

Clarence Heiber, Strong Man

By Mason Bishop, 2007



Clarence and Angie
Heiber

Over the years, our village has had many outstanding people. Among them was the mathematics wizard Casimir Manigold, probably our only genius. Few of you, however, remember the strong man Clarence Heiber. The relating of some of Clarence's feats makes interesting additions to the history of our village.

Clarence was the son of Phil and Angie Hieber. In stature he was not a giant of a man, being a little over six feet and weighing about 225 pounds. However, his muscular development was prodigious, simply and naturally formed that way, and not from any Mr. America type body-building program. His bulging biceps and awesome muscular thighs just grew that way!

Clarence's father was a building mover by profession, relocating houses, barns, and smaller buildings to new locales. Clarence's prodigious strength was demonstrated on one of these relocations. Houses were towed behind Phil's big Mack truck supported by dollies and massive 16-foot timbers. On one of these moves, the house and truck were forced to the side of a narrow road by an oncoming piece of farm machinery that had no place to turn off. As the ditch was rather steep, the building tilted dangerously toward capsizing on its side. Seeing the danger, Clarence, quick as a flash, ran back to another truck, following in the wake of the house, snatched another of the big timbers, ran down into the ditch and propped it against the teetering side of the house.

One day, soon after the event, Bill Jacobs and I were walking past the Heiber grounds at the foot of Main Street at Highway Street. One of the big timbers lay there, and William, curious as to its weight and the strength of Clarence, tried to lift one end of the timber. He was barely able to lift one end of it off the ground, and this from a big, strong high school boy!

Many of Clarence's feats were recounted by Ed Newkirk who lived just a few doors from the Heiber yards. Once, Clarence on a bet and after having dug two holes for his feet, squatted down and grabbing the front axle of his father's Mack truck, merely straightened his legs and lifted that big truck right off the ground. The onlookers couldn't believe their eyes!

Another of Ed's stories concerned the moving of a full-size Balk Callendar pool table from Conkrite's on the west side of South Main upstairs to the game room at the back of the K of P Lodge in the Phythian building. Five or six men lugged the table across the street to the foot of the very narrow stairway that led to the second floor. There was just not room for three men on each side of the table. They were stymied, but fortuitously Clarence stopped by and asked them their problem. After looking over the situation he told them to station two men at the top end of the table to steady it while he pushed from the bottom end. When all was in readiness, Heiber

put his shoulder against the low end of the table and literally ran up the first flight of steps, the table in the air when it lit on the first landing. After repeating the process to the second landing, the table was smoothly moved to the door of the game room. Clarence then picked up the front end, and with another push deposited it inside the room. Newkirk claimed the whole process didn't take more than five minutes.

I saw one of his feats I still don't believe. It concerned John Godshalk's ice truck on a day in summer when Clarence was delivering for John. We kids always followed the truck, as the ice had to be chipped with a pick to reduce the 100 pound cakes to 50 or 25 pound size as the customer's window card indicated. During this process, slivers of ice would drop to the road which the kids could pick up and suck. It happened on one occasion that a man standing near by bet Clarence that he couldn't throw a full cake of ice over the back of the truck. The sides of the truck were quite high, I judged over 6 feet, and the bed of the truck was a little longer than that. After looking over the situation, Clarence agreed to the bet.

Now there is no way to get a grip on a 100 pound cake of ice except with the tongs. Clarence experimented a bit with the security of the grip of the tongs, then started to swing that 100-pound cake in wider and wider half circles. When the cake neared its apex he released the tons with a mighty heave and grunt and threw that 100 pound cake over the truck bed at least six feet to the road on the other side. Everyone was speechless for a moment at this prodigious effort. The man gladly paid off the bet, then walked away shaking his head.

There was a story told of Clarence changing a tire on the right back wheel of his Model T touring car. Rather than putting the wheel up with a jack, Clarence simply squatted down, lifted the right wheel and axle with his left hand, and wedged a piece of cordwood under it to raise the wheel off the ground.

Another story had Clarence picking up a whole car engine and placing it on to a truck bed.

My old football coach, Hubert Smith, told me of a time when Pete Matz asked him to help move a big iron safe from one room of his apartment to another. Now, both of these men were quite strong. Hubert stood over six feet and Pete was short but strong. After getting the safe out of the door and onto the second floor landing, the soft wood floor and the lack of wheels on the safe prevented them from sliding it to the door of the next room. They needed help. Hubert went out to the street to look for another hand. Along came Clarence, and Hubert enlisted his help. After appraising the situation, Clarence asked where they wanted it to be placed. The only hand hold on the safe was on the sides where a thin metal strip projected about half an inch. With just his fingertips, Clarence picked up that heavy load, turned around, carried it to the door of the next room, lifted it over the threshold, and set it down on the floor. Massaging his fingertips, Clarence went down the stairs to the street without a word. Hubert said he didn't believe what he had seen. Needless to say, any sweets that Clarence was to eat in Pete's malt shop were free after that.

Clarence died a bachelor in 1959.