

Endnotes...

Taking The Plunge




A few months ago, we received a note from David Coon, a subscriber from Dallas, TX, with an interesting connection and back story to the Old Photo Album from our Spring 2021 issue. We thought David's story would make an interesting one for this installment of Endnotes.

I had called about those photos in your Spring 21 issue regarding Lafayette High School. I was more than surprised to see my Dad's picture on the swim team—back row middle [Page 47]. I promised to send another photo of my Dad in his swimming “costume”—I believe that's what they were called. Dad's name was Donald A. Coon. It's taken me this long to find this photo—relatives had it. Anyway, I am sending it now with the hope that it is useful.

There's more: The event that Dad swam was quite unusual—called “The Plunge.” Swimmers would stand at pool side, do deep breathing exercises, then plunge into the pool—head under water with no movements of body whatsoever and the furthest wins. Dad told me he was Buffalo champ in this event but I have no record. I read that The Plunge was an Olympic event and discontinued in the early 1900's.

Officially called “The Plunge for Distance,” this short-lived swimming event reached the height of its popularity in the late 19th/early 20th century. The American Swim Association at that time described it as “a dive from a stationary take-off which is free from spring from a height of 18 inches above the water. Upon reaching the water the plunger glides face downward for a period of 60 seconds without imparting any propulsion to the body from the arms and legs.” The Plunge was, indeed, included as its own event in the 1904 Olympic Games held in St. Louis. An American won the event with a distance of 62.5 feet, though there were only five entries, all from the New York Athletic Club.

The event was unpopular with many in the swimming community, and the public in general felt it lacked excitement as a spectator event, and so The Plunge fell out of favor almost as quickly as it had appeared. It was never again featured on the world stage and was dropped from the NCAA's official list of events in 1925. Apparently, the last championship occurred in England in 1937.

We would like to thank David for sharing this personal connection to our Spring 2021 Old Photo Album! 



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