

# The Harness Horse

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## From this came a Champion, “The Background of DAN PATCH”

By KEN McCARR, Columbus, Ohio, [THE HARNESS HORSE](#) - June 29, 1966

THERE were three eras in the early history of breeding for the trotters. The first was the Hambletonian era and the cross on the American Star mares. The second was the George Wilkes period and the third was Axworthy and the golden cross on Peter the Great blood. The keystone in the pedigree of Dan Patch is the second era as George Wilkes is listed on both sides of the pedigree.

George Wilkes was a son of Hambletonian 10 and that side of the pedigree can be traced for the early stallion owners had to use the pedigree of their animal as a means of drawing mares for competition was keen in those days. With the mares it was a different story for most of the great broodmares of the early days were great road mares. Many were purchased for their good looks and action and conformation. It was the speed of the mare that was of importance at the moment and their background was not deemed a necessity. As a consequence pedigrees were lost.

Later when the register was started, the pedigrees of those old mares became an important item when their name appeared in the family tree of a champion or in a family that was really producing speed.

Dolly Spanker, the dam of George Wilkes, was one of the road mares whose ancestry was a mystery. After her son became famous on the track she was the object of much tracing and probing into her past history. In 1887 John Wallace accepted a pedigree, which stood in the register for some time. Clark Phillips of Bristol, N. Y., claimed that he was the breeder of the mare. He stated that he had at one time purchased a mare believed to have been a thoroughbred that had come from England. She had "the disposition of a runner and was finally spoiled when he attempted to work her beside a balky horse and the mare promptly accepted the bad habits of her team mate.

The stallion Baker's Highlander was standing for a fee of five dollars so the balky mare was sent to his court. The result was a filly later called Old Telegraph and she was too high strung to be a good work horse. It took a real mechanic at the reins to make her pull a heavy load. She took the appearance and disposition from her mother for Baker's Highlander and his get were mild tempered.

Telegraph was sent to the stallion Henry Clay, who also was standing for a fee of five dollars, and from this embrace she produced Dolly Spanker. The dam and the filly were purchased by E. V. Phillips. He kept the filly but traded the dam to Orestes Case in the winter while she was carrying a foal by Gooding's Champion. The mare stepped in a hole in the road and broke her leg, the injury being so severe that she had to be destroyed.

Dolly Spanker had her first lessons to harness, as she was coming five-years-old. She was nervous and high strung and wanted her own way. She was impatient and would rear and go into the air if she was restrained. The mare was sold to Joshua Phillips who soon had enough of her and sold her to a man in the eastern part of the country.

After the above version was accepted by Wallace, one of the important witnesses changed his testimony as it was incorrect. For some strange reason, Wallace never corrected the records in the register. After the register had passed from Wallace's ownership, the board of censors brought the case out for another review. It was found that it was impossible for the mare to be by Henry Clay so the pedigree was stricken from the records. Dolly Spanker was listed as a mare of mystery and no pedigree was assigned to her.

Thus was removed from the pedigree the stallion for which General James B. Wadsworth, of Geneseo, N. Y., journeyed to New York City and after dickering with the Brooklyn banker, George M. Patchen, finally purchased Henry Clay for one dollar a pound.

The known history of the mysterious Blare started about 1851. A cattleman, his name was never known, was riding a mare on the road between Erie and Meadville, Pa. He met James Gilbert of Phelps, N. Y., after some bartering the six-year-old mare of unknown lineage changed hands for \$75, the price included the saddle and bridle. At this stage the mare was known as Dolly and it was later on that she was given the second part of the name. One of the roles in the play London Assurance was for a character named Dolly Spanker. This name was given to the mare in spite of the fact that the Dolly Spanker in the play was a man.

Circus owner William Delevan later purchased the mare in upper New York State for \$250, he claimed that the seller was Joseph S. Lewis of Geneva. The fact that this mare was used by the circus would indicate that she was attractive in looks for only the best looking horses were used on the lead wagon.

A New York grocer and wine merchant by the name of Harry Felter was on the lookout for a fast roadster, for business as well as for his own use. He liked Dolly Spanker and bought her from the circus man. The mare had great speed but she was willful in her ways. One bad habit was switching her tail and getting it over the reins. When this happened she would run away. In an attempt to stop this, the owner figured the docking of her tail would keep her from getting it over the lines. The operation did not have the desired effect and Dolly Spanker ran away once too often. In the ensuing spill owner Felton received a broken arm. He promptly sent the mare up the river to his father, Colonel Thomas Felton, who lived at Newburg. He paid the \$35 fee and bred the mare to Hambletonian, who was just six years old at the time.

In March of the following spring, Dolly Spanker was found dead in the field with a newborn foal beside her. The foal was hurriedly carried to the warm kitchen and the women of the house nursed it along on a diet of row's milk sweetened with sugar and to this was added a dash of Jamaica rum. The little fellow thrived on this treatment and remained in the dooryard until he became a nuisance. He was finally placed in a paddock and slowly matured.

When broken to harness the colt could show speed and he was one of the first of his sire to race. He first started in 1861 and won his race under the name of Robert Fillingham. This was the start of a racing career, which was to run for twelve years and 69 races, over 200 heats. He won 27 contests and was second in 26 more. He won over \$20,000 and took his record of 2:22 at the age of twelve.

The Simmons brothers were well known among the sporting fraternity of the metropolitan area. W. L. Simmons was better known as Bill while the nickname of Eph was given to Z. E. Simmons.

These two men bought Robert. Fillingham and later changed the horses name to George Wilkes, in honor of a great friend of Eph Simmons.

George Wilkes, the man, was editor of The Spirit of the Times, and had been among the first to advocate the building of a railroad to the Pacific coast and later was decorated by the Czar of Russia for being the first to suggest the trans-Siberia railroad. Wilkes covered the civil war as a reporter and bitterly criticized General McClellan. While with the army of the Potomac in 1862, Wilkes contracted a disease which made him a semi-invalid for life and eventually caused his death in 1885. He continued to have bitter battles with the press and in the courts. He eventually turned on his friends and even fought with the man that had named the champion-trotting stallion in his honor.

George Wilkes, the horse, was raced long and hard. He was often pitted against horses that were much faster. In many of the finishes the horse was brutally whipped and being a horse of high temper, he resented this treatment. He soon started to sulk and on some occasions would stop completely when the whip was used. It did not take the public long before they soured on George Wilkes for the championship was gone and an uncertain racehorse was not interesting.

Coupled with the grueling racing campaign, George Wilkes had done heavy stud duty each spring and had quite a few foals. None of these had shown much in the line of speed. The horse had not only lost his friends from the racing end of the sport but here he was at the end of his track career and no one wanted to book a mare to him.

One friend remained. W. H. Wilson had been born in Illinois and had moved to New York. He had married a girl from Kentucky so he had an interest in the bluegrass state. Kentucky had become the hotbed of Thoroughbred breeding. Starting with Messinger, the breeding of trotters was almost exclusively in the north. Wilson figured that if Kentucky could produce good runners she could also produce good trotters.

Wilson was a good friend of the Simmons brothers and he finally succeeding in leasing George Wilkes. In the spring of 1873 he took the horse to Lexington and there leased Ash Grove Farm, which is now better known as Idle Hour Farm. It was a risky venture as Wilson only had a one-year lease on the stallion. The reception of the horse in the blue grass area was anything but complimentary and the breeders showed their derision by calling George Wilkes "Simmons baked up pony."

Wilson worked hard, the stud fee was set at \$100 and he set out to get mares but money was scarce. He made special rates for men with two or more mares; some were bred on shares; in other cases he leased desirable mares. His Herculean efforts managed to get 82 mares on the books for that season. It was one of the greatest feats of salesmanship ever seen but it had an unusual result.

W. L. Simmons refused to renew the lease at the end of the season as he decided that the stallion was too popular and profitable for anyone to control except himself. He sent out notices that he would locate in Kentucky and take over the management of George Wilkes.

He bought Ash Grove farm and started to gather a band of brood mares. He built up the farm and made this his home.

In 1875 the first crop of yearlings were broken and they could really show the promise of speed. These foals caused the prejudice against George Wilkes to melt away. By the time these foals were racing, their sire had become so popular that his book was more than filled by the best matrons of that section. At first there were other stallions standing at Ash Grove as companion studs but as the popularity of the premier sire kept rising, faster than the prices on the goods on the present day grocer's shelves, the other stallions were replaced by sons of George Wilkes.

In nine years George Wilkes had founded a family of outstanding colt trotters. He had started at the bottom and in spite of many handicaps he had come through with flying colors. His family grew greater and greater as the years passed and even today his record is phenomenal. The old horse lived his life out at Ash Grove and died on May 28, 1882 at the age of twenty-six.

The Jewett Stock Farm had been established by Henry C. Jewett and the main farm was located at Jewettville, just outside of Buffalo, N. Y. Although this was a large farm it was soon busting at the seams and the crowded condition brought about the decision to start an additional stock farm. Jewett soon bought an immense tract of prairie land at Chenery, near Wichita, Kansas. A great number of the less important brood mares and young stock were shipped to this western annex.

Jewett had collected a number of sons of George Wilkes as this was the bloodline that was all the rage with the breeders at that time. The Wilkes boom was in full swing. This owner had a surplus of the sons of George Wilkes so he shipped several to Kansas practically into exile. While the stallions were mated with the farm harem, they also drew a few outside mares from the Kansas breeders.

One of the sons sent to the sunflower state was Patchen Wilkes. He was a handsome horse without too much speed and he took a time record of only 2:29½. His dam was Kitty Patchen out of Brown Betty, a mare that had been bred back to her own sire Mambrino Patchen to produce Kitty Patchen.

Patchen Wilkes had a vile temper and was one of those stallions listed as man-eaters. He was the most savage horse of the entire Wilkes line. It took several husky grooms to get him harnessed, hitched, and out of the stable. As this horse grew older his temper grew worse and late in his life he was kept chained in his stall and his feed was shoved into the stall at the end of a pitchfork. No one dared to enter the stall without a pitchfork or some other weapon for his or her protection.

Peter Duryea had formed a partnership with W. E. D. Stokes of New York about 1896. They decided to buy Patchen Wilkes after he became famous as the sire of Joe Patchen. They purchased a farm near Lexington, adjacent to Hamburg Place on the Winchester Pike and in honor of their new stallion they named their establishment the Patchen Wilkes Farm. Their dream of speed production did not materialize, as this horse did not live up to their expectations.

Patchen Wilkes was a dud as a sire. Outside of siring Joe Patchen, he had only one foal that entered the 2:10 list. This was the trotting mare Patchen Maid, better known around the tracks as "The diving elk" due to her wild maneuvers not only at the post but also during the progress of the race.

After being given every chance as a sire there no great results and the owners soured on Patchen Wilkes.

The stallion was sent to Tennessee and practically disappeared from sight. He died in the Volunteer State at the age of 28.

Charles Rathbone lived at Peabody, Kansas, a small town that was out on the prairie, located about 50 miles from Emporia. He owned a black mare called Josephine Young. Her sire was Joe Young, a Morgan-bred horse that traced back to Vermont Black Hawk. Joe was rough and ready racehorse that had covered a lot of territory west of the Mississippi during the several years (hat-he raced. As a sire he drew few good mares, as most were very commonly bred stock. One of the latter was the trotting mare Josephine with pedigree unknown. An attempt was made later to trace this mare when her daughter became famous. All that could be found was that her dam was a gray pacing mare.

The price that Rathbone paid for Josephine Young was never found out but it is known that he bought her for a small sum. She had not produced speed from the local stallions so the owner decided to send her to the western branch of the Jewett Farm. In 1888 he took her overland across the plains to the large nursery.

Patchen Wilkes was six years old at that time and he had produced nothing, as he did not have a single foal in the standard list. His fee had been set at \$50 but most of the Kansas farmers did not pay cash and made trading agreements on the amount of the service fee. Patchen Wilkes was the stallion selected by Rathbone for his mare.

In the spring of 1889 the mare dropped a black colt with a white face and four white ankles. Part of the name of his sire was used with part of the name of the sire of his dam were combined to form Joe Patchen. The mare had been left at the farm to be bred back and as the owner had no suitable place to care for the foal, he decided to leave the foal at Jewett Farm after he was weaned. The pacing inclination was strong in the Wilkes family and the little fellow was a natural pacer. He was a chesty youngster and seemed to take great delight in fighting the other colts. Due to this pugnacious habit he often had to be isolated in a small paddock and around this was a wooden fence so high that he could not see out. One day he was shut in his cell and he decided he wanted to see the outside world so he attempted to jump the fence. He didn't quite succeed and was hung part way across the boards. It was some time before he was found and everybody thought he was ruined. Joe was tough as pig iron and after a few days rest he again had a chip on his shoulder and was once more ready to tackle the other colts.

Joe Patchen was a big, growthy colt so he was not raced until he was a four-year-old. After making one start, sickness caused his retirement for the season. The next year he started as an unknown but before the season was well on its way he had moved to the front as a pacing star. The horse was soon purchased by Colonel John Taylor of St. Louis and placed in the hands of Jack Curry.

The stallion was later sent to Chicago and was purchased by C. W. Marks of that city for \$15,000. The new owner was engaged in a wholesale business in shoes and he was rated among the best of the amateur drivers in the windy city area.

The complete story of the racing career of Joe Patchen would take a book length article. His racing rivals were John R. Gentry and Star Pointer, the first horse to break the two minute barrier. Joe took a record of 2:01 ¼ but he was separately timed in 2:00 ¾ in a race and he earned the title of "The Iron Horse." He never held the World's Record for pacers but he did hold the half-mile track record as he was the first pacer to beat 2:10 over a two-lap course.

In 1889 a well known Brooklyn politician paid \$22,500 for Joe Patchen and he was raced under the colors of Senator McCarthy. The driver at this time was a well-known reinsman named John

Dickerson. At the end of his racing career Joe was placed in the breeding ranks under the management of W. K. Dickerson, who had raced the great pacer at the tag end of his career.

Billy Dickerson was generally called Billy Dick by his friends. He was a younger brother of John. He was a Hoosier by birth, coming from Greensburg, Ind., the city where the tree grew from the steeple atop the courthouse. The old settlers from that section always claimed that when Billy went to school he always did his homework while jogging Pilot Duroc or leading the Wilkes Boy colt, Stemberg, for his uncle Tom, a very clever horseman in his own right. Dickerson had a puckish sense of humor and he thought up many practical jokes that were classics. However he always stoutly denied the responsibility of that tree on the steeple.

After brother John had left Indiana in 1893 to drive for Budd Doble, the place was not the same so the younger brother headed eastward and eventually settled at Goshen, N. Y. One of his first lucky breaks was in leasing Joe Patchen and he covered Orange County with foals of this great racehorse. While in his employment, during one of those gab sessions under the awning, Dickerson in a reminiscent mood once told of a season when the old horse had sired over one hundred live foals.

Some of the temper of his sire had been passed on to Joe Patchen. He was an attractive horse with his flashy markings and people would want to pet him but Joe would have no part of that and he was handy with his teeth. The old fellow was a good feeling horse and Mrs. Dickerson still remembers some of the fast rides behind Joe when her husband was giving the pacer his exercise.

The horse first stood for service on Long Island but was soon moved to the Parkway Farm at Goshen. The farm is now gone but spectators sitting in the grandstand at Historic Track at one time could look across the racing strip and see the big barn of Parkway Farm not too far back from the back stretch.

Although extremely popular at first, the demand fell off until he had scant bookings. When the owner died, Joe Patchen remained under the Dickerson management and made his last season at a farm near Goshen.

Joe Patchen was a big horse, standing 16-1 hands. He had a stride of 23 feet. After living a few years of ease he passed away on February 18, 1917. He was 28-years-old, the same age as his sire at the time of death. There was one statement that described Joe Patchen-A gamer horse never graced the track.

Young Jim was often called the finest son of George Wilkes. The handsome bay stallion of 15-3 1/2 hands, was out of a mare by Lear's Sir William and her dam was a fast trotting mare, said to have come from Ohio. The Simmons brothers thought so much of Young Jim that they reserved him as one of the sons of the famous sire to be kept at Ash Grove Farm after the death of George Wilkes. This was a wise decision as Young Jim was the first stallion to sire three trotters with race records of 2:10 or better. He also sired Young Miss, the dam of Bingen who was to head one of the four families of trot- ting.

One of the mares sent to Young Jim was Madam Adams, a daughter of Cassius M. Clay Jr. The result of the mating was a colt called Wilkesberry, foaled in 1888. The latter was sold to Patton and Trilby of Remington, Ind. Wilkesberry was a fast young horse but unfortunately he died at an early age.

It was customary to take stallions from place to place to stand them for service. Transportation was a simple item as the horse was tied behind a wagon and led to his next assignment. Being a young stallion, Wilkesberry was snubbed down close to the wagon as it set out for the next town. There were not so many bridges and it was necessary to ford a stream. Due to heavy rains the current was running fast and strong. The wagon was overturned in midstream and the head of the closely tied stallion was forced under water. He drowned before he could be released. It was due to his early death that he left only a few foals.

Alexander's Abdallah was another stallion that met an early tragic death. Both armies raided the blue grass section for horses for their cavalry. It was one of these raids that caused the death of this great son of Hambletonian. At the time of his death Alexander's Abdallah had sired four crops of foals while at Woodburn Farm, near Lexington. Three of these crops made their appearance while the great conflict was still raging and most of these were lost during the progress of war. One of the few survivors was Pacing Abdallah.

This stallion was foaled in 1861. His dam was Lydia Talbot by Taylor's Messenger. Used as a saddle mare, she was even trained in saddle gaits while she was carrying the foal. Whether it was pre-natal influence or not cannot be proven but Pacing Abdallah never had any inclination to trot. According to all reports, he never trotted in his life.

He was a highly finished stallion but pacing sires were not popular with the racing fraternity at that time. The men that fancied the roadster type for the show ring also did not patronize sires of that gait. In the reconstruction period following the great conflict it was the mule that had the ready market and the breeding of mules was a profitable business. Pacing Abdallah was exiled to the mule industry and was assigned the lowly task of acting as a teaser for a jack until he was twelve years old.

The good looks of the stallion did draw a few saddle mares and, oddly enough, these foals did nothing but trot. They also showed promise of speed and in time started to attract attention. W. H. Wilson was one of the most far seeing breeders in the blue grass section and he decided to give this practically unknown stallion a chance. He hunted out Pacing Abdallah, purchased him and took him home to his farm at Cynthiana, Kentucky.

An interesting story is told concerning the naming of Cynthiana, one of the oldest cities in the state. It is located in Harrison county, named after its largest land holder and pioneer settler, Judge Harrison. The judge had two attractive daughters, Ann and Cynthia.

When it came time to name the new village the judge had quite a problem as each daughter insisted that the settlement should be named after herself. The handling of people's problems during his long tenure in office made Judge Harrison a wise man. In a clever spirit of domestic compromise he combined the names and satisfied both daughters. He also created the attractive name, Cynthiana.

When Wilson brought Pacing Abdalla to Cynthiana, his farm was reached "by a long winding drive of a mile and a half as there was a spur of a hill that made a long detour necessary to get around the promontory. The long drive irked Wilson so he hired a crew to blast away the troublesome hill. When the new road was completed the farm was just a short distance from town.

The farm was named Abdallah Park in honor of his new stallion. It was a large place with a track and buildings. Wilson could see that it would be ideal for fairs so he offered the use of his land and buildings to the fair association and his bid was accepted. The people of Cynthiana had a nearby fairground.

One of the mares bred to Abdallah was called Fanny. She had scanty breeding as she was by Yellow Jacket and the name of the dam was never known. The resulting foal was named Abdallah Belle, a mare that never took a record and was finally sold to D. H. Patton of Bloomsburg, Ind. This mare was stunted to the young sire Wilkesberry and produced Zelica, one of the few foals of the unfortunate stallion.

Zelica was put in training but went lame and was sold for a small sum to Dan A. Messner of Oxford, Ind. The price was never made public but it was generally conceded that if the mare were to pass through a sales ring the price would have been less than \$100. She was a good-looking mare but had a light bone structure below the knees and this was the cause of her failure to stand training.

Messner must have had great admiration to send Zelica to Illinois and pay a stud fee in excess of the value of the mare. Joe Patchen was an untried sire in spite of being a great racehorse. The raising of the money for the fee in depression times completed the deal that resulted in Dan Patch, a champion, a great racehorse and probably the most publicized horse in the history of the sport.

Both the sire and the dam outlived their famous son. Zelica died in December 1917, just missing the completing of her twenty-seventh year. She was only four-years-old when she entered the brood mare ranks and foaled her famous son at the age of five. She produced quite a tribe of offspring during her life but none of her foals, outside of Dan Patch, ever became a great, or even notable, race horse. The analytical powers of students of breeding have long been exercised on cases like this and no one has ever seemed to come up with a plausible explanation.

To the cover of Joe Patchen she produced Dan's Brother 2:20  $\frac{1}{4}$ , the sire of Lelia Patchen p, 2:04 $\frac{1}{4}$ . From the embrace of Allerton she produced Messner, sire of Power Lot 2:07  $\frac{1}{4}$ . Dan Patch had quite a list of 2:10 performers to his credit, headed by Power Patch p, 2:03  $\frac{1}{2}$ . This gave Zelica the distinction of having two sons siring 2:05 speed and three with 2:10 performers. There were few patrons at that time that could boast of a similar record.

Some believe that Dan Patch was a failure in the stud but he can be found in the century sire list. He is credited with 38 trotters, 1 in 2:10, and 138 pacers, 5 in 2:05, 36 in 2:10. He had 45 sons that sired standard speed and his daughters produced 12 trotters, 2 in 2:10, and 71 pacers, 2 in 2:05, 25 in 2:10. Under the conditions, it was not bad for his time.

The present day breeder realizes that it takes great brood mares to make a great producing stallion. In the old days it had been believed that the stallion exerted the greatest influence in producing speed.

Experts had handled Dan Patch during his track career. If he only had someone like W. H. Wilson to give him the same break that George Wilkes had in the stud. Dan had a large harem but few could be called real high-class, fashionably bred mares.



Dan could produce speed. One son, Dazzle Patch, appeared to be the one to carry on. As a colt he had phenomenal speed but was not given a record for at that time a mile against the stopwatch classified a horse just the same as a mile in a race. As a four-year-old Dazzle worked a mile in 2:00 flat before a group of spectators at the mile track at the Savage farm. This was better than the existing World's Record for his age at that time. He never did get a record indicative of his true speed as he met with ill fortune and just did get into the 2:10 list.

Dazzle Patch should also have been the son to carry on the line of Dan Patch but he was not fortunate in his stud career. Morrie McDonald, in one of his letters, told of having Dazzle at their farm in Canada. In his second season he was kicked by a mare and a leg was broken so badly that the stallion had to be destroyed. From his few scant foals he did remarkably well as he had six in the 2:10 list, headed by Tell & Tell p, 2:04 ½. His daughters had 9 in the 2:10 list headed by Dazzle Direct p, 1:59 ¾ and Mighty Tony p, 2:04 4/5.

The track exploits of Dan Patch are well remembered. He was not a great brood mare sire so his bloodlines have almost disappeared in today's pedigrees.