

A Brief History of the Ridgetop Pool

Background

World War Two was over and Johnny Doughboy and his beloved waiting bride were united in matrimony. The GI Bill making available Gov't Loans for discharged military men made it easy to purchase a home. The home building boom was in full swing. Home builder, Carol Fleming broke ground in a new area called Westhampton Hills which encompassed Ridgetop, Horsepen and Borden Roads and some small streets. Once the hard surface roads were in and the water and power lines were installed the homes began to be erected with the constant pounding of hammers. All the land in the area was committed to home building except for a small lot at the corners of Horsepen and Devon roads. It was later offered as a location for the pool but it was too small for a neighborhood pool. Also the corner lot of Ridgetop and Durwood Crescent which was originally designated as the "well Lot" was offered as a possible pool location. This occurred after Henrico County installed the water lines down Ridgetop Road and it also was too small for a pool location.

As each home was finished, young families were quickly settled. In the year 1953 there were 80 children on Ridgetop Road alone. Horsepen Road could claim an equal number of children residing there. The need for a recreational area that would be safe for the children began to slowly appear. Perhaps we could find room for a baseball field with swing and slides. There wasn't a level field or space in the hilly community which could accommodate a baseball field.

This writer moved into his home in 1952. It was the first house built on the east side of Ridgetop Road. The hard surface road of Ridgetop only ran as far as Durwood Crescent and ended there as a turn around circle. After that it was a mud and gravel road leading to the area later now known as College Hills. At one point on the high side of where Chandler Road now runs, was a gravel pit from which the contractors were using the gravel to fill in low road spots in the College Hills area.

The area of New Westham was experiencing the same need of space for the children to safely play. The contractor in that area offered a small similar piece of land near Dogwood Road which still stands vacant. Duntreath was experiencing the same need for a safe place for children to play and families to meet. The word got around, through the wives talking about it in the local A&P store and soon the husbands were involved. The first meeting of the search committee met in the lower level of the Wren house at 1011 Ridgetop Road where plans were organized.

As the parents read about the almost daily youthful drownings in the James River, the conversations shifted to a "do-able project." Since there was no level land available in Westhampton Hills, something should be done to teach swimming so children could have a safe place to swim and would not be tempted to cool off in the James River. There were no pools in Henrico County. The various County neighborhood schools did not support swim teams and the near City of Richmond

lacked a program to teach swimming. The thought of a cold summer dip after coming home from work brought the working fathers to concentrate quickly on a "swim pool" and to forget the baseball diamond.

Drawing on the potential revenue supplied by the population of Duntreath, New Westham and Westhampton Hills would support a neighborhood pool. The only piece of land which could accommodate a pool facility was that which Mrs. Lipscomb owned from Three Chopt Road clear through to Ridgetop Road. (Name of street is now Everview. FB)

Given the okay from the committee this writer called Mrs. Lipscomb for an appointment to talk about purchasing a piece of her land. This meeting occurred in the summer of 1955. The first thing Mrs. Lipscomb wanted to know was, "Are you a real estate agent?" The answer was no and that she would be talking to several members of a community who wished to provide an area recreational swimming pool for the neighborhood children. Attending this first meeting was Gene Deas, Frank McCormick, Leroy Brown (our attorney) George Nelback and this writer. The result of the meeting is summed up in two lines. (1) She had not thought of selling any part of the land at that time. (2) She said she would think about it.

Here's the background. Mrs. Lipscomb was in her 70's, living alone in another piece of property at 900 West Franklin St. At that time the property on Three Chopt Road had two houses on the very back of the level plot of land. After passing the two built houses, the Lipscomb land ran down hill to the little creek and then moved up the hill on the other side of the creek to Ridgetop Road. Her single brother lived alone in one of the houses. The other was unoccupied. The Henrico County line runs half way through the property as it does in the Village Shopping Center. (We knew this.) Mrs. Lipscomb was paying property taxes to both the city and the county which may have been a reason for her "thinking about it" answer.

We told her we would consider the bottom piece of land where the little creek runs through the property. We wanted the land to be on the Ridgetop side of the creek. We knew if we could purchase any piece of her land that the chance of her selling to another with a neighborhood pool in the back yard would be a hard sell. She was aware of this too and that influenced the price we finally paid. Her decision was slow in coming but being an outside sales person I would call her asking if it was okay to come by for a visit. Often I brought a "Whitman Sampler" or a flowering plant, or a Home & Gardens magazine. It got to the point where she enjoyed my visits and soon agreed to sell us a nice size piece of the land on both sides of the creek. With Leroy Brown's help we completed a contract to purchase the land.

The steering committee engaged neighbors to recruit neighbors and accept \$100.00 toward the building of the pool. The building contractors, Carl Fleming (Westhampton Hills) and Alfred Blake (College Hills) each donated \$22,000.00 toward our pool project. Wm Bird who was also a builder offered a loan of \$1,000.00 to help us along. We agreed to return his loan at a later date and did so. The three areas were

solicited and the best achieved membership was 67 families who advanced the \$100 dollars. With Leroy Brown (attorney) and George Heifert as our accountant and treasurer, we approached the First & Merchants Bank at Patterson & Libby to establish a loan for the total project. After seeing the names of the 67 first joiners for the project, Mr. Swan of F & M granted the loan.

By February 1956 we had contracted with the Paddock Pool Company with an estimated completion date of July 1, 1956. Every day past that date would cost the contractor a penalty of \$100 per day. When the contractor dug deep to accommodate the diving area of the pool, he discovered a fast flowing spring. The spring had to be capped before they could continue the pool construction. The children's pool was to be a large circle so there would be no fighting as to who owned a corner. The filter house would handle the problems of filling the pool and keeping the water filtered and clear. The large pool would be the standard length of 25 yards long with four lane width at the diving well. Moving toward the shallow end of the pool, it was decided to expand the pool one lane on each side, making it six lanes since there would be more activity in this area. (wedge shaped). This proved to be a mistake when it came to swimming meets. Only four lanes were usable which meant the meets were very long and some of the younger swimmers needed to go to bed before their events came up. There were no electrical outlets pool side so the scorers table was lighted by candle. Our swim meets looked more like a "Luau" but the workers continued on throughout the night keeping score.

The pool was completed and we blessed the day that Henrico County put a six inch water main down Ridgetop Road because the pool could be filled at night and families were not left without water for daily needs. The pool opened July 4th, 1956 with the same 67 members who committed their \$100.

The thing that surprised the committee was the fact that the county permitted us to open a pool without toilet facilities. If not acted on quickly the pool would have been shut down as quickly as it opened. To provide a toilet facility at the lower level would require an expensive pump to get the waste up the hill to the sewer line on Ridgetop Road. Further to procure liability coverage for mishaps around the pool we had to purchase a "Fire Policy" for a swimming pool.

Fortunately Mrs. Lipscomb was invited out to see how wisely we had used her land. She was astounded to see the beautiful blue white diamond pool surrounded by the evergreen trees. She expected to see the creek with a large dirt wall containing a swimming "pond" and a swing rope hanging from a tree. When we asked for her help for more land up the hill so we could locate the toilets at a proper level, she granted us the land we needed. Quickly we engaged a builder and plumber and the waste problem was solved.

Our first tennis courts were basically on clay but with more land and fencing they were macadamized and the tennis people multiplied our membership. Robert Brooks

(Sid) now residing at Cedarfield can fill in many detail of the tennis matches and the tennis activity.

We had another casualty when a tremendous thunder storm occurred in our area. For those who don't know this be advised, that the rain falling on the Village parking lot drains into the creek that passes beside our pool. After one really heavy storm the water rose above the creek bed and flooded the pool with its muddy water and debris. The pool was closed immediately, pumped out, cleaned and refilled after the water receded from the pool apron. A quick meeting was held and money was set aside to aid a quick flow of water through the creek just below the pool. Walk out on the bridge to the tennis courts and eyeball the creek bed as it passes the pool area. You will find it lined with cinder block and cement. So far quick floods have not disturbed out summer swims.

A swim team report:

It is believed Ridgetop was the first neighborhood pool in western Henrico and was quickly followed by the Three Chopt Pool on Skipwith Road. Ridgetop entered the local community swim association where all the different neighborhood swim teams compete by age group. In the early years there was a combination of four boys who for awhile were the County & State AAU Champions of their age group. As midget boys and as juniors these four boys were unbeatable in the medley relay. Foster Jennings (backstroke), Par Sims (butterfly), Craig Yagel (breaststroke) Mike Wren (freestyle). Also it is worth note that two of the young swimmers who were started at Ridgetop pool qualified for the 1984 Olympics Trials. They swam their best swims but the competition was fierce. Both graduated from UVA and captained the University's swim team. One achieved All American status in multiple events.

Submitted by
L. Peter Wren
5th Past President and Charter member
Written May 22, 2005

p.s. If I missed any names, please excuse my "age" and "memory." L.P.Wren

Another P.S. by Frances Burch

There are many things to be remembered about Ridgetop. I will add a few random facts to Pete Wren's history.

Another RT swimmer, Peter Elmore, who came along a little later than the AAU champs, swam the English Channel on August 7, 1988; 24 miles in 9 hours and 52 minutes. As of 2004, only 692 successful solo swims have been recorded since 1875 and only 62 of those crossings were accomplished in less than 10 hours. 200 to 300 individuals attempt to swim the Channel every year and only 10 per cent are able to finish. Peter was inducted into the Emory Sports Hall of Fame in 1998.

After Helfert served as treasurer, Adolf Platz took the reins and then George Wagner. George's son, Rick, is now CEO of General Motors. Rick, of course, was a Ridgetop member along with his sister and their parents.

Since we had not land to "spread out from the first tennis courts, RT had to go to the City of Richmond Council, requesting permission to buy a parcel of the Bandy Field property. With help from Straughn Richardson who worked for the city and Wayland Rennie, who was a Council member at the time, we were finally able to get the needed land. This feat was several years in the making.

Straughan Richardson was also President of RT when the big decision was made to enlarge our pool. This was a difficult decision because again, we had no land to accommodate a new pool. The old pool had to go in order for the lovely new pool to be built.

As far as I know, we were the only pool in the West End of Richmond except for CCV and perhaps Westwood. Ginter Park was there and so was Bon Air. For that reason, when my children were on the swim team, there were many children from the city whose parents joined Ridgetop.