Foreword Review SPORTS & RECREATION

Surf & Rescue: George Freeth and the Birth of California Beach Culture

Patrick Moser
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The surfing culture that California embodied in the middle of the twentieth century wouldn't have been possible without the sport's Hawaiian origins—or without George Freeth, the surfing virtuoso and heroic lifeguard who helped popularize surfing when he arrived on the mainland in 1907. Patrick Moser chronicles Freeth's short but eventful life in the thorough, engaging biography *Surf & Rescue*.

Freeth spent his childhood in Hawaii and on other islands before Hawaii's annexation by the United States. He was the multiracial son of a struggling businessman. His story hits its stride when he heads to California, where he took part in a wide array of aquatic feats, including diving, surfing, and playing goalie on a competitive water polo squad.

With local papers covering his accomplishments and his high-profile roles at tourist resorts, Freeth played a big part in making the Pacific Coast a popular travel destination. Via the public bath houses and club sports that hired him, and his work directly on behalf of Hawaiian tourism, Freeth helped to promote Hawaiian culture on the US mainland, and to make surfing—earlier portrayed by the likes of Jack London as a high adventure—a sport accessible to the general public.

Freeth's athletic prowess also made a major impact on his lifeguard work, and the book chronicles some of his most daring feats, including the rescue of seven stranded fishermen during a storm. He earned a medal from the federal government for his lifesaving work. Though he was only thirty-five when he died during the flu pandemic in 1919, his life was eventful. A mix of photographs, quotes from contemporary sources, and meticulous research help to document his tale.

Surf & Rescue is the exciting biography of a surfing legend who left behind a considerable legacy.

JEFF FLEISCHER (May / June 2022)

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