

THE RAWHITIROA WAR MEMORIAL POOL

Contributed by Pat O'Connor



Some of the pool builders:

BACK: Vic Belcher, Bill Oldfield, Bob Wood, Brian Tipler, Les Pranker, Ken Walke, Mike Silver, Bill The Dutchman, Roly May, Edgar Askew, ?, John Neal.

FRONT ROW: Dick Silver, Peter Pranker, Peter Bolstad, John Campbell, Paul Every, Pat O'Connor, Ken Rye, Darcy Knuckey. (Photo taken by Lawrie O'Connor).

On 9 January 1986 the *Central Taranaki News* is quoted as saying....

A lonely Rawhitiroa soldier, posted overseas during WWII, wrote to his family saying all children should learn to swim at school. He had learnt overseas, and suggested a pool at Rawhitiroa School, east of Eltham, would be of great benefit. That soldier was killed, but the idea was not and local people set out in 1946 to build a community war memorial pool.

On the 15 July 1947, the inaugural meeting of the War Memorial Pool was held. The purpose of the meeting was to gauge public support.

It took approximately seven years to get everything organised and finalised, the plan, the site, the water supply (which caused some problems), and of course the subsidy to work out. Also to consider was the availability of tiles, a suitable filtration plant and a deep well pump. It was decided that the district would do the building of the complex and that decision resulted in being able to build a larger pool than at first envisaged.

In May 1954, the excavation was finished and all the timber for boxing and shingle was there for the start of what was to become a great team effort for a small community. Pat O'Connor was Foreman of the Works and between him and the chairman, they ensured there were enough workers every day to get the allotted tasks completed on schedule. They would work with the men in the day and then do all the organising in the evenings. What a wonderful help their wives must have been!

On 16 December 1955, just 19 months after the start of building, the locals started swimming in the pool, but it was a long way from being finished. The official opening was held on January 30, 1960, however, it wasn't until one year later that it was all finished. *The Eltham Argus* on 22 January 1960 ran the following notice:

Official Opening

The Rawhitiroa Memorial Pool will be officially opened by the Honourable W.T. Anderton, Minister of Internal Affairs, on Saturday of next week, 30th January at 2 p.m. The official ceremony will be followed by a short programme of swimming events, after which the pool will be open to the public. All friends and patrons of the pool are cordially invited to be present. There will be no charge for admission during the

day, but the pool will be closed to swimming from noon till the completion of the opening ceremony.

After the opening the pool was averaging 2000 swimmers per day as it was the only tiled and filtered pool in the area from Greytown to Hamilton. At that time, cleaning the pool was very hard and reports indicate that it would take two days to clean after so many had used the facility.

The celebrations of opening day was recorded in *The Eltham Argus* 1 February 1960 and here's some of the things that were reported....

Ministerial Tribute to Rawhitiroa Community Effort

"Rawhitiroa must be one of the smallest communities in New Zealand possessing modern swimming baths", said the Hon. W.T. Anderton, Minister of Internal Affairs during the course of his address when officially opening the Memorial Pool on Saturday.

The ceremony was attended by a gathering of about 300 people, including several old settlers who had made a lengthy journey for the purpose.

Mr Every (chairman of the Memorial Pool committee) described the genesis of the movement for establishment of the pool and its gradual development to the present stage stating that the early settlers had shown a very strong community spirit. "Thirty-five years ago", he said, "the first effort was made to provide swimming facilities, but the project lapsed because of the difficulty of obtaining water."

Mr Every gave details of the search for water, including particulars of how the project was financed. He told us all that in the preliminary work, 6,500 yards of clay was removed by voluntary labour. In 1955 the filtration plant was installed and the pool was used for the first time. The following year the learners' pool was built and a concrete surround installed. It was then learned that where a filtration plant was installed, the term "pool" could be applied. Mr Every informed the gathering that in bringing the pool to its present state, 12,000 man hours of voluntary labour were given.

....Never in the history of baths construction have so few done so much for the enjoyment of so many," said Mr R.A. Grace, Chairman of the Eltham County Council.

..."I don't know of any other district which has done so much in a voluntary way", said Mr Anderton, voicing the pleasure he felt in visiting Rawhitiroa, which showed a living picture of

continuity of effort, referring to the fact that labour was always the greatest cost in any construction work. £30,000 was a meagre value to place on such an effort, suggested Mr Anderton, adding that the real value was in the hearts of those people who had laboured to provide the pool. There were only one or two efforts in New Zealand which could be likened to this one. Mr Anderton said he had no fear that the Eltham County Council would fulfil all its promises, and the ratepayers had nothing to worry about, as the pool had been handed over debt free. He paid a tribute to the patience, perseverance, and continuity of effort of all who had engaged in the work; it was a magnificent effort....

The ladies of the district manned the shop for the first years of operation. It was then leased to the custodians for several years until 1971 when it was returned to the control of the ladies where it remained for the next 12 years. The profits were always spent on facilities for the improvement of the pool and grounds. There has been only one alteration to the buildings which was carried out in 1979/80 when the office was enlarged so as to include the shop facility in one building. This was entirely financed by the Ladies Shop Account.

The pool has been and still is, a wonderful amenity for the use of the district and all the visitors that come from around Taranaki and further afield.

(This information has been gathered from the minutes of the many meetings held by the Rawhitiroa Memorial Pool Committees over the years.)



Rawhitiroa Memorial Pool Construction Committee:
BACK ROW: E. Walke, D. W. Knuckey, G. W. Bolstad.
MIDDLE ROW: A. K. Walke, Mrs F. G. Tipler, C. D. Silver, J. McK. Campbell, W. S. Oldfield, J. T. Neal.
FRONT ROW: L. M. O'Connor, Mrs C. D. Silver, P. R. Every, Mrs P. R. Every, P. J. O'Connor.
INSETS: S. W. Askew, E. R. Knuckey, Miss M. G. Baxter.

Pat O'Connor reflects.....

How did it all come about? Mr Paul Every saw the need for a pool to teach the young people of the school and district to swim. Also Rawhitiroa had lost seven young men in the 1st World War and three in the 2nd. World War. This was to be a memorial to them. In 1947 £100 was donated for the purpose, in 1951 the project was accepted as a War Memorial project, and vested in the Eltham County Council. Meetings were held and the district residents agreed to supply the labour to build the pool. A committee was formed as follows:

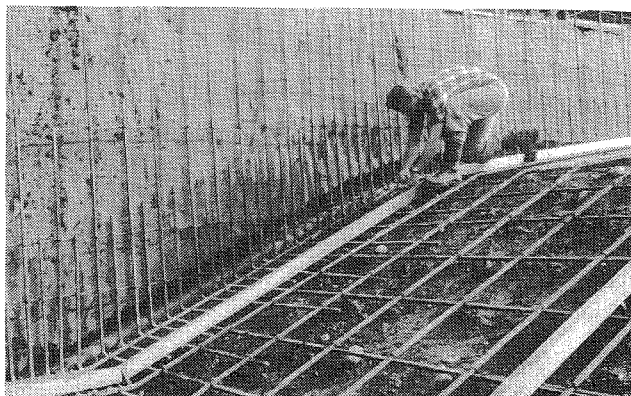
- Mr Paul Every Chairman
- Mrs Phyllis Every Secretary
- Mr Pat O'Connor Works Foreman

Committee:
 Most residents in the district

Work started about 1951 with the digging of two wells to find a supply of water. One was dug to 74 feet but it was dry. A second one was dug to 84 feet and water was found. The next stage was levelling and excavating the site for the pool. Paul Every had a bulldozer and numerous farm tractors were buzzing about shifting some thousands of yards of clay. Joe Menzies from Mangamingi, John O'Neill from Pukengahu and Graham Parkes arrived with their bulldozers and helped out. It was a remarkable example of what could be done with goodwill. All the work had to be done during the farming off-season in the winter.

After that came the pool construction itself. Paul Every had pine trees milled for boxing timber, enough for the whole project. Most of the concrete shingle was delivered on site by the local farmers' trucks. These deliveries consisted of:

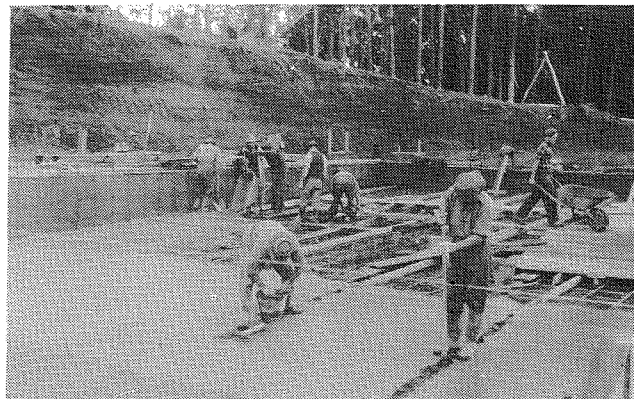
- Concrete Shingle 6609 cubic yards
- Cement 110 tons
- Several tons of 5/8 square reinforcing
 (poles from the Taranaki Electric Power Board)



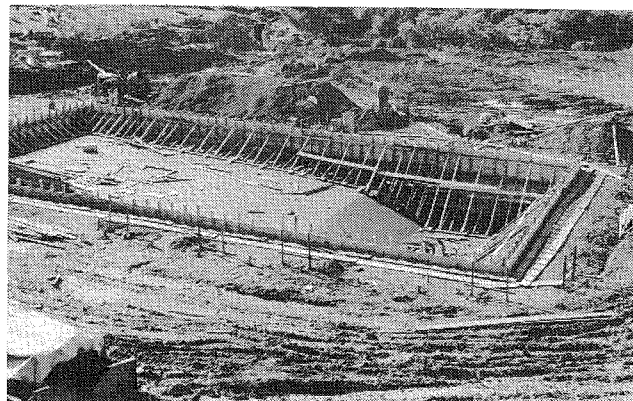
Edgar Askew.

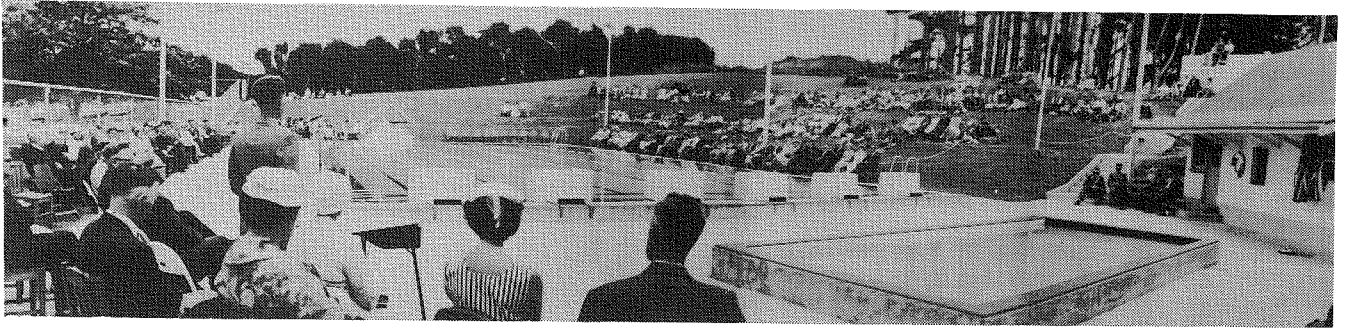


Concreting floor of the pool.



Laying floor of the pool.





Opening day at the pool.

Then came the building of the filter house, the dressing sheds and the office. Also the installation of the filter plant itself. About this time, it was decided to tile the pool. Tiles were ordered from England at a cost of £3,300. The tiles were non-slip but it was two years before they arrived. The installation and fixing was carried out by Mr A. Jenkins, plasterer of Stratford.

Order of work was as follows:

Level site; Mark out pool; Excavate; Install field tile drainage under and around pool (we dug drains and laid out field tiles); Install delivery line; fit reinforcing for pool; concrete floor; build wall boxing; pour wall; build small pool; install delivery lines and drainage lines; surface drainage; concrete around pool; build oblong tank reservoir; build additional balance tank, one in filter house and one under shop; fence the pool area; bulldoze entrance from Horoi Road to the pool (John O'Neill used his bulldozer to do this task)

From the start of the project until it was finally declared open by the Minister of Internal Affairs in 1961, it took approximately nine years.

What are my memories? Paul Every was an able and enthusiastic Chairman. His wife, Phyllis was a most efficient secretary. Practically every resident in the district worked on the construction at some time. The floor of the pool was laid in one day - there were four concrete mixers and twenty or more volunteers with shovels and barrows; the good fellowship amongst those working on this project is always a lasting memory. The ladies of the district did a marvellous job in overseeing the running of the pool for several years until finally the job was taken over by the Eltham County Council. Of those who actually built the pool, very few had an opportunity to learn to swim. Times changed and I think it is fair to say most young people and school children in the district can now swim.

The *Central Taranaki News* further states:

This year (1986) marks the 30th anniversary of the pool which took 15 years to build from its conception to its opening in 1961. Forty-five families spent hundreds of hours excavating the site on Rawhitiroa Road, digging the pool out, pouring concrete and building the sheds and shop. People involved with the initial work say the community spirit to build the pool was "quite phenomenal". Mr Paul Every is quoted as saying..."We got out and raised £900, which was a great amount of money in those days. Then we qualified for a government subsidy, which was a pound for a pound then. The government had set up a memorial fund for people who wished to commemorate those who had died in the war. We had three men who went and we wanted to remember them"

Today, Rawhitiroa War Memorial Swimming Pool has kept up with changing times. Over the years, many additions have been made including a new wing with a shop, barbecues, swings, a diving board and a solar panel designed to prolong the season.

Hundreds of Rawhitiroa children have a handful of early residents to thank for a pool which has taught hundreds how to swim.

Pool Firsts

Nelson Every was the first person to jump into the pool

Nelson Every and Margaret O'Connor laid the last tile at the opening ceremony.

Nelson was also the first person to dive from the diving board On 17 December 1958 Carole Tipler was the first person to swim one mile freestyle (72 lengths).

Sandra Tipler and Margaret Neal swam 880 yards (half a mile) the same day.

On 17 February 1960, four boys swam one mile in the pool.

As a footnote to this chapter, at least two grandchildren of men who built the pool have served as pool custodians. They are Fiona Craig, granddaughter of John McK. Campbell and Sharon O'Connor, granddaughter of Pat O'Connor.

The Rawhitiroa Memorial

Pool Committee

has pleasure in inviting

Mrs. Mrs. J. Neal

to be present at the

Official Opening

of the

MEMORIAL POOL

at

RAWHITIROA

on

Saturday, 30th January 1960

at 2 p.m.



Cleaning the pool.