



# Manchester Urban Ponds Restoration Program

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## The History of Nutts Pond

Since colonial times Nutts Pond has been known by several names. In the mid-1800's, it was known as Fort Pond, but "in ancient time(s) was known as Swager's Pond" (Potter, 1856). It came to be known as Nutts Pond shortly thereafter, named for a popular local circus performer, "Commodore" Nutt. At that time, the Nutt family farm was situated near the pond.

### "Commodore" Nutt

"Commodore" George Washington Morrison Nutt was born in Manchester in 1884 and was the son of a New Hampshire farmer. He stood 29 inches tall and weighed 24 pounds. Like Tom Thumb, he was discovered by P.T. Barnum, and in fact because of the resemblance between the two, many people suspected that Nutt was in fact Thumb posing under a different name. To exploit the situation, Barnum began to exhibit the two together, billing them as "The Two Smallest Men and Greatest Curiosities Living."

Barnum first placed them on exhibit in New York and made them rich and famous. Tom Thumb and Nutt undertook a three-year tour of Europe during the 1860s where they appeared before almost all of the crowned heads on the continent. After the completion of their European tour, they toured the United States.

They were reported as being graceful, intelligent, witty, educated and refined, exhibiting the most polished manners, and yet only the size of three-year-old children. They performed songs, duets, dances, pantomimes, orations and military exercises (Historical Society of Cheshire County, New Hampshire)

### Historical Uses

Nutts Pond has been put to many uses over the years. In 1976 archeological evidence revealed historical records of the existence of a fort on the north shore of the pond (Slown, 1987). In 1746, Archibald Stark, seeing a necessity for a safe haven for colonists from Native American attacks, built a wooden garrison at this site (Manchester Leader, 1929). The well still exists at the site today although it has long since been filled in. The Manchester Coal and Ice Company, which owned the lot in 1928, deeded the well to the Molly Stark Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution on December 24, 1928.

The Manchester Coal & Ice Company harvested ice at Nutts Pond until at least the 1920's, but preceding them were at least two other ice companies. Ice harvesting at Nutts Pond probably began about 1860 by A.L. Walker, followed by Dickey & Young, and then L.B. Bodwell & Company (The Mirror, 1899). Nutts Pond ice was described by The Mirror in 1899, as "pure, sweet and clear."

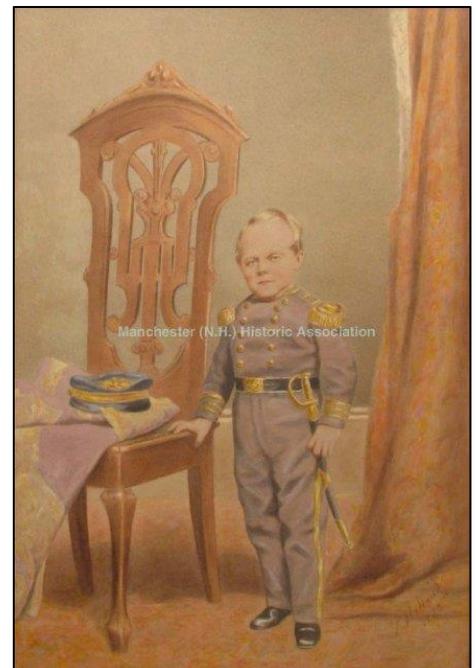


Illustration of Commodore Nutt.  
Manchester Historic Association image.

By 1938, Nutts Pond had become a popular swimming and recreation area. A 1938 New Hampshire Fish and Game Department survey indicates that the pond was routinely treated with chlorine due to the high volume of swimmers, thus preventing any fisheries management plan on the part of the Fish and Game Department. In 1951, the area now known as Precourt Park, on the pond's north side, was sold to the city by the Manchester Coal & Ice Company.

During the 1950's and '60's, Nutts Pond gained popularity as a swimming area and as result the Parks and Recreation Department installed a large scale chlorination system to treat high bacteria levels (Slown, 1987). However, water testing after chlorination revealed that high bacteria levels still prevailed and the pond was closed to public swimming in July, 1968. It was later determined that the bacterial pollution was the result of a combined sewer outfall that emptied into the pond at a point near the swimming area. Though new sewer systems were installed in the area to accommodate large-scale commercial and multi-family housing developments, the pollution of Nutts Pond became an increasingly serious problem during the 1960's and '70's (Slown, 1987.)



Swimmers at Nutt's Pond in the early 20th century.  
Manchester Historical Association photograph.