chinese farmers which also served as ideal breeding grounds for pesky mosquitoes, one of the few unpleasant features of an otherwise idyllic setting.

It was on this scene that the idea of a Club devoted to water sports emerged in a most unlikely manner. As a slight, middle-aged *haole* from South Carolina gazed out at the ocean while a guest at the Seaside Hotel, he was dismayed at seeing so few surfers riding the waves. Those he saw were mostly young *haole* boys. There were few outrigger canoes to be seen.

Barge racing at Honolulu Harbor was then the most popular ocean sport in Hawaii. The mainlander realized that something should be done to prevent the inevitable extinction of these sports which had been a part of Hawaii's culture and tradition for centuries.

Fortunately for the sports themselves and for the future Outrigger Canoe Club, the man was Alexander Hume Ford, a visionary with the ability to turn impossible dreams into reality. His enthusiasm for causes he espoused was contagious; he had the gift of being able to convince others to embrace his ideas.

Ford realized that the native sports were truly endangered and extinction was only a matter of time. There were many reasons for this: the decline of the

*continued on page 4*

OCC Beach

# Humble Beginnings for The Outrigger Canoe Club



OCC



Starting out for a surf ride at Waikiki Beach



Date palm, duck pond near Moana Hotel.

continued from page 3

native Hawaiian population, the adoption of Western ways, and the scarcity of *koa*, the traditional wood from which surfboards and canoes were made.

A very basic cause, perhaps overlooked by most, was that simply getting to the beach had become increasingly difficult for surfers because buildings had taken over the open spaces that once provided access to the shore.

Ford's vision was a place that afforded beach access, dressing rooms to change and facilities to store surfboards and outrigger canoes so that "men and boys might ride upright on the crest of waves."

Ford began his campaign by proposing his idea to the group of young surfers. Next he solicited help from Honolulu's businessmen. In both quarters his plan was met with enthusiasm and before long a broad segment of the community began to show interest.

Timing, they say, is everything and by coincidence President Theodore Roosevelt had planned a Pacific tour of his "great white fleet" to demonstrate to the world the United State's maritime strength. The enormous armada was due to arrive at Pearl Harbor in July of 1908.

The promoters had been searching for ways to entertain officers and crew in the real "Hawaiian Style." The concept of a charming beachfront club which could demonstrate the native culture with surfing exhibitions and canoe races had strong appeal.

This added incentive of accommodating the fleet moved the project along faster than it might otherwise have progressed.

Bylaws and dues were established and as word spread the number of surfers and non-surfers interested in joining the Club surpassed all expectations. Two major obstacles remained, however, before the fledgling organization could actually materialize; a site on which to locate the club and facilities for the use of members.

Fortunately, a one and a half acre plot of land between the Seaside and Moana Hotels was available. Owned by the estate of Queen Emma, the land contained a lagoon formed by Apuakehau Stream which carried waters from the *mauka* valleys into the ocean. The Estate's Trustee was amenable to the idea and willingly leased the land to the Club for a nominal fee.

The neighboring hotels believed the Club would provide an added attraction for their visitors and they too espoused the idea. The last hurdle was overcome when, by chance, two authentic grass houses on the grounds of a defunct Kaimuki zoo were available for a small sum. Ford and a group of young surfers borrowed a truck and hauled them to the new Club site.

Members pitched in to adapt the grass houses for use as dressing rooms and surfboard storages areas; lanai were added for social activities. Canoe storage areas were constructed of coconut fronds to house the several outrigger canoes which had been purchased and a carpenter employed by the Club turned out a record number of surfboards; young boys who couldn't afford the two dollars necessary to purchase one, made their own.

With other improvements to the grounds the Club,



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Duck ponds from Waikiki Road on way to Moana

OCC from Moana Hotel



Another successful surfing trip

which truly resembled a little Hawaiian village was up and running by the time the fleet sailed around Diamond Head.

The entire city of Honolulu turned out to greet the navy men and activities of all sorts were planned. In just a few short weeks, Outrigger members organized what was acclaimed the most popular of the week's events: a regatta, surfboard competition and aquatic parade combined into one colorful production.

On the Club's grounds Hawaiians turned out in full force to demonstrate poi pounding, fishing, net mending, canoe lashing and other native crafts. Dozens of canoes and surfboards were placed at the disposal of the officers and men and the day was acclaimed a great success by servicemen, visitors and residents alike.

The Pacific Commercial Advertiser estimated that between four and five thousand people had witnessed the day-long extravaganza. It was an auspicious beginning for the new Club.

After the fleet sailed away, members got back to the mundane tasks of adding improvements to the club. *Hau* trees growing on the grounds were propped up over a trellis and branches soon spread out to form a leafy canopy creating the club's first *Hau* Terrace and a dance pavilion with thatched roof was built beside the lagoon.

True to its mission, the Outrigger Canoe Club continued to organize water sports activities of all types, resurrecting an interest in surfing and canoeing that had not been seen for many years. One particularly dazzling event was a Moonlight Water Carnival featuring illuminated surfboards and canoes.

Eventually Waikiki replaced Honolulu Harbor as the milieu for water sports competitions and outrigger canoes replaced barges as the major racing craft. The thriving Outrigger Canoe Club was the center of these activities.

Over the years as membership grew, the grass houses, always in need of re-thatching, became inadequate

and were replaced by wooden structures in 1911. A fire in 1914 demolished the popular dance pavilion.

The appearance of the Outrigger changed perceptibly over time but the changes taking place around the Club and throughout Waikiki were far more dramatic. In 1918 a concrete wing was added to each side of the Moana Hotel and in 1927 the magnificent Royal Hawaiian Hotel, called "The Pink Palace" was completed.

In the early twenties the Ala Wai Canal was completed which drained the water from the swamps and turned them into dry land, tremendously increasing the value overnight. Tourism became a major factor in the economy of the Islands and it was only a matter of time before the cost of leasing the land under the Outrigger Canoe Club would be prohibitive.

The Club made a valiant effort to retain its ideal site, but it was not to be. In 1964 the new Ossipoff-designed Clubhouse opened its doors on land leased from the Elks Club at the foot of Diamond Head. On its former site stands the Outrigger Waikiki Hotel.

The Moana Hotel is the only structure remaining in Waikiki from the early years of the twentieth century when the Outrigger Canoe Club was born. Present day Waikiki, with its massive high-rise hotels and condominiums, and thousands of visitors is a far cry from the sleepy seaside village that once existed.

The present day Outrigger Canoe Club bears no resemblance to the original cluster of grass houses.

Despite the vast changes the Club has undergone, its guiding principal has remained unchanged throughout the nearly 100 years since Alexander Hume Ford watched a few young boys surfing in the waters off the Seaside Hotel.

His dream to provide a place where "men and boys can ride upright on the crests of waves" came true beyond all expectations as the sports of old Hawaii thrive and waters of Waikiki are filled with surfers and outrigger canoes from dawn to dusk.