



It's Our History, Our Country

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Ethel Mary Catherwood

April 28, 1908



Ethel Mary Catherwood (April 28, 1908 – Sept. 26, 1987) was an extremely attractive Canadian track and field athlete.

She excelled at athletics, including baseball, basketball and track and field. Called The Saskatoon Lily by reporters, on account of her film star looks, she found backing from Toronto philanthropist Teddy Oke, which allowed her to train hard.

At the Canadian championships in Halifax in 1928, she again broke the world record, jumping 1.6 metres. At the Amsterdam Olympics that year, jumping in cold windy weather, Catherwood cleared 5' 2 1/2" (1.588m). In 1926 she equalled a Canadian record for high jump at the Saskatoon city track and field championships.

On Labour Day of the same year, she broke the British held high jump world record. In 1928, she became a member of the Matchless Six, a group of seven Canadian women who competed at the 1928 Summer Olympics in Amsterdam, the first Olympics to allow female competitors in athletics.

Catherwood took home a gold medal in high jump, clearing 1.59 metres. There was considerable focus on her physical attributes during the games earning her the nickname "Saskatoon Lily". As well, a New York Times correspondent dubbed her the "prettiest girl athlete" at the 1928 Olympics.

However, much more than a pretty face Ethel Catherwood took home the world's first ever

gold medal awarded to a female high jumper and holds the title as the only Canadian female athlete to have won an individual gold medal in an Olympic track and field event.

When most women her age dreamed of a movie contract Cartherwood was offered one but declined the offer. What movies she would have been in is unknown.

She took a business course, was married, and moved to California.

In 1955, she was inducted into Canada's Sports Hall of Fame, the Saskatchewan Sports Hall of Fame in 1966, and the Saskatoon Sports Hall of Fame in 1986.

Catherwood had an enigmatic life. After the Olympics, where she was feted as the beauty of the games, she was surrounded in scandal. Her secret marriage led to a speedy Reno divorce from James McLaren, and later marriage to Byron Mitchell (whom she divorced in 1960) had the press following her every move. She died in California on Sept. 26, 1987.

She is the subject of a short graphic biography by David Collier entitled "The Ethel Catherwood Story," collected in An Anthology of Graphic Fiction, Cartoons, and True Stories, Ivan Brunetti ed. 2006.

A stamp honouring Ethel Catherwood was made in 1966. Another stamp (2.4 million issued) was issued in 1996 was designed by Mark Koudis and based on photograph from Canada's Sports Hall of fame.

Another Canadian wins a world record, is offered a movie contract and excels at almost everything she put her mind to sounds like the true Canadian spirit doesn't it? I'm not bragging, just telling the truth and putting the facts high on a pedestal in Our History, Our Country.

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