

#24 Mountain Memories

By Robert Williamson

"RAPID" RAY LEWIS RECOGNIZED ON HAMILTON DAY

It seems to me that until the publication of the Hamilton Board of Education's history book, "**150 Years of Excellence 1847-1997**", Ray Lewis and his Hamilton Central Collegiate Institute (HCCI) Mile Relay teammates were forgotten men. Their team photo, shown here, lay buried for sixty years in the Hamilton Wentworth Board of Education Archives. While doing research for the chapter on the excellence of the former Board of Education's athletic programs I found the photograph in one of the school's dusty old yearbooks.



Hamilton Central Collegiate's undefeated Mile Relay Team of 1928-29 set a record time of 3.27 in an era when the 4 minute mile for an individual runner was still 25 years in the future. L-R: Ray Lewis, George Peterson, Fred MacBeth and Jack Fraser.
Vox Lycei Yearbook 1929 HWDSB Archives.

Prior to 1920, interscholastic athletic competition was hard to find in Hamilton. HCCI was the only high school in the city. Games were played with Halton, Brantford and Niagara District Schools. After the completion of Hamilton Technical Institute in 1922 and Delta in 1924, an interscholastic program of football, basketball and track & field were possible. Delta dominated in football winning three Dominion Championships in the first six years while HCCI, under legendary track and field coach Captain J. R. Cornelius was successful not only at the national level, but reached the heights of North American Championships at the Penn Relays. Lewis would go on to win a bronze medal at the 1932 Olympic Games and a silver medal at the 1934 British Empire Games. He was inducted into the Hamilton Gallery of Distinction in 1995. A beautiful mountain school at Rymal and Upper Wentworth was named in his honour in 2005.

Shortly after the publication of "150 Years of Excellence", Brian Henley, former archivist of the Hamilton Public Library Special Collections, (Heritage and Archives) wrote an excellent article about Ray Lewis in the Spectator on May 26, 1998 entitled "Athlete Was the Toast of Hamilton". On November 18, 2003, Spectator writer, Scott Radley wrote an inspiring and sentimental story around Ray's death at Henderson Hospital at the age of 93.

Ray Lewis was once again a headliner on August 3, 2015 at the annual George Hamilton Day celebrations held in the Canadian Football Hall of Fame. Through the recommendations of the Hamilton Historical Board, City Council has, for the last several years, designated the August Civic Holiday in honour of our city's founder. Each year, a notable Hamilton citizen is selected for recognition. Previous recognition has been given on George Hamilton Day to: Thomas McQuesten 2011, Clementina Fessenden 2012, Sara Calder 2013, and Nora Frances Henderson 2014.



Ray Lewis 1998

Mike Hanley The Spectator

This year, it is most appropriate and in keeping with our Pan Am sports theme, that "Rapid" Ray Lewis be selected as an outstanding representative of our civic heritage.

Mountain Memories, written by historian **Robert Williamson** on behalf of the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society, generally appears monthly. The topic at the society's next meeting on Thursday September 17, 2015, will be "Olivet Church Centennial", presented at the church, 7:30 p.m. 40 Empress Ave. See the Society's website (Hamiltonheritage.ca) for information and copies of all twenty-three previous Mountain Memory news columns.