



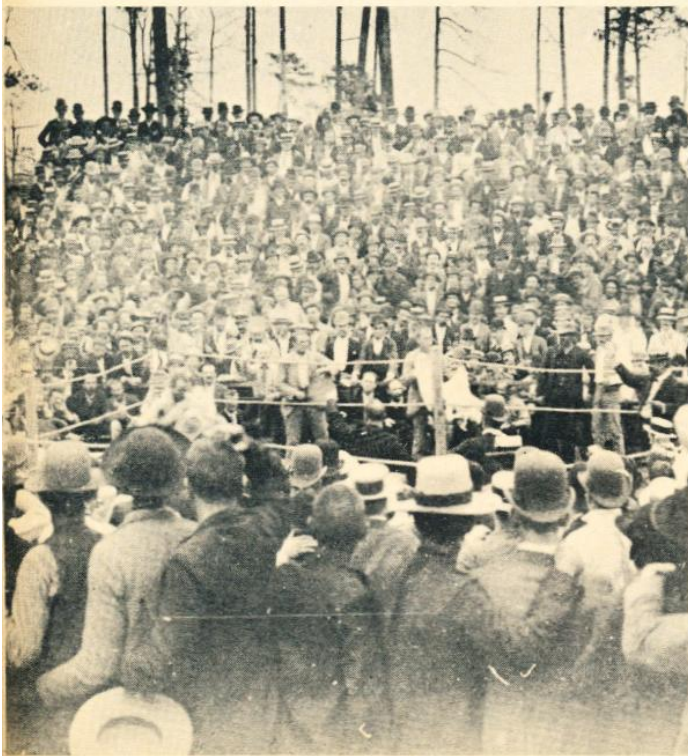
THOMAS PYE
Pioneer New Orleans photographer whose daring and determination resulted in the remarkable pictures which are reproduced on these pages for the first time anywhere.



Pye's camera captures construction crew which built enclosure where the fight took place. Picture was taken on the morning before the fight.

HISTORIC DISCOVERY

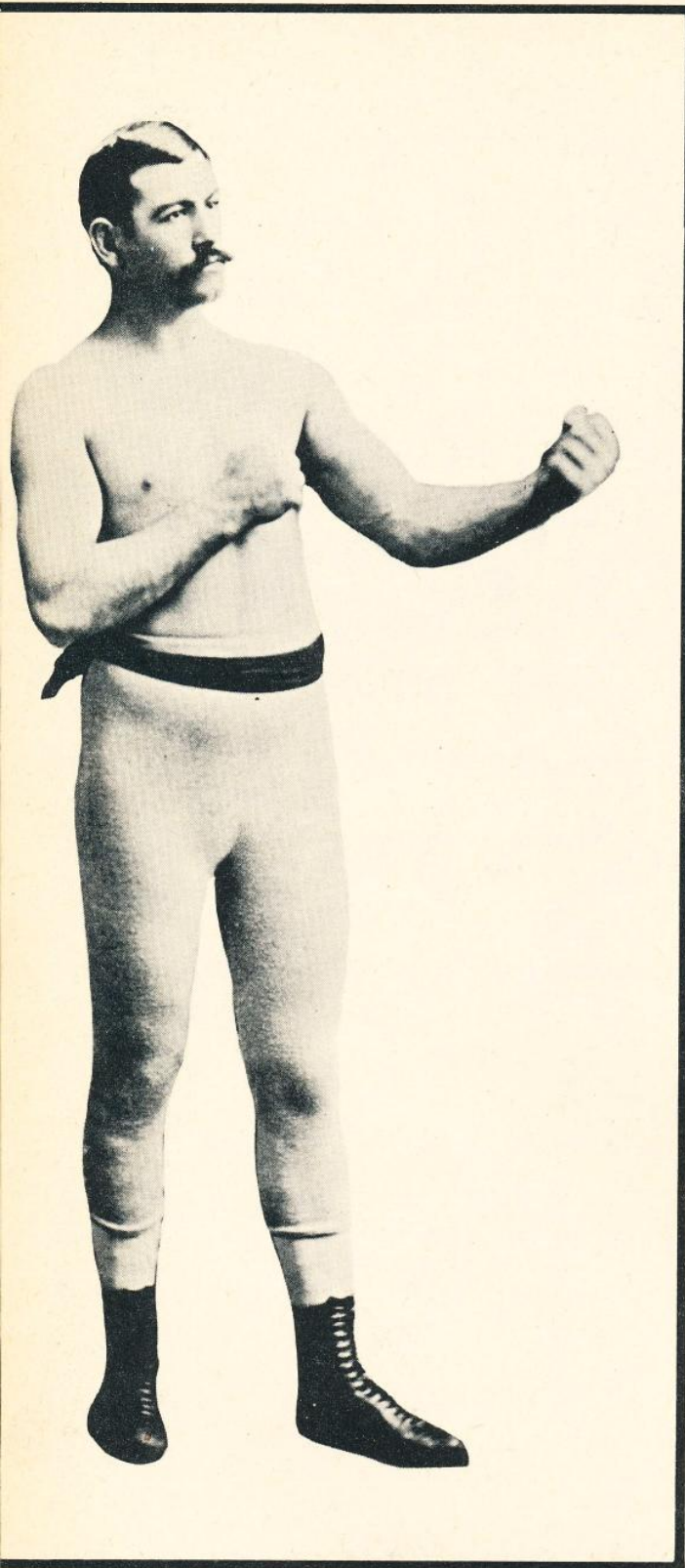
*Long lost photographs of classic
John L. Sullivan-Jake Kilrain
bare-knuckle fight found by
Illinois housewife*



This was Pye's first exposure. It was taken in the 1st round and shows Kilrain, on the left, clinching with Sullivan.

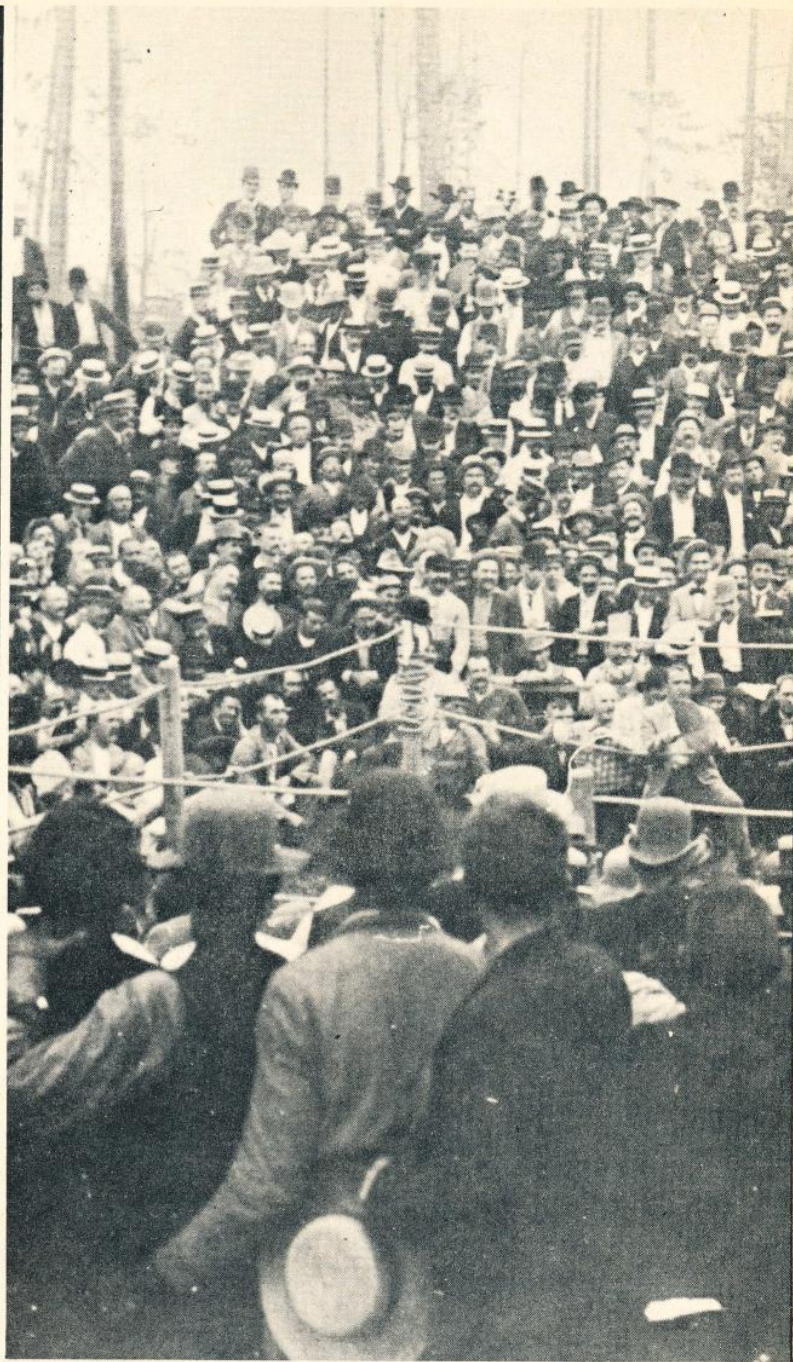
ONE DAY LAST SEPTEMBER a Springfield, Illinois, housewife was busily cleaning the attic of her rambling Victorian home when she noticed a package tucked far under the eaves. She reached down and pulled it out, wiped off the inch-thick dust and cut the cords which tied it together. What she saw didn't impress her, but the more than two dozen old-style photographic plates which lay at her feet were a priceless treasure. There, covered with the dirt and grime of 71 years, were the long lost original glass negatives of the classic John L. Sullivan-Jake Kilrain bare-knuckle fight at Richburg, Mississippi, July 8, 1889.

Taken by pioneering New Orleans photographer Thomas Pye, only two plates of his original set were known to exist before the historic discovery. But it was known that Pye had taken many pictures during the long (2 hours, 16 minutes) fight and those missing plates had been the



JOHN L. SULLIVAN
The Champion

At first Sullivan objected vehemently to having the fight photographed. But his friend and trainer, William Muldoon, convinced him that his objection would be construed as a sign of cowardness. Finally John L. consented.



Clearest action picture in Pye's historic set was taken in the second round. Sullivan, facing camera, shoots right that zooms over Jake's

object of searching collectors for more than half a century.

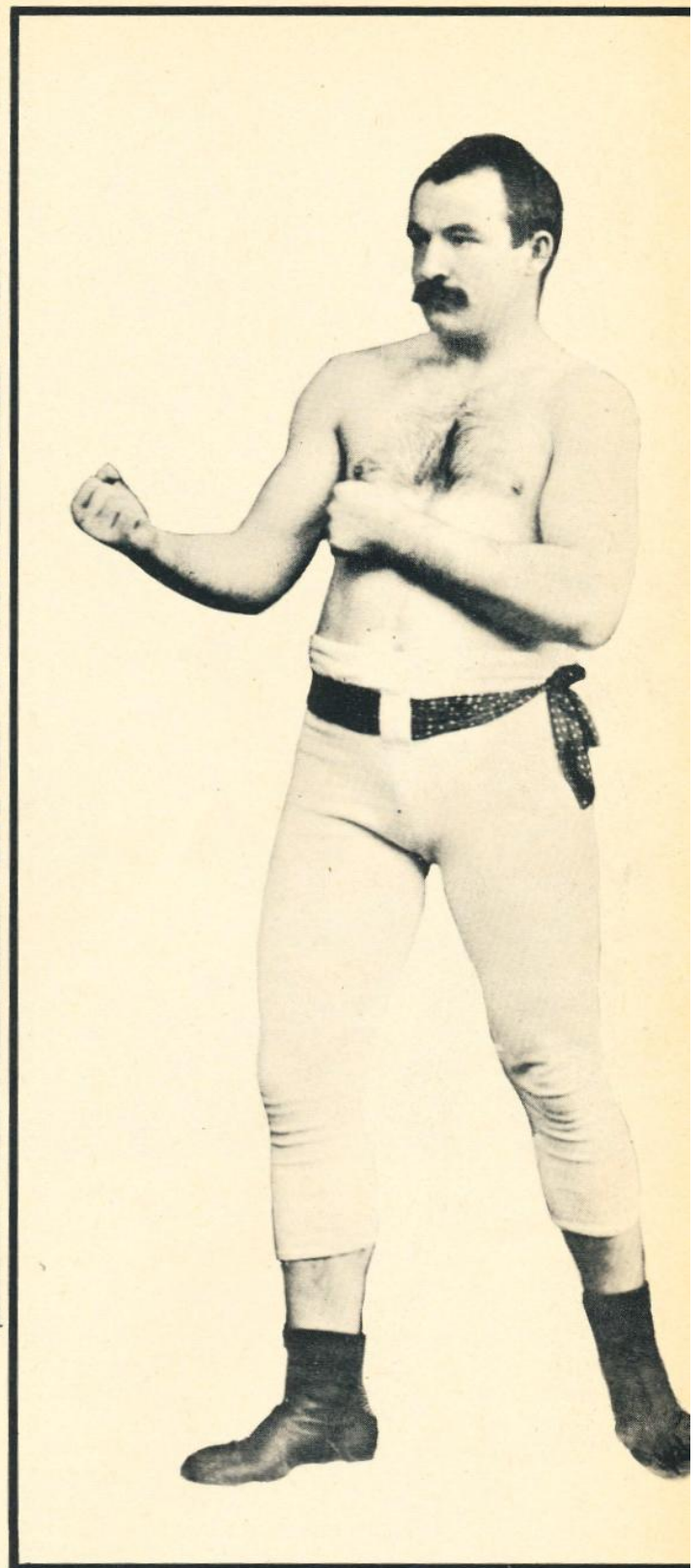
Thomas Pye was a sickly, scholarly man who since his early youth had been intrigued by the miracle of photography. He idolized famed Civil War photographer Matthew Brady and eagerly studied every work by Brady available to him. In 1882, after developing his first set of newsworthy pictures (of a train wreck) Pye said: "The photographer's camera has eliminated the need for the newspaper artist." When Pye learned that the Sullivan-Kilrain fight would take place in the general area of New Orleans, it gave him the perfect opportunity to prove his theory.



neck. Notice how the Irish flag Kilrain wears around waist has been jarred loose and is halfway up his back.

But there were several problems to be solved before Pye could get his pictures. First of all, it was essential that he have immediate accessibility to his developing wagon, a horse-drawn contraption filled with a maze of pans, shelves, bottles and chemicals. If the plates were not in the developing solutions a few minutes after exposure they would be ruined. It was also necessary to have a clear path between the camera position and the wagon so that there would be no obstacles in the way of Pye's assistant as he dashed toward the wagon with the precious plates.

There was also the matter of locating a camera position which would not interfere with the spectators line of vision.



JAKE KILRAIN
The Challenger

A strapping figure of a man, Kilrain was an underdog in the betting at odds of about 4-1. But there was an abundance of money to support him at ringtime. His best weapon was a crushing overhand right to the Adam's Apple.



In the sixth round, Pye's camera captured the only picture in existence of the great John L. Sullivan actually throwing his famous right. John, on the right, pulls Kilrain's head down with left hand, then shoots right. Punch knocked Jake on his back.

But what bothered Pye most was the light problem. He had no way of knowing whether the sun would shine during the fight, or, if it did shine, whether it would be dulled by floating clouds.

Pye attacked each problem with the skill and determination of a field general. He was quickly given permission to set up his camera on the west side of the enclosure, about 50 feet from the ring. The wagon could be parked in the shade of a tree behind the last row of seats, about 60 feet from the camera location. As for the clear path, the promoters offered no help. It would be up to Pye's assistant to get through the crowd as best he could.

When the sun rose like a ball of fire on the morning of July 8, 1889, photographer Pye breathed a sigh of relief and thanked God. But about half an hour before the fight was scheduled to begin, the most serious obstacle of all was suddenly tossed at Pye by John L. Sullivan himself.

When Sullivan was told by one of his seconds that the fight would be photographed, the great man became furious. He flatly refused to allow any camera within range of the ring and threatened to walk out unless his demand was obeyed. Luckily for Pye, tough, outspoken William Muldoon, Sullivan's chief trainer and friend, became riled by John L.'s seemingly baseless demand. He said something to Sullivan and after a long pause, the fighter, his face still flushed a deep red, half-heartedly nodded his head. Muldoon then told Pye, "you can take your pictures."

Although the reasons for Sullivan's objections are not known, Muldoon, in his autobiography, hinted that John L. feared having photographic evidence in existence of a fight he may very well have lost.

Thus, the road was cleared for Pye to take his historic pictures, the best of which are published on these pages for the first time anywhere.

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