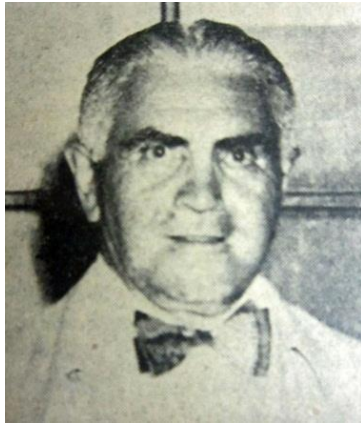


## William Horowitz and Vernon's First Public Pool

By Jean Luddy

Before the pool at Henry Park was built, people in town had several places to go to take a dip on a hot summer day. Rockville residents would use Papermill Pond, Snipsic Lake, or take their chances in spots along the Hockanum River. Vernon people got wet in the Hockanum or Tankerhoosen Rivers, Valley Falls, or used smaller "swimming holes" like the one on the Ecker Farm property. All these locations provided cool relief, but lack consistency in sanitation and safety.



William R. Horowitz, president of the American Dye Company, later Amerbelle, played a leading role in bringing a public swimming pool to the Rockville area. Born in Russia in 1888, he came to the United States at a young age. Starting by selling goods from door to door as his first job, he later worked as a fabric cutter in the hat trade. In 1924, he joined with others to form the HPH Manufacturing Company in Rhode Island that produced linings for women's hats. Later, the company added a plant for dyeing cloth. His obituary in the *Rockville Journal* stated that "Then in 1936, with a few younger associates, he founded the American Dyeing Corporation in Rockville. He established the business in the building the firm still occupies on East Main and Brooklyn Streets. The plant [formerly the Belding silk mill] had been standing idle for several years, but shortly after he started the business; it was operating on two and three shifts."

Horowitz was considered to be a progressive employer. "The wages he paid his help were the highest in that branch of the industry. He was a forerunner in giving the workers hospitalization, insurance, and other benefits. He gave men who were willing to work, and who had difficulty getting employment, a chance to work. ... He installed the latest equipment in the plant here. He devised new equipment and improved standard equipment to better serve the industry. His relations with the labor union representing his workers was always friendly, and at one gathering of the workers, a labor organizer, said, 'If the entire textile industry had men like Bill Horowitz, there would be no labor difficulties.' Having risen from workingman to an executive, he knew the needs and desires of workers."

Horowitz was known for his interest in civic betterment projects. Shortly before his death on May 4, 1952, he had been involved in evaluating possible sites for a community pool. In his will, he had designated \$10,000 to be put toward funding a public swimming pool with the town and public to contribute the rest of the money. His William Horowitz Charitable Foundation established a Swimming Pool Fund to manage the project.

As a result of the Horowitz seed money, support for a community pool began to grow among local civic and religious leaders. Nat Schwedel, Treasurer of the American Dyeing Company, was a trustee of the Horowitz Charitable Foundation and served as the Director of the Swimming Pool Fund. He submitted frequent reports to the *Rockville Journal* about the progress of raising the \$75,000 necessary to build the pool. Henry Park was chosen as the spot for the new pool. The Swimming Pool Fund received donations large and small from community groups and individual citizens. Letters of endorsement from supporters and donation amounts were published in the local newspapers. By February 1953, over \$60,000 had been contributed to the fund. As encouragement, The *Rockville Journal* printed a donation form in the paper.

By April, the Horowitz Foundation announced that an additional \$10,000 had to be added to the cost of the pool, because construction bids ran higher than anticipated. The Foundation joined with local church and civic groups to set up a house to house canvass for raising enough funds to complete the project.

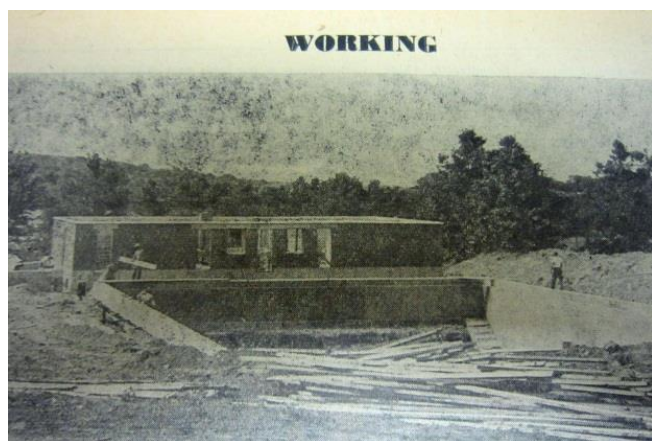
In an article in the April 9th *Rockville Journal*, Trustee Nat Schwedel explained, “Enough funds have now been raised for the swimming pool and the wading pool and part of the field house... In spite of the fact that the contractor’s bid expired on April 9, we have succeeded in getting him to extend his bid and hold it firm for two more weeks. If these funds cannot be raised in that time, it would require a delay of the project into next summer.”

By May of 1953, the decision was made to start construction of the pool even though \$8000 was still needed to reach the financial goal. The ground breaking was scheduled for May 4, 1953, the first anniversary of William Horowitz’s death. On the day of the ceremony, the designated area in Henry Park was filled with spectators who listened to speeches from members of the Horowitz Foundation and local civic and religious leaders. Nat Schwedel announced that the contractor would be able to finish the pool by July 31, 1953 as long as there were no delays in getting building materials. He went on to thank the City of Rockville for a donation of \$10,000 from the Recreation Fund which the Pool Committee planned to replay at a later date by using the donations that were still coming in.



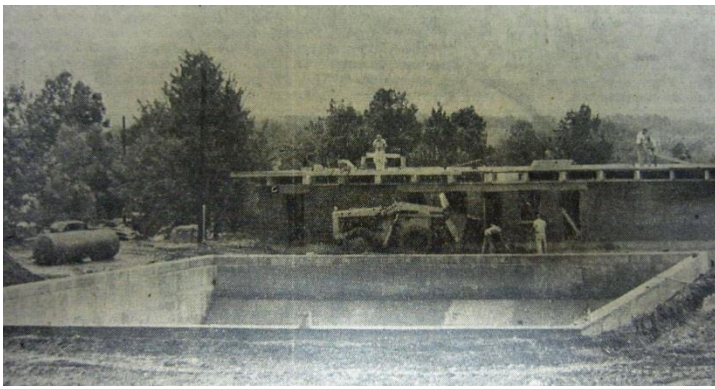
*Mayor Frederick Berger on the right at the controls of the power shovel with Nat Schwedel in the middle and Bruno Frechette on the end)*

Construction on the pool, a wading area and a field house started and continued into mid-summer.

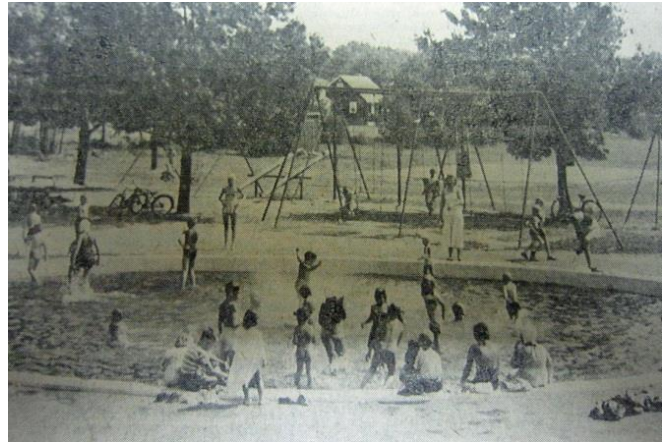


*Two pictures from the same issue of the Rockville Journal show the main pool under construction and several potential swimmers inspecting the work at the wading pool.*





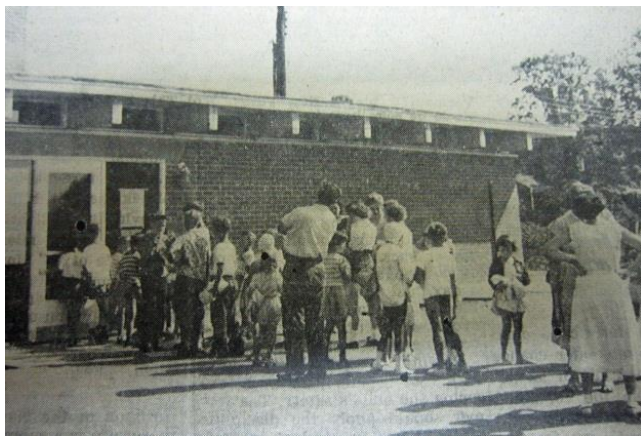
*Work continued on the field house as the pool took shape*



*Once the pool opened, eager children frolicked in the wading pool under their mothers' watchful eyes*

*the*

By August, the project was complete and the Horowitz Pool at Henry Park opened for public swimming. In the years that followed, the Horowitz Pool facility has been renovated several times. A new wading pool for children adjacent to the main pool has been installed.



*Families wait to enter the field house to begin swimming lessons, a familiar scene to children and parents in the decades since the pool was opened.*

Over the last several decades, the Horowitz Pool at Henry Park, the public pool near the former Vernon Elementary School and the Valley Falls swimming area have provided Vernon's families with safe places to swim, to learn water safety and to cool off on hot summer days. Ironically, on the first day that the Horowitz pool opened for swimming lessons, photographs from the *Rockville Journal* showed police and rescue workers searching for the body of a young man who drowned while swimming in the Tankerhoosen river near the Ackerley Mill in Talcottville.

William Horowitz's desire to establish a public swimming pool allowed Vernon and Rockville to offer a safer alternative to the people in town at the time and into the future. Our town is fortunate to this wonderful public asset that originated from the vision of one civic minded businessman and was made possible through a community effort.