

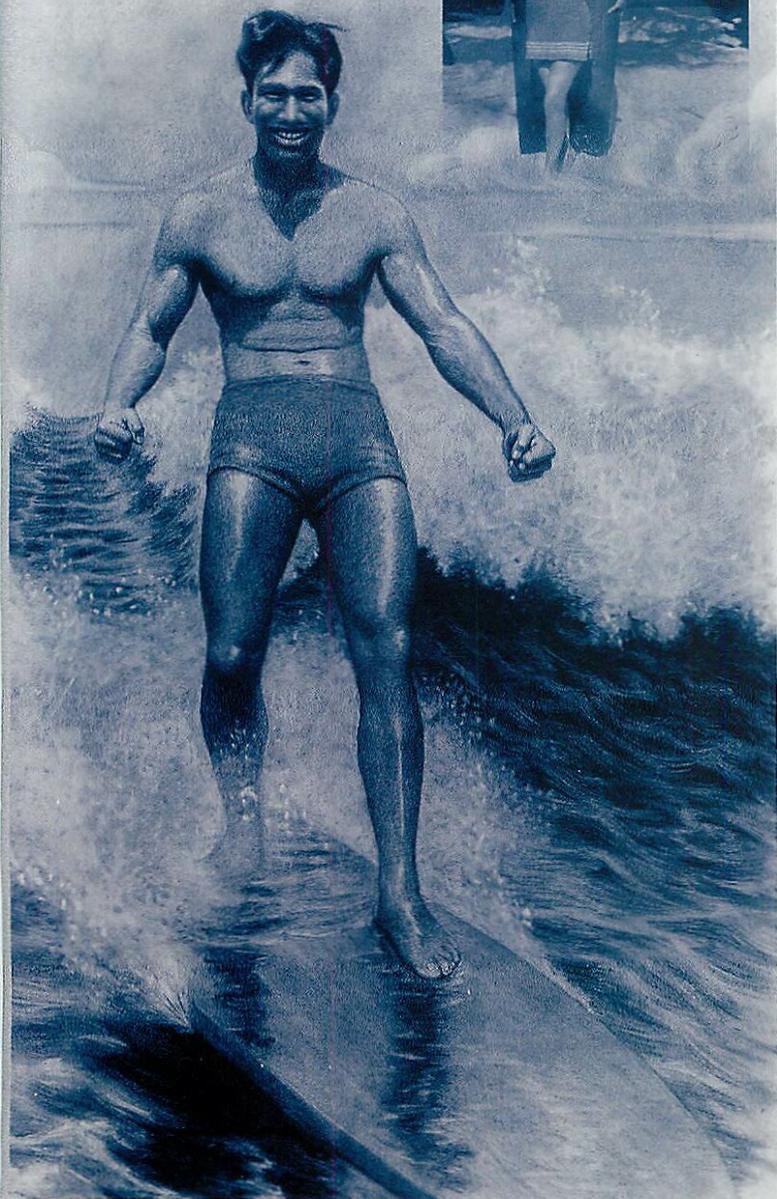
# Sport of Surfing

(Editors note: Our Club has played a vital role in the sport of surfing, helping to resurrect the ancient sport from near extinction near the end of the 19th century. In one chapter of his new book, "Surfing USA," Ben Marcus reports on that contribution. Below we reprint a portion of that chapter. This portion follows a description of how the combination of Hawaiians abandoning the kapu system and embracing the more austere values of the missionaries of the time, led to a drastic decline--though not a total disappearance--of surfing. Some people still surfed.)

An early woman surfer at the OCC



Duke Kahanamoku c1914



In 1851, the Reverend Henry T. Cheever observed surfing at Lahaina, Maui and wrote about it in his book, *Life in the Hawaiian Islands, The Heart of the Pacific As it Was and Is*. "It is highly amusing to a stranger to go out to the south part of this town, some day when the sea is rolling in heavily over the reef, and to observe there the evolutions and rapid career of a company of surf-players.

"[The sport of surfing] is so attractive and full of wild excitement to the Hawaiians, and withal so healthy, that I cannot but hope it will be many years before civilization shall look it out of countenance, or make it disreputable to indulge in this manly, though it be dangerous, pastime."

Fifteen years later, Mark Twain sailed to the Hawaiian Islands and tried surfing, describing it in ... *Roughing It*. "I tried surf-bathing once, subsequently, but made a failure of it. I got the board placed right and at the right moment, too; but missed the connection myself.

"The board struck the shore in three-quarters of a second, without any cargo, and I struck the bottom about the same time, with a couple of barrels of water in me."

In 1907, Jack London came to Hawai'i as a literary lion, having already published three best-selling adventure novels: *The Call of the Wild*, *The Sea-Wolf* and *White Fang*. London and his wife Charmian were celebrities when they came to Waikiki in 1907 and stayed on the beach where the Moana Hotel now stands.

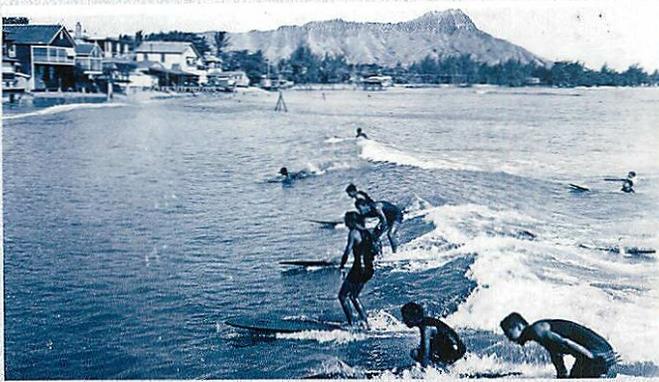
There were a few surfers on the beach at Waikiki at that time, a loose clique of Hawaiians and part-Hawaiians who formed a club called the Waikiki Swimming Club. London met that crew and was introduced to the joy of surfing by Alexander Hume Ford.

Ford took London surfing, and there London met the most celebrated Waikiki beach boy of the time, a 23-year-old Irish/Hawaiian named George Freeth. London was a renowned writer, Ford a habitual organizer and Freeth a great waterman. What they had in common was a love of surfing, and their combined talents breathed life into a dying, beautiful sport -- the Sport of Kings.

In 1907 London wrote *A Royal Sport: Surfing in Waikiki*, which included descriptions of Waikiki and Alexander Hume Ford. His story was published in the October, 1907 edition of *The Lady's Home Companion* and again in 1911 as part of *The Cruise of the Snark*.

"Where but the moment before was only the wide desolation and invincible roar, is now a man, erect, full statured, not-struggling frantically in that wild movement, not buried and crushed and buffeted by those mighty monsters, but standing above them all, calm and superb, poised on the giddy summit, his feet buried in the churning foam, the salt smoke rising to his knees, and all the rest of him in the free air and flashing sunlight, and he is flying through the air, flying forward, flying fast as the surge on which he stands. He is a Mercury-a brown Mercury. His heels are winged, and in them is the swiftness of the sea."

One of the boys riding upon the crests of waves was George Freeth, whom London encountered during surf sessions with



Left: Surfing at Waikiki c 1920



Middle: Jack and Charmian London at the OCC c1915



Right: George Freeth shows off his surfing plank.

Alexander Hume Ford. London described Freeth glowingly, "I saw him tearing in on the back of [a wave] standing upright with his board, carelessly poised, a young god bronzed with sunburn."

London's celebrity and power was such that in 1907, Freeth was invited to California by railroad and real estate magnate Henry Huntington. Freeth was asked to put on a demonstration of wave-riding in southern California to promote the Redondo-Los Angeles Railway. Freeth accepted the invitation and earned the title of *The First Man to Surf in California*.

However, that title wasn't exactly true. As early as 1885, three Hawaiian princes visiting Santa Cruz, California from a military academy in San Mateo were reported to have ridden waves at the San Lorenzo Rivermouth on boards shaped from local redwood.

Earlier than that, in *Two Years Before the Mast*, Richard Henry Dana described Hawaiian crews on sailing vessels along the California coast in 1835. Dana tells one story of the Hawaiians gliding through a Santa Barbara shorebreak in their longboat without a hitch, then laughing from shore as the haole boat crew of easterners failed miserably at the same landing.

You have to wonder about the Hawaiian boat crews in California in the early 1800s and throughout the century. A surfer is a surfer and a wave is a wave. It's hard to imagine anyone who has ridden a wave passing perfect Rincon or Malibu and not stopping to catch a few. Who knows how many surfers rode waves in California, but the Hawaiian princes were the first to be recorded and George Freeth was the first to become famous as a surfer.

While London was writing about surfing and Freeth was surfing in front of astonished crowds, Alexander Hume Ford was campaigning on behalf of surfing. In 1908, Ford petitioned the trustees of the Queen Emma Estate to set aside a plot of land next to Waikiki's Moana Hotel for a club that would preserve the ancient Hawaiian pursuits of surfing and outrigger canoeing.

Hume Ford's fund-raising manifesto described a club that would "give an added and permanent attraction to Hawai'i and make Waikiki always the Home of the Surfer, with perhaps an annual Surfboard and Outrigger Canoe Carnival which will do much to spread abroad the attractions of Hawai'i, the only islands in the world where men and boys ride upright upon the crests of waves."

Ford presented the manifesto to the trustees of the Queen Emma Estate, and they accepted it. On May 1, 1908 they founded the Hawaiian Outrigger Canoe Club, the first modern club dedicated to the perpetuation of wave-riding. The club offered facilities for dressing and a grass hut for board storage right on the beach.

In 1905, the native Hawaiians began the informal *Hui Nalu* (surf club), revitalizing native Hawaiian interest in the sport. The Hui Nalu and the Outrigger Canoe Club began friendly competitions, and by 1911 when the Hui Nalu was formalized there were

as many as one hundred surfboards on the beach at Waikiki.

In 1915 Jack London returned to Hawai'i and was shocked and excited to find the Outrigger Canoe Club had 1,200 members, "with hundreds more on the waiting list, and with what seems like half a mile of surfboard lockers."

In 1912, Hawaiian beach boy Duke Paoa Kahanamoku was already famous as a surfer and swimmer. He was credited with developing the flutter kick to replace the scissor kick in freestyle swimming and was the three-time world record holder in the 100-meter freestyle.

As a surfer, Duke was one of Hawai'i's best ocean watermen, a beach boy and one of the founders of the Hui Nalu Club. Duke was a fine figure of a Polynesian, slim and muscular and built for speed, blessed with extraordinarily long hands and feet.

In 1912, Duke passed through southern California en route to the summer Olympics in Stockholm, Sweden. His surfing demonstrations at Corona del Mar and Santa Monica caused a sensation much greater than Freeth's. Duke became world famous by winning an Olympic gold medal in the 100-meter freestyle in Stockholm and again in Antwerp in 1916.

Touted as the fastest swimmer alive, Duke was on the road constantly, giving swimming exhibitions around Europe, the United States and the world. He also became a favorite of Hollywood casting directors, playing Aztec chiefs, Hindu thieves and Arab princes. On weekends he would take his Hollywood friends surfing, and everywhere he could, Duke used his fame to introduce the world to the sport of surfing.

In 1915, Duke was invited by the New South Wales Swimming Association to give a swimming exhibition at the Domain Baths in Sydney. Australians were vaguely aware of surfing at the time, and the ocean-crazed people were thrilled when Duke fashioned an 8' 6" alaia board out of native Australian sugar pine.

Duke rode the board at Freshwater Beach in Manly in February of 1915 and single handedly put Australia on a path to superpower status in the surfing world.

Duke was a busy man into the '20s, competing in the 1920 and 1924 Olympics, hobnobbing in Hollywood and spreading surfing to the world. Back home in Hawai'i in the summer of 1917, [the year Duke joined the Outrigger Canoe Club—ed.] he rode a now legendary wave at Kalehuawehe, which was now called Outside Castles.

He caught a wave that took him well over a thousand yards, from all the way outside Castles, through Elk's Club, Cunha's and Queen's and all the way to the beach. This was a wave and a feat that has never been matched, and another boost for Duke's enduring legend.

(To read the complete chapter, go to the OCC website)

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