



Eleanor Garatti, Swim Star and Olympic Champion

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Marin County's first Olympian was a teen-age girl born on Belvedere Island in 1909, raised in San Rafael, and discovered while swimming in the salt-water pools of the magnificent San Rafael Municipal Baths. Eleanor Garatti, a second-generation Italian American, rocketed to national and international fame during the 1920s as she repeatedly set world records in the 50- and 100-yard swimming races around the country. Incredibly, she won her first national championship at the age of 15 in a meet at St. Augustine, Florida. Eleanor is pictured above on the left with competitors Adrienne Gibson and Helen Curtis who she bested in an Alameda County meet just before her record-setting performance in Florida.

In 1927 a *Sausalito News* article reported that Garatti, "carried off the honors" at the San Rafael pool while appearing with two-time Olympic Champion and future film star Johnny Weissmuller. The event was attended by hundreds of enthusiastic fans who watched Eleanor lower her record time in the 100-yard race that day to 1 minute and 3.25 seconds. Garatti's domination in the short-distance sprints earned her a spot on the 1928 U.S. Olympic swim team that travelled to Amsterdam where she won a silver medal in the individual 100-meter race and a gold medal as a member of the women's 4X100 relay team. Eleanor returned to San Rafael as a celebrated athlete and became a regular participant in swim meets around the country and as a luminary at many local fairs and events. She competed four years later in the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics, winning a Bronze medal in the individual 100-meter race and repeating as a member of the gold-medal winning 4X100 relay team.

According to the 1930 Census, Eleanor lived with her family at 324 Second St. in San Rafael, just a few blocks from the San Rafael Municipal Baths where she was first discovered by Harold Duffy, the bath's manager. At the time, she was also listed as working as a stenographer for the Pacific Gas & Electric Company where her coach, James Ward also worked. Between her Olympic appearances of 1928 and 1932, Eleanor married engineer

Laurence Edward Saville, and continued to swim in meets well into the 1930s under the name Eleanor Garatti-Saville. She died in Walnut Creek in 1998 at the age of 89 and is buried alongside her husband at Oak Mound Cemetery in Healdsburg, CA.

Written at the height of her fame, a lyrical *Mill Valley Record* article wrote of her birth, that it was, "...in a cottage named "Wiggin" where, "she first waked to the music of the waves", and "where the mermaids first promised that she should be one of them."

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