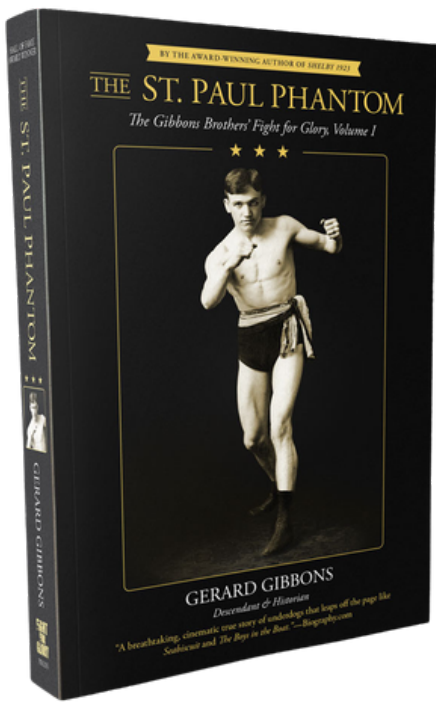




KIRKUS REVIEWS

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TITLE INFORMATION

THE ST. PAUL PHANTOM

The Gibbons Brothers' Fight for Glory, Volume 1

Gerard Gibbons

Self (532 pp.)

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BOOK REVIEW

Gibbons charts the paths of a pair of brothers who became two of the best boxers of their generation.

The story of brothers Mike and Tommy Gibbons, members of the International Boxing Hall of Fame known as “shining knights of the ring,” comes to life in this sweeping historical account written by Tommy’s grandson. He’s composed a lively family history set against larger themes of poverty, family, faith, and ambition. The book’s first section, which traces the brothers’ childhood in St. Paul’s Frogtown neighborhood, opens with Mike and Tommy vowing to become the first brothers to be crowned world-champion boxers as Halley’s Comet makes an appearance. They honed their skills, and Mike became known as “The St. Paul Phantom.” The middle section follows Mike as he pursues the middleweight crown, gaining fame (and a wife, Mae) as Tommy’s star also began to rise. The book’s final portion describes the brothers as they train soldiers at Camp Dodge, Iowa, during World War I. After the war, Mike was still hungry for the middleweight title, though he retired without winning the belt. The dream then shifted to Tommy, who stepped out of his brother’s shadow with a decisive victory over Harry Greb in 1920. The book ends with Mike content in retirement and Tommy working toward a heavyweight bout with the great Jack Dempsey. Gibbons writes evocatively about boxing—the text abounds with wonderfully vivid descriptions of the sport—but he also tackles Irish Catholic identity, class divisions, vaudeville, the media, racial issues, war, the changing culture of the 20th century, and much more along the way. Famous boxers and other historical figures, including Jack Johnson, Jack Dempsey, “Bat” Masterson, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, populate the book (which is peppered with photos throughout), but the Gibbons brothers’ story remains at the forefront. It’s a stirring story of siblings against the world, and the author handles the tale with expert pacing and character development. The brothers emerge as people one can’t wait to read more about, and the “Volume 1” in the book’s subtitle promises that more is yet to come.

A truly engaging family history and celebration of boxing in the early 20th century.