



## Waterton Swimming Pools

From the time the Hot Springs Reserve was established at Banff in 1885, swimming and swimming pools have been a part of Canadian national park history. Today, much of the swimming in national parks takes place at beaches, but for many years, a number of parks, including Waterton, operated or encouraged the operation of purpose-built swimming pools. The best known of these recreational swimming pools was at Cave and Basin in Banff.

Promoted as a health-giving activity, swimming for recreation and leisure rose in popularity in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In North America, increasingly elaborate community pools were built from the 1920s forward.<sup>1</sup> Going to the pool became a summer ritual especially for youth who enjoyed the opportunity to mix with the opposite sex.<sup>2</sup> Provision of swimming facilities was one more way to ensure Canadians had an opportunity to enjoy their national parks.



*The Crystal Pool was located on Cameron Falls Drive next to the RCMP Barracks. (Photo: WLNP Archives)*

Lorin Allred was the first person in Waterton to get permission from Ottawa to build a swimming pool in the townsite.<sup>3</sup> He hired Oland and Scott Construction in 1924 to build an 11 metre by 21 metre concrete swimming pool on Cameron Falls Drive immediately west of the present day Royal Canadian Mounted Police barracks.<sup>4</sup>

By July 22 the open air heated pool was being filled with water, ready for use and was an immediate hit with the public. The following season Allred made some

improvements in the steam system and reopened the pool in late June but the heating of the water became a recurring problem.

The liability of operating a swimming pool became a reality in 1925 when non-swimmer Elmer Ginther, 20, of Fort Macleod, went beyond the rope line into deep water and got into trouble. The pool attendant, in a panic, dove to help Ginther and cracked his head on the bottom and had to be helped out of the pool. Attempts to revive Ginther were unsuccessful.<sup>5</sup> The report of the death was placed on page 10 of *The Lethbridge Herald* where readers were less likely to notice it and patronage at the pool did not seem to be affected by the event.

But what was noticed was that the promise of heated water was not quite up to snuff so Allred decided to cover the pool in 1926 with a roof made partially of glass to prevent the chilling effects of adverse weather.<sup>6</sup> Allred, aware his pool wasn't operating at top efficiency, made an effort to improve the water piping and heating system.<sup>7</sup> Allred hoped the roof would solve his problem but the partial glass roof proved to be a mistake in snow country. The roof was crushed by more than two metres of snow and ice in a December, 1929 storm.<sup>8</sup>



*The roof of the Crystal Pool collapsed under the weight of two metres of snow in December, 1929.*

*(Photo: Harwood Collection, WLNP Archives)*

The following season, having made arrangements for a new roof, Allred hosted a successful swim meet at the end of August.<sup>9</sup> In April, 1931 Allred sold the pool, by then known as the Crystal Pool, to his brother-in-law Del H. Ellison<sup>10</sup> who had several other businesses in the park which included apartment and cabin rentals and a grocery store on the north end of Waterton Avenue (now a parking lot). To improve the pool, he had a new roof installed and not only hired lifeguard-pool attendants, he also offered swimming instruction for a fee.<sup>11</sup>

The Crystal Pool was the site of the 1937 Southern Alberta Swimming Meet under the sponsorship of the Ladies' Penguin Swimming Club of Lethbridge.<sup>12</sup> The meet proved to be a highlight of the summer and included a brief welcome by Supt. Herbert Knight and presentations by Senator W. A. Buchanan of Lethbridge.

In the years that followed problems plagued the pool which operated sporadically and mostly at the displeasure of park officials. One last attempt at solving the problems was made in 1948 when a new filtering system and heating plant were installed. Finally in October, 1949 it became apparent that it was imperative to close the facility until something was done to replace the building and dressing rooms and a thorough check up made of the water circulating apparatus. The operation was deemed unsafe, the building hazardous and liable to collapse, the pool dirty and completely unsatisfactory for visitors to use.<sup>13</sup> The pool was closed for good in 1949.

For the next 11 seasons, the only swimming was at Linnet Lake. The call for a pool was expressed locally time and time again beginning in 1951. *The Lethbridge Herald* tried its best, in an editorial, to justify federal government attention and investment: "Waterton meets the implied requirements admirably, as measured by the number of people visiting it, has been phenomenal. It badly needs a swimming pool...."<sup>14</sup>

Residents and visitors alike urged the government to build a modern pool in the townsite but it took until 1959 for an appropriation of \$400,000 to be designated for the project.<sup>15</sup> The contract was awarded to Bennett and White of Calgary and several other

local subcontractors who began work in late March, 1959 and continued through to June, 1960.<sup>16</sup>

In the spring of 1960, prior to the pool's opening, park officials announced that while Linnet Lake would continue to be available for swimming, it would be unsupervised. Buoys would be used to mark the end of shallow water and some life saving equipment would be made available at the lake but without attendants.<sup>17</sup>

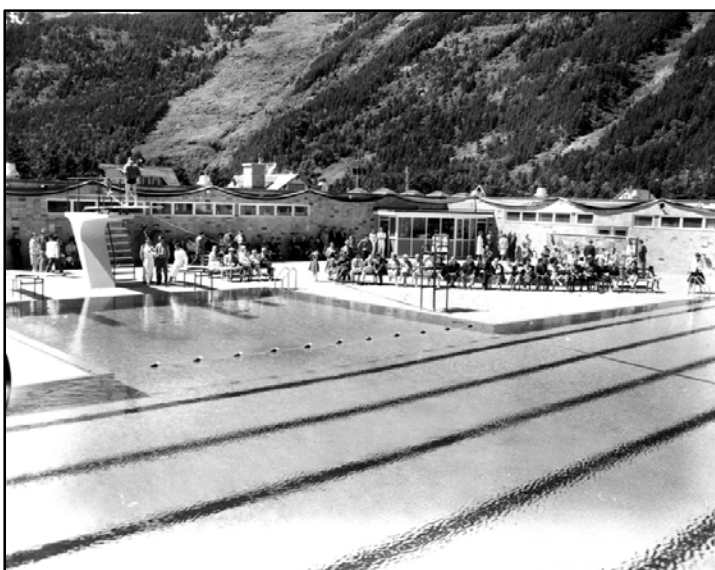
The new facility, located in the centre of the townsite, included a heated, covered Olympic-sized T-shaped pool and a children's wading pool, dressing rooms, caretaker's quarters, and landscaping. It was formally opened on June 18, 1960 by the Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources, Hon. Alvin Hamilton.<sup>18</sup> It was said to be one of the largest and most modern in Western Canada.<sup>19</sup> The main pool was 13 metres by 37 metres with a diving section and three diving boards.

Admission to the new pool was 50 cents for adults and 25 cents for children. Swim suits could be rented for 20 cents and towels for 15 cents. The first year's operation, which ended on Labour Day, was encouraging. Some 52,255 people had used the facility.<sup>20</sup>

Thirty-three years later when the pool was declared uneconomical due to high labor and operating costs, fees were \$2 for adults and \$1.25 for children but the increase was nowhere near what was needed to be in the black. The demise of the swimming pool in 1993 caused as much grumbling as it had caused praise in 1960. The writing had been on the wall since at least 1985 when Supt. Bernie Lieff told the public that the pool attendance was so low it didn't generate enough revenue to pay for the propane used to heat the water.<sup>21</sup> Local efforts to keep the pool open fizzled <sup>22</sup> and the government kept the pool closed permanently, releasing the site for redevelopment by a private lodging company which incorporated a small indoor



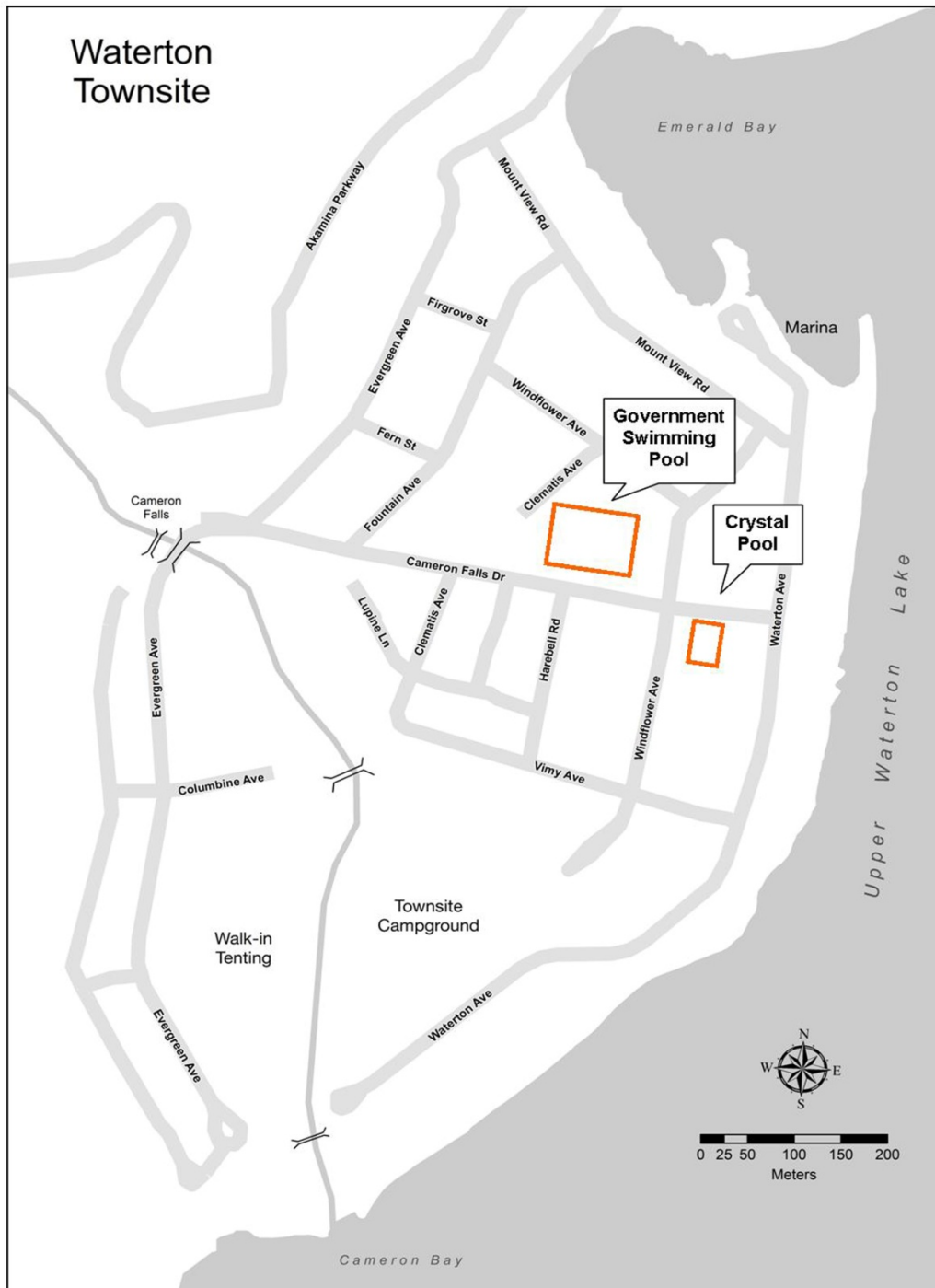
*Opening ceremonies for the pool included a gathering of dignitaries, above, and a swimming competition, below. (Photo: Galt Museum and Archives)*



water pool, hot tub, sauna and fitness centre for public use on an admission basis.



*Three diving boards at the Waterton swimming pool were a special feature which made for some interesting entertainment for spectators.  
(Photo: Library and Archives Canada, 4302079)*



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- <sup>1</sup> Jeff Wiltse, *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America* (Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press), 105.
- <sup>2</sup> Wiltse, 109.
- <sup>3</sup> Memo to file, Villa Lots 17-18, Block One, Waterton Lakes National Park, May 28, 1953. Library and Archives Canada, RG 84, A-2-a, Vol. 2176, file W21-1-17-18.
- <sup>4</sup> "Wonderful Waterton," *Lethbridge Herald*, June 12, 1924, 5. WLNP Archives Box 130, Item 30.
- <sup>5</sup> "Wonderful Waterton: Sad Fatality," *Lethbridge Herald*, July 31, 1925, 10. WLNP Archives Box 130, Item 30.
- <sup>6</sup> Waterton National Park," *Lethbridge Herald*, July 8, 1926. WLNP Archives Box 130, Item 30.
- <sup>7</sup> "Wonderful Waterton," *Lethbridge Herald*, April 19, 1926, 5. WLNP Archives Box 130, Item 30.
- <sup>8</sup> "Six Feet of Snow at Waterton," *Lethbridge Herald*, Dec. 16, 1929, front page. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 30.
- <sup>9</sup> "Wonderful Waterton Calls," *Lethbridge Herald*, August 20, 1930, 15. WLNP Archives Box 130, Item 30.
- <sup>10</sup> Memorandum to W. F. Lothian, Ottawa, from H. A. DeVeber, Ottawa, June 7, 1952, Library and Archives Canada, RG 84, A-2-a, Vol. 2176, file W21-1-17-18.
- <sup>11</sup> Newspaper advertisement. WLNP Archives Box 130, Item 30.
- <sup>12</sup> "Local Swimmers Clean Up at Waterton," *Lethbridge Herald*, July 26, 1937, 10. WLNP Archives Box 130, Item 30.
- <sup>13</sup> Memorandum to W. F. Lothian, Ottawa, from H. A. DeVeber, Ottawa, June 7, 1952, Library and Archives Canada, RG 84, A-2-a, Vol. 2176, file W21-1-17-18.
- <sup>14</sup> "Waterton Projects," *Lethbridge Herald*, March 6, 1958, editorial, 4. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 30.
- <sup>15</sup> W. F. Lothian, *A History of Canada's National Parks*, Vol.III, (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1979) 46.
- <sup>16</sup> Brander Parsons, "Face-Lifting for Waterton," *Lethbridge Herald* March 28, 1959. No copy of item is available but excerpt provided in typewritten form. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 30.
- <sup>17</sup> Linnet to Continue as Bathing Beach," *Lethbridge Herald*, March 21, 1960. WLNP Archives Box 130, Item 30.
- <sup>18</sup> W. F. Lothian, *A History of Canada's National Parks*, Vol.III, 46.
- <sup>19</sup> Photo caption, *Lethbridge Herald*, Jan. 3, 1959, front page. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 30.
- <sup>20</sup> "52,255 Swim at Waterton Pool," *Lethbridge Herald*, Sept. 15, 1960, 7. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 30.
- <sup>21</sup> Michael Lamb, "Park Didn't Mince Words," *Lethbridge Herald*, Feb. 22, 1985. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 30.
- <sup>22</sup> Chris Morrison, "No Bail Out Seen for Town Pool," *Lethbridge Herald*, June 4, 1993, A6. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 30.