



BELMONT PARK

*1905-1968*

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BELMONT PARK

*1905-1968*

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# *The NYRA: Money Magic*

## *chapter one*

The new Belmont Park was built by the non-dividend-paying New York Racing Association at a cost of \$30,700,000. This money was provided by bank loans.

With the opening of the beautiful new track, the NYRA has, in less than a decade, given New York racing fans two ultra-modern tracks worthy of the metropolis. This was accomplished under the leadership first of John W.

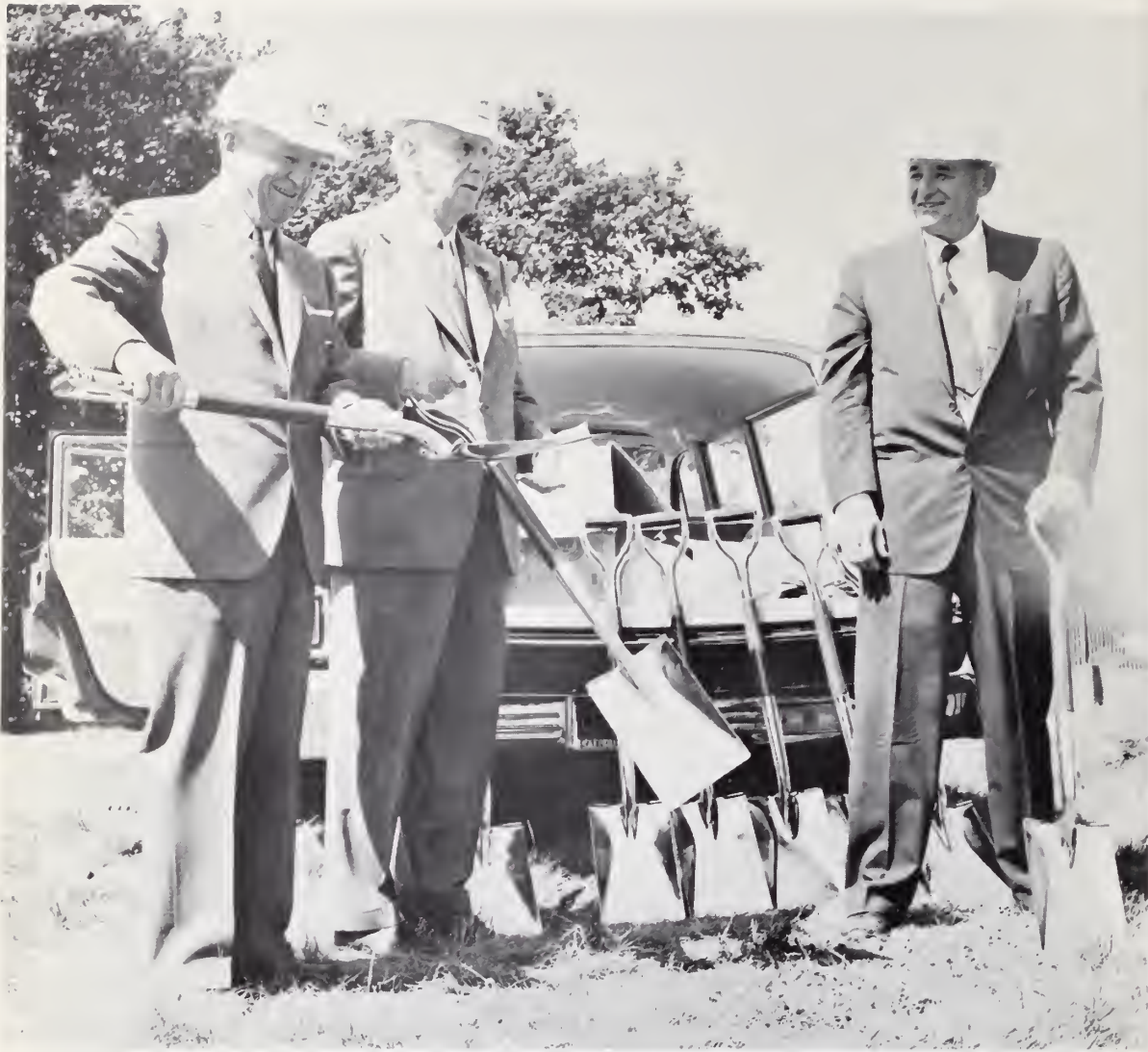
Hanes, as Chairman of its Board of Trustees, and then of James Cox Brady, his successor in 1962.

The achievements of the NYRA are all the more noteworthy because, during that period, it received the lowest percentage of the mutuel handle of any racing association in this country or Canada.

Aqueduct is, of course, the other NYRA-



**PRESENT THROUGH PAST:** *View of the arch-decorated rear of new Belmont Park grandstand and clubhouse seen through branches of venerable white pine, now bent and gnarled with age. Old tree has been part of the Belmont Park scene since track opened in 1905.*



*BREAKTHROUGH: Helmeted leaders of the NYRA prepare for groundbreaking rites as first step in building new \$30,700,000 Belmont Park; date, July 20, 1965. Holding the ceremonial shovels are (left to right) John W. Galbreath, Chairman of the Building Committee; George D. Widener, Honorary Chairman, Board of Trustees, and James Cox Brady, Chairman, Board of Trustees.*

built racing plant. It opened to international acclaim on September 14, 1959. And, as in the case of the new Belmont Park, it was built without State aid at a cost of \$34,500,000. This sum was larger than the cost of the new wonder track at Elmont, L. I., because it included expenditures for new stables and accessory buildings along with a complete new racing strip—facilities not needed at Belmont Park.

Other undertakings by the NYRA during its twelve years of operation were the multi-

million-dollar renovation and rebuilding of the Saratoga track and extensive improvements at old Belmont Park in the late 1950's.

All the money needed for these tremendous projects, as well as for the purchase of the assets of the four privately owned New York racing associations—the Westchester Racing Association (Belmont Park), the Queens County Jockey Club (Aqueduct), the Metropolitan Jockey Club (Jamaica), and the Saratoga Racing Association (Saratoga)—was borrowed from banks by the NYRA.



The following banks were the original participants in the loan: Morgan-Guaranty Trust Co. of New York, Manufacturers Hanover Trust Co., The Chase Manhattan Bank, The First National City Bank of New York, Bankers Trust Co., Lincoln Rochester Trust Co., Federation Bank and Trust Co., Fidelity Union Trust Co., Security Trust Co. of Rochester, First Trust and Deposit Co., First-City National Bank of Binghamton, N. Y., and Kings County Trust Co.

The net cost of the purchase of the existing New York tracks' assets at the time the NYRA swung into action in the mid-50's to revitalize thoroughbred racing in New York State was \$20,048,000. The total funds borrowed by the NYRA to carry out its consolidation and improvement programs to date is approximately \$105,000,000. Of that \$105,000,000, the NYRA has repaid \$51,000,000.

It should be noted here that while the NYRA is a "non-profit" organization in that its stockholders cannot receive dividends or any other kind of distribution including compensation for services, nor can they or their estates receive any capital gains when the stock is surrendered upon resignation or death, it is not a charitable corporation exempt from paying local or federal taxes. It must pay these like any other business corporation.

Although New York State is the principal beneficiary of thoroughbred racing at the NYRA tracks, it must be remembered that these tracks are not State-operated. The NYRA is a completely private enterprise, subject to no more regulation by the State than any other racing association.

The trustees of the NYRA, in addition to Chairman of the Board James Cox Brady are: George H. Bostwick, Christopher T. Chenery, John C. Clark, Jack Dreyfus Jr., Walter D. Fletcher, John W. Galbreath, Harry F. Guggenheim, John W. Hanes, Robert J. Kleberg Jr., John A. Morris, Ogden Phipps (who is Chairman of the Jockey Club), John M. Schiff, Gerard S. Smith, Alfred G. Vanderbilt, Joseph Walker Jr., John Hay Whitney, and George D. Widener, who is Honorary Chairman of the Board.

Edward T. Dickinson is President of the NYRA, while Frank M. Basil is Vice-President and Treasurer.

The illustrious roster of the men who organized the NYRA and, without profit to themselves, have helped pour almost three-quarters of a billion dollars into New York State's coffers, represents the highest leadership in finance, industry, and commerce, as well as in thoroughbred racing.

It is doubtful that any other corporation in the world could muster a board of directors of the quality of the trustees of the NYRA who have given their time and the priceless benefit of their experience so freely to the sport they love—and, gratis, in service to the State.

Trustee John W. Galbreath is an example. He is one of the world's foremost builders and real estate tycoons, with the \$42,500,000 Socony-Mobil building in midtown Manhattan just one of the many construction landmarks of the John W. Galbreath Company. He is also owner of the immense Darby Dan Farm and two Kentucky Derby winners — Chateaugay and Proud Clarion—as well as of baseball's Pittsburgh Pirates.

But in spite of the press of his international business and sports interests, Galbreath accepted the post of Chairman of the Building Committee for the NYRA and devoted his energies and acumen to the planning of both the fabulous Aqueduct track which opened in 1959 and the colossal new Belmont Park.

In building the mammoth new plant with the old name, the NYRA trustees always kept uppermost in mind the thought that the track had to be a blend of the old and the new. As dedicated horsemen with roots deep in the sport, they held to the belief that tradition is the soul of thoroughbred racing.

At Belmont Park, 1968, the look of old Belmont Park has been scrupulously maintained, under the trustees' direction, by architect Arthur Froehlich in the majestic white arches of the grandstand. But the track's appointments are of the very latest concepts—including a trackside "sidewalk cafe" for grandstand patrons.

The main mile-and-a-half racing strip, however, is where it has been since the first Belmont Park opened on May 4, 1905, except that the direction of the races, originally clockwise, was reversed to counterclockwise beginning with the 1921 season. Inside it are the grass and steeplechase courses, as of old.



*'FAMILY' TRACK: Old Belmont Park was a "family" track, beloved by young and old. Here's a young lady visitor at the course in 1939. Her name was Jacqueline Bouvier, better known since as 'Jackie' Kennedy, widow of the late President John F. Kennedy.*

The training track, too, is the same. The tracks were in use for training from 1963 to 1967 while the new stands were being erected.

Belmont Park's vast, picturesque barn area, a tree-canopied village of white cottages, stables housing 2,100 horses, and country roads where they always have the right of way, is as it always has been, a quiet cosmos

light years away from the noisy world outside. Except for enlargement, modernization of fire-prevention methods and equipment, and the building of better housing, eating, and recreational facilities for stable employees, Belmont's "backstretch" looks much the same as it did in 1905.

But it was in retaining the mood of old Belmont Park, its ageless charm, that the NYRA planners struck their most pleasing blow on behalf of tradition. At the original track, from its inception, the word "Park" was a meaningful part of its name. Generations of New Yorkers and out-of-staters went to Belmont Park to enjoy the beauty of its gorgeous floral displays—the product of its own greenhouses—and to sit and walk under its towering old trees. A day at Belmont Park was truly a day in the country—and the NYRA meant to keep it so.

The welfare of Belmont Park's ancient, leafy paddock sentries was guarded jealously during the building of the new grandstand and approaches and they emerged triumphantly unscathed from their joust with progress.

Society flocked to the races at Belmont Park from its opening in 1905, but the track had a faithful clientele of ordinary racing fans who seldom visited other tracks. Many other of its patrons found its bucolic beauties a welcome change from the stark surroundings of more businesslike racing plants. It was indeed a "family" track with a picnic air on big days.

There was such a thing as the Belmont Park Mystique. Proximity to horse and horseman in the walking ring under the paddock trees gave the two-dollar punter at Belmont Park a kinship with the sport he didn't feel elsewhere. It gave him the sensation of being "in," or being part of a wonderful world otherwise beyond his reach.

Thanks to the foresight and understanding of its planners, the new Belmont Park, in addition to its splendors, offers the racing fan the same natural beauty and pastoral pleasures as the old track. It's still "Beautiful Belmont Park."

# *Opening Day, 1905*

## *chapter two*

A balmy dawn broke brightly over Long Island on Thursday, May 4, 1905, a warming augury for the success of the biggest sporting event of the lusty young century—the opening of Belmont Park, more than two years in the building at an estimated cost of \$2,500,000.

But, as the day wore on, its early promise of a summery preview turned out to be a morning glory. The gentle breeze did a Jekyll-Hyde, veered wildly to the East, and changed into a gnashing cold wind under an ash-gray sky.

Post-time for the Belmont Inaugural, first race on the opening day's card, was set for 2:30 P.M., an hour dictated by the leisurely luncheon pace of the well-fixed of that era. By noon, the hoof-dented, cartwheel-rutted roads leading to the new wonder course at Elmont, L. I., were clogged with unwonted traffic, the whinnying of frightened carriage and dray horses mingling shrilly with the stuttering putt-putt and staccato backfire of automobiles, the new status symbol of the times. Close by, the track-bound Long Island Rail Road trains puffed, groaned and keened around the curves under the tonnage of thousands of other racing aficionados less prosperous than the auto and carriage trade.

Paradoxically, the opening of Belmont Park by the Westchester Racing Association, resulted in almost as much publicity for the horseless carriage as for the horse the auto was scheming to replace. It produced Long Island's first great automobile logjam, a primitive precursor of today's rush-hour tieups on Long Island highways. Later, Belmont Park was to become the pioneering center of an even newer mode of travel—the airplane.

One reporter counted 200 automobiles heading into Hempstead Turnpike, on which the track fronted (its new \$30,700,000 successor still does), from the South Shore of the Island alone.

Hillside Avenue, leading to the vicinity of the track from Jamaica, squirmed with hundreds of more machines. Still more, loaded with duster-wearing, veil-trailing, begoggled society daredevils from the Island's posh estates on the North Shore snaked toward Belmont through an obstacle course of horse-drawn vehicles. Auto breakdowns were numerous, further contributing to the confusion.

In the view of some of the non-sporting members of the press attending the unveiling of America's greatest track, one of the most impressive sights from the roof, which had accommodations for spectators in the English fashion, was a five-acre enclosure back of the grandstand completely covered by automobiles.

The crowd, from dowagers to draymen in the curious amalgam of what, in those innocent days, was called "classes and masses", poured into the new track at an increasing tempo. By two o'clock, most of the crowd, which finally numbered 40,000, was inside the green-and-gold iron fences enclosing America's answer to the fashionable foreign race course.

"There were more of New York's aristocracy at Belmont Park yesterday than ever before attended any meet at any track in America," the Brooklyn Eagle noted the next day, and proceeded to list the clubhouse guests, leading off with titled visitors. These included the Earl and Countess of Suffolk, Princess Stigliano, and "Count Limburg



CROWD SCENE: *Forty-thousand fans turn out for Belmont Park inaugural, and here are some of them in brand new grandstand. View looks East from end of stand next to clubhouse.*

Stirum, Society's latest pet". Princess Colonna was the guest of James Henry Smith, whose party also included Mr. and Mrs. Rhinelander Stewart and Mrs. Oliver Harriman.

"The Vanderbilts, Belmonts, and Pells were there in full force," the dazzled reported went on. "Miss Alice Roosevelt was with the Monson Morris party, which also included Alfred G. Vanderbilt. Mr. and Mrs. O.H.P. Belmont had with them Mrs. William Jay. The dowager Mrs. Vanderbilt had a striking costume of gray veiling."

Among other notables in the clubhouse were Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt, Mr. and Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt, Mrs. Thomas Hitchcock, Mrs. James B. Haggin, Mrs. Perry Tiffany, Mr. and Mrs. Paul D. Cravath, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney, Mrs. R. Livingston Beekman, and Mrs. John Sanford.

While Landers Band bravely battled the wind with a program beginning with Victor Herbert's "Toys" and ending, aptly enough, with Harry Von Tilzer's "Frost is on the Pumpkin", the first-dayers took rapt stock of the scene. The vast spaces, the old trees care-

fully preserved during construction of the track (as they were again to be preserved 60 years later while a new and far bigger Belmont Park was being built), the towering green-and-straw-colored stands seating almost 15,000 spectators, (11,000 in the grandstand, 4,000 in the field stand) in steep tiers—they all contributed to a feeling of awe. This was heightened by the sight of the mile-and-a-half main track with grass and steeplechase courses inside it.

But what caused the punters to do a double-take long before Hollywood invented that term was the reversal of the usual American track layout. The races were to be run clockwise, in the English manner. And the finish line was located far up the track, directly in front of the imposing three-storied granite and terra cotta clubhouse (for members only). It was a lavish structure with terraces, balconies, porches, sleeping quarters, ballroom, bar, dining room, trackside restaurant, and retiring parlors. Its fenced lawn was dotted with comfortable chairs.

The judges' stand was directly opposite

the clubhouse at a point near what would be the start of the stretch on a counterclock wise race course.

The Turf and Field Club, an inner sanctum of racing elite organized in 1895 with headquarters at Morris Park, moved to the new track when it opened and occupied the historic Manice Mansion, part of the Belmont Park complex. It was a magnificent turreted house about 150 years old which could be seen from Hempstead Turnpike and stood on what is now a parking area. It was torn down in 1956.

On Opening Day, the Turf and Field Club's new home, surrounded by lush gardens and towering trees, echoed with the small talk of the mighty, as it was to do for the next half-century at pre-race luncheons and gay social gatherings after dark.

When the Manice homestead was demolished, the Turf and Field Club, whose founders had included John Jacob Astor, Robert Golet, Ogden Mills, J. Pierpont Morgau, and William C. Whitney, was relocated in an upper corner at the East end of the public clubhouse at Belmont Park.

In the center of the stretch, which extended eastward into a chute permitting seven-furlong races on a straightway, was the grandstand proper; admission, \$2.00. Beyond it, at a point which would be toward the first turn on a counterclockwise track, was the 50-cent field stand. Thus the field stand was situated to the right and east of the grandstand as you faced the track, the clubhouse, at least a furlong away and to the left and west of the grandstand.

The paddock was beyond the clubhouse and the huge betting ring, with some 300 bookmakers operating on Opening Day, was under the grandstand. It was so spacious that bettors agreed it was a pleasure to make their play without being trampled on, as, for example, on a big day at cozy Sheepshead Bay.

There were two classes of bookmakers under the grandstand. The 80 odds-butchers in the first "ring" were all members of the Metropolitan Turf Association and were considered the leaders of their trade. The second class, numbering about 100, were known as "backliners" and were a cut below the As-

sociation members. And more than 100 declassé bookmakers known as "hurdlers" catered to the action of the field stand fans on the lawn, the track having provided no sheltered ring for them. After the first year at Belmont Park, August Belmont built them a field stand ring at a cost of \$50,000.

Students of racetrack cant reason that the name "hurdlers" was a rather indelicate reference to the field stand shoestrings bookmakers' penchant for leaping the fence when hit for a large sum by their clients.

Messengers to relay bets from grandstands to betting ring were barred by the management, but some managed to operate by claiming the altruistic motive of placing a wager for a friend unable to make the trip below because of gout or other afflictions.

The result board was situated right in front of the clubhouse. The track announced the installation of an electrical system by which the numbers of the money horses were to be relayed from the clubhouse board to other boards placed strategically in front of the grandstand, but the device failed to work on Opening Day.

Racing traditions rank highly among the virtues of the turf, but the change in the sport's nickname from "Sport of Kings" to "King of Sports" over the years illustrates the wisdom of halting some of the ancient practices.

When Belmont Park opened in 1905, racing was dominated by socially prominent giants of finance and industry, men of great wealth whose thoroughbreds lifted the sport they loved out of shanty tracks and into pleasure parks like the new track on Long Island and Jerome Park and Morris Park before it. Beyond reproach themselves, they took a stern paternalistic posture toward the regulation of racing. They ran the sport according to their own rigid code.

This included the custom—long since discarded for obvious reasons—of acting as stewards at tracks they ran and where their own horses were competing, although they did leave the officials' stand when they were represented in a race. Thus, on Opening Day at Belmont Park, the stewards were August Belmont, leading figure in the building of the new track, James R. Keene, and Francis R. Hitchcock.



DEAD HEAT: Yards past wire, Sysonby (lower left, nearer camera) and Race King still run as team after finishing in dead heat in Metropolitan Handicap as Belmont Park opens in 1905. Finish line is at right in front of steps to judges' stand. Sysonby and Race King raced on outside rail through stretch to take advantage of hard-packed footing there. Races were run clockwise.

They all had horses entered in the afternoon's racing.

By 2:30, post-time for the first race—the \$1,500-added Belmont Inaugural—the sputtering of late-arriving automobiles was overpowered by the crowd's anticipatory murmur. But the clubhouse patrons were the first to know that something was amiss. A track attendant went out to the post-time clock (manually operated) and moved the hands ahead from 2:30 to 2:45.

That time, too, passed without the sign of a race, and a mutter of restlessness arose from the windswept grandstand. But, at a few minutes before three, Wilcox, the bugler, climbed the steps of the judges' stand and, with a flourish, blew his frigid horn for the opener. The delay was ascribed to the lateness of a train bringing horses from Sheepshead Bay to the new course.

Each of the stewards had a horse entered in the Inaugural. Blandy raced in the scarlet, maroon sleeves, and black cap of Belmont. Regal represented Keene. Dandelion, which was to run for Hitchcock, was scratched.

In spite of the auspices under which Blandy and Regal raced, the betting public ignored

them, backing Lady Amelia, a swift filly, into 11-10 favoritism even though she was being asked to carry the knee-buckling impost of 137 pounds. Blandy and Regal, the stewards' horses' went off at 7-1 apiece.

Lady Amelia showed the way out of the chute and led for five of the Inaugural's six furlongs. Suddenly on the extreme outside, jockey W. Davis roared up on even terms with her aboard Blandy and she faded out of the money. Then the Belmont colt forged ahead and stood off a late bid by Oliver Cromwell, a 100-1 shot. Regal come on to take the show.

Even, as Belmont, Andrew J. Joyner, his trainer, and Davis were accepting the \$50 silver Inaugural trophies provided under the conditions of the event, the cognoscenti in the crowd were making a mental note of the route the Belmont jockey had taken to win with Blandy—the extreme outside. The track was faster there than elsewhere, due to a path packed down along the outer rail by workmen and track vehicles. It became the favored route of smart jockeys at early Belmont Park. Some observers, however, thought that the horses went wide because they were unused to the "clockwise" turn.

A race too late, the bettors hunched a Belmont-owned runner into 7-5 favoritism in the second event, but Don Diego, their choice, finished out of the money back of Veronese, the 12-1 winner, owned by the legendary, one-legged "Father Bill" Daly.

The third race was the secondary feature of the program, the 31st running of the Juvenile Stakes, and the form players pegged this one right. It was won by Newton Bennington's unbeaten, \$30,000 First Water, which went off at 9-10, took the lead at the start of the straightaway five-furlong dash, and defeated Francis Hitchcock's Vendor by a length.

The afternoon's unexpected chill—so bone-piercing that some chilblained restaurant patrons resorted to the use of tablecloths as serapes and ladies on the clubhouse balconies turned their tables on end to shield them from the wind—was all but forgotten when 12 horses went to the post for the 14th running of the \$10,000-added Metropolitan Handicap which, like the Juvenile, had been run previously at Morris Park.

Grandstanders noted with some heat (and it came in handy) that jockey Willie Shaw, leading the post parade with Sysonby, No. 1 on the program, turned to canter to the starting barrier on the far side of the track after passing the clubhouse, with the rest of the field following his example. Thus the grandstand crowd was deprived of a close look at the feature race entrants, a privilege guaranteed by all modern racing mores.

Also in the race was Belmont's great mare, Beldame, which, despite top weight of 122 pounds, was backed strongly at 4-1. But Sysonby, which later was to be voted into Racing's Hall of Fame and whose skeleton stands proudly in the American Museum of Natural History, went to the post a firm favorite at 2-1. The Keene-bred colt, making his three-year-old debut under 107 pounds, had won five of his six races as a two-year-old, a galloping winner in all his starts except the Futurity, in which he had finished third.

Starter Mars Cassidy, father of George Cassidy, currently the starter at the New York tracks, got the Metropolitan off to a good break from the tape on the far side of the main strip, the present-day starting gate not yet a gleam in some inventor's eye.

O. L. Richard's Race King, a 20-1 shot, broke on top, but was soon passed by Sysonby, the 2-1 favorite, while Beldame, spotting both of them a lot of weight, dogged them in third place for a while to the encouragement of Belmont, who watched the race from the grandstand roof, an airy aerie, indeed, that blustery day.

Under Shaw's urging, Sysonby soon drew clear by a length and a half, with Race King second and Beldame dropping back into the strung-out field. Keene's three-year-old star held this advantage to the head of the stretch.

At this point, jockey L. Smith made his bid with Race King, and, in a swift move, the Richards colt came up on even terms with Sysonby. The Metropolitan was now strictly a two-horse race. Both Shaw and Smith knew all about the fast "path" along the outer rail, and, as they swung their mounts into the stretch (the inside rail was on their right), they cut diagonally across the strip to take advantage of the hard lane.

Sysonby, on the outside, had the better of this ploy, and showed his nose in front, but Race King, under the whip, crept up steadily on his hand-ridden rival until the two merged into one silhouette. And that was how they crossed the finish-line—in a dead heat which made the Belmont Park opening an even more memorable event.

The question of a runoff of the tie was raised, but Richard suggested splitting first and second money with Keene and the offer was accepted. Each owner received \$5,655.

Thomas J. Hitchcock, Jr.'s Good and Plenty, the 7-10 favorite, won the New York Steeplechase on the new track's magnificent jump course. It was the penultimate event of the day, with only a selling race left. Once the steeplechase numbers were up, the crowd started for the trains. The platform was reached through a tunnel, which soon became clogged with frozen sportsmen. Eternally optimistic, the fans in the crowd found something to be thankful for even in the mob scene. It was warm in the underground.

A round of sumptuous parties in the great Long Island houses of the leaders of New York society celebrated the opening of Belmont Park. And the hotels and restaurants of Hempstead, Garden City, and other nearby



*CLUBHOUSE SET: Belmont Park boasted a luxurious clubhouse with spacious private lawn. Here's balconied edifice, situated toward West end of track with finish line close by.*

towns were taxed to the utmost by horsemen, bookmakers, and even lucky bettors. It was evident that the new track was a golden asset to local business.

A dinner-dance given by Mr. and Mrs. Clarence H. Mackay at Harbor Hill, their country place, was in honor of August Belmont for the smashing success of the new track named after his father. Members of the Meadowbrook, Rockaway, and Philadelphia Hunts Clubs attended. And guest lists were being prepared for other parties to be held during the rest of the 18 days of Belmont Park's inaugural meeting.

Next day, the press reverberated with echoes of the event, the New York Times leading Page One with its account of the Grand Opening and filling virtually the whole of its sec-

ond page with overflow text and pictures. The Times writers marveled at the size of the new track and one of them quoted a waggish grandstand fan as about to apply for a franchise for a "Field Stand and Paddock Railway" to link those two distant poles at opposite ends of the long stretch, with free transfer to lines connecting with the betting ring and lunchroom.

The Brooklyn papers—the Standard Union and the Eagle—were less enthusiastic about Beautiful Belmont, influenced, perhaps by chauvinistic feelings for that borough's triple-header of racing centers consisting of Sheepshead Bay, Brighton and Gravesend.

They carped about purely temporary inconveniences such as a few unfinished pedestrian walks, but had a point when they called at-



tention to two tall fir trees in front of the field stand which barred a clear view of the chute for grandstand—and even clubhouse—spectators. The trees had been left standing as part of the track builders' zealous regard for its flora.

But August Belmont and the other stockholders of the Westchester Racing Association were more sensitive to the needs of the public than they were given credit for by their critics. Before the 1905 Fall meeting at the new track, they spent \$100,000 for improvements. Chief of them was the rebuilding of the flat lawn in front of the grandstand to provide an incline so that lawn habitués would have a better view of the racing strips.

With the passing years, the "masses" have

become the prime concern of the New York tracks, as evidenced by the impeccably democratic layouts of new Aqueduct and now of new Belmont Park, both planned and built by the non-profit New York Racing Association.

At both the Big A and new Belmont Park, the Turf and Field Club sections, roughly the equivalent of the finish-line membership clubhouse at the original Belmont Park, are located high-up at about the same point in the public clubhouse—toward the first turn of the counterclockwise track.

This location approximates the 50-cent field stand in the Belmont Park which opened in 1905!

# *Nassau to Coney and Back*

## *chapter three*

Fittingly enough, the majestically towering new Belmont Park commands a sweep of Long Island with racing rooted deep in its history. Not far from the \$30,700,000 plant which has set a breathtaking new standard for architecture, beauty, convenience, and the seamless welding of today and yesterday, formal horse racing in the New World was born more than 300 years ago.

The infant sport sprouted into lusty adolescence and adulthood in a picturesque succession of Long Island racetracks which doubled back from Nassau County into fast-growing New York City. It spread out through Queens and Brooklyn to the distant reaches of Coney Island— all part of Long Island.

Then, in 1905, racing attained full maturity at Belmont Park proudly set in the Long Island heartland 14 miles East of the center of New York City and close to the very area where the sport had originated in the 17th Century. The new Belmont Park stands on the same site occupied by its fabled predecessor, which closed down to racing in 1962.

In 1664, Peter Stuyvesant surrendered the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam to the British, led by Col. Richard Nicolls, who renamed it New York and became its first Governor. He wasted little time establishing the first formal horse race course in North America in 1665.

Scouts had reported an ideal location for such a venture—the Salisbury Plain on Long Island, later known as the Hempstead Plains, in what is now Nassau County. It was a flat, grassy tract sixteen miles long and four miles wide abutting on what is now Garden City and probably reaching the vicinity of Belmont Park.

On May 14, 1966, Edward T. Dickinson, president of the NYRA and Mayor H. Allen Mark of Garden City unveiled a plaque at Garden City commemorating the 300th anniversary of the birth of racing on Long Island. Queen Elizabeth of England sent her greetings on the occasion.

In addition to being the daddy of formal racing in the New World, Governor Nicolls coined the sport's all-time cliché of "improving the breed," although he expressed the thought as "bettering the breed." His Excellency explained that he was offering a silver cup for a race in the Spring and another in the Fall "not so much for the divertimento of youth as for encouraging the bettering of horses, which, through great neglect, has been impaired."

The oldest existing racing trophy, now in the Yale University Museum, and dating back to this period, was awarded at Governor Nicolls' course, named Newmarket, in 1668. It's a silver porringer inscribed, somewhat quaintly, "1668. wunn at hanpsted plaines, march 25." The spirit was willing, but the spelling was weak.

Later there was another Newmarket course in the same area. During the 18th Century, Maryland and Virginia took the play away from New York in the matter of racing, although Manhattan and Long Island had a number of courses.

Among the racing strips in Manhattan were the Church Farm Course, Lispenard Meadows in what is now Greenwich Village, and Maiden Head Course on Bowery Lane. On Long Island, there were Beaver Pond and Flatland Plains in Brooklyn. The British took over Flatland Plains during the Revolutionary



OLD PRINT: *In 1665, Col. Richard Nicolls, first British Governor of New York, built New World's first formal racing course on Long Island's Hempstead Plains, not far from site of Belmont Park. Here's Col. Nicolls viewing start of race.*

War and renamed it Ascot Heath. This was a bizarre carnival-type track. It had women jockeys and sideline attractions which included bull-baiting.

There was a resurgence in Long Island thoroughbred racing with the coming of the 19th Century, and the Island has maintained its top ranking among the nation's turf centers until the present day—now loftier than ever with the opening of new Belmont Park. Only Jerome Park in what is now the Bronx and Morris Park in Westchester County, both noted for elegance, outshone the Long Island tracks for a while.

Long Island's first major 19th Century track was Union Course, opened in 1821. Its main gate was at the intersection of Atlantic Ave. and Rockaway Blvd., little more than a mile from the present Aqueduct track's main entrance on Rockaway Blvd. The Union Course grounds extended North to Jamaica Ave. from Rockaway, a distance of about three-quarters of a mile; the entire property

was along the present border between Woodhaven and Ozone Park.

Union Course was probably the first track to lay stress on grassless footing with an eye toward faster race time. A historian of the era noted that the same horses took three to five seconds longer to run a mile over the New Market (Virginia) turf than over the "naked soil" of Union Course. Banked turns were also introduced at Union Course.

A series of famous match races fixed the Long Island track for all time in racing history. The first was the race between American Eclipse and Henry, representing the North and the South respectively, at Union Course on May 27, 1823. The match was at three four-mile heats around the mile track, winner to be determined by two heat wins. The purse was \$20,000.

With the journalistic license of the era, it was reported that 60,000 enthusiasts crowded into Union Course for the event, a rather wild estimate for a sporting event in a city of 150,-



FOND MEMORIES: *Old Brooklyn and Queens tracks which antedated Belmont Park and helped make New York nation's turf center. Gravesend (top left) opened in 1836, Sheepshead Bay (top right) in 1880. Jamaica (above) as it looked in 1903 debut. Old Aqueduct (right) opened in 1894 and Brighton Beach (below) in 1879.*



000. But it was pointed out that some 20,000 Henry rooters galloped up from the South to attend the race. In any event, it was a tremendous throng, and brawling young Gotham was enthralled by the race.

One version of the betting angle of the match—more than ten times the purse is supposed to have changed hands on the outcome—had it that the Southerners plunged heavily on Henry in the first heat with the idea of passing up the second heat and the third, if it were needed.

In any event, Henry won the first heat and set an American record of 7:37 1/2 for the four miles in doing so. But American Eclipse came on to win the next two heats, the middle one enlivened by the shrill reverse-English rooting of John Randolph, the eccentric Virginia orator and sportsman who had backed Henry.

As Samuel Purdy, American Eclipse's jockey, moved up to challenge the Southern horse in the late stages of the second heat, Randolph's voice could be heard above the crowd noises. "You can't do it, Mr. Purdy! You can't do it, Mr. Purdy!" he screamed. Mr. Purdy could and did.

In 1835, Union Course became the first track to be served by a railroad. It went into Brooklyn, but fans from Manhattan had to cross the East River by connecting ferry.

A match race in which the great mare Fashion, representing the North, beat William R. Johnson's horse Boston, carrying the hopes and cash of the South, gave Union Course another day of febrile glory on May 10, 1842. Train service broke down and the temper of the crowd, said to be bigger than the one at the American Eclipse-Henry race, grew ugly. During the running of the first heat, the horses had to pick their way through an overflow of heated humanity on the course. Fashion won in straight heats.

On May 13, 1845, with North-South antagonisms reaching a climax. Fashion again represented the North, this time against Peytona, another outstanding mare, doing the honors for the South. The purse was \$20,000. Again, track police found it difficult to keep rowdies off the racing strip, but it was finally cleared. Peytona won. Two weeks later, Fashion reversed the verdict at Camden, N. J.

Another pre-Civil War track even closer to the present site of the Big A than Union Course was Centreville, at Rockaway Blvd. and 103rd Ave. Erected a few years after the opening of Union Course and known as the Eclipse track later, it didn't attract the quality of horses that its more famous neighbor did. Both tracks turned to trotting before the 1860's.

In 1854, Long Island awaited its first really elaborate racetrack with the formation of the National Jockey Club by Lovel Purdy, son of the man who had ridden American Eclipse, W. W. Boyden, S. J. Carter, and others. They bought the Willett Farm of 141 acres at Newton, a section of Queens County now called Corona and, in those days, West Flushing.

Plans for the track on this site were sensational. Almost half of the tract, spanning what is now Roosevelt Ave. West of the World's Fair site, was enclosed by a nine-foot-high brick wall. The mile racing strip stretched out before a grandstand 1,200 feet in length with of 25,000 seats under cover and 12,000 more on the roof.

The ambitious new track, named the National Course, was rushed into completion by a force of 600 workmen at a cost estimated at \$250,000. and was ready to open in June of 1854 with a widely-heralded purse schedule calculated to attract the best horses. Open it did, but the customers to fill its vast reaches were lacking. After two unsuccessful meetings that year, it closed down, despite a flamboyant offer from P. T. Barnum for purposes of his own.

The National remained closed in 1855, but reopened in 1856 as the Fashion Course, named after the grand mare. Success still eluded the venture, and the huge track turned to the trotters.

Thoroughbred racing ground to a standstill in New York during the Civil War, but revived almost as soon as peace returned. But the first major track opened after the conflagration was not on Long Island, but in part of Westchester County which was annexed by New York City in the 1870's.

In 1865, Leonard W. Jerome, prominent lawyer, publisher, and financier bought the old Bathgate estate at Fordham for the purpose of building an elegant new race track.

Completed in 1866, it became the most important thoroughbred race course of its time.

Jerome Park, named after its founder, who was to become Sir Winston Churchill's maternal grandfather, was operated by the 1,300-member American Jockey Club, which had city headquarters at 920 Broadway. August Belmont I was elected president. The track, whose membership clubhouse stood on a bluff which caused an indentation into the racing strip, was the center of historic racing and fabled social activities of the elite. The clubhouse was open all year and was the scene of gay coaching and sleighing parties.

For 20 years, Jerome Park lit up the New York racing scene, establishing stakes events still on the calendar. But in 1887, well-founded reports were heard that New York City was planning to buy Jerome Park as the site of a reservoir. Jerome started looking for a new home. The acreage now occupied by Van Cortlandt Park was first suggested, but it developed that the City had park designs on the area.

The site for a new track was found about two miles East of the Jerome Park course, now Jerome Park Reservoir and part of the uptown campus of Hunter College. It comprised the Pearsall and Bradford estates. Here building was begun in the summer of 1888 for a new track to be called Morris Park. It was named after John A. Morris of the famous racing family and opened August 20, 1889.

Morris Park, which gave New York racing more new stakes races, had a single-tier grandstand built on a hill. Its stables were built to "last a century." The racing strip was one-and-three-eighths miles around, slashed diagonally through the infield by a straight course with a slight decline. It was waggishly called the "toboggan slide"—and so was born the "Toboggan Slide Handicap," still being contested as the "Toboggan."

During the Autumn of 1889, Morris Park ran in competition with Jerome Park. In 1890, Jerome Park was idle, although work on the reservoir had not yet begun. Monmouth Park in New Jersey leased the posh layout for a Summer meeting in 1891. It was closed again in 1892 and 1893, but Mike Dwyer reopened it for its final fling in 1894. Then it was gone.

Because of a schism in the high echelons of

New York racing in the early 1890's, Morris Park's path was not an easy one. In 1891, Pierre Lorillard took the lead in the organization of the Board of Control, a body dominated by track operators, whose purpose was to bring order out of the chaos into which the sport was heading.

But in December of 1893, James R. Keene led a movement to replace the Board of Control with a governing body which would give horse-owners the balance of power. In 1894, The Jockey Club, composed of 50 members with management vested in seven stewards, came into being and succeeded the Board of Control. John Hunter was its first chairman. August Belmont II became its chairman in 1895 and remained in that post until his death in 1924.

Meanwhile, starting about a decade after the opening of Jerome Park, thoroughbred racing embarked on a boom in the Southwestern end of Long Island in localities which later became part of Brooklyn. This was sparked by the discovery of Coney Island and Sheepshead Bay as beach and fishing resorts by the "fancy" of the 1870's.

William Engeman, owner of property close to the booming surf of Brighton Beach at the foot of Ocean Parkway, was the first entrepreneur to take the plunge. He was a pragmatist who wanted to get in on the ground floor and so had little time to waste on elaborate plans, what with a glittering array of fashionable racing celebrities organizing the Coney Island Jockey Club even though they had no track.

Engeman constructed a quickie course on his acreage and opened it as the Brighton Beach track on June 23, 1879 under the aegis of the Brighton Beach Association, which he had just organized. Auction pool betting was the only wagering system at the new track.

His early meetings, of five or six days' duration, were an instant success, and, by August, he was ready to offer \$2,000 for a race which attracted such good horses of the era as Fortuna and Bramble.

Easily accessible and surrounded by fine hotels such as the Shelburne and the Brighton, a music hall, and other attractions, the Brighton track flourished, although it never attained the stature of the Sheepshead Bay

track. But Brighton assayed high in color and the patronage of Broadway celebrities.

Engeman died in 1897, by which time his seaside track was on the downgrade. But his son, William Engeman, Jr., built a new grandstand, refurbished the grounds, and offered big stakes which drew the nation's best horses. The Brighton track staging a comeback, reached its peak in 1906 under the management of Christopher J. Fitzgerald. But its new prosperity was short-lived. In 1908, when adverse legislation struck New York racing its first body blow, the track shut down forever.

Sheepshead Bay, operated by the Coney Island Jockey Club, was easily the most glamorous and best remembered of the three Brooklyn tracks within walking distance of each other. (The third was Gravesend.) It left an indelible mark on thoroughbred racing everywhere in the roster of famed horsemen, horses, and races associated with it.

Leonard W. Jerome, who built Jerome Park, led a group of racing's "Young Turks" in the organization of the Coney Island Jockey Club in June of 1879. Among its founders were the younger August Belmont, Pierre Lorillard, Jr., and William K. Vanderbilt. The new club had no track but planned one for the near future. It ran its first meeting soon after incorporation at Prospect Park Fair Grounds, and another in the Fall at the same course. This was in Gravesend, West of Ocean Parkway, at the foot of which the new Brighton Beach track had just opened its gates. Later, the Fair Grounds became the Gravesend track of the Brooklyn Jockey Club.

The site of the Coney Island Jockey Club's own new track was announced at a meeting in New York on December 4, 1879. It consisted of 112 acres fronting on the East side of Ocean Ave. and spreading out toward Gerritsen Beach. Part of the property was bought from William C. Whitney, the transportation magnate who, upon entering racing at an advanced age, rebuilt Saratoga and helped build Belmont Park.

The Sheepshead Bay track, on the site of which "Sunny" Jim Fitzsimmons was born in 1874 and where stands the funeral parlor in which racing paid him its last respects in 1966, had a 500-foot grandstand, two stories high with an entresol divided into boxes.



WILLIAM K. VANDERBILT

The new track turned the Sheepshead Bay area into a busy turf colony. Over the years, such great trainers as Fitzsimmons, Frank Taylor, "Father Bill" Daly, Jack Goldsborough, and "Uncle Henry" McDaniel owned houses along Ave. U beyond the North end of the course.

Daly was probably the most picturesque trainer of his era. He lost a leg in a brick factory accident, a misfortune which left him on the irascible side. He was a shrewd mentor of jockeys, and the legend is that when one of them disobeyed orders, "Father Bill" would whup him with his wooden leg.

He also gave racing the expression "on the Bill Daly," which means getting off on top and leading all the way. That was the instruction he gave most of his riders.

It was Sheepshead Bay which inaugurated great races like the Suburban (1884), the Futurity (1888), and the Realization (1889), changed to the "Lawrence Realization" in honor of J. G. K. Lawrence, who succeeded Jerome as president of the Coney Island Jockey Club. Belmont Park was to inherit these great racing fixtures along with many others from Jerome Park, Morris Park, and Gravesend.

The Suburban, for which entries closed the January before each running at Sheepshead Bay, became the medium of tremendous bet-



BY THE BAY: *Crowd circa 1905 on lawn of Sheepshead Bay track. Field stand with roof seats jammed with fans is seen at right.*

ting in the Winter books and made it one of the most widely discussed races in America.

Sheepshead Bay was the favorite Brooklyn track with the fashionable set, its luxuries compounded by the salubrious breezes from the Bay and the ocean beyond. The Coney Island Jockey Club members proudly wore metal badges in the shape of a seashell embossed with the head of a horse, a jockey's cap, and the club initials. And there was free lunch in the clubhouse for members and their guests.

Probably the most famous race in the distinguished history of Sheepshead Bay was the match between James Ben Ali Haggin's Salvator and D. T. Pulsifer's Tenny on June 25, 1890. It was at a mile-and-a-quarter, with each owner putting up \$5,000 and the track the same amount, winner take all. Salvator, which had beaten Tenny by inches in both the Rea-

lization and the Suburban, was ridden by Isaac Murphy, the matchless Negro jockey. "Snapper" Garrison was on Tenny.

Salvator led from the start, but, with a furlong to go, Garrison set into motion the kind of frenzied late rush which gave his name to "Garrison finish". Tenny, responding, kept gaining on Salvator, but the imperturbable Murphy had saved a little just for this. As they swept across the line, Salvator was still in front by a short head.

Sheepshead Bay maintained its class and style until 1910, when anti-betting legislation knocked out racing in New York for two years. When the sport was revived in 1913, it was without the track on Ocean Ave.

The Dwyer brothers, Mike and Phil, were among the most spectacular horse-owners of the post-Civil War decades, notable for the fact that they came out of their father's but-



cher shop on Brooklyn's Bergen St. rather than from Wall St. Mike was the plunger; Phil, the discerning horse-buyer (their first horse was sold to them by one of their patrons, the first August Belmont) and administrator.

Impressed by the success of Sheepshead Bay and Brighton Beach, the Dwyer brothers organized the Brooklyn Jockey Club in the Winter of 1885-1886 with plans for a track of their own near the other two.

They bought the Prospect Park Fair Grounds which had been used as a starter by the Coney Island Jockey Club and was also a trotting track. With Phil Dwyer as president of the Brooklyn Jockey Club, improvements were quickly effected and the Gravesend track was ready for business by the Summer of 1886. Dovetailing its schedule with that of Sheepshead Bay—the new course ran Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays—Gravesend was an instant hit when it opened on August 26, 1886. It was easy to get to, for one thing, and its informality pleased the public.

The Dwyers enjoyed great success with their track and were shrewd enough to institute stakes races which lured top horses to the strictly functional course. They inaugurated the Brooklyn Handicap, the Gazelle, and the Tremont in 1887—races which are still on the calendar of the New York Racing Association.

Gravesend operated until 1910. Shut down in the 1911-1912 blackout, it never reopened for racing again, although its stables and racing strip were kept open for a while for training.

After the three Brooklyn tracks were established, racing moved back into Queens County, where it had been dormant since the demise of the Union Course, Eclipse, and Fashion tracks. And its return was in anything but high style, a most modest beginning on a site which, 65 years later, was to house the majestic Big A.

In 1894, the Queens County Jockey Club came into being, headed by T. D. "Cab" Reilly, David Holland, and Robert Tucker. Its object was to open a race track at Aqueduct in South Ozone Park, an aim accomplished on Sept. 27 of that year. The Queens County group had used up most of its limited

funds building a racing strip three quarters of a mile around, and so the grandstand was minimal—"a shanty held up by stilts", was one unflattering description. The "lawn" was covered with boards to protect the public from sinking into the mud.

Purses on Opening Day averaged \$200, and a crowd estimated at anywhere from 700 to 2,000 attended. The venture failed to gain the sanction of The Jockey Club because the track was shorter than the required mile. The new track, surrounded by farms, got its horses, at first, from the Maspeth, L. I., track in North Queens, an "outlaw" by reason of its nighttime racing. Some jockeys doubled between the two courses — young Jim Fitzsimmons among them.

But Aqueduct caught on in spite of its meager beginnings. By the time of its Spring meeting in 1895, it had obtained the sanction of The Jockey Club, and, with its stands repainted and the track widened, was on its way. That second year saw the inauguration of the famed Carter Handicap. It was named after Capt. William Carter, a Brooklyn contractor and tugboat captain who was a close friend of "Cab" Reilly. Of the first Carter purse of \$600, \$500 was put up by the man after whom the race was named.

The Carter Handicap made all-time history at Aqueduct in 1944, when Bossuet, Brownie, and Wait A Bit finished in a triple dead heat for first place.

In 1905, Phil Dwyer gained control of Aqueduct and ran the track, which he raised to major status, until his death in 1917.

The Dwyer Handicap, named after him, was initiated in 1918, and, two years later, resulted in one of the great turf battles of all time. The protagonists were Man o' War and Harry Payne Whitney's John P. Grier. John P. Grier made a strong run at "Big Red" at the eighth pole in the mile-and-a-quarter test, but Clarence Kummer let the super-horse out a notch and he pulled away to win handily. The race was popularly supposed to have "broken" John P. Grier's heart, but the fact is that he went on to win stakes races after his defeat in the Dwyer.

The pole at which the race was decided is now a memento of old Aqueduct in a prominent position at the Big A.

Aqueduct, undergoing improvements and enlargement during ensuing decades, remained a favorite with racing fans until, after its acquisition by the New York Racing Association, it was closed down in 1955 to make way for the \$34,500,000 new Aqueduct track which opened on Sept. 14, 1959.

Jamaica was the next stop on the Queens county circuit after Aqueduct was established in 1894. On April 27, 1903, a new track called Jamaica was opened on Baisley Blvd. by a group incorporated as the Metropolitan Jockey Club and boasting the leadership of "Big Tim" Sullivan, the Tammany leader of the East Side, and Eugene Wood, another Tammany celebrity after whom the Wood Memorial was named. This was a starkly functional track, and was always to be one until it finally shut down on August 1, 1959.

On Opening Day in 1903, a crowd of 18,000 attended and saw Sullivan's Setauket win the second race. Big crowds poured into the plain

Jamaica course down through the years, and, on Memorial Day, 1945, 64,670 patrons managed to shoe-horn their way into the establishment.

When the New York Racing Association, originally the Greater New York Association, took over the assets of the New York tracks to operate them on a non-profit basis, Jamaica, because of its tight quarters and general insufficiency, was regrettably ticketed for oblivion. On its site now stands Rochdale Village, a non-profit co-operative housing development.

The only other New York thoroughbred track immediately preceding Belmont Park was Empire City in Yonkers. It was built in 1900 by William H. Clark, who died before it opened. The peripatetic Phil Dwyer ran a meeting there in October of 1900. Later, it won its greatest renown under the ownership of James Butler, the grocery magnate.



BEAUTY SPOT: *Manice Mansion, bought at time parcel was assembled for building of original Belmont Park, became Turf and Field Club headquarters and flourished until mid-1950's.*

# *A Dream Comes True*

## *chapter four*

Early in 1902, the year which saw the building of the Jamaica track of fond, footsore memory and devoted claque, there was a flurry of bullish activity in real estate in and about the Long Island town of Elmont, adjacent to the New York City line.

Strangers appeared on the pastoral scene with offers to buy local homes, farms, and undeveloped properties fronting on both sides of Hempstead Turnpike. The bids were restrained and the would-be buyers careful not to appear too eager lest prices soar.

But the offers were fair and early sellers accepted willingly. The price at this stage averaged about \$500 per acre. The consensus around Elmont was that the land was being bought up for a cemetery, but some more cheerful guessers held out for a housing development.

The parcel, when finally assembled, embraced 560 acres, 400 of them on the North side of Hempstead Turnpike, the other 160 acres to the South. It included the properties of William De Forest Manice, W. G. Hoople, the Laing estate, E. H. Brown, Jacob Simon, Peter Brown, and the Collison, Richardson, Findlay, and Eagle farms. A small piece of the package spilled across the line into New York City. Later buys increased the total area of the acquired land to about 650 acres.

Most costly of the purchases was the Manice estate, for which the owner got more than \$125,000. Its focal point was a magnificent turreted mansion built early in the 19th Century by his father, De Forest Manice, and called, prophetically, "Oatlands." It was a Tudor-Gothic house with the look of a castle which could be seen from the Turnpike. It stood in a setting of ancient trees, one

of which, known as the "Cathedral Beech," was 200 years old. Another was a Cedar of Lebanon brought to this country from the Holy Land by the Manice family.

One of the genteel boasts of the family was that the mansion had numbered among its earlier guests Louis Phillipe, exiled heir to the French throne.

By the time the deal was made for the Manice estate, the real purpose of the wholesale land acquisition became titillating public knowledge. A great new race track was to be built on the site by the Westchester Racing Association, then holding its meetings at Morris Park in Westchester County.

Leading spirits in the move to Long Island, the cradle of formal racing in North America, and close to the Island's Hempstead Plains, where the sport actually originated on this continent, were the second August Belmont, William C. Whitney, J. P. Morgan, E. D. Morgan, Thomas Hitchcock, and William K. Vanderbilt. At the suggestion of Whitney, the course was to be named Belmont Park in memory of the first August Belmont.

Similarity of "Belmont" to "Elmont", the town where the track was to be built, and where the new \$30,700,000 Belmont Park now stands, has led to conflicting explanations. One story is that when Belmont was building the track in the early 1900's, he donated ground to the local volunteer fire department for its first firehouse. In gratitude, they proposed naming their unnamed locality "Belmont." When Belmont modestly declined the honor, they settled for "Elmont."

But Richard A. Winsche, writing in the Nassau County Historical Society Journal, neatly punctured this pretty folk tale in his



*BUILDER: William C. Whitney, who entered racing late in life, bought and rebuilt Saratoga track, and was one of leaders in building of Belmont Park. He founded turf dynasty.*

“Echoes of Belmont Park.” He found that a newspaper called the South Side Observer reported in 1882 that “Elmont” was chosen by residents of Farmer’s Valley and Belle Font at a meeting called to pick a name for their locality since a post office was in the offing. The village was part of the property bought by Christopher and Thomas Foster in 1647 and had long been known as “Foster’s Meadow.”

The seeds of the new track had been planted on August 14, 1895, with the organization of the Westchester Racing Association, a stock corporation by August Belmont, Jr. and other financier-sportsmen following the demise of the American Jockey Club at Morris Park. The group’s original charter was for 50 years, and was subsequently extended for another 50 years.

The WRA leased Morris Park, luxurious successor to fashionable Jerome Park, for 10 years. But when it became obvious at the turn of the century that negotiations for a lease extension for another 10 years beyond December 31, 1904, would fall through, the association looked to Long Island for a new location. Belmont and many other turf leaders had homes on the Island.

Work on the new track began even before the entire acreage had been bought up, and, by March of 1903, a crew of some 500 laborers was on the scene, a force soon to be doubled.

The men were chiefly Irish, Italian, and Polish immigrants, and the job of directing them was complicated by language problems and clashes between different ethnic groups. Shovels and pickaxes were swung in intramural combat, and one warrior lost an ear. Strikes also disrupted the schedule.

Belmont and Whitney (the latter, a newcomer to racing in his late years, had bought and rebuilt the Saratoga track to a state of pastoral near-perfection in 1900) were daily visitors to Elmont to watch every phase of the project. This included the erection of a sawmill on the property to handle the vast amount of lumber needed for construction of the stands, barns, and other buildings.

One day, they arrived as a work force was zealously cutting down some of the ancient trees on the site. Horrified at this irreverence, they issued immediate orders to halt the vandalism and save as many trees as possible. Because of their foresight, Belmont Park was to earn accolades as the most beautiful track in the world.

(When the new Belmont Park was being built for its opening this year, Chairman James Cox Brady and the other trustees of the New York Racing Association continued the same tree-saving policy.)

In line with his intentions of making the new track a place of scenic splendor, Belmont engaged Thomas Jones, who had been in charge of the Manice estate for 25 years, to supervise the landscaping. The Manice Mansion, surrounded by gardens of breath-taking beauty, was taken over by the Turf and Field Club as its clubhouse when Belmont Park opened in 1905 and was the scene of sparkling social functions—luncheon, apres-race teas, and dinner dances and balls—until it was demolished in 1956.

Belmont also hired H. F. W. A. Williams, secretary of Sandown Park in England, as adviser because the new track was too be modeled after that famous race course.

Morris Park’s track was one-and-three-eighth miles around, the biggest racing strip in

the country, but Belmont Park's was a furlong longer. Work on the record-size main course, on which races were to be run clockwise, was started long before the grandstand began to take shape.

Inside the mile-and-a-half main dirt strip, a grass course of a mile-and-three-eighths and a steeplechase track of a mile-and-a-quarter were to be built. The main track was to have four "chutes," or extensions, to permit of a variety of race distances, and, to its East, and at a tangent, a one-mile training track was becoming recognizable.

Under the watchful eyes of Belmont, Whitney, and other leaders of the WRA, construction proceeded as close to schedule as almost daily crises permitted while the Summer of 1903 faded into Fall. A mile-long ornamental iron picket fence, painted bottle-green and topped with gilded spears, enclosed the front of the track property on Hempstead Turnpike. The historic fence still exists.

The foundation of the luxurious clubhouse at the West end of the grandstand, to which it was to be joined by an enclosed bridge, was laid in October. This was not a clubhouse in

the modern racetrack context—a more desirable section of the grandstand to which the public is admitted at a higher entry fee—but a true clubhouse in the membership sense. It was open only to members of the WRA and their guests.

Plans at this point provided for the construction of an automobile race course as well as a horse track, but they were dropped. A thoroughbred track of the magnificence envisioned for Belmont Park was undertaking enough.

At first, the target date for the opening of the new track was late in 1904, but the death of William C. Whitney in February of that year held up construction for a few months and the sights were re-set for 1905. Iron work on the 650-foot-long grandstand got under way in May, 1904, but was stymied for a while by a political squabble. But, by the middle of the year, the pace quickened, and it was decided to continue work through the following Winter so that the new track would be ready for Spring racing in 1905.

A swarm of laborers and artisans conjured up barns for 750 horses (new Belmont Park



*TERMINAL TRACK: 1916 scene at Belmont Park Terminal, steeplechase course used by United Hunts. Course was built at same time as Belmont Park main track across Hempstead Turnpike.*

has accommodations for 2,100), administration buildings, jockeys' quarters, stable cottages, roads, and other track appointments out of seeming chaos and bedlam. Meanwhile, up front, the grandstand, field stand, and clubhouse were progressing to their final form.

But troubles still proliferated. A 300-foot, two-track railroad tunnel being built under Hempstead Turnpike to accommodate special Long Island Railroad race trains running from the main line to the Belmont Park terminal South of the turnpike provided the biggest headache. This was aside from the fact that land for the depot cost the WRA more than \$2,000 per acre—about four times the price of the first acreage bought for the track site two years earlier.

Two cave-ins, one resulting in a fatality and the other in injuries to workmen, cast gloom over the underground undertaking and necessitated costly duplication of labor. By the time it was finished, the tunnel, whose two tracks fanned out into ten for speedier detrainment of racing fans at the depot platforms, cost \$100,000—exclusive of the cost of the 700-foot passenger shed over the platforms.

A 23-foot-wide, sloping pedestrian tunnel under Hempstead Turnpike led from the train terminal to the new track. (A picturesque auxiliary track used by the United Hunts Racing Association for its predominantly steeplechase meetings was located near the depot and was called, appropriately enough, Belmont Park Terminal. It lasted until the 1920's.)

Theft of material and vandalism during the late stages of construction moved the harassed WRA to ask authorities in Nassau County, in which almost all of the new track was located, for police protection. It was refused on the grounds that the county didn't have a police force.

In October of 1904, four historic stone pillars were set in place at the Hempstead Turnpike entrance to the clubhouse grounds. They remain there to this day. One of them bears a plaque inscription which reflect the high esteem the New York sportsmen who created Belmont Park were held by their peers in the South. It reads:

"Presented to Belmont Park May, 1903, by the Mayors and Park Commissioners of the City of Charleston, S. C., at the suggestion of B. R. Kittredge Esq., and through the good offices of A. W. Marshall Esq. These piers stood at the entrance of the Washington Course of the South Carolina Jockey Club, Charleston, S. C., which course opened Feb. 15, 1792, under presidency of J. E. McPherson Esq., and was last used for racing in December, 1882, Theo. G. Barker Esq., then being president."

Presentation of the mementoes in May, 1903, was indeed a vote of confidence in the undertaking at Elmont, since work on it had just barely begun. It was a vote of confidence fully deserved. Two years almost to the day that the Charleston piers arrived at the site of the projected course, its gates swung open to welcome a huge crowd of racing fans.

# *The Belmonts: Father and Son*

## *chapter five*

August Belmont II, leading figure in the building of Belmont Park, which was named after his father, was a man of myriad interests. They encompassed, among other things, thoroughbred breeding and racing, track operation, high finance, subway and canal construction, yachting, the opera, art, politics, aviation — and the introduction to America from Europe of spiked shoes for human runners.

And he could be as fascinated by a vaudeville turn as a rube at a carnival. Thus, he invited Houdini, the escape artist, aboard his

yacht, the *Scout*, off Newport one summer day and, like any “gentleman in the audience,” helped shackle and handcuff the performer, tie him up in a sack, and toss him overboard. Peering spellbound into the water, Belmont waited breathlessly until Houdini, free of his fetters, came up in a triumphant geyser.

The aristocratic chairman of The Jockey Club and president of the Westchester Racing Association led the bravos and extended a hand to help the waterlogged escapee back onto the gleaming deck of the *Scout*.

In spite of his simultaneous involvement in a vast variety of enterprises, Belmont insisted on attending to minutiae himself. He expressed his credo this way: “If you want a thing done, go; if you don’t, send.” But a discerning friend fingered this tenet as a weakness in a man of so many colossal concerns.

“August,” he said, “would be a genius if he didn’t submerge himself so much in detail.”

The fact is that, genius or not, the second August Belmont, from the 1890’s until his death in 1924, exercised more influence on racing, and in more different ways, than any other turfman of his times.

He helped organize The Jockey Club, was its chairman for thirty years, and headed New York State’s first Racing Commission. He bred a procession of great horses, including *Man O’ War*, and raced a stable here and abroad. He moved fashionable racing from Westchester County to Belmont Park at Elmont, L. I. in 1905, revived it there after the sport’s New York blackout in 1911 and 1912, and made his track the center of international racing in the 1920’s.

The saga of the Belmonts, father and son,



AUGUST BELMONT I

began with the first August Belmont who, from shortly after the Civil War until his death in 1890, played a vital, and sometimes imperious, role in thoroughbred racing as breeder, owner, track entrepreneur, and president of the 1,300-member American Jockey Club. This last is not to be confused with The Jockey Club formed in 1894, but was a club operating Jerome Park.

The elder August Belmont was born in 1816 in Alzey, Germany, in the Rhenish Palatinate. Something of a prodigy, he went to work for the Rothschild banking house at fourteen. At seventeen, he was traveling on business missions with Rothschild agents to European capitals and the Vatican. These trips instilled in him a love of fine art which distinguished him all his life.

At twenty, the short, handsome, boy banker moved to New York, where, in 1837, he opened the Wall Street firm of August Belmont and Company. Its Rothschild affiliations assured his rapid business climb. And his Continental elegance won him entry into New York's best social circles, in which he soon became the style-setter.

As a dashing young man about town, he mingled with his peers at Nible's Garden, then the "in" spot. Spirits ran higher than usual one evening and Belmont and Edward Heyward got into a quarrel which was resolved in a pistol duel. Belmont was shot in the thigh. The wound left him lame for life.

Not yet thirty, he was appointed consul-general for the Austrian Empire in 1844, a post he held until 1849. That year, he married Carolyn Slidell Perry, daughter of Commodore Matthew C. Perry, who later opened Japan to the West. She was a niece of Oliver Hazard Perry, hero of Lake Erie in the War of 1812. The Belmonts bought a home on lower Fifth Ave. and soon won recognition as New York's social leaders.

Already one of the most influential Democrats in New York, Belmont was appointed Minister to Holland in 1853 and served in that capacity for four years. In 1860, he was elected National Chairman of the Democratic party.

In spite of his political opposition to President Abraham Lincoln, he was a staunch supporter of the Union Cause the Civil War.

Abroad, he exerted strong influence, through his connection with the Rothschilds, to keep England and France from giving all-out aid to the Confederacy.

Belmont made his entrance into the then moribund world of thoroughbred racing, which had been decimated in New York by the war, with characteristic authority. He was one of the incorporators of Leonard W. Jerome's American Jockey Club, which built Jerome Park, but he wasn't in the habit of playing a passive role in any enterprise in which he had an interest—even in the case a racetrack, an undertaking with which he had had no previous experience.

Aware of Belmont's prominence in many fields, Jerome offered him the presidency of the American Jockey Club—and Belmont became the dominant figure in the venture. In time, he became a leader in breeding and the government of the sport itself.

A writer noted: "His (Belmont's) nature is essentially authoritative; he does not seek power, but when it is given to him, he means to use it at his own discretion."

He was portrayed by a contemporary as a short, stout man, balding and with iron-gray side whiskers: brusque, and appearing "as anything but amiable to the casual person who meets him." And another journalist noted, "if he cannot have a thing his own way, he won't touch it at all."

Yet there was a warm side to his nature. Among the tributes paid him on his passing was this one in a New York newspaper: "His hand was always in his pocket, and the friends of beggarmdom knew this fact so well that they pursued him to his very door."

In 1867, Belmont bought 1,000 acres of uncultivated land North of Babylon, L. I., and there established his famous Nursery Stud. It is now the site of Belmont Lake State Park, a favored family resort of New Yorkers on wheels. Within a few years, and at lavish expense, Nursery Stud was one of the show-places of America's thoroughbred breeding industry. A long double row of magnificent old trees still on view once shaded the driveway leading to the great Belmont manor house of Nursery Stud.

The Belmont layout at Babylon had two



training tracks, one inside the other. The outer strip was a mile around and of light red leam. The inner course was sandy and used in wet weather. The barns, training stables, breeding center, and paddocks added up to an unmatched equine paradise.

Belmont started out by buying horses, and he made a ten-strike in 1867 with the purchase of Glenelg, picked up for him by Jacob Pincus, his trainer, for \$2,000 at an auction on Staten Island. Fractious as a two-year-old, he wasn't raced until 1869, when he was three.

His first start was in the Belmont Stakes (named after Belmont), a race inaugurated in 1867 at Jerome Park and intended as America's answer to the British Epsom Derby. Glenelg ran coupled with Fenian, one of Belmont's first homebreds. Fenian won with Glenelg second.

Until Pincus left his employ to train for Pierre Lorillard in 1877, Belmont enjoyed success with his table, but it was followed by a discouraging letdown. By 1882, although still a top figure in the American Jockey Club and one of the six founders of Monmouth Park in New Jersey, Belmont decided to withdraw from the racing end of the sport.

Three years later, he was back as a breeder and stable-owner, but with a change. He leased a farm near Lexington, Ky., where, the consensus had it, the climate and grass were better than on Long Island. He also persuaded Pincus to return as his trainer. His fortunes soared at once. By 1890, the Belmont stable was tops, earning \$171,350 purses that year for a new record.

In November, Belmont, then 74 years old, presided over the Horse Show in old Madison Square Garden and caught cold. Pneumonia developed, and the illness proved fatal a few days later.

One of his obituary notices said: "His wealth and marriage ranked him even higher than the Astors. He sustained Italian opera in the old Academy of Music. He collected the finest private gallery of pictures in the country."

Perry Belmont, his oldest son, who served as Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs while a member of Congress and was also named Minister to Spain, owned



AUGUST BELMONT II

thoroughbreds for much of his life. O.H.P. Belmont, another son, also raced a stable. But August Belmont II became the most active member of the family on the death of their father.

The second August Belmont, born in New York City on February 15, 1853, was graduated from Harvard in 1874 and went into his father's banking house. In 1881, he married the former Elizabeth Hamilton Morgan, who died in 1898. They had three sons, Raymond, Morgan, and August III.

One of the second Belmont's earliest racing ventures was as one of the youthful founders of the Coney Island Jockey Club in June, 1879, along with Jerome. Pierre Lorillard Jr., and William K. Vanderbilt. The group opened the historic Sheepshead Bay track on June of the following year.

But, although a good rider and a founder of the Meadowbrook Club, the younger Belmont didn't go into racing in a big way until his father's death. Determined to maintain the high repute of Nursery Stud, he bid extensively, not for horses in training, but for stallions, broodmares, and yearlings at the disposal sale of his father's stock.

In time, August Belmont II, would surpass him, not only an an arbiter of racing ethics,



ACE BELMONT-BRED: *Man o'War* raced for Samuel D. Riddle, but he was bred by August Belmont II. He sold the immortal son of Fair Play-Mahubah to Riddle for \$5,000 when he disposed of his stock on entering World War I service as an Army major at the age of 65. Here's *Man o'War* as a two-year at Belmont Park, painting by F. B. Voss.

but as a brilliant student of bloodlines and an alltime great among breeders. John E. Madden, himself a famous breeder, said of Belmont: "He was the most successful student of thoroughbred lines in America. He had more success in breeding good horses than any other breeder in the world."

Among the top horses he bred were *Man o' War*, *Hourless*, *Tracery*, *Friar Rock*, *Fair Play*, *Friar Rock*, *Vulcain*, *Chatterton*, *Ladkin*, *Chance Play*, *Dunlin*, *Chance Shot* and *Beldame*, the great mare which regularly beat horses. He bred six Belmont Stakes winners, five Jockey Club Gold Cup winners, and four Saratoga Cup winners.

*Man o' War*, by *Fair Play-Mahubah*, was named by the second Mrs. August Belmont. She was the former Eleanor Robson, a noted actress and friend of George Bernard Shaw. Their wedding took place in 1910. Mrs. Belmont had also named *Mahubah*, an Arabic greeting meaning "May good things be with you", which she had heard on the Belmonts' honeymoon stop in Tunis. Years later, she noted ruefully, she learned that the correct

spelling was "Mahabah."

Foaled in 1917 at Nursery Stud in Kentucky, *Man o' War* was first named "My *Man o' War*" by Mrs. Belmont in honor of her husband, who, at the age of 65, volunteered for service in World War I and was commissioned a major. He served in France and Spain. But the sentimental "My" was dropped before the colt's name was registered.

Belmont decided to sell all but two of his yearlings while the war was on, but finally put them on the market, too. One was by *Fair Play*, and Robert L. Gerry and Samuel D. Riddle were the strongest bidders. Riddle went to \$5,000 at the urging of Louis Feustel, his trainer, topping Gerry's best bid by \$500, and the gavel dropped. And so he got *Man o' War*, one of the turf's monumental bargains.

It was only a few years after entering the racing and breeding lists that the younger Belmont zoomed to the top as the sport's leading figure. In 1894, The Jockey Club was organized to succeed the unsatisfactory Board of Control as racing's governing body. John

Hunter was elected chairman, but, in 1895, Belmont was named to the post. He held it until his death in 1924, the singly most powerful man in the sport.

Formation of the Westchester Racing Association with Belmont as its president the same year he became chairman of The Jockey Club gave him the two most prestigious offices in racing. The authority of the sport's new controlling body soon became obvious, while Morris Park, until the WRA left it for a new track on Long Island, was the "class" course of the Gay 90's. The group's new home was, of course, Belmont Park.

The early 1900's were the busiest years of Belmont's crowded career. He built the Interborough Subway and Belmont Park, conducted the affairs of August Belmont and Company, as whose head he had succeeded his father in 1890, took an active part in Democratic politics, ran the Nursery Stud with a firm hand and definite ideas about bloodlines, operated his racing stable in the "red, maroon sleeves, black cap" colors first registered by his father, and acted the role of stern chairman of The Jockey Club and the State Racing Commission.

He was chairman of the National Democratic Committee, a director of the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company, one of the founders of the New Theatre, and vice-commodore of the New York Yacht Club. And he was a leading figure in the American Kennel Club.

And yet, in spite of his preoccupation with concerns of the very wealthy, he displayed a social consciousness rarely associated in those days with members of his caste. He pioneered, for instance in the field of workmen's compensation.

In 1909, Belmont, then still courting Eleanor Robson, embarked on a new venture which was to prove the most trying—and financially exhausting—of his life. It was the building of the Cape Cod Canal, planned to cut off 70 miles of dangerous water travel from Buzzards Bay to Cape Cod Bay by slicing through the eight-mile shoulder of the "bare, bended arm of Massachusetts."

He ascribed his interest in the undertaking as due, in small part, to his descent from Commodore Perry, his maternal grandfather,

who was a native of New England. But more important was his desire to perform a public service.

Work started on the canal on June 22, 1909, and trouble developed at once. Huge granite boulders blocked the way where engineers had predicted sand and small rocks. It took five years to complete the canal. It was opened on July 29, 1914 with a gala procession led by Belmont's yacht, Scout, and J. P. Morgan's Corsair. But the story of the opening was buried in the ominous news of impending World War I.

When the United States entered the war in April, 1917, the government took over operation of the canal, but it was found too narrow and shallow for warship passage and was returned to private ownership in 1918. Bills were offered in Congress for purchase of the waterway by the government for enlargement, but it wasn't until 1926, two years after Belmont's death, that Washington finally acted. The estate got only half of what it had cost to build the canal.

The canal had been a disastrous undertaking financially for Belmont. At one point, he approached Mrs. E. H. Harriman for help to keep it going.

She said: "My faith in the project as a patriotic service remains intact. Besides, I always keep a little money in the bank to help a friend in need." The "little money" was \$500,000.

In 1934, Army engineers finally got around to widening and deepening the canal. For this purpose, they needed a bit of land Mrs. Belmont still owned at the site. She swapped it for a piece on the opposite bank. On this, a native granite boulder—a final touch of iron in view of the havoc such boulders had wrought at the outset of the venture—was erected as a monument to the builder.

Its inscription reads: "In Memory of August Belmont (February 18, 1853 - December 10, 1924) whose vision made possible the first complete construction of the Cape Cod Canal connecting Buzzards Bay and Cape Cod Bay and officially opened for traffic July 29, 1914."

In her memoirs, "Fabric of Memory," Mrs. Belmont, a public-spirited lady who worked with tremendous energy for such causes as the American Red Cross, war relief, repeal of



*TURF TITANS: August Belmont II (left), leading figure in racing from 1894 to 1924, in a pleasant discussion with Sam Hildreth, his famous trainer, at Belmont Park in 1914.*

Prohibition, and government aid for the needy, told of the change in her life following her marriage to Belmont. They were married on February 25, 1910, in her apartment at 302 West 77th Street.

There were, for example, her new addresses—the Belmont mansion at Hempstead, L. I., the Nursery Stud Farm at Babylon, L. I., and the one at Lexington, where they had a “bungalow”; the Surcingle, their “cottage” set inside a private training track adjoining the Saratoga race track; the shooting place in South Carolina, a New York town house, and “By the Sea” at Newport, R. I.

The Hempstead house, set on five-and-one-half acres at Bulton and Bennett Aves., was sold to the local Elks for \$65,000 following Belmont’s death. For the next 37 years it was used by them as their clubhouse after alterations costing \$85,000. It proved a solid investment. In 1961, the property was sold for development for \$500,000.

Tracery, Belmont’s great two-year-old, was sent to England in 1910. He won the St. Leger in 1912, and the following year was almost done in by a fanatic demonstrator during the running of the Ascot Gold Cup. He was leading the field by a good margin when a women’s suffrage sympathizer darted onto the track from the infield, waving a banner in one hand and a loaded six-shooter in the other.

Somehow, he managed to grab Tracery’s bridle. Horse, jockey, and protester plunged to the turf in a tangle, to be joined by two

other horses. In the confusion, Prince Palatine came from far back to win.

Tracery suffered a shoulder injury which threatened his career, but he recovered and came back to win the Eclipse over the same course. His jockey said he could feel Tracery tense when he reached the spot of his earlier fall, especially since the infield crowd surged forward to get close to him. But he gallantly kept his stride and won with ease.

Belmont’s long involvement in international racing reached its triumphant crest when he sponsored the Zev-Papyrus match at Belmont Park in 1923 and International Special No. 1, at the same track in 1924. An added fillip was the fact that Papyrus, the British Derby winner, was a son of Tracery.

Returning to New York after World War I, Belmont, absorbed in pressing business matters and mourning the death of his son, August III, closed out his stable operations until 1922. He sold most of his horses in training to Sam Hildreth, his trainer, and most of the Nursery yearlings were sold privately in 1919, 1920, and 1921.

He died, a victim of blood poisoning, on December 10, 1924. Following his death, his stable and the Nursery Stud were sold.

But, while his famous colors disappeared from the scene, his unique place in racing history has been assured by the prolific get of the horses he bred, the unswerving honesty he brought to the sport—and by Belmont Park.

# *Flying Horses and Planes*

## *chapter six*

Sysonby . . . Colin . . . Man o' War . . . In that chronological order, they were the best-known horses to race at Belmont Park during its first decade-and-a-half. And, to this day, racing scholars argue the respective merits of this immortal thoroughbred trio.

Not long ago, Joe Notter, a cherubic little turf patriarch and jockey member of racing's Hall of Fame, was asked to compare Colin, which he had ridden, with Man o' War, winner of 20 of his 21 starts.

'Man o' War was great,' Notter said, 'but remember—Colin never lost a race.'

James R. Keene, the goateed Wall Street wizard who bred and raced both Sysonby, winner of 14 of his 15 races, and Colin, undefeated in all his 15, had long ago been handed a similar poser: Sysonby or Colin? The occasion was his visit to the American Museum of Natural History, where the departed Sysonby's articulated skeleton had been placed on exhibition.

'Sysonby,' Keene had answered, 'was great, but Colin was unbeaten.' He gave Colin the nod.

Viewed through the rosy bifocals of nostalgia, the Sysonby-Colin-Man o' War years (1905-1920) at the original Belmont Park were a dazzling kaleidoscope of superb horses and unforgettable races. It was an era of high society, high fashion, and higher betting by plungers like John ('Bet-a-Million') Gates, John A. Drake and Davey Johnson.

The huge sums they won and lost at Belmont Park (Gates reputedly cleaned up \$200,000 when Grapple won the 1906 Metropolitan) offered a sharp contrast to the generally minuscule purses of the period. And the poker-faced, big time bookmakers who accepted bets of \$100,000 or more without batting a cold eye were invested with a fraudulently romantic air by newspaper feature writers.



*FABLED DUO: James R. Keene (left), outstanding breeder and owner in late 1800's and early years at Belmont Park, owned both Sysonby and Colin. With him is James Rowe, his gifted trainer. The combine won the Belmont Stakes in 1907 with Peter Pan, in 1908 with Colin, and in 1910 with Sweep at Belmont Park.*



*THE UNDEFEATED: Colin raced 15 times and was never beaten, although he had close call in the 1908 Belmont Stakes. On him is Joe Notter, premier jockey of his era, who also won Handicap Triple with Whisk Broom II in 1913.*

But if those years were the best of times, they were also the worst of times, and the fact that Belmont Park survived them was a tribute to the courage and perseverance of August Belmont, II, spiritual architect of the track, and other leaders of the Westchester Racing Association. The beautiful course at Elmont, L. I., prevailed until October 27, 1962, when it closed to racing and made way for today's new \$30,700,000 Belmont Park.

The financial Panic of 1907 hit the nation only two years after Belmont Park opened, and that was no help. There was harassment by reformers of the on-course bookmaking system, which operated in an uneasy demimonde of questionable legality. Purses, as noted before, were skimpy because the track's income was limited to gate receipts and concessions. And then came the shutdown of rac-

ing in New York State in 1911 and 1912 because of anti-betting legislation and the attendant dispersal of some of the best horses to other states and abroad.

Officially betless, Belmont Park reopened in 1913. The following year saw the outbreak of World War I and another racing recession. Three years later, a calamitous series of fires devastated the track. Rebuilding was hampered by war shortages until 1920.

Yet, in the face of these assorted disasters, Belmont Park came up to the 1920's with a worldwide racing reputation—and, as a serendipity, recognition as a pioneering center of civil aviation.

Two of the most vividly recalled—and controversial—races at Belmont Park in its early years were the 1908 running of the Belmont Stakes and the 1913 Suburban Handicap. And Notter, a kid from the Flatlands section of Brooklyn who had started riding in 1904 at Morris Park, won both of them.

Joe's early recollections mirror the attitudes of those distant days. "I won my very first race," he says. "It was with *Hydrangea*, a 150-1 shot, owned by Cad and Sam Doggett. They did handsomely. So one of them threw me a quarter and said, 'Here you are, kiddo. Don't spend it all at once.' But I did. I bought six apples. I gave one to the horse—and the stablehands grabbed the other five."

By 1908, Notter was being mentioned with the gifted Walter Miller, who had won 388 races in 1906 and 334 the following year. And Joe was riding for Keene, most successful breeder of the times. Colin was Keene's three-year-old star in 1908 and son of *Commando*, which had won the Belmont for Keene in 1901. Colin had won all his 12 starts as a two-year-old, five of them at Belmont Park, in spite of an ankle deformity.

He opened his 1908 campaign with a victory in the Withers at Belmont Park, and one week later, on Memorial Day, went up against August Belmont II's *Fair Play* in the Belmont Stakes. *Fair Play* was later to sire *Man o' War*. Colin approached the race with what appeared to be a bowed tendon, but Keene decided to run him. Trainer Jimmy Rowe couldn't bear watching the race. He hid behind the grandstand during the running.

A sudden, blinding rainstorm blotted out

the first stages of the Belmont, but when the leaders loomed up out of the watery curtain and headed into the stretch, Colin, ridden by Notter, was seen to be five lengths ahead of Fair Play. But then Colin seemed to falter, finally almost stopping. Meanwhile, Fair Play ate up the muddy stretch until he was almost on even terms with Colin. But Notter shook up his mount with sudden desperation, and managed to win by a head.

The critical storm breaking around Notter's head after the Belmont was noisier than the one it had been run in. Some said Notter had misjudged the finish line and was lucky to get Colin going again in time to save the race. But Notter insists they were wrong.

"Like a lot of good horses," he says, "Colin loafed when he got to the front. He didn't tire at all. With his big lead, there was no call for me to ride out a colt with tendon trouble. It wasn't until Fair Play was almost on top of him that I could shake him up. I didn't misjudge the finish line."

After one more win, this one at Sheepshead Bay, Colin was retired—undefeated. It had been a close call in the Belmont.

Notter, who turned trainer after hanging up his tack and has lived in Floral Park, L. I., near Belmont Park, for almost 50 years, caused even more heated debate in 1913. That was the year racing returned to Belmont Park after the two-year drought and was greeted by a crowd of 35,000 which sang "Auld Lang Syne".

This time, Joe was on Harry Payne Whitney's Whisk Broom II, which had raced in England for three years. He was saddled with 139 pounds for the Suburban Handicap after having won the Metropolitan and Brooklyn. The six-year-old Whitney horses had set a Belmont Park record of 2:03 2/5 in the Brooklyn.

He beat Lahore, which had a 27-pound edge, in the Suburban by a half-length, and the crowd gave him an ovation. But its roar turned into a buzz of disbelief when the time for the race was hung out. It was two minutes flat! No horse had ever come close to that time in a 10-furlong race, the Suburban and Brooklyn distance.

And so started another brouhaha. Except for William H. Barretto, the official Belmont

timer, no watch-holder had anything near 2:00 for the race, the nearest being horseman James Brown's 2:01 3.5. The furthest was E. J. Albright's 2:03 2/5, Whisk Broom's winning time in the Brooklyn.

Critics shouted foul and charged that the timer had stopped his watch at the wrong line. The controversy raged on until it was quieted by Belmont's official support of the record and Barretto's unassailable logic. "I caught the race in two minutes flat," he said. "and my time is the only one that counts."

Whisk Broom II's victories in the Metropolitan, Brooklyn, and Suburban—the first time a horse had won the three handicaps in the same year—were worth a grand total of \$9,625. Last year, the winners' shares of the same three races, now called the "Handicap Triple Crown," totaled \$211,705.

When racing was resuscitated at Belmont Park on May 30, 1913, initial purse money (except for nomination and entry fees), came out of the pockets of the Westchester Racing Association stockholders and was eked out by gate receipts. The "oral" bookmakers, theoretically non-existent, handled untold millions in bets, yet contributed nothing to fatten the purses.

Harry Payne Whitney went his Association peers one better in helping balance the WRA budget. Arriving at one of the main gates in a crush of humanity that Memorial Day, he found ticket windows swamped and fans climbing the fences while local constables tried to pull them down. He ordered the gates thrown open—and picked up the tab for thousands of delighted punters who might otherwise have crashed the gate.

During Belmont Park's first five years, on-course bookmaking, out in the open and with the odds-layers holding up slates on which they chalked their prices, came under increasing attack by anti-racing elements. In 1908, the Hart-Agnew bill, signed into law by New York Governor Charles E. Hughes, outlawed betting at the tracks. But it kept going via loopholes in the new law until 1910, when the Directors' Criminal Liability Act was passed. This made track directors responsible for violation of the 1908 anti-bookmaking law, which had already knocked out the Brighton Beach track. Now the other New



TALK OF TURFDOM: *Belmont Park as it looked when it was completed in 1905. Clubhouse at right, Grand stand (note seat roofs) center, and field stand far left. Horse-drawn rig in front of clubhouse for use of racing officials.*

York tracks closed their gates.

It was late in 1910 that Belmont Park won worldwide headlines by staging the first international aerial tournament under Belmont's aegis. He was a director of the airplane company formed by Orville and Wilbur Wright. The aviation extravaganza lasted from October 22 to 31, and featured the \$5,000 Gordon Bennett Trophy Race, the \$10,000 Statue of Liberty Race backed by Thomas Fortune Ryan, a \$5,000 altitude competition, and other tests for the fledgling flying machines.

Work on the infield, focus of the tournament, and on wooden fences to keep out non-paying guests (admission was to be \$2), was begun in September and completed in time for the opening.

It came on a foggy, overcast day. When the crowd, peering into the skies for signs of arriving planes, could detect nothing after an hour's wait, the skeptics among them began drifting away. Then, one tiny blob appeared out of the bankers' gray sky . . . another and another . . . until there were more than a dozen.

The Wright brothers and Glenn Curtiss, great names among early airplane designers, were on hand to supervise the handling of

their machines by the flying daredevils. Arch Hoxsey and Ralph Johnstone, the Wright aces, were known variously as the "Heavenly Twins" and the "Stardust Twins". Johnstone established a new world altitude record of 9,714 feet during the tournament.

Claude Graham-White, the British entry, won the Bennett race of 20 laps around a five-kilometer course with an average speed of 61 miles an hour. A throng estimated at 150,000 watched the Statue of Liberty Race on October 30, the Long Island Railroad alone carrying 35,000 spectators to the track.

John B. Moisant, an American flyer in a borrowed plane, won the event, but Graham-White dissented from the verdict, which gave Moisant the nod by 43 seconds. While the meet ended in controversy, it was voted an outstanding success.

Eight years later—on May 15, 1918—Belmont Park again made aviation history, this time as the New York terminal of the first American air mail service. It coupled New York and Washington, D.C. Simultaneously, mail planes were dispatched from the Belmont Park infield bound for Washington and from the Capital for the track. Lt. Torrey Webb piloted the plane from Belmont Park while



Lt. Culver was at the controls of the Washington plane. They both landed safely, and air mail was a fact. Later, Boston and Chicago runs were added from Belmont Park. Eventually, the New York terminal was moved to Roosevelt Field, L. I.

A plaque commemorating the first airmail flight was dedicated at Belmont Park in 1955 by Air Force Secretary Harold Talbott.

Playing a decisive role in the return of racing to New York in 1913, even under less than ideal conditions, was the United Hunts Racing Association. It had been organized in 1905 for the purpose of "improving steeplechasing", with Perry Belmont, oldest son of the first August Belmont, as its head.

Its first race meeting was held at Morris Park in October, 1905, and then it moved around until it settled at Belmont Park Terminal, a bucolic layout across Hempstead Turnpike from the elegant new Belmont Park. The United Hunts' annual "days" were held at picturesque Belmont Park Terminal until 1922, when its acreage was sold for development. The non-profit hunts group also held meets at Piping Rock Club on Long Island beginning in 1912.

Thus, while the major New York tracks were shut down (Sheepshead Bay and Gravesend never to reopen), the United Hunts kept the feeble flame of racing flickering in New York State. But, more important, the organization forced a court action which made it possible for racing to return to the other tracks in 1913.

In 1911, the United Hunts held its regular meeting to Belmont Park Terminal. In accordance with the law, it was betless. And, under the Albany ukase, if a bet were made, one director had to be arrested. So a test wager was made, and Harry A. Buck, secretary of the UHRA, insisted on being pinched by a Nassau County constable. He was accommodated—and spent the night in the Mineola, L. I., jail.

There was a touching sidelight to this ploy. Buck's ailing mother read only the New York Herald, and he was worried lest the story of his arrest alarm her. So he arranged with the paper's editor to print a special copy for her without mention of the arrest.

The case came to trial in 1912. The judge ruled that the Director's Criminal Liability Act was invalid and tossed the case out of

court. No longer could New York track operators be held liable for bookmaking on their premises.

Outcome of this historic verdict was the 1913 reopening of the New York tracks, officially without betting—but with the same bookmakers on the grounds as before the hiatus. Now, however, they operated differently. Their slates were gone. The new system was called "oral" betting, an operation which prevailed at the New York tracks until 1934.

World War I engulfed Europe in 1914, and, on April 6, 1917, the United State declared war on Germany. The thoughts of America, on that fateful day, were far from horse-racing, but they were wrenched back temporarily to Belmont Park twenty-four hours later.

Shortly before three o'clock on the morning of April 7, 1917, watchman James Mahoney and John Cochran, a stable foreman, discovered six separate fires in various parts of the track. The Elmont Village Fire Department, which had been sponsored by Belmont, was first on the scene, followed by volunteer fire companies from nearby towns, but low water pressure and a strong West wind hampered their efforts.

A call for help was sent out to New York City fire headquarters, and smoke-eaters from across the Nassau County line soon joined the local companies. By heroic teamwork, the combined forces managed to keep the inferno from spreading to the stable areas.

But the main grandstand, the Belmont Park Terminal stand, the jockeys' quarters, the LIRR track terminal, and all the buildings of the United Hunts were completely destroyed. The luxurious clubhouse and the field stand were also damaged. Losses were estimated as high as \$1,000,000.

Hardly had the last ember of the first fires turned cold when another conflagration—this one in the barn complex—lit up the ruined track a few weeks later. The blaze was discovered by a watchman only fifteen minutes after a previous inspection of the stable housing the horses owned by H. K. Knapp and Schuyler L. Parsons. And, before the flames were brought under control, all 28 horses in the barn were dead. They included The Knocker, for whom \$10,000 had been refused a week earlier.

In spite of the holocaust, and with a gutted racing plant on their hands, the WRA directors announced their determination to go on with their early 1917 meeting, which was scheduled to start on May 30. And they did. Emergency crews salvaged what they could out of the rubble and cleaned up the grounds. By Memorial Day, Belmont Park was ready to resume the sport. Tents had been erected to help shelter the fans and the jockeys had new quarters.

Because of the war, materials for the rebuilding of the plant were in short supply in 1917 and 1918, but the track continued operations. One of the most talked-about races of 1917 was the surprising defeat of Hourless, Belmont's brilliant colt, by Wilfred Viau's Omar Khayyam in the Lawrence Realization at Belmont Park. It wasn't so much the fact that Omar Khayyam, the Kentucky Derby winner, beat Hourless as the way the latter lost.

There were only three horses in the Lawrence, yet Hourless was repeatedly caught in pockets and his rider lost his whip. Still, he was beaten only by a nose.

Sam Hildreth, Belmont's trainer who later worked for oilman Harry F. Sinclair, sought a chance to show that Hourless was the better horse. Matt Winn, then promoting Laurel, accommodated him by offering a \$10,000 purse for a winner-take-all match between Hourless and Omar Khayyam. The race, at a mile-and-a-quarter, came off on October 18, 1917, at the Maryland track.

With only minutes to post-time, Hildreth replaced Hourless' previous rider with young

Frankie Robinson. Everett Haynes broke on top with Omar Khayyam and set the pace until Robinson turned Hourless loose rounding into the stretch. Hourless pulled away to win by a length. Belmont donated the purse to the American Red Cross.

In 1919, more work was done on Belmont Park, but its complete renovation had to wait until 1920. That was the year in which Man o' War beat Donnacona, his only rival, in the Belmont Stakes, by 20 lengths and at 1-25. "Big Red" also won the Lawrence Realization and the Jockey Club Gold Cup at Belmont Park at odds of 1-100. And it was the last year of clockwise racing at the track.

Reversal of the racing strips to counter-clockwise was only one of the changes. The grandstand was completely rebuilt and made one with the old field stand. The seating capacity was increased to 17,500, and the seats brought closer to the track. A promenade and mezzanine were added.

(In the new Belmont Park, the seats have been brought even closer to the arena, only 85 feet from the outside rail of the main racing strip.)

Construction statistics of the 1920 renaissance showed that the job took 1,395,000 pounds of cement, 800 truckloads of gravel and 500 of sand, 10 miles of gaspipe for railings, 100,000 square feet of corrugated iron for floors, roofs, and cornices, and 207,000 feet of lumber.

A crew of 350 men worked to get the track ready for the new deal of 1921 and the picturesque decade ahead.



AH, YOUTH: Smiling young man in hard high collar on left is Max Hirsch. Picture taken just after Papp, owned by George W. Loft (right), and trained by Hirsch, won the 1917 Futurity at Belmont Park. Hirsch, now in his 80's, still training winners at NYRA tracks.

# *Hoofs Across the Sea*

## *chapter seven*

The 1920's were a period of hedonistic reaction to the tragedy and restraints of World War I—and of sentimental attachment to a procession of sports heroes who did their thing with the gay abandon of the times. Babe Ruth, roistering when he wasn't belting homers, was the living symbol of the decade.

Sports went international in a big way. The new hands-across-the-seas conviviality assured the success of almost any international event regardless of artistic merit.

Thus, Jack Dempsey, defending his heavy-weight title in 1921, drew boxing's first million-dollar gate with dashing George Carpentier, a fair French light-heavyweight whose only business in the ring with Dempsey was to draw a crowd. And, in 1923, Dempsey drew more than a million with Luis Firpe, a crude bear from Argentina who unexpectedly came close to knocking Dempsey out.

It was in this happy climate that Belmont Park, refurbished and really burgeoning into Beautiful Belmont, a proud alliteration it fully deserved for four subsequent decades, entered the international sports picture. Its media were two dazzling displays of promotional imagination at variance with the usually

staid practices of major racetracks of that period. And the public went wild over the resulting shows, which wrote memorable world racing history in 1923 and 1924.

The first one was staged at Belmont Park on October 20, 1923, when Zev, the year's Kentucky Derby winner, met Papyrus, the Epsom Derby winner, in a \$100,500 match race before



**BELMONT HUDDLE:** *August Belmont (right) emphasizes a point in 1923 chat with turfman H. K. Knapp (left) and Joseph E. Widener at Belmont Park. Widener headed the track after Belmont's death in 1924, remained as president until 1940.*

45,000 delirious racing fans. It was the biggest crowd at a match race in 100 years, a throng of 60,000 having been claimed, perhaps overenthusiastically for the Union Course, L. I., duel in which American Eclipse beat Henry of Navarre on May 27, 1823.

It might be pointed out here in connection with Zev, that a feeling for the underdog was another emerging phenomenon of what might be called the Teary Twenties. Charlie Chaplin's wistful "Little Tramp" and Jackie Coogan as "The Kid" softened the hardest of hearts. The Cinderella motif was big.

Man o' War, retired after his three-year-old campaign, was already a legend in his time, the near-perfect thoroughbred. As such, he was held in awe by racing fans. But their hearts belonged to the Cinderella horses. One was Exterminator, affectionately known as "Old Bones," a skinny gelding which uncomplainingly gave his best—and that was plenty good—from 1917 to 1924. He was possibly the greatest route-runner of all time.

Exterminator won his Cinderella credentials in his first race as a three-year-old in 1918. Bought by Willis Sharpe Kilmer as a work horse for his Kentucky Derby hopeful, Sun Beau, Exterminator, ordinary as a two-year-old, was started in the race when Sun Beau went wrong—and the ungainly substitute won all the roses by a length at 30-1. He was ridden by Willie Knapp, who, the following year, won a measure of fame he rather wouldn't have won by riding Upset to beat Man o' War in "Big Red's" lone defeat in 21 races.

With Man o' War retired, Exterminator, whose affection for Peanuts, his constant pony companion, furnished the meat for countless feature stories, clinched his hold on the mass of racing fans as their No. 1 hero. He was something they could "identify" with, although that cliché was not yet invented.

The tall gelding won 50 of his 100 races at distances from five-and-one-half furlongs to two miles and a quarter, and was the traveling horse of all time. He won at sixteen different tracks in the United States, Canada, and Mexico—in an era when swift air transportation was only a distant dream.

At Belmont Park over the years, Exterminator maintained the 50 per cent winning average which marked his career. In eight starts

there, he twice won the two-mile Autumn Gold Cup along with Garden City Handicap and the Bayside. He failed in two tries at the Suburban.

Zev, owned by Harry F. Sinclair and trained by Sam Hildreth, also qualified as a Cinderella horse, even though he had won the Derby and the Belmont Stakes. As a two-year-old in 1922, the son of The Finn-Miss Kearney had a record as spotty as a Dalmatian's coat. He was also unlucky, with a penchant for getting kicked at the starting barrier in stakes races. He had suffered this indignity at the start of the Futurity at Belmont Park—and still finished second to Sally's Alley. His stable attributed his defeat to the booting.

The colt narrowly won his first race in 1923—the Paumonok—and was installed the favorite to win the Preakness, then run before the Kentucky Derby. This time, Earle Sande rode him, supplanting Laverne Fator, who had taken the Paumonok with him. Zev finished twelfth in the thirteen-horse Preakness field. Sande excused his lamentable showing with the report that the colt had again been kicked at the post. But the cognoscenti dismissed Zev as just a sprinter.

The Derby was scheduled for May 19, one week after the Preakness. But in spite of Zev's win in a sprint on May 15, which showed that he was at least sound, Sinclair and Hildreth decided against sending him to the Derby, worth more than \$50,000. The distance seemed too far for him.

Sande, however, urged his employers to reconsider, and, at the last moment, they grudgingly agreed to give the colt, named after W. H. Zeverley, a friend of Sinclair's, a chance for the roses. But the supreme snub was part of the package. Neither Sinclair nor Hildreth would travel all the way to Louisville to see Zev get beaten. Hildreth sent Dave Leary, his assistant, to saddle him.

Zev fooled his stable—all but Sande. That great rider (he and Fator were rated Hildreth's two best "horses") broke him fifth in the unwieldy 21-horse Derby field, sent him to the front, and kept him there all the way. He paid \$40.40, and all America cheered, especially those who had backed him. Overnight, Zev became the new turf idol, an underdog turned killer. Zev reveled in his



MATCH RACE: *Papyrus* (left), British colt with Steve Donoghue up, and *America's Zev*, with Earl Sande, on way to post for their match race at Belmont in 1923. Note derby hat and leather leg-gings on trainer Basil Jarvis as he leads *Papyrus* out on track.

new role, winning the Withers and the Belmont and going on to take the Queens County Handicap at Aqueduct, all between May 26th and June 23rd.

But, training for the Latonia Derby, Zev reverted to his old hard luck form. He stepped on a stone and injured his leg so badly that he was laid up for two months.

Attuned to post-war America's beaming interest thoroughbred racing, August Belmont, in his role as chairman of The Jockey Club, entertained a novel idea the summer of 1923. This was a match race at Belmont Park between *Papyrus*, the British Derby winner, and the winner of a trial race for American three-year-olds.

The fact that *Papyrus* was by Tracery, a Belmont-bred stallion sent to England in 1911 because of the ban on racing in New York, further fanned enthusiasm for the proposed match. The distance was set at one-and-one-half miles; weights, 126 pounds. The winner was to get \$80,000 and a gold cup worth

\$5,000. The loser's share was to be \$20,000. October 20 was to be date—a day "borrowed" from the Empire City meeting which would then be in progress.

On August 18th, it was announced that Ben Irish, *Papyrus*' owner, had accepted terms of the match. But the British turf Tories frowned on the Belmont gambit, although many top American horses had competed in England during the previous half-century and the Duke of Beaufort had sent his colt *Strathrose* to run in the American Derby at Washington Park, Chicago, in 1893. Irish resisted all pressures to keep *Papyrus* home.

The trial race for the right to represent America against *Papyrus* was set for September 15th at Belmont Park, but Zev withdrawn on the grounds that the accident-prone colt had bruised a frog while winning the Lawrence Realization. The National Trial Stakes, as the test was called, was won easily by *My Own*, his only opponent being *Untidy*.

But, in spite of *My Own*'s solid claim to the

right to run against Papyrus, Zev was picked on October 5th, a move, which, while appearing unfair to My Own's supporters, certainly reflected popular sentiment. Meanwhile, Papyrus, accompanied by trainer Basil Jarvis, a veterinary, two valets, a plater, and exercise boy, and Bar Gold, his work horse, arrived in New York on September 29th after a stormy passage. The colt was stabled at Belmont Park with enough feed and water from back home to last his stay. Ten days later, Steve Donoghue, his jockey—England's best rider—joined him.

Papyrus, a handsome, friendly sort, soon became a public favorite and a host of Americans rooted for him because HE was an underdog against Zev—a stranger in a strange land, with little time to become acclimated and accustomed to running on a dirt track.

The Britisher worked well for the match, but Zev ran true to form. First, he contracted a cough, followed by a throat infection. When this subsided, he suffered a digestive upset—and two days before the match broke out in a body rash. Admiral Cary Grayson, My Own's sportsmanlike owner, was contacted. He generously agreed to have the winner of the National Trial Stakes ready to sub for Zev if the latter should be unable to go through with the match. But Zev, as always, got well in time.

On the night of October 19, a torrential rainstorm reduced the Belmont Park racing strip to a canal of slop. Although the next morning broke clear and sunny, the footing posed a new headache for the Papyrus camp. The question was whether or not to equip him with mud caulks, something the British colt had never worn in his grass races abroad.

Well-meaning American friends advised Jarvis to re-shoe him for the muddy race as the lesser of two evils, but it was decided to run the invader smooth-shod rather than gamble on unfamiliar equipment. Hildreth had no such problem. Zev, a natural mudder to begin with, as were most of the progeny of The Finn, was equipped with caulks.

The brilliant weather brought out a cosmopolitan crowd worthy of Beautiful Belmont Park—some 45,000 strong who paid \$432,000 for tickets. "Black and ermine were the fashion of the day," a lady writer noted trillingly. The

Turf and Field Club entertained 700 Smart Setters for lunch.

Thirteen special trains were added to the regular Long Island Railroad run from Penn Station to Belmont Park. Belmont and Vincent Astor were mouse-trapped in a swirling, good-natured throng outside the track clubhouse entrance and extricated themselves with some difficulty. Zealous fans clung to the track girders for a better view and did the Tarzan bit in tall trees.

Wall Street betting on the international race was tremendous, with estimates of a sum of as high as \$3,000,000 hanging on the outcome. Track bookmakers were inundated with betting slips. Wagers of \$10,000 were common. Zev went off the 4-5 favorite.

Donoghue broke Papyrus on top from the barrier in front of the grandstand, but Sande, on the rail with Zev, quickly took the lead away from the invader and settled down to a steady, mud-kicking pace. At the half, Donoghue made a move with Papyrus, and, for an eye-blink, seemed to be drawing up on Zev. But Sande let out a notch, increasing his lead to two lengths. It became plain that Papyrus, unsure and slipping in the mud, was beaten. At the head of the stretch, it was Zev by four. He won by five lengths.

Zev's international victory silenced earlier estimates that he was merely the best of a poor lot of three-year-olds. Further, it brought his earnings to \$254,913, which topped Man o' War's total of \$249,465.

There was an interesting fiscal footnote to the Zev-Papyrus match: After all expenses, including \$12,000 paid to Empire City for suspension of its meeting that day, there was a surplus of \$22,000. The committee members of The Jockey Club which had sponsored the match turned this sum over to the Westchester Racing Association for further beautification of Belmont Park.

In 1924, Belmont Park was again the scene of an international race, although not of the match variety, which furthered its recognition as the world's racing center.

Sparked by the Zev-Papyrus meeting, French sportsmen proposed a three-way international race in Paris which would pit both those colts against Epinard, French three-year-old champion of 1923, in the Spring of



*ROGUISH: Trainer Eugene Leigh shows off Epinard, popular French invader of America in 1924 for international races, first of them at Belmont Park, and the grinning Gallic colt rolls a naughty eye at camera, Epinard finished second in his three American races.*

1924. Sinclair accepted, as did Pierre Wertheimer, French perfume magnate who owned Epinard, but the British Establishment balked again.

Wertheimer visited New York in December, 1923, and discussed the situation with Belmont and other members of The Jockey Club. The result was a sporting proposition of a scope never before attempted: Wertheimer agreed to bring Epinard (which means Spinach in French) to the United States for three international races against America's best, each race at a different distance.

International Special No. 1, at six furlongs, was scheduled for Labor Day, September 1, 1924, at Belmont Park. International Special No. 2, at one mile, was slated for September 27 at Aqueduct. International Special No. 3,

at a mile-and-a-quarter, was ticketed for October 11 at Latonia.

Epinard arrived in New York on July 11 with a far less impressive retinue than that of Papyrus, but he quickly became even more popular than the British invader. This may have been due to the fact that he had American blood on both sides of his ancestry and that Eugene Leigh, his trainer, and Everett Haynes, his jockey, were both Americans who had gone to France to ply their trades.

But there were also Epinard's golden chestnut coat, his gentleness, and the fascination of American for all things French in the 1920's which contributed to his status as a thoroughbred idol. "Epinard" became a household word around New York, and a Greenwich Village speakeasy was named "Club Epinard",

an earthy honor for a guest from abroad. Its gimmick was an amiable little pony, also dubbed Epinard, which mellow customers could ride around the stamp-sized dance floor far into the small hours of the morning.

At first, Epinard — the French one — was stabled at Belmont Park, but the demands of sightseers, reporters, and photographers were so great that he was moved to Saratoga for quiet until shortly before his American race debut.

The dashing Prince of Wales, later King Edward VIII and now the Duke of Windsor, who was then cutting a wide social rug on Long Island's Gold Coast headed the vast Labor Day crowd which jammed Belmont Park for the first International of the series. The throng covered the whole spectrum of the social orders. So great was the crush that the day's races were 30 minutes late getting under way.

Zev, along with Wise Counsellor, Ladkin, Baffling, Goshawk, Miss Star, Snob II, and Wilderness represented America against Epinard, which drew the rail for the six-furlong sprint. Zev showed first, but soon gave way to the French horse, which, still leading at the eighth pole, seemed to have enough left to win.

But, as a surf-like roar arose from the crowd, Wise Counsellor came from far back in the middle of the track, where Frank Keogh had steered him to get the best footing, caught the laboring Epinard, and went on to beat him by three parts of a length. Ladkin was third, three lengths back.

Epinard lost little of his luster in defeat. It was blamed on his being short and on the fact that Haynes had kept him in the deepest part of the going on the rail. But some observers charged that the other jockeys hadn't been too polite to the foreigner and his rider.

Epinard failed to win any of the international races, finishing second in all of them. In the mile at Aqueduct, he was beaten a nose by Ladkin, Belmont's star, and again the Frenchman's partisans suggested that the other jockeys had been unfriendly to him and his expatriate pilot.

In the distance race at Latonia, Sarazen, trained by Max Hirsch, now the octogenarian dean of American trainers, stretched his speed

to beat the game invader in the brilliant time of 2:00 4/5 for the ten furlongs. The little gelding, named after Gene Sarazen, young golf hero, won \$55,000 for Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt III, his owner. Hirsch got a gold stopwatch as a bonus.

Death came to August Belmont, II, on December 10, 1924. Joseph E. Widener succeeded him as president of the Westchester Racing Association. Widener's first major change at Belmont Park was the building of a straightaway course which was to be the beautiful track's conversation piece for more than three decades. It was known as the "Widener Course." It was removed after the 1958 season.

The Widener Course, 165 feet short of seven furlongs from its most distant starting point to the finish line, began just inside the Plainfield Avenue track gate in Elmont, L. I., beyond the training track. It crossed the training track twice, sliced diagonally across the main track and through the infield from right to left as you looked out from the stands.

Its finish line, marked by an infield judges' stand, was in front of the grandstand well to the left (West) of the main track's finish line, and, naturally, at an angle to all but a few of the spectators. After crossing the finish line, the horses galloped out on the main track, where they were pulled up.

Widener planned the chute with the Futurity in mind. Prior to 1925 at Belmont Park, the Futurity, one of the all-time two-year-old classics, was run at six furlongs on another straightaway, the Futurity Course, left over from the clockwise race years which ended in 1920.

This straightaway started out of a chute far to the East of the stands, and the field ran from right to left as seen by the crowd. In 1925, when Pompey won the Futurity, it was at seven furlongs on this straight course.

The new Widener Course was ready for the Futurity of 1926, which was won by Scapa Flow, a son of Man o' War. The distance was snipped to "about seven furlongs," or 165 feet short of that distance. That was the full extent of the course for racing purposes.

If, as some critics claimed, green two-year-olds, trained to run around turns, became confused on the Widener Course, it offered some



valuable compensation. There was plenty of room for young horses to find their racing legs on it without getting knocked around. From the public's viewpoint, there was the fact that favorites ran surprisingly to form on the straightaway in spite of the huge fields and the predominance of two-year-old races.

It was under the aegis of Joseph E. Widener, uncle of George D. Widener, who later was to become president of the Westchester Racing Association and chairman of The Jockey Club, that the Futurity, a notable racing fixture since 1888, reached its highest monetary value. Nominated through their dams before birth, Futurity winners have included horses like Proctor Knott, Domino, Colin, Man o'

War, Citation, Tom Fool, Native Dancer, Nashua, and Bold Ruler.

When Anita Peabody won the 1927 Futurity, nosing out her stablemate Reigh Count, the race's gross value was \$116,350, tops in the world. John D. Hertz's winning share was \$91,790.

But two years later, just before Wall Street went off the high springboard, Whichone's Futurity winnings for Harry Payne Whitney soared to \$105,730. It was the first time the \$100,000 mark had been broken—and it was the richest Futurity in the history of the race. It wasn't until 1955 that a Futurity winner's share again went into six figures. Nail's victory that year was worth \$100,425.



*DOWN THE CHUTE: Closeup taken from far side of track of a race down the Widener Course at Belmont Park. Straightaway built by Joseph E. Widener opened in 1926, in use through 1958.*



*THE AUSSIE: Awed crowd at Belmont Park in 1932 looks at one of greatest thoroughbreds of all time—but at only his figure. Uncannily lifelike are remains of Phar Lap, the New Zealand star which died after winning lone race in North America, Owner D. J. Davis, stands sadly beside him. There had been talk of a match race between Phar Lap and Equipoise at Belmont Park.*

## *Only Way Was Up*

### *chapter eight*

A giant of a horse stood majestically under an ancient tree at Belmont Park one Autumn day in 1932. The spacious circle of seats ringing the tree and facing outward was free of the sitters who usually rested there between races. Instead, the benches formed a barrier against the crowd pressing forward to get a closer view of the magnificent animal. His huge, luminescent eyes and pricked ears seemed fixed on distant sights and sounds.

The bugle calling the field for the next race sounded faintly over the murmur of the viewers, who ran off in quickening rivulets toward the stands and bookmakers in front of it, leaving the big horse alone under the venerable pine to be solaced by its whispering boughs.

If his ears seemed to twitch, it was an illusion. The beauty of this majestic thoroughbred was literally only skin deep and a tribute to

the taxidermist's art. The regal horse was the outer shell of Phar Lap, the legendary super-horse from New Zealand, stretched over a papier mache form so skilfully as to create the eerie impression that he was alive and awaiting the saddle. He had been dead for six months.

Invading the United States after a spectacular career Down Under, Phar Lap, a six-year-old gelding was entered in the \$50,000 Agua Caliente Handicap on March 20, 1932, at the Lower California track. He was assigned 129 pounds. His performance was unbelievable. Tom Woodcock, a groom sent over to act as his trainer, rode him cross-country to work him. Jockey Billy Elliott, a second-stringer, sat on him for an hour before the race in the paddock under a broiling sun to "get him accustomed to the weight."

Woodcock's pre-race instructions were to "canter down the stretch when you leave the gate, and, when you get to the backstretch, gallop on home." Phar Lap, which had never seen a starting gate before, got off in front. Then, according to Marshall Cassidy, the starter for the race:

"Elliott took him back and steered him to the outside fence and he dropped as far back as Silky Sullivan ever did. Going into the backstretch, Phar Lap began to move, still far on the outside. The boy never hit him, just clucked, and away they went."

From sixth place at the half, Phar Lap moved to the lead in the eleven-horse field before the six-furlong marker. Turning for home, Elliott again took a tight hold and Reveille Boy drew up to within a neck. At the eighth pole, the Aussie jockey let him out again. He won by two lengths in the track record time of 2:02  $\frac{4}{5}$  for the mile-and-a-quarter.

Two weeks later, Phar Lap was dead. His shocking end came at the Palo Alto ranch of Ed Perry, where he was resting up before heading East and a proposed match race with Equipoise at Belmont Park. His death was ascribed to an attack of colic. A post-mortem disclosed that the giant horse from Down Under, which weighed 1,450 pounds, stood 16.3 hands, and had a girth of 75  $\frac{1}{4}$  inches compared with Man o' War's 71  $\frac{3}{4}$ , had a heart which weighed 14 pounds, five more than the average.

Following his death, Phar Lap's skin was shipped to the Jonas Brothers, taxidermists, in Yonkers. Louis Paul Jonas, who now has a studio in Hudson, N. Y., accomplished a life-like masterpiece in recreating the great thoroughbred's form.

And that was how Phar Lap fulfilled his tentative engagement at Belmont Park. The figure was then shipped to Melbourne, Australia, for permanent exhibition in the National Museum.

That same year—1932—produced an unique riding feat at Belmont Park. On June 1st, George H. (Pete) Bostwick, most spectacular steeplechase jockey of his era and an owner and trainer as well, accepted two mounts. One was Silverskin, an eight-year-old gray gelding jumper owned by Tommy Hitchcock, Jr. The other was a fast sprinter named Ha Ha, running in the colors of the Latin Stable. Silver-skin, an 11-5 favorite carrying 133 pounds, won for Bostwick in an eight-length breeze in the second race on the card. And, three races later, Bostwick won with Ha Ha at 3-5 and toting 113 $\frac{1}{2}$  pounds. His win margin was six lengths.

Winning over the jumps and on the flat on the same day, as the chesty little socialite did, was a feat sensational enough to make sports page readers forget, at least until the first race the next day, that "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" was the theme song of the times. The presence of "Mr." before Bostwick's name in the racing charts to denote that he was a "gentleman rider" set his achievement further apart from the routine.

And it was also in 1932, that Kerry Patch won the Futurity at Belmont Park for owner Lee Rosenberg and trainer Joe Notter at the longest price—30-1—in the history of the race. As a jockey, Notter had won the Futurity with Maskette in 1908 and Thunderer in 1915. The winner's share in 1932 was \$88,690, a staggering figure for a Depression year.

The size of the Futurity purse failed to hide the fact that racing in New York was heading for a new low during the early years of the 1930's. And, a few hours after Kerry Patch had won his race, Joseph E. Widener, president of the Westchester Racing Association, which owned Belmont Park, spelled out the gravity of the situation at a dinner of the New

York Turf Writers Association at Beefsteak Charlie's.

"Unless racing gets immediate relief," he said, "it may be necessary to run only stakes races at a combined meeting of one month in the year."

Widener, who made Hialeah the Taj Mahal of Winter racing, called on New York State to legalize the totalisator in use at his Florida track and abroad. He told his listeners:

"I believe New York racing with the totalisator and a five per cent 'brokerage' would bring the State \$10,000,000 annually. The State would take 75 per cent of the net profits, leaving the track 25 per cent. We have no desire to make money out of racing, only to keep it alive.

"I would like to show the lawmakers that in 28 years at Belmont Park, the Westchester Racing Association has paid only three small dividends of less than six per cent and that we have spent \$5,000,000."

In 1933, despite an admission price reduction from \$3.85 to \$2.50, racing humped bottom in New York. The purse average dipped from \$1,000 to \$600. And, taking heed of the crisis, Albany acted. The Twomey bill for legalization of mutuels was defeated, but a new bill yanked the punitive teeth from the law against bookmaking inside New York tracks. Its passage gave New York quasi-legal, open bookmaking for the first time since 1910. The measure went into effect in 1934.

Now the New York tracks had a source of revenue denied them during the oral betting year (1913-1933). Each book was charged \$100 a day and also bought admission tickets for all its help. This income went toward the fattening of purses, and the results were soon in evidence.

The 1934 season saw into office a State Racing Commission made up of Herbert Bayard Swope as chairman, John Hay Whitney, and John Sloan, with Marshall Cassidy as steward



*RID'NG TALENT: The 1930's produced a fine crop of jockeys. Here are some of them outside the Belmont Park jockeys' quarters in 1935. Standing (left to right): Don Meade, Cal Rainey (now the steward for The Jockey Club), Sammy Renick, and Sonny Workman. Seated (left to right): Wayne Wright, Eddie Arcaro, Charlie Kurtsinger, Sylvio Coucci, and Bobby Jones.*

representing the Commission. Under its rule, and with the stabilization of the betting system, the raising of purses, and further lowering of the grandstand admission price to \$2, the racing picture took on new brightness that year.

An increase in the number of racing days from 154 to 178 accounted in a small part for higher attendance and purse figures in 1934, but it was far from being the only factor. Attendance leaped from 597,152 in 1933 to 1,015,590 in 1934, and purses climbed from \$984,466 to \$1,403,570.

Belmont Park led all the New York tracks in attendance, gross receipts, and purse distribution. And although it was the most remote in relation to Manhattan of the three Long Island tracks, Belmont was assessed informally as by far the most valuable. Its valuation was put at \$4,201,166—only \$800,000 less than Aqueduct, Jamaica, Empire City and Saratoga combined.

The 1934 season produced one of the most dramatic—and tragic—races in Belmont Park history.

On Memorial Day, the Metropolitan Handicap drew a class field topped by Equipoise and Ladysman. But the crowd picked its own sentimental favorite, an unbeaten five-year-old gelding called Chase Me, whose bitter sweet story has become part of racing folklore.

Chase Me, by Purchase-Mayanel by Lucullite, was plagued by weak knees as a youngster and the experts said he would never be able to race. Mrs. Elizabeth Bosley of Maryland, his owner, decided to keep him as a saddle horse and pet for her children. He had as much fun as they did, and proved an apt student of such doggie tricks as sitting up and begging, playing dead, shaking hands, and planting a kiss in return for a lump of sugar.

At one point, Mrs. Bosley sold Chase Me to F. Ambrose Clark, but the children were so broken up by the loss of their pet that Clark graciously returned him.

Ridden by Sara Bosley, his owner's daughter, he became one of the best show horses in the country. There was no thought of trying him at the races. But when Lord Johnson, a handicap horse, was short a work mate, Chase

Me was pressed into service. His job was to set the pace for the star. He did that—but, when Lord Johnson tried to overtake him, he just couldn't, to Mrs. Bosley's delighted amazement. She decided to try him in a race. He was four years old.

In his maiden-race debut at Harve de Grace, the old Maryland track of fond memories, Chase Me won the spectators before, during, and after the running. He tried to shake hands with the assistant starters when he got to the barrier, but when the race got under way, he became all joyous business. He shot to the front and cakewalked on top every inch of the way, winning by 15 lengths. He went on to win the rest of his races in 1933, the last one being the Bryan and O'Hara Memorial Handicap at Bowie.

Chase Me was retired for a Winter of rest and play with the Bosley family. His first outing in 1934 was a prep for the Metropolitan. He won it easily.

Chase Me broke rather slowly in the Metropolitan, but he began moving up on the far turn, surging through the field until he was close to the leaders and running strongly when it happened. He fell suddenly, and with him into the dust went jockey Fred Slate.

Now the field had swept by, and soon was past the wire Equipoise in front, Mr. Khayyam second. A great communal murmur of anxiety arose from the holiday spectators as their eyes swept back to the head of the stretch where Chase Me had fallen.

Badly hurt, he had managed to get up somehow, and his great eyes focused on a woman, running desperately the length of the stretch to be with him. It was Mrs. Bosley.

The fatally injured Chase Me nuzzled her as he was led into the infield. An unbeaten horse which had to die to lose a race, Chase Me was buried on the Bosley place, Fox Hill Farm, in the ground where he had clowned with his family.

The footnote to the 1934 Metropolitan has often been told: Equipoise was disqualified for fouling Mr. Khayyam in the stretch and the race awarded to the latter. The disqualification furnished the plot twist for "Three Men on a Horse," a Broadway stage hit.

Belmont Park figured in two important firsts in New York racing in 1936. One was the



TRIPLE CROWN: *War Admiral*, son of *Man o' War*, cinching the 1937 Triple Crown by winning the Belmont Stakes with Charlie Kurtsinger in the saddle.

installation of a primitive type of public address system to keep the spectators apprised of the positions of the horses during the early stages of the races on the Widener Course. This was the forerunner, in New York, of the "calls" in all races, now an integral part of the enjoyment of going to the track.

The other innovation was of even greater importance. It was the introduction of the photo finish camera. Costing \$25 a day to

operate, it was set up at Jamaica when the 1936 season started and proved an immediate success.

But its value, debated as to the accuracy in the early days, was demonstrated when racing moved to Belmont Park in May. In a span of ten days, the camera picked out two dead heats there, and, before the season ended, added eleven more ties for a year's total of thirteen. During the 1935 season, the camera-

less placing judges had totaled only three dead heats.

The first photo finish tie on a New York track was between Tommy Hitchcock's Rioter and H. B. Bain's Rock Lad at Belmont Park on May 23 in the Charles L. Appleton Memorial Steeplechase. Rioter was ridden by Mr. Rigan McKinney (the "Mr." denoting a gentleman jockey) and Rock Lad by Paul McGinnis.

And, on June 2, William L. Woodward's Isolater, with Jimmy Stout up, was snapped in a head-heat with Mrs. Dodge Sloane's Corundum, ridden by Sammy Renick.

A side benefit of the introduction of the camera "eye", which was mounted on the roof at Belmont Park and other tracks, was the elimination of the old-fashioned judges' stand in the infield at the finish line. This obstacle to a full view of the race was first removed at Belmont Park.

In 1937, the track was embellished with the fine old wrought iron gates from Jerome Park, scene of the Belmont Stakes inaugural in 1867. The historic mementoes were presented to the track by Perry Belmont, sole surviving son of the first August Belmont.

A hurricane which killed eleven persons struck Long Island on September 21, 1938, plunging it into late afternoon darkness, inundating it with torrents of rain, and flattening 2,500 trees and countless buildings with roaring winds. But the storm failed to halt racing at Belmont Park.

The Westchester Claiming Stakes was the feature race of the day. The timer couldn't see the flag drop, so there was no official time, but, unofficially, At Play, ridden by Basil James, gasped the six furlongs down the Widener Course into the teeth of the hurricane

in 1:16. It was a day veteran race-goers who were there still recall proudly, like aging witnesses of the Blizzard of '88. Six favorites lost in as many races. The seventh race was called off.

(By contrast with At Play's time of 1:16 against the hurricane wind on the Widener Course in 1938 was Vestment's world record of 1:07 4/5 on the same course with the wind at her back during Hurricane Hazel on October 15, 1954.)

The 1939 season marked the end of an era at Belmont Park and the other New York tracks. It was the last year of the bookmakers. The mutuels were on their way.

While the early 1930's saw New York racing at its lowest fiscal ebb, the decade produced a list of celebrated thoroughbreds. Three of them were among the eight Triple Crown winners in racing history, which means that they clinched their claim to greatness in the Belmont Stakes. They were William Woodward's Gallant Fox in 1930, his Omaha, a son of Gallant Fox, in 1935, and Samel D. Riddle's War Admiral, by Man o' War, in 1937.

Joseph E. Widener, who had made an impassioned plea for legalization of betting machines in New York State in 1932, only to get almost-legal bookmaking instead, retired as president of the Westchester Racing Association as the decade closed out, and, the following year, the mutuels began clicking at New York tracks.

As Belmont Park entered the promising period of mutuel betting, a tally of the years from from 1905 to 1939 showed that it had operated at a net loss of \$526,262.50!

# War Aid:

## \$30M 'Gate'

### chapter nine

The mutuels came to New York in 1940, their advent hailed as a debut in the Empire State. Actually, they were making a helated comeback, since, in a primitive form, they had been used at Jerome Park, Brighton, Beach, and Sheepshead Bay from the 1870's into the Gay 90's.

The basic bet in those days was \$5 instead of the \$2 popularized in modern times. A horse named Nickajack paid \$1,178 for \$5 on October 12, 1872, at Jerome Park to set a record. But the oldstyle mutuels gave way to the bookmakers. Racing, in its early days, was geared to the handling of a comparatively few big bets, not to mass wagering.

Belmont Park went to the fore at once at the new era opened in New York. Its first year mutuel handle of \$24,281,285 topped that of any other New York track.

But the pastoral plant at Elmont, L. I., growing more beautiful with age, also showed the way in charitable enterprise. As World War II gained momentum and the need for aid to its victims increased, Belmont Park staged a War Relief Day on Thursday, June 6, 1940, with the American Red Cross as the beneficiary. Later, post-season "Victory Meeting" at the New York tracks during the war years raised \$2,620,565 for charitable organizations. Of this, \$891,320 was raised at Belmont Park.

Feature of the War Relief Day was a novelty—a match race between two of the best jumpers in training, Thomas Hitchcock's Annibal and Louis B. Mayer's Ossabaw. Each carried 140 pounds for their two-mile duel, dubbed the War Relief Steeplechase. The purse was \$3,000, winner take all. It was the first match race at the track since the Zev-Papyrus

classic of 1923, and the first of three such confrontations there during the 1940's.

Alfred G. Vanderbilt, who had succeeded Joseph E. Widener as president of the Westchester Racing Association on the latter's retirement in 1939, was no stranger to match races. As head of Pimlico, he had staged the famous Seahisquit-War Admiral duel in 1938. The race had been slated originally for Belmont Park, but was called off when Seahisquit was injured.

During his tenure as president of the WRA in 1940 and 1941 (he left to enlist in the Navy). Vanderbilt also staged a \$10,000 match between Alsab and Requested in 1941. And he built the five-furlong Juvenile Course out of a chute extending beyond the backstretch. It had one turn—into the home stretch. The course fell into disuse after a few years. Its chute became part of a parking lot.

A crowd of 11,640 who bet \$674,924 on War Relief Day's nine races saw Annibal, favored at 2-5, run true to form. Ridden by Angus Scott, the good gray gelding was rated behind the pace set by Merritt Mergler on Ossabaw until the last jump, where he went to the front to win by two lengths. Annibal rapped himself on the final jump and came back limping. However, it was in a worthy cause. The Red Cross received about \$50,000 from the day's receipts.

A paddock exhibition and parade on the track, in silks, of such prominent contemporary thoroughbreds as Cravat. Challedon, Eight Thirty, Third Degree. Corydon. Bimelech, Esposa, and Damaged Goods helped mark the day. The spirit of charity was shared by the jockeys. Basil James and Don Meade volunteered to donate all their earnings that day to the Red Cross. Other riders kicked back half



their payday. The jockeys' donations exceeded \$2,000.

The Alsab-Requested duel was at six-and-one-half furlongs, winner to take the whole \$10,000 pot; the date, September 23.

Alsab was a colorful little colt for which Albert Sabbath of Chicago had paid \$700 as a yearling and which went on to win the 1941 two-year-old title. Requested was another crack youngster in the running for the championship of his division. Each carried 122 pounds for their match, which stirred wide excitement interest because of its intersectional flavor—East vs. Midwest. Bobby Vedder rode Alsab. Johnny Westrope was on Requested, owned by Ben F. Whitaker. Requested went off the 7-10 favorite, while Alsab was held at 17-20. The date was September 23, 1941.

Sabbath, whose pride in Alsab was that of a doting papa and who liked to show off the colt to friends at all hours of day and night, to the dismay of Arthur "Sarge" Swenke, his trainer, was at Belmont Park for the duel. But his physician sternly advised him not to look at the race because of a heart condition.

The doctor needn't have worried about undue excitement. Westrope sent Requested to the front and he stayed there until the turn for home, where Vedder clucked to the Bargain Baby—and it was all over. Alsab won by four lengths. His time of 1:16 flat is still a Belmont Park record.

He won the affection of Belmont Park fans in his scurrying win over Requested and cemented it the following year by winning the Withers, Lawrence Realization, and New York Handicap and finishing second to Shut Out in the Belmont Stakes. He also won the Preakness. The following year, he nosed out Whirlaway in their \$25,000 match race at Narragansett. Alsab won \$350,015 during his racing career and sired progeny which won more than \$4,000,000. He died in 1963 at the age of 24.

The World War II years, during which gasoline and tires were rationed and special racetracks trains halted, produced a hardy strain of Belmont Park fans as well-conditioned as any of the horses they backed. They reached the pink by walking about a mile to the track from the Queens Village Station of

the Long Island Railroad, nearest stop on the main line, and back at day's end.

This exhilarating exercise was spread over an extra month during the war years with the transfer of the Saratoga meeting to beautiful Belmont Park.

Futurity Day—October 2, 1943—deserves star billing in any record of Belmont Park. It was "Back the Attack Day", and admission to the track was exclusively by purchase of one or more War Bonds. The patriotic occasion produced the biggest "gate" in sports history. Some 30,000 fans bought \$30,000,000 worth of bonds to help the war effort, and, incidentally, to see the races.

George D. Widener, nephew of Joseph E. Widener, who had just succeeded Vanderbilt as president of the Westchester Racing Association, pointed out that there were no "wooden money" subscriptions in the staggering total. This meant that none of the bonds had been bought previously and then attributed to their purchasers as new transactions to gain admission on "Back the Attack Day". The \$30,000,000 was all fresh money.

The day was an artistic as well as patriotic success. Exterminator, the grand old gelding which had captured the hearts of racing fans from 1917 to 1924 with 50 victories in 100 starts after being tabbed as just a work horse, paraded on the track, his 28 years resting lightly on his bony back. And the bond buyers saw the late George Woolf win the second of his three successive Futurities, this one with Occupy. He had won the 1942 race with Occupation. In 1944, he won with Pavot to set a record for the event.

Belmont Park had one rueful thought about "Back the Attack Day." While there was no federal tax on the admissions by bond purchase, the New York State Tax Commission put the bite on the track for more than \$6,000 in taxes on the "gate."

The 1940's saw four three-year-olds win the Triple Crown, the ultimate coronation, of course, being a victory in the Belmont Stakes at Belmont Park. They were Calumet Farm's long-tailed Whirlaway in 1941, Mrs. John D. Hertz's Count Fleet in 1943, King Ranch's Assault in 1946, and Calumet's Citation in 1948. Thus, the decade during which a world war threatened the very existence of thoroughbred



*OLD BONES: One of the greatest thoroughbreds helped make "Back the Attack Day" a \$30,000,000 success at Belmont Park in 1943. Exterminator, 23, came out of retirement to parade at the track. Here's how Old Bones looked at home at the time—with Peanuts, his pony mascot.*



*BEAUTIFUL BELMONT: The paddock, spacious and tree-shaded, always was a favorite spot with racing fans at old track. Post parades started from walking ring back of stands and aficionados lined fence for closeups of horses.*

racing produced half of all the Triple Crown winners on record.

The coming of peace with V-J Day, September 2, 1945, triggered a tremendous boom in racing. On September 22, Belmont Park set a mutuel handle record which was inconceivable when machine betting was legalized in New York in 1940. That day, \$5,016,745 was poured into the Iron Men at the Elmont track. And on May 31, 1948, an attendance record of 62,671, was set for the "Track with the Trees," as some city-bred punters called the course.

Perhaps the most memorable single day of racing at Belmont Park in the immediate post-war years was September 27, 1947. The chief magnet was the first \$100,000 match race in history, winner take all—along with a gold cup. The duelists were Calumet Farm's Armed, a talented gelding, and Assault. The race was at equal weights of 126 pounds over the mile-and-a-quarter route. Prospects of the clash aroused almost as much speculation as the Zev-Papyrus match at Belmont Park 24 years earlier.

Originally, the race had been ticketed for Washington Park in Chicago, but had been called off because of a leg ailment bothering Assault. Belmont Park finally plucked the plum.

This was a sporting proposition of the purest type. Because of continued uncertainty regarding Assault's condition, both Warren Wright and Robert J. Kleberg Jr., respectively owners of Armed and Assault, declared in advance that the net to the winner would be donated to charity. And the Westchester Racing Association added another altruistic note, also based on the Assault question mark. There would be no mutuel betting on the race, even though it attracted 51,573 fans to Belmont Park.

Assault had been troubled by a splint—a small growth on his left foreleg. A few times during the week preceding the match date, the race was almost called off. But Kleberg finally decided to send his four-year-old to the post because, in his own words, of "public interest and anticipation."

The race itself was anticlimactic. Doug Dodson, breaking on the outside with Armed, went to the fore with the six-year-old gelding,

and, setting a faster pace than was his wont, led every inch of the way. Eddie Arcaro was on Assault, which, it was soon obvious, was far from at his best.

At the head of the stretch, Armed's lead was two lengths. Here Arcaro called for Assault's usual drive, but it just wasn't there. Now it was Armed by four lengths, and Arcaro, sensing the hopelessness of the chase at the sixteenth pole, put away his whip. Dodson was easing up with Armed as he passed the wire, six lengths to the good.

There was the usual conjecture about how Assault, a big stakes winner in spite of a hoof deformity caused by an injury as a yearling, would have fared against Armed at his best. But this was clear—that winner and loser were among the greats of their era. Armed, retired in 1950 with earnings of \$817,475—a record for geldings which stood until Kelso broke it—lived to a venerable age. He died in 1964 at 23.

If the \$100,000 match race failed to produce fireworks, the other stakes events on the star-studded program that day did.

Calumet Farm's Bewitch, which had won eight straight races, including six stakes events, went to the post a 7-20 favorite in the \$25,000-added Matron Stakes, and, under an adventurous (to put it mildly) ride by Dodson, beat Brookmeade Stable's Inheritance in a photo finish.

Ruperto Donoso, first of the Latin-American jockeys to make it big on the Big Apple, promptly claimed a foul on behalf of C. V. Whitney's Ghost Run. He charged that Dodson had kept leaning over on the Whitney filly most of the way and almost forced her into the rail. The stewards agreed with Senor Donoso.

Down came Bewitch's number, all the way to last place in the ten-horse field. In those days, there was no disqualification to second, third, or fourth place at the discretion of the stewards on the New York tracks.

Bewitch's disqualification was a nightmare for the chalk-eaters, or favorite-players, particularly the super-cautious ones who had backed the "cinch" to show, hoping to get back a nickel on the dollar. They had wagered \$100,470 on Bewitch to finish third.

And then there was what happened that

star-crossed day to Stymie, Hirsch Jacob's famed Cinderella horse, claimed by him for \$1,500, ultimate winner of \$918,485, and daddy of the Jacobs-Bieber breeding empire.

Under 132 pounds and odds-on to win the Manhattan Handicap, he finished second to Rico Monte, ridden by Arcaro, a victim of Eddie's guile. Rice Monte set an unconscionably slow pace, and, with a nine-pound weight pull, was able to stand off Stymie's familiar stretch drive.

The Armed-Assault match was the last on New York tracks. There has been only one \$100,000 two-horse special since then. That was the Nashua-Swaps match at Washington Park on August 11, 1955. Nashua swamped Swamps by six-and-one-half lengths.

Just before the start of the 1946 season—a year which saw New York's adoption of the film patrol—the Daily Double was dropped from the Big Apple on the grounds that it was too blatantly speculative. It was to remain off the agenda for three years.

Toward the close of the 1948 semester, the New York State Racing Commission, aware of clamor for the reinstatement of the double, commissioned the Opinion Research Corporation of Princeton, N. J., to poll the punters on the subject. A survey was made at the Empire-at-Jamaica meeting from October 7 to 11 (two aleatory numbers no doubt chosen by mere chance), and the outcome was predicatable.

Of 1,264 racing fans polled, 81 per cent voted in favor of the return of the Daily Double. The following year, it was back.

The continuing process of improving facilities at Belmont Park took a spurt in 1948, when new landscaping was made possible near the clubhouse entrance with the removal of the Brookmeade Stable's barn and accessory housing in response to the insatiable demand for more parking space. New quarters were provided for Brookmeade elsewhere.

A fire control system connecting with Belmont's village central alarm station, water lines, and hydrants was instituted. Considerable work was done on dormitory and wash-room facilities at six stables. And a new building was erected for horse saliva and other post-race tests.

If some of the great thoroughbreds of the past failed to find Belmont Park particularly

to their liking—Exterminator was one of them—the track was obviously a favorite with Citation, Triple Crown winner of 1948, and now enshrined in racing's Hall of Fame. Citation's overall record shows 32 victories in 45 starts, but he batted 1.000 at Belmont Park in six times up.

As a two-year-old, Citation won the Futurity Trial and the Futurity there. At three, the Belmont Stakes, the Sysonby Mile, the Jockey Club Gold Cup, and the Gold Cup fell to him; the last three wins coming in a period of a little more than two weeks.

It was the old story of "horses for courses"—in this case, a great horse for a great course.

Belmont Park, scene of memorable international races in 1923 and 1924, was again the scene of such a test—worth \$100,000—on July 19, 1947, two months before the Armed-Assault \$100,000 match. This event was Empire City's International Gold Cup at a mile-and-five furlongs, run at Beautiful Belmont Park and planned by young James Butler of the Empire City clan as an annual event. (That was an "Empire-at-Belmont" season.)

Negotiations for the entry of English and French horses in the race fell through, and it was left for two South American horses, Ensueno and Endeavor II, to supply the international flavor against Stymie, Assault, Natchez, Phalanx, and Talon. The invaders were permitted to break from outside the starting gate.

It was one of Stymie's best races. Natchez, with Teddy Atkinson up, set a comfortable pace with the foreign horses in closest pursuit, but they faded as Stymie, turned it on through the stretch. Hirsch Jacobs' star got up to beat Natchez by a neck, with Assault, the odds-on favorite, finishing third after moving up into second place on the stretch turn. Stymie, ridden by Conn McCreary, returned \$11.50 for his famous victory, which netted his owner \$73,000 plus a gold cup.

The second running of the race proved a soft touch for Citation on October 16, 1948, at Belmont Park. He beat Carolyn A. by five lengths with Miss Grillo Third. Nathoo and Bayeux, the European horses flown over for the event, raced poorly. A crowd of 43,887 saw the race and bet \$3,085,988.

# Through the Stretch

## chapter ten

Christopher T. Chenery's Hill Prince won the Horse of the Year award in 1950, and among the victories which cinched the honor for him was his spectacular triumph in the Jerome Handicap on September 20 at Belmont Park. Carrying top weight of 129 pounds in the mile test for three-year-olds, he stumbled at the start in an unwieldy 13-horse field.

At the quarter, he was dead last by ten lengths. At the half, he was still last. But Eddie Arcaro, refusing to be hurried, moved him up slowly in the middle of the track. With a quarter of a mile to go, the son of Princequillo was eleventh, a dozen lengths back of the leaders. And then Arcaro called on him. Hill Prince responded with what some witnessing horsemen described as the most powerfully sustained run they had ever seen a horse make. Eating up ground, he ran over Greek Ship, the leader, in the stretch to win by open daylight. Navy Chief was third.

Later that year, Hill Prince assured himself of winning the 1950 top horse nod by beating Noor by four lengths in the Jockey Club Gold Cup at Belmont Park.

There were many great days to remember, great horses to recall fondly, during the 1950's at Belmont Park. All the giants of the decade raced there with the exception of Swaps, the California star. And it was a decade of radical change in the government of thoroughbred racing and in the sport's structure in New York State.

It was in 1951, for instance, that the power to license all racing personnel in New York, from owners to stablehands, was delegated to the New York State Racing Commission as the result of a court decision. Until then, it had been in the hands of The Jockey Club.

Racing fans who like to reminisce always get back to Hurricane Hazel which, although her full 100-miles-per-hour blast bypassed New York City proper, hit Belmont Park with such force as to blow a little filly into a world record performance. The date was Friday, October 15, 1954.

The smallest crowd of the year at the beautiful course at Elmont—the count was 12,457—huddled under the stands as Hazel puffed her



FIRST LADY: Mrs. H. C. Phipps, mistress of Wheatly Stable, leads her colt Bold Ruler into winner's circle after victory in 1956 Futurity at Belmont Park. Jockey is Eddie Arcaro.

mightiest, but to judge from the later number of self-proclaimed eyewitnesses to what happened, at least 100,000 fans must have been at Belmont Park that day.

There were 19 starters in the fifth race that afternoon, and they went to the post for a six-furlong maiden two-year-old filly sprint on the Widener course just as Hurricane Hazel struck. But the windy lady was in benign mood and might have been called Helpful Hazel for the next few minutes. She blew in the direction in which the fillies were scampering, propelling them from behind with such force that Vestment, the winner, broke the world record for six furlongs on a straight course. Vestment, ridden by Stanley Small and carrying 115 pounds, swooshed the three-quarters, dainty feet scarcely touching the ground, in 1:07 4/5.

The mark shattered by the Starmount Stable filly was 1:08, and it had been set exactly 50 years earlier to the day by Artful under 130 pounds at Morris Park. But Artful had some help, too. The course on which she ran was downhill.

The subject of fire control in Belmont Park's vast barn complex commanded the attention of the Westchester Racing Association in 1953 and 1954. During those years, a sprinkler system covering every stall and "fire curtains", or protective walls at intervals, were installed at a cost of \$800,000. A new \$18,000 fire truck was added to the track's equipment and an educational drive against smoking in the barns was instituted.

Old Belmont Park's final dozen years were distinguished by unforgettable performances by outstanding horses which became national heroes and which, partly through exposure to television, were known to a wider public than the idols of old, including Man o' War.

One of these was Alfred G. Vanderbilt's Native Dancer, the magnificent gray which died last year following an operation. After he was retired in the Summer of 1954 because of recurrent foot trouble, a silver plaque on which his record was engraved was presented to his owner in ceremonies at Belmont Park, scene of six of his victories in as many starts. All in all, Native Dancer won 21 of his 22 races, his only defeat—by a head—coming in the Kentucky Derby won by Dark Star.

The "Gray Ghost" was easy to follow on black-and-white TV because of his distinctive coloration, but there were other gray horses which never made it big on the screen, home and barside. It was Native Dancer's fire and spirit which commended him even to little old ladies who had never been to a racetrack.

Unbeaten in all his nine starts as a two-year-old, Native Dancer's victory in the Futurity on Belmont Park's Widener Course on September 27, 1952, stamped him as a champion. Ridden by Eric Guerin, who shared his popularity and rode him in all but one of his 22 races (Eddie Arcaro rode him to win the American Derby in 1953), Native Dancer was caught in a suffocating pocket a quarter mile from the wire. At this point, Arcaro moved to the front with Tahitian King and, with Native Dancer bottled up, seemed headed for a sure win.

Guerin had one choice—to take back and come around the field. This he did, and, in the space of 50 thrilling yards, was free and roaring along mightily, past the courageous Tahitian King, and so on to win by two and one-half lengths in the record time of 1:14 2/5. He fully justified his price of 35 cents on the dollar.

Native Dancer's neck triumphs in the Belmont Stakes in 1953 and the Metropolitan in 1954, both at Belmont, were also among his best efforts.

While not so spectacular recordwise as Native Dancer, Greentree Stable's Tom Fool, a year older than the "Gray Ghost", was at least of equal stature with him among the titans of the early 1950's, in the opinion of many horsemen. Both are in racing's Hall of Fame.

And his most thrilling victory has also become part of Belmont Park folklore. In 1953, the son of Menow-Gaga won the Triple Handicap Crown—the Metropolitan and Suburban at Belmont Park and the Brooklyn Handicap at Aqueduct. It was Tom Fool's win in the Suburban on May 30 that will remain always in the memory of racing fans privileged to have seen it.

Tom Fool's outstanding characteristic was his will to win, his courage when put to a drive against odds. "You could almost hear him growl," was the way Tom Atkinson, his



*LANDMARK: Belmont Park's famed great white pine, circled by benches, as it looked in paddock in 1960, when it was 134 years old. Plaque commemorates first airmail flight, from Belmont Park infield to Washington, D. C., May 15, 1918.*

rider, expressed the colt's determination. And his displayed it to the fullest in the Suburban, in which he carried 129 pounds. Conceding Royal Vale, his rival in the running, four pounds, it looked as though Tom Fool were beaten inside the furlong pole. But the lion-hearted Greentree star wouldn't give up. And, as he and Royal Vale burst into the photo finish, it was Tom Fool by a nose in 2:00  $\frac{3}{5}$ .

On September 30, 1954, a committee of members of The Jockey Club consisting of John W. Hanes, Christopher T. Chenery, and Harry F. Guggenheim submitted a plan to the New York State Racing Commission for a completely new deal for the operation of thoroughbred racing in the State.

A non-profit organization to be called the Greater New York Association would be formed. Belmont Park, Jamaica, Aqueduct, and Saratoga would be merged into this association, which would buy the assets of each track. Jamaica would be discontinued and Belmont Park and Saratoga improved. Aqueduct would be retained until it could be established that the Metropolitan area needed a second major track.

The following year, the Greater New York Association (the name was later changed to the present New York Racing Association) was incorporated. In October, 1955, it acquired the four tracks for approximately \$20,000,000 and was granted a mutuel betting franchise for 25 years.

By the end of 1956, the association announced a revised version of the original program, which had been known as "The Jockey Club Plan". The old Aqueduct track would be torn down and replaced by a completely new plant. Major improvements were planned for Belmont Park and Saratoga. Jamaica would be kept open during the construction and improvement periods involving the other tracks. It was put into effect immediately.

The old Aqueduct track was demolished between January 28 and June 26, 1957, and work started on the \$34,500,000 Big A which opened on September 14, 1959, and has since made racing history.

Following the close of the 1956 season, a multimillion-dollar face-lifting and improvement operation was undertaken at Belmont Park in line with the association's overall plan. Special emphasis was placed on transportation and parking. But, in the course of the program, two picturesque mementoes of Belmont Park's early splendor disappeared from the scene.

These were the Manice Mansion, headquarters of the Turf and Field Club since the track was opened in 1905, and the old clubhouse at the West end of the grandstand. The former was used by the Turf and Field Club up to the end, but the once luxurious clubhouse in front of which the clockwise races finished prior to 1921 had long ago fallen on unhappy days. It was used as a storehouse and as printing plant for the racing programs.

Approaches to the track were redesigned to facilitate the flow of automobiles and bus traffic and the Long Island Railroad terminal moved from South of Hempstead Turnpike to North of it. New parking fields were opened and old one resurfaced. A new bus terminal was erected, and a new covered walk from the train platforms to the West end of the grandstand built.

Three double banks of escalators, one in the clubhouse and two in the grandstand were installed to make life easier for the peripatetic punter. Fluorescent lights made his study periods more pleasant, and seating risers were completely replaced. A new judges' stand was erected opposite the finish line of the Widener course races and a rise of ground hampering standees' sight lines eliminated.

Other work included the construction of two Cross Island Parkway overpasses and the shortening of the West turn of the main track to permit of a wider bus road beyond it. This latter operation cut 96 feet off the racing strip's circumference, which had always been one-and-one-half miles.

The tab for all these improvements, designed for the greater convenience of the public, totaled about \$7,250,000. The schedule called for completion of the program by April 1, 1958.

Meanwhile, the parade of great horses continued at Belmont Park. In 1954, 1955, and 1956, Belair Stud's Nashua, trained by the late Sunny Jim Fitzsimmons and ridden in all but three of his 30 races by Eddie Arcaro, caught the fascinated attention of the New York racing fans. His galloping nine-length victory in the 1955 Belmont Stakes stamped him as a horse to remember, and his final race—a victory in the Jockey Club Gold Cup on October 13, 1956—was a fitting exclamation point to a remarkable career.

Mrs. Henry Carnegie Phipps' Bold Ruler, also trained by Fitzsimmons is best remembered by Belmont fans for his dramatic victory in the Suburban of 1958. The dashing son of Nasrullah, plagued by ailments throughout his racing career, which ended that Summer, carried 134 pounds in that tough ten-furlong handicap and spotted Clem, which was to beat Round Table three times that year, 25 pounds.

After a half-mile, Eddie Arcaro sent Bold Ruler past Clem to gain the lead and make the turn for home two lengths in front. But Clem came on again, regained the lead, and looked all over the winner. In a desperate lunge on the inside which wrenched a gasp from the crowd, Arcaro lifted Bold Ruler across the line a nose to the good.

Retired to the stud, Bold Ruler has become one of the most successful sires of all time.

Brookmeade Stable's mighty little Sword Dancer, Three-Year-Old of the Year in 1959, lit up the Belmont Park scene that year with victories in the Metropolitan Handicap and the Belmont Stakes; the former race under 114 pounds, top weight for an entry of his age in the famed mile race. And the following year, he won the Suburban at the dowager



race course, the last time it was run there.

Incidentally, Sword Dancer ran, but didn't win, in the final stakes race run at the old Jamaica track. That was the Brooklyn Handicap on August 1, 1959 on the last day of its final meeting. Babu won the event. As part of the Greater New York Association, overall program, demolition of the Jamaica grandstand began at once, although the track was used for stabling and workouts for the rest of the year. In short order, the Jamaica track was but a memory. A huge housing complex was erected on its site.

Time was running out for Beautiful Belmont Park but there were still two of the most crowd-pleasing horses of all time to add to her guest list of outstanding thoroughbreds. One was Mrs. Richard C. duPont's immortal gelding, Kelso, winner of a record \$1,977,896

in purses and 39 of his 63 races. The other was Carry Back, Jack Price's authentic Cinderella horse, which went on from an unprepossessing origin to win \$1,241,165 and became the darling of the two-dollar bettors.

The popularity of both these stars was heightened by television exposure and they both drew voluminous and adoring mail.

Kelso, stabled at Belmont Park, won five of his six races there, beginning with an easy victory in the Lawrence Realization on September 23, 1960. The following year, he won the Whitney on June 17 through the disqualification of Our Hope, which beat him a head. Carrying 130 pounds, Kelso, ridden by Eddie Arcaro, spotted Our Hope, with Pete Anderson up, 13 pounds. As Kelso tried to come through on the inside, Our Hope, in front, jammed him into the rail through the



*UPSET: Jack Dreyfus Jr.'s Beau Purple, a 20-1 shot ridden by Bill Boland, beats great Kelso, Milo Valenzuela up, in Man o' War on Belmont Park grass on October 27, 1962. It was last day of racing at the old track, and the last stakes event.*

stretch run, for which his number was taken down. The chartman noted that Kelso was much the best.

On September 30, 1961, Kelso ran away from his field by eight lengths to win the Woodward in two minutes flat. And, in 1962, he won an allowance race in June at Belmont Park and the Jockey Club Gold Cup on October 20 by ten lengths.

Carry Back won only twice in six tries at Belmont Park. As a two-year-old, he took the Cowdin on October 3, 1960, and at three, the Jerome Handicap on September 2, 1961. But, after having won the Kentucky Derby and the Preakness, his defeat in the Belmont Stakes was a crushing disappointment.

In retrospect, Saturday, October 27, 1962, looms as an historic date in the history of Belmont Park. At the time, it was merely the last day of the 1962 Autumn meeting at the grand old track. But its feature race, the mile-and-a-half Man o' War—on the turf—promised a contest to remember. The promise was fulfilled.

A dozen horses went to the post for the \$100,000 test on a track made soft by rain of the night before. Kelso, at even money, headed the field, which included Carry Back and such excellent grass course horses as Wise Ship, The Axe II, T.V. Lark, and others—among which was Hobeau Farm's speed horse, Beau Purple, trained by H. Allen Jerkens. Beau Purple had beaten Kelso in stunning front-running fashion in the Suburban earlier in the year. He had carried 115 pounds to Kelso's 132. In the Man o' War, they each carried 126 pounds. Beau Purple went off at better than 20-1.

Bill Boland broke Beau Purple in front in the Man o' War just as he had done in the Suburban—and he nursed him along there all the way to win by two lengths over Mrs. duPont's great gelding. Beau Purple paid \$43.30.

Two races later, Warspite, ridden by Bill Hartack, won the seven-furlong ninth race and the crowd of 33,026 headed for the exits. They couldn't know then that they had seen the last race ever to be run at old Belmont Park.

On April 10, 1963, James Cox Brady, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the New York Racing Association announced that engineering surveys by two separate firms showed that the Belmont Park grandstand was unsafe because of age-induced structural defects and would have to come down, the sooner the better. The reports noted that the damage was so extensive that the cost of repairs, if undertaken, would be prohibitive.

And so old Belmont Park came to the end of its years of glory, a victim of age and the ravages of the elements. But her stables remained open and her racing strips harrowed and cushioned for the housing and training of horses, just as though the post-time bugle would sound at the appointed hour.

It never did again. Instead, the melancholy thud of the wreckers' ball was heard throughout the Summer of 1963 and into the Fall while the old track's famous stakes events and racing dates were transferred to Aqueduct. Rumors that the track site would be turned into a gigantic parking site spread about, but were swiftly denied by Chairman Brady. The NYRA, he declared, would build a new and bigger Belmont Park where the old one had stood. A second track was imperative to share the long season with overworked Aqueduct.

By November 15, 1963, the demolition job was completed. Now the way was cleared for the erection of a new Belmont Park which would combine the traditions of the old track with all the conveniences of today and tomorrow. The first ceremonial spade of dirt for the \$30,700,000 successor racing plant was turned on July 20, 1965.

And now New Belmont Park is a reality.

On May 4, 1905, Belmont Park's Opening Day, the New York Steeplechase at two miles gave the windswept patrons one of their many thrills of the afternoon. It was won by Thomas Hitchcock, Jr.'s champion jumper, Good and Plenty, after a rough trip, with Flying Buttress second by a length and a half.

Good and Plenty was the first great steeplechase horse to race at Belmont Park. In 1904, 1905, and 1906 he competed sixteen times, winning thirteen of his races and finishing second and third in two other outings. He was unplaced only once. Nat Ray, his rider in the New York Steeplechase, led all the steeplechase jockeys in 1905 and 1906.

And thus began a colorful parade of great steeplechase horses and riders at Belmont Park which continued until October 26, 1962, the day before the beautiful track closed down to racing. Now, with the opening of the magnificent new Belmont Park, the track resumes its role as the showplace of the barrier-clearing sport.

New York racing owes an immeasurable debt of gratitude to the sportsmen and sports-women who race steeplechase horses. In 1905, they organized the non-profit United Hunts Racing Association, with Perry Belmont as president, to "improve steeplechasing." In 1911, when flat racing was dead in New York, United Hunts held its regular meet at Belmont Park Terminal course, across the road from Belmont Park and courageously challenged the anti-betting law in court.

The case was tried in 1912, another racing blackout year. When the decision was rendered in favor of the association's representative, the way was paved for the return of flat racing at Belmont Park in 1913.

If Good and Plenty was the first steeplechase star to win at the original Belmont Park, George H. (Pete) Bostwick's Barnabys Bluff was the last. On October 26, 1962, the four-year-old bay gelding, which had been bred and was trained by his owner, romped to a 10-length triumph under Tommy Walsh in the Temple Gwathmey Steeplechase Handicap, feature of United Hunts Day.

Barnabys Bluff thus wound up in spectacular fashion a season in which he suddenly found himself in October after a mediocre Summer. Coming to Belmont Park in the Fall, he won three big jump stakes races in succession—the Brook Steeplechase Handicap, the Grand National, and, finally, the Temple Gwathmey. His earnings' for the year totaled \$74,406—and won him the verdict as Best Steeplechase Horse of the year.

In between Good and Plenty and Barnabys Bluff, the Belmont Park turf throbbed under the tattooing hoofs of a cavalcade of memorable jumpers . . . Duettiste . . . Fairmount . . . Jolly Roger . . . Arc Light . . . Rioter . . . Bushranger . . . Annibal . . . Cottesmore . . . Elkridge . . . Rouge Dragon . . . Oedipus . . . Shipboard . . . Ancestor . . . Neji . . . Benguala . . . Peal . . . and others of bright memory Steeplechase aficionados, a close-knit cult among racing fans, argue the respective merits of their favorite jumpers in retrospect just as the Man o' War vs. Kelso debaters do.

And, coupled with the great steeplechase horses came a rousing succession of equally great riders. In the 1920's, there were J. Dallett (Dolly) Byers and R. H. (Specs) Crawford, taking turns at leading the jump jockeys in the annual standings. Each had an intensely personal following in the Daffy Decade.



LAST STAR: *Barnabys Bluff*, shown here with star rider *Tommy Walsh* and owner-trainer *George H. (Pete) Bostwick* (left), closed out jump racing at old Belmont Park by winning 1962 title.

Byers, who later became a trainer, did his best in that role with *Tea-Maker*, a speed demon on the flat which became the champion sprinter of 1952 at the venerable age of nine. Dolly died at his home in Aiken, S. C. in December, 1966.

*Tea-Maker*, incidentally, was owned by the late F. Ambrose Clark, noted steeplechase patron whose Kellsboro Jack won the Grand National at Aintree in 1933 after Clark had "sold" his horse to his wife for a one-pound note to foil a suspected "jinx."

Two gentlemen jump riders brightened the dark Depression years with their spectacular performances on Belmont Park's obstacle course. One was George H. (Pete) Bostwick, easily the most versatile horseman of any era. He rode on the flat as well as over the jumps, bred and trained his own horses, and was a whale of a polo player, to boot.

The other "Mister" was Rigan McKinney,

the daredevil steeplechaser from Cleveland, who, long after his riding days were over, broke and trained—but never raced—*Neji*, the almost unanimous choice as the greatest jumper of all time.

More anon about *Neji*, which raced in the old rose and yellow silks of Mrs. Ogden Phipps, wife of the present Chairman of The Jockey Club and sister of Pete Bostwick. Mrs. Phipps, the former Lillian Bostwick, is one of the great ladies of steeplechase racing, which has long had a distinguished list of distaff owners.

These have included Mrs. F. Ambrose Clerk, Mrs. Esther duPont Weir, later Mrs. John R. H. Thouron; Mrs. Isabel Dodge Sloan, who raced as Brookmeade Stable; Mrs. Theodora A. Randolph, Mrs. Marion duPont Scott, and Mrs. Stephen C. Clark, Jr.

In the 1940's, another steeplechase riding star burst on the Belmont Park scene, domin-

ated the field, and engendered a cult of partisans unequalled in the timber phase of New York racing. He was Frank (Dooley) Adams, a quiet, intense young man who at 19, tied for riding honors with Jack McGee at 28 victories. Three years later, he again topped the steeplechase riders—and continued doing so every year through 1955. In 1954, when he rode 38 winners, his winning percentage was .37.

Dooley Adams was born in Port Chester, N. Y., in 1927. His parents, Frank and Clara, were traveling horse people, and when their son was only 14, he was riding at Agua Caliente, where they were racing their small stable at the time. When he was 17, Dooley got his first steeplechase riding license, and, after a slow start on the Big Apple, tied for the title two years later.

With his family's racing background, uncanny riding instincts, integrity, and unsurpassed cool, Adams won recognition as one of the best steeplechase jockeys in the history of Belmont Park and all the hunts meetings. During his 13-year career, he won 301 races over the jumps—and 36 on the flat.

He rode most of the best jumpers of his era, including Neji, Elkridge, Oedipus, and Ancestor. But the fans loved him because of the many times he won with mounts which seemed to have no chance of winning. Adams' knack of getting the most of his horse in the late stages of a race set him apart from his peers.

After Adams hung up his tack, A. P. (Paddy) Smithwick took over as the top man among the steeplechase jockeys. They had ridden against each other with fierce rivalry in Dooley's heyday, and now he was in a class by himself. Turning pro in 1947 at the age of 20, Paddy Smithwick, brother of Mike Smithwick, one of the most successful of steeplechase trainers, rode more than 2,500 races over the jumps during the next 20 years, winning some 450 of them.

He led the riders in 1956, 1957, and 1958, and again in 1962, the final year at Belmont Park and, when he wasn't on top, he was close to it. This, despite a constant struggle against weight which included a well-nigh starvation diet, daily communion in the hot box—and driving to the track in the Summer with all the windows closed in his car and the heat

turned on to sweat off a few more pounds. And he never lost his good nature—or will to win.

Like Adams, Paddy Smithwick, now a trainer, had a tremendous following among racing fans. He never let them down.

Joe Aitcheson Jr., one of the last steeplechase stars to be developed at Belmont Park, was a late starter in the fence-clearing sweepstakes. He got his license in 1957, when he was 29 years old, and took a job in the Smithwick menage. Four years later, he led the jump riders with 36 victories.

What Aitcheson lacked in style in his early years—he reached his peak at Aqueduct after Belmont Park closed down to racing—he made up for in courage and a rapport with his mounts. Even a succession of damaging falls failed to stop him.

The last half-dozen years at old Belmont Park produced another steeplechase-riding prodigy in young Tommy Walsh, nephew of Mickey Walsh, Irish-born jump-horse training ace. At 16, Tommy rode 15 races in 1956 against top pros like Smithwick—and finished second to the latter in 1957 and 1958. In 1959, he was fourth in the steeplechase jockey standings, but led in money earned with \$130,000.

Walsh, a daring rider, zoomed to the head of the class in 1960 with 29 wins in 121 races. Among his triumphs was with Sun Dog in the Grand National at Belmont Park—the second straight win with the same mount in the race. Two years later, he finished out his meteoric career at the old track by sweeping the Brook, the Grand National, and the Temple Gwathmey with Barnaby Bluff.

To steeplechase riders, as well as owners of jumpers, the sport has to be chiefly a labor of love. Financial remunerations are minimal compared with the rewards in flat racing. The jockeys face constant danger if falling—and a relentless fight against weight. Walsh, like his rivals, has always had to wage this fight.

Mrs. Ogden Phipps' eminence in the gallant sport of steeplechase racing dates back to 1950, when her Oedipus, which had been a failure as a flat runner, developed into a star leaper and was voted champion of his division that year and the next. Ancestor took the purse-winning honors for her in 1956, but it was Neji which stole the headlines for Mrs. Phipps' stable of jumpers.



*THE CHAMP: Neji, Mrs. Ogden Phipps' great jumper, takes water jump in the 1955 Grand National Steeplechase at Belmont Park. Frank (Dooley) Adams piloted him to victory in the race. It was Neji's first of three Grand National wins.*

Bred by Mrs. Marion duPont Scott, who won the Grand National at Aintree in 1938 with Battleship, Neji was acquired by Rigan McKinney as a yearling. When he sold all his racing stock at Belmont Park in 1953, Mrs. Phipps bought Neji for \$16,500. Pete Bostwick trained him from then through 1956, and was succeeded by Mike Smithwick. Neji raced only twice at two and not at all at three. During the next seven years, he raced 47 times, winning 17 races and finishing second 11 times and third nine times. And he earned a record \$274,047.

It was in 1955 that Neji won his first title by winning five out of eight races, closing out the season with victories in the Brook, Grand National, and Temple Gwathmey at Belmont Park.

Many of Neji's triumphs are still vivid in the memory of racegoers. In the 1955 Grand National, he carried 163 pounds and spotted Rythminhim, his most determined rival in the running, 17 pounds. Neji, ridden by Adams, was a half-length short at the final jump. Smithwick, on Rymthminhim, exerted all his skill to nurse his shrinking lead, but Neji kept coming until, at the wire, he was a neck in front.

In the Temple Gwathmey a while later, Rythminhim again was leading at the final jump, this time by four lengths. But Adams kept hustling Neji along, and, in spite of his 167 pounds, he responded willingly. He caught Rythminhim near the finish and won by three-quarters of a length.

In 1957, when Neji won his second best-of-year award, he turned in what was perhaps his most memorable performance. He was assigned 173 pounds in the Temple Gwathmey, a train-stopping impost the fabled Jolly Roger, owned by Mrs. Payne Whitney, had tried unsuccessfully to tote in the race exactly 30 years earlier. He had finished second to Fairmount, Joseph E. Widener's fine jumper, which had carried 170 pounds.

Twelve brush stars were in the 1957 field, and, at the penultimate jump, five of them, including top-weighted Neji, were pushing for the lead with little space between them. But, coming around the last turn, Smithwick, now riding Mrs. Phipps' ace instead of Adams, shot to the front as though his 173 pounds

were a feather. He was all by himself taking the last barrier, and went on to win by four and one-half lengths over Ancestor.

Voted champion steeplechase horse again in 1958, Neji won the Grand National at Belmont Park under 173 pounds and came up to the Temple Gwathmey with 176 pounds chalked in opposite his name. Mrs. Phipps accepted the challenge, even though it was the highest weight ever assigned on a major track in this country.

Showing his lion-hearted courage again, Neji carried his punishing package as far and as fast as he could. With a late rush, he actually stuck his nose in front of Benguala, running in the colors of Mrs. Marion duPont Scott's Montpelier (farm), at the sixteenth pole. But the 29 pounds he was giving Benguala took its toll, and the Montpelier four-year-old eked out a head decision over his gallant eight-year-old rival.

When Neji returned to the stands, the crowd gave him a heartfelt ovation, the biggest ever given a loser at a New York track.

Oldtimers fondly recall the two great rival jumpers of the 1920's at Belmont Park—and the two jockeys who rode them. The horses were Joseph F. Widener's Fairmount and Jolly Roger. In the spirit of the times, Jolly Roger, a horse with strange white markings, almost psychedelic in effect, long before that term was invented, was a popular favorite. Specs Crawford was his rider, while Dolly Byers rode Fairmount.

The Widener jumper, top money earner in 1926, won the Temple Gwathmey, a race inaugurated at Belmont Park in 1924 and named after a sportsman known as "Mr. Cotton" by his commodity market colleagues, in 1926, 1927, and 1928. In his latter two victories, he carried 170 pounds. In all three races, he beat Jolly Roger. It was in their second meeting in the race that Jolly Roger carried 173 pounds. He was the leading steeplechase money winner in 1927 and 1928. Jolly Roger won the Grand National in 1927 and 1928, and Fairmount was second in the earlier renewal.

The amazing Dolly Byers won the Temple Gwathmey five years in a row, starting with McCarthy More in 1925 and winding up with Arc Light in 1929.

One of the outstanding jumpers of the

1930's was Joseph E. Widener's Bushranger, whose regular rider was Henry Little. Bushranger won the Broad Hollow at Belmont Park in 1935 and 1936, the Brook in 1936, and the Grand National the same year under 172 pounds. He came to an untimely end the following year and was buried in Belmont Park. In 1967, Bushranger's name was added to the list of greats in the Hall of Fame in the National Museum of Racing at Saratoga.

Of all the notable steeplechase horses which made Belmont Park their favorite arena, the most durable and best remembered in the years preceding Neji's reign was a slender bay gelding named Elkridge. Foaled in 1938, he went on to win fame as an "Iron Horse," what with 123 races in eleven years, winning 31 and earning what was then a world record of \$235,225. Neji later set a new mark.

A remarkable feature of Elkridge's career was the fact that he fell only once in all his races.

Bought as a weanling by Thomas Hitchcock, he raced only once in the latter's colors—and won. Hitchcock died in 1941, and Kent Miller of Louisville, Ky., bought Elkridge for \$7,000 at the disposal sale of the Hitchcock racing stock.

Miller, then unknown on the Big Apple, brought Elkridge to New York in 1942 after a brief fling in Maryland, and the son of Mate-

Best by Test proceeded to win seven of 20 races for him and earn top money of \$28,130. (Steeplechase purse in that era had gone into a decline from the high of the 1920's. In 1929, Arc Light had earned \$66,975 in four victories, and Jolly Roger, in 1927, had earned \$63,075 in six.)

Elkridge, voted the jump champion of 1942, competed in the Grand National at Belmont Park eight times, winning it in 1946, when he was eight years old. He raced, as sound as ever, until the 1951 season, when he was retired at 13. At 12, he ran one of the most thrilling races of his career to win the Saratoga Steeplechase with Dooley Adams in the saddle. Adams sent his Methuselah mount to the front under top weight of 150 pounds, and he courageously stood off the bids of Hampton Roads, the brilliant Oedipus, then a four-year-old, and Lone Fisherman to win by three lengths.

Steeplechase racing added color, thrills, and an extra measure of sportsmanship down through the years at old Belmont Park. It will continue to do so at new Belmont Park, to which the traditional stakes now return. And, undoubtedly, there will be new jumping stars to invite comparison with Neji, Elkridge, Bushranger, Jolly Roger, and the other leapers in the grand manner who wrote bright history at Belmont Park.



*IRON HORSE: Elkridge was one of steeplechase racing's most durable performers, racing over the barriers for 11 years, and falling only once in 123 races, of which he won 31. On him here is Paddy Smithwick, who ranked with best riders in steeplechase history before he retired to become a trainer.*



*chapter twelve*

At the head of the stretch, Jaipur swung to the outside, and, under the spirited direction of Willie Shoemaker, set out after the pace-setting, rail-running Admiral's Voyage. A third colt, Crimson Satan, going wide on the turn, joined the run down the straight path to the wire.

On the three came in the warm sunshine of a rare day in June at Belmont Park. Fifty thousand voices set up a wordless chorus, bass and treble, compounded of entreaty and pure exhilaration. For an instant, Manuel Ycaza had Crimson Satan's nose in front. But the colt was lugging in, and the Panamanian checked to straighten him out. In that instant, Crimson Satan was out of the race.

Now it was Jaipur against Admiral's Voyage, with the latter, leading from the start of the soul-searching mile-and-a-half race, holding on doggedly to his hairline lead under the urging of Braulio Baeza. But Shoemaker kept pushing . . . pushing . . . pushing Jaipur. Anud, with a precisely timed final lunge, drove his mount across the line to win by a bulldog's flat nose.

So ended one of the most stirring renewals of the Belmont Stakes, the classic \$125,000-added test for three-year-olds which this year celebrates its 100th running by returning to the historic racing strip at Belmont Park where it was contested from 1905 to 1962.

But, in its homecoming, the tradition-steeped Belmont had a different background—one of unsurpassed beauty and dimension—awaiting it. This is the new \$30,700,000 Belmont Park, the perfect setting for an heirloom race 100 years old.

The Belmont Stakes had originated at Jerome Park in 1867, six years before first Preak-

ness and eight before the Kentucky Derby, the other two three-year-old races in the Triple Crown. It was run at Jerome Park until 1890, when it moved to Morris Park, its home until 1905.

It was at Belmont Park that the Belmont Stakes—named, as was the track, after the first August Belmont—attained full stature as New York's very own big race, and, in 1926, became America's only mile-and-a-half event for three-year-olds.

But, while turf purists have always regarded the Belmont as a more significant and truly testing race than the other two parts of the Triple Crown, the Big Town has never been as demonstrative in its affection for the Belmont as Louisville and Baltimore for the Derby and Preakness respectively. It's the cool way of New York.

And yet, the feeling was always there on Belmont Stakes Day at old Belmont Park. You could see it in the faces of the crowd pressed against the walking ring fence under the great trees back of the grandstand and clubhouse as the Belmont field pranced in a circle for all to see and admire.

You could hear it in the hum of the throngs forming two human walls, held back by the taut tapes of the Pinkertons, between which the Belmont hopefuls passed on their path out of the walking ring en route to the track.

And the playing of "Sidewalks of New York," the Big Town's properly raffish, but nostalgic song as the Belmont entrants emerged onto the track brought a lump into thousands of city folks' throats.

Jaipur's nose victory in the Belmont had other dramatic aspects besides its heart-stopping finish. The year was 1962—the final sea-



*FINALE: The Belmont Stakes, celebrating its 100th running this year at new Belmont Park, went out in a blaze of drama in its final renewal at the old track in 1962. It was won in a searing nose finish by George D. Widener's Jaipur with Admiral's Voyage second. Jaipur is shown here with Willie Shoemaker up and Widerer, honorary NYRA board chairman, holding his bridle.*

son of racing—and the Belmont Stakes—at old Belmont Park before its demolition. And so Jaipur sent 'em away, not with a smile, but with an unforgettable thrill. From 1963 through 1967, the Belmont was run at Aqueduct.

And Jaipur's triumph was the sweeter for owner George D. Widener, then chairman of The Jockey Club, because he had been trying to win a Belmont Stakes since 1918. Not every year, but often enough to run up a losing streak of eight straight. Three times his horses had finished second—Your Chance in 1940, Lights Up in 1950, and Battlefield in 1951. And now, after 54 years, Jaipur, a homebred, won the ultimate three-year-old prize for him.

The history of the Belmont Stakes is stud-

ded with breathtaking finishes—and, by contrast—with awesome displays of such superiority that the winning horse seemed to be in a class by himself. Big fields and rodeo stampedes such as have characterized many renewals of the Kentucky Derby have been rare in the Belmont because, by the time of its running, the eligibles have been whittled down to a select few. The fact that the race is run over the true Derby distance of one-and-one-half miles further discourages take-a-flier entries.

Max Hirsch, the octogenarian trainer whose career is inextricably woven into the fabric of Belmont Park, has sent four Belmont winners to the post, beginning with A. H. Cosden's Vito in 1928. His other victories were scored

by Robert J. Kleberg Jr.'s Assault, the Triple Crown winner in 1946; and the same owner's Middleground in 1950 and High Gun in 1954.

There was no standout three-year-old coming up to the Belmont in 1954, which accounted for a field of 13 entries including Riverina, running coupled with High Gun. This was the second largest field in Belmont Stakes annals, 14 having started in the 1875 renewal won by Calvin, and it tied the 13 in the 1877 renewal won by Cloverbrook.

Ridden by Eric Guerin, who had won the 1953 Belmont with Native Dancer by a neck margin, High Gun was eighth by a dozen lengths at the mile, but he was running strongly. A quarter of a mile further, he was fifth, then second at the head of the stretch.

Now the 86th Belmont was between High Gun and C. V. Whitney's Fisherman, the pacesetter. Correlation, the favorite, ridden by Eddie Arcaro, who holds the Belmont Stakes record of six winners jointly with Jimmy McLaughlin, was all through and dropped back from third to fifth place. High Gun caught Fisherman a few yards from the wire and beat the game little Whitney colt by a neck.

High Gun, which had won only \$7,475 as a two-year-old, gave the first indication of his true class in winning the Belmont. He went on to win the Sysonby, Manhattan Handicap, and Jockey Club Gold Cup that same at Belmont Park year.

At four, he won the Metropolitan and Brooklyn, the latter handicap under 132 pounds. His purse earnings totaled \$486,025. A disappointment in stud, High Gun was retired to Texas. In 1962, when he was 11 years old, he broke a leg while playing in a pasture at T. C. Jenkin's ranch near Fort Worth and was destroyed.

It's seldom that a real longshot wins the Belmont Stakes, since there are few surprises among colts of class. But what the punters call a telephone-number mutuel price lit up alongside No. 7 when the 93rd running of the Belmont was declared official on June 3, 1961.

That Sherluck won this Belmont was not so startling as the fact that Carry Back, Jack Price's bargain colt which had already won the Kentucky Derby and the Preakness and so had a clear shot at the Triple Crown, finished seventh, beating only two horses.

In close quarters from the start, Carry Back failed to respond with his usual savage determination when jockey Johnny Sellers moved him to the outside for racing room.

A shorter-priced favorite than Carry Back was defeated in the 1958 Belmont Stakes to demonstrate that hard luck lightning can, indeed, strike the same barn twice.

Calumet Farm's Tim Tam came up to the mile-and-half test at Belmont Park with impeccable credentials. He had already won the Kentucky Derby and the Preakness and appeared unbeatable in the most demanding part of the Triple Crown series. The public backed him so heavily that his closing price was 15 cents on the dollar. Second choice to him at 4.90 to 1 was Cavan, an Irish-bred colt.

With Cavan, ridden by Pete Anderson, setting the pace, Milo Valenzuela, on Tim Tam, had the brilliant Calumet colt close up for his big move at the head of the stretch. Straightened out and running on the outside, Tim Tam appeared ready to take charge when he began to swerve in apparent distress. But he kept going in vain pursuit of the flying Cavan, which crossed the wire six lengths in front. Tim Tam had almost the same margin on Flamingo, the third horse.

It was found that the Calumet star had cracked a sesamoid bone during the stretch run. An operation healed the fracture, but Mrs. Gene Markey, mistress of Calumet, retired him.

This was the second time that the Triple Crown had eluded Calumet and its father-and-son trainers, Ben and Jimmy Jones, after Derby and Preakness wins, although twice before, with Whirlaway in 1941 and Citation in 1948, they had completed the three-way hat trick.

Back in 1944, Pensive won the Derby and Preakness and seemed headed for the Triple Crown. Favored at 1-2 in the Belmont Stakes, Conn McCreary sent the Calumet colt to the front at the quarter pole and appeared to have victory in his grasp. But the lightly-regarded Bounding Home came along on the outside, stuck his head in front of Pensive, and finally beat him a half-length.

Up to 1958, Tim Tam and Pensive were the only Derby-Preakness winners to fail in the Belmont Stakes. Burgoon King and Bold



IN A DRIVE: *Alfred G. Vanderbilt's great gray, Native Dancer, (left) ekes out a neck victory over the persistent Jamie K in 1953 Belmont Stakes before throng at old Belmont Park. Eric Guerin is on Native Dancer; Eddie Arcaro on Jamie K.*

Venture, which won the Derby and Preakness in 1932 and 1936, didn't answer the Belmont bugle.

Thirty-eight Belmont Stakes had been run at Jerome Park and Morris Park before the race — planned originally as the American counterpart of England's Epsom Derby — came to the then brand new Belmont Park in 1905.

Tanya, a filly owned by Harry Payne Whitney, won the first of the Belmont Stakes at Belmont Park, just as Ruthless, Francis Morris' filly, had won the inaugural of the event at Jerome Park in 1867.

The first six renewals of the race at Belmont Park produced three victories by colts owned by James R. Keene, the redoubtable Wall Street tycoon and horsebreeder. They were Peter Pan in 1907, Colin in 1908, and Sweep in 1910. Previously, the bearded magnate had won the race with Spendthrift in 1879, Com-mando in 1901, and Delhi in 1904.

Man o' War and Count Fleet, two of the most illustrious names in the roster of Belmont Stakes winners, registered the easiest triumphs in the race. Man o' War's only op-

ponent in the 1920 Belmont—the last one to be run clockwise — was George W. Loft's Donnacona. It was no contest. Man o' War, held at 1-20, broke on top under Clarence Kummer. His lead, at first two lengths, lengthened into seven, 12, and finally, at the wire, 20 lengths under a stout pull.

Twenty-three years later, Mrs. John D. Hertz's Count Fleet bettered the margin mark set by Man o' War by five lengths. Like "Big Red", Count Fleet was a prohibitive favorite. He had two rivals in the 1943 Belmont—Fairy Manhurst and Deserente. At the half, Johnny Longden had Count Fleet in front by eight lengths. At the mile, he was galloping along a dozen lengths ahead of Fairy Manhurst. Rounding into the stretch, he was 20 lengths in front. He won by 25.

Eighteen Belmont Stakes have been named Best Three-Year-Old of the year since voting of the award was started in 1936, and 12 have been named Horse of the Year, 11 as three-year-olds and one—Native Dancer—at four.

Trainers heading the list of those who have saddled Belmont Stakes winners were among the all-time greats. There was James Rowe,

for instance, the conditioning genius who trained eight Belmont winners, from George Kinney in 1883, to Harry Payne Whitney's Prince Eugene in 1913, the year racing returned to New York after its two-year hiatus.

Then there were Sam Hildreth with seven between 1899 and 1924, and Sunny Jim Fitzsimmons with six for the late William Woodward, chairman of The Jockey Club and master of Belair Stud. They were Gallant Fox in 1930, Faireno in 1932; Omaha, a son of Gallant Fox, in 1935; Granville, also a son of the 1930 Triple Crown winner in 1936; Johnston in 1939, and Nashua in 1955. The latter raced in the interests of William Woodward, Jr.

Granville, winner by a nose over Mr. Bones with Jimmy Stout in the irons, made a bit of Belmont Stakes history by being the first winner of the event caught by the photo finish camera.

Eight runnings of the Belmont Stakes had one uncommon common denominator — the cinching of the Triple Crown by its winner, the final seal attesting to his greatness. And it always took place at Belmont Park.

The first to win the three prime three-year-old stakes races was Sir Barton in 1919, which saw the 51st running of the Belmont, at that time clockwise over the mile-and-three-furlong route. Cmdr. J.K.L. Ross' son of Star Shoot-Lady Stirling, already winner that year of the Kentucky Derby and Preakness, drew only two opponents. They were the William R. Coe entry of Sweep On and Natural Bridge. Ridden by Johnny Doftus, Sir Barton won easily by five lengths in the new American record time of 2:17 2/5.

Sir Barton's record performance is significant, in retrospect, as a yardstick of the validity of the claim of some oldtimers that there has never been another horse like Man o' War. For, in 1920, Man o' War won the Belmont Stakes in 2:14 1/5, lopping three and one-fifth seconds off Sir Barton's time. The chart of the 1920 Belmont notes that jockey Clarence Kummer took Man o' War under a pull in the final sixteenth of a mile because he had distanced Donnacona, his only rival in the race!

Man o' War's 2:14 1/5 is still the American record for eleven furlongs. "Big Red" also

beat Sir Barton by seven lengths in their \$80,000 match race at Kenilworth Park in Canada on October 12, 1920.

William Woodward's Gallant Fox, trained by Sunny Jim Fitzsimmons and ridden by Earl Sande, won the 1930 Belmont Stakes by three lengths over James Butler's Questionnaire to account for his Triple Crown. And in 1935, Omaha, Gallant Fox's son, also bred Woodward and trained by Mr. Fitz, but with Willie Saunders in the saddle, won his Belmont by a length and a half to account for his tricorn tiara.

In 1937, it was War Admiral, a son of "Big Red", which won the Triple Crown, making sure of it with a three-length victory in the Belmont under Charlie Kurtsinger.

Long-tailed Whirlaway, pride of Calumet Farm, won his Belmont after taking the Derby and Preakness in 1941. Eddie Arcaro rode the colt, a 1-4 favorite, to a two-and-one-half-length victory over Robert Morris, Yankee Chance, and Itabo.

Two years later, it was Count Fleet's turn to sew up the Triple Crown by winning the Belmont, which he did with consummate ease under Johnny Longden. With his 25-length margin of victory in the event, Count Fleet's overall winning edge in his Triple Crown races totaled 36 lengths.

Trained by Max Hirsch and ridden by Warren Mehrtens, now a racing official with the New York Racing Association, King Ranch's Assault won the Triple Crown in 1946, beating Natchez, his closest rival, by three lengths in the Belmont.

The most recent Triple Crown winner was Citation in 1948. Calumet's great three-year-old also gave Arcaro the distinction of riding two Triple Crown winners—and he did it in a span of eight seasons. And the son of Bull Lea-Hydroplane II is regarded by many as the finest of all the winners of the three classics. After taking the Kentucky Derby by three and one-half lengths and the Preakness by five and one-half, Citation won his Belmont by eight lengths. This despite the fact that he stumbled at the break.

While Belair Stud and James R. Keene tied for the most Belmont Stakes winners at six each, Belair's famous colors of white, red dots, red cap, have actually been seen on



NUMBER 6: *Eddie Arcaro winning the 1955 Belmont Stakes with Nashua by nine lengths over Blazing Count. Portersville was third. It was Arcaro's sixth victory in the Belmont, an all-time record in a race whose 100th running is at new Belmont Park this year.*

seven colts first past the wire in the race celebrating its centennial this year at new Belmont Park.

The last time the Belair silks fluttered on a winning jockey's back at old Belmont Park was in 1955, when Arcaro breezed the whimsically fascinating Nashua to a nine-length victory. Belair was then being operated by William Woodward Jr., son of the founder of the great racing dynasty. Later that year, Nashua, a droll colt called "Mickey" by his handlers, and distinguished for his playfulness and eye-rolling histrionics when he wasn't running, was sold to a syndicate headed by Leslie Combs II for \$1,251,200.

When the first Belmont Park was torn down in 1963, the Belmont Stakes, with other rac-

ing fixtures at the beautiful track, was shifted to Aqueduct, where it was run from 1963 through 1967. And last year, at the Big A, the Belair colors again were seen in front in the Belmont Stakes.

They were worn by Willie Shoemaker, who was aboard Damascus, Mrs. Edith W. Bancroft's sensational three-year-old, which won the \$125,000-added classic handily. Among those he beat in the Belmont was Proud Clarion, the colt which had upset him in the Kentucky Derby and kept him from winning the Triple Crown. Mrs. Bancroft is the daughter of the elder William Woodward and thus inherited the family's racing colors.

Damascus, trained by Frank Whiteley Jr., went on to prove that he was a Belmont

Stakes winner in the finest tradition of the century-old race. He later won the Dwyer, the American Derby, the Travers—by 22 lengths—the Woodward, named after the founder of Belair, by 10, and the two-mile Jockey Club Gold Cup at the Big A by four-and-one-half. He easily won Horses of the Year and Three-Year-Old of the Year honors.

Before the late Sunny Jim Fitzsimmons' retirement when he nudged the 90-year mark, he trained a few horses for Mrs. Bancroft, whose husband, Thomas M. Bancroft, is a financier, former polo player, and a member of The Jockey Club. Mr. Fitz, of course, had trained horses for her father since the 1920's, and so it was natural that he would handle her stable when she inherited the Belair colors. Whiteley followed Mr. Fitz as her trainer.

The lightning-fast Hedevar was Mrs. Bancroft's first headline-maker. He ran a mile in 1:33 1/5 to tie the world record in winning the Equipoise Mile Handicap at Arlington Park on June 18, 1966. (Hedevar's mark didn't last long. One week later, also at Arlington Park, Ogden Phipps' tremendous three-year-old, Buckpasser, scorched a mile in the new world record time of 1:32 3/5 while winning the Arlington Classic under 125 pounds.)

And then came Damascus to keep alive the tradition—of those magic white and red polka dotted Belair Stud colors. . .

There's no race quite like the Belmont Stakes anywhere in America—and no track in the world so worthy of housing it as new Belmont Park, its old home.



**BELMONT WINNERS:** *Quartet who helped write Belmont Stakes history at old Belmont Park veterans reunion. Left to right: Joe Notter, who rode Colin, 1908 winner; George Odom, winner with Delhi in 1904; "Sunny Jim" Fitzsimmons, who trained six Belmont winners, and Earl Sande, four-time victor in century-old race.*





PICTURE CREDITS

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