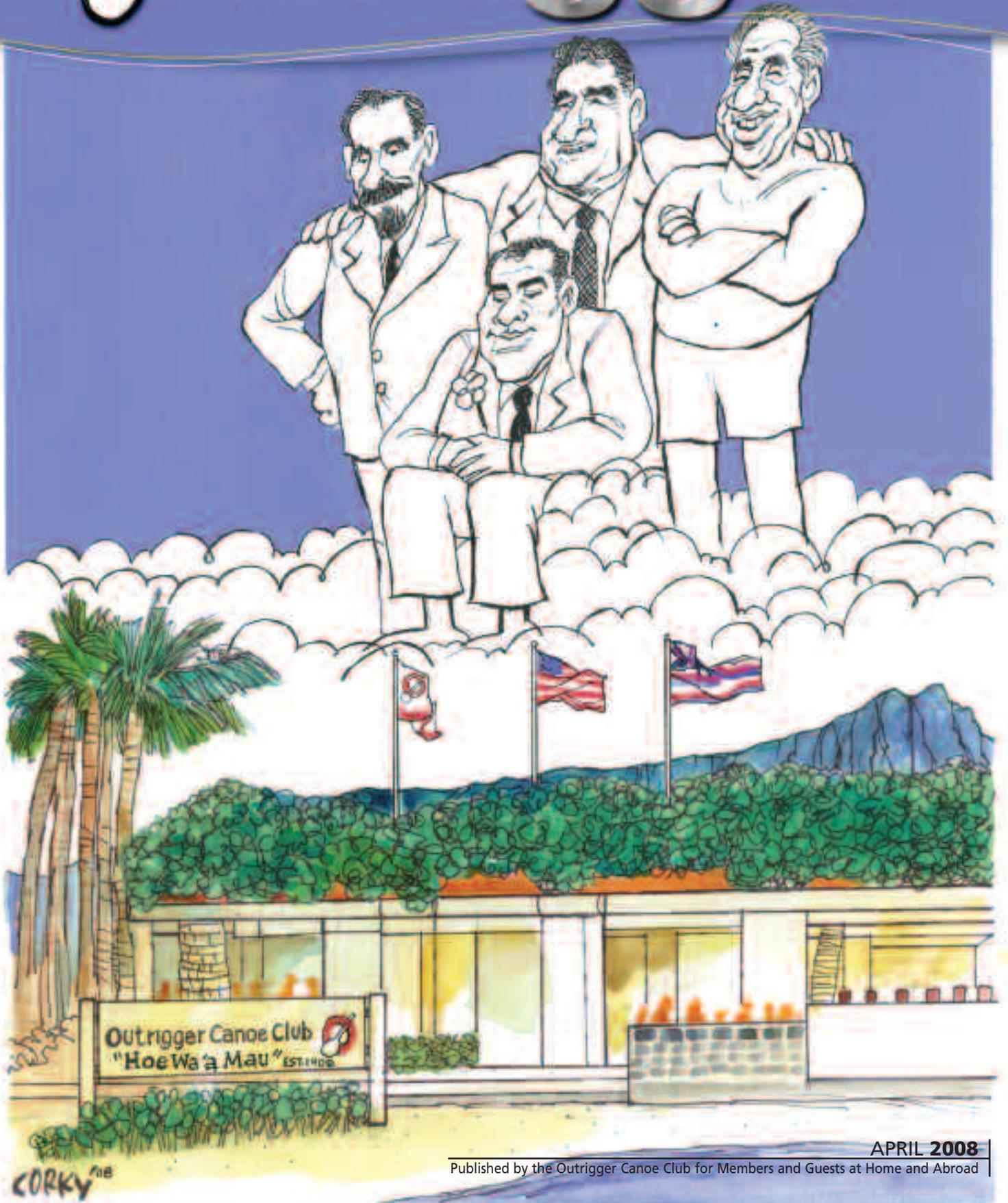


# the Outrigger



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# Outrigger PADDLES INTO ITS SECOND CENTURY

By Barbara Del Piano



To present-day members of the Outrigger Canoe Club, May Day, called *Lei Day* in Hawaii, is always a cause to celebrate. But in this year of 2008, its significance goes beyond wearing a lei, or attending a hula performance. It's a day to observe with awe and reverence the 100th anniversary of this place we all love and cherish.

The Outrigger Canoe Club officially came into existence on May 1, 1908, the vision of a man from South Carolina. Alexander Hume Ford recognized that the ancient sports of surfing and outrigger canoeing were disappearing from waters of Waikiki, caused by the exodus of Hawaiians from the area and the increasing difficulty of gaining access to the shore. (The most popular water sport at the time was barge racing in Honolulu Harbor, introduced by foreigners during the late 19th century.)

Rather than simply lamenting the situation, Ford approached a group of young surfers and proposed the idea of a club where they could change and store their boards. The boys probably had misgivings about this small, bearded, non-athletic *haole*, but inspired by his enthusiasm, went along with the idea.

It was a serendipitous set of circumstances that moved the

Club's formation through preliminary stages with few obstacles to delay its debut.

By coincidence, Teddy Roosevelt's "Great White Fleet," an armada of dozens of warships, was cruising the world, demonstrating the vast naval power of the United States. For months, the local planning committee had been pondering ways to entertain the hundreds of sailors that would pour ashore at Honolulu Harbor in early July.

The idea of a club on Oahu's most famous beach, complete with surf boards and outrigger canoes at the Navy's disposal, was a great solution to the dilemma. Honolulu's business community jumped on the bandwagon and before long, Ford and several of the Territory's most influential men were hard at work on the project.

At the time, Waikiki was in the early stages of its phenomenal development as one of the world's prime visitor destinations. The Moana, Waikiki's first "high-rise" hotel, had four stories and 75 rooms, making it one of Honolulu's largest structures.

Opened in 1901, the Moana was equipped with a telephone in each room and the first electric-powered elevator in the islands. Its gigantic banyan tree and 300 foot pier stretch-



**1908**  
OCC is founded by Alexander Hume Ford.



**1917**  
Duke Kahanamoku and George "Dad" Center join OCC.



**1926**  
Royal Hawaiian Hotel Opens

1900

1910

1920



**1914**  
Construction of new clubhouse begins.



**1926**  
Women's Auxiliary severs ties with Outrigger.



ing into the ocean added to its appeal.

Waikiki's second hotel, the Seaside, built in 1906, consisted mostly of charming cottages scattered on the spacious grounds of historic Helumoa with its 10,000 coconut trees. Between the two was an empty lot containing a *muliwai*, or pool, formed by the waters of three mountain streams that converged before flowing into the ocean.

Ford was able to acquire the empty one-and-a-half acre lot from the estate of Queen Emma at a lease rent of ten dollars a year.

In barely three months time, the site, filled with kiawe and hau trees and covered with weeds, was cleared and turned into an attractive "Hawaiian Village." The work was performed mostly by members.

Acquisition of a couple of authentic grass houses purchased from a former zoo in Kaimuki provided facilities for dressing rooms and canoe storage. Ford himself drove a truck borrowed from Lewers and Cooke Lumber Company, and with the help of a group of young surfers, transported the houses to the Club grounds.

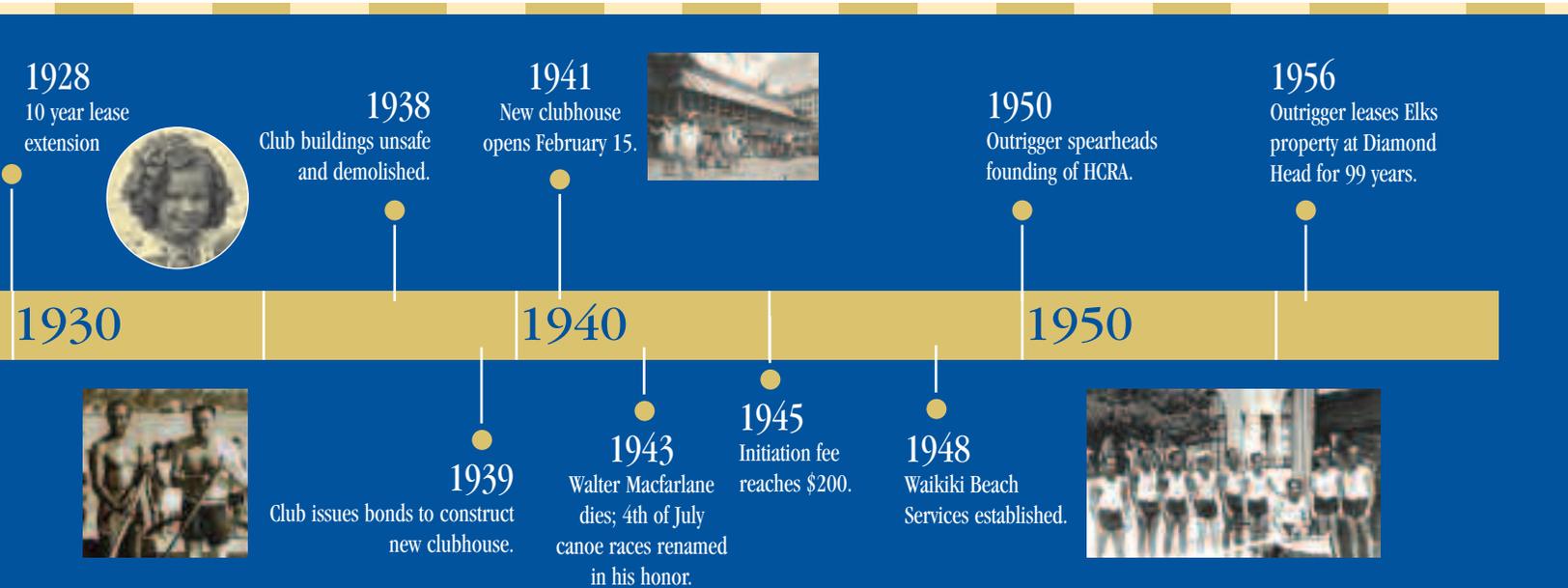
The fleet arrived, was royally entertained, then sailed away to other ports; the Outrigger Canoe Club remained to grow

and prosper throughout the years, fostering an interest in surfing and outrigger canoeing that has made it the most famous water sports club in the world today.

Although Ford's initial vision was to establish "a club for men and boys," it was not long before a women's auxiliary was established. Although a separate organization, it used Club facilities and was a great asset in raising funds and planning and providing entertainment. The two entities maintained a close relationship until 1926 when the Uluniu Women's Swimming Club was formed and ties with the Outrigger were formally severed.

After a fire in 1914 destroyed the thatched roof of the dance pavilion which had been built over the lagoon, as the *muliwai* was called, the clubhouse was rebuilt. In the meantime, the undamaged floor of the pavilion moved to the beach where it was raised off the ground, and another story was added. The lower area provided excellent canoe storage while the upper level became the Club's new dance pavilion. The new structure that was built was a larger version of the first.

Over the years, membership in the Outrigger continued to grow exponentially as interest in surfing and outrigger canoeing increased; new clubs formed and surfing contests and





canoe regattas took place more frequently. Beach volley ball also became a major Club sport, along with football and softball.

But all was not smooth sailing. World War I took its toll as did the “great depression” of the 1930s. The building of the Ala Wai Canal in the 1920s transformed acres of swampland to solid, usable ground increasing land values an estimated 800% overnight. Fortunately for the Outrigger, wise leadership careful planning, and most of all, help from sympathetic entities, allowed the Club to survive.

For many years, Matson Navigation Company, then owner of neighboring Royal Hawaiian Hotel, acted as the Club’s benefactor; when the lease rent became unaffordable in 1937, the steamship company leased the entire Outrigger property, sub-leased a major portion to the Club at a reasonable rate, and leased street frontage to commercial interests.

Not only was the Club able to remain on the property, but an ingenious plan, the brain-child of President Walter Macfarlane, to sell bonds to pay construction costs, enabled the Club to build attractive and functional new facilities.

The new Club had barely opened when the bombing of Pearl Harbor began America’s involvement in World War II,

plunging the Outrigger into a period of uncertainty and financial difficulty. With blackouts and curfews, and barbed wire surrounding the beach, the future looked bleak. But as it had in previous circumstances, Outrigger bounced back as service personnel and newcomers took the place of departing Islanders for the duration, turning the dire situation into an era of unexpected prosperity.

Statehood in 1959 spurred another building boom in Waikiki and hotels and condominiums turned the quiet, rural area into a bustling tourist Mecca. A few far-sighted people saw the handwriting on the wall as the expiration of the lease with Matson drew nearer. But there was little they could do.

The members loved the Club’s location, perfect beach and conditions ideal for surfing and canoeing. They could not accept the thought of moving. Many believed that if the Club were forced to give up its site, it could not survive. They continued to hope that somehow things would work out.

It came as an unpleasant surprise when Matson sold its Waikiki Hotels to Sheraton. It was an even greater shock to learn that Queen Emma’s Estate had leased all of her Waikiki land to mainland interests. These events brought about the most critical dilemma the Outrigger had ever faced.

**1960**  
Mariechen Jackson is first women elected to Board of Directors.

**1962**  
Vladimir Ossipoff designs new clubhouse at Diamond Head.

**1964**  
January 11 new clubhouse dedicated by Rev. Abraham Akaka.

**1966**  
Winged “O” established to honor Club athletes.

**1968**  
Outrigger wins National AAU Volleyball Championship

**1974**  
Aloha attire permitted in dining room year round.

**1977**  
Initiation fee reaches \$2,000.

**1978**  
Mortgage on new Club paid off.

**1980**  
OCC beats Tahiti to win Molokai to Oahu Race.

**1985**  
OCC wins Oahu, State Canoe Championships and Na Wahine O Ke Kai.

**1987**  
Michele St. John first woman head coach

**1989**  
Initiation fee reaches \$10,000.



After months of negotiating it finally became apparent that there was no way the Club could remain in the heart of Waikiki. Although land at Diamond Head had been leased from the Elks Club in 1956, few members were willing to relocate there. A contentious situation developed, pitting member against member and dissent among Club officers; the nearly fifty year old organization was at the brink of dissolution.

Eventually enough support was garnered to make the move although it was a traumatic event for all. Although members resigned in droves, the Club did not disband, as many predicted. Instead, its attractive facilities and beautiful grounds soon brought people clamoring to join. Another stormy crisis had been weathered and a new era begun.

Throughout its existence, Outrigger's biggest problem has been its inability to own its own land. Always at the mercy of landlords, it has been forced to raise its dues and initiation fees exponentially with its increased expenses. When the Club's lease with the Elks came up for renegotiation in 2006 discussions commenced to arrive at a figure for the remaining 49 years of the lease. After final arbitration, the new lease rent was determined; monthly payments jumped from \$3,000 to \$30,000 per month. Again dues were raised.

This year of 2008, as the Outrigger Canoe Club celebrates its one-hundredth anniversary, it can reflect on the proud and honorable legacy it has established over the past century. Despite its problems, the Club has stayed true to the vision that inspired Alexander Hume Ford to found a club where "men and boys might ride upright on the crest of waves."

It has perpetuated and promoted Hawaii's ancient water sports so that today they are popular throughout Hawaii, the mainland and many parts of the world. The Club has fostered a loyalty and devotion to its sports programs and continues, against increasingly fierce competition, to render outstanding performances at both the local and national levels.

As the centennial year approached, a special committee was formed to plan activities to celebrate the occasion. One of its first projects was to find a motto that would express the essence of the Club and its mission. A contest was held and the winning entry was *Hoe Wa'a Mau*, which translated, means "paddle your canoe forever." With a century of rich and colorful history behind it, the Outrigger Canoe Club looks forward to the next hundred years.

