

PETE WENDELL

"THE MAN WHO TAUGHT OMAHA TO SWIM"

Up until the year 1918 Omaha was without a public swimming pool where women could go to learn to swim. In that year the Omaha Athletic Club was opened and placed in operation a magnificent tile lined swimming pool for members only. Pete Wendell, an instructor of national reputation who had ability to impart the knowledge of swimming to his pupils, was placed in charge. His success at the club was immediate and early in the spring of 1919, when the modern indoor swimming pool was completed at Nicholas Senn Hospital for the use of nurses, he was engaged to coach swimming there in addition to his duties at the Omaha Athletic Club.

Through the efforts of Mr. Wendell, swimming soon became popular with everyone and his swimmers were attracting national attention in competition, and with this wave of popularity came many requests from the public for swimming lessons. The following year it was decided to open a public swimming school in the Nicholas Senn Hospital pool. This proved to be a success from the beginning and during the first summer season of two months, 500 women and children learned to swim. This success led to the opening of a year around school at the hospital under the name of "Pete Wendell's College of Swimming and Diving." By 1930, Wendell was credited with personally teaching over 15,000 men, women and children how to swim. By making swimming popular in Omaha through the lessons, swimming meets and water shows he produced, Wendell contributed significantly to the popularity and commercial success of Omaha's two great amusement park swimming pools at Krug and Peony Park.

Mr. Wendell was a Nebraska State Y.M.C.A. swimming and diving champion, and won medals in A.A.U. competition in Chicago during his competitive career. He was recognized as one of the foremost swimming coaches and authorities on swimming, diving and life saving in America. He was the first man to teach Red Cross life saving methods in Nebraska and organized the first Red Cross Life Saving Corps in Nebraska in 1919. In 1920, he organized and coached the first high school swimming teams in Nebraska and he developed many champion swimmers and



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divers, including many National A.A.U. champions like Corinne Condon, national backstroke champion in 1927 and 1928 and holder of three world records.

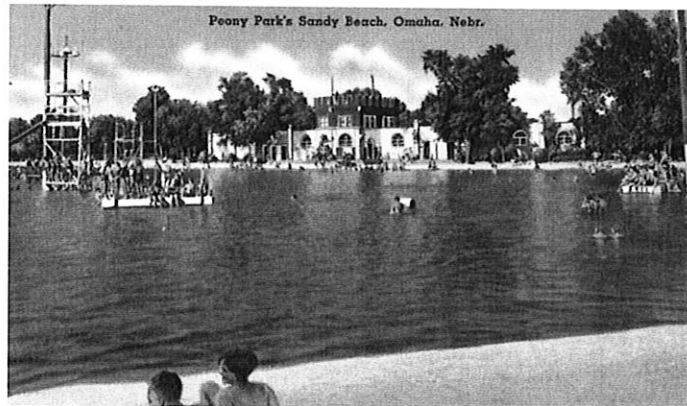
In the 1920's and 30's, Coach Wendell was a leading figure on the A.A.U. swimming rules committee, the Olympic Swimming committee and the National A.A.U. Board of Governors. For many years he supervised all A.A.U. swimming meets in the Mid-Western District of the A.A.U.

Other leading figures who worked with Wendell for the promulgation of swimming in Omaha were Dr. A.P. Condon, owner of the Nicholas Senn Hospital and Omaha's greatest swimming enthusiast, and Marcus Krasne, physical director of the Jewish Community

Center of Omaha. Krasne made the Center's pool available to the girls of Creighton University twice a week and the girls of the University of Omaha twice a week. Krasne also hosted many Mid-Western A.A.U. swim meets at the Center's pool.

Peony Park Pool

The Peony Park swimming pool was one of the most popular attractions at the Peony Amusement Park, the official headquarters of the Lawrence Welk Band. The concrete pool, surrounded by a sand beach, held five million gallons of filtered chlorinated water, supplied by an artesian well.



The Peony Park Swimming Pool was 700 feet long.



The Krug Park Swimming Pool had a waterfall, wave machine and wide sand beach.