

Surfer credited with naming Steamer Lane dies at 96

Horan was known as the 'father of ceramics' in Hawaii

By Jim Seimas

jseimas@santacruzsentinel.com
@AiringItOut on Twitter

Former surfer Claude "Duke" Horan — who is credited with naming Steamer Lane, one of the most popular breaks along the coast of California — died June 11 in Hawaii at the age of 96.

Friend Harry Mayo — a surf pioneer in Santa Cruz and one of the founding members of the Santa Cruz Surf Club in 1936 — said Horan "acciden-



Claude Horan

tally" named Steamer Lane, the break located northwest of the Santa Cruz Boardwalk and east of Lighthouse Point Park.

During a winter storm in the late 1930s, big sets of waves were rolling through, prompting Horan to tell a group of surfers gathered around a beach fire, "My God, look outside, they're breaking clean out in the steamer lane," referring to the route steam boats would take to the Santa Cruz Wharf.

"He was the same old guy, easy going, nice. Everyone liked him."

— Bob Rittenhouse, 89, on Claude "Duke" Horan

The name stuck with the surfers.

Mayo said Burlingame surfer Fred Hunt sent a letter to Horan in 1941, penning "The Steamer Lane Kid" above the receiving address.

"There are a bunch of other cockamamie stories," Mayo

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THE HARRY MAYO COLLECTION — CONTRIBUTED

Credited with naming Steamer Lane in the late 1930s, Claude Horan, above, died in Hawaii on June 11.

Horan

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said of how Steamer Lane came to be named, "but that's how it happened. Accidentally, as it turns out."

The story is referenced at the Santa Cruz Surfing Museum, located adjacent to Steamer Lane at the Mark Abbott Memorial Lighthouse at Lighthouse Point on West Cliff Drive.

Steamer Lane, which has hosted several big surfing events, including the long running O'Neill Coldwater Classic, is known by surfers worldwide. The Lane offers a series of reefs that can yield 15-foot waves, while there is an additional fear factor as surfers must maneuver alongside the cliffs.

An article in Ocean Life Magazine in 1996, "Lighthouse Point: Illuminating Santa Cruz," published in 2002, and "Images of America Surfing in Santa Cruz," published in 2009, also support Mayo's claim of the break's naming.

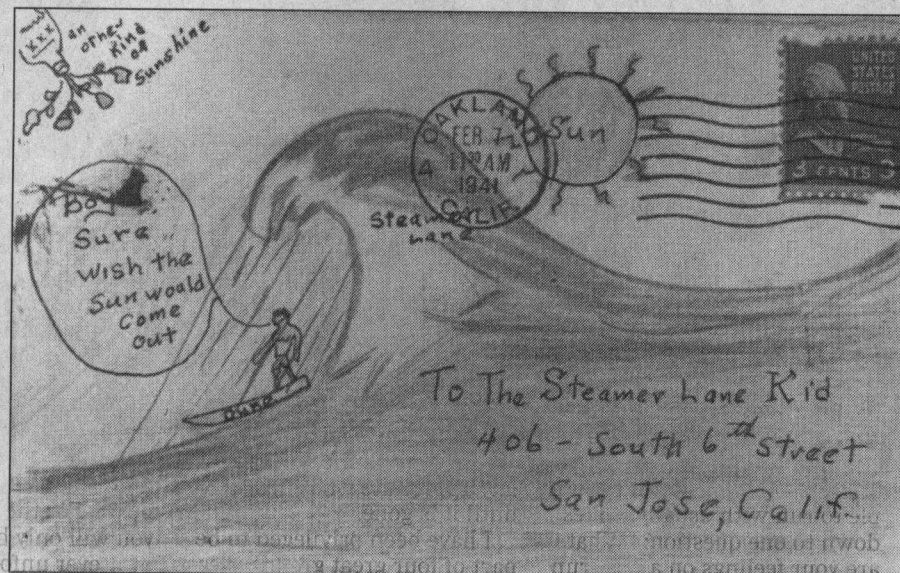
"He was a good surfer," said Mayo, 90, who walks West Cliff Drive five times a week and eats lunch on a bench outside the lighthouse. It was there he was informed by a tourist from Ohio of Horan's death, a day after his passing.

"He was always joking," Mayo said. "I knew his health was failing."

Horan loved surfing and the ocean, which is why he took classes in ceramics while attending San Jose State. Limiting his homework allowed him extra time to be in the water.

"He showed up mostly on weekends, or when the surf was good," Mayo said.

He was in Santa Cruz so often, in fact, he was considered a local by his peers. They didn't let him join the Santa Cruz Surf Club, but he hung out at the clubhouse



THE HARRY MAYO COLLECTION — CONTRIBUTED

Burlingame surfer Fred Hunt sent a letter to Claude Horan in 1941, penning "The Steamer Lane Kid" above the receiving address.

and stored his longboard at the board house.

"He complained about it later," Mayo said. "He started a Santa Cruz Surf Club at San Jose State in 1938, I think. There was a story about it in the school newspaper."

Horan earned his Bachelor of Arts from SJSU in 1942 and a Master of Arts from Ohio State in '46.

After earning his master's degree, the former Santa Cruz lifeguard and longboarder relocated to Hawaii. Horan went on to craft his identity as the "father of ceramics" in The Aloha State.

He started the ceramics program at University of Hawaii at Manoa in '47, and after picking up glass blowing while on sabbatical in '67, he established a glass blowing studio at the university a year later. He retired in '78 as a professor emeritus, having taught for 30 years.

Many of this students have continued to contribute substantially to contemporary ceramics.

"He was a very complex person," said Harue McVay, a retired professor at Hawaii who worked with

Horan. "He played when he wanted to play and he worked when he wanted to work. He wasn't an easy person to work with, but I certainly enjoyed it."

Horan created public works throughout Honolulu during his career. And the Hawaii State Art Museum, Honolulu Museum of Art and the National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C., are among the public collections holding some of his creations.

Koa Gallery at Kapiolani Community College honored Horan with the 2004 KOA Outstanding Achievement Award, presented to individuals dedicated to the arts in Hawaii.

In an article in the Honolulu Star-Bulletin previewing the award presentation, David Behlke, director of the Koa Gallery, described Horan's work as "fun and whimsical."

Horan is survived by his wife Suzi Pleyte Horan, who collaborated on many of the larger projects. Attempts to reach Suzi in Hawaii were unsuccessful.

Many of the original Santa Cruz Surf Club mem-

bers were happy to see Horan at their 50-year reunion in 1986 at Cocoanut Grove in Santa Cruz.

"He was the same old guy," said Santa Cruz's Bob Rittenhouse, an 89-year-old who stopped surfing 10 years ago, "easy going, nice. Everyone liked him."

Santa Cruz's Doug Thorne, an 85-year-old who stopped surfing three years ago, joined the club after Horan left San Jose. But the other surfers talked about Horan.

"They said he named Steamer Lane," Thorne said, "that he was a good surfer, a great athlete."

In addition to Horan, the remaining members of SCSC mourned the loss of former member Terrence Hickey, who passed away last week in San Diego.

There are six members left of the original 27 members, Mayo said.

Said Rittenhouse: "It's getting down to where there's not a lot of old guys left. Oh, what the heck, it was a great ride."

Contact Jim Seimas at 831-706-3256.