

FRANK MCGUIRE, VRWC LIFE MEMBER

Frank was born on 29th March 1912 in Richmond, inner Melbourne. His father, a WWI veteran, died of peritonitis in 1919 soon after army discharge, just a month short of his 40th birthday. That left Frank's mother Kate with the sole responsibility for her family.

Frank left school at the end of 1925 and started his working life, a life made much tougher by the impending Great Depression. He had a variety of jobs in his first few years in the workforce, many of them involving selling or hawking goods of one sort or another.

Even at a young age, sport was never far from his mind. He commented on his early years as follows

Having always been interested in gymnastics, athletics and fitness, I spent much time running or walking every time I had the chance and managed to run second in the combined Fitzroy School Sports at 13, in 1925, and won the Fitzroy Cricket Club medallion for the best Fitzroy School allrounder the same year. I joined Collingwood Harriers in 1929, made the team for the 880 yards in 1930 but switched to racewalking in 1931 and managed to finish 5th in the State five miles championship at John Wren's Richmond Racecourse and won the Junior Title (then Under 21). I was 19.

He joined the Victorian Amateur Walking Club (VAWC) as a junior in 1931, the same year as fellow life member Gus Theobald. As he commented above, he was immediately successful, winning the Victorian Junior walk titles over 880 yards (3:30) and 7 miles (61:47) ahead of Collingwood teammate Jim Gaylor. In 1932, he won the Victorian Junior 5 mile title in 40:05, again just ahead of Jim.



Our oldest photo of Frank, circa 1932

Frank at one time showed me a trophy that he won in 1931, during his first year as a VAWC club member. The trophy is engraved

*Byrne Trophy
Season 1931
Most Improved Member
F. M. McGuire*

It was at a dance on Boxing Day 1931 that Frank met Freda Staff and they were eventually married in July 1934 at St Matthew's Church in Prahran. They would have over 70 years of married life together.

Having found walking and liked it, Frank stayed with the sport, competing throughout the 1930s with Collingwood Harriers and VAWC. However, like most athletes his age, his career was interrupted by the Second World War and time in the army. It was ironic that Frank, who was by now an experienced long distance walker, was classified as A2 category and assigned to non-marching duties because of his flat feet and overlapping toes. Over the period of the war, he worked at several army store locations around Melbourne.

While still in the army, he and Freda moved to Chelsea in 1943 and accordingly, he transferred to the newly reformed

Chelsea Amateur Athletic Club in 1946. Because the club had many young and inexperienced members, he became involved in coaching and promoting, especially on the walking side.

Soon after, he achieved his best national performance - a third placing to Ted Allsopp and Ray Goulding in the inaugural Australian 10,000m title in 1948. He won the 1951 Melbourne to Frankston 25 Mile handicap and became VAWC Club Captain in 1952 and stayed in that capacity until 1956. His last interstate competition was the 1954 Australian 50 km championship as captain of the Victorian team (he was also captain of the 1948 and 1952 teams) and soon after that, he retired from racing and turned his attention to coaching.

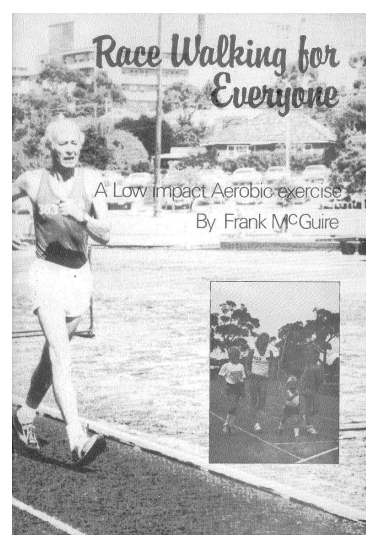
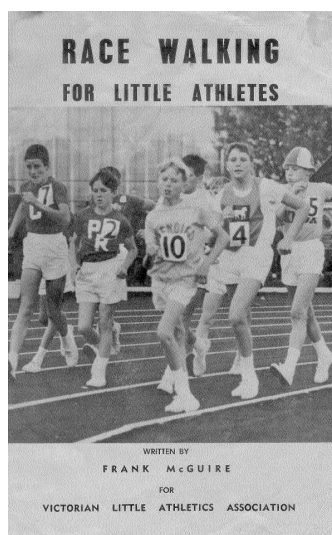
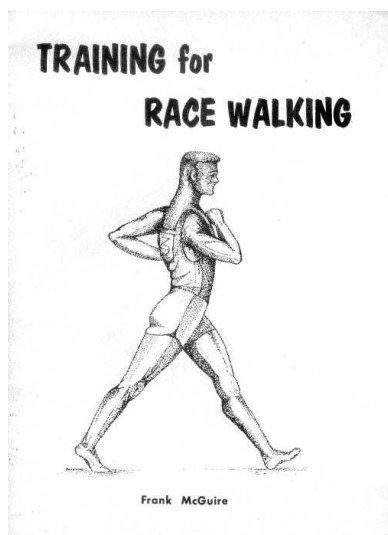


1949 - Alex Philpott, R Horden, Frank McGuire (centre front), W Knott and G Smith

He was appointed VAWC Club Coach in 1954 and attacked the task with great vigor. His innovative use of slow motion cine film to analyse walking technique was revolutionary and his recommendations that judges adopt angle judging was accepted first at VAWC level and then at Federation and Australian level. Not surprisingly, he had the job of filming the 1956 Olympic road events in slow motion for Guy Buther, the IAAF official photographer. It was at this stage (1956) that he was awarded life membership of VAWC.

Frank became an IAAF walking judge in 1959 and National Walking Coach that same year. He judged at the 1960 Rome Olympics and in the same year was appointed national walk coach. Always innovative, he tried to introduce examination by movie (video), but the suggestion was rejected by other judges.

He gained international respect and recognition as the author of numerous books on coaching and training, with emphasis on junior walkers in many of his publications. When his definitive book *Training for Race Walking* was published in 1962, he presented 40 copies to the club to sell for club funds.



Three of Franks' many racewalking publications – 1962, 1970 and 1987

Frank had a keen interest in history, sparked by family stories such as his grandmother witnessing the send-off of explorers Bourke and Wills in Parkville in 1860. In 1963, he founded the Chelsea and District Historical Society and subsequently wrote several books on the area's history including *A Short History of Chelsea* in 1965 to mark the centenary of the first land sales. Frank was the Society's Historian from 1963 until he retired from office in 1996. He was fittingly recognised with life membership of the society and he still attends Monthly meetings when possible.

Frank was also a prominent weights training coach, for many years operating a gym on The Strand in Chelsea. The annual VAWC St Kilda to Chelsea 15 mile race used to finish at his gym and I remember competing in it in 1967 as a sub-junior (U17). Over the years, he coached many famous sportsmen at his gym, amongst them top football players like Leigh Matthews, Stan Alves and the Moncrieff brothers as well as Olympic athletes like shotputter Ray Rigby.

In fact, it was his gymnasium work that resulted in him being stripped of his amateur status by the AAU in 1965. In 1966 VAWC had to follow suit and he was forced to resign his position as VAWC Club Coach. It is recorded that the committee received this resignation with great regret. But Frank continued to work tirelessly behind the scene, coaching and writing.



Frank's gym in the Strand in Chelsea

Frank and his wife Freda helped set up veteran athletics at Mentone in 1978 and the venue is still going strong over 30 years later. He was also prominent in Veteran Athletics as a competitor and formed an unbeatable duo with Tom Daintry and Jack Webber. Together they won the teams event at the 1981 World Vets in Christchurch (65+) and in the 1987 World Vets in Melbourne (70+). In fact, between 1969 and 1991, Frank won 66 medals in Victorian and Australian veteran athletic championships for events ranging from walking to pentathlon and shotput.



The 1981 World Veterans M65 podium – Frank McGuire, Tom Daintry and Jack Webber in the centre

Some of Frank's other involvements and achievements since retirement included

- The British Empire Medal, awarded in 1982 for services to Athletics
- The City of Chelsea's Distinguished Citizen's Award in 1984 in recognition of his work within the city and community
- The City of Melbourne Award in 1985 for contribution to the community, by radio station 3DB
- The Royal Historical Society of Victoria Award of Merit in 1987 for services to history in Victoria
- The Australian Sports Medal in 2000 for outstanding contribution to sport
- The Centenary Medal (General List) in 2001 for people who have served Australia
- The Paul Harris Fellow Award by the Rotary Club of Chelsea in 2004

And his amateur status - *"I got my amateur status back when everyone else was a pro!"*

In July 2004, Frank and Freda celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary but it was soon after this that Freda died, ending a life long partnership of service and love.

In 2007, Frank bid farewell to Chelsea and moved to the Emerald Glades Hostel in Emerald to be closer to his family. At that stage, at 95 years of age, he finally retired from Saturday morning coaching at the Mentone Athletics Track.

I first met Frank in 1967 when I was a young walker and he was giving a strength and conditioning talk at the VAWC headquarters at Albert Park. Frank celebrated his 100th birthday in March 2012 and I was there to help him celebrate it, some 45 years later.



Frank celebrates his 100th birthday last week

Sadly, Frank passed away on Friday September 28th 2012, still aged 100.

Frank will live on as one of the legends of Australian racewalking. He was not only our most longstanding link with the past. His contributions to our sport were many and varied and his innovative thinking helped ensure that our sport was well positioned to flourish and prosper in the new century.

Tim Erickson
Saturday 29 September 2012