

Jamison Handy : last survivor of the 1904 Olympics

by Bill Mallon

On the 7 th of September, 1904, in St. Louis, Missouri, a small crowd gathered to watch some swimming events held at the World's Fair Lifesaving Exhibition Lake. These events were the swimming portion of the 1904 Olympic Games – held concurrently that year with the World's Fair.

On that warm, late summer day one of the events scheduled was the 440 yard breast-stroke – the the only time this event would appear on the Olympic programme. There were but three entries, all Germans, until a young American, Jamison Handy, entered at the last minute. Seventy-seven years later, when asked why he entered so suddenly, Jam Handy replied, *"I thought it was my best chance to win an Olympic medal."* He was right for on that day Jam Handy finished third to win a bronze medal, a medal which he still has as the only known survivor of the 1904 Olympics.

Handy grew up in Chicago and represented the Chicago Central YMCA at the Olympics before later switching to the Chicago Athletic Association. He had a distinguished career as a swimmer and water poloist, winning six United States national championships at varying distances, and participating as a member of the United States national champion water polo team six times. In addition, in 1924, he was a member of the US water polo team that won a bronze medal at the 1924 Olympics. He is one of the very few Americans to make any Olympic team 20 years apart – much less in these strenuous sports, and winning medals, no less.

But Jam Handy was more than just a famous competitive swimmer. The International Swimming Hall of Fame considers Handy to be the father of modern swimming and one of the biggest supporters of the sport. However his swimming reputation is more than matched by his business accomplishments. He attended the University of Michigan and after leaving there he settled in Detroit, Michigan where he began the Jam Handy Corporation – a company which specializes in training sales men via educational and motivational techniques. This company was the first of its kind in the



United States but is now highly imitated. As President of the company, Handy still goes to his office every working day and still is a major force in running the corporation.

Handy credits the lessons he learned in his athletic career with helping him achieve of his business successes. He has not forgotten athletics, either, for at 97, he swims every day.

A few years ago he made a commercial for the US Olympic Committee in which he was seen swimming briskly.

Many years ago when Baron Pierre de Coubertin revived the Olympic Games, one thing he hoped to demonstrate in the Olympic athletes was the Greek ideal of 'Mens sana in corpore sano,' –A sound mind in a sound body.

One can well imagine the Baron, looking down from his resting place at Jamison Handy – nodding gently, and giving a small smile of satisfaction.

