

# CANADA

by Glynn A. Leyshon

The Games of 1906 took place in Athens and involved 20 countries, with nearly 900 athletes competing in 14 sports including the tug-o-war. Given that the world had not completely embraced the concept of the Olympics it is not surprising that the records of the competition should have gaps. The Canadian Olympic Association, for example, makes no mention of Canadian athlete Donald Linden, silver medallist in the 1500 m. walk, in its list of Olympic medal winners

The Canadian team at the 1906 Olympics was not an officially-sanctioned group as far as it can be ascertained. There was no Canadian Olympic Committee and there is no record of how the team was selected which, perhaps, reflects that the 1906 Games were labelled "intercalated"; the results were not officially recognized or recorded by the *International Olympic Committee*. The Canadian team was, however, the most successful in the country's

history. Half or more of the entries won medals! One must temper any enthusiasm for this accomplishment by also noting that the team consisted of three or four members (there are some conflicting accounts). The three were: William "Billy" SHERRING, Donald LINDEN and Edward ARCHIBALD. The mystery man, the fourth member, if, indeed, he were a team member, was named Elwood HUGHES. Of the known trio, 29 year-old "Billy" SHERRING was a standout as he won the marathon race in convincing fashion besting a field of 52 runners to finish seven minutes ahead of the second place man. The other medal winner was Donald LINDEN who garnered silver in the 1500 m walk.

**When Billy Sherring entered the Stadium the Greek spectators became silent abruptly but when King George accompanied Sherring on his last metres through the stadium the applause started again**



The start to the longest running event of the 1906 Games right at the city limits of Marathon



### William "Billy" Sherring

SHERRING'S race, in some ways, was the easiest part of the venture. History does not record any trials for selection so one must speculate as to how the team was chosen; however, when SHERRING knew he was to go to Athens, the veteran set out to raise the money to pay his passage, there being no organization to support him financially or in any way whatsoever. This was the difficult part. Employed as a brakeman on the *Grand Trunk Railway* in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, SHERRING lived a simple life with very few luxuries. This Spartan existence stood him in good stead for what he was about to undertake but made the price of the boat fare difficult to come by. In Greece he would be completely on his own in a foreign country, without logistic support, without language, without companions, without a coach, with little or no finances. But first he had to get to Greece. Money for boat trips was in extremely short supply.

A concert was arranged in Hamilton by whom it is unknown but one could guess that his home club, the *St. Patrick Athletic Club* was involved. The concert was to support his venture but the share of the receipts for SHERRING was reported to be \$ 75.00. It was not enough. Legend has it that SHERRING then went to a bartender friend, a race track tout, who advised on betting on a horse; "Cecily" was a sure thing. Not averse to a wager and with nothing to lose, SHERRING took the advice, bet the money and the horse won. He had enough to pay for his pas-

sage to Greece. There is some doubt that this actually happened for a later report from a relative indicated that SHERRING was a notoriously poor gambler and "*never won anything in his life*". As for the boat passage, SHERRING also apparently worked his passage on a cattle boat for one story reports he was a stoker in the engine room. While holding that job he ran on deck every night to retain some semblance of fitness since the ocean trip, especially on such a craft, took several weeks.

SHERRING wisely arrived in Greece some seven weeks ahead of race time which allowed him to acclimate to the heat. There is no record of how he managed with the language, accommodation, finances, and food but some reports state that he worked as a porter in Greece to stretch his limited finances for the extended stay. He trained faithfully for he knew what it took to be successful in the marathon. SHERRING had been competing for eleven years and had placed as high as second in the Boston Marathon and had twice won the around-the-bay race in Hamilton, his home town. As well, he had finished first in several other less prominent marathon competitions and held the Canadian record for the 10 mile run. Train he did, almost daily, in the heat of the Greek countryside and as a consequence dropped 9 kg from his already wispy body. He was to lose an additional 5 kg during the course of the race. At the finish he reportedly weighed in at 48 kg.



Sherring entered the Panathenaic Stadium through a gate which was constructed especially for the 1906 Olympic Games

SHERRING ran a tactical race in the Olympics using his experience to set his own pace and at the half-way point was reported to be 800m behind the leaders in the 52 man race, half of whom were Greeks. Slowly, he closed the gap, his sweat-stained singlet with the green shamrock on it breasting its way to the front. The shamrock symbolized his home club, the *St. Patrick Athletic Club*, back in Hamilton. No maple leaf emblem in those germinal days of international competition. After he established a comfortable lead, SHERRING walked for awhile and took some refreshment. As the race approached the stadium a cannon roared to mark the imminent arrival of the first runner. Anticipation simmered in the crowd of 70,000. SHERRING, for his part, could hear hoof beats as the official timer closed up behind him to ensure there were no irregularities. The pro-Greek audience was looking for one of their countrymen to win this famous race. Surely it would be a Greek! It was not to be. "Billy" SHERRING, the diminutive Irishman from Canada, wearing a stained fedora and a green shamrock on his chest, burst into the stadium. The crowd was subdued. Then a wonderful thing happened. Prince George of Greece, resplendent in his full uniform, joined SHERRING and brought the crowd to its feet by pacing him around the track in a final lap. It was a wonderful display of sportsmanship. For SHERRING it was a great and well-deserved victory.

SHERRING'S time is sometimes given as 2:15:23 but the accepted version is 2:51:23 for what was a slightly abbreviated course, the distance being 41.88 km.

The gold medal presentation was accompanied by the gift of a live lamb, a statue of goddess Athene, honorary citizenship from the city of Athens, a proposal of marriage (from whom is unrecorded), a bouquet of flowers and a lavish banquet.

On his return to Canada, SHERRING was feted in Montreal, Toronto and finally in Hamilton. The King sent his congratulations as did the Governor-General of Canada. The city of Toronto gave him a cash prize of \$ 400.00 while Hamilton, not to be outdone, purportedly settled on him a prize of \$ 5,000 and a house! Additionally, he ran a demonstration 1500 m at a baseball game and the crowd rewarded him with \$ 1200 for his effort. To put these prizes into perspective one should note that SHERRING made an estimated \$ 600.00 to \$ 700.00 a year as a brakeman on the *Grand Trunk Railway*. Thus the \$ 5000.00 grant alone would represent about ten years earnings - the equivalent today of about \$ 100,000. This granting of largesse was reported in the *New York Times* shortly after, with the declaration that it would destroy SHERRING'S amateur status. And, indeed, SHERRING retired within days, stating he had won all he thought he could win. He ultimately became coach of the Canadian team in the 1908 Olympic Games.

#### Edward Archibald

Edward ARCHIBALD, the only one of the trio who did not win a medal, was a pole vaulter and an all-around athlete at the University of Toronto where he competed in the hammer throw, discus, and high jump as well. On the trip from Italy to Greece, (notice the "team" did not travel together)

his pole was lost or stolen in transit and he failed with a borrowed pole to execute to his full potential. ARCHIBALD did engage in a demonstration in London before the 1908 Games began and was reported to have achieved "*incredible heights*". What he might have accomplished in 1906 is a moot point but in the 1908 Olympic Games he placed a creditable third and took home a bronze medal.

### Donald Linden

Walking races were popular at the turn of the century as evidenced by the slate of races in the 1906 Olympics. There were a total of seven competitions: 1500 m, 3000 m, 3500 m, 10,000 m, 20 km, 50 km, and 10 mile races. Canada's lone entry in walking was Donald LINDEN a race walker from Toronto and a staunch member of the West End YMCA leader's corps; his forte was the 1500 m race. Oddly enough a scratch entry in the form of US runner, George BONHAG, upset LINDEN'S quest for gold. BONHAG had not fared well in running the 1500 m or 800 m races and so, on a whim, entered the 1500 m walk having never before walked in a race of this or any other length. He won the event in a time of 7:12:6 and LINDEN placed second in 7:19:8.

### Conclusion

The careers of LINDEN and SHERRING as Olympic competitors ended with the 1906 Games. SHERRING forfeited his amateur status by accepting money for his victory although he was reported as losing a 15 mile race in Buffalo, New York to Englishman Alfie SHRUBB in 1909. In all likelihood it was a match race for money. LINDEN simply faded from public sight there being no further record of his competing. ARCHIBALD, as stated, continued for a few years and did eventually win an Olympic bronze medal in the pole vault. How it was or who decided to enter him in the Games, as is the case with the other two, remains a mystery locked in the vaults of time. Nothing approaching the adoration and prizes heaped on Billy SHERRING was awarded to either of the other team members. They, however, did retain their precious amateur status.

**The Panathenaic Stadium at the day of the Marathon race**

