

# 1930 Commonwealth Games

## Interview with Edna Robinson



(Edna pictured second to the right)

Available: [http://www.hamiltonolympicclub.ca/british\\_empire\\_games.htm](http://www.hamiltonolympicclub.ca/british_empire_games.htm)

On March 12, we traveled to a beautiful neighborhood along Lake Ontario to meet the lovely Edna Robinson. The daughter of M.M Robinson, founder of the Commonwealth games, Edna was full of stories and experiences to tell. She welcomed us into her tidy home and talked to us as though we were friends. We asked her about her experiences with the commonwealth games, particularly focusing on the first games that were in Hamilton in 1930.

**Sarah: I understand your father was a man who was very involved with the Commonwealth games and bringing it to Canada as well as starting it up. Can you tell me a little bit about that time?**

**Edna:** Yes, well he was the manager of the Canadian Olympics team in 1928 and so, my mother and I went with him to Amsterdam for the Olympics. And so, while he was at the Olympics he decided that this would be an good opportunity to meet the other representatives of the other teams and so he organized a meeting and... I was only... 12, and he brought the other representatives together and discussed the possibility of the Commonwealth games - he was a very enthusiastic person anyway, and if he undertook anything he did it with his whole heart. So he worked up a lot of enthusiasm among the representatives of the Commonwealth in Amsterdam. He had already organized the Hamilton Olympic committee, and he had been the sports editor for the Hamilton Spectator - and very interested in Sports.

Not a lot himself (playing). So he headed together a group from the Olympic committee and they went from there. You have to remember that there weren't the opportunities for competition in those days - I always think we've got too many now. I read the sports page and I think (shaking her head)...however, that's how it started. So they decided to have it in 1930. To have it in 1930 would be in two years - that is not enough for today's



M.M. Robinson

big competitions, but it was in those days. So that's how it got started. And so as a result of that they had to build the stadium and they had to build a big swimming pool. Fortunately the City of Hamilton put some funds forward. Again you didn't have that much competition for the government funds. Today everybody is at the door - provincial government, the Federal Government and municipal government... They're all at the door ( to receive money.) Also people expect more (today). In 1930, the athletes slept in a school. There was a school near the stadium and the committee brought in beds and organized it for the athletes to stay there. Whereas today, you have the athletes village - and they're pretty nice places.

It used to be that Hamilton was the Mecca of sporting facilities. Well, now the Mecca is Calgary. Why? Because they have all these facilities.

**Sarah: With the 1930 games themselves, do you have any favourite memories of the games?**

**Edna:** I guess... well that's a hard question because I was so young when it started. But I will just never forget when Percy Williams won the 100 m and 200m and then our ladies team was outstanding. I guess today people focus more on the team sports... Hockey , Football , and the team sports. Lord Burley was an outstanding hurdler...



*Percy Williams being carried by two other athletes*

Available: [http://www.archives.ca/05/0527/05270407\\_e.html](http://www.archives.ca/05/0527/05270407_e.html)

**Sarah: How did the games in 1930 compared to the games today?**

**Edna:** Well (laughing) they are more lavish. For instance, the opening ceremonies, the closing ceremonies, and they pack the stadium to the roof. And it is wonderful to watch, but I think to myself... Where are the sports? They were quite simple in Hamilton. They had a nice new stadium, but they were quite simple. But in 1936 the games, which were held in Germany.. the time of Hitler. They were Hitler's games and he wanted to impress the world ... I don't know where the money came from, and so they had very lavish games in Berlin. And that was the beginning of this lavish approach to sports. He wanted to impress the world because the world was against him because he was this Nazi dictator.

**Sarah: The stock Market crashed in 1929. Did that affect the 1930 games in any way?**

**Edna:** (Shaking head) Probably... I was too young to realize whether it did or not. Probably made it harder for my father and the other organizers. Hamilton was a sports mecca ... it really was. We had a great football team, the stadium, and various leagues to play in. It wasn't easy to go to Australia for instance because that would take 24 days... on a ship. Whereas now, I've gone to Australia quite a few times and it takes me 24 hours. From my door to my friends door ...24 hours.

**Sarah:** How were women treated in the 1930 games?

**Edna:** Oh, fine. They were outstanding. Just great.

**Sarah:** Were they seen as competitive athletes?

**Edna:** Oh yes.

**Sarah:** Obviously your father was very interested in sports. Did he pass that on to you in any way? Were you encouraged to play?

**Edna:** (Shaking head) No. I love sports in a very modest way.

**Sarah:** Did you get to meet any of the athletes that competed in the games?

**Edna:** I got to know them very well

**Sarah:** Really

**Edna:** Well in those days... these runners, they had to come well in advance of the competition because it took so long ... and they came by ship. So you spent 24 days on the ship, and it wasn't like the cruise ships you have today where you have all kinds of amenities and exercise rooms for exercising. The only exercising you could get on the ship in those days was running around the deck... it really was. I've gone on several cruises in the last few years, and I often think to myself ... oh.... Back in the days when I was a kid, now I had a great time because I was the only kid, and I was spoiled rotten, and I'd go running with the athletes, and I couldn't of course keep up, but I would try. And they were great athletes...

**Sarah:** Were there any athletes you were particularly close to?

**Edna:** I guess a number... they'd got to know my mother and dad when they came.

**Sarah:** Were you like their adopted little sister? They looked after you?

**Edna:** Yes. Have you heard of Robbie Rosenthal?... Well she was an outstanding runner. I remember her best when Amsterdam had the Olympics. We went over there early with her. She'd say to mother, "I'm going to take Edna," so we'd go. She bought me a necklace with two silver wooden shoes on a chain... the sweetest little thing. I suppose I should wear it now rather than what I wear now. I suppose it's a little too childish though. But anyway... she was just great.

Now the women didn't stay in the same places as the men. I should point out that in those days, we stayed in... I guess you could say a second rate hotel. Whereas the Americans came over in a big ship, and brought the ship with them, and the ship stayed in the harbour, and they called the ship home - and it was quite luxurious.

**Sarah: I suppose being a Canadian, you would cheer for the Canadian team, but was that your favourite team, or did you have other teams you cheered for?**

**Edna:** No, I got to know them (the Canadian athletes) quite well. We had a farm, and my parents would have them over for corn roasts.

**Sarah: If your father could have seen the games today, what do you suppose he would say?**

**Edna:** Well, he would have been very distressed by what happened with the bid. Not that he has anything against India... but ah... they're not as honest. They are poorer. The drugs weren't a problem in the games up until this year. I would say the Commonwealth games were the cleanest of the competitions in the world. But particularly, India was dishonest in winning this bid.

And, another thing, athletes are paid money now. That was unheard of then. I know one girl who went to M.M Robinson high-school. I got to know her. She's moved out to Calgary. She wrote to me and was having trouble financing... I thought about it.... I didn't want to get tied into anything, but I knew her, so I did. It was going to cost her \$30,000 to train, for her to go to the worlds, to qualify for the Olympics. That was unheard of in those days. \$30,000 in order to qualify!

One of my happiest memories of the games was in Victoria and the opening ceremonies. The stadium was packed. Victoria put on very good games. Not quite as lavish... so ... anyway. South Africa was always good at game sports. Unfortunately blacks were not accepted as members of the team. So...oh yes... an apartheid ... so South Africa was excluded from competition, so anyway... the games were in Victoria. Nelson Mandela was in power, so a huge South African team came, and they entered the stadium, and you should have heard the applause... it was wonderful! Because here was this big team, members of the Commonwealth, who had been isolated because of their political situation, and all of a sudden the stadium erupts and it was so touching that I couldn't hold the tears back. It was just so touching to see that team... part of the Commonwealth!

**Sarah: Are there any other comments you would like to say? Anything I failed to ask about?**

**Edna:** Well... would you like to see some of the things we made for the bid... particularly when we went to Jamaica. They (India) didn't even mention the word athlete in their 40-50 minute presentation. It was all about the money....

We went downstairs to look at many mementos Edna had in her basement from Commonwealth games of the past. In a case in the corner of the room lay a number of items from the 1930 games. In that case, we were able to see original pictures of M.M. Robinson, pictures of athletes that had competed and medals that would have given out to the winners. Also, there was an original program of the games and a number of patches which the athletes would have worn on their clothing. All of these items were fascinating to see because of their historical significance. Once we were done admiring these items, the hospitable Edna continued to tell interesting facts about herself. The time came for us to go. We thanked Edna many times for allowing us into her home and we were on our way home again.