

OCC Luau First Held in 1908

By Barbara Del Piano

The Outrigger Canoe Club had barely begun to operate when, inspired by founder Alexander Hume Ford, it put on the most spectacular display of surfing and canoeing that Waikiki, or in fact, the world had ever seen.

An illuminated water carnival on November 7, 1908, featured surfers and outrigger canoes slicing through the waves illuminated by multi-colored electric lights provided by compact storage batteries.

The entire sky above Waikiki was ablaze with light, while hundreds of onlookers gazed in awe at the spectacle. In addition to the ocean activities, the Club held its first luau. In true Hawaiian style, an enormous pig was cooked in an imu and served on ti leaves with all the extras.

Even a kahuna was on hand to tell fortunes. It was indeed a stunning debut for the barely six-month-old beach club!

For the next 55 years there does not appear to have been a luau held at the Outrigger. It was not until the Club officially moved to its new location at Diamond Head on January 11, 1964, that a grand luau climaxed a day of poignant ceremonies to mark the transition from one site to the other.

Four years later, a Club luau became an annual event that began with an elaborate and festive luau in celebration of the Club's 60th anniversary. More than 400 people gathered to have a good time and enjoy the ono food.

Club manager, Peter Van Dorn and a committee, visited imu farms around Oahu and chose the one they felt would do the best job of preparing the pig. Beloved Front Desk receptionist, Auntie Eva Pomroy, checked the poi to make sure it was just the right consistency, and bartenders Anzai and Pete distilled the okolehao to perfection.

Hawaiian musicians and dancers entertained, followed by dancing under the stars until midnight. People raved for weeks about the affair which, incidentally, cost a total of \$5.

Since 1968, celebrating the Club's anniversary with a luau has become an annual tradition. Although the actual birthday of the Outrigger is in May, June was chosen as a time when the weather was more likely to cooperate. In 1979, the luau moved from June to August, then to September, and finally October, when it is currently held.

The Entertainment Committee took over the event and each year, it seems, an attempt was made to outdo the success of the previous year. The finest of Island musicians were engaged to provide entertainment, including The Sons of Hawaii, Andy Cummings, Gabby Pahinui, Palani Vaughan, the Cazimero Brothers, George Kuo, and Cyril Pahinui.

The decorations turned the grounds into a lavish tropical paradise, thanks to Club members Dr. Adrian Brash, Dale Hope, Tiare Finney and Mary Philpotts who donated ti leaves, lauae fern, monstera leaves, banana trees, anthurium, plumeria, and other greenery from their lush gardens.

Headed for several years by Mitzi Murphy, committee members spent hours decorating the Clubhouse and stringing hundreds of plumeria lei to hang from the rafters of the Hau Terrace. It was truly a sight to behold.

For many years, the late Henry Ayau, took care of selecting the pig, overseeing the imu, arranging for the entertainment and emceeding the evenings' festivities. The luau was a sell-out year after year.

Baby Dave Rochlen, who assisted Henry for several years, remembers members coming early to watch the pig being removed from the imu, and the kids eagerly picking and munching on the pieces of hot, roasted pig plucked from the chicken wire that covered it.

In 2002, after his untimely death, the luau was held in Henry's honor, and guests were asked to wear a plumeria behind one ear, a trademark of Henry's, that he was rarely seen without.

Since the early 90s, Conne Sutherland has served on the Entertainment Committee nearly every year, lending her extraordinary talents

to planning and decorating for the big event.

Not only is Conne a professional events planner, but she grew up in a Hawaiian ohana that had its own family luau every month. With the help of enthusiastic committee members, Conne has adorned the Club with hanging lauhala baskets filled with ferns and tropical foliage, large floral arrangements fashioned around young banana trees, tables lined with ti and monstera leaves, and pineapples, with fragrant plumeria lei hanging overhead. Experts demonstrated the arts of weaving coconut hats and haku lei.

In 1999, major changes took place when the imu was discontinued in favor of a kitchen-prepared buffet. Items, such as rice, macaroni salad, and teriyaki steak were added to the menu to appeal to a broader range of appetites.

In 2008, the year of the Club's centennial, Glenna Wong and her Centennial Committee put on the luau. Prime tables close to the stage, went for \$1,000. Commemorative T-shirts were designed for the occasion.

In more recent years, Club member and kumu hula, Cathy Ostrem, brought her beautifully costumed halau, consisting of Club members of all ages, keiki to kupuna, to the stage to perform. Corin Gentry Balding and friends put on a spectacular performance of Tahitian dancing and drumming.

In 2013, the Club will celebrate its 105th anniversary and its 46th consecutive annual luau on October 6. Conne Sutherland and her faithful workers are brainstorming to come up with new ideas for the greatest luau yet. It's truly a special Club event you won't want to miss.



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