

"Horse Racing in 1894"

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By Jay A. Graybeal

On October 3, 1894, Carroll Countians attended the first event sponsored by the Carroll County Trotting, Riding and Pleasure Association. The late J. Leland Jordan, then an editor of this paper, wrote about the event in his "Time Flies" column of January 8, 1943:

"It is noted with considerable interest that throughout the early years of the county, and as late as 1894, horse racing—(harness and running races) were a popular pastime with many of our folks. At various periods, races have been held at Hampstead, Middleburg, Clover Hill Farm (now Cold Saturday), at Westminster and other points. Not until the automobile forced 'dobbin' off the road, did horse racing actually pass out. Many of us remember the impromptu races (especially of Sunday afternoons) when one owner of a spirited horse would challenge another to a race—usually hitched to a fine rubber-tired runabout—with a five or ten 'spot' as the stakes. Occasionally a race of this kind would be run on Pennsylvania avenue, or on the long flat stretch out the Washington road.

Westminster had its agricultural fair over a period of years—and horse racing was a feature attraction. But for Westminster to boast a race track without other concessions and attractions, was a novelty, even in 1894, for then only the larger communities could support such an enterprise.

The Carroll County Trotting, Riding and Pleasure Association had been organized, with Joseph D. Brooks (then Mayor), as its president, and former Sheriff S. Carr Wickert as the secretary. It was an active, 'go-getter' organization from the very beginning.

On the farm of Robert L. Hoppe, a mile north of Westminster, along the road leading to Littlestown, had been laid out an excellent track. A substantial grandstand had been erected and suitable stables were made available. According to accounts, hundreds of teams could be accommodated. The establishment was known as the Pleasure Park.

The opening day had been set for September 19 (1894) but a heavy rainstorm prevented. The opening was moved up to October 3, which turned out to be 'warm, summer like day with clear skies.' Music for the occasion was 'discoursed' by the 'excellent' Westminster Band.

On the program of events were the usual Grand Tournament—and featured was the championship for the state. Four track events were also scheduled for the grand opening. For the tournament, Guy W. Steele delivered the charge to the knights, and D. N. Henning delivered the coronation address.

Knights represented were: Lynn Wood of Linwood; G. P. Beasman of Freedom; Harry Davis of Woodbine; C. L. Rogers of Forest View; Grant Beasman of Rose Lawn; Jesse F. Stem of Westminster; C. C. Crawford of Waterloo; and K. G. Rogers of Glemis. C. L. Rogers was acclaimed the winner. Miss Bettie Reifsnider, of Westminster, was then crowned Queen of Love and Beauty. Judges for the tournament were Elias B. Arnold, David Cowan, Jr., and Philip H. Babylon.

Four races were scheduled—1) free for all Carroll county horses (trotters and pacers), (purse \$75)—won by Charles N. Mitten of Westminster, driving 'Belle.' 2) three minute class (half mile), (purse \$50)—won by E. L. Crawford of Sandyville, driving 'Jay Bird' 3) trotting race (mile), (purse \$100)—won by James M.

Smith of Woodsboro, driving 'Fannie Gold Dust.' 4) running race (purse \$100)—won by R. J. Walden of Bowlingbrook Stock Farm, riding 'Fearless.'

Among the entrants in the several races were Charles Hesson, Joseph Franklin, Jacob Thompson, P. J. Bennett of Westminster; F. Littlefield of the Brookfield Stock Farm at Middleburg, J. C. Gittings of Clover Hill Stock Farm, near Finksburg, and others.

Joseph W. Berrett was Chief Marshall for the day, and Charles E. Hering, J. Walter Shunk, Charles T. Reifsnider, Jr., Robert Gist and J. Wesley Biggs, assistant Marshals. Orlando Reese was clerk of the course. The judges; Messrs. Arnold, Cowan, Babylon, and Dr. A. M. Slade.

According to the local press, upwards of two thousand persons witnessed the events of the opening day.

Yes, Times Flies— for now, over a half century later, this same field is being converted into an air field. Shall we say for pleasure, commerce, or for war?"

Although Carroll's horse racing days are now part of local history, Countians remain active in breeding, raising, training and racing horses. Countians are also members of equestrian associations for trail riding, pleasure driving, horse showing and breeding special types of horses.

Photo caption: Prince, owned by Dr. Jacob J. Weaver, Jr., of Uniontown, posed on the Taneytown Rd. in 1904. He had recently won a blue ribbon for pacing at Louisville. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, gift of Grace Fox, 1979.