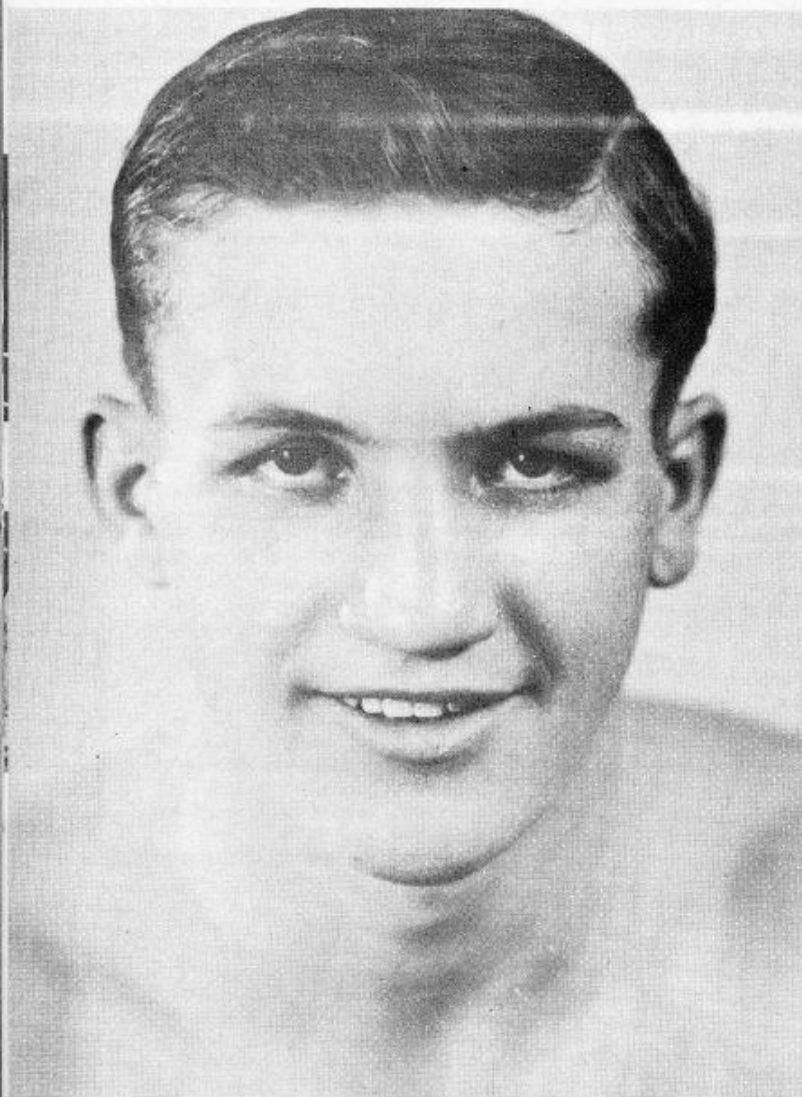


A FIGHTING IRISHMAN



JIMMY GARRISON

Former welterweight contender fought them all during long ring career.

By JACK D. HOPKINS

The month was October, the year was 1845. Newspaper headlines the world over read, "Potato Blight Hits Ireland." Without warning, famine was sweeping the once happy isle and during the five years that followed, nearly one million died of hunger and more than half the remaining Irish were reduced to homeless wanderers.

As news of this shocking tragedy spread throughout the world, sympathy for the Irish grew. America responded to the crisis abroad by sending shiploads of food to the starving people across the Atlantic. When the American ships landed on the shores of Ireland they were met by families begging a chance to flee their stricken homeland. As history books show, America opened its doors and between 1845 and 1860, nearly



This was the "Smiling Irishman" in his prime, one of the best welterweights of his era.

1,800,000 Irish found their way to our shores.

While most of America greeted its new inhabitants with warm welcomes, some people stateside were anti-foreigner and forced the Irish to fight for their rights. This was nothing new for the Irishman, however, as his history before the blight had been constant struggle and fierce fighting to protect his homeland from foreign invasion. This continuous strife probably molded the Irishman's

personality to what we know today, gay but quick tempered. Perhaps, this is also the reason that, instead of melting into America's working forces, many Irishmen turned to the sport of boxing for their livelihood after entering the states. Whatever the reason, they did, and have left their mark in every weight class since.

Some of the best Irish fighters to ever thrill American fight fans were the champion of champions, John L. Sullivan; the Manassa Mauler, Jack Dempsey; light heavyweights Tommy Loughran, Philadelphia Jack O'Brien, Jimmy Slattery, Billy Conn (for part of his career), and County Clare's Mike McTigue. At lighter weights there were the never-beaten lightweight, Jack Mc Auliffe; the baby faced welterweight, Jimmy McLarnin, and the Kansas City Cyclone, Jimmy Garrison.

Because he never won a title, the least known among the above is Jimmy Garrison. He was a popular campaigner from 1934 until 1944, but

when he hit his peak as a welterweight scrapper in 1939, the 147-pound class title was stingily guarded by one Henry Armstrong and Jimmy, like so many before and after him, couldn't quite take Mr. Armstrong's favorite possession away. Although he faced Hurricane Henry four times and went the distance with "Perpetual Motion" when the majority of Henry's other opponents were falling via the KO route, Garrison couldn't turn the trick and remains forever in the category of fighters that were "almost champs." Still, Garrison's ten years in the prize ring were exciting, and Jimmy's life before and after his ring career was and is an interesting one.

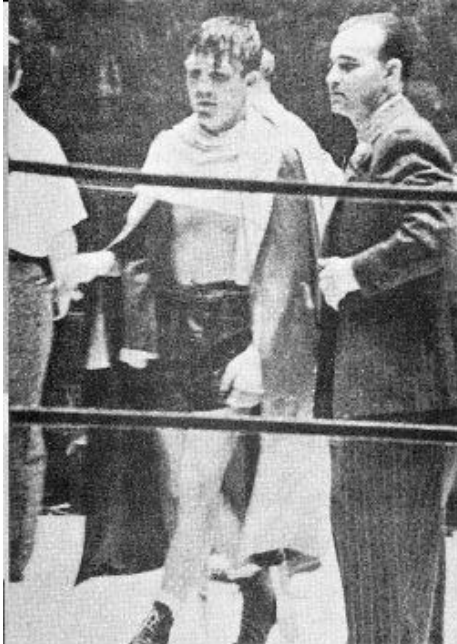
It all began back in Kansas City on December 17, 1915. On that day Jimmy was born the oldest child in a family that grew to include eight, five girls and three boys. After a rugged childhood on the back streets of Kansas City, a family breakup in 1925 saw Jimmy being sent to an orphanage and the rest of his family



Jimmy has the distinction of being the last to lose a decision in a ten-round world title bout, dropping the verdict to Henry Armstrong in Denver on Oct. 24, 1939.

Jimmy trained very hard for his return with "Hammerin' Hank", but was stopped in 7 rds. in Cleveland on Dec. 11, 1939.





This photo of Jimmy was taken after he lost to Lou Ambers on a close decision in a non-title bout in 1938.

scattering to parts still unknown.

After nine years of shifting from one orphanage to another, Jimmy lived with Frankie Gatto, a boxing promoter and handler whose promotions in Kansas City proved successful during that era. It was Frankie and his brother Steno who guided Garrison up the fistic ladder.

Eleven amateur fights and a broken nose gave Jimmy enough experience to crack the pro ranks. In 1934, he made his debut and looked good in winning his trial fights. Gaining experience and poise with every bout, Jimmy continued his winning ways throughout '35. On October 18th of that year Garrison helped write a chapter in the history of Kansas City by meeting and defeating Young Harry Wills in the first mixed bout ever held in that city. This fight established Jimmy as a threat among the lightweights after only 18 months as a pro.

In '36 Garrison defeated the likes of Lew Massey (7th ranked), Joe Ghoully (5th ranked), and Frankie Glick, the junior lightweight champion, in a non-title bout. It was also in '36 that Garrison took part in a real boxing rarity. It appeared that Jimmy wasn't the only lightweight from the Gatto stable who was making boxing headlines. Another young

Irishman, Pat Kissinger, had been racing Jimmy step by step up the lightweight ladder and many Kansas City fans believed Pat might be the better of the two stablemates. Local fans kept writing the boxing commissioner to see what could be done to match the two, and the fans' efforts paid off. The eventual fight contract stipulated that Gatto (Frankie, affectionately known as "Pop" by that time) and the trainer were to stay out of either fighter's corner and that someone else was to train each boy for that particular bout.

Pop protested, but to no avail. The public would be satisfied with nothing less than a Kissinger-Garrison battle, so Gatto was forced to sit by and watch his two aces batter each other as the Kansas City fans roared their approval. Garrison got the nod in their first battle, but Pat, and, of course, Kansas City fight fans, demanded a rematch. Then again, after a twelve-round rematch ended in a draw, a third bout became inevitable. This third bout, a fifteen-rounder, which officially opened the Kansas City Municipal Auditorium, ended with Jimmy a definite winner over his courageous rival, a rival who later lost an even bigger fight during the sweep of Bataan near the end of World War Two.

In '37, Garrison suffered a setback at the explosive hands of Davey Day. That loss nullified his chances for a fight with Ambers during that year. In '38, Jimmy scored wins over Georgie Crouch, Wally Hally, Nick Peters and George Zengaras, but

a close decision loss to champ Lou Ambers (non-title fight) and another to hard-hitting Pedro Montanez, once again cost him a title go.

In '39, Garrison's fortunes took an upswing. Victories over Nick Peters and Tony Chavez won him a title scrap with Ambers' conqueror, Henry Armstrong. Jimmy was ready for his title chance and led on all score cards after six fast rounds. However, Hammerin' Henry wasn't about to let his welter crown be taken that night in Los Angeles. He poured on the coal down the home stretch and won going away.

Although a losing effort on Jimmy's part, he fought hard enough to win the champs respect, as well as a title rematch. The second Armstrong-Garrison battle took place on December 11th in Cleveland, Ohio. Cleveland fans witnessed another free-swinging thriller, but cuts over Jimmy's eyes caused the referee to halt proceedings in the seventh round.

Down-heartedly, Garrison, then the toast of Hollywood boxing circles, returned to the city of stars and began a new campaign designed to win him a crown. Between fights, Jimmy found time to take a bit part in the James Cagney picture, *City for Conquest*. Yep, you guessed it, he played the part of a flat-nosed pug. His son, Jimmy Jr., presently a Marine stationed in Vietnam, became a regular on Hollywood sets and won a part in "Best Years of Our Lives," starring Fredric March and Myrna Loy. He also landed other bit parts.

In 1940 Garrison, then
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Jimmy and son, Jimmy Jr., taken in the late 30's and Jimmy and wife, Vivian, with two of their prize-winning poodles. The stadium in the back is Multnomah Stadium in Portland where Jimmy boxed in 1943.



GARRISON. (Continued from page 42) popularly known as, "The Kansas City Cyclone," won bouts with Tony Chavez, Baby Breeze, Toby Vigil and Georgie Crouch, but was suffering increasing troubles from the scar tissue around his eyes. In September of that year, he was stopped on cuts by Jackie Wilson and in '41 he lost the same way to Rudolfo Ramirez and Bob Montgomery. Despite his eye problems, Jimmy lost only four times in 22 outings during '41 and '42, and kept in contention for another title fight. In '43, a string of seven victories, six by knockout, won the Kansas boy a third fight with Armstrong. Arrangements were made to hold the fight in Portland, Oregon, where Jimmy had become very popular following several winning efforts in that city. Although there was no title at stake this time, both fighters went all out for victory. L.H. Gregory, then and still the sports editor of the Oregonian newspaper in the Rose City, wrote after the fight, "Just a grand fight, that's the least it could be called. In the entire ten rounds there never was so much as one clinch, not even one little one." But Armstrong held his mastery over

Garrison and was awarded another close decision.

After this third fight with the great Armstrong, Jimmy was about ready to hang 'em up. He had three more fights on the West Coast, beating Lige Drew in Portland, Saverio Turiello in Seattle and losing to Billy Morris in Hollywood. Following these bouts Jimmy quit the ring and became a race track bookie. At first, all the wrong horses were winning, and Garrison the Bookie was going broke.

"I needed a payday," recalls Garrison, "so I contacted Armstrong and promoted a match in Kansas City, with Henry and myself in the main event. I thought I could whip Henry that time, but right before the fight all the horses I was backing began finishing in the money and I became a very busy man, training for a bout in Kansas City and booking horses on the West Coast." Garrison admits he wasn't in his usual excellent shape for his fourth Armstrong fight, but, even had he been, the outcome would have been no different. It was the scar tissue again. Nearly blinded by his own blood, Garrison was sent to his corner in the fifth by the referee, Armstrong had won again.

After that fight, Garrison accepted the fact that the dynamite had all been spent. He could have lumbered on for a few more years, been a trial horse for the young boys building a reputation, but Jimmy was too smart. He not only quit the ring, he quit the race track as well and traveled to Coos Bay, Oregon, where he has now been a longshoreman for over 17 years.

Since leaving the ring, Jimmy claims his favorite pastime has been heckling his wife, Vivian, but he admits he has also found time to play a little golf, and has done some hunting and fishing. In '68 Jimmy plans to begin another boxing campaign, only this time he won't be throwing any punches. Billy "The Wisp" Rogers, a promising 17-year-old simon-pure from Coos Bay, has convinced Jimmy that it is time for another "Cyclone." Jimmy has agreed to teach his young protege boxing's finer points and to guide him up the fistic ladder as the Gatto brothers once did for him. "And this time," says Garrison with a smile, "if we ever get a shot at the title, you'd better believe we'll win it!"

PARNASSUS. . .

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George. People and telegrams came from all over the world to wish him luck.

George talked about his three champions and how he got sick after each lost the title. When the old timers brought up about the "good old days" and how the fighters were greater than the kids today, he told them in no uncertain terms that they were all wrong, that the best times are now and fighters today are the best.

George Parnassus has been great for boxing and boxing has been good to him. It helped him live well, and put his two boys through college. George is the very proud father of a Catholic priest, Father George, and a medical doctor, Dr. William Parnassus. For 44 years George has had a very happy life with his wife Rosalie, who has sacrificed much to be a boxing widow.

Now George is looking forward to the world championship fight he hopes to promote between Chu Chu Castillo and champion Lionel Rose of Australia. It could set still another record to add to the many already in Parnassus's collection.



Joe Louis was on hand to help George celebrate his 73rd birthday.