

DUKE PAOA KAHANAMOKU

1890-1968

His full name was Duke Paoa Kahinu Makoe Hulikoholoi Kahanamoku To his friends he was "Duke." The rest of the world knew him as Duke Paoa Kahanamoku the Hawaiian World Champion Surfer.

Duke Kahanamoku was one of the many prominent members of Hawaiian Lodge No. 21, F.& A.M. when the Hawaii Lodges were under the Grand Lodge of California. He was raised to the sublime degree of Master Mason on October 30, 1946, exalted a Royal Arch Mason in Honolulu Chapter No.1 on December 4, 1952; received and greeted a Royal and Select Master in Honolulu Council No. 1 on December 4, 1952; and dubbed and created a Knight Templar in the Honolulu Commandery No.1 on April 16, 1953.

Duke was born in Haleakala, Maui. He was the son of Duke Halapu and Julia Paoakalania Lonokahini Kahanamoku. He had six brothers and three sisters. Duke attended the Waikiki Grammar School, Kaahumanu School, and the Kamehameha School for Boys.

When Duke's name became a household name due to his swimming feats many people thought he was of Hawaiian Royalty because of his name. It was assumed by many folks that he actually was a Duke and that it was his royal title.

Duke was named after his father who was named Duke after the Duke of Edinburgh who visited Hawaii in 1869. Duke who was a very modest and unassuming man, although always getting a chuckle of being thought of as royalty, never hesitated to set the record straight about his lineage.

In his youth Duke became a master surfer using the now obsolete sixteen-foot Koa-wood surf board that weighed 114 pounds, a far cry from today's small, light weight fiberglass boards

In 1910, Duke developed what he called, "The Hawaiian crawl," a basic swimming competition stroke later known as "The American Crawl."

Duke Kahanamoku won an AAU meet in Honolulu Harbor, by breaking United States records for the 100- and 50-yard sprints. He subsequently went on to the Stockholm Olympics in 1912, and swept the swimming events, setting a world record for the 100- meter event. He received a wreath from King Gustave of Sweden when he was heralded the "Bronze Duke of Waikiki." In the same year he broke his own record at Hamburg, Germany.

In 1915, he introduced surfing to Australia. On his return to Hawaii he worked as a water meter reader, worked on surveys, and also became a Beach Boy.

In 1916, Duke broke more records with his distinctive swimming style. During World War I, when the Olympics were canceled he made a mainland tour demonstrating his skill to raise

money for the Red Cross. At almost 30 years of age, he beat his own 100-meter freestyle record at the Antwerp Olympics, by making the course in one minute flat.

Duke began a Hollywood film career in the late 1920's playing Polynesians and American Indians--everything except Hawaiians. He lost his title in the 1924, Paris Olympics to Johnny Weissmuller. On June 14, 1925, Duke Kahanamoku became a national hero when he rescued on his surf board eight of the twelve men saved from a capsized fishing boat in high surf off Newport Beach, California. He won medals in the 1928, Olympics and returned to Honolulu working as a janitor at the City Hall.

In 1932, he failed to place in the Olympic swimming trials but won a spot on the United States Water Polo team, thus appearing in four Olympic competitions in twenty years.

Back in Honolulu Duke was operating a gasoline service station, when in 1934, he was elected sheriff of Honolulu, a largely ceremonial office which he held until it was abolished in 1961; he was then appointed Official City of Honolulu Greeter. This was a role that Duke was very comfortable with and he proved to be a highly successful natural born one-man visitor's bureau. In his inimitable friendly manner Duke personified the "Aloha Spirit" of his native Hawaii.

Duke was a familiar figure at Waikiki Beach and was known to thousands of visitors to the Islands. Duke returned to Hollywood for a brief spell after World War II and had a supporting role as an Indonesian Chief in the movie version of Garland Roark's best selling high drama novel "The Wake of The Red Witch" which starred John Wayne. In 1965, Duke Kahanamoku was selected as a charter member of the Swimming Hall of Fame. He became one of the twenty-six all-time sports champions in 1967. The following year he was named to the first Surfing Hall of Fame. Duke Kahanamoku's name is perpetuated in the annual World Surfing Championships.

In 1990, a 17-foot bronze statue of Duke holding a surf board with one arm and the other outstretched was erected in front of Kuhio Beach in Waikiki.

In 2002 the United States Postal Service issued a commemorative "Duke Kahanamoku" 37-cent stamp.

Duke married Nadine Alexander in 1940. In later years after his death, along with other Hawaiian Lodge widows Nadine frequently attended Lodge social functions. Nadine died in 1997, at age 92.

By Herbert G. Gardiner, PGS
Grand Historian