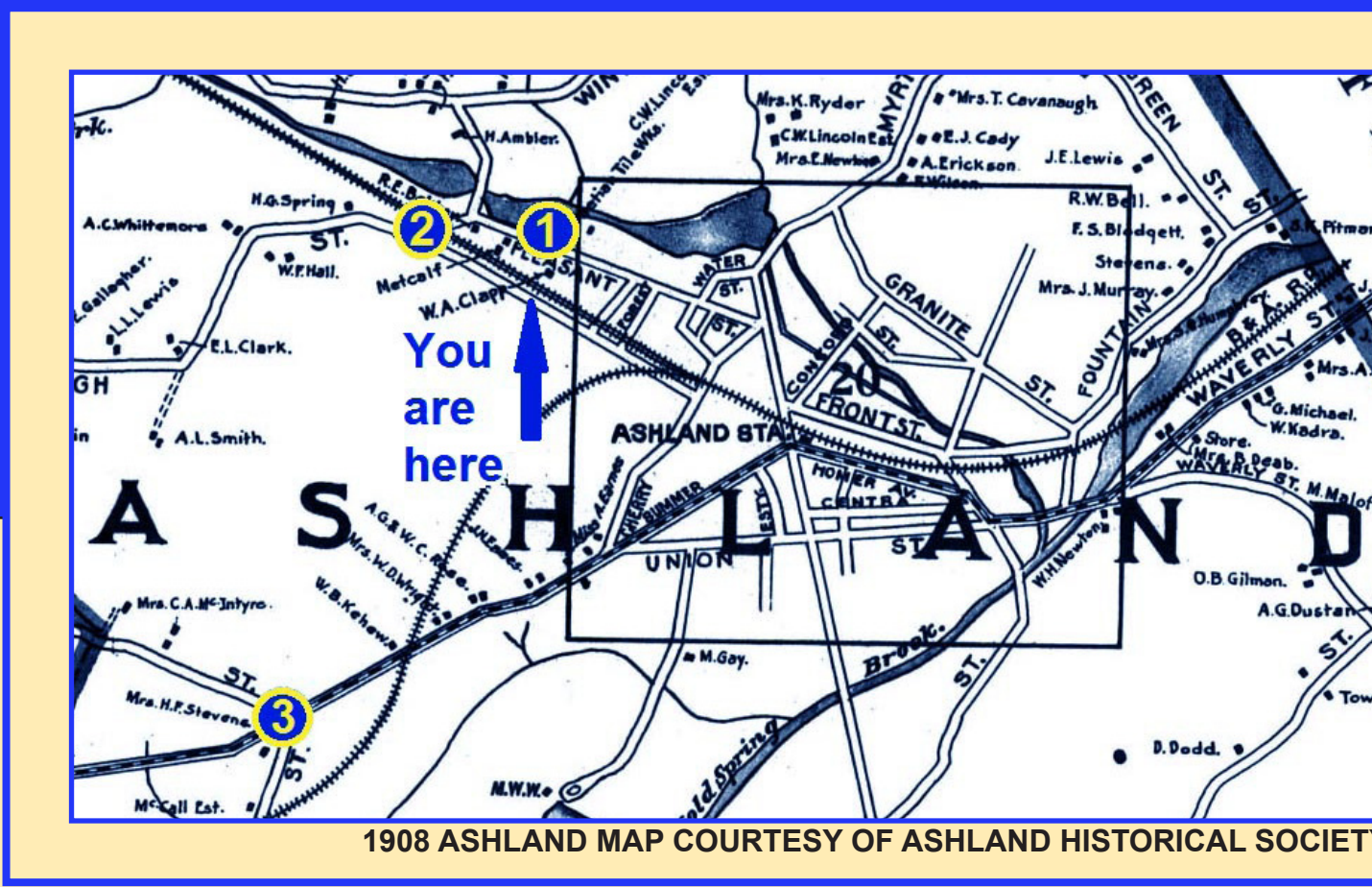


MARATHON PARK

IT ALL STARTED HERE

27 Starts, 27 Stories

Race summaries from the formative years of the world's greatest distance-running event



Tape measure talks: Ashland's starting line shifts

The Ashland locations:
1) 1897-98: Metcalf's Mill. Where you are now standing.
2) 1899-1906: High Street Railroad Bridge. The finish line was moved backward in Boston, so a corresponding move was necessary in Ashland to a site just west of Metcalf's Mill.
3) 1907-23: Stevens Corner (named for Stevens family). With the bridge closed for repairs and the field growing annually, the start was moved to the corner of Union Street (Route 135), Oliver Street and Frankland Street.
4) When the Olympic Marathon loomed in 1908 in London, Queen Alexandra was ill. King Edward VII "suggested" that the line be moved to what is now Windsor Castle to allow the queen to view the premier event's start. That new distance became the standard.
In 1924, 16 years later, the line was permanently moved up the road to Hopkinton to finally match the Olympic standard at 26 miles and 385 yards, adding a swift downhill leg to the course.

1897

'American Marathon' begins in Ashland

What was then called the "American Marathon" took its first strides steps away from where you now stand. On Monday, April 19, 1897, 15 runners, nine from the Boston area, six from New York, toed the line that starter Tom Burke, a double-gold medalist sprinter just a year prior at the first modern Olympic Games in Athens, scraped with his boot heel across the dirt road fronting Metcalf's Mill on this site. To cheers from the multitudes gathered here in Ashland, at 12:19 p.m. Burke yelled "Go!" and the fateful journey for these 15 began in a cloud of dust with their final destinations Boston's Back Bay and the history books. So began one of America's enduring sporting traditions, now an international spectacle well into its second century. *This first race is chronicled in depth on another informational plaque on display in this park.*

1898

Student in bicycle shoes blazes to win

Aspiring doctor and Boston College student Ronald McDonald, 22, won in whirlwind fashion, shaving 13:10 of the initial course record. Sporting bicycle shoes, McDonald rushed from the rear of the 21-man field and chased down New Yorker Hamilton Gray, who had led since sprinting off the line through the "immense crowd" in Ashland, at Beacon and Kent streets in Brookline. The pair settled into a duel before McDonald pulled away to win in 2:42:00. Gray was second, exactly three minutes behind, East Boston's R.A. McLean was third with defending champ John J. McDermott fourth.



McDonald

1899

Heavyweight blacksmith wears crown

On a raw day with gale-force East winds buffeting the runners from Ashland all the way to Boston, powerful Cambridge blacksmith Lawrence Brignolia was equal to the elements and decidedly better than his 16 rivals. The 5-foot-10 Brignolia was also a champion sculler and, at 173 pounds, the heaviest man ever to win "Boston." Brignolia caught Harvard man Dick Grant, popular with the female mobs at Wellesley College, and bested him despite collapsing with a twisted ankle near Kenmore Square. After his ankle was worked on for five minutes, Brignolia walked and ran to finish in 2:54:38, beating Grant by three minutes. Roxbury's Bart Sullivan was third. This was the first year a starting pistol was used.

1900

Foreign invasion begins... & goes 1-2-3

With temperatures soaring above 70, the first foreign entrants, five Canadians from Hamilton, Ontario came east to Ashland and beat the heat, finishing 1-2-3. James Caffrey won when Bill Sherring, the 1906 Olympic gold medalist for Canada, sat down on some roadside grass to cool off at 15 miles. Caffrey raced by him and never looked back, finishing in 2:39:44. Confusion reigned around packed Exeter Street and Caffrey could not locate the finish line or race officials. Caffrey eventually had to re-cross the line, adding about five minutes to his time. Sherring was next at 2:41:31 and Fred Hughson third at 2:49:08. American John McGuire, of Cambridge, was next at 2:51:36. Pesky Dick Grant, now a Harvard grad, duelled with the Canadians all day, coming within 100 yards of the leader Caffrey before finishing eighth in his last "Boston." Following the fierce Hamilton runners east were a collection of gamblers, wise guys, pockets bulging with cash. Mixing it up with the local touts, they took home the bank. This, combined with the bare-faced gloating in the Hamilton Herald newspaper as well as Caffrey's treatment at the finish, made for bad blood which may have manifested in mayhem the next year.

1901

Headlines trumpet scandal in Ashland

Canadian James Caffrey returned to Ashland to become the first repeat champion with a time of 2:29:23, beating his protege, fellow Hamiltonian Bill Davis, a Mohawk Indian, by just over five minutes. Rookie racer Sammy Mellor was third in 2:44:34. This edition was intriguing for four other reasons: for the first European entry, Greece's John Vrazanis; for flash photography being used for the first time; for the horse which briefly joined the race at Natick; and for an alleged gambling scandal, including still-murky charges of doping and race-fixing. *This scandal is chronicled in depth on another informational plaque on display in this park.*

1902

Small in stature, New Yorker wins big

Sammy Mellor, the diminutive laborer from Yonkers, N.Y., caught a break when two-time defending champ James Caffrey came down with dysentery. Weak and pale, the game Caffrey couldn't answer the bell, but he later congratulated Mellor at Coolidge Corner in Brookline. Mellor ran neck-and-neck with Ronald McDonald from Ashland through 12 miles, before leaving the 1898 champ in the dust. McDonald, the odds-on favorite of the bookmakers after Caffrey was forced to retire, dropped out at Newton Lower Falls in his final "Boston." Mellor finished in 2:43:12; Roxbury's J.J. Kennedy was next in 2:45:21. Irish immigrant John Lorden was 11½ minutes back and, in fourth, was 16-year-old Brighton High student Charles Moody in 3:03:47.



Mellor

1903

Insults fly as bitter rivals stage duel

Fans were expecting a barn burner between course record holder James Caffrey and defending champ Sammy Mellor and they got one — for 17 miles. The cordial relationship the pair had enjoyed soured after a hazardous incident during a 20-mile race the previous November in Caffrey's native Hamilton, Ont., when a hometown supporter allegedly tried to run down Mellor several times with his horse and wagon. Insults flew as the lead changed hands between the now-bitter rivals nine times between Ashland and Newton's hills, where Mellor finally shook off Caffrey, who, described as "inconsolable," dropped out two miles later with leg cramps in his last "Boston." Irishman John Lorden was running against doctor's orders with stomach miseries but he recovered about half way and raced from ninth place to third. After Caffrey retired, Lorden chased down the tiring Mellor within six miles and caught him, walking, strength now sapped, at Beacon and Kent streets in Brookline and beat him by almost six minutes at 2:41:29. New Yorker Mike Spring was second, 12 minutes later.

1904



Sammy Mellor & swarm of bicyclists in 1904.

New Yorker has some Spring in his step

Sammy Mellor again sprinted off the line in Ashland and went unchallenged for 20 miles. By Coolidge Corner, he was once again spent physically and began walking. New Yorker Mike Spring, third the year before, sprinted by Mellor with three miles to go and didn't stop until the finish line at Exeter Street, clocking in at 2:38:04. Tom Hicks of Cambridge, the 1904 Olympic gold medalist at St. Louis, rallied from 10th to finish second in a rush, 90 seconds behind Spring. Southie's Tom Cook was third while Mellor crossed the line sixth.

1905

Blistered bricklayer proves his mettle

New York bricklayer Fred Lorz chased down early bird Sammy Mellor, again first off the Ashland starting line on a blistering pace, at Cleveland Circle with Mellor once again soon dropping out. Lorz had allegedly cheated at the 1904 St. Louis Olympics and nearly ran himself into the ground in this effort to prove himself a honest competitor. Blistered and bleeding, Lorz collided with his own bicycle attendant and suffered a bad fall, crumbling atop the finish line to clock in at 2:38:25. Louis Marks of New York was second, 1:25 back with Cambridge's Bob Fowler third. Defending champ Mike Spring dropped out along with 37 of the 78 starters.

1906

Brash teen triumphs in close quarters

Sporting a scally cap tilted on his head and chewing on a feather quill, cocky 18-year-old plumbing apprentice Tim Ford arrived in Ashland not registered to race, then talked his way into the field... and the history books. At 5-foot-6 and weighing just 113½ pounds, the Cambridge teen bided his time while Roxbury's Dave Kneeland sparred with sprinting Sammy Mellor on the lead. Battling a chilly wind in his face, Kneeland pulled away on the hills of Wellesley with Ford slowly closing. Now abreast just a mile from the finish, the pair struggled on, with Ford leaping over a fallen bicyclist while threading his way through the surging crowd with Kneeland on his heels. The youngest "Boston" winner ever, Ford jumped over the finish line and into the arms of his waiting father at 2:45:45 with Kneeland just six seconds behind — the closest finish thus far at "Boston," and a mark which stood for the next 65 years.

1907

Train-spotting prompts course record

Reputed by many to be the fastest yet to run "Boston" Thomas Longboat, a 19-year-old Onondaga Indian from Hamilton, Ont., the Canadian road racing hotbed, came east to Ashland, his notoriety as a self-styled comedian and practical joker proceeding him. Boston's James Lee sprinted off the line and through the streets of Ashland, leading a pack of nine runners, which included Longboat and three former champs, Fred Lorz (1905), Mike Spring ('04) and, of course, Sammy Mellor ('02). At South Framingham, the group just beat a slow-moving freight train across the tracks, thus providing true separation from the remainder of the 102-man field, which had to wait 2 minutes for the train to pass. Lee led through Natick with Longboat gaining. With rain and sleet chilling the field, Longboat took the lead at Auburndale, brushed off a brief challenge from fellow Canadian Rink Patch in the Newton hills and cruised in at 2:24:24, setting a course record in his only "Boston." Cambridge's Bob Fowler was second three and a half minutes later and 1908 Olympic champ Johnny Hayes was third.



Longboat races through sleet.

1908

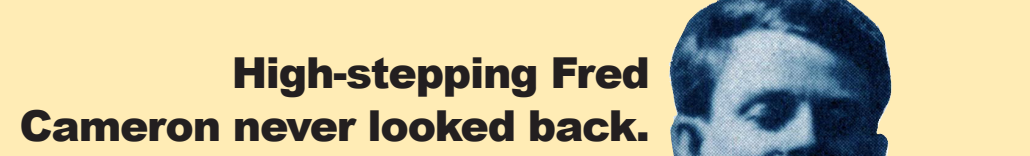
Twelfth edition truly best of 'Boston'

The 12th "Boston" was the best yet. Staged under "perfect running conditions," chilly with snow showers, which tamped down the dust, the top five finished within two minutes and five seconds of each other. With now-pro Tom Longboat absent and the 120-man field in Ashland chock-a-block with former champions and top finishers as well as once and future Olympic medalists, the order of finish was impossible to figure, so gamblers just spread money all across the board. Unknown stalking horse Arthur McDonald sprinted off the line to set a ferocious pace then fell off. Ten-mile specialist Roy Whelton of Lawrence took up the mantle for 16 miles, bettering Longboat's record pace by two minutes and leading by a mile at Newton Lower Falls, where he faltered. Then Boston's James Lee and Cambridge's Bob Fowler battled over the hills, thrust and parry, exchanging leads, with 19-year-old Tom Morrissey of Yonkers, N.Y. wearing ankle high tennis shoes and ready to rumble, waiting third. At Brighton's Lake Street, Fowler famously slaked his thirst with champagne offered from the crowd then wrestled the lead from Lee at Cleveland Circle. Then Morrissey began his move. He passed Lee at Coolidge Corner and then Fowler two minutes later, deciding the issue. Morrissey clocked in at 2:25:43, a "Boston" time second only to Longboat's 1907 mark. Johnny Hayes, who would capture Olympic gold that August in London in a race Morrissey failed to finish, rushed from fourth to finish second at 2:26:04. Fowler ran third at 2:26:42 with New Yorker Michael Ryan fourth (2:27:08) and Somerville's Bill Woods fifth (2:27:48). The top six finished faster than James Caffrey's record-setting win in 1901 with Lee rounding out that group at 2:28:34. Also of note, 1905 champ Fred Lorz was seventh (2:32:20) in his last "Boston", sprinting Sammy Mellor ran his best marathon time, but it was good for only eighth at 2:41:17. Early pacesetter Whelton rallied to end up ninth at 2:43:25.

1909

'Inferno' drags field to the gates of Hell

After perfect conditions just a year before, Mother Nature provided "The Inferno" for a change of pace. As marathon historian Jerry Nason described it, Patriots Day 1909 was certainly no holiday: "With temperatures at 97 degrees, the broiling sun leaving pools of melted tar and heat-stricken runners on the road, it provided the greatest test of endurance of all time." Of the 164 who toed the line that Monday in Ashland, 91 runners, or 55 percent, collapsed heat-stricken and many were rushed to nearby hospitals. *The "Inferno" is chronicled in depth on another informational plaque on display in this park.*



1910

Little longshot pays off big

Unknown Fred Cameron, all 5-foot-10½ inches of him, first set eyes on the "Boston" course the Tuesday morning he first stepped to the line in Ashland. Hailing from Amherst, Nova Scotia, Cameron, 23, broke fast off the line and, never challenged, never looked back, going wire-to-wire in 2:28:52. There was a changing of the guard that day in Ashland: hard-charging 1902 champ and perennial threat Sammy Mellor who, professing his love for "Boston", once said "when I come along on race day every rock on the course seems to jump up and shake hands with me," finished 34th in his last "Boston," the same race in which Melrose's Clarence Demar, also unknown but destined to win this event seven times and finish in its top ten 15 times, made his debut, rallying in the last 14 miles to finish second, one minute exactly behind Cameron.

1911

A course record, against doctor's orders

With the conditions cool and overcast in Ashland and a slight tailwind spurring him on, Clarence DeMar won his first "Boston" in record fashion, disregarding the advice of his doctor who had mistakenly diagnosed him with a heart murmur and urged him not to run. Alexis Ahlgren, a Swedish-born New Yorker, set the early pace, forcing Canadian favorite Jim Cockery to retire. Southie's Festus Martin then ran down Ahlgren in Wellesley while DeMar waited patiently 250 yards back. DeMar passed both in the Newton hills and, despite a sore knee, proceeded to dismantle Tom Longboat's 1907 course record by almost three minutes at 2:21:39. DeMar then followed his doctor's bad advice and skipped the next five "Bostons." *DeMar is profiled in depth on another informational plaque on display in this park.*

1912

Another run for the record books

Clarence DeMar's record stood for just one year. The race through the muddy wintry slush came down to two 21 year olds: New Yorker Mike Ryan, who failed to finish the Olympic Marathon in either 1908 or 1912, and Andrew Sockalexis, a Penobscot Indian from Old Town, Maine, who finished fourth at the 1912 Olympics. Yale freshman Johnny Gallagher roared off the Ashland line, his accelerated effort forcing the pace and giving him the lead for 21 miles, into Cleveland Circle, with Sockalexis and Southie stalwart Festus Martin in close pursuit with Ryan right behind. Gallagher faltered, and Ryan chased down Martin on Beacon Street and then overtook Sockalexis at the Boston-Brookline border to decide the matter. Redhead Ryan broke the tape in 2:21:18, 34 seconds ahead of Sockalexis and 21 seconds better than DeMar's 1911 performance.

1913

North Star State wildcard

With the smart money in Ashland on Andrew Sockalexis, the Mainer ran too cautiously to cash in. Burned the year before by racing out quickly then tiring, Sockalexis wagered his speed would carry the day and laid back too long in the prevailing humidity, allowing Swedish-born Minnesotan Fritz Carlson enough space to win at 2:25:14. At 29, Carlson had been discounted due to his age, but, from Ashland, he kept pace with national 10-mile champ Harry Smith for the first 20 miles, then wrestled the lead from him at Cleveland Circle. Sockalexis made a furious charge down Beacon Street, but Carlson's margin was too much to overcome and he crossed the line second just under two minutes arrears. Smith rallied for third place.

1914

Canadian duo engages in tug of war

Two Canadians, Edward Fabre of Montreal and James Duffy of Hamilton, Ont., played tug of war in the extreme humidity under overcast skies, mere feet between the pair as the lead changed hands between them four times on Beacon Street in Brookline alone before Duffy took over at Coolidge Corner and went on to break the tape at 2:25:01. Joe Lorden, brother of 1903 winner John, set the pace from Ashland before knuckling under to New Yorker Willie Kyrönen at 10 miles. Finnish-born Kyrönen flew over the hills until he gave way to the hard-charging Canucks in Newton. Fabre finished 15 seconds and sixty yards behind Duffy. Lorden was third at 2:28:42. 1913 champ Fritz Carlson was eighth.

1915

Despite heat, a fifth attempt brings win

The fifth time at Ashland was the charm for Edward Fabre on a day one-third of the field dropped out, wilted by the 84-degree temperature under a hot sun. New Yorker Hugh Honohan led for 23 miles with New England 10-mile champ Cliff Horne of Haverhill on his heels and Fabre waiting within striking distance. Horne took over the lead and then Fabre overtook Honohan at Kent and Beacon streets. On the Kenmore Square Railroad Bridge Fabre finally passed the wobbly Horne and cruised in to win in 2:31:41. Horne was second 2:40 later.

1916

Dorchester native 1st from Hub to triumph

Dorchester-born Arthur Roth came out to Ashland and became the first Hub native to win "Boston," a triumph met with much popular acclaim but cost the spindly, frail 120-pound Roth six pounds on a very warm day. With a slow lead pack, including favored Finn Willie Kyrönen, wary of the heat, Roth jumped to the fore at Natick and, by the hills, was leading by well over three minutes. Alarmed, Kyrönen took off in pursuit but Roth fought off the heat and exhaustion to break the tape in a state near collapse at 2:27:16. Kyrönen charged over the line second, 11 seconds later.

1917

Bricklayer wins as DeMar seeks top form

New York bricklayer Bill Kennedy took a temporary job in Boston to pay expenses while training and running local races for several weeks. He shared his brief bounty with fellow itinerate runner Charles Mellor, no relation to crowd-pleasing 1902 champ Sammy Mellor. With U.S. involvement in WWI near, Kennedy came to Ashland wearing a makeshift American flag hat with patriotic speeches on his lips and, at 35, became the oldest competitor to that point to win the race. Speedster Willie Kyrönen returned, accompanied by fellow Finn, "Smiling" Hannes Kolehmainen, eventually an Olympic gold medalist at four different distances. After a 17-mile battle for the lead with New York Swede Hans Schuster, Kyrönen was spent and ran out of gas. Kennedy moved forcefully on the Nordic trio taking the lead at Wellesley. Schuster made a run at Kennedy but he simply ran away on the Newton hills to win at 2:28:37. Chicagoan Sid Hatch was second at 2:30:19 and Clarence DeMar returned, finishing fast and third at 2:31:05. Kolehmainen was fourth, Mellor fifth.

1918

Relay race a display of patriotism

With WWI raging, a military relay substituted for a true individual marathon. Fourteen teams of 10 servicemen each toed the line in Ashland. The Army squad from Camp Devens won with the 302nd Infantry second and Charlestown Navy Yard third. All 14 teams finished.

1919

Flat feet can't stop triple threat & buddy

A great all-around athlete, Carl Linder owned the New England decathlon and javelin crowns as well as flat feet, a condition that kept him out of WWI but didn't stop him from traveling to Ashland and adding marathon winner to his resume with a 2:29:13 win. Linder's Quincy training pal Willie Wick finished a fast second. Fellow Finns, Linder worked in the shipyard, Wick at a bakery, earning him the post-race headline "He didn't loaf." Linder was short, stocky and determined and Wick was bald, bowlegged and stood just 4-foot-10½. Side-by-side, the pair followed behind the leaders while Chicagoan Frank Gillespie, wearing new sneakers on a hot day, took the lead in Natick and held it until Beacon Street where his blistered, bleeding feet quit as first Linder then Wicks passed. Gillespie walked across in fourth place.

1920

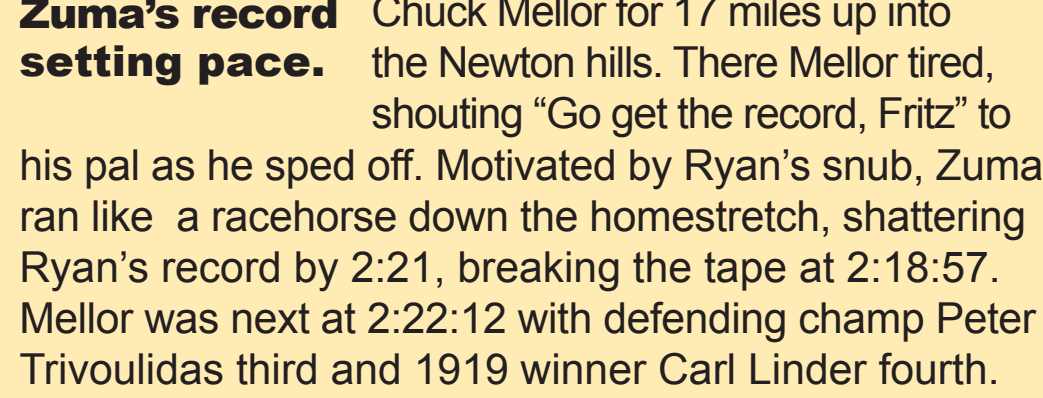
Olympic Trial in town

After The Great War, the Olympic movement was jump-started and the U.S. held its marathon trial at "Boston." Entries totaled 75 but, by race day, only 60 starters answered the call in Ashland, including three former winners, Quincy's Carl Linder (1919), New York bricklayer Bill Kennedy (1917) and Roxbury's Arthur Roth (1916). Other key players were Medford speedster Jimmy "Hinky" Henigan, New Jersey plumber Frank Zuma, New York City busboy Peter Trivoulidas, a Greek national, and the diminutive Willie Wick of Quincy. Henigan sprinted off the line and held sway until Newton, with Roth on his heels. On the first hill, Roth overtook the finished Henigan and led until Kenmore Square, where he wobbled. Closing, Trivoulidas took the lead near the corner of "Commonwealth & Mass." in the Back Bay, winning at 2:29:31, with Roth second, a minute back, and Linder and Wick next. Zuma stopped and took off his shoes, finishing seventh in his stocking feet. Roth, Linder and Zuma were among those chosen for the U.S. Olympic squad with Trivoulidas a Greek pick.

1921

Zuma revenges snub

Squarely focused on breaking Mike Ryan's 1912 course record, Frank Zuma had a point to prove. The New Jersey plumber rode the rails from Newark to Ashland ready to run on that raw cold day, with his running gear under a shabby suit and his shoes stuffed in its jacket pockets. 1920 Olympic coach Ryan had snubbed Zuma, labeling him unfit and holding him out of the marathon in Antwerp the summer previous. Zuma ran side-by-side with buddy Chuck Mellor for 17 miles up into the Newton hills. There Mellor tired, shouting "Go get the record, Fritz!" to his pal as he sped off. Motivated by Ryan's snub, Zuma ran like a racehorse down the homestretch, shattering Ryan's record by 2:21, breaking the tape at 2:18:57. Mellor was next at 2:22:12 with defending champ Peter Trivoulidas third and 1919 winner Carl Linder fourth.



Zuma's record setting pace.

1922

Ashland distance record set in stone

Busy after WWI, Clarence DeMar gave up running. Then, fate intervened. A winter storm knocked down trees all over Greater Boston, stopping DeMar from riding his bike to work. He ran to there for the first time in years and rediscovered his affinity for the roads. So began the greatest streak in "Boston" history with five wins in eight races. In the '20s, he was "DeMarvelous." He returned to Ashland on a cool, cloudy day and engaged in a 13-mile battle, from Natick to Brighton, with speed demon Jimmy "Hinky" Henigan of Medford. Henigan finally ran out of gas and DeMar then set the 24.85-mile Ashland distance permanent course record with a time of 2:18:10, prompting front-page headlines such as "Superman!" and "Defying Father Time!". DeMar finished three and a half minutes ahead of fleet Finn Ville Ritola, winner of five golds and three silver medals at lesser distances in the next two Olympics. Aply named Albert Smoke, a 4-foot-10 cigar-puffing Ontario Missassaja Indian and 1920 Olympian, was third.

1923

Doggone it, DeMar triumphant again

Clarence DeMar was training one winter day, jogging through the snowbanks in Medford when he was bitten by a dog. Kicking at the canine to ward it off, DeMar was slugged on the mouth by the dog's irate owner. The resulting split lip turned into an acute skin infection, its fever forcing the defending champ abed for 10 days. DeMar slowly recovered and, regaining strength, returned to Ashland that Patriots Day. He caught Connecticut's Whitney Michelson at Coolidge Corner after a six-mile chase through the hills to break the tape at 2:23:47. Frank Zuma, the 1921 winner, closed fast for second, 1:43 later. Michelson crossed fourth.