

AMERICAN ECLIPSE: GLEN COVE THOROUGHBRED

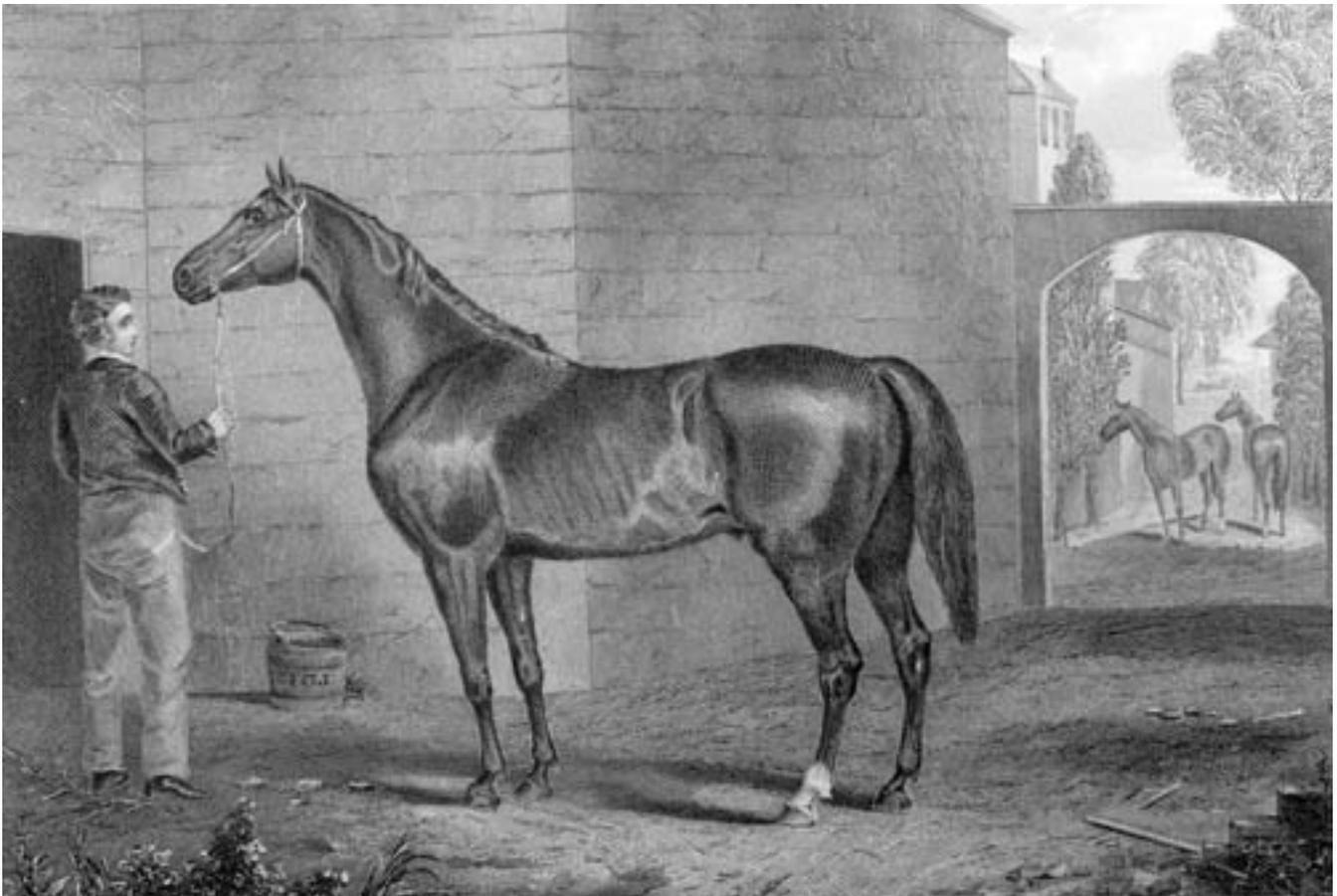
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Glen Cove can boast of a lengthy list of famous residents... J P Morgan, F W Woolworth, Charles Pratt, and even Robert F Kennedy. Our community also lays claim to one of the most famous race horses of the early 19th Century, *American Eclipse*.

American Eclipse was foaled on May 25, 1814, on the West Island estate of General Nathaniel Coles, at Dosoris. His maternal grandfather was *Messenger*; his mother was *Miller's Damsel*, con-

sidered to be the fastest racing mare of her day and nearly unbeatable at the track. His paternal grandfather was *Diomed*, of the Darly Arabian blood, and the winner of the first English Derby in 1780.

Eclipse made his debut at the New Market Race track in 1818, at the age of five. He beat *Black-eyed Susan* and *Seagull*, then considered the best 3-mile horses of the day. The next year,



he was purchased from General Coles by Cornelius Van Ranst for \$3,000. Van Ranst trained him to run at the 1821 opening of the Union Race course at Woodhaven, near Jamaica. Races at this course were run in May and October; the course itself was just a few feet over a mile in length.

In November of 1822, Col. William R. Johnson, of Petersburg, Virginia, wagered \$20,000 that within six months he could produce a southern horse which could beat the unbeaten *Eclipse*. Van Ranst accepted. The purse was deposited, and the race scheduled for the last Tuesday of May, at the Union Race Course.

Johnson did not have a particular horse in mind when he had made the wager with Van Ranst, but was sure he could find a



horse within six months that could beat *Eclipse*. Van Ranst was so confident in *Eclipse* that he made no stipulations.

When the day of the race arrived, the Southerners had not yet announced their contestant. They had brought five horses to train on Long Island, and then made a last minute selection, as was their right. By not announcing their choice in this manner, it kept the Northerners guessing, and unable to prepare a stratagem against their opponent. The Southerner's best choice had cut its foot in training, this left the choice between *Betsy Richards* and *Sir Henry*. Their final choice was *Sir Henry*, a 4 year old, also a grandson of Diomed, bred by Samuel Long, Esq near Halifax, North Carolina.

All of North America seemed alive with the excitement of the race. There was a massive pilgrimage to New York City by spectators from as far away as Virginia, amongst whom was John Randolph, the famous Southern statesman. During the five days of the race-event, the Fulton Ferry Co took in \$5,000 in tolls at Brooklyn alone.

One contemporary account described the scene:

The road from New York to the Course, a distance of eight miles, was covered by horsemen, and a triple line of carriages in an broken chain, from the dawn of day until 1 O'Clock, the appointed hour of starting. The stands on the grounds for the reception of spectators were crowded in excess at an early hour, and the club house and balcony extending along its whole front, was filled with ladies; the whole track, or nearly so, for a mile distant in circuit, was lined on the inside by carriages and horsemen, and the throng of pedestrians surpassed all belief not less than sixty thousand spectators were computed to be on the field.

Rufus King of Jamaica, who had been the New York delegate to the Continental Congress, and Virginia's John Randolph sat side by side "under a big tree on high seats" cheering on their different choice for winner. It was also announced that "a sufficient number of peace officers together with the sheriffs of Kings and Queens will attend to preserve order."

How To Raise A Winner

General Nathaniel Coles left behind a brief memorandum describing the early care given American Eclipse from the day it was weaned until the his debut race at New Market:

The colt was weaned on the 10th day of November, 1814. At the commencement of winter fed with four quarts of shorts which was increased during the winter to eight quarts per day; hay, clover dampened.

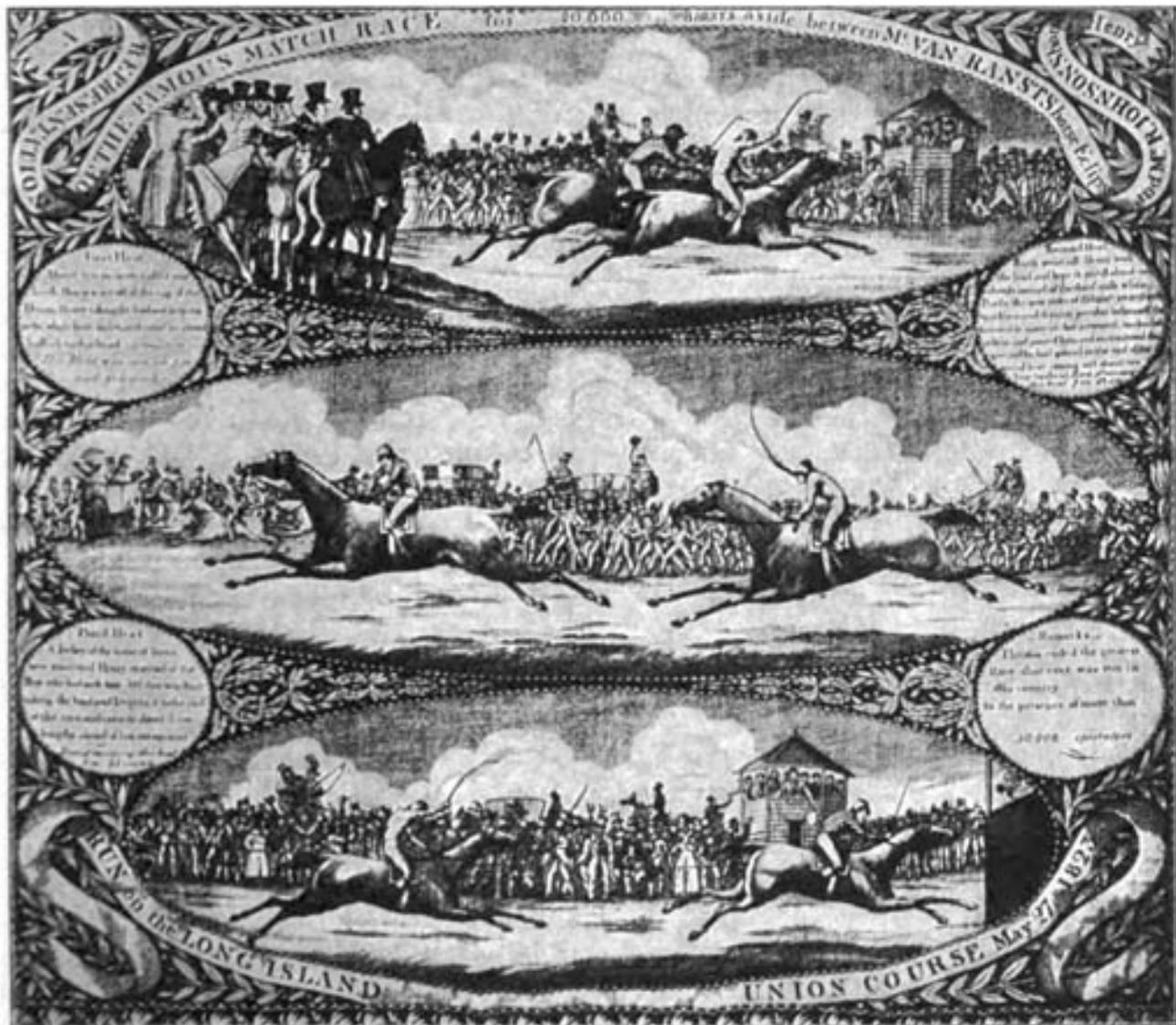
Second year (1815) in the spring, turned to grass with no grain. Nov. 10, put up, fed with eight quarts of shorts per day, during winter shorts was increased to ten quarts.

Third year, turned to grass, with four quarts of shorts per day. Sept. 1, commenced breaking; fed eight quarts oats; through the winter hay as formerly, grain, ground corn and oats, equal to 11 quarts oats.

March 1 (1817) commenced training and trained for nine weeks, then gave a trial of two miles and found the colt very superior.

Fourth year, in the summer turned to grass, fed with ground oats and corn equal to nine quarts oats; In winter hay as formerly, with nine quarts oats per day till let March, 1818, when commenced training; feed, oats and cracked corn equal to 12 quarts oats.

Fifth year, late in 1818, ran three-mile heat at Newmarket on Long Island, and won the first day's purse with ease, beating *Black-eyed Susan* and *Sea Gull*, then called the best three-mile horse of the day; turned to grass let June, with about six quarts of oats a day; in winter fed with hay as before, with ground corn and oats.



Souvenirs of major sporting events were just as important in 1823 as they are today, although few have survived. This printed handkerchief immortalized the 1823 race between Eclipse and Sir Henry

And, for those who could not attend this momentous occasion,

Mr Niblo, an enterprising inn-keeper of the city announces that after the termination of the match race between *Eclipse* and his antagonist, on Tuesday, he will dispatch a rider on a fleet horse, with the result, which will be made known by displaying a white flag from the top of the Banks Coffee House if *Eclipse* should be victorious. If his opponent should win the race, then a red flag will be raised to denote the fact. By this arrangement, the results will be known in the city about 40 minutes after the race is run, Fulton Market announced that it would be cleared and prepared as a place of reception for those ladies and gentlemen who may not have it in their power to attend the race tomorrow, but may desire to be early informed of it's results. The Market being opposite the white flag at Brooklyn which will be hoisted about 2 O'Clock, affords a convenient place of expectation.

The race was ready to start about 1 p.m., and *Eclipse*, ridden by a 126-lb jockey named Crafts, and *Sir Henry*, carrying the 108-lb jockey Taylor, appeared on the track. It seems that Van Ranst had

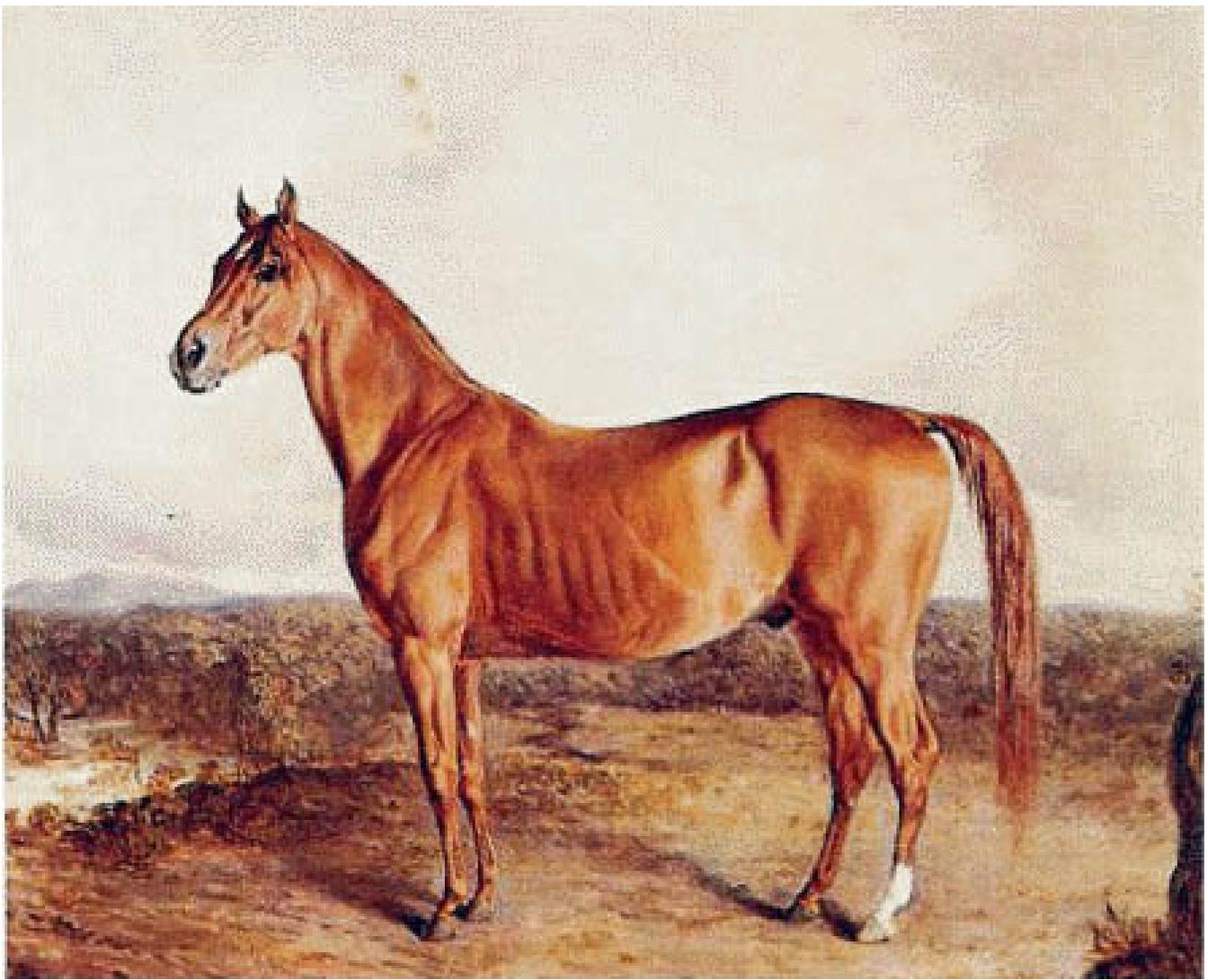
had a quarrel with his best jockey, a fellow named Purdy, and thus would not let him ride *Eclipse*. This proved to be a costly error, as Crafts rode *Eclipse* so badly in the first 1-mile heat that he lost. It is said that at the finish of the heat, *Eclipse* was bleeding from the beating that Crafts had given him. The time for the first heat was 7 minutes, 37 seconds.

Van Ranst quickly replaced Crafts with Purdy, who won the second heat by passing *Sir Henry* on the inside, a rather daring maneuver. The second heat took 7 minutes, 49 seconds.

In the third heat, Purdy quickly obtained a good lead over *Sir Henry*. But in the last 60 yards, *Sir Henry* managed to catch up, and looked as if he might pass him in the home stretch. *Eclipse* won, however, by half a length, with a winning time of 8 minutes and 24 seconds.

The fourth heat was not run, due to the poor physical state *Sir Henry* was in.

The Southerners lost the \$20,000 purse, and an additional \$200,000 changed hands in side bets. Ironically, most of these



American Eclipse (1814-1847)

side wagers were lost to the constituents of *Sir Henry*, having been wagered on the first heat, which *Eclipse* lost.

Within the week, Col. Johnson was back asking for a rematch, to be run on the Southerner's home territory. The stakes would be up to Van Ranst — anything between \$20,000 and \$50,000. Through spokesman John C. Sevens, Van Ranst declined the offer, stating he would never again, on any consideration, risk the life or reputation of the noble animal.

Eclipse lived to the ripe old age of 33 years, 46 days, dying in Kentucky on July 19, 1847.

Charles A Dana, editor of the New York Sun, and a great horse lover, later owned the large estate of Gen. Nathaniel Coles. He preserved the stall in which *Eclipse* had spent his earliest years as a memorial to the remarkable horse. The stable was dismantled by later owners.