422 MAIN STREET

Cus D'Amato's journey to the third-floor gym at 422 Main Street in Catskill, New York in the late 1960's reads like the final chapter of a soldier retiring from battlefield. In the early 1950s, D'Amato was locked in open war with the International Boxing Club (IBC), a monopoly controlling boxing with behind-the-scenes mob figures like Frankie Carbo and Blinky Palermo as well as other more white-collar shysters James D. Norris and Arhtur Wirtz. Cus refused to cooperate with them as he had his own mob crew thanks to his brother Tony, Charlie Black and Fat Tony Salerno. Cus refused to pay, refused to let his fighters be owned by the others but he knew how to pay to play when needed. The retaliation from the IBC was suffocating to Cus, opponents pulled out of fights, promoters blacklisted him, and threats became part of his daily life. By 1966, Cus was running from the city to upstate New York for both Torres and Mathis. The Gramercy Gym, his Manhattan sanctuary, was no longer a safe home. In a symbolic act of departure in 1968, he sold it for one dollar to two trusted trainers, Bob Jackson and Al Gavin, and walked away from the city he had lived in his entire life.

From 1959 on, D'Amato struggled. Cus lost his manager's license, he lost Floyd Patterson and a major stream of income but was able to pivot and develop a Puerto Rican sensation named Jose "Chequi" Torres. Jose, from Ponce, Puerto Rico, winning the Melbourne Olympics in '56 had an amazing run with Cus from 1957 – 1968.

A NEW CHAPTER BEGINS

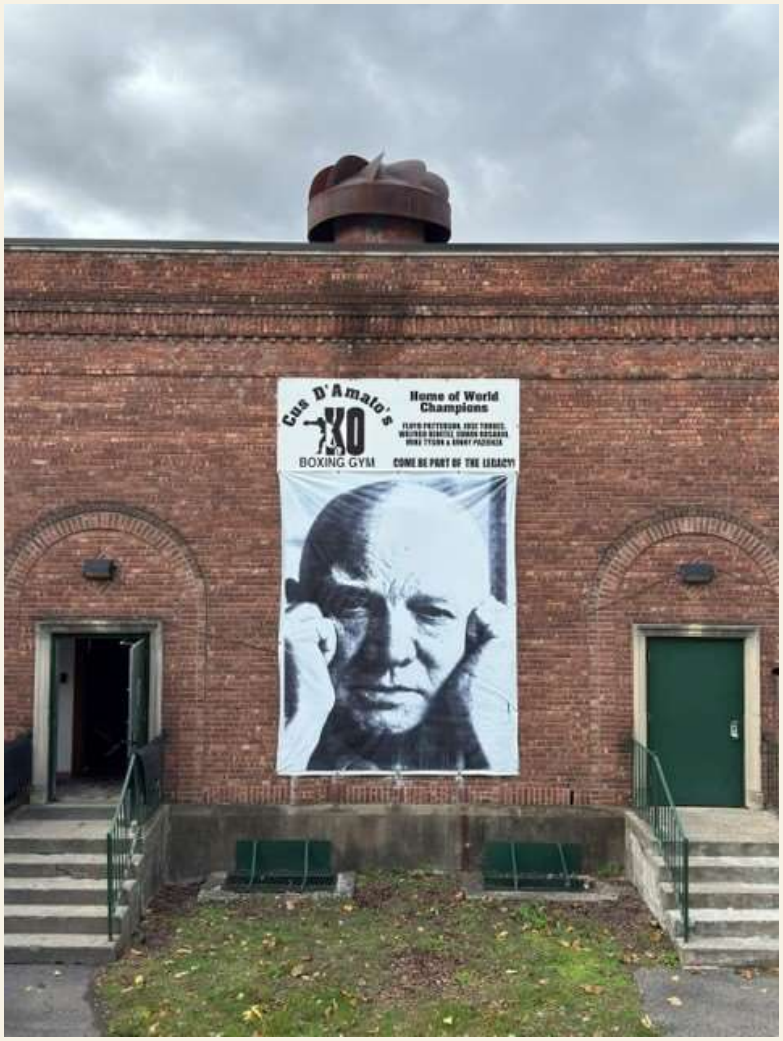
THE MOVE UPSTATE

JIMMY JACOBS AND A PLACE TO CALL HOME

CUS D'AMATO

"Break your opponent's will. Constant attack, don't let up. Destroy his spirit."

After making some money moves and squaring away his New York City commitments, he and Jimmy Jacobs wanted to leave the big apple for greener pastures. Being nudged by Jimmy to settle down with his companion upstate out of the chaos of New York City started to take hold on Cus. Cus told Jimmy to "figure it out".



Some of Cus' brothers lived upstate and Jimmy purchased a house where Cus and Camille would live and eventually train and house young fighters and troubled youths. Enter Camille Ewald. Rocco, Cus' oldest brother and the only D'Amato brother born in Italy, introduced Cus to Camille in 1946 when Cus returned from being stationed at Camp Kilmer in Edison, New Jersey after WWII. Arleigh or Annie introduced them at an immigrant party in the lower east side. They knew each other way before they started supporting youths in boxing.

CAMILLE EWALD

THE HEART OF THE CATSKILL HOUSE

CAMILLE

EWALD

“You treat him as if he is a machine and not a person with a soul.”

Camille had moved to Catskill, New York happily. She loved NYC but a quiet Hudson Valley town far removed from the political machinery of New York, she agreed to settle down, be with Cus and close to her sister. Jimmy made sure to put the house in Camille’s name so it wouldn’t interfere with the legalities of Cus’ bankruptcy. The house was sold to Camille Ewald for $1. Cus stayed with Camille in this house until his death on November 4th of 1985, the woman who had become his closest female companion and later Mike Tyson’s surrogate mother. She meant so much to Cus and helped balance out the Catskill house. She was a mother for the kids who never had one. The house became a home with Camille’s touch. Cus and Camille albeit companions and shared much love, never married, never had kids, and slept in separate rooms. They eventually became Mike’s Tysons legal guardians after Mikes mothers passing in 1982.

PAWLING MANOR

A HISTORIC TRAINING GROUND

Dr. Bob and Joy Gross

In Natural Hygiene we have no diets; we have a living regimen to overcome disease and fat accumulation.

While D'Amato frequented the town of Rhinebeck after NYC, his actual training facility was located just minutes south at the historic Pawling Manor later known as the Belvedere Mansion in neighboring Staatsburg, NY. Dr. Bob and Joy Gross owned the ranch. The legacy of the Pawling Manor / Belvedere Mansion began in 1696 as a royal land grant to Colonel Henry Pawling and served as a homestead for his descendants through the Revolutionary War. After the original structure burned down in 1899, New York socialite H.R. Hastings commissioned the renowned Beaux-Arts architecture firm Hoppin & Koen to erect the grand, Georgian-style mansion that stands today, creating a playground for high society that welcomed guests like Leonard Bernstein. By 1959, the property underwent a fascinating transformation under former boxer Dr. Robert Gross, who turned it into the Pawling Health Manor a pioneering wellness and fasting retreat that drew legendary cultural icons like Miles Davis and Elizabeth Taylor, while simultaneously serving as a secluded training camp where legendary boxing trainer Cus D'Amato coached heavyweight contender Buster Mathis. Being a boxer himself, Dr. Gross had a boxing ring on the premises. Decades later, this rich tapestry of Gilded Age opulence and mid-century celebrity lore found new life, reinventing the estate as a premier luxury wedding venue and boutique hotel that hosted high-profile events, including the 2010 wedding of Hamilton creator Lin-Manuel Miranda.

RHINEBECK & THE HUDSON

A JOURNEY TOWARD INDEPENDENCE

Jimmy Lesile Jacobs

“The basic concept of his style is not to have any feeling out time… he fights everyone like they stole something from him.”

By 1968, Cus began searching for a space where he could train young fighters beside The Pawling Ranch. His time in Rhinebeck is well-remembered locally, to the extent that he is still listed among the notable historical figures who stayed at the town's historic landmark, the Beekman Arms & Delamater Inn. He used the historic inn as a frequent base of operations and lodging hub for visitors, press, and associates tracking his work with Mathis. By 1969, outside pressures and promotional disputes caused Buster Mathis to split from D'Amato. The heartbreak of losing Mathis coupled with a desire for total independence prompted D'Amato to leave the Rhinebeck area permanently. He moved further upstate across the Hudson River to Catskill, New York where Jimmy bought the house.

THE THIRD-FLOOR GYM

422 MAIN STREET, CATSKILL, NEW YORK

Buster Mathis

Heavyweight boxer Buster Mathis stated that his best weapon in his boxing career was his desire to be a champion

He desperately had this urge to give back to society and find the world champion of his dreams; the perfect specimen. He didn't want a flashy gym or a commercial storefront. He wanted something quiet, inexpensive, but in the center of town making it easy for boys to find. It was a place where he could work with kids without interference and most importantly on his terms with no one looking over his shoulder. That search led him to the building at 422 Main Street, a municipal structure that housed the Catskill police station on the first floor. But up several flights of steep steps just like the Gramercy Gym on the third floor, an unused, dusty, and forgotten space. It once served civic functions, a courthouse or administrative office. Catskill Police Headquarters was owned and operated by the city of Catskill, shout out Greene County, and the third floor leased for $1 a year to the Cus D'Amato Memorial Boxing Club, a nonprofit organization in January of 1969. He arranged the rental through the Town clerk at the Village of Catskill. Once he secured the space, Cus transformed the third floor into the Catskill Boxing Club. There was no grand opening, no press, no signage. Just a key, a room, and a man who had spent his life fighting giants now choosing to start over in a small town. By 1970, it was little more than an empty room with creaking wooden floors and old dusty windows overlooking Main Street.

A PLACE TO BUILD CHAMPIONS

DISCIPLINE, MENTORSHIP AND BELIEF

Jay Bright, Teddy Atlas & Kevin Rooney

“My only regret is that I didn't record everything he ever said. The man was absolutely brilliant.”

With donated equipment and Jimmy’s fundraising they were not only able to house fighters but have an actual gym to create champions. Throughout the early 1970s, the gym became a magnet for troubled youths who needed structure, discipline, and someone who believed in them. Cus trained them for free. He fed them, lectured them, and taught them the psychological principles he believed mattered more than punches: how to confront fear, how to build character, how to control the mind under pressure and how to be an upstanding gentleman in society. By 1975, the Catskill gym had become a fully formed ecosystem. Cus was training fighters like Jay Bright, Teddy Atlas and Kevin Rooney, shaping them not just as athletes but as men. The gym’s reputation grew quietly not through big fights, but through the stories of kids whose lives were changed by D’Amato’s mentorship and Camille’s cooking. Cus was no longer part of the Manhattan boxing world, but he had built something purer: a place where boxing was a vehicle for personal transformation.

THE ARRIVAL OF MIKE TYSON

A LEGACY THAT CHANGED BOXING

Mike Tyson

“Discipline is doing what you hate to do, but doing it like you love it."

Then, in 1980, a 13-year-old boy from Brooklyn named Mike Tyson entered D’Amato’s electron shell and eventually became the nucleus of his life. Mike was angry, traumatized, and gifted. Cus saw in him the culmination of everything he had been preparing for during his exile and Cus claims he willed Tyson to him. The gym that had once been a refuge for Cus now became the birthplace of one of the most extraordinary trainer-fighter relationships in boxing history unrivaled to this day. Long live the legacy of the late, great Constantine “Cus” D’Amato.