

Alex Anderson Celebrates 100th Birthday

By Barbara Del Piano

On a typical day, he rises around 8 a.m., has a hearty breakfast which includes grapefruit, oatmeal and coffee, then walks for about 45 minutes. If it's Tuesday, he's off to Rotary at the Royal Hawaiian. On Wednesday, he lunches at the Club with one of his three sons.

On other days, he has meetings to attend, places to go and things to do. He's cut down on his golf somewhat but still gets in a few holes now and then. Certainly, retirement has not put him out of circulation. What, you may ask, is so remarkable about this lifestyle? Certainly, a lot of senior citizens follow similar schedules. What makes this gentleman and the life he leads so special is that the man is R. Alexander Anderson and on June 6, he celebrates his 100th birthday.

Although Anderson has lived a full and rewarding life as an outstanding student, sportsman, war hero, refrigeration pioneer and business executive, he gained fame as the composer of some of Hawaii's best known and loved hapa-haole songs. "Lovely Hula Hands," "Princess Pupule" and "Red Opu" are just a few of the more than 100 songs he has written.

One particularly successful recording nationwide was of "Mele Kalikimaka," recorded by Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters, which sold more than a million records. It didn't hurt that "White Christmas" was on the other side, he laughingly admits.

Anderson said that he felt honored when he and Irving Berlin were introduced together on an early "Hawaii Calls" broadcast.

Bing Crosby became a close friend of Anderson, as did many other prominent people in the music industry. Jack Kapp, who founded Decca Records, was also a good friend and recorded many of Anderson's songs on his label.

The recording artists, in addition to Crosby, were some of Hawaii's best known musicians and entertainers such as Ray Kinney, Renny Brooks and Hilo Hattie. Alex's songs were featured on the original "Hawaii Calls." His songs were a big hit at the Kodak Hula Show when it first started in 1928 and they are still popular today.

Anderson frequently wrote songs for special occasions. One of his earliest compositions was the graduation song for his Punahou Class of 1912. He wrote many songs for his Alma Mater including one for the centennial pageant in 1941 and its 150th anniversary in 1991.

The official Outrigger Canoe Club song Anderson himself introduced at the Annual Meeting in 1981.



His famous "Cockeyed Mayor of Kaunakakai" was written as a favor to Paul Fagan who was entertaining Warner Baxter on Molokai. Anderson dashed off the song but was too busy to go to Molokai to sing it so the musicians at the party introduced it.

"And the first thing I knew, it was being played all over Waikiki. And then it went to the Mainland and Hilo Hattie took it up," Anderson relates. So what was intended as a gag song ended up as one of his biggest hits.

As a lad of 14, Anderson, who was just learning to surf, was one of that famous group of young boys rounded up on the beach at Waikiki by Alexander Hume Ford and enrolled as one of the first members of the Outrigger Canoe Club.

Alex married Margaret Leith Center in 1919. Peggy was the sister of "Dad" Center, another Outrigger legend who was an outstanding sportsman, instrumental in developing the Club's athletic programs.

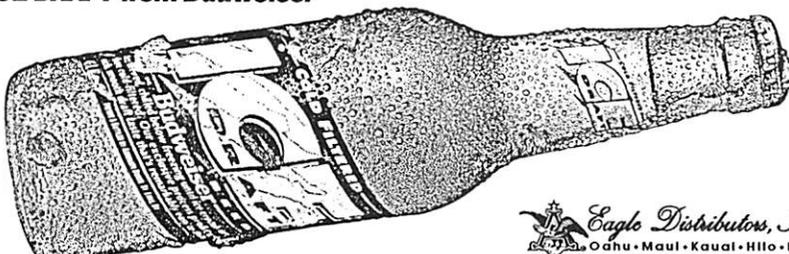
The Andersons became active members of the Outrigger and their four children, Robert Jr., David, Allen and Pamela all spent a great deal of their growing years at the Club.

The Anderson children have planned a very special birthday celebration for family and friends to celebrate his 100th Birthday.

Happy Birthday from all of us, Alex Anderson! 🍷

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