TEX RICKARD

Boxing's Greatest Promoter

Colleen Aycock *and* Mark Scott

Tex Rickard

Also by Colleen Aycock and Mark Scott

The First Black Boxing Champions: Essays on Fighters of the 1800s to the 1920s (editors, McFarland, 2011)

Joe Gans: A Biography of the First African American World Boxing Champion (McFarland, 2008)

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To
Colleen Aycock's sons,
Jason and Neil Wallace,
and to
Mark Scott's son,
Destan Scott

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Acknowledgments

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When we began our research, we hoped to find a genealogical link to our subject. We longed for someone who could bring a personal touch and fill in the backstory to help us convey the idea that our subject was not simply someone who accomplished extraordinary feats or set amazing records, but who was most importantly a family member, a father, an uncle, a husband, a provider, a teller of stories. We found that person in Dennis Kemper, grand-nephew of Tex Rickard whose grandmother was keeper of the family's treasures — their photos. We are pleased that he has shared those precious mementos and stories with us and for history's sake. Without your help, we would not be able to correct misleading information that currently exists.

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Introduction

The Greatest Show on Earth

The Circus Maximus

According to first-century historian Juvenal, the Roman crowds wanted only "bread and circuses." The Romans excelled at staging a gladiatorial show on a massive scale. Twenty centuries later, Tex Rickard would bring the enormous show into the modern era to become boxing's greatest promoter. Rickard would have the spark of genius and the wherewithal to introduce the sporting world to the same neoclassical mindset that inspired architects of the day to imitate the grandeur of the ancients. Like the palatial homes and magnificent public structures built in the Greek and Roman style, Rickard's large-scale boxing promotions would leave similar public monuments to the twentieth century. From his earliest days as a cowboy in Texas, Rickard's imagination was fired with doing things big. One of the ranch bosses told him, "If you're going to be anything, kid, be it big. It's just as much trouble worrying about a hundred of somethin' as it is about a million, so you might as well have the million."[1]

Whether it was in the saloon business, cattle business, or the promotion of sporting events, Tex Rickard had a drive to be the best. During his relatively short lifetime, he built the largest saloon in the American Southwest, pioneered the largest cattle ranch in South America, and promoted boxing matches that achieved record-breaking purses and attendance. His life desire was to do everything bigger and better than anyone else. With each new sporting event, Rickard worked to create the greatest show on earth. In time, his only competition, as to crowds and gate receipts, came from his own previous promotions.

In 1917, circus impresario John Ringling was already well established as the showman of the day when Rickard began promoting boxing events in the rings of New York. Rickard eventually hitched his wagon to Ringling's star in 1920 when the western promoter needed someone with influence and power to help him secure Madison Square Garden as a venue for his boxing events.

The Garden had long been home and wintering headquarters for the circus in New York. In fact, the original Madison Square Garden had been named in honor of the Roman circus. The first amphitheater at the location was called "the New York Roman Hippodrome." And while Ringling's Greatest Show on Earth never outgrew Madison Square Garden, Rickard's boxing promotions eventually drew such large numbers that he had to leave New York in order to find adequate, larger venues. He staged and managed these multi-

million-dollar outdoor events as grandly and lavishly, and with the same ethos of circus spectacle, as anything from the Roman gladiatorial era.

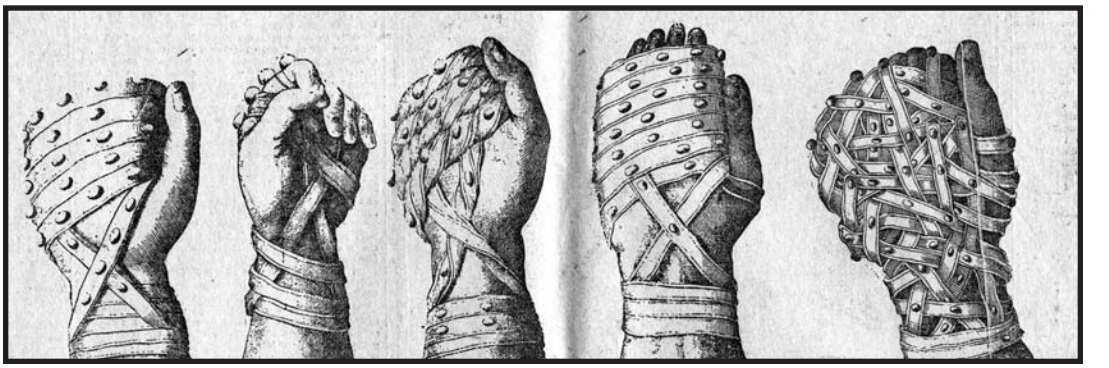
Rome had given the world the Circus Maximus, the largest of the coliseums, a stone amphitheater situated next to the Palatine hills which could hold upwards of 100,000 spectators. By the twentieth century, Rickard's events became so popular that he was forced to build arenas that could hold similar numbers. Like the Romans, Rickard understood and capitalized on the public's passion for entertainment and attraction to the drama of human contest. Whether ancient or modern, the urge to watch hand-to-hand combat appears a primordial one, as though it were part of our DNA to want to see the skillful confrontation played out between man and man, or even man and beast.

More than two thousand years ago, like moths to a flame, the crowds with their bloodlust came to the coliseums to see men fight to the death. It wasn't until the neoclassical interest in all things Roman that modern readers became familiar with these early gladiatorial bouts. Students of literature read Virgil's account of the prizefight between Entellus, the old hero, against the youthful Dares on the island of Sicily in the fifth book of the *Aeneid*, a story that would be played out again and again when modern championship sport titles passed to newer, younger competitors. The general public became familiar with classical gladiatorial events when newspapers printed comparisons of them to Tex Rickard's promotions. The questions were endless. Would a Rickard-promoted fight prove to be the greatest spectacle of all time? Or were the fighters Rickard helped to make famous equal to or better than the gladiators of yore?

While bare-knuckle bouts were often touted as the "real" game, and still remembered by some fans attending the Johnson-Jeffries battle, various sportswriters covering the Rickard promotion in 1910 reminded enthusiasts that even the bare-knuckle battles were never as brutal as the gladiatorial affairs where the early pugilists wore gloves. Not the "pillow types" worn by the modern battlers, gladiators' gloves were straps of leather studded with iron. Roman pugilists wrapped their hands from their knuckles to their elbows to prepare for their games in the ring. Like a Roman sandal for the fist, the *cestus* was variously outfitted with plates of iron, brass, or lead to protect the knuckles. Some gladiators clutched balls of bronze to give their fists an impact similar to modern brass knuckles. The stories of pugilists outfitted with a cestus-like mitt go back three thousand years.

By the second century B.C., the Roman Empire found both the chariot games and the gladiatorial fights to be entertaining profit centers. The gladiatorial schools were filled with slaves and criminals who had been sentenced to death *ad gladius* (by the sword) but who had extended their lives by taking the gladiatorial oath, swearing to fight every match to the death. Romans insisted that the virtues of fortitude and *contemptis mortis* (contempt of death) be demonstrated, and a defeated gladiator who exhibited these traits might have his life spared by the emperor or the crowd.

Given the expense of staging the games, there was a high expectation for sensationalism. When victorious Roman captors returned from North Africa, they brought back more than prisoners. They returned with elephants, lions, and other wild animals, some of which were trained to perform tricks. The Siegfrieds and Roys of the day could earn a pretty *sastare* using their talents to handle the beasts. With the masses craving food and entertainment, whoever could provide them stood to make a great deal of money. Whether in the Roman coliseum or Madison Square Garden, the entertainment "circle" (from the Roman term *circus*) was a template for financial success, both a masterpiece of simplicity and a road to ruin if mismanaged. Several men before Rickard had tried and failed in the large-scale pro-



Early boxing gloves: various types of the *cestus* used by Roman gladiators. Reporters at Rickard's Johnson and Jeffries promotion anticipated that the affair would compare to the gladiatorial bouts of Rome (*San Francisco Examiner*, July 3, 1910).

motion of ring sport. Unlike those in Rome, modern promoters had to worry about legalities, costs, and dull fights. In Rome, all fights were action-packed, brutal, state-supported spectacles.

How brutal were the Roman exhibitions?

Legislation was introduced in 126 B.C. that would boost attendance at the events. The new law created an even more sensational type of death sentence for Roman miscreants: condemnation *ad bestias* (death by wild beast). Under this sentence, criminals could be fed to wild animals rather than painlessly killed by the sword *ad gladius*. The crowds loved it.

Gladiatorial shows took place in the afternoon, while the mornings were filled with crucifixions and the feeding of prisoners to exotic carnivores brought in for the occasion. Except for the occasional satiated and consequently apathetic beast, which spoiled the show by giving his intended lunch the cold shoulder, the executions *ad bestius* kept the spectators' appetites for entertainment whetted and distracted them from the toils of Roman life. The gladiatorial cult gripped society.

As would happen later with the boxers Tex Rickard promoted, the gladiators of Rome became respected and idolized icons of their culture. Although Roman arena fighters were primarily slaves, they became objects of hero worship for young men and objects of lust for young women. Despite the gladiators' seemingly low social status (the same would be true of the boxers nearly twenty centuries later) noblemen's and senators' sons envied the glamour and often entered the profession. Commodus, son of emperor Marcus Aurelius, performed as a gladiator after he came to power at the age of 19. In keeping with his passion for gladiatorial sports, he adopted the heroic figure of Hercules, wrestler and boxer and patron of the gymnasium, as the symbol for his rule.

Of all the participants in the gladiatorial shows, none enjoyed greater compensation than the *lanista*, the manager-promoter of the events. The *lanista* kept 75 to 80 percent of the prize money of each gladiator, and some today might say that things have never changed regarding the exploitation of fighters. A successful *lanista* might go on scouting trips whenever tribes or nations were conquered and select the biggest and strongest for the elite gladiator schools. The search for giant-sized fighters would again be seen in the "Great White Hope" frenzy of the Jack Johnson era.

The golden age of Roman gladiator bouts lasted 600 years, throughout the span and

regions of the Empire. It would be under the burgeoning British Empire where hand-to-hand combat would once again flourish as a popular entertainment in a new world.

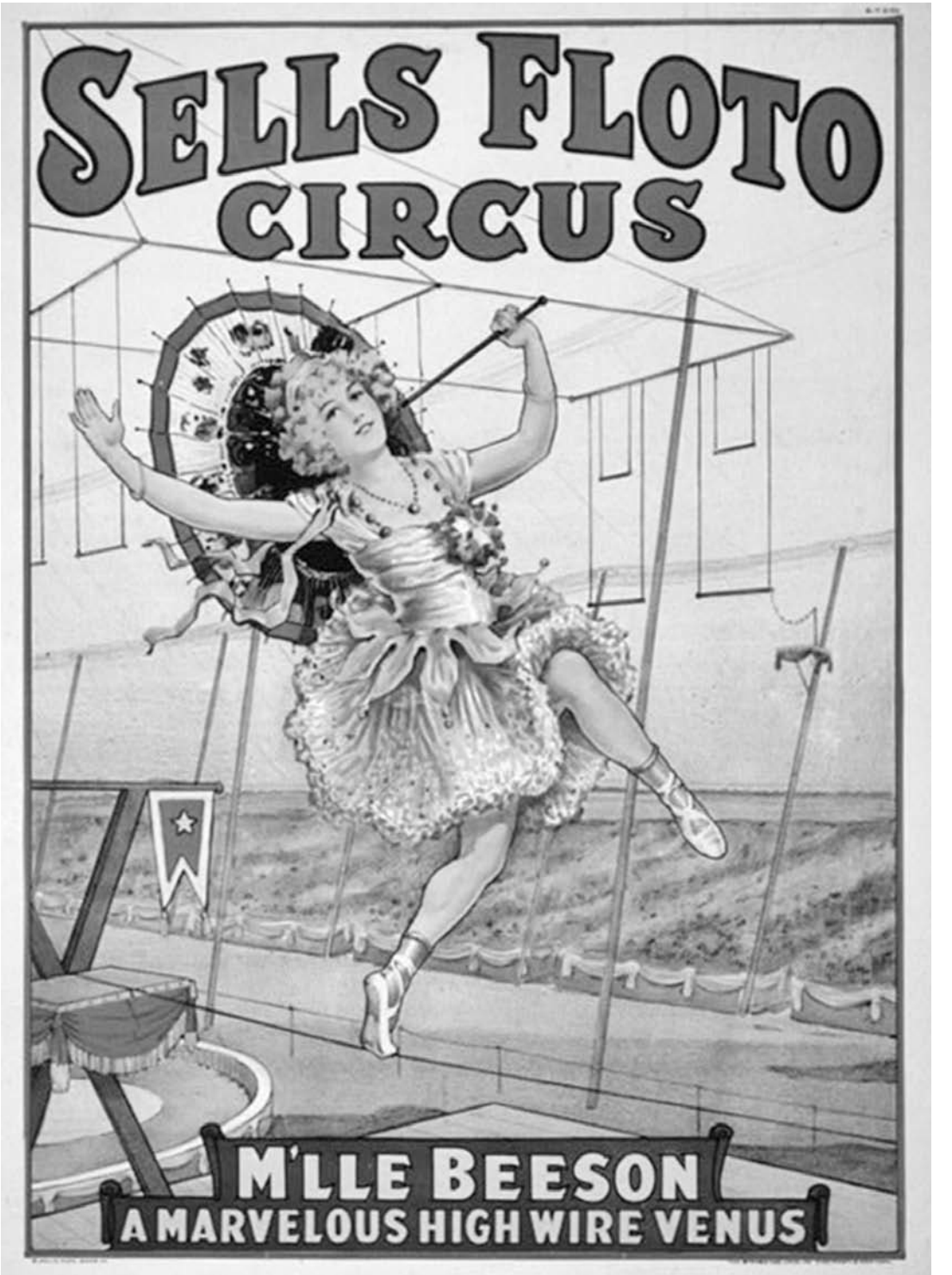
During Tex Rickard's day in America, men like President Theodore Roosevelt extolled the virtues that were consistent with manly toughness, and perhaps not incidentally, with the military expansion that mirrored earlier empires. One was considered a "sissy" if he failed to "put up his dukes" against a bully. Like the ancient Romans who needed to exhibit *contemptis mortis* as part of their military culture, American men felt compelled to show their manhood through "gameness." In sport and in politics it was considered proper and heroic to seek out solutions to conflict through combat. The lust for conquest was also a necessary element if Americans wanted to pursue what they saw as their manifest destiny to control the North American continent. A Roman youth who practiced with gladiators in the ancient arenas would not panic at the thought of having a spear thrust at his ribs. In Roman schools, hand-to-hand combat was part of the standard education. During the last century when the call to war came, young soldiers were given boxing training in the military. Accustomed to the sport, they would have less fear of the hand-to-hand combat in the wars that would take place in the early twentieth century. Thus did boxing serve not only for entertainment but also as valuable training for soldiers and military leaders.

Future leaders of America, men like Roosevelt, who led the Rough Riders into Cuba, or Jimmy Doolittle, ace pilot who led the bombing raid on Japan after Pearl Harbor, eagerly took up boxing when young, understanding that the skills developed in training would be useful later in life. Fisticuffs also offered a chance at improving one's financial circumstances. However, only a fortunate few boxers could make a living using their fists. Not until the arrival of Tex Rickard and his flair for promotion did boxing achieve the necessary media attention to give stars of the sport a real opportunity to become millionaires.

The Traveling Circus

From the Roman arena where the gladiators used the cestus to modern cable television where boxers use gloves, one man was the indispensable link. The ultimate outsider in a business run by insiders, Tex Rickard became the premier promoter of American sport in the first quarter of the twentieth century, bringing boxing out from lowly circus sideshows and isolated challenge matches in obscure remote locations, and turning it into a respectable, multi-million-dollar industry.

Before Tex Rickard, the general public was more familiar with boxing and demonstrations of physical prowess through the carnival circuits and circus shows rather than through individually staged boxing matches. Barnum and Bailey's circus troupes, later joined financially by the Ringling brothers, promoted the "Greatest Show on Earth," with novelty acrobatic acts, wild animals, extraordinarily beautiful men and women, and a variety of "freaks of nature." These shows spawned Wild West shows that banked upon novelty and extravaganza, and the public willingly paid hard-earned dollars to see them. By the late 1800s traveling carnivals reached every major city in America, bringing never-before-seen exotic animals from far-away continents as well as equally fascinating acrobats, cowboys, and strongmen who demonstrated remarkable athletic feats. All of these circus shows were considered "exhibitions." Although the boxing contests seemed to cross the line of legality, such carnival activities were allowed to take place without police interference.



Many boxers performed in the circus. After winning world titles, both Jess Willard and Jack Dempsey appeared with the Sells-Floto Circus (Library of Congress).

In addition to serving up spectacle, the traveling shows invited interaction with the crowds that came to watch. When the circus came to town, local tough guys could test their mettle by challenging the touring strongmen and boxers (frequently the same person) in contests for prize money. The carnival "strongman" was considered but one of the many circus oddities of the show. He was usually a wrestler or bare-knuckle boxer with extraordinary strength and skill, although in many instances his incredible feats were rigged as some modern-day professional wrestling. Despite these shenanigans, hand-to-hand combat between the strongman and well-known local competitors were publicly accepted and were eagerly anticipated.

Several top professional boxers of the new gloved era in the early twentieth century, men such as Battling Nelson and Georges Carpentier, recall in their memoirs their first introduction to boxing through these carnivals and their participation in them. They remember with fondness the intoxicating lure of the circus barkers and the bright lights of the circus ring. Many, like Battling Nelson, enjoyed challenging the carnival boxer. Owners of the carnival would often offer promising young lads jobs with their organizations, as well as offer jobs to aging boxers when their competitive days were over. Accounts of carnival boxers appear in numerous histories. Some of the early boxers eventually owned the show. Tony Gee, prize-ring historian of the bare-knuckle era, notes how Tom Sayers "prepared himself for a life away from the ring. Aiming to capitalize on his widespread popularity, he began exhibiting with Messrs. Howes and Cushing's Great United States Circus and, in *Bell's Life in London* (13 October 1861), announced that he had taken over as its proprietor. He renamed his acquisition Champion Circus and by the following month was claiming that 300,000 people had visited his show since the change of management."[2]

When the traveling carnivals moved on to different locales, they left a useful blueprint for a town's athletic clubs to follow in staging their own "athletic carnivals." Once gyms were set up to train local athletes, the owners of the gyms began to sponsor attractions and take their own athletes on the road.

The Boxing Carnival

In the late nineteenth century, because of its popularity, modern boxing (previously only one aspect of the circus) became its own separate traveling show, known as the *boxing carnival*. Boxers, like their circus counterparts, were still seen as societal fringe elements and gypsy-type vaudeville entertainers. This was perhaps all the more reason that the spectators, including the upper classes, were drawn to their shows, as they offered an exciting dalliance in a bit of Bohemia.

One of the most famous of the touring boxing troupes was William "Muldoon's Variety and Athletic Combination." First a Greco-Roman wrestling star and then a boxer in the early 1880s, Bill Muldoon became a master trainer and promoter of athletic shows. Muldoon toured the east with his troupe of formidable boxers, which included such well knowns of the era as Charlie Smith, the "Black Thunderbolt," and Fred Morris, "Muldoon's Cyclone." It was in Muldoon's show in 1891 that Joe Gans, eventually to become the first African American world boxing champion, gained notice by defeating a slugger called "Old Pickaninny." It was this show of prowess that convinced the future master of gladiators, Al Herford, to solicit and sign Gans as his protégé. Gans would be featured in Tex Rickard's first organized foray into boxing promotions.

These athletic carnival shows provided one stage for boxing's transition into a modern

sport when the bare-knuckle days were passing. During the transitional decade of the 1890s, when the gloved sport really took off in America, bare-knucklers were often seen as crude and barbaric scrappers, old fashioned, and undisciplined, masters of brawls.

In contrast, the new boxers were seen as skilled, scientific sportsmen who demonstrated a "manly art," and were trained in boxing gyms designed specifically to teach a more civil sport using the Queensberry rules. These rules mandated gloves, a limited round of three minutes, and a rest break of one minute. The difference was remarkable. Unlike the previous generation of brawlers who were tossed out of vogue, modern boxers enjoyed reputations as upstanding, healthy, and even exemplary physical specimens of manhood. They were frequently called "gentlemen," and several adopted the practice of calling themselves "Gentleman" followed by their name." They professed avoidance of such things as alcohol, tobacco, poor nutrition, or anything that taxed or drained their strength and vitality. Everything about the sport, including the exercise clothes — the "sweaters" that the boxers donned during their runs to sweat off the pounds — became a new craze.

With more men entering the boxing profession as its popularity surged, contests and exhibitions moved from traveling circus acts into more permanent venues sponsored by athletic clubs. Boxing promoters of the early 1900s tended to be businessmen, theater directors, athletic club managers, or owners of tracks of land used for larger outdoor athletic events. The "carnie barker" was transformed into a tuxedoed ring announcer, a role separate from the third man in the ring, the referee. The most popular early ring announcers were Joe Humphries in Chicago and New York and Billy Jordan, a Civil War veteran who called many of the great contests in the western United States. These men were the forerunners of the announcers we know today on HBO and closed-circuit boxing events.

Boxing matches were considered sporting entertainment, like competitive baseball matches, and occurred in every city. "Boxing exhibitions," as the fights were called when someone pointed out that "prize fighting" was illegal, tended to draw large crowds, and cities often vied for matches with popular boxers.

The Carnival of Champions: Dan Stuart, Rickard's Predecessor

Tex Rickard was a sheriff in Henrietta, Texas, in an area that bordered the Indian Territory, when John L. Sullivan lost his heavyweight title to Gentleman Jim Corbett. That fight, during the "Carnival of Champions" in New Orleans in September of 1892, formally marked the end of the bare-knuckle era. The New Orleans Olympic Club, with Charles Noel as its president, staged a three-fight carnival meant to rival Mardi Gras. The *Boston Globe* noted that the three fights were "Perfect Arguments for the Pugilistic Carnival."[3] It wrote that they were planned by distinguished businessmen of the city rather than a gaggle of gamblers and that ticket-holding spectators would sit in reserved seats, and officers of the peace would be in attendance. Folks down South were about to tame and harness what heretofore had been seen as something about as respectable as a cockfight. The pugilistic show in New Orleans would be a respectable three-day carnival, with three titles to be determined: heavyweight (between Sullivan and Corbett), lightweight (between Jack McAuliffe and Billy Mayer) and featherweight (between George Dixon and Jack Skelly). The carnival demonstrated, most tellingly to promoters, that a grand boxing show could be a financial success on a stand-alone basis.

While Tex Rickard would eventually create a template for colossal and successful fights, it was ironically the failed would-be impresario and fellow Texan, Dan Stuart, of Dallas,

who heralded Rickard's success. Although Rickard had been living and working in Texas, residing only fifty miles north of Dallas, he missed Stuart's big fiasco in the Lone Star State because he was on his way to the Klondike in search of his own fortune. Stuart dreamed big, but he neither had Rickard's Midas touch nor his talent for dealing with politics, building up boxers, and promoting them as interesting characters.

The concept of the carnival of champions, particularly with heavyweight title challenges, would be the golden prize of boxing that promoters would chase for the next six decades. But it didn't get off to an easy start, and promoters would have to learn some valuable lessons. Stuart discovered through torturous experience that in order to promote a successful boxing match, it helped to have a legal venue, a popular card, and especially a big purse. Also, it would have been wise for him to split the film rights to ensure that all parties were properly motivated. But the flickers were still in an early stage of development. Rickard would not make these mistakes, and he would prove that nothing succeeds like success.

Encouraged by the "Carnival of Champions" held in New Orleans, Stuart, one of Dallas' wealthiest "sports," or gamblers, attempted to promote a similar show in Dallas to coincide with the Texas State Fair in October 1895. Promoter Stuart tried to double up on the bet, so to speak, of the 1892 New Orleans carnival, which had featured three bouts. Stuart originally proposed six for his show, but the schedule quickly dwindled to three: marquee-draws between heavyweights James Corbett and Bob Fitzsimmons, welterweight Joe Walcott, and featherweight George Dixon, against suitable challengers. By June of 1895, Dallas businessmen had raised the necessary capital for the event and special guests were invited, which included the Prince of Wales and the Marquess of Queensberry. All of the elements of a big production seemed to be in place.[4]

However, when complaints about the proposed fight reached the Dallas Pastors' Association, influential members of the cloth convinced the Texas governor that the fight should be stopped because it would "demoralize" the citizens and bring unwanted riffraff in the form of pick-pockets, prostitutes, and gamblers into the respectable state. The issue made its way to the high court after payment of a $500 license fee for a boxing match was found to conflict with an existing state statute that outlawed prize-fights. Proponents for legalized boxing argued that the use of gloves, along with a list of rules, referees, and safeguards, had, in effect, created a new *sport*, as legitimate as the new sport of football, which many considered more dangerous. The court agreed, ruling that no law as of yet had been violated. Stuart continued with his plans for the big carnival and purchased more than one hundred railroad cars worth of lumber to be shipped to Dallas. The governor then called for a special legislative session that brought

Dan Stuart, the promoter who dreamed big but failed where Rickard succeeded (sketch by Swinnerton, *San Francisco Examiner*, March 11, 1897).

lawmakers back to the capital for a vote — for a new law that would ban public boxing contests, with or without gloves.

With a new law now banning boxing, Dan Stuart's fistic carnival could not go forward in Texas. He would promote his "Carnival of Champions" in Hot Springs, Arkansas. But when the governor there refused to allow the fights, Stuart returned to Texas, poorer in wallet but not in spirit. In the interim, and to everyone's dismay, heavyweight champion Gentleman Jim Corbett lost interest in the fight and decided to retire.

The Importance of an Attractive and Legal Venue

Stuart re-scheduled his fistic carnival for St. Valentine's Day 1896 in a geographically unclaimed frontier, no-man's land, somewhere along the meandering Rio Grande River between Juarez, Mexico, and El Paso, Texas. When the previously scheduled star welter and featherweights (Walcott and Dixon) decided to drop out, Stuart announced that only one big fight would still go forward somewhere near El Paso. The well-respected George Siler of the *Chicago Tribune* had agreed to serve as referee for a match between the aspiring heavyweight contender Peter Maher and the now legendary and still-willing Bob Fitzsimmons. During the second week of February, die-hard sportsmen traveled by train to El Paso to wait for the secret directions to the illicit event.

The governor of Texas felt challenged and sent out the Texas Rangers to guard the Lone Star State from any pugilistic miscreants should the fight take place in Texas. Not to be outdone in the display of military power, the governor of the State of Chihuahua sent the *federales* to Juarez to guard Mexico's border. A disappointingly low number of visitors to El Paso slowly left the city when Valentine's Day came and went without a fight. To add to the troubles, Peter Maher had developed a bad eye infection after being caught in a sandstorm, which delayed the bout once again. But within a week, the carnival's principal figures and the few remaining spectators boarded the train for a sixteen-hour ride to the safety of Langtry, Texas, where the legendary Judge Roy Bean and his idiosyncratic "Law West of the Pecos" would protect the prizefighters and the integrity of what was known by the boxing cognoscenti as "the game."

A Good Show Is Essential

For lack of a well-rounded boxing card, entertainment for the hardy souls of Dan Stuart's carnival who waited out the ordeal was supplemented by all-night fiestas, bullfights in Juarez, and a carnival of ropers (later to be called a rodeo) in El Paso. Also a part of the carnival atmosphere was a brutal game of football staged in El Paso between a group of hometown volunteers (which included Bob Fitzsimmons) and members from the Indian School of Albuquerque, New Mexico.

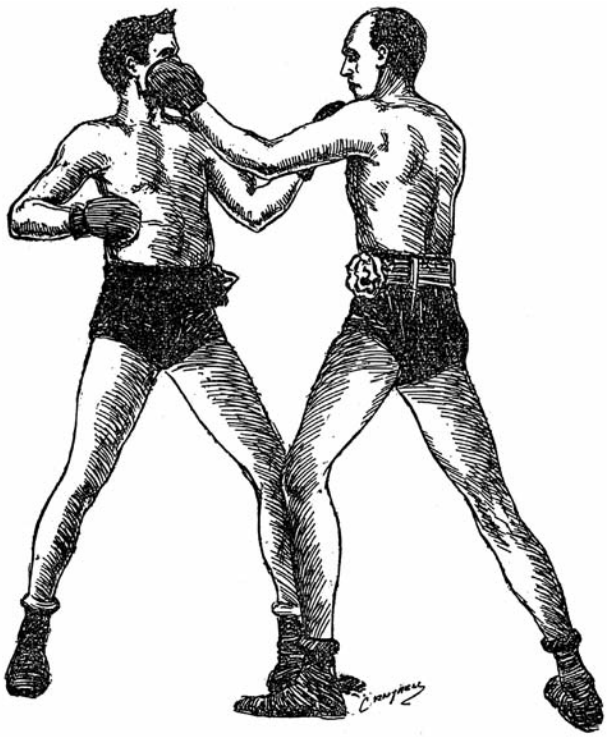
Bob Fitzsimmons proved a good draw. "Ruby Bob," as he was called, who would become the first man to win the middleweight, light-heavyweight and heavyweight world titles, was considered an all-time great. Perhaps more memorable than the championship contest itself was Bob's training quarters in Mexico, no less part and parcel of the carnival atmosphere. The boxer brought and displayed his pet lion, Nero. One newspaper man reported, "The lion waits until Fitz's back is turned and then makes a spring and the two

then get down to hard work. Then they go after one another over adobe fences and on top of out-houses. In this way Fitz keeps himself actively employed and never quits until the lion is tired out and wants to stop."[5] (Given boxing's close ties to the circus origins, it is interesting to note that many of the boxers enjoyed keeping circus animals as pets.)

For the bout between Maher and Fitzsimmons, a makeshift ring was set up on a sandbar in the middle of the Rio Grande. Thousands of Mexican *federales* and a few dozen Texas Rangers watched the highly touted bout for free from their respective borders overlooking the Rio Grande River. Fitzsimmons was not only miffed by the protracted delays, he felt cheated by the promoter when he realized that his contract didn't include a percentage of the film revenues. He finished off Maher with an anti-climatic, first-round knockout, which was all that came from Stuart's nine months of toil and trouble.

The Event Should Be Profitable

Even the movie plans for the fight were a flop. Stuart's last hope to earn enough revenue to cover his expenses fizzled ($20,000 was the anticipated profit from the movie) when the day turned overcast, preventing the filmmaker from recording the event. Fitz, disgusted at not getting a share of the movie rights, refused to re-enact the fight and lengthen it to six rounds to make it more marketable. Stuart and other promoters to come would realize the importance of giving the boxers a piece of the action.



Jim Corbett and Bob Fitzsimmons. Fitz, the only man to hold the middleweight, light-heavyweight, and heavyweight world championships, was featured in both Dan Stuart's major fight promotions (*San Francisco Examiner*, March 18, 1897).

Publicity Helps

While the fistic carnival didn't live up to Stuart's grand expectation, it nevertheless garnered a great deal of newspaper press because of the trouble it caused its promoter. John L. Sullivan predicted it would be the death knell of boxing. (Sullivan's prognostications on fights and everything else were usually wrong, but because he was the first venerated American heavyweight champion, his word always seemed to find its way into the press.) Never again, Sullivan lamented of the fiasco, would anyone likely witness a prize of $10,000 being offered for a fight. Because of Corbett's last-minute announcement to retire, John L. Sullivan argued that he

should be given back the heavyweight title he had lost to Corbett. That did not happen because Corbett reversed his decision to retire and issued a challenge to the winner of Stuart's match.

After his failed plan in 1896, Stuart finally came close to getting it right the following year at Carson City, Nevada, by selecting a legal venue, providing a good show, and focusing on profit and publicity. Nevada was an ideal locale for boxing. With gun fights commonplace, no moralizers were too concerned about a sport like boxing, which looked relatively tame, and in which contestants used padded mitts. Additionally, the governor of Nevada promised to make sure that no one interfered with a big fight in his state.

Dan Stuart offered a purse of $10,000 to be split between Gentleman Jim Corbett and Bob Fitzsimmons for a fight to take place on St. Patrick's Day, March 18, 1897. This was the card he had previously promoted and the one everyone had originally wanted to see. Corbett came out of retirement and agreed under relatively uncomplicated terms to defend his title. The date of the bout meant that the fighters training and other activities would take place while the snow was still deep in Nevada. This not only discouraged attendance but also made it difficult for the boxers to train.

Stuart expected more than 12,000 people to attend the event. To accommodate the large crowd he had railroad executives lay a mile of additional side tracks in order to park the special trains. Stuart's solution to his publicity needs was to give Randolph Hearst's media empire (from San Francisco to New York) the exclusive rights to cover the event. It meant that all parties — the boxers, trainers, and referee — could only give interviews or make statements to the *Examiner*. The situation created a bit of a problem when the participants refused to give other newspapermen interviews. A reporter from the *San Francisco Call* went ahead and printed an interview with the boxers, entirely fabricated, according to the editor of the *Examiner*.

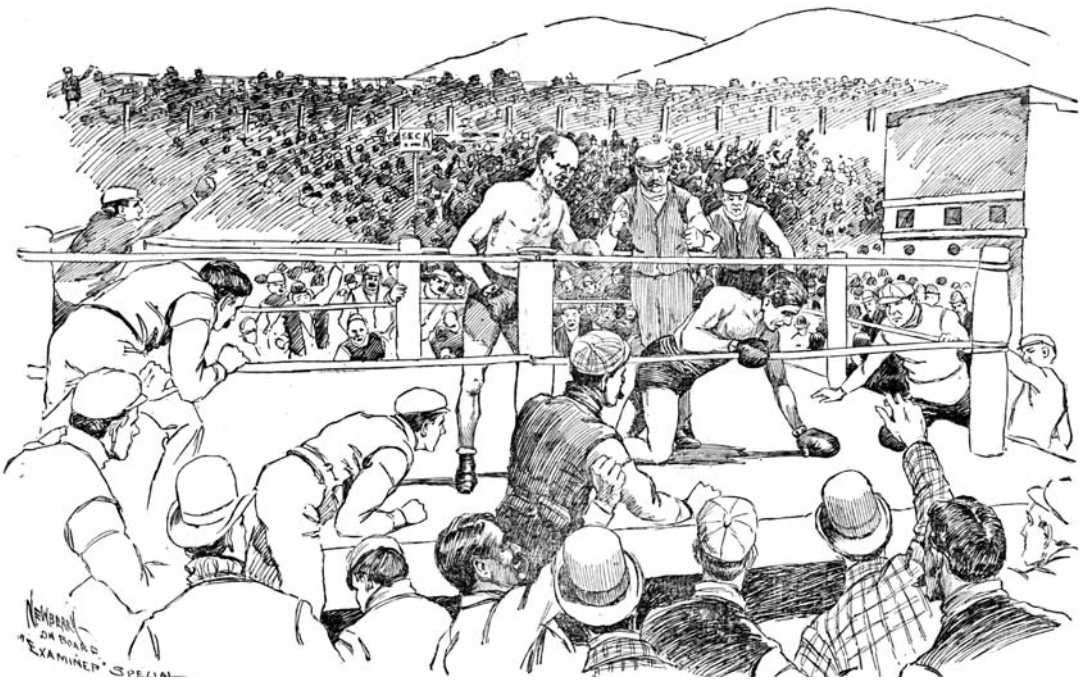
Hearst sent a special train, dubbed "the Great Examiner Lightning Special," filled with newspapermen, artists, and a photographer, from San Francisco to Nevada. The train parked in late February and began to send back to newspaper headquarters drawings and stories of the preliminary events leading up to what was billed as "the Fight of the Century." It should be noted that the photographer was on hand to provide pictures that the artists could use to illustrate the fight since only sketches could be printed in the news. Actually, there really wasn't much to report in the thirty days that preceded the fight. Carson City was full of snow and little was happening. When the artists ran out of interesting things to draw, they sketched the photographer "snap shooting," the layout of Fitzsimmons' bedroom, a sleigh filled with reporters enjoying a ride in the snow, Corbett's right arm extended, Corbett's left arm extended, Corbett's fist, Corbett's neck, or anything they could find to illustrate the story of the big fight that Hearst had paid so handsomely for them to attend.

A look at how the Carson City fight transpired will provide insight, by way of contrast, as to why Tex Rickard's promotions would later be so successful. Once fight day arrived, the train planned to return to San Francisco after the main event, with "lightning speed," and with the employees hard at work so that the *San Francisco Examiner's Special Edition* could go to press the next day. The distance from Carson City to San Francisco was 275 miles. The fast train could make the trip in six and one-half hours. The final ten-page exclusive newspaper edition covering Stuart's fight included little more than interviews, a round-by-round report and fifteen hand-drawn illustrations.

The morning of the fight did not go smoothly. First, there was a disagreement over the choice of physicians to examine the boxers. The doctor from Carson City was upset

that a visiting physician from Virginia City was chosen by virtue of being more qualified to examine the fighters. (The Carson City doctor indicated his long service to the community by pointing to all of the names in the local cemetery, which of course did little for his case.) Then there was the unexpected time change for the match. In order to accommodate the newspaper train's need for an early departure, Stuart had to start his show with the main event first. The heavyweights were told initially that they were to begin at noon. But at 10:00 A.M., when Stuart was told that only fifteen other trains had pulled into town, and no more were likely to arrive, he moved the time of the match up to 11:00 and hurried the fighters. Then Stuart selected a timekeeper. Because he was committed to Hearst, he asked if anyone in that group objected to William Muldoon. It was agreed that Muldoon would be the official timekeeper and also the one who would count the seconds if there was a knockdown. Normally that job would have gone to the referee, but George Siler agreed to give it to Muldoon.

The show began with John L. Sullivan, Tom Sharkey, and "One-eyed" Connelly making brief addresses to the audience. The two boxers entered the ring with their entourage and each took his seat on a stool. During the fight, one reporter noted that the boxers seemed to fatigue early. The spectators sat quietly like fans at a circus with an occasional burst of applause for a good blow. The newspaper reporters commented that for fourteen rounds, the crowds witnessed two battlers dancing, feinting, and otherwise lobbing volleys of harmless blows at each other. However, the film of the fight tells a different story. It is clear that the newspapers didn't realize what they saw because both fighters were actually throwing and landing hard punches. In the fourteenth round, after a body blow he had received, Cor-



Fitzsimmons kayos Corbett in the fourteenth round to win the heavyweight championship in Dan Stuart's promotion at Carson City, Nevada, March 18, 1897 (sketch by Newberry, from the March 18 *San Francisco Examiner* special edition dedicated to the fight).

bett shuddered, sank to his feet, clutched the rope with his right hand, and was counted out. No one was certain what had happened. Later, Corbett said that it was Fitz' body blows that got him, first in the third round, then in the ninth, and finally in the fourteenth. Corbett's corner yelled "foul" when he went down, but Corbett later said the blow wasn't a foul, that it was a left hook directly under the heart that stopped him. He said he was clear-sighted but that his muscles wouldn't move and he couldn't catch his breath. Fitzsimmons appeared just as dazed as the crowd.

After the main bout, the five thousand spectators left for lunch and returned to the stadium to see the rest of the fight card, which included a lightweight and a welterweight match. Dal Hawkins faced off with Martin Flaherty in the lightweight division for a purse of $2,500. Returning spectators almost missed that fight because Hawkins knocked out Flaherty inside the first round. Shortly after that bout, middleweight George Green met "Mysterious" Billy Smith for a purse of $3,000. Green won in thirteen rounds.

The San Francisco *Examiner* successfully issued its sparse but timely report and one of the papers reached Alaska, where Rickard was staking his claim in the Klondike saloon business. The paper and news of Fitzsimmons' win created such an interest among the miners that the paper was read and re-read for months afterwards. (It should be noted that it was the only paper in the mining camp.) Rickard took note of the efforts of his fellow Texan in the boxing business and developed the idea of using boxing matches to promote his saloon business.

The Corbett-Fitzsimmons fight was historic in that it was the first title fight to be documented on film. Three separate rolls of film were sent back to New York on different routes to safeguard their arrival. Stuart kept the film money for himself to offset the $100,000 expenditure on the fight. More than one hundred years later, Fitzsimmons can still be seen on film landing his devastating left hook to Corbett's solar plexus (the soft spot in the belly directly beneath the sternum) that won the heavyweight crown for Fitz. The lackluster earnings from the fight and the film, however, seemingly caused Stuart to throw in the towel.

While other fistic carnivals were staged in the United States in 1896, none were as grandly planned and attended as the "Carnival of Champions" in 1892, nor were any as grandly derailed as Stuart's Rio Grande "Carnival of Champions" in 1896. The next boxing carnival was staged by a different promoter in San Francisco in 1896 to showcase a group of up-and-comers who all would eventually make their marks in boxing history. The group of boxers included Mike Leonard, considered the "Adonis of Boxing" at the time, Joe Gans, and Jim Jeffries.

The San Francisco Syndicate and the Road to Goldfield

By the end of the nineteenth century promoters were trying to attract big-name fighters to compete for prestigious matches. San Francisco was a top boxing venue with a fight trust vying with Philadelphia, New York, and other East Coast cities for promising bouts. By 1905 the San Francisco syndicate, the closest anything came to promoting boxing on a large scale, consisted of Eddy Graney, Willus Britt (manager of boxer Jimmy Britt), Jimmy Coffroth, and Jack Welch. This group of promoters and professional club managers advertised and coordinated matches for their various clubs and fought to prevent major matches from going to other venues, especially those in Los Angeles. They were a powerful syndicate that helped make boxing a featured attraction on the West Coast, and many managers of boxers

around the country took their fighters west, hoping to get fights in venues such as Jimmy Coffroth's in Colma, California. However, because the San Francisco fight trust enjoyed a monopoly, there was little incentive for Coffroth's group to be creative. The San Franciscans, with complacent arrogance, had never heard of and certainly never dreamed that an upstart saloon-type like Tex Rickard was about to come down from the north country and outmaneuver them to stage the biggest boxing event to that point in history.

By 1900, due in part to the complacency of the San Francisco fight trust, boxing publicity was left up to the boxers and their managers. Hoping to attract publicity and prize money, managers and promoters alike posted challenges in the newspapers. Matches were accepted and contracts drawn up by official athletic clubs that included "articles of agreement" as to the details of the match: date, time, location, weight requirements, etc. The larger the fight, the more forfeit-deposit money and side-bets the boxers or their managers were required to post. Deposit amounts from $1,000 to $5,000 per match weeded out a great many fighters who were unable to make the payments.

Fight managers who could publicize their boxers stood a better chance of getting lucrative contracts. Broadway playwright and theater entrepreneur Jim Brady, Gentleman Jim Corbett's and later Jim Jeffries' manager, created the mold for other fight managers who wanted to promote their fistic protégés. Coming as he did from the traveling theater circuits, Brady realized the financial benefit of advertising, garnering news in the press by putting a champion fighter on display on the theater stages across America. He had written the play *Sport McAllister* to promote Corbett. After Corbett beat John L. Sullivan, Brady took him on the road in another play written for him, *Gentleman Jack*.[6] The champion boxer eagerly took to the stage. Corbett made so much money from these theater events that he grew reluctant to return to the ring. Even managers of lesser-known fighters went so far as having plays written about their scrappers in order to bolster the public's desire to witness their fighters in the ring. Thus, fight managers vied for publicity by taking their fighters back on the road in carnival-like, theater appearances, night after night in different towns. Early in his promotional career, Doc Kearns (who would manage Jack Dempsey) asked Jim Brady for his best advice. "Young man," said Brady, "just remember that you must be a showman every minute."[7]

Boxing Moves from the Small Club Back to the Colossal Stadium

In the context of the relaxed mores of the Gay Nineties, gambling and fixed fights created a counterculture set against religious and other reformers who were actively lobbying for anti-boxing and anti-gambling legislation at both state and national levels. Gambling and the trafficking of interstate bets on fights involved large wagers, including almost any permutation of bets imaginable. Who would win? What round? Who would draw first blood? In many instances fortunes rode on the outcomes. A public backlash was inevitable in an America still influenced by Puritan values.

By 1905, with more and more states outlawing boxing matches, the business of fisticuffs became more challenging for promoters. In addition, the field of potential participants for a big fight seemed to lack life. Corbett had retired for good. Jim Jeffries had beaten the great Bob Fitzsimmons in a rematch in 1902 for the heavyweight title, and Joe Gans demolished Frank Erne in just over a minute to capture the world lightweight title. Jeffries and Gans seemed unbeatable; their title defenses were many. But by 1905, no one was challenging

either, assuming they were simply too good to lose in a legitimate bout. Jeffries had retired to his California ranch, and Gans was somewhere between San Francisco and Baltimore, having run through his money and all of the top contenders. The assumption was that he couldn't be beaten in a *square* fight.

It would take a promoter with guts and a powerful personality, not to mention extraordinary luck *and* money (and someone outside the boxing establishment), to arrange a world-class title fight with either champion — to draw Jeffries out from retirement or, in Gans' case, pull it off with integrity and the public believing the fight was on the level, with the challenger to Gans having a chance to win. The first Great Fight of the New Century was never meant to be staged merely as a boxing event. Rather, it was a means to another end: to promote investments in a mining camp eighty-five miles northwest of Las Vegas. In Goldfield, then the largest town in Nevada, fifty saloon-keepers, multitudes of big-time gamblers and prospectors, rising politicians, millionaire bankers, and stock market swindlers were all interested in making money off of rich investors. But they had to be convinced that the wealthy could be drawn to the desert by a big fight and to invest large sums of money in the mining operations.

That larger-than-life personality who could bring together the best talent, provide a legal venue with access to transportation and lodging, and draw in the wealthiest "sports" and sportswriters, was Tex Rickard. It would mark the beginning of a new career for the rich Goldfield saloon-owner, which would earn him lasting fame in the business of boxing. It would also, in time, earn him the endearing title of father of New York's Madison Square Garden. In Goldfield, the mining camp gambler would stake his claim to history, taking a huge risk by doling out the largest cash prize of its time for a boxing match.

Years later, many called Rickard a swindler, some accused him of fraud, and still others went so far as to file criminal charges against him after he became successful. But without Tex Rickard there may never have been the major sporting events that became commonplace in the twentieth century, when boxing went from haphazard matches setup by managers and promoters across the country to well-organized national and world events.

Tex Rickard understood the public's fascination with the "Carnival of Champions," and the draw of the celebrity boxer, particularly in the heavyweight division. Capitalizing on a boxing card with a major draw as the marquee event, Rickard became a showman extraordinaire, creating some of the greatest shows on earth.

Tex Rickard and His Promotional Masterpieces

Tex Rickard lived in an era of fistic romance, one that included great boxers such as Joe Gans, Jack Johnson, Jack Dempsey, and so many others of the first two decades of the twentieth century, boxers who live in legend today as much as fact. But as remarkable as these larger-than-life ring figures and their fights seem today, of equal or greater interest is the wizard behind the scene pulling the strings to make everything happen. Rickard was of such stature that his confidants included Teddy Roosevelt and John Ringling, famous showmen in their own right. Like them, Rickard was an empire builder; one of the premier fathers of the business of sport.

Rickard was a consummate gambler in the time of an American gold rush that epitomized the American dream. A veteran adventurer, he traveled the untamed world forever searching for something bigger and better. He set amazing records during his lifetime. Many

of those records evolved around a number Americans have always been fascinated with: a million. The big million had been for the twentieth century a hallmark embedded in the American psyche. Rickard was the first to reach the million-dollar hallmark in sports and make his boxers rich. As Paul Gallico commented, before Rickard, boxers were just ham-and-eggers and "nobody gave a damn about them and never, unless they managed to stop a bullet or run amuck with a carving knife, did any of them manage the long journey from the sports section to page one."[8] No other boxers, perhaps with the exception of John L. Sullivan, impressed themselves upon the national consciousness quite like those from the promotions of Tex Rickard.

Rickard made boxing into front-page news on every major paper. His wife called it the "birth of ballyhoo," and the results of many of his fights exceeded all expectations with respect to drama, money, and action. It looked easy. It was not.

Drawing on "the Greatest Show on Earth," a phrase from Barnum and Bailey, Rickard called his first big fight between Joe Gans and Battling Nelson "the Greatest Fight of the Century." (It was a promotional tool that he would use repeatedly.) Given the skills of the combatants and the public's desire to see them matched, nobody disputed the use of the superlative.

Rickard's first promotion was as huge success, with the largest gate attendance to date. Goldfield's crown jewel in the history of boxing was witnessed by as many as 18,000 people, more than doubling the boomtown's population. That was no small feat considering that most people had never even heard of the once-tiny mining town in the desert of Nevada**.** And, like radio broadcasts to come, the Goldfield fight had a mass listening audience. Transcripts of the rounds were run by newspaper boys from ringside to the Goldfield telegraph office, where telegraphers tapped out the round-by-round news, only minutes away from being live, to be transmitted by "the wires" to telegraph stations across the country. Thousands of fans crowded streets in front of their hometown newspaper offices where the rounds were posted in real time. Hundreds more gathered at train depots to hear the round-by-round returns from the "wire," as if awaiting the news of whether Napoleon or Wellington would emerge victorious at Waterloo. At 3:00 P.M., Nevada time, the world seemed to stand still and remained on edge for hours into the twilight of the evening with reports favoring first one, then the other fighter.

The fight remains a landmark of history in that it was the longest modern, gloved (using five-ounce gloves) world title boxing contest and the longest fight ever filmed (42 brutal rounds). Rickard never knew that it would become so much a part of history. All he intended for the ballyhoo was to start a stampede to Goldfield, like the stampede he had witnessed in the Klondike. In that respect, the promotion succeeded. It sparked the last great gold-mining rush to the American frontier, and along with it, a host of stock scams. There were so many scams that in 1907 the federal government began prosecutions for securities fraud, and prospects in Goldfield dried up. Eventually, the boomtown turned into the ghost town that it is today. But the great prize-fight at Goldfield was a huge success. It formed the template for the mega-event sport promotions that became an integral part of American culture in the twentieth century.

Four years after the Goldfield bout, on July 4, 1910, the second of Rickard's promotions to be called the "Greatest Fight of the Century," the notorious "Great White Hope" bout between the first black heavyweight champion, Jack Johnson, and the former champion, Jim Jeffries, would make both boxers wealthy beyond their wildest dreams when they fought in Reno, Nevada. The drama and excitement of the contest of black vs. white, first created

in the Goldfield fight between Gans and Nelson, was brought to a fevered pitch by the Reno fight.

The Johnson-Jeffries fight lingers in the American consciousness. Johnson was not expected to win at a time in America when the establishment was cocksure that he was inferior. In the American imagination, the fight was more than a contest between two men — it was a contest between two races. Johnson's win was a shocking psychological blow to the white American psyche, and it would be a long time before Americans would forget the fighter or the western promoter responsible for it.

The promotion of the Reno fight strained Rickard's nerves, but it exposed him to all of the men working at the top of the field. He absorbed the elements of ballyhoo from the talented press men who were adept in the art of the new journalism, later labeled "yellow journalism." The newspapers carried over-the-top stories and sensational headlines. Media mogul Randolph Hearst famously called it (it was said to be his motto in his newsroom) "a journalism of action." Rickard understood its fundamental elements: that one must create a need, embellish it, make the story dramatic, and give the public a role in the drama (making their participation part of the headlines and part of history). It helped the ballyhoo and the financial success of the event to pre-sell it or to "put it over," as Rickard would say.

For the Reno fight, Rickard took advantage of an urgent need created by the premier sports journalist at the time, Jack London, who called upon the white race to take back the heavyweight title. Rickard parlayed that need into his second big "Fight of the Century."

After Jack Johnson had won the heavyweight crown, London pleaded in his flamboyant newspaper prose for Jeffries to emerge from his alfalfa farm and "wipe the golden smile off the face" of Johnson, who was despised by the white establishment. Rickard had profited from the racial overtones of the Goldfield fight in 1906 — and he would capitalize again on American's obsessions in 1910. Most importantly, Rickard understood what it took to make two super stars come together for a big fight: money. Rickard's staging of the bout was a masterpiece of planning. (Some would call it scheming for many reasons, not the least of which being the inconvenient obstacle of the ad hoc and changing boxing laws in the United States.) But Rickard was never a man to let obstacles stand in his way.

Boxing in the twentieth century has also been a venue for matching gentleman vs. ruffian. This is not quite the same as hero vs. villain. The Goldfield fight pitted the gentlemanly Gans against "the abysmal brute" Battling Nelson. Nelson's near-death matches with Gans and other top fighters witnessed such bloodletting that in the prize rings of today, they would be halted in the early rounds. The Goldfield fans definitely got their money's worth and they had shelled out quite a bit indeed. Rickard's first promotion in Goldfield created the largest purse in history to that point. He would outdo himself several times. In fact, the Dempsey-Tunney bout of 1927 was the richest event in all of sports to that time in history, largely because of the love of the American people for Dempsey, the tough-as-nails veteran of the hobo jungles of early twentieth-century America. Tunney, who often quoted Shakespeare and was considered, perhaps unfairly, a stuffed shirt, was respected but not greatly popular.

The purses from the fights, and the proceeds from the movie rights, earned both Rickard and his star boxers sizeable fortunes. Unlike the earlier promoter, Dan Stuart, who wanted to keep the proceeds of the films for himself, Rickard realized the importance of the fight films as a bargaining tool and as an entirely separate form of entertainment with tremendous business possibilities. Rickard knew how to spread the wealth.

Why Have Rickard's Fights Stayed in Our Memory?

What attracted the mass audiences to those fights? Part of the answer is that the fighters of the era were phenomenally talented and the fights were some of the most brutal in recorded history. In 1906 fans gathered by the hundreds around newspaper offices to hear live reports of rounds for the Gans-Nelson fight, and by the thousands to hear the Jim Jeffries and Jack Johnson results. American audiences were riveted to their radios for the first live transmission of a fight between Jack Dempsey and Georges Carpentier. As the author Rex Beach said of the immense popularity of the "Great White Hope" fight, "People do not attend boxing exhibitions from a gross Roman desire to see physical punishment inflicted or to glory at the painful impact of padded glove on naked flesh." It is not the effect of the blows that brings forth the "deafening, hoarse-voiced roar from the multitude but the skill and cunning behind it."[9]

The controversy surrounding Rickard's promotions helped to make them immortal. Battling Nelson was disqualified in the 42nd round against Gans, and nobody in the Goldfield crowd demurred. Yet for more than a century boxing fans have asked whether, in the end, did Nelson or Gans, neither or both, win or lose the longest fight? Their three-fight trilogy was as much debated as the Ali-Frazier bouts sixty-five years later.

Likewise, for decades fight fans have argued over who won the fight involving the "long count." In their famous re-match Jack Dempsey and Gene Tunney fought one of history's most controversial bouts. Gene Tunney was out-boxing the over-the-hill Dempsey when suddenly the Dempsey of yore flashed his old, devastating style and bombarded Tunney with a barrage of blows. One of Dempsey's patented, short, vicious left hooks put Tunney on the floor, and seemingly sent him off into dreamland. Dempsey stood over his fallen foe, not remembering the newly instituted rule that after knocking down an opponent a boxer had to go to a neutral corner. Tunney was on the floor for at least 14 seconds; many observers thought he was down for longer. The controversy raged because the beloved Dempsey had lost by virtue of a poorly understood rule; even the referee seemed unsure of how to implement the new regulation. Generations of fight fans have argued over who was truly the winner of the famous long-count fight between Dempsey and Tunney.

Between the longest fight and the long count, Rickard promoted many riveting fights, most notably the hero vs. villain, first million-dollar-gate bout between Georges Carpentier and Jack Dempsey. Many considered Dempsey vs. Carpentier as Rickard's masterpiece of ballyhoo, for reasons that will be explored later. Dempsey, the champion, had been portrayed as a draft dodger, while Carpentier was a good-looking Frenchman and World War I hero. Carpentier, who looked frail compared to the stout champion, nearly pulled off a huge upset when a fast combination punctuated with a right cross hit Dempsey's iron chin and nearly kayoed the champion. The hero-villain promotion was the first major fight to be broadcast on live radio.

The Carpentier-Dempsey fight was perhaps Rickard's all-time masterpiece in that he convinced the American public to root for an *entranger,* the charismatic Frenchman Georges Carpentier, a man hardly bigger than a middleweight. Carpentier was a hero in those heady days of the early 1920s after France's victory in the Great War. Dempsey had avoided the draft and was cast as the villain in Rickard's promotion. Whether this was fair or not seemed not to matter; it worked. The bout created the first million-dollar gate. If Dempsey's feelings were hurt, he cried crocodile tears all the way to the bank. In retrospect, the amazing thing was how close the much-lighter Carpentier came to knocking out the rawhide-tough

Dempsey. Once again, the results of a Rickard promotion exceeded the prefight hoopla. Rickard instinctively knew how to draw the best ring men and huge publicity. Roger Kahn, biographer of Jack Dempsey, said that "Rickard, a gambling man with a surpassing appreciation for the lure and nuances of money [had] a sense of promotion that might serve as a model for postdoctoral seminars in the Harvard School of Business."[10]

Rickard was a decisive manager and leader. He was also a listener. His advisors knew he had already made up his mind even while he was listening to them. He was open to all ideas and wanted to hear what everyone had to say, but once he made his decision, it was final. There was no looking back. Rickard was a poker-faced gambler of the highest caliber; these were the cards you were dealt, and then you played them.

He selected his aids and trusted them to do the work, but he took final responsibility for the results. Nat Fleischer compared Tex Rickard's working method to that of his successor at Madison Square Garden, Mike Jacobs: "Rickard always surrounded himself with excellent matchmakers and depended on them for the bouts that enabled Madison Square Garden to grow into the world's greatest boxing arena. When it came to clinching contests that meant the expenditure of thousands of dollars, Rickard, unlike Uncle Mike, took into his confidence for advice not only his matchmakers and publicity head, Ike Dorgan, but even Mike Jacobs, who often helped finance Tex when in a pinch and several newspaper friends, among them Bill McGeehan, Walter Trumbull, Grantland Rice, Jimmy Dawson and the writer [Nat Fleischer]."[11]

Whenever critics said that one of his projects would flop, Rickard proved them wrong. He liked to play (some would say gamble) with high stakes. He knew the thrills, and he gave those thrills to his audiences. His reach was high, and his financier friends would say deep. But nothing was too big or impossible for Tex Rickard. He did more than any other man to bring boxing's grand shows to life.

By staging the biggest ring matches of his era, the mining camp gambler would stake his claim to history, for the most part taking huge risks by doling out the largest cash prizes of his time for any sporting extravaganzas. His promotions marked the beginning of a new era of professional sport. Rickard would build and control a boxing empire, one fraught with risks, but one that eventually bestowed upon him lasting fame as the father of Madison Square Garden. By 1928, he was in the process of building an entire chain of Madison Square Gardens. Unfortunately, only two were completed before his untimely death.

Sadly, when he seemed on top of the boxing world, he died before he could enjoy the fruits of his long quest. Like the mythic goddess Diana, who symbolized the thrill of the hunt and whose statue stood atop Madison Square Garden for years, Rickard's thrill was in hunting bigger and greater accomplishments.

Rickard's promotions were successful because, like a seasoned gambler, he held the winning cards: adequate promotional money, a drawing card of excellent fighters, the certainty of location, and supportive advertising. He would later learn that if one of these elements went missing, the entire event could be jeopardized.

Rickard didn't invent ballyhoo, but he greatly improved upon it. Maybe he was able to accomplish so much because he operated in a Gilded Age and during the Roaring Twenties when money was loose. After Rickard died in 1929, the amounts earned from boxing events fell dramatically, along with a doomed economy. Even with later ring stars like Max Baer, Joe Louis, Floyd Patterson, George Foreman and Joe Frazier, there was no promoter until Don King, with the indispensable help of Muhammad Ali's gift for gab, able to pull off a series of million-dollar gate boxing events. From Hugh McIntosh, Dan Stuart, Jimmy

Coffroth to Tex Rickard, and then on to Mike Jacobs, Don King and Bob Arum — so reads the lineage of boxing promoters in the twentieth century. None was immune to hardship and challenge. Risk is part of the very nature of the sport they promote.

But for the prizefighters in the first quarter of the twentieth century, and the man who promoted their fights, courage in the face of danger and risk were never a greater part of their métier. Rickard had suffered as much hardship in his personal life as he would enjoy good fortune in his million-dollar-gate business ventures. But as Rickard's life showed, fate deals us the cards, and it's up to us as to how we play them. Tex Rickard succeeded where other promoters failed, largely because of his background. He was a kid schooled in hard luck and poverty. He rose from poverty to become a successful businessman. While he considered himself a showman, he remained at heart a gambler with a keen eye for which card to play.

Many have speculated about what would have happened to Rickard had he lived through the Great Depression of the 1930s. What we can say is that without the boxing business Rickard shored up for America before he died in 1929, many wouldn't have weathered, or even survived, those depressing years that followed. Large groups of America's young men were able to earn a livelihood in those lean years through the profession of boxing when so many other vocations dried up. The virtues of the ring — endurance, heart, and courage — taught us all that we could endure the hard times. Tex Rickard showed us that, in a very big way.

Chapter One

Texas Cowboy in the Gold Rush

"But the code of a man, says fight all you can." — Robert Service

Whether searching for the fountain of youth or El Dorado — the lost city of gold — western man has always sought various forms of the great elixir that would bring wealth, fame, or immortality. The drive has spurred individuals to cross oceans and continents. Some are simply "born under a wandering star," to quote the song from "Paint Your Wagon," and don't exhibit any ambition other than to finance their next drinking or whoring adventure. But Tex Rickard had a driving force that carried him through a string of events that would have caused other less-persevering, men to give up. Rickard had the fortitude to endure long and lonely cattle trails, wild places where gold lay buried, remote South African diamond mines, and the most contentious of struggles over boxing promotions. In the end, Rickard had the sheer guts to rebuild what seemed to be a financially doomed Madison Square Garden. This last feat bestowed upon him lasting fame — a heroic immortality with New Yorkers in particular, and sports fans in general, in that he saved the treasured great brick and mortar symbol from its intended destruction. With his driving ambition, unfailing determination, accumulated business savvy and knowledge of human nature, Tex Rickard not only rebuilt the Garden but turned it into the Mecca of boxing for the twentieth century.

Rickard's was the era of great manhood, and his adventurous life included many great male friendships and partnerships. He was a personal friend to Teddy Roosevelt, a man who considered himself foremost, even over his legacy as president, a member of the great cowboy fraternity at a time when the American West was writing the last chapter of its frontier history. Roosevelt called Rickard an "old Western friend," a compliment that denoted a life-long relationship. Rickard would partner with other men history remembers fondly, such as John Ringling, renowned for his Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey's "Greatest Show on Earth" circus. Some knew Rickard only as boxing's greatest promoter, but his oldest friends remembered him as a man who performed his sheriff duties in Texas with a calm but firm hand and who survived the long treks of the Alaskan and Nevadan gold rushes.

Rickard was a man driven to achieve great things, but his quiet manner tended to cover up his life's wild adventures. Maxine Rickard, in her biography, *Everything Happened to Him*, portrayed her husband not as a typical, loud-mouth impresario, but rather as a lonely, almost desperate seeker of love and acceptance by those whom he considered "the better classes." Rickard, the twentieth-century patron saint of sports gamblers, had followed a jagged road before landing in New York, even before Nevada, where he discovered that his true métier was the promotion of prize fighting.

The great fondness that Rickard would develop towards the toughest practitioners of pugilism can only be understood by reviewing the extremely harsh conditions of his early life. His exploits began out of necessity when his father, never a great provider in any case, died when Rickard was only a child. Rickard, known as "Dink" at that time, had to become the breadwinner for his family by hiring himself out on the cattle trails. Rickard's personal life was filled with tragedy. After he became sheriff, he could not protect his new bride from an untimely death. And despite all the money and resources at his disposal, he could not buy the kind of medical care that might have saved the lives of his first two children. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that before Rickard promoted any of his boxing masterpieces, everything did indeed happen to him.

George Lewis "Tex" Rickard was a born fighter of hardy pioneer stock. His great grandfather, Peter Rickard (whose father's name was Simon Ruckert), was presented with a grant of land in 1828 in Illinois in what is now Springfield by John Quincy Adams. Peter Rickard's son (Tex's grandfather) was Lewis Burr Rickard. Lewis married Catherine Wood, whose father's name was Lewis Wood, hence the middle name *Lewis* given to Tex in honor of both grandfathers. The name George came from an uncle. Lewis Rickard and his wife, Catherine, had eight children born in Illinois. According to genealogist Dennis Kemper, the Rickard family was well-acquainted with Abraham Lincoln. The second of the large family's two boys was Robert Wood Rickard (Tex Rickard's father), who happened to be born on Lincoln's 28th birthday, a coincidence the family must surely have celebrated.

Robert Wood Rickard joined the Union forces as a member of the Illinois 41st Infantry, first organized in Decatur and later stationed at the arsenal in St. Louis. Robert was already under command before the first Battle of Bull Run during the Civil War. By September of 1861 Rickard was assigned to the forces of Brigadier General Ulysses S. Grant for the following battles: the Battle of Shiloh; the siege of Corinth, Mississippi; and the Battle at Vicksburg.

Robert wrote his uncle in Springfield:

> Many of our brave boys fell on this bloody field, we were outnumbered by a large force of Brackenridge's men and them behind earthworks. We made the charge with 250 men in our Regiment and we came out with 80 unhurt. I was lucky to come off the field with only a slight scratch of a shell. At the Battle of Pittsburgh [Shiloh] and Fort Donelson, I thought the balls flew faster than they ever could again but at Jackson they sung Dixey around our ears, the grape and canister mowed our ranks down like grass before the sithe. Our old flag was riddled with balls. Three different flag bearers was killed in our Regiment and the 4th one carried the flag off the field. Our Major Long from Taylorsville, Ill was killed by a grape, he was a noble man and loved by all the Regiment. I seen General Grant this morning riding over the hills of Vicksburg. He is the old hero of the West and will make the South surrender unconditionally.[1]

In the summer of 1864, Robert Wood Rickard and the 41st Veteran's Battalion assisted General Sherman's March to the Sea and turned north to South Carolina. Rickard survived all four years of the brutal war to march triumphant in the Grand Review in Washington, D.C., on May 24, 1865.

After the Civil War, Robert Rickard met Lucretia Jane Ferguson (of Platte County, Missouri) when he visited friends in Kansas. In January of 1868, the couple married in Wyandotte City, Kansas. They settled there and had three children before moving on to Texas. It was said that Tex Rickard was never clear about the state where he was born. Some historians believe he was born in Kansas; others cite Missouri. To his friend, Jack Lawrence,

Robert Wood Rickard, father of Tex Rickard, served in the 41st Infantry of volunteers from Illinois from the beginning of the Civil War until its end (from the collection of Dennis Kemper).

he simply said he was born on a rural farm outside Kansas City. Two counties frequently cited as his birthplace are Wyandotte County, Kansas, and Clay County, Missouri. Because the two counties are neighboring and Kansas City straddles both states, Kansas and Missouri, it is easy to understand the confusion about Rickard's state of origin. Wyandotte County, where his parents were married, encompasses the northwestern portion of Kansas City, and later the family moved to Clay County, Texas, a coincidence of county names that may also account for the confusion regarding his birth and early life.

Tex Rickard's grand-nephew, Dennis Kemper, designates Tex Rickard's birthplace as Kansas rather than Missouri. Unfortunately, his birth record is absent and neither county noted above maintained such records prior to 1890. Rickard's press man at Madison Square Garden, Ike Dorgan, who worked closely with him, said that Tex was born in Kansas. In addition, Rickard's only surviving daughter pointed to Kansas. His certificate of marriage to Maxine Hodges, dated October 7, 1926, in West Virginia cites Wyandotte as the county where he was born, although he called it "Wyandotte, MO," even though Wyandotte County is in Kansas. Because Rickard would put so many American towns "across the map," it is worthy of consideration which counties have claimed bragging rights for his origin.

In the biography *The Magnificent Rube* written about Tex Rickard in 1957, author Charles Samuels tells an interesting story about Tex's birth, which he claimed to be in 1871 in Missouri. The book reinforces the misleading information about Rickard's date of birth and place of origin. Samuels says that Rickard was born during a hail of gunfire from a posse that was chasing Frank and Jesse James. The outlaws were home visiting their mother, Zerelda Samuel, who lived on the farm next door, he explained, to the Rickard's farm. The young Rickard family was so horrified by the violent acts surrounding them that they were forced to move to Texas. It is an interesting story but unlikely to be true. If the location for the Rickard farm was next door to the James farm, it would place it in Clay County, Missouri, about two miles east of Kearney. The close proximity of the farm to the town of Kearney, rather than Kansas City, would lead one to expect that Rickard would specifically name Kearney, Missouri, as his birthplace rather than Kansas City. He did not. He always mentioned a farm outside of Kansas City as his place of birth.

Samuels explains that detectives of the Pinkerton Agency, in their pursuit of the notorious James brothers, bombed the Samuel home in January of 1875, killing the youngest James boy, age eight. The explosion wounded mother Zerelda Samuel such that her arm had to be amputated. Samuels states that the famous raid took place "shortly after Tex's fourth birthday."[2] It is a horrifying story; however, the Rickard family had already moved from Kansas to Texas by 1874, a year before the famous Pinkerton raid. Nevertheless, it is easy to imagine that any family farm located within a 30-mile vicinity during any of the various escapades involving the infamous James residents of Clay County, Missouri, would qualify as "next door" to Kansas City. Such was the notoriety of the James outlaws that put the Kansas City area in the news.

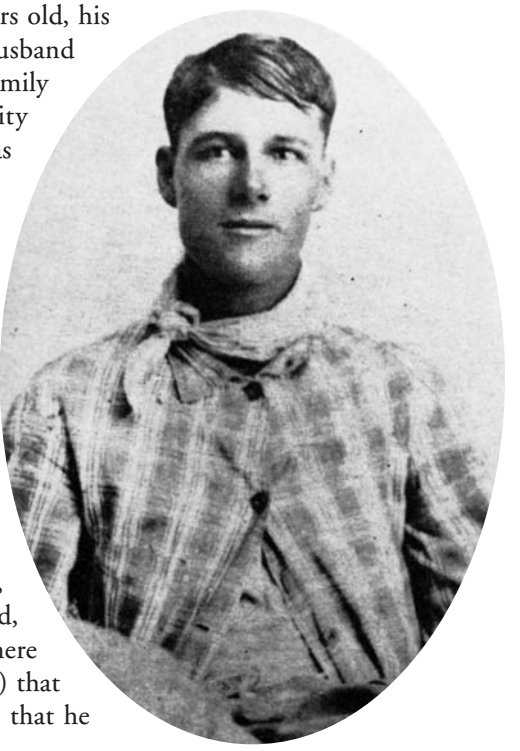
What is known is that Tex was born on January 2, 1870, and not 1871. According to the 1870 census records of Wyandotte County, Kansas, the Rickard family was living at that time in the Quintaro Township in Wyandotte County, Kansas, with son George L. listed as being five months of age and born in Kansas.[3] In 1874, Robert Rickard, his wife Lu, and three young children moved to the small town of Cambridge, Texas, also known as Pinhook. One of Tex Rickard's wives had this to say of Rickard's father: "Robert Woods Rickard tried hard but he was one of those individuals with a peculiar genius for not making money."[4] Robert was a millwright by trade, and he must have been prosperous enough to buy property

in Henrietta, because in 1880 he acquired a home on Angelina Street and settled his family there. In fairness to the men who served during the Civil War, it must be noted that the extremely harsh conditions of the time left many of them, including the very young, in such failing health that it was difficult for them later to hold any job requiring strenuous labor for any extended periods of time. There were no economic safety nets — if you couldn't work, you and your family starved.

Robert Wood was said to have suffered from consumption, which could have been caused by any number of things. He apparently contracted some form of lung disease during his service in the South during the Civil War. There were various forms of lung disease at the time ranging from tuberculosis to a type of lung fungus, called black lung in Mississippi, something similar to Valley Fever today. Many Civil War soldiers contracted TB (in both active and latent forms) during their service, causing their families to note on many documents that they were so afflicted by the war that they never recovered. Whatever the cause of Robert Rickard's lung ailment, it caused him to move to Texas where he believed the climate would improve his condition. Nevertheless, his illness proved fatal.

Rickard did share some happy times with his father. One of the activities Tex fondly remembered was a buffalo hunt to the location where Wichita Falls stands today.[5] Most of the large herds of American buffalo had already been killed by soldiers and white traders when Rickard was a child. But buffalo still roamed on Comanche hunting grounds northwest of Wichita Falls. Ranchers' relations with the Comanche Indians were fairly friendly during Rickard's boyhood years.

On March 22, 1881, when young Dink (the name stayed with him until he left Texas) was only eleven years old, his father died. Tex Rickard's mother Lu buried her husband in the Cambridge Cemetery and then moved the family to a small farm a few miles south to a community known as Blue Grove. There Dink helped serve as provider for his mother, two brothers, Bob Jr. and Merl, and three sisters, Minnie, Annie Katherine, and Alice.[6] Even at a young age Rickard was a natural promoter. He used to say that his first promotion was the Blue Grove Picnic. Clay County records are silent on the subject, but one can only imagine that whatever Dink sponsored at the picnic must surely have been successful. Dink was an industrious worker. He polished boots for local cowboys for a few pennies, but the income came far short of meeting the needs of a fatherless family.



Tex Rickard's sunburn from his days on the famous Texas longhorn cattle drives.

To help alleviate the family's grinding poverty, young Rickard hired himself out as a range hand, herding and punching cows until he was 22. There are two sources (each citation from a close friend) that mention the ranches where he worked. One says that he was employed by the Harold brothers for the East Ranch near Archer City, which is about twenty-five miles southwest of Henrietta.[7] The

other source mentions that he worked for the Curtis brothers and later for W. H. Worsham's R2 Ranch in Hardeman County.[8]

Rickard took part in several major cattle drives involving as many as 3,000 head of cattle. These were among the last of the great trail drives from Texas to Kansas in the early 1880s. The long drives ended when the railroad lines came into Texas. The men who worked the drives typically earned $100 per trip. Rickard's first drive, when he was sixteen, went from Henrietta, Texas, to Honeywell, Kansas. When he worked for the R2 Ranch, he drove a herd to Dodge City, Kansas. Later, he joined a group of eleven men (which included the cook and the foreman) who took a herd of 3,000 longhorns to Montana. It was a trial of the young Rickard's strength and stamina, working 18-hour days in the saddle, and having to deal not only with the cattle and the gruff men around him, but also on this occasion having to face the horrors of a prairie fire that caused a stampede and scattered the herd.[9] At 19, he started his last cattle drive, a three-month trip to Omaha, Nebraska. The time for a trip to Kansas varied with the weather, from one to three months. Like the stories told by many of the very young cowboys who were hired as drovers on the long trails during the two decades after the Civil War, these were the trips, Rickard recalled, that toughened him for life.[10]

On those long rides, Rickard fell into the camaraderie of close-knit male groups and learned how to handle men whose tempers were worn thin by lonely, bitter days on a hard trail. The men he met and worked with on the ranches in his early days became his lifelong friends. They were always his guests at his boxing promotions, and when he died, several of them made the trip to New York to attend his funeral. The one thing Tex Rickard maintained during his short life was a long list of friends. Whenever and wherever they got together, they shared stories of old times. Some worked and partnered with him. He was a man who believed that friends could work together. He never forgot his *pardners*, and they never forgot him, coming to his aid when he most needed them.

Young Dink Rickard absorbed the frontier wisdom on those early cattle drives out of Texas. During his first trail drive to Kansas, his boss gave him several pieces of advice that lasted Rickard a lifetime. He taught Rickard always to think big by telling him that if he was going to worry about a hundred, it was just as easy to worry about a million. Rickard would later realize that this was even more relevant to money than it was to cattle.

On the trail, the cowherds fought bandits and wild animals and engaged in solemn and occasionally philosophical conversation "as to whether the Indians were human beings."[11] After fording the Red River the drovers had to move their mile-long line of cattle across the Indian Territory that separated Texas and Kansas. The native people learned they could beg, steal, or exact cattle as tolls from the cowboys who crossed their land. Foremen found it safer to barter some of the animals at the "line" rather than to defend the herd and the hands from hostile raids (an activity that must have equipped Rickard for handling tickets and business matters when dealing with politicians and others during his boxing promotions later.) Regardless of how well prepared one was, there was always an unexpected harrowing event or two along the trail.

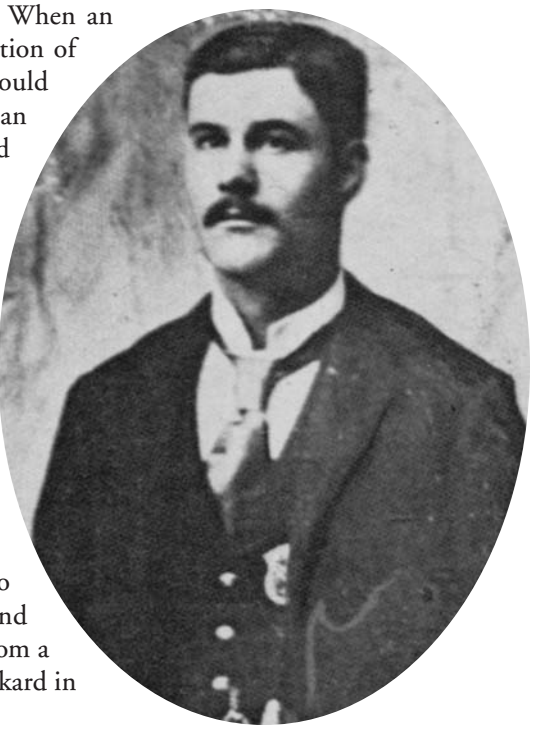
On his first ride, Rickard was handed a painful lesson on human relationships and violent death. Two cowboys, Kirby and the Tripper, who Rickard knew from Henrietta, had fallen in love with the same woman. She was known to be the prettiest girl in Clay County. While the cowboys were vying for her affections, the woman went and married someone else. Rickard told his friend Jack Lawrence, "You'd think that those two fellers would have made up and consoled each other after that, but they didn't. They seemed to hate each other more."[12]

The two cowboys were still deeply entrenched in their animosities when they signed on to the same great cattle drive as young Dink. It made for an interesting but uneasy start to a difficult trip. Two days into the drive, with unending bitter discussions between the cowboys, the Tripper got sick of the argument and put a bullet into Kirby's stomach and rode away. (Later, Rickard heard that he rode up to Chicago and opened a saloon near the stockyards.)

But after Kirby was shot, Matt, the foreman, and the trail hands left the herd and the mortally wounded cowboy in the care of young Rickard to make a wild dash on horseback to locate a doctor thirty miles away. It was a disturbing night back at camp. Rickard heard the howls of the hungry wolves and the yelps of coyotes as they drew closer. Kirby struggled for his last breath as Dink lay beside him. It wasn't long before a lone wolf came around sniffing at the corpse. Rickard drilled the animal with his Winchester. The evening seemed eternally long as he lay between a dead wolf and a dead man. "I'll never forget that night if I live to be a hundred years old," Rickard said years later. "Every time I'd see a pair of eyes gleaming through the darkness I'd take a shot at them. In the morning we found the carcasses of four coyotes and three wolves lying on the prairie."[13] At sunrise before moving on, the trail drivers buried Kirby in a shallow grave under a tree. Matt delivered the eulogy: "May God have mercy on poor Kirby's soul and keep the wolves and kyotes from digging him up."[14]

Matt took Dink aside and gave him some valuable life lessons and manly words of frontier philosophy. When an Indian attack, gun fight, or some other apparition of the Grim Reaper visited them, the foreman would tell Dink, "Don't sulk! Bite down on it!" It was an important lesson for his life to come.[15] Rickard grew up fast and hard, and earned a wealth of respect on the challenging cattle trails.

In 1894, at the age of 24, Rickard was elected city marshal of Henrietta, Texas, the youngest sheriff of the town known informally as Lick Skillet. It was an important but seemingly thankless job with no salary, his earnings based solely on what he could collect in fines from drunks. Rickard's characteristic method of cleaning up the town whenever there was an outburst of disorderly conduct was to say in his characteristically calm voice, "Now just go on home and be good," or "Go home and go to bed."[16] But there were occasional fights, and Rickard was known never to have backed off from a fight if it came to one. Confrontations with Rickard in bars have been reported after 1906 in Tonopah, San Francisco, and Chicago. His confidence, quick thinking, quick draw of his gun, and strong hands — experience he must have gained while sheriff — served him well in those confrontations and others later in life.



In 1894, at the age of 24, Rickard was elected city marshal of Henrietta, Texas, the youngest sheriff of the town known informally as Lick Skillet. Rickard would carry this badge as a memento for the rest of his days.

It was in the northwest Texas town of Henrietta in Clay County, just south of the government-drawn line for the Indian Territory, that Rickard gained a pedigree that would identify him for the remainder of his life. It was also here that he would encounter a second personal tragedy. The young sheriff fell in love with the daughter of Henrietta's physician, Dr. Samuel Guinn Bittick. When the couple announced their intentions to marry, the doctor forbade the marriage of his 19-year-old daughter, Leona Viola, to Rickard because he felt she was in "poor health." This did not stop the two from marrying. Clay County marriage records indicate that on July 2, 1894, Mr. G. L. Richard [*sic*] was joined in matrimony to Miss Leona Riddick [*sic*] by County Judge F. J. Barrett.[17]

The story that became legend in the town, however, was a different one. One week after Miss Bittick's graduation from the Polytechnic College in Fort Worth (now Texas Wesleyan University) and dressed in the same gown she wore for her May 1894 graduation, the couple eloped. They were married in the home of L.B. Upham in Fort Worth by a Baptist pastor, the Rev. J. F. Young. This account surfaced in the Wichita paper after Rickard died in 1929.[18] The sheriff and his wife seemed blissfully happy by all accounts, but by August, Mrs. Rickard was confined to her bed, suffering from what was then considered the "white plague"—incurable tuberculosis. Six months later on February 3, 1895, a son was born to the couple and named Curtis L. Rickard. The name Curtis came from one of Tex's honored friends, the man who ran against him and lost in the election for city marshal. Tragically, on March 11, the young bride and mother died of her illness. She had only recently turned 20 on February 20. On May 4, two months after the mother's death, Rickard's son Curtis died. The wife and son of Dink Rickard were buried in Henrietta's Hope Cemetery.

As tragic as these personal events were in 1895, they actually propelled Tex into his next adventure, and gave him a good head-start before the massive stampede of people north to Alaska. Lonely and filled with despair, Rickard did what so many others did in that era during the depression of the 1890s. He harnessed a friend from Henrietta—Will Slack—and in the summer of 1895, only a few short months after the death of his wife and son, Rickard and his friend boarded a "train to anywhere." Eventually, the train stopped in Seattle, Washington. The West Coast port was the end of the road for some and the stepping off point for a breed of young hopefuls, adventurous, robust, independent types who were as comfortable being vagabonds as tycoons. Tales of fortunes in gold being mined in the great white north excited their imaginations.

In November of 1895, Rickard and Slack boarded a boat to Juneau, Alaska. In Juneau they assembled their backpacks and sleds and a year's worth of food and supplies that at the time cost about $1,000 per person. While in Juneau, they heard an equal number of tales of misery told by empty-handers returning from the outback, glad to fit back into society. Their wretched tales only hardened Rickard's determination. Betting on opportunity and relying on his grit, Rickard responded to the call of riches in the frontier spaces of Alaska and Canada. The riches he would ultimately mine there would be found in the entertainment business.

Dealer in the Klondike

Tex and Will were among the early arrivals in the Klondike, two years before the great rush of 1897–98. As Klondike historian Pierre Berton noted, more than one-hundred thousand souls would attempt the trip in 1897, but only about thirty thousand would make it.[19]

Most would turn back. The trip into the gold fields was either too harsh; or after the life-threatening trek, prospectors found they were simply too late. All of the productive land had been claimed by miners two years earlier.

Rickard was told to wait until the spring, after the snow melted, before attempting the rugged trail, but Tex was eager and determined to get to his destination. At the time Rickard made the trek from Skagway into the gold fields, no railroad existed into the Klondike's interior. There were only two paths into the territory from Skagway: over the White Pass Trail (a trail considered inhospitable) or the shorter route via the Chilkoot Trail starting

Tex Rickard, like these "miners bound for the Klondike gold fields," had to carry a heavy backpack over the deadly summit of Chilkoot Pass (1898, Keystone View Co., Library of Congress).

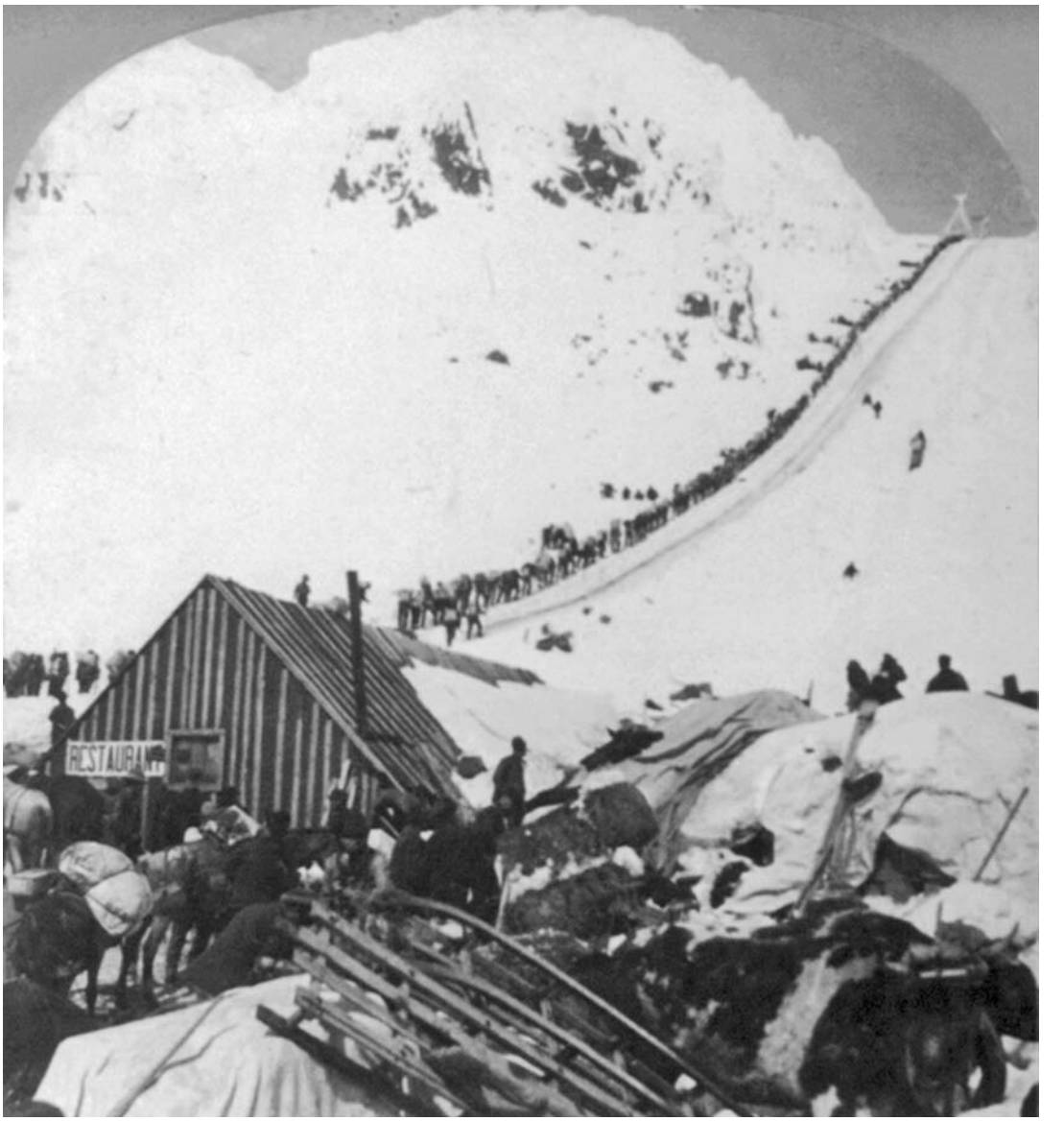
from Dyea. (The White Pass Railroad, constructed between 1898 and 1900, ended foot passage over the Chilkoot Trail.) But when Rickard and Slack started their trek, they had to make the arduous climb over the Chilkoot Pass, which meant traversing sixteen miles of trail over a 3,535-foot mountain summit, thirty-three miles from Dyea to Lake Bennett. The final climb of the mountain summit required scaling 800 feet at a grade of 45 degrees. The entire trip had to be broken into segments that allowed the men to carry fifty to one hundred pounds of provisions on their backs, make a drop, and then return to pick up the next load of provisions, thus traversing the trail twenty or thirty times. The ordeal took its toll on Rickard's friend from Henrietta. Slack had successfully negotiated the Chilkoot summit and its multiple journeys to pick up provisions. After arriving at Lake Bennett, the men had to wait until the river thawed, build a boat, travel through rapids, and float about 550 miles to their destination. When Slack arrived at the boat-building stage, he became delirious and sold his provisions to other hopefuls camped at the lake's edge waiting for the spring thaw. Without a thread of regret, Slack turned back, leaving Rickard to go it alone. It was to be Rickard's most strenuous course in physical training yet. He described it as "the coldest and most difficult task of his entire life."[20] Surviving the pass and making it to one of the outposts in the sub–Arctic wilderness took a measure of strength, endurance, and confidence that put Rickard in good standing with the boxers he encountered later in life.

During the summers when the snow melted, the landscape turned into harsh mountain tundra or swampy marshlands full of mosquitoes. The reward for successfully negotiating the icy march over treacherous mountain passes and dragging a sled full of provisions like a dog meant living in canvas tents, slaving with a pick and shovel during the summer, and enduring winter months of depressing darkness in virtual solitary confinement. Little wonder that when enough tent shacks around a couple of creeks collected into primitive townships, entrepreneurs focused on providing necessities for the miners. The first establishment to sprout was usually a general store. Saloons, dance halls, and prostitutes soon followed. These businesses collected much of the gold eventually mined in the Klondike. The various camps, forts and townships of Fortymile City, Circle City, and eventually Dawson City, were well established with "sourdoughs" like Rickard, who had arrived early, as opposed to the new "tenderfeet," who came north later during the Great Rush.

Toughened by the life he had so far endured, Rickard found a brotherhood of like-minded men who preferred more descriptive monikers (like Swiftwater Bill, Deep Hole Johnson, Ham-Grease Jimmy, or the Chills and Fever Kid) over meaningless names that said nothing about one's circumstances. It was in and among this fraternity that Rickard, the quiet-spoken, cowboy sheriff from Henrietta, was dubbed "Tex."

During the formative years of his early adult life, Rickard absorbed the Alaskan "code," and it would remain a part of his nature for the rest of his life. The Alaskan "code" ruled the territorial townships as opposed to existing laws that governed the Canadian posts and cities. For Americans filled with a free-for-all frontier spirit, the gold was simply there for the taking. Many never fathomed that the strike was in a different country, and the hoards of unruly Americans rushing into Canadian outposts posed a huge problem for the Canadian Mounties and the Yukon Field Force.

Author Pierre Burton describes the Alaskan "code" as a mixture of communism and anarchy. Fortymile "had no mayor, council, no judges or lawyers, no police or jail or written code." There was governance by local committee and a generosity born of a Christian ethic where no man went hungry. "If a man had no money, he could still get an outfit without payment.... Men shared their good fortune with their comrades.... Each man's cabin was



"Bound for the Klondike Gold Fields" at the base of Chilkoot Pass. The trials and tribulations of the march of stampeders over the summit (and the stereo-image with this title) inspired Charlie Chaplin's movie *The Gold Rush* in 1923 (1898, by B. L. Singley, Keystone View Co., Library of Congress).

open to any passer-by; such a traveler could enter, eat his fill, sleep in the absent owner's bed, and go on his way, as long as he cleaned up and left a supply of fresh kindling. This was more than mere courtesy in a land where a freezing man's life might depend on the speed with which he could light a fire."[21]

One hundred and forty river miles northwest of Fortymile was Circle City, Rickard's first destination. It was a city built on the sand bars of the river's bend (or its circle), which turned to mud banks with a hovering swarm of pesky mosquitoes in the spring. Nevertheless,

it was the Paris of Alaska as compared to other places in the territory at the time and a home base for young Rickard. By 1896, a year before the big rush, the city had a population of 1,200. It sported a grand opera house, two theaters, eight dance halls and twenty-eight saloons, one of which was Sam Bonnifield's Bank Saloon and Gambling House on the corner of Front and King, opposite the Alaska Commercial store. Sam's was the largest saloon in town.[22] Desperate for steady income, Rickard took a job in the saloon. Bonnifield, a renowned gambler as well as the owner, hired Rickard to deal cards at his establishment and later provided him a gambling shack of his own, which Rickard eventually lost in a card game.

Berton explained that the monikers for the city's most famous gambler were "Square Sam" Bonnifield because he ran an honest gambling house and "Silent Sam" because he was quiet and reserved. His aloof and steely blue eyes added to his reputation. He neither spoke nor displayed any emotion as he played the games or swept in hundreds of dollars worth of bets as dealer at his gambling tables. He was the emotionless winner of one of the largest recorded poker pots during the Great Rush: $150,000. He beat a man holding four queens with a hand that held four kings. On one occasion Rickard watched Bonnifield lose $72,000 along with his gambling establishment, only to be loaned money so that he could continue his bets. Eventually he won everything back, money and saloon.[23] The impressionable young Rickard seemed to have absorbed Bonnifield's personality and work ethic. Rickard was a consummate gambler, quiet socially, and poker-faced in the most challenging of his business dealings. When news circulated in Circle City of a gold strike up river, Rickard was one of the first to leave. The town emptied out and became a ghost town during the winter of 1896–97.[24]

Rickard first struck it rich in the Klondike, not by use of the hammer or pickax, but by buying and selling claims. Luckily, he was already situated in Alaska when news of the Dawson strike circulated. In February of 1896, the 26-year-old had a new partner, Harry Ash. It took twenty days for the pair to pull a sled up the frozen river toward Dawson to the Bonanza Creek where the strike was announced. (Throughout his life's adventures, Rickard rarely went into any new quest alone and without a hand or many hands to share in the risk. He always had a partner.) After arriving at the famous creek, the two bought a half interest in Three Below Bonanza. Shortly after buying it, they sold it for $20,000 and bought an interest in Four Below which they then sold for $30,000.[25] Because much of the land had already been staked, many prospectors had to buy into claims or lease them from existing owners. It was through the buying and leasing of claims that many prospectors made money without doing a day's work of hard-rock mining.

A mining job was difficult labor. First, the ground had to be thawed by building a fire. Next, little by little, the miner had to pick away at the ground, piling the rock diggings into mounds, and then wait until spring when running water would enable the miner to sluice the gold from the gravel. It was a rare site that would allow miners to simply pan for gold. But when that happened, it would send a new wave of prospectors to a new bonanza. The claims Rickard bought and sold at Bonanza Creek near Dawson were his first big strikes.

Commodities were scare in Dawson. When Tex arrived, there were only two chickens in town and each egg cost a dollar. Commodities easily drew five times what they would normally in the States. By the spring of 1897, Dawson had swelled to a population of 1,500, a city much like Fortymile, but it grew to 3,000 in only a few months with the news of the rich strikes nearby. Here in Dawson, Tex and Harry Ash opened their Northern Saloon. It existed alongside a dozen other saloons, but Tex's was the one known to be "square" (fair) and generous.

Credit was unlimited. Stories are told about miners who came into the city after months of toil. If miners didn't have enough gold dust to pay their debts at the store or the saloon, they were still allowed money for their "spree." It was universally agreed that after a hard winter, every man deserved a "spree," comprising a few drinks, some gambling entertainment, and a few kind caresses from one of the local females.

In his "Ballad of the Northern Lights," poet and adventurer to the Klondike Robert Service wrote about the miners' frequent fate:

> *The town looked mighty bright to us, with a bunch of dust to spend,*
> *And nothing was half too good them days, and everyone was our friend.*
> *Winning meant more than mining then, and life was a dizzy whirl,*
> *Gambling and dropping chunks of gold down the neck of a dance-hall girl;*
> *Till we went clean mad, it seems to me, and we squandered our last poke.*[26]

Such were the hard-working, gambling lives of the fortune-seekers. Debts were carried on the books of the business. It was an easy-going business method governed by a handshake, and one that Rickard took in his own business dealings from the Klondike to New York. But he was also a gambler who risked big. After an easy night of gambling, Ash and Rickard lost the Northern. Without breathing a word of his loss, Rickard walked out of his saloon and went to work dealing cards at another down the road — Swiftwater Bill Gates' Monte Carlo.

With the influx of the stampeders in 1898, Dawson was called the San Francisco of the North. It had churches, hospitals, theaters and saloons, although the buildings were furnished a little more shabbily than those in their sister city due to the lack of accessible

Dawson City, the "San Francisco of the North," on the Klondike River where Tex Rickard would first master the saloon business (photograph by Goetzman, 1898).

fineries. But like the Barbary Coast, Dawson was a swinging place. It attracted all kinds of camp followers, both men and women. Nelly Bly and Calamity Jane were reported to have visited. It was in Dawson while working at the Monte Carlo that Rickard is reported to have consorted with a belle of a dancehall girl, met the next woman he would marry, and staged a boxing match.

Dance hall women, or good-time girls, and prostitutes were as much a part of the life of the Klondike as were the miners and faro dealers. Like the men, they were pioneers staking their own claims to the gold dust. Most were young. Most chose their profession and courageously ventured into the promising search for opportunity and wealth in the north. After all, what was available in the States for a poor, single woman in the way of a profession? Educational opportunities were limited. Wages for the fairer sex were usually inadequate to live on, and the age of consent in some states remained 10. Many were from well-heeled families and were simply looking for excitement away from the constraints of home. Whatever the reason for the trek north, and the reasons were many, the women who made the perilous journey were obviously strong, independent spirits with the same determination as the prospects they hoped to either wed or fleece.

By 1898 Dawson had a conservative count of 150 working whores; some figures were estimated as high as 400.[27] The number of prostitutes tended to rise when gold production was up and drop when it was down. Blanche Lamonte was one of the more noted of the women at Dawson. At 19 she left San Francisco and went to work at the Monte Carlo. She lived in a room there and was pursued by many. Both Bob Ensley and Klondike King Charlie Anderson made her offers of marriage: her weight (she was tiny) in gold. But she declined. She considered herself Tex's girl.[28]

According to one tale, Blanche was with Rickard in the summer of 1898 when he happened to notice a dark-haired beauty who had recently arrived from Juneau with a theatrical group touring the Klondike in a burlesque of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Rickard was captivated by the young girl's looks and flirtatious charm. The jealous Blanche reminded Rickard that he belonged to her. Blanche had wanted to go into business with Rickard by setting up a saloon. Rickard's new love put an end to Blanche's plans. In time, Blanche took a new lover, C.B. Heath, alias the "Hobo Kid," a criminal running from the law in the States. The pair moved to Nome and established a gambling house called the Kid's Club.[29] In the meantime, Rickard's newest love, the actress Marie, also had other plans. "Meet you in Nome," she said one day to Tex, and then she, too, moved on.

Meanwhile, Tex was initiated into the world of prizefighting. Heavyweight boxer Frank Slavin, an Australian adventurer who had already toured the world as a champion fighter, was in the Klondike looking for riches in the gold fields when he landed in Dawson. In his prime Slavin had tried unsuccessfully to arrange title fights for himself with John L. Sullivan and Jim Corbett. One of Slavin's more famous bouts occurred against the great black Australian heavyweight, Peter Jackson, at the National Sporting Club at Covent Garden, London in 1892. One evening at the Monte Carlo in Dawson, after Slavin and a local tough, identified as Bill Hoffman, had imbibed a little too much local brew, the two got into a barroom brawl.

Rickard and co-worker Wilson Mizner broke up the fight and realized they had found a couple of prospects for new and exciting barroom entertainment. They arranged for the pair to fight in the back room theater at the saloon. Tickets for the seats cost $15. It wasn't much of a match, but the place filled. Slavin knocked out Hoffman in the first round, but with the new celebrity in town, the idea of fight entertainment caught on. Next Mizner

arranged for a fight between Slavin and wrestler Frank Gotch. It turned out to be a strange mix of a boxing/wrestling match. The referee was totally confused about which rules to use, boxing or wrestling, and when Gotch threw Slavin out of the ring, the referee declared the match a draw.[30]

Like Rickard, Mizner was bitten by the boxing bug. Later, after moving to New York, Mizner managed Stanley Ketchell. When learning of Ketchell's early death, Mizner was supposed to have commented, "Tell them to give him the ten count and he'll get up." Mizner was a colorful character who loved the stage, and in 1910 when Rickard was out West managing the Jeffries-Johnson affair, Mizner wrote a successful Broadway play, *The Deep Purple*, hailed at the time as the greatest melodrama since *Sweeney Todd*. Mizner moved on to Palm Beach, Florida, and made a fortune during the land boom there before moving on to Hollywood and establishing the Brown Derby.

After the Slavin-Gotch bout at the Monte Carlo, Mizner and Rickard matched Slavin with the boxer's Canadian sparring partner, Joe Boyle. They billed the match as the "Sydney Slasher" (Slavin) against "the Man who defied Soapy Smith," the crooked scallywag and ruler of Skagway until he was killed. Actually, the "man-who-defied" name came from Mizner, who had previously worked in Skagway, Alaska, as one of Soapy Smith's "deputies." Mizner and Rickard had the boxers act as though they were enemies. They sent the men to various saloons to make personal appearances and talk "smack." It was good publicity, and one senses Rickard's early attempt to build up a fight. Rickard found he could charge twenty-five dollars for both seats and standing room (another hallmark of the great promoter—high-dollar seats). Again, the place filled. History has not recorded how the receipts were split, but boxer Slavin remained in Dawson where he was matched in other fights.

In August of 1899, Rickard moved on to Rawhide and met future novelist Rex Beach. Rickard built a small saloon and advertised a grand opening that Beach said included a boxing match and a ball. With miners starved for entertainment, they swarmed in "like a delayed hatch of May flies."[31] The saloon was not large enough to hold a standard-sized boxing ring, so the men formed a circle, and the "sock-footed" battlers tumbled around, bouncing from miner to miner. Afterwards there was a grand ball. There was always someone who played the harmonica, the fiddle or mandolin, and everyone enjoyed dancing the shottish, polka, square dance, or waltz. Stephen Foster songs were popular, along with old favorites like "Turkey in the Straw." Because of the lack of women, men waltzed with men in what was called a "squaw dance." The grand opening was a success, but with the townsmen being so poor, Rickard's business went broke, and he moved on to St. Michael in the spring with twenty-one dollars. With that money, he bought a barrel of whisky and opened a tent saloon.[32] It was not uncommon for men to move from fortune to poverty overnight. There were no roots to be laid in the Klondike, and there certainly was little to do but adjust to the situation and face another day with unharnessed anticipation. Rickard was known throughout his life to be an optimist. These early lessons in how to start over and erect a successful business surely helped to build his confidence.

In 1900 when word arrived of the strikes along Anvil Creek of the Seward Peninsula, Rickard moved to Nome. Once there, Rickard went to J.B. (Jim) Murphy's (Murray's) Northern saloon. (One city business directory lists J.B. Murphy as the proprietor at this time, however other records, including a photo of the Northern, identify the name as "Jim Murray.") To Rickard's surprise, the singer Marie, the dark-haired beauty he had met back in Dawson, was working at the Northern. The couple reunited, and with Murphy serving as best man, Rickard married Marie Berteau in the saloon.[33] Murphy advanced Tex gold

dust for the marriage. Their new home would be a rented room in the El Dorado saloon. Rickard went to work and eventually bought into the Northern and hired his brother, Merl, as a bartender. During this time, Rickard operated as both businessman and professional gambler. His wife frequently stood behind him when he worked and played the faro tables. Marie Rickard eventually spent more and more of her time at the Standard, a saloon known for its theatrical entertainment.

One evening after Rickard left the Northern, he went to the Standard expecting to find his wife at a Shakespeare play. Instead, Tex found her behind an "unpainted door" in the arms of another man—an actor. She explained guiltily, "We were practicing a love scene." She fully expected Rickard to pull out the gun he always carried. Murders under such circumstances were frequent in the Arctic and seen as justifiable. Instead, Rickard grasped her arm firmly and escorted her back to the El Dorado. The following morning, Tex discovered that Marie was gone. She had left him a "Dear John" letter under the sheets: "I have gone away with him. Don't try to follow us, I will not come back. You have been very good to me but I want a career, and he can give it to me."[34]

Rickard had nothing else to do but carry on by refreshing the thirsts and alleviating the boredom of the Nome businessmen and ore seekers. Eventually, the Northern became a major outpost in the harsh wilderness. At the bar, adventurous wayfarers (which included significant writers-to-be, such as Rex Beach, Jack London, and poet Robert Service, lawmen such as Wyatt Earp, and others who would later figure into the world of boxing) congregated to share their crude experiences with the miners and the conmen. The Northern sported such famous madams as Klondike Kate. There were also the luckless vagabonds. As a barkeep, Rickard offered a kindly ear to the gypsy, nomadic types who flooded to Alaska seeking their fortunes. He understood them, as only the lonely and luckless can do, and he was tight-lipped about it all. Like Bonnifield's Bank Saloon, the miners in town trusted Tex to hold their gold for safe-keeping in the absence of any formal banks in the north. It was a tradition that would occur later in Goldfield, Nevada, and one that would give Tex the idea of how to publicize his first big fight.

By the summer of 1900, after the great stampede, the population of Nome swelled to 20,000. The busy seaport was no longer an easy-going mining camp filled with seasoned prospectors who were hardened and tested by life in the wilderness into some kind of civilized amicability. As one scribe wrote,

> The country was infested with bad men. Yet Tex never had any fuss in his place. He let it be known that no shooting would be allowed and that bad men would be all the more welcome for their absence. This was taken as a bluff. It was not a bluff. Some of them tried to make a "rough house" in his place. They went in with the avowed intention of killing him. Yet he never killed a man, in spite of the fact that he would have been quite justified in doing so, morally and legally. Somehow these bad men found that it would be much better to be bad somewhere else.[35]

In the Klondike, the Canadian Mounties governed the mining camps, but Nome was without an equivalent in Alaska. Tired of the city's criminal element, Nome's businessmen appointed a council that would govern the burgeoning city, curb its lawlessness, and raise funds for an administrative infrastructure. Tex Rickard was one of the trusted pillars of that first council. Others included Charles Hoxie (co-owner with Wyatt Earp of the largest saloon in town, the Dexter), Bill Tierney and Bill McPhee, saloon owners who, like Rickard, had come up from Dawson, and Julius Geise, a merchant who had made his fortune building sheet-iron stove pipes. The new city council considered two details on its first agenda:

appointing a mayor and taxing the saloons. Rickard was considered the first choice for mayor. When he declined, the job was turned over to Geise. An interesting note by author Lael Morgan mentions that Geise's formal education was so poor that the new mayor let "the well-spoken saloon man [Rickard] call the shots," quite a comment since Rickard was affectionately known as a man of action but very few words.[36]

The second order of business for the new city council was to assess a liquor license fee of $1,000 per establishment. The council needed an income for resources that would counter the graft and protection money that was being collected from business owners by corrupt law enforcement. One of the prostitutes brought public attention to the matter in the newspaper, the *Nome Gold Digger*. Lottie Wilson was flaming mad when a police officer failed to pay her bill of $75 for an evening of services. The deputy had assumed the tryst was a part of her "protection" payment. Wilson thought otherwise and demanded her payment from the police chief. When he denied the bill, Ms. Wilson took it to the court of public opinion, the newspaper. The public agreed with her, and the matter landed on the desk of a U.S. attorney who came to investigate and prosecute the matter. In 1900 Rickard testified that U. S. Attorney Joseph Wood had demanded $3,000 a month to protect Rickard's establishment and not close it down. Rickard admitted that he had made payments of 15 percent of his gross operations to stay in business.[37] Such was the nature of corruption in Nome.

With a new city council governing business affairs, and directed by Rickard, the announcement of a $1,000 licensing fee for liquor sales was considered a welcome change and less of a burden on owners than the graft they had been forced to pay. The large saloons in Nome were making so much money that the tax was considered a drop in the bucket to clean up the place; however, the effect of the tax on owners of small clubs was considerable and put many of them out of business. It was during this time in Nome while dealing with the unsavory element of "pay to play" politics that Rickard was given a stout business lesson that enabled him to survive the underworld elements he would later encounter in the business of boxing. His stint on the city council would also prepare him for organizing a similar one when he moved to Goldfield, Nevada.

It was also as part-owner in the Northern where Rickard met Flora Haig, his future mother-in-law, who hailed from Seattle. The interesting woman extended a gloved hand of introduction to Rickard one evening in the saloon, possibly intending to attract his attention. She was touring with a theatrical group that included her young daughter, Edith Mae. Mrs. Haig was known occasionally to dress the girl as a boy to protect her from the lusty instincts of the sex-starved miners her professional group served. Rickard would be attracted instead to her daughter, and eventually took her for his wife.

Rickard would meet others at his saloon who would fare in his later life. At the age of sixteen, John Philip McKernan (later to become Jack "Doc" Kearns, manager of heavyweight champion Jack Dempsey) had followed the same adventurous route to the Klondike and wound up working for a short time at Rickard's Northern saloon, weighing the miner's gold dust, the most common currency in Alaska. Kearns explained in his autobiography how he would gift himself of some of the gold dust he weighed at the famous saloon, figuring no one would miss it. He would pour syrup onto his hands and rub his hands through his hair to ensure that gold dust would stick. Then, when he "managed" to get some of the miners' precious dust on his hands, he would quickly swipe his hands through his hair. After work, he would shake out his excess profit.[38] Rickard was known to run an honest establishment, and his steely-eyed stare, which Kearns later recalled in his memoirs, kept the employee at

a distance from his boss. Years later when the two were introduced, Rickard failed to recognize Kearns from his days at the Northern, which only contributed to Kearn's smoldering enmity. Kearns would spend the remainder of his life bad-mouthing and eventually suing the successful impresario.

The wheel of fortune had begun to turn for Rickard, and before he left Alaska, Tex would be known as the epitome of a lucky man. When he cashed out his partnership interest in the Northern hotel and saloon after four years, he was given $400,000. Being the gambler that he was, he put all the money on the poker table before he left, double or nothing, and walked out with $800,000.[39] Lady luck was truly on his side. With little formal education but a distinguished graduate of the school of "hard knocks," Rickard was ready to move on to his next fortune.

Unfortunately, the lucky man also had a reputation for being gullible. With a fortune in hand from his proceeds and winnings in Alaska, he headed to Johannesburg, South Africa. It was a crazy pursuit, he admitted, of a diamond claim. Jim Whitney, a person with a shady background, told Rickard in a bar one night about a diamond claim he had in Africa, one in the middle of a whole patch of diamonds. The two became partners and sailed off to another continent on the *Patricia*. Once they arrived, Rickard found that he was part-owner of a bogus mine.[40] The trip took him to London and eventually back to San Francisco, California, in 1903. Again, he was out of money — all that he had made to that point. But love rescued the man and lifted his spirits. He married Edith Haig, the daughter of the actress he met in Alaska. The couple produced a daughter who was named Bessie.[41]

Upon learning of big gold strikes in the American Southwest, it seemed like everyone in Nome had moved to Nevada. Rickard's friend Wyatt Earp had traveled to the Tonopah area and opened a saloon in 1901. The place seemed promising. Rickard talked his new wife into heading to Nevada. In a smaller mining camp thirty miles south of Tonopah, Rickard and his wife set up housekeeping and Rickard established an even bigger saloon than his first.

The Largest Saloon in the Southwest

Rickard established his Nevada version of the great Northern saloon with E.S. "Kid" Highley, one of his Arctic brothers. Like his reputation in the Klondike, Rickard became known among gold prospectors as a square dealer and a leader who could get things done. The people of Goldfield were amazed at his Midas touch, and his influence in town affairs rose rapidly, much like his experience in Henrietta or Nome. What seemed to be Rickard's primary attribute, his good luck, wasn't bestowed upon him for free — it was hard-earned luck. Perhaps resilience in the face of personal adversity was his primary character trait.

In 1905, the mines around Goldfield produced $2,300,000. Rickard garnered part of this astounding wealth by once again quenching the thirsts and the compulsive gambling appetites of the miners who became rich overnight. His Northern saloon and gambling hall at the corner of Crook and Main streets in Goldfield was one of the most successful in the West, with fourteen game tables and 24 dealers to accommodate roulette, faro, blackjack and craps. Eight bartenders worked an eight-hour shift, and the doors never closed. Each man paid himself $12 from the cash register after his shift. Two or more floor bosses, sometimes Rickard himself, or the famed western lawman Virgil Earp, ran an orderly operation. It was the scene of what old-timers said "were some of the greatest gambling plays ever wit-

Tex Rickard's Northern saloon, the largest in the Southwest, where thousands of gold miners stored their gold pokes and quenched their thirsts.

nessed on the desert. The 'sky' was the limit and promoters and 'wild catters' were said to have 'got all the excitement they craved,' frequently laying $10,000 on the turn of a card."[42]

Rickard soon became one of the leading financiers in the state. Considered a "settler" of the area, he put down roots by building a respectable brick Victorian home, the first building of its kind in Goldfield. Rickard's was the only home with grass that had to be kept alive with a daily watering, using up precious gallons of the desert commodity. (Water was sold by the bucket.) But at that time, money was flowing into his saloon business.

But on April 18, 1906, an earthquake rocked San Francisco, the largest town and banking center of the West. The resulting fire destroyed the city, burned bank records, and displaced more than 250,000 people, halting all manners of service. The San Francisco Stock Exchange, the principal market for many of the Goldfield mining stocks, closed for more than two months. According to one memoir, "Every bank in Nevada closed down, just as every California bank did.... Nevada banks, as a rule, had cleared through San Francisco banks, and practically all of Nevada's cash was tied up by the catastrophe."[43] Goldfield merchants and bankers were left with only the cash in their vaults. Desperate for new funds, mining brokers began selling their stocks directly to eastern markets as the town attempted to avoid the pattern of other ore-made cities in the boom-and-bust mining economy.

Before the earthquake, San Francisco had been the fight center for the West and had drawn eastern fighters eager for larger and more stable paychecks. And while nearby Los Angeles could attract the fight crowd, it was still considered a small town in 1906, not large

Edith Mae, Tex, and daughter Bessie sitting on the porch of their brick home in Goldfield, 1907 (Cayton Sports, Inc.).

enough to take over San Francisco's role as a center of sport and finance. The San Francisco sporting world had suffered a fatal blow. Prize fights, along with every other form of entertainment, disappeared. Mechanics' Pavilion, where most of the important fights were held, was destroyed by the resulting fire. Even Jim Coffroth's open-air arena in nearby Colma, California, went vacant. Californians had more important matters to deal with than sporting events. Even fights in Los Angeles were cancelled. Without the support of San Franciscans, LA could not support the sport by itself.

Boxers who had previously gone west to attract fights were forced to move back east. Philadelphia, New York, and Baltimore stood to become more attractive venues for boxing. However, clubs like the Philadelphia Tuxedo Club could not offer the big, high-paying attractions that had been offered by the San Francisco fight trust. New York stepped up to fill in.

Only a few weeks after the disaster, Rickard had gone to New York to assess business interests, and while in Brooklyn witnessed his first professional prize fight on May 28, between two of the top lightweight boxers: Terry McGovern and Jimmy Britt.

McGovern and Britt were top white boxers, both of whom had fought previously in fixed bouts versus Joe Gans. (Joe Gans had been forced to "fight to orders.") McGovern had "knocked out Gans" in 1900 in Chicago in what was so blatant a fix that the sport of

boxing was banned for a quarter-century in the Windy City. Jimmy Britt's brother, Willus Britt had arranged with Gans' manager, Al Herford, for Gans to let Britt "make a good showing" in their 1904 bout in Britt's home town of San Francisco. Britt had taken advantage of the deal by going all out to kayo Gans and was disqualified when, in his blood lust, he fouled Gans several times. Based on the fact that Britt "was winning the fight," the San Francisco papers declared him the lightweight champion, a fallacy that persisted for more than a century.[44]

Although boxing purists still regarded Gans as the rightful title holder, Britt had carried on during 1905 as if he were the champion. Even those who considered Gans the champ called Britt the "white lightweight champion." Britt lost whatever title he may have held to Battling Nelson late in 1905. Nelson then lost to Britt in a return match. While Nelson and Britt fought over imaginary titles, Gans, the legitimate champion, struggled to find paydays in 1905 for two reasons: first, he was so good that nobody wanted to fight him; and second, he had the doleful reputation of being "a fakir."[45]

In any case, Rickard had gone to the New York event to see McGovern fight Britt without being aware of the long controversial string of events that surrounded the history of the lightweight championship. Rickard had a choice seat at ringside — in the row directly behind McGovern's manager, Joe Humphries, and legendary lawman Bat Masterson. Masterson was quite taken with the manly sport of boxing. He and Rickard had a great deal in common: mutual friends of the Earps, Wyatt and Virgil, and mutual business interests. Both had been western lawmen and both had owned popular establishments. Rickard owned the Northern, and Masterson had owned the Lone Star Dance Hall in Dodge City, Kansas.

The Britt-McGovern fight was a hard-fought ten rounds for which no official decision was rendered. Britt fought well and forced the fighting in the last of ten rounds, but the consensus among sportswriters was that McGovern had won. The scene after the main event in New York was even more chaotic than the fight and made an indelible impression on Rickard. The participants were arrested and charged with "engaging in a prize fight." While everyone was released on bail, spectator Rickard made a mental note of the excitement the event had generated, the people he had met, and the complicated regulations that had to be navigated in order to stage a boxing event in the big city.[46]

Back in October of 1904, Gans had fought San Francisco's favorite son, James Edward Britt, who pretentiously referred to himself as "Sir Edward" in and around his hometown. Britt fouled Gans repeatedly and was disqualified. Gans later revealed that he had been forced into accepting a deal made between the two managers whereby Britt would "make a good showing" in the fight. As a result, Gans was pummeled to a pulp, his eyes turned glassy, and he choked for air during the early rounds. Britt fouled out when he hit Gans in the head as he was attempting to rise after being knocked to the floor. Britt was duly disqualified, whereupon he was so upset by the referee's decision to give the win to Gans on a foul that he attacked referee Ed Graney. The latter, a former fighter, exchanged blows with the out-of-control Sir Edward until the police intervened.

Unaware of the arrangement made by Gans' and Britt's managers, sportswriter W.W. Naughton opined in the press that Britt was the true champ but for a "technicality."[47] Unknown to the scribe was that the duplicitous Britt had taken advantage of Gans' low-key approach to the bout, raining punches from every legal and illegal angle, most of which landed below the belt.

Dismayed by the events, and fully cognizant that as a black man he would bear the blame if the "deal" was disclosed, Gans kept mum about the fight for more than a year.

However, Britt, performing on stage and issuing press releases and other obnoxious forget-me-nots from San Francisco, succeeded in convincing men like Jack London and W.W. Naughton that he was the "new white champion" to such an extent that Gans, the rightful champion, was all but forgotten. So successful was the press campaign that for more than a century many of the record books have misrepresented first Britt and then Nelson as holding the title of world lightweight champion in the years 1905 and 1906.

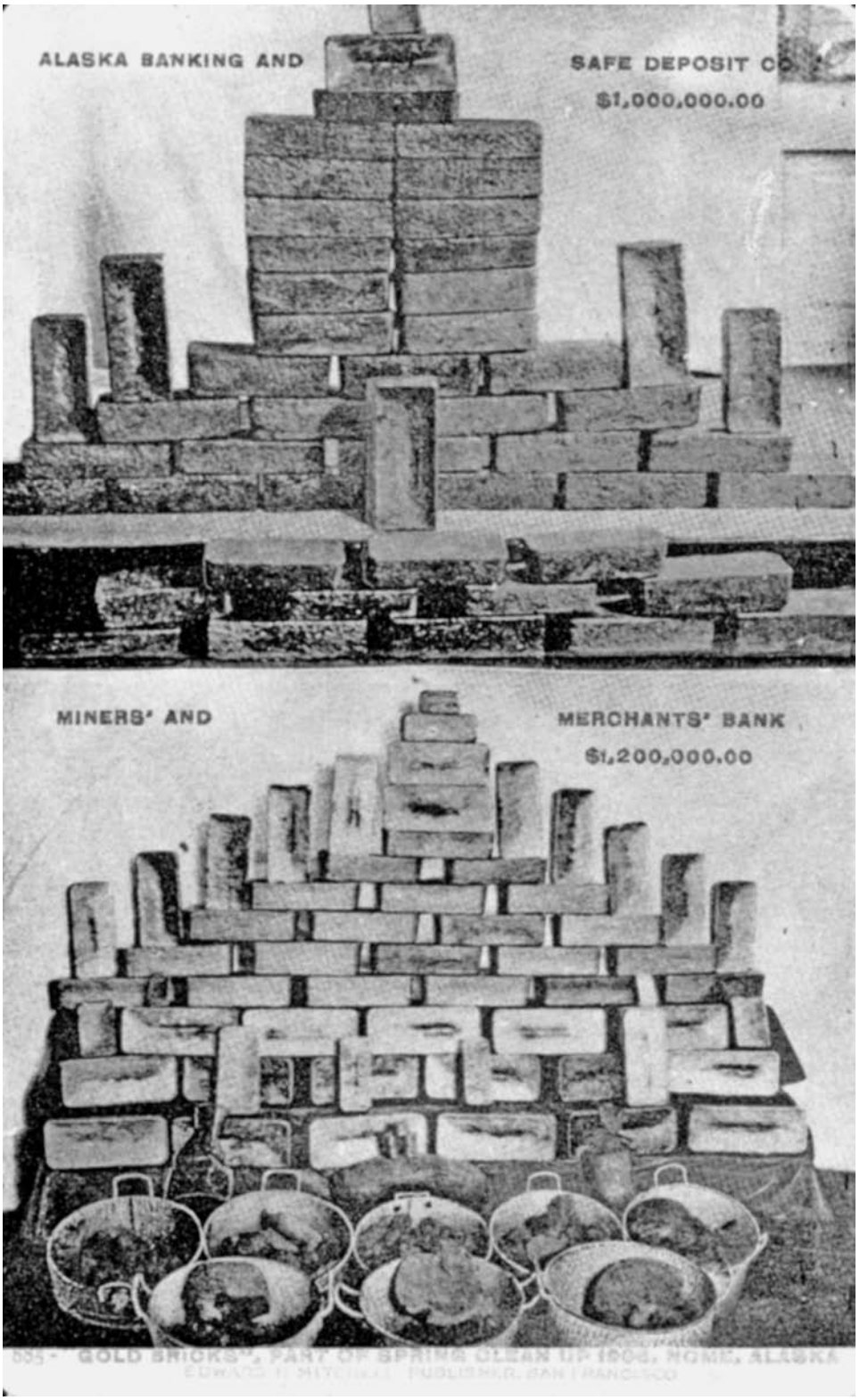
Jimmie Britt had lost his claim to Battling Nelson in 1905, and many considered Nelson the next lineal lightweight champion, even though Gans had never lost his title. Gans spent a year in boxing's equivalent of the wilderness. Rickard seemed to find in him a kindred spirit. Rickard would later speak up for Gans when the incomparable fighter was under verbal attack.

By 1905 Gans had won more recorded boxing matches than any boxer before him, but he was desperate for a fight to earn a payday. Herford, Gans' manager, could not arrange a fight for Gans, so he quit trying. Operating in his own behalf, Gans searched the papers for fight postings and proposed offers where none existed. Most were ignored. On February 25, 1905, Gans inquired about the Nevada mining town, 500 miles from San Francisco, that had previously staged a bout between a local welterweight, Billy Otts, and Bob Lundy, a California pug. Gans sent a letter to W.C. Mikulich asking him about the financial success of the Tonopah fight and the possibilities of a fight for himself.[48] Gans' letter stirred up a great deal of interest in the Tonopah mining camp, which was situated 30 miles north of its soon-to-be famous sister camp, Goldfield. It was the first mention in the town of a possible fight with someone with "a world-wide reputation such as Gans." Without anyone to follow through with a promotion, the news generated attention for about a day, along with other newsworthy items, such as the announcement of a new "moving picture show" at the Tonopah opera house or a case of lockjaw following the use of a tooth-ache paste. Nothing came of the fight inquiry in Tonopah that spring for Gans.

No ring work materialized for Gans in Nevada despite his determined efforts. By March of 1905, he returned to the East Coast to look for fights. From the end of March, when he fought a six-round fight with Rufe Turner, and for the duration of an entire year, the only white fighter who would take on Gans was a welterweight Mike "Twin" Sullivan. Gans fought him in Baltimore, and then borrowed money to get to the West Coast to fight him there. Months before the Goldfield fight, Gans twice knocked out the soon-to-be middleweight champ, Mike Sullivan. After seeing Gans' wins over Sullivan, W.W. Naughton of San Francisco wrote admiringly of Gans. But words could not pay for a meal. He needed another fight.

By late January 1906, after a Sullivan bout, Gans had won enough money to post a challenge to Jimmy Britt and to Battling Nelson. News in the Nevada mining camps carried the challenge, but still no offers came.[49] By April, San Francisco sports editor W.W. Naughton admitted, "In my daily walks I meet a sufficiency of fight patrons to be able to form opinions as to what ideas are popular among sports of that class, and I have no hesitation in saying that a Gans-Nelson match would prove a bigger attraction than any other pugilistic event at present in sight."[50] Sentiment in the newspapers was forming. Headlines read, "Battling

Opposite: **Bankers in Nome advertised with picture postcards of gold bars stacked in their windows. The idea stuck and Rickard used it to advertise his boxing match in Goldfield, Nevada (Alaska Banking and Safe Deposit Co. $1,000,000 stacked on top, and Miners and Merchants Bank $1,200,000 on bottom. Photograph by Edward H. Mitchell, San Francisco, 1906).**


ALASKA BANKING AND
SAFE DEPOSIT CO.
$1,000,000.00
MINERS' AND
MERCHANTS' BANK
$1,200,000.00

Nelson Criticized for Dodging Joe Gans."[51] Gans continued to issue challenges in the newspapers to either Britt or Nelson, as late as July 26, 1906.[52] Little did he know that within a few months the opportunity of his lifetime would come to him, not in response to his own supplications, but instead from a saloon keeper unknown to the prize-ring.

By July, Rickard and other municipal leaders of Goldfield, essentially mine owners, stockbrokers, saloon owners and a few lawyers, realized their desperate straits. With their financial lifeline to San Francisco cut, if they did not bring eastern money to the Nevada mining town, they would go bust. They needed something big to attract publicity and money. It was Rickard who envisioned the excitement of the prize fight and convinced the town patrons that there was nothing western miners liked more than a good fight — whether a gun fight or fisticuffs. Rickard argued, "The problem with you fellows is you can't see the nose on your own face. Whether it's a couple of snakes or roosters, the thing you really crave is a good fight."[53] The mining camp needed an immediate infusion of publicity.

But what would draw large numbers of boxing's "sports" from the East to the West? Rickard could think of no equal excitement except one: money. Why not pair the fever of the gold rush with the excitement of a big fight? He knew the feeling when someone gingerly swirled the water around the pan of black sand to uncover the fleck of gold, or the thrill in the desert mines when a vein was revealed. He remembered the advertising cards used by the banks in Nome to promote their businesses by showing pictures of gold bars stacked in their windows. If hordes of people stampeded to the Klondike and then to the American West to dig for dust and nuggets, would a major fight lead them to invest their money in Goldfield?

Chapter Two

A Title Fight Promotes a Gold Mining Camp

"Peary discovered the earth's axis. Tex Rickard located the center of the universe."
—Rex Beach

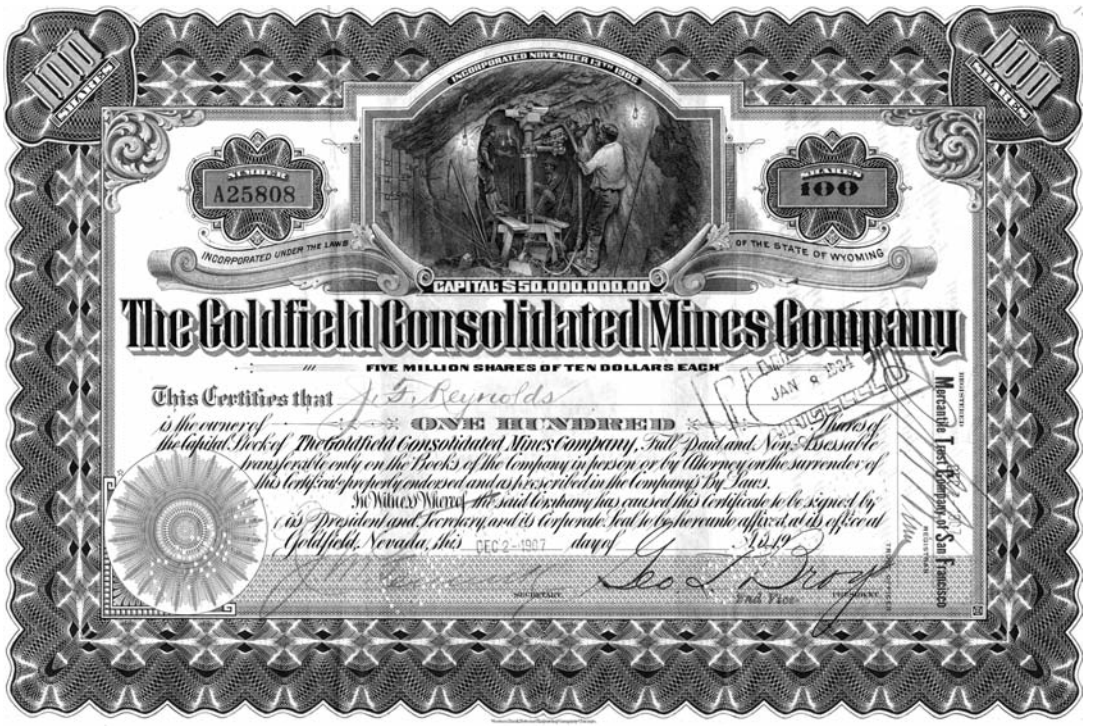
Rickard was confident of his ability to pull off the big event in Goldfield. After all, he had seen a few fights. And he would put up high enough stakes (along with other town fathers, such as Kid Highley and Ole Elliott, who had thrown in their promissory notes) to jumpstart the promotion. Unlucky in his personal life, Tex Rickard was about to "put Goldfield on the map" by parlaying gold fever into a sporting event that dwarfed all other athletic events of the day and more than lived up to what his wife and friends called "the birth of ballyhoo."

With San Francisco down and out and Los Angeles too small to host a large fight, Rickard began organizing the biggest sporting coup of the new century. The actual size of the event was yet to be determined. As was the custom, an ad was placed in various newspapers to solicit contenders. Rickard tested the promotional waters by offering a purse of $5,000. He wasted no time waiting for offers to arrive.

A critical point underlying the entire event was the scale of respect and trust that Nevadans showed towards Rickard. Like his larger-than-life moniker, "Tex" exuded grandness—but in a quiet, confident way. Nevadans both trusted and admired his resilience, and the Goldfielders gave Rickard complete discretion in selecting opponents for the big event.

Rickard's first choice of contenders for the grand Labor Day celebration was knockout artist "Terrible" Terry McGovern. McGovern was a white fighter with a reputation for hard hitting. He was a man who could withstand savage blows, then wear down his opponent with speed and powerful punches. McGovern had recently suffered from a physical and nervous breakdown that in 1905 landed him in a psychiatric ward. But by 1906 he was determined to come back. The editor of *The Mirror of Life*, a British sport magazine, commented that "Terry McGovern having emerged from his temporary incarceration in a madhouse like a giant refreshed with wine seems likely to once again loom large in the pugilistic world."[1] American sport Sam Austin said enthusiastically after McGovern's victory over Tommy Murphy, "He stands today as a marvel of a little man—as plucky and remarkable a little warrior as ever drew strength and courage together and turned the tide of disaster into remarkable strength."[2] But poor Terry's "turn of tide" would not flow into an enormous payday that might have been his.

Rickard wired McGovern's manager Joe Humphries an offer of $15,000, an amount



The first "Great Fight of the Century" (1906) was designed to promote Goldfield's gold-mining stock and business interests in the mining camp.

so high that the manager, who at the time was about to be thrown out of his lodging for lack of payment, thought the telegram was a hoax and immediately threw it in the trash. The New Yorker had never heard of Tex Rickard or of Goldfield, Nevada. He had never paid close enough attention or had forgotten the time Bat Masterson introduced him to Rickard at the McGovern-Britt fight in New York. With Rickard's telegram trashed, Humphries never bothered to mention the proposal to Terry McGovern, who was just as financially strapped and in terrible need of a fight purse at the time as his manager.

Rickard was still waiting to hear back from McGovern's manager when Jack Clifford, of California, responded to the newspaper advertisement. Clifford was not the marquee fighter Rickard had hoped for, but he was willing to fight for $5,000, and he might serve as an opponent for one.

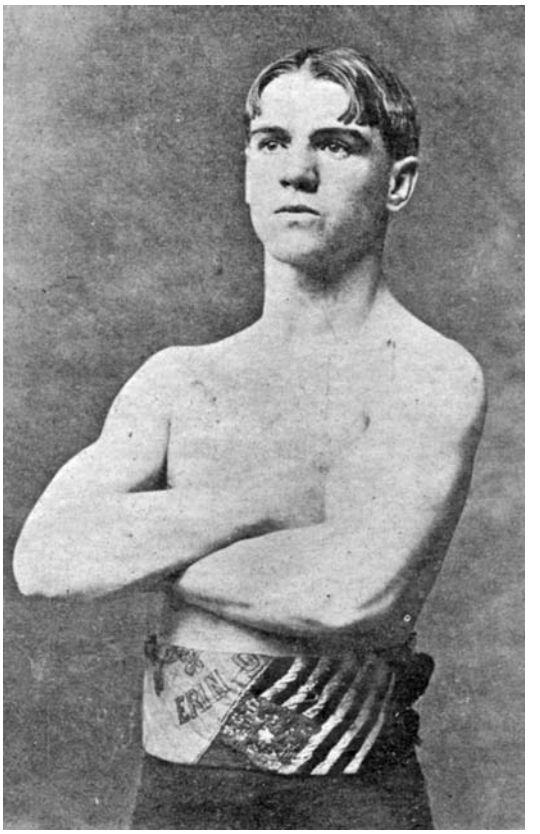
To Rickard's dismay, and the detriment of McGovern's bank account, his offer to McGovern went unanswered. With a world-class fighter disregarding his offer and Clifford accepting, Rickard went back to the drawing board. Little could Rickard have known at the time that McGovern's non-response would turn out to be one of the most fortuitous evenst of his life. Instead of a McGovern-Britt fight, he would end up securing one of the century's greatest matches.

With very little time to schedule a Labor Day fight, Rickard advertised for someone to meet Jack Clifford.

After completing a theatrical tour, Matthew "Battling" Nelson, the "white lightweight champion," had vacationed in Utah, hunting and fishing in a place called Ogden canyon. During a stop in Salt Lake City to appear in an exhibition fight with a Mormon preacher

by the name of Willard Bean, Nelson saw the ad in the paper soliciting fighters for a match in Nevada. Without discussing the matter with his manager, Nelson personally answered and accepted the challenge in a telegram to the Goldfield newspaper.

Tex Rickard replied to the Dane in less than an hour.



Tex Rickard originally wanted "Terrible" Terry McGovern for his "Battle of the Century" in Goldfield (*The Mirror of Life and Sport*, Nov. 15, 1905).

The Dane Answers the Call

Nelson, who by virtue of his fame was accustomed to making $1,000 a week on theatrical tours, must have thought that he could pick up a quick $5,000, not realizing that the match would turn into the title fight he had been waiting for — a chance at the world lightweight crown. Neither could he know the match was about to become the longest fight of his life.

Who was this "Battling Dane" from Hegewisch, Illinois, whose fame allowed him to earn $1,000 a week just by showing up? His story is all the more intriguing considering that he was, in a way, the original "Great White Hope" at a time when Joe Gans, a black lightweight champion, seemed unbeatable. Gans was known as the world's best fighter. The only problem for the white public was that he was black. Where could be found a white pugilist who could beat him?

The Dane was as strong as an ox and born to fight. "Battling" was no nickname for Oscar Matthew Battling Nielson. His mother had named her third child in honor of her brother. Nelson explained, "[I] was such a scrappy, lusty-lunged, busy child that my daddy decided that there was but one name for me, *De Battler*."[3]

Nelson was proud of his ethnic heritage and especially fond of noting important dates that fate had seemed to divine for him. His birth in Copenhagen on June 5, 1882, coincided with Denmark's independence day. He pointed out how the land of the admirable Irish fighters was originally populated by the fighting Danes many "rounds" ago. The hardy stock of Danish people, originally the Vikings, had always been "a warlike" people, an appellation Nelson considered the highest of personal compliments.[4]

Like many of his peers who finished grammar school but never made it to high school, young Nelson went into the labor force to help his needy family. He excelled at various jobs: as a chunker, cutting and packing ice; as a blacksmith's apprentice; and as a butcher at a meat house. He preferred physically demanding work. His labors added muscle to his stocky frame and four dollars a week to the family's coffers.

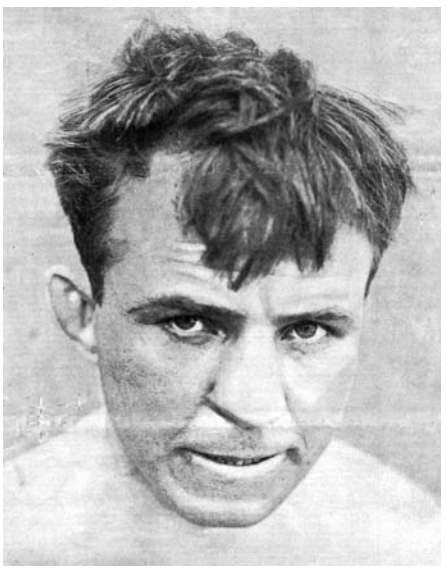
Nelson's first foray into the ring came on September 3, 1896, another fateful date;

exactly ten years later he would be in Goldfield with Tex Rickard and in the ring with Joe Gans. But on September 3, a decade earlier, Nelson and his adventurous friends were attracted to Wallace's Traveling Circus in nearby Hammond, Indiana. That evening, his comrades secretly offered the Bat up to the challenge of the strongman, a professional boxer known as the "Terrible Unknown." If a *volunteer* could last three rounds with the brute, he would earn a dollar for his effort. Surprised by the impromptu match but seasoned by two years of hauling ice and butchering cattle, Nelson was willing to risk a go. The raw recruit was introduced under the carnival tent as the "Packinghouse Pride." To the apprehension of the local crowd, which included a few of his mortified siblings, Nelson managed to evade the strongman's advances in what appeared more of a cockfight than a boxing match. With an adrenaline rush from the spotlight, screams from the spectators, and roars from the wild animals, Nelson proceeded to trounce the circus fighter, he proudly recalled in his memoirs, leaving the boxer to wallow "in the sawdust like a chicken with its head cut off, completely knocked out."[5]

After the circus event, the Battler was bitten by the boxing bug and left home to make his fortune in the sport. The Dane's super-human stamina during his early career gave him the ability to absorb punishment that would have sent other, less durable men to the floor. "I ain't human," he boasted, referring to his ability to soak up the hits, seeming invulnerable to blows.[6] Bat was both physically and psychologically able to endure long and grueling bouts, so much so that the boxing experts in San Francisco named the most extreme engagement — the endurance of a 45-round fight to the finish — after Nelson, calling it the *Battler's route*. His thick skull, brick-like torso, and low heart rate gave him a tremendous advantage with respect to endurance during extended prize-ring bouts.

Popular novelist of the day and former professional boxer H.C. Witwer wrote of Battling Nelson's abilities in *The Leather Pushers*, a novel that was made into a movie in 1920. To be mentioned in the same sentence as Jack Dempsey ten years after losing his title illustrates Nelson's enduring fame as a pugilist. A colorful character in Witwer's book comments on how one of the famous boxers who is

> prouder of the capacity for takin'a maulin' than Dempsey is of his record as a knockerout ... was Bat Nelson, [who] held the lightweight title against some of the greatest boxers that ever fought in that class, for no other reason on earth than the fact that them guys broke their hearts, and frequently their hands, tryin' to put him away.... He rarely come out of a scrap without lookin' like he had been run through a meat chopper — the worst tramps which ever stuck their hand in a glove used to paste him with everything but the box office, and then when they was so tired they couldn't even feint him, the grinnin', gore-covered Bat would step in and knock 'em for a goal."[7]



Battling Nelson, one of the toughest men who ever lived, became world lightweight champion in 1908 (*Police Gazette*, Jan. 29, 1910).

Scientists of the day were intrigued by the boxers. They viewed champion athletes as unique specimens of biology, a kind resulting from the brutal natural

selection that Charles Darwin had explained. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Darwin's theory of evolution, in which the empirical study of nature illustrated how species changed over epochs of time, had ushered in a "modernity" of thought that often inflamed the status-quo or, more often than not, was misused to explain parochial racist attitudes. Many used Darwinism to buttress the notion in Jim Crow America that the white race had developed to a point of superiority over the darker peoples of the earth. Darwin's *The Origin of Species* book was, after all, subtitled: *Or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. While most books were luxuries, this book was a must-have in libraries, and Darwin's theories were discussed in the saloons, on the cattle trails, and even in the Klondike.

Because of Nelson's thick skull and slow-beating heart, doctors determined that it would be next to impossible for anyone to kayo or out-distance him. According to the *Boston Traveler* of November 1908, the amazing boxer "was taken to Dr. Sargent at Harvard who said, 'Nelson's jaw is what puzzled me.... I did not believe it possible that anyone could hit the young Dane hard enough on the jaw to make him feel dazed."[8] Columbia rowing coach Dr. Walter Peet, whose research specialty was the study of human endurance, examined the boxer twice and discussed his findings with every brain surgeon he knew. Nelson's best defense in the ring was his hard head. Even the curator of the American Museum of Natural History concluded that Nelson's skull was the thickest since Neanderthal man.

That his head was amazingly strong was no curiosity of De Battler. As a youth, he had conditioned it by challenging his friends in head-butting contests, imitating the fighters of yore. And while the bare-knuckle days were now passé, the Battler continued to use his greatest asset, his thick skull, on offense as a battering ram, head-butting his ring opponents to the point that their eyes swelled shut or a massive concussion sent them into dreamland. Head-butts were illegal under boxing's Marquis of Queensberry rules governing gloved contests, however the Dane got away with them because referees at the time frequently ignored the rules when fans cheered on the rugged tactics. Nelson enjoyed immense popularity.

Battling Nelson was also fond of kicking. According to the modern rules, boxers were prohibited from kicking, head-butting, or hitting while the referee was breaking up a clinch. But rules never bothered Nelson. He did not really care what happened in the ring as long as the referee didn't count him out for fear of a little blood and gore, which Nelson had a tendency to spout all over the ring as he absorbed punch after punch. He never complained, and he could withstand pain that was intolerable to other fighters. What he couldn't tolerate was a referee coming between him and his opponent when he was attempting to wear down the other boxer.

Modern glove rules permit only hits with the knuckles of a closed fist. V*erboten* is hitting with open gloves, the wrist, the inside, back or side of the hand or any part of the arm (including hitting with the elbow, shoulder or forearm). However, the most punishing blow Nelson would deliver with his hands was his pet punch: the half-scissors hook. Nelson's signature maneuver was a clever left hook delivered to the liver as he extended and twisted his thumb and forefinger like a vice grip to penetrate the flesh in order to reach the internal organs. He would wait for an opportune time, usually after wearing down his foe in a clinch with hard right jabs to the stomach, before delivering his incapacitating blow.

Leaving his technique to posterity in his autobiography, published in 1908 after he became the world champion, Nelson offered his scientific description of the punch:

> The half-scissors hook is dealt with the side of the left hand. In coming out of a clinch fight fans will notice that the left hand of a fighter is withdrawn, as a rule, from under the right arm of his opponent. It is just at this moment that the blow must be delivered.

> Instead of hitting with the knuckles of the fist, I take a swing of not more than six inches and plunge the side of my hand with thumb and forefinger on top of my opponent's liver.... To be explicit, the spot is on the two lower ribs about two inches above the lower right-hand pocket of your vest. A slight tap on that spot will send pain shooting all the way to the spine.[9]

Rickard and the famed referee George Siler of Chicago were both aware of Nelson's reputation as a dirty fighter. But while Nelson had been warned repeatedly against fouling his opponents by numerous referees during his bouts, his viciousness and tactics only increased his mystique, as well as his purses. Nelson's raw manhood attracted flocks of people to his training camps, especially women who swooned over any of his activities. Nelson would charge spectators fifty cents to get a look at him when he was training in Goldfield.

The year before the great fight, when he still had his good looks, Nelson played the vaudeville circuits. He loved the glamorous life. Seldom was he paid to give orations, preferring instead to exhibit his "manly science" skills. He was popular with the society crowd. Teddy Roosevelt, a life-long fan of boxing, invited Nelson to the White House on February 14, 1909. It was the first time a lightweight boxing champion had been so honored. "He was received royally and had the honor of spending about an hour in Roosevelt's company."[10] Roosevelt and his son were both invited out to Goldfield to see the fight. It was announced that the younger Roosevelt was in attendance, although it was later learned that he was not.

Once Nelson was hired by Evelyn Nesbitt, the curvy Gibson model and showgirl who had posed nude as the model for the Statue of Diana, perched atop New York's Madison Square Garden. Nesbitt wrote in *Prodigal Days*, "During my vaudeville days, while playing a week in Cincinnati, Battling Nelson had given me boxing lessons and taught me a medicine ball routine."[11] Nesbitt, a prototype for the femme fatale in the twentieth century, was on a first-name basis with royalty and millionaire socialites; and yet for her own physical edification, the glamorous Broadway *artiste* turned to the Dane, who taught her how to train in order to stay fit.

For all his Neanderthal qualities, Nelson was a progressive compared to many men of his day who "drew the color line" in the sport of boxing. The confident Dane never feared that some non–Caucasian opponent might prove to be of superior strength. He cared not for whom his opponents were as long as they propelled him up the ladder toward his goal of winning the championship belt. One of his toughest opponents during his campaign to the top was the Los Angeles–based fighter Aurelia Herrera, of whom the Dane said, "As you know, he is a Mexican, and incidentally, he is the only good Mexican fighter that we have had."[12] While claiming that Herrera was one of the world's greatest fighters, Nelson described him as "dark and swarthy — a typical Spaniard. He smoked cigars continuously and kept a bottle of whiskey in his training quarters all the time."[13] What bothered Nelson was not the color of Herrera's skin but his poor health habits. Nelson frowned upon a fighter's use of liquor and tobacco. He explained that Herrera would go to sleep with a cigar, smoke one before he even got out of bed, and occasionally could be found smoking a cigar during his roadwork. The Dane abstained from any such vices that might affect his fighting stamina. Rickard could not have hoped for a more entertaining character than this Dane who soaked his head in brine to harden it and felt obliged to lecture others on their health habits.

There was already bad blood between Nelson and Joe Gans before the Goldfield fight had even been contemplated. Al Herford, manager and promoter in Baltimore, had invited

Nelson to fight against Kid Sullivan in the Monumental City, on June 2, 1905. The agreement was that if both fighters were on their feet at the end of the six-round match, the fight would be declared a draw. There was nothing unusual about this, but Nelson accused the fighter's corner, which included Al Herford, Joe Gans, and Young Peter Jackson, of having smeared Kid Sullivan's gloves with belladonna so as to blind Nelson, making it easier for their man to win with a knockout. After the fighters touched gloves at the beginning of the sixth round to shake hands, as was the custom in the final round, Nelson said that he became almost totally blind. Nelson said that he spent the final round relying on his fighting instinct because he couldn't see, and at one point he hit referee Billy Rocap, mistaking him for Sullivan. Because both fighters were on their feet at the end, the bout was called a draw. Nelson complained to the referee about the doping but to no avail. Nelson reported, "Herford, fox that he is, hustled Sullivan away and refused to give up the mitts."[14]

Much of Nelson's fame was the result of his knock-out win over Jimmy Britt. Nelson's manager had in August 1905 secured a huge rematch in California between Nelson and Britt for a $20,000 purse. Britt's brother and manager, Willus Britt, held what he thought to be the trump card: he would force Oscar Nelson to agree to a 45-round fight to the finish in addition to weighing in at ringside (boxers usually weighed in several hours before the bout) at 133 pounds. It was exactly the wrong tactic to use against Nelson, the Battling Neanderthal of such stout endurance.

On September 9, 1905, Battling Nelson defeated Jimmy Britt at the Mission Street Arena in Colma, California. It earned Nelson $18,841 and his manager an even larger sum when the Dane sold him the rights to the popular fight movie. While the new invention of the movie camera captured both heavyweight and lightweight battles during the first decade of the twentieth century, the most attractive battle of 1905, when the film-makers, the Miles Brothers, set up shop in San Francisco, proved to be between the two lightweight battlers James Britt and Oscar "Battling" Nelson. Heavyweight contenders were far less profitable in terms of both gate receipts and movie attendance.

The Miles Brothers' films offered for the first time the chance for promoters, trainers, and the fighters themselves to study films of the boxers they would subsequently see in the ring. Rickard was apparently impressed by Nelson's fighting skills because he later placed a large wager that the Dane would win the fight at Goldfield. Nelson's relentless pressure during the Britt fight overcame the San Franciscan's elegant science. In the 18th round the Dane landed a thudding left hook to Britt's jaw and knocked him out. Nelson had won the "white lightweight championship" and soon would claim to be prince of all the small titans of the ring. The fact that the white title in 1904 was not the world title did not seem to bother many white ring scribes, who treated it at the time as more prestigious than the world championship that was held by Joe Gans.

The *San Francisco Examiner* lavished vast quantities of ink on the 1905 "championship fight" between Britt, their native son, and Nelson. Under the sub-heading titled "Dane Takes Awful Walloping," the *Examiner* said of the Dane, "He is the only one anywhere who could live through the fire he was subjected to. He was banged to a jelly — to a jam. Britt beat him around the ring at will, starting blood afresh with every punch to the face."[15] The *Examiner* went on to say, "In the sixth the tide turned. Nelson bowed his head and humped his shoulders, tearing in like a wild man."[16] In the sixteenth round, Nelson managed to engage Britt and knocked him to the ground for a count of nine, Britt being saved by the bell. By the seventeenth round, Britt was back in control. "There he was rushing away like a tiger, sure the next moment would see Nelson down and gone. Quickly came the turning

of the worm. A jaw Jimmy thought need no guard was suddenly assaulted."[17] Biff! Bang! Biff! resounded the Danish glove upon the California jaw! To the floor went J. Edward.

Nelson crowed that it was his "plunge" of his thumb and forefinger on top of his opponent's liver that incapacitated Britt. He bragged how in the final round he had to wear him down while he was in a weakened state. "I do not like to appear cruel, but as I looked at him I thought of that big hat and Prince Albert coat, and I imagine I felt very much as a cat does that has a mouse in a corner."[18] Britt fell into a clinch with the Dane, a mistake, because Nelson was known as the "king of infighters," punching his opponent in the stomach, in the kidneys, or with an uppercut to the face at close range. He was a master at boring in.

Britt managed to land a good blow to Nelson's wind that surprised the Dane. Britt expected Nelson to back away, but the blow only infuriated Nelson. "I put all the strength I had in my right arm and let fly a punch which caught the champion squarely over the heart followed by a left and right and another quick left while he was falling. I shall never forget that moment. Britt's face crumpled up with pain, and throwing his hands up over his head he toppled over and fell on all fours, but immediately fell over flat on his back.... At that moment I couldn't help feeling sorry for him as I saw him twisting and squirming in an effort to get up long after the count was over."[19]

Jack London, famed author of *Call of the Wild* in 1903 and *Sea Wolf* in 1904 (later to write *White Fang* in 1906) was hired by Hearst to cover the Britt-Nelson fight for the *San Francisco Examiner*. Only a few months before the fight, he had published a fictional story, "The Game," serialized in the *Metropolitan Magazine* in April and May. Jimmy Britt read the story and praised London's understanding of "the game" of the prize-fight and commented that he thought it would be nice if Jack London refereed his impending battle with Nelson.

Jack London loved the sport, boxed daily, and carried boxing gloves wherever he traveled. When no male contenders could be found to share in his hour-long exercise, he sparred with his wife, Charmian. In the story "The Game," London conveys what it is like for a professional boxer "playing the game at the supreme summit of existence." He describes, with first-hand immediacy, what it is like to "feel good in the ring, when you've got the man where you want him, when he's had a punch up both sleeves waiting for you and you've never given him an opening to land 'em."[20] It was provocative and engaging realism for the time.

Jack London's newspaper report of the San Francisco match and his famed description of Nelson was an instant hit and bestowed upon the boxer an immortal moniker, "the abysmal brute," a subject London would write about later in his fiction story in 1911. In his newspaper story of the fight, London described Nelson as "creature" and Britt as "thoroughbred." He wrote, "The Dane's perpetual motion was more effective than Britt's mental superiority.... Nelson is a fighting animal.... Britt is an intelligent animal with fighting proclivities.... It was the abysmal brute against a more highly organized intelligent creature."[21]

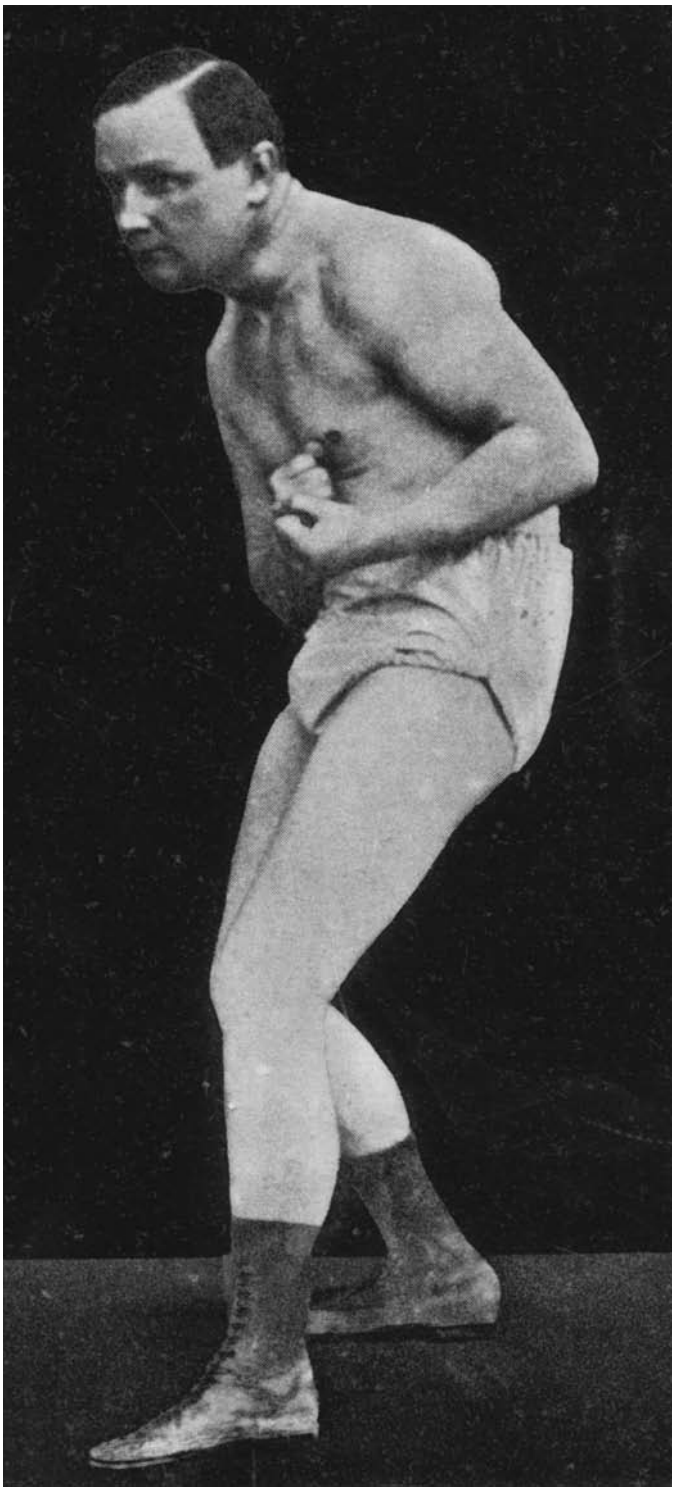
The "abysmal brute," London explained, mixing poetics with popular science of the day,

> is lower down on the ladder of evolution than is intelligence. It comes first, before the intellect. The intellect rests before it; and when the intellect goes it still remains — the abysmal brute.... Nelson is the lower type. Britt is the higher type. Nelson is more callous to pain and shock, has less sensibility. At the same time the abysmal brute in him gives him a tremendous capacity to move and to keep on moving. Britt is more delicately organized. He is more easily put out of gear. At the same time he possesses less capacity to move and to keep on ceaselessly moving. Had he Nelson's capacity to move, plus his own intelligence, he would have whipped Nelson. But Britt did not have this power of movement; was too far removed from the brute, and was himself whipped.... Britt landed six blows to

> the Dane's one. Had Britt received the blows he gave Nelson, Britt would have been out long before the eighteenth round. But Nelson scarcely seemed bothered by the punishment. One thing was strikingly noticeable. His blows, when they did land, jarred and often staggered Britt, while Britt's blows did not seem to jar nor stagger Nelson. He met these blows as he came on, and he kept on coming just the same.

London concluded, "The best man won — according to the rules of the game."[22]

Here was a celebrity scribe bestowing upon the Dane an aura of the noble savage, a figure with primordial instincts upon a civilized stage. Nelson's fame, as "the abysmal brute," swelled, especially when he would later face Joe Gans, a gentleman known for his craft in the ring. London's notoriety would swell when later he would call forth a "great white hope" to "wipe the golden smile off" the face of Jack Johnson, the black heavyweight champion. Nelson seemed to fancy London's beastly description, as he included the entire text from London's pen in his memoir. While many believe that the "abysmal brute" in London's short story written years later using the popular title refers to heavyweight Jim Jeffries, the descriptor harkens back to the remarkable Dane and his physical capacity to absorb whatever punishment awaited him in the ring, enabling him



Jimmy Britt, white lightweight champion during Joe Gans' reign as world champion.

ultimately to wear down his opponent and make him easy prey for his coup de gras, the savage half-scissors hook. London only playfully hid the reference to Nelson in his fiction, calling him "Nat Belson."

By the time the Dane defeated Britt, Oscar Nelson had already fought 75 contests, many of them 20 rounds. Today, championship-caliber fighters typically end their entire careers with 50 or fewer fights. The extremely rugged Joe Frazier fought 37 professional bouts. Sugar Ray Leonard fought 40 times from the late 70s to the early 90s. Nelson had already fought more bouts than both of these great fighters combined before the epic Goldfield fight.

After defeating Britt, Nelson was feted by the *San Francisco Examiner's* famed sportswriter, W.W. Naughton, as the "prince of the lightweight boxers." The Dane was both white and light, each of which were major drawing cards in Jim Crow America at the beginning of the twentieth century. His renown as a figure of fighting madness and primitive manhood, the beast of the ring, seemed to loom in America's imagination. By 1905 the major sporting newspapers like New York's *The Police Gazette* and London's *Mirror of Life* would sensationalize "the champion lightweight's career."[23] And while his physical stamina remained a mystery to scientists of the day, his phenomenal strength and endurance would carry him through the longest fight of his career in Goldfield.

For Nelson, 1905 was a banner year; not only did he defeat "Sir Edward," Jimmy Britt, he also met such other noted fighters as Young Corbett, Abe Attell, Kid Sullivan, and Jack Neil. He even appeared in an exhibition on stage in Detroit with the former lightweight world champion, George "Kid" Lavigne. He was star quality, at the top of his game. In March of 1906, Nelson would take on Terry McGovern for six rounds, a contest that pitted two bulls and turned the ring crimson with both men's blood. As Nelson traveled various theater circuits giving exhibition fights during the summer of 1906, he picked up the *Goldfield Sun*, a newspaper he found while in Salt Lake City, Utah. He looked to the fight solicitations and saw that Jack Clifford was scheduled for the mining camps' Labor Day fight, and Goldfield was advertising for his opponent: a fight to the finish with Clifford for $5,000. Nelson answered the challenge in a telegram to the *Sun*. The famous head-butter was about to butt heads with Tex Rickard.

BRAIN BEATEN
BY BRUTE FORCE

Dane's Perpetual Motion More Effective Than Britt's Mental Superiority, Says Jack London.

BY JACK LONDON

IN the first round Britt hit Nelson half a dozen blows. At each blow Nelson was coming on. The blows did not stop him. He kept coming on. Then Nelson hit Britt, and Britt was staggered by the blow. The whole story of the fight was told right there. Blows did not stop Nelson from coming on. Blows did stop Britt; also they staggered him.

Nelson is a fighting animal. Britt is an intelligent animal with fighting proclivities. This is another way of telling the story.

It was the abysmal brute against a more highly organized, intelligent creature. Now, do not misunderstand me. I do not wish to call Nelson a brute; but what I wish to say is that Nelson possesses to an unusual degree the brute that you and I and all of us possess in varying degree.

Let me explain. By abysmal brute I mean the basic life that resides deeper than the brain and the intellect in living things. It is itself the very staff of life—movement; and it is saturated with a blind and illimitable desire to exist. This desire it expresses by movement.

No matter what comes it will move. It came into the world first. It is lower down on the ladder of evolution than is intelligence. It comes first,

(Continued on Page Forty-four. Column Two.)

Jack London made a name for himself as a journalist covering the Britt-Nelson fight where he described "the game" of boxing and the "abysmal brute" Oscar Nelson (*San Francisco Examiner*, Sept. 10, 1905).

While Nelson matched Rickard in determination and endurance, Rickard won the tale of the tape

when it came to intelligence. The Goldfield newspaper delivered the telegram to Rickard's office. In less than an hour, according to Nelson, Rickard replied, "Your proposition of $5,000 guarantee and $5,000 side bet accepted, but.... "[24]

Once Rickard realized he could draw the likes of a Battling Nelson, he upped the stakes for a match. If it was going to draw fans from all over the country, it had to be big. *Really big*.

Rickard pondered the best draw. A few inquiries to movers and shakers of the world of fistiana gave him the scoop on the man considered the best fighter in the game, Joe Gans. The fight that had long eluded would-be promoters was one between Battling Nelson and Gans, the black wizard of the ring.

Known as the "Old Master," Gans carried KO power in both hands, and had an impregnable defense and the legitimate claim to the world lightweight title. He also carried the baggage of a reputation for throwing fights to suit the betting whims of his manager.

Rickard knew the papers had printed that a Gans-Nelson bout was "the most talked of bout in ring circles. It would surely prove a drawing card."[25] Now it seemed that the battle between Nelson and Gans was about to fall into his hands. Since Tex Rickard was not at the time a professional promoter of boxing matches, he did not care about all the fuss over Gans' reputation as a "fakir." Out west men were unencumbered by the shackles of civilization and past reputations. As actor Nat Goodwin said of a business partner with a shady past, "Who cares? In Nevada it is what a man is today that counts, not who he was five years ago."[26] (It was a good thing that Westerners were so forgiving because many of them had previous criminal records.) Despite his inexperience with the professional sport, but confident in his own abilities, Rickard was not worried about any possible controversy in matching Gans against Nelson. With the unshakable nerve that enabled him to handle any situation, Rickard would make sure the fight was on the level.

Neither did Rickard care at the time about a "color line," so he sought out the famous Joe Gans. But would the Old Master's skill in the ring pose a problem in getting Nelson and his manager to agree to the match? Rickard would need to up the ante to get Nelson to battle Gans, a much tougher opponent than Clifford. He figured a larger purse would seal the deal. Rickard replied with a new offer to the Dane: $15,000 for a fight with Joe Gans.

Rickard realized, as the bout was about to fall into his hands, that he could capitalize on the controversy surrounding the lightweight title. It was in dispute and a Goldfield match with the principals would provide the greatest of all stakes. Although Gans held better claim to the lightweight championship from 1902 when he had knocked out the lineal champion Frank Erne in the first round, by 1906 many were claiming the title for Nelson. During his reign, Gans had successfully defended his title against all challengers, including Jimmy Britt in October of 1904. But in the fracas that ensued over that fight, Britt argued that he should be champion by virtue of a better showing, and the sportswriters of San Francisco agreed. Jack London referred to Britt, and then later to Nelson, as the world lightweight champion. Britt claimed the lightweight title in 1904, and by 1906, Nelson considered himself the champion by virtue of having knocked out Britt in the 18th round in September 1905 in Colma, California. The Goldfield fight would settle the claim to the world title once and for all. It was a fight the San Francisco syndicate, so partial to their hometown hero "Sir Edward," was unwilling to promote. The unwavering Goldfield promoter was determined to make it the grandest event the world had ever seen.

Rickard concluded his telegram to Nelson, "...would prefer a meeting between yourself

and Gans. We will give $15,000 for same."[27] Considering that all of the other white lightweights had avoided Gans for months and for good reason, Nelson would up the ante by proposing an amount unheard of for a fight at that time, one that would likely *not* be taken seriously: "Raise the bid to $30,000 for Gans match and accepted."[28] In the event that the match did go forward, Nelson knew Gans would be a tough opponent.

Billy Nolan, Nelson's manager, realized the opportunity to exploit the situation. From Salt Lake City, on August 3, Nolan wired Tex Rickard, "Thirty thousand dollars for finish fight between Nelson and Gans. Post cash. Would consider Clifford for twenty rounds for much less figure."[29]

Outside Nevada, Rickard may have been seen as inexperienced in the larcenous field of fight promotion, but he was no greenhorn in business matters. His instincts were keen; more importantly, he could back up his word with ready cash. In less than two hours on August 2, 1906, only one month before the anticipated event, Rickard was about to nail down the biggest boxing promotional coup of the new century.

Within minutes of receiving Billy Nolan's offer to match Battling Nelson for $30,000 on August 3, 1906, Tex Rickard responded with his pledge for the $30,000 purse. Rickard would later say that he knew he was going to have trouble getting Nelson into the ring with Gans, and he realized it was going to take a huge amount of money to bring the Battler to Goldfield to face Gans. Rickard was so determined to seal the deal, to "put Goldfield on the map," that he said he would have funded the entire amount from his own pockets, if necessary. But other businessmen — like Larry Sullivan, a stock seller — agreed that the venture was worth the investment and joined Tex.

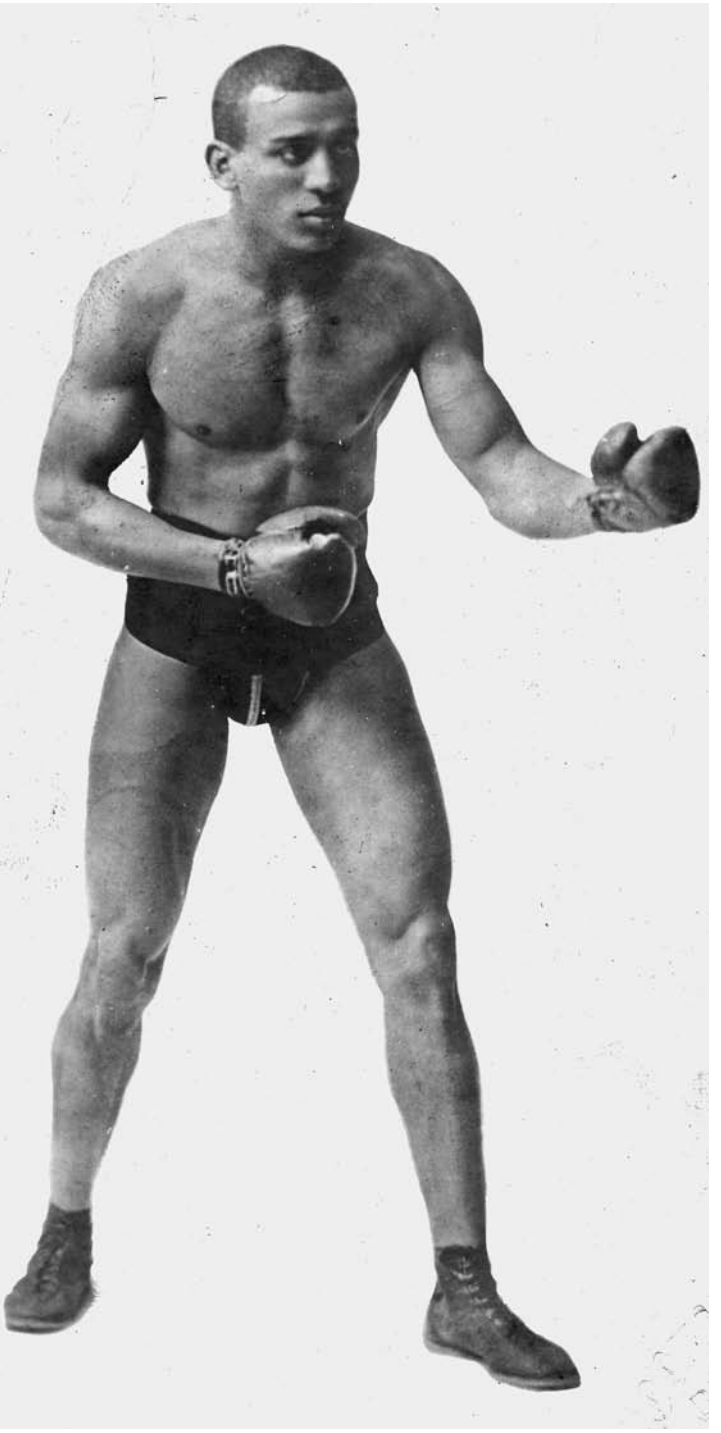
Joe Gans, the Invisible World Champion

With Battling Nelson on board, Rickard would need to locate Joe Gans and bring him to Nevada. The lightweight champion of the world was at that time down on his luck, practically roaming the country searching for a match that would provide a payday. With Gans separated from his manager, Rickard had difficulty getting the offer into his hands. Rickard had heard that Gans was in San Francisco and requested help from W.W. Naughton, sports editor of the *Examiner* there. Naughton was able to locate Gans and relay the offer. Gans jumped at the offer; and, not wanting to risk spoiling the deal on conditions, he wired Rickard that he would agree to take the fight on any terms Nelson demanded. "Anything that suits Nelson will suit [me]."[30] Gans' generosity over the terms would cost him dearly with respect to his health.

Because the black champion was so superior to his competition and also due to the controversy over Gans' involvement with fixed fights, he found it hard to get bouts for his title defenses in his division. A multitude of newspapers had published innuendo and lies about Joe Gans, the first black American to win a world boxing title. Here and there would be references to his "shady past" and questions about whether he would display the "yellow streak" or cowardness. Gans' rise to the top had not been easy. He had fought professionally for more than ten years, and before winning a crown would battle it out with top contenders for the title like Dal Hawkins and Elbows McFadden. But in 1902 Gans easily won the lightweight world title with a one-punch knockout, a perfect right-cross, over matinee boxing idol Frank Erne. The easy victory only increased suspicion that Gans did not always fight his best, but rather "boxed to the orders of his manager," a bookie named Al Herford with a shady reputation as a fight manager.

Prior to the era of the "Three Colored Aces," as boxing historian Nat Fleischer called Joe Gans (lightweight), Joe Walcott (welterweight), and George Dixon (featherweight), there had been no black world champions in boxing, only black fighters with black titles. Although the nineteenth century boasted many great fighters of African descent, they simply were not allowed to compete for titles in the bare-knuckle era and the early days of the Marquis of Queensberry rules. At first shut out of the title picture, Gans eventually proceeded to mow down a field of excellent lightweight-title contenders and gain respect as a gentleman. According to H.L. Mencken, he "had the manners of the old armed guards of Vienna."[31] Nevertheless, in the prevailing climate of Jim Crow America, his success was seen as a menace.

When Rickard heard about Gans' abilities and his so-called shady past, he dismissed the latter by saying that it sounded to him more like a crooked jockey than a bad horse.



Joe Gans, the first African American world boxing champion, fought the toughest group of contenders that any man had ever faced on the road to the title (Brooks' photograph, Buffalo, New York).

Rickard Puts Goldfield, Nevada, on the Map

During the last half-century, the desert pleasure domes of Las Vegas, Nevada,

have hosted world-class entertainment, including championship sporting events, where boxers such as Sugar Ray Leonard, Thomas "Hitman" Hearns, "Marvelous" Marvin Hagler, and Roberto "*Manos de Piedra*" Duran fought many of their greatest battles. But the preeminent fights, the forerunners of the big-bucks sporting industry in the gambling capital of the West, happened a century ago in Goldfield whose story is only a ghost of a memory now.

By 1900 the southern Nevada desert was drawing fortune seekers away from the Klondike in Alaska. By 1904 a few hundred people (which included Tex Rickard) had set up camp in a mining town called Goldfield. During the 1906–1907 rush, a host of gold and silver promoters, including the notorious, silver-tongued swindler George Graham Rice, quickly turned Goldfield into a boomtown of about 15,000 people. Venture capital flowed freely. Among the new tycoons were Rickard's associates in Goldfield.

Today, Goldfield, Nevada, is a town with about 300 residents calling it home. A century ago Las Vegas was a Mexican village, a farm camp grown into a dust-filled railroad stop with only a handful of saloons. By contrast, Goldfield, the largest city in Nevada in 1906, had fifty saloons, four banks, and its own stock exchange. The Tonopah strikes in 1902 were among the richest in history, and Goldfield soon followed. Developed from "rag cities," as the early mining camps dotted by canvas tents were called, to boomtowns, the sister cities were blessed with a host of lively millionaires. While many tent saloons and restaurants still serviced the area, the town could boast the presence of one brick home with modern plumbing and a patch of grass — Tex Rickard's.

The city was blessed by the abundance of gold but was by no means considered a resort. In her history of the Goldfield Rush, Sally Zanjani notes that water, which was not always potable, was delivered by wagon, sold by the bucket, tasted like whitewash, and looked like whiskey. City lots were expensive and building materials, which had to be brought in, were scarce, hence the many homes constructed of sod, barrels, and wine bottles. The town was racially mixed, with the exception of Asians, which were excluded (as they were in several Colorado mining towns). The twenty-eight-mile journey to Tonopah took six hours by stagecoach, and the transportation was booked. One had to reserve a ticket days, sometimes weeks, in advance. But there were plenty of private autos, as many as forty by 1904.[32]

Tex Rickard was not only the proud owner of a car, a Thomas flyer, the highly competitive sport was usually the winning driver of the local auto races. Away from town, out on the desert sands, was a twelve-mile race course. On Sundays and special occasions, crowds would gather around a refreshment tent to watch the auto races. By 1906 the Northern Saloon had become the largest saloon in the West, and Rickard was considered a revered, pioneering founding father. During his lifetime, Rickard was never able to fathom the depths of his charisma, especially how he could draw such publicity. When asked how it was that he drew as much publicity as Nelson or Gans at his first fight, he modestly indicated that there was no one else to point to.

Rickard was the man doing all the work. Jack Dempsey told the story that Tex told him about his first relationship with the press. When it was clear that the big fight was going forward, all of the Goldfield men signed themselves up to hold fancy titles for the affair. When they realized that there was going to be a lot of work involved, like negotiating deals with managers, building an arena, and managing the financial affairs, the thought of actually devoting the next month of 24-hour days to the project took hold, and the managerial affairs didn't look quite so golden. Rickard was more or less appointed to the top

Tex Rickard enjoyed racing his "Desert Flyer" on the outskirts of Goldfield. His wife Edith Mae and daughter Bessie accompany him in front of their Goldfield home (Cayton Sports, Inc.).

position by virtue of being left to do the hard work. Rickard was well versed in decision-making jobs involving 24-hour days. So when the press read his name on the various telegraphs of the negotiations, they asked for Rickard. He was new copy, and his background fascinated reporters, especially in that he had never been involved in the fight game prior. The novelty of the situation and Rickard's quiet demeanor made for its own publicity.

Using millionaire pocketbooks, Lucky Tex and the mining camp achieved what established boxing cities and well-venerated sport promoters had been unable to do with Jeffries in retirement: set up the most anticipated boxing match of the time, between two champions, one with a white title, Oscar Battling Nelson, and the other with a world title who no one wanted to fight, Joe Gans. It happened so quickly that the boxing syndicate in San Francisco, California, could not believe it had been out-foxed by a dusty, quiet saloon-keep. They were shocked to learn the bout was slated for a remote location across Death Valley, which had for its sports arena only a baseball field next to a cemetery.

But Rickard was obviously no small-timer, and certainly not naive. From his experience in the saloon business, he was well connected and had his finger on the pulse of the "sporting men" of the day. He knew that a grand fight was just the thing to bring in a crowd of big spenders to shore up the local economy. The Goldfield boxing match was financed by gamblers of a different sort: the sellers of gold-mining stock. Rickard had a crafty partner in

George Graham Rice (who would later serve time for stock fraud), who helped conduct the publicity campaign. Rice published the program for the fight, which included advertisements for mining stocks that would be illegal and laughable today. But as Rice would later explain in his brazenly titled autobiography, *My Adventures with Your Money*, Rickard knew that the gambling instinct in men had to be stoked by floods of publicity, and Rice was just the man to provide such a flood. He had been run out of New York for writing false advertisements after having served a stint in the slammer as a teen for check forgery. But all of that New York unpleasantness was behind him now, and besides it had been several aliases ago. Such a background was not uncommon in the Wild West.

Rickard proved to be a promotional magnet. Immediately, he was able to kick-start the operations by raising funds of more than $50,000 in less than an hour, simply walking up and down the streets of Goldfield and asking his wealthy business friends if they wanted to buy $5 shares in a new Goldfield Athletic Club. Tex Rickard did not just stake the event with an astounding $30,000 purse, he staked it in $20 gold pieces he placed in the window of the local bank. He knew from his Klondike days the magnitude of excitement brought by the sight of gold. Bankers in the Klondike advertised their banks by stacking gold bars in the windows. Rickard advertised his fight with a stake of gold. It worked like a charm. The picture of gold coins equaling $30,000 and neatly stacked in the bank's window made its way into every major newspaper — it was Rickard's first major act of ballyhoo.

The city hummed with pride from the outset and the newspaper editor boosted the promotion like a chamber of commerce promoter advertising a local parade: "Will Goldfield Monopolize the Pugelistic [*sic*] Limelight?"[33]

Tex Rickard, Larry Sullivan, and Billy Nolan in the Cook Bank, Goldfield. Behind the $30,000 gold purse is Teddy Gay. Behind Sullivan and Nolan is Ben Rosenthal. At the time of the "Longest Fight," the Cook Bank was located on Main and Ramsey in the Nixon Block. It moved to its current location in 1919 (Dana photograph, 1906).

> The great benefit Goldfield, Tonopah and other Nevada camps would derive from the holding of a world's championship contest is obvious. Men of money from all parts of the United States would see such a fight. Outside of the actual money spent by such men while in the county the advertising and future benefits would be many. At the present time there are many men of means who have heard of the Nevada camps who have never taken the trouble to investigate the merits of Nevada's mines. Hundreds of these men would be attracted here by the fight and while here would take the time to look into the situation. That permanent investment would follow goes without saying.

During the time the boxers were in training, the papers of the country received daily accounts of their movements and Goldfield became even more famous than ever. "Hundreds of thousands of dollars spent in advertising would not bring to Goldfield the prominence that the Gans-Nelson fight will give."[34] This frenzy over boxing was no mere hopeful speculation. Novelist Rex Beach, invited guest and friend of Rickard's from the Klondike days, reported four months after the fight,

> I grew amazed at the hold this sport has on the American people. For these were typical Americans, gathered from every quarter of our land. Not merely prospectors, but men from universities and farms and the cities of the East, of the kind who brush their teeth and polish their nails. Men have preached and railed and made laws against pugilism till its exponents are ostracized, and he who attends a fight takes chances with his social standing. It is the one athletic game that cannot be discussed in drawing-rooms, and from which women are barred, as a rule; and yet when the word goes out ... in the heart of a Nevada desert, a white boy will fight a Negro, men flock thither even from the edge of the Atlantic. In the journals countless columns are given to it. It is discussed in every club East and West, fortunes are wagered on its outcome, it shares importance in the press with wars and Presidential messages and stock-yard scandals. Moving pictures are taken and thousands pay to see them for months after.[35]

Before anyone arrived in Goldfield, the *Tonopah Daily Sun* noted how sporting celebrities would spread the buzz by flocking to the camp. Boxers "Spider Kelly and Tim McGrath" were expected to come to town. Referee Ed Graney and announcer Billy Jordan were rushing towards Goldfield (rumored as they were for attempting to persuade the boxers to hold the event in San Francisco).[36] Even *The Police Gazette*, the premier sporting newspaper of the day, was depicted announcing news of the fight. The Nevada mule, symbol of the state, proclaimed, "The whole civilized world has discovered that Goldfield is on the map!"[37] But most importantly, Tex Rickard was crowned the new "fight king." The previously unknown fight king was pictured in an ermine cloak, holding a bag of $30,000 gold coins. Businessman Ole Elliott was portrayed as one of Rickard's ring men or "seconds," swinging the towels. But the almost too-good-to-be-true promotion was not without its hitches.

Promoters from the West Coast scoffed at the possibility of a major fight between Gans and Nelson actually being carried off in a Nevada mining camp. Ed Graney, one of the four key players in the San Francisco fight trust, had gone to Salt Lake City when he heard the news so that he could to try to talk Nelson and his manager out of fighting in Goldfield. While Graney and Nolan were reported to have spent an entire day "in conference," the citizens of Goldfield felt confident that nothing would come of their meeting. They were certain, with Rickard now off to Reno to meet the participants, that their man, Rickard, had the situation well under control: "Goldfield realizes that the opportunity of a lifetime for the advertisement of the camps is at hand and the 'live ones' of our sister camp are going to grasp it with a vengeance."[38]

The town had fewer than thirty days to prepare for the grand event, and plans were

set to begin as soon as Rickard sent the word from Reno that the fight was on. Everything seemed perfect, including the mild weather with evening temperatures for that August day reaching a maximum high of 88 degrees and lows for a typically cool evening of 65 degrees. In August of 1906, Goldfield was blissful.

On August 8, Rickard wired Goldfield from Reno that Gans, the fighter, and Nelson's manager, Billy Nolan, had arrived in Reno, and that the Gans-Nelson fight was definitely on. Gans had boarded a train from San Francisco and Nolan from Salt Lake. Nolan decided that Rickard's offer was better than Graney's, but Graney refused to give up and accompanied Nolan to Reno in case he happened to change his mind en route to Nevada. Nelson, who remained in Salt Lake, was expected to come to Goldfield as soon as Nolan signed the contract.

Reporters asked Gans if he was certain the fight would occur. He responded, perhaps a bit too eagerly, that "nothing in the world would prevent the fight from coming off."[39] Nevada was, after all, referred to as "the battle state," the only state to join the United States during the Civil War. There had been important boxing events in Nevada before, in Carson City, but nothing like what Rickard envisioned. And Gans was going to make sure that Nelson would not back down over details in the contract. Without a manager, Gans promised to concede anything Nelson's camp wanted. Since Nolan was the one who offered to have his fighter engaged at $30,000, the match seemed to be a sure deal in the minds of Nevadans.

A deal was at hand, yes, but the details unquestionably seemed to be disproportionately in Nolan's favor from the outset. When reporters in Reno asked about the division of the $30,000 purse, Nolan responded, "Well, it ought to be fair. We'll work out the details between the boxers in the Articles of Agreement. But in all fairness, I think a 75–25 percent would be the best division since everyone is coming to see Battling Nelson. Gans couldn't draw $500."[40]

Who was this enigmatic Joe Gans, said to be the "greatest fighting machine the world had ever known," but who had such a bad reputation?[41] Joe Gans had become the first African American world title holder in any sport in 1902, with his one-punch knockout of Frank Erne in Fort Erie, Canada. According to *The Ring* magazine editor Nat Fleischer, "No fighter had ever faced a tougher field in the journey to the title than Joe Gans."[42] Gans had won more recorded fights than any man in history, and had beaten all comers as champion. His manager, Al Herford, finding it hard to make money when nobody had a chance against Gans, worked a deal with Jimmy Britt's manager. The deal had backfired and Britt had "taken Gans reputation." Now Gans would be fighting in Goldfield to restore his good name and regain his undisputed claim to the world lightweight championship.

Billy Nolan and Tex Rickard left for Goldfield on the same train. Rickard wasted little time in Reno; he purchased a carload of lumber for the stadium that would be built to seat 20,000 people. Rickard turned on the publicity spigot, and it would run until the day of the fight, but he was not a man who thought grandly and risked unwisely. Most of the high-dollar seats had already been sold to his wealthy friends and patrons in Goldfield and Tonopah. High rollers bought ten, twenty, even fifty high-dollar seats. Many of the tickets were given to their high-hat friends coming into town for the event. With ticket sales virtually guaranteed, the event was off and running with a solid start.

A month before the fight, the promotion promised to be a smashing success. Gans came into town weighing 139 pounds. He was convinced that he would not have any problem making the contract requirement of 133 pounds by Labor Day. He was ready to go into

training with the two men who had accompanied him from San Francisco, Arthur S. Price and Tom Robinson. When asked about his choice of referee, Gans said that he preferred someone from the West Coast since that would tend to draw in a larger audience and larger gate. When asked what this fight meant to him, Gans replied that the title meant more to him than the money, although "he grinned when he talked of the golden harvest he expected to reap in the coming contest."[43]

The Hurdle Before the Fight: The Articles of Agreement, August 9, 1906

In a town where deals were frequently made on a quick and friendly handshake, news that Billy Nolan had high-jacked the negotiations did not sit well. Newspaper cartoonist Art Buel's "Sketches from the Battlefield" pretty well summed it up: he drew Gans as a gentleman and Nolan as a highwayman, holding up "King" Rickard and Gans with a pistol in one hand and a list of demands in the other, "75 percent win or lose, with $5000 bonus" and Gans "to weigh every 15 minutes."[44]

Discussions over the articles of agreement continued all day and into the late evening hours at Rickard's Northern saloon, with participants stuck on one issue. Billy Nolan stubbornly demanded that his man receive $22,500 of the purse, win or lose. Nolan reminded everyone that Gans had originally agreed to any conditions. Gans countered that he had obviously understood this to mean something within the realm of reason.

Gans stood his ground, refusing to allow 75 percent of the purse to go to Nelson, win or lose. His position was that the purse be split 60/40 to the winner, or winner take all.

Nolan was aghast that anyone would take suggestions from Gans, whom as a black pugilist he considered a non-entity in the negotiations. Nolan displayed the obstinacy of a mule. He wanted $22,500, regardless of the arguments made by Tex Rickard or any other members of the club's management. Finally, at 5:00 P.M. Nolan said that if he did not receive $22,500 for Nelson's share, they could find another opponent for Gans.

Frustrated, as all the members were with Nolan, Larry Sullivan ponied-up an offer: a 50/50 split of the purse, each man to receive $15,000 win or lose, and Sullivan would personally throw in $5,000 cash to Nelson.

Nolan refused Sullivan's offer. The negotiations stalled again until 10:00 P.M. when Rickard took Nolan, arm around the shoulders, and walked outside with him. When the two came back into the meeting room an hour later, both had smiles on their faces. An agreement had been reached, the first of many to come where Rickard would have to make deals under the table to ensure a fight. But it was a lesson learned: a few thousand dollars under the table as an expense could mean a few hundred thousand profit down the road.

The trio of Nolan, Gans, and Rickard left the Northern and walked over to the Nixon building where they signed the articles of agreement. In addition to the division of the purse, Nolan insisted that each fighter be required to make 133 pounds by 3:00 P.M., a half-hour before entering the ring. Additional provisions required that each man weigh in at noon and 1:45 and be "under 133 at both weigh ins."[45] Nolan and Nelson did not want a repeat of the situation that had occurred when Nelson fought Aurelia Herrera. According to Nelson, Herrera had deliberately avoided weighing in on time and then later stated that he couldn't be expected to make weight after eating a hearty meal.

Nolan explained to reporters

Signing the articles of agreement: (seated left to right) Battling Nelson, Billy Nolan, Tex Rickard, Joe Gans. Others include Milton Detch (far left), Frank McDonald (behind Nolan), George Siler and Charles Chrisman (between Rickard and Gans), and Larry Sullivan (behind Gans). Back row unidentified (Larson photograph, 1906).

> In order to avoid another fiasco like the Herrera affair, both men shall, if required, weigh at noon and at 1:45. If both men are under the limit at that time it will be reasonable to suppose that they will both be able to make the weight at 3. Should it happen that either man is above 133 at the noon weighing or the 1:45 weighing then there will be no necessity of having them go on the scales at 3 o'clock as there will be no fight. If either fails to make the weight before 3 o'clock then there will be no ringside scene such as took place in Los Angeles as the crowd can learn beforehand that there will be no fight. I know that Nelson can make the weight easily and I fully anticipate that Gans can also, but if he should not be able to we can avoid trouble by not going to the ringside."[46]

At this point Rickard was becoming exasperated with Nolan. Another 11th-hour demand made at the Nixon building was a clause with regard to the referee. While the referee was yet to be chosen, Nelson insisted that no referee touch either fighter. Gans objected, saying such a stipulation was unwarranted and unheard of, to which Nelson said he would bet Gans $100 that in his fight with Terry McGovern the referee never touched either of them. Gans took the bet.

No one would ever really know exactly what offer Rickard made to satisfy Nolan that day. All the press was told was that Nelson would get $20,000 and Gans $10,000. The details of the arrangements remain a mystery to this day. Whatever sums Rickard had to pay to ensure the fight he was willing to shell out because too much had already been invested to let the deal fall through at the last minute.

Gans immediately went into training at Merchants' Hotel in Columbia, a mining camp

close to Goldfield. His typical training day was spent in the mornings jumping rope and shadow boxing. In the afternoon he beat the body bag. It was said that you could hear the punches throughout the neighborhood. His final activity of the day was a sparring match with Kid Symms of Denver, a "ladylike" affair considering that Gans did not want to hurt his hands.

By Sunday, August 13, Charles Dana arrived to photograph Gans for the San Francisco papers. The photographer, along with crowds of people, followed Gans. He weighed in publicly, wanting people to know that he could make the weight easily enough. He stepped on the public scales: 137 pounds. Gans said it would be no trouble to step into the ring at 133 by Labor Day.

Meanwhile, Nolan and Nelson searched for a training camp. At first Nolan wanted to set up camp in Reno, but the citizens of Goldfield objected to anything other than their town. For a time, Tonopah was considered when no other suitable location could be found. Finally, the brewery south of Goldfield was selected.

Nolan joked, "Bat will be safe near the brewery, but you can bet that if I was handling Young Corbett or some other fighters I know of, I would get as far away from the brewery as I possibly could."[47]

When the owner of the brewery told Nolan that his cottage would not be ready for several days, Nolan became disgusted and decided to look elsewhere. He considered the Goldfield swimming pool. But after a brief visit and a sniff of the air, Nolan and Nelson decided against the swimming pool. The water was rancid and the place was too close to

Nelson arrives in style. Driver's seat: Charles Chrisman (auto inventor); Battling Nelson; second seat: Billy Nolan; third seat (left to right), Winfield S. Elliot, Tex Rikard, Grant (last name unknown) (Larson photograph, 1906).

the slaughter houses. Nolan and his fighter stayed at the Goldfield hotel, but the lodge did not have adequate indoor training facilities. Late in the afternoon of August 15, Nelson went for a jog with Jack Clifford, who would fight on the undercard. On their return, word went out that the champion was returning from his run down Main Street, and every worker and patron turned out to welcome him with cheers. It seemed that the women of Goldfield were taking just about as much interest in the fight and the fighters as were the men.

Upon his return to town, Nelson learned that a telegram had been sent to the referee of the McGovern-Nelson bout in New York. Sure enough, Nelson had won the $100 bet made with Gans — the referee said he had never touched the two fighters. The durable one was as happy as a boy with a little red wagon when he heard that he had won the bet. "It looks good to me to start off with a bunch of good luck like that and I know the horseshoe will stick with me," he said as he perused the telegram.[48]

Meanwhile, Tex Rickard was sick in bed with a cold, and all work on stadium plans came to a halt until he was better. The wood lay on the baseball field with only three weeks left to get it built.

On August 16, Nolan negotiated a brief contract for training quarters: the Goldfield Ladies' Aid hall, complete with an auditorium that could seat the onlookers who watched his training. Nelson was expected to spar with Jack Clifford and the Gardner brothers of Chicago, Jimmy and George. After a ten-mile jog, Nelson stepped on the scales for the public. He weighed 135. He remarked that the high altitude did not affect him and that "it would be pumpkins" for him to get to 133 by fight day.[49]

Once Nelson went into active training, he announced that Wednesdays would be "Ladies' Day" at his training quarters. Nelson loved women fawning over him, and he would devote a day where women could come see him train without the burden of men following them. This was ironic given the fact that women were not usually admitted to fights — a taboo that Tex Rickard would break. The news set off a blaze of controversy. Billy Nolan predicted, "Watch 'em come."[50] And they did. The next Wednesday, 80 women streamed into to his quarters a half-hour before 3:00 P.M., the scheduled time, but so did a group of angry male reporters, when Nolan refused them. After some wrangling, Nolan let a few men in; then the doors closed to a full house.

Local ministers were not happy at the scene unfolding in the community. The Rev. James Byers, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Goldfield, said, "I will expel any woman who attends this prize fight from my flock."[51]

After the ministers weighed in, more than 100 interested women rushed to the fight headquarters to pick up postcards advertising the Labor Day event that they could send to their friends and family out of state.

Rickard saw the interest as an advertising bonanza, and the newspapers were quick to comment on the change the promoter brought to boxing: "All the traditions of the sacredness of the ringside for males only will be broken on Labor day when the majority of women in the camp will be in the arena to watch the fight."[52]

It was another coup for Rickard in terms of pre-fight publicity. He reassured the crowds:

> Already a large number of reservations have been made by women singly and by many of the prominent men of the camp for their wives. It is estimated that 250–300 women will witness the contest. The club is making special preparations to properly care for all women who attend. The arena will be filled by specially sworn in officers who will see that nothing offensive is said or done. No one under the influence of liquor will be allowed within

> the gates and the officers will be instructed to eject any man who in any way transgresses the rules laid down by the club for the protection and comfort of the women."[53]

The newspapers noted, "This unique way of conducting the fight will add greatly to the novelty of the championship contest in the heart of the desert."[54]

Rickard felt that the success of a venture had to be guaranteed with meticulous planning and preparation before the event ever got under way. To accommodate incoming visitors,

Tex Rickard would be the subject of many editorial cartoons regarding the "bags of gold" he offered for fight purses (*Louisville Courier-Journal*, Feb. 10, 1919).

he saw to it that a host of railroad tracks were laid down next to the old baseball field, with additional side tracks laid to accommodate 200 cars to be parked as sleepers when the trains arrived for the fight.

By August 24, $15,000 worth of tickets had been bought and paid for. Locals were responsible for most of the sales. Denny Sullivan, the owner of the Mohawk saloon in Goldfield, bought a $400 box, 100 $10 tickets and 20 $15 tickets for his friends, for a total of $1,700. Rickard would always pre-sell the tickets. Monies from advanced ticket sales, or "the gate," would finance the building of the stadium, pay for advertising and other costs, and fund the exorbitant purses Rickard would offer.

Prior to August 23, the betting favorite was Nelson. But on Saturday, August 25, the papers reported there were indications that a shift to Gans as a betting favorite had occurred. "He is certainly preparing for the fight of his life. He has won many friends by his simple, earnest manner and while Nelson's youth may prove too much for him the lad of Hegewisch will have to do some tall work to win the day. The arena is rapidly nearing completion and will prove of very satisfactory design. Nearly all of the great fighters have signified their intention to be on hand on Labor day."[55]

The referee for the bout was George Siler of Chicago, the famous referee chosen by Dan Stuart for his promotions with Corbett and Fitzsimmons. Siler arrived in Tonopah six days before the fight to familiarize himself with the rules and other conditions for the event. He reported to the news media that many Chicagoans would be attending the fight. Siler, who it was reported had refereed more than 2000 fights, predicted, "I don't suppose that any mining camp in the world ever had the advertisement that Goldfield is getting today as a result of this bout. You see this is the largest purse that has been offered in many years

From left, Tex Rickard, George Siler, and Joe Gans examine the legal documents before the Goldfield fight (Dana photograph, 1906).

where the fighters are certain to get the money when the bout is over. In addition to that this is the first finish fight in the lightweight class since 1892. These things all help to attract great attention to the match and the whole country is talking of Goldfield." He added, "Many people will, I believe, take advantage of the reduced rate [railroad fare] to get a look at the big Nevada mining camps that are so much talked of all over the country. They will see the fight and then spend the rest of the time their tickets allow running about the mines. I expect to stay a day or so after the fight and will have a look at some of the mines before I return to Chicago."[56] On this day, August 28 (the fight was six days away), the Tonopah and Goldfield Railroad Company reported having finished the rails to accommodate 200 Pullman cars that would function as hotel accommodations for their travelers.

George Siler of Chicago refereed more than 2,000 bouts, which included work for both promoters Dan Stuart and Tex Rickard.

If any love existed in the camp for Nelson's manager, Billy Nolan, all of it was lost by August 30. Nolan insisted the issue of weight at 133 pounds meant that the fighters were to weigh in with their boxing togs, "exclusive of their gloves.... The weigh-ins are noon, 1:30 and 3 o'clock at 133 or under in their fighting togs, and that's all there is to it.... Either of the fighters failing to meet the requirements will forfeit $5,000 for each such failure." And Nolan and Nelson would leave town.[57] This would mean that Gans would have to weigh in at 131 pounds immediately before the fight, when it was scheduled to begin at 3:00 P.M. in the hot afternoon. Tex commented that "Nolan became alarmed when he heard that Gans was making the weight without any big effort and started to find some excuse to make the Baltimorean take off a few more pounds. He lit upon this one."[58]

"There is no precedent for it," George Siler, the veteran referee, declared. "There is no rule to cover it."[59] But Nolan stood firm on the weight situation and said that if Gans could not make weight, the fight would not go forward.

That was the last straw for the former sheriff. Rickard, normally cool-headed and called the "best natured man in the town," lost his temper. If the fight were called off at this point, Tex said publicly, "the two principals will find themselves hiking through the desert without funds."[60] But Rickard was fed up with Nolan's shenanigans, and privately, Tex sent two deputies with strong arms to tell Nolan, in no uncertain terms, that he better not try to leave town before the fight. Nolan's popularity fell as fast as Gans' rose.

By August 30, betting favored Gans 10 to 7, but the ladies had fallen in love with Nelson and were placing their bets on the Dane. Also on August 30, the newspaper men began pouring into town: Bart W. Currie*, New York Morning and Evening World, Boston Globe*; Paul Cowles, manager, Associated Press west of Denver; E. Van Loan, *L.A Examiner*; R. A. Smith, *San Francisco Call.*

Thousands Make Their Way to Goldfield

"Never in the history of Nevada will there be such an influx of outsiders as will be present at the Labor day event in Goldfield, 8–31."[61]

On Saturday, two days before Monday's big Labor Day holiday, visitors flooded in by the thousands, men *and* women, swelling the dusty streets of the mining camp. Saturday's paper talked about the readiness of the "greatest fight" about to occur and the "Gold Galore" available for the picking. Every major ore company had a column of their recent news. News titles read: "Gold Galore on the Whale Company Ground," "New Camp of Oro ... reports great activity in that camp ... the greatest one of the miner's has ever seen." "Six feet of high grade ore in the bottom of a 50-foot shaft on the Fairview Eagle property in the encouraging report received at the office of W. F. Bond & Co."[62] And so, despite a whirlwind of newsworthy events occurring throughout the world, the only talk in the summer of 1906 in Goldfield was of gold and prizefights.

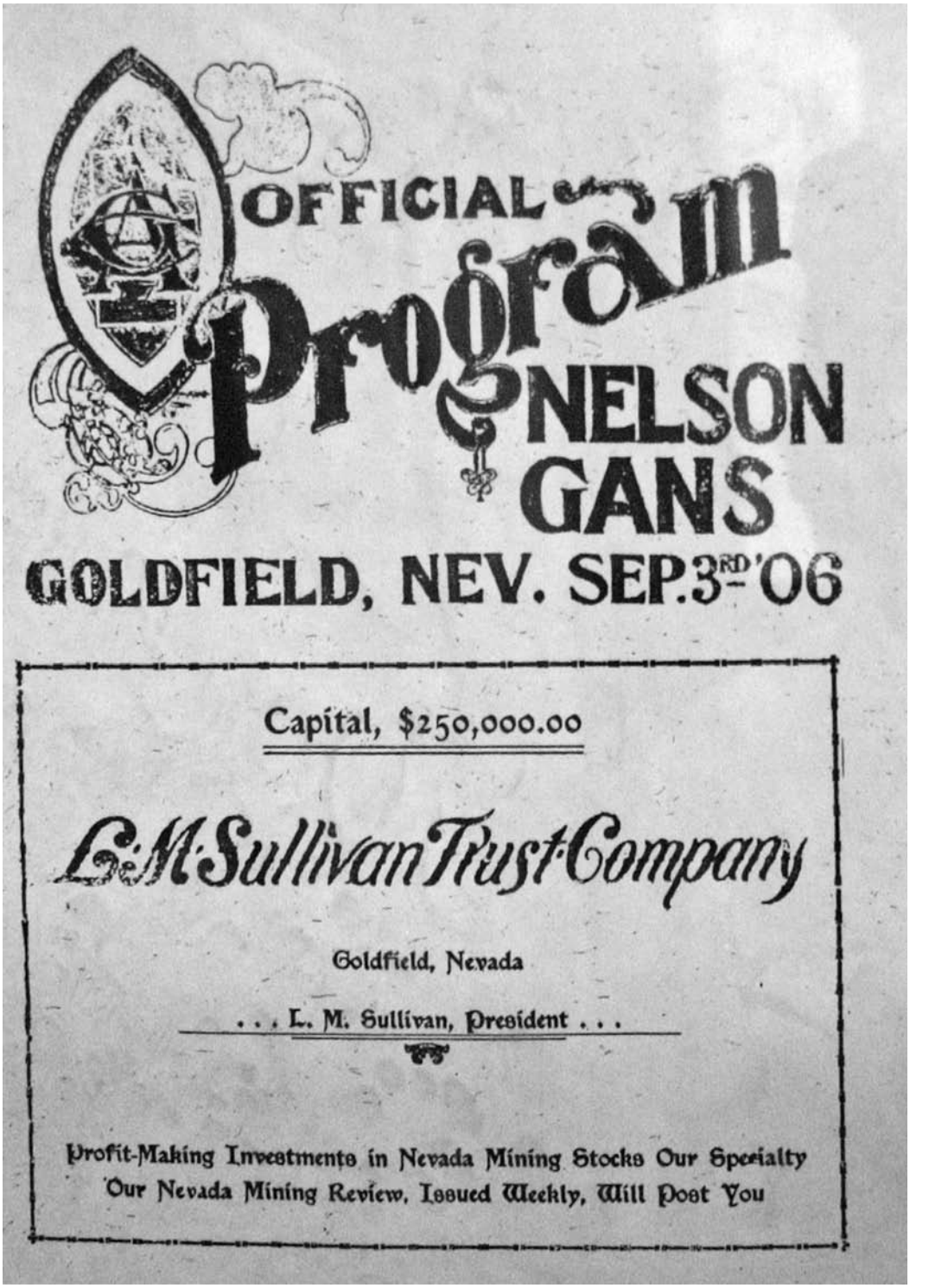
Pre-fight parties lasted throughout the night. Saloons were stuffed beyond capacity with players at the roulette wheels and faro tables. Restaurants never closed. Men waited in line at the cribs of the prostitutes. Patrons of Haps, the Chinese opium dealer, made their way south through town to stoke their foggy pleasures in a drug den, literally dug into the ground like a marmot's cave.

The little baseball field on the edge of town had been transformed into a magnificent open-air stadium in a matter of weeks, with bench seats still green and oozing with sap. Men and women in their holiday dress would sit respectfully in front of the cameras that would record the event for posterity. On that momentous day, and the long afternoon that lasted into the early evening, the crown-jewel spectacle of boxing would be witnessed by more than 18,000 people and recorded by three cameramen from the pioneering film studios of the Miles Brothers of San Francisco, hand-cranking several miles of film through their boxes. After editing, the silent film would throw jerky film images of the boxers and referee on canvas screens in movie theaters across the country and into Europe.

The fight program was so filled with advertisements for gold-mining stocks that there was hardly any mention of the fighters themselves. A photo of Gans receiving instructions from Larry Sullivan, head of the Sullivan Trust Company, whose bustling office was next door to The Northern, carried the caption, "My friends are going to bet a lot of money on you, and you must win. If you lose they'll think you faked and kill you sure." The death threat against a black man garnered no attention. The important thing was to convince the betting public that Gans would fight to win so as not to disrupt the wagering on the contest, which might in turn cause collateral damage by slowing down the flow of money into the gold stocks. (A few years later several of the promoters would serve time for securities fraud.) The message was clear: the fight was "on the level" and "to the finish."

Rickard's brainchild worked so well that the world took notice. Papers throughout the country announced the big Labor Day event to take place in Goldfield, and large sums of money poured into investments in mining stock. The town's telegraph office worked continuously to take ticket sales and stock orders. Rickard knew what it felt like to see gold stacked on the gambling table, and it would be a ploy he would use again in bidding for his next big promotion.

The day of the fight the odds against Nelson were extended, 10 to 6 in favor of Gans. Nelson sat in his corner chewing gum and chatting with his seconds. Gans wore his "worried look." He first told a newspaper man and then spoke directly to Siler to say that none of



The official program for the Gans-Nelson fight, which was filled with more stock information than fight dope.

his seconds could throw in the sponge for him. Gans won the coin toss to select a corner. He chose the corner that put his back to the sun. Both men weighed 132¼.

Rickard posted three hundred armed deputies at ringside to keep order. The pre-fight ring activities included introductions and pre-fight challenges made by boxers in person or through telegrams. (The practice of issuing challenges by other fighters in the ring before the fight would eventually stop after Tex Rickard changed the order and started introducing former ring champions before a big fight. Rickard's practice of introducing champions in attendance at a fight is a courtesy still observed today.) Boxers Jimmy Britt and Frankie Neil were introduced, then Ed Graney and George Siler. The telegram sent to Gans from his mother was read: "Joe, the eyes of the whole world are on you. Everybody believes you will win. Peter Jackson will give me the news. You bring home the bacon."[63] At 3:23 P.M. the boxers posed for pictures. When Siler called the men to the center at 3:25 P.M., Gans bet Nolan $2,000 that he would win; Nolan refused the bet.

By 3:00 in the afternoon, the temperature rose to 100 degrees under the torrid Nevada sun. When the fighters came out for the first round, Nelson refused to shake hands. The animosity remained for forty-two, grueling rounds. In the world of epic sport events, the prizefight at Goldfield would be one of the bitterest personal rivals in history, a life-and-death struggle, like the third Ali-Frazier brawl, the sternest test either combatant had ever faced.

Gans weighs in, looking emaciated from having to get down to 133 pounds ringside in complete "boxing togs" (Dana photograph, 1906).

The First "Great Fight of the Century"

In the film of the fight produced by the Miles Brothers, Tex Rickard and other Goldfield financiers can be seen standing stoically through the long, hot desert day watching Gans and Nelson painting their masterpiece of fistic art.

In round one Gans goes to shake, but Nelson crouched and drew back his mitts like a cat ready to pounce. Gans circled Nelson, then again held out his gloves in the traditional sportsman's shake. Nelson touched gloves half-heartedly. Then the action begins!

After the belated handshake Gans stepped left, jolted Bat's head back with a hard jab, followed by a hard left hook. As quick as a flash, Gans circled Nelson and hit him with a hard left-right combination. The Old Master's fighting science is preserved on a century-old film.

Both fighters charged out at the start of round two. Gans' jab hit Bat in the face, while Bat's jab connected with the Old Master's shoulder. Each man was knocked back by the impact. Nelson charged forward and threw a wicked straight left that Gans avoided by pulling back at a seemingly impossible angle. Gans danced left, landed a jab and a hook. Nelson grabbed Gans' arms and pushed him back.

Nelson landed a perfectly timed over-hand right. Any questions of Bat lacking boxing skills are gone with that punch! Gans regained his form and lands two lefts. Gans landed a right uppercut followed by a left hook. The hook was blocked by Nelson's shoulder. Gans repeated the combination and the film breaks to show cornermen fanning their fighters with white towels. It is a deadly earnest attempt to cool the fighters in the 100-degree heat.

The bout continued in the same pattern with Gans peppering Nelson's face with straight staccato combinations. Gans scored several knockdowns during the course of the fight. In round 15 Gans landed hard jabs at the onrushing Nelson. Nelson bored his way in and threw body shots. Gans pushed Nelson to the ropes, stepped back, and lands a perfect uppercut to the chin. Nelson fell, going through the ropes.

Gans helped Nelson back up, holding the ropes open. The crowd views this as a sign of sportsmanship. Nelson threw hard left and right hooks. Nelson hit Gans with a right after the bell. Gans starts to hit him back but the two were separated by referee Siler.

Fortitude, one of the cardinal virtues espoused by Saint Augustine, was never more on display than in the ring at Goldfield that day. Tex Rickard, who had shown so much of his own fortitude in putting the match together, had a fight for which he could be proud. Prize fighters, even more than the gunslingers of western lore, were the legends and entertainers of the day. In 1906 the majority of Americans worked six days a week, 12 hours a day. Many children truly did walk five miles to school, if they weren't already employed in grimy factories or dust-filled mines. It is no wonder that endurance was held in such high regard. Without television or radio, boxing matches provided what little entertainment was available to the working classes. And fans certainly wanted to see something for their money. "Gameness" was a sporting manifestation of courage and a quality of great importance for fighters. Never was it more in evidence than in Goldfield.

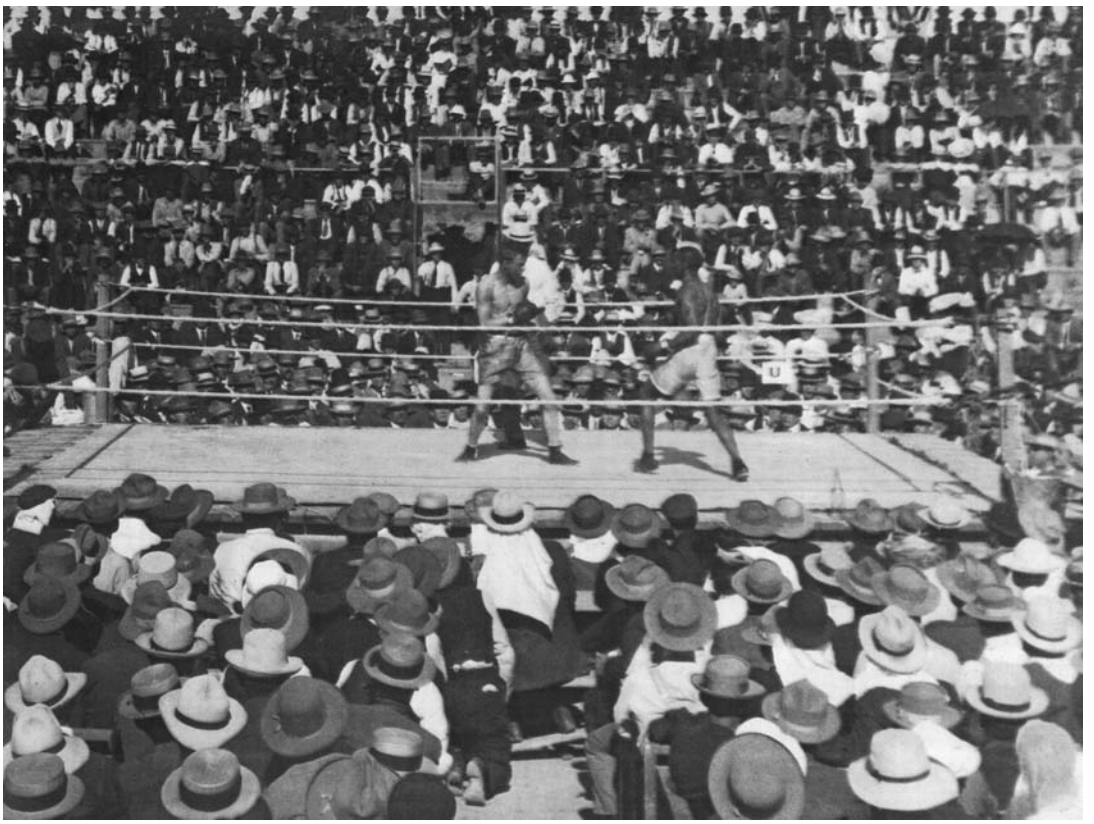
Nelson put up a valiant effort until the 15th round when he seemed to have given up all hope of winning legitimately and began to use his head as a battering ram and hit below the belt on a regular basis. Battling Nelson was so infamous for the practice that the articles of agreement for the Goldfield fight had to specifically address how much fouling by Nelson would be tolerated. Would the referee deduct points? Would he physically separate the

fighters? The discussions went so far as to specify whether and under what circumstances the referee could tug on the Dane's hair to pull his head off Gans.

At one point all of the spectators turned to look at something behind the camera. It is the only time there is a disturbance among the crowd. In fact, the audience was as well-mannered as one at an opera. The town's leaders had great hope that the fight and the film will generate high interest in Goldfield and revive the mining-stock market. Whatever the disturbance in the back of the stadium, no mention of it appears in the news accounts of that afternoon's bout.

There is some evidence that Nelson thought the fight was fixed in his favor. He later asked Gans why he had not "gone down as he should have."[64]

Instead of a prostrate opponent, Gans was pumping hard punches into Nelson's face, turning it from a jelly to a jam. And yet despite his constant fouls, Nelson did relatively well during these middle rounds, forcing the action and landing numerous body blows. Compared to modern fights that last a maximum of twelve rounds indoors, the Goldfield fight outdoors comprised the length of more than three bouts in one. In round 27, Gans landed a hard right to the top of the Dane's skull that broke his hand. To disguise his injury, he limped as if he had twisted his ankle. According to George Graham Rice, Gans had said he could beat Nelson with one hand tied behind his back. Little had he known how prophetic those words would prove to be.



Nelson and Gans do battle under the torrid Nevada sun. They fought for more than three hours in 100-degree heat (Dana photograph, 1906).

Tex Rickard had supported Gans in the press, saying that he "displayed the patience of an Arizona monk" during the pre-bout disputes over the terms of the fight.[65] Yet Tex had bet his money on Nelson. Siler said later he could have disqualified Nelson at several points but did not because the crowd wanted to see a fight, and previous referees of Nelson's other fights had not disqualified him.

Gans' backers were getting worried that Gans had not yet won. They had bet large sums of money on Gans and were expected to kill him if he lost.

For Gans, it may well have been a case of victory or death. The impunity with which white mobs lynched black men was a standard part of the culture. H.L. Mencken wrote of lynchings in a jocular way, noting that only "anti-social sheriffs" ever tried to spoil the entertainment.

The film takes on a hazy, smoky quality as the afternoon heads toward sundown. Notably, the Miles Brothers called their film company "The Sundowners" in tribute to the two gladiators who laid their lives on the line that day.

As the light faded, Gans loaded up on his joust-like left jabs, jolting back Nelson's head time and again. He used his broken right hand rarely, but took care not to show it was hurt. He had to use every trick in his bag due to Nelson's incredible endurance.

In round 42, Gans hit Nelson with a straight left that, when seen in slow motion, seems to risk decapitating Nelson. (It makes him groggy and mad, knowing that Gans still has enough stamina to strike him with a hard blow. Nelson, who in most instances behaved like a petulant school boy, probably felt at that point he would soon be knocked out, and decided to resort to a crippling low blow.) A desperate Nelson then felt around and delivered a left hook, well below the belt.

The consensus among sportswriters was that Nelson had deliberately fouled to avoid being knocked out by Gans' trip-hammer blows. This would have been the ultimate insult to the arch-racist Nelson, who in his autobiography bragged of his "coon grave yard." Nelson went to his grave denying he had fouled Gans.

Although Nelson lost the fight, he received the bulk of the purse. He would go to his grave stating that he did not foul Gans and should have won the fight. He won his re-match with Gans in 1908 when the Old Master was practically dead from tuberculosis (Dana photograph, 1906).

The Aftermath

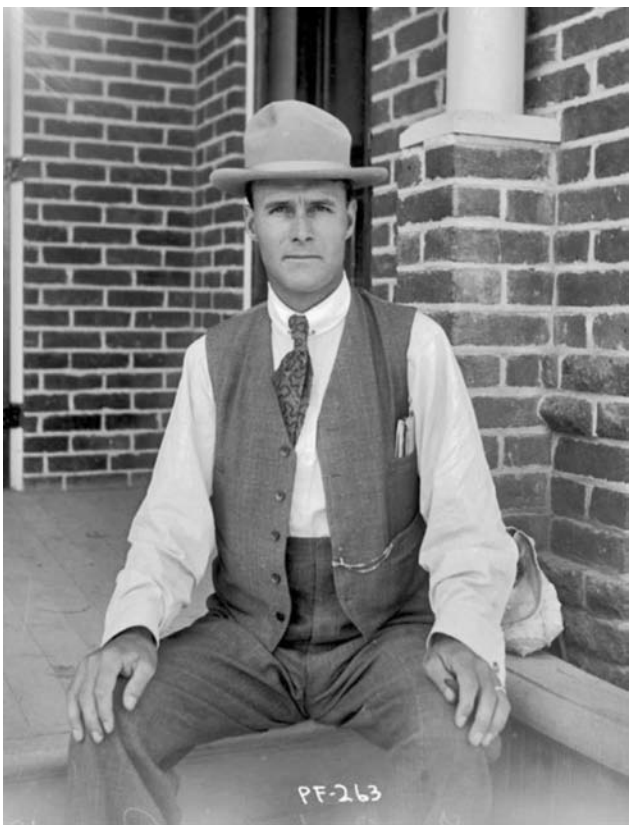
The fight propelled both Tex Rickard and the sport into a new era.

The "Great Fight of the Century" had exceeded all expectation in terms of the action and especially the punishment that both fighters meted out over three

hours. One ringside spectator remarked afterward, "It was really too brutal to look at."[66] The film of the fight was shown in theaters throughout the country, the moves of the boxers so picture-perfect that they seemed choreographed.

Dr. Paul Cope examined Gans the next day and confirmed that he had been hit with a low blow. "Dr. Cope's examination also revealed the truth of the statement of Gans' backers that the negro was disabled early in the fight and that his most damaging blow, the one with which he hoped to beat the Dane into submission, was taken from him by the breaking of one of the small bones in his right hand."[67]

At the Nelson camp all was "bitterness of spirit," and the air was "dark with charges of fraud and robbery." Nelson was especially mad at referee Siler for pulling on his hair during the fight when he was trying to head-butt Gans. Nelson thought the interference was intentional and that someone in the Gans camp probably paid him off. Nelson definitely thought Siler's actions kept him from winning the fight. "'I believe that I am still the better man,' said Nelson this morning, glaring at this interlocutor out of a battered left eye and twisting his bruised lips. 'I did not foul the dirty skunk.' Nolan was left to 'holler his head off...' We were jobbed out of the fight. The dinge laid down cold and quit and yet Siler gave him the decision.'"[68]



Tex Rickard would close the Northern and leave Goldfield in 1907. He would rebuild the saloon in Rawhide, but it would be destroyed by fire in 1908 (Cayton Sports, Inc.).

Nelson had been so battered that several newspapers reported that he may die as a result of the beating he had taken from Gans. His urine was blood-filled for days. When Nelson was finally strong enough to leave town, a Goldfield man, George Springmeyer, saw Nelson on the train and was shocked to see "the fighter's head hugely swollen, with split flesh in several places and hideous bruises in shades of yellow, green, and purple."[69] Yet Nelson would never admit what was a nearly unanimous opinion, that he had fouled Gans after three hours of battle in order to avoid being knocked out.

Immediately after the successful fight, telegrams arrived in Goldfield requesting Rickard to make matches for fighters. Four days after the fight Rickard left for San Francisco on a business trip where he viewed the fight film and sized up the "boxing" situation in San Francisco. Jimmy Britt was eager for a payday with Gans. So, too, was Nelson, although it was the feeling at the time that neither Billy Nolan nor

Battling Nelson would ever again be invited back to Goldfield. Joe Humphries, McGovern's manager, also wired Rickard hoping to secure a battle like the one Rickard had originally planned — one with Terry McGovern and Britt. It seemed that Rickard had the promoter's pick of the pugs. He even gave some thought to buying the athletic arena and going it alone should the Goldfield Athletic Club want to get out of the boxing business. As it turned out, Joe Gans' next fight would be thirty miles away in Tonopah, Nevada, on New Year's Day, with a different promoter. Goldfield's sister city hoped to replicate the success of the big Labor Day fight in Goldfield and jumpstart its own economic boom. In the middle of a huge snowstorm that winter, the fight failed to draw the numbers Tonopah businessmen had hoped.

Although extremely popular, Rickard figured that none of the fights with Gans, Britt, or Nelson would draw like the fight in Goldfield or make their promoters as much money. In fact, while grudge matches have always seemed popular, from a promoter's point of view Rickard didn't believe in re-matches. (One re-match he did promote was Dempsey-Tunney in 1927. It is unlikely that he would have promoted that re-match if the circumstances had been different.) Rickard would sit back and wait four years for his next big opportunity.

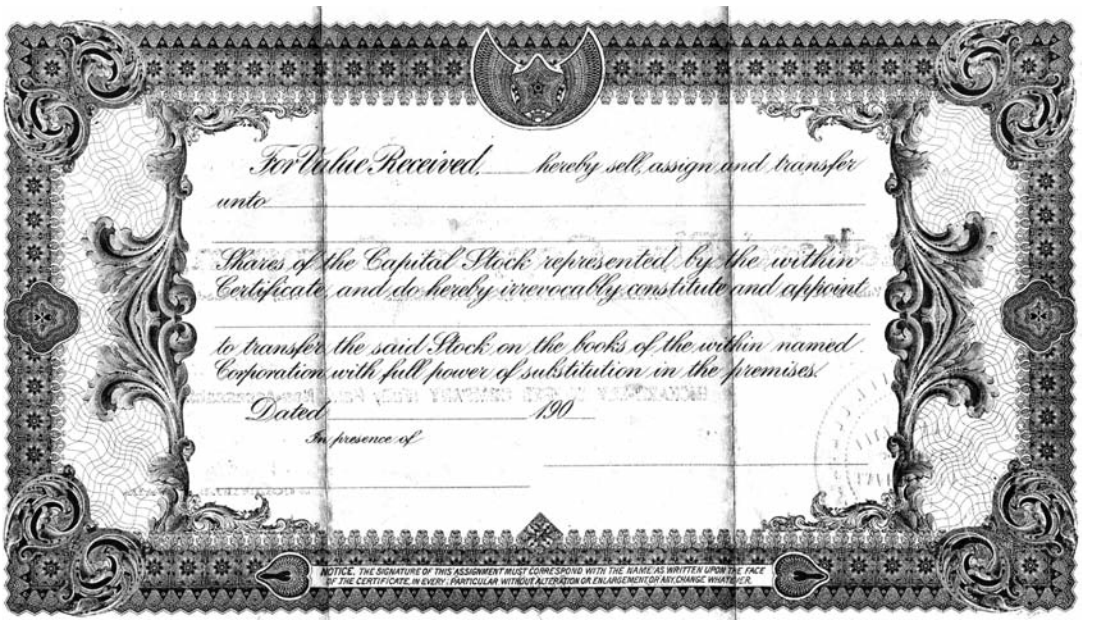
Gans and Nelson would meet again with Gans gravely suffering from tuberculosis. After the Goldfield fight, Battling Nelson pursued Joe Gans across America with the same determination shown by Ahab pursuing Moby Dick across the earth's oceans. Beating Gans was Nelson's life purpose, as he stated in his autobiography. It would gain him fame and fortune and also cost him dearly.

The two men fought twice more, and all three of their bouts were death struggles, unlike fights in the modern era that never go more than 12 rounds of often timid, careful boxing. The Gans-Nelson fights harkened back to the days of the gladiators. A few classic

Tex Rickard's house in Goldfield as it looked in 2009 (photograph by the authors).

rivalries later in the twentieth century approached Gans-Nelson in savage artistry: Robinson-LaMotta, Griffith-Paret, and, of course, Ali-Frazier. And just as neither Ali nor Frazier was ever the same after their "Thrilla in Manilla," so, too, Gans and Nelson left the best parts of themselves in the ring in Goldfield, Nevada, on Labor Day 1906. Tex Rickard had

After he sold the Northern in Goldfield, Rickard went back to promoting mining stocks.



Back side of Rickard's Ely copper stock.

created the prototype of the epic ring battle and with it the first of the great "grudge match" series of twentieth-century boxing.

The popularity of the event sparked a frontier gold rush that late summer, the last of its kind in America. It was said that before the second rush ended, "the American public sank $150,000,000 into worthless mining properties in that state."[70] By 1907 the mines faltered. Rickard, like everyone else who had invested in mine stock, lost a great deal of his wealth in the boom-and-bust aftermath of 1907.

The papers had not forgotten his success in 1906 and they would report his financial troubles of 1907 and 1908. Rickard was now known as much for being a boxing promoter as he was a western saloon owner and professional gambler. "The famous gambler and promoter is once more on his feet," the papers reported in 1909. "For a long time Rick was in the ruck, and bad luck hit him on all sides."[71] After the financial disaster of 1907, he worked to recoup his losses, paid all his debts, and closed up the Northern. "Then his luck returned. About sixty miles from Goldfield at a place called Pioneer City, rich ores were unearthed. Rickard went over there and secured a lease on the Pioneer Bonanza."[72] It was reported that by January of 1909, he was shipping 100 tons a day of valuable ore at $100 per ton, and that it would not take long for him to recover some of the big money he had lost. In the easy-come-easy-go manner of the gambler, he would move on optimistically to his next adventure.

Rickard's first "Great Fight of the Century" helped to change the social landscape and the ways of big fight promotion. He had instituted the idea that boxing was appropriate entertainment for all classes, including women. Rickard capitalized on the fact that the wealthy were intrigued by the widespread popularity of boxing and were willing to pay high prices for tickets regardless of its illegality. In addition to his business acumen and proven administrative abilities, Rickard had a natural flair for dramatizing a prize fight. In terms of racial politics in Jim Crow America, Rickard had capitalized on the epic confrontation between a black man and a white man. It would be his model for the second "Great Fight of the Century."

Chapter Three

The Gambler Outbids the Competition: The Great White Hope Fight

"Few men in any period of the world's history have led a more varied or intense existence than I." — Jack Johnson

In terms of bravado and showmanship, Tex Rickard would meet his match in the first black world heavyweight champion, Jack Johnson. Rickard's promotion of the fight between the "Great White Hope" Jim Jeffries and Jack Johnson would earn more money than any prior sporting event and create such a backlash before it was over in terms of racial strife that even the super-resilient Tex would need a long respite from the toils and controversy of the prize-fighting business.

Johnson's rise in the world of boxing had mirrored that of Rickard as a promoter. Both were self-made men who did things their own way. As the first black heavyweight champion, Johnson's laurels were all the more disputed by virtue of the fact that his predecessor, Jim Jeffries, had retired undefeated, leaving the heavyweight boxing scene in a state of limbo. From the moment Johnson won the championship in Australia, a promotion by Hugh D. "Huge Deal" McIntosh in 1908, Johnson was on a collision course with the former champion Jeffries.

Rickard was, in his way, as much of an outsider as Johnson, who in the words of W.E.B. DuBois suffered from his "unforgiveable blackness." Rickard was shunned by the establishment because of his unrepentant knack for seizing opportunities that everyone else coveted. In 1910 Rickard would snatch the plumb "Fight of the Century" away from his competitors by using the same audacity that Johnson had used in staking his claim to sport's biggest prize, boxing's heavyweight championship.

Tex Rickard's first "Great Fight of the Century" had successfully promoted Goldfield's mining stock, but within months of the fight, Goldfield was struggling to survive the trials of nature and the economic problems brought on by the winter of '06. Disease, workers' strikes, and a consolidation of mines made for a bleak beginning to 1907. Excessive snows buried hopes, and stock prices continued to plummet.

In addition to the Nevada woes of 1907, the Rickard family suffered the death of their only child. Five-year-old Bessie had become gravely ill from tonsillitis. Her high fever indicated to local doctors that her condition was critical, especially in that she might have a "blood poisoning." In attempting to give her the best medical attention possible, Rickard

took his young daughter to a New York throat specialist. The doctor felt that she needed an operation, but the girl could not survive the ordeal and died under the surgeon's knife, on August 5. Rickard stood helplessly at her side. He never got over the shock of the fact that while he could afford the most excellent care, all the money in the world could not buy what she needed. He was powerless to save the most precious thing in his life. He never got over it, and he never again trusted any doctor. He lashed out at the surgeon, but the only way he could retaliate was to withhold his money. Rickard ultimately challenged the doctor's handling of his daughter's case and left New York with a large part of the surgeon's bill unpaid.

With the best of Goldfield, financially and emotionally, behind him, Rickard uprooted in the fall of 1907 and moved to Rawhide where he again partnered with Kid Highley in a new Northern saloon. The saloon was short lived. In September of 1908, a fire destroyed the Northern along with much of the city. Rickard then gave the Northern name to a hotel in Ely, Nevada, and took on management of a local copper stock and mining operation owned by millionaire Thomas F. Cole of Minnesota.

Back in California, world heavyweight champion Jim Jeffries had retired to live off his saloon operation and boxing gym in Los Angeles and his alfalfa farm in Burbank. Tired of the fight game, "the Boilermaker" had virtually abandoned the world's most coveted sports title, and no one quite knew what to make of it. There had always been an uneasy tension in the heavyweight division. But during Jeffries' hiatus, with a dearth of qualified white contenders and a plethora of more-than-capable black contenders, which included Sam Langford, Joe Jennette, Sam McVey, and Jack Johnson, no one seemed to know who to promote for the title.

While Jeffries "drew the color line" and refused to give Jack Johnson or any other good black fighter a chance to fight him for the title, the general consensus among boxing insiders was that Johnson was now a legitimate contender. Like the Gans-Nelson match earlier, a Johnson-Jeffries fight was the one everyone wanted to see. But Jeffries was ambivalent about fighting again and under no circumstances did he want to risk the title going to a black champion.

With the title in a strange limbo between abdication and vacancy, the Reno Club of Nevada decided to promote a heavyweight card of its own, naming its own contenders for the crown. The club pitted former light heavyweight champion Marvin Hart of Kentucky against Jack Root of Chicago for a $5,000 purse in Reno on July 3, 1905.[1] During the ringside announcements, Battling Nelson challenged Jimmy Britt, and then Joe Gans issued a challenge to the winner of that proposed match. Jack Johnson then climbed into the ring to challenge the winner of the Root-Hart match.

Hart won the bout in the 12th round. The giant Jeffries, who had put on a noticeable amount of weight in his retirement, served as referee and towered over the contestants. While the fight was successful (its promoters made about $20,000 for the Reno Club), not everyone was convinced that the bout had given them a true heavyweight champion — at least not one of the caliber of the champions who had previously held the title.

Even Jeffries was ambivalent. He said very little before or during the match when he was refereeing it. At the end of the fight as people cleared the ring, Jeffries stepped down from the canvas onto a shelf-like board against one side of the ring, which was used by the media as a table where many of the newspaper men were still working on their stories. Jeffries' weight split the table and sent men and pencils flying. No one was hurt, but as a result of the unintended blow dealt to the media, Jeffries felt obligated to give the newsmen

what they had so long clamored for: a statement from the heavyweight king. Jeffries was a quiet man who normally kept his thoughts to himself. But when he did speak, it was with candor. When asked about the state of the championship, Jeffries responded, "I have no power to confer the world's championship upon any man. If I did, I would give it to my brother Jack." His final word on the subject was: "The championship, however, rests with the people. They and the press will be the best Judges."[2]

When he read Jeffries' comment in the newspaper, former heavyweight champion John L. Sullivan was incensed and would have none of that "press be the judges" malarkey. He gave his own statement to the press. As far as he was concerned, *he* was still champion. A British press editor scoffed, "John Lawrence Sullivan, better known, perhaps, in the pugilistic world as the 'Boston Bragger,' who was beaten in the only real fight he ever had, has handed out some more guff to a long-suffering press. Said he to a reporter the other day: 'I am still the champion. Who is Jeffries, and how and who did he ever lick?' Muzzles must be awfully expensive in America these days I should imagine!"[3]

The heavyweight title, however, might have been debated in the press, but the practical lineage went from Hart to Tommy Burns, who, in turn, lost it to Jack Johnson in 1908. Jeffries well understood the power of the media to report "the people's" demands. He knew that the public still considered him the undefeated champion, and the longer Jeffries refused to come back into the ring to defend his title, the more his image of invincibility grew. Jeffries continued to swear that he would not fight a black man. But his feelings would change when enough money was dangled like bait in front of a hungry cat. He was eager to expand his farm and toy in the real estate market. Twice he had profited from buying acreage near Los Angeles, dividing it and selling individual lots. He was enjoying the good life, and said he wouldn't come back into the ring unless he was confident he could win. That confidence gave a good number of people the hope they were looking for.

Without Rickard's determination and flare for being able to, as he said, "put over" the big deal, the Great White Hope bout of 1910 may never have materialized. Rickard had moved the "prize" bar to such an unprecedented height that Jeffries could not refuse. Rickard's guaranteed purse would bring the Boilermaker out of retirement. The Root and Hart fight drew only a $5,000 purse. One year later, Rickard had paid $30,000 for a lightweight title bout, and in 1908 he again offered $30,000 but lost the bid for the Burns-Johnson heavyweight title fight. As it turned out, Hugh "Huge Deal" McIntosh would be Rickard's foremost competitor.

In 1908, after Jack Johnson had followed Tommy Burns around the ends of the earth trying to entice him into a match, Australian promoter Hugh McIntosh had finally accumulated enough money to offer Burns a $35,000 purse. Burns held out; nothing lower would convince him to accept a match with Johnson.

McIntosh had initially established himself in the sporting business by promoting marathon bicycle races in Sydney. After gaining a reputation for fixing races, he moved out of that line and into boxing when he saw an opportunity to promote a pair of matches for the entertainment of the U. S. Navy, when the service pulled into port with its Great White Fleet. McIntosh offered Burns $20,000 for two bouts: first with Bill Squires in Rushcutters Bay and a week later with Bill Lang in Melbourne.[4] Both fights did well at the gates, and using the profit of $50,000 he made from the two fights, McIntosh could afford Burns' $35,000 demand for a fight that promised to be sensational.

Like the fight Rickard had promoted with Nelson and Gans, the Burns-Johnson fight would end up shorting the black fighter from the outset whether he won or lost. Black

fighters were frequently forced to agree to the loser's share in order to get the fight instead of having the chance to fight for the winner's percentage. Granted, Johnson did not go into his 1908 bout as champion as Gans had been for his lightweight title defense in 1906. Gans had been forced to take $10,000, ceding $20,000 to Battling Nelson in order to get that fight, even though Gans was the champion and would be the winner. For Burns' title defense, the champion was guaranteed $35,000 and contender Johnson received $5,000, even though Johnson dominated the fight. Everyone knew that the fight was the opportunity of a lifetime for Johnson and he could not turn it down even if he were not given a cent; but Johnson would never forgive McIntosh for this financial insult. That affront would come back to haunt McIntosh when he lost the bid in New York two years later for the Johnson-Jeffries fight. On December 26, 1908, Jack Johnson defeated Canadian Tommy Burns and brought the heavyweight title back to America, keeping the valuable championship close to his vest by studiously avoiding Sam Langford, Joe Jennette, Sam McVey, or any other qualified black contender where the competition was a little too close.

Jack Johnson was more than his era's boxing superman. He was the greatest heavyweight of the century, according to Nat Fleischer, who had seen them all during his lifetime up through Muhammad Ali. Nineteen years after Rickard's death, Fleischer would call Tex Rickard "boxing's greatest promoter of all time."[5]

Like Rickard, Johnson was a larger-than-life-Texan, and throughout their lives — although they would spend little time in the state after leaving it — both Rickard and Johnson would be identified with Texas. Both men were tall and statuesque: Rickard, almost six feet, and Johnson, about six feet two. Both men had a recognizable Texas drawl. Jack Dempsey

"There ain't gonna be but one Jack Johnson." Rickard, seated right of Johnson, and the champion were kindred spirits.

described Rickard's speech, in his own western vernacular, as a "half-Texas" way of talking. Newspaperman Paul Gallico said of Rickard's plaintive "soft Texas drawl" when he was unhappy with them: "You fellows oughtn' to be knocking. You ought to be boosting my shows. What you fellows always around knocking for? Knocking don't help no one."[6]

Like Rickard, Johnson could mangle the English language with the best of them. In fact, for both men, it took a conscious effort to keep their tenses in order and words properly pronounced. That rarely happened. Rickard was timid and quiet. Johnson was unguarded and rash, simply because he did not care what others thought about him. Rickard's often-quoted remark—"I never seed anything like it"—was the honest response of an astonished man. He was truly and quite innocently amazed whenever he exceeded his goal. Whatever grammatical errors Rickard committed were overlooked because of his honest and humble character. Added to his charm was a boyish grin. Observers never really knew if he was joking or serious. Johnson also had a boyish innocence about him. For newspaper interviews or during other more formal occasions, both Johnson's and Rickard's elocution was more consciously guarded. However, when reporting their stories, white newspaper men saw it necessary to invent a printed black dialect for Johnson's speech; for Rickard they tended to print his words in a more proper form of English.

Both Rickard and Johnson were full of the kind of self-confidence that has always been associated with Texas bravado. Rickard certainly was no blusterer. His confidence was exhibited in his eyes—some said cold, blue eyes. (They were actually brown.) He "looked you directly in the eyes" when he spoke. Rickard was known as a gentleman and a diplomat. He had the kind of western courtesy that attracted people to him. Both men had the kind of confidence that pointed to lives lived to the fullest, if not to the extreme. They had developed an ease of self-reliance that comes from having endured abject poverty or a sudden, sharp, unfortunate twist of fate, and a satisfying pride that comes from the painstaking journey to reach the pinnacle of unparalleled success. Few men attain such self-confidence, but when they do, it frequently shows in their humor.

Rickard was smart, and his humor was colorful but blunt. It came from an ability to "size up" a situation in as few words as possible. His first impression of Dempsey was when he was a "pore skinny-looking thing got wheelbarrowed home" after a fight.[7]

Johnson, on the other hand, was the epitome of attitude, a laugh-out-loud entertainer with a masterfully quick wit. He was very clever and very funny. Much of his sass in the ring and out was perceived as conceit and insolence to an offended white race. Few appreciated his repartee. His ring talk was pure and simple boxing tactic, the same one used by any number of other boxers, both black and white, to unnerve and disarm their opponents. Johnson's insult to Burns during their match, "You box like a woman! Who taught you to box, your mother?" were boxing "jibes" or "jabs" taken from ring lingo. They were seen as entertaining when coming from a white fighter, but disrespectful and full of inappropriate innuendo when coming from a black fighter. Boxers are not the only professionals to turn a threatening situation into humor, but their ring training makes them well-versed in the art. Johnson could whip out punch-lines at the most appropriate time and in as rapid a succession as his short-arm jabs. Boxers train to be quick, mentally and physically, and certainly Johnson was lightning fast when it came to choice words.

An incident involving Johnson prior to the Jeffries fight could be viewed as another example of the boxer's extreme conceit when, in fact, it showed how he was able to funnel his annoyance into witty banter. Geoffrey Ward used Johnson's discussion of Halley's Comet as a vivid and memorable symbol to introduce his biography, *Unforgiveable Blackness*, depict-

ing the rise and fall of Jack Johnson. But in recapturing and quoting the affair, the author omits Tex Rickard from the scene, probably suggesting that everyone other than Johnson was merely a constellation in the champion's orbit, including the great promoter. Here is how the situation unfolded.

Rickard and his wife invited Li'l Artha to lunch. The moment the champion arrived it was obvious that he was not in the best mood. He was accompanied by his trainer, and the two had been quarreling. The trainer was excited to see the historic appearance of Halley's Comet passing through the night sky and had awakened Johnson to see the marvel. Johnson was still fuming at lunch the next day over his loss of sleep.

Fussing, but obviously playing it up for his audience, Johnson quickly and with great humor turned the stellar event into a memorable proclamation of his own cosmic significance. "I told you not to wake me up to see no comet! Who cares about comets? I want my sleep. There's gonna be a helluva lot of comets when I goes away, but there ain't gonna be but one Johnson!"

Johnson was considered unbearably conceited in his day, but boastful jibes like his are common today among athletes who furthermore don't always exhibit the champion's panache.

Johnson turned to Tex, "How about that, Mr. Rickard?"

Tex thought about it for a moment and then agreed with a straight face, as he nudged Albert Fink, a friend from his former Nome days who was dining with the group. "That's right Jack. There ain't gonna be but one Johnson."[8]

Rickard might have been smiling inwardly, because the same thing could have been said about him. "There ain't gonna be but one Rickard."

Another personality trait shared by the famous Texans was that neither Rickard nor Johnson wanted to be fenced in. Both needed their space, and both would fight like bulls if pushed against a wall. Because of his great wealth, Rickard was virtually guaranteed this freedom to travel and to follow his impulses. Johnson, however, although his rich purses bought him a certain amount of mobility, especially by virtue of his numerous fast cars, was always limited by societal restrictions. His money simply could not buy him the same freedom.

For black men acculturated prior to Reconstruction, it was unbecoming to "show up" a white man. The first generation of gloved boxers, such as Joe Gans, Jack Johnson, Jack Blackburn, Joe Jennette, and a remarkably talented host of others born after the Civil War, found themselves creating new rules for an old society as much as they were carving out a profession for themselves. Boxing was one of the new vocations that gave black men indisputable access and roads to the top that had never been possible.

Both Rickard and Johnson attracted an unbelievable amount of press attention. Neither really courted it, except when they needed it. Johnson made a game of it; Rickard was simply amazed at it, and disappointed when something was intentionally reported that seemed a disservice. "Why do you want to be knocking something, when you ought to be helping out?" Rickard would say to the press. Johnson would merely shrug off undesirable press attention, and in hindsight should have paid more attention to the case that was building against him that would eventually cause his demise. Almost everywhere the men went, their presence was noted. Johnson especially was hounded by a paparazzi as out of control as anything witnessed by celebrities today. Newspapermen were in his face, knocked on his private door, interrupted his dinners, and more, to get the "scoop" or to report a new scandal. When Johnson dressed as a gentleman, reporters criticized it as over the top and looked for whatever elements might disclose some character flaw. When Rickard, or anyone

else from the white sporting world, dressed in diamond-studded fineries, it was noted but accepted as proper. But in the end, the deadly sin of envy knew no color bar. When both became too popular and too rich for the expectations of the establishment, they would both be accused by jealous enemies and harassed by prosecutors.

After Johnson won the world heavyweight title, the establishment wanted him out of the picture and Jim Jeffries back in. It was Jack London, writing as a newspaper man for the *New York Herald*, who had witnessed Johnson's title victory in Australia, and started all of the ballyhoo that fanned the racist fires in the United States by petitioning Jeffries to come out of retirement to "wipe the golden smile" from Johnson's face. Boxing became so central to American life that the national language of America swelled with boxing metaphors. At the turn of the century boxing's parlance was focused on courage and gameness. But when a black man won the title, the rhetoric of boxing shifted from boisterous *defi* to delusional ideas of race. Jeffries was not implored to come out of retirement to defend his title, but to defend his race.

With Jeffries not rushing to accept a fight with Johnson, the public tried to discredit Johnson's title. Like Sullivan, who attempted to retake the heavyweight crown when Corbett went into a temporary retirement, Jeffries made the point that he had never lost the title in the ring. Jeffries had won the title from Bob Fitzsimmons in 1899 and had never lost a bout. As a result, Jeffries was frequently petitioned to come back into the ring to defend *his* title, to knock Jack Johnson off the top of the totem pole. It was Jack London who posed the interesting question, "What would happen if Jeffries *did* come out of retirement to beat Johnson, and then go back into retirement?" Would Johnson reclaim the title then? A fight between champion Jack Johnson and champion Jim Jeffries would truly test the matter. It would be, as Jack London said, the "first time two undefeated heavyweight champions battle," with each going up "against the most dangerous and formidable man he has ever tackled."[9]

Reacting to all the media hoopla circulating in 1909, but out of shape and weighing more than three-hundred pounds, a heavy smoker, and with his reflexes dulled by age and drink, Jeffries went on an eight-month theatrical boxing exhibition with two goals in mind. The first was to re-fill his financial coffers because his Los Angeles businesses were eating up his cash. The second was to see if the tour would get him back in good enough shape to consider taking on the phenomenal Johnson.

The search for a "Great White Hope" to beat Johnson and "return the title to the white race" was part and parcel of the unprecedented publicity that led up to the July 4, 1910, heavyweight title fight**.** Finally, in early August of 1909, James Jeffries and Jack Johnson agreed to fight each other for an enormous purse, and not because they wanted to settle any philosophical or racial scores. Both needed money, and both saw advantages in striking while the irons were hot. They then advertised that they would take bids for a promoter to stage the fight, which in turn created another round of news stories. A date was set. Sealed bids were to be presented to the fighters with a certified check for $5,000 on December 1, 1909, in New York.

How Rickard Won the Bid for the Big Fight

The point should be made that without the Johnson-Jeffries fight, there would have been no phenomenon of promoter Tex Rickard and, more than likely, no million-dollar gates. In that he was not "in the money" at the time, Tex Rickard was not anticipated to

be among those bidding for the boxing event of a lifetime. But to the dismay of the top promoters of the day, the cowboy, as New York reporters called him, would ride back into the picture at the eleventh hour after receiving financial backing from his Minnesota friend and wealthy mine investor, Thomas Cole.

Late in 1909, Rickard went to Duluth to meet with Cole about his mine business that Rickard was overseeing in Nevada. At the meeting, the subject of the impending Jeffries Johnson fight was discussed. Cole knew that Rickard had successfully conducted the Gans-Nelson fight in 1906 and asked him if he was going to bid on the promotion. Rickard explained that he wasn't in a financial position to compete against the other promoters.

"Go after that fight, Tex," Cole replied. "If it's only money that you need, why you can count on me as much as you want. Outbid every promoter by $20,000, if necessary, but get the match."[10]

Here again, as at Goldfield, moneyed backers would fall into place to give Rickard the winning hand. On the train back to Ely, Nevada, Rickard decided to indeed go after the fight and wired Cole that he would take him up on his offer. "I knew I would have to act fast," said Rickard, "as the big western promoters had already started east to sign Johnson."[11]

With money in hand, Rickard had the confidence that he could win the bids. He simply needed to ponder his strategy. He did not want to find himself in the same situation that happened with Battling Nelson and his manager Willus Britt, where he was forced into making a backroom deal with them at the last minute so that they wouldn't back out. With this fight, Rickard would seal the deal ahead of time if he could.

He had heard that Jeffries had already cast his affiliation with a California promoter, which meant Rickard would go after Johnson. He had read in a Chicago paper that Johnson was playing a vaudeville engagement at a theater in Pittsburgh. Instead of traveling directly to New York, Rickard stopped in Pittsburgh to see if he could induce Jack Johnson into an agreement prior to the bid meeting. The stopover in Pittsburgh gave Rickard a feel for what it would take to win the bid.

Rickard located the boarding house where Johnson and his girlfriend, Belle Schreiber, were staying during his engagement. Johnson was not at home, but Belle was willing to meet with the man from the West. When Rickard asked her what she would most like from the impending deal, she responded, "A seal-skin coat."

"I'll buy you the best seal-skin coat I can find if you'll get Jack to sign," Tex told her.[12]

Rickard left Pittsburgh and went on to New York. Before the bid time, he met Johnson and Schreiber in a black and tan club in Harlem to talk business. Just as he had promised, Rickard presented her with a $1,000 seal-skin coat. He would downplay the cost later by saying that the coat cost him a mere $75. The cost of the coat was somewhere closer to $1,000. Rickard offered Johnson $2,500 to sign with him. Knowing the amount of money that the fight guarantees were generating, what Johnson actually wanted in addition to the money was to be guaranteed a fair and honest deal. Rickard was the one man with the reputation as a straight shooter who could give Johnson this assurance. Rickard's handshake on this was as good as a signed contract.

Through the grapevine, Rickard knew that the bids for the fight would be somewhere between $75,000 and $100,000. Johnson then gave Rickard the inside scoop — people were going to bid as high as $100,000 to get the fight, an amount three times what had ever been offered for a purse. Johnson assured Rickard that a bid of $101,000 would give him the winning bid. Actually, it would not be the highest bid presented, but it was the one that Johnson was supposed to have agreed to take.

According to a United Press agent, Johnson had been entertaining his friends at the Harlem club, acting like a millionaire when he confided in Rickard, "Look here, Mr. Tex, I needs dough."[13] The newspaper reporter tried to capture or invent some sort of black dialect.

Rickard pulled out his wad of bills and gave Johnson $2,500 without batting an eye.

"I likes yo way o' doing things," Johnson said. "We is playing ball together."[14]

Was this just another Jack Johnson story circulated after the fact by the United Press reporter in 1929?

Jack Johnson was one of the only principals in the matter to be on the East Coast at the time of the signing. The others had to travel there or send a representative to the meeting, a rather strange location in that boxing was illegal in New York at that time. Authorities refused to allow even the bidding to occur there. New York's dominance in the national media and the availability there of a large neutral financial institution to act as holding facility for the stakes were the main reasons that drew everyone from the West to New York City. The stakeholder for the fight, Robert Murphy, volunteered his hotel in Hoboken, across the river, for the bid war. By 11:00 A.M., the hotel was so crowded with newspaper men and the general public that the participants were forced to move across the street to a private room in Naegeli's Hotel.

The key figures in the deal included Tex Rickard, Jack Gleason, Ed Graney, Tom McCarey of Los Angeles, P.T. King, representing Hugh McIntosh of Australia, Jack Johnson and his manager George Little of Chicago, and Jim Jeffries' manager Sam Berger of Los Angeles. Jim Jeffries did not appear.

A total of five complicated bids were presented. In considering the bids, the big unknown for the participants was the amount of income that might be generated from the fight films. Fight films were becoming increasingly popular, and more fighters were expecting a share of the income in their contracts. The only established benchmark for the promoters regarding recent film income was the Jeffries-Sharkey fight, which had grossed $65,000. By the end of November 1909, fight promoters and newspaper men speculated that the bids for the Johnson-Jeffries match could go as high as $75,000, guarantees absolutely unfathomable in boxing circles at the time. This would be worth approximately $12 million in current U.S. dollars, a king's ransom indeed. Little did the press know that the bids were even higher than $75,000. The stakes were enormous. Not only would the promoters of the big fight have the chance to become fabulously rich, they also had the chance to achieve a measure of immortality.

The bidders sat around a large table. Tex Rickard stood behind them. The first envelope opened was Ed Graney's. As president of the Tuxedo Club of San Francisco, he made three offers. The first presented the fighters with 80 percent of the gross gate receipts with a $75,000 guarantee and an additional 100 percent of the movie rights. Graney's second offer gave the fighters 80 percent of the gross gate receipts with a $70,000 guarantee and $20,000 of income from the movies. The third offer gave the fighters 90 percent of the gate (absent a guarantee) and 100 percent of the film rights.

The second bid came from partners James J. Coffroth, president of the TiaJuana Jockey Club, and Jack Gleason of San Francisco. Coffroth did not attend the meeting but was being represented by Gleason. The duo made three offers. The first would give the fighters $125,000, with the agreement that the Jockey Club would retain 100 percent of the film rights. The second offer would give the fighters $75,000 and 66⅔ percent of the film revenue with a $20,000 bid acceptance bonus. The third offer gave the fighters 80 percent of the gross gate revenue and 66⅔ percent of the film revenue.

In what was a strange twist, Jack Gleason was also partnered with Tex Rickard (another

Johnson vs. Jefferies Fight Offers

5 Bids	Offers				Movies	
Promoter	*Bid*	*Guaranty*	*Bonus*	*Gate %*	*Fighters*	*Club/Promoter*
Ed Graney	A	$75,000		80%	100%	
	B	$70,000		80%	$20,000	
	C	$0		90%	100%	
Jim Coffroth	A	$125,000				100%
Jack Glenson	B	$75,000	$20,000		66.7%	
	C	$0		80%	66.7%	
Tex Rickard Jack Glenson	A	$101,000	$20,000		70%	
Tom Carey	A			100%	50%	
	B	$110,000			50%	
Hugh McIntosh	A	$37,000 America $40,000 England or France $50,000 Australia				100%
	B	$10,000		100%	$10,000	

Details of the bids for the Johnson-Jeffries fight. Rickard won the bid (chart by Helen Turner).

example of Rickard's pre-bid, deal-making schemes to tip the bidding scales). When their envelope was opened, out came fifteen $1,000 bills and a check for $5,000. It was as if Rickard were sitting at the head of a high-stakes card game throwing down thousand-dollar chips at his Northern saloon. The bid offered the fighters a $101,000 guarantee. Rickard could make up-front guarantees because of his proven business acumen. One of his advantages throughout his fight promotion career was that through his wealthy connections he could pre-sell large numbers of tickets. His bid also included 70 percent of the film revenues with the following incentives: $20,000 of the guarantee to be paid immediately (no promise, but fact: the bills and a check were already on the table), $30,000 in thirty days, and the balance forty-eight days prior to the fight.

Tom Carey's bid, representing the Pacific Club of Los Angeles, was the fourth to be opened. He presented two offers. The first was 100 percent of the gate receipts and 50 percent of the movie profits. The second was a $110,000 guarantee and 50 percent of the movie profits with the stipulation that the club had "absolute management of the pictures."[15]

Huge McIntosh sent his bid by cable and he was represented in New York by P.T. King. His first offer was to pay *each* fighter $37,000 if the fight were held in America, $40,000 to each if held in England or France, and $50,000 if held in Australia, with McIntosh getting all movie profits. His second offer was to give the fighters 100 percent of the gate (less $10,000) and an additional $10,000 to the fighters in the way of movie profits. Of course, considering Johnson's bitterness toward McIntosh after the Burns fight, the promoter may as well have offered the continent of Australia as the purse — Johnson was tune-deaf

to his offers, both out of animosity and for fear that the promoter would in some way slight him again financially.

Rickard had played his trump card in the form of actual $1,000 bills. He had elicited the same effect with the $30,000 purse stacked in $20 gold pieces in the window of the Cook bank in Goldfield four years earlier. Because Jack Johnson was champion, he had the primary authority to make the decision of which bid to accept. Although Rickard's bid was not the highest, Johnson trusted him and accepted Rickard's bid. Jeffries' manager went along with Johnson's decision.

Rickard could be trusted, he brought cash, and while historians have said that Johnson stopped the bid process to say, "Stop everything, this party is over. I'm fighting for Mr. Tex," it is highly unlikely that he said this. There were two more bidders to follow Rickard, and others at the meeting reported Johnson as saying that "all of the promoters looked good to him, and that he regarded them as responsible men."[16] But faced with so many different kinds of bid possibilities, he suggested that the fighters be given 24 hours to consider the offers. All agreed.

That night, Jim Jeffries and Jack Johnson were both at Madison Square Garden but appearing in different rooms. Both gave interesting exhibitions: Jeffries was exercising and sparring with his manager Benson, and Johnson was having fun with sparring partners Monte Cutler, Jack Heinan, and Joe Murray in the ring.[17]

The next day, in a meeting that excluded the media, Jack Johnson and Jeffries' manager selected Rickard and Gleason's proposal. While it wasn't the highest bid, Rickard had done his homework in the deal-making arena. He had made a good impression with Johnson, and by partnering with Gleason (giving him 50 percent of the promoter's earnings), he had knocked Coffroth out of the running. Gleason, no doubt, split his Rickard deal with Coffroth. Immediately after the bidding was made public, Coffroth gave a statement to the media saying, "Rickard will get the big fight, but [I] am not at all disappointed."[18]

For the second time, the cowboy from Nevada seemed to have sauntered in and outsmarted the professional competition. Coffroth would later say of Rickard, "The man is absolutely crazy. He'll go broke and sink a lot of others with him. The bout can't possibly draw over $100,000."[19]

Before the fight, as early as January of 1910, Tex Rickard and Jim Jeffries sold their shares of the fight pictures for $190,000 (Jeffries to receive two-thirds and Rickard one-third of the amount) to W. T. Rock, representing an eastern syndicate.[20] The papers reported that Jack Johnson had already sold his share to a western syndicate for $50,000. The ones left holding the fight pictures would lose money when the government outlawed the transporting of the films across state lines after Johnson won the bout. It was an act meant to retaliate against the black heavyweight, but for the two decades that the law was on the books, it cost many other people dearly. Jack Dempsey estimated that he lost $2 million in income during the time he held the title and could have made money from film of his fights. Many in the boxing business would continue to distribute fight films while working on the edge of legality. Rickard pushed the envelope, and eventually he was prosecuted for doing so.

Preparing for a Fight

One month before the fight, everything seemed to be progressing smoothly in San Francisco. W. W. Naughton, sports editor for the *San Francisco Examiner*, described the

activities in full-page accounts. Jim Jeffries' outdoor boxing ring in his training camp at Rowardennan had been built to match exactly the one being built by Tex Rickard for the match. Jeffries' ring was padded to the same degree as the one for the big fight and sprinkled with rosin dust for each performance. Jeffries was in excellent condition and was sparring with such greats as Jim Corbett, Bob Armstrong, and Joe Choynski.

Jack Johnson's camp was headquartered at the Seal Beach Hotel and his training regimen included taking on all comers. Boxer Al Kaufman had taken up residence at Johnson's camp and was also sparring with Johnson. Kaufman had a match scheduled with Sam Langford for June 18. Perhaps one of the more interesting comments of the pre-fight period came from the man who planned to be in Johnson's corner as his chief second, the veteran Billy Delaney. Joe Gans was scheduled to be Johnson's chief second, but he was in the final stages of a terminal case of tuberculosis one state away in Prescott, Arizona. Delaney stepped in to replace him.

Delaney seemed as old as the gladiators. As far as trainers from the old school were concerned, Naughton called him the last of the Mohicans. While fight fans could talk about the days of John L. Sullivan, Delaney could talk about Jem Mace, Donney Harris, Tommy Chandler, Joe Goss and Bill Clark. Delaney was a quiet, thoughtful man, but his word was law — even Tex Rickard deferred to him. When asked by reporters who he thought was better prepared and who might win the big fight, Delaney responded after much thought that they were equally in shape. The man who had the most self-confidence would have the edge. Bill Delaney explained to reporter Naughton on June 5, 1910, that he would rather have a fighter confide any doubt about beating his opponent rather than stew on a fear and keep it hidden away, thinking it an unpardonable secret. In sharing his doubt, the boxer could be buoyed up by the trainer, who knows how to overcome any weakness the boxer may feel.

Tex Rickard let his fears about Johnson be known to trainer Delaney. Rickard had heard that Johnson had called one of the San Francisco newspapers the day before the fight and wanted them to send an automobile out to his camp so he could take a joy ride. Rickard flatly wanted Delaney to take away Johnson's automobile priviledges. (Rickard needed a guarantee that his fighters would be in good condition for the costly match.) The old trainer would not budge on allowing Johnson his vehicular pleasures, and Johnson took off in a cloud of dust. Delaney explained to Rickard that Johnson needed this diversion.

Tex Rickard did not know it at the time, but he had bigger things to worry about than the condition of his fighters. He had already faced challenges that would have halted the battle had it been left to other, less able promoters. There had been trouble over the forfeits, trouble over the referee, and now there seemed to be trouble over the location.

Rickard's partner Jack Gleason had convinced Rickard, against his better judgment, to stage the bout in San Francisco. Rickard had originally proposed Reno or Ely, Nevada, or Salt Lake City, Utah. Tex had already sunk $35,000 into construction costs on the San Francisco arena when the fates turned on him. The governor of California decided he would not permit the fight to take place in his state on July 4. News from San Francisco was sent out across the country on June 16. California attorney general UlyssesWebb filed a motion for a permanent injunction against the Jeffries-Johnson fight and an application for a temporary restraining order against the Kaufman-Langford contest in the state's superior court. When informed of the actions of the attorney general, Rickard fired back that he would move the fight to a different state.[21]

That same day, Governor William Spry of Utah said he would not hold the fight in

his state. Rickard sent a telegram to Lou Houseman in Chicago. Houseman was taking care of the details that needed arranging in Chicago. The telegram read: "Hold matters in abeyance; will-be settled definitely by noon Thursday, Tex Rickard."[22] Mayor McCarthy of San Francisco said that the fight would positively be held as per the program, adding that the matter was one for the local authorities rather than the governor.

Rickard wasted no time transferring the fight to Reno, Nevada. There were a number of theories circulating at the time among reporters as to who really jinxed the San Francisco deal. Did the religious reformers (who perpetually picketed the capitol) win the governor's support? Was it his wife's influence? She was known to have been offended that boxers were getting more attention than her governor husband. Was it the state's attorney general weighing in on the illegality of boxing? Federal pressure? Was it Ed Graney who didn't get the bid for the fight or the job of referee? Or was it, as Rickard thought, retaliation from Coffroth, who felt double-crossed in New York at the bidding? Regardless of the cause, the situation was what it was. Rickard estimated that he had already sold $70,000 of tickets for a California event, now worthless. With less than a month to go, the location of the fight had to be changed. Like a good fighter taking a hard blow, Rickard sucked it up, refunded all of the money for tickets, salvaged the building materials and shipped them to Reno where, as with all of his big fights, there would be more setbacks.

With thousands of dollars being in view, transported , and deposited to various accounts for contract guarantees for the purse, it was only a matter of time before attorneys got involved for a piece of the pie. With all of the publicity in the press about Rickard winning the exorbitant bid for the fight, Dr. Cornelius G. Coakley, the surgeon who had operated on Rickard's child in 1907, filed a lawsuit against the promoter for $2,200 in unpaid bills.[23] To Rickard's objections, the court ruled that the money he owed the doctor be taken from the $20,000 being held in New York by the stakeholder. Jeffries had his own problems. Three days before the match, Jeffries was still arguing with attorneys, Summerfield *&* Currier, over their fee for drawing up the contract between Jeffries and Rickard and Rock, who had bought their moving picture rights.[24]

The biggest wrangling for the fight, however, ended up being over the referee. When no agreement could be reached, Rickard assigned himself the task. Like Wyatt Earp, Bat Masterson, and others whose interests led them to a respected position in the ring when their duties as lawmen ended, Rickard would take on refereeing what was already one of the most divisive title fights in history. But unlike other frontier lawmen, this would be the only professional fight Rickard ever refereed.

When author Rex Beach arrived in Reno he wrote, "Amundsen found the spot where the magnetic needle stands on its head and fixed it as somewhere north of Canada, but Tex has proved him in error. It remained for a 39-year-old miner to demonstrate that Reno, Nevada, is not only the exact geographical focusing point of all things terrestrial but also the precise magnetic center of the civilized world."[25]

"Only yesterday," Beach wrote, "we offered such a welcome as the world has never known to a fighter. No Roman Emperor in the great epic days of old ever reviewed such a pageant of honor."[26] The author was referring to the Fourth of July parade honoring President Theodore Roosevelt in New York in 1910 upon his return from his travels. Beach concluded ironically, "Of all those fellows who slowly baked their soles on Manhattan's blistering asphalt that day waiting for a sight of Roosevelt, the big voiced, deep-chested, nine-tenths are either on their way to Reno today or want to come."[27]

The scope of press attention given to the fight was almost unimaginable. Tex Rickard

told Beach that he had received requests for 3,000 press seats. "We are obsessed by the magnitude of this coming clash, we see, we hear, we talk nothing else. Monday, one hundred and fifty thousand words went out from here over the wires and the fight was a week away.... And every day it is the same. From now on until the time of the battle the daily number will increase."[28] Top journalists received ten cents a word plus travel expenses. Even former boxers had taken up the pen. John L. Sullivan represented more of the syndicated papers than any other scribe. Bob Fitzsimmons represented a New York daily. Battling Nelson was writing for a Chicago paper. Beach explained:

> In other words, two novels are being written every twenty-four hours dealing entirely with the question of individual superiority. When it is realized that of those 150,000 words 100,000 at least are relayed through dozens of syndicates to countless newspaper offices in the United States, Canada, and foreign countries, and that those offices in turn print papers by the myriad which are read by an average of two or three people to each copy it is possible to grasp something of the enormity of the public's interest in the coming event. It means that every day more printed matter bearing on the Johnson-Jeffries prize fight is written, printed, distributed and read than most booklovers have in their entire libraries."[29]

Jim Jeffries, the undefeated white champion, was sullen, and from the time he appeared at his training quarters until he entered the ring, he was glum and moody. He was short tempered with his wife and hated performing for the crowds, which he refused to do at his training quarters and thereby greatly disappointed his fans. While his quarters were accessible to the crowds via trolley, he simply did not want to shake hands, sign autographs, or perform. Certain reporters did have some daily access. Jack London and Rex Beach were among those who did. But for most reporters and spectators who wanted a glimpse of the old champion, Moana Springs was off-limits. Numerous reporters lamented the fact that they would fight the alkali dust several times a day in hope of seeing Jeffries spar or jump rope. Jack London said, "Jeff does not care a red cent for the public. In his way he is an iron man, simple and quiet and reposeful and not gregarious in a wide way. He feels no impulse to be a hale fellow well met with Tom, Dick and Harry, and he is honest enough not to stimulate a feeling he does not possess. All the same, it is darned hard on the public."[30] London simply explained that Jeffries was a silent type. But Rex Beach commented, "He has the disposition of a tarantula. He's got a diabolical gift of second sight. He can smell a spectator for a mile and he seems to know just when we won't be there."[31]

As London so aptly described Jeffries, he was as mean as and looked like an old grizzly bear. He came into the ring after training more than a year to lose 100 pounds still weighing twenty pounds more than Johnson. Jeff was taller, and his muscles seemed more defined than those of the black undefeated heavyweight champion. London described the strength of his column-like legs: "His thighs are so mighty that they remind one inevitably of the legendary Teutonic warrior who, by the grip of his thighs, made his war horse groan beneath him. It would have to be an armor-plated, steel-crossed horse that Jeffries could not make groan.... His back muscles play in matted masses, while those of the shoulders and biceps leap into a twisted roll at the slightest uplift of the arms.... He is at a concert pitch and ready for the summons."[32]

Not to be outdone by another newspaperman in fawning over the "Great White Hope," Rex Beach wrote:

> His cheeks are sunken, but it is the gauntness of vigorous health, and they shine with ruddy color. His muscles are firm and pliant and they are tanned to that perfect brown which comes only from a life beneath smiling skies. He is younger than the camera shows

> and no clicking shutter can snap the vigor that seems to lie in his massive, hairy frame. In build he is more like a wrestler than a fighter and at first sight one refuses to credit the stories of his quickness, but it is there, and with it all is a certain irresistible power that is hard to describe. His arms are huge and in his blows there appears to be the same heavy weight that is in the thrust of a steamboat's "walking beam." That is what impresses one most strongly, the tremendous weight that lurks behind his blows.[33]

Jim Jeffries had a boxing style similar to that of Battling Nelson. They both crouched and moved in the ring like primitive cats. London had described both Battling Nelson and Jim Jeffries as "abysmal brutes" in a complimentary way. Both had come from Nordic stock; both looked like throwbacks to primitive men who hunted wild game and ate raw meat with their bare hands. Like wolves in their natural habitat, the ring was for Jeffries and Nelson, a place to either kill or be killed in their quest to maintain their position at the top of the food chain. Both fighters came to their title matches promoted by Rickard as white champions, examples of physical superiority, eager to put to rest the very idea of black champions.

In contrast to their white opponents, both Joe Gans and Jack Johnson were master boxers, skilled in the science and the art of defense, masters at both the physical and emotional tools needed to carry the day. Both were game in the matter of fortitude and knew how to conserve their energy in the ring. Johnson was labeled in the newspapers as a "loafer," a cartoon character in the ring, unable to appreciate anything but the moment and unable to formulate a long-term offensive strategy. Rex Beach assessed his abilities:

> In the afternoon I watched Johnson work and it was very different. He has the soul of a joy-rider. Nature designed him for a chauffeur and while he is the master of the greatest defensive system any fighter of his weight has been equipped with, he seems to look upon this battle as a joke. I believe he knows of fifty good and sufficient reasons why he will beat his opponent next Monday. I doubt if the other possibility has ever appealed to him. He is fast, marvelously fast. Jeffries cannot approach the swiftness of his arms and hands. He has a straight left that taxes the eye to follow, but it seems that most of his agility and superlative cunning is exercised in self-protection."[34]

Everyone had an opinion about the fight. Writing for the *San Francisco Call*, front-page scribe Edward Cahill boldly announced that Johnson, the "Grinning Savage [was] Perfectly Trained."

> Johnson is the perfect fighter, compact, of whipcord and steel. He is the savage raised to the highest power by a thousand — a natural, grinning savage. He would not hurt a fly save in the way of business. Johnson, stripped, shows the perfection of manly symmetry, save for his retreating forehead, that hints at an arboreal ancestry not so far removed. He might have come out of the jungle and been fed on the meat of crocodiles.... Don't get away with the idea that his high sense of his own importance is offensive. Not at all; he is just the simple minded, elemental savage, basking in the sunlight of popular admiration.[35]

Not every reporter thought or noted that Johnson was so simple minded. He trained at Ricks Road House, a place loosely described as a honky tonk. In the parlor a piano player and fiddler entertained the drunks with popular ragtime music, accompanying two roulette tables that saw constant action. People everywhere moved freely throughout the rooms, the porches, even upstairs to the private quarters of "Li'l Atha." Whenever Johnson came downstairs and wherever he went, a retinue surrounded him. Much like celebrities today, Johnson's handlers spoke to the man in whispers.[36] Reporters noted that throughout his stay, Johnson remained "serene and smiling" amidst the bedlam. But he was serious when it came to his

music. Johnson brought to camp his phonograph (he liked to listen to classical music) and his bass viol, which entertained the folks at the Road House. One night Johnson was seen playing roulette with a book tucked up under his arm. When asked by reporters what it was, he told them it was bedtime reading and gave the title. Not hearing him clearly, they thought he said something like "The History of the Warfare of Modern Science and Theology,"[37] which may have been Widdicombe's *The Conflict Between Reason and Superstition*, subtitled *or, Theology Viewed by the Light of Modern Science*. While Johnson thus displayed conspicuous intellectual tendencies, it is probably a good bet that neither Jeff nor Tex had such reading on their nightstands.

Rex Beach reminded his readers that

> while countless reams of paper have been devoted to the actual contestants, no one has thought to describe Tex Rickard in a human way. Nevertheless, he is bigger than either of the other men and has ever been the object of a certain admiration on my part. We first met 12 years ago in a little Yukon mining camp, when the first snows of an Arctic winter were sweeping down upon us. He was a frank-faced youthful chap with a keen dark eye and a mouth ready to curl in friendly smiles or back again, or tighten into ominous lines. His speech was quick and his tongue had the twist of a Texan cowboy. His hand was always open to grasp the hand of a friend distressed or to clench in defense of those he cared for. He made and lost some $50,000 in the Upper Country the year before but ate his meager ration of "pork bosom" and brown beans as cheerfully as the rest of us who were likewise frowned upon by Fortune. When spring came we both went to chopping cordwood to pay the fiddler. In the course of a few weeks he hewed out another fortune sufficient to take him to Nome and leave a bankable balance of $35.00 of which token I concede him a better axeman than I. He landed on the shores of the Bearing Sea twelve years ago next Monday with two ounces of dust in his "kick." Three months and twenty days later he sailed out with $40,000 in the purser's keeping. For the next five summers he averaged close to $100,000 and grubstaked every broken "sour dough" who came to him for help. Then aspiring to a metropolitan existence he journeyed forth to Seattle where he lost it all.[38]

The Fight

As many who went to Reno recalled, the event was the grandest collection of sporting notables ever assembled. All five previous heavyweight champions were on display in one ring. It was almost too much for reporters to grasp. The booming voice of Billy Jordan, a celebrity boxing announcer, introduced the idols of fistiana. They were: John L. Sullivan (who was somewhat out of sorts, having been slighted by Corbett when he visited Jeffries camp); Ruby Bob Fitzsimmons; "Gentleman" Jim Corbett (who would prove to be anything but gentlemanly in Jeffries' corner); Marvin Hart; and Tommy Burns. Many champions in the other divisions were also introduced.

In the ring, Tex said, "Now fellers, I didn't want to referee this fight, but seein' as you can't agree on anyone else, I guess it will have to be me. Now I don't know much about this refereein' job except that I want you to give the crowd what they paid for, break clean, and come out fighting at the bell."[39]

Tex might have been the best choice for referee in that he had such a noted reputation for fairness. It is still amazing that in spite of his persuasive handling of most matters surrounding the event, he could not convince the Jeffries camp to begin the fight with a customary handshake. In addition, Jeffries would not allow any pre-fight photos. The lack of

All six world heavyweight champions (John L. Sullivan, James J. Corbett, Robert Fitzsimmons, James J. Jeffries, Tommy Burns, and Jack Johnson) were in attendance at the Jeffries-Johnson fight, July 4, 1910. Introducing champions of the ring would be a tradition that Rickard would start and continue throughout his lifetime (*San Francisco Examiner*, July 3, 1910).

a sportsmanlike handshake between the two contestants did not sit well with reporters or spectators who expected the professionals to put the game above personal animosities. (Such was the tradition of boxing that, while the entire socio-political, well-being of the country rested on the racial outcome of the match, spectators *expected* a friendly handshake at the beginning!)

James J. Jeffries was legendary for his ruggedness and punching power. For a modern boxing fan, the films of Jeffries do not readily bear out why the "Boilermaker" was so feared as a fighter. He tended to plod forward and make an easy target of himself. In fact, his most famous victories were over, James J. Corbett and Bob Fitzsimmons, men who had both battered him to a pulp before being felled by Jeffries' sledgehammer left hook. Fitzsimmons had hit Jeffries so hard that a cleft remained on the latter's upper lip. Film footage of Jeffries on his alfalfa farm proves that not only did he let his stomach lop well over his belt, but also that the former champion had little use for his right hand outside the ring. He carried his farm tools in his giant left paw and pitched left-handed as well. In fact, the secret of Jeffries' power lay partly in that he was a converted lefty who took up an orthodox stance in an era when nobody wanted to fight a left-hander. Fighting a left-hander can be as disconcerting as a room full of mirrors. A right-handed (or orthodox) fighter leads with his left hand with his left foot forward. An opponent with the opposite stance carries his right hand forward, which causes him to crowd an orthodox fighter before they even begin punching. The left-handed fighter has the same problem in reverse, but has the advantage of being used to fighting orthodox fighters.

Jeffries trimmed down from 334 to 226 pounds leading up to the fight in Reno. By the time of the opening bell, he was a mountain of muscle, and he made the burly Johnson seem thin by comparison. Johnson, referred to sardonically by the press as "L'il Artha" because of his enormous size, threw punches that were too fast to count. The only thing faster than his mitts was his mouth, from which a stream of taunts poured as he casually bent Jeffries' arms behind his back.

Tex Rickard in a striped shirt and a straw hat circled the fighters at a radius of approximately five feet. Tex had agreed to referee the fight after the two boxers could not come to an agreement on who should be the third man in the ring. Sportswriter and cartoonist Tad

Dorgan, who was at the fight, explained that when it came to the matter of selecting a referee, hundreds of names were considered.

> It looked as though the whole world had been scanned and not one man was found to be square enough. Jeffries advisers wouldn't stand for anyone who ever had the finger of suspicion even partly aimed at him. Johnson's people wouldn't stand for anyone who even knew anyone who knew Jeff and so it went on for weeks. After a while the newspaper men were out there digging up news decided that there would be no referee at all. The names of the fairest and the most famous referees were tossed aside. There was too much at stake. There was too much money bet. The man selected to be referee had to be purer than the driven snow. They argued until way up close to the date of the fight, and finally when the thing looked hopeless they decided to insist that the promoter (who had never refereed before), Tex Rickard, be named. In all the world there was only one man both sides could agree upon. The writer, knowing all the fights and all the referees mentioned, considers that to be the greatest compliment ever paid to Tex Rickard or any other man in the world of sports.[40]

Rumor had it that Rickard had wanted either President Taft or Arthur Conan Doyle to officiate but both had declined. As referee, Rickard took a hands-off approach and never stepped between the fighters until the end. Although Rickard was not known for his boxing expertise, he had the best vantage point of any of the witnesses and would later demonstrate that his knowledge of boxing was better than anyone gave him credit for.

Jeffries had a strategy to rush and whack and destroy his opponent's strength by overpowering him with his own strength and forceful punches. After testing a variety of punches in his bag of tricks during the first few rounds, Jeffries knew the fight would be very difficult.

Later Tex told his wife that as he moved around the fighters, he saw "the haggard lines in Jeffries face. There was a strange indecision in the man's movements; above the rumble of the crowd Tex heard a voice offering 10 to 6 on Jeffries ... and he thought that the loud voiced bettor was bound to lose some money."[41]

Johnson had his own strategy: let the man wear himself out; throw the force of his own weight on Jeffries' left shoulder and arm in the clinches so as to weaken his powerful left jab; and engage, unnerve, and demoralize him through a witty ring chat — no smack, no profanity, just quick and witty one-ups-man talk. Johnson resisted Jeffries' rushes, matched his power in the clinches, and began to utilize his psychological warfare when he engaged Jeffries. When Johnson's big smile cracked his concentration and forced a smile on Jeffries' face, Johnson thought, "Mission accomplished!" Johnson hacked away at the psyche of the old champion.

The century-old fight film is evidence of a mismatch. "Li'l Arthur" snapped in quick left jabs and sharp right uppercuts. Jeffries' face was cut to ribbons. At the end of the fourth round, Johnson scored with a looping right over the top of Jeffries' guard. Jeffries looked a beaten fighter right from that moment as he walked dejectedly back to his corner after the round. Johnson outclassed Jeffries so thoroughly that Congress passed a law to prohibit the distribution of the film. The footage that is available for viewing today includes only fragments of the bout. The two fighters wrestle around the ring, and the only evidence of Johnson's rapid, powerful uppercuts is the manner in which Jeffries' head flies repeatedly up and backwards.

Rex Beach had speculated, "Regarding their actual, eighteen-carat fighting quality when it comes to the crucial test nothing can be proven until the fateful fourth, for both men are holding back. On the one hand is the white man, somber, sullen, dogged and tremendous in his strength, on the other the black man alert, cautious, brilliant in execution,

self-proactive and utterly confident. Of Jeffries we ask the great question, has he retained that magic, unquenchable flame of Youth. Of Johnson we inquire has he the bulldog courage to continue a losing fight if necessary, the heedlessness to fatigue and to bodily torture. Has he the Heart?"[42]

In the actual fight, Jeffries was so overmatched in terms of boxing skill that any questions Beach may have had regarding determination would not be relevant. Jeffries did manage to draw first blood in round four from Johnson's mouth. Johnson had recently sustained an injury while sparring during a training session. The first blood scored was a customary indicator, and word that Jeffries had scored first blood was sent over the wires, giving the impression that Jeffries was winning the match.

Round 13 was especially noteworthy for the way that Johnson not only continued his taunting but markedly picked up the pace. There is no soundtrack to the film, but Johnson's never-closing, rapid motor of a mouth leaves no doubt that he was still jabbering away while he pounded Jeffries' face with quick left jabs and right uppercuts.

Jeffries did manage to launch a few double left hooks to the body and head. They are the only signs on the film that there is any substance to the myth of the great James J. Jeffries. Johnson grimaced when one hook lands.

Throughout most of the fight, however, Jeffries did little more than fall into clinches. He seemed to have forgotten how to fight. Johnson masterfully whirled and swung left and right hooks into Jeffries battered face time and again. He landed straight rights followed by right uppercuts that left Jeffries in a daze. At the end of round 13, Johnson measured Jeffries with a left and crashed home yet another overhand right-fisted smash. Rickard steadied his straw hat as he watched and walked back and forth, observing the fight.

As round 15 unfolded, Johnson landed a left jab that drove Jeffries back into the ropes. Jeffries clinched and pushed Johnson to ring center. Johnson freed his right hand and crashed in an uppercut that had Jeffries out on his feet. Jeffries stumbled back into the ropes whereupon Johnson landed three slapping left hooks that put Jeffries on the mat.

As Jeffries struggled to get up, both Johnson and Tex Rickard watched with their hands on their hips, like men waiting on a bus. Jeffries tried to pull himself up and Johnson hovered over him like a hawk. Rickard came in and grabbed Johnson's left shoulder as Jeffries struggled to his feet, but Johnson shook him off and smashed in a left hook that sent Jeffries sprawling through the ropes.

Jeffries' cornermen poured into the ring in flagrant disregard of the rules, helping Jeffries to his feet. Johnson had his right cocked but seemed worried about hitting the referee or one of Jeffries' seconds. Jim Corbett, the former heavyweight champion, seemed to rush at Johnson, who turned as if to fight him off. Although Rickard had only reluctantly accepted the job of refereeing the bout, in fact, he proved to be in good physical shape to keep step with the boxers. Finally, with Jeffries in a bloody heap, Tex Rickard stopped the fight and raised Johnson's hand in victory. Jeffries lay in a pitiable state. His nose was broken; his eyes were shut; and his tongue lolled, the color of the amethysts that the medieval soldiers wore into battle, as he gasped for air. Throughout his ordeal he plodded forward as if he had forgotten how to fight, just mimicking the motions of a boxer. Perhaps he believed the sycophantic praise of his followers, convinced that Johnson would surrender at his mere presence. The white sportswriters had claimed that the Anglo-Saxon race, with a legacy dating from Agincourt and Waterloo, was inherently superior on any field of battle. Johnson crushed that illusion forever, and therein was the real reason for the hatred directed against him.

In addition to being a savvy promoter, Rickard had shown his mettle as a referee. No one claimed the referee fouled or erred in any way. Despite all the rancor and predictions of violence if Johnson should win, the disillusioned fans at the scene sullenly accepted that the great Jim Jeffries had been thoroughly beaten. Considering the circumstances, the control of the Reno crowd was praiseworthy.

Jack London, who wrote some of the best description of the fight in his ringside report, was so devastated by the kayo in the fifteenth round that he did not bother to describe the final blows. "It was pitiful," London lamented. "There happened to Jeff the bitterness that he had so often made others taste, but which for the first time, perforce, he was made to taste himself. He who had never been knocked down was knocked down repeatedly. He who had never been knocked out was knocked out. Never mind the technical decision. Jeff was knocked out. That is all there is to it.... It is to be doubted if the old Jeff could have put away this amazing negro from Texas."[43]

The day and hour of the fight, matinees were being used to read the news to theatre patrons, men and women alike. Across the continent from coast to coast, newspapers were cranking out the round-by-round reports of the fight. Ocean liners at sea signaled S.O.S. signals to other ships, asking the results of the fight.

Titles change hands when champions are past their primes and the challengers are younger and stronger. It is as simple as that. Just as Corbett ran over Sullivan, Jeffries over Fitzsimmons, and Nelson eventually over Gans, Jack Johnson steam-rolled over Jim Jeffries. As Rex Beach notes, "We never know what Youth is until it leaves us."[44] The event was painful for Jeffries' fans to watch and even more difficult to read in the papers the next day for those who could not imagine Jeffries losing a boxing match. Fred Bechdolt wrote, "It was too brutal.... If you had seen Jeffries, the man whose name stood for rocklike invulnerability, sinking, sinking, sinking; if you had seen that huge proud bulk falling through the ropes; if you had seen that great, rugged face yesterday — and then today, bruised, cut, beaten. But that was not the worst of it. Working with the enormous bitterness of defeat as he left the arena, there lay the brutality — in that bitterness."[45] Former heavyweight champion Bob Fitzsimmons sat at ringside and cried like a baby. Regarding Johnson's ring skills, Bechdolt said that "we (reporters) have all hinted at Johnson's yellowstreak, but it will be a long time before any man makes him show it."[46]

Tex Rickard, who had shared the ring with the two fighters, showed his even-handedness in his description of the fight and virtually had the last word. At the end of the fight, he responded:

> Jack Johnson is the most wonderful fighter that ever pulled on a glove. He won as he pleased from Jeffries and was never in danger. I could not help but feel sorry for the big white man as he fell beneath the champion's blows. It was the most pitiable sight I ever saw. As a matter of fact, I thought way down in my heart that Jeffries would be the winner of the fight. The fight was won and lost when Jeffries went through the ropes the first time. This is official. The other knockdown does not count. It was this way: Jeffries was brought to his knees, and as he arose dazed, Johnson hit him with a succession of lefts that sent him through the ropes. As he lay there several of his seconds caught hold of him and helped him to his feet. Under the rules of the game, which I have read thoroughly while certain people were saying that I couldn't referee a fight, this disqualified Jeffries and Johnson was the winner. I thought the seconds were going to carry Jeffries to his corner. Instead, they shoved him into the ring again to be beaten further, while I was doing all I could, during the confusion, to stop the fight. Jeffries couldn't hit Johnson and Johnson could hit Jeffries whenever he pleased, Jeffries was not as good as the last time he fought.[47]

Rickard's favorite ballyhoo — gold. From left, Rickard, Jack Johnson, James Coffroth, unidentified and Jack Gleason. Johnson wanted his purse in gold, 1910.

The months and years of anticipation over a single boxing match were over in a little less than an hour. The next day's newspapers were prepared to report solely on the fight, anticipating a Jeffries victory. But instead of Jim Jeffries, July 5 was Jack Johnson's day to bask in glory and in the newspapers.

The Aftermath

According to the official statement given by Tex Rickard, 15,760 people with paid tickets attended the event, and the gate brought in $270,755, a record for both attendance and gate. In addition to those who paid to see the fight, Rickard said there were 760 complimentary tickets given to the press and others. He estimated the numbers that slipped in at various places around the arena, breaking in tie holes in the boarding or climbing up the tie rim of the big structure, at 1,500. The total attendance was given as 18,020. Rickard's profit exceeded $100,000 after he had paid all the bills and reimbursed Cole for his share of the money loaned to Rickard. By winning, Johnson, the "Texas Assassin," netted the sum of $145,750, while "Big Jeff," the "Redwood Giant," was forced to "make do" with $101,916. These were huge sums in 1910.[48]

When reporters asked Tex if he planned to stay in the fight promoting business, he answered, "Well I can't say what I'll do, but it will have to be some big proposition to interest me, and I have nothing in mind now. There is no man in the world fit to go against Johnson."[49]

It took three days for the trains to remove all of the fight visitors from Reno, Nevada. In the weeks following, riots broke out across America, pitting jubilant blacks against bitterly disappointed whites. A black man ordering coffee with scrambled eggs and ketchup told the waiter, "I want my coffee as strong and black as Jack Johnson, and my eggs as red and smashed up as Jim Jeffries."[50] Johnson's pride was high and his fall was just over the horizon.

In January of 1912, shortly before heading to South America, Rickard gave a long interview to the press, a rare one, in that so much of his direct dialogue is captured along with the immediacy of the day. The interview vividly indicates what was happening in Johnson's early career as champion, especially with regard to the early white hopefuls. Despite Charles Samuel's comment that Rickard was "never a good judge of boxing skill,"[51] this interview clearly shows that Rickard knew boxing, not only from its business aspects, but also with regard to the skills of the would-be contenders. It is also interesting to note that while Johnson avoided black contenders for his title, Rickard would have promoted them.

A reporter from Pennsylvania took Rickard's statement as he sat in a large, comfortable chair at the Waldorf Astoria. The interview is printed in its entirety.

Rickard blew a cloud of smoke from his perfecto and meditated. "There's a fortune waiting for the man who discovers the white conqueror of Jack Johnson. The moving pictures of the fight in which Johnson is defeated by a white heavyweight will alone be worth $600,000."

The man who hung up the $101,000 purse for Johnson and Jeffries at Reno spoke snappily and his small brown eyes seemed fired with the idea of promoting a championship battle that would bring about the triumph of a white fighter.

"Right now, Johnson and his title are safe," went on Rickard, "but another year or year and a half, the big negro may find himself in the ring with his white master. For instance, he may find himself battering this youngster, Al Palzer, on the chin until the bones in his hands give way. I have looked over the crop of white hopes here and in Europe and have seen but one who seems to possess the makings of a champion. He is the big fellow Palzer. He has the strength, the physique, the foundation from which champions are made. A year or so of careful nursing and instruction, Johnson will have his hands full beating him."

(By the time Rickard had given his interview to the New York reporter, Al Palzer had beaten the likes of Sailor White, Tom Kennedy, and Soldier Delaney. He was coming off a loss to Tom Kennedy in a re-match and was about to fight Sailor White again. He would win that re-match and go on to beat in June 1912 Bombardier Billy Wells — who is mentioned below — by way of a KO in the third round at Madison Square Garden. The win would set Palzer up for a chance at the White Heavyweight Championship, on November 15, 1912, which he lost to Tony Ross. The only win Palzer had after that was to Fred Fulton. His life came to a tragic end when his father shot and killed him during an argument in 1917.)

"How about the Englishman Bombardier Wells; you have been quoted as speaking enthusiastically of him?" the writer asked.

Rickard hesitated before replying and then said, "Wells is a very good man, well built, fast and clever with his hands and feet and might beat the rest of the white men now. He is of the Jim Corbett type. He is well thought of in England. He got a lot of prestige out of being matched, with Johnson, but it is luck for him that the fight was prevented. Had the fight come off as scheduled, Wells perhaps wouldn't be enjoying the same popularity today."

"Is Wells a better man than Palzer?" the reporter asked.

"As a fighting proposition and a championship contender, I prefer Palzer. The big farmer has the fighting instinct that's admirable in a fighter. He's fast and always tearing in; a hard punch doesn't check him much. All he needs is development. I've been told," continued Tex, "that O'Rourke doesn't want any of Johnson's game just yet. O'Rourke is wise. He can afford to go slowly with Palzer. In fact, I don't think he should have matched him with Flynn. I'd pick something easier, some big fellow like himself first and then this Carl Morris. After, that, in my opinion he'd be ready for Flynn; not now."

It was suggested that Tex evidently figured Palzer a valuable fighting proposition. "Indeed. I do," snapped Rickard "O'Rourke has turned down an offer of $10,000 for his contract with Palzer and I don't blame him. He's worth a lot more."

"What's your opinion of Carl Morris as a championship contender?" the writer interrupted.

"He won't do," and Tex bit off a piece of cigar as his teeth snapped together with emphasis.

"He's big, strong and no doubt as game as anybody would want, but he's too slow. He has not natural speed and absolutely lacks the necessary fighting instinct. He hasn't that desire to tear in and annihilate the other fellow that Palzer has. I've seen him drop his hands to his sides when he ought to have been swinging them at the other fellow."

"Do you think Johnson ought to be allowed to fight in New York?"

"Well, I don't know. The church people might oppose it; but if I were in the promoting business here, I wouldn't hesitate a minute about offering $40,000 for a ten-round bout between Johnson and Jeannette or Johnson and Langford. The public would pay good prices for either bout. Johnson is worth the $30,000 he asks, and Jeannette or Langford would be foolish if they wouldn't take $10,000. But after thinking it all over, I believe that Nevada is the only place in America for Johnson to fight. I don't think even California would stand for him." The conversation then switched to the Reno fight.

Rickard posed in bowler hat in 1916.

"Is it true that Johnson was to have laid down to Jeff and that he ran out on the agreement two days before the fight?" Tex was asked.

"There's nothing to that story," replied Tex with an air of finality.

He added that the pictures were a financial success, his last report from the picture people showing $253,000 earned.[52]

Rickard had never fought in a boxing match but he knew the qualities of endurance and fortitude from his long days on the cattle trails and in the Klondike. His insights into Jack Johnson were spot on.

After the Johnson-Jeffries fight, Johnson's downfall was perhaps inevitable. Rickard probably intuited this fact, and he was able to judge fighters' prospects based on their states of mind almost as accurately as today's boxing experts make predictions based on a fighter's skills.

After the Reno fight, according to his last wife, Rickard was fed up with the racial politics surrounding heavyweight champion Jack Johnson. In the next episode of his storied life, Rickard would return to the cattle business, only this time down farther south in Paraguay. This was a country that had 31 presidents between 1904 and 1954, most of whom were removed from office by force. It was the Wild West all over again for Rickard, who was drawn to chaotic situations.

Rickard's poet friend from the Klondike, Robert Service, surely must have had Tex and his wife, Edith Mae, in mind when he penned these lines about the siren's call that the adventurer hears from the wandering star:

> There's a cry from out the loneliness — oh, listen, Honey, listen!
> Do you hear it, do you fear it, you're a-holding of me so?...
> Night and day they never leave me — do you know what they are saying?
> "He was ours before you got him, and we want him once again."[53]

Chapter Four

A Texas-sized Ranch in Paraguay

"Had anyone predicted after the Johnson-Jeffries fight in Reno that 'Tex' Rickard could have dropped out of sight for three years, it would have seemed incredible." Thus ran a story in the *New York Times* after Tex and his wife were interviewed at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel upon arriving back in the United States from South America.[1] It was hard to believe, but it was true: the marquee boxing promoter had left the sport and the United States. Very little was reported about Tex Rickard's life during those years by his newspaper acquaintances and friends, who had been so eager to comment on the boxing extravaganzas. But even when he was heavily involved in the cattle business in South America and professed openly to hate the business of boxing, he never forgot or abandoned the sport that held so much fascination for him.

Rickard made two sojourns to Paraguay in the decade between the "Great White Hope" fight and the Roaring Twenties. The first trip began in the aftermath of the Johnson-Jeffries fight, when Rickard was fed up with the rancorous politics that had accompanied the event. His second trip would come in 1916 when he went back on a mission to "relieve the meat shortage situation of the Allied Armies" by exporting cattle from his South American company to the English and French troops who were fighting in Europe against Germany.[2]

A month after the Johnson-Jeffries fight, a friend from his Klondike days asked Tex why on earth he would want to go to Paraguay. The perplexed Albert Fink inquired, "But South America, why South America of all the places in the world? You've just made a tremendous success of that fight; why not stay here and cash in on it with other promotions?"

"No thanks, Al." Tex made it clear he was fed up with fight promotions. "I've had all of that I want for quite some time. They shoved me around to last me a lifetime; I'm going to put my money into something that don't depend on politicians."[3] If Rickard was put off by the irritating, impromptu activities of the politicians that threatened to disrupt his early fight plans, he had no way of knowing the enormity of the problems they would cause him when they would dominate his later years at Madison Square Garden in the Roaring Twenties.

Despite having been successful as a saloon owner, mine speculator, and boxing promoter, shortly after the Jeffries-Johnson promotion, Tex Rickard returned to his roots as a cowboy. He sold his copper mining interests in Ely, Nevada, in 1910, reportedly to the Guggenheims; and with the huge sum of $400,000 to invest, he went to Texas to buy a cattle ranch. But Texas no longer had available acreage grand enough to raise the number of cattle Rickard had in mind. The population of the counties Rickard had known in his youth had grown a hundred-fold. The land was now fenced by ranchers and farmers who were more interested in growing wheat, oats, corn, and cotton than raising large herds of

cattle. Rickard's money simply would not buy into a real estate version of the million-dollar gate there. Disappointed in what he had seen (He had already been to South Africa.), Rickard and his wife, Edith Mae, sailed to South America. "I did not see anything in Cape Town," he told reporters at the dock upon leaving, who were anxious to get the scoop on why Tex Rickard was leaving the country for South America. "I think Argentina is the place."[4]

On February 11, 1911, Rickard and his wife boarded a ship for Buenos Aires. He looked "fit and prosperous. He isn't worrying over his prospects," reporters commented. Rickard then gave them the scoop they were looking for.[5]

"I am through with the business of prize fighting, as there isn't anything in it," he said. "I don't like prize fighting anyway. I'm a frontiersman. I like new things. I am going down to Argentina to look over the arrangements there. It is not unlikely that I shall go into the beef and sheep raising business in the republic. I shall also look into mining properties."[6]

Tex would meet up with Teddy Roosevelt in Paraguay (Underwood photograph).

Rickard seemed to beam at the glowing reports he heard about the country. He said he had always been used to "lots of room, and that the United States is becoming too congested for his 'close to nature' spirit." His soft-spoken wife Edith Mae agreed. He spoke for her, "She is a daughter of the prairies and is anxious to get away to a place with plenty of elbow room." With regard to business ventures, he had this to say: "Buenos Aires looks good to me. It has an export trade exceeding that of San Francisco by several million dollars yearly, a fact that very few people seem to be acquainted with, but one which appeals to me."[7]

When asked if he intended to promote any more prize fight affairs such as the July 4 fight, he told reporters at dockside, "I don't consider that a dozen years would hold any event in that line big enough to warrant my consideration." He explained, "You know that after you have been mixed up in a big affair, the bouts which are being run in this country now seem very small in comparison. I can not foresee any event of the near future that would warrant my attention after this big affair, and therefore I have put that kind of business out of my mind. I will not touch anything of that character again. I have been from time to time, interested in mining, but I find that pretty risky and consider my first love, the cattle business, the best proposition."[8]

Ever since Jack Johnson had knocked out Jim Jeffries, Congress had exhibited a moral aversion to films of boxing matches. Rickard was then asked to comment on the controversial issue of the fight pictures. Giving the first known revenue figures to the press, he said, "In spite of the opposition with which they were met, both in this country and on the other side, they have proved to be a very successful venture. The dividends have amounted to

more than $250,000 up to the present time, and will aggregate more than $300,000 when Australian returns have been made. It is reported that they have made an exceptionally big hit in the island continent. My interest, which is a sixth, has already netted me $19,800 in dividends. I have also received besides this $16,100 on the original sale, and do not know yet what I received from the Australian films." This was big news, which would influence the later development of both boxing and the film industry. Reporters had been led to believe (and thus so had the general public) that the fight pictures had been a failure. The information that Rickard was revealing may have given the U.S. Congress new ammunition for a ban, in addition to enticing would-be movie moguls. Rickard continued, "Gleason has done about the same as myself," referring to the money his partner had made.[9] Rickard was leaving the country. Congress would enact a ban on fight films the following year, in 1912.

Reporters were eager to hear what Rickard had to say about Jack Johnson and any promising white hopes, a situation that was referred to merely as "the heavyweight situation." It had been three years since Johnson won the big title and every promoter in the country was searching for the next big challenger.

Rickard commented,

> In this country I think that it will be a long while before a man big enough and clever enough will be developed to wrest the title from Jack Johnson. He, in my estimation, will hold that title for many years to come. I received the record and measurements of this man, Carl Morris, who has been touted as the white hope. He must be a wonderfully big man and one thing I like about him is his determination to approach the heavyweight title slowly, and not allow the visions of big money and glory to make him take any foolish moves, such as meeting Johnson at the present time. He seems to be willing to climb the ladder slowly, after the fashion of all our successful champions of the past, and not follow in the footsteps of Jack Munroe.[10]

When questioned about whether or not Rickard believed that Jim Jeffries had been drugged before the Reno fight (the rumor that was currently circulating and had been started by Jim's brother Jack), Rickard merely scoffed and said that old age and high living were the cause of Jeff's failure to come back.

While waiting for the ship to sail, Tex looked out over the river and exulted in the wonders of the big bridges. He would file this memory away in the back of his mind and it would create the seeds of a different promotion in South America a year and a half later when he went to London to propose a railroad, along with bridges, in the Andes. He said that people like himself, who had been used to seeing the marvelous bridges only in pictures, could not realize what great structures they were until almost under them as he was at the moment.

Rickard and his wife set sail from Brooklyn, from the foot of Montague Street, on the steamship *Vasari* of the Lamport-Holt Line headed for Buenos Aires.

The couple spent six months in South America before returning to New York. Rickard had inquired about land on a large scale through the American ambassador Lieutenant John S. Hammond. Hammond suggested an area in Paraguay called the Grand Chaco and made arrangements for him to contact the Paraguayan authorities. (Later, when Rickard was president of Madison Square Garden and he learned of Hammond's interest in hockey, he rewarded the former South American ambassador with a plum of a job within the organization when Hammond had retired from government service.) While the land where Rickard and his wife were heading was some of the wildest of the continent in the untamed interior,

Rickard must have been intrigued by its possibilities. After arriving in Buenos Aires, Rickard convinced the Paraguayan government to give him control of 270,000 acres of land for a cattle business. Rickard would be rewarded with even more acreage.

During his first year in the South American cattle business, Rickard was busy traveling from South America to London and New York. Immediately after appraising the land situation in Paraguay, Rickard moved to London in order to interest capitalists in his land and cattle proposition. He returned to Paraguay where he bought an initial 12,000 acres of rich ranch land. Before Rickard left Paraguay, the Farquahar syndicate of London, whose interests in South America Rickard managed, controlled more than five million acres of South American land. Rickard would seed his original business with a stock of 50,000 head of cattle on his main ranch.[11] Rickard sent for about a dozen Texas cowboys from the Panhandle to help set up and supervise operations on the massive spread.[12] Many of these cowboys stayed in the area long after Rickard left.

The trip from Buenos Aires to the ranch headquarters via the Paraguay River was not an easy one. A U.S. reporter described the limited transportation of the area: "There is a railroad extending northward from Buenos Aires to the town of Embarcaclon, pretty close to its own Chaco's western edge, but it is not much of a railroad. Moreover, although the distance looks short on the map, it is a six-day hard ride on muleback from Embarcaclon to the Pilcomayo River, the eastern limit of Argentine territory. It was in the Argentine Chaco, on the west bank of the Pilcomayo, that Tex Rickard tried to found a colony, devoted to cattle raising."[13] Once on the river, the trip to the ranch took three days.

Rickard would never really leave the sport of boxing, even while in South America. In his spare time, Rickard sought to put on another big boxing show. It was reported that in September of 1911, Rickard established an athletic club in Buenos Aires for the purpose of promoting a title fight with Ad Wolgast, then world lightweight champion. "Tex Rickard has been heard from again. The man who promoted the Jeffries-Johnson, Nelson-Gans, and a few other equally important battles [These two were the only important battles Rickard had promoted.] is now in South America and he has made an offer of a purse of $40,000 for a finish bout between Wolgast and Matt Wells, the English lightweight champion."[14]

Ad Wolgast had won the lightweight title by beating Battling Nelson in a brutal 40-round blood bath on February 22, 1910. Wolgast fought and won four title defenses in 1911 before Rickard made his South American offer. The fight failed to materialize, and nothing really came of it in newspaper reportage. Wolgast, the "Michigan Wildcat," continued to hold the title until he lost it to Willie Ritchie in November of 1912. The following year, in 1913, Wolgast was challenged by Battling Nelson, who was still working to regain his former title. Wolgast won a newspaper decision against Nelson.

In attempting to set up a match with Wolgast in September, Rickard traveled to London before returning to New York, where he remained through December of 1911. With Rickard now back in the news, reporters were eager to find out if his thoughts on the "heavyweight situation" had changed while he had been away. "Don't let anybody tell you Jack Johnson is a back number and that any of the 'white hopes' can whip him. There are only two men in the world who would have a chance with him now — Sam Langford and Joe Jeannette."[15] Johnson never gave any of the black fighters a chance to take away his title by allowing them to fight him, but it is interesting to know that Rickard was a strong proponent of these two particular boxers, believing in 1911 that they were Johnson's most threatening competitors at the time.[16]

By August of 1912, Rickard and his wife were living at the Sevoy Hotel in London,

"dignified, prosperous, quiet, unostentatious and reticent about Goldfield," the papers noted.[17] Rickard had become less enamored with the economic and political living conditions in South America, however he was still looking to harness a potential business opportunity. "He dislikes to be reminded of his former life. He has been in Argentina for a year, and is here as a financier, promoting a trans–Andean railroad. He expects to return to Argentina in a few weeks. Argentina, he says, is the most expensive country in the world to live in. A man can make lots of money, but is foolish to go there without a fortune to start with. A great land and cattle boom is under way, says Rickard, and there is a railroad boom affecting all lines in the country."[18]

By 1913, the cattle business in South America had become mired in political controversy, with the land Rickard and his associates had secured becoming the subject of bitter dispute over boundary lines among the governments of Bolivia, Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil. The crisis reached a boiling point when soldiers from Bolivia were sent to the disputed grounds in the spring. Two of Rickard's men were killed in the land battles. But the Texas lawman stood firm, with his men helping him guard the ranch land. In June of 1913, newspapers reported that "Rickard and his cowmen continue to remain in possession and probably will continue to do so until some agreement or settlement is reached by the four contending countries."[19]

Rickard explained the situation by joking, with his typical cowboy humor, how he "lost a chance to promote the biggest fight of his career"—a war between Bolivia and Paraguay. Rickard was traveling with a train of about 50 wagons in an attempt to cross into Paraguay across the Pilcomayo, the boundary between Paraguay and the Argentine. "Well, as soon as we got into Paraguay we came across a lot of forts, all filled with Bolivians. The Bolivian soldiers said that if we didn't turn back they'd shoot us. Well, we thought we'd better go around, so we came out again and went south through the Argentine to Asuncion and into Paraguay across the eastern boundary, the Paraguay River. When we got there we told them how there were a lot of civilians sitting in forts in the middle of Paraguay, and that vexed them a bit. It was the first they'd heard of it I guess."[20]

"Anyway, they all came around to me, the president, the cabinet and everyone, and they told me that if I'd go out and fight the Bolivians they'd give me all the soldiers I wanted and more. They'd give me an army, in fact. Well, I didn't like to act without instructions, so I wired to my people in Buenos Aires and they cabled to Mr. Farquahar in Paris. He didn't want a war, though: he had too many big interests; he had too much at stake. And so I missed my chance to lead an army."[21]

Theodore Roosevelt Expedition

In 1913 with war clouds hanging over Europe, Germany's foreign policy was devoted to war plans against France and Russia. Central to the strategy was ensuring that Great Britain and America would not fight against Germany. To that end, Germany bankrolled Latin American dictatorships such as those in Paraguay and Argentina. Also as part of its strategy, Germany had agents whose sole purpose was to encourage pro–German sentiment in the American press. Germany had staked out as potential allies all of the countries south of the Texas border. Paraguay, in particular, was totally controlled by Kaiser Wilhelm's minions prior to Rickard's arrival.

Former U.S. President Teddy Roosevelt had been invited by the Argentine and

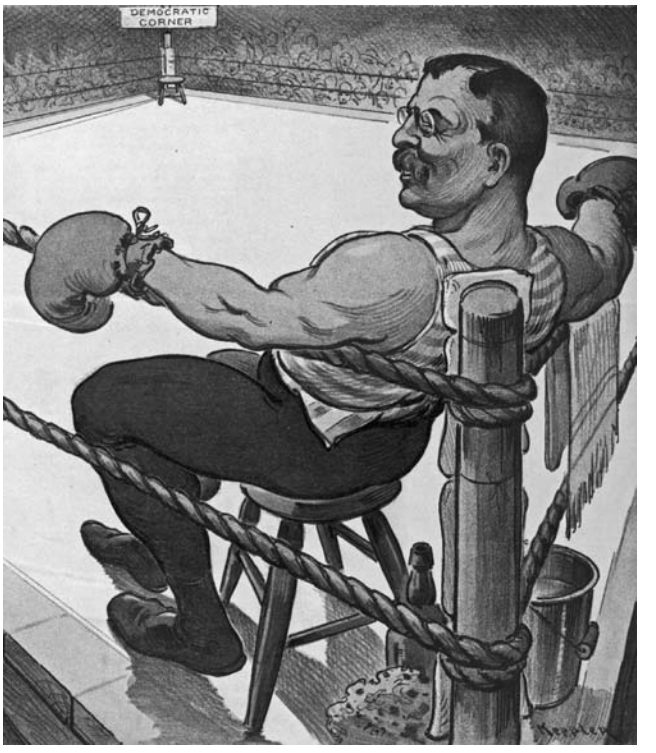
Paraguayan governments to visit their countries. He took full advantage of the invitations. Roosevelt arrived in Paraguay in December of 1913 on an exploring trip that would take him from Buenos Aires into the heart of the Paraguayan wilderness. The press was given no word as to his whereabouts or his actions while he was on the trip. A description of his expedition was serialized and appeared in April 1914 in *Scribner's* magazine and published in book form in September 1914 as *Through the Brazilian Wilderness*. But Roosevelt's description of his "scientific expedition" in South America seems oddly lacking of political context, especially from someone so interested in history and who was considered a war hawk most of his life.

Granted, Roosevelt had been a naturalist, particularly interested in ornithology, since childhood and a conservator of America's natural resources when president. (By establishing so many national parks, he created the template for other presidents to follow.) The nature of his South American trip was stated to be "a zoogeographic reconnaissance," but one might speculate that Roosevelt was in South America for more than a spree. It would seem that at least one of the reasons for his presence, specifically in Paraguay, was to assess the degree to which the Germans controlled the country and whether or not Americans would have any South American enemies there should they be drawn into an international conflict. His detailed naturalist tract would include valuable information about terrain and topography for American military should they ever be called upon to have a presence in the country.

Roosevelt was a prolific author, beginning with a history he had written during his college years at Harvard. He also believed in a strong defense, both personally and politically. He was fascinated with both boxing and the outdoor life of the Western cowboy, two interests that would give him a great deal in common with Tex Rickard.

Roosevelt enjoyed hunting and fishing because it allowed him to experience the rigors of frontier life. He bought two cattle ranches in the Dakota Territory (now North Dakota) and would spend a great deal of his time there. While Roosevelt was riding the ranges in the 1880s looking after his cattle, Rickard was riding the cattle trails, experiencing first hand the rigors of the frontier.

As a child, Roosevelt was so humiliated by his lack of stamina that he spent years building up his own physical endurance. He wrote



"Terrible Teddy [a ring name like "Terrible" Terry McGovern] waits for the unknown." Teddy Roosevelt, who boxed while at Harvard, is caricatured for his pugnacious personality (*Puck* magazine cover, June 1, 1904, Library of Congress).

in a letter, "I was a rather sickly, rather timid little boy ... and not excelling in any form of sport. Owing to my asthma I was not able to go to a school, and I was nervous and self-conscious, so that as far as I can remember my belief is that I was rather below than above my average playmate in point of leadership."[22] Equating physical toughness with mental strength and leadership, Roosevelt described his thrill of the "manly" sports while at Harvard: "I did a good deal of boxing and wrestling at Harvard, but never attained to the first rank in either, even at my own weight. Once, in the big contests in the Gym, I got into either the finals or the semifinals; I forget which, but aside from this the chief part I played was to act as trial horse for some friend or classmate who did have a chance at distinguishing himself in the championship contests."[23]

With great eloquence in his speeches, Roosevelt used images of the "good fight" and other boxing metaphors that aptly applied to the life struggles and the aspirations of mankind. In 1910 in France, he said:

> It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcoming, but who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself for a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.[24]

Whenever Roosevelt waved to the crowd, he raised his arm and waved with a clenched fist that came from his boxing days. The gesture symbolized the strength of his beliefs. His presidency from 1901 to 1908 was characterized by youthful, pugnacious policies. He aggressively pursued a belief in manifest destiny for the United States, always seeking out possibilities for various U.S. territorial acquisitions, eager for a big fight, if that's what it took. "Walk softly and carry a big stick" was his favorite saying and the basis for his own foreign policy.

In late 1913, Roosevelt, now called Colonel Roosevelt, was on the second junket of his "grand adventure" to explore the continent of South America. (He had previously explored Africa.) The trip into the Brazilian hinterland, called the "Expedicão Scientifica Roosevelt-Rondon" by the Brazilian government, began on behalf of Frank Chapman, curator of the American Museum of Natural History of New York and at the kind proposal of the Brazilian Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, General Lauro Müller. Roosevelt explained in the preface of his book recounting the expedition that he had thought about a trip to Paraguay as early as 1908, and when invited by the governments of Argentina and Brazil to lecture in their countries in 1913, he decided to turn the occasion into more than a tourist trip to the major cities.

Teddy, the hunter, warrior, and now explorer, had, on December 9, 1913, boarded a gunboat in Asuncion, courtesy of the Paraguayan president, to venture along the river into the interior of South America to explore the wilds of the Amazon. He was accompanied by his son, Kermit, and various scientific explorers. It would be two months before the press knew exactly where the former U.S. president had been. Considering the politically contentious situation and the various outbreaks of war that Rickard had faced when trying to "develop a new country,"[25] it is tempting to speculate that Roosevelt's visit to Paraguay at such an opportune time was for quite more than his desire to collect new specimens of birds

and mammals and other outdoor curiosities of the wild territory. Rickard, the American pioneer in the country, was clearly waiting to meet the expedition in Asuncion and prepared to escort Roosevelt and his party into the interior. Roosevelt did not just show up as an "explorer in a wilderness" in some kind of socio-political vacuum, only coincidentally to meet up with a man who for two years had been working five million acres of land in continuous contact with Paraguayan and German military leaders and major London capitalists. The importance of the South American country to the Allies, especially during the meat shortage of the war, was critical.

Roosevelt published an account of his time in Paraguay in the descriptive style of a travel brochure.

> On the afternoon of December 9, we left the attractive and picturesque city of Asuncion to ascend the Paraguay [River].... For three days we steamed northward toward the Tropic of Capricorn, and then when passed it, we were within the republic of Paraguay. On our right, to the coast, there was fairly well-settled country.... On the banks we passed an occasional small town or saw a ranch house close to the river's brink.... Across the river to the west lay the Chaco. The area was given over to the wild Indians.... The broad river ran in curves between mud banks where terraces marked successive periods of flood. A belt of forest stood on each bank, but it was only a couple of hundred yards wide. Back of it was the open country; on the Chaco side this was a vast plain of grass dotted with tall, graceful palms. In places the belt of forest vanished and the palm dotted prairie came to the river's edge.[26]

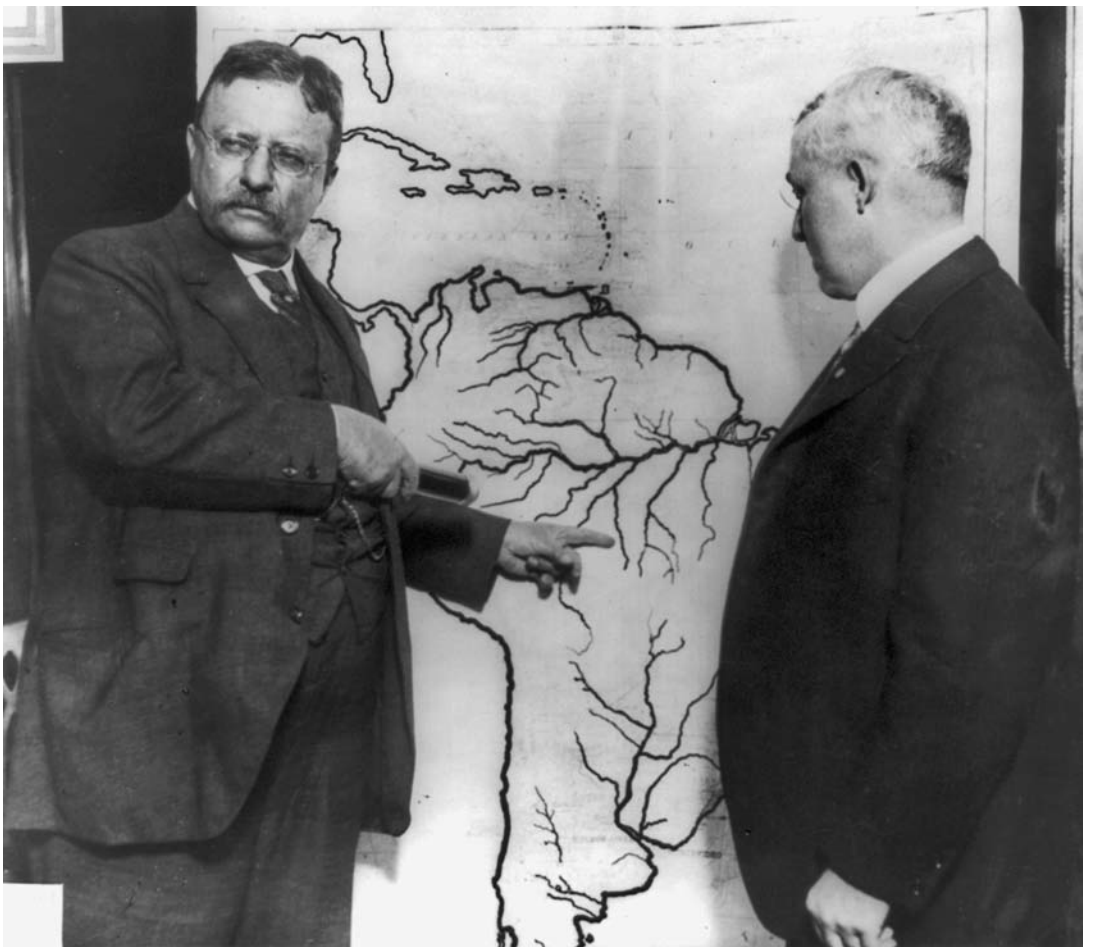
Were it not for the detailed descriptions of the man-eating piranha, the venomous snakes, the "loathsome" bloodsucking insects, especially in the Chaco, the trip sounds rather tame with only a brief note of the peril caused by the rainy season. Roosevelt also notes the exact location of the leaders of the major villages as he travels up the river. Roosevelt seemed to have been camouflaging the more important political nature of his trip by presenting his report to the public as a scientific study and geographical travel guide. Accompanying Roosevelt was Brazilian explorer Colonel Rondon — of pure Indian blood — who had explored the Brazilian "hinterland" for a quarter of a century and served as his primary guide. Rickard joined the group to explain the situation in Paraguay.

Rickard entered Roosevelt's exploration as expert on the Wild Chaco, a large section of that country Rickard had already tamed for his cattle business. Roosevelt noted Rickard's explanation of the river's biological nuances and how it served as a barrier to certain insects that posed problems for the cattle men. Roosevelt wrote that Rickard "told me that horses did not do well in the Chaco but that cattle thrive, and that while ticks swarmed on the east bank of the great river, they would not live on the west bank."[27]

In addition, Roosevelt learned something of the Chaco people and their language. "Guaran is one of the most widespread of the Indian tongues, being originally found in various closely allied forms not only in Paraguay but in Uruguay and over the major part of Brazil."[28] Roosevelt explained that the term *Chaco* was a Guaran Indian term for *wilderness*. Most importantly, he spoke directly to the respect given Rickard by the indigenous people: "The Indian of the Chaco, a pure savage, a bow-bearing savage will never come east of the Paraguay and the Paraguayan is only beginning to venture into the western interior, away from the banks of the river — under the lead of pioneer settlers like Rickard, whom, by the way, the wild Indians thoroughly trust."[29] In these few words, it is possible to intuit the importance of the country's language and Rickard's impact and influence over the people.

Rickard stayed with Roosevelt's party until the boat reached Concepcion, where a reception was given Roosevelt by the colonel of the garrison. Rickard then departed for his ranch. Roosevelt described the barracks and the troops at Concepcion. He "inspected the arms, the artillery, and the equipment. There was a German lieutenant with the Paraguayan officers; one of several German officers who are now engaged in helping the Paraguayans with their army. The equipments and arms were in good condition; the enlisted men evidently offered fine material; and the officers were doing hard work."[30] The presence of a German occupation force in Paraguay had to be of interest to Roosevelt. Certainly one can also surmise that the two American cowboys, Roosevelt and Rickard, also must have shared conversation regarding the border skirmishes and Rickard's loss of men only months earlier.

The last word sent to the newspapers from South America from explorer Roosevelt, dated February 27, was that his party had discovered an unknown river in the Brazilian jungle.[31] Roosevelt, who had done so much to expand U.S. naval power, had the Paraguayan navy at his service for his trip through South America. Whatever his pretext for being in Paraguay, it would have been illogical for the U.S. government not to have tasked him with



Roosevelt identifies the interior of the Chaco, South America, where he visited with Tex Rickard on his "Expedicão Scientifica Roosevelt-Rondon" (Library of Congress).

keeping tabs on the Germans there. Once World War I was in full swing, both Germany and England would try to starve out the other. This would make for a tense situation later when Rickard tried to ship his cattle to the British forces.

Eventually Germany would resort to unrestricted submarine warfare, sinking several U.S. ships in the process. But what finally brought the U.S. into the war was Germany's attempt to incite Mexico to declare war on the U.S. From Roosevelt's activities in 1913 and Rickard's later treatment at the hands of certain "Teutonic gentlemen," Germany's first ally in Latin America may have been Paraguay. One may postulate that Roosevelt was on a reconnaissance mission to evaluate any threat coming from the area.

After the South American trip, Rickard would remain good friends with both Teddy and Kermit Roosevelt. The trip to South America would ultimately result in Roosevelt's death on January 6, 1919. (Rickard, coincidentally, died on this same day and same month — January 6 — exactly ten years later, in 1929. Another interesting coincidence is that both men had lost very young wives and both re-married women named Edith.) In the months before his death, when Roosevelt was suffering from a form of rheumatism that doctors believed to have been caused by the jungle fever he contracted during his South American trip, Rickard, his cowboy friend, would be called to Roosevelt's bedside.

By 1914 and early 1915, the situation in South America had turned dour. Rickard returned to New York to battle the bad press he had received as a result of the political skirmishes and the war in general. His closely guarded comments to the press were, "Paraguay has not been at all hurt by the war ... and since the war there has been practically no change."[32] Those feelings masked more sensitive business interests.

On May 12, 1915, an advertisement ran in the *Kingston Daily Freeman* that the South American Land and Cattle Company, headquartered at 1328 Broadway, New York, was selling two million shares of stock that represented cattle on Rickard's 325,000-acre ranch in Paraguay. The stock that was valued at $1 par value was being sold for 75 cents a share. The company pitched the land as a place where "the grass is always green there — no blizzards, no drought — and the operation is run by the ablest of cattle men, G.L. "Tex" Rickard. He knows the cattle business and how to make money."[33]

By the end of 1915, it was clear that the business Rickard managed was failing. The title to the big ranch was in dispute and Rickard's parent corporation, the Farquhar syndicate, was having financial difficulties over the matter. It was rumored in the press that the problem was attributed to Rickard's poor stewardship. Even though reporters described the Chaco as "a howling jungle," they managed to blame the venture's failure "due to no fault of the Chaco, or the border battles, but to Tex's own inexperience."[34] The loss to Rickard was stated as being about $1,000,000, despite the fact that a group of about a dozen or so North American cow-punchers from the party had elected to remain on the grounds, working the cattle as meat producers for the Buenos Aires market, and were doing quite well. The reporters extolled the virtues of the South American territory: "With rail facilities, there seems to be no question that the entire district would produce immense crops. For cotton, in particular, experts have pronounced it an ideal country." They noted that "the extreme southern portion of it shades off into beautiful savannas — dotted with a good many palm and quebracho groves, but mainly rich, long grassed, open prairie."[35] Rickard was still touting the value of the land, but a source close to the *New York Herald* said Rickard was way off mark.[36] With the glitter worn from the cattle business in South America, it was the lure of boxing promotions and the hope of taking over Madison Square Garden in 1916 that brought Rickard back permanently to the United States.

In 1912, when Rickard was settling in to the cattle business in South America, Jack Curley promoted a world title match between Jack Johnson and Jim Flynn in Las Vegas, New Mexico, one of the largest towns in the Southwest at the time. Curley had been scouring around trying to find a "Great White Hope" to beat Johnson. Flynn was a young fighter when he met Johnson. Later in his boxing career, the "Pueblo Fireman" would be credited in boxing history as the only boxer to KO the great Jack Dempsey.

Many have said that Flynn's knockout of Dempsey must have been a fix because Dempsey was a far better boxer and needed money at the time. They point out that Flynn had lost his previous five fights, and Dempsey had only lost one battle in his last thirty-four. But Dempsey swore the fight was on the level. He described the licking he took from the Fireman in Utah in 1917 and what it felt like to be knocked out.

> About four hundred fans showed up the night of the fight to see one of the most famous fights of my life. Flynn knocked me out in two minutes of the first round. It was the only official knockout of my prize-fighting career. In the first minute of the fight he hit me with a right that put me on the deck. I came up groggy and he was waiting there over me, and down I went again when he hit me. I got up and this time I was able to hold. But only for a few seconds. He knew how to get out of a clutch like that. He broke away, stepped back, threw a punch, and I was flat on my back a third time. When I got up I couldn't see him. He was behind me. I turned like a drunk, I guess, and he let me have it while my eyes were trying to find him. I went down again. As I got up to face Flynn, my brother Bernie, working in my corner, threw in the towel.[37]

Johnson won against Flynn on July 4, 1912, in what was called the "worst heavyweight title fight ever staged." Flynn kicked and head-butted Johnson until the sheriff disqualified him.

Johnson fought another unexciting match on June 27, 1914, in Paris, France. The bout with Frank Moran ended in a 20-round decision by the referee in favor of Johnson. One of the more interesting facts regarding the fight was that it was refereed by 19-year-old Georges Carpentier. A month later, Carpentier would win the so-called "world white heavyweight championship" on a foul against Gunboat Smith. (As happened earlier when the lightweight title was held by Joe Gans, a "white" title was created when Jack Johnson held the heavyweight championship.) Carpentier would also figure prominently in Rickard's first million-dollar-gate bout in 1921.

The two Johnson title-fight flops that were not promoted by Rickard only served to show the vast difference between a well-promoted event and a poorly promoted fiasco. The Flynn bout concluded with the police breaking it up, while the managers of the Johnson-Moran fight ended up leaving the fighters high and dry without getting paid for the twenty-round match. The French lawyer, who was holding the fighters' purses, was killed in the war on the Western Front.

It wasn't until Rickard and his wife returned from South America that Rickard learned that Jess Willard had beaten Jack Johnson, five days earlier, in Havana, Cuba. Apparently, word had not reached the ship they were traveling on. Rickard was quite surprised by the news. "I didn't even know they were going to fight in Havana," he said. "It was my understanding that the fight was to take place in Mexico. I saw Johnson in Buenos Aires only two months ago, and that was the last I heard of him until 3:00 o'clock this morning. As for Willard's beating him, I don't know how to figure it out. When I saw Johnson in Argentina he looked as good as ever. I believe it can only be explained by Willard's being a wonderful boy."[38] Johnson had been a welcomed guest in Mexico and was expected to defend his title

there. However, U.S. pressure caused the Mexican government to push him out. From Mexico, Johnson had traveled first to Argentina and then to Cuba where he would lose the title.

Willard-Johnson Fight, April 5, 1915, Havana, Cuba, and Rickard's Meeting with Ike Dorgan

It was Jack Curley who promoted the famous Jack Johnson vs. Jess Willard match in Cuba. Many historians say that Johnson was fat and out of shape when he fought Jess Willard in Havana. This has to be viewed in a relative sense. The fact that Johnson won most of the first twenty-five rounds under the scorching Cuban sun against a giant like Willard demonstrated the stamina, if not the super-human endurance, that Johnson still had from his younger days. Also, Johnson had to attack, pushing the fight, in order to get inside Willard's long arms. Fighting taller opponents was not something to which Johnson was accustomed.

Johnson's last defense of his title was actually quite valiant. His charges, his fast combinations and defensive skills, were all the right stuff to defeat the enormous Willard, who was in supreme physical condition. If not for Willard's extensive training and resulting stamina, Johnson most likely would have won the fight. But Willard could absorb punishment, as he would prove so grimly in his later bout with Jack Dempsey.

Even in the final round, the 26th, Johnson managed to land some combinations. But he was winded, and Willard teed off with a right cross. So huge was Willard that he started the punch on one side of the ring and the follow-through carried him to the other side, where Johnson collapsed near the ropes. The punch landed flush and knocked-out one of Johnson's teeth, and there is no doubt that it was hard enough to register a legitimate knock out. Johnson's later claim that he threw the fight is not borne out by the film of the bout.

In the previous round, as well as at the start of the 26th, Willard landed hard rights to the body that sapped Johnson's energy. Just before the knockout punch, Johnson stood listlessly, an easy target, as opposed to his usual nimble stance that allowed him to parry and dodge all blows.

When Rickard finally heard about the fight and the new champion, his old promoter's instinct was stirred. Unlike Johnson, who had clearly invented himself as a master entertainer and then had broken the mold, Willard turned out to be somewhat anti-social, certainly not the entertainer that Johnson was. Willard preferred the circus sideshows rather than the big ring matches, professing really never to have wanted to go into boxing. He was born a giant of a man and into poverty. He vowed to do whatever he could to get by with what he was born with. Promoter Jack Curley had found his big man. Following the title win, Curley managed Willard around the country, following the vaudeville circuits and circus, and earning a reported $150,000. During one of the tours he booked Willard with the Sells-Floto Circus and teamed him with Frank Gotch as an attraction. Many fans felt the Willard/Johnson bout was as big a work as any of Gotch's matches. In the end, Willard turned out to be stubborn and disagreeable and their arrangement ended with a lawsuit that was settled when Jess gave Curley a check for $10,000.

Just off the boat from South America, tanned and bronzed from his days working on the ranch, Rickard sniffed the New York air and responded, "I don't see how I managed to keep away so long."[39] The next day Rickard exchanged his cowboy hat for a fedora and was

on his way to the American Museum of National History with a small gift for the curator when Tad Dorgan caught up with him as he walked down Broadway. It was Rickard's first contact with the newsman and cartoonist who worked for the Hearst papers. Dorgan, in their meeting that day on the street, unintentionally gave Rickard the idea for a Willard-Moran fight.

"Mr. Rickard? I'm Tad Dorgan."

Rickard recalled the cartoon-like drawings about his promotions printed in the newspapers. "You're the one who draws the funny pictures."

"This is certainly a lucky meeting for me. I heard you got back from South America yesterday, and I was hoping to get to talk to you." Dorgan pumped Rickard for a scoop. "I know you didn't come back here for your health. You must have a good reason to leave all those cattle ranches."

"I do have a good reason, right here in my coat pocket," Rickard pointed.

Wishing to beat the famous promoter to the punch, Dorgan assumed, "You've signed up Moran and Willard?" Rickard had never heard of Moran, but he filed away the name for later use. A match between the two men had been the talk of New York for the past four months, but at the moment, Rickard was unaware of any such promotions or public excitement.

Rickard drew a small pasteboard box from his coat pocket and opened it carefully. "No, I've brought back some specimens from South America. I was on my way to giving them to my friends at the Museum."[40] Museum Curator Frank Chapman had sent two men, George Cherrie and Leo Miller, to accompany Roosevelt on his Paraguayan "collecting" mission. Rickard must have returned from Paraguay with something interesting in hand for his New York science friends. "But thanks for the tip," he told Dorgan.

Tad had been scooped by the master. Dorgan later recalled from their first meeting how Rickard had tricked him into giving the wily Texan the scoop. From that meeting the Dorgan brothers would become life-long friends to Tex. Tad Dorgan's brother Ike would eventually become Rickard's right-hand press agent and publicist for Madison Square Garden.

Rickard would return to the fight profession and promote the first title defense of Jess Willard's heavyweight reign, nine months after Willard beat Jack Johnson. Rickard sought out Willard, the new champion. Arrangements had been made for a Willard fight with Frank Moran of Pittsburgh. Originally, the fight had been promoted by Tommy Burns and scheduled for New Orleans, but that fight promotion fell apart. Later Jimmy Johnston bid on the fight for Madison Square Garden. Rickard knew nothing about these details.

Willard-Moran Fight, March 25, 1916

Rickard would pick up the pieces of the Willard-Moran fight plan that had fallen through. He formed a partnership with Samuel McCracken, manager of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus, and the pair offered $40,000 to Willard, who accepted.[41] The deal, however, ended up costing Rickard additional bonus fees of $7,500. Pittsburgh's Frank Moran was given $23,750.[42] Rickard wanted a New York venue for the fight and envisioned nothing less than Madison Square Garden. That, too, would end up costing him more than he had expected. Rickard was an outsider to the world of sports promoting in New York, and for his first promotion in the Big Apple he proved an easy mark for almost everyone associated with the fight.

Every politician in town wanted a piece of the action in terms of kickbacks or handouts. The cost for renting Madison Square Garden was normally $1,000 per night, but after Jimmy Johnston, manager of the Garden, had tallied up all the lease fees, Rickard owed him almost $15,000 for use of the place. Johnston was still fuming about losing the fight deal. Back in January he had wired the two parties with an offer of $55,000 ($35,000 to Willard and $20,000 to Moran), the largest offer ever made for a no-decision bout for a fight at Madison Square Garden.[43] Rickard simply sucked it up as part of doing business in New York, but he vowed to get Madison Square Garden under his control. Within a year, Johnston would lose his lease as manager, and Rickard would be first in line with an offer for a new lease on the historic property.

Meanwhile, Rickard went about promoting the title fight, infuriating other promoters who jealously thought themselves more deserving of the big affair. Nothing was easy. Willard was expected to slaughter his opponent. Moran was shorter and fifty pounds lighter than the champion. So uneven was the match expected to be that newspaper mogul Randolph Hearst decided it was an opportune time to take a moral (hence political) stand against boxing. Before the fight, he solicited letters from the clergy. They flooded in, but also did the spectators — to the fight. A record number, in fact, attended the New York event, many in evening attire, setting a new and sophisticated tone for future boxing matches.

The fight itself was rather uneventful, although Willard showed a surprisingly good defense, and his hand speed, despite his bulk, allowed him to land often. On the film of the fight Moran, while 6'1", is dwarfed by the gigantic champion, Willard, and has trouble getting inside his long arms. In 1916 decision bouts were illegal in New York. This fight, refereed by Charlie White, with the men wearing 7-ounce gloves, would be a 10-round no-decision bout, but Willard received a newspaper decision over Moran.

Tad Dorgan wrote of the fight that it was a rather tame affair. But Hearst's frontal assault on the "ghastly spectacle" of boxing the same day, claiming the slaughter in the ring of the smaller man, helped to win converts for his political purposes. The respectable attendance and gate receipts of $152,000 (Rickard's profit would be $30,000) would put Rickard back into the boxing promotion business for good, even though Hearst's crusade would sound the death-knell for boxing the next year in New York.[44]

At a dinner to celebrate the fight, the grand old man of the gladiators, John L. Sullivan, was invited to say a word. He was back in the saddle in true form. "Mr. Rickard, if that was a fight that I just saw, then I want to say that I challenge both the bums right now, winner take all."[45]

Even though Tex Rickard promised New Yorkers another Willard title defense, one with Fred Fulton, boxing would take a back seat to other events.[46] Madison Square Garden would not see another heavyweight title match for four years.

By early 1917 America had entered the Great War. England's resources were strained. There was a severe meat shortage both at home and for troops serving in Europe. American ambassador to South America, Lieutenant John S. Hammond, contacted Rickard for help: could he raise cattle to help alleviate the food shortage in Europe? Rickard was on the next boat to his ranch in Paraguay. While he had sold some of his land, Rickard still owned more than 500 square miles of land in the disputed territory of the Grand Chaco. (Nine years after Rickard died, the newspapers reported he still owned the land.)[47] When he had left it two years earlier, Rickard had granted grazing privileges to a group of Americans still working there in the cattle business. He contacted British agents and proceeded to round up a herd of cattle and drive the herd to a port. However, Rickard could not get the cattle out of

Paraguay. When asked by the Paraguayan government officials where the herd was going, Rickard told them that he was selling the meat to the British. Officials would not release the cattle. Rickard was told there was an embargo — his cattle had been infected by a tick called "tristeza" and his cattle would not be allowed out of the country. Rickard knew his cattle were healthy. But to appease the agents, he returned to his ranch with the herd and gathered up a different collection. He returned with a second shipment, only to be turned down again. His cattle would not be allowed out of the country.[48] Frustrated with the political situation, Rickard returned to the United States.

Impending Fate of Madison Square Garden

New York's centerpiece of Broadway was Madison Square Garden. Rickard told his wife that "the man who controlled the largest arena in the east would control the promotion of every great sporting spectacle to come."[49] But for decades, the facility had been a white elephant, making money on its large, regularly scheduled events during the year, but losing money on its inconsistent overall operations. With the exception of the circus, a world-famous horse show, and various national business exhibitions, entertainment attractions at the elegant amusement center failed to earn enough profit to meet the expenses.

The New York Life Insurance Company, which had held the first mortgage on the famous building since 1912, began foreclosure action on the property in June of 1916.[50] It was commonly known that the club's management was struggling. Financial losses had been especially heavy since 1914. A consortium of real-estate developers, simply called the F. & D. Company, had taken a $2,250,000 loan on the property when they purchased it in 1912 for $3,500,000. The loan was backed by a title insurance company that transferred the loan to the insurance company. While New York Life intended eventually to demolish the building and construct a modern 24-story, high-rise office building for its purposes, the owners were not immediately ready for such an expensive proposition if the building could be turned to profitable use. Rickard heard about the situation and jumped at the chance to get Madison Square Garden.

The insurance company took over the failing property on December 8, 1916, and entertained offers from potential lessees. Rickard, in partnership with Sam McCracken, appeared to be the highest bidder in early November on a five-to-ten-year lease for the property, but the pair would be disappointed when their offer was not accepted.[51] The contract went to W. Carmen Roberts, backed by the Ringling Circus. Rickard learned from this broken deal that he would need Ringling on his side if he wanted to gain control of Madison Square Garden. It was a lesson Rickard would not forget. Rickard would have to wait another four years before he could become the partner of John Ringling and place another bid for the famous showplace.

Once more, with Madison Square Garden in the hands of his competitors, Rickard seemed headed back into obscurity, at least as far as boxing promotion was concerned. However, by 1917, lease holder Grant Hugh Browne and his Garden Tower Corporation failed to make its second rent payment. Without a payment, they had no future lease. Browne tried to extend the lease but failed. Without a valid lease, the New York Boxing Commissioners revoked their boxing license. It was a catch twenty-two, for without income from boxing matches, they could not pay the lease. Owner New York Life ordered Browne and his company to vacate the premises by March of 1917.[52] During this month Les Darcy, under

Rickard's management, was scheduled to fight Jack Dillon at Madison Square Garden. But without a boxing license, and given the ousting of Browne, the fight was in jeopardy.

Rickard immediately set about to back his bid on the property with hard cash. On March 15, he submitted a promissory note to the Life Insurance Company that explained he held 400 shares of the Northern Texas Oil Company that could be liquidated at any time. Rickard had loaned the "Northern" name to the company and his prestige as a major stockholder. The owner, J. C. Taylor, began to send Rickard payments on his stock sales, and Rickard held that cash, along with McCracken's, for future use on a Madison Square Garden lease.

Rickard and Sam McCracken bid on the new lease, but the insurance company decided to take on management of the property themselves. Rickard would not get the chance to bid on the money-losing property for at least several more years. Prizefighting would have to take a back seat because America had more important things on its mind than sporting events.

In 1916 Woodrow Wilson had won the U.S. presidency with his slogan, "He kept us out of the war." The European war was of little interest to most Americans, and virtually no one wanted to send their sons to fight in Flanders Fields or anywhere on the Western Front. Only when the Germans began unrestricted submarine warfare and tried to incite Mexico to make war on the United States was American opinion changed. Defending France and "making the world safe for democracy" became the new political slogan.

In November of 1918, Rickard received a call from Teddy Roosevelt's home at Sagamore Hill, New York. The former president was bed-ridden, gravely ill with inflammatory rheumatism that medical experts at the time attributed to a viral infection the explorer had contracted in Paraguay. A visit from Rickard might cheer him. Tex immediately went to Roosevelt's bedside.

Roosevelt was delighted to see his cowboy friend again, and explained his condition. "Some of the happiest days of my life lead to this. By George, Tex, I would like to be down there with you now." He smiled.

Rickard explained that his cattle and cowboy days had passed, but Roosevelt said, "You'll go back there someday perhaps, Tex, but who can tell about me...."

Tex tried to reassure him. "You always were a good fighter, TR; you'll beat this." When the subject turned back to Roosevelt's condition, the nurse politely informed Rickard that it was time for his visit to end.

Roosevelt reacted, "Why is it, Tex, that the moment anyone comes to see me that I really want to talk to, these nurses and doctors around here decide that they want to feed me or temperature me or something like that?" Tex shook the hand of the man who was still robust and animated. Rickard's normal poker-face must have betrayed him this time because Roosevelt asked, "What's the matter, Tex? Do I look as badly as all that?"

Tex said, "Get well quick, TR. I'm figuring on putting some big fights on now, the kind you'd enjoy."

The sick man's eyes lit up. "Who are you going to match this time?"

"I'm not sure, TR, but you're invited."

"Goodbye, Tex. Thanks for remembering me. I hope the next time you see me, I'll be able to stand on my feet and shake hands with you like a man."

Tex gripped his hand. "Sure, you will."[53] But that was the last time Rickard saw his pal. Two months later Theodore Roosevelt died.

After Roosevelt's death, and without Madison Square Garden as a venue, Rickard searched for a new locale to promote a big event. Another dull matchup like the Willard-Moran fight could have spelled the end for Rickard's career as a promoter. Willard had always been viewed more as a circus side-show for his enormous size rather than as a great boxer. Luckily for Rickard and the history of American sports, there was a bulldog of a man from Colorado who had been hardening his knuckles fighting for his life in the hobo jungles and make-shift prize rings that littered the country in the early twentieth century.

Chapter 5

The Toledo Massacre and the First Million-Dollar Sports Event

> "Between a battle lost and a battle won, there are kingdoms, empires, the world — or nothing." — Napoleon on the morning of the Battle of Waterloo

It might be said that the Roaring Twenties began in 1919 in Toledo, Ohio, with a battle for the highest of stakes — the world heavyweight championship. Back in 1916 after the Willard-Moran fight, with America inching toward world war, the country was in no mood to stage a grand event like a heavyweight championship match. In fact, Jess Willard was touring and unwilling to defend the title while men were suffering on foreign soil. He felt he had symbolically saved the country previously (at least the white establishment) when he defeated Jack Johnson for the heavyweight title in 1915. For three years Willard had been happily on the road performing with the circus and Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. But after the war ended, Americans were caught up in youthful abandon and were ready to amuse themselves with high-stakes entertainment. Willard's hiatus in defending the heavyweight crown ended when Tex Rickard signed him to fight a little-known ex-hobo named Jack Dempsey. Willard had no idea how big a risk he was taking, but the offer by Tex Rickard was too good to turn down.

Rickard offered Willard an individual purse of $100,000 to defend his title. The total guarantees Rickard extended to the contenders for this match far exceeded the $101,000 total in purses offered to Jack Johnson and Jim Jeffries. While Willard was the champion and the heavy betting favorite, the excitement generated by the Willard-Dempsey match on July 4, 1919, both its build-up and aftermath, would turn Willard's youthful challenger, Jack Dempsey, into a celebrity icon. The 1920s would belong to Dempsey, a ruggedly handsome new face on the American scene, while Willard, and the old-world order he seemed to represent, faded into obscurity. Dempsey had taken the battle seriously, and his were the fruits of victory. But before Dempsey and Willard fought their bloodbath in Toledo, an equally vicious battle outside the ring between Dempsey's manager Doc Kearns and Tex Rickard was taking place.

Dempsey's Manager: A Thorn in the Impresario's Side

Jack "Doc" Kearns had the good fortune and cunning ability to have latched onto Jack Dempsey at the right time and manage him into heavyweight stardom**.** It was a relationship

that would forever prove to be a thorn in Tex Rickard's side, as Rickard labored to promote Dempsey through seven major fights.

Jack Kearns was considered a snake, a prince of chicanery, by those in the business world. He was by his own admission one of the world's best con-men. Jess Willard called him a gangster. Australian boxing historian Arnold Thomas noted that someone once said, "When you first meet Jack, you are inclined to dislike him, but when you know him a while, you really get to hate him."[1] Like so many young boys at the beginning of the twentieth century, Jack Kearns dropped out of school and left home after eighth grade. Foregoing higher education to strike out on his own, he frequently had to rely on his brawn, wits, and fists for a living. Kearns ran through a list of occupations before turning twenty — Klondike adventurer, seaman, Bible peddler, and fighter. For the last, he found himself vying with numerous others who were trying to build up fighting reputations by plying their trade in tenderloin saloons. It did not take Kearns long to figure out that managing fighters, as opposed to actually fighting against them, gave him a better percentage with better benefits. As a promoter, he loved the art of the deal. He once told Dempsey, "Most folks are willing to believe anything you tell 'em, no matter what. It's all about how it's presented. You gotta sell them good, kid, make 'em buy anything and let them think they got the best end of the deal."[2]

Jack Dempsey and manager Jack "Doc" Kearns (Library of Congress).

With smug satisfaction, Kearns highly appreciated his talents. While many discount Kearns' boast about all the ring proficiencies he taught the young Jack Dempsey — because he never let the truth stand in the way of self-serving praise — Kearns was, in fact, schooled in the fine art of boxing. While never a stand-out, Kearns had been trained by Dal Hawkins, the same man who gave Joe Gans a run at the lightweight title and who kayoed Martin Flaherty in the first round on the undercard of the Corbett-Fitzsimmons battle in 1897 in Carson City, Nevada. Hawkins set up shop in San Rafael, California, instructing pugs at Billy Shannon's bar and gym, which included a shanty dormitory in the rear for the serious student. Hawkins taught Kearns how to deliver punches, especially the left hook, different boxing styles, and how to adjust to them while in the ring. Kearns learned balanced footwork, ring craftsmanship, and a host of other fighting skills as a young student of the art. It is not inconceivable that the Dal Hawkins left hook found its way to Jack Dempsey by way of Kearns.

As Kearns recalled, "Hawkins was a man with a feared left hook, one of boxing's most effective weapons. Too many boxers deliver it in a round-house fashion that robs it of both its surprise and its effectiveness."[3] To teach a snappy left hook, Hawkins had Kearns take a weight in his left hand and snap that left hook straight forward without drawing his arm back first. Hawkins compared it to throwing a baseball: an outfielder can afford a windup, but not so a catcher. Kearns put the information to good use. "Snapping the left hook, a boxer can land with devastating power right after having thrown a jab. It was the kind of punching which, years later, I taught Dempsey, Mickey Walker and all my other fighters."[4] Dempsey's left hook would become a legend unto itself and make Dempsey, Kearns, and Rickard fabulously wealthy during the Roaring Twenties.

Kearns began to build his stable of fighters around 1914. He saw Harry Wills, a future top black heavyweight, fight in New Orleans, and added Wills to his list that included middleweights Eddie McGoorty, Jimmy Clabby, and Billy Murray (all aspirants to the title) and lightweights "Red" Watson and Joe Bonds. But when Kearns matched Wills against Sam Langford in Vernon, California, in November of 1914, and Langford beat Wills in the fourteenth round, Kearns dropped Wills from the group he was planning to take to Australia, a major world boxing center. (Wills would figure into the tangled lives of the trio of Dempsey, Kearns and Rickard later on.) By 1916, Kearns had made two trips to debut his American fighters in the Antipodes and professed to have signed a contract there to manage one of Australia's champion boxers, Les Darcy. Historian Arnold Thomas described the situation: "Doc Kearns came to Australia in 1915 with his protégé, Billy Murray, and Darcy twice administered dreadful beatings to Murray in the ring. Kearns then tried to woo Darcy to America so that he could manage him. Darcy declined his kind offer and acquired the good Doc's everlasting, and vengeful, displeasure."[5] But, that was not the story Doc Kearns liked to tell. He preferred the one that said Rickard stole Darcy from him, and then he (Kearns) came to Darcy's final rescue.

The up-and-coming fight manager Kearns explained that he had already signed Darcy to a contract and that Tex Rickard had secretly plotted to steal Darcy from him. Kearns would say, "In all honesty, at this time Rickard didn't remember me from Adam's off-ox."[6] It would be Kearns' first of many run-ins with Tex Rickard.

Historian Arnold Thomas noted that Hugh McIntosh had also offered Les Darcy a contract for a theatrical and boxing tour of the United States but Darcy turned that down, believing he could earn more money by going directly to the United States. (It would be McIntosh's second promotional loss to Rickard, the first being the Johnson-Jeffries bid.)

Because Australians of conscription age were prohibited from leaving the country other than for reasons of military service, Darcy had to depart the nation clandestinely. Thomas explained the arrangements for the trip to America were made by Tim O'Sullivan, a boxing manager, who had convinced Darcy to pay the costs of passage for both men. The men boarded a boat for Chile, and from there they sailed to America.

On December 23, 1916, the *New York Times* heralded the news that the Australian heavyweight and world middleweight champion Les Darcy was coming to the United States: "Darcy Will Reach Here Early Today; Tex Rickard Prepares to Receive Australian Boxer from the Tanker." His ship, the *Cushing*, was expected to port in the early morning. Kearns explained that he set out to meet the boxer at 7:30 A.M., only to find that Darcy had been picked up earlier (4:30 A.M.) by Rickard. Thomas explained that Darcy was "greeted by hordes of trainers, would-be managers and the press. Tex Rickard was one of the would-be's, and no doubt Doc Kearns would have been there too, to have another crack at Darcy. Tex got a jump on the hopefuls by getting on board ship before the others and successfully wooed Darcy away, setting him up at the Broztell Hotel in New York. The spiteful and vitriolic Kearns then set about badmouthing Darcy to the press as a liar and un-trustworthy double-crosser. Then, when the charge of 'slacker' was leveled at Darcy, Kearns was quick to put the boot in."[7] Kearns told biographer Oscar Fraley that Rickard got his come-uppance when Darcy was later labeled a "slacker" in the newspapers for trying to avoid war service in Australia, and he dropped the boxer.[8]

Rickard's early management of fighters in New York did include Les Darcy, but his

Tex Rickard meets Les Darcy (left) and Tim O'Sullivan (right) after their ship arrives in New York on December 23, 1916. Darcy was one of the first fighters Rickard tried to promote in New York (G.G. Bain Collection, Library of Congress).

management of the fighter was complicated by an untimely financial predicament at Madison Square Garden in addition to the winds of public opinion. Australians like Darcy who did not volunteer for service to help their British comrades in the first World War became the object of public scorn during government conscription campaigns. Many of the fighters, including Darcy, had wanted to enlist, but managers who were also their promoters discouraged star "bread-winners" from doing so.

Rickard's first attempt to promote a Darcy fight began when Grant Hugh Browne was hired to take over management of the Garden when it came under new owners. Browne promoted fights there under the National Sportsmen's Club of America. On December 26, 1916, Tex issued a newspaper challenge to Jack Dillon to showcase Darcy's first U.S. fight. The match was arranged for March 5, 1917, at Madison Square Garden. The newspapers followed Darcy's training for the Dillon match, and by February 26, it was reported that he was in fine form. But with less than a week before the bout, Grant Browne, manager of the Garden, could not make his second lease payment, and he was kicked out by the Garden's owners, the New York Life Insurance Company. Then when it looked as though the fight could be salvaged, New York Governor Charles S. Whitman banned Darcy from fighting in New York only two days before the fight, branding him a "slacker."[9] Kearns was blamed for stirring up the political sentiment against Darcy.

When Kearns actually met Rickard for the second time (the first was when he worked for him at the Northern in the Klondike, although Tex never remembered him), Kearns said in his bull-headed manner, "You're the son of a bitch who tried to steal Darcy from me."[10] Rickard apologized, saying that he did not know anyone owned Darcy. According to Kearns, after Rickard dropped the fighter because of his tarnished "slacker" reputation, Kearns advised Darcy to go to Memphis and join the National Guard. Unfortunately, Darcy came down with pneumonia and died while serving there on May 24, 1917. His body was sent back to San Francisco where Kearns said he put it on a ship bound for Australia.[11]

Jack Kearns' first encounter with Dempsey is the stuff of legend. One night in the early summer of 1917, Kearns got into a bar fight with a much larger man, apparently over the name "Darcy," in White's Saloon, an establishment among the iron foundries of Oakland, California. When three other men came to his opponent's defense, Jack Dempsey, who just happened to come in for a drink after working his shift in a nearby shipyard, jumped into the fray to help out the small man dressed in a fine suit with a diamond pin in his necktie. Young Dempsey, as he was then called, exhorted that only "cowards pick on someone half their size."[12] He jumped in to help the little guy, recalling, "You could hear thuds, resounding smacks and grunts accompanied by the sound of tables and chairs over-turning, mirrors shattering and bottles splintering."[13] Dempsey scrammed before the cops came, and Kearns would spend the next month trying to track down his impressive rescuer.

Jack Dempsey was the name his older brother had originally adopted but later bestowed upon his younger brother at an opportune moment to get out of a personal scrape. The younger Dempsey began fighting as Kid Blackie in Colorado. He landed a few fights in Nevada — specifically Goldfield, Tonopah, and Reno — and had taken his first real boxing lessons from Young Peter Jackson (Joe Gans' sparring partner) at his gym in Salt Lake City.[14] In order to make a bigger name for himself, Dempsey made a trip in June 1916 to New York (a trip he later considered unsuccessful). He arrived in the big city without a reputation but desperate for fights in order to pay for a square meal. At least three of the people he met on that trip would play into his life later.

One fledgling young sportswriter was assigned to write a Sunday column about the

burly man. The writer was Nat Fleischer. Dempsey also appealed to boxing promoter Tom McArdle, who later became a matchmaker at Madison Square Garden. At the time, McArdle was looking for someone to fight a giant of a man named Andre Anderson at the Fairmont Club, run by Billy Gibson. Gibson would later manage Gene Tunney.

The twenty-one-year-old and starving Dempsey said he would have fought anyone for food at that low point in his life. Andre Anderson was an experienced heavyweight. Dempsey weighed only 170 pounds. The giant swatted and battered Dempsey through four rounds until Anderson wore himself out. Although severely beaten, Dempsey's raw courage turned the tide, and he emerged winner of the $16 purse. Two weeks later, he was matched with Wild Burt Kenny, another giant, for which he was paid $43. After that win, he was promised $500 if he would fight John Lester Johnson. Key men in the New York fight game saw that there was nothing deceptive about Jack Dempsey. He was in it for the payday. His scowl and demeanor in the ring left no doubt that he intended to kill or be killed. But in the Johnson bout, the experienced body-puncher broke three of Dempsey's ribs. Despite his courageous efforts, Dempsey was cheated out of his money.[15] Broke but not without having given New York fans a flash of his staying power, the rough heavyweight from the hobo jungles returned to Salt Lake City.

Back in Utah, Dempsey fell head over heels and married a saloon piano player, Maxine Cates, a woman fifteen years older than Dempsey, in November of 1916. The two were unable to afford a life together away from saloon earnings and bar fights, so Dempsey continued fighting and Maxine continued working the saloon business. He fought Jim Flynn unsuccessfully. After losing in the first round to Fireman Flynn, who caught him with a right on the chin, Dempsey was unable to get additional fights in Salt Lake City. He migrated to the West Coast and was ripe for the managerial picking when his fortune landed him in the Oakland bar. Manager Kearns was there to pick him up and add him to his stable. Kearns tried to impress Dempsey by telling him that he had once managed Battling Nelson. Kearns quickly deposited his potential money-maker at his mother's house where the young talent was given steady meals and allowed undisturbed gym work to build up his tall, lean physique.[16]

Dempsey's first real test under Kearns' tutelage came on October 17, 1917, when he was paired with Ed "Gunboat" Smith. Smith had been one of the "Great White Hopes" of the Jack Johnson era. According to an interview of Smith, cited by author Peter Heller, he never really got over a beating he suffered in a fight with Sam Langford.[17] Before fighting Langford, he was considered one of the era's best heavyweights, and even after that Smith was a dangerous foe. Smith had beaten Jess Willard before the giant Willard won the heavyweight title.

Although Dempsey lost consciousness temporarily after Smith hit him on the chin in the second round, he continued to show such fortitude and courageous persistence that he carried the decision. Kearns then took Dempsey to Chicago where he announced to the press, to Willard's annoyance that Dempsey would be fighting him in Chicago for the title. After the news was printed, the three happened to meet up in a hotel lobby. Willard was livid about the announcement. "That was a cheap trick you pulled Kearns. When I decide to fight again, it'll be with someone who's earned it."[18] The scene was embarrassing for Dempsey and humiliating for Kearns. But the quick-witted manager rattled off that it was a disgrace for Willard not to fight him since the proceeds were planned for charities that would help the fighting men overseas. Kearns' pit-bull attack style and his clever knack for publicity proved a brilliant tool for Dempsey's career. Kearns' abrasiveness certainly set

Willard on the defensive. It paid off with other Dempsey fights, making positive use of Kearns' decidedly unpleasant personality.

By 1918, Dempsey, known as "the Manassa Mauler" (a moniker attributed to the Coloradan by Damon Runyon), had beaten a long list of fighters that included Jim Flynn, Carl Morris, "Gunboat" Smith and Fred Fulton. But out of money and out of contacts, Kearns had to travel to New York to meet and convince Tex Rickard that Dempsey was worth a Willard match. Rickard simply responded that Willard would kill him if they ever got in the ring, and he did not want to be responsible. He added, "The public will never go for that."[19] Kearns liked to think that the entire idea of a fight between Willard and Dempsey was the result of his manipulating Rickard, but the New York impresario was several steps ahead and already aware that another promoter was considering a deal between the two fighters. Rickard was just giving Kearns the brush-off until he was ready to make a deal.

Ike Dorgan, Tex Rickard's press man, had spoken to a promoter simply identified as Tortorich, of New Orleans, who told him that he was prepared to offer Jess Willard $75,000 to fight Dempsey. It was Dorgan who first told Rickard to offer Willard $100,000.[20] Willard had been reluctant to defend his title until after the war was over, but Kearns jumped at the chance to fashion a deal with Willard and Dempsey. Everyone thought that an offer of $100,000 for Willard to fight Dempsey (money that neither Kearns nor Rickard had at the time) might change the champion's mind. Kearns assured Rickard that he had a friend who could back the expensive proposition. He also promised Rickard that if Willard would take the fight, Dempsey would perform for no guarantee. Kearns pressed his point as the two talked over drinks one night at the Biltmore. According to Kearns, he hastily drafted a telegram to Willard on behalf of Rickard, and with Rickard's twenty-dollar bill, Kearns asked the waiter to send the telegram (and keep the change).

Two days later, Willard responded, agreeing to the match, and asked Rickard to meet him to discuss the details in Kansas City. After Rickard successfully negotiated the deal with Willard, he set about turning on the publicity spigot, all the while being deliberately coy with the press about where the bout would take place and whom Willard would fight. He dribbled various, and misleading, leaks to the press: "Willard reported to have accepted $100,000 offer from Rickard to meet Dempsey or Carpentier in July." "Dempsey favored as opponent." "Texas bars bout." "Bout may be held in Europe." "Dempsey Selected as Opponent." "Shreveport, Louisiana is After Bout." "Dempsey Signs Contract in Weehawken Ferry House." "Halifax Bids for Bout." "Bout May be Staged in Paris." "Pocatello, Idaho Offers $160,000 for Bout." "Rickard Returns to New York without Definite Site." "England Offers $100,000 Purse."[21] Only when Tex thought the moment was opportune did he announce that "Toledo, Ohio, was the fortunate locale of the Fight of the Decade." All of the intrigue over the bout's location was nothing but ballyhoo to stir up interest in the fight. According to his wife, Rickard had already determined the location of the fight prior to his leaks to the newspaper, but it was better to keep everyone guessing.

Rickard notified Kearns to meet him in New York where he would host a press conference at the Claridge Hotel to announce the match. With headlining sports editors assembled (the group included men like Bill Farnsworth of the *Evening Journal*, Jim Dawson of the *New York Times*, Eddie Frayne of the *New York American*, Gene Fowler, Grantland Rice, Hype Igoe, Damon Runyon, Tad Dorgan, and Rube Goldberg), Rickard tapped his Malacca cane and announced: "Gentlemen, Jess Willard has agreed to defend his title against young Jack Dempsey. We haven't picked a site for the fight, yet [Rickard would reveal that later]. But Mr. Willard will receive a guarantee of $100,000." Actually, at that time, no money

had yet been raised for the guarantee. Then he added, "Mr. Kearns and Mr. Dempsey are so grateful for the opportunity that they have asked for no guarantee and would fight for nothing if necessary. However, I shall be glad to take care of them after the gate is checked."[22] Then Rickard explained that he would, of course, provide Dempsey with ten or fifteen thousand for training expenses.

At that point, Doc Kearns interrupted with his raspy voice, "Just a minute, Rickard. First I show you how to get Willard and now you're going to pay us off in the dark?" He told the newsmen that there wouldn't even be a fight without his "push." "You're just trying to worm out of paying us."

Offended, Rickard responded, "We are gambling one hundred thousand to get you a shot at the title. You are gambling for millions."

"Fine," Kearns said, figuring with a world title at stake, especially after the long hiatus in boxing caused by the war, and with Tex Rickard's name attached to the promotion that the event was a sure thing. "Me and Dempsey will take fifty thousand."[23] "It should be plainer than the noses on your faces that this boy deserves at least half as much as Willard."[24]

In front of the reporters, the two argued back and forth, with offers dropping from the original $50,000 demand: Rickard, firm at $25,000; Kearns, standing his ground at $30,000. The press decided, with a wink towards a compromise, that the difference should be split. Dempsey, present at the meeting, would be guaranteed $27,500, the most money he had ever been offered.

Rickard was still reeling from the press conference when Kearns approached him later to assure him that he had a contact in Ohio who could support the fight. That contact was Addison Q. Thatcher of the Toledo Athletic Club.[25] Rickard and Kearns took off for Ohio. There, Thatcher and one of his business associates in Memphis, Frank Flournoy, a banker, agreed to advance Rickard $100,000 against the gate receipts.[26] Kearns, as much of a gambler as his nemesis Rickard, had speculated correctly. At the age of thirty-six and after working with Dempsey for only two years, he was now managing a fighter who had the chance to win a world title.

At that time, New York was not a favorable venue for boxing. Because of anti-fight sentiment backed by legislation, Rickard feared that even the articles of agreement might be illegal if signed in the state. The contract for the Willard-Dempsey fight was signed February 11, across the river, at the Weehawken ferry house in New Jersey.

Toledo, Ohio, however, did seem a favorable location for the title fight. Known for its gambling and gangster hideaways, Toledo was in the heart of the Midwest, and by train it was close to Detroit, Chicago, and New York. In addition, the mayor and Ohio's governor would not stand in the way of a boxing match, especially if it added revenue to government coffers. To help seal the deal, Rickard and Kearns traveled to an Elks convention at Columbus where all of the important men of Ohio were assembled and eager to visit with the now-famous promoter. It did not seem to matter that neither Rickard nor Kearns were Elk members. And it didn't hurt the odds for bringing home the bacon that Rickard played poker in a high-stakes game one evening during the convention with Warren G. Harding.[27]

When the Ohio Ministerial Association and other blue-law societies heard about the upcoming fight plans in their state, they protested. But Rickard had found himself in this situation before. Immediately, he contacted Major Anthony J. D. Biddle, a former amateur heavyweight boxer in the U.S. Marines, and asked for his help. Major Biddle's passion for the U.S. Marching Marines (and his fondness for donating Bibles to the ministerial association) was only surpassed by his passion for boxing. Biddle's patriotic fervor trumped the

preachers' disapproval. Biddle called in his religious I.O.U.s and the preachers quietly stepped aside. Rickard would return Biddle's favor by allowing him to open the boxing show with a patriotic drill by his Marines. Biddle would also pick the time-keeper and serve as judge alongside Rickard. And so after such a long dry spell for marquee boxing matches, the stage was set. The actual event would exceed the anticipation, and the controversies it created are still debated to this day. Although opinions differ as to exactly what happened backstage, particularly in the wrapping of Dempsey's rock-hard fists, it is obvious from existing film footage what the Toledo crowd saw when Dempsey and Willard collided. Dempsey came into the ring perhaps more battle ready than any heavyweight in history at that point in time.

Jack Dempsey-Jess Willard Massacre in Toledo, Ohio — July 4, 1919

The reputation attained by Jack Dempsey as one of the world's greatest fighters derived largely from his destruction of two hard-hitting giant heavyweights: Jess Willard and Luis Firpo. Dempsey owed his victory to his intense training regimen and also to the fact that Willard underestimated him fatally. Dempsey's wealth from the fights, he owed to promoter Tex Rickard, who made him a millionaire. In numbers given to Nat Fleischer, Rickard was reported to have paid Dempsey a total of $2,475,259. Figures showed that Rickard paid Dempsey $27,500 for the Willard fight; $100,000 to fight Brennan; $300,000 to fight Carpentier; $509,000 to fight Firpo; $711,000 to fight Tunney; $252,759 to fight Sharkey; and $450,000 to fight Tunney in Chicago. Dempsey's film revenues are not included in these figures.[28]

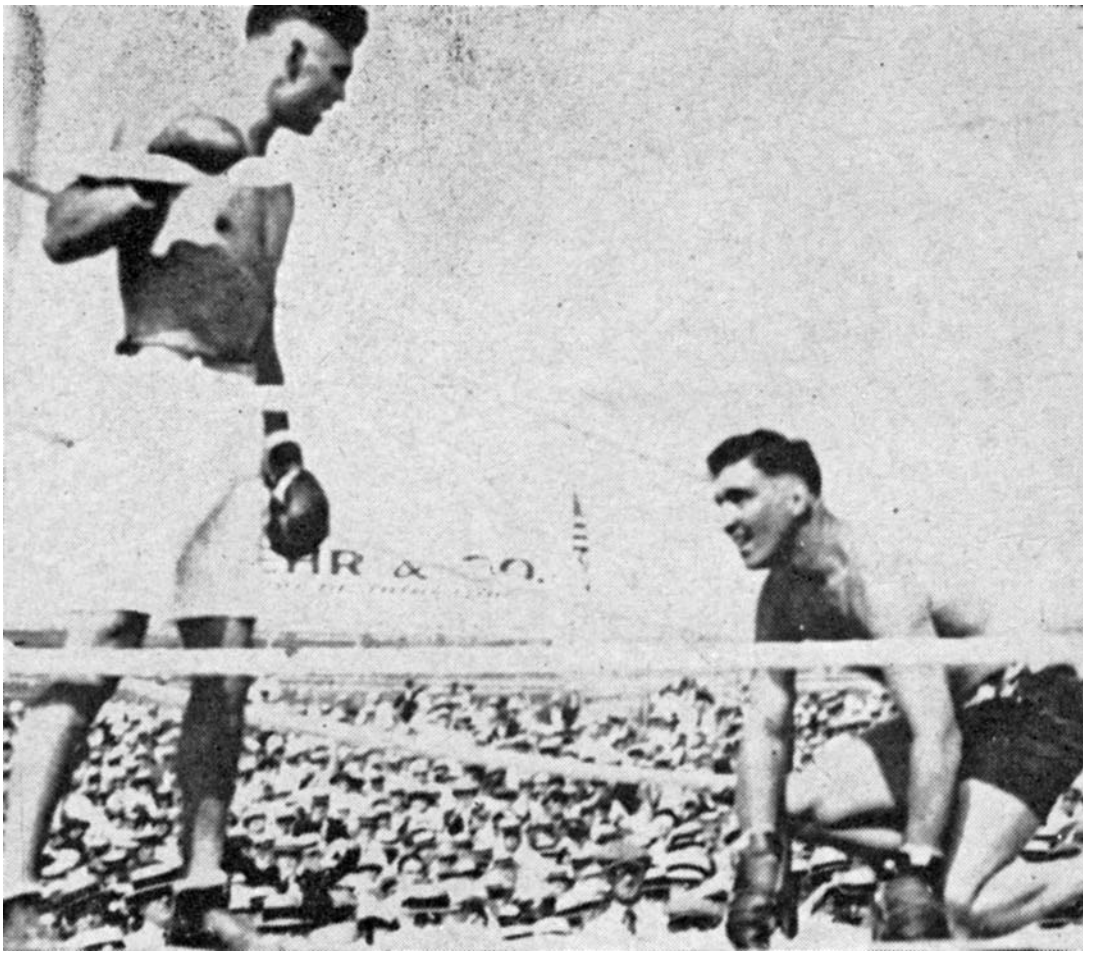
To help build up the Willard-Dempsey fight, Rickard proposed a new Army-Navy championship as the preliminary to the fight. In February of 1919, Rickard dangled $10,000 for the purse and proposed that an elimination tournament begin in order to narrow the field of men in both services at home and abroad. Rickard proposed to make the all-service match an acknowledged "military" title bout.[29] Out of this tournament would emerge an unknown youngster named Gene Tunney.

In contrast to the Spartan-like Dempsey, the thirty-six-year-old Willard, only four years after his victory over Jack Johnson, was arrogantly confident and had woefully underestimated the twenty-four-year-old from Manassa, Colorado.

Dempsey set up camp in the middle of May at the Overland Club in Toledo, on the banks of Maumee Bay. Trainer Jimmy De Forest insisted that Dempsey train hard for one week and rest for another so as not to burn out by overtraining. Dempsey's working regimen was ten miles of jogging in the morning, then gym work and sparring in the afternoon. He spent his weeks off talking to members of the press and looking for any pastimes to ward off boredom.

Willard, on the other hand, took his training far too lightly. He brought no trainer or manager to his camp. He lacked competent sparring partners, and he chose to reside in a comfortable (for a fighter almost decadent) home in Toledo. He also elected to sleep in most mornings instead of doing roadwork.

In the weeks before the bout, Rickard seemed to enjoy all of the controversy and strife that his slick dealing had created. His wife stated that he "reveled in a Mardi Gras of injunction-waving reformers, settlement seeking managers, rebellious referees, and blustering box-



Jack Dempsey wins the heavyweight title from Jess Willard at Toledo, Ohio, 1919. Jess Willard is the first to receive an unprecedented purse amount of $100,000.

ing commissions. Tickets were selling rapidly, and with the flow of money into the cash box came a myriad of itching palms eager for a share of the receipts."[30]

Rickard was extremely proud of his stadium. Built to hold 80,000, it cost $160,000; and during its construction, Rickard walked around admiring it like a new baby.[31] Reserved ringside seats sold for $60, an enormous sum when the average working man's salary was $10 per week.[32] The cheapest seats were $10, standing room $2.

The Dempsey-Willard fight in Toledo drew a disappointing number of slightly more than 20,000 on July 4, 1919. The multitude included several sporting luminaries, such as former lightweight champion Nelson, who posed with the new lightweight sensation Benny Leonard. Battling Nelson, looking and acting a bit too battered at this point in his life, attended the event with a ghostwriter assigned to draft his impressions of the fight for a newspaper column. The story of Nelson taking a bath in a cold lemonade tank the night before the fight has been a story retold for many years by several in attendance.[33] On fight day, the afternoon following Nelson's dip in the lemonade, when the temperatures rose beyond the century point, no one seemed to mind drinking the sweetened bath water.

In addition to being hot, the day was humid. By noon the temperature had already passed the one hundred-degree mark; by fight time, some reporters called it 114 degrees in the shade.[34] Dempsey was restless and elected to work out and spar in the morning. The presence of Rickard's western friends and former lawmen, now boxing aficionados upon turning in their badges, increased the grandeur of the spectacle. Bat Masterson and Wyatt Earp showed up as self-appointed keepers of the peace. They posted themselves at the entrance to the stadium and disarmed men and women, taking their knives and guns, with some refusing to hand over their weaponry without a scuffle.[35] Wyatt Earp had been a saloon owner in Nome with Rickard, and his brother, Virgil, had been the floor-boss of Rickard's Northern saloon in Goldfield before becoming sheriff of Esmeralda County, Nevada. Masterson, too, was a life-long friend of Rickard. (Rickard served as a pall-bearer for Masterson when he died. It was also reported that both Wyatt Earp and Tex Rickard were ill simultaneously at the end of their lives. Earp "left his bed the day before Rickard died to send a telegram to his sick friend in Florida. The exertion caused a relapse," and Earp died one week after Rickard died.)[36]

The appearance of men like Masterson and Earp was noteworthy. They now kept order outside the stadium rather than on the wild frontier. It marked a transition from the days of the Wild West to the Roaring Twenties. Inside the arena, Marines keep guard over the ring. They were positioned two rows behind the reporters and stenographers.

During the preliminary bout an aerial act occurred between two biplanes that distracted the spectators from the fight when a man from one plane stepped over to the other, several thousand feet above the arena. At 3:30 P.M. before the main event, Major Biddle stepped into the ring and with voice and whistle drilled his Philadelphia Marines around the canvas. Afterwards a band played while a new canvas was laid for the main event.

Both fighters were eager to be out of their hot, suffocating dressing rooms. Tex Rickard had hired soldiers and sailors to carry water throughout the arena to the thirsty spectators. That was stopped when he learned the men were charging ten cents a glass.

Dempsey entered the ring first. He was very nervous and would fight with a ferocity and desperation born from years of sleepless nights while defending himself in the hobo jungles across America. His gigantic opponent, Jess Willard, sauntered into the ring as if attending a picnic. Hearing the crowd roar when Willard entered, Dempsey concentrated on looking down at his feet to avoid making eye contact with the champion.

Men from Willard's corner watched as his gloves were put on over his hand wrappings. This makes the later story, that Dempsey's gloves were "loaded" to include a horseshoe or any other device, difficult to believe. Willard later said that he wished he had touched the wrapped hands himself to see if Dempsey's hands had been soaked in anything to harden the wrappings. Walter Monaghan and Ike O'Neil from the Willard group had been in Dempsey's dressing room to oversee the wrapping of his hands by Jimmy De Forest. A large number of journalists also were in the room to witness the event: Grantland Rice, Ring Lardner, Jimmy Johnston, Ned Brown, Ruben Goldberg, Hype Igoe, Bugs Baer, Bob Edgren, boxing commissioner William Muldoon, Tom Mix, Nat Fleischer, and Damon Runyon.[37] Kearns had been in Willard's room to oversee the same activity. Kearns had tried to rile Willard by telling his men that they were wrapping his hands incorrectly. Willard snarled, "Get the hell out of here." Kearns had previously shown up at Willard's training quarters to taunt him. "Just trying to help," Kearns smiled, like a Cheshire cat.[38]

Willard, weighing 245 pounds, entered the ring relaxed. Jim Corbett, the only heavyweight champion at ringside, had picked him over Dempsey. On film, Willard looked com-

pletely carefree. He held up his hands to the crowd casually to accept their applause. When the two fighters posed for the camera, Willard, at an amazing height of 6'7" (taller than Primo Carnera), dwarfed the 187-pound Dempsey. (Before the match, Willard had asked for legal immunity should he happen to kill Dempsey.)[39] Kearns tried to reassure Dempsey by telling him that larger men such as Willard are easier targets to hit. Neither man looked at the other.

Tex Rickard, one of the judges, took his seat at ringside. At the bell, Dempsey, who had not shaved for three days in order to look intimidating, came out crouching, bobbing and circling, looking for an opening. Willard landed a few light one-twos. Dempsey swung a vicious left hook that Willard deflected with his shoulder. They faced off and Willard tried a jab. Dempsey was wound up like a spring. He spun and stepped back, actually turning his back on Willard. Dempsey bored in and Willard tied him up, looking bored.

In the next sequence captured on film, Dempsey caused so much damage that many sportswriters have called the combination the most devastating in history. A right to the body, a left to the body, a crushing right to the jaw, and a final left hook that Dempsey leveraged by spinning his body weight into the lumbering Willard, have the effect similar to an ox felled by sniper cross-fire. Willard fell straight back, plopping back to the canvass. When he tried to get up, he looked at Ollie Pecord, the referee, as if for help.

Pecord chewed gum nervously throughout the fight.

Willard rose and Dempsey immediately crashed a sweeping left hook to his jaw. Incredibly accurate, Dempsey followed with a right and left hook, both of which landed hard on the jaw. Two rights and a sweeping left hook floored Willard for a second time. The same sequence almost to the punch was repeated, and down Willard went a third time.

When Willard rose a third time, Dempsey belted him from behind, then stood over him when he fell for knockdown number four. This practice by Dempsey would eventually give rise to the neutral corner rule, whereby the fighter scoring a knockdown would have to give his opponent room to rise. But in Toledo there was no chance for Willard to even gain his feet before the crouching Dempsey ripped into him again, pouncing on him like a panther. Willard was as game but also as battered and foggy as the giant Jeffries had been upon suffering the blows of his more-youthful opponent Jack Johnson nine years earlier.

When Willard rose a fourth time, Dempsey tore into him from behind, actually throwing a hook over his shoulder into his battered face. Willard's right eye was almost closed. Dempsey stood over Willard whenever he was down. Willard rose and felt three more times for a total of seven knockdowns. He staggered around the ring and finally slumped onto the bottom ropes. The crowd screamed, cheering so loudly that no one could hear the bell. (The fact that the bell had sounded so faintly was a problem Rickard would correct before his next big fight.) Referee Pecord never heard the bell and was still counting when Kearns jumped into the ring and held up Dempsey's hand. Dempsey left the ring at Kearns' instruction. Kearns had bet $10,000 against $100,000 that Dempsey would kayo Willard in the first round. He wanted to ensure the bet. Chaos ensued.

But the fight was not over. Kearns said Willard went down at 2:39. Warren Barbour the timekeeper said there were seven seconds left in the first round.[40] Dempsey was called back. The bell saved the bloodied Willard, who incredibly came out boxing in round two. He fought fairly evenly, landing several good one-two punches on the crouching Dempsey, who continued to pound away at Willard with vicious hooks. The right side of Willard's head was swollen, and his eye was closed. Pecord did not end the assault and allowed the fight to continue against pleas from the spectators.

In round three, Willard, beaten to a pulp, actually got the better of a few exchanges. At the end of the round, he was helped to his corner and sat like a lump of coal. The brown stain of blood on the canvas widened at his feet from the dripping of the fluids from his mauled face. Walter Monahan, a sergeant in the United States Army and Willard's chief second, leaned down to hear what Willard was trying to tell him. One man in the crowd yelled "You big yellow hound." But Jess Willard did not show the yellow streak; he simply recognized the futility of taking any more punishment. Monahan, his second, threw in the towel to end the fight. Dempsey is officially credited with a win in the third round, although he insisted that he won the fight in the fourth, that the bell had rung to begin the next round and he had already taken two or three steps toward Willard. But Willard could not lift his head. He had lost four teeth, his cheekbone was shattered, and he had been saved from what may have been a fatal beating. Willard would be the first heavyweight champion to relinquish his title without being counted out by a referee.

The twenty-four-year-old Dempsey, who had trained like a Spartan while Willard took the battle lightly, would enjoy the life of a king for the rest of his days while Willard faded into history. Although not the $1 million he had hoped for, Rickard had gained new momentum for his goal.The gate earnings added up to $452,522. After expenses, Rickard and financial partner Frank Flournoy made about $100,000.[41]

After winning the world title, Dempsey was in perfect position to make money on personal appearances. His first exhibition was in Cincinnati where he made $7,500 in one week. For the rest of the summer and into the fall, Dempsey appeared with the Sells-Floto Circus.[42] (Otto Floto had been a wrestling promoter and lawman in Denver, but other than lending his name had nothing to do with the circus. The owner of the Denver-based circus had only taken the name Floto because he liked the sound of it.) From the circus it was on to Hollywood for Dempsey, where he began his motion picture career starring in a quickly made, fifteen-episode series of *Daredevil Jack*. He was soon promenading with companions like Douglas Fairbanks and boxer-wanna-be Rudolph Valentino. Dempsey saw a similarity between star stage performers and champion fighters. "We were all very famous because we were freaks of nature. I was born with a good punch. They were born with good profiles, pretty mouths, curves in the right places, things like that."[43] While Dempsey may have considered his luck in the ring as being beyond his control, the real reason Dempsey considered Fairbanks his pal was because of his kind action. Fairbanks (like Frank Sinatra in another generation) took care of the old fighters, like Bull Montana and Spike Robinson.[44]

But it was in the circus life where Dempsey felt most comfortable. Dempsey made $45,000 in 1919 with the circus, starring with twenty-five wrestlers and ten other boxers. He also fell in love with one of the tent performers. "It was the happiest and most contented time of my life," Dempsey recalled.[45] He was crushed when the woman called it off, saying their lives were too diverse and that they should go their separate ways. Dempsey discovered that the lady had been paid off to leave him. He suspected that Kearns paid her off so as not to interfere with Dempsey's career.

Even before Dempsey had become champion he had been haunted by accusations of being a slacker. After his first win over Bill Brennan in 1918, he should have been elated, but when he was walking back to his dressing room, he heard someone say the word that would haunt him for years to come. Dempsey recalled the word "slacker." It was a bullet to his psyche. "A guy in the middle of a row yelled at me. When I turned his way somebody on the other side of the aisle said, 'Slacker, you were lucky to win.' I had been called everything. Believe me, everything. But not this ... I wanted to die, and for some years after that, I wished I had died."[46]

Dempsey's idyllic life came to an abrupt end early the next year when in 1920 he was indicted for evading military service. As had happened to other heavyweight stars, it was a case of politics clashing with the sport of boxing. Jack Dempsey was hauled into court. He was to be haunted by damaging press and testimonial letters from his former wife, Maxine. Immediately after Dempsey won the title, Grantland Rice wrote: "If he had been a fighting man he would have been in khaki when at twenty-two he had no other responsibilities except to protect his own hide. So let us have no illusions about our new heavyweight champion. He is a marvel in the ring, the greatest boxing or the greatest hitting machine even the old timers here have ever seen. But he isn't the world's champion fighter. Not by a margin of 50,000,000 men who either stood or were ready to stand the test of cold steel and exploding shell for anything from six cents to a dollar a day."[47] (Rice had his own ax to grind. He had done active duty in the war. He had also left his accumulated press earnings to an attorney for safe-keeping for his wife should he fail to return. The lawyer absconded with his savings.)

Dempsey had avoided military service by claiming to be the sole supporter of his family and prostitute wife. After reading about all the money Dempsey had been earning after his title win, ex-wife Maxine wrote a damning letter about the champ for a San Francisco newspaper. The sensational press coverage excited the U.S. attorney general's office. Dempsey was labeled a "slacker" in the most publicly humiliating way: a federal grand jury indicted him on filing false dependency claims with the draft board on February 26, 1920.[48] But after the jury heard testimony in Dempsey's defense — from his mother, from the Red Cross (about his $200,000 money-raising efforts), and from a Lieutenant John F. Kennedy about his attempts to enlist — he was found "not guilty." The trial that began on June 7 ended on June 15, 1920, with the judge's instructions to the jury members taking longer than their deliberations. The trial was costly. It was Tex Rickard who came to Dempsey's financial rescue, paying all of his legal bills, which amounted to $150,000. Dempsey never again spoke with Maxine or heard anything about her until 1924. She was burned to death, trapped where she slept, in the second floor of a Juarez brothel.[49] Even after a public exoneration, Dempsey was still considered tarnished material by the time Rickard was ready to promote his next big fight.

Tex Rickard would promote seven major fights with Dempsey as principle (including all but two of Dempsey's fights for the title). But in 1920, Rickard found it hard to find anyone worthy to fight Dempsey for the huge payday he had in mind. Rickard was still hoping for a big fight to take place during the fall of 1920. But Jack Kearns was frustrated by what he thought was Rickard's lack of effort, and he decided to go out on his own to promote a Dempsey fight.

On September 6, 1920, Kearns worked a deal with promoter Floyd Fitzsimmons for Dempsey to defend his title in Benton Harbor, Michigan, against Billy Miske. Dempsey had fought the "St. Paul Thunderbolt" twice before, and Miske had also been his sparring partner. According to biographer Clay Moyle, Miske had made a disastrous investment in a car dealership using his entire savings from boxing earnings. The dealership folded. He desperately needed money for his family. In addition, Miske was suffering from a kidney ailment, Bright's disease. His condition would be fatal.[50] The fight was a quick one, with Miske knocked out in the third round. The gate receipts were $134,904, Dempsey earning $55,000 and Miske $25,000. Dempsey knew this was clearly less money than would have been generated by a fight staged by Rickard. But Dempsey was a loyal man in the same way that Rickard was loyal: Miske was Dempsey's friend, and he felt that he owed his friend a title fight.

While Dempsey trained for the Miske fight, Rickard visited him in camp at Benton Harbor. Some said that because Rickard did not want to be seen by Kearns at the time, he came in a Hollywood disguise, wearing dark glasses and a mustache under a large fake nose. It is difficult to imagine Rickard in such a get-up as that because Rickard was always known to be fearless, one who, in a long western tradition, still toted a pistol (he called it his "friend") in his coat pocket wherever he went.

Kearns was away from the camp, in Chicago, at the time, but when he heard about Rickard's visit, he accused Rickard of adversely influencing Dempsey and "planting suspicions in him" about the way he was managing Dempsey's career.[51] Rickard had actually gone to Benton Harbor to start the dealings with Dempsey for his next title fight against Bill Brennan. Rickard by then hated Kearns, and the feeling was mutual. Kearns called Rickard a "crafty son-of-a-bitch," and Rickard called Kearns a "cheap conniver."[52] "That guy has no heartbeat and no blood," Rickard warned Dempsey. "You just make sure he doesn't do to you what comes naturally to him."[53] Dempsey was caught in the middle, loyal to them both.

Dempsey would later make an insightful comment about Rickard, the promoter who made him a millionaire. "He was his own man — a lone, sensitive man — who didn't want to be obligated to anyone."[54]

It was also while training for the Miske fight that Dempsey first met another of his many ardent admirers: a man of great means who avoided the flash bulb-wielding press like the plague — mafia boss Al Capone. The Chicago crime overlord was a heavy-set man who wore a wide-brimmed hat, chomped a cigar, and otherwise could have been easily mistaken for any other big-time boxing promoter. Capone appeared at Dempsey's training quarters and offered Dempsey any amount of money to appear on his behalf at his private club in a boxing exhibition. This time, Dempsey sought out the wisdom of Tex Rickard rather than manager Jack Kearns, figuring that Rickard could offer him better advice in such matters. Dempsey had previously sought out the advice of Rickard, rather than Kearns, in matters concerning his dress and speech.

Rickard explained how the mob operated in those days. He told Dempsey that they were not necessarily out to control the fighters or fighting operations; they simply wanted to impress others. For example, they would buy thousands of dollars worth of the best boxing tickets to pass out to politicians and other notables they wanted to impress. Rickard explained to Dempsey, "Jack, those gangster fellers are nice guys, most of them. You're going to have to meet them more and more in this business. Be nice to them, polite, but don't never have no business with them. When they own you they don't let go. And tell that noisy manager of yours the same thing."[55]

With Rickard's advice in hand, Dempsey politely refused Capone's offer, although Dempsey did deliver an autographed photo of himself to Capone's lavishly decorated Chicago office.[56] Capone remained a loyal fan of Dempsey throughout his life. And with regard to the mob and Rickard, Dempsey said that those guys never fooled Tex Rickard. "He wasn't even impressed by them. He had seen tougher bums for thirty-five years. Some of them tougher than anything New York ever produced."[57]

Rickard Becomes a Full-Time Boxing Promoter

By 1920, just when New York's law was about to become more boxing-friendly and sanction the sport, the city's venerated amusement palace was scheduled to close. It was

horrible timing for everyone except Tex Rickard, who had always considered the Garden to be the future center of the boxing (if not the entire sporting) world.

After two decades of anti-boxing sentiment in New York, the Gibbs bill that would have legalized decision fights had passed the Senate in 1919, but was never signed by the governor. The Ross-Walker bill, introduced in January of 1920, would be more successful. The bill created a three-person boxing commission to govern the sport, required promoters and boxers to be licensed, and permitted 15-round decision bouts overseen and scored by a referee and two judges. While the bill was working its way through the state legislature, the New York Life Insurance Company, which owned Madison Square Garden, decided it could no longer afford to have on its books a building with limited use and a history of debt. The company planned to tear down the building and use the space for its own new high-rise office building.

Sport promoters, managers, and New Yorkers in general were mortified at the thought of the landmark's destruction. But the cowboy from Texas saw it as an opportunity to become a full-time boxing promoter and major player in the East Coast sporting business . Rickard came to the building's rescue by offering the insurance executives a lease for the property that they couldn't refuse.

The Ross-Walker bill was signed into law on May 20, 1920, and soon after, Rickard, the poker-faced gambler with a hefty bet, had the attention of the Garden executives when he proposed a lease amount backed by two imaginative plans: an entire boxing season of Friday-night fights, followed by a summer swim season. His weekly boxing events would include title fights in all divisions. He said he could bring not just some, but all of the world's great indoor boxers to Madison Square Garden. Bouts would rival and exceed those taking place in the great club of London and would begin as soon as state boxing licenses could be acquired. Rickard was now a proven giant in the boxing field, with his own wealth and connections. If he said he could promote a fight, as far-sighted and unattainable as it may have seemed at the time, his word was good; and everyone knew it. The owners of Madison Square Garden had him sign on the dotted line. Rickard leased the building, concessions and all, on July 12, 1920, for $300,000 a year for ten years. Backing his lease with a sublease was his partner in the venture, John Ringling, the circus impresario and mainstay of the Garden. Rickard's services were to begin August 1, but Governor Al Smith of New York did not appoint a Boxing Commission and License Board until August 12. Rickard's first card, and the first main event for legal boxing under New York's new law, would be at the Garden on September 17.

In addition to a full slate of boxing matches, Rickard's plan for the Garden included remodeling the structure, adding seating capacity (bringing it to 13,000 seats) and turning the giant amphitheater into the world's largest indoor swimming pool during the summer months. He estimated that the pool revenue would make the overall Madison Square Garden operations profitable when boxing matches could not be held indoors. His plans proved true.

With hands-on supervision, his organizational skills and a Midas touch, Rickard became the first boxing promoter and manager of the Garden to make the facility profitable. Within five months, the Garden brought in over a million dollars. True to his word, Rickard accomplished this extraordinary feat by maintaining a steady, weekly supply of boxing events that attracted the public in large numbers. The following bouts, with their respective gate receipts, show a total of over $1 million in earnings in those initial months, with a total attendance of 275,000.[58]

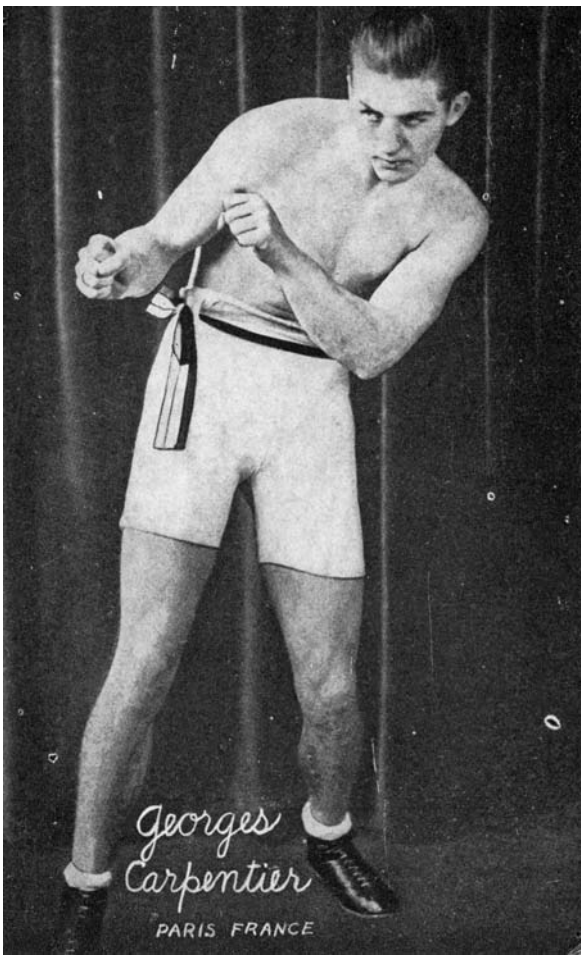
1920–1921: Madison Square Garden

Sept. 17: Joe Welling–Johnny Dundee; $51,000
Sept. 28: Joe Lynch–Jackie Sharkey and Abe Goldstein–Patsy Wallace; $33,000
Oct. 8: Tommy Noble–Johnny Murray and Panama Joe Gans–George Robinson; $19,200 (Rickard created a new Colored Middleweight World Title for the Gans-Robinson bout.)
Oct. 15: Jackie Sharkey–Charley Ledoux and Joe Lynch–Jabez White; $39,000
Oct. 22: Louis Bogash–Marty Cross, George Ward–Willis O'Loughlin, Jack Perry–Paul Doyle, and Johnny Summers–Steve Latzo; $22,300
Oct. 29: Willie Jackson–Eddie Fitzsimmons, Willie DeFoe–Ralph Brady, and Dan Lynch–Buddy Sprague; $62,000
Nov. 5: Joe Lynch–Abe Attell Goldstein; $25,750
Nov. 9: Mike O'Dowd–Jeff Smith; $45,600
Nov. 26: Benny Leonard–Joe Welling; $91,000 (Lightweight Title)
Dec. 2: Joe Lynch–Jackie Sharkey; $41,719
Dec. 14: Jack Dempsey–Bill Brennan; $145,935 (Heavyweight Title)
Dec. 22: Joe Lynch–Pete Herman; $74,881 (Bantamweight Title)
Dec. 30: Roy Moore–Jackie Sharkey, Panama Joe Gans–Sailor Darden; $16,022
Jan. 7, 1921: Willie Jackson–Pinky Mitchell; $40,839
Jan. 14: Benny Leonard–Ritchie Mitchell; $133,745 (Lightweight Title — Championship Benefit Show for French Relief sponsored by Anne Morgan, daughter of J.P. Morgan)
Jan. 17: Andy Chaney–Charley Beecher; $28,825
Jan. 26: Pat Moore–Young Montreal; $27,712
Feb. 7: Jack Britton–Ted Lewis; $60,231 (Welterweight Title)
Feb. 15: Billy DeFoe–Sammy Sieger; $38,360
Feb. 18: Bill Brennan–Bob Martin, Kid Norfolk–Pinkey Lewis; $45,630
Feb. 22: Bartfield-Louis Bogash; $18,771
Feb. 25: Willie Jackson–Johnny Dundee; $45,892
Mar. 2: M. Smith–M. Collins, Beecher-Loadman, Buff-F. Daly, Bloom-J. Kelly; $24,882
Mar. 17: Johnny Wilson–Mike O'Dowd; $96,771 (Middleweight Title)
Mar. 21: Rocky Kansas–Willie Jackson; $77,395 (also a charity event)

In his first season of boxing, Rickard promoted an amazing 100 fights, which included a string of successful title fights. In the summer of 1921, New Yorkers witnessed Rickard's next miracle: a giant swimming pool in Madison Square Garden. At this point it seemed that the great showman's wand could turn impossible dreams into reality. While other Garden tenants before Rickard had hoped to add a natatorium to the Garden, their plans had failed. It remained for Rickard to achieve the daunting feat. The giant white-tiled pool was 250 feet long by 110 feet wide, two-thirds the size of a football field. The water tank held 1,500,000 gallons of water. The ends of the pool had a depth of three feet and sloped to the center for a depth of fifteen feet, an area that served amateur and professional swim and dive competitions on Thursday evenings. A cascading waterfall was incorporated into the design at one end. According to the *New York Tribune*, "Once more NY has added to its fame as the one place where things are done on a big scale, thanks to Tex Rickard's latest enterprise, the world's largest and most elaborate swimming pool, under the great dome of

Madison Square Garden.... [It] surpasses anything ever before attempted for the benefit of sweltering New Yorkers. Its popularity has surpassed all estimates."[59] Rickard accomplished this massive indoor construction project while he was planning for his giant outdoor event, the Dempsey-Carpentier fight in New Jersey. Rickard basked in his success, but little did he know that the Garden's successful swimming pool would lead him to the precipice of disaster when, later, several of the female swimmers would accuse him of sexual improprieties.

In the meantime, Rickard planned to promote a Dempsey fight at Madison Square Garden on December 14, 1920. Seats were limited. Even with 13,000 of them in the newly remodeled Garden, tickets were at a premium for the Dempsey title defense against Bill Brennan (born Wilhelm Schenck, and also known as Bill Shanks). Again, Kearns put the moves on Rickard. As Dempsey's manager, Kearns demanded, *after* the contract had been signed, that Rickard pony up 500 ringside tickets. These were tickets Kearns intended to give to ticket scalper Mike Jacobs, or else Dempsey would "sprain an ankle."[60] Rickard ended up giving Jacobs more than 300 premium tickets.



Georges Carpentier, the acrobat and World War I flying ace turned boxer. The European heavyweight champion would be featured in Rickard's first international fight, 1921.

The fight was scheduled for fifteen rounds, and surprisingly, Brennan almost beat Dempsey. Some said that Dempsey was stale. Others in the packed arena thought the bout was a set-up, fixed by Chicago's Al Capone. Brennan's second-round blow to Dempsey's chin changed that perception. Dempsey was dazed and shaken. Brennan was as surprised as the crowd by the effective blow to the champion's chin, so much so that he gave away valuable time which allowed Dempsey to regain his senses. It was a torrid battle. Brennan had caused one of Dempsey's eyes to swell, and one of his ears was half torn away. By the twelfth round, both men were swinging wildly and missing. Dempsey managed to pound out a victory. Dempsey recalled years later, "Aside from my second bout with Gene Tunney, this bout with Brennan was just about the most closely contested fight I ever had."[61] Rickard paid Brennan $30,000 and Dempsey $50,000. The fight was Dempsey's second with Brennan, and Brennan wanted a third, but after Brennan's loss to Firpo a rematch was out of the question. (Brennan was shot and killed in his New York club, *The Tia Juana*, in 1924.)

Because the battle with Brennan had been so close, Dempsey was now seen as beatable. His popularity still suffered from the reputation of having been a "slacker" during World War I. The champion's vulnerability, in that he could now be portrayed as a villain in the circus that was the boxing ring, was something the clever Rickard would soon exploit by pitting Dempsey against a challenger with a chance to win. Rickard would take advantage of this pattern several times over; a poor showing by Dempsey would be followed by a huge promotion against someone with a chance to "knock his block off."

Now Rickard was ready to engineer a boxing extravaganza on an international scale. From across the Atlantic came the answer to the riddle of who would wear the white hat against the champion. Georges Carpentier was everything the 1920s wanted in a hero. A former fighter pilot, the handsome Carpentier was a clever boxer, and a proven referee to boot. He had handed Jack Johnson the decision in Johnson's 20-round title defense against Frank Moran in Paris in 1914. If the French champion landed his hard right hand, he stood a good chance of knocking out the iron-jawed Dempsey.

And so, Tex Rickard chomped his cigar and gleefully set in motion the hero-villain fight between the French war pilot, Georges Carpentier, and the former hobo, Jack Dempsey.

Jack Dempsey-Georges Carpentier at Boyles Thirty Acres, Jersey City, N.J.—July 2, 1921

Just as it is impossible to understand how the Ali-Frazier battle of the unbeatens captivated the entire world in 1971 without knowing the vitriol, controversy, and even hatred that divided opinion about the Vietnam War, the same thing can be said with regard to the Dempsey-Carpentier fight and the background of World War I. After the war was won, those who had fought with the French had nothing but contempt for the "slackers" who had stayed home while others were fighting the war, as Dempsey was accused to have done.

Against the "villainous" Dempsey, Rickard pitted a seeming paragon of virtue. The Frenchman was a deceptively tough World War I hero who had, like Battling Nelson before him, begun his boxing career after an encounter with a local carnival strong man. As a youth, Carpentier also earned money as an acrobat, which is the only way to understand some of his later boxing moves and achievements. He became a Houdini of the ring who would appear battered and beaten only to snap back with blistering combinations that put him in control of a fight.

Carpentier, a true showman from his years in the circus and the boxing ring, prospered under the *tri-couler* before and after the Great War. Although he had won the light-heavyweight title in New Jersey against Battling Levinsky, no European had vied for the heavyweight crown in the twentieth century prior to Carpentier. The fame to be had in America now beckoned the European boxing king.

In 1914, just before World War I began, Carpentier had defeated Gunboat Smith to win a laurel known as the "white heavyweight championship" of the world. Carpentier's skills from his days as an acrobat enabled him to baffle the much-bigger Gunboat Smith and win the title. Gunboat described Carpentier as the most frustrating opponent he had ever encountered. Smith said of Carpentier, "He was a fellow that you didn't know whether he was standing on his head or if he was on his feet. In the first round he hit me a terrific punch. I didn't go right down, but I kind of sunk. I took the count of eight and got up....

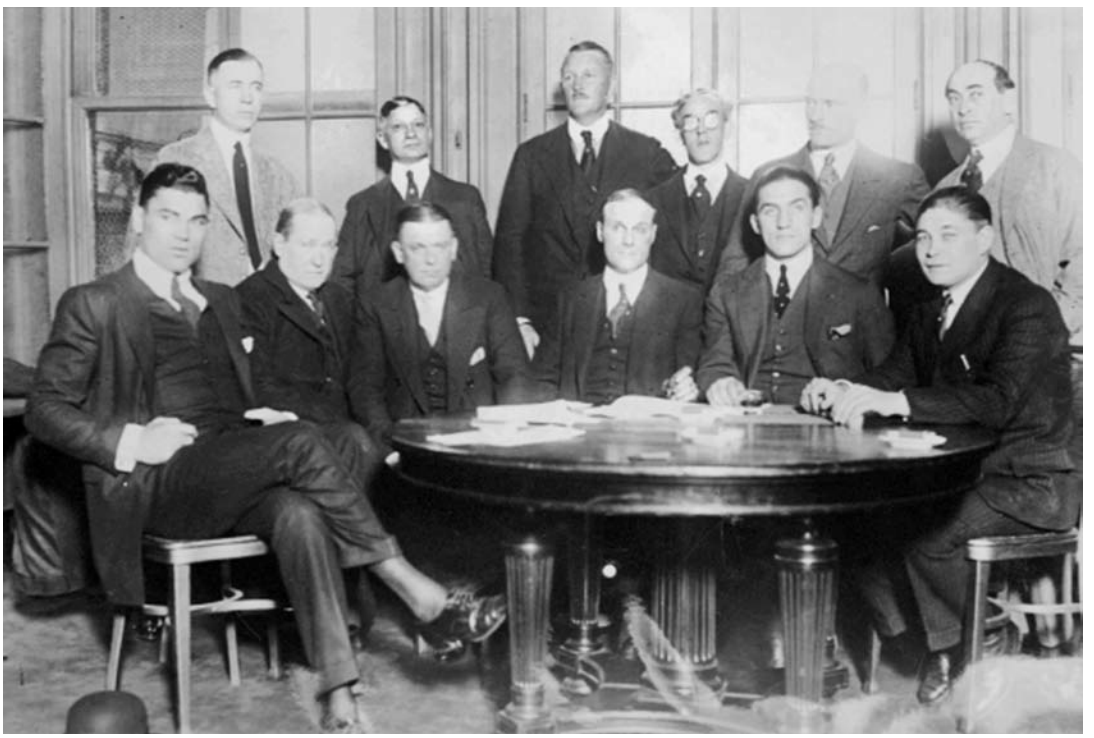
Every time you'd go to hit him, he was a fellow that from the legs down he'd do all his ducking. You didn't know whether he was on the floor or up."[62]

Thus Carpentier went off to fight against the Germans with a claim to a version of the heavyweight title. A year later, when Jess Willard knocked out Jack Johnson, nobody cared any longer about the white heavyweight title. Certainly at that point, the French public had no time to worry about sporting titles while they were fighting for their lives against Germany.

Although Carpentier was a highly decorated hero of the Great War, he had actually been taken out of the front lines after suffering shell shock at Verdun. That horrific battle had killed and maimed untold numbers of Frenchmen and Germans. Many French soldiers were literally blown to pieces and buried in the shell craters, never to be identified; thus, the tradition of commemorating the Unknown Soldier. The Germans suffered equally, but the numbers of their dead remained hidden for reasons of propaganda.

Carpentier, after several months of recuperation from Verdun, was up and back in a soldier's uniform in the latter part of the war as a pilot. Compared to the trenches, Carpentier's nearly suicidal exploits in the air may have seemed like play to him. He flew so low that he could see the faces of "le Boche," the hated German enemy.

After the Armistice, Carpentier received a well-earned hero's welcome in Paris. If courage is one of a fighter's primary assets, Carpentier's certainly had not gathered any rust on that score during his hiatus from boxing while fighting on the Western front.



The "Manassa Mauler" and the French war hero sign the articles of agreement. Seated left to right, Jack Dempsey, William Brady, Charles Cochran, Tex Rickard, George Carpentier, Francois Descamps (G.G. Bain Collection, Library of Congress).

Still full of fight, Carpentier quickly won the world light-heavyweight championship, and by 1921, Rickard recognized the Frenchman as a gold mine in terms of an opponent for the brooding champion, Jack Dempsey, who had just undergone his trial for draft evasion.

Rickard sold the idea of a Dempsey-Carpentier fight to a team of promoters. The articles of agreement were signed on November 6, 1920, at Rickard's favorite New York hotel, the Claridge. In attendance were promoter Tex Rickard, Francois Descamps, Carpentier's manager, Charles Cochran (the English promoter who had optioned Carpentier for his fight against Dempsey), William Brady (the third member of the promotion team), stakeholder Robert Edgren, manager Jack Kearns, and a ballroom full of invited guests and members of the news media. There the promoters offered a guarantee of $500,000. The managers each offered $50,000 in fight forfeits. Edgren was also named as the sole arbiter should any dispute arise that threatened the venture.

The next great "Battle of the Century" appeared to be on until Jack Kearns pushed his way to the table. Kearns objected to the contract stipulation that the fight would be held "somewhere in the United States, Canada, Mexico or Cuba." His fighter had won the title in the United States, and he was going to make sure that he would definitely *not* be fighting anywhere other than the United States. A brouhaha seemed ready to erupt. According to Nat Fleischer, two individuals, named Raphael Posso and Marcos Gonzales, approached with an offer of $50,000 to take the fight to Cuba. Then Tom O'Rourke announced that he had a syndicate that was willing to offer $600,000 to buy the contract. Rickard calmly and emphatically announced, "My interest is not for sale. If my colleagues want to sell, that is their own affair, but if they do, I'll handle the fight myself."[63]

Later, on January 22, when Brady announced that he and Cochran had decided to withdraw from the fight promotion, Rickard was left holding the entire financial obligation. According to journalist and author William Inglis, the two promoters did not like what they had read in the newspapers. "Powerful interests were fighting Rickard in the dark, influential New Yorkers who declared that this wild Westerner had no business trying to run the game in their territory."[64] Inglis recalled, "I once tried to get Rickard to tell this story — it would have been a thriller — but he shook his head and said: 'No. That's out.' He lived by the gamblers' code — play the game and don't talk."[65]

Rickard appealed to Kearns for a lesser guarantee for the fighters, but Kearns responded with an adamant, "No deal." Kearns demanded a flat $300,000 for Dempsey and $200,000 for Carpentier. (Kearns would later admit that he lost money by refusing at this juncture to accept a percentage of what would be the unprecedented gate receipts.) At this point, the entire fight might have fallen through had it not been for Rickard's grit and connections. He definitely did not have the kind of cash he needed to get things underway. He first turned to ticket scalper Mike Jacobs, promising him choice seats in advance. Jacobs raised $180,000 in cash. (Rickard never forgot this act, and for the rest of his promotional days made a point of offering Jacobs choice seats for every match, a gesture that would be seen later as scandalous ticket machinations and unethical operating procedures.)[66] Then Rickard appealed to John Ringling, the successful circus impresario who became Rickard's silent partner.[67] Rickard, disgusted with Kearns, told Dempsey, "Listen, Jack. The public makes the champion and I'm the public's agent, so tell your loudmouth manager not to underestimate me again."[68]

When pressure from New Yorkers prevented Rickard from staging the match in New York, he leased a site in Jersey City, known as Boyle's Thirty Acres. Rickard began work on

the massive stadium. Originally designed to hold 50,000, the outdoor arena was redesigned to accommodate 70,000, and then expanded again to hold 90,000. Rickard worked frantically to sell tickets to cover his increased costs.

It seemed that Rickard had as many invited guests to the fight as he had attendants. He booked his visitors to New York into the lavish Belmont Hotel, and no one seemed to remember that Prohibition in America was in full swing. "Hooch," also provided by Rickard, was everywhere. By fight time, the arena was flanked by 400 firemen, 600 attendants, and dozens of nurses and ambulances from various hospitals.[69] The firemen were eager to serve for a chance at seeing the famous bout. They were wearing red knitted hats, which, according to Gene Corri, who had been one of Rickard's invited guests from across the big pond, looked quite "piratical."[70]

American business and entertainment royalty poured in among Rickard's guests: John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Henry Ford, George J. Gould, Vincent Astor, Harry Payne Whitney, Joseph Harriman, Harry Sinclair, Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., Kermit and Alice Roosevelt Longworth, George Cohan, David Belasco, Flo Ziegfeld, Al Jolson, and John Ringling.[71]

Before the fight Rickard visited Dempsey in his dressing room. "You never *seed* anything like it." Rickard had said this before, but he continued to amaze himself with his promotions. Then he turned to Kearns and Dempsey and said of his organized masterpiece, "Now don't mess it up!"

"What do you mean, 'Don't mess it up'?" Dempsey asked.

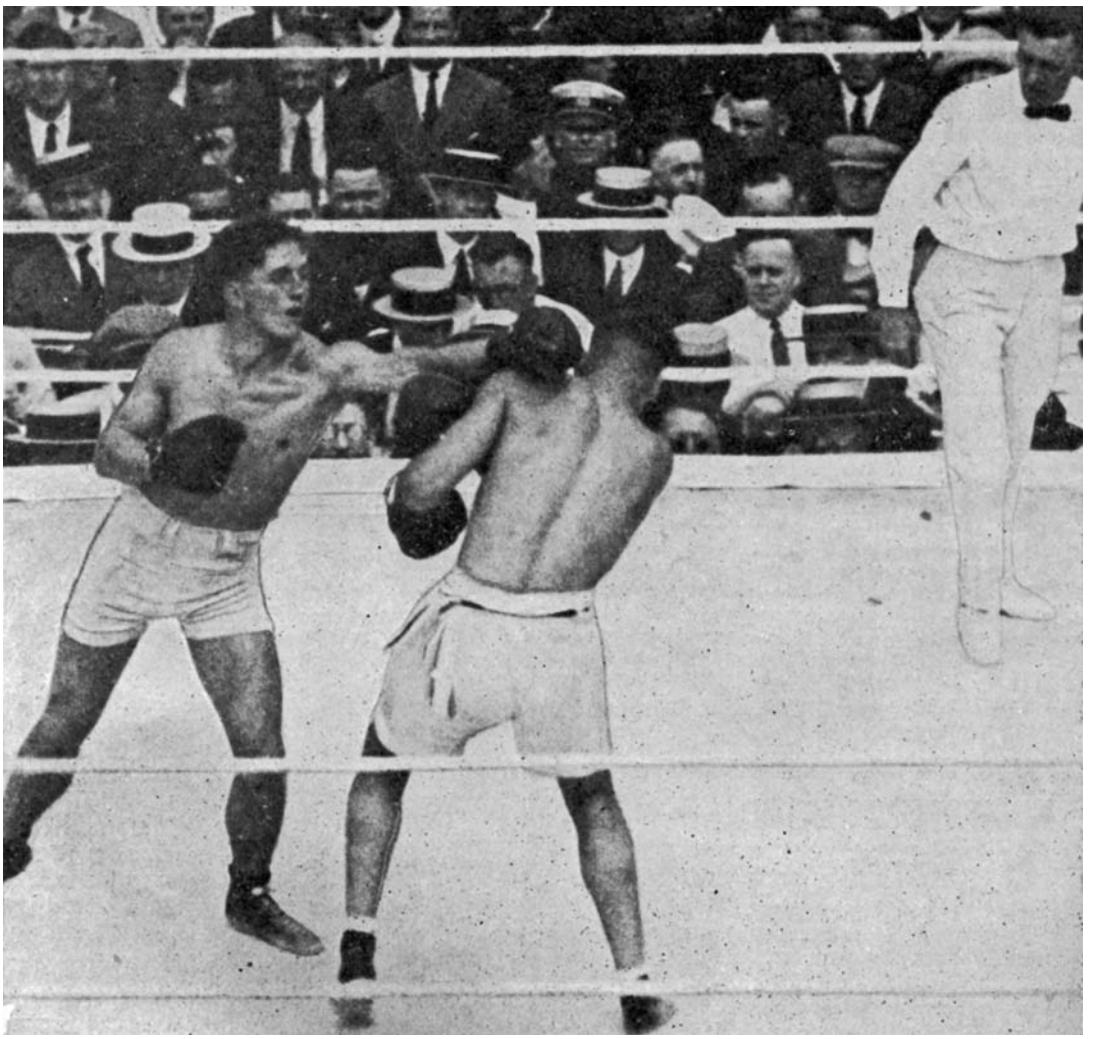
"This is just the beginning and I hope you guys don't mess it up." Rickard had a master plan for the future of boxing promotions, which definitely did not have any room for accidental ring deaths. Once again, he asked a champion to take it easy on a smaller opponent. "Listen, Jack, take it easy on Carpentier. Give the people out there a good run for their money, but be careful. Don't kill him. Don't kill everything."[72]

On the undercard was an eight-round heavyweight bout between a man called "The Fighting Marine," Gene Tunney, who would battle it out with a relatively unknown Canadian called "Soldier Jones." Gene Corri, who was sitting ringside, described Tunney as "a good-looking young man of fine proportions." He described Jones as "a typical pug." Corri's trained eye provides an early look at the style and abilities of young Tunney. "It was obvious to me that he was not so much trying for a knock-out as demonstrating his real boxing skill and complete superiority over the other man. His long left kept jabbing at Soldier Jones, who swung wildly and more wildly until one ringside fight fan began to gibe at him in a foghorn voice. 'Soldier,' bawled this critic, 'get out of that ring! Soldier, knitting is your game!'—and finally in tones of deepest disgust, 'Soldier, you're wanted on the 'phone!'"[73] Corri noted that Soldier Jones was not as bad as the spectator thought. Nevertheless, Tunney scored a technical knockout in the seventh round. Back in February, Rickard had proposed an Army-Navy championship for the undercard, with a purse of $10,000 awarded to the victor of the battle. What he got was a battle of war veterans, one American and the other Canadian. Little did anyone suspect that the unimpressive former U.S. Marine fighting on the same card would one day be the conqueror of the mighty Dempsey.

This boxing event marked another significant moment in history: it was the first time a world title match, or any large event for that matter, had been transmitted over the radio or relayed to the masses by the "Super Vox." It introduced radio announcers Nat Fleischer and Andrew White. Thousands tuned in and listened eagerly as Joe Humphreys began his booming announcements: "Weighing 188 pounds, from Salt Lake City, Utah, Jack Dempsey!" The crowd roared in the background. Carpentier weighed only 175 pounds.

Dempsey remembered that the Frenchman was "chalk white" and looked like a "graceful statue." Carpentier later told Dempsey that when the well-tanned Westerner entered the ring, he looked like a lion and Carpentier had no intentions of being mauled by him.[74]

Ninety thousand people paid a total of $1.6 million to watch the Frenchman try to beat the powerful mauler of Manassas. Three thousand miles away, ten thousand San Franciscans gathered on Market and Third streets to hear the round-by-round telegraph returns in another history-making event surrounding boxing. The *Examiner* extolled its use of modern science to enable the crowds to hear the returns as well as to read them from the posted bulletins. The newspaper employed a telegraph reader to speak the fight returns into the "Super Vox" (microphone) that would transmit the reader's voice "right out of the air" so that it could be heard across three city blocks. Reporters of the remarkable event exclaimed how the "air told the news." "H.G. Wells, in one of his early prophetic romances, told of



Carpentier misses a left in the third round. Although outweighed by almost 30 pounds, he was one of the first men to stagger the iron-chinned Jack Dempsey (Underwood & Underwood).

the future dissemination of news, when the people would merely turn their ears to the air and hear sounded the happenings of the world. This romantic prophecy has been realized more quickly than the brilliant novelist forecasted."[75]

Even though Carpentier told the press, "I have failed in my life's ambition and can only say that I honestly believe a better man won," the film of the fight shows a brave Frenchman indeed.[76] In the first round, Carpentier circled Dempsey, then charged in and tied him up, pushing him to the ropes. Wary of Dempsey's power, Carpentier did not want to give him room to punch. Quickly Carpentier let fly a right to the face, a sizzling left hook, and a booming overhand right. Dempsey stumbled back from his waif-like antagonist.

During the infighting the smaller man threw in right uppercuts and overhand rights. He came so close to victory that he could feel the championship in his grasp, but after breaking a bone in his right hand in the second round, he withered under Dempsey's heavy-handed blows. Several times when Dempsey walked in, Carpentier landed his hard, high left jab from a crouch and then pummeled Dempsey with quick barrages.

Carpentier explained, "In the third round I believe I out-boxed Dempsey except in the clinches; but what was the use? He took everything I had for the sake of hitting me. He hurt me badly, and with my broken hand I could not hold him off. I determined to stay as long as possible. His body blows weakened me, and I kept on running. A hard left

The game but overpowered Carpentier counted out by referee Harry Ertle (Underwood & Underwood).

to my jaw staggered me, and I knew Dempsey was letting me hit him in order to get in his own punches."[77]

Carpentier clung to Dempsey when able, with Dempsey's left mitt tucked under Carpentier's arm. In round four, the Frenchman quickly he let fly a right to Dempsey's face, followed by a sizzling left hook and a booming over-hand right. Dempsey once more stumbled back from his much-smaller antagonist.

Finally, Dempsey, after taking one last two-fisted combination from the fabulous, fleet-footed Frenchman, landed a left to the heart and a thudding right to the temple that put Carpentier down. Amazingly, Carpentier got back up at the count of six, but he was hacked down to the mat in what he said was the hardest blow he ever felt, just over his heart. After that blow, the brave man said later that he never heard the count of ten. He had to be carried back to his corner.

Dempsey retained the world title.

Sexual Assault Charges Against Rickard

Rickard's amazing financial accomplishments were accompanied by envious resentment that eventually resulted in horrifying accusations which caused some of the most painful events in his life. It was not long after the newspapers published the financial records of his operational success at the Garden that Rickard became the object of lawsuits. Rickard spent much of the early part of 1922 in court and away from the very operations at Madison Square Garden that needed his leadership.

First came accusations related to his financial dealings. Frank C. Armstrong, a New York boxing promoter who had worked with Rickard prior to Rickard's leasing of the Garden, sued Rickard for a share of his recent income from the Garden's operations. Armstrong alleged that he and Rickard had agreed to partner in the promotion of fights at the Garden. Rickard's assets were frozen and John Ringling, vice president of Garden operations, replaced Rickard temporarily as president. In February, the state's Supreme Court ruled in favor of plaintiff Armstrong. Rickard appealed, and the court then decided in Rickard's favor, that no partnership had ever existed between the two parties. Rickard was restored to his full management duties at the Garden, but Armstrong continued to level charges and lawsuits at Rickard throughout Rickard's lifetime. In fact, Armstrong was still trying to recover funds after Rickard died when he sued Rickard's estate.[78]

Rickard was out of one court and into another where even more damaging accusations were made. On February 16, 1922, a grand jury returned two indictments against Tex Rickard, charging him with assaulting two girls. He pleaded not guilty before Justice Isidor Wasservogel in the Supreme Court and was released, pending trial on $10,000 bail.[79]

The next day, Rickard was, for a second time, removed from active management of his business. But this time he would also lose his promoter's license when the Madison Square Garden swimming pool, which had been so profitable, proved to be a time bomb. Social gatherings that put near-naked multitudes in comfortable proximity were a novelty, not without risks. Several young female bathers he had met during the previous summer's swimming season at the Garden accused him of sexual assault. The State Athletic Commission gave their ultimatum to the Garden's owners. Unless they got rid of Tex Rickard as manager, the Garden would lose its boxing venue.[80] Even though Rickard's attorney told him to say nothing to the press, Rickard promised "fireworks."

The court proceedings and Rickard's humiliating incarceration in New York's "Tombs" prison while awaiting trial tested the real measure of his grit and ability to overcome obstacles, a test that would have caused others to crumble. Rickard attacked the allegations as determinedly as he worked to make any of his grand boxing events a reality. He would not be beaten by the odds. The key to Rickard's business success was that he simply refused to lose and he staked all that he had in order to prevail. He overcame his legal troubles just as he succeeded in overcoming other obstacles in his professional path. Rickard would not allow anyone else's vision of the outcome to dictate his fate.

America's opinion of Rickard was rocked by allegations made by three young girls, ages 11, 12, and 15. The oldest girl said that Rickard had sexual relations with her and that the sordid affair had lasted for a period of months. He was put on trial for abduction and assault in the second degree of fifteen-year-old Sarah Shoenfeld.[81] Rickard's connection with the girl was complicated. According to her courtroom testimony, she had first met Rickard at the Madison Square Garden swimming pool the previous September. She had been introduced to him by a 12-year-old friend. She also said that she had visited his Garden tower office and an apartment on West 47th Street. As proof of her knowledge of him, she stated that he carried a revolver, wore a badge, and was some kind of "police commissioner." Every time she saw him, Rickard would ask "how she was getting along at school, and ask about her mother."[82] At one point, the girl explained that her brother had been jailed, and that her mother had asked her to seek Rickard's help in the matter. Rickard told her he would do what he could to help out.

With the knowledge that her daughter was acquainted with the politically connected and powerful promoter, the girl's mother (with the girl in tow) appealed to Rickard in January to write a letter on behalf of her son, who was jailed in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, for robbery. Rickard did help the family. On January 22, he had written: "I enclose herewith a letter which I have signed and you can send to the Governor of Wisconsin. It says I will bring the boy here, give him medical attention, and put him to work. I hope you will succeed in getting him released and that my letter will have some influence with the Governor. Explain in your letter to the Governor just where the boy is and all the facts regarding his arrest, the name of the warden, etc. I think that the letter direct from you to the Governor will have more effect with my letter enclosed than by my approaching the Governor direct."[83] In return for his help, Rickard had to answer charges against him that included assault and statutory rape. Six girls were held as material witnesses to the assault. Rickard was jailed beginning March 20, 1922, in the infamous Tombs of New York.[84] The ex-lawman never recovered from this humiliation, even though he was acquitted eight days later.

Many of Rickard's friends were either questioned as suspected witnesses to the crime or brought in as character witnesses. Rickard's good friend, Walter Fields, brother of actor W.C. Fields, had rented the apartment where some of the crimes with Rickard were said to have taken place, and the judge questioned why he was mysteriously missing from New York during the trial. The prosecution had tried to impugn his character by explaining that Rickard was a known gambler and a saloon owner. Rex Beach testified that he was a personal friend of Rickard's during their Alaska and Nevada days but that Rickard was known to have run a legal and "square" operation. He explained that these operations were prior to Prohibition, and that "no odium had attached to either. Gambling was not illegal, the liquor business was considered as respectable as others and some of the squarest men in the country were engaged in it. Tex, I told them, had never been accused of crooked dealing."[85]

In the summary arguments, Rickard's lawyer, Max Steuer, asserted that Rickard was

a victim of "Wall Street Blackmailers." He did not elaborate, but promised that Rickard would "hunt them down."[86] Steuer emphasized Rickard's whereabouts. "On January 23, the day he was supposed to be riding in his automobile with his girls," attorney Steuer told Judge Wasservogel, "he was in my room in my house."[87] If attorney and client were lying about the matter, the attorney stood to lose his license. He made that clear to everyone in court. Kermit Roosevelt, son of the former president, had also testified that Rickard was at the Dartmouth-Pennsylvania football game on one of the days in question.[88] The problem was that Rickard could not remember anything about the game that was played. Nevertheless, Rickard could provide alibis for the times in question.

Beach explained that the episode reeked of a shakedown. "I considered it a deliberate frame by the mob which had controlled boxing and which was bent upon smashing him before he could smash them."[89] Rickard, at one point before the trial, was told at a restaurant that the charges would be dropped in return for a handsome payoff.[90]

The gauntlet was thrown down. After deliberating an hour and a half, the jury found the defendant not guilty. Dempsey biographer Randy Roberts noted a source that said Rickard "'gripped the rail and almost fell to his knees in his emotion.' The courtroom then erupted into a frenzy of cheering, handclapping, and handshaking." Rickard's relief was palpable. "This is the happiest day of my life."[91] Although the charges were probably a fabrication, in later years others would also claim that Rickard had always had a taste for very young women.[92]

Rickard hunkered down. Beach explained "that experience changed him in some way too subtle for me to analyze. He never referred to it but I saw indications that it had left its mark and that he had grown more wary."[93] After his trial, Rickard became an easy mark for extortion. The newspapers were ruthless: scandals were reported in every tabloid, and Rickard was very visible. But he could not afford another personal attack on his integrity. *Broadway Brevities*, a New York tabloid, was one of the newspapers that requested money from Rickard to change its "uncomplimentary references" about him in the publication. He paid $250 to the editor to ensure that the newspaper attacks would stop. Rickard was one of several victims who had been silent about paying hush money to the tabloids. But when his name came up in a specific case, he testified under oath against publisher Stephen G. Clow and three of his advertising agents that after he paid the fees, the "attacks ceased and he was lauded as Rickard the Great."[94]

It took about a year (and a big promotion for charity), but when Rickard's personal ordeal was over, lady luck again smiled down upon him, this time presenting a fortune in the form of a massive Argentinean with a bone-crunching, right-handed punch.

Jess Willard — Luis Firpo Elimination Fight at Boyle's Thirty Acres, N.J. — July 12, 1923

In 1922, Luis Angel Firpo won four fights by sensational knockouts. In 1923 he knocked out Bill Brennan and Jack McAuliffe. In early 1923, former champion Willard tried a comeback and was matched with the hard-hitting Argentine, with the winner to get the shot at Jack Dempsey for the heavyweight title. Rickard kept reassuring everyone who was skeptical of Firpo as a contender: "Why he's the nearest thing to Jeffries I ever looked at."[95] Rickard had billed the Willard-Firpo fight as the "Battle of the Giants," with the winner to fight Dempsey for the title. Rickard staged an elimination match between Firpo and former

champion Jess Willard, who had mounted a surprising comeback considering the beating he had taken in Toledo. The bout between the two giants provided plenty of excitement. True to Rickard's pre-fight press buildup, Firpo was the aggressor from the start of battle. The younger man was fighting the biggest bout of his life before Dempsey.

Willard boxed cleverly for eight rounds, jabbing from the outside. In the eighth, one of Firpo's sledgehammer overhand rights caught Willard on the chin and caused the giant ex-champ to crumble and be counted out. As a result, Firpo was in line for the title fight. Rickard had made an arrangement with Firpo, and he approached Kearns before the latter took off with Dempsey for Shelby, Montana, and the Gibbons fight. Rickard offered Dempsey $300,000 to fight Firpo, but Kearns flatly refused. He figured that Rickard could create another million-dollar gate, so he demanded $500,000. Rickard agreed to pay that amount.[96]

Rickard had his two fighters lined up, but it would be a greater challenge to create public interest in Firpo. Carpentier, the European king, had seemed a more popular draw than Firpo, the South American king. Firpo furiously and repeatedly drove into Willard with his thunderbolt right. Willard seemed unable to inflict any punishment on Firpo. Three days before the bout, Willard had injured his left hand. He had two doctors looking at the hand before fight time. Whenever he landed a blow on Firpo, the hand was wracked with pain. Firpo was crude but effective.

After eight rounds of punishment by the South American, the 42-year-old ring giant collapsed and was counted out. Firpo explained afterwards that "Willard gave me hell. I expected a tough fight, but I didn't think he would last as long as he did. Now I want a chance at Dempsey."[97] Willard explained, "I do not wish to appear as if I am alibi-ing, but I feel sure I could have defeated Firpo had my hand been all right."[98]

With 82,000 people in attendance, Willard got $185,000 and Firpo $110,000. Rickard had promoted another heavyweight fight that drew a million-dollar gate. Rickard was back in his best form. "I'm ready to match either Dempsey or Wills with Firpo now. It doesn't matter to me which one it is. I want to stage the next fight about Labor Day. I'd like to match Wills with Firpo if Wills will fight him. I tried to arrange that match before, though, and Wills wouldn't fight him."[99]

While Rickard struggled with his legal troubles and the Wills controversy, Dempsey went west and fought Tom Gibbons in a bout that was such a financial flop that it bankrupted the entire city of Shelby, Montana. In the days leading up to the bout, Dempsey started to worry about whether he was going to be paid in full. He called Rickard to ask for his advice. Without hesitating a moment, Rickard offered to have the bout moved to New York if all of the participants would agree. In addition, Rickard offered to pay all the guarantees.[100] The town of Shelby had already invested time and money in the project and wanted it to go forward. The Gibbons fight was filmed in a clumsy way, with Kearns featured standing beside Dempsey before the fight. The camera captured the Blackfeet Native Americans at ringside to emphasize the Western flavor of the spectacle. They appeared in headdress and braided hair. Gibbons had a crab-like defense that gave Dempsey trouble. He had an awkward way of shuttling over to his right whenever Dempsey unleashed a flurry, and he would lock up Dempsey's arms during the infighting. Gibbons hurt Dempsey several times, especially in round five with a straight left. Throughout the latter rounds, Gibbons was able to land counters as Dempsey pressed the fight. Dempsey threw more punches but for the most part they bounced off Gibbon's shoulders and gloves. Furthermore, on several occasions Dempsey walked right into sucker-punches thrown by the clever boxing challenger from

Jack Dempsey between two Blackfeet braves. Part Indian himself, Dempsey acquires a "war bonnet" for his brave deeds. Dempsey was not happy about the promotional arrangements for his fight with Gibbons in Selby, Montana.

St. Paul. Although Dempsey won a clear decision, Gibbons won the red badge of courage by being the only man to go fifteen rounds with the champion. The most important thing was that Dempsey looked very beatable against the much-smaller Gibbons. For Rickard, it was a prerequisite for a big-money fight — that the fans would have an expectation that Dempsey might lose his title.

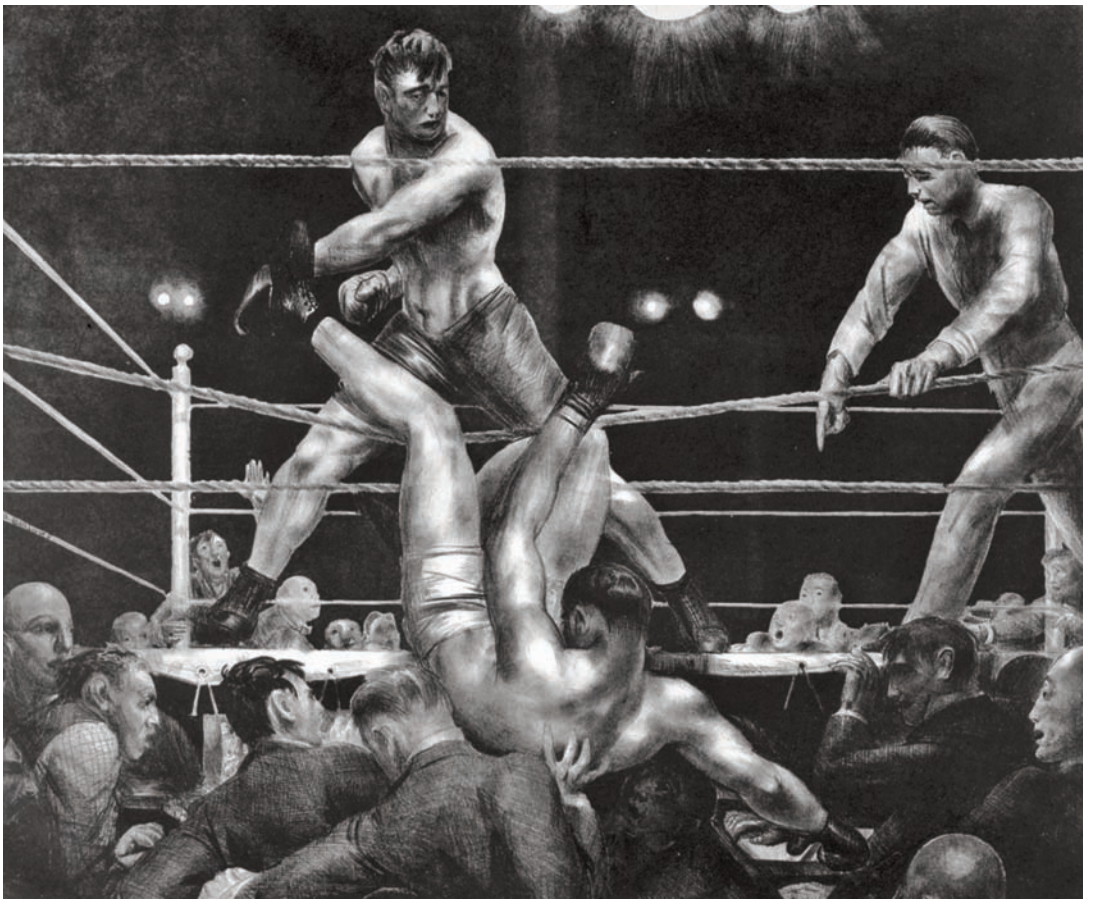
The stage was set for what many ring experts consider the most exciting ring brawl in history, excitement that would be captured and forever enshrined by American artist George Bellows in his painting Dempsey and Firpo, in 1924.

Jack Dempsey-Luis Firpo–the Second Million-Dollar Gate–New York's Polo Grounds–September 14, 1923

Once more, Rickard had occasion to enter Dempsey's dressing room before a fight to admonish the champion. "If you put him away with the first punch, all those people out there won't get their money's worth."

"Listen, Tex. There's one difference between this guy and Carpentier. Firpo is bigger and a slugger. He could kill me with one wallop."

"But, Jack, how is he gonna hit you? He's slow and moves like an old tub. I hate to



The "Wild Bull of the Pampas" knocks Dempsey completely out of the ring in the first round, September 14, 1923. The image was captured in George Bellows' most famous painting, *Dempsey and Firpo*, 1924 (Library of Congress).

think of all them nice millionaires going out of here sore at both of us."[101] Dempsey's manager Kearns was worried. Because he was unfamiliar with Firpo, he had sent spies into his training camp to watch him and report back. They reported that Firpo was "powerful" and "could take you out with one punch."[102]

Georges Carpentier had somehow managed to get up from the first knockdown in the fourth round two years before against Dempsey. "Allez-up" went the former French circus acrobat. In 1923, Dempsey would have ringside reporters yelling the same thing at the dazed champion when he was knocked completely out of the ring by the giant Argentinean, Luis Angel Firpo, who could hit like the Devil incarnate.

Firpo was the most dangerous, if not the most charismatic, of Dempsey's opponents. He weighed 220 pounds against Dempsey, who barely tipped the scales at 190 pounds for the fight. Rickard had first heard of Firpo on one of his junkets to South America while he was attempting to raise and export cattle.

Firpo was a bigger, cruder version of Dempsey, and he usually knocked out his opponents in one round or two. Like George Foreman a half-century later, Firpo had perfected the "anywhere" punch, so named because it caused damage anywhere it landed. Punchers

like Firpo leave bruised and broken bones on faces, arms, hips, ribs, or anywhere they land a blow. The enormous Argentinean stoked the imaginations of Americans, who saw in him a man who might finally be a match for Dempsey, the brutal "Manassa Mauler." The two sluggers put on a breath-taking slugfest that would become legend and confirm Rickard's genius for match-making in the prize ring.

The fans received a great show for their ticket money. While the fight lasted only one round and 57 seconds into the second, it was the most viciously fought four minutes in boxing history.

Joe Humphrey's booming voice announced: "In this corner, one of the greatest of all heavyweight champions, at 192½ pounds, Jack Dempsey. And in this corner, the challenger from Argentina, the pride of all South America, at 216½ pounds, Luis Angel Firpo."[103] With the aid of frame-by-frame analysis, it is possible to break down what those present that day in New York experienced as the wildest brawl in the history of the ring, one that would be recalled in American literature and recorded in American artist George Bellows' most famous painting, *Dempsey and Firpo*.

At the sound of the opening bell, Dempsey charged across the ring and threw a left hook to the body. Firpo answered with a chopping right to the chin that caught Dempsey coming in. The effects of this punch can be credited for Dempsey's kamikaze performance in the rest of the fight. Dempsey was out on his feet and only saved himself from falling by grabbing both of Firpo's arms and holding for a good ten seconds, ignoring the referee's attempt to break the fighters. Dempsey later admitted that he did not remember the rest of the bout.

When Dempsey was steady, if not clear-headed, he crashed two left hooks to Firpo's body and one to the chin that floored the giant Argentinean. Firpo rose and Dempsey attacked, holding with his right and swinging in three more crushing left hooks that put Firpo down again.

Firpo rose and fought back with pile-driver right hands. He drove Dempsey to the ropes, but Dempsey knocked him down again with a left hook to the body and a right uppercut. Firpo barely got to his feet when a right-handed swing knocked him down again. Once more, Firpo rose and as Dempsey charged in, a crushing right by Firpo to Dempsey's left ear put Dempsey down for a one-count.

Dempsey charged back in with a left and right to Firpo's head that dropped Firpo to all fours. He tried to get up but was immediately knocked back down by Dempsey, who standing over Firpo clubbed him with a left hook as he rose.

When Firpo was back on his feet Dempsey tried to finish him off. Firpo hurled his giant body into swinging lefts and rights that drove Dempsey back into the ropes. Dempsey cocked his right hand, but a clean right to the jaw beat Dempsey to the punch and knocked him headfirst, completely out of the ring. Dempsey landed on fight judge Kid McPartland, a one-time opponent of both Joe Gans and Battling Nelson, and the first row of journalists. Dempsey's legs were caught by the ropes.[104] Almost every reporter at the scene claimed to have cushioned Dempsey's fall. Hype Igoe, Walter Winchell, and even George Bellows reported to have taken the brunt of the fall.[105] Dempsey claimed he landed on Jack Lawrence, but then Dempsey did not remember even getting back into the ring.[106]

McPartland and several ringside reporters pushed Dempsey back into the ring. This was a clear violation of the rules, and Dempsey could have been disqualified for having been out of the ring for more than ten seconds and receiving assistance in returning to his fighting pose. Firpo hurled several more right-hand volleys. Dempsey held until the end of the round.

"What roundzit?" Dempsey asked when back on his stool.

"You just slipped," Kearns reassured him. "You're coming out for the second."[107]

Only one round had passed, but there had been more action than in almost any other fight in history, with Firpo going down seven times and Dempsey knocked out of the ring. Dempsey would later say that he did not remember anything after Firpo's first chopping right that had him hanging on for at least a ten-count at the opening bell.

"Was I knocked out?" His eyes would not focus and he was acting as though he had been kayoed.

Kearns hit him with a cold sponge of ice water. "You son of a bitch, you weren't knocked out.... Go out there and box this guy carefully. Let him think you're still groggy and look for the right opening."[108]

In round two, they exchanged more bombs before Firpo was floored for the tenth knockdown of the bout. He rose and took another crushing hook to the chin. Finally, Firpo was counted out. Many, including Damon Runyon, considered Firpo to have won because of the time Dempsey was out of the ring in round one. Dempsey would later say of his brush with defeat, "Losing is nothing but an occupational hazard."[109]

The torrid Dempsey-Firpo bout took on a legendary and almost mythical aspect. It was referenced in paintings, movies, and literature. In James Cain's classic novel, *The Postman Always Rings Twice,* the murderer's lawyer says after the trial, "Chambers, this is the greatest case I ever had in my life. I'm in it, and I'm out of it, in less than twenty-four hours, and yet I tell you I never had anything like it. Well, the Dempsey-Firpo fight lasted less than two rounds, didn't it? It's not how long it lasts. It's what you do while you are in there."[110] In James Cain's other classic, *Double Indemnity*, the murderer also pays homage to Jack Dempsey when the protagonist is shot in the chest. "There was a flash, and something hit me in the chest like Jack Dempsey had hauled off and given me all he had."[111]

Both Dempsey and Firpo had earned a king's ransom for less than five minutes of fighting. Dempsey asked Tex Rickard to pay his winnings directly to him instead of to his manager. Kearns still owed Dempsey money from previous fights, and Rickard was probably eager to comply with Dempsey's request.

Firpo complained that Dempsey had ignored the pre-fight instructions that a boxer must retire to a neutral corner after a knockdown. Firpo would fight and lose in 1924 to Harry Wills, but it was his complaint against Dempsey that launched the universal adoption of the neutral corner rule, the rule that was to figure in the famous long-count fight between Dempsey and Tunney a few years later. Firpo returned to Argentina where he leveraged his fame to become fabulously wealthy in his business endeavors.

Dempsey would not fight again for three years. The Firpo fight was his last successful title defense. Once again, Rickard's promotional genius at matchmaking had given the huge crowd not mere "bread and circuses" but rather a ring war of mythic proportions. To this day, the Dempsey-Firpo first round is considered the wildest and most exciting in history.

Chapter Six

Madison Square Garden: The House That Tex Built for Boxing

"There's Nothing Too Big for Tex Rickard to try,
—Here, Tex, Try these; Others Have Failed."
—*Oklahoma News,* March 31, 1916

A half-century before Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier made a cool $5 million for their Homeric bloodbath title fights in Madison Square Garden, Jack Dempsey, Gene Tunney, and a host of other great battlers of the 1920s had first infused life into the twentieth-century version of the Roman Colosseum.

Of all the grandiose visions that Tex Rickard realized in his life, the greatest testimonial to his accomplishments was his colossal sports palace. Standing on the corner of New York's Forty-ninth Street and Eighth Avenue exactly one year before he died, Rickard pointed up to Madison Square Garden and told reporter Ed Frayne, "That is my monument. That is the biggest thing in my life. I worked years to make it possible and I went through obstacles I never thought I could surmount."[1] For Tex, the brick and mortar shrine in New York represented as much solidity and closure in his risky life (having such a deep desire to leave his mark on the world) as it gave New Yorkers a sense of continuity and pride in their historic landmark. Rickard's quest was not a matter of vanity. He could have chosen to name the new building after himself, and there would have been little dissent considering his accomplishment. But given his personal attachment to the Garden, its landmark significance to New York, and the Garden's history as the Mecca of boxing, Rickard chose to transfer the name and bestow it upon his new sports-entertainment complex. Madison Square Garden, which had tottered on the brink of closure so many times, would survive and prosper, thanks to Tex Rickard.

It is hard to imagine twentieth-century boxing and entertainment in general in America without the iconic Madison Square Garden. There were so many great fights, so many movie scripts using the Garden as backdrop, that the feeling that Madison Square Garden is synonymous with boxing is ingrained in the American psyche.

Rickard's ambition to build the largest monument to the sport of boxing was both uniquely American and as ancient as that of Egyptian pharaohs' aspirations to build giant funerary monuments that would exist for all time. For Rickard, perhaps the Garden was just an upscale version of his popular Northern saloons that met the age-old need for people

to have a meeting place to relax, gamble, tell stories, and otherwise entertain themselves. Rickard understood that instinctively, just as the Roman emperors who had built the coliseums understood it.

History of Madison Square Garden

The building New Yorkers fondly refer to as Madison Square Garden has been a series of incarnations as an amusement park; yet with the exception of two programs, the circus and boxing, it was historically a financial white elephant. Early on, Barnum and Bailey brought in the circus crowds, and John L. Sullivan put on his wildly popular exhibitions of boxing skill for sell-out audiences. While the early architectural wonder housed many a fine show, its construction and maintenance cost small fortunes. Until Tex Rickard arrived, the income never covered the expenditures.

In its earliest days, the location was known as Tieman's Farm. It is perhaps amusing to note the Garden's precedent: "A House of Refuge for sinful boys stood in its center," and at the edge stood Corporal Thompson's Madison Cottage "where at the sign of the buckhorn, the trotting men of the period found frequent refreshment." Close by was Franconi's hippodrome, which housed horses and other "kinds of beasts."[2] After 1836, the area bounded by Madison and Fourth avenues and 26th and 27th streets was designated as a park called Madison Square. The property passed into the hands of Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt and became the site of the first union passenger railroad station in New York City in 1857. In the 1860s, Madison Square became known as the Harlem Railroad Station. The station was a rather unimpressive structure, "a mere low, sordid shed."[3] On one side the cars departed to Albany, and from the other they headed to Boston. The cars were pulled by horses to a point farther away where they could be attached to train engines. After 1871 when the Grand Central Terminal was built uptown, the property became a vacant lot and was leased by P.T. Barnum for his extravagant zoological tent displays. When not in use as a circus, "the interior was transformed into some semblance of a covered garden, and the place was very pleasant of an evening while Thomas's orchestra played amid the plants and tables. And so the name which it bequeathed to the present structure might, were accuracy more precious than anything else, be read as the Madison Square Beer-garden."[4]

P.T. Barnum's first circus events were considered little more than chicken and horse shows. As their importance increased, they became exciting extravaganzas, shows lit with hand-held torches and graced by beautiful women who turned summersaults atop spectacular stallions. Victorians loved classical history and archeology, and Barnum's re-creation of Roman chariot races driven by women, and cowboy and Indian chases were sensational entertainment. The circus impresarios were continually searching for bigger and better acts to ratchet up the entertainment. In 1882, Barnum purchased Jumbo, an elephant, for $10,000 from England's Royal Zoological Society, then sailed it to New York to be housed at the Garden. The elephant was such a popular attraction that "Jumbo"-size soon entered the language and became a fashionable measurement.

Barnum built a new giant oval for his shows and called this first structural incarnation of Madison Square Garden his "Great Roman Hippodrome," a direct link back to the days of the Roman Colosseum and gladiatorial entertainment. The name had been shortened from "Barnum's Monster Classical and Geological Hippodrome." Oratory was popular entertainment at the time, and the great structure drew speakers whose colorful linguistic

embellishments seemed as grand and vibrant as the circus tents. Majestic *carni*-men, revivalists, and politicians were extremely popular, and they enjoyed the fanfare under immense tents that could hold large audiences when the circus traveled away from its home base.

In 1876, the property was leased to Patrick Gilmore, a popular band leader, and the Garden became known for its outdoor concerts, going by the name of "Gilmore's Garden." In 1879, the Vanderbilt heirs renamed it for its historical location: Madison Square Garden.

In 1889 the Vanderbilts sold the city block to another group of famously moneyed Americans who established their own corporation comprised of William Astor, Andrew Carnegie, J.P. Morgan, and James Stillman. The new corporation demolished the oval arena and hired architects McKim, Mead, and White (known locally by the whimsical title of McKim, Gold, and White for the firm's inexhaustible use of gold paint and white stucco). The architects had designed many of the important New York public buildings.[5] For the Madison Square Garden property, Stanford White designed a large covered amphitheater in the Moorish style of a cathedral.

Above the Garden's roof stood the tower, the highest observation tower in America at the time: thirty feet in diameter, 341 feet high, with brick walls 3½ feet thick. (The tower was inspired by the Giralda, the bell tower at the Cathedral of Seville, a Moorish-styled structure built in the twelfth century with the statue of *Faith* at the top.) The Garden's tower was seven stories high, and accommodated an elevator to reach a small apartment on each level and the café at the top.

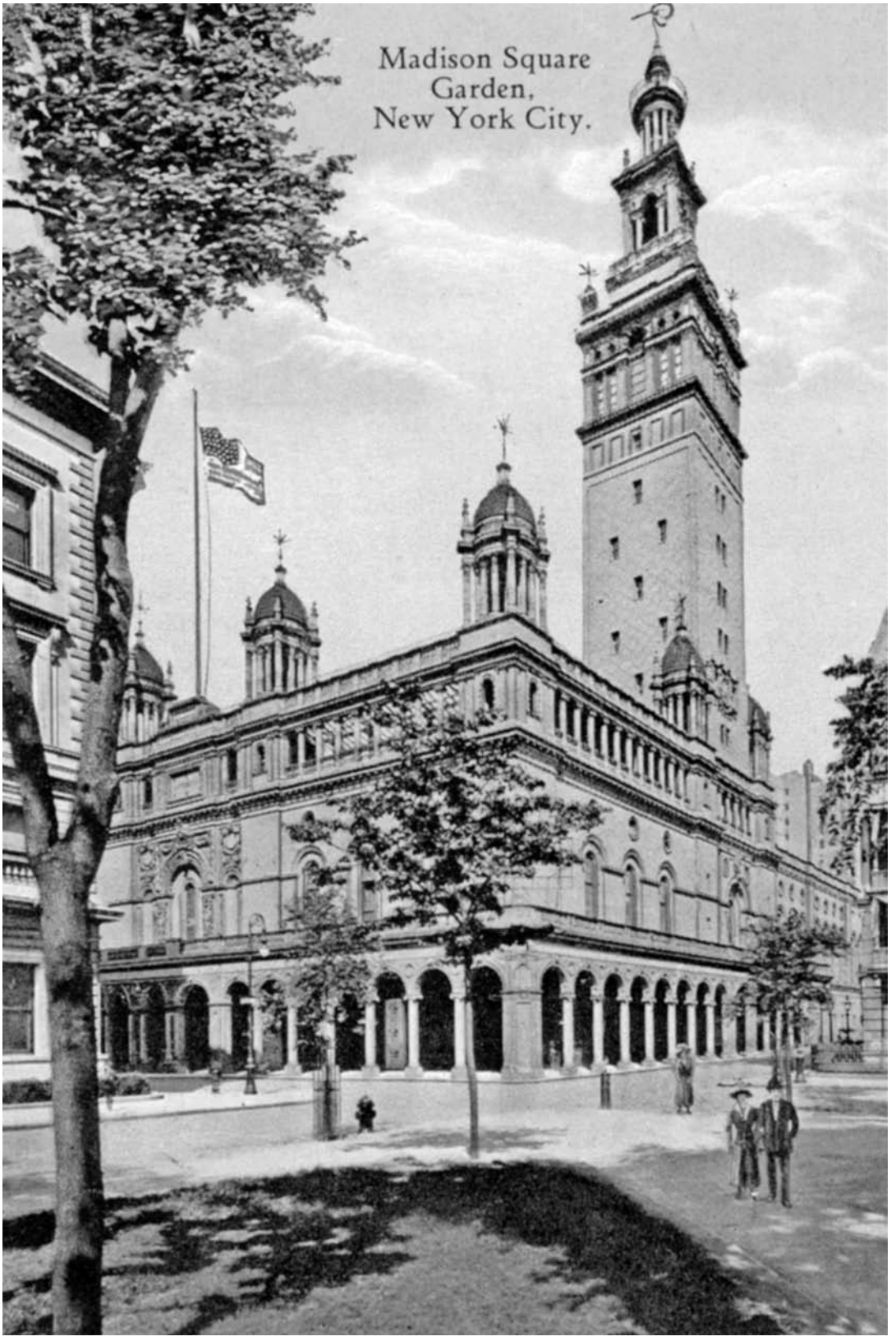
The figure at the peak of the tower was Diana, goddess of the hunt. The first bronze statue of Diana, designed by August Saint-Gaudens, appeared disproportionately large, according to the architect, in relation to its underlying structure. The original statue was removed and donated to the Columbian Exhibition in Chicago in 1893 for display over the Agricultural Building pointing to the Court of Honor. A second, smaller Diana was constructed for the Madison Square Garden tower.

The new building opened for business on June 16, 1890, with a ballet directed by Leon Spinosa and a concert by Viennese director Edward Strauss. The roof garden was opened in 1892. The cost of the entire structure was reported to be in the $3 million range, a fortune reflecting the tastes of its wealthy investors. But it was built to last. "The new Garden was built so big and so beautiful that it will never be removed. 'I am here to stay,' it very plainly says; 'and so other places of amusement must stay, and other fine buildings must come; and at all events for many years, New Yorkers, in their idle hours, will be tempted to gather nowhere else.'"[6]

From the moment it opened, Madison Square Garden became a conspicuous center for the fashionable amusements of New York. The large amphitheater held fixed seats for 6,000 spectators, and when chairs were added to the floor, the space could accommodate 10,000. The acoustics were extremely poor, making it difficult for a speaker to be heard across the expansive floor, but for the musical or visual entertainments, such as the horse and bicycle shows, the building was adequate.

After its glorious opening, the Garden proceeded to lose $18,000. While it remained a losing operation from the beginning, it continued to host some of New York's finest Wild West shows, beauty contests, and sporting entertainment. Its exhibitions included everything from horses and dog shows to baby contests and boxing.

The Garden was not without a stormy past, even before Tex Rickard became involved. The tower was simply a hornet's nest of intrigue. The "sexcapades" of the wealthy were


Madison Square
Garden,
New York City.

exciting newspaper fodder for readers during this period of yellow journalism, and dalliances at the Garden were always popular. In 1906 the Garden's architect, Stanford White, became infatuated with the teenage Evelyn Nesbitt, the quintessential Gibson Girl, better known to future generations as the "girl in the red velvet swing." Nesbitt had been the model for the nude statue of Diana that sat atop White's famous tower. One evening while at dinner in the tower restaurant, White was shot and killed by Evelyn's jealous husband, Harry Thaw. The murderer was acquitted on grounds of insanity in what was called the first "Great Trial of the Century."

By 1920, the fate of the Garden was in peril. When the owners of the building failed to make timely payments on their loan, the company holding the mortgage on the property, the New York Life Insurance Company, threatened to shut it down on July 12, 1920. The insurance company wanted to raze the structure to make way for a newer, more modern building. The owner's attitude seemed to change when Tex Rickard came to them with an enticing offer to lease the building.[7] With the help of John Ringling, Tex Rickard signed a ten-year lease for the iconic amusement palace and became the first manager to make Madison Square Garden operations consistently profitable. New Yorkers' fears seemed to be allayed — they would not lose their Garden and its time-honored traditions. The Garden flourished under Rickard with the traditional circus, rodeos, bicycle races, horse shows, and boxing. Attendance averaged three million people per year.

Boxing's Social Benefits

Early in his management of the Garden, Rickard and New York's aristocratic women (and their ladies-aid charities) became mutual fans. Rickard, always one to include the ladies at his boxing events, realized that the participation by the New York women would not only increase the gate but also improve boxing's image. In January of 1921, Ann Morgan, daughter of the Garden's long-time patron J.P. Morgan, asked Rickard to organize and sponsor an affair for her charity, the American Friends of France. Rickard proposed a boxing match at the Garden because the event was likely to bring in the most money. He proposed a championship battle, featuring New York's popular Benny Leonard and Richie Mitchell for the lightweight title. The bout was so popularly attended that it raised more than $75,000 for Morgan's relief efforts. In that the proceeds went to charity, it opened the gates, literally, to women. The idea was ingenious. It was an event sponsored by a woman, and meant to raise money for a good cause. The *New York Times* reported that now a "woman's place is at the ring side. This is the dictum of 1921, at least for a part of New York 'society.'"[8] Only secondarily in importance was the fight billed as an excitement for the men who flocked to the fundraiser with their wives' approval. For a time, at least, the charitable boxing shows quelled the Reformers' arguments that nothing of moral benefit could come of boxing events.

In 1923, Mrs. William Randolph Hearst wanted a "fistic carnival" for her charity. Millicent Hearst was chairman of the Mayor's Committee of Women, a group appointed originally to raise funds to aid the French war efforts. After the war, the group continued to solicit and donate money to local charities. Rickard's success with the Morgan event encouraged Mrs. Hearst to seek a similar fundraiser. The New York socialite asked Tex to stage a

Opposite: **The original Madison Square Garden designed by Stanford White served as the venue for circus and sporting events alike (Underwood).**

bout that would be called "the Greatest of all Charity Affairs," with the proceeds going to aid the Free Milk Fund for New York's underfed children.[9] She had gone to the right person.

Rickard believed that with Hearst's support he could stage an event with greater attendance than what the Garden could hold. Rickard became the first promoter to stage a boxing card at Yankee Stadium. His great "Heavyweight Carnival" on May 12, 1923, accomplished three things: it provided milk and other staples for New York children; it proved to Rickard that elimination bouts or "the build up" to a title fight could be profitable; and it showed Rickard, through several eliminations, who might be the best contender for the heavyweight title. His card featured the following:

1. Jess Willard, the "Pottawatomie Giant," against Floyd Johnson, a Californian called the "Auburn Bulldog." Johnson had just come off a win over Fred Fulton. Willard TKO'd Johnson in the 11th round of a scheduled 15-round fight.
2. "Tiny" Jim Herman (actually not so tiny at 280 pounds) to meet Fred Fulton, the 6'6½" "Rochester Plasterer;" but when Herman withdrew from the match, Fulton was paired with Jack Renault. Fulton was disqualified in the fourth round.
3. Luis Angel Firpo KO'd Jack McAuliffe II, a.k.a. Henry Bussineau, a 6'3" heavy from Detroit, in the third round of a scheduled 15-round fight.

Attendance totaled 63,000. (The highest paid attendance in boxing's history at Yankee Stadium was when Joe Louis KO'd Max Baer in 1935 when 88,000 attended.) Minus expenses, Mrs. Hearst's charity collected $182,903.26. Afterward, she proudly announced to the press that she expected to earn an additional $25,000 from the proceeds of the fight films. She gave a grand thank you to "All who helped make the fistic carnival the Greatest of Charity Affairs. This includes Rickard and William Muldoon, chairman of the Boxing Commission."[10] It was ironic that she bragged about making money from the fight films when Rickard and others had been convicted of illegal commerce over the issue.

With Rickard at the helm, boxing events encouraged a glamorous "coming out" for women. And with more elegant women attending boxing events (in that they were the ones who could afford the high prices Rickard charged for ringside seats), the sport became even more socially acceptable. It was considered sexy to see a boxing match at the Garden. It was during this period that Madison Square Garden became an iconic draw for the stage and screen. In 1924 the Garden was used as the background set for the silent film, *The Great White Way*, about boxing and Broadway. (The "Great White Way" was a designation given to a section of Broadway Avenue that was lit by electric lights before 1900 and later by neon lights.) The movie was filmed by W.R. Hearst's production company, the Cosmopolitan, and was remade twelve years later as *Cain and Mabel*, starring Clark Gable and Marion Davies, continuing to reinforce the glamorous image of the Garden.

Little did anyone know at the time that the financial ax was about to drop on Madison Square Garden and the temple to entertainment built by Stanford White. The president of New York Life announced that Madison Square Garden would close permanently.

April 26, 1924, would see the last Ringling circus in the original Garden. In May, Rickard and Ringling, who were only four years into their ten-year lease, were notified that their time at Madison Square Garden was being cut short. In June, a representative from New York Life filed architectural plans with the city to replace the Garden with the company's proposed high-rise office complex. The filing was public and very unwelcomed news. The *New York Times* headline announced, "Diana of the Garden to Lose Job on Tower." The story began frostily, "While Madison Square Garden is at the height of its fame, Darwin

P. Kingsley, President of the New York Life Insurance Company, announces that Diana, the St. Gauden's lady in bronze atop the Moorish tower, must go. The Garden is to be torn down and be replaced by a new building for the New York Life Insurance company."[11]

The insurance company had threatened destruction of the property years earlier when it foreclosed on a $2.3 million mortgage, and Rickard had saved the day with his lease. Now, even Rickard seemed helpless to save the architectural masterpiece, which was still considered a structurally sound landmark. The public was outraged. New Yorkers spouted their opinions to the press in loud volumes, but they were not able to save the building. (Their outrage eventually led to the preservation of other historical New York landmarks.) But after realizing that Madison Square Garden could not be saved and was going to be demolished, New Yorkers spent the next year trying to save the now-famous statue of Diana, designed by Saint Gaudens, notable in that when the naked effigy was originally proposed, many New Yorkers had mixed feelings about it. Now it was viewed as a city treasure. Diana and Tex prominently filled the news from 1924 to 1925. Only slightly more press attention was given to saving Diana in 1925. A well-respected committee, chaired by Elihu Root, was formed to determine a suitable site for her relocation.[12] Rickard was busy with financial matters. He and his partner were given one year, from May 1924 to May 1925, in which to vacate the old building.

Despite the fact that they had lost their lease, Tex Rickard and John Ringling did not alter their commitments. They continued to spend a small fortune donating their venue for public events. When the unfortunate news about the building was announced, Rickard was in the middle of transforming the swimming pool into a grand political arena, swathed in state flags, for the upcoming Democratic National Convention. He had previously committed to donate the facility free of charge to the Democratic National Committee for two weeks in the summer, beginning July 24. The event was the first national political convention to be held at the Garden and would host the largest number of people ever assembled for a press event. More than 850 desks were assigned to reporters in the arena gallery, with an equal number of spots allocated in the press basement. Work on the arena required the addition of miles of telephone and telegraph cables.

During the time it took to transfigure the building, host the convention, and strike the set, Rickard and Ringling went without income. The swimming pool that had to be shut down early for the convention normally took in revenues of $3,000 per day. The short season and final week of regular boxing included a benefit for the American Olympic Committee, on April 29, featuring Young Willie Stribling against Mike Burke, Jack Zivic against Ever Hammer, and Paul Berlenbach and Harold Abbott. (Berlenbach broke his hand in the bout.)[13] Rickard would showcase Olympic star Paavo Nurmi, a runner who had won five medals in the summer games of 1924. The event packed a full house on January 6, 1925.

Rickard spent the next week with his head in his newspapers and notes, studying up on the boxers who had made the news during the previous year, 1924. Rickard was a promotional genius, very creative, and always thinking about ways to organize the sport. For the first time in history, Rickard worked to rank fighters according to their weight categories. He established nine categories and listed the top ten international boxers according to a ranking based upon his opinion. Rickard was a well-respected expert on the sport, not only in America, but also in other parts of the boxing world. His ranking was expected to be published in a new magazine called *The Ring*, edited by Nat Fleischer. Rickard had provided two of his assistants to start the magazine. Rickard's list of rankings was intended to be published in the first issue of 1925, in January, but it made the February issue instead. It

In January 1924, Rickard traveled to D.C. with the delegation from New York to win the bid for the upcoming National Democratic Convention to be held in Madison Square Garden (National Photo Co., Jan. 15, 1924, Library of Congress).

was the first world ranking of boxers, and all selections were made by Tex Rickard.[14] The list proved very popular, and in addition to being published annually in *The Ring*, it would be published annually in the newspapers. Rickard continued to make his lists ("Rickard's Ranking") until his death in 1929, with his final list being published posthumously. It was another example of the innovation and order the maestro brought to the chaotic world of boxing.

Only a few days later, Rickard began demolishing the old structures at the car barns that he had purchased to make way for a new uptown sports complex a mile and a half away from the former Garden. He announced the new Garden would be "the largest building in the world devoted exclusively to amusements."[15]

Farewell to the Old Garden

The wrecking ball was scheduled to begin its work on May 6, 1925. The final six-week run of Ringling's "Greatest Show on Earth" in March marked 52 uninterrupted years of circus at Madison Square Garden.

The "farewell battle" in the old Madison Square Garden was scheduled for the evening of May 5, 1925. The bout between lightweights Johnny Dundee and Sid Terris was not a crowd-pleaser, but most of the packed house of 10,105 attendees came for other, more sentimental reasons. Many current and former boxers, managers, trainers, promoters, politicians, sportswriters and commissioners poured in. Dempsey and his wife were there, along with Kid McPartland, Frank Bagley, John O'Brien, Jack Waldron, Mayor James J. Walker, William Muldoon, and Paddy Mullen. They all said they had come to see the fight, but really they had come to say goodbye to the place.[16]

The undercard had two four-round bouts (featherweights Marty Silvers vs. Joey Dorando and welterweights Wiley Reily vs. Jack Zabelsky) and a six-round battle between featherweights Jimmy Trannet and Nick Quagerelli. The semi-final bout brought together featherweights Jack Snyder and Eddie Shea. The fight card would go down in history as the last fight in the old Madison Square Garden. Certainly the participants expected their names to make fistic history, but sadly hardly anyone today recognizes the names.

Long-time New York announcer Joe Humphreys introduced the 12-round match. The crowd came to see Dundee and was displeased when the decision went to Terris. Spectators booed and jeered from the time of the announcement to the time Terris left the ring. As Jack Lawrence wrote, "the decision was close," but Dundee was "never in trouble" and was "strong in the finish." The *Herald Tribune* score sheet indicated that Terris clearly won four of the twelve rounds, Dundee had the edge in three, and the other rounds were even.[17]

After the bout, Humphreys began his doleful valediction: "I wish to say that this marks the passing of this old arena that has stood the acid test these many years. Tonight we leave it for the last time. We mourn our loss, and take with us fragrant memories...." It was a slip of the tongue that was quickly picked up by a spectator who yelled back at him, "I can still smell them hotdogs and elephants."

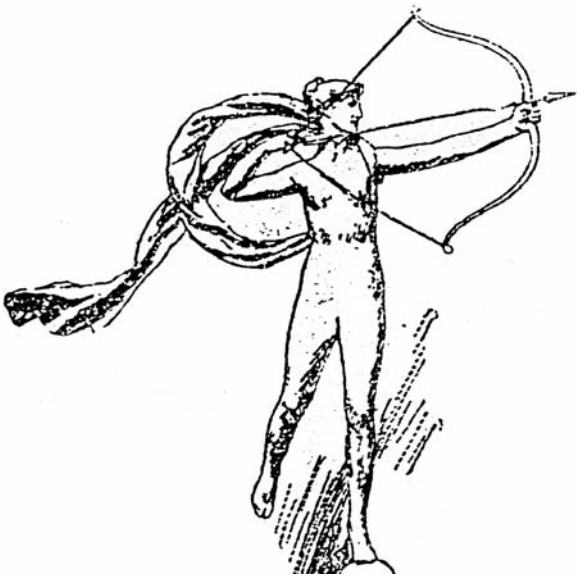
Never missing a beat, Joe retorted, "The more I hear from guys like you, the more I believe in birth control." He continued with his soliloquy, "These memories will live forever in our hearts and in our minds. The great sport that made it stand out was boxing, and I want to pay tribute now to Tex Rickard and others I met within these portals."

Then a lone bugler, Sergeant John F. Mullin of the 69th Regiment, played *Taps.* The

sad song was followed by a chorus of *Auld Lang Syne*.[18] Rickard leaned on his cane and watched in amazement at what he had created and where he had come to at this point in his life. Normally, Rickard was not boastful but on that evening he commented, "I am sorry to say goodbye to the old place myself. It has been good to me, and I have had a lot of fun in it, and I am rather proud of the fact that I am the only man who ever made it pay. The Garden was all right, it had never been run properly, that was all."[19]

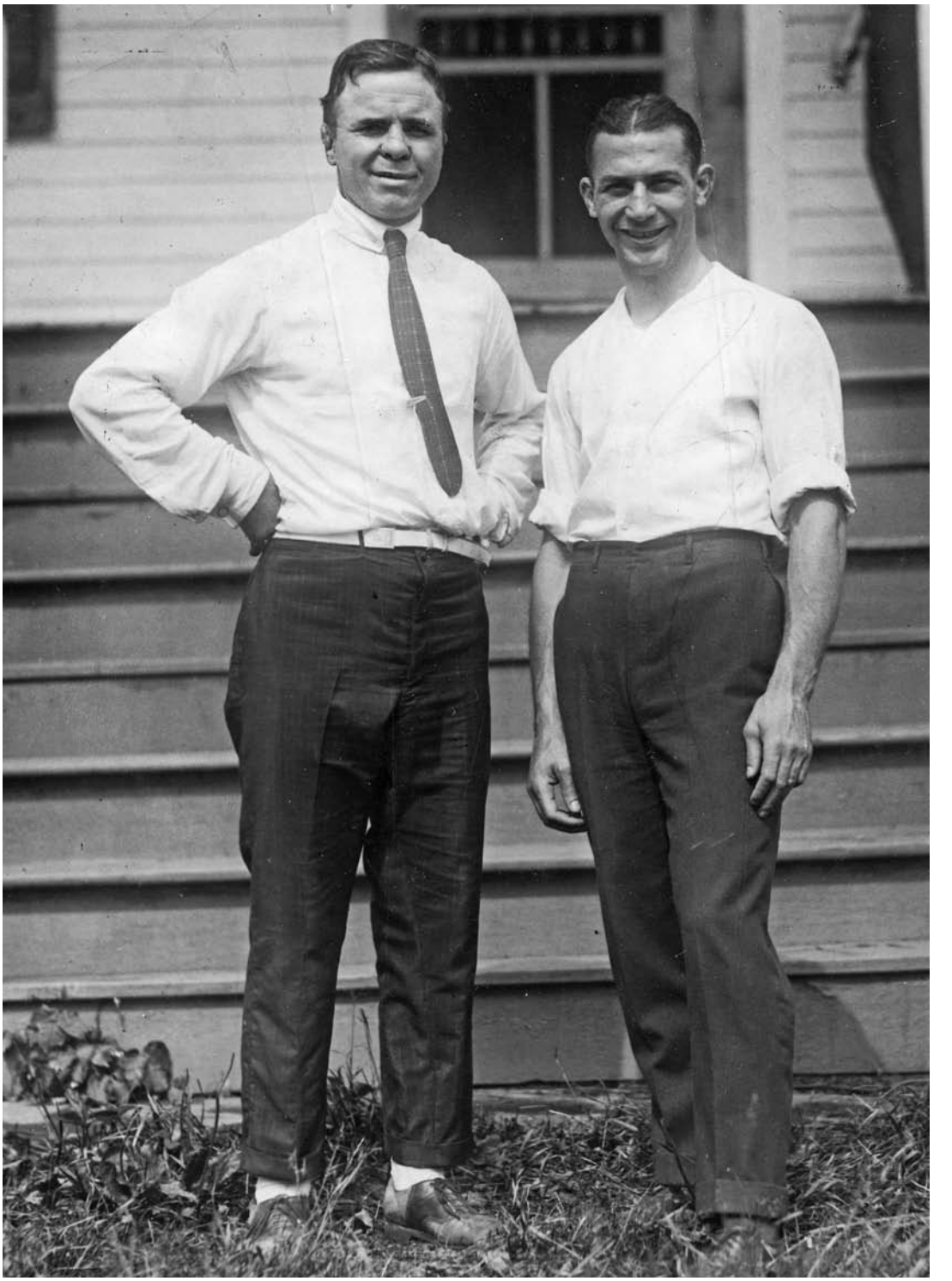
The next day, the statue of Diana was scheduled to be taken down from the tower. City officials along with those at New York Life received countless appeals to save her. The *New York Times* printed this appeal from boxer Benny Leonard sent to the New York Life Insurance Company:

> It was with no small amount of trepidation that I read that the New York Life Insurance Company was contemplating tearing down Madison Square Garden. My interest in the old structure is purely sentimental, my thoughts being solely with the statue of Diana poised atop the tower.
>
> Diana has always been my goddess of luck. At every fight of mine at the Garden, I have made it a point to get a look at her before going into the ring. When the going was not so good for me, I thought of her while resting in my corner and always managed to rally.
>
> Now that you intend to raze the Garden and put in its place a modern office building, I feel moved to ask what is to become of the statue. Is it going to fall with the building, to be hauled away with the bricks, timbers and girders? Surely so lowly an end is not to come to her who has so gracefully hunted over the roofs of the city?
>
> Aside from my interest in Diana as my goddess of luck, I have great admiration for the statue as a work of art. Desiring to save it, I am requesting that you consider this letter a bid for the statue in case you should definitely decide to raze the Garden. I would make every effort to place it where everyone would appreciate its beauty and at the same time preserve my luck.[20]



Diana, the goddess of the hunt, perched upon the Madison Square Garden tower, was a good luck charm for boxer Benny Leonard (drawn by A.F. Jaccaci, 1893).

The removal of Diana created its own event. While workmen disassembled her from her mount and crated her remains to be stored in a warehouse, a band played in Madison Square Park. People gathered on the street, crowded onto rooftops and peered from windows of nearby office buildings to watch as she descended, tangled in the ropes attached to a tripod derrick built atop the tower's roof. Tex watched over the work. He stood, along with some invited guests, officers of the insurance company, and the architect of the new building that would replace the old, on the wooden running track on the roof as the statue of Diana was brought down. On-lookers were amazed at how beautiful she was at close view: her arms were lithe and agile, her face finely featured, and her lips full. Only her bronzed patina had aged. It had turned green with time, and she was



Battling Nelson (left) with Benny Leonard, who would dominate the lightweight division in the 1920s.

missing her sash. Originally, the 12-foot statue had served as a weather vane. The naked goddess was fitted with a long sash streaming behind her to catch the wind and shift her position such that her arrow pointed into the wind. But two decades earlier her sash had mysteriously disappeared, and she was left to stare motionless with her steady gaze over the Garden. The headlines recorded the event, and reporters were not kind to the insurance company that owned her: "Diana Gives Up Peak at Garden After 30 Years: Goddess Brought to Earth by Wreckers as Notables See Commerce Triumph Again Over Famous Art."[21] One reporter noted, "There is probably no other nation in the world which could lament a thirty-year-old building as an ancient relic of a forgotten age." The general consensus was that Madison Square ceases to be itself without Madison Square Garden. They also pointed out the irony that the owners of the building were replacing it with a building that the "architectural critics" called "more American."[22]

In 1925 under Root's Committee to save Diana, Leonard's lucky statue was donated by Darwin P. Kingsley, president of New York Life, to the University of New York. While it was formally accepted by the university's president, it was never moved there. It is currently located in the Philadelphia Museum of Art.[23]

On the final evening a four-hour reception was held at Madison Square Garden where everyone who had ever appeared at the Garden was invited back. The list included actors, prizefighters, circus masters, bicycle racers, musicians, and Broadway performers. The program included a community songfest, a host of cheerleaders, and comments from members of some of the oldest New York families. It was a sad evening for New Yorkers. They were losing their beautiful architectural landmark, but they were not completely losing an entertainment palace. Rickard again would come to their rescue. He planned to build a new landmark entertainment complex that was even larger than the original.

Feelings were mixed. Was Tex Rickard, the man from the West, getting too big for his britches? Some New Yorkers and others seemed to think so.

Trouble Brewing Again for Rickard

While Rickard had considered the Johnson-Jeffries bout his greatest fight card, he did not relish the social fallout caused by another mixed-racial fight and especially the controversy that resulted over the films of the bout. In 1912 Congress enacted legislation under inter-state commerce to ban the transportation of fight films across state lines. It was an act meant to retaliate against Jack Johnson by denying him income and publicity from his most famous fight in 1910, and certain legislators never forgot that Rickard had been the promoter of that fight.

Much of the earnings from big fight affairs came from the public's viewing of the fights in theaters across the country for many years afterwards. When Johnson was eventually chased out of the United States, enforcement of the anti-fight film law was lax. If convicted, the distributors usually had to pay a fine of $1,000. It was tantamount to paying for a license fee. But the law remained on the books in case another disreputable or trouble-making figure happened to emerge.

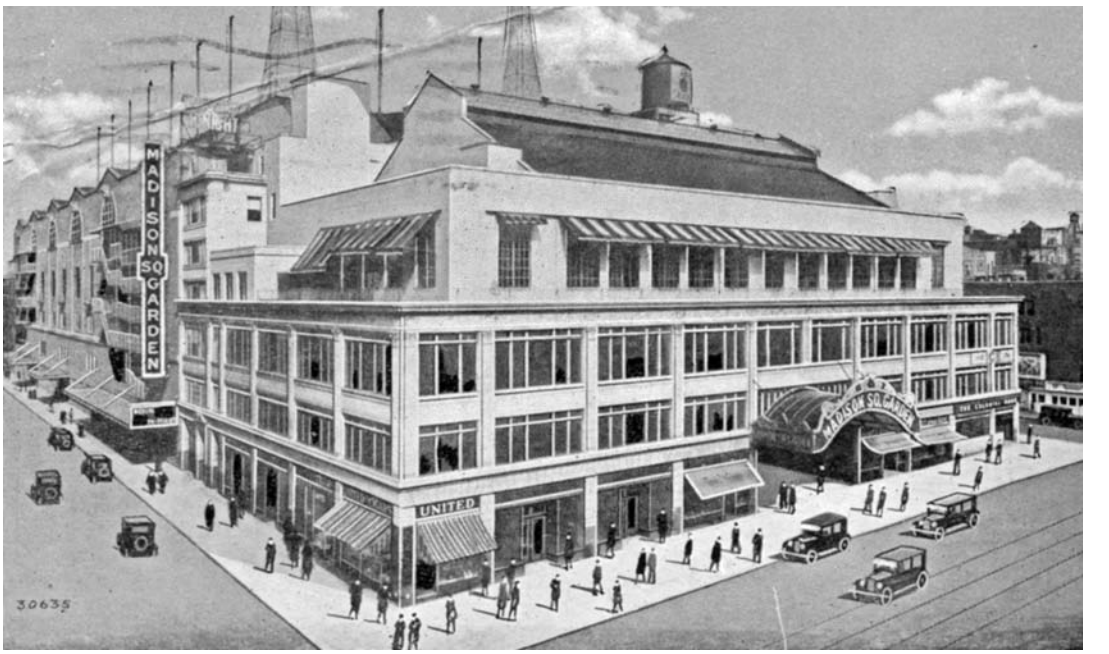
By 1925, Rickard's promotional success was starting to look like a monopoly. Other promoters, arena owners, and fight managers grumbled. Politicians saw the anti-film law as the chance to put the nail in Rickard's coffin, as far as promoting fights was concerned. Amid great publicity, Rickard was tried, convicted, and forced to pay a fine, along with five

co-defendants in Trenton, New Jersey, for "conspiracy to violate the interstate commerce law by illegally transporting films of the Dempsey-Carpentier fight," the fight for which the film was made four years earlier. It is interesting that one of the co-defendants was Fred Quimby, who became a major executive at MGM, winning eight Academy Awards.[24]

The House That Tex Built for Boxing

In 1924, Tex Rickard and John Ringling bought property and made plans for a new jumbo-sized sports coliseum. Rickard first tried to talk his financier friends into putting a roof over the New York Polo Grounds and walling it in so that he could stage boxing matches year-round. His friends, however, could not be convinced of the project's feasibility. Rickard then looked for a property that could accommodate a building to seat between 23,000 and 32,000 people—10,000 more than the Olympia in London, which was at the time the largest covered amphitheater in the world.

The property Rickard found for his new construction was valued at $2.5 million. It comprised the streetcar barn site, bounded by Eighth and Ninth avenues and Forty-ninth and Fiftieth streets. Clearing the trolley barn and two nearby smaller properties would give builders 102,500 square feet of working room to plan for a new Garden.[25] Rickard had been so impressed with the Philadelphia Sesquicentennial Exhibit Hall that, according to Jack Lawrence, he bought the main exhibition building and had it brought to New York in sections to use as the Garden's cornerstone towers.[26] The architect for the new project (originally called the Starling Park Project), Thomas W. Lamb, incorporated the Philadelphia façade into the design. Later, the Sesquicentennial structure was dropped in favor of a newly created, less ornate design.



Rickard's Madison Square Garden, completed in 1925.

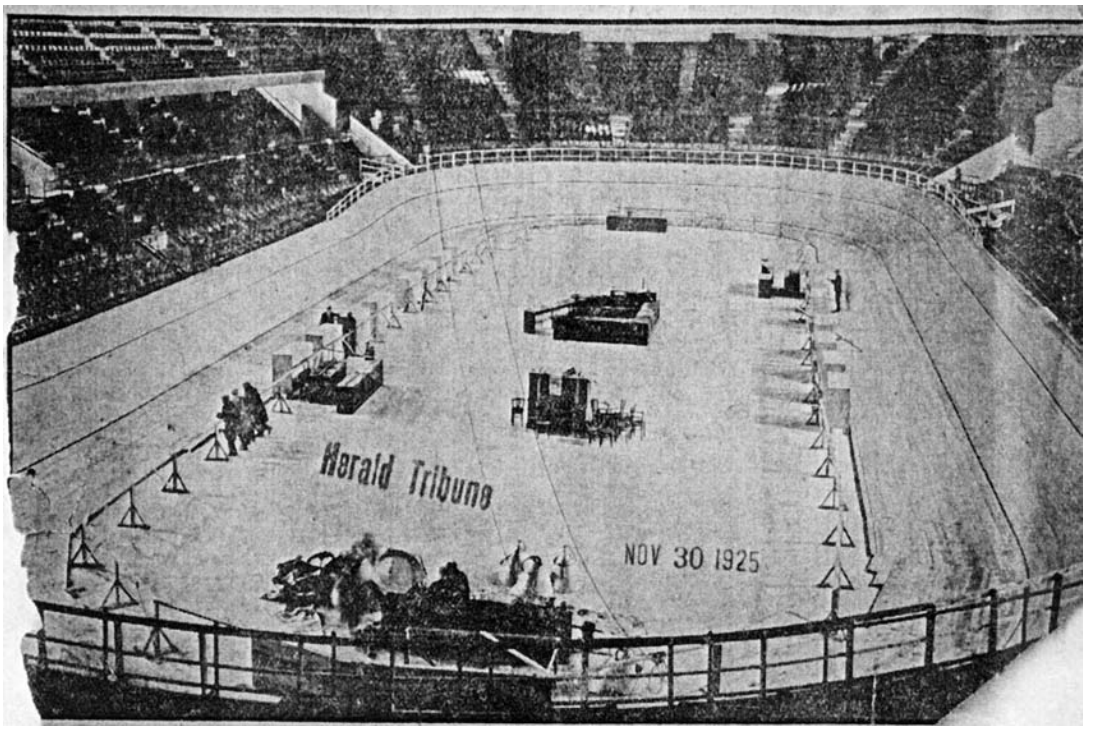
The initial cost of materials and construction of the building, originally estimated at $5.5 million (although some reported the costs as high as $18 million), were financed by a syndicate of Wall Street bankers. Not everyone Rickard approached considered his project worthwhile. Many thought that the original Garden patrons would never move to a new location twenty five blocks away. Nevertheless, Rickard managed to gather together what he called his "600 millionaires" to fund a corporation. The syndicate was called the New Madison Square Garden Corporation, and it was headed by Allen A. Week & Company. The corporation opened sale of its stock to the public, advancing $1 million of stock at $20 per share in order to bring in revenues for the immense building project.[27] Rickard was granted a twenty-year lease and an annual salary of $30,000 to run Madison Square Garden. He made plans to move into a penthouse on West End.

Shortly after the ground was cleared for the new building, Rickard's joy was shattered when the doctors called him to the bedside of his wife, Edith Mae. She had been ailing for quite some time with what Rickard called "a bad ticker" or weak heart. Rickard had her attended by the best doctors in New York who assured him that all she needed was rest. At their advice, Rickard located the finest sanitarium for her care and rest. But when he visited her to tell her of the great news about the opening of Madison Square Garden, he learned that in her weakened condition she had developed pneumonia. When the doctor finally gave Rickard the sad news that she had little time left, Edith Mae died only a few hours later with Rickard at her side. They had been partners in some of the most thrilling and challenging adventures of the new century, but she would not be at his side to share in the pinnacle of Rickard's success.

As he had done in the past, Tex "bit down on" his sorrow at his wife's passing. He threw his energies into his new building. With Rickard's supervision, construction progressed in a timely fashion. Contractors worked day and night, beginning in the fall of 1924. The public was captivated and the newspapers followed the progress with photos. Ringling spear-headed the celebration of the excavation by bringing in two of his circus elephants, Babe and Old John, to visit the New Garden site. The elephants worked hand-to-"trunk" next to the excavators. The press ate it up. To commemorate the completion of the superstructure, Rickard, accompanied by J.A. Sessler, works manager, and Robert Dunn, superintendent of construction, raised the American flag over the bones of the structure.[28] There was a musical contest to determine the best march to be played at the grand opening. Rickard predicted that the building would be ready for events in November of 1925. He predicted correctly.

The Madison Square Garden that would dominate boxing in the twentieth century was open for business. There were two and half weeks of preliminary events before the official opening, which occurred on December 15, 1925. The first event was one that the previous Garden had held for 35 years: the annual six-day bicycle sprint races. The event was opened by boxing commissioner Jim Farley, who fired a pistol to start the race on November 28, 1925. No one seemed to mind that the race went through Sunday, and that because of the "blue laws" it was illegal to hold a professional sporting event on Sunday. The race progressed as planned.

The building's grand entrance was yet to be completed; however, Rickard was not going to let a few pieces of tangled iron prevent him from opening the Garden as he had planned. Only a few days before the bicycle event, Rickard was found rushing around and overseeing construction, dripping with plaster, and according to one reporter, looking like



Rickard opened his Garden with the six-day bicycle races (G.G. Bain Collection, Library of Congress).

"a forlorn Santa Claus."[29] But against the advice and predictions of the naysayers, Rickard's vision was becoming a reality. Like boxing, his determination was directed by one goal: when you go into the ring, you've got to go in it to win. Rickard had once again succeeded in saving and rebuilding what was called "the most historic home of sport the world has ever known."[30]

The opening was an emotional milestone that echoed the long history of boxing. One reporter had captured the true essence of Rickard. Jack Lawrence said of the project, "Tex had his Eighth Avenue vision and was bent on making it materialize."[31] He had listened to all the reasons why the proposed project would end in disaster — that boxing matches could never fill such a large building or cover the Garden's expenses. As Lawrence reported, "That was last summer [1924], and to say that it was a tough summer for Mr. Rickard would be stating the case mildly."[32] But Rickard was not the type to let obstacles hinder his vision. He simply replied, "In the four-and-a-half years we have had charge of the old Garden, more than seven million persons have been entertained there. We believe that the millions who will come to the new one are incalculable."[33] He thought grandly, but his boundless energy and personal supervision made the project happen.

Everything about the new Garden spoke of comfort, including its five box offices, seven entrances, and enough seats to accommodate the dining pleasures of 17,000 persons. The indoor arena was 40 feet longer than that of the previous Garden, with floor space exceeding it by 25 square feet. While the old Garden could hold 7,000 for the bicycle race, the new one could accommodate at least 17,000. Depending upon the event, the arena was expected to hold 24,000 people. Rickard's amphitheater was now the largest indoor arena

in existence up to that time, and the place was filled to capacity for the cycling event, more by gawkers eager to get a first glimpse of the new building than by the sport's enthusiasts.

The new Garden had a decidedly clean and modern appearance. It was deeper on the sides, and the end balconies hung lower. Where the rafters in the old arena were covered with cobwebs, the new structure was encased in steel. Everything the eye could see was made of steel, stone, or concrete. Whereas the old Garden was smoky, the new building had the benefit of ten 14-foot ventilator systems perched overhead. Rickard explained that the massive machines could suck out stale air and re-circulate fresh air with six complete changes of air per hour. In addition, air temperature could be regulated, allowing indoor events to be attended in complete comfort year round. The place was a modern engineering marvel, complete with the Western Electric public address system and telephone wires throughout. Lights overhead were electrified by three-wire, 110- and 220-volt currents. For the patrons' comfort and security, twenty-five stations were manned by the Holmes Protective Service. Rickard also intended to introduce hockey in a big way to New Yorkers. Under the terrazzo tile flooring was imbedded 12.5 miles of pipe that could be used to freeze water for winter sports.

The boxing ring was Rickard's personal gem. The old Garden had never been built to showcase boxing. The new one was. It was so luxurious that sportsmen said "any boxer should be glad to be knocked out in it! This ring is surely the most luxurious of all rings

Rickard's original ring, now on display at the International Boxing Hall of Fame. The ring posts are equipped with red lights that began flashing upon a knockdown of a boxer (photograph by the authors, 2011).

since the beginning of fighting."[34] The posts were solid brass. The floor at the old Garden was wooden, covered with padding, but the flooring at the new Garden was made of cork with a rubberized canvas laid on top. Electric lights beemed down upon the boxers with such intense clarity that spectators in the galleries could see every move of their slick and gleaming bodies. The four ring ropes were thick and plushly wrapped in green velvet. Like a fancy bordello, the feeling was at once sensuous and new, a bewildering mix of elegance and muscle. On opposite sides, over the heads of spectators could be seen two four-minute clocks, four feet wide. The clocks could be started by the timekeeper and would tick off three minutes for each round and one minute for the rest break — leaving nothing to human error. A special electrical timing system would signal the beginning of a knockdown by triggering the red lights atop each ring post that would flash for ten seconds.[35] The red lights can still be seen on the posts of the original Garden ring on display at the International Boxing Hall of Fame in Canastota, New York.

Frank B. Flournoy had been Rickard's matchmaker at the old Garden, but upon his retirement, Rickard hired Jess McMahon for the new club. McMahon had been the matchmaker at the Commonwealth Sporting Club in Harlem. It had been a small club, but Rickard recognized the fact that McMahon had made a go of it in a relatively difficult location, particularly compared to other clubs that were struggling in more desirable locations. McMahon's was no small task. He opened the Garden to the first boxing match on December 8 when flyweight champion Jack McDermott defeated Johnny Erickson. Then, on December 11, Paul Berlenbach successfully defended his light-heavyweight title against Jack Delaney. The event was filled with 17,675 people in formal dinner attire (which would be the apparel adopted by the fight crowd while Rickard was in management). Women were in conspicuous attendance, also draped in elegant attire and wearing fine jewelry. The gate drew $148,155, said to be an all-time record for an indoor boxing event. The fight was fast, and the two light-heavyweights saw the chance to make names for themselves as the first Madison Square Garden stars. And while the "Astoria Assassin" was victorious, the French-Canadian received the greater applause. However, newspapers were less interested in describing the quality of the fight than the qualities of the new Garden.

After all the curtain raisers, the new Madison Square Garden was officially opened with an international sporting event, new to New York — an ice-hockey game between the New York Americans (the team had been created for the occasion) and the Montreal Canadians. The event was staged with flourish by Colonel John Hammond, the U.S. attaché Rickard had worked with on his Paraguayan venture. Ottawa's Royal Foot Guard Band paraded along Fifth Avenue, led by Mayor John Hylan and Mayor-elect Jimmy Walker. The Canadians won the game by a score of 3–0.[36]

The event sold out and proved so successful that Rickard applied for his own team franchise and hired Colonel Hammond to supervise the hockey events. In 1926, the National Hockey League granted Rickard a franchise to operate what the sportswriters dubbed "New York's Tex's Rangers." The name stuck and Tex's Rangers eventually became the New York Rangers.

New York had become a hockey town with its own team. The Rangers opened at home, on November 17, 1926, in red, white, and blue jerseys to a crowd of 13,000 against the Montreal Maroons. The game became so heated that Ranger Frank Boucher got into a fight with "Bad Bill" Phillips of the Maroons, and the two were sent to the penalty box and later forced to pay a fine of $15.[37] The Rangers won the game, 1–0, and it seemed that nothing stood in the way of their success. In their second season, Tex's Rangers won the Stanley Cup series in Montreal.

Everything Tex touched seemed to turn to gold. Week after week, the new Garden turned out successful professional boxing events (in addition to amateur bouts that are not included below)[38]:

The New Madison Square Garden's 1925–26 boxing season with gate receipts:
Paul Berlenbach and Jack Delaney (Ovila Chapdelaine), $148,155
Louis Kid Kaplan and Babe Herman, $56,705
Mike McTigue and Tiger Flowers, $49,976
Dave Shade and Roland Todd, $28,808
Sid Terris and Lucien Vinez, $43,480
Jack Delaney and Young Bob Fitzsimmons, $42,883
Jack Zivic and Tommy Milligan, $39,163
Joe Glick and Johnny Dundee, $41,566
Jack Delaney and Johnny Risko, $51,638
Jack Sharkey and Eddie Huffman, $24,586
Tommy Milligan and Jack Zivic, $44,300
Harry Greb and Tiger Flowers, for the middle-weight championship, $98, 063
Stanislaus Loayza and Phil McGraw, for charity, $58,602
Paul Berlenbach and Johnny Risko, $56,494
Mike McTigue and Jack Delaney, $79,799

In drawing a quarter-million paid admissions to his first season of boxing, Rickard proved that weekly, indoor boxing events could more than pay for expenses. But some New Yorkers, including boxing commissioner William Muldoon, were unhappy with the quality of the bouts at the new Garden. In the meantime, newspapers speculated that Rickard would possibly consider one more "Battle of the Century" in an outdoor arena with either Jack Dempsey and Harry Wills, or Dempsey and Tunney or Tunney and Wills. Rickard had boxing privileges at New York's Veladrome, Yankee Stadium, and Boyles Thirty Acres in New Jersey. But he said that any future battle would likely mean that he would need to construct an arena to accommodate 150,000.[39] The statement upset existing stadium owners. Complicating the issue was whether or not Rickard would take his next big fight out of New York. Politicians pressured the commission and the commission pressured promoters, fighters and managers to put on fights where the politicians wanted them.

It was a slow time for outdoor arenas in the New York area, and the battles featuring Harry Wills had not materialized. This avoidance particularly bothered the boxing commission. The commissioners demanded that Dempsey or Tunney fight Wills. Harry Wills was the dominant black heavyweight of the 1920s. Many considered him the obvious top contender, but he was never given a title shot. When Rickard was accused of drawing the color line against Wills, he pointed out that he had championed the ring success of both Joe Gans and Jack Johnson. Rickard's wife, Maxine, who would have known, said that the incessant racial strife that accompanied the Johnson-Jeffries fight had so worn on Rickard's nerves that he had to leave not only the sport but also absent himself from the United States for several years to let the unpleasant memories of the Reno fight fade from his mind.[40]

In addition to the social issue, the boxing commission faced economic criticism. Outdoor arenas were simply not making money in 1925, and that included the Coney Island Stadium, one of the mainstays of boxing. The Queensboro Stadium, Dexter Park, Rockaway Beach, the Bayonne Stadium, Ocean View Athletic Association, Polo Ground Athletic Club, Dreamland Parks and the Oakland Athletic Association were all suffering. The champions were asking for more money than was financially feasible if the events were still to meet expenses at these venues. Various politicians blamed Rickard for creating the problem.

Rickard vowed publicly to deal with the issue. Many boxers thought that Rickard was sure to make more money in the new Garden with increased seating capacity, and they could afford to ask for larger purses. But Rickard laid down the new law that would change the way boxers were paid: you will make no more than you can draw. He told the press, "Guaranties are out and this rule will apply to the stars and title-holders as well as to the small fry. The boys who are too greedy will find themselves on the outside looking in." Rickard added, "With gate receipts running into the six figures there ought to be a little change left over for the promoter who does all the work and assumes most of the risks. Be reasonable," he told the boxers, "or you can't work for me." Rickard promised to offer a reasonable percentage to the boxer, and if he didn't like it, he could work for someone else.[41] Rickard held the purse-strings and the boxers were forced to concede. He opened the boxing at the Garden with everything *but* championship heavyweights, proving that he could put on shows either with or without them. But the lack of championship fights bothered the commissioners.

In addition, Rickard and other promoters often had been blackmailed into using a manager's lesser-known fighters if they wanted to employ their big-name draw. "If you want X, you have to take Y," had been the stipulation of the past. Rickard felt that this practice frequently resulted in making the public sit through boring matches. Rickard simply announced that this situation would not be tolerated at the new Garden. The situation did not sit well with fight managers. To them, Rickard's domineering stance over boxing matters proved that he had become all too powerful. Don Skene, sportswriter for the *Herald Tribune*, dubbed him as the "Mussolini of Madison Square Garden."[42] The New York boxing commissioners saw it as a battle for control over boxing and proceeded to blame Rickard for many of the problems. They used a heavy hand when it came to Rickard's petitions for fights.

On April 21, 1926, in Fort Worth, Texas, Rickard signed Dempsey to a contract to fight Tunney. When the newspapers announced that Rickard intended to promote a fight between Dempsey and Tunney in New Jersey, the New York commissioners were outraged. Commission chairman James A. Farley told Sam Hall that "Wills was the first and only opponent for Dempsey in New York."[43] The board's power came from the fact that it controlled the licenses, and board members used that power liberally. If Dempsey chose to fight someone other than of the board's choosing, then he would lose his license in New York. If Rickard attempted to set up a fight other than in New York, then he would lose his promoter's license. Even Tunney's license was threatened. After reading the newspapers, New Yorkers were left to wonder if anyone of any interest would be left to fight in New York. The boxing establishment seemed intent on either controlling or preventing any fights having to do with Tex Rickard.

Had Rickard and his iconic boxers ruined the sport? That was a question asked outside the sport pages. In the May 1926 issue of *The American Mercury*, edited by H.L. Mencken, the most fashionable literary magazine of the period, appeared a "Diatribe Upon A Manly Theme." "What has become of the Diamond Belt, and where — if I may ask these questions gently, so as not to hurt the tender feelings of the modern pad pushers," the author asked sardonically, "where are the good old gladiators who used to battle for it so ferociously, and give us fans our money's worth?"[44] Without naming names, the author slammed Dempsey for his trials with his wife, his surgery to repair his nose, and Rickard, the promoter of "the five-million-dollar pug palace:" "In those simple days we expected gladiators to [wear their wounds honorably]. They marked him as a man whose business it was to slap 'em over, no

matter when, where, or how they showed up, or at what price.... He did it quickly and gladly, and as a prelude to the ceremony he didn't put in eighteen months getting the consent of a wife, a manager, a nasal architect, a press-agent, a masseur, a movie director, a partner in Wall Street, a boxing commission, and a whole flock of promoters.... The present generation of boxing fans, and the present generation of upholstered boxing divinities, don't even know what I'm talking about when I speak of a prize-fight."[45] The writer pointed to the Garden's attendance and income on January 5, 1926, where 15, 718 fans paid $56,958 to see a boxing exhibition. He asked "What did they get for their money? Five pairs of Queensbury nurslings go for a grand total of forty rounds — and in all that time there was but one knockdown!"[46]

While the commissioners complained, rumors flew that Rickard was being pressured to leave the Garden. But that was impossible; the Garden had never been a more popular attraction or a more profitable operation. Since the first two years that Rickard's new Madison Square Garden operated, Rickard's fights alone (both indoor and outdoor fights) grossed $6.35 million. Between September 1, 1925, and August 31, 1927, the Garden's corporation had yielded a net profit of more than $1 million ($1,393,194.28).

Rickard had achieved his grand vision by establishing Madison Square Garden as the fistic centerpiece of the world, a place it was to hold for decades to come. However, in order to draw the extraordinary gates for the Dempsey-Tunney fights, Rickard would have to move the locales to Philadelphia and Chicago, two cities where there were no pesky commissioners to impose caps on ticket prices, and where any interference in boxing matters would come not from boxing administrators but from mobsters. In fact, those same charming miscreants who brought America the fixed World Series in 1919 would play a role in Philadelphia in the 1926 Dempsey-Tunney fight. And no less a celebrity gangster than big Al Capone would try to fix their 1927 fight in Chicago.

Chapter Seven

A New World Champion and the First $2 Million Prize Fight

After so many years of putting together promotional masterpieces in America's boxing rings, Tex Rickard's richest, and perhaps most controversial, endeavors were the Dempsey-Tunney fights of 1926 and 1927. Tunney would succeed the great Jack Dempsey but would not take his place in the imagination of the American public. However, the second fight between Tunney and Dempsey created sports' richest event and a controversy that raged for decades.

During the fall of 1923, after his brawl with Firpo, Dempsey had literally gone Hollywood in more ways than one. Between Dempsey's knockout of Firpo and his two fights against Tunney, his idleness did not go unnoticed. In 1925, while he and his actress wife, Estelle Taylor, were making the movie *Manhattan Madness* and the country was focused on the "Scopes Monkey Trial" in Tennessee, where a high school biology teacher was prosecuted for teaching Darwin's theory of evolution, Dempsey's inactivity made him an increasingly unpopular champion. Grantland Rice wrote, "His continued statements that he is keen to fight and his continued refusal to do so have put him in the attitude of kidding the public. He now ranks with Jack Johnson as being the most unpopular of heavyweight champions."[1]

Dempsey spent the time away from the boxing ring managing the stresses brought by a new marriage, court subpoenas, and a boxing suspension in New York. Dempsey's wife was an aspiring starlet in the early days of the Hollywood motion picture industry. Unfortunately for their glamorous union, Taylor despised boxing in general and his fight friends specifically, overlooking the fact that Dempsey's rich avocation was responsible for their income. Like many people, she detested Dempsey's manager, Jack Kearns, and preferred to party with people who could help her own career.[2] In 1925, Rickard phoned Dempsey's new manager at the time, Teddy Hayes, to inquire as to Dempsey's physical condition and his readiness to fight. Hayes told Rickard, "All he's been doing for two years, Tex, is climbing on top of that dame."[3] Rickard discounted Hayes' assessment to a certain extent after he discovered that Dempsey had not turned "fat" and was still the pugnacious Mauler of old. If Rickard wanted to create another big event, he would have to figure out a way to encourage Dempsey to come back into the ring. That wasn't going to happen until Dempsey was offered something better than making $1,000 a week on the stage just for hamming it up without the risk of a title defense.

After the Firpo fight Dempsey had, for the first time, asked the promoter to pay him directly instead of his manager. Rickard was glad to do so because he could not stand Kearns either. From his fight earnings, Dempsey took out his own fifty percent and an additional

amount Kearns owed him before handing Kearns the balance. Kearns was livid and would spend the rest of Dempsey's fighting life hounding him for fifty percent of Dempsey's income, all the while suing him for whatever he thought he could get his hands on. Even after Dempsey had called it quits with his former manager, Kearns continued to hold himself out as Dempsey's representative. Kearns would keep Dempsey forever knocked off-guard by his legal machinations.

Controversy Over Contender Harry Wills

For three years, while Dempsey was enjoying the good life in Los Angeles with his movie-star wife, he did not defend his title. The press attacked, noting how there were important challengers waiting in the wings for their chance at a world title. Dempsey was accused of being a spoiled child who demanded fees as large as a national war chest, fees that only Tex Rickard could afford to pay. In the meantime, Rickard would create elimination bouts for possible contenders for the title.

During those years that Dempsey was out of the ring, a black heavyweight from New Orleans named Harry Wills worked his way up to the top contender spot and waited to get a shot at the title. Wills, called the "Dark Menace," had spent a good many years defending his "Colored Heavyweight Title." And like other great black champions, Wills had many more professional fights under his belt than most of his white contemporaries. Wills had an impressive string of victories over big-name fighters. In fact, Wills fought the great Sam Langford sixteen times. During his rise, he beat Luis Firpo, Gunboat Smith, Fred Fulton, Joe Jennette, Sam McVey, and John Lester Johnson, to name but a few. However, as skillful as he was, Tunney biographer Jack Cavanaugh said, "The 6 ft. 4 in., 225-pound Wills was no [Jack] Johnson,"[4] and most of his victories over top black fighters came when his opponents were past their primes.

Rickard found himself in the middle of the Wills controversy that was unfolding in New York. From 1922 to 1927 Paddy Mullins, manager of Harry Wills, desperately tried to get a title match with Dempsey. Mullins' plea was backed by the New York commissioners, who demanded that Dempsey accept his challenge after Mullins posted a $2,500 forfeit fee (the amount necessary at that time to post a challenge for a title fight in New York). The New York boxing commission pressed Dempsey to fight Wills and pressed Rickard to promote the fight. While several factors actually prevented a Dempsey-Wills fight, the finger of blame pointed to Rickard. Many thought Rickard operated in the background as Dempsey's manager, keeping him out of the ring and preventing a Dempsey-Wills title match. The New York press seemed to set upon him like jackals attacking a wounded animal. They accused him of being racist.

Rickard still remembered the strain on his nerves from the controversy over Jack Johnson's reign as heavyweight champion. The Wills controversy was one piece of ballyhoo that Rickard would have preferred to do without**.** Wills was not only a big, strong, and talented fighter, he was also well connected. Rickard suspected that New York politician Jimmy Walker owned a piece of Wills. Also, the more Jim Farley of the New York State Boxing Commission insisted that Rickard pit Wills against Dempsey, the more Rickard resisted. He thought that Farley represented a political district where Wills was popular and that Farley was exerting inappropriate pressure.

Rickard exhibited no eagerness to match Wills for a world title fight. But neither did

he actively avoid him. Rickard had been starched financially when he had promoted Wills in a "big fight" with Firpo at Boyles Thirty Acres, New Jersey, on September 11, 1924. Even with all the ballyhoo Rickard could muster (the battle of two big men; black versus white; contenders for the title), the event was not what Rickard had hoped it would be. He had anticipated the attendance would reach as high as 75,000. Only 40,000 attended. Rickard told a British sporting royal, Sir Harry Preston, that he had earned £93,000 on the event, but after expenses when he finished on the wrong side of the accounting ledger, he "had all his trouble for nothing."[5] Publicly, Rickard blamed the poor attendance on the radio broadcast, saying that people simply chose to stay home and listen to it on the radio.[6] Even though Wills won the match with Firpo, he did not garner much enthusiasm from Rickard.

The truth of the matter was that during those years of Dempsey's furlough, Rickard's focus was on obtaining financial backing to rebuild and reinvigorate Madison Square Garden. He had already lost money on the 1924 Wills bout, and he was not about to get involved with anything that looked like it wouldn't be a success while he was trying to promote Madison Square Garden and build up membership in his new corporation. Rickard needed to generate an ever-increasing gate to match the expectations of his "600 millionaires," and he did not consider Harry Wills a major financial draw.

Wills, while a very good fighter, would nonetheless have been an easier opponent for Dempsey than the man who finally beat him, Gene Tunney. Wills was bigger but not as mobile as Tunney and would have made an easier target for Dempsey's murderous fists.

Rickard would actually make efforts on Wills' behalf. In 1926, Rickard proposed a fight between Paulino Uzcudun and Harry Wills, but it was Uzcudun who pulled the plug on that Rickard promotion. Uzcudun was mad at Rickard for not including him in the 1926 proposals for the heavyweight elimination tournament with Dempsey, when Tunney was then the champion. Uzcudun thought that he was going to be fighting Dempsey, and that the winner of that match would be fighting the winner of the Jack Sharkey-Jimmy Maloney bout. When Paulino's name did not appear before the commissioners, he broke with Rickard. Uzcudun went ahead and fought Wills in July of 1927, but not as a Rickard promotion. The outcome of that match would put an end to Wills' status as a top contender.

Dempsey said he was never unwilling to meet Wills. In the meantime, Paddy Mullins, Wills' manager, signed Wills to meet Dempsey outside of New York, but Mullins did not have a promoter. Frustrated at the lack of a match, Mullins was going to make sure that Dempsey did not fight for Rickard in New York. Mullins pressured the New York boxing commission to suspend Dempsey's license for failing to defend his title against Wills, which they did.

There have been many theories about Rickard's controversial refusal to match Dempsey with Wills or any other black fighter for the heavyweight title during the Dempsey-Tunney era. One is that he had had enough of mixed racial world title pairings and did not want to be responsible for the social consequences, such as the riots that had occurred after the Gans-Nelson and the Johnson-Jeffries fights. But he had staged mixed racial bouts with Tiger Flowers for the middleweight title. Some boxing experts argued that another Jack Johnson-like figure as a heavyweight champion would ruin the financial prospects for boxing promotions. But even when Jack Johnson was champion, the business side of boxing flourished because Johnson was an entertainer without equal, though he was usually cast as the villain.

Another theory put forth is that Rickard did not want to risk Dempsey's earning potential by matching him with any of the stellar black fighters at the time. However, the cir-

cumstances show that Rickard's actions were based solely on his own need to draw big gates at the time rather than any social repercussions or concerns for Dempsey's welfare. Rickard's financial risks *for each event* were his primary concern. Rickard only threw big money at big fights. If a Dempsey-Wills fight would have been profitable for Rickard and not laden with other risks, it is doubtful he would have avoided making the math work out just to save Dempsey's reputation.

Rickard did, however, attempt to set up a match between Wills and Gene Tunney, the crowd-pleasing ex–Marine, but the match fell through because of finances.[7] Finally, Rickard gave the New York Athletic Commissioners an ultimatum: either they agree to a Dempsey-Tunney (not Dempsey-Wills) match in New York or he would take the fight elsewhere.

When Rickard formally announced his next venture, the match between Dempsey and Tunney, the Athletic Commission suspended his promoter's license in New York.[8] Rickard toyed with the idea of a Wills-Dempsey match in Chicago (possibly to spite the New York Commission), but the Illinois governor would not agree to it.[9]

The closest Wills came to a chance at the title was when he was matched with Jack Sharkey in 1926 (Wills' only fight that year). Wills lost the fight on a foul after being beaten around the ring throughout the encounter. With the Sharkey loss and then the loss to Uzcudun in 1927 (his only fight in 1927), Wills was out of the picture. Wills was knocked out by Paolino Uzcudun, the "Basque Woodchopper," and didn't regain his status as a top contender. Wills, as was his habit, pushed his smaller opponent around the ring, using his superior size to wear his man down. Uzcudun was several inches shorter than Wills, but Wills had a careless way of dropping his left hand after jabbing, and Uzcudun put him down with a short, hard right hand over Wills' low left. Dempsey, more than likely, could have knocked out Wills, who did not have the defensive skills of Tunney or Carpentier. Wills never won the biggest prize in the ring, but unlike many fighters he had a successful post-ring career by becoming a successful businessman.

Tunney would emerge as the top contender in 1926; not Wills.

When the Dempsey-Tunney match was announced, Wills was bitter, saying he would fight Dempsey for free. Many thought Tunney seemed to come in under the radar for a match with Dempsey and take over the position that should have gone to Wills. But by the time Tunney was matched with Dempsey, Tunney had already won 76 fights, having suffered his only loss to Harry Greb.

Gene Tunney—"Sweet are the uses of adversity"

James Joseph (Gene) Tunney had won his fighting notoriety during service in the armed forces. Although the "Fighting Marine" never experienced actual combat against the Germans in World War I, he returned to the States as a hero and military champion of the ring on July 19, 1919. Tunney had fought on the undercards of Dempsey's title fights and had ample opportunity to study the "Manassa Mauler." Tunney's tame exhibitions of boxing skills on the undercards of the Dempsey-Willard Toledo massacre and the four-round shootout between Dempsey and Carpentier gave no indication that the Fighting Marine would one day become Dempsey's biggest adversary. In *As You Like It*, Shakespeare had written, "Sweet are the uses of adversity," which could be turned into one's advantage. Adversity "wears a precious jewel in its head," Shakespeare wrote. Tunney would use his

fights against Greb as learning experiences that later proved valuable when he fought a bigger version of the "Pittsburg Windmill," the Manassa Mauler. Not only did Tunney learn how to handle a rough opponent, the loss to Greb left him absolutely determined never to taste defeat again.

Gene Tunney would spend years watching Jack Dempsey before the two actually met in the ring. After one of Dempsey's title defenses that he won by knockout, Tunney began to envision how he would one day defeat the Manassa Mauler. Tunney had watched Dempsey fight Brennan at Madison Square Garden on December 14, 1920. Tunney biographer Jack Cavanaugh said that while Tunney was impressed at Dempsey's body shots at Brennan, he was also "surprised at how often Dempsey missed badly with his right hand, and how, in missing, he had left himself wide open. At times, Brennan had taken advantage of those openings, but often he had been slow to react to them. If Bill Brennan could hurt Dempsey on several occasions, well then, a really good fighter could certainly do even better; a really good fighter could beat Dempsey."[10]

Tunney was from an Irish family and grew up in Greenwich Village. Like the stories told by many children bullied by toughs from neighborhood gangs, his father gave him a pair of boxing gloves and told him to learn to defend himself. It was merely a pastime, but after graduation he sparred more seriously at various gyms and smokers. He competed at both the Fairmont Athletic Club and Sharkey's Athletic Club in New York while working two jobs: as a shipping clerk and as an athletic director for a public school. Before his military stint, Tunney professed never wanting to turn professional. But after winning the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) light-heavyweight title overseas in 1918, he returned to his home state with a new-found interest in his boxing talent. Lured by the large purses, Tunney realized that being a professional athlete was an easier route to financial success than working the two jobs he had left before his military service.

Long before Tunney was considered a challenger for Dempsey, Rickard had signed and promoted the Fighting Marine for a 12-round title fight with Battling Levinsky in 1922. Rickard staged the fight as for the "American Light-Heavyweight Championship," a title he created to promote a title fight in America in that the world light-heavyweight champion, Carpentier, was not interested in leaving Europe. (Levinsky had lost the world light-heavyweight title to Frenchman Georges Carpentier in 1920.) The Tunney fight filled the Garden to capacity with 14,000 fans. Levinsky was a ring-worn champion, highly respected for his gameness and fortitude, but the fans were eager to see Tunney, the aggressive and exciting challenger. The judges' decision was unanimous for Tunney, who won all twelve rounds. It was all that Levinsky could do to remain standing in the final round.

After a stellar military fighting career and finally stepping into boxing's limelight, Tunney would lose his newly coined American light-heavyweight crown five fights and four months later to ferocious middleweight Harry Greb. Tunney fought five brutal bouts with Greb. In his first fight with Greb in 1922, Tunney took a savage beating over 15 rounds.

Greb was so tricky and threw punches in such bewildering combinations that they called him "the Human Windmill." When Greb originally challenged Tunney, Greb was only a middleweight, but the smaller man with a reputation for hurt was favored 3 to 1 to beat the lowly regarded champion Tunney. According to Rex Lardner, Greb "was perhaps the dirtiest Queensberry fighter who ever lived. He would knee, butt, hit with the heel of his glove, hit on emerging from a clinch, hit back-handed, hit after the bell, rabbit punch, scrape his opponent's face with his glove laces and use his thumb to pluck out his opponent's eye."[11]

The trauma of the first fight with Greb, and the fact that Tunney later mastered Greb with brains over brawn, solidified Tunney's determination to be known as a man for his intellect and gentlemanly qualities. He prided himself for being able to outsmart or outbox his opponent rather than simply out-mauling him. Tunney detested the ruffian style of a Dempsey or a Greb. His safety-first style won him many fights but few fans.

Boxing experts were surprised that the first Tunney-Greb fight had gone the distance, and even more surprised when Tunney signed for a rematch shortly after their first bout. After the beating Tunney sustained from Greb, many ringside experts fully expected him to hang up the gloves. But Tunney learned from his adversity, and his trials by fire with Greb were what steeled the Fighting Marine for the high-stakes showdowns with Jack Dempsey that Tex Rickard would promote during 1926 and 1927.

After being beaten by Greb, Tunney employed clever lightweight champion Benny Leonard for instruction. He asked Leonard to teach him how to counter Greb's rough tactics. Leonard obviously came through with good advice because Tunney proceeded to win all of the four subsequent bouts against Greb. In the five rough-and-tumble bouts with Greb, Tunney would fight a total of sixty-five rounds of mayhem that would serve him well in his later trials against Dempsey. Thus did Tunney discover the uses of adversity.

George Barton, referee for the final Tunney-Greb fight, was in the dressing room after the fight and recalled the conversation: "Greb was slow in getting started. I asked him how he felt. He said, 'That big guy broke something over my heart.' Tunney congratulated Harry on making a nice fight. Harry said, 'I don't want any part of you. You broke something inside of me.' Then Greb told Tunney, 'You'll beat Dempsey. When you do, I'm betting on you.'"[12]

Greb, the only man ever to defeat Tunney as a professional, died young on the operating table after one of his many bouts. In fact, when Greb finally met his match in the middleweight division in the person of Tiger Flowers, both men would die from the complications of eye surgery from injuries sustained in the ring. Greb died in 1926 and Flowers in 1927.[13]

To understand Tunney's frame of mind, one simply must be reminded of Harry Greb. For Tunney, the epitome of the tough-guy persona was Harry Greb, who fought dirty and lived the wild life. Tunney obviously saw that Greb's road led nowhere. The foremost practitioner of the mauling, street-fighter style, which Tunney knew only too well after five fights, lay dead in his grave before Tunney's two bouts with Dempsey. Tunney decided to take a different path.

Unlike Dempsey, a born fighter, Tunney's ambition was to be an elitist, and he certainly considered himself an intellectual. He saw boxing as the quickest means to achieve his goals. Gene Tunney was often lampooned as an exaggerated "high hat" with a tendency towards pretentiousness. He was always quoting Shakespeare or other literati when the press greatly preferred to report on some of Dempsey's brutal sparring sessions. Although Tunney had built a national reputation as a "perfect fighting machine," he also had a reputation for being irredeemably pompous. After one speech where Tunney had "exhausted his vocabulary of four-syllable words," Rickard quipped that "Tunney will be a nice boy some day when he grows up."[14]

After Tunney's 20 fights subsequent to the Greb loss that marred his perfect record, Tunney took on Georges Carpentier. They met on July 4, 1924. The American public was much cooler towards Carpentier than had been the case in 1921 when the Frenchman fought Dempsey. The American love affair with France that had occasioned the Armistice after

World War I was over, not coincidentally because France had made scant repayments of its war debt to the United States.

The Tunney-Carpentier bout was a wild mêlée during which Tunney accidentally put his knee into Carpentier's groin when the Frenchman had him on the ropes in round 14. Despite cries of foul, Tunney was declared the winner when Carpentier could not continue. Tunney had a victory, but not one that indicated he would pose any danger to Dempsey's title.

In 1925, Tunney finally won a match that made him look like a real contender for the title. He fought Tom Gibbons, who had given Dempsey a hard fight in 1923. Gibbons had won more than 100 fights. Tunney had studied Gibbons carefully and decided to fight much more aggressively than he had against other opponents. His aggression proved effective, and he knocked out Gibbons in the 12th round. Now Tunney was the number one contender for Dempsey's crown.

Prior to his wins in 1925, Tunney was not considered a serious contender. But with wins over Greb, Gibbons, and Johnny Risko, and quick KOs over three other fighters, Tunney was in his prime. Rickard proceeded to set up the first match between the Manassa Mauler and the Fighting Marine for 1926. "I want you to fight Gene Tunney, right here in New York," Rickard said to Dempsey.[15] "I started remembering what I knew about him: Just a boxer. That was all I could think of."[16] Dempsey probably still remembered having been separated from his senses in the Firpo fight and figured he had nothing to fear from Tunney. Rickard convinced Dempsey that the light-hitting Tunney would pose little trouble for the murderous punching champion.

Tex offered 50 percent of the net profit, but Dempsey first had to get a manager. Kearns was still dogging him with legal harangues. There was a rule in New York and many other states that required a boxer to have a manager. Rickard did not take on Dempsey's management, but to the public it looked as if Rickard was controlling Dempsey, holding him out of ring activity until it suited him to make a big match. Actually, Dempsey was managing himself, but he picked up Gene Normile, a friend of Baron Long who ran boxing in Tijuana. Normile took care of the paperwork while Dempsey called the shots.

With the announcement that Dempsey planned to fight Tunney before he fought Harry Wills (and with Wills' challenge money still on the table), the New York Boxing Commission revoked Dempsey's boxing license. Dempsey would not fight in New York, and the New York State Athletic Commission would not sanction the fight.

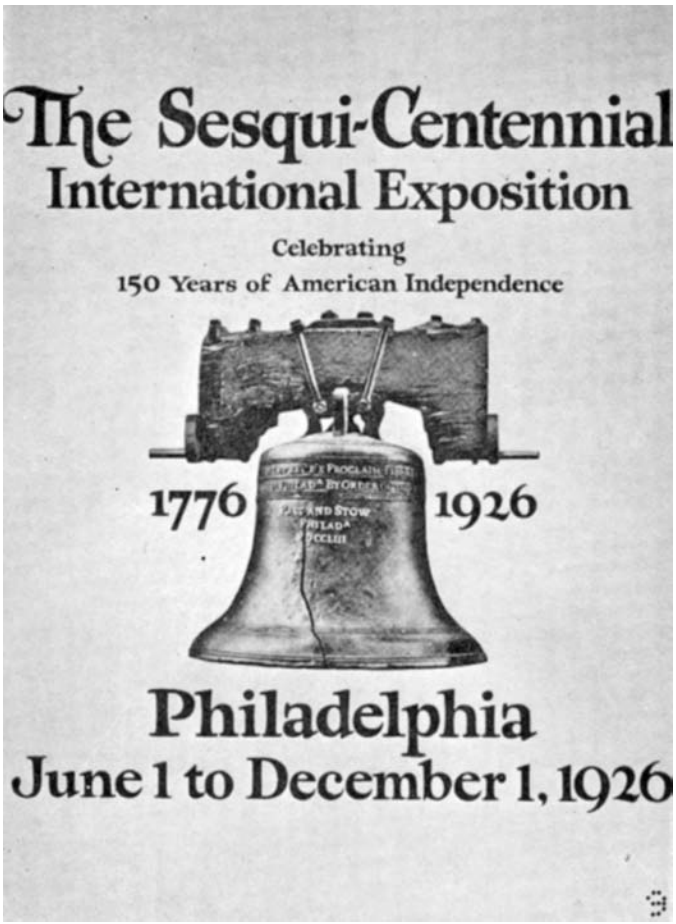
The New York obstacle turned into a better opportunity for Rickard when he seized the historic moment for another grand promotion. He would take the fight to Pennsylvania where the state was already planning to host a national event. The United States was commemorating its sesquicentennial of (the 150th year since) the signing of the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia. It was the perfect location for Rickard's next venue. Attendance for a fight there would make twice what it would have made in New York. The buildings for a large public exhibition had already been constructed, and publicity was rolling. The Dempsey-Tunney fight could be staged in the enormous outdoor stadium constructed near the U.S. Navy Yard. (The stadium would later become home to the Army-Navy football games.) The Philadelphia stadium was a perfect setting for another Rickard boxing affair billed as the "Battle of the Century," a battle pitting the rugged Jack Dempsey against a clean-living Fighting Marine.

Dempsey still felt the shadow cast over him by the public's disfavor. He was still being called a "slacker." Years later, after his stint in the U.S. Coast Guard and even after public

opinion swung over to his side, Dempsey emphatically pleaded, "I was not a slacker."[17] Whereas Dempsey's previous wife had fanned the flames of the slacker charges, his new wife raised the specter of racism. Dempsey's wife, Estelle, was glad that Dempsey would be fighting Tunney instead of Wills. "Don't fight the Nigger, Jack, fight Tunney, he's more refined. Besides, Tunney will mean a bigger gate."[18]

Tunney's careful style and Dempsey's rusty ring skills would make for two interesting fights. Tunney is not generally considered to be one of the greatest of heavyweight champions, although he would retire without losing his crown in the ring. In Tunney, Rickard had again found a perfect opponent for Dempsey, while Tunney versus most fighters produced a boring bout.

By the time of the fight, Dempsey had been out of training for three years, and the cause for his pale complexion and yellow eyes at the time of the fight was attributed in the press to his being out of shape. True, Dempsey was having a difficult time getting back to his old training regimens. He was managing his own training camps, and under great stress. He continued to feel threatened by Kearns and his minions and felt forced to hire body guards for his continuous protection. But he never took the fight lightly. While Tunney was at his peak physically and mentally, Dempsey would go into the fight with many distractions on his mind. Dempsey said that for weeks before the fight he had to keep reminding himself that Tunney was just a boxer. "That was about the only comforting thing I could think of in those busy days leading up to the fight. I'd move in through those light punches and flatten him as soon as I caught him."[19]



A commemorative card from the Sesqui-Centennial International Exposition of 1926, celebrating 150 years of American independence.

On the morning of the fight, the Dempsey team took the train from his camp in Atlantic City to Philly. Dempsey was sick and complained about his stomach and his head. He threw up, and it took two of his trainers, arms-in-arms, to help him to his dressing room. He entered the ring sick. "I was heavy-footed and sluggish and felt old with legs that seemed shot. Was this the penalty I had to pay for my layoff—or was it something else?"[20] There was even some speculation that

Dempsey had been poisoned. The stakes were huge and rumors abounded that the same gangsters who had fixed the World Series in the infamous "Black Sox" affair were pulling strings to ensure a Tunney victory.

Dempsey was told that if he hit Tunney low, Tunney was going to show signs of distress, be examined by the ring doctor, and then the referee would declare a win for Tunney on a foul. Suspicion was that the referee had been carefully selected by Tunney's side.[21] Dempsey was a wild killer in the ring, and there was no assurance he wouldn't accidentally hit Tunney low. But that did not happen.

Rickard remarked casually before the fight that most of the country's brains and money were seated in the front ten rows. Nobody wanted to miss seeing Dempsey after he had been away from the ring for so long. Rickard would always say that Dempsey was the best fighter he ever saw. But Dempsey had to contend with illness, the Philadelphia rain, and the sound of boos as he entered the ring on the night he first fought Tunney. His illness was attributed to a batch of bad olive oil he had consumed to quiet his stomach. Yet his performance in the first Tunney fight was not nearly as poor as it was later portrayed.

The event once again surpassed any that had preceded it. The *New York Times* estimated the crowd at 135,000, calling the bout "the biggest event in the history of sport."[22] It is an interesting depiction of America's attitudes toward its sports heroes that Dempsey entered the ring to jeers and boos, and after losing with great courage, would leave the stadium with the crowd cheering for him.

Strangely, reports of the two fights years later describe Dempsey as almost a stumblebum for the slick-boxing Tunney. A review of the actual fight films provides a real wake-up call. Even the aged Dempsey is a dangerous tiger indeed. Rickard knew a real fighter when he saw one. Here's what he saw in Philadelphia under the pouring rain.

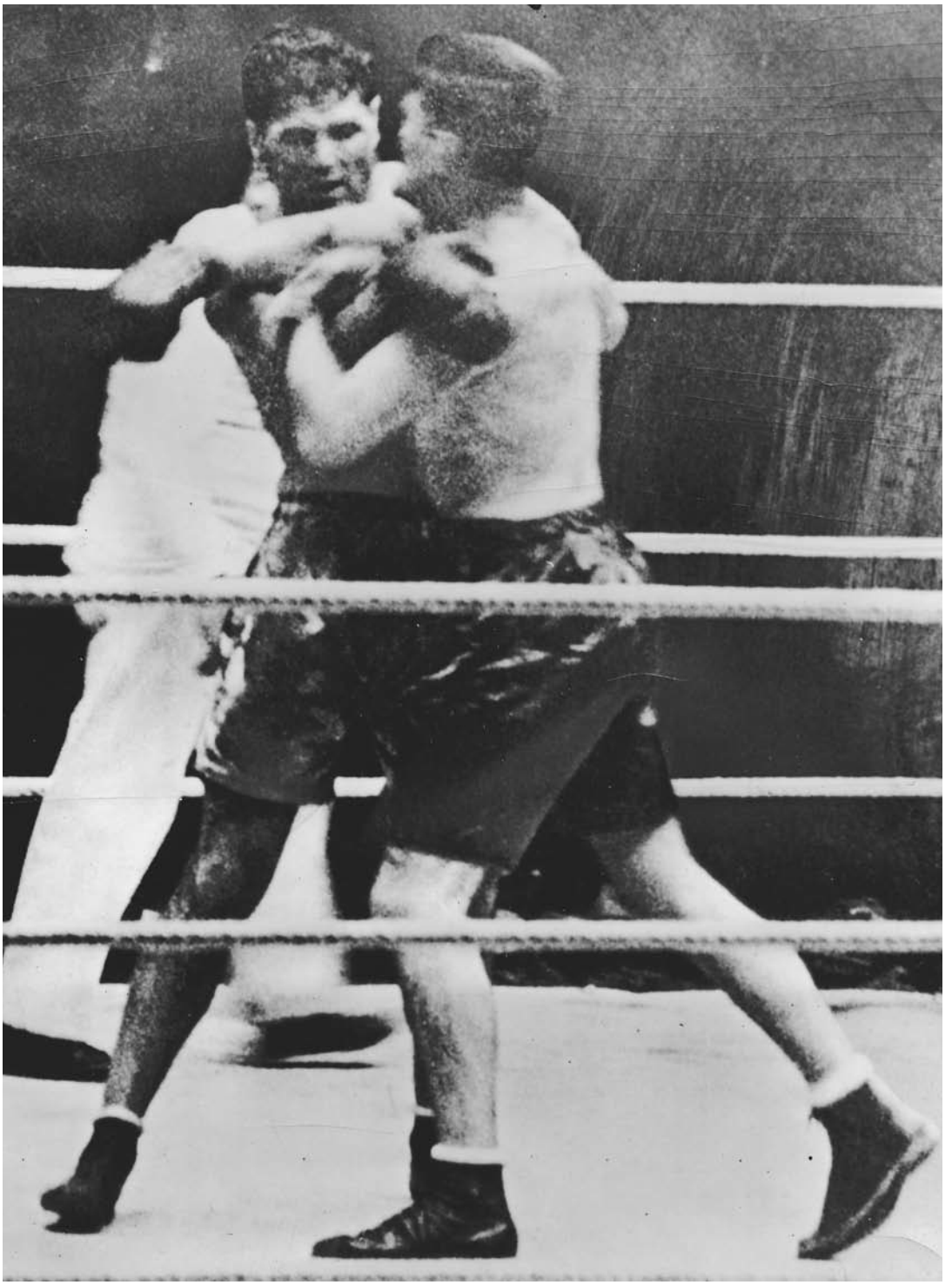
Jack Dempsey-Gene Tunney, September 23, 1926, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

That Dempsey went into this fight not feeling up to par is evident on the film. He had been drinking olive oil every evening to calm a digestive disorder. Furthermore, he had to contend with the rain that lasted throughout the match. He found it difficult to plant his feet in order to get the leverage he needed for his powerful punches.

The tendency among boxing historians has been to say that the first bout between Jack Dempsey and Gene Tunney was a one-sided affair in which Tunney won every round. In fact, Dempsey nearly kayoed Tunney in round four of the bout and probably would have if he had not gone into the fight feeling ill. But Dempsey never made excuses for losing. A professional boxer going into battle has to be ready to fight, regardless of how he feels at the time.

However the fight may have been scored, the one impression from the opening bell was that Tunney was scared. His eyes were wide as those of a rabbit being stalked by a tiger. He grabbed Dempsey and held on for dear life whenever the latter got inside. In the first round, Tunney landed more punches, but Dempsey landed enough body blows that it is difficult to call a clear winner in that round.

Round two was more of the same, with Dempsey boring in and Tunney landing light one-two combinations. One aspect of Dempsey's skill is that when he missed with left hooks, he did not lose his balance. He had good footwork and was not in any way an awk-



Tunney would grab and hold on the inside to prevent damage from Dempsey's murderous short punches (Sept. 23, 1926).

ward slugger. Most of Tunney's blows were either blocked or sail over Dempsey's head as he bobbed and weaved. In the middle of round two, Dempsey threw a right over Tunney's left lead that rocked Tunney. But Dempsey did not have the snap to follow up with combinations. Dempsey landed another right over Tunney's left lead at the end of the round. Tunney landed more punches, but every time Dempsey connected, Tunney was rocked to his heals.

Round three continued much the same as rounds one and two. In the fourth round, Dempsey landed a left hook that had Tunney out on his feet. He held on to Dempsey for dear life. Dempsey broke free and landed another left hook, and Tunney had to grab the top of the rope to stay on his feet. Tunney backed up jabbing. Although Tunney was hitting Dempsey more, Tunney did not hurt Dempsey at all, and seemed, through four rounds on the verge of getting knocked out any second.

In round five the pace slowed to a crawl. Dempsey's illness showed in his performance. At one point, Tunney grabbed Dempsey and seemed to mimic a waltz dancer. Dempsey, as opposed to his usual concentration on throwing his left hook, tried to time his right cross over Tunney's weak left jab. Neither fighter did much to impress in round five.

Tunney won round six almost by default, as Dempsey did nothing but slip punches. A few of Tunney's light combinations landed. The seventh was tame until Dempsey landed an overhand right that drove Tunney to the ropes. Dempsey effectively bobbed and weaved under Tunney's left jab. Judging the action was difficult at this point. Tunney probably had the edge just from his glancing blows, which had little effect on Dempsey.

In the eighth round Dempsey used a different, shorter right-hand counter. He slipped one blow inside Tunney's jab and wobbled Tunney who hung on. The rest of the round was uneventful as Dempsey came forward and Tunney threw light punches. In rounds nine and ten Dempsey tried for a knockout, but could not land solid, as he sloshed forward in the ring. The fight had gone only ten rounds (under New York law it would have gone fifteen) because Dempsey, as reigning champion, had chosen that distance. Having not fought in three years, he felt that a short fight would be to his advantage.

But Dempsey had lost his title. He and his staff blamed it on the illness. Everyone blamed, or at least was suspicious of, Dempsey's body guard Mike Trent for Dempsey's sudden and unusual illness.[23] Had Trent slipped something into his food or drink? Dempsey took a long time to recover from his illness. The yellow-colored eyes and pain in his limbs lingered, and by February of the next year, he found himself in the hospital, diagnosed with blood poisoning, convinced he was going to die.[24]

Although Tunney won the fight, it was anything but one-sided. Throughout the fight Dempsey looked like he could knock out Tunney at any minute if he landed one of his haymakers on the chin. Although Dempsey landed less frequently than Tunney, his punches were harder, and the punches that missed looked like they could have ripped Tunney's head off had they landed. Over the years, the conventional wisdom has stated that Tunney dominated the fight. By most accounts "Dempsey landed only one good punch."[25] So often was this story of the one-sided fight repeated that it appeared to even convince Dempsey in his later years. "Tunney, I don't know if I could lick him even at my best."[26] Dempsey was over 75 when he gave this interview and had obviously forgotten what a ferocious fighting machine he had been. However, the film does not lie, and Dempsey, in light of the Philadelphia rain and his ring rust, gave a very good account of himself in the first Tunney fight. Dempsey forced the fight all the way, and although Tunney was throwing a lot of punches, the majority of them landed on Dempsey's gloves or shoulders.

Tex with his new bride, Maxine Hodges (Underwood family portrait).

After the fight, Dempsey was despondent and contemplated retirement. Despite his loss, or as some say because of the courageous way he had lost, boxing fans clamored for Dempsey to fight again. It was Babe Ruth, Dempsey said, who eventually talked him into returning to the ring.[27]

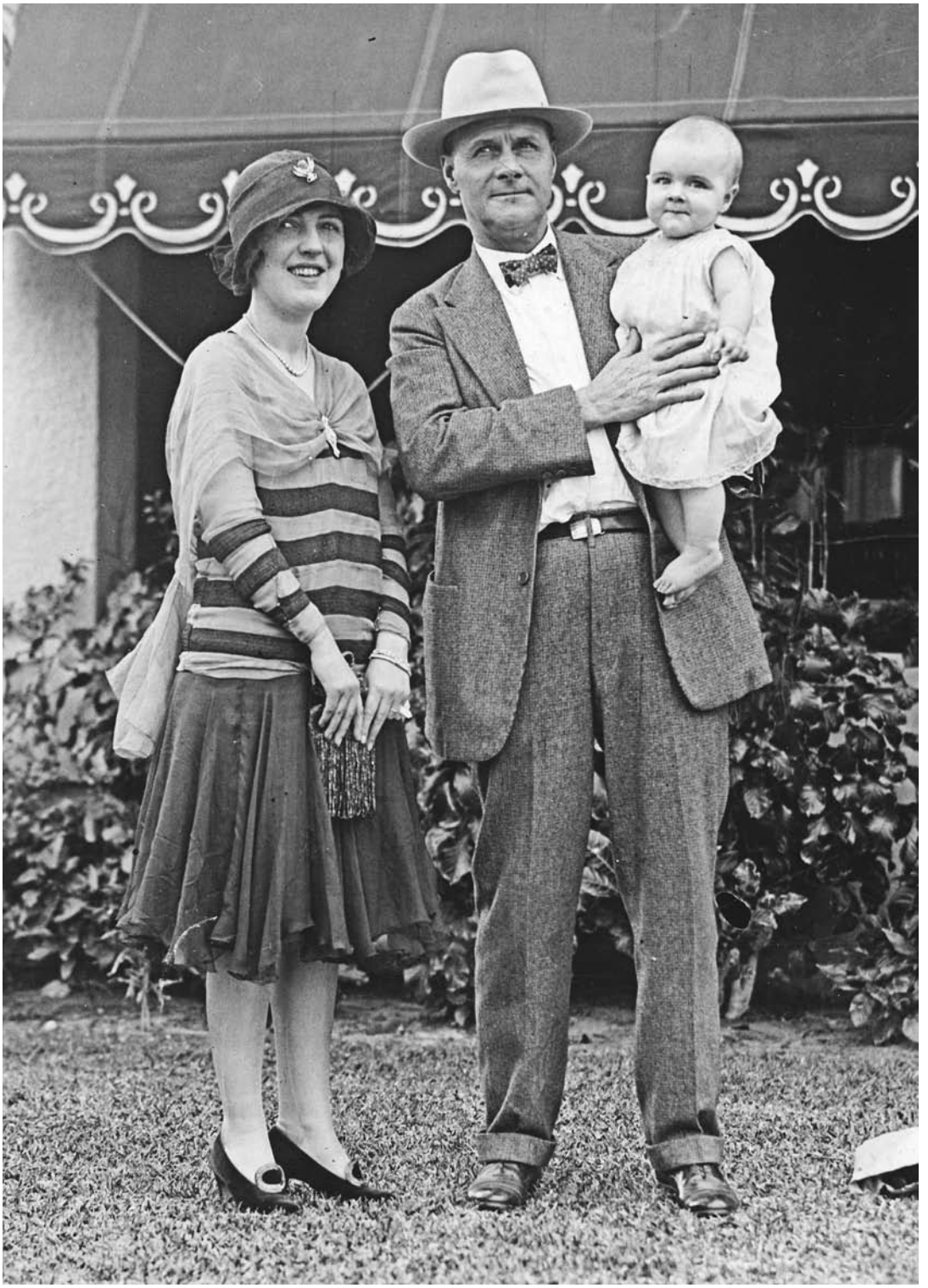
Rickard Marries Hodges — October 7, 1926

While supervising work in Madison Square Garden one evening, Rickard was approached by Harold Delaney, who wanted to introduce the promoter to his niece, Maxine Hodges. Her full name was Bernadette Maxine Hodges. At the time she met Rickard, she went by the name Maxine Elliott Hodges. Although the woman was 23 (born on July 25, 1903, in Brooklyn) and Rickard was 33 years older, Rickard was quite taken by the young woman because he recalled first seeing her at the Firpo fight. Their courtship and intention to marry became the talk of New York society for several months, but the actual date of the marriage was kept secret. Only after the fact was it announced that the couple had married. Actually, the couple married on October 7, 1926, in Lewisburg, the county seat in the Greenbrier Valley of West Virginia. [28] The couple enjoyed a luxurious honeymoon escape at the celebrated Greenbrier Sporting Club, a Hollywood-like resort for the very wealthy. The first news to the world that Rickard was escorting a new wife was on October 12, 1926. Things were about to change on the Rickard home front. The happy couple welcomed into the world baby Maxine Texas Rickard, on June 7, 1927, in New York. Tex was so very proud of his daughter. Sadly, he had only a short time to enjoy his new marriage and only a year and a half to bond with his new daughter.

Rickard with his daughter, one of the few times he smiled.

Jack Dempsey-Jack Sharkey, July 21, 1927, Yankee Stadium, the Bronx

Rickard's plans to make a mint from a Dempsey-Tunney rematch were nearly derailed by a Bostonian who would later become champion in the 1930s —



Rickard, with wife Maxine and Maxine Texas in front of their Miami estate.

Jack Sharkey. Sharkey had a win over Harry Wills by disqualification. In fact, Sharkey won several fights by foul, partly because of the way he wore his trunks up high so that many, otherwise legal, punches landed below the belt. Sharkey was a renowned complainer, and this had earned him the uncomplimentary nickname of "the Boston Gob," a term at the time used for gossipers and whiners.

Rickard did not like re-matches, certainly not immediate ones. He liked to have time to build up public interest in a fight. So after Dempsey lost to Tunney, Rickard simply told Dempsey, "I'm going to match you against Jack Sharkey, the winner to fight Tunney."[29] There was no arguing. Rickard was boss. When Rickard saw that Dempsey's manager, Gene Normile, was inadequately handling Dempsey's affairs, Rickard steered Dempsey to Leo P. Flynn. Flynn was able to help Dempsey with regard to Sharkey. But most importantly, he guided him through a very difficult period. Dempsey was being pursued in court (by both Kearns and Wills for not fighting Wills earlier), his new wife was struggling in show business, and Dempsey's brother, Johnny Dempsey had become a drug addict and an abusive husband. Seventy-two hours before the Sharkey fight, Dempsey's brother killed his wife in Utica, New York, and then shot himself.

Dempsey and Sharkey met on July 21, 1927, at Yankee Stadium in the Bronx. Sharkey had fast hands and was winning against Dempsey until the seventh round when Dempsey bored in while throwing body punches. Sharkey turned to the referee to complain of a low blow, and Dempsey threw a crushing left hook to the chin that laid the loquacious Bostonian flat on his face. Sharkey grabbed his groin area as if he had been separated from his senses by a low body blow, but neither the referee nor the crowd bought his act.

Hundreds of articles have been written about the Dempsey-Sharkey fight, but Dempsey's down-to-earth description says it all: "Sharkey, I fought him to the body.... He turned to the referee and said 'He's hitting me low...' He had no business saying nothing to the referee.... He said I hit him when he wasn't looking. Well, what the hell, why ain't you looking?"[30]

The fight grossed $1,083,530 and Dempsey earned $500,000. It was Rickard's fourth million-dollar gate. Years later, after the Tunney fights, Dempsey would say of Rickard, "At the time I was fighting, we had a man named Rickard who was a great promoter and a good man. And everybody got paid exactly what the contract called for. That's what made the fight game good."[31]

Maxine Rickard said of the Dempsey-Sharkey fight, "Dempsey's left hook whammed in the Gob's face, and Rickard knew the minute the blow landed that Tunney's opponent for the title fight two months hence would be Dempsey, not Sharkey."[32] Rickard was pleased because he thought "Sharkey talks too much and fights too little."[33]

Jack Dempsey-Gene Tunney, September 22, 1927, Soldier's Field, Chicago, Illinois

Prior to the second Tunney-Dempsey fight, the two fighters took shots at each other in the press. Dempsey wrote an open letter that claimed the fight in Philadelphia had been fixed. According to Maxine, Tex's new wife, "The ballyhoo went on. 'Tunney scoffs at story of million-dollar bribe to throw fight; aims to knock out Dempsey.'

"Tex said to his wife, 'Now they're hating each other. I think I'll have some more tickets printed.'"[34] Mayor Walker of New York Garden presented a plaque to Rickard from his 600 millionaires. Whether New York officials were trying to make up with Rickard at

that time is unclear. In any case, in New York there was a cap imposed on the price of tickets. In Chicago, Rickard could charge whatever the market would bear. Boxing was making a comeback in Chicago after a quarter-century of being illegal there as a result of the 1900 fixed fight between Joe Gans and Terry McGovern. And Rickard had an ally of the boxing commissioner in Chicago, George Goetz. Rickard had wanted to wait until 1928 before staging another big fight. He needed time to build up the promotion. But Geotz was a big-game hunter and had already planned a long trip into Africa in 1928. Dempsey was still having legal problems, his marriage was on the rocks, and he would have preferred to have more time to train. But Rickard needed to accommodate his millionaire friend Goetz. Rickard proceeded with a fight earlier than what he would have preferred and patted Dempsey on the back, saying, "That Tunney, well *I* can lick him."[35]

Leading up to the second fight in 1927, Mrs. Rickard's view on Tunney was that he could not discuss boxing without going into a history of boxing from the Roman gladiators to the present, all in four-syllable words. The papers said he had gone Shakespeare. Tunney offended the Rickards by sending a telegram that said, "Congratulations on the new baby, too bad it wasn't a boy."[36]

Tunney's percentage of the gate didn't quite make $1 million, so Tunney (center) wrote a personal check to Tex Rickard (left) for $9,554.46, and Tex handed him a check for $1 million. Billy Gibson, Tunney's manager, is on right (Cayton Sports, Inc.).

For their fight in Chicago, one prominent citizen of the Windy City did not want to be outdone by any so-called gangsters in Philadelphia who may have tried to influence the outcome of the first fight. Al Capone wrote to Dempsey in no uncertain terms that he could make sure "the real champ" won in Chicago. Big Al considered Tunney "a fucking pansy."[37] When Dempsey received Capone's offer, he graciously declined, invoking sportsmanship. Capone sent a truckload of flowers to Dempsey's training camp along with a note reading, "in the name of sportsmanship."[38]

At one point Tunney told the press he did not like to be called a fighter, preferring the moniker of "boxer." "I'm a boxer," he said before the second Dempsey-Tunney fight, distinguishing himself from Dempsey, the brawler.[39] Perhaps mocking Tunney, Rickard had the ushers at the second fight wear armbands proclaiming the encounter the "Tunney-Dempsey Boxing Exhibition." This was a touch of irony on Rickard's part because anytime Dempsey got in the ring, it was sure to be a life-and-death brawl. Boxing exhibitions were considered tame affairs where the participants choreographed their moves and went out of their way not to hurt each other.

Soldier's Field in Chicago was home to the first title fight in the Windy City since the Gans-McGovern scandal. The richest and most famous men in the world were sitting in the first ten rows. Dempsey, the loser in their first fight, was now enormously popular. Tunney was given grudging respect by the crowd, but boxing fans considered him something of a "high hat," and he was not very popular.

After the first fight, rumors swirled that the Philadelphia mob had fixed the fight in favor of Tunney by giving Tunney's handlers the referee and the bigger ring size they wanted. The controversy only whetted the public's appetite for the second fight, given the speculation that it was not Dempsey's declining skills that had cost him the title, but rather the crooked set up of the bout. For the re-match, the gate receipts were greater than the first fight, making Dempsey-Tunney II the first $2 million-dollar gate bout in history, and making Tunney the first boxer to earn more than $1 million for one fight.

In terms of drama, the crowd would get its money's worth and then some. Dempsey would score what seemed a convincing knockout, only to have it stolen by a delayed and then elaborately slow count that allowed Tunney time enough to recover his senses. Dempsey would be down himself in the next round, upon which the referee immediately began the count. This time, the referee ignored the neutral-corner rule, which he had so diligently enforced when it had been Tunney on the canvass. There was speculation later that the referee had favored Tunney and may have been paid off. Here is what the fans saw at the first $2 million-dollar gate fight in history.

The bell rings and Dempsey plods in, with his chin tucked into his chest, trying to land his left hook. Tunney snaps in one-twos and steps quickly out of range. Tunney ties Dempsey up.

One thing that is evident is that the always-aggressive Dempsey does not have the quickness to counterpunch during most of the fight. Tunney's chin is up whenever he throws his right, but Dempsey only plods forward. If he had changed his pattern, waited for Tunney's right, then thrown his left hook as a counterpunch, he could have landed often during the fight.

Tunney circles mainly to his left in rounds one through six or else dances lightly back and forth. For a right-handed boxer, moving to the left, or clockwise, comes naturally. This is because he leads with his left and pivots from his left foot to jab, thus his weight and momentum pull him to the left.

Tunney pours combos into Dempsey's face throughout the first six rounds. Every now and then, Dempsey's deadly left hook whistles by Tunney's chin, is blocked, or lands partially.

Round seven of the second Dempsey-Tunney fight, probably the most famous three minutes in boxing history, began as all the others had: Dempsey plodding forward and Tunney landing snappy one-two combos.

Tunney's jab and quick right cross over Dempsey's guard cannot seem to miss. Finally, the Dempsey of yore and legend appears as if back from the grave. Tunney jabs and Dempsey slips inside it, at the same time launching a perfectly timed right cross that lands flush on the chin. Dempsey, his killer instinct intact, leaps in with a swinging left hook. On impact, it distorts Tunney's features into a grotesque mask, like the still shot of the Rocky Marciano punch that kayoed Jersey Joe Walcott.

Almost as part of the same move, Dempsey launches an overhand right that lands just below Tunney's ear. Another left hook, right on the chin, again turns Tunney's face into a gargoyle's mask, as he falls into the ropes. A short right hammers the falling Tunney in the face. A short hook to the chin and another right to the face leave Tunney in an unconscious heap.

Dempsey said he thought Tunney was finished. At that moment, "I thought I had become the first guy ever to win back the heavyweight title after blowing it."[40] "You don't forget any second of something you waited seventeen rounds for — ten through the first fight and now seven in the second fight."[41]

Next occurred what was probably the most controversial half-minute in sports history, what would be forever known as "the Long Count." Glassy-eyed, Tunney is still down for 15 seconds on the fast version of film. (He's down for 20 seconds in normal time, and his eyes are still glassy at 15 seconds at normal time.)

Dempsey is told to go to a neutral corner. He remembers thinking,

> What the hell is a neutral corner? When you're fighting — or at least when you're fighting the way I used to fight — all of the corners look alike, and it's hard to stop what you're doing, standing over a guy and waiting for him to get up, and start figuring out which corner is farthest away from where it's all happening. The new rule said something else. It said that if there was a knockdown the referee was supposed to take the guy who threw the punch to a neutral corner, then come back and pick up the count in unison with the count of the knockdown timekeeper. Well, I didn't go to a neutral corner. I forgot all about the rules. But I was finally pushed to one. Gene was still on the canvas, where I had knocked him. After the ref pushed me into the neutral corner he came back to where Gene was and started counting. But instead of picking up the count of the knockdown timekeeper and saying, let's say, "Nine ... ten ... out," he started from one. Gene got up at seven or eight.[42]

Tunney rises, and Dempsey lands a wide left hook that Tunney endures, and then out of some uncanny instinct Tunney begins circling to his right, counter-clockwise and the opposite direction from the route he moved the previous six and one-half rounds. This may have served to befuddle Dempsey, who instead of cutting off the ring follows Tunney around for nearly a half minute before waving his left glove at the circling Tunney as if to say, "Come on and fight already."

Tunney keeps circling to his right and counterclockwise. It would seem he risked stepping directly into a Dempsey left hook, but Dempsey has been timing his clockwise movement all night, and the new dance step keeps Dempsey from landing the overhand right

that set up the earlier left hooks. By the end of the round Tunney's head is clear and he is back in control.

Dempsey had thrown another combination for the ages. To land every one of a seven-punch power combination, all to the chin, on a fighter of Tunney's defensive skill is a phenomenon of accuracy. And Tunney was even more knocked out than he appeared on the original, speeded up film, which by stop watch has him down for 14 seconds. The film in real time has him down for at least 20 seconds.

Anyone who has ever fought in the boxing ring knows that it is unusual for someone to be completely knocked out for more than ten seconds. After 15 seconds, Tunney still did not know where he was. For him to get up and fight his way out of the situation proved that Tunney ranked right up there with Joe Gans as one of the smartest men in ring history. On a historical note, the rumors of fix that surrounded Gans' 1900 fight were nearly as prevalent as before and after the Dempsey-Tunney long-count fight. The referee, a Philadelphian, was widely accused of fixing the fight in Tunney's favor. Watching him drag out the count when Tunney was knocked out lends great credence to the rumors.

Photos of the bout indicate that the referee was either crooked or confused in the heat of the moment. When Tunney is down with glassy eyes, the third man in the ring, Dave Barry, is seen focused on giving Dempsey instructions. In the next round when Dempsey is down, Barry leaps in to start counting while Tunney still has his fists cocked over the fallen Dempsey. The inconsistency is glaring.

Dempsey, having thrown his best in round seven, was out of gas. All he could do in the last three rounds was to follow Tunney listlessly. The fight, along with Dempsey's career, was over.

The Roaring Twenties were still in high gear in 1927. There were many good things to celebrate that year. Rickard had landed exclusive rights to both Yankee Stadium in New York and Boyles Thirty Acres in New Jersey. He also announced that he had $1 million at his disposal to build a new cement stadium somewhere in New York to house large football games or boxing matches. Money was pouring in. Earnings from the first half of 1927 indicated a gross of $2,512.515 against the previous full year's gross earnings of $5,584,846. Operating income after general expenses totaled $763,326, against $1,473,276. Net income after taxes for the two periods was $506,482 and $784,639. Champagne bottles were uncorked. Even though there was Prohibition, Rickard had his own private stock of wine — as did everyone else of means.

The Garden's stock was being moved from the Curb market to the "Big Board." After May's earnings report, Rickard's Garden (and its 600 millionaires) Corporation was approved by the Governing Committee of the New York Stock Exchange. The move indicated the

> increased respectability and popularity of boxing in New York during the past few years.... The action of the Stock Exchange was considered yesterday as a remarkable tribute to Rickard's sagacity as a boxing promoter, for when he came out of the West boxing in this state was in considerable disrepute and was in no sense the honorable and legitimate business it has since become. Even crooked fights were not unknown in the old days, and a prizefighter who read a book or even a newspaper, except the sport page, was ostracized by his fellows. But such as been the influence of Rickard.... The rise of fighting began when Rickard took over the old Madison Square Garden, and the profits were so enormous that he had no difficulty in obtaining backing when he determined to build the present arena.[43]

The controversy over "the Long Count" would live on, and be the high-water mark for Rickard's promotional career. And so Tex Rickard's successful promotional career

ended as it began, at the height of controversy. His last promotion would not make for any new guaranteed, successful promotion in that Rickard struggled to get anyone interested in the bookish, light-hitting new heavyweight champion, Gene Tunney.

Gene Tunney-Tom Heeney, July 26, 1928, Yankee Stadium, New York

For the last heavyweight title fight promoted by Rickard, Gene Tunney would be matched with Tom Heeney of New Zealand. Rickard claimed before the fight that the gate would reach $1.5 million. He told the *New York Tribune* that he "realized that it will take an unusually spiffy brand of conversation on his part to interest that many customers. He knows he will have to ballyhoo this one as he never ballyhoo'ed any in his life."[44]

Rickard, in the manner described by his wife of creating and then denying rumors to promote a bout, said, "I have abandoned all thought of holding the bout in England. After we got through paying income taxes, excess taxes, and special governmental levies, we would come away owing ourselves money. The fight will be held in New York, and it will be staged during the last two weeks in July. I have not decided whether to put it in the Yankee Stadium or the Polo Grounds." "The promoter emphatically denied that he is legally obligated to stage the bout at Colonel Jack Ruppert's ball yard. He, furthermore, denied that he has posted a bond of $100,000 which will be forfeited if the affair goes to the polo grounds. He said he will not pick the site until he has inspected the seating plans for both ball parks." This was all just a way of creating intrigue.

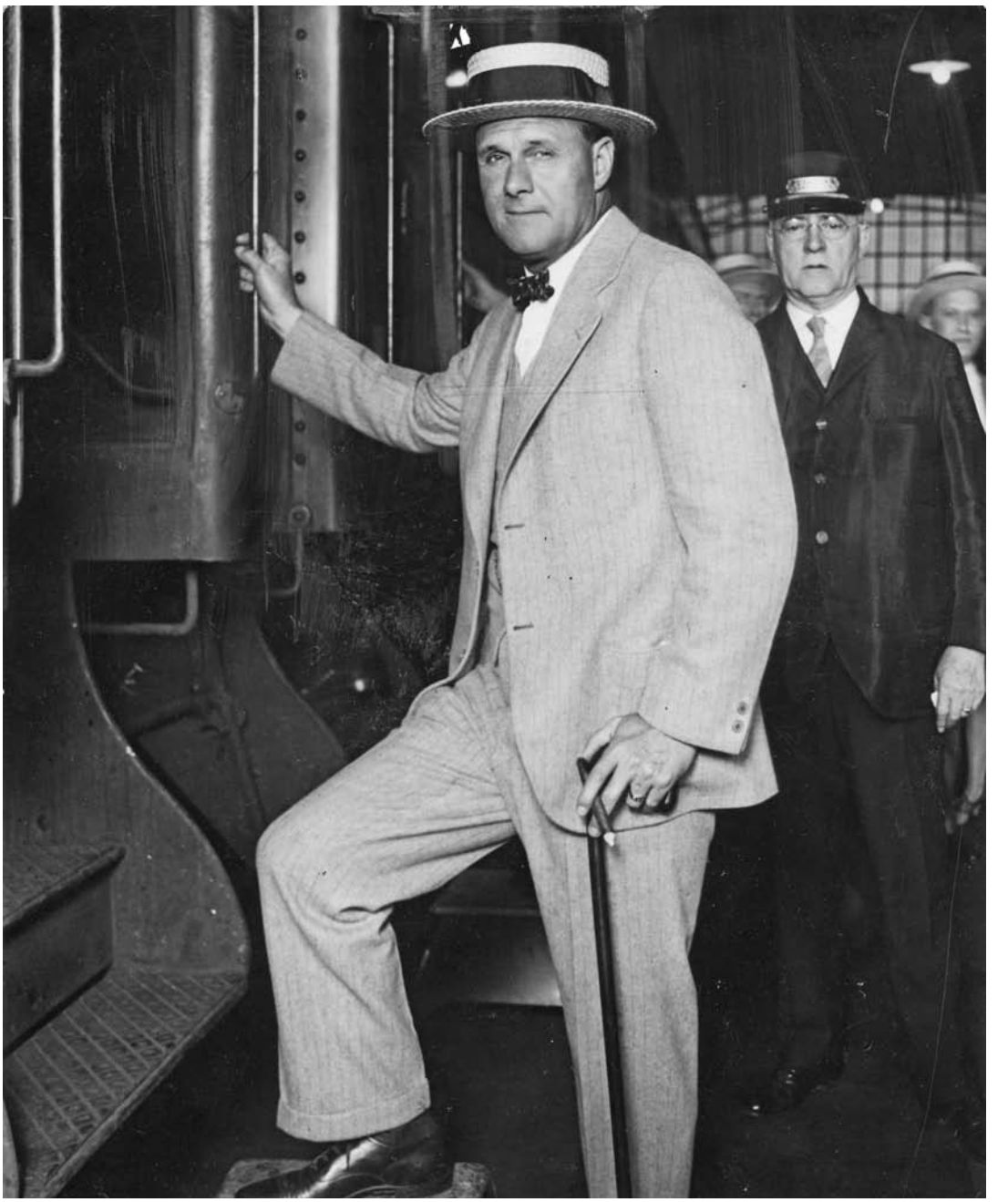
The explanation of how Rickard came to match Tunney with Heeney also was designed to create interest in an otherwise boring match. "There ain't nothing to this talk about Tunney picking Heeney. I did the picking and I'll tell you why ... I picked the logical man, and a man who will give the match international color."[45] For purposes of ballyhoo Rickard dubbed Heeney as the "hard rock from down under."

As the day for the bout approached, Rickard was desperate to ballyhoo the Tunney-Heeney fight. Ticket sales in New York were not going well, and it did not seem to be enough to say that the public was now more interested in Tunney than they ever were before. They simply were not that interested in the new champion.

In June, Rickard was in Houston, Texas, attending the Democratic Convention when he got the attention of the newsmen with a fabricated scoop about Tex in New York. Had they heard the news? He was planning to buy the New York Giants baseball team. The scoop was bigger than any political convention news. Rickard said, "It is true that such a deal is on the fire and I would not be surprised if the announcement would be made any day. My interests have been dickering with the Stoneham people for some time and are almost ready to close."[46] Outside of this Rickard had nothing else to say to the press regarding the subject. The press should have been wary — whenever Rickard had nothing to say, it usually meant just that. But they were always eager for a scoop and never figured they were being duped. John McGraw was one of the most respected names in baseball. (He managed the New York team for 30 years, winning ten pennants and three world championships.) His name was to baseball what Rickard's name was to boxing. The story was huge, only it was entirely ballyhoo.

It was certainly a surprise to McGraw. The manager of the Giants issued a statement when he was told that Tex Rickard was buying his ball team. "The Giants are not for sale —

to Tex Rickard, or anyone else.... If Mr. Rickard is going to buy the ball club, he will have to consult me about it, and he hasn't done so up to date. Under the agreement entered by Mr. Stoneham, Judge McQuaid and myself when we purchased the club, it cannot be sold without our unanimous consent. Naturally, if there was any sale contemplated, I would know about it.... The Giants are not on the market."[47]



Rickard spent a great deal of time on the railroad (Jan. 1927).

Days later, and with interest still waning for the big fight, the headlines read, "Rickard Hints Giant Deal is Nearing Close: McGraw Will Be Retained as Manager and Games Transferred to Yankee Stadium."[48] Rickard was coy and his words were parsed by Ed Frayne, who asked him if the negotiations were still on the table.

Rickard said, "Please, please, don't make me say anything now." Frayne wrote, "If silence gives consent George Tex Rickard admitted yesterday that he either is, or soon will be owner of the New York Giants."

Again, Frayne asked Rickard, yes or no, "Is the deal still on?" Rickard responded, "I don't want to lie, and I am not in a position to say anything definite at this time."

Frayne reported, "If you are up on the science of sports promotion you know that means that it would be exceedingly bad business to discuss such a topic at this particular moment. It would distract attention from a more important enterprise, the Tunney-Heeney fight. The pugilists are getting none too much publicity as it is."[49] This was Rickard pulling out every stop to ballyhoo the hopelessly uninteresting Tunney fight. The New York Giants were a national institution and he might as well have said he planned to buy Pershing's army or McArthur's navy. But he had to stir up some kind of controversy by ostentatiously "not saying anything."

The fight itself was as uninteresting as the build-up. Heeney was as strong as an ox, almost muscle-bound. He came at Tunney throwing haymakers but absorbing combinations in the process. Tunney would tie up his foe whenever he got near enough to land. By round 10, Heeney was exhausted. Tunney methodically chopped Heeney to the mat at the end of the round, but Heeney was saved by the bell. In round 11 the referee stopped the fight, declaring Tunney the winner.

After the battle, the papers reported Rickard's huge loss on the Tunney-Heeney fight: "Tex Rickard lost his golden touch at the Yankee Stadium last night. While the promoter admitted a loss of $100,000 on the title contest between Tunney and Heeney, others close to the business end of the fight placed the figure at $250,000." Dempsey, who would have known, admitted that the loss was more like a quarter of a million dollars. It would be Rickard's last big fight, and he took a licking on it.

Rickard blamed the loss on the radio broadcast and the new federal law that placed a tax of 25 percent on each ticket sale. While Rickard was hoping to attract 88,000 seating capacity, the fight only drew 50,000. Gross receipts totaled $694,014. Taxes, Tunney's payment of $625,000 and Heeney's payment of $100,000 put the promotion at a loss. The stadium rent was $50,000. The reporters noted that there seemed to be about as many police officers, firemen, ushers, and other service attendants as there were paid patrons.

Tunney was just not a big enough drawing card. Maxine Rickard said, "In spite of ballyhoo that portrayed challenger Heeney as a 'hard rock from down under' against whose ruggedness Tunney would fling himself in vain, the Tunney-Heeney fight in Yankee Stadium was a financial disaster." At this point Maxine knew "Tex was a very tired man."[50]

Chapter Eight

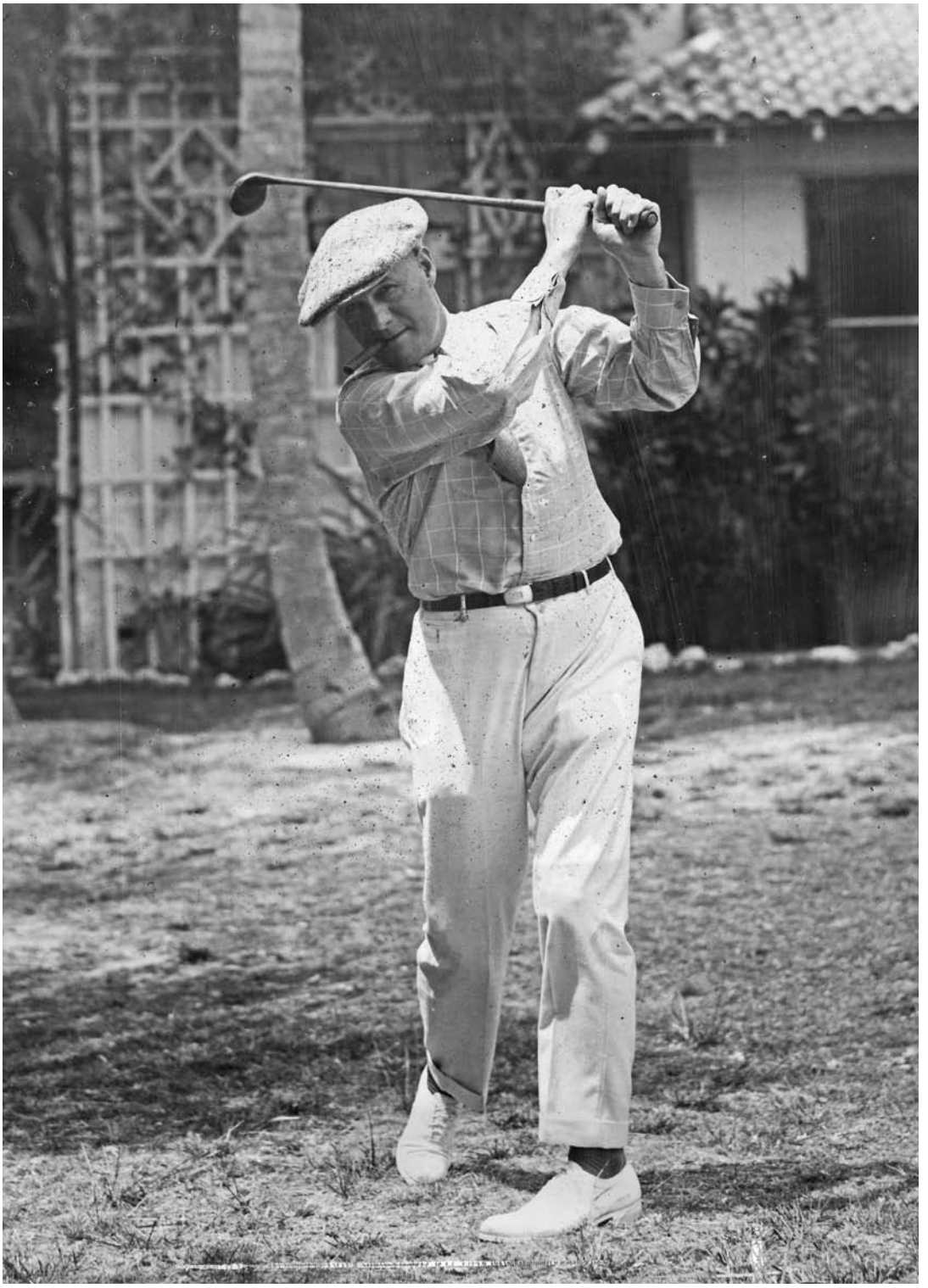
From the Top of His Game to Sudden Death in Miami

"Am I too old, I wonder? Can I take one trip more?...
Do they not miss me, I wonder, valley and peak and plain?
Whispering each to the other: 'Many a moon has passed...
Where has he gone, our lover? Will he come back again?'"
— Robert Service

The year 1928 had started a bit rocky at the Madison Square Garden. On February 2, 1928, a "ticket scandal" erupted into the news of the day. It appeared that the manager of the Garden had been giving away 600 hockey tickets. Business interests like the Garden have routinely given away tickets to friends, charitable institutions, and other business organizations. In this instance, the Garden punched the "giveaway" tickets with three holes to identify them as non-revenue producing tickets. But the freebies had found their way to a discount ticket broker by the name of Joe LeBlang. He, in turn, sold the $3.30 tickets for $2.00, the $2.20 for $1.50, the $1.10 for $ .75. When a newspaperman from the *Evening World* bought three tickets and showed them to assistant Garden manager John Chapman, he explained that the reason the tickets were punched was to prevent people from buying them. The news made its way into the papers, and one warned: "It is hoped that the Garden has kept very good count of each ticket sent to LeBlang, because the Government is very finicky about these little matters. They demand tax on everything permitted by law and they check up most carefully. The most mysterious part of the little tale is that the sale stopped as soon as word got out."[1] Rickard trusted his managers to take care of matters like these while he was out scouting for bigger and better projects.

Rickard's attention was not focused on Madison Square Garden in New York, however, because he was attempting to create another version of Madison Square Garden in Boston. In fact, he planned to found seven Gardens throughout the country. The Boston Madison Square Garden opened with a fight between Vick Finnegan and Andre Routis in 1928. Again it was another successful design to highlight boxing. Rickard wanted spectators close enough so that they felt as though they had ringside seats and could see every movement of the boxers. The Boston Garden would become famous in the 1980s when the Boston Celtics were seemingly unbeatable.

Rickard spent the summer in Miami. It was the height of the real estate boom in Florida. Everyone was making money. Tex had purchased a mansion for his young family. Tex, the daring, debonair cowboy with a quiet but rakish flare, had successfully promoted



Tex tried to take up golf in Miami.

more than 200 fights, and the newspapers reported that he was ready to take it easy and enjoy the good life. "It's the beginning of the end for the most picturesque figure of modern times," said the *Journal American*. "It may not be this month, and it may not be this year, but the time is growing near. The lust for success has gone. The incentive has been removed. Tex is rich, richer than even a gambler could hope to be."[2] Rickard took up golf and bought a yacht. He spent only a few weeks on the golf course and sailing on his yacht; he was never comfortable with either. When he bought the yacht from Walter Chrysler, it came with a set of expensive china monogrammed with a "C." When asked why he did not replace the china with something with an "R," Rickard responded in his practical style that he didn't look at the plate when he ate his food.

In September, Rickard made Jack Dempsey one of the best deals of the former champion's life. Dempsey became a 50–50 *pardner* with Tex Rickard. Dempsey explained: "He did me the honor of making me his partner. I was as proud of that as of anything in my life.... Now there was his big hand shaking mine, and he was telling me I was his fifty-fifty partner until death. We never had a contract. You didn't need one with Tex Rickard. He was the great man of my life."[3]

The year ended on another big promotion: Tex Rickard was going south, to prove that it didn't take a big city to host a big event. The critics were against him, saying that Florida just wasn't big enough for boxing or another Madison Square Garden.

Many have reported that at this time Tex Rickard had left Madison Square Garden to go out on his own. True, his "enterprises" in Miami were considered grand new undertakings (an outdoor stadium larger than any built to date, a race track, a casino to rival Monte Carlo, among other undertakings "under his hat)." But Rickard was not operating on his own. He was still working for the Garden Corporation. That fact is clearly stated in a business letter he sent on Madison Square Garden Corporation letterhead dated December 24, 1928, to Walter Trumbull of New York, where he promised stock in the Miami business as soon as the business was formally organized.[4] Obviously, the letter indicates that investors were eager to get information about Rickard's new venture.

Rickard was also arranging fight plans for a heavyweight elimination match between Jack Sharkey of Boston and W. L. "Young" Stribling of Atlanta, on February 27, with the winner to battle Jack Dempsey for the title relinquished by Gene Tunney.[5] Young Stribling was a child of the circus whose parents were trained acrobats. He had fought for years in many weight categories, and in fact had one of the best knock-out rates in history. However, he was not a natural heavyweight and was beaten by the larger man Sharkey.

Rickard and his family planned to spend the beginning of the December holidays in New York and the remainder of the holidays at their winter home in Miami. In the days before Rickard, his wife and 18-month-old daughter left for Florida, Tex went to visit his friend, Bill Muldoon, at the office of the New York Athletic Commission. On the morning of Rickard's visit, the aging Muldoon had received bad news from his physician regarding his health. Rickard tried to cheer his friend, "Mr. Muldoon, come on down to Miami with me. It will add five years to your life."[6] Muldoon politely declined. Muldoon's biographer said that Rickard was deeply upset "over the way he had left Muldoon."[7] From the commissioner's office, Rickard went back to Madison Square Garden and gave interviews to the newsmen about his new casino in Florida. He told them that the new place would draw $500,000, and prove that southern Florida would be the newest thing in the winter sport-entertainment business. It was to be his last press conference, and his last words were not of the ballyhoo but about his friend William Muldoon.

"'Poor old man,' he said sadly to the newspaper boys before he left. 'Be nice to [Muldoon], boys, he hasn't got long to go.'"[8]

Rickard had planned to build an outdoor arena in Miami and have it host the first big outdoor boxing event of the year. But on New Year's Day, 1929, he complained of stomach pains. He saw his doctor who rushed him to the Allison Hospital where he was immediately operated on to remove his appendix. The next morning, while still considered in critical condition, he seemed interested in the sports news, and everyone expected him to fully recover.

Rickard's new business partner, Jack Dempsey, arrived in Miami that first week of January for the negotiations for Tex Rickard's heavyweight match planned for Jack Sharkey and Young Stribling in Miami Beach, on February 27.

By Friday, January 4, Rickard's condition worsened, and Mrs. Rickard was desperately searching for a second opinion about his medical condition. Back in New York, Dr. Robert Emory Brannon, a surgeon, attempted to catch a plane on Saturday at Curtiss Fields in order to get to Rickard's bedside. But luck was not with him. Weather caused the flight to be cancelled until the next day, Sunday.[9] When Jack Dempsey was allowed in to see Rickard, the promoter told him, "Jack, I've got this fight licked."[10] Once outside the hospital room, an excited Dempsey scrambled to find additional doctors to bring in to assess Rickard's condition. No measures would be spared in the attempt to save Tex Rickard.

On Saturday, Dr. S.W. Fleming, Mrs. Rickard's personal New York physician who was spending the winter in Palm Beach, flew into Miami to consult with the attending physicians. After the consultation, he announced that Rickard's critical condition had essentially not changed. By 4:00 P.M. Saturday another report on his condition was issued at the hospital: "Mr. Rickard's condition is still critical. The patient is very toxic with a temperature of 103 and pulse of 132. The outlook is grave, but not entirely hopeless."[11]

At that point, Mrs. Rickard requested that Dr. Will Mayo, of the Mayo Brothers Clinic at Rochester, Minnesota, be called in to treat her husband, but the doctor was away attending a medical conference in Havana, Cuba. One of Rickard's fight friends, a pilot, took off for Havana to convince the Rochester doctor to accompany him back to Miami to treat Rickard. But assessing the situation from Cuba, Dr. Mayo believed there was nothing he could possibly do that the existing doctors were not already doing. News that Dr. Mayo would not be coming to Florida added to the depressing scene.

At midnight Dr. E.H. Adkins, the attending physician at the hospital, issued a statement, "Practically the same condition existed tonight as this afternoon. Mr. Rickard's resistance was possibly slightly lower. His temperature remained at 103 and his pulse had increased from 132 at 4 P.M. to 140 at this time."[12]

Five days after his operation, on Sunday morning, with his wife at his side, Rickard died. Rickard remained conscious until about two hours before his death. Before lapsing into a coma, he turned to his wife and friends who were keeping vigil at his bedside and said, "I'm getting a tough break, but I'll fight." He clutched Mrs. Rickard's hand and asked about his daughter. Mrs. Rickard replied that she was fine and wanted her father to get well. Then he said to Maxine, "Help me over this, sweetheart, I'm fighting my...."' He never finished his sentence. Death came at 8:37 A.M., January 6, 1929.[13] The papers noted that he died gamely.

The official death certificate signed by Dr. E. H. Adkins noted that Rickard's death resulted from an overwhelming infection following acute gangrenous appendicitis.

The rough and rugged Jack Dempsey was reported as saying, "I've lost the best pal I

ever had." According to the AP reports, "When Dempsey left the room and sought the reception hall, he struggled to control his emotions. His face covered by a two day growth of beard, Dempsey choked as he said, 'It must come to everyone, but it's mighty hard to see Tex go. We can only carry on as he would have done.'"[14]

Rickard's good friend, the poet Robert Service, often seemed to have Rickard in mind when he penned his verses. He wrote of many old-time gladiators, but this particular poem seems to be inspired by the great promoter.

"Carry On!"

And so in the strife of the battle of life
It's easy to fight when you're winning...
But the man who can meet despair and defeat
With a cheer, there's the man of God's choosing;
The man who can fight to Heaven's own height
Is the man who can fight when he's losing.
Carry On! Carry On!
Fight the good fight and true;
Believe in your mission, greet life with a cheer;
There's big work to do, and that's why you are here...
Let the world be the better for you;
And at last when you die, let this be your cry:
Carry on, my soul, carry on![15]

Rickard's body was placed in a bronze casket, and Mrs. Rickard, who was Catholic, had Father William Barry provide local services for Tex in Miami. Afterward, the heavy casket (12 men were required to lift it) was transferred by hearse to a train car on the Havana Special of the Florida East Coast Line Railroad that would carry Rickard's remains back to his home in New York. The body was accompanied by his wife, two of his best friends, Jack Dempsey and Walter Fields (brother of W.C. Fields), and Steve Hannegan (representing the city of Miami Beach). (Mrs. Fields stayed in Florida to care for Rickard's daughter.)

The casket was covered with a blanket of roses provided by Dempsey and Fields with a note that read simply, "To Our Pal." The train route took the body through Jacksonville, Savannah, Richmond, and Washington, D.C., and finally New York, where it arrived to lie in state at his temple and monument, Madison Square Garden.

A police escort of 100 waited to accompany the remains to Madison Square Garden. Hundreds of people stood silently about the Pennsylvania station gates; men and women lined the streets along the route to the Garden. They stood shivering in the cold. The newspapers explained that "because Rickard was a man of no particular religion, those in charge of his funeral services were seeking to have a priest, a rabbi and a Protestant clergyman participate in the final rites."[16]

With the help of many friends, Jack Dempsey assumed charge of funeral affairs. Rickard's body was carried into the huge tomb of a building, and was attended through the night by two honor guards. The floodlights that normally illuminated the Garden's boxing ring shone down on the promoter as he lay opposite his own private box now draped in somber black. Surrounding the casket were huge palms and masses of floral tributes.

It was noted that Mrs. Rickard bore up bravely under the strain of the long days. After relatives and close friends were given time alone with the promoter, the doors of the sports palace were opened to the general public.

Thousands of mourners filed past Rickard's casket under the grand lights of Madison Square Garden.

Edward Van Every, biographer of Tex's good friend, Bill Muldoon, wrote: "On January 9 [only nine days after saying goodbye to his friend], William Muldoon walked by the bier of the promoter, one of the thousands that passed along to look their last on the still face of George L. Rickard. He had looked on the face of death so often in his long life, but this time he had been shaken to his foundation."[17]

In three hours, some 15,000 men, women, and children passed by the bier in single file to pay their last respects to the great showman. "Eighty a minute, 4800 an hour, they walked in awed silence, glanced hastily at the pallid face and moved on."[18] It was a solemn orderly throng in disbelief that the great promoter was dead.

Vacationing in St. Moritz, Switzerland, Gene Tunney responded, "My sympathy goes out to Mr. Rickard's family. I feel his death keenly as one of his myriad of friends. The world of sport has undoubtedly lost a genius. There probably never will be another promoter so capable of stirring the public interest. It might truly be said that whatever his hands touched turned to gold."[19]

The Estate

In a *New York Times* article dated June 28, 1928, Tex Rickard is quoted as saying, "I am worth $2,500,000. I have $1,000,000 in cash in New York banks. I keep that sum because I am always looking around for a good investment, some gilt-edge securities. And when it comes along I want to be able to have the money ready to get in on it. So I can go to any good investment."[20] Six months later the *Times* reported that most of his estate, valued somewhere between $1–$3 million would go to his three-year-old daughter, Maxine Texas Rickard. The will was filed on January 11.[21] A year later the *Daily News* stated, "Street

Got Rickard Roll, Left $500,000." The article noted that "there's many a slip twixt the will and the bull market."[22] When the executor of the estate finally published a full accounting in 1932, the *Journal American* stated that "Rickard Heirs to Receive less than $114,000."[23] This article noted that the assets were listed blocks of stock in fifty-three different corporations, all of which were appraised as valueless. "There were almost as many personal notes on which he had loaned money between 1924 and 1929 and which became so much waste

Maxine Texas and Maxine were not left a fortune, but they were provided for.

paper in the appraiser's eyes after Rickard's death."[24] Jack Dempsey explained that Tex Rickard trusted everyone. "The same old story of a man who had too much confidence in his friends."[25]

Rickard, the man who had ushered in the Roaring Twenties with his larger than life sporting events, died ten months before Black Friday, which signaled the crash of Wall Street and the coming depression. The Roaring Twenties were over, and Rickard's wife and daughter faced the Great Depression alone, but not without a healthy dose of the same grit and determination that had driven Tex Rickard.

Decades later, Bob Considine would dub Rickard "the successful failure." He said that Rickard "had invested a fortune, willed only memories."[26] Considine noted that Rickard had left Maxine and daughter "practically nothing but a trunk filled with worthless securities and notes" with a securities list that read "something like an index to his life as an adventurer, prospector, gambler, promoter, and eventual intimate of Madison Square Garden's 600 millionaires of happy memory."[27] Considine's comment on Rickard ignores the fact that the entire American stock market experienced devastating losses in the years immediately following Rickard's death, and most of the 600 millionaires suffered substantial losses in their wealth. Considine said, "The widow still attractive has mainly her memories—which she keeps to herself as she goes about the routine little clerical tasks assigned to her by people who do not know her or the part she played in Tex's incredible rise and fall."[28]

The Aftermath

Gene Tunney, like Jack Dempsey, had become a millionaire thanks to Rickard's promotional genius. Tunney retired shortly after winning the Battle of the Long Count. True to his plan, he left boxing immediately after accomplishing his life's goal of defeating the great Manassa Mauler and thereby achieving great wealth. He married a rich heiress (Polly Lauder) and lived very well for the rest of his life.

Jeffries, Willard, Dempsey, and Carpentier all lived to a ripe old age. Battling Nelson developed dementia at an early age. And Joe Gans died of tuberculosis at the age of 35. Jack Johnson died in a car crash at 66, but was in good health until he perished. Jack Sharkey lived past the age of 90. Dempsey quit the ring after his second fight with Tunney with sixty-nine fights on his professional record, figuring that more fights would just encourage more lawsuits. Like most Americans who suffered financial ruin in the Great Depression, Dempsey was dead broke by 1931. Dempsey's only option was to return to the ring. Between August 20, 1931, and August 15, 1932, he fought 175 men, sometimes as many as four a night.[29] In one year of the Great Depression, Dempsey fought twice as many bouts as he fought during his entire professional life against second-rate opposition who probably would not have qualified as his sparring partners during his prime.

Upon Rickard's death it was said repeatedly, "It doesn't matter if he goes to heaven or hell, because he is sure to arrange a match with the other side as soon as he gets there." But his death left a void in the earthly sporting world. Texas newspapers aptly summarized the problem in their tribute to Rickard's life: "Fistic World Fails to Find Answer to Problem of Taking Place of King of Promoters."

> Rickard wasn't merely associated with boxing; he was boxing itself. He took it out of the back rooms and dropped it into the laps of millionaires. He established a monopoly by cornering its star performers. He made it the biggest money business of all

> professional sports, a monument of marble where once it was a hovel of weather-beaten shingle. He held the unseen strings that made its puppets dance and he held them alone. This man had to die to make one fully realize how complete was his domination of the sport. So today, with the master gone, the aides are in a state of flustered confusion, while plans that he made for the future are marking time, awaiting action that may never come.[30]

The End of the Roaring Twenties

Nine months after his death, the shares for Rickard's beloved Garden stock fell precipitously, along with the market of 1929. Everyone, including the 600 millionaires, suffered. Boxing and ice hockey kept money flowing through the Garden during the Depression. During the depth of the Depression, the Rangers garnered another Stanley Cup victory in 1933.

Before Tex died, the Garden's profits had climbed into the millions. By 1931, they dwindled to $130,000. "A year later, the boxing shows, the pride of the house, netted only $7,000. And a year after that, they took a $59,000 bath."[31]

Boxing as the grand spectacle died with Rickard and would not be brought back to life until the arrival of the brash showman, Muhammad Ali. The staging of world title fights on a large scale was temporarily re-invigorated in 1937, when promoter Mike Jacobs (who took over Rickard's position as boxing's top promoter) staged four world title matches at New York's Polo Grounds. Attendance at his Carnival of Champions reached 32,000, some estimates say 40,000 for the title bouts between middleweights Marcel Thil of France and American Fred Apostoli, welterweights Barney Ross and Ceferino Garcia, lightweights Lou Ambers and Pedro Montanez, and bantams Sixto Escobar and Harry Jeffra. The gate receipts brought only $190,000 with which to pay the participants, causing the promoter to lose money. His mistake was excluding Joe Louis and the heavyweight title from the mix, an error Rickard would have been unlikely to make. Mike Jacobs would go on to promote other, more successful boxing shows, but not of the caliber of his great Carnival of Champions; it was simply too much of a financial risk.

Rickard's Garden would continue to host Democratic presidential nominees. It would also host President John F. Kennedy's birthday party in May 1962, famous, or perhaps infamous, for Marilyn Monroe's drippingly sexual rendition of "Happy Birthday Mr. President." By the 1960s Madison Square Garden hosted popular fighters like Sugar Ray Robinson, Carmen Basilio, and Emile Griffith. While no fighters were killed in any of Rickard's promotions, one of Griffith's fights nearly spelled the end of boxing in America when he killed welterweight champion Benny "Kid" Paret in their torrid 1962 title fight.

Rickard's Madison Square Garden was closed in 1968.

Rickard had that spark of genius and driving desire to dream the impossible dream, but most of all he had the ability to inspire trust and gain the support of the multitudes who were needed to bring off a big event. From the fighters to the gamblers, everyone knew they could count on a square deal from Tex Rickard.

In an age before mass communications and sophisticated capital markets, entrepreneurs like Tex needed partners they could trust with their money and even with their lives in places like Alaska, the Klondike, and the Nevada desert. The word of Tex Rickard was as good as gold, and Tex was the most sought after of partners from the ragtime era right up through the end of the Roaring Twenties.

Tex Remembered by His Contemporaries

- "He lived square."—Old-timers from Texas
- "They don't make them like Rickard anymore."—Jack Dempsey
- "He out-smarted some of the most larcenous guys in the history of boxing and out-toughed some of the toughest."—Jack Dempsey
- "He could be trusted."—Ike Dorgan
- "Mr. Rickard seems to have done more for the manly art of modified murder than even the late Marquis of Queensberry. That distinguished peer merely outlined the methods of ring procedure. It remained for the great commoner, Mr. Tex Rickard, to put the thing on a business basis."—W.O. McGeehan, sports editor for the *New York Tribune*
- "Boxing literally is tottering on its throne, a prey to the uncertainty that inevitably seizes upon any institution from which the steadying hand of its master has been removed."—Davis J. Walsh, sports editor for the *International News Service*
- "The greatest fight promoter of all time."—Nat Fleischer
- "The showman who out–Barnum'd Barnum."—Francis Albertanti

Rickard introduced the million-dollar purses, turned Madison Square Garden into the home of boxing and made it a paying operation. He seemed to have a magic wand that he could wave over a proposal—it was backed by his word, fueled by his high energy and determination and drive for success—and never once did he seem deterred by the risk. His only concern was to "put it over."

No promoter before or since could equal Rickard's match-making genius.

When others saw attendance in the tens of thousands, Rickard envisioned a hundred thousand. When others saw gates in the thousands, he dreamed of millions. He was the ringmaster behind the really big show, creating that perfect tension between the boxers that fight followers wanted to see. His intuition, business acumen and ability to gauge public reactions was finely tuned.

Rickard's life work, the big fights he promoted and the venues he created, left more than just the memories. He gave America a standard for fair play in business and sports. Although Considine called Rickard "the successful failure" who "willed only memories," in the final account it is men like Rickard who put everything they have into everything they do, and thereby leave the world a much richer place.

Appendix: Chronology of Tex Rickard's Life

1870	
Jan. 2	Born and named George Lewis Rickard
1894	Elected marshall of Henrietta, Texas
1895	Travels to the Klondike ahead of the Great Stampede of 1897–1898
1906	Promotes first "Great Fight of the Century": Joe Gans-Battling Nelson for lightweight title
Sept. 3	Gate receipts of $69,715 set record $30,000 purse—greater than any heavyweight title had ever drawn
1910	Promotes "Greatest Fight of the Century": Jim Jeffries-Jack Johnson, Reno, Nevada
July 4	Gate receipts of $270,755 set record Attendance of 18,020 sets record (not all were paid tickets) First $100,000 combined purse guarantee Only time Rickard referees a match
1911	Acquires 327,000 acres in Paraguay, South America, to promote cattle business
1916	Promotes Jess Willard-Frank Moran fight at Madison Square Garden Gate receipts of $152,000 set new record for an indoor event Record purse for a *no-decision* fight
1919	Promotes Jess Willard-Jack Dempsey, Toledo, Ohio
July 4	First $100,000 individual purse Gate receipts were $452,522 After expenses promoter Rickard's profit was $100,000 Largest combined purse to date ($127,500)
1920	Leases Madison Square Garden, New York Gate receipts total for five months exceed $1 million, new record
1921	Builds and promotes world's largest indoor swimming pool, Madison Square Garden

July 2	Promotes Jack Dempsey-Georges Carpentier, Boyles Thirty Acres, New Jersey
	First million-dollar gate, receipts of $1.6 million set new record
	Attendance is 90,000
	First live radio broadcast of a major event
	First to be simulcast in multiple languages
1922	Promoter's license revoked by New York State Athletic Commission
1923	Promotes "Greatest of All Charity Affairs," Yankee Stadium, for Millicent Hearst
May 12	First boxing card at Yankee Stadium
	Donates $182,903.26 and movie proceeds to the New York Milk Fund
Sept. 14	Promotes Jack Dempsey-Luis Firpo, New York Polo Grounds
	Second million-dollar gate
1924	Loses lease on Madison Square Garden
	Forms new Madison Square Garden Corporation with "600 millionaires"
1925	Builds the new Madison Square Garden, the world's largest amphitheater
Feb.	Begins and provides the first world rankings of boxers for *The Ring* magazine
Dec. 11	Opens new Garden with Paul Berlenbach vs. Jack Delaney, light-heavyweight title
	New gate record for indoor boxing event: $148,155
1926	Promotes Jack Dempsey-Gene Tunney "Battle of the Century," Philadelphia, Sesquicentennial Stadium
Sept. 23	New world attendance record of 135,000
	New gate record: $1.895 million
	Record individual purse: $800,000 (Dempsey)
Nov. 17	Founds Tex's Rangers (New York Rangers) hockey team
1927	Promotes Jack Dempsey-Gene Tunney Re-match, Soldier Field, Chicago, Illinois
Sept. 22	The famous "Long Count"
	First $2 million gate ($2.658 million)
	First boxer (Tunney) to get $1-million
1928	Opens Boston Madison Square Garden (The Boston Garden)
	Opens stock for his new Miami Beach Garden enterprise
1929	
Jan. 6	Dies in Miami from complications of operation for appendicitis

Notes

Introduction

1. Mrs. "Tex" Rickard, with Arch Oboler, *Everything Happened to Him*, 18.
2. Tony Gee, *Up to Scratch*, 141–143. His book contains an illustration of "Tom Sayers' Champion Circus" on page 142. The author notes that pugilist John C. Heenan also toured with the circus in Great Britain in 1863.
3. "For Three Fights: Perfect Arguments for the Pugilistic Carnival," *The Boston Globe*, August 22, 1892.
4. Leo N. Miletich, *Dan Stuart's Fistic Carnival,* is an entertaining, well-documented treatment of the promoter's frustrating attempt to arrange a "Carnival of Champions." The information here is from newspaper sources cited in his book.
5. Leo N. Miletich, *Dan Stuart's Fistic Carnival,* 120.
6. Jack Kearns, with Oscar Fraley, *The Million Dollar Gate*, 64.
7. Ibid.
8. Paul Gallico, *The Golden People*, 183; Jack Lawrence, "Rickard, the Man of Ballyhoo," *New York American*, January 11, 1929.
9. Rex Beach, "Jeffries Will Win if…" *Reno Evening Gazette,* July 1, 1910.
10. Roger Kahn, *A Flame of Pure Fire: Jack Dempsey and the Roaring '20s,* 34.
11. Nat Fleischer, "How Tex Made His Start," 23. Fleischer liked to consider himself among Rickard's great aids. In truth, Rickard did much to aid Fleischer in the business.

Chapter 1

1. Genealogist and Robert Wood Rickard family descendant Dennis Kemper has worked extensively on the Rickard family history. Civil War soldier Robert Wood Rickard wrote three (extant) letters home during his four-year Civil War service. The text quoted here is from the second letter in the family's collection. See also: Dennis W. Kemper, editor, "Tex Rickard, Biographical Sketches," *Clay County, Texas Centennial Book 1873–1973,* 46–47. Note: Mr. Kemper believes that Tex Rickard's daughter, Maxine Rickard-Halprin, was the author of the Rickard biography in the Clay County book.
2. Charles Samuels, *The Magnificent Rube*, 9–11.
3. "Tex Rickard's Life a Fantastic Career," *Joplin* (Missouri) *Globe*, January 8, 1929. Robert F. Delaney, "The Maxine and Tex Rickard Story and the Connection to the Delaney Family" (Delaney Family Genealogy), January 2007. Census information provided by Dennis Kemper in a personal e-mail to Colleen Aycock, dated August 4, 2011.
4. Mrs. Tex Rickard, *Everything Happened to Him*, 12.
5. Dennis W. Kemper, "Tex Rickard, Biographical Sketches." tn-roots.com/Clay/histories/ritter.htm.
6. Clay County, *Clay County Pioneers Reunion: Tex Rickard Day, Clay County, Henrietta, Texas* (program), October 17 & 18,1952.
7. "Many Old Settlers of Northern Texas Mourn Death of Rickard," *Wichita Falls* (Texas) *Times*, January 7, 1929.
8. Mrs. Tex Rickard, *Everything Happened to Him*, 15.
9. Ibid., 45.
10. Ibid., 53.
11. Ibid., 30.
12. Jack Lawrence, "Rickard, The Man of Ballyhoo," *New York American*, January 11, 1929.
13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.
15. Mrs. Tex Rickard, *Everything Happened to Him*, 26.
16. "Many Old Settlers of Northern Texas Mourn Death of Rickard," *Wichita Falls Times*, January 7, 1929.
17. Clay County, Texas, Marriage Records, 1893–1896, No. 171.
18. "Many Old Settlers of Northern Texas Mourn Death of Rickard," *Wichita Falls Times,* January 7, 1929.
19. Klondike Gold Rush National Historic Park. *Klondike Trail, North to the Yukon,* 18 and 28.
20. Les McLaughlin, "Yukon Nuggets: Before 1890, From the Klondike Muck to Madison Square Gardens," http://www.hougengroup.com/yukonhistory/nuggets_year/2000s.aspx?nugget=1871, June 29, 2011.
21. Pierre Berton, *Klondike: The Last Great Gold Rush, 1896–1899*, 21.
22. Ibid., 371–372.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., 29–30.
25. Ibid., 67. Berton says that Rickard was 26 and wore a "pencil-thin mustache" at the time, the only reference to any facial hair displayed on Rickard.
26. Robert Service, "The Ballad of the Northern Lights," *Collected Poems*, 82.
27. Lael Morgan, *Good Time Girls of the Alaska-Yukon Gold Rush*, 16.
28. Ibid., 159–161.
29. Ibid.; Mrs. Tex Rickard refers to the girlfriend as Blanche LaMarre, 131.
30. Pierre Berton, *Klondike,* 364–365.
31. Rex Beach, *Personal Exposures*, 83.
32. Ibid., 84.
33. Mrs. Tex Rickard, *Everything Happened to Him*, 131.
34. Ibid., 143–157.
35. "Cowboy From Lone Star State Who Has Made National Reputation for Nerve and Squareness," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 3, 1910.
36. Lael Morgan, *Good Time Girls,* 167. Morgan cites Reed, "The Mayor," 10–11.
37. *The Nome Nugget*, May 14, 1904, cited in Lael Morgan, 177.
38. Jack Kearns, *The Million Dollar Gate*, 29.
39. Charles Samuels, *The Magnificent Rube,* 66; Mrs. Tex Rickard, *Everything Happened to Him,* 181.
40. Charles Samuels, *The Magnificent Rube,* 92–93; Mrs. Tex Rickard, *Everything Happened To Him,* 162.
41. The daughter named Bessie Rickard is buried next to Tex Rickard at Woodlawn Cemetery, New York. The headstone reads, "Born on March 8, 1902 and died on August 5, 1907."
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43. George Graham Rice, *My Adventures with Your Money*, 99.
44. Colleen Aycock and Mark Scott, *Joe Gans,* 112–124.
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47. Ibid., 120–121.
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51. Ibid.
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1. Editor, *Mirror of Life: An Illustrated Weekly Journal of Sport*, November 13, 1905, 10.
2. Sam C. Austin, *Mirror of Life*, November 13, 1905, 10.
3. Battling Nelson, *Life, Battles and Career of Battling Nelson, Lightweight Champion of the World*, 30.
4. Ibid., 140.
5. Ibid., 13.
6. Ibid., 169.
7. H.C. Witwer, *The Leather Pushers*, 33.
8. Cited in Colleen Aycock and Mark Scott, *Joe Gans*, 157.
9. Battling Nelson, *Life, Battles and Career,* 117.
10. Ibid., 50.
11. Evelyn Nesbit, *Tragic Beauty: The Lost 1914 Memoirs of Evelyn Nesbit*, 258.
12. Battling Nelson, *Life, Battles and Career*, 139.
13. Ibid.

14. Ibid., 168.
15. "Dane Takes Awful Walloping," *San Francisco Examiner*, September 10, 1905.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Battling Nelson, *Life, Battles and Career*, 174–175.
19. Ibid.
20. Jack London, "The Game," James Bankes, editor, *Jack London Stories of Boxing*, 8–9.
21. Jack London, "How Different People View Fighters: Brain Beaten by Brute Force," *San Francisco Examiner*, September 10, 1905.
22. Ibid.
23. *The Police Gazette,* New York, November 4, 1905, and London's *Mirror of Life*, November 15, 1905.
24. Battling Nelson, *Life, Battles and Career*, 201.
25. "Nolan Offers Gans-Nelson Fight at Goldfield," *Tonopah Daily Sun*, August 3, 1906.
26. Nat Goodwin, *Nat Goodwin's Book*, 299.
27. Battling Nelson, *Life, Battles and Career*, 201.
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31. H.L. Mencken, "A Master of Gladiators, 1907," 104.
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33. "Goldfield Jumps at the Gans Nelson Match," *Tonopah Daily Sun*, August 4, 1906.
34. Ibid.
35. Rex Beach, author of The Spoilers, "The Fight at Tonopah," Nevada Historical Review, Summer 1973, p. 16; reprinted from *Everybody's Magazine*, April, 1907. For a complete discussion of the Gans-Herman fight, see Colleen Aycock and Mark Scott, "The Joe Gans-Kid Herman World Boxing Title Fight: New Year's Day, 1907, Tonopah, Nevada," *Boomtown History III: Life in Goldfield & Tonopah's Boomtowns*. Tonopah, Nevada: Boomtown History Conferences, 2009, 181–204
36. "Will Goldfield Monopolize the Pugilistic Limelight?" *Tonopah Daily Sun*, August 4, 1906.
37. Ibid.
38. "Gans-Nelson Fight Goes to Goldfield," *Tonopah Daily Sun*, August 7, 1906.
39. "Goldfield is Certain of the Big Fight: Gans Arrives at the Camp," *Tonopah Daily Sun*, August 8, 1906.
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63. "Gans Wins on Foul," *Tonopah Daily Sun*, September 3, 1906.

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Chapter 3

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2. "Wanted to See the Best Man Win," *Daily Nevada State Journal*, July 4, 1905.
3. Editor, *Mirror of Life: An Illustrated Weekly Journal of Sport*, November 15, 1905, 10.
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5. Nat Fleischer, "How Tex Made His Start," 23.
6. Paul Gallico, *The Golden People*, 192.
7. Bob Considine, *Dempsey*, 203.
8. Mrs. Tex Rickard, *Everything Happened to Him*, 234.
9. Jack London, reporting from Reno, June 30, 1910, cited in James Bankes, editor, *Jack London, Stories of Boxing*, 174.
10. George Kirksey, "Rickard Stages Second Big Fight at Reno, Nevada," *Waterloo* (Iowa) *Evening Courier*, January 14, 1929.
11. Ibid.
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13. George Kirksey, "Rickard Stages Second Big Fight at Reno, Nevada," *Waterloo* (Iowa) *Evening Courier*, January 14, 1929.
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15. "Big Bids Dazzle Fighters' Eye: $125,000 the Highest Offer," *New York Times*, December 2, 1909.
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17. "Fighters in Garden Ring," *New York Times*, December 2, 1909.
18. "Rickard Will Get Fight," *New York Times*, December 2, 1909.
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33. Rex Beach, "Jeffries Will Win If…," *Reno Evening Gazette*, July 1, 1910.
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35. Edward F. Cahill, "Another Case of Too Much Johnson, Grinning Savage Perfectly Trained," *San Francisco Call*, July 5, 1910.
36. Rex Beach, "Whispered Him to Death," *Reno Evening Gazette*, July 2, 1910.
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38. Ibid. Beach was incensed when Rickard had to defend himself against rumors that the fight was fixed. The day before the fight, Rickard issued a statement to the press: "This fight is absolutely on the square. We regret very

much if any contrary impression prevails, for we have tried our best to avoid any move in our negotiations for the staging of this contest that would lend the least semblance of truth to the many vicious rumors and opinions that have gone the rounds regarding a 'frame-up.' The people who are knocking are the ones who know least about either the fighters or ourselves. If they were fully informed of the determination of both Jeffries and Johnson to win and of the great amount of money and glory the victor will achieve, they would not have to seek further for a reason to controvert their false ideas. We wish to thank the Associated Press for the accuracy of all its reports concerning this fight and for its fair and unbiased treatment of every one connected with the 'battle of the century.'" Tex Rickard and John L. Gleason, "Fight Absolutely on the Square is Statement of the Promoters," *Nevada State Journal*, July 3, 1910.

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45. Fred R. Bechdolt, "Confident Smile Turns to Lines of Deep Bitterness; In White Man's Grief Lay Brutality of Contest; Come Back? There is No Such Thing," *San Francisco Call*, July 5, 1910.

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53. Robert Service, "The Lure of Little Voices," *Collected Poems of Robert Service*, 23.

Chapter 4

1. "'Tex' Rickard Lord Over 50,000 Cattle; Cowman, Back from Paraguay After Three Years," *New York Times*, April 5, 1915.

2. Mrs. Tex Rickard, *Everything Happened to Him*, 241–242, 263.

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4. "Tex Rickard Sails for South America," *Colorado Springs Gazette*, February 22, 1911.

5. "In Argentina: Me for an Undeveloped Place," *Colorado Springs Gazette*, February 22, 1911.

6. "Rickard to Argentina," *Galveston Daily News*, February 26, 1911.

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11. "Rickard Lord Over 50,000 Cattle," *New York Times*, April 10, 1915.

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13. Charles P. Stewart, "Bone of Contention," *Montana Standard*, December 30, 1928.

14. "Boxing Notes," *Syracuse Herald*, September 3, 1911.

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25. "Rickard Lord Over 50,000 Cattle," *New York Times*, April 10, 1915.
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32. "Rickard Lord Over 50,000 Cattle," *New York Times*, April 10, 1915.
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35. Ibid.
36. "Here and There," *Reno Evening Gazette*, September 11, 1915.
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38. "Rickard Lord Over 50,000 Cattle," *New York Times*, April 10, 1915.
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43. "Johnston Offers $55,000 for Fight," *New York Times*, Jan 22, 1916.
44. Charles Samuels, *The Magnificent Rube*, 187.
45. Mrs. Tex Rickard, *Everything Happened to Him*, 259.
46. "Thinks Fulton will Give Willard Battle," *New York Times*, March 25, 1917.
47. "Tex Rickard Could Have Bossed Army for Latins," *Ada* (Oklahoma) *Evening News*, December 13, 1928.
48. Mrs. Tex Rickard, *Everything Happened to Him*, 263–265.
49. Ibid., 274.
50. "Madison Sq. Garden Goes to Receiver" *New York Tribune*, June 21, 1916.
51. "Garden Lessees Will Be Evicted, Nov. 7, 1916," *New York Sun,* December 9, 1916.
52. "Garden Owners to Vacate," *New York Tribune*, March 20, 1917.
53. Rickard's visit with Theodore Roosevelt before the former president died is discussed by Mrs. Tex Rickard in *Everything Happened to Him*, 268–9.

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2. Jack Dempsey with B.P. Dempsey, *Dempsey*, 73.
3. Jack Kearns, *The Million Dollar Gate*, 49–50.
4. Ibid.
5. Arnold Thomas, private e-mail to author Colleen Aycock. For an excellent history of Les Darcy and his manager Snowy Baker, see Thomas' *Heroes of The Fancy*, 64–92.
6. Jack Kearns, *The Million Dollar Gate*, 72.
7. Arnold Thomas, personal e-mail to Colleen Aycock.
8. Jack Kearns, *The Million Dollar Gate,* 73.
9. "Browne's Lease in Danger, But Darcy Fight Is On," *New York Tribune*, March 2, 1917; "Whitman Bars Darcy in New York State; Ban Put on Darcy Bout by Governor: Fight with Dillon Forbidden," *New York Times*, March 3, 1917.
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11. Ibid., 73.
12. Jack Dempsey, *Dempsey,* 61.
13. Ibid.
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15. Nat Fleischer, *Jack Dempsey*, 95–100.
16. Jack Kearns, *The Million Dollar Gate,* 80.
17. Peter Heller, *In This Corner,* Gunboat Smiths' interview, 43.
18. Jack Dempsey, *Dempsey,* 75.
19. Ibid., 93.
20. Ibid., 96.
21. Mrs. Tex Rickard, *Everything Happened to Him*, 272.

22. Jack Kearns, *The Million Dollar Gate,* 109–110; Jack Dempsey, *Dempsey,* 97–99.
23. Jack Kearns, *The Million Dollar Gate,* 111.
24. Jack Dempsey, *Dempsey,* 99.
25. Ibid., 99–100.
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31. Jack Kearns, *The Million Dollar Gate,* 116.
32. Jack Dempsey, *Dempsey,* 113.
33. Jack Kearns, *The Million Dollar Gate,* 12; Jack Dempsey, *Dempsey,* 113. Roger Kahn, *A Frame of Pure Fire*, 61.
34. Jack Kearns, *The Million Dollar Gate,* 7; Jack Dempsey, *Dempsey,* 113; Roger Kahn, *A Frame of Pure Fire*, 101–102.
35. Jack Dempsey, *Dempsey,* 113–114.
36. "Noted Gun fighter of Old West Dead," cited in Mike DeLisa and Johnny Bos, *Who Lies There,* compendium.
37. Jack Dempsey, *Dempsey,* 114–15.
38. Jack Kearns, *The Million Dollar Gate,* 7–11.
39. Ibid., 9.
40. Ibid., 18.
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43. Jack Dempsey, *Dempsey,* 110.
44. Ibid., 112.
45. Ibid., 134.
46. Ibid., 90–91.
47. Ibid., 122–123.
48. Jack Kearns, *The Million Dollar Gate,* 120.
49. Nat Fleischer, *Jack Dempsey*, 56–63; Jack Dempsey, *Dempsey,* 130–131.
50. Clay Moyle, *A Fighter's Last Christmas: The Billy Miske Story*, manuscript.
51. Jack Kearns, *The Million Dollar Gate,* 128.
52. Jack Dempsey, *Dempsey,* 94.
53. Ibid., 135.
54. Ibid., 95.
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56. Jack Dempsey, *Dempsey,* 136.
57. Jack Cavanaugh, *Tunney*, 115.
58. Nat Fleischer, *The Ring* magazine, February, 1935.
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60. Jack Kearns, *The Million Dollar Gate,* 128–129.
61. Jack Dempsey, *Dempsey,* 139.
62. Peter Heller, *In this Corner*, 43.
63. Jack Kearns, *The Million Dollar Gate,* 185.
64. William Inglis, Champions Off Guard, 260.
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69. Ibid., 143.
70. Gene Corri, *Fifty Years in the Ring*, 55
71. Jack Kearns, *The Million Dollar Gate,* 147–8.
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97. "Firpo vs. Willard," *Time Magazine*, July 23, 1923.
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100. Jack Dempsey, *Dempsey,* 145.
101. Ibid., 160.
102. Jack Kearns, *Million Dollar Gate,* 185.
103. Ibid., 186.
104. Ibid., 187–88.
105. Jack Dempsey, *Dempsey,* 161.
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108. Jack Kearns, *Million Dollar Gate,* 188.
109. Jack Dempsey, *Dempsey,* 162.
110. James Cain, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, 76.
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Chapter 6

1. Ed Frayne, "Rickard Finally Sees Luxury's Beckoning," *New York American*, June 4, 1928.
2. Mrs. Schuyler Van Rensselaer, "The Madison Square Garden," *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, 732.
3. Mrs. Schuyler Van Renssaelaer, 735.
4. Ibid.
5. Architectural critic Mrs. Van Renssaelaer identifies "the yellow and white church on one side of Washington Square and the white Washington Arch on the other side, the Judge Building at Fifth Avenue and Sixteenth street, the Columbia Bank at Fifth Avenue and Forty-second street, the Bank of America, the Yosemite apartment house, the Hotel Imperial, the Herald Building, and the power-house at Broadway and Houston street; the Century Club, the Players' Club, the Metropolitan Club, and the club-houses for the Deutscher Verein and the Freundschaft Society; the Villard houses on Madison Avenue behind the cathedral, and the big Tiffany house on the same avenue at Seventy-second street; the business building on the southeastern corner of Broadway and Twentieth street, and the one diagonally opposite: these will be enough to convince you that they have done more than any other single architect or firm for the imporovement of the city," 738.
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39. "Promoter Plans Program for Year Round at Amphitheater," *Herald Tribune,* Aug 2, 1924.
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41. "Value of Fighter Measured Strictly on Drawing Power," *Herald Tribune*, November 22, 1925.
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2. Jack Dempsey, *Dempsey*, 191.
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4. Jack Cavanaugh, *Tunney,* 149.
5. Harry Preston, *Memories*, 121.
6. "Rickard Bars Radio at Ring: Bad for Box Office," *Herald Tribune*, November 26, 1924.
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