Currier and Ives Trotting Horses: the Maine Connection

Clark P. Thompson

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The Maine Connection
By
Clark P. Thompson
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According to one source, nearly one out of every ten prints published by Currier and Ives had the trotting horse as its subject. See Currier and Ives Trotting: A Pageant of Their Horse Prints from 1840 to 1895 by Evelyn and Lawrence Slobody, Philip A. Pines (1984). Of the approximately 650 Currier and Ives trotting horse prints, some 30 (13 different ones) depicted horses bred in Maine. Nearly 80 of their lithographs illustrated horses with a connection to Maine. The so-called “Golden Age of Trotting” in America (1840 to 1895) corresponded with the time that the prints of Currier and Ives were most popular. Trotting became our national pastime thanks in part to the hard work of this dynamic duo. What follows is a brief description of some Currier and Ives trotters with a connection to Maine.

Mac

Mac was one of the first Maine trotters to achieve fame on the trotting tracks of New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. He was proceeded by a long list of Maine bred trotters which included among others: Zuarrow, Lion, Fanny Pullen, Independence, Lady Swan, Henry, Celeste, Lafayette, Ice Pony, Tom Benton, and Post Boy. While there is no question that Mac was bred and foaled (1843) in Maine, there was a difference of opinion as to his sire. Several letters were published (1853) in “The Maine Farmer” about his breeding. The well respected farmer Jesse Wadsworth of Livermore Falls claimed he was foaled on Moose Hill in East Livermore, the property of Thomas Record. According to Wadsworth, he was sired by a stallion called “Postboy” out of a mare belonging to Thomas Record. Nevertheless, most sources give his breeding by the Morgan stallion “Morgan Caesar” out of a Messenger line dam. The noted trainer Hiram Woodruff, who campaigned Lady Suffolk and other famous trotting horses, had the following to say about Mac. The year was 1849 and “The Lady” had gone down east to Providence to trot against Mac, Gray Eagle and Gray Trouble under saddle. “Mac was a very famous horse, and very fast. He was a brown gelding, fifteen and a half hands high. When he first came to notice, he was owned by Mr. Robert Walton of Boston. He sold him to Harry Jones of New York, who in turn disposed of him to Mr. John Mc Ardle of Albany.” See “The Trotting Horse of America” by Hiram Woodruff (1869). Mac was named after Mc Ardle. Currier published three prints of Mac.
Tacony and Zachary Taylor

Tacony and Zachary Taylor competed against Mac and other top trotting cracks of the day. Hiram Woodruff described Tacony as a “roan gelding, bred in Canada”. However, several other sources including Samuel L. Boardman, editor of “The Maine Farmer”, in a 1867 article claim he was a descendant of Winthrop Messenger. Winthrop Messenger was a son of Imported Messenger who was brought to Winthrop, Maine, from New York in 1819. The trotting stock of this foundation sire were simply referred to as “Messenger horses”. Two prints of Tacony published in 1853 show him in a race against Mac - one at Hunting Park Course in Philadelphia and another over the Union Course on Long Island. The print of Mac and Zachary Taylor was reproduced in 1851 from a famous French painting by Henri Delattre and is considered one of the best large folios by Currier. Zachary Taylor, a chestnut grandson of Winthrop Messenger, was bred by Dr. Safford of West Gardiner who sold him to Benjamin Hodges (Hallowell) who resold him to Robert Walton of Boston. Currier printed three folios of Tacony and one of Zachary Taylor.

Pelham

According to George H. Bailey of Portland, a noted authority on early Maine trotting horses who served for a time as the editor of the “Horse Department” of “The Maine Farmer”, Pelham was bred and raised in Maine and gained notoriety by becoming the first horse to trot a mile in harness under 2.30. This feat was accomplished (and immortalized by Currier) on July 2, 1849, over the Centreville Course on Long Island when he trotted a heat in a time of 2.28 defeating Lady Suffolk and Jack Rossiter. Hiram Woodruff described him thusly: “Pelham was a bay gelding, owned (1849) in Boston by Mr. Robert Walton. The horse came originally from Maine. .... He was a fast and stylish little horse, standing an inch under fifteen hands high.” Pelham, who was bred by B. Esmond of Gardiner (per Bailey) was another descendant of Winthrop Messenger. Clarence A. Day’s History of Maine Agriculture 1604-1860 notes that Pelham was once owned by Arnold Wentworth of Sabattus Mountain and later (??) by B. Esmond of Gardiner.

Daniel D. Tompkins and Blanc Negre

Daniel D. Tompkins was a chestnut gelding, a grandson of Winthrop Messenger, bred in Farmington (1830) by a Mr. Libby according to Day. He was named after a New York politician of that era. An 1851 print by Currier shows him racing as a double team with Blanc Negre over the Hunting Park Course on October 26, 1849. In 1837 he beat Rattler at three miles over the Centreville Course in 7.59 which was the best time on record for the distance according to Bailey. William H. Gocher, secretary of the National Trotting Association, claims in his book Pacealong (1928) that his best race was trotted under saddle in 1839 at Philadelphia where he defeated the champion Edwin Forrest in a $5000 match race at three miles in 8.07. Later he appeared in team races with Blanc Negre - yet another grandson of Winthrop Messenger. Blanc Negre was owned by C. P. Relf who
later owned Zachary Taylor.

Trustee

The Maine bred mare Fanny Pullen never made the list of Currier and Ives prints, however, her son Trustee, a chestnut gelding, was immortalized by Currier in 1848 when he became the first horse to trot twenty miles within an hour. A very tired looking Trustee as he appeared in his twentieth mile over the Union Course was the subject of one print by Currier in 1848. Trustee’s dam was sired by Winthrop Messenger and bred by Sullivan Pullen of Augusta according to Day. Fanny Pullen raced with distinction over the New York tracks against the likes of Dutchman and Confidence. Hiram Woodruff, who trained and drove Dutchman, described her as “a chestnut, standing fifteen hands high, and was raised in the State of Maine.”

Stella

While the get of Winthrop Messenger were dominant in Maine early, the offspring of the Drew Horse (Old Drew) and Gen Knox were not far behind. The black mare Stella was sired by Old Drew, a stallion owned by Hiram Drew of Exeter/Levant. On June 5, 1855, Stella and mate Alice Grey trotted in double harness over the Union Course against Lantern and Whalebone. This much celebrated race to wagons won by Lantern and Whalebone featured perhaps two other Maine bred trotters as some sources claim that Alice Grey and Whalebone were also Maine bred. This race was subtitled “Passing the Stand” by Currier in 1855. Currier and Ives published two other prints of Stella - one of a race in 1857 over the Union Course and another entitled “Trotting Cracks On The Snow” which showed Stella, Alice Grey, Flora Temple and others hooked to sleighs. Bailey, in an article published in the “Spirit of the Times” (1876), stated that Stella and Whalebone trotted a mile in 2.42, then (1856) the fastest on record for a double team. Stella was bred by Elmer Pease of Stetson according to letter written to “The Maine Horse Breeders’ Monthly” in 1883 by David Quimby of Corrina. According to Quimby, she was “the fastest mare in Maine in her day” and was called “Black Sal”. Quimby claimed he drove her “more than one thousand miles” before she was sold when seven years old to Joshua Seward of Boston.

Flora Temple

This trotting mare was the successor to Lady Suffolk for the title “Queen of the Turf”. In 1859 Flora Temple came to Portland appearing at old Forest City Park. Hiram Woodruff, her trainer and driver, remembered the trip down east from Saratoga as he recalled in his book that they “gave an exhibition there on the 1st of September. Flora won all the heats again, - the fastest, 2.26.” If nothing else, this great mare will be remembered as the “bob-tailed nag” in Stephen Foster’s song “Camptown Races”. Currier published 13 prints showing Flora Temple.
Hopeful

This small gray gelding was one of the most celebrated trotters on the Grand Circuit in 1878. No less than six prints by Currier and Ives featured the exploits of Hopeful. Hopeful was foaled in 1866 on the North Dixmont farm of Eli Whitcomb, the property of Benjamin D. Whitcomb of Boston. The latter Whitcomb owned Hopeful's dam (Kate) and sire (Godfrey's Patchen). An article (1/29/77) in "The Maine Farmer" stated that Hopeful's dam was sired by the Bridgham Horse (aka Young Indian Chief) owned by George Bridgham of Poland Corner. This is noted in the 1879 print of Hopeful subtitled "Winner of all the Free-For-All races in the Grand Circuit of 1878." At the close of 1878 Hopeful also held the best record (2.16 ½ ) to wagon for trotting horses.

Lady Maud and Camors

These two trotters were sired by Gen Knox who was owned by Thomas S. Lang of North Vassalboro. Camors was the first Maine bred horse to take a record better than 2.20 (2.19 ¾ ) for a mile. An 1874 Currier and Ives print shows him at Buffalo in his record mile. According to Bailey, Camors was later sold for $20,000 and taken to California where he died of lung fever. The single print of Lady Maud published in 1876 shows her record standing at 2.18 ¼. Lang was the breeder of record for Lady Maud. Her dam is listed as "unknown" but other sources give it as by a thoroughbred named "Saboo". In 1875 she joined a very select group of trotting horses having trotted three heats of a race each in a time better than 2.20. She later produced the champion two year old "Mobars". This mare should not be confused with the pacer Lady Maud C whose namesake race "The Lady Maud" is managed by the Hambletonian Society.

Smuggler

Smuggler was not bred in Maine but came to Maine in the fall of 1876 to give exhibition miles in Portland, Gardiner and Bangor. George H. Bailey of Portland was selected by Smuggler's trainer and driver, Charles Marvin, to drive the prompter in all three appearances. At the same time, several ads appeared in "The Maine Farmer" where Col. Henry S. Russell offered stock for sale - all sired by his champion stallion. Currier and Ives offered eleven prints of Smuggler. One of the more popular ones show him winning the great stallion race at Mystic Park (Medford, Ma.) on September 15, 1874.

Emma B, a/k/a Police Gazette

This small (under 15 hands), grey trotting mare was foaled in 1872 on the Foxcroft farm of Phineas M. and Cleoral C. Jeffers. Sired by the Kentucky bred stallion Bayard from a dam by the Morgan stallion Brown Harry. Bayard was purchased by F. M. Wetherbee of
Boston and sent to Jefferds who boarded some of his mares for breeding purposes. Jefferds bred one of his own mares to Bayard and Emma B was the result. Prior to the fall of 1878 Jefferds sold Emma B to a Boston sportsman/gambler by the name of James Keenan. Keenan also happened to be the manager of the boxer John L. Sullivan and the professional sculler Fred Plaisted who later coached at Bowdoin College. Emma B raced on the Eastern Circuit under the care of Dan Bigley Jr. in 1878-79. Her speed and style made her a favorite with the fans at the Boston area tracks. She took her mark (2.22) in the fall of 1879 at Philadelphia’s Point Breeze Park. In 1880 she raced in the Midwest driven by James Dustin, a native of Winslow, who once worked at the Lang Stables in North Vassalboro. In the spring of 1882 Keenan sold Emma B for $10,000 to Richard K. Fox, the owner of the New York City newspaper called “The Police Gazette”. Fox renamed her “Police Gazette” and gave her to the care of James Dustin. As things turned out, her best trotting days were past so Fox was not able to use her to promote his paper as planned. Currier and Ives published three prints of her from 1879 to 1882, the last one being a large folio where she appears to be almost white in color.

Jay-Eye-See, Phallas and Kremlin

Jay-Eye-See has two connections to Maine. First, this gelding trotter, the first to trot a mile in 2.10, was trained and driven by a Maine boy, Edwin D. Bither, from Charleston. An 1884 Currier and Ives print notes the dam of Jay-Eye-See was a mare called “Midnight”. Midnight was once owned for a short time by James Edgecomb at Recluse Farm in South Hiram. Phallas, who later beat Smuggler’s record, was also trained and driven by Bither. The trotter Kremlin was a bay stallion bred in Kentucky who was purchased as a yearling by William R. Allen of Pittsfield, Ma. Bither, while employed at Allen Farm, developed Kremlin into a world champion going a mile in 2:07 ¾ over a regulation track at Nashville, Tenn. in the fall of 1892. Currier and Ives published fifteen prints of Jay-Eye-See, four of Phallas and one of Kremlin.

Nelson

The trotting stallion Nelson, bred at Sunnyside Farm in Waterville and foaled in 1882, was one of the most famous horses of his day. He is the only Maine bred trotting horse to be elected as an immortal in the Harness Racing Hall of Fame. His dam, Gretchen, was sired by a son of Hambletonian called “Gideon”. Gideon was brought to Maine by Thomas S. Lang around 1860. Nelson’s sire was Young Rolfe, a young stallion purchased when six months old by C. H. Nelson from W.P. Balch of Boston. In the fall of 1890 Nelson lowered the stallion record for a regulation mile track to 2:10 ¾ at Cambridge City, Indiana. Nelson was the subject of six prints by Currier and Ives.