

PORTRAIT OF A STRONGMAN

THE CIRCUS CAREER OF OTTLEY RUSSELL COULTER: 1912-1916

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This article is dedicated to Angelo Iuspa, whose love of collecting and preservation helped us bring the story of Coulter's early life to the readers of *Iron Game History*.

For the historian, letters are more precious than gold. They reveal things about the writer that are not disclosed by magazine articles or even by personal observation. The way a letter is written can reveal a person's education, intelligence, prejudices, what things most interested them, and whether they were fair-minded and kind, or self-centered and arrogant. Letters are also a kind of memory. They remind us of where we went, what we did, who we saw, and when. Ottley Russell Coulter, whose magnificent collection of iron game materials makes up the heart of the Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection at the University of Texas at Austin, was a prolific and detailed letter writer. And because of Ottley's collector's instincts, he saved most of the letters he received and made carbon copies of many of his own letters to other people. People who received Coulter's letters tended to save them, too, for Ottley was no normal correspondent. His single-spaced, small-margined missives were often five-to-ten pages in length and were crammed full of stories about the greats of the game, his search for new materials for his collection, his love for his family, and his nearly seventy-year passion for physical culture. (One of his letters to David Willoughby, for instance, was 28 pages of single-spaced typescript.)

So, using a group of Coulter letters saved by Angelo Iuspa, and Coulter's personal papers now housed at The University of Texas at Austin, we decided that the time was right to piece together the biography of this important pioneer of American weightlifting.¹ This article is the first in a series detailing the life of Ottley Coulter and his many contributions to American physical culture. Our next article will examine his years at the Milo Gym in Philadelphia, his work as a handbalancer and muscle control artist, and his performance in *The Police Gazette's* 1918 strongman competition.

—Jan Todd

If one were to look for the origins of weightlifting in America, that search would lead directly back to the circuses of the nineteenth century. The circus was the most popular form of mass entertainment during the latter-half of the nineteenth century, and by the 1890s nearly every circus touring the continent had some kind of strength act. Although circus historians have documented the lives of many of the artists who played under the white tops, remarkably little scholarly attention has been paid to the strength performers.² Articles of a historical nature have been published through the years in a variety of muscle magazines but, except for David Chapman's *Sandow the Magnificent*, and the few articles published in *Iron Game History*, even weightlifting historians haven't really looked at the circus phenomenon. This article, then, attempts to fill this gap in our understanding of the history of the iron game. By using Coulter's diaries and letters, we've tried to retrace his steps as he trained, planned, and struggled to become a circus strongman. We believe that these years had a profound influence on his later life and in many ways shaped him as a man. Furthermore, his struggle to succeed in the strongman business at a time when the big

train circuses were losing ground to vaudeville, burlesque and the new moving pictures is also representative of the struggles of thousands of other young artists who also tried to make it to the "Big Top" as acrobats, jugglers, equestriennes, and other sorts of performers.

We should note, however, that unlike most circus strongmen, Ottley Coulter has at least attracted some scholarly attention, although the attention was not due to his professional career. John Fair, author of the highly acclaimed *Muscle town USA: Bob Hoffman and the Manly Culture of York Barbell*, has discussed Coulter's contributions to the birth of organized weightlifting in two articles for *Iron Game History*. Fair's articles explore the development of the American Continental Weightlifting Association and the career of George F. Jowett.³ Fair shows that Coulter, David P. Willoughby, and Jowett formed a guiding triumvirate that moved American weightlifting out of the quasi-respectable arena of the circus and vaudeville and into the world of modern sport. The three men founded the American Continental Weightlifting Association, established records and a record-breaking process, tried to mandate equivalent competitive conditions, and established an association of members.⁴ The result was an organization that became the official governing body for American weightlifting when the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) rose to dominate amateur sport in the 1930s. What's missing from Fair's painstakingly researched history, however, is the story of Coulter's early life. Why was Ottley so concerned about records? Fair's articles introduce us to Coulter in January of 1917, as he has just written an editorial for *Strength* magazine entitled, "Honesty in Weightlifting and the Necessity of Making Lifters Prove Their Claims"⁵ We have examined the trials and hardships of Ottley's early profession-



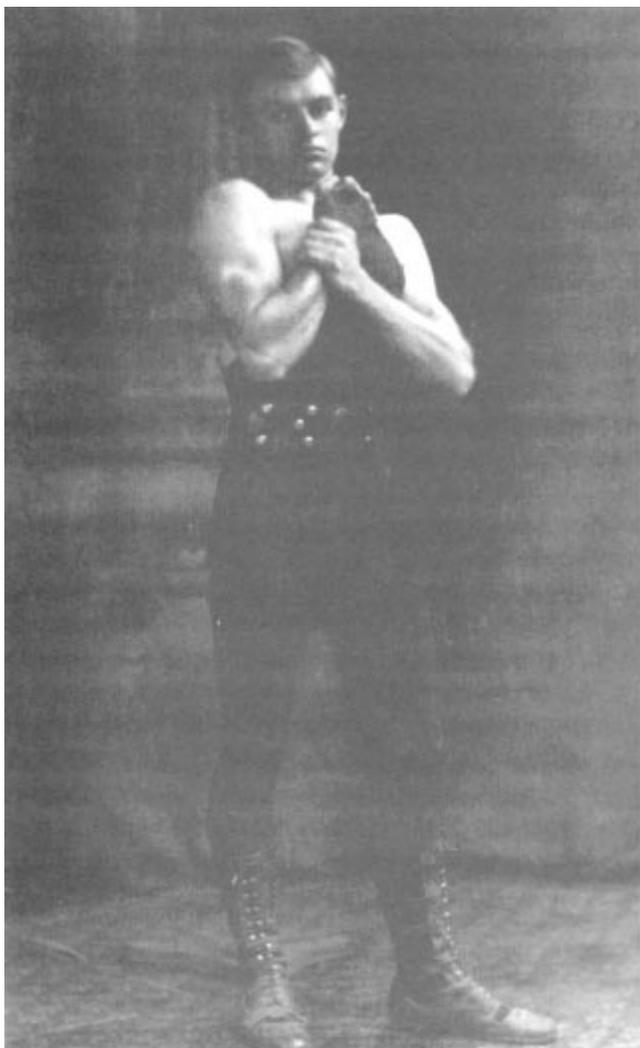
Ottley Coulter's high school graduation picture, taken at age 17.

al career, and have come to believe that more than his love of honesty and integrity was at stake when he wrote the 1917 editorial. He was also trying to legitimate his own lifting and perhaps even justify his choice of profession. Coulter, you see, although small, was truly a "strong" man. But, in a time before there were records in different bodyweight divisions, his lifting accomplishments were overshadowed by three hundred pound behemoths like Louis Cyr and Henry Holtgrewe, who preceded him by a few years in the sawdust circles. Men of great size, who claimed to be the "World's Strongest" had a much better chance to earn a good living from their strength than did the 130 to 140-pound Coulter, whose

chief claim was that he was the "Strongest Man at his Weight in

the World."

Ottley Russell Coulter was the smallest male in a family of relatively large men, but in time he would prove to be the strongest. His father, David Coulter, born close to Philadelphia in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, was a "lightheavyweight" according to Ottley, and an expert at both Cumberland and Westmoreland-style wrestling.⁶ In an article in *Strength* magazine in 1920, Ottley described his father as a "thick-set, somewhat fleshy man weighing about 170 pounds stripped and about 5 feet 5 1/2 inches in height. He was a miller by trade and years of lifting bags and barrels of feed and grain had developed an ability for lifting barrels that is seldom equaled."⁷ His father's three brothers were somewhat larger. "One was 6 ft. and 195 and lean," Ottley wrote, "another, who died from gangrene before he was 21, was way over 200 in weight and was something of what Paul Anderson would have been, if he had never trained. He worked in the warehouse of a flour mill in his early teens and his work daily was stacking



At the urging of Warren Lincoln Travis, Ottley Coulter had a series of physique photographs made by Rynald H. Krumhar of Cleveland. In these photos (which he described as his “first muscular poses,” and were probably taken in 1911) Ottley weighed approximately 139 pounds.

barrels on end, three high.” According to Ottley, William, the largest of his father’s brothers, “could take a barrel of flour and roll it up on his chest and from there raise it to arms’ length above his head.”⁸ This heavy, daily work, Ottley explained, dramatically thickened his uncle’s physique. “My father wore a 44 coat,” Ottley claimed, but, “looked like a jockey beside him.”⁹ Even his paternal grandfather, an Irish sailor from Belfast, Ireland, was reportedly a “very large man,” although he died well before Ottley’s birth.¹⁰

Ottley’s mother, Effie Elizabeth Ohl, born in Parkman, Ohio, was also larger than average. “My mother weighed 175 when I was born, and was not a fat woman by any means,” wrote Ottley.¹¹ “She had two

sisters, who were even heavier and larger boned. And all [six] of her brothers had large bones and hands in proportion to their size.”¹² One of her brothers, Jefferson Ohl, won contests for carrying a barrel of salt the greatest distance. Another brother, Warren, held the record for carrying the most bags of wheat up two flights of stairs at the Parkman flourmill.¹³ According to Ottley, “he was short but built on the general lines of George Jowett.” Other Ohl brothers, James and John, were involved in wrestling. “John was broader in the shoulders than Grimek,” wrote Ottley, “and he and Calvin [yet another brother] had hands like the Saxons.”¹⁴ Lest anyone doubt the comparison of his uncles’ hands to those of the Saxons, Ottley told his correspondent, “I know, I saw them all.”¹⁵

Although Ottley was clearly bothered by his relatively short stature of 5’6” and mentions it frequently in his letters, he also recognized that his family heritage of strength had stood him in good stead in his chosen career.¹⁶ “At one time,” he wrote Gerard Nisivoccia in 1974, “I believed I would be able to lift as much as any man living. I expected to be as big as all the other male Coulters are big but for some reason unknown to me, I did not increase in height after I was 14.”¹⁷ Nonetheless, Ottley considered himself fortunate. “I have always said,” he wrote Jack Kent, “that some of these men who worked long and hard deserve much more credit than some of us who were more gifted by birth . . . It is not what you are born with but what you accomplish that counts.”¹⁸

Ottley was blessed in other ways by the circumstances of his birth in Parkman, Geauga County, Ohio, on 6 June 1890. His father, David Coulter, was as good a businessman as he was a wrestler and by the 1890s was the sole proprietor of a feed, coal, and building supply business in Parkman that was successful enough to have a Dunn & Bradstreet rating. His father did so well, in fact, that he paid to have special rail lines come directly onto his property so that his warehouses and supply yards could be easily stocked by train.¹⁹ When his father moved from his birthplace in Pennsylvania to Parkman is not known. However, Ottley’s letters show considerable pride when he tells the story of his father’s rise to success.

Ottley’s paternal grandfather had drowned, leaving his grandmother virtually destitute while his father, David, and the other children were still very young. This was during the Civil War and since there was no government relief for widows, Ottley’s father and uncle left home to find work and make their own way. They first

worked for room and board on nearby farms, and then moved on to a variety of odd jobs. However, both brothers ended up financially secure. Andrew, the older brother, worked carrying hod for a brick mason, then ran a flourmill, and later served as a bank director for nearly 20 years. Ottley's father went to work in a mill, and from there migrated to Ohio.²⁰ As Ottley explained it to Jack Kent, even their lack of formal education didn't prove to be a hindrance. "Although my father had only two years of schooling, he learned to read by reading the daily papers and he certainly learned how to figure to his own advantage."²¹

Ottley's childhood was considerably easier. Although they were not truly wealthy, he and his three sisters enjoyed a relatively peaceful childhood in Parkman.²² He attended Parkman Public Grade School from 1896-1904 and Parkman High School from 1905 to 1908. At the insistence of his father, who wanted his son to have all the educational benefits he'd never had, Ottley then entered Hiram College in nearby Hiram, Ohio, in the fall of 1909.²³ His first year at Hiram counted only as an extra year of high school since Parkman High's academic standing was considered only "third grade" and didn't meet Hiram College's requirements.²⁴ Hiram was a denominational liberal arts college founded by the Disciples of Christ that offered three tracks of study during the time Ottley was a student—Ministerial, Classical or Humanities, and Scientific.²⁵ According to Hiram College's records, Ottley was enrolled in the Scientific program and was also a member of the literary society in his freshman year.²⁶ Photographs from his personal collection show him wearing a football jersey, as a smiling young man standing alongside his dorm mates, and dressed as a hobo for a costume party.²⁷ But while Ottley made it through even differential calculus, his father's dream for him—that he become a civil engineer—was not to be realized. In his second year at Hiram, Ottley left school and joined his family who were then living close to Lake Erie in Austinburg, Ohio.²⁸ Why the family moved to Austinburg is not clear, but it apparently happened late in 1909. Letters from his sister Luella were sent from Austinburg early in 1910, while in a listing of jobs Ottley compiled in 1929, he described himself as a "laborer" in Parkman during the summer of 1909, and as a "milk loader" at the Austinburg Creamery during the summer of 1910.²⁹

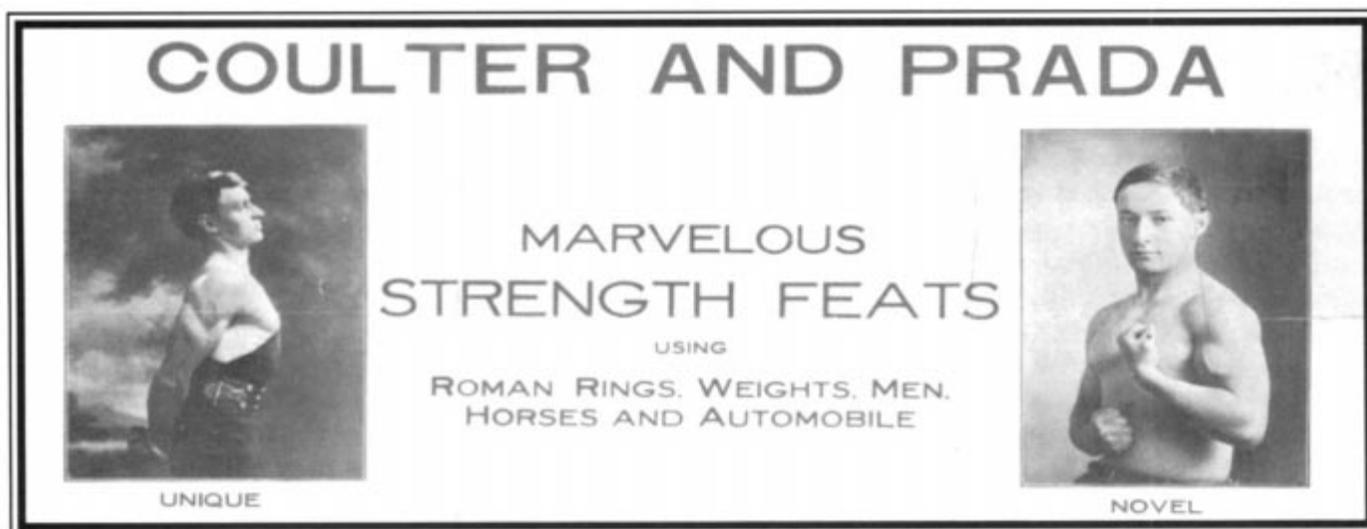
Although Ottley off-handedly explained his decision to quit college in a letter to Jack Kent in 1959 by saying, "I soon tired of studying and quit for circus work,"³⁰ the reality of his decision to leave Hiram

College is actually more complicated. In a letter written on 26 January 1911, David Coulter explains to his son that he is selling his interest in the mill he was then running in Austinburg. "I sold out to Kelly two [sic] cheap but I thought I had better sell and get rid of him as he was cheeting [sic] me blind." After discussing the arrangements of the sale, his father continues, "it is worth more than that but he would not sell and I would have had to fight him so I thought I would sell to him before he stole all, as he was taking and not charging anything up to himself. I am to [sic] honest for that kind of partner." Ottley's father then suggests that he and Ottley become partners:

Ottley, you spoke in your letter that you would go in with me, that is all right if we can find a place without investing to [sic] much money. I will give you a good chance. I can furnish 7000 dollars to start with and maybe we can borrow some to go with that after we get out of debt. I will give you half of what we make and board you. If we strike the right place we ought to make some money, if you want to go into any other business I will go with you. You will be your own boss as you will be working for yourself. All we want is to work together, and as you get older you can be at the head of the business . . . If we can get the right place we can do well . . .³¹

A letter from Ottley's cousin Mary, written in April of 1911, sheds further light on his decision to leave school. "I was glad to hear from you and was certainly surprised to hear that you are going to stop school," Mary wrote. "No doubt going in with your father will be as good a thing as you can do. I heard that Uncle Dave was not well."³² A letter from his sister Luella, written in 1910, mentions that their father has had "bad spells with his heart," so it seems likely that it was a combination of his father's health problems and business problems that helped Ottley make the decision to return home.³³

What is known is that by the time he left Hiram he was seriously interested in strength, as he had been reading about lifting and training with weights, since he was about fifteen years old. In an article for *Physical Culture*, entitled "How I Attained Muscular Control," Ottley claimed that *Physical Culture* magazine had been one of the things that "stimulated my interest in health and physical development."³⁴ His interest in strength had already been piqued, however, by the work he did with his father at the mill. It was there that he laid the real foundation for his strength, lifting bags of feed and



In 1911, Ottley Coulter and Mexican ring artist Jose Prada had this letterhead made to advertise their new act.

barrels of flour. In his "Training Record," Ottley notes that he began lifting in 1906 but "not systematic until 1911 and then not very systematic."³⁵ In 1911, however, he wrote to some of the leading physical culturists of the era and signed up for their training courses. In June he began a subscription to Joseph Barth's "Course of Physical Culture." In July he began receiving installments of Professor Charles Herold's "Scientific System of Muscle Building." In September he subscribed to Dr. W. F. Gaylord's "Peerless Progressive System of Physical Culture," and sometime during the fall he subscribed to Carl Victor's course. In December of that year, he added Edward Aston's and Lionel Strongfort's courses as well.³⁶

In 1912, ready to move on to more advanced work, Ottley "bought one of the old style Milo bells, which were the best to be obtained, although they are not nearly as practicable as the later Milo bells. My enthusiasm was so intense that I trained with the Milo bells and a back lift platform in my father's mill when the thermometer was registering below zero."³⁷ His first back lift platform was really nothing more than a pair of high sawhorses and a simple platform, but thanks to his father, he had access to plenty of bags of feed and cement to load on top. As his strength developed that year, Ottley and some of his co-workers began holding informal competitions to see who could carry the most grain, or succeed at raising the most cement in a back lift.³⁸ According to Ottley, he "Lifted 1900 [pounds in a] back lift after one week's practice with platform and sacks of cement." Because of this, he explained, he "acquired local reputation from this and lifting sacks and

barrels."³⁹ "Time after time," Ottley told Bob Jones in 1940, "I out-lifted bigger and stronger men because they didn't have the stuff inside to force themselves to do the last pound they were really capable of moving. You know what I mean, Bob; guts, fighting heart, or what ever you want to call it-they just didn't have enough of the old what-it-takes."⁴⁰

Ottley, however, clearly had what it took, even in the face of his family's strong opposition. His Uncle Andrew, Ottley reported, "considered all athletes as a nuisance and a bit nutty, myself included. He thought that the time spent in athletic work should be spent in building up a business . . . he considered all athletes to be headed for the county home or worse. He even thought that there should be laws passed to make athletes do useful work."⁴¹ His father referred to Ottley as an "educated fool."⁴²

The record isn't clear on exactly why Ottley entered the professional ranks. Probably, he was inspired by having seen one or more strongmen whose circuses would have played in his hometown. It's also possible that as a regular reader of *The Police Gazette*, he learned about the high salaries being made by Louis Cyr, Eugen Sandow and the other professional strongmen then working in the circus and vaudeville and that this made him anxious to follow in their Roman-sandled steps. Bob Jones' article simply says, "In due time young Coulter got such a reputation as a small edition of Hercules that the professional game beckoned to him, and he answered the call."⁴³ Probably all these forces had an influence, but the final impetus, according to Ottley, was meeting August Totzke, "the strongman and

iron jaw marvel” whose show Ottley saw in Cleveland.⁴⁴ Totzke encouraged young Coulter to enter the business, and so, at some point during late 1911 or early 1912, with his father’s health considerably improved, Ottley teamed up with Mexican ring artist, Jose Prada, and became a professional strongman at last.⁴⁵

Jose Vazquez Prada, Jr. was from Celaya, Mexico, about 100 miles northwest of Mexico City, near Leon. Prada apparently came from a wealthy family, and his father at one time had served as the mayor in Celaya. On 16 October 1901, the ten-year-old Prada arrived at Notre Dame University in Indiana where he boarded and attended classes through his graduation from Notre Dame’s high school in 1907.⁴⁶ According to the university’s records, Prada graduated with a “commercial” diploma. During his senior year his classes included book keeping, commercial law, commercial correspondence, “phonography,” morality and arithmetic.⁴⁷ Ottley described him as a “very intelligent man, had a fine education . . . and had a better knowledge of English than I have.”⁴⁸

It seems likely that Prada’s interest in gymnastics and acrobatics began at Notre Dame, a school known even then for its excellent athletic programs. It is also possible that Prada was influenced by another Notre Dame Student—Bernard Lange—who became known as Father Lange, the weightlifting priest. Lange achieved considerable fame as a lifter and as a teacher and promoter of weightlifting during the years he taught at St. Edwards University in Austin, Texas and then at Notre Dame itself. Whether Lange was already lifting when he entered Notre Dame’s high school in 1904, at the age of 16, isn’t known, although the Notre Dame yearbook for 1912, the year he graduated from the college, makes special reference to his strength and size.⁴⁹ And, while we can’t prove that Prada and Lange were friends, it seems unlikely that the two young men would *not* know one another since they spent three years together at a relatively small school and shared a mutual interest in strength. Whatever the stimulus, by the time Jose joined Ottley in 1911, he was already well versed in ring-work and had had some professional experience.

In a letter to David Willoughby, Ottley explained that Prada boarded with his family for free and “trained with me during the last of the winter of 1911 and the spring of 1912. He introduced me to the use of the rings, as he brought a fine pair of rings with him. However, I could do nothing on the rings at that time, except the full-mount, although later I became able to do it with 50 lbs. suspended from my waist.”⁵⁰ Although the Coulter warehouse was tall enough to hang Prada’s rings, most of their workouts were held inside Ottley’s home, using weights and cable expanders, because of the cold weather.⁵¹

During this period they also began planning their act and had stationery printed. The broadsides printed for the Coulter and Prada act proclaimed them capable of “Marvelous Strength Feats Using Roman Rings, Weights, Men, Horses and Automobile.”⁵² Ottley wrote to Jack Kent in 1961, “He [Prada] was one of the greatest ring performers ever seen. Most ring performers do the crucifix as a feat but he would lower from straight arms above the rings down into the crucifix position and keeping his arms straight, lever back up again for about ten reps with a light weight suspended from his waist.”⁵³ According to Willoughby, this feat and the one arm chin that Prada did with 56 pounds attached to his body rank Prada’s as among the all-time great feats in acrobatics.⁵⁴ Ottley further noted that the ringwork done by Prada had resulted in a magnificent physique. Although Prada weighed only about 120 pounds at that time, and stood only 5’2”, Ottley noted that Prada “had the largest arm that I have ever seen on a man of his size—something like Theriault but surpassing Theriault in ability as a professional strength athlete.”⁵⁵

The Coulter and Prada act was designed to be a combination of ringwork and strength stunts. In a letter to the Great Empire Shows in March of 1912, Ottley described the act as consisting of “first class work” on the Roman rings by Prada, which included the straight-armed crucifix stunt done on the rings as well as other traditional stunts.⁵⁶ In one of his old training notebooks, Ottley included a list of the stunts performed in the Coulter and Prada act and indicates that he also did some ringwork. Number three on the list is



The Only Feat of its Kind in the World

Although Ottley’s publicity materials claimed that this was the “only feat of its kind in the world,” a number of strength stars, including Katie Sandwina, did a human-trestle act.

“Prada and Coulter on rings using back phalange on neck and phalange and finger support.”⁵⁷

According to a letter written by Ottley to the Great Empire Shows, he did most of the lifting in the show, although Prada finished his part of the act by pressing overhead a dumbbell that weighed more than he did. Ottley’s portion of the show began with a chair lift and ringweight juggling. Then he placed a barbell on his shoulders and revolved in a circle supporting the bar and a number of men hanging on it. Next Ottley performed a backlift with men or a small horse standing on the platform, and then followed that with a supporting feat in which he lay on his back on the ground and supported a plank on his feet and a barbell in his hands while men sat on both. His finale was generally the “auto act,” which



This photo, taken by Rynald Krumhar of Cleveland shows Ottley in the lifting costume he wore during his first season as a strongman in 1912. The belt cinching his narrow waist is now housed at the Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection at the University of Texas.

he copied from Warren Lincoln Travis.”⁵⁸ In Coulter’s handwriting on a poster for their act he also notes:

Some feats that we perform daily...
 Breaking 1/2 inch spikes with the teeth;
 Lifting more than a horse can pull-
 proving by practical demonstration;
 Human burden act using 30 to 40 men;
 Human Whiffle Tree Act in which we pull
 a wagon not over 2000 lbs loaded with 25 men
 using an elephant or 4-6 horses as leaders.⁵⁹

For those unfamiliar with the harnessing of teams of horses to a wagon, a whiffle tree is a heavy wooden bar used to attach the horses’ harness to the wagon. Chains at each end of the whiffle tree connected to hooks on the harness so that the harness was carried along the sides of the horses’ bodies and didn’t rub against their legs. A single pin or hook then connected the whiffle tree to the tongue of the wagon. The strength feat here, then, was to simply be strong enough to serve as a link in the chain connecting the team of horses (or the elephant) to the wagon. It was not dissimilar, in a way, to that other well-known turn-of-the-last-century strength feat, “resisting the pull of two horses,” in which strongmen such as Louis Cyr put padded ropes around their elbows and became a “link” in the chain as two or more horses pulled against each other.

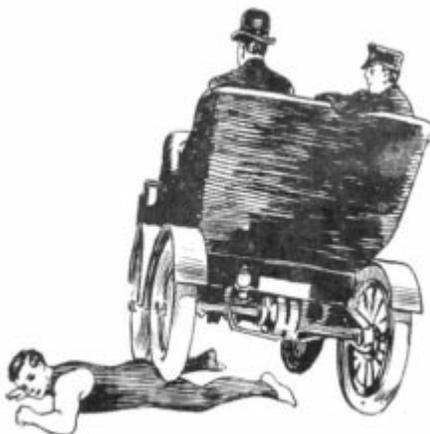
How many shows the two men actually gave that winter is not known. In the early part of 1912, however, Ottley wrote to a number of circuses seeking a position for “Coulter and Prada” for the upcoming season.⁶⁰ When an offer finally came from the Frank Robbins Circus, it spelled the end of their duo act. “Gentlemen,” read the brief letter, “We could use a strong act with only one man who could also do the automobile trick, providing salary was satisfactory.”⁶¹ Three days later, a second letter from Robbins arrived at Ottley’s home, addressed solely to him, and offering him a slot as a single act at \$25.00 per week for the 1912 season. Although Warren Lincoln Travis had told Ottley that he should be paid \$80.00 a week for such a strength act, circus historian Janet Davis of the University of Texas at Austin believes that \$25.00 per week represented a fairly good wage for a circus performer in that era.⁶² “It would be somewhere in the middle,” said Dr. Davis. “The chorus girls were probably only making about \$7.00 a week, so \$25.00 is not at all bad, especially for someone just starting out.”⁶³

In Bob Hise’s *Iron Man* article on Ottley, Hise

claims that it was Prada who decided to split the duo. "Two offers from different sources were received at same salary, the one offering for the two-man act, the other only needed one man and would not consider the other man at the same salary. Coulter was willing to accept the two-man spot even though it meant half the salary. Prada's pride would not permit him to accept Coulter's generous offer and he returned to his native Mexico."⁶⁴

Some correspondence survives between Coulter and Prada, but no letters survive from these early years. It appears, however, that while Prada continued to do some vaudeville and circus work he didn't have much financial success. In June of 1918, for instance, he wrote to Ottley from Chicago for help. "As I am rather short on this material they call money to go home on," wrote Prada, "I wish to propose the sale of all my Physical Culture books. You know more or less what I have as I brought them when I saw you fist in 1912 . . . I believe that you once told me that you wanted to buy all my books and things on Physical Culture . . . You need not pay for the stuff right away, we are friends and [I] can trust you on a reasonable basis." In that same letter he tells Ottley that once he gets his money situation straightened out, "I will then make a decision on whether I shall start anew on my training or not."⁶⁵

Apparently, Prada wasn't able to get his various problems solved. In fact, by 1919 he was writing Ottley from the penitentiary in Mexico City and admitting that he had made a mistake by not staying with his circus work. "If I had only stuck [sic] to the rings and the weights, just think what a ring performer I would be and some bent press record too. But as you know I have been fickle, and this is the reason why I have not been able to accomplish anything worth while yet. . ."⁶⁶ What crime placed Prada in prison isn't clear, although it appears that it may have been political and related to the Mexican Revolution. In a letter to Ottley written in 1921, Prada states that things in Mexico were finally returning to normal and that "I am sure to be liberated by the middle of next month by virtue of a general pardon granted by the President."⁶⁷ In March of 1923, Prada



In the auto act, Ottley lay face down on the ground and allowed a heavy car to drive over his thighs.

wrote from Chicago that he was planning to come and visit Ottley and hoped to find work near him. "I am thru [sic] with the wrong kind of ideas and just want to be let alone and do what's right."⁶⁸ In his letters, Ottley almost never comments on Prada's imprisonment, although in one letter to Willoughby he explained that Prada "was in some political trouble at one time with the Mexican Government during a time of some revolutionary trouble of which I do not understand and have no interest, aside from my interest in him."⁶⁹ In any case, Prada

was released from prison in September of 1921 and corresponded with Ottley through 1923. How he spent the remaining years of his life is not known.⁷⁰

After splitting from Prada, Ottley made his way to New York to get ready for his stint with the Robbins Circus. For more than a year, Ottley had been corresponding with Warren Lincoln Travis, who was then headlining the John Robinson Circus. Ottley had written to Travis for advice on getting up an act, and the first letter from Travis [written on the back of one of his posters] told Ottley he'd help him get ready. "You see," wrote Travis in February of 1911, "I lay out acts for strong men when I am home in the winter—if I was in your place I would do a backlift like you see me do with John Robinson Circus." Travis then offered to sell Ottley a small backlift platform that he no longer used, for \$15.00 and told him that along with the sale he would give Ottley lessons on how to use the platform safely. He also offered Ottley several barbells of various sizes and a Roman column "like the one I made for Sandow," that Ottley could buy for \$20.00. He then gave Ottley his final sales pitch, telling him, "I also can fix you for a circus if you wish to travel. I made the weights for Arthur Saxon, Sandow, Titus, Rolandow, Unger, Atilla, and all the strongmen . . . I go with Robinson again so think this over so I can get you ready for the stage or circus."⁷¹ In December of that same year, Travis wrote again to Coulter, offering to send him kettlebells, barbells several of his old leotards, a second-hand pair of tights, and a pair of size 7 1/2 lifting shoes. Again, he told Ottley to let him know when he can come, and said he'd help him fix his act.⁷² Ottley bought the shoes and leotards, and in his next letter, Travis bragged, "You see, I treat you

good.” He then told Ottley, “Now dear friend I will try and help you along. I will sell you my backlift, out[fit] the horse act complete, get your picture in *The Police Gazette* and send you 100 names of show managers all for \$25.00. It cost me \$25.00 just to get the 100 names when I started in show business.”⁷³ Time was of the essence, Travis explained. “If you take my outfit by March 1st 1912, I will have a little time to help you to book your act. But after March 1st, I get ready to travel again . . .”⁷⁴ By return post, Ottley sent a \$10.00 down payment on the equipment and the promise of Travis’ help. With the money in hand, Travis told Ottley to hurry his picture along so that he could get it in *The Police Gazette*. “Write on the back of the picture who you want to meet and I will say you are a pupil of mine and I will back you for \$500.00 a side bet. You see I am trying to help you all I can.”⁷⁵

On Saturday, 20 April 1912, Ottley traveled to Brooklyn to meet Travis and get even more help from the most famous American strongman of that era. According to Ottley’s diary, on that Saturday he bought both a stage barbell and a revolving table apparatus to use in his shows. He also demonstrated his strength for Travis by “lifting 1800 pounds in his presence.”⁷⁶ Travis praised the young showman, and encouraged him to continue doing the backlift so that the platform cleared the supports by several inches, as Travis, himself, performed the lift.⁷⁷ Ottley heeded his advice and noted on August seventh, after several months on the road, that he had “Cut my jacks down so I could lift my platform higher.”⁷⁸ The reason height is important in this context is that unless the platform or table is lifted several inches, it is hard for the audience to see that a backlift has been successful.

Coulter went back to Brooklyn on Sunday, the twenty-first of April, after stopping to order new tights from a man named Nolan. He spent the rest of the day with Travis and, according to a letter to Jack Kent, the two strongmen had plenty to talk about.

When I was with him in 1912 at 205 South First St. in Brooklyn getting ready to be featured with the Frank A. Robbins Circus, which opened in Jersey City that spring, Travis had his exhibition barbell and exhibition dumbbell. Also a solid dumbbell weighing about 400 lbs. and another weighing about 600 pounds, a revolving hip lift carousel, back lift platform, back lift scales and planks of different weights. His basement had all kinds of iron implements such as ship anchors, oil drums to load with slugs, many

pounds of slugs, railroad car wheels, castings of various sizes and shapes, shells of various sizes and shapes, a barbell weighing about 2,000 pounds, which he wanted to sell to me but cost too much to move around. His cellar was filled with junk material up to the ceiling. Apparently, he bought such material at junkyards and used some of it in his training or exhibition. He also sold such material to various pupils about the country. I bought considerable material from him but only a small fraction of what he had in his cellar. I have never seen such a collection outside of a junk yard and I never expect to see such a collection again. He had a number of barbells of different sizes. In fact, he had globe and plate bells manufactured and sold them to different persons. The famed Rolandow bell was furnished Rolandow by Travis, who carried it from his home in Brooklyn to Rolandow’s gym – that is he carried it wherever he could not to take it on a streetcar and it weighed, I believe, 209 pounds. Certainly would like to see some of these modern Olympic lifters do some of the rough and ready stunts that Travis did just to save paying a drayman.⁷⁹

That night, Coulter apparently slept in Jersey City with the rest of the circus cast, for on Monday, April 22, his diary reports that he came back to Brooklyn to “see the Barnum show. Saw Berne Brothers & Sandwina & the Jordys.”⁸⁰ Two days later, on Wednesday, April 24, he opened with the Frank A. Robbins Circus in Jersey City. According to the press reports, it was a terrible night, with heavy rains and winds estimated at fifty miles an hour. Still, Robbins sold almost every seat, including two to Warren Lincoln Travis and strongman Andy Kandrat, who braved the weather to come to Coulter’s opening.⁸¹ *The Billboard*, a circus and theatrical periodical, devoted half a page to the opening of the Robbins Circus, and made special mention of Ottley’s act: “O.R. Coulter, the strong man, makes a fine appearance and holds the undivided attention of the crowds when he performs his matchless feats of strength.”⁸² *The New York Clipper*, another theatrical weekly, also had high praise for the young strongman, even if they didn’t spell his name right: “The marvelous Colten, in feats of strength, had the attention of everyone. Being very lightly built, he surprised everybody with his excellent work. He features lifting ten men seated on a plank with his back.”⁸³ Robbins must have felt good about Coulter’s performances, too, for in advertisements in *The Billboard* and other trade publications “Ottley Coulter—‘The Strong Man’ of 1912” is featured



Coulter didn't have a particularly showy physique. Although he never really built much muscle, he was terrifically strong for his size.

prominently with a notice that he's "booked solid" for the season.⁸⁴

The Robbins Circus was one of the largest of the train circuses then touring the country. Robbins was a protege of Adam Forepaugh, one of the leading impresarios of the circus world, and though Robbins had gone bankrupt once in the circus business, his new train circus was well regarded in 1912, the year Ottley joined the cast.⁸⁵ *The Billboard* describes it, in fact, "as one of the finest that will be seen on the road this year."⁸⁶

The circus played Jersey City for two nights before heading off across the northeastern United States in a tour that would end six months later, on October 19, just outside St. Louis in a small town called Bellville. Along the way, Ottley played in 147 different towns, and often gave two performances a day.⁸⁷ The schedule must have been grueling. In September, for instance, Ottley's diary reveals that he had a rare Sunday off and so decided to go to Cincinnati. There he watched Cincinnati beat St. Louis in a baseball game and that night went to a vaudeville show. He stayed the night in Cincinnati and took a morning train down to Loveland, Ohio to meet the rest of the circus cast. He did both afternoon and evening shows, noting that it was "rather poor business." The next day, Tuesday, the 10th, they played in Brownstown, Indiana. Said Ottley, "We arrived too late for a street parade," but business was fair and Ottley admired the fact that the town had horse cars that con-

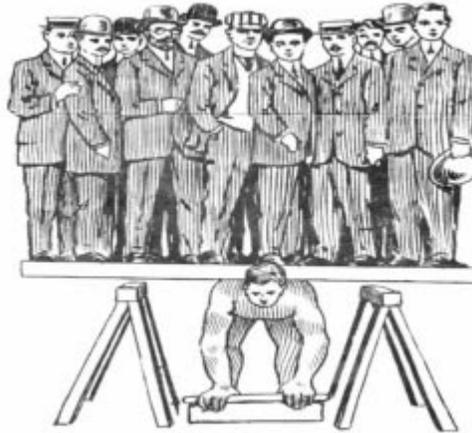
nected to the train depot. Wednesday found them in Bedford, Indiana, a "good-sized place" known for its quarries. By Thursday, they'd moved on to Shoals, Indiana, a "very small town," where Ottley for some reason visited a wooden coat hanger factory. Although the town was small, the crowds for both shows were large, and Ottley lifted ten men that night. Friday, they crossed the border into Illinois and set up their tents in Laurenceville. There he lifted nine men at both shows but injured his knee when he did his auto stunt. "Used a white auto weighing 4680 pounds + 5 men in it," wrote Ottley, "Injured my knee with it at night." The injury didn't cause him to miss the next day's show in Robinson, however, where he was "run over by [an] Overland weighing 2640," and lifted eight men in the afternoon and nine at night.⁸⁸ Many weeks, his diaries reveal,

the circus held performances on all seven days.

Pictures from the publicity surrounding his performances with the Robbins Circus suggest that the auto stunt performed by Ottley was a copy of the act done by Travis. Ottley lay face down on the ground and allowed the vehicle to drive over the backs of his thighs. He would never be holding the full weight of the car, of course, but still he had to be able to bear the weight even if it was just momentarily. And, like many of the stunts performed by Coulter and the other strongmen of this era, injuries were just waiting to happen. As Ottley said in a letter to Jack Kent, "I think most of the professionals who went in for the heavy spectacular stuff have had some quite narrow escapes. I know that two of the Saxons and Steinborn were injured with auto supporting acts. Travis was lucky to escape serious injury when a back lifting trestle upset when he was performing a heavy back lift. I had both kneecaps dislocated at one time when being run over by an auto."⁸⁹

In addition to the auto stunt, Ottley generally performed both harness and back lifting at each show and also did the "plank feat," in which he supported a large number of men on a sturdy board placed across the soles of his feet in a legpress lockout position. On 18 July 1912, for instance, Ottley notes that he lifted eight men in the backlift and "six on plank." The next day, in Albion, when there was a "scarcity of props," he lifted

only seven men in the back lift, six on the plank, and used a 2800-pound Mitchell car.⁹⁰ On his harness lifts, Ottley took pride in the fact that he performed a “straight lift” without leverage advantage because of the way the chains were rigged. Ottley commented about this in a letter to Jack Kent in 1956.



This woodcut, from Coulter's publicity materials, shows how he performed the backlift using a table and heavy sawhorses.

George Lettle, a lightweight lifter from Bavaria, who had a reputation of lifting tremendous poundages for his weight, certainly was great at hand and thigh lifting. He was also credited with some tremendous harness and back lifts. However, his harness lifts were made with the quite common chain hook-ups, that is chains fastened to the chains that support the platform were at an angle. This was mainly for the purpose of eliminating the balancing difficulty of the platform but it gave a leverage percentage to the lifter. Whether or not Lettle could lift as much on the back lift as he was credited with, I do not know. I have never been able to find any account of him lifting officially. However, I do know that he was shaking at the knees when lifting 2400 and he could not lift a platform high enough for general circus work and he was never able to perform his back lift successfully for American circus work. He could not do the back lift as I performed it twice daily with the heaviest poundage used for a season of work at my weight.⁹¹

Ottley enjoyed good billing with Robbins Circus where he was a featured act. For a while he was billed as the “Great Herr Coulter” from Germany, even though his family name was Irish.⁹² Advertising him as German fit the public’s view that the best strongmen came from Germany and Austria. Alan Calvert noted this in his *Truth About Weightlifting* in 1911 when he observed that the Americans were far behind the Europeans, both in number of lifters and in absolute strength.⁹³

In 1912, Ottley turned down two offers that, in retrospect, might have made his life go in quite different directions. One offer was from the Barnum management who offered him a chance to join their circus and perform in one of the side rings while Katie Sandwina performed at center and the Berne Brothers (another

strength act) played on the other side. It was a tough decision for Ottley as Barnum’s was certainly a larger and more prestigious show. But, Ottley said, “I knew I would have to play second fiddle to a woman . . . In fact, I do not think that any mere man could meet the public on equal terms with her. She had strength like a man and performed feats that were spectacular,” he reported, and they “required a strength surpassing that of many male professionals. She had everything, even sex appeal.” Regarding her large size, “she had 8” wrists (larger than John Davis) and weighed around 200 lbs.,” Ottley

wrote to Jack Kent that she was so perfectly proportioned, as to be billed as ‘Europe’s Queen of Strength and Beauty,’ and, unlike much circus ballyhoo, [it] was an accurate description of her.”⁹⁴ Ottley’s other reason for not going with Barnum, however, was that it would mean he’d have to break his contract with the Robbins’ Circus. Leaving a circus midway through the season was considered “bad business” according to Ottley and doing so might have meant that other circuses wouldn’t hire him.⁹⁵ The other offer Ottley turned down that year was a chance to perform in Cuba once the Robbins’ season was over. “Dan Ducrow wanted to manage me in the winter of 1912,” wrote Ottley, “and book me through Charles Sasse to go to Cuba and pull against oxen. I decided that pulling against horses was hard enough and that it was too far to swim back from Havana.” Ducrow, however, thought the stunt would go over well in Cuba, as they were using lots of oxen in the sugarfields there at that time. “No doubt Travis or some of the heavyweights could resist the pull of oxen,” Ottley concluded, “but I decided that it was too risky for little me.”⁹⁶

And so, when the Robbins Circus took down its tents for the last time on 19 October 1912, Ottley found himself suddenly adrift and with no immediate prospects for work. That night he stayed in St. Louis at the new Barnum hotel and saw that his gear was shipped home to Ohio. For the next several days he stayed in the St. Louis area where the Robbins Circus had its winter quarters. He took in several vaudeville shows, visited “with Gay

and Cousins,” and then began walking and riding the rails homeward, looking for work along the way.⁹⁷

Several circus performers travelled with him on this cross-country trip. They walked from St. Louis to Granite City, Missouri, and then to Venice where they caught a “Big 4 Freight” that took them overnight to Hillsboro, Illinois, where they arrived and witnessed a big fire. The men stayed there part of the day, then walked on to Witt, Illinois, a distance of about 11 miles, where they were able to sleep in a boxcar that night. The next morning, October 24, they walked another five miles to Nokomis, caught a freight to Rosamund, walked nine miles from Rosamund to Pana, Illinois, and then caught a “fast freight” to Mattoon, Illinois. In Mattoon, they slipped past the guards and found a room to share for seventy-five cents. The next day they walked 12 miles over to Charleston, where one of the men left the group. That night, October 25, they camped along the railroad tracks. The next morning, Ottley and his fellow travelers—Garibaldi and Bennett—unloaded a 40-ton car of coal for which they were paid \$2.50. Feeling flush, they spent the night at the Maple House.⁹⁸ The next day they walked 14 miles to Kansas, Illinois, slept in a grain elevator that night and walked 16 miles the next day to Paris. Ottley liked Paris; he looked around the town that day, attended a meeting of the Progressive Party which he happened upon, and tried to find work. His diary notes that he approached a farmer about a job and was refused, so he walked on, crossing into Indiana, to St. Mary’s of the Woods, just outside Terre Haute. There he hopped a train to Terre Haute, visited the big industrial exposition at the fairgrounds and in the evening attended a vaudeville show. It was the first big town he’d been in since leaving St. Louis. The next morning he began looking for work in earnest and was quickly hired by the Foulke & Forbes Contracting Company, specialists in concrete construction. On his first day on the job, Saturday, 2 October 1912, he unloaded a car of gravel at the Glass Foundry Yard. On Sunday he ate a “big, big meal” at the Henderson House that cost him twenty cents and stayed there the rest of the day and wrote letters. For the next month, he unloaded gravel and did concrete work during the day as the company built sidewalks along Tippecanoe Street. At night, he either read, attended vaudeville shows, or went to the movies. On

Thanksgiving, he had a turkey dinner at his hotel and then attended Al Field’s Minstrel Show at the Varieties Theater.⁹⁹ He also trained while he was there, and continued to work on his strength. In a letter to John Grimek, written in 1942, Ottley lists as one of his greatest feats of strength pushing “a railroad car loaded with scrapiron” at the Vandalia train station in Terre Haute.¹⁰⁰

Whether Ottley stayed in Terre Haute for the rest of the winter isn’t known. The next verifiable date found in his papers is 27 April 1913, when he began working as a professional strongman with the Walter L. Main Circus. The Main Circus began its season in Jamestown, Pennsylvania, its winter home. Jamestown was almost directly across the state line from Andover, where Ottley’s family was then living, and the close proximity may have influenced his decision to go with them. His correspondence files indicate that he had several other offers of employment that spring; Sanger’s Greater European Shows offered him \$20.00 per week for the season and both the Rentz Brothers Circus and the Greater Chicago Shows had also made offers.¹⁰¹ “Dear Sir,” the Rentz Brothers circus manager wrote, “Your letter rec’d and everything O.K. We want the auto act, swinging with shetland pony and lifting platform with men standing on . . . we open in Geneva, O. on April 26/13.”¹⁰² A letter dated six days earlier had asked Ottley to send photos and publicity materials so they could get started on advertising his act.¹⁰³ Why he chose to refuse this offer, with one of the more respected circuses then touring North America, remains a mystery.¹⁰⁴

Whatever his reason for deciding to go with Main, it was not entirely a successful season for the young strongman. Perhaps Ottley should have been forewarned when he had an almost fatal accident at the dress rehearsal. “I was, as always, featuring my back lift,” he explained to Jack Kent,

but was intending to do a revolving Tomb of Hercules support with 12 to 14 men. I had a small platform, large enough for my feet and elbows. At the bottom of this was an iron pin to fit into a socket in the bottom platform on the ground. There was a long rod, sliding into a slot on the revolving platform, so that a man could take hold of it and walk around on the ground and turn the platform on which my elbows and feet rested. A third framework or

platform fitted over my shoulders and knees and a plank was across this so that 12 to 14 men could sit on it, 6 or 7 to a side. However, when the men sat down, apparently they were not careful enough and the pin, although large, was of cast iron, [and] broke off. I got a terrific jolt but held my position and escaped any real injury. If I had not maintained my position, the weight of the men would have broken arms or legs.¹⁰⁵

According to Ottley's diary for that year, the Main Circus, like the Robbins Circus, primarily played in smaller towns. From Jamestown, for instance, they headed south, along the Pennsylvania/Ohio border, to Sharpeville, then Farrell, then Wampum, then Cambridge, then Sewickley before they finally played in North Pittsburgh on the 4th and 5th of May. On the 31st of May, Ottley suffered a serious setback when he came down with measles and was forced to leave the show for several weeks to go home to Andover and recover.¹⁰⁶ By midsummer, though, he was back with the Main Circus and as the season progressed he regained most of his strength. On 4 August 1913, for instance, he used a 5500-pound brewery truck with solid rubber tires for the auto stunt at both performances that day in Ticonderoga, New York. In Aberdeen, North Carolina, on 11 November 1913, he used a 4800-pound Hudson car with five men in it for both performances.¹⁰⁷ It was also during this season that Ottley experimented with a new way to do the backlift. As he explained it to one of his correspondents, the lift actually used three platforms.

The account by Grimek in Strength and Health which stated "Harness lifted a horse and 6 to 8 men" is wrong. I never performed an exhibition harness lift of men or horse. This was also a back lift but I used two platforms, or actually three platforms. My top platform was large enough that a small platform was placed on uprights extending up from the sides of the platform that I stood on. The chains from the platform that the horse and men were on, extended directly to the little platform. I got under this little platform in backlift style and with hands on a stool lifted the horse and the men. This as you see was a legitimate backlift and a bit more difficult than the ordinary backlift because of the possible swaying of the lower platform. However, I lifted high enough that the balance of the lower platform did not cause much trouble. So far as I know, no one has ever made a back lift in this manner. Nearly all of such lifting has been performed with the leverage chain hookup. This idea was my own. The uprights to the platform

that I stood on were of tubular steel and everything came apart for moving from place to place. . .¹⁰⁸

Ottley's diary for 1913 includes a new kind of entry—a running tally of his expenses on the tour. On August 5, for instance, the day after the 5500-pound truck ran him over in Ticonderoga, Ottley spent 35 cents on cold cream and rope, a nickel for postcards and 65 cents on food. Over the next several days, he reports spending 25 cents for "towels, tie and cards," five cents for a new tablet, 50 cents for a new chain, and he lists modest food entries of 40 cents, 25 cents and 15 cents. In fact, the most he apparently spent on food in any one day during the entire season was 75 cents. His most common expense, after food, was for postcards, and nearly every day he spent five cents or so on cards that he sent to his family and friends. The financial records may simply indicate a man trying to be careful with his money, but they also suggest that Ottley was probably not making as much as he might have wished. Throughout the records of that tour are mentions of "poor business" or "small place" alongside the date and names of cities, suggesting, again, that even though he was starring in a circus, he'd yet to financially capitalize on his exceptional strength.¹⁰⁹

On 29 November, 1913 the Walter L. Main Circus ended its season in Bassett, Virginia, a small town just outside Martinsville. Their tour had taken them through Pennsylvania, New York, North Carolina, West Virginia and Virginia, and when it was over, Ottley made his way home to Andover.¹¹⁰ During the next year and a half, Ottley apparently stayed at home, working with his father in their new feed business. Stationery from that era lists the business as "D. Coulter and Son: Dealers in Corn, Oats, Ground Feed, Flour, Coal, Hay and Straw," and on a job resume Ottley put together in 1929, he described himself as "Foreman in Charge" from December 1913 to April 1915.¹¹¹ It is impossible to know for sure why he stayed home to work with his father. One could speculate that at age 23 he was simply tired of the circus life and wanted job stability and a better, more regular source of income. One can also speculate that his father's health problems may have worsened and Ottley felt he was needed at home. One other tantalizing clue survives. A letter from Ken Palmer, a con-tortionist with the Walter L. Main Circus, suggests that the 1914 season had ended in a dispute over the performers' salaries. After catching up on the news about the various people they'd worked with in the Main show,

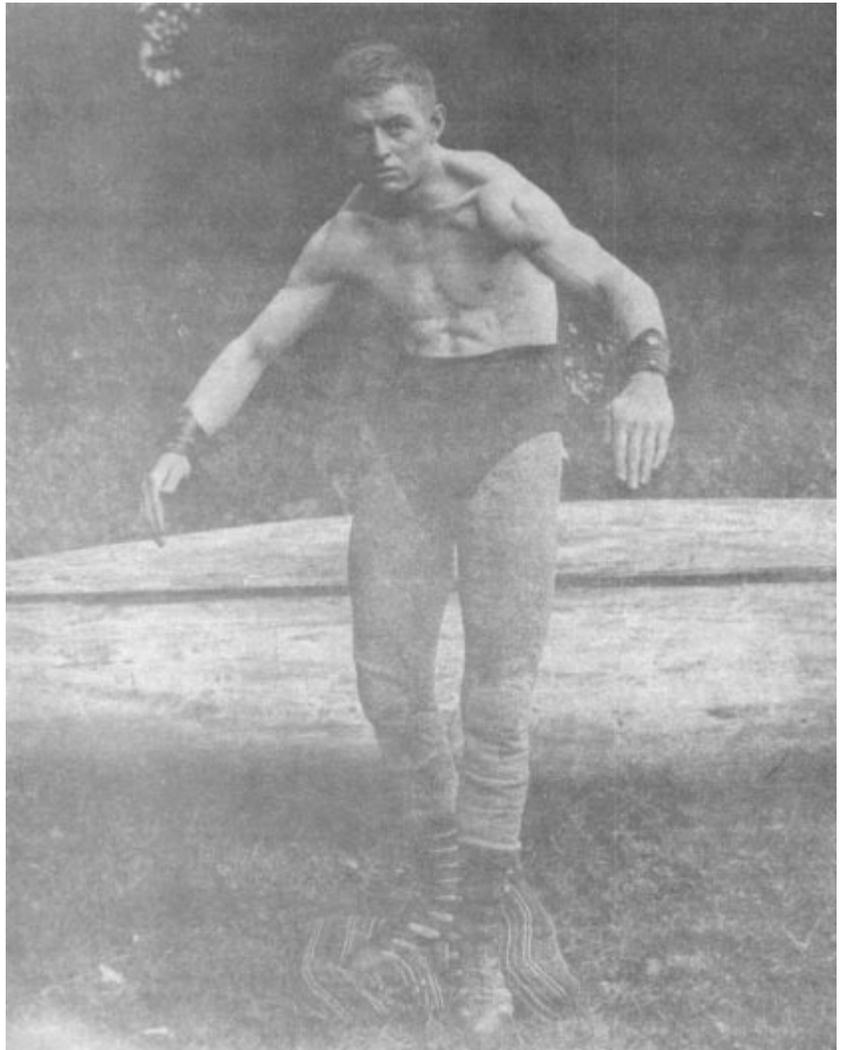
Palmer explains that he's financially in trouble. "Main said he was going to black ball everyone who went to law about our salaries. [sic] I don't know whether he could or not but I am using the nickname the bunch gave me last year." He then asks Ottley to keep his whereabouts a secret and signs the letter, "Remember the Main-not in Santiago [Cuba]. . . but Stony Creek, Va."¹¹² Although Ottley never makes any mention of being blackballed, the pay dispute with Main could have temporarily soured him on a circus career.

Although Ottley stayed home in 1915, he didn't forsake his love of physical culture and the strong man profession. He corresponded, for instance, with several mail-order experts, ordered their courses, and apparently began thinking about how to establish himself as a qualified teacher of physical culture. A letter from Lionel Kelly, a "Professor" of Physical Culture in Great Britain, for instance, offered Ottley a chance to get detailed, personal instruction in such diverse topics as card tearing, tennis ball tearing, expander pulling, scientific posing, chain breaking, poker bending, hand balancing, massage, diet, and "anatomy, physiology and histology as needed by a genuine instructor of P.C."¹¹³ Kelly offered to give Ottley written tests over the courses and then send a certificate and medal asserting his expertise if he satisfactorily passed the tests.

As the spring of 1915 rolled around, Ottley's correspondence reveals that he'd made a decision to return to work as a strongman. This time, though, rather than working for someone else, Ottley organized his own athletic troupe so that he could serve as a sub-contractor and place the troupe with various carnivals. The new act was called the Coulter Brothers Athletic Show and its two stars were Ottley, who did his strength act and some wrestling, and Kid Parker, the former welterweight wrestling champion. Parker's real name was Harry Williams. According to Ottley, Williams was "certainly one of the very best welterweight wrestlers in the world. I am not sure he was as capable as George Bothner but I know that he really believed that he was and that would be a big help."¹¹⁴ Also in the troupe were

Joe Fisher, who held *The Police Gazette* featherweight championship belt, Kris Ramer, a big heavyweight wrestler from Akron, Ohio, and two women wrestlers, Jessie Mack and Josephine McNally.¹¹⁵

In March of 1915, the Coulter Brothers signed to



This photo of Ottley Coulter was taken in 1916 during the time he and Kid Parker toured the southern United States as the Coulter Brothers.

tour with the Superior United Shows, a large carnival company out of Cleveland. Although the contract of Ottley's financial arrangement with the Superior Shows hasn't survived, letters he wrote to several prospective employees explain that he would split the gate receipts fifty-fifty with the carnival management.¹¹⁶ Letters from several other carnival companies reveal how these kinds of financial arrangements worked. The Keen & Shippy Model Shows, for instance, offered to take forty-five percent of the troupe's gate receipts in return for providing them with a tent, licenses, electricity, freight, tickets,

ticket-takers and transportation from city to city. Ottley and Kid Parker would be responsible for handling all aspects of their show, including buying their own banner.¹¹⁷ William Kanell, manager of the Great European Shows, offered them a similar arrangement with a fifty-fifty split of the gate.¹¹⁸ As for the performers who worked with him and Parker, a blank contract in the Coulter Papers offered one of them ten percent of the gate receipts with Ottley and Parker keeping forty percent.¹¹⁹ A letter inviting strongman John Athes to join the troupe offered him 15% of the gate.¹²⁰

Stationery for the new act advertised described it as “Harry and Ottley, the Coulter Brothers—Adroit, Artistic Astounding Athletes,” and their act consisted of 12 minutes of Classical Statuary, Muscular Posing and Wrestling.¹²¹ One surviving ad for the act lists it as “Coulter Bros. Athletic Stadium and School of Physical Culture.”¹²² Ottley apparently made openings for the show on a ballyhoo platform by bending spikes and iron bars. The following “pitch,” obviously written hurriedly by him, has survived in his papers:

Ladies and Gentlemen, with your kind permission we will illustrate holts made famous by the world’s greatest wrestlers, at the conclusion of which we will give an exhibition of catch as catch can wrestling which from a fast and scientific standpoint will leave nothing to be desired. For the benefit of those who do not understand wrestling we will endeavor to explain as briefly as possible that there are several different styles of wrestling namely Collar and elbow style, Cornish, Lankershire, Indian, Jiu Jitsui, GrecioRoman, and catch as catch can which is a combination of all the rest. Flying or roleing falls at this style of wrestling do not count that is roleing on two shoulders and immediately off is not considered a fall, thrown off your feet landing squarely on two shoulders and immediately off is not considered a fall but one’s opponents two shoulders must be pinned securely to the mat for a period of three seconds in order to win. We thank you for your kind attention.¹²³

Ottley sent a letter to handbalancer R. H. Lade, for instance, Ottley offers him a full third of the profits if he will only come and join the act. “We will have the best athletic show on the road with any carnival . . .” he wrote, and “Another reason why we would like you with

us . . . we are going to get up an act for three men which will be the most spectacular, thrilling and wonderful act ever performed in vaudeville and you will be with us to practice it and have it ready for the season.” Ottley dreamed of taking the troupe to New York, Boston and other sites along the East Coast before heading off to England and even Australia. “This act is a wonder,” he wrote to Lade, “and you will be able to work in it as you are an athlete. Make up your mind to wire and come on at once.” Ottley wrote a similar letter to Texas strongman and handbalancer John Athes, promising that the proposed three-man act “would be a good money getter and we should have no trouble booking it on the best circuit in the world.”¹²⁴

Unfortunately, Ottley’s dreams of financial success were again thwarted. In a letter to Willoughby, Ottley claimed that although he’d found Kid Parker to be a “dependable man of good character,” the carnival’s tour through the Southern United States was hampered by both bad weather and poor economic conditions. In addition, Ottley found that both the physical and psychological aspects of wrestling didn’t suit him. In a letter to Gerard Nissivoccia, Ottley explained,

One year, the original Kid Parker, welterweight wrestler and I booked Coulter Brothers Athletic Show with the Greater Superior United Shows, a big carnival out of Cleveland. He wrestled and I planned to lift a horse and men at every show and wrestle when necessary to make a good performance. However, I found on weekends and holidays that it was just too many lifts a day and became exhausting, so I eliminated the men and just lifted a good-sized horse and that seemed to please people just as well as with the additional men.”¹²⁵

In a 1973 letter to Willoughby, Ottley explained that unlike the circus, where he never gave more than two performances a day, the carnival required him to “make a show as often as you get crowd enough because the Carnival always requires a good percentage.”¹²⁶ The frequent performance schedule also hurt his training and so he told Willoughby, “When the carnival closed in Southern Georgia, I decided I wanted to get back into the strongman game, as I did not have the proper qualifications for wrestling. I did not like to hurt anyone and did not like to be hurt, did not have the necessary speed for

wrestling and got by on my strength. Kid Parker always claimed that I was the strongest man of my weight that he had ever wrestled.”¹²⁷

With the carnival’s tour over, the “Coulter Brothers” decided to go their separate ways and Ottley once again looked for work. On August 1st, he rode the Superior United Train from Pennsylvania to Wheeling Junction, West Virginia, then walked to Weirton and slept at the freight station. The next day he traveled on to Steubenville, West Virginia, to visit his friend Bill Crow. Ottley lived there for the next month. He finally landed a job dressing stone for the Ohio Valley Clay Products Company in Mingo Junction. On August 14, he got his first paycheck of \$4.50. While there he continued looking for carnival work. On the 24th of August he reported an “offer of \$15.00 from Williams.”¹²⁸ However, according to his autobiographical resume, his next regular engagement was with the Legette and Brown Carnival and his new partner was Ed Musselman. In a letter to Willoughby, Ottley claimed that their act was almost entirely wrestling. Ottley did no strength stunts except for spike and iron bending on the platform to draw customers.¹²⁹ In his diary for the next several months, there are also no references to lifting. On the 9th of September, for instance, he “Wrestled Red Morris, Old Time Wrestler.” On the 10th, he “Only illustrated holds.” On the 11th, he “Wrestled Cobb, a very strong wrestler. Hurt my side.” In Corbin, Kentucky on the 21st of September, Ottley reported that the weather was cold and he “wrestled a town chump.” On the 23rd, he “Wrestled a cowboy.”¹³⁰ As he continued to head southward with the carnival, Ottley’s diary entries continue to reflect disillusionment with his situation. On October 9th, for instance, he described the fair he was playing in Eton, Georgia as the “poorest fair ever seen.”¹³¹ After a week in Columbus, Georgia, where each day’s entry ends with—“Business Poor!” Ottley and Ed Musselman took the train from Columbus to Hurtsboro. His diary for that day reads: “Train hit three mules on the way. They died. Ed Musselman Gets Married.” The day after the wedding, Ed’s wife joined the act, illustrating wrestling holds. Even the novelty of a woman wrestler didn’t help. “Business Bad,” Ottley wrote again and again in his diary. “Business Poor.” On November 23rd, Ottley noted, “Mostly Negroes. In center of negro country. Lots of cotton. Fine board.”¹³²

In December, with the weather increasingly cold, and business continuing poor, Ottley noted in his

diary that he “received an invitation” from Robert Snyder of Hagerstown, Maryland. Although that letter doesn’t survive, an earlier letter from Snyder had asked Ottley to consider becoming partners with him. “How about that three act this fall?” Snyder wrote in July. “Write and tell me if you have me in any of your plans. I would sooner travel the stage with you than any person I could ever run against . . . You say you’ll need money for that three act? How much? Tell me about it. Write me as soon as you get this.”¹³³ Ottley’s last day with The Legette and Brown Carnival was 7 January 1916. In his final week with the carnival, he made \$7.55 for his portion of the gate receipts. No doubt Ottley looked forward with optimism to the new opportunities presented by his move to Hagerstown. Clearly, he’d slipped from his days as a starring performer with the Robbins Circus and he’d gotten far from his first love—heavy lifting. Although Ottley didn’t realize it as he rode the train toward Hagerstown that January, his career as a circus and carnival strongman was essentially over. Although he went to Hagerstown believing that he and Snyder would organize a vaudeville act, Snyder later changed his mind and decided to continue working at the local newspaper. “He was very much of a homeboy,” Ottley wrote to Willoughby, “and I believe that it was just as well for him that he decided to do so.”¹³⁴ In a way, even though Ottley didn’t get his act with Snyder going, the move to Hagerstown proved to be a good one. “This was my first training at hand balancing and my first intensive training with barbells,” he told Willoughby.¹³⁵ It was also where he met and married his wife, Ethel Alexander. Because of her, he would, at least temporarily, give up the idea of a stage career and try to find another profession.¹³⁶

Years later, reflecting upon his seventy-year passion for weightlifting, Ottley told Willoughby that he hoped people would remember him not as someone who’d been an expert at training people or as someone who’d written about the game (as significant as those accomplishments were). He hoped, instead, that people would remember him for his accomplishments as a strongman and professional athlete. “It is not what I know but what I did that means most to me,” he wrote. “I am the last of the professional strongmen who were featured with special announcements in the big tops of major U.S. Railroad Circuses, a group that included Gailer, Cyr, Barre, Sandow, Lundin, Batta, Levasseur, Saxon Trio, Travis, Sandwina & Coulter. I was the last

of that line.”¹³⁷

Notes:

¹ The letters in the Iuspa Collection were primarily between Ottley Coulter and New York film collector, Jack Kent. These letters, and Coulter's letters to Iuspa, are now in the possession of co-author Michael Murphy of West Warwick, Rhode Island. In subsequent footnotes, we shall use the abbreviation "IMC" to indicate inclusion in the Iuspa/Murphy Collection and "TMPCC" for The Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection at the University of Texas at Austin.

² During the organization of the "Picturing the Modern Amazon" exhibition at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York City, Jan Todd visited all the major circus archives in North America and searched for scholarly information on male and female strength performers. That literature consists of: David Chapman's *Sandow the Magnificent: Eugen Sandow and the Beginnings of Bodybuilding* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press 1994); Terry Todd's 1966 doctoral dissertation "The History of Resistance Exercise and its Role in United States Education" (University of Texas at Austin); two masters theses and a small number of scholarly articles. In 1971, David Norwood completed his thesis, "The Sport Hero Concept and Louis Cyr" at the University of Windsor in Ontario. Joshua Buck's thesis, completed at the University of Maryland at College Park in 1999, is titled "The Development of the Performances of Strongmen in America between 1881 and 1932." Academic articles in this field include: Jan Todd, "Bring on the Amazons: An Evolutionary History," in *Picturing the Modern Amazon* (New York: Rizzoli & New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1999): 48-61; Jan Todd, "The Mystery of Minerva" *Iron Game History* 1(April 1990): 14-17; David Norwood, "The Legend of Louis Cyr," *Iron Game History* 1(April 1990): 4-5; Kim Beckwith, "Thomas Jefferson 'Stout' Jackson," *Iron Game History* 3(January 1994): 8-15; David P. Webster, "William Pagel Circus Strongman," *Iron Game History* 4(July 1995): 11; and David P. Webster, "Too Many Cookies," *Iron Game History* 4(August 1997): 13-15.

The best popular sources on circus strongmen are: David P. Willoughby, *The Super Athletes* (New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1970); David P. Webster, *The Iron Game* (Irvine: by the author, 1976); Leo Gaudreau, *Anvils, Horseshoes and Cannons: The History of Strongmen*, 2 vols. (Alliance, NE: *Iron Man*, 1975) and Edmond Desbonnet, *Les Rois de la Force* (Paris: Librairie Berger-Levrault, 1911).

³ John Fair, "George Jowett, Ottley Coulter, David Willoughby and the Organization of American Weightlifting, 1911-1924," *Iron Game History* 2(May 1993): 3-15; and John Fair, "Father-Figure or Phony? George Jowett, the ACWLA and the Milo Barbell Company, 1924-1927," *Iron Game History* 3(December 1994): 13-25.

⁴ According to the historian Allen Guttman, the seven characteristics of modern sport are: secularism, equality of opportunity to compete and similar conditions for competition, specialization of roles, rationalization, bureaucratic organization, quantification, and the quest for records. Allen Guttman, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 16.

⁵ Ottley Russell Coulter, "Honesty in Weightlifting and the Necessity of Making Lifters Prove Their Claims," *Strength* 3(January 1917): 14-15.

⁶ Ottley Coulter, "Personal Record," typescript prepared as part of job application at U.S. Steel, dated Sept. 1944, Coulter Papers, TMPCC. On this document the town is listed as Chaddsford. The *Rand McNally Atlas for 2001*, and Ottley's birth certificate, lists it as Chadds Ford, however, and so the current spelling is used. See also: Ottley Coulter to Gerard Nisivoccia, 8 December 1964, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

⁷ O. R. Coulter, "The Value of Enthusiasm," *Strength* (February 1920): 54.

⁸ Coulter, "Enthusiasm," p. 54.

⁹ Ottley Coulter to Gerard Nisivoccia, 8 December 1964, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

¹⁰ Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 18 March 1961. IMC. See also Ottley Coulter to Gerard Nisivoccia, 27 July 1946, TMPCC.

¹¹ Ottley Coulter to Gerard Nisivoccia, 27 July 1946. TMPCC.

¹² Ibid. See also: Ottley Coulter to Gerard Nisivoccia, 8 December 1964, TMPCC.

¹³ Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 18 March 1961, IMC.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ottley Coulter to Gerard Nisivoccia, 8 December 1964, TMPCC.

¹⁶ In 1926, Ottley's height became an issue in his job with the Uniontown, Pennsylvania, police department. Ottley had been brought in to lead physical training classes for the officers and worked at the department for more than a year before a bureaucrat pointed out that he was shorter than the department's 5'8" height requirement. Although the matter went to city council, which voted to keep him on board, the department decided to release him and so he was out of work. See: Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent 8 April 1957; and the following clippings in the Coulter Papers: "How Tall is a Policeman?" *Morning Herald*, 22 May 1926, p. 6; "Mayor Seeks to Fire Cop Under 5 Feet 8 Inches Rule: Council Objects." *The Evening Genius*, 21 May 1926. p. 1; and "Coulter is Given Job

on Frick Force," *The Evening Genius*, 3 June 1926, p. 1.

¹⁷ Ottley Coulter to Gerard Nisivoccia, 8 December 1964, TMPCC.

¹⁸ Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 18 March 1961, IMC.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 17 December 1965, TMPCC.

²¹ Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 30 March 1959, IMC.

²² In 1929, in a personnel record for the Lemont Police Department. Ottley identified his sisters as Luella Kuzma of Cleveland, Ohio; Lillian French of Andover, Ohio; and Beulah Labrouse, also of Andover. See: "From Patrolman Ottley H. Coulter to Commanding Officer of District I—Subject Personal History," Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

²³ Although Ottley claimed to have entered Hiram in 1908, the archives at Hiram College list him as a "Senior Prep" student in 1909-1910 and as a college freshman in 1910-1911.

²⁴ Ottley Coulter, "Personal Record," typescript prepared as part of job application at U.S. Steel, dated Sept. 1944, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

²⁵ Interview with Joanna Sawyer, Hiram College Archivist, 13 June 2001.

²⁶ Ottley claimed that freshman English was one of his most difficult subjects. Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 23 February 1959, TMPCC. Also: interview with Joanna Sawyer, Hiram College archivist, 12 June 2001.

²⁷ Ottley Coulter, photography collection, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

²⁸ Bob Jones, "Ottley Coulter—Romance of Strength," edited by Ottley Coulter, typescript in Coulter Papers of article submitted by Bob Jones for November 1940 issue of *Strength & Health*.

²⁹ "Previous Occupations" attachment to "From Patrolman Ottley R. Coulter to Commanding Officer of District I—Subject Personal History;" Also: Luella Coulter to Ottley Coulter, 4 February 1910, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

³⁰ Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 30 March 1959, IMC.

³¹ David Coulter to Ottley Coulter, 26 January 1911, TMPCC.

³² Mary to Ottley Coulter, 3 April 1911, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

³³ Luella Coulter to Ottley Coulter, 4 February 1910, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

³⁴ O.R. Coulter, "How I Attained Muscular Control," *Physical Culture* undated clipping, Articles Folder, Coulter Papers, TMPCC

³⁵ "Training Record," Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

³⁶ Professor Charles Herold to Ottley Coulter, 13 July 1911; Dr. W.F. Gaylord to Ottley Coulter, 6 September 1911; Joseph Baths to Ottley Coulter 6 June 1911; Edward Aston to Ottley Coulter 28 December 1911; Lionel Strongfort to Ottley Coulter, 2 December 1911.

³⁷ O.R. Coulter, "The Value of Enthusiasm." *Strength* (February 1920): 55. Calvert shipped Ottley's Milo in November of 1912. Alan Calvert to O. R. Coulter, 18 November 1912, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

³⁸ See Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent on 12 November 1959; on 30 November 1960; and on 27 July 1961 for details of Ottley's lifting at his father's mill, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

³⁹ "Ottley R. Coulter," typescript, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

⁴⁰ Jones, "Romance of Strength" typescript.

⁴¹ Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 2 June 1947. Coulter Papers. TMPCC.

⁴² Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 30 March 1959, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

⁴³ Jones, "Romance of Strength" typescript.

⁴⁴ "Ottley R. Coulter," typescript, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Jose Prada file, Coulter Papers, TMPCC. Also: interview with Angie Kindig, Notre Dame archivist, 13 June 2001.

⁴⁷ Interview with Angie Kindig, Notre Dame archivist, 13 June 2001. Prada was never enrolled as a university student at Notre Dame.

⁴⁸ Ottley Coulter to David P. Willoughby, undated letter, TMPCC.

⁴⁹ Interview with Ingrid Corklund, St. Edwards University archivist, 15 June 2001. Lange graduated from the University of Notre Dame in 1912. He taught at St. Edwards University from 1922-23 and from 1927-34. He taught at Notre Dame from 1917-1922, 1923-1927, and from 1934 until his death in 1970.

⁵⁰ Ottley Coulter to David P. Willoughby, 1 January 1959. Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

⁵¹ Ottley Coulter to David P. Willoughby, undated letter, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

⁵² Coulter and Prada broadside, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

⁵³ Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 27 July 1961, IMC.

⁵⁴ Willoughby, *Super Athletes*, pp. 254 and 274. Ottley told Willoughby that he doubted Prada had made such a lift, for during their time together he never saw Prada do a one-arm chin of any kind. Ottley Coulter to David P. Willoughby, undated letter, TMPCC.

- ⁵⁵ Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 27 July 1961, IMC. Also: Willoughby, *The Super Athletes*, 274.
- ⁵⁶ Ottley Coulter to Great Empire Shows, 22 March 1912, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ⁵⁷ Notebook entitled "Act, Routines—Etc." See page titled, "Coulter and Prada Act," Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ⁵⁸ Ottley Coulter to Great Empire Shows, 22 March 1912, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ⁵⁹ Coulter and Prada broadside, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ⁶⁰ See, for instance, Cole Brothers Circus to Coulter and Prada," 31 March 1912, and Jones Shows and Concessions to Coulter and Prada, 25 March 1912, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ⁶¹ Frank A. Robbins to Coulter and Prada, 23 March 1912, Coulter papers, TMPCC.
- ⁶² Warren Lincoln Travis to Ottley Coulter, 21 February 1912, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ⁶³ Interview with Dr. Janet Davis, American Studies Program, The University of Texas at Austin, May 31, 2001.
- ⁶⁴ Bob Hise, "Gentleman of Moral. Physical Strength," *Iron Man*, undated clipping, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ⁶⁵ Jose V. Prada to Ottley Coulter, 9 June 1918, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ⁶⁶ Jose V. Prada to Ottley Coulter, 5 November 1919, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ⁶⁷ J.V. Prada to Ottley Coulter, 8 August 1921, TMPCC.
- ⁶⁸ Joe Prada to Ottley Coulter, 16 March 1923, TMPCC.
- ⁶⁹ Ottley Coulter to David P. Willoughby, undated letter, TMPCC.
- ⁷⁰ J. V. Prada to Ottley Coulter, 18 October 1921, TMPCC. Based on a business card in his papers, it appears that Prada may have tried to run a gymnasium in Celaya Mexico. Ottley claimed in a letter to Willoughby that he did not know what happened to Prada in later years.
- ⁷¹ Warren Lincoln Travis to Ottley Coulter, 8 February 1911, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ⁷² Warren Lincoln Travis to Ottley Coulter, 9 December 1911, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ⁷³ Warren Lincoln Travis to Ottley Coulter, 8 February 1912, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid.
- ⁷⁵ Warren Lincoln Travis to Ottley Coulter, 21 February 1912, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ⁷⁶ Ottley Coulter, personal diary for 1912. Coulter Papers, TMPCC. It's possible that Coulter may have been in New York already and spent other time with Travis before this date for in one letter he claims that he trained with Travis for six weeks.
- ⁷⁷ Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 23 October 1906. Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ⁷⁸ Ottley Coulter, personal diary for 1912. Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ⁷⁹ Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 30 October 1959. IMC
- ⁸⁰ Ottley Coulter, personal diary for 1912. Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ⁸¹ Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 18 December 1956. IMC.
- ⁸² "Frank A. Robbins' Show Opens Season," *Billboard* (4 May 1912): 6.
- ⁸³ "Frank A. Robbins' Circus Opens: Greenville, Jersey City, NJ, the Place," *New York Clipper*, 4 May 1912. Coulter publicity tile, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ⁸⁴ "Performers with Frank A. Robbins Show," Clipping in Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ⁸⁵ John and Alice Durant, *Pictorial History of the American Circus* (New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1957), 318.
- ⁸⁶ Frank A. Robbins' Show Opens Season," *Billboard* (4 May 1912): 6.
- ⁸⁷ Ottley Coulter, personal diary for 1912, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid.
- ⁸⁹ Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 18 December 1956, IMC.
- ⁹⁰ Ottley Coulter, personal diary for 1912, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ⁹¹ Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 18 December 1956, IMC.
- ⁹² Ibid.
- ⁹³ Alan Calvert, *The Truth About Weightlifting* (Philadelphia: by the author, 1911). 11-13.
- ⁹⁴ Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 18 December 1956, IMC.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid.
- ⁹⁶ Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 30 October 1959, IMC.
- ⁹⁷ Ottley Coulter, personal diary for 1912, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ottley Coulter to John Grimek, 17 February 1942. See attachment entitled "Ottley R. Coulter." Grimek used the material provided by Coulter in this attachment for an article on Coulter in his "Old Timers Column," in the July 1942 issue of *Strength & Health*. See page 7.
- ¹⁰¹ L. D. Thieman to Ottley Russell Coulter, 17 March 1913, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹⁰² Rentz Bros. to O.R. Coulter, 9 April 1913, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹⁰³ Harry R. Overton to Ottley Russell Coulter, 3 April 1913, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹⁰⁴ Chicago Greater Shows to O. R. Coulter 15 March 1913, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹⁰⁵ Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 18 December 1956, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ottley Coulter, personal diary for 1913, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹⁰⁷ Ottley Coulter to John Grimek, 17 February 1942, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹⁰⁸ Unidentified letter from Ottley Coulter, no date, Coulter Papers, TMPCC. Reference is to Grimek's "Old-timers" column in *Strength & Health* (July 1942): 7.
- ¹⁰⁹ Ottley Coulter, personal diary for 1913, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹¹ "Previous Occupations," attachment to letter "From Patrolman Ottley Coulter to Commanding Officer of District #1." See also: David Coulter to Ottley Coulter, 13 March 1917, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹¹² Ken Palmer to Dear Friend, 4 February 1915, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹¹³ Lionel Kelly to Ottley Coulter, 1 August 1914, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹¹⁴ Ottley Coulter to David Willoughby, 4 December 1973, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹¹⁵ See Coulter Brothers to Jessie Mack, 21 April 1915; and Jessie Mack to Coulter Brothers, 20 April 1915, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹¹⁶ In a letter to R. H. Lade, Ottley states that he splits the gate receipts on a 50/50 basis with the carnival management. Ottley Coulter to R. H. Lade, 24 April 1915, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹¹⁷ Keen & Shippy to Coulter Bros., 15 April 1915, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹¹⁸ William Kanell to Coulter Brothers, 12 April 1915, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹¹⁹ Contract and Agreement between Coulter Brothers and "a man to make openings or a door talker," 1915, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹²⁰ Ottley Coulter to John Athes, April 15, 1915, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹²¹ Effie Coulter to Ottley Coulter, undated letter, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹²² Superior United Shows Advertisement, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹²³ Typescript in Coulter Papers, No date, TMPCC.
- ¹²⁴ Ottley Coulter to R.H. Lade, 24 April 1915; and Ottley Coulter to John Athes, 15 April 1915, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹²⁵ Ottley Coulter to Gerard Nisivoccia, 20 July 1974, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹²⁶ Ottley Coulter to David Willoughby, 4 December 1973, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹²⁷ Ottley Coulter to David Willoughby, no date, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹²⁸ Personal Diary of Ottley Coulter for 1915, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹²⁹ Ottley Coulter to David Willoughby, undated letter, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹³⁰ Personal Diary of Ottley Coulter for 1915, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹³¹ Ibid.
- ¹³² Ibid.
- ¹³³ Robert B. Snyder Jr. to Ottley Coulter, 6 July 1915, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹³⁴ Ottley Coulter to David Willoughby, no date, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹³⁵ Ibid.
- ¹³⁶ In Hagerstown, Ottley worked first at an ironworks and then at the Monroe Restaurant. See "Previous Occupations" attachment to "From Patrolman Ottley R. Coulter to Commanding Officer of District I-Subject Personal History;" Coulter Papers, TMPCC.
- ¹³⁷ Ottley Coulter to David Willoughby, 16 July 1974, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.



The Plank Feat