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GENTLEMAN'S SPORT: HORSE RACING IN ANTEBELLUM CHARLESTON

RANDY J. SPARKS*

A WRITER IN THE *SOUTHERN LITERARY MESSENGER* IN 1837 observed that "the national character of a people depends more upon the amusements to which they are addicted, than upon their laws, their literature, or their religious institutions." While the writer may have exaggerated the importance of sport in society, only recently have historians come to appreciate how sporting events and other forms of ritualized behavior can serve as a window into past societies and social relationships.[1] Through this window, this essay will examine the sport of horse racing in the antebellum South and particularly in Charleston.

In 1674 James Bullocke, a Virginia tailor, arranged a race with a gentleman for 2,000 pounds of tobacco. When the York County Court learned of the contest Bullocke was fined 100 pounds of tobacco, "it being contrary to Law for a Labourer to make a race, being a sport only for Gentlemen." Horse racing was widely regarded as a gentleman's sport; in England it was already known as the "Sport of Kings" because of royal patronage. Organized racing in England began under the Tudors; even Henry VIII rode his horses in races until his increasing girth became too great a liability. The famous Newmarket track opened under James I, who imported the first Arabian stallion into England. The sport fell into disfavor under the dour Oliver Cromwell and his Puritan followers, but revived and flourished under the "Merry Monarch" Charles II, who encouraged the Newmarket races. During the Restoration period rules and regulations were drawn up, primarily to protect the financial investments of the gamblers as stakes rose higher and higher.[2]

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[1]*Messenger* quoted in *Spirit of the Times*, April 15, 1837, p. 67. For recent analyses of horse racing see Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), pp. 98-101, and T. H. Breen, "Horses and Gentlemen: The Cultural Significance of Gambling Among the Gentry of Virginia," *William and Mary Quarterly* XXXIV (April 1977), pp. 239-257. For more general, recent works which put racing in a larger context see Patricia C. Click, *The Spirit of the Times: Amusements in Nineteenth-Century Baltimore, Norfolk, and Richmond* (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 1989), and Steven A. Riess, *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

[2]Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The Colonial Experience* (New York: Random House, 1958), p. 104 (first quotation); Dennis Brailsford, *Sport and Society: Elizabeth to Anne* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1969), pp. 28, 110-112, 137, 213.

It is uncertain when horse racing began in the colonies, but the earliest recorded races were held in Virginia during the Restoration period. The early races were quarter-mile contests over a straight track, but soon races were run on oval tracks following the rules of the British tracks. By the eighteenth century wealthy Virginia planters spent enormous sums of money on race horses. To cite one example, John Baylor went to England for his education; like many young Virginians, he fashioned himself after the English gentry and acquired a passion for gambling and fast horses. After his return to Virginia he named his plantation "Newmarket" for the English race track and began to import thoroughbred horses. One of the leading importers and breeders of thoroughbreds in colonial Virginia, nearly 100 blooded horses were sold at his death in 1772. By the 1770s South Carolinians, too, imported fine English horses.[3]

Horses had symbolic significance; an expensive thoroughbred, the Mercedes-Benz of the eighteenth century, was an emblem of wealth and status and a proud extension of his owner. To be mounted on such an animal set a gentleman apart from all but his social equals. A visitor to Virginia marveled that planters would "spend the morning in ranging several miles in the woods to find and catch their horses only to ride two or three miles to church ... or to a horse-race," a practice that seemed illogical to someone who did not understand the social significance of the horse. Planters were as jealous of their horses' pedigrees as of their own. Philip Fithian, tutor to a prominent family, once found a group of gentlemen involved in "Loud disputes concerning the Excellence of each others Colts — Concerning their Fathers, Mothers, Brothers, Sisters, Uncles, Aunts, Nephews, Nieces, and Cousins to the forth Degree!" To breeders, tracing their horses' sires' and dams' descent over four generations was not unusual; William Alston's studbook shows examples of pedigrees reaching back nine generations to famed English Arabians. Such concern was understandable since the value of a horse depended in large measure on this pedigree; breeders kept careful

[3]Fairfax Harrison, "The Equine FFVs: A Study of the Evidence for the English Horses Imported into Virginia before the Revolution," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* XXV (October 1927), pp. 329-330; "Baylor Family," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* VI (July 1898), p. 198; George Tucker, "Museum Committee Report," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* LXXXVI (April 1978), p. 240; Henry Edmund Ravenel, *Ravenel Records* (Dunwoody, Ga.: Norman S. Berg, 1971), pp. 37-38. A 1771 advertisement in the South Carolina *Gazette* read, "on the *First* Day of the Races, will be SOLD, the fine English Horse *MORO* ... whose Pedigree may be seen in the Hands of the Subscribers" (January 31, 1771).

records and carried on a wide correspondence to verify lineages.[4]

Breeding race horses was an expensive and risky venture, a factor that contributed to its exclusiveness since only the very rich could afford to engage in it. As noted earlier, the finest horses in the colonial period were imported directly from England, and by the 1830s a fine horse could fetch from $6,000 to $20,000. Examples from William Alston's careful records from 1801-1802 reveal the vicissitudes that could befall a breeder. He noted in October 1801 that a colt "Died in the Rice field ...;" later "The Filley got choaked with pears & died 28th March 1802;" and on March 13, 1802, his bay colt "Died by Castration."[5] Such loss and expense did not discourage the wealthy planters, but rather gave added significance to what might otherwise be interpreted as mere sport.

HORSE RACING CAME TO CHARLESTON in the early-eighteenth century; the earliest recorded race took place in 1734. In the same year prominent South Carolina planters organized the Carolina Jockey Club, sixteen years before the English Jockey Club. Its membership list was a "Who's Who" of prominent South Carolinians and included John Drayton, Daniel Ravenel, John Izard, and William Moultrie, who imported expensive horses from Virginia and England. The club was equally famous for the Jockey Club Ball, perhaps the most eagerly awaited social event in the city. The first race course, called the York, was built about six miles outside the city. In 1754 the New Market course (named, of course, for the famous English track) was laid out about a mile from town, east of King Street between present-day Huger and Line streets. With the support of the gentry, the February races became the center of the city's social life and its favorite sport.[6] Gentlemen protected the high reputation enjoyed by the

[4]Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, p. 99 (first quotation); Philip Fithian, *Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian, 1773-1774: A Plantation Tutor of the Old Dominion*, ed. by Hunter Dickinson Farish (Williamsburg, Va.: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1957), p. 177; William Alston Studbook, 1789-1809, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina, hereafter SCHS; J.L. Skinner to Col. R. Singleton, February 3, 1832, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, SCHS. Isaac Ball listed the date of birth and description of his horses along with slave births in his Slave Register and Blanket Book, 1804-1821, Ball Family Papers, SCHS.

[5]Alston Studbook, 1801-1802; John Beaufain Irving, *The South Carolina Jockey Club* (Charleston, S.C.: Russell & Jones, 1857), p. 75. Breeders regularly advertised their studs to "cover" mares for substantial fees. See, for example, South Carolina *Gazette*, May 31, June 7, 1770; January 31, February 28, March 7, 1771.

[6]Hennig Cohen, *The South Carolina Gazette, 1732-1775* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1953, p. 71; Charles E. Trevathan, *The American Thoroughbred* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1905), p. 39; Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt: Urban Life in America, 1743-1776* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1955), p. 167; Irving, *South Carolina Jockey Club*, pp. 33-36.

Charleston races; when Fenwicke Bull, a minor public official, tried to bribe a jockey to throw a 1769 race, the South Carolinians had him publicly horsewhipped. Not all gentlemen, however, approved of the sport; Henry Laurens, for example, opposed all forms of gambling and objected to racing on those grounds. He wrote that the Commons House of Assembly recessed "for that ... Amusement which you know is due us in February." He also noted that many planters were "out of debt & full of Money which they must spend in Horse Races."[7]

As Laurens suggested, gambling was an important part of the sport and wagers could be substantial. One member of the Carolina Jockey Club wrote that members did not race for money, "but solely for the *honor* that a horse of their own breeding and training should distinguish himself" and his owner. Indeed, Daniel Ravenel of Wantoot refused to enter his horses in the Charleston races after the 1780s when cash awards replaced the traditional piece of plate. In a sense, of course, planters like Ravenel did not race for money, but the high bets increased the commitment to a race and raised the consequences of victory or defeat. The men who raced their horses against one another were not strangers; they were fellow members of the Jockey Club, a part of the same community, and, more importantly, members of the elite master class. The race was one aspect of the competition, the constant striving for success, that characterized colonial society. These high stakes were symbols of a gentleman's independence and assertiveness and remained key elements of the sport throughout the antebellum period.[8]

One contemporary observed that one reason for the popularity of the sport among the planters was their "ambition for distinction...." Historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown has analyzed the importance of honor in the Old South and identified horse racing as one of the forms of competition Southerners employed in their quest for honor and distinction. He wrote that horse racing "dramatized vicarious triumph and misfortune within a structure of set rules.... The point of play was the distribution of honor and status." Honor depended upon one's reputation; it was conferred by others, and could, therefore, be enhanced or diminished in public contests. In this regard, the highly publicized and well-attended races took on an added

[7]Dixon Wecter, *The Saga of American Society: A Record of Social Aspiration, 1606-1937* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1937), p. 429; Philip Hamer, George C. Rogers, Jr., and David Chestnutt, eds., *The Papers of Henry Laurens* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968ff.), Vol. IV, p. 480, Vol. V, p. 572, Vol. VI, p. 91. Such attempts to influence the outcome of races were reported periodically; for another such incident see "Extracts from the Journal of Mrs. Ann Manigault, 1754-1781," *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* (hereafter *SCHM*) 21 (January 1920), p. 13.

[8]Irving, *Jockey Club*, Part IV, pp. 11-12; Ravenel, *Ravenel Records* , pp. 37-38, 46-47; Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, pp. 118-120.

significance. Planters could have held private races, but they encouraged a wide attendance and thereby invested these contests with an importance they would not have otherwise enjoyed. One writer described the supporters of the loser in a hotly contested 1859 race in these terms: "Her representatives here — her manly men ... are dissatisfied and restless. Their cavalier blood is stirred — they cannot brook such defeat — they cannot go home thus shorn, stripped of their trophies, bankrupt of applause — not a green leaf of all their laurels, now only a crown of thorns." The feelings of the winners, on the other hand, were captured by a 1773 visitor to South Carolina who wrote, "He who won the ... last horse-race assumed the airs of a hero or German potentate. The ingenuity of a Locke or the discoveries of a Newton were considered as infinitely inferior to the accomplishments of him who knew when to ... start a fleet horse."[9]

Despite the prosperity of the 1760s and the popularity of racing, the growing hostility between the mother country and the American colonies affected the sport. Colonists responded to the Stamp Act and other Parliamentary attempts to tax the colonies by boycotting British goods, a boycott that extended even to thoroughbred horses. An Association of Congress formed in October 1774 attempted to stop "expensive diversions" like cockfighting and "especially all horse-racing." A number of patriotic patrons of the sport, including Henry Middleton and Edward Rutledge, signed a pledge to give it up. County associations in all the colonies frequently disciplined men for horse racing. The Carolina Jockey Club agreed to suspend its activities during the war.[10]

The Revolutionary War interrupted racing in Charleston. Many owners of race horses, like Daniel Ravenel, used their swift steeds as chargers while others hid their valuable animals in the swamps. The thoroughbreds were a favorite target of British raiders who needed mounts for their cavalry, and many fine horses were stolen. British cavalry commander Banastre Tarleton, for example, captured 400 horses including "60 famous ones."[11]

[9]Charles Fraser, *Reminiscences of Charleston* (Charleston, S.C.: Garnier & Col., 1854; repr.: n.p., 1963), p. 62; *Tri-Weekly Mercury*, February 15, 1859 (second quotation) in "Horse Racing, Miscellaneous File," SCHS; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 327-361 (third quotation on pp. 339-340, fourth on p. 344).

[10]W. G. Stanard, "Racing in Colonial Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 2 II (January 1895), pp. 299-305; Worthington Chauncy Ford, ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, 34 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, Government Printing Office, 1904ff.), Vol. I, p. 78; Wecter, *Saga of American Society*, p. 429; "Historical Notes: Horse Racing During the Revolution," *SCHM* 8 (July 1907), p. 174.

[11]Irving, *Jockey Club*, 42; Ravenel, *Ravenel Records*, pp. 37-38, 46-47; Charleston *News and Courier*, June 25, 1973.

AFTER THE DEPRIVATIONS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR, Southerners eagerly returned to their favorite sport. In Charleston, too, "a *new* and more vigorous impulse was given to the sports of the Turf," and new jockey clubs, like the St. George's Club of Dorchester, were organized. A contemporary wrote that the period from the end of the Revolution to the Civil War was the "golden age of racing." The high wagers and other forms of social competition also continued after the war. Isaac Weld, an Irish traveler in the South during the late 1790s, noted that planters in the Carolinas attached so much importance to a horse race "that it is no uncommon thing there, to see gangs of negroes staked at a horse race." One Charleston resident wrote, "This is the week of the Washington Races, a season of much dissipation." A Scotsman who visited the city during the 1811 racing season left a vivid description of the excitement that filled the air. He wrote, "at this season the City exhibits a continued routine of gaiety ... for the inhabitants confined to their houses or banished to the unsocial sands of Sullivans Island during the long & inclement summer, hail with demonstrations of joy the return of winter and give full scope their inclination which is naturally gay and fond of pleasure." He reported that during Race Week "nothing is talked of but amusement." He found that the planters competed with one another in their displays of wealth and refinement; "All at once there appears a grand display of new carriages and all are envious which should carry off the public opinion with regard to taste." The extravagance of this competitiveness shocked the frugal Scot who added that "This custom is carried so far that a Planter will embarrass himself for one half of the year for the gratification of shewing on this occasion something superior." The last race was held at the New Market course in 1791, and the following year the Jockey Club moved the races to the Washington Course where they remained throughout the antebellum period.[12]

The Washington Track became one of the most famous in the South. It was built and owned by a number of prominent members of the Jockey

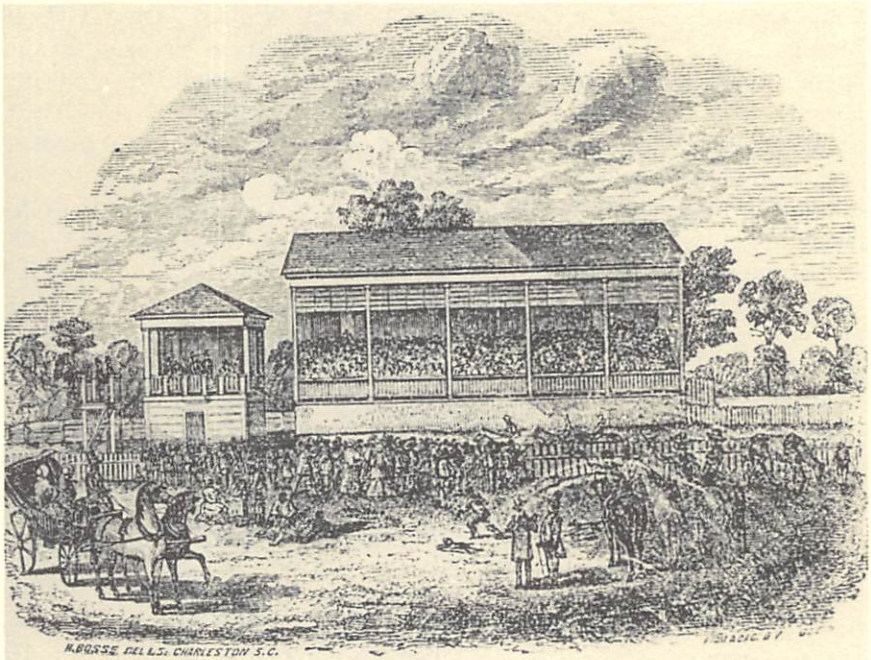
[12]Isaac Weld, Jr., *Travels Through the States of North America ... during the Years 1795, 1796 and 1797*, 2 vols. (London: J. Stockdale, 1807, repr. New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1968), Vol. I, pp. 150, 185. "Journal of Mrs. Ann Manigault," *SCHM* 20 (January 1919), p. 61; Irving, *Jockey Club*, Part IV, pp. 6, 11, 14; Raymond A. Mohl, ed., "'The Grand Fabric of Republicanism': A Scotsman Describes South Carolina, 1810-11," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* (hereafter *SCHM*) 71 (July 1970), p. 186; William Read to Jacob Read, February 14, 1800 (fourth quotation), Read Family Papers, SCHS; Click, *Spirit of the Times*, pp. 59-60. The St. George's, organized in 1786, included such men as Wade Hampton, Arthur Middleton, and members of the Izard and Waring families. "The St. George's Club," *SCHM* 8 (April 1907), pp. 88-94. See also the Records of the Pineville Jockey Club in the Gaillard Collection, SCHS. Jon Vance Chancy, ed., *Travels of John Davis in the United States of America, 1798 to 1802* (Boston: Privately printed, 1910), p. 119. The Washington course was located at the present site of Hampton Park. Mary Murray Drive approximates the old course.

Club, including Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, William Alston, Gabriel Manigault, and Wade Hampton. The club purchased the track in 1835 and spent considerable sums on its improvement. For example, the club constructed a ladies' stand which was designed by Charles F. Reichardt, architect of the Charleston Hotel. The annual races increased in popularity and became the "*carnival* of the State." But the fame of the races spread far beyond the state borders; ships from New York City advertised special accommodations for those passengers going to Charleston for Race Week, and by the 1850s breeders from Virginia, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, and other states regularly entered their horses. In keeping with the carnival-like atmosphere, regular activity ground to a halt during Race Week as the entire city joined in the celebration. As one contemporary noted, "The whole week was devoted to pleasure and the interchanges of conviviality...." A newspaper columnist in the 1850s observed that "all other interests are forgotten in the one great expectation of a good time coming — every one *affects the turf*, and 'talks horse,' morning, noon and night.... Go where we will, the Club — the Mills House — the Charleston Hotel, or any other favorite resort of our sporting friends, ... the talk prevails ...."[13] Indeed, the schools declared a holiday, law courts did not meet, and many businesses closed. While members of the planter elite dominated the sport, members of all social classes attended; one writer described Race Week as "a great popular festival shared in by every one, from the Governor and the ladies in the Grand Stand to the negroes who sat unmolested on the fence tops." Another writer described the "*Backgammon Board* appearance" of the course with "*black* and *white* groups, dotting the Course here and there...."[14]

There was something for everyone, and amusements were not limited to the races. For example, in 1804 a visitor to the track could also stop by a large tent to see a most remarkable "Learned Pig"; according to the advertisement, "He reads printing or writing; spells; tells the time of the day, both hours and minutes ... the date of the year; the day of the month; distinguishes colours; how many persons there are present ... and to the astonishment of every spectator, will add, subtract, multiply, and divide...." This talented swine finished his act with a few card tricks, after which any

[13]Marshall B. Davidson, *Life in America*, 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), Vol. II, p. 34; Irving, *Jockey Club*, Part IV, pp. 6, 11, 14; South Carolina Jockey Club Receipt Book, 1832-34, SCHS; Ivan D. Smith, "Charleston in the 1850's: As Described by British Travelers," *SCHM* 71 (January 1970), p. 40; Mrs. St. Julien Ravenel, *Charleston: The Place and the People* (New York and London: The Macmillan Co., 1912), p. 385; Undated newspaper clipping (1850s), Miscellaneous File, Series II, SCHS.

[14]Fraser, *Reminiscences of Charleston*, p. 62; Undated newspaper clipping (1850s), Miscellaneous File, Series II, SCHS; Ravenel, *Charleston*, p. 129, 385; Irving, *South Carolina Jockey Club*, Part I, p. 15; Click, *Spirit of the Times*, p. 60.



Above: "The Washington Track became one of the most famous in the South." Illustration from the Hinson File, courtesy of the Charleston Library Society.

Left: The Washington Race Track clubhouse, seen here in 1865, was designed by Charleston architect Charles Reichardt. After the Jockey Club disbanded in 1900, the gates were given to August Belmont, who used them at Belmont Park. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.

spectator dissatisfied with the performance could have his fifty cents refunded, though if the pig lived up to even half his billing such requests must have been rare indeed.[15]

Whether or not members of the elite visited the trained pig is unclear in the records, but the week's glittering social events were open only to them. Our Scotch visitor reported that "the Evening[s] are spent in dancing," and, indeed, the Jockey Club Ball was the highlight of the season. The ball was held in the Hall of the St. Cecilia Society. One visitor wrote, "The Jockey Club begins by giving a splendid Dinner & Ball. The married men afterwards treat the Bachelors with a Ball and they in their turn repay the civility in a tenfold manner, for of all the parties I had the pleasure to be at there was none that equalled in brilliancy & expence a Batchelors Ball.... The room was painted elegantly for the purpose and the floor of which was chalked into a thousand different figures, amongst which the Eagle with extended wings was exhibited hovering in the Center of the room...." Noted architect Robert Mills called Race Week the "season of festivity & ease." He attended the ball in 1817 and noted that "the society was very select, none but the higher classes attending ... in their dress the ladies displayed a great deal of good taste...." The dancing was followed by an "elegant supper" at 11:00 p.m.; he observed that "No expense appeared to have been spared, and preparation made for about 200 persons." At the races the planters displayed the fitness of their horses, while at the balls they displayed the beauty and accomplishments of their daughters who often made their debuts there. One writer observed, "With some of our young ladies ... the Races are associated in their minds with new dresses, balls and flirtations." Here aristocratic families cemented ties through marriages between their sons and daughters, attachments that often began during Race Week.[16]

Margaret Hunter Hall and her family traveled from Great Britain through the United States in the late 1820s and visited Charleston during Race Week. She found the Jockey Club Ball "very dull ... much too thinly attended ... [with] too small a proportion of gentlemen." Even the gentlemen there, some of the South's finest, appeared "very second-rate" to the critical British woman, and "as for the female part of the company," she wrote, "I never in my life saw so many ugly women gathered together."[17]

[15]Charleston *Courier*, February 13, 1804.

[16]Mohl, "The Grand Fabric," p. 186; Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), p. 138; Irving, *Jockey Club*, pp. 13-14; "Letters From Robert Mills," *SCHM* 39 (July 1938), pp. 118-119; Walter J. Fraser, Jr., *Charleston! Charleston! The History of a Southern City* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), pp. 111, 196; Undated newspaper clipping, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, Series II, SCHS.

[17]Margaret Hunter Hall, *The Aristocratic Journey* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1931), pp. 211-212.

Apparently many Americans disagreed with Mrs. Hall because the Charleston races and the balls continued to be famous throughout the nation.

Charlestonians were well aware of the value of tourists' dollars even in the antebellum period, and even then they sometimes had to endure rude and ignorant visitors like Mrs. Hall, but tourism was not the primary value of the races in the eyes of the planters. South Carolina's peculiar political system gave the sport an added significance. The state had the most aristocratic and least democratic government in the entire nation. All white males could vote, but they had little to vote for; only state legislators and members of the national House of Representatives were elected by popular vote, and usually the ruling elite agreed upon a candidate who then ran unopposed. South Carolinians maintained that government should be in the hands of "independent, incorruptible, and virtuous individuals" who "would be free to follow the dictates of conscience" and who would "oppose every appearance of despotism." It was "a system designed to install the 'best men' in positions of power and to invest them with the responsibility to govern the less virtuous, less talented residue of the population." The state's master class, the ruling elite, was bound by ties of personal friendship and family loyalty. Yet, as already noted, they engaged in a fierce competition among themselves for status, prestige, and leadership.[18]

RACE WEEK PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE in the maintenance and creation of these personal ties among South Carolina planters, and while the popularity of racing declined among the elite in other southern cities during the antebellum period, planter hegemony secured its popularity in Charleston. In 1830 a writer in the Charleston *Courier* assessed the value of the races. He noted that friends and connections met there from across the state; "Mind then has free intercourse with mind; asperities are softened; local prejudices are removed, and a delightful harmony of feelings and sentiments prevails. This leads ... to unanimity in our councils, and particularly in the State Legislature. Hence union, political union, is confirmed and established." Important state political meetings were often scheduled to coincide with Race Week as members of the elite gathered from across the state to attend the festivities.[19]

[18]Faust, *Hammond and the Old South*, pp. 40-43, 138.

[19]Charleston *Courier*, February 23, 1830; Faust, *Hammond and the Old South*, p. 138. Patricia Click found that in Baltimore, Norfolk, and Richmond the popularity and status of racing began to decline in the 1830s and 1840s; the elite abandoned the races to the lower classes and jockey clubs disbanded. She believes racing declined as it lost its "symbolic and social function" in those cities. I argue here that in Charleston it retained those functions — and its popularity — throughout the antebellum period. Click, *Spirit of the Times*, pp. 60-71 (quote on p. 66).

The example of one South Carolinian, James Henry Hammond, demonstrates how horse racing could help advance a career. Hammond was not born into the tight-knit planter aristocracy, but he was intelligent and highly ambitious. In 1831 he made an advantageous marriage with the daughter of a planter family, a marriage that brought him slaves and plantations as well. With these necessary prerequisites, he began to work his way into the planters' ranks. In 1833 he bought a part interest in three of Pierce Butler's thoroughbreds; Butler, of course, was very prominent socially and politically. In the years following the two men increased their holdings, and at the same time became more closely acquainted. In 1835 the two paid $8,000 for a Virginia-bred racer, Argyle, a fine horse who carried Hammond's name to victory when he won the Charleston race in February. Argyle had won a monetary return for his owners, but as Hammond's biographer observed, Hammond "could not measure in dollars and cents the satisfaction he had felt in attending the festivities of ... race week as one of the inner circle of triumphant owners." Winning that race confirmed Hammond as a successful competitor among the elite, and not just in a sporting event. The competition in racing was a necessary preliminary skirmish in a bigger game, a demonstration of a social superiority that could be transformed into political power, a transformation that the ambitious Hammond was able to make. In 1842 he was elected governor, then became a U.S. senator, and remained a key figure in state politics throughout his life.[20]

Another advantage of the wide attendance at the races noted by newspaper writers was a good effect on public manners; the races had many lessons to teach the lower classes. The columnists believed that "Inferiority ... naturally submits itself to the guidance of education and talents.... [T]he language and manners of the polite are closely imitated...." But the planters hoped that the lower classes would learn more than just manners and language. A writer in the 1850s asked, "are there not some admirable lessons to be learned from *the life and the character of the horse*? What a homily does HIS OBEDIENCE furnish?" In his view, the race could teach vital lessons for a slave society dominated by a planter elite. He described the thoroughbred as having "*a bridle ... upon his passions* — he feels it his duty to obey...." The horse, he wrote, "is content to lose his own identity, 'to live, and move...' by *the will of another* — he receives the chastisements of his master, and immediately amends his ways. In a word, how truely may it be said, that he ... 'loves him that is set in authority over him...' [and] serves him faithfully all the days of his life.... What a contrast is this to human contact!" he lamented. He advised others, and here he spoke to the slaves and plain folk, to "learn from his *docility* and obedience THE WHOLE DUTY OF MAN!" If only the entire society could be as easily managed as a race, and

[20]Faust, *Hammond and the Old South*, pp. 158-159, 211 and *passim*.

if only slaves could be controlled as easily as a horse! They could, of course, be bought and sold like horses, and were, in fact, sold between races at the track.[21]

Horse racing meshed well with the spirit of romanticism that took root in the South in the 1830s. Historian Rollin G. Osterweis numbered the sport among the "trappings of the Southern cult of chivalry." An article from the Charleston *Courier* in 1837 illustrates this aspect of the sport:

> All parts of the State, and the neighboring States, conspired to swell the concourse; and the ladies, by their presence and their smiles, gave a seducing influence to the gay and animated scene ... the beaux with their gallant steeds kept near the object of their loves, ready at any moment to play the knight-errant and to do their lady's bidding.... At the same time crowds of the most promiscuous character would be issuing through the foot-passenger's gate.... The eye rested at the same time upon all that was lovely and interesting, as well as upon that which was loathsome and disgusting.... Most frequently the names of our finest country women are given to horses....

While women were barred from attending some popular southern sports — cockfights, for example — they were encouraged to attend horse races, and, as previously noted, a special gallery was built at the Washington Track for their accommodation.[22]

As sectionalism intensified in the 1850s, Northerners sometimes disparaged southern races. John Milton Mackie, a northern writer who visited Charleston in 1860, found much to criticize about the races. He found "nearly all" the ladies "rather over-dressed for the occasion," and "nothing was gorgeous save the silks and ribbons; ... even the cheeks of the fair were pale, and their eyes lacked lustre." He also found that the "lords of this part of creation.... carried a trifle too much weight in the watch chain." Mackie was shocked "at seeing the floor of the saloon ... wet with tobacco juice, and sprinkled with nutshells." He even questioned the gentility of

[21]Charleston *Courier*, February 23, 1830; Irving, *Jockey Club*, p. 29 (second quotation); George C. Rogers, Jr., *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), p. 71.

[22]Osterweis, *Romanticism and Nationalism in the Old South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), pp. 55, 98; *Courier* quoted in *Spirit of the Times*, April 15, 1837, p. 67. For an article similar in tone see a February 1858 clipping in "Horse Racing, Miscellaneous File", SCHS. Charleston women noted with pleasure the arrival of racing season. See, for example, Anna Lesesne's Diary, February 18-19, 1836, SCHS, and "Journal of Mrs. Ann Manigault, 1754-1781," *SCHM* 21 (January 1922), p. 12. Irving, *South Carolina Jockey Club*, p. 13. See also Click, *Spirit of the Times*, p. 65.

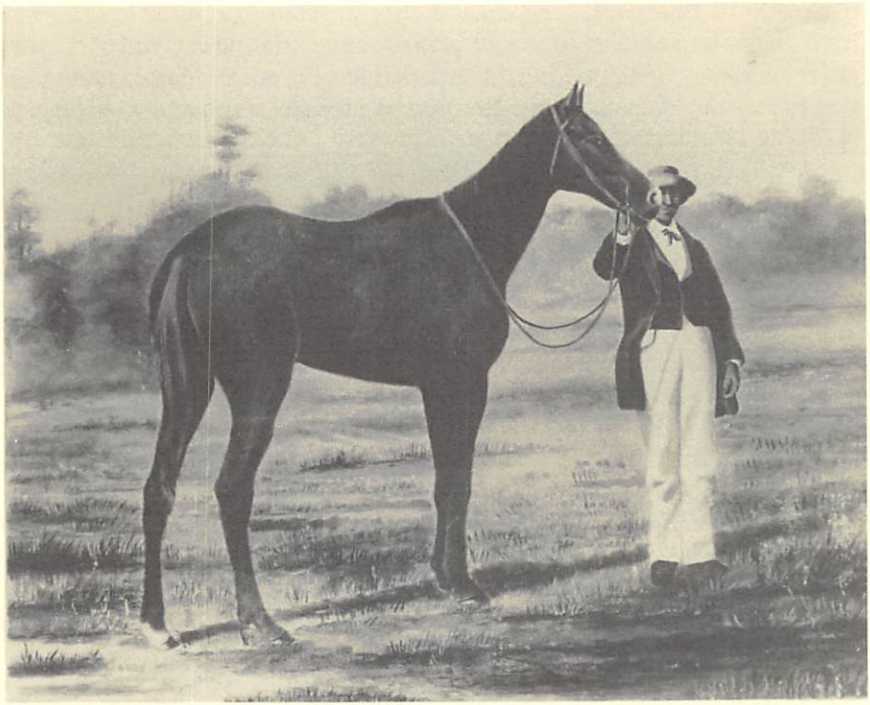
Charleston's finest when he saw "a lady arrayed in ermine ... who was holding court ... consisting of four gentlemen ... suffered two out of the four to stand in her presence munching peanuts." He admired only the horses and the young black jockeys who, "like the steeds, ... must have been bred specially for the race course."[23]

While slave jockeys were not precisely "bred" for the race course, they were certainly an important part of the race, as were the slave trainers. Here, as in most other aspects of their lives, the planters' success depended on their slaves' skills; the sizeable investment in horse flesh would mean nothing unless the animals were well trained and ridden. Capable trainers were well known and much sought after; for example, in 1834 Wade Hampton pleaded with Col. Richard Singleton to allow him to hire his trainer, a slave named Cornelius: "he would be very useful to us," he wrote, "& might be advantageously employed for himself." This comment suggests that skilled trainers may have enjoyed some measure of independence and found opportunities to hire themselves out; as historian Eugene Genovese noted, skilled slaves had "a reputation for being the proudest and most independent of all slaves." Historian John B. Boles has suggested that some slaves may have "gained a sense of fulfillment and even pleasure from the performance of their agricultural duties." While nothing written by Genovese or Boles should be misconstrued to imply that these slaves acquiesced in their bondage, their suggestion that some slaves took pride and pleasure in their work applies especially well to trainers and jockeys. As one writer observed, "it was 'my horse' to the trainers and the rider, quite as much as to the owner."[24]

In this context, the example of Hercules, an enslaved trainer, is instructive. He was owned by the Sinkler family, who were prominent in local racing circles, and was hired out to other breeders including Major Jack Cantry. Cantry purchased a thoroughbred mare named Albine, despite her miserable showing in her first races. Hercules then began to train Albine, and her losing record turned into a winning streak. Her greatest race occurred at the Washington Track in 1861 against a horse named Planet; racing enthusiasts considered it one of the greatest races in the history of the track, and, indeed, Albine set the best recorded time in the four-mile heat at the track (seven minutes, thirty-six and one-half seconds). No one doubted that Hercules was responsible for her success, least of all Hercules himself. As one

[23]John Milton Mackie, *From Cape Cod to Dixie and The Tropics* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1864) pp. 93-95.

[24]Hampton to Singleton, August 1, 1834, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, SCHS; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), pp. 390-394 (quotation on p. 392); Boles, *Black Southerners, 1619-1869* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1984), p. 80; Ravenel, *Charleston*, p. 392 (final quotation).



HINSON CLIPPINGS

Washington Race Course.

Wednesday, February 6th, 1861.

JOCKEY CLUB PURSE, $1,000—*4 mile heats.*

1. T. & T. W. DOSWELL enter ch. h. *Planet* 5 years old, by Revenue, dam Nina by Boston—Rider's dress—Orange and Orange.
2. JOHN CANTEY enters ch. f. *Albine*, 4 years old, by Jeff Davis, dam by imported Monarch—Rider's dress—Red and White.

SECOND RACE.

Hutchinson Stakes, for 3 years old—mile heats

1. Fondren & White names b. c. *Red Eagle*, by Red Eye, dam by imported Margrave.
2. W. J. Magill names (R. A. Alston's) ch. c. *Tom Puryear*, by Highlander, out of Kitty Puryear by imported Ainderby.
3. F. M. Hall names ch. c. *Eugene*, by Revenue, out of Fanny Fern by imported Glencoe
4. F. M. Hall names ch. f. by Financier dam by Steele
5. H. C. Caffey names b. c. by imported Sovereign, out of Little Mistress by Shamrock.
6. H. C. Caffey names br. f. *Emily Blount* by Brown Dick, dam by Gero.
7. Gen. Thos. J. Green & Son names b. f. *Miss Tobacco Fly*, by Red Eye, out of Firefly by imported Priam
8. Jos. Pringle Alston names b. c. *Waccamaw*, by Red Eye, out of Ellen Evans.
9. Thos. Puryear names ch. f. *Rosa Bonheur*, by imported Glencoe, out of Millwood.
10. Thos. Puryear names br. c. *Bourbon*, by imported Glencoe, out of Fleur-de-Lis by imported Sovereign.
11. O. P. Hare names ch. f. by Boston Junior, dam by imported Truster
12. Thos. J. Jennings names ch. f. *Becky B.*, by Highflyer, out of Elizabeth McNairy by Ambassador.

☞ *The Horses will start precisely at 1 o'clock.*

The 1861 race between Albine and Planet was considered one of the greatest in the history of the Washington Race Course.

Above, Albine and her trainer, Hercules. Photo of an oil painting on paper courtesy of the Gibbes Museum of Art/Carolina Art Association.

Left: The famed race between Albine and Planet heads this program. On the reverse is pencilled the times for each of the four miles that were run, totaling seven minutes, thirty-seven and one-half seconds. From the Hinson File, courtesy of Charleston Library Society.

contemporary recalled, "Old Herc was very proud of defeating Planet. After the race was over he asked Major Cantry to send to the City ... and order a basket of champagne and he would pay for it, as he wanted to treat Major Cantey and the other gentlemen.... The champagne was ordered, but, of course, old Hercules didn't pay for it, and all the turfites were invited to his stables."[25]

In many respects, this thrilling 1861 contest was a last hurrah for the Charleston races. When the bitter sectionalism of the 1850s and 1860s turned to war, Southerners confronted invading armies and the races were quickly disrupted. In South Carolina the army of General William T. Sherman inflicted the heaviest losses, and since the Union Army could not supply an army of 60,000 men over such distances, the army relied on foraging. As General Sherman reported, "I am practising [sic] them in the art of foraging and they take to it like ducks to water." From the southern perspective, the soldiers learned all too well, and foraging often turned into simple thievery. Among the supplies and provisions soldiers were ordered to appropriate were horses, "freely and without limit," an order they carried out to the fullest. Incomplete records from the Carolina campaign show that Sherman's troops took almost 12,000 horses and mules; the actual number was even higher. Among the horses captured by the northern troops were those owned by Major Cantry, including his champion Albine, and although two of his thoroughbreds were returned to him after the war, Albine was not among them.[26]

During the Civil War the Jockey Club members, like many other Southerners, sought to protect their valuables from Union troops. Among the Club's assets was a well-stocked wine cellar. The Club madeira was moved to Columbia during the war and stored in the cellar of the insane asylum where it escaped detection. In 1877, 714 bottles of the valuable old stock were sold for over $3,000 to help pay the Club's debts.[27]

THE LOSS OF THOROUGHBREDS in the Civil War and the postbellum poverty in the South virtually ended organized racing in the region. The

[25]C. Fitzsimons, *Sketch of the Racing Mare Albine* (Columbia, S.C.: The State, 1913), p. 10. Members of the Sinkler family belonged to the St. Stephens Jockey Club and the South Carolina Jockey Club. Ravenel, *Charleston*, p. 392.

[26]Joseph Glatthaar, *The March to the Sea and Beyond: Sherman's Troops in the Savannah and Carolinas Campaigns* (New York: New York University Press, 1985), pp. 120, 130; John G. Barrett, *Sherman's March Through the Carolinas* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1956), pp. 36, 114; Katharine M. Jones, *When Sherman Came: Southern Women and the "Great March"* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merril, 1964), pp. 212, 218, 239; Fitzsimons, *Sketch of the Racing Mare*, p. 11.

[27]Charleston *News and Courier*, March 14, 1983; *Sunday News*, July 1900 in Hinson File, Charleston Library Society, Charleston, S.C.

antebellum social, political, and economic conditions that gave the Charleston races their reason for being were destroyed. The war ended Charleston's economic preeminence, and many gentlemen who had been patrons of the turf lost their fortunes; the fine thoroughbreds, the high bets, the elegant carriages, and the lavish balls were only memories. With the advent of Reconstruction the former planters also lost their political domination; as noted earlier, the races had been an important part of the antebellum political process, a role they could no longer fulfill.[28]

The Carolina Jockey Club members attempted to revive the sport after the war without success; as one post-war club president wrote, "the spirit of racing ... had died out in the land." In the 1880s the Washington Track was leased for farming and the once elegant grandstands were used to store farm equipment. By 1899 the club concluded that "the prospect of restoring the amusement of horse-racing on a respectable footing has proved to be hopeless...." In 1900 the Jockey Club voted to disband. The members donated the club's assets, valued at about $100,000, to the Charleston Library Society. The impressive gates to the race track were presented to August Belmont, a wealthy New York banker, politician, and president of the American Jockey Club. He used the posts at Belmont Park, a new track which became home of the Belmont Stakes, a fitting tribute to the famed Charleston races.[29]

[28]On the city's postbellum history see Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, and Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

[29]*Sunday News*, February 3, 1900; January 1, 1899 in Hinson File. W.M. Hutchenson to T.G. Barker, December 12, 1892, 1899 Report; Lease to J.H. West, 1 June 1884 to 31 December 1886 in Carolina Jockey Club Papers, Charleston Library Society. Theodore G. Barker to Reverend Robert Wilson, January 31, 1900, Jockey Club Papers; *Sunday News*, April 1903, Hinson File.