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# Tom Blake

## Surfboard Design

U.S. PATENT NO. 1,872,230: Water sled

**Inducted in 2025** Born: March 8, 1902 Died: May 5, 1994

Tom Blake designed the first lightweight, hollow surfboards and paddleboards – some of the earliest boards to be commercially produced. A record-breaking swimmer and surfing pioneer, Blake helped make surfing more accessible and more popular, provided a vital tool for ocean lifeguards and impacted the future of board design.



**Full Bio:** <https://www.invent.org/inductees/tom-blake>

### Primary Connections:

- Inventor, Athlete, Actor, Stunt Double, Author and Photographer
- Lifeguard in California, Hawaii, Florida and New York, 1924-64

### Military Service:

- U.S. Coast Guard, World War II, 1942-45

### Key Memberships/Awards:

- East Coast Surfing Hall of Fame, 2000
- Surfing Walk of Fame, Huntington Beach, California (Inaugural Class), 1994
- International Swimming Hall of Fame, 1992
- National Surf Life Saving Association of America, Special Recognition, 1974
- International Surfing Magazine: Surfing Hall of Fame, 1967
- Mainland to Catalina Paddleboard Race: Founder and First Winner
- Hawaiian Surfboard Paddling Championships: 100-Yard and Half-Mile Paddling Events, First Place and World Records, 1930
- Pacific Coast Surfing Championship: First Place, 1928
- Amateur Athletic Union (AAU): 10-Mile Open Water National Swimming Championship, 1922

### Things You Should Know:

- Blake was born in 1902 in Milwaukee.
- At age 18, he was inspired by meeting Duke Kahanamoku, a Hawaiian swimmer, U.S. Olympic gold medalist and the “father of modern surfing.” It was the start of a lifelong friendship.
- Blake moved to Los Angeles and became a competitive swimmer.
- In Los Angeles, he worked as a lifeguard, actor and stunt double.
- In 1929, Blake built the first waterproof camera housing that was applied to close-up photography of surfers in action.
- In 1932, he used his hollow board to rescue two sailors whose skiff had capsized off Santa Monica Beach, proving the usefulness of his invention as a lifesaving device.
- In the 1930s, Blake invented an early version of a sailboard, which are now used for the sport of windsurfing.
- He authored the first book on the history of surfing, "Hawaiian Surfboard," in 1935.
- During World War II, Blake enlisted in the U.S. Coast Guard at age 40, teaching swimming and ocean rescue, and serving on a munitions loading team.
- Blake had one U.S. patent.