For the improvement of the breed of horse: thoroughbred racing and national security in the age of horsepower, 1776-1945

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FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE BREED OF HORSE:
THOROUGHBRED RACING AND NATIONAL SECURITY IN THE
AGE OF HORSEPOWER, 1776-1945

by

Elizabeth Redkey

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For

Edwin Storer Redkey (1931-2011)

A great historian and even better father
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Abstract

From Biblical times through the mid-twentieth century, humans relied on horses as a critical vehicle of war. But horses, unlike modern machines, could not simply be manufactured to the necessary specifications, in the necessary numbers, at the necessary times. In addition, cavalry warfare was the most physically demanding of all tasks to which humans have put horses, and required horses of exceptional endurance and athletic ability. Creating a pool of such horses to be drawn from in times of military need took careful breeding and planning. But the United States, with its fear of a standing military, and its decentralized government structure, did not have the political will or ability to create a military horse breeding program, while most European powers did. Instead, for its horse supply, the United States relied on the one group of horsemen in the nation who had systematized programs to breed uniformly superb horses with the ability to pass their best qualities on to their offspring, even when crossed with horses of different breeding. These were the thoroughbred racing men who performance tested their bloodstock and bred for generations for uniform, measurable qualities, and whose animals the common American horse owner sought out to improve his own workaday stock.

This work argues that the demands on a cavalry mount were more than the average horse could withstand, and that for the United States to succeed militarily without its own central breeding program, it needed thoroughbred breeders to provide horses capable of meeting those demands. It also traces the government’s response to the decline of usable thoroughbred stock after the Civil War decimated the nation’s saddle horse population, and as political reformers attacked thoroughbred racing, and therefore the nation’s ability to replenish that stock. Faced with a critical shortage of
suitable cavalry mounts at the onset of World War I, military and civilian horsemen were finally able to create a path through the decentralized structure of the government, via the Department of Agriculture, to create a thoroughbred-based breeding program for the Army that rapidly began to produce some of the best equine athletes in the world.
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Introduction

“A horse to ride for a man’s life, and for the honor and interest of the United States, should at least be equal to the breed of the saddle horse of Kentucky.”1 –Col. E.A. Carr

Visitors to the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame, in Saratoga Springs, New York, upon touring the museum galleries, may happen upon a small and unassuming silver bowl. It is no larger than a modern cereal bowl, with a flat handle projecting off its rim. Amidst the elaborate racing trophies, flashy jockey’s silks, and stunning artworks, it is easy to miss such a seemingly mundane relic. Engraved on its side is “1668 wunn at hanpsted plaines, march 25.” It is a replica2 of the oldest extent racing trophy in America, and it was not created as merely a decorative item to take pride of place over someone’s fireplace, but as a significant monetary prize, awarded at what is generally agreed to be the first formal racetrack in North America, by Richard Nicolls, the man who launched thoroughbred racing in the New World.

In 1665, Nicolls, the first British Governor of New York, laid the groundwork for English style horse racing in the United States. A horseman and cavalry commander, he had observed the sorry state of horses in the colony which he had just taken from the Dutch in a bloodless invasion the year before, and decided to offer a silver cup for horses to race for every spring and fall “not so much for the divertissement of youth as for encouraging the bettering of the breed of horses, which through great neglect has been

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1 E.A. Carr, “Letter from Colonel E. A. Carr to Major A.S. Kimball, Fort Wingate, New Mexico, September 12, 1890,” September 12, 1890, 5, Record Group 92, Box 12, Entry 65, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC.

2 The original is packed away in storage at Yale University and cataloged by a different date.
impaired."³ With that fateful phrase he gave future American racing organizations not only their purpose, but their mission statement. To this day, almost every racing entity in the United States justifies its existence with essentially the same phrase--for the improvement of the breed of horse. The 1668 cup is probably the last he offered before returning to England that summer.

Nicolls was fortunate that, unlike most of the other colonies at the time, his colony of New York had, near its primary population center, a perfect setting for a formal, English-style, racecourse. Whereas Virginia initially had woodland and cultivated fields, with no room for anything more than short sprints along roads or on paths around fields, New York had a natural clearing on Long Island, barren of trees, that consisted of approximately 44,000 acres⁴--plenty of room for serious contests that would test not only the speed, but the staying power and soundness, of the horses that would race there. According to Daniel Denton, one of the early residents of the area, the expanse had “neither stick nor stone to hinder the horse-heels or endanger them in their races,”⁵ which meant that it was a safe, as well as convenient, place to test the best horse flesh the region had to offer.


⁵ Daniel Denton, A Brief Description of New York:--Formerly Called New Netherland (London: John Hancock, 1670), Http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libraryscience/22.
Nicolls was a racing man from England, a Cavalier and groom of the bedchamber of James, Duke of York, the future James II. He raced with the Duke (and his brother, King Charles II), commanded a troop of horse during the English Civil War, and knew the benefits of racing. Indeed, the same year that Nicolls initiated his races for silver cups, Charles II initiated the “King’s Plate” races at Newmarket. Both Nicolls and the King were keenly aware that they needed a stronger cavalry after Charles I’s forces lost the Civil War largely on the strength of Cromwell’s cavalry. The ponderous Dutch and Flemish horses imported to New Netherland by the Dutch during their tenure did not impress Nicolls, nor did the lighter riding horses that had also trickled into the colony.

And as a military man, he knew they were of scant martial value. Until the advent of the internal combustion engine, the horse was the single most critical war vehicle, serving all of the roles later played by trucks, jeeps, Humvees, tanks, fighter jets and helicopters. Its ownership in earlier eras in Europe was often limited to the upper ranks of societies because of its value in controlling the masses, or avoiding that control, depending on who was riding. And Nicolls wanted to be sure that his troops, and his English settlers, had militarily viable horses available when they needed them for fighting off invading Europeans or displaced Native Americans.

When Richard Nicolls established formal horse racing on Long Island in 1665, the line between racehorses and working horses was not clearly defined and was highly

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8 It is not coincidence that descriptors of aristocracy—in English, cavalier; in French, chevalier; in Spanish caballero, and so on—meant horseman. The aristocracy was the group required by its monarchs to keep military horses and ride to war at that monarch’s request.
permeable, as it would remain up through the nineteenth century. Horses tested on the track bred working horses at least as often as they bred more racehorses. With the races Nicolls created, he laid the foundation upon which the United States would build its mounted military forces. Up into the early twentieth century, thoroughbred racing in the United States served as an informal method of assuring that quality horses were available to the military (and everyone else). But the advent of the automobile, along with Progressive Era attacks on horse racing, European armies buying up available American cavalry-quality horses for the Boer War and World War I, and increased specialization and exclusivity of race horses, created a crisis in the military horse supply that was only alleviated by the creation of the army Remount Program. That program successfully built upon the established tradition of using horseracing to test breeding stock and assure that quality horses were readily available. The Remount Program would take the informal system that was under threat and formalize it, ultimately creating uniformly sound and athletic horses that shaped the entire American light-horse breeding industry.

This work argues that from the founding of the nation, right through World War II, the United States government relied on the thoroughbred racing industry to supply, directly and indirectly, the horses capable of performing the rigorous work demanded of a cavalry mount. For most of American history, the existence of this industry allowed the United States to avoid creating a national military breeding program, while most European governments did have to establish such programs to mount their armies. Finally, as the saddle horse market declined at the end of the nineteenth century, and the thoroughbred racing industry came under potentially fatal attack, American military and civilian horsemen used the crisis in the horse supply to overcome the political obstacles
and force the creation of a uniquely American, and extremely successful, national breeding program, still based on the genetic power of the thoroughbred racehorse.

Studies, in history and in other disciplines, of animals have been on the rise recently in academia, which seems to be a logical extension of the ever increasing inclusion of underrepresented human groups. In the realm of history, much of this attention has been on what our treatment of animals says about us as humans. Harriet Ritvo’s *The Animal Estate: the English and Other Creatures of the Victorian Age* is one of the first serious, book-length examples of this. In it she addresses Victorian England’s interactions with animals as a way of exhibiting class hierarchy, upper classes controlling lower classes, or illustrating imperial ideology. While horses make only brief appearance in this work, it is a good example of the general tone historians have taken when focusing on animals in general and horses in particular. Margaret Derry’s book *Bred for Perfection: Shorthorn Cattle, Collies and Arabian Horses Since 1800* and Donna Landry’s *Noble Brutes: How Eastern Horses Transformed English Culture* follow a similar model to Ritvo’s work, and are, indeed, part of a series edited by Ritvo. Derry makes an argument similar to Ritvo’s about purebred animal breeding as being an expression of ideas about humans as much as it was about improving animals. Landry argues that Middle Eastern horses, on which the thoroughbred is founded, shaped an entire nation’s (England’s) human culture and how those humans understood themselves.

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Neither particularly looks at whether or not any of the breeding made significant changes in the practical utility of the animals in question, though Derry, herself a cattle breeder as well as a historian, does occasionally raise the question.

Some historians have begun to look at the more practical effects of horses in history, rather than focusing primarily on horses as a theoretical lens through which to understand people. Ann Norton Greene, Clay McShane and Joel A. Tarr have written specifically about horses as a critical physical power source in the nineteenth century and beyond. Greene, focusing primarily on the draft horses of the Northeast and Midwest, looks at the omnipresence of literal horsepower in nineteenth century America, and more particularly how it provided virtually all transportation that did not take place on immovable railroad tracks or waterways, including transporting goods to and from ports and depots whence they could be transported by rail or water. The transportation revolution of the industrial revolution in America, Greene argues, “was not just about using horses or using steam engines, but about the complimentary relationship between horse and steam powers that set the material terms of American life and from which everything else flowed.”

McShane and Tarr, looking specifically at urban horses, make similar points, arguing that the horse not only transported everything, but also that much of the built urban environment was organized around equine needs, that the need to feed those urban horses revolutionized the agricultural market, and that even this “living machinery…was modified to produce more power, mostly by better breeding and

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13 Ibid., 82.
feeding.” Both Greene’s work and McShane and Tarr’s work focus primarily on heavier horses used for their traction power in harness.

Margaret Derry, in *Horses in Society: a Story of Animal Breeding and Marketing Culture, 1800-1920*, unlike in her *Bred for Perfection*, also begins to look seriously at the actual utility of horses, both light and heavy, and how their breeding shaped agricultural markets. Importantly for this study, she includes a section on how military horse purchasing, most particularly by the British at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth, shaped the North American markets. Significantly, she points out that while Americans sold over 500,000 horses to European nations by March of 1915, that “three or four times that number had been rejected by foreign armies as not being good enough for cavalry or artillery purposes,” and that a large part of the cause was attributed by agricultural journals of the time to the decline of thoroughbred blood in the American horse population. Because she is looking at the entirety of the horse market across multiple nations, she understandably does not follow up very extensively on what types of horses made the best cavalry mounts, but she does begin to discuss some of the political elements of breed loyalty among breeders and she raises the topic as being historically relevant, at least to questions of the equine marketplace.

Apart from Derry’s brief mention of the topic of thoroughbreds and their offspring being used for utilitarian purposes, most historians who have studied

16 Ibid., 132.
thoroughbred racing have explored it following the model of animals-as-a-lens-to-understand-people. If they have not looked at racing as an issue of status, they have looked at it as part of leisure or culture, not having practical benefits beyond the benefits and detriments, both psychological and economic, that leisure activities in general have for humans. Perhaps the tendency is universally human, or perhaps it is uniquely American, but it seems that when we see someone having fun, or asserting social power, that we cannot (or just don’t like to) accept that what they are having fun or making social statements doing is also productive. Of course this is a false dichotomy, and most human activities are far more complex than it allows for, but the fruits of many a productive entertainment have been ignored, or actively denied, as a result. Horseracing is a victim of this prejudice, and whenever horsemen mention racing’s significant contribution to horse breeding, and therefore much of horse-powered history, they are dismissed as merely trying to justify the time and money they put into an elitist hobby.

So while American historians have occasionally broached the topic of thoroughbred racing, especially in recent years, it has primarily been to look at racing’s role as a status marker or as a venue for gambling—two roles which often overlap. Marshall Fishwick\textsuperscript{17} and T.H. Breen\textsuperscript{18} both looked at the centrality of racing horses, and betting on one’s own horses, as a critical status marker in early Chesapeake culture, but neither spent much ink on the horses themselves. Nancy Struna has looked at racing as a


reflection of sectionalism and shifts in American ante-bellum culture, 19 and in the context of status marker and physical prowess, but the prowess of the humans involved, rather than that of the horses, is her focus. 20 Melvin Adelman 21 and Steven Riess 22 have both looked at the connection between the rise of urbanization and the shift of racing (among other sports) to urban centers, along with the cultural shifts that accompanied that geographical shift and the increasing access for working class racegoers and gamblers, and Riess went on to look more specifically at the connection between racing and organized crime during the progressive era in New York. 23 To find racing histories that focus on the animals themselves, or on the history of the sport of thoroughbred racing as a whole, one needs to look to books written by horsemen—most notably John Hervey, Nancy L. Struna, People of Prowess: Sport, Leisure, and Labor in Early Anglo-America (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996). Melvin L. Adelman, A Sporting Time: New York City and the Rise of Modern Athletics, 1820-70 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986). Steven A. Riess, City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989). Steven A. Riess, The Sport of Kings and the Kings of Crime: Horse Racing, Politics, and Organized Crime in New York, 1865 - 1913 (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011).

journalists—with Edward Hotaling’s work being the most notable. Their works provide a wealth of information on the development of the sport and on specific horses, but are rarely concerned with how that history fit into the larger history of the nation.

The cavalry has, to a large extent, suffered a similar fate to racing among twentieth century academic historians. Cavalry history has generally been dismissed by the academy as unfashionable, at best, and Cavalry proponents from as early as the late nineteenth century are portrayed by historians of the larger military as elitists wanting to spend their army time partaking in equestrian leisure sports, or apologists for their own branch of the army and as “foot-dragging technophobes holding back the progress of mechanization.” As Gervase Phillips points out, “this dismissive attitude is deeply entrenched in military historiography,” particularly that of the English-speaking world. Much of this is due to military historians being influenced by the contemporary critics of the cavalry, but also to American and English historians of twentieth century military history being disproportionally focused on the Western Front of World War I as a clear sea change in military history in which they saw no cavalry. Newsreels of World War II no doubt contributed to this image of the world wars as wars of mechanization because they focused on the new and exciting, which tanks and aircraft certainly were, rather than


27 Ibid.
on the common and mundane, which cavalry, and even infantry, were, so the visual history of the wars is disproportionately skewed toward new military technology.

But many current historians, particularly historians of the German military, which used cavalry heavily right through World War II, have begun to reassess the role of cavalry, and to give far more credence to the arguments made by defenders of the mounted soldier. Indeed, horses—cavalry, artillery and transport—served in both world wars by the millions, and while they were no longer the ones who grabbed the headlines as they did in the days of J.E.B. Stuart, in both wars they played tactically significant roles. The German Wehrmacht, often portrayed as the most advanced army in the world at the beginning of World War II, sent cavalry alongside its Panzers in mixed divisions. Germany’s 1st Cavalry kicked off the German war effort in September of 1939 by riding into Poland, and five miles beyond the border engaged in their first pitched battle, against a unit of the then vaunted Polish cavalry, and then continued on, screening the German army’s movements and serving as its extreme left flank as it penetrated Poland. While the image of a military man on horseback is a potent symbol of power in almost any culture, these were not merely symbolic, but large, active fighting forces, as David Dorondo argues in his recent assessment of the German cavalry in the modern era.28 Klaus Richter,29 Janus Piekalkiewicz,30 and Richard DiNardo31 are others who have shed light on the extent of European, German in particular, use of cavalry up through World

War II, though DiNardo looks at Germany’s extensive use of horses throughout the entire army in World War II, not just its use of cavalry. Perhaps Richter’s and Piekalkiewicz’s biggest contributions are in their hundreds of photographs of mounted troops in action in World War II, which serve as a counter to the prevailing visual culture of the war as all tanks, jeeps and airplanes.

Historians have been far too quick to dismiss any military man who called for a better horse supply before World War II as a backward thinking man who could not see the obvious changes taking place before him, but these dismissals often seem to be based on the historians’ knowledge that World War II ended with nuclear bombs and perhaps their own images of soldiers arriving on modern battlefields via helicopter, as seen via the television screen on the nightly news. Even historians, such as Roman Jarymowycz, who do write about the cavalry during this era still tend to portray cavalry men as being opposed to and actively hindering mechanization, which is generally incorrect. Robert Larson has countered this idea, at least in the context of the British army, pointing out that the cavalry was not in a position to slow the advent of mechanization, and that it didn’t want to. As he puts it, “the belief that the army was blinded to the requirements of modern warfare by affection for the horse and innately hostile to the tank is simply not true.”

In the United States in the 1930s, as Allan Millett and Peter Maslowski point out, cavalry units, which were statutorily prohibited from having tanks, built experimental hybrid units with mounted soldiers and strategically named “combat cars” (light tanks), while infantry commanders still saw tanks merely as supporting, rather than integrated.

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32 Roman Johann Jarymowycz, *Cavalry from Hoof to Track* (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole, 2009).
Indeed many American cavalry officers would command armored units, and while officers such as George Patton argued in favor of retaining horses during the interwar period, that was not instead of armored vehicles, but in conjunction with them. As John Daley argues, Patton was fully aware of the value of tanks and that they would continue to play a larger and larger role in modern warfare, but he also recognized the very real shortcomings of the armored vehicles of that era, and that they would never be able to do everything that horse cavalry could. Millet and Maslowski note that “on the eve of World War II, the ... Army’s four mechanized regiments (two cavalry and two infantry) did not yet represent a major commitment to a new form of ground warfare.” This was not cavalry foot-dragging, it was a lack of financial commitment to mechanization on the part of the senior command and congress, and the cavalry, which already had a significant portion of the mechanized weaponry available, even if it had thought that mechanization should replace horses, still had to have something on which to mount the rest of its troopers. The idea that the debate on mechanization was an either/or issue has led modern historians to ignore the development of the American military horse supply as being unimportant in their teleological view of military history as heading for a completely horse-free battlefield.


37 It should be noted that modern warfare is still not horse-free, as evidenced by U.S. Special forces riding into battle alongside Northern Alliance horsemen against the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001 (see Doug Stanton, *Horse Soldiers: The Extraordinary Story of a Band of U.S. Soldiers Who Rode to Victory in Afghanistan* (New York: Scribner, 2009), 55.), which spurred the U.S. army to (re)create a military equitation program (see Lance Benzel, “Ft Carson Special Forces Train on Horseback,” *Army Times*, 13.)
Throughout the vast majority of military history, humans have relied on horses as one of their most critical military resources, and to assume that early twentieth century military men concerned with the military horse supply were mere luddites is unrealistic, but even those modern historians who have looked at the cavalry with an eye toward showing that its utility lasted far longer than is generally acknowledged, have focused on showing the actual usage of cavalry in battle and, by extension, that it therefore did need to mount itself, rather than on how it mounted itself. Leaving that question unanswered, added to the fact that the history of the turf has been restricted to the categories of leisure and social history, obscuring its central importance within military history, has created a significant historiographical gap which this work aims to fill.

This study also sheds additional light on the decentralized character of the American State and how that hindered the nation’s ability to prepare effectively for war. The United States was founded on a revolution that was largely a reaction against a strong centralizing government and the presence of a standing army that that government used against its own subjects. It should come as no surprise then that the founders of the nation created a decentralized government and a culture that was openly hostile to any professional army, but especially to one that was mounted, which smacked to them of aristocracy and authoritarianism. Many of the historiographical debates over the shape of the American political state, especially as it relates to its federal nature, have been drawn

September 8, 2010, www.armytimes.com/news/2010/09/ap-special-forces-train-on-horseback-090710/). Ironically, the horse-mounted Americans used their horses very effectively to attack vehicle-mounted Taliban troops which could not follow the horses across the rough landscape to counter attack (see Phillips, “Scapegoat Arm: Twentieth-Century Cavalry in Anglophone Historiography,” 74.), thus underscoring the claims of the cavalrmen of the interwar years who argued that mechanized vehicles would never be able to serve on all of the terrain that horses could.

on the grounds of periodization. Richard McCormick argues that for most of the nineteenth century, political parties and courts were the most powerful entities in shaping political—especially economic—policy, rather than the national government, and that while twentieth century historians have often found this to be a weak pattern of government, “from everything we know, the American people got roughly the economic policies they wanted.” 39 He saw the role of all levels of government during this “party period” as being primarily distributive—distributing land, tariff protection, and tax exemptions—in order to promote development, rather than administrative, and indeed that it rarely enforced what regulations it put on the recipients of distribution. 40 Generally this led to more local power, where face-to-face government between party representatives and voters could most directly capitalize on political patronage, which meant that local influences often trumped any national attempt at coordinated policy. As Richard John, points out, this model, as most other periodizing models, looks primarily to the relationship between the state and economic policy. 41 He also points out that while many, including himself, were challenging the party period model, no one had yet replaced it, and that while most had come to the conclusion that the nineteenth century American state was not weak, it was most certainly small and decentralized. 42 Except in its role of protecting settlers on the frontier, the army did not fit the ideal of government’s primary peacetime role being to promote economic development. In the territories, it


40 Ibid., 284.


42 Ibid., 122.
certainly protected American citizens’ investments, whether guarding transportation
routes and settlers, or trying to contain Native Americans on reservations, and there
seems to have been almost unanimous support for its use there, at least in small numbers,
but Americans were uneasy about its use anywhere else.

From the first shots of the Revolution, Americans relied on the ideal of the citizen
soldier, like the minutemen at Lexington and Concord, to provide defense. Those citizen
soldiers had a vested interest in defending their homes and property, and so it was
assumed they would fight with the dedication that comes from strong self-interest, but
also that once their homes had been successfully defended, they would go back to private
life and not pose a threat to anyone else’s liberty. The ideals of the local militias in
particular, and civilian control of the military in general, are enshrined in the constitution,
not just cultural memory. But state militias are under state control, and, as Stephen
Skowronek points out, that means state power and patronage, which the states would
guard jealously. 43 Indeed, as Skowronek wrote, “at all levels, the American army
establishment…[was] molded to fit a radically decentralized governmental order where
national authority was employed to provide support services to the localities.” 44 So the
use of a professional army in the territories, where it could be viewed as aiding in the
economic development of the nation and did not compete with any state government
prerogatives, was carefully limited by the states so that it could not expand into other
areas and threaten their political clout as heads of the militias.

44 Ibid., 86.
Brian Balogh agrees with Richard John that the national government was not weak, as the party period model seems to imply, but also that it was more powerful for being less visible. Citing no less an authority than Alexander Hamilton, in *Federalist 27*, he points out that the national government, as approved by the American people, was stronger and more effective, creating less opposition, when it enabled policy rather than commanding it. “In the United States,” Balogh argues, “a national government capable of mobilizing compatible resources in the private and voluntary sectors often yielded more impressive results than unilateral state power.”45 But whether one credits the national government with enabling the states to perform the role of defense, or the states with hindering the national government from building a strong professional army, the decentralization made it extremely difficult for the nation to mobilize large, effective armies rapidly, and the more industrialized warfare, and the nation in general, became, the more significant an issue military preparedness became because, as Millet and Maslowski point out, while the nation managed to create armies in time to successfully defend the United States throughout the nineteenth century, each time, that last minute mobilization extracted higher and higher costs.46

As the nineteenth century neared its end, the nation could no longer assume that every man knew how to use a rifle, let alone the increasingly advanced weapons being invented, so training, and who would conduct the training, loomed as a much larger issue. Indeed with the invention of more and more industrialized weaponry, war required more “stuff” entirely, and that took time to accumulate. And then there was the issue of horses.


At the end of the nineteenth century, horses still carried officers and troopers, they pulled artillery, and were otherwise indispensable, in vast numbers, to any army, but they were less and less omnipresent in the daily life of civilian America, so mobilized men were less and less familiar with how to handle them. Of course as Americans relied less on light horses, there were also fewer of them around to be used by the army. While most war materiel could be manufactured relatively quickly in emergency, albeit at increased cost, the “manufacture” of horses cannot be speeded up. The decentralization of the government rendered it extremely difficult for the small professional army to overcome the long standing bias against a strong military and take measures to allow the nation to address its preparedness issues. The professionals saw clearly that “industrial America could not afford the military innocence of the bucolic age,” as Stephen Skowronek put it, but had to find a way to work within the decentralized system to address the problem.

Central to this study is how the army managed to address its ever-growing horse supply problem. Because the population of military-quality light horses, improved by thoroughbred blood, was rapidly dwindling, the army had to get creative. One of the ways that the state built capacity during this era was through associations. David Hamilton poses the Department of Agriculture as a prime example of these public-private partnerships as “publicly approved ‘private governments’ seeking to coordinate and rationalize through cooperative action.” This can been seen as an extension of Balogh’s

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47 During the late nineteenth century total horse numbers continued to rise with the population, but the by this period most of those horses were heavy work horses used to pull the new farm machinery being invented, and the number of light horses, of which the army needed vast numbers, was declining.

48 Skowronek, Building a New American State, 87.

model of the national government enabling rather than commanding. The Department of Agriculture, a national government entity, was able to expand the power of the national government by creating a system, not only of agricultural colleges, which trained future farmers in the methods the department wanted them to follow, but by sponsoring and working in tandem with local cooperative extensions and farmers associations, so that it reached far more people than the colleges ever could.\textsuperscript{50} By creating and sponsoring agricultural associations, and encouraging them to band together cooperatively, it could attempt to rationalize agricultural markets in ways that simply could not be done by government fiat.\textsuperscript{51} It was under the aegis of the Department of Agriculture that the army finally was able to find a way through the decentralized maze to start increasing the supply of military horses. The first breeding program for military horses was conducted by the Department of Agriculture as an agricultural experiment to not only help the army, but to rationalize light horse breeding in America and improve the market for the farmers who raised them. This was done with the assistance and encouragement of another public-private group, the Army Remount Association, whose president was none other than the chief of staff of the United States Army. The Association was technically a civilian organization created by interested citizens to aid the government. Some of the most important members of that group, business leaders like August Belmont, not only helped organize and sponsor the breeding experiment, but also donated much of the necessary bloodstock to make the program a success.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 214.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 215.
The decentralization of the state was not, however, the only governmental impediment to the military horse supply. At the same time that the army was trying to find a way to get more quality horses, the fountainhead of that supply—thoroughbred racing—was under attack by the progressives for its association with gambling interests. Progressive reformers, while they were certainly not a monolithic group, generally fought for more governmental regulation to protect the populace from such ills as drinking, gambling, prostitution, unsafe working conditions, and other social and physical dangers. Their motives and their methods varied, but they too had to work within a decentralized governmental structure. As Richard Hamm points out, they generally used three different approaches—legally forbidding an activity, putting legal restrictions on an activity, or trying to reform individual people so that they stopped performing an activity. The progressives who went after race-track gambling generally tried to abolish gambling, and while they ultimately had to settle for regulating it, they came very close to regulating horse-racing out of existence. William Graebner argues that the progressives’ contribution to state building at the turn of the twentieth century was in their attempts to move from action within individual states to uniform state legislation, lobbying for relatively consistent laws governing their cause of choice from state to state, which Graebner sees as helping create the circumstances leading to the national legislation of the New Deal era. But he also notes that they were successful in creating relatively uniform laws only in rare cases. As Laura Wittern-Keller points out in her work on


54 Ibid., 353.
film censorship, sometimes victory or defeat in a few strategic, powerful states could define the course of the industry reformers were trying to control, even without uniform legislation. This was the case in the fight against racetrack gambling, as the anti-gambling reformers saw their greatest success by working in the state that was the capital of American thoroughbred racing—New York. While they were technically challenging race-track gambling, the racing industry could not survive without the revenue from gamblers, and so racing men saw the movement as a direct threat to racing, which proved accurate. When New York State elected progressive Republican Charles Evans Hughes governor, the reformers were able to regulate racing out of existence by holding the directors of the tracks liable for any illegal gambling that occurred at their tracks. Without racing in New York State, the entire thoroughbred racing and breeding industry quickly began to collapse. This caused great concern among both horsemen and military men and prompted them to establish the aforementioned Remount Association to lobby for the return of racing for the defense of the nation. After two years of New York’s tracks being shut down, they were able to get the directors’ liability legislation repealed, and the associative state-building efforts of the Department of Agriculture ultimately won out over the reform efforts of the progressives in the case of horseracing and national defense. The military finally saw a way clear to solving its remount troubles by using race-tested thoroughbreds as the basis for a national breeding program to supply a reserve of uniform, quality military remounts, formalizing and rationalizing the process that the nation had relied on informally since its founding.

Chapter 1: The Development of the European Warhorse

In the automobile age, it is very easy to forget that horses are not interchangeable machines, each roughly able to perform the roles of another. There is far more variability of physical abilities among horses than among humans, and the tasks performed by the cavalry, as they evolved from days of the steppe warriors of central Asia, put more stresses on horses than anything in their wild environment or any other human-derived task. Understanding the development of cavalry duty is critical to understanding why the United States would need such specialized horses to mount its cavalry. Successfully breeding horses for specific traits is a complex process, which few people of any era have had the resources, knowledge and time to do systematically. It is not a simple matter of breeding two horses with the right traits together and getting a foal with the same desirable traits. Understanding the development of breeding knowledge and strategies, and how deeply they did or did not penetrate even horse-dependant societies, is equally critical to understanding the military horse supply dilemma the United States faced throughout its reliance on horse-mounted cavalry.

When Governor Nichols began racing in order to improve potential cavalry mounts in colonial North America, human-kind had thousands of years of experience breeding, racing and fighting with horses. Western Civilization built upon the innovations of the ancient peoples of the steppes as it learned to breed horses and spot desirable traits in horses that would make them more effective tools of war. From the Companion Cavalry of Alexander the Great, the Western warhorse developed into the center around which European armies would be built. As the roles the cavalry played evolved, different types of horses were needed to fulfill those roles as they diverged into
light cavalry, which required light, fast horses to scout, forage and perform other
distance-covering duties, and heavy cavalry, which required large, strong horses to carry
heavily armored knights, often required to deal literal body-blows to similar troops of the
opposing army. But with the advent of firearms, the roles of the warhorse reunited, and
war in Europe required even more versatile, athletic horses to not only cover long
distances under saddle, but often to do so at speed over extended periods to minimize
their vulnerability as a large target. The English began to develop, based on their native
breeds and imported stock from Asia Minor and North Africa, a unique and effective
answer to the need for increasingly fast, enduring and agile horses in war. They
developed the English thoroughbred, testing its physical prowess objectively in trials on
the turf, and breeding systematically for the same traits over generations. The
thoroughbred was not only a horse that was ideally suited for the demands of modern
warfare, but one that was able to pass on its traits when bred to a wide variety of horses,
making it extremely well suited to improving the general horse population. As the
English expanded their empire into North America, they took these horses with them,
where they continued to develop them. These horses became the primary improvement
stock in the American colonies; they would give Americans a vital pool of suitable horses
to draw from as needed for their own military and general horse-power needs.

The idea of consciously breeding for specific traits seems like the logical basis of
most animal domestication, but this is not quite the case, according to Juliet Cullen-
Brock, a senior scientist in the Department of Zoology at The Natural History Museum,
London. The earliest domestic breeding sheltered the animals, horses in this case, from
much of the natural selection process of their wild cousins. This allowed for certain
individuals with coincidentally desirable traits to survive in human company, where they might not have in the wild. Then the desirable individual could have a strong genetic impact on a limited, isolated population. This early domestic breeding process did not necessarily mean that the humans involved intentionally bred horses to have varying characteristics, but often did it by accident. For example, the most docile stallion in a herd might get the most breeding opportunities because the more aggressive ones were killed for meat in order to avoid having the more aggressive stallions injure someone. Or a horse that was faster than average was kept as a military advantage to the human, and as a side effect, had more opportunity to breed than a horse that was culled (or killed in battle because it was not as fast and could not escape).¹

By the time of the Romans in Europe, the idea that humans could intentionally “improve” animals existed.² But until Darwin, Mendel, and the development of gene theory, no one knew the mechanism by which traits were inherited, and since there is wide variability even among direct siblings within any species, heritability would have been difficult to puzzle out, despite how obvious it seems to post-Darwinian breeders.³

Modern biologists have broken down and named the different ways that animals have bred, or been bred, to acquire particular traits. Taxonomically, a subspecies is a group within a species that inhabits a specific geographic locality, and as a result of that locality has evolved certain characteristics that it shares among its members, but not with


other members of its species. A breed, on the other hand, is a group within a species that shares certain characteristics that have developed as a result of human selection, rather than natural selection based on a specific locality. It is the characteristics, not parental lineage, which determine whether an individual belongs to a certain subspecies or breed, and breeds and subspecies alike constantly evolve as a result of newly introduced genetic material and/or changes in selection criteria, whether environmental changes in the case of subspecies, or human criteria in the case of breeds.4 In the nineteenth century, the idea of breeds as being strictly from a circumscribed genetic pool, developed, along with many ideas (usually erroneous) about what that entailed for the members of the breed.5 And what taxonomically would still accurately be called a breed--horses bred for certain traits, but not from a strictly static gene pool--came to be referred to among breeders as “types”. And along with the idea of type, these horses tend to this day to be seen as somehow “impure” and of lesser innate value due to their more varied ancestry.6 A primary reason humans began breeding horses was to use them as a means of war, and throughout the history of human-horse interaction, that use remained of paramount importance. The demands of war, and opinions of experts on mounted warfare, were prime considerations in evaluating domestic horses and effective horsemanship right up

4Clutton-Brock, Domesticated Animals, Chapter 2.

5See Margaret. Derry, Bred for Perfection: Shorthorn Cattle, Collies, and Arabian Horses Since 1800 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003) for an excellent examination of this development. The development was not limited to horses, but horse breeders led the way, with dog and cattle breeders following closely in their wake.

6A major exception to this among horse breeders are most of the various European Warmbloods (the primary pool for Olympic-style equestrian competition), which, within certain limits, are approved or not approved for registration based on type and quality. A registered Dutch Warmblood therefore, can sire a registered Swedish Warmblood if the foal fulfills the type and quality requirements of the Swedish Warmblood registry. “Color Breeds”, registries based on coat color, such as Pintos or Palominos, generally try to treat their horses as modern breeds, but have had to come up with various strategies of coping with the foals of “purebred” parents who are born the “wrong” color.
into the twentieth century. So while many classicists and historians consider Xenophon as a recorder of history, a source of the sayings of Socrates, and a mercenary soldier, and consider his writings “On the Art of Horsemanship” and “On the Cavalry Commander” to be among his *scripta minora*, for horsemen in the Western tradition, he is nothing less than the founder of modern horsemanship, and those two works are the basis upon which military horsemanship, and the equestrian disciplines which descend from military horsemanship, were founded. And to Xenophon, in a well run army the acquisition and training of good horses came before the training of the men, as an unfit horse was utterly useless to the army.8

That both of Xenophon’s works on military horsemanship should begin with an admonishment to buy naturally well conformed horses to begin with is no accident of organization, nor mere aesthetic appreciation. Xenophon was an experienced and practical cavalry commander, and he knew full well upon what his life depended when in battle. “On the Art of Horsemanship” begins with a detailed description of the points of conformation a military man should look for in a horse, because he knew that without sound conformation the horse would not be able to withstand the rigors of campaigning and at best would be lame and unusable before a battle, and at worst would become lame in the heat of battle, putting its rider’s life in jeopardy. As all serious horsemen since, Xenophon started his description of good conformation from the ground. “A warhorse will be quite useless, even though all his other points are good, if he has bad feet; for in

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8 Ibid., 235.
that case he will be unable to use any of his good points.”

No amount of athletic ability will help a horse, or its rider, if the horse’s foundation, its feet, cannot withstand the rigors of military life.

He continues up the leg, pointing out all the key elements which made for sound and enduring legs, before he comes to the body, and the elements which counted for athletic ability and other points of utility for the rider. Horses with deficient legs may have been able to withstand use as general transportation, but not the strains of galloping full speed, stopping short, spinning, jumping, and long marches that are required of a military horse. Once the purchaser had determined the potential soundness of the horse, only then did Xenophon recommend that he turn his attention to other critical qualities of the horse. Many times throughout his treatises Xenophon emphasized the critical nature of the horse’s speed. He noted its importance in overtaking the enemy, as well as its key role in keeping soldiers from being captured when forced to retreat. He directed the military purchaser to test the horse in all activities that might have been asked of it during war in order to determine that the horse would be of more help to its own army than to the enemy’s. “To sum up: the horse that is sound in his feet, gentle and fairly speedy … will, as a matter of course, give the least trouble and the greatest measure of safety to his rider in warfare.”

His remained the best advice to military horse purchasers right up to the day that military ceased to purchase horses.

From Xenophon forward, a good cavalryman has understood that horses are not indistinguishable, interchangeable equipment—organic vehicles of various colors. They

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9 Ibid., 299.
10 Ibid., 265, 285.
11 Ibid., 313.
have unique characteristics, just like any other being, and some are better suited to extreme conditions than others. And there are few endeavors which a horse may undertake that are more challenging to a horse’s constitution than military life, which pushes its physical limits far more than either life in the wild or in common domestic service does. Left to its own devices, the wild horse is fairly pacific. He would rather flee than fight, and he would prefer to only flee as far as necessary to remove himself from immediate danger. As herd animals, horses most commonly defend themselves in maneuvers that resemble the westward migrant’s trick of circling the wagons. A band of wild horses, when threatened, will generally gather together, with their young at the center of the group and their hind feet facing the perimeter of the group, ready to kick whatever threatens them. Even if one is caught by surprise, away from the others, its primary goal is to get back to the safety of the herd. Only stallions fight with any regularity, and, as with most wild animals, much of their fighting is ritualized, lasting only long enough to determine who is the stronger, allowing the weaker one to retreat relatively unharmed. Most of a wild horse’s physical demands come from bad weather and lack of forage, not acute or enduring physical exertion.12

For domestic horses, particularly those in the military, as Xenophon was well aware, most of their physical demands did come from acute or enduring physical exertion, or both, and generally occurred while they were carrying the unnatural weight of a human on their backs. It took an unusually strong horse to be a useful and durable cavalry mount. This is why Xenophon’s treatises, which recognized this critical point,

were so important militarily. It is also why the Hellenistic cavalry was the best in Europe in its time. The role of the cavalry in ancient Greek warfare is often played down for various cultural reasons including the veneration of the hoplite foot-soldier, but the Macedonian cavalry under Alexander the Great is the noted exception. This group of cavalry rode across their known world and is often given the lion’s share of credit for conquering it. Indeed, well into the twentieth century, many a schoolchild knew the name of Bucephalus, Alexander’s magnificent warhorse. According to Plutarch, a horse trader brought the stallion to Philip of Macedon for his inspection and prospective purchase, but the horse was extremely restive and would not let anyone on its back. As Philip was about to send the trader away, Alexander, then an adolescent, begged a chance to ride the horse, to the laughter and amusement of all present. But he had noticed that the horse was spooking from the movement of his own shadow and turned him into the sun, hopped on, and rode around the assembly with no difficulty. Thus began the partnership that would bring the cavalry into foreground.

Unlike most military mounts, whose lives are generally cut short as a result of their occupation, Bucephalus almost miraculously lived to the ripe age of thirty. In many ways he is a very good illustration of what a war horse needed to be. He was fast, he was

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13 The cavalry in ancient Greece, as in most other eras and locales, was associated with the aristocratic elite because that was who could afford horses. So in a culture that put a high value on relatively egalitarian democracy ancient Greek city states did, the hoplite, who came from a broader base of men (though still property owning citizens) was culturally more valuable. See Philip Sidnell, *Warhorse: Cavalry in Ancient Warfare* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), 25.


powerful, he was substantial, and he was very minutely attuned to his rider’s intentions. Most importantly, it is clear from depictions of him, he was able to collect, as horsemen call it. As Xenophon, and every cavalry writer since has expounded, a good cavalry horse needs to be able to collect himself. What horsemen mean by the term “collect” is very precise. It is the flexing of all the joints from the sacro-illiac at the top of the pelvis, right down to the lowest joints on the hind leg. This action brings the horse’s hindquarters lower to the ground, shifting its center gravity back and down, and creates the maximum potential energy its body can produce. From this state, the horse can spring powerfully into action in any direction, or brace itself against impact. As Robert Gaebel suggests, the easiest way for a non-equestrian to understand this is to imagine a horse prancing. It is not a perfect analogy, but it gives a good working understanding of collection in the equestrian sense of the word.16

A wild horse fighting will collect itself, but is not likely to sustain the action for extended periods of time. Indeed it takes very strong muscles in the hindquarters, back, and abdomen to sustain it, and with the added weight of a human on the horse’s back, it is very difficult for an average horse to sustain for even short periods. One of the primary differences between a wild horse and a horse selectively bred for athleticism under saddle is that the wild, or randomly bred, horse has a longer back that is markedly harder to “lift” into collection, and a shorter hind quarter with less leverage and strength with which to “squat”. Selectively bred horses, well trained and fit, have what is often called “uphill” balance; in other words it looks like their forequarters are ever so slightly higher than their hindquarters, making it much easier to collect under the weight of a rider.

For a wild horse a longer back makes sense. A wild horse does perform many of the same maneuvers in its native habitat as a cavalry horse does, but it does not have to adapt to the added weight of a rider, often a quarter of its own weight right where it is least able to adjust for it—on the free span of its back. From Bucephalus on, cavalry horses have had to charge, and then be able to stop and turn in an instant from full speed, requiring great collection. It would then need to be prepared to charge again, wheel and close with the enemy, or barge directly into him, and to be prepared for the enemy to do the same to it at any moment. Horses instinctively ram each other with their shoulders when fighting, and many cavalry horses will do this in battle, but to retain their balance with a rider on their back, is much harder than without, and again, a short backed, uphill, collected horse can withstand and inflict this treatment with much greater efficiency while ridden than a wild horse could while ridden. Having to perform at the peak of its athletic ability for far longer than a wild horse would ever do, and to do it with a heavy, armed man sitting on the weakest part of its anatomy, has meant from the earliest time of ridden cavalry that horses selectively bred for athletic ability while mounted would be the most successful.17

Alexander’s “Companion Cavalry” at the battle of Gaugamela provides a good example of some of the duties of a cavalry mount. In this final battle in his campaign against the Persian emperor, Darius, this body of cavalry, which served directly under Alexander, was almost omnipresent. Before the battle even began, they rode out to capture enemy scouts in order to determine where Darius’ army was, and how it was

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17 The single best treatment of horse conformation from a form-to-function perspective is Deb Bennett, *Principles of Conformation Analysis*, 3 vols., (Gaithersburg, MD: Fleet Street Publishing Corporation, 1992). Bennett is a vertebrate paleontologist and horsewoman, and brings both fields of understanding together to produce an extremely thorough and accessible work on how horses’ bodies work and why they evolved the way they did.
arrayed for battle. Then, once Alexander was ready to attack, they formed the strength of the Macedonian right flank, and led the attack against Darius’ forces. After charging and fighting in close quarters against more heavily armored men (and horses), they were charged by Darius’ scythe-wheeled chariots. These chariots were rather ghoulishly devised with scythes poking out from the hub of each wheel, to destroy the legs of any man or beast they encountered. But the Companion Cavalry was able to capitalize on the fact that men mounted on horses are more maneuverable than men being pulled behind them in chariots, and they were protected by archers and javelin throwers who were also more maneuverable, and the chariots where quickly neutralized.

Once the chariots were no longer a factor, Alexander led his horsemen straight for the Persian center, where Darius was. They and their accompanying infantrymen charged and engaged an Indian army, including battle elephants, and were able to knock them back and go on to attack the royal forces of Darius, with “the cavalry with Alexander, and Alexander himself,…shoving the Persians and striking their faces with their spears”\(^{18}\) so successfully that Darius fled the field. At that, the Companions headed to help the left wing of their army which was under serious pressure from the Persian cavalry. By the end of the day, Alexander’s greatly outnumbered army had triumphed over the Persians, and it was time to chase down Darius once and for all. Again, the Companions were in on the chase. After having spent a grueling day of charging, counter-charging, and close quarter man-to-man fighting, they were off to be light cavalry again and chase Darius across the countryside. In the pursuit alone, Arrian reports that the Companions lost 500 horses from injuries and exhaustion, having raced about 75 miles since the end of the

battle the previous day. Such was the lot of a Hellenistic cavalry mount, or, indeed, a cavalry mount from almost any period.

From the days of Classical Greece, and possibly even before, there have been two general categories of duty that cavalry have performed. At the height of formal mounted warfare in the middle ages, these duties were divided between two clearly defined branches of cavalry: the heavy and the light. But throughout most of cavalry history, Bucephalus and his brethren could be expected to perform both sets of duties as the situation warranted. What most people think of when they imagine the cavalry is the role of the heavy cavalry, which is cavalry as shock troops. The romantic cavalry charge is the primary example. When the more heavily armored “heavies” assemble in formation and charge the enemy as a solid wall, their goal is to slam into the opposition, ride over them, and then engage the survivors in close combat, with horses and men shoving and gouging for all they were worth. Eventually, the primary weapon of the heavies would be the saber, but in Alexander’s day, both the heavy and the light role were performed by the same troops, and they were all armed with double ended spears which could be thrown from a distance or used in close combat.

For the horses, the role meant charging with great discipline, not necessarily at a very fast speed, and being brave enough to obey the riders’ requests that they charge directly into an apparently solid wall, which is how a well disciplined line of infantrymen, especially in the classical Greek phalanx, would look to a horse. Being sentient creatures with a strong sense of self preservation, horses are no more likely than

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19 Ibid., 273.

20 Two exceptionally good modern texts on ancient Greek cavalry are Sidnell, *Warhorse: Cavalry in Ancient Warfare*. And Gaebel, *Cavalry Operations in the Ancient Greek World*. 
humans to want to crash headlong into solid objects, though when, with training and trust, they do, the effect is impressive. Of course men in the ranks, who also have a strong sense of self preservation, though tempered with reason, are affected not only by the physical impact, but by the psychological impact. It takes strong mental discipline for a man to stand firm when a horse of four to six times his weight is bearing down directly upon him. When men flinched or shuffled to one side or the other, they created small gaps in the line which invited a horse to be braver, since the line no longer looked so solid.  

Once the initial collision thinned out the ranks, the cavalry would wheel and fight at close quarters with the enemy. This point in the action is where all of the work on collection would come into play, as the horse had to twist and turn as necessary in close quarters. And it was also here that the horses’ ability to use their own bodies to shove at each other would be of paramount value. So for the heavies, strength and discipline were key. At the height of the middle ages and into the early renaissance, when European knights rode “great horses” into battle, this pushing and shoving ability led knights to favor ponderous, steady horses. But in most other eras, when horses had to be able to serve either heavy or light cavalry purposes, too much muscle, at the expense of speed and agility, could prove fatal. 

Light cavalry, a term generally referring to weight of armor and arms rather than the horses themselves, had to be far more versatile. Light cavalry duty generally

\[21\] For thorough discussions of Greek cavalry tactics, see Gaebel, *Cavalry Operations in the Ancient Greek World.*, and Sidnell, *Warhorse: Cavalry in Ancient Warfare.*, chapters 2 and 3.

consisted of scouting, which required great endurance since they would be sent out from the main body of the army looking for the enemy, and spying out its deployments in any and all directions, and reporting back, thereby covering far more distance than the primary body of the army did. Indeed, by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these missions could reach epic distances that could kill a man off from exhaustion, let alone the horse carrying him. The lights also took the lead in harassing the enemy’s supply lines, critical in any era, where they had to be both fast and agile to perform their role well. Pursuit after routing of an enemy’s army also fell directly to the lights, and was often the most grueling of all duties. Any light cavalry troops had to be ready to run for their lives, literally, at an instant. This light cavalry duty is where Xenophon’s admonitions about knowing your mount’s speed in order to accurately gauge overtaking distance would come into play. Obviously, whether overtaking or trying not to be overtaken, no soldier wanted to be on the slower mount.

So cavalry mounts like Bucephalus generally had to perform both heavy and light duty, working as shock troops and fighting at close quarters, as well as scouting, raiding, and long distance reconnaissance, as the situation required. A man marching can raise an objection when he knows he is reaching the limits of his endurance, but a horse cannot speak, and therefore does not have that luxury. Horses are also herd animals, whose instinct tells them to follow their leaders, even if those leaders are humans riding on their backs. These factors often led to horses being ridden in military campaigns until they literally dropped dead from exhaustion. Few of the horses that marched east with Alexander were still alive when the army turned around to head back home.
Throughout Asia and Africa, and in the more distant corners of Europe, the role of the cavalry horse remained fairly constant right up to the dwindling days of cavalry warfare. The specific battlefield tactics, and the weaponry, changed, but the horses were still expected to charge in massed formation, fight in close quarters, scout enemy territory and endure long, grueling pursuits. But in the larger European kingdoms, the role of the heavy cavalry began to grow. It was not so much that what a heavy cavalry horse was expected to do was different, but that as the weight of armor on horse and rider increased, it took increasingly specialized horses to be able to carry out their role, leading to more specialized division of labor between heavy cavalry and light, with the heavies becoming by far the more valued.

While the Celts, Romans and Greeks were known for phenomenal horsemanship and cavalry prowess, the more central regions of continental Europe did not have such a reputation. It was not until the beginnings of the medieval period that those regions began to develop a serious cavalry tradition. While Lynn White Jr., among others, claims the advent of the European heavy cavalry was in large part due to the introduction of the stirrup, 23 Philip Sidnell convincingly debunks the cause and effect relationship. Certainly the stirrup makes riding much easier for the uninitiated, but to claim that heavy cavalry tactics were not possible before the stirrup is to ignore the history of mounted warfare, and the skills of a well trained rider. Stirrups provide a way for riders to catch their balance, but riders who learned to ride without the aid of stirrups were perfectly capable of the maneuvers necessary for charges and close combat without them. White claims that until the stirrup, the mounted soldier had to cling “to his steed by the pressure of his

knees,” which is a common misperception of those not well acquainted with riding. A classically trained rider, in the tradition of Xenophon, as well as the modern masters, rides with the pressure of his legs evenly distributed from thigh to knee, or even upper calf. Clinging with the knee would indeed have created an unstable seat that would make heavy cavalry tactics difficult, but this well distributed, fairly light pressure, makes for a surprisingly secure seat with the ability to adjust quickly to the necessary sudden changes of direction, and to inflict or receive blows of heavy cavalry tactics without becoming instantly unbalanced.

The one new method of wielding a lance, couching it under the rider’s arm, which became the standard method in jousting, is aided by stirrups, but is aided far more by the exaggeratedly high cantle of the saddle, which helped keep the rider from being bumped backwards off the back and over the hindquarters of his horse from the shock of the impact of his lance on his target. Unlike a man wielding a lance on foot, the mounted soldier has not only his own momentum, but that of his significantly larger horse, and the saddle helps transfer more of that momentum to the impact, instead of causing the rider to slip backwards. So the one new strategy of mounted warfare—a new angle from which to deliver a lance blow—was probably much more a feature of the newer style of saddles. But pre-stirrup soldiers had not been merely “a rapidly mobile Bowman or hurler of javelins,” they had been delivering lance blows from other angles for at least a thousand years. While it certainly took years of practice to develop a sufficiently secure seat to deliver those blows, a skilled rider could deliver them with relative ease. The stirrup

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24 Ibid., 1.

25 The cantle is the back of the seat of the saddle.

merely made it a little safer and easier for soldiers to do what they had already been doing, especially for new recruits with less experience on horseback, and the new saddles with their high cantles allowed them to use their horses’ momentum to inflict a harder blow.

More significant in European cavalry evolution was the increase in armor. Not only did the increasingly heavy armor provide the soldier better protection, it also made him heavier and less agile. A small Greek or Macedonian horse, even Bucephalus, was not likely to withstand racing about the battlefield all day under this burden. And so they began to ride heavier and heavier horses. These were not, as many modern people believe, giant horses, equivalent to today’s draught horses (which are a product of the nineteenth century), but more likely stout, but still not very tall, horses of the type that would today be referred to as small cobs. Looking at the Bayeux tapestry, or any other contemporary depiction of medieval knights, a viewer will easily see that the riders’ feet hang well down below their mounts’ bellies. As a point of comparison, the feet of an average rider of 5’6” generally hang about the same distance below a 14.2 hand\textsuperscript{27} (the pony/horse cutoff height) horse’s belly. Most horsemen and archeologists agree that the horses ridden by early medieval knights were no more than 14 to 15 hands high on average, and similar in build to the modern Welsh Cob or Morgan.

English native breeds, even today, measure only about 10-13 hands tall\textsuperscript{28} when left to breed in a feral setting. By modern standards, these would be small children’s mounts. A fully armed medieval knight would have to search far and wide to find a horse

\textsuperscript{27} A “hand” is the standard unit of measurement for horses in England and the United States, and equals four inches. A horse designated as 15.2, is fifteen hands and two inches tall, or 62 inches. Horses are measured from the withers, the tallest point of their shoulder.

of cob proportions. As a result of the English army needing more and larger horses on
the relatively short notice that warfare dictates, edicts requiring landholders to keep such
horses on hand repeatedly appeared during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in
particular. As breeding know-how was very rudimentary in England at this point,
Spanish destriers (great horses) were brought in.\textsuperscript{29} Unfortunately, while records of horses
often included coat color and markings, the records of their sizes rarely were more
specific than simply “large” or “small” so we have no specific measurements listed. In a
time when everyone was familiar with the basic size of a horse for their era, listing a
horse as large or small would be meaningful, but for historians trying to reconstruct a
picture of the horse of the day, it is far less information than we would want. Anne
Hyland performed measurements on two sets of horse armor and then compared them to
her own horses. Her Arabian-Standardbred cross would be too large for the armor, and
her purebred Arabian mare would fit it reasonably well.\textsuperscript{30} She also claims that the British
Royal Armouries purchased four Lithuanian Heavy drafts to use as models for warhorses,
and their measurements fit the armor almost perfectly.\textsuperscript{31} These horses are considerably
smaller than the more familiar Clydesdale or Percheron, and are between 15 and 15.2
hands tall and built like a heavyweight hunter rather than what most people would think
of as a “plow horse”.

In studying the horse inventories of the English armies under Edwards I through
III, Andrew Ayers argues that there was a fair amount of variety among the military
horses of that era. While the great horse was apex of military horseflesh, as well as

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 162.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 10.
military status, it was the preserve of the very few. Not only were there few knights who could afford them, but there were simply few of them to be had at any price.\textsuperscript{32} Ayton also argues that they remained an important, and very functional, element of European field armies through the fifteenth century when they were intelligently used.\textsuperscript{33} The majority, probably the vast majority, or horses used in warfare were not great horses, but lighter horses who were cheaper, faster and more maneuverable, and which made the chevauchees\textsuperscript{34} of the English during the Hundred Years War possible. These chevauchees were essentially mounted blitzkriegs wherein mounted infantry, mounted archers and cavalrymen raided across the countryside, moving very quickly on horseback, but with most of the soldiers fighting dismounted. Since it was too expensive to ship the necessary horseflesh across the channel, vast numbers of the horses were purchased in France. Since the less expensive lighter horses were purchased on the spot, that market was not yet a major driver for English breeders. Because the great horse was the highest status, and hardest to procure, military horse, most breeding efforts, such as they were, went to producing them. So while lighter horses were the most common military mount, they were not specifically bred on a large scale. It takes breeding for specific traits for many generations to “fix” them so that the breeding stock breeds true. It takes far less time for a breed to revert to more typical “wild” horse traits if bred


\textsuperscript{34} For the most thorough description of chevauchees see Ayton, \textit{Knights and Warhorses}. 
indiscriminately or in a feral setting, even if all the horses in the gene pool are of the same breed.\textsuperscript{35}

When the great horse finally began to lose status with the advent of reliable firearms, lighter horses, which had already been used by the subalterns, became a focus of the elite military men, who were the men with the money and power. The army’s tactics began to focus more clearly on what could be done with a lightly armed man against firearms, and the men who had the money to breed their own horses began to focus on the agility, speed and endurance of their horses. While the cavalry was still divided into light and heavy, and even middle weight, all of the divisions of cavalry focused their tactics on horsemen either evading bullets, or charging too fast for infantry to get many shots off before the cavalry struck their lines.

At the peak of the great horse’s tactical prominence, a knight required many horses during a war campaign. He needed his great horse (and a spare, if possible) to actually fight on. He needed a horse for his squire to ride, since he could not get himself into his armor to fight without his squire’s assistance. He also needed a horse to carry his weapons when he was not actively fighting with them because they were too heavy for him to carry for long periods of time. And, finally, he needed a comfortable horse for himself to ride from battlefield to battlefield, allowing his great horse, built for strength rather than endurance, to remain as rested as possible by not having to carry a rider on the march.\textsuperscript{36} With lighter mounted cavalry, there was no need for a squire to help with armor, the cavalry man could keep his weapons on him, and he could ride his charger


\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 24–26.
from field to field if necessary. This meant each officer needed fewer horses, which meant less military traffic, and a faster moving army. A faster moving army put that much more physical pressure on the mounts since they moved more quickly and with less rest. In a return to the tactics of Xenophon, the elite military men took a military interest in the small racing hobbies of the less elite mounted infantry, the hobelars.

The tradition of heavily armed cavalry men, while in many ways an anomaly in the development of cavalry, had become well entrenched, and it was not really until the English Civil Wars that the cuirassiers went by the wayside. A German emperor is claimed to have once stated that “armor protects the wearer, and prevents him from injuring others,” meaning enemies cannot damage the armed man because of the bulk of armor, but the bulk of the armor prevents the armed man from being able to inflict much damage on the enemy because the armor gets in his way, and mounted soldiers of the early modern era began to embrace the idea that not only was the second half of that statement true, but the first half no longer was because bullets could penetrate even the heaviest armor. Indeed, when asked to serve in full armor during the English Civil Wars, Sir Edmund Verney declared that it would “kill a man…to serve in a whole cuirass.” Not only did it slow his horse down and not stop bullets, but if he was knocked from his horse he would not even be able to remount, let alone move agilely enough to defend himself on foot.

Because of the devastation musketeers could create in cavalry ranks when the heavy cavalry approached at their traditional slow speeds—generally a trot until the very

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last moment—cavalry tactics changed. At the beginning of seventeenth century, when
the cavalry began using firearms themselves, they would tend to approach in waves, each
unit firing their pistols then retiring behind the next wave in order to reload. This tactic
left them vulnerable to foot soldiers who could reload with greater speed. During the
English Civil Wars, successful cavalry commanders returned to the massed charge at key
spots in the enemy line, once again capitalizing on the shock value of thundering horses.39
But horses charging slowly under heavily armed men are still slow, and relatively easy,
targets, so with very few exceptions, the cavalry abandoned their heavy armor in favor of
lighter, mostly leather armor, so that they could use lighter, faster horses so that they
were more difficult targets. The primary exception to the retiring of the cuirass was Sir
Arthur Hazelrig’s troop of horse, which was derisively known as the “lobsters” precisely
because their armor looked ludicrous to their enemies, who were no longer used to seeing
such a slow, heavy opponent.

With a more lightly armored soldier, horses could be used on rougher ground.
The Royalists in the Civil War, made up of far more gentry who were used to hunting,
were able to take advantage of their lighter armor and charge across ground crossed with
hedges and ditches that their horses never could have negotiated with heavy armor.40
This change in terrain that mounted cavalry could operate over forced a change in the
demands of the army on its cavalry. The horsemen had to be more skillful riders, and the
horses had to be both more athletic and better built. The physical stresses of jumping put
more structural stress on horses’ legs; so in order to stay sound with the increased

39 Stanley D. M. Carpenter, Military Leadership in the British Civil Wars, 1642-1651: The Genius of This

40 Peter Young and Richard Holmes, The English Civil War, Wordsworth Military Library: A Military
physical demands, horses had to have sounder legs. This change in tactics that firearms forced was a watershed in the development of the European cavalry. While early Greek cavalry had required swift, agile horses, the weapons they faced did not have anywhere near the range of even early firearms. What the army required with the advent of viable firepower was horses that were quick, agile, and could maintain their speed and agility over significantly longer periods of time as required to get into and out of range of the guns without making the cavalry easy targets. These new demands on the cavalry forced the creation of new divisions among mounted troops, as well as requiring that horsemen figure out how to most effectively use their own firearms in battle.

The different branches of mounted soldiers went by many names—hussars, dragoons, lancers, harbusquiers, cuirassiers, to name a few—but what those names designated changed frequently and rapidly over the next centuries. To list the specific duties of each, even for a specific period, is difficult, because they might differ from troop to troop, and because what an army manual might dictate as the appropriate duties for each and what the heat of battle dictated were often at odds with one another. For simplicity’s sake, it is easiest to continue to think in terms of heavy cavalry—shock troops who did not perform outpost duty—light cavalry—who did anything and everything—and mounted infantry—using horses for mobility, but fighting dismounted. The realities of war often rendered even these designations moot, but they serve nonetheless.41

41 Dorondo, Riders of the Apocalypse : German Cavalry and Modern Warfare, 1870-1945, 18.
between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries, armies required vastly greater numbers of horses. While spears, swords and crossbows could kill horses, they could not do it at the rate pistols, muskets and cannon could. And as the populations of nations mushroomed with advances in agriculture at the same time, the size of armies mushroomed in proportion with them. Larger numbers of horses, being killed off at significantly higher rates, meant that while the army needed better horses to outrun guns, it also simply needed more—exponentially more. But it only needed them when it was at war. Rulers did not want to feed and care for vast numbers of military mounts when they were not at war because the expense would be unsustainable, but when they needed them, they needed good ones, in large numbers, in a hurry. This would be a bigger and bigger issue for the armies of the west throughout the rest of the horse-powered age.

This dilemma was answered, at least in part, by the creation of the thoroughbred. The thoroughbred is arguably the first modern horse breed in the west, with carefully recorded pedigrees, and its creation shows the evolution in understanding of breeding strategies by English horsemen. As they carefully performance tested their breeding stock on the racetrack, and began to systematically use not only the best horses, but the best producing horses, in the breeding shed, they created an animal that met the needs, not only of the military, but of civilians as well.

Eighteenth century racing men did not invent the idea of keeping pedigrees and using that information in making breeding decisions, they were merely the first Europeans to do so on a large scale and with a population of animals that has continued to this day. The Arab people had done so for hundreds of years, and indeed, since it

\[42\text{See Charles Gladitz, }\textit{Horse Breeding in the Medieval World}(Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997)\text{ for extensive discussion of breeding criteria throughout the medieval world, including both Arabia and Europe.}\]
was at about the time that the creators of the thoroughbred began to import horses from Arab lands that they began to collect and study the pedigrees of their horses, it is very possible that the idea of transmissible equine family traits came from contact with the breeders of their newly imported stock. It is also likely that it appealed to the European breeders because it coincided nicely with the idea of a hereditary human nobility, to which the majority of these breeders adhered.\textsuperscript{43}

The thoroughbred horse, which allegedly got its name because it was erroneously considered to be thoroughbred (purebred) Arabian, began as a type bred from native English types crossed with desert types, all selected for certain criteria—speed over middle distances (one to fifteen miles), with the ability to remain sound in order to exhibit that speed repeatedly. While biologists would likely consider that it met their definition of a breed, it was with the founding of the Jockey Club in England, in 1750, and the collecting of pedigrees for the first general studbook, finally published in 1791,\textsuperscript{44} that the Thoroughbred began to take on the modern definition of a breed, based on pedigrees, kept in public registries, tracing to specific individuals.

The thoroughbred horse is not, contrary to tradition,\textsuperscript{45} a purebred Arabian horse who differs from the modern Arabian only because of centuries of selective breeding for speed. It is actually the product of crossing Arabian, Turkomen, and Barbary horses imported from the lands generally controlled by the Ottoman Empire, with native British


\textsuperscript{45}Many breeders and devotees of both thoroughbreds and modern Arabian horses have tried to explain away holes in the traditional history of thoroughbreds being purebred Arabs, perhaps most notably (and vehemently) Lady Judith Wentworth, one of the most important breeders of Arabian horses in the twentieth century. But the evidence does not bear this out. See Mackay-Smith, \textit{Speed and the Thoroughbred: The Complete History}, 1–4. Also see Landry, \textit{Noble Brutes}, 76–80.
horses, many of whom had been raced and were noted for their inherent speed. The two key native influences were the Irish Hobby and the English Running Horse, sometimes called Gallways, both of which were raced extensively in the centuries before the creation of the thoroughbred, and were known in Britain for sprinting speed. Racing in England is documented as far back as the Roman times, with its center in York (where it would remain until it moved to Newmarket during the restoration), and in Ireland, as far back as a millennium BC. Horse fairs were the primary venue for racing, and the races were apparently run with an eye to attracting buyers. According to Alexander Mackay-Smith, the races were sprints, approximately a quarter of a mile, so that spectators could easily see the horses for the entire race.46

The Irish Hobby was known throughout much of Europe as not only a fast horse, but as a military horse too. Indeed the Roman era Irish light cavalry were known as hobelars because they rode hobbies, thus establishing an early British link between racing and light cavalry. Hobbies were exported not only to England and Scotland, but also to Italy for Palio racing. Henry VIII was a great fan of the Irish Hobby and imported them for hunting as well as racing and military mounts. They were even exported to the young British colony of Virginia, where they would help found the American Thoroughbred and the American Quarter Horse.

They were small in stature, compared to the modern thoroughbred, and instead of trotting for their intermediate gait, where diagonal pairs of legs move in unison, they tended to amble, where the left or right pairs of legs move in unison. This gait is still

46 Alexander Mackay-Smith, Speed and the Thoroughbred Horse: The Complete History (Lanham, MD: The Derrydale Press, 2000), Chapters 2 and 3. This book, and Alexander Mackay-Smith, The Colonial Quarter Race Horse (Middleburg, VA: Colonial Quarter Horse Publication, 1983) are the most extensively researched and reliable books on the origins of the bloodstock on which the thoroughbred is based.
seen in “gaited” breeds today, especially in the United States and Latin America, and these breeds are likely derived from the same stock. The amble is less stable than the trot for covering difficult terrain, but for covering ground in open country it is slightly faster than the trot and particularly comfortable for the rider, hence its popularity.

The second native speed influence on the thoroughbred was the English Running Horse, or Gallway, which evolved running in English and Scottish town races, again, usually about a quarter of a mile long for the sake of the spectators. York, in Northern England, was the central region of these races and horses, and the Cistercian Monastery at Jervaulx seems to have been one of, if not the, largest breeders of English Running Horses. While the records of the abbey did not survive Henry VIII’s order of dissolution, there remain tantalizing allusions to it in other records. Most famously, a letter from Arthur D’Arcy to Thomas Cromwell, dated June 8, 1537, noting that “surely the breed of Gervaix [Jervaulx] for hors was the trydd [tried] breed in the north. Ye stallyons and mares well sortyd, I thinke in no realme shold be found the lyke to them.”47 The Jervaulx horses were “trydd” on the racecourse, proving their mettle, and the stallions and mares were kept separated and mated according to human selection, not allowed to run together mating as they chose, which was common elsewhere. It is possible that some of these horses wound up in the Royal Studs of Henry VIII, as D’Arcy’s letter seems to refer to finding suitable locations for housing Henry’s Royal Studs, which Henry was expanding at a prodigious rate. Alexander Mackay-Smith argues that with the dissolution of the

According Gervase Markham, the prolific expert on horses and horsemanship of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, English Running Horses were the swiftest of their day. In his works on choosing and training race horses, he describes the English Running horse as follows: “somewhat long and loosely made, that is to say somewhat long filletted between the hucklebones [hip bones] and the short ribs, [with]... slender limbes, long joyntes, a thinne necke, and a little belie, being in all his generall parts, not so strong and knit together as the Hunting Horse.” This description of the English Running Horse’s conformation describes the build of a horse that is biomechanically adapted for optimal for speed. The Duke of Newcastle, one of the greatest horsemen of the seventeenth century, agreed with Markham on ideal racehorse conformation. He wrote that: “they must be shaped thus: as light as possible, large and long, but well shaped, a short back, but with long sides, and a little long-legged; their breast as narrow as may be, for so they will gallop, the lighter and nimbler, and run the faster; for the lighter and thinner you breed for galloping is the better.” These words could easily be descriptions of the modern thoroughbred. Indeed, based on contemporary descriptions of English Running Horse, the only difference between it and the modern thoroughbred is that the thoroughbred is considerably taller.

48 Mackay-Smith, Speed, 55. The Cistercians were known for keeping excellent records, which would most likely have proven invaluable to breeders (and historians).

49 Gervase Markham, Cavalrice, or The English Horseman (London: Printed for Edward White, 1607) Book 6, p3.

50 William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, A New Method and Extraordinary Invention, to Dress Horses: And Work with Them According to Nature; as Also to Perfect Nature by the Subtilty of Art: Which Was Never Found Our but by the Thrice Noble, High, and Puissant Prince William Cavendish (Dublin: James Kelburn, 1740 [originally published 1667]), 57, Eighteenth Century Collections Online.
Henry VIII is the first English monarch for whom we have any stud records of significance, and as an avid outdoorsman he appears to have collected horses for a wide variety of uses, including racing. In addition to the studs for his immediate use in and around London, he expanded his equestrian operations to include breeding studs. The first and best known was Tutbury Race (a “race” was a studfarm), in Staffordshire. The second largest was at Malmsbury in Wiltshire, which Henry took over after his dissolution of the monastery that had originally stood there. According to C.M. Prior, he continuously sent emissaries to continental Europe to buy breeding stock from the best studs in Europe. The Italians and Spanish were generally considered to breed the foremost horses of that day, and Henry acquired as many as he could. English breeders were most likely introduced to the Arab, Barb and Turkish\textsuperscript{51} horses through these routes, because both the Italians and Spaniards made ample use of these breeds. The Spanish in particular were well acquainted with them because of the years of Islamic rule in Southern Spain, during which the Arabs brought a continuous supply of desert horses. The Italians regularly imported Barbs for racing and breeding and, according to Hubertus Reade, Henry VIII imported Barbs, as well as Italian and Spanish horses, via Mantua and Cordova.\textsuperscript{52} Apparently Henry’s studs were not well tended toward the end of his reign, and according to Holinshed, “the officers waxing wearie, procured a mixed brood of

\textsuperscript{51}The terms Arab, Arabian, Barb, Barbe, Barbary, Turk, Turkish, and Morrocco were often used indiscriminately for horses of desert breeding. The most common collective term used for them was Oriental. In general, a horse that was imported from a Turkish controlled area would be called a Turk, from a Berber area, a Barb (Barbary), and so on. But there was a brisk horse trade between these areas, so many of the horses in question may have started out in a different geographical area. I have generally referred to horses in the same way they are listed in the records, and collectively as either Oriental or desert horses.

\textsuperscript{52} Prior, The Royal Studs, p. 2,
bastard races, whereby his good purpose came to little effect.”

But they were revived by his children, most notably, Elizabeth I, who would breed primarily heavy cavalry horses which were critical in the defense of the crown in an era of contested succession.

Elizabeth I’s first Master of Horse, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, was an excellent horseman and turned to the Italians for guidance. Most notably he brought Prospero D’Osma, not only to teach elite horsemanship, but to tour the royal studs and “report all that concerns [their] advantages and disadvantages...so that your Lordship may find fitting remedies for the past shortcomings.” The report, which was originally written in Italian and a part of the Leicesters’ private library, was purchased in 1927 by the New Yorker, Alfred B. Maclay. Maclay had it translated by Charles B. Lombardo, of Columbia University, and made the translation available to C.M. Prior for reproduction in its entirety in Prior’s 1935 book The Royal Studs.

D’Osma’s report gives us a glimpse into how the studs were run, and what breeding theories he, as an expert of his day, espoused. There were only mares and juvenile horses at the studs, not stallions or geldings. D’Osma was opposed to this practice because he thought it was too physically demanding on the stallions to be ridden a great distance from where they were stabled to the stud before breeding mares. There was no indication in his report of exactly where the stallions were kept, but he mentions

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54Prior, The Royal Studs, 11.


56A gelding is a castrated stallion. The vast majority of male horses were and are gelded before reaching sexual maturity because a mature stallion can be unpredictable and dangerous if he is not appropriately handled.
that the grooms who had to bring them were paid extra for bringing them such a great distance and that therefore it would also save the queen considerable money to keep the stallions in the same location as the mares.\textsuperscript{57} The life of a breeding stallion, while presumably gratifying, is also extremely strenuous, so there is much merit to this objection. He also believed that stallions should not be bred until they were thirteen years old, and that once they had begun a life of breeding they should only be used for breeding, since the addition of any other activities could reduce both its effectiveness as a stud and its lifespan.\textsuperscript{58}

While D’Osma clearly believed that heredity was important, he believed that factors occurring at conception and during gestation, and in the raising of the foal were more important considerations in how valuable the foal would be. For example, he wrote that mares that should be allowed to digest their meal before being bred and “her stomach bowels and viscera will be empty of gasses moisture or filth, and the foal she bears...will be strong and sound.”\textsuperscript{59} There are no modern studies showing any relationship even with initial conception rates that relate to the timing of a mare’s meal in relationship to when she is covered by a stallion. So this theory is not borne out by science, though horses do digest slowly, meaning that any strenuous activity directly after a large meal could lead to digestive upset, which is particularly serious in horses since their digestive tracts to do not allow for any reversal of direction by vomiting, which might conceivably lead a modern breeder to agree with D’Osma’s methods here, though for the sake of the mare

\textsuperscript{57}Prior, \textit{The Royal Studs}, 34.

\textsuperscript{58}Prior, \textit{The Royal Studs}, 31–33, 36.

\textsuperscript{59}Prior, \textit{The Royal Studs}, 36.
rather than the potential offspring. Generally speaking, overall nutrition of a broodmare is of far more interest to modern breeders than is her immediate pre-service meal.\(^{60}\)

D’Osma was also a proponent of spirited horses and did not think overly tame horses were as valuable. Therefore he advocated that a mare be turned out in a paddock with the stallion which was to breed her, letting the stallion and mare run together and breed in their own time. He wrote that breedings done with grooms holding the mare and stallion would lead to less spirited, and therefore less valuable, offspring. Again, there is no data to back up his assertion, although a stud managed on his principals would also be less likely to handle the foals extensively when they were young, and that would lead to less tame offspring. Believing that stallions and mares were, at least to a certain extent, as good breeding candidates as any other well cared for horses, meant that D’Osma seems to have been less concerned about the risk of injury to any one individual horse in natural breeding. If one stallion’s breeding career was ended by a well placed kick from a mare which was not receptive to his advances, he could simply be replaced by another stallion. Once the idea of traits being mostly passed on from parents by heredity became ascendant, the idea that breeding horses were more or less interchangeable was replaced by the idea that specific individual breeding horses were critical to producing improved stock, and therefore the elimination of a breeding-worthy stallion from the gene pool by one angry mare ceased to be an acceptable risk among breeders. Though in D’Osma’s defense, natural breeding did reduce the danger to handlers since they did not need to be in close proximity to the stallion and mare, and since there was no need for a handler for

\(^{60}\) Larryann C. Willis, *The Horse-Breeding Farm* (South Brunswick, N.J: A.S. Barnes, 1973), 244–247.
each horse during the process, presumably relying on pasture breeding could also cut down on payroll expenses.

These are just a few examples of breeding theories in existence directly prior to the development of the thoroughbred. These theories would begin to change quickly with the idea among horse breeders that the best way to get desired traits among the offspring of horses was to breed parents with the same traits. This shift was happening during D’Osma’s day, evidenced by his assertion that in choosing breeding pairs, mares and stallions of similar size and type should be bred in order to get predictable and desirable types in foals. There were various ideas about which parent contributed more to the height of the offspring (showing there was some sense of heredity among breeders) and D’Osma argued against breeding small mares to large stallions in order to get larger foals. Indeed he believed that mares should be bred to stallions of similar size and type to themselves for the best resulting offspring.

Not all genes that a horse carries are expressed in his or her own makeup. Some traits require the same gene to be transmitted from each parent to be expressed, while others are sufficiently dominant that if they are passed on from one parent no genetic input from the other parent can override them. All horses carry a vast number of genes, expressed or unexpressed, which can be passed on to their offspring. In the words of modern biology, horses have both phenotype (outwardly visible type) and genotype (the types encoded in their genetic material—both expressed and unexpressed). When horses have been bred for many generations with no thought toward consistent phenotype, the types encoded in their genes are widely variable. This variability makes their genetic transmission to their offspring highly unpredictable, and their foals’ phenotypes become a
matter of luck. Two horses of the same phenotype could be the result of quite different parents. For example: a chestnut horse, 15.2 hands high, and with nicely balanced shoulder and hindquarters could be the offspring of a palomino and a bay, one of whom was 14 hands and one of whom was 16 hands, one of whom had larger hindquarters than shoulders and the other of whom had the reverse. Another nicely balanced, 15.2 hand chestnut horse could be the offspring of two chestnut parents, both close to 15.2 hands, and both with nicely balanced fore- and hindquarters. Assuming a breeder has chosen these chestnut horses in order to breed foals of similar appearance, the second one is far more likely to produce the desired results, because it has more copies of the desirable genes in his genotype. Obviously this is a very simplified example, but it serves to illustrate why horses of greatly varied type rarely breed true, and therefore make poorer breeding stock. When a pool of horses is bred for generations for certain characteristics, those characteristics become genetically “fixed” within the group. Of course any trait, good or bad, can be fixed through generations of breeding, making breeding in desirable traits, and breeding out undesirable ones, a complex undertaking.

This example also illustrates why when a horse that has been consistently bred for many generations for the same desirable characteristics is bred to a horse of very mixed heritage, the offspring is more likely to resemble the consistently bred parent. The consistently bred parent has genetically loaded the dice in its own favor, although the advantage rarely lasts beyond a generation or two of outcrossing. But this is the reason that the thoroughbred, the first European horse to be consistently bred to the point of greatly increased genetic heredity, became so influential in breeding general purpose and military mounts.
While most people credit the restoration kings, Charles II and his brother James II, and their peers with creating the thoroughbred horse, the groundwork was laid well before, and the process itself seems to have started with James I. As previously noted, the Hobby, the English Running Horse and the oriental breeds—Arabians, Barbs and Turks—were already established in England under Henry VIII. The Hobby and Running Horses had been available for hundreds of years, and the Oriental breeds had begun to be imported in significant numbers during the reign of Henry VIII, many of them by Henry’s direct order. So the stock was available. The hobbies and running horses had regular opportunities to exhibit their speed over sprint distances, so one might reasonably ask why there was a need for a new type of horse.

Sprint racing seems to have been a leisure activity of the masses. Certainly many noblemen took great delight in it too, and kept horses for this purpose, but they also had other leisure activities such as hunting. Hunting horses had to have much more stamina, as well as a more balanced way of going. Sprint horses, in order to achieve top speeds as quickly as possible, tended to run with much of their weight forward on their shoulders. This forward balance gives them more ability to dig in and propel themselves forward quickly, but it also puts them off balance on uneven footing, and greatly increases their likelihood of stumbling and falling, and decreases their ability to shift course and adapt to unexpected circumstances, such as a tree down in their path. Hunting horses, on the other hand, were chosen for stamina and a more balanced gait, which gave them more maneuverability, stability, and the ability to handle downed trees and their like by leaping over them. The nobles began racing their hunting horses for their own amusement, but they were not as swift as the hobbies and running horses, and therefore not as exiting, but
the hobbies and running horses could not maintain their speed over the distances that the hunting horses raced. The thoroughbred is the result of breeders blending the strengths of the two different types into a peerless middle distance racing specialist.

A large part of the shift in horse breeding at this time was reflected in changes in James I’s royal studs. The larger coursers started to be phased out for royal use because the heavy cavalry was being phased out militarily. With the expanding use of firearms, the military value of heavy horses as shock troops, weighed down by heavy armor and heavily armored knights, was rapidly declining. The armor did not protect against bullets or cannonballs, and the ponderousness of the horses made them big, slow, easy targets.

James I’s royal breeding focused more on light, fast horses, with good endurance, which were useful mounts for troops with firearms. For medieval great horses, speed was not really a factor because there was not much that could injure a fully armored knight. Knights, armed with axes and swords that could do damage, whom other knights were most likely to engage, were equally slow moving. Infantrymen, no matter how well armed, could not reach a knight until the knight was in close proximity in the final moment of a charge. A charge made by heavy cavalry could essentially take its time across the field of battle, and not hit their rather low top speed until the last moment, so their bulk, instead of hindering them, helped them achieve maximum physical impact. A fifteenth or sixteenth century great horse neither could, nor had to, carry his rider very far at top speed.

The newly necessary mount needed the endurance and soundness of a hunting horse and the speed of the hobbies and running horses. He had to be able to make long runs, over difficult footing, with obstacles such as downed comrades or enemies to be
negotiated without crashing headlong. Fairly quickly, therefore, the horses kept by the nobility for war, as required by law, ceased to be the heavy Flemish type horses, who would soon start to be bred for even more bulk, for use as draft and coach horses as farming implements and roads improved, and which eventually became the modern draft breeds such as the Clydesdale, Shire and Percheron. Instead the nobility began to improve their hunting horses, already improved by crossing with oriental stallions. Only now they were not breeding these horses just for recreational mounts, but for military advantage as well.

What the Arabian, Turkish and Barbary horses added was denser bone, sounder joints, greater endurance and agility, and the ability to perform on less, and poorer quality, feed. They had been bred as light cavalry mounts in the Arab, North African and Ottoman lands for centuries. The barren, hard ground of the desert areas where they were bred led to physical adaptation of the skeletal structure, creating denser bone that could take the pounding, and the ability to very efficiently use every possible nutrient in the sparse desert forage. The crossing of horses with these traits would take English racing from short sprints to middle distances. The specialty of the desert horse was speed over long distances of 20 to 100 miles or more, and in modern endurance racing, they still reign supreme. By blending their genes with those of the speedy hobbies and English running horses--recognized across Europe as superior sprinters, the middle distance king, the English thoroughbred, was created. With the added endurance of the Oriental stallions, the English race horse could extend his speed over one to fifteen miles.

The English hunting horse of the day could run that far, and was strong and reasonably agile, but was less valuable when crossed with the sprinters because their
genes proved a greater detriment to the speed of the resulting offspring than did the genes of the oriental stallions. The desert horses were not often successful racers themselves, but their crossbred offspring were extremely successful. As the nobility had less and less reason to keep the heavy “great horses” for military requirements, more and more kept these new horses of middle distance racing type.

James I had a small hunting lodge at Newmarket, in Suffolk, approximately sixty-five miles north of London, for his own sporting leisure, and it was there that modern thoroughbred racing developed. It was not only good hunting territory, but thousands of acres of clear, gently rolling heath also offered a great racing setting. James I did not frequently ride in races himself, owners then being likely to ride their own horses, but others of his court did, and he was a regular spectator. He used his own oriental crosses for hunting.

So, whereas the equine inhabitants of the royal studs during the reign of Elizabeth I had been “coursers”, heavy cavalry types, and Jennets, Spanish horses of similar physical attributes, under James I, new breeds had moved in. In 1598, in the last years of Elizabeth I’s reign, there was, according to the papers of the Earl of Essex, her Master of Horse, not a single Barb at the stud. In a circa 1620 report of the Hampton Court stud, three of thirteen mares are identified as Barbary, and five were covered by Barbes [Barbaries]. And in the 1623 report on the Hampton Court Stud, two of the twenty one mares are listed as “barbary”, and five of the mares, including the two Barbary mares,

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had been covered by Barbary stallions. Most of the mares have no breed listed at all and some others may very well have been of desert origin. At the royal stud at Tutbury, of the forty seven mares, two are listed as Barbs, again most have no breeding listed, and thirteen were covered by either a Barb or an Arabian.

James not only bred horses suitable for racing, but during the Sabbatarian movement in England, that was a prelude to the English Civil War, James I defended the racing of horses and other country pastimes on Sundays, in his Declaration of Sport. This proclamation issued in 1618, and reissued in 1633 by his son, Charles I, declared that his subjects were permitted to engage in sport after Sunday services. This declaration had a complex beginning as both a way of getting Catholics to Anglican services—they were only allowed to participate in sport on Sundays if they had attended services first—and as a rebuke to clergy and nobility who did not think it appropriate for their parishioners to partake in any sport on the Sabbath. What effect this had on racing in the short term, whether to make it more or less popular, is hard to determine, but it certainly showed it was a political issue.

Racing continued to thrive during the reign of Charles I, with formal racing becoming more regular at Newmarket as well as other venues. And Charles I, in addition to reissuing his father’s Declaration of Sport, maintained the royal studs,

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63 Reproduced in its entirety from the records of the Duke of Buckingham, George Villiers, in Prior, The Royal Studs, 40–41.

64 A report reproduced in its entirety from the papers of the Duke of Buckingham, George Villiers, in Prior, The Royal Studs, 48–49.


including the Tutbury Race, with its new emphasis on Oriental breeding stock.\textsuperscript{67} While Newmarket was not yet the center of racing that it would become under Charles II, Charles I regularly visited for both hunting and racing, and brought his court with him when he did, increasing the exposure of the upper echelons of English society to the newer lighter horses, and showing them royal approval. Newmarket became generally known as the second capital of England, and even impending civil war did not stop Charles I from his visits to his favorite racing venue, as he was in residence at Newmarket when the Civil War began in 1642.

By the end of the Civil War, with the victory of the Puritans and elevation of Oliver Cromwell to the position of Lord Protector, the fate of the proto-thoroughbred might have been in grave danger, indeed it had been so assumed for many years. But as historian Patrick Little argues, Cromwell was no enemy of elite horse breeding. Indeed, the idea that breeding suffered under Cromwell seems to have come primarily from William Cavendish, the Duke of Newcastle, who wrote that “there were, afore the [English civil] wars, many good races in England, but they are now ruined...because the men that did govern in those days were not so curious as the great lords and great gentry were heretofore, neither would they be at the cost; and besides, they have not the knowledge of horses as in other countries.”\textsuperscript{68} This dismissal of breeding under the protectorate most likely stems from Cavendish’s Royalist sympathies. Indeed, he was the tutor to Charles II, and spent the interregnum in exile on the continent. Once the Royalists regained power, Cavendish’s classist take on the matter became an example of

\textsuperscript{67}Prior, \textit{The Royal Studs}.

\textsuperscript{68}Cavendish, \textit{A New Method}, 56.
the winners writing the history. Subsequently, when later historians saw Cromwell’s dissolution of Royal Studs and bans of racing, they assumed they were seeing evidence that supported Cavendish’s claims. But a closer reading of the evidence suggests that Cromwell, who was an avid horseman, was, if not a fan of racing, not exactly a foe either.

Cromwell famously dissolved the royal stud at Tutbury, which many have taken as evidence of his dislike for the breeding of elite horses, but he did not simply scatter its inhabitants to the four winds. Indeed, in the Calendar of State Records there is a clear admonition that the “Council of State take care for the preservation of the race and breed,” and since the stud itself was expensive to operate, and the protectorate was always under tight budget constraints, it is possible that the stud was disbursed at least in part for monetary, rather than ideological reasons. Indeed, Little argues that Cromwell was trying to set up his own equivalent of the royal studs at Whitehall, and that his taste in horses was very similar to that of his two royal predecessors.

The other evidence used to convict Cromwell of being anti horse racing is that during the protectorate he banned racing. While on the surface this certainly sounds like opposition to racing, what most ignore is that racing was only banned sporadically, and the reasons given were not ideological, but based on security. The reason given for the first six-month ban, five years into the protectorate, is that an anti-puritan plot had been discovered at Berwick, and the plotters had been meeting under cover of racing meetings.

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69 Public Records Office Great Britain and Mary Anne Everett Green [editor], Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series [of the Commonwealth] 1649–1660 (Longmans, 1876), 67.

The ban was to prevent “all meetings of Papists or dissafected,” to not stop people from racing horses. Indeed when Members of Parliament complained to Cromwell that they were not allowed to go racing or cockfighting, his answer was not that racing and cockfighting were evil, but merely that “to make them recreations, that they will not endure the abridgement of them, is folly.” In other words, that these members of Parliament had become so immoderate in their pastimes that they could not live without them for short periods was the problem. Cromwell specifically told them that he did not think racing unlawful.

The Cromwell men, Oliver and his sons, were all avid horsemen, and it is likely that in addition to hunting on horseback, they also raced. Cromwell owned a “dun Arabian,” probably not a purebred by modern standards, and possibly a descendent of the Markham Arabian. This horse was in training at Epsom in 1654, presumably to race. And his son Richard gave Winchester 30 pounds for a “race-cup” in 1657, between racing bans. Presumably their racing was a ‘recreation’ they could ‘abridge’ when necessary, but it was also a recreation they supported.

Many historians who have acknowledged Cromwell’s horsemanship and interest in breeding have claimed that his interest was not in sport, but in practical military need. I would argue that the distinction is misleading. The seventeenth century saw the race horse, hunting horse, and military horse converge essentially into one. A horse that was

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71Great Britain and Green [editor], *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series [of the Commonwealth] 1649–1660*, 244.


73Little, “Uncovering a Protectoral Stud,” 255.

74Little, “Uncovering a Protectoral Stud,” 262.

75Little, “Uncovering a Protectoral Stud,” 255.
good at hunting was a good military horse, and if he could win hunt races, he could, with a lightweight dragoon on his back, charge enemy lines before the enemy could get more than one shot off at him. The horses Cromwell was breeding, including the horses he saved for himself from the royal studs, were of the same type and lineage that the gentry across England were breeding for both sport and meeting their state military requirements.

While ruling England, Cromwell acquired many Barbary horses, which were considered by the Duke of Newcastle to be the best stallions to sire racehorses. On one occasion he is said to have even ignored a parliamentary committee, telling them he would meet with them another day, so that he could view a new Barb stallion. In addition to collecting Barb stock, he tried to go the Stuarts one better by attempting to procure true Arabian horses for breeding. At this point in England Arabians were essentially a beast of mythology about whom Newcastle, possibly the most knowledgeable horseman of his day, wrote: “He is nursed with camels milk; there are the strangest reports in the world of these horses; for I have been told by many gentlemen of credit, and by very many merchants, that the price of right Arabians is one thousand, two thousand and three thousand pounds a horse...I never saw any but one of these horses.” Arabians were bred by nomadic Bedouin tribes of the Arabian Peninsula and their breeders used them for military purposes. The breeders were loath to part with them, and the Ottomans, who controlled the region, were loath to have Europeans buy them, so the prices are not surprising. And Newcastle commented that “Arabs are as careful and

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76 Cavendish, A New Method, 57–58.
77 Little, “Uncovering a Protectoral Stud,” 259.
78 Cavendish, A New Method, 65–66.
diligent, in keeping the genealogies of their horses as any princes can be in keeping any of their own pedigrees."\textsuperscript{79} And this may have prompted English breeders to start keeping more careful records of their own horses breeding, following the lead of the acknowledged masters of horse breeding, which, as Newcastle points out, also suited their ideas of their own ancestry.

Cromwell was only modestly successful in acquiring true Arabian breeding stock from the source. He was able to bring in at least one stallion,\textsuperscript{80} but most of his attempts, via the Levant Company, were stymied by there being very few horses available in Aleppo. Even if his agent had been successful, he would have had to acquire a permit from the Ottoman government to export the horse, which would not have been a simple task.\textsuperscript{81} Indeed the Ottomans bred part bred Arabians for export as diplomatic gifts, and Peter Edwards argues Cromwell’s one Arab probably was one of these very nice, but not “pure” horses.\textsuperscript{82} So, while Oliver Cromwell was building his stud, albeit with only one (possible) Arabian, he had done his part to keep the momentum of proto-thoroughbred breeding marching forward, and had increased the interest among English breeders in desert horses, both Barbs and true Arabians.

It was on this foundation that the Thoroughbred was built during the Restoration. Charles II was a passionate racegoer and an excellent horseman, trained by the venerable William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, the acknowledged master horseman of his day.

\textsuperscript{79}Cavendish, \textit{A New Method}, 66.

\textsuperscript{80}Little, “Uncovering a Protectoral Stud,” 263.


\textsuperscript{82}Edwards, \textit{Horse and Man}, 111.
And under Charles II, Newmarket again became known as the second capital of England, as the king rebuilt his father’s palace at Newmarket, and acquired a second residence in which to house his wife, the queen, and more stolid members of court while he and his inner circle, and his many significant mistresses, lived a more sporting existence at the palace.\textsuperscript{83}

Charles II attached sufficient importance to his horses that he had sent his brother, Duke of York, future James II, to England from exile when he heard that Cromwell was dispersing Tutbury stud in an effort to purchase some of his own horses.\textsuperscript{84} And while that effort was unsuccessful, he did not waste any time after his restoration in beginning a new collection of high class horses. He returned to England on May 29, 1660, and on June 6 he appointed James D’arcy as his Master of Horse.\textsuperscript{85} Charles II himself did not recreate a royal breeding stud on the scale of Tutbury, but Cromwell’s stud at Hampton Court became his property and he quickly began adding to its numbers. D’arcy, having inspected the old Tutbury stud at Charles’ request, reported back that it would be prohibitively expensive to restore it as a breeding stud, and suggested instead that as part of his duties as Master of Horse, he be paid to produce, from his family’s renowned stud, twelve choice horses a year to the king. His argument was that it had cost Charles I 1200 to 1500 pounds a year to keep up Tutbury and the stud only produced five to seven suitable colts a year. For 800 pounds a year added to his salary as Master of Horse, he


\textsuperscript{84}Prior, \textit{The Royal Studs}, 61–62.

\textsuperscript{85}Fitzgerald, \textit{Royal Thoroughbreds}, 14.
would guarantee the king twelve suitable colts. The arrangement saved the king money and gave him top quality horses, so, after seeking a second opinion from his treasurer, he approved it.

The foundation of the thoroughbred has often been traced to a collection of “Royal Mares” imported from the East by Charles II, a notion codified in the first edition of the General Stud Book, but there is no evidence that Charles himself imported many mares, as he had no need with his horses already being supplied by one of the best studs in the country. He did own a “natural barb mare” that was a gift of the King of Morocco, and may have owned the “Burton Barb mare, and he did import at least one Arabian stallion from Constantinople, but primarily he collected horses bred by others. Where the idea of the royal mares came from is hard to say. Charles II’s contribution was not in bringing in mythical oriental mares, but in support for racing, and giving the best studs incentives to breed horses that could race at middle distances.

In addition to being an avid racegoer, and owner and rider of many top racehorses, Charles II quickly became the adjudicator of all racing disputes. He was just as interested in the training of the horses as their competing, and throughout his reign became such a fixture watching the training gallops at Newmarket from the back of his trusty mount Old Rowley, that Old Rowley became his own nickname and the designation for part of the heath itself, and is still the name of one of the two modern

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88 Fitzgerald, Royal Thoroughbreds, 17.
tracks at Newmarket. When his influential French mistress, Louise de Querouaille, convinced King Louis XIV of France to send over his famous astrologer, the Abbe Pregnani, for Charles’ use, in an effort to get England to return to Catholicism, Charles, while not about to be lured back to the Catholic fold, eagerly put the great seer to work predicting race winners. The astrologer was completely incapable of forecasting a winner, and was sent back to France with his reputation in tatters, unable to fulfill his duties to the French king and a laughing stock in England because he was unable to perform in the arena that mattered to the English king.

Most significantly Charles II instituted on October 16, 1665, a series of races, known as “King’s Plate” races, at Newmarket. The rules of these races were designed to cater to the type of horse he wanted to see bred in England, and which would be the most useful sort for both racing and the military. The races would be held over four miles, three times around the round course at Newmarket, and the horses would have to win three heats to win the race, all while carrying 168 pounds. These conditions, which were replicated at race tracks around the country, were ones that a hobby or English running horse could not endure with any success, and only the newly fashionable oriental crosses would excel under. And they were conditions that required a horse that could also carry an average sized man under contemporary battle conditions. These races were similar to how the gentry raced their hunters, but now they carried significant monetary value, and the encouragement of the king, making them not a variation on the primary form of racing for non race horses, but the primary form of racing for the best of

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racehorses. With Charles II having just returned from a long exile resulting from a catastrophic military defeat, his emphasis on encouraging this type of horse is not likely coincidence.

It is worth noting that owners generally rode their own horses in these early races, and these race horses produced the stock that the same owners hunted. As Donna Landry reminds us, “to ride a horse well was to possess the virtues necessary for social authority and even political rule.”

Horsemanship was both a symbol of power and a practical means of exercising it. As the landed gentry were also fencing their property as part of the larger enclosure movement, these horses capable of significantly higher rates of speed for longer periods of time, were also navigating more obstacles in the course of a day’s hunt. In order to adapt to their mounts’ increasing abilities, both in the hunt field and, correspondingly, on the battlefield, the gentry began to adapt their style of riding. They shortened their stirrups and inclined their bodies forward, lightening their weight in the seat of saddle. This was in contrast to the formal style of riding with long stirrups, vertical posture, and deep seats of the classical continental tradition. Landry argues this English seat, as it is still known today, which allowed for more freedom of the horse’s back and, as a result, more speed across country, became a metaphor for English freedoms as opposed to the strictly regimented continental style, where the horse was more autocratically ruled by its rider. Charging across the English countryside on horseback became an “adrenaline-fueled bodily reenactment” of English political freedoms. And, as Karen Raber and Treva Tucker point out, in England at this period, it

93 Landry, Noble Brutes, 16.

94 Ibid., 66.
was the aristocracy that embodied the idea of liberty. Raber and Tucker also note that “horse culture…both shaped and reflected a larger discourse about national character and values.” As the English began to create a colonial empire, they would take with them across the Atlantic these values and the horses that helped shape them, and colonial elites in North America would emulate both, and ultimately use both to help separate themselves from England.


96 Ibid., 27–28.
Chapter 2: The Development of the Early American Blood-Horse and the Initial Evolution of its Military Use

In 1665, the very same year that Charles II instituted the King’s Plate races at Newmarket, Richard Nicolls instituted his own races, for that now historic silver cup, at the New World Newmarket. The horses that raced for Nicholl’s cup, and hundreds like it in Colonial North America, would develop in concert with the English racers into the primary horses American breeders would use to improve the general run of their equine stock. Most Americans were small-scale, haphazard breeders, making these systematically bred racing horses invaluable to producing predictably athletic, useful horses for general usage. As America’s early racing men imported hobbies, English running horses, proto-thoroughbreds and oriental horses, and bred their racehorses from them generation after generation, the development of the American thoroughbred paralleled that of the English thoroughbred. With consistent progeny testing on the turf, American racing men created the same genetic consistency in their horses as English racing men did. The result was not only an outstanding racehorse, but an invaluable asset to breeders of average working horses. Because racing had not yet become such a specialized activity as it is today, and races were generally confined to short race meetings in the spring and fall, most race horses had to earn their keep between races and after their racing careers by serving as saddle horses for their owners. When the colonies rebelled against the English crown, they had to draw on their militias, and the cavalry of those militias were made up primarily of the social elite that bred and rode this stock. The government created by the Revolution would be reluctant to use cavalry after the war, both for ideological reasons and because it was perpetually unwilling to pay the
necessary money to acquire horses of the necessary quality, but, from the Revolution onward, it nonetheless relied heavily on these race-improved horses to mount its military so that the fewest possible men could effectively defend its citizens.

We know virtually nothing of the horses that raced at the new New Market, indeed sources for colonial races in general are few and far between. Newspapers were the primary records of the races, but they have always been printed on cheap paper and, as a result, most no longer exist. Even where they do exist, they only rarely mentioned the races. By far the most useful documents for tracing these early racehorses are the stud advertisements for them, and their offspring, that show up in the existing papers, or that were collected by racing men before the newspapers themselves disintegrated. Luckily for modern researchers, there are notable books from the early 1900’s by men still well versed in the lore of the colonial turf, and who had access to records belonging to private individuals which have since been lost to time or unknowing descendants.

John Hervey, one of the most thorough and accurate early twentieth century racing researchers, believed that most of the horses that raced in the first races on Long Island were officers’ mounts, citing Captain Sylvester Salisbury as the winner of the cup awarded in 1668 at Hempstead Plain. Officers would likely have the best horses around,

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1In England, Newmarket is traditionally written as one word, but the racecourse on Long Island, though named for the one in England, was most often written as two words.

2Having authors who were familiar with the horses of the day is extremely helpful because until the late 1800s, when racing men began to make systematic efforts at record keeping for racing as a whole, there was nothing to stop people from naming their horses after other horses, or changing a horse’s name multiple times. When faced with four or five horses named Regulus, racing during the same period as each other, the guidance of earlier authors who knew which was which is extremely beneficial as a jumping off place to sort out who was who. They were not error free, but they were also not shy about correcting each other in print, happily for the modern researcher who is saved much hair tearing by their willingness to publicly fact check each other.

3 Hervey, Racing in America: 1665-1865, 1944, 1:12.
since life and limb depended on their athleticism, but Nicolls’ aim was not to give his army colleagues a big prize for which to race. Indeed he was continually asking to be sent back to England, in part because serving as Governor was costing him too much out of pocket, so he kept his expenses limited to important and productive purposes. So, as he stated in announcing the cup, his intentions were to promote breeding. Improved breeding would mean that officers and everyone else would have more useful, durable horses available to them. The importance of the horse is institutionally ingrained in the first set of English Laws for New York, which refer to the districts therein as “ridings”. These were areas that officials had to cover on horseback.

These early races run on Long Island, and elsewhere in the colonies, during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, were presumably run by the best horses available, but, as the English thoroughbred was still in its formational stages, there were few imported race horses. In many ways the English thoroughbred was a transcontinental breed from the start since Americans imported horses from England, and from the same sources as English breeders did, and then bred and raced them at home. Because of the colonial tendency to evaluate things by how closely they remained true to the homeland version, they generally promoted their stock as being from the best British lines; but

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many of those lines were only developed into prominence in the colonies and later in the United States—the *Diomed* line being a prime example.

While we know that colonists touted British blood in their horses, because breeds as we know them today, with public registries, did not exist in the early colonial period, it is difficult to determine exactly what types of horses were available in the English colonies when Nicolls offered his cup. The first horses to arrive in Jamestown, in 1610, got eaten and left no offspring, but before long horses were coming across the Atlantic regularly, from England and other locales. We know that 20 mares were shipped to Virginia in 1620 who were “beautiful and full of courage,” generally a description lauded on race-type horses, so they may have been hobbies or English Running horses. What their precise breeding was, there is no record, though most likely the wealthy colonists brought with them the types of horses they rode at home—Hobbies, English running horses, hunters and Spanish horses. The first known shipment of horses to New Amsterdam came in 1623. Most likely it included heavy horses suited to farm work, as that seems to have been the primary use in New Amsterdam, and was the general type of horse in the Netherlands. There are many references to Dutch horses later on in New York and the surrounding colonies that would most likely have been descendants of these Flemish-type horses brought by the Dutch. There were probably also the feral descendants of Spanish horses which established themselves in the southern colonies. Among these was what was often referred to as the Chickasaw horse. Apart from the Flemish stock, this is essentially the same stock that England began its racehorse

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6 The asterisk before his name was, and still is, a standard method of indicating a horse was imported.

breeding with, though possibly in different proportions, and the Flemish horses were probably not used for racing purposes in North America either, as they were bulkier and better suited for heavy farm work. Colonists would eventually add oriental blood to their stock as well, either imported from England, or directly from Asia and Africa. This melting pot of horses was the foundation of the American quarter horse, as well as the American thoroughbred.

While Nicolls’ cup was the first formal horse race that we know of in North America, it was probably not the first formal race run. It is difficult to imagine an era in which the seemingly irrepressible human urge to see who is faster did not express itself in spontaneous “race you to the [fill in the landmark of your choice]” form, but Quarter racing, which grew to great popularity in Virginia during the seventeenth century, was probably already more formally established, and likely grew out of those informal matches between riders with high opinions of their mounts and their own horsemanship. Quarter races began on the streets of heavily forested regions, as these were the only sufficiently clear paths for them to get up to top speed. Alexander Mackay-Smith notes that the stock racing under these conditions was probably of hobby and Galloway breeding. As quarter racing grew in popularity, municipalities quickly began to pass ordinances forbidding racing on the streets as a great danger to pedestrians and other users of the road. This precipitated the shift to race paths, since the racers did not want to lose ground dodging ox carts and people any more than they wanted to be fined. These new paths generally were along the sides of tobacco fields, and consisted of two parallel

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8 His book on the colonial quarter horse is far and away the most thorough examination of the colonial origins of the American Quarter Horse. Most others focus only on the century or so before the registry was founded in 1940, with just passing mention to the breed’s colonial roots. See Alexander Mackay-Smith, *The Colonial Quarter Race Horse*.  


tracks, one for each of the two horses racing, and the races seem to have been primarily personal challenges between individuals with the stakes a simple matter of each owner betting with the other on his own horse. The public, including those with no prospect of ever owning a “race nag,” placed bets among themselves.

That the participants were the gentry is clearly demonstrated in the oft-cited court case of September 10, 1674, in York County, when a tailor, James Bullocke, was hauled into court for racing his mare against the horse of one Matthew Slader, gentleman. The case was based on the grounds that “it is contrary to the law for a labourer to make a race, being a sport only for gentlemen.” While this case is widely cited as being evidence that there were widespread sumptuary restrictions against the hoi polloi racing, it appears to be the only one. Perhaps there were no other cases because of the steep penalty issued of two thousand pounds of tobacco. Or it may be that what really made this case impossible to ignore, was that Slader, the gentleman in question, had conspired with Bullocke to let Bullocke’s mare win, which was “an apparent cheate” that was also a gross violation of social protocol, which landed Slader in the stocks for an hour—a strong deterrent to members of the upper classes. Perhaps this is the only case because others were not so foolish as Slader as to put the deal in writing.

Virginia did pass a law in 1713, well after the Bullocke-Slader case, making it illegal for those without substantial land to own a stallion or mare (unless spayed), or to own more than one gelding or spayed mare. The restriction applied to those owning

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10 From the court records of York County, quoted in Ibid.

11 William Waller Hening, *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619*, vol. IV (Richmond, Va: Franklin Press, W.W. Gray, Printer, 1820), 47.
less than fifty acres of land, or renting and occupying land worth less than twenty pounds or simply renting land worth five hundred pounds of tobacco or fifty schillings annually, and it applied to horses of any sort. The reason given in the preamble of the law was that “it is found by daily experience, that the great number of horses and mares, kept by persons who have no freehold or tenancy in lands, and suffered to go at large on the lands of other persons, is not only prejudicial to the breed of horses, but also injurious to the stocks of cattle and sheep of this colony.”12 The law clearly tried to keep horses out of the hands of those with little land. On the one hand, the Burgesses were acknowledging that, without sufficient land to support the nutritional needs of the horses, people in this income category tended to simply let them run loose to graze on other people’s land, and the owners of that land found this unacceptable. On the other hand, they also noted that this led to horses breeding at random, which led to poor stock (and possibly, depending on where they roamed, free breeding to expensive bloodstock, or, worse, a grade stallion breeding a blooded mare). This was in part an attempt to curtail the random breeding practices that led to a substandard horse population, but also clearly an attempt to curtail trespasses on the assets of more wealthy landholders. This type of law would be echoed after the civil war when white landholders tried to restrict the access of freedmen to means of supporting themselves that might reduce their economic dependency on whites by denying them hunting and fishing rights. This 1713 law passed in an era when less affluent whites, possibly former indentured servants, were an economic, and possibly civic, threat. Bacon’s rebellion, almost forty years earlier, had shown the Planters that this population could be a destabilizing force, and as horses were a military asset, putting

12 Ibid., IV:46–47.
land restrictions on their ownership was a potential avenue to keeping this population controlled.

By the time this law passed, course racing may have already reached Virginia, which was already the center of quarter racing. Virginia governor Francis Nicholson offered “first and second prizes to be run for Horse [sic] on the 22\textsuperscript{nd} day of April”\textsuperscript{13} in 1691 for a race of whose distance we are unsure. Since quarter races were matches between only two opponents, there would be no call for a second prize, leading one to believe that there were more than two horses to race for the prize, and that the race was not a quarter race. Nicholson was a military man who had served as Lieutenant Governor in New York, and therefore was undoubtedly acquainted with longer course racing, so if the race was not a quarter match, it is at least possible that it took place over a longer distance.

Even in 1700 it is likely that any horse that raced also had a second occupation. Horses were expensive, and apart from mares producing foals, most horses probably had to do more than carry a jockey down a quarter mile path every year or so. In the South, horses were a major form of land transportation—mounted or, more rarely, in harness—and general purpose farm work. And we know from militia records that Virginia horses were a significant, if rarely tested, portion of the state’s militia beginning in 1661\textsuperscript{14}, and by the time of the Anglo-Dutch war precipitated by Nicolls’ acquisition of New Netherland, Virginia could boast 1500 “dragooners” [dragoons, or mounted troops].\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{13} Quoted in Hervey, \textit{Racing in America: 1665-1865}, 1944, 1:21.

\textsuperscript{14} William L. Shea, \textit{The Virginia Militia in the Seventeenth Century} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 76.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 87.
While there are no extent records to confirm it, these prized racers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries likely spent most of their days ferrying humans around their plantations, to church on Sundays, and to militia musters. Their role as status symbol was important, but for the vast majority, they still had to work for their feed.

These races were developing in concert with classic English races, and with the long heat-races for King’s Plates and “plates” like Governor Nicolls offered, and the horses themselves were developing in concert with the English thoroughbred. As the oriental stallions began to make a significant impact on English horse breeding and culture, their offspring and fellow Eastern natives crossed the Atlantic and arrived in the American colonies, where, just as in England, they were crossed with Hobby and English Running Horse stock which, in America, was already running in quarter races. The three most famous oriental stallions to contribute to the thoroughbred, indeed often referred to as the three foundation stallions of the breed, were the Byerly Turk, who arrived in England in 1690, the Darley Arabian, who arrived in 1704, and the Godolphin Arabian, the last to arrive, in 1730.17 By 1730, *Bulle Rock, the first of their descendants to make the Atlantic crossing, arrived in America. *Bulle Rock was imported six decades before the General Studbook, the first English thoroughbred pedigree registry, had even been founded, so verification of his pedigree is difficult. But the most vigorous of pedigree researchers, Fairfax Harrison, found substantial documentation to support that *Bulle

16 Landry, Noble Brutes, 2–14.

17 All thoroughbreds trace to all three of these stallions, and to one of them in their direct male line, but other oriental stallions of the same era actually made larger genetic contributions, however, since their influence was often via a female line, they were not granted as much importance in a patriarchal era that did not yet have the benefit of an understanding of genetic theory.
Rock was sired by the Darley Arabian, and could find nothing to refute Wallace’s listing of him as being out of a daughter of the Byerly Turk, whose dam was sired by the Lister Turk, and out of a “natural barb” mare.

The next reliably documented blood horse to cross the Atlantic was *Monkey, who not only was important in the colonies, but had a traceable record in England before his importation. He was foaled in 1725, bred by Lord Lonsdale in England, and sired by Lonsdale’s Bay Arabian, out of a mare by the Curwen Bay Barb, and out of a daughter of the Byerly Turk and an Arabian mare. There is a record of *Monkey running on the English turf before his importation, and he is the only pre-revolutionary import of whom we have a portrait. The portrait was of him in training while still in England, and his appearance was very much that of an oriental horse, with high tail carriage, clean, hard legs, petite, curved ears, and a neck not merely well crested, but arched at the throat allowing for good wind. He was built for speed and endurance. Compared to images of military horses of previous centuries, *Monkey would be a poor candidate for carrying a heavily armored knight into battle—he was too lightly muscled—but he was ideally built for the newly important speed and agility required in an age of firearms, where his

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18 Harrison, Early American Turf Stock--Stallions, 19.

19 John Hankins Wallace, Wallace’s American Stud-Book : Being a Compilation of the Pedigrees of American and Imported Blood Horses, with an Appendix of All Animals without Extended Pedigrees prior to 1840. And a Supplement Containing All Horses and Mares That Have Trotted in Public in 2 M. 40 S., and Geldings That Have Trotted in 2 M. 35 S., and Many of Their Progenitors and Descendants, with All That Is Known of Their Blood, from the Earliest Trotting Races till the Close of 1866. (New York: W.A. Townsend and Adams., 1867), 79.

20 James Weatherby, The General Stud-Book : Containing (with Few Exceptions) the Pedigree of Every Horse, Mare, &c. of Note, That Has Appeared on the Turf, for the Last Fifty Years, with Many of an Earlier Date : Together with Some Account of the Foreign Horses and Mares from Whence Is Derived the Present Breed of Racers, in Great Britain and Ireland. (London: Printed by H. Reynell, No. 21, Piccadilly, for J. Weatherby, Junior, No. 7, Oxenden-Street, near the Hay-Market, 1793), 302.

21 Harrison, Early American Turf Stock--Stallions, frontispiece.
mount’s ability to dodge and run, rather than the horseman’s suit of armor, would save a horseman. *Monkey was perfectly suited as a mount to get around on in tidewater Virginia, and serve on in the militia.

These first British-bred descendants of oriental stallions were arriving in the colonies at the same time as an important development in colonial racing that would further encourage the breeding of these horses. Subscription plates were races that owners had to subscribe to, often years in advance, with the subscription going to the winner, or divided among the first placings. These would eventually develop into futurities, wherein a horse has to be nominated in utero to be eligible. With long lead times before the horses’ races, owners had time not only to train their horse for the race, but to breed the best, and the nomination was in essence, a wager that they could develop the best horse.\textsuperscript{22}

The first subscription plate we know of was the New York Subscription Plate, run at the Church Farm Course, where it would be run until the land it occupied was deeded from Trinity Church to King’s College (now Columbia University) in 1754, and while we cannot say for certain the first year it was run, we know it had begun by 1725, and that it was an annual event that outlasted its initial home, moving to the Beaver Pond track in Jamaica, Long Island, after the Church Farm course became an institution of higher learning.\textsuperscript{23} A race with significant prize money, reliably run each year, was worth spending the time, money, and effort to breed better and better horses to run in it. And many of the most prominent New Yorkers did indeed spend that time, money and

\textsuperscript{22} Roberston, \textit{The History of Thoroughbred Racing in America}, 138.

effort—most notably, members of the DeLancy, Morris and Van Cortland families. While these families all had significant economic interests tied up with the slave trade, and were slaveholders, it is not clear if slaves were a significant proportion of the horsemen who trained and cared for their horses as was almost universally the case in the South. They were certainly artisans in vastly greater proportions than slaves in the south, including in the art of blacksmithing. Blacksmiths were critical to horseracing because they not only had to fit shoes carefully to the horses’ feet, but also had to trim the ever-growing hoof wall of those feet. A poor job at either task could easily lame horse—sometimes permanently. But because white urban artisans’ livelihoods were threatened by slave artisans, there was much resistance to their use in the cities, and the great New York landholders were more likely to use slave artisans to keep their Hudson Valley farms self-sufficient, and, in the city, keep slaves primarily as domestic staff.

The first New York Subscription Plate winner whose name we know was Old Tenor, owned by Lewis Morris, Jr., a future signer of the Declaration of Independence. The solid silver bowl Old Tenor won in 1751 resides at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in its early American Silver collection. By the time Old Tenor won the race, it was a contest of two-mile heats, with weights set at 112. Earlier in the race’s history the race weights were advertised as being 140, which would have allowed for owners themselves to ride their horses should they so choose, but at 112, specialist jockeys

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26 Ibid., 47–49.

clearly got the rides, which was an indication of the growing rationalization and professionalization of the sport. There would be resistance to these lower weights in the North, which would generally retain higher race weights than the South. Indeed at least one horse was advertised for sale as having “sufficient strength to carry the New York weights.”

Northern horsemen and politicians, including New York Governor (and first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court) John Jay, resisted lowering the weights in the North because it could eventually lead to thoroughbreds becoming less serviceable for carrying the average man in daily life or into battle. The lightest weights tended to be reserved for the youngest horses, with the intention of preserving their legs for harder work when they were older and fully developed.

The New York Subscription plate was the first we know of, but it was joined by Annapolis and others. Just as important as the prize money is the reliability of the running of the races. A single race here or there is merely sport, but if the goal was, as Governor Nicolls stated, to improve the breed of horse, then the regularity of races being run every year was critical to make it worth the effort of breeding horses to be tested in them, especially since it would take six years between breeding a mare and when the resulting offspring could first race. Four year old racing was not introduced in England until 1727, and three year old racing, not introduced until 1731, and it was with great controversy, and seen by many as ruinous to the young horses participating. So the regularity of the race meets in spring and fall wherever racing was established were an


important element in the process of improvement. Indeed, the pushes to race horses at younger ages, the two-year-olds we see commonly today, have come from the breeders, because they wanted to see the fruits of labors, and returns on their investments, sooner.\textsuperscript{32} So racing younger horses may have been an early sign that racing to encourage breeders to breed better stock was already working.

These races were growing alongside the increased rate of importation of “blood” horses from England. *Bulle Rock and *Monkey were the vanguard, and were soon followed by more blood horses. Indeed, the horses that were brought over were rarely imported to put on the track, but were stallions or mares that raced in England, or were at least of racing stock, and were brought to the colonies to improve colonial stock. By the mid eighteenth century not only had large racing studs been founded, but by 1763 Americans were clearly differentiating “full blooded horses” from “three quarters and half-blood horses.”\textsuperscript{33} A race in Philadelphia was advertised that year with lower entry fees for three-quarter and half-bred horses, seemingly recognizing their lower chances of emerging victorious against the full blooded horses.

The term thoroughbred, as applied to the ancestry of race horses, did not come into common use until around 1800. Racing stock was generally referred to as being “blooded” or “bred” when referring to lineage. These designations may have initially referred simply to racehorses having been bred from intentional matings, rather than haphazardly among loose horses—indeed “blooded” and “bred” were terms used to describe other intentionally bred, elite animals, including dogs. The word

\textsuperscript{32} Roger Longrigg, \textit{The History of Horse Racing} (New York: Stein and Day, 1972), 85.

\textsuperscript{33} Hervey, \textit{Racing in America: 1665-1865}, 1944, 1:56.
“thoroughbred” was not put in print until John Lawrence, in his 1809 book *The History and Delineation of the Horse in all his Varieties* wrote “All horses intended for this purpose [racing] must be thoroughbred; in plain terms both their sires and dams must be of the purest Asiatic or African courses exclusively, and this must be attested in an authentic pedigree throughout whatever number of English descendants.”34 This purity never truly existed, as the English thoroughbred has many native English horses among its anonymous forebears, but it served as an ideal, or foundation myth, not something that had to be literally proven before a horse was allowed onto the racecourse, and the ideal was transferred to the colonies. Indeed the term “thoroughbred” was never defined in any official way in the racing world until 1911, when the definition was that any horse was thoroughbred if all of its ancestors were registered in the General Stud Book. This definition was part of the Jersey Law of the Jockey Club (of England) and was used to exclude American thoroughbreds from English tracks, because much of the foundation stock of the American thoroughbred was imported well before the publication of the first edition of said book, in 1791, and therefore did not receive the necessary mention.

It is worth noting that the General Studbook—tracing the pedigrees of race horses and making it easier for breeders to follow which bloodlines produced which sorts of horses—was created before Charles Darwin was born. And it was during this period that Robert Bakewell began his experiments in inbreeding and linebreeding, as well as progeny testing, which would later be such an influence on the late nineteenth century

rage of breeding purebred animals of all sorts. Indeed, historian Margaret Derry speculates that it was likely that Bakewell’s breeding experiments were influenced by the results thoroughbred breeders got from testing their stallions’ progeny on the track.  

During this same period, Americans, disappointed that the General Studbook did not include many American horses, soon began efforts to create an American stud book, though, for logistical reasons, it would take decades before they succeeded in creating a thorough version.

Of course these horses were not just bred to other racehorses, but to the general equine stock of the colonies. Racing was seen as a way to produce superior breeding stock to improve the horse population in general for practical uses. Based on the stallion advertisements of the period, what convinced breeders to spend good money to breed their mares to a stallion was racing blood. Racing men already knew each others’ stock and its heritage, so these advertisements were aimed at other people wanting to breed good quality horses for their own use. Selectively bred stallions produced valuable stock even from average mares, so the offspring were valuable equine citizens for work and military use. In addition to the part bred horses, many thoroughbreds retired from racing, or that did not quite have the desired turn of foot for the track, would make the ideal candidates for the militia, or, eventually, the Continental Army. Since it tended to be the social elite which made up the cavalry, because they were the experienced horsemen who could afford their own top quality mounts, the horses that would carry them throughout

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the Revolution were almost certainly the products of the growth of the race horse population right before the war.

Building on the solid foundation of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the mid eighteenth century saw an increase in the importation of racing stock, by whatever name, including some of the most significant horses in early American breeding. Of the four men Fairfax Harrison dubbed the Founders of the Turf in America\textsuperscript{37} for their importations of English blood horses, all four were active during this period. These four horsemen were: John Carter, of Virginia; James Delancy, of New York; Edward Fenwick of South Carolina; and Benjamin Tasker, Jr., of Maryland.

Perhaps the most prolific importer of the four was Edward Fenwick of the John’s Island Stud, who came from a racing family in England. Before heading to his stud on John’s Island, most of his imported stock was presented to the community for inspection at his stables in Charleston. The first of his imports was *Brutus, a roan\textsuperscript{38} colt, sired by Martindales Regulus, one of the Godolphin Arabian’s most successful sons, and out of Lodge’s Roan Mare, a mare of entirely oriental blood by the Byerly Turk grandson Partner.\textsuperscript{39} *Brutus was foaled in 1748\textsuperscript{40} and raced until 1755\textsuperscript{41} before being sold to

\textsuperscript{37} Harrison, The John’s Island Stud (South Carolina), 1750-1788, 5.

\textsuperscript{38} Horse coat colors can be quite confusing, especially when dealing with the variations between traditional understandings and modern genetic understandings. A true roan coat has white hairs mixed in with colored hairs, and changes very little over the life of the horse. This should not be confused with a (more common) gray coat where, regardless of the base coat color, the hairs begin to lose their pigmentation early in a horse’s life, eventually leading to an entirely gray horse. Unfortunately, before biologists sorted out the genetics behind coat coloring, the Jockey Club codified its definitions of roan as white hairs mixing with brown hairs, and gray as white hairs mixing with black hairs, regardless of whether or not the horse eventually turned all gray (white). Gray and roan coats, both by Jockey Club rules and modern genetic rules, are common among oriental horses, and so they are both reasonably frequent among thoroughbreds. Based on his breeding, it is quite possible that *Brutus was a true roan.

\textsuperscript{39} Weatherby, GSB, 187.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
Fenwick and shipped to South Carolina. Very quickly he became one of the most prominent sires in the region, with his offspring dominating the Carolina racing scene.

*Brutus was soon followed by eight more stallions and six mares. Taken together, Fenwick’s imports represented top English breeding, with increasing preference over the years for the blood of the Godolphin Arabian, and varying degrees of success on the turf themselves. They made a huge stamp on the horse population of the Carolinas where the free (white) population was particularly small and spread out, with poor roads connecting farms and plantations, and where good saddle horses were, therefore, critical for transportation. Many of the products of Fenwick’s stud joined the general population of horses, presumably at the high end of the price spectrum.

James DeLancy, Jr., son of New York colonial Lieutenant Governor, and Chief Justice of the colonial New York Supreme Court, James DeLancy, in addition to aspiring to fill his father’s political shoes, was an avid and astute horseman who imported blood horses from England in significant numbers. While his stud was not as numerically well stocked as Edward Fenwick’s (his farm on the Bowery in Manhattan did not have has much room as Fenwick’s plantations to house such a vast quantity of stock) in quality, his horses were superb. In 1765 he imported *Wildair, by Cade (son of the Godolphin Arabian) out of a mare by the Childers son Steady, and out of a Partner mare. *Wildair was successful at the top level on the turf in England and was equally successful at stud in the colonies. He was so successful that when DeLancy, a Tory, saw that the Revolution was indeed on its way, he was able to sell *Wildair back to England for a

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“large price”\textsuperscript{42} even at the ripe age of 19. Indeed, he was sufficiently well known that while most stallion advertisements waxed eloquent about the stallion’s pedigree and racing heritage, *Wildair’s simply stated where he was standing, and that he was in excellent health.\textsuperscript{43} Everyone even remotely interested in horses in the New York area knew him. Before the Revolution sent him and his family back to England, DeLancy also imported at least one more stallion and five mares. His emphasis on mares showed his astuteness as a breeder. Stallions are a more economical means of introducing new blood to an area since a stallion can breed tens of mares in a season, whereas a mare can only have one foal a year. But good mares are just as critical to breeding top horses as stallions are, and making the effort to acquire prime broodmares is a sign of a serious and knowledgeable breeder.

Possibly the most significant horse DeLancy imported was a horse named *True Britain, and after DeLancy returned to England he gave the horse to his uncle, Oliver DeLancy, who in turn gave it to his nephew, another man by the name of James Delancy, also a Tory, from whom the horse was stolen by a patriot during the revolution. It is probable that this stallion sired Justin Morgan’s famous stallion Figure (more commonly known as Justin Morgan, after his owner) who became the foundation of the Morgan breed, which, in addition to serving as superb farm and harness racing horses, acquired a brilliant reputation as cavalry mounts. There is conflicting evidence regarding this


\textsuperscript{43} For comparison, see the ads for Wildair, Batchelor, and Old England in Ibid., 3–4.
relationship, but the *True Britain parentage is the traditional understanding in Vermont, where Figure stood at stud, and the Morgan breed was founded.44

Regardless of whether *True Briton was the sire of Figure or not, his theft is fairly well documented45 and quite celebrated,46 and he is not alone among British officers’ high-bred horses to be purloined by patriots and join the ranks of American thoroughbred breeding stock. General Burgoyne was relieved of his stallion *Old Prisoner at the Battle of Saratoga, and that horse stood in Connecticut after the war47 and was an antecedent of the great trotting mare Flora Temple48 (the “Bob-Tailed Nag” of Camptown Races fame). And Lord Cornwallis “imported” *Old Merry Momus who later stood at stud in Massachusetts.49 Perhaps vying with *True Briton for genetically important revolutionary captive was *Dian, the infamous Banastre Tarleton’s charger, who accompanied him to America at the beginning of the war and was acquired by the patriots in South Carolina before the war was over, and appears to have left offspring who became not only part of the general American working horse population, but recorded American thoroughbred heritage.50

While these race horses were being developed in the colonies, the men breeding them were very well aware of the military innovations happening in Europe and the need

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44 For a thorough, though inconclusive, examination of the evidence for Figure’s parentage, see Harrison, Early American Turf Stock--Stallions, 214–217.
45 Ibid.
47 Ibid., II:ccxiii.
48 Ibid., II:xcvii.
49 Ibid., II:ccxvii.
50 Harrison, Early American Turf Stock--Mares, 251–253.
for lighter, faster horses to keep up with current military firepower and new, more demanding (on horses) tactics and doctrine. Swedish King Gustavus Adolphus, and England’s Oliver Cromwell were the first to become known for their effective use of cavalry under gunfire, owing largely to their insistence on discipline—something cavalrymen were historically lacking—but Frederick William von Seydlitz, fighting in the Seven Years War, was the first European cavalry officer to be truly innovative. He was a daredevil, in the cavalry tradition, and was known throughout his career to race mounted through the spinning arms of windmills.51 This potentially fatal hobby kept his timing sharp and his aggression high. Aggression is what he brought to cavalry tactics. This aggressiveness began in cavalry drill. He drilled his men and horses hard, with difficult maneuvers, and was willing to have a few of each die in the training process. His king, Frederick of Prussia, also notoriously opposed to any codling of soldiers, once expressed reservations about the death toll one cavalry exercise was taking on men and mounts, and Seydlitz is reputed to have said “If you make so much fuss about a few broken necks, Your Majesty will never have the horsemen you require.”52 And the horsemen he required were those willing to always be on the attack. Indeed the official doctrine of the Prussian cavalry became that it must always attack first, never wait to be attacked. Seydlitz made sure his men could ride their horses over difficult obstacles, in any conditions, and because of the speed he required in war, he was always concerned with weight. He did not want the “colossi on elephants” who “could neither maneuver


52 Quoted in Ibid., 64.
nor fight,” as Frederick the Great called the cavalry he had inherited from his father. Seydlitz wanted only fairly short men, and rejected the ponderous beasts the German cavalry had notoriously been mounted on previously. He wanted speed and discipline, maneuverability and aggression.

During the middle ages in Europe cavalry tended to be held in reserve, and used in a final rush to rout a faltering enemy. Very few cavalry commanders had sufficient control over their troops to get more than one good charge out of them in a day because they lost cohesion as they charged through enemy lines into a melee and were very difficult to re-form. Cromwell had been lauded for being able to gather his troops for multiple charges in one battle, but they charged slowly. Seydlitz created the discipline among his troops to charge at great speed, fight effectively hand to hand, and then regroup for another charge. No European since Alexander had been able to do this as effectively, and Seydlitz’s troops had to cover much greater distances at speed than Alexander’s had due to the effective range of firearms. Much of Frederick the Great’s military fame belongs to Seydlitz and his cavalry. As the most successful cavalry most had ever seen, Seydlitz’s tactics became the model upon which all other Europeans tried, with varying degrees of success, to model their own.

The Seven Years War in North America employed few mounted troops at all. Virginia had a small light horse unit that served as General Edward Braddock’s escort in his calamitous campaign against the French at Fort Duquesne, in 1755. Due to the heavily wooded terrain they were unable to perform any useful reconnaissance duty, and

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during the disastrous fighting lost virtually all of their horses.\textsuperscript{54} Even the horses required to move baggage and ammunition were virtually useless in 1758, on John Forbes’ campaign against Fort Duquesne, because they were too few, too hungry, and too exhausted to be of any help. Because the war was fought for the most part in the heavily wooded areas of the Appalachian mountain range, horses could simply be of little use. There were few roads, few open areas, and little grazing. These were lessons that Washington, himself an infantryman, would take forward into the Revolution,\textsuperscript{55} rather than the lessons of Seydlitz in the European theater of the same far-flung war.

The British on the continent had, however, witnessed the German cavalry in action during the Seven Years War and saw just how effectively mounted troops could be used. Probably the first English officer to excel in this military model was Banastre Tarleton, who was the most successful British cavalry officer in the American Revolution, and who was able to create unusually well disciplined, aggressive cavalry that gave the British a fighting chance, especially in the southern theater of the war.

Even so, the British cavalry were at a serious disadvantage in the Revolution for a number of reasons. First, because they had to transport their horses across the Atlantic, and horses do not fare well in confined spaces with no exercise for long periods of time. Horses evolved to be constantly moving as they grazed on the savannah. Their circulatory system uses the pressure of feet regularly stepping up and down to help pump blood, and their digestive systems require exercise to keep their gut moving—particularly important for an animal with no ability to regurgitate. And while they can, and regularly


\textsuperscript{55} Donald Vincent Lockey, “Cavalry of the Continental Army During the War of the American Revolution, 1775-1783” (Master’s Thesis, Duke University, 1971), 11–12.
do, sleep standing up, they also need space to lie down from time to time to give their feet and legs a rest. None of these requirements were met while on an eighteenth century transatlantic voyage. As a result, horses often arrived in very poor condition and were not immediately available for service, and rarely did 100% of them survive the passage. Whenever maneuvers during the war required movement by water, horse transport faced similar problems.

The Seventeenth Light Dragoons were the first British cavalry unit to arrive in North America after the Revolution had begun, and they arrived in Boston in June of 1775 with 269 men and 193 horses, having lost sixteen horses on the comparatively easy journey. Its captain, Oliver DeLancey, uncle of James DeLancey, Jr. who had given Oliver “True Britain, had been sent ahead to provide American mounts for those members of the regiment who were as yet unmounted, but he was unable to obtain a single horse because of the unrest in New York. The dragoons, along with the rest of the army, spent most of their time under siege in Boston being bored and hungry, and this included the horses. General Thomas Gage got a small amount of forage shipped over from England, but had to send armed transports to Nova Scotia and Quebec for hay and oats. Forage supply was a continuous problem for the British during the war and would ultimately limit the number of cavalry troops they used in the war even after everyone agreed that their effort would be greatly aided by more mounted troops.


57 Ibid.

Under ideal circumstances, horses of the light dragoons were to have twenty pounds of hay a day, and about ten pounds of oats. But rarely were conditions during any war ideal, and the revolution was no exception. Indeed, in the winter of 1777-1778 horses under Howe’s command were fed fourteen pounds of hay and eight pounds of oats each day while in heavy work of almost daily patrolling. The horses were also expected to carry not only a trooper with his equipment and provisions, but also thirty pounds of hay and forty pounds of oats. Grains like oats are relatively compact and can be carried in sacks, albeit heavy ones. Hay, on the other hand, is difficult to compact, and has a significantly higher volume to weight ratio, making it very problematic to transport on horseback. Unfortunately for horses, their digestive tracks can become easily disrupted if they consume more grain than hay (hay, being dried grass, and grass being what they evolved to digest) and because hay is so awkward to transport, they usually got more grain. Too much grain often leads to diarrhea, so the horse does not process the necessary nutrients while the grain is still in its digestive track, and it can easily become dehydrated. Needless to say, a dehydrated, undernourished horse is a horse with less endurance, speed and general military usefulness.

As with most members of the military, the cavalry spent far less time in combat than it did on patrol, guard duty and forage missions. Indeed, these are some of the

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60 Jones, “The British Cavalry in the American War of Independence,” 42.


62 Diarrhea, while the most common consequence, is actually the least hazardous of the possibilities. Far more hazardous is laminititis, and subsequent founder, in which the soft tissue of the horse’s foot swells inside the hoof wall, which cannot accommodate the increased volume, so the foot loses circulation, causing the tissue that holds the lowest bone of the foot in place to die, pull away, and rotate the toe of the bone downward into the sole of the foot, often crippling the horse for life, if not ending its life.
specialties of light cavalry, and as much time as other troops spent undertaking these duties, the cavalry spent far more. In a war like the Revolution, which took on many aspects of a guerilla war, these duties were particularly hazardous. In the North, where the British had a very difficult time procuring mounts and fodder, the cavalry had to resort to raiding the countryside extensively for supplies. Westchester County, New York, which is just north of New York City, was a particular target because it was prime agricultural land and had a significant supply of both livestock (ride-able and edible) and livestock feed. Because of this bounty, and the county’s proximity to the British base in New York City, British dragoons relied heavily on raiding this region to try to supply the army. This reliance on raiding meant that the horses the army did have were constantly on the march, with very little rest. Being larger targets than humans, they also tended to have higher casualty rates on these foraging expeditions, just as they did in formal battles.

This raiding was also the setting in which Banastre Tarelton began to demonstrate his mastery of Seydlitz’ tactics, and his reputation was based on his being extremely active. For example, on July 1, 1779, he led his legion from Mile Square to Poundridge (both in Westchester County, NY) and back in a raid against the Second Continental Dragoons. While they were unable to capture the leaders of the Continental force, they covered 64 miles in 23 hours as they skirmished with their opposition, and returned with minimal casualties. This sort of aggressive cavalry tactic that Seydlitz had championed as most effective, highlights the endurance necessary in the cavalry mount of the modern army.


When Tarleton went south under Cornwallis in 1780, he found himself in far better cavalry territory than he had in the North. The South by then had larger cleared fields, rolling hills and green forage—grass—available for the horses for the better part of the year, reducing the need for hay and oats. They also arrived in the midst of tremendous partisan fighting, were the mobility of the mounted soldiers was critical to their success. Because of the entry of the French into the war, the British had to spread their troops more thinly so that they could cover Canada and the Caribbean more thoroughly, and Tarleton’s Legion was more or less the only cavalry element that the British had left to use against the Continental forces. And the British used them heavily.

Tarleton’s tactics consisted of capitalizing on: 1) the shock value of swift surprise attacks, 2) the range mounted troops have to seek and find their opponents, and 3) their capacity for relentless pursuit. Instead of classical European set-piece battles where the cavalry were held in reserve for a single spectacular charge, Tarleton used his cavalry to force fights. His pursuit and defeat of Colonel Buford at Waxhaws illustrates his tactics well. In less than three days, his men, some mounted two to a horse, tracked down, caught up with, and pursued Continental forces under Colonel Buford over a distance of 105 miles in the heat of late spring in South Carolina. When they finally forced a battle, the cavalry charged the main body, and quickly won the battle. In the course of the battle, Tarelton’s horse was shot from beneath him. As was generally the case, the rates of horse casualties significantly exceeded those for the men. In this battle the British had 19 human dead and wounded to 31 equine.65

65 Banastre Tarleton, A History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781 in the Southern Provinces of North America (Dublin: Printed for Colles, Exhaw, White, H. Whitestone, Burton, Byrne, Moore, Jones, and Dornin, 1787), 30.
Because of the high equine casualties, the British had to mount themselves on American horses. Those British horses that survived naval transport were quickly thinned out by starvation and battle. The primary methods of horse procurement mentioned in Tarelton’s, and his comrade Lieutenant Colonel John Simcoe’s, journals are capture from continental and state forces, and local acquisition. Generally speaking, horses taken from non-combatants were paid for, but rigorous gathering of forage by the army in some areas made it very difficult for colonial residents to feed their horses with what forage remained in the area, so even those who resisted the idea of selling their horses to the British often decided to sell their horses rather than let them starve.

The Americans were slow to add mounted troops to their forces in the Revolution. Because so little cavalry had been used in the French and Indian War, and because George Washington served in the infantry, Washington went into the Revolution without any real experience of how to effectively use cavalry. And since George Washington had witnessed the debacle of the few horse troops used during the French and Indian War, he was of the mind that cavalry was not going to be worth the trouble. This attitude was particularly ironic since he was an accomplished horseman who bred and raced very fine horses.

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North America seems to have had plenty of horses to draw on. In 1770 Americans exported more than 6000 horses to the West Indies as riding and driving horses, and Congress did not prohibit their exportation until 1778, well into the war, despite prohibiting the export of other livestock in 1776. A volunteer light horse regiment from Connecticut presented itself to Washington in 1776, but they were sent home because they were deemed too expensive. Indeed, were horses less expensive to feed, it is possible Congress would have authorized them, as other colonies also raised light horse units, but Congress was always short on money and this would continue to be an issue for the entire army throughout the war. It would take the Battle of Long Island to convince Washington and Congress that light horse troops were not only worth the expense, but utterly necessary to conducting the war. In that battle, had Washington had cavalry on routine screening maneuvers, they would almost certainly have discovered the movements of the British in time to stop the flanking maneuver that was his undoing, or at the very least, the attack would not have taken the Americans so utterly by surprise. But as Charles Francis Adams put it, at the time of the Battle of Long Island, Washington “did not seem at all to grasp the idea of some mounted force as an instrument essential to

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69 While this seems a large number, the Caribbean climate is hard on horses, while being ideal for many horse parasites, and because the sugar plantations did not waste space on pasturage, they imported a steady stream of replacements rather than breeding their own.


71 Ibid., 193.

72 Ibid., 333.

73 Weigley, *History of the United States Army,* 70.
ascertaining the whereabouts and movements of his opponent….”

But he figured it out quickly. In October, Washington asked Connecticut to send their light horse troops back to him. In November of 1776, Congress asked Virginia for its light horse troops, and in December, Washington asked Congress for permission to establish a Continental Cavalry, stating “from the experience I have had this campaign of the utility of horse, I am convinced there is no carrying on the war without them.”

Thus was born the United States Cavalry.

Washington began with the Connecticut and Virginia light horse units, which were already established and serving within, and at the expense of, their own states. Congress appointed Major Elisha Sheldon, who had commanded the Connecticut light horse, the commander of the new Continental Cavalry, with instructions to “raise and discipline the said regiment; and…repair to and join the army under General Washington’s command, by companies, as soon as each company shall be complete.”

Washington did not want to wait for the entire regiment to be ready before he was able to make use of the horsemen. He wanted to have them as quickly as possible to put them to work foraging and gathering information. On December 27, 1776 Congress authorized the raising and equipping of 3000 light horse troops.

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75 Lockey, “Cavalry of the Continental Army During the War of the American Revolution, 1775-1783,” 17.

76 Ibid.


78 Ibid., 1025.

79 Ibid., 1045.
While the Virginia Light Horse was on its way to join Washington at Morristown, New Jersey, Congress resolved to put its members under Continental pay, including reimbursement for their equipment and their excellent Virginia blood-horses, and with that resolution brought the most capable American cavalry commander into the continental army. Henry “Light Horse Harry” Lee was not only an expert horseman, but proved an exceptional cavalry tactician in battle, and even better leader of foraging missions, without whom the army might not have survived the starving winter at Valley Forge.

The Continental army only ever got four regiments of light horse, although it did eventually create three mixed legions, also known as partisan regiments, consisting of both horse and infantry. The cavalry regiments (often referred to as dragoons) were always attached to a larger army command and not allowed to act as a united Division, but the legions were relatively independent units that operated apart from the main armies. In addition to the Continental legions, irregular legions, such as that of Francis Marion, fought on the American side although they were never formally part of the Continental Army, and Marion and Lee would eventually coordinate their efforts successfully in the southern theater.

The Continental Cavalry was slow to materialize despite having been authorized by Congress, and by June of 1777 only one regiment of cavalry was serving in the field. That one regiment, Colonel Bland’s, was in constant work, and Washington repeatedly urged his other cavalry commanders to get their troops mounted, equipped, and in the field as soon as possible because he feared that if Bland’s unit was not relieved and
allowed to rest it would soon be “totally unfit for service of any kind.” The troops began arriving piecemeal, and by June 16, 1777, Washington had only approximately 150 men to relieve Bland’s—about half a regiment instead of three. In frustration, Washington ordered Sheldon to “march your regiment of horse, armed or unarmed, accoutered or not, to join this army, leaving one troop with General Putnam at Peeks Kill. A large number of horse in the present situation of our affairs is so indispensably necessary, that I cannot admit of any excuse to justify your remaining any longer from camp. I expect I shall see you as soon as possible….If you have any accoutrements to collect, leave a careful officer to bring ‘em on.” Washington had not only realized the value of mounted troops, but was using them exhaustively and realized that he needed every cavalry trooper available.

In order to be maximally effective, these troops needed good horses, and those were not cheap. As was the common refrain, lack of money was the cause of much delay. Baylor, for example, had recruited his full regiment, and had the proper equipment for them, but could not find enough suitable horses available for purchase at the prices Congress had authorized. Indeed, Washington never got anywhere near the 3000 light horse Congress authorized, even with the eventual organization of independent legions, and this was largely because the four regiments and three legions he did get were hard enough to raise and to keep at operational strength. The cavalry regiments ended up being consolidated in order to keep units at effective numbers. From his first request to


81 Ibid., 262.

82 Ibid., 226.
Congress for mounted troops, Washington never again questioned their value and always would have liked to have more.

Washington had to learn quickly how to use light horse effectively, and with some trial and error, he was fairly successful. He never did learn to use mounted troops as effectively as Europeans of the era, often dividing them up for escort, courier or guard duty rather than using them as a cohesive unit, but he was, on a number of occasions, able to use them to significant effect at critical junctures of the war. Perhaps if the British had been able to put more cavalry in the field his constant piecemealing of cavalry for small detail duties would have proved more detrimental.

When the season’s campaign was over in winter of 1777, and the bulk of the armies were in winter quarters, mounted troops were needed to keep an eye on the British army in Philadelphia, and during that starving winter at Valley Forge, to procure sustenance for the Continental army. Light Horse Harry Lee, and Captain Allan McLane under him, did their utmost to feed the starving the soldiers, and they did it using the light horse in one of their most arduous roles. Foraging required the troops to be on the move for days and weeks at a time, and for the light horse, this meant that the horses’ endurance was severely tested. They had to gather provisions for both the human and animal elements of the army, in the dead of winter, when food stores were in short supply, and they had to do it without antagonizing the local populace, never forgetting that the Revolution was, in many ways, a civil war. Therefore, their prime targets were the British supply trains heading into Philadelphia with supplies for the British army.83 The trains were well guarded and Lee and McLane had to be extremely daring and

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aggressive in order to capture sufficient provisions to keep Washington’s army fed. They rode long days and then had to fight furiously and race back with their prize before it could be recaptured. This type of action required sound, fast horses that could subsist on meager rations while still keeping their condition. Since Lee was from Virginia, and his command was originally part of the Virginia militia, most of his men were mounted on just such sound, fast horses from Virginia, many of which were of racing stock. The Virginia militia when it was authorized by the Virginia Convention, required that the volunteers equip and mount themselves.  

Indeed, most militia generally brought their own mounts, and as military historian Russell Weigley points out, this requirement led most militia’s cavalry to take on an element of elitism, both in expertise and social rank, in part because the cavalry branch, like the artillery, required expensive equipment and horses. The elite of Virginia had very good horses bred for racing, and race-bred stock of this era was very well suited to this type of warfare, having the soundness, endurance and speed required.

In 1778, when Lee was granted permission to raise his own corps of cavalry, consisting of three troops (including the one he already commanded), he had to mount his new recruits on horses paid for by the Continental Congress. Since the men did not come with their own horses, they needed to find suitable mounts that could withstand the rigorous service they were going to have to perform. Finding such horses was not an

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easy task since those who owned such horses were not pleased by the prospect of selling them at government rates. The Board of War, consisting at the time of Horatio Gates, Thomas Mifflin, Timothy Pickering and Richard Peters, recommended to Congress that Lee be given permission to force sales of horses, especially if the owner was a loyalist. The horses would be valued by “two or more indifferent and honest men,” and the owner forced to sell at that price. Congress was uncomfortable with the recommendation, fearing that it would create animosity among the populace, tipping neutral citizens toward the loyalist camp. Finally, a representative from Maryland, another state with strong, race-bred horses, offered to help Lee find good Maryland mounts for 125 pounds a head, which would serve the double purpose of mounting Lee’s men, and keeping good Maryland horses out of the hands of the British. Ultimately Congress authorized just shy of $100,000.00 for the mounting and equipping of Lee’s new troops. Acquiring good horses cost a lot of money, even in an era when horses were relatively abundant. This problem would continue to plague the cavalry, especially when the numbers of quality horses the army required increased, raising the market value of the quality animals beyond what the army was able to pay, even if the army could find enough of them.

By January 29, 1778, Washington had enough of a taste of the benefits of light horse that in his report to Congress he underscored the importance of the mounted men,

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88 Ibid.

89 Lockey, “Cavalry of the Continental Army During the War of the American Revolution, 1775-1783,” 81. Note 5.

90 United States. Continental Congress. et al., Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789., 192. The grand total authorized was $99,139.00.
pressing for that arm to be reinforced and reorganized. He explained that “the benefits arising from superiority of horse, are obvious to those who have experienced them.”

Their value, he argued was not just in battle used classically as shock troops, but to provide intelligence for its own army, prevent intelligence gathering of the enemy, to control enemy movements, and in a defensive war such as the Revolution, it “affords great protection to the country, and is a barrier to those inroads and depredation upon the inhabitants, which are inevitable when the superiority lies on the side of the invader.”

In order to keep the British from regaining their initial superior numbers of horse, Washington wanted Congress to augment the Continentals’ existing cavalry.

Despite the organizational difficulties, the Continental cavalry, just like the British, came into its own as the war moved south. Each side learned how to use cavalry effectively in North America, and each side wished it had more. William Washington, a cousin of George Washington and one of his aids, was sent south to take command of the 3rd Dragoons, and proved himself another of America’s capable cavalry commanders, though not quite in a league with Lee. Despite having a command that was perpetually short of mounts, he was able to be very effective against Tarelton’s cavalry and the rest of the British army. As usual, money was the reason that William Washington’s men were short of horses. But by 1780 the Continental Congress was experiencing a financial crisis that lasted almost through the end of the war, and as George Washington put it to General Steuben, “I believe the want of means to purchase horses at the exorbitant prices

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92 Ibid.
asked for them is the reason why it [the replacement of horses] is not done." Since the British also had trouble with horse numbers, the Americans were able to make do. William Washington arrived with his new command of about 100 dragoons and fairly quickly began to have a positive impact on the Americans’ southern campaign. His men were immediately put to work scouting, screening, gathering intelligence and trying to make the British as miserable as possible. Despite their reduced numbers they were effective and ultimately played a large role in rendering Tarleton beatable.

By early summer of 1782 Washington wrote Secretary of War Benjamin Lincoln that since the states were not going to want to pay for recruiting and equipping troops any more they had to “consider what kinds of troops can best be dispensed with; in doing which I cannot hesitate to declare that, cavalry…ought to be the first to be reduced.” He valued their service highly, but, as he explained to Benjamin Harrison, “the very expense of procuring and subsisting cavalry must in our circumstances be a sufficient argument against raising more.” The reductions began, first selling off the horses in poor condition, until finally in April of 1783, Congress voted that the military immediately arrange the “sale of all the dragoon horses belonging to the United States.” This resolution brought an end to the first meaningful use of cavalry in what had just become the United States. Upon seeing a number of fine horses in a company of Connecticut Rangers, George Washington is reputed to have sent Henry Lee to

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93 Ibid., 18.
94 Ibid., 352–353.
95 Ibid., 469.
96 United States. Continental Congress. et al., Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789., 254. There was a small contingency of twelve dragoons who remained in the service as mounted guard to Washington, but even they were discharged in October of the same year, and given their mounts as reward for their extended service. Ibid., 646–647.
investigate their origins. The entire unit was mounted on extremely well matched grey horses who were all the offspring of a single oriental stallion known as *Ranger, who may have come originally from Morocco, and Lee was so impressed that he sent Captain Lindsay to see if the stallion could be purchased. Lindsay was successful in his acquisition of the stallion, which would be known from then on as the Lindsay Arabian, and he took him to Virginia where the stallion had a very successful career at stud, siring not only many successful turf horses,\(^97\) but also Magnolia (or Magnolio), George Washington’s favorite mount. Magnolia stood at stud at Mount Vernon, and raced as well, and was eventually sold to Lee for $1500. It is also likely, according to an old family friend and Custis relative, that Magnolia was part of the only known race in the United States between horses belonging to United States presidents, wherein Magnolia apparently lost to Thomas Jefferson’s roan colt.\(^98\) The line between turf horses and using horses was still vague and mobile. Horses like Washington’s Magnolia were regular means of transportation even during their breeding careers, and they begat much of the horsepower in their geographical regions. Looking at stallion advertisements for the era, readers cannot help but notice that the vast majority of stallions standing at stud for the production of saddle horses were advertised as being of racing stock, oriental stock (and thus of foundational racing stock), or having racing stock in their ancestry. For example, in 1799, “the beautiful high bred horse Alcknomoc”\(^99\) was advertised as one of the best


\(^99\) Alcknomoc Stud Advertisement, *Winchester Gazette*, March 27, 1799, Typed Copy, Alexander Mackay-Smith Papers, Box 12, File 15, National Sporting Library, Middleburg, VA.
sons of Medley, an English thoroughbred, but was not advertised specifically for breeding race mares. Alleghany’s owner listed Alleghany’s racing ancestors while advertising him, in 1795, as a hunter. And many stallions were advertised as being only partly of racing ancestry. People knew that even in a second generation, racing stock produced more predictably than randomly bred horses, and a good colt, like Young Morick, from Delaware, who was advertised as being sired by a thoroughbred stallion and out of a mare of one quarter racing blood, was a superior bet as a breeding stallion to one without thoroughbred breeding.

Even horses for heavy work, such as Buffulofus, in Maryland, were advertised as being sired by a draft stallion and “out of a blooded [thoroughbred] mare.” And breeders of thoroughbreds, such as George Washington, even crossed their imported jacks (ass stallions) on their well-bred mares to produce top-quality mules. Indeed, thoroughbred breeding to some degree or another was claimed for stallions of all types, and one is hard-pressed to find any stallion advertisements at all for saddle horses that do not mention racing ancestry of some sort, whether legitimate or otherwise. The advertisers knew that that breeders wanted a stallion to breed foals with the same characteristics the stallion himself had, and they knew that stallions with racing blood were the most likely to do that predictably. So thoroughbred crosses were widely

100 Alleghany Stud Advertisement, *Otsego Herald*, Cooperstown, NY, July 5, 1795, Typed Copy, Alexander Mackay-Smith Papers, Box 12, File 15, National Sporting Library, Middleburg, VA.

101 Young Morick Stud Advertisement, *Delaware Gazette*, April 2, 1791, Typed Copy, Alexander Mackay-Smith Papers, Box 12, File 17, National Sporting Library, Middleburg, VA.

102 Buffulofus Stud Advertisement, *Maryland Journal*, Baltimore, MD, April 9, 1782, Typed Copy, Alexander Mackay-Smith Papers, Box 12, File 15, National Sporting Library, Middleburg, VA.

103 Old Knight of Malta Stud Advertisement, *Virginia Gazette*, February 9, 1802, Typed Copy, Alexander Mackay-Smith Papers, National Sporting Library, Middleburg, VA.
available during the Revolution and the early republic, and they remained so through most of the nineteenth century.

Kenneth Cohen argues that racing was far more of a business than historians have previously acknowledged. Part of his argument is based on the ever increasing advertising of race-bred stallions to breed workaday mares. He notes that as early as the 1760s, John Baylor, a wealthy Virginia planter, earned more of his income from breeding and selling blooded horses than he did from selling his tobacco.\(^\text{104}\) Baylor stood racing stallions and sold racehorses, but also produced crossbreds for the sales market. Baylor had given up racing his own horses as being too costly with unreliable rewards. For this he was admonished by an Englishman that he might be “thought a little out of character,”\(^\text{105}\) and while Cohen cites this example as a possible social repercussion of not racing, I would point out that the Englishman in question might well have been warning Baylor that if he didn’t race his stock with each generation, breeding only those that were most successful in the objective testing of the racetrack, he would lessen his reputation as a breeder because his stock would begin to degenerate. Cohen goes on to argue, correctly, that breeding to racing stock spread rapidly outside the planter classes after the revolution, and that racing and selling horses became very much a business venture for the wealthy of the Chesapeake. And while he argues that racing and selling horses were where they made more money, rather than in breeding, he fails to acknowledge how intertwined racing, breeding, and selling were—his wealthy Virginians and Marlylanders bred mares and stallions that won at the track, sold the offspring to each other, raced


\(^{105}\) Quoted in Ibid.
those same offspring, and then retired the most successful to breed the next generation. He counts only stud fees in the income of breeders, not the sale of young horses bred from their own mares, or purses won by those same home-bred horses.

As the United States began to define itself, its horsemen continued comparing their horses to those of England. In the post-war era, not yet secure in their new status, Americans demonstrated a desire to produce horses that could not only equal British horses, but surpass them. Very quickly after the war, they began importing blood stock from England again. The vast majority of breeding studs in all of the major racing regions had been either dispersed or destroyed during the revolution, and so in addition to collecting the surviving breeding stock from wither it wound up by the end of the war, they needed to bring over new horses too.  

After the Revolution, when new groups, such as Baptists and Methodists, rose in power, there was a certain amount of anti-racing feeling in some quarters where racing was seen as too British, or simply, as sinful. Racing had been strongly identified with the gentry during the colonial period, and certainly many of the major American racing men were Loyalists, DeLancy and Fenwick, to name just two of the most prominent. And during the war, most of the racing that did continue was predominantly carried out in New York by British officers. The Church of England, the dominant denomination of most of the powerful colonial figures, by conviction or political expedience, had also been very benignly inclined toward racing, as evidenced by the many “sporting parsons” of Virginia. As the Baptists and Methodists, and denominations descending from

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107 There are advertisements for races “for noblemen and gentlemen” in the New York newspapers during the revolution, as well as broadsides, one of which is reproduced in Hervey, *Racing in America: 1665-1865*, 1944, 1:Facing 140.
Puritanism, rose in prominence, they began to oppose racing on the grounds that it led to gambling.\textsuperscript{108}

The Baptists, taking full advantage of the disestablishment of the Church of England,\textsuperscript{109} became a strong voice against racing in its former stronghold of Virginia. John Brauddus, from Caroline, Virginia, and the breeder of Amanda, a mare who would produce the sire of America’s first sporting icon—American Eclipse—was allegedly chastised by his minister for selling her to Colonel Hoomes, whom Brauddus knew would put her on the track. When Hoomes tried to acquire Amanda’s half brother, Brauddus would not sell him, fearing that the colt, too, would be “dedicated to sin.”\textsuperscript{110} Across the new United States, state legislatures were beginning to limit racing. In Virginia, one of the two centers of racing, the House of Burgesses limited betting on racing, cock fighting and other sports, to a maximum of $7 per bet in 1792.\textsuperscript{111} North Carolina, Pennsylvania and New Jersey also passed restrictive laws. In 1802, New York State outlawed racing for any bet or stakes as “common and public nuisances.”\textsuperscript{112} Which of these acts were prompted by religion, and which by anti-English sentiment is impossible to tease out, most likely both sentiments worked in tandem, with one or the other taking the lead depending on the specific time and location.

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\item \textsuperscript{108}See for example Rev. John McDowell, Sermon on Horse Racing; Preached at the Presbyterian Church, Elizabeth-Town, September 17, 1809 (Elizabeth-Town, New Jersey: Isaak Kollock, 1809).
\item \textsuperscript{109}See Rhys Isaac, The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790 (Chapel Hill, NC: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, VA, by the University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 291-292.
\item \textsuperscript{110}Hervey, \textit{Racing in America: 1665-1865}, 1944.
\item \textsuperscript{111}Roberston, \textit{The History of Thoroughbred Racing in America}, 31.
\item \textsuperscript{112}New York Legislature, Chapter XLIV, “An Act to Prevent Horse Racing, and for Other Purposes Therein Mentioned”, Passed March 19, 1802.
\end{itemize}
Racing revived nonetheless. Though the city of Charleston was virtually destroyed during the Revolution, racing had returned by 1786,\textsuperscript{113} and Hervey alleges that racing may even have resumed there as early as 1783.\textsuperscript{114} The early results of the Charleston races were dominated by the horses of military men—Col. Alston, Col Washington (William, cousin to George), and General Hampton being the most prominent—although there were certainly civilians racing as well.\textsuperscript{115} As early as 1784 races were advertised in New York, at the Maidenhead course in the Bowery, on James DeLancy’s former property. While it had to battle the aftermath of war, the anti-English sentiment, and the ascendant religious objections, racing began picking up momentum.

The first races at the Maidenhead track not only give us our first names post-revolutionary winners, but also what would become an American fixation, the recording of the winning times. In England, despite the availability of the stopwatch, they did not consider it important to record race times until long after the practice was established in America. Americans considered time another measure of a horse, and in addition to recording the race times of their thoroughbreds, they began to time their driving horses, eventually creating an entirely new breed of harness horse, the American Standardbred.\textsuperscript{116} And because of their obsession with speed, the foundation breeding stock of this new, soon to be ubiquitous, American breed was thoroughbred. Indeed the stallion

\textsuperscript{113}John Irving, \textit{The South Carolina Jockey Club} (Spartanburg S.C.: Reprint Co., 1975), 12.


\textsuperscript{115}Irving, \textit{The South Carolina Jockey Club}, 13–14.

\textsuperscript{116}Horses were admitted into the standardbred stud book based on their being able to meet the trotting time standard of a mile in two minutes and thirty seconds. Indeed time became so important that when naming a standardbred in print, many authors include the horse’s fastest mile time after their name: “Guy Wilkes 2:15 ¼” and “Bingen 2:06 ¼”, for example. John Hervey, \textit{The American Trotter} (New York, N.Y.: Coward-McCann, Inc., for the Trotting Horse Club of America, 1947), 335.
*Messenger, who is the most important founder of the standardbred, was not only a successful English thoroughbred racehorse, but he also sired extremely important thoroughbreds in the United States, including some of the best of his day.

*Messenger was imported by Thomas Benger, an Irishman who emigrated to Bucks County Pennsylvania at about the same time he imported Messenger in 1788.\(^\text{117}\) There was no racing in Pennsylvania at that time, but a proven race horse was a valuable breeding commodity nonetheless. He stood at stud in Philadelphia and Bucks county until Benger returned Ireland and sold *Messenger to Henry Astor, brother of John Jacob Astor. The stallion stood in New York for several years and eventually Cornelius Van Ranst, an eminent post-revolutionary New York turfman, who would own American Eclipse, acquired a part interest in him. Under this ownership, *Messenger stood at various locations on Long Island, and as far north as Dutchess County, New York, siring large numbers of horses in each locale.\(^\text{118}\) John Wallace, compiler of one of the first American studbooks, noted that the qualities he passed on to his half-bred offspring were a large reason he was “for all purposes…certainly one of the best horses ever imported.”\(^\text{119}\)

As was the custom, *Messenger bred mares from all walks of life. When bred to race mares, his offspring raced. When bred to working mares, his offspring worked. He got very good race horses, including one of the greatest race mares of her era, Miller’s

\(^\text{117}\) John H. Wallace, *The Horse of America* (New York: Published by the Author, 1897), 224.

\(^\text{118}\) He was sufficiently regarded among horseman at the time of his death that his grave was marked, and in 1935 a plaque was affixed to the boulder marking his grave that reads “No Stallion Ever Imported Into This Country Did More to Improve Our Horse Stock. None Enriched More the Stock of the Whole World.” His grave is alongside the road outside Piping Rock Country Club on Long Island, and can still be seen today.

Damsel, who was not only virtually unbeatable, but was also a superb broodmare. Her most famous and significant offspring was American Eclipse, America’s first sporting icon, and winner of the great North-South Match Race in 1823. He also got Mambrino, who became the grandsire of Rysdyk’s Hambletonian, the great trotting progenitor (who was inbred to Messenger, tracing three times to him). The standardbred arose from working harness horses, and the vast majority of standardbreds remained working horses, again showing that the genetic prepotency of the thoroughbred—bred successively for speed over middle distances, stamina, and durability—was perpetually contributing to the improved physical capacity of the general bloodstock of the nation.\footnote{The history of Messenger was sufficiently important to horseman of his day that it was regularly recorded. Only his importer was for many years a matter of speculation until John Wallace was able to trace him. See Wallace, *The Horse of America*.; Harrison, *Early American Turf Stock--Stallions*, 264–267.}

The next critically important stallion to be imported from England was *Diomed*. He was the first winner of the Epsom Derby, among other races, but the final years of his career were not as successful. Therefore when he was put to stud he did not breed as many, or as high quality, mares as he might otherwise have. According to John Hervey’s calculations, during the fourteen seasons he stood in England, he only bred, on average, slightly fewer than five mares per season.\footnote{Hervey, *Racing in America: 1665-1865*, 1944, 1:171–172.} Whether he was the victim of fashion, bad press, or just bad luck, is difficult to determine, but whatever the reason he was not highly esteemed at stud in England, and that lack of respect was extremely good fortune for American breeders.

In the spring of 1798, Hoomes purchased *Diomed*, for the sum of 50 guineas (approximately $250) and shipped him to Virginia. Hoomes was probably importing him on speculation, hoping to turn a profit on him despite stallion’s being twenty-one years
and he did indeed sell him less than a year later, to Thomas Goode and Miles Selden for 1000 Virginia pounds, which was about $1500 at the time. Considering the horse’s age, and that most stallions experience declining fertility as they get older, this was a significant financial vote of confidence in *Diomed. And *Diomed more than lived up to his new owners’ hopes. He lived to the age of 31, dying before the breeding season began in 1808. And not only was he fertile to the last, but in his final foal crop he sired Haynie’s Maria, one of the best of his many stellar offspring. Haynie’s Maria was the bane of Andrew Jackson’s racing career, and after trying with many horses to beat her, he finally gave up and became one of her primary backers, and she eventually retired undefeated. Jackson, along with Thomas Jefferson and John Marshall, is alleged to have preferred “*Diomeds” as riding horses as well.

After his importation, during the run-up to the War of 1812, far fewer stallions were imported to the United States than had previously been imported. The non-importation acts prior the war extended to horses, and the political tensions fueled lasting nationalist rhetoric from horsemen claiming that American horses were just as good, if not better than English horses, and *Diomed’s descendants were the primary examples they held up. At the forefront of *Diomed’s offspring was Sir Archy (or Sir Archie). According to W.R. Johnson, “the Napoleon of the Turf”, Sir Archy was “the best horse I ever saw, and I well know that I never had anything to do with one that was at all his equal….and [he] has not run with any horse that could put him to half speed toward the

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122 Modern horses are generally expected to live well into their twenties, in large part due to the invention of effective anthelmintics (de-wormers), but in *Diomed’s day, a 21 year old horse had already surpassed the average life expectancy.


Johnson was the great racehorse trainer of the South during the first half of the nineteenth century, so he knew a good horse when he saw one. And two of Sir Archy’s get—Sir Charles and Sir Henry—would eventually represent the South in high profile North-South match races.

Duroc, Sir Archy’s half-brother, was *Diomed’s next most important son. He sired, among others, the great American Eclipse, winner of the first Great North-South Match Race (representing the North), and sire of racing greats in both the North and the South. Indeed the first two North-South match races were contested by American Eclipse and the sons of Sir Archy. Eclipse, born and raised on Long Island, would seem an unlikely racing hero. He was foaled in 1814, during the height of the War of 1812, on the farm of General Nathaniel Coles. The legal ban on horse racing in New York, made law in 1802, was still in effect, but there was racing on Long Island, despite both law and war. So when Eclipse showed promise as a three year at two miles, Coles decided to hold on to him and aim him for a racing career. He won his first race for Coles, and was later sold to Cornelius Van Ranst. In his first race for Van Ranst, he won a $500 race at four mile heats, over four other horses (one of whom was also named Eclipse), but the competition was not particularly well regarded. After a second win, Van Ranst retired him. Eclipse stood at stud in 1820 as a “common stallion” for $12.50. He stood for the same price in 1821, and is reported to have bred 87 mares.

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127 Ibid.
128 Ibid.
where racing was technically illegal, few of the mares he serviced were race horses. So he entered into the most common life of a thoroughbred stallion of his era, becoming a stallion for improving the general stock of horses in his geographical location. But when the New York legislature passed a law exempting Queens County from the racing ban, Van Ranst apparently felt obliged to bring Eclipse back to the track to support the new high profile, legal, race meetings put on by the newly formed New York Association for the Improvement of the Breed of Horses, and to support this organization, of which he was a member.

Word of his prominence made its way south, where he was at first dismissed as a mere New York horse, but eventually William R. Johnson, the same man who proclaimed Sir Archy the best horse he had ever seen or trained, challenged Eclipse to a North-South match race to put an end to what he considered to be the North’s pretensions to having good horses. He set his challenge in the *Petersburg Intelligencer*, which was sent to the office of the *New York Evening Post* with the note: “The owner of the famed Eclipse, if really anxious for a trial of speed, surely could not desire a more liberal proposition from any Southern Racer.” He challenged Eclipse to run against Sir Charles, at the time considered the best of Sir Archy’s offspring, at four mile heats, $10,000 a side, and the challenge was taken up.

There was tremendous excitement before the race, to the extent that some worried that the rivalry needed to stay between horses, and not manifest as “political strife between the *citizens* of the two states [New York and Virginia].” The nation was still

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digesting the experience of the Missouri Compromise, and the sectional tensions ran high. President Monroe, along with Secretary of State, John Quincy Adams, Secretary of War, John C. Calhoun and Secretary of the Navy, Smith Thompson, turned out to see the race.  But it did not quite come off as planned. Sir Charles, the Southern Champion, had come up lame. His backers had to pay a forfeit of $5000 (half the stake) for not running him. In the interest of lessening the disappointment of the throngs of spectators, the horsemen arranged a substitute match between the two horses of a single four mile heat, instead of the best two out of three that had been planned. While this may have been the “courteous” thing to do, it was certainly not in the best interest of Sir Charles, who ran gamely for the first mile, but was completely broken down by the final lap of the course.

The race prompted a Philadelphia essayist to write at length in the Philadelphia Democratic Press on what he thought the lesson for the Middle Atlantic States was from the match. Pennsylvania no longer allowed thoroughbred racing, and his essay was an effort to “ponder the subject of horse racing, and to endeavor to ascertain whether Pennsylvania has not lost by losing it.” Recognizing the balance between the value of racing in improving horses, and power of gambling to encourage vice, he determined that Pennsylvania’s having decided that the vice outweighed the benefit was the wrong answer, and ruinous to Pennsylvania’s saddle stock. Harkening back to the war of 1812, when he says that suitable cavalry horses were difficult to find in Pennsylvania no matter

what price the government offered for them, he lamented that “with all the drains on our [Pennsylvania’s] means our supplies are scanty and poor.”\textsuperscript{134} That the loss of racing had led to the loss of suitable military horses was the lesson he took from a sectional contest in which Pennsylvania was a mere bystander. This essay was picked up and reprinted in other papers, including the \textit{New York Evening Post},\textsuperscript{135} which clearly thought the essay and its lesson would be of enough interest to their own readers to sell more newspapers. The author’s opinion would appear to be backed up by the judges at the Philadelphia County Agricultural Exhibition in June of 1822, who declared that “there was not one” breeding stallion of sufficient quality to be deserving of a premium.\textsuperscript{136}

While this Pennsylvania horseman was able to draw a lesson from the race, others were not satisfied, and instantly the cry came for a rematch, though it was clear that Sir Charles was not likely to ever race again. Johnson challenged Eclipse to a race against a Southern horse, to be named at the time of the race, at Eclipse’s home track, the Union Course on Long Island. The stakes were doubled to $20,000 a side. While the rematch could have lost steam and been treated as an anti-climax, it was not. Indeed, “the interest in the contest increased, like a snow ball, as the period of it approached, and the feelings of many were as much excited as when the eyes of the nation were fixed on Washington, during the balloting in the house of representatives for Jefferson and Burr!”\textsuperscript{137}

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{137} “Highly Important!!!,” \textit{Niles Weekly Register}, May 31, 1823, 193 (front page).
Newspapers continuously hoped in print that regardless of the outcome, sectional tensions would not be escalated.\textsuperscript{138}

A number of Southern horses had been prepared for the match, all placed in the masterful hands of W.R. Johnson for training, and their race campaigns leading up to the match determined who would meet Eclipse. When the moment of truth arrived, it was Sir Henry who took the field. He was a chestnut four-year-old colt, a grandson of *Diomed, just like Eclipse, and his age would give him a break in the weights. Eclipse, as a nine year old carried 126 pounds, and Sir Henry carried 108.\textsuperscript{139}

Accounts of the race are endless, as it became the iconic match of the antebellum era, if not the entire nineteenth century. In the first heat Eclipse was ridden by a young jockey who proved incompetent, resulting in the first heat Eclipse had ever lost. But with a jockey change, the results too changed. Samuel Purdy, Eclipse’s retired former jockey stepped out of the crowd and rode the Northerner in the second heat. The horses were clearly quite evenly matched, but Purdy was able to squeeze Eclipse inside of Henry on the final turn and take the second heat, after Henry had led from the start. Then Henry got a new jockey. Purdy figured that his horse had the greater stamina and for the final and deciding heat he sent Eclipse directly to the lead and forced Henry to chase him the entire way. Purdy was right, and while Henry made a gallant charge at the end, he was not able to outrun Eclipse. The twelve mile race—run in three four-mile heats with a half


\textsuperscript{139} “Memoir of American Eclipse,” 273.
hour’s rest between each—was run in a total racing time of 23 minutes and 50.5 seconds, and each horse returned sound.\textsuperscript{140}

Henry’s backers immediately called for rematch, claiming that he had been unfairly assigned weights. Everyone agreed that the appropriate weight for a four year old to carry was 108, but the Southerners proclaimed that he was not yet a four year old by Southern racing rules, and should have carried a three year old’s impost. But by the rules of the Northern tracks he was a four year old and carried the appropriate weight. Indeed some Northerners proclaimed Eclipse’s victory an example of the fruits of Northern tracks requiring higher weights.\textsuperscript{141} Eclipse’s backers declined the rematch, claiming that two victories over the best the South had to offer were enough. They feared that “age and hard service may one day accomplish what strength and fleetness, directed by consummate skill has hitherto failed to accomplish.”\textsuperscript{142} Indeed, at nine years old, Eclipse was likely past his racing prime, and he was immediately retired to stud, and offered to a maximum of 25 mares, beginning June 9\textsuperscript{th}, a mere 13 days after the race, for a fee of $40.\textsuperscript{143}

Eclipse and Henry became the paragons of their day, and the measure by which Americans compared their horses to English horses. The horses were universally referred

\textsuperscript{140} This description of the race is taken from Cadwallader Colden’s detailed description written down at the time of the race and first printed under the pseudonym of “An Old Turfman” in An Old Turfman, “The Great Match Race Between Eclipse and Sir Henry--Minutely Described by an Old Turfman,” \textit{American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine} 2, no. 1 (September 1830): 3–12. Virtually every major newspaper of the day, North, South and West, carried at least a reprinted version of the race. Colden’s version has been generally viewed as the most precise and accurate, with perhaps a slight Northern bias according to some Southerners.

\textsuperscript{141} “Match Race,” 2.


to as champions, in the fashion of Walter Scott’s medieval knights, who were the heroes of the bestselling books of the day. Much as Ivanhoe was the champion of his king and his lady, these horses were seen as knights fighting for the honor of their section. This imagery had particular influence among Southerners, many of whom fancied themselves descendants of the Cavaliers of the English Civil Wars. While their numbers were not particularly large, many of the Royalist Cavalier exiles of from Cromwell’s protectorate did go to the southern colonies after war, rather than mix with the puritans of New England, and due to their wealth, they did become leading families, giving them far greater cultural influence than their numbers might otherwise suggest. Those Cavaliers, who would have been among the circle that raced and hunted at Newmarket with the Stuarts, brought with them their love of horse racing and the race horses themselves, and their cultural influence no doubt contributed to the strength of, and pride in, racing in the South. Few Southerners were actual descendants of Cavaliers, but when it came to horses, most Southerners were at least the Cavaliers’ cultural descendants.

So, in part because of the notoriety these equine champions gained from their performance in the race, the great race set off a series of North-South match races that lasted up into the 1840s. As Nancy Struna argues, part of the reason these races were so widely popular among a broad range of Americans was that the primary humans involved were wealthy gentlemen who raced not only for the personal challenge and excitement, but “out of a sense of service to their states and regions.”¹⁴⁴ William Johnson was a Virginia planter, state politician, and businessman. And John C. Stevens, one of Eclipse’s major backers and spokespeople, even though not his owner, was an engineer

who was critical in the development of the rail and steamship industry, in addition to having married into one of New York’s first families, the Livingstons. These two men were responsible for the majority of the next decade’s matches. While New York continued to have good racing, the best breeding horses, including Eclipse, migrated south. These horses became the primary breeding stock for Southern saddle horses, which ultimately gave the South a leg up in horse flesh.

Very quickly race horse breeders of the day began to cross the two bloodlines (which were already closely related) and to compare them, as American horses, rather than those of one section or the other, to English horses. They compared American race times to English ones, when English times were available, and more markedly compared their usefulness. “An Amateur, But No Jockey”, the pseudonym used by a regular contributor to the *American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine*, wrote in 1830 that the current fashion of single heat racing in England was not a “fair test of bottom [mental and physical endurance].” He argued that while the English bred numerically more good race horses because more Englishmen participated in breeding racing stock, that the stock Americans’ bred was better overall. Americans continued to race in heats over longer distances much longer than the English did because they valued the endurance and soundness the format required. With a large field it might take many heats for one horse to win two, and thereby the race. So a four mile English race, in “dash” format of only one heat, could not test the endurance and soundness of a horse the way a four mile race that went three heats—12 miles—could. And most heat races went at least three heats, with many races on record of five heats. One of the most famous of these five-heat tests

of true bottom was won by Eclipse’s daughter Black Maria. After racing 20 miles in one afternoon she was still sound and fit to continue.

Horses like Black Maria, that could remain sound under such a test, generally had very good conformation, including what horsemen still refer to as having good “bone”. “Bone” refers generally to physical strength and size, and more particularly to the measurement of the horse’s front leg taken directly beneath the knee, which technically includes both bone and tendon with noticeable space between the two. A horse with greater bone, in proportion to its height, is generally sounder than one with less. Americans wanted horses to prove they had qualities that Americans valued for working and military horses, not just flashy race horses, and they relied on their racing to test their breeding stock. They certainly took great pleasure in a flashy racehorse, but if it was going to breed on, it had to have bone and bottom too. Dash racing, which is still a good test of a horse’s athletic ability, was slower to take hold in the United States than in other nations because of its being perceived as a lesser test of soundness.

While Americans wanted to be sure that they bred horses capable of serving as superior military mounts when necessary, they tried hard to keep it from being necessary. Barring invasion, in which case they would gladly press their race-tested horses into military service, they found the idea of a peacetime army, especially one consisting of men on horseback, as a threat to American liberties.146 Therefore, during the immediate post-Revolutionary period, the United States had a standing army of approximately 1000 men147 trained and equipped, and no horsemen. But in 1792 Congress authorized four

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146 Skowronek, Building a New American State, 86.
troops of dragoons to serve as part of mixed legions in the tradition of Lee, and put “Mad Anthony” Wayne in charge of using them to protect the white citizens on the nation’s western frontier from attack by the Native Americans who lived there.\textsuperscript{148} They, along with mounted Kentucky militia, presumably mounted on the race-bred horses the area was already famous for, played a significant role in the Battle of Fallen Timbers in the summer of 1794. Wayne was reluctant to use militia, as they had proven extremely ineffective in 1791 in the Northwest Territory, but he made the exception for the Kentuckians.\textsuperscript{149} The actual effective numbers of the mounted troops was small, but their impact was significant. They served in a heavily wooded area that would require agile horses to negotiate the fallen timbers that would give the battle its name, and despite the distinctly non-traditional ground (for cavalry) on which they fought, they played the traditional cavalry role of dealing the decisive final blow to the wavering enemy. As a soldier eyewitness later succinctly described the end of the battle, “the Indians gave way, and were pursued and cut down by the horse [troops].”\textsuperscript{150} On that terrain, only mounted men, riding extremely athletic horses, could so decisively deal that final blow, which effectively put an end to the fighting in that region, and the Kentuckians were the men with the right mounts for the job.

At the outbreak of the War of 1812, Congress authorized the raising of two regiments of dragoons, but they do not appear to have been used. Indeed in the two

\textsuperscript{148} Weigley, History of the United States Army, 92–93.

\textsuperscript{149} Carl Edward Skeen, Citizen Soldiers in the War of 1812 (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 6–7.

\textsuperscript{150} Quoted in Alan D. Gaff, Bayonets in the Wilderness : Anthony Wayne’s Legion in the Old Northwest (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 310.
major battles, the Thames and Horseshoe Bend, where mounted men played notable roles, state mounted militia were the horsemen involved. The mounted militias at the Battle of the Thames were the Kentuckians, this time fighting effectively under William Henry Harrison, and at Horseshoe Bend, John Coffee’s Tennessee militiamen served under Andrew Jackson. At the battle of the Thames, in Ontario in 1813, the Kentuckians again needed the athleticism of their good Kentucky horses, as they were again fighting in a heavily wooded area. Traditionally, mounted troops would have dismounted, sent the horses to safety, and fought on foot under those conditions, but Harrison had faith in the unit’s ability to ride at speed through the woods and ordered them to charge British lines, “fully convinced it would succeed,” despite the fact that it was “not sanctioned by anything I had seen or heard of.” They charged so quickly that the British could only get off two volleys at them, they broke the British line and wheeled around and attacked again from behind. Within the span of only about five minutes they captured most of the soldiers they faced, an artillery piece, and the British General’s carriage. They then turned and charged the Indian allies of the British, who were in a swamp under the direct command of Tecumseh, and defeated them in a lengthy battle and killed Tecumseh. Tecumseh was one of the ablest Native American military leaders of

151 Herr, The Story of the U. S. Cavalry, 1775-1942, 21.
152 John Coffee was a close confidant of Jackson, having married Jackson’s niece. Coffee was also at Jackson’s side at the races. Lorman Ratner, Andrew Jackson and His Tennessee Lieutenants : A Study in Political Culture (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1997), 44. He was another military man who knew the value of race-bred horses to a military man.
153 Skeen, Citizen Soldiers in the War of 1812, 166.
155 Ibid., 283–284.
the era, and it took men on Kentucky horses to achieve the necessary mobility to finally defeat him.

Coffee’s men, at the battle of Horseshoe Bend, in Alabama in 1814, used their mobility not only to give Jackson excellent intelligence about the Red Stick position, but also to cut off their avenue of retreat on the day of the battle with deadly efficiency. That it was mounted militia from Kentucky and Tennessee is no surprise, as Tennessee was another stronghold of race-bred horses, with Jackson himself one of the most prominent and knowledgeable breeders. Since the mounted militias were still generally the domain of the social elite who could afford the necessary mounts and equipment, and they were the same people who owned and bred race horses, they had the right animals to get the job done.

But the United States was still not sure it was willing to have a standing army of mounted soldiers, so by 1821 the Federal cavalry was again abolished, only to be brought back in tiny numbers for the Blackhawk War in 1832, where it was underequipped and mounted, poorly used, got sick (both men and horses), and did not play a significant role. The mounted troops who did the most soldiering in the Blackhawk War were, again, the state militias, which had no trouble mounting men on their own horses for service in fighting Native Americans on their frontiers. Finally, after the Blackhawk War, the 1st Dragoons were re-organized, and they would serve on

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the frontier, primarily making the prairie safe for pioneers and merchants, throughout much of the rest of the century.

The horses pressed into service by the 1st Dragoons were asked to live a very rigorous life. The difference between farm and patrol work was significant. The average farm horse lived in a stable at night, protected from the elements and predators. The average army horse on the frontier did not have a stable (at least not while on patrol), and no protection from the elements or predators. Indeed, his ability to detect predators, animal or human, would often be better than the humans’ in whose care he worked. And as Richard Wormser points out, a farm horse’s chores could be postponed a day or more if necessary when the horse was ill or became injured, but “if a cavalry mount gave out while in pursuit of, contact with, or flight from hostile Indians, his rider was likely to be dead and the horse himself captured by Sioux or eaten by Apaches.” During the 1830s and 1840s the Dragoons were often in pursuit of, contact with, or flight from the Sioux, Apaches, and others, so a sound, fast horse was not a convenience, but a necessity, especially on the plains where they served out of contact with any population center, or even shelter, for weeks on end, surrounded by Native Americans and others who were often not favorably inclined towards them as they guarded merchants and emigrants on the Santa Fe trail or heading to California or Texas.

Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Watts Kearny, later considered the Father of the U.S. Cavalry, took the horses and men of the 1st Dragoons from greenhorns to hardened veterans out on the prairie. Kearny recruited and trained them, and by 1835 led them officially as well. Unlike their initial commander, who had come to the army via the

161 Ibid., 47.
militia, Kearny was Regular Army and knew how to drill and prepare man and beast. Jefferson Davis, later president of the Confederacy, and Philip St. George Cooke, later to write the cavalry manual issued to Union cavalry officers fighting against Davis, both served as lieutenants under Kearny during the formative years of the unit.

Despite the romance of serving in an elite unit, on horseback, recruiting was a slow business. Recruiting officers like Cooke, in addition to recruiting men, also purchased horses along the way from farms and sales barns and when they had enough of both horses and men, they arranged the units by horse’s coat color, which endured as cavalry tradition more or less until the end of the cavalry. Initially the dragoons had units of virtually all the colors of the equine rainbow, but fairly quickly discovered that white and cream (palomino) horses were far too conspicuous targets, as were pintos and appaloosas, and they soon restricted themselves to chestnut, bay, dark grey, and black horses which were more difficult for armed opponents to draw a bead on at a distance. Artillery, whose horses moved slower by nature of their duty, restricted color even more strictly unless circumstances required their using anything with four legs and the strength to move their guns.

According to cavalry historian Richard Wormser, the dragoons used almost exclusively eastern horses—primarily and preferably Morgans, standardbreds and part bred thoroughbreds (Morgans and standardbreds at the time still were part bred thoroughbreds), which he considers too heavy and expensive, suggesting the army should have used a remuda system, with smaller, less capable, western horses. In this he raises

\footnote{Ibid., 44.}

\footnote{Ibid.}
an important question since many of the Indian nations the dragoons fought used this system at the time, as did the Mexicans in California. The remuda system would have required multiple horses per man, with those not under saddle at any given time grazing as a herd under the supervision of a few enlisted men. By only having one horse per man, he says, the army needed to use these more expensive horses that could carry their own grain—necessary because they did not get sufficient grazing time for their nutritional needs because they were perpetually under saddle.\(^{164}\)

But the government could never justify purchasing or having to feed that many horses through the winter, or, as Lieutenant-Colonel Philip St. George Cooke, second only to Kearny in shaping the US cavalry, noted, “it would not suit the views of the Treasury Department,”\(^{165}\) and indeed would not be militarily expedient, if only for carrying the necessary iron to shoe that many horses.\(^{166}\) And Wormser forgets his own point that lesser horses would be a terrible liability to any trooper attempting to flee a determined enemy while out on patrol, days from the nearest outpost. Besides, in an organization like the army, in which logistics were both a perpetual weak link and a matter of life and death, requiring vastly greater numbers of any critical supply tempted fate beyond the point that those in charge were willing to tempt her. The Morgans, Standardbreds and other part bred thoroughbreds were the only horses up to the task of carrying a fully accoutered soldier, plus food for both man and horse, for days on end and still be able to gallop and maneuver in a fight, and stay sound galloping hell-bent-for-

\(^{164}\) Ibid., 50.


\(^{166}\) Ibid., 296.
leather while pursued by enemies. These horses proved themselves on frontier duty, as they had in prior wars.

The dragoons regularly traversed the trails that brought pioneers west, covering thousands of miles on horseback, escorting settlers and merchants, conducting peace missions with Native American nations, protecting the settlers and merchants from Native American nations when the peace treaties fell apart. These hardened dragoons and horses became the core of Kearny’s troops a decade later, in 1846, when President Polk ordered Kearny to march his army from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, down the Santa Fe Trail to New Mexico, capture that sprawling territory, and then march another thousand or so miles to California and help secure that territory.

Kearny made it to New Mexico and took it, with relatively little difficulty, from the Mexican forces, but nature was not as kind. The country was arid, and supported little grazing and little agriculture. Their first goal—Santa Fe—offered no grazing. As Richard Smith Elliot, a Lieutenant of Missouri Volunteer Cavalry put it, “our poor horses, tired beyond measure, had no hope of a single blade of grass to stand between them and starvation.”

The beef they herded with the army had nothing to eat, so the army ate the skinny cattle before they wasted away entirely. Neither horse nor man had enough to eat on the marches—marches of 20-30 miles a day, which was impressive for an army under good conditions, let alone one crossing a thousand miles of poorly watered, sparsely populated, hostile territory. As Philip St. George Cooke described on the eve of the army heading off on the second leg of their mission, from New Mexico into California:

Tomorrow, three hundred wilderness-worn dragoons, in shabby and patched clothing, who have been on short allowances of food, set forth to conquer or annex a Pacific empire, to take a leap in the dark of a thousand miles of wild plains and mountains, only known in vague reports as unwatered, and with several deserts of two or three marches where a camel might starve, if not perish of thirst.168

While Cooke was perhaps a bit romantic, he was, in essence, correct. And the march killed off most of the best horses and mules Kearny had left in his army, and that loss almost got his troops killed. Kearny arrived in California with starving men, almost all on foot. But they did make it to California—lesser beasts would have stranded the army much sooner, to perish in the waterless wastelands of the Arizona desert.

While Kearny was wrestling New Mexico and California from the Mexicans, the 2nd Dragoons, originally organized to fight the Seminoles in Florida,169 were fighting the Mexicans in Texas and Mexico.170 They faced Mexican lancers who vastly outnumbered them, but they played a significant role in those lands too. The dragoons were central in the first pitched battle of the war, at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, as were the “flying artillery”—mounted artillery men with mounted guns that could be quickly brought into position, fired and moved out before the enemy could fix their position. The dragoons broke the Mexican center with a classical charge led by Captain Charles May.


170 Dragoons were an odd choice for fighting in the Florida swamps where the horsemen were, predictably, not very successful there except when they left their horses behind. Presumably the horses were intended as a method of moving troops quickly from place to place rather than actual mounted fighting, but as troop transport the horses were more liability than resource in swamplands.
And despite West Point teaching that “cavalry should never, never charge artillery”\textsuperscript{171}—a key lesson handed down by the revered military theorist Baron Antoine Henri de Jomini as a lesson from the Napoleonic era\textsuperscript{172}—Zachary Taylor, who did not attend West Point, ordered a cavalry charge directly into enemy artillery. Leading eighty of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Dragoons, May captured both the Mexican artillery and the Mexican general La Vega, no doubt to the great relief of Taylor’s West Point trained staff officers who had been stunned by Taylor’s order. James Longstreet, later a leading general in the Confederate Army, described the charge: “The road was only wide enough to form the dragoons in column of fours…and May’s spurs pressing his horses had them on the leap…in a minute he was at the guns sabring the gunners, and wheeling right and left got possession of the guns.”\textsuperscript{173} General La Vega finally had to climb between the wheels of the gun carriage to avoid being trampled by the dragoons’ mounts, and when May’s men recognized his rank, they forced his surrender.

Once the war with Mexico was well under way, and the primary theater of the war shifted south into Mexico proper, the high command, as they had in the Revolution, effectively dismantled the dragoons by picking them to pieces and assigning small units to act as couriers, or body guards, or to do guard and escort duty. The United States fought the war with three regular army mounted regiments (one of which served most of the war dismounted, its mounts having been lost at sea) supplemented with seven

\textsuperscript{171} Wormser, \textit{The Yellowlegs; the Story of the United States Cavalry}, 80.


volunteer regiments from the states.\textsuperscript{174} The mounted troops’ opportunity to fight as effective units ended, and the United States Army still had not entirely figured out how to use them as major force in war. It would not learn that skill until the Confederate Army did, and the United States Army had to learn from it or lose to it.

The war with Mexico also showed that the United States Army had not figured out the logistics of fighting with large numbers of horses. The Horse Claim records of volunteers from that war who supplied their own mounts are replete with entries such as “Horse was abandoned at Vera Cruz per order of the commanding officer because of failure on the part of the United States to provide transportation.”\textsuperscript{175} And when they did get some sort of transportation the results were not always better, as the fate of an Illinois horse reveals: “Horse was thrown overboard a transportation vessel near Vera Cruz in order that he might swim ashore, and was drowned.”\textsuperscript{176} Horses are not strong swimmers, having bulky bodies and slender legs and feet, nor are they particularly good at knowing which direction to swim when pushed overboard at sea, and yet this was a tactic that the army would continue to use on occasion right through the Spanish American War. The final logistical issue was the same that had plagued the army from its inception, and that was its inability to provide enough forage for the necessary number of animals needed for

\textsuperscript{174} Albert G. Brackett, \textit{History of the United States Cavalry: From the Formation of the Federal Government to the 1st of June, 1863; to Which Is Added a List of All the Cavalry Regiments, with the Names of Their Commanders, Which Have Been in the United States Service since the Breaking out of the Rebellion} (New York: Harper & Bros., 1865), 60.

\textsuperscript{175} Entry # 641 Page 1, Volume 1 of 6, Abstract of Horse Claims of Mexican War. Georgian Mounted Volunteers, Tennessee Mounted Volunteers, Illinois Mounted Volunteers, Arkansas Mounted Volunteers, Kentucky Mounted Volunteers. Records of the Accounting Officers of the Department of the Treasury, Record Group 217, National Archives Building, Washington DC.

massed mounted action. Occasionally this led to death by starvation or death “from
eating unknown food…in consequence of failure on the part of the United States to
furnish proper forage,”¹⁷⁷ as was the case of a Tennessee mare, but more often it led to
horses simply being abandoned by the army.

So, after the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the war, and the volunteer
soldiers returned to their homes, the dragoons, such as remained, returned to patrolling
the west, which had suddenly doubled in size, with two units of dragoons and one troop
of mounted riflemen. The 3rd Dragoons were disbanded. The Army had at least learned
that mounted troops’ mobility gave them a great advantage over infantry on the prairie,
but the government did not at first expend the money to add to their numbers despite the
added territory they had to cover. The reasons, not surprisingly, smack of politics rather
than practicality. John C. Fremont, who had defied Kearny in California, had Thomas
Hart Benton for a father in law, and Benton swayed the Senate against anything that
might favor Kearny and his troops, even after Kearny died. And the Texans, now
represented in the House and Senate, hated Cooke for reasons harkening back to pre-
annexation days, and they too took great glee in thwarting the dragoons, which they
associated with him. Only after Benton and Fremont left the senate did the government
authorize the creation of two more units of mounted troops—the 1st and 2nd Cavalry. The
differences between the different types of mounted troops were almost entirely on paper,
and at the beginning of the Civil War they would be renamed the 1st through 5th Cavalry,
in order of seniority, so the 1st and 2nd Dragoons became the 1st and 2nd Cavalry, the

¹⁷⁷ Entry # 641 Page 16, Volume 1 of 6, Abstract of Horse Claims of Mexican War. Georgian Mounted
Volunteers, Tennessee Mounted Volunteers, Illinois Mounted Volunteers, Arkansas Mounted Volunteers,
Kentucky Mounted Volunteers. Records of the Accounting Officers of the Department of the Treasury,
Record Group 217, National Archives Building, Washington DC.
Mounted Riflemen became the 3rd Cavalry, and the original 1st and 2nd Cavalry became the 4th and 5th Cavalry, to the confusion of everyone. 178

During the 1850s the Dragoons exhausted themselves and their mounts patrolling the trails that led emigrants west into the newly acquired territory, defending those emigrants against newly acquired Native American enemies who did not wish to see their land being trampled through and taken over by Americans. At first, the dragoons had a hard time keeping their numbers up because of desertion—apparently many a trooper enlisted simply for paid transportation to the gold fields of California. But the government raised their pay, and that helped keep them in the service.

In addition to Indian fighting, the dragoons and riflemen had to pacify belligerent white Americans. When the government approved Illinois Senator Stephen Douglas’ “Popular Sovereignty” idea, wherein the inhabitants of the newly formed Kansas territory would decide for themselves if Kansas was to be free or slave, Cooke and his dragoons had to deal with the subsequent “bleeding.” Cooke had to contend with men on both sides of the slavery issue, and as an officer in the federal army, had to do his best to behave in an impartial manner, remembering that they were all Americans whom he was sworn to protect. Flying directly in the face of the inherent American fear of professional military men (especially those on horseback) as political forces independent of elected officials, Cooke followed his instructions from Washington, and instead of following Kansas’ pro-slavery Governor Woodson’s directives to destroy the free-state forces, he refused what he deemed unlawful orders, citing the Constitution, and instead continued to place his command in between the opposing forces, protecting each from the other, with

178 Herr, The Story of the U. S. Cavalry, 1775-1942, 73.
his goal being to keep the peace rather than assist one side politically.\textsuperscript{179} With a command, including junior officers, made up of both pro-slavery and free-state men, Cooke was able to keep control of his own troops, maintaining the neutrality of the army, and forestalling an all-out civil war in Kansas.

In 1857, as the Lawrence violence was subsiding, Cooke got word that Comanche were planning an attack on Fort Riley, and marched about 100 dragoons the 98 miles from Lawrence to the fort in summer heat, with few roads, in less than twenty eight hours.\textsuperscript{180} The Comanche never showed, but Cooke was soon off again, this time to Utah to address the Mormon war. The Mormons, however, had done their best to make sure the army had a hard time reaching them by destroying all the pasturage that the horses and mules would need for forage along the route, and the dragoons lost about one third of their horses over that winter as a result.\textsuperscript{181} Army horses passed the years between the Mexican and Civil Wars this way—march, pursuit, fight, starve, rest, repeat—with little variation.\textsuperscript{182}

While the written evidence is intermittent, in part because so many issues of newspapers have not survived and because of the lack of a central equine genealogical


\textsuperscript{180} Wormser, \textit{The Yellowlegs; the Story of the United States Cavalry}, 139.

\textsuperscript{181} Herr, \textit{The Story of the U. S. Cavalry, 1775-1942}, 84.

\textsuperscript{182} Their one great surprise between 1848 and 1861 was the army’s attempt, beginning in 1856, to add camels to their numbers for use in the desert regions of the west. Among other duties, the camels would reduce the burden on the cavalry horses by transporting forage to depots so that the cavalry horses did not need to carry as much fodder, and could serve farther from camp for longer periods, and in theory reduce the “starve” portion of their service. Camels, with their strength and ability to go long distances on scant food and water, could perform heavy service in the desert southwest as no other draft animal could, North Africa had proven that they could serve as cavalry mounts as well. But the horses made it known, in no uncertain terms, that they would not serve with camels, and regularly stampeded in their presence. The men were not fond of them either, and the camels were sold or turned loose in the desert when the Civil War interrupted the experiment.
record keeping system, it is clear that the primary military men of the seventeenth, and
eighteenth centuries were not just devotees of the turf, but also rode those same horses, or
their offspring, in battle. The mentions of officers and their bloodhorses are too
ubiquitous to dismiss as mere anecdotes of turf fanatics trying to justify their sport.
There is too much evidence, intermittent though it might be, that military men from
Washington, to Lee, to Tarleton, to Kearney, to the Virginia, Connecticut, Kentucky and
Tennessee Militias, all rode blooded horses, not just because they thought they looked
flashy and conveyed status, but because they thought when their lives were on the line,
these race-bred horses would serve their purpose better than a slower, less agile, horse
would. And as the American Revolution was in essence a war to regain the rights of
Englishmen, of which rights the Americans felt they were being slowly robbed under
British rule, and one the most important of those rights was to be free of a standing army,
it is small surprise that Congress essentially disbanded the army as soon as hostilities had
ceased. As John Phillip Reid points out, instead of a traditional right, it might more
appropriately be termed a traditional fear, and he quotes Samuel Johnson who wrote that
a “standing army was always a name of dread and horror to an English ear, and signify’d
the worst sort of invasion, being intestine, and already got within us.” With what Allan
Millett and Peter Maslowski characterized as that “hypersensitive fear” in mind,
Congress’ immediate post-war demobilizations of the army is predictable. Out of sheer
necessity, since the English remained in their forts in the West, and the Spanish and
Native Americans remained on the new nation’s borders, Congress created a 700 man

183 Quoted in Reid, In Defiance of the Law: The Standing-Army Controversy, the Two Constitutions, and the Coming of the American Revolution, 80.

force\textsuperscript{185} to defend the frontiers after the revolution, but it was, at first, officially militia, and it was insufficient for the task at hand. That none of the force was cavalry is likely due to the combined issue of mounted troops being too expensive for the cash-poor government to support, and the amorphous fear that a mounted man was even more of a threat to liberty than an infantryman. A military man on horseback was, after all, still a potent symbol of power. The legacy of a formation of armored knights being the most feared force on a battlefield lingered long after the cavalry no longer wore armor, and with good reason—the cavalry posed all the same threats of infantry, plus the ability to move fast, strike unexpectedly, and literally ride over anyone on foot. And in America, the lingering association between cavalry and aristocracy was another mark against mounted troops.

Even long after congress decided it needed a regular army, money would continue to be a factor in the use of cavalry throughout its history in the United States. Having virtually no mounted troops in times of peace would eventually cause great difficulties when the nation again needed mounted soldiers, and in large numbers, when it found itself again at war on a grand scale, but in the interim, the small numbers of horses eventually used patrolling the prairie and even fighting Mexico would be relatively easy to procure when the government was willing to spend the money to do so.

\textsuperscript{185} Ibid., 86–87.
Chapter 3: The Civil War and the Decimation of American Bloodstock

The Mexican war and service on the Western frontier required quality horses, but neither required more than the army could supply fairly easily, even if it was reluctant to pay out the necessary funds. With the Civil War came a sea change in the Army’s horse needs. The prevalence of rifles, with their greatly increased accurate range, made for higher equine casualty rates, but the real difference was in the scale of the war itself. Whereas in the war with Mexico the Federal government had three of its own mounted regiments plus seven volunteer regiments from the states,¹ the Civil War required more than 500 regiments of mounted troops, between North and South. The South had an initial advantage with superior horses, due to its having the preponderance of thoroughbred breeding stock in the nation, and superior horsemen, who relied more heavily on saddle horses for both transportation and recreation than their Northern counterparts; but in the second half of the war, as it became a war of attrition, the North balanced those advantages by having simply more horses and more men. When the war was at its height, the Northern army had to supply more than 500 remounts a week² to keep its cavalry on horseback, whereas the Confederates essentially ran out of horses with which to remount its cavalry. The Civil War ate horses. After the war, the United States Army was left to patrol the west on mounts of decreasing quality. The war had decimated the American horse population, and the best horses had been the first to go to war. While racing was revived in the North, changes in the equine marketplace meant

¹ Brackett, History of the United States Cavalry: From the Formation of the Federal Government to the 1st of June, 1863; to Which Is Added a List of All the Cavalry Regiments, with the Names of Their Commanders, Which Have Been in the United States Service since the Breaking out of the Rebellion, 60.

² Phil Livingston and Ed Roberts, War Horse: Mounting the Cavalry with America’s Finest Horses (Albany, Tex.: Bright Sky Press, 2003), 28.
that thoroughbred stallions became less available to farmers to improve their stock, leaving the military horse buyers to choose the best of a poor assortment of unsuitable horses when trying to mount the army on horses at the prices the government was willing to spend.

Never having had more than a few regiments of cavalry to work with at any time, and most of its experience of mounted service coming in small-unit fighting against Native Americans in the West, the scale of the maneuvers in the Civil War caught the armies of both sides unprepared. West Point, in the awkward position of serving as the military academy of a nation that was still uncomfortable with a professional military, let alone with competent cavalrmen in its midst in times of peace, did not even initially include formal lessons on cavalry tactics in its engineering-centered curriculum. The Board of Visitors (which conducted the students’ annual examinations each spring) recommended its inclusion in June of 1838, but the suggestion was not taken up, although the school procured horses by the fall of 1839, allowing it to make equitation a regular part of the curriculum. Good horsemanship was necessary for officers in any branch of the army because whether infantry, artillery, cavalry or engineer, officers commanded from horseback even in the heat of battle when handling a horse took significant skill. But what training those officers got in cavalry tactics generally came from their equitation instructor, Lieutenant James Hawes, Second Dragoons, who was finally able to get cavalry tactics officially added to the curriculum in 1849. Hawes was

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3 George S. Pappas, *To the Point: The United States Military Academy, 1802-1902* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1993), 236.

4 James L. Morrison, “The Best School in the World”: *West Point, the Pre-Civil War Years, 1833-1866* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1986), 98.

5 Ibid.
a graduate of Saumur, the French military academy, which to this day remains one of the
world’s most respected riding schools, but that led him to concentrate on European tactics
of the Napoleonic wars which emphasized regimental scale action.⁶

In the United States, the mounted troops would use much smaller units fighting in
the West (and much larger ones eventually in the Civil War). So, as Robert Utley notes,
West Point’s teachings “remained barren of guidance on how to employ a company of
dragoons against the only enemy any of them could see in their future…. [They had] to
learn Indian fighting by hard experience.”⁷ In the pre-Civil War era at West Point,
military tactics of any sort were secondary to engineering—another symptom of
Americans’ uneasiness with a professional military. As James Morrison argues, “the men
who controlled the institution viewed its mission as being the production of engineers
who could also function as soldiers rather than the reverse.”⁸ United States cavalry
training was, therefore, not on a par with European cavalry training as the Civil War
approached, which forced the commanders to learn and innovate on the battlefield by trial
and error, often at the expense of both horse and horseman.

Stephen Kearney and George McClellan had both in their day been sent abroad to
study European cavalry tactics in action—Kearney in the 1840s⁹ and McClellan in the
1850s¹⁰. They saw small scale, set piece battle tactics, at the twilight of the smooth-bore
and saber era. McClellan returned with a design for a saddle that became the standard

⁶ Ibid., 99.
⁸ Morrison, “The Best School in the World” : West Point, the Pre-Civil War Years, 1833-1866, 101.
⁹ Wormser, The Yellowlegs; the Story of the United States Cavalry, 145.
¹⁰ Herr, The Story of the U. S. Cavalry, 1775-1942, 78.
issue cavalry saddle, with few modifications, for the remainder of the mounted cavalry’s
days, but with tactical ideas based on traditional European ideas that horsemen could only
effectively fight with a blade. In the American Civil War, very few horsemen ever
fought with blades. They fought with guns. Philip St. George Cooke, who had
essentially inherited Kearney’s position of grand old man of the cavalry, translated the
cavalry manual in vogue in Europe at the time and updated Kearney’s official tactics, but
they were outdated before they were published. They assumed cavalry numbers no larger
than a brigade, as Hawes had taught, and which had until then been about the size of the
entire United States mounted force, but those numbers were far surpassed during the
Civil War. And those outdated tactics included primarily maneuvers of closely massed
men and horses, and virtually all of the weapon instruction was how to handle a saber.¹¹
That made sense in saber charges against inaccurate, smooth-bore single-shot fire power,
but was suicidal in the face of rifled artillery and repeaters. But Cooke’s tactics, while it
was not officially adopted by the army, was pretty much the best handbook available.

So at the start of the Civil War, as with the Revolution, no one was really sure
what to do with cavalry or that they were even really going to be significantly useful
beyond guard duty and messenger service. In fact, at first, both sides used them almost
entirely in these roles, splitting up their units into tiny details all over the vast armies,
where they were fairly useless as a fighting arm. To be more accurate, at the very start of
the war, neither side really had any cavalry available for any use.

¹¹ United States, War Dept. and Philip St. George Cooke, Cavalry Tactics; Or, Regulations for the
Instruction, Formations, and Movements of the Cavalry of the Army and Volunteers of the United States
The Federal troops were in the West when the Southern states began seceding. Some officers, such as Charles May, the great hero of Resaca de la Palma in Mexico, while not hailing from the South himself, had served with Southerners for a sufficiently long term that he felt disloyal fighting against them and resigned from the army in order to remain neutral. Instead of fighting, May ran a railroad in New York and became rich by the standards of professional soldiers.¹² But most of the officers either remained in the army, or left for the Confederate one, as their states withdrew. A few Southerners remained loyal to the Union, but the Union tended to be wary of those Southerners, and they, Cooke, most notably, did not have much opportunity to distinguish themselves in the war.

The 2nd Cavalry was stationed in Texas when Texas voted to secede, and its leading officers, Southerners, resigned their commissions and attempted to take as many of the 2nd Cavalry’s men with them to the Confederacy as they could. General David Twigg, a native Georgian, surrendered everything the Federal army owned or controlled in the State of Texas to Texas troops. Earl Van Dorn rode off for an audience with Jefferson Davis, and returned with commissions for any officer willing to fight for the confederacy. According to Albert Brackett, who served with Van Dorn, Van Dorn had “boasted that he could take the regiment with him [to join the Confederacy],”¹³ but was unable to persuade Northerners like Brackett to follow him. The officers remaining loyal to the Union, and the enlisted men who did not desert (enlisted men not having the luxury of resigning) had to abandon their possessions and retreat by steamer to Florida, thence to

¹² Wormser, The Yellowlegs; the Story of the United States Cavalry, 288.
¹³ Brackett, History of the United States Cavalry: From the Formation of the Federal Government to the 1st of June, 1863; to Which Is Added a List of All the Cavalry Regiments, with the Names of Their Commanders, Which Have Been in the United States Service since the Breaking out of the Rebellion, 208.
Cuba, and on to New York and finally Carlisle Barracks in Pennsylvania where they were refitted and remounted for service. Brackett denounced the Texans for effectively handing over the regiment to the Confederacy after men like him had spent the prime years of their lives defending Texans from “the wrath of Indian warriors.” Indeed many of them had suffered significant bodily harm in that work. He claimed that the loyal officers felt “rejected by those who ought to have loved them—borne down by those who ought to have cherished them.” The powerful combination of loyalty and a newly formed grudge was enough to keep these men in the service, though they were renamed the 5th Cavalry.

Only one federal cavalry unit managed to get from its western post to the East more or less intact and ready to fight. This was the new 2nd Cavalry (formerly the 2nd Dragoons) which, under the leadership of Alfred Pleasanton, managed to make its way from Utah to Washington D.C. by the fall of 1861—well after the war was under way. The rest of the troops, once loyal officers could be found to replace the resigned Southern officers, stayed scattered across the western posts, attempting to hold onto their hard won gains against the likes of the Sioux, Navajo, Cayuse, Apache, and many other Native American nations that saw the Civil War as a convenient diversionary event that might help them regain territory.

The majority of the most experienced officers in the mounted units of the army were Southerners, and whether they resigned with great enthusiasm, like Earl Van Dorn, or great reluctance, like Robert E. Lee, they resigned nonetheless and headed for the

All of these experienced cavalry officers, many of whom soon became general officers, in charge of much larger bodies of troops consisting of infantry, artillery and cavalry, did not automatically mean that the South knew how to use cavalry well in a large scale war. Indeed, no one did at this point, at least not in a war on the scale of the Civil War, because there really had never been a war on that scale, and certainly not with the current weaponry. In the opening battle of Bull Run/Manassas neither side had really figured out how best to use their mounted arm. Both sides tended to attach them to infantry units to serve as scouts, and to screen army movements—these were the most effective uses at first—but also broke up units into tiny fragments to use as escorts, couriers and on guard duty.

But the South had some immediate advantages, occasionally over-stated by scholars, but true advantages regardless. One of these, of course, was the preponderance of experienced cavalry officers. But they also had two more: many men who knew how to ride well, and a large supply of superb saddle horses. Statistically speaking, a much larger percentage of Southern men came from rural areas with widely dispersed farms, and without good roads, and the primary method of getting from place to place was on the back of a horse. Culturally, pastimes such as fox hunting had far more participation by Southerners than by Northerners, and this sport, then, as at any other period in history, produced riders who could handle virtually any terrain at full gallop. William T.
Sherman said of the confederate cavalry “the rascals are brave, fine riders, bold to rashness and dangerous subjects in every sense…. [T]hey are the most dangerous set of men which this war has turned loose upon the world.”16 No one was saying this about the Union cavalry any time during the first half of the war, if ever.

Southerners also raced horses, and bred horses for racing, more than Northerners did. And in an era where the line between race horse and working horse was much more permeable, this meant that most Southern saddle horses carried at least some thoroughbred blood, and that meant that their forebears were tested on the tracks in races that required multiple heats of many miles. The important races of the day were run in four mile heats, and since a horse had to win two heats, that could mean running three, four or even five heats in an afternoon to emerge victorious.17 These were the best equine athletes of the day, and by no means fragile, delicate animals useful only for sport. So Southern horses were bred for speed, endurance and soundness under saddle, which was exactly what the cavalry demanded.

On the other hand, the growth of the trotting horse, the Standardbred, was enormous in the North during the middle half of the nineteenth century. These were horses that were primarily of thoroughbred breeding, but not in any way required to be purebred in the modern sense. The Standardbred was the breed that the great Messenger was so important in helping found, and that Vermont’s prized Morgans contributed to as well. Any horse that could meet the standard of trotting (or pacing) one mile in two minutes and thirty seconds was eligible to be entered into the standard book. In the

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17 Roberston, The History of Thoroughbred Racing in America, 33.
North, from New England out to the modern Mid-West, which was much more urban and had far better roads, the driving horse became a more common means of daily transportation. The standardbred (a partbred thoroughbred) driving horse became more common than riding horses. After all, if the roads were good, why not sit in a wagon, and stay cleaner and arrive at your destination well rested? Riding a horse meant much more physical exertion, and arriving at your destination smelling of horse, and, in harness, one horse could transport many people, and those people could easily bring baggage or goods with them. So Northerners, who had the option due to the availability of good roads, began to favor harness horses. These horses, too, were tested on the track for both speed and soundness. And as more and more people bred for trotting speed, the horses’ conformation altered.

Conformation that is optimal for harness horses is not the same as that which is optimal for riding horses. For optimal riding performance, a horse needs to have a relatively short (strong) back, both to carry the weight of a rider efficiently, and also to allow the horse to use his hindquarters to the most powerful effect while jumping and turning. A longer back is generally less able to carry weight well, and the longer-backed horse is generally less agile. But for work in harness, where jumping and agility are not required, a longer back has advantages. Driving horses spend most of their working hours at the trot, which is steadier for the passengers than a canter or gallop, which involves a giant bound each stride, and the trot is a gate a fit horse can keep up for a very

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long time. But trotting at speed greatly increases the horse’s likelihood of stepping on a front foot with a back one. A longer back puts the hind legs further away from the front legs, making the horse less likely to “grab a heel”. Riding horses are also more agile if their gates have longer hang time, or suspension. But for a harness horse, pulling a load behind him, any time without a hoof in contact with the ground to propel the vehicle forward is inefficient because during the suspension period of his stride the weight of the vehicle is hindering his forward progress much more significantly. So Standardbreds developed as harness specialists, and were generally better suited for harness work than thoroughbreds, and other thoroughbred derivatives, bred for riding. While this produced the epitome of useful driving horses, it diminished the horses’ usefulness under saddle. 

By the time of the Civil War, the Northern horse population was significantly tipped in favor of these harness horses. This reliance on driving meant that they were also less practiced in the saddle than their Southern contemporaries, and the difference would be telling in the Civil War. There were certainly many fine Northern horses and horsemen, but on average, far more Southerners could ride well and had good, race-bred horses suited for riding, and therefore cavalry service, than Northerners did.

While the great North South matches were generally held at the “Eclipse Course” on Long Island, and New York continued to be the center of a thriving Northern race scene, the majority of breeding had shifted South. The Northern farmer, therefore, had far more access to standardbred stallions than to thoroughbred stallions, and their stock would reflect that. Northern breeders, unlike their Southern brethren, did not have the

\[19\] Indeed, the American Standardbred is still the most sought after harness horse for practical driving in the world. The Amish, who rely on their horses for transportation in harness, use almost invariably Standardbreds retired from racing. These horses withstand long distance driving, on hard, paved roads, surrounded by car and truck traffic.
horse supply on hand to mount entire cavalry units during the civil war. General J.T. Wells of Louisiana, and A. Keene Richards of Kentucky, both racing men, each mounted cavalry troops from their own studs. John Hunt Morgan, brother-in-law to the man who would found the American studbook, and the magazine that would become the “Thoroughbred Record”, regularly raided stock farms, and as a result, his troopers were very well mounted.

These three advantages of the Southern cavalry at the outbreak of the war—experienced officers, men who could ride well, and top notch cavalry mounts—meant that the South was able to make the most of cavalry on a large scale fairly quickly. J.E.B. Stuart was the first outstanding cavalry officer to emerge in the war, and he was a product of the Federal army, having served in the West for years as an Indian fighter. He had married Philip St. George Cooke’s daughter Flora while posted in the West, but proved to be more willing than his Northern counterparts to toss his father-in-law’s small scale, saber fighting tactics by the wayside and fight with a huge independent cavalry force, that could and did fight very effectively with firearms. His new tactics called for his well mounted men to make grueling rides that lesser men and horses could not have accomplished.

Stuart’s dash and bravado have become legend, but he used them effectively. According to cavalry veteran and historian Alfred Brackett, “without some little recklessness, cavalry can never accomplish any thing [sic].” This idea of cavalry dash

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20 Roberston, The History of Thoroughbred Racing in America, 88.
21 Ibid.
22 Brackett, History of the United States Cavalry: From the Formation of the Federal Government to the 1st of June, 1863; to Which Is Added a List of All the Cavalry Regiments, with the Names of Their
being critical to success is echoed by just about every other cavalry officer, and no less an authority than Jomini wrote that one of the cavalry’s principal values was “its impetuosity.”

Seydlitz was the great role model for cavalry bravado before Stuart, because, while he commanded the same discipline from his men as had Cromwell, his willingness to toss aside the accepted standards and attack without hesitation whenever he saw an opportunity open before him, regardless of orders, was what allowed him to capitalize so thoroughly on the strengths of cavalry—speed, mobility, and shock.

Stephen Forbes, a Northern cavalry officer, describes the bravado of civil war cavalry raiding as “at its best…essentially a game of strategy and speed, with personal violence as an incidental complication. It is played according to more or less definite rules, not inconsistent, indeed with the players killing each other if the game cannot be won in any other way; but it is commonly a strenuous game, rather than a bloody one, intensely exciting.” And Stuart more or less invented the game on the large scale.

While McClellan was cautiously keeping his cavalry close to hand, Robert E. Lee, Stuart’s commanding officer, was willing to cut Stuart loose from the main body of the army and send him out, not only to gather information and keep the opposing cavalry from doing the same, but to use the mobility of independent cavalry, not slowed down by men on foot, to play havoc with McClellan’s supply and communication lines before what would come to be known as the Seven Days’ Battle, from June 25-July 1, 1862.

Commanders, Which Have Been in the United States Service since the Breaking out of the Rebellion, 222–223.

23 Jomini, The Art of War, 304.

Stuart took 1,200 men$^{25}$ and rode north, skirting McClellan’s right flank, discovered its vulnerabilities, captured 170 Union soldiers, about 300$^{26}$ horses, and when he realized that in also destroying Union army supplies he had called enough attention to himself that the Union cavalry was after him, instead of returning the way he had intended, he rode clear around McClellan’s army to rejoin Lee. His men and horses had covered about 100 miles in four days, wreaked havoc with McClellan’s supplies and nerves, gathered all the information Lee needed, and only lost one man in the process.

Part of what made Stuart’s first major raid possible was that the South had created a cavalry division, of which Stuart was in charge, but the North had not created an equivalent unified cavalry division. This lack of a united Northern cavalry command meant that the cavalry sent to track Stuart down was fragmented and coming after him from different locations, with different information and orders, as they had been parcelled out and assigned to different infantry commands for their use. So even though led by competent commanders, including Stuart’s own father in law, Philip St. George Cooke, they did not have the numbers, under unified command, to catch him nor do him any significant harm. Indeed, he was able to repeat the performance, riding around the Union Army in a raid on Chambersburg, Pennsylvania in October of the same year. This time, with 1800 men (at least 300 more than Lee had ordered)$^{27}$ Stuart set off to gather supplies from the lands just north of the Mason-Dixon Line and in addition to capturing 1,200 horses and a number of valuable hostages, they did almost a million dollars worth of


$^{26}$ Ibid.

damage and only lost two men. The raid crossed through three states, covering 126 miles, and they covered the last 80 in just over 24 hours, while skirmishing, herding loose horses, and maintaining unit cohesion.\(^{28}\) Crossing the Potomac, the exhausted, starving and thirsty horses struggled to make their way through the water, and fought to stop and drink.\(^{29}\) Lesser horsemen might not have gotten them across before their pursuers caught up. By way of comparison, modern endurance horses that race in 100 mile races are carefully conditioned for years to be able to cover 100 miles in the span of about 10-20 hours, depending on the course. These horses carry far less weight, are carefully and well fed, have enforced rest stops, optimally spaced, can travel at a very consistent speed, and have nothing hindering their path. Even with these ideal circumstances, there is a relatively high rate of attrition, with horses being eliminated from competition at mandatory veterinary inspections along the route. Cavalry horses on raids were often already tired when they began, carried roughly twice the weight that an endurance racer carries, and were constantly doubling back for cover or making fast sprints in the open. They were fed, rested, or watered only when enemy pursuit permitted, and covered much rougher territory with opposing forces hindering their way. They also had to continue on when lame or injured, and were large targets for enemies to shoot. Sound, fast mounts with significant innate endurance minimized equine mortality on raids, but could not eliminate it.

This style of raiding, which would become one of the predominant uses of cavalry in the war, demanded more of horses and men than did frontier patrols, demanding

\(^{28}\) Ibid., 44–45.

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 44.
though those were. Not only did the horses have to have endurance and a turn of speed, but they had to maintain that speed over considerably more mileage. On a frontier patrol, horses might cover vast territory at a marching walk, but they only needed to travel at high speed for limited distances until an enemy was captured or evaded capture. With numbers usually under 100 in a unit, this happened fairly quickly. But in civil war raids, horses had to travel at high speeds, often over rough ground for many miles at a stretch, with very few breaks to catch their breath. And while it is one thing to find a hundred horses that can endure that sort of trial, it is quite another to find thousands of them, which could not only endure that sort of endurance race, but could do it carrying not only a rider (who became less help and more hindrance the more tired he got) but also his equipment, ammunition and rations, because on a raid, speed was of the essence, and supply wagons were far too slow. At first, the Southern horses could outrun and out-endure the Northern ones, but as the war became an war of attrition, and the horses wore out, the Southerners began to run out of serviceable horses faster than the Northerners, and by the end of the war, when anything with four legs was deemed possibly serviceable, only the North could supply enough even of that class of mount.

The North received far fewer of the top cavalry officers. It did get Cooke (a Virginian who, after being unable to catch Stuart, was given desk duties for the rest of the war because many questioned his loyalty), Alfred Pleasanton, and George Stoneman, none of whom greatly distinguished themselves during the war. But it also got a number of promising junior officers, including Philip Sheriden, George Custer, John Buford and Wesley Merritt, who, given time, would prove exceptional cavalry commanders on a par
with Stuart, but they would not get their chances until well into the war, by which time they finally had useful troopers to command.

Northern men were less likely to ride well at the beginning of the war. They were statistically more likely to live in cities, some of which had public transportation, or at least in areas which had roads of sufficient quality that driving was more practical than riding, so a young swell wanting to impress his friends was more likely to have a fast trotting “crack” than a riding horse. Of course there were many exceptions to this generalization, but compared to the South, the cultural landscape favored driving horses, rather than riding them.

Because most Northern men tended to drive rather than ride, they had to learn how to ride in order to serve in the cavalry. But it takes time to learn how to ride, and it takes more time to learn how to ride well. Cavalry troopers needed to ride well. The general rule of thumb at the time, which proved quite accurate, was that it took two years to make a cavalry trooper out of a raw recruit, and raw recruits are what the majority of cavalry volunteers were. Captain (later Major) George Vanderbilt, of the 10th New York Cavalry, describes a scene far different from Sherman’s description of Southern cavalry men. On Vanderbilt’s first escort duty with the regiment in 1862, this is what he says of his men when they were ordered to mount:

Some of the boys had never ridden anything since they galloped on a hobby horse, and they clasped their legs close together, thus unconsciously sticking the spurs into their horses’ sides...saddles slipped back until they were on the rumps of horses; others turned and were on the underside of the animals; horses running and kicking; tin pans, mess- kettles…flying through the air; and all I could do was
to give a hasty glance to the rear and sing out at the top of my voice, “Close up!”… We went only a few miles, but the boys didn’t all get there till noon.\textsuperscript{30} 

The men could not even get on their horses, let alone fight on their horses. And they did not know how to take care of them either. During the first two years of the war the US cavalry troops went through, conservatively, five horses per trooper.\textsuperscript{31} Some of these, to be sure, were casualties of fighting (or capture) but vast amounts of horse losses were attributed to poor horse husbandry by the green troopers.\textsuperscript{32} They let them drink their fill of cold water when the horses were hot, causing fatal colic, or they did not tend to their horses feet properly leading to permanent crippling, or they ruined the horses’ backs by improperly saddling them before a long march—the list of ruinous errors was long.\textsuperscript{33} These were errors that the more riding-horse-savvy confederates made far less often.

The North was slower to create separate cavalry divisions, but once “Fighting Joe” Hooker took command of the Army of the Potomac in January of 1863, he did create one, with George Stoneman in command. The North learned from Stuart’s successful raids, and it also began to promote junior officers who showed some of the same dash and courage as Stuart. But it was a slow process. Stoneman’s first major raid into Southern territory accomplished little, resulting in his being removed from command. But by this time sufficient numbers of Northern troopers had learned to not only ride, but fight while doing so, and the North was raiding on a large scale and with

\textsuperscript{30} Quoted in Burton B. Porter, \textit{One of the People: His Own Story} (Colton, CA: Published by the Author, 1907), 119–120.

\textsuperscript{31} Herr, \textit{The Story of the U. S. Cavalry, 1775-1942}, 118–119.

\textsuperscript{32} Brackett, \textit{History of the United States Cavalry : From the Formation of the Federal Government to the 1st of June, 1863 ; to Which Is Added a List of All the Cavalry Regiments, with the Names of Their Commanders, Which Have Been in the United States Service since the Breaking out of the Rebellion}, 317.

\textsuperscript{33} Herr, \textit{The Story of the U. S. Cavalry, 1775-1942}, 119.
multiple commands in different states simultaneously. While Stoneman was raiding in Virginia, Benjamin Grierson was having a much more successful time raiding through Mississippi, starting in La Grange, Tennessee and ending in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, two weeks later, having done approximately six million dollars worth of damage and distracting significant portions of the Confederate army from countering Grant’s movements along the Mississippi, setting the stage for Grant’s successful capture of Vicksburg.

From the perspective of the army horse, it would be difficult to say which was worse: inexperienced riders who might cripple or kill their mounts out of ignorance, or experienced troops who could be sent on raids of hundreds of miles, much of them at high speed, where the horses might get a chance to die in battle or drop from exhaustion. The successful cavalry commander Colonel Charles Francis Adams, Jr., who was very cognizant of the suffering of the horses, wrote to his mother in 1863 of the condition of his command’s mounts, asking her to “imagine a horse with his withers swollen to three times the natural size, and with a volcanic, running sore pouring matter down each side, and you have a case with which every cavalry officer is daily called upon to deal, and you imagine a horse which has still to be ridden until he lays down in sheer suffering under the saddle.” And these were the horses in regiments led by good horsemen who took great pains to see that each man took the best care possible of their difficult-to-replace mounts, and most especially of their backs. But as a man who cared enough about the

34 Brackett, History of the United States Cavalry: From the Formation of the Federal Government to the 1st of June, 1863; to Which Is Added a List of All the Cavalry Regiments, with the Names of Their Commanders, Which Have Been in the United States Service since the Breaking out of the Rebellion, 298.

plight of the horses to write his mother about it, even Adams had “but one rule, a horse must go until he can’t be spurred any further, and then the rider must get another horse as soon as he can seize one.”\textsuperscript{36} A cavalry commander’s job was to bring mounted troopers to the field to defeat the enemy and end the war, no matter how badly he felt for the suffering of the animals they rode.

Getting those mounted troopers to the field in the larger and larger numbers demanded was complicated by a constant remount supply problem. Horses could not be manufactured in a matter of months, and not every horse was suitable for cavalry service. Short of importing stock from abroad, the war had to be fought with the horses already born at the fall of Fort Sumter. If breeders had miraculously foreseen that the war would last as long as it did, and consume as many horses as it did, and had presciently bred suitable mares to suitable stallions to produce cavalry remounts, those remounts would have just begun saddle training by Appomatox. Horses have an eleven month gestation period, and are not physically mature enough for serious saddle training until they are about three years old.

In the confederacy, mounted soldiers had to bring their own horse with them. They were paid for its keep, and they were paid the value of the horse if it was killed so that they could replace it. This relieved the government from the immediate problem of procurement, and presumably the soldier would take better care of his own property than he would of government property. But it meant that when a soldier needed to procure a new mount, he had to leave his unit and go horse shopping to do so. This was not a problem early on, as the upper South and border states, where most of the soldiers were

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 4.
fighting, were prime horse country, and home to the best thoroughbred breeding farms—horsemen had discovered the benefits of raising horses on Kentucky Bluegrass before the revolution, and northern Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee were home to the majority of the best breeding stock. But only so many top quality riding horses existed anywhere, and as the war quickly exhausted the supply, the men were left unmounted for long stretches of time. Lee was extremely careful of his army’s horses, recognizing their critical importance. Seeing that his army had already begun to struggle to replace the precious commodity, he issued General Orders at the beginning of October, 1862, specifically reminding “all officers in charge of horses of the army the urgent necessity of energetic and unwearied care of their animals, and of preventing their neglect and abuse.”

As the men became more and more exhausted from almost constant action, they had less and less energy for taking care of their mounts, and they clearly had to be prodded for the sake of the army’s fighting capacity.

Sufficient feed for the horses (as well as the men) also worried Lee constantly. As he fought battle after battle in the upper South, the armies stripped that land of feed, including grass. Both armies had to ship feed in, and the South, with fewer railroads available for shipping such a bulky necessity, experienced the pinch first. As successful as Stuart was, lack of horses and feed kept Lee from being more aggressive and capitalizing on the slowness of the North to find a successful combination of commanders and strategies. In February of 1863, while the Army of the Potomac was swapping commanders, he wrote to Jefferson Davis that he could not capitalize on his opponent’s disorganization because “our horses… are in that reduced state that the labor

37 General Orders 115, October 1, 1862, OR, Series I, Volume XIX, part 2, p 642.
and exposure incident to an attack would result in their destruction.”

He included both his cavalry and his transport animals because they were all overworked and needed the same non-forthcoming feed. His frustration showed in report after report, explaining that he would like to attack but was afraid that his horses would drop of starvation before they could engage the enemy.

As Charles Ramsdell argues, Lee was always conscious of the Southern farmers’ keeping sufficient serviceable horse power on the farms to grow crops, understanding full well that if they could not do that, his army, horse and human, was doomed to starvation. But most of the horses suitable for cavalry were not necessary to keeping the nation fed. The biggest problem in procuring them was that there were simply limited numbers of them in existence, and the army wore them down quickly. As the war wore on, the standards for “serviceable” dropped drastically. By 1864 Lee was worried that his cavalry numbers had dropped so low that his communication lines were in serious danger, and since there were no horses available anywhere near his army for his men to purchase, he asked that the government purchase horses from Texas (where the resident equine population was not originally deemed suitable for cavalry use) and actually try to swim them across the Mississippi. Eventually, since replacements were so incredibly difficult to procure, the South created a system of horse and mule hospitals, but most had to be in the Deep South, far from the army, in order to have pasturage and grain to feed


the animals. Because the army did not send the animals to the infirmaries until they were utterly exhausted and worn down, few of the animals recovered sufficiently to be returned to duty. By spring of 1865, Lee had hardly any cavalry left at his disposal. The few he had, he could not place where he wanted them because he could not feed them there. Even in the trench warfare around Petersburg near the end of the war, cavalry was critical for defending the Confederate flanks, and Lee attributed the loss of those final key positions to a lack of cavalry. He wrote to cavalry commander Wade Hampton that with more cavalry “the result at Five Forks [which resulted in Lee having to pull out of Petersburg] would have been different. But how long the contest would have been prolonged, it is difficult to say.” Without more cavalry, Lee simply could not defend the Confederacy against the Union forces.

The situation for the Union was slightly different. It, too, burned through horses at a devastating rate, but it had a larger supply, especially after it secured much of the horse breeding territory in the upper South and Border States. As the standards for what was deemed serviceable dropped on the Union side, just as on the Confederate side, the Union fared better based on sheer numbers. The poorer quality horses did not last long, but the Union could replace them with more poor quality horses, whereas the Confederacy had serious problems even with that. The Union also had a far easier time of feeding its horses. As the war stretched on, the Union cavalry was able to outride the Confederate cavalry because its horses, while tired, hungry, and footsore, were far less tired, hungry and footsore than the Confederate horses, and there were more of them.

40 Ibid., 777.

In 1863, along with the creation of large cavalry divisions, the whole Federal cavalry administration was also overhauled via general orders number 236 and 237 which created a Cavalry Bureau as a division of the War Department, and new depots for supplying the cavalry units with remounts. The Bureau tried to bring order to the purchasing system by requiring that units comply with the standardized purchasing system to avoid competing with each other, and worked hard to make the contract system of purchase, required of the army by Secretary of War Edward Stanton, work. These depots would be the staging location for newly purchased horses entering the service, where they would be trained and kept until assigned to a specific unit. They would also serve as hospitals for unfit horses that were deemed likely candidates to be nursed back to serviceable health. Because the North had more forage available, the horses in these hospitals had a greater likelihood of returning to service than their Southern counterparts. The cavalry units also got the new requirement of monthly reports to the cavalry bureau listing the numbers of horses they had on hand of each of four classes. Class one included horses not fit, nor likely to become fit, for any branch of service. Class two consisted of horses unfit for cavalry service, and not likely to regain fitness for cavalry service, but which might be fit for other service such as hauling baggage. Class three was horses currently unfit for cavalry service, but which would likely return to fitness for that service—these were the horses sent to the depots for rehabilitation. And the fourth and final class was horses presently fit for cavalry service. This system made it far easier

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43 Brackett, History of the United States Cavalry: From the Formation of the Federal Government to the 1st of June, 1863; to Which Is Added a List of All the Cavalry Regiments, with the Names of Their
for the government to keep track of its equine combatants. The problem, not as critical as in the Confederacy, was that keeping track of the horses and their condition merely informed them more accurately of what even the Union did not have—enough suitable horses. A telegram from A.G. Brackett to William Redwood Price, acting Inspector General of the Cavalry Bureau is a representative description of the problem:

McCook’s Division has four hundred and seventeen (417) serviceable horses, and four thousand (4000) men. Three thousand five hundred (3500) horses required. Garrard’s Division has seven thousand one hundred and forty two (7142) men, and three thousand and seven hundred and twenty two (3722) horses. Three thousand (3000) horses required. Kilpatrick’s Division has Six thousand two hundred and three (6203) men, and two thousand three hundred and twenty eight horses (2328). Three thousand (3000) horses required.\(^4^4\)

Even in the Union, which had far more horses to draw on than the Confederacy, the army was running out of horses to mount its soldiers with, and no amount of accounting for horses was going to make more appear.

While the war continued, horse races were few and far between. But the pressures brought on by demand for good horses in the war had one unexpected consequence. Up until this period, the North’s best racing was all concentrated around the New York City area, with some minor tracks in New England and Upstate New York, and in Pennsylvania and Maryland. But the war led to the creation of a new top-of-the-

\(^4^4\) Albert G. Brackett, “Telegram from Colonel A.G. Brackett to Major William Redwood Price, Huntsville, Alabama, September 1, 1864,” September 1, 1864, Record Group 108, Entry 74, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC.
line racing facility, with some of the most prestigious races, to open, just two months after the battle of Gettysburg.

Saratoga Springs had hitherto been home to a poorly laid out trotting track, with very sharp corners and obstructed visibility across the infield. But it was also the home of internationally famous mineral springs, and was a popular summer resort among the wealthy. It boasted enormous hotel capacity, good rail transportation, and a pleasant summer climate. As horsemen watched the population of Southern horses begin to dwindle, they began to fear for the bloodstock of the nation. And the Northerners saw an opportunity to acquire, or reacquire, good breeding stock for saddle horses, as their cavalry’s performance had been a staggering disappointment. In the pages of the primary sporting paper of the Civil War era, Wilkes Spirit of the Times, contributors cheered the Northerners who were buying up Southern horses, proclaiming that “it is plain enough…that the southern excellence in saddle horses and riders over those of the North has proceeded from the breeding of the blood horse and the practice of horse-racing.”45 And some Southern horsemen with allegiances to good horses stronger than allegiances to section, were selling their horses to Northerners at bargain prices to get them out of harm’s way, and they certainly got better prices from Northerners than they would from the Confederate government if the horses were requisitioned for the Confederate Army. In order to encourage the Northern migration of good bloodstock, Spirit contributors

45 “The Thorough-Bred Horses Coming North,” Wilkes’ Spirit of the Times, January 3, 1863, 284. To be sure, someone contributing to a publication that caters to sports is pre-disposed to attribute the deficiency to racing. But racing men were not the only ones to come to that conclusion, and while they were interested parties, they were also the experts.
urged Northerners to establish a race meeting to revive the Northern racing empire and give the four legged refuges a venue to prove themselves. 46

John Morrissey took up the challenge and provided that venue. He was a famous former prize fighter and Tammany thug, as well as a future congressman, and he ran a lucrative illegal casino in Saratoga Springs during the August social season. He rented Horse Haven, the existing track, and advertised Saratoga’s first thoroughbred race meeting for August 3-6, 1863. He even bought from Henry Clay’s son, John, a top racehorse for $3000 47 so that he might participate in the racing himself.

The races were a resounding success, though illegal. In 1854 the New York Legislature had passed a law that allowed for “the incorporation of associations for improving the breed of horses,” 48 which allowed New Yorkers to breed and sell horses “and do all other acts and things necessary in their judgment to carry out and effect the objects of their incorporation.” 49 In 1860 they added that “nothing herein shall prevent any association regularly formed…from offering premiums, at any regular meetings of said association, and a competition therefore.” 50 This was the loophole that New York racing associations would use to offer purses for horse races. But Morrissey had not formed an association.

So in 1865 a group of wealthy New Yorkers of high social standing established the Saratoga Association for the Improvement of the Breed of Horses. In 1864, they paid

46 “More Racehorses for the North,” Wilkes’ Spirit of the Times, February 14, 1863, 376.
49 Ibid., 3:2068.
50 Ibid.
$60,000\textsuperscript{51} for the racing grounds and built an entirely new track across the street from Horse Haven\textsuperscript{52} and constructed a grandstand which, while it has been expanded, is still in use today. For the 1865 season, the first legal one, they had erected not only a ladies’ stand, but also the nation’s first press box.\textsuperscript{53}

And the races were successful at bringing top thoroughbred stock out of the war zone. The winner of the first race on the second day of the meet in 1863 was named John Morgan, and the *Albany Atlas and Argus* listed his results right next to the announcement of the capture of the real John Hunt Morgan.\textsuperscript{54} The human Morgan would escape to continue his horse raids in the border country, including Kentucky. And in 1864, John Hunter, one of the members of the Saratoga Association, purchased from R.A. Alexander’s stud farm a young son of the great Lexington, whom Hunter would name Kentucky, just before the farm was raided by Morgan’s men.\textsuperscript{55} Good race-bred horses were continuous targets of military raids because of their physical abilities, and for those who did not patriotically donate their stock, or ride it into battle themselves, perpetual worry was their lot.\textsuperscript{56} R.A. Alexander, who was doubly neutral, being a resident of the officially neutral state of Kentucky, and a citizen of the neutral nation of Great Britain,

\textsuperscript{51} *New York Times*, July 9, 1865, 3.

\textsuperscript{52} The path of the original Horse Haven track is still in use in the Saratoga Race Course stabling area across the street from the main track.

\textsuperscript{53} *New York Times*, July 14, 1865, 8.


\textsuperscript{55} “Morgan’s Route Complete,” *Daily Saratogian*, June 16, 1864, 2. And *Daily Saratogian*, June 27, 1864, 2.

would have been wiped out by Morgan’s raid, had he not sent his best breeding stock to Canada with a trusted groom. This stock included the great stallion Lexington, who was not only a legend on the track, but one of the greatest breeding stallions in American history. The horse was blind at this point, and therefore not a likely mount for cavalry, but he was as famous as most of the generals in the war, and therefore a target for theft. Lexington’s son Kentucky “escaped” via sale to John Hunter to win the first running of the Travers Stakes at Saratoga in 1864.

The Saratoga races were a grand success for the proprietors, and they did provide an excuse to get many good Southern and border-state thoroughbreds out of harm’s way, but the war was still devastating to racing in the United States, and that had significant repercussions. The war highlighted the value of the South’s race-bred saddle horses in the military. It also killed off a significant proportion of them. Indeed the breeding industry in South would take decades to recover—in large part because breeding top quality horses is expensive, and with a ruined economy, the economic ability to sustain a market for such horses was negligible. In the North, the market continued to shift toward harness horses, which meant that for the horses that did not make it on the track, there were fewer second career options for them, so spending a lot of money breeding them made little sense. Horse racing continued, indeed it picked up fairly quickly and tracks soon proliferated across the North, particularly in the New York City area, but the horses running on them were no longer quite as carefully bred. The advent of handicap racing, where horses were assigned weights based on their likelihood of winning, instead of simply age and sex, meant that even poor horses could provide exciting racing, and therefore more poor horses were kept in the game. And gambling became a prime
motivator for the track operators instead of improving horses, so they had reasons to keep
the poorer horses around. Creating a motive to retain poorer quality horses would
undermine racing’s ability to drive the breeding of superior stock. By the beginning of
the twentieth century, this would contribute to a decline in militarily viable saddle horses.

There were still some breeders carefully breeding the best runners, with the
soundest limbs, to run in the best weight-for-age stakes races, and this racing still tested
the best of the best. But these top horses became more and more expensive, and breeding
to them, or even their offspring, began to be too expensive for the common man; the
average person with a mare to breed could no longer afford to turn to the thoroughbred to
improve the next generation of his saddle horses. And as money became a bigger and
bigger driver of the industry, commercial gambling interests grew to be more and more of
a problem for racing men.

Gambling had certainly been an important part of early racing, where, instead of
purses, owners would wager large amounts against each other to create a race, but that
wagering was more a public testament to their estimation of their horse, than a means of
financial gain. After the Civil War, gamblers with no connection to the horses
themselves set up their businesses with the sole intent to make money off of anyone they
could, whether that person could afford to lose it or not. This innovation would lead to a
crisis in racing, as well as a crisis in the military. With the primary breeders of everyday
saddle horses shifting to the range lands of the west, that is where the army had to look
for military mounts for the Indian Wars of the late nineteenth century, and eventually for
World War I. Those horses were not carefully bred, and proved very unsatisfactory. In
order to continue to have quality part-thoroughbred horses available on a large scale for
military use when needed, the government would eventually have to create a way to make those top quality thoroughbreds available to the average breeder once again, but it would need to be spurred on by a military horse supply crisis before it would finally act.

Despite the lack of horses, when the most of the army was demobilized at the end of the Civil War, the regular cavalry expanded. During the war the country’s relations with the Native Americans in the west had deteriorated so badly that Sheriden and his men were rushed off to Texas in May of 1865. Congress authorized four more regiments of regular cavalry, the 7th, of Little Bighorn fame, the 8th, and two African American units, of Buffalo Soldier fame, the 9th and 10th. Despite the relatively small number of mounted regiments as compared to those during the war years, the horses available to these troops were of ever decreasing quality.

The Civil War decimated America’s horse population, and because the horses most suitable for cavalry service were the first horses to see battle, they were also among the first to be killed in battle. As the war dragged on, and virtually any horse that could carry a trooper was pressed into service, the saddle horse breeding stock of the nation also fought and died. As the nation rebuilt itself after the war, the horse breeding efforts went increasingly into draft horses and mules rather than riding horses, as farming was essential to recovery. Good saddle horses became a luxury commodity among the civilian population. The South, long the seat of thoroughbred breeding, could barely afford to feed itself, and it certainly ceased to have the capitol to put into thoroughbred breeding, the foundation of the best quality American saddle horses on which the American military had relied since its foundation. Cavalry-quality remounts became

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57 Herr, *The Story of the U. S. Cavalry, 1775-1942*, 143.
sufficiently rare that their price outpaced what the government was willing to pay. The cavalry fighting the Indian campaigns of the post Civil War years therefore had to rely on western range-bred horses or draft horse crosses. The Western horses were generally bred in semi-feral herds, with nature and the horses themselves making the mating selections, which meant they were in no way selected for weight carrying conformation, optimal for maximum athleticism under the unnatural weight of a fully armed and accoutered trooper. The draft horse crosses were even more unsuitable, as their conformation was, at best, optimized for pulling heavy loads at slow speeds, rather than carrying a heavy load at high speed.

The cavalry after the war was primarily used to patrol the western territories, which were not yet states, and to defend the borders or fight against Native Americans. While the U.S. army occupied much of the South during reconstruction, it was primarily infantry which attempted to protect the rights of the freedmen and enforce the new voter protection legislation. In northern Mississippi, cavalry was occasionally brought in to defend against the Ku Klux Klan, but despite their being much more effective due to their mobility, their mobility was even more important further west fighting Native Americans, and there were not enough of them to go around. Before heading west, a few elements of the 5th and 7th Cavalry chased down moonshiners in Georgia and South Carolina, where their speed through wooded land was helpful in catching outlaw distillers, but they hated the duty and were, like their comrades in Mississippi, needed far more urgently in the West, and therefore quickly replaced by infantry and artillery, which

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would occasionally rent mounts to attempt to duplicate the mobility of the cavalry.\textsuperscript{59} Infantry could cover the distances between population centers in the South sufficiently well that it had to perform the role that might otherwise have been played by the cavalry, had the cavalry not been needed more desperately in the vast stretches of the West. But the use of the army, mounted and otherwise, to occupy the South would later have significant repercussions for the cavalry. As the southern Democrats, bitter over their occupation by the federal army during reconstruction, returned to power after 1877, they would consistently block any attempts of the army to expand, centralize its organization, or in any way gain supremacy over the State-controlled National Guard.\textsuperscript{60} As a result, when the army’s remount supply problem became critical at the end of the century, the army was repeatedly blocked from creating a program that would solve the problem.

In the West, the cavalry was not always received any better than it was in the South because there, in addition to fighting Native Americans, they also occasionally had to protect Native American land. In Arizona, where the 6\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry had to help enforce the law, they had to deal with significant backlash from white squatters whom they evicted from Apache reservation land, or whites whom they arrested for murdering Apaches.\textsuperscript{61} In their awkward role as the law enforcement officers of federal territory, they also saw very limited use against the Mormons in Utah Territory,\textsuperscript{62} echoing their use under Cooke in “Bleeding Kansas” and the pre-Civil War fighting against the Mormons,


\textsuperscript{60} Skowronek, \textit{Building a New American State}, 98.


\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 110.
and they served as the earliest protectors of the national parks, where, in small units capitalizing on their superior mobility, they guarded the massive swaths of land that make up Yellowstone and Yosemite parks from poachers, vandals, and other law-breaking Americans who threatened the existence of the new parks. 63 But most of their service was in the virtually unsettled (by whites) stretches of the West, where they had to cover vast mileage, and their primary opponents were Native Americans—the one group that even Southern Democrats were willing to have some professional mounted military to deal with.

Between the end of the Civil War and 1898, the army had 943 officially recorded engagements with Native Americans, and the majority of these were fought by small units of cavalry against the equally mobile Indian nations of the Great Plains. 64 Most of their duty consisted of long lonely patrols, punctuated by very occasional guerilla-style strikes by plains warriors who resented the encroachment of the railroads across the plains, recognizing its threat to the buffalo and therefore their ability to sustain themselves. 65 The plains tribes were recognized among the army officers as “the finest light cavalry in the world,” 66 and during this period about 5000 troopers were charged with controlling and containing approximately 250,000 of them across approximately one third of the current United States. 67 What made it possible for them to perform this duty without being annihilated was less superior technology or ability than different cultures


64 Weigley, History of the United States Army, 267.

65 Herr, The Story of the U. S. Cavalry, 1775-1942, 148.

66 Ibid., 150.

67 Ibid.
of warfare. The Native American warriors were unmatched in individual skills, but their doctrines of warfare centered on quick strikes and equally quick withdrawals before their numbers could be significantly depleted. Therefore they tended to focus on single raids rather than long term strategic maneuvers.\(^68\) Rarely did the U.S. cavalry have to mass its forces in sustained action in the West.

The notable exceptions to the small-unit, lonely garrison duty of the cavalry were the campaigns against the Sioux and Cheyenne in the Black Hills, which resulted in the decimation of Custer’s command at the Little Big Horn, and the campaign against the Nez Perce, led by Chief Joseph. The campaign into the Black Hills demonstrated the difficulties of large unit actions. In order to move fast enough to keep up with their adversary, who could travel up to fifty miles a day even with their non-combatants and baggage,\(^69\) the federal troops had to divide up into several separate columns, but that exposed them to the dangers of being isolated and attacked by superior numbers. This is precisely what happened to Custer and his command with famously devastating results.\(^70\) In the case of the Nez Perce, who were a relatively peaceful and Christianized nation that wanted to escape their reservation to Canada, not fight, they were hunted by several different army units, both mounted and unmounted, but it was the Nez Perce who travelled 1,600 miles with their famous appaloosa horses evading nine different army units along the way, until they were finally captured by the tenth—General Nelson Miles’ six companies of cavalry and five of infantry.\(^71\) No single unit of U.S. cavalry could keep

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\(^69\) Herr, *The Story of the U. S. Cavalry, 1775-1942*, 150.

\(^70\) Weigley, *History of the United States Army*, 268.

\(^71\) Wormser, *The Yellowlegs; the Story of the United States Cavalry*, 386.
up with them. While the large operations like those against the Nez Perce and the Sioux and Cheyenne were the exception, they underlined a significant issue for the military. It was having a hard time mounting its soldiers on horses that were up to the task of successfully patrolling the West, because horses with sufficient speed and durability were increasingly rare, and the few suitable horses available cost more than the government wanted to pay.

By 1890, the problem was sufficiently bad that the army finally launched a survey of cavalry officers to gather ideas to rectify the situation, the responses to which make up the first installment in the Remount’s archival records. But by that point the Indian Wars were essentially over, so its progress was slow. The Spanish-American War might have been a turning point, had the cavalry fought as cavalry, but even Teddy Roosevelt’s famous “Rough Riders” fought as unmounted infantry because there was no room on the transport ships for any but the officers’ mounts.\(^\text{72}\) This applied to all of the cavalry units, not just the Rough Riders, with the result, as cavalry historian Richard Wormser put it, that “the war is really no concern of a cavalry history.”\(^\text{73}\) Roosevelt’s assessment of the horses his men were issued in Texas, before they were left behind in Florida, was precisely what other cavalry commanders had said about the western horses the army purchased—they were too small, wild, and, despite the ministrations of his expert riders, “a large number remained to the end mounts upon which any ordinary rider would have felt very uncomfortable.”\(^\text{74}\) Even Roosevelt, politically and financially connected, and a


\(^{73}\) Wormser, *The Yellowlegs; the Story of the United States Cavalry*, 435.

man who knew both horses and the men who bred the best of them, couldn’t get suitable horses to mount his men for war.

The Civil War proved the superiority of the predominantly thoroughbred horses used in the cavalry, but it also wiped out most of their numbers. After the war, Americans had to rebuild their horse population, and because of improvements in roads and farming machinery, the market for saddle horses was not as strong as it had been before the war, so even when racing was revived in the North, thoroughbreds had a smaller impact on the general horse population. With fewer people investing in breeding good saddle horses, the Army had a more difficult time finding any that were suitable for the rigors of military life, and when they did find them, they were sufficiently rare as to bring prices higher than government was willing to pay. This created a serious problem for the cavalry that patrolled the west, as it had a harder and harder time providing its troops with sufficient mounts in a time of peace. Many recognized that the task would be insurmountable in a time of war. Nonetheless, it would take the serious unrest in Europe during the early part of the next century before the United States government would, reluctantly, take steps to solve its remount problem.
Chapter 4: Reformers Attack Racing as the Army Ponders its Remount Problem

The conflict between the racing men and the progressive reformers in New York shaped the future of the horse in the United States, with potentially disastrous consequences for the military. During the post-Civil War era, New York became by far the largest, and richest, center of thoroughbred racing in the nation. What happened in New York dictated what happened in the industry as a whole. There were tracks operating in other places—Maryland, New Orleans, Kentucky, Chicago, and California, most notably—but they did not have the same financial backing as the tracks in New York. The South’s economy had been more or less destroyed in the war, and had far more pressing matters to attend to than the revival of racing. As Melvin Adelman put it, “while racing did eventually return to several southern cities it was but a vain attempt to revive an earlier glory…. Control of the sport shifted firmly to the North, with New York as its capital.”1 As New York solidified its place as the economic center of the nation, it was the only state that had the financial underpinnings to support racing on a grand scale. It also had the population to pay admission into the racetracks in vast numbers, which became an increasingly important source of revenue for the tracks, which was then used to fund the largest race purses in the country.2 The increased attendance drove, and was driven by, increased gambling opportunities on races, and that gambling would be the lightning rod that drew the progressive reformers and convinced them that racing was a moral danger that need to be rooted out. But while the progressives were attacking horse racing, the Army was finally facing the seriousness of its remount problem, and asking its

1 Adelman, A Sporting Time: New York City and the Rise of Modern Athletics, 1820-70, 82.
2 Roberston, The History of Thoroughbred Racing in America, 91.
officers their opinions on how to address it. They gave their opinions freely, and between them arrived at very effective solutions, or at least solutions that would be effective if the government would enact them. The obstacles created by the decentralized architecture of the government, and the nation’s continuing aversion to a professional army, proved extremely difficult to overcome, even as the progressives made the issue more urgent by threatening the most important source of suitable breeding stock.

One of the changes that New Yorkers made to increase their gate receipts was to begin to adopt the English style of dash racing. These races did not immediately displace heat racing, but they allowed for more races in a day, which meant, among other things, more races to bet on. The *New York Times* was adamant that horses winning the dash races were significantly faster than their forebears, but had just as much stamina.\(^3\) This change in formats would certainly raise valid questions about the endurance of thoroughbreds, but the change also secured the financial future of racing because of its popularity with spectators—dash races were faster and more exciting, in addition to allowing for more gambling—but also because more races meant more prize money for the owners to help offset the increased costs of racing during the era.\(^4\) Thoroughbreds still unquestionably had their soundness and athleticism tested in these races, and, in support of the *New York Times* writer, today’s racing thoroughbreds race even shorter distances, but in three day eventing, the modern version of the “military test,” the thoroughbred’s supremacy was only challenged when the speed and endurance phase was drastically shortened at the end of the twentieth century from roughly twenty miles, to a

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mere three miles,\textsuperscript{5} lending credence to his argument. More of a problem to the horse supply was that as racing became more profitable, the best thoroughbreds became more expensive to own and breed, and as a result, became less accessible to the average American for breeding the general population of horses.

The leaders of this new era of racing in New York were also the leaders of business in New York and beyond, and were aggressively asserting themselves as leaders in high society. Many members of the Jockey Club, founded in 1894 in New York, were also members of the New York Stock Exchange, leaders of industry, and generally becoming household names. The DuPonts, Belmonts, Phippses, Vanderbilts, and Paulsons not only made the financial world go around, but also made the racing world go around. They owned not only top horses, but also most of the racetracks. And these men who knew that time was money had their tracks close to home so that they could enjoy their leisure without time-wasting travel to such rural venues as Saratoga and the Southern tracks. When the progressives first started to go after racetrack gambling, because they did not understand the economics and logistics of horse-breeding and racing, they got more resistance than they expected, but they were committed so they carried on anyhow.

The people who ran racing were not only the wealthy, but they were generally the newly wealthy. As historian Nicola Beisel argues in her book \textit{Imperiled Innocents}, the \textit{nouveau riche} not only were shaped by the culture and behavior of the old money, but

\textsuperscript{5} Federation Equestre Internationale, \url{http://fei.org/fei/events/olympic-para-games}, accessed February 1, 2014. The speed and endurance phase was shortened in order to keep the sport in the Olympics. The International Olympic Committee was considering dropping the sport because the acreage required to host it was too expensive.
they also shaped that culture. When Anthony Comstock, Charles Evans Hughes, and their fellow reformers went after racing, the respectability of racing and its place in high society was still being contested, with the newly moneyed racing men rapidly gaining the upper hand. Men like August Belmont, whose father made his fortune as an agent of Rothschilds, the Dwyer brothers, who made their fortune as butchers, Leonard Jerome, who made his fortune on Wall Street, along with allies among the Southern elite who had long considered racing an integral part of the display of status, were successfully contesting the status markers of New York high society, creating powerful obstacles to any anti-gambling plans. Cultural mores passed down by the Puritans to their descendants had far more influence on Northern society, where the majority of the Puritans’ descents lived, than on the Southern elite, which meant that New York’s traditional social leaders and the Progressives were more likely to disparage activities, such as racing, that involved gambling. But just as more conservative religious mores spread South after the Revolution, challenging the traditional toleration of gambling, those same mores were being challenged by immigrants and newly emerging groups in the North, who were not of a Calvinist or evangelical religious heritage, and who found the restrictions on such activities arbitrary and annoying. Had reformers begun their anti-gambling crusades earlier, before these turf men had begun to entrench themselves, they might have had more success, but by the time they turned their energies against staking fortunes on educated guesses in the form of racetrack gambling, the men who made their livings by staking fortunes on educated guesses on Wall Street had made too

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7 This spread South of moral reform that challenged gambling parallels the spread of the temperance movement, along with other Progressive causes, into the South during the same period.
much headway in rendering such behavior a matter of personal choice, if not actual masculine prowess, for the reformers to shut them out.

Anthony Comstock was the first major reformer to go after racetrack gambling in New York. His attack on gambling was probably prompted in part by the opening of a number of new tracks in New York during that period. In the Coney Island area alone, the Brighton Beach Racetrack opened in 1879, the Sheepshead Bay Racetrack, in 1880, and Gravesend, in 1885. Comstock gained more notoriety for attacking indecent publications and abortion than for attacking gambling, perhaps because he was much more successful against pornography. When he began his crusade against race track gambling in the 1880s, however, he did not expect the fight to be particularly difficult because he was not trying to get the government to pass new legislation, but simply to enforce what was already on the books, much as the anti-liquor advocates would attempt to do, and much as he, himself, had done crusading against pornography. In defense of Comstock, New York politics, like the politics of many major cities at the time, had sunk to impressive lows of corruption, and civic leaders, both elected and appointed, frequently profited from flouting laws it was their duty to uphold. But Comstock’s head-on style of attack, which had worked for him in the past, did not wipe out gambling.9

Raised in Connecticut, Comstock moved to New York after serving in the 17th Connecticut Volunteers during the Civil War. According to his early biographers, Heywood Broun and Margaret Leach, he became bent on moral reform after an army

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comrade “became corrupted” by some obscene literature. After a successful campaign against pornography he turned his attentions to forcing public officials to crack down on illegal gambling. In the preface to his 218 page “pamphlet” *Gambling Outrages: Improving the Breed of Horses at the Expense of Public Morals*, Comstock posed the question: “honest young men or horses: which?” He came the closest of the progressives to acknowledging the argument of turf- and military men that racing improves the breed of horses. But he wavered between arguing that the moral character of young men is more important than improving horses and that racing does not improve horses. His muddied responses never addressed his own stated question. He neither explained why guarding young men from gambling was more important than breeding good horses, nor why he thought that the horsemen’s argument that racing improves horses was a specious argument. To him it was no doubt obvious that, based on religious grounds, guarding young men, who had souls, was more important than improving horses, which did not, but he phrased his question in practical terms, without addressing the practical military outcomes. The only clearly argued points Comstock made were that some professional gamblers broke the law and that many government officials allowed them to get away with it, and he was able to argue those points by citing both court records and his own involvement in bringing many of these miscreants to justice, or at least to public attention. Most racing men would have agreed with him on those points anyway. At the end of his pamphlet he attempted to answer his original question: “it is

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morals, not horses...that the State must look to in the future for support and defense,”¹² but nowhere did he make a direct argument showing that morals were more important to the defense of that nation than horses.

Following the model of earlier temperance reformers and his own anti-obscenity campaigns, Comstock addressed his argument to “the ‘eminent men of wealth and position’ who [had] petitioned the legislature to ‘improve the breed of horses’ at the expense of the morals of the community.”¹³ And then he proceeded to list a number of gamblers who had stolen money with which to gamble. He made the assumption that since some people broke the law in order to gamble that made gambling itself bad, which, while perhaps morally sound, is not legally sound.¹⁴ And he made this argument despite always presenting himself in his anti-gambling crusade as proving the moral argument to the legalistically-minded with clear legal arguments. By putting the phrase “eminent men of wealth and position” in quotation marks, Comstock implied that he questioned how deserving these turf men of new wealth were of their position in society, adding support to the argument that flux in status was at the heart of much moral reform. And by putting the phrase “improve the breed of horse” in quotation marks, he undermined the validity of the phrase for his readers, without ever directly challenging it with evidence showing that racing did nothing to improve horse breeding. Indeed, Comstock probably could not have even if he were correct because he did not know enough about horse breeding to go beyond the fallacy that if people supported the activity (racing) for reasons

¹²Comstock, Gambling Outrages, 216.
¹³Comstock, Gambling Outrages, 166.
¹⁴While this approach had worked well for him in his anti-pornography crusade, which had more universal moral support, it was outdated by this period, and had already been abandoned by temperance reformers in favor of more effective tactics.
(entertainment, socializing, making money) other than simply a societally beneficial goal (improving horse stock) that the beneficial goal was not met because the beneficial goal was not the sole, or even primary, goal. Even supposing that Comstock was right that horsemen were only in racing for money, that would not alter the beneficial affect racing had on breeding. And most of the leading horsemen had far more interest in racing than just greed and lust for excitement.

The New York State Constitution did ban lotteries, beginning in 1821, and many argued that pool-selling for horseraces was a lottery. In 1877 the New York State Legislature tried to clarify that position and passed legislation more specifically banning pool-selling, but it was a misdemeanor, and was often not enforced without prompting. Comstock made it is his business to prompt the enforcement of that law. One of his most celebrated anti-gambling raids, in July of 1882, was a rousing success in terms of both arrests made and media coverage. He convinced the New York County District Attorney, John McKeon, to go after the “Parole Club” on Barclay Street, which was a private club which he believed ran betting pools on the races. The road to membership allegedly consisted of paying $1 and signing a pledge never to disclose anything about the club even (probably especially) when called as a witness by the legal authorities. Comstock and his associates joined the club, purchased pool tickets for horses in races at a number of different tracks, and, according to the New York Times, even had a winner, after

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15 New York Constitution of 1821, article VII, section 11.


18“A Raid on Pool-Sellers.”
which Comstock took the incriminating evidence to the authorities who then issued a warrant. As was his habit, and not uncommon for the era, he accompanied the police when they raided the club.

In October of 1882, he was in the papers again with an even bigger success that included an unexpected twist. He and his men set out to put the proprietors of the Hunters Point gambling houses out of business. The police had raided them two weeks earlier with little success, so Comstock, and about twenty of his associates raided the gambling “den” by going through the office of the saloon that housed the gamblers, which was owned by the Long Island City Coroner, James Robinson. Robinson initially slammed the door shut in Comstock’s face, but Comstock kicked in the panels of the door, charged through the splintered door into the room, and seized thousands of dollars worth of gambling paraphernalia. In addition to bagging copious amounts of evidence, he also gained a charge of assault from the coroner himself. Comstock counter-sued, and the case dragged on through April of 1884, when Comstock finally agreed to drop his counter-suit if the coroner would drop the original charges.

With these raids, Comstock claims to have removed the gamblers from Queens County. But the gamblers just went to Kings County, a “pestiferous center of thieving.”

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as Comstock referred to it, where they apparently met with friendlier public officials. In November of 1884, for example, Justice Delehanty had Comstock arrested on flimsy charges that would ultimately not stick, the night before Comstock was planning a major raid on pool sellers in Kings County. Comstock publicly, and probably accurately, referred to them as “glaring offenders against the law.” Comstock would not only insist that officials like Justice Delehanty and numerous sheriffs and other police officers be arrested and indicted, but would go directly to Governor Grover Cleveland, and later to his successor David B. Hill, both Democrats, to attempt to get successive Kings County District Attorneys Isaac S. Catlin (a Republican who would soon change party affiliation to Democrat) and James W. Ridgeway (another Democrat) indicted. They were brought before the Bacon Investigating Committee, a committee of the New York State Legislature called to investigate political corruption, in 1887, but the committee recommended only Ridgeway face penalties, and Governor Hill declined to act. The Democrats, with their Tammany Hall machine, became the party of horse racing, while the Republican Party, led by its progressive wing, became racing’s opposition. This followed what became the standard political division on moral issues of the era, at least in the North and Midwest.

24Comstock, Gambling Outrages, 24.
26“Anthony Comstock on Pool-Selling.”
27Comstock, Gambling Outrages, 15.
While pool-selling was clearly rendered illegal by the New York State Legislature in 1877, the practice of book-making had not yet arrived from England by that year and so was not specifically mentioned in the 1877 legislation. Pool-selling is a form of gambling wherein a bettor bids on the right to take the pool of money if “his” horse wins. One bettor might risk a low amount for a horse that was a longshot, when another would have to bid much higher for right to take the pool if the favorite won. In this form of betting, the gamblers themselves set the odds by what they are willing to bid on each horse in the race. The pool-seller would get a cut of the pool, but would not directly set the odds, and his take was not affected by which horse won. In bookmaking, a gambler would place a bet with a bookmaker, who would offer specific odds on individual horses, resulting in essentially a bet between the gambler and bookmaker, with the bookmaker betting that any one of the other horses in the field would beat the one specific horse the gambler had chosen. In this form of betting, the bookmaker directly sets the odds, and his income is directly affected by which horse wins.\(^{30}\)

That bookmaking was not specifically outlawed did not stop Comstock from going after the bookmakers at Jerome Park, a track owned by Leonard Jerome\(^{31}\) in the Bronx. Jerome was one of the Jockey Club set—the “eminent men of wealth and position”--whom Comstock attacked in his anti-gambling book. The bookies’ attorneys argued that bookmaking was not covered under the pool-selling law (even though it was the same act in essentials—gamblers betting on horses they had no direct ties to), and the “Jerome Park Villa Site and Improvement Company” also sued the Board of Police

\(^{30}\) Roberston, *The History of Thoroughbred Racing in America*, 93–94.

\(^{31}\) Leonard Jerome was a Wall Street tycoon who would eventually be best known for being Winston Churchill’s grandfather.
Commissioners and made a motion to keep the police from interfering with the bookies for the duration of the Jerome Park meet while the case was being decided. Comstock was furious because the judge allowed the case. The tactics that had been successful when he attacked prostitution were not working anywhere near as well against gambling.

All of this publicity was a double edged sword for Comstock. On the one hand, it generated support from like-minded citizens in the city, but it also generated much ill will among citizens who were not like-minded, and it eventually began to generate action among the non-like-minded-but-politically-connected citizens. When Comstock went after the police in Gravesend, near Coney Island, for winking at pool-selling going on right under their noses, Comstock was unsuccessful and “a jeering crowd followed the officers, and seemed to rejoice exceedingly at the poor results which attended the raid.”

Comstock reported that many attempted to bribe him, and the annual report of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, the organization that employed him, claimed in January of 1884 that “there was an offer to put $20,000 in cash in the letter box on his office door if certain parties were ‘let up on,’” but it does not state who those parties were. Compared to his annual salary of $4,000, the alleged bribe was a handsome sum, but not enough to tempt Comstock. Indeed, even if he were in the business of suppressing vice for the money, which he was not, his salary was quite impressive for the day, which would have reduced the temptation to succumb to illegal


35"Licentious French Art: Mr. Comstock on the Work of the Society for Which He is Agent."
financial incentive. Such was Comstock’s stature that some inventive criminals blackmailed gamblers with the threat of going to Comstock. Herbert Grey, an 83-year-old former constable in Coney Island, and Brooklyn resident, was arrested for a widespread blackmail scheme whereby he would seek out gambling houses and exact hush money in exchange for not going to Comstock with his findings. He claimed to have influence with Comstock, but Comstock testified against him in court, as one would expect since the claim of association with blackmail (and, worse, the implied subsequent lack of legal action against the gamblers) infuriated him. He addressed the accusations specifically in *Gambling Outrages*; indeed addressing these accusations seems to be one of his primary motives for writing the book.

By 1885 the racing powers decided they had had enough of Comstock’s activities, and Republican Assemblyman Jonas S. Vanduzer introduced a bill to make pool selling legal at race tracks to put an end to it. Comstock testified before the Assembly Judicial Committee, reiterating the arguments from his pamphlet *Gambling Outrages* against pool selling and the dangers it posed to society. The committee apparently agreed to give the bill a negative report to the Legislature, but this was just the beginning of the pro-racing powers’ counter attack against Comstock.

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38 Despite his reputed moral and ethical purity, Comstock himself did not always obey the law to the letter. When one of his raids in Long Island City was foiled by a warrant of arrest issued for him, he resisted arrest and ran away. He was convinced, probably correctly, that the warrant was a ploy by complicit police officials to thwart his raid. He was arrested later in the day and held until nighttime when he was “discharged on his own recognizance.”(see “Accused of Malfeasance,” *The New York Times*, 1884, 30 November 1884, 7.) This did little to undermine his reputation with his supporters, and he continued to make life difficult for gambling and racing interests in New York.

In February of 1887, Democratic Assemblyman Eugene S. Ives, of New York County, introduced what came to be called the “Ives Pool Bill.” The bill would make pool selling off track property illegal, but would allow it on the tracks, during race meetings. It was prepared by the American and Coney Island Jockey Clubs and was backed by many of the same petitioners as Vanduzer’s bill had been, including: August Belmont, W.K. Vanderbilt, Pierre Lorillard, W.R. Travers, Roscoe Conkling, Ogden Mills, Perry Belmont, William Jay, and Joseph Pulitzer. Given such powerful backers, Comstock was not going to have an easy time thwarting the bill, and he threw himself into the fight with the fervor for which he had become famous.

His first endeavor after lobbying Republican Senator John E. Smith, representing the rural counties of Herkimer, Otsego and Madison, was “getting the senate by the ears for nearly two hours over the evils of gambling,” and of pool selling in particular, and he managed to get the bill sent to the judiciary committee where he hoped it would be killed. He also tried to get a counter amendment introduced that would strengthen the penalties for pool selling by making it an offense punishable by imprisonment instead of just a fine. By these measures he managed to get the bill delayed. And it was at this time that the Bacon Committee, which itself came into being at least in part as a result of Comstock’s work, was looking into the actions of Brooklyn’s municipal corruption, including law enforcement officials’ inactions against gambling, and that investigation

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further bogged down the discussion of the bill. While the Bacon Committee was charged with the task of investigating all of the corruption in Brooklyn, one of its primary targets was Kings County District Attorney James W. Ridgeway, whom Comstock had been accusing of not only not going after gamblers, but of letting them off when Comstock and his crew forced the police to arrest them. And Comstock not only publicly accused the man, but went as far as laying his charges before the governor to try to force his hand in the matter. During the hearings, Ridgeway argued that it was a matter of a district attorney’s discretion to dismiss cases that even though they were violation of the law, it would be repugnant to the will of the people to pursue, and that since he was reelected against a candidate who claimed that Ridgeway was a friend to gamblers, that his actions were for the “approbation of the people.” He also claimed that Comstock’s “attitude, manner, the means he employed to get notoriety” not only made Ridgeway dislike him, but that they had made him “obnoxious to Messrs. Jerome, Purdy, Belmont, Sanford, and many other members of the Coney Island Jockey Club, who thought he [Comstock] was a public nuisance.” Ridgeway also made public accusations that Comstock was a blackmailer, and that he was being paid off by the book makers who had regular payments on their books to one A.C.

44 “Mr. Ridgway Safe,” The New York Times, 1887, 1 July 1887, 4.
45 “Between Lawyer Parsons and the District Attorney,” Brooklyn Eagle, March 21, 1887.
46 “Mr. Ridgeway’s Discretion.”
47 “Mr. Ridgeway’s Discretion.”
48 “Investigation: Ordered by the Assembly to Made in Brooklyn Affairs,” Brooklyn Eagle, February 9, 1887.
49 “Between Lawyer Parsons and the District Attorney.”
The Bacon Committee ultimately recommended the removal of Ridgeway, though Governor Hill declined to do so and the *New York Times* offered backhanded support to Comstock pointing out that “everybody knows that there are some reforms that cannot be effected by persons of entirely balanced minds...[and so] Mr. Comstock has been a very useful person” by going after the pool sellers when no one else was willing.

Comstock’s efforts only succeeded in making him more obnoxious than ever to the racing set and their proponents in the legislature. Ives was able to get his bill passed on April 21 (despite the *Times* ironically laying odds of twenty to one against the bill). The act was a great victory for the proprietors of racing since it legalized pool selling only on the grounds of the race tracks, and for thirty days a year, rather than the original twenty day period proposed. So not only would people still pay to come to the track, thus earning the tracks the money to offer purses for the races, but it seriously handicapped the competition by having the pool selling only legal on the tracks, not at independent pool rooms. The price exacted from the urban representatives for this favorable development was a five percent tax on admission receipts of the tracks to go towards awards for horses, cattle and other livestock, to be awarded at the New York State and County fairs, which rendered the bill beneficial to the rural constituencies as well.

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50 “The Reports: Brooklyn’s Affairs as Judged by the Committee,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, May 11, 1887.


55 New York State Legislature, “Ives Pool Bill,” in *An Act Prescribing the Period in Each Year During Which and the Terms Under Which Racing May Take Place Upon the Grounds of Associations*
This defeat seems to have marked a turning point in Comstock’s career. In his fight against obscenity he lost plenty of battles, but never the war. With the passage of the Ives Pool Bill he seemed to have lost the war against racetrack gambling. He continued to fight with his usual tenacity, but met with little success against the forces of racing, and every time it looked like he might be making headway, the legislature would disappoint him. He continued to be a major force among reformers, but his greatest glories were behind him.

The Ives Pool Bill made professional gambling legal for the first time in New York. Whereas gambling had heretofore been governed by laws which were understood to render gambling legal among private individuals only, the Ives bill specifically stated that pool selling was legal on the tracks during the race meetings. Many of those who opposed gambling on religious grounds were horrified by this development because to them anything short of “thou shalt not...” was condoning the act and sanctioning sin. Pragmatists thought that pool selling was going on regardless of what the legislature said, and believed that in regulating it they would at least gain some control over the practice.

Class prejudice played into the legislation as well. The pool rooms were primarily in poorer areas of the city, often areas with large immigrant populations, and conveniently located were an average working man could easily drop in to make a wager on his lunch break. This convenience lent fuel to the arguments that pool rooms were leading working men into temptation. With the passing of the Ives bill, the argument that the week-willed poor were lured into throwing away the rent on a chance on a horse were weakened because, as one editorial put it, “if a man goes a dozen miles or so to bet on a

horse race, it’s safe to infer that he’s seeking after instead of being led into temptation.”

As early as 1885, there were grumblings from the Coney Island men that “the aristocrats up there [in the Bronx and Queens] were allowed to do as they pleased for pleasure, but at Coney Island men who devoted their time exclusively to what was countenanced at Jerome Park were arrested and their business broken up.”

The “aristocrats” of course were actually the newly wealthy who were vigorously asserting their position in the upper echelons of society. As others have argued before, this group’s adoption of European aristocratic habits (including horse racing) helped them circumvent their lack of American aristocratic lineage. The success of people like Leonard Jerome, August Belmont and William Travers in separating themselves in the eyes of the general masses from the fray of poor immigrant gamblers that more obviously threatened the established society’s order of things, demonstrates why reformers like Comstock had such a difficult time going after them. Indeed, even Comstock referred to Leonard Jerome and Philip Dwyer as “gentlemen who are incapable of dishonesty.”

These new aristocrats were primarily a threat only to the old aristocrats, as the lower reaches of society had ceased to distinguish between the two groups.

With the support of the racing elite, the years between 1879 and 1905 saw a great increase in the number of tracks in the New York metropolitan area, which caused reformers to further question how racing improved horse breeding, since so many of the horses which raced on the new tracks were of lesser quality than those found at Jerome Park or Saratoga. An editorial sardonically asked “are these equine rats at Coney Island

58 “Anthony Comstock on Pool-Selling.”
the improved horses? They look like shipwrecked mules, graduates of the towpath and cavalry service.”59 The sudden abundance of tracks increased the racing opportunities for horses which would otherwise have been sold into service pulling horse trolleys and performing other necessary duties of urban horsepower. Compared to the top racers they were of poor quality, and would never make it into breeding service, but once trained for work they were better suited to, such as pulling streetcars or becoming livery horses,60 they were the very same serviceable horses that city dwellers had unknowingly come to rely on thoroughbred breeders for in their daily lives. As to their looking like cavalry veterans, that remark is doubly telling. The cavalry mounts journalists of that time were familiar with were the few worn out survivors of the Civil War and the Indian campaigns. Because the Civil War so seriously depleted the horse population of the United States, because the military horse procurement procedure was in crisis (an issue the military was finally about to begin addressing), and because the cavalry could not afford to retire any horse that was still serviceable, those “graduates” of the cavalry service were often the dregs of the equine population rather than those best suited for the work. A horse used in work it was not suited to was far more likely to become worn down and injured, whether it was a race horse which should have been a riding horse, or a cavalry mount which should have been a pleasure mount, and in that sense there was no doubt a strong resemblance between the broken-down racehorses and the broken-down cavalry horses. It takes a highly trained eye to see the qualities, good or bad, in a skinny, injured, and


60. A livery horse was a horse for hire, much like a modern rental car, and as equally relied upon by city dwellers who did not have the space or funds to own their own.
demoralized horse, and few of the people passing judgment on racing had that trained eye.

When the Ives pool bill passed the legislature, it still needed the governor’s signature to become law. In the arguments for and against the governor signing the Ives bill, General Dan Butterfield, a prominent Union general of the Civil War, reminded Governor Hill that the ramifications of the bill went well beyond mere gambling by pointing out to him that “the Southerners were far better equipped cavalrymen than the Northerners when the rebellion broke out, simply because they had all their lives been interested in improving the breed of their horses and in bringing out their fine points on the turf.” This opinion was shared by virtually all cavalrymen during the war, and the history of the cavalry action of the war bears it out. Unfortunately for the nation as a whole, most of those Southern horses were killed during the war, and the South had not yet recovered sufficiently to recommence racing and breeding on a significant scale. This loss made it all the more important that New York, the center of Northern, and now national, racing encourage both racing and the breeding it fostered.

But New York racing men still faced strong challenges. Calvinist Protestants had a major cultural influence on the Progressive movement, and one of their main arguments against gambling was that it was not productive labor. Indeed, the gambler was merely an opportunist making money off of other men’s toil. This idea was of particular significance at this period in the nation’s history, especially, again, in New York, because speculation on Wall Street was the new fuel, in the form of cheaper capital, for the economy. Indeed it circles back to the issue of the social status of the new elite, most of

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whom were connected to Wall Street. As Ann Fabian discusses in her book *Card Sharps, Dream Books and Bucket Shops: Gambling in 19th Century America*, part of the reason gambling became such a hot-button issue at the end of the nineteenth century is that as more and more people were making their living by legalized gambling in the stock and commodities exchanges, the culture as a whole developed a need to distinguish between immoral gambling and this new economic reality that they were not particularly comfortable with. To make matters more confusing, bucket shops, where people could place bets on how stock prices would rise or fall, became extremely prevalent after the invention of the stock ticker. David Hochfelder argues that was how average middle-class Americans first made their way into stock market investing, but because they were not actually buying stock certificates, it was illegal gambling. Bucket shops would do their best to blur the line between what they did and what legal stock brokers did, which only served to further muddy the moral waters. For men like Comstock, slighting the new elite by such tactics as calling them honorable in quotation marks was a way of pointing out that in his opinion they were no better than the pool sellers and bucket shop owners, while, in contrast, for men like those in the new elite, going after disreputable track owners, pool sellers, and bucket shops was a way of proclaiming themselves to be

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63 To further illustrate the similarities between race-track gambling and playing the stock market, the *Wall Street Journal* reported in 1909, during a period when racing was curtailed, that papers that had previously printed racing tips had substituted stock tips in their place, and at least one sporting editor had been named the financial editor of his paper. “Broad Street Gossip,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 16, 1909.

on an entirely different moral plane from mere gamblers. Speculating on stocks and commodities on Wall Street was to them a good and necessary part of a productive economy, while the gamblers were only productive to themselves. And of course there were others still, often represented publicly by the pool-sellers themselves, who, like Comstock, so no difference between themselves and the Wall Street crowd, but unlike Comstock, thought that gambling was all a matter of choice and that none of it should be discriminated against whether it was at the Coney Island tracks or on Wall Street.

While the legislature was still far from resolving the legal answers to this cultural question, the common law assumption had been that gambling between two private individuals was legal as it was a personal matter. And with the passage of the bill, and its successful defense in the courts, gambling grew more rampant. While part of the intention of the bill was to close down pool houses that had heretofore been ignored by the police, it did not seem to work out that way. The pool sellers came up with the idea of proclaiming themselves couriers and taking the bets to place them on their customers’ behalf at the track. Of course they did not generally take the money to the track, but kept the books themselves, but unless that could be proven they had found a successful loophole in the law. And they were definitely unhappy that their colleagues at the track had been granted special status while they themselves had not.

Another problem arose when Judge Pryor, of the New York Court of Common Pleas, who was a regular at the track, ruled in a case brought by Robert G. Irving against Joseph A. Britton, that pool selling on races was a lottery and therefore unlawful under the state constitution regardless of the Ives law. This ruling was doubly damning for

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racing because the judge was generally seen as a pro-racing man. The tracks were allowed to continue their pool selling pending appeal, but this was cause for great unrest among the racing set. In a way, racing was becoming a victim of its own popularity which had been increasing in New York in the post-bellum years. The more people came to the races, the harder it was for the tracks to be discrete. And increasingly the people racing was attracting were not gentlemen, or those who aspired to be seen as gentlemen, but those who wanted to make money quickly.

 Whereas earlier the gentlemen who raced had not raised much ire because they were established socially and financially and behaved with decorum, the new breed of sporting man was very much seen as a threat by the groups that spawned reformers. These new men were not socially established, were often immigrants or from groups associated with immigrants, they had different moral values and with the anonymity brought about by the ever increasing population of New York, felt no compunction about fleecing people. They were not breeders, and therefore their motivation in racing horses was primarily financial gain by whatever means were convenient.

 The motivation of this new category of racing men was different from the more established racing men who had emotional and financial investments in the horses themselves. These established men, like Belmont and Jerome, were interested in the entire process from breeding to racing and back to breeding, and therefore they wanted to be sure the races were run as fairly as possible to avoid breeding a generation of duds from horses that only appeared to be successful on the track. They bet on their horses to show to their peers that they believed they owned the truly superior horse, not

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particularly to win money. Large sums of money changed hands because they had large sums of money to begin with, and therefore only a large bet would make the point that they had faith in the product of their stables.

If a horse could not run, they sold it. And that was generally easy to do because horses were everywhere needed in daily life. A slow racehorse, or a horse with the physical ability, but not the mental desire, would make a saddlehorse with little retraining. With the exception of racehorse breeders, Americans were notoriously unskilled at, and haphazard about, breeding horses, so for a merchant to get his hands on a slow racehorse was a wonderful thing. He could stand the horse at stud (or breed the mare) and make a fair amount of money simply because people knew something of the horse’s forbears and the horse could be counted on to throw fairly consistent and useful offspring. Race horses, bred consistently for generations, were much more predictable as breeding stock. Even if the horse did not have that special something that makes a horse want to outrun its rivals at the track, its genes were far more predictable and likely to pass on the traits of soundness and athleticism, qualities that the thoroughbred had been selectively bred for for generations. Good horsemen raced horses to see which ones to breed.

Because their genetic makeup was much more uniform, thoroughbreds generally left a clear stamp on their offspring even when bred to horses of scatter-shot breeding. Thus most mare owners could expect a foal that was a significant improvement on its dam when she was bred to a thoroughbred stallion. The outcross also generally benefited

\[67\] In fairness to those haphazard breeders, it takes a significant, long term commitment of resources to breed for generations to create a pool of horses whose phenotype and genotype match up, and few people have, or can justify using, the resources required if they only need one new horse every few years.
from what geneticists today refer to as hybrid vigor; when two sets of dissimilar genes are combined, the resulting offspring often gains a certain increase in robustness over both parents--a mule would be a classic and extreme example of this. Mules are a cross between two separate species, and while they cannot themselves reproduce, they are generally hardier than either their horse or ass parent, hence were invaluable in tough long distance hauling. To a significant degree, this happened when carefully bred racing stock was crossed with horses of different breeding such as Dutch horses or English coach horses. Because thoroughbreds have been so intensely bred, they are today still regularly used as outcrosses for almost all sporting breeds of horse.

When the less scrupulous sporting men built racetracks which started to sprout like mushrooms in the 1880s and 1890s, the horses who would otherwise not have had careers on the track had places to run against other lesser quality horses, and this was where many of the problems arose. Horses that would not ever be bred were raced to make money for the proprietors, and these horses were often involved in swindles to which no one who cared about breeding would subject their stock. It was far easier to prevent a favorite from winning than to make a slower horse run faster, so the most common ways of fixing races involved taking a favorite out in the middle of the night before his race and galloping him for miles to tire him out; paying the jockey off to make sure he did not let the horse run at its top speed; shoeing a horse with unevenly weighted shoes to throw it off its stride; or the simplest way, taking the horse’s water bucket out of his stall for a day and then giving it back to him right before he was to go to the track--the horse would then gulp down the entire bucket out of thirst an not be able to run up to

par because it had fifty pounds or more of water sloshing around in its gut. Anyone who wanted to prove that his horse was good breeding stock would never subject his horse to this because the horse would soon learn to lose. These were just the most common ways to fix a race, and obviously the reason for doing so was gambling. A crooked trainer with a favorite would cut a deal with bookies who would give favorable odds on the favorite in order to entice even more people to bet on him and then give the trainer a cut of the take when the horse lost. Or a trainer could simply bet heavily against his own favorite. The bookies and pool sellers naturally preferred to be cut in on the deal and would become very suspicious of people betting against their own horses and adjust the odds they offered accordingly.

Because the reformers were fixated on racing as a gambling vehicle, as that is how it had found its way into their collective conscious, they apparently did not recognize that apart from these new arrivals, racing generally did not follow that pattern. Of course there were always some cheats, but for the most part, while racing was certainly an exciting sport where one could win money, it was seen by the people who participated in it as a tool of breeders, regardless of whether they themselves were breeders or simply patronized good breeders.

For people who needed a horse as simply a way to get from one place to another, and would never tax the beast’s abilities, breeding was not particularly important to them and they might not see the connection between the attributes of a well bred horse and a grade, or randomly bred, plug. Moreover, they might see a well bred horse as simply the snobbish designation of “well bred” people. But for anyone who pushed the abilities of

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his mount, good breeding readily became apparent. Obviously the military was one of the main horse consumers that would push the abilities of its mounts to the utmost, though there were civilians who did as well. Salespeople, who travelled from town to town and were increasingly common, needed sturdy horses with endurance for them to be able to cover enough territory to make a living. Dispatch riders needed sound, enduring and fast horses, and so on. While many of these people were beginning to rely increasingly on railroads, railroads were fixed to their tracks, and to get anywhere the tracks did not run, they still needed horses.

These challenges to racing in New York, and by extension the breeding industry, came as the military was having increasing troubles acquiring suitable remounts for its troops in the West. With high quality thoroughbred breeding stock becoming too expensive for the average man to use to breed workaday horses, the population of suitable horses available to the cavalry was dwindling, and the purchasing procedures mandated by congress allowed horse-dealers—the middle-men—to inflate prices sufficiently that the few good horses available were too expensive for the army to buy. The army had a significant and growing problem, and knowledgeable military horsemen began to seriously promote the idea of the United States government following the example of European governments by starting to breed its own remounts.


According to Colonel (Brevet General) E.A. Carr, veteran of almost fifty years in the cavalry service, a bill for a government breeding program had been suggested as early as 1856 or 1857 by Isaiah Rynders, a sportsman and Tammany Hall politician. By 1868, the Quartermaster General’s office generated a report for that fiscal year that included the recommendation that the government establish a stock farm to supply the cavalry with mounts to use in Texas. The concept did not fit with the ideology of the citizen soldier, since it implied a reliance on professional troops under federal control, and was modeled on the armies of what many Americans would have considered tyrannical monarchies, like that of Germany. The idea was, however, revived again by Captain George Pond of the Quartermasters Department, in 1884, with Fort Leavenworth suggested as the ideal site for a stock farm. And in 1890, it got another boost, however unintentionally, when the Office of the Quartermaster General began polling quartermaster, cavalry and artillery officers about possible changes in horse purchasing regulations. The responding officers were all professional military men who were fed up with what they saw as the inefficiency of the current system. They were not generally supporters of the ideology of the citizen-soldier, and so they had no objection to institutions which supported their ability to do their duty more safely and effectively. The responses to this request eventually gave the government a strong foundation on which to plan the program that came to fruition more than two decades later.

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74 Ibid.
The Quartermaster Department was forced into action on the purchasing question due to cavalry reaction to a seemingly minor change in the annual requisition law from Congress. Up until a few years earlier, the requisition bills had required a purchasing board, and cavalry officers generally were the primary board members. But in the 1887 and 1888 the law passed containing the provision “that no part of this appropriation shall be paid out for horses not purchased by contract, after competition duly invited by the Quartermaster’s department and inspection by such department.”

This change meant that instead of a board of primarily cavalry officers inspecting horses, a representative of the quartermaster department would do it. Generally, this was not an officer, but a civilian contractor. Presumably the change was an effort at cost-cutting, but the results were a rapid decline in the satisfaction of cavalry officers with the remounts supplied their troops. For many of them, it was the catalyst that spurred them to action, calling for a complete overhaul of the already distressing remount system.

In 1887, Lieutenant S.C. Robertson of the First Cavalry responded to this call with a thorough essay in the Journal of the Military Service Institution of the United States, discussing his suggestions to remedy the problems. He proposed a depot system where military horses could be sent for training and eventual requisitioning by units as needed, and he also suggested a breeding farm. And in 1888, a large group of cavalry officers founded the U.S. Cavalry Association, whose design was “professional unity and


76 Robertson, “The Remount Question in the United States Cavalry.”
improvement, and the advancement of the cavalry service generally.” In the very first issue of their journal, Captain Moses Harris, 1st Cavalry, wrote an article recommending Lieutenant Roberston’s suggestions be acted upon and giving further reasons why the current system was unworkable. In the next issue, Captain Albert Woodson, 5th Cavalry, offered an essay specifically urging that the remount issue be dealt with by means of creating a government breeding farm or farms.

The Quartermaster decided to address these suggestions with a survey. This request for the officers’ feedback accompanied a copy of a report by Lieutenant Colonel Lawton, of the Inspector General’s Office, outlining his observations from his most recent inspection tour and his suggestions for improving the system the army used for obtaining remounts. What he saw on his inspection tour was that what had been a primary source of prime riding horses—the middle states—no longer had a sufficiently strong riding horse market to make it worth the while of breeders to specialize in them, and that those breeders were instead catering to the increasing draft horse market. The result was that in order to meet what demand there was for saddle horses, breeders would cross draft stallions on lighter mares, producing horses which fit the broad specs of the cavalry in terms of height and weight, but had conformation utterly unsuitable to cavalry work. Lawton took up the cause of the depot system. He suggested that the army create “one or more permanent depots at suitable points where it may be known that a certain

77 “Constitution and By-Laws of the U.S. Cavalry Association,” Journal of the United States Cavalry Association I, no. 1 (March 1888): 121. This type of approach to growing the government to meet problems by forming association was typical in America, and was also seen in such areas as parks and conservation.


79 “Report of Lieutenant Colonel Lawton, War Department, Inspector General’s Office, March 27, 1890,” March 27, 1890, 6, Record Group 92, Box 12, Entry 65, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC.
number of suitably bred colts will be purchased by the U.S. and where these colts shall be matured, broken and trained, [which] will encourage the breeding in their vicinity [of] a sufficient number of suitable animals, at reasonable prices.”  

He suggested these depots as a reaction to the changes in American breeding trends. With the depots, he hoped the army would create a sufficient market in the area of the depots that breeders would find it worthwhile to breed good riding horses.

The opportunity to officially weigh in on purchasing procedures brought out strong opinions from virtually all of the officers polled. Most emphatically, they addressed an issue that Lawton did not, and that was doing away with the contract purchases of horses. By law, the army had to purchase its horses, and all other supplies, by contract, and the contract went to the lowest bidder. This system meant that the army agreed to pay a fixed amount per head for horses that met army regulations. In Washington, this made fiscal sense. In the field this made no sense, at least according to the vast majority of cavalry officers. They referred to it as “the bane of the present system,” and “a dead failure.” The issues were generally as follows: it was in the contractors’ best interest to purchase the lowest quality horses that they could get past inspection; not all quartermaster officers could tell, beyond the easily measured height and weight, if the horses were appropriate for cavalry work (and often passed horses that did not even conform to height and weight specifications); contractors were unscrupulous

80 Ibid., 7.
81 “Letter from Lt. Col. Hughes to Quartermaster General, Headquarters, Department of the Platte, Omaha, Nebraska,” July 1, 1890, 1, Record Group 92, Box 12, Entry 65, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC.
82 A.E. Wood, “Letter from Capt. AE Wood to Chief Quartermaster, Dept. Cal., Presidio of San Francisco, September 15, 1890,” n.d., 1, Record Group 92, Box 12, Entry 65, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC.
about passing off unsound horses as sound; and they paid breeders too little for their horses to encourage the breeders to breed good riding horses when they could make more money in other markets.

Explaining the difficulty of the lowest bidder approach, Lieut. Col. George Weeks, Deputy Quartermaster General, explained to his superior officers how a contractor did business:

He fixes a price of, say 66 per cent. of his bid, to be paid for the horses which pass [government inspections]. He pockets 33 per cent. of the allotment, takes no responsibility, does no work that the Quartermaster could not do, and the Government gets horses just one-third below the grade it could get without the contract system…. Nothing could be more unbusinesslike. It must continue as long as the law requires this system of purchase.83

So if the army contracted for $100 horses, the contractor would supply it with $66 horses, for which he would charge the army $100. Obviously the contractor should expect to receive some profit for his efforts, but allowing the contractor that large a profit margin was fiscally irresponsible on the part of the army. Over and over, cavalry officers stationed across the country echoed this description of how the government was not getting the grade of horses it was paying for. When a unit in Walla Walla, Washington was trying to get a contract filled for remounts, “good horses were brought into Walla Walla from the surrounding country and offered to the contractor at $100 each, but the contractor would not pay that amount for them and they were not presented to the

83 George Weeks, “Letter from Lieut. Col. George Weeks to Quartermaster General of the United States, San Antonio Texas, August 2, 1890,” August 2, 1890, 2, Record Group 92, Box 12, Entry 65, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC.
The contractor would not pay the $100 despite the contract allotting him well over $100 per head for the remounts. While they did not all agree on whether or not suitable horses could be had for the average $140 available per horse, the vast majority of officers wished to be allowed to shop in the open market so that they could at least get $140 horses for their $140, instead of getting $95 ones.

For the most part, by 1890 the horses the cavalry was receiving under this system were either draft crosses, generally from the East and Midwest, or western range horses. Neither was popular. The draft cross, “a clumsy brute at best,” was roundly condemned as having straight shoulders, a big head, flat feet and a lumbering gait. They might meet the height and weight requirements, but the straight shoulders, which are advantageous for a draft horse in harness that spends its work day pulling hard against a collar across its shoulders, and is always in the equine equivalent of low gear, were a distinct disadvantage in a cavalry mount which needs to be able to swing its shoulders freely forward to achieve any reasonable speed, and to avoid jarring its rider out of the saddle.

The flat feet, perfectly suited to soft, plowed fields, was crippling to a horse that needed to traverse rough country, as it subjects the sole of the animal’s foot to damaging contact with rocks and other debris. The large head generally made for a horse with an insensitive mouth, and which was hard to maneuver with any precision. These horses also tended to have a draft horse’s phlegmatic disposition which meant that a trooper would become exhausted just from the work of trying to convince his mount to keep up with the regiment on a routine march.

84 D.R. Clendenin, “Report by Colonel D.R. Clendenin, Division of the Pacific, March, 1890,” March 1890, Record Group 92, Box 10, Entry 63, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC.

The western range horses were worse. They were “vicious, stubborn, fractious, and never reliable. They have to be broken after every short period of rest, have no more endurance and are dangerous to groom and handle in the stables.”\textsuperscript{86} They were generally considered undersized and unable to hold up to rigorous marching, and while many attributed their uncooperative dispositions to the manner in which they were raised, never being handled until they were brought in off the range as full grown horses to be broken, others were convinced they were inherently nasty. Many officers complained of their men spending too much time in the hospital from being kicked or bitten by the western horses, with some blaming the western horses for high numbers of desertions among the men “from pure disgust.”\textsuperscript{87} Within the span of approximately eight months, one unit had twenty four men who had to be treated for injuries, many serious, from handling their latest batch of western remounts.\textsuperscript{88} That they were still causing injuries months after their arrival, does not speak well of their training or temperaments. Captain C.H. Murray quoted his sergeant as saying “before you can use them you have to kill them first, and then they ain’t any good because they are ruined.”\textsuperscript{89} And the same captain wrote that “the question between western and eastern horses is about the same as the question of smooth
bore vs. rifles. Would any one advise the use of blunderbussses because they are cheap?

90 Any price paid for a horse they could not use was too much.

In theory, because these horses did not meet the official standard for cavalry mounts, they should have been rejected by the inspection boards. Most attributed the failure of the boards to incompetent horsemen, or simply non-horsemen, not being able to understand the standard beyond the easily measurable elements of height and weight. A few, such as Colonel E.A. Carr, suggested that members of the inspection boards would pass inferior stock when bribed by the contractors.91 Major J.G.C. Lee, of the Quartermaster division, suggested the most charitable reason: “The contractor having made a contract say at $130 or $140 per head, offers the public $60 or $70 thus securing the offer of only the poorer class of horses. After inspecting a month or so, the inspectors conclude that the country affords no better animals, and pass the best of the ones offered.”92 As a quartermaster officer, Lee certainly would not want his men to appear incompetent, and he may have been latching onto a suggestion already made by Captain Moses Harris in an article in the Cavalry Journal two years earlier,93 but the logic of his explanation is compelling. Harris, however, also suggested that when the quartermaster corps decided the horses could not be found, it would dissolve the board with officers who rejected the horses, and form a new one that would pass the horses.94 Certainly

90 Ibid., 2.


92 J.G.C. Lee, “Letter from J.G.C. Lee to Quartermaster General Fo the Army, Vancouver Barracks, Washington, November 17, 1890,” November 17, 1890, 2, Record Group 92, Box 12, Entry 65, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC.

93 Harris, “Remounts,” 22.

94 Ibid.
some quartermaster officers were not capable of discerning the finer points of a horse, as it takes considerable study to do so well, but even the most competent officer who is being pressed to hurry up and supply remounts would likely eventually figure that a sub-standard horse was more use to a trooper than no horse.

An official investigation into the circumstances surrounding the remounting of a unit at Fort Walla Walla illustrates the difficulty cavalry officers faced when they tried to insist upon useable remounts, per the inspection guidelines. Lieutenant Nance, commander of one of the troops of cavalry stationed at Walla Walla, reported that his troop had received fifty three remounts, essentially remounting the entire troop at once, in October of 1890. Thirty seven of them had come from a ranch in Oregon, and of those thirty seven, only seven had actually been used as saddle horses. “Of the remaining thirty, all were wild and eleven of them vicious and dangerous for even expert horsemen to handle.” The horses had apparently been marched 160 miles in four days to reach the post, and as they rested and recovered, after their inspection, they grew rapidly worse. “After they became better conditioned, four more of them became unapproachable.” Indeed the troop had to be relieved of its regular post duties for a month in order to attempt to train their remounts to a level of usefulness. When another officer was questioned on the quality of the mounts in April 1890, he responded that they had

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95 J.T. Nance, “Letter from J.T. Nance to The Post Adjutant, Fort Walla Wall, Washington, April 4, 1890,” April 4, 1890, 2, Record Group 92, Box 10, Entry 63, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC.

96 Ibid., 3.

97 Ibid., 5.
improved, and by then fully forty five of them were useful. The officer who initially inspected the horses argued that “it is quite possible that some of these young horses in the hands of recruits and indifferent soldiers may have developed an intractable disposition since purchase,” but that was not his fault. No action was apparently ever taken beyond copious rounds of depositions, so the result was lost time, much paperwork, and doubt in higher ranks about Nance’s abilities as a horseman. This was what cavalry officers could expect when they spoke up about the inferior horses being passed by inspections boards.

The horses the contractors presented were generally not only below the necessary standard of quality, but not of any uniform standard beyond occasionally being of similar height and weight. Uniformity was not only important in the sense that the horses needed to meet the best conformation standards to produce long term effective service, but army equipment did not come in various sizes and shapes, and if a horse’s back deviated from the standard for which a saddle was shaped, that horse was destined for a term of service, probably short, consisting of constant pain from saddle bars gouging its flesh. The horse would no doubt be considered to have a poor temperament because it would likely buck or kick out of self-preservation, and even if it behaved well, it would be crippled after its first long march carrying a fully equipped soldier. The contract system made acquiring uniform remounts virtually impossible.


Most officers were convinced that if the army could purchase directly from the farmers who bred the horses, they could encourage farmers to breed suitable horses because the farmers would be getting paid the army price rather than the contractor price, making it much more worth their while. Similarly to the crop farmers and populists of the same era, they wanted to cut out the middle-man. And as Captain Charles Morton stated: “Farmers do not jockey their horses so much as dealers.”\(^{100}\) Dealers were roundly credited with “genius in shrewdness, dexterity and cunning”\(^{101}\) for their unscrupulous dealings such as starving rank horses so that they would appear docile—standard accusations toward horse dealers. As Lieutenant J.G. Galbraith wrote, “our lawmakers, who imposed this complicated system of contract purchase on the army, doubtless thought that this would prevent fraud and favoritism. Every Quartermaster knows that fraud is as easily committed under one system as the other; and that laws cannot make officers honest.”\(^{102}\) And Lieutenant Finley argued that with the contract system, “the intention of the government would seem to be to distribute its moneys, so far as its own interests will permit,[…]offering a market to many horse breeders and worthy farmers[…]and thus supporting a worthy national industry. [But] does not the present system support the contractor? It may be safely said that, as a rule, the contractor is not a

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\(^{101}\) James F. Randlett, “Letter from Major James F. Randlett to the Assistant Adjutant General, Fort Robinson Nebraska, June 9, 1890,” June 9, 1890, 1, Record Group 92, Box 12, Entry 65, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC.

\(^{102}\) J.G. Galbraith, “Letter from Lieutenant J.G. Galbraith to the Chief Quartermaster, Fort Custer, Montana, June 9, 1890,” June 9, 1890, 4, Record Group 92, Box 12, Entry 65, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC.
horse breeder.” A contract for saddles would be made with a saddler who would manufacture a specified number of a specific model of saddles for an agreed upon price per saddle. But horse contractors did not “manufacture” the horses they sold to the government—they were resellers—and supporting the middleman was never the government’s intention. The problem with the contract system was that horses, as living breathing individuals, were not interchangeable, their quality could not be assessed until years after their “manufacture”, and they cannot be efficiently mass produced to a specific standard by private breeders. Or as Captain J.B. Kerr of the 6th cavalry stated, “they cannot be classed and bought and sold as inanimate things and materials.” In these qualities, they differed fundamentally from everything else the army purchased by contract.

One point the officers were almost unanimous on was that a poor quality horse was bad economy. While some in Washington argued that boards must purchase Western horses because they were cheaper, men like Captain C.H. Murray pointed out that “the frequent and speedy failure, condemnations and consequent sales of broken-down half-breds seems to be forgotten.” Captain Mason agreed with Murray, stating that “the loss to the government in the condemnation of [Western] horses for the one fault

103 Leighton Finley, “Letter from Lieutenant Leighton Finley to the Chief Quartermaster, Fort Apache, Arizona, July 26, 1890,” July 26, 1890, 2–3, Record Group 92, Box 12, Entry 65, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC.

104 Captain J.B. Kerr, “Letter from Captain J.B. Kerr to Major A.S Kimball, Fort Wingate, NM, July 24, 1890,” July 24, 1890, 2, Record Group 92, Box 12, Entry 65, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC.

of viciousness would be more than the excess of price paid for Eastern horses.”¹⁰⁶  Over
and over again, officers pointed out that the horses they were getting for the prices the
government would pay could not hold up “under a weight of 225 to 240 pounds, [and]
break down if pushed, as cavalry horses must be at times.”¹⁰⁷  The cavalry officers knew
how often they needed to replace the less suitable horses, and they were not convinced by
the bureaucrats’ arguments of frugality. “On the ground of economy alone, their
arguments will hardly bear close investigation,”¹⁰⁸ pointed out Captain Murray. None of
the officers voiced any support for the idea that less expensive, less physically suited
horses made economic sense.

Many of the officers agreed that the depot system that Colonel Lawton was
proposing would alleviate some of the remount difficulties they were having. It would
allow the government to purchase suitable horses, and have them well trained, before
they were needed, thus eliminating the urgency that might encourage inspectors to pass
sub-standard horses in order to get a unit mounted and back in the field in a timely
manner. Because training was difficult to determine at the time of purchase due to time
constraints and the ability of sellers to temporarily subdue fractious horses by
withholding feed and water, or other methods, troops often received horses that were “in
a semi-educated state, just fit enough to break up any organization at drill or maneuver,

¹⁰⁶ S.A. Mason, “Letter from S.A. Mason to The Chief Quartermaster, Vancouver Barracks, Washington,
January 13, 1891,” January 13, 1891, 2, Record Group 92, Box 12, Entry 65, National Archives and
Records Administration, Washington DC.

¹⁰⁷ Major Beaumont, “Letter from Major Beaumont to Captain E.B. Atwood, San Antonio, Texas, June 14,
1890,” June 14, 1890, 2, Record Group 92, Box 12, Entry 65, National Archives and Records
Administration, Washington DC.

or to run away with an indifferent trooper at ‘the charge’.” Indeed, as Major James Jackson argued, “suitable, ‘well broken’ horses are becoming difficult to obtain anywhere. Horses that, when purchased, are so ‘thoroughly broken’ as to need no further training, are generally broken down in some way, and last but a short time.” And as Second Lieutenant Alonzo Grey stated, “an old soldier does not wish to give up an old and well trained mount to break ugly, vicious horses for recruits, and recruits do not know enough to break them for themselves.” Even if the veterans had the inclination, or the recruits, the skills, the troopers had no time for this job on top of all of their other daily duties. If the depots could train the remounts before sending them to the units that needed them, the units would be able to use them right away, and there would be far fewer horses condemned as unrideable due to rushed or incompetent training, and far fewer men laid up in the hospital from injuries resulting from attempts to train remounts.

There were other advantages to the depot idea as well. With depots in place, even if the government insisted on keeping the contract system, contracts could be timed so that tardy congressional appropriations would not delay the remounting of troops (which was a complaint of the officers) because the depot could, in essence become a short-

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109 James Jackson, “Letter from Major James Jackson to Major A.S. Kimball, Fort Lowell Arizona, July 22, 1890,” July 22, 1890, 3, Record Group 92, Box 12, Entry 65, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC.

110 Ibid., 2.

111 Alonzo Grey, “Letter from 2nd Lieutenant Alonzo Grey to the Chief Quartermaster, Fort Wingate New Mexico, July 26, 1890,” July 26, 1890, 2, Record Group 92, Box 12, Entry 65, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC.


113 A.R. Chaffee, “Letter from A.R. Chaffee to Assistant Adjutant General, of the Department of the Platte, Fort Du Chesne, Utah, June 2, 1890,” June 2, 1890, 3, Record Group 92, Box 12, Entry 65, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC.
term warehouse for mounts. Congressional delays would be more likely to result in a depot that could not replenish its stock in a timely fashion after supplying a unit with remounts, than to actually delay the remounting of a unit.

With the depots able to serve as a much needed training center, many officers pointed out that the Army could then purchase three or four-year-old horses, and purchase them in the fall when they were much cheaper because owners wanted to sell rather than have the expense of feeding the horses through the winter. In the fall, young horses could “be purchased at least one fourth less than at any other season.”\textsuperscript{114} And a horse who had not yet been trained was already less expensive than a trained one (or, more often, one that a dealer merely claimed was trained). Buying horses at that age also spared them being worked in harness before being trained under saddle. Many officers claimed that horses they received were “stiffened by the too early breaking to the plow and wagon.”\textsuperscript{115} A horse “entering [the depot] at 4 years of age…should be serviceable for 12 to 14 years.”\textsuperscript{116} Essentially, they were arguing that reliable training at the depots, by men with a vested interest in producing well-trained mounts, was cheaper than relying on horses traders because there would be far less waste of condemned horses (and injured men), and would provide troops with horses of known, sound experience, that could be counted on in service without having to be replaced in a matter of a few years.

\textsuperscript{114} J.M. Kelly, “Letter from J.M. Kelly to Major A.S. Kimball, Fort Apache, Arizona, July 20, 1890,” July 20, 1890, 2, Record Group 92, Box 12, Entry 65, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC.

\textsuperscript{115} James Erwin, “Letter from Lieutenant James Erwin to Chief Quartermaster, Presidio of San Francisco, September 10, 1890,” September 10, 1890, 2, Record Group 92, Box 12, Entry 65, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC.

\textsuperscript{116} Chaffee, “Letter from A.R. Chaffee to Assistant Adjutant General, of the Department of the Platte, Fort Du Chesne, Utah, June 2, 1890,” 3.
The depots would also solve the problems of acclimation and disease from the horse markets. Horses heading to the West from the East often needed a period of a number of months to acclimate to the arid west. And while officers generally preferred eastern horses, they needed that period of “acclimatization, [but] after that period had elapsed they were always superior.” As the most often suggested location for the depots were Forts Leavenworth and Riley, both in Kansas, the depots would alleviate this problem to a large extent. They could also serve as quarantine stations for horses purchased at the large horse markets, such as Saint Louis, Missouri. Saint Louis was the largest horse and mule market in the nation as a result of its extensive rail connections and proximity to primary horse raising regions, and as the largest horse and mule market in the country, it was particularly at risk for becoming a hub of contagion, especially as horses were “taken and placed in the immense corrals and stables there to prepare for sale, soon becoming infected with a kind of influenza or some like contagious disorder which has become implanted in the troughs, stalls, &c.” Whatever ailment they had contracted would then incubate and express itself while the horses were in transport to their new units, arriving utterly unfit for service, assuming they did not succumb to the disease en route. For this reason, many also suggested that “to make the depot system complete, the government should own sufficient [railroad] cars of latest and most


118 Finley, “Letter from Lieutenant Leighton Finley to the Chief Quartermaster, Fort Apache, Arizona, July 26, 1890,” 2.

119 While Chicago was the meat market of the nation, it was not quite as conveniently located to the horse-raising regions of the nation as Saint Louis was, and while the urban population that Chicago’s lines were most connected to was a huge market for meat, it was not the largest market for horses and mules. Saint Louis was better situated to serve both the primary producers and the primary markets of horses and mules.

120 “Letter from Lt. Col. Hughes to Quartermaster General, Headquarters, Department of the Platte, Omaha, Nebraska,” 3.
improved patterns…so that horses could then be delivered in good condition, and the risk now run from infected cars reduced to a minimum.”121 There was no point in making the effort to collect good horses and train them well only to lose them to disease on their way to their first posting.

While the depot suggestion was generally quite well received among cavalry officers, many did not think it would be sufficient to garner the army sufficient useable mounts, because no matter how good the purchasing system was, it could not purchase what did not exist. The existence, or not, of sufficient numbers of military-quality saddle horses was a topic of lively debate. There were those who thought the supply was there. For example, Major J.G.C. Lee had “no doubt whatever in my mind that good horses can be obtained in nearly all parts of the country.”122 And many agreed with Colonel Lawton that “more and better horses are bred [in the United States] than in any other country in the world.”123 Lawton qualified his comment slightly by suggesting that the depots would encourage the breeding of good horses, and most officers agreed that that encouragement would be necessary for the supply to become sufficient. On the other side of the argument, far more of the officers agreed with Lieutenant Charles Rhodes who thought that “while horse-breeding is a leading industry in this country, the breeding of cavalry horses is not…and the cavalry horse…must be picked up here and there, where he can be

121 Chaffee, “Letter from A.R. Chaffee to Assistant Adjutant General, of the Department of the Platte, Fort Du Chesne, Utah, June 2, 1890,” 5.


found.”

Captain Mason, in stating that his troops had just received twelve very satisfactory local horses, admitted that “the supply of this same kind is limited and will be so for a number of years,” though he hoped that with the army as a regular purchaser, their numbers would increase because breeders would be encouraged to breed more.

But many, including Lieutenant John Bigelow, thought it folly to “expect by the agency of one or more purchasing depots to stimulate our horse breeders to the evolution of as high and uniform a type of cavalry horse as would be developed on a single government farm.” Lawton, in his report, had stated that “the establishment of breeding farms…would seem hardly necessary or possible in a country like ours where horse breeding is one of the leading industries,” but many agreed with Bigelow. Lawton had tried to counter the increased rumblings for a breeding farm, but the perceived need was becoming much greater. Many, like Lieutenant Scott, insisted that “Government breeding farms situated at suitable points [are]…the only way to ensure the supply of suitable cavalry horses for the service.” Indeed, Lieutenant Leighton Finley argued that “a government stock and breeding farm would be the best, and, ultimately,

124 Charles Rhodes, “Letter from Lieutenant Charles Rhodes to Major Kimball, Fort Wingate, New Mexico, July 21, 1890,” July 21, 1890, 2, Record Group 92, Box 12, Entry 65, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC.


126 John Bigelow, “Letter from Lieutenant John Bigelow, Jr. to the Chief Quartermaster, Fort Grant, Arizona, July 25, 1890,” July 25, 1890, 2, Record Group 92, Box 12, Entry 65, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC.


128 G.L. Scott, “Letter from Lieutenant G.L. Scott to the Chief Quartermaster, Fort Stanton, New Mexico, July 25, 1890,” July 25, 1890, 1, Record Group 92, Box 12, Entry 65, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC.
the least expensive, method of supply of public horses”¹²⁹ and “submitted that it is such a self-evident proposition that any argument…would simply be words wasted.”¹³⁰ Others acknowledged that the argument would be difficult to make because the farms would require “a large original outlay,”¹³¹ and “Congress would probably object to making the necessary appropriation, on the grounds that the Government would be competing with the Farmers and stock man [sic] of the country.”¹³² Indeed, the perception that Army breeding farms “would seem to bring the Gov’t in competition with the horse raising industry,”¹³³ as Major Van Vliet put it, seemed to be the largest anticipated objection. Even though the breeding industry did not see fit to focus on riding horses any more, it did not want to give up the army as an outlet for the horses it did breed. It was a significant part of the large and powerful agricultural lobby, and the idea that “there would be very strong opposition to such a plan on the part of the stock raisers”¹³⁴ seemed enough to make many advocates of the breeding farm idea “suppose this cannot be done.”¹³⁵

¹²⁹ Finley, “Letter from Lieutenant Leighton Finley to the Chief Quartermaster, Fort Apache, Arizona, July 26, 1890,” 1.

¹³⁰ Ibid.


¹³² Henry Carroll, “Letter Form Major Henry Carroll to Chief Quartermaster, Camp Crook, Montana, May 26, 1890,” May 26, 1890, 1, Record Group 92, Box 12, Entry 65, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC.

¹³³ F. Van Vliet, “Letter from Major F. Van Vliet to Major A.S. Kimball, San Francisco, California, July 26, 1890,” July 26, 1890, 3, Record Group 92, Box 12, Entry 65, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC.

¹³⁴ Robert Howze, “Letter from Lieutenant Robert Howze to Major A.S. Kimball, Fort Wingate, New Mexico, July 2, 1890,” July 2, 1890, 1, Record Group 92, Box 12, Entry 65, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC.

But many advocates were sufficiently undaunted by the obstacles that they not only strongly urged the breeding farms be implemented, but they went on to make suggestions for ways that it might function. Lieutenant Rhodes strongly urged that “such farms—one placed in northern latitude and the other in a southern latitude, would subject all the colts bred at such places, to the climatic changes of that latitude, and would hence decrease the disabilities to which many horses are subject, when sent from one latitude to another.”

Lieutenant Kingsbury added that locating the farms in such positions would mean “that horses would not have to be transported any great distance to reach destination [sic].” These officers wanted to be sure that the government consider how location could optimize the usefulness of the breeding farms.

Other officers were more interested in suggesting ways to stock the farms. On one extreme, Major Carroll recommended “that the Government keep suitable stallions, which by crossing with the local mares to be found in the surrounding country would produce the colts required.” His suggestion was that these stallions would simply be an adjunct to the depot system proposed by Colonel Lawton. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Lieutenant Fuller advocated a much more expansive (and detailed) plan:

Such a farm could be stocked with 2000 broodmares and a suitable number of stallions, Jennies and Jacks, and, after the fifth year an output of 800 horses, 400 mules and 800 fillies might reasonably be expected. The 800 fillies, at $75 per

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137 F.W. Kingsbury, “Letter from Lieutenant F.W. Kingsbury to the Chief Quartermaster, Fort Walla Walla, Washington, June 14, 1890,” June 14, 1890, 2, Record Group 92, Box 12, Entry 65, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC.

head, would bring $60,000; a sum which would pay for fifty horse-breakers at $50 per month, and leave $30,000 for forage…. [I would] take 400 square miles of Uncle Sam’s unused territory where the climate and feed were good, for this purpose.\textsuperscript{139}

His plan assumed there was still Federal land available that would produce enough forage to support a large herd of horses. It would also have the government producing its own horses entirely, while Major Carroll’s would create a market of locally bred colts, by quality stallions, for the government to purchase from private breeders when and if it saw fit. Other officers suggested hybrids between these two ideas.

One thing they virtually all agreed on was that what thoroughbred stallions should be the cornerstones of the program. By the 1890s, thoroughbreds bred for the track were becoming very expensive, and, since they were not as suited to draft work as heavier breeds, were not as frequently used for breeding of general-use stock as they once were. Apart from some old-timers, like Colonel Carr, by his own account the oldest cavalry officer then in active service, who boasted of having ridden “a Glencoe horse in my first fight in 1854,”\textsuperscript{140} and a few officers whom others accused of having “overindulged in this amusement [racing] to the detriment of their regimental duties,”\textsuperscript{141} most officers did not advocate that the army breeding farms produce pure thoroughbreds for cavalry use,

\textsuperscript{139} Fuller, “Letter from Lieutenant Fuller to Major A.S. Kimball, Fort Bowie, Arizona Territory, July 24, 1890,” July 24, 1890, Record Group 92, Box 12, Entry 65, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC.

\textsuperscript{140} Carr, “Letter from Colonel E. A. Carr to Major A.S. Kimball, Fort Wingate, New Mexico, September 12, 1890,” 2.

\textsuperscript{141} D.S. Gordon, “Letter from Lieutenant Colonel D.S. Gordon to Major A.S. Kimball, Fort Huachuca, Arizona Territory, July 24, 1890,” July 24, 1890, 4, Record Group 92, Box 12, Entry 65, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC.
except perhaps “for the dress parade troops which are kept East for show.” Indeed, at least one senior officer, Lieutenant Colonel D.S. Gordon, feared that a pure thoroughbred breeding establishment would “gradually result in a horse racing establishment instead of a horse training school.” These officers were not interested in producing pure racing stock.

What they advocated was “crossing the Kentucky thoroughbred with the native mare.” Indeed, such “horse has given good results, and last to the age of 18 or 20 years.” There was strong agreement with Captain Murray that “A half or three fourths bred thoroughbred is the best horse. Intelligence and courage count as much in a horse as in a man. Such horses are trained in less time than broncos, and when they are broken can be relied upon. They also possess better natural gaits, a point of great importance frequently lost sight of...[and] in the end they are the more economical.” Captain William Thompson added that in his 23 years of service, “for stamina, spirit, intelligence, and wonderful endurance, I have never found any horses equal to a ½ [thorough]bred horse.... This class of horse takes more kindly to rough usage, i.e., in all kinds of weather, and living on native grasses, than any other breed in the cavalry service.”

142 Scott, “Letter from Lieutenant G.L. Scott to the Chief Quartermaster, Fort Stanton, New Mexico, July 25, 1890,” 2.


144 Grey, “Letter from 2nd Lieutenant Alonzo Grey to the Chief Quartermaster, Fort Wingate New Mexico, July 26, 1890,” 3.


According to James Jackson, they also had “better feet, a stronger loin, and more capacity for carrying food.”\textsuperscript{148} The mare’s breeding was generally considered less important as long as she was well built. There was probably some residual sexism among breeders, which was in part a holdover from the successes of inbred sires breeding outcrosses so successfully during Bakewell’s day, but it also made sound modern economic sense.\textsuperscript{149}

When breeding crossbred horses, it made far more sense to pay for a few purebred stallions that could get hundreds of cross-bred foals in one year, than to buy hundreds of purebred mares to get the same number of equal quality foals. And as Major Carroll stated, “many…crosses could be made from the numberless breeds of good horses now in this country. The main point made in crossing are that the stallion should be thoroughbred, the mares large and roomy, with sufficient bone and muscle, together with the compactness of build that will leave no reason to doubt that the foal will possess all the requisites of a good cavalry horse.”\textsuperscript{150} Left up to the officers of the service, the cavalry would be mounted on thoroughbred crosses. As Colonel Carr put it, “A horse to ride for a man’s life, and for the honor and interest of the United States, should at least be equal to the breed of the saddle horse of Kentucky.”\textsuperscript{151}

But even if the cavalry men could somehow convince the government to create these breeding farms, and that it needed to invest in race-tried thoroughbred stallions to

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\textsuperscript{148} Jackson, “Letter from Major James Jackson to Major A.S. Kimball, Fort Lowell Arizona, July 22, 1890,” 2. \\
\textsuperscript{150} Henry Carroll, “The Cavalry Horse, Undated Report,” 1890, 6–7, Record Group 92, Box 12, Entry 65, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC. \\
\textsuperscript{151} Carr, “Letter from Colonel E. A. Carr to Major A.S. Kimball, Fort Wingate, New Mexico, September 12, 1890,” 5.
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make the project successful, they needed racing at a high level to continue to test the breeding stock. New York’s Ives Pool Bill of 1887, while it gave racing a reprieve, did not end the reformers’ attempts to end racing altogether. Indeed, the Ives Pool Bill served as a galvanizing event for all sides of the racing debate—increasing opposition among reformers, opportunity among gamblers, and anxiety among the more respectable racing men. The prominent racing men finally decided they had to take strong action to protect their fragile legal victories.

In the fast and loose milieu of the 1890s, racing men began to centralize control over racing in order to protect its legal standing. By tradition, and by law in New York, each track had its own jockey club (usually a “corporation for the improvement of the breed of horse”), and each club had always been its own master. With the chaos, both legal and moral, surrounding racing in the nineties, the wealthy racing elite decided it was time for them to take a firmer hold of their own and others’ racing destinies by bringing order to racing in the northeast.

They began this effort to bring order out of chaos with a Board of Control, organized in 1891 by Pierre Lorillard.\(^\text{152}\) He got the representatives of four of the New York area tracks, Monmouth (NJ), Sheepshead Bay, Gravesend, and Morris Park, to create an organization that would license jockeys and trainers before they could work at any of the New York area tracks. They even considered licensing owners, since the owners who ran their horses at the cheaper tracks, and were in it only for the money, tended to perpetrate swindles that were unfair to the betting public and sometimes the track owners, and were also often inhumane. This move paralleled the trend of private

regulation and licensing happening in other fields such as medicine, law and baseball. A.J. Cassatt (brother of painter Mary Cassatt), John Hunter (who had helped get racing started in Saratoga) and John Galway represented the owners, although they were close friends with most of the respectable track owners. Walter Vosbergh was the secretary of the organization and in charge of handling the license applications, although the board collectively decided whether or not they should be granted in most cases. The papers reported that it was the most reputable trainers and jockeys who were first in line to hand him their applications, although some of the cockier jockeys thought it beneath them or that they at least should be paid more for having to apply for the free licenses.\footnote{Racing News and Notions, “The New York Times,” 16 March 1891, 2.}

The \textit{Brooklyn Eagle} stated that “this cry for reform has been getting louder and more urgent for some time and now that it seems likely to be accomplished, racing will become more popular than ever and no question of its honesty can be put forth.”\footnote{“News of the Track and Racers: Interesting Items Gleaned From Post and Paddock,” \textit{Brooklyn Eagle}, January 19, 1891.}

The Board took over the offices of the New York Jockey Club (which controlled Morris Park) in the Cumberland, at Fifth Avenue and 22nd street.\footnote{“Racing News and Notions,” \textit{The New York Times}, 2 March 1891, 2.} In part this location was chosen to be convenient to most people with racing interests, though it also was convenient to the Board members themselves. The Board moving into the New York Jockey Club’s offices meant that the New York Jockey Club moved its personnel and business operations onto its own racecourse, Morris Park, in Westchester, making it far less accessible to the general racing public, but since Morris Park was one of the tracks represented on the board, they no doubt believed they were accessible enough. Since the
Board was responsible for all of the licensing, it was far more important that it have the central location.

In addition to licensing racing professionals, they made other attempts at innovation, the most important being the elimination of forfeits. Up until this time, when an owner entered his horse in a stakes race, which had to be done anywhere from months to years in advance, if the horse did not go to the post on the appointed day, his backers had to pay a fixed “forfeit” that would be added on to the purse for the winner. When there were fewer horses available for stakes races, as there had been early in the nineteenth century, the procedure had made sense as a way to keep owners from backing out of races. No owner wanted to risk shipping a horse hundreds of miles only to find the race was cancelled because the competition had scratched. But by the 1890s there was a large enough racehorse population that the process was logistically cumbersome, as some people were starting to refuse to pay up, and it also encouraged owners to race their horses even if they were injured or ill.

The Board of Control also worked on ending winter racing. Racing on dirt tracks that were frozen solid was just as unsafe to horses as racing on uneven cement, and the Board and most of the public considered it inhumane as a result. Most of those who participated in winter racing were among the less savory members of the turf crowd, which would have given the Board even more incentive to crack down on them. Their existence impugned the racing elite simply by association with the same sport, and the elite were getting tired of both that tarnish-by-association and the legal reforms it

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156 Track operators have since developed safe, all-weather footing that prevents the track surfaces from becoming frozen hard in the winter.
threatened to prompt.\textsuperscript{157} The elite racing men were successful and shrewd businessmen, and certainly the money racing brought them gave financial incentive to be involved in the sport, and many of them would not have been involved if their business minds could not have seen a way for their very expensive passion to pay for itself. But what was best for their financial interests generally did coincide with what was best for racing in this period, and generally for what was best for horse breeding and for the horses themselves. The little guys who complained about the Board driving them out of business tended to be the same people who gave racing a bad name. For the pool seller or bookmaker, racing was his main source of income, and financial necessity often led him to illegal measures, while the elite, even though they spent and earned far more money in racing than the rest, were never financially dependent on racing for their lifestyle or position in society.

This is not to say that there was not prejudice involved in efforts to gain control over the men who relied on racing, and race-track gambling, to feed their families. There almost certainly was. These gamblers, who were often not interested in the horses per se, were often of immigrant backgrounds and were part of the population that prompted many of the reforms of the progressive movement. Reformers wanted to force these men to make their living in ways that fit the dominant class’ ideas of what was appropriate. This sort of prejudice closely parallels what happened with hunting laws in the South, during Reconstruction, which were passed to protect the wildlife in the forests, but were also moves to make it essentially illegal for freedmen to feed their families without

working as sharecroppers. The passage of preservation laws in New York’s Adirondack Forest—which attempted to change the values of the communities living within the park by making subsistence hunting illegal—also came during the same period as racing reforms. The men the Board was trying to rein in were trying to make a living on what the Board wanted to keep a sporting pastime, albeit a financially self-sustaining one. These elite racing men did not like having their sport brought into the line of the reformers’ fire by men who didn’t care, or didn’t think it fair that others cared, that the elite men’s gambling on the track and on Wall Street was considered legitimate and their own gambling was considered crooked.

But the racing world did not straighten out as easily as Pierre Lorillard and the Board of Control had hoped, and within two years many prominent men were retiring from the turf in disgust at the dishonest management of so many of the tracks. And those who did not like the Board of Control complained that it only benefited a few tracks and owners at the expense of the rest. So by September of 1893 Lorillard himself, too, was rumored to be retiring from racing. He complained that “racing [was] becoming too much of a business,” and wanted tracks to ban bookmakers and begin to use Paris-mutual betting machines, which reduced the incentive to fix races (and would also

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162 The name “Paris-mutual” would be quickly be Anglicized into “pari-mutual,” or “parimutual” as it is known today.
have had the side benefit of keeping the gambling revenue in the hands of the track owners). The beginning of the end was apparently the 1893 racing season at the track in Elizabeth owned by Mike Dwyer--the less respected of the two Dwyer brothers--where the races and their conditions were allegedly set for the benefit of Dwyer’s horses and of a small number of stables whose owners were part of the “Dwyer-Croker-Daly combination.” Those conditions included scheduling races at distances and weights that would advantage the abilities of specific horses in the Dwyer stable, setting favorable weights in handicap races, or simply allowing Dwyer to read the list of entries for races before deciding whether to enter his own. Dwyer had enough influence that he was able to get favorable arrangements at almost every track the Board of Control controlled except, ironically, at his brother Philip’s track, where things were run fairly. Indeed, it was Philip Dwyer who was one of the main forces in putting an end to his brother’s shenanigans, and Mike’s gambling habits were rumored to be the primary reason the two had broken up their shared stables in favor of pursuing their own individual racing businesses in 1890. While the track in Elizabeth was only in business from 1889 through 1893, its influence caused many reputable turf men to abandon the sport (and it


166 “Race-Horse Owners Aroused.”

167 “Dwyers Divide Their Famous Racing Stable and Separate,” Brooklyn Eagle, August 19, 1890. The Dwyers divided their stables by selling them at public auction, so each brother could bid against the public, and each other, to buy for his own stable those horses he wanted to retain. Philip Dwyer bought Kingston, the pride of the stable, for $30,000. “It’s Phil Dwyer’s Kingston,” The Evening World, November 4, 1890, 3.
also caused the New Jersey State legislature to outlaw racing in the state) brought down the Board of Control, and led directly to the creation of the American Jockey Club.

With Lorillard out, the Board ceased to retain its legitimacy and respect, and in order to fill the void, a new group of socially well-respected owners decided to create the Jockey Club, in 1894. The Jockey Club’s centennial history of thoroughbred racing claims that the club was formed in order to keep racing from collapsing under its own weight by having overlapping race dates and the subsequent reduction in purse money for individual races.\(^\text{168}\) The minutes from its formative meetings in 1893 and 1894 (available only in sections quoted in a text composed by the club’s attorneys on the occasion of the club’s fiftieth anniversary, as the Jockey Club does not allow public access to their archives) stated the club’s goals were “To establish a firm authority over all racing upon all the Association’s courses which may come under its control…[and] to punish offenders against the accepted racing laws.”\(^\text{169}\) This statement is revealing of the immediate motives of the club’s founders. The allusions to the club’s being able to meet out justice were a reaction to the unruly state of the sport under Mike Dwyer and his cohorts that had led to the increased legal pressure on the sport itself from reform minded politicians and private citizens. The minutes also state the goal of protecting “the interests of the public and thereby ensure its confidence and support.”\(^\text{170}\) By clearly protecting the interests of the public, they hoped to stop the tide of government attempts

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\(^{170}\) Ibid.
to restrict racing, because not only did New Jersey outlaw racing in reaction to the activities of Mike Dwyer and his fellows, but in 1894 a New York State constitutional convention was on the immediate horizon and for many people a specific goal of the convention was to have race track gambling explicitly added to the section of the constitution that outlawed lotteries. The Jockey Club wanted the public to feel confident that its interests were protected so that public opinion would not allow any anti-horse-racing additions to the New York State Constitution. The club’s founders not only needed to bring order to chaos, they intended to defend the sport of racing against legal prohibition.

The creation of the Jockey Club, composed of up to fifty eminent men, relieved the minds of racing minded politicians, and the club inherited the Board of Control’s control over racing via the State Racing Commission, which had to adhere to the official Jockey Club rules and regulations. This legal control over licensing in particular, and racing in general, was upheld by the New York State Court of Appeals, New York’s highest court, in 1897 in *Grannan v. Westchester Racing Association*, and demonstrated the pattern of legal licensing done by a private entity that the medical and legal professions followed. In the case of medicine and law, state licensure was done through various local professional associations, and eventually the national associations, and was supported by the public because it protected their safety, and was supported by the professionals

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171. Today the Jockey Club is made up of 100 men and women—women having only been included beginning in the 1980s.

themselves because it limited competition and raised their income.\textsuperscript{173} And while the comparison to the medical and legal professions is one that the racing men might have thought appropriate, probably a more appropriate comparison, especially for reform-minded voters and politicians, would be to the licensing of liquor. Liquor sellers were charged a high license fee, with the idea that the “high license” would limit the number of providers, offer at least nominal industry control, and require some standard of respectability in an industry that was rapidly losing respectability.\textsuperscript{174} The liquor industry supported the licensing, hoping that regulation would head off more restrictive reforms such as outright prohibition, just as racing’s Jockey Club was using licensing to help convince state political constituents that there was no need to follow New Jersey’s lead and outlaw racing entirely. In an era when there was still limited acceptance of national regulation in moral reform issues, and resistance to insistence on uniform state legislation,\textsuperscript{175} racing men were less concerned about Washington D.C.’s or other states’ positions on racetrack gambling—for or against—because they knew that ultimately the racing industry would live or die based on New York State’s legislative stand.

On December 27 at a general meeting of horse owners, James R. Keene, a Wall Street financier, was appointed to chair a committee of fourteen charged


\textsuperscript{174} Hamm, \textit{Shaping the Eighteenth Amendment : Temperance Reform, Legal Culture, and the Polity, 1880-1920}, 27.

\textsuperscript{175} Graebner, “Federalism in the Progressive Era: A Structural Interpretation of Reform,” 332–333.
with the creation of the new organization. And on January 4, 1894, at the Hoffman House in Manhattan, he chaired a meeting which included his committee, the Board of Control members, and members of various racing associations. Among those present included August Belmont II, Perry Belmont, F. Cool—a representative of Pierre Lorillard, who was out of town—Richard Croker, and Philip Dwyer. They were all well-known business men of substantial fortune and good public reputation whom no one would associate with a need to earn money in racing, hence they would not be seen as having any incentive to cheat. Keene declared them men of the “position, tone and character,” which he deemed necessary “so that the public shall have full confidence in the conduct of the sport.”

Keene expressed an opinion that was probably generally agreed and legally quite accurate when he proclaimed to the gathering “Unless we take warning from what has happened about us and purify and reform turf matters, I tell you, gentlemen, that the pool bill will be wiped from the statute books and we will be left without law, and we will deserve the ruin that will come to all of us.” Those present at the meeting approved the formation of the club, which proved to be a turning point in the history of the American turf as it would lead the charge to save racing in the nation, and the admittedly autocratic organization

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178“Racing Reform Demanded.”
would go on to control racing right up to the present day. The Jockey Club was officially incorporated in February of 1894, and its first critical hurdle was the state constitutional convention of 1894, which began in May. The convention was originally called in 1886, but it took eight years of wrangling between Governor Hill and the legislature over how the delegates should be chosen before it was finally convened in 1894. The matter was finally resolved when the Democrats won both houses of the legislature. Expecting to be trounced in the election of delegates, the Republicans ran a number of well-known and well liked moderate candidates instead of hard-core party men, and much to everyone’s surprise, they won a majority of the delegates to the convention—just over half of the district seats (83 of 160) and all fifteen of the at-large seats, including Joseph

179 While the American Jockey Club was formed at the height of the “purebred” breeding trend in England and America that saw the creation of breeding registries for all sorts of animals, and the beginnings of the Eugenics movement, the American Jockey Club was created to regulate racing, not breeding, on the model of the Jockey Club in England, which was founded in 1750. The American Jockey Club did take over the Thoroughbred registry, but the registry had been created decades before. While some in the Eugenics movement used thoroughbred breeding as model for their activities, few in thoroughbred breeding saw what eugenicists were doing as being similar. Indeed, historian Margaret Derry has suggested that livestock breeders quickly began to resent the implied link to eugenics (see Derry, Bred for Perfection, 14.), and Barbara Kimmelman suggests that lack of real shared professional interests between livestock breeders and eugenicists played a significant role in the disintegration of the American Breeders Association (see Barbara A. Kimmelman, “The American Breeders’ Association: Genetics and Eugenics in an Agricultural Context, 1903-13,” Social Studies of Science 13, no. 2 (May 1, 1983): 163–204, doi:10.2307/284589.). Several prominent harness-racing men, most notably, E.H. Harriman, Leland Stanford and John D. Rockefeller, were supporters of the eugenics movement, but by the twentieth century, even though harness horses were descendants of thoroughbreds, harness racing interests and thoroughbred interests tended to represent opposite ends of the political spectrum, with harness racing, despite a few very rich leaders, being equated much more with middle and working class mores. See Phillip Thurtle, “Harnessing Heredity in Gilded Age America: Middle Class Mores and Industrial Breeding in a Cultural Context,” Journal of the History of Biology 35, no. 1 (April 1, 2002): 43–78, doi:10.2307/4331707. Perhaps following the example of the Jockey Club, and certainly their intention, baseball would turn to an autocratic pillar of society, Kennesaw Mountain Landis, to successfully save baseball from similar debasement by gambling when the issue was brought to a head with the Black Sox scandal in 1919. David Pietrusza, Judge and Jury : The Life and Times of Judge Kennesaw Mountain Landis (South Bend, Ind.: Diamond Communications, 1998).

H. Choate, who would be elected president of the convention.\textsuperscript{181} Once deaths, resignations and legally challenged seatings shook themselves out, the final tally was 104 Republicans to 67 Democrats.\textsuperscript{182} This majority gave the Republicans a chance to not only lead the discussion on which amendments to propose, but also to control how those amendments would be put before the public for ratification.

For many delegates, regardless of party, clamping down on vice and government corruption was the major reason behind the call for a convention. And for many, the primary goal for the entire constitutional convention was to put an end to race track gambling.\textsuperscript{183} The debate over how to go about meeting that goal was wide ranging and heated. According to Charles Lincoln, who was himself a delegate at the convention, in his \textit{Constitutional History of New York}, the arguments ranged from specifically eliminating pool-selling and bookmaking, to broadly outlawing any form of gambling. Choate was among those arguing for exclusively outlawing pool selling and bookmaking because he feared that including the language “or any other kind of gambling” would “make criminals of everybody who sat down to a game of cards at his home or his club,”\textsuperscript{184} and anyone buying a chance at a church fair.\textsuperscript{185} And there was also the worry that it

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might even put the legality of trading on the stock and commodities exchanges into question.\textsuperscript{186}

But these arguments for moderation were drowned out by the likes of E.R. Brown, who insisted that because the legislature had been able to enact the Ives Pool bill, the amended constitution needed to put to rest any idea that gambling in any form should ever be legally sanctioned in the state, and Edward Lauterbach, who insisted that the constitution “sweep...all the racing fraternity into oblivion forever.”\textsuperscript{187} And so, with little ambiguity as to who the amendment was aimed at, the convention voted to approve the amendment that read: “...nor shall any lottery or the sale of lottery tickets, pool selling, bookmaking, or any other kind of gambling hereafter be authorized or allowed within this state, and the Legislature shall pass appropriate laws to prevent offenses against any of the provisions of this section.”\textsuperscript{188} That they constitutionally commanded the legislature to act on the amendment was unusual, and reflected both the adamancy with which the delegates were calling for this reform, and their doubts as to willingness of the Democratic legislature to act on it.

Horsemen were very worried. As the \textit{New York Tribune} reported, “the fear of yesterday has developed into a panic today. On every hand men who have invested heavily in thoroughbreds talk as if their investments were thrown away…. Some of the leading horse-owners are in despair, and say this if the anti-


\textsuperscript{188}“The Convention Near Its End.”
gambling amendment to the constitution is carried, racing is doomed in the United States.”189 *The Evening Sun* understood that “breeders will probably be affected more than any one [sic] else. The absence of the rich Suburban, Brooklyn Handicap, Futurity and other stakes races where thousands of dollars were given away by racing associations will undoubtedly affect the market…. With no money in sight, the fastest thoroughbreds will become practically valueless.”

These horsemen understood that the ramifications of the amendment would reach far beyond the bookies and pool-sellers. No gambling on races meant no ticket sales, which meant no money for purses, which meant that the price of top race horses would plummet, which meant that thoroughbred breeders could not afford the overhead necessary to breed top quality horses. And without the availability that objectively performance-tested genetic input, the general American saddle horse quality would decline precipitously.

With the amendments written and passed, the convention then had to decide how to present all of the proposed amendments to the people of New York for ratification. Giving the people the opportunity to vote up or down on each amendment would render the anti-gambling bill vulnerable to the lobbying efforts of the well-heeled racing interests, but the delegates did not want to put the entire product of their efforts in jeopardy by presenting the amendments as a single question to be voted on, lest a few controversial amendments sink the entire ship. What they finally opted to do was to separate the amendments relating to district

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apportionment and canals to be voted on individually, but lump all of the others together as an omnibus to be voted on as a unit.\textsuperscript{191} The affect was that clergy such as W.C. Bitting of the Mount Morris Baptist Church,\textsuperscript{192} and J.A.B. Wilson of the Eighteenth Street Methodist Church,\textsuperscript{193} encouraged their parishioners to vote for the amendments as a package, even though one or two were objectionable, in order to pass the anti-gambling amendment. And many voters who might not have voted for the anti-gambling amendment if it stood alone, decided not to let it keep them from voting for the omnibus. Indeed even many Republicans, in Republican districts, would have preferred not to vote for the anti-gambling amendment because many farmers would be hurt by the resulting drop in value of their trotting horses.\textsuperscript{194} With very close voting in most districts, all three--omnibus, canals and apportionment--amendment packages were ratified.\textsuperscript{195}

The passage of the omnibus looked like the beginning of the end of racing in New York State. Everyone in the state knew that the amendment was specifically geared at stopping betting on horseracing, but the constitution could not enforce itself, so the legislature had to fashion laws to put the provision into effect. As the \textit{New York Times} pointed out, before the amendments were even ratified, “if public sentiment did not effectively demand of the Legislature the appropriate laws to prevent poolselling and bookmaking, it is plain that

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{191}“Ready for the People,” \textit{Brooklyn Eagle}, September 29, 1894. And “Open to Strong Objections.”
  \item \textsuperscript{192}“Is Against the Race Tracks,” \textit{The New York Times}, 29 October 1894, 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{193}“Submits, but Says It is Infamous,” \textit{The New York Times}, 29 October 1894, 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{194}“Current Racing Topics,” \textit{The New York Herald}, October 29, 1894, 8.
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poolselling and bookmaking would go on.” It was the legislative implementation of the amendment that would test whether the tactic of having voters decide on the bulk of the amendments together actually had worked. If public sentiment really opposed gambling on racing, the legislature would have little choice but to eliminate it as the amendment clearly intended. But if public sentiment was not strong against gambling on racing, then the legislature could work within the letter of the amendment while at the same time disregarding its intent. As long as it produced a law that could technically satisfy the courts, it would not need to worry about satisfying a public that might vote them out of office for allowing racetrack gambling to continue.

Until a new law was written and passed, racing was in limbo, so the Jockey Club got immediately to work trying influence the content of the necessary law. Assemblyman Augustus B. Gray, from Dutchess County, was the man who proposed the law that would fulfill the constitutional requirement that the legislature pass a law supporting the new constitutional gambling ban, though it was written by Assemblyman Welton C. Percy. His bill would ban gambling by poolselling, bookmaking, and even the newly invented pari-mutuel machines. It also recognized the licensing power of the Jockey Club to regulate all racing in the state. Any racing association that wished to run races had to go through the Jockey Club for racing dates, and any jockeys or trainers who wished to be allowed to race in New York had to apply to the Jockey Club for a license. This

196 “The Poolselling Amendment,” *The New York Times*, 15 October 1894, 4. This sentiment was echoed by the *Brooklyn Eagle*. “Ready for the People.”

provision was essentially a continuance of the licensing power of the earlier Board of Control. It called for the creation of a State Racing Commission and officially repealed the Ives Pool Law, while retaining the tax on gate receipts that created the fund for the state fairs to use as premiums for livestock breeding competitions.\textsuperscript{198} The bill, on its surface, appeared to meet every legal expectation of the men who had written the constitutional amendment.

But members of the racing set were wholeheartedly behind the bill, which they would not have been, had they thought it would really shut down gambling on racing, since shutting down gambling on racing would strangle the sport financially. There were some key provisions to the bill which made it not only acceptable to them, but positively favorable. For one thing, it explicitly removed from the trustees of any racing association any legal liability for gambling on races without their knowledge as long as they clearly posted signs around their grounds stating that gambling was not allowed on the premises, and they appointed officers to patrol the grounds.\textsuperscript{199} Equally, if not more, important to the racing men, was the penalty for violating the law. Instead of gambling on the racetrack being a criminal offense (as it was elsewhere) it was a civil offense, and a person had to sue in civil court to recover his or her losses--they were not liable to criminal prosecution. It was this provision that raised the ire of gambling opponents like Anthony Comstock, who favored an opposing bill by Republican

\textsuperscript{198}“A Law to Permit Racing,” \textit{The New York Times}, 12 February 1895, 6.

\textsuperscript{199}“A Law to Permit Racing.”
Assemblyman Howard P. Wilds which had stiffer penalties and did not “make a monopoly of racing for the Jockey Club.”

In their defense of Gray’s bill, many of its supporters were vehement in their defense of racing and their attacks on Comstock. The Jockey Club’s legal counsel pointed out that much of the language was taken directly from other business law, not created out of the blue for the benefit of racing associations, and that the racing associations were not great profit generators as major commercial corporations were. And, on one of their longest standing differences of opinion with Comstock, they claimed a desire “to continue improving horses, and think they have done more for horses than he has for men,” which, in the case of any easily measurable qualities, was probably true.

Despite Comstock’s and his allies’ protestations, the Percy-Gray bill, named for its two official sponsors, passed the Assembly by 90 votes to 10 on April 2, 1895. Almost all of the debate on the bills among lawmakers was regarding fairly uncontroversial details of wording, so as to be sure that the law was clear. The Senate, however, provided some drama. Comstock made his case to that body as well, as did the Jockey Club, but, according to the New York Times, the members of the Senate were mysteriously led to believe the Jockey Club was willing to pay $32,000 for the passage of the bill, and so when it came

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201“Opposed by Mr. Comstock.”


up for a vote on May 1st without any pecuniary incentive, they voted it down--with many of the members simply absenting themselves from the process.\textsuperscript{204} The members of the Jockey Club were reported to be anything from furious to despondent.\textsuperscript{205} There were no clear reports about how the pay-off rumor had begun, or even corroboration that it had, but, as the \textit{Brooklyn Eagle} reported, the vote “did look a little queer.”\textsuperscript{206}

The senators seemed to understand very quickly that their strange actions the night before had put their political reputations in danger, and the very next morning, they reconsidered the bill and passed it overwhelmingly, on a vote of 21 to 4.\textsuperscript{207} The speed of the revote was gratifying to both the Jockey Club and its supporters, and to the general public, which had reportedly found the Senate’s actions so repulsive. August Belmont claimed never to have “had any serious doubt” of the measure passing, despite the delay being “vexatious and hard to bear patiently.”\textsuperscript{208} He also believed that the “handsome majority given the bill shows the hollowness of the bribery theory once and for all.”\textsuperscript{209} On May 9th Governor Morton signed the bill into law, and at the same time appointed August Belmont, John Sanford (former congressman and avid horseman), Edwin Morgan and John Boden to the Racing Commission called for in the law.\textsuperscript{210} And with that,

\textsuperscript{204} “Miscellanious,” \textit{Wall Street Journal}, May 2, 1895.
\textsuperscript{206} “Gray-Percy Bill Passed: Given a Good Majority Today After Yesterday's Defeat.”
\textsuperscript{209} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{210} Ibid.
the 1895 racing season was under way. The law would be challenged, but was upheld by the New York State Court of Appeals.\textsuperscript{211}

After appearing to have its death warrant signed by the constitutional convention, racing instead had a new lease on life. The Jockey Club, now legally ensconced at the top of the racing power pyramid, had much reason to be optimistic. The new tracks opened at Morris Park in 1889 and Aqueduct in 1894, were joined by three more new tracks within a decade—Empire City Racetrack in 1900, Jamaica Racetrack in 1903, and Belmont Park Racetrack in 1905—bringing the number of racetracks between Yonkers and eastern Long Island to eight.\textsuperscript{212}

While the government debated how to address the remount issue, and sent commissions to report on foreign government breeding programs,\textsuperscript{213} the Jockey Club and its increasing number of affiliate tracks made an effort to remedy the problem, at least in New York State. By creating the New York State Breeding Bureau in 1906, it also underscored racing’s argument that its goal was to improve the breed of horse. They followed the example set by foreign government breeding programs and placed thoroughbred stallions around the state for breeding use by the general public.

Four race-bred stallions were donated by their owners to stand for no fee, and the Jockey Club proposed to offer premiums to the best offspring of the Breeding Bureau

\textsuperscript{210}“Racing Bills All Signed,” \textit{The New York Times}, 10 May 1895, 3.


stallions at horse shows as an incentive to breeders to take advantage of the program.\textsuperscript{214} The prizes were divided up around the state agricultural shows, and the winner would qualify for even larger prizes at the National Horse Show at Madison Square Garden in New York City each fall.\textsuperscript{215} At $75 to each winner, the prize money at the qualifying competitions was roughly equal to the average value of a horse in 1906\textsuperscript{216} and as such had the potential to be a significant inducement. The Jockey Club certainly had multiple motives, since it was still fighting a public relations battle with the anti-gambling forces, but the members did have the best stallions for the purpose and they sacrificed significant potential breeding income by donating the stallions’ services in order to prove their point about improving the breed. How much impact the Breeding Bureau had over the years is hard to gauge. But it was soon copied by groups in Canada, Kentucky, Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee, Maryland and Virginia,\textsuperscript{217} and it lasted at least half a century\textsuperscript{218}—well after racing was back on sound footing—and resulted in thousands of half thoroughbred foals.\textsuperscript{219}

Instead of being crushed by the anti-gambling amendment to the state constitution, the New York racing industry entered an era of expansion. Because New York led the racing world, its survival was critical to the thoroughbred

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breeding industry, since even the rich could not afford the expense of breeding top quality, performance-proven horses without the possibility of recouping their investment with large purses, or by selling them for high prices to someone else who expected to win purses. As the army’s cavalry officers pushed for some sort of a breeding program, focused on the thoroughbred stock that had always produced the most useful cavalry mounts, the Jockey Club, acting on its own, attempted to create a program along those lines. The Breeding Bureau was only in New York State, and apparently served more as a model of what was possible rather than a significant source of military mounts. This program was another example of the patchwork solutions with which Americans generally had to make due, instead of a coordinated, national system that the army really needed. New York’s interpretation of its new constitutional amendment at least made the Jockey Club’s model possible by keeping the necessary racing industry alive. But New York State’s favorable interpretation of the amendment depended on a Democratic majority in the government, and the era of Democratic patronage of racing220 could not last long beyond Democrats being voted out of the Governor’s Mansion in New York in 1895.

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220 “Friends of Racing.”
Chapter 5: New York’s Racing “Blackout” and World War I Force the Army into Action

Charles Evans Hughes, the Republican Governor of New York State from 1907-1910, began to attack thoroughbred racing soon after he entered office, and caused a panic among both civilian and military horsemen. He attacked the Percy-Grey law, which he saw as a “curse of which no just defense is possible,”¹ and by doing so he threatened racetrack gambling, which would eliminate the funds from which tracks created prize money, and therefore shut down racing in New York. Since New York was the hub of American racing, with eight of the nation’s twenty-seven tracks and its highest caliber races,² shutting down racing in New York would effectively shut down racing across the country. With no good racing, thoroughbred breeders would not have enough of a market to warrant the necessary investment in breeding, and they feared they might have to close down their operations if they were no longer self-sustaining. There was only so much money even they could afford to lose. With the renewed prospect of losing the breeding stock that had been physically tested on the track, horsemen both within and without the military grew extremely uneasy about future sources for durable cavalry horses. So at the same time that Governor Hughes was launching his attack that would successfully shut down racing for two years, with immediate negative affects on the thoroughbred breeding industry, the military finally began to make progress addressing the remount problem. With the help of racing men and the Department of Agriculture, which anti-military forces found less threatening than the War Department, the army was


able to launch a small experimental breeding program to encourage the breeding of horses suitable to cavalry needs as well as benefitting small farmers. The plan still essentially trusted the market to supply the needs of the cavalry, but it attempted to rationalize the market to a degree that it was a reliable one for farmers to stay in. As the shortage of cavalry mounts became more critical with the outbreak of World War I, it became clear that government would have to do even more to create a reliable reserve of remounts to meet wartime needs.

Hughes, a devout progressive, claimed he only intended to go after gambling interests, who, as he put it, “fatten upon wretchedness,” but he shed no tears over the possibility of idle tracks. His lack of understanding of racing and horse husbandry kept him from foreseeing the ramifications of his actions, and his effort to do good ultimately was viewed by horsemen as coming perilously close to undermining the United States’ already inadequate military preparedness just as World War I loomed on the horizon. Unlike other war materiel, horses are not machines to be built quickly. Breeders breed horses four to five years before the resultant mounts are usable and the breeders can potentially gain maximum financial return in an already risky market, and by significantly undermining breeders’ confidence in the future financial viability of their young thoroughbreds, Hughes undercut breeders’ willingness to invest the significant sums necessary in breeding horses for which they might have no viable market.

Hughes had been elected on a platform of cleaning up government and he saw this constitutional discrepancy as a clear example of government corruption. His was still an era of party bosses and extensive patronage hiring, and it was becoming very important to

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3Hughes, Hughes Public Papers, 39.
just about everyone except the politicians who directly benefited that the system needed to be more responsive to the desires of the electorate than to the desires of the politicians. Because Hughes thought that deal making and patronage were immoral manipulation, he had to win the legislature to his side without making political deals. He would not try to force fellow Republicans to vote the way he wanted them to by direct pressure. He would appeal to the electorate, which, according to his secretary Robert H. Fuller, “was Governor Hughes’s substitute for bribery, bulldozing and intrigue.” Of course the politicians who worked happily within the system of bribery, bulldozing and intrigue felt that playing to public opinion was underhanded. As Hughes biographer Merlo Pusey wrote, Hughes’ approach “was about as palatable to the Old Guard as earthworm soup.”

New York was not the only state where progressives were taking power around the turn of the century, nor was it the only state that was cracking down on vices such as racetrack gambling. In New Jersey, the racetracks had been closed down since 1893, Texas and Louisiana were cracking down on racing, and even overseas, in England, the home of thoroughbred racing, a similar reform movement created new restrictions on bookmaking. But New York, Long Island in particular, had become the home of America’s racing elite, and the richest racing in North America. With racing shut down in New York, the major breeders of thoroughbreds in the United States would lose their

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5 Hughes, *Autobiographical Notes*, 346.


most profitable market. And with breeding thoroughbreds ceasing to be economically viable, few people would be willing to make the financial sacrifice to do it, and therefore the supply of quality horseflesh was in danger of rapidly disappearing.

In 1908, the second year of his first term as governor of New York State, Hughes turned his attention to racetrack gambling. In his address to the State Legislature opening the legislative session in January, 1908, Hughes launched his campaign against racetrack betting by pointing out that the New York State Constitution of 1895 clearly charged the legislature with passing bills specifically outlawing bookmaking and pool-selling. The legislature had indeed done so, but in the Percy-Gray racing law it had given racetrack gamblers a loophole, by rendering gambling at racetracks (as opposed to gambling halls or any other gambling venue) punishable only by a forfeiture of the amount wagered or won, which would have to be reclaimed by means of a civil action. This loophole, Hughes correctly pointed out, meant that they had not really prohibited playing the ponies at all. Any gambler who was in a position to sue for his wager back, unless he was giving up gambling for good, was not likely to risk getting himself blacklisted by the bookmaking establishment by dragging one of its members into court. And a bookie who had to pay out was even less likely to sue a patron because that would ruin his business. So no one was ever likely to be punished under the Percy Grey Act, rendering it impotent. And, in the three test cases pressed by opponents of the law who wanted it to be declared unconstitutional, it was upheld. The key gambling case, challenging the

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8 Many, though not all, of the most prominent racing men bred thoroughbreds as well as racing them, and their primary market was each other. As the riding horse market shrank, making breeding a financially viable endeavor depended more and more on top individual horses being worth large sums because of the large purses they might win, because the profit they brought in compensated for the lack of a market for the inevitable average and subpar individuals which cost just as much to care for and were often sold at a loss. These same horses would have made excellent saddle stock if there was still a market for excellent saddle stock, even though they might have been culls as racehorses.
constitutionality of only a forfeiture of wagers in a civil action as a penalty for betting on a race, resulted in the court declaring that “the Constitution in express terms reposed in the legislature the power, and imposed upon it the duty of passing such laws, thus clothing it with the right to consider and determine for itself what laws were appropriate and should be passed to carry it into effect.”9 Just because someone might think the punishment ineffective, did not mean the law was unconstitutional.

Hughes disagreed. Since the constitution clearly stated that the legislature had to pass laws making bookmaking and pool-selling illegal, Hughes argued that the Percy-Gray law was “a scandal of the first order and a disgrace to the State.”10 Moreover, he believed that the legislature had flouted its constitutional duty by enacting it. The son of a Presbyterian minister, Hughes called on the support of Walter Laidlaw, the Secretary of the Federation of Churches. He asked Laidlaw to chair the Citizen’s Anti-Race-Track Gambling Committee and run the popular campaign against racetrack gambling. He also asked such clergy as Reverend Charles Parkhurst and Rabbi Stephen S. Wise to rally their congregants in favor of new anti-gambling legislation.11 The constitutional issue was not the only one for Hughes—he was going unabashedly after the tracks.

Hughes had a good friend and supporter in George B. Agnew,12 a State Senator from New York City. Agnew and Assemblyman Merwin K. Hart from Oneida County, presented to the legislature a bill (the Agnew-Hart Bill) that would require a jail term for

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10 Hughes, Hughes Public Papers, 39.


anyone convicted of gambling at the track, and would eliminate the option of a fine. It sought, in short, to bring the penalties for gambling at the track into line with the penalties for gambling anywhere else. Hughes believed “public sentiment is against such arbitrary distinctions [whether betting is inside or outside racetrack property], with the result that the laws against gambling outside the tracks have been defied, and the administration of the law has been brought into contempt.”13 Because the public was allowed to bet at the track, it apparently felt entitled to bet everywhere. This argument echoed the prohibition debate going on at the same time, with many of the same proponents.

But many in the legislature, used to the quid pro quo politics of the day, did not see the advantage to going along with Hughes’ logical arguments, as the political habit of the era was not to vote for a bill simply because it made sense, but because the legislator would get something in return. Legislators far preferred the Jockey Club’s approach which was allegedly to create a half-million dollar bribery “slush fund”14 to fight against the bill. The turf elite apparently subscribed to the alleged war chest at a turf men’s dinner at the famous restaurant Delmonico’s sometime in early 1908.15 All eight of the area racing associations allegedly subscribed about $33,000 each, along with about $3,000 each from most of the members of the Metropolitan Turf Association, the book

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13 Hughes, Hughes Public Papers, 26.
15 “Bribe of $100,000 Offered to Travis,” New York Times, 1910, 19 November 1910, 1–2. James R. Keene later stated that “I never attended a meeting at Delmonico’s with the gentlemen named, nor have I ever heard of such a meeting.” “Subpoenas for Keene, Whitney and Others in Graft Hearing,” Wall Street Journal, October 21, 1910.
Frank K. Sturgis, Treasurer of the Jockey Club (and president of the New York Stock Exchange) managed the fund that he deposited in the Standard Trust Company, in New York City, though he claimed that Mr. Belmont made the dispersals. It was two years later, in 1910, that the fund was brought to light by Brooklyn Assistant District Attorney Robert H. Elder, who claimed that Republican State Senator (by then former-senator) Frank J. Gardner had admitted to Elder that he had received money from the fund, and how the fund came to be. Eventually the assistant council for a legislative graft investigating commission calculated that the Jockey Club paid out approximately $264,000 between 1907 and 1908 for “legal expenses.” Sturgis claimed that much of the money was spent on “publicity,” which apparently meant paying lobbyists, such as former governor Frank S. Black, who lobbied the legislature on the Jockey Club’s behalf during the Agnew-Hart bill deliberations, and to attorney Amasa Thornton, who lobbied New York clergy on behalf of the Jockey Club.

Frank Gardner was the director of the turf men’s alleged bribery operation within the legislature, and he or his staffers had approached the other legislators on behalf of the 

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18 “Clue to $500,000 Race Track Fund.”
22 “Sturgis Before Graft Hunters.”
racing interests. According to Senator Eugene M. Travis of Madison County, who was approached with a bribery offer, Gardner’s staffer said “more votes were needed to defeat the bill, and that a large, juicy watermelon was to be cut.”

He claimed that he was ultimately offered $100,000 for his vote: $25,000 up front and $75,000 after the vote. His vote was apparently worth a significant portion of the alleged fund.

A number of clergymen allegedly received money from this fund, although the Jockey Club only acknowledged paying Amasa Thornton to lobby them. The money was to encourage favorably inclined clergy to publicly state that they thought the racing laws were fine as they were, without the governor’s changes, and to reassure their parishioners that there was nothing innately immoral about horse racing. Among the more prominent clergy to publicly endorse regulation, rather than abolition, of racetrack gambling was the well-known reformer, Bishop Henry C. Potter of the Episcopal Church. This endorsement proved not to be a popular move as a huge gathering of Episcopal laymen in the Bishop’s diocese publicly proclaimed that they disagreed with Potter, and that they wholeheartedly supported the Agnew-Hart bill, although their implication was not that he had been bribed, but that the pragmatic logic of his argument for regulation was faulty.

When Hughes first began the campaign, the issue seemed so clear cut to him that he did not expect a particularly large fight. But once the racing interests started lobbying, Hughes saw that passing the bill would be a challenge, and the anti-racetrack-

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26 “Bribe of $100,000 Offered to Travis.”
27 “Senator Travis Says He Was Offered $100, 000 for Vote,” Wall Street Journal, November 19, 1910.
30 Pusey, Charles Evans Hughes, Volume One, 226.
The gambling bill became his primary focus for the session.\textsuperscript{31} The bill passed the assembly easily in March of 1908, but passing the Senate proved extremely difficult.\textsuperscript{32} Through Gardner’s efforts, along with the emphatic and direct pleas from the racing leaders themselves, the Senate defeated the bill. The racing leaders explained that without betting at horse races, people would stop attending. And without admission fees, the tracks would no longer be able to operate.\textsuperscript{33} The Jockey Club attorneys, one of whom was James R. Keene, a founding member of the Jockey Club and its Vice Chairman, quipped that “racing enthusiasts were concerned with improving the breed of horses,” but that Hughes was “trying to improve the breed of men”, at which he would fail because “only God almighty can do that!”\textsuperscript{34} But Hughes was not moved. He called a special session of the legislature, with the Agnew-Hart Bill at the top of the agenda. Since Senator Stanislaus P. Franchot of Niagara Falls had died in office, Hughes called a special election for his replacement. He put his personal reputation on the line by campaigning heavily for his chosen candidate, William C. Wallace.\textsuperscript{35} With all of his efforts to get Wallace elected, had Wallace lost, Hughes’ prestige would have suffered a great blow. Because the political bosses (along with the Jockey Club) were trying to influence senators’ votes by bringing political pressures to bear, Hughes framed the election as though representative government itself were on trial.\textsuperscript{36} The election was

\textsuperscript{31}Wesser, Hughes, 189.

\textsuperscript{32}Wesser, Hughes, 197.

\textsuperscript{33}“Turf Followers Ready for Fight,” New York Times, 1908, 3 January 1908, 10.

\textsuperscript{34}Wesser, Hughes, 195.

\textsuperscript{35}Pusey, Charles Evans Hughes, Volume One, 229.

\textsuperscript{36}Pusey, Charles Evans Hughes, Volume One, 229.
close, but Wallace prevailed and Hughes proclaimed it “a victory for law and order,” though it was clear to most that, as a *New York Tribune* article sub-title proclaimed, it was a “victory for [the] governor’s anti-gambling policy.” But even though he managed to get Wallace into office, Hughes still worried that he did not have enough votes unless every possible proponent of his bill was present when it was taken.

Otto Foelker, a Republican senator from Brooklyn, NY, had an appendectomy a month before the vote, and was confined to his sick bed at his father-in-law’s house in Staatsburg, NY. In an era before antibiotics, his recovery was slow. But Hughes was fairly sure he would vote as Hughes wanted, so he had the “Albany Flyer”, the express train from New York City to the capitol, stop in Staatsburg specifically to pick up the ailing senator. Foelker’s physician, Dr. Franklin L. Murphy, told Foelker plainly that he was risking his life by taking the journey, to which the senator, no doubt with touch of drama, replied, “I know that it may mean my death, but I am going to Albany just the same...I have promised Senator Agnew and the Governor.” According to the *Evening World*, Foelker “showed little interest in his surroundings and gave slight sign of recognition of his fellow legislators, but sat listless in the invalid chair on which he was wheeled to his carriage, his head drooping upon his chest, his hands feebly clasped in his lap.” Foelker’s health was clearly not good. The next morning Foelker was half carried

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40 “Foelker’s Trip Ends in Collapse.”
41 “Foelker’s Trip Ends in Collapse.”
42 “Dramatic Scene in the Senate as Vote on the Anti-Gambling Bill is Cast,” *The Evening World*, June 11, 1908, 2.
to the capitol.43 When Foelker showed up on the senate floor, on the arm of Dr. Murphy, the Democratic leader, Senator Grady, tried to prolong the ordeal in an apparent bid to outlast Foelker’s stamina. Finally, the vote was called and Foelker cast the winning vote for the Agnew-Hart bill. Realizing Hughes had won, the anti-racing contingent agreed to let Foelker vote for the repeal of the old Percy-Gray law, thus ending the director’s exemption from liability for gambling done on their property without their knowledge, from a more comfortable anti-chamber rather than actually forcing him to stay on the senate floor.44 Five of the eight Republican senators who voted against the bill, Gardner included, lost their seats in the next election. Foelker, for his determined “heroic” vote, got a letter of commendation and thanks from the governor45 and was elected to Congress.46

As racing men gave up hope of defeating the bill, they started discussing New Jersey as a possible venue for their major races, even though the tracks in New Jersey had been shut down in 1893. They hoped that since the ban in New Jersey was statutory, rather than constitutional as it was in New York, that it would be easier to get changed.47 Entries for stake races, which were usually opened at least one year in advance, if not more, were not opened. Track owners would only guarantee stakes in races for which the entries had already closed, and many made dire predictions that purses for future


44“Passage of the Bills.”

45“Passage of the Bills.”


races would be drastically reduced since gate receipts without betting would not support higher prize money.\textsuperscript{48}

In a pro-Agnew-Hart opinion piece, the \textit{New York Times} could not “help but wonder why the Jockey Club does not welcome the repeal of the Percy-Gray law, for, with that out of the way, there would be nothing to prevent racing from going on without objection from anybody.” No doubt the author knew full well that the repeal would bring on the collapse of the industry. He went on to suggest that the repeal should have the blessing of “all the great and good who love [racing]...for itself alone as a glorious sport and a noble encouragement of those who would elevate and refine the horse.”\textsuperscript{49} Clearly the author was writing tongue-in-cheek, and he had strong suspicions about whether money was not perhaps an equal incentive to the leaders of the turf. Indeed, purses made it possible to recoup some of the money that horsemen spent on trying to produce great horses--without it, improving horses would be financially ruinous even for the rich.

The Agnew-Hart bill was signed into law on June 11,\textsuperscript{50} and the police went into action on June 12, before they even had a certified copy of the law. The Gravesend (on Coney Island) race meeting was in session and it was full of both plain clothes and uniformed officers trying to catch people betting. While most people were either too worried or too sensible to bet in the presence of law enforcement, enough did bet to cause quite a ruckus. On the first arrests in the betting ring, other furtive bettors tried to flee,

\textsuperscript{48}\textit{“Racing Men Certain Betting is Ended.”}


just as curious onlookers tried to rush in to watch. In the confusion a brawl broke out between Brooklyn and Manhattan under-cover officers, who did not know each other.\textsuperscript{51}

Everyone arrested by the police that day was taken off to the Coney Island Jail and had to wait there until a magistrate could be found to set bail.\textsuperscript{52} One thing the Agnew-Hart law had done was reduce gambling from a felony to a misdemeanor,\textsuperscript{53} so the police should have let the offenders off with “station bail”, and for failure to do so the police were scolded by the magistrate whom they eventually were able to locate (who ultimately set $1,000 bail).\textsuperscript{54} By the next week’s racing, spectators seemed to be behaving themselves and there were only nine arrests,\textsuperscript{55} and law enforcement’s final total appears to have been forty one indictments.\textsuperscript{56} Ironically, the \textit{New York Times} reported on the day’s races in gambling terms, describing one horse as “an even money favorite,” and declaring that “form players had a field day [because] four favorites won, while in the other two races well-played second choices finished in the lead.”\textsuperscript{57} They refrained, however, from laying odds on the racetrack directors’ reactions to the legal proceedings.

Philip Dwyer, president of the Queens Jockey Club and the Brooklyn Jockey Club, declared that until the law could be interpreted by a judge, he would stand behind the police and their actions. He said he did not believe that the legislature intended to

\textsuperscript{51}“The Police Crush Race Track Betting,” \textit{New York Times}, 1908, 13 June 1908, 1,3.
\textsuperscript{52}“Sterilized Racing at Gravesend Track,” \textit{New York Tribune}, June 13, 1908, 1.
\textsuperscript{53}“The Provisions of the Bills.”
\textsuperscript{54}“The Police Crush Race Track Betting.”
\textsuperscript{57}“Nine Arrests at Track.”
shut down racing, merely specific forms of gambling, and until everyone knew exactly what the law meant, he would not do anything to “jeopardize the interests of racing.”

By August, William K. Vanderbilt, Grandson of Cornelius, and president and primary stock holder of the Coney Island Jockey Club, announced that the Coney Island Jockey Club would not be held responsible for any illegal activity taking place on its grounds, and that if professional gamblers did not desist, the course would be closed to the public and only the stake races which the Club had already committed to would be run. Philip Dwyer reportedly announced that his two clubs would run their meetings as long as racing itself was not forbidden, “until the highest courts had settled all questions of the legality of racing,” and many considered Vanderbilt’s position “a premature surrender.” Indeed, the Wall Street Journal doubted at the end of June that the public was really in favor of the crackdown on racing.

By September, however, the situation has shifted slightly. The trial of one of the arrested bookmakers, Melville Collins, had finished and the court had ruled that only professional gambling was illegal. The police therefore decided that they could only arrest people openly setting odds and exchanging money, as that was how they defined professional gambling. Private wagers between individual citizens were not deemed

58 “The Police Crush Race Track Betting.”
60 “Will Bar the Public Unless Betting Stops.”
61 “Will Bar the Public Unless Betting Stops.”
illegal. What this interpretation of the law created was the “oral betting” system that kept racing alive through the next two years. In this ad hoc system the odds gamblers used would be either the published post odds, or the odds of the city’s pool halls, so no one at the track was technically making odds. And the bets would be made orally, with no written record. This system was extremely taxing on the bookies’ memories, and the bookies were constrained as to what odds they could offer, but the formerly warned off bookmakers were allowed back to the tracks, and the public began to come back too.

Despite the public’s eventual return, the *New York Times* estimated that the law cost racing interests about $2,000,000 during the 1908 racing season. Even the Long Island Railroad expected to lose $200,000 from loss of passengers to and from the races. The tracks were all operated at a loss and the track owners had still not opened up entries to any important (and expensive) stakes races. Philip Dwyer, the most determined of the track operators, planned to keep racing going in 1909 even if it was in a much abbreviated manner. He claimed “the racing associations ought to hold together until the courts have interpreted the law. I am not yet ready to believe that the anti-betting law was construed properly in the attacks that were made on racing in the summer.” But once Hughes was reelected, the Jockey Club was less willing to press a test case because it feared that with Hughes still in office he was in a position to fix any flaw the court


65 “Enforce Betting Law at Gravesend Track.”

66 “‘Taps’ is Sounded on Racing Here,” *New York Times*, 1908, 5 November 1908, 6.


68 “Gravesend May See Real Racing,” *The Evening World*, September 14, 1908, 10.

69 “‘Taps’ is Sounded on Racing Here.”
might find in the law. So even though none of the arrests made had yet resulted in a conviction, the outlook on racing was gloomy.  

The reaction of many of the largest racing stables was simply to head abroad. J.B. Haggin and James R. Keene first tried to send the cream of their young stock to Buenos Aires to sell at auction in order to test the Argentinian market. But as the horses were in transit, the Buenos Aires racing commission voted to allow only Argentine-bred horses to run in its classic races. This vote was allegedly a move to push Uruguayan studs to move to Argentina and not to fend off an invasion of American horses that might result from the Agnew-Hart law, but Americans were dubious of that claim.

With Argentina only a viable outlet for selling broodmares, turf men looked to England. Among others, James R. Keene took Colin, the American superhorse of the day, to England to run in the English classics. As soon as Colin set foot on British turf, he was considered a favorite for the Ascot Gold Cup. Indeed, America’s “invaders” were assigned the top three highest weights in England’s Great Jubilee Handicap, meaning they were officially deemed the three best horses entered. Richard Marsh, King Edward’s trainer, declared that if Americans “are able to breed animals to win our classic races why should an English sportsman complain?” When the King could not win with his own horses, he apparently preferred to lose to Americans rather than fellow

70“The Taps’ is Sounded on Racing Here.”
75“American Invasion of English Turf.”
Englishmen, and had, in the past, been able to intercede with the English Jockey Club on behalf of American turf men. But apparently others in the British turf establishment did complain, as did the French, especially when the Americans appeared to be invading in force from 1909 to 1912. Both the British and the French passed resolutions denying registry in their studbooks to horses that did not trace in all lines to other horses recognized by their studbooks. These resolutions eliminated many American horses primarily because they traced to the stallion Lexington, whom the Europeans considered not purebred. Lexington was, however, one of the greatest horses ever to race in the United States, and one of the most prolific sires, so the exclusion of his descendants effectively moderated the American invasion. Many prominent Americans began to win important races with horses registered prior to the ban, or with the few horses they had that still qualified for registration, but the registration ban meant that most of their breeding stock could not produce horses for the English or French tracks. The ban was a move to exclude the Americans from the European market rather than a real concern over purity, as many of Lexington’s descendants had previously been exported to Europe and included in both the French and English studbooks, and the Europeans made no effort to remove them as the majority of them were already under European ownership.

None of these developments helped matters in New York. With Colin and his cohorts moving to Europe, spectators had even less inducement to head to the tracks, and with only oral betting allowed, there was a limit to how many could place wagers because the bookies could not keep records. And since the Agnew-Hart Law had not shut down racetrack gambling as planned, Hughes and his allies proposed new legislation to do in betting once and for all. This first amendment to the Agnew-Hart Law added the
language “with or without writing” so that bookies could no longer take oral bets. The second repealed the section of the old Percy-Gray law that exempted directors of tracks from any liability for gambling that took place on their tracks without their knowledge as long as it was posted that no gambling was allowed and the track was policed. The third amendment extended the area covered to include enclosures outside the track as well as inside.76 Members of the racing establishment considered these changes the possible death-knell of racing. With the Jockey Club members themselves threatened with jail, they could not afford to allow the tracks to operate, and one member, Herman B. Duryea, even threatened to resign.77 Joseph S. Aurbach, the Jockey Club’s lead counsel, lobbied the legislature aggressively, hovering over them or sitting right down next to the Senators on the Senate floor, pleading and cajoling.78 While the Senate initially voted down the director’s liability measure,79 the victory was short lived. Soon the Senate would take the motion up again. August Belmont, chairman of the Jockey Club, requested a special meeting with Governor Hughes to have the exact meaning of the bills clearly laid out, and to discover if the Governor would sign them should they come to his desk.80 Hughes granted the Jockey Club an audience, but only a short one.81 In addition to the Jockey Club men, Hughes invited Rev. Walter Laidlaw, and Rev. A. Miller, who were staunch supporters of his position. Before Hughes, Aurbach argued that Appellate Justice

William Gaynor had ruled in the case against Orlando Jones, arrested for bookmaking at the Sheepshead Bay track in 1908, that “there can be no bookmaking without writing or recording” and that therefore the bill created an oxymoron by stating that bookmaking could be done without writing. He also argued that the measures would endanger directors of railroads and hotels if someone should happen to gamble on trains or in rooms. There were also concerns that it could disrupt baseball. But Hughes, and his clergy allies, who claimed that “the moral sense of the Commonwealth is in favor of these bills,” would not be swayed. Ultimately all three measures were passed, and on June 15, 1910, Governor Hughes signed them into law.

The two amendments to the Agnew-Hart law went into effect immediately, but the director’s liability measure was not to take effect until September 1, 1910. As long as the Jockey Club members themselves were not liable, they were willing to continue racing. But at Saratoga, on August 5, they announced that New York racing would end for the season on August 31. They would devote themselves to trying to get the law overturned by the courts, especially as private wagers, which they believed were protected by Common Law (even if that belief was somewhat antiquated by this period), could lead to arrest under the new laws. But the outlook was bleak since, as the papers

83 “Ask Hughes to Veto Anti-Betting Bills.”
84 “Horse Racing and Gambling,” Wall Street Journal, September 12, 1911.
85 “Ask Hughes to Veto Anti-Betting Bills.”
all pointed out, nowhere had racing been successfully revived after falling to the progressive crusaders. 89 The Coney Island tracks at Brighton Beach, Sheepshead Bay, and Gravesend shut down permanently. 90

James R. Keene sold off most of his horses at Saratoga, as did the owners of many smaller studs, 91 and most of the other prominent owners who had not already done so, prepared to send their best horses abroad. Even August Belmont, Chairman of the Jockey Club, who had been loyal to American racing and promised to race part of his string at Pimlico, in Maryland, as well as on the Canadian circuit, sent his most promising two-year-olds to England in 1911. 92 The states that had not followed Hughes’ lead by effectively banning racing did not offer sufficient sport to be worth most New Yorkers’ efforts. Virginia tracks, which had dominated racing during the antebellum era, had never recovered from the effects of the Civil War, and Virginia’s Governor William H. Mann declared himself about to follow Hughes’ lead. 93 Kentucky, which was already the location of most thoroughbred breeding (including the stud farms of most of the New York men), did not have sufficient racing to tempt most of the prominent owners. 94

The men of the turf did not simply give up, however, and they continued to fight for their sport, insisting horseracing was indeed necessary to the improvement of the

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94 Even today the Kentucky Derby is the one race that supports the rest of the Kentucky racing season, and back then, the Kentucky Derby was not even one of the top stakes races on the American calendar, let alone the international event it has become today.
breed of horse. On February 15, 1911, Harry Worcester Smith, Massachusetts textile magnate and founder of the Master of Foxhounds Association in America, gathered more than 300 horsemen from around the nation and Canada\textsuperscript{95} in the Myrtle Room of New York’s Waldorf Hotel.\textsuperscript{96} August Belmont as the toastmaster for this “Sportsmen’s dinner” used the occasion to announce that he was donating two of his best breeding stallions, Henry of Navarre and Octagon, along with four other younger stallions, to the Army for the establishment of a national stud,\textsuperscript{97} following the example of the Jockey Club Breeding Bureau, which the Jockey Club established in 1906, and the equally successful and longer standing examples of the national studs of the major powers of continental Europe. The United States army had established remount stations in 1908 in order to collect and train remount purchases, but the government had still resisted getting into the breeding business itself. With the possible collapse of the American thoroughbred breeding industry, however, the offer of the stallions was accepted and plans to begin remount breeding stations were under way,\textsuperscript{98} though they would still face significant political obstacles.

 Speakers at the dinner, which was created as an annual affair, spoke to the critical importance of the thoroughbred and to the importance of racing to sustaining the breed’s superior qualities. Using the example of dog shows, and how dogs bred for the show ring had lost their working abilities, they denounced horse shows as a poor substitute for

\textsuperscript{95}Smith, “The Sportsman’s Book Shelf,” 2.

\textsuperscript{96}“To The Horse ‘All Praise,’” \textit{New York Tribune}, February 16, 1911, 8, and “Belmont Horses as a Gift to Army,” \textit{New York Times}, 1911, 16 February 1911, 1,2.

\textsuperscript{97}“Belmont Horses as a Gift to Army.”

In horse shows, as in dog shows, what was rewarded was the appearance of being able to perform, without actually testing if the animal could perform. Because one of the critical things that racing actually tested in a horse was its durability, which was absolutely critical in a cavalry mount, and extremely difficult to judge merely by appearances, relying on horse shows to do the same testing work as racing would be disastrous. Both horses and dogs today which are bred for the show ring have become almost separate breeds from their counterparts which are bred to actually do the original work of the breed, with animals from the show ring lines generally proving to retain none of the original performance attributes of the breed despite looking spectacular when stood up for a judge. A cavalry mount does not need to look pretty, but it must be agile and durable. Throughout the dinner, the needs of the cavalry for suitable remounts created the thread that connected everyone’s remarks. After the dinner, Belmont sent Smith a congratulatory letter proclaiming “it has started a ball that may, I hope, grow and roll over all our enemies.”

By the 1912 dinner, military necessity was an even more prominent theme, and numerous army officers were among the noted guests and speakers. The assembly of sportsmen created the Unites States Cavalry and Artillery Remount Association, and while it was not an army entity, they unanimously elected fellow diner Major-General Leonard Wood, Chief of Staff, USA, a major proponent of the professionalization and

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99. Belmont Horses as a Gift to Army.

100. In human terms, imagine if Olympic contestants were judged by whether they had the appearance of the traits that would make them successful in each of the particular events, rather than competing in the events themselves.

rationalization of the army, to head the organization. Belmont even had an agreement from Theodore Roosevelt to serve as Vice President of the organization should those assembled wish it. Roosevelt, in addition to his political résumé, was another military leader and sportsman, who had served directly under Wood with the 1st United States Volunteer Cavalry (the “Rough Riders”) during the Spanish-American War. And while he was a great promoter of the rugged West, he knew horses and therefore the value of the thoroughbred over the western range horse. Comparing big game hunting to fox hunting, Roosevelt wrote “unless the quarry is a grizzly bear, it [big-game hunting] does not need nearly as much personal daring [as fox-hunting].” He also insisted that if hunting had been as popular in the North as it was in South in 1860, that the Northern cavalry would not have been so outridden for the first two years of the Civil War. Because they needed both speed and bottom, he was adamant that best hunters were, if not purebred, at least of predominantly thoroughbred blood. If thoroughbred racing ceased to be a driver in the American horse breeding industry, those hunters, and the sport that Roosevelt though best trained men for cavalry work, would disappear.

When Wood spoke, he focused on the fact that the quality of army mounts had seriously deteriorated since the advent of the automobile and that became “more serious

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104 “Save the Horse!” Slogan of Diners.”


106 Ibid., 341.

107 Ibid., 338.
When the army could not get hold of sufficient stock to fill its peacetime needs, how could it possibly handle a war? He had stated to Congress the previous year that the crusade against racing was doing tangible harm to the army remount situation, and called the exodus of thoroughbred stock to Europe “a national calamity.” Registration of thoroughbred foals dropped by more than 50% after the New York racing ban when into effect, and since the best stock had gone abroad, those registered foals were not the best of the best. He was clearly aware, though he did not articulate the idea in these terms, that the federal government and the State of New York had a serious conflict of interest, with federal government, in its role as orchestrator of national defense, relying heavily on the equine fruits of the racing industry, and the State of New York effectively trying to shut that industry down. One progressive trend was, ironically, at war with another, and the horses were caught in the middle.

This orchestrated effort of civilians to launch a program intended to encourage the government to act on their cause (a cause intended ultimately to aid the government) followed the example of the Society for the Preservation of National Parks, headed by John Muir. The group lobbied hard for some sort of agency to coordinate the protection and preservation of the growing number of national parks, and their lobbying efforts resulted in the National Park Service Act of 1916. Many of the same men would, in 1919, form the National Parks Association as a civilian organization supporting.

108 “Save the Horse!” Slogan of Diners.

109 “$12,000,000 Worth of State Racing Property Worse Than Useless,” The Evening World, December 23, 1911, 7.

110 Ibid.

promoting, and helping define guidelines for the National Park Service’s mandate.\textsuperscript{112}

This second role is also one the Remount Association would eventually emulate in its turn.

With racing under attack, and the best American horseflesh being shipped to Europe, the United States Army had to act to ensure its supply of remounts. The American horse population had reached a critical point where breeders were giving up on carefully bred saddle horses, and concentrating on harness and draft horses, and with the crises in racing, even many top thoroughbred breeders were getting out of the breeding business. What this left the army with was a choice between undersized range horses from the west, or draft crosses that were unsuitable to cavalry work. The few well bred riding horses available cost more than Congress was willing for the army to pay. As circumstances converged to force the United States government to confront this problem, it had both successful European breeding models and extensive internal plans from which to work. Both of these ultimately led it to formalize its hitherto haphazard reliance on thoroughbred breeding stock. That stock, once the ubiquitous improvement stock in the countryside, had begun to become too specialized and expensive for average breeders to make use of, and with the ever increasing availability of other forms of transportation, such as bicycles and automobiles, the saddle horse market was too weak for a breeder to risk much money in it. So the government finally had to do what it had resisted for decades and create the Remount Breeding Program.

This new program came at a time when the United States military had to work out how it was going to address new and expanded responsibilities. It had survived for over

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 23–26.
a century with a minimal professional, permanent army used primarily for fighting Native Americans on the various frontiers, and only expanding in emergencies of war, to be immediately reduced back to a skeleton force when the emergency subsided. But it was now having to reinvent itself to maintain imperial possessions wrested from Spain during the Spanish American War and therefore had to be prepared for much more international, sometimes offensive, military action.¹¹³ The American public was far more willing to upgrade and expand its Navy, which it tended to see as protecting commerce and keeping the United States out of wars, rather than as an internal threat to liberty.¹¹⁴ But the Army faced much resistance from those who still mistrusted a standing army and preferred to rely on state-based militias (in the form of the National Guard) of amateur citizen soldiers, led by the Democratic South which was still bitter from the occupation by federal troops after the Civil War. This ideological obstacle made the task of creating any long-term Army programs, like the Remount Program, extremely difficult, despite the economic and military logic that seemed obvious to its supporters.

The idea of a government breeding farm for the production of military horses did not occur to these officers out of the blue, as their own original idea, to solve the United States’ remount problem. Many nations in Europe and beyond had long since established such farms. Americans had seen the successes of European government studs and, as Lieutenant Leighton Finley insisted, the argument that the American “experience, should we adopt the system, might differ from their experience, which has always proved

¹¹³ Skowronek, Building a New American State.

satisfactory, is scarcely a tenable proposition.”¹¹⁵ Indeed, as Captain Woodson, in his article promoting a U.S. breeding farm, stated, “other governments have preceded us in such enterprises, and their breeding studs have passed beyond the point of experimental ventures to that of assured success.”¹¹⁶ Woodson believed that the United States was falling behind Europe in its production of warhorses.

Not only were many European nations, especially those with strong professional military traditions, ahead of the United States in this respect, but Germany, in particular, was widely acknowledged to have the most extensive and successful government breeding farms, and its studs were considered to breed “the best cavalry horses in the world.”¹¹⁷ As the remount problem worsened through the crises of racing and Europeans buying up “extra” American horses, the U.S. government began to collect information on foreign remount programs. In 1902, Lieutenant Colonel J.B. Kerr, promoted since his input on Lawton’s report, was the military attaché to Berlin and reported for government publication on Germany’s remount and breeding program, and he reiterated that it had “better-bred mounts than those of any other European country.”¹¹⁸ Germany’s program was multi-faceted: it had government breeding farms with both stallions and mares, stallion depots and stations scattered throughout the country which offered quality stallions to private citizens for their own breeding purposes, and it had remount depots

¹¹⁵ Finley, “Letter from Lieutenant Leighton Finley to the Chief Quartermaster, Fort Apache, Arizona, July 26, 1890,” 1.


where horses purchased in the open market were trained and prepared for military service.

On the breeding farms proper, the German government bred thoroughbreds in order to have a regular supply of top quality, race-tested, thoroughbred stallions to send to the stallion depots. Renowned German breeder and eventual Director General of the German stud farms, Count Georg von Lehndorff, was recognized, as Spencer Borden, another renowned horseman put it, “as one of the most scientific students of blood influences in horse-breeding.” Lehndorff believed that “the principal requisite in a good racehorse is soundness, again soundness, and nothing but soundness; and the object of the thoroughbred is, to imbue the limbs, the constitution and the nerves of the half-bred horse with that essential quality, and thereby enhance its capabilities.” And the “only practical test of soundness of limbs, digestive organs, nerves and temper…the public trial on the racecourse.” So in order to obtain the best race-proven breeding stock, the German studs were willing to pay an average price of $17,850 for each of the 10 stallions at the Trakenen stud, the largest, at the time of Colonel Kerr’s report, and the stud at Graditz even had one stallion costing $32,000.

The offspring of these top class racing stallions were sent to the stallion depots, where, each breeding season, they were dispersed to the various stallion stations to stand stud for public mares at reasonable stud fees, averaging $1, but sometimes as low as

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119 Ibid., 281.
120 Spencer Borden, *What Horse For the Cavalry?* (Fall River, MA: J.H. Franklin Company, 1912), 17.
122 Ibid., 25.
123 Kerr, “Germany,” 282.
$.50. This allowed for the general quality of horses in the nation to be elevated, resulting in private breeders having far more cavalry quality horses available to sell back to the government when the government needed them.

Every year, to remount the military, purchasing commissions would publicly advertise “remount markets” at which they would purchase only top quality horses, and purchase them in numbers large enough to send 63 horses to each regiment of cavalry in the army. This large scale purchasing of only eminently suited horses, kept the market strong enough for horse breeders to find it worthwhile to take advantage of the government stallions and breed quality saddle horses.

Once purchased, the horses would be sent to remount depots for training. This system successfully produced the approximately 130,000 horses in the German peacetime army at the turn of the twentieth century. It also made the German cavalry the envy of all others, and helped Germany’s military horses become so well known that popular publications like Munsey’s Magazine even featured articles about them, replete with photographic illustrations and reminders that “it must not be forgotten that in military Germany—where the needs of the army are considered first, last and all the time, and where few people except officers ride—the primary conception of a horse, unless for racing purposes, is of a regimental charger.” The American public might not approve of the Kaiser’s perceived militarism, but it knew well that he could mount his military on the best horses in the world at a moment’s notice.

124 Ibid.
125 Ibid., 273.
126 Ibid., 277.
Germany, while generally regarded as the most successful, was hardly the only European nation to throw itself into breeding military horses. Indeed, most European governments, other than Great Britain’s, took steps to ensure quality horses would be available to their armies in times of need. Austria-Hungary was another empire with a strong horse breeding tradition and extensive breeding operations. It, too, had both breeding farms and stallion depots, and encouraged the breeding of thoroughbreds. Hungarian owners of thoroughbred mares could breed them to state stallions for half the normal stud fee, and if the mares had won races, the fee was waived entirely. Even the non-thoroughbreds in the Austro-Hungarian breeding programs, such as their famous Lipizzaner horses, which had been carefully bred for centuries, were raced against each other to test for soundness and endurance before they were allowed into the breeding studs.

As the crisis in the horse supply became more apparent, the U.S. government began to collect information on state breeding programs in other countries. Colonel Kerr’s reports on Germany and Austria-Hungary were only part of that effort. Other military attaches were sent out to report on the cavalry procurement and breeding programs of countries ranging from Algeria to China to Norway to Argentina. Where attachés were not available, it relied on civilian reports. These were collected and printed for use by the War Department. Some American horsemen, like Spencer Borden,

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129 Borden, What Horse For the Cavalry?, 102–103.

conducted their own tours of state studs.\textsuperscript{131} Men like Borden certainly had their own interests. Borden, for example, was a devotee of the Arabian horse and wanted to use his tour to help make a case for the government to use Arabians in any breeding program it might create, but his work helped inform other American horsemen, and the general public, about the operations of foreign studs, making it easier for them to support a new remount system in general.

A great irony of the crisis in the American horse supply is that, while military and civilian horsemen were vigorously debating how to reverse the decline of American light-horse numbers, the crisis came as the absolute numbers of horses in the United States were reaching their all-time high. According to the census data, in 1890 there were 15,266,000 horses counted. In 1900, there were 16,965,000; in 1910, 19,220,000; in 1920, 19,767,000—the numerical peak of the horse population in U.S. history.\textsuperscript{132} The problem for the army was that while absolute horse numbers were higher than they ever had been, or would be again, the numbers of quality saddle horses were dwindling. The horses that made up the majority of the increased population were draft horses, needed to produce and transport food for the exploding urban population fueled by the tremendous increase in immigration during the same period. As George M. Rommel, Chief of Animal Industry Division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, put it in his official report on the state of the horse market in 1902, “one is impressed with the pronounced scarcity of animals of the better grades, especially among light horses.”\textsuperscript{133} Rommel

\textsuperscript{131} Borden, \textit{What Horse For the Cavalry?}.


attributed this lack to a number of causes. First, there had been a depression in the horse
market during the 1890s caused by the combined effects of the electric streetcar putting
millions of street-car horses out of work and on the market, and the terrible financial
panic of 1893, which caused vast numbers of breeders to stop breeding light horses
because the market was so unstable.\textsuperscript{134} Second, he cited the export market which had
exploded in the late 1890s, raising the prices for the few quality light horses beyond what
the domestic market would bear.\textsuperscript{135} But much of this export business was from foreign
armies, Great Britain’s most particularly, and could not be counted on as a steady enough
market to encourage breeders to get back into breeding light horses. The total number of
horses exported from the United States in 1890 was 3,501. The number of horses the
British purchased in the U.S. for cavalry use in the Boer War between 1900 and 1901
reached almost 50,000.\textsuperscript{136} This purchasing by foreign governments would only increase
as the instability in the Balkans grew and the nations of Europe prepared for full scale
mobilization. And foreign governments were willing to pay higher prices for remounts,
often significantly higher, than the United States, so what suitable cavalry mounts did
exist rapidly became too expensive for the U.S. cavalry to purchase.

Despite all of the military purchasing already going on in 1902, Rommel
proclaimed that “under no circumstances…can the army demand be looked upon as of
such a character as to affect the market steadily.”\textsuperscript{137} Horse breeders seemed to agree with
him and put their money in the much more reliable and profitable market for heavy

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 11–12.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 29.
horses. Since the government had always trusted in the market to produce the needed horses for the cavalry, this was a serious problem. Relying on what legal historian J. Willard Hurst called the “nineteenth century preoccupation with the market”\(^{138}\) simply did not work in breeding military horses in the twentieth century when there was no longer a sufficient non-military market from which the army could shop when it needed to. Rifles could be made in a hurry (for the right price) when needed for war, even if there was no significant peacetime market, and those rifles could then be stockpiled for years and be fit to use again. But horses could not be “manufactured” quickly for any price, and they had to be fed, housed and exercised, and would grow up and grow old, get sick and die regardless of the timing of wars.

To attempt to deal at least with the problem of the few suitable horses still available being too expensive for the army, in 1907, Quartermaster General (then Major) James B. Aleshire—urged on, in part, by the formation of the Jockey Club Breeding Bureau—outlined a plan for remount depots for the American army.\(^{139}\) His plans were detailed, and bore a strong resemblance to suggestions made by Roberston, Harris, and the officers polled in 1890, not to mention the remount depots of foreign countries. His plan called for the army to purchase the best available young horses on the open market, take them to one of the three or more depots he proposed, where they would grow to maturity and be trained for cavalry service, and from there be sent, as needed, to the cavalry regiments across the nation.\(^{140}\) He argued that the horses, chosen appropriately


and trained carefully, would reduce wastage to the point that a cavalry horse’s service life expectancy would rise from 6.4 years to 10 years, and reduce the cost of remounts by one third. In 1908 Congress acquiesced and appropriated the necessary funds in the appropriation act for fiscal year 1909. Officially created in 1908, the depots began collecting horses in 1910, and even though the horses purchased were of high quality, because they were purchased as untrained three and four year olds, and because they were purchased directly from the breeders without a middle-man, the per horse cost was significantly lower right from the start.

But George Rommel noted two continuing weaknesses in the program, which were not faults of the depot arrangement per se, but would limit its ability to keep the cavalry suitably mounted. The weaknesses were, first, the changes that had taken place in the U.S. horse market since the Civil War, with the balance shifting greatly in the favor of draft horses, unsuitable for cavalry purposes. He did not believe the army would have a problem getting all of the peacetime remounts it needed, but that there was “no reserve” of quality light saddle horses. He believed that draft horses made the most sense for farmers in the corn-belt to breed for their own farming purposes, but in other areas quality light horses would make sense for farmers if there was a sufficient market for the extras. He called it “only plain business foresight and judgment for the Government to encourage breeding of a type of horse, in suitable localities, that will be

141 Annual Report, Quartermaster General, War Department, 1907, quoted in Ibid., Circular 186:115.
142 Ibid., Circular 186:116.
143 Ibid., Circular 186:116–117.
144 Ibid., Circular 186:118.
useful not only to the army but satisfactory to the farmer as well.”¹⁴⁵ From his position as the horse expert in the Department of Agriculture, he had a strong understanding of the national horse market as a whole, and knew well what would best serve all of the major stakeholders.

The second major weakness he saw was that there was no systematic method to light horse breeding in the United States. Racehorse breeders, and, by this point, draft horse breeders, were fairly systematic about their breeding, but most Americans who bred light horses did not breed purebred horses and had what the Department of Agriculture representative A.D. Melvin deemed “an absolutely irrational system of breeding, or…lack of any system whatsoever,”¹⁴⁶ and Rommel bemoaned “the average man’s lack of ability as a horse breeder.”¹⁴⁷ The department published manuals and advice for American breeders, attempting to improve their methods, and reports on efforts to license breeding stallions in order to remove the poor ones from the gene pool.¹⁴⁸ As had been the case throughout U.S. horse breeding history, the thoroughbred could have a tremendous impact when bred to work-a-day mares because the thoroughbred had the genetic consistency—their phenotypes (expressed genes that made up their physical appearance) matched their genotypes (complete genetic makeup)—that the haphazardly

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ A.D. Melvin, “U.S. Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Animal Industry--Circular 178” (U.S. Department of Agriculture, April 19, 1911), 4, Record Group 17, Box 2, Folder “Horses--Care and Management,” National Archives and Records Administration Annex, College Park, MD.

¹⁴⁷ Rommel, The Army Remount Problem, Circular 186:117.

bred horse did not, so the thoroughbred’s phenotype was more predictably expressed in the offspring. Rommel had no doubt that the army buyers would give the breeders they purchased colts from good advice, but he was less confident that the breeders would take that advice. As he put it, “The only way to get anywhere in breeding is to be systematic, to adopt a policy and stick with it.”

Thoroughbred breeders had done this for generations and Rommel was strongly in favor of encouraging breeders to use tested, top-quality thoroughbred stallions. As a result, when the Secretary of War, Jacob Dickinson, approached the Secretary of Agriculture, James Wilson, in 1910, explaining that with direct purchase from the farmers, the army was still finding that there were simply insufficient numbers of horses available in case of war, the Department of Agriculture crafted a plan to help remedy the situation. This collaboration made sense as the War Department was still suffering the pains of reorganization to be able to maintain an international military presence after the Spanish American War, in the face of strongly entrenched anti-professional-military sentiment in Congress and much of the nation. The Department of Agriculture, on the other hand, was growing rapidly under Wilson, who was a firm believer in practical agricultural experimentation that would benefit farmers. Horse breeding was still a vast industry in the nation and the light-horse breeding sector was obviously lagging. Wilson, who had helped create the Bureau of Animal Industry within the department when he was in Congress, and oversaw its significant expansion as


Secretary,\textsuperscript{151} was in a much stronger position to act on the remount problem than was Dickinson. Research was the original purpose of the Department of Agriculture,\textsuperscript{152} and Wilson, in the process of overseeing a tremendous expansion of the department, created what Wayne Rasmussen, a historian of the Department, called one of the “world’s greatest research organizations.”\textsuperscript{153} This breeding project was officially deemed experimental research.

Rommel, representing the Department of Agriculture, and Captain Casper H. Conrad, of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Cavalry, representing the War Department, were the chief architects of the program.\textsuperscript{154} The basic outline was borrowed from Europe, particularly Germany, France and Austria-Hungary, and was very similar to what the Jockey Club had already implemented in New York. In its essence, the plan was to collect top quality stallions in four different regions, and to offer their services, at no fee, for approved mares. The owner of the mare contracted to give the army first option on the resulting foal when it turned three, at a price set before the breeding season began, but the owner could otherwise do with the foal as he saw fit. Only if he chose to sell the foal before the army exercised its option would he pay a breeding fee.\textsuperscript{155} As Rommel said, it “appeals to both patriotism and the pocketbook,”\textsuperscript{156} and he expected it to be well received by breeders.

The arguments Rommel claimed had been raised against his plan were that there were

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{151}Ibid., 170.
  \item \textsuperscript{152}Wayne D. Rasmussen, “The People’s Department: Myth or Reality?,” \textit{Agricultural History} 64, no. 2 (April 1, 1990): 292, doi:10.2307/3743818.
  \item \textsuperscript{153}Ibid., 294.
  \item \textsuperscript{154}Melvin, “U.S. Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Animal Industry--Circular 178,” 1.
  \item \textsuperscript{155}Ibid., 11.
  \item \textsuperscript{156}Rommel, \textit{The Army Remount Problem}, Circular 186:119.
\end{itemize}
already enough horses of the right type (which was clearly not accurate by that time), and that if the army would just pay more for horses, breeders would raise the quality on their own. But as Rommel argued, the army was already paying more for good colts than farmers could get elsewhere, and it had not raised the quality or number of the horses available, and would merely cost the government more money.  

Rommel came back again to his point that unless some sort of system was, if not imposed, made easily accessible, then the same haphazard breeding methods would prevail. If the government would approve the expenditures for the program the War and Agriculture Departments were collectively proposing, “the Government would be able to develop a systematic and economical system of breeding; it would know what was wanted and would get it.” It would ensure that sound stallions were being bred to sound mares, which would greatly increase the likelihood of sound offspring.

In February of 1911, August Belmont donated to the project two of the best known thoroughbred stallions in the nation, Henry of Navarre and Octagon. He used the first of Harry Worcester Smith’s horsemen’s dinners to make the announcement public. George Rommel does not appear to have attended the dinner, but was clearly in contact with its organizers and supported their aims. About 50 mares were bred that year, with the government having the option to buy the resulting colts for $150 at age three. The stallions did not reach Virginia until after the breeding season had started, and

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157 Ibid., Circular 186:120.
158 Ibid., Circular 186:121.
Octagon suffered a serious case of distemper upon arrival, or they would have bred more mares, as mare owners were eager to take advantage of the experiment.\textsuperscript{161} But an experiment was all it was, because it was paid for by appropriations to the Agriculture Department, which had authority to conduct breeding experiments. The Democrats, who had just gained control of the House and would control both chambers of the legislature after the next election, were not yet willing to authorize a military remount breeding program. The Department of Agriculture had two other breeding programs in operation at the time, one in Colorado, which was breeding carriage horses, and one breeding Morgan horses in Middlebury, Vermont, at the farm donated, along with its stock, by Morgan breeder Colonel Joseph Battell. But as Rommel said, “it should be specifically stated” that while some of the stallions bred in these programs might be useful in the military program, “neither project was outlined with the Army demand in view.”\textsuperscript{162} Congress had not yet approved a military breeding program, and the costs of the breeding program had to come from the Department of Agriculture appropriations.\textsuperscript{163} A number of those Morgans did eventually find their way into the remount breeding program,\textsuperscript{164} but Morgans had become specialized harness horses by then, so those that were deemed suitable for military use rather than civilian use were considered suitable for breeding light artillery remounts rather than cavalry remounts.\textsuperscript{165} The remount program was the

\textsuperscript{161} Rommel, \textit{The Army Remount Problem}, Circular 186:122.

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{163} Melvin, “U.S. Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Animal Industry--Circular 178,” 2.

\textsuperscript{164} C.C. Stillwell, “Letter From C.C. Stillwell to the Members of the Morgan Horse Club, June 13, 1922,” June 13, 1922, Record Group 17, Box 1, Folder “Horses-Breeds,” National Archives and Records Administration Annex, College Park, MD.

only program officially aimed at producing military horses, and included provisions for breeding both cavalry and artillery horses, with the cavalry mounts being the primary focus.

The idea for the Remount Association originally sprang from a conversation Harry Smith had with Major Allen at the New York Horse Show back in 1910. Their idea at first had been to raise money to buy thoroughbreds to donate to the army for breeding, and followed the model of Gun Foundry Board, which was an Army-civilian venture, founded in 1885, wherein private industrialists collaborated with the Federal Government to improve the United States’ coastal defenses. By the time it was fully organized and officially begun, the Remount Association had longer term goals than simply donating stallions, and aimed to create an entire remount breeding and training infrastructure for the Army. In keeping with those goals, one of the Remount Association’s first official endeavors was to create a basic library of the most important treatises on breeding and training for each US cavalry post. A prestigious committee comprised of Theodore Roosevelt, Harry Smith, August Belmont, among others, chose the catalog of books that they considered the most important works for each post to have and then set about raising the necessary $4,800 to purchase 12 copies of each book chosen (one copy for each post). They themselves subscribed a total of $2,000 towards the $4,800, in their efforts to make sure the different posts were as well informed as possible to make the venture successful.

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167 Skowronek, Building a New American State, 111.
169 “Working Hard for the Remount Cause.”
Ultimately, however, the program could never be successful without racing to continue to provide performance tested breeding stock. So turf leaders used this campaign to spread word of the army’s needs as a back door way of challenging progressives who had attacked racing, implying that the progressives were being shortsighted at the expense of national military preparedness. They hoped this argument would be effective at this time when even isolationist Americans could not help noticing that the conflicts in the Balkans were likely to lead to a significant war. The Republican Party, in addition to being the party of the progressives, was also the party of American imperial expansion, and in order to hold the territories acquired in the Spanish American War, the army had to be more efficient and effective, not less.

Turf men never stopped working the political angle, lobbying new legislators and New York’s new Democratic governor, John Alden Dix, from the moment they were sworn in. While a number of pro-racing legislators were willing to put forth legislation that would overturn the anti-racing laws from the previous sessions, they could never muster a majority. And while Governor Dix was a Democrat, he was still a moderate reformer, and did not seem inclined to revisit the issue. Whether for political reasons, or because he simply did not think racing was of tremendous importance, he allowed the courts to decide the issue and could not be prevailed upon to take a stand on the issue himself. So while the turf interests lobbied hard, the courts would ultimately decide whether racing would resume in New York State, and therefore, for all intents and purposes, in the nation. The courts did not arrive at any conclusions about the merits of the laws that had caused all of the turmoil until early 1912.
The Directors’ liability law was what had really shut down racing, and it was not until that was struck down in a case in October of 1912, and affirmed by the Appellate Court on February 21, 1913, that track managers could finally think about reopening their gates.²⁷⁰ Perry Belmont, brother of August Belmont and president of the United Hunts Racing Association, the organization for steeplechase racing, decided after Paul Shane was arrested for bookmaking at a steeplechase meet to make Shane a test case. Shane’s lawyer sought a writ of habeas corpus on behalf of Shane before New York Supreme Court Justice Townsend Scudder in Mineola, NY (Long Island). As part of the writ, Shane said that he had made oral bets, but had not violated the law because he was not a professional gambler or bookmaker.²⁷¹

Justice Scudder agreed with Shane’s legal arguments and issued the writ, releasing Shane from prison. He based his decision on the case of Sol Lichtenstein where the law was held to be a curb on professional gamblers and bookmakers, not on betting in general. He went on to state that when the law was amended to include the words “with or without writing” in 1910, that it was still intended as a measure against professional gamblers, not ordinary citizens betting amongst each other.²⁷² While Hughes and his allies might have debated that point, they were no longer in power. Furthermore, Governor Dix’s successor, Governor William Sulzer, reportedly believed that the laws as they stood prohibited neither racing nor betting on races, and had no intention of standing

²⁷² Ibid.
in the way of the rebirth of New York racing so long as professional gambling was not allowed.\textsuperscript{173}

Although directors’ liability was not technically part of the writ, Justice Scudder added that “it is erroneous to say that any director could be held liable under these conditions under the present law.”\textsuperscript{174} It was his interpretation that the law prohibited “the keeping of racetracks used for gambling”\textsuperscript{175} which could not be the case if the director had no direct knowledge of the gambling going on. This decision was what the turf men had been hoping for. Although it was technically \textit{obiter dictum}, since it was not part of the writ, and therefore should not have the force of law, it was upheld unanimously by the Appellate Division--New York State’s highest court,\textsuperscript{176} and was treated as legal precedent.\textsuperscript{177}

Once their lawyers agreed that it was indeed safe to resume racing, the Jockey Club members had to figure out how to go about it. With most of the major racing strings in Europe, or simply sold off, few good horses were fit and in condition to immediately head to the track. Certainly some were in training for the meets in Maryland and Virginia, and some had been racing in the Carolinas and Mexico over the winter, but they did not come close to the number needed to sustain racing on the scale to which New York was accustomed. It was an old racing axiom that “money makes the mare go” and without purses, no one would bother to bring the mare (or stallion, or gelding) to the


\textsuperscript{174} “Oral Bets on Track Upheld by Court.”

\textsuperscript{175} “Oral Bets on Track Upheld by Court.”

\textsuperscript{176} “Three Days of Racing a Week,” \textit{New York Tribune}, April 5, 1913, 1.

\textsuperscript{177} There was historical precedent for treating \textit{obiter dictum} rulings as law, with the Supreme Court’s Dred Scott decision being the most notable.
track to run. The Jockey Club faced a conundrum because the admission fees paid by the bettors (which they had not had in the previous two years) provided the purse money to entice “the mare’s” owner. How were they to bring back big purse money to New York without any of the tracks going bankrupt?

To complicate matters, the Jockey Club had a conflict of interest. It was the ruling body for racing across the country (at least in theory), but it was made up almost entirely of the proprietors of the various New York tracks. So it had to try to balance the needs of the New York tracks with those of the smaller tracks in the South, which had been trying to keep racing alive in the United States. What it decided to do, since it would not be able to get the tracks up and running before late spring anyhow, was to declare that the New York tracks would not be given racing dates that conflicted with, and hence competed with, the dates already given to the Southern tracks. This decision meant that New York racing could not resume before the end of May, 1913, which at least gave them the appearance of dealing fairly with the smaller tracks.

In order to provide purses without bankrupting themselves, the track owners decided to revive a plan that they had tried during the abbreviated season of 1910. To avoid catastrophic losses for any of the individual tracks, they pooled together their resources to share the profits and losses. While no tracks generated any profit in 1910, and nobody expected them to in the near future, they could at least manage to get racing

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179 I have found no evidence of anyone attempting to have the Jockey Club ruled an illegal trust, perhaps because the legislature had officially enshrined its position in law. Presumably, once the Supreme Court ruled, in 1922, that Major League Baseball was exempt from the trust laws, anyone who might have questioned the Jockey Club’s trust status would have considered the MLB ruling their answer.
going again and see how far it would take them. They also encouraged owners, breeders, and lovers of the sport in general to subscribe to The Owners Fund, which they established to subsidize racing. And they decided to hold meets only at Belmont, Aqueduct, Jamaica and Saratoga, because they were the tracks most easily made ready on time. What none of them could know at the time was that none of the others tracks would hear a call to the post ever again. New York’s biggest tracks immediately began to host the nation’s best race horses and most prestigious races again, and on the day of the first post-blackout running of the Metropolitan Handicap, Belmont Park ran out of admission tickets because the crowd was so large, but New York racing never revived to the point where owners of the tracks not immediately brought back onto action could withstand the pressures of urban development. The land rapidly went from race tracks to housing tracts. But racing came back across the country, and as tracks began to install pari-mutual systems for betting, where the revenues went to the track owners instead of to bookmakers, gambling became a revenue stream for the states, via taxation on the tracks, that became more and more important in state budgets. By the time of the Great Depression, that tax revenue prompted states to vigorously promote racing, causing it, unlike almost every other business, to expand significantly, and it has not been threatened since.

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184 Roberston, The History of Thoroughbred Racing in America, 275.
The racing public was aware that the breeding industry was ultimately what was at stake. As the *New York Tribune* put it, describing the crowd at the Belmont, “fully 25,000 lovers of the horse…approved in most convincing way [sic] the efforts being made by those who are trying to build afresh and to protect, or at least to stimulate, the great breeding industry of this country.”\(^{185}\) To breed athletic, durable horses, the nation relied on racing. Because the army relied on athletic, durable horses to mount the cavalry, the army relied on racing.

The restoration of racing in New York should have cleared the way for the Army Remount Breeding Program to gain traction and grow. But despite the well publicized mobilization disaster of the Spanish American War, which Theodore Roosevelt referred to as being “within a measurable distance of a military disaster,”\(^{186}\) and which was very publicly investigated by a presidential commission, the United States was still not politically ready for a breeding farm under the control of the War Department. As a nation, it was willing to spend more money on its navy, but the army faced much more significant hurdles to reorganization and professionalization, and for preparedness during peacetime, because its traditional integration with state and local government structures, which the navy did not have, brought its reorganization firmly up against entrenched power interests.\(^{187}\)

And while cavalry officers were enthusiastic about the military breeding experiment at Front Royal, Virginia, not all private breeders shared that enthusiasm. *The

\(^{185}\) Ibid.


Thoroughbred Record, in an editorial published in its August 16, 1913, issue, reported that “Uncle Sam has recently embarked in the horse business on such a giant scale that it is not improbable that the business of private breeders will be seriously affected.”\footnote{188} It stated that the government wanted to “turn out thoroughbreds by the thousands,”\footnote{189} which it apparently worried would glut the market. As Lieutenant Danford pointed out in a letter to the editor of the Thoroughbred Record, the thoroughbred market was far more likely to benefit, and the continued support of the major breeders like Belmont seemed to back him up. He argued that the government farms would have relatively few purebred thoroughbreds, and would offer them to private breeders for their use.\footnote{190} Breeders also gained a ready market and good price for the offspring.\footnote{191} Others pointed out that the army was not trying to breed race horses. It was trying to breed cavalry horses. Indeed, Captain Albert McLure asserted that “the speed of the stallion or the purses he has won on the race track are of no importance…. It is important, however, that the young stallion destined for the stud should as a three year old prove his soundness and endurance by flat racing before entering the stud at four.”\footnote{192} The relative speed of thoroughbred versus thoroughbred was not what the army was interested in. It was interested in the relative

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188 “Uncle Sam Has Horses for the Whole World,” The Thoroughbred Record, August 16, 1913, Vol. 78, No. 7 edition, 76.

189 Ibid.


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speed of the thoroughbred versus other breeds.\textsuperscript{193} It was also interested in a rigorous proving ground for structural durability and staying power. Major American thoroughbred breeders like August Belmont agreed, and they continued to support the program with breeding stock. Indeed, there is little evidence of significant division among horsemen on the topic of the government breeding program, particularly once it was established and private breeders suffered no ill consequences.

Many Cavalry men were well versed in breeding science, and were well aware of the work of men like Bakewell, Mendel, and Darwin.\textsuperscript{194} They understood that informed breeders now had the knowhow to make fairly significant changes in the attributes of a breed in relatively few generations by careful selective breeding. As a result, men like Lieutenant Danford argued that other American breeds like the Morgan, the standardbred and the saddlebred, though they were based on thoroughbred lines, had been specialized in directions that were no longer as suitable for cavalry as they might have been a few decades earlier, and that therefore the thoroughbred was still “the road shorter and more certain of success”\textsuperscript{195} when breeding for cavalry horses. Again, he did not suggest that the cavalry should be mounted on purebred thoroughbreds. Indeed he, like so many others, including the universally esteemed Count Lehndorff, thought that the thoroughbred cross was the answer. Because of trends toward short sprint races at the turn of the century, and breeders ability to more quickly breed for them, even some thoroughbreds were becoming “a light boned animal with little substance and an animal


\textsuperscript{194} Danford, “The Army Horse,” September 6, 1913, 112.

\textsuperscript{195} Danford, “The Army Horse,” January 1914, 675.
with such a high strung nervous temperament as to be of little use any place except on the race track.”

The army had no intention of competing with breeders who bred for the track. It needed thoroughbred stallions bred for, and tested in, distance races, and with good temperaments, to breed top quality part-bred cavalry horses. Through all of the tides of fashion and upheaval, this had always been the best cavalry horse, and it still was.

Not yet mounted on results of the new breeding program, in 1916 the United States Army did get a small dress rehearsal, of sorts, before officially entering World War I, and that came in the form of the Punitive Expedition into Mexico. Pancho Villa had raided and burned Columbus, New Mexico, and while President Wilson did not want to start a war with Mexico, which was itself in the midst of a revolutionary civil war, he could not afford politically to ignore the overtly hostile action. He sent General John J. Pershing—called “Black Jack” for his years commanding the 10th Cavalry, an African America unit—into Mexico to disrupt Villa’s army. It was a cavalry-heavy expedition, though it included infantry, artillery and even an air force of sorts. But the planes broke down, the trucks bogged down, and the infantry couldn’t keep up. So the cavalry did the lion’s share of the work.

Villa’s men were not unopposed in Columbus, indeed far more of them were killed or captured than Americans, and the outnumbered 13th U.S. Cavalry methodically fought the Villistas out of Columbus, and as soon as the Mexicans began to retreat, according to Major Frank Tompkins’ official report, Tompkins had the men of troops H and G mounted and led them out on the offensive, into waterless, rocky, desert Mexican...
Within the span of “seven and one half hours, [they] covered 25 to 30 miles of rough country, fought four separate rear guard actions without the loss of a single man, and inflicted a loss of from 75 to 100 killed.” They also recovered much of what had been looted from Columbus and called a halt to the pursuit only when they were about to run out of ammunition—all on horses that had not been fed or watered since the previous evening. Within a week, Pershing led the Punitive Expedition across the border.

The mounted units ultimately involved were 5th, 6th, 7th, 10th, 11th, 12th, and 13th Cavalry (plus First Lieutenant George S. Patton of the 8th cavalry, on special assignment to Pershing)—all frontier-hardened regulars. They rode 350 miles into Mexico, and decimated Villa’s forces. The airplanes that were supposed to help the cavalry gather intelligence as they hunted for Villa in the mountains all crashed within a month, and were therefore useless, and the army was unable to maintain their supply and troop transport trucks in the field (where they often bogged down in sand or mud anyway). So the infantry essentially guarded the supply line while the cavalry chased down Villa’s men. Because of the restrictions placed on Pershing by President Wilson, Villa was personally able to evade the Americans, but not only were most of his forces broken up, but a significant number of his top commanders were killed, with George Patton

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198 Ibid., 56.
199 Ibid.
200 Herr, *The Story of the U. S. Cavalry, 1775-1942*, 236.
himself killing one of Villa’s most sought after colonels while on a hay foraging expedition. What Pershing learned from this experience was that mechanized elements of the army, while potentially very useful, were difficult to maintain in the field, horses could still go where trucks couldn’t, and in rough territory, it was the cavalry that was the most mobile force yet available. These lessons would stay with Pershing, and would ultimately play a significant role in shaping the United States’ view on the necessity of a remount supply—at least as much as World War I would.

When World War I began, Europeans increased their purchasing in the United States, because they, too, were suffering from the shortages of saddle horses wrought by changing technology and the unprecedented scale of twentieth century warfare. Their actions made the United States remount problem more pressing. As British Brigadier General T.R.L. Bate, a remount purchaser in North America, said during the war, “the cavalry horse as we know him in England does not exist in North America in any numbers which are appreciable for modern war requirements. What have been bought as cavalry are the best that can be procured, but that is all. The cavalry horse is not a commercial factor in America, and that, in a nutshell, is the reason of the scarcity of the type.” The British loved the American-bred artillery and transport horses, fondly referred to as “Yanks,” but they were light draft horses, which were very much a commercial factor in America. While the Remount Program bred these light draft horses, because they were commercially viable, there was a significant supply of them in the

204 Herr, _The Story of the U. S. Cavalry, 1775-1942_, 239–240.

205 “Buying British Remounts in America,” in _The Horse and the War_, by Sidney Galtrey (London: Country Life, 1918), 34.

206 Sidney Galtrey, _The Horse and the War_ (London: Country Life, 1918), 38.
civilian marketplace through the 1920s. But the United States was cleaned out of quality cavalry horses.

As the need for cavalry mounts became immediate when the United States joined the war 1917, H.H. Reese, of the Animal Husbandry Division of the Bureau of Animal Industry, in the Department of Agriculture, assessed the military breeding experiment begun four years earlier. He declared the plan satisfactory for peacetime needs, but in order “to create a reserve which will be needed in recouping an army actively engaged in war, when the demands are infinitely greater, this plan of encouragement should be considerably increased in scope.”207 By the summer of 1917, the Government had purchased a total of 33 stallions of thoroughbred, saddlebred, standardbred and Morgan breeding,208 and an additional nine thoroughbred stallions had been donated by leading thoroughbred breeders.209 Those donated stallions were among the best bred in the country, and they were among the most popular with breeders.210 The standardbred and Morgan stallions were intended to breed light artillery horses, and the Thoroughbreds made up the majority of the stallions intended for breeding cavalry mounts. The racing men had by this time won their battles against anti-gambling legislatures, so the immediate financially motivated impulses for the racing men to appear patriotic had relaxed. These were wealthy Americans whose fortunes would stand to suffer as much as any if the United States military efforts failed. Men like August Belmont, Johnson


208 Ibid., 4–6.

209 Ibid., 6.

210 Ibid., 13.
Camden and Thomas Nelson Page,\textsuperscript{211} who all donated elite thoroughbred stallions to the program, understood the advantages of a well mounted cavalry, and the security it could bring to their own positions in the larger picture of the future.

Even in the context of the commencement of World War I, Herbert Reese could not make his argument solely on military grounds. There was still enough resistance to the army being involved in horse breeding that he had to make a strong case that this program was also a significant benefit to farmers. Many in the United States, led by the anti-professional-army Democrats,\textsuperscript{212} had a lingering fear of the military man-on-horse, but by the beginning of World War I, another significant source of resistance was the horse breeding and horse contractor lobby. The top horse breeders, most of whom bred draft horses, enjoyed their cornered military market as a profit venue for their culls, and the contractors did not want it to be easy for individual farmers to sell their horses to the military without a middleman. Reese had to argue that, while the draft horse was generally the more suitable form of horse power for farm work, certain regions, like Appalachian Virginia, required light horses because of the terrain, and the lack of heavy machinery that required draft horse muscle to move it. He framed the military element of the program in terms of its aid to farmers, generally a Democratic constituency, when he summed up his entire argument for the expansion of the remount breeding program as follows:

In short, the Government’s plan of aiding farmers in such sections in producing Army horses is giving them material aid as well as educational aid in developing

\textsuperscript{211} Ibid., 6.

an important phase of their farming operations…. From the agricultural standpoint alone, the remount-breeding work should be extended to other suitable localities, to say nothing of the resultant effect of adding to the defensive strength of the country in a military way.\textsuperscript{213}

Reese, in the face of mobilization for World War I, pitched the military breeding plan as way of helping economically challenged American farmers increase their farming capacity and agricultural education to gain support for expanding it, despite the obvious military necessity.

That year was the first in which the Departments of Agriculture and War could begin to gauge the program’s potential ability to produce military quality cavalry mounts. Due to the almost year-long gestation period of horses, and the offspring’s needing to be three years old before they were of age for purchase by remount depots, 1917 was the first year that there were products of the experimental program ready to be inspected for purchase, and that first round of inspections resulted in exactly 174 horses purchased for the military that spring.\textsuperscript{214} Despite the tiny proportion of necessary military horses, the resistance to government stockpiling cavalry mounts was still strong and reinforced by influential breeders, who wanted to unload their culls.\textsuperscript{215} Breeding was still a business, and breeders didn’t want to lose their market share. As one reader of the Breeder’s Gazette wrote, “surely this is not a time to breed war horses; it is a time to sell them.”\textsuperscript{216}

\textsuperscript{213} Reese, “Breeding Horses for the United States Army,” 18.

\textsuperscript{214} Ibid., 13.


\textsuperscript{216} Derry, Horses in Society a Story of Animal Breeding and Marketing, 1800-1920, 132.
But when the United States officially entered the conflict, the tone of the remount discussion changed, as the fears about the nation’s ability to mount its soldiers in wartime proved accurate. As Major A.A. Cederwald would later put it, “there is no doubt but that the war advanced remount matters to a point they would not have reached for years, if ever.” No one had apparently expected the United States to ever mobilize an army of the size that was suddenly being raised, and while the remount system had addressed the peacetime supply issues, it had only ever operated on a peacetime scale. With the War Department suddenly having to purchase horses on the scale of up to 100,000 per lot, after foreign governments had been purchasing American horses on the same scale since the beginning of the war, the full implications of the dwindling light horse population became impossible to ignore.

In May of 1917, less than a month after the declaration of war, the War Department came up with a procedure for purchasing remounts on the necessary scale. First, cavalry remounts were to be purchased for approximately $180, which was a slight increase over previous rates. Purchasers were to make no contracts for lots fewer than 300 because of the efficiencies of bulk purchasing and the small numbers of inspectors. As the Quartermaster General’s memo on the purchase plan stated, “on account of the scarcity of qualified officers, it will be impossible to handle the purchase

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of large number [sic] of animals unless the services of dealers are utilized to do the enormous amount of work in connection with the preliminary inspection of animals in the hands of breeders and farmers, and the concentration of suitable animals in sufficient numbers at points where they can be conveniently inspected by purchasing boards.”

The government wanted to promote individual farmers, rather than huge contractors, but with the pressing needs of war suddenly upon it, it could not really afford to look at small lots.

In July of 1917, in order to figure out precisely how they were going to find the necessary horses, George Rommel held a meeting of horsemen, probably the Remount Advisory Board, to have a frank discussion of the remount issue. Congress had authorized an increase in the number of cavalry regiments from seventeen to twenty five, and they needed to be mounted. H.H. Reese, representing the Bureau of Animal Industry stated that “the farmers of Virginia have been very anxious to breed from the stallions the Government has been furnishing….Farmers there are going to raise army horses and breed to Government stallions.” The problem, as he saw it, was that because the army was only buying in large number, it was only buying through middlemen, and as a result, the farmers were only getting about $115 per colt, which did not leave them enough profit to keep up the practice. If the army paid $160-$170 directly to them for the colts they raised, then the profits would be very much worth their

220 Ibid., 2–3.
222 “Transcript of Meeting Presided over by George Rommel, Chief of Bureau of Animal Industry,” July 18, 1917, 2, Record Group 62, Box 302, Folder “Minutes of Meetings,” National Archives and Records Administration Annex, College Park, MD.
223 Ibid.
while. By November of 1917, the army did make provisions for lots as small as one railroad car load (approximately twenty horses)\textsuperscript{224}, and attempted to have “at least one purchasing board in each of zone…reserved for the inspection of animals offered by farmers and breeders in lot [sic] less than carload lots.”\textsuperscript{225} But with the entire United States divided up into only three zones, it was very expensive for farmers to ship their sales animals to a central location to be inspected, and possibly rejected, by the one board in their third of the nation that was able to inspect lots that small. The idea was impractical and potentially hazardous for the horses that would be exposed to disease and railroad accidents as a result. Colonel John S. Fair, the head of the Remount Department, stated that “the scarcity of qualified inspectors makes it almost impossible to buy direct from the farmer.”\textsuperscript{226} Because the growth of the Regular Army had been so vigorously and successfully opposed by the Democrats over the previous decades, America’s Army staff was far smaller than that of the other belligerent nations,\textsuperscript{227} and so Fair simply lacked the manpower.

Another obstacle to the farmers selling directly to the government was communication, and miscommunication. The army purchasing boards could only be in

\textsuperscript{224} R.H. Williams and Grosvenor B. Clarkson, “Transcript of a Conversation Between Mr. R.H. Williams, Assistant to the Director of the Council of National Defense and Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Purchase of Public Animals and Remount Service, and Mr. Grosvenor B. Clarkson, Secretary of the Council of National Defence, October 2, 1917, Subject: The Purchase of Horses and Mules for the United States Army, Together with a General Discussion of the Organization and Work of the Remount Division of the United States Army,” October 2, 1917, 7, Record Group 62, Box 301, Folder “Clarkson, Grosvenor,” National Archives and Records Administration Annex, College Park, MD.


\textsuperscript{226} John S. Fair, “Letter from Captain Fair to the Administrative Division,” June 20, 1917, 2, Record Group 62, Box 301, Folder “Lt Col Fair--Awards,” National Archives and Records Administration Annex, College Park, MD.

\textsuperscript{227} Skowronek, \textit{Building a New American State}, 236.
so many places at once, but large horse dealing firms had longstanding infrastructure to purchase large numbers of horses. Dealers knew all the areas where farmers might have horses to sell, and they carpeted them with their own advertisements. The firm of Harbison, Jouett and Patterson, for example, allegedly posted advertisements stating that the government offered $110-$150 for cavalry horses, thus justifying their lower payment to the farmer.²²⁸ This type of advertising was apparently a common trick of dealers to misinform farmers of what the government would pay, so that the dealers could gain a better profit margin. According to Colonel Fair, one dealer spread the rumor that farmers selling their horses to the government had to pay the shipping, and if the horses were rejected, the farmer had to pay the return shipping as well.²²⁹

One of the horsemen present at Rommel’s Remount meeting claimed that “we know economic conditions are such that there is no encouragement to produce the type [of horse] the government needs and there is no encouragement from the army…. Men will not produce unless the Bureau of Animal Industry can plan to encourage the farmer.”²³⁰ With only the small scale experimental breeding farms, the government encouragement to breeding reached far too few farmers to create enough horses to supply army needs. This reality led Rommel to proclaim that “the farmer is going out of breeding these light types and the government must step in.”²³¹ Captain Fair agreed that the government must get involved, saying: “we hope the Agriculture Department will step in and supply the necessities in time of peace. We expect to arrange between the

²²⁸ “Transcript of Meeting Presided over by George Rommel, Chief of Bureau of Animal Industry,” 3.
²²⁹ Ibid.
²³⁰ Ibid., 8.
²³¹ Ibid.
Agriculture and War Departments to supply them." But neither of these men was in Congress, and even if Congress cleared the way for a massive government breeding program, since horses could not be produced on an assembly line like other war materiel, the fruits of the farms would not be realized until well after the war was over. Despite the best intentions to offer top quality thoroughbred stallions to the farmers for breeding, for the benefit of both the farmers and the military, the massive scale of wartime horsepower needs virtually forced the government to deal primarily with dealers. It simply did not have the purchasing infrastructure that the dealers did to notify farmers of its needs and what its terms were.

In October of 1917, the War Department deemed the remount purchasing a success, and claimed that it was getting all of the animals it needed. But by December of the same year, the Allied Purchasing Board changed its tone and argued that no horses that the U.S. military might find useable for the war should be allowed to be exported, and that any loopholes in export rules be closed because “The demand of this war on animals have [sic] been far beyond our calculations.” The fears of George Rommel and other proponents of the Remount breeding program were being realized, and the reserve supply of suitable light horses for cavalry work, along with other non-draft horses, was gone.

232 Ibid.
Foreign armies, particularly the French and English, took mares as well as geldings, before the United States joined the war, and this caused consternation in the United States once it did join the war. Americans were conflicted about using mares. On a practical level, as Major Fair pointed out, military men objected to using “the mare in the military service owing to their [sic] nature.” When some mares come into season their hormones can make them as difficult to handle as stallions, though this is certainly not the case for all, or even most, mares. It is a long-standing prejudice against mares that survives to the current day among many. While the prejudice spoke as much to societal beliefs as to biological reality, there was a germ of biological reality to it. But the official position, which had great merit, was that any mare of suitable quality for the cavalry should be used to produce more cavalry horses, not as a cavalry horse herself. When the United States entered the war, the Remount service, under the direction of Major Fair, struck a “gentlemen’s agreement with the French and the English not to buy mares unless over [breeding] age.” This position on the use of mares was important to the continued supply of cavalry mounts. But many breeders, primarily draft horse breeders, objected to the policy, largely because they wanted to find a market for their culls which they did not want to breed and which they could not sell otherwise. They did not claim that the army should buy unsound mares, but mares which were “a size which is considerably too small for profitable breeding purposes on American farms [but] corresponds quite accurately to that demanded for certain purposes in the army.” Mr. W.R. Goodwin, managing editor of the Breeder’s Gazette, and Wayne Dinsmore, secretary of the National Society of

236 Ibid., 5.
Record Associations, urged the case that earlier Allied purchases began the “elimination of these light weight mares [which] has been a God-send to our horse breeders.” Samuel Insull argued that the army restrictions on selling mares were “interfering with a clearance of a class of mares whose presence for some years had been a stumbling block in the path of our farmers improving their stock of horses…. The exportation of such mares is to be encouraged, for the reason that there is no satisfactory outlet for them…. Their elimination will be a benefit.”

Eventually, when available mule numbers began dropping dangerously low, the Allied Purchasing Board and the Bureau of Animal Industry began a campaign to get small-scale farmers to sell their work mules and buy mares in their place because “the mule market had never been so high or the market for mares so low and it makes an attractive business proposition for the farmer.” Although they were adamant that “for the successful working of this plan, there be not the least suspicion aroused that this in any way emanates from the vicinity of the War Department.”

Apparently the small-scale farmers trusted the Bureau of Animal Industry, and Agricultural Extension Agents to have their best interests at heart, but thought the War Department just wanted what was best for the War Department’s interests. The small farmers also tended to be Democrats, and therefore had a strong

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239 Samuel Insull, “Letter from Samuel Insull to George F. Porter, Chief, Section of Cooperation with States,” September 26, 1917, 1, Record Group 62, Box 304, Folder “P,” National Archives and Records Administration Annex, College Park, MD.


241 Ibid.
instinct to oppose ideas emanating from the War Department. Ultimately these arguments from draft horse men, no matter what the Bureau of Animal Industry did to try to help their situation, merely underscored the reality that farmers were not breeding light horses in sufficient numbers for the army’s needs, because the mares those breeders were desperately trying to remove from the breeding pool were precisely the mares that the government needed to preserve in the breeding pool. Due to the military necessity, Fair did agree that militarily suitable mares that were barren should be considered to mount the military and give the farmers a market for this unbreedable stock,242 but the breedable light mares had to stay in the broodmare pool.

Because foreign governments had been buying up militarily suitable horses since the beginning of the war, they had established infrastructure, routines and personnel with which the United States military buyers had to compete. Once the United States officially entered the war, Germans were no longer allowed to purchase American horses, but the Americans still had to compete with their own allies. Captain Fair, as head of the Remount Department, sent R.H. Williams, of the Committee on Purchase of Public Animals, a confidential copy of the British memo stating the prices the British military would pay for different classes of military horse,243 along with a memo instructing purchasing officers to pay “$5 over British [prices].”244 Between October of 1914 and


244 “Memorandum,” June 27, 1917, Record Group 62, Box 303, Folder “Tauber, Max and Sons, Chicago, Ill.,” National Archives and Records Administration Annex, College Park, MD.
September of 1917, the British had purchased 103,638 head of horses at the St. Louis National Stock Yards alone.\textsuperscript{245} In that same time frame, the French had purchased 94,507 horses, the Italians, 38,571, the Belgians, 21,176, and the Americans, 10,980—again, just through that single stock yard.\textsuperscript{246} Once the Americans began purchasing, they were generally given the first option by dealers. Indeed, according to one horseman at Rommel’s remount meeting, “the first look is always given to our Government; the second look to the English and next look given to the French who took all the English would not.”\textsuperscript{247} But even with the United States getting the first opportunity to purchase what was left, as F.L. Eaton, the president of the Sioux City Stock Yards warned, “for the last three years many horses have been taken by other governments and large numbers of the best horses are gone. I believe it will be absolutely impossible for the government to keep its high standards and secure enough horses for its use.”\textsuperscript{248} He was confident that the dealers who worked through his stockyards could supply sufficient heavy horses for artillery use, but not enough cavalry horses.\textsuperscript{249} Breeding light horses, with the army—via dealers—as the primary market, was simply not a viable economic venture for farmers; there was more money in other, less risky livestock.\textsuperscript{250}

\textsuperscript{245} E.F. Buber, “Letter to Mr. R.E. Conway from E.F. Buber, Vice President of St. Louis National Stockyards,” September 5, 1917, 1, Record Group 62, Box 301, Folder “Hold Unfinished Business,” National Archives and Records Administration Annex, College Park, MD.

\textsuperscript{246} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{247} “Transcript of Meeting Presided over by George Rommel, Chief of Bureau of Animal Industry,” 7.


\textsuperscript{250} “Transcript of Meeting Presided over by George Rommel, Chief of Bureau of Animal Industry,” 11.
Before any remedy the government could provide would produce usable cavalry mounts, the Remount Department had to find a way to purchase enough horses to supply the immediate emergency, and there were a number of serious obstacles beyond scarcity that hindered that process. First and foremost, the army did not have sufficient numbers of qualified personnel to inspect the horses offered for purchase. According to Captain Fair, “out of 5,000 men who certified under oath that they were capable of purchasing horses, only about eight were so qualified.”\textsuperscript{251} Among those deemed unqualified, Fair quoted those who evaluated the men as saying “when asked where the withers [the highest point of the shoulders] were. Would look about the back and possibly raise tail of the animal and looking at the hind quarters and inquire whether the withers were thereabouts,”\textsuperscript{252} indicating that they literally did not know one end of a horse from the other. Clearly the army had a problem. Dr. Lawton, another attendee of Rommel’s remount meeting, pointed out that “inspectors appointed by political influence are easy-marks for the contractor.”\textsuperscript{253} When Fair challenged him on whether he knew specifically of any such inspectors, his answer was, “yes, that refers to me personally.”\textsuperscript{254} The best cavalry men were needed in Europe, and there were few men left behind who were sufficiently qualified to purchase mounts for the cavalry, though most certainly did their best.

One of the dealer tricks they had to confront was the simple resubmission of rejected horses. Dealers would keep resubmitting the same horse until they got it front of  

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\textsuperscript{251} Ibid., 4.

\textsuperscript{252} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{253} Ibid., 3.

\textsuperscript{254} Ibid., 4.
an inspector who did not recognize its disqualifying fault, or was simply too tired, or overwhelmed by the numbers of horses and limited time, that he passed the horse. The dealer might also ship the horse to another inspection station, hoping for a less competent inspector. The extra shipping was less than taking a loss on the purchase of the horse from the farmer. Captain Fair wanted any dealer who resubmitted a horse to be blacklisted, but Dr. Lawton, based on his own experience, thought the practice would be impossible to stop.

Other dealer tricks included patching quarter cracks, a significant crack in the rear of the hoof that would cause serious lameness under stress, with mud so that it wasn’t visible. More common were their attempts to make an undersized animal appear to make the weight requirement. Some of the tricks for that included pulling down on the halter while the animal was being weighed, or surreptitiously putting a foot on the scale. Or sometimes, they simply changed the official weight tags.

Purchasing boards also had to contend with unsanitary stock yards causing disease; in the summer of 1916, the government purchased approximately 70,000 horses and mules, and according to Henry Sharpe, Quartermaster General, “practically all of them had contracted influenza by the time they had reached the army or had been

255 Ibid.
256 Ibid.
257 Ibid.
delivered to a remount depot.” Influenza, and other related diseases, such as shipping fever, were generally spread in large stock yards, where thousands of animals were crowded together, if those yards were not regularly and scrupulously disinfected. The stock yards, while insisting they always kept their yards sanitized, complained of the costs of meeting government sanitary regulations, and claimed that they would have to levy a “sanitary charge” to pay for the costs of compliance.

In 1917, the army was not equipped to handle the necessary mass-mobilization of horses for a world war. Despite its efforts to address the remount supply, even after New York State shut down horse racing for two years, instantly cutting into thoroughbred horse production, substantial political opposition kept the army from being able to provide significant numbers of horses in time for nation’s entry into World War I. The army had always relied on the market to produce the horses it needed, but the changing market forces of the twentieth century meant that the Army had to take a more active in role in shaping that market to its needs, and creating a supply of suitable remounts.

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260 Sharpe, “Memo No. 454-12-T, From the Quartermaster General to The Adjutant General, Subject: Method of Purchasing Animals for the Military Service,” 3.

261 E.F. Buber, “Letter to Mr. Lawrence Armour, Member National Council of Defence, from E.F. Buber, Vice President of St. Louis National Stock Yards.,” November 22, 1917, 1, Record Group 62, Box 301, Folder “Armour, Lawrence H. Assistant,” National Archives and Records Administration Annex, College Park, MD.

262 As tends to be the case in war, there was worry about enemy interference. Army records show the administrators having to deal with issues from a Swiss Colonel purchasing horses that might somehow wind up in German hands, to a Missourian writing to insist that Missouri farmers of German descent were refusing to sell their horses to the military because of German sympathies. See Lawrence Armour, “Letter to Mr. R.H. Williams, Jr., Council of National Defense, from Lawrence Armour,” October 22, 1917, Record Group 62, Box 301, Folder “Armour, Lawrence H. Assistant,” National Archives and Records Administration Annex, College Park, MD.; William M. Jeffords, “Letter to Colonel John S. Fair from William Jeffords, Allied Purchasing Board,” February 18, 1918, Record Group 62, Box 305, Folder “Fair, Col. John S.,” National Archives and Records Administration Annex, College Park, MD. and J.A. Laycock, “Letter to T.H. McCain, The Adjutant General, from J.A. Laycock,” June 29, 1917, Record Group 62, Box 302, Folder “Laycock, J.A.,” National Archives and Records Administration Annex, College Park, MD.
otherwise the laws of both the nature and the market would mean that there were no suitable remounts available on the scale the army would need them in time of war.

The continuing, and briefly successful, attack on horse racing in New York was particularly worrisome because without racing, the horses the army wanted to use in its remount program would cease to exist. The racing blackout did force the government to push harder against the opposition and create the beginnings of the Remount Breeding Program, but America’s entry into World War I brought the issue to the point of crisis. A small program, even with the full support of racing men willing to donate bloodstock, that was trying to nudge the market in the direction the army wanted it to go, was not up to the task of making tens of thousands of suitable horses instantly available in time to mobilize an army and ship it to Europe. The decentralized nature of the government, and the lingering distrust of a professional military, plus the government’s perpetual reluctance to pay the market price of the quality of horses it needed was hampering the army’s ability to serve its mandated functions of protecting the nation. The army needed those high quality racing-bred horses that it had always relied on, and in order to get them, in the necessary numbers, the government was going to have to acknowledge the scale of the problem and allow the army to increase its breeding program so that it could finally create a systematic program of breeding uniformly military quality part-bred thoroughbreds on a much larger scale. Barring that, the horses the army needed might well completely vanish from the market.
Epilogue

Despite the herculean effort put into finding, inspecting and purchasing the necessary horses to fight in World War I, the logistics and duration of American involvement in the war resulted in none of those cavalry mounts making it to Europe. But the experience of the American army, as well as that of the other armies, convinced the military hierarchy and the government that the cavalry was still critical in warfare and that America needed to take decisive action to make sure that its horse supply was assured, so that it did not put itself at a significant military disadvantage in future wars. So the government significantly increased the budget and scale of the breeding program, made it an official military, instead of agricultural, program, and the results were impressive. Within a few years, the army had a supply of uniformly athletic, sound, and durable remounts, which were not only suitable for military use, but also could compete on the world stage in military style equestrian competition and would eventually become the foundation of the newly emerging American pleasure and sport horse market. World War I proved the essential catalyst to finally helping the army overcome the institutional and ideological obstacles blocking it from solving its remount problems.

During the seventeen months that the US was in the war, the government had to vastly expand its armed forces by means of a draft, assemble, train, and arm that army, and then figure out how to ship it across the Atlantic, avoiding German U-boats. Pershing’s Punitive Expedition into Mexico had shown the government that its military infrastructure was sorely lacking. In large part due to the successes of the anti-army forces in Congress, not only did the United States Army have a general staff of less than one fifth the size of the next smallest general staff—that of the British—but by law, only
one half of it could ever be in Washington at one time.\(^1\) President Wilson, in 1916, had explicitly forbidden the army to plan strategies to prepare for a possible war with Germany,\(^2\) so the tiny general staff had to launch a massive military mobilization with no prior planning. On April 1, 1917 the army was comprised of 5791 officers, and 121,797 enlisted men, the majority of which were on the Mexican border.\(^3\) Close to 3,000,000 men were drafted,\(^4\) but moving, arming, and equipping them created a transportation crisis, which was compounded by the beginning of the influenza epidemic. General Pershing, given command of the American Expeditionary Force, did not himself leave for France until the end of May, and it wasn’t until April of 1918 that he had four divisions ready for combat.\(^5\) Under those circumstances, the military command had to prioritize its use of its drastically over-extended transportation infrastructure.

The war on the Western front by that period was stalled out in trenches, which required unmounted soldiers to man them. Because the Western front was where the Americans were heading first, the only cavalry regiments they sent over were the 2\(^{nd}\), 3\(^{rd}\), 6\(^{th}\), and 15\(^{th}\).\(^6\) And because they needed men in Europe fast, they were sent over without their mounts, because supply train animals—horses and mules—were a greater priority because they were desperately needed for getting munitions to the trenches, and they took

\(^1\) Lacey, *Pershing*, 92.
\(^2\) Ibid., 93.
\(^4\) Ibid., 29.
\(^5\) Ibid., 121.
\(^6\) Cavalry School (U.S.), *Cavalry Combat* (Fort Riley, KS: The Cavalry school, United States Army, 1937), 11.
up the first available shipping space for horses. Even of those, the army was requesting 30,000 a month and only receiving 1,000 due to the trans-Atlantic shipping bottleneck.\(^7\) The military did not know when the cavalry horses would arrive; indeed, it didn’t know when anything would arrive. Therefore cavalry men either fought dismounted or were assigned to construction duties.

But as the front began to become more mobile in August of 1918, American commanders needed mounted troops and couldn’t wait any longer for the cavalry mounts to arrive, so four troops of the 2\(^{nd}\) Cavalry were mounted on veterinary hospital convalescents,\(^8\) (probably officers mounts and light transport or artillery horses) and they were the first American cavalry troops to see mounted action.\(^9\) The most important and dangerous actions they undertook were reconnaissance patrols, a classical cavalry role, during the Meuse-Argonne offensive. As the front line was in perpetual flux, the artillery needed constant feedback on positions in order to offer support without shelling friendly troops. The cavalry patrols were able to distinguish friendly from enemy troops in foxholes and covered with mud, and they were able to use stealth when necessary and work after nightfall—none of which aircraft were able to do. They also swam rivers, crossed footbridges, traversed trenches and woods, none of which mechanized patrols could have done.\(^10\) And, contrary to modern assumptions, they took out German

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\(^7\) Lacey, Pershing, 169.

\(^8\) Coffman, The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I, 281. Cavalry School (U.S.), Cavalry Combat, 73.

\(^9\) Cavalry School (U.S.), Cavalry Combat, 73.

\(^10\) Ibid., 74–77.
machine-guns and captured automatic-rifle-armed German troops as well.\textsuperscript{11} French cavalry was particularly effective at taking out machine gun nests. It had trained its horses to lie down on command, so small units went out and when one spotted a machine-gun nest, it would quietly get as close as it could, then have its horses lie down, making themselves much more difficult targets, and then shell the nest with their portable 37 mm guns, then move in to finish them off with hand grenades. Then they would mount back up and gallop off in search of their next target.\textsuperscript{12}

The war ended before the American cavalry’s horses caught up to them, so they were not able to distinguish themselves as the Europeans did, though once the war broke out of the trenches, and the Germans began to retreat, American commanders bemoaned their lack of cavalry.\textsuperscript{13} The British began to make significant use of their cavalry brigades at this point, particularly effectively in their retaking of Amiens, in which the cavalry, which included British, Australian, Canadian and Indian horsemen, made use of their speed and mobility and advanced ahead of the rest of the army, outstripping the whippet tanks, to take their final objectives and hold them until the rest of the army could arrive.\textsuperscript{14} In the Middle East, they were used even more extensively and effectively. In Allenby’s campaign against the Turkish forces, his mounted troops advanced over 500

\textsuperscript{11} Coffman, \textit{The War to End All Wars : The American Military Experience in World War I}, 282.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 257.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 281.

miles of desert, destroyed three Turkish armies, taking over 100,000 prisoners and almost 1000 guns, knocking the Turkish Empire out of the war.\textsuperscript{15}

Because of the United States’ late entry into the war, and the logistical nightmare that resulted from a tiny, balkanized general staff and Wilson’s strictly forbidding any military planning lest it be construed as American intent to enter the war, the American cavalry did not get much opportunity to contribute to the fighting in Europe, though the men of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Cavalry won commendation for their mounted patrol work.\textsuperscript{16} The American cavalry was deployed in greater numbers along the border with Mexico to prevent German spying and guard against successful German instigation of hostility from Mexico.\textsuperscript{17} The Zimmerman telegram, from Germany’s foreign secretary, inviting Mexico to join the war on the side of Germany in exchange for the return of territories lost by Mexico to the United States, coupled with the anti-American feelings generated by Pershing’s Punitive Expedition, made Americans very wary of a potential Mexican incursion, and although Mexico ultimately refrained from such action as unwinnable,\textsuperscript{18} the army could not know that would be the case. The cavalries of the European powers saw considerably more action throughout the entire war, especially on the Eastern front and in the desert campaigns, but also on the Western front in both reconnaissance roles and in battle.\textsuperscript{19} While American and British historians focus primarily on the Western


\textsuperscript{16} Coffman, The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I, 312.

\textsuperscript{17} Herr, The Story of the U. S. Cavalry, 1775-1942, 242–243.

\textsuperscript{18} Kennedy, Over Here: The First World War and American Society, 10.

\textsuperscript{19} For a survey of cavalry action in World War I, see Cavalry School (U.S.), Cavalry Combat. It includes descriptions of actions by European cavalry on all fronts and in all cavalry roles, from Belgium (16) to Lithuania (259) to Palestine (306).
front of the war, historian Gervase Philips points out that recent work done on the Eastern front of the war, and on later fighting in the Soviet Union during its civil war, has shown that much of the anti-cavalry sentiment among previous historians is misplaced and based on a post-equestrian military, anachronistic bias, supported by giving more weight to the arguments of contemporary cavalry opponents than to the cavalrymen because it suited that bias. In fighting between the Poles and Russia in 1920, for example, one Polish cavalry unit advanced over 125 miles in 36 hours, capturing “eight thousand prisoners, three thousand railway cars, five hundred horses, twenty seven artillery pieces and…three airplanes,” and another Polish cavalry unit took and occupied Kiev until Russian cavalry, 18,000 mounted troopers, finally dislodged them, not only from Kiev, but all of Ukraine. Indeed there were classic massed cavalry battles, with charges and counter charges, between the enormous Polish and Russian cavalry forces, which exemplified classical use of cavalry, despite the new weaponry of the twentieth century.

While the United States cavalry did not see much action in Europe, European cavalry saw significant action, with over one hundred full divisions of cavalry in the field during World War I, and so the war and its aftermath seemed like good evidence to most military men that a continuing supply of cavalry horses was going to be critical in modern warfare.

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21 Dorondo, Riders of the Apocalypse: German Cavalry and Modern Warfare, 1870-1945, 76.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., 77.

After the end of the war, and no doubt at least in part prompted by contemporary critics, Pershing ordered the creation of a Cavalry Board in February of 1919 to assess the use of cavalry in the war, and its future relevance. The Board’s answer to the question of whether the cavalry was still relevant, after inspecting all of the allied armies’ cavalry units and consulting with their commanders, was emphatic—the cavalry had played a much larger role in the war than it was given credit for, and it would continue to be a critical element of warfare for the foreseeable future. It reported that “all officers consulted believe that our pre-war conceptions of the role of Cavalry and Cavalry tactics was sound.” This same sentiment would be echoed eighteen years later by the United States’ Cavalry School, which stated in its assessment of cavalry action in World War I, “no leader again will allow a state of stabilization [trench warfare] to exist except as a temporary expedient, and that future warfare, now more than ever, will be characterized by movement [emphasis in the original],” which was the bailiwick of cavalry. Obviously the men involved were cavalry men, and therefore biased toward their own branch of the military, but they cited compelling evidence and had the backing of highly respected general officers, and their conclusions aligned almost exactly with the lessons that Pershing had learned on the Punitive Expedition in Mexico.

Among the evidence offered was that cavalry screens, thought by many to have been outmoded by the advent of aircraft reconnaissance, was still very much used, and


26 Ibid., 5.

27 Cavalry School (U.S.), Cavalry Combat, 11.
needed, because airplanes were met by other airplanes and had to fly fairly high and fast in order to evade hostile fire, and as a result, could not give sufficiently detailed reports on enemy troop positions as could cavalry.28 Cavalry was also capable of moving quickly across broken country that no motor vehicle could traverse, lending its traditional mobility to the army in a way that no mechanized vehicle yet could.29 The board cited numerous actions where cavalry played critical roles during the war, including Palestine, where cavalry not only crossed vast expanses of desert, but charged trenches defended by machineguns and aircraft, and took the city of Beersheba, which proved the lynchpin of the whole region.30 Essentially, the entire Eastern front saw constant cavalry action. Even the Western front, despite the entrenched positions, saw fruitful cavalry action in the form of quick marches of long distances. Indeed, long fast marches, in the tradition of the medieval chevauchee (which would soon be better known as the blitzkrieg) were one of the key offensive roles that the board foresaw in the cavalry’s future.31

The Board cited no less a commander than British Field Marshall Douglas Haig, commander of the British Expeditionary Force, saying that “in light of the full experience of the war the decision to preserve the cavalry corps has been completely justified. ‘It has been proved that cavalry, whether used for shock effect under suitable conditions, or as mobile infantry, have still an indispensible part to play in modern warfare.’”32 Haig knew full well the growing question about the need for cavalry in a mechanized world,

29 Ibid., 27.
30 Ibid., 10.
31 Ibid., 9.
32 Ibid., 8.
but found the cavalry still absolutely necessary. Under Haig, on the Western Front, cavalry had been used in its traditional role as a shock force to decisively crack the enemy line when it was reeling. Both the Canadian cavalry at Moreuil Wood, \(^{33}\) and the French cavalry at Chaudun, \(^{34}\) made decisive charges in the spring of 1918. The Board also interviewed Marshall Joffre, the French hero of the Battle of the Marne, at the French War College, and proclaimed themselves “impressed with the fact that Marshal Joffre considered the cavalry…would always be very necessary and of great utility. Evidently the question of the abolition of cavalry had never even suggested itself to his mind.”\(^{35}\) The key leaders of the Allied armies saw cavalry as very much a part of military planning going forward from the war.

The Board did come out with suggestions for some changes. The elimination of the saber was, for example, strongly recommended, despite a few officers wishing to retain it for psychological effect. \(^{36}\) They also recommended that the cavalry get more training in dismounted combat, \(^{37}\) allowing them to serve in what was historically the role of dragoons. This suggestion was particularly urged by the French, who believed they needed be mounted on well-bred horses “capable of galloping”\(^{38}\) so that they could get into position far faster than infantry could, even with its mechanized transport. The cavalry, they believed, were therefore be the quintessential quick-response units when the

\(^{33}\) Cavalry School (U.S.), *Cavalry Combat*, 395.

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 164.


\(^{36}\) Ibid., 3.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 6.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 15.
enemy created a momentary gap to be offensively exploited, or appeared to be making a successful drive to be defensively countered. The French cavalry had successfully used its mobility to reinforce the British Expeditionary force during the German Spring Offensive of 1918 in precisely this manner and brought the German advance to a halt.\textsuperscript{39} Significantly, the board noted that the French horses were extremely good. They were primarily Anglo-Arabians (thoroughbred-Arabian crosses) and were agile and fast. They noted the thoroughbred blood, and said that “the comparison of the average [French] troop horse with that seen in our American troops, showed much in favor of the French type—a fact entirely attributable to the care taken in breeding and selection.”\textsuperscript{40} Part of the reason that the American cavalry had not been as effective in recent years as compared those of other nations was that Americans had lost the thoroughbred crosses over the years, and did not have sufficiently suitable horseflesh on which to be effective.

As Gervase Phillips points out, many important military men of the inter-war era fully agreed with the findings of the Board. He notes that George Patton argued that mounted troops could still operate in ways that mechanized units never could—they could negotiate forested and mountainous terrain, they could swim, and could cut loose from their supply lines for extended periods of time because horses could forage for their own fuel.\textsuperscript{41} And Hans von Seeckt, the German officer who is often credited with creating the tactics for Germany’s early success in World War II, believed that the stationary trench warfare of the Western front in World War I was an aberration (which proved

\textsuperscript{39} Cavalry School (U.S.), \textit{Cavalry Combat}, 164–176.

\textsuperscript{40} King, Gleaves, and Montgomery, “Report of The Cavalry Board to The Adjutant General, A.E.F., Subject: Report of the Board,” 16.

\textsuperscript{41} Phillips, “Scapegoat Arm: Twentieth-Century Cavalry in Anglophone Historiography,” 53.
true) and that the cavalry, when deployed alongside mechanized troops, would be vital in future wars.\textsuperscript{42} When the German army was recreated under Hitler, it included a cavalry branch that it used extensively.

With the Board’s recommendations and the arguments of leading officers of World War I in mind, the War Department officially recognized that “The necessity for the establishment of a breeding policy in order to improve the type of riding animal in the United States is now pressing…. By utilizing the services of civilian horsemen who were identified with the Remount Service during the war, it is believed that the production of the Army type of horse can be encouraged.”\textsuperscript{43} As historian David Kennedy showed, this type of cooperation between civilian businessmen and the government characterized WWI’s economic mobilization.\textsuperscript{44} While many feared the motive of the businessmen was more profiteering than patriotic, an administration faced with a small army due to the workings of its own party, and wanting to create as little debt as possible, found it to be a sensible solution to significant mobilization difficulties. So, following the model of business-government cooperation begun before the war, and expanded upon during the war, Secretary of War Peyton C. March issued orders which, in addition to officially creating the Remount Board, gave it its general outlines including its makeup of specified

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 55.

\textsuperscript{43} George W. Burr, “Memorandum for the Chief of Staff, from George W. Burr, Major General, Assistant Chief of Staff, Director of Purchase, Storage and Traffic, Subject: Publication of a General Order Establishing a Remount Board to Supervise Breeding Activities for War Purposes,” May 8, 1919, Record Group 165, Box 162, Folder “1198 Remount Service,” National Archives and Records Administration Annex, College Park, MD.

\textsuperscript{44} Kennedy, \textit{Over Here : The First World War and American Society}, 137–143.
numbers of officers from different branches of the service, and seven civilians.⁴⁵ Most significantly, the order included paragraph 3, which reads, “The Remount Board is hereby given authority, subject to the approval of the Secretary of War, and in conformity with law, to accept donations of animals for breeding purposes and donations of money or other property to be used as prizes or awards at agricultural fairs, horse shows, and similar exhibitions, for the purpose of encouraging breeding of animals suitable for army purposes.”⁴⁶ Prior to this, the breeding experiment that began in 1913 had to be under the aegis of the Department of Agriculture, and even during the war could not be officially a military breeding program.

Very quickly, the War Department decided who it wanted to serve on the board, and within less than two weeks had its list finalized. The civilians on the board included men who had assisted during the war and were all both prominent businessmen and horsemen.⁴⁷ They were, all of them, thoroughbred men. By the fall of that year, Colonel Fair recommended that an officer from the Veterinary Corps be added, as well as four more civilian members, representing the Standardbred, Arabian, Morgan and Saddle Horse breeding interests.⁴⁸

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⁴⁵ Peyton C. March, “General Orders, No. 65” (War Department, May 17, 1919), 2, Record Group 165, Box 162, Folder “1198 Remount Service,” National Archives and Records Administration Annex, College Park, MD.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Henry Jervey, “Memorandum for the Adjutant General, from Henry Jervey, Major General, General Staff, Assistant to the Chief of Staff, Director of Operations, Subject: Remount Board,” May 29, 1919, Record Group 165, Box 162, Folder “1198 Remount Service,” National Archives and Records Administration Annex, College Park, MD.

⁴⁸ John S. Fair, “Memorandum for the Chief of Staff, from Colonel John S. Fair, General Staff, Acting Director of Purchase, Storage and Traffic, Subject: Recommendation to Increase the Personnel of the Remount Board,” November 28, 1919, Record Group 165, Box 162, Folder “1198 Remount Service,” National Archives and Records Administration Annex, College Park, MD.
The Bureau of Animal Industry turned its breeding program, stallions and all, over to the Remount Department, and the Remount Board got an appropriation from Congress to begin building the program. The annual army appropriations bill for the fiscal year 1921 included $250,000.00 to be used by the Remount Board to purchase and maintain horses for the breeding program, as well as authorization to accept donated horses for the program and donated prizes to be awarded at agricultural fairs and horse shows to promote the breeding of militarily suitable horses.\footnote{49} In the Congressional hearings on the appropriations bill, Colonel Scott testified to the success of the program saying that farmers who used the government stallions were willing to pay the stud fee of $25 to sell the resulting colts to private buyers and still make a larger profit than they would if they sold the colts to the army for the stipulated $150, which was very encouraging for the success of the program.\footnote{50} But warned that without the program, it would be virtually impossible to find the necessary horses to mount the cavalry because light horse breeding had otherwise dropped off so much. He cited Bureau of Animal Husbandry statistics showing the decline of light horses bred since 1917 ranging from a 14.3% decrease in Utah to a 79.1% decrease in Kansas, with an average 50.5% decrease overall.\footnote{51} The Bureau of Animal Husbandry report warned that “the type of scrub horse generally being raised is worth little, if anything, commercially, neither is it suitable for


\footnote{51} Ibid., 770.
Army purposes."\(^{52}\) The only discussion from the Congressmen was over changes relevant to potential changes in the numbers of units in the peace-time army. Some of the language of the bill was taken directly from Secretary March’s order establishing the Remount Board, and the members of the Remount Board, in their recommendation to Congress to make the appropriation, probably also included suggested language.

Colonel F.S. Armstrong, Chief of the Remount Service after the war, wrote up the beginnings of the program for the first issue of the *Quartermaster Review*, in 1921, and he laid out the general plan as suggested by the Remount Board. The breeding actually done by the government was done at the primary remount depots of Front Royal, Virginia, Fort Robinson, Nebraska, Fort Keogh, Montana, and Fort Reno, Oklahoma, and stallions were sent to these hubs before being dispersed to agents for use on private mares. Before being sent out into the public, any “doubtful stallions”\(^{53}\) were used on government mares at these depots to prove themselves capable of siring quality foals and thereby worthy of entering the program. In order to obtain and keep the trust of farmers in the program, the Remount had to make sure the stallions it offered were not only impressive individuals, but proven sires of high quality offspring. Without establishing that trust, the program would fail. Once a stallion was determined suitable, it would be sent out to a civilian agent who was paid a small fee, based on the number of mares the stallion bred in his care, and the nominal stud fees he therefore collected for the government. This arrangement gave the area breeders access to a top quality stallion, at

\(^{52}\) Ibid.

low fees, where they would otherwise have no access to good breeding studs.\textsuperscript{54} Since the money appropriated by Congress became available in July of 1920, it was too late for the 1920 breeding season, but gave the Remount time to gear up thoroughly for the 1921 season.

The Remount Association, formed by the Remount Board, reported in 1921 that the Remount Service had a total of 160 stallions for breeding. Of those, six were Arabians, six were Morgans, six were Saddlebreds, seven were Standardbreds, one was a Hackney, and one hundred thirty four were thoroughbreds. Of those 160, eighty five were donated, and seventy five were purchased, though many of those purchased were purchased at far below their market value because the seller wanted the horse to go to the Remount breeding program.\textsuperscript{55} Those stallions were dispersed across the country for the breeding season. Samples of letters sent from the agents upon receiving their stallion charges were included in the Remount Association’s journal, \textit{The Remount}, and while it is certainly possible that there were unflattering letters that were not included, the agents whose letters were included were clearly appreciative. J.W. Neuens, from Medora, North Dakota, wrote “I received SON OF THE WIND [sic] in good condition and am very well pleased. He sure is a dandy and I don’t see but what we should get a good many mares of good type to breed to him. Everyone who has seen him says he is a dandy.”\textsuperscript{56} And Goelet Gallatin, from Sheridan, Wyoming, wrote “I am more than delighted with

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 18.

\textsuperscript{55} C.L. Scott, “Breeding Committee,” \textit{The Remount}, May 1921, 4, National Sporting Library, Middleburg, VA.

\textsuperscript{56} Quoted in Ibid., 7.
MENTOR. He is a beauty and I expect to get fine colts from him.”

Many other agents wrote with similar reviews of the stallions they were standing. The stallions were placed in regions where they were likely to be an asset to the general public, so they were not sent into heavy crop farming areas, where draft horses were the primary equine commodity, but to areas such as Virginia, and Western ranch regions, where light riding horses were still important. The Remount Association repeatedly stressed that what the cavalry needed, and what they were hoping the agents would breed, was the equivalent of a hunter, or stout polo pony. This repetition was in part to remind farmers that there was a market for such horses beyond ranch work since both hunting and polo were popular sports at the time. It was difficult to raise poor to average quality light horses for profit, but a quality hunter or polo pony would bring a good price if the colts an agent bred were not needed by the government.

The Remount also greatly improved the Western ranch horse. Many Remount stallions are seen in the pedigrees of the top foundation Quarter Horse stock in the nation, not to mention the other stock horse breeds such as the paint, palomino, and appaloosa. These are the horses which move cattle and other stock on ranches, and compete in stock horse competitions, in calf roping, cutting, reining, and other events designed to test the practical working ability of ranch horses. Cattle men recognized the value of the thoroughbred in these horses, and that they could not afford to include thoroughbred breeding without the assistance of the government. They made good use of Remount stallions, and publicly praised the Remount’s efforts. One example of this, as early as 1922, was Resolution No. 14, of the Arizona Cattle Growers’ Association which praised

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57 Quoted in Ibid.
the American Remount Association’s “splendid and generous attitude [which was] proving profitable to our cattlemen.”\textsuperscript{58} The members of the association wanted to “go on record with our hearty endorsement of this movement and extend our sincere thanks for the service, in the hope that it will enjoy an uninterrupted continuance.”\textsuperscript{59} Ranchers still benefitted from quality horses when they were available, but they were not a sufficient market on their own to keep the light horse market strong enough to allow breeders to profit sufficiently to breed such horses without the assistance of the Remount program, and even with the program, they were an insufficient market.

Colonel Fred L. Hamilton, of the Remount Service, would later write that while the Remount’s key concern was creating a surplus of top flight cavalry horses in case of war, it knew that in peacetime, the army and ranchers would not provide a sufficient market force to keep enough breeders producing the numbers of good horses needed in war. Therefore “a market had to be created and encouraged, and of necessity, it had to be, largely, a luxury market,”\textsuperscript{60} which made sense during the 1920s, but would become significantly more difficult and awkward during the Great Depression. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the general public had needed top quality riding horses for everyday life. As roads improved, and eventually as the automobile and electric streetcar took over much of the most demanding work of typical light horses, the public could survive with lesser light horses. So the carefully bred thoroughbred blood that had once been almost ubiquitous in the light horse population more or less disappeared. During

\textsuperscript{58} Arizona Cattle Growers’ Association, “An Appreciation From Arizona, Resolution No. 14 Endorsing the American Remount Association,” \textit{The Remount}, March 1922, National Sporting Library.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{60} Fred L. Hamilton, “The Remount Story,” \textit{The Western Horseman}, December 1950, 8.
that same period, the race horse became a more rarified specialist, and the average farmer
could not afford to breed his mares to race-tested thoroughbred stallions anymore. The
government stepped in to make the stallions available, but the farmers still needed a
strong market for the excess colts not needed in peace time.

Very early on, the Remount began promoting the sporting capacity of its product.
Hunting and polo were both well established in the army, indeed in most armies of the
time, not only as a pastime of officers, but as a training ground for the men and horses.
Both require great agility and endurance on the part of the horse, and because the
Remount Association used the hunter and polo pony, fairly familiar horse types, as
eamples to the farmer of what the Army needed in cavalry horses, Remount horses
quickly headed into hunt country and onto the polo pitch. They also, almost
immediately, headed to the show ring. The Remount itself sponsored classes for
Remount-bred horses, as well as for breeding stock suitable to produce cavalry horses.
Congress had expressly granted that its appropriations could be used to sponsor
competitions for suitable potential military horses, so horse shows across the country
began having Remount classes. The Elko County (Nevada) Fair, for example, held
classes with significant cash awards in 1922 for both stallions and mares suitable to sire
or produce general utility riding horses. Elko County had eight Government stallions that
year, and at least four of them showed in the stallion class, placing first through fourth,
and one, the Arabian stallion Suleiman, showed in another class. Private individuals
and Remount agents were thus encouraged to show their wares in public settings.

62 “Horse Notes,” The Remount, March 1922, 11–12, National Sporting Library.
Government-owned troop horses, or future troop horses, also competed in these breeding classes as youngsters.

But very quickly, the Remount Association began to promote the products of the program in performance classes such as show jumping, and they were generally shown by cavalry men. A prime example of this public relations initiative was Garry Owen, assigned to the 7th Cavalry, and named for that unit’s famous regimental song. He was born in 1919 at Fort Reno, Oklahoma, and after coming of age and joining the 7th Cavalry, the tall grey was quickly picked out for his athleticism. After creating a sensation with his success showing over fences at a number of military horse shows, he toured the country’s most prestigious circuits and dominated the competition. He became a national hero, with fans requesting his old shoes or other memorabilia be sent them.\(^63\) The *Los Angeles Times* proclaiming “The most interesting feature of the [Los Angeles] horse show was a tall grey jumper with an army brand burned into his neck…. For the honor of the Gallant Seventh, the grey horse jumped like a jackrabbit in the show against the pedigreed aristocrats.”\(^64\) In addition to competing at the great horse shows of the day, he “was a first class soldier’s mount, as he participated in the long, hot, dusty hikes and maneuvers that the regiment is required to make.”\(^65\) At his death, Garry Owen was buried with honor in the military cemetery at Fort Bliss, in the section reserved for the Seventh

\(^{63}\) Donald A. Young, “Transcript of Funeral Ceremony for Garry Owen, Headquarters Seventh Cavalry, Office of the Regimental Commander, Fort Bliss Texas. Given by Donald A. Young, Captain 7th Cavalry, Adjutant,” January 1934, Record Group 177, Box 52, Folder “454 7th Cavalry,” National Archives and Records Administration Annex, College Park, MD.

\(^{64}\) Quoted in Ibid., 2.

\(^{65}\) Ibid.
Cavalry, and the transcript of his funeral service, along with his official newspaper obituary, were enshrined in the Seventh Cavalry files at the National Archives.

Garry Owen was but one Remount show-ring success. In 1932, at the Los Angeles Olympic Games, the great Remount-bred mare Jenny Camp won her first individual silver medal in the three day event. She led the team to a gold medal in the team event, and would go on to repeat her individual silver medal performance at the Berlin games in 1936. She was a daughter of Gordon Russell, who had been donated to the Remount by the Kentucky Racing Association, and she was foaled at the Front Royal Depot in 1926. After her Olympic career, she returned to Front Royal as a broodmare, and was ultimately buried in the horse cemetery there. Jenny Camp earned her way into the United States Eventing Hall of Fame by being one of only three horses ever to win individual medals at consecutive Olympic Games, and she is the only American horse to ever do it. The three day event, the discipline in which she earned those medals, was originally called the military, or cavalry, test, as it was designed to be the ultimate test of a cavalry mount, showing the discipline needed for close maneuvers in dressage on the first day, the stamina and strength to tackle miles of cross country obstacles at a full gallop on the second, and the soundness to compete in the show jumping phase on the third day. Jenny Camp, along with other remount-bred Olympians, proved that the United States Remount Service was producing world-class horses, superbly suited for cavalry use, and as thoroughly tested as could be during peace time. She harkened back

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66 Young, “Transcript of Funeral Ceremony for Garry Owen, Headquarters Seventh Cavalry, Office of the Regimental Commander, Fort Bliss Texas, Given by Donald A. Young, Captain 7th Cavalry, Adjutant.”

67 Livingston and Roberts, War Horse : Mounting the Cavalry with America’s Finest Horses, 141.

to the best cavalry mounts of the Civil War era, also predominantly part-bred thoroughbreds.

Well into the 1930s, National and International horse shows and polo matches showed off both the quality of the horses and skills of the cavalrymen. The Remount Depots themselves often hosted large horse shows, with Fort Riley’s being the biggest, in order to show off the horses and the skills of the men, and to foster healthy competition between the army units that shipped in from all over the area. They were good public relations for the Remount, encouraging the market for good horses, making it more profitable for farmers to participate in the program, underscoring the suitability of the Remount Program as a source for good horses, and generally reminding the public that the army, most emphatically, still used horses. Commanders were not shy about requesting remounts that would be aimed specifically at these types of events. This was an era when polo was an Olympic sport and America was “at the apex of its world supremacy in polo.” Top polo tournaments could draw tens of thousands of spectators on Long Island, and army teams often made good showings, even against the best in the world. Roger S. Fitch, of the 11th Cavalry, in requesting remounts pointed out that the regimental polo team had done very well the previous year, with some of its matches

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70 Livingston and Roberts, *War Horse: Mounting the Cavalry with America’s Finest Horses*, 140–144.


72 See, for example, Robert F. Kelley, “U.S. Riders Retain Supremacy in Polo: Victory Over Argentina in Great Series and Formation of New American Team Notable.,” *New York Times*, December 30, 1928. And Vernon Van Ness, “Army Polo Team in Final Today, Meets Aiken Knights in Meadow Brook Cup Test at International Field,” *New York Times*, July 8, 1930. While today polo is looked upon as a an obscure sport in America, that is a legacy of World War II, which not only saw the end of the mounted cavalry, which was a bastion of American polo, but also saw the death of some of America’s best players during their service in the war. Laffaye, *Polo in the United States: A History*, 183.
having spectators numbering in the thousands, but also noted, that “our horse show and jumper horses are getting pretty old now and we are very much in need of some new blood.”73 And in a letter to another 11th cavalry commander, reporting on his incoming remounts, then Chief of Cavalry, Major General Leon B. Kromer wrote “from all we hear the remounts being purchased [at Fort Robinson, Nebraska] are all half-breds or better and of excellent type; so every carload should contain four or five show prospects.”74

The army was in the awkward position during the Great Depression of having to promote luxury goods—show horses and polo ponies—in order to keep the market strong enough for farmers to keep breeding the type of horse the army required in case the army suddenly needed a lot of them for war. And in a time of universal budget reductions, it had to be seen using these luxury goods publicly and often, in order to remind the public that it still used horses. This is not to say that the military show and polo horses led lives of luxury. Garry Owen, after all, did all the same marching and drilling his lesser known comrades did. In a letter to Washington, Lieutenant Colonel Paul R. Davison extolled the virtues of some of his remounts as he pointed out that “they, in addition to polo, drill, hunt and many of them are regular entries in all jumping events except the big horse show classes.”75 They admirably performed just about every duty a peace-time cavalry


74 Leon B. Kromer, “Letter to Colonel Ralph M Parker, Commanding, 11th Cavalry, from Major General Leon B. Kromer, Chief of Cavalry,” September 24, 1934, Record Group 177, Box 52, Folder “454 11th Cavalry,” National Archives and Records Administration Annex, College Park, MD.

75 Paul R. Davison, “Letter to Major General J.K. Herr, Chief of Cavalry, from Lieutenant Colonel Paul R. Davison, 10th Cavalry,” June 6, 1940, 1, Record Group 177, Box 52, Folder “454 10th Cavalry,” National Archives and Records Administration Annex, College Park, MD.
mount could be asked to perform in order to prove itself worthy for battle, train its rider, and promote the program that produced it.

Equestrian competition on the international level was almost universally the purview of the cavalry across the world through World War II, and had become the only major form of sport still restricted to military personnel. As such, it was one of the few ways that nations could proclaim their military prowess during times of peace. Average Americans could take pride Jenny Camp beating the German military horses and feel like the United States military was superior without having to actually fight Germany’s army.

There were no Olympic tank competitions. Equestrian competition was a way for the United States to get even anti-army citizens to support army officers, while at the same time proving the success of its military breeding program. While many, though far from all, in the military were beginning to question the practical military value of mounted cavalry versus mechanized troops, even the pro-mechanization officers recognized the continuing symbolic power of cavalry officers defeating their enemies in competition.

From international competition to ranches in remote areas of the American West, the results of the Remount Breeding Program were overwhelming positive. The light horses in the United States improved dramatically, and it was not just the elite breeders that produced superb horses, but by virtue of the stallions made available to average farmers and ranchers via the program, the depth of quality in American light horses was equally impressive. By 1937, the remount breeding program had produced 135,840 militarily-suitable foals, worth an estimated $20,376,000.76 As World War II approached, the Army had phenomenal equine reserves upon which to call.

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76 Livingston and Roberts, War Horse: Mounting the Cavalry with America’s Finest Horses, 113.
The Remount program had produced this supply of horses on depression budgets which had stymied the growth of mechanization in the army. Between 1925 and 1940, the army had spent approximately $21 million per year for purchase and development of new weaponry for ground forces,\(^{77}\) including the tanks which many thought should replace horses on the battlefield, but that had gone primarily to developing prototypes because the depression era budget could not support the complete rearmament of the army.\(^{78}\) The remount program, by contrast, had spent, between 1921 and 1937, an average of $122,667 per year to produce an average of 7991 foals (valued at $1,198,700) per year.\(^{79}\) Once the United States entered World War II, and the army finally had the finances to purchase tanks on a large scale, the cavalry, having two of the only four trained mechanized ground regiments in existence in 1940,\(^{80}\) suddenly had to defend its remount budget.

Major General John K. Herr, Chief of Cavalry, was forced to justify the expense of the continued use of horse cavalry as he testified in 1940 before the House Subcommittee on Appropriations that

the illusion prevails that horse cavalry is outmoded because it is outspeeded by the motor on the highways and because a surging mass of horsemen, charging with drawn sabers, is only courting sudden death when it tries to attack in the face of modern machine-gun fire, barbed wire entanglements, and other obstacles….


\(^{78}\) Ibid.

\(^{79}\) Livingston and Roberts, *War Horse : Mounting the Cavalry with America’s Finest Horses*, 113.

It must be remembered that…the modern cavalry rarely fights mounted; for the most part it fights dismounted. It simply maneuvers mounted in order to get advantageous positions…. After one arrives in the theater of action in modern war, there will be little chance to use roads, certainly not in great masses or at any speed, and it is there that the great flexibility and mobility of horse cavalry reaches its apex of value.\textsuperscript{81}

Herr was not alone in seeing the value of the horse, especially the superb horses the army now had available to it, in places that mechanized vehicles could not go.

When Wayne Dinsmore, president of the Horse and Mule Association of America, printed Herr’s testimony to make it available to horsemen, he included a story by Walter Trohan, clipped from the \textit{Chicago Tribune}, September 18, 1940, whose headline was “Plan to Double Horse Cavalry Power of Army, Decision Based on Nazi Successes in Europe.”\textsuperscript{82} In it, Trohan noted that the army was going to more than double its horse numbers, and that the decision was based on the success of Nazi tactics in Poland, where the Germans used horse cavalry and horse artillery to create holes in the Polish lines through which its mechanized forces could then proceed.\textsuperscript{83} Indeed the Germans would use seven full cavalry divisions during the war, including an elite Waffen-SS division formed in 1942, along with the mixed cavalry-panzer division.\textsuperscript{84}


\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 683.

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{84} Richter, \textit{Cavalry of the Wehrmacht : 1941-1945}, 29.
Again, it would be the Eastern front that saw most of the cavalry action, including increasingly numerous units of “tank hunting cavalry,” while some Americans mocked the Poles for using cavalry to charge panzers (which they never did). Hitler coveted the breeding stock of the superb Polish national breeding program and would confiscate and use it extensively in his attempts to breed super-horses. Germany and the Eastern European nations used their cavalry extensively, right through the end of the war, but that was, in part, because they could not afford to keep up with the technology race of the other major powers. By the end of the war, the technological advances in weaponry had changed the face of modern warfare. So while the U.S. Army now had phenomenal horses, courtesy of the Remount Breeding Program, those horses were not given the opportunity to serve in Europe. Of the 26,409 horses purchased by the Army during the war years, only 49 were ever shipped overseas. The great irony of the Remount Breeding Program is that it was wildly successful in producing a vast supply of some of the world’s best military horses, finally addressing the remount supply issues that had plagued the army from its inception, but just as it was about to get a chance to make use of it, the age of the tank arrived. As the nation entered the war, the government finally appropriated sufficient funds to develop and manufacture modern, effective mechanized weaponry. The ability of mechanized weaponry and more powerful munitions to provide the quick and destructive shock power that had traditionally been the specialty of cavalry

85 Jarymowycz, *Cavalry from Hoof to Track*, 170.

86 Ibid.


88 Ibid., 16–19.
meant that the logistical difficulties of breeding, shipping and maintaining horses, versus manufacturing, shipping and maintaining mechanized vehicles, outweighed the value the horses could add to the army.

Anna Waller, contracting officer for the Office of the Quartermaster General, assembled a report in 1958 on the use of Horses and Mules for the National Defense, and her summary of the Remount service’s role during World War II was that “throughout the war period the problem of the Remount Branch, insofar as horses were concerned, was chiefly a matter of liquidation rather than procurement.”

As units were unhorsed for quick deployment overseas, their mounts were returned to the depots. The primary use of military horses during the war was for Mounted Coast Guard patrols along U.S. beaches, guarding against, or least able to provide early warning of, submarine attacks. But even those rapidly decreased well before the war ended. Essentially, even though there existed opportunities where mounted cavalry could have been used effectively in the war, they were large targets for increasingly powerful weaponry, and by the end of the war, airplanes and tanks could cover much more of the territory that once only horses could cover. The logistics of getting horses and their feed to the front, anticipating where an opportunity for capitalizing on their particular strengths would occur, and making productive use of them in the intervals between those opportunities, ceased to be worth the necessary effort. The cost to benefit ratio no longer fell to the favor of the horse cavalry.

89 Ibid., 16.
90 Ibid., 19.
The Remount Breeding program continued on until it was officially liquidated in 1949. Cavalry men were loath to concede that the horse-mounted cavalry was a thing of the past. George Patton, himself a former cavalryman, went against orders, indeed he violated the territorial agreements made at Potsdam, and crossed into Soviet held Czechoslovakia at the end of the war, bringing out a vast collection of breeding horses the Nazis had assembled at Hostau, including the breeding stock of Austria’s world-famous Lipizzans, so that the Soviets would not take control of them, and in doing so, he added to his then heroic stature. Many of those “Superhorses”, as they were dubbed in the newspapers, that he and his troops herded into American lines came back to the United States and became part of the Remount Breeding Program for its last years, adding to the quality of the Remount product. But the army decided it did not need them. In 1949, the program ended, and the superb breeding stock the program had collected, bred, and used to vastly improve American light horse bloodstock, was liquidated at auction.

The average American was never a good horse breeder. From colonial days even through the early twentieth century, most American breeders did not have a systematic plan for breeding, and rarely thought beyond the immediate offspring, instead of generations down the line, when planning how they would breed their mares. The first exception to this rule was racing men. They carefully tested and bred their thoroughbreds, keeping meticulous records of their pedigrees, and the records of their

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91 These are the famous “dancing horses” of the Spanish Riding School in Vienna. Patton’s rescue of them was so popular in the United States that Disney turned it into a movie. See Arthur Hiller, Miracle of the White Stallions ([United States]: Disney, 1963).

92 Daniel Mannix, “The Superhorses Are Ours,” Collier’s, August 17, 1946, 18, National Sporting Library, Middleburg, VA.
horses’ performances. They ran their horses over long distances to test their soundness and mental toughness, and because they bred their horses to a consistent set of standards, they created animals of considerable uniformity, in addition to horses of superb working traits. Because those horses were bred for generations, their entire genetic makeup—not just their expressed genes—matched their physical traits, and therefore they were able to breed offspring that more predictably resembled their thoroughbred parent, even when bred to horses of more haphazard genetic makeup, and therefore thoroughbreds became the ultimate light horse improvement stock. Virtually every light horse advertisement for stallions standing for public service in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries boasted of the stallions’ racing ancestors, real or fictitious, because breeders knew those racing horses were quality and bred true. When the military needed horses, from the Revolution through the Civil War, it had stock that was improved with this blood, even though it was often reluctant to pay the necessary price to get them. But the Civil War decimated the nation’s horse stock, and as racing became more specialized, and ideas about “purebred” and “breed” became more ingrained and elite, those horses grew too expensive for the average breeder to access, and the general American light horse devolved.

From the Reconstruction period onward, the supply of thoroughbred-improved horses diminished and the cavalrmen worried. The army had always trusted the market to supply sufficient suitable remounts, but the market was changing. The decentralized structure of the government, added to the inherited mistrust of professional armies in general, and professional cavalry in particular, made it extremely difficult for the army to address the problem. With the Progressive’s attacks on racing threatening to eliminate the stock which the military depended on to give its mounts the necessary soundness,
endurance and athletic ability, the military horse supply was in crisis. Finally, with World War I, the federal government was able to step in and open the way to the army creating the Remount Breeding Program on a scale that again made thoroughbred stallions available to the average American breeder, with an overall system to follow, and the results were immediate and valuable. Americans were suddenly producing superbly tough and athletic horses, and the Army, once again, had an enormous pool of quality remounts to draw on in case of war emergency, at set prices that it agreed to pay.

In creating the remount breeding program, the government put a permanent stamp on American horseflesh, and put American horsemen in a position of having some of the best horses available for just about any sporting or utility purpose to which man cold put them. The successes of the United States Equestrian Team during the 20th century are owed in many ways to the success of that program. Many breeds, most particularly America’s most numerous, the American Quarter Horse, boast remount stallions among their foundation sires. The legacy of the part-bred army horse, and the government’s need to breed more of them, is a horse population that is versatile, athletic, and has been exported as improvement stock for some of the best horse breeding nations in the world. That the government’s formal efforts bore fruit too late to keep up with military technology does not diminish its immeasurable impact on the quality of American horseflesh.

Part thoroughbreds are what the army had always relied on to mount the cavalry. The part-bred thoroughbreds that the army itself finally began to systematically breed proved themselves world-class in every sport based on military riding. Their descendants are still counted among the most athletic and successful equine athletes in the world.
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