



NEW YEADON SWIMMING POOL. Panoramic view of the more than one thousand who attended the opening of the \$100,000 Nile Swimming Club, Union and Lincoln avenues, Saturday. The place an ultra sports center has a pool of Olympic size, with a separate pool for diving and another for toddlers. It is blue-tile lined and set against a background of shade trees. Ultimate plans call for several tennis courts and a picnic ground in the all steel fence enclosed four-acre site. The club is private.

Photo from the Philadelphia Independent Newspaper

THE NILE SWIM CLUB ARCHIVE COLLECTION OF THE YEADON BOROUGH HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Mr. Patterson also shared some of their community activities. They partnered with the owner of the Brown Grocery Stores in a program to feed their neighbors by giving two bags of groceries to 100 families. They also created and run a program titled “No Child will Drown in Our Town,” in which they offer free swim lessons for the children in their area. I am honored to have this opportunity to share and document this information on this historic cultural landmark.

Editor’s Note: On May 22, 2021, Yeadon residents gathered to celebrate the official unveiling of a Pennsylvania Historical Museum Commission marker, designating the Nile Swim Club as a historic landmark in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, along with a ribbon-cutting ceremony for its new basketball court.

Kevin Colquitt is a retired educator. He was a competitive swimmer in Philadelphia Public Schools, certified as an American Red Cross lifeguard at 15, swam 4 years on Howard University’s varsity team, was certified as an American Red Cross WSI at 19, later received SCUBA certifications through Advanced Open Water to Rescue Diver, and coached YMCA Age Group, Masters, and Special Olympics swim teams. Presently, he is researching and documenting African American aquatic and swimming history to dispel the myths, misunderstandings, misperceptions and generally bad stories that are in our public domain, which discourage Black people from pursuing interests in aquatics and swimming.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Information provided by The Yeadon Borough Historic Commission from the archives of the Nile Swim Club

² Christian Street YMCA Swim Team Competes in YMCA championships, 1950.

³ Commentary by Mrs. Donna Samuel, Secretary for the Yeadon Borough Historical Commission

⁴ From photo of the first “Certificate of Loan” issued by the Nile Swim Club Non-Profit Corporation, from the archive collection of the Nile Swim Club and the Yeadon Borough Historical Commission

⁵ Photo of Groundbreaking Ceremony for the Nile Swim Club taken in May 1959, part of the Nile Swim Club archive and the presentation for the Historic Marker for the Nile Swim Club

⁶ Photo of the Nile Swim Club pool published in the Philadelphia Independent Newspaper, July 18, 1959, part of the Nile Swim Club archive and the submission for the Historical marker

⁷ Documentary on the Nile Swim Club done by SCRIBE, the video media organization led by Mr. Louis Massiah

⁸ Information provided by Mr. Richard Watson, Archivist and Curator for The Philadelphia African American Museum

⁹ Philadelphia Tribune, “Nile Swim Club Map Out Plan to Stave Off Tax Auction,” August 2018

¹⁰ The Philadelphia Inquirer, “In This Sink-or-Swim COVID Year, The Nile Swim Club Wages a Heroic Summer Effort” by Ms. Maria Panaritis, July 2020



The club offers swim lessons, splash parties, basketball, tennis and aquatic fitness and other activities for community members of all ages from May–September.

In 1959, middle-class African American families living in the Philadelphia suburb of Yeadon founded a private swimming pool named the Nile Swim Club after several of them were denied membership at nearby swim clubs that had all-white memberships. “The Nile” quickly became an integral part of the social and recreational life of Yeadon’s African American community. The pool offered swim lessons and regularly hosted evening parties, synchronized swimming shows, community cookouts and dance lessons.

Sixty years later, the Nile Swim Club is still in operation, serving its membership and running “No Child Will Drown in Our Town,” a program that provides free swimming lessons to children in the community. During 2020, when all of Philadelphia’s public pools shut down due to issues related to the Covid-19 pandemic, the club instituted safety measures to keep its pool open, and also became a food distribution center for the needy. As a result, the Nile continued its long tradition as a vital haven for fun, exercise and social connection, especially for kids. In 2021, the Nile Swim Club was awarded a State Historical Marker as the oldest African American owned membership swim club.

“Back in 1957 or ‘58, when the founders applied to that other swim club and were denied, some folks would have said we could have went and marched, and protested, and forced them to make us become members. But our founders said, we’re not going to go that route. We’re going to raise our own money, we’re going to buy these four and a half acres of land, and we’ll have our own pool. And I take great pride in that. The fact that they said we’re going to have our own in our community was very powerful back in 1959.”

–Anthony Patterson, Sr., Board President, Nile Swim Club



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