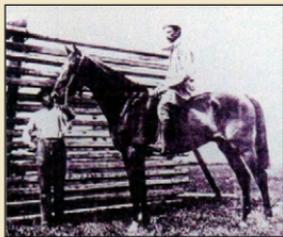


1996 Richard “Dick” Donnelly and Heatherbloom



Heatherbloom, foaled in Canada in 1895, was a dark bay Thoroughbred gelding by Philosophy standing a scant 16 hands. Purchased by Howard Willets of White Plains, NY from Robert Allan of Montreal, he cost the “damn fool price” of \$1,000 as a four-year-old, but Willets considered his purchase a once-in-a-lifetime bargain for “the greatest jumper that ever entered the show ring.” (He was later to turn down an offer from Barnum & Bailey for twenty-five times the purchase price!)

Willets sent his new acquisition to Dick Donnelly, a local trainer, to get him started jumping. That fall Willets qualified Heatherbloom with the Westchester Hounds and took him to the old Madison Square Garden, where he won the Middleweight Hunter Championship. For the balance of his career he showed extensively both as a hunter and jumper, and with Donnelly up, was a threat to win any class they entered. Starring consistently at such shows as Chicago, Bryn Mawr, Atlantic City, Philadelphia and Monmouth, he won every title Willets tried to win except for Montreal and Boston, although he won Boston’s High Jump in 1901.

Heatherbloom’s official horse show high jump record was 7’10½”, made at Richmond, Virginia, but he is even more famous for two jumps he made unofficially; one at Donnelly’s in 1902 (to permit Harper’s Weekly to take a picture), where he cleared 8’2”, and the other at Willets’ Gedney Farm in White Plains, where he cleared 8’3” (and, standing back, was 27’ in the air). His jump of 8’3”, if properly certified under the rules, would even today constitute a World Record, exceeding both the international (FEI) record of 2.47 meters and the AHSA mark of 8’¹³/₁₆”.

Though Dick Donnelly was a famous man in his own era, less is known about him than about his favorite mount. He had clients on both sides of the Canadian border, and for some years ran a training stable not far from Willets’ Gedney Farm. While Donnelly’s greatest fame came through Heatherbloom, he campaigned many other noted jumpers for other owners, among them Rifle, Going Up and Clifford Sifton’s remarkable half-hackney Confidence, on whom he negotiated the then-record height of 8’½” in 1912.

