

The Women's Pool: Muddled Waters?

Most readers are likely familiar with a sign over the entrance to Clare Small that rather infamously reads: Clare Small Pool est. 1910.

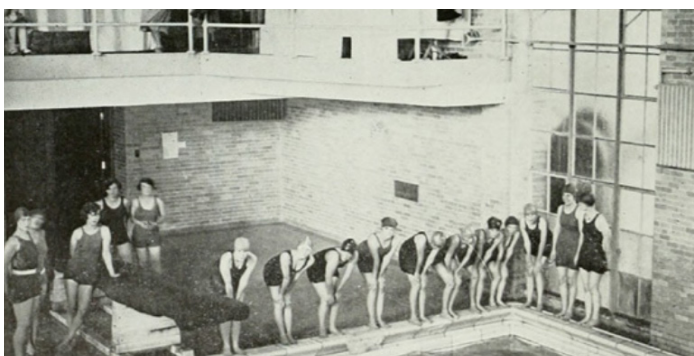


Clare Small Entrance (2024) ¹

1910 is certainly an interesting endorsement for the establishment of the pool. It begs the question, if Clare Small was built in that year, why didn't a swim team spring up as soon as it was built? We saw the men's team take action just months after the men's pool was built in 1924.

The answer to these questions all point to the same conclusion, the date 1910 is simply wrong. We know based on a piece from the Rocky Mountain Collegian that in 1926, Boulder had "three large swimming pools, one at the university, the 'Y' pool and the Hygienic." The 'one' at the university of course would refer to the pool within the men's gym. ²

Pictured below is a photo of the women's swimming class practicing. This was published in the 1926 yearbook and depicts the women's team very clearly practicing in the men's pool. We say very clearly, as the men's pool was known for its elevated causeway that wrapped around on three sides. The eventual women's pool was not built with a causeway, nor was the roof high enough to support one in the first place.



Women's Swim Class (1926) ³

It's hard to think of a reason why the women's swim class would be practicing in the men's pool. The obvious explanation is that the women's pool had not yet been built. This is suggested by the caption of the photo, which summarizes, "Women's swimming class ready to plunge in the pool in the gymnasium." Notice that gymnasium is singular, not plural. After 1928, all photos of women's swim classes and events picture the women's pool in the background.

So, if there was only one pool on campus in 1926, where does the 1910 number come from? Perhaps it was constructed in 1910 and torn down by 1926? We've also seen dozens of instances of these early year newspapers get things wrong. Could they have forgotten to list the 'second' pool on campus? This theory is also false, as a dozen or so articles from the Silver and Gold newspaper outline the well documented opening of the women's gymnasium, and the subsequent pool within.

Built for the cost of \$190,000, designed by Charles Klauder, and similarly designed in the Italian rural style as the men's gym, the women's gymnasium took less than a year to undergo construction. Excavation for the base of the building's structure began in mid 1926, northwest of the men's gymnasium and east of Macky auditorium. At the time, the building housed two gyms, administrative offices, locker rooms, fifty showers, a saucer shaped track, a laboratory, a library, several classrooms and of course a pool. The pool was 75 feet by 35 feet, eclipsing the size of the men's. Located in the basement, the pool depth ranged from three and a half feet to eight feet at the west end. The pool deck also exceeded that of the men's, with there being at least four feet of walkway on every side. ⁴

Perhaps most critical in regards to the construction of the pool was the treatment used to sterilize the water. A 'special' company from California was brought in during construction to install a revolutionary chlorine sterilization system. Compared to the ultraviolet fine sand filter offered in the men's gymnasium, you don't need to guess which pool stood the test of time. ⁵

On January 27, 1928, Clare Small announced that the formal dedication of the building would take place on

February 10. The pool itself had unofficially opened on January 23, where roughly thirty five women swam on opening day. Admission was five cents per person.
6

Dedication day was Friday, February 10, 1928, and hosted by members of the WAA, where visitors were given tea, sandwiches and a tour. The opening of the building had grown the WAA to roughly 750 students, with 105 being registered for swimming classes. It was the single greatest thing to happen for women's athletics in the previous ten years, and Miss Small would continue to grow the department during her tenure.⁷

So the pool opened in February 1928. As did the building itself. Where did the university get the 1910 number? Perhaps it references the building that stood before it? Sections of the university hospital had to be demolished to make room for the building. But even that wouldn't make sense, as the old hospital was built in 1898.⁸

The year 1910 poses more questions than answers, and we are left wondering where the university came up with this date. All of this information is readily available within Norlin Library, so if the university is ready to correct this signage to 1928, they need not look far.

Works Cited

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