

Outrigger's Koa Racing Canoes Span the Ages, Await New Season

By Marilyn Kali

The art of racing outrigger canoes, once the sport of Hawaiian royalty, will be revived once again this month when the Oahu Hawaiian Canoe Racing Association begins its regatta season.

The OHCRA perpetuates the ages old tradition of racing in sleek koa canoes, as opposed to the newer fiberglass canoes.

In the case of koa canoes, new is not always better.

Outrigger is the proud owner of three koa racing canoes--the Leilani and Kakina, both built in the 1930s, and the Kaoloa, built in 1986. This season, our paddlers will be racing in the Kaoloa and the Leilani.

Since its founding in 1908, the OCC has owned and raced five koa canoes.

On a rainy night several years ago, a group of Club members sat down with George Downing, OCC Beach Captain in the 1950s, and former president Cline Mann, to reminisce about the Club's early koa canoes and record as much information about the canoes as possible.

Later meetings with Mark Buck, Walter Guild, Bill Danford and Joe Quigg produced additional information.

When you step into the canoe this year before your first race, take a minute to think about the proud tradition of outrigger canoe racing and the thousands of Club members who have raced before you in these beautiful koa canoes for the past 60 years.

Hanakeoki

The Club's first koa canoe was the Hanakeoki which was built by Kealakahi in Kona around 1900 and owned originally by Dr. Alford Wall. The name means "working George" and refers to George Carter, who was Territorial Governor.

The Hanakeoki had a calabash shape.

The first recorded regatta for the Hanakeoki was September 16, 1906,

two years before the founding of the OCC. The canoe was one of three entered in the regatta at Honolulu Harbor for the Territorial Championship. The crew of haoles in the Hanakeoki were later to become the founders of the OCC.

The other two canoes were the Alabama (with a Hawaiian crew from Kona) which was owned by Arthur M. Brown, and Prince Cupid's (Kuhio) canoe, the A (also with Hawaiian paddlers from Kona).

The A won by a half-length over the Hanakeoki. It started the age-old debate--do paddlers win the race or is it the canoe?

In 1910, after Outrigger again lost to Prince Cupid's A, OCC captain Kenneth "Rusty" Brown reportedly said that the men of Kona had won because of their superior canoe. Kona graciously agreed to a second race with swapped canoes and six days later defeated Outrigger for the second time.

After the race, according to the Honolulu Advertiser, Prince Cupid reportedly kidded the OCC, telling them "that they could take his canoe A to Hawaii and race flying fish until they worked up some speed."

Once Outrigger purchased the Leilani and Kakina in 1933, the Hanakeoki was primarily used for training. The canoe could win under certain circumstances but had a hard time competing with the lighter and sleeker Leilani and Kakina.

In 1947, Downing wanted to enter the 4th of July Macfarlane Regatta. He didn't have a canoe, so borrowed the Hanakeoki from Outrigger. The official competitors were OCC, Hui Nalu, McCabe-Hamilton & Renny and the Hawaiian Civic Club.

Downing and Wally Froiseth had so much fun that they decided to start their own canoe club, the Waikiki Surf Club, and became official competitors in the Macfarlane

race from 1948 on.

Outrigger first entered the Molokai race in 1954, the third year the event was held, and finished fifth in the Hanakeoki. Only four members of the OCC crew (Bill McCracken, John Russell, Jim Smith and Allen Wooddell) were OCC members. The others were a pick up crew from the military.

OCC also raced the Hanakeoki in the Molokai race in 1955 with an all-OCC crew (Doug Carr, Paul Dolan, Al Lemes, Frenchie Lyons, Jack Mattice, Tom Moore, Bob Muirhead, Harry Schaffer and Tom Schroeder) and finished fourth.

In 1959, the Hanakeoki was hanging in the old canoe shed at the Club. It was loaned to the Beach Boys to use in the 1959 and 1960 Molokai races.

After the Molokai race, Harry Field of Maui Canoe Club appealed to the Club to borrow the canoe for their Prince Kuhio Regatta. They agreed to repair the canoe and pay shipping expenses. The Board approved the loan of the canoe for two years.

In 1965, the Hanakeoki was loaned to Hui Nalu, whose famous canoe the White Horse was used during the filming of the epic movie, "Hawaii" in Makua. The White Horse had been damaged during the filming of the movie and they used the Hanakeoki while repairs were made.

The Hanakeoki was sold to Makaha Canoe Club, a new canoe club, in 1972. Look for it this season. Now in it's 90s, the Hanakeoki is the oldest koa canoe still in competition.

Leilani, Kakina, Malie

The story of the Leilani and Kakina and their sister canoe, the Malie, starts in the 1930s (some say 1933, others 1935). This is the story told to Downing by Outrigger's famous coach and Club Captain, the late Dad Center.

Center worked for American Fac-

tors. They had a big establishment on the Kona Coast where they produced oil, fuel and lumber.

In the late 1920s, private land acquisition on the Big Island started to make it difficult for people to get logs for canoes.

In the early 1930s, a company called Takemoto Hardwoods was taken over by American Factors for indebtedness. The company's primary work was cutting koa for sale and making furniture. The company hired all canoe builders because they knew where the best koa was and they were willing to stay in the mountains to cut it. They also had the strength to bring the koa logs (that weigh many tons) from the mountains to sea level.

Every time they saw a good log, they wouldn't cut it for lumber, they'd save it for a canoe. Because of the scarcity of koa, logs for canoes were not readily available for sale. The canoe builders at Takemoto were among the few who continued to have access to the logs and to build canoes. At the time of the takeover by Amfac, they had quite a few canoes in various stages of completion.

Dad tried to find a market for the unfinished canoes. He offered three canoes to the Club, but OCC decided it only wanted two of them.

Dad hired Jim Yamasaki of Kailua, Kona to finish the canoes. Yamasaki was a craftsman finisher and all-around carpenter who prepared canoes to be raced in Kona.

When Dad bought the canoes, they were roughed out but weren't

sanded and didn't have any seats in them. Yamasaki used wood sculpturing tools to finish the canoes.

When the canoes arrived in Waikiki, Outrigger gave them a water test. Of the three, the Kakina, which had a

shallow draft and didn't hold much weight because it was only 38-feet long, was the fastest. The Leilani, which was a little longer (39-40 feet) and one-inch fatter in back floated a lot better, was next, and the Malie, slightly longer and the heaviest, was slowest.

Outrigger purchased the Kakina and Leilani and Dad Center kept the Malie.

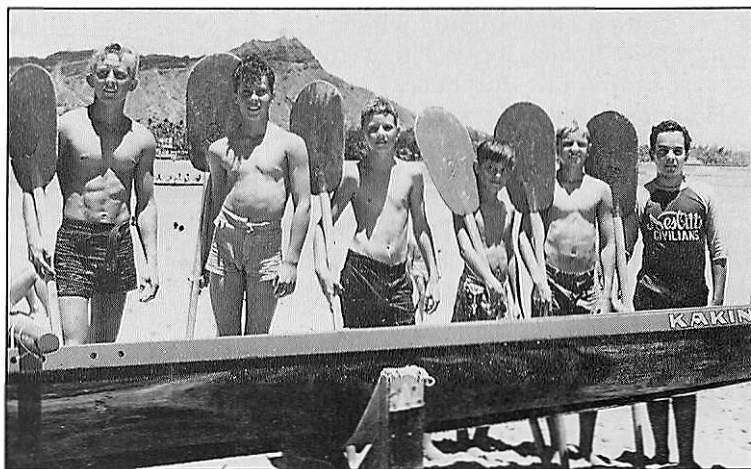
The Club held a contest. Whoever put up the most money to help purchase the canoes got to name them.

Bob Topping, owner of the New York Yankees, had the most money and he named one canoe after his girlfriend, Leilani.

The second canoe was named Kakina by Lorin Thurston for his family name.

The third canoe, still unnamed, was taken home by Dad. He built a shed over it and it got watered every time he watered his plants in his yard.

When Surf Club was looking for a koa racing canoe in 1947, they asked Ah Kong Pang who handled OCC canoes where they might find one. Kong told them to see Dad Center because he had a ca-



The Kakina in front of the old Club, about 1940.

noe in his yard.

WSC paid Dad \$3,000 for the canoe "on the payment plan" Downing said. "It took us eight years or so to pay for it, but he was very gracious about it."

After listening to Dad talk about how well the canoe ran in calm water, the canoe was named Malie. Sometime, over the years, it was re-named Malia.

Outrigger was quite chauvinistic at the time. Women were not allowed to race in the Kakina. The men were afraid they might break "their" canoe. The women had to use the Leilani, then considered the second best canoe.

In the 1950s, the OCC Beach Services had numerous koa canoes--the Ka Moi, Moi Lii, old Kakina, Eleu and Honaunau. Every three months they had to be drydocked for caulking. Jimmy Kaya was the head carpenter. Each of the beach boys had their own favorite.

"When we purchased the Malie, we had no concept of weight, we just used it," Downing said. "About a year later, it was on the beach next to the Kakina. When we lifted the Kakina it was so light. When we weighed them, the Malie weighed 545 pounds, the Leilani 480 pounds and the Kakina was about 400 pounds.

Downing went to John D. Kaupiko and asked him if there was a weight limit for racing canoes. He told him no. "We told him we wanted to make the Malie lighter. He said to be careful and not make it too light. Some canoes used to be made out of cottonwood and they were too light. We assembled all the tools to make the Malie lighter, and were almost ready to



The rebuilt Kakina getting rigged.

begin cutting her. But when it came down to making the first cut, we just didn't have the heart."

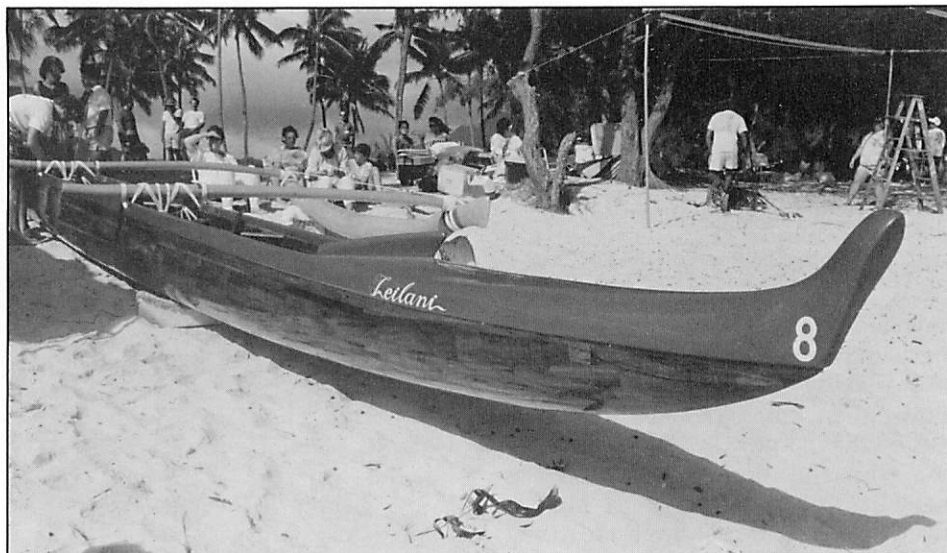
However, Downing said, he was convinced that weight made a difference and thus acquired a semi-racing canoe called the Lanakila from the Honolulu Fire Department in 1949. It was 35-feet long, which was short for racing, and weighed only 265 pounds.

"I'll never forget, when we went down to put it in the water it only took two people. We won every race beginning in 1949. This was when we finally established that light canoes could win."

The late Bill Capp, was OCC canoe racing chairman in 1950, and one of the founders of the Hawaiian Canoe Racing Association.

"It was apparent," Capp said, "that it would be necessary to establish some kind of rules if canoe paddling was to be perpetuated in the islands. This included such things as eligibility of paddlers, race distances and canoe construction."

"One day at the Club I heard



The Leilani has been rebuilt several times and is now at its peak as a racing canoe.

several paddlers discussing canoes and one of them said, 'I wonder who the crazy guy was that set 400 pounds for the minimum weight for koa canoes.' I explained that I was the one and that we weighed all of the racing canoes and the lightest at the time was 401 pounds. Consequently, 400 was adopted."

The Star Bulletin notes in a story in 1969 that the weight was agreed upon to discriminate against Surf Club's 268 pound canoe.

The experts agree that 400 pounds was probably a good choice, although a few argue that 450 pounds might have been better because the added thickness would have eliminated a lot of the hull damage which occurs in rough seas.

"The Hawaiian people knew the native koa wood. They knew that koa wood was a high density material and prone to cracking if made too thin," Downing said.

"Canoes were designed thick on the bottom and tapered thinner on the sides. This allowed the canoe to absorb pounding when going through and/or over waves. The tapered thickness would allow the energy to be distributed up to the gunnels of the canoe. This helped the hull from cracking.

"It takes time for a canoe to be understood. Each canoe has its own personality. You have to learn how to rig and balance each canoe to take advantage of this personality. You must rig it differently for each occasion. You have to remember that the canoe hull stays the

same, it's the rigging you have to adjust to meet the occasion."

With the weight set at a 400 pound minimum, canoe owners began working on their canoes.

Up until now, Outrigger and most canoe builders, used brass bolts and butterflies to fix cracks in the koa canoes. The butterflies would stop the crack from spreading. You had to keep caulking these cracks until they leaked again and you'd have to go through the whole process again.

But by 1955, the system was changing.

"We started installing wooden wedges which we called a window patch. These glued-in patches replaced the cracked sections of the hull with a new solid piece of wood. In the 30s, they used pitch to seal the cracks. In the 40s, it was caulking. Nobody believed that glue would hold two pieces of wood together under strain," Downing said. "But it did."

Downing said he learned about this new patching concept from Alfred Kumalae. "Not everyone knew how to deal with a cracked canoe. Kumalae was a master craftsman who shared his knowledge with his friends, Wally Froiseth, Rudy Choy, Woody Brown and me."

In 1956, Outrigger decided to renovate the Leilani. It was bigger than the Kakina and floated a lot better because it had a bigger belly. And it was still the women's canoe so if anything happened in the renovation, the men's Kakina was still safe.



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The first thing they did was remove 60 pounds of metal (bands, screws and bolts) and 40 pounds of other junk, including oak ribbings, from the canoe. "We raised the Leilani in mid-section to increase her depth, but didn't change the bottom shape," Downing said.

Because it was now 100 pounds lighter and quite thin, plywood was laminated on the inside circumference of the hull, under each seat, for reinforcement. When this was finished, the canoe weighed 407 pounds.

Downing insisted that the Leilani was a good racing canoe and could beat the Kakina. "Leilani has her own personality. There was just something about her. I thought she worked best in the open ocean as compared to the Kakina."

Downing coached the Club to its first victory in the newly renovated Leilani in the 5th annual Molokai Hoe in 1956 setting a record of 7:54 (which remains today due to a race course change).

OCC raced the Leilani in the Molokai race in 1959 (no entry in 1957-58, 64), 1960, 1961, 1962 and 1965. (Outrigger raced in fiberglass in 1963).

In the 1966 Molokai race, held in 15-foot swells, midway through the Molokai Channel, the Leilani was hit by a rapid series of 20-foot swells with such velocity that she could not shake them off.

Before the crew could bail or jump out, and with a ripped cover, the Leilani was swamped. For two hours they tried in vain to refloat the canoe. Only after the crew had succumbed to exhaustion and the continuing effort in the still rising seas became too dangerous, did the crew put the Leilani under tow.

Sherry Dowsett and his crew on the escort boat the Hula Kai, did all possible to bring Leilani in under tow. But with the high seas, it was impossible and the canoe was starting to break up. Finally the Leilani was brought aboard the escort boat. No one to this day can describe how they got

the canoe onto the boat.

The boat was severely damaged and many thought it couldn't be put back together again. However, master canoe craftsman George Perry completely reconstructed the Leilani and had it ready for racing in the 1967 season.

Right after the Leilani was rebuilt, Perry turned his attention to the Kakina.

The Kakina had been damaged in 1961 when a kids crew coming back from the Ala Wai in the dark was hit by some waves outside the Kaiser buoy. The canoe was destroyed. The Club trailer was sent to pick up the pieces and it sat in the parking lot for months until they could find someone to rebuild it.

George Blanchard had finally taken it to his home in Pauoa Valley and put the Kakina back together in its original form.

Perry worked on the Kakina during the summer of 1967. He cleaned it up a lot and raised the gunnels and hull, giving her new gunwales and manus, and brought her back to racing form.

The Kakina returned to active racing on the 4th of July in 1967 with an impressive series of wins and then went on to win the Molokai races in 1967, 1968 and 1975, setting records in 1968 and 1975. The Outrigger men also crossed the Molokai Channel in the Kakina in 1969-73, 75-76, and 78-81.

The Kakina has not been changed since 1967. Quigg believes that if the Kakina was renovated today to the same length and width as the Leilani, it would be the faster of the two.

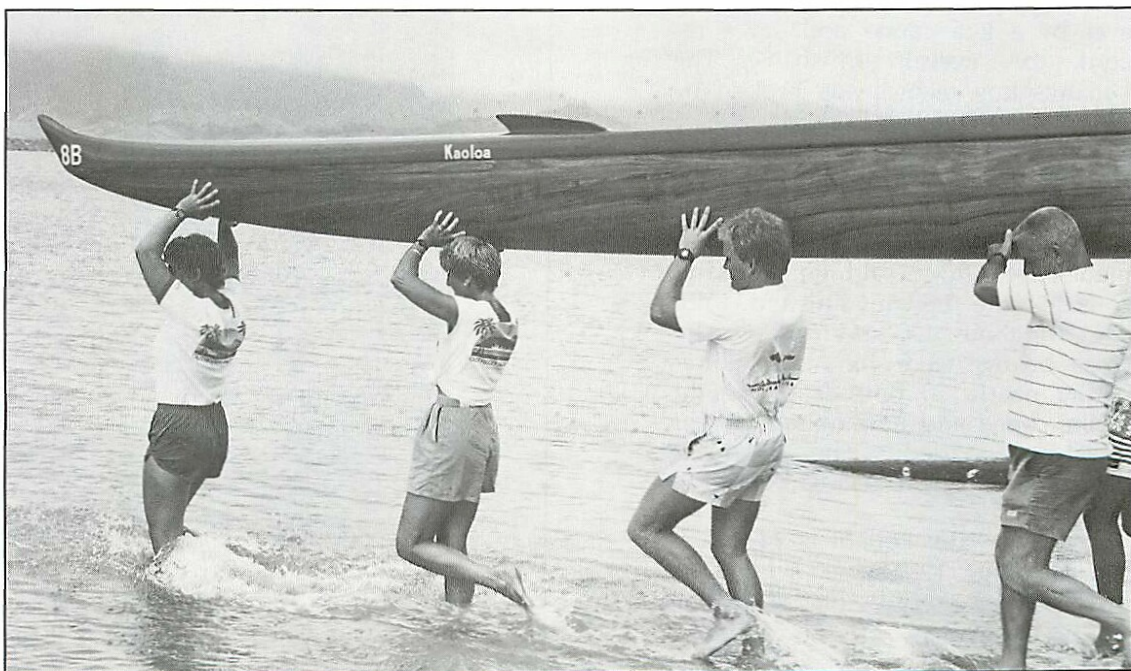
In 1974, the Leilani underwent still another transformation. George and Tay Perry remodeled the bow of the Leilani. They split the canoe from the three seat forward, widened the bow and lengthened the canoe slightly.

OCC raced the Leilani in 1974 and 1978 in the Molokai race.

Still the bow of the Leilani was heavy. In the summer of 1982, Sonny Bradley rebuilt the forward 10-feet of the canoe from the number three seat forward. He cut and lengthened the Leilani by about a foot. Following the keel line up, he added one piece of wood at a time until the front looked like an Egyptian slipper and was 1 1/2 inches thick.

He finished the job just in time for the 1982 Molokai race. In that race, Outrigger was dead even with Hui Nalu and Imua as they approached the Club on the way to the finish line in Waikiki. They were hit by a large wave at Rice Bowl and swamped. The OCC crew managed to finish third, but the Leilani had an 8-foot crack and two cross braces had broken.

Before the 1983 racing season, Quigg took on the job of remodeling the Leilani once again.



The Kaoloa is placed in the water before its first race.

"After we'd watched the Tahitians beat us in their new-style canoes, we knew that the only way to get a boat like this was to build a new one. However, we knew this would take a few years and we wanted to maximize the potential of the Leilani while we were commissioning a new canoe," Quigg said.

The Leilani was cut in half and lengthened to 42'4".

Quigg skill sawed it down the lengths of the keel, cutting out 2 1/2" of width from the back, narrowing it to 19" wide. This was the first time the back of the canoe was rebuilt.

Next, Quigg planed the front end down one inch narrower, making the canoe 20 pounds lighter. He lengthened and lightened the front manu, raised the front gunnel one-inch, put in new lighter, stronger seats and cut out all the cross bracings and other rotten remodeled junk.

When he was finished, the bow was 3/4 of an inch thick, the front end had been refined to match the Tahitian style canoes and the Leilani weighed 417 pounds.

The Leilani was now so fast in big surf that it took three paddlers to hold it on a big wave.

Outrigger won the 1983 Molokai in 5:45:09. However, the 1984 Molokai race will be remembered for a long time. In 3-4 foot swells, the Leilani surfed to a record finish of 5:18:19.62. This was the fastest crossing of the Molokai Channel ever by a koa canoe and set a record for overall finish. The Leilani's koa record was broken by Hui Nalu in 1989 in 5:11:38.

Outrigger also raced the Leilani in 1985 and 1988 in the Molokai race.

In 1990, the Leilani was again remodeled. Quigg said he wouldn't consider the Leilani finished until she weighed 400 pounds. The cross beams were removed, eliminating nearly 20 pounds of weight in the canoe and new lighter veneer seats were added. The Leilani is now in the finest racing condition ever.

Presently, the Leilani is 42-feet 4-inches long, 19 inches wide and weighs 401.5 pounds, just above the minimum weight for an OHCRA canoe.

The Kakina is 38-feet long, 19 3/8-inches wide and weighs 400

pounds.

Many Club oldtimers still favor one or the other of the two canoes. However, depending on the coaches, both canoes are still in racing condition.

Paoa

After the Leilani was damaged in the 1966 Molokai race and believed to be a total loss, the Board of Directors decided that a new koa canoe should be built to replace the Leilani.

The only koa log that was avail-

able was on exhibit at Ulu Mau Village. It weighed eight tons and had a diameter of 4 1/2 feet. Both of its ends were termite infested.

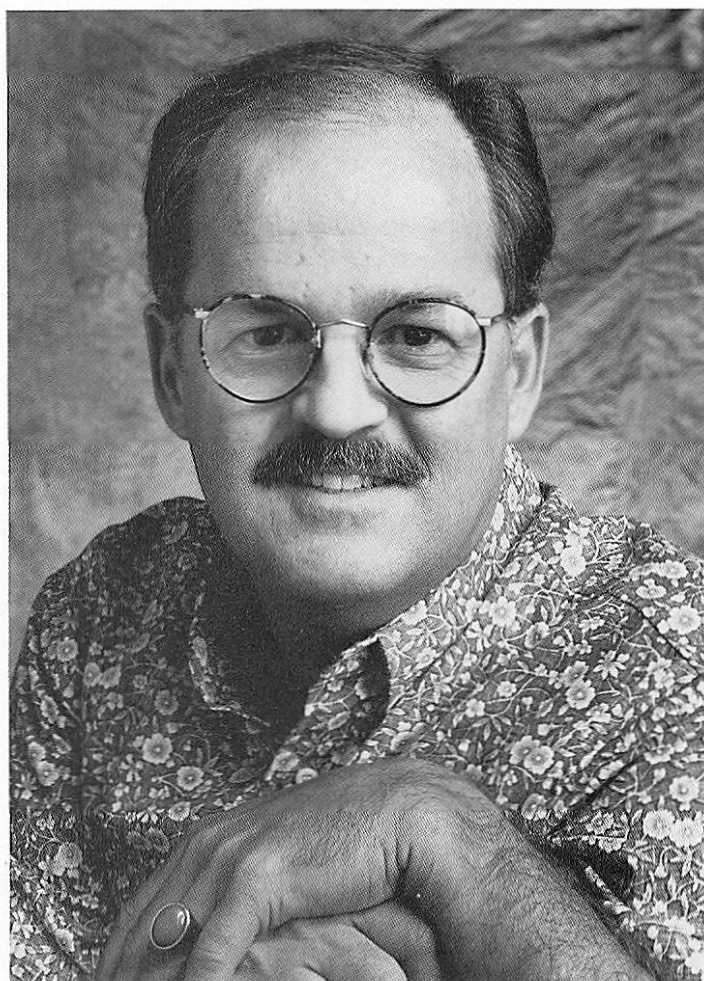
The Club hired George Perry to build the canoe. He says the log came from the Kulani region on the Big Island and was probably more than 100 years old.

The Paoa was 39 feet 6 inches long and weighed 400 pounds. No metal screws, nails or braces were used in the canoe, only wood dowels.

Perry says he designed the canoe

Dave McCoy, Chief Operating Officer, Estate of James Campbell. Worked at Reyn's while earning his B.A. at the University of the Pacific in the late 60s. Has been wearing Reyn Spooner shirts ever since, and in fact, still enjoys some of his original purchases that date back 25 years. "I think everyone recognizes that they get good value from a Reyn Spooner shirt. They are of the highest quality. Some of the first shirts I ever bought still look great, and I feel great wearing them."

"Kettle Floral." First introduced in 1970. By request, reintroduced as a Commemorative Classics "limited issue." In case you missed it the first time.



Reyn's

for calm water, as the Kakina was intended for rough seas.

The canoe was originally named the Leahi. However, when Duke Paoa Kahanamoku died in January, 1968, the Club decided to honor Duke and named the canoe the Paoa. It was dedicated on June 15, 1969 at the Club in Waikiki.

The first crew to race in the Paoa was the Boys 16 which included Skipper Barnes, Doug Straehley, Barry Hall, Johnny King, George McPheeters and Dale Hope and they won.

Although Outrigger won some races in the Paoa, it was eventually considered excess since the Leilani had been rebuilt and the Kakina was in top form. It was sold to Ewa Beach Canoe Club in 1983 for \$10,000.

Kaoloa

In 1981, the Board of Directors decided again that a new koa canoe should be built to complement the aging Leilani and Kakina. While Club members looked for a koa log, the Board commissioned member Joe Quigg to design a new koa canoe in March, 1982.

During the OHCRA regatta season in 1983, Outrigger paddlers won a koa log by scoring the most points during the season. The log was a gift from Laura Thompson of Hui Nalu to OHCRA to encourage and promote the use of koa canoes. The 45-foot log came from the Big Island.

With the log in hand, the Board gave Quigg the go-ahead to build the canoe. Work began in January 1985 and the canoe was finished in July 1986.

Quigg estimated the log was 200 years old, which is why it was so hard, heavy and rotten at both ends and in the center. When he got the log it had already been cut in half and left out in the rain for a long time. It had an original diameter that ranged from six to seven feet.

Winning the log gave Outrigger a chance to build a canoe to the most extreme limits of the Hawaiian Canoe Racing Association rules, which had been changed after the long, narrow, sleek Tahitian canoes had won the Molokai race in 1976 and taken eight of the top 11 places.

Quigg used a chain saw to cut the outlines of the canoe. To hollow out the inside, he made criss-

cross cuts and then broke out the middle using a small curved adze about the same size as the ancient Hawaiians (2-feet long), a chisel and sledgehammer. A power planer was used to bring it down to the design dimensions and smooth it out. A power sander was used to smoothly round everything out. Finer and finer sanding was done to hone it into the exact HCRA specifications.

Quigg patched the rotten portions of the canoe with koa from a new log.

The Kaoloa is 44-feet 11-inches long and weighed 415 pounds when completed. The canoe had koa seats which were integrated into the hull. The waes are raised two inches. Strength and support were given by adding wood strips crosswise inside the canoe. Quigg fashioned four new iakos for the Kaoloa.

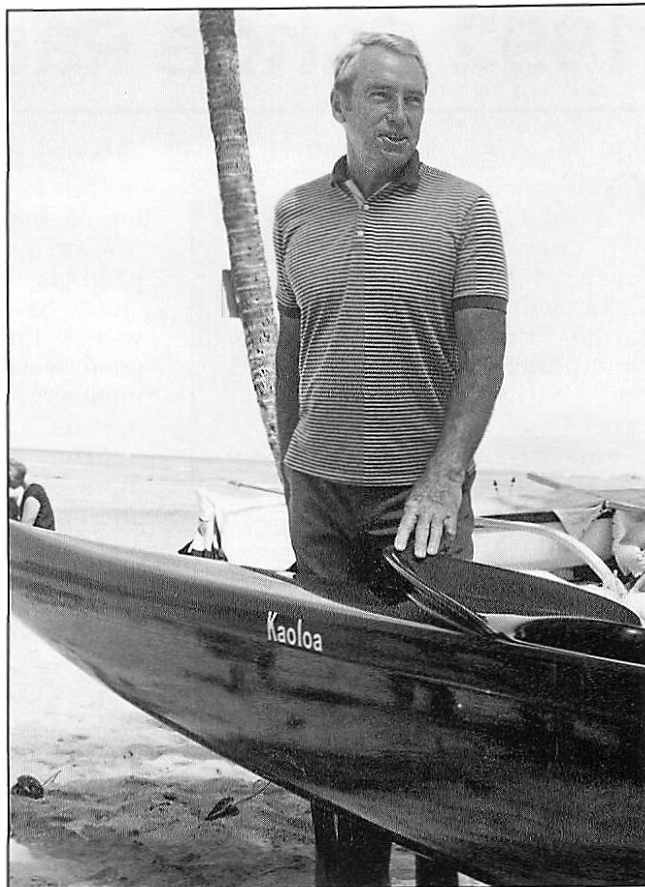
The Kaoloa was blessed on July 12, 1986 by Auntie Eva Pomroy. It was named by Quigg and the Canoe Racing Committee. The name means long spear.

The day after the blessing, the Kaoloa was put to its first test in the John D. Kaupiko Regatta at Kaneohe Bay. The first crew to race in the Kaoloa was the Girls 12. They finished second. The first crew to win in the Kaoloa was the Men's Novice B crew in a half-mile race.

In the following weeks, the Outrigger used the Kaoloa to win both the OHCRA and HCRA Championships.

The ultimate victory in the Kaoloa came in the Molokai Hoe on October 17, 1990 with a winning time of 5:19:38, the third fastest crossing time for a koa canoe. The glass boats have dominated the Molokai race so heavily in the past few years, it was very unusual for a koa canoe to do so well.

The Kaoloa, which continues to



Joe Quigg designed and built the Kaoloa to the extreme limits of the HCRA rules.

go through the on-going development process of a koa canoe, has undergone changes the past five years.

Club carpenter Domie Gose replaced and carved out the excess hard-heavy areas which dropped the Kaoloa from its original 417 pounds to 400.5 pounds. He also replaced the seats with lighter veneer laminated seats.

While Outrigger is often accused of being able to buy the best canoes to win races, nothing could be farther from the truth. The Leilani and Kakina are more than 60 years old, and the Kaoloa is a home-grown project. Club paddlers won the log, and Club members designed and built it.

The question of superior equipment or superior paddlers continues to arise as each new canoe racing season comes around. While Outrigger does everything possible to keep its old and new canoes on the cutting edge, as Prince Kuhio pointed out 80 years ago, it's people who paddle them.

The canoes are ready for the 1992 season. Let's go paddlers! ☺