



**Commemorating Bob Hoffman**  
**John D. Fair**  
**Georgia College & State University**

Bob Hoffman, founder and president of York Barbell, frequently expressed his intention to reach the age of one hundred and to live in three centuries. He also liked to chart his progress towards the century mark (and promote “MuscleTown”) by staging elaborate annual birthday celebrations on November 9. At the time of his seventy-fifth birthday in 1973, he seemed destined to realize his goals. He boasted (surely a rare occurrence for Bob!) that he enjoyed super health and felt no differently than he did as a teenager. This enabled him supposedly, at a bodyweight of 245, to go on regular five-mile runs while wearing a 15-pound weight belt and carrying 20-pound dumbbells. How many other 75-year-olds, he queried, could run with 300 pounds for that distance? [*Strength & Health*, January 1974] Unfortunately, over the next decade Bob, who liked to call himself the “world’s healthiest man,” suffered from a variety of serious illnesses. He died on July 18, 1985,

at age eighty-six, and was buried in Mount Rose Cemetery in east York.

His memory, however, lives on—and not only from the benefits accrued by countless Americans from his work as a physical culturist. His memory also lives on through a roadside marker recently erected just outside York Barbell Company by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. The idea originated with the new management team at Susquehanna Capital in the fall of 1997 as a means to ensure proper acknowledgement of the company’s roots and to pay tribute to its founder. In January 1998 York Barbell President Paul Stombaugh asked Barb Andrelezyk, the company’s librarian/archivist, to nominate Bob Hoffman for a historical marker. The application had to follow strictly the guidelines of the commission for historicity, include an overview of Bob’s life, and be subjected to the scrutiny of a panel of consultants from across the state. In March, York executives were notified that Bob’s name had been approved, along with 13 other notables, to join the more than 1,600 people, events, and buildings which have been memorialized since the commission was founded in 1913. Bob is likely the only iron game figure to be so recognized anywhere in the United States.

Appropriately, the day set aside for the official unveiling was the hundredth anniversary of Bob’s birthday. November 9 was a beautiful, sunny, and cool day, and nearly fifty of the seventy-five invited guests attended, mostly local personages who had benefited from Bob’s generosity. Virtually no one from the old York gang or the iron game could be present. Among the notables attending the ceremony were Alda Ketterman, Bob’s common law widow; York mayor Charlie Robertson; Congressman Bill Goodling; and long-time friend Harry McLaughlin. In his welcoming remarks, President Stombaugh stated that York Barbell had languished in recent years but was undergoing a resurgence. “We are much dedicated to building the company to the level I think Bob would have expected it to be,” he said. Representing the Historical and Museum Commission, Dr. James Adovasio recalled that as a youth of seventeen the first set of weights that he used was manufactured by York Barbell. He called Hoffman a “pivotal” figure in the history of weightlifting, bodybuilding, and use of

nutritional supplements. Dick Smith recounted his long association (from 1937) with the original “York gang.” Thanks to Bob and York Barbell, he had the opportunity to serve as a coach, manager and trainer in various Olympics, world championships, and Pan American Games in thirty-five countries. Smitty praised Hoffman for his generous contributions to athletes, the city of York, and the youth of America for more than five decades.

The unveiling of the marker was then carried out by Stombaugh and Adovasio. Although Bob Hoffman never attained his goal of reaching 100 or living in three centuries, the erection of the historical marker stands as a permanent tribute to his many accomplishments and a fitting way to commemorate, albeit posthumously, his one hundredth birthday.

