

MARATHON PARK IT ALL STARTED HERE

1901: Gambling Fix Alleged in Ashland

At the dawn of the 20th century, gambling was rampant in America, a real national pastime.

The swells could wager on the ponies, the prizefights, wrestling and, yes, even baseball. If a sporting event was soon to be staged, a man about town could get odds on it.

The marathon was no different.

Bookmakers had been around the race since its inception in 1897. They were not accepted or legitimized but they were legal and, come race week, readily available in Ashland.

Big, big money in 1901, thousands and thousands of dollars were said to be bet on the race with the book situated at the Columbia House, a roadhouse next to the old Boston & Albany Railroad station in downtown Ashland and, that year, the location of the race headquarters.

Odds were said to favor carpenter James Caffrey, 24, of Hamilton, Ontario, the defending champ who had led the Canadian invasion from north of the border the year before, a shocking 1-2-3 sweep for the race's first foreign competitors.

Sportsmen could get even money on the entire field versus the champ or bet him 2-1 over 1898 winner Ronald MacDonald, a Nova Scotia native and aspiring doctor soon to graduate from Tufts Medical School. MacDonald, 25, handled himself in a brash and boastful manner and arrived in Ashland predicting his own victory.

Well-heeled Hamilton wise guys had come northeast flush with cash, boosting the betting pools with wagers

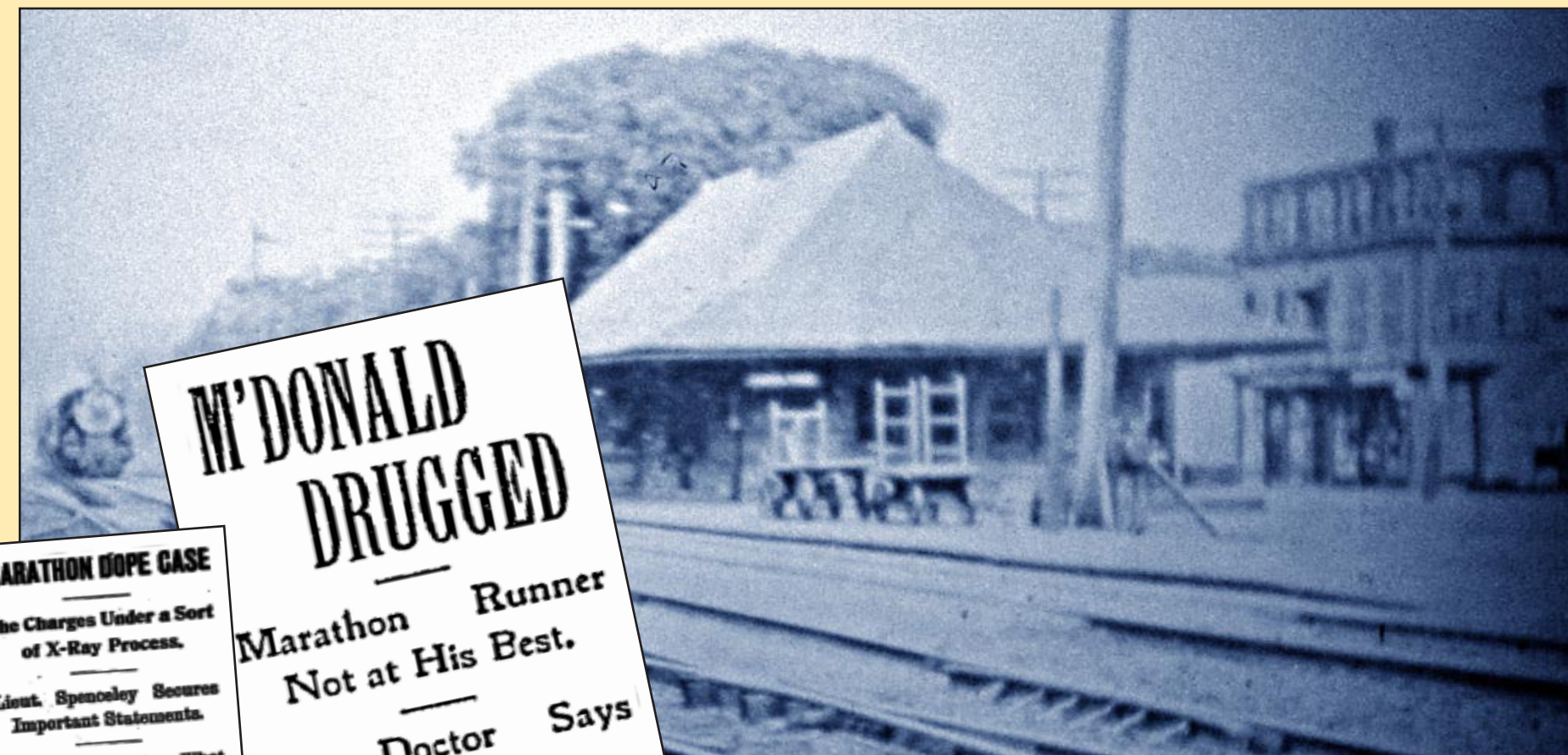
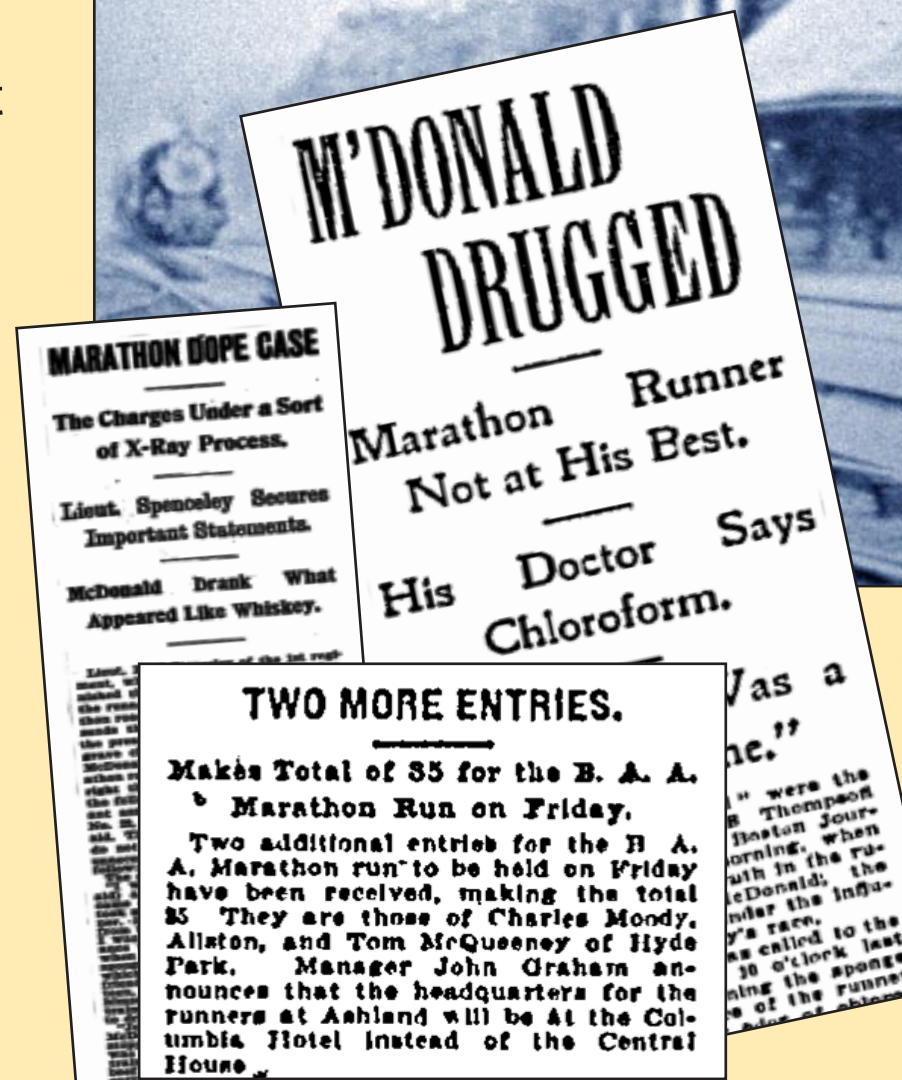


PHOTO ABOVE COURTESY OF ASHLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY



MARATHON DOPE CASE
The Charges Under a Sort of X-Ray Process.
Lieut. Spensley Secures Important Statements.
McDonald Drank What Appeared Like Whiskey.

MCDONALD DRUGGED
Marathon Runner Not at His Best.
His Doctor Says Chloroform.

TWO MORE ENTRIES.
Makes Total of 35 for the B. A. A. Marathon Run on Friday.
Two additional entries for the B. A. A. Marathon run to be held on Friday have been received, making the total 35. They are those of Charles Moody, Ailston, and Tom McQuoseny of Hyde Park. Manager John Graham announces that the headquarters for the runners at Ashland will be at the Columbia Hotel instead of the Central House.

Top: Columbia House, right.

Right: McDonald

Far right: Caffrey



on Caffrey, their favorite son. It was these unexpected huge piles of cash along with an unusual incident along the course which combined to produce an uproar from unhappy gamblers and the clamor of scandal in the press.

In Wellesley, Caffrey had just wrested the lead from fellow Canadian Fred Hughson. Then MacDonald built up some steam and also passed Hughson who, fatigued from back-to-back duels, would soon drop out.

MacDonald, secure in second place and said to be attempting to cool off before moving up on the leader, then accepted a soaked sponge from an outstretched hand near Chestnut Hill. Soon, allegedly overtaken by cramps,

MacDonald slowed to a walk. He was loaded on to a cart and ferried to his nearby residence, still clutching the suspect sponge and accompanied by his attending physician, Dr. J.B. Thompson of East Cambridge.

There, Dr. Thompson examined the sponge and reported he found traces of chloroform upon it. MacDonald's trainer, John Bowles, soon accused Dr. Thompson of slipping MacDonald a mickey in the form of some pills Bowles said Thompson gave the runner disguised as a stimulant.

Comments Dr. Thompson made to a reporter concerning the generous betting pools only contributed to the uproar, which dominated the sporting press for days without end.

Caffrey cruised to victory that day, the Canadians went home carrying buckets full of greenbacks and Dr. Thompson faded from public view.

Ronald MacDonald ran one more race the next year. The bookies made him the favorite after Caffrey, rife with dysentery, couldn't answer the starter's call. This time the odds-on choice, MacDonald dropped out again in 1902 and, despite an unsuccessful later attempt as a race trainer, was soon practicing medicine in his native Nova Scotia, married and building a family, distance running now part of his distant past.

So what happened that Friday?
◆ Did a stranger, perhaps an organized crime figure or a shadowy Canadian gambler, really hand MacDonald a chloroform-soaked sponge and knock him out of the race, ensuring Caffrey's triumph?

◆ Or did Dr. Thompson, as part of a criminal enterprise, drug MacDonald, as the trainer Bowles contended?

◆ Famously, MacDonald rejected all manner of liquids offered him during his 1898 victory, raising suspicions of why he accepted the sponge. So, perhaps, his boasts of victory boosting the pools, MacDonald was in cahoots with some fellow Canadians and simply took a dive, letting the controversy over chloroform or rogue pills shield his complicity and fill their coffers.

The contemporary press was unsuccessful in its attempts to uncover any culprits and so, obscured by the fog of history, we'll just never know...



PHOTO COURTESY OF SPORTS MUSEUM OF NEW ENGLAND

The 1912 marathon starting field toes the line in Ashland.

Marathon Moments: Some Good, Some Bad and One Just Plain Sad

At its beginnings in Ashland, the marathon was very much a race for the common man.

Plumbers, waiters, blacksmiths, clerks, carpenters, stevedores, farmers and bricklayers gathered to test their mettle.

In the Ellis Island era, many had local addresses but came from far and wide as Ashland's starting line gave newcomers a head start on the American Dream.

Canadians ran alongside Frenchmen, Poles, Greeks, Irishmen, Swedes, Finns Germans and Italians, all immigrants and all stewing in the melting pot of Ashland.

And while there was your occasional Harvard man or, every so often, a Yalie, the Native Americans were a true force.

Many traveled here by train, others on horseback with a lucky few rolling into town in an automobile. Some arrived with primitive gear, often heavy boots and treader pants, tucked under their street clothes and plenty were equipped with makeshift or experimental footwear.

Some gambled on the race, many puffed on outsized stogies, others drank and caroused about town but, come Patriots Day, all were determined to pass the test. These characters and the chaos

surrounding them often made for strange circumstances. Here's a few examples:

◆ Eugene Estoppey, who finished sixth in both 1898 and 1899 and 12th in 1902, repeatedly prepared for the rigors of the marathon by walking to Ashland from his home in New York, earning him the label of eccentric.

◆ In 1898, starter "Doc" Moran held up the start in Ashland to wait for a late group of runners arriving via a tardy train. Those entrants leapt off the train sprinting, many tossing off clothes, and reached the line just as the gun fired.

◆ In 1899, a hound dog named Prince jumped in at the Ashland starting line alongside the 17 starters and kept pace with blacksmith Larry Brignolia, the eventual winner, all the way to Wellesley.

◆ In 1900, a few high-strung Canadians, led by John Bernard, jumped the gun at Ashland's starting line and took off, forcing "Boston's" only re-start ever.

◆ Brash Canadian Dennis Carroll told anyone who'd listen in Ashland that if he didn't win the 1900 race he would never return to his Ontario home. He dropped out and, true to his word, Carroll settled in The Hub to live out his days in self-exile.

◆ In 1905, the 78 entrants included Peter Foley, 52, of Winchester. Wary of his age and fitness, officials banned the gray-whiskered veteran. Quickly, Foley shaved off his beard, snuck onto the starting line at Ashland and ran all the way into Boston, perhaps the first "bandit". This became a routine Foley famously followed well into his 80s, his antics chronicled in TIME magazine.

◆ Two notable cheaters began the road to infamy in Ashland: Howard Pearce of New Bedford quit and hopped in a car in 1909. At the finish he ran for the tape to cheers until police tackled him; and, in 1917, Freddy Merchant, in BAA colors, also quit. Near the finish he jumped out of a car and crossed fifth. After protests ensued, Merchant was tossed out.

◆ The 1914 champion, James Duffy of Canada, found himself one year later not defending his title in Ashland but rather in a Belgian trench fighting in World War I. Just three days after the first anniversary of his triumph, Duffy was shot dead during a foolhardy midnight charge toward enemy front lines, one of 278 out of 305 fellow battalion members killed that night.