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Swimming education in Douglas County

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SWIMMING EDUCATION IN DOUGLAS COUNTY

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I. Introduction

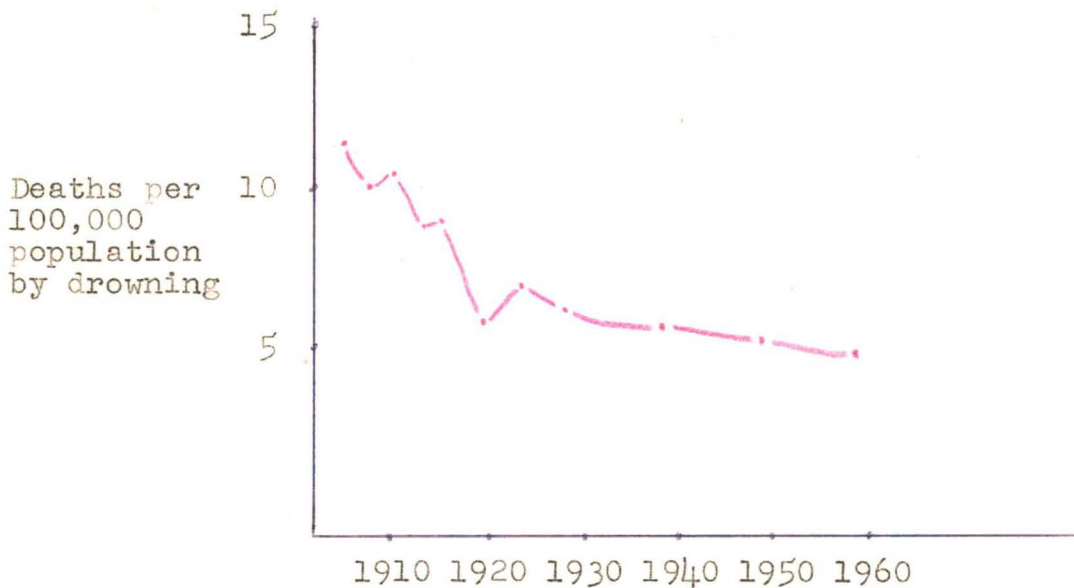
On July 9, 1963, a local radio broadcasting station announced that in the past week there had been six drownings in the Omaha-Council Bluffs area. This was a sobering statement and one which caused many to wonder if these deaths could have been prevented. It is the purpose of this paper to report on the drownings and the swimming educational facilities of Douglas County.

II. The History

Swimming education is not a new issue in this country. In 1885 the YMCA built the first indoor "swimming bath" in the United States. Although only fourteen feet wide and forty-five feet long, this pool gave the YMCA the distinction of being the first national organization to encourage swimming education. The public was slow to realize the importance of swimming, however, and required the services of Commodore Wilbert E. Longfellow to organize a national movement towards better swimming education. He established the United States Volunteer Life Saving Corps in 1907, added a section to the Boy Scout Handbook in 1911, and joined with the

American Red Cross as their swimming education programmer in 1914. By 1916 he had visited nearly all parts of the United States laying the ground work for his dream, "Every American a swimmer; every swimmer a lifesaver." Swimming education is credited for reducing the water fatality rate in the face of an increasing number of people using water as a source of recreation.

Graph A¹



III. A Statistical Study on Drownings

Eventhough the number of yearly drownings per

1. Miller, H. Gene and Recht, J.L., Accident Facts, Chicago 11, Illinois, National Safety Council, p.11, 1963.

100,000 population is declining, drownings still constitute the second most common type of accidental death between the ages of five and twenty-five. This fact becomes more meaningful when you consider that the majority of the deaths in this given age group are accidental deaths. The yearly totals of accidental drownings on the national level have varied from a high of 6,550 to a low of 6,434 in the past five years. These figures represent deaths from boating accidents, from swimming, and from playing in or by the water. They do not include deaths from floods or suicide. In Nebraska, accidental drownings over the past five years have varied between 16 and 48 per year with a yearly mean of 35. The exact portion that Douglas County represents in these figures is more difficult to present. In the past five years, there have been a total of 14 reported deaths by accidental drowning, as defined above, in Douglas County. However, when a resident of Douglas County dies by drowning in a different county, their death is not recorded in the county of residency but in the county where the fatality took place. Also, with Douglas County being largely a cosmopolitan county and one with relatively few swimming facilities

available, many of its residents travel from the county for water recreation. It is interesting to note that in the past five years, 34% of Nebraska's accidental drownings occurred within a fifty mile radius of Omaha.

A further analysis of this county's drowning records shows that in the previous five years, 64.3% of the drowned victims were males and twenty-one years of age or younger. This compares rather well with a similar study conducted by the Bureau of Vital Statistics in Arkansas where they found males to account for 64% of the drownings and people twenty years old and younger to account for 57%.

An investigation into the socio-economic background of Douglas County's drowned victims' families for the previous five years shows their average formal education to total 10.6 years with a range from 8.7 to 12.7 years. Their average yearly income was \$5,824 as compared with the national average of \$6,500 per family unit. The segment of Omaha east of 30th street is an area holding the greatest number of the lower economic and educationally deprived families. This area, as shown on the following page's map, has produced 71.5% of the previous five years' drownings in Douglas County.

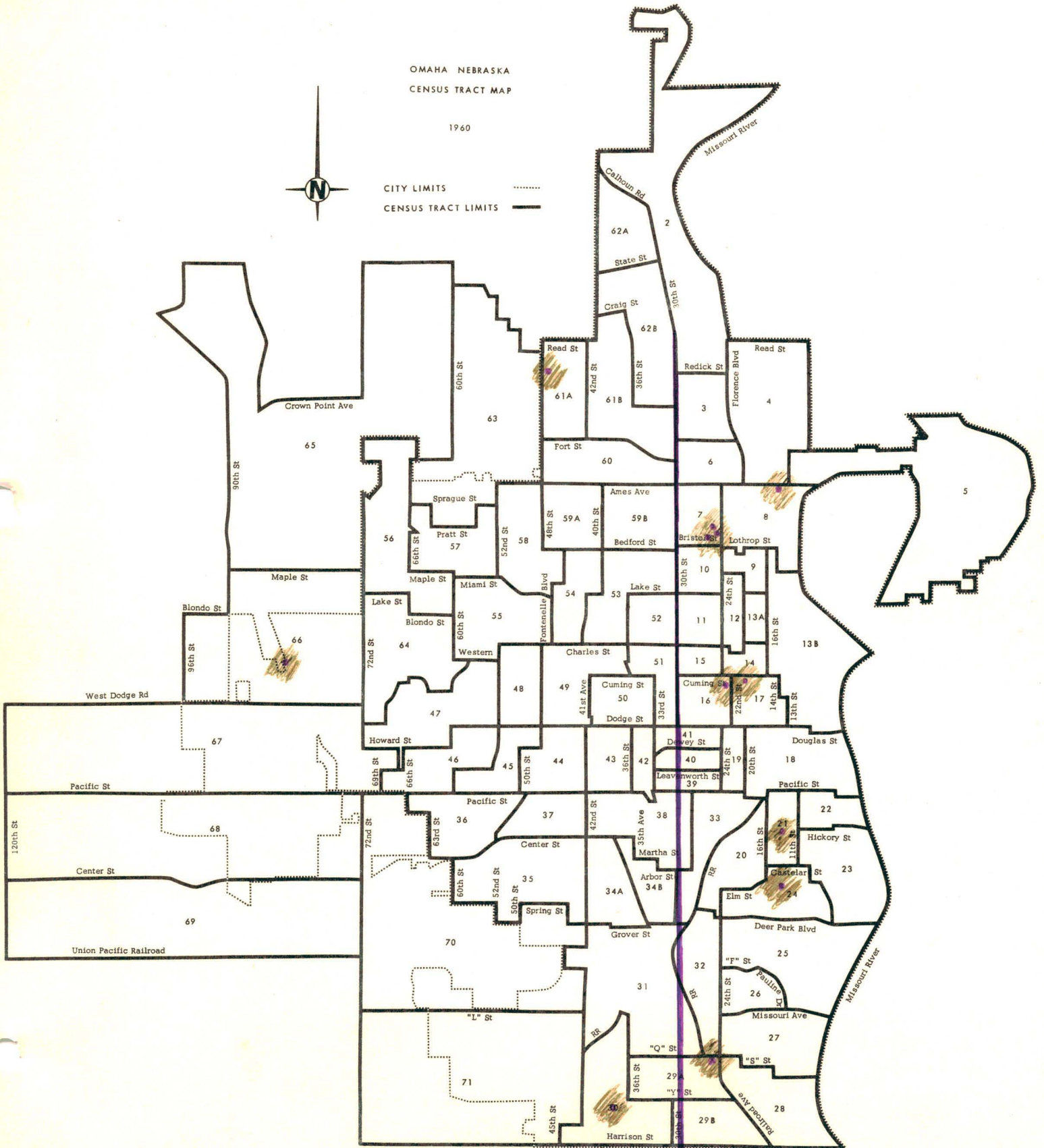
A MAP SHOWING THE DROWNED VICTIMS' HOMES OVER A FIVE YEAR PERIOD, 1958-1962

OMAHA NEBRASKA
CENSUS TRACT MAP

1960



CITY LIMITS
CENSUS TRACT LIMITS ———



30th Street

IV. Swimming Education in Douglas County

There are several organizations in Omaha that actively promote swimming education. Of these, the American Red Cross has the largest program. In the last year, they issued a total of 6,357 certificates, 2,237 being issued to beginning swimmers. The majority of these certificates were earned during the summer months at Omaha's public pools. The remaining passed the set qualifications in the winter program which is primarily held at the Jewish Community Center.

The Young Men's and Women's Christian Associations also have summer and winter programs. The majority of their participants are between the ages of six and fifteen; they all must be members of their respective associations. Last year 233 members earned various swimming certificates.

The Omaha School Board has recently enlarged their program for learning to swim at the three public school pools. Their summer enrollment last year was 3,100 children, most of them being third through sixth graders. Of this number, 1,000 started as beginners. Classes are also held during the school year with 770 children enrolling in each of the two semesters. Additional pools are now under way at South High School,

and at Monroe, Nathan Hale, and William Jennings Bryan junior high schools. These will undoubtedly increase the program's enrollment.

The Boy Scouts of America have placed their swimming instructions on a troop basis. The only teaching the organization does collectively is during the summer camp periods where 1800 to 2000 scouts receive swimming instructions once a day for one week.

The Girl Scouts of America and the Campfire Girls each have referred their programs to the American Red Cross.

The Boys' Clubs of Omaha, which is still in its first year in this community, has started an active swimming educational program. They have about 1700 members at present between the ages of eight and eighteen.

V. An Evaluation of Douglas County's Program

An index as to the effectiveness of these mentioned programs in teaching the children of Douglas County how to swim might be gathered from a recent study of 6,429 local fourth graders. In this study, 30% could not swim a stroke and 40% could swim only

a distance less than 25 yards. Therefore, in this particular group, seven out of ten would not survive if forced to swim a distance of less than 25 yards to safety. Actually, the number of children in the group that could swim close to 25 yards would probably be the minority; for in this particular survey, the questions were listed as follows:

1. I cannot swim.....30%
2. I can swim but not very well...40%
3. I can swim 25 yards.....20%

In a national survey of swimmers of all ages, it was stated that of the 100 million Americans who will visit the beaches, pools, lakes, and "swimming holes" in the summer of 1958, about 40% will be unable to swim. With no change in the swimming programs, this problem is certain to become worse since more people are visiting water recreational areas now than ever before. In Arkansas, for example, the use of water recreational areas has increased tenfold between 1947 and 1959. And, to bring these figures up to date, in the past five years the number of pleasure boats owned in the United States has increased 29%.

VI. A Workable Solution

Ideally, every child should know how to swim. One suggested plan is compulsory swimming instruction for all new fourth graders during the summer months. The plan must be compulsory since the figures cited in this paper show that an elective program has not been effective. Fourth graders are selected since this is an age where children learn swimming easily. A single grade level is probably all that Douglas County's facilities could comfortably accommodate, and it offers a simple method of organizing the program. Finally, the program should be held during the summer months, for it is only by using the city's pools as well as the county's school pools that adequate facilities can be provided. A summer program would also eliminate the problem of transporting the participants to and from their respective pools.

Last summer approximately 3,237 children learned how to swim in Douglas County without individual instruction. The American Red Cross held their classes at the city's pools, and the Omaha School Board utilized the public schools' pools. The total enrollment of the Omaha Public School System's fourth grades for the current year is about 4,100. With the additional school and city pools that were built last summer and are

being built now, the facilities of this county will be adequate for such a program. The 2,237 children who received beginner certificates last summer from the American Red Cross paid one dollar each for the use of the city's pools. The instructors worked on a voluntary basis. The Omaha School Board's program for the last year cost \$6,879 to teach about one thousand beginners how to swim. Therefore, at a total cost of only \$6,879, 3,237 children learned how to swim.

A sample pamphlet that is sent home with each third grader in Toronto, Ontario, a city that has compulsory swimming education, is attached below.

By taking positive action, the three out of four drownings that occur within sixty feet of shore might then be prevented, and a great service would have been rendered for children.

Form 87
75M-5-63

PLEASE READ CAREFULLY
DO NOT THROW AWAY

TORONTO BOARD OF EDUCATION

SUMMER SWIMMING CLASSES



JULY 2nd to AUGUST 16th

1963

AGE AND HEIGHT

The recommended starting age is 7 years. However, younger children may be sent to these classes provided:

- (a) They are tall enough to stand erect in water 3 feet deep with heads clear of the surface; and
- (b) They are ready to accept group instruction.

Note: Please do not phone the schools.

PARENT PERMISSION FORM

Date.....

Name of Pupil.....

Please print

Address..... Phone.....

School..... Age..... Grade.....

I hereby give permission for my child to attend the free Summer Swimming classes provided by the Toronto Board of Education.

Parent or Guardian

Is your child subject to epilepsy or spells of any kind? If so please explain

This form, which is to be presented at the first class, will entitle bearer to an admission card.

TEAR ALONG PERFORATED LINE

LIST OF SWIMMING POOLS

BOYS 9 a.m. - 12 NOON

GIRLS 1:15 - 4:15 p.m.

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| Central Commerce | North Toronto C.I. |
| Deer Park | Oakwood C.I. |
| Duke of Connaught | Osler |
| *Earl Grey | Parkdale C.I. |
| Eastern Commerce | Queen Alexandra |
| Jarvis C.I. | Sunny View |
| | Western Tech-Commerce |

GIRLS 9 a.m. - 12 NOON

BOYS 1:15 - 4:15 p.m.

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| Allenby | Lord Dufferin |
| Bloor C.I. | *Malvern C.I. |
| Danforth Tech. | *McMurrich |
| Fern | Northern Secondary |
| Harbord C.I. | Riverdale C.I. |
| *Humberside C.I. | Williamson Road |
| *Lawrence Park C.I. | |

*These pools operate on Saturdays also.

THE ABOVE POOLS WILL BE IN OPERATION FROM JULY 2ND TO AUGUST 16TH, NOT INCLUDING SATURDAYS (EXCEPT WHERE MENTIONED ABOVE) AND CIVIC HOLIDAY.

INFORMATION

1. All instructors are required to hold the Instructor's Certificate from the Canadian Red Cross Society and to requalify every two years.
2. 4,577 pupils learned to swim during July and August last summer. 3,222 learned to swim during school hours in the month of June.
3. The group instruction plan encourages beginners to overcome fear of the water more rapidly than under individual coaching.
4. Separate classes are organized on a skill basis for (a) Non-swimmers; (b) Those who can swim a few strokes; and (c) Those interested in stroke improvement, diving, water safety and life-saving.
5. Girls wear bathing suits and caps. Boys may swim in bathing trunks or in the nude. Soap is provided but not towels.
6. All pupils are inspected for cleanliness and freedom from skin conditions. Pupils wearing bandaids or other bandages are not admitted.
7. Pupils are not permitted to bring underwater equipment or buoyancy devices into the pool.
8. Inexpensive badges are awarded to pupils who (a) swim the width of the pool for the first time, and (b) swim the length of the pool for the first time.

N. R. SPEIRS,
Director of Physical Education.



VII. Summary

It has been shown that swimming education is not a new concern. The importance of drownings was shown to be numerically ranked as second in the category making up the majority of all deaths between the ages of five and twenty-five. This may be further emphasized by stating that for every drowning, lifeguards report fifty near-drownings resulting in shock, illness, and future fear of the water. The area of Nebraska within a fifty mile radius of Omaha was found to account for 34%, or about one-third, of Nebraska's accidental drownings in the past five years. Of these drownings, 64% were males and twenty-one years or younger in age, and 72% of the drowning victims' homes were in the lower socio-economic area east of 30th Street. In spite of the excellent swimming instruction given to the children of our county, seven out of ten fourth graders cannot swim a distance of twenty-five yards, and three out of ten admit to not being able to swim at all. This is supported on the national level. A plan was presented whereby the children of Douglas County would learn how to swim by a compulsory, single grade level, summer program.

VIII. Conclusion

By supporting compulsory swimming instruction for all fourth graders during the summer months, a great service will be rendered toward safeguarding the lives of children.

I would like to acknowledge my advisor, Dr. Paul K. Mooring, whose encouragement and guidance made this paper possible.

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