From Perry Street to Mt .Parnassus

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Glaring headlines in the daily press revealed recently that in a short time the grand old Steele High building will be sold and no doubt dismantled. The removal of this old landmark in a way highlights the passing of an era but the memories engendered at Steele will forever be a fragrant part of a glorious past, a past which saw the origin of the “Legend of the Steele Youth.” Yes there is a melodious spirit of zeal, energy and enthusiasm about the massive stones of Steele, a spirit which belongs to all sons and daughters of Steele.

Paul Laurence Dunbar, poetic genius that he was, and a graduate of Steele High school has best expressed the affection for the old school when he said: “because you loved me I have much achieved. Had you despised me, then I must have failed. But since I knew you trusted and believed I could not disappoint you so I prevailed.

This evening in “Sports Memories” I am going back to a half century to a son of Steele who belongs to the class of 1895 and who today carries on as a dentist in Granville Ohio, licking County, that new Eden, so to speak, where Mount Parnassus, Sugar loaf and the raccoon bestow their benedictions upon all who come to the hills of licking.

The son of Steele to whom I refer is Dr. Jacob Rohrer, sportsman, coach, athlete, and scholar Dr. Rohrer is a native Daytonian and his career is an indelible Chapter in the “Legend of the Steele Youth.” Dr. Rohrer spent eight years at the old Perry Street grade school and then entered Central high school at Fourth and Wilkinson Street where he spent his freshman and sophomore years.

Central high school had served our city well since the spring of 1850, but Dayton was expanding and a new high school was needed. That need was forthcoming when the new Steele high was opened in 1892. Here Dr. Rohrer spent his junior and senior years graduating as stated in the class of 1895.

The principle of Steele was Charles B Stivers and Capt. Stivers was a monument of affection in the hearts of thousands of Dayton boys and girls. He was a tall, grave, slender figure, hands clasped behind his back or pulling at his gray beard. Through the halls the walked with unhurried gait stopping to speak to this girl or that boy with a kindly twinkle, or a slow, doubtful shake of the head. Capt. Charles B Stivers was indeed a central figure.

Capt. Stivers was a devoted sports follower and he took great pride in coach Lou Ball’s football team, a team by the way of which Jake Rohrer was a member. The team practiced and played at the YMCA athletic Park. High school days were now over and to the University of Cincinnati to study dentistry went Jake. His love for football continued and with it he earned a place on the varsity. It was now that he met with a novel experience when he was equipped with the best football togs. When he was a member of the Steele varsity all players brought their own equipment.

Jake Rohrer played on the University varsity at Cincinnati in 1897 and in 1898 and the record shows that in those two years only one defeat was chalked against them and that by the Carlisle Indians. Score 6 to 2.

In 1897 the University of Cincinnati took the first cross-country trip of any football team. On new years day 1897 the University of Cincinnati met and defeated the southern athletic club at New Orleans and on the following Monday they defeated the University of Louisiana at Baton Rouge. After leaving college, Dr. Rohrer coached and played with the young men’s McKinley club for five years.

And now became a great thrill for the new dentist. Possibly nostalgia may explain in part. In 1904 and 1905 Dr. Rohrer not only practiced dentistry in Dayton but he returned to the Steele High as football coach, and Steele high in red and black never lost a game under Dr. Rohrer’s coaching.

Football 50 years ago was far different than at present. Those were the days of mass formations with guards and tackles back. Supreme trickery in 1904 was the end-around play. The quarterback handled every pass from center and then relayed it to the ball carriers. The forward pass was then unknown and touchdowns counted only five point.

Dr. Rohrer coach his 1904 team to nine victories with 207 points and only seven for the opponents. The schedule at the end of the season said, Steele 12 Miami athletic club 0. Steele 28 Springfield 0, Steele 20 Xenia 0. Steele 35 Piqua 6. Steele 6 Chillicothe 0. Steele 51 Columbus North 0. Steele 27 Springfield 0. Steele 12 Cincinnati Walnut Hills 0. Steele 18 Piqua 0. Little wonder then That many alumni consider Dr. Rohrer’s Steele team of 1904 as the greatest team in the history of the school up to that time. And there is no doubting the influence of 1904 upon such players as Jackson Keefer, Ollie Klee, Tuffy Brooks, Clarence Fox, Dick Dobleit and many others who were privileged to wear the red and black-the champion colors of Leo in bronze.

Whether or not the 1904 football team of Steele takes precedence over the great elevens of 1899 and 1900 that preceded it, is something that cannot be determined today but the club that Mason Lytle Captained through a successful campaign must rank along with the teams of 1909 and those that graced the Main Street school under the coaching of Roland Bevan.

Mason Lytle, captain of the team placed credit for its success on the fumble-proof character of its play. Eddie Graef played quarterback and there is no record to show that he had a single fumble the entire season. Graef caught Joe Kerns passes from center and placed them in the hands of the ends, guards, tackles or backs without a single slip in nine full games. I might mention that all players were eligible to carry the ball.

Columbus North and the polar bears were swamped in 1904. 51-0. The strong team from the capital city had defeated Steele in 1901, and in 1903, and it was of course, sweet revenge to see the total score roll past the half century mark. Everson, Welliver, and John Turner scored three touchdowns that afternoon. Ed Stewart at tackle scored one as did Herb Allen, halfback Adolph Smith, Mason Lytle, halfback and big Ed Rogers, **the plunging** fullback. Herb Allen converted six points after touchdown with his accurate toe.

The rules provided that the ball be punted out from the point where the touchdown drive crossed the goal line and the try for point made from the position where the punt was caught. Many placekicks for points were made from difficult angles in those days.

Other members of that team were George Crowl, Wellmore B. Turner, Ben Shofstall, Victor Rowe, and Wm. Powers. Alfred “Swifty” Frank was manager of that 1904 team. Swifty Frank later played college football at Amherst, Joe Kearns played at Michigan, Wellmore Turner at the University of Colorado and Ed Rogers at Dennison and Pennsylvania. Rogers who now is in the law in North Carolina returned to Dennison for commencement June 1951. “Leather” they called him and there are many in North Dayton who will tell you about Ed Rogers as he ran from Kemp Street to Steele High to keep in Condition. His companion on the jaunts was Walter McGrew another son of Steele and one who excelled in track. Is

Yes, in "Sports Memories" I find that Dr. Jacob Rohrer produced two great teams at Steele in 1904 and 1905 and for it is he received no pay. As a reward for his two championship teams he was presented with a large Morris Chain. This same chain, with the halo of "Sports Memories" about it is now in Granville Ohio and the past few years occupied a select place in the room of Dr. Rohrer’s grandson, Pete Hazlitt. This is at Kappa, Sigma, Gamma Xi out as.

Just a stone's throw east on Broadway from Kappa Sigma, I see the office of Dr. Rohrer the same son of Steele 1895 now long a resident Granville, he carries on in his chosen profession but back of all this is another “Sports Memory” about coach Jake.

After his successful years at Steele with “Play-it-Pays” the good doctor moved on to Dennison University in Granville Ohio where he coached all sports in 1906 and 1907. He was physical director as well, having five classes a day besides coaching basketball, track, baseball and football, in the latter sport there was extreme rivalry with Otterbein, Ohio Wesleyan, Case, Washington and Jefferson and Wooster. Our good coach and Dr. had the true competitive spirit which he acquired no doubt at Steele under coach Lou Ball and Capt. Charles B Stivers. The splendid teams of that era have left a lasting imprint on “Sports Memories” in Dayton. They are a part of the legends of the steel youth.

As stated, the reverberating halls of Steele must soon give way to modern hands of progress, but there will be hundreds who will regret its disappearance, but as someone has said: “Please give me the patients to accept that which cannot be changed. Give me the courage to change that which can and should be changed. And above all give me the wisdom to know which is which.”

As stated, the legend of the Steele youth bows to the hand of progress and of course there can be no progress without incentive. I know that Dr. Rohrer’s class, Steele 1895, would subscribe. The Steele of his day pointed the way to greater days in sports, recreation and play.

Dr. Rohrer has not forgotten this because Jake, as he likes to be called, plays golf several times a week and with a score in the 80s and that at his advanced age. As he stands on the 18th tee and looks southward to Mount Parnassus his “Sports Memories” must take him back to that autumn day in 1906 when he came to Dennison and farther still when he started as football coach at Steele high in 1904. And we might repent again with Paul Laurence Dunbar: “Because you loved me I have much achieved. Had you despised me, then I must have failed; but since I know you trusted and believed, I could not disappoint you, so I prevailed.

Robert Worst