

*The Manchester Historical Society*

# Honoring John E. McCluskey

**Winner of the very first  
running of the Manchester  
Thanksgiving Day Road Race**

**80<sup>th</sup>**

**Anniversary of the  
first race, 1927-2007**

**John E. McCluskey, M.D., age 98**  
*2007 photo courtesy of the McCluskey family.*



John McCluskey (April 12, 1909 to March 7, 2009) won that first race in 29.46 minutes.

In a 1986 letter to the late sports editor Earl Yost, John said, “As far as I am concerned Frank Haraburda should have won it but I felt I could win it coming down Porter St. if I were near the front. So I lengthened my stride by over a foot and still looked as though I was running the same speed. This gave me well over 100 yards lead – maybe 200 – and so, when I reached the “Center” it was too late to catch me, although Frank was closing in fast. I received a silver loving cup as the prize which my parents cherished very much...”

The McCluskey family’s story is similar to many tales of life in Manchester at the turn of the last century. His father came from Ireland in 1901 to work at Cheney Brothers silk mills and saved his money to go back to Ireland in 1903 and get the rest of his family, including his new bride, Catherine. These hard-working immigrants had six children – John being the third child.

John recounts these memories of the first Road Race: “In 1927, when I was eighteen ... I ran in and won the first Thanksgiving Day race, called the Five Mile Road Race, although it was a little over five miles. I believe there were nine runners. Joe [Joe McCluskey, John’s brother, who went on to win many national and international track events] was too young to enter but he rode his bicycle alongside for most of the race. Lewis Lloyd, Manchester’s recreation director, came up with the idea of the race, and Frank Busch, also from the recreation department, assisted him, as did Coach Pete Wigren...After one year at Hartford Seminary, I decided I wasn’t going to be a priest. I attended Manchester High School, and started running on the track team. Pete Wigren had been track coach about six years. Pete said I was ‘going to be all right on the mile.’ I said, ‘Oh no, wait until you see my brother, Joe, he can beat everyone here.’ Joe was in the eighth grade then, but by his freshman year, he was winning all the races.”

John went on to Fordham University in New York, and became a medical doctor. He had to give up running due to a hip injury he sustained as a youngster. “Dr. John,” as his Irish parents proudly called him, has retired from his medical practice, and lives in Duxbury, MA with his wife.

*Prepared in November, 2007, by Susan Barlow, for the Manchester Historical Society*