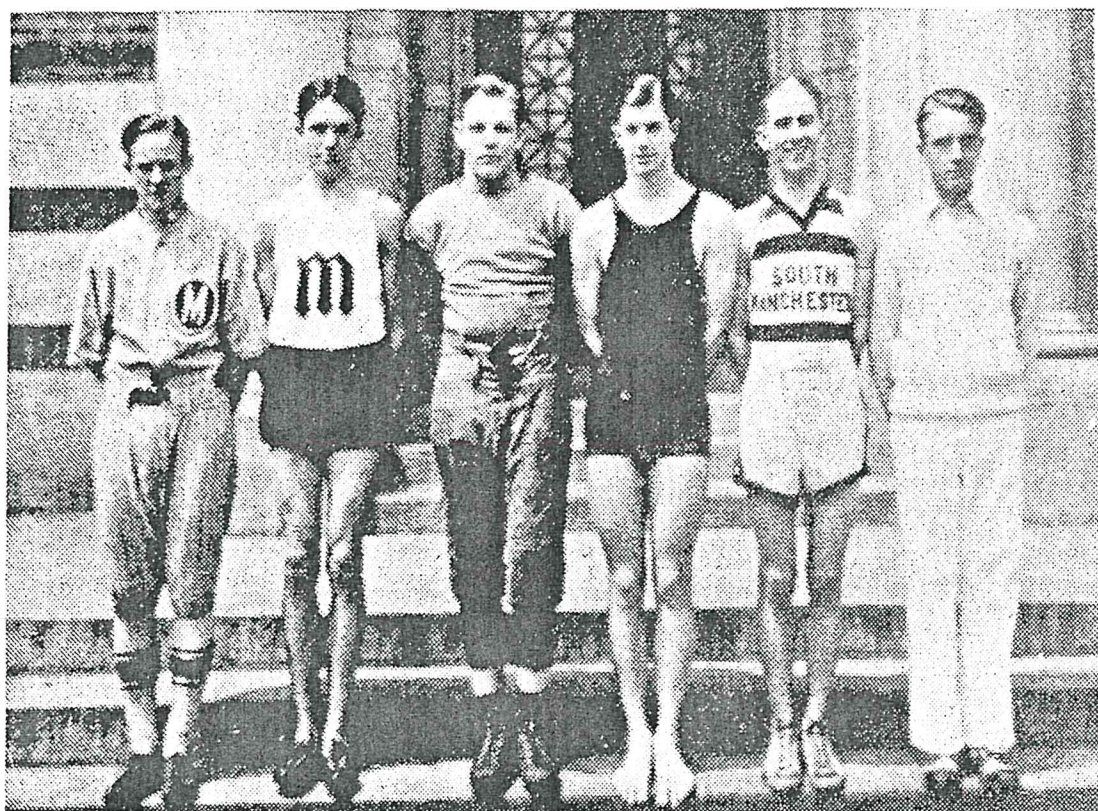


## *Manchester's Greatest Athlete*

*Shufflin' Joe McCluskey, Manchester's greatest contribution to the world of sports, will be featured in Saturday's special sports section of The Herald's sesquicentennial edition. Here's the East Sider during the height of his career, 40.*

69-155-16

May 1 1929  
MANCHESTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY



### *Manchester High 1929 Captains*

Captains of athletic teams at Manchester High in 1929 were, left to right, Ernie Dowd, baseball; Joe McCluskey, track; Bob Treat, football; Les Buckland, swimming, Danny Renn, basketball; Bob Smith, tennis. (See Herald Angle)

# Manchester's sports greats helped build the town

By Charles E. Mowbray  
Special to the Herald

The bowling leagues, Twilight baseball, softball teams, and all the town recreation department activities make modern Manchester a sports-minded town. But Manchester's biggest sports years were those between World War I and World War II.

There was no television in those days and people had plenty of leisure time. Manchester, like many other American towns, was ripe for local sports. And all kinds of local teams grew as a result.

There was Eastern League basketball (the forerunner of the Basketball Association of America, which was the forerunner of the present-day NBA), semipro baseball and football, an annual golf tournament, recreation department sponsored boxing and other events, and plenty of scholastic sports.

Manchester's real claim to fame, of course, is the Five Mile Thanksgiving Day Road Race, which attracts top runners from all over the country. It's only fitting because Manchester was once known as a track town. Paul Wigren, who coached at Manchester High from 1922 to 1954, churned out a batch of runners during his tenure.

GREATEST of them all was Joe McCluskey, an outstanding steely-plechaser who represented the U.S. in both the 1932 and 1936 Olympics and just missed qualifying a third time in 1950 (and this was after a five-year hiatus in the military).

McCluskey's running career got off to an auspicious start when he jogged around the east side delivering copies of the Manchester Herald to residents. By the time he got to South Manchester High School, he worked em in the mile and two-mile runs. He was captain of the 1929 varsity team.

He won a scholarship to Fordham University, joined the famed New York Athletic Club, and compiled a string of 25 national AAU championships during a 30-year career. McCluskey was named to the All-America track and field team 14 times, and was a big draw during the early days of the Manchester Road Race. He won the event from 1930 to 1932, and stepped aside after that to let someone else have a chance.

His graciousness really was a help, though. Without a local star to bring the spectators to the race, it folded two years after McCluskey's last victory. The Thanksgiving Day classic didn't return until 1945.

AND IT TOOK another local running star to catapult it to greatness and establish it as one of the major running events in the country. Charlie Robbins, who has missed only one race in its 47-year history, brought the crowds back to Main Street. He won the 1945 and 1946 races, and has been a familiar figure ever since. Only a medical internship in Cleveland kept him away.

Robbins, another graduate of Manchester High, started at the University of Connecticut as a distance runner. He won eleven AAU national championships, including two in the marathon.

Robbins and McCluskey, the prodigies, actually learned better than their mentor, the venerable Wigren who died less than two years ago. He ran track at Wesleyan University, but never won a letter in his favorite sport.

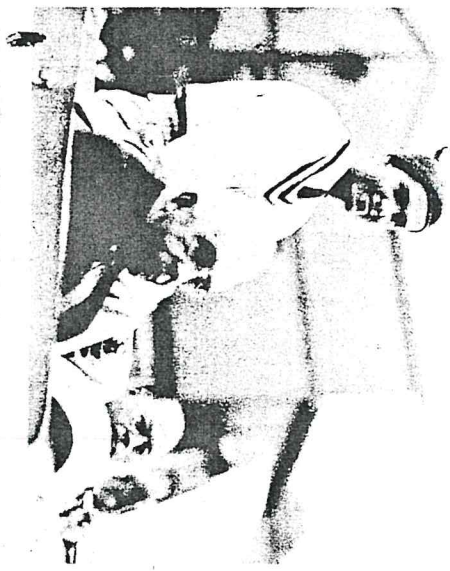
Wigren produced an astonishing 54 championships in his 32-year tenure at Manchester High. His track and field squads won 21 CCIL titles as well as three state indoor championships and three Rhode Island Invitational meets.

He had seven undefeated teams. His cross-country teams copied 15 CCIL titles, nine state championships, two New England titles, and one Connecticut Invitational. Twelve of his teams had undefeated seasons.

When he resigned from Manchester to accept an assistant professorship in mathematics at UConn in 1954, Wigren was awarded the Gold Key by Connecticut sports writers. Three years ago, he was elected to Manchester's Hall of Fame.

MANCHESTER PRODUCED some stellar athletes in other sports, as well. Four residents played for major league baseball. The first was Herman Bronke, a high-kicking utility infielder who played for the old St. Louis Browns as well as the Indians, Cardinals, and Cubs. The Browns missed the American League pennant by just one game to the Yankees in 1922, and Bronke posted his best average (.281) that year when he appeared in 23 games. His seven-year career average was an unremarkable .242. Bronke died in Somers in 1968 at the age of 83.

Merredith Goodwin "Moe" Morhardt was born in Manchester in 1937. An All-American at UConn, he signed with the Chicago Cubs as a bonus baby in 1960. In the next two seasons, Morhardt played only 25 games, most of them as a pinch hitter. By that time, the Cubs had decided to convert their shortstop, Ernie Banks, to first base, and Morhardt quickly found himself out of a job.



Olympic runner Joe McCluskey with Gov. Wilbur Cross, during a parade through town, shortly after an Olympic victory. McCluskey is credited with attracting crowds during the early years of the Manchester Thanksgiving Day Road Race.

Tom Kelley, born in 1944, impressed Cleveland scouts with his blazing fastball. He compiled a 2-1 record in 1965, including a win over the defending AL champion New York Yankees. However, Kelley slipped to 4-8 the next year, and arm miseries stopped his career altogether in 1967.

The popular Jay Johnstone, who slammed a key pinch hit home run for the Dodgers in their 1981 World Series victory, is the only other Manchester resident, if you can call him that, to make professional baseball. The journeyman outfielder, now with the Cubs after

City College in Pennsylvania and went on to play for the Philadelphia Quakers, the forerunners of the modern day Eagles. In the mid-1920's, football players had to go both ways and Fay did his duty as a tackle. Fay, who died in 1978 at the age of 81, also was good enough to bat .329 and win a home run title in the Eastern League when he played for New Haven.

Leo Karkaveck was the only Manchester native to play professional basketball when he played for the Washington Capitols of the old Basketball Association of America.

The list of names is long, but it would be a serious oversight to omit Matt Morarty Sr. He may not have made his mark as an athlete, although he did box his way through college, but he was the financial backer of many teams in Manchester.

Morarty, 81, is known as "Mr. Baseball" for his strong support of town teams and the Greater Hartford Twilight League team that bears the name of his firm. However, his contributions weren't limited to baseball.

He did more than any other person to promote sports in Manchester," said former Herald sports editor Earl Yost. "He was the first businessman to sponsor an athletic team. He had teams in basketball, football, volleyball, baseball, hockey, you name it. His volleyball team won the New England title. He had that special touch.

In May, 1962 the town renamed the baseball diamond at the M. Nebo sports complex in his honor.

WALLY FORTIN'S contributions to Manchester sports are more inspirational than financial. In the mid-1960's, town-organized sports burgeoned. Fortin took a pay cut from Hamilton Standard to serve as the town's assistant recreation department director.

Fortin coached one of the first four Little League teams during its maiden 1960 season and took the Dodgers to the league title. He helped organize Alumni Junior and Alumni Leagues for players beyond the Little League level of play, coached in both leagues, and, not surprisingly, won the first Alumni League championship in 1951.

From 1951-56, Fortin coached Manchester's American Legion baseball team with remarkable success. Four of his clubs won Zone championships with the 1953 edition taking the state crown. Two other teams were runners-up in the state. He left Legion baseball for a few years before returning for three more campaigns. His final coaching record was 112-29.

In basketball, Fortin's teams won middle and intermediate town championships on the same night in 1947. He also coached intermediate championship teams in 1950 and 1951, had junior championship teams in 1952 and 1954 and had middle championship teams in 1955 and 1956. In addition he led a local all-star team to the title in the Goodwill Tournament in Hartford in 1950.

The aforementioned names are all contemporaries of Earl Yost, who has been at the center of Manchester sports in some capacity. Yost retired last year after 38 years as sports editor of the Manchester Herald.

While he's quick to credit McCluskey and Robbins for bringing the crowds to the Thanksgiving Day Five-Mile Road Race, Yost did plenty himself to make the race what it is today. He is the undisputed historian of the state's largest road race, and has been at the starting line of every race since the race began.

When Yost started at the Herald in 1945, he was the youngest sports editor. When he retired last year, he was state's oldest.

75-059

Man. Herald, 12/18/75

MANCHESTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# Road Runners' Hall of Fame door opened for McCluskey

By EARL YOST

Sports Editor

Honors continue to come the way of Joe McCluskey, native son of Manchester and one of track's all-time greats.

Christmas came early for the one-time Manchester High and Fordham University distance runner who twice represented the United States in the Olympic Games.

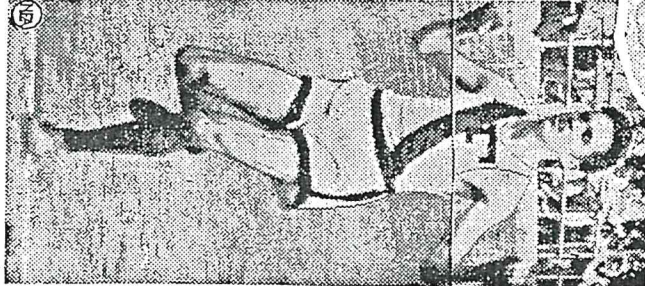
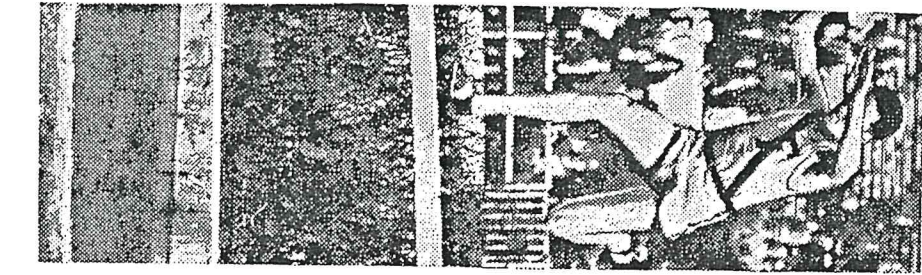
The Road Runners of America have elected McCluskey to the Hall of Fame of American distance running.

McCluskey, winner of 25 national individual championships during his storied career, was named along with Horace Ashenfelter and Don Lash. All three were one-time Olympians and Ashenfelter was often a foe of McCluskey in steeplechase events. Lash and Ashenfelter were red-hot rivals over the two-mile runs.

The 64-year-old McCluskey, a stock broker on Wall Street in New York City and a resident of Rego Park, Long Island, dominated the steeplechase event for a decade.

Seventeen of his national titles were garnered in this running and water-jump event. McCluskey dominated the indoor steeplechase field for a decade, winning eight national titles during the years 1932 thru 1941, missing out only in '37 and '39.

Outdoors, Shufflin' Joe and the Iron Duke, two nicknames he picked up while campaigning for the New York A.C. after a great career at



Familiar scenes: McCluskey going over steeplechase water jump, left; victory smile, top right; breaking the tape first, right; Joe today, center.

Fordham, won nine steeplechase championships, reeling off four straight in 1930 thru 1933, added a fifth in 1935 and then put together three more successes in 1938-39-40. The ninth outdoors was achieved in 1943.

Twice McCluskey was part of the New York A.C. team which won the national senior cross country titles in 1941 and 1946.

McCluskey's other individual national crowns in Amateur Athletic Union competition were two in each the indoor two-mile run and outdoors in the 5,000 meters and 15 kilometers (10 miles), plus one each in the 10,000 meters (six miles) and the senior cross country run. In between he won 39 Metropolitan track events in New York.

The one-time newsboy from Manchester's East Side coached the New York A.C. for 15 seasons, guiding the talent-rich national club to many national championships. He stepped down after the 1970 season. McCluskey helped put Fordham on the track map before graduating in 1933. While a collegian, he won 10 national titles, plus six ICAA crowns. In 1932 and 1935 Olympic Games in Los Angeles and Berlin, the Connecticut runner placed third and 10th in the steeplechase.

Fourteen times McCluskey was named to the All-America track and field squad and in 1971 was cited by Dan Ferris, AAU executive secretary, as the greatest American AAU runner in history because of his diversification of ability, long record, loyalty, good sportsmanship

and courage.

McCluskey's showcase of awards includes more than 100 trophies of various shapes and sizes, plus more than 350 medals.

Three years ago he was inducted into Fordham's Athletic Hall of Fame. In 1946 he received the coveted Gold Key from the Connecticut Sports Writers Alliance.

Following five years of service in World War II, McCluskey, at age 36, sought a spot on the 1948 Olympic squad in the steeplechase for an unprecedented third time but was nipped in the final yards. The 1940 and 1944 Olympics were canceled due to the war.

The Shufflin' tag was applied due to his peculiar flat-footed style which carried him to worldwide fame in 13 foreign countries.

McCluskey was just a little skinny five-footer weighing less than 100 pounds as an eighth grader when he became interested in running just watching Manchester High's team working out at the West Side Oval.

His record is legendary and he's one of the main reasons the Five Mile Road Race in Manchester has developed into one of the biggest in the country today each Thanksgiving. McCluskey won the Five Miller four times and last month he marked finish to a 50-year competitive career by running before the home folks.

The Hall of Fame berth was well deserved. It's rich frosting to the many awards won over the years by the smiling Irishman who helped put Manchester, Conn., on the sports map.

# Herald Man Reported on '32 Olympiad

The Herald falls into that category of newspapers known as "small town dailies", but frequently it has offered its readers what literally amounts to big city coverage. This is especially true of the sports department.

Every spring sports editor Earl Yost packs his bags and journeys South to give Herald readers exclusive, on-the-spot coverage of developments in the Grapefruit League. At World Series time, Yost is dispatched to cover the annual fall baseball championship. Frequently the sports department will report heavyweight championship boxing bouts in the New York area. And seldom, if ever, does The Herald fail to send a staffer to cover regional sports events involving local personalities or teams.

## Stowe Covers Olympics

Perhaps the most ambitious project ever undertaken by a member of The Herald Sports department was the coverage of Joe McCluskey's participation in the 1932 Olympics, 3,000 miles away in Los Angeles.

Sports editor at that time, Tom Stowe, not only covered the 2-week period during which the Games were held, but he sent home dispatches a full month before the 10th modern Olympiad began.

However, Stowe was not assigned by The Herald, and actually took the time off against the wishes of the publisher.

Starting July 5, 1932, the first story with a California dateline, written exclusively for The Herald, appeared carrying the banner headline "McCluskey Wins 2-Mile Title for Third Time." This race was a warm-up event at Berkeley. July 6 brought another "Special to The Herald" from California.

This time it was "McCluskey First in Semi-Final Tryout." In the ensuing weeks, story after story brought Herald readers the most complete details of their local hero.

On Aug. 2, the day it was announced McCluskey placed second to Iso-Hollo, the Finnish ace, in the final heat, the Bissell St. office was swamped with calls asking about "Shuffling Joe's" fate. By 9 p.m., a bulletin had been flashed across the country to Manchester and during the next hour 690 phone callers learned the news.

## Megaphone Relays Results

A crowd of 600 had gathered outside The Herald building, and the home front staff, with the help of a megaphone, relayed the good news about Manchester's favorite son to the cheering throng.

Five days later there was another bulletin from California. This time it contained the results of the finals in the 3,000-meter Olympic steeplechase.

The public had been told the day before that they could call The Herald shortly after 8 p.m., and on that night the drama of Aug. 2 was repeated.

However, "Shuffling Joe" did not win.

Stowe cabled back his story of the race the next day and the report appeared in the Aug. 8 edition of The Herald under the banner headline, "Officials Make Queer Blunder in the Steeplechase."

"A blunder unparalleled in the annals of athletic history brought an unsatisfactory ending to the 3,000-meter steeplechase Saturday afternoon, and as a result Joseph P. McCluskey, the Manchester boy who rose to the heights of running fame in three years, finished third in the event behind Iso-Hollo of Finland and Ryanson of Great Britain.

"A substitute lap scorer was responsible for the error which caused the runners to negotiate 40 more meters, or one lap, over the regular distance of 3,000 meters.

"The extra lap was too much for McCluskey. (He had a week ago been laid up with a cold). He was second at the end of 3,000 meters, but the additional 410 proved beyond his strength, and his usual finishing drive was lacking.

## Accepts Third Place

"After a long conference, the runners decided against accepting an offer to run the race over again McCluskey, the first American to cross the finish line in the race, was accorded a thunderous ovation for his sportsmanship in accepting the third place medal.

By Aug. 10, the McCluskey story had been relegated to just another item in "Sports Chatter." And thus did the greatest sports story ever covered by a Herald staffer end.

as and many picnic  
the picturesque and

the binder, head of the  
Development Corporation  
built many dwellings  
ford, Newington and  
including the Rolling  
es here has been re-  
e developer who has  
purchase the 70-acre  
in off Hackensack  
ty. now in a rural

Numerous other cases were  
disposed of Saturday, most were  
minor motor vehicle violations.

**Brief Items**

Joseph McCluskey of this town,  
a Wall Street broker, and for-  
mer nationally known track star  
has been named track coach of  
the New York Athletic Club.

Dr. John I. Nutterberger of the  
Institute of Living in Hart-  
ford will be the speaker at the  
Verplanck School PTA meeting  
Tuesday at 8 p.m. in the school

*Courant*  
3/6/1955



# Herald Angle

Earl Yost

Sports Editor

LESTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

5/1/79  
69-155-16

## Class to Celebrate

Class of 1929, Manchester High School, will note its 50th reunion Saturday night, May 12 at the Manchester Country Club.

Leslie Buckland is general chairman, just as he was for Silver Anniversary reunion 25 years ago. Robert Hyde Smith will be toastmaster.

The pair ranked with the top athletes of the class, Buckland, a gentleman vegetable farmer these days in his retirement, was the premier swimmer on three MHS teams that he represented.

Smith, for many years in his own insurance business in Manchester, was the No. 1 singles player with the tennis squad for two seasons.

"I was captain of the swimming team in both my junior and senior years, and also team manager," Buckland recalled. "I also doubled as coach although Will Clarke had the title. We had to have a faculty man in charge and Clarke was named for Principal Clarence Quimby," Buckland said. Swimming was introduced as a varsity sport in 1927.

Buckland sparked the Indians to two CCIL swim titles, excelling in two individual and one relay events when all home meets were staged at the East Side Rec Center Pool.

Swimming was always a big sport with the Hillstown Road man and he continued after graduating from Manchester High at Westminster School and then on to Wesleyan University, setting records along the way. He also reigned as Manchester town men's swim champion in Globe Hollow competition.

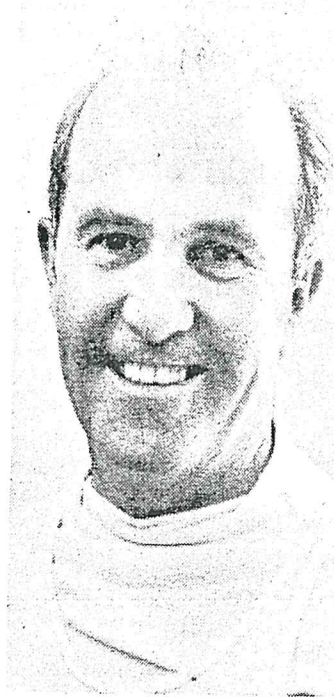
Smith noted yesterday that Manchester's three Gold Key recipients from the Connecticut Sports Writers' Alliance, will be at the 25th — Pete Wigren, Tom Kelley and Joe McCluskey.

Wigren coached track and cross country in 1929 while Kelley handled the coaching reins for the football and baseball squads.

McCluskey graduated in 1929 and went on to become the most famous member of the class, gaining All-America honors in track and then on to fame in the Olympic Games.

One member of the Class of '29 was John Johnston, who was a reporter at The Herald following his retirement as a school teacher on Long Island. Johnston was a football player for three years in addition to excelling in the classroom.

Captains of the '29 athletic teams,



Joe McCluskey

besides Buckland and Smith, were Ernie Dowd in baseball, Bob Treat in football, Danny Renn in basketball and McCluskey in track.

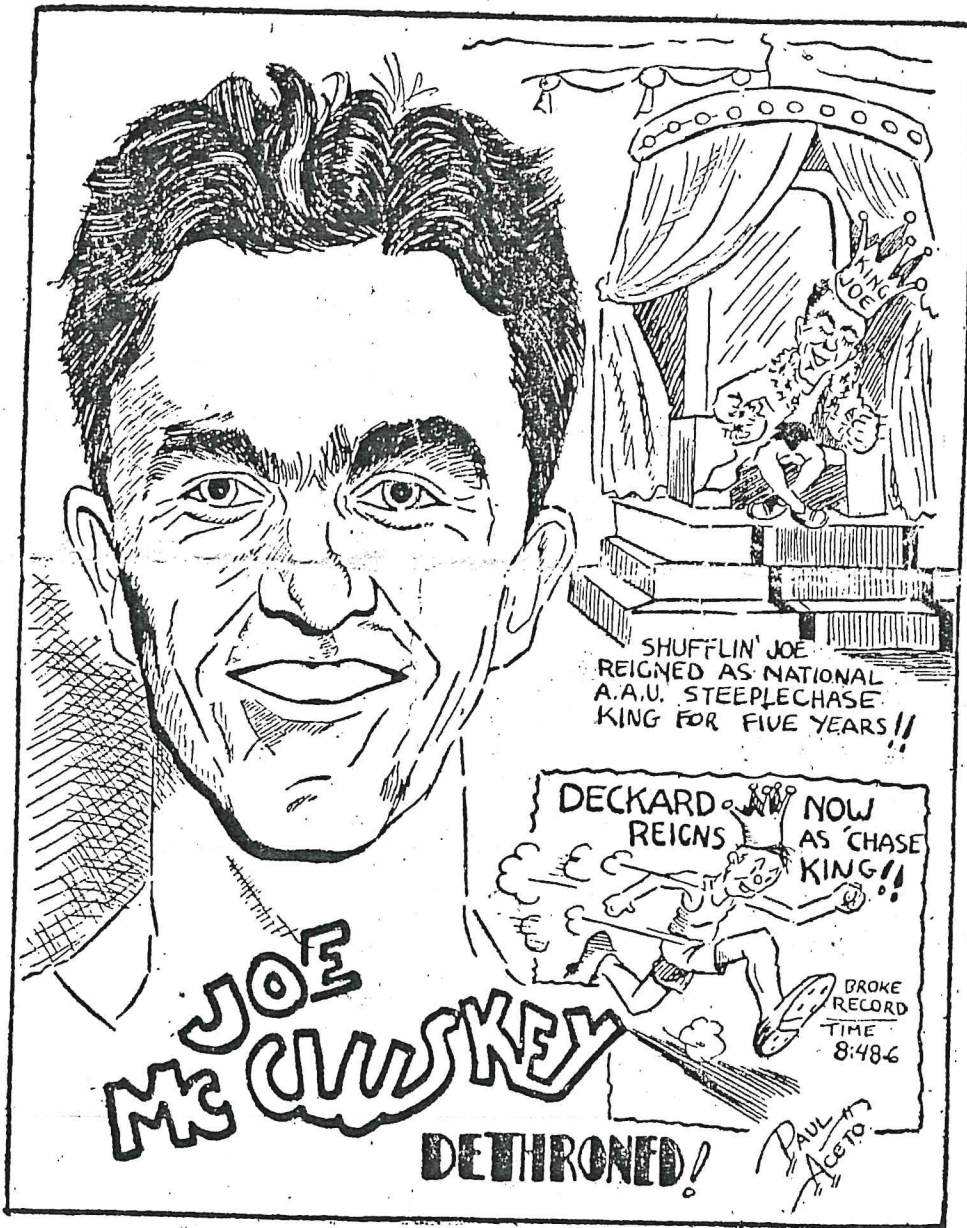
At last count, 69 class members signified their intentions of being present and the overall figure was 117 which means that there will be stories spun until the wee hours of the morning — about the "good old days."



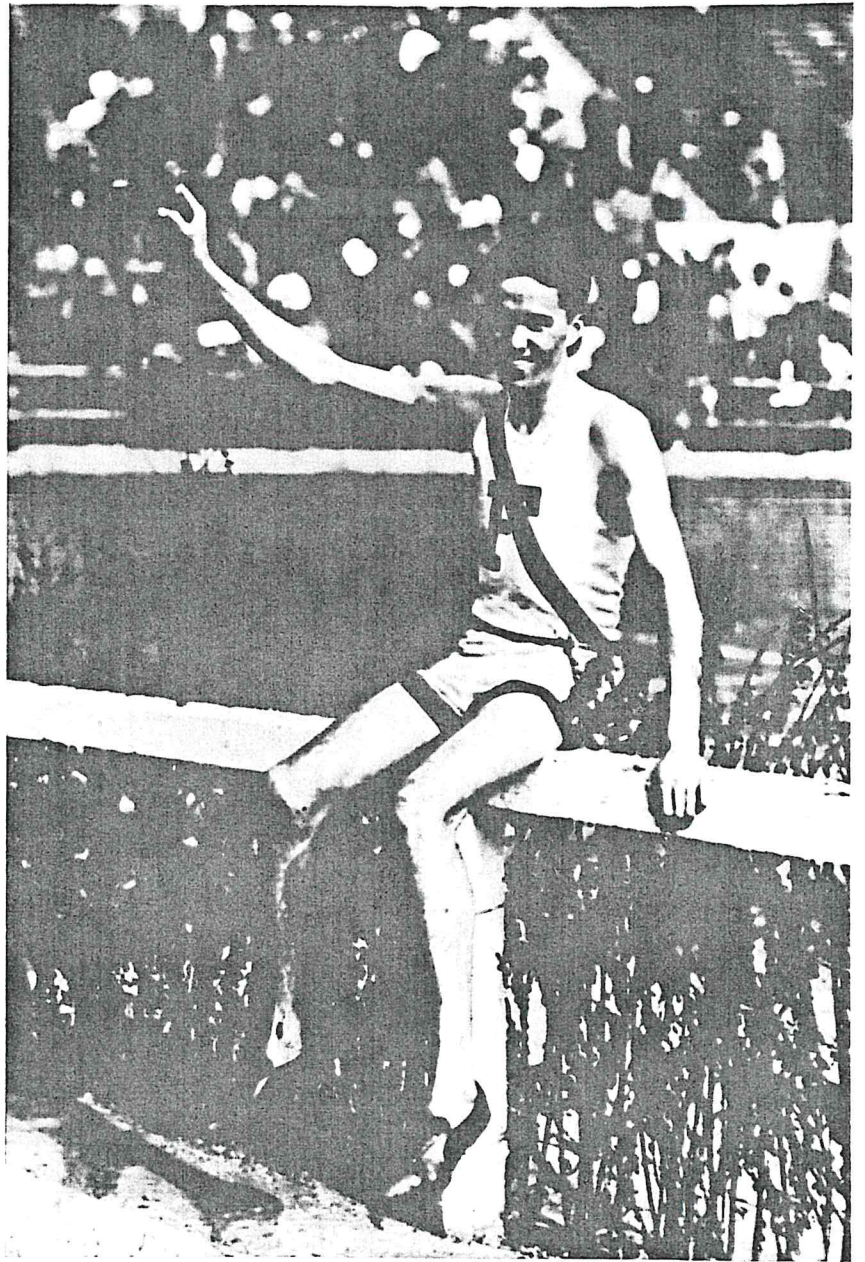
*WITH TEAMMATES heading for the Olympics more than five decades ago is Joe McCluskey, third from the right.*

1932 or 1936?



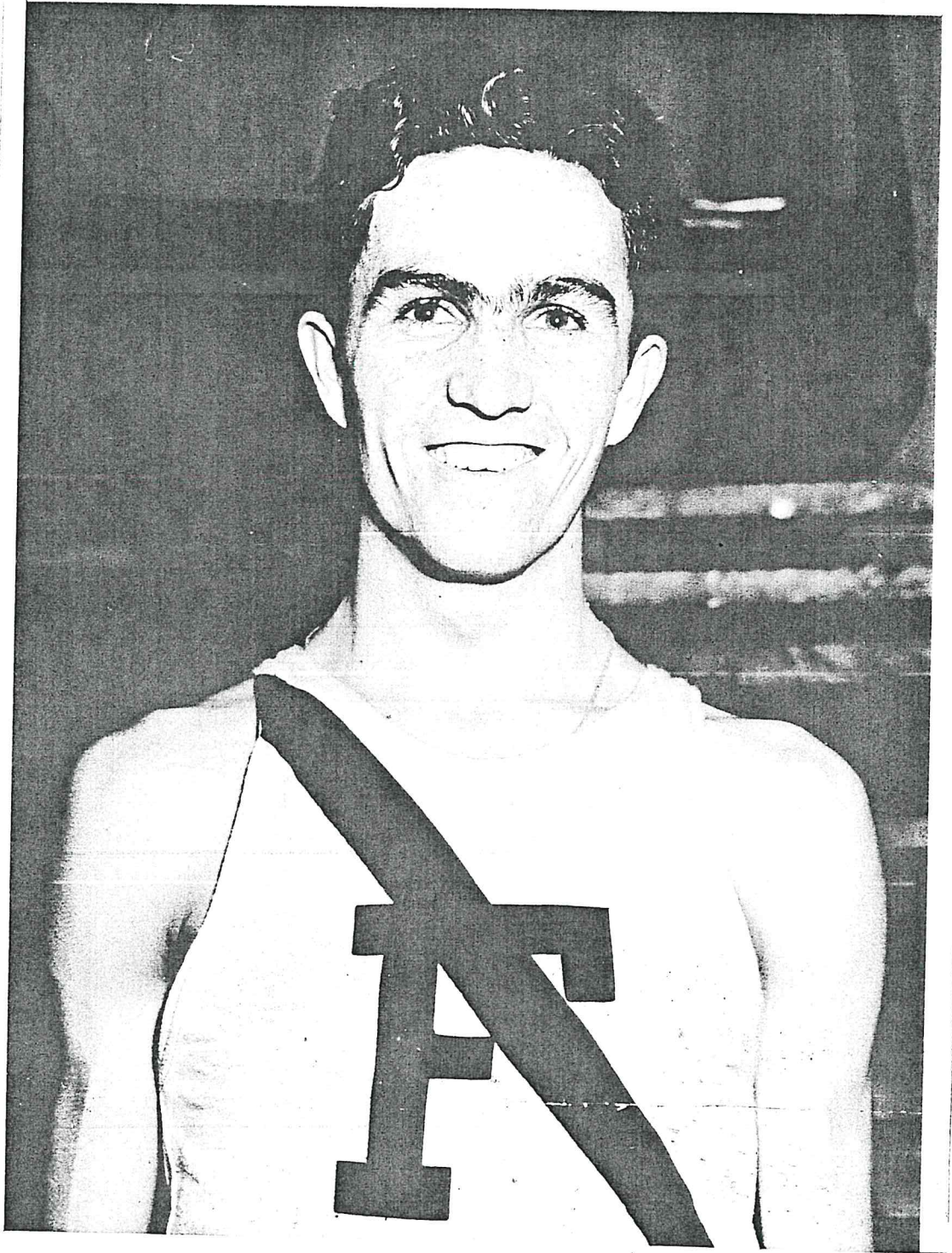


March Herald  
May 7, 1954



1982.85.23

ca 1930



1930's

