IRON GAME HISTORY

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Me and Paul

I met Paul Anderson late one night in 1958 in Houston, in a corridor behind the seats of an auditorium where he was appearing on a pro wrestling card. Paul had just finished his match by body-slamming his 6'6", 280 pound opponent with such force that the slammee's eyes—as he walked toward me along the corridor just ahead of Paul—were filled with what appeared to be tears of real pain. And then came Paul, moving in that wide-legged, rolling gait his 36" thighs required.

I had only been training for a couple of years, and then only sporadically, but I was so fascinated with lifting that I had driven from Austin with a college buddy for the express purpose of seeing Paul and, if possible, shaking his hand and saying hello. But when the moment came to step forward and introduce myself I was so awestruck by his size that I waited until he was almost past before stepping forward, putting out my hand, and telling him he was my hero.

In many ways, he is my hero still. For almost 50 years, Paul has epitomized for me the superheavy strongman with a social conscience. Back in the 50s and 60s as I dreamed my young man's dreams about the future, I always had the example of Paul before me as a standard.

Being big and strong was for me as it was for Paul—a deep, psychological need that drove us to train and to eat so that we reached bodyweights that were unhealthy yet very effective in the lifting of heavy weights. We often spoke of this obsession when we were together. In our competitive years we ate and we drank milk and we trained with an almost religious fervor in order to get big and strong. Not just big, and not just strong. Big *and* strong. Strong *and* big.

In 1965, Paul Anderson got a laugh from 6'2", 335 pound Terry Todd when the 5'9", 365 pound Anderson stepped up on a box just as the photographer snapped this picture at Paul's youth home in Vidalia, Georgia. Anderson used to say that pictures of the two together made him look too short, so he told the photographer, but not Todd, to not take the shot until he (Paul) was on the box. This was during Todd's first visit to Vidalia, the day after he had substituted for an ailing Paul at a benefit in Tennessee to raise money for the children of a friend, Rye Bell, who had died suddenly. Paul was suffering from ulcers and was told by his doctors that to lift big weights could be fatal.

As the years passed Paul and his beloved wife Glenda opened their Youth Home, and my lifting hero became heroic to me for another reason—for devoting a large part of his life to a cause greater than himself. Just as I was hungry to follow him as a strongman, I came in time to understand my responsibility to use my talents—just as Paul had used his—to be of help to others.

I don't mean to imply that I was Paul's equal in

either strength or good works, only that I admired him and was led by him as I became a man. I'm proud of the strength I was able to wrest from my less-than-perfect genetic package, of course, but as a strength historian I realize that in most lifts he was the stronger man. Similarly, I'm proud of the physical culture collection Jan and I have built and given to the University of Texas. However, even though it's the largest in the world I'm sure most people would agree that Paul's Youth Home, which fed and housed and clothed and nurtured so many needful boys, was a more significant "gift" than I have managed with my assortment of books, magazines, and photos.

The point here is that as I went to the gym and lifted and then went to dinner and ate, Paul's image was there to follow. And as I built a physical culture archive and found a permanent home for it here at UT, his work at the Youth Home was there as an inspiration. So in two crucial ways he has shaped my life, and I have loved him.

We did not, however, always agree about certain of life's larger questions. In the years I knew Paul he was a committed Christian; I was a low-voltage agnostic. Paul was socially conservative; I was considerably more liberal. But we got along really well during the many times we were together, travelling to exhibitions or

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working in Vidalia on our "Size and Strength" series of articles for John Grimek's *Muscular Development.* Paul was a fine companion.

In any case, I have been reluctant for a variety of reasons to publish the findings Joe Roark and John Fair reveal in this issue. But *Iron Game History* was created in part as a publication in which accuracy would be the watchword, a publication in which full credit would be given to the pioneers in lifting and bodybuilding. *Full* credit, but not *extra* credit. To do less would be to shortchange the people who have made verifiable lifts that are less than lifts that are *not* sufficiently documented. Paul's legendary 1957 backlift of 6270 pounds is one of these insufficiently documented lifts.

Paul may well have made this lift, but as Roark and Fair have found, there are substantial reasons to doubt that the lift was done in the way Paul claimed. The problem is that his remarkable career as a competitive lifter, coupled with his charitable work with the Youth Home, have made of him an icon virtually above suspicion in the game. His verifiable lifts were so stupendous and his reputation was so solid that for a very long time almost no one-certainly not me-doubted him.

Joe Roark and John Fair, working independently, began their research into his career believing that if they looked hard enough they would find support for his increasingly controversial backlift. None of us take any pleasure in what this digging has uncovered. But we must remember that Paul is not a god. He is a man and thus, according to his own beliefs, flawed, as are we all. He was also a professional strongman for most of his life, and such men have often found it to their advantage to exaggerate their lifts or their measurements. (Perhaps, of course, new evidence will come to light that strongly supports Paul's account of his big backlift. On the other hand, perhaps new evidence will further weaken his claim.)

For my part, I suspect that if Paul *did* exaggerate that particular poundage, he did it to bolster his reputation as a strongman with a home full of hungry, hurting boys to support. I say this in part because many years ago, shortly after the publication of his 1975 autobiography, *Paul Anderson: the World's Strongest Man,* I wrote to him and expressed my concern that he might have damaged his reputation among experts in the game by writing such things as, "Strong, young, supple bodies have come up since my youth and they have aimed at my records, only to fall short. Ten or twenty men will be within a pound or two of each others' best lifts, but when they check the record book, they see that the first place lifter, the world record holder, Paul Anderson, is still 30 pounds ahead per lift," and, ". . . even after a couple of day's layoff and maybe a month of scheduling difficulties, I would still be able to outlift the second strongest man in the world in any lift." I mentioned in my letter that in several of the six competitive lifts even Paul's best *claimed* lifts were approximately 50 pounds behind what had been done *officially.* I also suggested, as gently as I could, that perhaps it was time to pass along the mantle of "World's Strongest Man" and to bring his weight down to a more healthy level. In response to my suggestion that he partially retire as a competitive strongman and drop some weight he thanked me for my concern but said that he didn't think he had need for any advice about his personal life. His response regarding the claims he made in the book were more revealing. He pointed out that anyone could "nit-pick" and that he felt he was doing a great deal of good work at the Youth Home.

I suspect that Paul never realized at the time that his claimed three ton backlift would come to have such significance. In the late 50s, he was well ahead of everyone in overall body strength, and he probably could not have imagined that lifting records—driven chiefly by drugs—would soar so dramatically. How could he have known that men weighing far less than half of what he weighed would surpass his records in the snatch and clean and jerk? Or that men half his size would exceed even his claims in the bench press and deadlift. All that remained was the squat and, looming ever larger as the years passed, that prodigious backlift. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the two lifts which have done the most to sustain his reputation as history's strongest man are the two for which the supporting evidence is weakest.

I hope that out of the analysis provided by Roark and Fair will come the thing Paul needs and deserves—a full-blown, well-researched, objective biography of his life as a lifter and evangelist. Paul was a complicated man, and he had an extraordinary, albeit too short, life. My suspicion is that such a book would leave most readers awestruck by his titanic strength and inspired by his dedication to his boys and to his God. Only then will the now-famous backlift fade to the level of importance it deserves as his strengths are balanced against his weaknesses. Only then will Paul be revealed to the wider world as the multifaceted American original he most surely was.

–Terry Todd

PORTRAIT OF A STRONGMAN

THE CIRCUS CAREER OF OTTLEY RUSSELL COULTER: 1912-1916

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

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

—Jan Todd

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

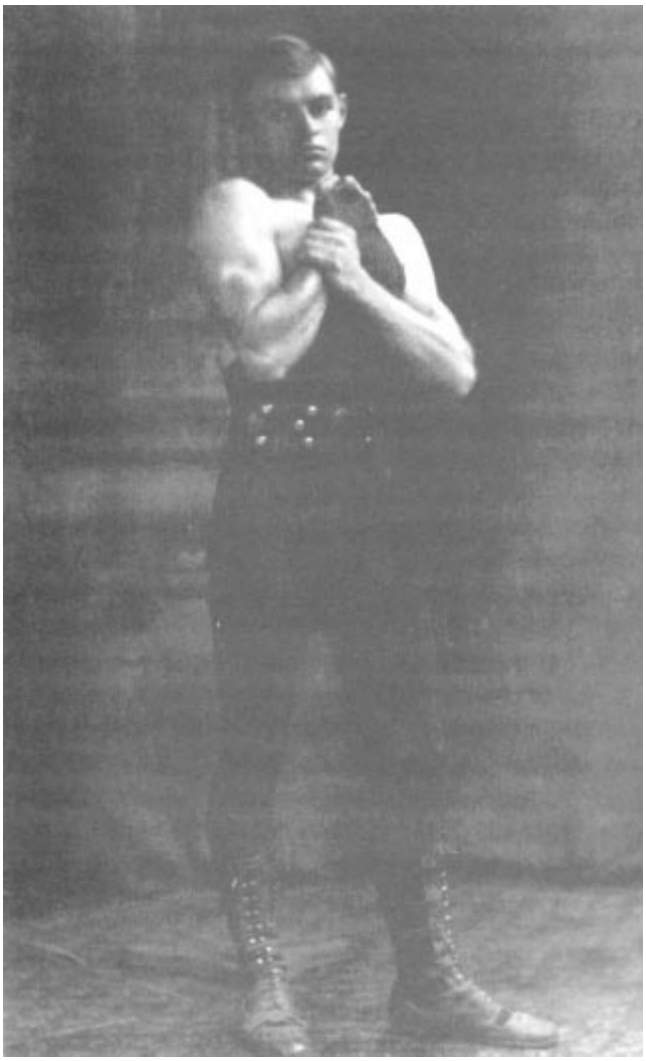
If one were to look for the origins of weightlifting in America, that search would lead directly back to the circuses of the nineteenth century. The circus was the most popular form of mass entertainment during the latter-half of the nineteenth century, and by the 1890s nearly every circus touring the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

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

We should note, however, that unlike most circus strongmen, Ottley Coulter has at least attracted some scholarly attention, although the attention was not due to his professional career. John Fair, author of the highly acclaimed *Muscletown USA: Bob Hoffman and the Manly Culture of York Barbell,* has discussed Coulter's contributions to the birth of organized weightlifting in two articles for *Iron Game History.* Fair's articles explore the development of the American Continental Weightlifting Association and the career of George F. Jowett.[3] Fair shows that Coulter, David P. Willoughby, and Jowett formed a guiding triumvirate that moved American weightlifting out of the quasi-respectable arena of the circus and vaudeville and into the world of modern sport. The three men founded the American Continental Weightlifting Association, established records and a record-breaking process, tried to mandate equivalent competitive conditions, and established an association of members.[4] The result was an organization that became the official governing body for American weightlifting when the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) rose to dominate amateur sport in the 1930s. What's missing from Fair's painstakingly researched history, however, is the story of Coulter's early life. Why was Ottley so concerned about records? Fair's articles introduce us to Coulter in January of 1917, as he has just written an editorial for *Strength* magazine entitled, "Honesty in Weightlifting and the Necessity of Making Lifters Prove Their Claims"[5] We have examined the trials and hardships of Ottley's early professional career, and have come to believe that more than his love of honesty and integrity was at stake when he wrote the 1917 editorial. He was also trying to legitimate his own lifting and perhaps even justify his choice of profession. Coulter, you see, although small, was truly a "strong" man. But, in a time before there were records in different bodyweight divisions, his lifting accomplishments were overshadowed by three hundred pound behemoths like Louis Cyr and Henry Holtgrewe, who preceded him by a few years in the sawdust circles. Men of great size, who claimed to be the "World's Strongest" had a much better chance to earn a good living from their strength than did the 130 to 140-pound Coulter, whose chief claim was that he was the "Strongest Man at his Weight in the World."

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

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



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

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

Ottley's mother, Effie Elizabeth Ohl, born in Parkman, Ohio, was also larger than average. "My mother weighed 175 when I was born, and was not a fat woman by any means," wrote Ottley.[11] "She had two sisters, who were even heavier and larger boned. And all [six] of her brothers had large bones and hands in proportion to their size."[12] One of her brothers, Jefferson Ohl, won contests for carrying a barrel of salt the greatest distance. Another brother, Warren, held the record for carrying the most bags of wheat up two flights of stairs at the Parkman flourmill.[13] According to Ottley, "he was short but built on the general lines of George Jowett." Other Ohl brothers, James and John, were involved in wrestling. "John was broader in the shoulders than Grimek," wrote Ottley, "and he and Calvin [yet another brother] had hands like the Saxons."[14] Lest anyone doubt the comparison of his uncles' hands to those of the Saxons, Ottley told his correspondent, "I know, I saw them all."[15]

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

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

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

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

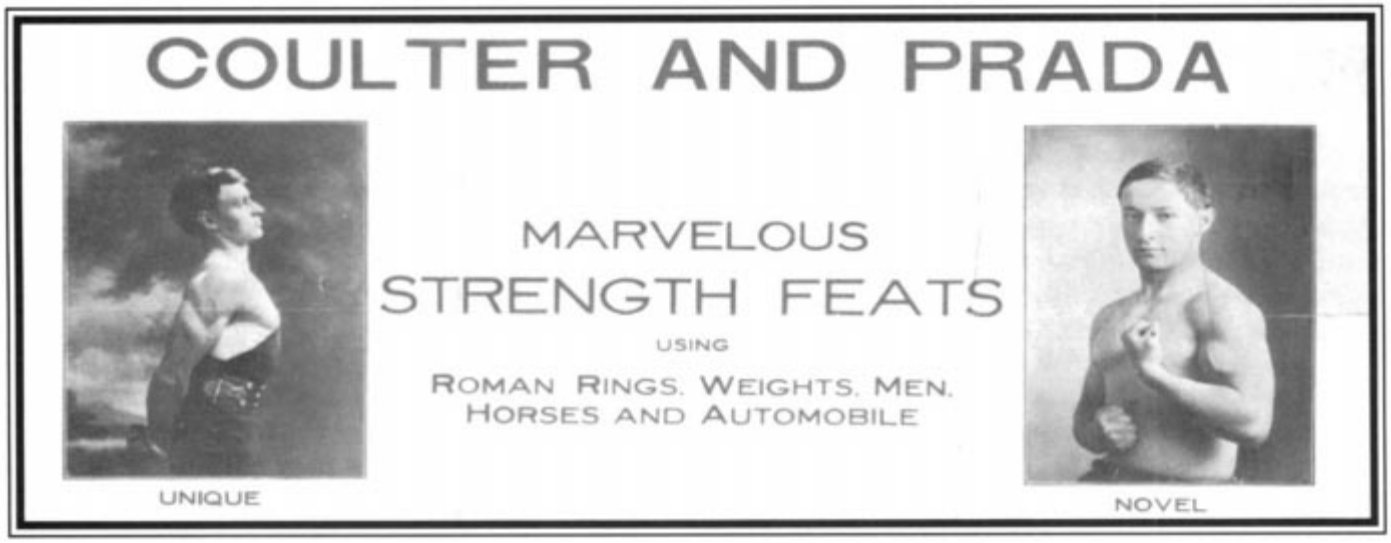
Ottley's childhood was considerably easier. Although they were not truly wealthy, he and his three sisters enjoyed a relatively peaceful childhood in Parkman.[22] He attended Parkman Public Grade School from 1896-1904 and Parkman High School from 1905 to 1908. At the insistence of his father, who wanted his son to have all the educational benefits he'd never had, Ottley then entered Hiram College in nearby Hiram, Ohio, in the fall of 1909.[23] His first year at Hiram counted only as an extra year of high school since Parkman High's academic standing was considered only "third grade" and didn't meet Hiram College's requirements.[24] Hiram was a denominational liberal arts college founded by the Disciples of Christ that offered three tracks of study during the time Ottley was a student—Ministerial, Classical or Humanities, and Scientific.[25] According to Hiram College's records, Ottley was enrolled in the Scientific program and was also a member of the literary society in his freshman year.[26] Photographs from his personal collection show him wearing a football jersey, as a smiling young man standing alongside his dorm mates, and dressed as a hobo for a costume party.[27] But while Ottley made it through even differential calculus, his father's dream for him-that he become a civil engineer—was not to be realized. In his second year at Hiram, Ottley left school and joined his family who were then living close to Lake Erie in Austinburg, Ohio.[28] Why the family moved to Austinburg is not clear, but it apparently happened late in 1909. Letters from his sister Luella were sent from Austinburg early in 1910, while in a listing of jobs Ottley compiled in 1929, he described himself as a "laborer" in Parkman during the summer of 1909, and as a "milk loader" at the Austinburg Creamery during the summer of 1910.[29]

Although Ottley off-handedly explained his decision to quit college in a letter to Jack Kent in 1959 by saying, "I soon tired of studying and quit for circus work,"[30] the reality of his decision to leave Hiram College is actually more complicated. In a letter written on 26 January 1911, David Coulter explains to his son that he is selling his interest in the mill he was then running in Austinburg. "I sold out to Kelly two [sic] cheap but I thought I had better sell and get rid of him as he was cheeting [sic] me blind." After discussing the arrangements of the sale, his father continues, "it is worth more than that but he would not sell and I would have had to fight him so I thought I would sell to him before he stole all, as he was taking and not charging anything up to himself. I am to [sic] honest for that kind of partner." Ottley's father then suggests that he and Ottley become partners:

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

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

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



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

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

In 1912, ready to move on to more advanced work, Ottley "bought one of the old style Milo bells, which were the best to be obtained, although they are not nearly as practicable as the later Milo bells. My enthusiasm was so intense that I trained with the Milo bells and a back lift platform in my father's mill when the thermometer was registering below zero."[37] His first back lift platform was really nothing more than a pair of high sawhorses and a simple platform, but thanks to his father, he had access to plenty of bags of feed and cement to load on top. As his strength developed that year, Ottley and some of his co-workers began holding informal competitions to see who could carry the most grain, or succeed at raising the most cement in a back lift.[38] According to Ottley, he "Lifted 1900 [pounds in a] back lift after one week's practice with platform and sacks of cement." Because of this, he explained, he "acquired local reputation from this and lifting sacks and barrels."[39] "Time after time," Ottley told Bob Jones in 1940, "I out-lifted bigger and stronger men because they didn't have the stuff inside to force themselves to do the last pound they were really capable of moving. You know what I mean, Bob; guts, fighting heart, or what ever you want to call it-they just didn't have enough of the old what-it-takes."[40]

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

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

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

Jose Vazquez Prada, Jr. was from Celaya, Mexico, about 100 miles northwest of Mexico City, near Leon. Prada apparently came from a wealthy family, and his father at one time had served as the mayor in Celaya. On 16 October 1901, the ten-year-old Prada arrived at Notre Dame University in Indiana where he boarded and attended classes through his graduation from Notre Dame's high school in 1907.[46] According to the university's records, Prada graduated with a "commercial" diploma. During his senior year his classes included book keeping, commercial law, commercial correspondence, "phonography," morality and arithmetic.[47] Ottley described him as a "very intelligent man, had a tine education . . . and had a better knowledge of English than I have."[48]

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

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

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

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

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

"Prada and Coulter on rings using back phalange on neck and phalange and finger support."[57]

According to a letter written by Ottley to the Great Empire Shows, he did most of the lifting in the show, although Prada finished his part of the act by pressing overhead a dumbell that weighed more than he did. Ottley's portion of the show began with a chair lift and ringweight juggling. Then he placed a barbell on his shoulders and revolved in a circle supporting the bar and a number of men hanging on it. Next Ottley performed a backlift with men or a small horse standing on the platform, and then followed that with a supporting feat in which he lay on his back on the ground and supported a plank on his feet and a barbell in his hands while men sat on both. His finale was generally the "auto act," which he copied from Warren Lincoln Travis."[58] In Coulter's handwriting on a poster for their act he also notes:

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

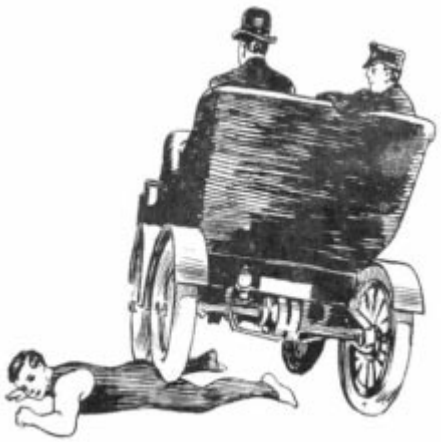
This photo, taken by Rynald Krumhar of Cleveland shows Ottley in the lifting costume he wore during his first season as a strongman in 1912. The belt cinching his narrow waist is now housed at the Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection at the Univeristy of Texas.

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

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

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

claims that it was Prada who decided to split the duo. "Two offers from different sources were received at same salary, the one offering for the two-man act, the other only needed one man and would not consider the other man at the same salary. Coulter was willing to accept the two-man spot even though it meant half the salary. Prada's pride would not permit him to accept Coulter's generous offer and he returned to his native Mexico."[64] Some correspondence survives between Coulter and Prada, but no letters survive from these early years. It appears, however, that while Prada continued to do some vaudeville and circus work he didn't have much financial success. In June of 1918, for instance, he wrote to Ottley from Chicago for help. "As I am rather short on this material they call money to go home on," wrote Prada, "I wish to propose the sale of all my Physical Culture books. You know more or less what I have as I brought them when I saw you fist in 1912 . . . I believe that you once told me that you wanted to buy all my books and things on Physical Culture . . . You need not pay for the stuff right away, we are friends and [I] can trust you on a reasonable basis." In that same letter he tells Ottley that once he gets his money situation straightened out, "I will then make a decision on whether I shall start anew on my training or not."[65]



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

Apparently, Prada wasn't able to get his various problems solved. In fact, by 1919 he was writing Ottley from the penitentiary in Mexico City and admitting that he had made a mistake by not staying with his circus work. "If I had only sticked [sic] to the rings and the weights, just think what a ring performer I would be and some bent press record too. But as you know I have been fickle, and this is the reason why I have not been able to accomplish anything worth while yet. . ."[66] What crime placed Prada in prison isn't clear, although it appears that it may have been political and related to the Mexican Revolution. In a letter to Ottley written in 1921, Prada states that things in Mexico were finally returning to normal and that "I am sure to be liberated by the middle of next month by virtue of a general pardon granted by the President."[67] In March of 1923, Prada wrote from Chicago that he was planning to come and visit Ottley and hoped to find work near him. "I am thru [sic] with the wrong kind of ideas and just want to be let alone and do what's right."[68] In his letters, Ottley almost never comments on Prada's imprisonment, although in one letter to Willoughby he explained that Prada "was in some political trouble at one time with the Mexican Government during a time of some revolutionary trouble of which I do not understand and have no interest, aside from my interest in him."[69] In any case, Prada was released from prison in September of 1921 and corresponded with Ottley through 1923. How he spent the remaining years of his life is not known.[70]

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

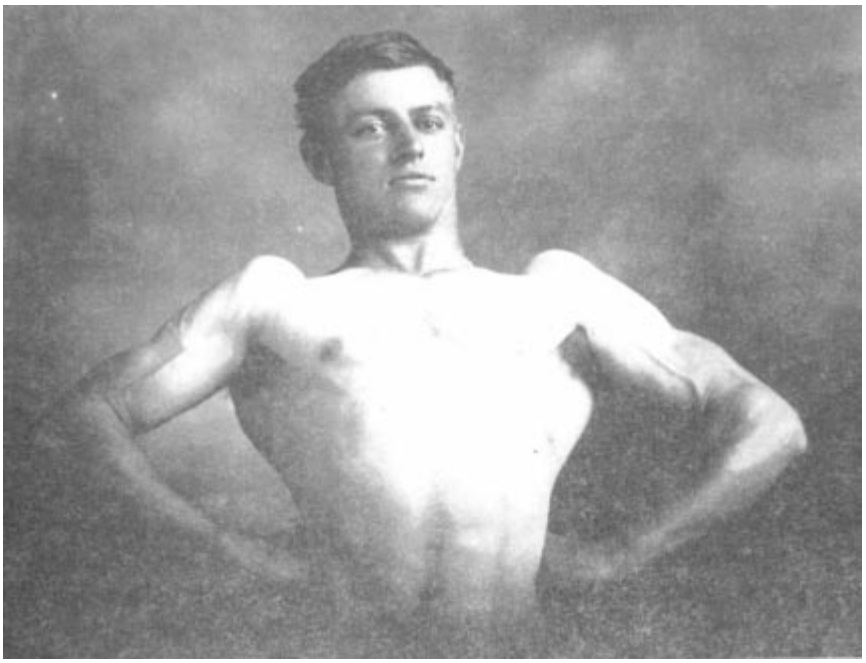
good." He then told Ottley, "Now dear friend I will try and help you along. I will sell you my backlift, out[fit] the horse act complete, get your picture in The Police Gazette and send you 100 names of show managers all for $25.00. It cost me $25.00 just to get the 100 names when I started in show business."[73]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

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

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

> When I was with him in 1912 at 205 South First St. in Brooklyn getting ready to be featured with the Frank A. Robbins Circus, which opened in Jersey City that spring, Travis had his exhibition barbell and exhibition dumbbell. Also a solid dumbbell weighing about 400 lbs. and another weighing about 600 pounds, a revolving hip lift carousel, back lift platform, back lift scales and planks of different weights. His basement had all kinds of iron implements such as ship anchors, oil drums to load with slugs, many pounds of slugs, railroad car wheels, castings of various sizes and shapes, shells of various sizes and shapes, a barbell weighing about 2,000 pounds, which he wanted to sell to me but cost too much to move around. His cellar was filled with junk material up to the ceiling. Apparently, he bought such material at junkyards and used some of it in his training or exhibition. He also sold such material to various pupils about the country. I bought considerable material from him but only a small fraction of what he had in his cellar. I have never seen such a collection outside of a junk yard and I never expect to see such a collection again. He had a number of barbells of different sizes. In fact, he had globe and plate bells manufactured and sold them to different persons. The famed Rolandow bell was furnished Rolandow by Travis, who carried it from his home in Brooklyn to Rolandow's gym – that is he carried it wherever he could not to take it on a streetcar and it weighed, I believe, 209 pounds. Certainly would like to see some of these modern Olympic lifters do some of the rough and ready stunts that Travis did just to save paying a drayman.[79]

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



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

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

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

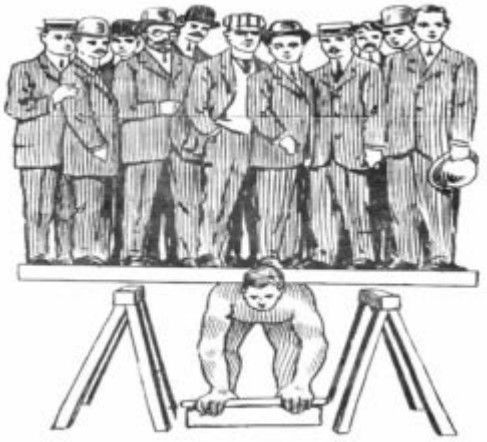
The circus played Jersey City for two nights before heading off across the northeastern United States in a tour that would end six months later, on October 19, just outside St. Louis in a small town called Bellville. Along the way, Ottley played in 147 different towns, and often gave two performances a day.[87] The schedule must have been grueling. In September, for instance, Ottley's diary reveals that he had a rare Sunday off and so decided to go to Cincinnati. There he watched Cincinnati beat St. Louis in a baseball game and that night went to a vaudeville show. He stayed the night in Cincinnati and took a morning train down to Loveland, Ohio to meet the rest of the circus cast. He did both afternoon and evening shows, noting that it was "rather poor business." The next day, Tuesday, the 10th, they played in Brownstown, Indiana. Said Ottley, "We arrived too late for a street parade," but business was fair and Ottley admired the fact that the town had horse cars that connected to the train depot. Wednesday found them in Bedford, Indiana, a "good-sized place" known for its quarries. By Thursday, they'd moved on to Shoals, Indiana, a "very small town," where Ottley for some reason visited a wooden coat hanger factory. Although the town was small, the crowds for both shows were large, and Ottley lifted ten men that night. Friday, they crossed the border into Illinois and set up their tents in Laurenceville. There he lifted nine men at both shows but injured his knee when he did his auto stunt. "Used a white auto weighing 4680 pounds + 5 men in it." wrote Ottley, "Injured my knee with it at night." The injury didn't cause him to miss the next day's show in Robinson, however, where he was "run over by [an] Overland weighing 2640," and lifted eight men in the afternoon and nine at night.[88] Many weeks, his diaries reveal, the circus held performances on all seven days.

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

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

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

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



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

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

In 1912, Ottley turned down two offers that, in retrospect, might have made his life go in quite different directions. One offer was from the Barnum management who offered him a chance to join their circus and perform in one of the side rings while Katie Sandwina performed at center and the Berne Brothers (another strength act) played on the other side. It was a tough decision for Ottley as Barnum's was certainly a larger and more prestigious show. But, Ottley said, "I knew I would have to play second fiddle to a woman . . . In fact, I do not think that any mere man could meet the public on equal terms with her. She had strength like a man and performed feats that were spectacular," he reported, and they "required a strength surpassing that of many male professionals. She had everything, even sex appeal." Regarding her large size, "she had 8" wrists (larger than John Davis) and weighed around 200 lbs.," Ottley wrote to Jack Kent that she was so perfectly proportioned, as to be billed as 'Europe's Queen of Strength and Beauty,' and, unlike much circus ballyhoo, [it] was an accurate description of her."[94] Ottley's other reason for not going with Barnum, however, was that it would mean he'd have to break his contract with the Robbins' Circus. Leaving a circus midway through the season was considered "bad business" according to Ottley and doing so might have meant that other circuses wouldn't hire him.[95] The other offer Ottley turned down that year was a chance to perform in Cuba once the Robbins' season was over. "Dan Ducrow wanted to manage me in the winter of 1912," wrote Ottley, "and book me through Charles Sasse to go to Cuba and pull against oxen. I decided that pulling against horses was hard enough and that it was too far to swim back from Havana." Ducrow, however, thought the stunt would go over well in Cuba, as they were using lots of oxen in the sugarfields there at that time. "No doubt Travis or some of the heavyweights could resist the pull of oxen," Ottley concluded, "but I decided that it was too risky for little me."[96]

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

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

Several circus performers travelled with him on this cross-country trip. They walked from St. Louis to Granite City, Missouri, and then to Venice where they caught a "Big 4 Freight" that took them overnight to Hillsboro, Illinois, where they arrived and witnessed a big fire. The men stayed there part of the day, then walked on to Witt, Illinois, a distance of about 11 miles, where they were able to sleep in a boxcar that night. The next morning, October 24, they walked another five miles to Nokomis, caught a freight to Rosamund, walked nine miles from Rosamund to Pana, Illinois, and then caught a "fast freight" to Mattoon, Illinois. In Mattoon, they slipped past the guards and found a room to share for seventy-five cents. The next day they walked 12 miles over to Charleston, where one of the men left the group. That night, October 25, they camped along the railroad tracks. The next morning, Ottley and his fellow travelers-Garibaldi and Bennett—unloaded a 40-ton car of coal for which they were paid $2.50. Feeling flush, they spent the night at the Maple House.[98] The next day they walked 14 miles to Kansas, Illinois, slept in a grain elevator that night and walked 16 miles the next day to Paris. Ottley liked Paris; he looked around the town that day, attended a meeting of the Progressive Party which he happened upon, and tried to find work. His diary notes that he approached a farmer about a job and was refused, so he walked on, crossing into Indiana, to St. Mary's of the Woods, just outside Terre Haute. There he hopped a train to Terre Haute, visited the big industrial exposition at the fairgrounds and in the evening attended a vaudeville show. It was the first big town he'd been in since leaving St. Louis. The next morning he began looking for work in earnest and was quickly hired by the Foulke & Forbes Contracting Company, specialists in concrete construction. On his first day on the job, Saturday, 2 October 1912, he unloaded a car of gravel at the Glass Foundry Yard. On Sunday he ate a "big, big meal" at the Henderson House that cost him twenty cents and stayed there the rest of the day and wrote letters. For the next month, he unloaded gravel and did concrete work during the day as the company built sidewalks along Tippecanoe Street. At night, he either read, attended vaudeville shows, or went to the movies. On Thanksgiving, he had a turkey dinner at his hotel and then attended Al Field's Minstrel Show at the Varieties Theater.[99] He also trained while he was there, and continued to work on his strength. In a letter to John Grimek, written in 1942, Ottley lists as one of his greatest feats of strength pushing "a railroad car loaded with scrapiron" at the Vandalia train station in Terre Haute.[100]

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

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

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

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

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

> The account by Grimek in Strength and Health which stated "Harness lifted a horse and 6 to 8 men" is wrong. I never performed an exhibition harness lift of men or horse. This was also a back lift but I used two platforms, or actually three platforms. My top platform was large enough that a small platform was placed on uprights extending up from the sides of the platform that I stood on. The chains from the platform that the horse and men were on, extended directly to the little platform. I got under this little platform in backlift style and with hands on a stool lifted the horse and the men. This as you see was a legitimate backlift and a bit more difficult than the ordinary backlift because of the possible swaying of the lower platform. However, I lifted high enough that the balance of the lower platform did not cause much trouble. So far as I know, no one has ever made a back lift in this manner. Nearly all of such lifting has been performed with the leverage chain hookup. This idea was my own. The uprights to the platform that I stood on were of tubular steel and everything came apart for moving from place to place. . .[108]

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

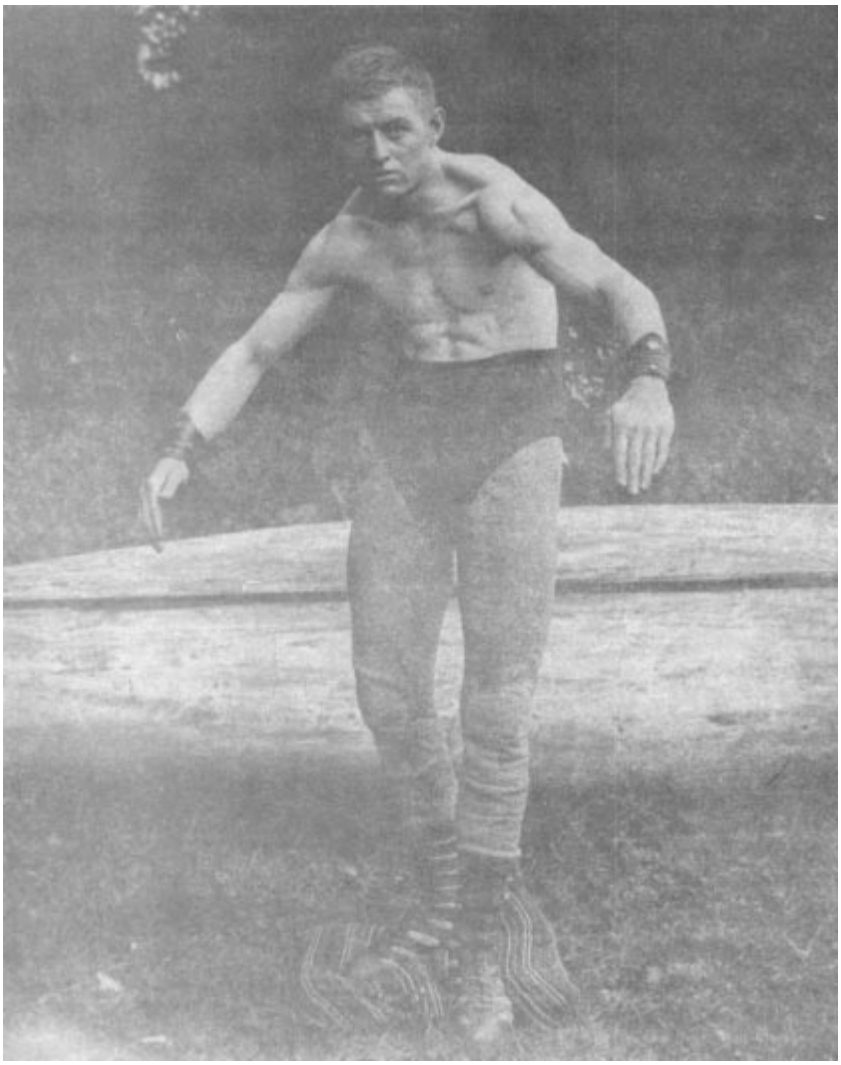
On 29 November, 1913 the Walter L. Main Circus ended its season in Bassett, Virginia, a small town just outside Martinsville. Their tour had taken them through Pennsylvania, New York, North Carolina, West Virgnia and Virginia, and when it was over, Ottley made his way home to Andover.[110] During the next year and a half, Ottley apparently stayed at home, working with his father in their new feed business. Stationery from that era lists the business as "D. Coulter and Son: Dealers in Corn, Oats, Ground Feed, Flour, Coal, Hay and Straw," and on a job resume Ottley put together in 1929, he described himself as "Foreman in Charge" from December 1913 to April 1915.[111] It is impossible to know for sure why he stayed home to work with his father. One could speculate that at age 23 he was simply tired of the circus life and wanted job stability and a better, more regular source of income. One can also speculate that his father's health problems may have worsened and Ottley felt he was needed at home. One other tantalizing clue survives. A letter from Ken Palmer, a contortionist with the Walter L. Main Circus, suggests that the 1914 season had ended in a dispute over the performers' salaries. After catching up on the news about the various people they'd worked with in the Main show,

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

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

As the spring of 1915 rolled around, Ottley's correspondence reveals that he'd made a decision to return to work as a strongman. This time, though, rather than working for someone else, Ottley organized his own athletic troupe so that he could serve as a subcontractor and place the troupe with various carnivals. The new act was called the Coulter Brothers Athletic Show and its two stars were Ottley, who did his strength act and some wrestling, and Kid Parker, the former welterweight wrestling champion. Parker's real name was Harry Williams. According to Ottley, Williams was "certainly one of the very best welterweight wrestlers in the world. I am not sure he was as capable as George Bothner but I know that he really believed that he was and that would be a big help."[114] Also in the troupe were Joe Fisher, who held *The Police Gazette* featherweight championship belt, Kris Ramer, a big heavyweight wrestler from Akron, Ohio, and two women wrestlers, Jessie Mack and Josephine McNally.[115]

In March of 1915, the Coulter Brothers signed to tour with the Superior United Shows, a large carnival company out of Cleveland. Although the contract of Ottley's financial arrangement with the Superior Shows hasn't survived, letters he wrote to several prospective employees explain that he would split the gate receipts fifty-fifty with the carnival management.[116] Letters from several other carnival companies reveal how these kinds of financial arrangements worked. The Keen & Shippy Model Shows, for instance, offered to take forty-five percent of the troupe's gate receipts in return for providing them with a tent, licenses, electricity, freight, tickets,



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

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

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

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

Ottley sent a letter to handbalancer R. H. Lade, for instance, Ottley offers him a full third of the profits if he will only come and join the act. "We will have the best athletic show on the road with any carnival . . ." he wrote, and "Another reason why we would like you with us . . . we are going to get up an act for three men which will be the most spectcular, thrilling and wonderful act ever performed in vaudeville and you will be with us to practice it and have it ready for the season." Ottley dreamed of taking the troupe to New York, Boston and other sites along the East Coast before heading off to England and even Australia. "This act is a wonder," he wrote to Lade, "and you will be able to work in it as you are an athlete. Make up your mind to wire and come on at once." Ottley wrote a similar letter to Texas strongman and handbalancer John Athes, promising that the proposed three-man act "would be a good money getter and we should have no trouble booking it on the best circuit in the world."[124]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

of that line."[137]

Notes:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[8] Coulter, "Enthusiasm," p. 54.

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

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

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

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

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

[14] Ibid.

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

[16] In 1926, Ottley's height became an issue in his job with the Uniontown, Pennsylvania, police department. Ottley had been brought in to lead physical training classes for the officers and worked at the department for more than a year before a bureaucrat pointed out that he was shorter than the department's 5'8" height requirement. Although the matter went to city council, which voted to keep him on board, the department decided to release him and so he was out of work. See: Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent 8 April 1957; and the following clippings in the Coulter Papers: "How Tall is a Policeman?" *Morning Herald,* 22 May 1926, p. 6; "Mayor Seeks to Fire Cop Under 5 Feet 8 Inches Rule: Council Objects." *The Evening Genius,* 21 May 1926. p. 1; and "Coulter is Given Job on Frick Force," *The Evening Genius,* 3 June 1926, p. 1.

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

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

[19] Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[29] "Previous Occupations" attachment to "From Patrolman Ottley R. Coulter to Commanding Officer of District 1—Subject Personal History;" Also: Luella Coulter to Ottley Coulter, 4 February 1910, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

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

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

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

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

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

[35] "Training Record," Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

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

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

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

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

[40] Jones, "Romance of Strength" typescript.

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

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

[43] Jones, "Romance of Strength" typescript.

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

[45] Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

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

[52] Coulter and Prada broadside, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

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

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

[55] Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 27 July 1961, IMC. Also: Willoughby, *The Super Athletes,* 274.

[56] Ottley Coulter to Great Empire Shows, 22 March 1912, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[57] Notebook entitled "Act, Routines—Etc." See page titled, "Coulter and Prada Act," Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[58] Ottley Coulter to Great Empire Shows, 22 March 1912, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[59] Coulter and Prada broadside, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[60] See, for instance, Cole Brothers Circus to Coulter and Prada," 31 March 1912, and Jones Shows and Concessions to Coulter and Prada, 25 March 1912, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[61] Frank A. Robbins to Coulter and Prada, 23 March 1912, Coulter papers, TMPCC.

[62] Warren Lincoln Travis to Ottley Coulter, 21 February 1912, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[63] Interview with Dr. Janet Davis, American Studies Program, The University of Texas at Austin, May 31, 2001.

[64] Bob Hise, "Gentleman of Moral. Physical Strength," *Iron Man,* undated clipping, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[65] Jose V. Prada to Ottley Coulter, 9 June 1918, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[66] Jose V. Prada to Ottley Coulter, 5 November 1919, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[67] J.V. Prada to Ottley Coulter, 8 August 1921, TMPCC.

[68] Joe Prada to Ottley Coulter, 16 March 1923, TMPCC.

[69] Ottley Coulter to David P. Willoughby, undated letter, TMPCC.

[70] J. V. Prada to Ottley Coulter, 18 October 1921, TMPCC. Based on a business card in his papers, it appears that Prada may have tried to run a gymnasium in Celaya Mexico. Ottley claimed in a letter to Willoughby that he did not know what happened to Prada in later years.

[71] Warren Lincoln Travis to Ottley Coulter, 8 February 1911, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[72] Warren Lincoln Travis to Ottley Coulter, 9 December 1911, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[73] Warren Lincoln Travis to Ottley Coulter, 8 February 1912, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Warren Lincoln Travis to Ottley Coulter, 21 February 1912, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[76] Ottley Coulter, personal diary for 1912. Coulter Papers, TMPCC. It's possible that Coulter may have been in New York already and spent other time with Travis before this date for in one letter he claims that he trained with Travis for six weeks.

[77] Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 23 October 1906. Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[78] Ottley Coulter, personal diary for 1912. Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[79] Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 30 October 1959. IMC

[80] Ottley Coulter, personal diary for 1912. Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[81] Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 18 December 1956. IMC.

[82] "Frank A. Robbins' Show Opens Season," *Billboard* (4 May 1912): 6.

[83] "Frank A. Robbins' Circus Opens: Greenville, Jersey City, NJ, the Place," *New York Clipper,* 4 May 1912. Coulter publicity tile, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[84] "Performers with Frank A. Robbins Show," Clipping in Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[85] John and Alice Durant, *Pictorial History of the American Circus* (New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1957), 318.

[86] Frank A. Robbins' Show Opens Season," *Billboard* (4 May 1912): 6.

[87] Ottley Coulter, personal diary for 1912, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 18 December 1956, IMC.

[90] Ottley Coulter, personal diary for 1912, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[91] Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 18 December 1956, IMC.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Alan Calvert, *The Truth About Weightlifting* (Philadelphia: by the author, 1911). 11-13.

[94] Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 18 December 1956, IMC.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 30 October 1959, IMC.

[97] Ottley Coulter, personal diary for 1912, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Ottley Coulter to John Grimek, 17 February 1942. See attachment entitled "Ottley R. Coulter." Grimek used the material provided by Coulter in this attachment for an article on Coulter in his "Old Timers Column," in the July 1942 issue of *Strength & Health.* See page 7.

[101] L. D. Thieman to Ottley Russell Coulter, 17 March 1913, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[102] Rentz Bros. to O.R. Coulter, 9 April 1913, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[103] Harry R. Overton to Ottley Russell Coulter, 3 April 1913, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[104] Chicago Greater Shows to O. R. Coulter 15 March 1913, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[105] Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 18 December 1956, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[106] Ottley Coulter, personal diary for 1913, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[107] Ottley Coulter to John Grimek, 17 February 1942, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[108] Unidentified letter from Ottley Coulter, no date, Coulter Papers, TMPCC. Reference is to Grimek's "Old-timers" column in *Strength & Health* (July 1942): 7.

[109] Ottley Coulter, personal diary for 1913, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[110] Ibid.

[111] "Previous Occupations," attachment to letter "From Patrolman Ottley Coulter to Commanding Officer of District #1." See also: David Coulter to Ottley Coulter, 13 March 1917, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[112] Ken Palmer to Dear Friend, 4 February 1915, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[113] Lionel Kelly to Ottley Coulter, 1 August 1914, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[114] Ottley Coulter to David Willoughby, 4 December 1973, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[115] See Coulter Brothers to Jessie Mack, 21 April 1915; and Jessie Mack to Coulter Brothers, 20 April 1915, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[116] In a letter to R. H. Lade, Ottley states that he splits the gate receipts on a 50/50 basis with the carnival management. Ottley Coulter to R. H. Lade, 24 April 1915, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[117] Keen & Shippy to Coulter Bros., 15 April 1915, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[118] William Kanell to Coulter Brothers, 12 April 1915, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[119] Contract and Agreement between Coulter Brothers and "a man to make openings or a door talker," 1915, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[120] Ottley Coulter to John Athes, April 15, 1915, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[121] Effie Coulter to Ottley Coulter, undated letter, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[122] Superior United Shows Advertisement, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[123] Typescript in Coulter Papers, No date, TMPCC.

[124] Ottley Coulter to R.H. Lade, 24 April 1915; and Ottley Coulter to John Athes, 15 April 1915, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[125] Ottley Coulter to Gerard Nisivoccia, 20 July 1974, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[126] Ottley Coulter to David Willoughby, 4 December 1973, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[127] Ottley Coulter to David Willoughby, no date, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[128] Personal Diary of Ottley Coulter for 1915, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[129] Ottley Coulter to David Willoughby, undated letter, Coulter Papers. TMPCC.

[130] Personal Diary of Ottley Coulter for 1915, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[131] Ibid.

[132] Ibid.

[133] Robert B. Snyder Jr. to Ottley Coulter, 6 July 1915, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[134] Ottley Coulter to David Willoughby, no date, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[135] Ibid.

[136] In Hagerstown, Ottley worked first at an ironworks and then at the Monroe Restaurant. See "Previous Occupations" attachment to "From Patrolman Ottley R. Coulter to Commanding Officer of District l-Subject Personal History;" Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

[137] Ottley Coulter to David Willoughby, 16 July 1974, Coulter Papers, TMPCC.

The Plank Feat

SEARCHING FOR THE REAL PAUL ANDERSON

A Review Article

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Authors who seek to inspire confidence and credibility are probably best advised to avoid the word "definitive," especially in describing their own work. Randall J. Strossen, however, exercises no such restraint in promoting his *Paul Anderson, The Mightiest Minister.* While it does contain many facts (virtually all of which are known) and lots of pictures (many of which are not known), it is a far from complete depiction of the life or even the lifting career of this most celebrated of strongmen. Although basically biographical in approach, the book is really a pastiche of previously published articles (including some by the author himself) and reminiscences from those who wish to portray Anderson in the best possible light. Fully 57 (almost two-thirds) of the 87 pages of non-pictorial text is either wholly or mostly quoted material, including many reprints. Margins are exceedingly generous and, with one notable exception, the format is basically cut and paste.

What is obvious from the outset is that this is an "official" biography or hagiography-instigated, sanctioned, and supported by the Anderson family and associates. This preconditioning provides two essential qualities that permeate the book. The first is a distinctive Christian air that is manifested through visual symbols, Biblical quotations, frequent references to "Doubting Thomases," and billowing heavenly clouds-but no angels! When this iconography is blended with a text that is laced with repeated references to Paul's Christian commitment, the result is a memorial to the subject's religious fervor and evangelical mission. Virtually none of this spirituality is evident in Strossen's other publications, namely *Super Squats* or *Milo, A Journal for Serious Athletes,* but it is absolutely basic to the convictions of those who administer the Paul Anderson Youth Home and staunchly support this life of its founder. Additionally, and most critically, this book aims to please Anderson's legions of supporters, Christian and otherwise, who are unwilling to entertain views that are even slightly critical or questioning about him. Such a meeting of minds disallows any objectivity and permits almost no wiggle room for Strossen. This is the kind of account where the interpretation is essentially predetermined and evidence is then provided to support it.

One of the casualties of this approach is breadth of coverage. Never probing very far into Anderson's life outside of lifting, the author limits his narrative almost solely to information that has been provided by family members or already published. The first chapter on Anderson's boyhood, for instance, consists almost entirely of a verbatim account by Paul's sister Dorothy. It shows that he was reared in a rather typical Southern environment, "loving dogs, hunting, and playing football," but there really weren't clear signs of the indelible marks he would make on the weightlifting world (p.1). We also learn that, despite a devilish streak, Paul was an exceptionally well-behaved and respectable young man, to the extent of assuming a chaperone's role on his senior class trip to Washington. Arguably the most significant event of his childhood was his affliction with Bright's Disease in the second grade, an experience which had longterm consequences. Other formative influences of significance are omitted. We are told little about his relationship with his peers and the opposite sex, both primary conditioners of youth. Despite Paul's later roles as educator, poet, and writer, virtually nothing is revealed about his early academic experiences. There are conflicting stories about why Anderson left Furman University after his freshman year. Strossen's statement that he "decided to take a break from college" totally dodges the question. Most surprisingly, no mention is made of his religious background. From this account, one might conclude that he was not a Christian and never attended church as a child. That so little information and analysis is provided on his youth is quite out of keeping with Strossen's training in psychology and Anderson's work with delinquent youth, both of which are predicated on the assumption that childhood influences are of the utmost importance in shaping adult behavior.

The second chapter relates Anderson's experiences as an amateur weightlifter, beginning with his tutelage in East Tennessee from legendary deadlifter Bob Peoples. Herein lay the first serious poundages discrepancy which occurred at the critical first encounter between these two iron game notables in 1952. Contrary to Peoples' contemporary report that Paul did an amazing double deep knee bend with 550 pounds, Anderson recollects over two decades later in his memoir, *Paul Anderson: The World's Strongest Man,* that it was an even more remarkable 600 pounds. Strossen never even notes, much less attempts to clarify, this descrepancy.

This photo captures the two things that defined Paul Anderson's life-the iron and his ministry to his boys.

Bodybuilder/wrestler Harry Smith, on the other hand, provides much greater insight into Paul's personality and describes how easily perceptions of exact poundages can become distorted. "Anderson in those days was "laid-back. Always a quiet person. A cracker boy with no airs about him. Peoples was also laid-back. You had to pull conversation out of Paul. 'Don't tell me what it weighs. Just load the bar, and I'll pick it up' was his line." Paul's lifts were still superior to any standard of the time, but the 50 pound differential illustrates some of the difficulties in verifying his unofficial lifts.

In chronicling Anderson's rise from state and regional standout to world champion from 1952 to 1955, replete with pictures, Strossen's account is quite clearly at its strongest inasmuch as it relies on lifts completed under official conditions and reported by responsible publications. Again, however, amidst an abundance of data, the human element is lacking. While mention is made of how Anderson's progress was hampered by injuries, it would be far more enlightening to know his means of support, what he did with his time, his career goals, and most importantly, what was motivating him to achieve such unprecedented feats of strength, especially in the squat. What were the psycho/social forces propelling him? He was hardly a normal human being! While coverage is provided on his international debut in Moscow and his world championship victory in Munich in 1955, it lacks depth and drama, and receives scarcely more attention than some contests of lesser consequence. No sense of their impact on world weightlifting or Cold War politics is conveyed. Paul's 402 press in Gorky Park was a propaganda coup that catapulted him to immediate fame. Likewise, for the coverage of the 1956 Melbourne Olympics the author forsakes Anderson's own dramatic and detailed recollections (the foremost primary source extant) for D. G. Johnson's less stirring account in *Lifting News.* Most importantly it was at this moment, according to Anderson, that he gave his life to Christ, a commitment that supposedly shaped all of his subsequent life. As Paul confirmed to me in March of 1986, "You are correct about my total Christian commitment being made in Melbourne. Before then I was a churched individual, but not a real committed Christian." How Strossen could have omitted such a momentous event in this otherwise religious rendering, even as a "milestone" at the end, is not easy to comprehend.

Another incongruity between author and subject appears at the outset of the section on "The Early Professional Years." Here Strossen's statement that Paul abandoned his amateur status as a "means for earning his livelihood' is at variance with Anderson's own claim that he did it for reasons of Christian charity. In a 1962 letter to Bob Hoffman, he states that "I am in full swing with the 'Paul Anderson Youth Home.' We are taking homeless children [in] every day. This is a dream I have had for sometime. In fact this is the reason I started doing the professional work." While Strossen may have a point, he ignores testimonials from his subject (not limited to this letter) over a matter of great consequence to Paul's Christian commitment. Another relevant factor which bears investigation is that Paul's Olympic lifting career may have reached its zenith. While there seemed no limit to what he could press or push press from the racks, he was never able officially to clean much more than 440 pounds. He perhaps realized that other heavyweights, the likes of Yuri Vlasov, Gary Gubner, and Joe Dube, would soon emerge to eclipse his marks, simply from his inability to get over the "hump" of the clean. Thus it was more promising to stick with unofficial strongman lifts where he could apply his own standards, play to his strengths, and receive maximum recognition for his efforts. Virtually all of the lifts described in "The Early Professional Years" are of the unconventional variety.

By no means the least interesting aspect of Paul's professional career was his brief but spectacular foray into show business. But there is no indication in

Early in his career as a professional strongman, Paul Anderson did a number of shows in Las Vegas and Reno where this publicity shot was taken.

Strossen's book of how long Anderson performed in Las Vegas and Reno, how much money he made (for himself and the casino), or what the audience response might have been to his performances, either on site or on the Ed Sullivan Show. It can only be assumed that his kind of act had little of the staying power of a Wayne Newton, Debbie Reynolds, or Siegfried and Roy! Much less is conveyed (less than a sentence) about Paul's pursuit of other sporting endeavors-namely wrestling and boxing. In keeping with his practice of saying nothing unfavorable about his subject, Strossen brushes this experience aside by saying that "neither sphere was as well suited to his abilities as the world of pure strength." Far from drawing attention away from Anderson's weakness, this glib assertion has the effect of provoking any intelligent reader to want more. How many matches did he engage in? What was his record? How did he train? How did his strength and size assist or hinder him? And how much money did he make? Finally, though it is arguably the most significant (and publicized) feat of strength in Anderson's illustrious career. the big (6,270 pound) backlift is only mentioned in passing, and divorced from its historical context. No empirical evidence is provided, no date, no information on the circumstances surrounding its performance, and no mention is made of testimony from witnesses. With no concrete information on Paul's record backlift, it is not possible to capture any sense of the moment.

What seems obvious to even the most casual reader is that Paul, despite his alleged conversion in 1956, was still searching for something. And during the years after Melbourne he was searching most obviously in the fame and fortune sector, or at least for a career in which he could employ his very unique abilities. Interestingly, neither in the publicity surrounding his professional endeavors nor in his post 1956 correspondence is any mention made of his idea for a boys home. Only in his sworn affidavit for AAU reinstatement in October 1963 does Paul himself reveal this altruistic intent. Nor was his Christianity evident during the early post Olympic period. Tommy Kono does not recall Paul ever mentioning his conversion at Melbourne and Peary Rader, known in the iron game for his Christian witness, never mentions Anderson's spirituality until the 1960s. Lacking too is the salutation, so familiar in his later letters of "Your Friend in Christ." Finally, no one I've interviewed in Georgia who knew Paul in the 1950s remembers him for his religiosity then. What appears to have had the greatest impact on Anderson's life, providing a focus for his career and Christian commitment, was his courtship and marriage to Glenda Garland in 1959. Yet scant mention is made of this most significant of developments, or of their daughter Paula. Unquestionably by 1962 Paul found fulfillment by discovering, almost simultaneously, the love of his life, his God, and a meaningful career. Arguably, any of these commitments meant more to him than weightlifting at this point.

Indeed Glenda Anderson confirms that while her husband may have had a conversion experience and ideas about starting a boys' home as early as the Melbourne Olympics, they remained latent until the early 1960s. By this time Paul was attempting to regain his amateur status with an eye to crushing challenges from Yuri Vlasov and other heavyweights at the Tokyo Olympics. He was also built perfectly for the fledgling sport of powerlifting. But Anderson was not reinstated and had to live with the consequences of his earlier decision to turn professional. At this critical juncture Strossen misses an opportunity to boost the stock of his subject by not bringing out the fact that unlike other elite lifters of this era, Anderson, despite his awesome strength, was never suspected in the 1950s of taking steroids. Nor did he benefit from any of the supportive devices that modern powerlifters employ to boost their lifts, sometimes by hundreds of pounds. That Paul's strength was all natural is never sufficiently recognized or credited to him. Instead, Strossen takes a harsh negative turn by belittling the early powerlifting achievements of Terry Todd in his classic confrontation with Gene Roberson at the first national power meet in 1965.

This demeaning spirit continues into the chapter

on "The Later Years" where Todd's 650 squat at a Dallas power meet in 1964 is called "small potatoes" in comparison to Anderson's feats of strength. A more positive spin on these events is provided in Todd's 1972 article in *Muscular Development.* In the 1964 meet Todd had just won the heavyweight class with a quite respectable deadlift of 700 pounds. Then, after a pressing exhibition, Anderson had that same poundage placed on racks

> and with no squat warm-up at all, proceeded to knock off 8 reps so easily that I'm positive he could have done at least 15, maybe more. I mean he popped up and down with that 700 pounds like he was lifting feathers instead of iron. I'll admit that before I saw him squat, I was skeptical, believing that he probably didn't really go very low or was not really as strong as I'd always heard he was. . . . the depth and ease of his squats changed my skepticism to awe and admiration.

These sentiments in support of Paul's credibility are even stronger than Peary Rader's eyewitness account of the same meet that Strossen reproduces. Less credible, however, are speculations about a 600 pound press that Anderson *might* have done had he not become so engrossed in the development of his children's home. Given the importance of this enterprise to Paul, and the Christian ministry that accompanied it, it is remarkable that barely a page of text and only four pictures are devoted to it. The author thus misses the climactic events of his subject's life, extending over two decades—the point toward which all previous events seemed destined to culminate. It would be interesting to know not only some details of the many thousands of exhibitions he performed but the general public response to his muscular ministry. Surely there are letters available, interview possibilities, printed testimonials, etc. that could provide some idea of his impact. Paul's involvement with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and other evangelical groups begs coverage. Likewise, much more attention needs to be devoted to coverage of the Paul Anderson Youth Home. Details about his lifting career are meaningless otherwise. Arguably there had never been an athlete whose combination of talent and Christian witness reached quite so many souls, yet this account hardly touches upon it. Lost too is the opportunity to show how the mightiest minister constituted a continuation of the popular muscular Christianity tradition of the nineteenth century.

Unquestionably the most specious and least convincing chapter, one that is no doubt foremost in the author's estimation, deals with "Paul's Unofficial Lifts." Here two hypothetical situations are created to explain what cannot be verified through historical evidence. The first pertains to the 6,270 pound backlift that Paul allegedly performed on 12 June 1957, in his backyard in Toccoa. After rationalizing for two pages about why Paul should have been able to do it because of the strength he displayed on many other lifts throughout his career, for which there are "mountains of documentation," Strossen then creates an imaginary setting, complete with a table similar to one that Anderson's father supposedly crafted for Paul and weights similar to those that might have been placed on it. The inescapable fact remains, however, that neither the table nor most of the assorted lead and iron objects that were supposedly on it exist any longer. Furthermore, we do not know the exact dimensions of the table or the exact nature of the objects. There is no record of anything ever being weighed and no photograph extant of the event. In fact, there is no historical evidence that the lift was ever even done.

The first report of a feat resembling the big backlift appears in the January 1959 issue of *Iron Man,* just as Paul was in the midst of his "very successful" professional wrestling career. "We hear that he has made a 6200 lb. back lift for a new world record" (p. 36). It would be interesting to know why it took fully one and a half years for any publicity to appear on this momentous event. The same 6,200 figure reappears two years later in the March 1961 issue, again with no intervening coverage. Shortly afterwards it appeared in the *Guinness Book of World Records* for the first time in 1962, but only as 6,000 pounds! Although the *Guinness* folks have no record of who submitted the entry, Paul himself provides some enlightenment on the circumstances surrounding its acceptance in his autobiography.

> By June 1957 people had begun to ask: If you are indeed the World's Strongest Man and World and Olympic champion, why aren't you listed in the Guinness Book of World Records? French Canadian Louis Cyr had the record for the most weight ever lifted in any manner by man with the incredible four thousand pounds-plus back lift (crouching under a table loaded with weights and lifting it on his back). His record had stood since before the turn of the century.
>
> We had to know exactly how much the lifting table weighed before the lift, so after we nailed it together, we took it apart and weighed it. (You can imagine how much wood and nails went into a table that would support thousands of pounds of weights. The table itself weighed eighteen hundred pounds.) Then we nailed the table together again.
>
> We weighed each weight as it was added to the table. When the total of weights and the table reached 6,270 pounds, I set myself carefully and squarely beneath it and raised it off the ground,

breaking the record by more than a ton.

What begs an immediate answer is why, if the big backlift was staged specifically as a record for the *Guinness* book, it took six years to register it-and then only as 6,000 pounds. Also, contrary to Paul's description of the lift, the actual entry states that the weight was "lifted off trestles," not "off the ground." Finally, as Steve Neece and Joe Roark have asked, if the lift was done for publicity purposes, why was there no photographer, journalist, or credible lifting authority present to verify and publicize this stupendous feat?

But, according to at least one source, there was a newspaper reporter and an AAU official present at the event. According to an article by Paul's brother-in-law, Julius Johnson, in a memorial issue of the *Toccoa Record* in October 1994, Maurice Payne and Karo Whitfield were present and helped organize the event. Betty Swords, curator of the Stephens County Historical Museum and lifelong resident of Toccoa, verifies that Payne was a photographer for the *Anderson* (South Carolina) *Independent* and was in charge of its Toccoa circulation. Karo Whitfield was an Atlanta gym operator, a category I international referee, and a major promoter of weightlifting in Georgia. It is inconceivable that neither Payne nor Whitfield, who supposedly staged the backlift for publicity purposes, would not publicize it until six years later! Yet one searches the Anderson and Toccoa newspapers (for 1957 and 1958) in vain for any picture or story on the 6,270 pound backlift. A short article does appear in the *Record* verifying Paul's appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show on the 16th, only four days after the alleged backlift. This news item shows that the local paper did provide coverage of Anderson and further suggests that he may have been off pursuing his show business career and not even in Toccoa on the 12th. These suspicions are reinforced by contemporary articles in *Strength & Health* indicating that following Paul's "most successful engagement at a large Reno night-club," he traveled to Los Angeles where he performed various strength feats at Muscle Beach and made plans with his promoter Harold Cantonwine, a Los Angeles resident, for a "strength act to tour the country." There is no indication, nor does it seem likely, that this series of events orchestrated by Cantonwine and culminating with the Sullivan Show (also staged from the west coast) was interrupted to enable Paul to return to Toccoa to perform a record backlift. It would have constituted a critical break of historical sequence of events.

By no means the least interesting aspect of Johnson's article is that, though it provides eyewitness-quality testimony of Paul's memorable lift, it is not cited by Strossen. Johnson verifies that Paul used the "stout wooden platform" his father had built for him and that previously

> many people saw him use that kind of platform to lift several [sic] people at one time. That afternoon he decided to fill it up with weights to see if he could lift over 4,000. For the centerpiece he used an old iron safe, filled with cement. He said it was 'pretty heavy.' As I recall, it weighed something over 3,000 pounds. Around the safe they stacked other weights until the platform was covered in a fairly balanced manner. Paul slid under it and with a mighty effort lifted it up. It bent slightly, so he held it until it was steady and everyone could clearly see that all four legs were off the ground.
>
> Then they weighed and recorded all parts, including the platform. Again and again they checked the total which was 6,270 pounds. Whitfield said this was more than 800 pounds over the previous record. He suggested that they should notify the Guinness Book of Records. He and Payne the reporter took on that task and officially certified what they had seen. The Guinness people accepted their testimony and published Paul's feat in their books annually for over thirty years.

This first-hand testimony closely coincides with Anderson's own account of his famous backlift, yet neither are cited as evidence by Strossen. Again it begs the question of why, if Payne and Whitfield took their evidence to the *Guinness* authorities, it took another six years to see the light of day. Finally, the question emerges as to how much of a primary source Johnson's account really is. Such phrases as "I recall," "a fairly balanced manner," "Paul slid under it," "a mighty effort," "bent slightly," and "all four legs were off the ground" suggest strongly that Johnson actually saw what he describes so graphically. But in a telephone conversation in February 2000, he informed me that he never witnessed the lift and dismissed this occasion as just another time when Paul had lifted this much weight and more. Voila!

Likewise there is no one in Toccoa or anywhere else who has ever come forward as having seen the lift actually performed. Payne committed suicide in 1959 and Whitfield died in 1982 without leaving any papers– so neither of the original organizers are talking. And Glenda Anderson suspects that all of the records verifying Paul's *Guinness* entry were destroyed through a conspiracy mounted by the supporters of Indian strongman Sri Chinmoy!

A clue to resolving this seemingly impossible dilemma can be found by examining the context of Peary Rader's first mention of Anderson's backlift in early

1959. This information was drawn from an article that appeared in the *Omaha World-herald* on 4 November 1958, publicizing Paul's forthcoming wrestling match on Saturday in the City Auditorium. Among various other feats of strength attributed to him, **"No. 1 is the fact he holds the world record for the back lift, having hoisted 62 hundred pounds about five inches."** [bold print in original] Although no one in the iron game was aware of this magnificent feat of strength at this time, wrestling fans were among the first to know. Furthermore, in this version Paul allegedly lifted the weight "about five inches," which borders on the fantastic. It would be interesting to know the source of the *World-herald* statement, but it was most likely some wrestling promoter or Paul himself, and not some other weightlifting authority.

My research has yielded a second early mention of the big backlift from the late 1950s, and again it is within the context of wrestling. In a video tape of the 26 year old Anderson wrestling one Bozo Brown in the International Amphitheatre in Chicago, Russ "Pappy" Davis waxes eloquent about the Georgian's many weightlifting accomplishments. "One time in a backlift, he lifted over 6,000 pounds. That, dear friend, is three tons." Obviously impressed with this feat, Davis repeats it later in the match. Then he alludes to an endeavor that, like Paul's wrestling career, stood to benefit from publicity generated from the big backlift. "Paul is in the mail order business," states Davis. "He's selling weightlifting equipment." Nothing about this money-making enterprise appears in Strossen's book, but in written responses to queries from Terry Todd in the 1970s, Anderson revealed much about his early entrepreneurial efforts.

> Health Products Corporation was something that actually I really would like to soft pedal a little bit because it gets so family. . . . The idea come from my brother-in-law [Julius Johnson] wanting to start a corporation to handle various products under my name. Of course you know the thought and idea there is nothing really wrong with that. To make a long story short I worked with him on this and we started before the Olympic Games. After the Olympic Games they put out a weight lifting course. I also thought the best thing would be to put out the health food first. As you know the health food business was just kindly in it's infancy at that time especially the fact that the protein business was quite young and I think it would have gone better than the course. When we were doing the course, we were falling back into the old Earl Leiderman, Charles Atlas bit. Also it is a funny thing, they offered a money back guarantee on this course, which I never did think was too good. There had been courses copied and returned. They did a great deal of advertising which even today I receive a world of material wanting to buy that old original course, from people who are finding the ads in 1957 magazines.
>
> As I said to make a long story short I blew the 25,000 on advertising and never really accomplished a great deal. Many mistakes were made, and I would rather soft pedal it right here, concerning that.

It is hardly surprising that Paul wanted to "soft pedal" this information, but it fits the 1957 time frame, and Paul further admits that he went "out on the road" to promote this Health Products Company. Whether the three ton backlift was fabricated as promotional hype for this venture and later utilized to advance his wrestling career cannot be determined. There's hardly a smoking gun here. But the scenario is by no means unfamiliar amongst professional strongmen.

A final way of deconstructing Paul's legendary backlift is afforded by the curious course of entries by which it was recognized in the *Guinness Book of World Records* over three decades. According to Joanne Violette of the *Guinness* organization, Anderson's feat was first recognized in the 1962 edition as follows:

> WEIGHTLIFTING: THE GREATEST WEIGHT EVER RAISED BY A HUMAN BEING IS, 6,000 LB. (2.67 TONS) BY THE 26 STONE, 1956 OLYMPIC HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION, PAUL ANDERSON (USA) AT TOCCOA GEORGIA, ON JUNE 12 1957, IN A BACK LIFT (WEIGHT RAISED OFF TRESTLES).

Exactly the same entry appeared in the 1963 edition. In both references the 2.67 tons refers to the long ton equivalent of 6,000 pounds. Whereas the short ton of 2,000 pounds is most commonly recognized in the United States, Canada, and South Africa, the long ton is the preferred usage in Great Britain, and the 2.67 figure was no doubt included in parentheses to make the lift comprehensible to what was then largely a British readership. By 1968, however, as worldwide sales of the *Guinness* book proliferated, the Anglicisms of long tons and stones (for bodyweight) are Americanized and a curious addition to Paul's world record lift creeps into the entry.

> The greatest weight ever raised by a human being is 6,000 lbs. In a back lift (weight raised off trestles) by the 364-lb. Paul Anderson (U.S.), the 1956 Olympic heavyweight champion, at Toccoa, Georgia, on June 12, 1957. *Anderson is reputed to have once lifted*

6,200 lbs. [my italics]

This last sentence raises two new points of concern. First, it suggests that Paul performed a second record backlift that exceeded the one in June 1957, but no specific date or place is specified. Furthermore, the statement is couched in the elusive passive voice and employs the equivocal verb "reputed," implying a less than definite progeny for the information. Even more remarkable, the ensuing 1973 edition of Guinness conflates this dubious 6,200 poundage with the original 1957 date and adds yet another 70 pounds.

> The greatest weight ever raised by a human being is 6,270 lb. 2,844 kg (2.80) tons [2.84]) in a back lift (weight raised off trestles) by the 26st. 165 kg Paul Anderson (USA) (born 1933 [sic]), the 1956 Olympic heavyweight champion at Toccoa, Georgia, U.S.A., on 12 June 1957.

Possibly this final figure of 6,270 pounds was derived from some confusion over 6,000 pounds and 2.67 tons. At any rate, it seems likely that it came from Anderson or a close associate. Indeed, in the November 1971 issue of *Strength & Health* under the heading of "It's Official," Paul asserts that "I have backlifted over 6000 lbs., to be exact 6270 officially." In addition to a number of other startling claims in this list of his personal records (including a 485 clean and press!) this is the first time the word "official" has been invoked. Allusions to the presence of Whitfield and Payne would be a later accretion. The story then took on a life of its own over the next two decades, boosted by the worldwide credibility of Guinness and the unwavering trust of iron gamers everywhere in the integrity of Anderson and belief in his Christian mission. Eventually it was etched in granite and mounted in front of his boyhood home on Tugalo Street in Toccoa. By the early 1990s *Guinness,* realizing that it had no evidence for any backlift—6,000, 6,200, or 6,270—for Paul, deleted the entry and started listing only officially verifiable lifts in its weightlifting section. What this examination of successive entries shows is how something can be created out of nothing for the sake of a heroic tradition. In this endeavor the iron game is hardly unique. So prevalent is the tendency in serving the interests of subcultures and ethnic groups that William McNeill, in his 1985 presidential address to the American Historical Association labeled the practice "Mythistory."

The problem with Paul's claim to a 1200 pound squat is less acute. We at least have the satisfaction of knowing that some such lift was at least attempted at his exhibitions at the Mapes Hotel in Reno. But two further flaws arise in Strossen's line of argument. First, we are asked to accept the weight of an object that has never been weighed-in an attempt, once again, to invent history. That the glass-sided safes contained 15,000 silver dollars and that each one weighed 26.73 grams sounds plausible enough, but we have no official verification that the safes were really loaded with that number of coins or that the total actually weighed what Strossen calculates it should have—883.93 pounds. More seriously, we are asked to believe that the apparatus containing the silver dollars weighed at least three hundred pounds by comparing it to a similar device used subsequently for the World's Strongest Man contest for deadlifting. For verification that this latter apparatus weighed 600 pounds, Strossen cites himself! Again, there are simply too many leaps of faith required here to create a climate of confidence. Most importantly, Strossen again overlooks published testimony from his subject in the most obvious of places—*Strength & Health* (July, 1957)—where Anderson states that the silver dollar apparatus weighed just "1100 pounds." In reporting this information Harry Paschall, who was nobody's fool, seemed skeptical.

> We believe he probably used the well-known professional strongmen's prerogative of stretching the poundage a bit, but we can tell you that 15,000 silver dollars weigh 600 lbs., and the apparatus possibly went another couple hundred. Certainly he is safe in offering anybody the $15,000 who can duplicate this feat-for there is nobody around who can do 800 lbs. Maybe it even weighed more than this, since Paul is supposed to have squatted with 1,000 lbs.

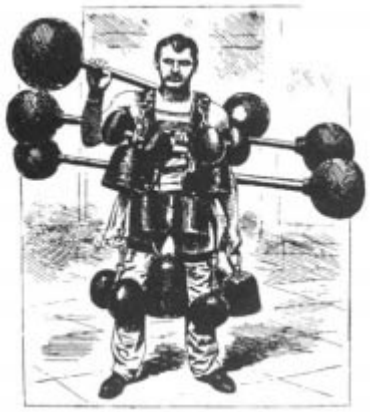
It is significant that Strossen completely ignores the context in which the 1200 pound squat was allegedly performed—in the fast-paced atmosphere of a tourist Mecca where the major purpose was to promote gambling. Failure to perform the much publicized silver dollar squat was simply not an option for the casino promoters. And while there is no evidence that the event was rigged, fooling the public has a long tradition among strongmen, and it was in the best interests of the good folks at Mapes as well as Paul to make sure that he lived up to his billing of "Strongest Man on Earth."

A further problem with Anderson's squat relates to depth. Despite Strossen's insistence that "Paul had a long history of squatting to rock bottom" and the protestations of Terry Todd that Paul went plenty low, there are too many iron gamers who were not so satisfied. I remember first seeing Paul squat at the conclusion of the All-South Power Meet in Durham, North Carolina, where I was completing my doctoral studies in the spring

of 1969. For much of the next week those of us who worked out at the Durham YMCA debated whether he broke parallel on his heavy squats. The consensus was that his squats would not have been passed in the preceding powerlifting contest but that his legs were so huge that he probably couldn't go any lower. As I recall, the only big man from those years who really hit "rock bottom" was Paul Wrenn of Tennessee whose squats truly inspired awe and admiration. Also, those of us who carried Anderson's 150 pound exhibition plates back to his car after the performance could not help but wonder whether they really weighed that much. Perhaps we were all expecting too much from this living legend, but I remember feeling a trifle disappointed. Finally, mention should be made of the frozen photo that Strossen painstakingly reproduces (on page 92) of Paul's descent with the silver dollar squat. While it certainly shows that he did "more than a half squat," it hardly constitutes proof of anything "rock bottom." If this frame shows Paul at his lowest point, as it surely must, it is evident that the tops of his thighs are still above parallel, thus providing yet more grist for the Doubting Thomas mills. ***[Editor's note:*** *It is possible that the lack of agreement in the recollections about Anderson's squat depth by those who saw him lift is due to a tendency some lifters have of varying the depth of their squat depending on conditions, weight on the bar, how they're feeling, and so on. Many lifters who comfortably hit deep positions (below the "thigh parallel" position) with a "light weight" while doing repetitions will "cut" their depth when a heavy single repetition is being done. As the author pointed out, I saw Paul do eight reps with 700 pounds in the squat with a standard Olympic bar and all but the first rep reached the "thigh parallel" benchmark. At the same time, I have heard several experienced weight men tell me that they had seen one or more of his heavy single reps and that he did not reach such a low position, or "legal" position with the heavier weight. However, I have also talked to seasoned lifters who saw him do a single "thighs parallel" squat with slightly more than 900 pounds. The simple facts are that almost all lifters vary the depth of their squats to some degree, and that some lifters can "cut" their depth and, by doing so, lift substantially more weight.]*

The remaining chapter on Paul's training and diet is anticlimactic. Its principal thrust is on the obvious, his squat training and consumption of high protein foods. In this respect, as the author rightly points out, Anderson was in the forefront of training techniques of his time. What he neglects to point out is that Paul often engaged in the unwise practice of lifting heavy weights without warming up. According to Georgia colleague Ben Green, Paul did not have much time to train in his later years, "so he kept a 400 pound barbell at home, and each time he passed it he pressed it cold." Glenda attributes some of his later health problems to this practice. Likewise he spent so much time on the road that his exhibitions often also served as training sessions. Contrary to the testimony of Bob Peoples on page 15 and the commentary of Larry Coleman in "The Strongest Man" video, Strossen correctly points out that Paul was never a big eater and consumed prodigious quantities of milk. What he does not mention is that Anderson never had a balanced diet. It was radically rich in protein, including raw eggs and even soup made from beef blood, but deficient in vegetables. Also, owing to his constant travels in his later years, he often consumed junk food, especially soft drinks, which did nothing for his declining health. A truism that does emerge in this final chapter, more implicit than explicit, is that Paul was an original who had a mind of his own and blazed his own way through the weightlifting world for a quarter century. As Julius Johnson observed, "He was an innovator."

That much cannot be said, however, for Randall Strossen's attempt to relate his life story. Most of the information, well known and previously published, serves only to reinforce preexisting views of Anderson's goodness and worth. Serious omissions abound, most of which could have been avoided by some quality research time in Georgia and elsewhere. The only original chapter, on "The Unofficial Lifts," is actually an exercise in virtual history which is hardly a substitute for real history. Instead of searching for tangible evidence of Anderson's 1957 backlift, the author attempts an armchair reconstruction which is unconvincing. What he calls "a shred of faith" to make his arguments believable actually amounts to a giant leap of faith. Furthermore, such specious arguments should serve as a caveat to the unwary that what passes for truth might be nothing more than speculation which feeds on itself and has no independent existence other than the reality of its own repetition. Indeed, there is no evidence that Anderson ever tried to backlift 6,270 pounds or that his silver dollar squats actually weighed 1,200 pounds. Strossen's book constitutes a missed opportunity to understand the most remarkable strength phenomenon of the twentieth century, whose official lifts alone entitle him to be called the World's Strongest Man during his prime (1955-1967). However strong and virtuous Paul may have been, he was a human being, not a saint or demigod, and deserves a much fuller and more probing treatment. This account, alas, raises far more questions than it answers and shows us how far away we are from knowing the full story of Paul Anderson.



IRONCLAD

Paul Anderson's June 12, 1957 Backlift

by Joe Roark

Why would any man crawl under a platform loaded with weights weighing almost three tons more than himself, then try to backlift it? Paul Anderson says he was motivated to try it to prove he was the strongest man in the world after someone had shown him a copy of the 1956 *Guinness Book **of** Superlatives* which listed Louis Cyr as the strongest man in the world: "The greatest weight ever raised by a human being is 4,133 lbs (1.84 tons) by the 350 lb. French-Canadian, Louis Cyr (1863-1912) in Chicago in 1896 in a back-lift (weight raised off trestles)." Paul wrote in his autobiography, *A Greater Strength:* "I decided to break Cyr's record in my hometown, partly because of the prohibitive cost involved in moving all that weight to another area."

Here is what was happening in Paul's life in the weeks leading to the famous backlift of 12 June, 1957. On 4 April 1957 Paul began a two week engagement of strength demonstrations at the Mapes Hotel in Reno, Nevada. Advertising heralding this nightclub act included a mention that Paul ". . . has lifted better than 5000 pounds." *Reno Evening Gazette,* 2 April 1957.

When the Mapes Hotel was built in 1947 it was, at twelve stories, the tallest building in Nevada. Charles W. Mapes had first encountered Paul weeks earlier while Anderson was performing in California by hip-lifting his 2300 pound safe out of a hole. During Paul's engagement at the Skyroom at the Mapes Hotel two challenges were issued. To a regular patron (non-lifter) all that was required to keep the $15,000 (in silver dollars) packed into the special see-through barbell was to lift the barbell off of a squat rack and stand there supporting it. The barbell has been reported as weighing between 900 and about 1200 pounds. No actual squat (either full or half) was required of a challenger who was a non-lifter.

For a *lifter* to earn the $15,000, a deep squat needed to be performed, or at least a squat of the sort Paul demonstrated twice each evening and during three performances on Saturday. No one ever won the cash, and after the final performance each evening four stagehands and Paul would carry the barbell to the storage area. Mr. Mapes said that the barbell was weighed publicly and that it weighed 1,000 pounds. He also said that Paul played to a packed house (350 patrons) each performance during the two week engagement. During Paul's stay about ten people tried for the money.

In June of 1957 Paul was at Muscle Beach and did some heavy lifting; this was the month that he and Gail Taylor were to have been married, but were not.

Then came the fateful day. On 12 June 1957, according to Paul's later claims, he performed a feat that has received more publicity, particularly among the non-lifting public, than any other lift in history—his backlift of 6,270 pounds. *[Editors' note: The only lifting feat that is perhaps better known than Anderson's would be the reported lifting and carrying of a heifer calf, as it grew to maturity, by the Greek wrestler, Milo of Croton in the fifth century B.C.]*

On Wednesday 12 June 1957, Paul Anderson was just 24 years of age, and the temperature in Toccoa rose from Tuesday's high of 82 with .02 inches of rain to 95 degrees with no rain. Paul, in the afternoon (according to his brother-in-law, Julius Johnson, who was not present), supposedly attempted to backlift more weight than anyone else had ever hoisted, surpassing Cyr's sixty-one year old record by more than a ton. (Actually, several references indicate that Paul had already bypassed Louis by more than 800 pounds.) It was established in an earlier issue of *Iron Game History* that the safe Paul used for this backlift weighed approximately 2300 pounds instead of approximately 3500 pounds, so

let's now study the components of the backlift: the platform and the other items added to the platform for additional weight. In a telephone interview on 1 December 1999 with Julius Johnson, Anderson's brother-in-law, Johnson said ". . . the backlift platform that was in Paul's back yard was about six feet long and three or four feet wide..." In otherwords, the platform had the overall approximate dimensions of a household door. He also said that the platform had saw-horse type legs. Keep in mind that *Guinness* describes this lift as having been done "off trestles," so no "sawhorse legs" or any other sorts of legs would leave the ground. If for some reason the legs were attached to the platform, it would require eight legs to be lifted clear of the ground, not four as is always described by various writers with more enthusiasm than knowledge.

The *Toccoa Record* newspaper on 6 October 1994 (page 2-c), carried an article by Julius Johnson regarding the backlift on 12 June 1957, maintaining that: "That afternoon he decided to fill it [platform] up with weights to see if he could lift over 4,000 pounds." In reference to the 6'x3'-4' platform (which Paul has said weighed 1800 pounds), Johnson describes what happened to it during the backlift: "It bent slightly, so he held it until it was steady and everyone could clearly see that all four legs were off the ground." Legs? To repeat, *Guinness* says this was a lift off trestles, in which only the door-like platform and the weights on top of the platform would have been lifted.

Now let's compare the various descriptions of these events. Paul indicates in his 1975 autobiography, *Paul Anderson: The World's Strongest Man,* on page 88, that the weighing of what was lifted was prior to the lift attempt. Julius Johnson, however, says that the weighing followed the lift, and that Paul was trying to ". . . see if he could lift over 4,000 pounds." Why? According to the *Reno Gazette* he had already lifted 5,000 pounds. What's more, when Earl Liederman interviewed Paul for a *Muscle Power* article that appeared in February 1957 (page 58) Paul himself claimed a backlift of 5,000 pounds. If the platform weighed 1,800 pounds, as claimed, and the safe 3,500, as claimed, why would anyone have to weigh either to determine that 4,000 pounds had been surpassed, especially when Johnson had described the addition of ". . . other weights until the platform was covered in a fairly balanced manner."

Also, why would an 1800 pound table that was only 6' long bend at the ends? The great majority of the weight was dead center over Paul's wide back. Obviously, the saw-horses would have been placed at the longer ends of the platform, not under the narrower 3' to 4' wide span. If the platform was only three feet wide, and the safe (we know) is two feet wide, then there was only six inches of space on either side of the platform for extra weight, and only two feet of extra space on each end. This would not have left much room for additional weights to be added. Another matter is this. Of what material would you construct a lifting platform six feet long and three or four feet wide that would end up weighing nine-tenths of a ton? How thick would it have to be? For example, it would require a stack of forty-four (3/4" thick) plywood sheets to weigh approximately 1800 pounds, but, at 4'x8', such a plywood table would have been 2' longer than the one Johnson described, and perhaps wider.

One of the lifts in which Paul Anderson was unusually strong was the one-hand side press.

Platform Descriptions

Let's examine in detail what has been written about the backlift platform that Paul used in his quest for the record. Herb Glossbrenner in *Iron Man* magazine July 1987 (page 23) says that Paul and his dad "...built a big platform and loaded it with metal weights." In describing the 6,270 pound backlift, Glossbrenner says that, "At last all four corners cleared the uprights. He had done it-the greatest weight ever lifted by a human—6,270 pounds!" So Glossbrenner says the platform was what was lifted, just as *Guinness* had described it-a lift off trestles and not a lift in which the "legs" also cleared the ground. This 6' x 3'-4' platform weighed 1,800 pounds?

As for Paul's own

account, he wrote in his autobiography, *A Greater Strength,* "I worked with my father to build the platform and lifting table." So Paul lists two items. Obviously, he's describing a platform which rested upon a lifting table He also said, "The table itself weighed about 1,800 pounds." Why weigh the table if it was not to be a part of the lift? And, what did the platform weigh? But Paul continues that each weight was added to the table. Did he mean the platform resting upon the table, or did he mean the reverse? Paul's widow Glenda acknowledged to me that she had never seen the lifting table/platform Paul used for his June 1957 attempt. She said that it was gone from the backyard in Toccoa by the time she and Paul were dating and she had occasion to visit that location. But she and Paul were married September 1, 1959, and Paul wrote to me that, "That old manganese safe finally fell through the platform as it deteriorated over the years and its laying in the same spot today up in Toccoa, Georgia where my daughter now lives in the home where I was born." But how could this be? If the platform was there in 1957 for the attempt and rotted through by the time Glenda was in the area two years later, of what was this massive 1,800 pound table composed? Certainly not railroad ties, that have a life expectancy of several decades, not several months. And what 1,800 pounds of wood would rot through in two years in the north Georgia climate?

In *Musclemag International,* July 1992, Julius Johnson's letter to the editor indicates that the backlift components were weighed after the backlift, instead of before it, as Paul had claimed. Johnson wrote: "They piled all the junk they could get on a platform. When they could pile on no more, he lifted it. Then they totaled the weight of all the parts, including the platform. A newspaper man (Maurice Payne) and the owner of a gym in Atlanta (Karo Whitfield) were there. They suggested, not Paul, that the feat should be submitted to the Guiness(sic) Book of Records." But Paul himself says in *A Greater Strength* that he had summoned the proper authorities to witness the lift. And if a representative from *Guinness* was indeed present, why would anyone have to urge that representative to include the lift as a replacement listing for Cyr's record? Why else would *Guinness* have sent anyone to cover the event? In that same letter, Johnson adds, "None of the [Toccoa] townspeople were aware that an exceptional event would take place in Paul's backyard that day." So when did Mr. Johnson learn of the backlift? What he told me over the phone was, "I will tell you that I was not aware of it until I saw it published." In *Guinness?* Read on...

In any case, Paul realized that in order to be known as the world's strongest man he had to break Cyr's backlift record of 4,133 pounds. Surprisingly, Paul understates his case in a manuscript which he provided to author John Little, who wrote a long article in *Muscle & Fitness* magazine in May 1993. In the manuscript, Paul writes that, "The backlift I did of over 6,000 pounds wasn't important at all. A bigger to-do is made about it today than it was then. I only did it to have my name associated with the greatest lift ever made. There was no fan-fare or anything . . . It wasn't as big a deal then as it's being discussed today. People are, you know, disputing it and all that but, you know, it doesn't bother me."

Why are people disputing it? Was it not well witnessed and soon put into the *Guinness Book **of** World Records?* The answers are no and no. Regarding witnesses, Paul has said that Karo Whitfield was there along with a newsman named Maurice Payne. Paul also said that his brother-in-law, Julius Johnson, was there with his camera to get some photos. As stated earlier, however, Johnson disputes this and says he was not present, did not take photos, and did not even learn about the backlift attempt until much later, long after the incident. If Maurice Payne ever photographed or wrote of the backlift of June 12, I, along with others who have researched this incident, have been unable to find any such photos or text. And if Karo Whitfield ever wrote of it, I can find no trace after years of searching. So the witnesses to this historic lift bore no witness?

As to when the backlift claim of 6,270 pounds was entered as a record into the *Guinness Book of World Records,* was it an entry in the next available issue: 1957? Or perhaps in 1958? No to both. *People* magazine, 29 August 1994, in its obituary on Paul asserts that, "In 1957 he [Paul] made the *Guinness Book of World Records* after lifting 6,270 pounds." Not really...

The first edition of the *Guinness* book to mention his record was the 1962 edition, five years after the fact, which lists the lift as 6,000 pounds. Why would it take so long? And why just 6000 pounds? It gets even more confusing. The 1962 listing remains the same until 1968, which repeats the 6,000 figure and adds that Anderson ". . . is reputed to have done" 6,200 pounds. Note that the new figure is 6200 and *not* 6,270. Even so, for some reason the date given for the 6,000 remained

the same as always—June 12, 1957. This 1968 citation is the first mention (11 years after 1957!) that Paul backlifted more than one amount on that date. Indeed, it has long been implied by Paul that *Guinness* had a representative at the backlift attempt that day. Yet if Paul loaded the table to 6,270 pounds (the final, famous figure) and then lifted it, and the representative saw it, or Payne and Whitfield saw it, why would not that figure, instead of the 6,000, or 6200, be printed in the record book? And why would Paul have been later "reputed" to have done 6,200? Did the Guinness representative leave before the lifting was over? Or did Paul first backlift 6,000, then 6200, and then finally 6,270? Indeed Paul later stated that when the amount on the table reached 6,270 pounds, the attempt was made; he does not mention a lighter attempt. David Willoughby in his 1970 book, *The Super Athletes,* writes that Paul backlifted 6,000 pounds and had "unoffrcially" lifted 6,270.

The finale in most of the hundreds of exhibitions Paul gave as he crisscrossed the country raising money for the Paul Anderson Youth Home was the lifting of a table loaded with people. Paul always sent detailed instructions to the people sponsoring his exhibitions so that a table built to his specifications would be available. Such a table allowed him to do the lift so it was safe for him as well as for those he lilted.

In a letter to Tom Ryan on 1 April 1988 regarding the 12 June 1957 date, Paul wrote, "I had officials there and what you would call a small audience. At the time, documented letters were written to the officials of the Guinness Book of World Records by the certified judges and newspapermen who were present." Newspapermen, plural? Judges certified as to what? Weightlifting? Who were they, other than Whitfield, and why have they never written about this? Paul continues: "The McWhirter brothers, who founded and edited the Guinness Book . . . have always been very particular about what they used in print. They did a full investigation in our case."

Well, maybe not so full. In a letter on *Guinness* letterhead, Stewart Newport, Deputy Editor, wrote to Dr. Terry Todd, 4 October 1989, regarding Paul's backlift, as follows: "However, after due consideration, the lack of extensive evidence for these claims led me to discuss the matter with our Sports Editor. He himself was unhappy with the entries and consequently we have taken the decision to delete the entries as highlighted on the enclosed copy." Thus was Paul's unsubstantiated backlift deleted from the "record" book, after almost 30 years of free publicity. *[Editors' note: We had become interested in the backlift records after meeting the father of Stout Jackson, a Texas strongman (profiled in the January 1994 issue of IGH) who had been listed as early as 1949 in Ripley's Believe It Or Not publications for a backlift of 6470 pounds. So we contacted the U.S. representatives of the Guinness organization as well as those at the Ripley organization to get whatever documentation existed about these decades-old claims. We received no documentation about Anderson's lift, except for the letter quoted above, but we received a substantial amount of documentation about the Jackson claim, though not enough to convince us of its authenticity given his overall career.]*

So whatever Whitfield and Payne or others wrote to Guinness, if anything, was judged upon reflection to have been inadequate proof Paul had argued in

a 24 January 1990 letter to me that, "We had officials present. One was a man by the name of Foster, who lived in Oregon and represented the *Guinness Book of Records* at one time, or at least was a contributor, another was Karo Whitfield and several of his friends from Atlanta, but I do not remember their names. Most of them were business and professional men and not lifters . . . A newspaper man was there, who came through our request, and as I have already said, my brother-in-law was also there." Whitfield was an AAU official, and would have been the only weightlifting official unless one or more of his friends were also weightlifting officials. As was stated earlier, Johnson claims not to have been there or even to have known of the lift until much later.

Almost 6,500 lbs?

In the same 24 January 1990 letter, Paul wrote, "Let's now go to the 6,270 pounds. This was rounded off, because it actually was a couple hundred pounds more." *Read that again.* Does this mean that he actually lifted 6,470 or maybe 6,500 pounds? So now we learn that the initial reports of *Guinness* at 6,000 pounds (which were listed for six years) were off by nearly 500 pounds? And what about the documenting letters, if any, written by the witnesses? They missed the 6,270 and the weighing which had actually totaled about 6,500? Or did everyone agree it would somehow be better if the 6500 were rounded *down* to 6,270 or maybe 6,000?

In any case, by the 1970 edition the 6,270 pounds is presented as the record. Thirteen years after the date of the event! Whitfield was still living at the time of this change.

Chance at Headline Publicity

Four days after Wednesday 12 June 1957, Paul appeared on the Ed Sullivan TV show. This was a golden opportunity to proclaim his achievement of four days earlier-that of having eclipsed Cyr's venerable record by one ton, and to add that Guinness would soon be updating its record book. But neither Anderson nor Sullivan (if he knew of it) saw fit to break this news on national TV. As for *Guinness,* they waited a dozen or baker's dozen years before committing the figure to print. Why?

And how about the bodybuilding magazines which had spotlighted every incremental increase in poundage as Paul upped the squat record beyond the reach of mere mortals? Did they headline the backlift accomplishment? There is no mention at all of the 12 June 1957 lift for many months in the bodybuilding literature. *Iron Man* magazine in January 1959 (page 36) states that, "We hear that he has made a 6200 lb. Back lift for a new world record." Surprisingly, the August 1963 issue of the same magazine offers one sentence on page 58: "It is rumored that Paul Anderson has recently succeeded with a back lift of 6,000 lbs." Apparently, editor Peary Rader forgot about the mention he had made of a 6200 pound lift four and a half years earlier. What's more, why would it be presented as a "rumor" by Rader?

Also, it would seem unlikely (because of the way the wire services operate) that a publishing deadline had caused Bob Thomas in his August 1957 Associated Press piece on Anderson, titled, "Bring Back Strong Man to Show Business" to mention only a backlift of 5,000 when Paul had lifted almost 1300 pounds more, "officially," just two months earlier? Why did Anderson not tell Thomas of the brand new record of 6270?

And although there may be ways to explain certain other omissions, one wonders why in September when Paul returned to Ed Sullivan's TV show did the announcement in *TV Guide* herald his carousel lift "laden with top Hollywood celebrities" and not mention his record backlift of June, a lift that has been the literal benchmark for nearly every biographical piece written about Paul for almost 45 years? And why in the *Hagerstown Daily Mail* 16 May 1958 does the AP story "Strong Man Would Fight For Title" fail to mention that Paul was entering the world of boxing as the greatest backlifter in history? Or the following day in Madison Square Garden when during his lifting exhibition he cleaned then pressed 424.25 pounds for two and [almost] three reps was the backlift not remarked on? And when Paul lifted at Karo Whitfield's show in Atlanta in March 1963, why did Karo not tell the audience that he had witnessed the incredible backlift that had been done just six years earlier?

Later assessments of Paul's lift can perhaps add insight to the situation. For instance, Jon Cole in *PLUSA* magazine, Dec 1994 (page 10) describes his thought of breaking Paul Anderson's backlift record in a response to the writer Herb Glossbrenner, who had asked Cole, "Did you pursue [Anderson's backlift record]?' Jon answered, "I found out that sort of stunt was out of my league or anyone else as far as that goes;

it was a farce." Whether Cole meant that it was a farce for him or anyone else to be able to match Paul's lift, or that Paul's lift was a farce, is unclear from the language, although the latter interpretation is more likely given his (Cole's) May 1972 challenge to Paul (in *Muscular Development* magazine) to meet him in a lifting competition. Bruce Wilhelm, writing in *MILO* April 1993 (page 14) adds to the Cole comparison in the article, "Paul Anderson: Force of Nature." Wilhelm wrote, of Cole, "He had a steel company in West Phoenix construct a back lift platform. Without any weight it was 2,500-plus pounds. Jon said he got under it, and darned near killed himself trying to move it. He decided then and there to pass on the attempt at a record in the back lift." That was in 1971/1972. So are we to believe that Jon Cole, ranked among the strongest men in history nearly killed himself trying to backlift 40% of what Paul had done? Was Paul more than twice as strong as Jon? Certainly not in any of the other, standard lifts. In fact, Paul's best publicly done competition lifts in the three "Olympic lifts" (Press, Snatch, and Clean & Jerk) added to his best in the three Powerlifts (Squat, Bench Press, and Deadlift) fall short in cumulative poundage to what was done officially by Cole.

Regarding the argument used by some of Paul's supporters that if a man like Jack Walsh, who usually weighed less than 200 pounds, could backlift x-amount, then it is easy to believe that Paul could lift x-plus, it cannot be taken seriously. It is a flawed argument. We cannot take, as a base point, a non-substantiated lift (like that of Jack Walsh), and then use that amount and Paul's great overall strength as a beginning point. What's more, all lifts require practice, and Jack Walsh was a real specialist in the backlift. In contrast, and by Paul's own account, he claims that, essentially, he had done no training in the backlift when he and his father built the platform and added the safe and other weights until the poundage was approximately a ton more than was done by Louis Cyr.

An additional bit of circumstantial evidence was provided at Norway's Strongest Viking contest held in June 2000, in which the Norwegian backlift record of 940kg was surpassed:

Roy Holte won with	1400 kg or 3,080 lbs
Olav Dahl was 2nd	1359 kg or 2,970 lbs
Sveinung Tangstad 3rd	1300 kg or 2,860 lbs

So, could Paul Anderson have added together the first and second place finisher's weights (which total 6,050 pounds) and still had strength to spare? I think reasonable people would find this difficult to believe.

In summary, this three part series on Paul Anderson's claimed backlift has attempted to raise significant questions regarding the components used for the lift, the weights of those components, and the lack of consistency regarding how many witnesses, if any, were present. It has been determined that the weight of the safe was (and is) approximately 1,200 pounds less than the figure Paul used to calculate and finally reach a cumulative total of 6,270 pounds. Serious reservations remain regarding a wooden table which measures only about 3' to 4' by 6' yet supposedly weighs 1800 pounds -nearly a ton. Even allowing an inflated (in my opinion) figure of 800 pounds for the weight of the table requires reducing the overall backlift aggregate to approximately 4,070 pounds (6270 minus 1000 from the table minus another 1200 from the safe equals 4070 pounds).

These facts, in addition to the total lack of written accounts by witnesses, and the disparities of accounts in various muscle magazines compared among themselves as well as compared to the several *Guinness Book of World Records* poundages, all create serious questions regarding what, if anything, really happened on June 12, 1957.

I began my study of this lift fully, perhaps naively, believing that an untapped well of proof was awaiting my discovery. Perhaps that well is out there. Somewhere. To those who see this three part series as a personal attack on Paul, or as somehow vengeful, please be aware that for a long time I did not publish my findings. But the personal attacks against me, instead of against my conclusions—attacks based on my simple asking of questions—prompted me to offer what I have discovered and to open myself to any rebuttal arguments available. Responsible replies are welcomed. One other thought. When I began I intended, and hoped, to align proof showing how Paul had indeed performed this monumental feat. Reality, as I have come to understand it regarding this situation, led me to another conclusion. I am saddened by this whole discovery. But facts cannot be good or bad; they can only form truth. And truth will set us free.

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