

History of Fonty's Pool

Archimedes Fontanini was born on 14th April 1880 at Giangugnana in the Province of Lucca, Italy. At 16 years of age, he went to France and was employed in general building and stone masonry. Little did he know that the skills he acquired here would later play a huge part in the future of Fonty's Pool in Manjimup, Western Australia.

At 20 years of age he began his mandatory three years in the Italian army and volunteered to serve in China where the Boxer Rebellion had erupted. Because of his literacy and handwriting skills, he was selected as a hospital secretary. In this position Archie gained much knowledge from his association with patients, their treatment, supervision of the catering, cooking and so on. This experience would become useful in his future pioneering life in Australia.

Archie arrived in Fremantle in 1904 with 12s.6p (\$1.25) in his pocket and the will to succeed. After three years working at the Timber Corporation Sawmill at Greenbushes, Archie was keen to go farming. He had taught himself English by translating writing he came across with his Italian/English dictionary and had read that the government was urging people to take up land. He went in search of the South Western town of Bridgetown and here was

shown a place on the map marked "Archie's Oven Gulley". Thinking that the coincidence of the name could be significant he set off by horse and buggy with a lands department guide, viewing several sites along the way. Archie rejected each of them due to their lack of water. Finally they reached Archie's Oven Gulley. With its nearby stream still flowing strongly in the middle of summer, it was just what he had been looking for.



Pre 1925: Fonty's Pool



1936: Sports Day

On 15th February 1907, Archie applied for 460 acres and was granted it on May 15th of that year. Not long after Archie brought out his younger brother Jack (Germano) who took up the adjoining land which was later to be developed into the Nut Farm.

Manjimup did not exist in 1907 and Bridgetown was the centre for business and obtaining supplies. The trip by horse and cart for provisions took up to

three days, the road being little better than a track and almost impassable in winter.

On 31st August 1909, Archie married Lucy Bonata in Collie. Undaunted by thoughts of isolation and the lack of civilised comforts, they set about building a bush cottage with timber split, hewn and trimmed from their block. The first farming venture was to ringbark 60 acres of the massive karri trees after which ten acres were cleared by hand and planted with apples. Produce was sold at Bridgetown, Jarlanup (now Jardee) and the No. 1 State Sawmill (now Deanmill). For many years the swamp in front of the house,



Archie celebrating his Member of British Empire (MBE) with his family

which had been cleared and drained, had been used consistently for growing heavy crops of potatoes, cauliflowers and other vegetables. To rest the land, Archie pulled a tree across the creek and covered it with earth thrown up over the log. He hoped that the silt in the stream would settle at the dam and thus revive the fertility of the land when the wall was later removed.

The first of Archie and Lucy's five children was born in 1910. The Fontanini's swam regularly in the dam he had created and the children often brought friends home to swim. It also began to become popular with adults who used it as a meeting place. As the Manjimup district expanded, it became obvious that a public pool was required. The lack of water close to town was a drawback and it was requested that Archie not only continue with the dam but charge an entry fee to go towards the cost of improving it. He agreed and set about providing facilities, cementing the dam walls and floor and developing the gardens. His wife and family worked hard by his side and gradually "Fonty's Pool" emerged. Covering nearly an acre in size and with little mechanical assistance this feat was one that would amaze and be admired by generations to come.

In 1925 the pool was officially opened and had already become one of the noted beauty spots in the state. The pool itself holds 18 million litres of water and has a winter flow rate of 44,000 litres per hour.

Beginning in 1947, the Australia Day Sports conducted at Fonty's Pool were billed as W.A.'s greatest Log Chop. For eleven years it was a major event with many of Australia's best choppers and swimmers competing. It also served as an important fundraiser for the building of the St. Joseph's church in Manjimup.

In 1950, Fonty, as Archie had become affectionately known, found it necessary to retire from the farming aspect of the property and devoted his full attention to the management of the gardens and day to day running of the pool. By this time there

were thousands of annual visitors, and more importantly thousands of children had learnt to swim in its waters. In 1970, Archie received a Queen's honour and was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire for his outstanding contribution to the community and the tourist industry.



Archie with grand-daughter, Lee Fontanini

By 1973 the management of the pool had become too much of a burden for Fonty. He was 93 years old and the pool was closed to the public for the first time since 1925. In 1979, amongst a groundswell of community support, the pool was reopened with the Australia Day Log Chops and Swimming Carnival helping to celebrate Western Australia's 150th anniversary. Archie was present and very pleased to see his pool brought back to life.

Archie, who at the age of 99 could still recite all the names of the American Presidents in order, died in 1982 at the age of 102. To his credit "Fonty's Pool" remains in all its splendour for generations to come.