

# A New Beginning for the Outrigger Canoe Club

By Barbara Del Piano

It was a long time coming, but the day was finally here. It was January 11, 1964, the day of the official opening of the new Outrigger Canoe Club at Diamond Head, and the bidding of a fond aloha to the old site at Waikiki.

The day's activities began at 2 p.m. with volleyball finals played on the new courts. At 3 p.m., a flotilla of 10 canoes departed on their last voyage to the old Club. A half hour later, as they drew onto the beach at Waikiki, awaiting them were Club President J. Ward Russell, Kahu Abraham Akaka, pastor of Kawaiahao Church, and a group of members who were about to witness a momentous event in the history of the Club.

The Kahu blessed each of the canoes, sprinkling them with water from a calabash that once belonged to Kamehameha the Great. He then consecrated a small area on the beach in front of the old Club from which each of the paddlers scooped a handful of sand and placed it in the calabash.

The paddlers then returned to their canoes and set out to sea in single file. In the lead was the *Leilani*, Outrigger's prized koa canoe, whose crew was composed of some of the Club's most stalwart watermen: Gay Harris, Jack McKenzie, Johnny Hollinger, and Charley Amalu, with Duke Kahanamoku steering. It was followed by a double-hulled canoe carrying Ward Russell and Kahu Akaka. When the canoes were about 100 feet off shore, they formed a circle and the Kahu tossed a lei in the water in memory of departed members. At that very moment, a beautiful rainbow appeared over Manoa Valley.

The canoes then headed toward Diamond Head and the new home of the Outrigger Canoe Club, where more than 500 members eagerly awaited their arrival. As the double-hulled canoe approached the shore, it circled the area in front of the new clubhouse as Kahu Akaka, in a symbolic gesture, emptied the sand from the calabash into the water, thus bringing a part of the old Club to the new site.

The ceremony continued when Kahu went ashore and untied a fragrant maile lei strung between two coconut trees. He then delivered a prayer, dedicating the new premises with heart-rending words. Not a sound was heard as throngs of

members gathered solemnly around him with bowed heads, listening to his every word as he blessed those present, as well as past and future members, and the new Club. In his soft melodious voice, he prayed:

"...that this Club may promote the sports and activities of old and new Hawaii in all their forms... cultivate aloha and friendship among its members, families, and staff. Let this be a place where the individuality of each person is appreciated.

"Thus may all who come here, members and guests, find their peace in a deeper unity with nature and neighbor, with self and Thee. Thus may the Outrigger Canoe Club become the finest of clubs in our state and nation."

After a few moments of silence, as people absorbed the poignant words, the somber ceremony erupted into a joyous celebration commencing with a two-hour happy hour from 5 to 7 p.m. A program, emceed by long-time member Bob Fischer, gave special praise to Cline Mann, whose birthday it coincidentally was, for his contributions in making the transition run so smoothly. His committee was also given special commendation for its diligent work.

Then the luau began as the kalua pig, poi and all the accompaniments were rolled out. For the rest of the evening, guests were entertained with delicious food, Hawaiian music and hula, and finally, dancing under the stars to the music of Ken Alford and his Dixiecats, Honolulu's most popular dance band of the era. It was well after midnight when guests departed in a jubilant, ecstatic mood, having spent the past few years in a state of anxious uncertainty about the future of the Club.

President J. Ward Russell expressed not only his feelings, but those of many others who had worked so hard to ensure the Club's future when he said: "I find it difficult to find the right words to express the flood of emotions I experienced... as the flotilla of canoes, led by our 'old-timers'" left the old Club and landed at the beach at our new site...as I listened to the Reverend Abraham Akaka's inspiring and moving words of dedication, challenge, and prayer...as I witnessed the tremendous turnout of our members for the day's activities, and the Herculean efforts of the staff to handle the crowd...as I listened to the favorable comments of our members, I can only say I am truly grateful for the opportunity to have been a part of this impressive event."

Unnoticed by the crowd, two young girls on surf boards, 11-year-old Keani Reiner, and 8-year-old Anne Hogan, had followed the flotilla on its journey to and from Waikiki.

After the paddlers had placed the sand in the calabash and returned to their canoes, Keani and Anne each picked up a handful from the blessed area and placed it on the top of their boards before setting off again, careful not to let any of the sand slide off.

As the double canoe circled close to shore, and Kahu Akaka emptied the calabash, the girls followed suit, gently pushing the sand off their boards and into the ocean. Ann, still an active member of the Club, remembers that day as being a very special occasion in her life... participating, though unofficially, in transferring the mana of the old Outrigger to the new.

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The dedication of the "new" Outrigger Canoe Club at Diamond Head.



Duke Kahanamoku sprinkles sand brought from the old Club onto the grounds of the new Club bringing a part of the old Club to the new. He's aided by OCC President Ward Russell.



Kahu Abraham Akaka is flanked by Duke Kahanamoku and Ward Russell at the Club's dedication ceremony.



Twenty-five years later on Club Day in 1989, the moving ceremony was reenacted by past OCC Presidents Mark Buck and Ward Russell, Henry Ayau, Kahu Akaka, and past President Peter Balding.


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