

THE STORY OF PIONEERING BLACK MANAGER AND PROMOTER GEORGE MOORE

By Kenneth Bridgham



*A rare photo of George Moore
California Eagle, February 6, 1958*

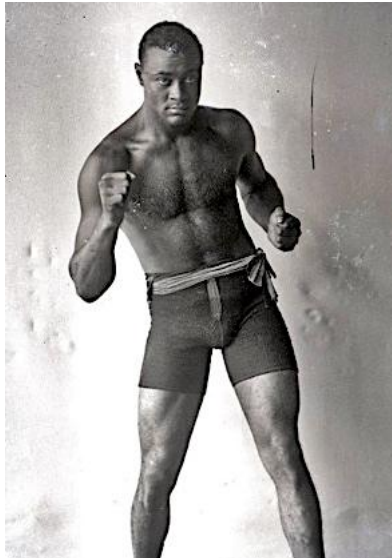
Hurricane Henry Armstrong was looking to make a comeback in 1942. His longtime manager Eddie Mead, who had siphoned off a fortune from Armstrong's purses and accounts, was dead of a heart attack, and Henry was looking for a trustworthy guide to take his place. The man he chose was one of pioneering hustler from the early days of gloved boxing: George Moore.

Born May 1, 1874 in Leavenworth, Kansas, Moore was a bespeckled, light-skinned, overweight Black man in his sixties. He could have passed as someone's kindly grandfather. In his autobiography, Henry described him as a "smart, gentle man." Maybe he was both of those things. But Moore was also a savvy businessman looking out for himself. He was shrewd at best, unscrupulous at worst, and had a shady background to go along with it. But maybe that's what it took to be one of the first successful Black managers, matchmakers, and promoters in boxing history, one who broke down barriers for black fighters in both New York City and Los Angeles during the first half of the twentieth century.

An orphan raised in a Catholic home in Independence, Texas, Moore had also been a hustler for decades before he met Armstrong. In his teens, he worked as a printer throughout the southwestern United States, then drifted to Oklahoma City, where he somehow got together the funds to open a successful saloon. Then it was on to Portland, Oregon where, still in his thirties, he bought a share of the successful Golden West Hotel, over which he became the manager. By 1918, the *Oregon Daily Journal* recognized him as "one of the wealthiest colored men in the city" and "the 'overseer' of the north end colored district."

He owned the pool hall across the street from the Golden West, too. On Moore's orders, the pool room put on boxing shows for twenty-five cent admission on Wednesday nights and eventually churned out a halfway decent fighter named Jack Taylor, the first fighter in Moore's managerial stable.

Moore had frequent run-ins with the law in his capacity as owner of the Golden West, which offered gambling and prostitution as attractions. Police raids were frequent, but Moore was never in a cell long. Most notably, police arrested him in Tacoma in 1913 after he allegedly made off with thousands of dollars in cash and jewelry following a split from his common-law wife, who also accused him of forcing her into prostitution.



Big Bill Tate

Big Bill Tate, one of the best heavyweights of the 1920s and a sparring partner to champion Jack Dempsey, and Danny Edwards, a stellar bantamweight, were Moore's most famous charges in his early career.

Charley Cooke, Tate's prior manager, accused Moore of stealing the fighter out from under him. According to Cooke, Tate fought on a couple of cards in Oregon promoted by Moore, but Cooke never agreed to give up managerial rights. Tate had apparently signed five-year contracts with both men.

Edwards was an aggressive young Black fighter out of California. Moore ballyhooed him as the second coming of George Dixon. Edwards was claimant to the "colored" bantamweight championship when Moore brought him to New York City in 1921 and "built up a splendid reputation" for himself. The next year, he became the resident matchmaker at the city's 15th Armory. By that time, Moore was already engaged in a campaign to break down the unofficial barrier to interracial boxing matches in New York State. As the *New York Age* reported on September 23, 1922:

After a year's agitation, George P. Moore, manager for Edwards, has finally succeeded in breaking down the barrier here against mixed-race bouts. Some time ago he forced the State Boxing Commission to admit that there was no legal objection against mixed bouts in the state, but he could not get a promoter to stage a mixed bout. Recently so much public criticism has been leveled at the Commission that it is thought that they influenced Matchmaker Buckley of the Pioneer Club to stage this bout to see how the public would take it.

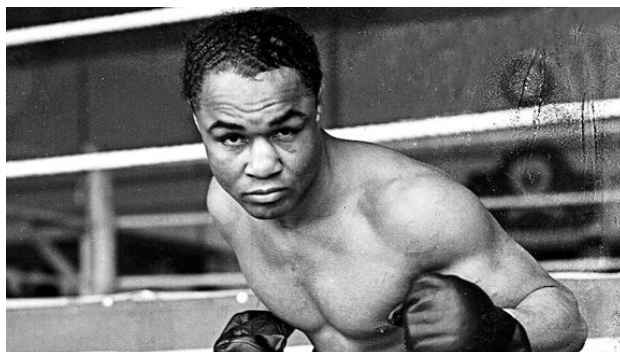
It is thought that if this bout goes over successfully, most of the clubs of the city will stage mixed bouts.

On Tuesday, September 26, 1922, in a fight the *Daily News* called "one of the best fights ever seen around here," Edwards lost a decision to New Jersey's Irish Johnny Curtin at the aptly named Pioneer Club. In the eleventh round, Curtin punched Edwards through the ropes and then tumbled out of the ring himself with the force of one of his follow-up punches. Both men made it back into the ring and finished the twelve-round bout, but it was Curtin who got the decision.

By the early 1940s, both Tate and Edwards had long since faded from the fistic spotlight. Moore had been retired for about a decade and was living in California when a new Black phenom emerged in the form of Armstrong. Moore and Armstrong first worked together in January 1940. Armstrong, the reigning welterweight champion of the world, was set to challenge middleweight champion Ceferino Garcia for a record fourth division world championship. At the time, the fight was scheduled to take place at L.A. Wrigley Field on February 22, but Armstrong was not happy with the Hollywood Legion, who was handling the promotion of the event.

The Legion refused to promote interracial boxing matches featuring Black fighters but were making a one-time exception for the potential lucrative Armstrong-Garcia showdown. That was not good enough for Armstrong, who wanted to make a stand for all Black boxers. Either Armstrong or his manager Eddie Mead reached out to Moore to use his connections to place pressure on the Legion. Meanwhile, with Moore advising him, Armstrong refused to sign the contract to fight until the promoters lifted their rule. The combined powers of Armstrong, Mead, and Moore won out, the fight was made (at Griffith Stadium instead), and Garcia retained his title with a highly controversial draw.

A little over two years later, Mead was dead of a heart attack, and Henry Armstrong, no longer a champion, was looking to make a comeback following a brief retirement. Apparently, their work together on the Garcia fight had reignited Moore's passion for wheeling and dealing, and he put in a call to Armstrong, who took Moore on as his new manager, with financial backing from wealthy Texas sportsman Lucius Lomax.



Henry Armstrong

Moore's guidance of the Armstrong comeback could be called both a success and a tragedy. Under Moore, Armstrong went 40-7-2 in less than two years. The ex-champion made (and spent) a lot of money in that time, and he beat such notables as Earl Turner, Juan Zurita, Fritzie Zivc, Lew Jenkins, Sammy Angott, and Willie Joyce. But he lost to others, most notably a one-sided embarrassment against a bigger, younger Sugar Ray Robinson that made Armstrong far less money than it should have. After the Robinson bout, Armstrong once again wanted to retire, but Moore tried to pressure the California State Athletic Commission into forcing his faded fighter with damaged eyes to keep fighting. He was outraged when the Commission would not allow a faded Armstrong – who openly stated that he did not want to fight any longer – to risk his eyesight against "Slugger" White in 1943. Moore got his wish when a cash-strapped Armstrong returned to the ring in 1944 and continue to risk his health against younger fighters before retiring again in 1945.

While Armstrong descended into alcoholism, depression, and financial woes, Moore continued managing fighters; the duo even partnered together on a few young prospects. By the mid-1950s, Moore was the oldest active boxing manager in the nation, but his health was failing. He passed away on Friday, January 31, 1958 at eighty-four, leaving behind a morally dubious yet historic legacy as a Black pioneer in the business of boxing.

Kenneth Bridgham is a contributor to thefightcity.com and author of the book [The Life and Crimes of John Morrissey](#). He is currently completing a biography of the Henry Armstrong, boxing's great triple champion.