

Whitey Sheridan

February 4th - Whitey Sheridan, who died on the weekend, is being mourned by the local running community as Hamilton's most beloved, enduring and iconic figure. At 92, he had probably crammed more running miles into his life than any human being after he caught the running bug watching the Commonwealth Games from a telephone pole in 1930.

He became a permanent fixture the Around the Bay Race for more than 50 years and was the best known Canadian in Berwick, Pa., where he competed in a nine-mile race called the "Run for the Diamonds" on American Thanksgiving since the 1930s.

As a member of the Hamilton Olympic Club (HOC) for almost about 70 years, he also mentored a number of young runners including world class competitors like Gordon Dickson of Hamilton and Cecilia Carter-Smith.

A true amateur, he crammed in his races and running-related activities while working shifts at Stelco and raising four boys and five daughters with his wife of more than 60 years, Eileen.

"He was the king of the road," said Carter-Smith, who met Sheridan at a track meet a McMaster University almost 50 years ago.

"He ran the marathon of life and his life was a marathon. He was an exceptional human being," she added.

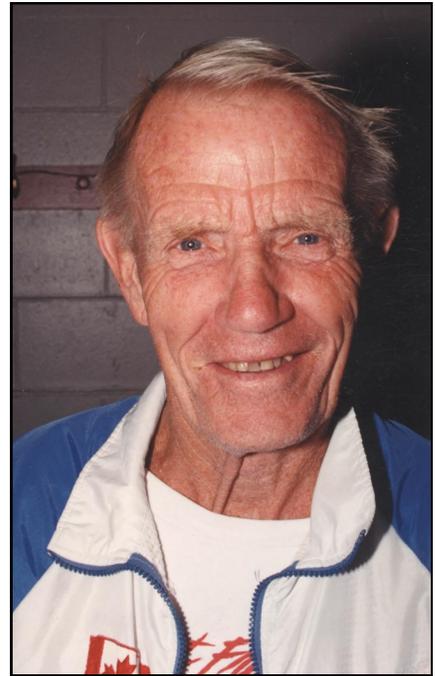
She said Sheridan and his wife, Eileen, had an "open-door policy" at their Waterdown bungalow where they welcomed young athletes like herself.

Each spring, after the Waterdown 15-kilometre race which Sheridan organized, they'd invite all the competitors to the house for refreshments. Runners inevitably wandered into the basement where Sheridan had a huge trove of running artifacts known as the Runners Roost.

Ed Whitlock, 72, of Georgetown, described the basement museum as an "Aladdin's cave of running memorabilia."

The trove included old posters, scrap books, medals and trophies.

Whitlock, the first septuagenarian to run a marathon under three hours, remembered Sheridan as a tough competitor who expected others to work as hard as he did.



At the Legends Tribute Race in Cambridge in 1997

And if you were associated with him, he expected you to run. He didn't put too much pressure on his daughters take up the sport.

But their husbands and his sons were expected to follow the old man, who kept on running until he was almost 85 years old.

"He was sort of outspoken, a crusty old character. He wasn't a polished type of person. But he meant well," recalled Gord Dickson, who met Sheridan at the Toronto airport in 1956.

Dickson had arrived with a track team from Alberta and Sheridan drove them to Hamilton for Canadian Olympic trials.

They became close friends and travelled extensively together as Dickson became a kind of surrogate son at the Runners Roost.

Dickson developed into one of Canada's top marathon runners and went on to represent Canada at the Olympics, something Sheridan never achieved during seven decades of running.

But he came close when he finished third at the 1948 Olympic trials in Montreal. He was leading the pack coming into the stadium where the race ended on a running track. He might have been confused about the number of laps he was supposed to run or just too tired to put on a finishing kick. But two other runners suddenly appeared in the stadium and sprinted past him to the finish line. Only the first two got Olympic berths. He also had a lot of top finishes, but never won the diamond ring at the "Run for the Diamonds," in Berwick, Pa. But he won the hearts of the small community which welcomed him back each year like an international celebrity. Because of the goodwill he spread across the border, a number of Berwick runners have been coming here to run the "Around the Bay."

To put Sheridan running achievements in perspective, Dickson said, you have to consider that he spent 40 years in the steel mills and raised a huge family while trying to train for races. "I wouldn't have won many races either, if I had to do that," he said.

Dickson last saw Sheridan about six months ago at the Regina Gardens nursing home on Hamilton Mountain where he had been living with Eileen, for several years. They

were still living in the home when he passed away on Saturday.

Ed Whitlock writes....

We said goodbye today to one of the great running enthusiasts. His scrapbooks of running events covered decades and the basement at his home "The Runners Roost" in Waterdown was an Aladdin's cave of running memorabilia. He was a fierce competitor who was hard on himself and others when they showed any shortcomings. He could generally come up with something to needle someone about even if you ran well.

After attending the Berwick PA "Run for the diamonds" then known as the "Berwick Marathon" in the 30's he made it a regular annual pilgrimage to the race coming close to winning but never achieving that goal, I am sure he berated himself for that. He cemented the long relationship with that race and a significant Canadian participation out of proportion with its distance from Canada and its awkward date for us of American Thanksgiving day. The ties of the race with Hamilton are particularly strong. The welcome by the people there keep us coming each year in spite of the hill on the course for us non hill runners and the problematic weather.

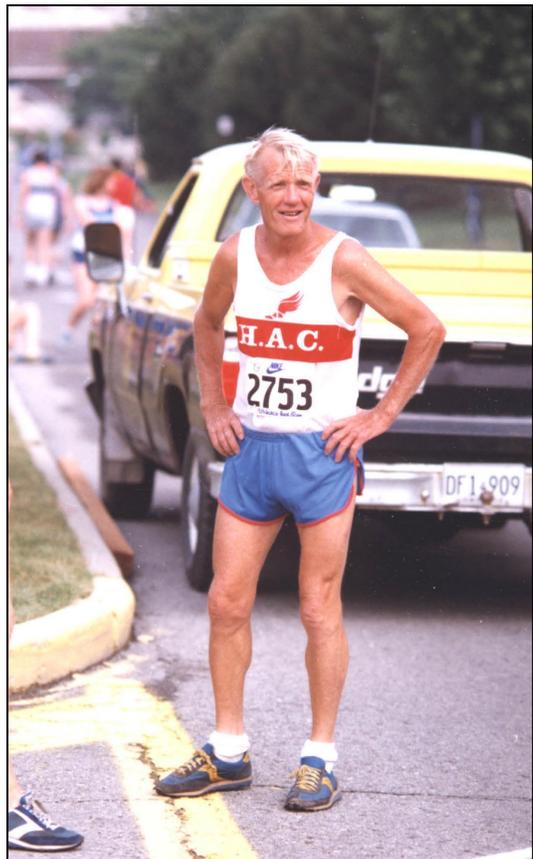
Whitey was a regular attendee of major events such as the Olympics etc, driving his minders to distraction as they tried to keep track of him. The tales of him getting separated and lost are legendary, somehow it was always them that were confused not him.

If one was associated with Whitey one was expected to run. Even though the daughters got out of it somehow their husbands were not exempt.

He was the race organizer for Whitey's 15k, a race for runners. It is a shame that a race with lower entry fees than any other road race did not attract more participants although it would then have outgrown the after race party at the Runner's Roost with the best food and a multitude of prizes.

Whitey worked for Stelco as an open hearth furnace operator, the heat probably kept his weight down in the days before the ubiquitous bottled water, of course there was none in the races in those days either, but that would have been an excuse that would give one no escape from his needling.

All the best Whitey, you won't be soon forgotten!



At an early 80's Waterloo 10K Classic

One of the fixtures at Ontario road and cross country races from the 1920's until the late nineties died this afternoon at the age of 92. Whitey Sheridan had an amazingly long running career and although he wasn't the fastest guy, he inspired and astounded many of us with his attendance at events, He would often drive to distant NCAA cross country meets to watch any Hamilton area runners who would be competing. His story is too long to describe here, but I hope some on this list can relate a few to us.

Here are a couple of the many shots I have of him, taken at a race in Cambridge when he was 82 years old.

George Aitkin



Whitey (R) at the 1948 CAN Olympic Trials