

JOHN V. CRUM

# THE PALIMPSEST

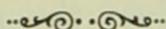
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## John Van Fleet Crum

On May 25, 1895, at Berkeley Oval in New York City, John V. Crum of the State University of Iowa surprised the East by flashing to the tape a winner in both the 100 yard and 220 yard dashes of the Intercollegiate Association meet. And in ten seconds and twenty-two seconds respectively.

Yale, Harvard, Princeton, Pennsylvania *et al.* had heard of a young sprinter in the West who was coming to the Mott Haven games with a remarkable record for fast running, but they were confident that inaccurate timers had overrated the boy's ability. Yale said he couldn't beat Richards, their star performer; Pennsylvania knew that he couldn't defeat Ramsdell, who had carried off the honors in the dashes a year earlier; Harvard hoped he could, but doubted it. And when the lone representative of the "cornstalk univer-

sity", as some Eastern writers dubbed Iowa, had lowered the colors of all the Eastern universities in the dust, Yale protested as did Pennsylvania. Crum did not run as they did in the East, besides he was a professional, and his name was not Crum at all. These protests, however, availed little except to deprive Crum of his rightfully won medals for a few weeks while the officials investigated and cleared him of all charges of professionalism.

John V. Crum was born in Bedford, Iowa, on September 3, 1872, the son of William E. and Harriet Van Fleet Crum. His father was a prominent lawyer and banker who had been graduated in law at the University in 1869. Inasmuch as Iowa City had been the home of his parents before they moved to Bedford and his grandmother, Ellen Van Fleet, still lived there, it was only natural that young Crum should select the University of Iowa as his school.

He entered the College of Liberal Arts in the fall of 1890. Crum was a modest, unassuming lad who soon became popular with his classmates. As a freshman he gave little indication of that speed which was later to bring him and his University national recognition. As a fellow classman put it: "When Crum was a freshman, no one ever thought he could run."

Nor did he show much more promise as a

sprinter in his sophomore year, but he kept doggedly at the task of perfecting himself on the track. He won his first race at the University in 1892, a 220 yard dash, inasmuch as Henry C. McCluskey, University champion at that time, was ill. In his junior year Crum ably seconded McCluskey at Des Moines in the Iowa State meet. It was as a senior, however, that he began to display the marvelous speed which carried him to the pinnacle of intercollegiate racing fame. On a memorable October afternoon in 1893, at the Fall Field Day games of the University, he began a series of thirty-seven victories in the 100 and 220 yard dashes.

Crum also played halfback on the football team at the University in the fall of 1892 and again in 1893, and contributed to several victories by his brilliant long runs. At the insistence of the Athletic Association, however, he gave up football to perfect himself on the track.

In the spring of 1894, under the careful training of Edward W. Moulton, Crum easily won the 100 yard and the 220 yard dashes and the 220 yard hurdle race at the home meet, and then captured first in both the dashes at the State meet in ten and one-fifth and twenty-three seconds respectively. The fatigue of these races was augmented by an all-night ride to Chicago, where,

the next day, he won the 100 yard dash in ten and one-fifth seconds and the 220 yard dash in twenty-two and two-fifths seconds at the first Western Intercollegiate Association meet.

The fall of 1894 found Crum back at the University enrolled in the College of Law. At the fall field meet he won first place in the 50 yard, the 100 yard, and the 220 yard dashes and in the 220 yard hurdle race. He also won first in both dashes at the Central Association championship meet at St. Louis in ten seconds and twenty-six seconds respectively.

The track season of 1895 began with the Iowa-Grinnell meet on May 18th, in which Crum won the 50 yard dash in five and two-fifths seconds, the 100 yard dash in ten seconds, the 220 yard dash in twenty-two and two-fifths seconds, and the 220 yard hurdles in twenty-six and one-fifth seconds. Between that date and June 15th, he participated in twenty-five races in Iowa, New York, and Chicago, and won them all. On the strength of this extraordinary performance he was invited to represent the New York Athletic Club in the Labor Day games at Bergen Point, New Jersey, and to meet the fleet representatives from the London Athletic Club in the international meet in New York on September 21, 1895.

Two well filled scrapbooks of clippings from



Iowa, Chicago, and New York papers, from *Harper's Weekly* and other magazines, kept by Crum and carefully preserved by his family, tell the story of the many triumphs and final defeat of the Iowa wonder during the year 1895.

The twentieth annual field meet of the Intercollegiate Association of Amateur Athletes of America, commonly known as the Mott Haven games, was held in the Berkeley Oval at Morris Heights, New York City. Saturday, May 25, 1895, was an ideal day for any sort of outdoor sport and Morris Heights never looked more attractive. A gentle breeze swept over the emerald field, but it was not strong enough to interfere with the races. The track was lightning fast.

Bedecked in the colors of their favorite colleges, between four and five thousand spectators filled the grandstand, the bleachers, and the adjacent bluffs. There were several drays and coaching parties on the bluffs and along the lower field. Pennsylvania followers, pinning their hopes on Ramsdell, made the most noise.

Crum was the center of attention. He had come out for the trial heats on Friday, the day before, with a hotel blanket wrapped around him and a close fitting yellow cap pulled down tight on his head. This cap had become a talisman for he had not lost a race since he began to wear it.

When he tossed aside his blanket he stood revealed as "a pleasant looking fellow, dark skinned, of medium height, and very muscular." His running suit was tight fitting and of black material, relieved only by an old gold sash over one shoulder and an old gold S. U. I. monogram on his chest. This monogram was mistaken by many as a dollar sign until it was explained that it stood for State University of Iowa.

He got off to a bad start in the first trial heat, but soon caught his man, and flashed to the tape so easily a winner that the knowing ones at once recognized the fact that the rumors about his speed had not been overstated. In each succeeding heat he clearly demonstrated that he was practically alone in his class among the starters. Crum's style of running was at once noticed. He swung his arms almost stiff from side to side as he ran, not directly back and forth, as was the custom in the East.

It was after his display of speed in the trials on Friday that his competitors lodged the protest against him on the grounds that he was a professional and his name was not Crum. One wag said, "He's a professional all right, for he has the dollar sign on his chest."

During the trial heats, a tall angular student from Yale, standing close to the ropes on Berke-

ley Oval, asked Crum, "Do you have a nice class of fellows out there in Iowa?" John V. assured him that Iowa students were pretty fair fellows, all things considered. Then the Easterner inquired, "Do you have a track to practise on?" "Dad" Moulton, hearing the question, wheeled around and said, "Oh, no! Out in Iowa, they race between corn rows."

The semi-finals in the one hundred yard dash left William Richards of Yale, E. S. Ramsdell of Pennsylvania, H. S. Patterson of Williams, and John V. Crum of Iowa to compete. The four men were called to their marks, and, when the pistol was fired, Crum made a most awkward start, getting away some eight feet behind the field. At fifty yards he still trailed the Easterners. Then slowly but surely his muscular legs carried him up to his opponents, and at eighty yards they were only a shade in front of him. At ninety yards, the four sprinters were almost on a straight line. Then Crum, with a final burst of speed, flashed past his rivals and breasted the tape six inches ahead of Richards. Ramsdell, faltering in the last few strides, took third. Time, ten seconds flat.

It was in the 220 yard run, however, that the young man from Iowa showed his remarkable sprinting. The disappointed University of Penn-

sylvania delegation brightened up as the final heat was called, for Ramsdell usually was better in the longer distance, and the Quakers felt he would turn the trick in this race. The Yale men were confident that Richards would win for trainer Mike Murphy had assured them that his star pupil would do close to twenty-one and one-fifth seconds if the race was red hot.

As usual Crum was the last man away from the mark, but at 100 yards he had the field in hand, and held his lead safe down the stretch at a heart-breaking clip. Unfortunately there was blundering in the timing. Charley Reed, with an injured hand, failed to stop his watch as Crum broke the tape. Bob Stoll, who was one of the most reliable timers in the country, caught the winner in twenty-one and three-fifths seconds. Mort Bishop, the third timer, caught the race in twenty-two seconds even. Such experts as "Sparrow" Robinson, Fred Stone, Mickey Finn, and "Dad" Moulton all tolled twenty-one and three-fifths seconds. The rules, however, made it imperative in such a situation for the judges to announce the slower time of the two official timers — twenty-two seconds. It was the general opinion of trainers and sports writers that, except for the accident to the third timekeeper, Crum would have been credited with a world's record.

It was Crum's custom to telegraph the outcome of important races to his parents. "New York, 5:45 P. M. To W. E. Crum, Bedford, Iowa", sang over the wires. "Won Both Races", was the laconic message. As soon as the welcome news was received, the local newspaper issued a special edition which was delivered to all parts of the city by boys on bicycles. The front page carried a banner headline, "Blue Grass Johnny Wins", with pictures of two roosters crowing in exultation. As the people of Bedford learned the joyful news, they began to assemble on Main Street, as if by common consent, until in an incredibly short space of time a vast number of men, women, and children had congregated to celebrate the occasion.

A huge bonfire, the blare of a brass band, the firing of anvils, and the din of many types of noisemakers furnished an outlet for the pride and satisfaction of the home folks in the victory of Johnny Crum. The throng paraded to the home of Crum's parents and serenaded the family. Speeches were made, the crowd gave the University yell, and improvised the following: "Hi! Hi! Hi! Rah! Rah! Rum! Champion of America! John V. Crum!"

When Crum returned to Iowa City he was given a rousing reception. A delegation of a

thousand students and townspeople besieged the home of the venerable Mrs. Ellen Van Fleet and demanded her grandson. The boy had to be forced by the committee in charge to come out. Finally he yielded and as he stepped out on the porch, a mighty shout went up.

He walked down the wide steps and entered an open carriage. A hundred willing hands seized the ropes attached to the carriage and the procession paraded down the street to the business section of the city. A band led the way, the University cannon boomed a welcome, and skyrocketes and roman candles filled the sky with colored balls of fire. The ball team sported a white-tented wagon decorated with Chinese lanterns and bearing a legend, "Our Johnnie, the Pride of the West". Banners and transparencies of old gold carried sentiments that would have "stirred the heart of an Egyptian mummy."

The procession moved to the post office corner and paused. Will Larrabee, as an Athletic Association leader, presided. Judge Martin J. Wade expressed his joy over the enthusiasm manifested. He predicted the defeat of the English champions if Crum met them, and declared that the energy, pluck, and determination, thus far shown by John V. Crum, if continued through life, meant perpetual success. Chancellor Emlin McClain of the

College of Law declared that it was a time for happiness and festivity, not speech making, and proceeded to lead the crowd in the University yell — "Haw! Haw! Haw! Hi! Hi! Hi! Hawkeye! Hawkeye! S. U. I.!" Dean Amos N. Currier of the College of Liberal Arts thought the time was ripe for an appeal for support of the new athletic park movement, and spoke feelingly on that subject.

Then Larrabee introduced Crum as the champion of America. As he stood up, a loud cheer lasting five minutes greeted him. Students shouted "Crum! Crum! His father's son! He went to New York and away he run!" Others yelled "Crum! Crum! He took the bun! He went to New York and see what he done!"

In a voice trembling with emotion, Crum said, "Friends, let me thank you one and all for your kind assistance. The track team, as you know, is running no bank just at present, and had you not contributed liberally, I could not have gone to New York. It gave me great pleasure to win there; but my joy was multiplied many times over when I learned that it had been such a pleasure to you. When I see what you have done in my honor to-night, I feel as if I could run a hundred yards faster than ever in my life."

Crum's performance at the Mott Haven games

was so much of a surprise to the East that New York papers devoted columns to the young man from the University of Iowa. "Who is this man Crum, and where is the University of Iowa," queried a writer in the *New York Press*, "and why weren't these questions asked before by the proper committee of the Intercollegiate Athletic Association, so that we would have been spared the unpleasant sight of this undergraduate of a prairie-dog and grasshopper institution carrying off two first prizes from Yale, Harvard, Princeton and the University of Pennsylvania?"

"We are sure that if the proper committee had done its duty and found out who Crum was, this never, never would have happened. . . . What are college lawyers for except to keep Crums out of such contests to save the public and post-graduate mind the shock of seeing first prizes going anywhere except where they belong; that is to say, to Yale, Harvard, Princeton and occasionally the University of Pennsylvania? It avails nothing now to make Crum out a professional on the ground, for instance, that the monogram 'U. S. I.' on his shirt looks like '\$'. The mischief is done. The public mind has been shocked. . . . It will be receptive of all sorts of heresies now. Next year it will be prepared to see a first prize sprinter from Kickapoo College or the University of Okla-

homa. The college lawyers were caught napping when they failed to hold the watch on Crum before receiving the entry from the University of Iowa.

"But what does Crum mean? Does he realize the height and depth and all-around dimensions of his iconoclasm? Does he remember that there have been sprinters out on the Harvard campus for more than 250 years, a quarter millennium? That at Yale athletics were nigh three-quarters of a century old when Nathan Hale went there, before the Revolutionary War? That Jonathan Edwards, Princeton's second president, forgot the damnation of infants unbaptized long enough to 'root' for the orange and black of old Nassau when George II was king, before the one-hoss shay was built, when Iowa was further beyond the ken of men than to-day are the rings of Saturn or the canals of Mars? That Benjamin Franklin watched with delighted approval his boys of old Penn take out the first eight-oared barge on the Schuylkill?

"Avaunt! Aroint thee, Crum! Go get thee to thy grasshoppery, thy prairie-doggery! And come not back!"

Newspapers in Chicago had given much space to Crum's exploits both before and after the Mott Haven games, and naturally the sports writers

heralded his coming to participate in the second meet of the Western Intercollegiate Association on June 2, 1895.

Loud cheers greeted the Iowa boy when he appeared on the field clad in the famous black track suit with the gold sash and monogram, and wearing the little yellow cap, soiled with the dust and sweat of battle. He had not fully recovered from the fatigue of the trip east, and was worrying over his forthcoming law examinations. Even the phlegmatic "Dad" Moulton was concerned about his pupil's condition. Nevertheless Crum won his preliminary heats in both the 100 and 220 with ease. Then he won the finals in both races in ten seconds and twenty-two seconds respectively, crossing the line two feet ahead of his nearest rival in the former and three feet ahead in the latter.

Crum returned to the University, passed his examinations successfully, and returned to Chicago to represent the Chicago Athletic Association in the meet with the University of California. There, on June 15th, he won the 100 yard dash in nine and four-fifths seconds and the 220 yard dash in twenty-two and two-fifths seconds.

Crum returned to his home at Bedford to begin the practice of law. He kept up his training, however, won a race at a national guard encamp-

ment in August, and then departed for Chicago to begin active training for the championship games of the Central Division of the Amateur Athletic Union scheduled for August 31, 1895. These games were open to amateurs attending college or residing in Colorado, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Ohio, Missouri, Montana, Wisconsin, Nebraska, and Wyoming.

Under the direction of Harry S. Cornish, trainer for the C. A. A., Crum practiced faithfully to improve his starting. "Dad" Moulton had not tried to change his style of starting, fearing that his protégé might injure himself in breaking away too fast during the cold days of spring. He relied on Crum's unique finishing power to win, and his confidence had not been misplaced.

On the day of the games interest centered in the dashes, and a huge crowd attended hoping to see Johnny Crum establish a new record. The Iowa wonder was the center of all eyes. He wore a white flannel shirt with the "C" and "Circle" of the C. A. A. on his breast, black trunks, and the famous little yellow cap. In his practice work, he trotted up and down the path, occasionally running off into the grass, curvetting and frisking about like a young colt.

The 100 yard dash was the first event on the

afternoon program. Four men responded to the call — G. D. Stuart of St. Albans, Lewis Holland of the West End Athletic Club of St. Louis, E. R. Perry and John V. Crum of the C. A. A. Crum won the race easily finishing three yards ahead of Stuart in ten seconds flat.

The contestants in the 220 yard dash were called to the track shortly before four o'clock. The entries were John Maybury of the University of Wisconsin, Lewis Holland of St. Louis, D. H. Jackson and John V. Crum of the C. A. A. The 220 yard course was around a turn with each lane staked and roped to prevent fouling. The track was firm and fast, ideal for a record-breaking contest.

The four men set beautifully at the first attempt and were given the pistol. To all appearances Maybury was quickest away, Crum delaying slightly and seeming to tangle in getting into his stride. He was well straightened out, however, in the first ten or twelve yards, and the pace was terrific as the four runners rounded the turn into the home stretch. As they settled into the straight-away Crum and his Wisconsin rival were exactly abreast. Maybury held the Iowan even for the next twenty yards, then Crum forged ahead. Maybury made a desperate effort, but Crum responded with one of those famous bursts of speed,

and crossed the line four yards ahead of Maybury who faltered near the finish.

This brilliant finish was cheered wildly by the crowd, and the timers at once compared watches. Each of the three men caught the race in twenty-one and four-fifths seconds, a new world's record for a 220 yard race around a turn. Cornish, who had been training Crum since August 15th, was elated. "Crum is the grandest runner the world has ever seen", he declared. "He is a wonder."

After walking to his dressing room Crum turned deathly sick, but soon rallied and left immediately to catch a 5:30 train for the East to participate in the Labor Day games at Bergen Point, New Jersey. When he arrived in New York City he was met by representatives of the New York Athletic Club who took him to the training quarters on Travers Island.

The next day, September 2, 1895, he took part in three 100 yard dashes, winning the first in ten and one-fifth seconds, losing the second in the same time to B. J. Wefers of Lawrence, Massachusetts, and winning the final from Wefers by six inches in a thrilling finish. Time, ten seconds. A large crowd witnessed the Labor Day games and Crum was greeted warmly by the Easterners who remembered his performances in the Mott Haven games the previous spring.

In the Labor Day games, Crum wrenched his left leg and it refused to yield to treatment. A swelling and a long blister developed on the back leg muscle some four inches above the knee. Despite the condition of his leg, those in charge of the group on Travers Island insisted on his participation in trial heats at Manhattan Field, New York, on September 7th. In the 100 yard dash, Wefers, to the surprise of many, defeated Crum by two feet in ten seconds. Crum did not run in the 220 as he wrenched his leg again in the former race.

In a letter on September 12th to a friend in Iowa City, Crum said: "Don't be surprised if you hear that I am beaten Saturday, because I sprained my leg and it is not well yet, but I hope the soreness will leave the muscle so that I can run."

The championship races of the American Athletic Union were held at Manhattan Field, New York City, on September 14, 1895. Crum limped after the preliminaries, but gamely came out for the finals. He and Wefers had clearly demonstrated their superiority in the dashes over the rest of the field in training at Travers Island, and a large crowd had assembled to see the Eastern speedster and the flash from Iowa perform. Crum wore the dingy yellow mascot cap, but despite this

aid, Wefers defeated him in the 100 yard dash in ten seconds flat, and the 220 yard dash in twenty-one and four-fifths seconds.

Crum was terribly cut up over his double defeat by Wefers but set about doggedly to get ready for the international games on September 21st. He missed the careful attention of "Dad" Moulton and Harry Cornish, for it is certain, had either been in charge of his training, Crum would not have been allowed to participate in the trials on September 7th, which caused further damage to his injured leg.

On the day of the international games, between ten and twelve thousand people gathered at Manhattan Field to witness America's star athletes meet the best from the British Isles. In the 100 yard dash, B. J. Wefers and John V. Crum, wearing the Mercury winged-foot emblem of the N. Y. A. C., represented the United States; Charles Alfred Bradley and H. G. Stevenson of the London Athletic Club represented Great Britain.

Wefers took the lead when the pistol was fired, with Bradley, Crum, and Stevenson coming at a terrific pace a yard behind, in the order named. Throughout the race they never faltered, and the four finished in a burst of speed that brought every spectator to his feet. Wefers broke the tape a yard in advance of Bradley with Crum

third. Time, nine and four-fifths seconds, equaling the world's record.

In the 220 yard race Wefers and Crum represented the United States while Gilbert Jordan and Alfred R. Downer were the British entrants. Again Wefers ran a magnificent race, breaking the tape in twenty-one and three-fifths seconds, and equalling the world's record. Crum was second.

Although the Americans captured every event from the Britons the cup of bitterness for John V. Crum and his friends was full. One week later, on September 28, 1895, he closed his career on the cinder track by winning the preliminary and final in the 120 yard dash in twelve seconds at the fall field meet of the N. Y. A. C. on Travers Island.

Crum returned to Bedford to engage in the practice of law. In the fall of 1896 he captained a football team, composed of former high school and college players and known as the Bedford Athletic Club Football Eleven. His team rolled up a total of 134 points against 10 for their opponents, closing the season without a defeat.

Having served as city attorney in 1896, a successful career in his chosen profession seemed assured. However, he had developed a very successful liniment for athletes which he named *John*

*V. Crum's Rub Out*; and, believing that business offered greater opportunities than the law, he moved to Des Moines early in 1897 to manufacture and distribute this product.

He was manufacturer, business manager, shipping clerk, and office force, all in one. Returning to his boarding house, he would often joke about having trouble with his factory hands that day. He wrote his own ads, and, due to the fact that he was nationally known among athletes and his liniment was well received, the business expanded rapidly.

One Saturday afternoon, late in April, he engaged in some strenuous exercise, and that night he complained of cramps in his stomach. On Sunday he felt no better, and that night he suffered severe pains. On Monday he was taken to the hospital, and from that time he grew steadily worse. On Friday he was operated on for appendicitis, apparently with success, for on Saturday he seemed much better. On Sunday evening, however, a change for the worse recalled doctors and nurses who labored with him all night. Early on Monday morning, May 3, 1897, the end came.

His death cast a gloom over the entire community. Messages of sympathy came to his parents from all over the country. His body was removed to Bedford where on May 5, 1897,

funeral services were held. Court adjourned and the bar and court officials attended in a body. His fraternities, Beta Theta Pi and Phi Delta Phi, each sent an official representative from Iowa City. All Bedford mourned, for every one in the city knew and admired John V. Crum.

One of the resolutions passed by the Taylor County Bar Association expressed the sentiments of all. "*Be it further Resolved*, That in the death of our brother, the Taylor County Bar has lost one of its most esteemed and respected members and our city one of its noblest citizens."

BRUCE E. MAHAN