



# IRON GAME HISTORY

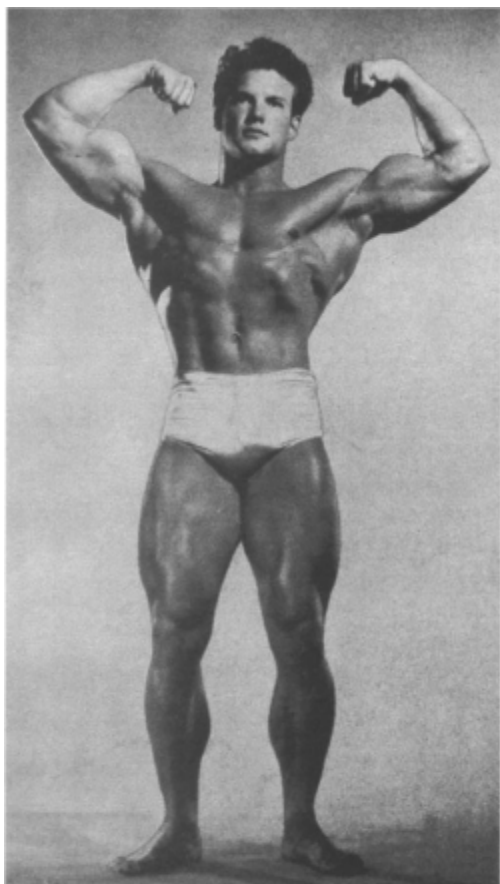
THE JOURNAL OF PHYSICAL CULTURE



December 2000

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## *The Last Interview*



**Steve Reeves: 1926-2000**  
*A Commemorative Issue*

As many *IGH* readers know, we've been working on a book about the cultural significance of Muscle Beach for the past several years. As part of our research for that book, we've interviewed many of the "regulars" of Muscle Beach. On 10 June 1999 we visited with Steve Reeves, and as far as we know, this was the last formal interview he ever gave. We met Steve at his horse ranch in southern California and taped him in the living room of his spacious Spanish-style ranchhouse. Present for the interview with us was Steve's longtime companion, Deborah Englehorn Reeves. Steve was dressed in his work clothes—blue jeans, a short-sleeved work shirt, and a pair of well-worn boots. He was a wonderful host, proudly showing us his beautiful Morgan horses and the stable he had personally designed to house them. The day was warm and he was the picture of vigorous health—lean yet thick, with a youthful stride, that legendary face, a pair of hands and forearms that bespoke a lifetime of hard work, and the relaxed attitude of a man at peace with himself.

—Jan and Terry Todd

**TT:** Yesterday, when I spoke to Armand Tanny, he told me that he remembers very fondly the days you guys spent down there at Muscle Beach and he said he has a pretty clear memory of the first time he ever saw you. He knew who you were. Maybe he'd seen a photograph of you when you were still a teenager and so when he saw you come to the Beach that first time, he recognized who you were. Tell me, what was your first experience there at the old Muscle Beach in Santa Monica?

**SR:** Well, my first experience was when I was 18 and I'd just graduated from high school in Oakland, in 1944. It was during the War and I was working half-time at the quartermaster supply depot and going to school half a day, so you got your credits for working, instead of shop



and gym and things like that. So, I'd go to school from eight till noon and then I'd "powerwalk" to work and work from one till five, and I did that for two years. And then I got drafted into the Army. I got my notice that I was going to be drafted in September. So a friend of mine, Ronald Roper, who was working with me said, "Let's quit about July 1st and at least take a vacation. I have an aunt that lives down in Hollywood, so let's go down there." I said, "Sure, well, sure, why not?" So we went down there and his aunt had this home there in Hollywood. At the time, there was a tram, streetcar, whatever you want to call it, that went from Hollywood

out to Sunset Beach. All the way to Santa Monica. So we used to go there, oh, every day or every other day, and go to the beach. We started up there at State Beach and gradually worked down to Muscle Beach. And at Muscle Beach—I was 18 then—like I said, all the wrestlers wanted to make me a wrestler, all the adagio dancers wanted to make me an adagio dancer, and all the acrobats wanted me to perform with them.

**TT:** [Chuckling] Russ Saunders and those guys?

**SR:** Yeah, exactly right. And on that tram going back and forth, people said, "Aren't you a movie star?" And I said, "No, I'm not." People wanted me to be a movie



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star, they wanted me to be an acrobat, they wanted me to be an adagio dancer, they wanted me to be a wrestler. We stayed down there a couple weeks and I used to go to the beach and watch those guys. One of them was Armand. He was known for the "Santa Monica Spread." He had a real lat spread. So I hung around the beach with Armand and those guys for those two weeks. Then I went home and got drafted into the Army and didn't get back there again until after I had won Mr. Pacific Coast—Mr. Pacific Coast, in Portland. Anyway, when I'd gotten out of the Army, I'd gone up there to Portland in December of 1946 and won Mr. Pacific Coast. Then they were going to have Mr. Western America in Los Angeles, so I went down there and that's the second time I went to Muscle Beach. That was in about May of 1947.

**JT:** And that's about when George Eiferman arrived?

**SR:** No, George arrived in '48. In fact, George and I met at the Mr. America contest and I said, "Why don't you come out to the West Coast. There are better train-



Reeves enlisted in the army in 1944 and saw action in the Philippines before his discharge in 1946.

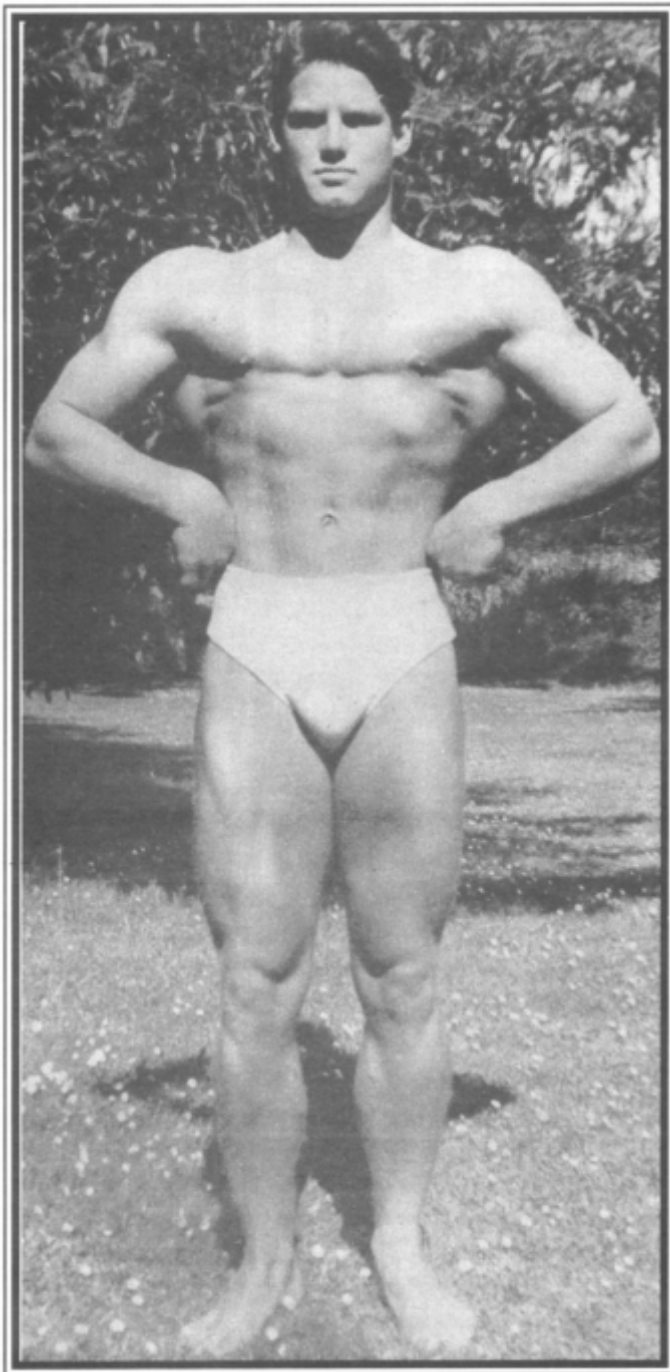
ing facilities, better climate, things like that." He said, "Yeah, great idea." So, after he had won the contest, he came out to California. He came out in 1948. After I had gotten out of the service I went on this 52-20. In other words, you get 20 bucks a week for 52 weeks, till you find a job or till you go to school or whatever you want to do.

So I went down there to Santa Monica and George Eiferman came out from the East Coast at that time so we got an apartment together there on Muscle Beach. And we both were collecting our 52-20. The apartment on Muscle Beach wasn't too good. It was just a little hole in the wall, in a kind of basement. Then we read this ad in the paper where Joy Cortez had this Muscle House by the Sea. She called it that later. She just had a home that had four bedrooms and she wanted some people there to help her pay the rent. She was a lady in her seventies. And she was very fit. She only ate health food, and she used to go swimming every morning at 6:00 in the ocean there, because the Muscle House was only about a block from the ocean. It was halfway between Santa Monica and Venice. Sometimes George would buy salami or something and hide it in the back of her refrigerator, and she'd say [Steve raises his voice to



Studio pot-trait of Steve aged six, with his beloved mother, Golden "Goldie" Boyce Reeves, taken in 1932.





Steve at age 16 reveals truly unusual maturity and promise, much like that of Louis "Apollon" Uni at the same age.

imitate a woman], "What is this? What is this?"

**TT & JT:** [Laughing]

**SR:** George and I were the first guys to go there. We shared a room. So some other people heard that we were staying there and they got a room. So, altogether at one time there were six of us living there.

**TT:** Was Armand living there?

**SR:** No, Armand lived with his mother at the time. She had a home in Santa Monica. To me, those were the good old days of my life. I'm telling you, I'd just gotten out of the Army, and when you're in the Army you're under discipline at all times, you have to do this, have to do that. So I thought I'm going to relax and live it up for a year. Just relax and do what I want to do. So, I'd get up in the morning, I don't know, about 7:00, cause I can't sleep too late anyway, and go to the beach. Just hang around for a little bit. Then go to the gym and work out for a couple hours. We'll say from 8-10. Then back to the beach for the rest of the day. At that time on the 52-20 it cost us a dollar a day for our room—which was terrific—and a dollar a day for food, and so we had money left over to go to the movies or whatever, after that. Twenty bucks a week, you see, was 14 for the room and board, you know. And we had six bucks left over. And at the time, there was a restaurant, somewhere between Santa Monica and Hollywood, there, that was called the Roundup. It was all you could eat for a buck and a half. And they had huge hams, turkeys. . .

**TT:** Oh, me.

**SR:** Roast beef, and all different kinds of vegetables. So, us guys would get together about once a week, and say, "Hey, let's go to the Roundup." And that's where a buck and a half would go [laughing]. It was terrific.

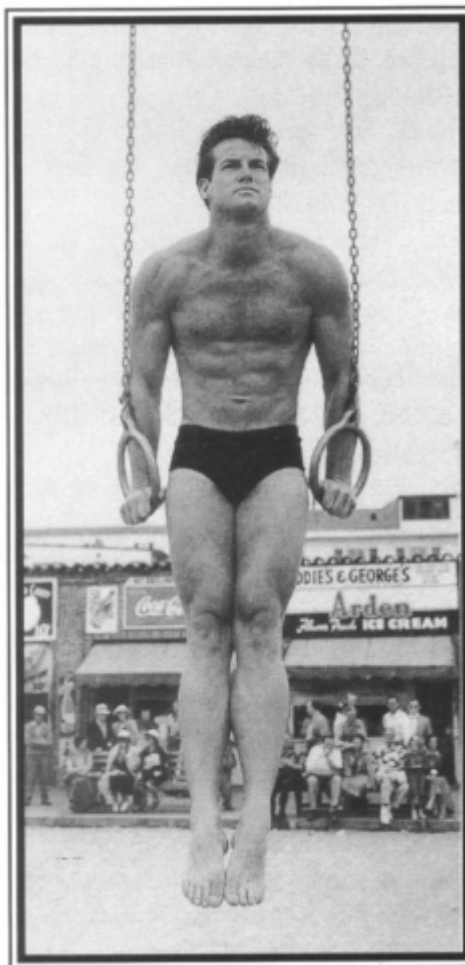
**TT:** They must have hated to see all you guys. . .

**SR:** Oh, they hated to see us coming. So we never came more than four together, you see what I mean? [laughing] We'd pretend we didn't know the other guys. [hard laughter] And that was great. All you could eat for a buck and a half and a dollar a day for room. Normally, we'd live on a dollar a day for food. We mainly lived on fruits and vegetables, and we'd get our protein from cottage cheese and tuna. We ate a lot of cottage cheese. We'd mix cottage cheese with raisins, cottage cheese with carrots, and other things.

**TT:** Did you take any meals with Joy as part of living there?

**SR:** No, each person would furnish his own food and had his own little area in the refrigerator. Sometimes I'd go, let's say, on an orange juice diet for three days in the springtime just to clean out or just before wintertime to prevent colds and get a lot of vitamin C. So I said, "George, let's go on the orange juice diet for three days. "Sure, sure," he'd say, "let's do it." But after about a day and a half, I'd see George sneaking this, or sneaking that, or sneaking something else [laughing].





Although Steve didn't do acrobatics in the Muscle Beach shows or regularly train there with weights, his flawless physique and celebrity status made him one of Muscle Beach's main attractions.

**TT:** During that time, after the war when you were there, were there fairly big crowds on the weekends to watch the various, you know, lifters and bodybuilders, and all the people weight training and doing acrobatics?

**SR:** I would say maybe 250-300 people. Maybe on a big holiday weekend maybe 1000 or more. The place was crowded. They liked that free entertainment.

**TT:** Yeah, I guess so. And it must have been in a way kind of fun for those of you

pletely new thing. People must have seen someone like you walking down the beach and thought they were seeing something from another planet. I'm not exaggerating; it must have seemed that way.

**SR:** [Laughing] I think it was a little of both. There were two crowds there. People who wanted to see the bodybuilders work out, or walking down the beach, or lying on their blankets. Or people who wanted to see more action on the rings or on the platform, or a little of each.

**JT:** Where did you train, and where were the weights at Muscle Beach in those days?

**SR:** Actually, 90% of us trained at Tanny's Gym in Santa Monica. Way down in the basement. We might do something on the bars or on the rings at the beach, but our training was there at the Vic Tanny's.

**TT:** But there were some weights on the beach, right? Some actual barbells that stayed down there?

**SR:** Yes, they were to the south of the main platform where they did all the acrobatics.

**TT:** But it was uncommon for you to go there to take a workout.

**SR:** That's right. I had a certain routine I did and I'd use a pulley for this, I'd use a bar for that, a dumbbell for this and a barbell for that. I liked order and I liked to have everything the way I wanted it, so I could follow the sequence I wanted. And I didn't want to be bugged when I was working out. I wanted to do my routine in a certain period of time. I'd be happy to talk to somebody before my workout or after my workout if they wanted

who mostly were doing the weight training to watch all of the tumbling.

**SR:** Oh, it was good, you know. There were a lot of people there—Russ Saunders, Johnnie Collins, Harold Zinkin, George, Les and Pudgy, I can't name all them. Renald and Rudy, and Glen Sundby.

**TT:** Yeah, Sundby.

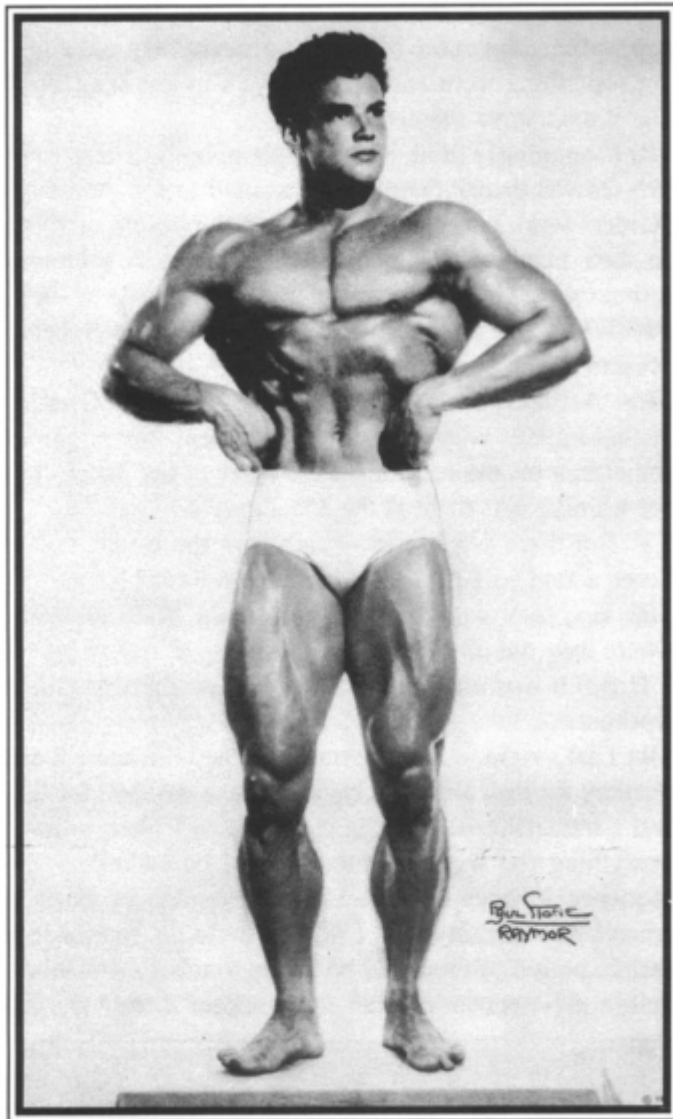
**SR:** And his partner. He had the greatest deltoids I've ever seen in my life. I mean better than any bodybuilder. I mean they came out like coconuts and it was from all that pressing. [Demonstrating the lifting of a person overhead]

**TT:** From what you could tell, as far as the people who were just down there to look and watch and be entertained, were they there more to watch the acrobats, or to watch the bodybuilders? In those days it was a com-



Reeves and Eiferman began a lifelong friendship in the late forties at Muscle Beach. They roomed together at Muscle House By The Sea and trained in Vic Tanny's basement gym, where this shot was taken in 1949.





Chicago photographer Paul-Stone Raymor took a number of physique studies of the young Steve Reeves which Reeves then sold through the "Steve Reeves Company" he founded in 1947.

to know something—my ideas about bodybuilding, what they should do or whatever. I'd be happy before or after. But during, that was a no-no.

**TT:** Yeah. And, of course down there at the beach it would have been impossible to go through a workout without people coming over and wanting to know this or that.

**SR:** One time at Yarick's gym there was a guy always coming and asking questions, so one time he came there and I was ready for him. I said, "Well, this is my favorite exercise." I laid down on the bench, and I had one guy working on my neck, one guy giving me leg curls, and I

was doing side laterals all at the same time [laughing by everyone]. He bugged me so much I thought I'd give him something he couldn't ever do.

**TT:** [Chuckling] Yeah, he'd go home and say, "You can't believe what this guy told me to do, but he was doing it and he was really built."

**SR:** Right. I said, "That's the only way to do it. Compound exercises." [more laughing]

**TT:** I know that one of the things I've heard people say, and I talked a little bit about it to Armand yesterday but he's kind of a modest person by nature. But I've heard people who saw him lift say that Armand was really a very, very gifted weightlifter.

**SR:** Oh he was, right. He was a combination of the two. He had a great build and he was a talented weightlifter.

**TT:** Everybody said he was really quick and explosive.

**SR:** One time Armand and I and George had a contest to see who could clean the most while on their knees. . . [laughing]. We both got to 220 apiece.

**TT:** When you came back to southern California, how long did you live the life that you came back to live?

**SR:** Well, I lived that life for just one year. Then afterwards I went down to the employment agency and I said I'm looking for a job. I told them, "I'm an actor." I thought that was how it would work, but it never did [laughing]. But anyway, after that year was over, to make a living I did three or four things. There was a guy at Muscle Beach named Leo. He had Leo's Hot Dog Stand and things like that. He also owned a gas station. So, during that time I would go one day a week and work for about six or eight hours at his gas station and get a few bucks. And then a friend of mine named Dick Webster, he used to park cars at the Captain's Table there on La Cienega, a very elegant seafood restaurant. And he wanted one day a week off so I parked the cars on one day a week for him. And then every once in a while some television show would call up and say, "Hey, we want you to be on the show. This is the Dinah Shore show and we need somebody like you." I'd say, "All right," and I'd make a few bucks that way. I did the Red Skelton Show, the Topper Series, Ozzie and Harriet and several more. Anyway, that's how I'd make my money.

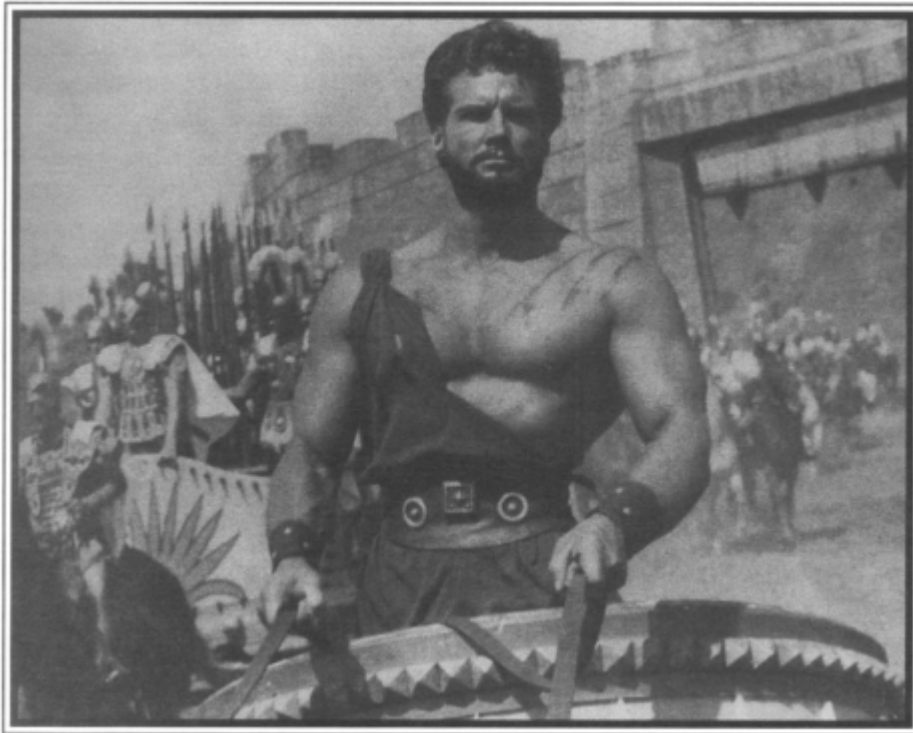
**TT:** And that was after that first year when you were on the 52-20?

**SR:** Yeah, right.

**TT:** So how long did you live in the Santa Monica area?

**SR:** Let me think? You see I won Mr. America in '47 in June or July. I think it was probably June. And at the Mr.





Steve Reeves in his roles as Hercules and other cinematic heroes was able to do almost all of his own stunts, particularly those involving horses. This was of great benefit to directors, as Steve's unique proportions made finding a double difficult.

America contest there was a letter for me. I don't know if it was backstage or at my hotel room, from an agent in New York saying, "I think you have possibilities. If you're interested in show business, let me know." So I took that letter back to Oakland, pondered it for a couple weeks and told him I'd let him know. At the time I was going over to San Francisco. I was studying to be a chiropractor, and a physical therapist, on the GI Bill. So when I called the agent he said, "Why don't you come back to New York and go to acting school?" So I told the administration of the GI program that I wanted to change from chiropractor to actor. And so I went to acting school in New York City.

**TT:** You just took off those first six letters.

**SR:** Yeah, right, right [laughing], chiropractor to actor. Take off that first syllable [more laughter]. So I went back there and I went to the Theodore Urban School of the Theater. But before I went there I studied under Stella Adler, who was Marlon Brando's coach. Some days she had people just walk, and some days she had people lisping, or stuttering or walking

pigeon-toed, or whatever. And, this one day we were all walking pigeon-toed. And so I was walking pigeon-toed. And she said, "Steve," or "Mr. Reeves," whatever she called me, "You're not doing that right." I said, "Miss Adler, from six years old to ten years old I taught myself not to be pigeon-toed, so you're telling me I don't know how to do it? As I look around this room here I see a bunch of people who want to be character actors. I want to be a leading man. I don't want to learn how to stutter, I don't want to learn how to walk pigeon-toed. I want to learn how to have good diction and how to walk well and gracefully." She said, "You'd better see me afterwards." Afterwards she said, "You're disrupting class, I'll have to give you your money back." So she gave me my money back and I went to the Theodore Urban School, which was a

nice school. There were maybe fifty kids in the class and plays every week and all that. So I would go to school every day—acting school—and on weekends I would do vaudeville. At that time they used to have a stage



After taking second, to John Grimek at the 1948 Mr. Universe contest in London, Reeves travelled to France and entered the Mr. World competition. While in France, he took most of his workouts outdoors, near the swimming pool of the the Palm Beach Hotel in Cannes where he stayed. He won the Mr. World title, on August 16, 1948.



show along with the major movie in New York and all the places within a hundred miles of there. So this comedian, Dick Burney—he was a very good comedian from the Army days—and my agent got me teamed up with him. We did kind of a Jerry Lewis/Dean Martin type of deal. I was the strong, healthy guy and he was the weak, sickly type of guy. And anyway the act went over pretty well. It was kind of corny, though, but that's beside the point [laughing]. Anyway, at one of those shows, a talent scout for Cecil B. DeMille saw me and contacted me and said, "Look, I think you have possibilities, come into our studio there in New York City—Paramount—and we'll give you a screen test." So, I went in there and I took a screen test, I think it lasted about fifteen minutes. I think I did the "Give me Liberty or Give me Death" sort of speech, you know what I mean. So on my 22nd birthday, I flew from New York City to Hollywood with a contract—a seven year contract—with Paramount Pictures.

**JT:** Wow.

**SR:** [To Deborah] Would you go to my little box there

and get my little card that says, "*Samson and Delilah* 1948?" So anyway, I flew out there with a contract for seven years for Paramount that had a six months option then a year option down the line. So, I got an apartment, maybe two or three blocks from there so I could walk to the studio. I went to the studio and the first day somebody said, "I want you to meet Mr. DeMille." So I walked into Mr. DeMille's office and there were about six or seven big pictures, about three feet by two feet each. There were pictures of Dean Martin, Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, Alan Ladd, Dorothy Lamour, and me.

**TT:** Is that right?

**SR:** Yeah, right. The picture was called "Perfection in the Clouds," and in the shot I have my hands over my head. He said, "There is my Samson, but you realize that the camera puts on 20 pounds, so I want you to lose 20 pounds." You know the rest of the story. At first I'd have lunch with Mr. DeMille every day. And I wondered why all the starlets seemed so interested in me. I thought, well, I'm kind of a good looking guy and all that, I guess, but this is too much. The real reason was

that they had been there for two or three years and never even met Mr. DeMille. This way they could sit at the table and talk to him every day. You see what I mean. . . [laughing].

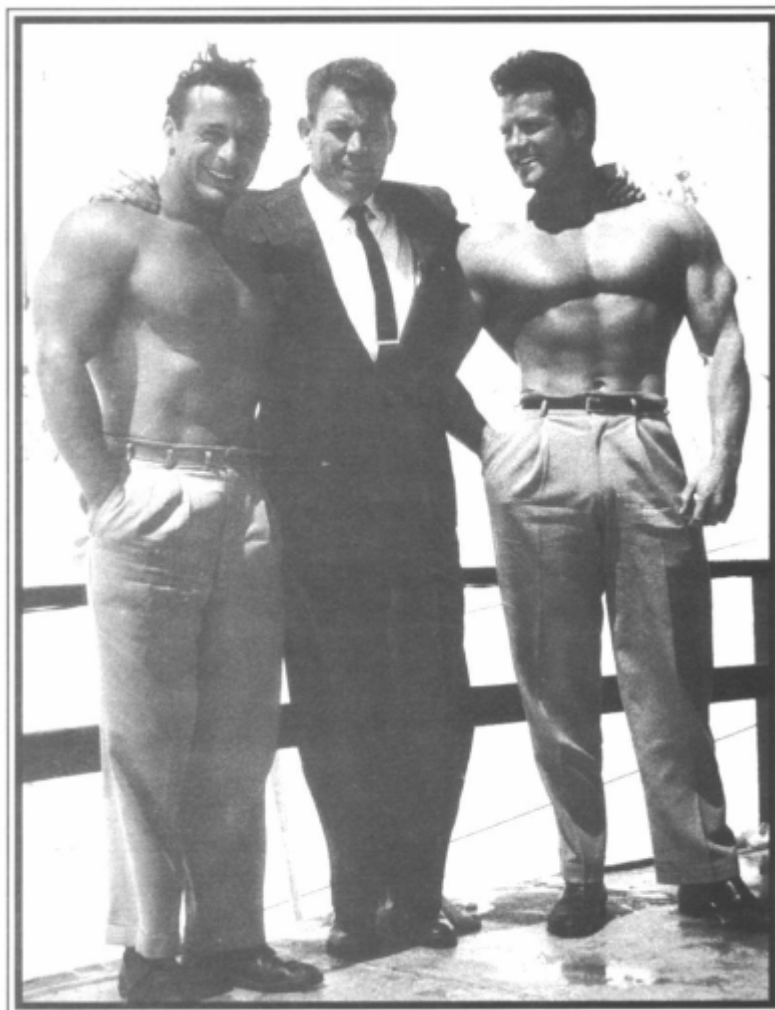
**TT:** Yeah.

**SR:** So they would have me every two weeks or so do a play. You're in this room like a stage and there's a big glass window there. You can't see, but they're sitting there in their lounge chairs just checking you out. you know, as you do your scenes. So, after I was there for maybe three months, DeMille says, "You know, you've been



In 1959, Steve starred in *Goliath and the Barbarians*. At the wrap party on the last day of shooting, Steve celebrated with his co-star, Chelo Alonso, and assorted cast members, most of whom were still in costume. Like many of his films, *Goliath and the Barbarians* wasn't commercially successful in the United States but reportedly did very well in Europe and other countries around the world.





Three iron game immortals—George Eiferman, Bert Goodrich, and Steve Reeves—all past winners of the A.A.U. Mr. America contest.

here for three months already, and I start my picture in three more months, and you've only lost five pounds. And some days you give a good performance and some you give a lousy performance. You're preoccupied about something." Well, the truth was, I'd lost the five pounds and I'd go to the beach and the guys would say, "Steve, you're ruining yourself. Why do you want to be an actor? You're the best in your field, why do you want to go into another field, start at the bottom, and work up?"

**TT:** No iron gamer likes to lose muscle, and you didn't carry a lot of extra weight, anyway.

**SR:** No, no. I had to lose muscle. So I lost two more pounds. This made seven pounds that I'd lost by then. I'd go to the gym and they'd tell me the same thing. Everywhere I went I was wrong. At the gym, at the beach, they'd say, "Look at you. You're ruining your-

self." I'd go to DeMille's and he'd say, "Look, if you want a career you've got to lose weight, because you look fine but the camera's going to make you look big and I want you to look on the screen like you do in real life." So, after about three more months he said, "You know, I guess I'm going to have to drop your contract." And when the contract came up for renewal, he just dropped it. But I have to say they really treated me well there, overall. They gave me my own office to study in and they brought a drama coach in for a couple hours a day for me.

[Deborah returns with the card from *Samson and Delilah*]

**DE:** It was the very last thing in the box.

**TT:** It always works that way.

**SR:** Show it to them—March 2, 1948.

**TT:** That's your card. Your pass into the lot.

**SR:** Exactly. This is what got me in the studio every day.

**TT:** I see it. March the second, 1948. My goodness.

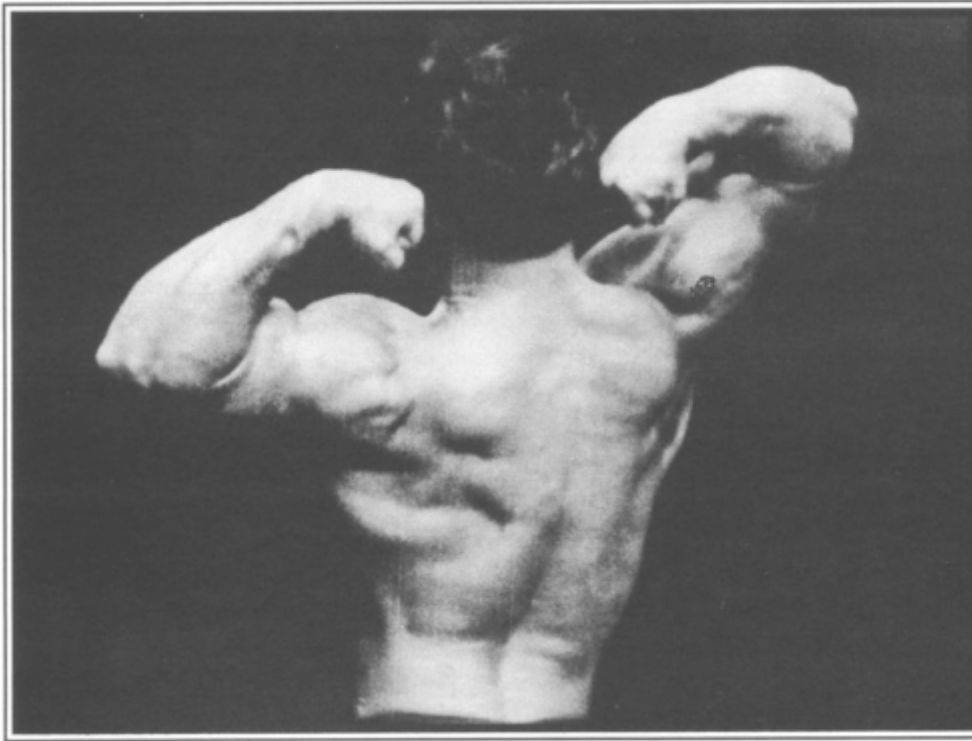
**SR:** You know, back then I didn't have my priorities straight. I was only 22 years old, and everywhere I went I was wrong. When DeMille dropped me, Vic Tanny had the Mr. USA contest and he talked to me and said, "Why don't you enter the contest?" Well, for one thing I was white. I hadn't been to the beach or anything else because I was studying and all that, and I'd lost that seven pounds. But he talked me into entering the contest. I thought, "Well, if you're rejected one place you want to hit it some other place where you know you're pretty good."

**TT:** You knew you'd feel at home.

**SR:** Exactly. Where you know you can excel under the right conditions. So I built myself a sunlamp with about four bulbs in it and I think I fell asleep there and I burned my back so badly that for the contest it hurt me to pose. I had to put on this powder—I think it comes from Texas—and it's red and it has a little oyster shell in it and kind of glistens. DeMille used it for his Indians in his Cowboy and Indian pictures. I had to put that all over my body to cover the burn. So I came in second, and I deserved to come in second, maybe third. But I entered a contest when I wasn't in shape to win. After that I went to Muscle Beach to live.

**TT:** Before you talk more about Muscle Beach I want to





This rarely seen back shot of Steve Reeves reveals the thickness of his wrists, forearms, and deltoids that was sometimes overlooked because of his unusual symmetry. He did little specific work on his trapezius muscles as he thought it detracted from shoulder breadth.

ask you about one thing because I've always been curious. Maybe a lifter would always feel this way, but I think DeMille was mistaken in thinking that in the role of Samson you would have been better twenty pounds lighter than your normal contest weight. Obviously you do have a little bit of magnification on film, but with your particular body type I still think he would have been surprised. After all, you were playing a superman.  
**SR:** That's right. I was playing a superman. Samson was Hercules in his time. I think you're right.

**TT:** Later, in Reg Park's case, unless I'm misremembering the story, they didn't make that requirement of him.

**SR:** No, they didn't. Because they wanted him for Hercules. And Hercules had been established by then.

**TT:** Right.

**SR:** Another reason I had trouble getting started in the movies was because people like Gary Cooper, Gregory Peck and Burt Lancaster said they wouldn't let me work with them. In other words if there was a part for me, and they were going to cast me Lancaster said, "No." And Peck said, "No." And Gary Cooper said, "I'm not going

to walk with that guy in the swamps of Louisiana with my shirt off' [laughing]. I can understand them trying to protect themselves but at the same time it made it difficult for me trying to get a start.

**TT:** But that was the time that was tied into Muscle Beach.

**SR:** Right. And so the summer just after the Mr. USA contest I moved down to Muscle Beach—with Eiferman—and I stayed there for about a year, I guess, maybe a little over, a year and a half. Then I started working for Bert Goodrich, at his gym there in Hollywood, so I got myself an apartment a walking distance from there.

**TT:** Was that gym going pretty well then?

**SR:** Goodrich's gym in Hollywood? Yeah, it was going very well. They had a lot of stu-

dents there from USC. In fact half my buddies there were from USC. They were all rich kids from Pasadena, places like that.

**TT:** Was it men and women both at the gym?

**SR:** No, no, just men.

**TT:** Was Bert himself there regularly at the gym?

**SR:** Oh, yeah, he'd be there every day. And he had a juice bar there and I used to like to drink that coconut and carrot. He said, "You're going to drink me out of business here" [laughing].

**TT:** When you were there did you still make it down to the beach some on the weekends and when you had a little free time?

**SR:** Oh, sure, I did. Right.

**JT:** One thing I was asking George yesterday was about the women who were down there and whether there was any kind of negative response to a woman with Pudgy's build and the muscles that she had?

**SR:** Well Pudgy was the only one. There were acrobats and gymnasts and they had some muscle but Pudgy was the only female bodybuilder that I knew of at that time.

**TT:** So the Bert Goodrich time, that would have been



when?

**SR:** I worked for Goodrich off and on, in 1955 and '56. In '57 I started working for American Health Studios. In between times I was in different plays and things like that either in New York or on the road. I moved to Muscle Beach with George Eiferman about three or four months after, probably in July of that year.

**TT:** I guess some of the people you would see down at the beach that you were pals with also worked in the movies but more in stunts.

**SR:** Yeah, they worked as stunt men.

**TT:** And maybe sometimes in bit parts, I guess.

**SR:** Yeah, Russ Saunders doubled for quite a few people.

**TT:** And Johnny Collins, he worked as an understander in a lot of those stunts on the beach.

**SR:** Right.

**TT:** He was a big fellow, not built like a lifter. He had big legs and hips and he must have been very strong. Everybody said that he was terrific as a catcher and also as an understander.

**SR:** Yeah, he was terrific.

**TT:** Jan, did George talk yesterday about doing any work with films?

**SR:** Actually, he did make one. He played a part in a film at one time, and in fact somebody sent me a video and I sent it on to George.

**JT:** Yeah, George told me. He also showed me the wonderful book that you guys put together for him. The "This is Your Life" book.

**SR:** That was Deborah's idea. She thought it would help him with his memory. Help him remember the good times. The good days, you know. When things were positive in his life.

**JT:** It was the first thing he got out to show me.

**SR:** That's good.

**JT:** It clearly meant a lot to him.

**TT:** This is more of a feeling question than a fact question, but what were the things that made the beach such a magnet to young men like you?

**SR:** I think it was the camaraderie because at the time you were a strange person on other beaches, you know, you were an oddity. And at Muscle Beach you were just one of the guys. You had the weights in common with the people you were with. Yeah. Just like if you're in the horse business you want to be around people at horse

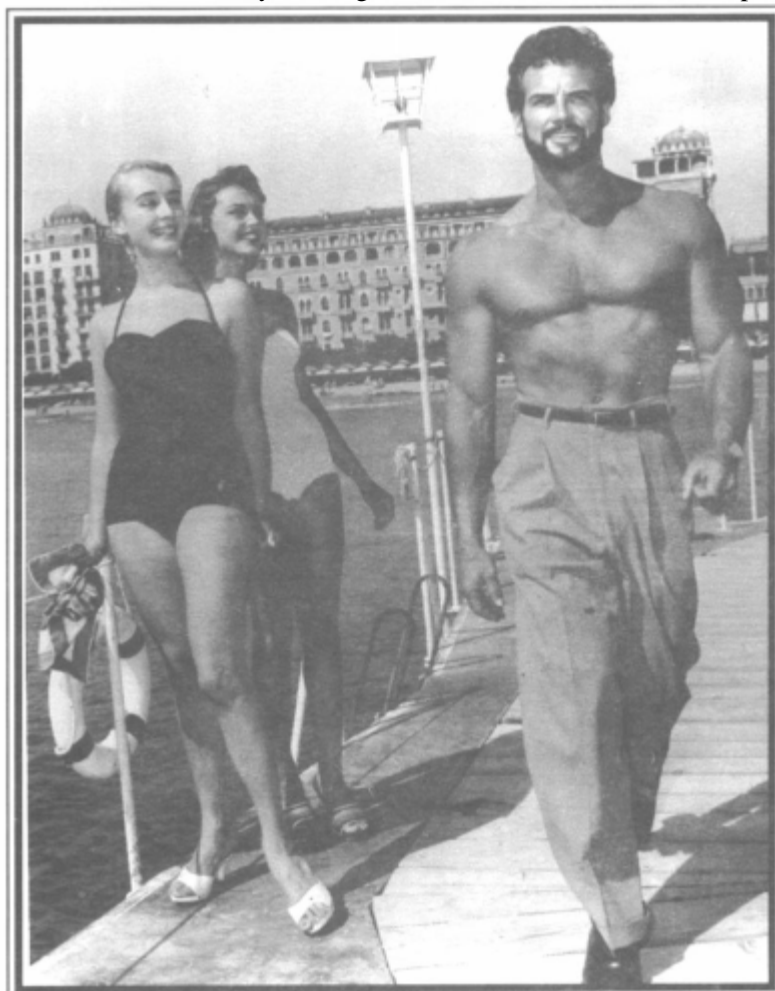
shows, and places like that, so you feel at home.

**TT:** Kind of like the tag line they always use in that tv show *Cheers*—"Where everyone knows your name."

**SR:** Yeah, right. And everybody knows the lingo.

**TT:** Was there friendship as opposed to any kind of rivalry and jealousy between the people who were primarily acrobats and the ones who were primarily the weight trainers?

**SR:** No, no, no, no. We were all friends. And not only that, we admired each other's talents, you know? We didn't think that guy was too skinny just because he could do a stunt we couldn't do, no, no. We thought the guy was great. We wished we could do it, and still look like we looked. And not only that. At that time bodybuilders were buddies who would help each other. Later eras of bodybuilding were kind of cutthroat. People



According to those who were his contemporaries, there has never been a showstopper on the beaches to match Steve Reeves. This shot also reveals how he looked when he lost weight for film roles.



would try to sabotage each other. But at this time it was a real true sport and people did it for the love of it because there was no money in it.

**TT:** Well, I know that John Grimek talked to me about this in person on a couple of occasions, and I know that in the Grimek issue we did about him recently he told a story about the time you came back before you went over for the Universe.

**SR:** Right.

**TT:** John told me how amazed he was, and everybody else in York, too, at the speed with which you acquired a high level of condition. But you could tell when he was writing the story, how happy it had made him that you won. And didn't he meet you there in New York when you got back and throw a kind of party or a celebration

for you?

**SR:** Yes, he did.

**TT:** It was almost like a member of his family had won, and in a funny way I guess it was that way.

**SR:** In fact I have the telegram somewhere where he said, "Bring home the bacon. John." I wired back and said, "Jules Bacon?" [Laughter by everyone.] He said, "No, no, *the* bacon." [More laughter.] I'm kidding, I'm kidding. That's a joke. That's a George Eiferman joke. Jan, when you saw George yesterday was he still joking?

**JT:** Yes.

**SR:** That's good. I'm glad. He really loved jokes. He used to love it when instead of saying, "I'm dreaming of a White Christmas," I'd say, "I'm dreaming of a wide latissimus" [laughter]. Back during the Muscle Beach days.

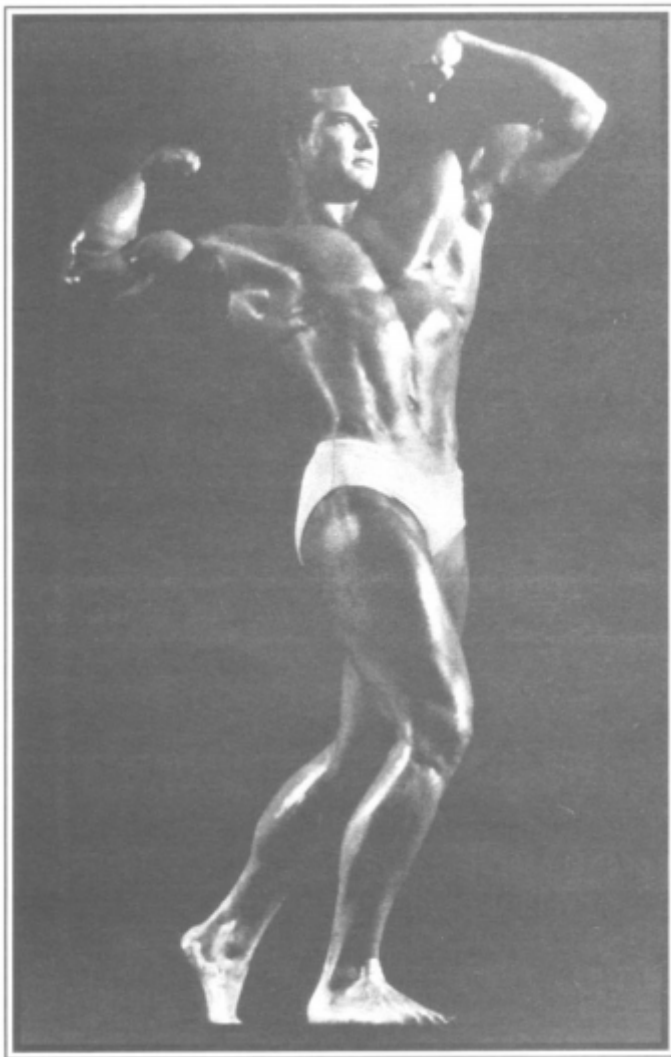
**TT:** I'll tell you. We had a meeting at Long Beach a few years ago with an academic conference about sports history. We asked Pudgy and Les, and George and Russ Saunders and Relna Brewer McRae, since they were handy there in southern California, to give a sort of formal interview at one of the sessions. I interviewed them, I'd guess you'd say, but it was really just a free-flowing conversation between the five of them. And those academic people, those professors, they really enjoyed hearing about the old days at Muscle Beach. They told me many times later that it was the best session they'd ever had at one of those conferences. They appreciated hearing and seeing the people who'd actually done it. . . who'd been the star athletes who lived through it and were still here fifty years later remembering it with pleasure.

**JT:** But George was the star.

**TT:** Yeah, George was the star. He and Les had everybody laughing.

**SR:** He always did. I remember one time in Hawaii. We went over there to do a show, Mr. Hawaii, I think, and Les and Pudgy and George and I went over and did this little show there for them. And Hawaiians either like you or they don't like you. So George tried to ingratiate himself and us, too. They had this luau and there was this huge, huge tub filled with ice and beer and pop and things like that. So, Eiferman backed up and fell backwards into it on purpose and that broke the ice. Everybody was great from then on. I can still see him doing it and making it look like an accident.

**TT:** There's another thing I wanted to ask you about. I've often wondered if Muscle Beach might have helped



Much of the appeal of the Reeves physique was the unusual combination of a heavy bonestructure, a narrow pelvis, and full, yet refined muscular shape.



a lot in breaking down the myth—and I know you lived through it—when almost all coaches, physical educators, medical doctors, and sport scientists believed that if you lifted weights you'd be musclebound. That was the term.

**SR:** Right.

**TT:** They believed it was the worst thing an athlete could do. Of course they were wrong, and those of us who lifted knew they were wrong, but they believed it anyway. And so I'm wondering about the impression anyone who went to Muscle Beach would have. At the beach there were muscular people training with weights right there and right next to the weight area there's a big platform where people can do all kinds of elaborate tumbling, and some of the lifters tumbled and some of the tumblers lifted. That had to have had an impact on the myth of musclebinding.

**SR:** It probably did help. You know that musclebound stuff is still with us, in a way. Even today, some reporters who don't know anything about it and try to give a person a compliment, will say, "Boy, he's really musclebound." They're trying to say muscular.

**DE:** You know, when I was growing up I thought that was what musclebound meant.

**SR:** Muscular?

**TT:** No, it's true. The meaning has changed over time. But you take 30-40 years ago, 50-60 years ago, "musclebound" meant tied up and clumsy.

**SR:** That's right. Bound. It meant you couldn't tie your necktie, couldn't comb your hair.

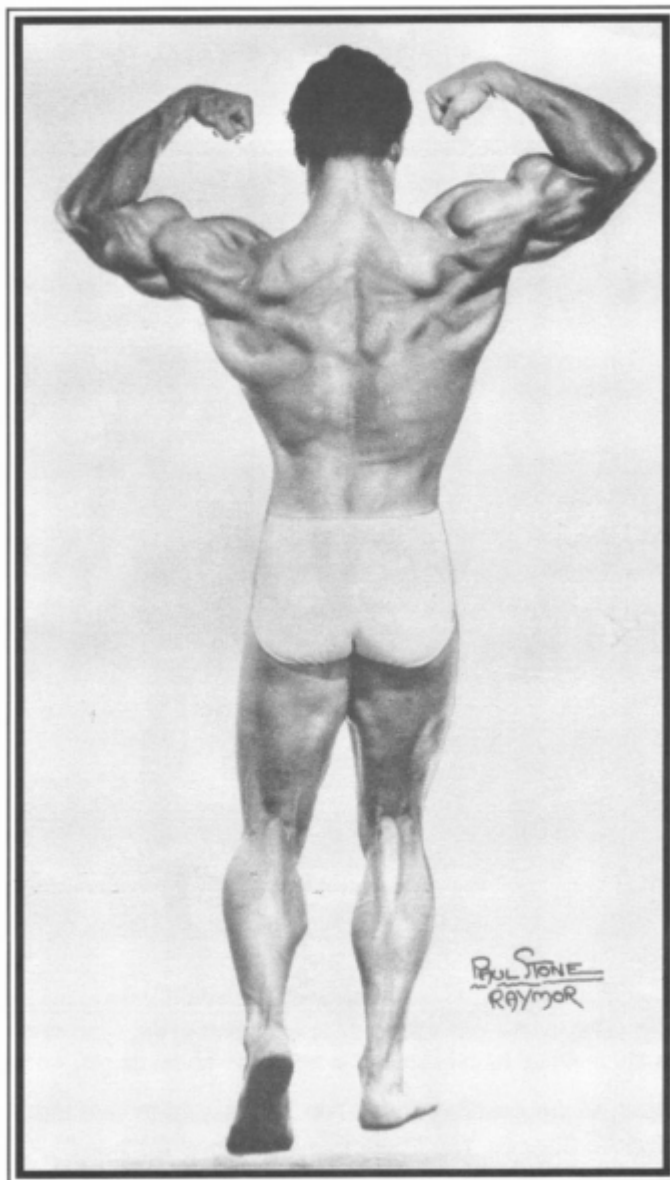
**TT:** By the way, I was so glad that in your book you laid into the steroid users. Because I really believe that with the steroids and various other kinds of bodybuilding drugs that are used the guys now truly can make themselves musclebound. I think that in the old days you couldn't really build that much muscle. Grimek is just an example. He had a lot of muscle for his height yet he could do those deep bends, he could do the splits.

**SR:** Yeah, he was really something.

**TT:** But I think that with drugs these guys can make themselves so thick in the arms and chest that they couldn't begin to address a golf ball, for instance. So, I think that what used to be a myth has become a possibility because of steroids and related drugs.

**SR:** I think you're right.

**TT:** You might speak for a minute about how common that myth was, and ways that you experienced it and heard people talk about it back in those days.



This photograph was taken by Paul-Stone Raymor in 1947, in Chicago, when Steve was just 21 years old. In the A.A.U. Mr. America event that year, he won the Best Back Award.

**SR:** Like you say, the trainers, like the football coaches, wouldn't let their football players lift weights because they'd become musclebound. They wouldn't let the players ride a bicycle because it would cut up their legs. And some of them wouldn't let the players swim, so all the things that condition people today were taboo at that time. It was strange. And baseball players weren't even supposed to go near a weight because if they did then they couldn't swing that bat or throw that ball correctly.

**TT:** When you were in your high school years and you'd already done some lifting did you catch it that way? Did





This publicity still was taken of Steve as part of the effort to draw attention to his film role as the mythical hero Hercules, a role in which he gained worldwide fame.

some of the coaches say, “You know, you’re making a mistake, Reeves. You know this isn’t good for you?”

**SR:** Actually, the coach wanted me to play guard but I couldn’t because it was during the war years and my junior and senior years I was working at the quartermaster supply depot like I said earlier—half a day school, half a day work. So I didn’t have any time for after school activities. But he actually wanted me to play because during class, you know, I did well.

**TT:** Did he know you were lifting?

**SR:** Yeah, he knew I was lifting. But he didn’t know to what extent.

**TT:** Maybe it wasn’t quite as bad in California.

**SR:** Probably wasn’t.

**JT:** Were you a magazine reader? Did you read *Strength & Health* when you were in high school?

**SR:** Oh, yes. I loved to read it.

**TT:** Were there any weights at your school?

**SR:** In the high school they had a hundred pound barbell. That’s all they had. But they did have a hundred pound barbell at Castlemont High School, where I graduated. And Clint Eastwood graduated from Castlemont too, about four years later. Anyway, during recess we’d go out there and lift it. They didn’t have all these laws about insurance and things like that. I was finally able to one-arm-snatch the hundred pounds.

**TT:** I doubt if any other kid that age could do it, could they?

**SR:** I don’t think so. While I was going to Castlemont, one day they had a gymnastics meet, and Jack Dellinger, who became Mr. America a couple years later, after I won, was there. Even as a kid he had great shoulders, arms and lats and a really small waist, but he had nothing for the legs. Nothing. At the time I hadn’t worked out with weights yet, just fooled around

there at the school trying to snatch that hundred pounds like the other kids but I did have heavy, well-developed legs.

**TT:** I’d say.

**SR:** I got a lot of my thigh development from riding my bicycle up the hills in Oakland. I really worked at it. When I went up a hard hill one of three things was going to happen. I was going to make that hill, I was going to break a chain, or I was going to come to a dead stop. One of the three [laughter]. I’m a man of determination, right Deborah, at least sometimes? If I set my mind to something. If I don’t set my mind to something, I’m just like anybody else.

**DE:** You are never like anybody else [more laughter].

**SR:** What I figure is that if there’s a light at the end of the tunnel and I can see it, no matter how long the tunnel and how dim the light, if I can see it, I’ll get there.





# MEMORIES OF STEVE REEVES

BY GEORGE MILLER

In the summer of 1951, I went on vacation with my parents from Burlington, Iowa, to California. I had been working out with weights since 1948 and went to Bert Goodrich's Gym in Hollywood for a workout. I had a box camera with me and had a trainer take a picture of me with Bert. As I was in the locker room getting ready to leave, Steve Reeves came in and stripped down to step on the scale and check his weight. I was in a state of euphoria to be in his presence but managed to carry on a conversation with him. He weighed in at 194 pounds and explained that he was slimming down for the movies. He said he had weighed 214 pounds the year before when he won Mr. Universe, defeating Reg Park. I asked him to pose with me for a picture and he agreed. We went down the steps to the back of the gym with the trainer for the picture.

In the fall of 1951, as a freshman at Burlington Junior College, we had an assembly speaker from *Listen* magazine, a publication of the Iowa Temperance League. They also published *The Margin*, a junior issue of the Iowa Temperance League with the byline, "Champions Believe In Clean Living." The speaker, Bob Roach, editor of *The Margin*, referred to Steve Reeves as a living champion. At the end of the assembly, I proudly showed him the pic-

ture of Steve and I. He asked to borrow it for the next issue of *The Margin*, and I readily agreed. It was published in *The Margin* in November 1951.

Forty-five years later and residing in Oakton, Virginia, I heard at Olympus Gym that the A.A.U. Mr. America Contest was to be held at Fairfax High School on September 14, 1996 and Steve Reeves would be present. I had followed his career and anxiously looked forward to seeing him in person again.

I had him autograph copies of the picture from 1951 and bought an autographed copy of his book *The Classic Physique*. He had the same pleasant mild-mannered demeanor that I remembered from 1951. He was presented with some awards which he humbly accepted and he stated his opposition to the use of steroids by today's bodybuilders.

It is unfortunate that Steve did not live a longer life based upon his clean life style. The standards that he set for physical symmetry are a welcome relief from today's bodybuilders with bloated muscles and abdomens and with extreme vascularity. Steve had smooth, yet well-defined muscles with a slight vascularity that blended perfectly on a perfect frame. His photos and standards will survive long after today's current stars have faded.



This shot was taken by one of the leading lensmen working the physique field, Russ Warner.



# *Perfection in Chicago:*

## *Lanza Photographs Steve Reeves*

*By David Chapman*

Sky, sun, water, and a superbly muscular young man: these are the ingredients that comprised one of bodybuilding's most famous series of photos when in 1947 the great physique photographer Tony Lanza captured Steve Reeves on the shores of Lake Michigan. These are "pure" physique photos since there was no attempt to turn the subject into a Greek statue or a ballet dancer. All superfluous elements had been removed, and only the essential remained, but this Zen-like understatement was enough.

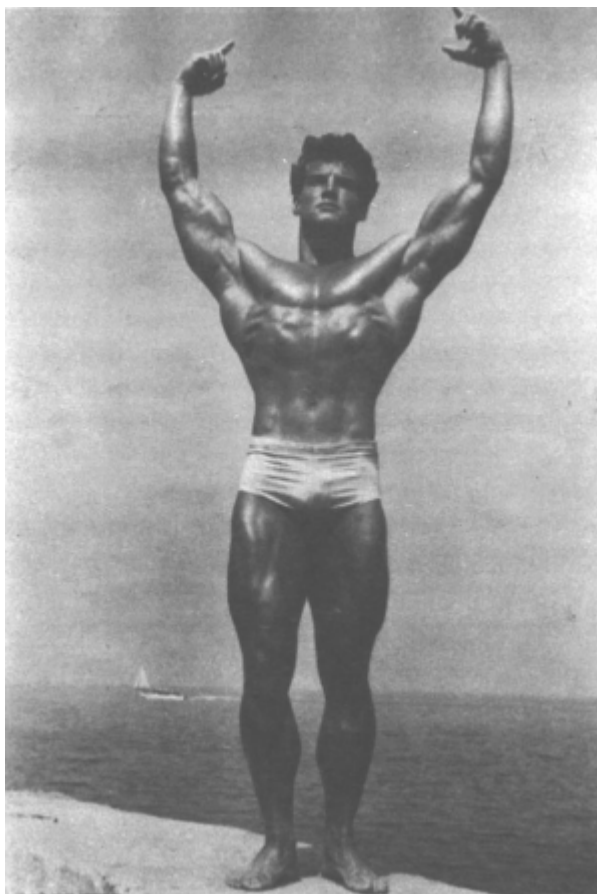
Certain photographs have the ability to convey more than just their subjects—almost always they are greater than either creator or model understand at the time. It is only with time that their sublimity becomes apparent to all. Few contemporaries could probably have guessed that these pictures would become honored as masterpieces of physique photography, but such they became. The story of how these photos were taken and of their subsequent appreciation is one that indicates the delicate way that the silken threads of history, accident, and art all came together at precisely the right time.

The Mr. America contest for 1947 was to be held in

Chicago, and fresh upon the heels of his victory in the Mr. Pacific Coast competition, Steve Reeves arrived at the Windy City's airport, Midway Field. Steve's fame had gone before him, and Dick Trusdale, a PR man who had managed the career of another Mr. America victor Alan Stephan, met the young athlete at the airport. Trusdale's head was bursting with ideas, and he tried to tell Steve all about them as the two drove back to his house where the bodybuilder was to spend the night.

The promoter had arranged for Reeves to be photographed by several well-known camera men, most notably Tony Lanza from Montreal. The resulting portfolio of pictures would then be sold through the mail. They would call their enterprise simply, "The Steve Reeves Company." Trusdale informed Reeves that he had already made arrangements with Lanza to shoot a series before the contest and that he would also be staying at his house.

Tony Lanza had been the best of a number of talented photographers who had worked for Joe Weider and his fledgling magazine *Your Physique*. Almost by accident Lanza was approached by Weider around 1941 to become the staff pho-



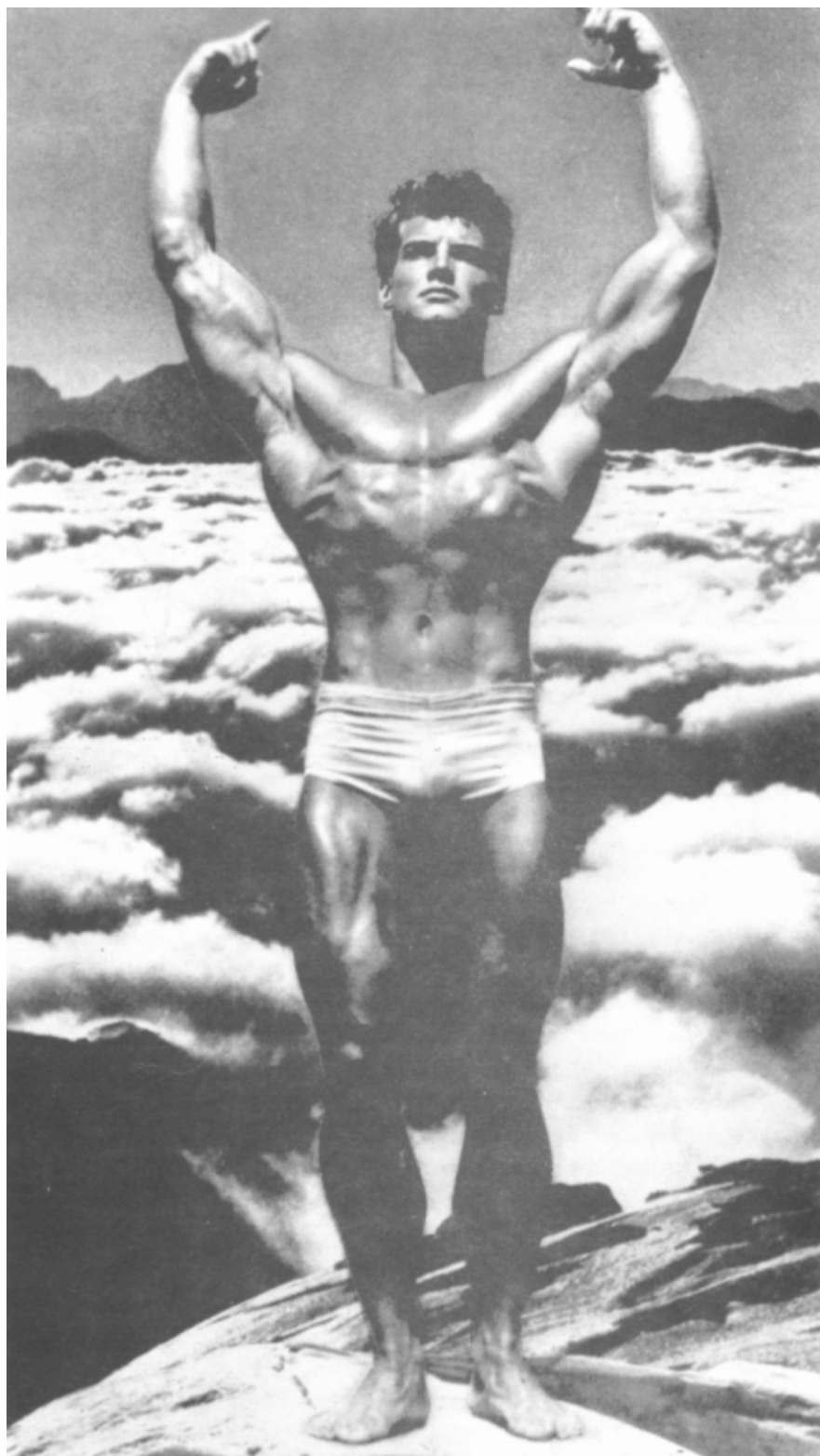
The original photo from which Tony Lanza created one of the most famous images in iron game history.



tographer for his early publication; at the time this was hardly an honor since the “magazine” consisted of a few mimeographed pages. Lanza had never been trained as a photographer, so he had to learn by imitating the techniques of others until he could find his own style. Fortunately, he was a quick study and, as it turned out, possessed considerable natural talent, so it did not take him long to acquire the vision and sophistication that turned him into a master photographer. By 1947 he was one of the best lensmen in the world when it came to physique photography, and his work had been published in magazines throughout the world.

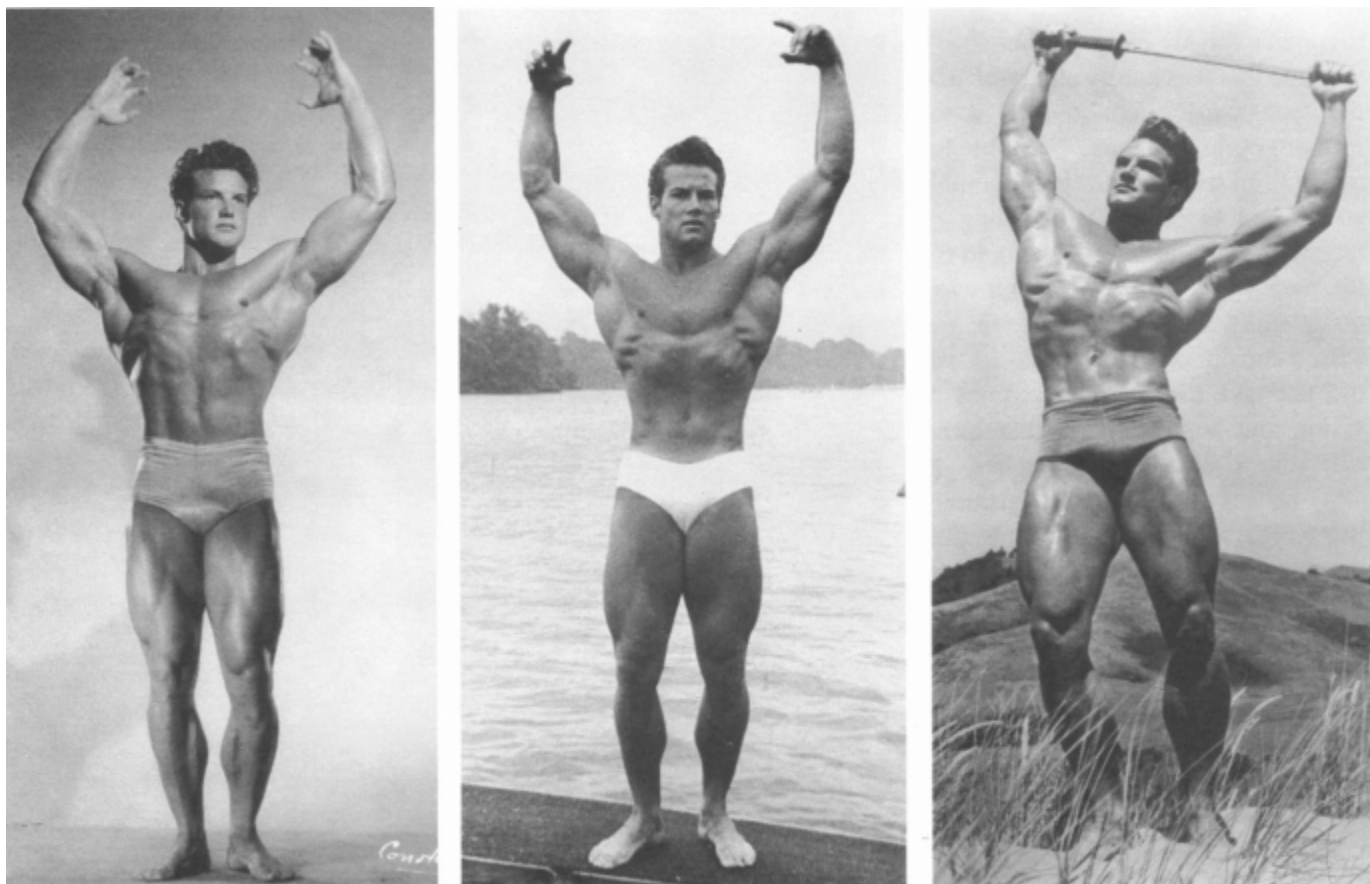
Trusdale had met Lanza the previous year when the promoter visited Montreal where the two men had hit it off famously. Because of this friendship and the photographer’s unquestioned talent, Trusdale had sent for the Canadian camera man, and Tony awaited the arrival of the “new prospect” that Trusdale had attempted to describe. The weather was hot and humid, but all that was forgotten as soon as the two men returned from the airport and confronted the photographer. “Tony,” announced the PR man, “I’d like you to meet Steve Reeves from California.”

Lanza later reported his startled reactions to his first view of the athlete. “I remember Steve was wearing his short-sleeved shirt that gave him this Lil’ Abner look, and he had this incredible deep bronze tan and styled hair. He looked fabulous! And the shoulders, Wow! He was everything I’d heard about and then some.” Understandably, Lanza was anxious to record Reeves on film, and after some consideration, he decided that the shores of Lake Michigan at Foster



The photographer Lanza superimposed mountain clouds behind the image on the opposite page to produce the masterpiece, “Perfection in the Skies.”





In the accompanying article, David Chapman explains how Tony Lanza posed Steve Reeves with his arms held over his head in a “U” shape, and how this pose seemed to fit Reeves’ body shape so well that it became one of his signature poses. Indeed, in our photo collection we counted more than a dozen shots that were variations on the same theme.

Avenue Beach would be a good location.

Most experts agree that although Steve Reeves was a very talented physique athlete who possessed considerable natural grace, he was not a particularly inspired poser. He therefore relied heavily on the men who photographed him to direct his movements. Fortunately, Lanza was prepared to give him all the direction he needed; and besides the photographer insists that Reeves had what he describes as “magnetism” which drew people to him.

Lanza recalls walking with Steve along the Chicago waterfront looking for an appropriate place to begin taking pictures. As they did so, a small but growing crowd of curious onlookers began to follow them on their quest. Chicago’s lakeside is remarkable because a heavily traveled road winds along fairly close to the water, so everything that Reeves did would be plainly visible from the roadway. Finally, Lanza chose a place that possessed just the right background, and he shooed

the crowds away and began taking pictures.

Reeves started to go through a series of poses for the camera as Lanza clicked away. Because of the extreme heat, Tony took off his shirt. Even though the bodybuilder and former pro-wrestler described himself as being “in fairly good shape,” the sight of Steve’s muscles caused him to realize that he did not compare well with his subject. “I had to put my shirt back on because he made me look like shit.”

Despite the many photos that had been taken, something was not quite right, and the photographer was not pleased with the results he was getting from Reeves’ own poses. Finally, Tony said, “Steve, let me pose you and take pictures that I like so that you can be seen in better, more classical poses.” It was then that things started to click in the session. Under Lanza’s expert direction, the poses became more graceful and fluid. The lines formed by Reeves’ muscular limbs arced and folded into graceful lines and the model’s muscularity



combined with his startling good looks began to yield excellent results.

Finally, Lanza had an inspiration. He asked Steve to stand erect and while flexing his biceps to raise his arms in roughly a "U" shape over his head. It was the perfect pose to accentuate the athlete's ample chest, thick arms, and narrow waist. The sheen of perspiration caused by the hot Midwestern sun, the earnest expression on the bodybuilder's face, and the beautifully sculpted muscles, all combined to create one of the most sublime moments in the history of the human body. The resulting picture was destined to be an unqualified masterpiece of physique art.

Unfortunately, the artistic impact of the photo was matched by an impact of a more physical nature. Lanza and Reeves were busily at work, when all of a sudden they heard the squeal of brakes and the crash of an auto accident. A few minutes later the driver involved in the collision came up and announced to Reeves, "Sir, I just caused an accident over there, and had to come over and shake your hand because you were the cause of it. I just couldn't believe my eyes!"

After the shoot, Lanza would take the photo, and carefully superimpose it over a shot of misty mountain tops. He titled the resulting collage "Perfection in the Skies." Steve's upraised arms and the pointing index fingers act like the vaults of a Gothic cathedral, drawing the eye upwards toward the heights of glory. It becomes an allegory of the human aspiration for physical perfection and earthly limitations. "That pose made Steve Reeves a star," maintains Lanza, "and it has been imitated many times afterward, but never with such success." He is right, of course. Like all great works of art, this one captures its subject at precisely the right moment, and it could never be duplicated—not even by Reeves himself. It is the document of a fleeting instant in time and space when all the right forces were in conjunction, and it is that very temporality that makes

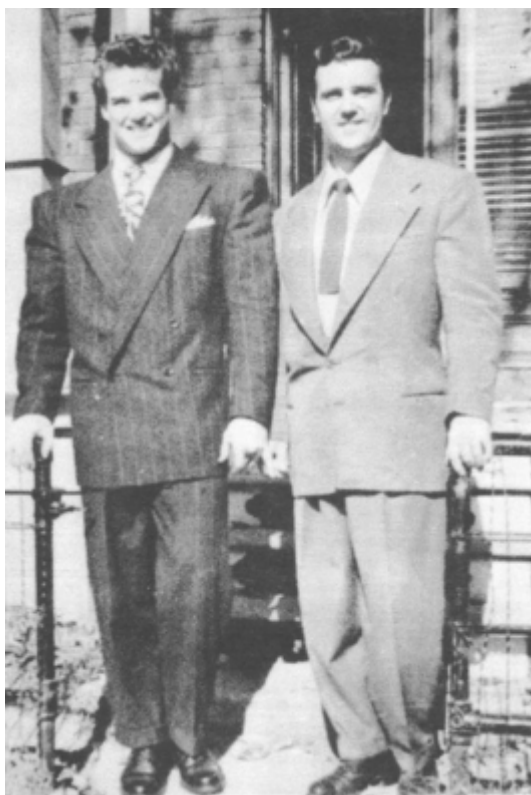
it so precious as both art and history.

Ironically, the picture would come back to haunt Reeves in an unexpected way. When he was attempting to build a movie career, Reeves entered the offices of Cecil B. DeMille hoping for a role in *Samson and Delilah*. There on the wall was the famous picture of Reeves amongst the clouds. Earlier, the director had pointed his finger at the photograph and announced, "There is my man for *Samson and Delilah*!" But when Reeves stood before C.B., the director insisted that Reeves lose twenty pounds before filming. According to Tony Lanza's version of this famous exchange, DeMille complained to Reeves, "You're not like the picture at all. We want you to look like the Lanza photograph." No matter what was said, the result was the same: Reeves did not get the role. He would have to wait until 1959 for his big break when he starred in the Italian epic, *Hercules*.

Reeves did win the Mr. America contest in 1947, however. He swept aside the competition in a final climactic posedown. Considering his discomfort with posing, it is a wonder he was able to emerge victorious, but

then perhaps his personal charisma was dazzling enough so that the judges saw past his indifferently executed poses. Whatever the reason, Reeves won, and the victory allowed him to shoot into the firmament like a Roman candle. It was many years before that glowing ember of fire and light fell back to earth.

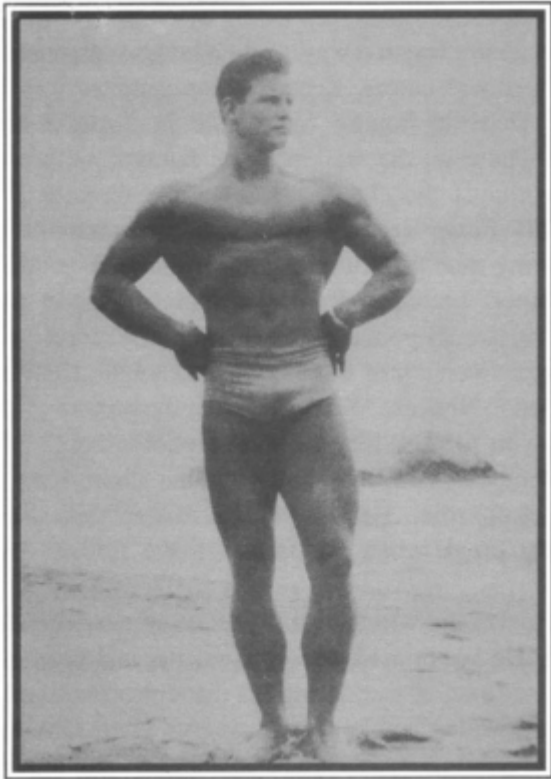
Steve Reeves is no more, but the photos that he posed for half a century earlier are still vivid reminders of what he looked like in his prime. Thanks to Tony Lanza, we still have a beautiful record of male physical perfection



Reeves with one of the photographers who helped make him famous, Tony Lanza. The photo was taken in Montreal in 1947.

**Sources:** Interview with Tony Lanza, Montreal, 31 July 2000; Chris LeClaire, *Worlds to Conquer: Steve Reeves* (author: South Chatham, Mass., 1999); and Milton Moore, Jr., *Steve Reeves: One of a Kind* (author, 1983).





Steve at age 17 on Stinson Beach.

# The Steve Reeves I Know and Remember

By Ed Yarick

From: *Muscle Mag International* Vol. 2, No. 1  
(May 1976): 33-36.

**Editors' Note:** This article appeared in the May 1976 issue of *Muscle Mag International*, as part of a 50th birthday tribute to Steve Reeves. We are grateful to *MMI* publisher Bob Kennedy for permission to reprint it for our *IGH* readers. As we prepared this issue, however, we discovered that substantial portions of Yarick's piece were taken virtually word for word from a longer, more detailed article in the August 1947 issue of *Your Physique*. The earlier article was written by Alyce Stagg, who later became Yarick's wife. Space did not permit us to run the earlier article.

Steve Reeves is universally known as the Hercules of the movies. He won Mr. America, Mr. World and Mr. Universe titles, yet few know much about him as a person. Who was he? How did he get started in bodybuilding? How did he train?

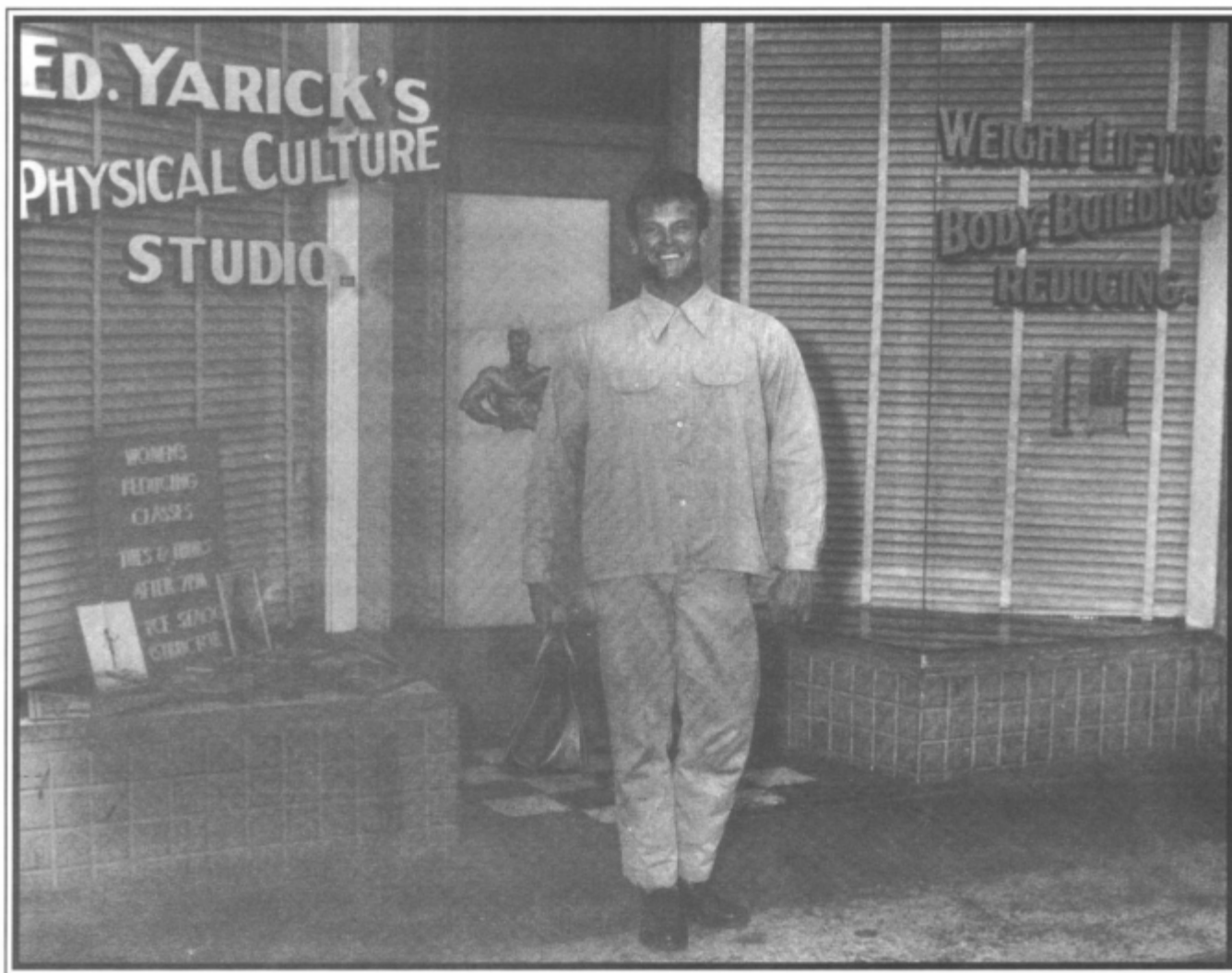
My association with Steve goes back over thirty years. In the '40s my gym was located in Oakland, California, near three high schools—Oakland, Fremont and Castlemount. Reeves attended Castlemount, one of the few schools of that era to offer weight training instruction. He began working out at school and also at

home, but spent much of his free time touring the few local barbell gyms, namely Jack LaLanne's and my gym to obtain all possible information about bodybuilding. During this period he decided to train under my supervision, gaining 30 pounds of solid muscle in four months.

For two years Steve worked out under my instruction and encouragement. His progress continued to be outstanding and by the time he was eighteen, he weighed a solid 203 pounds. In the opinion of many experts, Reeves could have won the Mr. America contest that year had he entered. His physique was already showing signs of the fine shape and muscularity that would eventually make him the most famous bodybuilder of our time.

Steve graduated from Castlemount in 1944 at the height of World War II and promptly enlisted in the Army. At that time soldiers were being shipped overseas quickly and Reeves was no exception. After six short weeks of basic training, he was in on some of the fighting in the Philippines where he earned the Combat Infantryman's Badge and several other awards. While there, however, he contracted a severe case of malaria that required a long period of hospitalization and resulted in a weight loss of over 20 pounds. After several





A smiling Steve Reeves stands in the doorway of the building in which he became a finished bodybuilder—Ed Yarick's gym in Oakland, Steve's hometown. At first, Steve was Yarick's student. Then they became training partners and friends.

recurrences, Steve was finally transferred from combat duty to the quartermaster corp. He eventually ended up in Tokyo with General MacArthur's troops.

Steve was still recuperating from his malaria attacks in 1945 and was physically well below par. He had not had any bodybuilding workouts in over a year, and with no available equipment, it didn't look like he would be able to train. But in typical Reeves "take the bull by the horns" fashion, he located an interpreter and the two went to a local foundry. With the aid of sketches and much hand waving, Steve was able to have a 300-pound barbell set made up. With this crude equipment he began training again and it wasn't long before he had a regular gym set up and a number of other bodybuilders exercised with him. We kept in touch by mail and I was able to monitor his progress that way.

Finally, in the fall of 1946, he returned home and was discharged. Without delay he was back in my gym training, but this time he was no longer a pupil. Instead, we were workout partners, training diligently three times a week on a routine that included several exercises and trying for perfection on all muscles of the body. I invented the incline bench and Steve improvised another exercise for the bench by adding a bar on which curls could be done. [Ed Note: The incline bench predates 1946.] The bench for the incline press and incline curls became a very important piece of equipment in gyms all over the country. Our training sessions continued as regularly as clockwork and were something we both looked forward to. I was improving and I could see Steve growing rapidly in size and shape. We never missed workouts so I was surprised when Steve didn't show for one of our





A teenaged Steve Reeves at Sunny Cove Beach in Alameda is pictured here, second from the right, sitting with some of his friends, including his mentor and training partner, Ed Yarick, who is wearing the sailors' hat.

workout sessions on a Saturday in December. I was extremely puzzled because he was in such top condition that he simply could not have been ill. I found out the reason when he showed up on schedule the following Tuesday and he handed me two huge trophies inscribed "Mr. Pacific Coast of 1946" and said, "Merry Christmas, Ed."

Telling only his mother, Steve and another gym member, Bob Weidlick, had flown to Portland, Oregon. He left on Friday, won the title and returned late Monday. I was quite surprised by the unexpected manner in which Reeves entered this major physique contest, but certainly not startled by his victory. He was in great condition! That's how Steve is, though. He never sought publicity and didn't even desire any advanced build-up prior to his Mr. America victory.

Early in January of 1947, a Mr. California contest was held. Steve did not enter, even though he would have had an easy win. Having won the larger Mr. Pacific Coast title a month earlier, he did not think he would be eligible until it was too late to enter. He did, though, retain his title as Mr. Pacific Coast and copped trophies at that event for Best Arms, Best Legs and Best Chest. And, of course, he also won the Mr. America title at Chicago later that year.

Many bodybuilding fans have asked me about Steve Reeve's early years. He was born in Montana on January 21, 1926 and is of Welsh, Irish and German descent. His father died when Steve was a year-and-a-

half old, so Steve attended boarding schools and spent summers on an uncle's ranch in Montana. He learned to ride when he was three years old and is an excellent horseman. I believe that the great amount of riding Steve's done is unquestionably a factor that contributed to his small waist and trim hips. These characteristics are found in a majority of active cowboys.

Steve and his mother moved to Oakland when he was approaching his teens. To do his share in helping out his mother financially, Steve had a newspaper route. I would say that even as a boy Steve was physique conscious because he would pedal that bike in a manner designed to provide his calves with the greatest amount of stimulation.

One of Steve's greatest assets was his mother. She was an indispensable and invaluable aid to his bodybuilding progress. Not only did she encourage his athletic endeavors, but Goldie always cooperated with him in meals she prepared. They were always wholesome and nourishing. Steve is especially fond of steak, salads, vegetables and fresh fruit. He consumed more than a quart of milk a day when I knew him and he never smoked, drank alcoholic beverages, or ate any products containing devitalized white flour or refined white sugar. He substituted honey for sugar. As a result of his healthy diet, his teeth were a dental advertisement, totally free from cavities. Even today, I believe he only has one cavity.

Our training program was a very strenuous one.



We adhered to a three day a week schedule and had no favorite exercises. Instead, we employed a broad variety of exercises in an effort to arrive at a well-balanced program. Steve did not endeavor to specialize in competitive lifts, but the very heavy poundages that he employed in bodybuilding exercises with high repetitions provided plenty of evidence that he was exceptionally powerful.

Steve and I used a very strict type of exercise form in all our movements. We did each exercise from complete extension to complete contraction, no swinging, no bouncing and no cheating of any kind. We held to a golden rule, "If you cheat, you cheat yourself." It did not matter to us if we could only do five or six reps with our heaviest weights, so long as these were done in perfect style. Some of Steve's poundages might seem light to modern bodybuilders with sloppy form, but in 1947 and with strict style, the weights Steve used were considered phenomenal for his bodyweight.

I will briefly describe one of the routines Steve and I would use. We started with exercises for the deltoids of the shoulders to attain a wide look in that area and followed these with movements for the chest. Then we moved to the latissimus dorsi of the upper back (this gives a "V" shape and tapered appearance to the torso). The triceps and biceps of the upper arm, the thighs and calves of the legs and even the neck weren't omitted. As mentioned before, we always did a variety of all-around exercises to promote even development.

Steve and I had many good times together outside the gym too. During the warm summer months, many Bay area bodybuilders would gather at Sunny Cove Beach in Alameda, just a short distance from Oakland. There we would bask in the sun and swim either in the surf or in the adjacent pool. Jack LaLanne and I would handbalance a lot with my wife, Alyce. Steve and many of the local barbell enthusiasts talked and exchanged views on bodybuilding. Steve was always one of the most ardent in all of these discussions.

During the winter months we had a weekly Sunday gathering at the local ice skating rink. Wearing a ski sweater and with his wide shoulders, "V" shape and hips of less than 36 inches, Steve was always the main attraction of our group. The girls did double takes as they passed him, and after a while they seemed to pass him quite frequently. He was truly an All-American boy.

Reeves was always inclined to be a bit modest,

and he was also very cooperative, especially in the way he encouraged youngsters in bodybuilding. I knew there would be nothing to stop him from going on to bigger and better things, and of course, no one was more deserving of this than he. Steve was intelligent and had both big ideals and a conscientious nature. I was confident he would go on to accomplish a tremendous amount of good on behalf of the physical culture movement.

I knew that one day Steve would leave Oakland. The southern beaches had more to offer him. He no longer needed instruction, and opportunities in television and the film industry were more plentiful in Los Angeles. When the day came, I wished him well and he was off to find his fortune.

Alyce and I stayed in touch with his folks, and we often saw Steve in later years, when he would drop over to his folks' house or our house, with many of his friends. He liked to get into the kitchen to help with the broiling of steaks, or the making of a tossed salad, as these were his favorite foods. I remember how appreciative he was when we gave him a blender to mix high protein health drinks.

Steve went on to win the Mr. Universe, Mr. World and other titles, and later toured with the stage play "Kismet." His first movie break came in "Athena" with Jane Powell and Debbie Reynolds, and he went on to star in 16 films, his most popular being "Hercules." Steve once had his own bodybuilding studio and later raised Red Angus cattle on a ranch in Oregon. He currently breeds and trains Morgan horses on his ranch near San Diego.

The last contact I had with Steve was when I called him and told him our son Bart was driving his way via motorcycle and would stop by his place in Oregon. Bart spent ten days there and to this day he talks of it as being some experience to stay at Mr. Hercules' place.

I have always said that Steve's body was much like a drawing of Lil' Abner, the sort of All-American ideal physique admired by the general public. He has the healthy mind and body that made up a unique man. A man that smashed existing box office records with his portrayal of Hercules and a man who cast a spell over the bodybuilding fraternity that is as meaningful today as it was when he first came on the national scene almost thirty years ago. Presently, at fifty years of age, Reeves is alive and well and going places.



# Armand Tanny Remembers Steve Reeves

Terry Todd conducted this interview in June of 1999 near Armand Tanny's home in Woodland Hills, California. Tanny has lived in southern California for over 60 years and has made significant contributions to the iron game as a competitive weightlifter, a bodybuilder, and a prolific writer for many physical culture magazines, including *Muscle & Fitness*.

**TT:** Am I wrong? It seems like I remember somewhere that there was a time when you and George Eiferman and Steve Reeves were all living pretty close to one another near Muscle Beach.

**AT:** Oh yeah, that's right.

**TT:** That was kind of amazing that three guys who'd have such big reputations would be so close. I'd guess those were kind of your salad days.

**AT:** Really. We all lived there at the same place for awhile. We paid a total of \$60 a month or something like that, you know? We were right on the water. I could jump off the balcony onto the sand of Muscle Beach. It was the life. I got there in '39 and was in the Beach area down to 1958, so it was about 20 years that I was there most of the time when I wasn't rambling around.

**TT:** When were you and Reeves and Eiferman all there together at the same time?

**AT:** It was in the late 40s cause we were all competing, you know, and all three of us competed in the 1949 Mr. USA show. That one show had Grimek, Clancy Ross, Reeves, Eiferman, me, and others, too. So those of us who lived out here had a lot of opportunity to watch one another and train together.

**TT:** Where did you do most of your training? On the beach or in the gym?

**AT:** In the gym. The Tanny Gym. Fourth and Broadway.

**TT:** So if you'd do something at the beach with the weights it would be just light stuff, or maybe a little arm work?

**AT:** Yeah, right. But I might do some odd lifts, too. I used to have a little trick I'd do. I'd pull maybe 300 pounds or so to my shoulders in a power clean and jerk it overhead and then walk down through the sand holding it over my head.

**TT:** I don't imagine you had too many people trying to match that.

**AT:** No.

**TT:** Old George was a great presser, though, wasn't he?

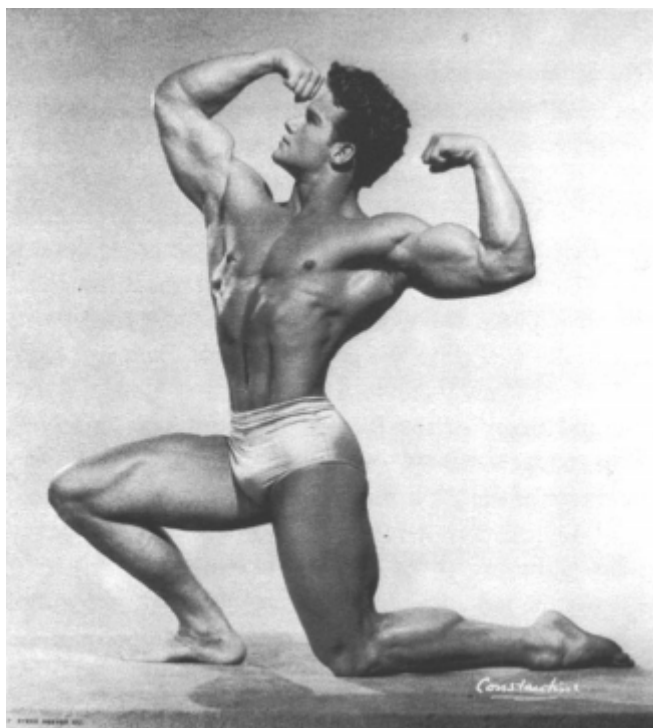
**AT:** He had tremendous pressing power. He wasn't a talented weightlifter, but he was really strong, particularly in the pressing movements.

**TT:** I know he's told me he wasn't very good in cleaning or things like that.

**AT:** No, he didn't have that speed, you know, that quickness that a top lifter needs.

**TT:** I remember seeing photographs of him playing a trumpet and at the same time pressing a person or a 14.5 pound barbell over his head with one hand.

**AT:** Yeah, that was one of his stage tricks. After he was out here in the late 40s there was a time when he travelled around the country speaking to school systems, you know. He gave lectures and told jokes and did strength stunts. He'd always take one of the students and press him or her over his head while he was blowing on his



Steve Reeves more or less as he looked the first time he came to Muscle Beach and was seen by Armand Tanny.



trumpet.

**TT:** I guess Reeves must've been amazing, too, in his own way. He always looked to me like what an artist might have created if someone told the artist, "Okay, let's see you make a physically perfect man." I've always thought that most artists with imagination and real skill would have come up with something a lot like Steve.

**AT:** Oh, he was so pretty.

**TT:** [Laughing.] Yeah, that's right. He had real beauty. In all seriousness "beauty" may be the best word for someone made like he was. Everything about him seemed to fit the other parts, with perhaps the most defining parts being his face and those big calves.

**AT:** Yeah, everything was to perfection. It was just amazing. Yeah, Steve. He used to poke a little fun at himself, you know. He loved to joke. He'd hold out his foot and he'd say, "Isn't that foot perfect?" And it was perfect. Or he'd open his mouth and say, "Not a cavity." And it was true, there wasn't a cavity in his mouth and all we could say was, "Reeves, you dirty dog." You know? But he knew he was special and he was easy with it. He always seemed to be in good spirits and had a lot of fun. He really enjoyed being around everybody at the Beach, you know?

**TT:** He and his ladyfriend Deborah came out and visited us at the library a few years ago. He wanted to look at our collection of books and magazines and photos and things. But he had another reason, too, which is that he was thinking about getting a ranch out in central Texas where we live. He said he was serious about moving because everything was getting too crowded where he was.

**AT:** I could believe that.

**TT:** And so they came out and stayed a few days with us. That was the first time I'd been around him for any length of time and I found him to have a truly pleasant nature. In a way, he seemed almost shy at first, or at least reserved.

**AT:** He was a bit shy. But he had a good sense of humor. Loved jokes and fun, you know? A pleasant kid.

**TT:** But did he have an impact on the beach? With the general public?

**AT:** Oh, man, let me tell you. I think it was about 1945 when I first learned about him. The war was still on and



Muscle Beach buddies—Steve Reeves, George Eiferman, and Armand Tanny on stage in the 1949 Mr. USA, which was won by John Grimek.

I went up to San Francisco to see Jack LaLanne's gym there, you know, and he said, "Armand, look at this picture." So here was this kid, you know, and he's only about 16 years old in the shot. Here's this 16 year-old kid with this perfect structure. So, Jack says, "Anyway, he's down in the Philippines in the service but he'll be back soon." I thought. Jesus, man. Wow. Great body, and he already looked like a man. Anyway, about two or three years later, you know, I'm sitting there at Muscle Beach one day and this fellow comes walking down the beach. He's got a tailored shirt, and when he gets on the sand and starts to strip down, you know, and he's standing out there and we're all watching him I say, "Holy Christ! Look at that body. That's Steve Reeves."

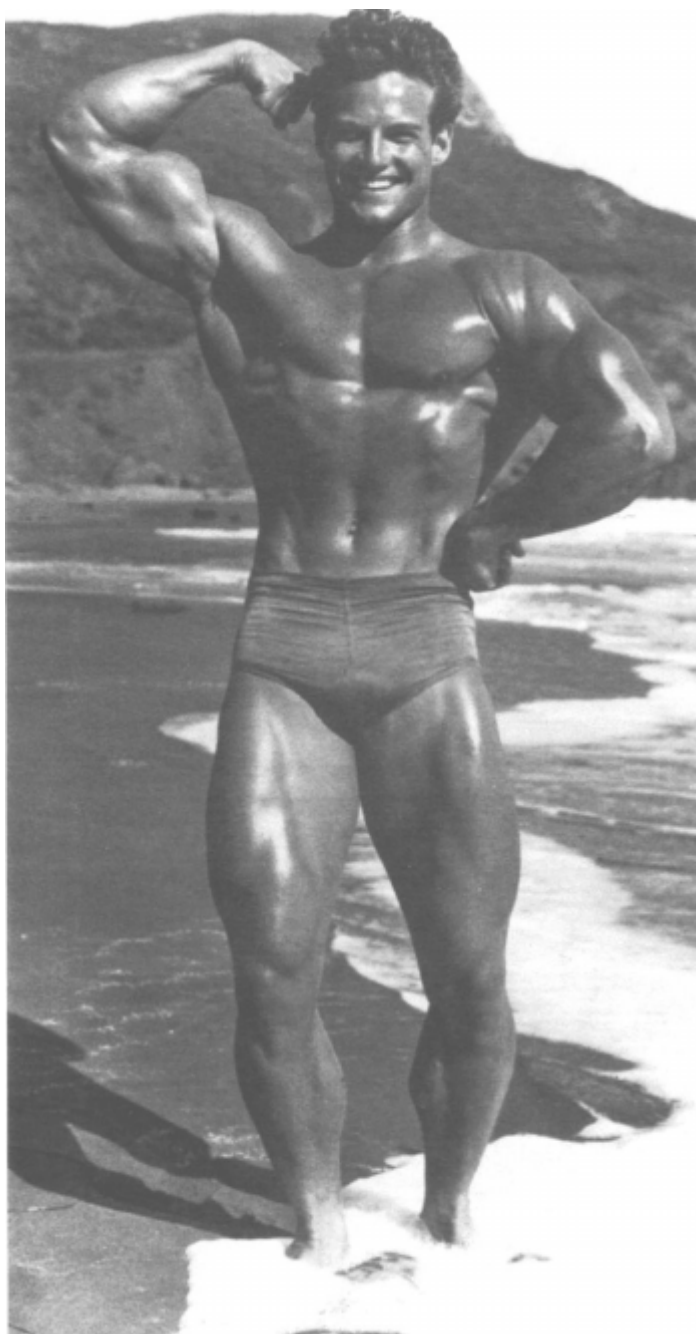
**TT:** I guess when the big crowds were there, he must have had a big impact. I mean, people must have. . .

**AT:** They followed him around like dogs. Like, for instance, groups of women, middle-aged or older women, would walk by him. He'd be walking down the boardwalk in his trunks and they'd see him coming and then they'd make a U-turn and just follow him. He had a lot of fun with that body, but he never took himself too seriously. He was a hell of a guy.



# The Immortal Reeves

by Les Stockton



Two beach icons—Steve Reeves and Diamond Head.

Steve Reeves was perfect the first time I saw him, after his early training at the gyms of Jack LaLanne and, especially, that of Ed Yarick, who nurtured the early development of this classic legend.

Beginning with 17 inch calves [in high school], the widest shoulders and a small waist, six feet tall and with an eventual 215 pounds, as handsome as any movie idol, Steve had a body that easily and quickly responded to the weight training. Once in a lifetime someone special comes along and Ed Yarick knew Steve was one of these.

When Steve stayed with us on visits to Southern California, perfection required perfection, as Steve was very meticulous about the preparation of his nutritious meals. So Pudgy became an even better cook. At that time she—and I—certainly thought Steve would live forever.

Of course, she couldn't have known that she would be featured 50 years later in an article in the April 2000 issue of the Association of Oldtime Barbell & Strongmen Newsletter with a picture displaying her and Steve. Nor could she have anticipated the editor's [Vic Boff's] observation that they were the supreme examples of the natural [pre-chemical] "Classical" physiques—the male and female "Epitomes of Physical Development." And then just days after reading this incomparable tribute, she was devastated to learn that her "Forever Living" male role model's wonderful, exemplary life had come to an end on May 1, 2000 in a San Diego, California hospital at 74 years of age. Pudgy said, "Oh no, Steve. Not there and too soon."

"Classic Perfection" is the description of Steve that will be remembered by all of us who knew and respected him for his inspiring accomplishments. Steve, you will live forever in our hearts and thoughts, and we shall never forget you.





If only one man and one woman could be chosen to symbolize sunny California's mid-20th century physical culture, body-oriented lifestyle, the man would be Steve Reeves and the woman would be Pudgy Stockton.

# A King Meets a King

by Pudgy Stockton

I remember the Hawaiian Islands in 1949, when Steve and his friend, George Eiferman, and Les and I were invited to appear as the guests of honor at a big show in Honolulu. We were all so young—just starting our live's work. We had no thoughts of the ending of our abilities—that time could shut down any of us, even in the twilight of what we expected would be our long lives. It is now many years since our short sojourn in the lovely Hawaiian Islands—but a memory remains of a young, handsome man with a smiling face who thrilled the audience at the Civic auditorium in Honolulu with his classic physique and his wonderful posing routine.

Few people are privileged to spend an entire week in close association with a celebrity they respect and admire, and then to have that celebrity become a lifelong close friend. In any case, we were in Hawaii performing four shows in the islands, sponsored by the Nuuanu YMCA—an AAU benefit affair with proceeds helping to send Hawaii's "iron men" to the AAU Nationals in Cleveland, Ohio in May, 1949. Our hosts and hostesses gave us interesting, fun tours of each destination we reached—and Steve had the ability to trade joke for joke with George and Les. Through humor and a shared love of the game we had a truly special time together. Wonderful memories!

The shock of Steve's death for Les and I was profound. In our minds he was still a young man riding his horses and keeping in shape on his beloved ranch—even his 74 years were young years to us. It is with deep sadness that we say farewell to Steve—a true King.





## HERCULES MEETS SEALTEST DAN:

### The Rediscovery of an Iron Game Icon

by John Fair, Ph.D.

What most tributes to Steve fail to comprehend is that he was also human, and attempts to idolize him as the perfect man risk losing sight of the fact that he, like everyone else, had to cope with the real world. His interactions with Dan Lurie, iron game promoter and publisher of *Muscle Training Illustrated* (MTI), in the early 1970s provide some insights into how even the brightest stars must inevitably reckon with age and withdrawal from the limelight.

Dan Lurie was a near contemporary to Steve Reeves. Though he possessed one of the best physiques of the 1940s and was thrice named Most Muscular Man in Mr. America contests, he had repeatedly failed to capture the top title. During the 1950s, however, Lurie rose to national prominence as Sealtest Dan the Musclemán on a popular circus show that was broadcast on Saturday afternoons from WCAU in Philadelphia. In the mid-1960s Lurie launched a vigorous promotional campaign, featuring the establishment of a World Bodybuilding Guild (WBBG), grandiose (America, World, Olympus) physique titles, a full line of weightlifting apparatus, and a magazine—*Muscle Training Illustrated*—to publicize these endeavors. He even appropriated the title of “The Champion Maker.”<sup>2</sup> By this time, however, other promoters—Bob Hoffman, Joe and Ben Weider, and Peary Rader—had established a seemingly insurmountable lead in these areas, and it was easy to perceive Lurie as a copy-cat trying desperately to gain ground in the physical culture market. Although he regularly featured leading bodybuilders and iron game authors in his magazine, he needed to attract a superstar—a John Grimek or a Clancy Ross, a Bill Pearl or a

At the 1973 WBBG Professional Mr. America Contest in Manhattan, Dan Lurie crowned Steve Reeves as the “World’s Greatest Bodybuilder.” Reeves’ wife, Aline, looks on as Lurie told the audience, “This is the proudest moment of my busy life.”

It happened with Paul Anderson in 1994, and it happened with John Grimek in 1998. And now it is happening again with Steve Reeves—as countless well-meaning pundits rush their tributes to the latest fallen iron game hero into print. It is not that Steve does not deserve to be eulogized—far from it. He was not only one of the handsomest and best built men of his era, but led a clean, dignified, and scandal-free life. Furthermore, and this is his chief claim to fame, Reeves was virtually the only bodybuilder prior to Arnold Schwarzenegger to translate his muscles into money and international renown through a successful film career.<sup>1</sup>



Larry Scott—to lend credibility to his cause.

Steve Reeves, as Mr. America (1947), Mr. World (1948), and Mr. Universe (1950), had won all the top physique titles that had eluded Lurie. Additionally, from 1954 to 1968 he appeared in eighteen films (often as the lead) and amassed a tidy fortune. Reeves' role of "Hercules" in the late 1950s was the lasting image he projected to adoring movie audiences. He was the top box office draw for 1959 and starred in nine more films over the next four years. By this time, however, his career was languishing as he was well into middle age and no longer as suited for the sword-and-sandal epics that had become his hallmark. It was fortunate that he was able to retire inasmuch as his lifestyle and public persona hardly coincided with the cultural revolution that swept America and the world in the late 1960s. Nude scenes were totally out of character for Steve, he was repulsed by steroid-induced physiques, and he sought consolation in various solitary health and fitness pursuits. Screen icons of the 1950s were no longer in vogue. "Steve Reeves was a Hercules for another time" is one obituarial assessment.<sup>3</sup> The early 1970s was a period of mid-life introspection for Steve when he could reflect on what his career had meant, think about the future, and contemplate his legacy. It was also a time when he was particularly vulnerable to solicitations from iron game promoters eager to rescue him from obscurity-

As with Grimek and Anderson, Steve was gifted with an immense hereditary advantage. His body responded easily to weight training in size, strength, and proportion. In an early article in *Muscle Training Illustrated*, Earle Liederman recalls his "discovery" of the 16 year-old Reeves behind the scenes at a Los Angeles physique show in 1942. When asked "how he had secured such wonderful calves," Steve responded that it had come from lots of bicycle riding, especially up hills. "In all my long life-time I have done, and also had done at this particular occasion," explained Liederman, "considerably more bicycle riding than this young chap ever had done at his age; and I ask you, did I get 18½ inch calves? I did NOT!" Liederman concluded, like virtually all other observers and Steve himself, that this boy wonder was a "natural"<sup>4</sup> Subsequent issues of *Muscle Training Illustrated* continued to feature Reeves. A gossip column in 1968 called him the "Last of the Mohicans," noting in his latest release, *Sandokan the Great*, that "Steve's wrinkles may be showing . . . but his

bank account is young and ever beautiful."<sup>5</sup> When Jim Haislop won the 1969 AAU Mr. America contest, he attributed his inspiration to seeing Reeves' Hercules films while serving a hitch in the Navy.<sup>6</sup> Publisher Robert Kennedy, a long-time aficionado of Reeves, even thought he might return to heavy training and show up for a guest appearance at one of the big annual muscle shows. "He is certainly not too old to do so. Nor is it beyond his ability."<sup>7</sup> That Steve might be a candidate for cult figure status was evident in an article featuring milestones of his career. *Muscle Training Illustrated* also carried regular advertisements for his movie and bodybuilding photographs and even a WBBG Bodybuilder of the Month centerfold of him in his prime.<sup>8</sup> Part of his potential appeal to bodybuilders was that he had become a scarce commodity. Reclusive by nature, Reeves retired after his last film in 1968 and sought peace and solitude at his mountain retreat in Switzerland, his cattle ranch in Oregon, and his horse ranch in California.

As a result of this seclusion, an air of mystery about his condition and whereabouts permeated the July 1972 issue of *Muscle Training Illustrated*, leading Denie (Dennis Walter) to speculate that Reeves could be severely ill or in serious trouble. These rumors alerted the enquiring mind of Dan Lurie and spurred him to action. Sealtest Dan discovered, through an "agent," that Steve was well and living comfortably at his home in the Alps. Reeves' response to this continuing concern by his bodybuilding fans reveals that he was beginning to think of himself as an anachronism. "I can't understand why today after all these years people still are interested in me. . . . I just want to be left alone and live my life quietly, doing what I'm interested in." It is hardly surprising that he declined Lurie's offer of \$1,000 to emcee the WBBG Professional Mr. America contest in 1971.<sup>9</sup> But Lurie persisted, through his "special envoy," and managed to draw the former star out of hiding for the 1973 event at Hunter College in Manhattan. Unlike emceeing, the prospect of accepting "The Dan Lurie Award" recognizing him as "The World's Greatest Bodybuilder" proved an attractive lure. Lurie was rhapsodic about his success in associating Reeves with his movement, calling it "a dream fulfilled." In the actual plaque presentation on September 8, Lurie told Steve that "This is the proudest moment of my busy life to have you honor my organization and myself with your presence." In a sense, this whole ceremony was more an honor for the honorer than it was for the honoree!



Additionally Dan paraded Reeves and his wife Alina around the Big Apple television talk show circuit, including interviews with comic Soupy Sales and “Mr. Warmth,” Howard Cosell. Reeves was also awarded a Key to the City by Commissioner of Parks, Joseph Davidson, and September 8 was designated Physical Culture Day in honor of Reeves. Steve’s responses to these accolades were modest and banal, with references to his love of outdoor life and the Morgan horses he raised at his ranch. It was not so much the substance of anything he said that counted but his appearance. Lurie used every opportunity to attach his own success as a promoter to the honors bestowed upon Reeves. “Many did not believe,” boasted *MTI*, “that Dan Lurie could produce Steve Reeves . . . to even get him here . . . and to see that the City of New York gave him the Key to the City. As one reporter put it: ‘Dan Lurie is the Mike Todd of the Bodybuilding World!’”<sup>10</sup>

Energized by this publicity coup, Lurie sought further opportunities to appropriate Hercules to his cause. Acting under the rationale that Reeves was needed back in motion pictures “to inspire the general public to take up the healthful recreation and sport of physical culture,” Lurie had secured from Steve an admission “that he might return if the right part was available.” Lurie learned that a Hollywood producer was looking for an actor to play the fictional character Doc Savage, which had appeared in pulp magazines and novels in the 1930s. And Reeves had even indicated on his recent visit that the idea of a film based on the fantastic escapes and escapades of Doc Savage “had caught his fancy.” Therefore Denie appealed to Lurie’s readers for support:

*MTI* feels it is time Hercules became Doc Savage, and to launch his third and possibly most successful career and return to public life. We believe we can encourage this because Reeves is certainly willing, but we readers and bodybuilders must let the producer of the projected Doc Savage films know that Reeves is the only one who could play him. At the end of this article we shall give the producer’s address, so let’s all of us simply deluge him with letters! *MTI* is attempting through its own many channels to get national publicity for this important undertaking, but we need your support to make public feeling about Reeves’ popularity and talent known where it counts!

Denie was convinced that the voice and facial characteristics as well as the “square pectorals, wide shoulders, contoured head and mighty forearms” of Reeves were a perfect fit for the fictional hero’s casting.<sup>11</sup>

The next two issues of *Muscle Training Illustrated* featured more hyperbole on the success of Lurie, “our impresario of the sport,” in attracting Reeves to New York, and a series of interviews by Denie. Despite the sensational title, “The Truth & the Greatness” for the latter, Reeves revealed nothing extraordinary about himself and little that was not already known. He revealed, for instance, how he was cast for *Hercules*, that he had made enough money to retire at forty-five, that his wife was gorgeous, and that he was a horse enthusiast—not exactly a riveting personal expose. Likewise, his revelation that he no longer lifted weights must have been disappointing to *Muscle Training Illustrated* readers. “Working with weights is a discipline,” he said, “and I would rather do the things that are fun rather than disciplinarian.” This statement hardly coincided with Denie’s remark that “after Steve had gone home we all realized he left behind in his wake a storm of new inspiration and hope for today’s bodybuilding world.” These were perhaps the kind of misconstructions that annoyed Reeves most, the tendency of writers to make something out of nothing. Desperate for an interesting story about Hercules, some of them perpetuated “the opposite of what really happened.” About fifty percent of what was published on him in the 1950s was wrong. Despite the best efforts of the iron game rumor mill, Reeves lived a pretty normal existence. Denie concluded by reiterating *Muscle Training Illustrated*’s pitch for readers to encourage the producer of Doc Savage, George Pal, to give the starring role to Reeves.<sup>12</sup>

In part two of the interview, Steve talked about his current conditioning training, how he had met Aline, his modest education, his facial hair, and other desultory topics. When asked if he had any bad habits, he could think of none. He was never a drinker, disliked smoking, had a sound diet, and “never had any serious health problem.” Were it not for the fact that he was Steve Reeves, these pedestrian details would have been boring. Steve did admit that he was interested in the Doc Savage role. “I think that would be a challenge to me as an actor and, of course, an adventure to play.”<sup>13</sup> Indeed Lurie and Denie seemed to have reignited Reeves’ interest and confidence in reentering show business. He appeared



excited at the prospect. Unfortunately *Muscle Training Illustrated*, in the same issue, had to announce “to our deep regret” that ex-TV Tarzan, Ron Ely, not Steve, was chosen for the Doc Savage part.<sup>14</sup> Obviously a younger man was preferred. Undaunted, the indefatigable Lurie announced that he was “trying hard to lure Steve into actually posing for a WBBG show. . . Ah, to see Reeves pose again!”<sup>15</sup>

That Steve, nearly 50, would remount the posing dais and invite comparisons of how he had looked a quarter century earlier seemed highly unlikely. Nevertheless Lurie continued to capitalize on Reeves’ enduring appeal monthly by republishing pictures and recollections of his 1973 visit. Then Lurie learned that Columbia Pictures was casting for a new film entitled *Sindbad at the World’s End* and looking for a star that closely fit Steve’s attributes. “Armed with this knowledge and Denie’s wild enthusiasm I contacted the Reeves’ who, being informed of this, politely gave their permission to act in their behalf to find out everything about the venture.” Dan next got in touch with the head of Columbia’s European affiliate, Charles Schneer. Although subsequent negotiations proved abortive, Lurie remained convinced of Reeves’ marketability. “Many have believed Steve was finished working in films for some reason.” But “this is untrue. When the ‘Hercules Man’ wants to return he can name his own price, his own vehicle, and do it his way. The question is when? The screen waits. . . .”<sup>16</sup> In any case, it seemed to console Lurie that Steve had turned down several other parts and that “thousands of fans” were supposedly asking when he was going to reappear at a WBBG show. “Soon . . . we hope.”<sup>17</sup>

To facilitate such an arrangement and further tap the influence of other rich and famous personages for his movement, Lurie had devised the WBBG Hall of Fame. Formed in 1974, it had honored nine iron game notables—Bill Pearl, Peter Lupus, Bob Bednarski, Chris Dickerson, Joe Bonomo, Joe “Mighty Atom” Greenstein, Dave Draper, Johnny Weissmuller, and Buster Crabbe. For 1977, Lurie planned to induct five more—Mr. Universe Serge Nubret, wrestler Billy Graham, boxer Joe Louis, actor Sylvester Stallone, and Reeves—and to select new WBBG physique champions. Lurie took this opportunity (through his son Mark) to gloat over his accomplishments during the past decade in a *Muscle Training Illustrated* article entitled “Years of Conquest.” Each year WBBG successes were highlight-



In 1973 Steve Reeves came to New York City as Dan Lurie’s guest of honor at that year’s WBBG Pro Mr. America event. On that trip, he was interviewed by ABC’s Howard Cosell.

ed against a backdrop of events of national significance. Whether Harold Poole’s Pro-Mr. America victory was comparable to the Pueblo incident in 1968 or Boyer Coe’s winning the Pro-Mr. World title could be likened to the Mariner 9 space probe in 1971 were moot points. What was obvious to Mark was that the WBBG was “establishing a beachhead of its own importance for those who practice physical culture in times that try men’s minds.” But clearly the keystone event in these years of WBBG “conquest” was the Reeves visit in 1973, which took on an even greater significance and was likened to the Skylab docking mission of that year. “Dan Lurie accomplishes a docking mission of his own; that of reuniting the bodybuilding world with one of its super legends—Steve Reeves. Lurie accomplishes the impossible; he returns the retired Reeves to public life. . . and an audience nearly riots on the spot as they run on the stage to shake the hand of their most prominently recognized hero.”<sup>18</sup> With all due allowance for exaggeration, Lurie was making a significant contribution to the iron game. What he did not realize was that he was doing more to revive and preserve its past than building a future power base for himself as a promoter.

At the 1977 “Hall of Fame” testimonial dinner at New York’s Statler Hilton, Reeves was the center of the show. Even before Reeves was introduced Graham, in accepting his own award, was carried away by the nostalgia of the moment and shocked the audience by stating

I’d rather be here with Steve Reeves today than with any man alive, even President Jimmy Carter, or King Hussein, or anybody in the



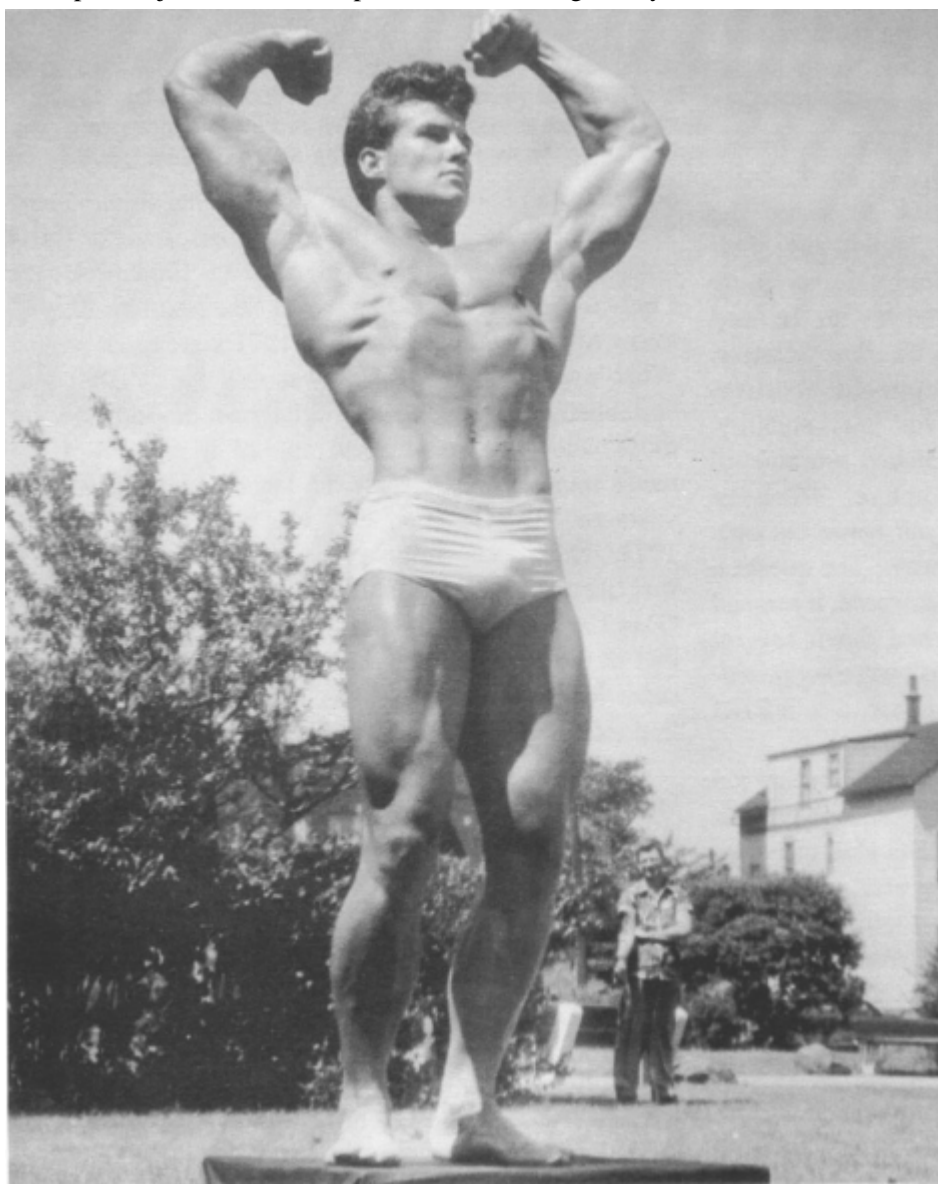
world. I mean there is no other man in bodybuilding—not Arnold Schwarzenegger, and my respects to Serge Nubret sitting here—but Steve Reeves started it all. Steve Reeves is God!

Steve and his wife were understandably embarrassed by this outburst of spontaneity and emotion. Indeed the formal tribute to Reeves by television personality Alan Burke paled by comparison, and Steve's response to the accolades he was receiving was humble and restrained—hardly befitting God! Still the audience was uplifted just to be in the presence of this legendary

hero. Denie reported that:

as Steve tried to leave after signing autographs at the conclusion for the dinner, for over a half hour, it was found next to impossible to get him out of the room. When they would take him to one exit people would run after him and good-naturedly he would sign. Dan Lurie would break Steve away, move him up behind the banquet table toward the other exits, and 'whammo' . . . wall to wall people again. Steve was literally chased from one corner to the next with cameras, autograph pads, and handshakes. The most amazing spectacle this author has ever witnessed. Perhaps Billy Graham was right, at least from a bodybuilding standpoint. Thanks, Dan, for letting us dine with 'Hercules' and all the rest.<sup>19</sup>

Later Steve traveled to shows conducted by Nubret's World Amateur Bodybuilding Association in Paris and Madrid where he received further awards as "The World's Most Classic Physique" and "The World's Most Popular Bodybuilder." Lurie also took credit for these accolades inasmuch as it was he who had brought Reeves out of retirement. "Bodybuilders everywhere are indebted to Dan Lurie for his dedication to our sport, and his persuasiveness in bringing the great Steve Reeves into the spotlight again—thereby inspiring thousands more to follow the example he has set."<sup>20</sup> And when Steve was honored by the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports for his "Outstanding Contributions" at the annual awards dinner of the Downtown Athletic Club (DAC) in 1978, Lurie was there to share the limelight. Steve Reeves was now "The Man with the Power."<sup>21</sup>



One of the rarely seen Reeves' photos in our archives is this informal outdoor shot by Ken Ryan. Except that the model is the godlike Reeves, this looks like a family photo.



By the early 1980s it was the DAC, home of the Heisman trophy, that was taking the lead in honoring physical culture greats at its September banquets. Rudy Riska, DAC Athletic Director and former pitcher for the New York Yankees, established the annual Steve Reeves Award in 1981 for the person who had made the greatest contribution to the nation's fitness. Jack LaLanne was the second recipient in 1982, and as the principals lined up for an official photograph, Lurie and his son Mark squeezed into the middle of the picture. Notwithstanding his brashness, organizers of the affair realized how much they owed to Lurie for popularizing fitness award galas and for rediscovering Reeves. According to 1962 Mr. America Joe Abbenda, who reported the festivities, Lurie looked "great" and received "a tremendous ovation" when introduced to the audience. "He tells me that he is back in heavy training every morning, I think he is secretly getting ready for the PLATFORM. 'Watch out' Uncle Joe, the Sealtest Muscle Man is coming back." Steve Reeves also "looked in magnificent shape," observed Abbenda, "and every bit of the superstar that he is." In his tribute to LaLanne, Reeves called him the "Godfather of Fitness" and, according to Abbenda, recalled how "Jack personally helped him in his teens when Steve used to go to the Jack LaLanne Spa in Oakland . . . Everyone there realized the unforgettable moments of having these men together. They both influenced the fitness field in their own ways. Steve brought it to the screen and Jack took it to your home."<sup>22</sup>

During the remainder of the 1980s, Steve's connections with Lurie diminished and the honors bestowed upon him subsided somewhat, but his reputation as an iron game icon was secure. In great part through the untiring efforts of Lurie, this otherwise reclusive personality was rescued from obscurity. Unquestionably these endeavors were also part of a larger scheme of self-promotion to boost Lurie and his organization, enabling them to share in the recognition of this former box office idol. Sealtest Dan was a showman and to some extent an exhibitionist, and some of his initiatives did not always coincide with the good taste and refinement that so characterized Reeves in his later years. Reeves and Lurie were opposites, yet they provided strength and sustenance to each other at critical junctures in their respective lives.

What then was the appeal for Reeves, who had wealth, comfort, and happiness in two homes, to accept

Lurie's offers? In part, he probably felt a sense of nostalgia for his bodybuilding roots and a desire to repay his fans for their generosity over the years. He may also have had a little too much time on his hands. But there is a possible deeper motivation that enabled Lurie to carry out his rediscovery. A cue is provided in Robert Kennedy's 1982 article in *Muscle Training Illustrated* entitled "Is the Steve Reeves Physique Dead?" Kennedy contends that when Steve burst upon the bodybuilding scene in the 1940s he was regarded as the "perfect specimen" because of his "incredible physical proportions. . . No one could touch him for looks. He had definition, size and shape. He had broad shoulders, narrow hips and a waspish waist. Both his forearms and calves . . . were fully developed." In Reeves' heyday muscles had to fit the frame and look right on the person. After several decades of competitive bodybuilding, emphasis had changed from proportion to size (muscle stacking) and definition in the 1980s champion.

I suppose like the passing of time, it is both regrettable and incredible, especially for those of us who knew the Reeves' physique during the middle of this century, to realize that Steve Reeves could not even win a state title today. He would have difficulty qualifying to even enter the Mr. America contest and would certainly be left out of the biggies such as the Mr. Universe or the Olympia.<sup>23</sup>

Although Kennedy barely mentions it, steroids and the ubiquitous drug culture undoubtedly were the most potent factors in this transformation of physiques in the 1960s and 1970s. These innovations, accompanied by seismic changes in American society during the Vietnam War era, influenced not only the way that Reeves' physique was assessed but how he was perceived and received as an actor by the general public. He was no longer a desired commodity at the box office not because he was a few years older or any less talented but because society had changed. The new realism of the 1970s, featuring gratuitous sex, foul language, drugs, vulgarity, and violence, flew directly against the values of the high-minded, clean-living Reeves. Steve personified qualities that were redolent of an earlier era. when America was captivated by onscreen images of the likes of Mario Lanza, Esther Williams, Tab Hunter, and the Nelson family. Reeves had epitomized the image of the perfect man and, perhaps more than any other major figure, represented the opposite of what bodybuilding and the motion picture industry was moving towards.



For Steve, however, the ego investment in both of his careers over the previous three decades had been great, and it could not have been easy for him to adapt to this departure from his value system. It is hardly surprising that he sought escape to his Alps retreat and west coast ranches. It was not the first time he had experienced untoward circumstances, and he had developed considerable coping skills. "My philosophy of life is one of adaptation," he told his latest biographer, "to be able to function regardless of your means in life." Chris LeClaire concluded that "in later years, facing disappointments in his bodybuilding career and challenges in Hollywood, these beliefs, formed in childhood, would sustain him."<sup>24</sup> It was fortuitous that in the mid-life crisis Steve encountered in the early 1970s he received succor from an unexpected quarter. In his autobiography, Reeves credits Lurie with the first two of the nineteen bodybuilding awards he received after retirement. Although he never returned to the posing platform or played Doc Savage, Hercules was rescued by Sealtest Dan from lapsing into comfortable seclusion. Ironically Lurie's organization and magazine ran their course by the mid-1990s and Lurie himself faded into obscurity.

But he left a lasting legacy. Lurie's recognition of Reeves in 1973 proved to be the catalyst for a series of Hall of Fame type events that occurred in succeeding years and decades. As Lurie had done, the Downtown Athletic Club eventually abandoned its annual awards banquets. In the meantime, a new tradition of honoring physical culture greats was instigated by Vic Boff and his Association of Oldtime Barbell & Strongmen in the 1980s. Although Vic is quick to point out that his organization's annual reunion/dinners developed out of annual birthday celebrations for Siegmund Klein, they reveal a striking similarity to those conducted a decade earlier by Lurie and the DAC, both of which were attended by Boff.<sup>25</sup> In 1988 the Oldtime Barbell and Strongmen Association honored Steve Reeves as "one of the most popular physique champions of all time."<sup>26</sup> Boff's organization perpetuates the spirit of Steve Reeves that inspired the relatively recent tradition of paying formal tribute to iron game heroes. Long may it "carry on"!

## Notes

1. The foremost sources on Reeves' life are his own *Building the Classic Physique the Natural Way* (Calabasas, California, 1995), and Chris LeClaire's, *Worlds to Conquer: Steve Reeves* (South Chatham, Massachusetts, 1999). Also see Milton T. Moore's *Steve Reeves: A Tribute* (privately printed, 1989).

2. By 1980 Lurie claimed 25,000 members on his WBBG roster. "Dan Lurie: The Champion Maker," *Muscle Training Illustrated* (Summer, 1980), 6.

3. "A Hercules for Another Time," *Chicago Tribune*, May 12, 2000. For other obituary accounts see Rick Lyman, "Steve Reeves, 74, Whose 'Hercules' Began a Genre," *New York Times*, May 5, 2000, and Gene Mosee, "Steve Reeves Ascends from Legendary Superstar to Bodybuilding Immortality," *Iron Man*, 59 (August, 2000), 174-176, 178, 181-182 and 184.

4. Earle Liederman, "The Magnificent Steve Reeves," *MTI*, 3 (March, 1967), 27.

5. "Muscle Happenings," *ibid.*, 16 (October, 1968) 12.

6. Dick Falcon, "Jim Haislop: The Greatest Mr. America Since Steve Reeves," *ibid.*, 22 (December, 1969), 29.

7. Robert Kennedy, "Steve Reeves, He Knew What He Wanted . . . And Got It!" *ibid.*, 24 (December, 1970), 60.

8. Milton T. Moore, Jr., "Milestones in the Life of Steve Reeves," *ibid.*, 28 (August, 1971), 26-27, and *ibid.*, 32 (April/May, 1972), 33-35.

9. Denie, "Steve Reeves is Alive and Well," *ibid.*, 33 (July, 1972), 58-59.

10. Nat Haber, "A Dream Fulfilled," *ibid.*, 41 (January, 1974), 5 and 61.

11. Denie, "Steve Reeves is Doc Savage!" *ibid.*, 22-23.

12. Denie, "Reeves: The Truth & the Greatness," *ibid.*, 42 (March, 1974) 22.

13. Denie, "Reeves: Part 2," *ibid.*, 43 (May, 1974) 19 and 66.

14. "Star Talk," *ibid.*, 9.

15. Dan Lurie, "How to Get Calves Like Steve Reeves," *ibid.*, 41.

16. Dan Lurie, "Jones, Reeves, Ferrigno . . . and *Sports Illustrated*," *ibid.*, 48 (May, 1975), 62.

17. "Star Talk," *ibid.*, 49 (July, 1975), 9.

18. Mark [Lurie], "WBBG: Years of Conquest," *ibid.*, 62 (September, 1977), 11, 57-59.

19. Denie, "Dynamite Within These Walls," *ibid.*, 65 (March, 1978), 17, 57, 59 and 62.

20. "Star Talk," *ibid.*, 67 (June, 1978), 6.

21. Denie, "The Man with the Power," *ibid.*, 69 (August, 1978), 12-13, and "Part II," *ibid.*, 70 (October, 1978), 8.

22. Joe Abbenda, "Jack LaLanne—Godfather of Fitness," *ibid.*, 103 (December, 1982), 18 and 60. Later, however, Reeves explained that during his early days in Oakland, he chose to work out at Ed Yaricks gym, rather than LaLanne's, because it was much closer to his home. LeClaire, *Worlds to Conquer*, p. 37.

23. Robert Kennedy, "Is the Steve Reeves Physique Dead?" *MTI*, 100 (August, 1982), 7-8.

24. LeClaire, *Worlds to Conquer*, p. 24.

25. Interview with Vic Boff, Coral Gables, Florida, August 8, 2000.

26. AOBs Membership Letter, August 18, 1988, in author's possession.



# Finally Meeting the Man

by Lou Mezzanotte

It was not until the 1997 AAU Mr. America that I was finally able to realize a personal ambition and meet the man whose physique launched me on my own lifelong quest for strength and health. When I arrived at the contest, Steve Reeves was seated outside the auditorium where the pre-judging was taking place. He was busily shaking hands and signing autographs. I was immediately struck by his youthful appearance, and how massive he still looked for a man his age—positively huge. You never equate Reeves with forearms, probably because of his overall symmetry, but his forearms were incredible. As big if not bigger than any I had ever seen, and that includes Pearl, Sipes and Grimek.

I waited for the crowd to thin out before approaching him. When the moment came to finally shake his hand in person, it was like renewing a friendship with someone I had known all my life. Steve had an easygoing manner about him. I talked “training” with Steve a bit and asked him about a photograph I had seen of him where he is doing a deadlift, but instead of holding the bar, he is gripping the rims of the old-style 45-pound Olympic plates. Over the years, I had read that Steve used this exercise to widen his lats. Not so, said Steve. He indicated that when he trained at the old York Barbell Club for the Mr. Universe in 1950, everyone at the gym was encouraged to come up with an odd feat of strength others could try, so that little competitions could be held. Steve came up with that particular one. He said that no one was able to lift more than he did in this particular movement, and he wasn’t sure if it was because he was stronger than everyone else in this movement, or if his long reach gave him an advantage. Steve was able to do around 400 pounds in this manner.

Of course, I also asked Steve about calf-work and the proper way to do a calf raise, even though I had been doing them for 30 years and knew there were no secrets to be gleaned. But how many opportunities does one have to ask the “master” himself about calf training! Steve very patiently put his hand on the table where he



Although strength was not as important to Reeves as was development, in 1950 he showed the York Barbell gang one of his stunts. The weight shown above is less than the 400 pounds he could lift.

was sitting and simulated the exercise with his fingers emphasizing the need to come up as high as possible on the big toe. Then he looked at me with a straight face and said, “Of course, you’ll never have calves like mine.” The understatement of the year! We both laughed. I found that Steve had a sense of humor, too.

That evening at the Mr. America show, Steve was given another award for his contributions to the sport. He was decked out in a suit that made his already wide shoulders look even wider. No padding needed here! As I left the auditorium, my last glimpse of Steve was of him talking with fans and signing autographs, with that same easy manner. As I drifted out with the crowd into the summer evening air, I remembered back to the days when I trained in my folks’ basement with Steve’s picture up on the wall providing most of the inspiration. I never came close to emulating his impossibly perfect physique, of course, but I have been training for 30 some odd years now thanks in large part to Steve’s inspiration. I still maintain a high degree of strength and, more importantly at age 52, health. Many thanks, Steve. Rest in Peace.



# Steve Reeves: A Lifetime of Inspiration

by: Dr. Ken “Leo” Rosa

As I look on my life so far, I said so far, it's inescapable that I have been privileged to have known and interacted with several icons in various fields of endeavor. Each has left indelible effects on countless numbers of lives. In bodybuilding Steve Reeves was one of those unforgettable figures.

Mine was a generation whose childhood and adolescent years were influenced by comic books with heroically muscular, always handsome superheroes and by Saturday afternoon action movie serials. Our steady diet was feature films with leading men named Tyrone Power, Clark Gable, and Robert Taylor, who were famous for their uncommon good looks. They all had soft looking, unimpressive physiques, however. It was what Hollywood wanted, at that time.

During a summer long ago the boy that was me went on what had become a monthly pilgrimage to a news stand at the junction of Westchester and Prospect Avenues in the Bronx, New York. There it was. The August 1947 issue of the magazine *Strength & Health*. It cost 20¢. On the cover was the blurb, “Meet The New Mr. America.” The cover photograph in brilliant color was of a muscular young man striking a front double biceps pose. That was the first time I had ever seen or heard of Steve Reeves. The issue was replete with photographs of the Mr. America competition. Steve Reeves and another impressive young newcomer with amazing arms, Eric Pedersen, were the two most outstanding contenders. The struggle for supremacy between Pedersen and Reeves was close and so difficult for the judges to determine that a pioneer posedown was necessary. The victor was Steve Reeves.

Nineteen forty-seven was a couple of years after the end of World War Two. We had fabulous neighborhood movie theaters where for 24¢ a kid could see two full length feature films, a newsreel and cartoons. On special weeknights there were stage shows, too. So I went to the RKO Franklin one Wednesday evening and, to my astonishment, part of the stage show was the new



Mr. America, Steve Reeves, doing his posing routine. He was actually here, right where I lived. Almost unbelievable. I was about to enter the impressionable years of adolescence and indeed I was impressed. At that time my training was with steel cables in the cellar of our home after school. After I saw Steve Reeves in person, however, the cellar training with cables was no longer good enough. With finances provided by my mother I joined the Bronx Union YMCA. Charles A. Smith was the weight training instructor. In Bronx Union I quickly learned that the Steve Reeves physique had set a new standard to which adolescent, fledgling bodybuilders like me were now aspiring. It was not enough to develop an outstanding physique. Would-be future Mister winners, to the delight of their mothers, now were paying attention to their grooming, seeking as best they could to achieve some degree of the Steve Reeves sensational good looks. The idea was to become an Adonis endowed with splendor of physique, flawless pompadour and imagined good looks, all of which rendered us totally irresistible to the girls of summer on Orchard Beach. Or so we hoped.

Nineteen forty-seven. Siegmund Klein's New York City show with Klein himself posing as well as John Farbotnik, Pudgy Stockton, John Grimek and Steve Reeves. I was seated near the very back of the auditorium. I heard some conversation behind me. I looked around. There were two arena workers also looking around and to my wide-eyed amazement the new Mr. America was standing there in a tan trench coat, hands in his pockets. Steve Reeves, tall, with incredibly wide shoulders, and a small waist. He looked like the 1940s Superman. He looked like a movie star, a leading man but with a fantastic physique. Yes, I was entering those impressionable years and I was very impressed.

Looking back, 1947 was an interesting year. The sensational 21 year-old Reeves was crowned Mr. America and across the ocean a boy named Arnold was born.



It seemed likely that Hollywood would be eager to propel this super-handsome new Mr. America into movie stardom. But this was the late 1940s and the Hollywood of that time just did not share our admiration of a well proportioned, muscular physique. In fact, Hollywood preferred to cling to the old brainless muscleman myth. Hollywood wanted their leading men to be muscle-less. It would take almost thirty more years before that would change. One wonders what might have happened if the young Steve Reeves had come along in 1975.

Hollywood did cast Steve in a mediocre movie called *Athena* at the beginning of the 1950s. It was not a compliment to him at all. Steve then had another not very auspicious part in the Broadway play *Kismet*. He was now Mr. America and Mr. Universe but Hollywood still did not see the potential in this well-built, handsome young man.

Hollywood of the early 1950s did not appreciate Steve Reeves but fortunately Italy did. A producer named Joseph E. Levine recognized Steve's box office potential and the young bodybuilder was cast as Hercules in several movies filmed in Italy. The Europeans, Italians in particular, loved him. Bodybuilders in the U.S.A. eagerly went to see the Hercules movies. The success of these films motivated several American bodybuilders to try their luck in the Italian films, and they crossed the ocean for just that purpose. Among them were Lou Degni and Leroy Colbert. The leading man image was in a process of change. It was Steve Reeves who was the catalyst. It was Steve Reeves whose name became synonymous with muscles to the general public.

During the 1960s I was employed in one of New York City's top of the line nightclubs, the Chateau Madrid, and movie star Ava Gardner was a regular visitor whenever she was in town. In the Chateau Madrid I was sitting directly across a table from Ava Gardner one night when she asked me to join her. She was the most breathtakingly beautiful woman I have ever seen. She was so beautiful that I had to avert my gaze as I spoke with her lest she perceive how totally captivated I was. Just as there is feminine beauty there is masculine beauty and Steve Reeves represented its pinnacle in sharp contrast to the disgustingly ugly, pathologically grotesque steroid freaks of today.

In 1985 I attended the Steve Reeves Special Awards Dinner at New York City's Downtown Athletic

Club. The award recipients were Ms Olympia, the stunning Rachel McLish and Olympic star Rafer Johnson. In attendance, among others, were Mr. Nostalgia, Joe Franklin and his athletic radio sidekick, Richie Ornstein. That night I observed Steve Reeves as he entered the spacious room and made his way to the dais. He still had that dynamic Reeves stride. He still had the wide shoulders and small waist. He was still a handsome, heroic-looking man. In fact, I thought he was even more impressive in maturity. There was a new look of dignity which youth doesn't have. I shook hands with Steve. His large hands and firm grip were impressive.

Nineteen eighty-eight was the year that Steve Reeves was honored by the Association of Oldtime Barbell and Strongmen, again in New York City's Downtown Athletic Club, home of the Heisman Trophy. John Grimek presented the special award. Steve looked like an athletic superhero. He displayed that beaming Steve Reeves smile more than I had ever seen before. Weightlifters and bodybuilders alike jostled for position to be able to speak to Steve, shake his hand, get his autograph.

Nineteen ninety-four in England, when Steve Reeves was inducted into the Oscar Heidenstam Memorial Hall of Fame was the last time I saw him. He still looked impressive. A bit older but vigorous. There were attendees from England, U.S.A., Belgium, France, Holland, and Scotland. Most amazing was the large number of Steve's loyal fans from Italy who made the trip to see their hero. I was given the privilege of speaking briefly at the beginning of the proceedings. Steve was seated a few feet away from me at the dais. At last, a long-awaited opportunity to share with Steve and the audience my boyhood impressions of seeing the 21 year-old new Mr. America in 1947. Back then it would never have occurred to me that I would be doing this 47 years later. Fans lined up patiently in front of the dais to receive Steve's autograph and since I thought it appropriate, I played music from *Kismet* on the grand piano.

There will always be individuals so immersed in negativity that they project it onto everyone around them. They bemoan and criticize the fact that Steve could not match Paul Anderson's strength. Or John Davis. Or Marvin Eder's. The reality is that he didn't have to do that. All he had to do was to be what he was. An inspiration. An icon. One of the greatest natural bodybuilders of all time. *Natural*.



# STEVE REEVES

## DAZZLED THE WORLD

**Malcolm Whyatt, Oscar Heidenstam Foundation Archivist and Historian**

The phone rang on Monday 1st May 2000, and a voice of despair said those fateful words, "Steve died a few hours ago." How could that be!? Reeves the magnificent, the ultimate idol who inspired so many! Reeves, who surpassed the beauty of the statues of Michelangelo's "David" and the Farnese Hercules and that of the immortal Sandow. The sensational news was met with an almost total disbelief by the whole world of bodybuilding.

Steve Reeves was "IT." There are many stars but he was a supernova who, in bodybuilding terms, transcended all those before him and since. From head to foot Steve Reeves was superlative. "If you are a miracle of beauty, you can't help it. That's why you are so immensely applauded for it". (John Ayscough, *Levia-Pendera*.)

When discussing the merits of the ideal physique, mention the name of Steve Reeves, and I can think of no other person who causes so many grown men to go misty-eyed. Show a photograph of Reeves to the uninitiated and you have an instant convert.

What was Reeves really like? He was magnanimous. After the Oscar Heidenstam Foundation had honored Grimek in 1992, I received a very courteous letter from Steve, suggesting that if sometime in the future we were considering him, then first we might wish to consider a British bodybuilder.

In 1994 Steve was inducted into the Oscar Heidenstam Foundation "Hall of Fame." When he walked into the banqueting room his presence didn't require an announcement; the atmosphere was nuclear fusion! There he was, aged 68, attending his first public engagement in England since winning the first NABBA

Mr Universe title back in 1950. He was as handsome as ever, remarkably so, and he exuded class.

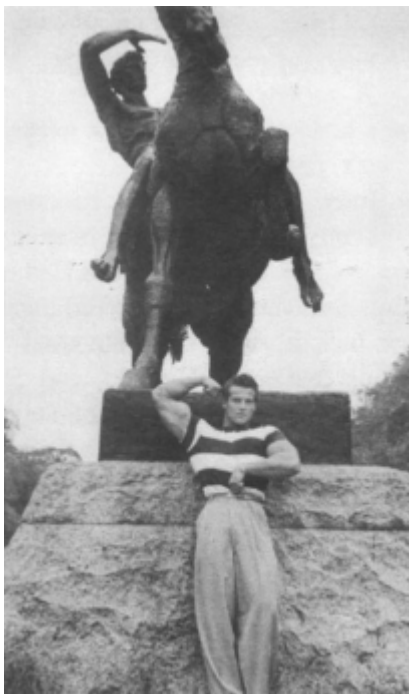
In 1959 Reeves was voted the biggest box office star in the world, for his title role in *Hercules*. His film career is of course well documented but probably not so well known is that during the filming of *The Last Days of Pompeii* he dislocated his shoulder when his chariot crashed into a tree. Without fuss, he manipulated it back into place (not the tree!) and resumed filming. Steve

retired from acting in 1969. He actually refused the role in *A Fistful of Dollars* which later went to a relatively unknown actor (at the time), Clint Eastwood.

Paradoxically, Steve was rather shy, preferring privacy; he chose his friends carefully. However, in a small group, he was always relaxed and very amusing. We last met in 1998 at a barbecue party, organized for Steve's family and friends by his close friends George and Tuesday Coates. Over a pint, we were all ears as the conversation drifted to his current training. At the age of 72, he was fit and healthy, and his biceps were truly rock hard! Steve regularly walked miles and cycled even more; it was not unusual for him to be seen on his bike 45 miles from his ranch in Valley Center, California. He loved his purebred Morgan horses, indeed he appreciated all things of beauty and never more so

than when riding with Deborah in the solitude of his other ranch in Montana. Steve also had an affinity with the Egyptian Pyramids. He often expressed his admiration for their timeless majesty. Indeed, Steve Reeves is a pyramid among the immortals.

His ashes were scattered on his Montana ranch, and his headstone will be a pyramid.



Here, Reeve's rigid, somewhat inartistic pose is in sharp contrast with London's famous statue, "Physical Energy."





In 1977, *Muscle Mag International* publisher Bob Kennedy asked a variety of iron game notables to pay tribute to Steve Reeves' legacy on the occasion of Reeves' 50th birthday. Excerpts from their comments are included in boldface below, along with just a few of the letters and tributes we received from our readers. We thank Bob Kennedy for permission to reprint these, and thank the many loyal *IGH* readers who sent us their personal memories of Steve. We also thank Deborah Engelhorn Reeves for permission to reprint many of the photographs of Steve contained in this issue.

We'd also like to let our readers know that there are two excellent sources for further information about Steve Reeves and his life. Chris LeClaire collaborated with Reeves on an authorized biography called, *Steve Reeves: Worlds to Conquer*. It's a wonderfully illustrated look at Reeves' bodybuilding and movie careers. To purchase, send \$35.00 to: Chris LeClaire at P. O. Box 116, South Chatham, MA 02659. *IGH* readers may also be interested in the official Reeves fan club—the Steve Reeves International Society. It publishes a quarterly magazine, *Classic Physique*, and can be reached at P. O. Box 2625, Malibu, CA 90265. A membership, which includes the magazine, is only \$25.00 a year in the USA and \$35.00 in other countries.

Finally, we apologize for the delay since our last issue. It took several of our authors longer than usual to submit their pieces and then, as we began the layout process of the magazine, our computers became infected with the MTX virus. It took two visits by technicians to get the machine working properly again and after that problem was solved we discovered we had to go back in and restore many files that had become damaged. However, in partial payment for your patience, we've made this issue 44 pages long. We feel that both Steve and our readers deserve the eight pages of extra effort.

—Jan and Terry Todd



**It was the Reeves movies more than anything else that inspired my training in the late 50s and early 60s. His films also marked the beginning of the public acceptance of bodybuilding**

—Frank Zane

**Dear *IGH*:**

Terry's piece on Reeves in the May/June 2000 *Iron Game History* was a beautifully written tribute! Doreen and I read it aloud to each other, pausing at the elegant passages, wiping away a tear or two, and just smiling in appreciation and gratitude that you folks are there doing what you do so well! So little is reported on our heroes in the national press, so little accord is given to the lifetimes spent in pursuit of our sport . . . I sincerely hope that Steve Reeves is happy wherever he is, but I am certain he knew that all of his achievements were on record and part of the Iron Game attic at UT and that his history would be in good hands.

**Spencer Maxcy  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**



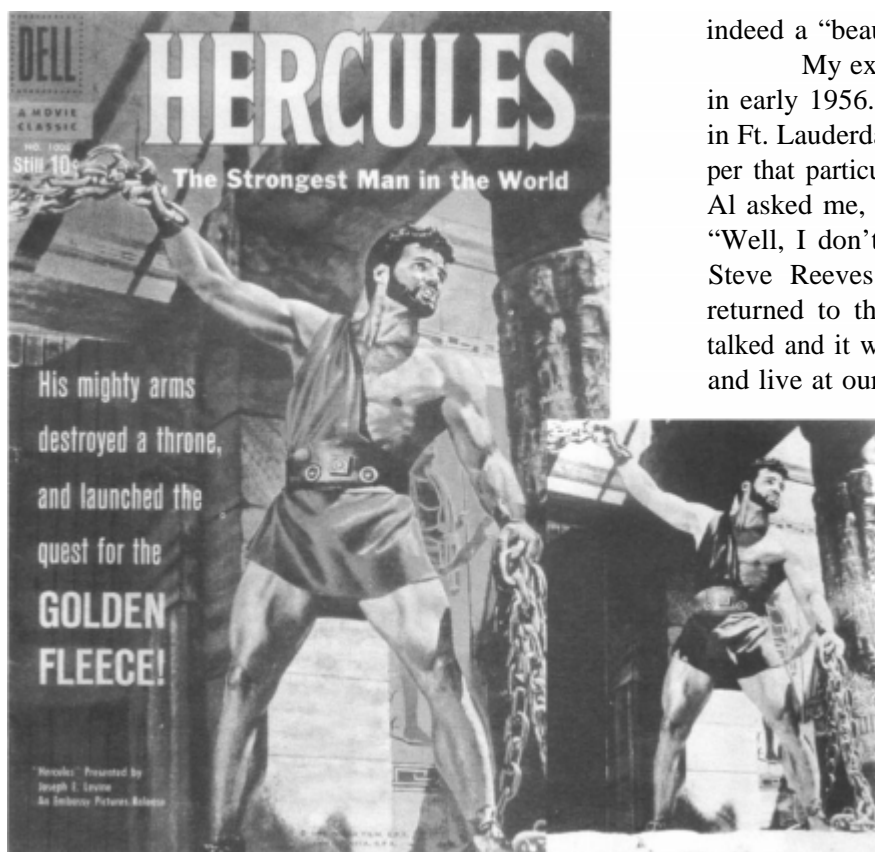
**The greatest compliment I could ever pay any man is the way Steve made me feel the first time I ever met him; I could not stand being in the same room with him! He made me feel totally inadequate as a bodybuilder . . . Steve was Michelangelo's concept of the perfectly formed man!**

—Vince Gironda

**Dear *IGH*:**

I knew Steve from the 1940s prior to his Mr. America win. Steve was long recognized as a great champion and made a tremendous contribution to physical fitness. His "Hercules" of the screen influenced millions of people to become healthy and physically oriented. Steve had an ideal physique and never bragged about his achievements in bodybuilding or the film





This publicity photo of Steve Reeves was artistically reproduced in color on the cover on a Dell comic book published in conjunction with the release of *Hercules*.

world. He was a very humble person. His personality projected an image of what people actually thought about him. Because of his Hercules fame, he influenced millions of young people with his clean living and clean thoughts. And he was a great role model for all the kids of America. His star in the world of physical culture will shine forever alongside those of his great contemporaries.

**Vic Boff, President  
Oldtime Barbell & Strongmen Association**



**We used to wonder what it would be like to be like  
Reeves—the best looking, best built man God has  
ever created.**

**—Larry Scott**

**Dear IGH:**

I am so pleased you are going to devote your entire magazine next time to Steve Reeves. He was

indeed a “beautiful gentleman.”

My ex-husband Al and I first encountered Steve in early 1956. He unexpectedly showed up at our gym in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. When Al came home for supper that particular night, someone walked in behind him. Al asked me, “Do you know who this is?” I answered, “Well, I don’t know who he is, but he looks just like Steve Reeves.” Steve stayed for supper and then returned to the gym with Al. During the evening we talked and it was mutually agreed that Steve would come and live at our home for awhile. It seems Steve and his wife, Sandra Smith, were separated and getting a divorce. When that was finalized Sandra drove off with her belongings in her Volkswagen across county to California.

Steve then settled in at our home for the next several months. We introduced him to the islands off Florida—Nassau in the Bahamas, and the Caribbean. The natives down there knew of him and he was constantly stopped on the sidewalk to sign autographs, and snap photos. He was having a great time and was most congenial to everyone. Steve, Al and I and all our close friends had a great time socializing or just sitting at home watch-

ing TV. He was also working out quite hard and made great gains at that particular time. Eventually he left in his Karman Ghia for the West Coast.

I must tell you about one important incident that

Steve played a great part in. We had two little boys and I was expecting a third child in the fall. Our driveway was on a steep upward slant beside the house. In those days nobody locked their cars. One Sunday afternoon we were all in the living room just relaxing after lunch, and Steve just happened to glance out the window and saw our station wagon rolling backwards down the drive. He leaped up and ran outside and stopped the vehicle just as it was crossing the road and saved our two little guys, before Al and I could even get there.

Guess I better quit here as I am sure you will be receiving lots of info from other folks that he encountered through out his life. This family is most saddened at Steve’s passing. It seems impossible that he would succumb to anything.

**Vera Hope Christensen  
Las Vegas, NV**





**I can remember the first time I saw Steve. It was 1952 at Leo Stern's Gym. I was never so impressed with a male in my life.**

—Bill Pearl

**Dear IGH:**

Thanks for your tribute issue to Steve Reeves. In 1949, I introduced Steve to Mario Lanza, while we worked out in Santa Monica on Muscle Beach. Steve loved classical music and Lanza's voice. Lanza, who loved to use weights, loved to be around Steve Reeves. They had a great feeling for one another.

Many years later, in 1957, both Steve and Mario were making films at the same studio in Italy (the Ciuecitta Studio). They were able to renew their friendship in Italy. A lot of people may not know this, but Steve was a very sensitive person; for a hobby he wrote poetry and listened to classical music.

Also wanted to let you know that the Venice Beach Chamber of Commerce and the Department of Parks and Recreation recently held an event, produced and emceed by Bill Howard. Thousands of people were present, and the Award was a gold-plated American Eagle that said, "Spirit of Muscle Beach Award, presented to Terry Robinson, in recognition for your many years of service to the sport, the art form and lifestyle of Bodybuilding. July 4, 2000." Previous winners include Harold Zinkin, Steve Reeves, Jack LaLanne, and Abbye (Pudgy) Stockton.

It's great to be able to inspire others to keep developing their bodies and minds. I've been encouraging people for over 60 years now.

**Terry Robinson  
Los Angeles, CA**



**Steve Reeves was the first man that was responsible for getting bodybuilding to the general public through his films. He did a hell of a job with it and was a good actor and should get a lot of credit for putting bodybuilding where it is today.**

—Arnold Schwarzenegger

**Dear IGH,**

First of all, it's hard to believe that you've been doing this for over a decade now, right? I just realized this when recently receiving a Xerox copy of *IGH* volume I number 1. It really has been a blessing, especially with so many of the old folks like Perry Rader, Bob Hoffman, John Grimek, Vince Gironda, and now, Steve Reeves gone from this world.

Your last issue, which has as the lead story the report of Reeves' death makes me recall meeting him about five years ago at a movie fan convention here in Chicago. It was promoted by a guy named Bud Courts, who holds such shows all over the country. They have many celebs and a whole lot of venders selling videos, photos, lobby cards, etc. Well, here I was, walking along with my head sort of down, looking at the merchandise available, when I noticed that whoever's table this was, he had an awful lot of Steve Reeves photos. Well, finally these old eyes of mine looked up and there was Mr. Reeves, himself, in the flesh! Needless to say, I quickly obtained an autographed photo (one of those from the series taken by Lanza) and did some chatting. Steve was a man of 70 yet he had the vitality of a 30 year-old, and looked great.

Once again, thanks for *Iron Game History*. And keep up the good work! With the quality of the publication, and the information, you'd think you'd have hundreds or thousands of Patron subscribers.

**John T. (Red) Ryan  
Chicago, Illinois**



**Steve Reeves was directly responsible for my career in motion pictures. Steve opened the door for me (and other bodybuilder/actors) with his success as Hercules in Italy in the late fifties.**

—Brad Harris



**We are saddened to report that weightlifting great Doug Hepburn, the 1953 World Champion, passed away at age 74. Hepburn died of complications resulting from a perforated gastric ulcer. A memorial service was held on December 9, 2000, in Vancouver, British Columbia, his hometown.**



# STEVE REEVES: MY ROLE MODEL

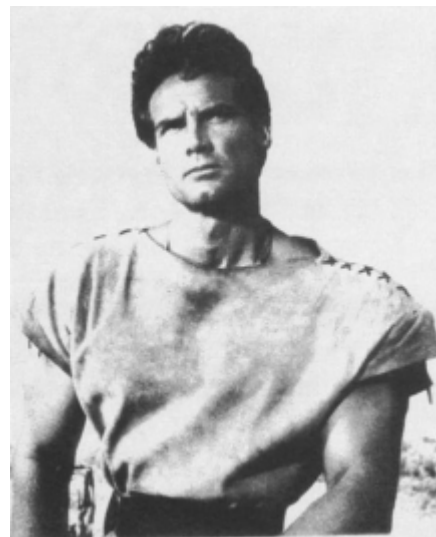
By Grover L. Porter, Ph.D.

**“Steve Reeves was the male ideal of physical perfection.”**

—Joe Weider, “A Giant Legacy,” *Flex* (August 2000).

**“Steve Reeves was the greatest bodybuilder of the pre-steroid era.”**

—Harrison Pope, Jr., M.D., Katherine Phillips, M.D., Roberto Olivardia, Ph.D.,  
*The Adonis Complex*, New York: Free Press (2000).



Still photo from *Duel of the Titans*, 1962.

“Steve Reeves, Mr. America—1947” read the brief comments adjacent to a small photo of the contest winner in the *Nashville Tennessean* [June 30, 1947]. A few weeks later I saw another photo of the new “Mr. America” and a few short comments about “AAU’s Ideal Man” in *Life* [July 14, 1947]. However, neither of these publications answered the question as to how he became the best-built man in all creation.

Our family would usually take a break from the daily grind of farm work and go to town—Lafayette, Tennessee—on Saturday. One Saturday afternoon while waiting to go to the movies, I was looking at magazines on the newsstand at the local drug store. There I saw a photo of Steve Reeves gracing the cover of *Muscle Power* [October 1947]. I spent my entire weekly allowance of 25 cents to purchase that magazine. Since I had no money left for my usual Saturday entertainment—movie, popcorn, cola—I spent that hot afternoon sitting in our car reading about how weight-training could turn me into a “Mr. Somebody” too.

I was inspired by my first visual encounter with the godlike Steve Reeves. He became “my role model” and motivated me to be the best I could be. I never won a physique contest but I later became the first member of our family to earn a college degree. And, I attribute my successful academic career to the inspiration and motivation my encounter with “Mr. America” gave me. Like millions of other men, my life was forever changed for the better because of Steve Reeves!

I didn’t have the money to buy a barbell at the time, therefore I made my first barbell using a bar from an old car and two five-gallon buckets filled with con-

crete. With that crude barbell and a two-part bodybuilding program written by Peary Rader and published in *Your Physique* [November, 1947, December 1947], I began transforming myself from a fat teenager into a muscular teenager. More importantly, the Apollo physique I was developing contributed to a geometric increase in my self-esteem. Thus, I naively thought that I could achieve whatever my mind could conceive and believe.

I lost the fat and gained some muscle during the summer of 1947. My grade school classmates, therefore, did not recognize me when we enrolled in high school that fall. I used my newly developed muscle to help me gain positions on the athletic teams (basketball, football) in high school. Although the coach was opposed to weight-training because he believed it would make a person “muscle bound,” I secretly continued my weight-training in a barn on our farm.

After graduating from high school, I volunteered to serve my country in the United States Army during the Korean War. A veteran of World War II himself, Steve Reeves [Mr. America-1947, Mr. World-1948, Mr. Universe-1950] and some other bodybuilders were entertaining the troops at various military bases in the United States. His visit to our base gave me my first chance to see “my role model” in the flesh. Wow, Steve Reeves looked even more godlike in the flesh than in his photos gracing the covers of the various bodybuilding magazines!

Since I was unable to get copies of bodybuilding magazines while later serving overseas with the United States Army, I temporarily lost contact with how life was



treating Steve Reeves. Upon receiving an honorable discharge from the military, I enrolled as a student at The University of Tennessee. I resumed my weight-training at the campus gym. I also began purchasing various bodybuilding magazines and caught up with the recent exploits of “my role model” again. Steve Reeves was appearing on some TV shows and playing small parts in the movies at that time.

While I was a college student, the movie *Athena* in which Steve Reeves had a small part was playing at a theatre in another city. A couple of friends and I went to see that movie. I had a date that night with a girl on campus. I became so engrossed in watching the movie that I forgot to keep track of the time. Therefore, I was late for the date. “You stood me up,” the girl told me, and threatened to never date me again. However, she has now been my wife for nearly 45 years.

Upon earning my B.S. degree from the University of Tennessee, I accepted a position in the corporate world. During my sojourn in that world, Dorothy and I had three fine children — Venice Ann, Don Lee and Jon Paul. Later, I earned an M.S. degree from The University of North Carolina and completed the requirements for the C.P.A. certificate. Then, I left the corporate world for the academic world. While serving on the faculty at the University of Tennessee, I earned the Ph.D. degree from Louisiana State University. My lengthy academic career has seen me affiliated with universities in several states including Tennessee, North Carolina, Mississippi, Louisiana, Kentucky, and Alabama.

As the years passed, I continued to follow Steve’s exploits. Then, while writing an article about “the perfect man” for one of the bodybuilding magazines, I had an opportunity to interview him at his ranch in 1982. To my surprise, the star of *Hercules* and many other movies about the heroic age seemed shy about a visit from an old college professor than I was about interviewing “my role model.” However, Steve and I had a very interesting and enjoyable conversation at his ranch about his dual-career in bodybuilding and the movies. A photo taken at his ranch of us talking about his *Power Walking* book was published in *Muscle & Fitness* [October 1992].

We corresponded a number of times over the years between 1982 and 2000. My last opportunity to talk with Steve was at the “Mr. America” contest in 1996. We had a very interesting and enjoyable conversation at the contest about “the golden age of physical culture” that existed before steroids came on the scene circa 1960. A photo taken at the contest of us talking about his *Building the Classic Physique: The Natural Way* book was published in *MuscleMag* (September 1997).

We all would like to believe that a god like Steve Reeves is immortal. His godly spirit is immortal, of course, but his classic body was mortal. Since God has called my friend back to live with Him in Heaven [May 1, 2000], I choose to remember “my role model” the way he described his journey across the great divide in his last poem:

**When my days on earth are over,  
With my faithful dogs by my side,  
I will ride through knee deep clover  
On a horse called Classic Pride.**

**They have been my true companions,  
Along mountain trails and rivers wide,  
My friends will look at me with envy  
When we cross the great divide.**

—Steve Reeves



Steve Reeves was a horseman all his life, and those who knew him best say he was never happier than when he was training one of his beloved Morgan stallions, or riding in the high country of the Palomar Mountains near his ranch.