

Dive Into 1967

The Construction of Metuchen's Municipal Pool

The Space Race, Summer of Love, Cold War, and Vietnam. Humans had not yet walked on the Moon, Lyndon B. Johnson was President, Jimmy Hoffa went to prison, and Stalin's daughter defected to the United States. Muhammed Ali declined military service, Elvis Presley & Priscilla Beaulieu were married in Las Vegas, The Beatles released *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, the first issue of the *Rolling Stone* was published in San Francisco, and Jimi Hendrix released *Are You Experienced*. Closer to home, JFK Memorial Hospital opened, there was violent racial conflict in Plainfield and Newark, and the Metuchen Municipal Pool opened.

Based on a review of back issues of *The Recorder* and records in the archives of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society, it appears that push for a municipal pool in Metuchen began in earnest in the very early 1960s.

Advocates formed the Metuchen Municipal Pool Association and lobbied the public and Borough Council to pass an ordinance for the pool's creation as a safe, healthy, and wholesome space for local youth to spend



Letters to the Editor

Help Our Youth-- Our Major Resource

TO THE EDITOR:

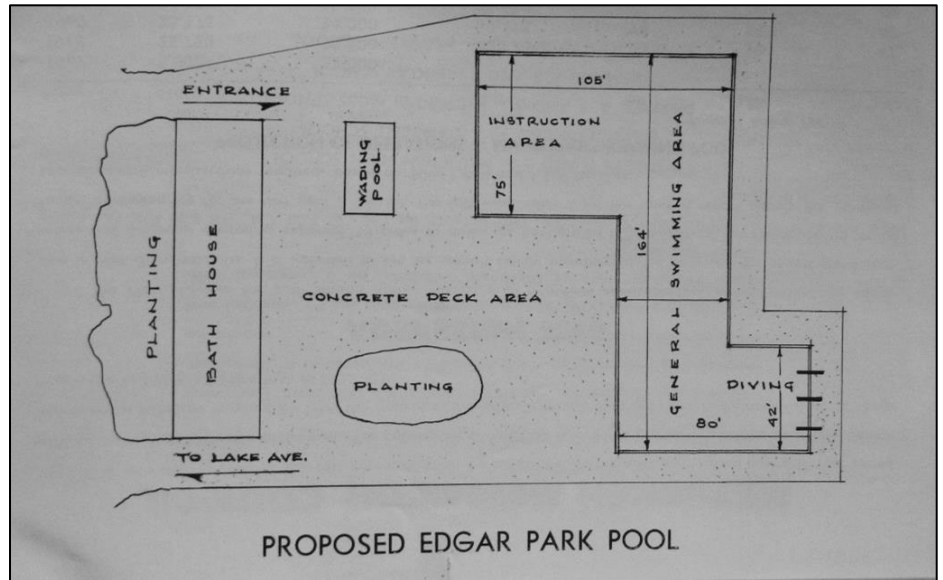
I was among the spectators in Borough Hall last week when one of Metuchen's residents asked council to disband the Municipal Pool Association. Among the reasons proposed to justify this action was the

the summer. A number of undeveloped tracts in the Borough were considered as potential sites, but eventually a site in Edgar Woods was chosen as the preferred location. In 1963, a large, two-page insert was included in *The Criterion* outlining the benefits and support by the Metuchen Recreation Commission.

However, the proposal was met with opposition, organized by a group called

“Citizens for Sound Government.” These opponents feared high construction and operating costs, potential crime risks, and increased traffic. However, support for the initiative was just as strong and over the next four years the number of advocates continued to grow. The Race Relations Council, Metuchen Area Chamber of Commerce, and a variety of Borough leaders spoke publicly in favor of the pool’s benefits, and it was touted by many businesses as an amenity for the community. This support was buoyed along the way by successful and financially solvent municipal pool efforts in New Jersey towns such as Springfield (1962), Millburn (1962), Hillside (1964), and Cranford (1965).

In early 1967, the Metuchen Municipal Pool Association doubled down on the campaign and it was finally approved by the Borough Council. The approval was challenged, and then subsequently sent to a special public referendum.



"Should the Borough of Metuchen construct a municipal swimming pool in a portion of Edgar Park owned by the Borough of Metuchen, the estimated cost of which would be \$305,000, which would be financed by a municipal bond issue and be paid for by seasonal and daily admission fees of Metuchen residents on a proposed self-liquidating basis?"



On March 6, 1967, a total of 3,234 Metuchenites went to the polls and voted in the issue. The final tally was 1,748 in favor, 1,477 opposed. Councilman Donald Wernik said he was “never more proud of Metuchen than I am today” and that he was overjoyed that the community didn’t “fall prey to the last-minute injection of racial and religious” arguments.

The architect selected for the project was John MacWilliam, and Paddock Pools, founded 1947 and still in operation today, was chosen for the construction. Work began soon after the vote and with the opening day scheduled for July 4th.

Season subscriptions for families were set at \$60 per year, or \$100 for two years. Daily admissions were set at \$2 on weekends, and on weekdays 75 cents for children and \$1.50 for adults.

Unfortunately, the Spring and early Summer weather of 1967 was not cooperative and caused a delay in the grand opening of the pool from July 4 to August 1. But, as reported in *The Recorder*,

June was cold, July was showery, but August 1 dawned sparkingly warm — a perfect day to go swimming... a perfect day for the opening of the Metuchen municipal pool.

At 10:08 Tuesday morning, Mayor Thomas Weber cut the ribbon opening the pool to its first users — 1,500 kids from Metuchen's seven playgrounds. Sharing the ribbon-cutting was Councilman Eugene Haley.



In a short opening speech, Mayor Weber termed Haley the “man more responsible than anyone for this pool. No one has devoted more of his energy, more of his life to this project.” Haley said later, “The faces of those kids were the payoff for all the work.” Surveying the hundreds of people using the pool Tuesday evening, Haley said, “These are the people who backed us and withstood the five years of frustration with us. They’re the type of people who say, if this is for the kids, then we’re for it.’ Metuchen is a kids’ town, and the attitude of the people in supporting the school budgets and in supporting the pool shows it.”

Haley added that pool users had complimented him the most on the large size of the pool and on its overall appearance. After months of delays due to rate, swimmers were greeted Tuesday with a sparkling L-shaped pool surrounded by green sod, and with a wading pool, complete with a fountain, for the small fry. More than 3,600 residents used the pool the first day, Manager Ed Adams reported at the end of Tuesday’s opening.



In 1968 efforts to construct the bathhouse ramped up, and in 1969 – following a change in Borough Government – daily admissions were eliminated, a move which was vigorously opposed by the Race Relations Council and those responsible for bringing the pool about.

But, despite that added restriction, it seems that compared with what was

happening nationally in the 1960s, that municipal pools were being constructed in New Jersey was unusual. To try and put this in perspective, the Society contacted nationally-renowned historian Jeff Wiltse, author of *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America*, to get a sense of where this fit into the story.

Wiltse graciously responded, and reiterated that, when viewed within the national context, it would have been unusual for white residents to support the funding of a public pool in 1967 that they intended to be racially integrated, and “that it occurred in Metuchen and other surrounding

communities, there must have been a pocket of progressive-minded people and strong progressive leadership in the area.”

And for that leadership, founding Metuchen Pool Association Members, Metuchen’s children and families from the past fifty years thank you *very, very* much.

Compiled on behalf of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society for the 50th Anniversary of the Opening of the Metuchen Municipal Pool (August 1, 2017) by Tyreen A. Reuter in July 2017. All errors and omissions are solely the responsibility of the author, not the Society.

Membership Fees	
1. Family membership, Husband, wife and children .	\$60.00 per season
2. Members of household over 21, part of family membership	10.00 per season
3. Individual membership	35.00 per season
4. Senior Citizen membership	15.00 per season

DAILY ADMISSION RATE:	
Monday thru Friday	
Children 4 years thru 15 years	\$.75
Adults and children 16 years and older	1.50
Saturday – Sunday and Holidays	
All persons 4 years old and up	2.00



THANKS DADI-- Among the 514 families in Metuchen who now have pool memberships the Eugene Haley family is getting an extra special treat for their money, Mrs. Haley and her five sons are also getting a chance to see Councilman Gene, too. Haley was one of the prime movers in establishing the pool and getting it open -- after a series of problems-- last week. The Haley boys are 1 to r, Richard, John, Peter, Kenneth (on Mrs. Haley's lap) and Jeff.