

In The Beginning...

THE OUTRIGGER

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. For her first installment, she writes about the period 1901-1910.

For the first 57 years of its existence, the Outrigger Canoe Club occupied one of the choicest spots on Waikiki Beach. This is a story not only about the origin of the Club, but a story of that special area on Waikiki Beach where it all started.

In the beginning...there was a softly curving strip of white sand beach, constantly caressed by a sea of brilliant blues and greens, transparent in the glittering rays of a tropic sun. Majestic purple mountains with deeply gorged ridges, eroded by the winds and rains of a thousand years, provided an awesome backdrop for the picture perfect

scene.

The beach was lined with a profusion of coconut trees and the land beyond the shore was dotted with fish ponds and loi for growing taro. The landscape was marked with several heiau, where the chiefs worshiped their gods and sacrificed their enemies. In the water, outrigger canoes and long surfboards made of koa sliced through the rolling surf, gentled by an unseen coral reef.

The beach was interrupted by a stream called Apuakehau which flowed from the valleys mauka into the ocean. The land on the Ewa side was called Helumoa; the land on the Diamond Head side was Ulukou. At the mouth of the stream was the famous surfing beach called Kalehuawehe.

Heavy mountain rains sometimes caused Apuakehau to empty tons of sediment into the

ocean, muddying the waters for weeks on end, and the taro patches and fish ponds provided ideal conditions for the pesky mosquito to flourish.

Coral outcroppings on the ocean floor sometimes proved hazardous for the surfers. But despite these irritations, Waikiki was still considered one of the island's most idyllic locales.

It was here that Captain George Vancouver first set foot on Hawaiian soil in 1792. And it was here that Kamehameha the Great landed his armada, said to consist of 1,200 double canoes holding 10,000 warriors, when he began his conquest of Oahu in 1775.

This was Waikiki, a place so special that for hundreds of years, it was the place where the highest ranking chiefs lived, and the place where many of them died, including Kahekili, the ruling chief of Maui, who conquered Oahu in 1783.

On the land of Helumoa, Kamehameha the Great built a large compound for his court amid the 10,000 coconut trees that are said to have grown there. It was not until 1808 that Kamehameha moved his court of 1,000 people to Honolulu Harbor where the large foreign ships found the deep waters more suitable for mooring.

With the seat of government removed, the face of Waikiki began to change, and the area became a retreat for the alii; a place removed from the busy political and social arena of downtown Honolulu, where they could relax and be rejuvenated by gentle breezes and soothing waters.

Soon wealthy business men began to build homes for their families in the area and before long, palatial columned mansions replaced the thatched-roof cottages.

Visitors to Oahu were drawn to Waikiki and enchanted by its tropical ambience. With the passing of the alii, trusts were established to administer their lands, and much of it became

available for commercial development.

It was said that Kamehameha V, Lunalilo, Kalakaua, as well as the beautiful young Princess Kaiulani, were all proficient surfers, but now the sport of surf board riding gradually declined. Only a few young men and boys, mostly Caucasian, perpetuated the sport. There were few native Hawaiians living in Waikiki and the fish ponds were transformed from rice paddies and taro patches into duck ponds as Chinese farmers moved into the area. Bath houses sprang up providing amenities for the daily use of bathers and in 1901, the Moana Hotel first opened its doors.

Located on the Diamond Head side of Apuakehau, this grand wooden structure was the finest hotel in the Pacific. Again, the face of Waikiki was changing. In 1906, the Seaside Hotel, built by George W. Macfarlane, was built at Helumoa, on the Ewa side of the stream.

It was onto this scene that a visitor wandered one day in 1907. As he stood on the beach and watched, agile, sun-browned surfers rode their long, narrow boards through curling waves toward shore. He was fascinated by this sport he had only briefly heard about, and the impression it made on his fertile mind would have lasting repercussions.

The visitor was Alexander Hume Ford, and within a year he would found a club on the beach at Waikiki, at the mouth of Apuakehau, by the ancient surfing grounds of Kalehuawehe.

Ford's purpose, he stated, was to perpetuate and preserve the declining water sports of Waikiki, "by making the beach and surfing areas available to the small boy of limited means...and to provide a place where men and boys might ride upright upon the crests of waves."

Small in stature but a giant in terms of imagination and organizing skills, Ford realized his dream not by first approaching

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CANOE CLUB 1904 – 1910

the downtown business community, or even the fledgling visitor industry. Instead, he gathered a group of young boys who were out in the water with their boards and asked them if they were interested in joining a club he was planning to organize. It was in this rather nebulous and casual manner that the Outrigger Canoe Club first came into being.

The idea for such an organization came at just the right time and place, and from just the right person to make it happen. Ford was most definitely a dreamer and a visionary. He was not a business man or entrepreneur by any stretch of the imagination. He dreamed dreams and then had the ability to make them a reality. Then he would move on to dream other dreams and have other visions.

Once he had gathered his nucleus of a membership, mostly young surfing enthusiasts, he proceeded to solicit community support, but first and foremost, he needed to find a suitable location. Much of the land in the area was owned by the large estates.

Ford set his sights on a one and a half acre parcel nestled between the Moana and the Seaside hotels which was owned by the Estate of Queen Emma. Fortunately, the trustees of the estate found the idea of a club for aquatic sports commendable and facilitated a lease to the land for the sum of \$10 per year which contained the stipulation that the land be used "only for the purpose of preserving surfing on boards and in outrigger canoes."

Support from the community was enthusiastic, and the project was considered an idea whose time had come. Next came the nitty gritty of organizing the club and establishing a plan of operation.

A series of meetings were held and many prominent community leaders offered their support to get things going.

President Theodore

Roosevelt's "Great White Fleet" was due to arrive in Honolulu in July of that year, and many believed that a club of this nature would be the ideal place to entertain them.

At any rate, the organization proceeded quickly and Alexander Ford was elected the Club's first President. Initiation fees of \$5 for boys and \$10 for adults were approved, while dues were set at \$12 a year for adults and \$5 for boys.

With an enthusiastic membership and a suitable location, the next order of business was to provide a physical structure for the Club.

Ford was fortunate to locate two authentic grass structures in good repair that were owned by a zoo in Kaimuki that was closing down. The structures were purchased and moved to the site at relatively little expense. One was located at the lagoon formed by Apuakehau Stream and adapted for surfboard and canoe storage. The other faced the beach and was used as a bathhouse and dressing room.

Hau trees growing on the property were propped up and their thick, intertwining branches provided a natural sunshade.

By the time "The Great White Fleet" arrived in Honolulu, the Club was ready and the officers and enlisted men were entertained in great style with a series of events which included luau and dancing parties.

Because of the success of these events and the favorable publicity which the Club received, the Outrigger Canoe Club's reputation was immediately established.

Barely a year after its founding, the Women's Auxiliary of the Outrigger Canoe Club was established and the "club for men and boys" would never be the same. Picnics and family gatherings under the hau tree lanais were almost daily occurrences and dressing rooms for the ladies were soon added.

Just as everything seemed to be going smoothly, the officers and membership were shocked by the unexpected departure of founder, President, and ex-officio manager, Alexander Hume Ford, whose steady hand, creative ideas and on site participation had set the club on a steady course.

Before long a financial crisis developed, and the Club's early demise was averted only by diligent efforts of officers and other members and generous private donations.

In 1910, under the leadership of Judge Sanford B. Dole, the club's third president, the impracticality of the thatched roof structures became evident, and plans were made to replace them with more substantial wooden buildings. The new construction provided space for more activities and before long, dances were held on the second floor

"pavilion" and afternoon tea and other beverages were served.

Although the Club remained first and foremost a water sports club, social activities were becoming more and more frequent and subtly but irrevocably the Club expanded in new directions.

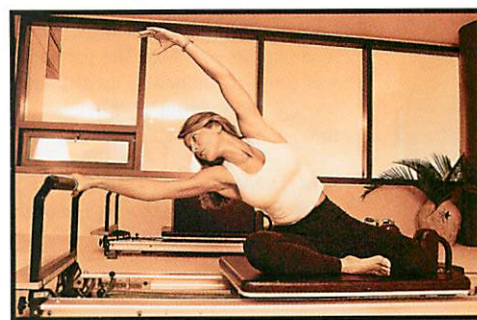
Having weathered its first serious financial crisis, the Outrigger Canoe Club was on its way to becoming an established institution in Waikiki, not only for men and boys, but for entire families to enjoy water sports and a pleasant social environment. No one could predict the future, but for the time being, the Outrigger Canoe Club appeared to have a bright and promising future.

Next Month: Growing Pains, 1911-1920.



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