

Proud lady in pink losing bout with progress

FINAL

SAY GOODBYE to the dingy old Pink Lady of South Seventh Avenue.

Phoenix's Madison Square Garden is going out of business.

No more wrestling matches, no more hoedown western jamborees, no more boxing cards.

No more mice or stale smell of spilled popcorn, slopped beer or crunched munchies kicked into odd corners.

With a quiver in his voice, wrestling promoter Tito Montez called last week and said, "Just a few more weeks for the Garden. It's being converted into an auto supply house and garage."

Montez said the wrestling hadn't been drawing well.

"Just a couple hundred each Friday," he said.

He blamed the building, the location and competition from television for the decline of patronage.

The Garden may change, but mem-

Frank Gianelli



ories won't die.

It had its beginning around 1927. Local boxer Bobby McIndoo, later to become a popular lightweight throughout the Southwest in addition to his role as city fireman and one of the area's better referees, fought on that card.

The Garden drew packed houses in those days. But the depression hit, and it was tough sledding from there on.

A valiant effort was made to keep it attractive with paint and a cooling system.

But not all changes were for the good.

The building originally was designed strictly as a sporting arena with a slanting floor so all seats had a good view of the ring. To obtain more utility, that was torn out and a flat hardwood floor was installed to make it a dance center. Seating for boxing and wrestling never was satisfactory thereafter.

In its heyday, the Garden hummed with many good boxers and all the top wrestlers.

World wrestling champion Jim Londos was a frequent feature — and for good reason. He owned the building in partnership with the late John Contos.

Paavo Ketonen, perfumed and high-coiffed Gorgeous George, Lord Carlton, Lou Thesz, Red Berry, a procession of Masked Marvels and Earthquake McGoons wove a web of feigned and factual expertise that kept the fans frenzied.

The lineup of promoters was long

SPORTS

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SECTION D Page 1

Tuesday, Feb. 13, 1979

and — at times — devious:

Tex McPherson, Charles Wright, Paul Clinite, Contos, Rod Fendon, Al Fenn and Ernie Mohamad, Herman Ray, Monte LaDue.

Down through the years they sponsored a major segment of sports entertainment for the community.

Boxers Zora Folley and John Henry Lewis — two of Phoenix's more renowned products — rippled ring hopes there. So did bantam Manny Elias, middleweight and welterweight Jimmy Martinez, Cisco Saenz, Tito

Fuentes and Charlie Salas, who held a win over Ike Williams.

Jay Edson learned to referee there and was later in demand for big bouts worldwide.

Lewis was a ring-wise kid training at Billy Honeyfield's gym in the Garden neighborhood when he broke into the pros with a string of 10 Arizona knockouts — including a four-rounder at Prescott in which beaten Sam Terrain died.

He then moved to Los Angeles. Based there, he ultimately fought 104 times, won 54 by knockouts and 37 by decision and had 5 draws. He lost seven on decision and one by knockout.

John Henry knocked out Bob Olin in the eighth to win the light heavy title in 1935. He held it through 1939 when he retired undefeated as class champ after being kayoed in the first in a try for Joe Louis' heavyweight crown.

Touch a Garden wall — and you feel the pulse of history.

Not all of it has been good. There've been muggings there and a killing to go with the fiddling shows and revival meetings.

And there've been some promotional bummers.

Like the Folley-Joe Sandel fight W.T. Washington promoted in 1956 that was seen by only 160 customers. Washington called the affair off and refunded money. But a number of courtesy tickets had been given out — and to the last cheapskate — all were redeemed, too. Washington lost \$300 at the box office.

If what Montez says holds true — farewell to the Garden.

But don't bet on it. The tough Old Lady has survived a lot.

And, until they raze the joint — ghosts still will walk.