In the spring of 2015, Reaktion Press in Great Britain published The Temple of Perfection: A History of the Gym by Eric Chaline. I became aware of the book when a colleague forwarded to me a lengthy review from the Irish Times, which declared in the headline that the book was an “Exhaustive History” that “Takes Us from Ancient Greece to the Birth of Global Fitness.” After reading novelist Rob Doyle’s positive review, which explained Chaline’s attempt to encapsulate 2800 years of physical culture history into 245 pages, I ordered a copy for the Stark Center’s library. Several days later, when I received the book, I did what most historians do and turned to the “selected bibliography” in the back to see what Chaline had used as sources. Although it was flattering to be listed more times than any other author (seven), I was surprised to see that Chaline included only some of my Iron Game History articles in his bibliography, and did not list my book on women’s exercise which has a lot to say about gymnasiuums in the nineteenth century. As I looked further, I saw that John Fair’s IGH articles on bodybuilding and weightlifting were also not mentioned and, even more astonishingly, that there was no mention of Fair’s seminal Muscletown USA: Bob Hoffman and the Manly Culture of York Barbell. Similarly, Terry Todd’s many articles on the history of the game were not mentioned except for the interview he and I did with Steve Reeves. “The Last Interview,” as we called that piece, was heavily used by Chaline as one of his main sources on Muscle Beach. His other sources for that important moment in our sportive history consisted in toto of a Muscle Beach website, my IGH article on Pudgy Stockton, and an obscure 1980 book titled Muscle Beach, authored by Ed Murray, describing the “Muscle Beachniks.” Murray’s 147-page book has no sources, and describes a “Muscle Beach” totally unfamiliar to most Iron Gamers. His book is not about people like Pudgy and Les Stockton, Russ Saunders, Jack LaLanne, or Harold Zinkin. Among Murray’s cast of characters are “The Heap, The Face, Myron the Dancer, and their lawyer Suing Sydney.” The choice of Murray’s book as a major source for the history of Muscle Beach is beyond lamentable. Given the existence of Harold Zinkin’s first-person memoir of his days at Muscle Beach; Marla Matzer Rose’s first-rate Muscle Beach: Where the Best Bodies in the World Started a Fitness Revolution; the innovative 2014 dissertation written by University of Texas scholar Tolga Ozyurtcu; and, of course literally hundreds of newspaper and magazine articles published over the
years; Chaline’s decision to use none of these sources in a supposedly “exhaustive history” is, frankly, unpardonable.8

Also missing from Chaline’s bibliography, however, are any references to books or articles by such well-known iron game authors as David P. Webster, David P. Willoughby, Randy Roach, or Bill Pearl. Pearl’s three-volume Legends of the Iron Game would have been a great help to Chaline. Chaline also never mentions Joe and Ben Weider’s Brothers of Iron, Dick Tyler and Dave Draper’s West Coast Bodybuilding Scene, or any number of autobiographical books written by weightlifters and bodybuilders in recent years in which gyms and the significant role they played in the careers of the authors are discussed.9 Even David Chapman is slighted. While Chapman’s Sando the Magnificent is included, none of Chapman’s other books on strongmen, strongwomen, or physique photography are mentioned at all.10 Given this paucity of sourcing, the fact that Chaline also fails to use anything by historians Patricia Vertinsky, Roberta Park, Martha Verbrugge, Kenneth Dutton, Caroline de la Pena, or Kim Beckwith is hardly surprising. However, how he also missed using as sources Roberta Sassatelli’s 2010 Fitness Culture: Gyms and The Commercialization of Discipline and Fun; Shelley McKenzie’s Getting Physical: The Rise of
Fitness Culture in America; and Alan Klein’s landmark study of 1980s gym culture—Little Big Men—truly boggles the imagination.11

A “selected bibliography” is not necessarily the full list of sources used in the production of a book, and it is true that Chaline includes a few other sources in his footnotes—although nearly all of those sources are websites. His very brief discussion of gym innovators Joe Gold, Vic Tanny, Ray Wilson, and their respective health club chains, for example, is taken strictly from websites.12 As for Jack LaLanne, an iron game figure, about whom more may have been written in the last century than almost anyone except Arnold Schwarzenegger, Chaline uses only one website and a single LaLanne book to tell the story of his long life in physical culture.13

As for the book’s content, Chaline pays almost no attention to the early twentieth-century until Muscle Beach begins in California. He devotes virtually no space to Macfadden, says nothing about Attila’s gym in New York, never mentions Thomas Inch in London, and omits all discussion of York Barbell, Bob Hoffman, John Grimek, and the famous Broad Street gym in York, Pennsylvania, which bears consideration as one of the more significant gyms in history. On page 150, Chaline incorrectly writes that Jack LaLanne had: “the first mixed-gender gym in the U.S.; the first to have women athletes, the physically challenged and the elderly working out with weights; and the first health club to provide health and nutritional advice.”14 Had Chaline bothered to spend any time on the history of gyms in the nineteenth century, he would have known that Dio Lewis was running co-ed gyms and using weights for men and women in the 1860s, that Dr. George Taylor ran a Movement Cure gym in New York City in the 1850s, and that George Barker Windship and David P. Butler had men and women practicing health lifting in the 1860s.15 Chaline does not even seem to know that Sandow dispensed exercise and nutritional advice to men and women at his London gym.16 Over on page 151, to cite another major error, Chaline explains that Ray Wilson and Bob Delmonteque’s American Health Studios were “the first gyms to offer therapeutic facilities to members,” ignoring entirely the decades of movement cure therapies that included the “remedial work” promoted by Harvard’s Dudley Allen Sargent, Sandow’s Curative Institute of Physical Culture in the early twentieth century, and Gustav Zander’s revolutionary exercise machines, all of which had therapeutic applications.17

Why should we worry about a book like this? Why not just ignore it, a reader might ask. I raise these criticisms because, unfortunately, until someone comes along and writes an accurate, well-researched history of gyms, the unknowing public and even many academics, will turn to Chaline’s book as a trustworthy source on physical culture history. The fact that it is so riddled with errors, however, may well mean that Chaline’s misinformation will continue to be passed forward to new readers, and will undermine the integrity of the emerging field of physical culture studies within the academic community.

I can easily imagine a future, for example, in which a student cites Chaline’s assertion on page 64 that when the Farnese Hercules was unearthed during the Renaissance, Cardinal Allesandro Farnese asked a contemporary sculptor to “replace its missing lower half.” Chaline’s book leads one to believe that half the statue was carved in the Renaissance, when in reality, the statue was only missing a leg from the knee down—a leg that was later found and replaced.18 Or, as Chaline asserts on page 181, will future scholars believe that Sandow “promoted” the career of Katie Sandwina, when in fact they hardly associated?19 There are many other errors, both large and small, in Chaline’s book, but he is not the only transgressor.

David Waller’s book The Perfect Man: The Muscular Life and Times of Eugen Sandow, Victorian Strongman, released in 2011, is vastly superior to Chaline’s effort, yet also contains troubling mistakes that reveal Waller’s lack of real understanding of physical culture. In a description of Sandow posing in his show costume, for example, Waller explains that Sandow is wearing “harlequin socks,” rather than Roman sandals—Sandow’s normal footwear when he performed. In another place he claims that Katie Sandwina “was a maid of German extraction who had 17.5” biceps, 26.5” calves and a good claim to be the strongest woman in the world.”20 Where Waller found such large numbers for Sandwina’s measurements is unknown. However, had he bothered to check them, he could easily have discovered that Sandwina was measured by physicians at a press event announcing her as one of the stars of the 1911 season for the Barnum and Bailey Circus. Reporters were in the room as she was measured and found to be: 5 feet 9¾ inches tall, 210 pounds in weight, with a 44½ inch chest measurement (expanded), a 29
inch waist, 43 inch hips, a 16\% inch calf, and a flexed right biceps measurement of 14 inches.\textsuperscript{21} Historians working in the fields of circus, theater, and physical culture history generally know to be suspicious of lifts and measurements claimed by press agents. Had Waller taken time to do some research — rather than accepting the measurements at face value — he would have realized the impossibility of her calf being larger than the also exaggerated 24" claimed by the John Robinson Circus in 1898 for Louis Cyr. Historian David Willoughby, whose life was dedicated to understanding the limits of human potential, estimated Cyr’s calf at “only” 18 inches in the strongman’s prime.\textsuperscript{22}

While mistakes will happen from time to time, my deeper concern is how we can strengthen the field of Physical Culture Studies and attract more historians to our field. I first began thinking about this in 1987 when I won the graduate essay contest of the North American Society for Sport History (NASSR) and was invited to Vancouver to present my paper at the society’s annual conference. At the final banquet Jack Berryman, then NASSR president, took me aside to tell me how much he had enjoyed my paper about Bernarr Macfadden’s ideas on exercise for women and that he thought I would like to know that there had been a spirited discussion among the members of the selection committee about whether my paper was actually eligible for consideration. The issue, Berryman explained, was that I had written about exercise, rather than competitive sport, and some members of the committee were not sure that exercise fit under the umbrella of the society. Until that moment it had never occurred to me that people would view the study of exercise as belonging outside the boundaries of sport history. And, as time passed, I have realized all too often how little attention we pay to the history of exercise in both our public schools and universities.

I am happy to report that research related to the study of physical culture is no longer unusual in the field of sport history. In 2012, Kim Beckwith, Tommy Hunt, Tolga Ozyurucu and I made presentations at NASSH about the state of physical culture history. We reported to those attending our session that approximately 20 percent of the papers delivered at NASSH’s annual conference each year now deal with physical culture topics such as exercise, embodiment, media representations of the body, definitions of masculinity and femininity with-

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I know some may think I am starting to sound overly critical here — even for a book called Critical Readings in Bodybuilding. However, the number of errors of fact in a book aimed at classroom use for future scholars in physical cultural studies is genuinely alarming. Even more distressing is the fact that Locks’ and Richardson’s lack of knowledge of the history of physical culture also reveals how unprepared they were to serve as editors of the volume. For example, anthropologist Ann Bolin has an essay in the book about women’s bodybuilding in which she writes: “Time has shown that virtually any activity that threatens the hegemonic gender order will call into question the gender authenticity of its participants. This debate surfaced in the infancy of women’s bodybuilding when Gloria Miller Fudge took off her high heels. It arose again when Cammie Lusko (1980 Miss Olympia) presented a ‘hardcore muscular routine.’”28 However the correct name of the early bodybuilder mentioned is Georgia Miller Fudge, not Gloria. Further, Fudge is not the bodybuilder who famously took off her high heels in 1979, closed her fists when posing, and set women’s bodybuilding on its modern path. That was Laura Combes. Combes’ performance was even written about in Sports Illustrated.29 And Cammie Lusko was never Miss Olympia. The winner of the first Ms. Olympia in 1980 was Rachel McLish. Lusko finished ninth.30

Academic history is a curious profession. Before the founding of the American Historical Association in 1884, few universities had professional historians on their staff, as history was largely written by wealthy men with time on their hands and access to books and rare manuscripts. The same has been true in the field of physical culture history. Until the past couple of decades, historical scholarship on strongmen, bodybuilding, and weight training of all sorts has largely been written by men who had private collections such as Edmund Desbonnet in France, David Willoughby in the United States, and, most prolific of them all, David Webster OBE in Scotland. One reason for the lack of earlier scholarly attention is because sources in the pre-internet era were scarce and because the term “physical culture” has had such a checkered history within the academic community — and even popular culture — in America. Before talking about the academic side of all this, however, I would like to examine the evolution of the term “physical culture.”

The earliest use I can find in print appeared in a 1787 book by Adolphus Vongnieur, entitled Treatise on the Bane of Vice.31 Vongnieur uses the term to speak of guiding growth and maturation — as was also meant when “physical culture” was used in the lengthy title of Dr. Samuel Hare’s 1838, Practical Observations on the Causes and Treatment of Curvatures of the Spine, with Hygienic Directions for the Physical Culture of Youth.32 In November 1860, Dio Lewis uses the term as the subtitle for his new monthly magazine and then, following Lewis’ use — it quickly began appearing in many other books and magazines in the late nineteenth century as a descriptive “umbrella” term for exercise, fitness, and the pursuit of health.33 The Water Cure Journal and Herald of Reforms, for example, renamed itself the Herald of Reform and Journal of Physical Culture in 1863. Sim Kehoe used it as the subtitle of his popular Indian club book in 1866.34 By the end of the nineteenth century “physical culture” had even made its way into universities and schools where it was often used to describe physical education programs and physical training classes.35 In the late nineteenth century, sport and games were not significant factors in most school physical education programs and so the term “physical culture” evoked for the early, pioneering physical educators the idea of rational, systematic training — what I called in my book “purposive exercise,” to differentiate it from competitive sport and recreation.

At the turn of the twentieth century, however, the term physical culture began to fall into disfavor in academic circles. This is probably due in large part to the fact that both Sandow in 1898 and — especially — Bernarr Macfadden in 1899, adopted the term as the title of their respective magazines.36 After that time — while the term did not “go viral” in our modern sense of that word — the healthy sales of both magazines made the term widely known. In the pages of Macfadden’s Physical Culture, and in the dozens of training courses and articles in health and fitness magazines that appeared during the first decades of the twentieth century, the term physical culture began to be used for a set of holistic health practices that encompassed nutrition, fresh air, proper digestion, adequate sleep, and the other tenets of what Americans in earlier times had referred to as the “Laws of Health.”37 It became, as historian David Kirk argues, “a way of life.” Physical culture systems were not just exercise routines, Kirk explains, they were also
“embedded in beliefs, knowledge, and broader individual and social practices.” In fact, if we were able to speak to the readers of these early health and fitness magazines, they would probably tell you they were physical culturists — not bodybuilders, and not mere weight trainers. Jack LaLanne’s daughter, Dr. Yvonne Laraine Rubio, told me in 2012 that when someone asked her father what he did for a living he always said he was a “physical culturist.” Similarly, Pudgy and Les Stockton told me on more than one occasion that they never thought of themselves as bodybuilders at Muscle Beach — they were physical culturists.

My belief is that in America, Macfadden’s personal eccentricities, his connections to such at-that-time academically suspect activities as weightlifting and vegetarianism and his contempt for most aspects of traditional medicine, alienated the medical and academic community. As a consequence, during the first half of the twentieth century, most university programs began abandoning the term physical culture and using instead such terms as physical training or physical education to describe their curriculum. As a consequence the term physical culture moved outside the American academy until late in the twentieth century.

In Europe and other parts of the world, however, the term “physical culture” has remained in much more common use in academic circles. However, in almost all of these countries the term is used as an all-inclusive term to describe all kinds of human movement, including competitive sport, dance, recreation, and exercise, rather than the way we generally define it in the United States.

In recent decades, the term “physical culture” has begun to creep back into American academia. I like to think that Terry and I played a role in returning the term to academic respectability. For example, we began calling our collection of books, magazines, and related materials the Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection back in the early 1980s, and in 1990 we began publishing this journal — Iron Game History: the Journal of Physical Culture. And, of course, the full name of our academic research center is the H.J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports. At The University of Texas in Austin we now offer an undergraduate major called “Physical Culture and Sports,” and our doctoral program in sport history is called the Ph.D. Program in Physical Culture and Sport Studies.

These uses of the term all suggest that “physical culture” is somehow separate from “sport,” and that was exactly what we tried to convey as we were establishing the Stark Center. As part of that effort we decided we needed to define the term — since we used it in our name from the beginning. The definition we finally arrived at is this: “Physical Culture is a term used to describe the various activities people have employed over the centuries to strengthen their bodies, enhance their physiques, increase their endurance, enhance their health, fight against aging, and become better athletes.”

Encyclopedia Britannica defines physical culture in a somewhat longer but similar fashion: “A philosophy, regimen, or lifestyle seeking maximum physical development through such means as weight (resistance) training, diet, aerobic activity, athletic competition, and mental discipline. Specific benefits include improvements in health, appearance, strength, endurance, flexibility, speed, and general fitness as well as greater proficiency in sport-related activities.” Oxford English Dictionary’s definition is much shorter: “the development and strengthening of the body, esp. by means of regular exercise.” Feminist scholars Patricia Vertinsky and Jennifer Hargreaves use it in yet another way. In their book, Physical Culture, Power and the Body — they use the term to refer to “all activities in which the body itself — its anatomy, its physicality, and most importantly, its forms of movements — is the very purpose, raison d’être of the activity.”

However we define it, there is no question that the field of Physical Culture Studies is growing and finding greater academic acceptance. Even so, as Ben Franklin once observed, “It takes many good deeds to build a good reputation, and only one bad act to destroy it.” Franklin’s comment reflects the essence of my concern about such poorly sourced and inadequately researched books as Eric Chaline’s The Temple of Perfection. I continue to hope that we are moving toward a time in which the contributions of Eugen Sandow, Bernarr Macfadden, Joseph Pilates, Professor Attila, Jack LaLanne, Dr. Thomas Delorme, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Jane Fonda, Kenneth Cooper, and Boyd Epley are taught in our college sport history classes alongside the stories of Babe Ruth, Bobby Jones, Jesse Owens, Billie Jean King, Jackie Robinson, Jim Thorpe, and Muhammad Ali. If we can move to a time when the history of physical culture is no longer margin-
alized and is, instead, fully part of our sport history curriculum — it will be far less likely that books such as *Critical Readings in Bodybuilding and Temple of Perfection* will find publishers who do not see the glaring errors contained in them. It can also be hoped that the burgeoning group of young scholars who want to study and write about strength, bodybuilding, and other forms of body culture will no longer consider themselves anything less than true sport historians.

— Jan Todd

NOTES

In several places in this essay I refer to the work of scholars by name only and do not include a footnote with a list of their publications. This is done solely because of space in the journal. I will happily provide a full list of publications by these scholars upon request.


4. John Fair, *Muscle Town USA: Bob Hoffman and the Manly Culture of York Barbell* (State College, PA: Penn State Press, 1999). There are also no references to Fair’s articles on physical culture published in other academic journals.


7. Ibid.


16. Nor does Chaline discuss any of the hydropathic sanitariums and health homes in Battle Creek, Michigan and other parts of the country, most of which not only had a gym of some sort on their grounds but also dispensed nutritional advice.


25. Ibid., 1-18.


28. Locks and Richardson, Critical Readings in Bodybuilding, 33-34.


31. Adolphus Yongnieur, A Treatise on the Bane of Vice (London: L. Pennington, 1787), 41.


33. Todd, Physical Culture and the Body Beautiful, 239-240.


35. See, for example, Nathan Allen, Physical Culture in Amherst College (Lowell: 1873). Dudley Allen Sargent’s title at Harvard when hired in 1879 was “Director of Physical Culture.”


39. Interview with Yvonne Lanne Rubid, San Francisco, California, 22 May 2012.

40. Author’s memory, confirmed by Terry Todd.

41. Ivo Jirasek and Peter Hosicker, “Philosophical Kinanthropology (Philosophy of Physical Culture, Philosophy of Sport) in Slavonic Countries: The Culture, the Writers, and the Current Directions," Journal of the Philosophy of Sport 37 (2012): 253-270. See also the fascinating article published in the journal Kinesiology, by a group of Croatian scholars who found that the following terms are now being used on both sides of the Atlantic to describe our departments: sport, sport science, exercise science, human performance, movement science, human kinetics, kinesiology, kinanthropology, anthropometrics, anthropokinetics, anthropokinesiology, health, physical education, physical culture, recreation, leisure studies, and so on. Zrinko Custonja, Dragan Milanovic, and Goran Sporis, “Kinesiology in the Names of Higher Education Institutions in Europe and the United States of America,” Kinesiology-International Journal of Fundamental and Applied Kinesiology (Croatia) 41, no. 2 (2009): 136-146.


43. Outside UT, a number of other universities now offering classes and/or degree programs that include physical culture. Susan Zieff uses the term in the title of her “Research Group for Studies in Physical Culture, Sport and Education,” at San Francisco State; and the University of Rhode Island offers a Masters in Cultural Studies in Sport and Physical Culture. There is also a second journal now in the field called Physical Culture & Sport: Studies and Research.


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