

the Outrigger

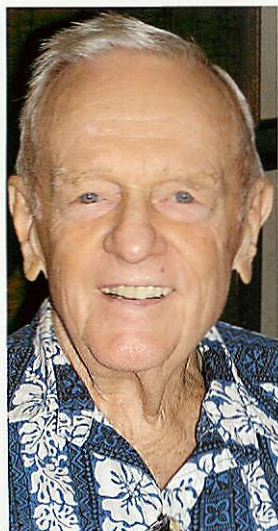


JANUARY 2006

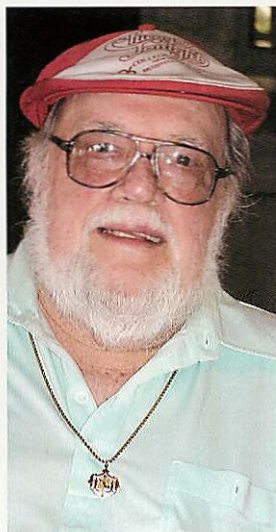
Published by the Outrigger Canoe Club for Members and Guests at Home and Abroad

A Stroll Down Memory Lane

By Barbara Del Piano



Bill Barnhart



Bill Cook



Melville Baptiste



Neal Ifversen



Thad Ekstrand

They arrived promptly at the appointed hour and took their seats in the Outrigger's Board Room after a brief photo session. *Outrigger Magazine* editor, Marilyn Kali, had invited the five octogenarians to a "talk story" session because of a special distinction they hold.

Bill Barnhart, Thad Ekstrand, Bill Cook, Melville "Buddy" Baptiste and Neal Ifversen have belonged to the Outrigger Canoe Club longer than any of the 4,852 current members. Their combined membership totals 373 years.

Also attending, in addition to Kali, were "youngster" Paul Dolan, (he didn't join until 1945) representing the Historical Committee, Board member Barbara Stehouwer, a second cousin of Baptiste, and the author.

Kali got the ball rolling with a few pertinent questions and within minutes the five were teenagers again, recounting early, carefree days at the "old" Club in Waikiki.

Asked how they happened to become members, Baptiste and Ekstrand both replied that their memberships were presents on the occasion of their tenth birthdays. Baptiste's, in 1931, was from Uncle George Freitas, long time member and the contractor who built the "new" Club at Diamond Head. Ekstrand's membership in 1930 came from Uncle

John Whitenack, with Duke Kahanamoku as sponsor. (At the time, the initiation fee was ten dollars and dues one dollar a month.)

Barnhart, whose membership dates back to January 1, 1928, was on the verge of becoming "persona non grata" for overdoing guest privileges when he accompanied his father to the Club every weekend. (George H. W. Barnhart was

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Outrigger President in 1931-1932.) Tired of being sent to his mother at the Uluniu Women's Swimming Club, Bill became a Junior Member at age eight. He recalls his father spending weekends working around the Club, at one time completely rewiring the Hau Terrace.

Cook remembered spending a lot of time at the Club with friends before he joined in June, 1934 at the age of 12. At the time Bill lived a few doors down the beach at *Pualeilani*, the former home of Prince Kuhio, where his father operated a restaurant. Asked why his older brother, George, had not joined at the same time,

Bill replied: "Because I had the ten bucks, and he didn't." (George joined in 1943.)

Neal Ifversen, the only one of the exclusive group who was mainland-born, joined in October 1934, shortly after moving to the Islands. The Club immediately became his second home where he paddled, surfed and played volleyball for more than 50 years.

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They all reminisced about their surfing days and how the beach boys ruled the waves. Only when they considered you adept enough were you allowed to venture from *Baby Surf* to *Canoes*. And woe be to a surfer that crossed the line of their canoes.

The five all had fond memories of their first surfboard—solid redwood planks that weighed close to a hundred pounds.

Thad chuckled over the fun they had "surfing" down the Ala Wai in the days before coconut trees lined the side. Surfboards were attached to a Model T which towed the board down the canal at about 20 miles an hour.



◀ The view of OCC from Kalakaua Avenue.

◀ Volleyball was an important part of OCC life at the old Club.

▶ Wartime Waikiki found barbed wire on the beach in front of the Club.



Neal remembered the medicine ball and boxing gloves that were standard athletic equipment at the Club and Willy Whittle who coached the kids in boxing. According to Neal, many a dispute was resolved with the use of boxing gloves.

Bill Cook talked proudly about owning his own 22-foot koa canoe which he bought from Charlie Amalu and kept parked in front of the old Club when he wasn't out catching waves at Canoes.

An avid volleyball player, Cook and Lawrence "Small Jack" Ackerman competed year after year in the Outrigger's Doubles Championship tournament coming in a perennial second place. After seven silver medals, they finally won the Club championship in 1949. That was the last year they competed.

No reminiscence of the Outrigger Canoe Club would be complete without recollections of the war years and the barbed wire, armed sentries and gun emplacements that lined the beaches. Bill Barnhart recalled that after a while the sentries allowed surfers to go through the gates in the barbed wire with strict orders to be out by sundown.

Occasionally a few avid surfers stayed out a little too long. "Within minutes after the sun disappeared, two 32-caliber machine guns would start shooting over their heads," Barnhart said. Needless to say, the surfers bee-lined it to shore.

Neal spoke of "Dad" Center getting

permission from the Coast Guard to move the barbed wire back to allow canoes to get into the water. Permission was granted but only from four to five o'clock in the afternoon. Thad said that he and his friends, Tom Arnott and Tom O'Brien picked up extra spending money giving servicemen canoe rides—three waves for a dollar.

Barnhart also remembered hanging out on the Club grounds with friends at night during the war, avoiding Maxi and Raymond who slept on the premises. One night, according to Barnhart, they managed to get into the kitchen through an unlocked window and raid the refrigerator. They spent the night munching on turkey and slurping ice cream.

The following day, Bill and friends went back to the dining room and ordered turkey sandwiches. A grinning waiter returned from the kitchen with a knowing look on his face and informed the boys that they were out of turkey.

Barnhart and Ekstrand both paddled in the first Walter Macfarlane Regatta in 1943. Thad was one of "Duke's" boys that dominated the "Senior Six" race for years.

A memorable day in Thad's life was the day he met his wife Pat in 1951 at the Outrigger. A coed from the mainland, she was in town for summer classes at the University of Hawaii. After a whirlwind six-week romance, Thad proposed.

The Ekstrands recently celebrated their 54th wedding anniversary.

Everyone had fond memories of Club founder Alexander Hume Ford in his later years, particularly his special kindness toward children. They chuckled remembering how he sometimes wore one white sock and one blue one, or on occasion, had his shoes on the wrong feet, but they all felt a special affection for the elderly gentleman.

The group was unanimous in its assertion that the move from Waikiki to Diamond Head was the most traumatic event in the Club's nearly 100 year existence.

But while the "old" Club will always be a place dear to their hearts and filled with wonderful memories, they also acknowledge that it would have been impossible to survive had they tried to remain there.

At one of the special meetings held to discuss the Club's future, Bill Cook remembers President Ward Russell making a dire prediction: "If we stay here, our dues will go up to twenty-five dollars a month." Bill says that was enough for him to vote for the move.

The meeting ended on a happy note, with laughter and jokes, and a genuine spirit of camaraderie, yet beneath the surface was an unmistakable sense of nostalgia for another time and place that will always evoke fond memories.