



the **Outrigger**

May 1993

Outrigger Celebrates 85th Anniversary

By Barbara Del Piano, Historical Committee

Put another candle on the cake and raise your glass on high!

The Outrigger Canoe Club has now reached the ripe old age of 85. And lest we take for granted the attractive and comfortable premises we enjoy, let's stop a moment and compare our Club today with that loosely knit group of men and boys that evolved into one of Honolulu's most prestigious social and athletic clubs.

It's always a surprise to the uninformed that the man behind the formation of the Outrigger was not involved in water sports himself, or even a kamaaina.

Alexander Hume Ford was a malihini from South Carolina enamored by the surfing and canoeing he witnessed when he first visited Waikiki in 1907.

Being a promoter and an organizer by nature, Ford saw a need and figured out a way to meet it. The need was to perpetuate and promote Hawaiian water sports 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 the waves."

The solution was the Outrigger Canoe Club.

May 1, 1908

When it formally came into existence on May 1, 1908, the great heroes of Club history, like "Dad" and Duke and "Toots" were not yet on the scene. Neither was the grand dame of Waikiki, the Royal Hawaiian Hotel.

The beach was narrow, with heads of coral poking treacherously above the water at low tide, and lurking dangerously below the surface when the tide was high.

But if you were an avid surfer, or wanted to learn the sport, you could have taken the hour-long trolley ride to Waikiki, through swamps, banana farms and duck ponds.

The Club premises were situated on an acre and a half of land nestled between the Seaside and Moana Hotels, leased from the



Earliest Outrigger Pavilion, circa 1910

Queen Emma Estate for \$50 per year.

If you could afford to plunk down the initiation fee of \$10 for men or \$5 for boys, you would be an instant member. There was no waiting list in those days. In fact, the Club started out with 86 regular members and 15 juniors and was vigorously seeking new members.

Annual dues for men was \$12 and \$5 for boys. Once a member, you would probably have been coaxed into soliciting donations from downtown businesses to get the Club going.

Two Large Grass Houses

The original facilities consisted of two large grass houses, moved to the site from a private zoo in Kaimuki. One was used to store boards and canoes, and the other served as a bathhouse and dressing room.

Apuakehau Stream, which ran through the property, provided fresh water for washing off the sand and salt water.

Before long, a large platform was built among the Hau trees, providing the Club with its first Hau Ter-

race. The platform was thatched over with wide lanais extending over a lagoon, or muliwai, which was fed by Apuakehau Stream.

Surfboards Were \$2

If you didn't own your own board, you could have purchased one from a carpenter who was busily employed on the Club grounds making boards and selling them for \$2.

The Club was also acquiring canoes for use by its members. The first was an eight year old koa canoe, the Hanakeoki, brought over from the Big Island. (Incidentally, that canoe is still in use and presently owned by the Makaha Surf Club.)

It would be a while before outrigger canoe racing would provide any real competition to the popular barge racing in Honolulu Harbor, but within a year, an Outrigger crew did compete against a crew from the Big Island and was soundly beaten.

Ladies On the Beach

Ladies were initially excluded from membership, but before long,

family outings were held on the Club grounds and picnic baskets and beach blankets were common sights under the coconut trees, where women and toddlers basked in the sun.

Soon, dances were held on the Hau Terrace as the social aspects of the Club developed right along with the water sports.

Common Goals, Then and Now

Primitive though it was, that original Outrigger Canoe Club had many things in common with the Club of today. That the goals and dreams of its founding fathers have been perpetuated for 85 years, is indeed a tribute to the succeeding generations of members and leaders

who have led the Outrigger through good times and bad, surviving many crises that would have swamped a weaker, less determined organization.

Since that day 85 years ago when Alexander Hume Ford talked a few young surfers into joining a club not yet in existence, the Outrigger Canoe Club has come a long way.

More than 50 men have followed Mr. Ford in the role of president, steering the Club on a course that weathered several financial crises, and saw the facilities completely rebuilt three times since the days of the grass houses, the most recent in 1963, at an entirely new site.

The present facilities still boast a Hau Terrace which forms a congenial and pleasant center of activity, just as the original one did in 1908.

The water sports which inspired the founding of the Club are alive and well and surf meets and canoe races are held from spring to fall each year.

On July 4th, 1992, 14 canoe clubs competed in the 50th annual Walter Macfarlane Regatta, the premier Club-sponsored event of the season.

Had the Outrigger not come into existence at the time that it did, it is possible that the "royal sports" of surfing and outrigger canoeing might have disappeared from the waters of Waikiki. 🍃