

Lon Myers

1858-1899



Slim and Delicate

- 5'8" tall, long-legged, weighed 8 st 2lb
- prone to infection throughout his life
- A doctor encouraged him to take up running
- Caught malaria and pneumonia several times
- Died of pneumonia in 1899.



Background and Life

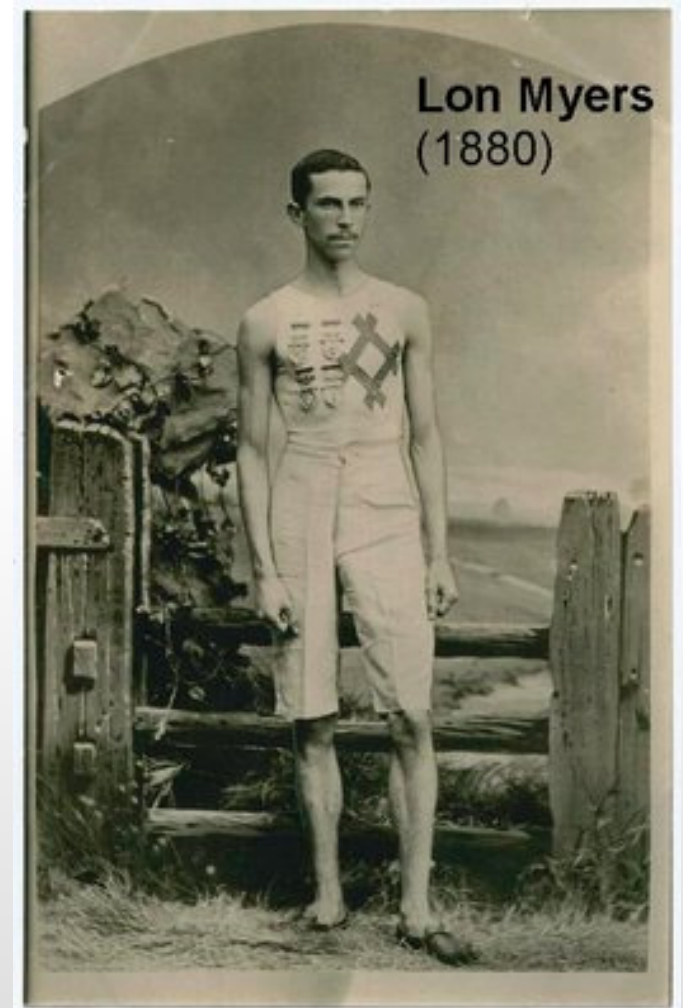
- Born February 16, 1858, in Richmond, Virginia, son of a business clerk
- American ancestry went back to Myer Myers, Jewish silversmith in NY, early 17th century
- After graduating high school he became a book-keeper in NY
- In his spare time Myers ran
- Myers competitive career lasted ten years:
 - 1878 to 1885 as an amateur, mainly for Manhattan Athletic Club
 - 1886 to 1888 as a professional, in New York and Australia.

1879: Making his Mark

- In 1879 NYAC Games he set a world 440 yard record of 49 $\frac{1}{5}$ sec
 - the first time that anyone had ever broken fifty seconds
 - running the last 120 yards without his right shoe
- In the same meet, he set the American record for 220 in 22 $\frac{3}{4}$ sec
 - the run described as the “handsomest running that was ever seen on the grounds.”
- Won the American national championships in 3 events: 220, 440, 880
 - acclaimed as the “fastest amateur runner in America”

1880: Assault on the Record Book

- In 1880 he set out to break all records from 100 yards to one mile.
 - To a large extent he succeeded, with times ranging from 10.0 for 100 yards to 4:29.5 for one mile
- At the National Championships, he contested the 100, 220, 440 and 880 - 4 events, 7 races
 - He won them all - in a single day
- Three days later he won the same events in the Canadian Championships



1881: A lesson for the English

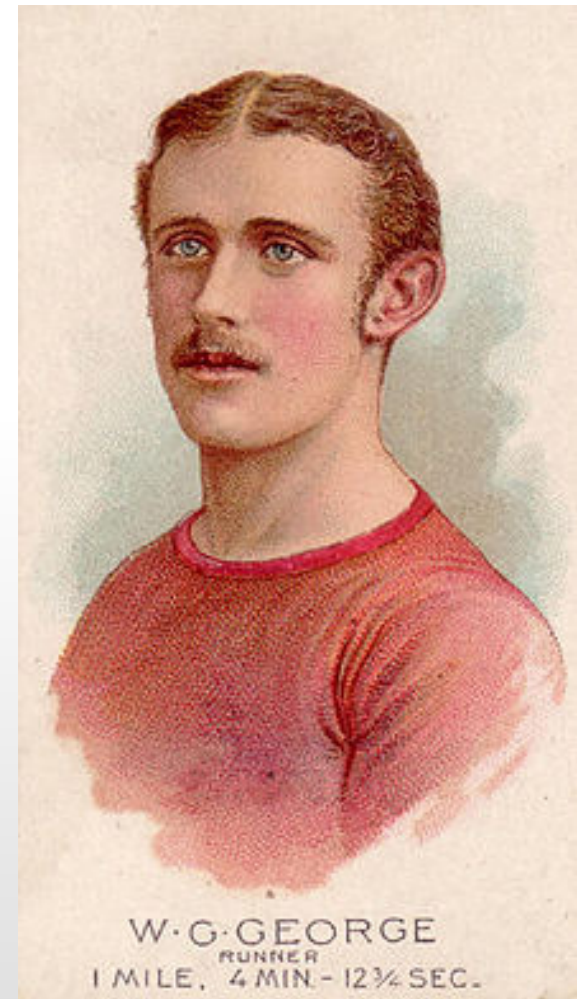
- Myers' fame had reached England – but they were skeptical
 - One official: “Let him come, he will go back a sadder but wiser man”
- Summer 1881: Myers came to England and immediately showed his class:
 - A crowd of 20,000 at Birmingham, July 1, saw him lower the world 440 record to $48 \frac{3}{5}$ and English 880 record to 1:56
 - Was declared by the English press as “the best runner ever seen.”
- Back in USA he continued setting records, but also running himself to exhaustion
 - In one race he lowered the world 1000 yard record from 2:18 to 2:13 and cut the 880 record to $1:55\frac{1}{2}$ en route

1882-1885: Last years as an amateur

- He continued to break records throughout this time
 - culminating in his final American 880 record of 1:55.4
- He accumulated more American, Canadian and English national titles
- But he suffered from
 - ill-health: malaria throughout spring, summer 1883, and again in spring of 1885
 - malicious, and ultimately disproved, accusations of professionalism
- A highly successful testimonial games was staged in October 1885
 - It represented the end of Myers' amateur career

Walter George

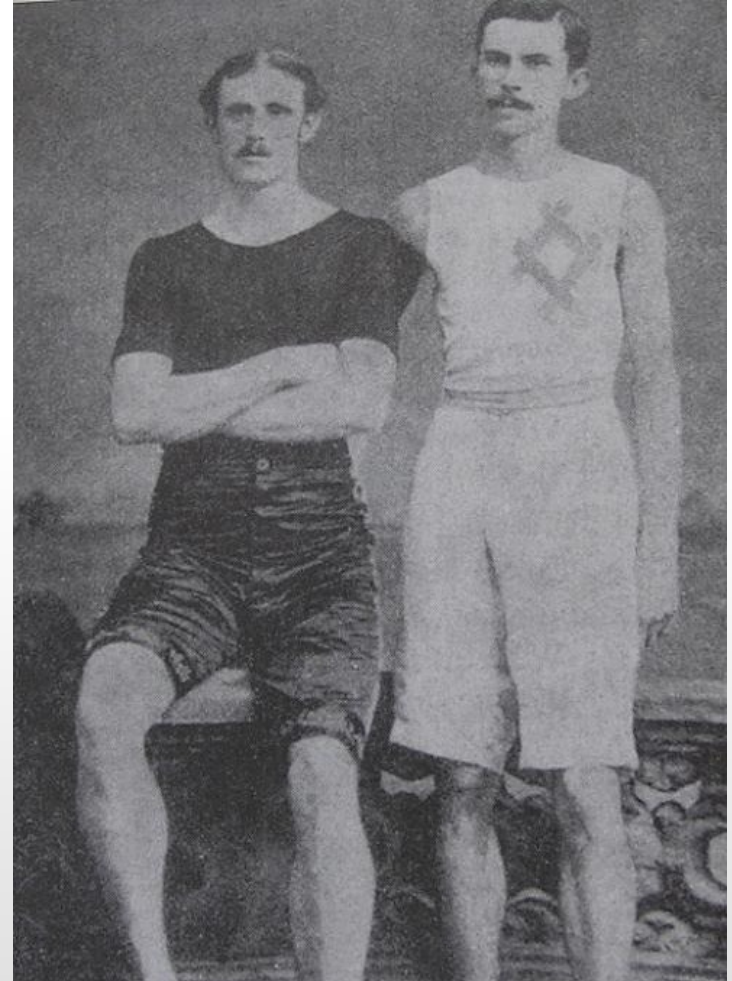
- The other great runner of the 19th century
- In 1884, George he set amateur world records of:
 - 1 mile 4:18 $\frac{2}{5}$
 - 2 miles (9:17 $\frac{2}{5}$)
 - 3 miles (14:39)
 - 6 miles (30:21 $\frac{1}{2}$)
 - 10 miles (51:20)
 - 1 hour (11 miles 932 yards).
- Also in 1884, he won English titles over 880 yards, 1 mile, 4 miles, 10 miles and cross country
- He then turned professional, and beat professional world mile record holder William Cummings in 4:12.8



Myers meets George

The two champions first met in 1882 – in a series that generated great interest on both sides of the Atlantic:

- Myers won the first race, 880 yards
- George won second and third races, 1 mile and $\frac{3}{4}$ mile
- In 1884, in England, George refused to meet Myers
- In 1886 George, now professional, arrived in America and challenged all comers. This lured Myers out of retirement into professional competition.
- A series of three races was agreed on:
 - 1000 yards, $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile, one mile
 - Myers won them all
- A third series of 3 clashes was agreed upon, this time in Australia, in 1887
 - Myers won the first two: 1000 yards and 1500 yards
 - George then left Australia, avoiding the third race



Records and Championships

Records

Held every American record from 50 yards to a mile at some point in his career

Distance (yards)	Time	Year	Record type
50	5.5	1884	American
100	10.0	1880	American
200	20 1/3	1881	American
250	26.0	1882	World
300	31 3/8	1881	American
350	36.8	1881	World
400	43 5/8	1882	World
440	48.6	1881	American
500	58.0	1880	World

Distance (yards)	Time	Year	Record type
600	01:11.4	1882	World
660	01:22.0	1880	World
700	01:31	1882	American
800	01:44.4	1882	World
880	01:55.4	1884	American
1000	02:13.0	1881	World
1320	03:13	1882	American
Mile	04:27.6	1882	American

Championships

15 United States, 10 Canadian, and 3 British national championships

“There never was a man more naturally cut out for running than L. E. Myers. He is narrow chested, and next to no weight above the hips, but his style of going, the way in which he puts his feet down, is without doubt the most perfect action I ever saw exhibited by any pedestrian.”

Manchester Athletic News

“The most remarkable example of an all-around runner that the modern world has known”

Ellery Clarke, Reminiscences of an Athlete, 1911