

## The Ageless Allure of the Swimming Pool



Brookline Preservation Commission

In 1897, the Town of Brookline, Mass., built "THE TANK," the first municipal pool in the U.S.

> **S**wimming in a clear, refreshing pool is a luxury prized by civilizations dating back to the Greeks, Romans and Egyptians, and still an elixir for many in the modern age.

Although the Greeks didn't include swimming in their Olympic Games, they did practice the sport, often building swimming pools near, but distinct from, their baths. The first heated swimming pool is credited to the wealthy Roman lord Gaius Maecenas in the first century B.C. And what should be unearthed earlier this year in Cairo, Egypt? A 650-year-old swimming pool buried beneath a palace. It seems that Egyptians enjoyed their workouts in 1352.

But swimming pools didn't become popular with the bourgeois until the mid-to-latter part of the 19th century. In 1837, six indoor pools with diving boards were known to exist in London. Across the Atlantic, the first indoor municipally operated pool in the U.S. was built in

1897 in Brookline, Mass., also the birthplace of John F. Kennedy. "It was the first public pool in America," recounts Bob Lynch, director of recreation for the town. Somewhere along the way, the pool picked up the nickname "The Tank" and served generations of swimmers until it was replaced with an Olympic-sized pool, diving well and beginners' pool now occupying the same spot as the original.

But it took the introduction of swimming events at the 1896 Olympic Games to give rise to a pool construction boom that roared across the 1920s. Several thousand institutional and public pools were built, as well as numerous estate and private pools. It was the start of something big.

Even during the Depression years, swimming was a popular diversion that kept new pool construction going. President Roosevelt installed the first pool in the White House, and the WPA—a New Deal program established in 1935—built

numerous municipal pools across the country. Some were great examples of architecture including the Holton, Kan., pool with its solid limestone bathhouse. The 385,000-gallon pool and surrounding complex were completely renovated in 1985 and use remains strong.

Fate hasn't been as kind to the WWII-era Hey Rookie pool in San Pedro, Calif., where preservationists are seeking to save the neglected and graffiti-covered pool by having it listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Soldiers at Fort MacArthur Garrison used proceeds from their popular musical revue, "Hey, Rookie," to fund pool construction in 1943. For many young recruits slated for overseas service, Hey Rookie pool was their first experience with swimming. <<<

Built by the WPA, the Holton Municipal Pool sported a mid-pool platform. Renovated several times, the pool remains in use today.

### FUN FACTS

>>> In 1879 King Louis III of Bavaria built a swimming pool in castle Linderhof. This is believed to be the first artificial wave pool and also featured electrically heated water and light.

>>> The Farnham Swimming Club in England was established in 1893, five years before the club's first swimming pool was built. Club members swam in a fenced-off section of the river Wey until the first swimming baths were built in 1898 to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria. The open-air pool was 25 yards long, without any form of heating, but included changing facilities for both men and women.

>>> The indoor pool at West Virginia's famed Greenbrier resort opened in 1912. The Bath Wing, as it was called, "might have been the pride of Rome," according to one writer's description. The huge pool was housed under a glass dome and encircled by broad walks. Mud baths and other spa treatments were generated from the nearby White Sulphur Springs.

>>> The first swimming pool built at the White House was completed in 1933 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Roosevelt, who suffered from polio, built the pool in the West Wing so he could use it to help strengthen his upper body. *The New York Daily News* helped him raise money from American citizens to pay for pool construction. In 1969, President Richard Nixon had the pool filled and converted to an area for the press corps to gather. In 1975, an outdoor pool was built during the presidency of Gerald Ford.

>>> Sources: InfoPlease.com, The Farnham Swimming Club/UK and Wikipedia.



City of Holton, Kan., Archives