



Ida Elionsky, Honor Swimmer, United States of America, 2019



Videos: [IMSHOF 2019](#) [IMSHOF 2019 at 0:16](#)

Ida Elionsky was the first woman to swim around Manhattan Island. Honoree Robert Dowling was the first to complete the swim in 1915. One year later Ida swam in 11 hours and 35 minutes, at age 13 and held the speed record for 11 years. She drew worldwide attention at the time but withdrew from the limelight embarrassed by her athleticism (unseemly for a woman!) and ground-breaking performance. IMSHOF Honoree Gertrude Ederle was the first woman to swim the English Channel ten years later. Her ticker tape parade in New York City was greatest recognition ever of marathon swimming and announced that women could proudly do sports! One can only image that Ida was one of Gertrude's inspirations.

Ida's swim was not universally recognized in the past. Recently Honoree Captain Tim Johnson (a leading authority of the history of the Manhattan swim) reviewed newly assembled historic reports supplied by Ida's granddaughter Joanna Langfield, ran tidal simulations and now credits Ida's swim. Ida swam her entire life – but her version of "taking a swim" was never what it is for most people. More than a few times, she would go to her family beach, Elrin Beach, on Pequot Avenue in New London, Connecticut, for an afternoon. Soon, she would stand up, stretch and casually say, "I'm going for a swim". Upon her return, several hours later, she would report that she had swum out to the Ledge Lighthouse and visited with the keepers of the light there. She continued these recreational swims well into her 50s. Even near the end of her life, Ida would find comfort in the water, choosing water therapies above all others.

[Expanded Biography \(Openwaterpedia\)](#)

[Long Swims Database \(Marathon Swimmers Federation\)](#)