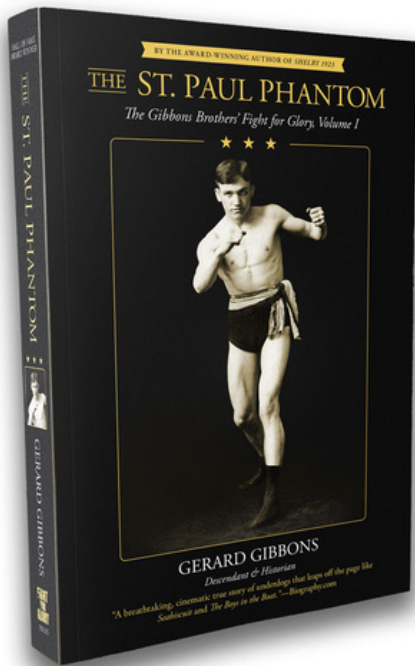




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"Gibbons tells the story with dramatic, fluid, exciting writing that boasts a distinctly cinematic feel."

THE ST. PAUL PHANTOM

Gerard Gibbons, author

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Gerard Gibbons

Author

| [Website](#)

Synopsis: In *The St. Paul Phantom*, historian and descendant Gerard Gibbons chronicles the rise of Irish American boxing brothers Mike and Tommy Gibbons from working-class St. Paul, Minnesota, to national prominence during the outlaw era of prizefighting. Set in the early twentieth century, the book traces the brothers' ascent through a brutal and rapidly evolving sports landscape shaped by immigration, racial tension, the expansion of newspapers, and the emergence of modern fame. Figures such as Joe Gans, Jack Johnson, Tex Rickard, and influential journalists of the era intersect with the Gibbons brothers' story. Based on extensive archival research, period newspaper coverage, and family materials, *The St. Paul Phantom* blends sports history, biography, and literary narrative nonfiction into a sweeping account of ambition, family loyalty, and the American Dream.



The grandson of the heavyweight boxer Tommy Gibbons and great-nephew of the storied Mike "The St. Paul Phantom" Gibbons, author Gibbons brings spirited novelistic life to an intensely personal and highly entertaining family story that captures the epic sweep of immigration and the golden age of boxing in early 20th century America, dramatizing how these lives intersected with so many other larger historical currents. Mike's father Thomas flees Ireland as British authorities clamp down on his anti-government activities. Later, in St. Paul, Minnesota, his American-born sons Mike and Tommy become obsessed with boxing, partly as a way to strike back against bullies.

The older Mike is trained by a fireman and engages in illegal "sneak fights," since boxing is technically banned in Minnesota. He and Tommy, the "cleverest boys," use training methods that are as cerebral as they are physical, scribbling notes in their "Dope Book" that form the basis of their reliance on speed, strategy, and footwork instead of raw power. Mike gets guidance from the first Black champion in America, Joe Gans, as well as his career-long friend and rival, Packey McFarland, before he makes his name in New York City.

Because these fights aren't allowed to have decisions other than knockouts, Mike has to impress sportswriters like Robert Edgren to get traction. In short order, he's regarded as the uncrowned greatest middleweight boxer in the world. Circumstances prevent this from ever becoming official, but his influence goes far beyond the ring. In World War I, Gibbons is called upon to teach soldiers, while the brothers' school and books influence approaches to the "sweet science" for decades afterward. Gibbons contextualizes all of this with personal details, like Mike's marriage to suffragette Mae, his difficult relationship with his now-pacifist father, and deep friendship with Black boxers like Jack Johnson. Gibbons tells the story with dramatic, fluid, and exciting writing that boasts a distinctly cinematic feel.

Takeaway: Epic, intimate novel of Irish boxing heroes in early 20th century America.

Comparable Titles: Jim Tully's *Shanty Irish*, Jay Neugeboren's *Max Baer and the Star of David*.

Production grades

Cover: **B**

Design and typography: **A**

Illustrations: **B-**

Editing: **B+**

Marketing copy: **A**