



Aurelio Herrera

The First Mexican-American Boxing Champion, 1873-1927

By Gilbert P. Gia

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Aurelio Herrera was a little fellow, just five-four, 122 pounds, but he was Bakersfield's hometown hero. Aurelio was born in San Luis Obispo County, but Kern City

became his home,¹ and from 1896 to 1909 he fought 94 professional bouts across the county: 64 wins, 16 ties, and 14 losses. Fifty-seven of those wins were by knock-out. This is the Aurelio Herrera story.

In 1890, 30 year-old Frank Carrillo² managed Joe Bailey's saloon and theater in Bakersfield where he supervised gambling, prostitution, and theater entertainment.³ Anselmo Herrera, Aurelio Herrera's father, had newly arrived in Kern City and

1 Aurelio's father was Anselmo Herrera born in 1840 in Sonora, Mexico. He came to California before 1850. In 1880 Anselmo lived at San Jose Township (San Luis Obispo County) with his wife, 29 year-old Asencion from CA, daughter Rosario, 18, and five sons: Anselmo, 11; Librado, 9; Aurelio, 7; Leon, 5; and Mauro, 3 yrs. *Supplement to the Kern Co. Great Register* [Dec 13, 1890] notes that Anselmo Herrera, then 45, was naturalized in 1870 at San Jose, CA. Anselmo registered to vote in Kern County in Sep 1888. His wife died in 1890. In 1891 Anselmo married 15 year-old Maria Francesca Figueroa (*Kern Co. Marriages*, No. 219, Jan 3, 1891). Herrera descendant Katherine A. McLaughlin discovered San Buenaventura Mission records showing that Maria Francesca Figueroa was born Dec 7, 1876. Anselmo Herrera operated a saloon on 19th Street between L and M in Bakersfield, CA (*Bakersfield & Kern Co. Directory 1891-2*, Bensel and Maitland Co.) Herrera also owned or managed a saloon in nearby Kern City, now known as East Bakersfield.

2 Francisco M. Carrillo was born in Mexico and was naturalized on Aug 5, 1890. The 1890 Kern Co Great Register of Voters notes he had a prominent scar on his right cheek.

3 In 1907, 55 year-old Joseph [John] E. Bailey was president of the Bakersfield City Council and owner of the Cosmopolitan Hotel at 19th and M [*Bakersfield & Kern Co. Directory 1891-2*, (Bensel and Maitland Co)]. He was mayor of Bakersfield in 1909. See also "If Christ Came to Bakersfield, Part I" by Gilbert Gia, a series on the history of public prostitution in Bakersfield," *The Blackboard* (Bakersfield, CA), July 2002.

managed a saloon there.⁴ What went on with the Herreras was not publicized at the time, but years later a Washington newspaper wrote a story about them that contained "more truth than fantasy."⁵ Much was journalistic yarn, but much rings true.

"Herrera's father pursued the calling of a street vendor of hot tamales, enchiladas, tortillas, chili *con carne* and other sizzling delicacies dear to the palette of the Westerner. Aurelio and his brother Mauro helped their father in the distribution of hot-stuff appetizers, but being gay sparks, they targeted and looked for a more strenuous game. The Herreras lived in that aristocratic part of Bakersfield which shelters the Mexican and Chinese colonies.⁶ The brother's first idea of sport was to break up an oriental fan-tan session with .44-caliber colts. At the same time, if any of the young bloods of the community were looking for Queensbury exercise,⁷ they had to look no farther

⁴ *Bakersfield Californian*, Greater Bakersfield and Kern Co Expansion Edition 1911, p 42. Carrillo arrived in Bakersfield about 1888 (*Bakersfield Californian*, Sep 24, 1908)

⁵ *Washington [DC] Times*, Jan 16, 1906.

⁶ *Bakersfield Californian*, Jan 16, 1906; *Washington [DC] Times*, Jan 16, 1906. The center of Bakersfield's French, Basque, and Mexican populations was a few miles east of Bakersfield at the town of Sumner, incorporated as Kern City on March 11, 1893 and merged with the city of Bakersfield in 1906. Anselmo Herrera and son Aurelio bought lots 15 and 16 in Blk 124 in Kern City on Jun 12, 1902 (Kern Co. Hall of Records, *Deed Book* 0135-0430).

⁷ boxing

than Aurelio who soon had thumped every youth of his size of the city. In this way Aurelio worked himself into the favor of the gamblers and sports of the town. Frank Carrillo, a six-foot-two bit of pleasant company, admired the fighting spirit in the young Mexican's make up, and took him under his wing. Carrillo was the owner of a big dance hall and gambling house, and in the cellar of this establishment he arranged a crude gymnasium for various benefit. Mauro, too, was handy with the mitts, and the brothers by constant practice showed much development."⁸

The paper wrote that Herrera gained local boxing fame after he beat a bully who'd challenged all comers. The newspaper continued,

"Aurelio then went to other towns in the vicinity and won more battles, but tiring of the game, he returned to Bakersfield and dealt Faro for Carrillo at five dollars a night. Carrillo said Herrera was suited for the position because

⁸ *Washington [DC] Times*, Jan 16, 1906; *BA CA*, Jan 16, 1906; In 1902 Frank Carrillo was a founding member of the Bakersfield Athletic Club. (*Daily Californian*, Feb 23, 1892) A passage in *Little Dramas of Old Bakersfield* by Rush Maxwell Blodget entitled "Maruro Herrera, Early 90's" implies that the Herreras came to Bakersfield between 1889 and 1892.

when the Mexican was running the game, losers never squealed. The city Marshal, too, was impressed with the little scraper and appointed him deputy.”⁹

The article explained what happened after Herrera lost his first out-of-town boxing match.

“The reverse fairly stung the Mexican, and when he returned he was a central figure in several shooting-up-the-town episodes. Aurelio was called upon to defend the peace and quiet of his law-abiding fellow townsmen. This occurred when Jim McKinney, the bad man of Tulare County, killed a man at one setting... [T]he vigilance committee decided it was 23 for Jim.¹⁰ The city marshal formed a posse, and with Herrera cornered the outlaw in a Chinese joss house... Aurelio, carrying a Winchester, judged distance well, and said afterward that he had maintained the best traditions of the town.”¹¹

9 *Washington [DC] Times*, Jan 16, 1906.

10 Several law enforcement agencies tracked McKinney’s movements, but no vigilantes pursued him. See Lee Harold Edwards, *The Killing of Jim McKinney*; “23” is short for “23 skidoo,” a slang expression meaning to leave quickly.

11 McKinney was killed Apr 19, 1903. Herrera was not in California that day.



Aurelio Herrera, 1903

Mongolian-Mexican Glove Fight

On August 24, 1893, the Sumner Athletic Club at Kern City sponsored fight night at Ritzman's Hall. The opener was Miss Millie "The Amazon" Stokes who went four rounds with Miss Mabel Cokky. Herrera's bout was billed as a **Mongolian-Mexican Glove Fight**.¹² That evening Woo Sing lost to Herrera, but the *Daily Californian* showed less interest in Herrera's win than in the news that Woo Sing's next fight, at Reich's hall in Bakersfield, would be against "another white man."¹³

12 *Daily Californian*, Aug 24, 1893. "Glove fight" as opposed to bare-knuckle fight.

13 *Daily Californian*, Aug 31, 1893. In 1892, Reich's opera house was on Opera Alley between 19th and 20th Streets and J and K streets. (LH Rudy, Old Bakersfield)

The phrase “another white man” suggests Bakersfield viz-a-vi its Mexican population. On July 11, 1900 a US census taker working in the Bakersfield tenderloin visited a lodging house at 1921 K Street. He recorded the name of a 27 year-old male named Aurelia Herrera [sic] born June 1872, occupation *Pugilist*. Nine residents at the at 1921 K Street address had English surnames; Herrera was the tenth.

After the Woo Sing fight, Herrera took a \$25 purse when he knocked out C. Todd in in Bakersfield on October 18, 1895,¹⁴ but after that the fights were in Los Angeles. In July, Herrera signed for a four-round exhibition bout at Los Angeles Athletic Club, and he faced off against Joe Welch, the Los Angeles boxer who the *Los Angeles Times* called one of the best featherweights in the region. Herrera won, and the *Times* commented, “The new aspirant for pugilistic honors was impressive...and, if anything, had a little the best of the local man.”¹⁵

On August 14, 1896 the *Times* noted that “Young Aurelia Herrera, the Spanish boy of Bakersfield” had been invited to a 15-

14 Briefly mentioned in the *Bakersfield Californian*, Oct 18, 1915, “Twenty Years Ago”; The Athletic Club rooms were probably at K and Opera streets. (See *Daily Californian*, Mar 8, 1892)

15 *Los Angeles Times*, Jul 27, 1896

round rematch with Joe Welch.¹⁶ Herrera went into Round 1 favored, Welch's "swarthy opponent" outclassed him, and Welch's trainers "threw out the sponge before the 10th round..."¹⁷ The *Times* account of the match was fair and unbiased.¹⁸

The win attracted Southern California fight fans to the featherweight class. Wrote the *Times*, "The excellent attendance at the match served to demonstrate that even in midsummer a boxing match of mediocre merit will draw a large number of lovers of the manly art to the ringside."¹⁹ Weeks later the *Times* added, "One of the most interesting gos [*fights*] outside the main event will be the featherweight championship of Southern California between Aurelio Herrera and Mike Thornton of San Pedro."²⁰ Herrera won.

In August 1899, Frank Carrillo signed his 122-pounder with Billy de Coursey for a 20-rounder at Los Angeles Athletic Club, and among the 400 spectators filling the club that night was a ringside contingent of well-heeled Bakersfield fans. Herrera did

¹⁶ *Los Angeles Times*, Aug 3 and 10, 1896

¹⁷ *Los Angeles Times*, Aug 17, 1896

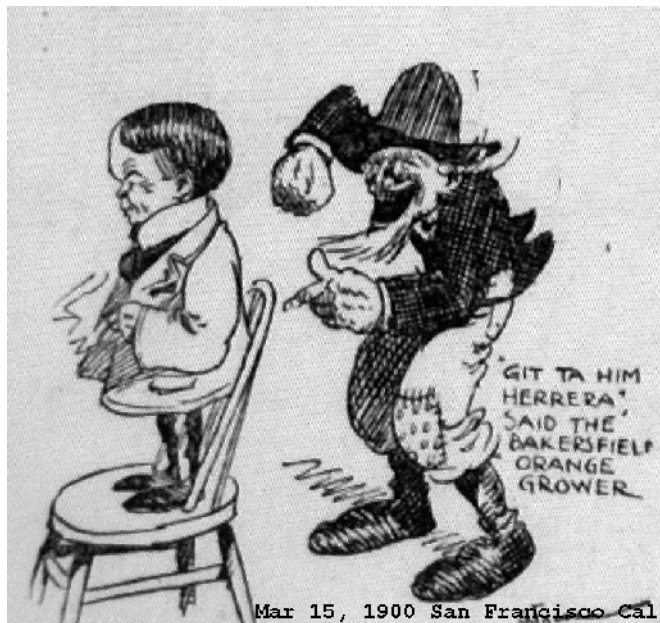
¹⁸ *Los Angeles Times*, Aug 15, 1896

¹⁹ *Los Angeles Times*, Aug 17, 1896

²⁰ *Los Angeles Times*, Oct 26, 1896 ("Gos" means boxing matches)

not disappoint them; the referee stopped the fight in the 15th.²¹

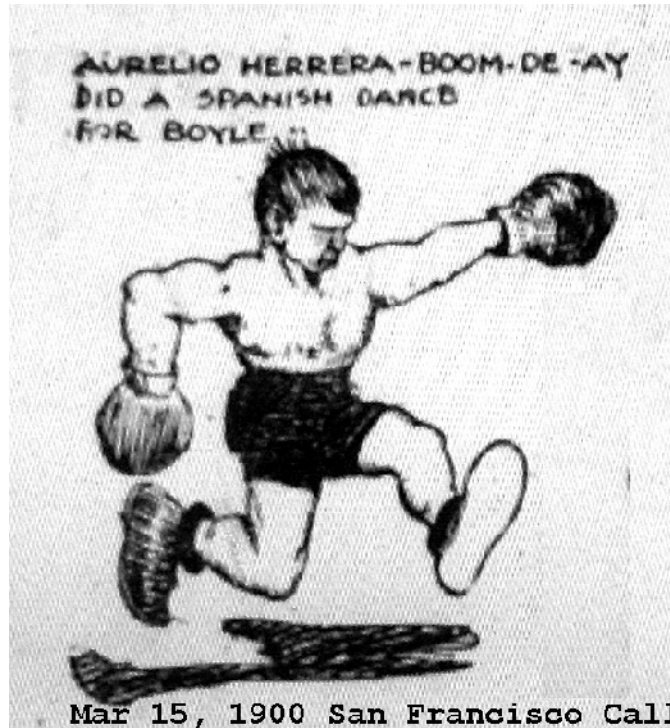
Most of Herrera's earlier opponents were not as well-known as de Coursey. For the 26-months between 1896 and 1900, Herrera competed 19 times and won most by knockout. Thirteen of those matches were in Bakersfield, two were in Randsburg, three in Los Angeles, and one in San Francisco, that one against Cockney Boyle.²² Herrera's knockout for that one was so spectacular it merited a cartoon in the *San Francisco Call*. Through 1900, Herrera's imposing record of victories was marred by only a few draws.



Boyle, the "parlor fighter"

²¹ *Los Angeles Times*, Aug 21, 1899

²² Herrera knocked out Cockney Boyle in the 10th at Woodward's Pavilion in San Francisco. (*San Francisco Chronicle*, Mar 14, 1900)



"Boom-De-Ay"

An Iron Man

Frank Carrillo wouldn't argue that most of his protégé's wins were over Pacific Coast fighters yet unknown in Eastern rings,²³ but Carrillo was sure that Herrera was unstoppable anywhere. The manager promised he could easily drum-up whatever money was necessary to get Herrera into the

²³ *San Francisco Call/Bulletin*, May 30, 1901, p 4

ring against Terry "The Brooklyn Wonder" McGovern, who was the world featherweight champion. ²⁴

The *Los Angeles Times* was optimistic about Frank Carrillo's boxing phenomenon, and it assured readers that the "clever and game little Mexican" was certainly "good enough" for the champ.²⁵ On the other hand, odds-makers favored McGovern three to one, although money was even that Herrera would hold up until the 8th.²⁶

Carrillo put together the front money, and San Francisco promoter "Sunny Jim" Coffroth laid the ground work for a McGovern-Herrera 20-rounder on May 29, 1901 at Mechanics Pavilion in San Francisco.²⁷ Boxing insiders favored McGovern for his 61-match fight record made up of 54 wins²⁸ and said those numbers alone were proof that bets on the champ were easy money.

McGovern was not so sure. On May 2nd he showed up in Bakersfield to ostensibly referee a fight between Al Neill and Jim

24 *Los Angeles Times*, Apr 26, 1901

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Los Angeles Times*, May 30, 1901

27 Russ J. Newland, *Los Angeles Times*, Feb 11, 1934; From 1901 to 1915 Coffroth promoted most topnotch fighters in the country, either in San Francisco or in Colma or in Daly City, California. (McCallum, John D. *The World Heavyweight Boxing Championship*, p 370. Chilton Book Co., 1974)

28 *San Francisco Call/Bulletin*, May 30, 1901

Trimble, but a lot of people said he came to scout-out this new many Herrera. But McGovern didn't learn much.²⁹ The "Queensbury warrior of Spanish descent" had already left for training at San Jose.³⁰

Nature vs Nurture

The fight at Mechanics Pavilion drew an enormous audience, but not everyone was welcome. The San Francisco Board of Supervisors had ordered the police committee to bar women from the exhibition, that night the order didn't work: About 15 minutes before the fight started, two women made their way into the pavilion escorted by some well-known sporting figures. After being seated, seven more women slipped in and edged along to ringside boxes, and as thousands of men leaned forward for a better look, they "hissed and groaned at the disgraceful spectacle."³¹

A Chicago visitor to Bakersfield, recalled that McGovern-

29 (Documentation misfiled)

30 *San Francisco Call/Bulletin*, May 30, 1901; *Los Angeles Times*, May 17, 1901. So many Bakersfield visitors came to visit Herrera he had to move to Terminal House in San Francisco.

31 *Los Angeles Times*, May 31, 1901, [Exclusive Dispatch by Wire service, San Francisco, May 30.]

Herrera fight:

"McGovern's crowd had bet several thousands of dollars that Terry would knock out the Mexican within six rounds. Of course they thought an *unknown* that had done all of his fighting in the backwoods would be easy meat for the Terror. The fight started, and to everybody's surprise Herrera was busy in every mix-up. At the end of each round, Terry went back to his corner with more respect for the Mexican's fighting ability.

"In the fourth round, Sam Harris, who had about \$10,000 for Herrera to lose, remembered getting nervous. 'Terry boiled away for his life, but although he dropped the Mexican now and then, he could not hurt him. Herrera always hopped up instantly with a smile. At the end of the fourth round, Terry said to Stringer: 'I can't put this fellow out. He is an iron man.'

" 32

McGovern had been acting at a San Francisco theater, he was not in best of condition, and in the first rounds his blows lacked stamina. But McGovern was an experienced fighter. In Round 5 the fight turned into a fiasco, a fiasco described as "the effect of

32 *Bakersfield Californian*, Jan 23, 1906

rank nature against trained professionalism."³³ Carrillo, with thousands of dollars on the line, watched in horror as McGovern dropped Herrera for an eight count. Herrera rose, took another one to the jaw, and dropped for the count.³⁴

"I Was Doped"

The crowd at Herrera's dressing room heard Frank Carrillo's side of the story: "Herrera was repeatedly fouled by McGovern, and the referee failed to take notice of the tactics pursued by the Brooklyn fighter. He had Herrera in clinches after the referee told him to break away. McGovern should have stepped back to his corner after knocking Herrera down. Indeed he stood over my man and was on top of him as soon as he rose to his feet. Had [Phil] Wand compelled McGovern to go to his corner, Herrera might have continued a number of more rounds. I will state that when a boxer is sent to the floor, the other man must retire to his corner. The referee disregarded

33 *San Francisco Chronicle, pt B, May 30, 1901*

34 *Ibid.*

the rules. I lost a considerable sum on the result of the fight and won some money on the fight by rounds."³⁵

As for Herrera, he muttered that one of his seconds had doped him, ³⁶ and Carrillo amplified on that, saying, "Herrera's second, George Green, was mixed up in the case in behalf of an Eastern bookmaker."³⁷

For years following that fight a story said that before the fight started a referee named Joe Humphreys advised Herrera that if he was knocked down he should take his time getting up and watch for a signal from Humphreys before rising. The story also said Joe never gave the signal, and for that reason Herrera was counted out.³⁸ Interesting but not true; John Humphreys was Terry McGovern's manager. ³⁹

A Bakersfield reporter had yet another explanation for Herrera's loss:

"One of Terry's backers slipped around and got hold of a Herrera second. 'I am betting on your man,' he said. 'He will

35 *Ibid.*

36 *Bakersfield Californian*, Jan 16, 1906

37 *Washington [DC] Times*, Mar 7, 1906 (dated Bakersfield, Mar 7, 1906)

38 www.cyberboxingzone.com

39 *Bakersfield Californian*, Feb 1, 1906

win if he fights right. For heaven's sake let him take the full count if he gets knocked down, so he can come up fresh. Tell him to wait until there is a 10, and then jump up.' The second probably passed the service on to Herrera. In the middle of the fifth round, Herrera went down. He was not hurt much, but he sat there taking the count, waiting for the referee to reach 10. The referee did and said, 'Out!' " ⁴⁰

Of all the reasons, McGovern's was probably closest to the truth:

"Herrera is a tough fellow to knock out. I might have ended the battle sooner, but he held on all the time. He had a good punch and was in great shape. My whole mind was on landing a right cross, and I took many punches to getting close enough to land it."⁴¹ McGovern returned to New York and carried the same opinion: "That fellow took a lot of beating and no mistake. He is mighty clever, too. In the fourth round he hit me two wallops on the neck, and up to the gong-tap I didn't know whether I was on my feet or sitting down. Any other man who wants to

⁴⁰ *Bakersfield Californian*, Jan 23, 1906.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

challenge him can do it, but they can take a tip from me that Herrera can out a punch nearly as hard as Tom Sharkey. I think he could whip Joe Bernstein and 'Kid' Broad easily." ⁴²

Referee Phil Wand saw the fight like this: "Herrera is a plucky fellow. He made a fairly good showing against the champion, and his defeat was no disgrace. In my opinion, Herrera was simply outclassed." ⁴³ The *Los Angeles Times* agreed. "Herrera made a game fight. There was nothing of the yellow about him. He simply didn't know the game, and his manager made a big mistake in putting him up against McGovern before he had a little ring experience."⁴⁴ That was the last time the *Times* had anything good to say about Aurelio Herrera, and a San Francisco went negative and wrote that Herrera had shown "yellow propensities."⁴⁵

Biggest Side Bet Ever

42 *Los Angeles Times*, Jun 10, 1901 "By Direct Wire to the Times" Executive Dispatch, New York June 9

43 *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 30, 1901, p 4

44 *Los Angeles Times*, May 30, 1901

45 *San Francisco Chronicle, Pt B*, May 30, 1901, p 4

Twelve years went by before the public found out that Frank Carrillo lost a small fortune that night he took Herrera to San Francisco and made the big stab. A Bay City paper recalled the gambling goings-on leading up to the May 29, 1901 McGovern-Herrera fight.

“When the announcement was made that Carrillo possessed \$3,500 and was willing to place it against \$5,000, the managers fell off their perches, as many had not become really impressed with the idea that there was anyone who was in the possession of so much real coin, and willing and anxious to back the Bakersfield favorite. The sporting editor of The Bulletin has been on this job eighteen years, and during this time he has heard managers signify their willingness to bet fortunes galore, but most of it was stage twaddle. When the showdown came, Mr. Manager invariably took to the high and imperial timbers. The only manager that ever went through with a big bet in eighteen years of experience was Frank Carrillo of Bakersfield. In 1901 Terry McGovern, while champion, came here and defeated Oscar Gardner in four rounds. Immediately after the battle, Frank Carrillo dropped in

from Bakersfield with a roll of bills. Herrera being an unknown, naturally everybody said Carrillo was seeking cheap notoriety. After making his spiel, he posted his money with the sporting editor of the Bulletin.”⁴⁶



Frank Carrillo, about 1913

The story continued. “Sam Harris, who was managing McGovern, almost fell off his chair when told that so much real money was at the office. Harris really didn't have the money to cover Carrillo's bet, but he got it by peddling the bet among McGovern's admirers. Harry Corbett, who was one, took a

⁴⁶ Jun 7, 1913, p 13, *The Bulletin* [published at San Francisco, 1895-1928]; *San Francisco Chronicle*, Jun 7, 1913; Part of that story was carried in the Jun 10, 1913 *Daily Midway Driller* [Taft, CA].

chunk of the McGovern end. It was easy money as the McGovern end looked, and Harris had an easy time raising the five thou. Because the Bulletin held the money, the Examiner, Chronicle, Call, and the Post went out of their way to knock the fight, but despite their concerted action the great Mechanics Pavilion was packed. If Herrera had been a real game fighter he might have been champion, for he jolted McGovern hard in one round. Gameness told, however, for Terry came back and won in the fifth."⁴⁷

"That was a real side bet and the biggest one made in California in twenty years, to the sporting editor's knowledge. 'Tis true there have been bigger stage bets. Frank Carrillo lost his fortune, went back to Bakersfield, where he made it, but never squealed."⁴⁸

Spoiling For New Things

Carrillo kept the faith with his little fighter. In July 1901 he matched Herrera against Joe Bernstein at Los Angeles.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

The *Times* predicted the local fight would be a good go, but the paper also grouched that most of the good boxing action was in San Francisco, and "with everything doing there, little can go on down here."⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the Herrera fight attracted a good crowd. The lightweight fighters were keeping boxing alive in Los Angeles.

A week later the *Times* wrote, "There may be something doing among the little fellows, however, for Herrera of Bakersfield is looking for trouble. He is spoiling to find any old or new thing that may be handed out. Instead of taking on some second or third-rates, he wants real good ones."⁵⁰

About this same time Herrera parted with Carrillo and started managing his own fights. He talked of going East for a rematch with McGovern and let it be known that at Denver he planned to pick up a fight with Young Corbett.⁵¹ None of it happened. In fact, Herrera never went East.

Bakersfield had become a bright spot on the fistic map, and Herrera decided to stay. On October 2, 1902 heavyweight champion James Jeffries gave a boxing exhibition at Scribner's

⁴⁹ *Los Angeles Times*, May 30, 1901

⁵⁰ *Los Angeles Times*, Jul 8, 1901

⁵¹ *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 10, 1901 (by wire from Bakersfield, July 8); Young Corbett was William H. Rothwell

Opera house, and the curtain-raiser was Aurelio Herrera, who sparred four rounds with his brother Mauro.⁵² Unfortunately, Aurelio Herrera's fights during this Bakersfield period ranged from the unremarkable to the disappointing. His decision to remain in California turned out to be a mistake.

His Wrists

Tim Hegarty came to Bakersfield three times to fight Herrera. The first was July 15, 1901 when the Aussie won the 20-round decision. The next fight, which was in September, went to a draw, and the men then signed for a third match in Bakersfield for early 1902.⁵³ To Hegarty this third match was an important make-up opportunity. In December in a 20-rounder at Oakland with Kid Lavigne, the Kid surprised everybody by KO'ing Hegarty in the Fourth.⁵⁴

Hegarty and his trainer Billy Smith showed up in Bakersfield

52 *Los Angeles Times*, Oct 3, 1901. Mauro traveled as a trainer with his brother, but at the same time he fought professional matches.

53 *Bakersfield Californian*, Jan 9, 1902. Including a much earlier fight, this match was the fifth time the two men fought.

54 George Henry Lavigne

on January 20, 1902 and settled in at Crawford & Hoag's roadhouse near Agricultural Park.⁵⁵ Rumor had it that Hegarty's financial backer was Terry Corbett of San Francisco, the same Corbett who'd bankrolled McGovern in his win over Herrera. But locally, there was plenty money on Aurelio Herrera to win.⁵⁶

Hegarty was confident of a win, but he admitted he would have to avoid Herrera's powerful punch. Over in nearby Kern City, friends and sightseers showed up at Herrera's quarters, and all were confident he would knockout Tim Hegarty.

Herrera, then 28, had taken his training seriously and was in splendid condition when he stepped into the ring.⁵⁷ Bakersfield fans who filed into Scribner's opera house were buoyed with enthusiasm, but the next morning they were shaking their heads. Hegarty had won on points. But the gamblers weren't happy with the award either because the big money was on Hegarty sending Herrera to dreamland.⁵⁸ But the loss didn't dampen Herrera's fawning visitors. On January 27 the Black Patti troubadours

55 *Bakersfield Californian*, Jan 18, 1902, Mar 4, 1902. Agricultural Park was north of and adjacent to today's Kern County Museum on Chester Ave.

56 *Bakersfield Californian*, Jan 18; Jan 20; William Fowler of Bakersfield was one of Herrera's more serious financial investors (Jan 9, 1902)

57 *Ibid.*

58 *San Francisco Chronicle*, Jan 27, 1902 (Special Dispatch from Bakersfield); *San Francisco Chronicle*, Jan 28, 1902

dropping by his gym. ⁵⁹

Bakersfield was still up for another match, and yet another Hegarty-Herrera fight was scheduled for February 20, 1902. Herrera had a chance to win the \$500 purse, but much more was at stake; if he bested Hegarty he'd be in line to meet the Pacific Coast featherweight champ.

For that reason it was a surprise when Hegarty's manager, W.A. Rose, came to Bakersfield to sign, and Herrera's people said their man couldn't possibly make the date. ⁶⁰ Rose agreed to a match on March 18,⁶¹ but when that date neared, Herrera had another excuse. At that juncture, fight arrangements were handed over to a third party, the Arlington Club, which was Bakersfield's new sporting association. ⁶² They demanded the

59 *Bakersfield Californian*, Jan 28, 1902. The Black Patti troubadours were associated with the diva Matilda Joyner Jones known as Sissieretta Jones. In New York in 1888 the manager of Italian opera singer Adelina Patti saw Jones and engaged her as his client. US racism bared Jones from American concert halls, but she went on to become an international sensation. In 1896 Jones formed the Black Patti Troubadours, a chorus of 40 singers.

60 During the postponement periods, Herrera fought two 10-round fights that were out of Bakersfield on Feb 10 at Madera he knocked out an unseasoned fighter named Billy Wilson, and on March 3 at Fresno he knocked out Kid Champer, another green fighter.

61 *Bakersfield Californian*, Feb 21, 1902. *San Francisco Chronicle*, Mar 13, 1902. Herrera might have been neglecting his conditioning; the *Californian* noted his managers imported a trainer.

62 *Bakersfield Californian*, Feb 21, 1902. The Arlington Club supervised most boxing matches after this date. Tom O'Brien, T.H. Fogarty, J.L. Woolley, Ben Sill, and J. Clifford were initial organizers of the Arlington Club.

fight for the 18th.

Hegarty took a 14-mile run a week before the fight, and when he got back he weighed in at 128.⁶³ Hegarty was trying to drop weight, but in most other respects he and Herrera were close in size. Hegarty was about an inch taller, and his waist and legs were slightly larger than Herrera's, but the biggest physical difference was in their wrist sizes: Herrera's were two inches bigger around than Hegarty's.⁶⁴ However, from the standpoint of their fight records, the match could go either way.

"Hegarty was in fairly good shape when he arrived from San Francisco, " wrote the *Californian*, "but now he is rounded into much better form than at the previous meeting with Herrera. The local boxer-- ever since the decision was given against him-- has done some light work, and when the return match was finally clinched, the local lad got down to hard work and is more fit for the battle of his life." ⁶⁵ The "go" on March 18, 1902 was as clean and fast a 20-rounder as was ever witnessed at Scribner's Opera House. It ended in a draw.⁶⁶

63 *Bakersfield Californian*, Mar 11, 1902

64 *Bakersfield Californian*, Mar 15, 1902. Herrera: 5-ft 5-in; chest 84-in; waist 27-in; reach 5-ft 6-in; biceps 12-in; forearm 10 1/2-in; thigh 18-in; calves 12-1/2 in; neck 14-in; wrist 8 3/4-in.

65 *Bakersfield Californian*, Mar 17, 1902

66 *Bakersfield Californian*, Mar 19, 1902. Scribner's Opera House was above the

In mid-December, Herrera beat George Baker in Fresno, and by then he'd won, by knock-out, almost all of his 11 matches of 1902. Those wins made good copy, but they were wins over newcomers to the fight game.⁶⁷ Herrera's few losses came from experienced ring-men like Tim Hegarty and Abe Attel. If Herrera wanted to earn the right to fight Harry Corbett, Featherweight Champion of the World, Bakersfield's little champ would have to prove himself in the East.⁶⁸

"Dusty-Skinned Mexican"

After the Fresno win over George Baker in December, Herrera didn't return to the ring until early February.

The hiatus was because 62 year-old Anselmo Herrera was seriously ill and had been so for months.⁶⁹ On February 5th someone might have told the ailing man that his son had just won

Opera Café at 1812 Chester Ave. Scribner's Opera House was mentioned as early as Sep 28, 1899 in the *Los Angeles Times*. In 1920 the Opera House became the California Theater at 1808 Chester Ave.

67 Biddy Bishop became Herrera's manager sometime during this period. (*San Francisco Chronicle*, Oct 14, 1902)

68 *San Francisco Chronicle*, Jan 9, 1903. Harry Corbett, aka Young Corbett II, was William Rothwell.

69 *Morning [Bakersfield] Echo*, Feb 9, 1903

in Montana,⁷⁰ and on February 7th someone might have whispered that Aurelio was fighting at Lincoln Athletic Club in San Francisco.⁷¹ Aurelio was probably in the Bay Area on February 9 when Anselmo Herrera died at Kern City. His son's fight record makes it unlikely he was present at the burial the next day at Union Cemetery.⁷²



Anselmo Herrera about 1885

In 1903 Aurelio Herrera's home was no longer Bakersfield. In January he and his new manager, Biddy Bishop, were in Butte, Montana where on February 12 Herrera knocked out Kid Oglesby.

70 *Salt Lake Herald* , Feb 6, 1903. (dispatch from Butte, Montana, Feb 5)

71 *San Francisco Chronicle*, Feb 7, 1903

72 *Bakersfield Californian*, Feb 9, 1903. In Sep 1906 Francesca Herrera married Joe Osorio.

73 *Morning Echo*, Feb 15, 1903

A Butte paper trumpeted, "Herrera has defeated five of the best men in his class in this part of the country within the last five weeks." ⁷⁴ The *Salt Lake Herald* wrote, "Aurelio Herrera, the dusty-skinned Mexican, won the hearts of local ring followers by his remarkable fighting ability Monday night. Herrera was about the city yesterday and was the center of attraction wherever he went. Bishop said Herrera had learned the crouch style of fighting in the past two months and had used it for the first time on 'Kid' Oglesby in Butte on February 5th. Bishop says he now has it perfected to such a degree that he does not think there is a fighter in the world who can get by it." ⁷⁵ Herrera took part in 14 professional matches through November 11, 1905, and all of them were outside California.

Love Interest

Exactly when Aurelio Herrera met Bertha Katherine Martensen is unclear, but it was probably in Bakersfield

⁷⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle*, Feb 25, 1903

⁷⁵ *Salt Lake Herald* (Utah), Feb 25, 1903, p 7

sometime between 1899 and 1901 while Herrera was gaining popularity and training out of Kern City, and Bertha Martensen was a performer at Frank Carrillo's Standard Theater.⁷⁶ The early Martensen-Herrera connection has only two markers: (1) In late February 1903 Herrera was fighting in the East, and a Bertha Herrera was performing in a San Francisco music and song show that included boxing exhibitions.⁷⁷ (2) A Bertha Herrera was spotted in March 1903 at Broadway Theater in Salt Lake City where Herrera KO'd Jack Clifford. Among the 3,500 spectators "was a Mexican woman said to be Herrera's wife, who occupied one of the stage boxes, but refrained from demonstration."⁷⁸

76 *Bakersfield Californian*, Apr 10, 1908; 1900 *Bakersfield City Directory*

77 *San Francisco Chronicle*, Mar 1, 1903

78 *Salt Lake Herald*, Mar 17, 1903; Aurelio Herrera and Bertha Martensen were married May 23, 1903. [*Index to Marriages*, Lake Co. (Indiana), County Clerk's Office, Bk K, p 73.] In 1907 Aurelio Herrera said, "We were married in Hammond, Indiana May 23, 1904, but knew each other a long time before that." [*Bakersfield Californian*, April 10, 1908]. Bertha was born May 30, 1880 in Connecticut and died Jan 13, 1943 at San Francisco, California as Bertha Katherine Witcofski. [Author's correspondence with Herrera descendant A. Katherine McLaughlin, 2008.]



Boxing Banned in Butte

In June 1903 at Butte, Herrera's career accelerated when he fought Kid Broad of Cleveland. The fight was Broad's 106th, he had never taken the 10-count, and he had knocked out Young Corbett. On the afternoon of the Herrera-Broad fight, Broad's manager and Herrera's manager (then Biddy Bishop) were standing on the street discussing the question of referee. Behind them, Herrera and Broad started shouting, and Herrera's

fist connected with Broad's chin.⁷⁹ The scuffle might have been the reason that bookmakers gave Herrera a 10-8 edge over Broad.

At Sutton's Theater that night, 2,000 spectators saw Herrera drop Kid Broad in the Fourth for the ten-count. The win was "exceedingly popular in Salt Lake," wrote the Herald, and "Bishop's little Mexican has many friends in this city."⁸⁰ The win entitled Herrera to challenge Billy Riley, Buddy King, Eddie Hanlon, and maybe get another crack at the champ, Terry McGovern.

But back-room politicking in Butte was about to kill the fight game in that Mecca of American pugilism. In summer 1903, Butte had seen a menagerie of fighters, managers, trainers, odds-makers, and reporters,⁸¹ but in June the political gong sounded and ended prize fighting, and the reason was Mayor Patrick Mullins had been accused of taking payola from the gambling and vice operators.⁸² In reprisal Mullins did a face-saving, about-face and banned boxing.

79 *Salt Lake Herald* , Jun 14, 1903

80 *Salt Lake Herald* , Jun 15, 1903

81 *San Francisco Chronicle*, Jul 1, 1903. (By wire from Butte, Montana, Jun 30)

82 *New York Sun*, Jun 6, 1903

Crowd Screamed Fake

Because of that, Herrera's next fight was in Utah, but his work there was in sorry contrast to his spectacular knockout of Kid Broad. In fact, Herrera's Utah match severely wounded his boxing career. The story went like this: A featherweight named Jack Downey was booked to meet Herrera at Walker's Baseball Field, Salt Lake City, Utah on July 2, 1903, but when the man showed-up, his fight papers listed him as a lightweight, not a featherweight. After that was announced, a local sportsman informed the press that the boxing game had two professional fighters named Jack Downey, one a featherweight, and one a lightweight.⁸³

The fight went forward anyway. The *Herald* explained away the discrepancy by saying, "The person who started this, however, called up the *Herald* last evening and said he was mistaken and that he was now firmly convinced that Downey was the original lightweight Jack Downey. For the good of the sport it is bad to circulate such reports as these, but mistakes are bound to

⁸³ According to the classification, a lightweight fighter was a few pounds heavier than a flyweight.

happen.”⁸⁴ The *Herald* implied it was not a problem for Herrera, a featherweight, to fight Downey, a lightweight, but had the newspaper meant to write “...he was now firmly convinced that Downey was NOT the original lightweight Jack Downey...” ?

The 3,000 ticket holders at Walker’s Field expected to see Aurelio Herrera fight a Jack Downey, and most of them didn’t care which Downey it was as long as the fight was long and exciting. For that matter, the organizers themselves might not have been sure which Downey they had, but pre-fight ticket sales undoubtedly pushed the match on.

It was a horrible mismatch. Jack Downey went down two minutes and 32 seconds into the first round, and as the ref pronounced “10”, the crowd screamed over and over, “Fake!” Downey was unconscious for ten minutes, and Herrera broke a bone in his hand.⁸⁵ The *Deseret Evening News* observed, “... to satisfy the crowd, Herrera and his brother Mauro gave a four-round exhibition of very fast work despite the little fighter’s disabled hand. The way the two went at each other hammer-and-

⁸⁴ *Salt Lake Herald*, Jul 2, 1903. At this time there was no exact upper-weight for featherweights, but featherweights usually were not matched against lightweights. The lightweight class was then 130-135. In 1920 the upper-weight limit for featherweights was set at 126 lbs.

⁸⁵ *Los Angeles Times*, Jul 2, 1903

tongs caused several person to assert that the two were not members of the same family."⁸⁶

Herrera's hand healed in three months, but his reputation in Salt Lake was forever tarnished, and the *Salt Lake Herald* never forgave. Compounding the local anger, in September 1903 when Butte's fight club arranged for Herrera to fight Kid Goodman, Herrera postponed the fight complaining of a bad cold. When the next fight date arrived, Herrera skipped town, and the club had no one to fight Goodman. It left a permanent scar on his record. "He is not trusted in Butte anymore,"wrote the *Herald*.⁸⁷

Buy A Few Lessons

By early October 1903 Herrera's hand was still sore, but he was in Vancouver, British Columbia where he went 20-rounds against Louie Long. Herrera took the decision on points, but he paid for it in injuries and twice had to postpone his October 19 fight with Eddie Santry at Anaconda, Montana. The Anaconda match was important because Herrera was up in the

⁸⁶ *Deseret Evening News* [Great Salt Lake City, Utah], Jul 3, 1903, final ed, p 5

⁸⁷ *Salt Lake Herald* , Apr 9, 1905. Abraham "Kid" Goodman was a newcomer.

rankings. Eddie Santry was the only fighter who'd ever bested Ben Johnson, and Johnson was next in line to challenge the featherweight champion, Young Corbett.⁸⁸ On October 29, Herrera KO'd Eddie Santry in the 13th.

Aurelio with his sparring partner Bobby Johnson, brother Mauro, and manager Biddy Bishop were in Oakland on November 17, 1903 for a 15-rounder with Jack Cordell at the Reliance Club.⁸⁹ Cordell had recently moved up from the amateur class, and Herrera was favored two to one. Cordell looked like easy prey. But he wasn't.

The new man went down several times in the first round, once for a six count, but Herrera didn't have the punch. He waited too long to wade in, and Cordell not only blocked everything Herrera had but landed the few good blows of the match. Herrera lost on points.⁹⁰

A week after Cordell's surprise win, Sunshine Jim Coffroth signed lightweight Mauro Herrera as a new fighter and set up a six-rounder with Joe Bell at the San Francisco Olympic Athletic

⁸⁸ *Salt Lake Herald*, Oct 23, 1903. Anaconda was about 50 miles from Butte, and promoters there must have known about Herrera's skip of the Goodman match. That didn't stop the Herrera- Santry fight from taking place.

⁸⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle*, Nov 16, 1903

⁹⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle*, Nov 18, 1903

Club.⁹¹ Two days later Mauro faced off against Billy Welch. Mauro won, but what a win it was. Even if Coffroth had money on Herrera, he probably dropped him after the fight; it was an embarrassment. The *Chronicle* claimed Mauro was afraid and Billy Welch knew absolutely zero about the art of boxing. The *Call* continued, "The first round was so bad that referee Kreling wanted to call the police to have the men arrested for obtaining money on false pretenses. Herrera got the long the end of the purse which was enough to buy him a few lessons in boxing."⁹²

Clobbered With A Chair

Butte's ban on boxing wasn't holding up. Mayor Mullins was pressured to reinstate the sport, and he agreed to consider it, but Aurelio Herrera couldn't wait. On January 8, 1904 at the Badger Athletic Club in Milwaukee he signed for a six rounder against local-favorite Charles Neary.⁹³ A day later, Mayor Mullins opened the door for boxing in Butte, but this time the game was under

91 *San Francisco Chronicle*, Nov 24, 1903

92 *San Francisco Chronicle*, Nov 26, 1903. Referee Charles T. Kreling was a professional wrestler.

93 *San Francisco Chronicle*, Jan 9, 1904

the auspices of the new Silver Bow Athletic Club. ⁹⁴ First in line to sign were Benny Yanger of Chicago and Aurelio Herrera of Bakersfield. Meanwhile, Herrera had his fight in Wisconsin where "The Mexican"⁹⁵ from Bakersfield and Charles Neary from Milwaukee went six-rounds to a draw.

In February, 31 year-old Aurelio Herrera was in Montana and fought Louie Long. It was the first time Herrera was counted out. The *Salt Lake Herald* hadn't forgotten Herrera's one-round massacre of Jack Downey, and the paper was delighted by Long's surprise KO over Herrera. It seemed like the press everywhere had turned sour on the Bakersfield fighter. Wrote the *Herald*,

"Aurelio Herrera got his quietus on Friday night at Anaconda. Herrera numbered his friends in the thousands in the intermountain country a year ago, and now he's nothing but a back number. He became a party to a fake fight in Salt Lake with a bogus Jack Downey last July. For the sake of a little easy money he risked his reputation and threw down the Salt Lake sporting fraternity. He is now a has-been. He drew to Louis

⁹⁴ *Salt Lake Herald* , Jan 10, 1904 (by wire from Butte, Montana, Jan 9)

⁹⁵ *Salt Lake Herald* , Jan 12, 1904 (dated January 11 at Milwaukee); *Salt Lake Herald* , Jan 23, 1904

Long in Vancouver after being driven from the coast cities.⁹⁶ He then lost to Jack Cordell. He drew to Neary and lost last night. Herrera is now a dub fighter.”⁹⁷

The statement was passionate, but it was light on the details. The *Bulletin* of San Francisco told the fuller story like this: ⁹⁸ In the second round, Herrera dropped Long and seconds later dropped him again. As the ref counted “...seven...eight...nine” Long's manager, Billy Lavigne, reached through the ropes and pulled his man to his feet. Herrera pushed Lavigne, Lavigne lunged at Herrera, and, according to the paper, “the Mexican punched at his face, but missed.” While that was going on, the gong sounded and saved Long.⁹⁹

Moments into the third round Herrera dropped Long for a seven-count. When Long was finally to his feet, Herrera forced him into a corner, and they clinched. Herrera pushed away, and Long unleashed an uppercut to Herrera's chin that dropped him. Each time Herrera tried to rise, Long battered him down. Herrera

96 Herrera won many fights before he left California. There is no evidence he was driven out.

97 *Salt Lake Herald* , Feb 14, 1904

98 *Bakersfield Californian*, Feb 18, 1904 (from *The Bulletin*, San Francisco. Undated)

99 *Ibid.*

was taking “an awful amount of punishment,” but he still had his senses and took as much of the count as he could. When referee Patsy Sullivan pushed Long back, Herrera got a few more seconds to recover.

The third round still hadn't ended when the seconds on both sides jumped into the ring and started a free-for-all. As the timekeeper banged and banged the gong the Anaconda chief of police waded in.¹⁰⁰ The men returned to their corners, but when the gong sounded for round four the ring was still full of men.

As the fighters waited in their corners, someone came up from behind Herrera and struck him over the head with a chair. “The Mexican went to the floor on his face,” wrote the Bulletin, “and it was at this time that his seconds jumped into the ring, and the decision was given to Long. The decision was very unpopular with the crowd.”¹⁰¹

The Married Man

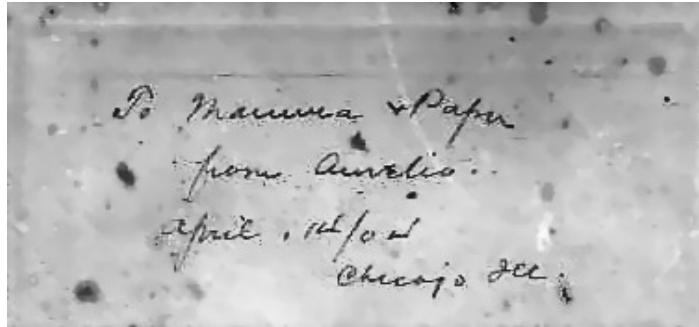
100 *Salt Lake Herald*, Feb 13, 1904; *Bakersfield Californian*, Feb 13, 1904

101 *Bakersfield Californian*, Feb 18, 1904 (from *The Bulletin*, San Francisco. Undated). www.boxrec.com notes that Long KO'd Herrera in Round 4. If the *Californian's* account was correct, the match should have been canceled after Herrera was assaulted.

For the next two months Herrera fought in the East. He took a decision over Benny Yanger on March 14 in Chicago, and he KO'd Kid Abel on March 25; he lost to Abe Attell in Saint Louis (Missouri) on March 28; KO'd Kid Farmer in Chicago on April 14; and lost to Kid Goodman at Saint Louis, Missouri on April 21. ¹⁰²



102 *San Francisco Chronicle*, Mar 15, 1904; Apr 15, 1904; Apr 22, 1904;
www.boxrec.com/list_bouts.php?human_id=17492&cat=boxer&pageID=1



Herrera then set up a 20-rounder against Louis Long on May 11, 1904 at Broadway Theater in Butte. But Aurelio Herrera was now in the journalistic cross-hairs, and the *Salt Lake Herald* resurrected the stories about Herrera's skipped fight in September 1903. The *Herald* also accused Herrera's new manager, Joe Woods, of mismanaging his fighter's schedule: How could Herrera possibly fight Louie Long in Butte on the 11th and still have time to make his next fight in Chicago on the 14th? ¹⁰³

In spite of bad press, a newspaper reported that Herrera's fight with Louie Long at Butte was the "fiercest fighting ever witnessed in the city." ¹⁰⁴ Herrera went after Long from the first gong and dropped him in the Sixth for a nine-count. Herrera took the fight on points. ¹⁰⁵ The *Herald's* earlier pronouncement that

¹⁰³ *Salt Lake Herald*, Apr 28, 1904. Joe Woods was Herrera's third manager.

¹⁰⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 12, 1904 (Reprinted from Butte newspaper)

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

Herrera "is now a dub fighter" was obviously a case of sour grapes.

About the middle of May, 1904, Herrera was in Saint Louis, Missouri, where he went 20-rounds against Kid Goodman, and won on points. In the first week of June, Herrera fought at Sutton's Theater in Butte, knocked-out Benny "The Tipton Slasher" Yanger in the Eighth, and won a \$2,500 purse.¹⁰⁶ During this successful period, Aurelio Herrera and Bertha Martensen were married.

Flipped Over The Ropes

In August, Herrera and company returned to Los Angeles Gymnasium for a 20-rounder with Battling Nelson.¹⁰⁷ If Herrera won, he'd be next in line to meet the world featherweight champ, Young Corbett II.¹⁰⁸ The Nelson fight was set for September 5, 1904 but was switched to the Montana Athletic Club

106 *San Francisco Chronicle*, Jun 14, 1904. The Call identified Yanger as Italian. Mauro was also on the card. He KO'd Howard Opie.

107 Identified as "Battling Nelson" Cobb (*San Francisco Chronicle*, Sep 6, 1904) but born Oscar Mattheus Nielsen

108 *San Francisco Chronicle*, Aug 10, 1904. The purse was decided by the managers: \$3,000 to the winner or 60% of the gate.

at Butte. Contracts were wired to both managers and established the weight limit at 129-1/2 pounds and the purse at \$3,500.¹⁰⁹ At Butte, the outdoor amphitheater was expanded from 10,000 to 12,000 seats. Odds were ten to eight for Herrera, although the *Herald* favored even money.¹¹⁰



Nelson advanced on Herrera in every round, and when the men did wade into each other, it was pounding iron. One of Herrera's punches flipped Nelson into a somersault over the ropes, yet at the end of the Twentieth, Nelson took the decision.¹¹¹

109 *San Francisco Chronicle*, Aug 16, 1904. A fight in Butte would benefit Herrera. He had been training at the 5,500-foot elevation. At the time, 126 was the top of the featherweight class, and some boxers, like Young Corbett II, were not always able to stay under that. The purse equaled about \$100,000 today; *Salt Lake Herald*, Sep 5, 1904

110 Eight dollars that was bet on Herrera would return ten if he won.

111 Roberts, James B., Alexander G. Skutt, *International Boxing Hall of Fame*

Warrant For His Arrest

Herrera laid off fighting for the next three months. He'd arrived at a career position where lesser fighters would have to beat him to move up. That was what was happening when Jimmy Britt and Battling Nelson were preparing their fight in San Francisco, and the Waverley Athletic Club of Chicago offered the winner a crack at Aurelio Herrera and a \$3,500 purse.¹¹² The club contacted Herrera's manger, Joe Woods, about the proposal, and Woods, "acting for the Mexican,"¹¹³ accepted. Meanwhile on December 23, 1904 at Milwaukee, Herrera went six-rounds with a local favorite named Maurice Sayers and won on points.¹¹⁴

Reporters asked Herrera what he thought about his chances against Battling Nelson, and Herrera answered by recalling an early match against him: "I'm the only man in recent months that has stayed in the ring for twenty rounds with Nelson. I took my

Official Record Book. McBooks Press, 2006. p 198; *San Francisco Chronicle*, Sep 6, 1904; Herrera 's stamina was remarkable. On Oct 7, 1904 he KO'd Kid Tracy in Helena, Montana, and on Oct 26 he fought Young Herman at Ogden, Utah.

112 *Salt Lake Herald* , Dec 18, 1904

113 *Ibid.*

114 *Salt Lake Herald* , Dec 14, 1904

fight on at eleven-days notice, and three of those days were spent in railroad-traveling getting to the battling ground. I had to take off fourteen pounds in that time, too, and did the last four-and-a-half pounds of it in the bathhouse on the day of the fight."¹¹⁵

Herrera kept fighting in the East. In April, 1905 the *Salt Lake Herald* reported that in Philadelphia "the great Mexican fighter" complained about the small purses he'd collected for winning six-rounders. It was true that the money was better out West, and Herrera would have returned to the West if there'd been offers, but there weren't any.

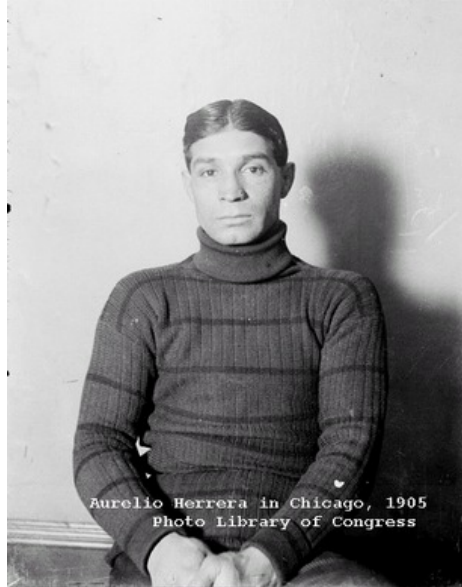
The reasons were several: At National Athletic Club in Philadelphia he lost a fast fight against seasoned boxer Young Erne;¹¹⁶ he won on points against newcomer Tommy Daly in Baltimore; he drew against Harry Lewis in Philadelphia on May 6; he took the decision from Kid Goodman on May 17 at Chelsea, Massachusetts;¹¹⁷ and he drew against Charley Neary on June 8 at Grand Rapids.¹¹⁸ Those fights were not the record of a champion.

115 *Ibid.*

116 *Salt Lake Herald*, Apr 23, 1905. Mauro fought on the same card.

117 Mauro was then fighting in Montana, (*Bakersfield Californian*, May 16, 1905)

118 *Salt Lake Herald*, Jun 9, 1905. Herrera damaged his right hand in the fight, (*Los Angeles Times*, July 18, 1905)



Aurelio Herrera, November 10, 1905

At the end of June, Herrera returned to Butte. Fight promoter Jere Clifford arranged a match for him and Charles Neary, but Clifford hadn't forgotten about Herrera's skipped fight the previous fall. When Herrera and Neary stepped into the ring before a packed house on July 4, 1905, Sheriff Quinn of Silver Bow County was waiting at ringside with a warrant sworn out by Jere Clifford for Herrera's arrest.¹¹⁹ A minute or so into round one, Quinn threw his hat into the ring and stopped the fight.¹²⁰

119 *Butte Miner*, Jul 5, 1905, (cited by www.boxrec.com); *Los Angeles Times*, Jul 5, 1905 (by wire from Butte, Montana, Jul 4)

120 Ibid. "The sheriff of Silver Bow County shied his castor into the ring in the first round." (*Salt Lake Herald*, Jul 9, 1905)

Two-thousand bewildered fans "...hissed and hooted, but the officer did his duty, and the two men left the ring after fighting half of the first round." ¹²¹

Herrera dealt with the warrant and later in the month was back in Bakersfield with no comments about the skipped fight. When the *Californian* asked why the Neary fight was stopped, Herrera explained that Clifford swore out the warrant as pay-back: "Louis Long won a decision from me in Butte, and we were rematched. ¹²² Clifford sent for me. He informed me he knew that I could best Long but offered me \$5,000 to lay down. I refused to sell out and went in and won from Long."¹²³

Events suggest that before Herrera spoke with the *Bakersfield Californian* he had been in San Francisco. On July 7, 1905 a vaudeville actress there named Lottie Talbot was attacked at the Empire Theater and obtained a warrant from Police Judge Conlan "...for the arrest of Bertha Herrera on a charge of battery. Miss Talbot says that Mrs. Herrera who, she says, is the wife of Aurelio Herrera the pugilist, attacked her in the theater on Friday night,

121 Ibid.

122 Long had knocked out Herrera in a 20-rounder at Anaconda. "In the Third, Long landed a terrific right to the jaw, and Herrera went down. When they came together again Long went at Herrera like a tiger, twice putting him to the mat, the second time putting him completely out." (*San Francisco Chronicle*, Feb 13, 1904)

123 *Los Angeles Times*, Jul 18, 1905, from Bakersfield Jul 17, 1905

knocking her down and kicking her. She said her assailant was actuated by jealousy."¹²⁴

Torchlight on His Finger

Herrera had been gone for two years, and Bakersfield was delighted to have him back: "Herrera comes home looking well and feeling quite independent. He wears a torchlight on one of his fingers and a jeweled bonfire illuminates his necktie.¹²⁵ To his select friends a bulging pocket book was exhibited. Herrera will rest quietly in this city for one month, during which time he will exercise moderately and strengthen up his right hand, which he'd damaged in his Grand Rapids match with Charles Neary. Herrera displayed telegrams from the Colma Club and one from Tom McCarey of Los Angeles.¹²⁶ McCarey wants Herrera to fight Eddie Hanion in Los Angeles next month."¹²⁷

124 *San Francisco Chronicle*, Jul 9, 1905

125 jewelry

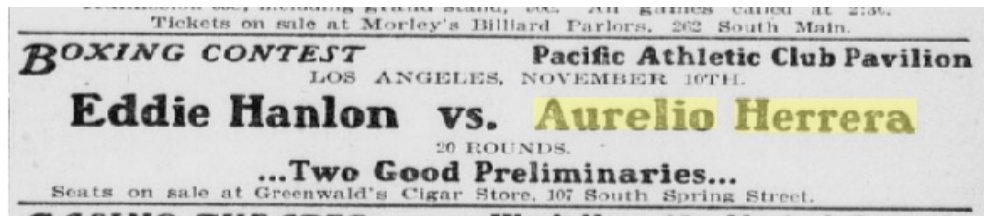
126 Promoter "Sunny Jim" Coffroth owned and managed the Bay Area Colma Club. He was Jim McCarey's Northern California rival.

127 *Bakersfield Californian*, Jul 17, 1905. Prize fighting was illegal in the city of Los Angeles. McCarey operated a boxing arena in Vernon, about seven miles outside Los Angeles. (McCallum, John D. *The World Heavyweight Boxing Championship*, p 369-70. Chilton Book Co., 1974)

Thirty-two year-old Herrera was very much a boxing contender, but that summer as he waited for the fight, he and William M. "Baldy" Wilson signed a lease on the Cosmopolitan Hotel saloon in the Bakersfield tenderloin.



Herrera before 1903 (Photo credit Katherine A. McLaughlin)



In November 1905 Herrera fought Eddie Hanlon. That 20-rounder went to a draw, but his next fight, in January, was a high

point in his career.¹²⁸ Five thousand spectators at McCarey's pavilion in Los Angeles saw Herrera meet Young Corbett II.¹²⁹

Corbett fans were delighted by his early-round success.¹³⁰ The *Times* wrote, "When Corbett had made several clever rushes that scintillated somewhat of his previous form and landed on the Mexican, who danced away, there were those who called "Yellow" from the tiers of humanity. Corbett commenced taunting, and a token of a popular victory noised through the air."¹³¹

In the Fourth, Corbett sent Herrera against the ropes, "and the crowd shouted for glee. In wily fashion he [Herrera] slipped to the center of the ring with his deadly arm poised for action, but the gong sounded...."¹³²

Spectators were struck dumb in the Fifth when Herrera KO'd Corbett. The *Times'* postmortem read, "A more popular boxer perhaps never stepped into the ring, and, when he went to oblivion Friday evening, hardly a person of the great crowd at the ringside but felt sympathy for the lightweight as he lay helpless

128 Jan 11, 1906

129 Corbett (William H. Rothwell) had risen steadily in the featherweight class but suffered recent reversals.

130 *San Francisco Chronicle*, Jan 13, 1906. Corbett won the world featherweight title from Terry McGovern on Nov 28, 1901.

131 *Los Angeles Times*, Jan 13, 1906

132 *Ibid.*

under the ropes. Whatever Herrera has been accused of, he demonstrated his right to mingle with the topnotch lightweights of the world and the future will tell whether he is to reach to the pinnacle of his ambition.”¹³³

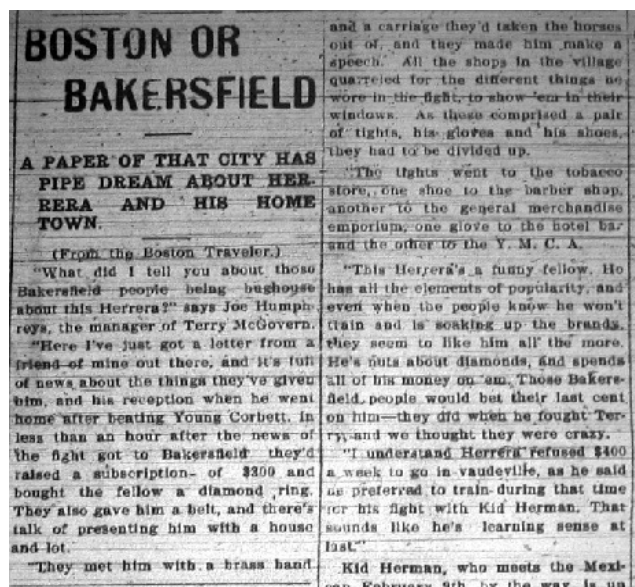
Manager Biddy Bishop wasn't present to share the victory. They had parted company, and probably not amicably. In an interview with Bishop a few days after the Corbett fight, the manager told stories about Herrera, and those stories crisscrossed the country on the news wires: "Among other things, Bishop stated that Aurelio secreted bottles of strong liquor in hiding places along the road while training. He pretended to take a spin, and he would in reality go for his cache of stimulants, and while training in Montana for important engagements, the Mexican would play cards all night long and never cease ordering drinks and smoking... The Mexican has not returned home and reports from LA indicate that he is eating all the 'frejoles' in sight and drinking moderately.”¹³⁴

133 *Ibid.* Los Angeles Herald, Jan 14, 1906. "Paid admission last Friday night in LA was \$8,720. Promoter got half and fighters divided 60-40." Corbett got \$1,844 and Herrera \$2,516. (*Bakersfield Californian*, Jan 16, 1906). Herrera's share was about the same as \$60,000 today. (Herrera was now fighting in the lightweight class.)

134 *Bakersfield Californian*, Jan 16, 1906. That issue suggests that the original story appeared on January 13, 1906 in the *San Francisco Bulletin*. The Jan 16, 1906 *Washington [DC] Times* also carried the story.

Bughouse Over Herrera

It didn't matter to Bakersfield what Bishop said. The town showered its famous boxer with honors. "Aurelio Herrera, the Mexican pugilist, is to be presented with a valuable token of appreciation upon his arrival in the city from Los Angeles, for on Friday night he defeated ex-champion Young Corbett in an easy manner. Friends and admirers started a subscription list for that purpose yesterday afternoon and within a half-hour over \$100 was collected."¹³⁵



February 3, 1906, *Daily [Bakersfield] Californian*

¹³⁵ *Bakersfield Californian*, Jan 17, 1906

The *Boston Traveler* carried the following adulation, and the *Bakersfield Californian* reprinted it.

“ ‘What did I tell you about those Bakersfield people being bughouse about this Herrera?’ says John Humphries, the manager of Terry McGovern. ‘Here I have just got a letter from a friend of mine out there, and it's full of news about the things they have given him, and his reception when he went home after beating Young Corbett. In less than an hour after the news of the fight got to Bakersfield they raised a subscription of \$300 and bought the fellow a diamond ring. They also gave him a belt, and there is talk of presenting him with a house and a lot. They met him with a brass band and a carriage they had taken the horses out of, and they made him make a speech. All shops in the village quarreled for the different things he wore in the fight, to show `em in their windows. As these comprise a pair of tights, his gloves and issues, they had to be divided up. The tights went to the tobacco store, one to the barbershop, another to the general merchandise emporium, one glove to the hotel bar and the other to the YMCA.’” ¹³⁶

“This Herrera is a funny fellow. He has all the elements of

136 *Bakersfield Californian*, Feb 1, 1906

popularity, and even when the people know he won't train and is soaking up the brands¹³⁷, they seem to like him all the more. He is nuts about diamonds, and spends all his money on 'em. Those Bakersfield people would let their last cent go on him -- they did when he fought Terry,¹³⁸ and we thought they were crazy. I understand Herrera's refused \$400 a week to go in vaudeville, as he said he preferred to train during that time for his fight with Kid Herman. That sounds like he is learning since last. Kid Herman, who meets the Mexican February 9th, by the way, is up against a tougher proposition than Young Corbett was. Herrera demands the weight to be 133 pounds at six o'clock, instead of 130, which is Herman's figure, but the Kid is agreed to accept this condition rather than lose the match. Young Corbett is now out with a most ill-advised statement to the effect that Herrera has a streak of yellow in him a foot-long.' 'Herman will win,' says Willie¹³⁹, 'if he just bangs the Greaser in the stomach a few times it'll take all the nerve out of him.' "¹⁴⁰

137 liquor

138 McGovern-Herrera fight, 1901

139 Corbett

140 *Bakersfield Californian*, Feb 1, 1906

The \$20,000 Bump

Herrera was "pegging along" at Tom Carey's pavilion in preparation for the Herman fight. He was confident of a win,¹⁴¹ but the 20-rounder ended in a draw.¹⁴² Impresario Cary immediately put up a \$15,000 purse for a 20-round, Herrera-Nelson fight at Pacific Athletic Club in Los Angeles for February 15, 1906,¹⁴³ and back in New York, 23 year-old Battling Nelson posted his forfeit at the offices of the *New York Journal*.¹⁴⁴

Nelson had fought the Bakersfield man before, and he told the press, "Aurelio Herrera was the toughest proposition that I ever swapped punches with. That Mexican has an awful punch. He can unbuckle stinging wallops up from any old angle. He carries a clout in either hand that is apt to make you forget to come up inside of ten seconds."¹⁴⁵

The match seemed a sure thing, but on January 19 a wire from

141 *Bakersfield Californian*, Feb 9, 1906

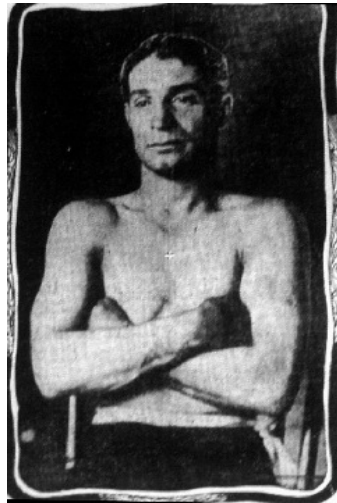
142 Gregory S. Rodriguez wrote, "As in most of his fights, in his bout with Kid Herman in February of 1906, the *Los Angeles Times* represented Herrera as the 'Mexican villain' in order to appeal to predominantly white fans." (www.laprensa-sandiego.org)

143 *Salt Lake Herald*, Feb 15, 1906

144 *Ibid.* The text added "...or American."

145 *Salt Lake Herald*, Feb 25, 1906

Thomas O'Rourke of New York trumped Carey's offer. Wrote O'Rourke, "Will you fight Nelson before the Tuxedo club for \$17,000? Answer." Herrera replied, "I will accept your offer. I am going to Los Angeles at once: Wire me full particulars of your terms and I will start for the East immediately."¹⁴⁶ Then Carey bumped his offer to \$20,000, and both fighters accepted.



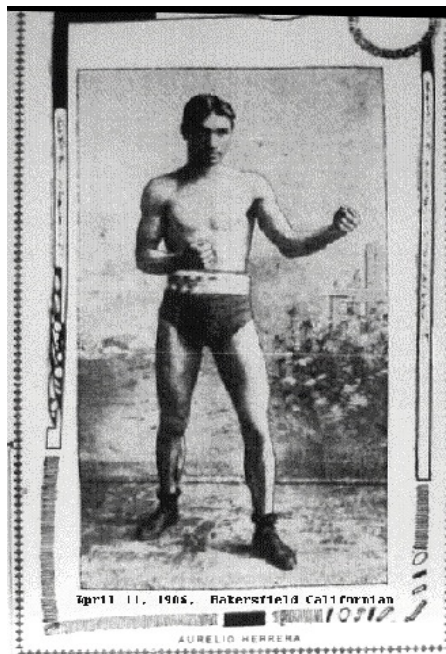
Aurelio Herrera, March 25, 1906, *Los Angeles Herald*

Nelson and his manager Billy Noland were sitting in New York, and Herrera and Carey were at the offices of the *Los Angeles Examiner*. Twenty-five minutes later the coast-to-coast deal was concluded via Hearst's lease-wire services. Nelson, as standing

146 *Bakersfield Californian*, Mar 19, 1906. O'Rourke was a promoter for the Tuxedo club, a newly organized fighting club just over the New York state line in Pennsylvania. The \$17,000 offer was equivalent to about \$400,000 today.

champion, would get \$9,000 up front, and the fighters would split \$16,000: 60% to the winner, 40% to the loser.¹⁴⁷

In the first days of April 1906 Herrera, his sparring partner Jerry McIlvaine, and Herrera's manager Baldy Wilson left Bakersfield for their training quarters at 49th and Central Avenue in Los Angeles.¹⁴⁸ On April 8, Battling Nelson and his party arrived by train from El Paso and took a steamer to Catalina Island for training.¹⁴⁹



Bakersfield Californian, April 11, 1906

147 *Salt Lake Herald*, Mar 26, 1906

148 *Bakersfield Californian*, Apr 4, 1906; May 17, 1906 (quoting the *Los Angeles Examiner*, which emphasized Herrera's intensive workouts. The May 21, 1906 *Bakersfield Californian*, described Herrera as being in the finest condition of his career.)

149 *Salt Lake Herald*, Apr 9, 1906

Singing, Yodeling, Boxing

A few minutes after 5:00 AM on April 18, 1906 Herrera might have been awoken by the rattling of dishes and house timbers in Los Angeles. The morning was still on Catalina,¹⁵⁰ but San Francisco it was chaos, and a disaster was metastasizing. The public's interest in boxing shifted to disaster relief. On the evening of April 25, fifteen-hundred men, women, and children filled McCarey's pavilion in a benefit for the citizens of San Francisco. The two-and-a-half hour show started with four rounds of foil swordsmanship followed by singing, yodeling, comic sketches, and whirlwind boxing.

“The star event of the evening was the hippodrome between Aurelio Herrera and his brother Mauro. From the tap of the gong until the four rounds were ended they did not spare each other, and Aurelio showed up in fine form. His training has put him in good condition, and his old-time panther-like form cropped out everywhere. In the third round Aurelio put Mauro

¹⁵⁰ *Los Angeles Times*, Apr 19, 1906, Pt II, 14; Apr 20, 1906. pt II,10

down with his right wallop and [Mauro] rolled over on his back. Somebody yelled 'count him out,' and the referee started in to do the work. The boys then got together for a slugging match, and half the people in the house were on their feet cheering like mad. The referee had to tear the boxer apart when the bell sounded."¹⁵¹

When Battling Nelson's turn came, he entered the ring to an an ovation, women joining in. Nelson and his sparing partner "furnished a good card."¹⁵²

Lead-Up To Disaster

The earthquake diverted attention from the Nelson-Herrera match, but it had little other effect on the fight's bizarre outcome. After May 26, 1906 Herrera's credibility would be destroyed.

On the afternoon of the fight Herrera's contingent entered McCarey's pavilion to cheering, and the fighter and his group

¹⁵¹ *Los Angeles Times*, Apr 25, 1906, pg. II3

¹⁵² Ibid. *The Times* described Nelson's part in the show in two short sentences.

made their way the dressing rooms. By 6:30 PM a line of ticket-buyers streaked far into the rainy evening. Days before the fight Carey had already sold \$20,000 in tickets¹⁵³ and negotiated rights for a motion picture of the event.

“We Done Our Share”

Promptly at 8:29 PM Herrera stepped through the ropes to ovations.¹⁵⁴ He had met the contract demand,¹⁵⁵ but by 8:30 Nelson hadn't showed. After 20-minutes, Herrera left the ring. His brother Mauro, who'd been milling about with the press, commented that boxer Eddie Hanlon told him that Battling Nelson was at a Turkish bath.¹⁵⁶ Nearly an hour later, Nelson finally entered the ring. The crowd was in an ugly mood.

Nelson finally quieted the booing and announced to the house that he wouldn't fight unless Herrera agreed to weigh-in at ringside. Spectators continued to hiss, but Nelson pleaded, “We went over to de bath shop and I weighed in. Herrera, he ducked

153 *Salt Lake Herald*, May 25, 1906

154 *Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 1906, p II1. Nelson was favored 10 to 7.

155 *Ibid.*

156 Implying that Nelson was attempting to drop weight. A few minutes later, Hanlon denied it, Mauro called him a liar, and Hanlon slugged Mauro.

out de back door and I couldn't get him to weigh." ¹⁵⁷

That wasn't the whole story. Nelson actually had weighed twice: at 6:00 PM at Tom McCarey's office and at 7:00 PM at a bath shop.¹⁵⁸ Herrera was there at McCarey's before Nelson arrived, and rumor had it that Jacobs, Herrera's manager, queered the scale before Herrera weighed.¹⁵⁹ When Nelson arrived, his manager Nolan said the scales were out of whack, and he demanded that both fighters weigh at a nearby Turkish bath.

Herrera told them he'd weighed as required, and then said he wanted to get something to eat.¹⁶⁰ Both fighters went to a Turkish bath to weigh on a different scale. Nelson did, but Herrera refused.¹⁶¹ That was why Nelson said Herrera "ducked out de back door."

157 *Los Angeles Times*, May 27, 1906. Nelson was born in Denmark.

158 *Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 1906, p II1. The contract did not require that both men be present at the same time for weigh-in.

159 Tommy Jacobs was a former Salt Lake boxer who became Herrera's sparring partner (*Salt Lake Herald*, February 11, 1906); The May 21, 1906 *Bakersfield Californian*, wrote about Jacobs, "In sporting parlance he is 'built from the ground up.' His muscles are magnificently developed from calves to neck, and he is a quick and graceful as he is well developed."

160 *Bakersfield Californian*, May 28, 1906

161 *Los Angeles Times*, May 27, 1906



**Aurelio Herrera in corner, Mario Herrera seated at his right
May 26, 1906, *Los Angeles Times***

When Herrera finally returned to the ring the crowd was seething. "He looked a typical Indian," wrote the Times, "his little pig eyes twinkling wickedly, and his face set and immovable and expressionless." Tommy Jacobs was quoted as saying, "We was willing to weigh at Tom McCarey's but the scales were on the bum. We done our share." ¹⁶² Both fighters then left the ring.

Promoter McCarey's contract hadn't specified where the weigh-in should take place. All it said was the men must weigh no more than 131 pounds at 6:00 PM on the night of the fight. Herrera weighed and shown up for the fight on time, but Nelson didn't show until almost two hours later, ¹⁶³ and Herrera's people

162 *Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 1906, pg II1

163 *Los Angeles Times*, May 29, 1906, pg II3

suspected Nelson was sweating pounds to make weight.¹⁶⁴ Jacobs might have bent the scales to benefit Herrera, as was charged, but there was no question that Nelson was a no show at 8:30 PM. Still, Tommy Jacobs could have done better for Herrera than announcing "We done our share" and then leaving the ring.¹⁶⁵

Crooked and Swindling

Promoter McCarey was frantic. Minutes were becoming hours, and McCarey's pot of gold was fading before his eyes. If the fight was canceled he would collect \$2,000 in forfeit money, but he was holding \$40,000 in refundable tickets, and managers Jacobs and Noland refused to budge on the weigh-in dispute. McCarey would have been even more frantic if he'd known that during his negotiations over motion picture rights, Herrera had wired his Bakersfield bank to stop payment on his \$1,000 weigh-in guarantee.¹⁶⁶ A lot was going wrong.

164 *Los Angeles Times*, May 27, 1906, 19

165 On July 26 the *Times* blamed Herrera's refusal to fight on manager Jacobs, "the intolerable little upstart who left a hash-foundry to manage Herrera..."

166 *Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 1906; *Daily [Bakersfield] Californian*, May 30, 1906; Herrera also stopped payment on a \$2,000 check he had given to McCarey as forfeit money for non-appearance. William R. Hearst's *Los Angeles Examiner*

The empty ring entered its second hour, men groaned and swore, and ring announcer Cook announced, yet again, "In five minutes, the fight will begin." Lucky, none of the 5,500 present knew that Nelson had already left the building. At 10:50 PM, Cook called off the fight. ¹⁶⁷ The *Times* wrote, "The sickest sporting event California ever saw" had ended, and the paper charged Herrera and his manager of being "a brutal, crooked, swindling bunch that runs this game." ¹⁶⁸

"Greaser Good For Nothing"

In a "back-alley" interview early the next day the *Times* described Aurelio Herrera as a miserable drunk. Around midnight Herrera reportedly had "brutally knocked down and out an unknown man at First and Main streets... Herrera's friends, to avoid possible trouble through police interference, hustled the

held the forfeit checks as third party stakeholder. Hearst brought suit for nonpayment against Herrera and the First Bank of Kern. (*Daily Californian*, Jun 3, 1906)

167 *Salt Lake Herald*, May 26, 1906

168 *Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 1906, pg II1

Mexican away and into the Palace Cafe."¹⁶⁹

ALL HE NEEDS NOW IS A BIG TIN CAN.

*Like a Whipped Pup the Indian
Candidate for Pugilistic Notoriety
Sneaks Along in Fear and Trem-
bling—What He Says.*

UNLESS the late Aurelio Herrera leaves town within two days he may be arrested as a vagrant and not to crackling rock on the chain gang. A member of the staff of T. J. McCreary states that Herrera has been warned out of town. The sergeant in charge of the detective squad was unable to verify the rumor last night. However—true or not—poor Herrera had been so bitterly punished that nothing further could hurt much. The disgraced Indian was found by a Times reporter last night as he was skulking home after having made the rounds of the North Main-street saloons. The Mexican invited out ex-

old man never fixed nothing. He's square. "They got things all their own way now. They think they got me going, but I'm going to show 'em. I'm going to the newspapers and tell them my end just like Nelson done." "Did you expect to fight when you went into the ring last night?" was asked.

WHAT HE KNEW. "Course I did," said Herrera. Then he thought a moment and a puzzled look swept over his otherwise expressionless face. "I mean," he explained, "I went there to fight, but I knew Nelson and those fallers wouldn't put up no scrap. I knew that 'fore I went." "Did you know you would lose your

May 27, 1906, *Los Angeles Times*

On May 31 Herrera promised the public an explanation for refusing to fight. A few days later he wrote,

"I would have weighed had Nelson guaranteed to fight me after doing so. But this he would not do.¹⁷⁰ To me the most opprobrious epithets have been applied. 'Indian.' 'low-brow,' 'greaser good for nothing,' etc., etc. These are but the result of newspaper men's desire to stand in with a public opinion which they try to form to their own advantage. I may be an Indian. If

¹⁶⁹ *Los Angeles Times*, May 27, 1906, 19; reprinted in the May 29, 1906 *Bakersfield Californian*

¹⁷⁰ *Los Angeles Times*, Jun 3, 1906. The Times claimed that Nelson pleaded with Herrera to fight.

so, I command a certain respect as a scion of an ancient race. I am not 'low-brow.' Perhaps I paid too much attention to ... what my manager advised. I have been accused of cowardice and of being afraid to meet Nelson at his weight. I will ... fight Nelson anywhere, from the back parlor to the neck of the woods, at any time he names."¹⁷¹

Other Hands In The Pie

Herrera's letter didn't melt any hearts at the *Los Angeles Times*, and a week later the paper offered its readers an imaginative story about Tommy Jacobs working as a waiter at a "Spring Street 'booze' café." In the story Jacobs was taking an order from Battling Nelson and manager Billy Nolan when Nolan sniffs the air and remarks, "What's that dead smell around here?" to which Jacobs answers, "I beg your pardon, sir; it ain't Aurelio, sir. He's been buried, sir-- long ago, sir."¹⁷²

171 *Los Angeles Times*, Jul 4, 1906, II5. Herrera's attorney in Bakersfield was George E. Whitaker who was also attorney for Madame Marie T. Brignaudy and saloon owner and investor Carlie Withington, both of the Bakersfield tenderloin. *Daily Californian*, Jun 1, 1906 (from Los Angeles): "Frankly he should be barred from [boxing], but the fact that he is illiterate and was acting under advice of his manager is a little excuse for him..."

172 *Los Angeles Times*, Jul 6, 1906. Although the pugilistic life was unpredictable, boxers admired Herrera's success: In Jan 1907, a few weeks after the canceled Nelson-Herrera fight, a Los Angeles pugilist was dying at Los

Why had Herrera refused to weigh-in? The imbroglio started when Nelson's seconds assumed that Herrera was over weight, perhaps somewhat more than 140 pounds, and Herrera's side assumed Nelson was late because he had to drop weight. But the fight wouldn't have been canceled if both men weighed at ringside. One – or both – could have pocketed the weight bond, but the fight would have gone on.

As far as Tommy Jacobs' tampering with the scales, Nolan didn't buy it. "He has not the brains for that. I believe there were other hands in the pie."¹⁷³ Tom McCarey also thought unknown hands had upset the scale. ¹⁷⁴ The *Times* claimed that "a San Francisco group" paid Herrera to deep-six the fight because they wanted to discredit Tom McCarey as a fight promoter, thus making it easier for them to move in on his Southland boxing empire.¹⁷⁵

Who was the San Francisco group? After the 1906 earthquake,

Angeles Co hospital. James Smith widely- known in the boxing world as "Young Herrera" had quarreled over a tenderloin woman with whom he was living, and a friend of hers morally stabbed Smith. (*Los Angeles Times*, Jan 26, 1907)

173 *Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 1906

¹⁷⁴ *Bakersfield Californian*, May 28, 1906

175 *Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 1906

voters in San Francisco cleaned their political house, the political support of Jim Coffroth ended, and he was forced out of San Francisco. It was possible that "Sunny Jim" Coffroth's boys were the "other hands in the pie."¹⁷⁶

Herrera's Cosmopolitan Gym

In July 1906 Aurelio Herrera mortgaged his Kern City property and got a \$500 loan from Bakersfield saloon-owner Carlie Withington,¹⁷⁷ and a week later Herrera signed a lease on Paul Castro's Ringside Saloon.¹⁷⁸ With that business taken care of, Herrera went back into training for a fight in Milwaukee with Charles Neary. The fight took place in mid-August, and added a technical knockout to Neary's record.¹⁷⁹ A couple of weeks later Herrera met Kid Goodman at Chelsea,

176 McCallum, John D. *The World Heavyweight Boxing Championship*, Chilton Book Co., 1974, p 369-70

177 Kern Co. Hall of Records, Jul 18, 1906, *Mortgage Book* 0042-0298. Town of Kern, Blk 124, Lts 14 and 15. Interest rate was 12%. Aurelio and his father had bought the lots earlier (KC Hall of Records, *Deed Book* 0135-0430, Jun 12, 1902).

178 Kern Co. Hall of Records, Jul 29, 1906, *Leases* 0015-0131. Castro was manager of the Ringside Saloon. (*Daily [Bakersfield] Californian*, Mar 22, 1907)

179 *Salt Lake Herald*, Aug 17, 1906 (from the *Herald's* annual review of events, Dec 30, 1906). Herrera's corner threw in the sponge in the Seventh Round.

Michigan and won on points.

Herrera was a saloon owner so why was he still in boxing? Maybe he needed the money. William Randolph Hearst, owner of the *Los Angeles Examiner*, had been a stakeholder in the canceled Herrera-Nelson fight, and Hearst had taken legal action against Herrera. In an article entitled "Mexican Retains Forfeit and Pays \$500," the *Californian* wrote that Herrera's attorney, George E. Whitaker, cut a deal allowing Herrera to keep his \$2,000 bond for non-performance.¹⁸⁰

With legal matters concluded, in late December 1906 "Baldy" Wilson and 34-year-old Aurelio Herrera bought Charles C. Scribner's liquor license, lodging house, saloon, personal goods, and the lease that Scribner held on the Cosmopolitan Hotel at 1234-19th Street.¹⁸¹ For the next 16 months Herrera took part in no professional fights.¹⁸²

Few were surprised that Aurelio Herrera had opened a gym in the Cosmopolitan Hotel and was staging boxing matches,¹⁸³ nor

180 *Bakersfield Californian*, Dec 10, 1906

181 KC Hall of Records, *Misc Records* 0008-0260, Dec 24, 1906; *Bakersfield Californian*, Dec 29, 1906; This building probably occupied most of the south-facing street frontage on 19th street between L and M: The 1907-1908 *City Directory* listed the rooming house at 1322-19th and the saloon at 1300-19th.

182 www.boxrec.com

183 *Morning Echo*, Mar 16, 1907

was anyone surprised that he announced in March that he might don the gloves himself. In fact Herrera did substitute in a two-round go against heavyweight Charlie Murray, a fighter from the oil fields. The *Echo* noted, "Herrera demonstrated that he has lost none of his old-time ring ability."¹⁸⁴

The Eagle And Wildcat

The big town fire of 1896 burned-out most of downtown Bakersfield. Owners rebuilt in brick, except in the Cosmopolitan Block on Nineteenth Street between L and M, which miraculously escaped the fire.¹⁸⁵ But in the early hours of March 22, 1907 luck ran out when an oil stove that barber Bert Strock left unattended flared up and set fire to the back of the shop.¹⁸⁶ Owner George Irwin fled next door to Herrera's saloon, and Herrera and Wilson rushed upstairs to awaken their sleeping roomers.¹⁸⁷ An hour later the Cosmopolitan Block was reduced to

184 *Ibid.*

185 *Morning Echo*, Mar 22, 1907

186 *Ibid.*

187 *Daily* [Bakersfield] *Californian*, Mar 22, 1907

smoldering ashes.¹⁸⁸

The big eagle that Herrera & Wilson kept at the saloon perished miserably in the flames, but their captive wildcat escaped down M street.¹⁸⁹ The partners' loss was eased by a \$2,000 fire insurance policy,¹⁹⁰ and a week later Herrera advertised boxing demonstrations at Bowling Alley Gardens, one-block north of the burned-out Cosmopolitan. Bouts at the Gardens on April 2 drew a large crowd,¹⁹¹ and that enthusiastic response probably convinced Herrera that Bakersfield had room for another boxing promoter.¹⁹²

Herrera & Wilson were back in the saloon business in June 1907 when they bought M. A. Goodrich's Club Saloon at 1300 Nineteenth Street, "together with all the fixtures, stock of liquors and cigars and retail liquor license appertaining to same."¹⁹³

188 *Ibid.* Some burned businesses from west to east were John Bailey's Cosmopolitan hotel at 1234-19th, corner of L (which included the Herrera & Wilson saloon); George Irwin's barber shop; the French Saloon at 1224-19th; PC Castro's Ringside saloon; Del Ramirez' restaurant; the Salvation Army barracks headquarters; G. Pucci's Remember the Main Saloon, Restaurant and Rooming House at 1218-19th; Tom E. Owens Union Saloon at 1240-19th near the west corner of 19th and M; and Fullers candy store around the corner on M.

189 *Daily* [Bakersfield] *Californian*, Mar 22, 1907

190 *Ibid.*

191 *Daily* [Bakersfield] *Californian*, Mar 29, 1907; *Morning Echo*, Apr 2, 1907

192 Established boxing promoters were Ezra Reyfeld of the Del Monte Athletic Club and Tom O'Brien of the Empire Athletic Club. (*Bakersfield Californian*, Oct 24, 1907; *Washington* [DC] *Herald*, December 18, 1907)

193 Hall of Records, Apr 17, 1907. Herrera-Goodrich transaction. Loan payable

Herrera converted one of the rooms into another gym.¹⁹⁴

Smoking, Drinking

The month Herrera became a fight promoter, Bakersfield promoter Ezra Rehfeld was arranging a 20-round fight at Armory Hall when he learned that Herrera had made a generous offer to the same boxers.¹⁹⁵ The *Californian* observed, "Unless Rehfeld can go the little Mexican one better and can make a higher offer to the fighters, it is likely that the next bout will be held under the auspices of Herrera's new Cosmopolitan Athletic Club."¹⁹⁶ But Rehfeld was an expert at the promotion game.

Boxing was now king in Bakersfield, and promoters wanted to keep it that way. In December "the best heavyweight pugilistic contest the coast has seen for years" was held at the Opera House, and management promised that "perfect order shall reign

\$2000 within five days and balance of \$1500 in six months.

194 *Californian*, Jun 1, 1907. Mauro Herrera was then working in Montana as a trainer for boxer Billy Finucane. (*Salt Lake Herald*, Jun 27, 1907)

195 *Californian*, Jun 1, 1907. 60% percent of the gate for the heavy-weight fighters and "solid coin" for the opening-card fighters

196 *Ibid*. It's unlikely that Herrera could have unseated Rehfeld. In October, Rehfeld staged 20-round "boxing contests" at Union Theater and sold tickets at the Del Monte Cigar Stand.

throughout the evening.”¹⁹⁷ “No Smoking, drinking or boisterous conduct will be allowed, and the club guarantees that each ticket-purchaser will be given the seat his coupon calls for. Peace officers will be on hand to see that order is strictly preserved at all times.”¹⁹⁸

Perhaps Herrera didn't have enough interest to sick with being boxing promoter, or maybe the attention to detail exceeded his reach. But that was not for Mauro. In February 1908 he was promoting “hot scraps” boxing at Union Theater.¹⁹⁹

She Can Have The Divorce

By early 1908 Herrera had returned to training, but his schedule was interrupted in April when Bertha Catherine Herrera, then living in San Francisco, sued him for divorce. Aurelio Herrera, “known from one coast to the other as

197 *Daily Californian*, Dec 20, 1907

198 *Ibid.*

199 *Bakersfield Californian*, Feb 25, 1908 and Sep 25, 1908. The Union was then only three years old. Today the building is occupied by the Buena Vista Museum of Natural History at 2818 Chester Ave. (see *Bakersfield Californian*, Nov 15, 1944)

the first Mexican pugilist,"²⁰⁰ was subpoenaed to court in San Francisco. The timing could not have been worse as it would interfere with his 20-round fight with Willie Fitzgerald in Boston in May.²⁰¹

Bertha said her husband failed to contribute to her support, even though his Bakersfield business brought in \$150 a month.²⁰² The *Californian* asked, and the boxer replied, "My wife and I have not lived together for a year or more... but as far as I am concerned she can have her divorce any time she wants it. She does not need me. She is making \$40 or \$50 a week in San Francisco as a performer."²⁰³

(see list of saloons below)

200 *Bakersfield Californian*, Apr 10, 1908

201 *Ibid.*

202 \$3,000 a month today

203 *Bakersfield Californian*, Apr 10, 1908

Castro & Viani, 1212
 City Saloon, 1204 19th
 Clark F M, 1917 K
 Club Saloon, 1300 19th
 Corilla F M, 2002 M
 Coyne & Hewitt, 1809 Chester av
 Dellaringa Ralph, 2131 N
 Dillon & Moore, 2022 L
 Dillon & Sweitzer, 1812 Chester av
 East Side Bar, 611 19th
 Gold & Price, 1308 19th
 Gray & Evans, 1823 Chester av
 Gray & Ransbottom, 1214 19th
 Hermitage The, 1809 Chester av
 Herrera & Wilson, 1300 19th
HOTEL ARLINGTON BAR, 19th se
 cor Chester av (see left bottom lines)
 Lang Jacob, 1918 L
LINDBERG M A, 19th se cor Chester
 av (see left bottom lines)
 Louvre The, 1330 19th
 Lugo J M, H se cor Brodrige lane
 McDougall Frank, Oil Field rd
 Martinez & Bonnet, 1207 19th
 Midland Bar and Pool Rooms, 1318 19th
 Monte Carlo The, 1434 19th
 O'Brien, Sill & O'Brien, 1919 Chester
 av
 O'Brien Thomas, 1330 19th
 Owens T E, 1240 19th
 Parker G E, 1434 19th
 Pioneer Saloon, 1930 L, cor 20th
 Pucci Giacinto, 1801 M
 Real C E, 1819 Chester av
 Rice A B, 1930 L
 Ross L C, 1521 19th
 Roth John, 611 19th
 Rupp Bros, 1318 19th
 Southern Hotel Bar, 19th cor Chester
 av
 Sweitzer Samuel, 1223 20th
 Sweet J L, 1438 19th
TURF SALOON AND GRILL, 1403
 19th (see left side lines)
 Whittington Bros, 20th cor L
 Willis W C, Chester av ne cor 20th

Herrera & Wilson Saloon listed from the 1908 City Directory

**Professional boxer, promoter, and saloon owner Aurelio
 Herrera fought Willie Fitzgerald in Boston, lost on points, and
 declared his retirement from boxing. He returned to Bakersfield
 and the Cosmopolitan, but his old drinking habits hadn't changed.
 In February 1909 Bakersfield policeman Glenn shot and wounded
 James Gallagher, a tenderloin hanger-on and ex-pugilist. When**

Gallagher's boxing friend Kid Winsor accosted Glenn, the policeman shot Winsor point-blank. Later in the day, Officers John Bowen and Glenn were together when Herrera approached Glenn and threatened him.²⁰⁴ The rest of the story wasn't told, but the next day the *Californian* wrote that Herrera was getting ready to leave town.²⁰⁵ He might have been low on funds because that day he borrowed against his property in East Bakersfield.²⁰⁶

"Rotten and Yellow"

Herrera returned to professional fighting in September 1909 when he showed up in Bakersfield for a 20-rounder against Fighting Dick Hyland, a 24-year-old on his way up.²⁰⁷ Herrera was then 36, his fight record was still formidable at 64 wins, 13 losses, and 16 draws, and he was determined to make a big-time come-back. The *Echo* was not impressed: "The Mexican

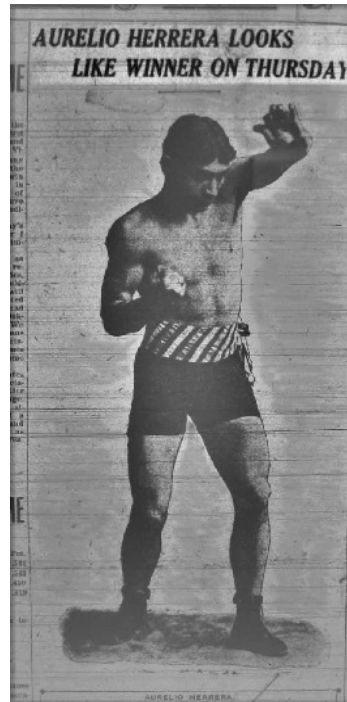
204 *Morning Echo*, Feb 5, 1909 and Mar 2, 1909

205 *Morning Echo*, Feb 6, 1909

206 Hall of Records, Feb 6, 1909. Aurelio Herrera-Felix Coblentz

207 *Washington Times*, Sep 3, 1909. Some records say it was a 10-rounder. On May 29, 1909 at Colma, CA, Lightweight Champion Battling Nelson KO'd Dick Hyland in Round 23 of a scheduled 45-round fight.

was always known as a lazy pugilist," ²⁰⁸ and that was once true, but this time it appeared he'd made serious changes.



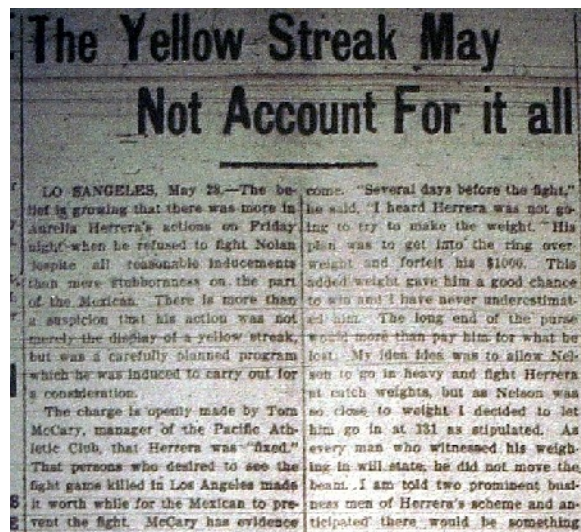
September 18, 1909, *Bakersfield Californian*

“Herrera is not allowing any grass to grow under his feet, and when he faces Hyland it will be a new Herrera in the ring not the old Herrera trying to break back. Herrera's training has been extended over a period of at least six months and he has built up his constitution wonder-clean in that time. The Mexican ... never before trained more than a week for battle. He is as playful as a kitten with his sparring partners and is showing such agility as to

208 *Morning Echo*, Sep 14, 1909

cause widespread comment every time he works out in the presence of a crowd.”²⁰⁹ A win over Hyland would give Herrera a shot at Battling Nelson, the World Champion,²¹⁰

In the center of the Scribner Opera House stage, Izzy Reyfeld installed the 24-foot, padded arena as close to the footlights as possible. On the sides of the house wings he built bleachers, which added 300 seats to the house. Seats went at popular prices, and enthusiasm was high, but on the night of the fight, fans went home much earlier than they expected.²¹¹



May 7, 1906 *Daily Californian* reprint from the *Los Angeles Times*

The fight: Herrera led Hyland in Round 1, but after that it was

²⁰⁹ *Bakersfield Californian*, Sep 14, 1909

²¹⁰ *Morning Echo*, Sep 15, 1909. Herrera then lived in East Bakersfield. His Trainer was Kid Dalton. (*Bakersfield Californian*, Sep 18, 1909). Newspaper photos of Herrera in September suggest that he was lean and muscular.

²¹¹ *Bakersfield Californian*, Sep 17, 1909

all Hyland. By the end of the Second, Herrera was winded. In the Third, Hyland dominated. Herrera came out revived in the Fourth, and the infighting was swift and hard. At the gong, Herrera was groggy as he turned to his corner. The Fifth saw severe infighting, and Herrera took a lot of punishment. "In the Sixth, Herrera came out jaunty and smiling, and in the clinches both men fought viciously. Hyland sent Herrera into the ropes several times, and when the gong sounded, Herrera was clinching with Hyland to save himself."²¹² At the gong for the Seventh, Herrera refused to go on. He said he had broken his hand. The crowd recalled the Nelson-Herrera non-fight in Los Angeles and shouted 'rotten' and 'yellow.' That was Herrera's last professional match.

Gentleman Rancher

If Aurelio Herrera had any thoughts of returning to boxing he probably laid them aside in June 1910 when California Governor Gillette made prize fighting here illegal.²¹³ In 1910 Herrera lived in a rooming house over the Club Saloon at 1322-

²¹² Los Angeles Times, Sep 24, 1909, by wire from the *Bakersfield Californian*, Sep 23.

²¹³ *Los Angeles Times*, Jun 21, 1910

19th Street, and in 1911 he resided at 601 Grove Street in East Bakersfield.²¹⁴ In December 1912 he bought two lots from C.R. Cutten in the town of Lost Hills,²¹⁵ and in spring 1914 he was farming barley ten miles west of Wasco.²¹⁶

The booming town of Lost Hills was much removed from the excitement of the Bakersfield tenderloin, but it would have been uncharacteristic of Herrera to have avoided Lost Hills. In 1910 the area experienced an oil rush, and when Herrera tried his hand at ranching Lost Hills had a tenderloin of at least a dozen saloons.²¹⁷

214 1910 and 1911 *Bakersfield City Directory*. 1322-19th Street was the Club Saloon. About 1908, the 601 G Street address in East Bakersfield became an address on Grove street, and about 1920 Grove street was renamed East 19th street. In 1906 Eugene Vendier was proprietor of the Club Saloon at 601 G Street in Kern City. The rooming house was above the saloon.

215 Hall of Records, Feb 14, 1912, MTG 0263-1300 suggests Herrera received a loan from Augustin Amour, who in 1912 built the Kern City Bakery on Grove street in East Bakersfield; Hall of Records, Dec 28, 1912, *Deeds*, Town of Lost Hills, Blk 23, Lts 1 and 2; Hall of Records, May 23, 1913, *Deeds*, 0280-0460.

216 *Taft Midway Driller*, Mar 9, 1914. Herrera's ranch was in T27S-R22E-Sec18.

217 Description of growth of Lost Hills by Jerry Kirkland, "Lost Hills, the Early Years", unpublished manuscript, 2009, Bakersfield, CA: "By October of 1910, Martin and Dudley [Visalia businessmen, John Martin and Benjamin Dudley, as well as Orlando Barton] had laid out the town site. A number of businesses sprung up to accommodate the needs of Lost Hills which, at the time, consisted mostly of men living away from their families. In addition to a general store, there was a men's clothing store, a hotel, several saloons, a drug store, and a pool hall... By 1912, the town had three restaurants, four more saloons, two livery stables, a supply house and three barber shops. With new businesses opening almost daily, a rapidly-growing Lost Hills began to assume the classic look and feel of a boom town." By 1916 the oil boom had played out, *Daily* (Bakersfield) *Report*, Dec 14, 1914: In Dec 1914 the Town of Lost Hills became a "dry" precinct of Kern County (liquor prohibited).

to illustrate: In 1912 a poolroom owner and his employee were arrested on charges of conducting ongoing craps and Klondike games "without the least semblance of secrecy."²¹⁸

Mucho Vino

Herrera might have ranched until 1920,²¹⁹ but he probably didn't. In 1915 a San Francisco newspaper carried a short report from Bakersfield: "Inspired to his old-time ardor from mucho vino," Herrera chased after Constable Charles Headstrom "shouting maledictions and other things" at him. Headstrom threw Herrera in jail. The paper added that the ex-fighter was a "member in good standing of the down-and-out club."²²⁰ But it didn't exactly happen the way the paper said. According to the *Californian* Herrera was indeed drunk, and he'd probably been in that condition many times before: "Headstrom arrested Herrera once before for being drunk and disorderly, and the Mexican athlete has never forgotten it. This morning, it is said, Herrera had a fighting jag, and called Headstrom a few 'pet

218 *Morning Echo*, Feb 11, 1912

219 Mauro Herrera's WWI draft registration card was issued in San Francisco on Sep 12, 1918. It listed his brother's address as "A. Herrera, Lost Hills".

220 *San Francisco Chronicle*, Feb 27, 1915

names.' Headstrom paid no attention, and Herrera became more voluble. Headstrom told him to 'cut it out' or he would run him in." Herrera did not desist, and officer Headstrom "threw him in the can."²²¹

The 1920 US Census counted Aurelio Herrera as a farmer, but his address was 219 Sumner Street in East Bakersfield. Kern County voter registration roles of 1920-1922 also said he was a rancher, but his address was 1011-20th Street in Bakersfield.²²² In December 1921, 49 year-old Aurelio Herrera homesteaded his Lost Hills property, and in April 1922 he sold it.²²³



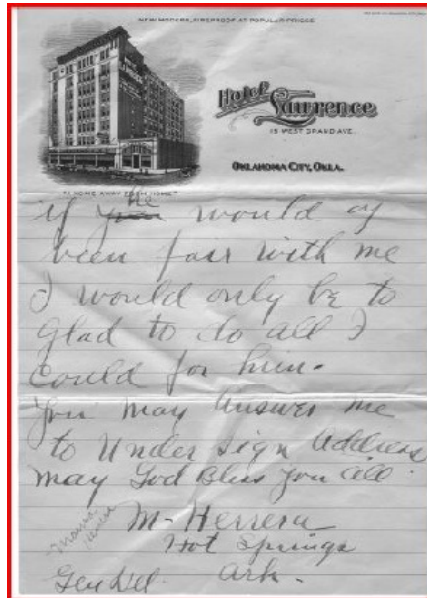
Aurelio's "Little Mother"

221 *Bakersfield Californian*, Feb 24, 1915

222 Address information from Herrera descendant A. Katherine McLaughlin.

223 Hall of Records, Apr 27, 1922, Aurelio Herrera-Edward L. Braswell

The paper trail doesn't take up again until March 1926 when Mauro wrote a letter to their stepmother, Maria Francesca Figueroa.



It read, "My Little Mother ... as for Aurelio -- well it is his own fault -- I got to work hard to take care of myself. And he is old enough to take care of himself. If he would have been fair with me I would only be to glad to do all I could for him."²²⁴ The letter was postmarked Hot Springs, Arkansas.²²⁵

²²⁴ Letter courtesy of Herrera descendant A. Katherine McLaughlin

²²⁵ Ibid. In 1925 Mauro Herrera was a sales distributor for the Handy Auto Light. (*Los Angeles Times*, Oct 15, 1925)

End Of The Rainbow

On December 19, 1926 one of the greatest fighters of his day was arrested in San Juan Capistrano, California.

“Now Aurelio Herrera, a slouchy, grubby little Mexican, 53 years of age, sits in a cell of the Orange County Jail, a vag. He is serving a sentence of thirty days for ‘roaming from place to place without visible means of support.’”²²⁶ The Santa Ana reporter quoted the one-time champ: “I had been given a lift by an automobile and was headed for Tijuana, but the driver stopped at Capistrano and said he was not going any further. They arrested me there for vagrancy.”²²⁷

The reporter continued: “Herrera would not talk of his brilliant past. He lacks the garrulity of most has-beens. Maybe it hurts him too much. Perhaps it is a touch of pride still struggling in the gutter. But the records of his prize-winning talk eloquently for him. But the end of his rainbow rests on the floor of his cell. The wildcat has been thoroughly tamed, beaten down by the sledgehammer blows of time, fortune, and foolishness. For

²²⁶ *Los Angeles Times*, Dec 19, 1926 (dated Santa Ana, Dec 18)

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

Herrera, they say, fell like many of his ilk who couldn't stand prosperity. When he rode the tide of Fortune he was a hard and reckless rider who finally lost his seat. Once he was the hero of his Latin fellows, might almost have displaced Diaz. His fame was greatest west of the Rockies from Los Angeles to Butte. Herrera missed the crown. He lost, but only three masters could beat him. And their victories were won at terrible cost, for Herrera could fight, no mistake about that. But Herrera with his vanished laurels now sits in his cell a brokenhearted man."²²⁸

Amazing Mexican Pugilist

In March 1927 Aurelio Herrera was again arrested for vagrancy, this time in San Francisco, and he faced three months in County Jail. "As Herrera stood before the judge, a sports writer rose in the courtroom and asked to be heard. 'This man is the amazing Mexican pugilist, Aurelio Herrera, whose name is inscribed in the annals of boxing history,' he exclaimed. After a closer inspection the judge also recognized Herrera and

228 *Ibid.*

decided to reverse his sentence. 'An individual such as you,' the judge admonished, 'who reached the maximum heights of your career, is punished enough just living with the knowledge that you alone are to blame for your destitute condition. Go with God and reform yourself, for you have already created your own prison.' ²²⁹

The first Mexican-American boxing champion passed into history on April 12, 1927 at City and County Hospital, San Francisco. ²³⁰ A few days later Los Angeles sports writer Westbrook Pegler mentioned Herrera in his review of past, sad examples of intemperance and extravagance among boxers who years before had earned only nickels and dimes compared to the high salaries of the sports stars of 1927. Pegler reflected, "... Still a man could get quite a heat on for a five dollar bill in the days when bonded goods sold at the rate of two for a quarter." ²³¹ They

229 Gregory S. Rodriguez, "Aurelio Herrera, Southern California's First 'Mexican' boxing Legend," *The Arizona Report*, Mexican-American Studies and Center. University of Arizona, fall 1999. V4, #1, pgs 1-3. See also <http://www.cyberboxingzone.com/cbzforum/showthread.php?t=4741>

230 *Los Angeles Times*, Apr 12, 1927 (from San Francisco); *New York Times*, Apr 13, 1927, p 22. According to Rodriguez, op cited, a correspondent for *La Opinión* and the *San Francisco Chronicle* was with Herrera when he died. Herrera's death was briefly noted in the *Los Angeles Times* on Apr 13, 1927 under the heading "Herrera Hears His Last Gong."

231 hard liquor

spent their money, drank their wine and generally had the sort of good time they wanted until they were all through and could not earn any more...²³² Bakersfield newspapers did not note Aurelio Herrera's passing.

<p>The author gratefully thanks Ramona, Jerry, Katherine, and Shirley Ann. Errors or omissions are my own. – Gilbert Gia, October 6, 2010</p>

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232 *Los Angeles Times*, Apr 15, 1927

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