

## **Paddle-out Ceremonies.**

Paddle-out ceremonies to scatter someone's ashes in the ocean began in Waikīkī in the early 1900s. They originated with the members of Hui Nalu, the canoe club founded in 1908 by Duke Kahanamoku, Knute Cottrell, and Ken Winter. Burials at sea have been a maritime tradition as long as sailors have been sailing, so members of Hui Nalu, many of them Waikīkī beach boys, took the burial at sea concept and modified it by paddling the ashes of the deceased offshore in a canoe and scattering them in the ocean along with flower lei.

Surfing legend Wally Froiseth (1919-2015) was born in Los Angeles, but moved Hawai'i with his parents when he was 3 years old. He started surfing as a child in the 1920s, learning the sport and how to make surfboards from Waikīkī beach boy John Kaupiko. In an interview with *The New York Times* in 2010 Froiseth recalled attending his first paddle out ceremony at the age of six and said, "I don't know of any place that did it before Waikīkī."

Cremation, an important part of most paddle-out ceremonies, was not practiced in Hawai'i until the early 1900s. Discussions about it started as early as 1890, when Dr. Sidney Swift, the Board of Health physician for the leprosy settlement at Kalaupapa, recommended investigating cremation as an alternative to tradition burials.

*Honolulu Advertiser*. June 6, 1890. P. 5. "Report of the Board of Health."

It is held on high authority that the leprous germ is not destroyed by the burial of a dead body. On the contrary it thrives for a time certainly and is not unlikely to penetrate wells and springs contaminating them thereby. It would seem as if the only true sanitation would be cremation of the dead.

In 1896 the Board of Health sent two emissaries to Japan to investigate crematories and cremation procedures as a way to deal with mass fatalities of an epidemic. One of them, Dr. Clifford Wood, submitted the following in his report after he returned to Hawai'i.

*Evening Bulletin*. July 24, 1896. P. 1. "Health Officials Back."

Cremation has been in vogue for ages in Japan and the people are accustomed to it as those in India, but up to twenty years ago it merely consisted of burning bodies in open air. The five crematories of Tokio [sic] are owned by an incorporated company, established less than eight years ago. Cremation is optional except in deaths from contagious or infectious diseases when the government makes it compulsory.

The information Dr. Wood gathered in Japan proved essential late in 1899 when bubonic plague struck Hawai'i. Under his direction as president of the Board of Health, the board asked Honolulu Iron Works to build a government-run crematory on Quarantine Island, a small tidal island off Honolulu Harbor. Known in Hawaiian as Kahaka'aulana, the island had been used as a quarantine station as early as the smallpox epidemic of 1853. The building was named the Mauiola Crematory after the Hawaiian god of health.

*Evening Bulletin*. January 8, 1900. P. 1. "Views Of Medical Men."

[During the monthly meeting of the Hawaiian Medical Association] cremation was recognized as the most sanitary mode of disposal of the dead, and the burning of bodies of victims of the plague illustrated the necessity of having a regular crematory.

*Honolulu Advertiser*. February 13, 1900. P. 3. "Scenes At The Mauiola Crematory."  
The crematory was built within four days after the order was given on December 12<sup>th</sup> [1899], all the ironwork being made from special castings. Honolulu is indebted to Attorney General Cooper and Minister of [the] Interior Young for the construction of the crematory. President Wood states that the Mauiola crematory is more effective in general results than the one at Tokyo, Japan.

The use of Mauiola Crematory during the bubonic plague introduced cremation to Hawai'i, and as it gained acceptance, the general public continued to use the facility on Quarantine Island [Sand Island today] long after the plague ended. When the government terminated cremation services in 1905, local mortuaries and Japanese Buddhist temples stepped in and built crematories for their clients and congregations.

*The Hawaiian Gazette*. 12 May 1905. P. 7. "The Question of Burial Versus Modern Cremation."

The crematory on Quarantine Island is the property of the Federal government, and is definitely closed for private use. Its purposes are for incineration of those who die of uncertain, possibly contagious, diseases, and, therefore, the necessity of there being established a crematory which would be available for all who wish.

With the widespread acceptance of cremation as an alternative to traditional burials, some Hawai'i residents began scattering ashes at sea.

*Honolulu Advertiser*. December 2, 1913. P. 5. "Daughter Scatters Ashes of Father on Sea Off Molokai."

At about ten o'clock last night, while the steamer Claudine, on its voyage from Honolulu to Lahaina, Maui, was on the high seas between Molokai and Maui, Mrs. Peter N. Kahokuoluna, in compliance with the last request of the late Capt. Andrew Rosehill, cast to the four winds the ashes of her father. She was assisted by her husband.

The memorial service that laid the foundation for paddle-out ceremonies took place in Waikiki in 1918 for Dr. George H. Stover, where the highlight of the service was scattering his ashes in the waves washing over the beach. Stover, a medical doctor from Denver, Colorado, first came to Hawaii in 1910. A prominent physician and an x-ray specialist, he was interested to learn if this new technology would work as a cure for leprosy. During several trips to Hawai'i, he stayed at the Seaside Hotel [the site of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel today], where he swam almost every afternoon with friends and listened to the music of the beach boys, many of them members of Hui Nalu.

Stover enjoyed writing poetry and during a visit in 1914 wrote the lyrics to “On the Beach at Waikiki,” the popular song that was also known as “Honi Kaua Wikiwiki.” Henry Kailimai composed the music, and Albert “Sonny” Cunha arranged it.

When Stover passed away in 1915, his remains were cremated and his ashes placed in an urn. Prior to his death, he requested his ashes to be scattered in the ocean at Waikīkī Beach. In 1918 Stover’s widow, Anna, asked J. Harrick, a family friend who was on his way to Hawai‘i, if he would fulfil Stover’s request. Harrick agreed and on February 22 he led the ceremony that was attended by hundreds.

*Honolulu Advertiser*. February 23, 1918. P. 6. “Wind and Wave Claim Ashes of Song Writer. Dust of Doctor Stover Who Wrote ‘On the Beach At Waikiki’, Scattered Over Sand and Sea As He Requested On Death Bed.”

It was the last wish of the doctor that his ashes be scattered upon the sands upon one of the sunny afternoons that have Waikiki Beach the theme of poets, painters and musicians, when the beach was crowded with bathers, surfers and canoists, and when it was the real Waikiki Beach of song and story.

There were hundreds of bathers in their varied assortment of bathing suits; there were fashionable groups; there were motion picture men and photographers; dancing upon the waves boards were held upright until [there] were many outrigger canoes and [the] surf-ceremony was over. The canoe boys, the beach guards and many of the members of the Hui Nalu, some of whom had played upon the beach and swam with Doctor Stover, [were there] and to them the duty was assigned of singing Hawaiian melodies.

Never was such a strange funeral ceremony witnessed in Honolulu, and never was such a strange burying ground selected. There was no minister, no choir, no gravediggers. The waves swept upon the beach, murmuring their own sad requiem to the memory of the man who had been their playfellow in years gone by.

Mr. Harrick stepped down from the seawall upon the sand just at the junction of the Seaside Hotel and Outrigger Club beaches. As he opened the urn the Hawaiian boys, led by Beach Guard David Kahanamoku, sang “Aloha Oe” softly and impressively. They continued the plaintive air as Mr. Harrick scattered the gray ashes over the sands. Back and forth the young man walked covering a wide area, stepping even into the water that some of the ashes might be carried out by the waves. Ripples of water washed up on the sands and obliterated thin gray lines.

A brief prayer was uttered by Mr. Harrick as he carried out the dying request, and as the last of the urn’s contents were caught by the breezes and blown seaward the singers changed to the lifting strains of “On the Beach at Waikiki” concluding with another verse of Aloha Oe.

In a few minutes the beach had resumed its wonted gaiety. The waves swept up high and dragged down the sands so that at last ashes and sea were one.

Stover’s memorial service set the stage for scattering ashes in the waters of Waikīkī. It included all of the elements of the paddle-out ceremonies that followed: surfboards, outrigger canoes, music, a beachside service, and the spreading of ashes in the ocean. Hui Nalu took the lead in organizing paddle-outs, conducting them for many years after

Stover's service. In a 1928 Burton Holmes Travelogue called "Hawaiian Shores," Holmes included movie footage of a paddle-out ceremony fronting the Moana Hotel, showing an impressive procession of several dozen outrigger canoes leaving the beach to scatter someone's ashes. He titled the piece "Toodle-oo," which was slang of the day for "goodbye."

In 1955 members of Hui Nalu still continued to provide the paddle-out ceremonies their founders had initiated earlier in the century. In addition to the original elements for paddle-outs, they also had participants form "a great arc," an early version of today's circle of surfers.

*Honolulu Star Bulletin*. April 14, 1955. P. 29. "Lew G. Henderson's Ashes Scattered to Ocean Waters."

Sixty-one beach boys paddled silently out past the breakers to Waikiki reef last night, to scatter the ashes of Lew G. Henderson in the waters he helped to make famous.

The 11-canoe procession was led by Samuel Mokuahi Sr., and his son Samuel Jr., who paddled David K. Bray to the reef with the ashes. Before the canoe procession Bray led the beach boys in several Hawaiian chants and delivered a eulogy.

The beach boys sang [their club song called] Hui Nalu, then sang Aloha Oe before moving the canoes into the water. The canoes went out single file. There was a slight rain falling at the reef. At the reef the canoes formed a great arc facing the sea. Bray led the 61 paddlers in a final Hawaiian chant, then sprinkled the ashes on the water.

Then floral wreaths and beach boy leis were placed in the water and started drifting out to sea, following the ashes.