



TODAY IS DAN PATCH DAY AT THE FAIR

Dan Patch set the world record of 1 minute, 55 seconds, for one mile on Sept 8, 1906, at the State Fair. The time was not equaled until 1938.

Owner Marion W. Savage built Dan Patch a magnificent stable, called the "Taj Mahal" because of its domed turrets. It stood near the town of Hamilton, later renamed for Savage. The stable is long gone, but the old track can be seen from the air.

Savage and his horse both fell ill in July 1916. Dan Patch died July 11 at the age of 20 from an enlarged, weakened heart. Savage died 32 hours later, also from a heart condition.



For more, the Dan Patch Historical Society: www.danpatch.com

A DAN FOR THE AGES

Two new books may help propel harness-racing hero Dan Patch to larger fame 100 years after he set a world record at the State Fair.

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The e-mails and phone calls come from all over the world, from South Africa to England to Minneapolis. Most of them start with the same simple questions: Who was this guy Dan Patch, anyway? And why would his name be next to a horse on this picture that was buried in Grandpa's attic?

The members of the Dan Patch Historical Society patiently explain that Dan is the horse. And the pictures — and tobacco tins and buttons and myriad other stuff bearing the likeness of the harness-racing hero — have kept his remarkable story alive for generations.

As the guardians of Dan's history gather today at the State Fair, where they will celebrate the 100th anniversary of the world record he set there, they're also enjoying renewed interest in the horse's tale.

A new book about Dan Patch and owner Marion W. Savage was published locally this summer. Dan Patch continues: "It's a great underdog story." Another, book, expected next year, will be released through prominent publisher Simon & Schuster and could elevate Dan to Seabiscuit-like fame. His memorabilia can be purchased on eBay, and the society's website has seen traffic increase significantly since it was launched two years ago.

The horse's enduring appeal traces in part to Savage, an extraordinary promoter who made Dan Patch a cultural icon and a marketing pioneer. It's also based in Dan's timeless saga as an underdog who became unbeatable. Much of the credit goes to his devoted band of fans, who hope to keep his story going for another hundred years.

"People contact us from everywhere to ask questions," said Greg Lind, a Savage resident and member of the Dan Patch Historical Society. "It's something people can still relate to today. Most cities don't have this tangible connection to history and we think it's important to keep it alive."

Dan Patch lived nearly 14 years in Savage and found his greatest fame there. He is honored through the town's annual Dan Patch Days festival, in the city logo, in exhibits at the library, in business names, and through the restoration of the vintage train depot that he and his owner visited frequently.

Still, many in this fast-growing suburb assume Dan was a man. Fifth-generation resident Will Williams and his brother-in-law, Jens Bohn, lead the effort to educate them. Bohn's barber shop, the Razor's Edge, houses Dan Patch memorabilia including a wood stove, a pocket watch and a print that hung on Williams' grandmother's porch.

Williams speaks about Dan Patch to school children, civic and church groups, senior citizens and history buffs. Bohn, president of the Dan Patch Historical Society, fields inquiries about the horse. The society's goal is to





preserve and promote Dan's history, which it does with as much enthusiasm as Marion Savage himself.

"We get calls from coast to coast, and we don't instigate this," Bohn said. "It's amazing that he just keeps showing up in the media, article after article."

But Dan's story is just as amazing, which helps account for its longevity. His legs were so crooked at birth that he needed human help to stand and nurse. Once he began racing in his home state of Indiana, he achieved nationwide celebrity, later enhanced by Savage's marketing savvy.



A pacer, Dan failed to finish first only twice in his career - both in qualifying heats — and soon became so dominant that no other horses would face him. Savage purchased him in 1902 for the then-astronomical price of \$60,000. He used his famous horse to promote his International Stock Food Company and plastered Dan's image on all kinds of products Patch's sold by his growing mail-order business.

The horse's exhibitions, in which he raced against the clock, became huge public attractions around the country. After setting a world record in 1905 of 1 minute, 55¼ seconds for one mile, he unofficially lowered it to 1:55 at 1906 Minnesota State Fair. Approximately 35,000 people witnessed the record, but many more would later claim to have seen the great horse's greatest moment.

"His history at the State Fair is really intriguing," said Tim Brady, author of the newly released book "The stored de Great Dan Patch and the Remarkable Mr. Savage." "Savage asked for \$2,000 for his first appearance and was turned down because that was too much. They asked him to take a percentage of the gate. He asked for 80 percent of the difference over the previous year, and he ended up making \$5,000."

Brady's book details the rapidly changing in which of the automobile age rendered horses — even famous ones quaint and outdated. Savage died only a day after the passing of his beloved horse in 1916, and before long, most of those Dan Patch pictures and merchandise were tucked into attics all over America.

But historians, collectors and racing enthusiasts hung on to the story. Charlie Leerhsen, a Sports Illustrated editor and author of the upcoming book, has been digging through Dan Patch's history in Indiana, Minnesota and New York. He said he is discovering new information that will bring Dan to life for modern readers.

"I've found newspapers in Alaska that put his death on the front page," Leerhsen said. "Ten years later, he was a curiosity from another age. But it's a great underdog story. He wasn't bred to be a racehorse; he was bred to be a family buggy horse. He went from being a poorly bred cripple to being the greatest of his kind in the world."

Leerhsen's book will carry Dan Patch's saga into the 21st century by detailing the ongoing effort to maintain his legacy. Lind said the Dan Patch Historical Society is hoping to commission a bronze statue to place in front of the restored depot. Minnesota Harness Racing Inc. made Dan first inductee into the Hall of Fame it began this year, and a harness track under development in Columbus Township could be named for him.



And Beth Dale will see Dan Patch every time she races her horses, Bonana Anna and Hurricane Jekyll, on the Minnesota circuit. Dale, who learned Dan's story as a child and once wore a burlap Dan Patch costume in parades, was delighted to find through pedigree research that her pacers are descendants of the Minnesota legend.

“I’m so proud” said Dale, whose horses have shared the stage with Savage’s family at Dan Patch Days. “It’s so much fun to see people get excited and ask questions. In a way, it’s like we’re helping M.W. Savage, who was one of the greatest promoters of all time. And that’s an honor.”

DAN PATCH DAY AT THE FAIR

The Dan Patch Historical Society will celebrate the great pacer with several activities today. The group’s tent in the grandstand plaza will display Dan Patch memorabilia from 8am – 10pm, and society members will be available to answer questions.

Other highlights:

- Author Tim Brady, who wrote “The Great Dan Patch and the Remarkable Mr. Savage,” will sign copies of the new book from 11am – 1pm and 2:30pm – 5:30pm at the Historical Society tent.
- State Rep. Duke Powell, R-Burnsville, will noon to present a proclamation from Gov. Tim Pawlenty declaring today Dan Patch Day at the fair.
- Descendants of Marion W. Savage, Dan Patch’s owner, will appear in the State Fair parade with society members at 2pm.