

The Boxing Biographies Newsletter

Volume 1 - No 18 Part 1

6 December 2007

www.boxingbiographies.com please visit our parent site www.worldboxingforums.com

If you wish to receive future newsletters please email the message "NEWS LETTER" robert.snell1@ntlworld.com

As always the full versions of these articles are on the website

This edition is split into two parts and provides a detailed account of the life of one of the true legends of sport

Tex Rickard

PART 1

Waterloo Evening Courier
9th January 1929

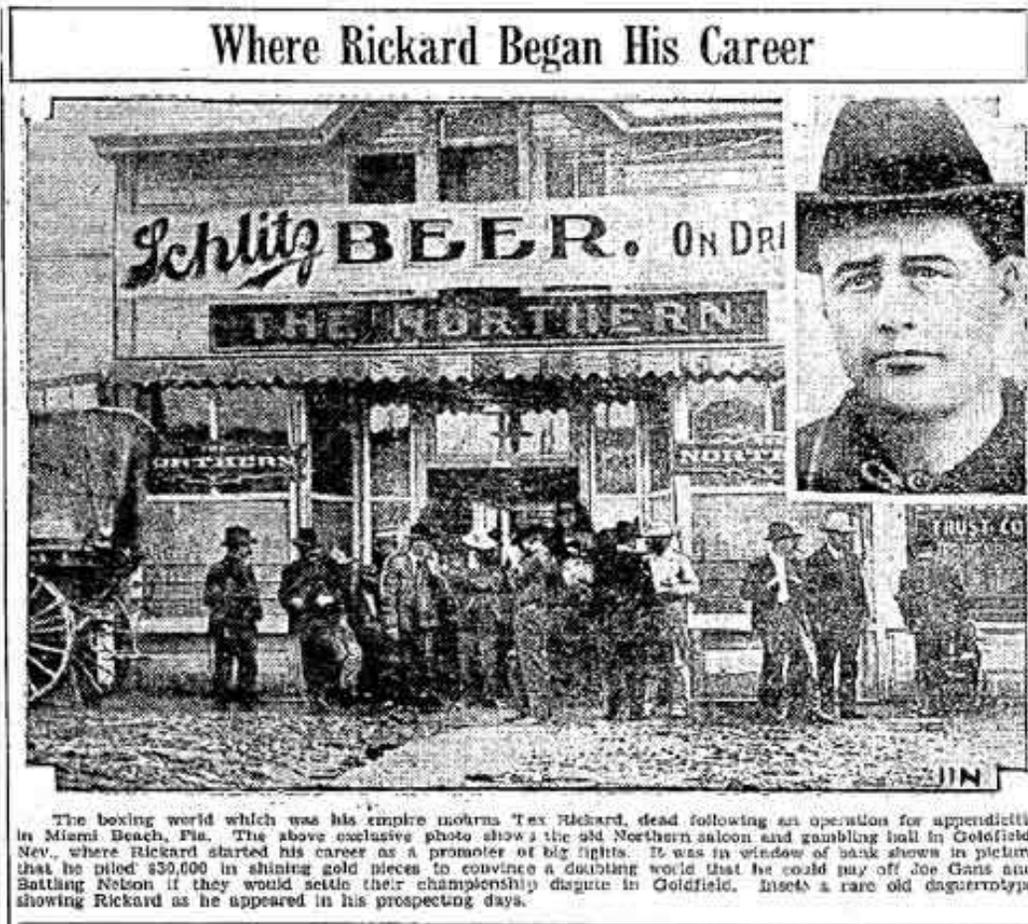
He Was My Pal Said Many Men In Varied Walks

Tex Rickard Born Jan " , 1870, Early Encountered Stirring Success

Following is the first chapter of "**The Life of Tex Rickard,**" written by George Kirksey of the United Press sports staff, who was with the late promoter at Miami Beach up to the time of his death. Additional chapters, probably 10 in number, will follow daily. The story is based upon facts obtained by Kirksey up to the time of Rickard's illness, and on information gathered from many parts of the country from men and women who knew Rickard from boyhood, including his 81- year-old mother in Seattle, who contributed largely to the first chapter.

By GEORGE KIRKSEY,
United Press Staff Correspondent.

"He was my pal." It was said of Tex Rickard by many men in varied walks of life; by cowboys and millionaires, prize fighters and society men. But it remained for his 81-year-old mother, when she learned of his death, to plumb the depth of the sincerity of his extraordinary character by saying: **"George was my pal."** The man who rode a trail to fortune from the ranches of the far west to the heights of showmanship and unparalleled success as a promoter .was christened George Lewis Rickard. His nickname of Tex, by which the world came to know him, was given him during his early manhood. His mother never liked it. **"He was always George Lewis to me,"** she said.



Parents Were Illinois Pioneers.

Rickard's parents were pioneers in Illinois. His father was a millwright and the family migrated to Kansas, where Tex's father built the first fully equipped mill in the state. Rickard often talked of this. It was characteristic of the man that he took the same straightforward pride in simple things of typically American life that he did in his most spectacular achievements as a showman.

George Lewis Rickard, then, was born Jan. 2, 1870. The date of his birth has been variously misrepresented, .due usually to a prevailing tendency to lop a few years from the toll taken by time from prominent characters. Rickard himself was uncertain in later years as to the exact place of his birth. He always gave it as Kansas City, but once explained: "**Well, it was outside Kansas City in a place called White Church, Kan. But I always just claimed Kansas City.**"

Memory of James Brothers.

Boyhood for Tex was far from dull. Jesse James' mother lived near the Rickard's, and one day, shortly after Tex was born, a posse invaded the neighborhood, hunting for the bandit and his brother, Frank. There was a "right smart lot of shooting," as Rickard put it, claiming he was born to the sound of firearms.

Until death stilled his naive, indomitable spirit, there always was a "**right smart lot of excitement**," where Rickard was around. When Tex was four years old the Rickard family settled in Sherman, Tex., but moved frequently from place to place as the father followed his trade of installing mills.

It was at the age of six, according to his mother, that Tex had his first experience with fighting. He came home from Sunday school one day, his best clothes torn and dusty, his face beaten and bruised.



First Taste of Fighting.

"George had been told never to fight, and hadn't defended himself when an older boy attacked him," explained the, late promoter's aged mother in recalling the incident. "When his father heard that, he reversed his instructions, but gave George a whipping anyway, telling him he should have another every time he didn't defend himself. "After that, George never got any more spankings."

While the Rickard's were living at Cambridge, Tex., the promoter's father died, leaving Tex with quite a job on his hands for a boy of 11, that of contributing materially, to the support of a widowed mother, two brothers and three sisters. Mrs Rickard subsequently moved to Henrietta, where Tex received a little schooling when not riding cows and doing odd jobs around the ranch.

Experience As A Cowboy

In 1886, before he was out of his teens Tex took the long trip up the north trail with many head of cattle for Montana. He rode with an outfit which wintered 16,000 head in three herds in that state. Less than 1,000 head survived the blizzards. At another time, 11 cowboys started north from the panhandle to Omaha with 3,500 steers, Tex being the youngster of the group. On the morning after the first day's travel, an exhausted calf was found with the herd, sunk on its haunches. Rickard adopted- the calf, named it "**Sitting Bull**" and saw it safely to Omaha.

That calf gave Tex. a lot of trouble on its wanderings, but he would always get it safely back to the herd. One of Rickard's favorite yarns of his youth was about

the calf. "I used to ask the other boys so often if they had seen Sitting Bull myself for a long time afterwards," Tex recounted.

Invited to Become Bandit.

The afternoon the herd stirred up the dust of Omaha's main street, Tex met three slight acquaintances. They had a plan on foot to rob a mail coach and proposed that Rickard join them. "I said I'd go, but I didn't," Tex told long afterwards. "A posse killed two of those fellows and the third was hanged later on."

Rickard continued to "punch cows" until he was 22, and must have made a reputation for himself far removed from that of lawlessness for two years later in 1894 he was elected city marshal of Henrietta, Tex.

Chapter 2

Rickard Went To Alaska In 1895 First Big Stake

Opened Saloon and Gambling House Acquires Name of "Square Shooter"

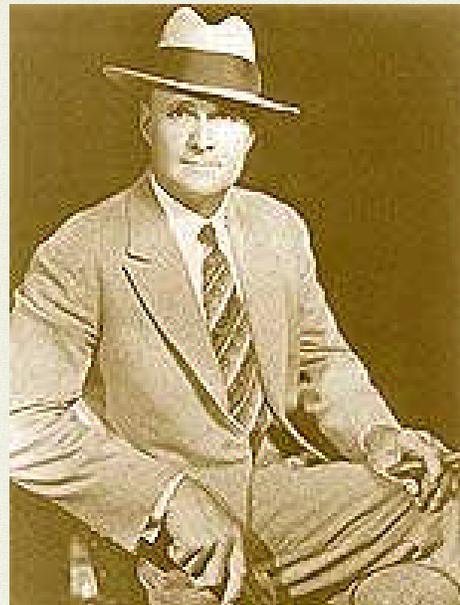
Tex Rickard made a reputation for himself as city marshal of Henrietta Tex., for his ability to handle men without gun play. Old timers cannot recall a single instance during his more than a year in office when he was forced to use his gun on a bad man.

Cattle rustlers, skylarking cowboys and drunkards were Rickard's principal "customers." He received no stipulated salary for the job, but made his money in fees. It was while serving as city marshal that Rickard married his first wife Leona . They had one child, a boy. The child died early and is buried beside his mother in the Henrietta cemetery.

Was Married Three Times.

Time almost obscured all trace of Rickard's first marriage , and it was not generally known that he was married three times. Rickard never talked about his private life.

Life as city marshal grew dull for Tex. One winter night Rickard was sitting around the stove in a Henrietta saloon : when a cowboy came in with a letter from Jim Roberts, a former Texas cow hand who wrote glowingly of life in the Klondike. Roberts told about flour selling for \$1 a pound.



Rickard started north early in 1895 with Willie Slack, a young man with the wanderlust. It was on the trip north from Seattle that Rickard got his nickname of "**Tex**" from a sailor who asked him where he was from.

The pair landed at Juneau broke and with only a few scanty possessions early in the spring of 1895. From Juneau they drifted from place to place.

Partner In Two Claims.

In July 1896 when the first Klondike strike was made, Rickard was a bartender at Circle City, 300 miles below on the Yukon. Rickard finally got his outfit together and hit the trail to Dawson. He had no dogs and had to pull his own sled. The weather was 50 below zero and the snow waist deep in the drifts.

There were only one or two houses and a dozen or so tents when Rickard arrived in Dawson. It grew overnight into a tawdry frontier town and Rickard rode the crest of the boom into his first big money.

He staked out two claims – No 3 with Jack Dodson and No. 4 with Al Mayo on Bonanza creek. Both claims were "**strikes**" but along with his good fortune came his first bit, mistake. He sold his interest in No. 3 for \$17,000, but in so doing lost a fortune. His successors reaped \$300,000 out of No. 3. He sold his interest in No. 4 for \$40,000. Little more than a year after he reached Alaska, Rickard, only 26, had amassed his first fortune. With a stake of almost \$10,000 he opened his first gambling venture, the famous Northern saloon and gambling palace in Dawson City.

Stripped by Rival Gamblers.

Rickard's policy of playing "square" even with gamblers led to his downfall. The other gambling houses in Dawson closed earlier than the Northern, and the faro dealers and card sharps from those places would come to Rickard's place to play their winnings. Rickard played them 50-50 and they broke him in less than a year.

But Rickard made his fame as a square shooter and it never deserted him. Although fortunes came and went. "**Rickard's Square**" became a byword among gamblers in the far frozen north and later a byword among millionaires.

Rickard's next job was sawing wood at \$15 per cord at Rampart city and it was there he met Rex Beach, fresh from college, in 1898. Rickard and Beach did not become close friends in those days as many persons thought.

"I liked Rickard but we were not close friends" Beach said. "***I was a 9 o'clock boy and he was a midnight son***". In the spring of 1899 both stampeded to

Nome. He had \$210, I was told. I was practically broke. He started the Northern Saloon (named after his first place at Dawson) and sold a quarter interest for \$21,000. I still went to bed early. He prospered in Nome and was very well liked. I got to know him better in Tonopah Nev. Several years later.

Ole Elliott and Kid Highly became Rickard's partners in his second Gambling hall and saloon in Nome. Rickard's reputation helped business and for four years the place earned about \$100,000 a year. Tex conducted a bank on the side for the men who would straggle into his saloon from the cold with their nuggets, and say: **"Keep my stuff, Tex,"** and walk away without bothering for a receipt. The bitter Alaskan winters made the thin-blooded westerner suffer and Tex left Alaska for California. **"I'm going where a fellow can keep warm,"** he said.

THE LIFE OF TEX RICKARD Chapter 3

After spending almost eight years in Alaska Tex Rickard left for California In 1902 to enjoy wealth acquired in the Nome gambling venture. Romance again entered the career of Rickard shortly after he reached San Francisco where he married his second wife, Miss Mae Meyers in 1902. She was often referred to as his first wife. One child was born to them, Bessie, and she died in 1907. The second Mrs. Rickard died in New York, October 30. 1925 of pneumonia. The facts about Richard's first marriage to Leona Rittick in May, 1894, were never made public and are worth retelling even at this point. Rickard and his young sweetheart eloped from Henrietta, Tex., where Rickard was serving as city marshal at the time, and were married at Fort Worth, Texas.

The bride's father, Dr. S. G. Rittick, bitterly opposed the marriage but forgave them afterwards. The first Mrs. Rickard became ill and a few months after she was pronounced incurable, a son was born. He was named George L. Rickard, Jr. Three weeks later his mother died. The baby died a few days later. The two tragedies brought a change into Rickard's life and influenced him in making his decision to go to Alaska.

Just how much money Rickard left Alaska with will always remain in doubt. Some say it was a half million, while others say it was no more than \$100,000. At any rate part of this fortune was wiped out in the purchase of claims which failed to yield gold after he left the Yukon.

He flourished as a gambler around Seattle and San Francisco for a time, but in 1903 headed for the Nevada Goldfields and settled in the town of Goldfields at the time the boom hit that lonely spot in the western desert.



One of Rickard's dreams came true at Goldfield when he built the finest brick mansion in Nevada – a palace in the desert. The house cost \$75,000. One years water bill was \$1,300. The bricks used to build the structure were imported.

Many stories have been told about Rickard's "cold steel nerve" but Jack Curley, the wrestling promoter, contributes one of the best illustrating

the fearless Rickard of his younger days. It happened in Reilly's saloon in a nearby Rival city of Goldfield. "Rickard walked in the saloon with a friend to get a drink," Curley recounted. "Larry Sullivan was drunk at the bar. He was one of the meanest men in the goldfields. He had a record of seven notches on his gun. He hated Rickard and began looking for trouble the minute Tex came in".

"He tried to insult Rickard by every conceivable way, but Rickard kept his head and ignored him. Finally Sullivan whipped out his gun. And Sullivan had reputation for never bluffing. All eyes were turned on Rickard. Tex turned around casually and faced Sullivan. The gun was leveled at Rickard's lowest vest button. With the swiftness of a panther Rickard's hand shot out and grabbed the gun. He twisted Sullivan's wrist and broke his grip on the gun. Then he stepped back and tossed the gun into a far corner and the crowd stood dumbfounded.. Tex turned to the bar and lifted his glass to his lips as if nothing had happened. Then he walked out.

A panic hit Goldfield in 1907 and business fell off at the Northern. Rickard sold out and opened the Palace Bar nearby. It was a failure. Then he opened his fourth Northern in Rawhide, where a new boom had started. Again Rickard caught the flow of easy money.

Fire destroyed the Northern at Rawhide and it was his last gambling house. Something happened at Goldfield in 1906 which definitely changed the career of the man who up to this time had been a cowboy, Marshal, miner, bartender and owner of gambling houses.

The big business men of Goldfield wanted to attract attention to their flourishing little desert city. Rickard was selected as the man to put Goldfield on the map. Here again conflicting- stories are told about how Rickard became engaged in the promotion of his first fight. John Mateer, a reporter from. Santiago, where he served under Col. Roosevelt, was said to have sold the idea of staging a big fight in Goldfield to Rickard.

Anyway Rickard took his first trip to New York City and saw his first ring battle.

He occupied a ringside seat in old Madison Square garden and saw Terry McGovern and Jimmy Britt, famous lightweights, fight a draw. When he got back to goldfield, Rickard wired Joe Humphreys, who was later to become Rickard's announcer, an offer of \$15,000 for a return bout between McGovern and Britt at Goldfield.

Chapter 4

Nelson And Gans Stage battle At Goldfield, Nev. Receipts Are \$69,715, High Record To date Tex Is photographed



"Just a nut who's gone crazy searching for gold," Joe Humphreys remarked when he received Tex Rickard's telegram offering \$15,000 for a return match between Terry McGovern and Jimmy Britt at Goldfield, Nev., Labor day. 1906.

Humphreys not only had never heard of Rickard, but when he went to look up Goldfield he couldn't find the boom town on the map. He never took the trouble to answer the wire.

Before Tex could make another move, luck played right into his hands. Billy Nolan, manager of Battling Nelson, the famous lightweight, picked up a copy of the Goldfield Sun in the lobby of a Salt Lake City hotel and read an "ad" placed in that paper by Jack Clifford, a fair lightweight of that time, who wanted an opponent for Labor day. Nolan wired the Goldfield paper for more details and the wire found its way to Rickard.

Bid for Joe Gans.

"That showed me that Nelson was open for a proposition," Rickard said in recalling the negotiations, "so I wired back that the Clifford bout was out, but that we'd give \$15,000 for Nelson to meet Jos Gans."

"Post \$30,000 in escrow and Nelson will fight," Nolan answered. Gans, who was willing to meet Nelson on any terms, had agreed to a \$10,000 purse. Rickard now had both fighters in line for the match, and thru subscriptions, he raised the money for their guarantees.

Suspicious of Rickard's tactics, Nolan and Nelson hurried to Goldfield. and when they arrived, found \$30,000 in \$20 gold pieces stacked in the window of a wooden shack. Five thousand of that was out of Rickard's pocket.

Purse Record at Time

The purse of \$30,000 was an unheard of sum in the boxing world .in those days, and was more than any heavyweight had ever received up to that time, including Sullivan, Corbett and Fitzsimmons.

Both fighters started training in Goldfield and the bout began to attract considerable attention to the little desert mining town. Then Rickard began building his first fight arena, a crude affair half a mile from the main street. Despite the fact that voluntary labor was largely recruited to build the arena, it cost in the-neighborhood of \$10,000.

Fight ,fans from all over the country poured into Goldfield long before the day of the fight. A San Francisco newspaper sent two staff men, Rube Goldberg and W. O. McGeehan, to cover the fight.

McGeehan asked him to pose for his first newspaper photograph and Goldberg did the first sketch of him. Embarrassed, Rickard posed for the photograph behind a livery stable because he didn't want anyone to see him before the camera.

Record Gate Established. The fight was held Sept. 3, 1906, and the receipts , of \$69,715 established a new world's record.. Nelson received \$22,500 and Gans, who won in the forty-second round on a foul, \$11,000. The net profit was around \$11,000, but Rickard did not receive all of this.

The troubles and drawbacks which attended the promotion of every big bout Rickard put on made their appearance in his very first effort. Even the day before the fight, there was some doubt as to where It would be held. Billy Nolan, caused Rickard most of the trouble by threatening to leave him flat.

"I had the two roughest deputy sheriffs in town go to Nolan and tell him that he would never leave town in good health," Rickard related. "Then he dug up an old rule which stipulated the lightweight limit was 133 pounds. He insisted to the last that Gans make 133 pounds. The severe training weakened Gans and contributed to his later death. Gans barely made the weight."

Rickard Not Impressed.

Despite the stupendous success of the bout, Rickard did not attempt to promote another fight until four years later. , Although Rickard never did say so, it is understood from many sources that he was not impressed with he possibilities of the promotion of boxing matches.

"I'll never promote another fight," Rickard is quoted as having said after the Gans-Nelson bout.

Chapter 5



Tex Rickard made his dramatic reentry into the fight game in 1910, four years after he had astounded the boxing world by successfully staging his first fight between Joe Gans and Battling Nelson in the little desert mining town of Goldfield, Nev.

During the intervening years Rickard devoted his time to mining speculation. He was employed by a syndicate to buy up mining claims from individuals who were unable to meet their mortgages when, late in 1909, he was summoned to Duluth by Thomas, F. Cole, copper king on a business proposition involving holdings in which they were interested.

The entire country at this time was excited about the possibility of James J. Jeffries, the retired undefeated heavyweight champion, returning to the ring in an effort to recapture the title for the white race from Jack Johnson, negro titleholder. After they completed their business transactions, Cole remembering Rickard's successful promotion of the Gans-Nelson match, said:

"Why don't you go after the Johnson-Jeffries match, Tex?"

Every big promoter in the country was bidding for the bout and Rickard explained that he wasn't in a financial position to compete against them. **"Go after that fight Tex,"** Cole replied. **"If it's only money that you need, why you can count on me for as much as you want. Outbid every promoter by \$20,000, if necessary, to get the match."**

Rickard made his decision on the train going-back to Ely, Nev., and wired Cole that he had decided to take him up on his offer and go after the match. **"I knew I would have to act fast,"** Rickard said afterwards, **"as the big western promoters had already started East to Sign Johnson."**

On his way to New York Rickard read in a Chicago newspaper that Johnson was playing a vaudeville engagement at a Pittsburgh theatre. Rickard decided to change his plans and gambled on getting to Pittsburgh before Saturday night when Johnson was due to close his engagement. The move proved to be one of the smartest ever made by Rickard and gave him the inside track to getting Johnson's signature. Rickard arrived in Pittsburgh Saturday night and, instead of going to the theatre to look for Johnson, called at the boarding house where the negro was living. Johnson was not there, but the landlady informed him that Mrs. Johnson was in.

"Tell her Mr. Rickard from the West wants to see her," Rickard said. When Mrs. Johnson, who was a white woman, came down, Rickard attempted to enlist her aid in getting Johnson to sign with him. **"I'll buy you the best sealskin coat I can find if you'll get Jack to sign with me to meet Jeffries,"** Tex told her.

She agreed and when she arrived in New York City Rickard presented her with a \$100 sealskin coat as he had promised. She used her influence, which was no little, in persuading Johnson to cast his lot with Rickard. Rickard met Johnson in a black and tan cabaret in Harlem to talk business. The negro champion was serving champagne and entertaining his crowd of friends as though he were a millionaire.

The negotiations hadn't progressed very far when Johnson said: **"Look here, Mr. Tex, I needs dough."** Rickard pulled out his wallet and gave Johnson \$2,500 without batting an eye. Rickard's tactics made a hit with the negro. **"I likes yo way o' doing things,"** Johnson said. **"We is playing ball together."**

Boxing was illegal in New York at that time and the bids for the bout had to be opened in Hoboken, N. J, across the river. Led by James J. Coffroth, now President of the Jockey Club who was the foremost promoter of that day, a large group of promoters and newspaper men crossed the river in a ferry for the formal signing of Johnson.

When the bids were opened in the ferry house, each had a check attached. One read \$60,000 another \$70,000 and then Rickard's offer was opened. It read: "\$101,000." Johnson's famous golden smile broke out in all its splendor. Then Rickard's played his trump card by tossing twenty yellow backed \$1,000 bills on the table. It was similar to the trick he had used in placing the \$30,000 in \$20 gold pieces in the window of a shack for Battling Nelson and his manager to see, when they arrived in Goldfield.

"Stop everything," Johnson interrupted. **"This party's all ovah. I'm fighting for Mr. Tex."** For the second time Rickard was ridiculed by smart boxing men. "The man is absolutely crazy," Coffroth said. "He'll go broke and sink a lot of others with him. The bout can't possibly draw over a hundred thousand dollars."

Rickard began preparation for the bout and had no difficulty getting Jeffries' signature after the syndicate with which he had previously signed failed to get Johnson. San Francisco was selected as the site for the bout and after Tex had spent \$35,000 on the arena and other preparations, the Governor of California decided he would not permit the fight to take place in that state.

Losing no time, Rickard closed all arrangements for transferring the fight to Reno, Nev., where it was held in a broiling sun July 4, 1910. Like all of his big fights there was one drawback after another before the bout actually took place. The Jeffries crowd created no end of trouble in their wrangling over the referee. Rickard was finally agreed on as a compromise and he was the third man in the ring. It was the only professional fight he ever refereed.

The gate was \$270,755, the largest up to that time. The moving pictures of the fight netted more than \$300,000. Johnson received \$70,600 and Jeffries \$50,000. Rickard's profit exceeded \$100,000 after he had paid all the bills and reimbursed Cole for the money he had loaned him. Jeffries proved the original "hollow shell" and was no match for the big negro who knocked out the hitherto unbeaten champion in the fifteenth round.