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Olympic Fever!

July 31, 2012 in [Uncategorized](#) | Tags: [Artifacts](#), [Doc Whittall](#), [Frank Havens](#), [Museum](#), [Olympics](#)

Olympic fever has hit the Canoe Museum! With all the excitement of the Games, we thought it would be fun to revisit some of the Olympic memorabilia in our collection.

A research request recently brought this object front and centre, and we couldn't be more pleased! Not only is this paddle visually appealing, but like most objects in our collection it tells an interesting story that provides a glimpse into our paddling past.



In 1952 American C1 paddler Frank Havens travelled to Helsinki to compete in the Olympic Games. The son of Bill Havens, another outstanding American canoeist, Frank had previously competed at the 1948 Games, held in London.

Frank brought three paddles with him to Helsinki. During his first week of training on the Olympic course Frank found that two of his paddle blades had developed pressure cracks. Luckily the Finnish team had brought a wood worker with them, and Frank was able to deliver his damaged blades to the Finns for repair. Unluckily, in the week before Frank's event was about to take place his last paddle blade broke. More bad news came in the form of an ill Finnish wood worker who was unable to complete any paddle repairs.

The American tandem team had spare blades, but they were too short for Frank's purposes. In the Canadian camp, Earl "Doc" Whittall had heard of Frank's dilemma and loaned him a 72 inch blade that he used for steering "war" canoes.

The blade was too long, and too heavy, but suitable for training purposes until Frank could find something better.



Doc Whittall. Circa 1945.

On the day before Frank's race, the Finnish wood worker was still too ill to perform any repairs and Frank was stuck up the figurative creek...without the literal paddle. Desperate, Frank asked Doc if he had a 69 inch paddle that he could borrow for the race. Doc responded by loaning Frank his own personal blade from the Lachine Canoe Club in Quebec, a 69 inch Clement paddle with the name "DOC" in bold black letters, and red and white stripes on the blade.



Frank Havens on the day of the 10, 000 metre race.

Frank used the Canadian blade in the 10, 000 metre C1 race on July 27, 1952. Not only did Frank win, he also set the world and Olympic record of 57.41.4. After the event Frank took the paddle back to Doc to thank him. Doc was as pleased with the results as Frank was, and gifted him the paddle, telling him that he "had earned it".

The Canoe Museum is lucky to hold this emblem of the Olympic spirit in its collection, and to be able to tell the story of the American canoeist with the Canadian blade who paddled for Gold.



Frank Havens setting a new world and Olympic record as he paddles to victory with Doc's Canadian blade.

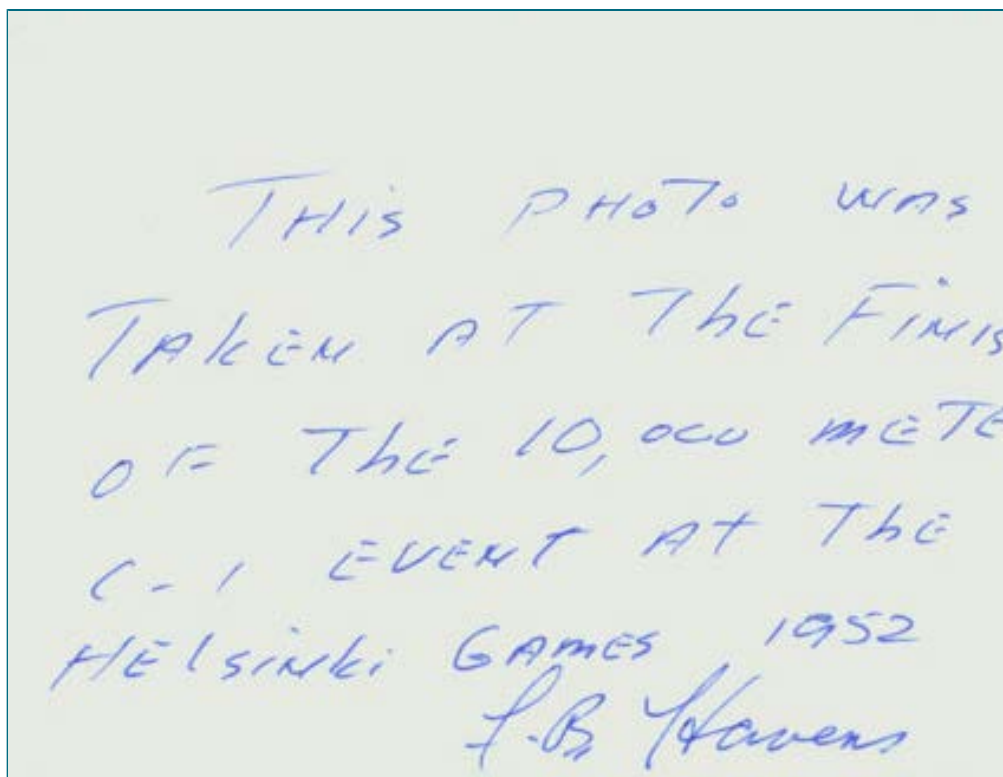


Photo of Earl "Doc" Whittall courtesy of Cartierville.org: <http://cartierville.org/Picture217.html>

Black andWhite Photo of Frank Havens courtesy of Sports

Illustrated: http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/multimedia/photo_gallery/1204/olympic-memorable-moments/content.30.html

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July 31, 2012 at 5:12 pm
bethstanley

Awesome!

I love this line:



'Frank was stuck up the figurative creek...without the literal paddle'

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August 1, 2012 at 1:57 pm
James

Fascinating! So topical. Thanks, Jessica.



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Ben Eastaugh and Chris Sternal-Johnson.