

The Official
Newsletter
of the PFRA



Mailing address:
Bob Carroll, ed.
The Coffin Corner
12870 Rt. 30
N. Huntingdon, PA
15642

Vol. II, No. 1

January, 1980

CORNER TURNS CORNER

The Coffin Corner is into Volume II, which is not quite the same thing as being a full year old. Our first issue (Volume I, No. 1) was that of March, 1979. At that time we mailed out a mere nine copies, tentatively suggesting a get-together in June to form a PF researchers organization. Now, only ten months later, P.F.R.A. is a reality and our membership/circulation is up to 50 and climbing.

We've made mistakes, of course, but one advantage of a monthly newsletter is that we can come back in a later issue and say, "Oops! we goofed; member Joe Dokes informs us that the real story is" On the other hand, that's what The Coffin Corner is all about -- disseminating PF research information -- and as long as Joe Dokes and others keep reading with a careful eye, we'll be okay.

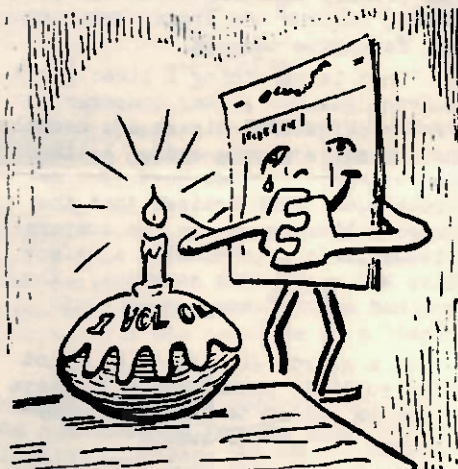
Several new members have asked about back issues. We wish we could supply all requests out of hand, but unfortunately almost all of the original copies are gone. We will be happy to supply xerox copies of back issues to members willing to pay the cost of copying and mailing.

Write to P.F.R.A., 218 Wise St. N.E., North Canton, Ohio 44720. Enclose one dollar for each issue. Please indicate which issues you need.

To aid you in asking (and to pat ourselves on the back a little), here is a list of the ten back Corners from 1979 along with the significant research articles in each issue.

- No. 1 (March) - "The First Pro All-Star Game"
- No. 2 (April) - "All Those A.F.L.'s: N.F.L. Competitors, 1935-41"
- No. 3 (May) - "The Massillon Tigers in 1903"
- No. 4 (June) - "The Youngstown Patricians, 1914-1917;" "The Ironton Tanks, 1919-1931"
- No. 5 (July) - "The 13th Import" (Frank Tripucka in Canadian Football); "Davey O'Brien's Big Day"
- No. 6 (August) - "Peggy Parratt, MVP;" "The First Pro Forward Pass;" "NFL Team vs. Team Won-Lost Totals"
- No. 7 (Sept.) - "The Day They Clobbered the Bronx;" "Johnny Blood: the Vagabond Halfback;" "50-yard Drop Kicks"
- No. 8 (Oct.) - "The Columbus Parahandles, 1904-1926;" "Pro Myth? The Relationship Between Running and Passing Attacks"
- No. 9 (Nov.) - "Ken Strong;" "Jock Sutherland;" "Pointmakers (4 tds or more in a single game)"
- No. 10 (Dec.) - "George McAfee;" "All-American Flops, Part 1;" "Those New Records: What Do They Prove?" "Big Foot: Glenn Presnell's Long FG"

As you can see, we have tried to add more material with each issue. With the help of our members, we hope to continue the trend.



YEAR-END

BOOK PLANNED

(This announcement was included with the last Corner. We repeat it both as a reminder and for any of our members who missed it due to the vagaries of the U.S. Postal Service.

Submissions are currently being solicited for possible inclusion in P.F.R.A.'s first annual publication. Manuscripts may be any length, but 20 to 100 pages is preferred. If possible, they should be typewritten.

Materials are submitted for first publication only; thereafter ownership reverts to the author(s). There is no payment for articles accepted. Original manuscripts will be returned if a stamped, self-addressed envelope is enclosed with the submission. Neither P.F.R.A. nor any reviewer will make any use of material not accepted for publication without permission of the author(s).

The annual publication will be approximately one hundred pages and will contain one or more (perhaps as many as five or six) articles. It will be available to members at cost at the next annual meeting or by mail thereafter.

Submissions and/or suggestions should be sent to the following address:

Robert Braunwart
5503 Roosevelt Way N.E.
Seattle, WA 98105

Materials should arrive before January 10, 1980, to allow adequate time for duplication, transmittal to reviewers, and review. P.F.R.A. reserves the right to make minor editorial changes in any material accepted.

P.F.R.A. and its review committee subscribe without exception to the Code of Behavior for P.F.R.A. members.

Jim Parker was an exceptional star for 11 seasons with the Baltimore Colts. Yet he received his first "game ball" on December 10, 1967, three days after he retired. No other proof is necessary to underscore the thankless task of the offensive lineman, the unsung hero of professional football. For Parker, however, the long wait for the game ball was exceptional because most honors came quickly and in a steady stream for the 6-3, 275-pound All-American from Ohio State.

Even pro football's highest honor, election into the Pro Football Hall of Fame, came in January of 1973, immediately after Jim's mandatory five-year retirement period was over. He was the first "pure" offensive lineman inducted into the Hall of Fame. Included among previous enshrinees had been two-way players who starred on the offensive line but Jim stood as the first who spent his entire pro career at the obscure task of clearing the way for the backfield stars who dominate the headlines.

In Jim's case, he may have received more attention than most offensive line stars because he was helping to protect pro football's most fabled passer, Johnny Unitas. The fact that Parker and his teammates did the job well goes a long way toward explaining the unprecedented passing feats of Unitas and the overall success of the Colts under both of the coaches for whom Parker played, first Weeb Ewbank and later Don Shula.

Parker's career was further set apart from those of most offensive linemen in that he played the first five-and-one-half years at left tackle and then in mid-1962 switched to left guard, a totally different position with totally different responsibilities. During this period, he was all-NFL eight straight seasons, the first four as a tackle and the last four as a guard. During those same years, he was a member of the Pro Bowl's West team every season.



Jim's most-remembered assignment at both positions was to protect Unitas. But particularly when he moved to guard, he took on a host of additional duties. That he was able to perform equally well at either spot is a testimony not only to his great natural ability but also to his fierce determination to succeed on the NFL playing field.

One big difference in the two positions was that, as a tackle, Jim ordinarily drew the defensive end as his primary blocking assignment. At guard, he drew the bigger and stronger defensive tackles.

"That is one thing I liked about playing guard," Parker compares. "The tackles were bigger and usually not as agile as the ends. I liked the big guys. Speed boys gave me trouble. I also noticed that the guard's blocking space was comparatively limited. Blocking a defensive end meant more movement. The end had lots of space outside to roam."

As a guard, Jim had to do a lot more running, particularly on plays where he pulled to lead the interference on a Colts sweep.

"At guard, your legs get tired from from all the pulling and running you have to do," Parker summarizes.

Whatever the difference, Jim adjusted well and soon the Colts were relying on him to punch holes in the defense for their running backs, as well as to keep Unitas healthy. Particularly near the end of a scoring drive, it became highly predictable that Parker would be called upon to lead the way for a Colts running back, hopefully into the end zone.

Parker was labelled as a future great from the moment he joined the Colts as a No. 1 draft choice in 1957. He was a two-way performer at Ohio State, but he had excelled on defense. He had won the Outland Award in 1956. The award is given by the Football Writers Association

JIM PARKER

By Don Smith

to the nation's outstanding college lineman.

Woody Hayes, Ohio State's veteran coach, had recruited Parker from Scott High School in Toledo, Ohio. Jim had played only his senior season at Scott after transferring from a high school in his native Macon, Ga. "I think I was only fourth-team all-state," Parker recalls, "so I was delighted to get a chance to go to Ohio State." Hayes took a special interest in Parker and even had him stay at his home during his freshman season. When Parker joined the Colts, Hayes confided to Ewbank that he felt his prize pupil's best shot would be on defense.

Right from the first day of the 1957 summer camp, however, the Colts geared Parker for the Offensive unit even though he had actually had very little practice pass blocking for the rush-dominated Buckeyes and his main job in Baltimore would be to pass block.

The Colts opened their 1957 exhibition season in Cincinnati against the Chicago Bears and the Colts threw 47 passes.

"We threw the ball more that day than we did all my four years at Ohio State," Parker remembers. "In the first half, I played against rookies and it wasn't so bad. Then in the second half they threw Doug Atkins at me. Man, did he give me a lesson that day."

That day marked the start of a Parker-Atkins "feud" that highlighted the Bears-Colts meetings the next few years and the duel was only one of several that Parker developed with some all-time greats. Parker always came out well in such encounters.

"I used to think that I could outmaneuver any big tackle but that Parker can stay with anybody," Andy Robustelli, the New York Giants great defensive end and now a Hall of Famer, once said. "He sure could move with me. The only way you can beat him is to make him move his head. But he is too strong and too good and too smart to do that."

"It didn't take me long to learn the one big rule," Parker summarizes his career. "Just keep 'em away from John. I remember Coach Ewbank telling me my first summer in camp: 'You can be the most unpopular man

(Continued on page 7)

ALL-AMERICAN FLOPS!

Part II: 1933-45

By Bob Braunwart & Bob Carroll

This is the second in a series of articles tracing the success of college All-Americans in professional football during various PF eras. In the first article, covering the years 1920-32, we discovered that nearly two-thirds of those named to the best-known All-American teams during the years 1919-31 did not play professional football at all in the N.F.L. However, the majority of those former AA's who did turn pro tended to play well enough to stretch their careers over several seasons, and, indeed, nearly ten per cent reached pro football's highest honor by being named to the Pro Football Hall of Fame. In summary, the All-American flop was a myth for the N.F.L.'s earliest period.

* * *

The period from 1933 to 1945 was one of struggle for America. First, the country had to climb out of its worst depression, and then, it had to wage and win the largest and most horrible war the planet had ever seen. Surprisingly, it was a period of growth for pro football. Attendance at games grew steadily. If pro ball still could not rival the college game for the spectator's dollar, at least it was getting there.

One result of the surge in pro interest was that the game's outstanding players began to be known for their feats on professional gridirons rather than by their college reputations. Former AA's like Bronko Nagurski and Don Hutson actually increased their fame once they left college. Others, such as Steve Van Buren, Joe Stydahar, Arnie Herber, and Tuffy Leemans only gained national reputations after they donned professional togs.

Perhaps the presence of so many pro stars who had not achieved AA honors helped popularize the stereotypical type of the All-American flop in

the public's mind. The reasoning -- such as it was -- went something like this: Arnie Herber from little Regis is All-Pro; Warren Heller from Pitt is not. Therefore, the best pros are players from obscure schools. Not only did such "logic" ignore the fact that Herber at Green Bay had a far better supporting cast than Heller at Pittsburgh, but it also overlooked players like Wayne Millner, Ernie Smith, Ace Parker, and Seattle Feathers who continued to make headlines at the same rate in pro ball as they had in college.

However, logical or not, fans began to take a more jaundiced view of All-American credentials, and when an occasional player failed his "pro test," the failure took on much more significance than it really warranted.

To examine the 1933-45 period, we checked the pro careers of 266 players listed on seven mythical AA teams from 1932 to 1944. The teams represented were the All-American Board, Associated Press, Collier's, International News Service, and United Press, all of which named teams during the entire period, and Look Magazine (1942-44) and the Football Writers' Association which began in 1944.

As in our initial article, we felt the simplest test of success for a pro is that he play in a game, and the next test is that he keep playing. The chart below shows the results of our survey.

Year	NO. AA	Pro Seasons					% Pro
		0	1	2-3	4+		
1932	21	11	3	5	2		47.6
1933	18	10	2	2	4		44.4
1934	23	13	2	4	4		43.5
1935	17	10	1	3	3		41.5
1936	18	8	1	4	5		55.5
1937	20	10	4	3	3		50.0
1938	22	11	4	5	2		50.0
1939	20	9	2	4	5		55.0
1940	15	4	1	4	6		73.3
1941	19	6	1	3	9		68.4
1942	26	6	1	7	12		76.9
1943	22	11	1	2	8		50.0
1944	25	8	6	4	7		68.0
Tot.	266	117	29	50	70		56.0

The percentage of AA players turn-pro increased by nearly 20 per cent over the previous period. This was caused, we believe, by three and possibly four factors.

First, of course, was the growing acceptance that pro football found with the public. If the pro player was not yet everyone's hero, he was no longer the ogre he had once been with some sports fans. This change in climate undoubtedly influenced some players to take a fling at pro ball.

Second, there was the Depression. Undoubtedly, many college grads decided that a job playing football

was preferable to joining former classmates in the unemployment line. Additionally, pro salaries -- low by modern standards -- compared favorably with those in the working world.

A third factor was related to the nature of the All-American teams themselves. Fewer and fewer names were coming from the elite Ivy League schools which traditionally opposed professionalism. More AA's were coming out of those midwest and southern schools that had supplied pro football manpower for years. In other words, the All-American teams began adding more potential pros. It is worth noting that the two most celebrated Yale players of the period -- Clint Frank and Larry Kelley -- ignored the appeals of the N.F.L.

A fourth factor cut both ways. World War II delayed many a player's entry into the pro ranks and reduced other careers to one or two seasons. For example, Banks McFadden had an excellent rookie season with Brooklyn and then spent the next five seasons in the military.

But, at the same time, experience on service teams with pro teammates well may have convinced many college stars to turn pro after the war.

When Jay Berwanger, the first Heisman winner and the first pick in the initial pro draft, decided not to turn pro in 1935, his decision was at most surprising. Today, such a decision would be inconceivable.

But, how did those who took the pro plunge during the period fare? As more players turned pro, the chance of All-Americans flopping became greater. Yet nearly half of the AA's who joined the pro ranks (70 of 149) played for four or more years -- surely a mark of high pro success. Many of them were named to All-Pro teams and a few reached Hall of Fame status.

For the record, these were Wayne Millner, Sammy Baugh, Bruiser Kinard, Alex Wojciechowicz, Parker, Bill Dudley, Pete Pihos, Otto Graham, Bill Willis, and Don Hutson.

Of those who played fewer than four years, we must factor out those who had their careers curtailed by military service and those who left the N.F.L. as soon as a better civilian career opened up. Then, there were a few, like Harry Newman, who jumped the N.F.L. to try the doomed American Football League in 1936.

When all of this is considered, the indication is that All-American credentials, though no guarantee of pro success, were certainly no ticket to failure.

1955

THAT WONDERFUL YEAR

The 1955 season began on a topsy-turvy note when Western Division co-favorites Detroit and Chicago Bears each lost their first three games. The Bears, inspired by owner-coach George Halas' announcement that he planned retirement from the sidelines at the close of the season, soon righted themselves and forged into the lead, but the Lions dropped three more in a row and never were a factor. An off-season shoulder separation took the zip out of Bobby Layne's passing arm, and the Detroit defense, minus retired Les Bingham, couldn't make up the difference.

'54 champ Cleveland looked hopeless through their exhibition season, but Paul Brown lured Otto Graham out of his retirement and once more it was business as usual at Lakefront Stadium. The Browns took their sixth Eastern crown in as many years and tenth straight counting their four A.A.F.C. years. Automatic Otto threw sparingly but with devastating effect, and two runners who had hitherto been considered pro disappointments -- Ed Modzelewski and Curly Morrison -- gave the Clevelanders a strong land attack.

Cleveland's title trip was made easier by the Giants' dreadful start. Like the Bears and Lions, the New Yorkers lost their opening three contests. Once coach Jim Lee Howell blended ex-Canadian star Alex Webster into the backfield with Frank Gifford and Charley Conerly, the Giants finished strong for third place.

The Browns' primary competition came from Washington. Bolstered by three stars who'd been sweet-talked into returning from the C.F.L. -- Eddie LeBaron, Gene Brito and Norb Hecker -- plus ex-baseballer Vic Janowicz, the Redskins finished a surprising second in the East.

In the West, Baltimore broke strong on the line-smashing of big Alan Ameche, but Weeb Ewbank's young Colts were still a couple of years away and faded badly.

The Bears were all set to proclaim a division title when they were ambushed by the otherwise hapless Cardinals, 53-14. As a result, the Los Angeles Rams, under rookie coach Sid Gillman, sneaked into the championship despite two regular season losses to the Halasmen.

Graham proved unbeatable in the championship game, as he threw for two touchdowns and ran for two more. The final score was 38-14.

Although crowds in Pittsburgh, Detroit and New York fell off a bit, overall attendance continued to

grow for the N.F.L., topping two and a half million. The five-man line was the big tactical news on defense and the three-end attack was fast becoming the offensive norm.

One of the most interesting developments of the year was barely noted in the press. At the Steeler training camp, coach Walt Kiesling settled on Ted Marchibroda and Vic Eaton as backups for QB Jim Finks and cut an unheralded rookie from Louisville U. named John Unitas.

Final standings:

EASTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	T	Pct.	PTS	OPP
Cleveland	9	2	1	.818	349	218
Washington	8	4	0	.667	246	222
N.Y. Giants	6	5	1	.545	267	223
Chi. Cards	4	7	1	.364	224	252
Philadelphia	4	7	1	.364	248	231
Pittsburgh	4	8	0	.333	195	285

WESTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	T	Pct.	PTS	OPP
Los Angeles	8	3	1	.727	260	231
Chi. Bears	8	4	0	.667	294	251
Green Bay	6	6	0	.500	258	276
Baltimore	5	6	1	.455	214	239
San Francisco	4	8	0	.333	216	298
Detroit	3	9	0	.250	230	275

Title Game: Cleve. 38, L.A. 14

TOP TEN

	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
RUSHING				
Ameche, Balt.	213	961	4.5	9
Ferguson, G.B.	192	859	4.5	4
Morrison, Cleve.	156	824	5.3	3
Waller, L.A.	151	716	4.7	7
Perry, S.F.	156	701	4.5	2
Casares, Bears	125	672	5.4	4
Younger, L.A.	138	644	4.7	5
Webster, N.Y.	128	634	5.0	5
Modzelewski, Cle.	185	619	3.3	6
Rogel, Pitt.	168	588	3.5	2
PASSING				
Graham, Cleve.	185	98	1721	15
Thomason, Phil.	171	88	1337	10
Layne, Det.	270	143	1830	11
Brown, Bears	154	85	1307	9
Tittle, S.F.	287	147	2185	17
Van Brocklin, L.A.	272	144	1890	8
Rote, G.B.	342	157	1977	17
Conerly, N.Y.	202	98	1310	13
Shaw, Balt.	237	119	1586	10
Finks, Pitt.	344	165	2270	10

	NO	YDS	AVG	TD
RECEIVING				
Pihos, Phil.	62	864	13.9	7
Wilson, S.F.	53	831	15.7	7
Howton, G.B.	44	697	15.8	5
Middleton, Det.	44	663	15.1	3
Fears, L.A.	44	569	12.9	2
Carpenter, Det.	44	312	7.1	2
Hill, Bears	42	789	18.8	9
Mathews, Pitt.	42	762	18.1	6
Knafelo, G.B.	40	613	15.3	8
Stribling, Phil.	38	568	14.9	6
	TD	XP	FG	PTS
SCORING				
Walker, Det.	7	27	9	96
Janowicz, Wash.	7	28	6	88
Blanda, Bears	2	37	11	82
Cone, G.B.	0	30	16	78
Groza, Cleve.	0	44	11	77
Richter, L.A.	0	30	13	69
Agajanian, N.Y.	0	32	10	62
Bielski, Phil.	1	23	9	56
Rechichar, Balt.	0	25	10	55
Ameche, Balt.	9	0	0	54
Hill, Bears	9	0	0	54

Chicago Card reserve quarterback Ogdon Compton came within a yard of the N.F.L. record when he completed a 98-yard TD pass to Dick "Night Train" Lane against Green Bay on November 13. Despite Compton's feat, the Packers won, 31-14.

1955 ALL-LEAGUE SELECTIONS

Offense

E - Harlon Hill, Bears (AP,UP)
E - Pete Pihos, Phil. (AP)
E - Billy Wilson, S.F. (UP)
T - Lou Groza, Cleve. (AP,UP)
T - Bill Wightkin, Bears (AP)
T - Bob St. Clair, S.F. (UP)
G - Stan Jones, Bears (AP)
G - Duane Putnam, L.A. (AP)
G - Abe Gibrón, Cleve. (UP)
G - Bill Austin, N.Y. (UP)
G - Frank Gatski, Cleve. (AP,UP)
Q - Otto Graham, Cleve. (AP,UP)
H - Ollie Matson, Cards (AP,UP)
H - Frank Gifford, N.Y. (AP)
H - Ron Waller, L.A. (UP)
F - Alan Ameche, Balt. (AP,UP)

Defense

3 - Gene Brito, Wash. (AP,UP)
3 - Andy Robustelli, N.Y. (AP)
E - Len Ford, Cleve. (UP)
T - Art Donovan, Balt. (AP,UP)
T - Bob Tonnoff, S.F. (AP)
T - Don Colo, Cleve. (UP)
G - Bill George, Bears (AP)
G - Dale Dodrill, Pitt. (UP)
LB - Joe Schmidt, Det. (AP)
LB - Roger Zatkoff, G.B. (AP)
LB - Chuck Bednarik, Phil. (UP)
LB - George Connor, Bears (UP)
B - Jack Christiansen, Det. (AP,UP)
B - Bobby Dillon, G.B. (AP,UP)
B - Will Sherman, L.A. (AP,UP)
B - Ealen Tunnell, N.Y. (AP)
B - Don Paul, Cleve. (UP)

CHARLES FOLLIS



By Milton Roberts

He was called the "Black Cyclone from Wooster." He was born in the little community of Cloverdale, near Roanoke, in 19th century Virginia. His name was Charles W. Follis.

What sets this handsome Black man apart from all others is that he was America's first Black professional football player.

The Shelby (Ohio) Daily Globe of September 16, 1904, announced that Charles Follis had signed a professional football contract. The headline read, "Charles Follis has signed for the season."

There was no better anywhere ... his sensational play for Shelby in 1904 more than justified the wisdom that their far-sighted manager, Frank G. Schiffer showed when he secured Follis' signature on a football contract.

Who was Charles W. Follis? Mrs. Florence Follis, of Wooster, Ohio, Charles' sister-in-law, was able to provide that answer.

Charles was born on February 3, 1879. He was one of seven children. He had four sisters: Cora, Lela, Alice, and Lucile, and two younger brothers, Curtis and Joseph.

All three boys played football for Wooster High School. Curtis died at age 19, as a result of complications stemming from a football injury.

In 1913, Florence married Joseph, the youngest of the three brothers. She related, "I don't recollect much about Charles and Curtis, only what Joe told me. They were brought to Wooster by their daddy when they were quite young. Joe was born here, and the brothers and sisters all grew up here in Wooster. Charles was the biggest of the three boys, about 200 pounds and six feet tall."

In 1899, as a junior in high school Charles helped organize the school's first varsity football team. His schoolmates elected him captain. With Follis doing most of the ball carrying, Wooster was un-

beaten and unscored on that first year.

Even as a young high school runner Follis showed devastating power. In 1899, when Wooster beat Alliance, 27-0, the Wooster Republican reported, "The ball was kicked off and Follis brought it back halfway across the field, plunging through the Alliance boys as if they were so much paper."

After graduation, he entered Wooster University in the spring term of 1901. He did not play football for the University that fall, but for the Wooster A.A., a local amateur team. This team met the Shelby A.A., champions of Northern Ohio, in a two game series which brought Follis to the attention of the Shelby team management.

In the first game, a narrow 5-0 loss for Wooster, the Wooster Republican reported that, "Follis did some splendid tackling and his all around playing was a feature." Shelby took another look at him in the second game. Those two looks were enough for Frank G. Schiffer, Shelby manager; he wanted Follis playing with his team, not against them.

The Shelby Daily Globe of September 8, 1902, reads, "Manager F.G. Schiffer stated this morning that he had secured Follis the colored player of Wooster. He played with Wooster last season and knows the game thoroughly. He will be a valuable addition to the team, and will arrive in Shelby next Sunday."

So, it was 1902 when Frank Schiffer first brought this marvelous Black athlete to Shelby, a town that to this day remains without a Black



family. He was offered a job at Howard Seltzer and Sons Hardware Store, with working hours arranged so that he could both practice and play football.

And play he did! The 58-0 rout of Fremont was highlighted by a 60-yard run by Follis "with the entire Fremont team at his heels." His defensive work was also cited.

Time and again in the football seasons of 1902 and 1903, Follis' superb play increased his popularity with the Shelby following.

One of Follis' admiring teammates on the Shelby eleven those two seasons was Branch Rickey, of later Brooklyn Dodger fame. Rickey often played for pay with Shelby while he was attending nearby Ohio Wesleyan University, his alma mater. He knew Follis well. In fact, as player-coach of Wesleyan's second team, on October 17, 1903, Rickey felt the "Black Cyclone's" full power when he ran their ends dissy for 20, 25, 35 and 70 yard gains, the last being a touchdown.

After that game Rickey praised Follis, calling him "a wonder."

But all was not praise for Shelby's wonder. He was sometimes the object of rough tactics from opposing players and ridicule from fans

in towns and cities visited by the Shelby team.

In a 40-0 defeat of Marion, the paper of October 12, 1903, reported, "Marion's quarterback started dirty work on Follis, but was called by Bushey." In other words, Bushey, a teammate, had to intercede and act as "policeman."

It was reported in a 22-5 victory over the rugged Columbus Panhandles in 1903, that Follis had torn ligaments of his shoulder.

As for fan abuse, Shelby and Toledo were playing one afternoon in 1905 in Toledo, and according to a newspaper account, "Follis, the Shelby halfback is a Negro and the crowd got after him early, advising the local players to put him out of the game. Toledo captain Jack Tattersoll addressed the crowd by saying, Don't call Follis a nigger. He is a gentleman, and a clean player, and please don't call him that! He was applauded for his sentiment and the colored player was not molested during the rest of the game."

Verbal abuse didn't always occur away from home however. One confrontation for the popular Black athlete was with a Shelby tavern owner. It is recalled by the town's old-timers even today.

The Shelby players crowded into the tavern one afternoon for post-practice refreshments. Follis, at a teammate's invitation, had come along for the first time. When the tavern owner saw him, he announced that white football players could stay but Black ones would have to go. Follis didn't force the issue; he withdrew from the group and took his refreshment alone.

Considering that he was often a loner, sometimes by choice, sometimes not, it would have been an easy thing for Follis to have withdrawn from people, to have become anti-social. He did not. He was a member of a family steeped in pride and heritage, and though he experienced many trying moments, Charles Follis was never known to have resorted to belligerence in dealing with others.

It is highly probable that Branch Rickey's first hand observation of Follis' unruffled handling of prejudice, on the field and off, influenced his decision to introduce Jackie Robinson to major league baseball, just as he had watched

Frank Schiffer introduce Charles Follis to professional football, some 40 years earlier.

Follis celebrated his contract signing in 1904, with a remarkable opening performance, leading Shelby to a 29-0 win over Marion with an 83-yard touchdown romp. His steady play was largely responsible for Shelby's 8-1-1 season's record. Their only loss was to the Massillon Tigers, the professional champions of 1904. In 1905 the play of Shelby's fleet halfback only served to increase his widespread reputation.

Then in 1906, Schiffer decided to change his reportedly half professional Shelby A.C. eleven into an openly professional team. Charles Follis, as always, figured heavily in Schiffer's plans. But the physical and mental strain the Black athlete had endured, started to take its toll. He missed the early part of the season, but upon his return handled his share of ball carrying in the late season games.

Finally, on Thanksgiving Day, 1906, playing against the Franklin A.C. of Cleveland, he suffered still another injury. It was over ... America's first Black professional football player limped off the football field for the last time.

Yet as exceptional as Follis' football talent was, even more startling were his baseball skills. He was truly major league material. Follis was the first Black catcher to move from college baseball into Black professional baseball. He left Wooster University, Ohio, in 1902, and by 1909 he was catching for John M. Bright's Cuban Giants.

It was evident from the very beginning of his baseball career that he was destined for stardom. In 1900 he was a brilliant young catcher for the Wooster A.A. town team. This team entered the Ohio Trolley League as the Wooster Giants and became the league champions. Charles Follis was the Giants' star catcher ... their leading slugger ... their most widely-known player.

In the seasons of 1901 and 1902, while playing for Wooster University, the Black catcher became the talk of the Ohio college circuit. His closest competitor for top catching honors among the Ohio colleges was his future Shelby A.C. football teammate, Branch Rickey, then playing for Ohio Wesleyan University. And though Rickey quickly moved into organized

professional baseball, Follis could not enter the major leagues with Rickey because of the color of his skin. Instead, he went his own way, into Black professional baseball.

Follis was credited with many stolen bases, double plays, and even two triple plays in his career, but these skills had to rank second to his reputation as a power hitter. More than once sports writers referred to a Follis four bagger as "his usual home run." At least two of his homers were in the category of "moon shots" and are worth description.

The first homer took place on August 22, 1901, at the fair grounds in Wooster, against the Sebring A.A. Catching for Wooster A.A., Charley went four-for-four and according to the Republican, "Follis came in for his usual whirl at the bat and knocked out two home runs, one of which went farther perhaps than any ball ever hit at the present diamond. Follis ... sent the ball so far and so swift that it looked like a pea as it whirled over across the race track."

The second occurred May 16, 1906, in Ohio Trolley League competition while Follis was catching for the Wooster Giants. With much fanfare, rival city Alyria announced the signing of Herbert "Buttons" Briggs, ex-Chicago Cubs pitcher, for the season's opener against Wooster. Briggs had won 20 games for the National League only two seasons before.

It was meant to scare off Wooster, it certainly didn't impress Charles Follis. Moved to lead-off batter, first inning, first ball pitched, Charley blasted a tremendous home run off the former major league star. He completed the day with four-for-six against the famous "Buttons."

From town ball to college ball, to Trolley League ball in Wooster, to Black professional ball in Cleveland was but a short stride for Charles Follis. He had all the ability he needed to make the big jump.

But fate did not smile long on his professional baseball career. Both he and Johnny Bright, who formed the crack battery for the well known Star-Light Champs of Cleveland and Bright's Cuban Giants, passed away tragically within one year of each other: Bright in 1909; Follis, at age 31, from pneumonia, on April

1910.

With Follis' passing, Ohio newspapers published feature articles about his talent, reputation, and widespread popularity. "Follis was a natural hitter and he had an ease about him and a confident smile that always seemed to worry opposing pitchers," one report said. "As a football player and as a baseball player he gained the respect of his associates and opponents as well, by his clean tactics and his game-ness," said another.

The oldtimers in Wooster, Shelby, and Cleveland still talk about him today ... but historians forgot him ... young sports fans probably never heard of him before.

In Wooster Cemetery, a thin, weathered headstone, slightly tilted by the winds and snow of more than 65 years, marks his final resting place. Today it is viewed as a local historical site.

In May, 1975, when Wooster celebrated its naming as an All-American City with a gala civic parade, seated proudly on one of the attractive floats were relatives of the original Follis family ... smiling and remembering America's first but forgotten Black professional football and baseball superstar, Charles W. Follis.

Milt Roberts, whose article "Peggy Parratt, MVP" appeared in the August, 1979, edition of The Coffin Corner, is a charter member of P.F.R.A. He is regarded as one of the nation's foremost authorities on early pro football in Ohio and on pioneer Black athletes. This article, combining both subjects, originally appeared in the November, 1975, edition of Black Sports.

JIM PARKER

on the team if the quarterback gets hurt." How could I ever forget that?"

Obviously, Parker didn't forget and he earned a number of nicknames in the next few years -- Johnny Unitas' bodyguard, the mother hen, the den mother, the guardian, Jumbo Jim. Almost any nickname that meant that he did his job superbly would have been appropriate.

When a knee injury failed to respond to treatment, Parker voluntarily stepped aside as an active



CORNER STAFFER RESIGNS

Miss Nomer Shrdlew, veteran headline writer for The Coffin Corner, has tendered her resignation to editor Bob Carroll. Her exodus came about because of a dispute over a headline used in the December issue.

Editor Carroll maintained that Miss Shrdlew's mind wandered when she appended the headline "Ken McAfee" to a story about the great Chicago Bear runner with that last name. "She must have been thinking of the old New York Giant end," Carroll insisted.

"Not so," said Miss Shrdlew. "The letters, K-E-N, stood for 'Kwik-Energetic and Nifty.' I know as well as the next guy that the fellow's name was Geoffrey McAfee."

Not satisfied with the explanation Carroll attempted to discipline Miss Shrdlew by ordering her to listen to four hours of recorded inspirational pre-game messages by Chuck Noll. After an hour and seven minutes, a glassy-eyed Miss Shrdlew resigned her position with the Corner and promised that from now on she would always write one headline at a time.

Included with this month's issue is the questionnaire for our membership directory. Please return it promptly. It is not only important for the directory, but also it will serve as a check that each member is receiving his Corner.

player late in the 1967 campaign because "I can't help the team and I won't deprive 40 guys of their big chance."

The Colts were undefeated at the time and hopefully headed toward a big Super Bowl pay day, in which Parker might have shared.

"It was one of the most unselfish moves ever made in sports," Colts coach Shula said. "Jim has stepped aside strictly to help the team. He will be remembered as one of the greatest offensive linemen in pro football history."

Shula was already a great coach and he proved himself to be a great prophet as well!

David Shapiro is offering a great bonus/bargain. He will send a copy of his excellent book "The 135 Greatest Pro Running Backs" to every P.F.R.A. member who will send him \$1.00 to cover postage, etc. (\$1.50 for California residents). This is the same interesting attempt to find new statistical comparisons among runners of different eras that has been favorably mentioned on these pages before. Write to David Shapiro, 288 Whitmore Street, Oakland, CA 94611. He stresses that this offer is made exclusively to P.F.R.A. members only.

We'd also like to remind readers that a few copies of Bob Wheeler's fine biography of Jim Thorpe, "Pathway to Glory," are still available to members at the special \$2 price by writing to P.F.R.A., 218 Wise St. N.E., North Canton, Ohio 44720.

P.F.R.A. bids a happy new year and a glorious arbor day to all its members and particularly welcomes four new members: Lee Ballinger (Ohio), Bruce Gehrke (Colorado), Roger Stanton (Michigan), and Bob Wheeler (Virginia).

Art Daley sent a correction and an addition to last month's story on Glenn Presnell's 54-yard field goal.

First, the corrections: Art checked his files and discovered that the game in which Presnell made his boot was actually played at Green Bay, rather than Detroit as was reported. Art also points out that none of Detroit's games were at Navin Field in 1934; the team played at Detroit U. Stadium.

The addition is even more interesting: Presnell's boot helped the Lions along a winning streak that eventually reached ten games. On November 25, the Packers came to Detroit for the second meeting.

Once again the game was a defensive struggle, played almost exclusively between the two 20-yard lines. But at the start of the final quarter, Green Bay cashed the only points of the game.

How? A field goal by Clarke Hinkle. How long? A cool 47-yards, only seven less than Presnell's then-record.

The effect of this near-mirror image on the Lions must have been shattering. They lost their next to starts to the Bears and finished second to Chicago in the division.

ABOUT PFRA:

The Professional Football Researchers Association was founded as a non-profit organization on June 22, 1979, at Canton, Ohio. The purpose of the association is to foster the study of professional football as a significant social and athletic institution. It further hopes to establish an accurate historical account of professional football and to disseminate research information.

Membership in P.F.R.A. is open to anyone with a sincere interest in the history of professional football or related subjects. Members receive: twelve issues of The Coffin Corner, the official newsletter of the P.F.R.A.; the opportunity to submit material to be considered for publication in the newsletter; an end of year Directory of Membership; a specially prepared association publication to be offered at the end of the year at a membership discount; and a P.F.R.A. Membership Card.

To join, write to P.F.R.A./ 218 Wise St., N.E./ N. Canton, O./ 44720.

To help defray operational expenses of the association, reasonable dues of \$12 per year have been set.

Canton
HOME OF
PRO
FOOTBALL



Ohio
HALL
OF
FAME



The Coffin Corner
12870 Rt. 30
N. Huntingdon, PA 15642

NUR 8U 161415N1 01/14/80

RETURN TO SENDER
NOT DELIVERABLE AS ADDRESSED
UNABLE TO FORWARD

John Hogrogian
9 Columbia Street
Hartford, Ct. 06106