



# IRON GAME HISTORY



Volume 5 Number 1

May 1998

## Harold Weiss—Another Friend Gone

I met Hal Weiss in the early 1960s through a mutual friend—the ex-circus strong man and avid collector Ottley Coulter. Hal and Ottley had been friends for many years, drawn together by their abiding love for the iron game. They also shared a passion for collecting books, magazines, and photographs in the field, and their collections were among the best in the country. I had sought out Ottley because his collection was supposed to be the most complete in the U.S., and Ottley introduced me to Hal. I suspect they sensed that my own love for books, magazines, and photographs about the iron game matched their own.

Ottley has been gone for many years now, and this fall we lost Hal to a sudden and massive heart attack. We last saw Hal in October in New York City. He was there with his wife, Helen, to attend the annual gathering of the Oldetime Barbell and Strongmen Association at the Downtown Athletic Club. Hal and Helen had been coming to the meeting of the Association for many years and, as usual, Jan and I spent a lot of our time talking to them and comparing notes about collecting. During those weekends we made many trips together to bookstores such as the Strand, searching for iron game treasures. During the trips we were often accompanied by Dave Webster, another inveterate collector, and Vic Boff, and those trips and the times with Hal and Helen and Dave and Vic were always a highlight of our jaunts to New York.

One of the most interesting things about Hal—who was in many ways an exceptionally interesting man—was that his love of collecting extended far beyond phys-

ical culture. He was also an avid collector of material about motion pictures, Sherlock Holmes, and the West. Readers of *IGH*, in fact, may recall Hal's fine article in Volume One, Number 4&5 about Sherlock Holmes and his physical prowess.

Hal spent his life in Memphis, and he spent his adult life there practicing law. By all accounts Hal was an extremely able attorney, and he developed over his long career a large and very successful practice. To those who knew him outside the law this success was no surprise, because it was impossible to spend much time with Hal without being impressed by his unusual combination of intelligence and charm. Witty and clever with words, Hal had a joke for every occasion, and his geniality and enthusiasm for life impressed everyone who knew him.

In his salad years Hal was also a very strong man, particularly in the pressing movements. At a bodyweight of slightly over two hundred pounds, Hal could clean a pair of 110 pound dumbbells and press them seesaw fashion for eight reps with each arm back in the Fifties. He loved to tell the story about going to Sieg Klein's gym in order to show the master what he could do. Unlike many iron gamers, Hal never lost his enthusiasm for training, and he worked out regularly in his garage gym, going as heavy as he could but honest about his failing strength. "I can't press worth a damn anymore," he would laugh, "but I haven't lost much on the curl or the pulling movements." When Hal and Helen's son, Martin, was young, Hal coached him in weightlifting, and the younger Weiss had tremendous promise, cleaning and jerking well over three hundred



pounds while still a teenager. "It came so easy to him that I think he lost interest," Hal explained adding, "I just wish I had had his natural talent." In the law, however, Martin followed his father's lead and joined the firm.

Nor did Hal tire of watching lifting. He and Helen attended many national and international lifting events over the past decades, including five Olympic Games. Even though his practice allowed him very little time for travel, he loved to see new places with his boon companion, Helen. Together, they made several trips to Austin to see our collection, and it was always such a treat to show the collection to someone who could fully appreciate what we were trying to do. Hal was always a solid supporter of our work, and he sent us many things through the years. And several years ago he told me that when he passed away he wanted his collection to take its place

alongside those of Ottley Coulter, David P. Willoughby, George Hackenschmidt, Joe Assirati, Dr. Jesse Mercer Gehman, Roy J. McLean, and Al Leroux. What can you say at a moment like that except "thank you. Thank you." Helen tells us that many people have called inquiring about the collection but that she has told them it would be coming to Texas. That it was Hal's wish to place it with us so that it would be protected and made available to fans and students of the iron game down through the years.

Not a week goes by in our busy lives that I don't think of Hal and Helen. I simply can't believe he's gone. I like to think that somewhere, he and Ottley and David P. and Sieg and Milo are engaged in a neverending conversation about such things as whether Cyr was stronger than Apollon or whether Sandow's abdominals were better than those of Staff Sergeant Moss.