

The Riverstone Swimming Pool

Rosemary Phillis from information provided by Norm & Shirley Wallace

The first Riverstone Swimming Pool was officially opened on Saturday 15 December 1962, following years of hard work and determination by a small number of people and the local community. Much of the drive behind the fundraising was led by Norm Wallace, his wife Shirley and Eric Martin who week after week sold tickets in dinner raffles. In recognition of the work of Mr Wallace the pool was officially named the Norman Wallace Pool.

Prior to construction of the pool residents swam in Eastern and South Creeks and local dams. In 1926 a swimming carnival was held in Eastern Creek, the event organised by the Riverstone P&C and the Riverstone Swimming Club.¹ Over the years there were a number of drownings and despite the obvious need for a pool nothing was done to establish a safe place for people to swim.

In 1950 the Riverstone Civic Centre Co-operative was formed to raise funds to improve facilities in the area, with one of the main aims being a swimming pool.² The Co-operative raised funds by selling shares in the organisation and encouraging people to run fund raising activities. In a notice titled 'Message to Parents', the Co-operative summed up the situation frankly:-

... It is most important that children learn to swim..... Hundreds of children in this town and district are denied this essential training or are compelled to travel long distances to obtain it. Children have an urge to swim. They like nothing better. It is not surprising, therefore, that children swim in the local creek. Do we - - the residents of Riverstone - - wish to see our children swim amongst the dead dogs and cats?.....Can we stand by and see children drowned or their health ruined? A swimming pool for Riverstone is an obvious necessity.

A meeting was held by the Co-operative on 15 October 1951 regarding the Olympic Pool and other amenities including a hall, bowling green and gymnasium.³ One of the major fundraisers of the Civic Centre Co-operative was a Festival in 1953. The fundraiser combined a concert arranged by Noela Strange-Muir at the RSL Hall featuring the 'Famous Riverstone School Choir', a carnival and barbecue at the Riverstone Park the next evening and a gymkhana at the Riverstone Park.

In the early 1950s the Civic Centre Co-operative bought a number of parcels of land to build a swimming pool, bowling club and civic centre. After examining the costs and returns, they decided to build a bowling club first.

Plans for raising funds for the pool through the Co-operative had not come to fruition. On 1 May 1957 a meeting was held and the Riverstone Swimming Pool Committee was formed. The office bearers were President, Mr L. Schilling; Secretary, Mr N. Wallace; Treasurer, Mrs N. Wallace; finance committee, Messrs Warr, Gill, Potter, New and Turnbull. The aim was to "obtain a pool so that every child within the Riverstone, Schofields, Marsden Park, Vineyard and Rouse Hill area would be taught to swim".

Locals made donations towards the fund and the first major fundraiser was a monster gymkhana which was held at the Riverstone Park on 19 July 1957. The gymkhana was a great success, raising nearly £200.

Other fundraisers included a Mannequin Parade, Bonfire night, football day, Melbourne Cup sweep, bottle drives, guessing competitions and a performance of H.M.S. Pinafore at the Olympia Theatre by the Schofields P&C which was said to be “a really good performance”.⁴

By early 1959 the initial enthusiasm had worn off, with funds standing at £800. Some felt the failure of the Co-operative showed that raising sufficient funds was beyond the community. Despite the apathy, the committee and particularly the Wallaces continued their fundraising efforts, the major source of funds coming from weekly dinner guessing competitions (the prize being a basket of meat and groceries). They also had a donation box with a picture painted on the top by Billy Griffen from Marsden Park.⁵

In 1959 a ‘barometer’ was erected near Conway’s newsagency to show the level of funds raised. The barometer was *painted in attractive colours and shows two children in their swimming costumes, with colourful towels, all ready for a swim*. The sign is thought to have been painted by Norm Crutchel.

Initially the amount needed was £2000, but as the years passed the amount grew. The Committee had raised around £3000 and finally at a special meeting of Blacktown Council on 9 August 1961 £6000 was allocated to finance the £13000 project for the construction of two pools and dressing sheds.

In 1961 the office bearers were: President, Mr N. Wallace; Vice Presidents, Mr S. Lane, Mr E. Martin, Mr E. Graham; Secretary, Mrs N. Wallace; Treasurer, Mr R. Bates; Committee Members, Messrs C.V. Dennis, A.T. Christie, J. Danks, H.L. Bower, E. New, S. Lane, E. Martin and E. Graham.⁶

The sites considered for the pool included land next to the Bowling Club and the grounds of the Primary School. The pool was eventually built on a three acre block which belonged to the Education Department. After about two years of haggling the Department transferred the land to the Blacktown Council.⁷

The pool complex was to include two pools, one 60ft by 30ft with a depth of 3ft at each end, sloping to 5ft at its deepest point; the other 30ft by 15ft with an overall depth of 15in. Apart from the pools there was to be a kiosk, Managers office, First Aid Room and dressing rooms to be built of Besser Vibropac blocks, with three showers and toilet facilities for both sexes.

The main pool would hold 40,000 gallons, the wading pool 5,000 gallons, with the water to be turned over at least five times daily by the Skim filter type plant installed at the pool. To ensure a satisfactory standard of filtration the maximum number to be admitted at one time was to be 400.⁸

Tender for construction of the pool was won by Mr Sairman and work commenced in early 1962. Periods of rain and other delays meant that the pool was not completed until late 1962.

The Riverstone District Children's Swimming Pool Committee had raised £3,234/5/9 towards the swimming pool, a fundraising effort that was described as being "herculean".

An ad on 5 October 1962 called for applications for pool staff and read in part as follows:-

*Pool superintendent (male), £21/19/- per week; male pool attendant £18/16/- per week;
Female pool attendant £13/19/- per week.*

The first pool attendant was Mr Brooks of Dundas. Admission charges were 1/6 for adults, children under 15 years 6d and children under 5 free.

Ald. Ashley Brown, Mayor of Blacktown officially opened the pool on 15 December. At the time Mr Brown said *the cost of such an amenity could not be measured in pounds shillings and pence, but in the good it did for the community. Ald. Brown named the pool the Norman Wallace Pool in honour of the President of the Riverstone Pool Committee, Mr Norman Wallace.....*⁹

The pool was an immediate success. The *Blacktown Advocate* of 9 January 1963 reported that the pool:- *has been accepted by the majority of Riverstone children as their favourite holiday resort. The record crowd at the pool was 1,154 on December 23. The average number each day was 600.*

A Swimming Club under the direction of Mr Brooks, the manager, has been formed and 120 children are already taking lessons in the 'learn to swim' classes. Schools throughout the district will take advantage of the 'learn to swim' classes during the ensuing school term.

There was a need for the 'learn to swim' classes. In a newspaper article in the early 1960s it was stated that a census of Riverstone School pupils revealed *that only 20% of the total enrolment can swim.* The popularity of the pool continued and the *Riverstone Press* of 25 February 1965 reported that *Diana Clark was the 100,000th child through the turnstiles at the pool.*

Adult 'learn to swim' classes were held Tuesday and Thursday evenings and classes for children were held on Monday to Saturday mornings. The adult classes were popular as many of the adults in the district had not previously had the opportunity to learn to swim. My father learnt to swim when he was thirty five and recalls being the only male in a group of women.

The main pool may not have been Olympic sized, but served its purpose well. Thousands of children and adults learnt to swim in it. I remember my 'learn to swim' classes, rain, hail or shine, wearing a piece of coloured ribbon pinned to my costume denoting which level I had reached.

As the pool was not a full sized one, taking your swimming certificate test in the mid 1960s involved swimming from one corner of the pool, across to the middle, treading water and then swimming to the opposite corner of the pool.

In 1973 a new Olympic Pool was added to the swimming centre, along with a new office complex, kiosk and change rooms. Due to a problem with the pool floor, the pool did not open until 1974. After the Olympic Pool was built, the original pool was still popular, as the main pool was utilised for training, carnivals and swimming clubs.

In 1993 the wading pool was converted into a leisure pool equipped with fountain and a sun cover, the pool area was landscaped and a number of barbecues were installed. The leisure pool was the winner of a Keep Australia Beautiful Award in the same year.

Riverstone now has two swimming clubs and you only have to drive past on a hot summer's day to see that the swimming centre is still a popular venue.

¹ *Windsor & Richmond Gazette*, 12 March 1926 & 2 April 1926

² Ad for 1st birthday *Blacktown Advocate* 8 November 1951

³ Advertising flyer for event

⁴ Interview with Norm and Shirley Wallace, 10 July 1999

⁵ Interview with Norm and Shirley Wallace, 10 July 1999

⁶ Undated newspaper article

⁷ Interview with Norm and Shirley Wallace, 10 July 1999

⁸ Undated newspaper article

⁹ *Hawkesbury Courier*, 20 December 1962