

What You Never Knew About the Macfarlane Regatta

By Barbara Del Piano



This year marks the 74th running of the Walter J. Macfarlane Regatta at Waikiki Beach, the longest running canoe race in Hawaii's history, and, in fact, the world. And believe it or not, there are still a few people around who paddled in, or witnessed, the first one in 1943. Although each year the races are documented, there are a few things that most of you probably don't know.

The reason the annual July 4th regatta was named after Walter Mac is that he unexpectedly passed away at the young age of 36 from typhoid fever after a brief trip to Mexico. Walter Mac was president of the Outrigger at the time and had brought the Club back from near-insolvency when the lease on the property at Waikiki was to expire. To honor him in a lasting manner, the races were named for him.

Did you know that after the first Regatta, Walter Mac's mother, Alice Kamokila Campbell Macfarlane, donated a case of Champagne to be given to the winners of the senior six-men and women race? The Outrigger won, and Kamokila poured the bubbly brew into the magnificent silver trophy donated by Matson Navigation Co. to honor Walter Mac; each member of the winning crew took a swig and then it was presented to the second place team.

This tradition has continued for 74 years, and although the Club now provides the Champagne, a descendent of the

family pours it into the bowl and presents it to the winners. Walter Mac's sister, Muriel Flanders, followed her mother and has been succeeded by her daughters, Alice Guild, and Mary Philpotts McGrath. Alice's son, Walter Guild, his sister Lissa Eveleth and their cousin Billy Philpotts, do the honors now. Walter gives a great pep-talk to the paddlers after a Club-sponsored breakfast held before the races begin. And Billy is the race course announcer.

Did you know that the regatta almost ended in 1958? Someone suggested to the Board of Directors, at the recommendation of the Club Captain, that a surfing contest replace the canoe regatta which would be called the Macfarlane Invitational Surfing Contest. A major reason, he explained, was that the cost would be cut in half...from \$300 down to \$150. After a motion was presented and seconded, the Board unanimously approved. If not for a group of "die-hards," that would have been the end of the regatta. But the old-timers group which included Dad Center vehemently protested the change at the next Board meeting and the Board reversed its decision and kept the regatta going.

Another thing you may not know is that the early regattas, until 1968, used the "LeMans Start" for the races. The course called for the canoes to start up on the sand, about ten feet from the water, with crew members on either side. At the sound of the gun, the paddlers lifted the canoe, rushed down to the water and attempted to jump in.

The spaces were small, especially for the steersman, whose seat was wedged behind the 'iako. In fact, the previous year the steersman didn't make it and by the time he caught up with the canoe, it had lost about five lengths.

Bob Anderson and Cline Mann suggested that the course be changed and the start be in the water. They also recommended that the course be straight in and out, instead of finishing in a line parallel to the beach and ending in front of the OCC Bar where the judges were seated.

Finally, after much discussion, Bob and Cline won out, on the condition that the new course be tried for just one year. Since it was so successful, no mention was ever again made to go back to the old way. The one change that has been made is that the distance for the senior six-man has been reduced from 4 miles to 1 1/2.

Another thing you may not know is that the first Macfarlane Regatta in 1943 consisted of Outrigger and Hui Nalu, plus beach boy entries from the Royal Hawaiian, Halekai, Beach Patrol and Queen Surfers, and just 13 events. It wasn't long before Healani entered the regatta during the war, Outrigger members in the military had a team and the award was given by Admiral "Bull" Halsey. In 1948, the newly formed Waikiki Surf Club competed. Today, there are approximately 18 clubs competing in 45 events.

Oh yes...just one more item. Did you know that the Macfarlane is the only "wave" race on OH CRA's schedule? This means that the races go out from the beach, make a turn, and come straight back in, allowing spectators on shore to watch the entire race, and allowing paddlers, if there is any surf, to



Walter Macfarlane

catch a wave and ride it in. It is the only competition where points do not count toward the state championship.

However, in order to enter the Macfarlane, a team must qualify. The reason is that the course is only wide enough for seven lanes and with so many teams participating, qualification is necessary to determine which

crews are eligible to enter.

And so the Macfarlane is a unique canoe race and the one members from all teams look forward to. They never know what to expect surf-wise, and it gives country teams the opportunity to come to Waikiki, which they seldom if ever do, except for the Macfarlane. Let's hope this grand tradition continues for at least another 74 years.



Where Have All the Flowers Gone?

Let's bring back the Aloha Spirit to canoe races on the 4th of July and for the rest of the season.

For many years it was tradition to gift paddlers with a flower lei after they finished their race. It not only smelled good, but the lei looked great in the crew photos and felt special.

Paddlers would sit under the OCC tent with their lei needles stringing plumeria into lei for their crews. Or they'd make ti leaf lei. The more energetic ones made haku lei.

In recent years, paddlers have been receiving ribbons with food items attached, such as chips, candy or even cans of soda. There's no magic in that.

Please consider the power of the flowers and bring lei for your crew and your friends for the Macfarlane Regatta and the remaining races this season.

