



# Gypsy Jem Mace

*Jeremy Poolman*

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A few miles from New Orleans, at LaSalle's Landing—in what is now the city of Kenner—stands a life-size bronze statue of two men in combat. One of them is the legendary Gypsy Jem Mace, the first Heavyweight Boxing Champion of the World and the last of the great bare-knuckle fighters. This is the story of Jem Mace's life. Born in Norfolk in 1855, between his first recorded fight, in October 1855, and his last—at the age of nearly 60—he became the greatest fighter the world has ever known. But "Gypsy" Jem Mace was far more than a champion boxer: he played the fiddle in street processions in war-wrecked New Orleans; was friends with Wyatt Earp—survivor of the gunfight at the OK Corral (who refereed one of his fights), the author Charles Dickens; controversial actress Adah Mencken (he and Dickens were rivals for her affection); and the great and the good of New York and London high society; he fathered numerous children (the author is his great-great-grandson), and had countless lovers, resulting in many marriages and divorces. *Gypsy Jem Mace* is not simply a book about boxing, but more a narrative quest to uncover the life of a famous but forgotten ancestor, who died in poverty in 1910. This is a story that deserves to be told, one that will resonate with anyone, young or old, man or woman, who has ever sought to do something special before the light of life starts to dim.

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