

Bellyboards/paipos in the US 1900 to the early 1960s

September 1, 2025

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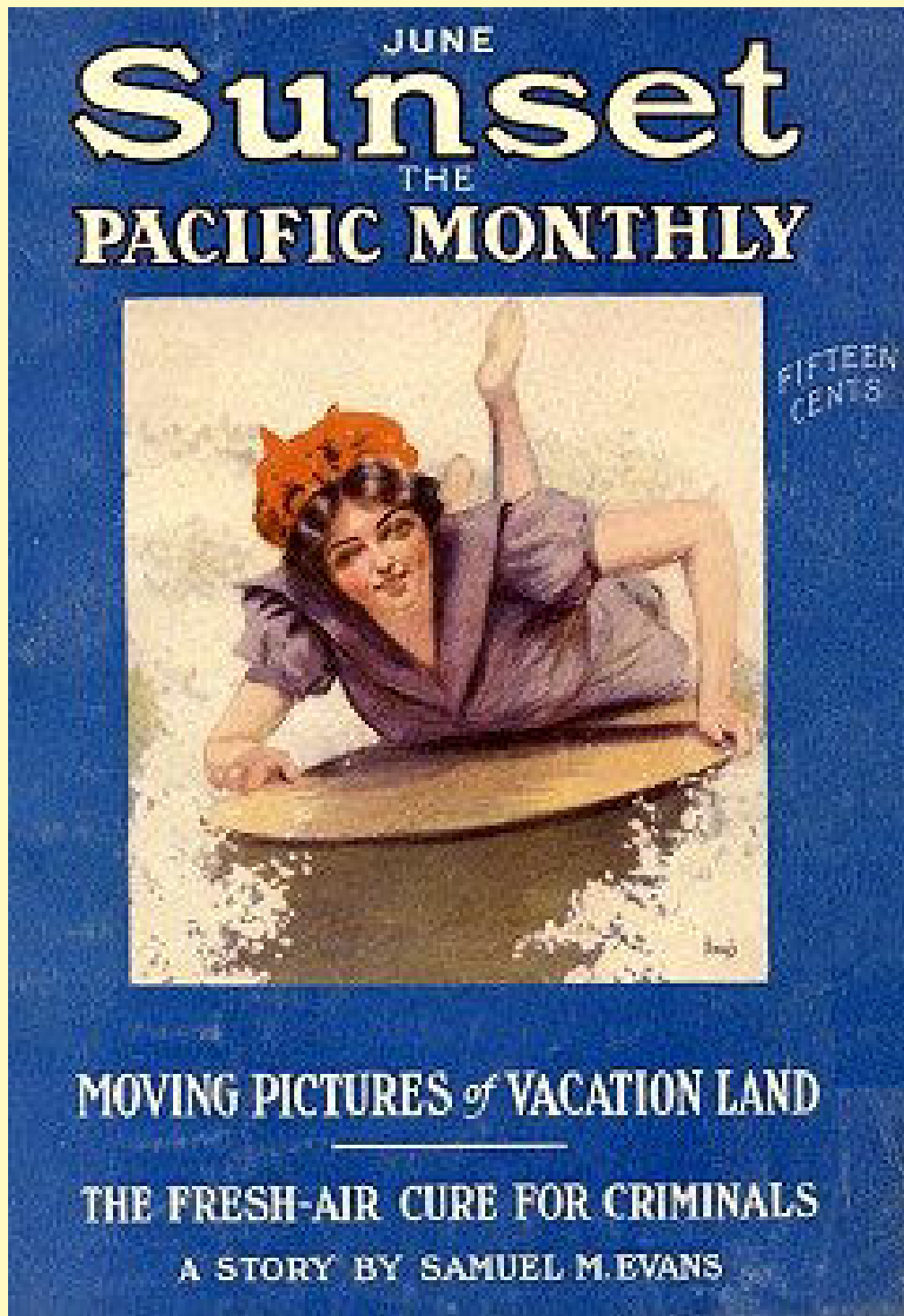
Introduction

Hawaii was a major influence on the development surfing on the US mainland. An Hawaiian, George Freeth provided demonstrations as well as lifeguarding services on the west and east coast, as well as being mentor to young people. Freeth appeared in articles written by Alexander Hume Ford and traveled with him to the U.S. Ford popularised surfing in a series of influential articles and Hawaii soon became a popular tourist destination, as did California. While the weight of the solid redwood boards were really only suited to the strongest and fittest, bellyboards were promoted in publications such as Popular Science Monthly (e.g. the 1935 excerpt below) as a surfcraft for children. One attraction of these boards is the simplicity of their construction. Ford's article in the children's magazine St Nicholas (1908) refers to bodysurfing, riding prone and standing, but it is clear that when he states that surfing is the king of sports, he is talking about standing on a surfboard. While bellyboards were a fashionable accessory for movie stars, the design and use of surfboards for standing grew at a much faster pace.

Before the development of flippers (swim fins) which more readily enabled waves to be ridden further offshore and the introduction of fibreglass bellyboards, bellyboards were generally simple wooden boards ridden in the shorebreak. Higher performance wooden bellyboards/paipos were influenced by two different styles of boards from Hawaii. One style of board, was the twin-finned Pae Po board made by Wally Frosieth from the mid 1950s. This style of board would later be produced by people like Gordon Theisz and gain popularity around Laguna Beach. The other style of board, is the low buoyancy finless Hawaiian Paipo Nui board, which in addition to being ridden prone, led to the

development of early kneeboards. Jon Manns from Santa Cruz and Steve Lis from San Diego, started riding these thin finless paipo boards.

Locations with long rolling waves, in California, North Carolina and New Jersey were particularly suited to the simpler timber boards, though evidence of bellyboard use was also found in Oregon, Washington State, New Jersey and North Carolina. It is likely that newspapers, libraries and private collections contain far more examples of surfing than what follows. The term “surfboard” was applied not only to boards ridden prone and standing, but all manner of other craft propelled by boat, horse and even plane, ridden in lakes and rivers.



Sunset the Pacific Monthly. 1912 (June).

Surf Sleds and Boards

Simple Ways to Build Them—One Type Is Only a Piece of Plywood, yet It Gives Thrilling Sport

By HI SIBLEY



Fig. 1. Most successful of the many varieties of surf boards used on the breakers of southern California is this light model made of plywood.

THERE used to be a tradition that no one but a native Hawaiian could ride a surf board. Young America, expert in the sports of all nations, soon exploded that myth. Now nearly every beach on the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts, as well as on the Great Lakes, has its devotees, some of whom have developed a fine skill.

Persistence and enthusiasm are required to master this exciting sport; it is a matter of catching the right roller at the right time—of climbing aboard just as the comb is going over. One can learn by practice better than by being told how to do it, but to start with one must have a suitable surf board or surf sled. A sled requires a little more work to construct, but it will give the less skilled or less daring bather a sure-fire ride on the crest of the foam. Both types are illustrated.

Surf boards are made in a large variety of styles to suit individual tastes, but the one which has proved the most successful on the breakers of southern California is the light plywood model shown in Fig. 1. This illustrates a boy's size—about 4½ ft. long. A drawing at the bottom of Fig. 3 shows how to make its adult prototype.

A plywood board is desirable because of its lightness and the fact that it is not likely to split or warp.

It may be purchased from any cabinet-maker and from many lumber yards. A three-layer piece about ¾ in. thick is satisfactory, although a thicker piece of five-ply wood will make a more substantial board.

Saw the outlines as shown with a good keyhole or turning saw. A sharp saw with comparatively fine teeth is to be preferred, as there will be less likelihood of tearing the wood. The hand slot is made by boring two ¾-in. holes about 5 in. apart and sawing out between them. The slot is only for convenience in carrying the board; it is not used in the surf. The rider grips the sides of the board where he can shift his grip or let it go entirely if disaster looms.

IT IS highly important to round off all sharp corners and edges to prevent cuts and bruises while in the turbulent surf. You must also give the edges several coats of spar varnish so there will be no possibility of the water's soaking in between the layers and loosening them.

As the plywood usually has a beautiful grain, a natural finish with spar varnish produces the most attractive appearance.



Fig. 2. The surf sled can be used in any sea not too dangerous for ordinary bathing. The rider holds himself by the handgrips or lies flat on the deck. In Fig. 3 is shown a slightly improved design.

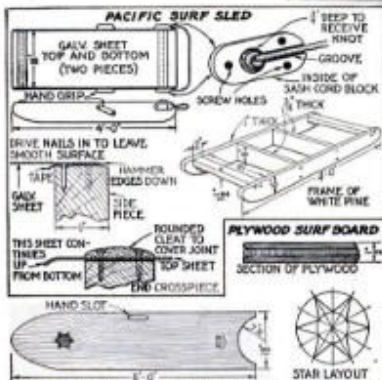


Fig. 3. The surf sled is a frame of light white pine covered with galvanized iron; the surf board is merely sawed from plywood.

facing the surf and looking for an accommodating wave (Fig. 4). When it comes he quickly swings the light board around and climbs aboard for a swift and merry trip.

Take great care that the nose of the board is always tilted up. If it goes down and strikes the sand, with a big breaker behind, painful injury may result.

With a surf sled such as illustrated in Fig. 2 and the drawings in the upper part of Fig. 3, the rank amateur is guaranteed a successful, hair-raising trip, provided he once gets it out to the starting point. Being sufficiently buoyant to support a heavy adult, the sled calls for little skill except in the matter of getting under way and has a great advantage in that it can be used successfully in much lighter surf than the surf board. It even can be used as a float or raft in calm weather and will always be in demand.

This type of sled is fairly light for a grown person to manage, but it is not the thing for a youngster to tackle, except in moderate seas, because of the tremendous force with which waves may strike it broadside. Note that all edges and corners are rounded, so that if one has a spill and is struck by his mount, it will not leave any appreciable dents. The vital importance of removing all protruding angles was learned after several beginners had become conspicuously bruised by screw eyes used in our first model.

THE proper way to maneuver the surf sled is to walk into the surf at right angles, towing the sled behind you by the sash cord provided for that purpose. It will slide over the oncoming breakers easily if the stern is lifted slightly.

Use light white pine for the framework and fasten it with flat-head wood screws, well countersunk. The

(Continued on page 80)

First, however, paint in your star at the forward end. Brilliant vermilion, or bright green with an outline of gold, is effective. On one board the writer made a gold-leaf star with green border. It is a good idea to put your initials and address at the lower end of the board, for anything as much in demand as a surf board has a tendency to wander from the home strand.

Because the lower end is cut to fit the body, the bather is able to walk out



Fig. 4. The light plywood surf board is easy to handle. The lower end is cut so as to fit the body. The bather takes this position when walking out into the surf.

Copyrighted material

BUILDING SURF BOARDS

(Continued from page 57)

varnish, rubbing well with steel wool after each one except the last.

Bear in mind that this type of board is not expected to take punishment on rocky shores or on gravel, because the balsa is easily dented.

The laminated red-wood-and-pine board shown in Fig. 2 is similar in appearance, although it differs somewhat in construction, having air cells cut in the solid wood. It is put together with $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. dowels and two $\frac{5}{16}$ -in. bolts with countersunk heads and nuts, as illustrated. Casein glue is used between the joints. Care must be taken when planing the assembled unit that you do not cut through into the air cells. This board should be varnished in the natural wood. Apply about four coats, and rub the first three, when dry, with steel wool.

The curved-head or toboggan type of board is illustrated in Figs. 3 and 4. This is adapted to ordinary surf in shallow waters, but is not intended to be paddled far from shore, as may be safely done with the others. It is a favorite with concessionaires at public beaches. As will be noted in the drawings, the fore ends of the pieces, one of which is shown in Fig. 3, are not bent, but are cut from straight stock. As the two outer pieces are $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. wide, they obviously must be band-sawed from stock that thick, and 4 in. wide. All of the ten inner pieces are grooved, as shown, to reduce the weight. Dowels, casein glue, and two bolts are used in the assembly. This type of board also looks best if finished in the natural wood with spar varnish.

The child's paddle board, Fig. 5, is made from a single piece of white pine or redwood. It should be $\frac{3}{4}$ or 1 in. thick. Two or three $\frac{3}{8}$ -in. dowels or $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. brass rods will lessen the danger of splitting. This type of board lends itself to striking decorations, and it is a good idea to paint an unusual pattern with bright colors, as suggested in Fig. 6.

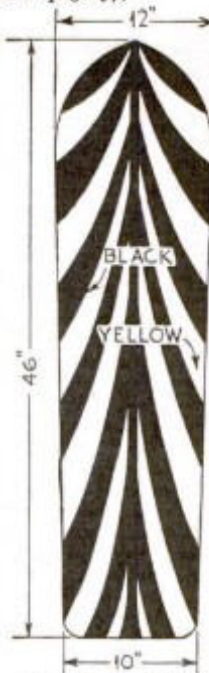


Fig. 5. A child's board for paddling

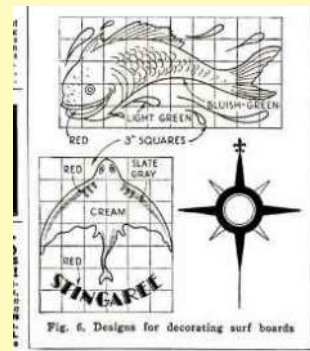
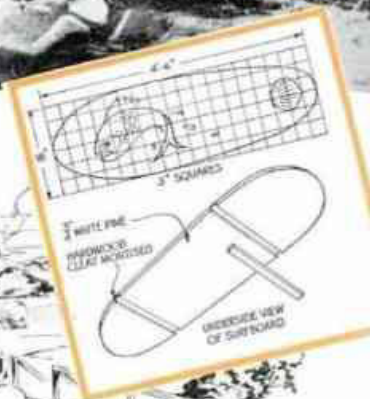


Fig. 6. Designs for decorating surf boards

Making Money at the BEACH

IN a favorable location the rental of beach equipment has money-making possibilities. One of the most popular items is a midget boat which no child can resist. It is designed for rowing, sail or paddle wheels. The paddle wheels clamp to the gunwales and can be operated individually, so that the user can maneuver without a rudder simply by turning one faster than the other. The boat is strongly built though light in weight, and is only



6 ft. long. The sides and bottom are of plywood, which makes it necessary to calk only along the chine, stem and transom. To calk, a strip of binding tape soaked in white lead is laid over the joint between the chine and the side board, and the bottom screwed down over it with brass screws. Use water-proof plywood if available. Smooth the edges well and apply several coats of paint. Also give at least two coats of paint to the inside surface of the ply-

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Design for a child's board.

Surf boards 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, will not split, if two cleats are mortised flush on the underside. Finish with oil stain and a brightly colored design, with spar varnish over all. The size given is suitable for children who do not weigh over 90 lbs. Larger surf boards along the same lines can be made for adults.

Build instructions.

1 California

California stands out as the surfing capital of mainland USA. What is intriguing, despite the dominance of stand-up surfing is that in some shape or form bellyboards continued to be used from the early twentieth century. George Freeth is credited with introducing surfing to California in 1907 and Gault-Williams (2018) suggested he may have surfed the East Coast years before that date. Regardless, the Honolulu Star-Bulletin of 19 August 1915 proclaimed that the “Surfing craze” had spread to most of California’s beaches. A lifeguard, Freeth mentored many young people introducing them to surfing and life-saving methods. Unlike the other states where bellyboards were used around the same time but essentially faded from use, in California there would be waves of bellyboard use.

From the late 1930s commercial enterprises such as Pacific Systems and General Veneer provided more sophisticated shapes than the early homemade boards, while swim fins allowed for waves to be more readily caught further out. After the mid-1950s there was the continued Hawaiian influence from Wally Froiseth and the ply paipos, which influenced early kneeboarding from Santa Cruz to San Diego. Small pockets kept the stoke alive and while not widespread, design did evolve. There were actresses sporting surfboards and due to the blackball it was not surprising that Newport became the source for “paipo” boards. George Greenough also showed there were other paths and people like Tom Wegener boosted a wood revival. In recent years there has been a renewed interest in both wooden and fibreglass bellyboards.



George Freeth 1910. Left to right: George Mitchell, Tommy Witt, Freeth, Ray Kegeris, Garry Witt at Hermosa. https://www.surfresearch.com.au/sFreeth_George.html. Original sources courtesy San Diego Historical Society and Mr. Lemon, in Lou Martin Stern and Cleary (1963): Surfing Guide to Southern California, page 17.

CALIFORNIA GIRLS LEARN ART OF HAWAIIAN SURF-BOARDING

George Freeth, Former Honolulu, Is Busy with Redondo Nymphs

REDONDO BEACH, July 12.—The exciting Hawaiian sport, surf-board riding, so easy for the native Hawaiian, and so difficult for the American, has been taken up by some of the summer girls here, and judging by their perseverance they mean to master the feat or die in the attempt. These girls are probably the only women in the country who ride the surf board, and but few men have learned the art of handling the board.

Miss Dolly Mings, Miss Birdene Jackson and Mrs. Hattie Whitney are the young women, and may be seen almost any morning learning the tricks of the sport under the instruction of George Freeth, the Hawaiian swimming instructor.

Miss Jackson, a pretty blonde, who came here recently from San Francisco, describes the surf-board riding as the “best sport” she knows of. She says “you feel just as though you were riding through the air in an aircraft when you ride in on the breakers.”

Miss Jackson has been swimming but three months, but in that time has learned to do no end of things in the swimming line. She swims well, does high and fancy diving and has become adept at swinging through the air on the rings in the plunge, a feat of which she is most proud, as she is the only girl among the swimmers who does this.

have fully caught the breaker. Then slide backward off the board until the end of it strikes between the knees and hips so as to remove the weight from the front of the board to prevent it from running into the sand. As the board rides over the breakers and up to the beach use the feet as a rudder with which to steer it, and as you are carried into shore hold to the board with both hands.

There are just four things to avoid to prevent danger, according to Freeth. “First, the rider must never get between the breaker and the board, or there is danger of being hit by the heavy board. Another thing to watch is that you paddle until fully up to the breaker. Above all things the rider should remember not to slide off the board too far when taking the breaker; that is, the foot of the board should touch the legs of the swimmer between the hips and the knees; otherwise the board might strike the swimmer in the body. The last thing, but most important to remember, is never to let go of the board.”

The surf boards used by Freeth and his class of pupils are of redwood and weigh about forty pounds. The dimensions are eight feet long, twenty-four inches in width and two inches thick.

Athletic Girls.

Although not many of the girls at the beach have been brave enough to attempt the surf board yet the majority this year are ambitious swimmers or divers and each one seems to have some particular stunt in aquatics in which she excels. No one seems content merely to jump the breakers.

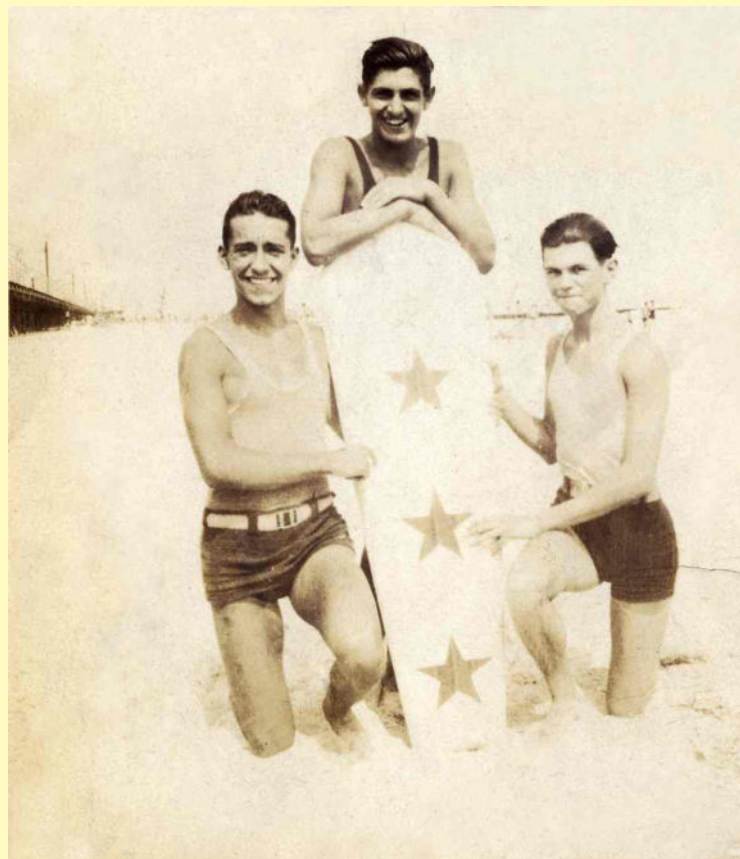
(1912, August 3). Honolulu Star-Bulletin, page 16.



Marshall rental boards 1920s, Long Beach.



Hollow boards, 1910, Long Beach. These boards used in a local waterslide may also have been ridden in the surf. Photo courtesy Tim De la Vega.



1927 Marshall board, Long Beach. Photo courtesy Tim De la Vega.



Marshall rental boards 1910.

Photos courtesy Tim De la Vega and Cary Weiss.



Long Beach, c. 1921.



Bolinas, 1926.

Photos courtesy Tim De la Vega.



Theodore Roosevelt Jr, Miramar near Santa Barbara 1910: <https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Blog>

Scott Palmer, who shaped the boards seen here, took this photograph of his daughters Erma and Bertha in 1924 at Old Mission Beach. The shorter, thinner boards were mostly used for bodyboarding and skimboarding, not stand-up surfing. (Courtesy of SDHS.)



Erma and Betha Palmer at Old Mission Beach 1924.



William Gordon Pellett's sister Mary. Long Beach c. 1928.

Photos: Elwell, J.C., Schmauss, J. & California Surf Museum (2007). Surfing in San Diego, page 17. Photo courtesy [My Paipo Boards](#) and (Right) Joe Lioski.



Del Mar Beach c.1925.

To date, San Diego's earliest surf history has gone largely undocumented. At two different times, fire destroyed local newspaper collections, and a great deal of important information has been lost. The California Surf Museum has gone back in time and gathered data from many individuals in order to piece together this fascinating story. Lifeguard Charlie Wright was one of the most visible fellows to step on a surfboard in San Diego. This photograph appeared in the *San Diego Sun* on September 5, 1925, and announced the first surfboard meet ever held. It reads: "Charlie Wright, life-guard and sponsor of a surfboard tournament in North Mission Beach Monday. Behind him is a board of the type to be considered regulation in the meet. It is 9 1/2 feet long, 3 inches thick, 2 feet wide, and weighs 100 pounds. At the left is Wright's young daughter, Cleo, who, but 2 years old, is a capable swimmer." Four days later, a sports section article headline read: "Wright Wins Surf Contest—Ernest Judd Cops Second Prize in Breaker Riding Tournament." (Courtesy of SDHS.)



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Two year old Cleo Wright with father Charlie, 1925.

(Left): Walter Averrett photo; (Right) Elwell, J.C., Schmauss, J. & California Surf Museum (2007). Surfing in San Diego, page 9. Photo courtesy [My Paipo Boards](#)

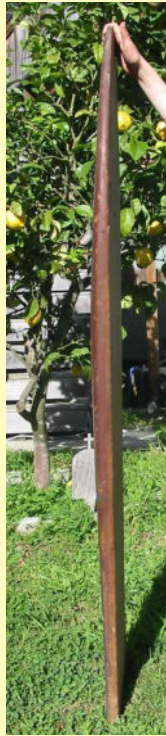


Gaylord's Campbell's father's homemade bellyboard, Long Beach.



"New for a Pacific plunge. The lure of the refreshing blue surf is irresistible". Surfer in the middle of the photo.

(Left) courtesy Gaylord Campbell; (1928, May 20). The Sunday Star (Washington D.C.), Gravure Section, page 98.



This board was brought to Los Angeles from Hawaii in 1923.



58 3/4" x 15 1/25" x 1.5".

Photos courtesy Ken Butteerfield.



Likely tow board in surf, c. 1925.



1930.

Photos courteys Tim De la Vega.



Joe and Jack Quigg, with Anslie Moon, Santa Monica 1932.



Encinitas 1938. Alistair Boot shared this photo with the Encinitas facebook group and a local identified his mother in the photo and dated it mid to late 1940s at San Onofre.

Photo courtesy Joe Quigg Collection posted by Bob Luben Legendary Surfers FB page & (Right) Photo by Jerry Morrison.



Source: (1931, June 7). The Sunday Star (Washington, D.C.) Gravure Section, page 100.



Source: Aguirre, David (2007). Waterman's eye: Emil Sigler—surfing San Diego to San Onofre, 1928-1940. San Diego: Tabler and Wood. San Onofre 1938, with bellyboard in the foreground. Photo courtesy: <https://mypaipoboard.org/pubs/BookSummaries.shtml>



Dorothy Arnold (1917-1984) with a DYAS Coaster, 1938.

Photo courtesy Universal Pictures; (1937, August 8). The Sunday Star, page B11.



“Venice Beach - This novel surf sled which Althea Martin is holding was invented by William L. Wheeler ... The streamlined pontoon below it's nose allows the sled to float the occupant in perfect safety. The stabilizer shield along the tail keeps it from slewing across the waves.”



Actress Dorothy Sebastian (1903-1957).



Actress Nancy Carroll (1903-1965).

Photos courtesy www.surfridershawaii.com.



Long Beach, 4 July 1933.



Shirley Temple, 1935.

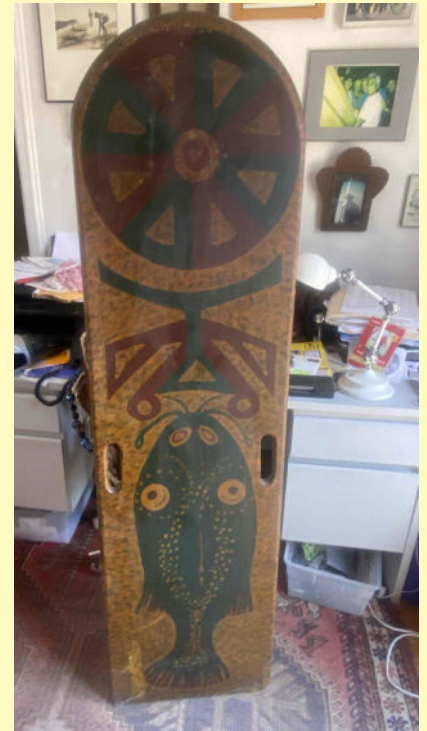
Photos courtesy Tim De la Vega.



Laura Corbay, Lucy Knoch and Lucille Barkley - 1949, Paramount "starlets" with Pacific Systems boards. Photo courtesy Tim De la Vega.



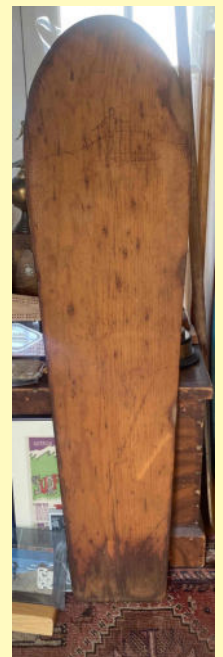
Redwood board estimated to be 1940s-1950s. Inscribed "To M.A.L. from J.S.". The board was found in San Francisco area.



Photos courtesy Cary Weiss.



Actress Esther William's board: 4'2"x18" x 3/4", c.1930-1940.



Redwood board used in Southern California.

Photos courtesy California Surf Museum; and Cary Weiss.



“Balsa and redwood resembling a Pacific Homes board from the 1930s to the early 1940s. The board has a rounded bottom.



Large redwood board found in Huntington Beach. Estimated to be 1940s or 1950s.



1940s board found in the San Francisco Presidio area.



Reverse side.

Photos courtesy Cary Weiss.

Details of the big commercial surfboard manufacturers of the 1930's to the 1940's have been documented by Stecyk (1997) and Kenvin (2019). Kenvin noted that while Pacific Systems started making surfboards in 1929, General Veneer began making "paipo/alaia belly boards" under contract for the Royal Hawaiian and Moana hotels in Waikiki. The boards were known as "hotel boards" because they were loaned to hotel guests and sold in souvenir shops. The decal on each board featured '... a royal Hawaiian crest bracketed by the words ALOHA HAWAII. A banner beneath the emblem read, UA MAU KE E A OKA AINA I KA PONO, which translates as "The Life of the Land is Preserved in Righteousness," a motto with origins dating back to the Hawaiian Monarchy'. Further, Kenvin noted "They are hollow, made of perfectly cut and matching pieces of veneer, just thick enough to provide the necessary strength. The boards are 5-feet long, 18-inches wide, and 1.5-inches thick. Grip handles are cut through each about a third of the way back from the nose." In contrast, Pacific Systems seems to have started out making surfboards but at some stage made a range of "kiddie boards" 5' and 6' in length (Stecyk 1997), though it is unclear when these were produced. Pacific Systems stopped production of surfboards in 1942 when the US entered WWII (Kenvin 2019).



5' 1940's General Veneer board, balsa core covered by veneer.



6' "1930s Pacific System Homes WAIKIKI Steam Nose Paipo".

Photos courtesy California Gold Surf Auctions: April 2025 and April 2024.



Pacific Systems logo.



Advertisement for Pacific System Homes "Kiddie boards".

Photos courtesy California Gold Surf Auction April 2024; Stecyk (1997) *The Surfer's Journal*, 6(4), 32-39.



5', "Early 1930s Pacific System Homes Swastika Steam Nose Paipo". Caption and photo courtesy California Gold Surf Auction April 2022.



4'11" Pacific Homes "alaia". Note logo is similar to General Veneer logo.

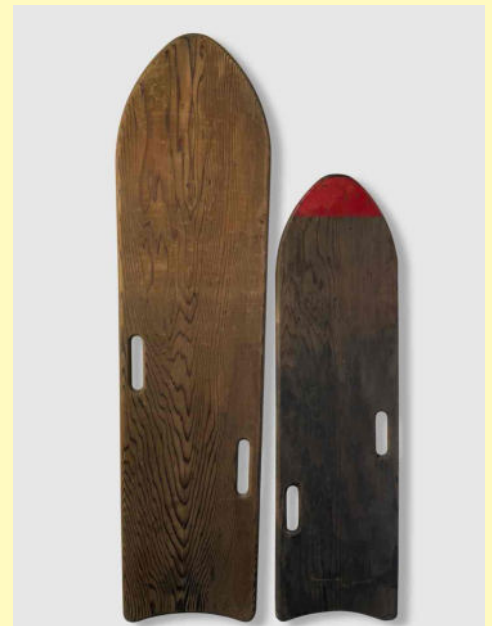


Pacific Homes "alaia" nose. Solid balsa with a redwood stringer and rails.

Photos courtesy <https://www.surflegendsusa.com>.



Actress Bebe Daniels, Santa Monica. Note the knobs at the rail.



54" and 43" 1930's Santa Monica bellyboards.

Photos courtesy of e-bay and October 2024 California Gold Surf Auction.

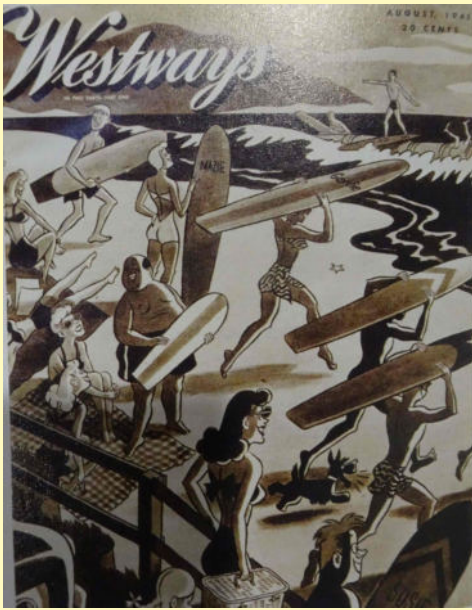


"Paddler Pete Peterson with tandem partner Monica Roche-Polkinghorn". The paddleboard was made in 1936 by Jim Mollica.



Santa Monica bellyboard, 1948.

Photos courtesy of <https://easyreadernews.com/274176-2/>; Santa Monica History Museum, Bill Beebe Collection (3.2.3755), 1948.



Westways August 1945. For youth, it was a stand-up surfboard.



Photo taken at San Diego Longboard Collector Club meet, c. 2013.

Photos courtesy of <https://easyreadernews.com/274176-2/> and Warshaw, Matt (2010). The history of surfing, Chronicle Books, San Francisco.



Bellyboards from different eras. Cary Weiss collection <https://surfartifacts.com/surfboards.html>.



Ply twin fin bellyboard: 29" x 20.5" x 0.5". Photos courtesy <https://shacc.emuseum.com/objects/2493/plywood-bellyboard-unknown-maker>.



Ray Gerling balsa bellyboard used around Santa Cruz late 1950s.

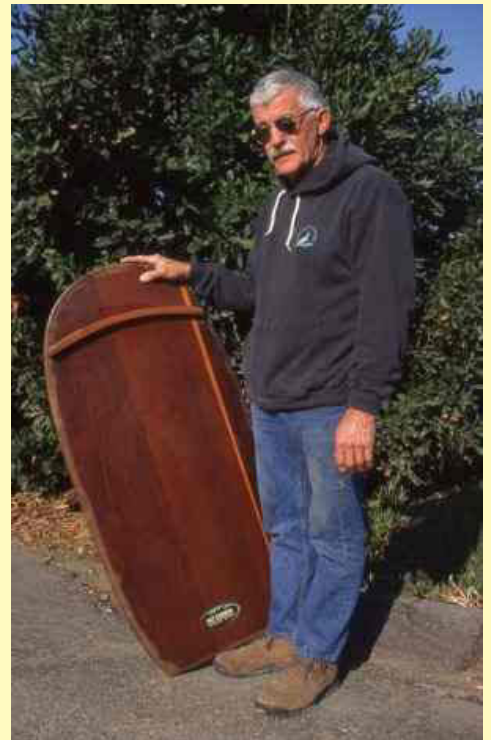


Ray Gerling balsa bellyboard used around Santa Cruz late 1950s.

Photos courtesy Rainer Stegemann.



Lance Carson. Hollow bellyboard built by his father, 1948.

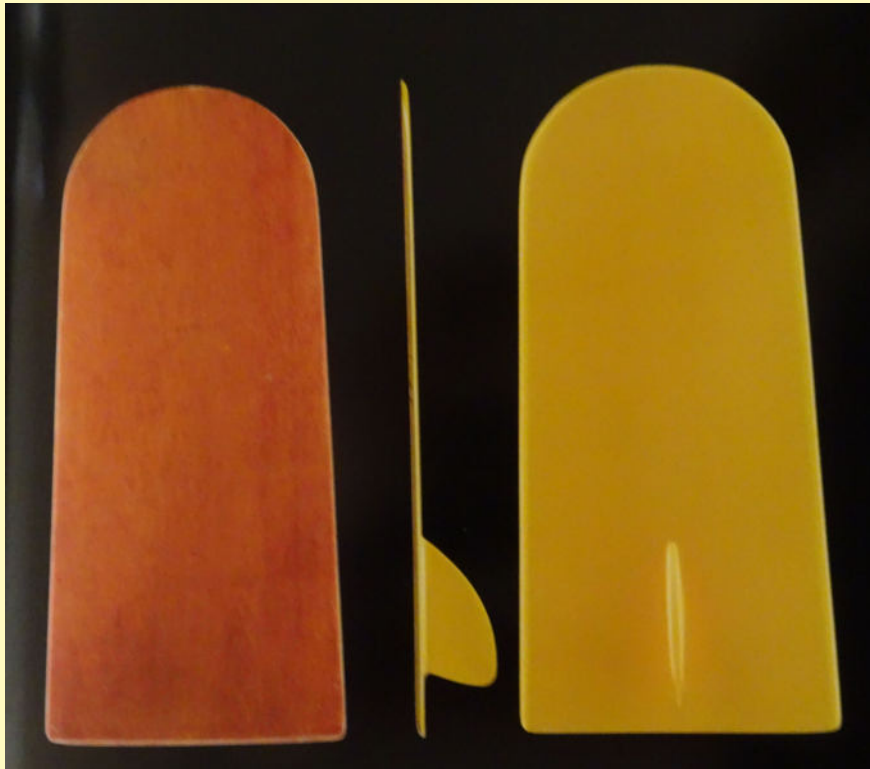


Pat Curren. Twin fin bellyboard, 1950s.

Photo unknown and courtesy Tom Keck.



Pat Curren. Twin fin bellyboard. Photo courtesy Tom Keck.



Early 1960s: 47" x 21.5" x 0.5". Paint and resin on plywood. Photo courtesy of Kenvin, R. (2014), *Surfcraft*. Mingel International Museum and MIT Press; and SHACC.



Jon Manss. Paipo with fin and Mustang in background. Photo courtesy Jon Manss.



1964 board shaped by John Greg/Grey for Gary Goodenough: 3'4" x 18 3/4" x 3/4."



Twin fin balsa bellyboard: 4' x 21.5" x 1 3/4". Credited to G.L. "Buck" Bradford.

Photos courtesy: <https://shacc.emuseum.com/collections/78/bellyboards/objects>.



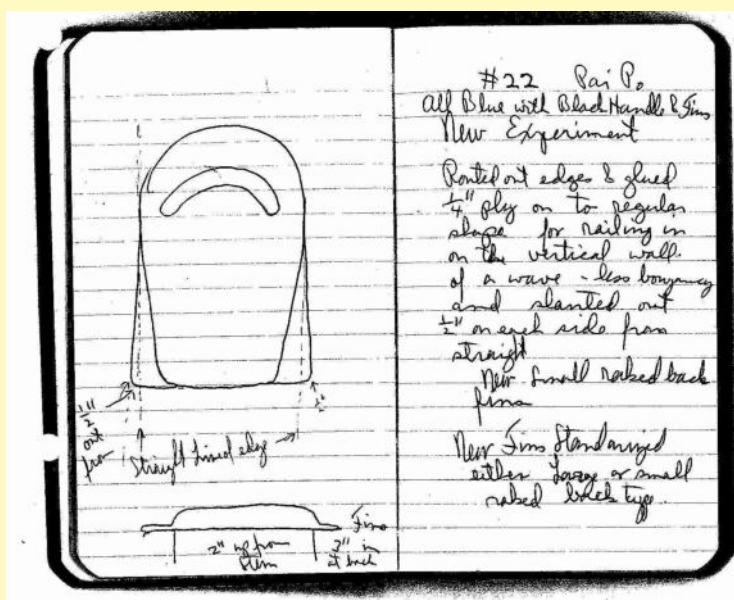
4" balsa bellyboard: <https://shacc.emuseum.com/collections/78/bellyboards/objects>.

One of the more sophisticated and contemporary designs came from Laguna Beach. The 2018 California Gold auction catalogue features a board from 1966 and states “A trio of young guys, Terry, Gordon & Colin (last names withheld to protect the innocent!) pooled their collective stoke to make a total of 22 boards. 11 balsa and 11 foam boards. They body surfed, and belly boarded in and around Laguna Beach. They bugged Hobie Alter, for pointers on how to improve their art.”

However, the origins of this design are due to Wally Froiseth from Hawaii, who was making this style of board from the mid 1950s. The first photo below, displays board at Oak Street, Laguna Beach, in 1964-1965. Art Brewer noted: “The board on the left belonged to Dave Watkins; the center board belonged to Candy Calhoun; and, the board on the right belonging to Gordon Theisz was made by Wally Froiseth.” This photo was featured in an interview with Jeff Quam (https://mypaipoboards.org/interviews/JeffQuam/JeffQuam_2013-0713.shtml).



Laguna Beach 1964-1965. Photo and caption information courtesy by Art Brewer.



Page from Wally Froiseth’s shaping diary, c. 1962. New small raked fins were added to this board. Photo courtesy John Clark.



3' 8" balsa/foam paipo board: 1966.



Froiseth style bellyboard

Photos courtesy May 2018 California Gold surf auction.



Modern looking raked fins.



A Froiseth style wood handle.

Photos courtesy May 2018 California Gold surf auction.

2 Connecticut

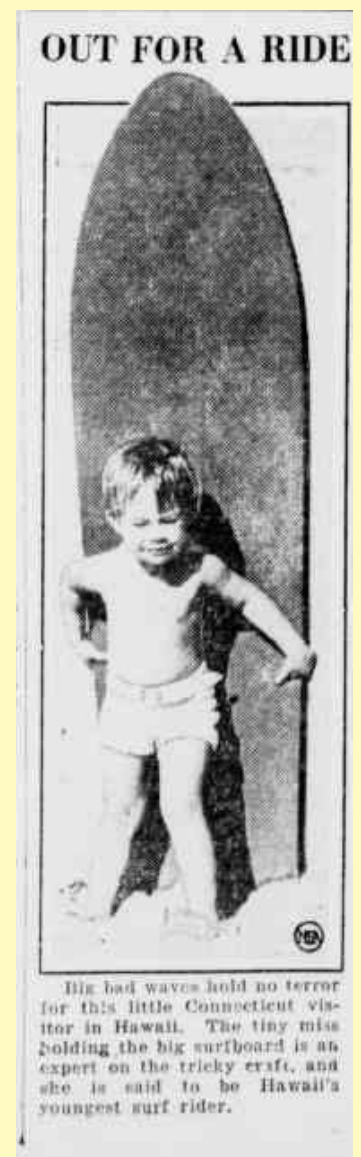
These three images only provide tenuous evidence of surfing in Connecticut. The cartoon is interesting as it suggests to youth that an ironing board could be used to ride waves. Whether the young girl rode waves in her home state, is unknown as is whether Marjorie Brooker rode a surfboard in New York, whether this was a local board or a prop acquired elsewhere.



(1939, December 20). The Waterbury Democrat, page 19.



Miss Marjorie Brooker of New York ... "carrying a surf board and a brightly colored beach bag."



Recurring photo of a young Connecticut child in Hawaii.

(1936 , June 18). Evening star, page A-6; 1934 (February 20). Imperial Valley Press, page 6.

3 Florida

The Florida Surf Museum website contains early newspaper extracts. The extract from the Daytona Gazette of August 28, 1909 refers to Eugene Johnson making a surfboard, inspired by Ford's article in Collier's Weekly. The 1915 article below provides dimensions for a board used at Assembly Beach

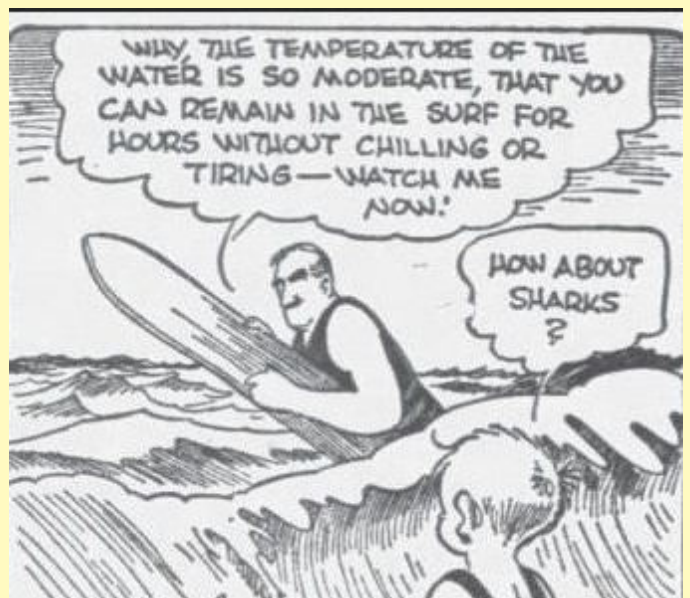


"Introduced-surf board". (1915). St Augustine Evening Record: <https://floridasurfmuseum.org/talking-story/very-early-florida-surfing-history>

The website also refers to surfing in Foley, Alabama in 1927. However, when the Foley Public Library was contacted for further details, Paul Leonard on 31 July, 2025 stated he found no evidence of wave riding. Mr Leonard noted: "I performed a search within our own local papers during that time period and was also unable to locate any articles relating to it. I was able to find that during this period, there was a fad of attaching a board by rope to the rear of a boat and being towed through the water similar to a water skier. It was apparently quite fashionable throughout the US. Several events were held locally to celebrate Independence Day and Labor Day which involved displays of "surf board riding". I am inclined to think that this might have been what the Martins in your article were doing as well. Although none of the articles mention being towed behind boats, they do mention motorboat races at the same events. Also, the events are occurring in bodies of water with little to no surf, such as the rivers and Mobile Bay."



Homemade board with the name Edie inscribed, c. 1940s. Offset handles to carry. 53" x 11 1/2" x 3/4".



Surfing cartoon. (1929, April 17). Fort Lauderdale News. The board in the cartoon has offset handles.

Photos: <https://floridasurfmuseum.org>. The board is on loan from John Hughes. Cartoon source: <https://floridasurfmuseum.org>



Thomas Cobb's 1920s board found by Kevin O'Neill amongst lumber in his neighbours garage.



"Florida swimmers carrying their surf boards seaward for a thrilling ride on the crest of an intrushing breaker. The Hawaiian sea sport promises to be increasingly popular at Palm Beach this winter. These boards are easily carried being made of Central American balsa wood..."

Photo courtesy (Left) <https://floridasurfmuseum.org>. (Right). "Hawaiian aquatics at Florida" (1919, October 16). Evening Public Ledger, page 2. Photo courtesy John Hughes.



Daytona or Coronado Beach. "Jimmy Milligan ... is endeavouring to entertain his youngsters and their guests with surf-board riding. (1939, July 9). Fourth of July holiday festivities. The Sunday Sentinel-Star Society, page 13 and [My Paipo Boards](#).

4 Maryland

It is possible that the surfboards in the photo below were restricted to the pool. Ms Cara from Downey from the Ocean City Life-Saving Station Museum advised on 21 August 2025 that there no known use of surfboards in Maryland. She noted that:

The only reference I have found is from 1977, and it is a statement made by a woman living in Fenwick, DE, saying that she “belly boards.”



"All set to splash". Surf boards and rubber floats being handed out at new the Chevy Chase swimming pool. (1928, July 18). The Washington Times, page 3.

5 New Jersey

George Freeth and shallow beaches which were considered comparable to Waikiki increased the popularity of Long Beach in the early twentieth century.



“Watching the surf for mother. Elaine Link ... is spending several days in Atlantic City.”



Right: New Jersey, 1939. Left: 1940s board used by Jimmie.

(1922, August 28). Evening Public Ledger (Philadelphia), page 28; Board photos courtesy Bart Tucker and Joe Lioski.



“The surf board is a never-ending source of delight for the fair bathers at Atlantic City and the other seaside resorts.” (1918, July 6). Evening Public Ledger (Philadelphia). Night Extra, page 20.



Surfing at Bay Head, 1911 Post card.



1911 (July 3) post card sent to England.

Photos courtesy Alex Williams.



"Frank Baxter furnished the power as Joe Marks enjoyed a ride on the surf board at Atlantic City."

(1921, June 13). Evening Public Ledger (NIGHT EXTRA), page 28; (1921, July 5). Atlanta Tri-weekly Journal, page 3.



"... the best board of all is the one you can use to go surf-riding on the waves"



Undated Harry C. Meyer postcard: "The boys at Ocean City, New Jersey". MyPaipoBoards Forums post by Poobah. Retrieved March 04, 2012, from <https://mypaipoboards.org/forum3/viewtopic.php?f=4&t=142>.

6 New York

In the background of this 1891 Stereograph image is what appears to be a person holding a surfboard.



Coney Island, Brighton Beach, c. May 7 1891. Strohmeyer & Wyman, Publishers.



"... Mae Poole Allen, artists' model, of Washington D.C. resting after a morning of surf-board riding." (1922, September 24). New-York Tribune, page 6.

7 North Carolina

In addition to the photo below dated to 1907 there is evidence that surfing occurred in 1910. The Pacific Commercial Advertiser Honolulu of April 7, 1910 contained Burke Hayward Bridgers' letter likely forwarded from Colliers Weekly. Previously, Alexander Hume Ford had written articles on surfing in St Nicholas (1908) and Collier's Outdoor America (1909). Bridgers noted that their boards "... did not have sufficient supporting ability to carry the weight of a man, except when reclining at full length on the board." Funderburg (2008) noted "... 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" (page 44). Lewis Phillip Hall, the author of the 1975 book, Land of the Golden River, was quoted by Funderburg: "in the early twenties (1920's) ... 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" (pages 43-44). Funderburg noted "... 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" (page 46).



Wrightsville beach scene 24 March, 1907 with a surfboard in foreground. Photo Courtesy [My Paipo Boards](#)



Wrightsville 1918. J.H. Redler & Co. postcard. A surfboard is visible to the far left. UNC libraries: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/unclibraries/commons/23098350715>

Plywood boards were also ridden and Funderburg (2008) who was familiar with the McIver family commented "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" (page 46).



Atlantic City lifeguard - 1920s.

ATLANTIC CITY DAILY PRESS TUESDAY, JUNE 11, 1912

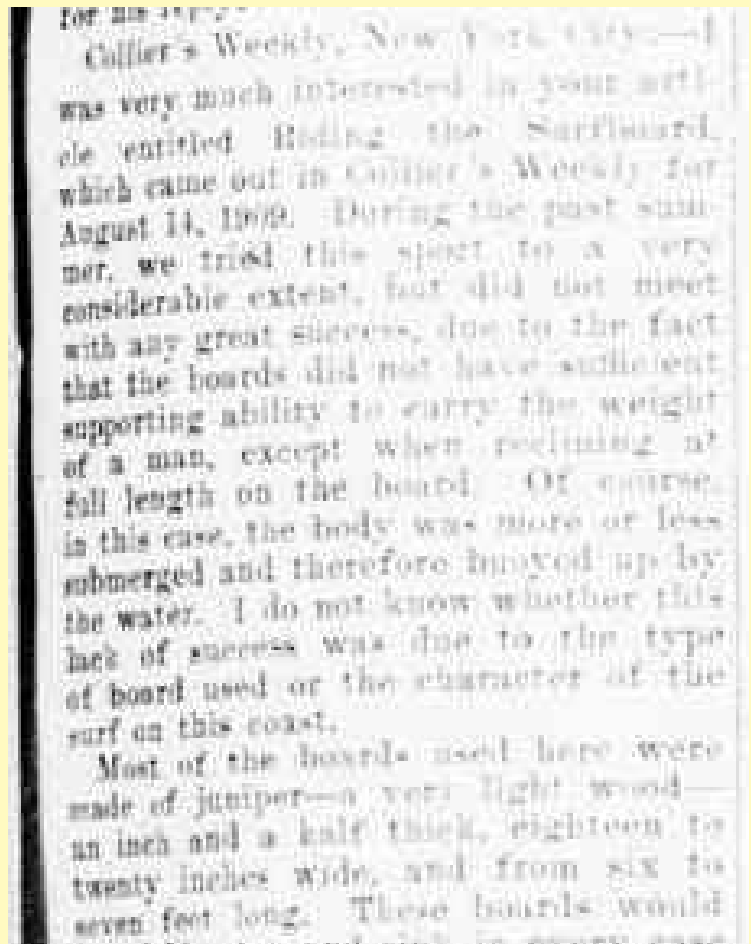
Athletic young men bathers are busily engaged in launching their diving boards, a la Hawaii, these summery days down by the sea. The game is to throw the board into the shallow surf that it will float along in an inch or more of water, then to jump aboard, keeping the nose of the board elevated. The impetus given by the expert jump propels the board through fifty yards or more of surf, and the bather stops and starts all over again.

Excerpt from Atlantic City Daily Press (1912, 11 June).

Photo courtesy [My Paipo Boards](#), originally from: DiMauro, Danny, and Johan Kugelberg. 2024. *I Heard There Were No Waves in New Jersey : Surfing on the Jersey Shore 1888-1984*.

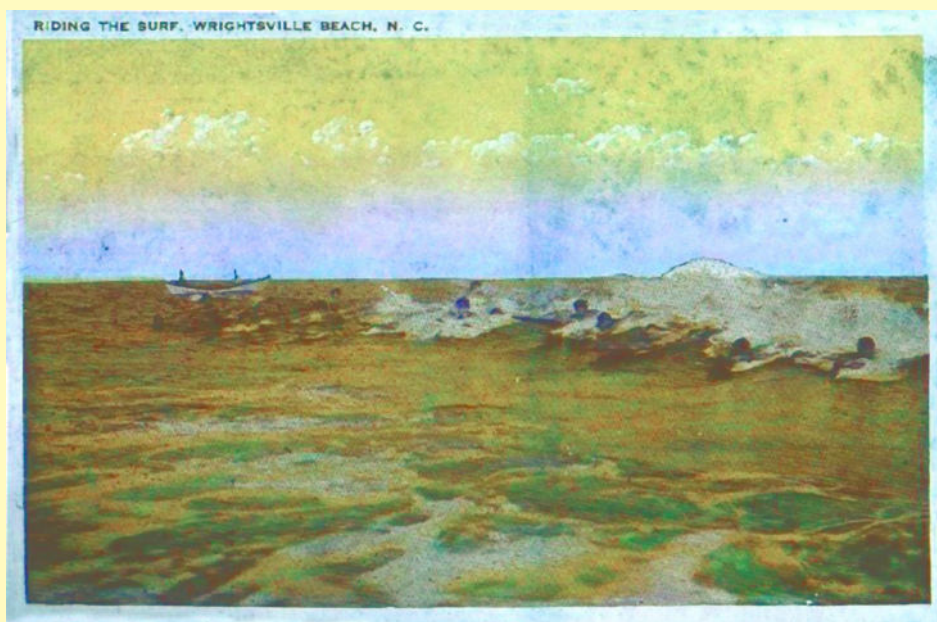


Malcolm McIver's 50-55" 1930s Harbor Island, Wrightsville Beach board on display at the Cape Fear Museum in Wilmington.



Excerpt from Bridgers' letter.

Photo courtesy [My Paipo Boards](https://mypaipoboards.org) and (Right) Funderburg, Joseph. 2008. Surfing on the Cape Fear Coast. Carolina Beach, N.C.: SlapDash Publishing, LLC; (1910, April 7). The Pacific Commercial Advertiser Honolulu, page 3.



Posted on the Legendary Surfers Blog, February 22, 2009. Photo Skipper Funderburg (2008). Surfing on the Cape Fear Coast. Carolina Beach, N.C. SlapDash Publishing; courtesy of https://mypaipoboards.org/postcards/Paipo_Postcards.shtml. My Paipo Boards



Katherine Meier Cameron at Wrihstville, May 1938. Funderburg reports that the board was made by her father.



Katherine Meier Cameron at Wrihstville, May 1938.

Photo courtesy State Archives of North Carolina NC Department of Cultural Resources, ConDev782.



Katherine Meier Cameron at Wrihstville, May 1938.



Katherine Meier Cameron at Wrihstville, May 1938.

Photo courtesy State Archives of North Carolina NC Department of Cultural Resources, ConDev782. Photo by Sharpe.



Katherine Meier Cameron at Wrihstville, May 1938. Photo courtesy State Archives of North Carolina NC Department of Cultural Resources, ConDev783D. Photo by Sharpe.

8 Oregon

No other known accounts exist, though given the number of people in the photo surfing must have occurred for a period of time in the local area by a small group of die-hards.



Taken in 1913 at the Agate Beach cove, this image of, from left to right, Eddie Effinger, Gilbert Mackey, Pat Effinger, Ella Baumann, and Elda Toch suggests that people may have used flat boards to play in or ride the waves at Agate Beach. This photograph from the Mackey family album was donated to the Lincoln County Historical Society and is now sold as a popular postcard along the Oregon coast. (Courtesy of Mike Jipp, Pacific Northwest Surfing Museum.)

Agate Beach, 2013. Source: Blackman S. & Blackman S (2014). Oregon Surfing. Arcadia Publishing (SC).

9 Washington

The history of early surfing in Washington has been documented by Gavin Kogan and is a great example of how surfing can occur in isolation from others and engaged in for the pure joy of riding waves. Kogan noted:

My grandmother, Elizabeth Emerson Lamble was told that during this time that the cedar surfboards were made at the direction of Wilfred's older brothers who had a more intimate knowledge of surfboard making from their earlier years in Kauai. These boards were finless and were generally for prone riding, "although it was likely they tried to stand up to test their skill" says Elizabeth. Although only one board remains today, it appears from the existing photos that at least four boards were manufactured between 1902 and 1905. The board remaining today is of knotless red cedar and measures 6'8". The rails are bevelled from the bottom to the deck. Ralph's initials, RD, are inscribed on the tail-deck and easily seen in some of the photographs.

Further details of the Kogan article have been provided by Gault-Williams (2018). In short, Ralph Emerson met Wilfred, Norman and George Dole at Stanford University. The Doles had relatives who had been missionaries in Hawaii. The Doles joined Ralph working on the latter's family sawmill. Subsequently, Ralph and Wilfred Dole established the Aloha Lumber Company in 1905. Kogan (2006) is quoted as stating: "Well preserved photos show the young men surfing, canoeing, fishing, horse riding and hunting... one can't help but shudder at the scant protection light wool bathing suits must have offered against the chilly Olympic waters...". He also recalled his grandmother saying: "... we used to take out those old surfboards, us and the Dole kids, and ride them in the surf and Joe Creek. I think we must have rode those boards well into the 1920's on a regular basis."



Surfing the boards. Source Kogan, G (2006).



Early Washington Surf scene.



Early Washington Surf scene.

Source Kogan, G (2006). Courtesy Gault-Williams, 2018.)



Surviving Emerson board. Source Kogan, G (2006).



Early Washington Surf scene.



Early Washington Surf scene.

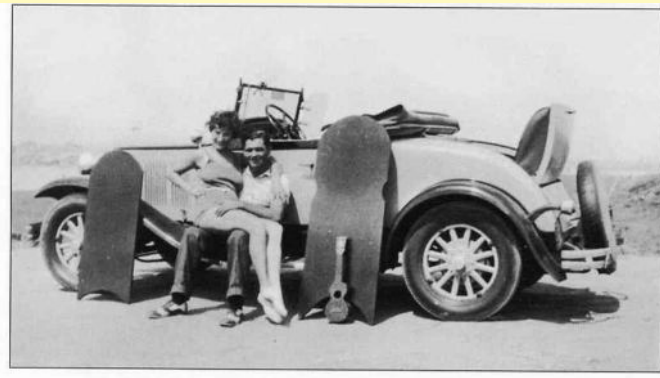
Source Kogan, G (2006). Courtesy Gault-Williams, 2018.

10 Unidentified locations

It is likely most of these boards or photos were from California, but at this stage they are simply identified as “unidentified locations.”



US serviceman 1942.



“A swing-era couple poses with their new Ford Model A, Papa Li’ili’i boards, and ukele at an unknown beach, c.1930”

Photos and caption courtesy Tim De la Vega.



Unidentified location.



Unidentified location.

Photos courtesy Alex Williams. Coloured by Duncan Wilson.



Unidentified photos.



The holes suggest this board may have been towed.



1930 boards

Left photo by Sherwin, right by Decoster, Gerard (2024). Alternative surf crafts: fringe surfing. H.A.C.S

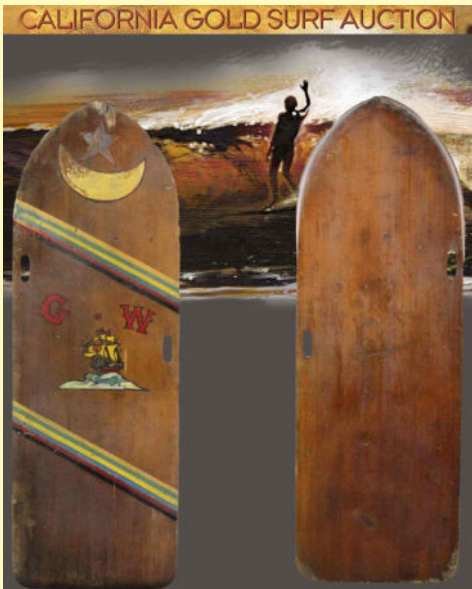


48" redwood belly-board.



Board made by Winner.

Left: Photo courtesy Kenvin, R (2014). Surfcraft. Mingel International Museum and MIT Press; and SHACC.



c. 1930's 4'5" x 18" redwood bellyboard.



1920's 3'6" bellyboard.

California Surf Auction May 2017 and 2019.



Photo courtesy Cary Weiss.

11 Fish boards and other novelties

A curiosity is these fish shaped boards described as surfboards. Several of the photos appear to be taken in still or flat water. The photo "Bobbie rides waves on a fish" appears in at least five newspapers: The Corpus Christi Caller, 7 December 1919; the Washington Herald (Washington, D.C.) 22 July 1920; the Daily Graphic (Arkansas) 24 July 1920; the East Oregonian, 26 July 1920; the Bismarck Tribune (N.D.), 26 July 1920 and the Pensacola Journal, 3 September 1920.



Helen Smith of Boston, 1916.



Brian Callahan's grandparents about 1918, City Island in the Bronx.

(1921, July 26). Evening Public Ledger (Philadelphia), page 24; 17 December 2024 Paipo & Bellyboard Riders Facebook post Brian Callahan



Brian Callahan's grandfather is to the left of the man with the board, 1915.



Constance Viola Greene Haroldson, Siasconset Beach 1932.

28 November 2024 Paipo & Bellyboard Riders Facebook post by Brian Callahan; Nantucket Historical Association Research Library.



"Bobbie rides a fish." The board is reported as being made of "baka wood - lighter than cork."

(1920, September 3). The Pensacola Journal, page 5; <https://www.fineartstorehouse.com/bettmann-archive/socialite-children-posing-surf-board-39406175.html>



"Society Children In The Country." Barbara and Payne Bingham, Westbury Long Island.



"These short boards from the revival era were ridden prone. They sport interesting plan shapes and design features like split tails, side cuts, parallel running rails, and asymmetry. But the post-revival disconnect from the riding styles of the past prevented them from fulfilling this design potential as stand-up bards. Instead, they provided bellyboard thrills aplenty to summer beachgoers." C.1900, 61" x 17.5" x 2", wood and canvas. Caption and photo courtesy Kenvin, R (2014) Surfcraft. Mingel International Museum and MIT Press; and SHACC.

Mike McTigue Quits Ring—See Page 13

INTERNATIONAL EDITION.

THE NATIONAL POLICE GAZETTE

THE LEADING ILLUSTRATED SPORTING JOURNAL IN THE WORLD.

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CHARLES J. FOX
President

NEW YORK: SATURDAY, JUNE 22, 1929.

VOLUME CXXXIV.—No. 2708
Price 10 Cents



Photo by International Newsreel.

OH, BOYS, WHAT A STUNNING BEACH SIREN—AND WHO SAID, "POOR FISH!"

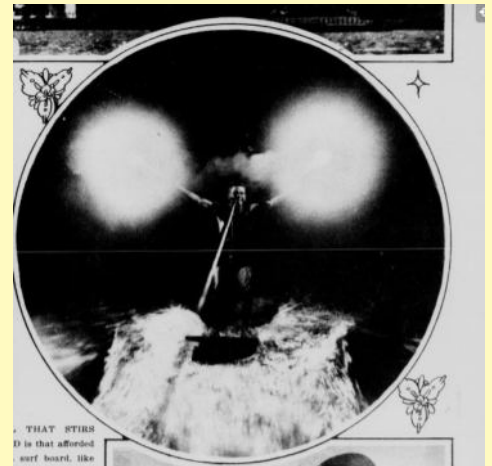
WHENEVER BEWITCHING NANCY CARROLL, MOTION PICTURE STAR, GOES FOR A DIP, SHE IS ACCOMPANIED BY HER INFLATED TUNA. NANCY DECLARES HE'S MUCH MORE DESIRABLE THAN A LOT OF MERE MALES SHE KNOWS. HE RIDES THE SURF LIKE A LIFEGUARD; FURTHERMORE, SHE CAN'T SINK WHEN HE'S AROUND, AND HE NEVER GETS TEMPERAMENTAL UNLESS HE'S PUNCTURED. IN SHEIK-HIDDEN HOLLYWOOD COULD ANY DAMSEL ASK FOR MORE?

Nancy Carroll (1929, June 22). The National Police Gazette. Photo courtesy Tim De la Vega.



Geraldine Mathias, Necanicum River Oregon 1940.

Photo courtesy <https://pleasurephoto.wordpress.com/2016/10/28/>; (1924, May 16). Palisadian (Clifford Park, N.J.), page 9.



"A thrill that stirs the blood is afforded by riding a surfboard like this adventurous spirit off Coronado Beach at night, behind a fast motor boat, a lurid light from a flare in either hand lighting up the lurid wave".



"Surf riding without the surf ... an imitation of 'surf-board' riding on the water, but more important than that it is good exercise for the participator."

(1925, September 16). Ventnor News (Ventnor City, N.J.), page 14.; (1933, August 5). The Daily Alaska Empire, page 6.



A new surf recreation has been enjoyed by summer vacationists at Santa Monica, Cal., in the form of surf dice. All you have to do is to take the oversize dice into the ocean and the waves roll the dice back on the surf while those on the beach wait breathlessly for their number. The new sport threatens to rival surfboard riding as a water sport. Photo shows Miss Leona Weaver languidly resting atop the overgrown dice.

"A new surf recreation has been enjoyed by summer vacationers at Santa Monica, Cal., in the form of surf dice... The new sports threatens to rival surfboard riding as a water sport."



“Surfboard riders, propelled by speed boats will compete in separate events for men and women.”

(1930, August 2). The Washington Times (Washington D.C.), page 9.; (1924, October 18). The Indianapolis Times (Home edition), page 6.



Cecil B. DeMille's "A feet of Clay": "Thw amazing story of a girl who goes from parties and petting at seventeen to marriage and responsibilities at twentyone."



Dahl, Truda. "The surf rider." (1928, July 11). The Brownsville Herald, page 6.



McEvoy, J.P & Striebel, J.H. Dixie Dugan. (1935, August 18). The Brownsville Herald, page 25.

12 References and acknowledgements

Assistance was provided by a number of people including Samantha Crisp (Archivist for Southeast North Carolina Archives and History UNCW Library), Lisa Dannenbaum (Director of Communications, Santa Monica History Museum), Tim De la Vega, Cara Downey (Assistant Curator, Ocean City Life-Saving Station Museum), Ian Dunn (Archivist, State Archives of North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources), John Hughes, Paul Leonard (Head of Cultural and Heritage Collections, Foley Public Library), Robert Moynier, Larry O'Brien, Rod Rodgers, Evan Smith (The Surfer's Journal), Rainer Stegemann, Cary Weiss and Alex Williams. Some photos can be found on multiple websites, so locating the original source can be difficult. Also, a number of boards are referred to in newspapers as surfboards, which were never ridden in the surf while boards that look like they were ridden prone, may have been ridden standing or used just for paddling. If any photo details are incorrect or missing, information to correct this is appreciated.

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