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The Fare Facs Gazette

The Newsletter of Historic Fairfax City, Inc.

Volume 13, Issue 2

Spring 2016

The Race Field at Fairfax Court House

by William Page Johnson, II



*"The course is handsome, equaled by few on the continent, and in good order."*¹

— John Ratcliffe, August 23, 1811.

In 1802, Richard Ratcliffe built a course for racing horses at Fairfax Court House.

The *Fairfax Race Field*, also known as the *race ground* or *race course*, was located south of the courthouse on the boundary between the present-day City of Fairfax, Fairfax County and George Mason University. The exact location of the race field was a twenty-five-acre parcel of land bounded by present-day Chain Bridge Road (then called Ellzey's Church Road) on the west, School Street on the north, University Drive on the south, and just west of Sideburn Road on the east. Present-day George Mason Boulevard, between School Street and University Drive, bisects the site and marks the approximate center of the former race field.² (see map on page 8)

In the late eighteenth century, Fairfax County Circuit Court justice Richard Ratcliffe, convinced his fellow justices and the Virginia General Assembly to move the Fairfax County Courthouse from Alexandria to what is now the City of Fairfax.

The location selected for the new courthouse was then a crossroads known as *Earp's Corner*, after Caleb Earp who operated a tavern or ordinary at this location. Earp's Corner was quite literally in the middle of nowhere and wholly unremarkable. However, this location was near the approximate geographic center of Fairfax County and therefore more easily accessible to a majority of the county's expanding population. Ratcliffe, who owned several thousand acres around the



A portion of the former *Fairfax Race Field* looking east from George Mason Boulevard between School Street and University Drive.
Source: Google Maps.

From the Desk of the President-

Fairfax, Virginia - April 2016

We look forward to seeing you at our Annual Meeting, Wednesday, April 13, 7 pm at Old town Hall. The speaker at 7:30 is David O Stewart, author of *Madison's Gift. Five Partnerships that Built America*.

This year HFCI is collaborating with Virginia Historical Society/George Mason University to bring a four part lecture series co- We will post reminders on sponsored by various historical groups. You have received the list of lectures with our Annual Meeting announcement. We will also post reminders on our web site before each separate event.

This year HFCI made the following major contributions to historic sites and educational programs:

- * Ongoing stabilization and pgrade of Blenheim Estate——\$50,000.
- * Initial design concepts for exhibit spaces at the Museum and Blenheim.——\$3,000.
- * Support of new exhibits at the Museum and Blenheim——\$5,200.
- * Fairfax Museum collection and acquisition of artifacts ——\$4,200.

HFCI raised \$47,800. through all fund raising activities this year.

The Kitty Poser Memorial Garden in the Old Town Square is emerging as an historically accurate garden using plants from the period 1930-1940.

As you walk in the Square this spring, take a look at the garden as it develops.

Finally, bring your family out for our annual Civil War Day event, Saturday, April 30. Each year we have some special events. This year will feature a cricket demonstration and many other interesting activities for the whole family.

Sandra Wilbur, President
Historic Fairfax City, Inc.

At the Fairfax Museum and Historic Blenheim...

Fairfax Museum and Visitor Center

Fairfax Museum and Visitor Center:

The Fairfax Story - Hamill Gallery. Permanent Fairfax history exhibition.

Fairfax Museum and Visitor Center "Second Sunday" Programs

Programs are held at **2 p.m.** on the second Sunday of each month. Unless otherwise noted, programs are held at the Fairfax Museum and Visitor Center, 10209 Main Street. Free (unless noted). Check back to find out about additional programs planned throughout the year. Information: **703-385-8414**.

Sunday, April 10 2 p.m. - SPECIAL

LOCATION: Civil War Interpretive Center at Historic Blenheim

"Private John S. Mosby, First Virginia Cavalry: Picketing Fairfax County before Becoming the Confederacy's 'Gray Ghost'."

Join historian and author Gregory P. Wilson for a discussion of his biography of Mosby's early military career. Book sale and signing will follow the talk.

Saturday, May 21, 2 p.m. - **SPECIAL**

LOCATION: Civil War Interpretive Center at Historic Blenheim

"American History Film Project Exhibition"

Enjoy viewing student short films on hometown history from across the United States, including Fairfax County! This ongoing project is open to students K-12. Free popcorn! Learn more about the project at <https://www.facebook.com/American-History-Film-Project-Exhibition-132>

Sunday, June 12, 2 p.m.

"The History of the Sewall-Belmont House and Museum"

Executive Director A. Page Harrington will tell how the National Woman's Party (NWP) and its leader Alice Paul used the strategic location of the house on Capitol Hill to lobby for women's suffrage and other issues.

Civil War Interpretive Center at Historic Blenheim

Historic Blenheim Civil War Interpretive Center Program Series Programs are free and held at 2 p.m. on Saturdays (unless otherwise noted) at the Civil War Interpretive Center at Historic Blenheim, 3610

Old Lee Highway. Information: 703-591-0560.

Saturday, April 30, 2 p.m.

FAIRFAX CIVIL WAR DAY 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Period music, living history encampments and demonstrations, military firings and drills with Company D, 17th Virginia Infantry, "Fairfax

Rifles," C.S.A., tours of the Historic Blenheim House and more. \$5/adults and \$3/children 12 and under. **Free shuttle from free parking at Fairfax High School.**

Saturday, May 21, 2 p.m.

"'Behind the Scenes' with Elizabeth Keckley"—

Lillian Garland will portray Elizabeth Keckley a former slave turned professional dressmaker and confidante of Mary Todd Lincoln.

Saturday, May 21, 2 p.m.

SPECIAL PROGRAM

"American Film History Project Screening"

Enjoy films produced by high school students about historic sites and personalities. Free popcorn!

Saturday, June 25, 2 p.m.

"For Brotherhood and Duty: The Civil War History of the West Point Class of 1862"

Book talk and signing with author Brian R. McEnany who follows the cadets from their initiation, through coursework, and on to the battlefield, focusing on twelve Union and four Confederate soldiers.

Saturday, July 23, 2 p.m.

"The Civil War and the Fairfax Courthouse,"

A talk by Katrina Krempasky of the Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Division.

Saturday, August 27, 2 p.m.

"PTSD and the Civil War"

Join Beth White, president of the Lynchburg Civil War Round Table as she examines the psychological burdens felt by Civil War soldiers long past the end of the war. She uses example from the 11th Virginia Infantry, C.S.A.

Sunday, September 25, 2 p.m. - SPECIAL DATE
Fall for the Book

“The Battle of Bristoe Station - Myths and Memory”

Authors Rob Orrison and Bill Backus, with the Prince William County Historic Preservation Division, will discuss the many myths surrounding the Battle of Bristoe Station. The Battle of Bristoe Station was the last major battle of the Civil War in Prince William County. Backus’ recent book and Orrison’s “A Want of Vigilance” will also be for sale.

Other Information of Interest:

Walking Tour

10 am Guided walking tour (approx. 90 min.) of Old Town Fairfax with stops at the Fairfax County Courthouse, several antebellum homes with a Civil War history, and the City of Fairfax Cemetery (formerly Fairfax Confederate Cemetery).

Location: Meet at Fairfax Museum and Visitors center, 10209 Main Street, Fairfax 703-385-8414. Wear comfortable shoes and bring water.

Volunteers and docents are sought for the city’s historic buildings: Ratcliffe-Allison House, Historic Blenheim and the Civil War Interpretive Center and Fairfax Museum and Visitor Center. Additionally, volunteers may be interested in assisting with walking tours and special events. For information email or call **703-385-8415**.

The city has published a free self-guided walking tour brochure that provides a brief history of the city and noteworthy buildings in the Old Town Fairfax Historic District. This brochure is available from the Fairfax Museum and Visitor Center, 10209 Main Street, or call **703-385-8414**.

Select historic buildings are open during city special events, including the Chocolate Lovers Festival,

Civil War Weekend, Independence Day Celebration, Fall Festival and Festival of Lights and Carols. To arrange group tours of city-owned historic buildings email or call **703-385-8414**.

The Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1987. It includes a variety of building and monument types and styles, including:

Fairfax Courthouse (1800)
 Ratcliffe-Allison House (1812)
 Joshua Gunnell House (c.1830)
 William Gunnell House (c.1835)
 Ford House (c.1835)
 Fairfax Elementary School (1873)*
 Old Fairfax Jail (1885)
 Old Town Hall (1900)
 Marr Monument (1904)

*Fairfax Elementary School was converted into the Fairfax Museum & Visitor Center in 1992.



FAIRFAX FAST FACT:

Our First President, George Washington, was a contemporary of Richard Ratcliffe, who founded the Town of Providence (now the City of Fairfax). Both George and Martha Washington's Wills are stored in the Fairfax County Circuit Court Archives.

Welcome New Members!

The President & Board of Directors of HFCI extends a hearty welcome to all new HFCI members.

The Jon Stehle Family

DUES ALERT

If you have not paid your annual Historic Fairfax City, Inc. dues they are now due. Please remit based on the schedule below. Annual dues payments should be made out and sent to: *Historic Fairfax City, Inc.*, 10209 Main Street, Fairfax, VA 22030.

Your annual dues help HFCI to continue to meet its basic goal of preserving the unique history of the City of Fairfax. Tax deductible donations over and above dues payments are encouraged.

Visit us on the web:
HFCI Website!

<http://www.historicfairfax.org>

In the Next Issue...

The Last Public Hanging in Fairfax. Public executions were once fairly common in the United States. However, it has been more than a century since the last such event occurred in Fairfax.

Fairfax News of 50 Years Ago

Fairfax Gardens To Open

The Garden Club of Fairfax in conjunction with Historic Garden Week in Virginia will sponsor a house and garden tour April 23 and 24.

The tour will be "Fairfax—From the Old to the New" with a variety in style and historical periods. Homes of three centuries will be featured, as well as the Fairfax Courthouse and Truro Chapel.

The Saturday tour will last from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. with a buffet luncheon served between noon and 2 p.m. at Truro Episcopal Church and tea from 3 to 5 p.m. at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph J. Mathy. Sunday afternoon the tour hours will be 2 to 5 p.m.

Evening Star, April 3, 1966, p. H-26

Continued on Page 14

proposed location, shrewdly offered 4-acres of his own land to the county for \$1.00 to construct the new courthouse, clerk's office, jail and other dependencies. Construction started on the new courthouse in 1799 and was completed by 1800.

People were initially reluctant to move to the new courthouse location. After all, Alexandria, with its comfortable townhomes, numerous shops, churches, and convenient waterfront was the ideal place to live and work for many people. Undeterred, Richard Ratcliffe worked hard to establish a new town around the courthouse. In 1799, he built the first of two taverns, likely on the spot of Earp's earlier tavern. He also constructed several small tenements, shops, and storehouses for merchants and *mechanics*. He advertised his new venture heavily in the *Alexandria Gazette* and other newspapers. In 1801, the Little River Turnpike Company was formed to construct a new road from Alexandria to the *Little River* at Aldie Mill in Loudoun County. Richard Ratcliffe, who was a member of the board of directors of the new company, likely saw to it that the route of the new road ran through his land and right by the new courthouse. In 1805, Ratcliffe received a charter from the Virginia General Assembly for the establishment of a new town to be known as *Providence*, around the new courthouse.

As an additional amenity and inducement, Richard Ratcliffe constructed a race field on his land south of the new courthouse. In the late 18th century and throughout much of the 19th century, horse racing was the main organized sporting event in Virginia and America. The sport attracted thousands. It was not unusual for competitors and spectators alike to travel great distances to attend these significant social events. By the late 18th century nearly every inhabited place in Virginia had its own race field. There were race fields at Alexandria, Bowling-Green, Charlottesville, Dumfries, Fredericksburg, Hanover, Haymarket, Leesburg, New Kent, Norfolk, Petersburg, Portsmouth, Powhatan, Richmond, Tappahannock, Warrenton, Woodstock, and *Kentucky County*, Virginia (now the Commonwealth of Kentucky), just to name a few.

Races were held several times each year. *Spring*

Races and *Fall Races* were typical. Race organizers offered purses to winning horses from entrance fees charged to competitors, spectators and vendors. At Fairfax Court House and elsewhere the purse was hung from the starting pole on the day of the race.

The entrance fees charged weren't always necessarily money. In 1829, the fee for entering a race at

Fairfax Court-House Races.

ON the first Thursday in November next, will be run for, over a handsome course, at Fairfax Court-House, a Subscription Purse of 100 dollars, free for any horse, mare or gelding, the three mile heats; subscribers starting a horse to pay 10 dollars, and non-subscribers 15 dollars entrance. The following day will be run for, over the same ground a handsome purse, the amount not yet ascertained, the subscription still being open, and will continue so until ten days before the racing commences, it is supposed to be equal to the first day's purse, free as above, the two mile heats, the winning horse of the first days purse excepted. On the third day will be run for over the same ground, a Sweepstake free for saddle horses only; every person starting a horse to pay 10 dollars, in all other respects the rules to be conformed to are those of the Fredericksburg Jockey Club; those who have not yet paid the amount of their subscriptions will please to do so on or before the first day's race to

JOHN RATCLIFFE, Sec'y.

N. B. As the Course, &c. will be put in order at the sole expence of the proprietor, some compensation will be required from all those who go on the field as spectators, to be first agreed on.

1 October 9.

en12t

The highly celebrated 4 mile horse Top Gallant,

Will stand at Mockland Wood, the seat of Richard Caton, at the ninth mile on the Fall's Road, at \$20 for blooded mares, and \$10 for common mares, and a dollar to the Groom for the season—the season to commence the 20th of May, and to end the 31st day of August—good pasturage will be found for mares at half a dollar a week, but no responsibility for accident or escape: every case will be taken of them, and the fields enclosed with good fences.

TOP GALLANT stood two seasons at the stables of John Milton, esq. near Battletown, Va. and his colts were so remarkably superb, large and elegant, that he was purchased of Col. John Taylor for \$2700, at a public sale and his value can scarcely now be ascertained, as two of his stock have only been tried, and both prove extraordinary runners, one of them a filly in Virginia, the other Dr. Thoraton's capital filly *Nick me targets*, that won the sweepstakes at Fairfax Court House in May last, and afterwards beat Mr. Brown's famous running horse Wonder, which had challenged the Continent.

American & Commercial Daily Advertiser. May 15, 1817, p. 4, c. 1.

Louisa, Virginia was “One hundred bushels of merchantable wheat.”³ Organizers also charged vendors a fee to operate booths, or concession stands, where liquor, food and other items were sold. The purses at places like Fairfax were small in comparison to larger venues of Richmond and Washington, D.C. For example, a head-to-head race between two horses in Richmond in 1815 featured a purse of \$5,000.00.⁴ Aside from the purse, the main attraction for winning competitors were the lucrative stud fees an owner could charge following the race if his horse won. There was also the prestige associated with having a winning horse.

For spectators the main attraction of horse racing was gambling, with the consumption of alcohol being a close second. There was considerable wagering among competitors and spectators at all races. Typical wagers included money, tobacco, slaves, and property. Races were generally started by firing a pistol, sounding a

trumpet, or hitting a drum. Race organizers employed “proper persons as judges of the Field and Race to settle all disputes that may arise.”⁵ These judges acted as starters, but were also posted around the race field to watch for *foul riding* by competitors. Alcohol-fueled tempers often ran high if a start was questioned or if one rider allegedly interfered with, or *fouled*, another rider.

The Race Course

“De Camptown ladies sing this song,

Doo-da! Doo-da!

De Camptown racetrack's five miles long,

Oh, de doo-da day!”⁶

Race courses at the time were by no means uniform. Sometimes they were just a spot in the woods that had been cleared wide enough for two horses to compete. The Fairfax Court House race course was three-quarters-of-a-mile long, or six furlongs,⁷ a commonly raced distance at the time.

In some towns sprint races were held along town streets. These races were typically a quarter-of-a-mile. This may have been the case in places like Farmville, Fredericksburg, Portsmouth, and Winchester, which locations all have a *Race Street*. The American Quarter Horse is named after this type of horse racing and the 1/4 mile race distance at which it excelled. Even after land became available for long circular tracks, the sport of quarter racing remained a popular American institution.

While the race courses may not have been uniform, the rules generally were. Each locality had a Jockey Club who established their own race rules which varied only slightly. For example, in 1791 the Martinsburg Jockey Club posted the following rules “*The races at Martinsburg will commence on Tuesday, the 4th of October next, on which day will be run for, over a fine course, near the town the Jockey Club Purse of Forty Guineas, free only for Members of the Club. Heats 4 miles each: Aged horses carrying 126 lbs., six years old 119 lbs., five years old 108 lbs., four years old 98 lbs., and three years old a feather. No horse will be permitted to start unless the rider be dressed in a silk jacket, half boots, and jockey cap.*”⁸

ENTERTAINMENT.

THE Public are respectfully informed that the subscriber has taken the Brick Tavern at Fairfax Court House, Va. for the term of four years, three of which are yet to come. He is well provided with stableage, provender, good beds, and the best of liquors, and all other necessaries proper for a *House of Entertainment* to be supplied with, and such as favor him with their custom may rely on his exertions to give general satisfaction,

JOHN MADDOX.

Nov. 4. if.

Alexandria Herald, November 15, 1811, p. 4, c. 4.

In 1796, the Red House Jockey Club,⁹ located in Haymarket, Prince William County advertised that “No person would be allowed to erect a booth or stand in the field or on the road around, without paying to the treasurer of the club ten dollars for every license.”¹⁰

That same year, the Woodstock Jockey Club in Shenandoah County, was even more restrictive: “Proper

persons will be appointed as judges, to settle all disputes that may arise. No person will be permitted to erect a booth or stand, at or near the ground, to sell liquors, without subscribing Four Dollars to the races.”

11

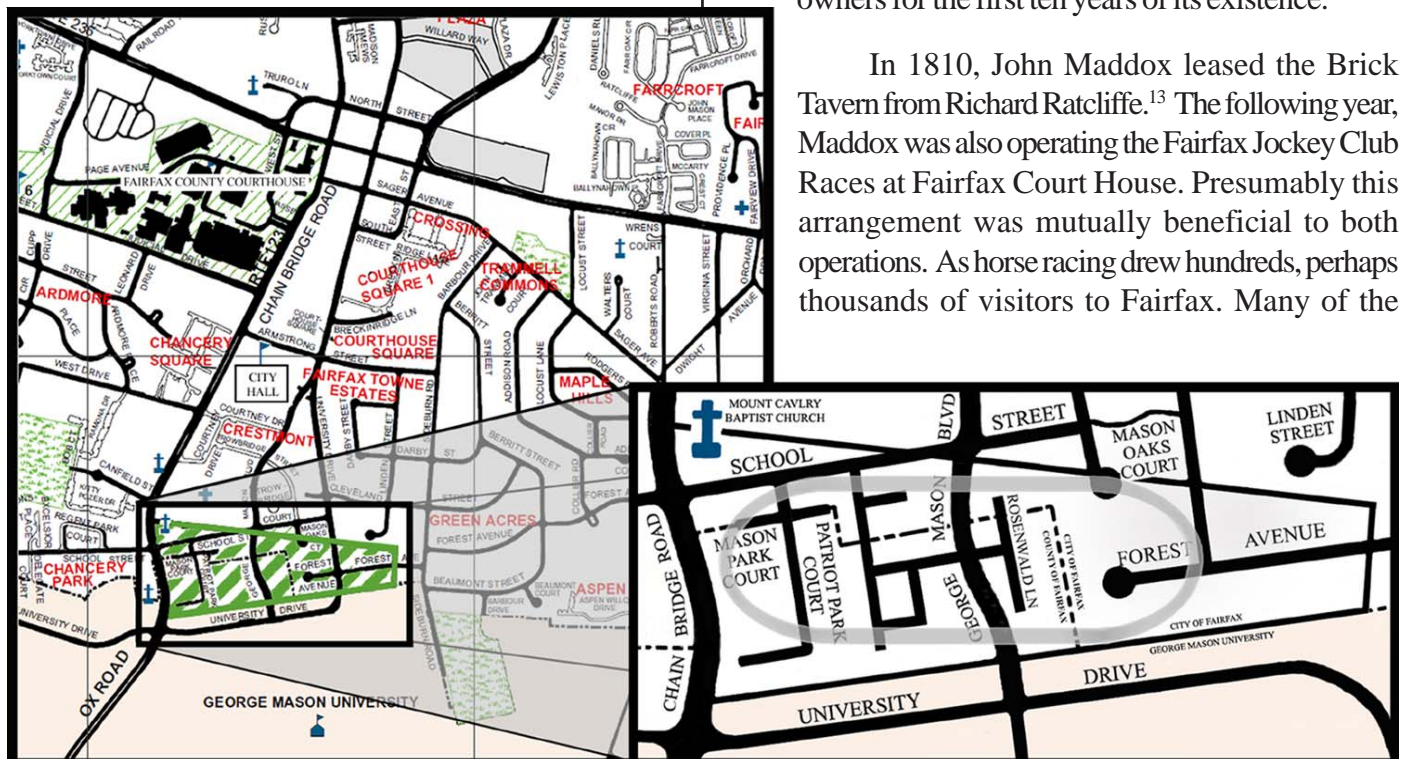
The race course at Alexandria, which was in operation by approximately 1760, was a place that would have been familiar to Richard Ratcliffe. Richard owned a town home on St. Asaph Street and other property in Alexandria. Consequently, he likely modeled his course at Fairfax after the one in Alexandria.

The race course at Fairfax was operational by 1802, a full three years before the charter for the Town of Providence was issued. The course was administered by Richard’s son, John Ratcliffe until about 1811.

Association with the Taverns at Fairfax Court House

Richard Ratcliffe constructed the first of two brick taverns at Fairfax Court House in 1799.¹² The first, was a large Brick Tavern, which came to be known as the *Willcoxon Tavern*, and was operated by a succession of owners for the first ten years of its existence.

In 1810, John Maddox leased the Brick Tavern from Richard Ratcliffe.¹³ The following year, Maddox was also operating the Fairfax Jockey Club Races at Fairfax Court House. Presumably this arrangement was mutually beneficial to both operations. As horse racing drew hundreds, perhaps thousands of visitors to Fairfax. Many of the



A modern map of the City of Fairfax, Fairfax County and George Mason University adapted to show the area of the Race Field.

Source: City of Fairfax, Department Information Technology.

Map adapted by Page Johnson.



An 1837 plat of a portion of Richard Ratcliffe's land holdings at Fairfax Court House and adjoining. Lot "No. 2", south of Fairfax Court House, is the 25-acre Race Field. Source: Fairfax County Chancery Suit *Moss, et. al. v. Ratcliffe's, exor.*, Fairfax County Circuit Court Clerk.



A Virginia Horse Race

Richmond Enquirer, April 22, 1806, p. 1, c. 1.

participants must have stayed in the Brick Taverns at Fairfax Court House.

John Maddox was a Horse racing enthusiast and a horse trainer. During his tenure horse racing flourished at Fairfax Court House. He enlarged the facilities at the Fairfax race course. He added a Training Stable and advertised:

*"...all those that may wish to entrust him with the management of their horses, that he is now ready to receive them, the owner sending with each horse 25 dollars in advance."*¹⁴

Business was so good that about 1814 Richard Ratcliffe constructed a second, smaller brick tavern, near the original.^{15, 16} A third tavern was constructed on Main Street sometime after 1828.¹⁷ This location became known as *Allison's Hotel*.¹⁸ Brothers, Gordon and Robert Allison purchased the property from their uncle William Allison in 1828.¹⁹ William Allison had acquired the property a month earlier from Richard Ratcliffe.²⁰ Maddox remained at Fairfax Court House until 1817 when he became the proprietor of the City Race Field in Washington, D.C.²¹

After Maddox's departure horseracing at Fairfax declined for several years. Richard Ratcliffe died in 1825. In his will, written in 1815, Richard left the race field to his sons Robert and John:

*"...the ballance of that land, on the east side of Ellzey's Church Road & the Old Ct. House Road, I give to Robert and John Ratcliffe including the racefield...."*²²

John Ratcliffe died before his father, sometime around 1818.²³ Subsequently, the race field went to surviving son Robert Ratcliffe.

After Robert Ratcliffe acquired the race field he revived the sport in Fairfax. In 1828, he leased the race field to W.H. Henry Shacklett of Fauquier Co. Shacklett and a partner, Col. Eliab Butler, also leased the "*Large Tavern*" from Ratcliffe and renamed it the *Virginia Hotel*.^{24, 25} Within two months he advertised a race to be held at the Fairfax Jockey Club Course later that December.²⁶

Sport of Kings

The phrase *Sport of Kings* dates back to 1711 and The Royal Ascot Horse Race, established by Queen Anne at Ascot, Berkshire, England. At this race commoners would have the chance to see the Queen and members of the aristocracy and other celebrities.

Likewise, horse racing at Fairfax Court House featured the entries of many prominent men in business, government and social circles. George Chichester of nearby *Mantua* wrote in a letter to *American Turf Register*:

*"...fox hunting and deer hunting are the only amusements of which I partake; and, except racing, are the only ones in which I feel any interest...."*²⁷

Mark Alexander (1792-1883) was a United States Congressman from Boydton, Mecklenberg County, Virginia (1819-1833).

Dr. Matthew Whiting Brooke (1778-1816), educated at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, was a prominent local physician.

Dr. Gustavus Richard Alexander Brown (1790-1835) of Alexandria, VA was the son of Dr. William Brown (1748-1792), Physician General of Continental Army, Revolutionary War and Catherine Scott.

Dr. John R. Drish (1795-1867) a Physician and Tavern Owner in Leesburg, Loudoun Co.

Armistead Hoomes (1785-1827) of Bowling Green, Caroline Co., VA. Was a Captain of Infantry during the War of 1812 and a member of the Virginia Senate from 1815 to 1820. He was a Presidential Elector for James Monroe in 1820, but was replaced by the Virginia General

Assembly for non-attendance of the Electoral College at Richmond, VA.

Nathan Loughborough (1772-1848) was born in Fairfax County, Virginia. His first important post was Chief Clerk in the Land Office of the Federal Government in Philadelphia. Loughborough moved to Washington, D.C. when the Federal capital relocated to that city in 1800. He served as Comptroller of the U.S. Treasury under President John Adams.

Edgar McCarty (1758-1819) b. *Cedar Grove*, Mason Neck, Fairfax Co., VA was the son of Daniel McCarty and Sarah Eilbeck Mason and the grandson of George Mason, IV (1725-1792), of *Gunston Hall*.

Abner Robinson (1779-1842) was a wealthy slave trader in Richmond and New Orleans. On his death in 1842, Robinson named Col. William R. Johnson, of Petersburg, VA, a noted horse trainer, one of his executors and left him an enormous bequest of \$25,000.²⁸

Col. John Tayloe, III (1770-1828) was a member of the Virginia House of Delegates and Virginia Senate. He resided at the Octagon House in Washington, D.C.

Dr. William Thornton (1759–1828) was the designer and First Architect of the United States Capitol.

The Horses

Some of the horses that raced at Fairfax Court House were quite famous in their day. Then as now, they often had colorful names.

Columbia: a chestnut filly owned by Nathan Loughborough, won the Spring Race at Fairfax Court House in 1813 “*in handsome style and is one of the most beautiful animals on the continent.*”²⁹

Godolphin: a chestnut owned by Dr. Gustavus Brown. Raced at Fairfax Court in the spring of 1813 and won the Jockey Club Purse.

Noli me Tangere: a brown filly owned by Colonel John Tayloe was trained at Fairfax Court House by John Maddox. *Noli me Tangere* beat the heavily favored

horse, *Wonder*, in the fall races at Fairfax Court House in 1813, winning the Jockey Club Purse.³⁰ *Noli me tangere* is a Latin phrase meaning “*touch me not*” or “*don’t step on me*”. According to the Bible, John 20:17, Jesus uttered this phrase to Mary Magdalene when she recognized him after his resurrection.

Top Gallant: a bay filly owned by Dr. Thornton was so dominating that the horse was excluded from the spring race at Fairfax Court House in 1814.³¹ On a square rigged sailing vessel, a *Topgallant* sail is the square-rigged sail or sails immediately above the topsail or topsails. It is also known as a gallant or garrant sail.

Wonder: a chestnut owned by Dr. Gustavus Brown. Heavily favored, but was beaten by *Noli me Tangere* at Fairfax Court House in 1813.

Role of the Jockey

Initially, the conventional wisdom of the day was that the best horse won regardless of the rider. Eventually however, the importance of the jockey came to be understood. Horse racing demanded both nerve and skill of the rider and was exceedingly dangerous. The job also required a certain degree recklessness and the ability to take chances. When a jockey lost his nerve, he ceased to be a winning rider. Great jockeys, were reputedly born, not made.

In the late 18th to mid-19th century nearly all Jockey’s in Virginia in were African American slaves. For the owner, the use of slaves was both a cost effective and profitable approach. After all, slaves were unpaid and had intimate knowledge of the temperament and ability of the horses under their care. Slave jockeys were under intense pressure from their owners to win. Their life and work was extremely arduous as most served as rider, trainer, and groom, simultaneously. Typically, they started each day by exercising the horses in their care before breakfast. Slave jockeys also endured physical and mental tortures in exercising their own bodies and restricting food intake to keep their weight down. It wasn’t until after the Civil War that the contribution and the role of the jockey began to be accepted. All black jockeys prior to that time remain virtually unknown.

Alternative Use of the Race Field

From time to time, the Fairfax Race Field served an alternative purpose.

In the first week of June, 1826, William Fitzhugh Hooe (1799-1826), the son of Henry Dade Hooe (1747-1806) and Jane Fitzhugh (1757-1826),³² was convicted in Fairfax Court House of the murder of William Simpson, a South Carolinian who had come to Virginia to purchase slaves.

William Simpson met William Hooe in Leesburg, Virginia, where Hooe was employed in the Clerk's Office, Loudoun County. Apparently, Hooe offered to show Simpson, a stranger to the area, around and help him in his business. They traveled together to Centreville, Fairfax County, where they lodged at Lane's Ordinary (the old Newgate Tavern). On the evening of March 5, 1826 they were seen at Mr. Grigsby's tavern in Centreville. They left, and Hooe returned alone shortly thereafter. Hooe returned the next day to Leesburg. By March 8th, after Simpson had still not appeared, a search was begun. His body was found, "*shot in the left shoulder, and stabbed eleven times in the neck and six times in the chest.*"³³

William Hooe was arrested in Leesburg and arraigned for murder and highway robbery on May 24, 1825. The trial the next year was apparently sensational, since "*the accused was young and a member of the gentry, and county citizens were in an uproar over the callousness of the crime.*" The evidence against William Hooe was circumstantial but overwhelming. He maintained his innocence until after the trial, when he acknowledged his guilt to the Reverend Mr. Burch, a Methodist minister.

On June 30, 1826, between two and three thousand people "*were camped outside the jail, waiting to witness the execution.*" A cart containing a coffin was brought to the jail. William Hooe climbed aboard and seated himself next to it. "*The cart, guarded by thirty to forty armed men, moved slowing on to the place of execution, about one mile distant from the jail, in the middle of an old field, once the resort of the devotees of sport, having been used as a race field.*"³⁴

End of an Era

On February 21, 1831, both taverns at Fairfax Court House were full of guests, it being *Court Day* for the Fairfax County Circuit Court. In the early morning hours of February 22nd the guests of the *Virginia Hotel* awoke to the smell of smoke. A fire had broken out in the cellar and was spreading rapidly. Through the supreme efforts of the people of Fairfax Court House, "*especially those keeping the other tavern*", the fire was confined to just the Virginia Hotel.³⁵ All escaped, but the Virginia Hotel, and all of its furnishings was, destroyed.³⁶ This incident seemed to spell the end horse racing at Fairfax Court House.

Within a month of the fire, Virginia Hotel proprietor Henry Shacklett had returned to Fauquier County. There he assumed the management of the Warren Green Hotel in Warrenton.³⁷ In May 1831, Robert Ratcliffe announced his intention of moving west and his desire to sell his land holdings adjoining Fairfax Court House. He indicated a willingness to exchange this land for land in West Tennessee, Arkansas, or Missouri.

In 1839, Robert Ratcliffe sold the old Fairfax Race Field to his daughter, Jane, and her husband Elcon Jones.³⁸

Sometime prior to 1842, Jane and Elcon Jones conveyed the property to Ellen and Burditt Skinner. Ellen Skinner was the daughter of Samuel Ratcliffe and therefore Jane's 1st cousin.³⁹ The purchase by the Skinner's was secured by a note from horse racing enthusiast George Chichester, of *Mantua*.

George Chichester acquired the property in 1842 after the Skinner's defaulted on the purchase note.^{40, 41} There is no record of George Chichester attempting to revive horse racing at Fairfax Court House after his acquisition however.

After Chichester's death the property was purchased at auction by Judge Henry W. Thomas in 1870.⁴² Judge Thomas died in 1890 and by his will conveyed the property to his wife and children.⁴³

Thomas' heirs sold the property to Fairfax attorney John S. Barbour in 1909.⁴⁴ During his lifetime, John Barbour sold several parcels of the former race field.

Notably, in 1922, he conveyed a portion of the site to the Fairfax Colored School League for the construction of the Rosenwald School and later Eleven Oaks School.^{45,46}

(Endnotes)

¹ *Alexandria Gazette*, August 23, 1811, p. 3, c. 4.

² In her book, *A History of the Town of Fairfax*, © 1960, Jeanne Johnson Rust incorrectly places the “approximate location” of Richard Ratcliffe’s race track as “east of Route 237 north of Little River Turnpike and west of Fairview Subdivision.” Fairfax County deed records point to this site as the correct location.

³ *Virginia Herald*, September 30, 1829, p. 1, c. 2.

⁴ Henderson, Robert W., *Early American Sport*, © 1953, Associated University Press, Cranbury, NJ.

⁵ *Virginia Herald*, September 2, 1796, p. 4, c. 1.

⁶ Foster, Stephen Collins, “Gwine to Run All Night,” aka “De Camptown Races”, [1850] F. D. Benteen, Baltimore, MD.

⁷ Furlong n. from the Old English furlang measure of distance of roughly 220 yards, originally the length of a furrow in the common field of 10 acres, from furh “furrow” + lang “long. A furlong in horse racing is one eighth of a mile (220 yards).

⁸ *Virginia Gazette and Alexandria Advertiser*, September 15, 1791, p. 1, c. 2.

⁹ *Red House*, Virginia is the former name of Haymarket. See Burton, Tommye S., Haymarket, Virginia, Echoes of History, May 1974 “...About 1779, he [William Skinker], erected an ordinary on the Carolina Road where it crossed the Dumfries tobacco road (the present site of Haymarket). The tavern was built of large, red bricks made in the English-style mold. Characteristically, it was called “Red House.” Red House was so well known that when Thomas Jefferson made a map of the region in 1787, he named the locality “Red House.” The *Virginia Gazette*, on October 4, 1787, announced the opening of another ordinary — Haymarket Inn. During the eighteenth century, Haymarket was the scene of Jockey Club races. People came from far and wide and stayed in the two taverns. A race course once adjoined the courthouse. Bishop William Meade wrote in 1857: “... in preaching there in former days I have, on a Sabbath seen from the courthouse bench, on which I stood, the horses in training for the sport which was at hand. Those times have, I trust, passed away forever.” General Anthony Wayne marched his brigade of the Pennsylvania line over the Carolina Road. They were encamped at Red House June 4, 1781. William Skinker took into partnership his nephew of the same name, William Skinker, Jr. On January 1, 1799, the General Assembly decreed ‘that the land of William Skinker, lying at the place known as Red House . . . as the same is already laid off in lots, with convenient streets shall be established a town by the name of Hay Market.’ Henry Washington, Bernard Hooe, Edward Carter, Edmond Brooke, Richard Alexander, William Tyler, George Tyler, Washington J. Washington, and Matthew Whiting were appointed trustees.”

¹⁰ *Virginia Herald*, August 23, 1796, p. 1, c. 1.

¹¹ *Virginia Herald*, August 19, 1796, p. 3, c. 3.

¹² *Columbian Mirror & Alexandria Gaz.*, January 23, 1800, p. 3, c. 4.

¹³ *Alexandria Herald*, November 15, 1811, p. 4, c. 4.

¹⁴ *Alexandria Gazette*, July 2, 1812, p. 3, c. 3.

¹⁵ Fairfax County Minute Books, 1811-1814, Tavern Licenses Issued to John Maddox & Hugh Violett in 1814, Fairfax County Circuit Court Clerk's Office.

¹⁶ Fairfax County Chancery Suit, Moss, et. al. v. Ratcliffe’s, exor., 1833, The Estate of Richard Ratcliffe, decd. In Account With Robert Ratcliffe, Executor “...To cash of J. Bronaugh for Rent of Large Tavern...To cash of W.P. Richardson for Rent of Small Tavern...,” p. 137-154, Fairfax County Circuit Court Clerk's Office.

¹⁷ Fairfax County Deed Book X2, Page 408, Fairfax County Circuit Court Clerk's Office. “The lot on which Richard Ratcliffe, decd. was building in 1812....”

¹⁸ *Allison’s Hotel* was located btwn. 10410 & 10424 Main Street, Fairfax.

¹⁹ Fairfax County Deed Book Y2, Page 24, September 20, 1828, Fairfax County Circuit Court Clerk's Office.

²⁰ Fairfax County Deed Book X2, Page 408, August 30, 1828, Fairfax County Circuit Court Clerk's Office.

²¹ *Daily National Intelligencer*, March 13, 1817, p. 4, c. 3.

²² Fairfax County Will Book O1, Page 57, October 25, 1825, Will of Richard Ratcliffe, Fairfax County Circuit Court Clerk's Office. “Ellzey’s Church Road” was that portion of present-day Rt. 123 (aka Chain Bridge Road) south of Fairfax Court House, while “Old Ct. House Road” was that portion of the same road north of Fairfax Court House.

²³ Fairfax County Will Book N1, Page 64, October 5, 1818, *Inventory of the Estate of John Ratcliffe*, Fairfax County Circuit Court Clerk's Office.

²⁴ Fairfax County Chancery Suit, Moss, et. al. v. Ratcliffe’s, exor., 1833, The Estate of Richard Ratcliffe, decd. In Account With Robert Ratcliffe, Executor “...By cash of H. Shacklett for Rent of Large Tavern,” p. 137-154, Fairfax County Circuit Court Clerk's Office.

²⁵ *Alexandria Gazette*, September 11, 1827, p. 3, c. 4.

²⁶ *Alexandria Gazette*, November 28, 1828, p. 3, c. 3.

²⁷ *American Turf Register*, Vol. I. No. 3, November 1830.

²⁸ Anderson, James Douglas, *Making the American Thoroughbred: Especially in Tennessee, 1800-1845*, © 1916, The Plimpton Press, Norwood, MA.

²⁹ *Federal Republican*, May 28, 1813, p. 3, c. 3.

³⁰ *Daily National Intelligencer*, November 6, 1813, p. 3, c. 3.

³¹ *Daily National Intelligencer*, March 3, 1814, p. 4, c. 2.

³² *Pilgrim’s Rest*, 14102 Carriage Ford Rd., Nokesville, VA. On Register of Historic Places, 2nd oldest existing house in Prince William County.

³³ *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 10, 1826, p. 2, c. 4.

³⁴ According to The *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 6, 1826, Jane died while William Fitzhugh was in jail awaiting indictment and arraignment for murder and highway robbery. The disgrace “brought the grey hairs of his aged parent, with mourning to the grave. . . he should have been a prop and staff to her declining years.”

³⁵ *United States Telegraph*, February 28, 1831, p. 3, c. 3&4.

³⁶ According to a notation in the Fairfax County Land Book for 1831 a building owned by Richard Ratcliffe in the Town of Fairfax was “part burnt.” Fairfax County Land Book, 1831, Fairfax County Circuit Court Clerk's Office.

³⁷ *Alexandria Gazette*, March 16, 1831, p. 7, c. 5.

³⁸ Fairfax County Deed Book E3, Page 123, February 16, 1839, Fairfax County Circuit Court Clerk's Office.

³⁹ Ellen Ratcliffe (1814-1888) was the daughter of Samuel Ratcliffe and Matilda Wilkinson, and the granddaughter of Richard and Locian Ratcliffe. She married Burditt/Burdett Skinner in 1835.

⁴⁰ Fairfax County Deed Book E3, Page 311, December 21, 1838, Fairfax County Circuit Court Clerk's Office, Fairfax, VA

⁴¹ Fairfax County Deed Book G3, Page 254, March 18, 1842, Fairfax County Circuit Court Clerk's Office.

⁴² Fairfax County Chancery Suit 1942-045, Fairfax County Circuit Court Clerk's Office.

⁴³ Fairfax County Will Book WB F2, Page 157, July 6, 1890, Fairfax County Circuit Court Clerk's Office.

⁴⁴ Fairfax County Deed Book C7, Page 136, January 1, 1909, Fairfax County Circuit Court Clerk's Office.

⁴⁵ Fairfax County Deed Book A9, p. 209, November 22, 1922, Fairfax County Circuit Court Clerk's Office.

⁴⁶ Johnson, II, William P. “African American Education in the Town/ City of Fairfax.” *Fare Facs Gazette*. (Winter 2006, 4:1): 6.

Fairfax News of 100 Years Ago

Fairfax Court House, Va.

Special Correspondence of The Star.

FAIRFAX COURT HOUSE, Va., June 17.—Dr. and Mrs. Wallis of the Theological Seminary are spending the week end at the rectory with Mr. and Mrs. Frank Page. Mr. Wallis will conduct the services at Zion Episcopal Church tomorrow evening at 8 o'clock. Parish day will be observed here, Friday, June 30, when the congregations from Vienna and Fairfax will hold an all-day basket picnic on the rectory lawn. Bishop Brown will be present and conduct a brief service in the church. Many former pastors will be present to renew acquaintance.

Miss Lillie Page is spending a month with her sister, Mrs. Norman J. Gaynor at her summer home on Long Island.

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Nelson Page were guests last week of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Page.

Mrs. James Barbour of Culpeper, is spending the summer with Mr. and Mrs. John S. Barbour.

Confederate Memorial day was observed here last Thursday, Col. Robert E. Lee of Ravensworth, being speaker

Evening Star, June 18, 1916, p. C.

FAIRFAX COURT HOUSE ITEMS.

Sunday, May 28, was a special rally day with Mt. Calvary Baptist Church at Fairfax Courthouse, Va. Pastor E. T. Lewis, of Washington, D. C., is leading a fair sized congregation there. The three o'clock afternoon service, though interfered with by rain, was well attended and an inspiring sermon was preached by Pastor E. M. Burrell, of Union Baptist

Church, Vienna, Va., from the text, Acts 16 chapter and 17th verse.

A very pleasing feature of the service was the music rendered by a select choir of five young ladies, including the organist, Miss Brass, under the leadership of the pastor's wife, Mrs. L. A. Lewis, the Misses Pearl, Mamie and Ella Jones, sang beautifully. This choir came all the way from Ivy City to do service for this occasion. The collection for the day was \$26.09. Rain prevented a night service.

We were pleased to meet at the services our esteemed Brother Benjamin Payne who came out with his family from Germantown, Va., in an excellent vehicle behind a fine span of horses all his own. Mr. Payne is one of the prosperous citizens of color in this section.

Accompanying Pastor Burrell were among others Prof. H. L. Mills, Mrs. Martha A. Jackson and Mrs. E. C. Minor, members and well wishers of Pastor Burrell's church. They returned on the 6:15 car.

The Sunday School of Mt. Calvary Baptist Church will observe Children's Day on the 2nd Sunday in June.

Washington Bee, June 3, 1916, p. 5

Fairfax News of 150 Years Ago

THE RECONSTRUCTED AT FAIRFAX COURT-HOUSE.—An intelligent and patriotic lady from Philadelphia, commenced, a few days ago, a school at Fairfax Court-house, in which she was trying to enlist forty or fifty colored children. Some of the chivalrous sons of the reconstructed in that place,

and among their number a son of Judge Thomas, took it upon themselves a duty to put a stop to a proceeding so distasteful to their dignity by throwing stones at the teacher as she passed to and from the school-house, whereupon the military authorities were notified of their conduct, and a squad of cavalry soon made their appearance in the village, but were unable to arrest the offending parties, they having left this county for their country's good.— *Virginia State Journal*.

Daily National Republican, April 19, 1866, p. 3.

There was an examination of the children charged with stoning the school mistress at Fairfax Court House last week, in that Village day before yesterday, at which the military authorities were present. The result of the examination was that one little boy had thrown some pebbles at the lady; and that some drunken men, for whose conduct the citizens are not responsible, and utterly condemn, went to the house of the lady in question one night some time ago, and threatened her.

Alexandria Gazette, April 21, 1866, p. 3.

CONFEDERATE DEAD.—The ladies of Fairfax purpose holding a Fair on Monday next, at Fairfax Court House. The proceeds to be devoted to the purchase of a Cemetery lot, for the reinterment of those who fell in the cause of the Confederacy. Any of our citizens who may desire to contribute to such a praiseworthy object can address the treasurer, Miss Amelia Jackson, Fairfax Court-House.

Alexandria Gazette, August 14, 1866, p. 3.

Fairfax News of 200 Years Ago

At a meeting held at the Tavern, at Fairfax Court House, 18th March, 1816, a respectable number of republican freeholders of the county of Fairfax being present—

Resolved, That John C. Hunter be appointed chairman, and T. C. Nash, Jr secretary.

Resolved unanimously, That John Love of Prince William county be nominated as a proper person to be supported at the next election, to represent the senatorial district composed of the counties of Fairfax and Prince William

Resolved unanimously, That Humphrey Peake and Robert Townshend be nominated as proper persons to be supported at the next election to represent the county of Fairfax in the house of delegates of this commonwealth

JNO. C HUNTER,
Chairman.
T. C. NASH Jr Sec'y

Alexandria Herald, March 20, 1816, p. 3, c. 1.

At an election held at Fairfax Court House, on the 4th inst. pursuant to a recommendation from sundry citizens of Virginia, for deputies to meet in convention at Staunton on the 19th of August, Wm: H: Fitzhugh and Thos. Moss, esqs. were duly elected.

Alexandria Herald, July 10, 1816, p. 3

"Preserving the Past. Protecting the Future."

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The Newsletter of Historic Fairfax City, Inc.

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