

The *TIDES* of CHANGE

By Barbara Del Piano

Editor's Note: Each month throughout the year 2000, writer Barbara Del Piano will highlight a decade in the Club's history. In this installment, she writes about the period of 1951-1960.

Everyone agreed that it was a wonderful party. The guests came early and stayed until the wee hours. The ladies were stunning in long gowns in a colorful array of satin, silk, and elegant brocade. The gentlemen were resplendent in tux and black tie. But the ambience was anything but formal; the mood was festive, the conversation was lively, and the dance floor was crowded. The guests donned party hats, guzzled champagne, and tooted their toy horns to the beat of Splash Lyons ukulele.

At the stroke of midnight, the members and guests of the Outrigger Canoe Club cheered in not only a new year, but a new decade, and with the tick of the clock, it was suddenly January 1, 1950 and the annual New Year's Eve party at the Club was coming to a joyful end.

One significant reason that the party was such a success was that it was the first large event to be held at the newly remodeled and redesigned Clubhouse. Nearly a decade had passed since the "new" Club had been built and the wear and tear was beginning to show. Also, the Club had outgrown its facilities and was badly in need of not only repairs and renovation, but an overall face lift as well.

The Outrigger had survived the war years better than most private clubs, due in part to its location. It was financially sound, with a sizeable building fund that enabled it to go forward with plans to upgrade the premises. The Board of Directors early in 1949 approved the concept and by mid-September, the actual construction was underway.

The plans called for a more spacious and attractive venue for social events as well as more practical use of available space. To achieve their goals, the Directors employed the services of one of Hawaii's outstanding architects, Vladimir Ossipoff, also a Club member, who did a masterful job of redesigning areas that integrated the site and the buildings so that upon entering the premises, one was able to immediately view the ocean. For the first time, the sea, the land and the structure were combined into one attractive entity. The contractor, James Clark, kept to his word that the project would be completed by December 26, in time for the big blast.

Among the many changes effected were a new entrance to the dining area which provided a vista to the blue waters beyond as well as direct access to the ocean. On the Ewa side, a cocktail lounge was created at a level between the Hau Terrace and the dining room. On the Diamond Head side an additional room was built off the sun deck and a new snack bar and carpenter shop on the mauka side were constructed.

New furnishings, equipment, and decorations

were installed throughout, including an outrigger canoe suspended from the ceiling of the new cocktail lounge. Since the Board was so pleased with the architectural details, they commissioned Mr. Ossipoff to oversee the decor as well. Landscaping and a new sound system added yet another dimension to the overall ambience.

The Club members were ecstatic with the outcome of the renovation and business in the dining room, cocktail lounge and Hau Terrace increased dramatically. Since the facility could now accommodate a larger number of people, considerably more than the existing 1,807 regular members, a low-key membership drive was initiated.

Members were asked to submit names of prospective members who were subsequently invited to join at a reduced initiation fee of \$150, half of the established rate. The drive, which was to last from March 1 to May 31 of 1950 was extended until the end of June. The overwhelming response brought in over 100 new members.

Not only was the Outrigger enjoying an unprecedented period of growth and rejuvenation, but Waikiki, particularly in the area surrounding the Club, was caught up in the expansion of the visitor industry, which had been drastically curtailed during the war years.

At a groundbreaking ceremony on November 4, 1950, the Surfrider Hotel was launched with great pageantry in a colorful ceremony reminiscent of old Hawaii. Matson Navigation Company President Randolph Sevier, assisted by Duke Kahanamoku, shoveled dirt into a ti leaf-lined calabash with a golden shovel draped with maile.

Father Bray chanted and Rev. Henry P. Judd offered a pulse, in keeping with Hawaiian tradition. Surfers and canoe paddlers, including 50 Outrigger members, took part in a spectacular aquatic parade. More than 500 spectators lined the beach to watch the festivities presided over by the King and Queen of Aloha Week.

Ancient and modern hula were performed on the beach, adding yet more color to the gala celebration. The Waikiki building boom had begun and the face of Waikiki was changing rapidly. Soon the Waikiki Biltmore and the Princess Kaiulani would appear on the scene.

The Outrigger Canoe Club, situated in the midst of the choicest area for resort development, continued to sail through the new, post war-decade under clear skies and balmy weather on a wave of optimism and confidence in the future, but not without some problems, the most pressing of which was lack of sufficient parking.

The adjacent lot on the Diamond Head side of the Club had given way to the Surfrider, but a larger space across the street was provided by good friend, Matson Navigation Co. on a month-to-month basis. However, when development spread to the mauka side of Kalakaua Avenue in the mid-fifties, the Club lost more than a third of its precious parking space.

Nevertheless, the Club continued to grow and prosper. The treasurer's report at each annual meeting painted an ever rosier financial picture than the year before. That the years remaining on the lease of the property were numbered was not yet cause for alarm. For several years, special attention had been given to increasing the building fund in the hope that when the lease expired on October 30, 1963, the Club would be able to purchase the fee.

The Outrigger Beach Services, under the direction of Sally Hale and long time beach attendant, "Bataan" Nunes, provided an excellent income to the Club in return for a wide array of activities that were available to the public.

These included outrigger canoe rides, surfing and swimming lessons, surf photography, surfboard and umbrella rentals provided by Waikiki's colorful beach boys including "Panama Dave" Baptiste, "Turkey" Love, "Steamboat" Mokuahi, "Chick" Daniels, "Kalakaua", Harry Robello and others. Lomilomi, the Hawaiian style massage, was dispensed by Earl King on a makeshift cot under a hau tree near the beach.

The athletic program flourished as more clubs were formed to participate in the many regattas that were becoming regular annual sporting events. By 1954, there were 12 canoe clubs competing in events set up by the Hawaiian Canoe Racing and Surfing Association, an organization that the Outrigger had helped to form.

The 1954 season opened with a Maritime Day Regatta in May, followed by the Kamehameha Day Races on June 11. Future President Sam Fuller portrayed an ancient high chief garbed in a pseudo-feather cloak and helmet, presiding over the races ensconced on a throne set up on a stage decorated with kahili, ti leaves, maile and tropical flowers.

Hookup of bananas, papaya, poi, chickens and even a live pig were presented to the alii in a colorful ceremony. The day's activities were followed by a Holoku Ball in the dining room later in the evening.

The Walter Macfarlane Memorial Regatta on July fourth had been growing in popularity as well, with Walter Mac's mother, Alice Kamokila Campbell, pouring champagne into the silver Matson bowl which was passed among the winners of the "senior six".

Other regattas were held near Sand Island in Honolulu Harbor and Kailua, as well as the Julian Yates Hawaiian Canoe Racing Championship Races in Hilo. Another competition during Aloha Week completed the busy schedule of canoe races.

The Molokai Hoe finally became a reality in 1952 and the Castle Swim was revived that same year. Volleyball, mountain ball, and swimming, were part of the Outrigger's expanded athletic program.

Social activities increased at the Club as well. Dinner dances, steak fries, canasta parties, cribbage tournaments, and movies were regular events. During the summer, casual dances on the Hau Terrace drew crowds of eager young people to enjoy

Outrigger Canoe Club 1951-1960

the music of the popular Kalima Brothers, and their "1000 Pounds of Melody".

A Keiki Christmas Party with Santa arriving by canoe was also a popular annual event. Holiday meals, such as Thanksgiving, were usually sellouts. The menu for the 1952 Turkey Day, which included assorted relishes, fruit cocktail, French onion soup, roast turkey with chestnut dressing and cranberry sauce, filet of mahimahi with fresh lobster sauce, roast prime rib of beef with Yorkshire pudding, salad and an assortment of desserts and beverages could be had for \$3, with children's portions at half price.

As the Club's popularity soared, so did the membership, and it was barely two years the new facilities were outgrown and it was necessary to explore ways and means of further expansion. Again Mr. Ossipoff was called upon to come up with a plan to enlarge the popular cocktail lounge. His solution was to extend the cocktail area out over the Hau Terrace on the mauka side toward the volleyball courts.

A state of the art television set, possibly the first in Hawaii to be installed in a public place, would be an added attraction. Additions to the ladies locker room, a new powder room and renovation of the lobby were also proposed. Because of the shortness of the remaining lease, a special membership meeting was held so that the members could vote on whether to proceed with these capital improvements, since, in the unlikely event that the lease was not renewed, all improvements on the property would revert to the lessor.

As a sign of the optimism felt by the members, the vote was unanimous to go forward with the plans. No one seriously thought at the time that the Club would not remain at its present site in the foreseeable future. And so the improvements were made, making the Club yet more attractive and functional as well.

In his report at the annual meeting of 1953, President Herbert M. "Yabo" Taylor addressed the lease situation and said, "We feel that the Outrigger belongs here at Waikiki and is popular because we are at Waikiki....", a statement that aptly expressed the feeling of the entire membership.

In July of 1954, Outrigger members were shocked to learn that the Queen Emma Estate had awarded an option on 14 acres of its prime Waikiki land to Paul W. Trousdale of California. The acreage included the property occupied by the Outrigger Canoe Club. Although the Club's lease had nine and a half years remaining, the news was cause for considerable alarm and raised questions about the future.

The Outrigger would no longer have its old friend, Matson Navigation Company, who had come through with help in prior crises, to deal with. There was nothing to be done but to wait to see what happened. The option was to expire on September 30. At the time, Mr. Trousdale was away on his honeymoon and it appeared as if the option would not be exercised.

However, the developer returned and announced his intention to go forward with his plan to acquire the property. A tentative verbal offer was made to extend the lease on the Club grounds under certain conditions, first and foremost being a hefty increase in the lease rent as well as beach access through the Club.

The Board of Directors stated their willingness to consider all offers and to keep the membership apprized of any developments. Mr. Trousdale announced that he hoped to work out an arrangement with the Outrigger, but if not, he would take over the property at the end of the lease and promote a "swank" club.

To allay the fears of the members, an article in the *Forecast*, as the Club magazine was called, stated that "The Club is of real value to Hawaii, Honolulu and Waikiki and adds much in recreation to visitors and local people alike. We believe that the new lessees will realize the value of our Club and negotiate an extension of our present lease on new terms".

On the surface, things went along as usual, but behind the scenes there was a great deal of concern and a search committee was formed to explore other locations, if in fact, a move should ultimately be necessary.

There had been a previous suggestion that the Outrigger lease the former Kailua Officer's Club on the beach at Kailua, which was available. However, after much investigation and discussion, the committee and the Board of Directors decided that although the idea of an annex on the Windward side would be an asset, moving the Club itself to that location was not a good idea. They believed that it would not be prudent to stretch the Club's resources and possibly weaken its financial structure at this crucial time.

"We all know that when we negotiate for a new lease for the property which we now occupy, that the rent will be considerably higher than it is now. Therefore, we should concentrate on being in a strong financial position," President Taylor advised the members.

By mid-1954, the Outrigger began to seriously consider buying or leasing a portion of the Elks Club property on the site of the old Castle home. The acquisition was considered more as an investment than an actual site to relocate the Club. A high rise building was envisioned with rooms and apartments for members and guests on the upper floors, with the first two stories reserved for offices, dining room and locker rooms.

The Board of Directors believed that it would be a sound financial venture, bringing in a greater return than present investments and in the unlikely event a move would be necessary, facilities would already be in place. At a special meeting in July of 1954, the members were informed of the negotiations with the Elks Club. The Steiner property, Diamond Head of the Moana Hotel, was also proposed as a possible alternative.

Early in 1955 a 55-year lease was consummat-

ed between the Queen Emma Estate and The Waikiki Development Company, an entity formed by Paul Trousdale and his partner, Clint Murchisen. Both the lessee and the Trustees of the Queen Emma Estate assured the Outrigger that a lease extension would be possible and a "long tenure of occupancy assured."

Again a special meeting was called for April, 1955 for the express purpose of authorizing the Board of Directors to enter serious negotiations with the Elks Club for the purchase of the Ewa half of their property. The motion was passed and \$450,000 was authorized as the purchase price. Meanwhile, the membership was assured that negotiations were continuing with the Waikiki Development Company to renew the lease on the existing property.

In the meantime, life at the Outrigger continued without interruption. A summer program for Junior members was implemented, canoe racing season was bigger than ever, parties and social events of all kinds filled the calendar. No one wanted to seriously consider the possibility of the lease negotiations failing. The Outrigger Canoe Club was indeed an integral part of Waikiki, and had been for nearly 50 years.

The City Planning Commission okayed the rezoning of the 14 acre parcel, which included the Club, designating it as a business district. A firm offer for lease renewal was made to the Club and another special meeting was called for July 29, 1955, to advise the membership of the terms.

Before the largest turnout of members in Club history, the meeting was called to order by President Sam Fuller. Leslie Hicks explained the terms of the offer which included relinquishing one third of the Club's beach frontage as well as ten feet along the Diamond Head side of the property for a right of way. The offer also required an up-front payment of \$200,000.

In addition, parking would be on Kuhio Avenue. Available space on the makai side could be leased for 75-cents a square foot, or on the mauka side for 50-cents. The Board of Directors, with one exception, considered the terms unacceptable. Among other sites proposed for eventual relocation, in addition to the Elks Club property, was a three acre tract Ewa of the Kaiser development and adjacent to the yacht harbor.

The Territorial Harbor Board already had plans to fill in the area and a 40 year lease could be obtained. Complaints about the poor surfing in that area were addressed by proposing that a power boat ferry could be acquired to haul canoes and surf boards out to the surfing areas.

Assured that for the next eight years, the present lease would remain in tact, and that other desirable sites were available, the membership voted to turn down Waikiki Development's offer by a vote of 137 to 86. Many members voted against the motion hoping that a new offer with better terms might be forthcoming. To many it was the death knell of the Club.

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It was difficult to imagine the Outrigger Canoe Club at any other location. Rumors based mostly on misinformation, ran wild and headlines such as "PASSING OF THE OUTRIGGER CANOE CLUB" and "OUTRIGGER CANOE CLUB TO BE REPLACED WITH NEW EXCLUSIVE CLUB" appeared in the local newspapers.

In September, negotiations with the Elks were satisfactorily completed and the B.P.O.E. voted unanimously to lease three and a half acres including several hundred feet on the water to the Outrigger Canoe Club for 99 years at the rate of \$30,000 per year, the amount to be renegotiated in the 51st year.

J. Russell Hudson, Board Chairman of the Elks, reported that it was one of the rare unanimous votes in the organization's history. The Outrigger, however, continued to explore other possible sites and it was not until May of 1956 that yet another special meeting was called to vote on the matter.

Leslie Hicks, a member of both the Board of Directors and the Search Committee, informed the members that "we have literally combed the shore frontage of this Island for a possible site. At times we thought we had something. Now we have eliminated everything but these two proposals: the Elks Club and the Waikiki Development Company's offer."

He expressed his own feelings that although a club could be maintained on the present site, a club of this type could not be maintained by the present membership.

"If you take the long range view that the community needs this kind of a club, and that the younger members will outlive the seven year period, and that their youngsters coming after them will want a club of this kind to be maintained for them and their posterity, then, I think there is no other answer than a different site...in other words, the Elks Club site."

And so the die was cast. The members, many with heavy hearts, voted to reject the offer tendered by Waikiki Development Company. Negotiations continued until at last a mutually satisfying agreement was reached between the Elks and the Outrigger Canoe Club.

Although there were still several years remaining at the old location, members began to utilize the new site for picnics, barbecues and other casual functions. A children's swimming pool was installed and the area was proclaimed a great place for family get-togethers.

At the main Club, it was business as usual. Membership applications continued to arrive and various improvements were made around the premises. Perhaps the most monumental decision in the Club's history had been made, and with it a great deal of pressure was lifted from the Board members who could now devote their energies to definite plans for the future.

Waikiki was inundated with visitors, charming wooden bungalows had given way to high rise buildings, verdant mountain views were blocked by concrete towers, lazy Kalakaua Avenue was now a busy thoroughfare with lines of cars and cabs and buses, and parking was a near-impossibility. Perhaps it was time to move on.

The Club had weathered other storms and it would weather this one. The place that the Outrigger Canoe Club held in the hearts and lives of so many of its members, and the traditions created over half a century that surrounded it, were now strong enough to withstand the tides of change. And so the members settled down to enjoy to the fullest the few remaining years on that most precious spot that had given it birth.

The New Year's eve party of December 31, 1959, was as gala and merry as the one a decade before and many a glass was raised to toast a long and happy future.

Next month: 1961-1970.