

Outrigger's Proud Role in CANOE RACING HISTORY

By Marilyn Kali

As canoe racing season rolls around it's time for all of us to be reminded of the Outrigger Canoe Club's great legacy and the important role the Club has played in making the sport what it is today.

While we all know that the Outrigger Canoe Club was formed in 1908 to make sure that "the sports of old Hawaii would always have a home," it is not as well known that the Club and its members took a leading role in reintroducing modern canoe racing in Hawaii in the 1930s and again in the 1940s and sponsored and officiated at most of the early races.

So as we pick up our paddles for another canoe racing season, let's review how OCC has helped the sport of outrigger canoe racing grow from our small canoe club on the beach in Waikiki to an international phenomenon with races now taking place around the world.

IN THE BEGINNING

OCC fielded its first outrigger canoe racing crew in 1908 in a race in Honolulu Harbor. In the early days, it was the custom for winners of outrigger canoe races to receive cash prizes. OCC paddlers were among the first to refuse cash in favor of medals, cups or other non-monetary prizes. The OCC policy was: "The Club has a duty to protect the amateur standing of its young members and no person should be allowed to represent the Club in any contest where cash is involved."

There were a few canoe races in the 1910s and 1920s, most often held in Waikiki, in conjunction with surfing contests. OCC entered and won many. Outrigger's first 4th of July race held in 1910, was just such a dual surfing and canoeing competition.

RACING REVIVED IN NAPO'OPO'O



Lorrin Thurston

In 1933, the first attempt to organize six-man canoe racing was made.

Former Outrigger President Lorrin Thurston, related in his oral history, that E. E. Black, a contractor, came to him and said he has just finished building the road from Kailua-Kona to just beyond Pu'uwa'aw'aa Ranch. He asked Thurston what he

could do to show his appreciation to his employees and the people of Kona for their patience during the road work.

Thurston, who had his own canoe, the *Kakina I*, loved to canoe surf and race others at Waikiki.

"I talked with Dad Center and suggested that perhaps we might start canoe racing again. And he encouraged me. To make a long story short, I raised enough money to buy medals for all the races. Princess



Dad Center

Kawananakoa was one of the principal donors. I went to Kona and interested Julian Yates, Louis Macfarlane and Eugene Kaupiko in holding a canoe race.

"They organized canoe crews from Kailua, Honaunau and Milolii to compete against crews from Oahu: Hui Nalu, Outrigger and Queen's Surf. There were five races and OCC

won three. The crews raced in Napo'opo'o. This was the first race that featured canoe racing only."

Races were also held in 1934 and 1935 in Kona.

One of the problems involved in holding the race in Kona was how to get the many paddlers from Oahu to Kona.

"I didn't have the money to pay for their steamship fares and there were no planes," Thurston explained. "We finally worked out a proposition with the U.S. Coast Guard who were able to bring the paddlers over in daylight hours—not spending any night on board—and we were able to get facilities to house the boys at the home of the Reverend Shannon Walker and a pavilion of the YMCA at Keauhou. The local boys stayed in their own homes.

"The Inter Island Steamship Company ran a special excursion of the *Waialeale* for spectators to view the races. There were four or five official boats of the U.S. Navy, two from Australia, and probably 15 yachts.

"After the races, everyone gathered at the Kona Inn for dancing and a luau."

MORE THAN JUST AN 'EXCURSIONIST'



Mariechen Wehselau Jackson

It was also the start of modern canoe racing for Outrigger women.

Mariechen Wehselau Jackson, Hawaii's first female Olympic Gold Medalist (1924 in swimming), sailed on the *Waialeale* as an "excursionist" to see the races along with Ruth Scudder Gillmar, Oma Haley, and Ann Barkey Cook. On other boats were Ginger Joyce and Dot Ruttman Lambert.

"Prior to going up," Mariechen relates, "Dad Center had said to me, 'Now, Squeaky, why don't you get a crew together because then you can race against the women up in Kona.' I thought he was joking. We were watching from the *Waialeale* and all of a sudden Lorrin Thurston came out with a megaphone and he yells, 'Squeaky, Dad wants you to get your crew together. So we decided to go have some fun. Then Dad tells us we're going to race in the *Hanakeeki*. The *Hanakeeki* was huge and I had only steered a 10-foot canoe before.

"We started out to the starting line and I steered the canoe just as straight as could be, very nicely. We flirted with the Coast Guard who were the officials, at the starting line. We waited and waited and finally the other crew came along. And they were elderly women, all white long hair, and they were wearing muumuu and the top of the canoe was just about three or four inches from the water. They were large women. They came out paddling very steadily and when they got out there the Coast Guard explained the rules and regulations to them and we lined up.

"We went out fast, and when I looked again, I had to shake my head. I couldn't believe it. We were going around in a circle. Then we headed right for the judges' boat and we had to yell to the judges to get out of our way. I couldn't handle that canoe. We mowed down a couple of flags. We went all over the place. And the other crew won, but by just a very, very little. If we had gone straight we would have won. The Hawaiian women won the gold medals from Princess Kawananakoa fair and square."

In 1936 interisland paddling moved to Honolulu Harbor with the Honaunau crews sweeping the events. The interisland races ceased at the onset of World War II. However, Outrigger, Hui Nalu and Waikiki Surf Club and several other clubs raced occasionally in Waikiki.

MACFARLANE REGATTA FOUNDED



Bill Capp

Robert (Bob) Fischer recalled in his oral history in 1985 that he thought a lot about canoe racing after the war started, and he got together with John D. Kaupiko (founder of Hui Nalu) in 1943 and asked him to put together a crew for a summer race. Bill Capp was on the Board of Directors and he got OCC to sponsor the race.

After OCC President Walter J. Macfarlane's untimely death in April 1943, the Board decided to name the already planned race after him. That race is now the Walter J. Macfarlane Memorial Regatta and has been held on the 4th of July every year since. The Macfarlane Regatta is the oldest continual six-man outrigger canoe race in the world, celebrating its 70th anniversary this year. There were 13 events in the 1943 Macfarlane and original participants were OCC, Hui Nalu, Royal Hawaiian, Halekai, Beach Patrol, and Queens Surfers.

Starting the Macfarlane relaunched six-man outrigger canoe racing for the second time in modern history, and earned Fischer the title "father of present day canoe racing." This time canoe racing was here to stay.

After World War II, other races were organized to commemorate special events, such as Maritime Day and

Kamehameha Day, and races were held in Honolulu Harbor, the Ala Wai Canal, Keahi Lagoon and various places on the Windward side.

FORMALIZING & ORGANIZING



OHCRA dedicated its 1988 championship regatta to Bob Fischer who led the formation of the association, and served as its race starter for many years. Bob is shown with Anita Brightman. He also steered the first women's crew in the Macfarlane Regatta in 1943.

Over the next few years Outrigger's William Capp, Dad Center, Duke Kahanamoku and Bob Fischer, who were often called on to organize and officiate at the races, became increasingly alarmed at what was happening. Each race was different. There was haphazard measuring of the race courses, different race rules for each race, and basically no consistency from race to race or year to year.

"You had to get Dad and Duke, all the old gang, and they said this and that and we raced here one time and there another, and when can you pass, when can you cut over, how much clearance?" explained Capp at a Hawaiian Canoe Racing and Surfing Association (HCRSA) meeting a few years later.

"There was nothing in writing. We thought it was time to establish some kind of an association if canoe paddling was to be perpetuated," Capp said.

"Being on the Board of Directors of the Outrigger, I got together with Duke and we talked it over and he thought it was a good idea to see if the Board would put up some money and try to get the ball rolling," he added.

On February 24, 1950, Bob Fischer appeared before the OCC Board of Directors and recommended the formation of a Hawaiian surfing and canoe racing association to standardize the rules for all water sports events. The committee was to be composed of members chosen from the Outrigger Canoe Club, Hui Nalu and the Waikiki Surf Club.

"The Board agreed to have a cocktail party and dinner at the Outrigger and we outlined to them that we were going to invite three members from each of the existing clubs, plus any that might be forming or had any idea of forming.

"Before we actually had the meeting we got some bylaws from various clubs, like the Racing Association, and started fitting them together, trying to write some bylaws that would be applicable or appropriate for canoe racing," Capp added.

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OCC's first canoe racing champions, 1908-1909, front: Kenneth Brown, Ted Malanphy and Dad Center. Back: Knute Cotrell, V. Zen Genoves, Harry Steiner.

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"That's when I started bothering people like Johnny Lind and Duke. I'd take these things and triple space them and hand them copies and let them look them over and write in their suggestions, and the same with the rules for the various races and also

the events that you have. I'd collect them and maybe next time double space them. That went on for quite a while and then finally we got together at the OCC and had a few drinks and some steaks and that was the starting of the canoe racing association.

"We started out with four clubs (Outrigger, Hui Nalu, Waikiki Surf Club and Koolaupoko). What I tried to do was get the thing rolling because I realized it was a necessity to keep participation and outrigger canoe races alive."

Although the organization started in 1950, it wasn't formally incorporated until 1963.

HCRSA

The first elected president of the Hawaiian Canoe Racing and Surfing Association was Outrigger's Samuel Fuller, who a couple of years later became president of the OCC.

The stated purpose of the HCRSA: "The Hawaiian Canoe Racing and Surfing Association was organized in 1950 with the encouragement and advancement of canoe racing and surfing in the territory as its main objective."

The first Territorial Championships were held in 1951 in Honolulu Harbor. Participants were the four charter members of HCRSA. Waikiki Surf Club won.

"As the sport grew we had to have some officials. I couldn't paddle and coach and do everything else so I became the official starter," Fischer related. "At the time we didn't have walkie-talkies and the other fancy radio communication facilities we have now. I had a big bull horn on the beach and a simple amplifying system. I talked into that, looked out across the lanes and tried to get the canoes lined up. I'd call them back and forth to get them even. It was a real challenge. I was the official HCRA race starter for nearly 20 years. I was the arbitrator of disputes, race director, starter, you name it, for a long time."

GROWING PAINS

"The canoe association began to grow, more clubs,

joined with different types of canoes. Some canoes were longer and some were shorter than others," Fischer explained. "Some weighed more, some less. It was soon obvious that the longer and lighter canoes had a great advantage. It boiled down after long discussions and measurements to getting a canoe that conformed in general shape to the *Malia* owned by the Waikiki Surf Club.

"The standard we made was that the canoe had to be "Hawaiian" in design. No "V" at the bow or stern. More like a typical Hawaiian surfing or fishing canoe. Slight variations were permitted in length and breadth but weight could not be less than 400 pounds. These were the first specifications for the koa canoes," Fischer continued.

"When the fiberglass canoes entered the picture it was funny. A big argument developed as to which was faster, a 400 pound koa or a 400 pound fiberglass canoe. Really, it was humorous for anybody with any engineering at all. These original standards were subsequently refined, approved, adopted and observed by HCRA until the Tahitian canoes entered the picture."

By 1953, the Hawaiian Canoe Racing and Surfing Association had expanded to eight clubs: adding Kai Opuia and Honaunau from the Big Island, and Healani from Oahu.

The racing season included six regattas: Maritime Day in Honolulu Harbor; Kamehameha Day in Keehi Lagoon; the Windward Oahu Championships in Kailua; the Walter J. Macfarlane Regatta, Waikiki Beach; the Oahu Championships in Keehi Lagoon; and the Julian Yates Hawaiian Canoe Racing Championships (Territorial Championship), Kailua Kona.

Race day included 11 events: Boys under 13, Boys 17 & Under, Junior Men, Novice Men, Junior Women, Freshman Men, Women Novice, Senior Men, Junior Men, Senior Women, Senior Men 4. Races ranged from quarter-mile (Boys under 13) to three miles for the Senior Men.

RACING FROM LAAU POINT TO WAIKIKI BEACH

On April 26, 1949 a meeting was held at the OCC to discuss a plan for holding the longest canoe race in the world. This race was the dream of Outrigger's Toots Minvielle, and would begin at La'au Point in Molokai and finish at the old Club on Waikiki Beach.

The Molokai Hoe became a reality in 1953. Outrigger declined to enter the first race citing safety and liability concerns. OCC finally entered its first crew in the Molokai in 1956, after making them sign liability waivers. OCC won.

THE SPORT GROWS

By the late 1950s the association dropped surfing

from its name and became the Hawaiian Canoe Racing Association.

During the next two decades, organized canoe racing continued with new clubs forming throughout the state. As interest grew, additional events were added to regattas to reflect more youth races and women's events and the number of regattas increased. Although the HCRA operated with Bylaws and Racing Rules, these were constantly changing to reflect the growth of the sport.

In 1973 the Hui Wa'a Surfing and Racing Association was formed on Oahu with six members. They were the first association to not require traditional koa canoes for racing. This opened up canoe racing to many new clubs that didn't have access to a koa canoe and began racing in fiberglass canoes.

Paddling on the Neighbor Islands had also grown, with each island having formed its own association of member clubs, many with the help of Bill Capp and Bob Fischer. Oahu became the only island whose canoe clubs were individual members of HCRA.

"Complications arose when Moku O Hawaii formed," Fischer recalled, "and had the Tahitians make two koa canoes out of one log for them. Unfortunately the canoes did not meet HCRA specifications. There was a big hassle and Oahu clubs refused to participate in events which allowed the Tahitian canoes to race.

"The end result was the HCRA became an umbrella organization with all the various canoe racing associations on each island retaining their autonomy as individual members of HCRA. They were free to conduct races on their home islands under their own rules but must conform to HCRA rules and specifications on all HCRA sanctioned events," Fischer said.

FOUNDING OF OHCRA

When HCRA became the umbrella organization in 1979, Oahu clubs, led by Fischer, formed the Oahu Hawaiian Canoe Racing Association and became part of HCRA. As part of the separation from HCRA, OHCRA became the official owner and sponsor of the Molokai Hoe race.

Hui Wa'a finally joined HCRA in 1983.

KEEHI LAGOON CANOE FACILITY

Bob Fischer, who paddled in the 1933 race in Kona, helped form HCRA and OHCRA, coached and steered OCC women's crews, and was a longtime race official, didn't stop there.

He felt that the canoe racing community needed a home, a better place to hold competitions, so in the early 1980s he spearheaded the drive to create a canoe facility in Keehi Lagoon on the Diamond Head side of Honolulu International Airport.

Working with the Department of Transportation, the Legislature, and other canoe clubs, the Keehi Lagoon Master Plan was developed and the improvements were funded by the Legislature. Under this plan, the state dredged Keehi Lagoon, landscaped it and built the canoe racing facilities that we use there today (judges' pavilion, restrooms, showers and canoe halau).

PADDLING TODAY - COME JOIN US!



Bob Fischer starts a race. Today HCRA sponsors the State Championship regatta each year, and has its own race rules for the race. The five associations each hold their own championship regatta prior to the States.

In 2012 there were 77 canoe clubs in Hawaii, representing more than 8,000 registered paddlers on five islands, and more than 50 regattas and long distance races sponsored by the various associations. And there are hundreds of canoe clubs around the world following in our footsteps, enjoying a sport founded in Hawaii by kings and supported for more than 100 years by the OCC.

Outrigger's founders loved the ocean and the water sports of the early Hawaiians. Over the years, they stepped in and took the actions that were necessary to preserve and perpetuate the sports and establish the framework that allowed them to grow and thrive.

Through the vision, leadership and hard work of dedicated members like Bill Capp, Bob Fischer and Dad Center, canoe racing as we know it today, exists. We honor Bob Fischer by giving an award each year in his name to the Most Valuable Boy and Girl paddler. We honor Dad Center by naming a women's distance race for him. The perpetual trophies for the winners are in our Lobby Trophy Case.

You will also find all of their names on the prestigious Winged "O" plaque in the Lobby for their leadership and service to the Club.

We are proud that Outrigger members started the Hawaiian Canoe Racing and Surfing Association, were instrumental in forming the Oahu Hawaiian Canoe Racing Association, wrote the first race rules and helped new clubs form and become competitive.

And not only have Outrigger Canoe Club and its' members contributed so much to the sport, we are also the winningest canoe club; we have more Territorial, State, Association, and Molokai championships than any other club.

If you have ever paddled for the Club, then you are part of this heritage and should be proud to be part of this dynasty. If you've never paddled, join us this year and earn your place in Club history.