

'I can understand why it caught their attention, as back then it would've resembled some of their home breaks.'

GEOFF DUNN, surfing historian on the San Lorenzo River mouth

The new plaque on the grass in front of the Santa Cruz Surfing Museum honors the three princes who were the first to demonstrate the Hawaiian tradition of surfing in Santa Cruz.

ROBINSON  
KUNTZ/  
SENTINEL



# TRIBUTE TO THE PRINCES

*History*  
New plaque of Hawaiian trio who took to the waves in 1885 honors the dawning of the sport in Santa Cruz

*4-11-10*  
Gaze out to sea along our beloved coastline on any given day and you'll see scores of rubber-clad fun seekers sitting in dense packs, waiting patiently for signs of an approaching wave. Once the waves pour in, these wave riders employ a number of different crafts to catch and ride them.

Some ride short, pointy boards that allow them to carve and even launch above the breaking waves. Others use longer, round-nosed boards for a more relaxed ride, during which the surfer can coast and trim casually, at times dancing to the nose, hanging the toes and gliding along as poised and erect as a statue.

You may even see surfers riding prone on much smaller, rectangular boards, or stand-up surfers using wide paddles to propel their large

crafts into the breakers.

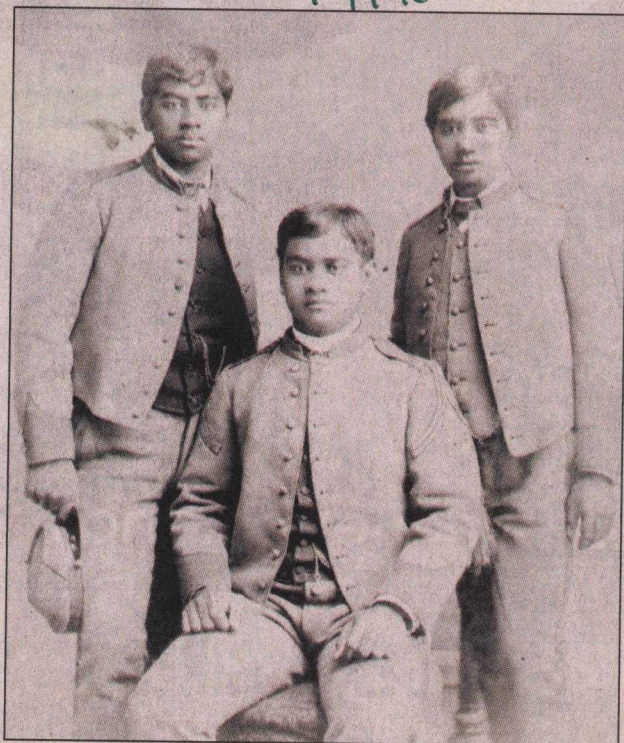
These aquatic enthusiasts are a tough and dedicated breed of passionate athletes who willingly enter the frigid waters, even in the most treacherous of conditions, just to get their saltwater fix.

Plain and simple, Santa Cruzans are crazy for surfing. And why shouldn't they be? After all, our town boasts a number of world-class breaks, beautiful beaches and a rich surfing history. Innovators such as wetsuit pioneer Jack O'Neill, world-renowned

shapers like Bob Pearson of Pearson Arrow and modern day surf icons such as Pete Mel and Jason "Ratboy" Collins serve as examples of our community's influence on the world of surf. In fact, Santa Cruz has had more of an impact on surfing history



NEAL  
KEARNEY  
*The Froth Pit*



GEOFF DUNN/ CONTRIBUTED PHOTO  
The three princes, David Kawanakoa, Edward Keliiahonui and Jonah Kuhio Kalaniana'ole.

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## KEARNEY

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than most of us probably realize.

Despite the area's long-held reputation as one of the most popular surf mecca's in the world, though, there's a bit of history that has slipped through the cracks, until now.

The gumshoe efforts of two passionate local surf historians have revealed the story of the three Hawaiian princes. These princes were the first to surf in mainland America, and the first place they paddled in was Santa Cruz.

The culmination of 35 years of work, Santa Cruz's Geoffrey Dunn and Kim Stoner have put together a clear, concise and historically supported account of the Hawaiian princes' stay in Santa Cruz. It is hard evidence supporting a story printed in the local newspaper, the Santa Cruz Daily Surf, on Monday, July 20, 1885.

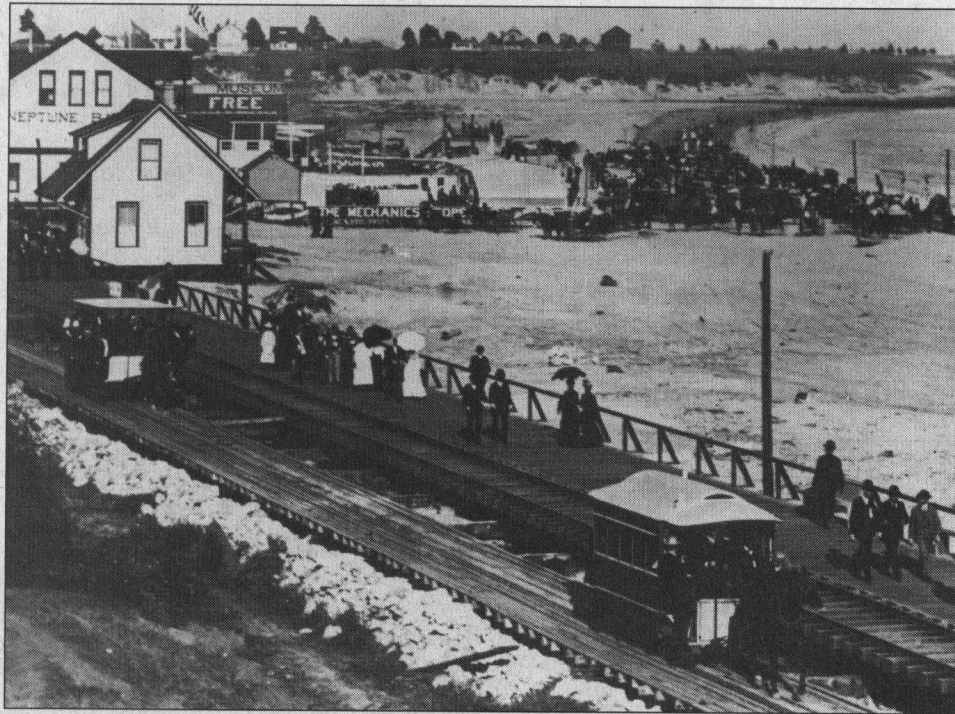
In the Daily Surf's page two Beach Breeze column, the writer mentions — along with reports of a packed beach, ideal summer conditions and 30-40 swimmers "dashing and tossing and plunging through the breakers" — the three princes and their surfing exploits in front of a crowd of merry beachgoers at the San Lorenzo River mouth.

"Every one knew about the Daily Surf mention in 1885," Dunn said. "But no one knew the actual story."

Dunn spent his childhood playing in the waters of the river mouth and has always felt a strong connection to the place. Like most of his peers who grew up on the Westside, Dunn spent a great deal of his time swimming and surfing. The river mouth was his favorite, and he and cousins would surf it on mats during the summer.

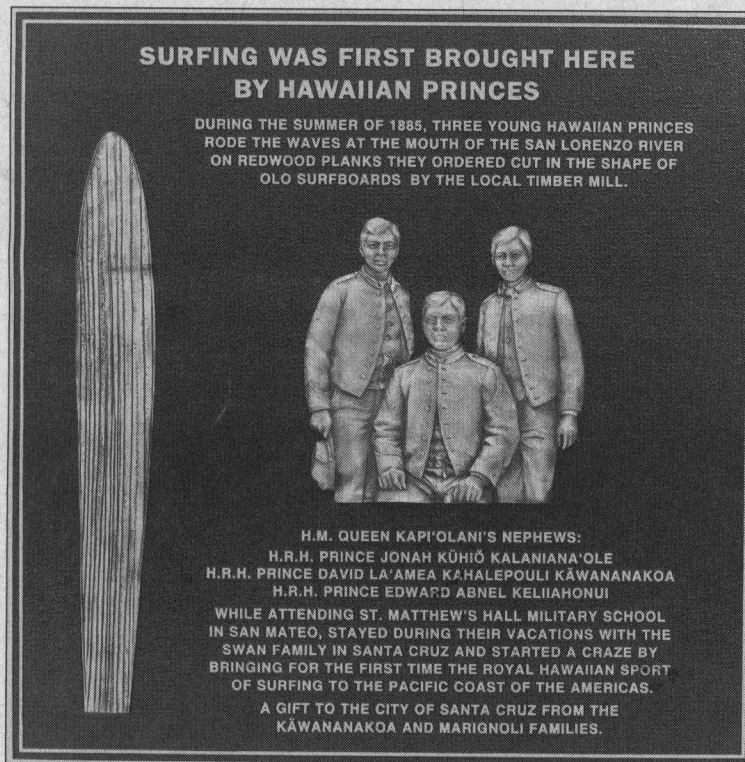
"The river mouth used to be an entirely different spot before the harbor was around," Dunn said. "When big western swells came in during the summer, the wave could get really good and powerful. I've always been fascinated with the river mouth as a surf break and could imagine how good it used to get. Being familiar with the story of the princes' surfing exploits there, I can understand why it caught their attention, as back then it would've resembled some of their home breaks on Oahu, such as Waikiki."

Dunn's personal connection to the river mouth and love for our city's rich surfing history inspired his subsequent quest to unearth the details of the



Main Beach in the 1880s. BELOW: A plaque commemorates surfing's mainland debut in Santa Cruz in 1885.

GEOFF DUNN/  
CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



surfing princes once and for all. Dunn teamed with Stoner, his childhood friend and a devout advocate for the preservation of Santa Cruz's surfing history who had similarly developed a fascination with the story of the princes, and began years of research.

Rare documents and photographs were gathered from the Hawaiian Legacy Archive in Honolulu and the Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley. They also found previous mentions of the princes by former Sentinel historian Ernest Otto. In time, a clear picture of the princes' visit to Santa Cruz, as well as the impact their "surfboard swimming" had on its residents, began to emerge.

As it turns out, the young princes had indeed spent time in Santa Cruz while attending St. Matthews Hall in San

Mateo, a military school for boys. During their time off school, the princes, named David Kawanakoa, Edward Keliiahonui and Jonah Kuhio Kalaniana'ole, had stayed with Antoinette Swan, a native of Oahu and an adopted member of the royal family.

Swan moved to Santa Cruz in the 1860s with her husband, Lyman. Her home served as a perfect summertime respite for the young men, who most likely were anxious to surf like they did back home on Oahu. It's easy to see how inviting the waves peeling into the San Lorenzo river mouth on that hot and festive day in 1885 were for the young Hawaiians.

The report of the surfing exposition highlighted the amusement and joy that beachgoers experienced. Ten years later, another article mentions how local boys had

taken to surfing the river mouth like the Hawaiian princes. This nugget of overlooked history shows how surfing caught on in Santa Cruz. The surfing spectacle must have had a profound effect on the generation of citizens who witnessed it, adding weight to our town's claim to the title of the real "Surf City, USA."

Kristin Zambucka, an artist and writer from Honolulu who is friends with the descendants of the royal family, came up with the idea to create a plaque to display somewhere in Santa Cruz. After collaborating with Zambucka on the design of the plaque, Dunn got financial support from the royal descendants of the Kawanakoa and Marignoli families. Bronze artist Sean Monaghan and Tom Ralston of Tom Ralston Concrete helped design and build the base, and additional funding came from the Santa Cruz Woodies Club and Friends of Parks and Recreation.

For Dunn, the plaque is a perfect way to celebrate the legacy of those who first brought surfing to America.

"It's gorgeous," he said. "The city could've done something else, but they went out of their way to do something special and I couldn't be any more pleased. Tom and Sean did a beautiful job on this and created what I think is the most spectacular framework for a monument in California. It's a beautiful monument, and I'm proud to have played a part in this effort to uncover and pay tribute to a rich part of our community's history."

Neal Kearney's surf column "The Froth Pit" appears every other week in the Sentinel. Contact him at [sports@santacruzsentinel.com](mailto:sports@santacruzsentinel.com).