

# Bathing in the Murray

*Greg Ryan*

For youngsters of many generations, summer in Albury has meant enjoying the water at the river, the swimming pool or the weir. But as the *Border Post* noted in 1856, “bathing in the river is attended by great risks.” For more information on about 270 local drownings, go to <https://alburyhistory.org.au/resources/downloads/>

In January 1859 an advert in the *Post* stated “The public are respectfully informed that there is a bathing place opened on the river, below the Crossing [behind the present Albury swimming pool]. Swimming taught ... open 6 am till 10 pm.”

Five years later the same paper reported that a youth was fined one shilling for “having a plunge near the punt at 5 pm.” The paper reminded readers that “by law, bathing is only permitted before 6 am and after 8 pm” and that police are “determined to prevent it during the day.”



Locals on the bank of the Murray River at Noreuil Park, 1950s. The park has stood the test of time and is still a popular spot to chill thanks to constant improvements and updates to facilities.

By the 1870s, some rules had been relaxed. In January 1871, Thomas Scott had opened ‘floating baths’ moored on the river “near the Chinaman’s Gardens” [now Oddies Creek Park]. He advertised swimming “For gentlemen from sunrise to 9 am and from 4 pm to sunset; for ladies from 9.30 am to 3.30 pm.”

In 1880, the council was asked to provide bathers a shed and platform in the loop of the river known as Bean’s, an area fenced with saplings. Facilities were primitive and complaints about poor changing facilities were still being heard well into the twentieth century.

Segregated bathing lasted for some time, but in February 1919 the *Border Morning Mail* started an article with “Mixed bathing is now the most popular sport in Albury.” The article

went on “For several days now the beautiful bend on the Murray, just below Hovell Tree Reserve, known as Bean’s baths, has been a most animated sight both day and evening ... It is estimated that yesterday 600 people went in bathing at Bean’s baths ... One bather stated that mixed bathing in Albury had ‘caught on’ more than it had ever done before. ‘It is the craze,’ he added.”

In November 1919, “it was decided to name the area surrounding Bean’s Baths, Noreuil Park.” The name was chosen to commemorate the bravery of soldiers of the ‘Albury Battery’ in the World War I battle near the town of Noreuil, France. Since then, improvements have been on-going making Noreuil arguably Albury’s most popular recreation site and tourist attraction.