Athletic Board

Top Row: St. John, Wilke, Trautman, Rover.
Middle Row: Hoyer, Trott, Bell.
Bottom Row: Chaffee, Brumley, French, Keys, Morris.
Mementos of Old House

Editor, The Monthly:

Columbus.

The house that stood on the University campus, just north of Fifteenth Ave., was not imposing in size or shape but it was the "brain center" for the athletic program of a growing University.

That house saw the beginning and early growth of many of the nation's great intercollegiate and intramural athletic programs. Within its rooms men of vision made plans and worked to bring those plans to fruition.

When I passed by the old Athletic House recently, I found it nearly leveled to the ground, most of the timbers hauled away and only the rubble of wreckage remaining. From the old brick walk, the steps so many great had trod led only to dust and debris.

It was natural for me to take a last photo of what I saw and to gather a few small mementos of the occasion. A workman kindly obliged and snapped me with these bits of wood, part of the hand railing from the bannister support. A few of the pieces I will distribute among L. W. St. (Sant) John, Miss Caroline (Carrie) Dudley, and Dr. John W. (Doc) Wilke.

The front door knob, gripped by more than three decades of athletic greats, I have kept for myself.

Those of us who grew up with Ohio State athletics will never forget the old Athletic House. Within its walls was born and nurtured the Ohio State tradition of clean sportsmanship and an athletic program second to none in the nation.

A. J. (Spike) Drigan
The Athletic House

It really had three careers on two different sites, but most old Ohio Staters will remember it as "the Athletic House" (from 1913 until 1931). It stood on the campus facing High Street opposite 16th Avenue.

My friend Howard E. Wentz has such detailed memories of OSU athletics that he has completed a 40,000-word manuscript on the subject. In the early 1920s he lived just a block from this house and spent every spare moment here and with the teams. His interest has never flagged. He has seen more than 225 games played in Ohio Stadium, many of them as a supervisor of portals. Most of my information comes from him.

The house originally was built in 1883, south of the Oval, about where Hagerty Hall now stands. It was the home of famous physics professor Thomas Mendenhall. About 1900 it was moved to the High Street site and became the home of Prof. Benjamin Thomas. "Prexy" Thompson's house (seen at left in my sketch) stood a short distance south. Ohio Field was immediately north.

In 1913, the year OSU entered the Big Ten, the house was taken over for Athletic Department headquarters. L. W. St. John, athletic director, his assistant, George Trautman, and secretary, Carey Dudley, had offices on the second floor. Dr. J. W. Wilce, football coach, used the living room for skull practice. The old dining room was the locker room. "Doc" Gurney, trainer and originator of Gurney's Liniment, used the kitchen and a first floor den.

The whole house smelled of the liniment, according to Howard, who has loaned me a tribute to that wonderful product written by his cousin, Theodore Lilley: "Gurney's Liniment is Ohio athletic history in liquid state and it evokes precious memories of Chic Harley, Pete Stinchcomb, the Workmen brothers and a host of old gridiron boys. Gurney's Liniment stiffened the line and ignited the backfield. A mighty morale-builder, it added the punch that insured extra yardage. It put the get-up-and-go in the Scarlet and Gray."

Another cousin was Al Lilley who, in 1890, became OSU's first football coach. During his tenure Ohio State was to play Kenyon at Columbus. Kenyon was offered a choice of 60 per cent of the gate receipts or $85 cash. They cautiously chose the cash but must have regretted it for receipts came to $1134. (They total considerably more these days.) Increasing popularity of football with paying spectators made possible a wing, seen at the rear of the house, for a shower room.

In 1931 the Athletic Department offices were moved to the new Men's Physical Education Building near the stadium. Then the old house served as an "annex" for the Music Department until 1949 when it was razed. The third building, just glimpsed at right, was the old Armory.