

## Notable Kytherians

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submitted by [George Poulos](#) on 28.11.2004

### Jack Lewis. Ioannis Gerakitis.

Text from;

Hugh Gilchrist, *Australians and Greeks. Volume 1: The Early Years*. Halstead Press. Sydney. 1992. pp. 260-261.



"Australia's most notable Greek sportsman....was Ioannis Gerakitis. Born on Kythera about 1893, he came to Australia as a very young lad. His family had nicknamed him *Glous*, which was later transformed into Lewis, and as Jack Lewis he became known in Australia as an outstanding long-distance runner.

In 1908 Lewis joined the *New South Wales Sports Club's gymnasium* in Sydney, and soon afterwards became a member of the *Sydney Harriers*, an amateur club of long distance runners based in Newtown. In July 1909 he ran in his first major race. Organised by the Harriers and billed as the *Second Annual Open Road Race from Parramatta to Sydney*, it was recognised as the first Marathon Race in Australia. Run over a course from Parramatta Town Hall to Moore Park, it attracted 59 competitors. Lewis, an almost unknown newcomer, was placed third - "a splendid achievement", as the press reported, since he had worked the previous evening until midnight at his place of business, and was tired at the start.

Later in the year he ran in Queensland's first Marathon race, at the Australasian athletics championships in Brisbane, and in Victoria's first Marathon (from Frankston to Wesley College), but was unplaced. He then moved to Melbourne, seeking employment, arriving penniless, friendless and hungry, and for weeks tramped the streets without success. Rejecting suggestions that he turn professional as a long-distance runner, he then sought a job in a sawmill in the high bush country near Warburton. Poorly clad, with a pair of sandshoes his only footwear, he walked 45 miles into the mountains and slept, exhausted, under a tree. He found employment in a timber mill, and for seven months walked 20 miles a day, to and from work. Later he became a contractor, clearing bush tracks and making roads for the Victorian Forests Commission.

In 1911 Lewis joined the East Melbourne Harriers and entered Victoria's third Marathon race, which wound through Melbourne's northern suburbs, beginning and ending on Carlton Oval. For this event he trained hard, walking 200 miles a week over mountain tracks, but had to suspend training towards the end because of a heavy cold. He won the race from a field of 34 starters, in 2 hours 59 minutes 30 seconds - five minutes outside the Australian amateur record and 12 minutes 7 seconds outside the world record at that time. A cheering crowd greeted his arrival at the finish, more than half a mile ahead of the next runner.

The Victorian Amateur Athletic Association enquired whether he would be available to run for Australia in the Marathon at the Stockholm Olympic Games in 1912. Another runner was selected, however, and (the Commonwealth government having declined to provide financial assistance) the funds raised by public appeal were

not sufficient to send Lewis also. [Academic Steve Georgakis provides us with a different version of events. He states that Lewis was under pressure to renounce his Greek citizenship - something he was reluctant to do. (See entry under *Photography Diaspora*, subsection, *Sporting Life*)].

In July 1912 Lewis entered his fifth Marathon race, travelling to Sydney to compete in an event organised by the Newtown Harriers which traversed the southern suburbs, beginning and ending at Newtown's Town Hall. In this, the fourth Marathon run in New South Wales, he gained a good lead but had the misfortune to run off the course and thus lost much ground. He finished second, in 3 hours 5 minutes 45 seconds, about five minutes behind the winner. He had arrived from Melbourne only the day before and was rather stiff and showed signs of pain towards the end. Sports writers acclaimed his run as "a splendid effort" and "a game race run under most trying conditions".

By this time his style had greatly improved. A sports journalist remarked that whereas Lewis had been known as a solid, plugging runner, he was now moving with perfect grace and ease. "But he owes this to a natural gift. He is a splendid example of what can be done by practice and perseverance."

Lewis thereafter ran in a 15-mile "modified Marathon" organised by the Newtown Harriers, finishing second, and in a similar race through Adelaide's southern and western suburbs, finishing third. Then the war intervened, and he did not race again for six years. In 1915, however, he was a contestant in the lightweight division of the Victorian amateur boxing tournament, for, like his two brothers, he was also a boxer and wrestler.

Short, muscular and slightly built, with a swarthy complexion, jet-black hair, sparkling black eyes and ready smile, Jack Lewis was a dedicated athlete, modest, cheerful and well liked by all who knew him. Sports writers referred to him as "the popular Grecian runner". In later years his passion for physical fitness would win him further distinction, when he would break the Australian record for the 50-mile walk.

[Jack Lewis died on 2 June 1, 1956. I do not know where he is buried.

I have been unable to determine what Jack Lewis did in his middle and later life.

However, additional details of his post-athletic life can be found in an entry on Jack Lewis, by **George Vardas** in *Sporting Life*.

If family members and descendants could enlighten us as to the events of his later life in more detail - this would help us obtain a more complete profile of this prolific athlete.]