

The Davis Islands Swimming Pool

by Rodney Kite-Powell
Curator, Tampa Bay History Center

Tucked behind an apartment complex on Davis Boulevard and Bosphorous Avenue, across from the Marjorie Park Yacht Basin and Hudson Manor, sits one of the original amenities designed for residents and visitors of Davis Islands. Constructed in 1929 and originally known simply as the Davis Islands Pool, the Roy E. Jenkins Pool at 154 Columbia Drive has provided cool relief from Tampa's hot summer sun for seventy-five years.

One of the last of David P. Davis' original design features, the "Roman Pool" was to be a focal point of recreational activity on the Islands. The pool was similar to the one located at Temple Terrace, another 1920s community, located north of Tampa on the Hillsborough River. Other area pools were at Palma Ceia Springs by the Bayshore (present-day Fred Ball Park) and the pool at Sulphur Springs. With the exception of the Temple Terrace pool, which has since been removed, no other pool in the city was as ornate as the pool on Davis Islands.

Built at a cost of \$75,000, the original plan for the pool was as elaborate as the rest of Davis' plans for the Islands. Unfortunately, the financial climate had cooled when the time finally arrived to build, so Davis Islands, Inc., the successor to Davis' DP Davis Properties, had to adjust the building plans accordingly. Looking back, it is amazing that the facility was constructed at all.

Cost-saving measures would be the rule, and corners were cut in a variety of places, from the overall scale of the pool and ancillary buildings to the interiors of those buildings. According to a September 15, 1929 *Tampa Morning Tribune* article, the company "changed the plan to use high grade wooden lockers to ready-built metal lockers from Ohio" because of the need for "home labor" to be given extra attention. Though home construction did continue in 1929, it was at a much slower pace than during the boom era of the mid-'20s: more workers were not needed. A more likely reason is that budgetary constraints allowed for neither the high grade lockers nor the skilled labor necessary to install them.

The pool did feature a number of modern conveniences and what were considered high-tech mechanisms designed to keep the pool and its patrons

clean. The pool water was treated with alum and lime, then sterilized with chlorine. Among the technological advances were “rapid sand filters” and showers and a circulating water basin, intended to both wash contaminants off of swimmers before they reached the pool deck and to discourage people with street shoes from walking on the deck at all. The 1929 *Tribune* article boasted “Tampan and their visitors will swim in water pure enough to drink.”

The Davis Islands pool was part of a bigger plan for that section of the Islands. The overall layout was to include: dressing rooms for 400 bathers, 200 for the pool and 200 more for a “sunken pool” to be built to the south; a children’s pool, plus a playground and solariums “placed in an adjoining garden.” According to Davis Islands, Inc. president George Osborn, the entire block was to be a “pleasure ground for kiddies and grownups.” Most of those features were not constructed, though there was a small garden just to the south of the main entrance to the pool which is now the site of a small playground.

The Davis Islands pool was renamed in 1965 to honor the memory of Roy E. Jenkins, a man who was “known throughout the South for his keen interest in the youth of Florida and in water safety,” according to a *Tampa Tribune* article marking his death. Jenkins, who passed away the year before the city honored him by naming the pool for him, entered the water safety program offered by the Tampa Red Cross in 1923. Jenkins spent a lifetime encouraging both aquatic sports and the Red Cross Lifesaving Corps. He was an honorary director of the Greater Tampa Swimming Association and served for eleven years as an official for the Tampa Invitational Swim Meet.

Tampa’s city council recently bestowed local historic landmark status to the Cuscaden Park swimming pool, which was built in cooperation with the Works Projects Administration during the Great Depression in the northern part of Ybor City. In addition, the city parks department restored the swimming complex, bringing an old gem back to life. Perhaps it is time for the city to expend the same effort, and extend the same honor, to the pool on Davis Islands.