

STRONG MEN ON PARADE

• How the Marx "brothers" met and formed a professional partnership.

by LEO GAUDREAU



Above and below are reproduced two old show bills used by the Brothers Marx during their amazing career.

ONE of the strong-men touring this country nearly sixty years ago was the "American Gladiator" whose show bills proclaimed as "Al. Marx, The King of Strength, in his New and Original feats of Herculean Power in which he overpowers Beasts and all Humanity."

Aloysius Marx was a German strong man, known to the famous Dr. Krajewski of Russia, who assessed him as a man of great natural strength. Marx was born in 1862. He was over 5 feet 8 inches tall and of massive physical proportions; he had a 49 inch chest, his biceps measured over 17 inches and he had 18 inch calves.

In his act he featured strand-pulling and was reputed to be quite strong at this sort of thing. In St. Louis, in 1890, in an exhibition for an athletic club he walked with a heavy barbell on his shoulders plus the weight of the three biggest men obtainable—a total weight of about one thousand pounds. He broke chains around his chest and biceps. His stone-breaking stunt was a sensational feature of his act; a huge stone was hoisted to be placed on his head, once there he balanced it with his hands. An assistant climbed a platform and took several healthy blows at the stone with a sledge hammer until it broke. Whatever other virtues this feat may (or may not) have, it is a terrifying thing to see; at every blow of the sledge hammer the strong man appears as if he was shrinking by about a couple of inches.

Al Marx walked into a saloon, in St. Louis, where he was currently featured, one day. The

word got around the habitues of the place that a celebrity was in their midst and soon he was surrounded by an admiring group. A big, generous fellow, he ordered drinks all around. Pressed to entertain them with his strength he asked for a barrel of beer which was quickly produced by the proprietor. Marx lifted it on to his knees, rolled and pulled it up his chest and got it around on one shoulder and walked around with it to the cheers and applause of his admirers.

When he put the barrel down he promised to buy drinks all around once more if any one there duplicated the feat. The bartender asked for permission to try and when granted he went on to perform the feat as easy, yes, easier than Marx had been able to lift and carry the barrel. Marx was astonished and so were the patrons of the place who had never suspected that the quiet, efficient, youthful bartender was so strong.

The bartender was the man we know as John Grun Marx and admire for his famous feats of grip strength.

Aloysius Marx was quick to extend an offer to John Grun, to teamup together; Grun was quick to accept and so we find them being billed as the "Brothers Marx, American Gladiators, Strongest Men Living. Feats of Herculean Strength".

To the repertoire of Al Marx was added some impressive feats by John Grun. His ability to twist horseshoes was featured; his father had been a blacksmith and John knew something about horseshoes. A piece of rope was attached to each end of the shoe and five men were allowed to pull against each other, tug-of-war style with the horseshoe in the middle. Actually the value of such a test was

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