

Illustration by Jim Phillips, painting collection of Rich Novak

# RIDERS LIKE THE SEA SPRAY

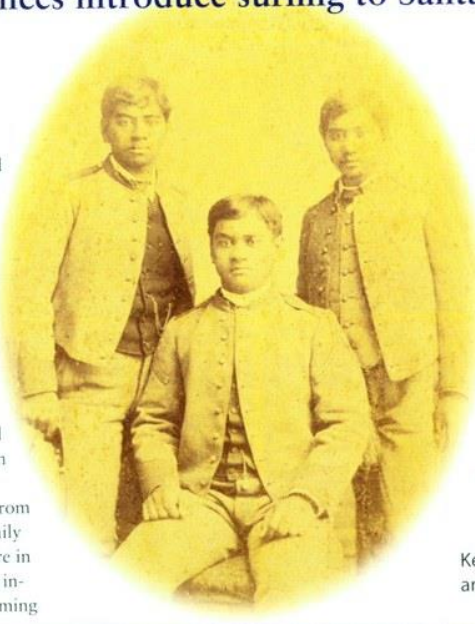
## Three Hawaiian princes introduce surfing to Santa Cruz

By Geoffrey Dunn

Sometimes local historical legacies need to be taken off the shelf and dusted a bit. So it is with the frequently told tale of the three Hawaiian princes, who, while visiting Santa Cruz one warm summer's day in 1885, brought the Polynesian sport of surfing to California.

Surfing scribes from Ernest Otto and Skip Littlefield to James D. Houston, Ben Marcus and Kim Stoner have all recounted this legendary lore of a trio of royal surfers riding locally milled redwood boards at the mouth of the San Lorenzo River.

According to an oft-cited passage from the appropriately named Santa Cruz Daily Surf, "The young Hawaiian princes were in the water, enjoying it hugely and giving interesting exhibitions of surfboard swimming



as practiced in their native islands."

The article, which appeared on July 20, 1885, under the rubric "Beach Breezes," also noted that "the breakers at the mouth of the river were very fine and here occurred the very finest of fun, at least, so said those who were 'in the swim.' Some 30 or 40 swimmers were dashing and tossing and plunging through the breakers, going out only to be tossed back, apparently at the will of the waves..."

In fact, this propitious moment in local history marked not only the

Jonah Kuhio Kalaniana'ole, David Kawananakoa and Edward Keliiahonui were studying in California and stopped by Santa Cruz to visit and introduce surfing to the mainland.

Photo: Bishop Museum Collection

introduction of surfing to California, but more than likely to the entirety of North and South America.

**B**ut who were these surfing “princes”? We have been left with their titles, but not with their legacies. In fact, two of them would play important roles in Hawaiian history and would later be named by Queen Lili’uokalani, the last reigning monarch of the Hawaiian Islands, as direct heirs to her throne.

man Swan ran a popular bakery on Pacific Avenue.

Born in New York in 1823, Lyman Swan arrived in California in the summer of 1848, moving first to Tahiti and later Hawaii. What has been hitherto unknown was that Swan and his partner, Ornan Clifford, had operated a ship chandlery business in Honolulu and, in March of 1854, had skipped the islands after forging \$40,000 in promissory notes and bilking

Avenue by the Grover Lumber Company. According to the legendary Sentinel scribe, Ernest Otto, it was there at the Grover mill that the princes’ 15-foot, 100-pound surfboards were fashioned from first-growth redwood harvested in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Not only did Santa Cruz sport the first surfing in the New World, but also the first surfboard manufacturing.



Photo: Geoffrey Dunn collection

The Santa Cruz coastline as it looked in the 1880s when the Hawaiian princes surfed the San Lorenzo River mouth.

The three young men—Jonah Kuhio Kalaniana’ole, David Kawanakoa and Edward Keliiahonui—were the nephews of Hawaiian Queen Kapiolani and adopted by her and her husband, King David Kalakaua, Lili’uokalani’s brother. After attending the finest schools in Hawaii in their early youth, they were sent to California to attend St. Matthew’s Hall, a rigorous, full-fledged military school for boys, located in San Mateo.

And what led them to Santa Cruz? Therein lies the tale. The “Piikoi Brothers,” as they were nicknamed, were regular visitors to the home of Lyman Swan, whose Hawaiian-born wife, Antoinette Marie Swan, was the daughter of a wealthy Honolulu family and had served as personal secretary to Lili’uokalani. The Swans were widely respected in Santa Cruz, where Ly-

man Swan ran a popular bakery on Pacific Avenue for an additional \$80,000—huge amounts of money for that time.

The wanted poster described Swan as “rather spare” and noted that he “stooped considerably.” Swan was eventually brought to trial in San Francisco and convicted in Santa Cruz in the late 1860s.

The first mention of the Hawaiian princes in the local press actually appeared in the Surf of May of 1885, in a small notice indicating that they would be spending their summer vacation at the Wilkins House, an upscale establishment at the corner of Pacific Avenue and Cathcart Street.

The Swans’ home was also located a block east on Cathcart, at the corner of Front Street, only a few blocks away from a planning mill operated on lower Pacific



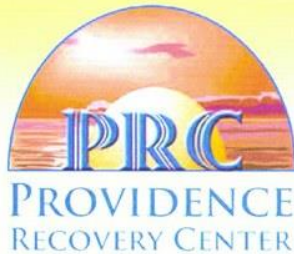
The princes continued politics after Hawaii’s annexation, Jonah appeared on this campaign button with Taft.

**A**s for the three princes, the middle brother, Edward, was sent home ill from St. Matthew’s in September of 1887 and died a short time later from scarlet fever.

The eldest brother, David, by all accounts the strongest of the three, would eventually become the immediate first heir to the throne. His youngest brother Jonah, who had been dubbed “Prince Cupid” and

{replay}

# Alcohol & Drug Treatment In Santa Cruz



**Safe, Comfortable Medically  
Managed Detox**

**30, 60, 90 Day  
Treatment Options**

**13-Bed Facility**

**Individual Attention**

**Compassionate,  
Professional Staff**

**Aftercare Planning**

**Personal Care in a Private Setting**

**Call Us Today For More Information**

**831-475-1326 or Toll Free at 888-SOS-REHAB**

**Or Visit Our Web Site: [www.ProvidenceRecovery.com](http://www.ProvidenceRecovery.com)**

was Queen Lili'uokalani's personal favorite, was second. Neither of them, however, would ever become king.

In January of 1893, a group of American and European businessmen, aided by the U.S. military, overthrew the Hawaiian monarchy. Queen Lili'uokalani was deposed on January 17, 1893, relinquishing her throne to "the superior military forces of the United States."



The Hawaiian Crest

Two years later, 24-year-old Jonah, a fierce advocate for Hawaiian independence, fought in a rebellion against the U.S. supported republic and was sentenced to a year in prison.

He left Hawaii immediately upon his release and traveled the world. He returned from exile in 1902 to participate in Hawaiian politics.

While his brother David headed up the state's Democratic Party (and was a delegate to the 1900 Democratic National Convention), Jonah joined the Republican Party and was elected to the U.S. Congress in 1903 as a "delegate" from the Territory of Hawaii, where he served until his death in 1922.

Today, the memory of Jonah Kuhio Kalaniana'ole is woven into the memory of Hawaiian culture. There are streets, beaches, plazas, highways, businesses, resorts, and a federal building named for him, along with a state holiday. A well-known Hawaiian chant, "Hui Hololio," was written in his honor:

*This is the name song for Kalaniana'ole  
Leader of the riders like the sea spray...*

Jonah and his two brothers also left a lasting legacy here in Santa Cruz. In the summer of 1896, the weekly edition of the Santa Cruz Surf noted that "the boys who go in swimming at Seabright Beach use surfboards to ride the breakers, like the Hawaiians."

Lyman Swan was the ninth signer of the Roll of Members of the Society of Pioneers of Santa Cruz County. His larceny went with him as a secret to his grave. He died in 1899. When his wife, Antoinette, passed away in 1905, the Santa Cruz Surf noted her many links to Hawaii and as-

serted that she “was courtly in manner, and had a charm in her dealing with people that won many friends.” Her burial registry listed her race as “Kanaka.”

As for the San Lorenzo Rivermouth, the birthplace of California surfing, that has changed a great deal since the three princes first charged into the brine there more than a century ago. Those of us who grew up in the Santa Cruz surf recall that the construction of the Santa Cruz Yacht Harbor in the 1960s forever altered the famous break.

Santa Cruz surfing legend Tommy Hickenbottom, who is currently at work on a book about the history of local surfing, remembers that the winters of 1964 and '65 were “classic years for incredible surf at the Rivermouth.” He recalls that the sand bar “extended at least a hundred yards off shore and the hollow waves were of Island quality and intensity.”

Those days and waves are now long gone—but back in 1885, the three Hawaiian princes visiting Santa Cruz must have felt right at home. 🌊

*Geoffrey Dunn is the author of “Santa Cruz Is in the Heart.” He thanks Stanley Stevens, UCSC Librarian Emeritus, for research assistance with this story.*

### Santa Cruz Magazine

**BAY FEDERAL CREDIT UNION**  
APTOS • CAPITOLA • FREEDOM • SANTA CRUZ

**BEN LOMOND MARKET**  
9440 MILL RD, BEN LOMOND

**BOOKSHOP SANTA CRUZ**  
1520 PACIFIC AVE, SANTA CRUZ

**BORDERS BOOKS**  
1200 PACIFIC AVE, SANTA CRUZ

**CAPITOLA BOOK CAFÉ**  
1475 41ST AVE, CAPITOLA

**CHAMINADE AT SANTA CRUZ**  
1 CHAMINADE LN, SANTA CRUZ

**DREAM INN**  
175 WEST CLIFF DR, SANTA CRUZ

**DELUXE FOODS OF APTOS**  
783 RIO DEL MAR BLVD, APTOS

**HILTON SANTA CRUZ/ SCOTTS VALLEY**  
6001 LA MADRONA DR, SCOTTS VALLEY

**NOB HILL WATSONVILLE**  
1912 MAIN ST, WATSONVILLE

**SANTA CRUZ NEWS**  
1500 MISSION ST, SANTA CRUZ

**SCOTTS VALLEY MARKET**  
14 VICTOR SQUARE, SCOTTS VALLEY

**SEACLIFF INN**  
DOMINICAN WAY, APTOS

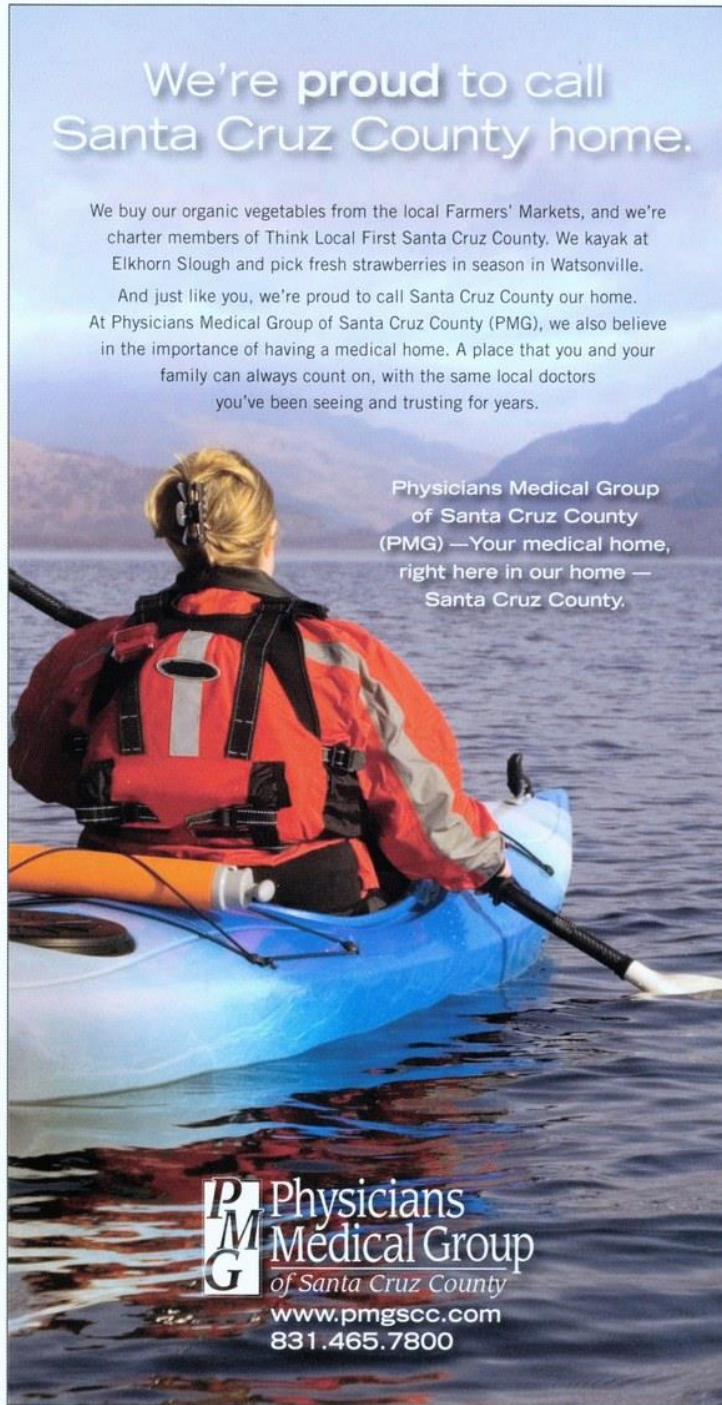
**SEASCAPE RESORT**  
1900 SEASCAPE RESORT, APTOS

## We're proud to call Santa Cruz County home.

We buy our organic vegetables from the local Farmers' Markets, and we're charter members of Think Local First Santa Cruz County. We kayak at Elkhorn Slough and pick fresh strawberries in season in Watsonville.

And just like you, we're proud to call Santa Cruz County our home. At Physicians Medical Group of Santa Cruz County (PMG), we also believe in the importance of having a medical home. A place that you and your family can always count on, with the same local doctors you've been seeing and trusting for years.

Physicians Medical Group  
of Santa Cruz County  
(PMG) —Your medical home,  
right here in our home —  
Santa Cruz County.



**PMG** Physicians  
Medical Group  
of Santa Cruz County  
www.pmgsc.com  
831.465.7800

{replay}