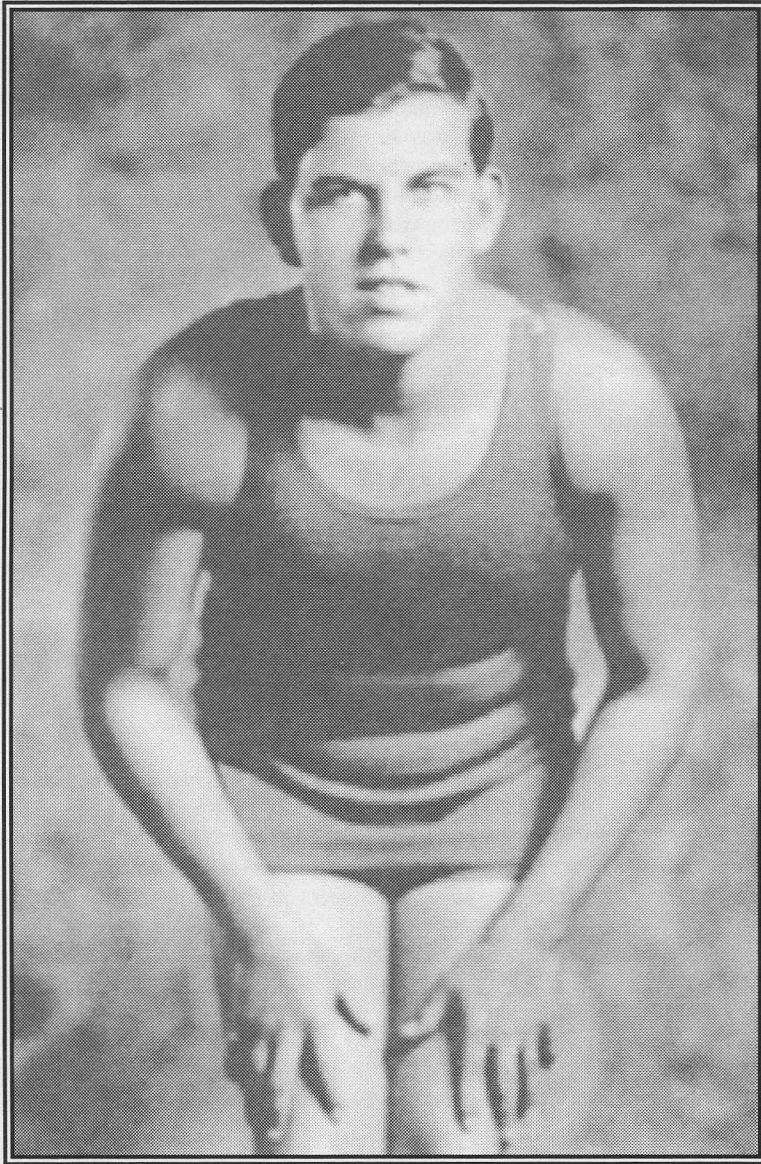


George Young



Ontario Aquatic Hall of Fame

Inducted as Pioneer Athlete in 1996

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George Young was born in Scotland in 1910. He was two years old when his widowed mother emigrated to Toronto. His story is one of triumph and tragedy. Before George became a Canadian hero, he and his mother were caught in a fire in the Wawa Hotel in Muskoka where both were employed. They jumped to safety but lost all their possessions, and Mrs. Young seriously injured her spine.

George learned to swim in Toronto's Don River. He got his swimming skills from being coached by the famous swimming instructor, Johnny Walker, of the Toronto West End YMCA. As an amateur swimmer, George won numerous competitions, including 5 Canadian championships (200, 220, 300, 440 yd Freestyle and one mile) and every long distance race he entered from 1924 to 1926. Amongst the outstanding male swimmers at that time, George had no equal. However, his greatest achievement took place on January 16, 1927. After motorcycling and hitchhiking from Toronto to California, George took his place alongside 101 of the world's most highly regarded marathoners to compete in the \$25,000 Wrigley Marathon. In a record time of 15 hours and 45 minutes George became the first ever, and only swimmer to complete the 22 mile race in the frigid water from Catalina Island to the California mainland. This 17-year-old boy from a poor neighbourhood in Toronto had suddenly become a Canadian hero. Even before he returned to Toronto, where he was welcomed by an estimated crowd of up to 150,000 admirers, he experienced both the good and bad side of fame. His personal background had become front-page news. He made personal appearances at theatres, on the radio and in movies. There were promises of movie contracts and he was hailed "one of the greatest swimmers of all times". However, the "Catalina Kid" also became the target of con artists of many descriptions and in the end, he and his mother were swindled out of all his earnings and ended up deeply in debt. On August 31, 1927, the C.N.E., together with the William Wrigley Company of Canada, held a marathon race for a purse of \$50,000 that George Young was expected to win. The water temperature was 44 degrees Fahrenheit, and the event was filled with drama and near tragedy. Unfortunately, contrary to expectations, George, too, fell victim to the cold and asked to be taken out after swimming five-and-a-half miles. After unsuccessfully trying to win the C.N.E. marathon in three succeeding years, George Young won a fifteen-mile marathon and the top prize of \$15,000 in 1931. George continued to enter and win races for a few more years. After he married C.N.E. Champion Swimmer, Margaret Ravior, he moved to Philadelphia in 1933. When his second wife, Gay Booth, died in 1953, he moved to Niagara Falls, Ontario. His last public appearance was at the C.N.E. in 1953, where his boyhood friend, the well known Canadian Diving Champion, Alfie Phillips, operated a midway swimming and diving act. At the closing of the Fair, George returned to live and work in Niagara Falls.

The sports world and Toronto did not overlook the contribution that George Young made to swimming and to Canada. In 1950 he was selected as the "nation's outstanding swimmer of the half-century"; inducted into Canada's Sports Hall of Fame in 1955; and in 1971, was elected into the International Marathon Swimmers Hall of Fame in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. George Young died of a heart attack on August 6, 1972, at age 62, while working for the Niagara Parks Commission. At the time of his death he was married to his third wife, Georgina Stokoe, and was the father of three children George, Margaret and Thomas.