

SAVAGE Pacer



Savage family reunion brings back spirit of Dan Patch to city

By Nancy Huddleston, Editor; Savage Pacer; Friday, July 01, 2005

A reunion of sorts took place at Dan Patch Days last weekend as descendents of Marion W. Savage and Dan Patch were in town celebrating the city's heritage.

All total, there were 12 members of Mr. Savage's family and three horses with lineage to Dan Patch at Sunday's parade.

For many of Mr. Savage's relatives, the reunion was rooted in the spirit of Harold Savage, one of Mr. Savage's two sons.



Mary Phyllis Savage Colwell got acquainted with Bonana Anna just before the Dan Patch Days parade on Sunday. (PHOTO COURTESY OF GREG LIND)

"I learned that Harold did all he could to keep the spirit of Dan Patch alive in Savage," said Greg Lind, a member of the Dan Patch Days committee who organized the reunion, "The catalyst for me was the 1953 pictures of Dan Patch Days. If not for that picture of Harold in the parade, I probably would not have been interested in getting the relatives together."

Mary Phyllis Savage Colwell, 87, said her father, Harold, loved Dan Patch and he worked very hard to keep the horse's memory alive by participating in Dan Patch Days parades by being the Grand Marshal and riding on a sulky behind a horse.

Susan Colwell, Mary's daughter, said the family grew up going to Dan Patch Days parades. But they didn't even know Dan Patch Days was still celebrated in Savage until Lind called inviting them to the parade. "We'd heard the celebration had stopped many years ago because of rowdy crowds and didn't know it had been resurrected into what it is today."

Susan said she, her brother and mother could not stop smiling throughout the day. "It was a thrill for mom and all of us to be in Savage for the parade," she said. "And mother felt like she was carrying on her father's legacy."

Mary Phyllis agreed, noting she watched her father Harold in many Dan Patch Days parades when she was young.

This time around, however, she was the one waving to the crowds from the front seat of an Amish made, covered wagon driven by Karl Bohn for the occasion. Other members of the family rode in the back of the wagon waving to residents all along the parade route.

"The people in the city couldn't have been nicer," Mary Phyllis said, noting she was especially thankful to Bohn for his hospitality.

She was also impressed by Savage and the way it has grown. "Jeepers, it's like a big city now," she said. "It sure would have blown my father's mind to see it today."

Another highlight for Mary Phyllis was meeting Bonana Anna, one of the descendants of Dan Patch. "Seeing the horses took me back a lot of years to when I spent a lot of time around horses," she said.

Robert Savage, who lives in Excelsior, is a son of Erle Savage and was one of the first relatives that Lind contacted. At first, the task of getting family members together was a little shaky, he said, because he lacked general knowledge of the family tree.

But now that Lind is helping him put the tree together, he feels more and more relatives will come to future parades and Dan Patch Days festivals.

"I think the people in our family enjoyed the event," he said. "Based on the feedback, I think you can be assured the family would be glad to participate in the future and we plan to see if we can get more of the Savage clan together next time."

Robert also feels it is great that other generations of his family are learning about his famous great-grandfather and his horse. "The man and his horse were quite amazing in their accomplishments and helped put Minnesota on the map at that time," he said. "I travel worldwide for business and it is amazing the older people I meet who remember them when they hear my name."

For Beth Dale, who brought Bonana Anna and Hurricane Jekyll -- two descendents of Dan Patch to the celebration -- the exposure helps fuel interest in harness racing.

She said the sport of harness racing treasures Mr. Savage and Dan Patch, and the most prestigious awards conferred by the U.S. Harness Writers' Association are still the Dan Patch awards.

Famed Standardbreds with Dan Patch lineage include Francis Albert, Big Towner, Cam's Card Shark, Dragon's Lair, Jate Lobell, Life Sign, Nero, No Nukes, Pacific Rocket, Run The Table, Tyler B and Western Hanover.

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