

“Robert J. Walden”

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by Jay A. Graybeal

In 1878, New York horseman Robert Wyndham Walden moved his training facility to Middleburg. The move proved highly successful and Walden's horses won numerous races including the 1888 Preakness. Walden's son Robert J. inherited the property and his father's interest in horse racing. The winner of the 1899 Kentucky Derby, he was active in horseracing matters until the 1930s. His death was reported in the June 22, 1951 issue of the Westminster Democratic Advocate newspaper under the headline of “Prominent Countian Dies At Middleburg”:

“A one-time vice president and director of the Maryland Jockey Club, a popular and well known citizen of Maryland was Robert J. Walden, who died at his Bowling Brook Farms, at Middleburg, Tuesday, June 19, 1951, at the age of 80 years.

Mr. Walden who was linked with the breeding, training and racing of thoroughbreds was not limited to association with a single organization.

The son of R. Wyndham Walden, one of the most famous of the early breeders and trainers in the country, he grew up in racing tradition and worked with his father to establish the nation wide renown of Bowling Brook Stables and colors.

He owned and trained a winner of the Kentucky Derby and early in the century as many of 200 thoroughbreds were stabled at one time at Bowling Brook, which then spread over 1,800 acres of blue grass land.

It has shrunk to 300 acres and the track has fallen into disuse, but it remains the site of much that was best in the development of race horses and racing ethics in Maryland.

Intimates of Mr. Walden disclosed that a few months ago the trainer and breeder declined to sell the last of the family estate. He told them, friends said, that he was the last of the Waldens and as such meant to live out his days there.

Over his desk hung the picture of Manuel, the horse with which he won the Kentucky Derby in 1899, and in the now almost empty stables still lives War Hero, son of Man O'War the last stallion at the famous stud farm.

Mr. Walden was born in Westchester county, New York, where his father was recognized as a pioneer in the development of racing.

The elder Mr. Walden has become almost a legendary figure among horse lovers. They like to recall that he owned and trained Refund, the 1888 Preakness winner, and trained six other winners of the Pimlico classic.

Robert Walden's success at the track did not equal his father's record, but his devotion to the interests of racing and to fostering the stamina of race horses was unexcelled.

After the family moved to Carroll county in 1878, young Walden entered ever more extensively into the operation of Bowling Brook. Friends said he broke and trained as many as 90 colts within a year when the stables were most productive.

The young man shared with his father the comradeship of sportsmen from over the country. Many came to Bowling Brook both as friends and stable owners.

Mr. Walden broke his connection with the Maryland Jockey Club in 1936 because of his objection to the policy of allowing the sale of liquor at the track. He had earlier taken a vigorous stand against liquor concessions in any public park and maintained a consistent position when the issue was raised at Pimlico.

He was for many years a vice president of the Maryland State Fair at Timonium. There his special interest was in the annual pony show for children, his love for children rivaling his interest in horse flesh.

Mr. Walden never bet on a horse race and was uncompromising in his insistence upon maintaining the highest ethical standards in racing.

It was his moral influence as well as his love in the handling of horses which gained for him the reputation of being one the best friends of racing in Maryland.

Fine poultry also interested the master of Bowling Brook Farms. He was an exhibitor and ribbon winner in shows in many states. He spent much time developing his own flock on his estate.

Since he resigned as a Maryland Jockey Club official, Mr. Walden was less active about the tracks and in recent years ill health has reduced his activities.

Funeral services will be held Friday at 2 p.m. at the Walden residence. Rev. Clifford H. Richmond, pastor of the Chevy Chase Methodist church will officiate, assisted by Rev. Ernest Caldwell, pastor of the Middleburg Methodist church. Burial will be in the Middleburg cemetery. C. O. Fuss and Son, Taneytown, are the funeral directors."

The death of Robert J. Walden in 1951 closed another chapter in the interesting story of Bowling Brook, historically, one of the most significant horse training facilities in the nation.



*Robert J. Walden of Bowling Brook Farms near Middleburg, photographed as a young man in c.1885, was prominent in horseracing circles. He died at his farm on June 19, 1951. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, bequest of Thelma Walden Littlefield Shriner, 1994.*