



Polynesian Culture in NC

1929 "Feast of the Pirates" baby parade on Wrightsville Beach. Margaret Getty wins first prize in Hawaiian style.

ionable in America and became highly publicized. The things that America advertises and displays in its store windows, and the manner in which they are advertised, show us all, as well as any other indication the direction in which the wind is blowing.

In the late 1800's Wrightsville Beach and Carolina Beach were known for their excellent fishing, boating and surf bathing. As early as 1889, public bath houses provided lifeguard protection. It was not until 1901, bath houses started renting bathing suits or garments. For men the bathing suit consisted of a shirt and knee pants, while the head, arms and legs were left bare. Ladies bathing suits of the day were so cumbersome, Wrightsville Beach native, Katherine Meier Cameron recently commented, "the bathing suits would drown you." The women wore wool skirts to the knees, undergarments, leg stockings, caps and bathing shoes.

On Wrightsville Beach canvas canoe racing in the surf became very popular during the mid 1880's. Prior to the 1880's, it is likely canoe races occurred, but it is not as well documented. The Carolina Canoe Club was founded in 1887 and was very active, as late as 1899. Members followed the regulation course - racing down the beach carrying their canoes, paddling seaward through the surf, rounded an anchored buoy, and paddled back towards the beach surfing with the waves. In 1915 and 1916, The Feast of the Lanterns celebration was held at the Carolina Yacht Club, Wrightsville Beach. Spectacular ocean



Canoe races in the surf on the Cape Fear Coast around 1910

canoe races were conducted and observed by thousands. Likely, other flotation devices, similar to wooden plank boards were being used in the surf zone during the period.

In the early 1900's formal athletic and aquatic events were being held at the Lumina Pavilion, Wrightsville Beach and the Carolina Pavilion, Carolina Beach. Canoe and swimming races in the surf to a buoy one quarter mile offshore were very popular and spectacular. Lifeguards were positioned in boats offshore and likely lifeguards clinging to wooden boards were very close to the surf zone. The source of the

early plank boards may have been surplus lumber from the Lumina Pavilion, built in 1905 on Wrightsville Beach or the Carolina Beach Pavilion, built in 1884 on Carolina Beach or the Carolina Moon Pavilion, built in 1910 on Carolina Beach. Discarded wooden shipping crates may have been a source for early wooden plank boards.

In the book, *Land of the Golden River, Vol. 1*, published in 1975, local author Lewis Phillip Hall (1907-1980), wrote of his personal experiences surfing on Wrightsville Beach. "In the early twenties (1920's), before the jetties were

11'9" Spencer KIMO (2006)

The Tom Blake style hollow wooden surfboard has wooden air chambers inside. Made of balsa, redwood and Koa wood. Typical of boards made in the 1930s and 1940s. Kimo means Jim in the Hawaiian language. Deck feature is inlaid, koa wood shell *honu*.



RIDING THE SURF, WRIGHTSVILLE BEACH, N. C.



1920's surfers at Wrightsville Beach, NC

constructed, a sand bar ran the entire length of the beach. We swam out to the combers (breakers) where (it was) making up. At times there would be ten or fifteen youths in a crowd. It was a beautiful sight, ten surfers riding the cresting wave a long time... I'll have to admit, however, that we did not ride our boards standing erect, but lying halfway the board." It is likely the colorized postcard of a group of early board riders on Wrightsville Beach was the 1920's bunch. The postcard is also representative of the Carolina Beach - Kure Beach surfing groups of the period.

An article was published in the August, 1924 edition of the *New York Times*, titled, "Long-Distance Surf Riding A Thrilling Sport in Hawaii." The article reported the, "peculiar beach formation makes Waikiki, Hawaii the best place in the world for perilous adventure in the breakers, surf board stunts of the natives." In another *New York Times* article, March 1924, reported, "Jackie Ott Shows How Its Done. The youthful champion of Miami, Florida rides on a surfboard behind a seaplane." Articles like these gave credence to and perpetuated the idea that stand up surf board riding was a stunt.

The inventor, Emil Hansen, of Media, Pennsylvania, made a novel idea popular in the November 1938 edition of *Popular Science Magazine*. The article reported, "Motor Surfboard Needs No Surf", all the thrills of riding a surfboard, with none of the effort, await the rider of a new motorized model for inland waters. A forerunner to the modern wave runner, "it had a four horsepower power motor and was described as a skim board."

As time passes, different types of surfing and surf bathing have declined, while others arise. Body surfing, prone board surfing and swimming seem to maintain an even keel of quiet popularity. Although occasional surfers were observed on the Cape Fear Coast as early as the 1920's, they were an anomaly in the area for the next forty years. Your author's research has determined the traditional surfboard in the Cape Fear Coast between the 1900 and the 1940's was often known as a board or plank surfboard (a rocker-less wooden plank) and typically ridden in the prone position. They were also known as ironing boards, because some of them probably were. The early 1900's *Sears & Roebuck Catalog* sold wooden ironing boards identical, in size and shape to boards utilized in the surf zone. However, the Sears ironing boards were a little heavy and

10'3" Spencer Gecko board (2004)

Mike Spencer built this modern longboard, for himself, to ride the surf break known as the "lone palm" in Costa Rica.





Lumina, Best Dancing Pavilion
on South Atlantic Coast,
Wrightsville Beach, near Wilmington, N. C.

1918 Postcard, Lumina Pavillon, Wrightsville Beach

Wooden plank surfboards, (lower left),
were observed in the surf zone.

long, so the early surfers preferred a shorter design made of light wood. Today, boards are referred to as ski boards, body boards, belly boards or surfboards. The 1918 postcard of the Lumina Pavilion, Wrightsville Beach depicts an early bather utilizing a board.

They Ride Surfboards

Cape Fear Coast surfboards of one design or another were ridden as far back as our beach history takes us. Surfboards were unusual during the period and adult models were built out of solid light wood planks typically 5 to 6 feet long; 16 to 18 inches wide at the nose, 18 to 24 inches at the widest point, 10 to 12 inches at the tail; and about 1 to 2 inches thick; smaller models were typically 4 to 5 feet long. Sometimes the bottoms of the surfboards were shaped like the bottom of a boat and sometimes the bottoms were flat. Plywood was invented in 1865, while marine plywood was invented in 1934. So by the 1930's, some typical boards were built out of marine plywood. Plywood boards were typically 4 to 5 feet long, 16 to 20 inches wide and 1/2, 5/8 or 3/4 inch's thick. The McIver family lived across Banks Channel from the Funderburg beach cottage on Wrightsville Beach. The McIver's were one

of the many families that had plywood boards as early as the 1930's. Your author, grew up and attended 12 years of school with Malcolm McIver's nephew, LaMar McIver. I recall LaMar speaking of his surfing uncle many times. The artifact surf board at the Cape Fear Museum, Wilmington was owned by Malcolm McIver and is representative of plywood boards.

Surfboards were similar to early wooden water skis or aqua planes, but were wider and did not have rubber foot bindings. The nose of the board was shaped as a half round or tapered, and the tail was rounded, tapered or square. Sharp edges were rounded for safety. Typically, boards did not have a fin or skeg on the bottom. Many of the early surfboards were built in garages, backyards or a wood shop. The 1937 photograph (p. 52) depicts Katherine Meier Cameron with a wooden board in the surf on Wrightsville Beach. Katherine's daughter, Mebane Meier Sherard is a lifetime friend of the author. Meier Street on Wrightsville Beach is named after their family.

Larger solid or hollow wooden surfboards, some 10 to 14 feet long, were rare between the 1920's and 1960's, often ridden prone or standing position by one or more persons. Plywood

9'0" Hobie Phil Edwards (1966)

After leaving Hobie surfboards, Phil Edwards moved to Oahu, Hawaii and experimented with new designs for bigger waves. This great riding surfboard has a pulled nose, more effective speed fin, narrower tail, limited rocker and rolled deck in the tail area to hold the fin down in the water.



behind power boats. The boards were used by the American Red Cross in all of their camps, chapters, aquatic schools and life saving divisions throughout the country. One of Blake's most long-lasting contributions was the aluminum torpedo buoy, first produced in 1937. The new plastic torpedo buoy is still in universal use on almost every protected beach throughout the world. Blake's numerous innovations also included: the breaker board in 1940, designed to ride broken waves near the beach (5 feet long with nose rocker); motorized surfboards in 1937 (today's jet ski is a further evolution); and the spun aluminum doughnut life buoy in 1940 (lighter than cork doughnut buoys).

Blake also invented the collapsible surfboard in 1932. The surfboard was made out of canvas and braced at the sides with overlapping wooden bracing strips. It was quickly inflated with a bicycle pump. At this time, your author, has not been able to completely identify a spe-

cific connection between Tom Blake and Cape Fear Coast surfers and lifeguards. However, it is objectively reasonable, hollow surfboards and paddleboards on the Cape Fear Coast were built using Blake plans. Blake's building plans were also available in *Popular Science Magazine* (1937) for example. As well, it is a reasonable belief of other historians, that Blake built boards may have been used on the Cape Fear Coast.

Blake also introduced surfboard sailing as a novel sport in *Popular Science Magazine*, November, 1938. Blake published similar articles in *Popular Science Magazine*, June 1939, "Improved Hollow Surfboard for the All-Around Sport." The article must have been a smash hit with some, as drawings depicted a voluptuous woman paddling a surfboard.

In the July, 1934, *Popular Science Magazine*, an article appeared, "Making Money at the Beach." The article described the money making pos-

Carolina Beach Lifeguards 1941

Lifeguards at Carolina Beach pulling a lifeguard and victim out of a rip tide (undertow). Hannah Block in dark bathing suit. Lonnie Peck in white trunks by rescue surfboard. Circa 1941.

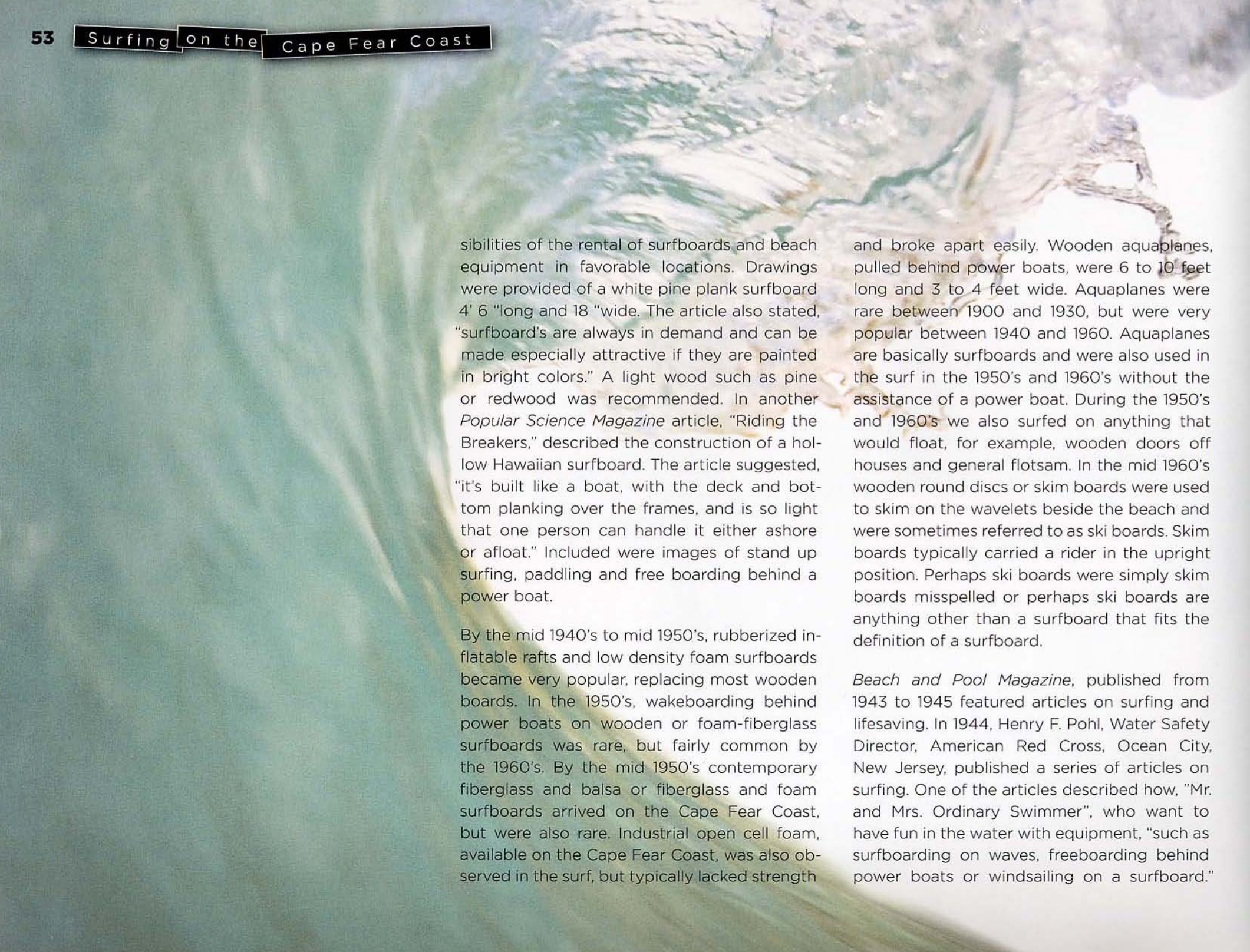




Early plank surfboard, Wrightsville Beach, NC - late 1930s

Mebane Meiers Sherard's mother, Katherine Meier Cameron rides the surf on a wooden plank board.

The board was made by Mebane's grandfather.



sibilities of the rental of surfboards and beach equipment in favorable locations. Drawings were provided of a white pine plank surfboard 4' 6" long and 18" wide. The article also stated, "surfboard's are always in demand and can be made especially attractive if they are painted in bright colors." A light wood such as pine or redwood was recommended. In another *Popular Science Magazine* article, "Riding the Breakers," described the construction of a hollow Hawaiian surfboard. The article suggested, "it's built like a boat, with the deck and bottom planking over the frames, and is so light that one person can handle it either ashore or afloat." Included were images of stand up surfing, paddling and free boarding behind a power boat.

By the mid 1940's to mid 1950's, rubberized inflatable rafts and low density foam surfboards became very popular, replacing most wooden boards. In the 1950's, wakeboarding behind power boats on wooden or foam-fiberglass surfboards was rare, but fairly common by the 1960's. By the mid 1950's contemporary fiberglass and balsa or fiberglass and foam surfboards arrived on the Cape Fear Coast, but were also rare. Industrial open cell foam, available on the Cape Fear Coast, was also observed in the surf, but typically lacked strength

and broke apart easily. Wooden aquaplanes, pulled behind power boats, were 6 to 10 feet long and 3 to 4 feet wide. Aquaplanes were rare between 1900 and 1930, but were very popular between 1940 and 1960. Aquaplanes are basically surfboards and were also used in the surf in the 1950's and 1960's without the assistance of a power boat. During the 1950's and 1960's we also surfed on anything that would float, for example, wooden doors off houses and general flotsam. In the mid 1960's wooden round discs or skim boards were used to skim on the wavelets beside the beach and were sometimes referred to as ski boards. Skim boards typically carried a rider in the upright position. Perhaps ski boards were simply skim boards misspelled or perhaps ski boards are anything other than a surfboard that fits the definition of a surfboard.

Beach and Pool Magazine, published from 1943 to 1945 featured articles on surfing and lifesaving. In 1944, Henry F. Pohl, Water Safety Director, American Red Cross, Ocean City, New Jersey, published a series of articles on surfing. One of the articles described how, "Mr. and Mrs. Ordinary Swimmer", who want to have fun in the water with equipment, "such as surfboarding on waves, freeboarding behind power boats or windsailing on a surfboard."



DanPri Custom Surfboards, built at Atlantic Surf Shop, Kure Beach, was founded by Sonny Danner and Herman Prichard around 1965. Spencer Surfboards on Wrightsville Beach was founded by Mike Spencer around 1965. By the 1960's, contemporary fiberglass - foam surfboards, belly boards, body boards, boogie boards and skim boards became very popular. Sometimes words shift meaning and usage, but language change is constant and inevitable. Newell's Shopping Center, 82 South Lumina Avenue, carried an inexpensive line of Ventura International Plastic Surfboards. These mass produced beginner surfboards served a good purpose for entry level surfers, but they were never as durable as the high quality custom surfboards.

Wrightsville Beach Surf Club History

The following chapter was written by Joe Funderburg and Peter Fritzler. Full citations can be found at: <http://library.uncw.edu/surf>

In the early 1960's a small group of energetic individuals began riding surfboards at Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina. Certainly, waves had been ridden in one form or another prior to then, but it was with this group that the

foundations for surfing in Wrightsville Beach were laid. Numbering about a dozen or so, these individuals decided to form a surf club. After several informal meetings among surfers and their parents, the Wrightsville Beach Surf Club was founded. Merging their hearts and minds, club members held meetings prescribed by parliamentary procedure at homes, community centers, and surf spots on Wrightsville Beach. And with access to the club's official transportation, a 1949 Packard coach owned by Joe Funderburg, club members frequently traveled the shores of both North Carolina and South Carolina, and Virginia.

While there were several reasons behind the origins of the Wrightsville Beach Surf Club (WBSC), a paramount reason was in response to efforts by some of the business owners and town officials in Wrightsville Beach to ban surfing. In late June 1964, Millard Everett "Stinky" Williamson, the Police Chief and

