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A FINDING AID FOR THE PUDGY AND LES STOCKTON COLLECTION

Geoff Schmalz
The University of Texas

I'm the archivist at the H.J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports at the University of Texas at Austin, and I'd like to explain a bit about what I do here and to provide some detail about my most recently completed project. For about four months, from September 2009 until January 2010, I worked on the Abbye "Pudgy" Stockton and Les Stockton Collection in order to create an "item level finding aid" for their papers. An item level finding aid allows iron gamers or, indeed, any researcher, to quickly know what is contained in someone's papers so that the maximum access can be obtained. Furthermore, archivy (the process of arranging and describing the items related to a specific creator, whether a person or a business) follows the essential principle of *respect des fonds* (respect for the materials). This means that archivists strive to put items

together so that, in combination, they can best bring out details about the creators—in this case, Pudgy and Les Stockton.

Archivists tend to think of items in terms of groups relating to aspects of the creator or creators: business, personal, etc. Archivists also diligently try to maintain original order. Since the creator or creators know best what purposes their items served, the archivist defers to their judgment in arranging the

resources whenever possible. The only exceptions to this are if either there is no real original order (everything is a jumble) or if it is obvious to the archivist that items are not arranged by the creator in a way that allows the maximum number of researchers to study the creator through the materials. However, the archivist first attempts to



Photographer Bernard Kobel, who took many photos of Pudgy Stockton in the early days of her career, was also one of her regular correspondents before World War II. He frequently decorated his envelopes with cartoons of Pudgy, Relna Brewer McRae, and other men and women from Muscle Beach.

divine the reason why items are where they are in order to gain insight into the mindset of the creator, only engendering his or her own order if that of the creator appears either totally random or unclear. In the case of the Stockton papers, they were wonderfully organized when they arrived here at Texas. Pudgy had created photo albums, had filed letters and correspondence, and had clearly given a great deal of thought to the preservation of her legacy.

Now, allow me to dive into some of the treasures contained within the Pudgy and Les Stockton Papers. Serious fans of physical culture will probably love the binder relating to the trip that Pudgy and Les took with George Eiferman and Steve Reeves to Hawaii

in 1949. The binder contains many photos of the trip, as well as Aloha placemats from a Hawaiian sushi restaurant and the packet given to the Stocktons on the Pan American Airways Clipper plane that brought them from Los Angeles to Honolulu. Furthermore, the wooden Aloha bowls given to Pudgy and Les Stockton (unfortunately, his arrived broken) by the Nuuanu YMCA Weightlifting club are also here at the Stark Center. The Papers also contain 11 publicity binders full of advertisements and articles featuring Les and, especially, Pudgy Stockton. In the late 1930s and early 1940s the Stocktons were featured in ads for everything from Univex cameras to Ritamine vitamins. In addition, the Papers subsume 14 binders full of photographs ranging

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Jan Todd's email: jan@starkcenter.org

Terry Todd's email: terry@starkcenter.org

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from 1937-1999, including many of handbalancing and acrobatics on Santa Monica's Muscle Beach.

The Stockton Papers also contain a great deal of valuable correspondence, vitally important to a more complete understanding of how very popular Pudgy Stockton became. Many fans wrote to Pudgy and not only do we have their queries, we also have carbon copies of the responses Pudgy sent back. Pudgy received mail from many interesting characters and she put their correspondence into several specific files, including: "ego," "screwball," and "meatball." One person even asked Pudgy to send her the "Salon of Figure Development," apparently thinking that that was the name of the personalized course Pudgy sent out to women. (Actually, the Salon of Figure Development was a woman's gym owned by Pudgy and Les, leading Les to write on the letter, "Well, are you going to send it to her?" and Pudgy to write "meatball," and place it in the appropriate file.)

The Papers also include correspondence with "Barbelles" featured in Pudgy Stockton's column of the same name in *Strength and Health*, and by reading this correspondence, researchers can discover what an inspiration Pudgy was to women worldwide. It is also apparent from the correspondence that Pudgy was not always paid on time for her *Barbelles* submissions, and she often wrote *Strength and Health* editor Jim Murray to ensure she was remunerated for her efforts.

One of the most fascinating sets of correspondence in the Papers is in regards to the appearance of Pudgy and Les Stockton in Siegmund Klein's *Stars of Strength* show in New York City in November 1947. Originally, Klein wants her to come for \$150 plus the cost of plane tickets. Pudgy writes back saying \$500 is the lowest she'll accept if Klein wants her and Les in the show. Klein writes back saying \$500 is too high for him to go and Pudgy responds that she cannot participate for less. Two days later, Klein wires the Stocktons that he will pay the full \$500 if they agree to arrive by 11/12/1947. The interchange between these legends shows that both Pudgy and Les knew what their talents were worth and that they were not willing to settle for less than they felt they deserved, even from a man as well-known in the game as Siegmund Klein. The Papers further subsume correspondence about the acts Pudgy and Les would perform, what kind of music they would like, and details about the venues and stages. In addition, the Papers contain tickets and programs for the show, bringing it even more to life for either academics

or fans. Thanks to archival arrangement, compelling interchanges like that between Klein and the Stocktons can be relived and studied rapidly, yet with amazing detail.

This is but a small part of the precious information residing in the Abbye "Pudgy" Stockton and Les Stockton Papers at the Stark Center. In order to make things easier for anyone interested in the Stocktons and their era, I created an item level finding aid for the Papers online. (This aid refers researchers to the exact box and folder in which an item in the Papers is located.) To find the aid, simply go to www.starkcenter.org and click on the word "Research" at the far right in the top taskbar. Then click on the "view the aid" link under the picture of Pudgy Stockton and the words "Pudgy Stockton Finding Aid." When it opens you'll see an abstract briefly describing Pudgy and Les Stockton, followed by language about access and restrictions on use for the Papers, processing information, copyright and right to privacy language, and finally an index of key figures and terms. The index should be most helpful to those of you researching a specific person, like Steve Reeves, or magazine, such as *Strength and Health*. If you encounter any problems using this procedure, please email me at geoff@starkcenter.org or call me at 512-471-0991. If you live in or near Austin, of course, we hope you'll visit the H.J. Lutchter Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports. If you do, please stop by and say hello. If you live farther away, we still hope your travels will one day soon bring you to Austin so that you can stop by and meet the entire Stark Center team. Once again, my name is Geoff Schmalz and I'm proud to be doing my part in sharing the history of the iron game.

Editors' Note: The Stockton finding aid is the first of what we hope will be a number of similar research tools that Geoff will be preparing for us in the future. However, we need to acknowledge that this work would not have been possible had Laura Stockton, Pudgy's daughter, not been willing to place her mother's wonderful collection with us at the Stark Center. We are deeply grateful to Laura for this kindness and there was no question in any of our minds when Geoff joined our team last fall whose collection he would start on first. It had to be Pudgy's. The finding aid Geoff prepared about her papers, by the way, is 200 pages long. Geoff is currently deeply immersed in George Jowett's papers and we expect to have the finding aid for that collection on-line later this summer.