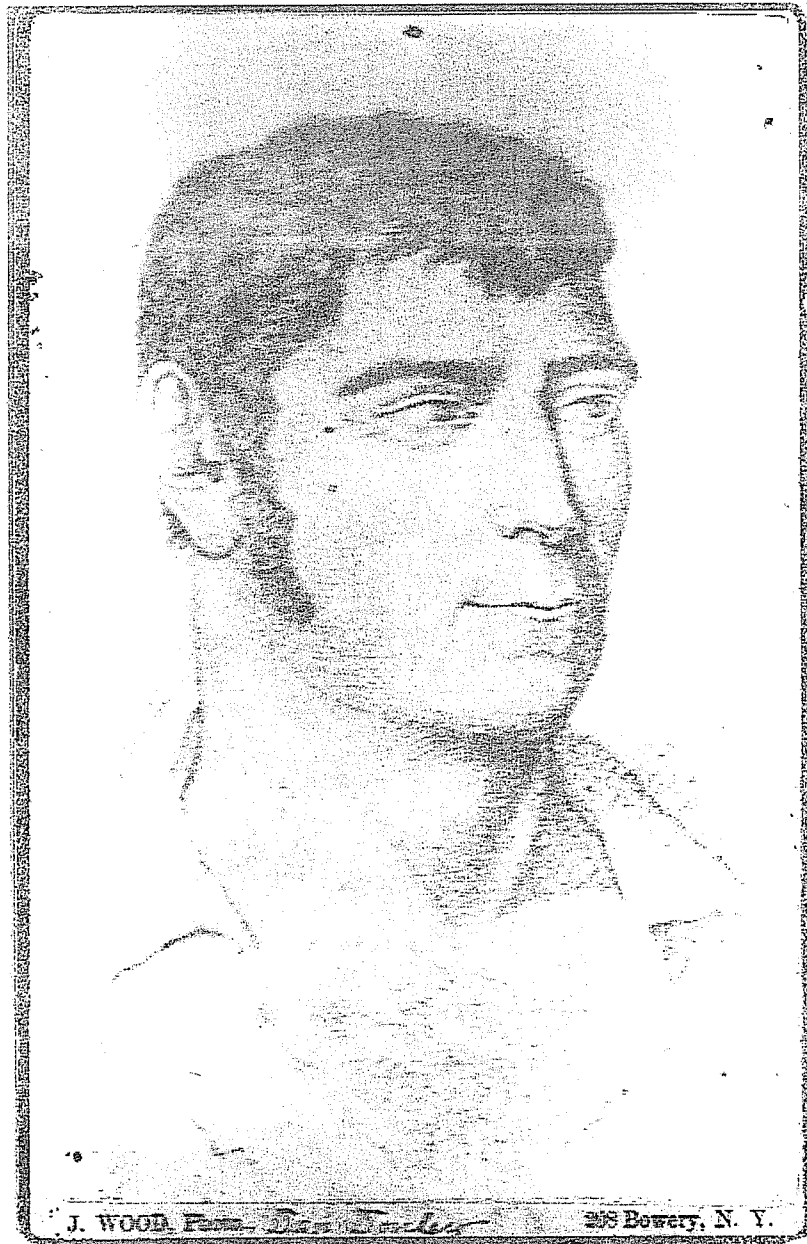
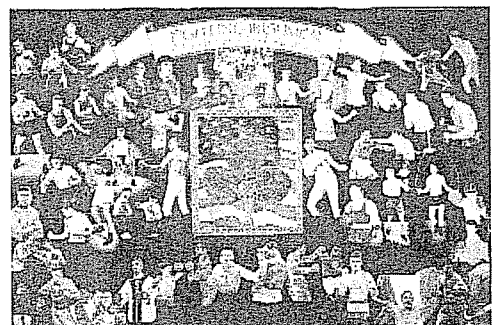


DAN DONNELLY



And more about the
Irish with a knockout
exhibit planned



The Legend of Dan Donnelly

by Dan Holden

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Dan Donnelly is a legend in Ireland – not only for his bare-knuckled boxing prowess, but also for the macabre journey of his mummified right arm. Why anyone would want a grisly souvenir of Ireland's first bare-knuckle champion is a mystery, but the fact remains the powerful arm, that once felled great pugilists, would become part of a traveling freak show.

The early life of Daniel Donnelly is vague. He was born in Townsend Street, Dublin, in 1788, at a time when the Irish people were subjected to severe poverty because of oppressive British rule. When Donnelly was 10 years old, the Wexford Rebellion of 1798 erupted, offering the Irish a brief sense of pride and the hope of freedom. However, as with previous insurgencies, it was brutally suppressed by the Crown's forces. Once again, the Irish would return to a subservient role in their own country.

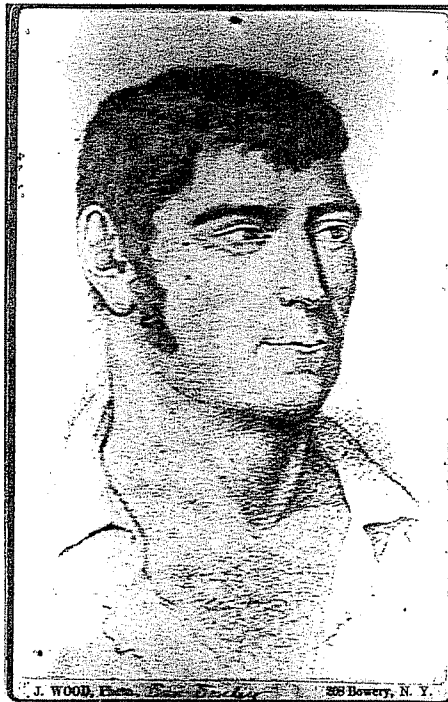
Donnelly's began life as a carpenter who liked to frequent public houses. Born the ninth out of a family of 19, his arms were so long he could tie his knee britches without bending down, according to legend. Not only was he a hard drinker, but he was a hard-hitting brawler as well.

One day, an eccentric fellow named Captain Kelly, a horse trainer from Maddenstown, wandered into a pub for a quick bite. Seated near him was young Dan Donnelly enjoying a drink with his ailing father. The elder Donnelly suddenly began a coughing fit. A rather large sailor, who was standing near-by, chastised the old man for making such a ruckus. Young Donnelly stood up and demanded the sailor show some respect. An exchange of words ensued, and the two men ended up exchanging blows. It didn't take Donnelly long before he smashed the sailor to the

ground.

Recognizing Donnelly's tremendous potential as a fighter, and realizing he could make a few sovereigns for himself, Captain Kelly persuaded Donnelly to take up boxing as a career. Donnelly agreed, and Kelly brought him to train at his brother's residence in Calverstown, near Kilcullen, Co. Kildare.

Captain Kelly started his new fighter's career with a few smaller contests, not only to test out his new man, but also to stir up excitement in the area.



After Donnelly thrashed a few local toughs, he was ready for the big leagues. His first recorded fight took place at the Curragh on September 14, 1814 for a purse of one hundred sovereigns. The Curragh (Cuireach - Gaelic for racecourse) in Co. Kildare was a grassy plain stretching over 5,000 acres, and was once the location of ancient Celtic horse races. His opponent was the popular British fighter, Tom Hall, who hailed from the Isle of Wight. Historians said that not less than 20,000 spectators came to watch the fight.

It didn't take Donnelly long to dispatch Hall. After twenty minutes of brutal punishment, Hall was sent to the ground by Donnelly's tremendous right hand. He didn't get up. After the fight was over, Donnelly made a bee-line to a tavern in Kilcullen where he spent the next five days celebrating his victory with his fans.

Donnelly's second fight was his most famous. It took place at the spot now known as Donnelly's Hollow, a natural amphitheatre at the Athgarven end of the Curragh. His opponent was George Cooper, an Englishman, who just two years prior had defeated the mighty Tom Oliver.

As the anticipation stirred leading up to the fight, something happened that had not occurred before in the annals of Irish boxing. Donnelly

had become the man of the people. An Irishman, who had come to epitomize the national struggle of the down trodden. Cooper, well, he represented England. Nothing more need be said. Every coach in Dublin crowded the roads, creaking and rambling towards the Curragh. No one wanted to miss this once in a lifetime spectacle. Those without a carriage walked the 28 miles from Dublin to see the historic fight. In a town of only 2,600 souls, 20,000 people showed up to see the Irishman fight.

The contest, which lasted eleven rounds, began shortly after 10 a.m. When big Dan Donnelly's entered the ring, the applause was deafening. His chiseled physique drew many comments from the crowd. Men cheered. Women swooned.

Once the preliminaries were covered, the match began. Donnelly, whose mighty right hand blows knocked the Englishman to the floor three times, dominated the first three rounds. The crowd roared with delight each time. The following three rounds went to Cooper. The Englishman was a skilled fighter, whereas Donnelly was a brute. Cooper managed to dodge Donnelly's rushes, and counter with some solid blows to the head, which only seemed to anger the Irishman.

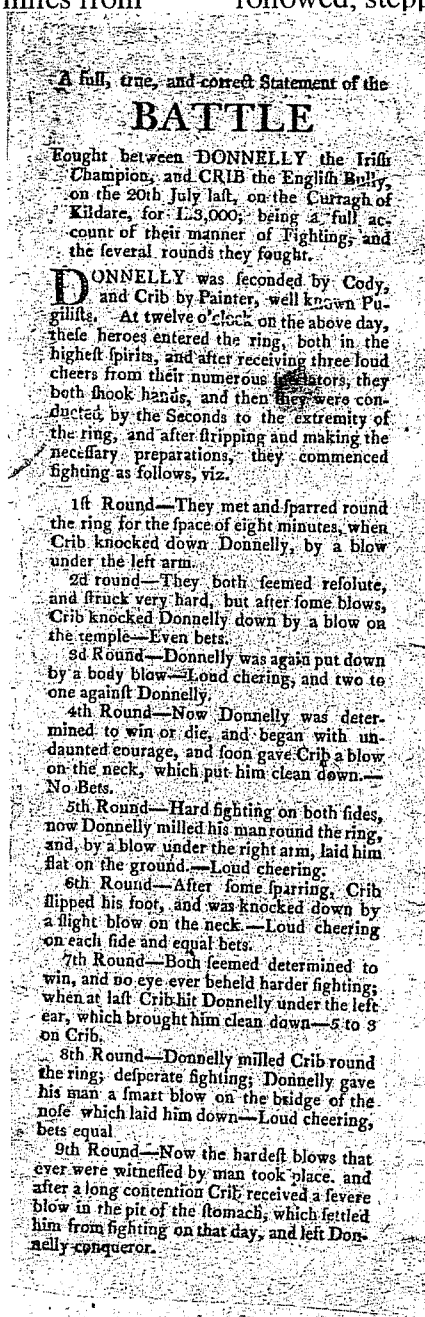
Donnelly came back with a vengeance in the seventh and eighth rounds as he stalked Cooper around the ring, pummeling him with sharp blows to the head and temple. By the 11th round, it was evident that Cooper was fading. He could no longer take the punishment from Donnelly, and was having trouble defending himself. The

Irishman finally connected with two tremendous punches. The second one slammed into Cooper's mouth and broke his jaw. The Englishman reeled back and hit the floor like a sack of dirt. The crowd roared with delight, and then surged into the ring to congratulate their hero.

As Donnelly left the arena, his supporters followed, stepping exactly where he stepped and created a mold of his footprints. Those footprints, now called "the steps to strength and fame," are still evident as historians, fight fans, and tourists retrace the big man's steps to this very day.

For all Donnelly's might and power, he liked a rather reckless life. Between 1815 and 1819, he was more well known for his drinking and carousing, then as a pugilist. His handlers had to practically force him to train for his fight with Tom Oliver (which he won after 34 rounds) at Crawley Hurst in Sussex, England on July 21, 1819. His boxing prowess so impressed the Prince Regent (later George IV) that he was awarded the first knighthood ever bestowed to a boxer.

He continued fighting in England for a time, but eventually "Sir" Dan returned to Dublin and to his adoring fans. Balladeers described the wild scenes of enthusiasm and adulation that greeted him upon his return. The crowd sat Donnelly in a chair, then hoisted the chair in the air and carried him through the streets of Dublin like a king. (cont page 10)



Fictional account of a fight never held but vintage to the period.