



Above: Thousands gathered to accompany Ketchel's casket to interment at a Grand Rapids cemetery. Below: His grave still draws visitors 100 years after his death.

Ketchel knew all the beer parlors and honky-tonks in New York and, seemingly, all the women who frequented them. He had a brief, passionate affair with the famous model and chorus girl Evelyn Nesbit and also paid a Grand Rapids woman \$10,000 for breaking their engagement.

Cashing in on his celebrity, Ketchel made up to \$1,000 a week for vaudeville appearances and exhibitions. He owned a bright red Lozier: one of the fastest and most expensive automobiles of the day. He had enough money to last a lifetime, but the years of fast living were beginning to take their toll. Back in Grand Rapids for a rest on Little Pine Island Lake, Ketchel had a chance meeting with an old family friend named Rollin Dickerson. Dickerson was a successful Missouri banker, businessman, rancher, and sports fan.

Dickerson owned an 860-acre ranch in the Ozark Mountains, where he invited Ketchel to take in some fresh air. On September 15, 1910, Ketchel arrived at the Two Bar Ranch armed with a Colt .45 pistol. He carried the Colt everywhere and slept with it when he was alone. Ketchel was welcomed by the ranch hands and introduced to Goldie Smith, Dickerson's attractive housekeeper and cook, and her common-law husband, Walter Diple.

On the morning of October 15, Ketchel was flirting with Goldie in the kitchen as she prepared his breakfast. Seated with his back to the door and his Colt .45 tucked in his belt, Ketchel was startled when Walter Diple burst into the room brandishing a .22-caliber rifle and yelled, "Get your hands up." As Ketchel slowly reached for his

pistol, Diple shot him in the back. Ketchel fell to the floor mortally wounded. Diple and Smith took a wad of money from the boxer's pocket and fled.

As Ketchel lay dying, he told the ranch foreman that Smith and Diple had robbed him. Smith was soon apprehended by the police. She told the authorities that Ketchel had raped her and that Diple was simply defending her honor. When confronted with Ketchel's version of the story, she admitted complicity in the shooting but claimed she didn't know Diple planned to shoot the boxer.

Dickerson immediately offered a \$5,000 reward for Diple, dead or

alive. The shooter was captured the following day on a neighboring farm. (Smith ended up serving 17 months for the robbery, while her husband spent 23 years in prison for murder.)

Dickerson chartered a special train to transport the wounded champion to a hospital in Springfield. Two physicians accompanied Ketchel, while a third worked to locate the slug that had entered the boxer below his right shoulder and lodged in his lung. At approximately 7 o'clock that evening, Ketchel whispered, "I'm so tired, take me home to mother," and died. He was just 24 years old.

The legendary champion was returned to Michigan for burial. The procession to his final resting place at Holy Cross Cemetery in Grand Rapids drew a crowd estimated in the thousands.

A century has passed since that fateful night, and Stanley Ketchel is still remembered as one of the greatest boxers of all time. In recognition of his accomplishments, he was inducted into the Michigan Sports Hall of

Fame and called the greatest middleweight champion of all time by historian Nat Fleischer. In 1990, Ketchel was named to the inaugural class of inductees in the International Boxing Hall of Fame.



*F. Daniel Somrack* authored "Boxing in San Francisco," which covered the sport on the Barbary Coast from 1890 to 1914. Somrack previously produced a sports documentary titled "Champions Forever" with boxing legends Muhammad Ali and George Foreman.