

'Toots' Minvielle made paddling into top sport

By Cindy Luis

Star-Bulletin

6/2/92

A.E. "Toots" Minvielle Jr., a pioneer in promoting outrigger canoe paddling as a sport, was "one of those rare and fortunate individuals who got to appreciate his own far-reaching concepts while he was still alive," said Dr. Philip Foti.

"It gave him great pleasure and satisfaction to see his dreams of canoe paddling as an international sport come to fruition," Foti added.

Minvielle, who founded the men's Molokai-to-Oahu canoe race in 1952 and the International Hawaiian Canoe Association in 1965, died of cancer at his Maunalani Heights home last Friday. He would have been 89 yesterday.



A.E. 'Toots' Minvielle

Minvielle was born in Olaa, Hawaii. A graduate of McKinley High School, he received his degrees in engineering and surveying from the University of Hawaii and was in private business for many years.

His first love was canoe paddling, and he was an active member of Outrigger Canoe Club for 75 years. He is credited with introducing the sport to California, Europe and Australia.

"Even during a visit last week, he was still talking about redesigning (fiberglass) canoes for better flotation," said Foti, president of the International Hawaiian Canoe Association. "Although he had a hard time talking, his mind was still working on things that were important to the sport."

"Toots was to paddling what Duke Kahanamoku was to surfing, a patriarch of the modern sport," said former state Rep. Fred Hemmings, a former world-class surfer. "I hope that everyone that takes a stroke in a canoe this week takes a stroke for Toots. He was a visionary who saw not what was, but what could be. Canoe paddling is an internationally recognized

sport because of him."

Minvielle is survived by his wife of 44 years, the former Mildred Tummonds. They had no children.

"We met in my hometown of Tacoma, Wash., when I was 16 and he 20," said his wife, who toured internationally as a concert pianist before her marriage. "He wrote me for 18 years, sending me gorgeous gifts and flowers and leis whenever I was performing," she said.

Finally, she saved enough money for a boat trip to Hawaii. "We were married within four days. The front page headline in the Tacoma paper read, 'After 18 years, romance matures into marriage.'"

"And I had a marvelous man for 44 years, one who was really ahead of his time and allowed me to have my identity."

She said her husband suggested in the 1930s that the Outrigger Canoe Club start the Molokai-to-Oahu race. His idea was rejected as too dangerous until 1952 when, against the advice of the Coast Guard, three canoes set out from Kawakui, Molokai, and finished 36 miles later in front of the Moana Hotel.

Today, the race annually attracts some 50 crews from Hawaii, the mainland, Canada, Australia, Tahiti and Europe.

"I hope they name the Molokai race for him; he was the father of canoeing," said Nappy Napoleon, who had paddled every Molokai race since 1958.

Minvielle, an accomplished violinist, was among the first 25 inductees into the Hawaii Sports Hall of Fame and Museum in 1978. He was a member of many Masonic organizations, and was awarded a 50-year pin by the Aloha Temple A.A.O.N.M.S., was a 50-year honoree of the Scottish Rite and a 70-year member of the Knights of Pythias.

Services will be held at Outrigger Canoe Club on June 15 at 8 a.m. The Rev. John J. Morrett, former Dean of St. Andrew's Cathedral, will officiate.

Ashes will be scattered at sea accompanied by a flotilla of canoes.

In lieu of flowers, donations are suggested to the International Hawaiian Canoe Association and the Shriners Hospital for Children.