

Requiem for a Strongman: Reassessing the Career of Professor Louis Attila

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“One thousand dollars to any charity if I cannot conclusively prove that every alleged instructor of physical culture in this country is [either] a former pupil of mine or using one of the systems I have originated and perfected, and which from time to time I have published.”¹ This bold challenge posted by Professor Attila in the *National Police Gazette* in 1894 could arguably sum up the most important impact of this pioneer of physical culture. While strongman Ludwig (Louis) Durlacher, who went by the stage name Attila, had largely retired from performing by the time he moved to America in 1893, his career as a trainer of others was far from over. And, in the long run, his contributions to the growth of scientific weight training may ultimately be of equal, or perhaps even greater, significance to the overall growth of strength training and physical culture in the USA than those of his ex-protege, the professional strongman Eugen Sandow.

Historian David Chapman argued that Sandow laid the foundation for modern weight training because he opened a physical training institute in London, wrote several popular books on the subject, and, most importantly, because his heavily muscled, yet aesthetically pleasing body served to inspire athletes on both sides of the Atlantic.² Indeed, some of the most important figures of the early physical culture era did claim that Sandow had inspired them to pursue physical culture. British lifting champion Launceton Elliott, American magazine publisher Bernarr Macfadden, and barbell manufacturer Alan Calvert for instance, all claimed that Sandow’s image was the muse that started them on their own journeys toward self-improvement.³ And it cannot be denied that Sandow’s American tour, following on the heels of his wildly successful performances at the World Colombian Exposition of 1893, delighted thousands of North American men and women and created the realization that one did not have to accept the body with

which one was born. Despite all these claims to greatness, however, Sandow was not in every sense an “original.” Louis Durlacher was.⁴

Most people who remember Attila at all know him primarily as a moderately successful professional strongman who became Sandow’s mentor and trainer. But Attila’s historic legacy stretches far beyond the years he spent as Sandow’s *eminence grise*. The “Professor,” as he liked to be called in later years, was a major contributor to the European and American physical culture movements of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries and, during the course of his career, he: 1) was a pioneer in the use of weight training to help athletic performance; 2) was one of the first “personal trainers” for the rich and famous; 3) was an influential supporter of equal opportunity for women in the gym; and 4) argued nearly a hundred years before the medical community came around to the same position that weight training would retard the process of aging. When considered in light of the times in which he lived, Attila’s achievements and open-mindedness — especially on the question of women’s training — are truly remarkable, and make this peripatetic figure worthy of canonization as a major innovator in the field of strength training.

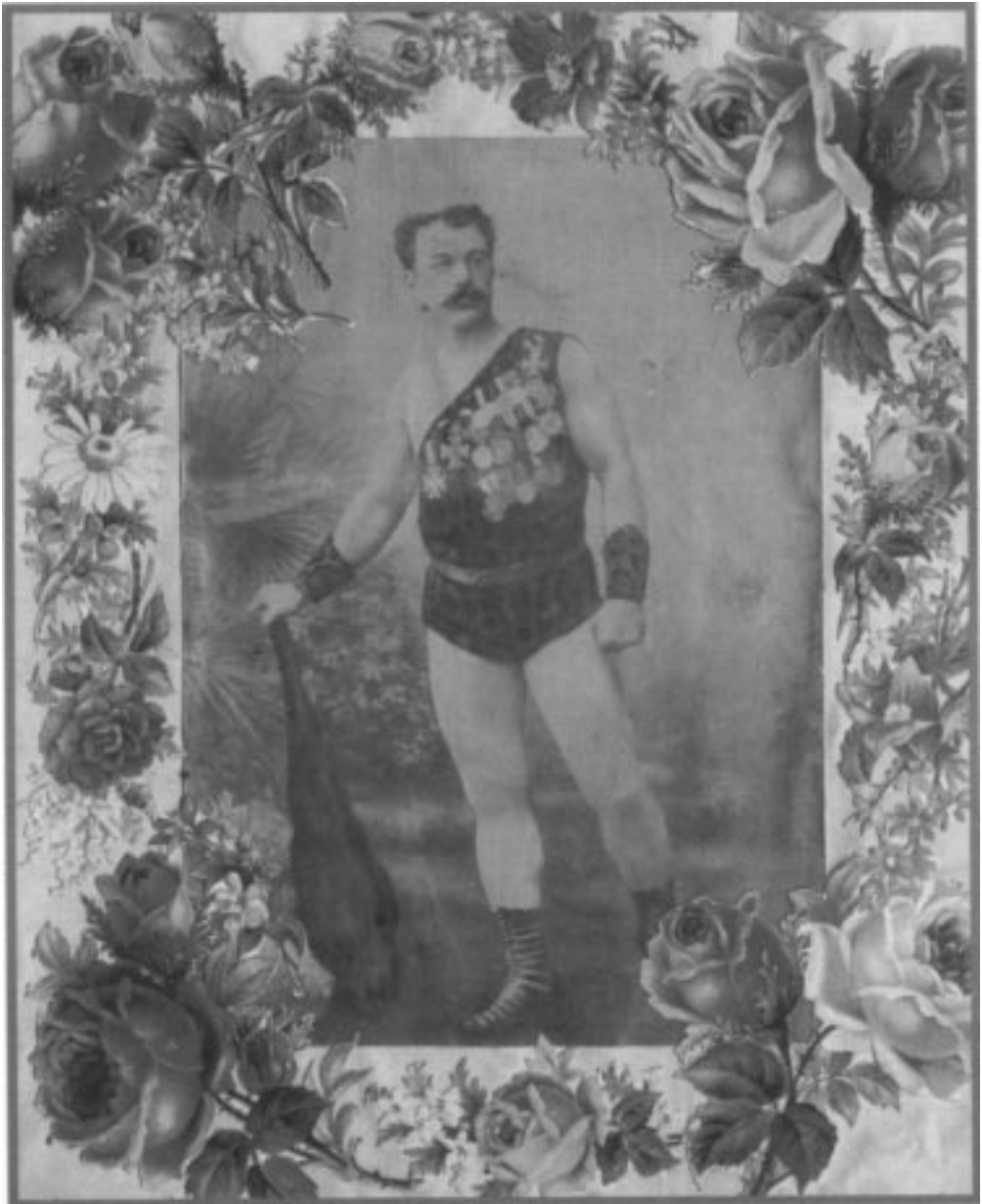
Ludwig Durlacher was born on 2 July 1844 in Karlsruhe, Germany, and developed an interest in sports and athletics at a young age.⁵ According to David Webster’s *The Iron Game*, Durlacher received his early education from a Professor Ernst in Berlin, who taught him to play the piano and helped him master five languages. The most significant event of Durlacher’s early years, however, was the day he saw Italian strongman Felice Napoli perform for the first time. Fascinated by the display, young Ludwig asked to study with Napoli as an apprentice. Napoli agreed, and from him young Ludwig learned all he could about the strongman profession.⁶ Napoli was a master of the platform. He understood the

importance of staging and costume, and he taught young Durlacher everything in his repertoire.⁷

Napoli had much to teach. Born under the surname Prades in Naples, Italy, in 1821, Napoli worked only the best European circuses and music halls where he performed at various times as a strongman, a pantomime artist, and a slackrope and trapeze artist. French historian Edmund Desbonnet reports that Napoli “was most remarkable for his artistic talent and by the way he presented his act.” A true showman, according to Desbonnet, Napoli also possessed a beautiful singing voice and worked for a time under the stage name of the Singing Strongman (*Athlète Ténor*).⁸

In this early era, most strongman acts didn’t consist simply of a series of lifts with explanations between them. Many showed their strength and physiques through short vignettes or pantomimes, with the lifts and posing integrated as part of a plot. Desbonnet writes of Napoli, “In all the circuses where he was engaged, he was the principal actor in the pantomimes. He was unsurpassed in the role of the poacher just when he is poised on the rock searching the horizon or when hidden behind a tree, his weapon at the ready, waiting for his pursuers. He displayed a physique so beautiful, and he assumed poses so noble that even the greatest artist could never have dreamed of creating anything equal to it.”⁹

The record isn’t clear on how long Attila stayed with Napoli, or what precisely the years were that they worked together. In fact, very little is known of Attila’s early life except that in 1861, at the age of seventeen, he joined the Baden Sharpshooters, a sport and riflery club.



In the Victorian era, it was the custom for people to decorate their scrapbooks with brilliantly colored, die-cut stickers. This original, sepia-tinted photo, showing Attila with his medals and famous club, must have been one of his favorites as it appears at the very front of his scrapbook and occupies a full page. The roses surrounding the picture are in shades of red, pink and white. The large daisies are yellow, and the smaller flowers are blue.

Although not a tall man at an adult height of 5’4”, Attila earned a reputation as a gifted all-round athlete and excelled in track and field events and swimming.¹⁰ While associated with the Sharpshooters, Attila supposedly saved the son of the Duke of Baden from drowning, and then apparently spent some time with the Duke’s family. This incident introduced him to wealth and culture and reinforced Attila’s desires to move in the best

circles. He knew that the theater was his ticket to that lifestyle and so, after adopting the name of the famous leader of the Huns, Attila set off on his first solo tour in approximately 1863 at the age of nineteen.¹¹ At first he advertised himself modestly as “Victor D’Attila – the Great Teutonic Hercules, the Lion Athlete, the Modern Samson.”¹² How long he worked as a “single” is unclear, however, for clippings in his scrapbook reveal that he was soon traveling with “Valerie,” who received top billing over Attila as “The Female Gladiator, The Magnificent, Queen of the Athletes, The Model.”¹³ Attila and Valerie performed at some of the most prestigious venues in Europe: The Royal Foresters’ Music Hall, The Metropolitan Theater, The Royal Aquarium, The Marble and Alexandra Skating Rinks in London, the Gaiety Theatre of Variety in Manchester, England, and the Folies Bergeres Theatre in Paris.¹⁴ At one English exhibition, organized by the Marquess of Abergraveny at a skating rink in May of 1878, the show was billed as a “Grand Assault of Arms,” and included displays of swordsmanship by Sergeant Major Plunkett along with the strength feats of Victor D’Attila. A contemporary newspaper reported, “Victor Attila then went through his wonderful performance, and at the conclusion was presented with a wreath by Lord Henry Nevill, on behalf of several gentlemen, who had been pleased with his performance the previous evening . . . Attila, who has been rightly named the Lion Athlete, elicited loud applause by his wonderful feats of strength and it seemed as if hundredweights were but mere playthings in his hands.”¹⁵

Attila’s act in those early years was apparently well staged and financially successful. Desbonnet tells us that “Attila’s act was simply designed to showcase his feats of balance and showmanship . . . Attila was, above all, an artist, and his well presented act was not faked. It was a real success.” To be fair, however, Desbonnet then points out that some individuals questioned the weight of Attila’s implements. Around 1885, while Attila was performing at the Alcazar Theater in Faubourg Poissonnière, Desbonnet reports, a Professor Dubois inspected Attila’s weights and stated that they were “particularly light.” Dubois claimed that one particularly unwieldy, evil-looking barbell covered with iron spikes, was made of some sort of exceptionally light metal and thus weighed only forty-four pounds.¹⁶ While they may have been light, they were undoubtedly elegant; the fifteen hundred pounds of weights Attila used in his act were nickel-coated and, as one reporter put it, he possessed “the finest and most costly apparatus ever seen on the stage.”¹⁷

One thing that set Attila apart from many of the strongmen then working the sawdust circles of the European circuses, and about which there is no controversy,

is that he was both inventive and intelligent. As a performer, he strove to find new and spectacular ways to demonstrate his strength and is credited by David Webster with inventing the “screw press” or bent press, and for originating the Human Bridge stunt that became a standard fixture in most strongman routines thereafter.¹⁸ Some authors also credit him with inventing such new pieces of apparatus as the Roman Chair and the shot-loading globe barbell.¹⁹

As Attila toured the capitals of Europe, playing to standing room only crowds in most cities, he began to be asked for exercise advice. His five languages came in handy as he found himself helping to shape up many of the crowned heads of Europe.²⁰ During this stage of his career he worked with Alexander III, the Czar of Russia; King George of Greece; the Prince of Wales, who became King Edward VII of England; King Haakon of Norway; the six children of King Christian of Denmark; Princess Dagmar, who later became Empress of Russia and the mother of Czar Nicholas; and the Queen Mother Alexandra of England. In addition, Attila trained dozens of millionaires, including Cornelius Vanderbilt and such nobles as the Baron Rothschild of France and Lord Lonsdale of England.²¹

In approximately 1886-1887, Attila began to curtail his strongman performances and opened a private gymnasium in Brussels.²² One newspaper account states that it was here, at his Brussels gym, that Attila first met Friedrich Mueller, the extraordinarily handsome, golden-haired youth who would become internationally famous as Sandow.²³ According to an article in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, “Attila . . . is a professor of athletics, and keeps a school in Brussels, where he has some three hundred pupils. Two and a half years ago, Sandow was brought to him by some of his pupils. He was then quite undeveloped, and Attila, after looking him over, undertook to make Sandow the strongest man in the school. Sandow submitted himself assiduously to the training, and in two months time the pupil was positively stronger than the master, and Attila’s strength is something out of the ordinary. He appears with his wonderful pupil at the Alhambra and joins him in tossing the 150 pound balls, and amuses himself with 90 lb. weights and such like.”²⁴

According to clippings in his scrapbook, Attila and Sandow performed together across continental Europe off and on from approximately 1887 to 1889. As Napoli had done for him, Attila taught the young man how to present himself and helped Sandow organize a strength and physique act. But, their friendship and business partnership temporarily fell apart around 1889 when Sandow began performing as a single act and then took time off from touring to model for the painter Aubrey Hunt. Attila then moved on to London and

opened another training facility.²⁵ His new gym was located in Bloomsbury, and Webster describes it as merely a “modest establishment.”²⁶ In 1889, the *Pall Mall Gazette* visited the establishment and reported, “Attila’s ambition is to teach the British youth how to develop great strength. He has a special system of training which he is eager to have adopted in our army and public schools. He greatly admires the pluck and endurance of the John Bull race, and is confident that if his system were adopted, Britons would become the most physically strong race on the face of the earth.”²⁷

Because of publicity such as this, and Attila’s excellent reputation as a theatrical performer, his gym became a magnet for the wealthy and famous. He even advertised the fact that he had opened the gym at the “behest” of the city’s sporting gentlemen.²⁸ Sporting men and nobles worked out side by side, and when the American tabloid publisher, Richard K. Fox, of the *National Police Gazette*, visited London, he, too, paid a call at Attila’s gym.²⁹ In that meeting, Fox and Attila found they had much in common. Fox advised Attila to come to America where he thought the time was ripe for the kind of gymnasium Attila hoped to one day establish. Although the Professor later claimed that Fox’s suggestion was the best advice he had ever been given, he didn’t immediately act on it.³⁰ In fact, it appears that his immigration to America may have owed more to Eugen Sandow and happenstance than it did to careful planning.

Shortly after Attila opened his gym in London, Sandow re-entered his life. The young strongman had come to the capital city to challenge the professional strongman Charles A. Sampson, who had a standing offer that no one could best him in a series of strength tests.³¹ Attila helped Sandow prepare for the public contest and after defeating Sampson, on 2 November 1889, Sandow began performing with Attila again, replacing Charles Sampson at the prestigious Alhambra. One of the London papers gave this account of their act:

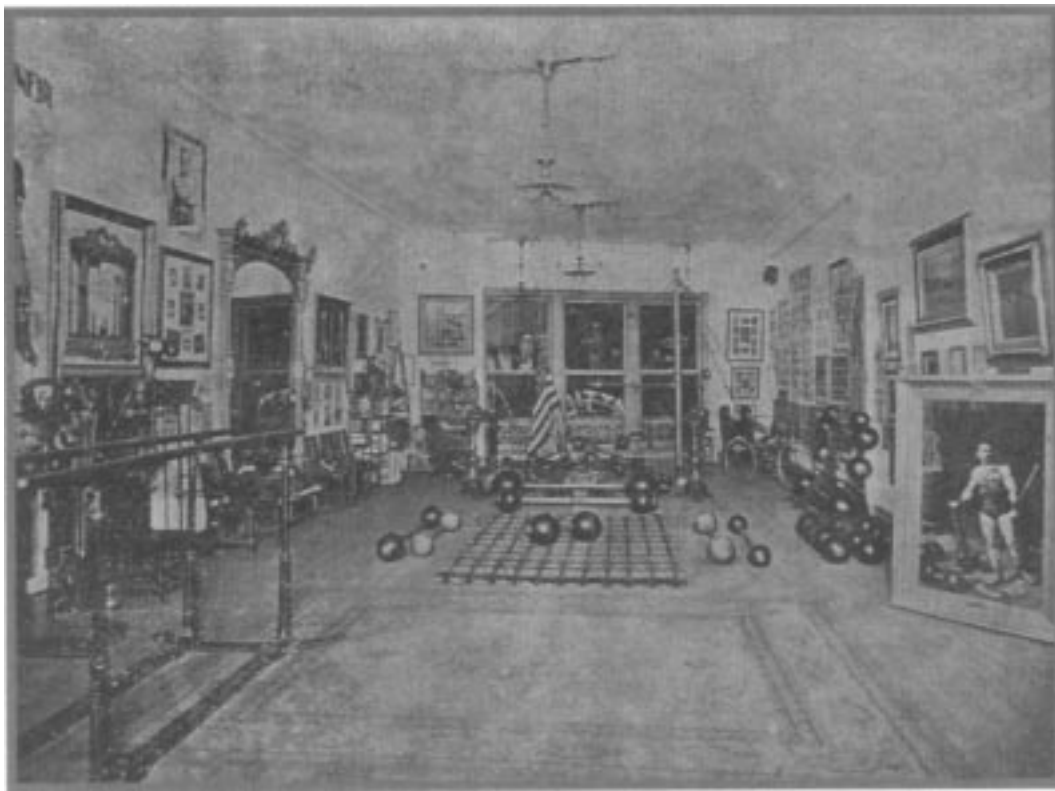
After Bertram [a magician] came Attila, vivid in scarlet, his mighty muscles in strong relief, causing his Mephistophelean-hued and complete set of tights, which was drawn to the figure as an eel’s skin to his sinuous body to quiver as he moved. Witlings, bardlets, poetasters, dainty mouthers of nothings into ladies’ ears, became as mere emasculate shadows when this Hercules appeared. Eyes sparkled, breath was quickly drawn, delicate palms clapped feverishly. Attila gave his performance — you have seen it. When standing on

a chair, he bends backward over the back, throwing the huge vigor of his thighs into grand relief, picks up a 150 lb. weight and brings it up with him to an erect position, rapture was at its highest. When Sandow came, semi-delirium seized the delighted dames and damosels. Those at the back of the room leapt on the chairs; paraquet-like ejaculations, irrepressible, resounded right and left; tiny palms beat ecstasy till five and three-quarter gloves burst at their wearer’s energy. And when Sandow, clad . . . in black and white, made the mountainous muscles of his arms wobble! Oh Ladies!”³²

After their run at the Alhambra was over, Attila accompanied Sandow and the magician Bertram on a tour of England and Scotland. The new act, called “Music, Muscle and Mystery,” played one night at the Mechanics Hall in Nottingham, and the local paper described the large hall as being filled to capacity on the night of their show. The reporter described Attila as a “compactly built athlete, well set up in the lower limbs, possessing a fine chest and arms, massive with muscle

. . . [He] first manipulated 56 lb. weights with great dexterity, performed evolutions with a bar weighing 90 lb. almost with ease, and gave a ‘sketch’ illustrative of the ‘sleep, dream and awakening of Hercules,’ necessitating the exercise of great skill and endurance, apart from physical force.” The paper goes on to then explain that “Attila is not merely strong, he shows gymnastic training and is also somewhat of an actor, and an experienced stage performer. His share in the programme is not only clever but graceful and finished.”³³ Napoli would no doubt have been proud of the description of his former pupil.

Other press reports from that tour also praise Attila’s physical prowess, even though he was well into his forties by this time. A clipping from Attila’s scrapbook reports that, “Then came the two chief artistes of the evening, Attila and Sandow, two athletes whose names are familiar to most people. Attila is the elder and has been much longer before the public. He is a finely built man and the feats he performed were received with hearty applause. Weights of 56 lbs. were knocked about with ease, and a steel bar, weighing 90 lbs. was wielded cleverly, balanced on his chin, and then a little musketry drill was gone through with it. His finest feat was standing in a low chair, bending himself backward until his head touched the floor, then, picking up a two handed dumb-bell weighing 150 lbs. He raised himself steadily until he once more stood erect, holding the dumb-bell aloft.”³⁴



This rare photo shows Attila's Athletic Studio and School of Physical Culture in New York as it appeared in approximately 1900. The large oil painting on the right now hangs at the Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection at the University of Texas at Austin. The painting was reportedly done by one of the royal painters at Queen Victoria's court and was given to Attila by the Royal Family in gratitude for his work as a personal trainer.

Something happened on the tour, however, that caused the two men to have another “falling out.” According to W. A. Pullum, when the tour ended, Sandow took an engagement at the Royal Music Hall, but without Attila. Absent the professor's advice, Sandow made the mistake of accepting a challenge from the McCann Brothers, who soundly beat him in an on-stage contest. Said Pullum, “[Sandow] now lacked the sage counsel and adroit guidance of Attila, having made alterations in his act when he came back to London which dispensed with the Professor's services in this — his company as well!”³⁵

What Attila did next is a matter of some dispute. The story generally told is that Attila remained behind in London where he ran his gym and concentrated on his personal clients (such as the Prince of Wales), while Sandow went on to America without him.³⁶ Once in the United States, Sandow was “discovered” by the young Florenz Ziegfeld, who invited him to appear at the 1893 Chicago World Fair, known as the World's Colombian

Exposition. While appearing on the midway to rave reviews, Sandow ran into an old acquaintance, the performer Sarah White, better known as “Lurline, the Water Queen.” Lurline then reportedly assaulted Sandow with a horse-whip, charging that he had borrowed money from her in Belgium and fled the country for Italy.

Sandow responded by charging her with blackmail.³⁷

The story, as told by iron game historians Webster, Chapman, and Gaudreau is that Attila came to the United States because of Lurline's charges so that he could testify against Sandow. However, Attila's immigration record shows that he arrived in New York City on 18 August 1893; and that his ship,

the Coleridge, came to New York not from England or France, but from Santos, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Attila was a second class passenger, and arrived with four trunks. He listed his nationality as German but did not indicate either a permanent address or an occupation on the forms. Interestingly, he either did not tell the truth about his age, or the immigration clerk mis-heard him as he is listed on the the ship's manifest as only thirty-nine years old; he had turned forty-nine the previous month.³⁸

In any case, whether Attila came to the United States because of a request by Lurline, or whether he just happened to show up in New York City after appearing in South America, he almost immediately became embroiled in the Sandow case. Although the trial finally ended in an out-of-court settlement (in which Sandow paid money to both Sarah White and Attila) the feelings between the two strength artists remained tense. In July of 1894, Sandow signed out a warrant to have Professor Attila arrested for “venting feelings through the mail,” a crime at the time. Sandow charged that Attila had sent

him an anonymous letter in which he called Sandow a “blackguard,” and a “clog of quicksilver,” among other names.³⁹ The idea that Sandow would have him arrested made Attila furious, and having to pay the \$2,500 bail led him to threaten Sandow with bodily harm – an offense worse than using the mail as a bearer of malice.⁴⁰ Again, the exact nature of the dispute is unclear from the surviving evidence. However, at some point the two men reconciled at least part of their differences, for within a few years the entrepreneurial Attila displayed signs in his new American gymnasium announcing himself as the “Tutor and Trainer of the Invincible Sandow,” and he named his first daughter Louise Sandowa Attila.⁴¹

Shortly after his arrival in New York in 1893, Attila visited Richard K. Fox at the *National Police Gazette*. Attila, who enjoyed boxing and wrestling, must have hoped that by reacquainting himself with Fox, he could lure some of the top athletes of the day into becoming his pupils. The *Gazette* was then one of the only sources of sport news in the country and it served as the hub of the professional sporting world. Boxers, wrestlers, and professional strongmen used the *Gazette's* pink pages to hurl challenges and arrange matches, while publisher Richard Fox often put up prize money and provided championship belts and trophies for the winners.⁴² In fact, Drago, the Australian Hercules challenged Attila to “lift weights, dumbbells, etc. for \$500 or \$1000 a side” or to a wrestling match “Greco-Roman, best three in five falls, for \$500 or \$1000 a side” just a few days after the Professor arrived in the country.⁴³ But Attila apparently didn’t take him up on the offer. He had bigger plans.

Attila’s Athletic Studio And School of Physical Culture

Shortly after his arrival. Attila began to make plans to stay in the United States and open a truly unique gymnasium. The city was by far the largest in the United States with a population of over three million people and, more importantly, it was at the very epicenter of the “German Belt.”⁴⁴ Thousands of German immigrants had settled in New York City and were prime customers for Attila’s new studio. Many of them had trained at *turnvereins* in their native (Germany and, newly arrived in the United States, they tried to keep their athletic traditions alive by forming *Turner* societies or by frequenting the growing number of commercial gyms. Attila reasoned that at least some of them would be drawn to a gym with a German-speaking owner.⁴⁵ The other thing that made New York ideal, however, was that it was filled with tired, dyspeptic office-workers who were turning to

exercise in increasing numbers as a way to rejuvenate themselves and look better physically. Thus it was that when Attila opened his doors late in 1893, he did so in a cultural climate that could hardly have been hungrier for discussions of health, strength, and hygiene.

To attract the right kind of clientele, Attila knew it was important to give his gym a suitable name. A short, simple name like World Gym would not have conveyed the elegance and sophistication Attila hoped to achieve. But, “Attila’s Athletic Studio and School of Physical Culture” made his members feel as if they were getting “physical education,” and not just a workout. The use of “studio” was also significant as it conveyed the artistic aspect of building the body; it also made the facility more appealing to women. While the chronology is difficult to deduce based on his scrapbook, it appears that Attila stayed at least part of that first year at the Secatague House in Islip, New York, and operated a small gymnasium there at Dufour’s Railroad House.⁴⁶ Why Attila was staying forty-five miles east of New York isn’t clear. However, like many Long Island cities, Islip was a popular summer and weekend resort for prosperous New Yorkers, and so it is possible that Attila may have known someone there who was helping him get established in America or, that he simply decided to enjoy some sea air. This second explanation makes sense based on a testimonial letter sent to Attila by stage performer, Lou Fuller, on 4 October 1893. That letter, welcoming Attila to New York and reiterating how much help the Professor’s exercises had been to him in Paris, is addressed to 248 East Twenty-third Street. An article in the Attila scrapbook has him living and operating a gym in December of 1894 at the same address.⁴⁷ In 1896, when he married for the first time at the age of fifty-two, he lived at 42 West Twenty-Eighth Street.⁴⁸ Although one newspaper reported that he was residing in Montreal, Canada in 1898, it is likely that this was merely an extended visit to gather information for a lifting competition between the strongmen of Canada and the United States or to explore the possibilities for another studio.⁴⁹ By 1898 Attila had made his final move in New York City and opened his Athletic Studio and School of Physical Culture in the New Zealand Building at 1383 Broadway on the northwest corner of Thirty-Seventh Street.⁵⁰ This location, in midtown Manhattan close to the theater district, proved useful in attracting the top musical and theatrical people of the day as well as a number of athletes and successful businessmen. The studio remained at this address until Attila’s death on 15 March 1924 at the age of 79.⁵¹

Attila’s midtown studio was a delight to the senses. The walls were filled with signed, gilt-framed

photographs of contemporary boxers, wrestlers, and strongman stars such as Sandow and Lionel Strongfort. Brightly-colored Turkish carpets protected the floor, a large oil painting of Attila in his leopard-skin stage costume dominated one wall, while another wall held a large, ornately-framed mirror. Several replicas of Greek statuary helped to create an atmosphere of elegance, refinement and classical beauty. Everything was of the finest quality, even the barbells. "Some had brass spheres and nickel plated bars. Some had black spheres with brass flanges on the ends and grooved grips in the center."⁵² Resting on the floor, along the bottom of the walls were solid weights of all types: ring weights, French block weights, kettlebells, and dumbbells. A set of parallel bars dominated the center of the room, while climbing ropes and gymnastics apparati were attached to the ceiling. As Siegmund Klein, who married Attila's daughter Grace and took over the gym following Attila's death put it, the beautifully appointed gym was "a strongman's paradise."⁵³

Renewing his acquaintance with Richard K. Fox paid off for the new immigrant. Fox featured Attila frequently in the *Police Gazette* and helped spread the Attila name throughout North America. When professional strongmen visited New York, nearly all of them stopped in to see Attila and to admire and train in his elegant studio. Louis Cyr, Horace Barre, Warren Lincoln Travis, Gottfried "Rolandow" Wuthrich, Henry W. "Professor" Titus, and Adolph Nordquest – the most famous strongmen of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – all came to Attila's to visit and learn from the master. According to Attila's scrapbook, so too did "the prominent, the distinguished, the eminent and the great."⁵⁴ Richard K. Fox, J. Pierpont Morgan, Jr., Alfred Vanderbilt, Florenz Ziegfeld, Oscar Hammerstein, John Philip Sousa, and heavyweight boxing champion James J. Corbett were all members at one time or another.⁵⁵ Attila's business was doing so well, in fact, that in 1908 he opened a second gym in Chicago. By 1912 he had a third gym operating at the Burns Hotel in Detroit. How long "Attila's Strength Institute of Detroit" or the Chicago gym lasted is not known.⁵⁶ Nor is it clear how much time Attila personally spent at either site.⁵⁷

Athletic Strength Training and James J. Corbett

If the number of articles in his scrapbook is an indication of his interests, then Attila was particularly interested in the sport of boxing. His fondness for the "sweet science" may well have been fueled by Fox's passion for pugilism and by the fact that he, Attila, used

boxing to help establish his name in America. With Fox's support, Attila gave exhibitions during several of the big prizefights that forged a connection between himself as a trainer and the boxing community. Attila recalled that in one of those shows he pulled "against twenty-six British soldiers with my teeth. That was in Madison Square Garden." According to the *New York Herald's* account, Attila placed a strap in his teeth that had "a rope tied to it and the soldiers had ahold of the rope. They worked hard, but I pulled them. It was fun to see them slip around and try to pull my teeth out, but I haven't lost one yet. That was nineteen years ago. I was a strapping young fellow of forty-eight and feeling my oats as Americans say."⁵⁸

Long before he moved to New York, Attila believed that athletes in all sports should do specific training to prepare themselves for competition. Although it was considered heresy in many quarters, Attila particularly believed that athletes should train with weights. Although popular sentiment was generally against such methods, Attila believed that increased strength would produce increased speed and greater power in an athlete. His hope was that he could find a well-known prizefighter willing to work with him. If he could get the boxer to follow his methods, he believed he could show other athletes that lifting could also help their performance. Attila got his chance in 1893, when James J. Corbett, the reigning world heavyweight champion, asked the Professor to help him increase his punching power as he prepared for the defense of his heavyweight title against Charley Mitchell of England.⁵⁹ "Gentleman Jim" later told a newspaper reporter that he had been hearing high recommendations for a man named Professor Attila, so he had to look him up.⁶⁰ Attila, writing about his approach to Corbett's training, said he used his knowledge of anatomy, "the primary essential for a physical culture instructor," but that he had also applied, "the principle of natural philosophy" to help Corbett perfect his famous "hook blow" punch.⁶¹ Corbett was more than pleased with the results. After winning the match handily, Corbett wrote to Attila. "Well old boy," he began, "it done me a great deal of good and I must say it is a wonderful (sic) method and might have not a little to do with my recent success."⁶² Attila had that letter framed and hung it prominently in his new gym. Corbett also expressed his appreciation more publicly in March of 1894 when, at a performance of "Gentleman Jack"—Corbett's theatrical show—he presented Attila with a gold medallion to commemorate his role in the recent title defense.⁶³

Modern practitioners of strength training expect to incorporate scientific methodologies such as peri-

odization, negative resistance, plyometrics, and even massage and hydrotherapy into their routines.⁶⁴ Elite athletes often use machines described in such technical jargon as isokinetic, variable resistance, or dual axis. Modern strength training is a science, complete with professional associations, peer-reviewed journals, and broad cultural acceptance. In fact, it is now virtually unheard of for an athlete at the top of his/her sport to not utilize some form of strength training. At the close of the nineteenth century, however, America's ideas about training for athletes were anything but scientific.⁶⁵ But Attila was anything but ordinary. He knew and understood the basic principles behind progressive weight training and he pioneered a concept that is commonplace today — Specificity of Training. After analyzing Corbett's punch, Attila prescribed specific exercises from his famous "Five Pound Dumb-bell Exercise System" to

strengthen Corbett's arms, shoulders, back, and forearms.⁶⁶ Rather than urging Corbett to spend his time on training his entire body, Attila focussed the strength exercises on the parts Corbett used most in punching in order to simulate both the speed and the range of motion of the movement. Corbett did some of the training in Asbury Park, some at Attila's gym in New York, but then the boxer carried weights with him to his training camp in Florida. In addition to the dumbbell exercises, Corbett also used an eighteen-pound "training stick" which Attila had given him.⁶⁷ It must be admitted that from today's vantage point, Corbett would have benefitted from a more extensive, heavier, total body weight training program. Even so, Attila's abbreviated exercise routine was still basically sound.

Attila always claimed he had invented the series of exercises that came to be known as his "Five Pound Dumb-bell Exercise Routine" as a way to train while he was with the Baden Sharpshooters.⁶⁸ His "system" was not published until 1910, however, when Richard K. Fox included it as part of the *Police Gazette's* series of instructional training manuals. By including it in the series, Attila was assured of good sales and regular advertising in the *Gazette's* pages. Although Attila recommended that beginners use light dumbbells, he did his best to make up for the lack of weight by requiring a high number of repetitions. The first exercise was a biceps



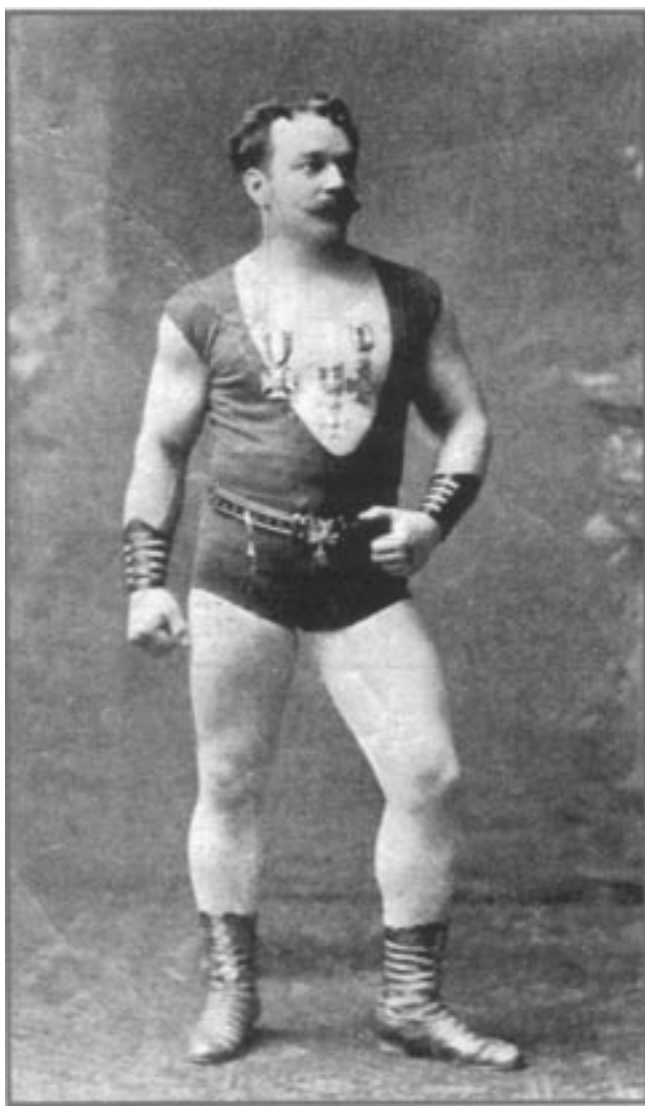
This sketch of Attila's New York gym appeared in a German-American newspaper in 1895 as part of an advertisement.

curl much like the present day exercise. Then the exerciser would rotate the palms and curl with the knuckles up to emphasize the forearm muscles. These two exercises would be done for fifty to one hundred repetitions each. The triceps and shoulders were worked by placing the dumbbells over the shoulders with the elbows pointing straight out from the body, the upper arms at right angles with the forearms. The trainer would then press the dumbbells alternately, keeping the elbows up, twenty to thirty times with each arm. The lifter would then repeat this exercise for ten to twenty repetitions moving the forearms simultaneously and gradually away from the body and then, again gradually, back over the shoulders. The pectorals and deltoids were exercised by a type of standing "dumbbell fly," (starting with the arms held straight out to the sides at shoulder height, and bringing them violently forward so that the dumbbells would meet in front of the chest at shoulder height.) More shoulder exercises followed, as well as a series of what today would be called rotator cuff exercises.⁶⁹

These upper body exercises were then followed by movements for the muscle group Attila believed to be the most important for an athlete — the back. According to the Professor, "The back is where the strength lies . . . (the front is for all your misery — that you become blind, that you lose your teeth, that you catch cold, that you feel pain in the stomach, that you pay the doctor's

fees.)⁷⁰ First, the back muscles were engaged by a series of punching movements; then the lifter performed an overhead-to-toes, stiff-legged deadlift to stretch and strengthen the lower back. He next executed a “shrugging” movement to stress the trapezius muscles of the upper back. These three main exercises were then followed by more standing pectoral fly motions — although in this series the lifter held the dumbbells at a low angle to the body — trunk bends, and a rear deltoid fly exercise.⁷¹

Attila’s leg exercises began with calf raises and a similar exercise for the front of the lower leg in which



In his prime, Attila stood 5'4" tall, weighed 175 pounds and had the following measurements: chest - 46", neck - 17.5", calf - 16.5", waist 36", and thigh 25". This photograph was taken in approximately 1894.

the heels were held motionless while the toes were raised from the floor. A one-legged squat then followed the more common two-legged squat. It is easy to imagine Attila laughing when he explained to a reporter that most pupils practice that exercise at home due to the difficulty and the high degree of coordination needed to balance the body in the one-legged squat. The reporter observed, “If its effectiveness be measured by its difficulty of execution, it should fulfill the claims of its inventor, who says that it adds inches to the girth of the leg.”⁷² The leg work was finished with a series of exercises to work the hip flexors and extensors as well as the adductors and abductors. The entire “Five Pound Dumb-bell Exercise” system concluded with stiff-legged sit-ups, back extensions from the floor and, finally, traditional pushups.⁷³ Most of these exercises were no different from modern exercises. Only a few adjustments — such as eliminating the locked-out joints that Attila favored — would be necessary to recognize them as acceptable exercises today in terms of their execution.

Unlike many physical culturists in his era, Attila did not believe that light weights were all that was needed to produce strength and fitness. Attila claimed that light dumbbells were good for beginners and would “develop every muscle group” when used scientifically. However, once people had trained for a time, “[the pupils] are taught great feats [of strength.]”⁷⁴ Attila differed from most physical culturists of his day by believing that the end goal of exercising was to build strength and that this strength in turn would promote good health and fitness. In much the same way, Boston physician George Barker Windship had preached a similar message in the 1860s by advocating the “Health Lift” or partial deadlift and adopting as his motto, “Strength is Health.”⁷⁵ Attila believed deeply in strength, and he was proud of his own and that of his pupils. As he said, “What is the use of acquiring strength if you do not also learn how to use it?”⁷⁶ Attila believed that the lifting of heavy weights was “a noble and ancient branch of athletics” and that if a high level of strength could be built then one would have achieved “the highest reward of labor, and the one indisputable test of manhood.”⁷⁷ Much like the strenuous life movement of Theodore Roosevelt, in which one’s manhood was constantly tested through experiences in the outdoors, Attila believed in challenging the body, and thus one’s masculinity and self-identity, through the use of progressively heavier weights.

Professor Attila and Women

Attila saw many changes in the American scene through the plate glass windows of his beautiful studio,

and among the most revolutionary was the change in the status of women. As urban centers became more densely populated, large numbers of women were needed to fill jobs outside the home. Their new financial independence coincided with a rise in feminism as women challenged the status quo for equal rights and voting privileges. As women strove for equality they also began to develop a consciousness about the self. Professor Attila was only too happy to help.

If the clippings in his scrapbook are accurate, many of Attila's pupils during his later years were women. This had not always been the case, as one undated (but almost certainly early) article has Attila claiming that he did not have many female pupils because American women were lazy. German and Austrian women, according to Attila, took pride in being known as strong and hard-working. But American women were insipid and fashion-conscious with "deformities" such as shallow chests and thin necks from their lack of work and exercise.⁷⁸ That attitude changed in the United States, however, as the Progressive Era birthed a generation of "New Women" who were ready to take on the world. Attila trained these paragons in weightlifting and boxing, and soon claimed to a reporter that "women pupils are far more ambitious and therefore more satisfactory to train."⁷⁹ That same article claimed that Attila was "inaugurating the strongwoman fad here and if the fair sex is not as well able to defend itself physically as a man," it was through no fault of his.⁸⁰ When asked if he believed women were the weaker sex, Attila replied that "the Creator never intended her to be the weaker," and that furthermore, "has she not the greater need of defending herself on account of her being female?"⁸¹ Although more than one reporter made fun of Attila's trainees, the Professor continued to introduce his women gym members to a regimen of boxing and weightlifting and to teach them one and all to "hit like men."⁸²

Actress Edna Wallace Hopper reported that along with her dumbbell and medicine ball routine she regularly boxed with Jack Cooper while training at Attila's gymnasium.⁸³ *Vanity Fair* published an article — "How a New York Woman Develops Her Figure" — in which a woman is pictured at Attila's studio hitting a punching bag and boxing with a man, as well as performing various exercises with weights and rubber chest expanders.⁸⁴ Charlotte Poillon trained under Attila and took her boxing portion a step further. She actually considered herself a pugilist and got the chance to go three publicity rounds with James J. Corbett before he was to fight "Kid" McCoy.⁸⁵

Professor Attila not only wanted women to be able to defend themselves, but to be strong enough to get

themselves out of dangerous situations, like fires and muggings. Self-help was one of the primary justifications Attila used to encourage women to become strong, and such an attitude was not at all unusual among reformers. In addition to teaching women how to box, Attila had rope ladders, poles, climbing ropes, and fire escape devices attached to his ceiling; and he trained women on the equipment to strengthen their arms and shoulders and allow them to "save themselves from fire."⁸⁶ Attila further believed that "Nature herself supplies the only true remedy for keeping the body as Nature originally intended it to be . . . physical exercise."⁸⁷ Believing that the outdoors could have medicinal effects on the body was not a novel idea. Attila stressed the need for fresh air and outdoor exercise because, "pure air and exercise are the only physicians that ever attend me."⁸⁸ He stressed breathing exercises in order "to develop chests and [build] thin necks." Otherwise, he had women perform the same exercises as the men but with a bit less intensity.⁸⁹

Above all things, though, Attila believed that the acquisition of strength was of paramount importance for both sexes. Strong women were to be admired, and even married. In April of 1896 New York Mayor Strong (Attila undoubtedly liked the man's name) performed the marriage ceremony for Attila and Rosa Sanders, one of his pupils.⁹⁰ Reporters found it amusing that after the ceremony Mayor Strong declined his traditional kiss of the bride. More than one paper joked that the mayor feared Attila would be jealous, or that Rosa, who also had a reputation for strength, might object to the kiss.⁹¹ Rosa was only nineteen on her wedding day; Attila was fifty-two. Several of the newspapers covering the ceremony speculated that Rosa had been planning to open her own studio and that Attila married her to keep her from doing so.⁹² Even Attila's three children would not be immune to his lifelong passion. His scrapbook contains a picture of his daughter Louise Sandowa at eight months of age sitting in a crib littered with dumbbells and Indian clubs, and an article discussing her training at thirty months.⁹³

Many of Attila's women clients joined his gym because they were — to use his terms — "overplump," or "fleshy." His most famous pupil of this type was Caroline Baumann. The young Austrian immigrant showed up at his Chicago studio when she was eighteen years old and plagued by what one newspaper described as "stomach troubles, getting fat, and, horrors — her beauty was deteriorating!"⁹⁴ After ten months of training she lost twenty-five pounds, could "lift from the ground 400 pounds, and . . . put over her head 140 pounds." At a height of 5' 5", a weight of 142 pounds, and with a bust



Undated French cartoon from the Attila scrapbook showing Attila working with a woman trainee.

of 38", a waist of 24", a neck of 13 ½", an upper arm of 13", and a chest expansion of 5" she was the "most magnificent specimen of womanhood in the world," at least to the eyes of the *National Police Gazette* reporter.⁹⁵ Baumann became one of Attila's prize pupils and eventually took over the running of his women's training programs. She traveled with Attila from the Chicago gym to his studio in New York City, and also helped him open the Detroit Strength Institute.⁹⁶ Throughout the teens she appeared in the *Police Gazette* from time to time and was often described as a boxing trainer. Although she never seems to have competed in any particular sport, she was, nonetheless, one of the most famous sportswomen of her era and undoubtedly served as a magnet to attract other women to Attila's studio.

Attila apparently was free of the Victorian concerns that had curtailed so much women's exercise in the late nineteenth century. He admonished women to not wear corsets to the gym, but rather to wear loose, baggy clothing that allowed for a full range of motion, adequate breathing, and free blood circulation.⁹⁷ This was a risky thought for conservative women who still dressed according to Victorian standards. But Attila urged women forward, writing, "Strength gives confidence, confidence courage."⁹⁸ "Women" he wrote, have at last "broken loose from ancient tradition and are not ashamed to cultivate their bodies as well as their

minds."⁹⁹

Requiem for a Strongman

In addition to Attila's work with women and athletes, he was also prescient about the effects of training on aging. Throughout his life, Attila had argued that training could offset the aging process, and in 1912, at the age of 68, he appeared in a full-page article in the *New York Herald* entitled, "Discoverers of the Fountain of Youth." Clad in a tuxedo, with hair still mostly black, Attila is shown in one photo holding aloft over two hundred pounds in ring-weights and kettlebells. In the article, the reporter described his visit to Attila's studio. Asked to talk about his remarkable vigor, "Attila's eyes flashed like a man's of twenty," as the Professor claimed he'd found the "fountain of youth." The secret, Attila explained, was "Exercise. Normal treatment of the body and exercise arranged to develop all the muscles of the body and not any certain set."¹⁰⁰ When asked if he followed a special diet as some of his contemporary physical culturists advocated, Attila replied in the negative, going on to explain that, "I drink — but never too much. That is the secret of the thing, moderation. I take wine, beer, schnapps, anything, but I never get intoxicated." As to diet, continued the strongman, "I eat as I please. Not too much meat and not too much vegetables, but well balanced. And that shows what foolishness some people are teaching. I would like now to put on the gloves with Horace Fletcher and Bernar [sic] Macfadden and pound them both all the way to Long Island City. That's faddism they teach and you have only to look at me to prove it."¹⁰¹

"I am now sixty-seven years old," continued the Professor, "and have been in the business fifty years. If I was fifty years in any other business — banking, merchant, workman, physician, navy, anything — imagine what I would be now. My hair would be white and I would walk bent over." To demonstrate that he was still stronger than an average man of twenty, the Professor then reportedly picked up an iron ball weighing eighty-five pounds and swung it up over his head with his right arm and balanced it in the air for a couple of seconds. According to the reporter, "His arm did not tremble, nor did the muscles of his thick neck stand out like they do in the photographs exhibited in front of vaudeville houses."¹⁰² Next, the reporter explained, Attila placed a leather strap around an eighty-five pound dumbbell and, clamping his jaw over the end of the strap, lifted the dumbbell to the center of his chest and held it while Caroline Baumann handed him a pair of seventy-five pound kettlebells. He then lifted these overhead while still holding the other dumbbell in his teeth for a total weight of 225 pounds. After the photographer snapped the pho-

to, Attila told the reporter as the weights crashed to the floor, “That’s what a man of three score and ten can do.”¹⁰³

While fifty years is indeed a long time to “be in the business,” by the time of his death on 15 March 1924, Attila had actually been in the business for more than sixty years and had managed during that long career to impact nearly every aspect of the iron game. While this essay has focussed primarily on his contributions after he arrived in the United States, Attila’s legacy was truly international in scope. He set a new standard for the running of gymnasiums with his beautifully appointed studio on Broadway. His “students” would carry his methods across Europe and the United States, and, through Sandow, down to Australia and the Pacific islands. Sandow would finally settle in Britain, open his own school of physical culture, and devote his later years trying to physically reform the subjects of the British Commonwealth. Webster claims that both Edmund Desbonnet, the so-called father of French physical culture, and weightlifting pioneer Theodore Siebert of Germany were, like Sandow, Attila devotees who continued his methods in their own work and thus spread Attila’s training principles across Europe.¹⁰⁴ Alan Calvert, founder of the Milo Barbell Company and publisher of *Strength* magazine in the United States also acknowledged Attila as an important influence on his ideas about strength and exercise. What’s more, through *Strength* Calvert propagated Attila’s philosophy that strength was what mattered — that strength was the goal. And then there are Attila’s contributions to the professionalization of strongman performance. Not only did he invent equipment and create new stunts, but strongmen on both sides of the Atlantic sought Attila’s advice on how to stage their acts and how to train to maximize their strength. The names of the men he worked with are a veritable “Who’s Who” of the strength world. Warren Lincoln Travis, Lionel Strongfort, Rolandow, Titus, Anthony Barker, Bobby Pandour, Louis Cyr, Horace Barre, Arthur Dandurand, Adolf Nordquest, and Milo Brinn were all Attila students at one time or another.¹⁰⁵ And then, of course, there were the athletes. Heavyweight title holder James J. Corbett was certainly the most notable, but Attila also worked with dozens of other boxers and wrestlers, and in so doing pioneered the use of resistance training by athletes.¹⁰⁶ Finally, but not insignificantly, there was his work with women. He encouraged them to train — to be proud of their strength and competence, and to not be fearful of doing the same exercises as men did. Taken as a whole, Attila’s list of contributions to resistance training is absolutely remarkable. It is also a list of contributions that proves he was much, much more than simply

Sandow’s mentor and trainer.

Notes:

This paper is primarily based on clippings and articles in the personal scrapbook of Professor Attila, which is now located at the Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection at the University of Texas at Austin. The four-inch-thick scrapbook is filled with dozens of articles about Attila’s performances as a strongman, his work at the gym in New York City, and advertisements for his acts. The book is bound in brown leather, about 8 x 10 inches in size, and on the cover, in gold letters it reads, “Attila’s Recensionen Album.” (“Recensionen” is a now archaic word meaning survey or review.) Although the interior flyleaf reads, “Press Opinions of Professor Attila from 1870-1890,” the book contains clippings from throughout Attila’s career. In the footnotes that follow, clippings from the scrapbook begin with the designation “AS:” and we’ve provided as much information as is available. Many of the clippings are not identified as to date and source, however.

¹ AS: Louis Attila letter to the editor. “Here’s a Challenge!,” Richard K. Fox, *The National Police Gazette*, 9 June 1894.

² David L. Chapman, *Sandow the Magnificent: Eugen Sandow and the Beginnings of Modern Bodybuilding* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

³ Launceton Elliott was the winner of the heavyweight class in the first modern Olympic Games in Athens in 1896. Macfadden was the founder and publisher of *Physical Culture* magazine. Alan Calvert owned the Milo Barbell Company and later edited *Strength* magazine.

⁴ Chapman, *Sandow*, 189.

⁵ Kenneth R. Dutton, *The Perfectible Body: The Western Ideal of Male Physical Development* (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1995), 102, 105; and Chapman, *Sandow*, 8.

⁶ Webster, *Iron Game*, 10-11.

⁷ Siegmund Klein, “Strong Men I Remember Best – Professor Attila,” *Strength and Health* (March 1959), 25 & 53.

⁸ Edmund Desbonnet, *Les Rois de la Force* (Paris: Librairie Berger-Levrault, 1911). Translated by David Chapman. Unpublished manuscript in Todd-McLean Collection, 70.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ David Webster, *Barbells and Beefcake* (Ayrshire, Scotland: by the author, 1979), 15.

¹¹ AS: “Discoverers of the Fountain of Youth,” *New York Herald*, 7 July 1912, Magazine Section.

¹² How Louis Durlacher chose his stage name is a topic of some controversy. Most authors say he took it from Attila the Hun because Durlacher wanted to present a powerful image. However, a newspaper clipping in his scrapbook states that Attila was his mother’s maiden name and that he’d taken it to honor her. Professor Attila’s scrapbook contains several drawings of the historic Attila.

¹³ AS: The advertising clipping for his act with Valerie contains no dates.

- ¹⁴ AS: Advertisements for Valerie and Attila performances.
- ¹⁵ AS: "Grand Assaults of Arms," *List*, 25 May 1878.
- ¹⁶ Desbonnet, *Les Rois de La Force*, [Chapman translation], 126.
- ¹⁷ AS: "Attila."
- ¹⁸ Webster, *Iron Game*, 10-11, Webster suggests that Attila may have been the first person to bent press more than two hundred pounds.
- ¹⁹ Klein, "Strong Men," 53. For a description of developments in weight-lifting equipment see David Webster, *The Iron Game* (Irvine: John Geddes Printers, 1976), 57-58; and Jan Todd, "From Milo to Milo: A History of Barbells, Dumbbells and Indian Clubs," *Iron Game History* 3(April 1995): 4-16.
- ²⁰ Webster, *The Iron Game*, 10.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Mark H. Berry, "The Rising Generation Indebted to Attila," *Strength* 15(January, 1930): 89. See also Webster, *Iron Game*, 10.
- ²³ Strength enthusiast Ernest Edwin Coffin claims that the two met in 1886 when Sandow was nineteen and the professor was forty-two. Quoted in Leo Gaudreau, "Professor Louis Attila" in *Anvils, Horse-shoes and Cannons: The History of Strongmen* Vol. 1 (Alliance, NE: Iron Man Publishing, 1975), 162.
- ²⁴ AS: *Pall Mall Gazette*, December 1889.
- ²⁵ Chapman, *Sandow*, 37-38. See also: Gaudreau, *Anvils, Horse-shoes and Cannons*, 161-164.
- ²⁶ Webster, *Iron Game*, 10.
- ²⁷ AS: *Pall Mall Gazette*, December 1889.
- ²⁸ AS: Advertisement for Attila's Bloomsbury Gym.
- ²⁹ Richard K. Fox, *National Police Gazette*, 6 January 1894.
- ³⁰ "Attila, World Famous Athlete," *National Police Gazette*, 19 September 1908, p.6.
- ³¹ Desbonnet, *Les Rois de La Force*, [Chapman translation], 157 & 174-176.
- ³² AS: "Alhambra,"
- ³³ AS: "Music, Muscle and Mystery."
- ³⁴ AS: "Sandow and Attila Perform."
- ³⁵ Pullum, "Foreword," in *The Amazing Sampson* (London: The Sampson Institute, 1925), 12-13.
- ³⁶ Webster claims that Sandow and Attila "made a fortune" on their tour of England and Scotland. Webster, *Iron Game*, 18.
- ³⁷ AS: "Lurline Held for the Grand Jury - Sandow may get a Challenge from Attila, Mrs. White's Witness."
- ³⁸ Attila's immigration record is available on-line through: www.ellisland.org. He can be found by searching under the name "Louis Attila."
- ³⁹ AS: "Sandow and Attita Meet - Commissioner Shields Presides and The Strongmen Glare and Glower at Each Other - Did Attila Write the Letters?"
- ⁴⁰ AS: "Would Hit Sandow," 11 July 1894.
- ⁴¹ Chapman, *Sandow*, 55.
- ⁴² For examples of challenges posted, see Jan Todd, "The Mystery of Minerva," *Iron Game Histoy* 1(April 1990): 14-17.
- ⁴³ AS: Letters to the editor, "Drago, the Australian Hercules," *National Police Gazette*, 16 September 1893, p. 10.
- ⁴⁴ German immigrants settled primarily between the "northern boundaries of Massachusetts and Maryland, spread westward north of the Ohio River to the Great Lakes and onward into the neighboring two tiers of trans-Mississippi states." Albert Bernhardt Faust, *The German Element in the United States* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1909), 581-582.
- ⁴⁵ Jan Todd, *Physical Culture and the Body Beautiful: Purposive Exercise in the Lives of American Women 1800-1875* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1998), 34-36.
- ⁴⁶ AS: "Gottfried Wuthrick Trained at Attila Studio."
- ⁴⁷ Lou Fuller to Professor Attila, 4 October 1893. Atilla Papers. Todd McLean Physical Culture Collection. The University of Texas at Austin. Also: AS: "Sandows Not Scarce," *New York Sunday News*, 9 December 1894.
- ⁴⁸ AS: "Man of Muscle Marries," *New York Press*, 9 April 1896.
- ⁴⁹ AS: "Attila's Success," 19 February 1898 and "Attila and . . . Sandow" [part of title missing].
- ⁵⁰ AS: "Attila on Daily Exercise," *New York Herald*, October 1900, and various advertisements for "Attila's Athletic Studio - School of Physical Culture."
- ⁵¹ "Obituary Notices," *New York Tribune*, 17 March 1924.
- ⁵² Siegmund Klein, "My Quarter Century in the Iron Game, Part 6," *Strength and Health*, August 1944, pp. 28, 34.
- ⁵³ Ibid.; and Berry, "Rising Generation," 29.
- ⁵⁴ Klein, "Strong Men," 53.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid.
- ⁵⁷ AS: "Attila's Strength Institute of Detroit," and advertisements.
- ⁵⁸ AS: "Discoverers of the Fountain of Youth," *New York Herald*, July 7, 1912, Magazine Section.
- ⁵⁹ Corbett won the world title in 1893 by defeating John L. Sullivan.
- ⁶⁰ AS: "Corbett's Half-Arm Blow."
- ⁶¹ AS: Attila, Louis, "Methods of Systematic Exercise," *Ev'ry Month*.
- ⁶² Letter from James J. Corbett to Professor Attila, Attila papers, The Todd-McLean Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.
- ⁶³ AS: "Attila Honored," *The World Sun*, 18 March 1894; "untitled." *The Press*, 12 March 1894 and "untitled" *New York Illustrated*, 22 March 1894.
- ⁶⁴ See *National Strength and Conditioning Association Journal* for more information concerning these and other training methodologies. Useful articles include the following: Jimmy Pedemonte, "Historical Perspectives: Foundations of Training Periodization Part I: Historical Outline," 8(3):62; Jimmy Pedemonte, "Historical Perspectives: Foundations of Training Periodization, Part 2: The Objective of Periodization," 8(4):26-28; Roundtable "Periodization: Part 1," 8(5): 12-22; Roundtable "Periodization: Part 2," 8(6): 17-24; Roundtable "Periodization Part 3," 9(1): 16-26; Phil Lundin, "A Review of Plyometric Training," 7(3):69-74; and Alan Tyson, "Rehab Tips: Aquatic Therapy," 18(5):30-31.
- ⁶⁵ Terry Todd, "The Myth of the Muscle-Bound Lifter," *National Strength and Conditioning Association Journal* 7(March 1985): 37-

41.

⁶⁶ AS: "Attila Maker of the Punch that Helped win Mitchell Fight."

⁶⁷ Letter from James J. Corbett to Louis Attila, Attila Papers, Todd-McLean Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.

⁶⁸ Dave Webster, "The Catalyst - Prof. Louis Attila," *Ironman* 44 (3, 1985): 34-35.

⁶⁹ Professor Attila, *Professor Attila's Five Pound Dumb-bell Exercise*, (New York: Richard K. Fox Publishing Company, 1913).

⁷⁰ AS: "How to be a Strongman - Simple Rules for Gaining Strength and Remaining Young," May be from the *Evening Sun* as it is mentioned in the article.

⁷¹ Attila, *Five Pound Dumb-bell*.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ AS: "How to be a Strongman."

⁷⁵ Jan Todd, "'Strength is Health': George Barker Winship and the First American Weight Training Boom," *Iron Game History* 3 (September 1993): 3-14.

⁷⁶ AS: "How to be a Strongman."

⁷⁷ AS: "Reference to Professional Strong Men;" and "How to be a Strongman."

⁷⁸ AS: "Nation Becoming Athletic - the Surprising Development of Physical Culture." Attila's notion of American women having deformed and physically imperfect bodies is somewhat ironic as he, himself was Jewish, and many Jews were considered poor athletic specimens in these years. For more information see John Hoberman, *Darwin's Athletes, How Sports has Damaged Black America and Preserved the Myth of Race* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

⁷⁹ AS: "Making a Woman Strong: What Can Be Accomplished with Dumb-bells," unknown New York newspaper.

⁸⁰ AS: "Making a Woman Strong."

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² AS: "Fair and swell Woman Athletes."

⁸³ AS: Arthur Colton, "How One Actress Keeps Her Form

- Edna Wallace Hopper is Rapidly Becoming an Athlete - How She Does It," *Broadway Magazine*, undated, p.36.

⁸⁴ AS: "How a New York Woman Develops Her Figure," *Vanity Fair*.

⁸⁵ AS: 'Girl vs. Corbett - Her Story of How They Fought Three Rounds,' *Evening World*, undated; see also: "Girl Pugilist Whips Two Thugs in the Park," *New York Evening Journal*, 4 October 1900. This article mentions that the match with Corbett occurred on August 27 and Corbett fought "Kid" McCoy on August 30, 1900.

⁸⁶ AS: "How Women May Save Themselves From Fire," *The World*, 11 June 1899.

⁸⁷ AS: "How to Get a Perfect Figure - One Method of Strengthening the Muscles of the Arm Chest Shoulders," *The Saturday Standard*.

⁸⁸ AS: "Making a Woman Strong."

⁸⁹ AS: "The Way to Develop Chests and Thin Necks;" and "Methods of Systematic Exercise," *Ev'ry Month*.

⁹⁰ AS: "Man of Muscle Marries," *New York Press*, 9 April 1896. See also similar articles from AS: *The World*, 9 April 1896 and "They'll Make a Strong Pair," *The Evening Sun*.

⁹¹ AS: "Was the Mayor Afraid'?"

⁹² AS: "Cupid and Muscle." *The Morning Advertiser*.

⁹³ Photograph in AS titled "Louise Sandowa Attila at 8 months." See also "Louise Sandowa Attila, Gymnast - Aged Thirty Months." *The World*, 4 June 1899, for more information on Attila's daughter.

⁹⁴ AS: "Girl Hercules Defies the World with a Challenge, a Beautiful and Well Developed Viennese Who Can Box, Wrestle and Lift Great Weights," *National Police Gazette*.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ AS: "Professor Attila and Pupil in Detroit," and "Life Without Health Has No Value" Attila's Strength institute advertisement.

⁹⁷ AS: "Making a Woman Strong."

⁹⁸ AS: "Athletics Are Not Harmful."

⁹⁹ AS: "Making a Woman Strong."

¹⁰⁰ AS: "Discoverers of the Fountain of Youth," *New York Herald*, July 7, 1912, Magazine Section.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Webster, *Iron Game*, 10.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ AS: Assorted clippings.



Caroline Baumann was Attila's most famous female student. Baumann worked for Attila for many years, teaching weight training and boxing to other women.

Photo courtesy Todd-McLean Collection