

Huntington Beach monument memorializes surfing pioneer

PAMPHLET

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The base of the Huntington Beach Pier is an unusual place for a bronze bust facing the sea.

A plaque in its lava-rock base is inscribed: Duke Paoa Kahanamoku, Olympic champion, the father of modern surfing and Hawaii's good-will ambassador.

Kahanamoku was an aristocrat, one of the few remaining full-blooded members of what once was Hawaii's Polynesian ruling class.

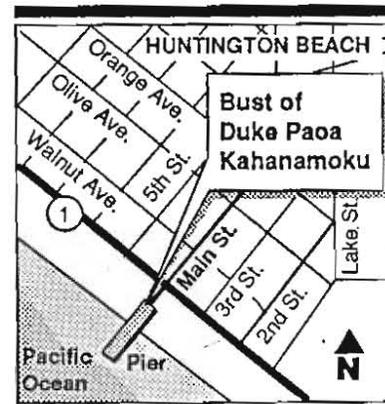
A champion swimmer, he is credited with having developed the flutter kick, and he won gold medals in freestyle swimming in the 1912 and 1920 Olympics. Kahanamoku was Hawaii's first Olympic champion.

He moved to Hollywood in the early 1920s in an unsuccessful attempt to become an actor. One of the things Kahanamoku brought with him was his surfboard. Shortly after his arrival, Kahanamoku discovered Orange County's beaches and waves.

The area near the Huntington Beach Pier was a particular favorite. He made friends with some of the local lifeguards. They copied his surfboard designs, and surfing, once known only to Hawaiians, became popular here.

Kahanamoku returned to Hawaii in the early 1930s, served 13 terms as the sheriff of Honolulu County and eventually was named the islands' official greeter.

He returned to Orange County often and discovered a whole industry around the sport he had popularized. Huntington Beach began hosting a national con-



test, the US Surfing Championships dedicated to Kahanamoku, who attended the event each year from its beginning until his death.

At 77, Kahanamoku died of heart failure in January 1968. Flags in Hawaii and Huntington Beach flew at half-staff when officials heard the news. His funeral service is as legendary as he was: More than 15,000 people watched a flotilla of 30 outrigger canoes scatter Kahanamoku's ashes in the ocean beyond the reefs of Waikiki Beach and cheered the winner when the canoes finished the services with a race.

Vince Moorhouse, Huntington Beach director of harbors and beaches, organized the memorial project at the pier a few months after Kahanamoku's death, and the bust was dedicated in 1969. Funds for the likeness were donated by friends, surfing-related businesses and the city he adopted as a second home.

Kim Heffner/The Register

