
Northern Horse

American Eclipse as a Representative New Yorker

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In May 1823, 60,000 spectators converged on Long Island to watch a match race between the New York horse American Eclipse and the southern horse Henry. They ran at the “Heroic Distance”: four-mile heats repeated at half-hour intervals until a competitor had won twice. It was an epic, severely contested match. Henry led the first heat from the start and won by half a length, setting a four-mile record that would stand for twenty years. The horses rested and cooled and repeated the contest. Henry, running very fast, led for three miles until Eclipse challenged and passed him and won by a length. The time was faster than most experts had thought possible for a second four-mile heat. In the third and deciding heat, Eclipse outlasted his exhausted opponent and won by a length and a half.¹

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1. [Cadwallader R. Colden], “The Great Match Race between Eclipse and Sir Henry—Minutely Described by an Old Turfman,” *American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine* 2 (Sept. 1830), 3–12. Modern accounts: Melvin L. Adelman, *A Sporting Time: New York City and the Rise of Modern Athletics, 1820–1970* (Urbana, IL, 1986), 34–38; John Hervey, *Racing in America, 1665–1865* (New York, 1944), 1: 261–69; Nancy J. Struna, “The North–South Races: American Thoroughbred Racing in Transition, 1823–1850,” *Journal of Sport History* 8 (Summer 1981), 28–57; Doreen Bush, “First Battle Between North and South,” *American History Illustrated* (May 1976), 40–43; Duncan MacLeod, “Racing to War: Antebellum Match Races between the North and the South,” *Southern Exposure* 7 (Fall 1979), 7–10. John Eisenberg, *The Great Match Race: When North Met*

The match between Eclipse and Henry was America's first national sporting event. Coming on the heels of the Missouri controversy and nursed by awareness of the conflicting cultural and political imperatives of the sections, it was witnessed and remembered as a contest between North and South. An English visitor remarked that "In all the papers, and in every man's mouth, were the questions, 'Are you for the North or the South?' 'The Free or the Slave states?' 'The Whites or the Blacks?' . . . all the Free States wishing success to Eclipse, and the Slave States to 'Sir Henry.'" A spectator from Baltimore declared it "a victory on which seems to hang the fate of nations, yet unborn." Thirty years later John Pendleton Kennedy evoked "the race down the quarter stretch between Eclipse and Henry, when North and South hung suspended on the strife." "There is no one," recalled James Watson Webb at Eclipse's death in 1847, "who witnessed the great Eclipse race on Long Island in the year 1823 . . . who will ever forget the clear and distinct manifestation of a feeling known before to exist, but called forth and embodied in that contest, in a manner quite as unmistakable as unprecedented—of North and South."²

The race was more than the victory of a northern over a southern horse. It was a victory for a northern *type* of horse. Races at four-mile heats demanded heroic levels of speed and endurance, and breeders know that there is a trade-off between the two. Southerners favored speed. New Yorkers leaned toward power, and bred a line of horses noted for uncommon strength and stamina. The New York horseman Cadwallader R. Colden described the two combatants. Sir Henry, he said,

has been represented as being fifteen hands and one inch high, but having taken his measure, his exact height is only fourteen hands three and a half inches. His form

South in America's First Sports Spectacle (Boston, 2006), is underresearched and heavily fictionalized. American Eclipse was often called Eclipse, and Henry was often called Sir Henry. This essay will use both names for each horse.

2. [William Newnham Blane], *An Excursion through the United States and Canada, during the Years 1822-23* (London, 1824), 316-17; *Baltimore Patriot*, May 30, 1823; *Niles' Weekly Register* (Baltimore), May 31, 1823, 44; John Pendleton Kennedy, *The Blackwater Chronicle: Narrative of an Expedition into the Land of Canaan, in Randolph County, Virginia* (New York, 1853), 30; Webb quoted in *Spirit of the Times* (New York), July 31, 1847.

is compact, bordering on what is commonly called pony-built, with a good shoulder, fine clear head, and all those points which constitute a fine forehead. . . . [He] possesses great action and muscular power, and although rather under size, the exquisite symmetry of his form indicates uncommon strength and hardihood.

And the northern horse:

Eclipse is . . . said to be fifteen hands three inches in height, but in fact measures . . . only fifteen hands and two inches. He possesses great power and substance, being well spread and full made throughout his whole frame, his general mould being much heavier than what is commonly met with in the thorough bred blood horse; he is, however, right in the cardinal points, very deep in the girth, with a good length of waist; loin wide and strong; shoulder by no means fine, being somewhat thick and heavy, yet strong and deep; breast wide, and apparently too full, and too much spread for a horse of great speed; arms long, strong, and muscular; head by no means fine; neck somewhat defective. . . . [U]pon the whole his forehead is too heavy. His form throughout denotes uncommon strength, yet to the extraordinary construction of his hind quarter, I conceive him indebted for his great racing powers, continuance, and ability, equal to any weight.

Henry was comparatively small and fast. Eclipse was bigger and stronger, not as fast, and not nearly as good looking. He was, said a New York racing man, “an uncommon strong horse, though not in *my opinion* beautiful. . . . His essentials are strength, and that hitherto has brought him off victorious. He can take a *longer run* at full speed, than any horse I have ever seen.”³

New Yorkers took great pride in having beaten southern speed with northern stamina (horse people call it “bottom”). The *New-York Post* boasted that “the event has shewn that the opinion of the Northern Sportsmen is better than that of the Southern; that size and bone are essential to strength, & ought to be taken into calculation.” The *New York American* predicted before the race that “no horse can contend in strength and bottom with Eclipse,” and boasted afterwards that “the superior size and power of Eclipse, seemed . . . to astonish, and a little to dismay, the men of the South.” The *National Advocate* granted that

3. Colden, “The Great Match Race,” 5–6; *American Farmer* (Baltimore), Nov. 8, 1822.

Henry was “a colt of most surprising swiftness,” but was not surprised when Eclipse won, “the bottom of Eclipse proving superior to that of his antagonist.” At the post-race banquet, Manhattan’s Alexander Hosack toasted the theme of the day: “Southern pluck and Northern bottom.”⁴

The bodies of Henry and Eclipse demonstrate, first of all, that different peoples can shape the same animal differently for the same task. Henry was a son of Sir Archie, the foundation stallion of the southern racehorse between 1815 and the 1840s. Most Sir Archie horses were taller than Henry, but like him they were relatively light, elegant, and short-backed, and they were known for speed and high courage (see Figure 1). American Eclipse was a different animal. He was a grandson of Messenger, New York’s great progenitor of both running horses and the trotters who pulled coaches and carriages. Messenger’s descendants were thicker than southern racers. They were big-boned and heavily muscled, with long backs and powerful hindquarters. They had legendary strength and sturdiness, and many of them possessed coarse looks that were unexpected in thoroughbred horses (see Figure 2).⁵

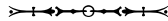
The fleet Sir Archie horse and the plain, powerful Messenger horse were southern and northern statements about what a racehorse should be, and they tell us something about the people who bred and admired them. This essay focuses on American Eclipse. It treats him as a northern artifact, and explains the practical, utilitarian reasons why he looked and performed as he did. It also suggests how New Yorkers, with southern elegance and speed as a counterpoint, imagined Eclipse, defended him, and made him a part of what they were.

4. *New-York Evening Post*, May 28, 1823; *New-York American*, May 29, 1823; *National Advocate* (Philadelphia), May 28, 1823; *New York Gazette*, reprinted in *the National Gazette* (Philadelphia), May 31, 1823.

5. On the two equine patriarchs, see Elizabeth Amis Cameron Blanchard and Manly Wade Wellman, *The Life and Times of Sir Archie: The Story of America’s Greatest Thoroughbred, 1805–1833* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1958); and John Hervey, *Messenger: The Great Progenitor* (New York, 1935). Messenger was by far the most important foundation of the Standard Bred trotting horse. Readers may request a written discussion of him and the characteristics of his line at pejohnson757@gmail.com.



Figure 1: Henry, painted by Edward Troye in 1834. Henry's thin, bony head, his long, curved neck, his slender legs, and his deer-like hooves resulted from Arab ancestry, southern aesthetics, and a preference for speed. Credit: The Jockey Club.



The lifetime of American Eclipse (1814–1847) corresponded with an explosive growth of cities, commerce, market farming, manufacturing, roads and canals, and consumer demand. Whatever we call this transformation—a market revolution, a communications revolution, a consumer revolution, a story of American liberty and get-up-and-go—we must acknowledge a long-neglected fact: It required a wholesale conversion to horsepower. Improved roads replaced the oxcart with the freight wagon, the stage coach, and the private buggy. Expanding markets encouraged farmers to get rid of their slow-moving oxen and to work with the quicker, stronger, and more expensive horse. In New York City and other seaports, ships met armies of wagons at the docks. Horse-carts and wagons hauled goods about the city, and hackneys, coaches, and private



Figure 2: American Eclipse, from a painting by Alvan Fisher (1823). Eclipse was a plain, powerful horse. He was 5½ inches taller than Henry and very much longer. His head was blunt, his neck was relatively short and straight, his shoulders and hindquarters were powerful, his legs were relatively short and muscular, the bones in his knees and hocks were large and pronounced (signs of strength and durability), and his hooves were bigger and less delicate than Henry's. The breeders of American Eclipse had sacrificed beauty and speed for power. Credit: *American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine* (1830).

gigs moved people through streets clogged with horse-drawn traffic. We tend to think that modernity outran the horse, and eventually it did. But throughout the nineteenth century, New Yorkers made their modern world in partnership with the horse.⁶

6. See Ann Norton Greene, *Horses at Work: Harnessing Power in Industrial America* (Cambridge, MA, 2008), 1–118; Clay McShane and Joel A. Tarr, *The Horse in the City: Living Machines in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore, 2007); Margaret E. Derry, *Horses in Society: A Story of Animal Breeding and Marketing Culture, 1800–1920* (Toronto, 2006).

American Eclipse was born into that partnership. His mother was a racing daughter of Messenger. His father was Duroc, a son of the Virginia horse Diomed (sire of Sir Archie), and thus kin to the best southern racers. Duroc was, however, a southern horse that looked like a northerner: tall, long-backed, big-boned and muscular, with the wide hips and open stride of a superior harness horse. A Long Islander bought Duroc hoping to cross him with an inbred Messenger line without changing its size and shape, and he sired hundreds of road horses. New York breeders never apologized for Duroc's southern origins. Indeed, they seldom mentioned them. As we shall see, they cared more about shapes and performances than about bloodlines, and Duroc gave them the big, strong colts that they wanted.⁷

At birth, Eclipse's racing future was uncertain. The New York legislature had banned racing in 1802, but sheriffs in Manhattan and on Long Island ignored the ban, and horses raced without legal sanction. In 1820, after a campaign that stressed the utility of thoroughbreds as all-purpose stallions, the legislature permitted racing in Queens County. The jockey club on Long Island renamed itself the New-York Association for the Improvement of the Breed of Horses, promising to breed thoroughbreds, identify the best of them on the race course, and then inject their speed, spirit, and power into working horses. Some, of course, saw the name as a mask for the disorder that attended the races. ("What next?" asked a Marylander, "*cock-fighting* for the improvement of *poultry*?") But New York horsemen took improvement seriously. They corresponded with similar organizations in America and Europe. They advertised races as "shows of horses," encouraged the importation of English and "Oriental" breeding animals, and awarded medals and premiums to their owners. Their rules of racing duplicated those of the southern clubs. In particular, they retained the long-distance heat races that had been abandoned in England. There were, however, important differences, all of which favored powerful horses. First, their Union Course was the first "skinned" (dirt) track in the United States. Dirt produced faster times than grass. It also put greater strain on the horses' legs, and thus provided a test of sturdiness. Second, the New Yorkers reduced the recovery time between four-mile heats from 45 to 30 minutes, increasing the

7. "Memoir of Duroc," *American Turf Register* 1 (Oct. 1829), 57-60; Henry T. Helm, *American Roadsters and Trotting Horses* (Chicago, 1878), 139-47.

demands on the racers' stamina. Finally, New York racehorses carried heavy weights. The "aged horse" Eclipse carried 126 pounds in the great race; the younger Henry carried 108. In the South, their burdens would have been 124 and 100 pounds respectively. Baltimore's *American Farmer*, the nation's first farm journal, applauded the New York rules: The New Yorkers "have judiciously directed their attention not only to *fleetness* and *continuance*, but to *power*, by requiring their horses to carry higher weights." The *New York Post* agreed: "The natural consequence [of heavier weights] is a breed of large, strong, serviceable horses. We hope they will not deviate from this wise course."⁸

New York breeders favored big, powerful thoroughbreds who would sire both racers and road horses. American Eclipse was a direct participant in that project. General Nathaniel Coles, the Long Island gentleman who bred Eclipse, raced him once and sold him to Cornelius W. Van Ranst in 1819. Van Ranst was a well-known racing man. He was also a Manhattan horse dealer. He sold carriages and harness horses; rented horses, carriages, and drivers to gentlemen visiting the city; and supplied teams for the mail stage to Albany. He had owned the stallion Messenger. He also owned Messenger's sons Tippoo Saib and Potowmac, distinguished sires of crossbred horses. Van Ranst, in short, made his fortune in the New York market for elite road horses. With his purchase by C. W. Van Ranst, American Eclipse entered the horse business.⁹

8. *New-York Columbian*, Oct. 2, 1820; *American Farmer* (Baltimore), May 13, 1825 (Marylander), Nov. 8, 1822 (Association), June 13, 1823 (Skinner); *New-York Evening Post*, May 28, 1823; weights: *Rules and Regulations of the Washington Jockey Club* (Washington, 1824), 8; John B. Irving, *The South Carolina Jockey Club* (1857; repr. Spartanburg, SC, 1975), 191; "Rules and Regulations of the Richmond Jockey Club," in Richard Mason, *The Gentleman's New Pocket Farrier: Comprising a General Description of the Noble and Useful Animal, the Horse, and Addendas* (Philadelphia, 1841), 412. The New Yorkers were not alone. Horsemen in Massachusetts had adopted the name in 1811, and in the 1820s every known racing club north of Washington, D.C. called itself an Association for the Improvement of the Breed of Horses. *Boston Gazette*, Sept. 30, 1811; *New-York Columbian*, Oct. 2, 1820; *Baltimore Patriot*, Aug. 27, 1823 and Sept. 14, 1829; *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, Sept. 4, 1823; *American Turf Register* 4 (Oct. 1832), 92. Associations south of the Potomac uniformly called themselves jockey clubs.

9. [Cornelius W. Van Ranst], *Authentic History of the Celebrated Horse American Eclipse* (New York, 1823), 14; Van Ranst's horse business: *New-York Evening Post*, June 4, 1806, Apr. 23, 1811, Jan. 28, 1812, Apr. 5, 1814, Dec. 9, 1815, Jan. 30, 1817, Dec. 27, 1820, Jan. 27, 1821, July 16, 1821; [Van Ranst], "Some

Van Ranst raced American Eclipse twice at four-mile heats, and won both contests. Having established Eclipse's reputation on the track, he put the horse to stud on Long Island in 1820 and 1821. The stud notice announced Eclipse as "the greatest RACER in the United States," and offered to match him at four-mile heats against any horse. Van Ranst probably knew that there would be no takers. Eclipse had beaten the best horses in the North, and southerners were unlikely to take their horses to New York to run illegal races. The challenge did, however, advertise Eclipse's value as a breeding animal. Eclipse's stud fee was \$12.50 "the leap," low for a racehorse, but at the high end for the breeders of working horses. He stood in Queens County, where some large farms were devoted to horses, and where many farmers bred horses as an auxiliary crop. Van Ranst announced that Eclipse's "unrivalled performances on the Courses of the Island . . . have been witnessed by a great number of its respectable farmers." Some of Eclipse's matings were with thoroughbreds. Most, however, were with country mares that produced horses for the road.¹⁰

In 1821 Eclipse interrupted his career in animal husbandry to defeat the good southern racing mare Lady Lightfoot, a daughter of Sir Archie. A week later, he was back in the horse business, entering the stallion competition at the New-York County Agricultural Society Cattle Show and Fair. It was his second appearance at the fair, and this time the judges awarded him a silver cup as New York's best breeding stallion. At the awards ceremony, C. W. Van Ranst shared the spotlight with the breeders of huge pigs and fat cattle, with the growers of fine celery, parsnips, and rutabaga, and with Mr. Peter Cooper, who exhibited a "fine specimen of glue." It was odd company for a racehorse. Yet American Eclipse shared that company with the best racehorses and the most prominent horsemen in New York.¹¹

Ties between racing and agricultural reform were substantial, and they were new. American agricultural societies were founded in the 1790s by

Account of the Bred Horses Which Have Been Owned by C.W. Van Ranst, Esq.," *American Turf Register* 3 (Oct. 1831), 49–60.

10. Van Ranst, *Authentic History*, 19–20; Stud notices: *Long Island Star* (Brooklyn, NY), Apr. 26, 1820 (quote) and Apr. 13, 1821; *New York American*, June 2, 1820.

11. *New-York Evening Post*, Oct. 25, 1821; *National Advocate* (Philadelphia), Nov. 8, 1820.

Federalist gentlemen who imported prize cattle and sheep, made experiments in horticulture, and wrote learned essays on rural subjects. They neither encouraged nor received support from practical farmers, and they declined after a few years. After 1815, a revived rural reform movement abandoned the old Federalist gentility and took up the language of National Republicanism. With subsidies from state governments (which reformers in New York and other northern states enjoyed), agricultural reform would become part of an orchestrated wave of economic and social progress. Agriculture was, according to a Long Island reformer, “the imperishable basis of the wealth, grandeur, and power of nations.” But farming was a nation-builder only in cooperation with commerce and manufactures. “The suspicions drawn between them by many public writers [nearly all of them southern] can never apply to us. In our country, these three branches of industry, wealth, and power . . . sustain each other by reciprocal patronage.” At the banquet that ended the New-York County Cattle Show and Fair in 1821, the first toast went up to “*Agriculture*—The first of arts; elevated in rank with the noblest sciences,” quickly followed by toasts to “*Domestic Manufactures*,” “*Commerce and Navigation*,” and “*Internal Improvements*.” More toasts to comity and interdependence came from Massachusetts: “*Agriculture, Commerce, and Manufactures*—Uncle Sam’s three buxom Daughters; May neither hold her head too high to contribute her equal share in the support of this growing family.”¹²

Horses were important objects of this spirit. The reformers of the 1790s had paid no attention to horses, sometimes branding them as luxuries that were irrelevant to agriculture. In the following decades the horse became a necessary and useful animal, and thoroughbred stallions and brood mares were the most popular attractions at the fairs. They were celebrities, of course, but they also presented opportunities for

12. *Long Island Star* (Brooklyn, NY), Jan. 6, 1819; *New-York Evening Post*, Mar. 14, 1821; *New England Farmer* (Boston), 3 (1825), 98. On the agricultural societies: Tamara Plakins Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen: The Meaning of Country Life among the Boston Elite, 1785–1860* (New Haven, CT, 1989); chronology of animal improvement: Peter D. McClelland, *Sowing Modernity: America’s First Agricultural Revolution* (Ithaca, NY, 1997), 230–35; state governments: Percy Wells Bidwell and John I. Falconer, *History of Agriculture in the Northern United States, 1620–1860* (New York, 1941), 184–95. The New York legislation was printed in the *Long Island Star* (NY), Apr. 14, 1819.

profit. The judges who awarded American Eclipse his silver cup knew his racing reputation. They praised him, however, as a powerful stallion who promised good working progeny. He possessed “great muscular strength, together with activity, precision and uniformity in his movements. These qualities well combined, constitute . . . the essential value of a horse, and render him most competent to the performance of any service for which he may be required.”¹³

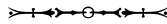
The utility of American Eclipse and other New York racers was in siring crossbred harness horses, and the market in such horses was booming. Farmers who bred horses as a sideline could make money with relatively little labor or expense, and gentleman-reformers encouraged them. The *American Farmer* asserted that “We want the half and three fourth bred, by large, spirited mares, to give us fine horses for the road.” New York’s Board of Agriculture agreed: “Horses sell for more money in this state, than any other animals in proportion; the great transportation which is continually going on, the stock which is wanted by the mail contractors and stages, and for private purposes, will . . . keep the demand more than equal to the production; probably no stock will for some time be more profitable to raise than fine horses.” For the farmer with a good common mare and the gentleman with a celebrated racing stallion, improving the breed was both a public service and a good way to make money.¹⁴

In 1823 American Eclipse was the best racehorse in the United States. He was, however, no pampered aristocrat. He was bred and used within the commercial horse trade of metropolitan New York. His gentleman-breeder indulged a passion for thoroughbreds, but he phrased that

13. *American Farmer* (Baltimore), Oct. 19, 1827; *Memoir of the New York State Board of Agriculture* 1 (1821), 334; early reformers and horses: Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen*, 108n, 182.

14. Horses the most popular attraction: *Long Island Star* (Brooklyn, NY), Nov. 15, 1820; *New-York Evening Post*, Oct. 24, 1821; *American Farmer* (Baltimore), July 5, 1822. Both the racing association and the agricultural societies in New York were sprinkled with men who were in the horse business: the proprietors of stage lines, dealers in horses, the operators of horse farms, even a pioneer veterinarian. In striking contrast, racing and agricultural reform were mutually exclusive pursuits in Virginia. The state agricultural society published a list of 230 members in 1818. None of them—not one—was a known member of the racing community. Membership list: *Memoir of the Society of Virginia for Promoting Agriculture* (Richmond, VA, 1818), xi–xiii.

indulgence as a public service: “Success to the turf,” toasted Gen. Coles after Eclipse defeated Henry, “the only means of promoting the breed of fine horses.” Eclipse was owned and raced by a Manhattan horse dealer. He spent two seasons siring horses for the road, and he was surrounded by a racing association, agricultural societies, and newspaper talk that conflated racing with the improvement of working horses. New Yorkers knew American Eclipse as a sporting hero, to be sure. They also knew him as a useful animal that helped provide the horsepower that was transforming their world.¹⁵



The road horses sired by American Eclipse and other northern racers did more than haul stagecoaches and carry the mail. They carried private families as well, contributing to what Richard Bushman calls the “Refinement of America.” Objects that had been emblems of power and privilege in the eighteenth century were adopted by a rising middle class. As signs of the old gentility (cultivated manners, aesthetic taste, upholstered furniture, decorative gardens, and the like) became more widely available they became more private, less flamboyant, and less explicitly associated with power. They retained much of their old cachet, but middling people naturalized them into a new way of life. The old artifacts of gentility now performed their cultural work under the banner of respectability.¹⁶

The horse and buggy provides a pitch-perfect example of that transition. In the eighteenth century only the very rich owned carriages. Driven by servants or slaves and powered by expensive, ornamental horses, these were mobile drawing rooms—curtained and upholstered (sound-proofed) compartments in which wealthy families traveled “at home,” undisturbed by the plain folk who walked or rumbled along in ox carts. That changed in the first half of the nineteenth century. The occasional grand equipage now shared the roads with stages and freight wagons, and with a great variety of two-wheeled, one-horse chaises (Americans called them “shays”) and four-wheeled carriages. These were smaller and less luxurious than the coaches of the old elite, and

15. Toast: *New York Gazette*, cited in *Richmond Enquirer* (VA), June 3, 1823.

16. Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York, 1992).

they did not require servant-drivers. A growing proportion of middle-class northerners owned horses and drove wheeled vehicles. In rural Massachusetts in the 1820s about one farm family in seven owned a gig or carriage. In Kings County, Long Island, though the figures are less reliable, the number was one in four or five. By the 1840s, fully four in ten families in Dover, Delaware, and the surrounding county owned carriages. Henry William Herbert (his readers knew him as “Frank Forester”) guessed that by 1850 New Yorkers who traveled by chaise and carriage outnumbered those on horseback by twenty to one.¹⁷

Ownership of a horse (ideally, a Messenger horse) and carriage became a widely acknowledged sign that one had arrived. A man who grew up in Huntington, Long Island recalled that “When [the almost certainly apocryphal] Squire John brought home his first carriage, and rode to church in it on Sunday, with his pair of fine colts all dressed in new harness, his old-fashioned neighbor could not stand it; he must have one too; and so it went. . . . The fine turnout on Sunday came to be the mark of respectability; and who could afford to be not respectable?” Public appearances may have been particularly important to women. The Englishman William Cobbett farmed for a year on Long Island, and he preferred oxen for farm work. But travel by ox cart had become an unfashionable embarrassment: “What! The ladies will say, ‘would you have us to be shut up at home all our lives; or be dragged about by oxen?’” (This from farm women whose mothers and grandmothers had routinely traveled by ox cart.)¹⁸

Squire John and the women in Cobbet’s household were learning to define and display themselves with what they bought. In ways that had been available only to the wealthy and powerful in the eighteenth century, they made choices about food and its preparation, furniture and its deployment in the house, clothing, books, and other purchased goods,

17. Jack Larkin, *The Reshaping of Everyday Life, 1790–1840* (New York, 1988), 213–18 (quote 216); M. Hunt Hessler, “The Spirit of Progress: Horse-Drawn Transportation on Long Island, 1800–1900,” in *19th Century American Carriages: Their Manufacture, Decoration, and Use* (Stony Brook, NY, 1987), 130–39; Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 229; Henry William Herbert, *Frank Forester’s Horse and Horsemanship of the United States and British Provinces of North America* (2 vols.; New York, 1857), 2: 721.

18. Hessler, “The Spirit of Progress,” 126; William Cobbett, *A Year’s Residence in the United States of America* (London, 1819), 181–82.

then stitched those goods into ensembles that signified who they were. The horse and buggy were among the most expensive, public, and widely recognized items of commoditized respectability. They signaled the same democratization of convenience and comfort as parlor goods, the same embrace of commerce, and the same rejection of deference and patriarchy. At the same time, they signaled a new social hierarchy. A modern scholar sums it up: the harness horse “was a symbol simultaneously of social status and of democratic values.”¹⁹

New York road horses neither walked nor galloped. They moved at a trot. “Trotting,” said a British visitor to New York, “is everything with *them*.” “All carriages are driven at a trot,” wrote James Stuart, while another Britisher reported that packet (passenger) boats on the Erie Canal were pulled by three horses, “a boy riding on one of them and keeping them at a trot.” Yet another Englishman complained that one could not rent a good saddle horse in New York, where all the horses were trotters. The trot was a brisk, purposeful gait. It was comfortable for horses traveling long distances, it pulled the load steadily and without lurching, and it was reasonably safe. It was also, even at speed, a disciplined gait that gave the roads and the people who traveled them an air of comfort and efficiency. Among the sounds that signified progress to northern ears, perhaps none was more ubiquitous than the controlled, metronomic clop of the trotting horse.²⁰

On the road, the trotter sacrificed flashiness for precision and understated power. The driver enjoyed control over a powerful animal, but with none of the direct mastery projected by the man on horseback. Like the southern gentleman’s saddle horse, the trotter was bound up with masculinity and power—but in a peculiarly northern, nineteenth-century way. The new middle-class man left aggressive, extravagant gestures to the thoughtless rich and the thoughtless poor. His public posture was

19. Greene, *Horses at Work*, 114. See Bushman, *Refinement of America*; and David Jaffee, *A New Nation of Goods: The Material Culture of Early America* (Philadelphia, 2010).

20. Herbert, *Frank Forester’s Horse and Horsemanship*, 2: 126–27; John Robert Godly, *Letters from America* (London, 1844), 2:61; Joseph Pickering, *Emigration or No Emigration; Being the Narrative of the Author (An English Farmer) from the Year 1824 to 1830* (London, 1830), 34; James Stuart, *Three Years in North America* (2 vols.; New York, 1833), 1: 273.

composed, inward-turning, controlled—a private outpost in public space. The horse and buggy elevated him above dirt and disorder, and he passed through the world without threatening it or being threatened. The wheeled vehicle also invited the owner's family to ride (and thus domesticated the look and meaning of riding), and it allowed the head of the family to mediate his power with wheels, long reins, upholstered seats, family chatter, and, underneath all of them, the good nineteenth-century roads for which he voted and in which he placed great faith.²¹

The trotter was a bourgeois horse. At the same time, the trotter, like cars today, became an article of consumer desire that transcended utility and social class. New Yorkers who did not own them wanted them, and very few wanted other kinds of horses. While trotting horses signaled respectability to improvement-minded New Yorkers, others learned to sport with them. Independent skilled workmen found that horses and wagons helped with their work, and that driving them was a lot of fun. Frank Forrester tells us that “Every tradesman, artisan, businessman, or mechanic, whose affairs require the services of a horse, in America, keeps, as that by which he can alone combine profit with pleasure, a fast and hardy trotter.” The best-known working-class horsemen were the butchers, workers who hauled carcasses and delivered dressed meat with the help of horses. The butchers controlled their own trade. They finished work by mid-morning, and spent their afternoons at fire houses, taverns, and stables. The butchers and most other working-class equestrians trotted under saddle. They rode in city parades, and they took great pride in their horses and horsemanship. J. S. Skinner, editor of the *American Farmer*, tells us that butchers “spare neither pains nor expense to gain a reputation for owning a crack goer. This sort of emulation so infects the class, as to have given rise to a common saying that ‘*a butcher always rides a trotter.*’” The butchers and other workmen made horsemanship a part of their occupational style. But many who had no practical use for horses spent large portions of their resources on keeping a horse. A fully outfitted Bowery B'hoy, for example, possessed more than

21. Greene, *Horses at Work*, 26; Derry, *Horses in Society*, 33–38. An insightful treatment of middle-class comportment in public informs Dell Upton, *Another City: Urban Life and Urban Spaces in the New American Republic* (New Haven, CT, 2008).

distinctive clothing and a pugnacious attitude. He was very likely to own or have access to a trotting horse.²²

New Yorkers were developing a distinctive taste for riding and sport driving with trotting horses, and sportsmen appropriated two roads at the edges of town as their own. The Harlem Road (Third Avenue), completed in 1807, ran six miles from lower Broadway to the village of Harlem. The Jamaica Turnpike stretched from the Brooklyn Ferry to Queens County. The best trotters on those roads belonged to wealthy sportsmen. But thousands of other trotting aficionados were, according to John Skinner, “respectable and independent mechanics, and others” who formed trotting clubs. (A less friendly account described them as “principally of the lower order, owning horses.”) Pleasure rides, road trials, club races, and impromptu matches crowded the Harlem and Jamaica roads on fair afternoons throughout the nineteenth century. On the Harlem Road, said an Irish actor in the 1830s, “Young men of all classes” gathered to drive for pleasure, test their horses, and lounge at the taverns that dotted the road. The trotting, he said, was the fastest in the world. “The first time I was whirled along this road at the heels of one of the crack goers of the city, amidst clouds of dust through which the rushing of other vehicles might be dimly made out, and startled by the wild cries used by the rival drivers, at once to encourage their horses and prove the impossibility of scaring them into breaking up, I thought it one of the most exciting things I had ever met.”²³

22. Herbert, *Frank Forester's Horse and Horsemanship*, 2: 126–27; John Skinner, “The American Trotter,” in William Youatt, *The Horse, together with a General History of the Horse* (Philadelphia, 1843), 50. On the butchers, see Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788–1850* (New York, 1984), 137–39; and Elliott J. Gorn, “‘Good-Bye Boys, I Die a True American’: Homicide, Nativism, and Working-Class Culture in Antebellum New York City,” *Journal of American History* 74 (Sept. 1987), 388–410. The classic account of butchers and trotters is Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (2 vols.; London, 1851), 1: 175–77.

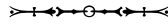
23. Skinner, “American Trotter”; “Lower orders,” *National Advocate* (New York), Mar. 22, 1820; Tyrone Power, *Impressions of America during the Years 1833, 1834, and 1835* (Philadelphia, 1836), 1: 56–57. For descriptions of early trotting on these roads, see Herbert, *Frank Forester's Horse and Horsemanship*, 2: 133ff; Dwight Akers, *Drivers Up: The Story of American Harness Racing* (New York, 1938), 27–40; and Peter C. Welsh, *Track and Road: The American Trotting Horse* (Washington, DC, 1967).

Sport driving, both high and low, was on full display when New Yorkers drove the Jamaica Turnpike to the races on Long Island. In 1819 the journalist Mordecai Noah wrote a fanciful “Journal of a Dandy” who drives his Tilbury gig to the races, viewing “a post chaise filled with four sailors—four dandies on horseback—a man with a portable soda water shop . . . , a coach containing a late resident of the penitentiary,” and much, much more along the way. On the morning of the Eclipse–Henry match, a merchant viewed coaches and carriages lined up for the ferries to Brooklyn, “all filled with Ladies & Dandies, high & low life, waiting their turns.” At Brooklyn “carriages of every description formed an unbroken line from the ferry to the ground.” “There were many fine horses on the ground,” said an Englishman who had braved the ride to the Eclipse–Henry match, “and some driving that would have *taken* in Picadilly.”²⁴

Early on, trotting matches became a part of New York race meetings. Trotters competed at the Union Course races in 1822. They competed again on the first day of the meeting that featured Henry and Eclipse. The trotting sportsmen built their own track in 1826. They stole most of racing’s popular audience, and harness racing became the great northern spectator sport of the nineteenth century. The running horses, though they drew an occasional crowd for a North–South match race, went into decline. Frank Forester explained: the trotter was “the most truly characteristic and national type of the horse, and phase of horsemanship, in America.” (By “America,” Frank Forrester usually meant New York.) “Trotting, in America,” he concluded, “is the people’s sport, the people’s pastime, and, consequently, is, and will be, supported by the people.” Oliver Wendell Holmes would put it more simply: “Horse *racing* is not a republican institution; horse *trotting* is.”²⁵

24. *National Advocate* (New York), June 4, 1819; Patrick Shirreff, *A Tour through North America; Together with a Comprehensive View of the Canadas and the United States, as Adapted for Agricultural Emigration* (Edinburgh, 1835), 10; [John Pintard], *Letters from John Pintard to His Daughter, Eliza Noel Pintard Davidson, 1816–1833* (New York, 1941), 2: 136; Josiah Quincy, Jr., *Figures from the Past, from the Leaves of Old Journals* (Boston, 1883), 96; Simeon Dewitt Bloodgood, *An Englishman’s Sketchbook; or, Letters from New York* (New York, 1828), 44.

25. Trotting matches at flat-race meetings: *New-York Evening Post*, Oct. 11, 1813, May 22, 1822; *Long Island Star* (Brooklyn, NY), May 29, 1823; *Niles’ Weekly Register* (Baltimore), May 31, 1823. On the rise of organized harness racing



The southern market for harness horses was small. The big southern farms sat near navigable rivers, and commerce moved on water. Most roads were too narrow and poorly maintained to support wheeled traffic, and gentlemen as well as plain folk traveled on horseback. In the fields, planters kept their oxen longer than did northern farmers, and when they got rid of oxen they tended to replace them with mules. The mule was cheaper to buy and feed than the horse, he worked well in hot weather, he had a long working life, and he was nearly indestructible. He also lacked the horse's breeding, status, and sexual potency and was thus, in the minds of planters, better suited to the slaves who worked with him. The region did not have the road traffic, the large middle class, or the free working class that drove the market for trotting horses in the North, and the southern gentry, even when roads provided a choice, preferred riding to driving. A South Carolinian proudly saluted "our bacon-eating, horse-riding, mule driving countrymen."²⁶

The well-bred southern horse was an elite riding animal, and southern horse talk was an elite conversation. Much of that talk was distilled in Richard Mason's *Gentleman's New Pocket Farrier*, published in Richmond in eight editions between 1811 and 1842. The book was intended for gentlemen with good horses, particularly those with an interest in racing. It began as a book of farriery, with instructions on stabling, shoeing, and so on, and with remedies for equine illnesses and injuries. New editions added essays on Virginia turf history, the training of racehorses, the rules of the Richmond Jockey Club, and the rudiments of an American stud book. Virginia and North Carolina horsemen, we are told, trusted Mason's book.²⁷

and the decline of flat racing, see Akers, *Drivers Up*; and Adelman, *A Sporting Time*, 27–73. Quotes: Herbert, *Frank Forester's Horse and Horsemanship*, 2: 127; Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table," *Atlantic Monthly* 1 (Nov. 1857), 178.

26. Greene, *Horses at Work*, 40–42, 88–89. Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (New York, 1967), 106–23, remains useful and evocative on these questions. Quote: *South Carolina State Gazette* (Columbia), Oct. 6, 1827.

27. The catalogue of the Virginia Historical Society lists eight Richmond editions, the last in 1841. On the book, its background, and its importance to the

Early on, Mason lists the qualities of a superior saddle horse. First, of course, the horse must be beautiful: “he must be clear of all defects, strike the fancy, entirely please the eye.” “In order that he may have just claim to beauty and elegance,” Mason went on, the horse must exhibit perfection in an excruciating list of small points. “[H]is head must be small, thin, bony, and tapering [i.e. he must be full of Arab blood]; his countenance lively and cheerful; his ears quick of action, high, erect, narrow, thin, and pointing together.” The neck must be long and arched; the mane one-half the width of the neck. Mason went on through the short back and muscled legs and hindquarters until he reached the tail, “well placed, and naturally or artificially elegant, which adds much to his figure and gay appearance.” “A beautiful horse displays nature in her highest polish and greatest perfection” Mason wrote. “His gay and cheerful appearance, proudly prancing and bounding, his elegance of shape, smoothness of limbs, polish of skin, due proportion of form, and gracefulness of action, united to a mild, soft, faithful, and patient disposition, raise him far above the rest of the brute creation.”²⁸

A gentleman’s horse, in short, was like a gentleman’s woman or the favored slaves who managed his house and stables. He was cheerful and spirited. But he was spirited within the limits (“mild, soft, faithful”) of ultimate submission, his eyes “sparkling with cheerfulness, yet hushing his agitated passions in order and obedience.” This was true not only when the horse ran free but when he was under saddle. “When mounted his appearance should be bold, lofty, and majestic; his eyes shining with intrepidity and fire, his movements light and airy as a phantom.” A good horse was a noble animal who cheerfully submitted his powers to a worthy master. He was, like a good woman or the best of slaves, a spirited and contented participant in a world owned by gentlemen. As one Virginian put it, the horse was “the noble animal to be cherished as the companion of our manly pleasures and glorious achievements.”²⁹

racing community, see Fairfax Harrison, *The Background of the American Stud Book* (Richmond, VA, 1933), 24–28, 63–64, 85–86.

28. Mason, *Gentleman’s New Pocket Farrier*, 16–17, 13–14.

29. Mason, *Gentleman’s New Pocket Farrier*, 16–17; *American Farmer* (Baltimore), Feb. 1823, 4. Here the southerners followed developments in elite horsemanship in Britain and Europe, where the relation between a gentleman and his horse was transformed from stylized domination to sporting partnership in the eighteenth century. See Donna Landry, *Noble Brutes: How Eastern Horses Transformed English Culture* (Baltimore, 2008); the essays in Karen L. Raber and Treva

Southern thoroughbreds at stud were advertised for their spotless pedigrees and their impressive performances on the track, but a noble bearing was also crucial. The highest praise was that a horse was “commanding.” Medley, according to his owner, possessed looks that were “commanding, admired, and approved.” As for Sir Charles, never “was any horse ever more admired for form, beauty, and commanding appearance.” Not surprising, for the appearance of Sir Archie, the father and grandfather of Sir Charles and Medley, was “fine and commanding.” The word denoted great physical presence, a hint of intimidation, and an easy sense of superiority. The southern race horse, in short, was an aristocrat. Retired to stud, Medley possessed “the buoyant bearing and self complacent expression of a highly pampered animal, exulting in the glory of past achievements.” Sir Charles demonstrated a more active nobility in his match with Sir William: “The rein was given, and the generous steed, fired with ambition and a proud sense of superiority, burst away from his competitors.” The owner of Sir Charles boasted that his horse had chased Sir William out of Virginia. The owner of Sir William demanded a rematch, and couched his challenge in language that Virginians understood: “*Touch my horse, you touch my honor.*”³⁰

American Eclipse had touched southern honor. Southerners responded, predictably enough, by attacking his ancestry. “Some of these gentlemen have asserted,” said the *Post* in 1823, “that Eclipse was not a horse of genuine blood and bottom, or to use their own coarse expression, that ‘*he was after all only a dunghill.*’” At the post-race banquet a Virginian responded to New Yorkers’ boasts about their horses: “True English blood,” he said, “will never degenerate on our [Virginia’s] soil.”³¹

The North–South argument about American Eclipse persisted for

J. Tucker, eds., *The Culture of the Horse: Status, Discipline, and Identity in the Early Modern World* (New York, 2005); and Daniel Roche, “Equestrian Culture in France from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century,” *Past and Present* 199 (May 2008), 113–45.

30. Medley: *Richmond Whig* (VA), Mar. 14 1829; Sir Charles: *Richmond Enquirer* (VA), Feb. 19, 1831; “Memoir of Sir Archie,” *American Turf Register* 1 (Dec. 1829), 165; “Medley,” *American Turf Register* 5 (Apr. 1833), 438; “Memoir of Sir Charles,” *American Turf Register* 1 (June 1830), 474; “Touch,” *Baltimore Patriot*, Nov. 20, 1822.

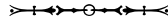
31. *New-York Evening Post*, June 7, 1823, and May 29, 1823.

many years, and it always centered on blood. Yet we cannot define what “true English blood” meant in 1823. The English stud book had closed the breed of thoroughbred horses in 1798, but Americans paid little attention until well into the nineteenth century. A British traveler in the 1830s disclosed that “in all parts of the Union . . . a well-bred horse is termed a ‘blooded’ horse.” Stallions advertised as “blooded” or “full bred” claimed direct male descent from an English race horse, but pedigrees were seldom complete. The rules of American racing associations did not specify breeding requirements, and a number of non-thoroughbreds competed on the tracks. Perhaps the best known of these was Walk-on-the-Water, a Virginia-born son of Sir Archie who raced successfully for many years. His mother, according to a North Carolinian, was a pacing mare “worth about forty dollars.”³²

American horsemen began paying greater attention to pedigree in the 1820s, and the impetus came from the South. When Eclipse began covering southern mares around 1830, southern guardians of “true English blood” warned that he would pollute the South’s perfect herd. Like many racers, Eclipse’s male line was documented, but some of his female ancestors were unknown and, worse, unknowable. In particular, the full pedigrees of Eclipse’s maternal grandmother and great-grandmother (the mother and grandmother of Messenger) were unrecorded. Patrick Nisbett Edgar, compiler of Virginia’s *Race-Turf Register, Sportsman’s Herald, and American Stud Book* (1833), pronounced American Eclipse “not a thorough bred horse on the side of his dam.” “The New Yorkers,” wrote a Virginian, “should do a little more for their favourite, American Eclipse. We now wish to know . . . *the g. dam &c. of Mr. Constable’s imported mare, by Pot8os* [the maternal grandmother of Eclipse]; *her dam by Gimcrack* [the great-grandmother].” New Yorkers, he told the *Turf Register*, were deficient in such matters. “If New York can do nothing in this last difficulty, there are probably gentlemen, in the old dominion, who could relieve your subscribers and constant readers.” A North Carolinian, equally steeped in equine bloodlore and contempt for the

32. Godfrey T. Vigne, *Six Months in America*, 2 vols. (London, 1832), 2: 8; Walk-in-the-Water: James Douglas Anderson and Balie Peyton, *Making the American Thoroughbred; Especially in Tennessee, 1800–1845* (1916; repr. Memphis, TN, 2010), 139–42; quote: [A.J. Davie], “Dissertation on the Blood Horse, Breeding for the Turf, the Road, &c., &c.,” *American Turf Register* 4 (Nov. 1832), 117.

New Yorkers, asserted that “American Eclipse is not known to be pure in all his crosses. They have been asked for the blood of Dolly Fyne, by Silver Eye. They have not answered. They have been asked for the pedigree of Cade, by Moreton’s Traveller. They have failed to answer; but, they have this merit—they do not fret.”³³



In fact, American Eclipse was as verifiably thoroughbred as most southern racers, and New Yorkers knew that. They also knew that pedigrees protected the thoroughbred (“blooded,” “full-bred”) brand name, and thus the market value of their horses. But New York breeders did not look at blood as the repository of equine perfection. They treated it as a natural resource to be crafted into useful animals, and their defense of American Eclipse rested on the language of utility and the methods of agricultural reform.

While elite Englishmen perfected the thoroughbred in the late eighteenth century, other Englishmen improved pigs, sheep, cattle, and working horses. They determined the characteristics that they wanted (meatier cattle, stronger horses), and chose foundation animals—regardless of ancestry—that possessed those characteristics and that reliably passed them on to their progeny. Through intensive inbreeding, they created herds of the desired type, protected those herds from sexual interlopers, and marketed them as improved breeds. New Yorkers often talked about American Eclipse in the way that reformers talked about cattle and hogs. First, they were less interested in the niceties of Eclipse’s pedigree than in his likeness to the foundation stallion of his breeding line. A letter to the *New-York Evening Post* responded to attacks on the purity of American Eclipse by noting that he looked like his great-grandfather, the English racehorse Eclipse. English Eclipse was thick and muscular. “His figure,” said the *Post*’s informant, “did not please

33. Edgar, cited in [Cadwallader R. Colden], “American Eclipse,” *American Turf Register* 3 (Mar. 1832), 370; [“A Breeder”], “On the Necessity of Further Information as to the Pedigree of Duroc and American Eclipse,” *American Turf Register* 2 (Apr. 1831), 378; [William Williams], “Importance of Authentic Pedigrees,” *American Turf Register* 2 (Apr. 1831), 304. See the discussion of blood purity and fears of pollution in Harriet Ritvo, *The Platypus and the Mermaid and Other Figments of the Classifying Imagination* (Cambridge, MA, 1997), esp. 85–130.

the eye of the pretended connoisseurs.” “Now, let me ask any horseman, who is acquainted with Long Island Eclipse,” he went on, “whether . . . this description may not be satisfactorily transferred to [American Eclipse.]” From that (regardless of the questionable mares, and thus regardless of completed pedigrees) the *Post* concluded that “Eclipse can boast of being descended of the noblest, purest blood that ever ran in English veins.”³⁴

In New York, shapes and performance were good enough evidence of pedigree. The manager of the stallion Duroc Messenger, for instance, invited prospective breeders to “examine both the horse and his stock for themselves, as it is presumed they will prove a better and more satisfactory recommendation than any other.” Similarly, farmers thinking about breeding to the full-blooded stallion Drone were invited to “call and see him, where he stands, and where his stock will be seen, which will be a more convincing recommendation than any thing that can be said of him.” Then there was the mysterious imported stallion Engineer. “The manner he came into this country,” said his owner, “is such that I cannot give an account of his pedigree, but his courage and activity shews the purity of his blood, which is much better than the empty sound of a long pedigree.”³⁵

Duroc Messenger, Drone, and Engineer were breeders of high-end workhorses, and their advertisements reflected the progeny-tested methods of the agricultural reformers. They were, however, the same assumptions that guided the New York Association for the Improvement of the Breed of Horses: Racing would identify the most promising breeding stallions, the best of whom would sire horses that looked and performed like themselves. The Westchester County breeder James Bathgate cared nothing for the distant pedigree of American Eclipse: “So well known, and in such estimation is the blood of Eclipse and [the brood mare]

34. *New-York Evening Post*, May 31, 1823. See Nicholas Russell, *Like Engendering Like: Heredity and Animal Breeding in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, UK, 1986); Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Era* (Cambridge, MA, 1987), 45–81; and Ritvo, “Possessing Mother Nature: Genetic Capital in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” in *Noble Cows & Hybrid Zebras: Essays on Animals & History* (Charlottesville, VA, 2010), 157–76.

35. Duroc Messenger: *Ithaca Journal and General Advertiser* (NY), May 18, 1831; Drone: *Political Barometer* (Poughkeepsie, NY), Apr. 30, 1811; Engineer: *Long Island Star* (Brooklyn, NY), May 8, 1816.

Maid of the Oaks held, by sportsmen of the North, that they rarely think it necessary to trace a horse beyond them—the performance of themselves and their respective families being of the first order, both for speed and endurance.” Similarly, in 1823 the *New-York Post* insisted on the pure blood of Eclipse, but only “to relieve [the southerners’] pride from the stinging mortification that must necessarily arise, from the consideration that such an imputation [the “dunghill” remark] upon the conquering horse must, if deserved, carry with it of course tenfold reproach upon him that was conquered.”³⁶

New Yorkers overlooked gaps in the pedigree of American Eclipse, and they took little interest in blood purity or its obvious resonance with inherited nobility among people. The few surviving projections of human traits onto Eclipse had nothing to do with noble birth. Against Sir Henry, Eclipse “breathed defiance.” Against Sir Charles he “kicked and snorted to get away from thralldom.” Aristocrats are neither defiant nor in thrall. Their democratic opponents often are. “Eclipse is too much of a republican for the southern jockies,” said the *New York Spectator* in 1822. “Both Sir Walter and Sir Charles [Sir Henry was in the future, and Lady Lightfoot was not mentioned] have been forced to yield to the plain, untitled Eclipse of Long Island.” James Fenimore Cooper reported that in defeating Sir Charles, Eclipse was simply “doing his work.” Sam Purdy, the jockey who rode Eclipse to victory in all of his big races, “better than any man living, probably knew the temperament of Eclipse, and how to get his work out of him.” While Virginians spoke of racehorses in the language of noble birth, New Yorkers applauded American Eclipse as a plain, hardworking republican.³⁷

The same horse culture shaped the northern critique of southern horses. Sir Archie’s sons and daughters, according to the New Yorkers, were the useless toys of wealthy men—short-lived, delicate, and prone to sickness and injury, they could not show up for a race without an excuse. When Messenger’s son Bright Phoebus upset Sir Archie in 1808, the

36. Bathgate, cited in T. K. Buford, “Memoir of Medoc,” *American Turf Register* 5 (Mar. 1834), 341; *New-York Evening Post*, June 7, 1823.

37. Charles Durang and William L. Sloat, comp., *The Theatrical Rambles of Mr. and Mrs. John Greene* (1865; repr. Rockville, MD, 2007), 95; *New-York Evening Post*, Nov. 28, 1822; *New York Spectator*, Nov. 26, 1822; *Spirit of the Times* (New York), Dec. 10, 1836 (Purdy); James Franklin Beard, ed., *The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper* (Cambridge, MA, 1960), 1: 98.

southerners disclosed that Sir Archie was recovering from a bout of dis-temper. Lady Lightfoot, it turns out, was old and sick when she raced Eclipse. In 1822 the first great North-South challenge race had pitted Sir Charles against Eclipse. Sir Charles injured his leg in training, withdrew from the race, and paid the forfeit. Van Ranst and the southern owner then agreed to a single four-mile heat. Eclipse ran well, and Sir Charles went lame and never raced again. The challenge of 1823 pitted Eclipse against any horse that the southerners could bring to the starting line. They selected and trained five racers: three sons, a daughter, and a grandson of Sir Archie. One went off his training, another injured his ankle in a practice run, and Henry, according to post-race excuses, was worn out by frequent racing and the long trip north. At the banquet a southerner raised Virginia's well-known boast: "Old Virginia never tire." As he spoke, the mail stage raced toward Buffalo, greeting crowds at every village with the news that Eclipse had beaten Henry. The coach flew a red flag with huge capital letters in white: "Eclipse Forever! Old Virginia a little tired."³⁸

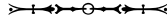
Eclipse, on the other hand, was never sick or injured, and he showed up ready to run for every race in which he was entered. "We are sorry Sir Charles fell down in his over training," wrote a newsman from Albany in 1822. "We thought this was only peculiar to the southern horses when brought on to the northern turf, but as it seems to be a general trait in them, 'we'll let it pass.' Eclipse we believe has never made an exhibition of this kind—but it is his great merit, that he can STAND, or go, as occasion and the honor of the state require."³⁹

Finally, Eclipse enjoyed the long working life characteristic of the Messenger line. He won his race against Henry at the age of nine, then stood at stud until his death at thirty-three. "Up to within a few days of his death," said an obituary, "he was as spirited and lively as a colt, and

38. Bright Phoebus: Blanchard and Wellman, *Life and Times of Sir Archie*, 29; Lady Lightfoot: ["Barrymore"], "Dissertation on the Blooded Stock of the United States, No. III," *American Turf Register* 5 (Dec. 1833), 175; Sir Charles: Hervey, *Racing in America*, 1: 261, 264; Henry: *Baltimore Patriot*, June 6, 1823; *Richmond Enquirer* (VA), June 3, 1823; *National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), May 30, 1823; toast: *New-York Evening Post*, May 29, 1823; mail stage: *Geneva Gazette* (NY), June 4, 1823; *Ontario Repository* (Canandaigua), June 17, 1823.

39. *Albany Daily Advertiser* (NY), cited in *New-York Evening Post*, Dec. 3, 1822.

did not appear to be over ten years old.” By that time, his southern competitors were long dead: Lady Lightfoot at age nineteen or twenty, Sir Charles at seventeen, Sir Henry at eighteen. Sir Archie, the patriarch of southern racers, survived to the age of twenty-eight, but he spent his last years “in the extremity of old age,” hobbling out of his stall only for an occasional drink of water, wearing a winter coat that he had not shed in three years.⁴⁰



New Yorkers loved American Eclipse because he was a great racehorse, and because he was theirs. He was, moreover, a distinctively *New York* horse: plain, powerful, reliable, and above all useful. Eclipse came from the Messenger breeding line that produced New York’s best thoroughbreds. But the line justified itself by making road horses that supplied the traction power for an economic revolution, and that provided convenience, prestige, and excitement for New York’s new middle and working classes. American Eclipse was an artifact of early-nineteenth-century New York—materially and culturally implicated in improved roads and the goods, people, and information that moved on them, in new forms of agriculture and commerce that depended upon horses, in new kinds of risk, play, and public spectacle, and in the flexible, practical, opportunistic aspirations that all of that fed. Eclipse represented what New York was becoming, and his power and stamina regularly trounced the equine aristocrats of the South. Following the forfeit of 1822, a writer for the *Post* boasted that Sir Charles was limping back to the “antient dominion . . . , while Eclipse marches home in triumph to the modern dominion, in the north.” Eclipse’s fans knew what the newsman was talking about.⁴¹

40. *Albany Evening Journal* (NY), Mar. 1, 1844; *The American Agriculturalist* 7 (New York, 1848), 74; “Henry,” *American Turf Register* 8 (Apr. 1837), 357; Lady Lightfoot: S. D. Bruce, *The American Stud Book* (2 vols.; New York, 1884), 1: 616; “Last Illness and Death of Sir Charles,” *American Turf Register* 5 (Sept. 1833), 27; “Sir Archy,” *American Turf Register* 4 (June 1833), 500.

41. *New-York Evening Post*, Nov. 18, 1822.