

Uncovering the Untold Story: Real Start Up Starting Surfing in New England 1964-1968



Surfing has always been associated with the sunny beaches of California and Hawaii, but did you know that there was a real start-up revolutionizing the sport on the cold and unpredictable waters of New England from 1964 to 1968? In this article, we dive into the untold story of how a group of passionate individuals

created a surfing scene that would put New England on the surfing map. From innovative board designs to braving freezing conditions, this is a tale of true dedication and love for the sport.

Braving the Elements: Surfing New England

New England's coastline is known for its rugged beauty, dramatic cliffs, and unpredictable weather conditions. While not an obvious choice for surfers, a group of local enthusiasts saw the potential in the region's waves. In 1964, a small crew of pioneers set out to conquer the untamed waters of New England. With no established surf spots or community, they had to rely on their determination and resourcefulness to make their dream a reality.



Surfing Through Time - Book 1: A real "Start-up" - Starting Surfing In New England 1964-1968

by Willard C. Somers(Kindle Edition)

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The Birth of a Start-up: Innovation and Collaboration

With a lack of proper gear specifically designed for the unique conditions of New England, the budding surfers had to get creative. They experimented with different board shapes and sizes, incorporating elements from both shortboards

and longboards. This led to the development of the "New England style" surfboard, which was shorter and wider than traditional boards, allowing for better maneuverability in the region's powerful waves.

In addition to board design, the start-up scene in New England brought together individuals with various backgrounds and skills. Surfers, designers, craftsmen, and entrepreneurs joined forces to create a thriving community centered around the sport. They exchanged knowledge, shared surf reports, and even started their own surfboard manufacturing workshops. This collaboration fueled the growth of the surfing culture in New England and transformed it into a true start-up scene.

Challenges and Triumphs

Creating a surfing scene in New England was not without its challenges. The harsh weather conditions, frigid water temperatures, and lack of established surf breaks made it a constant battle. Winter surfing sessions required thick wetsuits and a strong will to brave the freezing waters. However, it was precisely this adversity that united the surfers and pushed them to overcome their limitations.

As word spread about the emerging surf scene in New England, surfers from other parts of the country started to take notice. The region's unique waves attracted professional surfers, who saw the challenge as an opportunity for growth. Several iconic surf competitions were organized, showcasing the talent and determination of the New England surfers. These events put the region on the map, and soon enough, New England became a destination for surfers seeking a different kind of challenge.

The Legacy Lives on

Today, the legacy of the real start-up that started surfing in New England from 1964 to 1968 lives on. The surfers of that era have become local legends, and

their stories inspire the next generation of surfers braving the icy waves. Surf schools and shops have flourished along New England's coastline, offering a wide range of services to both locals and visitors.

The start-up mindset that drove the founders of New England's surfing scene continues to thrive. Inspired by the spirit of innovation, surfers in the region have developed new board designs, wetsuits, and accessories specifically tailored for the challenges posed by the cold waters. This ongoing commitment to pushing boundaries and adapting to New England's unique conditions keeps the legacy alive and ensures that the region remains a vibrant surfing hub.

The real start-up that kick-started surfing in New England from 1964 to 1968 stands as a testament to the power of passion and perseverance. Against all odds, a small group of surfers turned a seemingly improbable dream into a reality. Their dedication and innovation not only created a thriving surfing community but also put New England on the global surfing map. So, next time you think of surfing, remember the unsung heroes who braved the cold waters and created a legacy that continues to inspire generations of surfers.



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Surfing Through Time is a two-volume set about "surfing for life." In the last several years, things have transpired that inspired me to write a life history of "Surfing Through Time." covering fifty-five years. It has been a process, like the genesis of most books.

I wanted to answer some questions of and for myself. My answers may, in some way I hope, help you answer questions of and for yourselves. Your questions may look very different, but my description of both the underlying principles and the decision processes may help, since I think those aspects are appropriate to the experiences of all of us.

Anyway, Book One is the story of creating one of the first beach side surfboard shops in New England in 1964, and then extending that (as the surfing wave swelled) to five shops over the period 1964-1968. The book celebrates all the people involved, and most of all, all the young people who started to surf during that period and have carried fond memories and a love for the ocean in both their bodies and their hearts to this day. What we learned about life, opportunity, challenges, and our own characters and skills has served us well, I believe. It also talks a good deal about a gentleman named Hobie Alter, who served as a kind mentor to me and is renowned for fostering surfing, making beautiful surfboards, and creating the "Hobie Cat" catamaran sailboat. I wrote my Harvard Business School Thesis on the Hobie Surfboard Company, and the thesis is included as an appendix to Book One.

Surfing Through Time Book Two will be out shortly. It extends the "surfing for life" adventures, fleshing out a story of both family and business life by adding a recreational third leg, "soul surfing" for fifty additional years. In my case, I believe

I couldn't have achieved what I did without the contribution of practicing my favorite sport in the oceans worldwide.

In each of the two books, I have tried to bring out the value of living life fully, treating the challenges and life lessons, and forming "precepts" which might be helpful you as well.

One more thing about Surfing Through Time Book One, A Real 'Startup' - Surfing In New England 1964-1968 is that this narrative has also been well treated by famed filmmaker Will Lucas in his documentary film "Origins – The Narragansett Surf Shops 1964-1967." Much of the source material for Book One of "Surfing Through Time" and for the movie is common, and I am indebted to Will for his sensitivity and fidelity.

Sadly, Will Lucas died in July of 2018, and my urgency in completing this narrative was magnified. As reiterated throughout, surfing is and was important to me, and both the sport and the concept have, undeniably, I suggest, become important in and to the culture. I wanted to write about those "waves," and to tie life and surfing's threads into one person's eighty year ocean tapestry.

So why two books, and what are the underlying threads between the two (which, in many ways, is also a core thread in the movie "Origins...")? I guess the key thread is "Surfing For Life," which was actually an alternative title we considered for this book. Anyway, it is the story of our establishment of a surfboard business and the extension of the surfing culture in New England from its earliest roots to a robust wave which is still cresting, 50 years later. I hope you like it.



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