

## Daniel O'Leary (1841-1933) — aka the 'Plucky Pedestrian'



Daniel O'Leary was born in the village of Clonakilty, County Cork, and made his way to America.

*He was 91 years old when he died at the Glendale Sanatorium, Los Angeles on May 29, 1933 after a long illness.*

*Noted for his characteristic good humour and remarkable health and stamina as well as for his record-breaking walking feats,*

*Mr. O'Leary tall straight, well knit figures, swinging seemingly tirelessly along scores of roads and streets in this country and in Europe and Asia, was familiar to tens of thousands. He also gave many exhibitions of his walking prowess a baseball parks, fair ground, and other exhibition places. During his lifetime he is said to have walked well over 300,000 miles more than 125,000 of which were in competition.*

*A native of Cork Ireland where he was born on June 28th 1841, O'Leary came to the United States when he was 19 years old. While working as a book agent in Chicago he said he could walk 500 miles in six days, a feat never before accomplished although tried - by many noted walkers of the period. Mr. O'Leary astonished the entire athletic world and gained national prominence by traversing that distance in the specified time.*

*Not content with consistently defeating the best walkers in the United States, several times he journeyed to France, Ireland, England, Australia, Canada and other countries winning all walking races in which he was entered.*

*What was regarded as his greatest walking performance was accomplished at Norwood Inn. Cincinnati when he was 66 years old. He walked a mile at the beginning of each hour for 1,000 consecutive hour thus disproving medical theories that no human being could stand such a severe physical strain.*

*Because of the excellent health he experienced until recently, he always maintained that he would live beyond the century mark. In an interview once in Brooklyn he said. "I will get my full growth when I am 100 and will be up and going until I am 110. After that I am making no promises."*

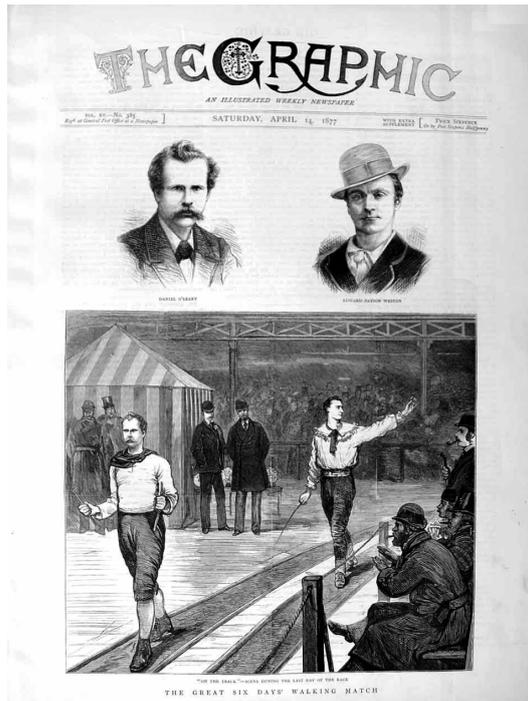
*Despite his advanced age, until he was taken ill a short time ago he could walk a mile in ten minutes and could average six miles an hour for two or three hour. He never used a cane when walking always preferring a lath stick or a folded newspaper to keep his hand balanced.*

*Regarding his exceptional powers or endurance, which enabled him to keep going when most of his other competitors were forced to quit through exhaustion, he once said:*

*"I never stay in one place long enough to get stale. Life is always fresh for me. That is my secret."*

The Irish-American adopted Chicago as his home in the late 1860's. His early life and career are covered in **Chapter 4**. The "*Plucky Pedestrian*" was indeed a wonderful athlete who set the whole sport of Pedestrianism alight in the mid-to-late 1870's. Indeed, and as the reader will discover, he became the world's long distance champion in no time.

Dan would go over to thrill massive crowds in England where, once again, he would take on the then ultra-famous eccentric American pedestrian, Edward Payson Weston — see **Chapter 7**.



Later, in **Chapter 9**, O’Leary would go on to win the in the 142-hour, “**1<sup>st</sup> International Astley Belt**” go-as-you-please contest in March 1878 which was again held at the Agricultural Hall, Islington, London, with a score of 521 miles. The whole chapter is well worth reading as it will give you a fascinating insight into what he had to go through to win the £500 first prize.

The Chicago-based pro would then back to America where he took on and easily beat the other Irishman who features prominently in the book, “Lepper” Hughes, in the “**2<sup>nd</sup> International Astley Belt**” which took place at Gilmore’s Garden (now Madison Square Garden) in September of 1878 (**Chapter 10**).

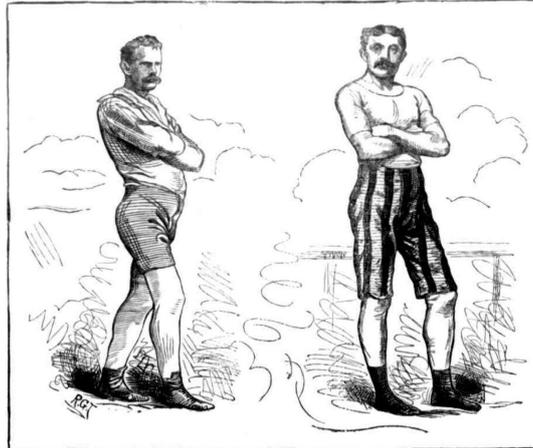
**Chapter 12** then deals with a race at Gilmore’s Garden in New York between O’Leary and Napoleon “Old Sport” Campana. The same venue was used to host the third international Astley Belt race and this race is covered in full in **Chapter 15**.

O’Leary’s last big race was when he took on three others, including “*Honest John*” Ennis, Charles Harriman and Charlie Rowell in the “**3<sup>rd</sup> International Astley Belt**” again in New York in March of 1879.

O’Leary then meets the Englishman, Peter Crossland, in a \$5,000 a side sweepstakes in Chicago, with the story of the race and who won unfolding between pages 337 and 342.

A year later, a world record was made in the O’Leary-promoted 142-hour heel-and-toe match was held at the Exposition Building in Chicago (page 443-445).

O’Leary’s final contributions to the book are when he organized the **1st O’Leary International Belt (Chapter 29)**. He then promoted the **3rd O’Leary Belt Race** before performing in a “**Four-Cornered Event**” against Henry Vaughan of England (**Chapter 30**). He then promoted the **2nd O’Leary International Belt** before traveling to France in 1882 (page 513) and later performing in Australia (page 523 and 524).



O'LEARY AND EDWARDS, COMPETITORS IN THE LATE SIX DAYS' WALKING CONTEST IN SYDNEY.

He then appeared in a 142 consecutive hour, “*combination walking match*” along with his previous protégé, the Afro-American Frank Hart, in San Francisco (page 524); in an interview on page 584; in another challenge against Weston in 1885 over 2,500 miles in America (**Chapter 50** - pages 587-589); a six-day heel-and-toe walk between him and Charles Harriman in March 1886 (page 590), a walking walk between him and W. Hoagland (Page 591). This was followed by another similar contested match between the pair on page 592.

Later, in 1886, he took on Weston for the last time in a 2,500 mile race in **Chap. 51**.



This is how the great rivals might have looked in their mid-70s — if they had competed against each other...

By P.S. Marshall — Author of *King of the Peds*

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