



Ready, Set, Hike! The National Football League Comes to Pennsylvania

While it may be hard now to imagine a Fall Sunday in Pennsylvania without the Eagles or Steelers playing football, in the early 20th century, the existence of professional football in Pennsylvania was anything but a foregone conclusion. Before the days when the songs "Here We Go!" and "Fly, Eagles, Fly" reverberated throughout the Commonwealth, "Blue Laws" forbade any professional sporting competition from being played on Sunday. When the National Football League (NFL) started to look at bringing a franchise to the cities of Pittsburgh and Philadelphia in the early 1930s, the General Assembly began a fierce debate about repealing the Commonwealth's Blue Laws.

Pennsylvania's early laws were heavily influenced by Christian philosophy, and many of the Blue Laws were enacted to encourage observance of the Sunday Sabbath. Under a law enacted in 1794, activities such as hunting, public sports and

shooting were all forbidden on Sundays. This Sunday ban on public sports came to be a major stumbling block for investors looking to start NFL franchises in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. To address this issue, in 1933, House Member Louis Schwartz introduced House Bill 1, a bill to allow local municipalities to hold a referendum on whether they would allow Sunday sports, or prefer to keep the ban on Sunday sports in place.

The Schwartz Bill was fiercely debated on the floor of the House. Rep. Charles H. DeFrehn, a Republican from Cambria County, spoke in opposition to the bill. He said in part: "Ladies and Gentleman of the House, you who favor this bill, what is your present reason for wanting to scrap the Lord's day? Is there no further need to rest body and mind and build up our waning spiritual being?" Speaking in support of the Schwartz Bill was Rep. James L. Quinn, a Democrat from Allegheny County, saying



Louis Schwartz, Republican from Philadelphia County, sponsor of the "Blue Law" Repeal Act of 1933, credit, Pennsylvania Manual

in part: "Think of throwing an American citizen into jail in this advanced age for fishing or playing a game of ball with his youngsters out in the meadow... let us take punishment out of this law and go back to those great human principles, love, life and laughter."

(Continued on Page 2)

Ready, Set, Hike! *(continued from page 1)*

On February 7, 1933, the Schwartz Bill passed the House by a vote of 126-76. However, the fight to legalize Sunday sports was far from over. On March 14, 1933, the Senate narrowly defeated the Schwartz Bill, 24-26, but a week later the bill was reconsidered, amended, and passed finally, 26-23. After the House and Senate convened a Conference Committee to work out their differences, the bill was sent to the Governor's Office, where it was signed on April 25, 1933.

However, the bill signing was merely the start of the process of legalizing Sunday sports. Once the bill became law, municipalities held referendums during the

November election of 1933 asking local citizens if they favored Sunday sports. Most of Pennsylvania's largest municipalities voted to legalize Sunday sports, including Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, Wilkes-Barre, Allentown, Sharon, New Castle and Warren. But, there were some municipalities that voted not to legalize Sunday sporting competitions, including Grove City, DuBois, York and Washington.

With the change of the Sunday Blue Laws in 1933, professional football began in

Pennsylvania, with the founding of the Pittsburgh Steelers (then called the "Pirates" after Pittsburgh's popular baseball team) and the Philadelphia Eagles.



This headline from The Pittsburgh Press was printed after the Schwartz Bill was passed by the Senate and House and approved by the Governor, April 26 1933.

Archiving Tips for Your Home and Office

Here in the House Archives, we are often asked about the best ways to preserve documents, photographs, and other items to keep them from deteriorating. Two of the most common ways in which materials are damaged are from exposure to moisture and light. To prevent problems such as mold or

rust, store items in a space with a temperature between 68 degrees and 72 degrees Fahrenheit and a humidity level between 35% and 45%. Light exposure can cause the fading of dyes and ink, and can lead to items drying out, becoming brittle, and cracking. Minimizing sunlight exposure and the use of

ultraviolet screens on windows and UV light filters on artificial lighting can minimize potential damage. For more delicate items, consider displaying copies and keeping original items stored in acid-free containers.

These recent donations to our collection illustrate what can happen when items are preserved properly versus when they are exposed to harmful elements. The pin on the left is rusted and cracked from water damage, while the band mirror on the right (from the same time period) remains in great condition due to proper storage.

Denny Bixler, unsuccessful candidate for Senate 30th district in 1974

Harry A. Englehart, Jr. 1965-1978, 70th district (Cambria and Somerset)



The “J.P. Rooneys”

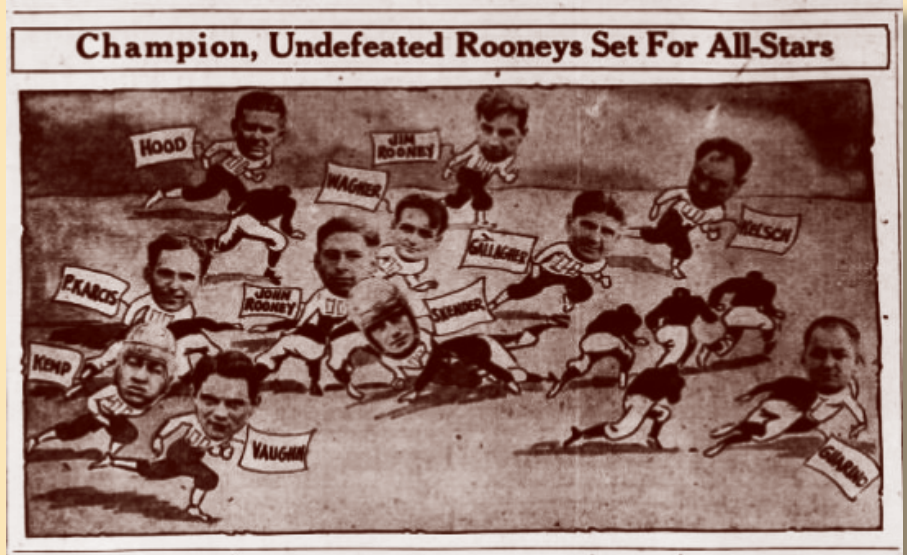
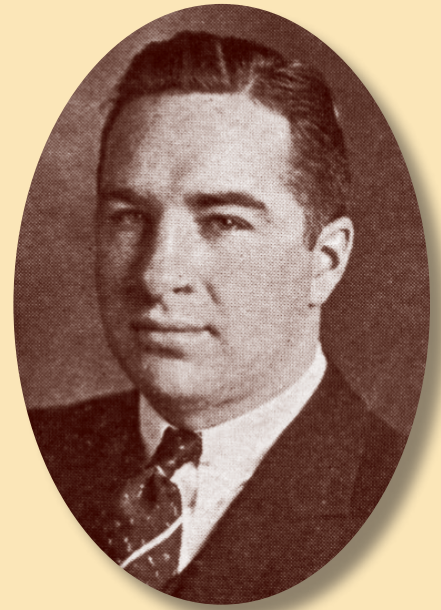
James P. Rooney (J.P. Rooney), brother of longtime Steelers owner Art Rooney, Sr., served in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives during the sessions of 1931-1932 and 1935-1936.

Born and raised in Pittsburgh’s North Side, J.P. grew up to be a fantastic athlete. During his collegiate years at the University of Pittsburgh, J.P. was a featured punter and running back for the Pitt Panthers Football Team, receiving varsity letters in 1926, 1928 and 1929.

In addition to athletics, J.P. Rooney was also interested in public service and in 1930, at the age of 25, J.P. ran for and won a seat in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. To help promote J.P.’s name recognition and visibility, Art renamed his semi-professional football team the “J.P. Rooneys” in 1931. The J.P. Rooneys became the “Pittsburgh Pirates” when the team received a license to join the NFL in 1933, and were later renamed the “Pittsburgh Steelers” in 1940.

J.P., a Republican, lost his reelection bid in the Franklin Roosevelt election landslide of 1932, and his athletic career was cut tragically short when he sustained severe injuries from a car accident in 1933. J.P. survived the accident and he returned to the House for a single term in 1935.

J.P. passed away in 1990, and although he served in Harrisburg a short time, the Rooney family legacy endures as they still own the Pittsburgh Steelers to this day.



Photos:

Top Right: James P. Rooney, c. 1930, credit, Pennsylvania Manual

Middle Right: “Champion, Undefeated Rooneys Set for All-Stars,” Pittsburgh Press, December 13, 1931.

Bottom Left: “Rooneys Rally to Defeat Burns, 7 to 0,” Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, October 17, 1932.

lpo.jil.0917

Recent additions to our collections

The House Archives has recently received collections of personal papers and objects from current and former members and staff – this list highlights a few:

- Mark Cohen, D-Philadelphia, 1973-2016
- Lawrence Curry, D-Montgomery/Philadelphia, 1993-2012
- Bernard Dombrowski, D-Erie, 1971-1990
- Ken Halverson, R-Somerset, 1967-1980
- Tim Mahoney, D-Fayette/Somerset, 2007-2016
- Sandra Major, R-Sullivan/Susquehanna/Wayne/Wyoming, 1995-2016
- David Parker, R-Monroe, 2015-2016
- Carole Rubley, R-Chester/Montgomery, 1993-2008
- David Wright, D-Armstrong, 1977-1996

In June, the House Archives staff had the opportunity to attend “The Association of Retired Legislators” annual luncheon. Our staff connected with former legislators and staff and provided them with information on the types of materials we accept for donation. If you have materials you think may be suitable for donation, please contact us to learn more about what the House Archives can do for you!

Below: Group photo of “Association of Retired Legislators” 2017 Luncheon, taken by Marsha Conley

