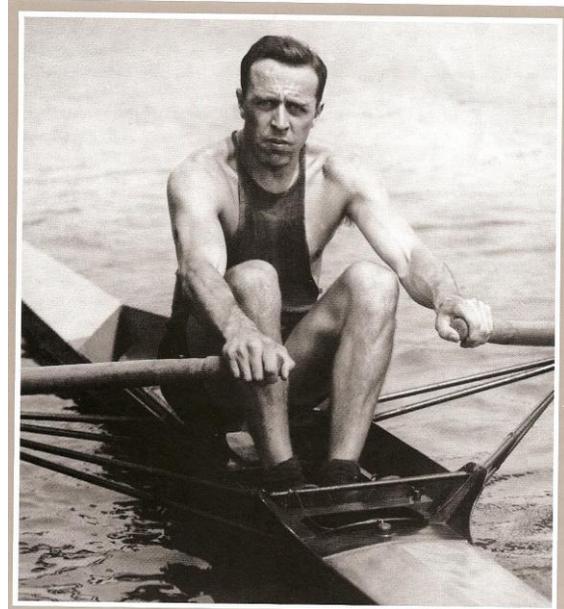


## **East Falls Past-- Paul Costello**

***The Fallser, August 2009, by Wendy Moody***

In 1983, triple Olympic Gold Medal rower Paul Costello, 89, was interviewed by gerontologist Cherie Snyder. Costello, an East Falls native who rowed for Vespers, was understandably proud as he remembered his athletic achievements. Some excerpts:



### **When did you start rowing?**

My early 20's. I started out like anybody else - a nobody. I won one race the first year. After that, it was rather discouraging to think you're going to go back and try to win some more.

### **What happened?**

The next year I won three or four. I was motivated terrifically by that. I had a beautiful physique built up from gymnastics and I had the right type of ego that I was going to win.

### **Was the 1920 Olympics your first?**

1920 was in Antwerp. Jack (Kelly, Costello's cousin) won the singles, and Jack and I won the doubles. In 1924 in Paris I won the doubles with Jack. I was scheduled for the singles the same day so I told Jack "I'm going to scratch it...we can always challenge the champion to rowing."

### **Didn't you also break the world record in single sculling? The 2000 meters?**

I rode a challenge race on the Schuylkill for 2000 meters (5/26/24). It went down as a world record. I won the Gold Cup – the (solid gold) cup was beautiful and was under strict bond. We drank champagne out of it. I had it a couple of days before it went in the vault.

I am the only American athlete to win the gold three times and I could have made it four. Could have gone to California; Kelly and I would have won out there. (*Costello was the first person to win the gold in the same event – the double scull – at three consecutive Olympics*).

### **Why didn't you try for four?**

I fell in love. I had to get some money together to get married. When you're an athlete you don't care.

### **What work did you do?**

I was the leading Ford salesman in Philadelphia.

### *What made you win?*

I shouldn't say this but, as a competitive sport, rowing is one of the toughest. You're rowing with all your body. You get a terrific amount of power from your legs. Naturally, your arms. Some people, I guess, they never really get the proper timing, they get discouraged and they stop.

It was a tremendous thrill. In the third Olympic (Amsterdam, 1928), we won as though we owned the canal. Charlie (McIlvaine) and I, weight-wise, were the lightest double. We heard the Canucks were hoping to get us in the finals so I said to Charlie: "When the gun goes off, we're going up the line like as though we're rowing 100 yards. We're never going to be second. When we get out in front we're going to stay there. That means we're going to bang it all the way down. So we won the finals by 10 boat lengths. The Canadians were second."

I fell in love with rowing. The Schuylkill River is one of the outstanding rivers to row on.