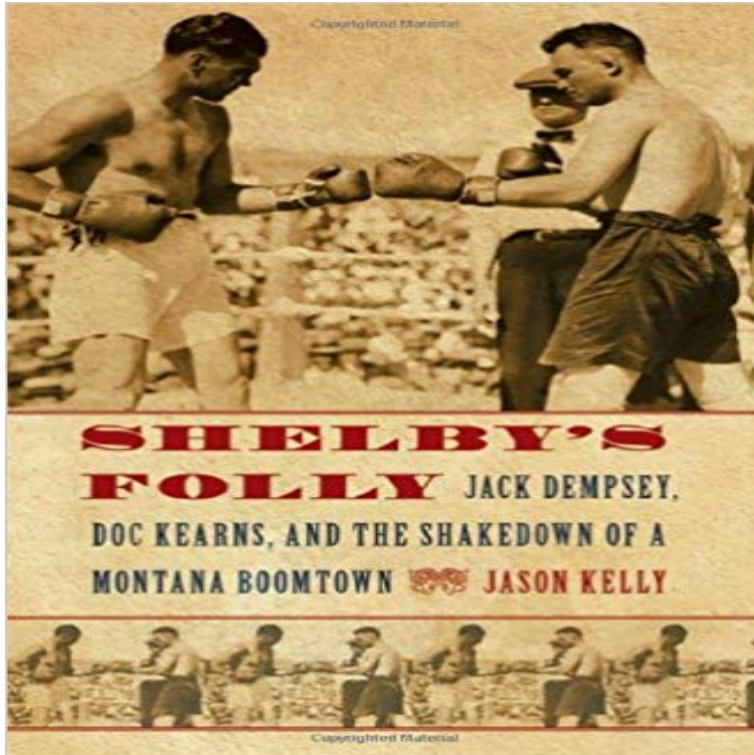


Shelbys Folly: Jack Dempsey, Doc Kearns, and the Shakedown of a Montana Boomtown



In 1923, not long after oil had started gushing from northern Montana fields, real-estate sales in nearby Shelby were declining, dimming the little towns prospects of becoming the Tulsa of the West. Then the mayors son dreamed up a marketing ploy: offer to host heavyweight champion Jack Dempseys next fight. What began as a publicity stunt soon spiraled into a civic drama unlike any Montana had ever seenor ever would again. Shelbys Folly tells this story in full for the first time. Against the background of boom-and-bust Montana history, the folly of Shelbys would-be promoters unfolds in colorful detail. It took months to persuade Dempseys conniving manager, Jack Doc Kearns, to sign a \$300,000 contract. With less than two months before the July 4th fight, the town still had no stadium and no accommodations for tens of thousands of expected fans. Jason Kelly describes the promoters desperate measures and their disastrous results, from the first inkling of the idea to the bitter end of the fifteen-round boxing match. Shelby residents identified with the underdog challenger, Tommy Gibbons, who went toe-to-toe with the champion in an atmosphere crackling with tension. Nerves were so frayed that a holiday firecracker exploding in the arena sent shockwaves of fear through the crowd. A soap opera of financial intrigue and chicanery, Shelbys Folly chronicles how Big Sky ambition and the scheming mind of Doc Kearns collided to produce one of the most preposterous series of events in boxing history. Watch the Shelbys Folly book trailer on YouTube.

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