

# St. Paul Dispatch

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## Savage becomes Little Giant of Industry

GABETH HIEBERT; Oliver Towne Columnist in the St. Paul Dispatch; 1962

SAVAGE, MINN.—Dan Patch, the world's most famous harness horse, gave this village of many shades its place in history more than a half century ago.

Now he has a rival.

It's a new kind of horsepower, pushing Savage into the role of an industrial giant, where mighty oaks of manufacturing already have grown along the banks of the Minnesota River and more acorns are being planted almost daily.

The motorist on the move, pulling into that long sweep down Minnesota 101, may mark Savage merely by changing his speed from 60 to 40 miles an hour until he is safely under the bridge carrying the tracks of the Minneapolis, Northfield Southern railway (the colorful Dan Patch line) and heads for Shakopee.

But his eyes will miss the scene and his ears the hoof beats of power muffled behind soundproof buildings.

He will pass the skyscraper towers of Cargill, Inc., and Continental Grain and never hear the rush of grain on a golden autumn day as it pours into the holds of barges tied to the slips of a mammoth inland harbor cut into the wild swamp. Or see forestlands along the stream in which the Sioux once paddled their canoes in the long ago when it was known as the River St. Pierre.

And he will not pause to listen to some descendant of a pioneer Savage family tell how, just below Port Cargill, the community's first steam locomotive was brought by flatboat in the late 1860's and, set upon the rails of the St. Paul & Sioux City railway, made its maiden run from Savage with spectators taking wagers that "it'll never get started" and, once it was underway, "they'll never get it stopped."

The motorist may miss, too, that long, clean, new building at the entrance to the Cargill base—and thereby an interlude of drama at the Producers Container Co., which is in a hurry to turn out 2 ½ million cans as a wholly owned subsidiary of Green Giant Canning Co. at Lie Sueur a comfortable hour's drive to the southwest.

With a few minutes to spare, the president himself, James Algeo, will put on his green plastic hard hat and show you through this mammoth employer of 100 persons where cans clatter and clink along conveyor race tracks in a dizzying pace and within whose walls one comes to believe that the machine is really smarter than man. And all this since 1958.

Then, with a brief glance left into the placid Savage business district, you hurry to the sprawling mighty oak of Savage factories—Continental Machines, Inc., whose gauge blocks and instruments, machine tool accessories, band machine and precision surface grinders pour out across the nation in

a chain of power. And where the payroll ranges from 500 to 1,000 men and women. All this since 1946.

You go on southwest past the Richards Oil Co. refinery, dating from the mid-1950's, and Continental Grain, whose leviathan storage bins were dedicated in 1960. And you have seen the oaks. But the acorns are there, too.

BACK BEHIND a curtain of trees, among the ruins of the old transient camp and later the army's Japanese language school of World War II, you come to a clearing and a long steel-domed building with a front facing of varnished wood paneling. This is the lair of an inventor, Harold Petsch, who grew up on a farm near Prior Lake and now owns the Master Specialty Co., whose dozen employees turn out plastic mops and brooms, car-top carriers, rotary lawn and hedge trimmers, Miter-Masters—all the product of Harold's brainstorming.

Harold's factory has a leased branch in Stuttgart, Germany. "I've been a tinkerer all my life—even back on the farm we made all our own machines," Harold says. "My first invention was the knob for auto steering wheels . . . but I lost that to someone else . . ."

In an old garage, which looks almost abandoned from the outside, you meet the owners of the Stroud Manufacturing Co.—Ralph Stroud and Joe Kottom. They make scales for weighing gunpowder used by sportsmen who make their own ammunition. "Accurate to one-tenth of a grain," says Ralph, putting away his lunch to demonstrate.

These two were friends at a Bloomington machine shop—Ralph working for Joe, who was one of the shop owners. They decided about a year ago to perfect their scale and go into production.

"We were just saying when you walked in that if business keeps up we could be grossing \$1,000 a week between us," says Joe. "Of course, this is a contrast to those boys across the road at Continental Machine."

BUT THOUGH this new horsepower may be propelling Savage towards a new place in the sun; you always walk with the ghost of Dan Patch. The water tower is emblazoned with the words: "Savage — Home of Dan Patch."

There is a Dan Patch bowling establishment, and the biggest municipal moneymaker, the liquor store, is proud of its Dan Patch cocktail lounge, although the horse, himself, never touched what it purveys. Murals on the walls depict famous episodes in the years Dan Patch lived in Savage. There is a Dan Patch apartment house, a building that may excite the memories of some. The building once housed the notorious Budweiser club, which in Savage's gamy era of the 1930s was known as Little Reno. Its walls were lined with slot machines and roulette tables and the lure of the almighty dollar was matched by the gratis lunches and liquid refreshments accorded all patrons. When the gendarmes swooped down in a raid the Budweiser club was the scene of such disorder as never attended rats leaving even the biggest, fastest-sinking ship. Slot machines and roulette wheels were thrown into any passing baby buggy, car trunk or coaster wagon. Many wound up under the beds of Savage residents. And the basements of a few homes still would yield a few poker chips, remnants of that period.

It should be said that most of the gambling devices were last seen on a truck heading for South St. Paul and that, two hours after the raid, auxiliary devices had been moved to the Budweiser club, which reopened in unruffled splendor, only to be shut down for good a short time later. BY PURE coincidence, Savage has a walking reminder of Dan Patch—a gentleman by that name who works at Continental Machine Co. and whom has "Home of Dan Patch" posted on his garage door.

Even those who lived through the pageantry and excitement of Dan Patch's reign have difficulty bringing back the picture of the mile track and spacious stables which stock-food tycoon M. W. Savage built for the pacing king and his court.

I browsed through those grounds with two men who have as strong affection for Dan Patch as any in Savage. One is Bob Allen, historian, native son and one-time justice of the peace. The other is Ben Morlock, justice of the peace, antique collector, dealer in used cans, whose cache of Dan Patch lore includes the horse's legendary nickel-plated teed box and a cutter he used to haul in winter.

The house in which Harry Hersey lived still stands. Hersey often was called the "man who made Dan Patch." Harry was Dan's trainer and driver on that memorable Sept. 8, 1906, when, before more than 90,000 people at the Minnesota State Fair, Dan Patch set the world's pacing record of 1:55—never matched.

STANDING on the lawn in front of the old Hersey home, you look across the fields toward the Dan Patch rail line. And one can only imagine how that broad plain looked in 1904 when M. W. Savage built his Taj Mahal of stock farms on it—the barn with the mosque-like turrets and minarets and the five wings that drew the harness horse fraternity of the nation. There is a slight depression where the one-mile track ran and where the natives and visitors by the thousands came to worship the hoof prints of Dan Patch and others like Minor Heir, which nearly equaled Dan's feat; George Gano, Hedgewood Boy, Lady Maud C. and Online. Then there was Seth Griffith's half-mile glass-enclosed track for wintertime jogging. And from his mansion high on the other side of the Minnesota River Mr. Savage could stand and watch this unmatched spectacle. The mansion on the tract which became the Masonic home is long gone.

And if residents of Savage ever asked themselves why Savage selected this particular site for, his farms, the answer comes quickly: because the spongy bottomland ground was ideal for horses.

And it is in some of this spongy ground along the bending Credit river that flows from the highlands back of Savage into the Minnesota that you find the piece of hallowed ground where lie the remains of Dan Patch.

It is regrettable that the grave is unmarked. And that, except for Bob Allen and Ben Morlock, few can point to the spot among the brambles and weeds.

Dan was laid to rest here in 1916. Thirty-six hours later, his master, M. W. Savage, died. And the spark that was Savage farms died, too. It flared once in a fire that destroyed some of the buildings. For a time there was dog racing on the track. But by 1938 the last vestiges had vanished except for Hersey's house and one next to it. Cargill now owns the property.

The legacy of Dan Patch and his owner lie in the name of the town— Savage—changed from Hamilton on March 26, 1904, in honor of Mr. Savage; and in the memory of the Dan Patch railroad train, a pioneer gas-electric train that ran until the early 1940's; and in a pride among Savage residents which has erupted again in this new molding of the community's face and role in Minnesota river valley life.

EVOLUTION of the Savage of 1961 had its beginning in World war II when Cargill built its grain-storage bins and—taking a gamble as big as any seen at the old Budweiser club—decided to build ships for the navy.

At peak, some 3,600 persons were employed at the shipyards and it was almost as thrilling to watch the tankers head into the river channel as it had been to see Dan Patch pacing down the back stretch 40 years earlier.

The key to Savage's good fortune in 1940, as now, was its strategic location for transportation, a low tax rate compared with the urban Twin Cities and the ease with which workers could come and go without bucking traffic rushes. These reasons you will hear recited in factory after factory.

In Savage, the crosscurrents run stronger than in most villages. It is at once a quiet, slow-flowing river community and a growing little Pittsburgh of the north. Century-old houses and buildings sprinkle the back streets, while new apartment houses and blocks of pastel-painted homes rise along the fringes. Land that once went begging at \$30 an acre now commands better than \$1,000. The fingers of suburbia are stretching across the wide Minnesota valley and drawing ever nearer Savage. They have brought a physician, Dr. Eugene L. Kus, a displaced person just finished with his U.S. medical schooling, and the town's first dentist, Dr. Ronald D. Yee, an American-Chinese from St. Paul.

The M. W. Savages of 1961 are the Wilkies—L. A., R. J., and J. W— who head Continental Machine Co. and live in new homes across the river on a promenade looking down on their factory just across the road from the old Savage farms.

Inside the plant, each summer, the old and the new meet. That is where the marchers assemble for the big Dan Patch Days parade, and among the horsemen is Harold Savage, son of M. W., who comes out from Minneapolis for the occasions.

YOU CAN RIDE up alongside Credit river, past the old Indian burying' ground called Tepee hill and the Larpenteur trading post and meet Walter and Margaret (Gretta) McColl, children of Margaret Nixon McColl, the first white child born in Glendale township (of which Savage is part) in 1854.

Their farm stands a few hundred feet off the old Indian trail that ran from Mendota to Mankato. On a clear day, they will go to the high ground behind their farm and look down across the valley of the River St. Pierre. They will see the spacious new schools of Savage below and in the distance the Northern States Power Co.'s Blackdog plant—NSP is a major taxpayer and called "Big Brother" by grateful Savage residents. An orange dot on hwy. 101 is a school bus bringing Savage high-schoolers home from the widely praised Burnsville school.

Walter and Margaret McColl will see these things—the new freeways in the misty background, down which stream workers for Savage plants. And they will pick out the old paint-flaked station past which once ran a dozen Omaha passenger trains a day. And what they see there and in their mind's eye will be a carpet of rainbow hues, colored by time and change. And by day the sounds of Savage will be the jangle and whirr, screech and roar of the new symphony of horsepower.

But in the still of the night, when the river fog creeps up across the bottomlands, they say you other times can hear the faint hoof beats of Dan Patch riding through the sleeping town.