

Photography

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Studio sepia photograph pasted on cardboard of a standing man in circus costume carrying a dark ball with a weight (245 Lb) inscribed on one arm stretched above his head. The background is composed of hangings, fireplace, console, plant and vase. On the back, a handwritten inscription indicates that this is Louis Cyr in 1890. The photographer's stamp is on the cardboard at the bottom of the photo in mauve.

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Artiste / Auteur Labonte, Solomon

Medium and Support silver print, paper

Historical context


This photograph depicts Louis Cyr, an exhibition athlete known for his strength. Taken in 1890 at the Solomon/Labonte photographic studios, it shows Louis Cyr in costume, carrying a 245-lb. ball on one arm.

Born Cyprien-Noé on October 10, 1863, in Saint-Cyprien-de-Napierville, Montérégie, he grew up in a family of seventeen children. As the eldest, he cut short his schooling to support the household by working on the family farm and as a lumberjack.

To improve their lot, the Cyr family immigrated to Lowell, Massachusetts in 1878. Louis Cyr worked in a factory, where he met his future wife, Méлина Comtois, a native of Saint-Jean-de-Matha. After a few years, the family moved to Montreal in 1883. At the same time, young Louis was hired by the town of Sainte-Cunégonde to serve on the police force until 1885. Annexed in 1905 and now part of the Little Burgundy district in southwest Montreal, Sainte-Cunégonde was plagued by serious delinquency problems.

At a time when feats of strength were a popular spectacle, Louis Cyr toured with various circuses and became a legend, taking part in numerous competitions. In 1885 and 1892, he won the titles of strongest man in Canada and world champion, respectively.

Suffering from a kidney infection, Louis Cyr retired in 1900 and took part in his last competition in 1906. He died on November 10, 1912 at his daughter's home in Montreal, and is buried in Saint-Jean-de-Matha, his home of the last years.



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