

BOSTON'S MECHANICS BUILDING TO BE RAZED

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By JERSEY JONES

THE March of Progress continues to raise havoc with historic citadels of sport.

After several years of rumors and denials, Mechanics Hall, or Building, in Boston is finally coming down to make way for a massive new business and entertainment center. Dismantling of the ancient edifice is scheduled to begin the first week in December.

With the passing of Mechanics, the St. Nicholas Arena here in New York will be justified in advertising itself as the "oldest active fight club in America." Until now, the St. Nick's right to that billing has been unauthorized by the facts. Mechanics is much older both in actual years and association with boxing.

St. Nick's was opened in 1896 as a hockey and ice skating rink, and it wasn't until 1908 or '09 that glove-tossing was introduced there.

Mechanics had its first get-together with the trade in 1883, a year or two after the building was completed.

On that occasion, a gala testimonial to John L. Sullivan, recently crowned heavyweight champion of America, attracted a capacity crowd of 12,000, which included many of the leading political personalities of the state and city, as well as such outstanding ring performers as Steve Taylor, Joe Coburn, Mike Cleary, Arthur Chambers, Billy Edwards, Tom Allen, Jake Kilrain, Joe Goss, George Godfrey, Patsy Sheppard, Bob Farrell and Bill Bushy, all of whom appeared in exhibition bouts.

Following the Sullivan shindig, Mechanics' early boxing history is somewhat vague. We've been unable to learn if any shows were staged in the building until 1908. Mechanics may have been too large for the average Boston fight crowd in those days. Even though the Hub was a hot-bed of fistic activity, the sport's appeal was to a limited percentage of the citizenry. Prize-fighting was considered too rowdy and boisterous for the so-called "better elements," and the normal attendance at a prizefight probably didn't number much more than a few hundred. A turnout of a thousand was regarded as exceptionally good and a couple of smaller halls in and around Boston were spacious enough to accommodate gatherings of that size.

AMATEURS STARTED IT.

In 1908, when amateur boxing was becoming tremendously popular, Mechanics was selected as the site of the National A.A.U. championships. For the next twenty years the medal-chasers held forth there annually with their title tournaments. (We recall some meets when the entry list was so packed with contestants that three rings were in simultaneous use.)

The Arena, then the main center of professional activity in Boston, burned down in 1918 and the money performers shifted their operations to Mechanics. By now the glove-tossing profession was solidly established with the Hub populace and Mechanics was no longer too large for a fight crowd. In fact, at times it wasn't large enough. For the better part of the next decade the building bustled with

fistic doings, and a sellout or near-sellout attendance became the rule rather than the exception.

New England was loaded with outstanding talent in those busy years. Eddie Shevlin, Tommy (Young Kloby) Corcoran, Johnny Wilson, George Robinson, Nate Siegel, Freddie Yelle, Pal Reed, Terry Martin, Al Shubert, Bobby Dyson, Al Friedman, Jack Delaney, Joe Eagan, Tommy Robson, Young Montreal, Johnny Vacca, Red Chapman, Louis (Kid) Kaplan, Jack Sharkey, Jim Maloney, Dick (Honeyboy) Finnegan, Chick Suggs, Sammy Fuller, Al Mello and Lou Brouillard were only some of the many Down Easterners who displayed their wares in Mechanics.

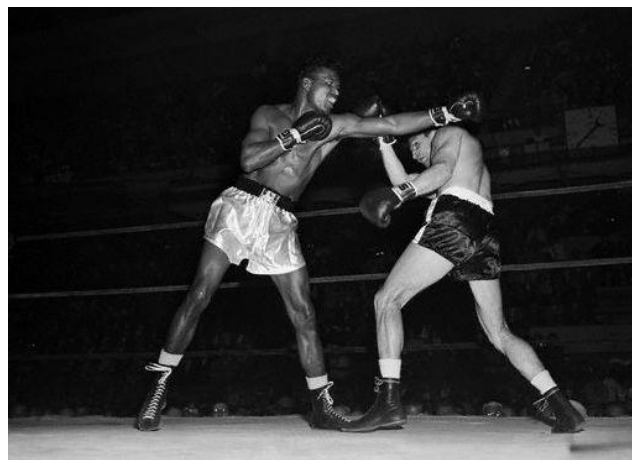
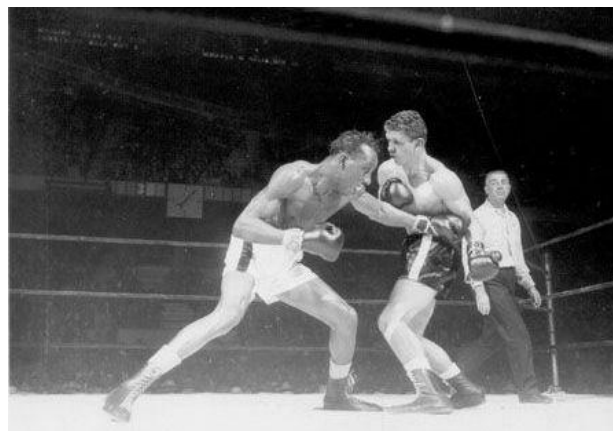
It seemed that everybody who was anybody in the sock market in those days appeared at some time or another in the old building. To complete with the locals—and sometimes against each other—Eddie Mack, who did most of promoting there, brought in such national headliners as Jack Dillon, Ted (Kid) Lewis, Jack Britton, Johnny Kilbane, Jeff Smith, Benny Leonard, Battling Levinsky, Mike O'Dowd, Harry Greb, Johnny Dundee, Willie Jackson, Pete Herman, Bermondsey Billy Wells, Mike Gibbons, Dave Shade, Babe Herman, Georgie Ward, Pete Latzo, Frankie Genaro, Jimmy Jones, Frank Moody, Mickey Walker, George Cook, Ted Moore, Pancho Villa, Tiger Flowers, Charley Weinert, Bud Gorman and Jock Malone.

FIGHTING TO THE END.

During the mid-'20's competition from the rebuilt Arena began to take some business away from Mechanics, and big-time boxing there suffered an even tougher jolt when the Boston Garden opened in 1928, but the ancient edifice refused to admit that its usefulness as a fight center was ended. Through the last three decades it continued to operate on an occasional basis, generally when the Garden or the Arena was not available for fisticuffing dates. Most of New England's top ringsters in recent years fought in Mechanics, among them Willie Pep, Tommy Collins and Tony DeMarco.

Promoter Sam Silverman is said to be contemplating a fitting farewell to Mechanics, before the wreckers get to work on it. If Sad Sam's plans materialize, he'll stage a final fight card there, and make an Old Home Night of the occasion by rounding up, and introducing from the ring, all the available local favorites who contributed so much to Mechanics' great boxing history.

An amazing character, Sam Silverman. After all the time and effort he put in on the Hogan Bassey-Willie Pep bout in the Boston Garden, Sad Sam was back on his Toonerville circuit with a card in Providence two nights later. Silverman certainly is keeping the fight business alive in New England. He operates on the theory that no town is too large or too small for his attention. Besides Boston and Providence, his promotions this year have taken him to Holyoke, North Adams, New Bedford, Revere Beach and Athol in Massachusetts and to Bangor, Fort Fairfield and Presque Isle in Maine. What, no East Lynne?



- [1] Henry Armstrong stopped Paul Junior for the world welterweight title on April 26, 1940.
- [2] Joe Louis stopped Al McCoy for the world heavyweight title on December 16, 1940.
- [3] Tony DeMarco stopped Johnny Saxton for the world welterweight title on April 1, 1955.
- [4] Larry Boardman won a ten round decision over Sandy Saddler on April 14, 1956.
- [5] Willie Pep handed young Jimmy Connors his first defeat on December 17, 1957.
- [6] Paul Pender outpointed Sugar Ray Robinson for the world middleweight title on January 22, 1960.

Photos courtesy of Harry Shaffer, Antiquities of the Prize Ring and the IBRO