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HISTORY OF SURFING IN HAWAII



The history of surfing in Hawaii goes back to the 4th century a.d.. Polynesian's began to make their way to the Hawaiian Island from Tahiti and the Marquesas. They brought many of their customs with them including playing in the surf on Paipo(belly) boards. It was here in Hawaii that the art of standing and surfing upright on long boards was invented. The first recorded sighting of actual surfing was made by Lieutenant James King, Commander of the "Discovery" in 1779. He recorded his sightings in the ship's logs.

By 1779 "Riding the waves" on long hardwood surfboards had become a daily part of Hawaiian culture. Many Ancient Hawaiian chants tell of Christening surfboards. The history of surfing in Hawaii tells of chants to the Gods to make big waves for surfing and chants to give courage to the men who rode these waves. Hawaii was ruled by many different Kapu (taboos). These kapu regulated everything from where and what to eat to learning how to build a good surfboard and how to convince the Gods to make the surf good. Hawaiian society was very distinct in separating the Ali'i (Royalty) from the commoner. There were certain beaches that the ali'i would surf on boards up to 24 feet long, while commoners would surf at different beaches and ride boards up to 12 feet long. Several of Hawaii's most famous Chiefs including Kaumali'I the ruler of Kauai and Kamehameha I were renowned for their surfing ability, and their surfboards were among their prized possessions.

The history of surfing in Hawaii tells that after the arrival of Captain Cook the H'aole (white man) tried to Americanize the Polynesians and in 1820 the Calvinistic Christian Missionaries arrived from England and taught the Polynesians to believe in only one God (Jesus Christ). They insisted that the Polynesians wear clothes, learn to read and write and work more and play less. They discouraged the Hawaiians from surfing.

By the early 1900's, surfing was almost a dead sport in Hawaii. The h'aole had tried to control everything Hawaiian including their Gods, cultures, land, lives and sports. South Oahu was about the only place a few people would still surf in the Hawaiian Islands. When there were once hundreds of surfers now there were only a small handful. The rebirth of surfing in Hawaii was ironically due to three h'aoles(white men) and one Native Hawaiian.

In 1907, the history of surfing in Hawaii started to change when famous author Jack London and his wife came to Oahu. They stayed in the area where the Moana Hotel now stands. There were a group of men there who had started a club called "The Waikiki Swimming Club." Jack London met this crew who introduced him to Alexander Ford Hume, an eccentric journalist and wanderer. Hume introduced London to the most celebrated beach boy of the time, a 23 year old Irish/Hawaiian named George Freeth the three men met another h'aole named Ford. The four men had one thing in common, the love of surfing "The sport of Kings". Jack London wrote about the sport of Kings "surfing" in 1907. The article was published in numerous magazines until 1911. These men had breathed a new life into this wonderful dying sport and changed the history of surfing in Hawaii. In 1907 after reading London's article, railroad and real estate magnate Henry Huntington invited George Freeth to California to put on a surfing demonstration to promote the opening of the Los Angeles - Redondo railway. Freeth accepted the invitation and was quickly given the title of being the first man to surf in California. These four men continued to revive the sport of surfing and Ford Petitioned the Queen Emma Estate to set aside a plot of land on Waikiki Beach, next to the Moana Hotel to build a club that would preserve the ancient Hawaiian sports of surfing and outrigger canoeing. He explained that it would also promote tourism to Hawaii. They accepted and on May 1, 1908 they founded the

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"Hawaiian Outrigger Canoe Club". The club offered a place to change and a grass hut for surfboard storage right on the beach.



Duke Kahanomoku Statue at Waikiki Beach

In 1905 Duke Paoa Kahanomoku and a group of native Hawaiians founded their own surf club called Hui Nalu (Surf Club). Once again the history of surfing in Hawaii was changing when Hui Nalu and the Outrigger Canoe Club started friendly competitions that many came to the beach to watch. In 1912, Hawaiian beach boy Duke Paoa Kahanomoku 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 Hawaii's best ocean watermen and beach boy. 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, which would forever change the history of surfing in Hawaii.

The history of surfing in Hawaii tells of Jack London returning to Waikiki in 1915 and how surprised he was to find that the Hawaii Outrigger Canoe Club had a membership of 1200 and a few hundred more on waiting lists. Waikiki Beach was once again full of surfers. After Duke's visits to California, surfing took off. Everybody wanted to try to "catch a wave".

During the 1940's, a lot of American soldiers stationed at Pearl Harbor were introduced to surfing. The number of people interested in the sport continued to grow. The history of surfing in Hawaii changed to the point that some people even quit their jobs in the late 1940's to move to Oahu to surf the big waves of Makaha Beach, Sunset Beach and Waimea Beach. By the late 1950's, more photographers and filmmakers were becoming interested in surfing and the sport of surfing continued to grow. After Hawaii became a state in 1959 more and more visitors came to Hawaii and wanted to [learn to surf](#) in Waikiki. The Australians and Californians wanted to come to Hawaii to surf the big waves at the [best surfing beaches](#) on Oahu. During the 1960's, Movies like the "Beach Party" movies and "Gidget Goes Hawaiian" continued to popularize the sport of surfing.

Today, surfing continues to be a favorite sport in Hawaii as well as the rest of the world.

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