

The scene is Antwerp, Belgium, the event is the 100 meter run in the Olympic Games, the year is 1920. The gold medal winner of this event is Charles William Paddock of Brighton, Michigan, U.S.A. He has won by tying the world record of 10.8 seconds. The headlines proclaim him as the "World's Fastest Human."

The 1924 Olympics in Paris, again found Charlie running that same race only to be defeated by .2 of a second by Harold Abrahams of Great Britain. The 1981 Movie of the Year, "Chariots of Fire", depicts the story of the only person faster on his feet than Charles W. Paddock.

Charlie's roots were deep in the Brighton Area. His grandfather, Hiram "Hi" Paddock was 12 years old in 1836 when he came (with one brother and five sisters) from near Rochester, N. Y., with his parents, George and Lydia (Goodrich) Paddock. They settled on a farm located north of the Brighton City limits on Grand River Road. An 8th generation American, Hi's ancestors had lived in several eastern states. Some of his predecessors had served in the French and Indian War, the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. Now resting in the Village Cemetery in Brighton, George and Lydia had seven grandsons and five grandsons-in-law who served in the Civil War, two of which were killed in the conflict.

On the frontier in Michigan, Hi's school days ended; his teen years spent helping clear the farm which later became his. He grew into a strong, young man, rough and ready for anything. Somewhere in the Paddock genes was a dominant characteristic that made them particularly agile on their feet. It was said Hi always seemed to be walking on his toes. From French-Canadian lumberjacks who came from the Michigan northwoods to work in the harvest season, it is reputed he learned how to "fight with his feet." While it was said he didn't pick fights, his reputation encouraged some to try to get the best of Hi Paddock.

One might say Charles, the Olympics runner, was a 'chip off the old block' of Grandpa Hi. He was very quick on his feet, willing to work hard and try to be the best. The early 1920s also saw Charlie engaged in a short career in the silent movies. As an officer in the airforce in World War II, he was killed in an airplane crash in Sitka, Alaska.

Are there any descendants of George and Lydia still in Brighton? Janice (Pitkin) Beach (whose mother, Loneita Lois (Paddock) Pitkin was a cousin of Charlie) makes her home with her husband, Charles, and their daughter just northeast of Brighton. Both are charter members and are on the board of the Brighton Area Historical Society. (Thanks to Janice and to Bill Pless for the assimilation of the facts related above.)

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