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Clark/Hawaiian Surfing

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INTRODUCTION

ON NOVEMBER 1, 2005, I received a call from Sea Engineering, Inc., a coastal and ocean engineering firm based at Makai Research Pier in Waimānalo. They asked me if I would be willing to do an ocean recreation assessment for them in Waikīkī. Sea Engineering explained that the owners of the Sheraton Waikīkī Hotel were considering a beach restoration project in front of their property, and they had asked Sea Engineering to do an environmental impact statement. My contribution to the EIS would be to identify the ocean recreation users in that area of Waikīkī, conduct interviews with them, and determine if the project would have any impacts on their activities. I was two months away from retiring from the Honolulu Fire Department after a thirty-three-year career as a firefighter, and Sea Engineering's project was the type of consulting work I had planned to do in my retirement. I accepted their offer.

My first step in shoreline assessments is to review the existing literature for information on the area, which helps to determine what activities occurred historically at the project site. I went first to Bishop Museum Press's *Sites of Oahu*, by Elspeth Sterling and Catherine Summers, which, although it was published in 1962, is still one of the best historical reference books for the island of O'ahu. I was surprised to find there was no information at all on Waikīkī. In their foreword the authors offered this brief explanation: "No information is given for Waikīkī or *makai* of Beretānia Street because this area should be the subject of a separate study." Sterling and Summers unfortunately never got around to the separate study.

From years of personal research on Hawai'i's beaches, including Waikīkī, I knew that the Hawaiian name for Gray's Beach, the small pocket of sand in the study area, was Kawehewehe, so I decided to try another avenue for information, a website called Ho'olaupa'i. In 2001, Dwayne Steele, Oswald Stender, and Puakea Nogelmeier started a project to scan more than a hundred

years of historic Hawaiian-language newspapers. Named Ho'olaupa'i, or "to multiply or increase," as in knowledge of Hawaiian culture, the pilot project was funded by Richard Dwayne "Nākila" Steele, a noted philanthropist who, after his retirement from Grace Pacific Corporation in 1989, dedicated the rest of his life to the perpetuation of Hawaiian culture. He sponsored Hawaiian-language books, commissioned the production and recording of Hawaiian musicians, assisted with the founding of two public charter schools in Kekaha, Kaua'i, for native-speaking Hawaiian children of the Nī'ihau community, and spearheaded the funding to digitize the Hawaiian-language newspapers. Ho'olaupa'i is now a joint project of Awaiaulu Inc. and Bishop Museum in collaboration with Alu Like Inc., Hale Kuamo'o, and Kamehameha Press. Its website is <http://nupepa.org/>, or it can be found online using the keyword "nupepa," which is "newspaper" (*nūpepa*) in Hawaiian. Ho'olaupa'i has a "search" feature, so anyone can search this invaluable online archive of Hawaiian history and language. To date, approximately 10 percent of the Hawaiian-language newspapers from 1834 to 1948 are searchable.

I went to the Ho'olaupa'i site, typed "Kawehewehe" into the search feature, and was amazed at the number of entries that came up. As I read through them, I discovered that Kawehewehe was not only the name of a beach, but also the name of a coconut grove, a surf site, a spring, and a small community. I did more searches on other Waikīkī place names, including surf sites, and quickly realized that the Hawaiian-language newspapers are a wealth of invaluable historical information. I decided to collect as much information as I could about traditional Hawaiian surfing and especially its connection to Waikīkī, and that was the beginning of *Hawaiian Surfing: Traditions from the Past*.

The vast collection of literature on surfing began with the journals of Captain James Cook on his voyage to Hawai'i, which spanned his arrival in 1778 and his return to the islands in 1779. Cook's journals were followed by the writings of other explorers, missionaries, travelers, magazine writers, newspaper writers, authors, and historians. During the twentieth century, surf historians scoured every source of information they could find to describe the earliest days of the sport, the days prior to 1900 when Hawaiians still surfed exactly as they had for hundreds of years before the impact of Western culture. My intent in writing *Hawaiian Surfing: Traditions from the Past* was not to repackage this wealth of information, but to add to it primarily from sources written by Hawaiians in the Hawaiian language of the 1800s. These sources included the Hawaiian-language newspapers, the first of which were published in 1834, and other writings of native Hawaiians.

I decided to look at traditional surfing language and terminology through descriptions of the sport in the Hawaiian language. Hawaiians, like surfers today, had their own surf culture, and I thought perhaps as a lifelong surfer, born and raised in Hawai'i, I could bring a surfer's point of view to the material. I caught my first wave when I was eight years old at Canoes in Waikīkī. That was in 1954, and I hoped that with the experience of my fifty-five-plus years of riding waves in Hawai'i, I would be able to show the depth of knowledge and skill that Hawaiian surfers had before surfing was influenced by non-Hawaiians.

Information on traditional surfing in the Hawaiian language has come primarily from native Hawaiians such as John Papa ʻŪi, Samuel Kamakau, Zephirin Kepelino, and David Malo, who wrote extensively in the 1800s to document precontact Hawaiian culture. Many of their writings were serialized in the historic Hawaiian-language newspapers, and eminent Hawaiian scholars in the 1900s, such as Mary Kawena Pukui of the Bishop Museum, spent years reading the old newspapers, searching out articles, translating them, and assembling them into books. Thanks to their efforts and translations, we have *Fragments of Hawaiian History*, by John Papa ʻŪi; *I Ka Wā O Kamehameha: In the Time of Kamehameha*, *Ka Poʻe Kahiko: The People of Old*, *Ruling Chiefs of Hawaiʻi*, *Tales and Traditions of the People of Old*; *Nā Moʻolelo a Ka Poʻe Kahiko*, and *The Works of the People of Old: Nā Hana a Ka Poʻe Kahiko*, all by Samuel Kamakau; *Kepelino's Traditions of Hawaiʻi*, by Martha Beckwith; and *Hawaiian Antiquities*, by David Malo, all invaluable references.

Information on traditional surfing has also come from Abraham Fornander's lengthy work, the *Fornander Collection of Folklore*, a major collection of Hawaiian legends in English and Hawaiian, which include many descriptions of surfing throughout Hawaiʻi. Fornander published his collection in 1930. Another literary work with valuable surfing information is Martha Beckwith's *Hawaiian Romance of Lāʻieikawai*, which includes descriptions of surfing and bodysurfing. Beckwith, who published her book in 1917, enlisted the assistance of some of the best Hawaiian-language authorities of the day to translate this epic tale, which was written by a Hawaiian historian named Haleʻole and published in Hawaiian in 1863.

A new contribution to traditional Hawaiian surf history surfaced in 2006 when Awaiaulu Press published Puakea Nogelmeier's translation of *Ka Moʻolelo o Hiʻiakaikapoliopole*, or *The Epic Tale of Hiʻiakaikapoliopole*. This legendary story about Hiʻiaka, the beautiful sister of Pele, goddess of the volcano, was written by a native Hawaiian, Hoʻoulumāhiehie, and was featured as a daily series in the Hawaiian-language newspaper *Ka Nai Aupuni* in 1905 and 1906. Nogelmeier's 490-page translation of this series is an exceptional treasury of cultural knowledge, which includes many descriptive stories about surfing.

Among the most intriguing of the Hiʻiakaikapoliopole surfing stories are those about Hiʻiaka and Hōpoe, Hiʻiaka's close friend in Keaʻau; Hiʻiaka and Punahoa, a skilled surfer who was a chiefess in Hilo; Hiʻiaka and her brother Kānemilohaie (also known as Kānemilohaʻi), another skilled surfer; and Hiʻiaka and Peleʻula, a chiefess of Waikīkī. *Hiʻiakaikapoliopole* reads like a modern adventure novel, and the author, Hoʻoulumāhiehie, tells story after story through lengthy conversations between the characters. It is in these conversations that we see the everyday surf culture of the Hawaiians and learn the language of the surfers, their surf-speak, and their traditions before the arrival of Western civilization. Words that otherwise are simply entries in Hawaiian-language dictionaries come alive in the interplay between Hiʻiaka, her companions, and the people, monsters, ghosts, and gods she meets as she travels and surfs across the island chain. Hoʻoulumāhiehie's text also includes many briefer references to surfers and surfing, all of which enrich the existing fabric of traditional surfing history.

Another important source of historic surfing information are the *kanikau*, or mourning chants, in the Hawaiian-language newspapers. The publication of the first Hawaiian-language newspaper in 1834, followed by the translation of the Baibala Hemolele, the Holy Bible, from English to Hawaiian, which was completed in 1839 by Christian missionaries and Hawaiian scholars, established Hawaiian as a written language. The missionaries also established schools, and within one generation Hawaiians were almost universally literate, more so than any native group in the world. There was an explosion of writing throughout the 1800s, especially in the newspapers, which are now an invaluable archive of historic, linguistic, and cultural information. *Kanikau* are usually defined as dirges, or poetic chants that express grief and sadness for someone who has passed away. Prior to the introduction of the printed word, composing mourning chants to honor the memory of a loved one was a common practice among Hawaiians, so composing *kanikau* for publication in the 1800s offered a new way to express this important tradition. Today, *kanikau* are treasuries of poetry, language, cultural knowledge, place names, genealogies, and resource descriptions.

A prominent characteristic of Hawaiian poetry is the enumeration of names of places, associated with persons, whose memory is perpetuated in chants or songs.

In the Hawaiian chant (*mele*) and dirge (*kanikau*), the aim seems to be chiefly to enumerate every place associated with the subject, and to give that place some special epithet, either attached to it by common place repetition, or specially devised for the occasion, as being particularly characteristic.

—Thrum. *Hawaiian Almanac and Annual for 1887*. p. 79.

A eia iho ua mau uē kanikau nei a Hi'iaka no ke kāne.

—Nogelmeier. *Ka Mō'olelo*. p. 382.

Here are the **chants of lamentation** that Hi'iaka chanted for her husband.

—Nogelmeier. *The Epic Tale*. p. 357.

I ka noho ana o Kamehameha a me na'lii a pau, a make iho la o Kalola, kaakumakena iho la na'lii me ke kanikau.

—*Ka Nupepa Kuokoa*. APR 13, 1867. p. 1.

When Kamehameha and all his chiefs sat together at the time Kalola died, the chiefs wailed and **chanted dirges**.

—Kamakau. *Ruling Chiefs*. p. 149.

In the Hawaiian-language newspapers, *kanikau* often take the form of a *huaka'i*, or journey, through the community where the deceased lived, around the deceased's home island, or throughout the island chain. The *huaka'i* takes the writer and the deceased past important places in their lives, including *wahi pana*, or famous places in Hawai'i. In many *kanikau* the names of the *wahi pana* are poetic references to the personality of the person who died and convey the loving relationship between the deceased and the writer. And if the person who died was a surfer, the *kanikau* often contain references to surfing, such as the names of beaches, surf spots, and springs where surfers rinsed off after surfing.

*Aloha Pōhakuloa i ka lulu,
Aloha Pāaiea i ka nalu,
Aloha Paiki i ke awa pae waa,
Aloha Moanalihā i ka wai auau,
Aloha Kapāniau i ke ehū a ke kai.*

—*Ko Hawaii Pae Aina*. JULY 31, 1880. P. 4.

How I love Pōhakuloa in the calm,
How I love Pāaiea in the waves,
How I love Paiki in the bay where canoes land,
How I love Moanalihā in the bathing waters,
How I love Kapāniau in the sea spray.

*Kuu wahine mai ka malu ulu o Lele,
Mai ka nalu hee ia e U-o,
Mai ka ihu kao lele la e ka huelopoki,
Mai na ale hulilua la e Pailolo,
Kau pono aku ka ihu o ka waa i Honomuni.*

—*Ko Hawaii Pae Aina*. APR 5, 1879. P. 4.

My dear wife of the shade of the 'ulu trees at Lele [Lahaina],
From the waves surfed at 'Uo,
From the bow where rockets were launched from the whaleboat,
From the swells that turn in two directions at Pailolo,
The bow of the canoe is steered directly toward Honomuni.

*Kuu wahine i ke alakai o Kanaeheehe,
Na ka waa kaua e lawe pae i ka lai o Lele,
Ike ia Halau Lahaina molale malu i ka ulu,
Kuu wahine mai ka nalu hai o U-o.*

—*Ko Hawaii Pae Aina*. JUNE 21, 1879. P. 4.

My dear wife in the ocean pathway of Kanaeheehee,
The canoe takes you and me into the calm shore of Lele,
Lahaina is seen clearly, like a large house shaded by 'ulu trees,
My dear wife from the surf break of 'Uo.

Kanikau are filled with *kaona*, hidden meanings in Hawaiian poetry. They often contain veiled references by using words and expressions with multiple meanings. One of the most popular poetic devices is to use a place name that itself has special meaning to the writer and the deceased and then play off the place name with identical words or other words with a similar meaning or sound in the same line or the one that follows. This poetic interplay of words often makes translation into other languages difficult or perhaps impossible at times. Even Hawaiian speakers today can sometimes only guess at the intended meanings of poetic expressions in the lyrics based on their knowledge of the language, the culture, the places, and the people. As a result, more than one interpretation may result from an analysis of the lyrics, which may have been the intent of the composer, either to conceal the true nature of the relationship between the composer and the person honored in the lyrics or perhaps to express how complicated the relationship was.

*Kiki kuu oho ilaila—o Waikiki,
Kike ka hua o ka alae—o Waialae,
He wahine oho lupe keia—o Wailupe,
E pii kaua i niu—o Niu,
He wahine heekoko keia—o Koko,
Ouou ka manu o Kaula—o Kuliouou.*

—*Ka Nupepa Kuokoa*. MAY 23, 1868. P. 4.

My hair stands up there—Waikiki,
The eggs of the *alae* birds crack open—Waialae,
This is a woman with hair like lupe seaweed—Wailupe,
Let us climb the coconut trees to get coconuts—Niu,
This is a woman bleeding—Koko,
The bird of Ka'ula Island cries out loud—Kuli'ou'ou.

Kanikau printed in the Hawaiian-language newspapers served as permanent eulogies, and they were especially common during the mid-1800s. L. H. Gulick, the editor of *Ka Nupepa Kuokoa*, ran a regular ad in every issue for many years, such as this one in English on August 28, 1868, p. 1:

Advertisements not exceeding 10 lines, inserted once for \$1.00; twice for \$1.50; and \$2.00 for one month; all advertisements must be paid in advance. *Kanikaus* will be charged \$1.00 per page, or 4 cts. a line.

One of the first *kanikau* in print was *He Kanikau No Kaahumanu*, by noted Hawaiian scholar David Malo, which was published in the August 8, 1834, issue of *Ka Lama Hawaii* on page 3. Writing at Lahainaluna School on Maui, Malo mourned the death of Ka'ahumanu, the beloved wife of Kamehameha I. Following Malo's example, this practice was continued in other Hawaiian-language newspapers, where family members or friends would write *kanikau* and pay a fee to have them printed.

The entry that follows, written in 1864 by Lot Kamehameha upon the death of his brother, Kamehameha IV, is an excellent example of a *kanikau* with many place names. These particular names are from Waikiki and include the names of a beach (Kahaloa), a village (Ulukou), a surf spot (Kapuni), and a rain (Punaiea).

*Kuu kaikunane hoi,
Mai ke kai o Kapuni,
Mai ka i-a hali ala o Kahaloe,
Hooluana ka Lani i Ulukou,
Me na kamalei a kakou,
Huli aku nana i ka ua Punaiea,
Ke halii mai la la i Palehala e.*

—*Ka Nupepa Kuokoa*. APR 30, 1864. P. 4.

My dear brother,
From the sea of Kapuni,
From the fish that carry the scent of Kahaloe,
The king relaxes at Ulukou,

With all of our children,
He turns and watches the Puanaiea rain,
Spreading this way over Palehala.
[“Ka i-a hali ala” (*ka i’a hali ’ala*) is an epithet for *lipoa* seaweed, which is fragrant
and a favorite edible seaweed.]

Hawaiian Surfing: Traditions from the Past is another look at the early history of surfing. While it includes observations by non-Hawaiians, most of the information is from native Hawaiians who were surfers writing about their sport or from Hawaiian writers who were familiar with the sport. From their writings, which include technical descriptions, legends, and eulogies for men and women who surfed, we see that traditional Hawaiian surfers were as at home in the ocean and as skilled in riding waves as any surfer today. While they rode solid wood boards without fins, boards that limited the extent of their maneuvers, they still did all the basics that surfers do now. Riding short boards, they took off on steep waves, they bottom turned and cut back, they rode down the line, and they got barreled in hollow waves. Riding long boards, they surfed big waves, especially those in Waikiki at the famous surf breaks like Kapua, Kalehuawehe, Aiwahi, Maihiwa, and Kapuni. Through the voices of native Hawaiian surfers, *Hawaiian Surfing: Traditions from the Past* takes another look at surfing before it evolved with the innovations of modern times, and in the process shows that in their day, traditional Hawaiian surfers were among the greatest watermen and waterwomen in the world.

The next day I spoke to Mr. Forbes [at the Ka’awaloa Mission] concerning the extraordinary dexterity in swimming [surfing] which I had observed on the preceding day among the natives. “You can have no adequate idea of it,” he replied, “they are more at their ease in the water than on the land.”

—Barrot. *Unless Haste Is Made*. p. 16.

[In 1836, Theodore-Adolphe Barrot watched Hawaiians surfing at Kealakekua.]

They are quite fearless on the water; all swim, and have little fear of loss of life by drowning. They appear quite as much at home in the water as on land, and many of them more so.

—Wilkes. *Narrative*. p. 44.

The inhabitants of these islands, both male and female, are distinguished by their fondness for the water, their powers of diving and swimming, and the dexterity and ease with which they manage themselves, their surf-boards and canoes, in that element.

—Bingham. *A Residence*. p. 136.

The three chapters that follow contain many passages in Hawaiian, each of which is followed by an English translation. If the translation was from a book, such as one by Hawaiian scholars ‘Ii, Kamakau, Kepelino, or Malo, the author and his or her book are acknowledged after the translation. Otherwise, all English translations of the Hawaiian passages not followed

by an acknowledgment were provided by Keao NeSmith, an instructor in Hawaiian language at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

The Hawaiian passages in the three chapters are primarily from Hawaiian-language newspapers of the 1800s and early 1900s, and writers then did not use the orthography that is used today. The passages were copied as they appear in their original sources and therefore do not have the diacritical marks that are common now, the *ʻokina*, or glottal stop, and the *kahakō*, or macron. Some of the early writers occasionally used an apostrophe, dash, or single open quote mark to represent the *ʻokina*, and these marks were copied if they appeared in the original work, but none of the early writers ever used the *kahakō*. Some Hawaiian source texts, such as *Ka Mo'ōlelo o Hi'iakaikapoliopole* by Puakea Nogelmeier, contain the *ʻokina* and *kahakō*, so these passages have diacritical marks in the original Hawaiian. Hawaiian words, names, and place names that appear in the English translations by Keao NeSmith are written with *ʻokina* and *kahakō* and follow the spellings found in Pukui and Elbert's *Hawaiian Dictionary* and Pukui, Elbert, and Mookini's *Place Names of Hawaii*.