



IRON GAME HISTORY



THE JOURNAL OF PHYSICAL CULTURE

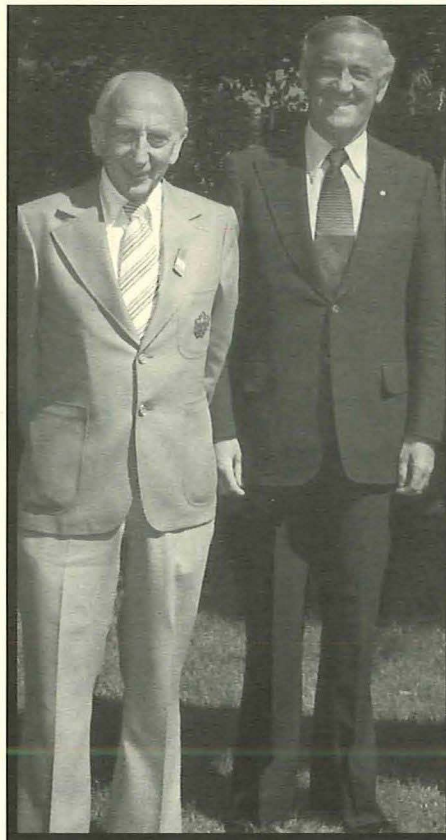
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January 2009

BEN WEIDER FEBRUARY 1, 1923 — OCTOBER 17, 2008

The last time I saw or spoke to Ben Weider was in early March of 2008 in the hallway on the tenth floor of the DoubleTree Suites hotel in Columbus, Ohio. Both of us were in Columbus to take part in the annual Arnold Sports Festival and, as it happened, we had adjacent rooms. Jan and I were there to oversee the Arnold Strongman Classic and Ben was there because he was being honored by Arnold Schwarzenegger for his lifetime of service to bodybuilding. Earlier that weekend, I had spoken to Ben in the dining room of the hotel, and each time we spoke he asked me about the progress of the H.J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports here at the University of Texas, which will house the Joe and Betty Weider Museum of Physical Culture. His questions went well beyond simple courtesy, and it was clear that they represented Ben's understanding of the importance of preserving the historical record of the Iron Game and creating a research facility in which academics and fans alike could study the aspect or aspects of the game that

particularly fascinated them and be able to examine important artifacts related to the Game.



The late Ben Weider with his good friend, Oscar State. Oscar played a leading role in the early days of the IFBB.

Several years earlier, Ben had displayed his support of what we're trying to build at UT by sending to us a large number of historical documents connected to the establishment and growth of the International Federation of Bodybuilding (IFBB), the organization Ben and his brother Joe created one day in 1946 after they were told by two officials of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU)—just as the curtain was about to go up at the Mr. Montreal competition—that any man who took part in the contest would immediately lose his AAU membership. Faced by this embarrassing threat and a packed house anxious to see a bodybuilding show, Ben and Joe had the chutzpa to decide, on the spot, to go ahead with the contest if the bodybuilders agreed to take part.

The bodybuilders, all of whom were dressed and ready to compete, decided to follow the Weiders' lead and the IFBB was born. When future historians look back at the

sport of bodybuilding and try to understand when and how it really emerged as a distinct sport, they could do worse than to examine that day in 1946, in Montreal.

Besides the historical documents Ben sent to us, he also promised to provide additional artifacts that we could display when the Weider Museum of Physical Culture had its official opening in 2009. What many people in the world of physical culture don't know about Ben is that his interest in, and appreciation of, the field of history goes well beyond matters related to the Iron Game. From a very early age, Ben was fascinated by the life and legend of Napoleon Bonaparte, and he read everything he could about the French ruler's life. He

also began to collect material related to Bonaparte. In time, Ben founded the International Napoleonic Society and became its president. What's more, in 1982 he published a controversial but ground-breaking book, *The Murder of Napoleon*, which provided scientific evidence suggesting that Bonaparte's death had been caused by intentional poisoning.

As Ben's support of Napoleonic Studies continued and as the conclusions proposed in *The Murder of Napoleon* began to gain more traction in the academic community, he received in 2000 the prestigious Legion of Honor, which was established by Bonaparte himself and remains France's highest award. Over the decades,

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his collection of Napoleon-related artifacts continued to grow, and one of his last major decisions was to donate the collection—said to be worth millions of dollars—to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. In a sad irony, the opening of this collection—which took place in a new wing of the museum—was held on 23 October 2008, just six days after Ben's sudden and unexpected death. In regard to his decision to donate the collection to the museum, he had said earlier, "If I keep this collection in my house, maybe 200 people a year will see it; now, thousands can [see it] every week."

The same sort of single-mindedness which allowed Ben—who dropped out of school at a very early age to help his parents—to have such unexpected influence in the field of Napoleonic History also allowed him to remain focused on growing the IFBB from a handful of Quebec bodybuilders in 1946 into a world-spanning sports federation with approximately 180 member nations, making it one of the largest such federations in the world. By all accounts, he did this with a combination of diplomatic skill, incessant travel, adequate funding, and plain hard work. Perhaps his best move as an administrator was to befriend the late Oscar State and to collaborate with him on how best to make the IFBB a truly international, fully-functional sports federation. State, a tireless, well-connected Englishman, helped Ben to negotiate the difficult terrain of international sports politics, and even wrote the constitution of the IFBB. All of this was critical to Ben's long-held dream of having the International Olympic Committee (IOC) accept bodybuilding as a provisional Olympic sport.

By the time State began to advise the IFBB, he had for many years been the General Secretary of the International Weightlifting Federation, but in the mid-1970s a group of jealous officials led by the Soviet Bloc organized a coup and unseated him. After he lost that position, State accepted Ben's offer of a similar role with the IFBB, and he continued to function in that capacity

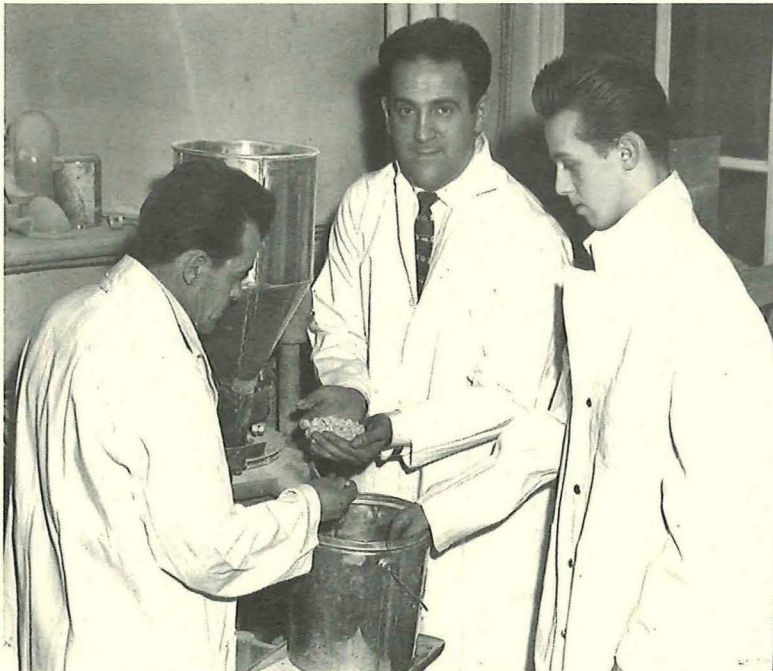


At the 2008 Mr. Olympia, Joe Weider and his brother Ben were backstage together a final time. This photo, taken by Anna Cruz, is the last shot taken of them together.

for the rest of his life.

The two men made a very effective team and—with Joe Weider's constant support—transformed the IFBB and gradually outpaced various rival federations such as the AAU and NABBA. In the process, State became Ben's best friend and it is a tribute to Ben's judgment that he appreciated Oscar's value as a man as well as an administrator. Ben also asked State to serve as the announcer at many of the major international IFBB competitions, realizing that the multi-lingual State, who could announce in 16 languages, added an element of class and sophistication to any competition. Truly, the International Weightlifting Federation's loss was the International Federation of Bodybuilder's gain.

Another critical element in Ben's plans for the expansion of the IFBB was its affiliation in 1971 with the General Association of International Sports Federations (GAISF), a federation which was closely affiliated with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and made up primarily of international sports with aspirations of eventually gaining membership into the IOC. State helped Ben write the formal membership applica-



In the mid-1950s, Tony Lanza took this photo of Ben working on some of the first Weider food supplements.

tion to the GAISF executive committee and also used his contacts within the international sporting community to build the required support for the IFBB's application. Fortunately, State was selected as the General Secretary of GAISF the same year that the IFBB became a member of the organization. A critical element in this complicated story is that the GAISF only recognizes one federation from any sport, and Ben was quick to realize that this gave the IFBB enormous leverage over any other bodybuilding federation with international aspirations.

The next step in Ben's quest for official recognition by the IOC of the IFBB was to convince the leadership of the IOC to formally recognize the IFBB as a provisional member of the IOC. This step would not mean that the IFBB would become a "medal sport" competing in the Summer Olympic Games, but it was the step all sporting federations had to take if they had any chance of ever becoming a medal sport. To anyone unfamiliar with the complicated politics of the IOC it would seem that this intermediate step of becoming a provisional member would not be all that difficult. However, nothing could be further from the truth, and it took 26 years of dogged effort on Ben's part to finally build the support he needed to gain official recognition for the IFBB.

During this quarter century of effort, Ben faced two primary obstacles, the first of which was that many

IOC delegates held the opinion that bodybuilding was not a "true sport," such as track and field, wrestling, volleyball, and downhill skiing.

This debate preceded the birth of the IFBB, of course, and it continues still, so it took a lot of convincing and careful political maneuvering to finally achieve official recognition.

The other major obstacle to official recognition was the specter of drugs, which has permeated the "strength sports" of weightlifting, powerlifting, and bodybuilding for the past 50 years. No sport in the Olympic family has been unaffected by the use of ergogenic drugs, of course, but the strength sports and the throwing events in track and field have been particularly damaged by this relationship. Weightlifting has been a member of the IOC from the beginning of the modern Olympic Games in 1896, and even though it has had the worst record of any medal sport in the Olympics in terms of drug positives it has not been disowned by the IOC.

At least not yet. Even so, the close relationship in the minds of sports fans between weightlifting and bodybuilding—and the many public scandals those two sports have faced—has made the IFBB's efforts to achieve full IOC recognition much more difficult.

As for powerlifting, it is a relatively new sport, but its own drug problems—plus its tragic splintering into a babel of rival national and international federations—makes its eventual acceptance as a provisional sport in the IOC, much less a medal sport, a virtual impossibility. The IFBB, however, even faced with long odds, finally managed in 1998 to receive official recognition by the IOC as a sport. This came to pass because the IFBB, over time, had become the only truly international federation in the sport and because Ben had the political skill and the determination to keep trying.

This recognition brought immediate prestige to the IFBB, and to the sport it represented. For example, on Ben's next visit to Lausanne, Switzerland to meet with the IOC president, Juan Antonio Samaranch, he witnessed concrete proof of this change in status. As he walked into the IOC headquarters and then to Samaranch's office, the IOC president looked out his window and then told an aide to immediately raise the flag of the IFBB in front of the building in keeping with the IOC tradition of flying the flag of any IOC federation when a representative of that federation came to Lausanne for an

official meeting. The raising of that flag meant the world to Ben, as he makes clear in the pages of *Brothers of Iron*, the joint autobiography he co-wrote with his brother, Joe. Many people through the years told Ben that he was wasting his time trying to get official recognition for bodybuilding from the IOC, but he never gave up.

Much has been made of how far Joe Weider came from his hardscrabble beginnings in Montreal, but Ben made an equally improbable journey. In fact, a recent comment in the newsletter, *From the Desk of Clarence Bass*, noted,

Ben never entered a physique contest as far as I know, but he was devoted to weight training and worked out regularly . . . I was dazzled every time I met [him]. His look, demeanor, and manner of speaking were sophisticated and elegant . . . For a guy who didn't make it past seventh grade, it was almost breathtaking . . . My third encounter with Ben was in Atlantic City, New Jersey, at a dinner he hosted after an IFBB professional contest. Boyer Coe, the winner, and various other dignitaries were there. I distinctly remember two things about the event. Boyer had two desserts and Ben split an entrée with his personal assistant . . . What I remember most is that shared entrée . . . [Ben] was willing to go the extra mile to look the part.

In a way, most of Ben Weider's career involved going the extra mile. After emotionally buying into his brother's improbable dream of creating a business around muscle-building, Ben realized that he would have to become a sort of Johnny Appleseed and make national as well as international trips on behalf of weight training and the IFBB. He began making such trips in the 1940s, on a shoestring, and for the next sixty-plus years he never stopped. He always planned his trips carefully so that he could visit as many sports officials and iron game personalities as possible on his visits to such far-flung places as Russia, Czechoslovakia, Poland, China, Egypt, Korea, and the Philippines.

During Ben's long, purpose-driven life, he traveled countless miles in conveyances ranging from camels to the Concorde and visited well over

100 countries—often multiple times. As the years passed and Ben's wealth and stature grew, it was no longer necessary for him to maintain such a brutal schedule, but he never slowed down. Ben said in letter written just a few days before his death, "I am now 85 years of age and still training, eating intelligently and working a full day." He had places to go. He had people to see. He went the extra mile. He shared entrées.

Besides his brother, Joe, and his sister-in-law Betty Weider, Ben is survived by his wife Huguette and his three sons—Louis, Mark, and Eric. Eric is President and CEO of Weider Health and Fitness.

—Photographs Courtesy Weider Health and Fitness, Inc.



The IFBB flag flies in the background as Ben poses with Rafael Santonja, who replaced him as president of the IFBB, Juan Antonio Samaranch, the president of the IOC, and Pamela Kagan at the Olympic headquarters in Lausanne, Switzerland.

THE NATIONAL STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING ASSOCIATION— OUR NEW PARTNERS

The H.J. Lutzer Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports is proud to announce that it has received a three-year commitment from the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) to fund one of the Center's permanent exhibits and to stimulate research in the history of "strength coaching" as a profession. This joint project is aimed at a better understanding of the history of strength and conditioning for athletes and the role played by the NSCA in that process.

The NSCA's three-year, \$51,000 donation will finance three Graduate Research Assistant positions dedicated to the development of both a museum exhibit and a "virtual history," which will be posted on the Stark Center website. The museum exhibit will be comprised of photographic, text, and artifact displays that explore the history of conditioning for sports from ancient times to the modern era. The story of the NSCA's formation; its influence in helping to establish a professional base for strength coaching and personal training; and the importance of the NSCA's journals, symposia, position papers, and research efforts will be situated within this framework.

The virtual or online exhibit will provide a more academically-oriented supplement to the museum exhibit, and will also contain a detailed history of strength training for athletics, with dozens of photographs, drawings, posters, and short video and film clips taken from interviews conducted with individuals who were pioneers in the development of the NSCA and those whose research and leadership have helped the NSCA grow into the most important professional organization of this type in the world.

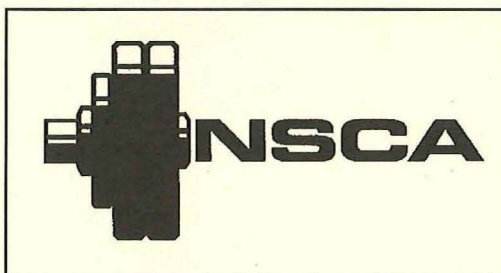
In response to the NSCA's support, The Stark Center will provide appropriate space in the Weider Museum and other galleries for displays relating to the preparation of athletes; cover the expenses involved in

the design and construction of the exhibits; and oversee an effort to locate interviewees, supervise the interview process, and coordinate the transcription of the interviews so that they can be made permanently available to researchers.

The National Strength and Conditioning Association is an international, nonprofit educational association founded in 1978. Evolving from an original membership of 76, the association now serves nearly 30,000 members in 52 countries. Drawing upon its vast network of members, the NSCA develops and presents research-based information regarding strength training, other conditioning practices, and injury prevention. The gift marks another step in the NSCA's long-standing commitment to bridging the gap between academic research and practical application.

The H.J. Lutzer Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports is an academic research center at the University of Texas at Austin. The Center houses the Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection,

which is the world's largest assemblage of archival materials relating to physical culture, broadly defined. It includes material and artifacts related to competitive sports such as golf, football, tennis, baseball, track and field, wrestling, basketball, and field sports as well as material and artifacts related to weight training, bodybuilding, physical education, conditioning for sports, health, alternative medicine, and nutrition. Its holdings include the Joe Weider Art Collection, the Ben Crenshaw Golf Collection, the Peary and Mabel Rader Photo Collection, the Dr. Kenneth Cooper Aerobics Collection, and the Ottley Coulter and Harold Weiss Book and Magazine Collections. The Stark Center is scheduled to open sometime in 2009 and will occupy 27,500 square feet on the second level of the newly-constructed north end-zone of the Darrell K. Royal Texas Memorial Stadium.





Sex! Murder! Suicide!

New Revelations about the “Mystery of Minerva”

Jan Todd

The University of Texas

In Volume 1 Number 2 of *Iron Game History*, I published a biographical sketch of the early professional strongwoman known as Minerva.¹ I used the sources available in that pre-internet era, which included a large number of articles on Minerva in *The National Police Gazette*, the articles I was able to find at that time in traditional contemporary newspapers, David Willoughby's *The Super Athletes*, and the various mentions of Minerva's exploits found in *Strength & Health* and *Iron Man*.² Throughout the piece, which I called, “The Mystery of Minerva,” I explained that there were many facts about Minerva's story that were still unknown, and even confusing, and I concluded the piece with a list of questions I hoped to one day answer: “What was her real name? What happened to her championship belt and her loving cup? Did she have children? What were her actual lifts? How was she perceived by the men and women who saw her?”³

Although the article fairly represented what I'd discovered about Minerva up to that time, the loose threads in the Minerva tale always bothered me. For that reason, I was delighted several years ago to receive an email from one of Minerva's great-granddaughters (Yes, Minerva was a mother!), who had found my article online. After she shared with me the small amount of information she and the family had related to Minerva, I decided to begin researching Minerva's life again.⁴ This time, thanks to the several new academic and public search engines, I was also able to search large numbers of digitized newspapers, digitized periodicals, and to examine on-line public records such as census reports, marriage licenses, and death records. The new evidence

I've uncovered about Minerva, her husband Charles Blatt, and their family life paints a picture of the strongwoman that is heretofore unknown in Iron Game literature. Rather than tackling all five of my questions from 1990, this essay focuses primarily on the question of Minerva's origins and her love affair and long term relationship with Charles Blatt. As a caveat to *IGH* readers, my research has been limited to newspaper and periodical sources in British and American newspapers, and to various kinds of American public records and documents. I have not yet attempted, for example, to research Minerva's time as a strength artist in Mexico, South America, or Europe. However, based on the research I've done to date, and with the assistance of Minerva's descendants, I believe this article is a more accurate picture of Minerva's life than has ever been published before.



On 28 March 1891, the following letter appeared in the widely read theatrical and sporting tabloid called *The National Police Gazette*: “Having been informed that Victorina, the female heavy-weight lifter, is eager to compete in feats of strength with any woman in the world, I hereby challenge her to arrange a match to lift heavy-weights and catch cannonballs from 10 pounds to 20 pounds for \$500 to \$1000 a side and the female heavy-weight-lifting championship of the world. The \$100 my backer, Mr. C.P. Blatt, has posted with Richard K. Fox, shows that I mean business.” It is

signed, "Josie Wohlford."⁵ This letter is the first mention of the strongwoman who would soon be known simply as "Minerva" in either the *Gazette* or any other publication from this era I have examined.⁶

I first encountered the letter in a book of reprinted newspaper articles and illustrations from the *National Police Gazette* that I read in the late 1980s.⁷ I was surprised to see the letter signed by Josie Wohlford and not Josephine Blatt, since other things I'd read about Minerva had led me to believe that she'd married Charles P. Blatt early in her career and that he had encouraged her to go on the stage. However, as I discovered while researching my first article on Minerva, there are several conflicting stories about Minerva's origins. One article, published in 1893 in the *Police Gazette*, claimed Minerva was the daughter of the well-to-do, socially prominent physician, Dr. Joseph Schauer, and that Minerva was the only member of the family who was not a "leader in society." Minerva, the *Police Gazette* claimed, had turned to heavy lifting because she "loathed the emptiness of the social world" and is "only happy when juggling with dumbbells."⁸ I dismissed this version of Minerva's origins as the kind of press agency then popular in circuses and vaudeville. In fact, one of the problems with historical research related to circus performers and theater people is that they not only adopt stage names but also create "stage biographies" for themselves as well. Many circus and vaudeville performers also had different acts during different stages of their careers and worked under more than one stage name.⁹

In 1990, I actually put more faith in the story Minerva told a reporter for *The Mirror*, in Manchester, New Hampshire, in which she claimed that she was born in Hamburg, Germany in 1865, and that like many young Germans she had begun doing exercise in the local *turnverein*, or gymnasium. According to the report in *The Mirror*, she "took a fancy for lifting" at age seven and by the time she was 11, was lifting 50- and 75-pound dumbbells overhead. She claimed in that interview to have been 15 when she became an instructor at the gymnasium and that she then taught gymnastics exercises to children for the next three years. According to that account, she supposedly met Charles P. Blatt when he toured Germany as a professional strongman. She said, "when he saw me he offered to take me to America. My parents objected at the thought of my going into show business, but they got over their prejudice and I came here six

years ago." Minerva went on to claim that once in America she soon had "engagements enough" and had visited nearly every state in the Union by 1893.¹⁰ In 1892, in an article for the *San Antonio Daily Light*, she tells a similar version of this tale, claiming to have begun lifting at age 12 when she juggled seven six-pound flat irons for a total weight of 42 pounds "as though they weighed nothing."¹¹

When I began researching Minerva's life again, one of the first things I did was to request a copy of her death certificate from the State of New Jersey. I have not been able to locate any sort of birth certificate for her, however, which is not unusual for the nineteenth century. In any case, according to her death certificate, Josephine Blatt (no middle name) died on 1 August 1923 from a "carcinoma of [the] stomach." The certificate states that she was born in Hoboken, New Jersey, on 2 January 1863, making her 60 years and 7 months old at the time of her death. Her father is listed as Joseph Schauer, originally from Germany, and her mother, also a native German, was named Louisa Hetener.¹² There is no mention of Wohlford anywhere. This puzzled me because in 1931, *National Police Gazette* author Harry Shelland also referred to "Josie Wohlford" in a reminiscence he wrote about meeting the young Minerva in the late 1880s before she made her stage debut. According to Shelland, Minerva weighed about 165 pounds at that time and was living in Elizabeth, New Jersey. She had come to Blatt's attention because she was famous in her neighborhood for her natural strength. Locals even claimed she had carried a barrel of potatoes up two flights of stairs.¹³ So, while the death certificate can probably allow us to put to rest the question of Minerva's maiden name, it doesn't tell us why she was using "Wohlford" when she wrote that letter in the *Police Gazette*. The answer to that question, it turns out, is that Minerva was apparently married not just once—but twice—before she married Charles P. Blatt.

On 12 June 1893, Judge David McAdam of the Superior Court of New York presided over one of the most sensational divorce trials of his career. Appearing before him in court that day was a Brooklyn "pork packer," named Christian Wohlforth, who was suing for divorce from the woman known on-stage as Minerva. According to the *New York Times* report which appeared the following day, Mr. Wohlforth (not Wohlford) had filed for divorce from "Catharine Wohlforth" who is described in the article as a "museum freak . . . known to

fame as ‘Minerva, the strongest woman on earth.’”¹⁴ (Other newspaper accounts of the divorce proceedings refer to Minerva as “Johanna Wohlfoth” or, in one case, “Johanna Wolfarth,” adding to the general confusion about her early life and real name.¹⁵) Except for the spelling of Minerva’s name, however, all of the newspaper reports tell the same basic story about how Minerva, Blatt, and her two earlier husbands ended up in court.

Minerva’s first husband, Christian Wohlforth, claimed that they were married on 2 October 1881, and that they had three children together. If she was born in 1863 as her death certificate indicates, Minerva would have been 18 at the time and Wohlforth was probably about 29.¹⁶ According to the report in the *New York Sun*, which was reprinted in the *San Antonio Daily Light* about a week after the trial, Minerva became tired of “brooms and washboards and the earnings of her husband were meager.” The article indicated that because of her size and strength she decided to try to find work as a professional strongwoman and so left her family and “has since been travelling about the country as Minerva.”¹⁷

Newspaper reports of the divorce proceedings suggest that Minerva met Blatt after she had decided to begin exhibiting her strength in dime museums. According to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Blatt fell in love with her, asked her to join him on the road, and the two “eloped” in 1888.¹⁸ No evidence was introduced in the



This rare photograph of the professional strongwoman Minerva shows her as she looked in approximately 1892. According to her descendants, the cannon in the picture is the one used in Minerva and Blatt’s act, which included catching cannon balls. Although we tried enhancing the poster shown leaning against the cannon using the software Photoshop, the only words we can clearly make out are the name “Minerva” and “One Week Only.” Note her Cyr-like legs.

—Photo courtesy June Stephens

trial that they had actually married, only that they began travelling together and were believed to be in a romantic relationship. Wohlforth’s attorney, August P. Wagener, cited Blatt in the divorce proceedings as a “co-respondent,” a term indicating that Blatt was being charged for adultery with Minerva.¹⁹ However, to Judge McAdam’s



Minerva's parents, Joseph and Louisa Schauer, were born in Germany, and then immigrated to America. In 1880, they were living in Hoboken with their nine children. One of Minerva's descendants wrote along the side of this picture, "He was one of the great old time strong men. It was well known no one would ever shake hands with him a second time when once he exerted even part of the force in his vise-like grasp. It is said strong fathers begat strong sons, and to this can be added strong daughters."

—Photo Courtesy June Stephens

and the press corps' surprise, Wohlforth's attorney also introduced evidence to the court, and to the avid reporters in the audience, demonstrating that in addition to living in an adulterous relationship with Blatt, Minerva had recently married a well-to-do accountant named Henry Bercaw (13 May 1893) in Washington, D.C. On that marriage license, Minerva used the name Josephine Wolford (no "h") and claimed that her hometown was Hoboken, New Jersey.²⁰ Apparently, Minerva had met the considerably older Bercaw in Easton, Pennsylvania,

just a month before she married him, and following the ceremony Bercaw took her to his home in Phillipsburg, New Jersey, to live.²¹

Although it is difficult to piece together all of their history, Blatt was a fairly well-regarded strongman working in dime museums and in variety theater and circuses when he and Minerva decided to join forces. An 1891 article in the *Washington Post*, for example, included Blatt in an article called "Hercules of Our Day" that compared the top strongmen in the world at that time—Eugen Sandow, Charles Sampson, Louis Cyr, Sebastian Miller, YMCA advocate Robert J. Roberts, and Blatt. Blatt is described in that article as having an arm larger than that of boxing champion John L. Sullivan, but also as a "far from a well-formed man" because his legs were not proportionate to his upper body. His biceps reportedly measured 17 inches, and his chest 42 inches. He was "naturally gifted with strength," wrote the author, who cited his principal feat of strength as "pulling apart horseshoes."²² We know that Blatt was working as a strongman at least as early as May of 1889 because his cannonball-catching act is described in the *New York Clipper*, the theatrical paper that covered vaudeville and variety entertainers as well as legitimate theater.²³ An article from Davenport, Iowa, in 1892, reported that Blatt had set a new record for breaking horseshoes with his bare hands by doing 18 in one hour. The article noted that he had hoped to do 20 in the hour's time but that one of the steel shoes was especially hard and that it took 15 minutes "before he rendered it in twain."²⁴

It is possible that Shelland's claim that Minerva met Blatt because of her New Jersey roots could be true, since a Charles P. Blatt is listed in the city directories for Elizabeth, New Jersey, in 1886, 1887, 1890 and 1891.²⁵ Whether this is Charles P. Blatt the strongman—or his father—is not clear, however, since they have identical names and there are no ages listed in the directories.²⁶

Even if it was the father and not the son, it is within reason that the younger Blatt could have stayed for periods of time with his father in Elizabeth, and that he would have become aware of Minerva's unusual strength because of the proximity of Elizabeth to Hoboken. This is even more likely if, as Shelland claims, she was somewhat famous for her strength among her neighbors at a young age.²⁷

I can find no record of a Schauer family in Elizabeth during the late 1880s or early 1890s but I do find a Joseph Schauer and his family living at various addresses in Hoboken between 1880 and 1893, and the distance between Hoboken and Elizabeth is less than 15 miles.²⁸ In the city directory for 1886-1887, Joseph Schauer—the man I, and Minerva's descendants, believe to be her father—was living in Hoboken at 96 Jefferson Street and is described as a laborer.²⁹ However, in 1887-1888 he listed himself in that year's directory as a salesman, then as a peddler in 1891, and finally as a seller of patent medicines in a business called Joseph Schauer and Son in 1892 and 1893.³⁰ As a seller of patent medicines it is not inconceivable that he began calling himself Dr. Schauer to give more credence to the products he was peddling.³¹ This could in part explain the claim made in the *Police Gazette* that her father was a doctor, although there are no references in any of the city directories of a Dr. Schauer, which there undoubtedly would have been had he been as socially prominent as was claimed.³²

In any case, we may never know how Minerva and Blatt actually met, and whether she met him before or after she had decided to leave Christian Wohlforth and the children.

Although the newspaper reports of the divorce case suggest that Minerva had begun performing by 1889, I find no records for any performances—with or without Blatt—prior to 1891 when her challenge letter to Victorina was published in the *Police Gazette*.³³ In fact, Minerva and Blatt seem almost to disappear from American newspapers until 12 August 1892 when an article on the front page of the *San Antonio Daily Light* reported that the “world-famed Minerva, who is the strongest woman known on earth,” had just arrived in San Antonio following a highly successful tour in Mexico.³⁴ Minerva is described in the article as being 5'8" tall, weighing 185

pounds, and is said to be “under the management of Prof. C.P. Blatt, who also trains her and is her teacher.” The article goes on to explain that Minerva wrestles, spars, swings clubs, and can lift 500 pounds with her teeth while standing on two chairs. She also reportedly broke chains and horseshoes, bent iron, and caught a 24-pound cannonball shot from a cannon.³⁵

Blatt and Minerva apparently liked San Antonio and decided to make it their headquarters.³⁶ In the 1890s, before the San Antonio River was straightened to help with flooding, it made a large bend in the downtown area that created a peninsula of land known as Central Park or Bowen's Island. The area served as both a public park and an amusement center, and in 1882 it was the scene of the first German Turner gathering held in Texas.³⁷ At some point, Blatt took over the management of Central Park and he placed a notice in the *San Antonio Daily Light* on 26 August 1892 announcing himself as the new proprietor and advertising that there would be nightly entertainment fit for families. The ad particularly urged patrons to come

AMUSEMENTS.

Central Park

C. P. BLATT, Proprietor.

OPEN EVERY NIGHT.



POPULAR FAMILY RESORT now open
under a new management. Don't
fail to see the great

∴ MINERVA ∴

THE STRONGEST WOMAN IN THE WORLD.
Dumb Bells have arrived.
Don't fail to see the new attractions next
week.

Don't fail to see the great Selemann who
lifts a 500 pound rock with one finger at
Central Park, Monday.

This ad, taken from an old issue of the *San Antonio Daily Light* shows the “Great Selemann” lifting what's claimed to be a 500-pound rock with one finger while shooting off his pistol like a true Texan. Selemann was probably Blatt.

and see, "the great Minerva, the strongest woman in the world," and even announced that the "Dumb Bells have Arrived."³⁸ The crowds apparently came in large numbers. At first the park opened only on Saturday and Sunday nights and, according to the *San Antonio Daily Light*, they had between two and three thousand people in attendance at most shows and more than half of them were women and children.³⁹ In addition to Minerva and Blatt, there were also musicians in the show, and other guest performers show up in the advertisements. The Nelson Family (four in number) appeared at Central Park in August, as did "Seleman, The Strongest Man on Earth," who would attempt to lift a 450-pound rock with one finger. Aiming his advertising at his Texas audience, Blatt included a drawing of "Seleman" on 26 August 1892 that shows him standing on two chairs, lifting the weight between his legs with one finger, and firing off a pistol with his free hand.⁴⁰ It is likely, of course, that "Seleman" was actually Blatt working under a different name. One of the more interesting stories of their time at Central Park is the tale of the wrestling match Minerva had with Edward Nelson. The *San Antonio Daily News* covered the event and reported that Nelson failed to throw Minerva during the 25-minute time limit and that "when time was called, Minerva had the half Nelson on her opponent and would probably have thrown him in a few more minutes."⁴¹

After the long tour Minerva and Blatt had spent with the Orrin Brothers Circus in Mexico during 1891 and early 1892, the idea of staying in one city for a time must have been enormously appealing. However, Minerva wasn't trying to stay out of the limelight. Shortly after she arrived in San Antonio, the *Police Gazette* reprinted a *San Antonio Light* article announcing to America that Minerva was back from Mexico and that she stood by her offer to give \$1,000 to any woman who could best her in an open contest.⁴² Over the next several months, numerous reports related to Minerva's exploits in San Antonio appeared in the *Police Gazette* as its editors tried to whip up enthusiasm for a challenge match between Minerva and the other reigning American strongwoman of the 1890s, Fannie Gorman, who performed as "Yucca."⁴³ (Kati Sandwina was only eight years old in 1892, and because of this was never in contention with Minerva for the title of "World's Strongest Woman."⁴⁴) With Yucca appearing at Huber's Museum in New York City, however, and Minerva hundreds of miles away in San Antonio, the question of who should

be regarded as the world's strongest woman, the *Gazette* pointed out, "is an open question and will never be decided until the rival Amazons meet in open competition."⁴⁵ Pushing the matter further, the *Gazette* observed on 19 November 1892 that "there appears to be something intervening between the two rivals which prevents the match from being arranged. It would be in order for the owner of some large hall or garden to hang up a big purse and have these rival champions compete against each other, and thus put a stop to the controversy."⁴⁶

By January, however, Minerva and Blatt had left San Antonio to return to the Northeast and new appearances. On 14 January 1893 Minerva opened in Philadelphia and reportedly created a "furor by her wonderful feats of strength." Her act consisted of lifting with her teeth a cannon and running gear weighing 400 pounds, lifting a horse reportedly weighing 1420 pounds with one finger, and lifting a rock weighing 400 pounds.⁴⁷ The article concluded with a statement of her hope to soon meet Yucca and settle once and for all the matter of who was truly the strongest woman in the world. In early March, Blatt and Minerva appeared in Manchester, New Hampshire, where Minerva "created quite the sensation."⁴⁸ On 2 April 1893, the now well-known pair dropped in at the *Police Gazette* offices to post money for a formal challenge to Yucca, who it turns out was then in Mexico with the Orrin Brothers Circus.⁴⁹

In mid-April of 1893 Minerva and Blatt checked into the Gerber Hotel in Easton, Pennsylvania, just across the border from New Jersey. Shortly after their arrival, Blatt left to return to San Antonio, leaving Minerva behind. According to the divorce proceedings, Blatt returned to San Antonio to see about his "museum," a statement that is borne out by an advertisement in the 1 May 1893 edition of the *San Antonio Daily Light* announcing the "Grand Re-Opening at Central Park of Minerva's Talented Specialty Co. and Band Concert."⁵⁰

Meanwhile, back in Easton, Minerva quickly become friends, and then far more than friends, with a 49-year old widower, Henry Bercaw, who lived in nearby Phillipsburg, New Jersey.⁵¹ Bercaw, a prosperous businessman, fought in the Civil War and then served in the U.S. Cavalry in California and Arizona for five years. After his return to Phillipsburg he began working for the Tippet and Woods Company, a firm that specialized in making boilers and was considered to be "one of the most solid mercantile concerns" in the vicinity.⁵² Bercaw began as a bookkeeper at the firm in the mid

1880s and eventually became a partner and stockholder. He was also apparently a fan of strongwomen, for within a few weeks Minerva and Bercaw travelled to Washington, D.C. and were married there on 13 May 1883. On the wedding license she used the name Josie Wolford.⁵³

Someone, perhaps even Minerva herself, informed Blatt of the marriage. In any event, introduced into the court record were two letters Blatt sent her within days of the ceremony.⁵⁴ The first was posted on May 15th and in it Blatt wrote:

My Dear Loving Wife, Josie: My Dear Pet—

I am so sick and troubled with my head. My dear wife, what in the world do you mean? My heart is broke to think that you could leave me. It is the last thing in the world I ever dreamt of. How can your heart turn so sudden toward me? My dear, loving Josie, you will have to excuse me. I can't write any more. I wish you were here and could see what I have done for you my dear pet. God bless you my dear wife. From your ever true husband,

Charles P. Blatt.⁵⁵

The next day, having recovered a bit more from the shock of Minerva's desertion and marriage, Blatt wrote again:

My Dear, Loving Wife, Josie: My Dear Pet—

Excuse me in the way I head my dear letter to you. What in the world have I ever done for you to treat me so? I am true to you, my dear Josie, as the day I left you. Oh! Do you remember the morning I left you, do you my pet? Oh! Can it be you have lost your love for me so soon? I would any day give up my life for you, and you know it in your heart. I am proud of you and love you. I can't help it. Do you remember the first Monday we met? Don't forget that day, my dear pet. I will give my right hand for you today just the same as the first day I met you.

Your heart-broken,
Charlie, til death.

[P.S.] If you have no money I will send it to you. I will have a divorce from the one I hate. I don't want to mention her name. My lawyer is getting out the papers.⁵⁶

This is the only mention I have found of Blatt's having had a wife before Minerva. Who she was, and how long the marriage lasted is not known.⁵⁷ However, it is worth noting that in the newspaper reports of Minerva and Blatt in San Antonio and in the *Police Gazette* up to the time of Minerva's divorce trial in 1893, Blatt is never referred to as her husband.

After their wedding, the newlyweds returned to Phillipsburg where, on 3 June 1893 Blatt showed up unexpectedly at Bercaw's front door. Speaking to Minerva in German, which Bercaw could not understand, Blatt accused her of being unfaithful and told her that if she had only come to San Antonio he would have met her with a fancy carriage and a brass band when she arrived at the train station.⁵⁸ Bercaw's nephew, who was standing where he could hear the conversation between Minerva and Blatt, translated the conversation for his uncle. Bercaw then confronted Blatt, and as tempers heated, Blatt drew a pistol and pointed it at Bercaw in "true Western style" according to one of the newspaper accounts.⁵⁹ Blatt had to be subdued by Bercaw and his nephew and then was forced to leave. One account of the fight over Minerva claimed that the ex-soldier drew on Blatt and ordered him to leave.⁶⁰ Regardless of who drew on whom, after Blatt's visit Bercaw told Minerva to get her things and get out, that the marriage was over. She reportedly left the following day on the train to New York, where she went into hiding for a time; Blatt reportedly followed her. Bercaw later claimed in the court records that she had stolen a diamond ring valued at \$280.00, a gold watch and chain, and a lot of letters from him, but no charges were filed for the supposed theft, or for committing bigamy.⁶¹

Following the testimony of the desk clerk at the Gerber Hotel in Easton, and Wohlforth's presentation of the Bercaws' marriage certificate from Washington, D.C. proving that Minerva was a bigamist, Judge McAdams quickly granted Wohlforth his divorce. Minerva did not mount any defense in the case and did not appear in court.⁶²

After the scandal of the divorce case, Minerva and Blatt disappeared from public view for a time. An

article about Yucca in the *New York Times* on 7 July 1893 claimed that Minerva was “hiding” in San Antonio in an attempt to avoid the head-to-head contest that had been talked about since the previous year.⁶³ In October, however, the two women agreed to meet in a public contest on 18 October 1893 at Madison Square Garden.⁶⁴ At the end of October, the match had still not come off but the *Gazette* was clearly beginning to throw its support behind Minerva. They devoted a full page to an engraving of Minerva on 28 October 1893 and noted that she was currently in New York completing arrangements for her match with Yucca.⁶⁵ By December, tired of their dallying, Richard K. Fox of the *Police Gazette* decided to heighten the stakes and commissioned a special championship belt to be made and sent to Minerva with the understanding that it would become her personal property if she “wins it three times or holds it one year against all comers.”⁶⁶ The belt was made of silver and gold and consisted of 17 plates, held together with small dumbbells. On the front was a picture of Richard K. Fox and an inscription that read, “The Police Gazette Championship Belt, Representing the female heavy-lifting championship of the world. Presented by Richard K. Fox on December 29, 1893.”⁶⁷ In an article in the *Gazette* in early January, it was noted that so far neither Yucca, or Mlle. Madro of France, or Madame Robusta, “who claims to be the champion of Europe,” had found the courage to face Minerva. Accordingly, the *Gazette* observed, Minerva now has in her

possession a special trophy which helps “to prove” that she deserves to be considered the world’s strongest woman. “Minerva will stand ready to compete for the belt against all comers, according to the rules governing the trophy,” the article continued, before finally noting that the belt was “the first trophy ever presented to a female heavy weight lifting champion.”⁶⁸

Fox’s hope that Minerva and Yucca, or any of the other strongwomen working in the 1890s would meet in a head-to-head contest apparently failed to materialize. Minerva published a challenge to the world on 20 January 1894 in the *Police Gazette*, and though excitement seemed to build later that summer and fall about the possibility of Athleta coming across the Atlantic to vie for the belt, that too never seems to have happened. In fact, I have not been able to find any solid evidence of real contests held between strongwomen in the *Gazette* during the 1890s, nor have I found any other newspaper articles discussing such contests during this era.⁶⁹ That the women did not meet head-to-head is not that difficult to understand, given the nature of the circus and vaudeville in this era. If Minerva and Yucca never met, they could each continue to advertise themselves as the “world’s strongest.” Furthermore, strength artists rarely played in the same cities at the same time and so there would have to be a serious financial inducement to make such a contest attractive to them, as it would be difficult for



Josephine Blatt as she appeared in approximately 1905, when she was performing with her daughter Matilda Blatt as one of the Minerva Sisters in a song and dance act in Vaudeville.

—Photo Courtesy June Stephens

them both to find work in the same city at the same time.

Fox continued to feature Minerva in the *Gazette* and published her open challenges to the strongwomen of the world to meet her in an open contest during 1894 and the spring of 1895.⁷⁰ When no contest materialized, Minerva and Blatt decided to settle the matter of her physical dominance in an exhibition at the Bijou Theater in Hoboken, New Jersey, just across the Hudson River from Manhattan. On Monday, 29 April 1895, the house was packed for the evening's vaudeville show. The *Gazette* described the evening's entertainment as "one of the best all-round vaudeville combinations seen at this house this season," and Minerva not only headlined the show, she reportedly "lifted and juggled heavy dumb bells [sic] and weights with ease."⁷¹ Near the end of her act, she asked for 18 volunteers from the audience, men who averaged around 150 pounds apiece. Once assembled on stage, the men were asked to stand closely together on a broad platform while Minerva climbed to a platform above their heads. She donned her harness, bent her legs, and managed to lift all 18 men and the platform from the floor. The *Police Gazette* proclaimed it to be a lift of 3000 pounds, which would be logical if the men totaled 2700 pounds and the platform and chains about 300.⁷² However, as lifting records often do over time, this great lift, which is still

the *Police Gazette* in 1923, and her *Billboard* obituary claims she lifted 28.⁷³ Because the obituary in the *Police Gazette* was the most accessible source on Minerva's life until recent years, it is not surprising that both the *Guinness Book of Records* and David Willoughby in *The Super Athletes* repeated the erroneous claim that there were 23 men on the platform.⁷⁴

However, the reports from 1895 suggest that the total weight was closer to 3000 pounds than the 3564 pounds claimed for her later.

Whatever the final weight, this lift, done in front of Sam Austin, the sporting editor of the *Police Gazette*, and a packed house of enthusiastic fans, solidified once and for all Minerva's claim to the title, "Strongest Woman in the World." After Minerva finished off the evening's entertainment by catching a 20-pound cannonball, Austin presented her with a special gold loving cup on behalf of Richard K. Fox and the *Police Gazette* to commemorate her historic achievement.⁷⁵

One of the most interesting aspects of the *Police Gazette* article about her famous lift is that it is also the first time Minerva is identified in print as "Mrs. Josephine Blatt."⁷⁶ In fact, the *Gazette* makes note of the fact that she "is known in private life as Mrs. Josephine Blatt."⁷⁷ When, where, and if Minerva and Blatt actually married is not known.⁷⁸

Following the appearance in Hoboken, Minerva and Blatt went to Washington, D.C. for an extended stay.⁷⁹ In late June of 1895 Minerva repeated her big lift in a special



Matilda Blatt performed on-stage with Minerva and Blatt in later years as a singer. She often dressed as a boy and was known for her rendition of "Danny Boy."—Photo Courtesy June Stephens

exhibition at a popular resort called River View just outside the city. She again lifted 18 men at one time, and the report in *The Washington Post* described her as a "marvelous specimen of muscle."⁸⁰ (The total weight of this lift has not been preserved.) Minerva and Blatt continued appearing at River View, often doing two shows a day, through the middle of July.⁸¹ On 14 July 1895 a crowd of 3000 watched their strength act and then held their collective breath as high diver Kearney Speedy dove from an 80-foot tall tower into a tank of water only three feet deep.⁸²

After their appearances at River View, however, Minerva and Blatt seem to disappear from the American scene for several years. It is likely that she and Blatt went to Europe as I find no newspaper advertisements for their act, or mentions of her, in the *Police Gazette* after 1895 until her obituary is published. According to the obituary, Minerva and Blatt spent four seasons with the Rentz Circus in Europe, and also worked in Germany with both Circus Schumann and the Merkel Circus, so it is probable that she and Blatt were in Europe at least during part of the late 1890s.⁸³

In 1900, however, Minerva and Blatt were living in Canton, Ohio when the federal census was done. Living with them was 17-year-old Matilda Blatt, who is listed as a "daughter" on the government record. Matilda was born in August of 1882, which makes it likely that she was a daughter from Minerva's marriage to Christian Wohlforth.⁸⁴ It is also worth noting that on the census Minerva and Blatt stated that they had been married for 17 years, a claim inconsistent with the public record as revealed in the divorce proceedings. As for what the family was doing in Canton, Josephine is listed as 35 years old, and with no profession listed beside her name. Charles is listed as a "saloonist and restaurateur," and is said to have been born in February of 1858, making him 42 in 1900.⁸⁵

According to family records made available to me by Minerva's descendants, Matilda was a good singer who sometimes appeared on stage with Charles and Minerva. Dressed frequently as a boy, she was known for her rendition of the Irish ballad "Danny Boy," and in later years supposedly performed a song and dance act with her mother called the Minerva Sisters.⁸⁶ Matilda married Ralph Travis in 1905 and, according to the family, this ended her career in entertainment. Matilda and Ralph eventually had eight children.⁸⁷

From 1905 until her death on 1 August 1923,

from stomach cancer, I have found no records of any sort regarding Minerva and Blatt except for the information contained in the two obituaries I found of her in the *Police Gazette* and *Billboard*.⁸⁸ According to *Billboard*, Minerva and Blatt continued performing until approximately 1910 when they retired to Perth Amboy, New Jersey, and Tottenville, New York. Tottenville is geographically just across the Hudson River from Perth Amboy, and it appears that after Blatt settled there he and Minerva began investing in real estate.⁸⁹ Minerva, whose weight had risen to 230 pounds by this time, became ill with stomach troubles in 1921. In *Billboard*, Blatt claimed that she had always been a woman with an unusually good appetite but did not consider it abnormal. "As far as eating was concerned," he claimed, the only thing she truly favored was lobsters. "She wanted lobsters whenever she could get them," and was never, according to him, a great eater of meat.⁹⁰ An article from the early 1890s quoted in my earlier article on Minerva, however, told of far more extravagant eating:

Eating is about the principal part of my existence . . . and I always have the best I can possibly procure. For breakfast I generally have beef, cooked rare; oatmeal, French-fry potatoes, sliced tomatoes with onions and two cups of coffee. At dinner I have French soup, plenty of vegetables, squabs and game. I prefer small birds to chicken, etc., the reed bird and such of that kind, as they have more nourishment in them. That is where I get my strength from. When supper comes, I am always ready for it, and I then have soup, porterhouse steak, three fried eggs, two different kinds of salads and tea.⁹¹

At lunch and dinner, she explained, she also had a bottle of the best wine she could procure. In fact, Minerva claimed that it was costing her about \$7.00 a day to eat in 1892 because "I will only eat the best of everything and have my meals cooked to order. I cannot get what I want from the regular hotel bill of fare."⁹² Whether diet played a part in her death from stomach cancer cannot, of course, be proven. However, from the start of her physical troubles in 1921 until she became bed-ridden in 1923, her weight reportedly went from 230 to 110 pounds. She spent the last three months of her life in North Arlington, New Jersey, and was buried there on

4 August 1923. She was described on the death certificate as a "housewife."⁹³

The final dramatic episode in the tale of Minerva and Blatt took place in 1924. Apparently, shortly after Minerva's death Blatt became friends with Sadie Tarbox, a much younger mother of three who lived in Perth Amboy, New Jersey.⁹⁴ According to the *New York Times*, Blatt met her when he went to visit his son Charles, then 25 years old, and his son's wife, Cecilia, who also lived in Perth Amboy. (When and where Charles was born is not known.) Blatt was apparently taken with Mrs. Tarbox and purchased a building at 80 Main Street in Tottenville where he set her up in business with a restaurant and candy store.⁹⁵ He also remodeled the second floor of the building to make it into living quarters for her and her children. Blatt, however, continued to live in a second story apartment at 5440 Arthur Kill Road in Tottenville. According to neighbors, on Wednesday, 30 July 1924, Blatt and Mrs. Tarbox had a loud argument at his home over his wife's jewelry, his real estate, and, particularly, Minerva's championship belt. According to the *New York Times*, Blatt felt Mrs. Tarbox had taken things from his home that she shouldn't have, so he demanded their return. Mrs. Tarbox, on the other hand, believed that Blatt should leave all of his property—Minerva's jewelry, her "diamond-studded" championship belt, and the real estate—to her, rather than to his son Charles and his wife, Cecilia. Some neighbors who overheard the argument said Blatt also threatened to sell the belt.⁹⁶

After the fight, Blatt left his house and went to visit a Lutheran pastor, the Reverend Jacob Ganss. Ganss told police that Blatt was so upset by the fight with Tarbox that he offered to give the preacher his real estate and the belt rather than to see Mrs. Tarbox get his property. The preacher claimed that Blatt said, "that woman robbed me of all my money and my wife's jewelry and now she'll get the rest of it if I don't give it to somebody."⁹⁷ Ganss refused the gift and advised Blatt to go see his son and daughter in Perth Amboy that evening, which he did. According to Cecilia, Blatt's daughter-in-law, he asked the young couple to meet him at his home the next morning so that he could deed the property over to them and give them Minerva's belt to keep.⁹⁸

The following morning, Cecilia arrived at Blatt's apartment alone, her husband having been detained in Perth Amboy. Blatt then sent for Mrs. Tar-

box and told her in Cecilia's presence that he was giving his real estate to his son Charles and the belt to Cecilia. He then told Mrs. Tarbox that he hoped she and Cecilia could become friends, at which point Mrs. Tarbox reportedly said, "I don't want to know her or have anything to do with her," and turned her back on Blatt and Cecilia. Cecilia went on to report, "My father-in-law was highly insulted and became angry. I was insulted and left the apartment while my father-in-law was scolding her. I was half way down the stairs when I heard two shots. I ran back. They were both on the floor."⁹⁹ Mrs. Tarbox had been shot in the back with a .38 caliber pistol, the bullet lodging in left lung; she died within five minutes according to the coroner. Blatt shot himself with the same gun behind his right ear. He died instantly.¹⁰⁰

The murder/suicide rocked the community of Tottenville, where Blatt was known as a well-established businessman.¹⁰¹ When Blatt's will was read, to everyone's surprise, the bulk of his estate went not to Charles Jr. and Cecilia but to 18-year-old Charlie Travis, the oldest of Matilda and Ralph Travis's eight children. In the newspaper report on the disposition of Blatt's estate, Matilda is described as a step-daughter, and Charles Blatt, Jr., is described as Blatt's "adopted son."¹⁰² Charlie Travis, Minerva's grandson, and Blatt's main heir, was still a senior in high school at this time but was described as "large for his years." The papers made much of the fact that Charlie, known as "Specks," because of his freckles, had been working that summer on a road gang earning just \$5.00 a day, but that he inherited four houses and a store with a total value of around \$75,000.¹⁰³ There is no mention of the final disposition of Minerva's belt in any of the newspaper accounts, and the family members I've interviewed have no idea of its whereabouts.



At the end of this piece, I find I have nearly as many questions about Minerva and Charles Blatt as I did at the beginning. While Joseph Schauer of Hoboken may well have been Minerva's father, I have not found the definitive link that allows me to confirm that fact with certainty. In her obituary in *Billboard*, Charles Blatt told the reporter, "Mrs. Blatt was a native of Hoboken . . . her father, Joseph Schauer, was an unusually strong man, and . . . Josephine, when but 18 years of age,

carried a barrel of potatoes up a flight of stairs.”¹⁰⁴ According to Blatt, having heard of the wonderful feats of strength of this girl, he became infatuated, and married her in 1888.¹⁰⁵

Clearly, this is the version of their story that Blatt and Minerva wished to have remembered. However, the facts just don’t quite match up with the tale. While Joseph Schauer being listed as her father both in the obituary and on her death certificate should seem like sufficient evidence, why can’t I find a Josephine anywhere who fits the right criteria in the Schauer family tree? On the federal census for 1880, Joseph and Louisa Schauer list a daughter named Josephine, but she’s only ten months old at that time. She can’t possibly be Minerva, who reportedly gave birth to Matilda in 1882. A more likely candidate is Hannah, the second daughter of Louisa and Joseph Schauer. Hannah was reportedly 18 in 1880, making her about 19 when and if she married Christian Wohlforth. This would also mean she was born in 1862 which is in line with the year of birth found on Minerva’s (Josephine’s) death certificate. Hannah is the closest fit, in terms of age, of any of the Schauer daughters, and if she did become Minerva, the fact that her name was Hannah may help explain why she is sometimes referred to as “Johanna” in newspaper reports.¹⁰⁶ Even so, I can’t definitively prove Hannah became Minerva.

The Schauers’ third daughter, named Minnie, was only 13 in 1880, but the closeness of “Minnie” to “Minerva,” makes her another possible candidate. Marriages at such a young age were not uncommon in the nineteenth century, and if she married Wohlforth when she was only 14 or 15 and then quickly became a mother, it is easier to understand why she may have felt trapped by the marriage and decided to leave Wohlforth and the children.¹⁰⁷ Minnie’s age also matches statements made in the *San Antonio Daily Light* and *The New York World*, suggesting that Minerva was 24 years old in 1892. If true, this would mean she was born in 1867 or 1868 rather than the 1862 listed on her death certi-



Portrait of Minerva from late in her life provided by her great granddaughter, June Stephens.

cate.¹⁰⁸ As for why either Hannah or Minnie used “Josie” or “Josephine,” rather than their real names, I can only speculate.

Perhaps it was a middle name, or perhaps, in reinventing herself as a performer, Minerva simply chose a name for herself from the classic mythology that she felt would help her hide from her husband.¹⁰⁹ We will probably never know.

The Spanish philosopher George Santayana argued in 1906 that “History is always written wrong, and so always needs to be rewritten.”¹¹⁰ This article has attempted to do just that, to rewrite the history of Minerva and Blatt based on the factual records I’ve been able to gather. Minerva’s great granddaughter, June Stephens, was enormously helpful to me in this quest for the truth about Minerva and Blatt, and I’m also deeply grateful to the expanding world of digital records and archives that

allowed me to find primary sources for this article that I would otherwise never have seen. However, I still have unanswered questions and may very well follow Santayana’s dictum and revise her history again in future years.

Notes.

1 Jan Todd, “The Mystery of Minerva,” *Iron Game History* 1(2) (April 1990): 14-16, is available for free download at: <http://www.la84foundation.org/SportsLibrary/IGH/IGH0102/IGH0102i.pdf>.

2 Ibid. See footnotes in the original article for a full list of sources.

3 Ibid., 16.

4 J. Stephens to J. Todd, personal communiqué, 4 October 2003.

5 “Letter, dated 13 March 1891,” *National Police Gazette*, 28 March 1891: 10. Reprinted in: Gene Smith and Jayne Barry Smith, eds., *The Police Gazette*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), 134-135.

6 Shortly after the appearance of this letter, Josie Wohlford changed her name to Minerva, at Fox’s suggestion. In addition to publishing the *National Police Gazette*, Richard K. Fox was vitally involved in the promotion of professional sports in North America in the Gilded Age. Fox was especially fond of boxing and had a special championship belt made for the 8 July 1889 fight between John L. Sullivan and Jake Kilrain. That belt contained 200 ounces of solid silver and was deco-

rated with diamond studs and gold ornaments. Sullivan won the fight after 75 rounds, but refused to wear the *Police Gazette* championship belt because he hated Richard K. Fox. So, the citizens of Boston raised money to create a new belt for him and this belt, which he wore with great pride is now at the Smithsonian. Fox also gave belts to strongman Louis Cyr and to Minerva. Cyr's belt now resides at the York Barbell Hall of Fame in York, Pennsylvania. Minerva's belt is still missing.

⁷ Smith and Smith, eds., *Police Gazette*, 134-135.

⁸ "Minerva," *National Police Gazette*, 11 March 1893: 11.

⁹ See: Jan Todd, "Center Ring: Katie Sandwina and the Construction of Celebrity," *Iron Game History* 10(3) (November 2007): 4-13, for a discussion of the ways in which circus performers often assumed new personas as performers.

¹⁰ Reprinted in: "Minerva the Champion Strongwoman," *National Police Gazette*, 11 March 1893: 11.

¹¹ "Minerva Interviewed: A Pleasant Hour with the Strong Woman," *San Antonio Daily Light*, 15 August 1892.

¹² Department of Health, State of New Jersey, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Certificate and Record of Death for Josephine Blatt, 1 August 1923. The birth certificate lists Charles P. Blatt as her husband. She had been at 20 Hendel Ave. in North Arlington, New Jersey, for only three months. Before then she lived in Tottenville, New York, on Staten Island.

¹³ Harry Shelland, "Recalling The Great Minerva," *National Police Gazette*, 28 December 1931: 8. As for the weight of the barrel, while farmers no doubt used barrels of different sizes, one report on the website, *The Voice of Agriculture*, reported, "The first way they shipped potatoes in the old days was in wooden barrels. A barrel of potatoes weighed 165 pounds and the lid would be stenciled with the name of the farm." Viewed at: <http://www.fb.org/index.php?fuaseaction=newsroom.focusfocus&year=1999&file=fo0517.html>.

¹⁴ "Minerva Sued for Divorce: Her First Husband Says the Strong Woman Married Too Often," *New York Times*, 13 June 1893.

¹⁵ In the *New York Sun*, Minerva is referred to as Johanna Wohlfarth. See: "Both Men Were Freed; Minerva the Strong Woman in Two Divorce Suits," quoted in *San Antonio Daily Express*, 19 June 1893. *The Philadelphia Enquirer* article on the case: "The Strong Woman Sued for Divorce: Muscular Minerva's Little Love Affairs Aired in Judge McAdam's Court," 13 June 1893: 4, refers to her as Catharine Wohlfarth. In *The News* for Frederick, Maryland, she is referred to as Johanna Wohlfarth on 13 June 1893: 1.

¹⁶ The 1880 United States Census has a Christ(ian) Wohlfarth living in Brooklyn as a boarder with the Thurman family. He was born in approximately 1852 in "Westenburgh," but no state or country is given. At this time Wohlfarth was employed in "a provisions store," which fits his description as a "pork packer" in the *Times*.

¹⁷ "Both Men Were Freed."

¹⁸ "The Strong Woman Sued for Divorce."

¹⁹ "Both Men Were Freed."

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ In the 1880 census for Phillipsburg, New Jersey, a Henry Bercaw is listed as living with a wife, named Mary. He was born in 1846 which would make him 47 at the time he married Minerva in 1893. See: "Henry Bercaw" 1880 United States Census, viewed at:

<http://pilot.familysearch.org/recordsearch/start.html>.

²² "Hercules of Our Day: Louis Cyr Undoubtedly the Strongest Man in the World," *Washington Post*, 4 January 1891: 10. Blatt is also discussed in: "Modern Samsons," *Grand Forks Herald*, 27 September 1891: 7.

²³ "Monsieur Blatt," *New York Clipper*, 11 May 1889: 140. The article discusses his performance at the Doris Museum, a wax museum and amusement venue in New York. He is also mentioned in an advertisement with testimonials in the *Clipper* on 15 November 1890: 575; in an advertisement in the *Clipper* for Davis' Pittsburg Museum that describes him as a "cannon ball catcher and dumbbell performer," on 29 November 1890: 599; and in an advertisement in the *Clipper* for Billing's World Museum in Boston on 20 December 1890: 653.

²⁴ "A Strong Pair," *Davenport Morning Tribune*, 17 January 1892.

²⁵ *Elizabeth, New Jersey Directories*, 1883-1891. Viewed at: <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv+1&db=1890&elzjn%2c&rank=0&%2c%2>.

²⁶ Charles P. Blatt, Sr. was born in Salz, France on 19 November 1826. In 1887 when he filed a passport application he was living at 46 Washington Avenue in Elizabeth, New Jersey. "U.S. Passport Applications, 1795-1925," viewed at: www.ancestry.com. In the 1880 census, a Blatt family with both father and son named Charles was living in Philadelphia. Whether this is the same family is not clear. The father in this instance is listed as 52 years of age, making him born in 1828, not 1826. The boy is listed as 12 years old which means he was born in 1868. In the *Elizabeth, New Jersey City Directory* for 1890 and 1891, Charles Blatt resided at 833 Martin Street. Only heads of households were normally listed in the directories. Viewed at: www.ancestry.com.

²⁷ Shelland, "Recalling the Great Minerva," 8. Shelland also claims that Minerva's father was known for his strength, especially his vise-like grip. A similar claim is made in *Billboard* in her obituary.

²⁸ See: 1880 United States Census for Hoboken, New Hersey, page 98, available at: www.ancestry.com.

²⁹ *Gopsill's Jersey City, Hoboken, West Hoboken and Union Hall Directory for 1886-1887*, 574.

³⁰ *Gopsill's Jersey City, Hoboken, West Hoboken and Union Hall Directory for 1887-1888*, 474.

³¹ *Jersey City, New Jersey Directories for 1891-1893*. Viewed at: www.ancestry.com.

³² "Minerva," *National Police Gazette*, 11 March 1893: 11.

³³ "Letter, 13 March 1891," *National Police Gazette*, 28 March 1891: 10.

³⁴ In "Minerva Interviewed: A Pleasant Hour With the Strong-woman," *San Antonio Daily Light* 15 August 1892, it states, "In Mexico she made a great hit and many friends. She is a member of the Daughters of Rebecca and has a fine diamond ring which was presented to her by the Odd Fellows in Mexico. She also wears a diamond ring which President Porforio Diaz gave her, and besides these has rings, silk shawls and medals, which were given her in that country. These she took great pleasure in showing to the reporter."

³⁵ "A Wonderful Woman, She Lifts Heavy Weights, Horses, Etc., As Though They Were Straws," *San Antonio Daily Light*, 12 August 1892: 1.

- 36 Minerva claimed that San Antonio, "suited them to a T." Ibid.
- 37 "Bowen's Island a Gay Place in Central Park Days," *San Antonio News*, 15 October 1965. See also: Frances J. Bowen, "Historic Bowen's Island: Once City Garden Sport, Now Site for \$5,000,000 Worth of New Buildings," *San Antonio Express*, 23 January 1927: 2D.
- 38 Advertisement, *San Antonio Daily Light*, 26 August 1892.
- 39 "Central Park," *San Antonio Daily Light*, 22 August 1892: 8.
- 40 "Advertisement for Central Park," *San Antonio Daily Light*, 26 August 1892; and "Advertisement for Central Park," *San Antonio Daily Light*, 25 August 1892; and "Advertisement for Central Park," *San Antonio Daily Light*, 29 August 1892.
- 41 "Minerva Too Much for Nelson," *Daily News* (San Antonio) 7 November 1892. Reprinted in *National Police Gazette*, 26 November 1892: 10.
- 42 "Minerva in San Antonio," *National Police Gazette*, 3 September 1892.
- 43 "Two Women of Muscle: One Breaks Horseshoes, the Other Lifts 300 Pounds With Her Teeth," reprinted from the *New York World* in *Los Angeles Times*, 7 August 1892: 9. See for example: "Minerva Issues Another Challenge," *National Police Gazette*, 5 November 1892: 10; "Letter from Yucca," *National Police Gazette*, 12 November 1892: 8; and "Minerva Too Much for Nelson," *National Police Gazette*, 26 November 1892: 10.
- 44 Todd, "Center Ring," 8. Sandwina was born in 1884.
- 45 "In the Square Circle: News and Gossip of Men and Muscle," *National Police Gazette*, 12 November 1892.
- 46 Choynski's Recent Fight," *National Police Gazette*, 19 November 1892: 11.
- 47 "Untitled letter to Richard C. Fox," reprinted in *National Police Gazette*, 28 January 1893.
- 48 "Minerva the Champion Strong Woman of the World," *National Police Gazette*, 11 March 1893: 10.
- 49 "Will Yucca Meet Minerva?" *National Police Gazette*, 3 April 1893: 11.
- 50 "The Strong Woman Sued for Divorce." "Advertisement for Central Park," *San Antonio Daily Light*, 1 May 1893.
- 51 Henry Bercaw married in 1877 but his wife, Mary, died in 1885. They are both listed in the 1880 United States Census. Viewed at: www.ancestry.com.
- 52 "Henry Bercaw," *Portraits and Biographical Record of Hunterdon and Warren County New Jersey* (New York: Chapman Publishing Company: 1898), 503.
- 53 "Minerva Divorced: Blatt the Cannon Ball Catcher Caught the Strongwoman," *The News*, Frederick, Maryland, 13 June 1893.
- 54 Telephone service had been introduced in San Antonio in 1879, so Minerva could have called Blatt, or more likely telegraphed, to let him know the news. Viewed at: <http://www.sanantonio.gov/saPD/history1d.htm>.
- 55 "Both Men Were Freed: Minerva, the Strong Woman in Two Divorce Suits," *San Antonio Daily Light*, 19 June 1893.
- 56 Ibid. See also: "Minerva Divorced."
- 57 In advertisements for Central Park in the *San Antonio Daily Light*, other performers were also listed making it possible that Mrs. Blatt was also a performer.
- 58 "Strong Woman Sued for Divorce," 4.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 "Both Men Were Freed," *San Antonio Daily Express*, 19 June 1893.
- 61 Ibid. It is not known when her divorce from Bercaw was finalized.
- 62 "Strong Woman Sued for Divorce," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 13 June 1893.
- 63 "Yucca Looking for a Match," *New York Times*, 7 July 1893. For additional information on Yucca see: "Two Women of Muscle," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 August 1892, 9.
- 64 "Minerva and Yucca Matched," *National Police Gazette*, 7 October 1893.
- 65 "Minerva," *National Police Gazette*, 28 October 1893, 7. The picture of Minerva appears on page 13.
- 66 "The Strong Woman Trophy," *National Police Gazette*, 13 January 1894: 10.
- 67 Ibid. Although it was later claimed to be covered with diamonds, there is no mention of any gemstones of any kind on the belt in the original newspaper coverage in 1893.
- 68 "Minerva, the Famous Champion Strong Woman," *National Police Gazette*, 6 January 1894: 10.
- 69 No library has a complete set of the *National Police Gazette* from this era. In working on this article I examined all the issues of the *National Police Gazette* available on microfilm at the H. J. Lutzer Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, which has one of the most complete runs of this publication in the US, and I used the academic search engine—American Periodicals Online—which also searches some issues of *The National Police Gazette*. I also used www.newspaperarchive.com, Google News Archive, and Proquest Historical Newspapers Online to look for references to Minerva and Blatt in both large and small newspapers in North America between 1880 and 1930. In doing those searches I found numerous references to appearances and advertisements for upcoming shows, but not a single mention of a contest between these women champions. For the possible Minerva and Athleta match see: "The Latest Sporting News," *National Police Gazette*, 26 May 1894: 10; "Mlle Athleta," *National Police Gazette*, 2 June 1894: 6; "Mlle Athleta to Richard Fox," *National Police Gazette*, 23 June 1894, 10; and "Athleta and Minerva," *National Police Gazette*, 29 December 1894: 11.
- 70 "Latest Sporting News," *National Police Gazette*, 7 April 1894: 11; and "Minerva," *National Police Gazette*, 17 November 1894: 10; "Minerva," *National Police Gazette*, 16 March 1895: 11.
- 71 "Minerva's Wonderful Act: Lifts Eighteen Men; Combined Weight Three Thousand Pounds," *National Police Gazette*, 4 May 1895: 10.
- 72 Ibid. There is no mention in the article of the platform and chains being weighed separately. Eighteen men of 150 pounds would weigh approximately 2700 pounds.
- 73 *The Police Gazette* obituary on 22 September 1923, claimed that the lift was made on 15 April 1895 and that there were 23 men on the men for a total weight of 3564 pounds. "Minerva: Strongest Woman in the World," *National Police Gazette*, 22 September 1923. See also: "Death of Mrs. J. Blatt Recalls Feats of Lifting," *Billboard*, 25 August 1923: 86.
- 74 Norris McWhirter, ed. *Guinness Book of Records* (New York: Sterling Publishing, Co., 1985), 462; David P. Willoughby, *The Super Athletes* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Co: 1970): 577.

⁷⁵ Yucca was the only other American strongwoman in this era known for heavy-harness lifting and her best effort appears to be a lift made in Hartford, Connecticut at the Wonderland Theater in 1894 when she lifted six men, two of whom weighed close to 250 pounds, for a total weight, with apparatus, of 1306 pounds. "Yucca's Great Lift," *The Hartford Courant*, 17 April 1894: 1. "She stood over the men on a platform, with a belt around her waist. Most of the lifting was done with her legs. She lifted a 1,100 pound horse in the same manner."

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ I can find no record of a marriage license being issued to Charles Blatt in either New York, Texas, or New Jersey. I used national genealogy search engines such as www.ancestry.com; www.familysearch.org; and www.ancestorhunt.com for this search.

⁷⁹ "Captain Randall's Popular Excursions," *The Washington Post*, 26 June 1895: 9.

⁸⁰ "Wednesday and the Fourth at River View," *The Washington Post*, 3 July 1895: 2. See also: "Wednesday at Beautiful River View," *The Washington Post*, 10 July 1895: 8.

⁸¹ "Big Day at the River Resorts," *The Washington Post*, 15 July 1895: 7.

⁸² "Wonderful Speedy at River View," *The Washington Post*, 14 July 1895: 15.

⁸³ According to her obituary in the *National Police Gazette* on 22 September 1923, Minerva and Blatt—at different times during their careers—spent two seasons with Barnum's Circus, one season with Forepaugh's Circus, four seasons with the Rentz Circus in Europe, and also worked with both Circus Schumann and the Merkel Circus in Germany. They also performed for Keith's Vaudeville Circuit, which took them all across the United States and into South America. They were also, of course, with the Orrin Brothers Circus in Mexico in 1891 and early 1892.

⁸⁴ On the family tree provided to me by Minerva's great granddaughter, Matilda's birth date is also confirmed as being from 1882. The descendants of Blatt and Minerva do not have any birth records from this era that might help to unravel her parentage.

⁸⁵ 1900 United States Census, viewed at www.FamilySearch.org.

⁸⁶ Personal communiqué via email from June Stephens to Jan Todd. Digital images and notes in author's collection. The act done by Josephine and Matilda should not be confused with the iron jaw act also known as the Minerva Sisters that toured with John Robinson's circus in 1907 when one of the sisters had a tragic fall, and that was still working in vaudeville as late as 1913 as the "Human Butterflies." There are many references to the aerial act known as the Minerva Sisters on www.newspaperarchive.com. See for example: "Robinson's Circus," *Austin (Minnesota) Daily Herald*, 6 June 1907: 2; and "Amusements," *San Antonio Daily Light*, 27 January 1913: 4. I can find no references to Matilda and Josephine performing together in a song and dance act.

⁸⁷ Family genealogy records sent by June Stephens to Jan Todd, in author's collection.

⁸⁸ Department of Health of the State of New Jersey, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Certificate and Record of Death for Josephine Blatt, 1 August 1923. Author's collection.

⁸⁹ Tottenville was a thriving beach resort in the early twentieth cen-

tury with rapid ferry service from Perth Amboy. It had a number of hotels, restaurants, and a casino by the early twentieth century making it a likely spot for Minerva and Blatt to settle. For more information go to: Angie Mangino, "Tottenville: Businesses of the Past," at: <http://www.geocities.com/tottenville10307/BusinessesOfPast.html>.

⁹⁰ "Death of Mrs. J. Blatt Recalls Feats of Lifting," *Billboard*, 25 August 1923: 86.

⁹¹ "Minerva Interviewed."

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Why Minerva was living in North Arlington, New Jersey is not known, although it is possible, given her need for nursing care, that she was in a health care facility such as a hospice or nursing home. Department of Health for the State of New Jersey Death Certificate. See also: "Death of Mrs. J. Blatt," 86.

⁹⁴ In some newspaper accounts she is called Sadie Tarbone.

⁹⁵ "Murder and Suicide Follow an Insult," *New York Times*, 1 August 1924: 13. See also: "Kills Housekeeper and Then Commits Suicide," *Titusville Herald*, 1 August 1924; and "Diamond Belt is Cause of Dispute, Two Are Killed," *Bridgeport Telegram*, 1 August 1924: 6.

⁹⁶ "Diamond Belt is Cause of Dispute."

⁹⁷ "Murder and Suicide," *New York Times*: 13.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ "Kills Woman and Self to Get Diamond Belt," *The Washington Post*, 1 August 1924: 8.

¹⁰² "Day Laborer Inherits \$75,000 When a Vaudeville Magician Suicides," *The Kingsport Times*, 12 August 1924.

¹⁰³ Ibid., and "Specks Travers Digs On, Though an Heir," *Coshocton Tribune*, 11 August 1924.

¹⁰⁴ "Death of Mrs. J. Blatt Recalls Feats of Lifting," *Billboard*, 25 August 1923, 86.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ "Both Men Were Freed" and "Minerva Divorced."

¹⁰⁷ On the 1900 Census Minerva claimed to have been born in January of 1865, not 1867, or 1862, as it says on her death certificate.

¹⁰⁸ "Two Women of Muscle," *New York World*, reprinted in the *Los Angeles Times*, 7 August 1892: 9; and "Minerva Interviewed."

¹⁰⁹ There are three possible Schauer daughters who could have been Minerva: Mary, who was 20 in 1880, Hannah, who was 18, and Minnie, 13. The next two children were boys: Frederick was 10 in 1880, and Joseph, Jr. was 8. The remaining children were: Louisa, age 6, Antoinde, age 4, Albert, age 2 and Josephine, 10 months. 1880 U.S. Census for Hoboken, New Jersey, viewed at: www.ancestry.com. I have not found middle names for any of the children. The ancient goddess Minerva was known as both the god of useful and decorative arts and as a god associated with war. She was supposedly born, fully mature and wearing a full suit of armor. For more information on the goddess Minerva see: <http://www.dewey-browse.org/minerva/minerva.htm#Responsibilities>.

¹¹⁰ George Santayana, *The Life of Reason: Or the Phases of Human Progress* (New York: Charles Scribners, 1906): 45.

**Weight-lifting “as a sport, as a means
of body building, and as a profession”:**

Alan Calvert's *The Truth About Weight-Lifting*¹

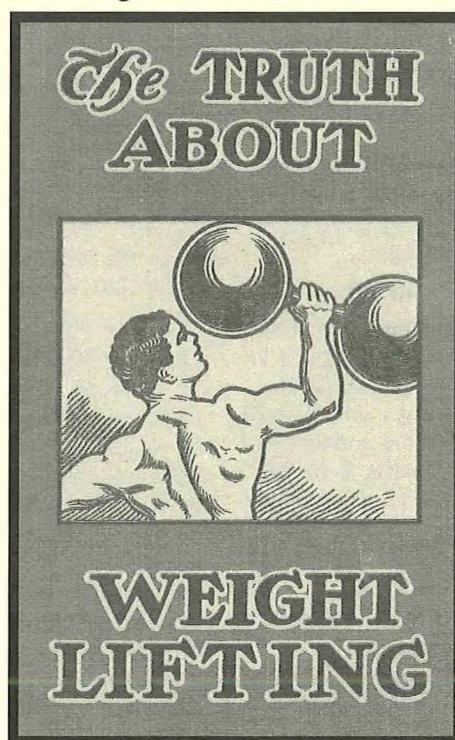
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The first three decades of the twentieth century witnessed a steady increase in sporting awareness and opportunity for the American citizen. As interest and participation in various sporting activities escalated, new rules and standards were introduced. Weightlifting in particular has been described by sport historian John Fair as “undergoing a metamorphosis from the strongmanism of an earlier era to a more regulated and respectable status” during these years.² Fair traced this evolution by considering such influential organizations as Alan Calvert's Milo Barbell Company, George Jowett's American Continental Weight-Lifters Association, and Bob Hoffman's York Barbell Company.³ The Milo Barbell Company in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, allowed American men, and undoubtedly a few women, to train and compete with adjustable barbells. According to Fair, however, it was Alan Calvert's publications, especially *Strength* magazine, which “exercised the greatest influence on the development of an early iron game culture.”⁴ *Strength* was by far Calvert's best known and most wide-spread publication, and it may well have had the greatest influence on lifting culture, but his first monograph, *The Truth*

About Weight-Lifting, also had an important impact on the development of American weightlifting as a sport. As ground-breaking as this text was in its time, scholars have provided little information on the book or its contents. Attempting to resolve this neglect, this article provides an historical evaluation of the contents of Calvert's book and the text's influence on American lifting during a time in which the public was enamored with strength yet troubled by the problem of inauthenticity.

The respected French physical culturist Professor Edmond Desbonnet hit the proverbial nail on the head when he published a few lines in 1911 about displays of strength and the power of impressions: “Physical prowess seems most often indisputable; a scientific or literary work does not tax the eyes the same way snatching a globe barbell tires the body, and the public hardly worries whether the book is worthy or whether the globes are empty—it is enough that the latter is large.”⁵ Some people who attended strength performances, and more than a few of those who actually lifted the weights, cared little about the truth, only about the impressions left behind. Although Alan Calvert agreed with the essence of Desbon-



Alan Calvert's *The Truth About Weight-Lifting* played a pivotal role in the evolution of the sport of weightlifting.

net's assertion, he regretted that what the Professor asserted was true. Calvert had grown up watching and reading about strongmen and their crowd-pleasing antics, but after he opened the Milo Bar-bell Company in 1902, he became personally involved in the business of strongmanism. He supplied many of the performers with equipment and many of his early students trained to become professional strongmen; however, Calvert knew that strongmanism had a dark side. Because these men had to amaze the public in order to sell tickets, many of them exaggerated their lifts, claiming to be stronger than they were. Those on the inside knew that a healthy dose of skepticism was needed when hearing about the feats of professional strongmen. But Calvert worried, with good reason, that if the sport—and his company—were to grow, the activity had to be placed on a higher and more ethical level. If barbellism was to be promoted as a wholesome and beneficial sport, Calvert had to find a way to make people believe that the weights men lifted were accurately represented. You couldn't claim that training worked if everyone thought you—and your weights—were fake.

Calvert was particularly concerned about the effect of such false claims on amateur lifting. The public, Calvert feared, couldn't differentiate between the claims of the professional strongman and those of amateur lifters who made up the majority of Calvert's students and potential customers. Amateur lifters didn't try to make a living by giving strength exhibitions. They might informally compete against each other, but they didn't generally resort to exaggeration or questionable practices. They stayed within their strength limits and didn't have the same great need to be regarded as record holders or the "world's strongest man" that the professionals had. In September 1911, after worrying about the effect of what he considered to be a growing cynicism toward lifting, Calvert decided to tackle the problem head-on in a book called *The Truth About Weight-Lifting*, the first hard-cover examination of the secrets of the strongman trade.

Calvert described the work in its inaugural *Physical Culture* advertisement as "a series of interesting articles on weight-lifting, dealing with it as a sport, as a means of body building, and as a profession."⁶ His purpose in writing the book was "to describe some of the greatest known feats of strength; how such feats are performed, which feats are genuine, and which feats are

tricks, or fakes; also to endeavor to give the reader some idea of who are the strongest men of the present day and the records to prove them so."⁷ In many ways, the book represented the first peal of the death knell for the professional strongman business. Calvert credited those men he believed to be truly strong, but he also exposed the fakers and exaggerators. *The Truth About Weight-Lifting's* other great thrust was to call for the organization of "the sport of lifting." At the same time that he condemned the dishonest professional strongmen, Calvert argued for the standardization of weights and lifts and for the creation of an amateur lifting organization that would keep records and oversee competitions.

Calvert began the book with a description of his qualifications: "Originator of Progressive Weight Lifting in America. Inventor of the 'Milo' and 'Milo Triplex' combination dumbbells. Proprietor of the Milo Bar-Bell Co."⁸ Although George Barker Windship has a more legitimate claim to the title of "father of resistance exercise in America," Calvert was by far the most important American figure in the first few decades of the twentieth century. The research he conducted both before and after he opened the company led him to develop a vast pool of knowledge about weight training. Although he didn't claim to know much when he opened his business—"my knowledge of bar-bell exercise and of lifting methods was rather limited"—he wrote that what he *did* know was "encyclopedic, when compared to what the average athlete knew about the subject."⁹ He had continued to educate himself and, in so doing, put himself at the top of the weight lifter's resource guide, if there had been such a thing at the time. Readers of his new book were encouraged to accept what he had to say as being a truthful evaluation because he was writing about weight-lifting "from the inside." Calvert wrote that his volume was groundbreaking and sure to "create a sensation," because he was using previously unpublished information.¹⁰

The book sold for one dollar in 1911 before it went down to ten cents during a "September Special" in 1912. Calvert began his "series of interesting articles" by explaining the existing state of American weight-lifting as both a recreational and competitive activity. He firmly believed the United States had the "raw material," but not the history and know-how of lifting to create renowned record-breakers. American athletes tended to favor "light" athletics (i.e. track and field or baseball),

while European nations, especially Germany and Austria, favored “heavy” athletics, such as weight-lifting, in which they held many of the records.¹¹ Another reason for weight training’s elevated status in Germany was that some of the *Turner* and lifting clubs had existed for fifty years or more; therefore, their members had had access to a wide assortment of training implements—including barbells and heavy dumbbells—for most of the second half of the nineteenth century.¹² Such heavy-lifting clubs were extremely rare in late nineteenth-century America; as a result, its populace had to wait for the opening of the Milo Bar-bell Company in order to purchase, and use with much consistency, heavily-weighted, adjustable barbells. More importantly, because of their longer experience with lifting, the Europeans had found that the most productive method of strength training was to gradually make “the exercise harder and harder.”¹³ Calvert argued that their highly developed, all-round strength beat out the more selective strength that Americans tended to build by targeting only one or two lifts.

The primary reason for these disparities, however, was the difference in the number of people involved in the activity on the two sides of the Atlantic. Calvert wrote that it was “no exaggeration to say that there are, in the average German lifting club, more first-class lifters than there are in the whole United States of America.”¹⁴ Historian David Willoughby has moreover reported that the German Athletic Association—*Deutschen Athletik Sport Verbandes*—founded in 1891 to bring all the *Kraftsport* (strength sports) clubs together, had a membership of over three hundred clubs and over twelve thousand athletes by 1900.¹⁵ These German and Austrian lifting clubs held tournaments weekly and

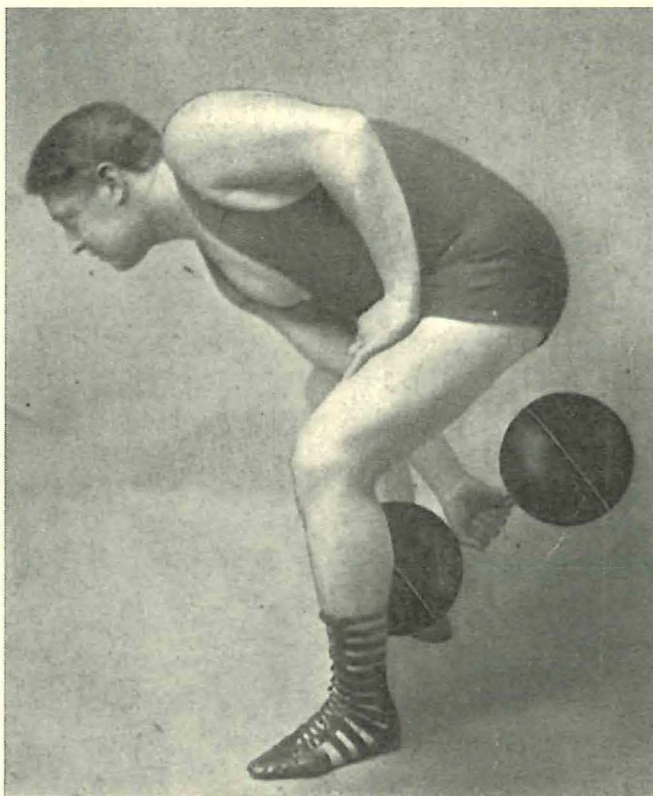
sometimes daily in the larger cities. On some occasions, as many as 150 to 200 entrants would compete in different weight classes performing various lifting feats. No such competitions occurred in the U.S. According to Calvert, though, the greatest factor for the neglected state of American lifting was the effect of the professional strongmen:

Probably the principal reason [why weight-lifting as a sport is not popular in this country] is the very foolish and short-sighted attitude of the professional lifters in this country. These professionals have made a practice of deceiving and “buncoing” the public for so long a time, that the public has become disgusted with their methods and has come to the conclusion, either that all weight-lifters are fakirs, or else that

weight-lifting is a peculiar kind of sport in which only a few men can excel.¹⁶

So, Calvert had to not only compete against barbell illiteracy as he launched his fledgling company but he had to also confront the image of the professional strongman as a charlatan.

Sport historians Allen Guttman and Melvin Adelman might say that American weight-lifting before Calvert was operating with pre-modern tendencies. A “modern” sport, according to Guttman, involves secularism, equality of opportunity to compete in standardized competitions, specialization of roles within the sport, rationalization of the rules and training for the sport, bureaucratic organizations to lead and unify the sport,



One of the few photos of Calvert known to exist is this shot of him performing a one-arm swing on page 32 of *The Truth About Weight-Lifting*. Although Calvert is not listed as the model in the book, David Willoughby wrote a pencil note identifying Calvert in a copy of the book given to James A. Cameron. Cameron’s thank you letter to Willoughby, housed at the H. J. Lutch Stark Center, allowed us to know that this was Calvert.

quantification of some sort, and the quest for records.¹⁷ Adelman further argues that a “modern” sport involves multiple levels of organization; competes by written, formalized, and standardized rules; provides chances to compete at local, national, and international levels; exhibits role differentiations; regularly reports in local and national media as well as its own specialized literature; and publishes statistics and records on a regular basis.¹⁸ The professional strongmen who performed in circuses and variety theaters were not trying to create a sport, of course. They were entertainers who used lifting as a means to an end—their paychecks. However, unlike jugglers and acrobats, where the performance is everything, lifting is an activity that requires quantification. Lifting is interesting primarily because it allows us to compare one man’s strength to another’s. Thus, professional strongmen had to claim to hold records and be title holders even though no association sanctioned their records. For Calvert, the fact that no agency regulated the various claims of the professional strongmen meant that it was harder to encourage a young person to take up heavy lifting. If the amateur had only the hyperbolic, unreachable records of the professional strongmen as a goal, it might seem pointless to train at all.

In the early twentieth century, Calvert did more to move weight-lifting toward being a modern sport than anyone else. His Milo barbells allowed men in different parts of America to train on identical equipment so that lifting conditions were standardized. In his educational out-reach activities, Calvert worked to standardize the lifts themselves, creating a canon of exercises which allowed men in different parts of America to replicate each other’s feats and thus compare themselves to one another. In publishing *The Truth About Weight-Lifting*, Calvert took the nascent sport one step closer to modernization by supplying outsiders with “inside” information and by exposing the fraudulent claims of some of the professionals.

STRONGMAN “TRICKS”

Arguments about the validity of many lifts, even when seen in person, were commonplace in the early twentieth century. Calvert explained that the strongmen’s easiest ruses “trade on the ignorance of the audience” by making absurd statements about the weight of their equipment.¹⁹ Since most exhibition bars tended to have globe ends, just counting the visible plate-weights, as would be done today, was impossible. If a photograph was to be published in a newspaper or magazine,

an art editor, or the photographer himself, often wrote the poundage of the bar on the globes in the photograph so that all would know the bar’s claimed weight. It was therefore easy for the performer to simply tell the photographer an exaggerated weight which was then relayed to the art editor. As an example, Calvert told of a weight-lifter who borrowed a 160-pound barbell to put on a strength exhibition. A reporter took pictures of the strength show and Calvert saw the resulting photos in the newspaper describing the barbell as weighing 260-pounds—one hundred pounds more than the actual weight.²⁰

Another such incident which amused Calvert and added to the fuel for his book involved a reporter and a “Herculean ‘hand-balancer’” who performed at a local theatre. The reporter asked the hand-balancer to pose for some photos to publish with an article he had written. When the reporter, hand-balancer, and Calvert met at the photographer’s studio they found that the theatre manager had forgotten to send the gymnast’s 75-pound kettle-bells to be used in the pictures. A call to the theatre assured them the bells would be brought post-haste by a team of horses. After 10 to 15 minutes had passed, Calvert and the others saw a young boy employed by the theatre parading down the street with two kettle-bells in one hand and a third in the other hand—each kettle-bell had 75-pounds stenciled on its globe. Calvert only commented, “If this gymnast’s muscles are as strong as the language he used on that occasion he must be a wonder.”²¹

Calvert also exposed the fact that many professional strongmen had their own stage weights specially made. A strongman’s reputation and marketability depended on his remaining undefeated in regards to the challenges he tossed at fellow performers and audiences. To preserve their images of invincibility, many strongmen had unique “tricks” built into their equipment. Anyone not knowing about the trick could not lift the bar on the first try, which was all they were likely to get. One method was to make a dumbbell ten to twenty pounds heavier on one end. A challenger would lose the balance of the bar when he gripped the handle in the middle and tried to lift it. The strongman, knowing that the bar was heavier on one end, could make the lift look effortless by gripping the handle closer to the heavier end.²² Some large-handed strongmen had thick handles on their equipment, often two inches and more in diameter. This was not exactly a trick, but only those with very large, strong hands had any hope of picking up the

implement. Men with average-sized hands who might be invited to the stage to “test” the weight would consequently have little chance of success.²³ Other strongmen were even known to put a liquid of some sort (e.g. mercury) in a hollow handle to throw the balance off when the bar was in motion and the challenger tried to keep the bar level.²⁴ In this case, the strongman was able to control the weight by simply keeping one end of the bar lower than the other so that the mercury would not flow from one end of the bar to the other.

If anyone questioned Calvert’s source for this information, his advertisements for the book explained that he had inside knowledge. He had supplied “exhibition dumb-bells for many of the most prominent professional ‘strong-men’” and “celebrated lifters” and, therefore, knew who gave fake representations to the public as to what their equipment weighed.²⁵ He estimated that “not more than one professional lifter out of five will tell the truth, or anything like the truth” about the weight of their equipment.²⁶ With so many “tricks” being employed by the performing strongmen, it was only natural that portions of society began to believe that there was a “catch” or “knack” to lifting. By publishing *The Truth About Weight-Lifting* Calvert didn’t make many friends among the professional strongman circles; in his words, he became “extremely unpopular with many of the professionals.”²⁷ A number of the strongmen wrote to defend themselves and their acts and called Calvert a “bum sport.”²⁸ One professional who Calvert saw perform in person and who turned down Calvert’s offer to verify his purported records even explained that he wasn’t really a strongman at all, but a “showman.”²⁹ For the strongmen unaccustomed to such scrutiny and criticism, Calvert was the harbinger of tough times to come. To the amateur lifter and uninitiated audience, though, Calvert was most likely a welcome font of knowledge.

Calvert also explained the difference between true lifting feats and the showier supporting tricks. True lifts tested one’s muscular strength while supporting feats shifted the emphasis to the bones of the skeleton, which are structurally much stronger than the muscles. Popular supporting acts included “bridging,” in which weight of some kind—men, automobiles, animals, etc.—was added to planks situated across the knees, shoulders, and/or feet of the strongman who held or supported the whole apparatus for the audience. Bridge acts took quite a bit of preparation and careful consideration to create the best visual impression for the audience. According to Calvert, though, these feats also represented times when “a professional will work [hard physical-

ly] in order to create an impression.”³⁰ Supporting feats, to take one prominent example, included one-armed stunts in which great amounts of weight were supported at arm’s length overhead. The famous strongman and physique artist Eugen Sandow always included several of these stunts in his performances since he believed he could support “almost any amount of weight” above his head “on a straight arm if it was lifted into position” for him.³¹ To Calvert’s way of thinking, these acts were great for leaving an impression with the audience, but did “not prove that he [the strongman] is a particle stronger than the average sturdy day-laborer.”³²

Strongman stunts such as coin-breaking, chain-breaking, and card-tearing also received Calvert’s attention. Acts like these, he assured his readers, were usually accomplished with the help of some deception. Those claiming to break coins were usually good at sleight of hand tricks. A previously torn coin (compliments of a vise and pliers before the show) was palmed while the strongman acted like he was ripping a whole coin. During some contrived struggling the previously-torn coin replaced the whole coin with the audience oblivious of what had taken place.³³ Men who wrapped a chain around their biceps with the intention of breaking it had usually doctored the chain first by filing through a link, subjecting the chain to acid, or replacing a steel link with a much weaker lead link.³⁴ Card tearing, on the other hand, could be accomplished a number of ways—some legitimate, some not. Calvert believed that anyone who trained for three months with heavy dumbbells should be able to rip a deck of cards and that an advanced lifter, able to put a 150-pound dumbbell overhead with one hand, should be able to rip two decks. Calvert explained the mechanics of how the trick was honestly completed and introduced factors which contributed to one’s ability to tear decks of cards: the material of the cards, their age, and whether or not they had been baked in an oven before the show.³⁵

When Calvert discussed who should be considered the “strongest man in the world,” he asserted that “there is no man who stands head and shoulders above all other men in point of strength.”³⁶ However, he gave credit to several famous lifters for what he believed to be their true accomplishments. Relying upon European standards because “they [lifters from the Old World] understand such things,” Calvert recognized Joseph Steinbach of Vienna as “the strongest man” because he was the strongest two-handed lifter. He could put overhead in a two-hand jerk 390 pounds and he could two-hand press 328¾ pounds.³⁷ Others believed Arthur Sax-

on of the famed Saxon Trio to be the strongest man of this era. Saxon held the record in the bent press with 371 pounds.³⁸ Calvert conceded that Saxon “possesses muscular strength in abundance” and was immensely impressed with Saxon as a “dumbbell lifter” and for his penchant to perform “straight shows;” however, since his best lifts were one-armed exercises he was automatically excluded from consideration for the overall strongest man title.³⁹ While one-armed exercises demanded skill and agility, Calvert’s opinion was that two-handed exercises demonstrated a greater amount of brute strength. He thus argued, “When a man gets a heavy bar-bell of 250 pounds, or more, to his chest, no tricks, skill or quickness in movement will enable him to get the bell aloft in the two-hand ‘press.’”⁴⁰ Calvert mentioned John Marx’s record-breaking abilities in back-lifting and tearing horseshoes, but since he rarely practiced with barbells and dumbbells he wasn’t a serious contender for the title either. The only other contender for the title was Karl Swoboda; he had lifted 400 pounds overhead in the two-handed jerk, ten pounds more than Steinbach.⁴¹ However, Swoboda outweighed Steinbach by fifty pounds, so Calvert thought the title should remain with Steinbach for being stronger pound-for-pound.⁴²

Calvert called attention to the fact that there weren’t any Americans in consideration for the title. In Calvert’s opinion, this was primarily because “an absolutely first-class ‘strong man’” did not exist in the whole of the United States.⁴³ He blamed this on the population’s tendency to favor the supporting feats instead of the purer strength lifts. However, he believed that the standardization of rules, events, and equipment would take care of that problem; but that the desired results would not, and indeed, could not, be seen overnight. Trying to help his readers understand that “weight-lifters are not developed in a day,” and to brag on his hometown, Calvert used an analogy with the national pastime of baseball. The Germans, he argued, would need at least three years to develop a baseball team to compare with the two-time World Champion Philadelphia Athletics, just as the United States needed the same span of time to produce “five absolutely first-class lifters” to compete with the German strength stars.⁴⁴ Since the Milo Bar-bell Company had opened its doors in 1902, Calvert assumed that the eventuality of American lifters actually competing against the European lifters was nearing. To speed up the process, he openly challenged the American lifters:

I would at any time gladly pay \$100.00 to see an American lifter raise from his shoulder to arm’s length above the head with the right arm a 300-lb. bar-bell, or to see any American lifter raise from the ground to arm’s length above the head a bar-bell weighing 400 lbs. Any aspiring young strong men who think they can perform either of these feats can take a chance any time they are in Philadelphia by calling at my factory, and I can assure such lifters that they will receive absolutely fair treatment, and that they can have the pick of the kind of bells they want to use, and that if they succeed in performing either of the above feats I will not only hand over the money, but will also do the utmost in my power to assist them to establish their claim for American records in these feats. I feel that my money is pretty safe for some years to come.⁴⁵

Calvert also included a chapter discussing bodily measurements in *The Truth About Weight-Lifting*. Anthropometry was popular in early twentieth century America and when strongmen began to display their physiques as well as put on strength exhibitions, many of them included their physical measurements in their publicity materials. Because of the public’s interest in anthropometry, strongmen found that people would flock to the circus or variety theater not just to see phenomenal lifting, but also to see a man with a 46-inch chest and 24-inch thighs. Calvert reminded his readers that the numbers on a seamstress’s measuring tape could also be manipulated by strongmen to their advantage.

Calvert wrote, for instance, about how Sandow reported in his book on physical culture that he had a 48-inch normal chest, a 60-inch expanded chest, 19-inch arms, 28-inch thighs, and that he weighed 200 pounds. However, in the back of Sandow’s book, Calvert confided to his readers, one could find Sandow’s measurements as they were certified by the famed Dr. Dudley Allen Sargent. According to Sargent, Sandow weighed only 180 pounds on the day he weighed him and Sandow possessed a 44-inch normal chest, a 47-inch expanded chest, a 16 ¾-inch arm, and 24-inch thighs.⁴⁶ Obviously, most of Sargent’s measurements were dramatically different from those claimed by Sandow. A person’s bodyweight—and measurements—do often

fluctuate during his or her lifetime, but in Sandow's case we have an extensive photographic record of his body and that record does not indicate that he put on 20 pounds. In fact, Sandow's claim of a 60-inch expanded chest is illogical since modern strongmen with 60-inch chest measurements normally weigh over 300 pounds, and most of these are bench press specialists who have particularly built the pectoral muscles of the chest. Sandow did not do bench presses; the exercise had not yet been invented. In any case, after claiming to have "examined the measurements of several hundred amateur and professional lifters" Calvert found their average measurements to be a 42-inch chest, a 15-inch arm, and 23-inch thighs.⁴⁷ Even so, Calvert conceded that a good deal of strength derived from one's skeletal structure, and therefore physical measurements didn't tell the whole story.

Although Calvert didn't discuss his philosophy of perfect proportions and ideal measurements in *The Truth About Weight-Lifting*, he did relate some ideas on proper amounts and types of muscle. Due to his interest in building strength, Calvert admonished his readers that "quality counts for more than quantity" where muscles were concerned.⁴⁸ The function and ability of the muscles to work together were more important considerations than their volume and appearance. Indeed, the concept that size mattered less than "know-how" was one of the recurring themes in Calvert's writings. Training with heavy weights, he believed, forced a person to learn how to use muscles in groups by the proper application of force.

In an era riddled with fears of constipation and other digestive maladies, Calvert also attributed one's strength and health to a "square-built, powerful waist."⁴⁹ Therefore, a person should not have more than eight or nine inches difference between the chest and waist measurements. If the waist was 12 or more inches less than the chest measurement, one had inadequate waist development, according to Calvert. However, he pointed out that strongmen often quoted *expanded* chest measurements—not the more natural, relaxed chest as one might expect—which would throw the waist-to-chest ratio off a bit. In order to take an expanded measurement the strongman took a deep breath and flexed the latissimus dorsi of the upper back which made the measurement much larger.⁵⁰ Exaggeration of measuring tape readings was fairly easy to accomplish, but deceiving the actual eye of the beholder took more imagination.

In order to make their physiques appear larger and more defined to the naked eye, Calvert explained,

the strongmen commonly employed several tricks. For instance, they often posed during their live acts in a three-sided posing cabinet in which lighting threw the muscles in shadowed relief and gave an impression of greater size. Photographers often took pictures of the strongmen in a similar cabinet for the same effect. Sometimes a photographer would even enhance a physique by applying shadows or lines of definition directly on the actual photo. Some unscrupulous professionals retouched their photos to an even greater extent, providing muscle where none was before. Calvert explained that this often resulted in "truly fearful and wonderful" muscle shapes not often found on a human. Another method to enhance the visual impact of live performances involved the rubbing of powder or burnt cork on the strongman's body and then having an assistant wipe away portions of the substance while he flexed his muscles. This practice, done just before a performance, left dark shadows in the valleys between muscles which, when lit properly, appeared more defined and significantly larger.⁵¹

AMATEUR LIFTING AND STANDARDIZATION

Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of *The Truth About Weight-Lifting* was Calvert's plea for the standardization of lifting in America. If weight-lifters knew how to do a core number of competitive lifts, they could be better prepared for any competition that might arise. Relying upon Europe's history of conducting strength contests, Calvert described the eight "standard lifts" recognized by the Old World lifters: right-arm snatch, left-arm snatch, right-arm jerk, left-arm jerk, right-arm swing, left-arm swing, two-arm press, and two-arm jerk. As he explained each exercise, Calvert gave important information about how different countries performed the lift, along with records and details of exceptional lifts generally accepted to be true. He also made occasional references to professional strongmen who found some tricky way to perform a particular exercise more easily or more impressively for the audience. One such example began with a discussion of the form displayed while performing the snatch. After explaining the basics of the lift Calvert wrote that in Europe credit was given to the athlete not only for the amount of weight lifted, but also "for the manner in which he lifts it." Bad form sometimes correlated to moving one's feet during the lift, such as when "an amateur, or a badly trained professional" makes a "tremendous effort to get a bell above his head, and then after he has gotten the bell aloft he will have to take a few rapid steps in order

to maintain his balance.” Calvert went on to accuse American professional strongmen of abusing this show of effort in their performances by “using a light bell and making a tremendous effort when lifting,” thus giving “the impression to the audience that he is raising a tremendous weight.”⁵²

Calvert described the snatch, the swing, and the jerk as the “quick lifts.” The quick lifts “put a premium on activity and skill,” and since the smaller, lighter man had an easier time developing both, such lifts allowed him to compete against a larger, heavier man. The man who made best use of his strength—whether he was small but quick and explosive, or large and powerfully strong—was the best man in the competition, according to Calvert. With the exception of the swing, these same quick-lift exercises involving the use of two hands comprise today’s Olympic sport of weightlifting. The only thing different in today’s sport is that the “clean and jerk” replaces just “the jerk.” The clean portion of the exercise, while treated cursorily by Calvert in his description of the overhead jerk and overhead press, addresses the accepted methods of getting the bar to the shoulders for either one of these two overhead lifts to commence. Calvert explained that some countries allowed a “continental clean” in which the bar could touch and/or rest on the body one or more times en route to the shoulders. A “true” clean meant that the bar traveled directly—cleanly, without touching the body—from the floor to the shoulders. Eventually, the “clean” was universally adopted and included in the name of one of the two present day Olympic weightlifting events.

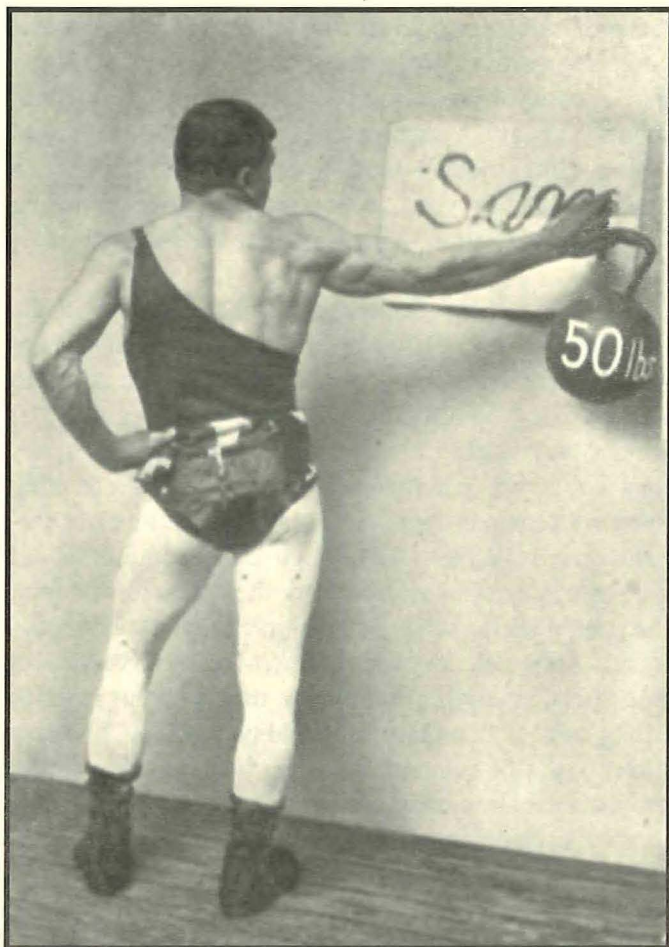
After discussing the core competitive lifts, Calvert moved on to explain other well-known lifts. He described in detail several presses, including the bent-press, the military press, and the ordinary press, and commented that they were rarely seen in Europe anymore, but that America seemed to still enjoy contesting them.⁵³ Sandow had been a good bent-presser and claimed he could press over three hundred pounds, but Calvert only credited him with the 271-pounds he did in a public exhibition in London in 1891.⁵⁴ Although Calvert believed Sandow had a fabulous physique, he also believed that as Sandow still belonged in the professional strongman category he was prone to stretching the truth about his lifts as well as his measurements. Calvert also illustrated stunts like “muscling out” the bells, harness lifting, back-lifting, and dead-weight lifting. Continuing his diatribe against professional strongmen, Calvert described these special lifts, gave their records if he knew them, and then proceeded to tell how

the professional would do the lift in order to make a good impression. If Calvert didn’t know of a way to fake or cheat on an exercise he accepted the lift as a “test of pure strength.” Such pure tests included dead-weight lifting—like today’s partial deadlift, or Windship’s health lift of fifty years earlier—and dead-weight lifting to the cross position—like a modern stiff-legged deadlift.⁵⁵

Calvert also argued for standardization in the competition itself. He differentiated between contests of strength and contests of endurance. It made sense to Calvert that weightlifters should be testing the amount of weight they could lift rather than the number of times they could lift a particular weight—which was often done in strongman contests where only fixed-weight barbells were available. Calvert argued that contests should consist of exercises chosen from the standard lifts with the goal of seeing who could lift the most in each movement. Above all, in order to keep the lifting contest a true test of strength, it should not mix different types of lifting such as dumbbell lifting and back-lifting.⁵⁶ These mixed types of competitions were the primary avenues professional strongmen used to win the challenges they threw at each other on the rare occasions when they actually met in competition. In an effort to get publicity in a local or national newspaper, the strongmen were “prolific with challenges,” but when it came time to actually “put up or shut up,” according to Calvert, “most American professional lifters avoid competitions as they do poison.”⁵⁷

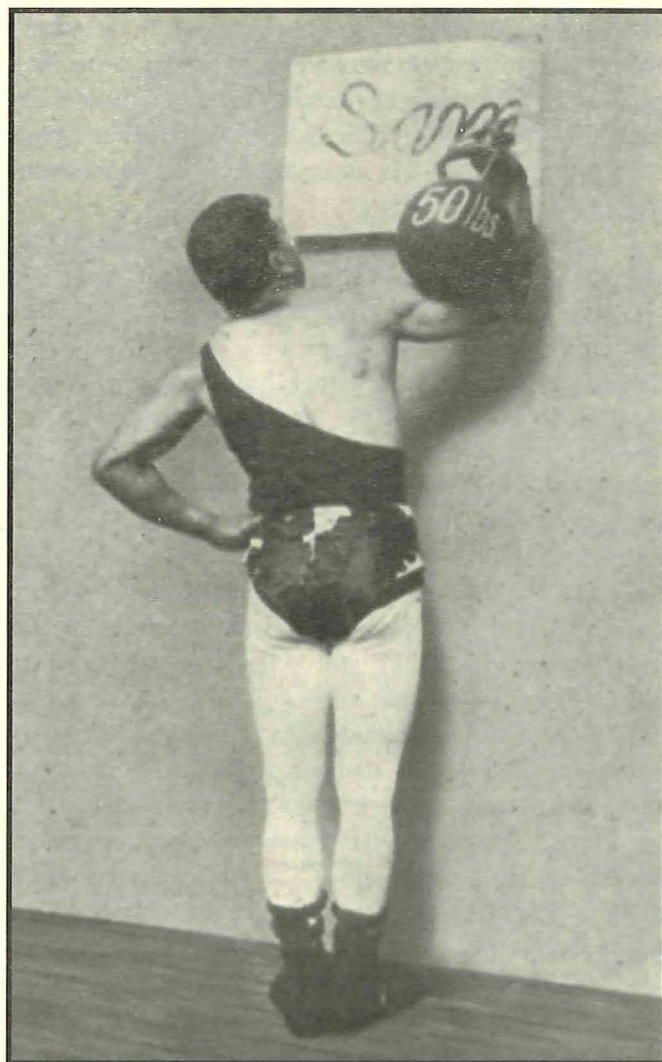
As for dumbbell lifting, Calvert maintained that it needed to be performed with equipment that was “uniform and of standard style.” Each lifter should be “compelled” to use the same equipment, argued Calvert, “thus placing every lifter on absolutely equal footing regarding apparatus.”⁵⁸ This was quite a novel idea in 1911 and, more than likely, Calvert envisioned all the competitions using Milo barbells. By restricting the kinds of lifts possible and making all competitors use the same equipment, Calvert could foresee regular and sensible competitions taking place across America. Each person would be properly trained in the lifts and records could be easily verified. This was the only way, Calvert believed, that the United States could develop lifters to compete against the European strength stars.

Taking the concept of standardization another step, Calvert discussed the future organization of American weightlifting. He stressed the need for a Board of Control so that standardized competitions would be held and rules enforced—an important aspect to a sport enter-



Calvert included these two images in *The Truth About Weight-Lifting* to expose some of the showman's tricks. The photo above is titled, "This is the way the theatre poster shows it." The one on the right is captioned, "This is the way it is really done." (Notice weight resting on upper arm.)

ing the modern era. Calvert reminded his readers about the beneficial effects of such organization on track-and-field. Athletes in that sport knew the rules of performance for each of the competitive events and knew what steps to take in order to establish records. However, until William B. Curtis and the Amateur Athletic Union organized track-and-field, the sport was like lifting—a morass of claims, counter-claims, and unverified records that made it impossible to follow as an organized, competitive activity. Calvert pointed out that, as of 1911, American weightlifting had no set competitive lifts, no rules of performance, and no supply of qualified referees; this meant that a reliable and comprehensive set of records could not be kept. A Board of Control, he explained, would establish the lifts and their rules of performance, and would allow referees to be trained and certified. This was an important aspect to the standardi-



zation process, according to Calvert, who also argued for the separation of professional and amateur lifters and the development of weight classes. Willing to assist in the formation of a "national association," Calvert believed it "would do more than anything else to develop champion lifters in the United States." He even suggested that the European system of governing lifting contests be followed, with the rules of performance patterned after the German rules.⁵⁹

BREAKING NEW GROUND

The Truth About Weight-Lifting broke new ground in many other ways as well. Before Calvert came on the scene, the term "dumbbell" meant more than just a short-handled weight to most lifting aficionados. Generally more inclusive at that time, the term was also used when talking about the long-handled version, presently referred to as a barbell. Calvert was one of the first to begin making distinctions between the terms

“dumbbell” and “barbell.” In *The Truth* he explained the differences in barbells, dumbbells, and kettle-bells and their various effects on the body. Barbells, he argued, were better for heavy, overhead weight work since the lifter often had to “concentrate all his attention and will-power on making the lifting muscles contract strongly enough to raise the weight.”⁶⁰ If only one piece of equipment was used the lifter’s focus stayed narrow, but if a pair of dumbbells was used the focus would be divided and he would, as a result, be less likely to succeed.

Calvert differentiated between “weight-lifting” and “heavy dumbbell exercises.” “Weight-lifting” involved “the lifting of heavy dumbbells” in the standard competitive lifts. Although six of the eight exercises were performed with only one arm, most of them were described as being done with a long-handled barbell. “Heavy dumbbell exercises,” on the other hand, involved the use of “moderately heavy dumbbells, or bar-bells, and are intended to prepare the muscles for the more arduous work of weight-lifting.” Calvert recommended weight-lifting proper for those 16 years and older, but heavy dumbbell work was acceptable for those as young as 14 years. A person’s best heavy work, Calvert believed, was accomplished between the ages of 30 and 40, but great benefits from weight training could be gained by those older than 40 years.⁶¹ In keeping with this philosophy, Calvert had redesigned his original training courses by 1911 to reflect the different levels of preparation—developmental exercise, competitive exercise, and exhibition strongman work.

The book also furthered a theme expected of the proprietor of the Milo Bar-bell Company and common to nearly all of Calvert’s writing—opposition to the notion that lifting light weights would develop significant muscle tissue. Calvert wrote that light dumbbell training was “valuable as a means of benefiting the health and keeping the body in good working condition, but . . . valueless for the purpose of developing great muscular strength and energy.”⁶² As the years progressed Calvert associated muscular strength with muscular growth and development and realized that a lifter generally did not get one without the other. He tried to relay this information to his students and the book’s readers. Train for muscular development and the strength will come. The muscles needed to be worked in groups, Calvert emphasized, and only the use of moderately-heavy to heavy weights forced an increase in strength and muscle growth to occur.⁶³

In an attempt to overcome other superstitions and myths surrounding weight training Calvert attacked

the concept of muscle binding. He explained that the quick lifts encouraged the development of speed and agility; therefore, they could not be associated with the muscle-bound state.⁶⁴ Another criticism of weight-lifting by some of the public included the unsightly development of a “knotty” physique. Calvert explained that the bearers of these “knots” were just used to tensing up their muscles while posing in front of people or a camera. Strong men had muscles that were smooth when not in a tensed state, Calvert confidently assured the readers.⁶⁵ Also, much like the aches, pains, and strains associated with today’s weekend warrior syndrome, Calvert revealed that the ever-dreaded “strain” was caused by “the conceit which prompts the untrained individual” to handle too much weight too quickly or to show off to their friends.⁶⁶ Although “strain” was often associated with abdominal ruptures, or hernias, during this time period, Calvert didn’t seem to include this malady in his version of the term. Whereas he had warned readers of “abdominal rupture” earlier in the book while discussing the proper back alignment for one of the deadlifting exercises, Calvert referred to strain as the foolishness that surrounds men who chance upon a heavy dumbbell.⁶⁷ Even though untrained, they will all strain themselves trying to lift the heavy object since “the average man is secretly very proud of his strength and very loath to admit that any one of his fellows can outdo him in any feat where strength alone is required.”⁶⁸ These types of incidents, in Calvert’s opinion, did much to give weight-lifting an unwarranted, bad reputation. Other types of strains, such as those on the heart, would be thwarted by systematic and rhythmic breathing during exercise.⁶⁹ Calvert also warned that athletes had to specialize and begin training according to their sporting interests. Although subsequent events would prove him wrong, Calvert asserted that if an athlete wanted extreme strength then he had to give up some speed. He also believed that if the athlete wanted to be the fastest man on the track then he had to forget the idea of being enormously strong. However, Calvert emphasized to the reader, correctly, that a good mix of the two abilities—speed and strength—led to great benefits and produced powerful, above average men.⁷⁰

Calvert finished the book by giving tips to those interested in entering the realm of the performing strongman. Although he claimed not to be preparing young men for the strongman profession, Calvert noted that others believed this was the sole aim of his business. In reality, he advised young men to avoid entering the profession because it would take away from their enjoyment

of the activity of lifting weights. "Weight lifting as a sport is not only one of the most beneficial forms of exercise, but is also one of the most fascinating of pastimes," stated Calvert.⁷¹ Becoming a professional strongman would require the young lifter to resort to exaggeration and trickery because the public demanded sensational acts filled with danger—not an honest, straightforward heavy lifting act. To prove his point he recounted a story about a touring vaudeville strongman who traveled "on his shape." He was "gifted by nature with a superb figure, and by doing a moderate amount of heavy dumbbell work he was able to keep his muscles in the finest, clear-cut condition." The man claimed he could lift a ton, but Calvert knew that he was "all 'looks.'" Making an average of \$100 to \$150 a week, he "trades on his appearance" and is "very clever in giving the audience the impression that he is working very hard" with his weights.⁷² In making his argument, Calvert contrasted this depiction with the story of a young strongman who "has been lifting dumbbells for years; he is remarkably clever in his work and lifts so correctly and gracefully that you cannot realize how much strength he is putting forth." Because of his non-remarkable build and the effortless ease with which he lifted the weights he couldn't get "a paying engagement on the stage" because the customers would believe him to be a faker.⁷³ In this way, Calvert reminded his readers that the public demanded beautifully-built and heavily muscled-men, and that a lifter must "look the part" if he hoped to make it as a professional.⁷⁴

Although Calvert understood that the professional strongmen tried to make a living by their performances, and that they believed it was necessary to exaggerate and falsify claims, he was fervently opposed to the effects such farces had upon the amateur or novice lifter. He believed that many young men declined to pick up a bell because of their fear of not being able to equal the strength of a famous or idolized professional. It was these individuals Calvert targeted when he wrote the parting statement for his book, "If this little volume encourages any number of young men to take up this fascinating sport, I will consider that the time and trouble spent in producing it have been well repaid."⁷⁵

Professional strongmen may have suffered to a degree at the hands of Alan Calvert and his groundbreaking book, but amateur lifting and the Milo Barbell Company benefited significantly from its publication. Calvert's entreaty for a Board of Control for the emerg-

ing American competitive lifting community went virtually unheard for another ten years, but ultimately George Jowett, Ottley Coulter, and David Willoughby answered the call by forming the American Continental Weight-Lifters Association in 1922. Probably most important, however, is that because Calvert had the courage to tell "The Truth About Weight-Lifting," more men began buying his barbells and training with weights.

Notes:

¹ Alan Calvert, "Advertisement for *The Truth About Weight-Lifting*," *Physical Culture*, (September 1911), inside front cover. This article is adapted from chapter four of the author's dissertation: Kimberly Beckwith, "Alan Calvert, the Milo Barbell Company, and the Modernization of American Weight Training," (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2006).

² John Fair, "George Jowett, Ottley Coulter, David Willoughby and the Organization of American Weightlifting, 1911-1924," *Iron Game History* 2 (May 1993): 3.

³ Ibid, 3-15; 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; and John Fair, "From Philadelphia to York: George Jowett, Mark Berry, Bob Hoffman, and the Rebirth of American Weightlifting, 1927-1936," *Iron Game History* 4 (April 1996): 3-17.

⁴ John Fair, "George Jowett, Ottley Coulter, David Willoughby," 3. For more information on Alan Calvert and *Strength* magazine see also Kim Beckwith and Jan Todd, "*Strength*, America's First Muscle Magazine: 1914-1935," *Iron Game History* 9 (August 2005): 11-28.

⁵ Edmond Desbonnet, *Les Rois De La Force (The Kings of Strength)*, trans. David Chapman, (Paris: Librairie Berger-Levrault/Librairie Athletique, 1911), 2. The translation is unpublished and the page numbers found in the notes will refer to the translated copy unless otherwise indicated.

⁶ Calvert, "The Truth Advertisement."

⁷ Alan Calvert, *The Truth about Weight-Lifting* (Philadelphia: by the author, 1911), 9.

⁸ Ibid., title page, 3.

⁹ Alan Calvert, *An Article on Natural Strength versus "Made" Strength* (Philadelphia: by the author, n.d.), 3.

¹⁰ Calvert, "The Truth Advertisement."

¹¹ Calvert, *The Truth*, 11-4.

¹² Jurgen Giessing and Jan Todd, "The Origins of German Bodybuilding: 1790-1970," *Iron Game History* 9 (December 2005): 11.

¹³ Calvert, *The Truth*, 12.

¹⁴ Ibid., 13-14.

¹⁵ David P. Willoughby, "The Kings of Strength - Chapter XIII - When Weightlifting Was First Organized in Germany and Austria, 1891-1906," *Iron Man* 18(April-May 1959): 30, as quoted in Terence Colquitt Todd, "The History of Resistance Exercise: And Its Role in United States Education" (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin,

- 1966), 54.
- ¹⁶ Calvert, *The Truth*, 15.
- ¹⁷ Allen Guttmann, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 16-55.
- ¹⁸ Melvin L. Adelman, *A Sporting Time: New York City and the Rise of Modern Athletics, 1820-70*, Illini Books ed., *Sport and Society* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 6.
- ¹⁹ Calvert, *The Truth*, 17.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 151.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 20-21.
- ²³ *Ibid.*
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 152-54. See also Wilfrid Diamond, "Thomas Inch and the Strong Men He Knew," *Muscle Power* 3 (September 1947): 34.
- ²⁵ Calvert, "Advertisement, *The Truth*"; Calvert, *The Truth*, 18.
- ²⁶ Calvert, *The Truth*, 18.
- ²⁷ Alan Calvert, *Confidential Information on Lifting and Lifters* (Philadelphia: by the author, 1926): 13.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 13-14.
- ³⁰ Calvert, *The Truth*, 63.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 71-72.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 72.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 73-74. See also: Terry Todd, "The Quest for the Quarter Master," *Iron Game History* 9 (December 2005): 21-31; David P. Willoughby, *The Super-Athletes* (South Brunswick: A. S. Barnes, 1970), 225-28.
- ³⁴ Calvert, *The Truth*, 74-75. For more analysis on chain-breaking see Willoughby, *Super-Athletes*, 220-21.
- ³⁵ Calvert, *The Truth*, 75-77. See also Willoughby, *The Super-Athletes*, 228-31.
- ³⁶ Calvert, *The Truth*, 89.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.
- ³⁸ Calvert only credits Saxon with a 336-pound bent press record. See Calvert, *The Truth*, 50. However, David Willoughby discusses Arthur Saxon's 371-pound bent press record performed in December 1905 as well as Saxon's unofficial 1906 record of 386 pounds. See Willoughby, *The Super-Athletes*, 78-79.
- ³⁹ Calvert, *The Truth*, 84-85.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 84.
- ⁴¹ According to Willoughby's *The Super-Athletes*, 87-90, Karl Swoboda lifted 409 pounds in 1912—the year after Calvert published *The Truth About Weight-Lifting*.
- ⁴² Calvert, *The Truth*, 87. Calvert spells Swoboda's first name, Karl, with a "C" but most historians traditionally accept it as beginning with a "K." See Willoughby, *The Super-Athletes*, 87-90.
- ⁴³ Calvert, *The Truth*, 91.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 92.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 91.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 93.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 99-100. For turn of the century health ailments see: James C. Whorton, *Inner Hygiene: Constipation and the Pursuit of Health in Modern Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- ⁵⁰ Calvert, *The Truth*, 98-101.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 103.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 30-31.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, 43-50.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 49. Willoughby only credits Sandow with 269 pounds. See: Willoughby, *Super-Athletes*, 61.
- ⁵⁵ Calvert, *The Truth*, 50-59.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 78-80.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 105. See especially pages 104-13 regarding the formation of a national association.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 119-20.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 114-23. See also pages 26-42 for the competitive lifts' descriptions and illustrations.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, 114.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, 116-17.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 130.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 130-31.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 132. For weekend warrior syndrome see: www.med-hunters.com/articles/weekendWarriorSyndrome.html.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 131-32.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 141.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 138-39, 142-43.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 146.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*, 147-48.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, 148.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 147.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 160.





Dear IGH,

Vol. 10 #3 is a fine issue; the Weiders are doing their part in allowing others to view some rare history. I am writing to comment on parts of the issue since I believe it warrants response. I know I promised an article to you (on Leo Stern); it is in the works. I really enjoyed Randy Roach's Bruce Randall article. When I first read of Randall in *Iron Man* I liked him for a number of reasons—mostly because he was different. He used good mornings a lot; I always liked that movement myself. His extremes in weight gaining and reducing were great examples of discipline; the resulting gains in muscular size and good overall balance were very inspiring. He of course had the perfect atmosphere to train like that being in the service at the time and access to the food and weights with freedom of schedule. I always thought he was a lot like Jim Haislop in that he could have gone a lot further had he been motivated in that direction—as it was, he did a lot.

I would like to comment on the Iron Grapevine letter [by John Coffee] about the top ten strongmen—all who follow the Iron Game for any period of time have their top choices, I am no different. When I first got enthused about the weights and getting stronger, Paul Anderson was a big influence—he is one of the men on my list also. There will be some names not on this list that might have great strength, but showed it with the aid of gear that aided them 20-40%. Over the recent years there have been changes in gear to aid the squat and bench press to move the lifts to incredible numbers. True strength can be judged by the deadlift, where the numbers have not changed much because the person does the lift, not some mummy suit that requires other want-to-be strongmen to put it on. I have seen lifters (?) that have bench shirts to aid them in benching 800-1000 pounds that could not lower 400-500 pounds to their chest because it was too light.

While my list will have ten very worthy candidates, I will not rank them 1 thru 10, mainly because of lifting in different eras—there are too many variables. Also some of the ten have been known to use pharma-

ceuticals which change the playing field. I do not begin to think this is the end-all be-all list—just one man's opinion.

Paul Anderson: his squatting and pressing prowess were incredible—a true phenomenon. I really do not care why so-called experts think he is not worthy.

Bill Kazmaier: World's Strongest Man 1980-81-82—he was far above the competition—truly focused on his craft. When I first met him and mentioned one of his competitors, it was like I pushed a button—his eyes and demeanor changed. One of a kind whose equal may not be seen again.

Don Reinhardt: the lifts he made in the mid 1970s with next to nothing in the way of supportive gear were incredible. The lifts stood as the best for years—he was (as Bill Kazmaier) a very balanced overall powerful man—I have met him and call him a friend. It is also easy to say he is one of the strongest men to ever walk the face of the earth.

Ken Patera: an all-around balanced lifter. Great hip and thigh strength and a great presser—very athletic as well, with great technique as an Olympic lifter.

Vasily Alexeev: a man who set record after record in Olympic lifting even though a lot of them were by small amounts—he had the ability to do more almost always—very good technique. Also a very smart lifter; on meet day, again great hip and back strength.

Svend Karlsen: a man with great hip, thigh and back/shoulder strength. He came through when it counted, an attribute that matters.

Zydrunas Savickas: a giant of a man who, like Bill Kazmaier, when compared to his competition, is on a different level. One common factor of WSM competitions is that most lifters do not last too long due to injuries; it is a very taxing endeavor.

Magnus Ver Magnusson: he won the title four times going against the best that were around; he would beat the pressers, the deadlifters, and the all-around men.

I will include two strongmen from an earlier era of physical culture as my last strongmen.

Louis Cyr: who had great overall strength even though certain tests of strength were not in use in his time (such as the squat). There is a reason that much has been written about him and the next strongman on my list.

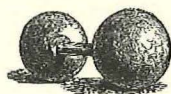
Arthur Saxon: he was part of the trio, The Saxon Brothers, along with his brothers Kurt and Herman. Arthur was the strongest of the three; that is no slight on his brothers; it just shows his true greatness. He could

bent press over 300 pounds. (until you try the lift you have no idea how hard it is). He did a "two hands anyhow" lift of over 445 pounds—that is incredible!

In closing, good things to you both and keep up the good work.

Howard Havener
Manassas, Virginia

We're glad that you enjoyed the last issue and we appreciate your kind comments. We agree that Joe and Betty Weider deserve credit for giving back to the field that gave them so much, and we also agree that Bruce Randall is a true Iron Game original who warrants our attention. We received a number of other letters that made the same points, and we look forward to receiving your article about Leo Stern, another Iron Game original. Your list of the top ten strongest men was also a fascinating read, and you make a good point when you say that everyone who follows the Game closely has their favorite strongmen, and that you're no different. The nice thing about such lists is that in many ways they are so subjective that they are beyond proof, but not beyond argument . . . Dempsey-Louis, Hackenschmidt-Gama, Johnson-Feller, Ruth-Cobb, Chamberlain-Russell, Grimek-Park, Cyr-Apollon, Brown-Sayers, Anderson-Kazmaier, Woods-Nicklaus, Federer-Sampras, Gant-Inaba, Kono-Vardanian. We do wonder—since you make the indisputable claim that "some" of the men on your list used "pharmaceuticals"—who you think did not, other than the obvious two.



Dear IGH:

Congratulations to Jan on her thorough, balanced—and very important—presentation ("Size Matters: Reflections on Muscle, Drugs and Sport," Vol. 10, No. 3). I've often looked at an athlete or group of athletes and thought weight training, knowing that others may be thinking steroids. Modern weight training is not given the credit it deserves—and worse—lives and reputations are often destroyed in the process. Sports media is notoriously cynical and it seems that some academics are more concerned with career than accuracy. You were, of course, more kind in your assessment. At minimum, people are not well informed.

As you noted, the cynicism extends beyond

sports requiring muscle mass and strength into events such as the Tour de France. I argued on our website that Floyd Landis may have been a victim of the poisonous atmosphere you describe; see <http://www.cbass.com/FloydLandis.htm>. (Taking testosterone in the middle of a race would be pretty dumb, even crazy.)

Congratulations again, for a wonderful job of setting the record straight on the value of intelligent—and clean—weight training. I hope people are listening. Bob Hoffman is surely smiling down on you as well.

Clarence Bass
Albuquerque, New Mexico

It's always a treat to get a letter or an email from Clarence Bass—or Sea Bass, as we call him here at IGH—because his comments are always thoughtful, well-reasoned, and require no editing. Like Clarence, we continue to be astonished and dismayed at how little understanding there is on the part of average sports fans—and even sports journalists or academics who deal with sports—about the capacity of progressive weight training to dramatically transform the strength and muscular size of a young man's body. We say "young man" here not because we doubt the capacity of purposefully-lifted iron to remake the thews of those in their middle or even late years, but because the transformation is so much more profound and apparent in young adult men—particularly those with the genetic predisposition to build muscle and strength more easily. In young men such as these—and there are millions of them in the US at this time with such a predisposition—the changes can be so astonishing that it's almost like watching an old Walt Disney time-lapse film of the blooming of a flower. We recall the story George Eiferman told us about the time he went home after being away in the service for over a year during which he really hit the gym with a vengeance, only to be turned away at the door by family members who at first simply didn't recognize him. This was in the 1940s, long before synthetic anabolic steroids with their capacity to hasten such awe-inspiring hypertrophy had appeared on the scene, and it simply lends weight to the point Clarence makes. Knee-jerk snap judgments in these areas should be avoided. They fly in the face of the sort of truth embodied—literally—in the mind-bending physical history of George Eiferman and many others, all the way up to the quintessential change agent—Bruce Randall.

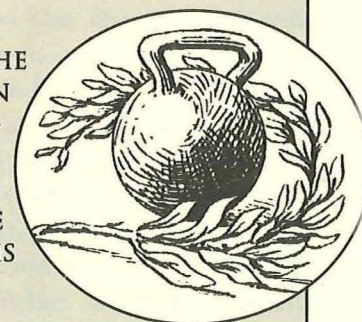
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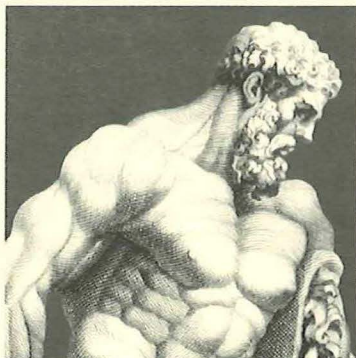
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