

Newspapers, Hawaii to 1907, US to 1910.

Overview.

America, to 1910.

The earliest and most obscure report is from **Union County Star and Lewisburg Chronicle** of 17 January 1862. Apparently (the document is barely legible), it records the sinking of a Union vessel and subsequent rescue of some of the crew, one supported by the wheel (as flotsom) and *"three clinging to the surf-boards."*

Of particular importance are the visits of Hawaiian surfers to demonstrate their skills in California. While three Hawaiian princes attending school in California in 1885 are known to have surfed at Santa Cruz, in November 1893 a group of native Hawaiians went to La Jolla, probably sponsored by the La Jolla Park Hotel, specifically to give *"surf riding shows"*, although it is possible they provided an assortment of entertainments. In 1894 a large contingent travelled to San Francisco to present the Hawaiian exhibit at the 1894 MidWinter Fair comprising a replica village, aquarium, and a wide range of products and handicrafts, including outrigger canoes and *"an old-fashioned surf-board."* The party included a group of hula performers and two surfers, James Apu and Kapahee, who were to give board riding exhibitions.

At Redondo Beach in 1895, the local hotel presented the Hawaiian National Band as one of their summer attractions. In addition to their musical performance, band members were also scheduled to demonstrate high diving and surf riding. Whereas the diving (from eighty feet) by John Inea and Sam Kaaua was a success, a letter home from a band member notes that *"they could not do some surf-riding there being no surf."* After the Californian engagements the band was expecting to travel to New York, but is unknown if they and their surfboards travelled to the East coast.

An all too brief report from Ocean City, Maryland, in 1900 notes that

"Messrs Carter and Cooper are skilled in surf riding." Apart from the early date for surf riding on the Atlantic coast, it should be noted that Carter and Cooper were Afro-Americans.

In an article printed in Honolulu in 28 June 1907, either written by or initiated by Ford and probably fictitious, George Freeth is said to be *"the only man living who has ever surfed on the Atlantic coast."* It is claimed that he had stowed away on a steamer to Atlantic City (without the knowledge of friends, relatives, or the press), shaped a surfboard there from a local *"woodpile when the cook wasn't looking"*, surfed standing on his head and shot through the piers, taunted the local life-savers, and, for his efforts was arrested and assaulted by the police. It is unlikely that Freeth actually did any of this. However, the story may have been based on the knowledge that someone from Hawaii had ridden at board at Atlantic City, to the concern of local officials, before this date. Maybe the Royal Hawaiian Band surfers did make it to the East coast in the late 1890s, and in 1912 it was reported that the *"City Commission forbids the use of boards in the ocean."* The article was accompanied by *"a snapshot of of Freeth riding the breakers, the picture being pronounced. the very best photograph ever taken of a surfer in action ... by Mr. Ford, who stood up to his neck among the breakers for days in order that he might be able to get a series of such photographs."*

The article was probably published to boost Freeth's profile before his departure to the West coast to demonstrate surf riding. Furthermore, it may had been intended to cement the negotiations for his appearance; if so, this goal was achieved. It is difficult to speculate on what the local surfers thought of the article; some may have believed it, some may have seen it as a comic hoax on Freeth's West coast sponsors, some were perhaps glad that Freeth was leaving Waikiki. Five days later Freeth departed on the Alameda for Southern California to introduce *"the royal Hawaiian sport"*.

By August 1907, Freeth and Kenneth Winter were in California, but

found the surf at Long Beach unsuitable. Freeth was more successful at Vience Beach, his exhibitions *"drawing immense crowds along the beach and on the piers."* He would later appear at Redondo Beach, which had previously hosted the surfers of the Royal Hawaiian Band in 1895.

Winter was back competing at Waikiki by June 1908, Freeth apparently did not return, even during for the Californian winter. In July, the Los Angles press reported that the organisers of the Vienice Water carnival had invited *"surf board riders from all over Southern California"* to participate. Freeth's, and possibly his predecessors, efforts appear to have a established a group of local enthusiastists in California.

On the east coast, inspired by Alexander Hume-Ford's *"Riding the Surf in Hawaii"*, published in **Colliers National Weekly** in August 1909,

.Eugene Johnson immediately acquired *"what is called a surf board"* and, with his wife, spent an *"afternoon riding the waves"* at Daytona Beach, Florida. It was suggested that the *"fine sport ... is taking well with surf bathers."*

Like the Royal Hawaiian Band surfers who performed on the West coast at Redondo Beach in 1895, a group of surfing musicians, *"the Hawaiian quintette"*, were booked at Atlantic City and at Ashbury Park N.J. in July 1910. At Ashbury Park, their board riding, "skimming on the crest of a wave for hundreds of feet", was admired and copied by some locals, with limited success.

Overview.

Hawaii, to 1907.

These numerous and varied newspaper reports between 1860 and 1908 confirm Patrick Moser's assessment:

"The more we look into the traditional Dark Ages of surf history —the period between missionary Hiram Bingham's departure in 1840 and

the

Ford/London arrival in 1907— the more evidence we find that surfing endured in native Hawaiian communities and among whites attracted to the sport."

After observing local native surfers at Kailua on the large island in December 1874 , two visiting Americans, Prof. Forbes and Charles Lambert, were lent surfboards by Simon Kaai, the local Sheriff. This was apparently a regular request, however in this case Lambert drowned and the fatality was widely reported by the press..

In June 1877 Kamehameha Day was to celebrated at Waikiki with displays of surfriding, unfortunately the waves failed to cooperate and the event was cancelled. Surfriding requires surfable waves, the result of a complex combination of meteorological events, and the ephemeral nature of good waves both fascinates and exasperates surf riders. To illustrate, on the same day at Lahania, on Maui, the celebrations were blessed with rideable surf and four board riders competed, including the highly favoured Poepoe and Nakooko, the eventual winner. Nakooko was a mature woman: *"past her youth, yet ... of a comely form."* A template for future surfing contests, it was held over a specified time and judged subjectively by an experienced elder. Also note that the four riders who presented for the public contest probably were the most skilled representatives of a much larger group of recreational surfers. Subsequent successful surf riding displays were reported at Waikiki (1887) and Hilo (1893) and during this period the local press also noted particular high surf events at these locations.

Perhaps the most unusual and culturally interesting is Edward Townsend's 1893 article, *"Waikiki ... where ... laziness is an art."* Townsend describes the members of a white privileged class succumbing to a mellifluous *"native"* or Polynesian lifestyle, augmented with the

latest technology (in this case the telephone), where deemed useful. There is an implication that the "*native servants*" actively (and sometimes, like their masters, less actively) share in many of the benefits of living at Waikiki.

Of particular importance are the visits of Hawaiian surfers to demonstrate their skills in California. While three Hawaiian princes attending school in California in 1885 are known to have surfed at Santa Cruz, in November 1893 a group of native Hawaiians went to La Jolla, probably sponsored by the La Jolla Park Hotel, specifically to give "*surf riding shows*", although it is possible they provided an assortment of entertainment. In 1894 a large contingent travelled to San Francisco to present the Hawaiian exhibit at the 1894 MidWinter Fair comprising a replica village, aquarium, and a wide range of products and handicrafts, including outrigger canoes and "*an old-fashioned surf-board.*" Later, there would be recurring calls to construct a similar attraction in Hawaii. The party included a group of hula performers and two surfers, James Apu and Kapahee, who were to give board riding exhibitions.

At Redondo Beach in 1895, the local hotel presented the Hawaiian National Band as one of their summer attractions. In addition to their musical performance, band members were also scheduled to demonstrate high diving and surf riding. Whereas the diving (from eighty feet) by John Inea and Sam Kaaua was a success, a letter home from a band member notes that "*they could not do some surf-riding there being no surf.*" After California the band was expecting to travel for engagements in New York, but is unknown if they and their surfboards travelled to the East coast. The band appears to had some residual impact at Redondo, three years later the locals celebrated the summer with "*boat races through the surf, high diving exhibition and swimming races.*"

From about 1895 images of surf riding become regular features of Hawaiian promotional material, initially by the shipping companies.

Before the turn of the century, images of surfing were of varying quality and accuracy and most artists struggled with presenting its essential dynamics. With beginnings of surf photography in 189, illustrators adapted photographs to produce far more realistic representations.

In the late 1890s, Burton Holmes' commenced his touring "*Illustrated Lecture on the Hawaiian Islands*", which included motion pictures of surf riding in native canoes. At an exhibit of postal cards in Paris in 1900, Honolulu photographer, Davey, received awards for "*artistically colored pictures of surf riding and the lei women.*"

With the formation in 1897 of the Hui Pukaka Nalu by native canoe owners, under the management of W. W. Dimond, canoe surfing became an enduring emblem of Waikiki Beach. Previously, the enjoyment of a canoe shoot was limited to canoe owners, their family and friends; but now, for \$1.00 an hour, the hui offered the pleasure of canoe surfing to all. The Hui Pukaka Nalu advertised in the local press and was a significant presence on the beach, with up to eight canoes regularly in action.

Following an accident in "*moderately high*" surf at Waikiki, Harry Kapulu and P. L. Kumukahi defended their reputation as skilled surf riders in a letter to the press in 1899, and identified some of their experienced colleagues as Marshall Brown, Leslie Scott, Ed Macfarlane, and Willie Dimond. The attraction was widely reported in the local and national (mainland) press over the next couple of years and canoe surfing was automatically pencilled in on the itinerary for every visiting dignitary and military serviceman to Oahu. An enthusiastic account by one visiting officer was published in 1898 under the heading "*Royal Sport of Surfing*" - a description that would hereafter regularly appear in print.

In April 1900 heavy north swells caused the suspension of the local steamer services and the foreshore was threatened at Hilo Bay. Here, the day after the peak of the swell, a *"considerable number of young Hawaiians"* were seen surf-riding. Despite some reports of the decline of surfing at Hilo, these surfers were sufficiently skilled and experienced to appreciate the challenge of what was probably the biggest day of the year. That year, *"a large Hawaiian made canoe"* was offered at auction and work commenced on the Moana Hotel, the prospectus noting that the location *"is ideal ... being at a point that faces the only place available for surf riding."*

The next year, concern was expressed for the depletion of the sands of Waikiki Beach, large sections then being mined by the building industry.

At the Waikiki Regatta that year an extensive program included canoe and swimming races. Canoe surfing franchises expanded, operating from the Long Branch Baths and in 1901 the Wakiki Inn advertised canoe riding at 50 cents per session.

Images of canoe or board surfing continued to feature in print such as the brochure for the Royal Hawaiian Hotel (1903), Emma Metcalf Nakuino's **Hawaii, Its People and Their Legends** (1904), and official sanction in July 1905 when a design incorporating Diamond Head and a surf-riding canoe was adopted as the county seal of Oahu.

In April 1904, Winfield S. Crouch, visiting from New York, drowned while board surfing at Waikiki. Two months later Jack London, the novelist on his first visit to Hawaii, benefiting his status, was taken for a canoe ride. London was far more impressed with surfing three years later, at this point in a letter to his future wife he merely noted that he had bathed at Waikiki. During the year the Tourist Promotion Committee encouraged as many people as possible to help in the photographing of beach scenes and a proposal was considered for the construction of a replica native village *"where canoeing, surf riding and fishing would be features."*

The first recorded headstand, considered by some the ultimate demonstration of skill, was at the 1905 Waikiki Regatta and at the end of the year the discovery of a cache of antiquities, including a sled and a surf board, made the front page of the Honolulu press. Also making front page news was the president's daughter, Alice Roosevelt, and her obligatory *"first experience as a surf rider"* in a canoe.

In 1906, photography would make a substantial impact at Waikiki. A dramatic water shot of an outrigger canoe shooting past Diamond Head was published in the **New York Tribune** and Mr. Bonine, of the Edison Moving Picture Company, secured film of surf riding at Waikiki.

The Waikiki Regatta of 1907 featured surfriding events for boards and canoes. The nominated entrants in the surfboard contest were Harry Steiner, Curtis Hustace, Dan Keawemahi, Duke Kahanamoku, William Dole, Keanu, Dudy Miller, Atherton Gilman, Lane Webster, and James McCandless (a George Freeth is listed in the swimming team for the Diamond Head Athletic Club). The event was postponed and rescheduled for March where the board and surf canoe entries were *"to be made at the judges' stand."* Before *"the biggest crowd ever known at this beach"*, the judges, J. E. P. Law, C. W. Macfarlane, and Olaf Sorenson, awarded first place in the board competition to Harold Hustace and the canoe event to the *Hanakeoke*. Hustace *"stood on the board, head up and head down and as an extra turned a somersault or two,"* and the performances of Harry Steiner and James McCandless were also praised.

In June 1907 Alexander Hume Ford and Jack and Charmian London met on Oahu. On this visit London was more enthusiastic about surfing, Ford was enthusiastic about everything. Their stays were brief, but their impact was huge with both promoting surfriding in widely circulated articles. Central in their writing was George Freeth, lauded as *"probably the most expert surf board rider in the world"* and who *"has probably done more to revive the wonderful art of the*

ancient Hawaiians here at home than any other one person."

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[Repeated in America]

By August 1907, Freeth and Kenneth Winter were in California, but found the surf at Long Beach unsuitable. Freeth was more successful at Venice Beach, his exhibitions *"drawing immense crowds along the*

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London 's landmark article, "*A Royal Sport*", an enthusiastic description of his initiation to surfing by George Freeth and Alexander Hume Ford, appeared in the October 1907 edition of the widely circulated **Woman's Home Companion**. Before the end of the year Jack London had left Hawaii for the South Seas, George Freeth was in California, and Alexander Hume Ford was on his way to Australia.
