

**"EARTH, TO RATTERMAN"
AND OTHER HALL OF FAME ARTIFACTS
Pro Football's Heritage Preserved in Canton**

By Joe Horrigan and Bob Carroll
(Written in 1988)

"A sharp-tongued little guy named Richard P. McCann is conducting the world's greatest scavenger hunt," led a November 9, 1962 UPI wire story.

McCann, the article explained, was the director of the then-under-construction Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio, and his hunt was for mementos of pro football's past.

In the 25 years since, the twice-expanded football museum has added thousands of memorable -- and sometimes trivial -- gridiron artifacts. Everything from Jim Thorpe's blanket to Super Bowl rings.

JUST FOR THE FUN OF IT

No doubt many of the 200,000 fans who visit the Pro Football Hall of Fame each year expect to find only a few dust-covered footballs along with the well-publicized bronze busts of enshrinees such as Thorpe, Bronko Nagurski, Roger Staubach, O.J. Simpson, and George Halas. They are surprised and delighted to find such odd-ball exhibits as:

A life-size plaster replica of passer Sammy Baugh's right hand.

The world's tallest trophy -- 22' 10" (originally earned by Harold Carmichael -- 6' 7" -- one of the world's tallest pass receivers).

A colorful "franchise chart," showing every past and present NFL franchise -- even little La Rue, Ohio, a town so small it had no football field.

A football art collection of paintings and photos by some of America's foremost sports artists.

The wrist band on which Baltimore Colts "emergency quarterback" Tom Matte jotted down his plays for a 1965 playoff game.

The shoe built specially for New Orleans kicker Tom Dempsey's deformed right foot with which he booted a record 63-yard field goal to beat Detroit in the last second.

The ice tongs used by Red Grange while working his way through college.

A duplicate of the Chicago Bear fullback Bronko Nagurski's huge Hall of Fame ring -- size 19 1/2!

THE PEN IS MIGHTIER

The most historically-significant item, according to Hall of Fame executive Don Smith, is the yellowed expense sheet of the 1892 Allegheny Athletic Association -- pro football's "birth certificate." It documents football's first paid player with the revealing entry: "Game performance bonus to W. Heffelfinger for playing (cash) \$500." For a single game on November 12, 1892, William "Pudge" Heffelfinger, a former Yale All-American guard, was paid more than the average American wage-earner took home in a year.

Pro football was off to a lucrative start, but many lean years lay ahead. These are amply detailed in the Hall's memorabilia.

Not all of the enshrined artifacts have the "smoking-gun," historical significance of the Heffelfinger paper. Many are there simply because they're interesting, unusual, or just plain odd.

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Case in point: a contract dated October 19, 1910, between Coach Ben E. Clarke and John Davis, promoter of a local Canton team called the Simpson Tigers. Clarke promised "to devote two nights a week to practice and do all in his power to make a winning team." For doing his "all," Clarke was to receive the "stipulated sum of \$2 a week and a jersey."

The Spalding Official Football Guide for 1910 lists the best "full fashioned" Spalding jersey at \$4, but Davis was obviously no spendthrift, and it's more likely Clarke ended up with a Spalding model advertised at \$1.25.

As meager as Clarke's \$2 salary was, it was twice the amount needed in 1926 to purchase the National League franchise of the Duluth (Minnesota) Kelleys. After losing money for three years, Kelley's owner M.C. Gebert was anxious to get out of the football business. According to a notarized bill of sale in the Hall's library-research center, Gebert unloaded his franchise on Messrs. Ole Haugrud and Dewey Scanlon for the sum of one dollar and the assumption of "liabilities." He didn't even ask for a jersey.

To capitalize on their investment, Haugrud and Scanlon went out and hired Stanford fullback Ernie Nevers, one of the nation's most famous players. Next, they changed the team name to "Eskimos," dressed them in white jerseys with black igloos on the fronts, one of which is on display at the Hall. Then, with Nevers as the attraction, they set out on a five-month, 29-game, cross-country tour that netted all a fine profit.

When fans stopped coming out to see the Eskimos, Haugrud negotiated a unique deal with the NFL, shutting down the team but giving him the right to bid on the "next" Minnesota franchise. In 1961, he exercised his option and purchased 10% of the stock of the expansion-Minnesota Vikings and became the Vikes' first chairman of the board. Not bad for a \$1 investment!

Another early-day NFL club unable to survive the league's lean years was the Providence (Rhode Island) Steam Roller. A "home movie" of some of their 1928 games, played in a Providence bicycle-racing arena, is the oldest reel of pro football film in the Hall's extensive film library. Their most innovative step, however, came on November 3, 1929, when -- under temporary flood lights -- they played the NFL's first night game.

When the lights were permanently installed the next season, management apparently tried to defray the cost at the expense of the players. According to his 1930 contract, on file at the Hall, Steam Roller running back Tony Latone was paid \$125 "for all league daylight games" but only "sixty percent of that sum for all league flood light games."

OUTRAGEOUS AND A MILE HIGH

Members of the 1960-61 Denver Broncos probably wanted all their games played at night WITHOUT lights. It wasn't their less-than-dazzling skills that caused the athletes' embarrassment; it was the hideous uniforms they were forced to wear. Drab brown and white hand-me-downs from a defunct college all-star bowl, the Broncos' garb was only dull to the knees, but then came clownlike, vertically-striped socks that set fans snickering from coast to coast.

When new coach Jack Faulkner took over in 1962, one of his first moves was to hold a public ceremony at the club's practice field before 5,000 witnesses. The players trotted around the field, waving the infamous socks over their heads. Then, to the cheers of the crowd, the offensive stockings were tossed onto a raging bonfire. Thanks to a Denver photographer with an appreciation for history, a single wrong-striped pair escaped the flames to provide the Hall of Fame with one of its most amusing exhibits.

THEIR PERSONAL SUNDAY BEST

Most uniform changes reflect aesthetic tastes, but sometimes they're for practical reasons. In 1952, the NFL instituted numbering uniforms by player position: ends became 80s and 90s, tackles 70s, and so on. This made it easier for fans and officials to spot which players belonged where.

Although Cleveland Browns quarterback Otto Graham was willing to give up his famous "60" for his assigned "14," he apparently wanted to keep the same jersey. The old number was peeled off and the new number applied, but even after numerous trips to the laundry, the original digits are still visible. Retired to the Hall's Enshrinee Memento Room, the jersey proclaims Graham's renowned number -- 6140!

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Hall of Fame center Jim Otto wore his name as his number, receiving special permission to wear 00, or "Aught-Oh."

Several displayed jerseys bear enshrinees' names in more traditional form. In 1960, the newly-created American Football League began including player's names above their numbers to assist TV watchers. The numbers worn by the new league's budding stars were unfamiliar to viewers and the fledgling organization desperately needed to make fans aware of them. The established NFL soon adopted the practice.

Doak Walker, Detroit's do-everything halfback in the early 1950s, recently contributed a personalized memento to the Hall's ever-growing collection -- his specially modified, high-top kicking shoe. Because he so often had to switch from being the Lions' star halfback to being the team's star placekicker -- all in the few seconds between plays -- Walker had a top-to-sole zipper sewn into his kicking shoe. His "quick-change" shoe proves that, even in pro football, necessity is the mother of invention.

CALLING ALL QUARTERBACKS!

But sometimes invention is an orphan. The Hall exhibits a variety of helmets, some belonging to famous players, others merely representative of particular eras. The most unusual headgear, the brainchild of Cleveland fans John Campbell and George Sarles, was donated to the Hall in 1985 by Campbell.

In the early 1950s, Campbell and Sarles noted the game delays caused by Cleveland coach Paul Brown's system of sending in plays via "messenger" guards. They decided the messages could be delivered quicker and clearer by radio and set to work building a proto-type "Radio Helmet," containing a tiny transistor receiver. On the sideline, a coach with a transmitter could tell his quarterback exactly what play to call.

Coach Brown was enthusiastic and, after a training camp demonstration, agreed to test the helmet under game conditions. On September 15, 1956, the Browns met the Lions in an exhibition game at the Akron, Ohio, Rubber Bowl. Quarterback George Ratterman, the successor to Graham, wore the new secret weapon and the transmitter was concealed behind a wooden light post.

The Lions were confused when the Browns ran their plays without benefit of the famed messenger guards. The unexpectedly quickened pace helped Cleveland move the ball well in the first half. At the intermission, Detroit coach Buddy Parker sent an assistant to scout the Browns' bench and the transmitter was discovered. The Lions' offense rallied to win the game in the second half. Meanwhile, an angry Lion defense concentrated on Ratterman, twice knocking off his helmet and, according to inventor Campbell, "pounding the inside with their fists, attempting to break up the radio."

When the Browns opened their regular season at Chicago against the Cardinals on September 30, the equipment was given a second trial by ordeal. This time, the opponents were ready for the high-tech Browns. The Cards had installed their own version of the Radio Helmet, a less sophisticated apparatus dependent upon a cable around the perimeter of the field. Because the Chicago quarterback had to run over and practically stand on top of the cable to get his signal, the Cardinal's radio did little more than slow down their own offense. But the cable proved valuable on defense, disrupting the Browns' radio with static. The teams stumbled to a 9-7 Cardinal victory.

A final test for the Radio Helmet came on October 14 when the New York Giants visited Cleveland. A few minutes before the end of a very bad first half for his team, Coach Brown ordered Ratterman to switch helmets. He suspected -- and Giant general manager Ray Walsh later verified -- New York had its own radio receiver on its bench. "We were able to get the Browns' signals better than they could," laughed Walsh. After hearing the Cleveland play, a Giant player would pass the word to the New York defense.

The next week, NFL Commissioner Bert Bell announced he was banning the use of radio-equipped helmets, citing "fan disapproval." He added that "even Paul Brown" was "happy to go along with the ban." Small wonder! The Browns lost every time they used their Radio Helmet.

Nearly every memento or exhibit at the Pro Football Hall of Fame has its own amusing or inspiring anecdote.

Little did Dick McCann realize when he started his "scavenger hunt" a quarter century ago, that the result would be the entertaining attraction some call "Pro Football's Smithsonian."