

BUILT ON THE SHOULDERS OF VETERINARY GIANTS CHAMPION OF ALL CHAMPIONS

BY: DR. STEVE JOSEPH, KCVMA HISTORIAN

In the late 1800's and early twentieth century it was believed throughout the land that Dan Patch (1896 – 1916) was the world's favorite harness and pacing horse. He never lost a race. Even to those who weren't racing enthusiasts, Dan's amazing accomplishments were well known. It's said no one believed more in Dan than his owner, Will Savage.

At a time when Ty Cobb was making \$12,000 a year, Dan was raking in over a million.

Skillful marketing led to Dan's fame and helped Savage become a multi-millionaire. Among his other interests Savage manufactured animal health products. Two were medications some historians say saved the horse's life. Here's the story.

The event occurred during mid – September 1904 in Topeka. Dan Patch arrived at the Kansas State Fair aboard his own private railroad Pullman car. However, it was noted the horse was in distress and it was believed he had a strangulated hernia. Upon learning this, Savage summoned experts from around the country including Dr. Robert Moore, who was President of the Kansas City Veterinary College.

Will arrived a short time later from Savage, MN aboard his own special train. He was wealthy enough to own a railroad and later an airline, as well as have a town named in his honor. Savage brought medications guaranteed to other horse owners to solve serious medical issues.

It's reported that Savage asked everyone to leave the building as he bedded down next to the horse. He petted Dan and whispered to him, and as a devout Methodist, he prayed.

The following morning, one of the horse's handlers tiptoed into the stall. He emerged seconds later with a beaming smile and said, "Anyone know where we can get some apples?"

From near death's doorstep to recovery, the world learned that Dan was pacing within days and ready to race within the month. Savage called his horse *The Champion of All Champions*.

The photo at left is the work of our own Dr. Keith Placke's Grandfather, completed as a youngster in the early 1900's. Keith is the KCVMA Secretary – Treasurer.

The Great Dan Patch was a late 1940's film starring Dennis O'Keefe and Gail Russell. The books *Crazy Good* and *The Great Dan Patch and the Remarkable Mr. Savage* tell more about the pair.

Our story ends sadly. In old age, Dan's accomplishments were all but forgotten and Savage had gone bankrupt. In 1916, Dan died. Savage died the next day.

If this article stirs your interest in harness racing you'll want to know the sport will be featured during the American Royal from November 15th to 19th.

