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Tollie Jean Banker
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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Tollie Jean Banker entitled "A Peculiar Diversion: The Social Ramifications of Quarter-Racing in the Eighteenth-Century Tidewater Virginia." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in History.

Lorri Glover, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:
Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

Interim Dean of Graduate Studies

Thesis
2006
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A PECULIAR DIVERSION: THE SOCIAL RAMIFICATIONS OF QUARTER-RACING IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY TIDEWATER VIRGINIA

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Tollie Jean Banker
December 2006

Abstract

Virginia's horse culture combined with the colonists' obsession with immediate gratification created the perfect ingredients for the formation of quarter-racing. Not only did short racing afford the ideal outlet for tidewater Virginians' independence, competitiveness, and materialism but it also functioned as a tool to police social order. Consequently, seventh and eighteenth-century tidewater Virginians embraced their new innovation, transforming it from an ad hoc drag race into a formalized competition complete with specially made race courses, racing covenants that stipulated the how, when, and where of the race, and even public notices announcing upcoming events.

As a result Quarter-racing became one of the most popular colonial sporting events and developed into a cultural icon with significant social ramifications. However, as the tidewater region's economy stabilized and tobacco practices evolved, the region became enamored with more dignified pursuits causing a decline in short racing's popularity. With a decline in short racing's popularity along the seaboard, quarter-racing all but disappeared by 1730. It was subsequently replaced by the more sophisticated and formalized thoroughbred race- a sport that more successfully allowed eighteenth-century gentlemen more effective social control. However, rather than disappearing, the versatile short race found a new home in the borderlands of the early republic. At the turn of the Eighteenth Century, American pioneers needed a fast-paced outlet. Lacking the means and time to pursue mile-lone racing, western migrants quickly adopted quarter-racing.

Despite its eventual replacement, quarter-racing dominated colonial Virginia's sporting world for close to one hundred years. Much like its creators, short racing was a combination of new and old. While it was loosely based on traditional mile races,

Virginians adapted European practices to fit their new environment and ensuing needs. The result was a sport that was exhilarating, provided quick results, and easily fit into the colonists' new life style. Thus, the events surrounding the creation of this unique sport, its rise in popularity, and its eventual westward expansion offer a significant window of opportunity for understanding eighteenth-century tidewater Virginian culture.

Historiography

Over the last one hundred years, as historians have broadened the definition of their field, sporting history has grown in popularity. Aside from providing interesting and intriguing awareness into the evolution of leisure, the history of sports and entertainment also reveals the mores and ambitions of the people who practiced and created each activity. This is evident in tidewater Virginians' development of quarter-racing, a type of horseracing unquestionably unique to the area. Invented in the early 1600s, quarter-racing took the fledgling colony by storm and dominated the entertainment industry for the next one hundred years. Not only was the sport a fast-paced exhilarating display of horsemanship, but it also provided colonial elites with a tool to reinforce social order. Surprisingly, despite the sport's dominance of Virginia entertainment, there has only been one monograph dedicated to this topic. The sport generally garners only a paragraph or two in larger social and sports histories, merely becoming another historical footnote.[1]

Despite its marginal status, historians (including academic, equine, and sporting scholars) generally agree that quarter-racing was one of the most popular leisure pursuits in colonial Virginia. That, however, is all they agree on. Over the last one hundred years historians have disagreed on such things as who was allowed to race, what type of horse was being bred, and what caused short racing's decline. Further complicating matters is a dismally small primary source base. Sadly, there are no contemporary how-to guides or quarter-racing manuals Therefore, historians must rely on colonial newspapers,

[1] Alexander Mackey-Smith, *The Colonial Quarter Race Horse* (Middleburg, VA: H. K. Groves, 1983).

personal letters, and travel accounts. Additionally, the sport has been investigated by three very diverse subfields with varying subjective intentions. For academic historians short racing provides important social and cultural insights. For equine enthusiasts it offers significant evidence into the creation of the American Quarter Horse, the world's most popular breed.[2] And finally, colonial quarter-racing is at its heart a sporting event; one that has gained attention from numerous non-professional popular sport historians. While each perspective provides important information, taken individually they offer an incomplete description.

Academic History

Scholarly trends of the first half of the twentieth century downplay the historical relevance of sporting and leisure activities, so it is not surprising that short-racing gained little academic interest. Nevertheless, in 1907 Philip Bruce briefly mentioned the sport in *The Social Life of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century* Bruce stated that of all colonial activities, including cock fighting, card playing, and bowls, quarter-racing was by far the "most popular form of amusement in Virginia during the seventeenth century...which led to much betting."[3] Although, Bruce did not delve deeper into the social ramifications of short racing, he clearly implied that quarter-racing was a popular fixture in Virginian society.

In 1917, Mary Stanard's *Colonial Virginia: Its People and Customs* provided readers with a more detailed explanation of short racing's popularity. For Stanard,

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[2] "Trends at a Glance." *Equus* 313. (2003): 48-51.

[3] Philip Bruce, *Social Life of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century* (Corner House Publisher, 1907), 94.

racing's fame was due to British tradition and Virginians' strong horse culture. She wrote that the tidewater colonists brought with them the English love of the outdoors and became accomplished riders which "accounts for the charm they found in racing…which became the reigning and raging sport of the colony."[4] Here again, Stanard assesses the sports cultural implications. Much like Bruce she deems quarter-racing socially important. Nevertheless, Stanard never attempts to ascertain the sports broader social implications.

Thirty years later, as racing's popularity was on the rise (both War Admiral, the son of Man O' War, and Seabiscuit were taking America by storm), Edward Wyatt II provided historians with the first focused examination of quarter-racing, including the first glimpse into the sport's social impact. In his article "Newmarket of the Virginia Turf," Wyatt reasoned that gentlemen around Fredericksburg, Virginia, gained the "reputation for more diligences in the pursuit of pleasure than in the cultivation of their farms."[5] Wyatt was the first historian to debate who was allowed to race (gentlemen or yeomen), and he concluded that only gentlemen were permitted.

Surprisingly, quarter-racing's rise in popularity among scholars was short-lived. Over the next thirty years, historians overlooked short racing, seldom affording it even a single paragraph. It was not until 1965 that Jane Carson's *Colonial Virginians at Play* finally reintroduced the sport to historical writings. Although Carson makes similar claims as Wyatt, both argue that anyone could attend races but only gentlemen

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[4] Mary Stanard, *Colonial Virginia: Its People and Customs* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, Company, 1917), 252.

[5] Ibid, 481.

competed.[6] Carson is the first historian to provide any information about quarter-racings disappearance along the Atlantic seaboard. She alone suggests that the sport relocated to the western borderlands of Tennessee and Kentucky.[7]

Three years later, W.G. Strand published "Racing in Colonial Virginia," an article completely dedicated to short racing. Unlike the previous historians, Strand overlooked the sport's social implications and instead focused on how each race was conducted. Like Stanard, Strand reasoned that short-racing was popular because Virginians often relied upon the horse for both work and transportation. For instance, Strand depicts Virginians as "a race of unsurpassed riders, [with] the ownership of a good horse being not only a necessity, but a matter of pleasure and pride."[8]

By the 1970s the broadening definition of history caused quarter-racing's historiography to take a significant turn. Instead of simply addressing the sport as a social interest, historians now saw the leisure activity as a very important representation of colonial society. In 1977, for instance, T.H. Breen's published, "Horses and Gentlemen: The Cultural Significance of Gambling among the Gentry of Virginia," a highly influential explanation of the cultural relevance of short racing and gambling. By using psychology, Breen implied gambling's cultural relevancy. For instance, Breen writes: "gaming relations reflected gentry culture. It was a ritual activity, a form of repetitive, patterned behavior that not only corresponded closely with gentry values and

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[6] Jane Carson, *Colonial Virginians at Play* (VA: Colonial Williamsburg; Distributed by the University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville, 1965), 109.
[7] Ibid, 110.

[8] W.G. Strand, "Racing in Colonial Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 11 (1968): 293.

assumptions but symbolized realties of everyday life."[9] Breen's article remains one of the foremost publications on this topic.

In 1982 Bertram Wyatt-Brown's *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* again addressed quarter-racing as it related to gambling and southern gentry culture. Wyatt-Brown not only dealt with gambling's psychological representations but also racing's connection to southern character. Wyatt-Brown further suggested that during peace times gambling and racing afforded colonists the "moral equivalent of war," thus supplying a much-needed outlet for Southerners' aggressive tendencies.[10]

Although hinted at by Wyatt-Brown, it was not until twelve years later, in Kathleen Brown's *Goodwives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs,* that the sport's masculinity finally came under intense historical scrutiny. Like Breen and Wyatt-Brown, Brown saw quarter-racing as a metaphorical representation of colonial culture. Unlike her predecessors, Brown ignored gambling and instead focused on short racing as an important visual display of wealth. For example, she argued "white men pitted themselves against each other in the representational form of horses." She further maintained that "this embodiment of self was never far-fetched for men who depend upon material trappings and tangible signs of status to confirm their sense of social legitimacy."[11]

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[9] T.H. Breen, "Horses and Gentlemen: The Cultural Significance of Gambling among the Gentry of Virginia," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 34 (1977): 247.

[10] Ibid, 41.

[11] Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 278.

Although previous historians had discussed the social and cultural ramifications of quarter-racing, it was not until 1996 that Nancy Struna's *People of Prowess: Sport, Leisure, and Labor in Early Anglo-America* examined quarter-racing's more practical aspects such as court cases, racing practices, and prominent participants in the racing world. More importantly, Struna specifically mentioned the quarter-race horse providing the first and only detailed breed analysis by a non-horse historian. She noted that "planter's horses were small, capable of short bursts of speed rather then distances."[12] More specifically, Struna argued that American horses were smaller, most likely due to a decrease in nutrients, which necessitated a change in racing practices.

In 1998 Michal Rozbicki provided another intriguing twist to the historiography. In his work, *The Complete Colonial Gentleman: Cultural Legitimacy in Plantation America,* Rozbicki examined Virginian's perceived social class legitimacy through horse bloodlines. Rozbicki concludes that Virginians' lack of social hierarchy caused an interesting phenomenon. He reasons that the colonists used their horse's pedigree for social justification.

Breed History

In contrast to academic historians, horse enthusiasts and breed historians understandably have had a different focus when it comes to the sports historiography. For the most part, these horsemen and horsewomen have endeavored to uncover the background of what many consider to be the most versatile modern horse breeds. In

[12] Nancy Struna, *People of Prowess: Sport, Leisure, and Labor in Early Anglo-America* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 150.

other words, equine enthusiasts generally study colonial short racing in order to enhance the popularity of the American Quarter Horse. By emphasizing the breed's long history, these equine scholars hope to further highlight its superiority.

Given that the modern day Quarter Horse did not become an official breed until the formation of its registry in 1941, it is predictable that no notable works were published prior to this date. Since 1967, however, there have been five prominent books published on this topic, with one completely dedicated to the sport.

In 1967 Robert Denhardt published his first book, *Quarter Horses: A Story of Two Centuries.* As this title suggests, Denhardt's work focused exclusively on the horse, and in particular how the colonial equine related to the creation of the modern Quarter Horse. Despite his title, Denhardt spent relatively little time studying the early history of the breed; however, this work was important because he provided an intensive investigation into the breed's creation, suggesting that the colonial quarter-racing horse and the Thoroughbred had a common ancestor.[13]

In 1973, breed specialist Paul Luane's *America's Quarter Horse* attempted to grapple with the breed's social consequence, again seeking to highlight the breed's ascendancy. Astonishingly, Luane contradicted Wyatt-Brown and other academic historians when he claimed that quarter-racing was egalitarian. According to Luane, "American horseracing was open to anyone with a fast horse and everyone owned horses...rich and poor both took pride in owning good stock."[14] Luane is the only

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[13] Robert Denhardt, *Quarter Horses: A Story of Two Centuries* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 5. Denhardt suggested that the Thoroughbred and the Quarter Horse both derived from the Irish Hobby Horse.

[14] Paul Laune, *America's Quarter Horse* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973), 35.

historian to suggest such a theory. His work suffers from a severe lack of primary sources, which greatly limits his argument.

In 1978, Walt Wiggins' *The Great American Speedhorse: A Guide to Quarter Horse Racing* again tried to address the sport's cultural significance. In spite of his lack of scholarly training, Wiggins does an admirable job of assessing both the horse and its social implications. For instance, he makes such observations as "the settlers were sportsmen to the last man."[15] Likewise he also wrote that racing's demise derived from the gentry's negative outlook on a sport they considering to be "untamed" and "fit only for rustics and [the] uncultivated."[16] As with Laune, Wiggins' work, while intriguing, suffers from a noticeable lack of primary sources.

Finally, in 1983 an entire book was dedicated to colonial quarter-racing. In his work, *The Colonial Quarter Race Horse,* Alexander Mackey-Smith, one of the breed's most noted historians, provided an in-depth and detailed history of the sport, including a thorough examination of court cases, key figures (both human and equine) in the colonial racing world, and a comprehensive examination of the sports decline in popularity in the tidewater region. For instance, Mackey-Smith spends an entire chapter on the creation of the breed, tracing its ancestry as far back as the ninth century.[17] Likewise, he spends a momentous amount of time examining the legal issues surrounding racing. Interestingly, unlike the previous equine enthusiasts, Mackey-Smith incorporates an abundance of

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[15] Walt Wiggins, *The Great American Speedhorse: A Guide to Quarter Horse Racing* (New York: Sovereign Books, 1978), 6.

[16] Ibid, 8.

[17] Mackey-Smith, 19.

contemporary documents, often presenting important letters, news advertisements, and legal papers.[18]

Sports History

Just as quarter-racing appeals to academic historians and equine enthusiasts, it has also held particular interest for non-professional popular sports historians. Taking into consideration that short racing was one of the most well-liked colonial leisure activities, it is quite understandable why it appears in most popular American sporting histories. Much like academia, however, most popular sporting authors only briefly mention colonial horseracing, leaving much left unsaid.

In 1937 William Ewing's produced *The Sports of Colonial Williamsburg,* which not only addressed racing practices but also the type of horse being raced and short racing's disappearance. For instance, he argues "after the first third of the eighteenth century Williamsburg scorned such [an] elementary sport as quarter-racing."[19] Ewing's work only focused on one specific local, but considering Williamsburg's prominence in Virginian history, it provides an excellent gauge for understanding the rest of the colony. Williamsburg was one of the first communities to adopt quarter-racing and consequently one of the first to lose interest in it as well.

Approximately fifty years after Ewing, William Baker again discussed the sport. This time, however, it was included in a much larger examination of popular sporting history. In his work, *Sports in the Western World,* Baker adopted a more psychological

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[18] Ibid, 54.

[19] William Ewing, *The Sports of Colonial Williamsburg* (Richmond, VA: The Dietz Press, 1937), 3.

approach, arguing that the organization of racing was "merely an extension of their [Virginians] more fundamental need to organize their society in any alien situation."[20] Again Baker's work showed a concerted effort in deducing the social implications of short racing. Nevertheless, given that he only dedicates a small portion of his larger work to the sport, his argument is understandably limited.

Benjamin Rader provides the most recent mention of quarter-racing in a popular sports history. Although short racing only garnered two pages in his *American Sports from the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Televised Sports,* Rader made an intriguing proposal. Instead of solely focusing on the sport within the confines of the colony, he suggested that religious practices allowed Virginian's to more freely practice their leisure activities. In other words, unlike their northern Puritan and Catholic counterparts, Anglicanism allowed Virginian's to gamble.[21]

In conclusion, although quarter-racing has been studied from three diverse historical perspectives, the sport continues to suffer from a noticeable lack of comprehensive historical research. This thesis seeks to fill in the historical gaps and provide a better understanding of short racing's social and cultural ramifications. By investigating primary sources, such as newspapers, personal correspondence, contemporary travel accounts, and legal cases I offer insight into the sport's creation, its popularity, and its cultural implications. I also provide new interpretations of specialized colonial breeding, egalitarian racing participation, and the sport's eventual westward expansion.

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[20] William Baker, *Sports in the Western World* (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982), 96.

[21] Benjamin Rader, *American Sports From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Televised Sports* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1999), 9.

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Introduction:

On October 8, 1776, Lieutenant Thomas Anbury began a six year tour of North America that took him from Quebec to Virginia and back to New York. During his colonial sojourn, Anbury wrote one hundred and twenty-seven personal letters detailing various aspects of his adventures, including a comprehensive description of North America's plant and animal life, its geography and climate, as well as its Indian and European inhabitants. On May 12 1779, while staying at the Jones Plantation near Charlottesville, Virginia, Anbury wrote, " I went with several officers to see a diversion peculiar to this country, termed quarter-racing, which is a match between two horses, to run a quarter of a mile in a straight direction…it is the most ridiculous amusement imaginable, for if you happen to be looking another way, the race is terminated before you can turn your head."[1] Anbury was equally fascinated and scandalized by what he witnessed. But why would a native of Britain, the land that practically created horseracing, be astounded by a horserace? The answer is simple. Anbury observed something he had never seen, and, to his English eyes, an almost comical aping of his beloved English racing heritage. What Anbury called a "diversion peculiar to this country," was a popular Virginia invention: the fast and exhilarating quarter-race.

To better understand Anbury's reaction, it is important to realize that quarter-racing was simultaneously foreign and familiar. Horseracing was a favorite European pastime, with England not only creating a specific racing breed, the Thoroughbred, but also developing the standard rules and practices still used today. However, in over five

[1] Thomas Anbury, *Travels Through the Interior Parts of America* (c. 1777) (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923), 227.

hundred years of experimentation, Britain never pursued quarter-racing. It is ironic, then, that colonial tidewater Virginians, who persistently argued for their rights as Englishman and strove to mimic all aspects of British life, did not espouse conventional mile-long oval track racing. These coastal colonists, instead, developed a sport uniquely their own.

This thesis seeks to ascertain the reasons behind these colonial modifications. By analyzing coastal Virginia's horse culture, the specific nuances of colonial racing practices, the men and the horses who participated in racing events, and the eventual westward relocation of the sport, I will explain the creation of the unique colonial quarter-racing phenomenon and, in doing so, provide important insight into eighteenth-century tidewater Virginian culture.

A Brief History of Horseracing

Cave paintings of the Magdalenian phase of the Upper Paleolithic in France and Spain some fifteen thousand years ago provide the earliest evidence of horse and human interaction, clearly suggesting that the horse was hunted for meat.[2] Despite these less than platonic beginnings by, 4000 B.C.E. people finally began to ride. From that point on, until the invention of mechanized transportation, horse and humans were linked as the equine quickly became a vital everyday necessity.

In addition to being a beast of burden, the horse was a prominent fixture in society's sporting culture. As early as 500 C.E. humans developed horseracing, and the sport was introduced to Great Britain by 642 C.E. For the next thousand years, racing

[2] Due to over-hunting and climate changes the horse became extinct in North America ten thousand years ago.

continued to be a prominent fixture in European gaming culture. By 1630, however, it became apparent to many prominent British horse owners that the traditional match race, which required two horses to run three to four three mile heats, was less than exhilarating. Over the next hundred years, British horsemen sought to reinvigorate the sport of kings by shortening the standard racing distance to a mile, specifically breeding a race horse, and establishing a governing body: the Jockey Club.[3]

By 1750, English racing's renovation was complete, resulting in the emergence of a new electrifying event that took the nation by storm. No longer did spectators have to sit all day to see the outcome of a single race; matches now lasted less than three minutes and were thrilling trials of equine speed and prowess. Adding to racing's reinvigoration, the new and improved racehorse, with its long slender legs and svelte conformation or body type, was eye-catching and capable of blazing speed.

In addition to a superior racing vehicle, the creation of well-enforced laws and handicapping regulations increased racing's popularity by allowing bystanders to more "safely" bet. The Jockey Club, which was formed in 1750, provided racing with a set of standards that it previously lacked. Although somewhat elitist in nature, this organization developed a good relationship between horse-breeding and horse-racing and helped promote the welfare of the Thoroughbred.[4] Furthermore, the Jockey Club also formed rules of dress and behavior for the jockey; appointed judges, starters, clerks, and racing officials; and, for the first time, exacted penalties for offenders.[5]

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[3] Roger Longrigg, *The History of Horse Racing* (London, England: Macmillan, 1972), 96.

[4] E.S. Montgomery, *The Thoroughbred* (South Brunswick: A.S. Barnes and Co. 1971), 4.

[5] Luane, *America's Quarter Horse,* 8.

A Brief History of Virginia

During the same period that British racing was undergoing its rebirth; the English were colonizing the New World. In 1607, the Virginia Company of London established the first permanent colony in what is now Jamestown, Virginia. Although the first years were fraught with hardship, the fledgling colony survived, and the first horse arrived in 1610. Over the next twenty years, the initial turmoil and instability gave way to a more settled period, with tobacco farming becoming a highly advantageous pursuit. This stabilization, in turn, drastically influenced the equine population, which increased from fifteen thousand to more than forty thousand between 1649 and 1666.[6]

To the majority of the early coastal Virginia transplants, the horse was simply an everyday work and transportation necessity. However, as the colony became more stable, the horse's role evolved, and the equine began to fill another important niche. As was the case in Europe, the Chesapeake region's equine population became a prominent fixture in entertainment; in particular, the sport of horseracing became a popular colonial pastime amongst the tidewater inhabitants.

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[6] Denhardt, *Quarter Horses: A Story of Two Centuries,* 7.

CHAPTER 1: THREE IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF VIRGINIAN CULTURE

Although the modern horse is little more than an expensive pet, before the invention of the car it played a far more significant and utilitarian role in human existence. Not only was the horse an essential transportation and work accoutrement in Europe and America, but it also was a vital fixture in numerous popular leisure activities such as fox hunting, steeple chasing , and of course horseracing.[7] Incidentally, because of its role in various gaming activities, the horse also held significant social symbolism. This is particularly apparent in the fledgling Virginian tidewater colony. Racing appealed to the new European inhabitants' traditional customs, it reinforced their manufactured social hierarchy, it appealed to certain aspects of Virginia culture, namely materialism and individualism, and it fulfilled the region's gambling habits.

Horse Culture

As early as the twelfth century many European countries had established royal and national studs that were dedicated to breeding specific types of horses. These state breeding facilities devoted themselves to creating animals that met the requirements of each respective country. Consequently, by the fifteen hundreds transportation improvements coupled with changing human needs allowed for greater equine diversity.[8]

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[7] In medieval times steeple chases were races that were actually run between to churches with the participants dashing from one spire to the next jumping all obstacles in between.

[8] Elwyn Edward, *The New Encyclopedia of the Horse* (London: A Dorling Kindersley Book, 2000), 124.

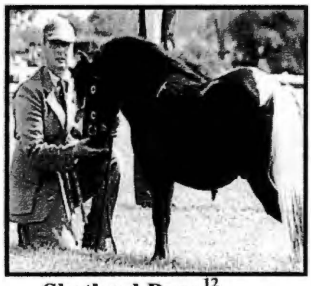
Thus, the horse became a highly stylized necessity that illustrated its owners' social status. Specialized breeding included all types of horses, from the commonplace pack animal to the most stylish riding and carriage horses. This was particularly apparent in Britain, where prominent members of the English upper class made an art form of creating the perfect riding, carriage, work, and racing horse; each breed or type was ideally suited to its duty, with the riding and carriage horses displaying elegant beauty and flashy gates depictive of their owners' social standings.[9] For instance, Britain developed a variety of different breeds such as the Shetland pony. [Figure 1] This versatile breed was predominately used as a children's riding pony and later became a fixture in British coal mining industry. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the English also bred giant work horses such as the Shire (the tallest breed in the world with some animals standing over 18 hands high). [10] These gentle giants were primarily found on farms pulling the plow or hauling heavy goods to market. Between these two extremes, the English also bred versatile riding and carriage horses such as the Cleveland Bay and the Windsor Grey, both of which are still used as mounts for the modern Queen's cavalry. However, despite their equine populations' diversity, the best known English horse is unquestionably the Thoroughbred, a breed solely created for the race course. [11]

For example, the Order of Teutonic Knights established the Trakehner breeding program in the 13th century. Likewise in 1680 the Dukes of Hostein established a royal stud in order to breed the world famous Holsteiners best known for its jumping ability. Both breeds are still in existence today.

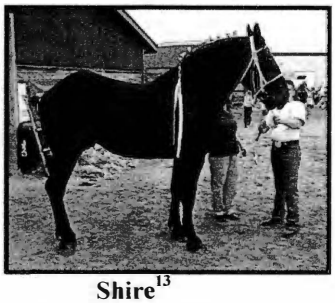
[9] Breen, "Horses and Gentlemen: The Cultural Significance of Gambling among the Gentry of Virginia," 249.

[10] Horses are measured in hands and there are four inches in one hand.

[11] For more on breeds see Elwyn Edwards *The New Encyclopedia of the Horse.*



Shetland Pony[12]



Shire[13]

Thoroughbred[14]

Figure 1: English Breeds

As this very brief list suggests, much like twentieth-century car culture, eighteenth-century inhabitants had a wide variety of horses from which to choose. This diversity not only permitted the specialization of breeds for particular tasks, but also a certain amount of refinement and elegance within each type. This ability to choose from a extensive array of riding horses allowed potential owners to select an animal that best suited the intended task, or, likewise, best represented the owner's affluence. Of course the more graceful and refined the horse, the more expensive the price tag – and the more reputable the owner.

Coastal Virginians, embracing their English heritage, readily adopted this dual function, treating horses as both an everyday necessity and a significant cultural status symbol. This twofold nature was clearly illustrated by Reverend Hugh Jones who stated that "They [Virginians] are such lovers of riding that almost every ordinary person keeps a horse; and I have known some [to] spend the morning in ranging several miles in the

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[12] *Halstock & Blackertor Shetland Pony Studs,* "Halstock Velvet Fox." Last updated July 18, 2006. http://www.halstockshetlands.co.uk/ Accessed July 23, 2006.

[13] *Wikipedia*, "Percheron" Last updated July 3, 2006. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Percheron. Accessed July 23, 2006.

[14] *Spotlight Horse.* "Barbaro" Lasted updated April, 2006. http://hometown.aol.com/thoughtsinblue/SLH.html Accessed July 23, 2006.

woods to find and catch their horses only to ride two or three miles to church, to the court-house, or to a race."[15] Jones's admission provides important awareness into tidewater Virginia character. While the colonists enjoyed the ease of riding, it is clear from his writings that an inordinate amount of time was spent simply finding the horse. But why would Virginians waste the time finding a horse when they could have just as easily walked? Simply answered, to Virginians the horse was more than a straightforward means of transportation; it was also a very important visual status symbol.

Both colonial laws and newspaper notices attest to the equine's rise as a status symbol. By the1 750s horse wrangling was quite common. However, despite its popularity amongst criminals, the laws prohibiting this crime were amazingly heavy-handed, with the guilty party being sentenced to death without benefit of clergy.[16] To the modern eye, death seems a bit extreme for merely stealing a horse. Taking into consideration, however, the iconic nature of the horse, the severe consequences are more justifiable. Not only did a thief filch an expensive work animal, he also stole one of the most visual, and hence valuable, status icons.

In response to stolen or missing animals, colonial Virginian's frequently posted public announcements in local newspapers offering bribes and rewards for the return of their valued property. In particular, the *Virginia Gazette* printed numerous advertisements that reveal the contemporary monetary and cultural value of the horses in question. For example, in the October 30, 1739 edition of the *Virginia Gazette* John

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[15] Hugh Jones, *The Present State of Virginia* (c. 1669-1760) (New York, Reprinted for J. Sabin, 1865),49.

[16] Hugh Ranklin, *Criminal Trial Proceedings in the General Court of Colonial Virginia* (Colonial Williamsburg, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1965),167.

Boswell placed an advertisement for his "stolen or stray'd" horse lost on the "fifth day of April last" described as a "large very dark bay pacing horse, branded on the near buttock TM; has a switch tail, a banging mane, and a small star in his forehead…" the advertisement goes on to state: "whoever will bring the said horse to the subscriber…or give intelligence of him, so he may be had again, shale have a pistole reward, paid by me."[17] Likewise in 1745 Martin Phillips placed a similar public announcement in which he requested the return or information concerning the loss of his "middle-siz'd, bright bay horse, branded on the near buttock L, a small scar in his forhead, his mane and tail black."[18] Like Boswell, Phillips also offered a reward of half a pistole.

Similar to laws regarding equine theft, the ensuing public notices provide intriguing evidence of the horse's cultural relevance. For instance, the mere fact that owners paid to place advertisements and offered monetary rewards for the return of their property unquestionably suggests the animals' value – both monetary and symbolic. This trend is even more noteworthy when one takes into account the fact that colonial broadsides were usually published weekly and had very slow circulation.

Hence, why publish these advertisements at all? The answer is twofold. First, by publishing an advertisement in the paper, the owner is clearly emphasizing to the colony at large the importance of the horse in question. Given the slow nature of eighteenth-century communication, in all probability the owner had little chance of relocating his missing or stolen horse. Therefore, only an owner who desperately wanted the return of his property would make the effort to publicly acknowledge his loses. Second, and more

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[17] *Virginia Gazette*, 30 October 1739.

[18] *Virginia Gazette*, 12 September 1745.

importantly, it required money to publish an advertisement in the paper. Thus, simply by printing an advertisement, the owner in question openly proclaimed his wealth, and, thus, his social status.

In addition to laws and public rewards, contemporary personal accounts also clearly attest to the equine's rise from a beast of burden to an influential status symbol. For instance, in 1735 a letter written by William Byrd II to Miss Pitt, the daughter of John Pitt the governor of Bermuda from 1727 to 1737, attests to the horse's changing role. The letter concerns the purchase of a horse that evidently went array; however, it clearly illustrates Miss Pitt's desire to own a fashionable yet practical mode of transportation. Byrd writes "your [Miss Pitt's] orders were particular as to his [the horse] qualifications. He was neither to start, nor stumble neither to be too dull or to sprightly, some of which failings tis hard to find a pacing horse without. Those who have spirit are apt to start, and those which are more sedate are given to stumble..."[19] As this correspondence demonstrates, Miss Pitt wanted a showy animal, however, either she was not an accomplished rider or was intending the horse for excitable activities such as fox hunting or public outings, because she further requests a safe animal. As Byrd so aptly points out, this was a difficult request because, in general, safe horses tend to be older or "duller," while more show animals tend to be more flighty and harder to handle.

Finally, riding itself was also a very important aspect of horse culture. Virginia's vast plantations necessitated a "race of unsurpassed riders, the ownership of a good horse

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[19] Marion Tinling, eds. *The Correspondence of The Three William Byrds of Westover, Virginia 1684-1776.* Vol. II. (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1977.) Originally written by William Byrd II to Miss Pitt January 6 1735, 469.

being not only a necessity but a matter of pleasure and pride."[20] Due to the everyday need for riding, coastal Virginians were enamored with equitation and enjoyed watching horsemanship performances. For instance, an advertisement in a 1772 issue of *Virginia Gazette* promoted Joseph Faulks, "who performed his exploits in Horsemanship on Wednesday last, in the City of Williamsburg, and gave great satisfaction to the spectators." The advertisement noted that Faulks could ride multiple horses, "in many different attitudes."[21] One can only assume that Faulks was a trick rider of sorts, demonstrating various disciplines such as dressage and jumping.[22]

Moreover, Virginian's not only took pride in equitation but also great pleasure. For example, Philip V. Fithian, a tutor for the reputable Carter Family noted that Ben Carter had " an unconquerable love for horses." Ben often told Fithian that "he [Ben] should have been a skilfull [*sic*] & useful groom; that he should be more fond & careful of a favourite [*sic*] horse than a wife." Fithian further writes that "he [Fithian] never saw a person, in any diversion, recreation or amusement, who seemed so full of pleasure & enjoyment as he [Ben] is when on horse back, or even in the company of a horse. He seems to possess as warm a regard for them as Dr. *Swift* had for the Houyhnhnms..."[23] Virginians loved riding, admired eloquent equitation, and took immense pride in the quality of their equine stock.

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[20] Strand, *Colonial Virginia: Its People and Customs,* 293.

[21] *Virginia Gazette,* 22 October 1772 .

[22] Dressage is literally defined as the basic training of the horse. However, it is also considered to be a style of riding focusing on balance and control with the Spanish Riding School in Vienna being one of the best examples.

[23] Philip Fithian, ed. *Journal & Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian 1773-1774: A Plantation Tutor of the Old Dominion* (Reprint Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg, Inc. 1957.)190.

The horse's metamorphosis from beast of burden to status symbol became further apparent as coastal Virginia grew more prosperous during the seventeen hundreds. Now, instead of simply importing work horses, Coastal Virginians were able to purchase higher quality stock. And, as Byrd's correspondence illustrates, it was not enough to simply own a horse, but a proper gentleman or woman had to own the *right* horse and be able to ride it correctly![24]

Gambling Culture

As personal accounts attest and many scholars have persuasively argued, Virginian gentlemen enjoyed a life focused on personal gain, particularly profits that could be quickly obtained.[25] Fortunately for the colonists, tobacco farming and horseracing provided the perfect outlet for their obsession with immediate gratification.

For instance, Anbury's travel account illustrates Virginian's pursuit of pleasure and profit. He writes that a gentleman usually "spent his day neither drunk nor sober, but in a state of stupefaction."[26] Anbury notes that typically a gentleman would rise at eight, drink a julep then survey his plantation (generally on horseback). He then returned at ten and ate a large breakfast. Then he would "saunder [*sic*] around the house, sometimes amusing himself with the little Negroes who are playing at the door." By noon the

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[24] It is very important to note that due to their extensive involvement with horses, the majority of early Virginians, in particular wealthy gentlemen, were well known for their keen sense of horse flesh. In other words, unlike today, colonial Virginians could easily determine the quality of a horse with a simple glance.

[25] T.H. Breen, "Looking Out for Number One: Conflicting Cultural Values in Early Seventeenth- Century Virginia," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 78 (1979): 342-360; Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery American Freedom* (New York: Norton, 1975).

[26] Anbury, *Travels Through the Interior Parts of America,* 91.

gentleman drank a toddy, ate lunch than took a nap. He then rose at five [and] commonly drank another toddy." The plantation owner, as Anbury mentions, only varied this routine on court days or to go to "some horserace or cock fight; at which times he gets so egregiously drunk" that his wife had to send someone to fetch him home.[27]

Although Anbury's account reads like excerpts from life styles of the colonial rich and famous, it nonetheless provides an important glimpse into colonial culture. Upon closer examination it becomes abundantly clear that many gentlemen wanted wealth without the drudgery of work. Plantation owners, therefore, sought a quickly attainable wealthy life of leisure which required little time or effort. Taking this into consideration it is easy to understand why Virginians readily embraced gambling.

Likewise, Anbury did not restrict his observations solely to Virginia's elite. He also noted "the lower people possess that impertinent curiosity, so very disagreeable and troublesome to strangers...they are averse to labor, much addicted to liquor, and when intoxicated, extremely savage and revengeful; for the insult arising in their minds, and the new friendship totally forgotten, they seek their object with keen attention, and satiate their passion with savage barbarity."[28] Similarly, Andrew Burnaby mused in his *Travels Through the Middle Settlements of North America* that Virginian character tended towards "acts of extravagance, ostentation, and a disregard of economy; it is not extraordinary therefore, that the Virginians outrun their incomes and that having involved

[27] Ibid, 91.

[28] Ibid, 217.

themselves in difficulties, they are frequently tempted to raise money by bills of exchange, which they know will be returned protested, with a ten per cent interest."[29]

Similarly, Anbury and Burnaby's accounts of the lower classes, although pejorative in nature, provide intriguing observations into tidewater Virginia's laboring sort, particularly as relates to gambling. For instance, they respectively claim that commoners' avoidance of labor and enjoyment of drink, coupled with their apparently hot tempers suggested a society given to pleasurable pursuits. Hence, Virginia's commoners also wanted an easily achievable life of leisure; one that provided immediate gain with little effort. Moreover, Anbury's statement that the non-elite "satiate their passion with savage barbarity" further insinuates their aggressive nature, a key character trait for successful wagering.

As Anbury's account reveals to Virginians were more then a little obsessed with finding an easy and immediate way to make money. Therefore it is not surprising that they embraced gambling. Along with highlighting the more colorful aspects of Virginians' zeal for immediate wealth and gratification, gambling draws attention to other important character traits-- namely individualism, competitiveness, and materialism. For instance, Virginia's plantations instilled its inhabitants with independence that became apparent in leisure activities such as quarter-racing. This autonomy was created by the vast Virginia farming acreage that made a neighborhood support system nearly impossible. When a plantation owner faced disaster, whether it was

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[29] Andrew Burnaby, Tr*avels Through the Middle Settlements of North America.* 1775 (Reprint, New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1970), 44.

an Indian attack, a fire, a sickness, or a weather related catastrophe, he was left to his own devices to survive as best he could.[30]

Much like individualism, Virginia's environment also exacerbated competitiveness. While colonial Virginia was unquestionably a land that provided vast means for potential wealth, it lacked a hereditary social hierarchy. More directly stated, while Virginia provided second sons a means for social ascendancy, it likewise afforded every other inhabitant the same advantages. More importantly, unlike England where sir names clearly asserted a man's social status, they held no relevance in early colonial Virginia. In response, the tidewater region produced a highly competitive society, as men sought ways to prove their social status. [31]

In addition to individualism and competitiveness, wagering brought out another central facet of Virginia gentry culture: materialism. Materialism was significant because without a hereditary social structure gentlemen became what they displayed. For instance, a man's social standing was confirmed not by his knowledge, but, instead, by outward signs such as land, slaves, buildings, clothing, and, of course, horses.[32]

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[30] Ibid, 243.

[31] Ibid, 244.

[32] Breen, "Horses and Gentlemen: The Cultural Significance of Gambling among the Gentry of Virginia," 246.

Racing Culture

The well traveled J.F.D. Smyth noted in his travel account "the inhabitants [of Virginia] almost to a man" were "quite devoted to the diversion of horseracing."[33] Considering Virginians' predilection towards horse and gaming cultures, it is understandable that horseracing, the perfect combination of both, became Virginia's premiere leisure activities. More than any other sport, horseracing proclaimed a man's independence, refinement, and power, and it unquestionably signified his right to rule.[34]

Moreover it also illustrated gambling's three primary social revelations. For instance, horseracing represented a colonist's Virginian's independence. Similar to the planter's independent decisions regarding each planting season, the rider independently decided how he would ride each race. The result being that, much like farming, racing was not a team sport, and a man's superiority was determined by his own capability. Therefore, winning a race, similar to producing a superior crop of tobacco, provided a gentleman with a sense of pride and power. In the same way, losing a race was analogous to planting a poor crop, with severe monetary and social implications.[35] Notably, however, unlike farming, which required an entire planting season to produce results, racing quickly afforded a quantifiable outlet that unquestionably determined a winner and a loser.

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[33] J. F. D. Smyth, *Tour in the United States of America: Containing an Account of the Present Situation of the Country* (London, England: Printed for G. Robinson, 1784), 21.

[34] Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 114.

[35] Ibid, 278.

Winning races also enriched successful gamblers; thus appealing to their materialism. For instance, in 1745 there is an advertisement for "a purse of nineteen pistoles" to be run for on the third Thursday in September.[36] Likewise, a few years later in 1752 there was an announcement for "a purse of sixty three pistoles."[37] Not all races offered prize money; some awarded winning riders a new saddle or bridle. Thus, horseracing not only enhanced a man's reputation, but it also added to his private property.

Finally, horseracing provided a perfect outlet for Virginians' competitive nature. Historian W.G. Strand notes in his article, "Racing in Colonial Virginia," that "every horsemen in every county has a desire to test the speed of his favorite mount, and there can be no doubt that, from the first importation, there were informal and impromptu trials of speed."[38] In other words, competitiveness was an ingrained colonial characteristic prevalent throughout the colony from its initial settlement. Consequently, horseracing offered the perfect forum for this addiction. Not only did racing allow a gentleman to demonstrate his horse's speed, but he also had the capability to establish his wealth.

In conclusion, from its colonization Virginians created a strong and thriving horseracing culture rooted in European equine and gambling traditions. By the early eighteenth century the colonial equine had transcended its utilitarian role to become an important visual cultural icon. The Virginians' passion for horseracing provided a perfect outlet for elite men's predilection towards gambling and immediate gratification.

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[36] *Virginia Gazette*, 12 September 1745.

[37] *Virginia Gazette*, 27 March 1752.

[38] Strand, *Colonial Virginia: Its People and Customs*, 164; Breen, "Horses and Gentlemen: The Cultural Significance of Gambling among the Gentry of Virginia," 239.

However, unlike Europeans, Virginians created and embraced an entirely new form of horseracing. This test of speed proved their prowess in forty-five seconds or less!

CHAPTER 2: THE RACE

In his eighteenth-century travel journal, J.F.D. Smyth noted that "in the southern part of the colony [Virginia], and in North Carolina, they are very much attached to quarter-racing, which is always a match between two horses, to run one quarter of a mile straight out; being merely an excursion of speed..."[39] What Smyth witnessed was the result of the unique combination of Virginia's English heritage intermingled with the colonists' distinctive character; an amalgamation that created a society enthralled by horseracing's alluring aspects, in particular, its risks, profits, and social consequences.

Unlike the British who had the time and resources to successfully practice oval track racing, Coastal Virginia's untamed environment, coupled with her new inhabitants' proclivity towards immediate gain, propelled the invention of an entirely new equine sport. Colonial Virginians designed a type of horserace that could not be found anywhere else in the world. Moreover, this unique sport's inception has far reaching implications. Above all, short racing's invention and popularity provide important insights into Virginia's cultural identity, particularly the colonist's mores and aspirations. Moreover, the mere fact that Virginians transformed the sport from a spur-of-the-moment affair into a sanctioned event further reflects the sport's cultural significance.

Settlers along the Atlantic seaboard most likely created quarter-racing in the early seventeenth century, with the sport being legalized in Jamestown by 1620.[40] Despite

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[39] Smyth, *Tours in the United States of America,* 22.

[40] Mackey-Smith, *The Colonial Quarter Race Horse,* 23.

the very limited early historical evidence, these first races appeared to be popular ad hoc affairs where horse owners informally challenged each other to speed trials.[41] The initial quarter-races were tied to other social gatherings and weekend events such as get-togethers at the local tavern, after church, or on court days.

These early matches were typically informal and impromptu, with owners riding their own horses and races often being run on town main streets.[42] Despite its initial off-the-cuff nature, quarter-racing had rapidly developed into a formalized sport by the early seventeen hundreds, with competitors moving races to crossroads or conveniently located fields. In cases where there were no fields or other open spaces, forests were specifically cleared to make formal quarter-racing tracks.[43] Anbury, for example, notes a horserace on a quarter mile track cut out of a densely forested area.[44]

Quarter-racing's relocation is very significant for two important reasons. First, the participants and spectators willingness to travel demonstrates the sport's growing popularity.[45] Second, racings' move also implies that it had long surpassed its impromptu roots, and, in some instances, had become significant enough to warrant the creation of specialized tracks.

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[41] Carson, *Colonial Virginians at Play,* 106.

[42] Rader, *American Sports From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Televised Sports* 10; Mackay-Smith, *The Colonial Quarter Race Horse,* 54.

[43] Baker, *Sports in the Western World,* 97; Breen, "Horses and Gentlemen: The Cultural Significance of Gambling among the Gentry of Virginia," 251.

[44] Anbury, *Travels Through the Interior Parts of America,* 223. See also Breen, Baker.

[45] Although enjoyed by all, horseraces took up main streets blocking the main thoroughfare and making it difficult for customers and businessmen. Races were generally loud and rowdy, further disrupting local inhabitants.

Newspaper notices announcing upcoming match races further attest to racing's recognition. The November 26, 1736 edition of the *Virginia Gazette* specifically mentions "that on Tuesday next, (being St. Andrews Day) some merry-dispos'd Gentlemen of the said county, design to celebrate that festival, by setting up divers prizes to be ....run for (the Quarter) by any number of horses and mares."[46] This announcement is particularly revealing because it clearly indicates quarter-racing's growing formality. Instead of the previously impromptu events attended by a very few, this advertisement lays out a specific date; thus, attesting to the growing interest in the sport.

Racing Practices

While travel accounts and news clippings make plain quarter-racing's growing popularity, they do not answer a very important question: why did coastal Virginians design what many Europeans dismissed as a ridiculous bastardization of their own prestigious sport of kings? At first glance, it appears the colonists had all they needed to continue traditional turf racing. They owned horses capable of running a mile, and given that they were already forced to build a track, it would be easy to simply build a mile oval. Moreover, the colonists desperately tried to emulate the mother country in all aspects of their daily lives, including food, dress, and leisure pursuits.

Despite these overwhelming factors, Virginians did not replicate Thoroughbred racing for two reasons. First, tidewater Virginia was not England. The colony lacked Britain's civility, social hierarchy, economy, and geography, thus making exact duplication impossible. Second and more importantly, Virginians were not Englishmen.

[46] *Virginia Gazette,* 26 November 1736.

Although the colonists strove to be British, equals the situations created by their new environment coupled with their distinct culture made precise replication unattainable.

To understand why Virginians created quarter-racing, it is essential to appreciate their unique nature. Henry Marsh's book, *Publick Good Without Private Interest,* provides important insight into what many Englishmen considered the depraved Virginia character. Marsh proclaimed the "people that are sent to inhabit in that colony are the most of them the very scum and off-scouring of our nation...and when they come thither [Virginia] either know not how, or will not betake themselves to an sober industrious course of living. And, if they chance to get ought to maintain them in their licentiousness and wickedness fall to practicing their old abominable practices [gambling, drinking, whoreing, etc.] there, as much or more than ever they did here [England]."[47] Moreover, "planters doe [*sic*] generally regard the planting of nothing but Tobacco; and that they plant so excessively, that they cannot make it up as it should be. And too many will not give it the due making that they might..."[48]

Although Marsh's biases of the shortcomings of the early Virginians are transparent, he also points to important character traits. In particular, Marsh's publication attests to Virginians' drinking and leisure-- both prominent factors in the horseracing environment.[49] Aside from Virginians' obvious drunkenness and gambling addictions,

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[47] Marsh, Henry. *Publick Good without Private Interest: A Compendious Remonstrance of the Present Sad State and Condition of the English Colonie of Virginia* (London: Privately Printed by Henry Marsh, 1957), 4.

[48] Ibid, 9.

[49] If one is in doubt, simply attend a modern day race such as the Kentucky Derby where the Mint Julep is the traditional drink of choice.

Marsh's observation of Virginian farming practices provides a vital clue to the colonists' love for quarter-racing.

According to Marsh, Virginians were obsessed with tobacco farming or rather the monetary gains associated with the planting of this lucrative crop. Tidewater Virginians desired wealth with little regard for upgrading or improving the quality of their product. They were preoccupied with goods or activities that provided abundant wealth with little work, and showed little interest in potential crop development.[50] This mindset helps explain why coastal Virginians created a faster and simpler form of horseracing. They did not want to burden themselves with time-consuming races or expend the efforts commonly associated with formalized Thoroughbred racing.

Traditional British course racing generally involved a field of anywhere from two to twenty horses running clockwise around an oval track. (Modern American dirt races run counter-clockwise, the opposite direction of twenty-first century English turf races.) Once the race started, the general rule was to run to the inside rail, which provided the shortest distance around the track. However, jockeying for position was no small feat when it involved a dozen other riders and horses trying to accomplish the same task. The initial half of the race typically included significant bumping, cutting off, and jostling as riders fought each other for the best piece of racing real estate. Furthermore, centripetal force and physics, along with leads, played a huge role in oval racing.[51] Much like a car,

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[50] Marsh, *Publick Good without Private Interest: A Compendious Remonstrance of the Present Sad State and Condition of the English Colonie of Virginia* , 4.

[51] A canter or lope is a three beat gait. The footfall pattern when circling to the right should be left hind, right hindleg, left fore (almost at the same time), right foreleg . When circling right, the right legs will be reaching further forward. As these legs contact the ground they push the horse forward and there is a moment of suspension. If the horse is on the wrong lead going around a turn, it can easily loose its balance

it is more difficult for a horse to accelerate around a turn then it is for him to increase speed in a straight line. In order to insure the horse and rider's safety it was imperative that a horse be on the right lead. If not, there was a possibility that the horse could easily loose its balance and fall over while trying to make a turn. This was even more significant given that older tracks did not have the wide sweeping turns of today. In order to safely and competitively compete, both horse and rider needed considerable racing knowledge, training that required extensive time and effort.

Similar to their desire for instant and easy planting profits, tidewater Virginians wanted a race that was short and quick. Unlike Thoroughbred racing, colonial quarter mile racing only involved two horses running in a straight line. By eliminating the free-for-all herd nature of track racing, including the added complication of turns, colonial Virginians drastically simplified horseracing. The end result was that quarter-racing did not require a trained horse or a trained jockey. Its only requirement was a quick start and the ability to gallop in a straight line. Hence, quarter-racing was conducive to a society that did not want to spend the time and did not have the resources required for traditional British oval track racing.

Distance was not the only Virginia deviation. Coastal colonists also created a less formalized racing environment; in particular, colonial entrance requirements lacked Britain's rigid conventions. Unlike the esteemed annual racing meets at Newmarket, Virginia races did not require prestigious pedigrees or a winning racing record. (Newmarket race course in England is considered to be the home of organized racing in

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and fall over. In general, modern racehorses run on the left lead for the majority of the race and, then, switch to the right lead on the home stretch.

Britain. It was transformed from a royal hunting lodge into a race grounds in the late seventeenth century by James I. Half a century later, it became headquarters for the Jockey Club. Today it is one of the largest racing training facilities in the world with twenty-five hundred acres completely devoted to training and conditioning the modern Thoroughbred.)[52] Virginian owners, unencumbered by the formalities of tracks like Newmarket, freely entered whatever horse they chose at regularly scheduled affairs usually held in a specific place at a specific time. [53] Contemporary race announcements simply state "any horses or mares" can participate, completely leaving out any references to pedigree or former racing records.[54]

This departure from traditional racing clearly demonstrates the limitations of the eighteenth-century Virginia environment. Although Virginians were unabashedly consumed with reinforcing a perceived social hierarchy, it would have been prohibitive to base racing participation on pedigrees or records given neither were readily available. Furthermore, these requirements contradicted quarter-racing's overall objectives. Clearly stated, quarter-racing was intended to be a fast-paced, unencumbered leisure activity meant to provide entertainment and an opportunity to gamble.

Despite racing's lack of requirements, Virginians did not completely dispense with all rules. The colonists took their favorite form of entertainment very seriously and consequently created regulations specifically designed to fit their unique circumstances. For instance, after a challenge was made, each owner consented to the details of the

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[52] *Newmarket Racecourse.* http://www.newmarketracecourses.co.uk/. Accessed July 23, 2006.

[53] Breen, "Horses and Gentlemen: The Cultural Significance of Gambling among the Gentry of Virginia," 25.

[54] *Virginia Gazette,* 26 November 1736.

match race, with the most significant being handicapping regulations. Handicapping, ironically, was a long-standing fixture of English racing.[55]

Similar to quarter-racing's creation, handicapping was born out of necessity. In racing's revitalization, British horsemen realized that, in order to "equalize" both contestants, a system of checks and balances was required. Thus, English race goers developed a set of handicaps based on age, size, gender, and previous racing records. These included weight and distance allowances that supposedly equalized each contestant.[56] For instance, if a mare and stallion were racing, the owners most likely granted the mare a head start.[57] Furthermore, if a well-known horse, such as the prestigious Traveler, was running, a racing contract would stipulate a pre-assigned equalizing weight. (Traveler belonged to Joseph Morton and was considered to be of the Byerley type. He was born in England and imported to the colonies sometime during the middle half of the eighteenth century. He raced several seasons before he was eventually put to stud. Although a winning race horse, Traveler was best known as a stud; producing many notable short racing off spring.)[58] Although seemingly inconsequential, racing weight consignment was very important. Not only did it clearly illustrate an attempt to further formalize quarter-racing, but it also was key to racing itself. For instance, racing weights work under the assumption if two animals are carrying the same amount of weight they have the same chance of winning the match. If an animal is required to carry more weight supposedly this extra burden decreases his speed and

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[55] Carson, *Colonial Virginians at Play,* 106.

[56] Baker, *Sports in the Western World.,* 97.

[57] A mare is a full grown female horse. A stallion is a full grown breeding male.

[58] Fairfax Harrison, "The Equine FFVs," *Virginia Magazine of History and Bibliography,* (1927): 347.

likelihood of winning. There are numerous examples of contemporary race weight stipulations. For example, a 1745 *Virginia Gazette* notice for a race to be run for "a purse of nineteen pistoles," further stipulating that each horse should carry 130 pounds.[59] Correspondingly, in 1752 there was a match run at York that had a fixed rider weight of 135 pounds.[60]

Handicapping also played a crucial role in wagering that unquestionably appealed to Virginias' predilection towards gambling. For instance, a spectator would most likely not wager on a horse that he perceived as being clearly inferior to its opponent. Unlike in Britain where a horse's name either alluded to a strong pedigree or an impressive racing record, tidewater Virginia's racing informality precluded these useful wagering aids. Consequently, Virginians generally bet on the horse that appeared to be the strongest, fastest, or healthiest. The horse's conformation, height, weight, muscle mass, and health were all prominent factors in determining a prospective winner. When one equine athlete was visually superior to its counterpart, handicapping became an essential equalizing tool. Handicapping both increased racing excitement, and allowed gamblers to place more "educated" bets.

Finally, race goers' reliance on visual assessment provides a powerful corollary to the colonists' social values. Virginia's lack of a hereditary social structure required elites to find other means to demonstrate their societal superiority. The most functional means of defining status was outward appearance. Colonists prided themselves on wearing the latest and most expensive fashions, building the largest and most elegant houses, and

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[59] *Virginia Gazette,* 12 September 1745.

[60] *Virginia Gazette,* 27 March 1752.

owning the most desired pieces of property. Just as Virginias visually gauged each others merits and social standing, bystanders measured a horses capability and speed by what they saw.

Racing Law

During the eighteenth century, another prominent indication not only of racing's popularity but also of the seriousness of its participants was the racing covenant. Once all the details had been agreed upon, gentlemen sealed gaming relations with a formal agreement. This contract could either be a written statement laying out the specific terms of the contest or an oral declaration before a disinterested third party. [61] These agreements or racing covenants "convened the contest and bound the participants to an accepted manner of riding."[62]

Racing covenants were important for several reasons. First, they increased the sport's popularity by clearly specifying the who, where, and when of a race. For instance, in order to attend an impromptu race, a spectator generally had to be present when the challenge was made. However, if the race was pre-scheduled, spectators could arrange their schedules in order to attend the meet. Second, racing covenants provided pre-established signed contracts that promised contestants and viewers a fairer race. This is illustrated in the most important covenant stipulation. In general, if a competitor was accused of cheating, the racing contract stipulated that the disagreement be taken to court

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[61] Ibid, 253.

[62] Nancy Struna, *People of Prowess: Sport, Leisure, and Labor in Early Anglo-America* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996.), 107.

where participants were legally granted an outlet for their grievances. In other words, instead of having to handle racing disputes personally, contestants simply relied on higher legal powers to peacefully decide the outcome of a questionable match. Such behavior indicates that gentlemen not only trusted the colony's formal legal system but that they were also willing to place institutional limitations on their competitiveness. [63] By taking their disputes to court, Virginians were relying on the state to solve their disputes through peaceful means. In response, Virginia courts treated racing covenants as binding legal contracts.[64]

Here again, quarter-racing provides significant insight into the inner workings of tidewater Virginia society. By examining specific contracts and cases, scholars can identify central aspects in the colonial world. For instance, in1674 the York County Court heard a case between James Bullocke and Mathew Slader. The suit stated that Bullocke "having made a race for his mare to run with a horse belonging to Mathew Slader, for 2000 lbs tobacco; it being contrary to law for a laborer to make a race, it being a sport only for gentlemen." The court fined Bullocke 100 pounds of tobacco. Ironically, the case continues by noting that "whereas Mr. Matthew Slader and James Bullocke, by condition under hand made a race for 2000 pounds tobacco, it appearing under hand and sale of said Slader, that his horse should run out of the way that Bullocke's mare might run, which is an apparent cheat, he [Slader] is order to put in the stocks for one hour."[65] Although this case centered upon social aspects, the fact that Slader, the wealthier of the

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[63] Breen, "Horses and Gentlemen: The Cultural Significance of Gambling among the Gentry of Virginia," 255.

[64] Ibid, 253.

[65] Benjamin Weisiger III, eds., *York County, Virginia Records 1672-1676.* (1991.), 128.

two, was placed in the stocks because his gelding ran into Bullocke's mare (considered at the time to be a racing foul) implies the seriousness of quarter-racing. More aptly put, even a commoner fined for racing a gentleman was still guaranteed a fair race. Likewise, Slader's elite status did not exempt him from fair racing practices and he too was punished for his racing indiscretions.

As this case demonstrates, social boundaries were a powerful issue in pre-revolutionary coastal Virginia. While white men in the colony fell into two classes (planters and yeomen) the Chesapeake region provided egalitarian opportunities. By working hard a yeoman could conceivably ascend his social status, a fact painfully obvious to Virginians self-proclaimed gentlemen class. Hence, elites created laws and regulations that reinforced their tenuous social rank.

Ironically, the simplification of horseracing that made it the sport so popular, also made it very dangerous, with potentially monumental social implications. Because the sport only required two fast horses and a straight short stretch of land, unlike formal education, expensive clothing, and other leisure activities such as dancing that required money and expertise, quarter-racing did not properly exclude commoners from what the elite felt was their domain. Therefore, elites developed laws restricting who could race in order to reinforce social order.

Not all disputes centered upon social issues, however; others cases dealt with the practical matters of racing. In October 1683, Edward Hatcher and Andrew Martin agreed to race, with the loser's horse as the prize. However, to complicate matters, Hatcher had intended on riding a horse owned by Richard Ligon, but Ligon refused to let Hatcher ride. The racing judge instructed Martin to run the course anyway. When he got to the

finish, Martin dismounted and placed his knife on the ground.[66] He then remounted and returned to the starting line. The racing officials declared him the winner and ordered Ligon to give Martin his horse. When Ligon refused to comply, the dispute was taken to the county court.[67]

In addition to arguing over bad racing form, courts also dealt with post-race disagreements. Much like modern sports, disputes were quite common; however, unlike twenty-first century games, colonial Virginias lacked instant replays. Therefore, in most cases, disagreeing parties were simply asked to reenact the disputed match. For instance, during a race at the Varina track, Thomas Batte and Richard Parker waged one hundred pounds of tobacco. During the race, Batte claimed that Parker crossed in front of him, forcing his horse to slow down; when the disagreement was taken to court, the judge stipulated that the race was to be run again on the same course. [68] Likewise, in 1697 Richard Ward and John Streward signed a quarter-racing covenant that agreed Bony, a mare actually owned by Thomas Jefferson Junior's [Grandfather of the third President] would race "ag'st a horse now belonging to Mr John Hardiman, named Watt." The covenant further stated that Bony would have a five length head start and only carry one hundred and thirty pounds with the winner receiving five pistoles. [69] However, it is evident from this case that John Steward, the looser, refused to pay the winner, Richard

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[66] Unfortunately, this was the only reference to burying a knife in the ground and it is unclear what it stood for. It can be assumed, however, that the knife signified that Martin finished the race and was the unquestionable winner.

[67] Louis Manarin and others, eds. *History of Henrico County* (Charlottesville, VA.: University Press of Virginia, 1984), 59.

[68] Ibid, 59.

[69] Thomas Altherr, eds. *Sports in North America: A Documentary History* vol. 1. (Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press, 1997), 244-245.

Ward, and the dispute was taken to the local Henrico Court house where the jury award the "s'd pl't'f against the Def'd't for the sum of five pounds sterling." [70]

In conclusion, it is clear that the combination of the unique Virginia character, born out of both tradition and necessity, coupled with the restrictions of their new environment created the perfect atmosphere for a new form of horseracing. Although shortened and informalized, quarter-racing was immensely popular and understandably appealed to a society obsessed with wealth and immediate gratification. Hence, racing provides an important and intriguing insight into coastal Virginian culture.

[70] Ibid, 245.

CHAPTER 3: THE CONTROVERSIES

While quarter-racing unquestionably illustrated both tidewater Virginia's traditional equine heritage and the colonial elites infatuation with gambling, short racing also lays bare the volatile class struggle between Virginia's self-appointed elite and the "lesser sorts." Elite efforts to use traditional racing practices coupled with strict legislation to police class lines provides significant insight into the colonial struggle over social status. When it came to quarter-racing, the elites' fears were justified. Sports such as short racing that did not require an abundance of money or education were easily accessible to non-elites. Moreover, there is primary evidence suggesting that although legally prohibited from participating in cross-social matches, commoners could and did partake in races conducted within their own ranks. In other words, even though non-elites were excluded from formalized elite racing, they still had the means to conduct matches amongst their equals. Moreover, it is essential to widen the argument beyond simply who was racing and include the horses themselves. Although the equine participants had no regard for tidewater Virginia's strict social divide, their breeding most assuredly did. Therefore, the two questions that must be answered are: first who exactly was racing? In other words, were the elites successful in their social exclusions or did racing's lack of requirements and popularity make it easy prey for a more egalitarian participation? Second, were elite coastal Virginians intentionally breeding a quarter-mile racing horse? If they were, this assuredly attested to a successful exclusion of the lower classes, who could not afford such a specialized animal. If, instead, the colonists were

simply breeding a utilitarian horse capable of many tasks, including racing, then the gentlemen might have been less successful in their social regulations.

The Men

Every sport has its idiosyncrasies, with the most apparent being who is allowed to participate. Ideally, this honor is extended to those who excel at the activity in question, regardless of their background or social status. Given that horseracing involves the horse's athleticism and owners usually do not ride their own horses, winning becomes more about a man's money than his physical ability. Hence, traditional racing easily lends itself to become a tool for enforcing social hierarchies. Nevertheless, quarter-racing's unique practices created an unusual problem. On one hand, Virginians, in particular gentlemen, created and embraced the sport because it fit into their lifestyles. On the other hand, while the elite desperately tried to instill short racing with the turf's traditional elitism, its simplicity allowed for lower class participation. In other words, because quarter-racing did not require extensive training or a formal track, it was a sport in which everyone, even the lowliest farmer who owned a horse, could participate. Thus, the sport not only fit with elite culture but also held the potential to challenge social boundaries.

In order to study the social classes of quarter-race enthusiasts, it is essential to first comprehend eighteenth-century Virginia's social structure and its connection to horseracing. For the most part, colonial gentlemen imagined themselves akin to members

of the traditional British upper classes.[71] However, despite Virginia's social advancements, by the eighteenth-century the colony still did not have England's stable social order. The gentlemen's elite claim was still precarious and open to challenges from below. The result being that, without a pre-established social hierarchy, men could easily fall out of or move into the elite ranks.[72]

The combination of these two factors created a very heavy-handed genteel class grasping for any tool to maintain their unstable social power.[73] Much as the colonial elite desperately tried to mimic England's upper classes, colonial lower classes also sought to emulate Virginia's wealthy. Although many elite activities such as travel, theatre, and balls were out of yeomen reach, quarter-racing's informality and potential spontaneity provided, if only momentarily, a gateway into the wealthy domain. Moreover, the sport also offered a good time, which many of Virginia's non-elites felt should not be monopolized by self-styled gentlemen.

Despite twenty-first century historians' common belief that quarter-racing was an exclusive genteel endeavor, contemporary sources suggest that commoners also participated. Given that the majority of the population owned a horse, and that a straight road or field was not difficult to come by, it is certainly plausible that non-elite men enjoyed their own quarter-races. Furthermore, Eighteenth-century observers contradict twenty-first century scholars' argument for the class limitations of quarter-racing. For instance, Anbury's 1776 travel account clearly states that "this diversion [quarter-racing]

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[71] Bruce, *Social Life of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century*, 39.

[72] Ibid, 39.

[73] Ibid, 108.

is a great favorite of the middling and lower classes."[74] It is important to note that, Anbury never acknowledges whether or not the "middling and lower classes" are competitors or spectators. This admission is very important nonetheless because, contrary to the modern assumption, Anbury does not clearly relegate the common citizen to the sidelines. Likewise, Smyth notes that "Virginians of *all* ranks and denominations, are excessively fond of horse and specially those of the race breed...in short their horses are their pleasure and their pride."[75]

Why then do historians assume that only gentlemen race horses? There are a few simple reasons. First, colonial historians face an imbalance of information. Landed gentry provide an overwhelming percentage of primary sources due to their advanced education and extended leisure time. Plantation owners and royal governors often kept documentation and personal accounts. Aristocratic families, moreover, had the means and were more likely to preserve the letters of their ancestors. Therefore, the gentry produced the preponderance of available sources.

Another reason for racing's seeming affluence is that it neatly fits a long-known cultural precedence. Racing has historically been associated with the elite. Even in modern times, it takes money to breed, train, and race a horse, and even more to race a winner. Secretariat, winner of the 1973 Triple Crown and one of the best known race horses of the twentieth century, was syndicated for over $6.8 million dollars by the age of

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[74] Anbury, *Travels Through the Interior Parts of America,* 227.

[75] Smyth, *Tour in the United States of America*, 21.

three.[76] To say that early racing was a common endeavor does not fit the turf's well-to-do present.

Racing history before Virginia also encourages this elite-only perception. Because racing was elite in England, so the logic goes, and the majority of Virginians were native English, racing in the colony must have been solely relegated to the wealthy classes. However, this assumption is limited. There are some very important and notable differences between England and Virginia colonies. The most significant being Virginia's lack of a hereditary nobility; instead, the gentry were forced to create a superficial social --and precarious-- hierarchy.

Another important detail that many modern historians overlook when considering quarter-racing is the far flung nature of Virginian settlement patterns. Even by the late colonial era townships and plantations were few and far between. Therefore, given the vast amount of acreage and the limited reach of the law, it was difficult for the elite and the government to exert their influence over the far reaches of the ever-extending colony. In the backwoods or in the borderland small towns quarter-racing was conducted on the sly. While these "commoner" races might have lacked the trappings and the quality horse flesh of their city counterparts, they nevertheless strove to answer the same competitive question – who has the faster horse?

Eight years after Thomas Anbury witnessed his first quarter-race, J.F. Smyth noted a similar experience. In 1784, he wrote in his travel journal that "in the southern part of the colony…they are much attached to quarter-racing… being merely a test of

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[76] Nack William, *Secretariat: The Making of a Champion* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2002), 113. Much like a company, a winning Thoroughbred is very expensive. Therefore, the horse will be syndicated. In other words, an association of people or firms will purchase shares in the horse and are authorized to undertake a duty or transact specific business.

speed; and they [Virginians] have a breed that perform it with astonishing velocity, beating every other, for that distance, with great ease…I am confident that there is not a horse in England, nor perhaps the whole world, that can excel them in rapid speed…"[77] Unlike Anbury, Smith was very complimentary of this unique leisure event. Thus, by the turn of the eighteenth century, quarter-racing had evolved into a common sporting event that, while still exciting, was more or less accepted.

In conclusion, horseracing was culturally entrenched and recognized as a central Virginia leisure pursuit. It did not, however, appear to be as elite dominated as the tidewater gentlemen (and scholars studying their culture) liked to believe. Ironically, by designing a race that necessitated only speed, tidewater gentlemen inadvertently made it possible for any horse owner to compete—so long as he claimed the better horse.

The Horse

While men controlled the race, it was the horse that actually competed; therefore, in order to fully grasp the true social implications of the sport, it is essential to examine the racing vehicle. By assessing the goals and intentions of colonial tidewater breeders, modern observers are allowed an intriguing glimpse into the world of quarter-racing, including its social implications. Furthermore, the creation of a North American horse also allegorically coincided with the development of an entirely new Virginia character!

In January 1782, Baron Ludwig Von Closen, an aide-de-camp to General Rochambeau, while visiting Williamsburg, wrote "I have gone to several horse-races, which I found entertaining. One of the greatest sciences and occupations of Virginias is

[77] Smyth, *Tour in the United States of America*, 27.

the preparation of horses for racing; they take the greatest care of them and understand them completely."[78] Even though technically not a breed at the time, the Celebrated American Quarter-mile Running Horse, or the C.A.Q.R.H.(the last letter could be changed to an M denoting the horse in question was female) as it was known at the time, was a popular type of horse conscientiously bred by colonial Virginians during the seventeen and eighteenth centuries.[79] While primary sources leave little doubt of the intentional breeding of this animal, these items do not delineate whether or not the Chesapeake inhabitants deliberately intended to breed a race horse or simply bred a utilitarian horse that just happened to be a fast galloper.

This question has vital social implications for two essential reasons. First, if coastal Virginians were specifically breeding a running horse, then their actions reveal their dedication to the sport of racing and, likewise, the elite's use of the sport as a social tool. Second, this question provides intriguing insight into the Virginian's gentlemanly values. For instance, much as the fast and simple nature of the sport appealed to a people obsessed with immediate gratification, the creation of a new and superior horse appealed to their pride. By producing an animal that excelled at the quarter of a mile, Virginians could finally justify their new sport. Additionally, even if Virginians did not intentionally breed a speed horse but simply created a utilitarian steed that happened to be a fast runner, they had, nonetheless, still fashioned a superior animal well suited to their environment. Hence, the new colonial horse metaphorically represented the creation of a

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[78] Evelyn Acomb, trans. *The Revolutionary Journal of Baron Ludwig Von Closen 1780-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1958), 177.

[79] Luane, *America's Quarter Horse* , 34.

new individual. While both man and horse might not have the refinement of their European brethren, these "lesser sorts" were exceedingly accomplished at what they did--surviving in the fast lane.

The Colonial Blood Horse

Breeding a winning race horse is not simple in any era. It requires knowledge, resources, and of course money. Moreover, for tidewater Virginians there was the added problem of the Atlantic Ocean, a gigantic barrier between themselves and the best European breeding farms. Therefore, in order to produce fine horses, Virginians had to find (either travel to Europe's finest studs or pay a knowledgeable person to seek out a desirable animal), purchase, and ship horses across the ocean. Understandably, this endeavor took an abundant amount of time, money, and effort. For instance, during the early eighteenth century, European horses commonly sold for anywhere between forty and sixty pounds not including the immense cost for shipping the animals across the Atlantic.[80]

Despite these overwhelming expenses, primary sources plainly suggest at least a few Virginians felt the effort worth the investment. For instance, Burnaby writes, " the horses [of Virginia] are fleet and beautiful; and the gentlemen of Virginia…have spared no expense or trouble to improve the breed of them by importing great numbers from England."[81] Likewise, Smyth notes "I am confident that there is not a horse in England,

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[80] *Virginia Gazette*, 27 July 1739.

[81] Burnaby, *Travels Through the Middle Settlements of North America* , 44.

nor perhaps the world that can excel them in rapid speed...the gentlemen of fortune expend great sums on their studs..."[82]

Since it is obvious that Virginians were not interested in expending much energy in the finer details of racing or farming, the mere fact that they put such time and effort into their racing stock clearly suggests a sense of pride. Moreover, breeding the best horse not only illustrated a gentlemen's superiority in the colony, but, also, his prestige ideally extended back to the mother country. Many Europeans considered colonial America nothing more than a barbaric borderland, complete with unsophisticated country bumpkins and wild Indians. Virginians, particularly the upper class, were acutely aware of this disparaging portrayal and desperately sought to justify their place in European society by importing the best clothing, wine, furniture, and of course the best livestock. However, when it came to horses, Virginians did not want to simply fit in; they wanted to prove their superiority!

For example, in his article "The Equine FFVs," the distinguished horsemen Fairfax Harrison acknowledged twenty of colonial Virginia's best blood stock. In his writings, Harrison mentions such greats as Jolly Roger, who he noted to be the "first horse that gave distinction to the racing stock of Virginia." Jolly Roger was one of the preeminent race horses of the colonial period, with a pedigree tracing back to the distinguished Partner, who Harrison considered to be "the best racer and stallion of his day." Jolly Roger was imported to Virginia sometime around 1748 and quickly put to use as a stud producing numerous exceptional racing off-springs. Harrison explained: "Jolly

[82]Smyth, *Tour in the United States of America*, 23.

Roger got many fine races, stallions and brood mares, and is a favorite cross in the pedigree of the Virginia bred turf horse, and very justly so."[83]

Jolly Roger was not the only stallion to make the arduous trans-Atlantic trek. A personal letter written by prominent horseman William Tayloe relates the purchase of the English "celebrated running horse" Clifden. In the letter, Tayloe writes to an unknown recipient that Clifden was a "horse of very fine form uniting beauty and uncommon strength." Furthermore, "at five years of age, he [Clifden] won ten times out of his first twelve races....he was considered to be one of the best horses of his year."[84] Clearly Tayloe found Clifden's pedigree and personal record worthwhile enough to go to the expense of transporting the stallion to Virginia. In the latter half of the letter, which must have been more of a private stud advertisement then a personal correspondence, he outlined Clifden's prestigious pedigree, mentioning that he was bred by the famous Earl of Derby (a man so prominent in English racing to warrant his own type of race – the derby) and was sold as a colt to Sir John Lade for five hundred Guineas. Tayloe further praises Clifden's brother, Mulberry, who he considered to be the best race horse in England.[85]

As this letter clearly illustrates, bloodlines were a key feature in a stallion's notoriety. Bloodlines appealed to Virginians for two very important reasons. First, prominent bloodlines supposedly attested to an animal's greatness. Given that many Virginians did not have the means to travel and watch these animals in person, bloodlines

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[83] Harrison, "The Equine FFVs," 341.

[84] William Tayloe to unknown recipient, 1792, Tayloe Papers, University of Virginia Alderman Library (here after UVAL),1.

[85] Ibid, 3.

were one of the few quantifiable attributes observable from afar. Second, and more important for this thesis, bloodlines probably appealed to a people lacking their own hereditary social status. More clearly stated, Virginians turned to their horses' parentage to justify their own flimsy grasp on their self-determined social status.[86]

This contrived human association with animal pedigrees became quite obvious in contemporary news publications. Aside from announcing a practical service, stud advertisements also clearly proclaimed the owners' status. For instance, Anthony Waters placed an advertisement in a New York paper for his stallion, True Britain, who Waters described as a fifteen hand, six year old "fine bay horse." The advertisement also mentions that True Britain was "got by Old Spark, who was a full sister to Col. Hopper's Pacolet: Her Dam was Queen Mab, got by Musgrove's Grey Arabian, a most beautiful horse, for which he refused five hundred guineas." Waters also makes sure to explain True Britain's tie to the famous horse Childers and Governor Harrison's Arabian. Finally, the publication stipulates that True Britain would only stand one season and would cover mares for five pounds a leap. Even though not from Virginia, this advertisement especially is interesting because Waters not only mentions famous horses but also famous people such as Col. Taskers and Governor Harrison. It is quite clear that the owner was trying to attach his name to other prominent colonists; hence, showing his own importance through association. [87]

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[86] Michel Rozbicki, *The Complete Colonial Gentleman: Cultural Legitimacy in Plantation America* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1998),163.

[87] New York: Printed by William Weyman, 1763.

Thus, it is quite clear that, at least for the upper elites, specialized breeding was a prominent activity, but that begs the question: what did importing English Thoroughbreds specifically bred to race a mile or longer have to do with the specialized breeding of colonial short racing horses? The answer is simple. These stallions were imported because they possessed particular attributes that made them desirable to early Virginians -- in particular, their capacity for short fast, bursts of speed. For instance, Harrison notes that the English bred Janus, a prominent colonial short racing stud, was said to be "of low stature[size] about 14 hands and ¾ of an inch high…had great bone and muscle, round very compact, large quarters, and very swift." with "nearly all of his [Janus] immediate descendents … swift quarter nags; they never could run far."[88]

Janus's description is very important because it relates to modern scholars the desirable qualities sought after by Virginia horse breeders. It is important to note that there are significant conformational differences between a long distance runner and a sprinter. Generally speaking, the best Thoroughbreds had slender legs, long backs, and lean bodies. A good sprinter, on the other hand, had short legs and back, and heavy hindquarters. Long-distance horses had time to reach the peak of their speed. Hence, a fast start was not necessary, with more importance given to the overall achievable speed. (Secretariat, the winner of the 1973 American Triple Crown, in fact, was over 17 hands tall and had a stride of 28 feet.) However, quarter mile races were short and required an animal capable of immediately obtaining maximum speed within the first few strides of the race. This type of race necessitated an animal with large, well-developed hind muscles that could quickly propel horse and rider forward.

[88] Harrison, "The Equine FFVs," 351.

Moreover, Janus also possessed another very essential stallion characteristic. He was well known for his prepotency, or rather his ability to reliably pass on character and type to his offspring. For instance, in 1767 the *Virginia Gazette* detailed a race run between two colts and a "bay filly got by Janus.[89]" Interestingly, the other two horses are identified solely by the owners' name, with no mention of their pedigree. The filly or young female, however, was described by her pedigree. This mention suggests that Janus was not only popular as a racehorse but also a well-known stud. Ironically, in this case Janus's blood did not prove the test and the filly was soundly beaten by one of her male adversaries.

However, importing a stallion was only half the recipe. In order to breed top quality stock, Virginians also needed superior mares. While importing a prominent stallion was money well spent, importing an entire herd of brood stock was monetarily prohibitive. Thus, Virginians turned to their only other option: native mares. This not only proved to be a more cost-efficient option, but it also bolstered Virginia pride. In sum, the Chesapeake inhabitants took England's best and bred it to native stock, an act considered by the English to be sacrilege, and created what the colonists saw to be an even better race-horse.

As Harrison notes in his *John's Island Stud,* colonial America had two distinct types of "native" horses (horses in the Americas became extinct 11,000 years ago and were reintroduced by the Spanish in 1492): the small and capricious Seminole or Creek

[89] *Virginia Gazette,* 28 May 1767.

horse, and the "larger and more docile" Choctaw or Chickasaw horse.[90] Both of these horses were of Spanish origin, tracing back to the Arabian and Barb breeds of northern Africa. Contemporary writings indicate that the Chickasaw horse's popularity outpaced its smaller counterparts. The Chickasaw was even admired by the snobbish colonial elite. For instance, an advertisement placed in the *South Carolina Gazette* advertised the sale of "several valuable saddle horses of the Chickasaw breed."[91] Similarly, there was even a stud notice printed in the *Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser* for a "Chickasaw to stand." The advertisement further stipulates that the horse in question stood "15 hands high, [was] of a fine deep brown colour, approaching a black, seven years old, and is one of the finest saddle horses in America."[92]

This out-crossing between European and colonial blood not only created a horse of astonishing speed and stamina but also one that was uniquely Virginian. By breeding native stock (animals considered by many of the English as nothing more than scrubby little ponies) with fine English bloodlines, the colonists were unintentionally emulating their own identities, which then combined Old World elegance with New World tenacity.

The resulting Virginian horses became so well-known that, instead of purchasing foreign stock, other colonists, including such as wealthy South Carolinians, turned to the Chesapeake region for fine horses. Harrison's *John's Island Stud* dedicates an entire

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[90] Fairfax Harrison, *The John's Island Stud South Carolina, 1750-1788* (Richmond: Privately printed by Old Dominion Press), 169.

[91] *South Carolina Gazette,* 16 December 1745.

[92] *Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser*, 15 March 1796.

chapter to Virginia horses in the Carolina region.[93] For example, in April of 1767 the *South Carolina Gazette* published:

> "the fine horse Traveller (now 5 years old) will cover at Thomas Nightingale's on Charles-town Neck, at only ten pounds 9 currency a mare…Traveller is a brown bay, sixteen hands high, without any blemish whatever, well marked, well proportioned and acting, and the best calculated for a useful breed…He was bred by Col. Ruffin of Virginia, and got by his own horse Crawford."[94]

This is very important and telling because Harrison's points out the perceived superiority of Virginia stock, even beyond her own colonial borders. In other words, instead of importing European brood stock, Carolinas' elite chose to buy horses from their sister colony.

In conclusion, contemporary sources clearly suggest that Virginia's elite practiced a dedicated breeding program. By importing the best sprinters to cross with the colony's best native stock, the elite were able to successfully create a phenomenal racing animal. By doing so, the wealthy demonstrated not only their pride but also their dedication to quarter-racing. By breeding a specialized racehorse the colonial upper class was able to finally create a defining tool that undercut lower class participation in this popular leisure activity. In other words, because breeding a specialized racehorse was very expensive, the elite assured that only members of their own class would be able to successfully compete. Nevertheless, their attempted exclusion did not take into account that commoners did not need a racehorse to compete in their own leisure sport! Although common breed horses lacked the speed of their elite brethren, they nonetheless were capable of competing amongst themselves.

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[93] Harrison, *The John's Island Stud South Carolina*, 173-178.
[94] *South Carolina Gazette*, 27 April 1767.

The Work Horse

Not all horses are created equal. Some excel at tests of strength and endurance, while others excel at speed. For the most part, breeds are specialized and what is easy for one type is almost impossible for another. Therefore, it is important to take into consideration the practicality of owning a horse bred to do only one thing. Unquestionably, the majority of colonial Virginians did not have the resources required to produce a specialized racehorse. Nor would they most likely have wanted to. For the great majority of the population outside Virginia's upper class, having a racehorse was akin to a farmer owning a sports car instead of a tractor. Yes, a race horse looked nice in the stall, but, the only thing this blood horse produced was fertilizer. Moreover, non-elites needed a horse suitable to the environment. Thus, almost all tidewater Virginians had a fine eye for horse flesh, they did not necessarily view equine quality through racing lenses.[95]

That is not to say that specialized breeding did not take place. It simply means that the preponderance of early Virginians were not trying to create the fastest, but, instead, the best multifaceted horse possible. Specifically, most sought an animal that was strong enough to plow, flashy enough to ride, and fast enough to race. Farmers and artisans, like Virginia gentlemen, selected horses with desirable qualities. Instead of sprinters, however, they sought horses that lent themselves to everyday chores.

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[95] Mackey-Smith, *The Colonial Quarter Race Horse*, 9.

While the gentlemen imported expensive racing stock, the majority of colonial Virginians chose to bring over the more practical and less expensive Irish Hobby horse.[96] A breed no longer in existence today, the Hobby was one of the most popular and versatile horses of the colonial era. [Figure 2] It was equally at home plowing a field, pulling a cart, or being ridden. Not only was this animal sturdy, but it was considered to be an extremely comfortable riding horse specifically acknowledged for its very easy-going lateral gates, better known as the amble or the rack. A lateral gate is where both right front leg and right hind leg move simultaneously creating a rocking sensation for the rider common to the modern day Tennessee Walking Horse. (The majority of today's riding horses have diagonal gates with the front right and left hind striking the ground at the same time.)[97]

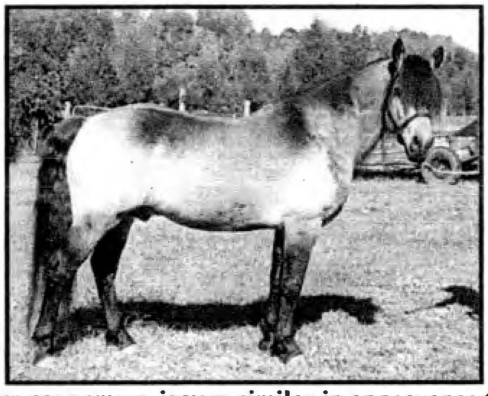

Figure 2: The modern connemara is very similar in appearance to the extinct Hobby Horse.[98]

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[96] Although extinct today the Hobby horse is very similar to the modern day Connemara pony. The Connemara is an all-around animal that excels at many different disciplines and is best known for its calm personality and extraordinary jumping ability.

[97] Ibid,9. Coincidently, it is imperative to note that Ireland was known for its racing tradition, and the Hobby was not only recognized as a superior work horse but also believed by natives to be faster then its taller English counter parts, thus making it the fastest horse in the world. Moreover, some historians consider this breed to be the forefather of the English Thoroughbred. But racing was only a side occupation for this brilliant horse.

[98] *Foothill Farms* "Gunsmoke" http://www.connemaras.com/nails/gunsphoto.html Accessed July 23, 2006.

Like the prestigious imported racing stock, the Hobby was then crossed with native colonial mares. However, unlike the upper classes, commoners predominately owned geldings and mares, and only occasionally crossed their best quality females to a local stallion. Thus, these crosses did not occur every generation, and happened only when an obvious improvement was needed, an exceptional mare came along, or there was a windfall of extra cash available that allowed for the expense of breeding. These crosses resulted in a new type of horse that was short and stocky, standing between thirteen to fifteen hands. The new colonial work horse possessed a deep chest, a short broad head, with little ears and a very prominent jowl. Furthermore, it had short cannon bones and pasterns, clean legs and, most importantly, heavily muscled rear quarters and a short back.[99] [Figure 3]

Additionally, this "peculiar" breed was very hardy. This attribute was highly enviable because, except for a very few special and prized saddle horses, the majority of

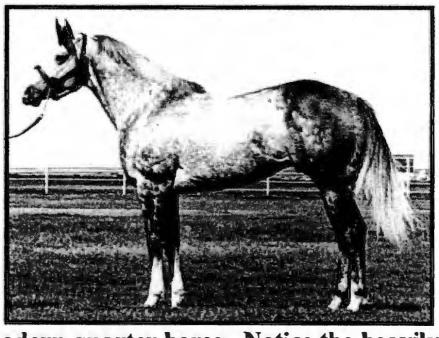

Figure 3: Picture of a modern quarter horse. Notice the heavily muscled hind quarters, prominent jowl, and short back. [100]

[99] Ibid, 10.

[100] America's Quarter Horse "Welcome to the Top Twenty-Seven Quarter Horse Sires of Money Earners (1999)" Last updated 1998-99. www.quarterh.com/top2700.htm Accessed July 23, 2006.

the colony's equine population was turned out to fend for themselves. [101] Incidentally, while toughness was a desirable quality in the wilds of the new colony, by the first half of the eighteenth century, free turnout had one noticeable shortcoming. American horses were becoming shorter and shorter. The advertisements in the *Virginia Gazette* clearly attest to the colonial horses' small stature. For instance, in 1738 there was a notice for a stolen horse that was 13 hands.[102] Likewise in 1745 there was an announcement for a strayed "middle-siz'd" horse.[103] To counteract the downsizing of the equine population, in 1748 the provincial government ruled that no stoned or non-gelded stallion over the age of two could be released if he was under 13½ hands. The penalty for this crime was the forfeiture of "every stoned horse (not gelded), found at large, upon any unenclosed grounds, or forty shillings current money, in lieu thereof."[104] These laws are telling because they illustrate the pride and importance of horse breeding in the colony.

Although these utilitarian horses lacked the blood lines of their elite counterparts, their owners took no less pride in their creation. Much like the commoners who created them, these all-around work horses lacked prominent pedigrees so they had to prove themselves by ability alone. This was particularly important in a land where a person could achieve much simply through hard work. Likewise, given the Virginian's habit of visually gauging status, commoners could easily emulate the upper classes (something they practiced in all aspects of life) by owning superior horse flesh.

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[101] Mackey-Smith, *The Colonial Quarter Race Horse*, 8; Harrison, *The John's Island Stud South Carolina*, 331.

[102] *Virginia Gazette,* 1 October 1738. A horse is any animal over 14.2 hands.

[103] *Virginia Gazette,* 12 September 1745.

[104] William Hening, *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, From the First Secession of the Legislature, in the year 1619.* Vol VI, 1748. (Richmond: Franklin Press, 1819),189.

In conclusion, the most plausible answer to the initial question of whether or not Virginians invested in specialized breeding is yes. However, there are a few notable conditions. First, evidence does suggest that the gentlemen class showed keen interest in producing a superior short racing horse. By importing prominent European stock and crossing it with notable native mares, these elites sought to produce a superior short racing horse. In doing so they were also clearly displaying their equine ascendancy. Second, while the non-elites were unable to import expensive stallions, this did not preclude them from conducting their own dedicated breeding. Like the elites, commoners took great pride in their animals and sought to produce a horse that fulfilled their priorities—which were practical rather than ornamental. Even though the primary goal of the commoners' dedicated breeding program was the creation of a utilitarian horse, their all-around-equine was inadvertently an exceptional racer. While not of the quality of the upper class horses, this commoner equine, nevertheless, provided its owners with a viable racing animal.

CHAPTER 4: RACING'S RELOCATION

By the middle of the eighteenth century the majority of tidewater Virginia's population, regardless if it was competing or merely watching, enjoyed the fast-paced, informal nature of quarter-racing. However, during the later half of the eighteenth century their love would prove to be fickle as the coast and its economy stabilized, making way for the more civilized practices of Europe, which of course included Thoroughbred racing. Aside from the tantalizing allure of finally being capable of emulating Old World practices, shifting planting practices, changing mores, social struggles, and the desperate need for European acceptance culminated in mile track racing's replacement of short racing. Moreover, the tidewater regions fear of non-elite participation also spurred the coastal elites to adopt a new more expensive sport, one in which it was beyond the reach of the lower classes. However, quarter-racing did not completely disappear. For the same reasons it was created in the first place, quarter-racing gained popularity in the colonial borderlands. Similar to the first colonists, the western pioneers did not have the time nor energy to dedicate mile racing; however, due to its informal nature, short racing once again proved to be a popular pastime. This move is not only important in understanding the development of the sport, but it is also key to grasping the advancement of Virginia's society and culture.

In order to grasp the cultural significance of quarter-racing's relocation, it is essential to first understand what happened to quarter-racing. Similar to the debate over who was competing, modern historians have contradictory answers to the when's and

why's of quarter-racing's declining coastal popularity. While the majority of historians suggest the sport was completely replaced by Thoroughbred racing by 1730, contemporary accounts and newspapers clearly suggest otherwise.

Despite historians' overwhelming agreement that short racing disappeared in 1730, contemporary sources such as Anbury and Smyth, whose accounts were both written post 1776, suggest otherwise. Why this chronological discrepancy? The answer is really quite simple but often overlooked because the contradiction between modern and past observers is not based on chronology but rather geography. Modern historians, for the most part, focus on the Virginia tidewater area that was settled first and, therefore, has the longest and best known history. During the eighteenth century, the colony of Virginia did not stop with the tidewater, but extended into the borderlands, including the mountainous regions near present day Charlottesville. Although Anbury and Smyth had traveled throughout Virginia, including the tidewater region, both of their accounts concerning quarter-racing were taken from the backcountry; in particular, Anbury was visiting the Jones Plantation near Charlottesville when he first observed quarter-racing. Likewise, Smyth's observation also came from the borderlands near the southern half of the state. Given their location, it becomes very obvious that, while quarter-racing might have been replaced by Thoroughbred racing on the coast, it was still practiced in the hinterlands and backcountry as late as the 1790's.[105]

In spite of this concrete information suggesting quarter-racing's western relocation, many modern historians still point to 1730 as the end of short racing in

[105] Anbury, *Travels Through the Interior Parts of America*, 227; Smyth, *Tour in the United States of America*, 23.

Virginia.[106] There are numerous reasons for this modern oversight. Again, the lack of colonial sources makes ascertaining exact dates very difficult.

For instance, one reason modern historians might embrace 1730 is because it is considered by many British racing historians as the completion date for Thoroughbred racing's transformation. By this time, oval track racing had established itself as a fast-paced, exciting leisure activity.[107] Furthermore, up until 1730, British horse breeders were still trying to create their ideal horse; by 1730, their invention was considered complete. The Thoroughbred unquestionably had become the pinnacle of racing.[108] It is quite plausible that Virginia's elite were capable of importing superior, more readily available stock better suited to long distance racing. Thus, supply and demand worked in the colonists' favor. [109]

Significant English dates are not the only reasons historians might lean towards 1730. By this time important changes had drastically influenced the colony, making it more susceptible to English racing's influences. For example, by 1730 Virginia's tidewater region was becoming wealthier, which is significant for two reasons. First, increased gain coupled with England's surplus of superior race horses allowed Virginians to import better stock. Second, economic wealth gained through tobacco farming afforded the coastal region the time and money to embrace more complicated sporting

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[106] Mackey-Smith, *The Colonial Quarter Race Horse*, 69; Wiggins, *The Great American Speedhorse: A Guide to Quarter Horse Racing,* 8; Baker, *Sports in the Western World* , 97; Ewing, *The Sports of Colonial Williamsburg*, 3.

[107] Longrigg, *The History of Horse Racin,* 89.

[108] Ibid, 85.

[109] Mackey-Smith, *The Colonial Quarter Race Horse*, 12.

endeavors. Colonists could now actively breed and train racehorses capable of competing over longer, more complicated courses. Moreover, not only were the horses themselves better suited for the riggers of a more complex sport, but riders also were able to spend more time learning the finer aspects of racing. This, in turn, led to the specialized training of young boys, mostly African Americans, as jockeys. By 1774 Joseph Pilmore, a Methodist itinerant preacher, in a rant concerning the morality of horseracing, states, "I began to speak freely of the absurdity of it [horseracing] and shewed [*sic*] how rediculus [*sic*] it is for gentlemen to sense to ride many miles to see two or three horses run about a field with Negroes on their backs!"[110]

By the later half of the eighteenth-century it was clear that owners no longer designed to ride their own horses, instead handing the task over to smaller and lighter slaves. This hints at a need to emulate England, which had had practicing jockeys since the early half of the century. Moreover, hiring a rider further distanced owners from the actual work and further insinuated their wealthy status. By using slaves as riders, the elite not only reinforced their social standing, they also enforced racial order.

Changes in the tobacco market also influenced the colonists' ability to embrace European racing practices. Prior to 1730, plowing over a tobacco field in order to build a large race course would have meant financial ruin. Fortunately for Thoroughbred racing, tobacco depletes the land of important nutrients if it is planted too frequently. In their haste to increase their own personal gain many Virginian farmers had continuously planted field after field of tobacco without taking the time to properly fertilize the soil.

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[110] Joseph Pilmore, *The Journal of Joseph Pilmore Methodist Itinerant for the Years August 1, 1769 to January 2, 1774.* (Reprint Philadelphia: Message Publishing Company, 1969),158.

While these farming practices were lucrative for the first hundred years, by 1730 Virginian plantations were literally drying up, leaving vast stretches of unusable land.[111] Unable to plant, some landowners transformed their once-wealthy tobacco fields into equally profitable oval racetracks.[112]

Primary sources, including personal travel accounts and contemporary newspapers, clearly confirm mile racings' rise in popularity. Smyth writes,

> "there are races at Williamsburg twice a year, that is every spring and fall, or autumn. Adjoining to the town is a very excellent course,... their purses are generally raised by subscription, and are gained by the horse that wins...they amount to a hundred pounds each for the first days running and fifty pounds each every day after; the races commonly continuing for a week. There are also matches and sweepstakes very often for considerable sums...besides these at Williamsburg, there are established annually, almost at every town and considerable place in Virginia."[113]

Smyth's account is very telling for numerous reasons. Not only does it attest to mile racing's popularity, but it also clearly describes important aspects of the race. This, in and of itself, is significant because it suggests that besides the distance, not much else had been changed. Much as in quarter-racing, there were still weight standards, purses, and even some match races being run (traditional mile races generally have fields of more than two horses). Thus, all that had changed was the distance, but, ironically, that was all that was required to make the sport acceptable to English eyes and, more importantly, beyond non-elites' reach. In other words, by

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[111] T.H. Breen, *Tobacco Culture: The Mentality of the Great Tidewater Planters on the Eve of the Revolution.* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press,1985), 177.

[112] Mackey-Smith, *The Colonial Quarter Race Horse*, 15.

[113] Smyth, *Tour in the United States of America*, 21.

finally adopting the longer distance, tidewater Virginians were symbolically relinquishing part of their individuality in order to fulfill their ambition of emulating European practices. Understandably, the coastal colonists wanted to rid themselves of anything that compromised their elite goal.

Personal accounts are not the only sources attesting to the colonists' growing interest in oval racing. Contemporary newspapers also attest to Virginia's quest to be accepted by their European counterparts. As early as 1737, for instance, an advertisement placed in the *Virginia Gazette* announced "horse-racing every Saturday until October, at the Race Ground near the City [Williamsburg]."[114] Likewise, in 1766 an advertisement made note that "last Wednesday the FAIR began in this city [Williamsburg] .... There was a Horserace, round the Mile course, the first Day..."[115] In 1768 there was mention of a "sweepstake race to be run annually, on the Day before the 4th Thursday in October, at the Seat of the Government in Virginia, for the Term of Seven Years, to commence in October 1768... to run fair, agreeable to the King's Plate Rules of Racing at Newmarket [England]..."[116] (Sadly the Williamsburg race course no longer exists; there is a Revolutionary pen and ink map of the city that references a mile round racetrack located on the south side of the York Road, between the road and a mill pond which was located below the capital. [Figure 4])

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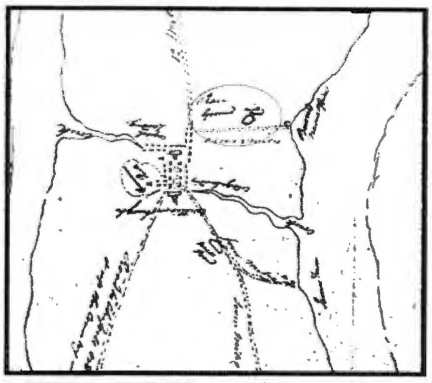
[114] *Virginia Gazette,* 26 November 1737.

[115] *Virginia Gazette,* 24 October 1766.

[116] *Virginia Gazette,* 24 October 1768.

Map of quarter patch road. Road marked in red. [117]



1780 pen and ink drawing of Williamsburg race course. [118]

Figure 4: Maps

Hence, modern historians have numerous reasons to believe that quarter-racing had disappeared by 1730. This rationale does not take into consideration the ever expanding Virginia border that was stretching farther west in the interior of the colony. Thus, as quarter-racing was replaced in the east, it easily found a niche in the west.

Quarter-racing's westward expansion derived from its decline in popularity in the tidewater. A change in wealth and planting practices coupled with a surplus of breeding stock combined to create an environment ripe for Thoroughbred racings' colonial migration. These factors provided a catalyst for quarter-racing's decline in popularity and subsequent westward expansion.

Many coastal Virginians by the late colonial era became disdainful of earlier practices. For the same reasons they had embraced the sport in the first place, tidewater

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[117] Civil War-era map of Quarter-Patch Road outside Williamsburg. This is were quarter-racing in Williamsburg most likely took place. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

[118] Pen-and ink sketch map of Williamsburg area Photostat from original in Clinton Collection, at the William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan ca. 1780-82.

farmers found it too spontaneous, unsophisticated, and "untamed, fit only for rustics, and uncultivated." [119] Furthermore, Anbury writes that "these races [quarter-races] are only among the settlers in the interior parts of this Province [Virginia], for they are much laughed at and ridiculed by the people in the lower parts.[120]" (Ironically, this viewpoint of short racing was not new or unique to Virginia. Europeans had been denigrating the sport since its creation.)

This distain coincided with the elites' continuous struggle to maintain their precarious social power. By the early eighteenth century, the tidewater elite still did not have a firm grasp on their social status, making quarter-racing, a sport that could easily fall prey to non-elite participation extremely hazardous. However, the advent of Thoroughbred racing provided them with an opportune replacement that was equally popular but out of reach to non-elites. Thoroughbred racing not only required large sums of money, but also vast amounts of time and effort to train and maintain a top racehorse.[121] Moreover, by the late eighteenth century the tidewater elite took their racing regulations even further. Once again, mimicking England, some elites formed jockey clubs that only allowed paying members to compete in club-sponsored events. For example, in the Tappahannic Jockey Club rule book it is stipulated that "no person, not being a member of this club, shall directly or indirectly, enjoy any imbursement

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[119] Ewing, *The Sports of Colonial Williamsburg*, 3.

[120] Anbury, *Travels Through the Interior Parts of America*, 228.

[121] Baker, *Sports in the Western World,* 20.

whatsoever from the winning of any horse, mare or gelding; and if any purse be won in violation of this resolution, such purse shall be forfeited to the next best horse.[122]"

Despite its fall from tidewater planters' grace, quarter-racing was still very appealing to Americans settling the borderlands, an environment very analogous to the one faced by early colonists. Like the early colonists, the backcountry migrants did not have the means to clear land for a track, breed a racehorse, or train man and beast in the finer niceties of mile racing. Hence, quarter-racing, appealed to men in western North Carolina, Tennessee, Western and Southern Virginia, and Kentucky, who wanted immediate gratification and enjoyed good, fast-paced recreation.[123] Primary sources affirm this relocation. For instance, Smyth stipulates that residents of the southern part of Virginia and North Carolina "are much attached to quarter-mile racing."[124] Correspondingly, in 1810 John Reynolds, an Illinois resident, wrote in his memoirs, *My Own Times,* that "quarter-races were the most common, and at which the most chicanery and jugglery were practiced. In quarter-races, much depends on fast judges than fast horses...In November of this year [1811], I [Reynolds] made a wager to run a quarter-race at Cahokia...the whole country turned out to see the sport.[125]" As these accounts illustrate, quarter-racing had not lost its popularity, but only moved west.

In conclusion, although the more established eastern coastline adopted standard racing practices in the mid-eighteenth century, quarter-racing did not disappear. Instead, it simply moved to the interior of early America. Ironically, today's Quarter Horseracing

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[122] Tappahannic Jockey Club, 1796. Virginia Historical Society (hereafter VHS).

[123] Carson, *Colonial Virginians at Play*, 110.

[124] Smyth, *Tour in the United States of America*, 22.

[125] John Reynolds, *My Own Times* (Belleville, Ill: B.H. Perryman, 1855), 84-85.

is still a sport enjoyed by westerners and rural Americans. For instance, while the east coast, from New York down to Florida, is dominated by prestigious Thoroughbred mile track racing, including such notable races as the Kentucky Derby in Kentucky, the Belmont in New York, and the Preakness in Maryland, quarter-racing is very popular in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona.

Conclusion:

Virginia's horse culture combined with the colonists' obsession for immediate gratification created the perfect ingredients for the formation of quarter-racing. Not only did short racing afford the ideal outlet for tidewater Virginians' independence, competitivism, and materialism, but it also functioned as a tool to police social order. Consequently, seventeenth and eighteenth-century tidewater Virginians embraced their new innovation, transforming it from an ad hoc race into a formalized competition complete with specially-made courses, racing covenants that stipulated the how, when, and where of the race, and even public notices announcing upcoming events. Moreover, Virginia courts refereed the sport by providing a forum for unsatisfied participants.

As a result of these factors, not only did quarter-racing become one of the most popular colonial sporting events, but it also developed into a cultural icon with significant social ramifications. For instance, while it might appear that short racing was an elite undertaking, upon closer examination it becomes clear that the sport's simplicity undermined upper class ambitions to monopolize it. Likewise, even though the elites attempted to breed a superior short racing animal, the lower class also bred a utilitarian work animal that was still a viable racing animal -- a fact that was painfully obvious for tidewater Virginia's gentlemen who used the sport as a social regulating tool.

As the tidewater region's economy stabilized and tobacco practices evolved, the region became enamored with more dignified pursuits. With a decline in short racing's popularity along the seaboard, quarter-racing all but disappeared by 1730. It was subsequently replaced by the more sophisticated and formalized thoroughbred race- a sport that allowed eighteenth-century gentlemen more effective social control. Rather

than disappearing, the versatile short race found a new home in the borderlands of the early republic. At the turn of the Eighteenth Century, American pioneers needed a fast-paced outlet. Lacking the means and time to pursue mile-long racing, western migrants quickly adopted quarter-racing.

Despite its eventual replacement, quarter-racing dominated colonial Virginia's sporting world for close to one hundred years. Much like its creators, short racing was a combination of new and old. While it was loosely based on traditional mile races, Virginians adapted European practices to fit their new environment and needs. The result was a sport that was exhilarating, provided quick results, and easily fit into the colonists' new lifestyle. Thus, the events surrounding the creation of this unique sport, its rise in popularity, and its eventual westward expansion offer a revealing window into understanding the culture of colonial tidewater Virginia.

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Maps

"Civil War-era Map of Quarter-Patch Road outside Williamsburg." [map] Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

"Pen-and-ink Sketch Map of Williamsburg Area." [map] Photostat from original in Clinton Collection, at the William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, circa 1780-1782.

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Vita

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