

The Boynton Ranch & Dan Patch-A Martin County Mystery

The Boynton Ranch was at one time a “landmark” in Martin County. Dan Patch was a famous harness racing horse of the early 1900’s. Was there a connection between the Boynton Ranch in Martin County and the “famous” Dan Patch? Did Dan Patch exercise, or perhaps even race, on the horse racing track on the Boynton Ranch? Although concrete evidence linking the two is somewhat of a mystery at this point, the following is a brief account of the history of the Boynton Ranch including some information about Dan Patch.

The Boynton Ranch, which was located in Section 12 of Waverly Township, was at one time very well known in the Truman area. The ranch, or farm, was perhaps most famous for its race track and its large white barn which was built around 1903. Apparently, there was no expense spared in building the barn as lumber was shipped from northern Minnesota and a Wisconsin lumber company for its construction.

Its owner in the early 1900’s was Carlos N. Boynton of St. Paul, a capitalist who owned 1,200 acres of land in Waverly and Westford Townships. Although Boynton seldom visited the farm, which even included a school, he always insisted on maintaining the property in a respectable manner. He took great pride in his stable of race horses which were kept in the huge barn. The ranch was managed by Jack Yaeger and his wife. Other employees included approximately a dozen hired hands and “Cap” Nelson who was the trainer that provided a daily workout for the race horses on the one mile track.

According to a *Sentinel* article written by Claude Swanson, a previous *Sentinel* editor, “Back in 1913, the ranch was probably the largest piece of land under single ownership and management outside of the Dakotas and Montana. At least it had that reputation ever since ‘Muletown,’ near Sherburn, faded from the picture.” The Boynton Ranch was devoted primarily to the raising of small grain and corn. All the work was done with horse-drawn equipment and there was said to be as many as forty work horses on hand at all times. By 1921, 800 acres of the ranch was sold for \$200,000.00, and it was not until 1983 that the barn, which was badly deteriorating, was finally torn down.

The race track was about one mile in length and was located just north of the barn. Boynton had both race horses and draft horses; however, they were kept in separate locations on the farm. Conjecture on the part of some is that the great Dan Patch, the renowned harness racing horse of the early 1900’s, actually raced, or at least exercised, at the Boynton Ranch track.

According to the Dan Patch Historical Society website, “Dan Patch earned the title of being the ‘World’s Champion Harness Horse’ and the ‘greatest harness horse in the history of the two-wheel sulky.’ These titles and this crown he won when he set the world record of 1.55 for the mile in a record that has been equaled once but never broken.”¹

¹ Taken from <http://www.danpatch.com/>

Although the claim that Dan Patch did actually appear at the track located on the Boynton Ranch may well be correct, research to this point has been unable to prove the accuracy of that claim. Nevertheless, with that said, there may also be those with anecdotal accounts of perhaps a father, grandfather, grandmother, uncle, or an acquaintance stating that, in fact, the great Dan Patch did run on the track at the Boynton Ranch.

The Boynton Ranch was certainly a unique and significant part of the history of the Truman area and Martin County in the early 1900's. The aura of Dan Patch only adds to the mystique of its memory.

Obviously, this article provides no conclusive proof as to whether or not Dan Patch did either exercise or race at the Boynton Ranch track. In that respect, perhaps readers of this article may be able to provide some factual information about this topic. If so, please contact the Pioneer Museum at 235-5178, as we would also like to verify whether or not Dan Patch was actually there, as well as acquiring additional historical documentation about the Boynton Ranch.