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Horse Racing During the Civil War:  
The Perseverance of the Sport During a Time of National Crisis

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in History

by

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This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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## **Abstract**

Horse racing has a long and uninterrupted history in the United States. The historiography, however, maintains that horse racing went into hiatus during the Civil War. This simply is not true. While it is true that horse racing saw a decline in the beginning of the war, by the time the war ended, the sport had risen to similar heights as seen before the war. During the war, the sport was enjoyed by both soldiers and civilians. In the army, soldiers would often have impromptu camp races. As the war continued on, camp races became frowned upon by officers. The leaders of the army did not want their horses needlessly injured. This does not mean that racing in the army vanished. Generals hosted grand meets for their soldiers, intending to boost the morale of their men. Aside from racing, racehorses were prized cavalry mounts by many officers. Cavalrymen and guerrillas would go out of their way to acquire a horse bred for racing. Among civilians, organized race meets dropped drastically during the first two years of the war. Starting in 1863, horse racing began to rebound. New tracks opened, attendance rose at the tracks, and the price of racehorses rose. The public clamored for the diversion that horse racing provided. The experience shared by both soldiers and civilians during the Civil War brought changes to horse racing and laid the groundwork for what horse racing is today.

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## Introduction

Horse racing in the United States has been popular since the colonial period. Before the Thoroughbred became the prominent racehorse, or even a breed, colonists bred their own racehorses. These horses were a mixture of English, Spanish, Cherokee, and Chickasaw horses and ponies.<sup>1</sup> These horses became known as the American Quarter Horse. While now primarily known as a ranch horse, the Quarter Horse was originally developed for short and intense bursts of speed and was raced over a quarter mile, hence the name. European visitors to the American colonies commented on these distinctive horses, focusing on their conformation and use as sport horses. These Europeans also noted the passion that the colonists had for these horses and for racing. This was the earliest form of racing within the American colonies and the early United States.<sup>2</sup>

It would not take long for the Thoroughbreds and Standardbreds to eclipse the Quarter Horse as the primary racehorse in the United States. Once this happened, the popularity of horse racing rose to new heights. Racetracks opened all over the young country. The South was known for its love of horse racing more than any other part of the country. Richmond, Virginia, had three Thoroughbred race tracks, which cemented it as the horse racing capital of the country. New Orleans built a major track that confirmed the city's reputation as a leisure center to many. The Southern cities of Charleston, Atlanta, Savannah, Mobile, Nashville, and Memphis also operated large racetracks. Outside the South, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Chicago, Baltimore, Washington, D.C, Philadelphia, New York City, and New Jersey also enjoyed horse racing.

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<sup>1</sup> The difference between a pony and horse is the height. A pony is under 14.2 hands at the withers (the ridge between the shoulder blades) and a horse is over that. A hand is a unit of measurement that is four inches.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Moorman Denhardt, *Quarter Horses: A Story of Two Centuries* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 3-7.

Racing in the devout Northeast was not as popular, but it was still present, with tracks located in Boston and Rhode Island.<sup>3</sup>

With horseracing being so widespread in the country, sectional rivalries began to develop. In 1823, the fastest Thoroughbred from the South, Sir Henry, came to New York City's Union Course to race against the fastest horse in the North, Eclipse. This race was billed as the Great Match Race and was bigger than any prior sporting event in the United States. Sixty thousand rabid fans attended the race from all classes of society. Congress shut down because so many congressmen left to attend the race, and Andrew Jackson suspended his presidential campaign for the day so that he could attend the race. This race represented more than just a good time. It became a matter of sectional pride, and, in the minds of many, the winner represented whether the North or South was the dominant force in the country.<sup>4</sup>

Once the Civil War started, the historiography of horse racing in the United States contends that racing virtually vanished. This is not completely accurate. Professional racing in the southern states, once the capital of racing in the United States, did vanish while under Confederate rule, but racing in the North continued and expanded in certain locales. New tracks opened, purses became higher, and the breeding of racehorses became more lucrative as the war progressed. Racing not only remained popular among civilians, it was also popular with soldiers. Soldiers of all ranks, from the lowly private to the highest-ranking generals, participated in racing, either by riding, organizing, or gambling. Racing was not always sanctioned in the military. But this did not stop soldiers from enjoying it. Racing was a mainstay during the Civil War and did not vanish as previous historians have claimed.

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<sup>3</sup> William H. P. Robertson, *The History of Thoroughbred Racing in America* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1864), 79-80.

<sup>4</sup> John Eisenberg, *The Great Match Race: When North Met South in America's First Sporting Spectacle* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006), ix-xii.

Horse racing stayed on the minds of many during the war and was never far from the thoughts of many leaders. Horses that were bred for racing, primarily Thoroughbreds and Standardbreds, were seen as an integral part of the war effort and were used as personal mounts for many officers and cavalrymen. Not only were racehorses used as mounts, many people argued that racing as a sport was an important component of the war. These people maintained that racing should be used to improve the quality of horses in the nation. European nations that had a strong cavalry were looked at as an example. It was claimed that these nations financially supported horse racing and that this support was instrumental to having an elite cavalry force.

Aside from using racehorses as warhorses or to improve the quality of the horse, there are other reasons that racing continued while the war was being waged. For civilians and soldiers, racing served as an escape. Instead of concentrating on what has happened or what could possibly happen, going to races allowed people to forget their day-to-day grind and the misery that is associated with war. Instead of focusing on the dead or those about to die, sports, such as horse racing, gave people a reason to keep their minds off the war. This kept them mentally fit and increased their effectiveness in either providing for the war effort or fighting the war. Without diversion, people develop war weariness and it becomes harder for a nation to win a war.<sup>5</sup>

In the military, morale was another reason that horse racing continued throughout the war. Military leaders have long known the importance of maintaining morale. Sports, including horse racing, have always been an important way of bolstering morale. Soldiers would keep up with races going on throughout the nation. More importantly, soldiers participated in racing whenever time allowed. This allowed soldiers to maintain their effectiveness by giving them an

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<sup>5</sup> W. H. P. Faunce, "Athletics for the Service of the Nation," *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, January 11, 1918, 351-353.

outlet for stress. Not only did horse racing help maintain morale by giving soldiers relief, it also built camaraderie among soldiers. A good horse could represent a unit in races and instill pride within the unit. Companies, regiments, divisions, and corps would compete against each other, with the winners claiming honors that nobody could deny.<sup>6</sup>

Aside from the physiological aspects, civilians and soldiers alike enjoyed horse racing because it became more profitable as the war progressed. This encouraged more people to participate in the sport. More civilians started to breed horses intended for the racetrack while others started to capitalize on the increased demand by selling their horses. In addition, as the Union army gained control of more southern territory, the federal government confiscated southern horses, many of which were prized racehorses. Civilians and soldiers bought these horses, often times below market value, with the intention of using them to make money, either by racing, breeding, or selling. As racehorses became increasingly valuable, people who had not been involved in or could not justify investing in the sport had greater incentives to invest their time and money in the sport.

The Civil War exposed more people to horse racing and racehorses, and this would lead to changes in the sport that had far-reaching consequences. Without the war, it is doubtful that horse racing would be what it is today. The war changed horse racing from a sport primarily enjoyed and operated by the wealthy to one that is influenced by the masses. It is due to the very nature of the sport, the passion involved and the gambling, that made it so appealing as an escape mechanism. Once the public became involved and their money became instrumental in the success of the sport, horse racing was fundamentally changed. The war opened an avenue for the public to become involved, and once this avenue was opened, it could not be closed.

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<sup>6</sup> Steven R. Bullock, *Playing for their Nation: Baseball and the American Military During World War II* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 1-10.



## **Chapter 1:**

### **1861-1862: The Decline of Racing**

Horse racing in the first half of the nineteenth century was one of the most popular sports in the United States. The outbreak of hostilities between the northern and southern states changed this. This change, however, was slow to come about. Racing in major cities continued for a short time after the election of the Abraham Lincoln and the declaration of secession by the southern states. Much like the civilian spectators of some early battles, horse racing enthusiasts did not realize the harshness and demands of the war. Society continued as normal for as long as possible, which was not long. For southern cities, organized racing was discontinued by the end of 1861. The northern cities faced a different set of realities. While organized racing meets did not have the same support as in southern cities, racing continued in the places insulated from the war. For cities on the border, racing stopped almost immediately once hostilities started.

While there are several reasons for the stoppage of racing, including insufficient interest and the need for the public to participate in war related actions, a major reason was the horses themselves. Horses were valuable to the two armies, which needed to raise and expand their cavalry. Racehorses were especially prized for their speed, strength, and endurance. These horses, the men thought, would make the perfect cavalry mount. Aside from their physical attributes, horses of racing stock added another dimension to the cavalryman. These were impressive specimens that added an element of prestige and elegance to the men riding them, especially in the war's first years, when it was still something of a lark. Many prominent officers, as well as enlisted soldiers, rode Thoroughbreds or Standardbreds throughout the war with great pride, thinking they had the ideal warhorse.

Even though organized racing vanished in the civilian world and many soldiers gobbled up racing stock as their personal mounts, horse racing was popular within the armies. At one point or another, most soldiers participated in or gambled on racing, from the lowest private to the highest-ranking general. The pure enjoyment that came from racing allowed soldiers to decompress after struggling through their daily lives and after engagements with the enemy, although that is not the only reason that soldiers enjoyed racing. The chance to win money gambling on horses held great appeal, as it has throughout history. While senior officers sanctioned and planned some of these races, races organized by men on the spur of the moment attracted everyone within shouting distance. Officers issued orders forbidding horse racing, at first seeing aspects of the sport, such as gambling, as too damaging to morale and the cohesiveness of the unit. No matter the stance of the commanding officers, horse racing could not be stamped out of the armies.

South Carolina had one of the longest racing traditions in the United States. The tradition was so strong in Charleston, South Carolina, that the city continued their annual Race Week in February 1861. This tradition started in 1792 at the Washington Race Course. The residents saw no reason to stop this grand event, even with the looming hostilities. People came from all over the state to participate in and watch the races. The entire town shut down so that all could enjoy the festivities. Slaves and whites alike rode horses to the cheers of the crowds. These jockeys even included such prominent South Carolinians as Frank Hampton, the younger brother of Wade Hampton III. Betting was ubiquitous, and alcohol flowed freely. The Washington Race Course Jockey Club, which ruled the week, limited entrance into the race course to the social elites, but this did not stop the rest of the population from watching the races. People lined the

perimeter and stood on anything they could to see over the fence and watch the horses galloping by.<sup>1</sup>

However, 1861 was the last year that Race Week would be held in Charleston until 1878. After the opening salvos were fired at Fort Sumter, many Charleston horse breeders and racers feared for their stock and hid them from potential Union raiders. Furthermore, the Confederate government needed the Washington Race Course for other purposes. The location of the track, far enough inland to protect it from naval bombardment, made it an ideal location for an army camp, which the Confederate army took full advantage of and bivouacked troops there in 1862. At least one deserter was executed on the former racecourse in 1862. In 1863, with the Andersonville prison becoming overcrowded, the Washington Race Course was turned into a prisoner-of-war camp and became the location of a mass grave of over two hundred Union soldiers.<sup>2</sup>

Charleston was not the only southern city where horse racing was popular prior to the Civil War. New Orleans had a strong enough racing tradition to support two different race courses. The sportsmen of New Orleans ignored the beginning of the hostilities and continued with their leisure and gambling activities. Horse racing continued well into the summer of 1861 and was widely supported by New Orleans' populace. After the summer meets concluded, the Metairie Jockey Club (MJC), hoping to continue its success, made plans to maintain the traditional December meet. To ensure that the meet took place, the MJC promised to donate all proceeds from the meet to the families of Confederate soldiers, a good enough reason, the club

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Dickey, *Our Man in Charleston: Britain's Secret Agent in the Civil War South* (New York: Random House, 2016), 212-213.

<sup>2</sup> Kevin R. Eberle, *A History of Charleston's Hampton Park* (Charleston: The History Press, 2012), 39-40.

announced, that “people who never went to races before should go now.”<sup>3</sup> The strategy failed; attendance was down for the December meet. The public showed little interest in going to the races, and the horsemen themselves showed little interest. Only two horses were entered for some races, and on some days, the attendance was less than a hundred people.<sup>4</sup> There was enough interest for the MJC to plan for a series of races in late March and early April 1862, but again, neither the local horsemen nor the general populace showed much enthusiasm in the face of ever more strict wartime demands being placed on them by both local and state governments, including the preparation of defenses against the Union invasion. The MJC canceled the meet, and New Orleans would not see another organized horse race until the Union occupied the city.<sup>5</sup>

Memphis, Tennessee, had a thriving race course at the beginning of the war, but the local jockey club suspended the meets on May 3, 1861. With conflict looming, the Memphis Jockey Club announced that there was no public interest in racing. Memphians found themselves more concerned with the war, “which impends at the very gates of our city,” said one local newspaper. Furthermore, the jockey club stated, “It is [not] ideal to attempt to excite any interest in racing until the condition of things shall materially alter for the better.”<sup>6</sup> However, this closure did not last long. By September of 1861, Memphis newspapers were again advertising an upcoming meet, set to begin at the end of October and end in November. The winners of the races were expected to receive purses ranging from 200 to 500 dollars.<sup>7</sup> This time, the meet was a success,

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<sup>3</sup> “The Races To-Day,” *Daily Crescent* (New Orleans, LA), December 11, 1861.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82015753/1861-12-11/ed-1/seq-2>. Last accessed November 24, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> “Metairies Jockey Club Races,” *Daily Crescent* (New Orleans, LA), December 13, 1862.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82015753/1861-12-13/ed-1/seq-1>. Last accessed November 24, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Dale A. Somers, *The Rise of Sports in New Orleans: 1850-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), 75-76.

<sup>6</sup> “The Race-Postponement,” *Daily Nashville Patriot* (Nashville, TN), May 3, 1861.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83025725/1861-05-03/ed-1/seq-1>. Last Accessed November 21, 2018.

<sup>7</sup> “Memphis Races! Fall Meeting, 1861,” *Memphis Daily Appeal* (Memphis, TN), September 6, 1861.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045160/1861-09-06/ed-1/seq-1>. Last Accessed November 24, 2018.

with the November 17, 1861, edition of the *Memphis Daily Appeal* announcing the winning horses of the meet. However, this appears to have been the last race held in Memphis until the Union gained control of the city. With the war coming to Memphis in mid-1862, civilians had more pressing matters than entertainment.

These three cities are not the only southern cities that continued racing during the early months of the war, only to see the sport stopped once the war began in earnest. This is reflective of most major cities and racecourses in the South. Records for Alabama, Georgia, and Virginia show similar patterns. While the war was in its infancy, people still clamored for the usual entertainment. However, once the reality of the war set in, entertainment, in this case, horse racing, was one of the first luxuries that people shed. Aside from the basic need of civilians to focus on the war effort, horses were in high demand in the South and could not be spared for the unnecessary and potentially fatal pastime. The armies' need for horses and its effect on horse racing will be explored later in this chapter.

The North enjoyed horse racing as much as the South. As highlighted in the introduction, a rivalry between the two regions existed long before the opening salvos of the Civil War. However, unlike their southern counterparts, northern cities did not cease their pursuit of leisure once the war started. It slowed down, but it did not stop. A case in point is New York City. Unlike most southern cities, New York City had multiple race courses. These included the Fashion Pleasure Ground, Union Course, and Centerville Course. Trotting races were held at Fashion Course on Long Island in February, May, June, August, and September of 1861. The other courses held trotting and hurdle races throughout the year as well. Horse racing was also popular for community fairs in New York City. During the summer, a carnival at a Staten Island park advertised different forms of entertainment. Included in this advertisement was a donkey

race, which was hailed as a “great sport.”<sup>8</sup> Racing continued through 1862, although it is perhaps noticeable that a race meet in July 1862 at Union Race Course was canceled and moved to Boston because of low public turnout, even though the price of admittance had dropped. This was “one of the most marked peculiarities of these very peculiar times,”<sup>9</sup> said the *New York Herald*, although this does seem to have been an outlier. Races continued as elsewhere throughout 1862 in the same fashion as they did in 1861.<sup>10</sup>

A major difference between the New York City and its southern counterparts is that the races in New York do not seem to have been as lavish and festive. Whereas race meets in Charleston, New Orleans, and Memphis would last a week or longer, the races in New York were a one or two day event. It is possible that these less formal and less festive operations allowed racing to continue uninterrupted because less planning, money, and time had to be committed to individual meets. Therefore, the races placed less stress on the people and the city. There is no doubt that if the war had been raging around New York, racing would have vanished. However, the low maintenance approach that New Yorkers took helped racing continue even as the Union placed demands for men and supplies on its population.

The Union-held Baltimore-Washington, D.C, area also enjoyed horse racing before the war. However, once the war started, racing stopped almost immediately. Washington was in a perilous situation with hostile forces mere miles to the south and Maryland potentially declaring support for the Confederacy. Therefore, racing was, while not banned, forced to shut down voluntarily. The race courses in and around Washington and Baltimore were transformed into

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<sup>8</sup> “Staten Island-Pavilion Hill Park,” *New York Herald* (New York City, NY), June 9, 1861.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1861-06-09/ed-1/seq-7>. Last Accessed November 7, 2018

<sup>9</sup> “The Turf,” *New York Herald* (New York City, NY), October 10, 1862.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1862-07-10/ed-1/seq-4>. Last Accessed November 7, 2018

<sup>10</sup> Information about the races, meets, and courses in this paragraph was compiled from multiple issues of *The New York Herald* from 1861-1862 located in the Library of Congress’ Chronicling America Newspaper Archives. This database can be found at <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>

army camps, like Charleston. By May 25, 1861, the Seventh New York had set up camp on Washington's main race course, near the Potomac River's Long Bridge, which connects the city to Arlington, Virginia.<sup>11</sup> For Washington and Baltimore, using race tracks as bivouac areas superseded the need for entertainment. Both areas could be attacked at any moment and race courses provided ample room for garrisoning soldiers. Thousands of soldiers could be fitted in the stables and grounds, the infield, and other support buildings. Racetracks also provided regiments plenty of space to drill. Furthermore, the general population did not seem to mind the interruption of horse racing. Some even praised it, saying that the abandonment of horseracing and other forms of gambling would improve "the prosperity of the nation" by "erecting a basis for solid prosperity"<sup>12</sup>

Like other major cities in the United States, Chicago enjoyed the thrill of a good horse race. Much like New York City, Chicago boasted multiple race tracks that hosted trotting races and, also like New York City, those races did not vanish with the start of the Civil War.

Similarly, the city was distant from the war, which allowed the races to continue into the fall of 1861, with organized meets being held at Brighton Race Course and Garden City Park.

Attendance seems to have stayed on par with the pre-war years, which justified the relatively large purses that the tracks awarded to the winners. The attendance figures and large purses continued through 1862 with races hosted throughout the year.<sup>13</sup>

Chicago was not a mirror image of New York City, however. In some respects, it clung even tighter to its entertainment. This is evident in the fact that Brighton Park hosted the Illinois

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<sup>11</sup> "The New York Seventh," *Evening Star* (Washington D.C), May 25, 1861.  
<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn830451462/1861-05-25/ed-1/seq-2>. Last Accessed November 13, 2018.

<sup>12</sup> "General News," *Republican* (Washington, D.C), July 10, 1861.  
<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014761/1861-07-10-ed-1/seq-2>. Last accessed November 13, 2018

<sup>13</sup> Information about the individual races, meets, and courses in this paragraph was compiled from multiple issues of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* from 1861-1862 located in the Library of Congress' Chronicling America Newspaper Archives. This database can be found at <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>.

State Fair in September of 1861. State fairs, much like today, existed to showcase new technology and techniques, primarily in agriculture, but entertainment was also an important attraction. Unlike today, Ferris wheels and other mechanical rides did not provide that entertainment. Rather it consisted mostly of sporting events, including horse racing. During the 1861 Illinois fair, harness racing attracted large crowds and allowed owners to showcase their horses. The Illinois fair was not the only special event in Chicago that featured organized racing. In September 1862, the city hosted the World's Horse Fair. This event was meant to highlight the horse, including different breeds and their uses, racing stock included. Racehorses of all types, including Thoroughbred, Standardbreds, and Quarter Horses, were showcased. Naturally, races were organized to pit the best against the best, and these competitions drew the largest crowds. As one newspaper reporter observed, "The attendance in the morning was not large, the matches of speed, which occurred mostly in the afternoon, proving the greatest attractions."<sup>14</sup> As these two major events show, Chicago not only continued its racing traditions during the first years of the war, but it also expanded it.<sup>15</sup>

So why was horse racing discontinued more often in the Confederacy than in the Union? The simple answer is that the South was preparing for a war on its soil while the North was, for the most part, insulated from any potential fighting. Then, once the destructive forces of war made itself felt, Confederates had more important priorities than racing. However, there is an equally important reason. Simply put, horses were valuable commodities needed by the armies. and this superseded the need for public gambling and amusement. Horses, converted for the use

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<sup>14</sup> "The World's Horse Fair: Exciting Races and Scenes in the Ring." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL). September 11, 1862. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84031490/1862-09-11/ed-1/seq-4>. Last Accessed November 25, 2018.

<sup>15</sup> Information about the individual races, meets, and courses in this paragraph was compiled from multiple issues of the *New York Herald* from 1861-1862 located in the Library of Congress' Chronicling America Newspaper Archives. This database can be found at <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>.



of officers and as cavalry mounts, became part of the general mobilization effort that required Confederates to invest in every available resource for military victory. As suggested above, racing in the South consisted of flat racing while the North primarily had trotting and hurdle races. The Thoroughbred, the horses that ran flat races, was prized for its speed and endurance; the Standardbred, the trotting horses, did not share this reputation, although it too, eventually came to be valued as a cavalry mount. When cavalry units formed, they needed horses and consequently prized the speedy and resilient Thoroughbred above others. The South, especially Virginia, South Carolina, and Tennessee, had more of this type of horses available for cavalry mounts.

When calls for volunteers went out for the cavalry, many of the most respected families were among the first to respond. When they reported for duty, young men from these brought their best Thoroughbreds as mounts.<sup>16</sup> Having a Thoroughbred as a cavalry mount not only made the young men look impressive, but, more importantly, the years of impeccable breeding by Virginians, South Carolinians, and Tennesseans also gave them a warhorse. Their experience on the race track also made these horses superior in the early years of the war to Union mounts, which were mostly former farm horses.<sup>17</sup>

The cavalryman was not the only soldier that valued Thoroughbreds or Standardbreds as their mounts. Generals in both armies valued these horses. They were considered powerful horses that reflected a commander's power and prestige. The most famous horse during and after the Civil War was Traveller, the horse that Confederate general Robert E. Lee rode through most of the conflict. While Traveller is described as a Saddlebred, this is a relatively new description.

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<sup>16</sup> Edward G. Longacre, *Gentleman and Soldier: A Biography of Wade Hampton III* (Nashville: Rutledge Hill, 2003), 38.

<sup>17</sup> Edward G. Longacre, *Lee's Cavalrymen* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2002), 31.

Saddlebreds, while now a recognized breed, started out as a hodgepodge of different breeds. Traveller's sire was an extremely well-bred Thoroughbred descendant of Sir Archy, one of the most valued stallions of the nineteenth century. Traveller's dam had a mixture of many different breeds, a true mutt, but a large percentage of her pedigree consisted of both Thoroughbred and Standardbred.<sup>18</sup> On the Union side, the most famous horse is likely Cincinnati, the massive mount (Cincinnati stood at seventeen hands, well above the average size of most Thoroughbreds) of General Ulysses S. Grant. Cincinnati was Grant's favorite warhorse and is the one he is depicted as riding in most paintings and sculptures. This horse was an impeccably bred Thoroughbred whose sire was Lexington, the greatest sire at that time, and one of the most famous sires of all time. Another horse of Grant, Egypt, was also a handsome Thoroughbred, but Traveller and Cincinnati remain the most storied horses of the war.<sup>19</sup> They epitomized the ideal horses for army officers: fast, calm, durable, and impressive, in both looks and pedigree.

Lee and Grant were not the only generals to use Thoroughbreds or Standardbreds. George B. McClellan's favorite horse was Daniel Webster, a trotting horse. Daniel Webster was said to be too fast for McClellan's staff to keep up with, and he had the endurance to go all day. William T. Sherman's two main horses, Lexington and Sam, were a Thoroughbred and half Thoroughbred, respectively. Both horses were said to be extremely handsome and hardy, and Sherman used both all the way from Vicksburg to the final review of the army in Washington, D.C. Albert Sidney Johnston also favored Thoroughbreds. His horse, Fire-eater, is described as magnificent, both in looks and temperament. It is said that Fire-eater was the calmest horse on the field. No matter how violent the environment, he remained steady. By the same accounts,

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<sup>18</sup> Robert M. Pendleton, *Traveller: General Robert E. Lee's Favorite Greenbrier War Horse* (Victoria, British Columbia: Trafford, 2005), 6.

<sup>19</sup> Denise M. Dowdall, *From Cincinnati to the Colorado Ranger: The Horsemanship of Ulysses S. Grant* (Dublin: Historyeye, 2013), 24-57.

once Johnson urged his steed forward, Fire-eater was “all fire and vim.”<sup>20</sup> Many other generals rode Thoroughbreds or Standardbreds. These included Confederate generals John Hunt Morgan, Joseph E. Johnson, Nathan Bedford Forrest, and Wade Hampton III (as well as the guerrilla William C. Quantrill); Union generals included Andrew Jackson Smith, George A. Custer, and possibly Philip H. Sheridan. Many more generals and officers rode horses of racing stock. This list is merely meant to highlight some of the more prestigious riders. It is also important to note that the pedigree of many horses ridden during the war have been lost to time and, due to this, the list of Thoroughbreds and Standardbreds is likely much longer.<sup>21</sup>

Horseracing was not an activity solely enjoyed by the civilian population. Soldiers in both armies enjoyed the sport. It served both as an outlet from the drudgery of army life and as a way to escape the brutalities of war. The soldier’s life could be quite tedious. Except for the occasional battle or skirmish, it consisted of hard marches, inspections, drills, training, and policing their camps. Leave it to soldiers, however, to find a way to enjoy themselves. Leisure activities included such things as baseball, foot races, and most importantly for this study, horse racing. However, horse racing was not always the most productive form of entertainment that soldiers could follow. It is not uncommon for either the horse or the rider to get hurt, or worse, killed, during a race.<sup>22</sup> It should come as no surprise that officers sometimes had to crack down on this activity, although having soldiers obey these orders is quite another matter.

Horse racing in army camps was an ever-present activity and one that the soldiers enjoyed immensely. The soldiers took much pride in these races and strove to find out which

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<sup>20</sup> Theo. F. Rodenbough, “War-Horses,” in *The Photographic History of the Civil War: The Cavalry*, eds. Francis Trevelyan Miller and Robert Sampson Lanier (New York: Patriot Publishing, 1912) 292-321.

<sup>21</sup> Gene C. Armistead, *Horses and Mules in the Civil War: A Complete History with a Roster of More than 700 Horses*, (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 2013), 122-147.

<sup>22</sup> William Corby, *Memoirs of Chaplain Life: Three Years with the Irish Brigade in the Army of the Potomac*, ed. Lawrence Frederick Kohl (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992), 60.

man had the best mount or which state had the fastest horses. With men coming together from all over the country, it was only natural that should pit themselves and their horses against one another. These contests could get heated, as happened when several Texas units were assigned duty in Arkansas. Texans believed that they were the best soldiers in the army and that their horses were the toughest and fastest horses in the nation. They relished any opportunity to prove that their horses were the superior animals. In one instance, while encamped near Clarksville, Arkansas, during the winter of 1861-1862, a race was arranged between one of the Texans' best horses and a "little gray horse owned by a hayseed" from Arkansas. The "Arkansaw" horse ruled the day, much to the disgust of the Texans.<sup>23</sup> This glimpse at regional rivalries shows the pride that soldiers took in both their state and their horses. Pitting their horses against one another allowed soldiers not only to have fun, but also to showcase their heritage and, if victorious, claim bragging rights in a sport that all enjoyed.

As a sport, soldiers enjoyed horse racing as pure entertainment. It allowed them to resolve disputes and release stress, forget their worries, and find distractions from the brutality of war. For instance, shortly after the battle of Wilson's Creek in August 1861, having made camp, Confederate soldiers who had fought in the battle organized a horse race. Men lined a country road and cheered as the horses and their jockeys thundered past them. All but a few men participated in the festive activity.<sup>24</sup> Another example of horse racing acting as an escape happened during the Peninsula campaign, in May 1862. General Thomas F. Meagher, on the eve of the battle of Fair Oaks, realized that his men needed a distraction and time to relax, so he organized a series of hurdle races (steeplechases) that became known as the Chickahominy

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<sup>23</sup> James C. Bates, *A Texas Cavalry Officer's Civil War: The Diary and Letters of James C. Bates*, ed. Richard Lowe (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 70.

<sup>24</sup> Johnnie Wilkerson, *Boy Soldiers of the Confederacy: The Memoirs of Johnnie Wilkerson*, ed. Kathleen Gorman (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006), 11-13.

Steeplechase. Meagher had a track prepared, collected money for purses, offered the skin from a tiger he had shot as part of the price, and appointed generals William H. French and Israel B. Richardson as judges. The soldier-jockeys even prepared their own racing silks. The first race was jockeyed by officers but enjoyed by all. After the first race, a mule race was arranged, to be ridden by the brigade musicians. However, just as the race was to start, the opening cannonade of the battle of Fair Oaks was fired and Meagher had to cancel the remaining races.<sup>25</sup>

Gambling was another form of entertainment that allowed soldiers to pass the monotony of their daily lives. Horse racing was built for this. It is, after all, a sport built around gambling. Throughout history, where there has been horse racing, there has been gambling. It did not matter if the race was carefully organized or put together on the spur of the moment; soldiers would gather around and wager their money on one horse or another. Sometimes the stakes were small. In one instance, a cry went out that a “big race, seven horses in it” was happening. Soldiers within earshot stopped what they were doing and rushed to line the makeshift racetrack. As soon as they were in position to watch the race, they started laying bets of no more than two bits.<sup>26</sup> Other times, the races were well planned and the stakes were higher, especially in cavalry units. It was popular to bet all one could afford, and sometimes more than that. One Texas cavalry officer reported, “[I] lost one hundred dollars [on races] and have a race to be run on Saturday.” The same officer said that he was willing to bet his own horse on a race.<sup>27</sup> It is impossible to say how many such men were addicted to gambling, or simply forced to “put up or shut up” when bragging about their favorite mount. Certainly, though, gambling gave a thrill to

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<sup>25</sup> Thomas Keneally, *The Great Shame: and the Irish Triumph in the English-Speaking World*, (New York: Doubleday, 1998). 342-344.

<sup>26</sup> Wilkerson, *Boy Soldier of the Confederacy*, 13.

<sup>27</sup> Bell I. Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 38.

winning and/or losing without putting their lives on the line. In other words, it provided an escape from reality.

For the most part, the participants and bettors in these races were the enlisted and low-ranking officers. Rarely was a high-ranking or commanding officer involved. It should not come as a surprise that these high-ranking officials took strong stances towards horse racing. Some officers encouraged it. They saw it as a way to boost morale, to keep their men's mind off the war and keep them out of trouble. This is what General Meagher had in mind with his Chickahominy Steeplechase. His men were in the enemy's backyard and fighting was imminent. In a position like that, a soldier can become too tense to be effective, virtually frozen with fear. The Chickahominy Steeplechase allowed the soldiers to escape the realities of war before the heavy fighting began. Distractions like these can result in a better functioning soldier. Soldiers realize this, which is why they happily created the course for the races.<sup>28</sup> Meagher was far from the only general to realize that horse racing was beneficial in boosting men's morale. General Samuel R. Curtis, when in Arkansas, is also said to have allowed horse racing within his ranks. This caused an uproar among his fellow generals, who insisted that gambling should not be tolerated in "any shape or form."<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, many officers saw the psychological benefits of both racing and gambling. They also knew that soldiers would engage in these activities regardless and, therefore, sanctioned them.

Some generals were not as open-minded when it came to allowing their men to participate in horse racing or gambling. General Lew Wallace, in particular, was staunchly against this sport and any other type of gambling. Wallace not only forbade gambling, he

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<sup>28</sup> Keneally, *The Great Shame*, 343.

<sup>29</sup> "General Lew Wallace on Gambling," *National Republic* (Washington, D.C) August 27, 1862. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014760/1862-08-27/ed-1/seq-2>. Last Accessed December 1, 2018

personally policed it. While traveling on the Tennessee River before the battle of Shiloh, Wallace came upon some men shooting dice on the deck of a boat. He immediately threw the dice into the river and by “stern admonition” warned the soldiers “not to be caught in like again.”<sup>30</sup> Other generals reacted similarly when it came to horse racing and gambling. In 1860, Sam Houston prohibited horse racing in several companies of Texas Rangers. By 1861, his orders had been implemented in every company of Rangers. While not soldiers in the traditional sense, the Texas Rangers were an armed force whose duty was to guard and protect the borders and citizens of Texas, much like the modern-day National Guard.<sup>31</sup> It is only natural that this order spread from the Texas Rangers to the Texas cavalry units serving in the Confederate army, which included many Ranger companies. Future Confederate general Henry E. McCulloch also issued an 1861 order that forbade horse racing when he was stationed at Camp Cooper in Texas. McCulloch went one step further in his order and forbade any gambler from coming on the post, so that they could not take money from the soldiers.<sup>32</sup>

Why was there such a strong reaction against horse racing and gambling? For one thing, these generals knew that losing money on racing could be demoralizing. If a soldier lost his money in such a reckless way, it would be bad for his morale. This in turn would make the soldier a bad man and “bad men cannot be good soldiers.”<sup>33</sup> Secondly, losing money to another person can create grudges between people. The loser can easily feel cheated, especially if he lost money to a higher ranking soldier. This can make soldiers less effective. These generals did not want any animosity within the ranks if it could be avoided. It is also worth noting that these

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> David Paul Smith, *Frontier Defense in the Civil War: Texas Rangers and Rebels* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1992), 21-23.

<sup>32</sup> Smith, *Frontier Defense in the Civil War*, 178-179

<sup>33</sup> Gerald Linderman, *Embattled Courage: the Experience of Combat in the American Civil War*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008), 84.

orders were intended to squash gambling, not horse racing per se. Racing was not prohibited out of concern for the safety of the rider or the horse. That would change as the war progressed.<sup>34</sup>

No matter the stance that generals took on horse racing, it was a subject that most enjoyed. General Meagher's enjoyment of horse racing has already been discussed, but there are more examples of generals who either mentioned the joys of racing or actively engaging in it. After the battle of Belmont, in Missouri, Union and Confederate generals agreed on a truce that allowed them to come together for a luncheon to discuss several issues, including prisoner exchange. While having a light hearted conversation after the lunch, Confederate General Benjamin F. Cheatham found out that both he and General Grant shared a passion for horse racing. The two generals discussed the joys of racing, and as the conversation came to an end, Cheatham, in a moment of levity, suggested to General Grant that they settle their differences in a "grand international horse race on the Missouri shore." Grant jokingly replied that he wished this could work.<sup>35</sup> Another instance of generals engaging in racing happened at General Joseph E. Johnston's headquarters. Johnston's brother, Beverly, was a member of the general's staff and liked to provoke Johnston good naturedly. In one instance, Beverly decided to take Johnson's horse and race him over some hurdles. Beverly could not make it over the first jump, which could also have seriously injured the horse or rider, and the general was understandably angry. His anger, however, dissipated quickly, and Johnston saw the humor in the incident.<sup>36</sup> It was one thing for senior officers to forbid horse racing but quite another to imagine that many of the same officers did not enjoy the sport. The fact that these men were at war and commanding troops does not mean that their enjoyment of racing vanished.

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<sup>34</sup> Linderman, *Embattled Courage*, 121-123; *Cong. Globe*, 40th Cong., 2nd sess., 3580-3583 (1868)

<sup>35</sup> William M. Polk, "General Pork and the Battle of Belmont," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 4 vols., ed. Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1887), I:357.

<sup>36</sup> Craig L. Symonds, *Joseph E. Johnston: A Civil War Biography* (New York: Norton & Company, 1992), 131-132.



Horse racing was a popular sport in antebellum America. No matter a person's station in society, they could enjoy horse racing, and many people took pride in the quality and breeding of their horses. However, once the war came, horse racing was one of the first leisure activities to disappear. Horses were needed elsewhere, and people had more pressing concerns than racing. Even though horse racing saw a decline in the southern and border cities, the sport did not vanish. It still persisted in the cities protected from the savagery of war, such as New York City and Chicago. While these cities did not have the same prestigious racing traditions as their southern counterparts, they did continue to host and even expanded their race meets.

The Thoroughbred and Standardbred continued to be prized horses as well, but instead of racing down a track, they were assigned new roles as cavalry mounts, racing across battlefields. Horse racing also found a home in both the Union and Confederate armies. The need for a way to escape from the reality of war and break up the daily grind allowed racing to flourish within the armies, even though the sport did not always receive a positive reception. Many officers opposed racing because of its ability to alienate soldiers. The very appeal of racing, the thrill of competition and wagering of money, also made it dangerous to army morale. However, no matter what measures officers took to stamp it out, it persisted. Some officers embraced the sport, ~~saw~~ believed the benefits outweighed the risks, and used it to build the morale of their soldiers. No matter their stance on racing among the troops, most senior officers enjoyed hearing the galloping hooves of the horses as they came down the home stretch.

## **Chapter 2:**

### **1863: The Increase of Racing**

As the war continued into 1863, a growing war weariness on the home front combined with the drudgery of camp life and the increasing bloodshed sent both civilians and soldiers in search of any means of escape. While the thrill of a good horse race was undeniable, the increased attention to the sport compared to the previous two years meant that horse racing would help fill this need. Indeed, racing became more prevalent as the war progressed, instead of fading away as the war claimed more men and horses. As the entertainment value of the horse became more widespread, it was hard to avoid well attended races, advertisements for upcoming meets, new tracks opening, want ads for racehorses, or soldiers racing in camp. It also became apparent that there was a need to improve the breeding of horses in the United States, both for racing and war, and there was an active campaign by members of society to improve the Thoroughbred, which was seen as the ultimate dual threat animal. The racehorse started to become just as valuable as a means for allowing people to forget their problems and boost morale as it was as a military mount and source of entertainment.

As counterintuitive as it seems, the need for cavalry mounts did not stop the racing industry from using horses for racing. In fact, the horse industry seemed to be on the rise in 1863. Advertisements for the sale or auction of racehorses increased from the previous years. In March of that year, a renowned trotting stallion named Tom Rolf, as well as other trotting horses, went up for sale in Ohio. Their racing times and pedigrees were listed, showing that the seller knew there was a market for these horses as racers or as the propagators of racers and not just as war mounts or plain riding horses. Furthermore, the seller guaranteed that if the horses did not

perform as advertised, the sale would be voided, which shows that fellow racehorse owners were the targeted buyers. These horses were advertised as racehorses and were intended to be used as either breeding stock for future racehorses or as racers and not as pleasure mounts, workhorses, nor cavalry mounts.<sup>1</sup>

Thoroughbreds were also sold privately with the intention of being raced. These horses were often bought west of the Appalachians and shipped east. Dr. J. W. Weldon, one of the most renowned trainers of the time, was known to buy horses in Kentucky and ship them to New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and other states. Weldon, along with other trainers, looked for young unproven racers that had excellent pedigrees. Some of these horses brought as much as twelve hundred dollars, a very good sum. They were bought to improve the racing stock in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast, where the majority of races were taking place. The need for superior racers to cater to the crowds made buying these young unproven horses risky but lucrative.<sup>2</sup>

Private sales was only one side of the coin. The other side was auctions. In 1863, R. A. Alexander, a prominent Kentucky breeder and racehorse owner, put up part of his stable for auction. This auction caused much anticipation, as it was widely believed that Alexander's racing string was second to none. The advertisement for the auction asserted, "[The] merits of Mr. Alexander's stable are patent to all horsemen and sporting gentlemen." This language makes it clear that the target buyers for these horses were those that wished to continue racing them, not the army or hobbyists. One might think that these horses were being sold because of a lack of a market. However, the auction took place directly after a race meet in Paterson, New Jersey, and

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<sup>1</sup> L.D Woodmans, "Stallions at Auction," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), March 7, 1863.

<sup>2</sup> Neptunus, "Letter from Neptunus-Horses Coming North," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), February 14, 1863.

the entire calendar year was already filled with upcoming meets. Even though the army needed horses, these horses had too much value in 1863 to be used as anything but racers.<sup>3</sup>

This was not the last time that R. A. Alexander held a public auction. His next auction was held June 17th and 18th on his farm in Woodford County, Kentucky, just outside of Lexington. The sale attracted buyers from states throughout the Midwest, where there was a demand for quality racing stock. He offered seventy-two horses, ranging from weanlings and yearlings to racing prospects and breeding stock. Of the seventy-two horses offered, sixty-five were sold at the June auction, one died, and three were sold privately. The average price for the horses sold at auction was around two hundred and twenty dollars. A journalist reporting on the event, named Neptunus, was dismayed at the seemingly low prices. However, one of the horses sold privately went for two thousand dollars, a remarkable amount for the time, to a buyer in St. Louis, Missouri. While one cannot know for sure, the reporter did speculate that the relatively low average was a result of a lack of buyers from the Mid-Atlantic and Northeastern states. If these buyers had been present, the sale prices would have likely been higher.<sup>4</sup>

It did not take long for Neptunus to be proven right. The low sale figures from R. A. Alexander's auction were not an indication of the demand. In August 1863, a Kentucky breeder passed away and his entire breeding herd was auctioned in September. The auction was held on the farm, just south of Lexington.<sup>5</sup> For this sale, buyers from the Midwest, Mid-Atlantic, and Northeast appeared. Twenty-seven horses were offered in the catalog, with twenty-three sold. Of the four that did not sell, two were racing in St. Louis and would be sold after the race meet; one

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<sup>3</sup> "Mr. Alexander's Kentucky Stable for Sale," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), May 23, 1863.

<sup>4</sup> "Large Sale of Thorough-Bred and Trotting Stock, June 17th, 1863," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), June 3, 1863. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84031490/1863-06-03/ed-1/seq-2>. Last accessed March 13, 2019.; Neptunus, "Thorough-breds and Trotters in Kentucky: Lexington, KY., June 19, 1863," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), July 11, 1863.

<sup>5</sup> "Sale of Bloodstock," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), August 22, 1863.

was stolen the night before the sale, and the last one died. The average price was close to four hundred dollars. After the auction, one of the buyers was offered five thousand dollars for a horse he had purchased during the auction but turned it down, which suggests the earning potential of the horse. The buyers from this auction almost uniformly stated that the horses would be used either for racing or for breeding racehorses.<sup>6</sup>

A third auction was held in Lexington in November. This sale featured thirty-six cataloged horses of all ages and sexes, but only twenty-three horses were sold. There were reports of equine distemper (also known as strangles, a highly contagious bacterial infection that has a mortality rate of approximately 10% and is still prevalent today)<sup>7</sup> and accidents which kept some of the cataloged horses from being sold. Of the horses sold, the average price was slightly over three hundred dollars per head for a total of \$7227. While the average was on par with the other auctions, this auction was vastly different from the previous ones. Instead of the prices being fairly consistent for most horses, they fluctuated widely. One horse went for as low as nineteen dollars while another went for fifteen hundred dollars. The highest priced horses went to buyers from the East Coast or to those that raced on the East Coast, such as Kentucky's R. A. Alexander. The cheaper horses stayed mostly in Kentucky or went to neighboring states. Also, the horses that left the area tended to have better pedigrees. While the buyers from the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast still wanted to buy and race horses, they had become more selective, indicating that there was a demand for superior quality on the racetrack.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "J. K. Duke's Sale of Thorough-bred Stock: Lexington, KY., Sept. 14, 1863," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), October 3, 1863.

<sup>7</sup> "Strangles: Understanding Equine Distemper and Purpura Haemorrhagica," *Texas A&M Veterinary Medicine and Biological Sciences News and Publications*, published November 29, 2012, <https://vetmed.tamu.edu/news/pet-talk/strangles-understanding-equine-distemper-and-purpura-haemorrhagica/>.

<sup>8</sup> Neptunus, "The Kentucky Sales," *Wilke's Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), December 5, 1863.

While harness racing was the most popular form of racing in the North during the mid-nineteenth century, there was a recognition that Thoroughbreds and their brand of racing were superior and worth more money. The easiest way for northern breeders and trainers to improve the quality of their stock was to bring the best horses to the northern states. This meant that confiscated horses from the states in rebellion were targeted. New Orleans was the prime location for northern horsemen to pick up quality horses. The city had a strong racing background with many prominent breeders. Many of the racehorses from New Orleans were confiscated by the Union army early in the war. Auctions for these impounded Thoroughbreds received widespread interest. Many were bought and taken to northern states to race or breed. The horses and buyers received much acclaim for doing this to improve the racing stock of the North.<sup>9</sup>

It should come as no surprise that with the sale of horses on the rise that the number of race tracks in operation in the North and Union-occupied areas increased from the previous two years. As the Union gained control of larger cities within the South, daily routines and activities in these cities returned to normal. New Orleans, captured in 1862, resumed racing at the Agricultural Fair Grounds (later shortened to the Fairgrounds, which is still in operation today) racetrack in 1863 with the approval of the governor. The governor also allowed gambling if the proprietors paid a fee to the government. This included the racetracks. Even though this was a serious obstacle for some gambling proprietors, the citizens of New Orleans relished the security and ability to return to a semblance of normalcy that the Union occupation brought.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> "Thorough-bred Horse from the South," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), March 28, 1863.

<sup>10</sup> George H. Devol, *Forty Years a Gambler on the Mississippi* (New York: Home Book Company, 1892), 119-120. [http://www2.latech.edu/~bmagee/louisiana\\_anthology/texts/devol/fortyyearsgamble00devo.pdf](http://www2.latech.edu/~bmagee/louisiana_anthology/texts/devol/fortyyearsgamble00devo.pdf)

The horsemen of New Orleans did face obstacles setting up race meets. As noted above, the city's horsemen saw their northern counterparts swooping in to buy some of the very best horses. The owners of these horses had two options. They could try to hide their horses from the Union forces or they could take an oath of allegiance to the Union and hope that this would exempt them from having their property confiscated. Most choose to take the oath. While this did not guarantee that the federal government would let them keep their horses, it was safer than hiding their property. Many horses were still confiscated, but the owners were allowed to keep their best stock.<sup>11</sup> This affected racing in two ways. First, it allowed northern racehorse owners to improve and increase their racing stock. Secondly, respectable racing was revitalized in New Orleans. When racing was first resumed in New Orleans, the quality of the horses was sub-par, and people had little interest in the sport. However, this changed as more owners were able to keep their horses and organized race meets attracted as many as five thousand people on any given day.<sup>12</sup>

By September 1863, enough former Confederates had pledged their loyalty to the Union to organize a race meet with quality racers at the Agricultural Fair Grounds. Up to five races a day were held for three day with purses worth hundreds of dollars.<sup>13</sup> This was the first meet that was recognized and reported by the national media. This is most likely due to superior horses being raced combined with the less impromptu nature of the races. While the meet did not live up to the former glory of the Metairie Jockey Club, it did bring a sense of stability to the city and became a stepping stone to future meets.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "Thorough-bred Horse from the South," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), March 28, 1863.

<sup>12</sup> Somers, *The Rise of Sports in New Orleans*, 77-79.

<sup>13</sup> H. G. Crickmore, *Racing Calendars: 1861, 1862, 1863, 1864, 1865* (printed by W. C. Whitney, 1901), 72.

<sup>14</sup> Somers, *The Rise of Sports in New Orleans*, 78-79.

New Orleans was not the only southern city that resumed racing once Union forces occupied it. Little Rock held a meet in December 1863 that was sponsored in part by the Union garrison stationed there. The meet had purses worth up to five hundred dollars. This amount was affordable because of the heavy betting that took place. The horses were, according to reports, as good as any found on the tracks in the East, and the citizens of Little Rock took great pride in that fact. During the meet, up to three thousand spectators were in attendance. The city had a need for entertainment because of the constant threat of military action in the area. Having this entertainment gave the people a sense of stability and let them forget that they lived in the shadow of the military, even if this stability lasted only for the short time that it took the horses to cross the finish line.<sup>15</sup>

Southern states were not the only states that resumed racing in 1863. The border states also resumed or increased their racing. The racetracks in St. Louis, Missouri, had shuttered their racing operations at the beginning of the war. By 1863, the city's jockey club felt confident enough to organize a four-day meet with three to five races per day in June. The meet was met with widespread support and was considered a great success. Trainers from the surrounding states brought their strings to the meet. While the purses were not the best in the country, they paid enough for the trainers to ship their horses to the city. While attendance numbers for the meet are not available, its success and popularity allowed the city to hold a second meet in October. This was a longer, ten-day event with larger purses. The number of horses running increased, as did the number of horses from out of state. As with the first meet, the attendance was not recorded, but one can assume that it was high as racing in St. Louis would continue in the upcoming years.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> "Racing at Little Rock, Arkansas," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), December 19, 1863.

<sup>16</sup> Crickmore, *Racing Calendars*, 51-52, 67-70.



Chicago relished trotting races, and the city continued to offer ample races during 1863. The city had two trotting parks that hosted races throughout the year, weather permitting. Not only did the city continue to offer races, it continued its expansion from the year before by building new race tracks. Built close to the prisoner-of-war facility Camp Douglas, it was predicted that the Chicago Driving Park would become one of the premiere tracks in the nation once it opened. It achieved this goal and attracted some of the nation's best trotting horses, including past and current champion trotters, when it opened on August 25, 1863, as the city's third race track. When the track's initial meet had concluded, racing officials in Chicago proclaimed that this was the best meet ever held in the city.<sup>17</sup>

Moving east, Kentucky's racing experience was the opposite of St. Louis and Chicago. While St. Louis had shut down its racing in 1862, Kentucky continued to have meets. However, in 1863, the number of meets in Kentucky dropped to only two meets for the year. Louisville hosted one meet in May and Lexington hosted the other in September. The purses in both meets dropped dramatically from the previous year. It is worth noting, however, that Louisville had not hosted a meet since 1861. Lexington, the breeding capital of the United States, was where the drop off occurred, going from three meets to one. The turnout for both meets, in terms of both horses and attendance was well below expectations.<sup>18</sup>

When one considers what was happening in Kentucky at this time, it is not surprising that racing declined, even though the state hosted a number of horse auctions. In the late summer and fall of 1862, Confederate general Braxton Bragg invaded the state before retiring to Tennessee in October, and Confederate cavalryman John Hunt Morgan raided the state multiple times in 1862

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<sup>17</sup> Alfred Theodore Andreas, *History of Chicago: From 1857 to the Fire of 1871* (Chicago: Higgins Book Company, 1885), 614

<sup>18</sup> Crickmore, *Racing Calendars*, 51, 66-67.

and 1863. Furthermore, guerrilla action was omnipresent. While the citizens of Kentucky were wary of the military actions in their state, the horse breeders and trainers were doubly cautious. Their stock was under constant threat from the pillaging that accompanied military action. Therefore, many of these men simply sent their horses out of the state. Those that kept their horses in Kentucky decided to move most of them to R. A. Alexander's Woodburn Farm, hoping to minimize their risks. Alexander was a British national, and many owners thought this would keep their horses safe from the Confederates, due to the sympathy many thought that the British had towards the Confederacy.<sup>19</sup>

Alexander's nationality did help protect the horses under his care from official action. During Morgan's raid into Kentucky in 1863, he bypassed Woodburn Farm. However, his men still raided the farm, due to the excellent quality of the horses. One of the horses that Morgan's men acquired was Gaines' Denmark 61, who was being boarded at Woodburn. There is some evidence that Morgan might have unofficially encouraged this one theft due to the horse's fame. Gaines' Denmark 61 was a well-known horse and was pressed into Confederate service after Morgan's men retreated to Virginia. His stamina and intelligence were praised by the soldiers that conscripted and used him. Gaines' Denmark 61 was returned to Kentucky in 1864 after a Union cavalryman recognized the horse and traded for him. While Morgan did not officially sanction raids on Woodburn, he had no qualms about raiding other farms and targeting horses bred for racing. Many farms were raided and had their horses either stolen or shot. These Confederate expeditions that raided the state and stole or killed horses help explain why racing declined in Kentucky in 1863.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> William Preston Mangum II, *A Kingdom for a Horse: The Legacy of R. A. Alexander and Woodburn Farms* (Louisville, KY: Harmony House Publishers, 1999), 45-50.

<sup>20</sup> Mangum, *A Kingdom for a Horse*, 50-54.

No Union city was affected by the war more than Washington, D.C. The city had a large permanent garrison and was one of the winter camps of the Army of the Potomac. Richmond, the capital of the Confederacy, sat barely a hundred miles to the south. Washington required diversion, and horse racing helped fill the need. On March 5, 1863, a match race was set up between a Washington based horse and a renowned racer from Richmond that the Union Army had captured and sold to a New York trainer. The purse was small and put up by the owners of the two horses. Even though it was only a match race and not an organized meet, the appreciative people of Washington turned out in great numbers.<sup>21</sup>

The people of Washington were not satisfied with a single match race. Therefore, the Columbia Park Association met on August 26 to discuss finishing construction of their new track and organizing a meet. The grounds were “within a fine days [sic] drive of the city” and visited by many interested citizens. The Association was just starting construction on the grandstands and stables and predicted that their completion would not take long. The only potential drawback was the predicted final cost of thirty thousand dollars. However, those interested in the new track were assured that enough money had been raised for the project. It was promised that once the track was complete, the grounds would be as good as any in the nation and would easily attract the best racehorses.<sup>22</sup>

The first organized race meet in Washington since the beginning of the war was held on November 3-5, 1863, at the National Course, the former bivouac of the Seventh New York Infantry Regiment. The meet offered only one race per day, each worth six hundred dollars. Each race consisted of multiple heats to determine the winners.<sup>23</sup> Even though there was not a full card

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<sup>21</sup> “The Race Track” *Evening Star* (Washington, D. C.), March 27, 1863.  
<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1863-03-27/ed-1/seq-3>. Last Accessed March 10, 2019.

<sup>22</sup> “Racing Prospects in Washington,” *Wilkes’ Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), September 12, 1863.

<sup>23</sup> Crickmore, *Racing Calendars*, 70-71.

of racing, the public came out in droves. Each day of the meet saw between three and four thousand spectators. These spectators were in for a treat. The few horses that showed up were well-respected racers, some of them from as far away as Canada, New York, and New Jersey. The quality of the horses caused much excitement for the crowd, which wagered large amounts of money on each heat and race. The first day of racing was such a success that plans were made for a spring meet, which people predicted would attract even more and better racers.<sup>24</sup>

At the beginning of the war, Baltimore was in a similar situation as Washington, with the war raging mere miles to the south. Troop encampments took over all available space, including the race tracks. By the end of 1863, the citizens were in need of something to take their mind off the war. One week after the Washington Thoroughbred meet, Baltimore decided to hold its own two-day meet on November 11 and 12.<sup>25</sup> The event proved to be fraught with problems. The track was not in prime condition, advertisement was sub-par, and most of the horses, having just raced in Washington, were not in the best condition. Since the meet was put together at the last minute and there was not enough time for a proper advertising campaign, attendance was not very high. Given these circumstances, one would think that the only attendees would have been the horsemen and pre-war supporters of the turf. Yet, the majority of the spectators turned out to be members of the general public.<sup>26</sup>

While Washington and Baltimore were starting their own meets, New Jersey was planning for the future. While there was a couple of meets in 1863, the Passaic Association (the local jockey club) of the Paterson Race Course decided to concentrate on and plan for a spring

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<sup>24</sup> "Great Three Mile Day on the National Course: Blood of Lexington Wins," *Daily National Republican* (Washington, D. C.), November 4, 1863. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86053570/1863-11-04/ed-1/seq-1/#date1=1863&sort=date&rows=20&words=horses+race&searchType=basic&sequence=0&index=7&state=District+of+Columbia&date2=1863&proxtext=horse+race&y=0&x=0&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=2>. Last Accessed March 15, 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Crickmore, *Racing Calendars*, 72.

<sup>26</sup> "Racing at Baltimore-Herring Run Course," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), November 21, 1863.

meet in 1864. Furthermore, the Passaic Association was planning meets for future spring and fall meets in 1865 and 1866. These meets had stakes races designed for two and three-year-old colts and fillies, meaning that the Passaic Association foresaw that Thoroughbred breeding would continue, if not increase. The horsemen of New Jersey also petitioned their state government to give more support to the racing industry so that they could compete with other states. The Passaic Association and New Jersey horsemen both realized that the public wanted racing and that there was a need for a strong racing industry if New Jersey was to stay competitive with other northern states.<sup>27</sup>

The horsemen responded to these future plans in droves. As soon as the Passaic Association announced its plans, horsemen started to send their racing strings to Paterson. One of the most well-known trainers to ship his horses to New Jersey was John M. Clay of Kentucky, the son of statesmen Henry Clay. In May 1863, Clay shipped and started training his horses for the 1864 season. He planned to enter at least one of his horses in the 1864 Post Stakes, worth \$1750, and he was not the only trainer preparing for the upcoming meet. By the time Clay sent his string to Paterson, at least four other trainers had already arrived and entered horses for the event. However, the horsemen of the state did not want to follow Baltimore's path with an impromptu race meet. They, therefore, decided to organize and promote future meets to maximize attendance.<sup>28</sup>

In the first half of 1863, the horsemen in New Jersey and New York also planned the Controversy Stakes, a race for three-year-old colts and fillies to be held in 1866 at Long Branch Racetrack (present-day Monmouth, Park in Monmouth, NJ) or, if the track was not ready, in New York. This event was notable for several reasons. To enter a horse in the race, the owners

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<sup>27</sup> "The Programme for Paterson Spring Meeting," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), November 14, 1863.

<sup>28</sup> "Arrival of John M. Clay's Stable," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Time* (New York, NY), May 16, 1863.

had to declare interest by January 1, 1864. By early December, four owners from different states had declared. The entry fee for the race was one thousand dollars, five hundred of which would be forfeited if the owner withdrew from the race. The purse, dependent on the entry fees, was to be a minimum of four thousand dollars. The fact that this race was planned in 1863 showed that there was enough interest in racing for this to be a viable event and that breeding horses for races was profitable.<sup>29</sup>

In the East, Washington and Baltimore decided to resurrect their racing tradition and New Jersey planned for the future. New York was entirely different. Racing did not vanish with the beginning of the war, so there was no need to restart it or plan for the future. Still, New York needed the distraction that racing provided as much as any state. The state was rocked by draft riots in July 1863, an ever-increasing percentage of men joining the Union army, and many prominent politicians speaking against the war. In response to these pressures on society, racing flourished and expanded.

New York City had several racetracks that continued in operation throughout the war, mostly for harness racing. In January 1863, an advertisement went out proclaiming “great trotting matches” were in store for the upcoming year. The marquee event was to be a series of six match races between May and July. The two horses, George M. Patchen and General Butler, named after the Union general, were among the most highly regarded trotting horses at the time. They were so well regarded that each race was to be worth five thousand dollars, meaning the potential earnings for a single horse could reach thirty thousand dollars.<sup>30</sup> George M. Patchen,

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<sup>29</sup> “The Controversy Stakes for Three Year-Old Colts and Fillies,” *Wilkes’ Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), December 5, 1863.

<sup>30</sup> “Miscellaneous Items,” *Cleveland Morning Leader* (Cleveland, OH), January 23, 1893.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83035143/1863-01-23/ed-1/seq-1/#date1=1863&sort=date&rows=20&words=George+M+Patchen&searchType=basic&sequence=0&index=0&state=&date2=1863&proxtext=george+m.+patchen&y=0&x=0&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=1>. Last accessed February 25, 2019.

whom Colonel Lafayette Curry Baker, the Union's master spy, used in the 1862 Second Manassas Campaign, won four out of the six match races, netting twenty thousand dollars. The match races were so popular that towns were named after the horses and the horses were a favorite of artists and printmakers, such as Currier & Ives.<sup>31</sup>

The popularity of harness racing in New York City only increased after the July draft riots. A three-mile race against time (racing against a time record instead of another horse) was held on August 1, 1863, at the Fashion Course without any other races scheduled for that day. The horse was General Butler, the same horse that had battled George M. Patchen. A crowd of thousands attended the race to see if General Butler would beat the time record. Many of these spectators were draft dodgers and risked being caught by the authorities. However, for the seven minutes and thirty-two seconds it took to trot the three miles, the risk was worth it as the people were able to escape their problems through the thrill of the race.<sup>32</sup>

Many of the proponents of horse racing in New York City saw the increased demand for entertainment as an opportunity to expand racing's presence in the city even further. A call went out for a race track to be built within the city, not just in surrounding areas, such as Long Island (Fashion Course) or Paterson, New Jersey. While many people attended the races in the outlying areas, it was predicted that attendance would increase dramatically if the races were more accessible. Furthermore, a track within the city would bring more Thoroughbred racing to New York which would bring in even more people. The people promoting the new track were interested in making money, and they knew people wanted more races.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Armistead, *Horses and Mules in the Civil War*, 136.

<sup>32</sup> Edward Hotaling, *They're Off!: Horse Racing at Saratoga* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 41-42.

<sup>33</sup> "Race Tracks Near New York-Cavalry Stock," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY) May 2, 1863.

The biggest expansion of racing outside of the city was in Saratoga Springs. Saratoga Springs had long been a resort and vacation location for people wishing to escape New York City. The famous boxer Jim Morrissey decided to take advantage of this haven by opening a racetrack there in 1863. He advertised the inaugural meet in May in the local newspaper *Daily Saratogian* and the national newspaper *Wilkes Spirit of the Times*. Originally, only two days of racing had been planned, but the horsemen responded in such droves to the purses (worth up to a thousand dollars per race) that two more days were added. It was not only the horsemen that responded. People excitedly talked about the upcoming meet across the country. Morrissey knew there was a demand by the wealthy to enjoy lavish lives, with all the entertainment and vices that they could find. What he did not envision was that “normal” people would also travel to partake in the festivities.<sup>34</sup>

The people did travel in droves to the new venue at Saratoga Springs. Neither reports of a hastily constructed track in poor condition nor President Lincoln’s call for a day of Thanksgiving to remember the Union victories could deter either the horsemen or the spectators. The four-day meet in early August attracted some of the best horses in the country and approximately fifteen thousand initial spectators, with another fifteen thousand people arriving while the meet was in progress. Saratoga, which had a large number of accommodations, was not prepared for this onslaught of people. Among the spectators were high profile members of society such as the Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt and Major General Daniel Sickles, who had lost a leg at Gettysburg just a month earlier.<sup>35</sup>

The meet was so successful that Morrissey called for the creation of a Saratoga Jockey Club the day after the last race. Backed by the commodore, plans for the Saratoga Association

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<sup>34</sup> Hotaling, *They’re Off!*, 41-48.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*



were put in place, and within two hours of announcing these plans, over ten thousand dollars had been pledged for the formation of the new organization. Another ten thousand dollars would new track, just across the road from the previous one. Members and officers of the Saratoga Association were recruited from across the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, and Midwest. The goal of this organization was to promote and improve Thoroughbred racing in the North.<sup>36</sup> By the end of the year, the Saratoga Association had done such a thorough job raising money, promoting the track, and advertising that editorials insisted that if a horse had not raced or was not engaged to race at Saratoga Springs then it was not worth buying. Furthermore, the Association promised increased purses for the future. All of this showed that there was a vested interest by the people in racing.<sup>37</sup>

As the armies started their new campaigns in 1863, it soon became apparent that the battles were getting bigger and bloodier. The new year brought horrors that were previously unheard of, such as the battles of Gettysburg, Chancellorsville, Chickamauga, and the siege of Vicksburg. Soldiers faced a whole new level of terror. During their time in camp, they needed something to take their mind off their trials and keep their spirits up. Often, as during the first two years of fighting, they turned towards horse racing, a sport that gave them the thrill of competition and gambling. Even if for a moment, soldiers forgot about their lives and had a different focus. More officers also accepted this as a useful way to maintain morale, albeit on a limited and controlled basis.

The common soldier partook in any activity to pass time in camp and to escape the war. For cavalry units, it was only natural to gravitate towards racing, often to the detriment of their horses. With the coming of spring, the drying fields, and sunshine, the cavalrymen in the Seventh

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-50.

<sup>37</sup> "Saratoga Races," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), December 12, 1863.

Kansas Volunteer Cavalry Regiment ignored the condition of their horses and spent much of their leisure time chasing the glory (and money) that came with winning a race against their peers. The men needed to let off steam from a hard and dull winter and, with horses at their disposal, racing seemed to be their best option until they departed their camp at Germantown, Tennessee. The condition of the horses deteriorated so much and racing became so common and problematic that Colonel Thomas P. Herrick issued orders forbidding horse races. If a cavalryman was caught racing, he would be subjected to the “severest penalties.” Furthermore, Herrick promised that his order would be “rigidly enforced.”<sup>38</sup>

The Seventh Kansas was not the only military unit that had a problem racing their horses. The Texas Frontier Regiment was another unit that was beset with problems due to horse racing. For this regiment, it was not the condition of the horses that caused a problem, but, rather, that racing led the men to neglect their duties. By early summer, this issue had become so pervasive that Colonel James E. McCord issued orders stating that if horse racing and the gambling that occurred during the races caused any harm to their military performance or if men were found racing and gambling while on duty, the guilty parties would be punished by court-martial, bypassing the non-judicial punishment that other officers used to combat unsanctioned horse races.<sup>39</sup>

Not all unsanctioned horse racing by soldiers was punished by officers. A Confederate cavalry unit garrisoned in Grenada, Mississippi, became notorious in the surrounding communities for its behavior. These cavalrymen, known for spending their time racing horses, along with other vices, were as much feared for their disregard for the local civilian population

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<sup>38</sup> Stephen Z. Starr, *Jennison's Jayhawkers: A Civil War Cavalry Regiment and Its Commander* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 242-243.

<sup>39</sup> Wiley, *Life of Johnny Reb*, 38.

as for the Union cavalry. Based on complaints that went unanswered, the officers either joined in these affairs, had no control of their men, or did not care. The situation became so dire that members of the communities plead their case directly to Jefferson Davis in hopes that he would replace the cavalrymen. Whether or not Davis answered this plea is unknown, but a Texas cavalry unit replaced the garrison and the people of Grenada and adjacent communities praised the new unit for not having the vices of the old one.<sup>40</sup>

While officers disapproved of unsanctioned horse racing by the enlisted men and lower ranking officers, racing was generally encouraged in the army during the men's downtime, as long as it did not compromise unit morale or the condition of the horses. In February, soldiers stationed in New Orleans organized a hurdle race on the Metairie Course. The race consisted of two heats, a mile each over six hurdles. Four horses were entered, three of which were the personal mounts of officers; the four jockeys were a colonel, adjutant, quartermaster, and captain of the 162nd New York Infantry Regiment.<sup>41</sup> The race afforded much excitement for soldiers and the civilian community. Many "fashionable" citizens of New Orleans attended the race, as did many of the soldiers from Camp Mansfield, near Carrollton, Louisiana.<sup>42</sup>

In September, the Sixth New York Volunteer Cavalry organized a race in Virginia it called the Dragoons' Plate. This race, while not involving officers, had the approval of the unit's commanders. The conditions of the race were unique. It was only open to horses that "had smelt gunpowder," and each horse was to carry "sabre [sic] and carbine weight," thus making sure that only cavalry mounts would qualify for the race. The purse consisted of thirteen dollars (the

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<sup>40</sup> Douglas Hale, *The Third Texas Cavalry in the Civil War* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 180.

<sup>41</sup> The unit was not named in the article but determined by cross referencing the names given in the article with the rosters of New York Infantry Units found at the New York Military Museum and Veterans Research Center's website, <https://dmna.ny.gov/historic/reghist/civil/MusterRolls/MusterRollsInfantry.htm>.

<sup>42</sup> "Hurdle Racing at New Orleans," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), March 21, 1863.

monthly wages for a private), a canteen, and a tin cup meant to representing a trophy. The soldiers were excited by the event and bet heavily. The race was not publicized for the public, nor was the public expected to attend. This was a race organized by soldiers to be enjoyed by soldiers.<sup>43</sup>

Races were also organized for the enjoyment of entire brigades and corps, not just companies and regiments. On St. Patrick's Day 1863, General Meagher and his Irish Brigade organized a series of hurdle races which thousands of soldiers, ranging from privates to generals, attended. Among the guests were Generals Joseph Hooker and Oliver Otis Howard, other officers, and the Irish Brigade's band. The first race, which had multiple heats, was reserved for staff officers. Thousands cheered as Meagher's adjutant won all the heats. After the race, the generals used their own money to create the one hundred and thirty-five dollar purse for the second race, which was open to any officer in the army. Six horses entered, and it was won by an artillery officer who was a grandson of the famed Prussian general Count Blucher. A third race was run, in which three horses died. The officers, caught up in the moment, did not seem to mind the losses as they cheered for the remaining runners. The crowd only broke up when cannonading was heard in the distance (possibly from the battle of Kelly's Ford) and the troops were ordered back to their units.<sup>44</sup>

Shortly after Meagher's St. Patrick's Day festival and the battle of Kelly's Ford, General Hooker planned another horse race for the entertainment of his generals and men. It was said that horse racing was a favorite activity of the "leaders of the army." Generals George Stoneman and David McMurtie Gregg, along with many of their subordinates in the First Pennsylvania

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<sup>43</sup> Shaks, "Camp Races in Virginia-Army Life and Sports," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), September 26, 1863.

<sup>44</sup> J. Franklin Dyer, *The Journal of a Civil War Surgeon*, ed. by Michael B. Chesson (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 65-67.

Cavalry, entered horses in the race. The contest was much anticipated among cavalrymen, although it was not as grandiose as Meagher's festival. The men did not go to a track with grandstands, but rather, had to hope that the race would pass their camp, so they could catch sight of it. As it was, the race ended on a somewhat down note when a rider was badly injured in a fall. One soldier, who was previously excited by the races, was soured by the result and complained that “generals...must indulge in their favorite amusements” and that “nothing is thought of a man’s life or limbs here.”<sup>45</sup>

During the summer and early fall, the armies had less organized horse racing. Armies were on the move, fighting intensified, and there was little time for festivities. However, once the conditions permitted, organized races resumed. In late October, the Union’s Nineteenth Army Corps took a break from its march to Opelousas, Louisiana, and held a day of racing at Bayou Carrion Crow. The race day was promoted as a chance to test who had the best horse. Individual and unit honor was at stake. Betting was extremely heavy, with many men acting like professional handicappers and professing that they held inside knowledge about a specific horse. More important than the money to be made, the race gave soldiers something different to do and relieved the “monotony of camp life” by providing “amusement and excitement” on an otherwise dull march.<sup>46</sup>

Soldiers did not solely rely on camp races to fulfill their desire for races. At Camp Nelson, a supply depot twenty miles south of Lexington, Kentucky, soldiers went to races at a local track situated a half mile from the camp for weekly races. The horses were not military mounts but owned by members of the community. These were not always trained racehorses, and

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<sup>45</sup> Eric J. Wittenberg, *The Union Cavalry Comes of Age: Hartwood Church to Brandy Station, 1863* (Charleston: The History Press, 2017), 148-149.

<sup>46</sup> W. H. H., “Nineteenth Army Corps Races,” *Wilkes’ Spirit of the Times*, (New York, NY), November 21, 1863.

they included different breeds, such as Thoroughbreds, Standardbreds, Saddlebreds, and Quarter Horses. This did not matter, as hundreds of soldiers and civilians would come to watch the races. Some people even came from Lexington if an advertised race seemed to be between quality horses. While everyone gambled, the soldiers were notorious for gambling the larger sums of money on the races. The civilians generally gambled no more than one dollar and would rarely bet more than five dollars. Racing, alongside baseball and cricket clubs, helped the soldiers fight the monotony at Camp Nelson.<sup>47</sup>

Racing was not only looked upon as entertainment or diversion in Union camps, but also as a way to improve the quality of the horses within the Union. Confederate irregulars and cavalry seemed to embarrass their Union counterparts on a regular basis. Raids into border states or Union controlled areas, as with Morgan's raid into Ohio, or General J.E.B. Stuart's circumnavigation of the Army of the Potomac, seemed to prove to the people in the North that the Confederates had better horses. They believed that these horses were better because they were Thoroughbreds instead of the Standardbreds or Morgans that were popular in the North. Furthermore, southerners had focused on improving their horses to combine speed with endurance in the name of racing, unintentionally making a better warhorse. To many northerners, the answer to improving their much-maligned cavalry was obvious; improve the quality of the horses in the North through racing.<sup>48</sup>

To improve the horse in the North, horsemen first had to improve Thoroughbred racing in the North. There were many suggestions about how this could be accomplished. One way was to decrease the stigma that many had against horse racing. Even though harness racing was popular in the North, many shunned Thoroughbred racing, especially in the puritanical Northeast. In the

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<sup>47</sup> "Spirit of the Camp," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times*, (New York, NY) January 1, 1864.

<sup>48</sup> "Thorough-bred Horses from the South," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), April 11, 1863.

views of those wanting to use Thoroughbreds to improve the Union cavalry, this was a backward attitude. To these people, horse racing was just as essential as raising crops or manufacturing arms. If quality was wanted, it had to be tested, whether in bloodlines, genetics, or manufactured goods. This is what racing accomplished. Its promoters wanted people to set aside any qualms about racing because racing was part of the war effort and the only way to show which bloodlines would produce the best horses.<sup>49</sup>

Along with changing any negative perception of horse racing, people believed that the breeding of Thoroughbreds, more so than Standardbreds, must be increased and improved. There were debates about how to do this. Should the focus be on improving stallions or broodmares? Some believed that the best Thoroughbred stallions should be used to cover cross-bred mares. Others believed that mares of the highest quality would be the key to improving the horse. This debate is still heard in modern times. Does a horse get the majority of its talent from the sire or the dam? What was agreed upon by all parties was that the key to improving breeding was to promote racing. Most agreed that in order for breeders to have the incentive to increase and improve their Thoroughbred breeding stock, the purses of the races had to be increased to make Thoroughbred racing more profitable than harness racing. It was hoped that this would cause many Standardbred breeders to switch to Thoroughbreds.<sup>50</sup>

The next issue that people tried to tackle was how to improve the purses of Thoroughbred racing to make it more lucrative. Many believed that the government should step in and sponsor Thoroughbred racing. The argument was that racing improved Thoroughbreds and, thus, improved cavalry horses. There was a belief that the government should pay the purse for a race or purses for a race meet and make purses significantly higher. Those arguing this point looked

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<sup>49</sup> "Racing Prizes by the Government," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), September 5, 1863.

<sup>50</sup> "Use and Necessity of Horse-Racing," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), October 10, 1863.

toward European countries, especially Great Britain, which was regarded as having the best racing and cavalry horses. The British monarchy regularly sponsored and attended races, which were seen as an investment in improving the breed of horses needed to serve in future conflicts. It also legitimized Thoroughbred racing in the eyes of the public. The northerners promoting the Thoroughbred as the future of the cavalry horse in the United States insisted that government-sponsored races and meets would have the same-effect on Thoroughbred horses and racing in the United States as it had in Great Britain.<sup>51</sup>

Some people also thought that the government should subsidize racing by committing one hundred thousand dollars annually to the sport. It was argued that this was a “trifling” amount when compared to other government wartime expenditures. The added money injected into the sport would cause breeders to become more serious about improving their stock. If the government did inject money into the sport, it was predicted that there would be a vast improvement in the Thoroughbred. To the proponents of this idea, it was apparent that an improved Thoroughbred equaled an improved cavalry horse. They claimed that all European and Asian countries with a respected cavalry had subsidized programs to improve their horse stock and that the United States had the only government that did not invest in some sort of activity that improved the nation’s horses.<sup>52</sup>

The beginning of the Civil War saw racing’s decline. Racing could still be found, but the areas where it was most popular, such as in the southern and border states, discontinued racing. As the war progressed into 1863, racing started to reappear where it had vanished. It still was not as strong as it was before the war, but it was on the rise. Furthermore, breeding stock and

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<sup>51</sup> “Racing Prizes by the Government,” *Wilkes’ Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY) September 5, 1863.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*; Whether or not the claim that European cavalry horses were so good because of government-sponsored racing bares further research. For this paper, however, the fact that people promoting racing believed this is what matters.



racehorses started to become more valuable. This was a result of simple supply and demand; racing was on the rise, so horses were needed to accommodate racing. This is reflected in the number of sales and the mounting sale prices for horses. Not only were there more horse sales, but races were being planned for the immediate and distant future. This indicated that horsemen realized that there was and always would be a need for distractions during times of great distress. This was a major difference from the previous two years, when race courses were shuttered, races canceled, and horses recruited for the cavalry instead of the track.

## Chapter 3

### 1864-1865: Returning to Normalcy

Between January 1864 and the end of May 1865, the United States saw racing rebound even further than it had in 1863. Racing was on the upswing in most northern and Union controlled and occupied southern states. Perhaps the best measuring stick of racing was the value of racehorses. While auctions had been popular in the past, private sales became more appealing to those selling fewer numbers of horses. Gone were the days of the two-thousand-dollar horse being the talk of the town. Now it was not uncommon for horses to be sold for eight thousand dollars or more. One cannot judge the popularity of racing on sales prices alone, however. One must also look at the number of actual races. Racing continued to increase in northern states and areas where horse racing had vanished because of the war. Not only were new meets organized, but tracks were being renovated and new tracks were opening in cities that already had tracks. Furthermore, racing organizations started working together to improve the sport and protect the sport and horsemen. These organizations coordinated their meets, assuring that the best horses would compete against each other and would grace each track. The organizations also started to establish a nationwide network to protect owners against the guerrilla activity that targeted racehorses. All this was done because of the revived interest in horse racing across the nation.

Among the military, racing morphed into something different from the previous years. While the sport was still used to increase morale and provide an escape for the troops, the ending of the war brought new opportunities to soldiers. During this time, soldiers with the financial means saw a new way to increase their prestige or wealth. These men looked to establish themselves in the racing industry by acquiring cheap horses that the Union army had confiscated

so that they could race or breed horses. Other soldiers saw an opportunity to enrich themselves by buying horses at government auctions and selling them to trainers or breeders in the North. Either way, horse racing was still an important part of the soldier's life.

During 1864 and 1865, auctions were more common than in 1863. They were held throughout the year and advertised heavily in the sports newspaper *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times*. The auctions became so common that, unlike 1863, there was little actual coverage dedicated to the auctions. *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* did not send any special correspondents to these auctions or, if they did, they did not publish the correspondents' reports. What became more common and profitable was the private sale of racehorses. In the first years of the war a good horse would be sold for around two thousand dollars. In the last two years of the war, this would vastly change.

Starting in 1864, the value of racehorses skyrocketed. One of the best trotting mares of the time, Flora Temple, went up for sale when her owner died in October. Naturally, this caused much interest. She sold for eight thousand dollars, and many people thought she would go for more, seeing as how she could serve as both trotter and broodmare. Still, this was not the only racehorse that went for thousands of dollars. In St. Louis, a Thoroughbred simply known as "Billy" was sold for thirty thousand dollars in March 1864. Nothing else is known about the horse, but the price was so high that it was reported nationwide. In February 1865, the champion trotting stallions Ethan Allen and Honest Allen were sold privately. The purchase price was not listed, but it can be safely assumed that the price was high because Ethan Allen was sold seven years later when he was twenty-one for over seven thousand dollars. In 1865, both stallions were still champion trotting horses and highly prized breeding stallions. High sale prices are indicative

of demand. In the case of racehorses in 1864 and 1865, it shows that racing was on the upswing, if not already thriving.<sup>1</sup>

New Orleans, a sanctuary of horse racing before the war, restarted racing as soon as possible after the Union occupation. In 1863, the city showed promise that the racing scene would return in full force. However, organized racing remained in the same condition in 1864 as it had been in the year before. In fact, there were signs that it might have deteriorated a bit. There was not a single organized meet reported in the national media, but rather three different days of racing, two in October and one in November. These races only had only two or three horses entered, and the purses were just a few hundred dollars. The next year, 1865, was similar. There was not an organized meet but only individual days of racing. More horses entered these races, but the purses were even lower.<sup>2</sup>

Even though the national media did not report an organized meet in New Orleans during these two years, there is evidence that the sport was still popular in the city. A Navy surgeon staying in the city while his ship was being repaired wrote a letter about the “godless ways of the Creoles.” He compared New Orleans to the Biblical city Sodom and implied that Sunday was a day set aside for fun and sports, not church. One of the main events was horse racing. The race course was overflowing with patrons, and money was changing hands. Gambler George Devol also recounts how he participated in and bet on races in New Orleans during this time. These races were often hastily arranged and took place at the closest place suitable to a race, be it a

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<sup>1</sup> “Flora at the Sale of the Late McDonald’s Horses,” *Wilkes’ Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), November 5, 1864; “Sentence of a Merchant,” *Evening Star* (Washington D.C.), August 27, 1864. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1864-08-27/ed-1/seq-2/>. Last accessed April 4, 2019.; “Sale of Ethan and Honest Allen,” *Wilkes’ Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), March 4, 1865.

<sup>2</sup> Crickmore, *Racing Calendars*, 111, 145-146.

track or road. After participants agreed to race, the word would go out to the community and hundreds would show up.<sup>3</sup>

The question is, why did New Orleans, after a promising year in horses that the Union army confiscated and subsequently auctioned off to northerners limited the amount of organized racing in which New Orleans' horsemen could participate. Racing in the city was at a severe disadvantage with many of its best racehorses leaving. The military activity in Louisiana was another possible reason that organized racing failed to come back to the city. Between regular army excursions and guerrilla activity, raising quality horses was a risky business, as one risked having the horses stolen by either side. In this respect, New Orleans, and all of Louisiana, was in a similar situation as Kentucky in 1863.

Horse racing exploded in St. Louis during 1864 and 1865. In May 1864, the city hosted a seven-day race meet, consisting of fourteen races. This was on par with St. Louis' fall meet of the previous year. The main difference was the purses. In 1863, the purses averaged approximately three hundred dollars, with one race worth one thousand dollars. Most purses during the spring meet were over five hundred dollars, including one worth \$1,200, another worth \$4,750, and yet another worth \$5,750. This enticed the top trainers from across the nation to bring their horses to St. Louis. While the purses were impressive on their own, perhaps the most impressive aspect of this meet was the amount of money that changed hands among gamblers. One reporter predicted that the "handle" (the amount of money wagered) was over two hundred thousand dollars for a single race. Even if the reporter's estimate was double the amount of money bet on the race, this is a spectacular sum, especially considering that this was the

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<sup>3</sup> "A Sabbath in New Orleans," *Congregationalist* (Boston, MA), Friday, May 06, 1864. <http://0-find.galegroup.com.library.uark.edu/ncnp/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=NCNP&userGroupName=faye28748&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&docId=GT3012906033&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0>. Last accessed March 21, 2019; Devol, *Forty Years a Gambler*, 224-226.

handle for one race, not for the entire day or meet. While no attendance figures were reported, it can safely be assumed that the meet was well attended based on the amount wagered.<sup>4</sup>

St. Louis hosted another race meet in the fall of 1864. The purses for the autumn meet were only a fraction of what was offered earlier that year. The highest purse offered was nine hundred dollars. Aside from the smaller purses, the prominent trainers who brought their race strings to St. Louis in the spring were missing. Looking at this, one would think that the meet would not live up to its previous one. That assumption would be wrong. The meet was originally planned to last six days and have sixteen races. The meet performed so well that two extra days and three races were added. While neither attendance nor gambling figures were reported, the two extra days, which included purses that were slightly higher than the average from the rest of the meet, indicated that the races were well-received by the public. In fact, the Laclede Association, the local jockey club, announced that it made more money than had been predicted. The meet was so successful that many predicted that horse racing was only going to grow the following year.<sup>5</sup>

The following spring, St. Louis hosted what was becoming an annual spring meet. Much like the previous spring, some of the highest profile owners and trainers participated. Five days of racing with eleven races were scheduled. The purses were slightly above those of the autumn meet and averaged between three and five hundred dollars. Three races had purses above one thousand dollars, with the highest being twelve-hundred dollars. However, unlike the two meets

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<sup>4</sup> Crickmore, *Racing Calendars*, 67-70, 77-80; "Horse Race in St. Louis," *Boston Daily Advertiser* (Boston, MA), Tuesday, May 17, 1864.

<http://0-find.galegroup.com.library.uark.edu/ncnp/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=NCNP&userGroupName=faye28748&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&docId=GT3006401994&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0>. Last accessed March 30, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Crickmore, *Racing Calendars*, 104-108; "The Turf," *New York Herald* (New York, NY), October 26, 1864. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1864-10-28/ed-1/seq-3/>. Last accessed April 1, 2019.

in 1864, newspapers did not report extraordinary handles or attendance, but concentrated on the results instead. This makes it hard to determine the success of the meet, although an extra day with three races was added at the end. Using past events as a measuring stick, this indicates a very successful meet that made more money than expected.<sup>6</sup>

Chicago continued its expansion of racing into 1864 and 1865. Chicago Driving Park hosted trotting races throughout the year, although its crowning glory was the two meets that it hosted in 1864. The first meet was held in early July. Before the meet commenced, the track's governing body advertised that the purses would total no less than ten thousand dollars. This enticed owners from across the nation to ship their horses to Chicago to compete. So many horses raced in the meet that the track was able to increase the purse to over twenty-five thousand dollars. The public also attended the races in high numbers. Enthusiasm ran so high that prisoners detained in nearby Camp Douglas could hear the cheers from the crowd during the meet. The autumn meet at the Chicago Driving Park did not attract the same quality of horses as the earlier meet, which was to be expected due to the lower purses. However, according to the September 17, 1864, edition of *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times*, the meet was a rousing success with the public.<sup>7</sup>

In the first half of 1865, Chicago hosted a series of racing days at each of its racetracks. The attendance corresponded with the quality of the horses running, which depended on the purse. Some days had higher attendance than others. However, the actions of the Chicago Driving Park Association defined the year for Chicago. The Association decided to coordinate meets with track associations and jockey clubs nationwide in the hopes of all tracks working

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<sup>6</sup> Crickmore, *Racing Calendars*, 125-128.

<sup>7</sup> "Chicago Driving Park," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), July 2, 1864; George Levy, *To Die in Chicago: Confederate Prisoners at Camp Douglas, 1862-1865* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 2008), 219.

together. This was the first report of a racing organization coordinating with tracks beyond its immediate region, at least since the Civil War had begun. Yet, the aim of the Association was not to coordinate races but to prevent thieves, including rebel guerrillas, from profiting from stolen horses. Prior to this proposal, a stolen racehorse could be taken to a track where the horse was not known. For example, a horse stolen in Kentucky could be taken to Detroit and nobody would be the wiser. The immediate goals of this proposal were self-explanatory, but it had a deeper impact on the racing industry. This was one of the first steps in creating a national organization to govern horse racing.<sup>8</sup>

In many ways, the Chicago Driving Park Association was responding to events in Kentucky. Kentucky went through turbulent times in 1863, and the tenuous conditions continued into 1864. General Stephen G. Burbridge declared martial law and made the state a military district, suspending many constitutional rights of Kentuckians. This was a response to guerrilla activity in the state. Guerillas plagued the state and targeted horse farms. A prime target for guerillas was the bluegrass area surrounding Lexington, including R. A. Alexander's Woodburn Farm. Alexander owned some of the best horses in the United States, both breeding stock and racehorses. Woodburn was spared from official military action due to Alexander's nationality, but guerillas did not abide by this rule and sought to acquire horses from the famed farm. The most publicized raid was conducted by Marcellus Jerome Clarke, also known as Sue Mundy, who raided Woodburn in November 1864. In this raid, Clarke's men stole five Thoroughbreds and perhaps one trotting mare while Clarke personally rode off on the Thoroughbred Asteroid. Asteroid, a son of the great stallion Lexington, was foaled in 1861 and was one of the best racehorses of the nineteenth century. By 1864, Asteroid was already known nationally as a

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<sup>8</sup> "Chicago Driving Park," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), February 4, 1865. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014064/1865-02-04/ed-1/seq-4/>. Last accessed March 30, 2019.



champion racehorse. After the raid, a group of men tracked Mundy and was able to negotiate Asteroid's return for two hundred fifty dollars. It is doubtful that Mundy knew the captured horse was Asteroid or else he would not have sold the horse so cheaply, if at all.<sup>9</sup>

General John Hunt Morgan was also active in Kentucky during 1864. While he did not target the famed Woodburn Farm, he did covet the prized Thoroughbreds of Kentucky. In one widely circulated story, during the summer of 1864, Morgan stole Thoroughbreds worth more than twenty-five thousand dollars from John Clay, including the prized Thoroughbred mare Skedaddle. Clay pursued Morgan in order to try to negotiate the return of the mare. According to reports, Clay offered to trade two horses he had on hand, each worth five hundred dollars, and six hundred dollars in cash for Skedaddle. Morgan decided to take Clay's two horses, the money, and to keep Skedaddle, leaving Clay on foot and without money.<sup>10</sup> While this story was widely reported, it is that the event actually happened. However, this story is important in other ways, even if false. It gives readers a glimpse into what was happening in Kentucky and how Kentuckians viewed the raiders. Even more importantly, it shows how prized Thoroughbreds were in both the public and military spheres.

While conflict curbed organized racing within the state in 1863, the horsemen and citizens of the Bluegrass State were determined to reignite their racing traditions going into 1864, despite continuing hostilities. Lexington hosted Kentucky's first meet of the year in May and June. This was a four day meet with purses that ranged from one hundred and fifty dollars to five hundred and fifty dollars, with the only noteworthy owner that attended the meet being John

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<sup>9</sup> Mangum, *A Kingdom for a Horse*, 55-58; Maryjean Wall, *How Kentucky Became Southern: A Tale of Outlaws, Horse Thieves, Gamblers, and Breeders* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 49.

<sup>10</sup> "How John Morgan Traded Horses," *Nashville Union* (Nashville, TN), August 9, 1864. <http://0-find.galegroup.com.library.uark.edu/ncnp/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=NCNP&userGroupName=faye28748&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&docId=GT3000827949&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0>. Last accessed April 3, 2019.

Clay. This does not seem impressive when compared to the races in St. Louis, but this meet was longer and had higher purses compared to Lexington's previous race meet.<sup>11</sup>

The following September and October, Lexington hosted another race meet. At seven days, this was longer than the spring meet. The purses were also much higher. While the highest purse in the spring was five hundred and fifty dollars, the purses in the fall meet ranged between five hundred dollars to one thousand dollars. The higher purses also attracted better quality horses and trainers. The most respected trainers on the East Coast and in the Midwest brought their racing strings to compete for the increased prizes. This meet took place while multiple guerrillas were riding throughout the state, including the Lexington area. A collection of quality racehorses must have been tempting. However, the horsemen and citizens were willing to risk their livelihoods, and possibly lives, in order to entertain and be entertained. The races must have provided a much-needed diversion when under constant threat of guerrilla raids.<sup>12</sup>

Nine days after Lexington's autumn meet closed, Louisville's Woodlawn Race Course hosted a six-day meet. The purses ranged from three hundred dollars to one thousand and fifty dollars. This meet attracted many of the same trainers and horses that had been in Lexington the which would be stolen a month later. The races caused much excitement in Louisville, and the attendance was reported as being quite good, with the races being of "excellent character."<sup>13</sup> Even though Louisville only hosted one meet in 1864, this one meet was much larger than the one day of racing that Louisville's Woodlawn Race Course hosted in 1863. It is remarkable that Louisville was able to host a race meet. The city was going through a turbulent time. Citizens were being accused of treason, the city was increasing its fortifications, and guerrilla prisoners

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<sup>11</sup> Crickmore, *Racing Calendars*, 80-81.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 100-102.

<sup>13</sup> "Woodlawn Fall Meeting," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), October 22, 1864.

were being executed for the crimes they had committed. The city needed a respite from the tension, and the meet provided this break.<sup>14</sup>

Guerrilla activity aimed toward Kentucky's horse farms slowed down in the first half of 1865 but did not stop completely. On February 2nd, Jerome Clarke and William C. Quantrill worked together to raid Woodburn Farm to replenish their horses. Unlike the previous raid on the farm, the guerrillas had researched and planned the raid. They knew which of Alexander's horses were the best, both Thoroughbreds and Standardbreds, and where they were located. Quantrill demanded that Alexander personally give him the horses requested. Alexander offered to give the raiders money instead of horses, including ten thousand dollars for one horse, but ended up having to give the Quantrill-Clarke gang most of the horses they wanted. Luckily, unbeknownst to the guerrillas, stable hands were able to substitute some horses, including Asteroid. After the raid, there was a concerted effort to retrieve the horses. However, because the guerrillas scattered in smaller units after the raid, they could only be recovered piecemeal, if at all. The last horse recovered was returned to Alexander the following June.<sup>15</sup>

Even with the constant threat of guerrillas, Lexington decided to host the spring meet in 1865. Hoping to lure the best trainers and horses, the purses were substantially higher. Two races were valued at over one thousand dollars, with the highest having a purse of three thousand and three hundred dollars. The increased purses did not attract many horsemen. Even Lexington based R. A. Alexander was absent from the meet. This caused the six-day event to stage-only six races, whereas the norm for the time would have been a minimum of two races per day, especially with such large purses.<sup>16</sup> The reason most horsemen probably decided to skip this

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<sup>14</sup> Crickmore, *Racing Calendars*, 51, 100-102; Damien Beach, *Civil War Battles, Skirmishes, and Events in Kentucky* (Louisville: Different Drummer Books, 1995), 198-202.

<sup>15</sup> Mangum, *A Kingdom for a Horse*, 74-91.

<sup>16</sup> Crickmore, *Racing Calendars*, 128-130.

meet was because of the guerrilla activity mentioned above. If Woodburn, a farm prepared for attacks, could be raided, there was no guarantee that guerrillas would not target the race.

Ever since its capture by Union forces in 1862, Nashville had been under constant military pressure. It was not until after the battle of Nashville in December 1864 that the city was relieved of a serious military threat. In February 1865, two men bought the city's old racecourse and started plans to renovate the facility host Thoroughbred, Standardbred, and Quarter Horse races. It was their hope to have the course ready by April 1865, when they planned to host Nashville's first spring meet in four years. While there are no recorded race meets held in April, a three-day meet featuring both Thoroughbred and Standardbred races was held in May. The purses for Thoroughbreds ranged between four hundred to eight hundred dollars, while the purses for Standardbreds were only one hundred dollars. The entrance fee for the public was one dollar. Even though the races were not of the highest quality, the meet performed above expectations and made enough money to schedule races throughout the summer, with two full meets coming in the fall of 1865.<sup>17</sup>

The quality of racing in Nashville suffered from a lack of quality horses. Before the Civil War, Tennessee had a reputation for breeding some of the best horses ever to grace the turf. Much like New Orleans, all racing and breeding operations either scaled down or stopped completely after the war began. However, there were still plenty of good racehorses in the state, which were targeted by horsemen from the North. Starting in 1864, northern horsemen started buying confiscated Thoroughbreds in Tennessee and shipping them north. Among the horses taken were some owned by former Confederate general William Giles Harding, a famed breeder before the war. Many of these Tennessee horses had better pedigrees than those found anywhere

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<sup>17</sup> "Racing at Nashville: Reorganization and Reconstruction," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), February 18, 1865; "Nashville Race Course," *Nashville Daily Union* (Nashville, TN), May 25, 1865.

but in Kentucky and were bought not for racing but for the sole purpose of breeding to improve Thoroughbred stock in the North.<sup>18</sup>

In Washington, D.C., the proprietors of the National Course planned to host a Thoroughbred meet in early May 1864. This was to be a six-day meet, with purses that went as high as seven hundred and fifty dollars and additional money allocated towards the purses if the meet was successful. However, after first being postponed several times the race had to be abandoned altogether, due to circumstances out of the control of those planning the meet. One of those circumstances was the extreme heat that Washington was facing. It was the hottest and driest spring and summer that many could remember. A larger problem was Confederate Lieutenant General Jubal Early's invasion of Maryland and march on Washington in June and July 1864. With the heat and news of Early potentially attacking the city, many prominent members of society, the same members of society that regularly supported the races, left town. After this failed attempt at a race meet, Thoroughbred racing in Washington was put on hold until the war ended.<sup>19</sup>

Just because Washington did not host a Thoroughbred meet in 1864 or the first half of 1865 does not mean that the city was without racing; on the contrary, trotting races were actively held in the city. The trotting matches were one-day affairs, usually held on a Friday or Saturday. However, there were times when they were set up much like a Thoroughbred meet, with races happening multiple days in a row. The first trotting match of 1864 was held in February amid much fanfare. Many people came out to see the races, and betting was heavy.

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<sup>18</sup> "Blooded Stock in Tennessee," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY) February 20, 1864; "Thorough-Breds in Tennessee," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), April 9, 1864.

<sup>19</sup> "National Jockey Club: Spring Meeting," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), March 5, 1864; "Washington Race Postponement," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), April 16, 1864; Joseph Judge, *Season of Fire: The Confederate Strike on Washington* (Berryville, Virginia: Rockbridge Publishing Company, 1994). 216-217.

From here the trotting season took off and lasted into 1865. While these races did not have the prestige or the wealthy clientele of Thoroughbred races, the lower classes and soldiers attended the races in great numbers and covered the ten-acre facility until there was barely room to stand. These people tended to bet extremely heavily and commit all of their energy to cheering for the racers.<sup>20</sup>

Baltimore once again mirrored Washington, as to be expected with their close proximity. The city had many of the same problems as Washington, including the climate and Early's invasion of Maryland, that prevented an organized Thoroughbred meet. While there is no mention of a Thoroughbred meet being planned or happening, there are several mentions of single-day trotting races in the newspapers *Evening Star*, out of Washington, and *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times*. These races took place throughout 1864 and into 1865, and the purses averaged between one hundred and three hundred dollars, which was the same as for the trotting races in Washington and New York City. Each report of the races anticipated large turnouts at the races, showing that the races were still popular in Baltimore.

New Jersey saw its 1863 plans to concentrate on future meets come to fruition in 1864. Starting in January 1864, the Passaic Association, in Paterson, began advertising for their spring meet, which was to take place in early June. The meet guaranteed three days of racing, with purses expected to reach a thousand dollars or more. The highlights of the meet would be the Jersey Derby and several smaller stake races. The Jersey Derby promised to bring in the best Thoroughbreds in the country. The one thousand dollar purse attached to the race would be supplemented by the entry fees, potentially making the races very lucrative for the winners.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> "Trotting at Washington City," *Wilkes Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), February 20, 1864; Armistead, *Horses and Mules in the Civil War*, 91.

<sup>21</sup> "The Passaic County Agricultural Society," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), January 2, 1864.

The Passaic Association's spring meet turned out to be a rousing success. Before, during, and after the meet, the main topics of conversation in Paterson were the war, the state of the country, and the races, and in no certain order. The nation's top horsemen, attracted by the high purses, brought their best horses, flooding the track with an unprecedented number of entrants. The Jersey Derby alone had thirty-two horses entered, which brought the purse to two thousand and six hundred dollars. The increased purse increased the excitement and attracted people from the entire area. People from New York City came by train, with the demand so great that extra trains had to be assigned to handle the high number of passengers. The crowds overflowed the grounds and bet extremely heavily. Many agreed that the quality of the races and the horses rivaled any found in England, arguably the racing capital of the world at this time.<sup>22</sup>

The Passaic Association hosted another meet in the autumn of 1864. The highlight of the meet was the St. Ledger Stakes. This race had a base purse of one thousand dollars that would be added to the entry fees, the same as the Jersey Derby. Twenty-seven horses entered the race, which bumped the purse to two thousand and three hundred dollars. The attendance was noted as good on the first day but lower than expected, which was blamed on the dreary weather. However, the remainder of the meet boasted exceptional attendance and was so successful that an extra day was added. This extra day featured a match race with horses that had met each other in the St. Ledger Stakes. The purse was the highest of the meet, worth five thousand and seven hundred fifty dollars.<sup>23</sup>

The races at Paterson were successful for many reasons. The city had a large working class population. These people were probably drawn to the races as a way of forgetting the

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<sup>22</sup> "The Paterson Races," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), June 18, 1864; "The Turf," *New York Herald* (New York, NY), June 7, 1864. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1865-06-07/ed-1/seq-5/>. Last accessed March 28, 2019.

<sup>23</sup> "Paterson Fall Races," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), September 24, 1864.

tedious nature of their lives. The course was also relatively close to New York City, which added large numbers of spectators. However, the biggest reason that the Passaic Association was able to host successful meets was that the Association worked hand-in-hand with the race track in Saratoga Springs, New York. In order to qualify for some of the best races in Saratoga, a horse had to compete at Paterson. With the success of Saratoga's first year and the promise for an even better year in 1864, this partnership guaranteed that trainers would bring their best horses to Paterson in order to compete at Saratoga. Not only did this attract the best trainers and horses, it also attracted the people who wanted to watch quality horses but could not attend the Saratoga meet.<sup>24</sup>

Paterson was not the only city in New Jersey to host a race meet. Hoboken hosted a meet in May 1865. Hoboken had hosted a small meet in 1864, but it was extremely small and did not attract much coverage or many spectators. The 1865 Hoboken spring meet did not have the prestige or purses of the Passaic Association's races, but the meet did attract some very good horses. Two selling races were scheduled, one with horses to be sold for four thousand dollars and the other for three thousand dollars.<sup>25</sup> This ensured that the both the horses and races would be of high quality and would attract a large number of patrons. This did, in fact, entice spectators to come to the races in very large numbers. The meet was claimed to be a stunning success, so much so that nobody could find anything to complain about and more races were promised later that year.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> "Saratoga Races," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), January 16, 1864.

<sup>25</sup> A selling race, or claiming race in today's terminology, is a race in which the horse running is for sell for a set price. Before the race, somebody can buy the horse.

<sup>26</sup> "The Turf: Hoboken Races," *New York Herald* (New York, NY), May 26, 1865.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1865-05-26/ed-1/seq-8/>. Last accessed February 27, 2019.



As the high attendance at Paterson showed, there was a passion for racing in New York City and the state as a whole. Multiple races were held regularly at New York City's Fashion Course and Union Course. These were trotting races and were not generally worth as much as Thoroughbred races. This did not dampen attendance or limit the number of races held in 1864. Between April and October, Fashion Course held twenty-five racing days, while Union Course held twenty-seven racing days. These races were very popular with the public. It was not uncommon for over five thousand people, who bet thousands of dollars, to be present for a single day of racing. What is also notable is that each racing day was just a series of heats between two horses. The people were not necessarily coming to see a field of high-quality horses competing, like those at Paterson. Instead, these people came to gamble and enjoy life.<sup>27</sup>

While trotting races in New York City were the norm, the city did host a Thoroughbred meet at Centreville Course, on Long Island, in late June and early July 1864. The meet was nothing spectacular because purses were low, trainers that had promised to come from other states did not show up, and the weather was extremely hot and dry. Due to these factors, the attendance was lackluster. However, the disappointing result of the meet is not what is important. This meet was the first meet to be held by the New York Jockey Club (NYJC). The NYJC was founded only a month before the Centreville meet, and its members included most of those who had formed the Saratoga Association the previous year. Centreville Course had a reputation as the best racetrack in the United States, which is why the NYJC choose this track as its base of operations. The NYJC was determined to improve Thoroughbred racing in New York City and connect it to the races in Saratoga, in a similar way as Paterson, thus hoping to draw the same

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<sup>27</sup> This information was compiled from "The Trotting Record of 1864," a three-part article in *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* January 14, 21, and 28 1865; "The Turf," *Portland Daily Press* (Portland, ME) June 16, 1864. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83016025/1864-06-16/ed-1/seq-3/>. Last accessed April 5, 2019.

crowds as Paterson. The NYJC also made plans to combine the local jockey clubs in New York into a single organization.<sup>28</sup>

Racing in New York City expanded even more in the spring of 1865. Standardbred racing was still the primary form of racing, but the purses offered nearly equaled the higher purses found in Thoroughbred racing. Both Fashion Course and the Union Course had ten or more races scheduled before June, and multiple races had purses over one thousand dollars. One race even offered a purse of four thousand dollars. Prior to this, a one or two hundred dollar purse was considered good. People could not remember the purses being so high, even before the war. These two courses had always been considered among the best trotting courses in the United States, but they had never drawn the number of horses that they did in 1865. From all reports, the excitement and attendance remained high all year, perhaps higher than any previous year.<sup>29</sup>

Following its successful initial meeting in 1863, the Saratoga Association's race meet of 1864 was an even bigger success. Prior to the meet, new investors were found to increase accommodations in hopes of preventing the same lodging problems from the previous year's meet. The crowds that showed up for the 1864 meet were said to be even larger than the previous year. The crowds made moving around the city almost impossible. One historian compared it to modern sporting events where fans invade and take over a city en masse. Many notable people were present for the meet, including Senator Edwin D. Morgan, the Speaker of the House of Representatives and future vice president Schuyler Colfax, multimillionaires William B. Astor, Cornelius Vanderbilt (along with his two sons, William and Cornelius Jeremiah), and Alexander

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<sup>28</sup> "The American Turf: New York Jockey Club Races," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), July 9, 1864; "Meeting of the New York Jockey Club," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), May 7, 1864.

<sup>29</sup> "The Trotting Season in New York," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, D. C), April 4, 1865. <http://0-find.galegroup.com.library.uark.edu/ncnp/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=NCNP&userGroupName=faye28748&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&docId=GT3017883757&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0>. Last accessed April 5, 2019; "Trotting at the Fashion Course," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), September 16, 1865.

T. Stewart. The Roosevelt, Delano, and Rockefeller families were also present, but they had not yet risen to the same level of fame as the previously mentioned men. However, the most notable guest was Robert Todd Lincoln, the son of Abraham Lincoln.<sup>30</sup>

The main draw of the meet was the Travers Stakes, which would become one of the most prestigious races run in North America. This race was to be run on the first day of the race meet. Over thirty horses entered the race to compete for the two thousand and five hundred dollar purse. More than five thousand people turned out for this race alone. By end of the meet, over twenty thousand different spectators paid for admission. The spectators at Saratoga were not the society. The crowd was reported to be one of the most fashionable ever to gather in the United States. Some even compared it to those at Ascot, the premiere racecourse in England, which attracted most of the English nobility and had the monarchy's support (and still does). During the meet, ticket sales reached over three thousand dollars for a single day, spectators wagered over five hundred dollars per race, and parties were hosted where people were charged up to five hundred dollars per meal. To these patrons, Saratoga Springs was the last "watering-place" for the wealthy not touched by the Civil War, and where they could truly escape from the war and enjoy themselves.<sup>31</sup>

With the increase of racing and purses, it should come as no surprise that the breeding of racehorses increased as well. After the onset of the Civil War, the breeding industry rapidly slowed down. Since there was not a national breed registry at this time, records of foal crops were not extensively kept or maintained, so it is impossible to know how many Thoroughbreds or Standardbreds were foaled each year. However, one can look at advertisements for stallion

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<sup>30</sup> "Saratoga Races and Hotels," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY) May 21, 1865; Hotaling, *They're Off!*, 51-53.

<sup>31</sup> Hotaling, *They're Off!*, 56-60.

services. Most Thoroughbred and Standardbred breeders advertised their stallions in the sporting newspaper *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times*. Starting in 1861, the number of advertisements dropped dramatically, confined to roughly to half a page or less. This trend continued until April 1864, when advertisement for stallions increased so much that a page and a half to two pages, depending on the issue, had to be dedicated to the advertisements. Going into 1865, stallion services continued to be advertised at a high rate. Stallion services for race horses would not have been so heavily advertised if there had not been a demand for their progeny, especially in back-to-back years.

In the mid-nineteenth century, R. A. Alexander in Kentucky had the best stallion in the United States with Lexington. Lexington was one of the best racehorses of his time, but his success as a stallion is unparalleled. As such, the demand for Lexington's service was extremely high. Unlike most operations at this time, Alexander also kept fastidious notes about the mares that Lexington bred. Unlike most stallions, the demand for Lexington did not drop during the war, but in 1864, Alexander stopped selling the stallion's able in order to breed his own mares. Lexington's services had been in such demand because of how well his progeny did on the track. In 1864, they earned almost as much as they had in any year before the war. In 1865, Lexington's offspring earned more than they had in any other single year.<sup>32</sup>

The popularity of horse racing and the breeding of horses increased so much between 1864 and 1865 that the Internal Revenue Commission (later, the IRS), founded in 1862 to help fund the war, became involved. Prior to 1864, the government did not tax horse racing. The closest that the government came to taxing horse racing was to require horse traders to buy a ten-dollar license after the Revenue Act of 1862 was passed. This changed in 1864 when the

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<sup>32</sup> John Hervey, *Racing in America: 1665-1865*, vol 2. (privately pub., The Jockey Club, 1944), 300-304.

government passed the Revenue Act of 1864. Section seventy-nine of the act stated which businesses required a license to operate. In the statute, all horse breeders who owned a stallion and was paid for the stallion's services were required to obtain a ten-dollar license. Horse racing was not mentioned in either statute, but by the summer of 1865 the popularity of racing was increasing so dramatically that the government ruled, based on the language in the statute, that the sport fell under the purview of circuses. In the statute, a circus was defined as an establishment that hosted acts of acrobatics or horsemanship. The government justified its classification of horse racing as a circus by defining racing as horsemanship. After this ruling, every race track, was required to pay a one-hundred-dollar license fee. It is worth noting that the government decided to tax racing only after it became widespread and profitable.<sup>33</sup>

Going into 1864 and 1865, the war was as bloody as ever. The Union organized and coordinated an all-out offensive against the Confederacy in every theater of war. The Army of the Potomac marched through Virginia, Sherman led his army through Georgia, and the Union tried to capture northern Louisiana and invade Texas. The Confederate armies were just as active. The Army of Northern Virginia was engaging the Army of the Potomac, Early invaded Maryland; the Army of Tennessee was trying to protect Atlanta before attempting to capture Nashville. Simultaneously, the armies in the Trans-Mississippi were doing all they could to hold back the Union. It was a trying time to be a soldier, and soldiers used any mechanism they could to escape the harsh realities of war. However, as the war began to wind down, either due to where a soldier was stationed (such as Nashville after the failed Confederate attack in December

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<sup>33</sup> "The Turf: Internal Revenue Decision," *New York Herald* (New York, NY) July 1, 1865. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1865-07-01/ed-1/seq-5/>. Last accessed April 3, 2019; Revenue Act of 1862, Pub. L. 37-119, 2 Stat. 432 (1863); Revenue Act of 1864, Pub. L. 38-173, 2 Stat. 223 (1865).

1864) or because the war was close to the end, soldiers began to approach horse racing, or racehorses to be more specific, differently.

If the need to maintain morale was one of the main reasons that horse racing was sanctioned, then racing was especially important during periods of inactivity, such as winter. Inactivity can cause soldiers to become disheartened and lose the will to fight. When this happens, desertion became more common. To prevent this, officers had to be inventive in creating ways to keep their men busy with enjoyable activities. One Confederate officer in Arkansas did this in two ways. First, he hosted mock battles. Secondly, he endorsed horse racing for his men. Soldiers in the Eastern Theatre also had camp races that were sanctioned by officers. A North Carolinian unit stationed in Smithville, North Carolina, during April 1864 regularly held races. These races were not only attended by soldiers, but also by members of the Smithville community. What was notable about this case was that gambling was allowed, and much money passed from person to person, both civilians and soldiers. These camp races served as distractions for the men as much as the large meets hosted by Union generals earlier in the war. The only difference was that the races were not organized in grand meets or held at race tracks.<sup>34</sup>

However, during the last half of 1864 and into 1865, the Confederate armies faced a shortage of horses and supplies. The situation was so dire in February 1865 that General Nathan Bedford Forrest was forced to issue a set of general orders to keep his men from harming horses. Some soldiers, including Forrest's son, did not agree with these orders and laid out a race track in front of Forrest's headquarters. The men proceeded to race their horses wildly while others gambled on them. When Forrest became aware of the races, he joined in the festivities and

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<sup>34</sup> Daniel E. Sutherland, "1864: 'A Strange, Wild Time,'" in *Rugged and Sublime: The Civil War in Arkansas*, ed. Mark K. Christ (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994), 107; John G. Barrett, *The Civil War in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 368-369.

gambled alongside his men. However, as soon as the races were finished, Forrest had the men, his son included, arrested and court-martialed.<sup>35</sup>

Soldiers at the siege of Petersburg also enjoyed horse racing. Shortly after the siege began, Union soldiers set up two racecourses just behind their lines, one on Halifax Road and the other on New Market Road north of the James River. Both of these courses were active for the duration of the siege. Soldiers not on the front lines would line up along the course to watch the races or even participate in them. Enlisted men, officers, and even staff officers from divisions and corps all competed. It was reported that this horse racing was the most popular sport in the army at this time.<sup>36</sup>

Horse racing in the army did not have to be a competition between men or even use army horses. Some men bought their own horses and often rode them against their own clock. One man in the First Alabama Cavalry (Union) bought a trotting mare and a sulky (racing cart). The mare was not to be used for military reasons but solely for entertainment. This cavalryman would take his mare out in the evening and race against time. No one was around; it was just the man and his horse. There was no thrill of competition nor prize to be won. It was the cavalryman's way to wind down and forget that he was in the army.<sup>37</sup>

The horses raced by soldiers were more than just horses to them. The soldiers developed a bond with their horses. If it was a good racer, then an entire company could prize the horse. The horse became a symbol for the men in the same way that a unit identified with its insignia or flag. The love and pride men had for racers went beyond winning money. Racehorses were

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<sup>35</sup> Brian Steel Wills, *A Battle from the Start: The Life of Nathan Bedford Forrest* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 303-302.

<sup>36</sup> Armistead, *Horses and Mules in the Civil War*, 91.

<sup>37</sup> Glenda McWhirter Todd, *First Alabama Cavalry, U.S.A: Homage to Patriotism* (Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, 1999), 145-153.

something that the men could have pride in and became like members of their families. During the battle of Cold Harbor, one regiment's prized racehorse broke its leg. Not one person could bare to put an end to the horse's suffering. A man from another regiment had to be brought in to end the horse's life. The men dug a grave extra deep so "the buzzards could not get him," even as their dead comrades still lay exposed on the battlefield. The men then marked the horse's grave with a wooden marker.<sup>38</sup>

Horse racing took on a different meaning for many officers in the Union Army in the final two years the war. These men looked beyond the war and wanted to establish themselves as racehorse owners or to enrich themselves. One of the officers who wanted to establish himself in postwar America was General Hooker. In order for a horse to be officially recognized, the horse's name had to be publicly claimed. To do this, the name had to be submitted to *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* so that the newspaper could publish it. This is just what Hooker did. Hooker claimed the name "Lookout" for his seven-year-old trotting horse. This horse was described as the best example of its kind, and Hooker had to win a bidding war with French Emperor Napoleon III for the horse. This is the first time during the war that an active member of the military claimed a name for a racehorse.<sup>39</sup>

Claiming names for racehorses is but one way to measure this continued interest in horse racing. The purchase of racehorses is an even better measuring stick. As horses were confiscated and auctioned from newly acquired areas, soldiers with some of the best pedigrees in the United States. Three mares in particular peaked everybody's' interest. The mares had unmatched pedigrees, and each had proven itself a winner on the track. When the three went on the auction

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<sup>38</sup> John Cheves Haskell, *The Haskell Memoirs*, ed. Gilbert E. Govan and James W. Livingood (New York: Van Rees Press, 1960) 70.

<sup>39</sup> "Named Claimed," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), February 6, 1864.



block, two were bought by different captains from the Union army. Both of these men planned to send the mares to the North to become broodmares. Horses of this quality would not be used to produce anything other than horses for the track.<sup>40</sup>

Some officers did not care to establish themselves in racing but did want to make money from the sport. The most prominent officer to do this was George Armstrong Custer. Custer spent much of his postwar career trading racehorses, never successfully. It was during the war that he learned of the potential money to be made from this venture. While in Virginia, Custer bought the confiscated stallion Don Juan from the army for one hundred and twenty-five dollars without knowing the horse's pedigree. Other accounts state that he stole the horse from the owner and demanded the pedigree, knowing that it was a valuable horse. No matter how Custer acquired the horse, he had other plans for it. After consulting *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times*, he discovered that the stallion was worth over ten thousand dollars and was considered the sixth fastest horse in the nation. This was the horse that he rode in the Grand Review in Washington, where he lost control of the horse while in front of the crowd. He later planned to sell the stallion, but Don Juan died before Custer could make the sale.<sup>41</sup>

As the war drew to a close, the expansion of horse racing significantly increased. Whether as a result of more racing, tracks opening, or communication between racing organizations, racing was receiving and requiring more attention from the public. More coverage was dedicated to it in all major newspaper, which reported on races from across the country. Not only was it popular with civilians, but it was still popular in the military. Soldiers fully

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<sup>40</sup> "Favorite Thorough-Bred Stock Takes from Tennessee to the North," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times* (New York, NY), February 4, 1865.

<sup>41</sup> Louis Barnett, *Touched by Fire: The Life, Death, and Mystic Afterlife of George Armstrong Custer* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1996), 263; T.J. Stiles, "That Time When Custer Stole a Horse," *Smithsonian Magazine*, November 2015, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/when-custer-stole-thoroughbred-180956961/>.

participated in camp races, either as riders or spectators. Many of the officers who enjoyed the races also took a chance to increase their financial standings. It was not uncommon to see soldiers buying Thoroughbreds or Standardbreds from the government's auctions of confiscated horses. No matter the arena, civilian or military, horse racing's presence in the life of the people grew larger as the war neared its end.

## Conclusion

During the Civil War, the common man gained greater access to the sport of horse racing, which had previously been more reliant on wealthy patronage. The public learned that horse racing could be used as an escape mechanism to avoid the realities of war. Not only did they use the races as a diversion, but also as a way to gamble. The money gambled by the public allowed organized racing to continue and expand in certain locations. The war allowed more people to become involved in the industry, as ordinary people flocked to the races. This included spectators spending more of their money gambling, more people purchasing racehorses, and more people demanding better quality racehorses. This changed the direction of horse racing going into the future.

The war also exposed people, especially soldiers, to quality racehorses. These soldiers had the opportunity to see and handle racehorses, with southern Thoroughbreds confiscated by the Union army, officers riding Thoroughbreds and Standardbreds, organized horse races in the army, and guerrillas targeting Thoroughbred farms. Without the war, many of these soldiers would not have seen these horses or known that horses of this quality existed. Many soldiers became involved in the racing industry by either owning racehorses, breeding horses, or “pinhooking,” which meant to buy a horse with the sole intention of selling it later for a profit. This brought a new group of people into the racing industry that, along with an increased public presence, forced horse racing to change.

After the war, the sport became more popular than ever, particularly Thoroughbred racing. In fact, Thoroughbred racing became the dominant form of racing in the United States. Standardbred racing, once the most popular type of racing in the North, was only found in a few

select locales. Not only did the public demand more Thoroughbred racing, but people also became less interested in the traditional heat racing and demanded more dash racing, the type of racing that is seen today. The public also demanded more transparency in the sport, which helped lead to the formation of the Jockey Club, the governing body over all horse racing in the United States, in 1894. These public demands and the response from horsemen led to radically higher purses, more horses competing, and increased attendance. This also led to horse racing becoming an organized sport from coast to coast.<sup>1</sup>

These changes created the atmosphere that was instrumental in horse racing becoming a major cultural event in the United States. The most famous races in the country are the Triple Crown races (the Kentucky Derby, Preakness Stakes, and Belmont Stakes). These races are flamboyant events that become fashion shows, with giant floppy hats as the *pièce de résistance* for female fans. They attract famous celebrities, politicians and diplomats, and the wealthy. These races are also attended and enjoyed by the “ordinary” people. In fact, more “ordinary” people than the wealthy attend them. It is not uncommon to see the average person standing next to a millionaire or famous actor during the races. Furthermore, millions more watch the races on television. The Kentucky Derby has averaged over fifteen million viewers since 2009, making it second only to the Super Bowl as the most viewed sporting event in the United States. As for betting, the handle was over two hundred million dollars for the Kentucky Derby in 2018. Even though celebrities receive the attention, it is the common person that drives the success of these horse races and the industry as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robertson, *The History of Thoroughbred Racing in America*, 91-93.

<sup>2</sup> “NBC’s Derby Coverage Averages 15.5 Million Viewers,” *Paulick Report*, May 10, 2016. <https://www.paulickreport.com/news/the-biz/derby-ratings/>; Thomas Novelty, “What could you buy with the bets from the 2018 Kentucky Derby?,” *Louisville Courier Journal* (Louisville, KY), May 6, 2018.

Horse racing also creates heroes that everybody knows, whether or not they are fans of racing. These heroes include Man o' War, Seabiscuit, Secretariat, Smarty Jones, Zenyatta, American Pharaoh, and Justify. During their racing days, national media attention is devoted to these horses. When their racing careers are over, millions come to see them at breeding farms. Indeed, this has sparked an entirely new industry at breeding farms in Kentucky, which charge tour agencies and members of the public to see these horses. Merchandise is sold to the tourists, including shirts, hats, horseshoes, and halters. Not only do people pay to see the horses, but the entertainment industry also takes advantage of their fame, mostly in the form of movies. Modern biographical movies include *Seabiscuit* and *Secretariat*. Horse racing is also depicted in non-biographical movies. A short list includes *The Black Stallion*, *National Velvet*, *Dreamer*, and *Hidalgo*. This tourist industry and these movies capitalize on the heroes made on the track and the public's love of the racehorse and horse racing.

Today, horse racing has become a multibillion-dollar industry in the United States. The sport has expanded and works conjointly with other countries' racing industries to make a truly international business empire. Horses are shipped back and forth between countries to breed and race. People shuttle to different countries to work for part of the year and then return to their home country. It is hard to know the economic impact worldwide, but the impact within the United States is measurable. The racing industry in Kentucky, the center of horse racing in the United States, was valued at three billion dollars in 2013. The economic impact in Maryland, with a smaller racing industry than Kentucky, was half a billion dollars. Most other states with strong racing and breeding programs have revenues as similar to Maryland. An economic study conducted in 2005 determined that horse racing contributed over twenty billion dollars to the United States gross domestic product. This study, however, did not include indirect contributions

to the economy, such as equipment or construction. Horse racing has become a major industry in the United States due to the changes enacted in response to the Civil War.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Holly Wiemers, "Kentucky's Equine Industry has \$3 Billion Economic Impact," University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food, and Environment, September 2013. <http://equine.ca.uky.edu/news-story/kentuckys-equine-industry-has-3-billion-economic-impact>; "Maryland: Horse Racing Industry Has \$500 Million Economic Impact," *Paulick Report*, May 14, 2018. <https://www.paulickreport.com/news/the-biz/maryland-horse-racing-industry-has-500-million-economic-impact/>; Tom LaMara, "U.S. Equine Economic Impact Study Released," *The Horse*, August 1, 2005, <https://thehorse.com/128685/u-s-equine-economic-impact-study-released/>.

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*Memphis Daily Appeal* (Memphis)  
*Nashville Daily Union* (Nashville)  
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