

## ***On the Track –***

### ***Thomas Peter, Henry Clay, and the Duchess of Marlborough***

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With a notice published on April 10, 1769 that a purse of 25 pounds would be offered on May 30 to any mare or gelding that could run the best of three two mile heats, horseracing was officially born in Georgetown! Horses rising four years would carry eight stone, four pounds, including the weight of the bridle and saddle; rising five years, nine stone; rising six years, nine stone, eight pounds; and rising seven years, ten stone. Owners submitted vouchers for the age of their entry, and paid an entrance fee of 25 shillings. Applications were directed to Joseph Bell, John Orme, or Cornelius Davies – all familiar Georgetown names. A fair was scheduled to take place on the same day as the race, establishing a social tradition that was maintained well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Horseracing was off and running!<sup>1</sup>

An oval-shaped course between 17<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Streets and extending across Pennsylvania Avenue into Lafayette Park was built in 1797. The judge's stand, a small elevated platform, stood on F Street between 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Streets N.W. The most exciting horserace in 1797 was run by *Cincinnatus* (foaled 1790), owned by Charles Ridgeley (1760-1829) of Hampton, Baltimore County, Maryland, and *Lamplighter* (nd), owned by Colonel John Tayloe III (1770-1828) of Mt. Airy, Richmond County, Virginia.



Thomas Peter's early 19th-century jockey's silk sleeve retains its brilliant blue. A family member's note identifies it.

Charles Ridgeley of Hampton raised thoroughbred horses which trained on the racetrack at his estate. He promoted the stud services of his racehorse *Grey Medley* (f. 1776); his racehorse *Post Boy* (f. 1800) was destined to win the prestigious Washington Jockey Club cup in 1804, 1805, and 1806. John Tayloe II (1721-1779), father of John Tayloe III, was a fourth generation tobacco planter and avid horse racer. His property, Mount Airy (1758), which exists today, was first and foremost a horse farm. Tayloe II's earliest recorded importation was *Childers* (nd) in 1751. His son, Colonel John Tayloe III, went on to purchase and breed many thoroughbreds, including *Grey Diomed* (f. 1786), *Dungannon* (f.1794), *Selima* (f. 1805), and *Sir Archy* (f. 1805). John Tayloe III built the Octagon in the Federal City, and also owned a 204 acre horse farm called Petworth, bounded on the south by Rock Creek Road and on the west by Georgia Avenue, which stood on the land that now comprises the Petworth neighborhood. The eager citizens who attended the four mile heat interpreted the race as a contest between the states; in this instance, Virginia was victorious and Tayloe carried home a purse of 500 guineas!<sup>2</sup>

Races traditionally lasted three to four days. On November 18, 1801, the “National Intelligencer” noted that entries for the November 12 race had included horses owned by two patrons of the local aristocracy, Thomas Peter and John Tayloe III, who had taken up residence in the Federal City.<sup>3</sup> A congressman from Massachusetts, the Rev. Dr. Manasseh Cutler (1742-1828), was a keen observer of the event.<sup>4</sup> He described John Tayloe III and the state of racing in America in a letter to his son; it should be noted, however, that horseracing was a forbidden sport in New England:

Mr. Tayloe, of this city, is one of the most famous of the Jockey Club. He had five horses run, one on each day, all coming near winning, but failed. He is said generally to be lucky. He is very rich –his horses are valued at more than 10,000 dollars . . . So it is these Nabobs [title of an Indian Prince] sport with their money. It is said one member of Congress lost, in private bets, 700 dollars. Such are the evils attending these races.<sup>5</sup>

Born in 1769, Thomas Peter was the oldest son of Robert Peter (1726-1806), first mayor of Georgetown, and Elizabeth Scott Peter (1744-1821). Thomas Peter inherited his father’s sharp business sense as a merchant and land speculator and received a sizable land inheritance from his father’s estate. He married Martha Parke Custis (1777-1854), one of the four grandchildren of Martha Washington, in 1795 at Hope Park, the Fairfax County estate of the bride’s mother, Eleanor Calvert Custis Stuart (1758-1811), and stepfather, Dr. David Stuart (1753-1814), a commissioner of the new Federal City and close friend of George Washington.



**Thomas Peter.** Lt. W.G. Williams (American, 1801-1846), oil on canvas, Washington, D.C., ca.1830.

After their marriage Thomas and Martha Custis Peter resided in a house on K [Wapping] Street in Georgetown. George Washington, Martha Custis Peter’s step-grandfather, was often their guest, and spent his last night in the Federal City at their home. In 1805 Thomas and Martha Peter purchased from Francis Lowndes (1751-1815) of Bladensburg, Maryland, 8.5 acres in Georgetown Heights with an \$8,000 legacy his wife received from George Washington.<sup>6</sup> They asked the architect of the first U.S. Capitol, the self-taught architect Dr. William Thornton (1759-1828), to design their home overlooking the Potomac, where they intended to live with their growing family.

In 1802 Thomas Peter was one of twelve citizens elected to the first City Council of Washington. From 1801 until his death in 1834, he served five terms as a Justice of the Peace for the County of Washington in Maryland. Thomas Peter was a director of the Bank of Columbia and a vestryman of St. John’s Protestant Episcopal Church in Georgetown. He owned racehorses: in 1802 he advertised in the “Washington Federalist” his thoroughbred *Pizarro* (nd) to stand stud at his farm, “. . . twenty miles from the City of Washington.” Along with friends of the day, he enjoyed racing his horses at the oval shaped track west of President’s Square. Several objects in the Tudor Place collection confirm Peter’s enthusiasm for this sport: a blue sleeve labeled, “The sleeve of a jockey coat worn by the jockey that rode my Grandfather Peter’s race horse,”; Peter’s riding crop; and a

portrait of Thomas Peter seated in a chair holding a riding crop, while the back ground reveals a landscape and two horses, one with a figure on horseback.<sup>7</sup>



Riding whip of wood wound waxed linen thread. Maker unknown, early 19th century. Bequest of Armistead Peter 3rd, 9981. This riding whip, or crop, has been identified by Armistead Peter, Jr.'s, handwritten label, "Riding Whip/Thomas Peter, of Tudor Place" (nd). Papers of Armistead Peter, Jr., MS 14, Box 77, Folder 26.

By 1803, as Pierre L'Enfant's plans for the Federal City were executed, the Pennsylvania Avenue race track was abandoned, and a new one was established south of Columbia Road between 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Streets.<sup>8</sup> This area near Meridian Hill, owned by William Holmead and originally known as Holmead Farm, was rented to the Washington Jockey Club.<sup>9</sup> The race track was oval shaped and a mile long. The new course, without a grandstand, was laid out by Dr. William Thornton, a family friend of the Peters, another racing fan.<sup>10</sup> The popularity of the sport was evident: on one occasion \$1200 was collected in admissions from a city that only had 5,000 inhabitants!<sup>11</sup>

William Thornton, born in Tortola, West Indies, in 1759, was of British birth; at the age of five he was sent to England to be educated. He was apprenticed to a physician, and eventually enrolled as a medical student at the University of Edinburgh in 1781. Although raised in the strict traditions of the Quakers, he expressed early on a strong interest in the design of landscape and architecture. Thornton pursued his medical studies in London, and eventually received his medical degree from the University of Aberdeen in Scotland in 1784. He returned briefly to Tortola and then entered the United States at Philadelphia in 1786. As a Quaker, Thornton was an abolitionist, and was active in encouraging enslaved individuals to return to Africa. He became an American citizen in 1788, and married Anna Maria Brodeau (1775-1865) in 1790.

In 1789 Thornton drew a plan for building a new hall for the Library Company of Philadelphia; although his design was altered in the actual construction of the building, winning this competition encouraged his pursuit of architecture. He moved to Washington when the seat of government was transferred there. Thornton submitted drawings for the United States Capitol in January 1793 and won the competition; for his efforts he received a city lot, \$500, and public acknowledgement of his talent. Thornton's success inspired confidence in his friends, and they applied to him as they began to build their own homes. His work included John Tayloe III's Octagon House in the Federal City, Lawrence and Eleanor [Nelly] Lewis' plantation house

Woodlawn in Virginia, and Thomas and Martha Peter's Tudor Place in Georgetown; possibly he influenced the addition of a domed structure at James Madison's Virginia home, Montpelier.<sup>12</sup> In 1794 he was appointed one of three City Commissioners of the Federal District, charged with supervising the construction of government buildings and designing the layout of the city. He was first head of the Patent Office from 1802-1828. During the War of 1812 he bravely faced the British and saved the Patent Building from destruction; he was not successful, however, in protecting the U.S. Capitol which he had designed.<sup>13</sup>



**Eclipse.** Engraving on paper. Engraved by Scott, after a painting by George Stubbs (English, 1724-1806). Published by J. Pittman, London, 1823.  
 Courtesy, The Victoria & Albert Museum, E.873-1896.

An ardent poet and writer, Thornton was also an enthusiastic fan of the horse races. He and his wife attended races regularly. Although he owned many thoroughbreds, it was rumored that *Eclipse Herod* (nd), descended from the great racers *Fearnought* (f.1755), *Eclipse* (f.1771), and *Herod* (f.1792), was the pride of his stable.<sup>14</sup> But he owned other racing stars: *Driver* (f.1795), *Flimnap* (f.1798), *Whistlejacket* (f.1798), *Diomed Eagle* (f.1814), *Rattler* (f. 1815/1816), and the *Duchess of Marlborough* (f.1817/1819).<sup>15</sup>

The races in the Federal City maintained a strict schedule beginning in October or November and lasting three, four, or five days each. Just as a fair had been arranged in conjunction with the event, now a ball was usually sponsored at a nearby tavern.<sup>16</sup> On November 8, 1803, the Rev. Dr. Cutler observed in his journal that the participants at the races were,

. . . three and four thousand people, black, white, and yellow; of all conditions from the President of the United States [Thomas Jefferson] to the beggar in his rags, of all ages and of both sexes . . . one-third were females . . . It was said toll collected from the carriages and horses (people on foot passed free) was \$1200.<sup>17</sup>

He noted the carriage people roamed in lines on the outside of the circular, fifty-foot wide and mile-long course. Those on horseback freely followed the contestants along the course. Inside the circle, wooden refreshment booths afforded flat roofs upon which the crowds stood to view the races.

By 1803 horse-racing fever had seized the entire Federal City. The “National Intelligencer” announced on December 16 of that year that both houses of Congress and the Senate adjourned for three days of racing. It was not known if the simultaneous repair of the plaster ceiling was scheduled purposefully or accidentally for those days, or if, as one senator claimed, “. . . you are rather to imagine that no business was in due state of preparation to be acted upon.”<sup>18</sup>

In 1806 the races began early on October 28, and a ball was held November 1 at Stelle’s Hotel located at the corner of A Street and New Jersey Avenue, S.E.<sup>19</sup> This famous fifty room hotel was erected in 1805 by Daniel Carroll in what became known as Carroll Row. Pontius D. Stelle of Trenton, New Jersey, was the proprietor from 1805-1809. There, officers of the Washington Jockey Club, established in 1802, were elected: President John Tayloe III; Secretary and Treasurer Dennison Darling; Chief of Course Chester Bailey; and Stewards John Mason, Thomas Peter, Henry O’Reilly, and Nathan Loughborough.<sup>20</sup>

The sport remained exceedingly popular despite the fact that the country became involved in the war with Great Britain in 1812.<sup>21</sup> A race held in October 1812 was attended by Mrs. William [Peggy] Seaton, who recorded the event, for although democratic in definition and spirit, horseracing was the fashionable event for those who had wealth, and for those who wanted it!

Yesterday was a day of all days in Washington –hundreds of strangers from Maryland and Virginia, in their grand equipages, to see a race! Gov. Wright with his horses to run, Col. Holmes with his, and people of every condition straining at full speed. Mr. and Mrs. Madison, the departments of government, all, all for the race! . . . It was an exhilarating spectacle, even if one took no interest in the main event of the day; and such an assemblage of stylish equipages I never before witnessed . . .”<sup>22</sup>

A month later the Washington Jockey Club held its scheduled fall meeting. While the city was still in the grip of terror at the arrival of the British fleet, the usual announcement of the Jockey Club races appeared in the “National Intelligencer” on October 26, 1813. On November 16, 1813, it was posted that a race would be run near the Eastern Branch Bridge at the foot of 14<sup>th</sup> Street, N.E. Still not to be denied the pleasure, two months after the British had virtually destroyed the city on August 24, 1814, the “Federal Republican” of October 31, 1814, ran a notice that the three-day racing event would be held on the Washington track.<sup>23</sup>

This period of horseracing never lost its allure. Years later Benjamin Ogle Tayloe (1792-1868), the son of John Tayloe III, who had inherited his father's and grandfather's love of horses, recalled:

. . . there were giants in those days, as names and achievements testify. This was the age of *Amanda*, of *Florizel*, of *The Maid of the Oaks*, three first-rate horses -ancestors of *Eclipse*, *Medoc*, *Boston*, *Lexington*, *Lightning*, and others of renown; the age of *Post Boy*, of *Oscar*, of *First Consul*, of *Hickory*, of *Sir Archy*, of *Duroc*, and of *Miller's Damsel*. Excepting the first two, the Washington City Race-course was the arena of these renowned champions, owned and run by gentlemen of education, position, and opulence, whose coaches and four, as those of other magnates, gave splendor to that course, which was often graced by several Presidents, from Jefferson to Van Buren. There I saw John Quincy Adams on foot, he having walked from "the President's house," and he walked back again. General Jackson took the liveliest interest in its races. . . This was the scene, too, of the turf eccentricities of Dr. Thornton, remarkable for his humor, his benevolence, and accomplishments.<sup>24</sup>

William Thornton died in March 1828. Despite his pursuit of architecture, he remained a respected physician but was described as lacking the ability “. . . to catch that psychological moment to present his bill when the patient . . . recognizes with gratitude the physician’s skill . . .”<sup>25</sup> For this reason, the expense of horses, and unsuccessful property dealings, he died deeply in debt. Only a few days after the Doctor’s death, Anna Maria Thornton wrote in her diary, “I am very unwell. God grant I may find the means to pay all his Debts!” To execute this unpleasant task, she began to sell his horses. To her surprise parting from these, “. . . which I was always trying to persuade my poor husband to sell, now affects me deeply –and it seems like parting with so many friends.”<sup>26</sup> But an inquiry from their good friend, Secretary of State Henry Clay (1777-1852), about two of the Doctor’s more famous horses, *Rattler* and the *Duchess of Marlborough*, seemed promising.



Born 1777 in Hanover County, Virginia, in a district known as “The Slashes,” Henry Clay lost his father, a clergyman, when he was four. Clay received an elementary education in a log school room, and worked on the family farm. His mother remarried and the family moved to Kentucky; Clay’s step-father was sympathetic to him and encouraged the youth. In 1792 Clay was placed in the office of the high court of chancery in Richmond, Virginia, and became acquainted with Chancellor George Wythe (1726-1806), who employed him as an amanuensis [he who writes from dictation or copies manuscripts] and directed his course of reading.<sup>27</sup> Wythe’s reputation was sterling and Clay could not have had a better mentor: Thomas Jefferson wrote, “No man ever left behind him a character more venerated than George Wythe. His virtue was of the purest kind, his integrity

inflexible, his justice exact.”<sup>28</sup> Clay studied law with the attorney general of Virginia, and in 1797 obtained a license to practice; he also earned the friendship of several prominent men in Richmond. He returned to Kentucky, and established himself as a successful criminal lawyer; his sophisticated manners soon made him a favorite in Lexington society.

He was chosen to revise the constitution of Kentucky, and argued against the alien and sedition laws as a member of the Republican Party. In 1803 he was elected to a seat in the state legislature, where his reputation as an eloquent debater was born. This reputation served him well all his life. When he was appointed to the U.S. Senate to fulfill an unexpired term in December 1806, he was placed on many committees; he was strongly in favor of internal improvements for the country. He returned to his state legislature, where he denounced the British embargo against the United States, and pledged the aid of Kentucky to resist British tyranny. He also urged the domestic manufacture of clothing be worn in the legislature as an example to the people, a strike in favor of home industry in case of war. In 1807 Clay was sent back to the U.S. Senate, where he argued further for home industry, and expressed a desire to preserve peace on the Indian frontier. He defended the American occupation of West Florida, but did not hesitate to oppose Albert Gallatin’s recommendation to renew the charter of the U.S. Bank on the ground of unconstitutionality.

In 1811 he was sent again to the House of Representatives and elected Speaker. Anticipating war with Britain, Clay established himself as the head of the war party, surmising war with Britain would be won by an easy conquest of Canada. He called for volunteers, and advocated for a stronger and larger navy. War was declared on June 18, 1812. Josiah Quincy of Massachusetts noted, “Henry Clay was the man whose influence and power more than any other produced the war of 1812,” but war lasted longer and proved more devastating than he had ever expected.<sup>29</sup> In 1813 he was elected Speaker, but resigned as a member of the commission to negotiate peace with England at Ghent, Netherlands. Clay vehemently opposed the British claim to navigate freely the Mississippi River, from which she could incite Native American Indian tribes against the United States. The treaty of Ghent, peace between Great Britain and the United States, was signed December 24, 1814. Clay returned to the House of Representatives in December 1815.

Due to his great skill and leadership, he was again chosen Speaker in both 1816 and 1817. He opposed James Monroe by advocating in favor of internal improvements; he criticized the conduct of Andrew Jackson in the Florida campaign, arousing Jackson’s ire which was never soothed. At the first session of the 16<sup>th</sup> Congress in December 1819 he censured Monroe’s administration for abandoning Texas, which he argued was part of the Louisiana Purchase. He skillfully negotiated what came to be known as the Missouri Compromise, and earned the title “The Great Pacificator.” Clay informed northern members that if they blocked Missouri from entering the Union as a slave state, southerners would block the admission of Maine. Ultimately, Maine was admitted as a free state, and Missouri as a slave state. An amendment attached to the compromise prohibited slavery in the rest of the Louisiana Purchase north of the boundary of Missouri.

Clay was elected to the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress in December 1823 and was Speaker; in 1824 he was a candidate for president. His competitors, however, received more electoral votes than he

did, and Clay swung his support to John Quincy Adams for whom he acted as Secretary of State. But when Andrew Jackson, his nemesis, was elected president in 1828, Clay was ready to return to his farm in Lexington, where he could enjoy a brief respite from the political stage and indulge his passion for breeding racehorses.<sup>30</sup>

He had established a country seat surrounded by woods of ash, which he called Ashland. It rose on land about a mile and a half south of Lexington, deep in blue grass country, land very different from “The Slashes” on which he had been born, an open, overgrown, tract of forest land devoid of shade, covered with weeds and dug out stumps. Once known as the “Mill Boy of the Slashes,” Clay was now a landed gentleman.<sup>31</sup> Wherever his political travels had taken him –or would take him- his heart was always in Kentucky:

It was a horse country, a sporting country, already in a fair way to surpass Virginia and South Carolina in blooded animals, high racing stakes, and colorful Jockey Club meetings. . . . Whenever the young squire of Ashland and his friends congregated one heard horse talk –‘the most astonishing animal of the age, sir,’ ‘of great size, fine bone, symmetry and action,’ ‘she easily outdistanced the field,’ ‘able to run with any horse in the world.’ All classes, even the slaves, had the ‘Kentucky mania’ –indeed, wrote a citizen to the “[Kentucky] Gazette,” it is said throughout the Union that ‘horse-jockeying and tipping is [our] chief employment.’<sup>32</sup>

Clay had rented Commodore Stephen Decatur’s house on Lafayette Square after Decatur’s death in 1820, and from there he secured the *Duchess of Marlborough* from Anna Maria Thornton.<sup>33</sup> He had good reason to be pleased with his purchase: in January 1830 the *Duchess* was noted as “one of the distinguished progeny of *Sir Archy*.”<sup>34</sup> Clay also wanted to purchase Thornton’s thoroughbred *Rattler*, but for some unknown reason Anna Maria Thornton refused to release *Rattler* until the following spring. This condition was unacceptable to Clay, and he expressed his regret to her on November 2, 1828. He told her that the mare [the *Duchess of Marlborough*] was at that moment in transit to Kentucky, and he had hoped *Rattler* would have accompanied her. He confirmed his deep disappointment over *Rattler* in a letter of the same date to his good friend James Calwell, the proprietor of White Sulphur Springs, Greenbrier County, [West] Virginia.<sup>35</sup> *Rattler*, the celebrated racer and stallion, was purchased eventually by Messrs. Keinsingham and Spears of Paris, Kentucky, and was slated to stand at stud at Mr. Spears’ horse farm in Bourbon County, Kentucky.<sup>36</sup>

Although Andrew Jackson won the 1828 presidential election, Clay was still Secretary of State under Adams until the Inauguration March 4, 1829. Anna Maria Thornton sent him a receipt for his payment of the mare for \$500 on February 16, 1829.<sup>37</sup> On that very day, Clay wrote a letter to Thomas Peter of Tudor Place, a friend and racing competitor, asking for advice:<sup>38</sup>

Washington 16th Feb. 1829

Dear Sir

Col. Bomford informs me that you are well acquainted with the *D. of Marlborough*, a mare late the property of Dr. Thornton, and since his death purchased by me; and that you had kindly said that you were willing to state what you know of her pedigree, & performance, and



your opinion of her as a brood mare. I shall deem it as a favor if you will, at your leisure, furnish me with such a statement.

I am with great respect  
Your ob. Servant  
H. Clay

*Thomas Peter Esq.*

Thomas Peter would have known Colonel George Bomford (1780-1848), graduate of the United States Military Academy (1804), a famous inventor and designer of weapons and defensive installments for the U.S. Army. He was assigned to help rebuild the United States Capitol after it was destroyed by the British during the War of 1812 and was appointed 3<sup>rd</sup> Chief of Ordnance in May 1832.<sup>39</sup> As Secretary of State Clay would have come into contact with Bomford, and the wives of all three men were friends. In October 1828, Anna Maria Thornton's diary noted that Mrs. [Martha Custis] Peter, Mrs. [Lucretia Hart] Clay, and Mrs. [Louisa Catton] Bomford called for her when she was out.<sup>40</sup>

Peter also would have been familiar with the *Dutchess*' history and habits. On September 18, 1828 Anna Maria Thornton recorded that she gave the *Dutchess* to Thomas Peter for safekeeping: "He is to keep her till I can sell her"; a month later she rode to Tudor Place to consult with Thomas Peter about selling *Rattler*. Later that same day she sent a servant to fetch the *Dutchess* home from the Peters.<sup>41</sup>

George Town 17th February 1829

Dr Sir

Your Letter of the 16th Feby. I received.

It is true I am well acquainted with the *Duts* (sic) of *Marlborough* a Mare late the property of the late Dr. Thornton. with (sic) respect to the performances on the turf of the above Mare I can not particularize them, but in General terms the popular opinion was that she was a Mare of fine Bottom and great speed &, if she had had an experienced Trainer she would certainly have ranked as a 2nd if not a first rate Nag. As a Brood Mare there are two fillies raised from the *Dutchess* (sic), the first sold at One year old in miserable condition for \$200 the other at two years old for \$250. her (sic) last years colt at six months in as bad order as possible sold for \$1000 - I think she was in foal last fall and to *Ratler* (sic), one of the best Sons of *Sir Archy* - As a Runner and a very high bred horse in this country, I know not his superior.

I heard one of my Sons say that Genl. Gibson gave a very extraordinary account of one or two trials of the *Dutchess* (sic) agt. [against] some very fine Mares, when four years of age at which time the Genl. Gibson thought the *Dutchess* (sic) broke down. Notwithstanding he beat her very easily -

The *Dutchess* (sic) of *Marlborough* was gotten by *Sir Archy* her Dam by the imported *Diomed* her great Dam by the imported *Alderman* her grt. grt. Dam by *old Clockfast* which was by *old Jimerack* (sic) the Sire of *old Medley*; her grt. grt. grand Dam by the *Wildair* of Virginia which was by *old Fenno* got out of *Kitty Fisher*.

-*Fearnought* was by *Regulus*; *Kitty Fisher* by *Cade* & both by the *Godolphin Arabian*.

I consider the *Dutchess* (sic) a good Brood Mare & one of the very best bred Mares in America.-

The information asked me in your [letter] I have complied (sic) with as far as in [my] power, & I hope it may be satisfactory.

I am with great respect  
Your Obt. Svt.  
Thomas Peter

Envelope Addressed:

Henry Clay Esq.

Washington

Postmarked [in red ink]: Feb 19 Georgetown, FREE<sup>42</sup>

Thomas Peter possessed a booklet published in 1826 entitled Stud Book, “comprising most of the Virginia horses, mares, etc., previous to the revolution . . .”<sup>43</sup> Described in its introduction as “a thin octavo,” it was written by “Mr. Skinner, A gentleman of the South of Virginia . . . who has been occasionally employed for more than thirteen years in collecting the information.” On the front cover it is inscribed, “Thos. Peter/from/Mr. Skinner”; the title page, however, holds the name of the book’s second owner, Thomas Peter’s great grandson, “Armistead Peter Jr./Feby 7<sup>th</sup> 1894.” This was a gift to him from Thomas Peter’s daughter, his grandmother Britannia Peter Kennon (1815-1911). The booklet lists eighty-nine horses and their genealogies. It is possible that Thomas Peter managed to trace the *Duchess*’ background here, as a brood mare *Duchess* (f.1801) is recorded; or, and more likely, Peter gathered his facts by word of mouth at the track or the Washington Jockey Club, both fine venues for such information.

Thomas Peter read J.S. Skinner’s “American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine,” and may have found his information in that prevailing sporting magazine of his day. Evidence of Peter’s interest in this journal surfaces in two letters he wrote to the editor that were published. In the first letter dated June 1830, Peter identified himself as “. . . a breeder of horses for forty years,” who observed a large swelling in the head of one of his horses and explained treatment of the ailment in a letter entitled “Remarks on the Big-Head in Horses.” In a more mysterious letter the magazine published “A Hint to the Breeder” by “T.P.,” who wrote from Georgetown, D.C., and advised: “. . . if you want a colt send your mare in the increase of the moon; if a filly, on the decrease . . .”<sup>44</sup>



**Godolphin Arabian**, George Townley after George Stubbs, print, English, 1794, British Museum, 1873,0712.570.

Thomas Peter’s genealogy of the *Duchess of Marlborough* (f. 1817/1819) contains the names of many well-known thoroughbreds. Her lineage was indeed a proud one! The thoroughbreds Peter named to Henry Clay would have been familiar to Clay and other serious sportsmen and horse breeders of the day. Just the mention of the *Godolphin Arabian* (f.1724) and his son *Regulus* (f.1739) in a bloodline was enough to inspire confidence for a winning purse, and assure Clay he had made a safe purchase.

The *Godolphin Arabian* (f.1724), foaled in Yemen, was imported to England ca. 1729. He was purchased by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Godolphin and stood at stud in Cambridgeshire and then in Richmond. He sired sixteen foals, of which the most famous were *Cade* (f. 1734) and *Regulus* (f. 1739). Of a brown bay color and noted for his high crest, he stood fifteen hands [60 inches] tall. He was the leading sire in England and Ireland in 1738, 1745, and 1747.

Two well-known racers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Man o' War* (f.1917) and *Seabiscuit* (f.1933), have traced their bloodlines back to the *Godolphin Arabian*. *Cade* (f. 1734), bay colored like his sire the *Godolphin Arabian*, was a good runner, but more famous as a stallion than a racehorse. He was a leading sire in England in 1752, 1753, and 1758-1760. One of his offspring, the mare *Kitty Fisher* (f.1756), had a long lasting impact on American bloodstock, and sires of the highest class trace back to her.



**Regulus** by Richard Roper.

*Regulus* (f.1739) also claimed the bloodline of the *Godolphin Arabian*. In 1745 he won eight Royal Plates in Great Britain. He stood at stud willingly, and his most famous offspring was *Fearnought* (f.1755). *Fearnought* earned the reputation of the most important sire in America in the colonial era, and was considered by many the most dominant stallion until the arrival of *Medley* (f.1776) in 1784; others held him the leading stallion until the arrival of *Diomed* (f.1777), imported 1798. He was a King's Plate winner, superior in four mile heats under heavy weights. Of a bright bay color, he stood nearly sixteen hands high, and

was large and strongly built. For these reasons he was imported at nine years old into Virginia to improve the colony's small sprinting horses of Oriental descent and stand at stud at Colonel John Baylor's plantation in Caroline County, Virginia. As promised, he brought size, stamina, and courage to his descendants; but these same desirable qualities made his sons valuable as battle chargers, and many were lost in the Revolutionary War. Yet despite this his influence in the racing world went undiminished.

*Gimcrack* (f.1760) started first at Epsom in 1764, where he won seven races. At Newmarket he won The Whip, a great honor because it was said to be fashioned with hair from the mane and tail of the British racing star *Eclipse* (f.1747). During his career he ran almost forty races, many in long distance heats. He is commemorated even today by the Gimcrack Stakes held at York, England. But it was through his son *Medley* (f.1776) that the bloodline of the *Godolphin Arabian* was imported and dispersed into America. *Medley* was brought into Virginia by Malcolm Hart in 1784. His sons were great racers, and several were owned by John Tayloe III. Although of small stature, his offspring inherited his beauty and spirit, as well as his speed and bottom. Imported into Virginia in 1784 along with *Medley*, *Clockfast* (f.1780) was rumored to be *Medley's* half-brother, sired by *Gimcrack*. He was a grey horse of fine form, great power



and substance. Usually grey in color, his colts were famous for their speed, determination, and great competitive spirit, and held in the same high esteem as *Medley's*.

*Diomed* (f.1777) was a large chestnut horse more than fifteen hands high, sporting a small touch of white on a hind heel. Famous in Great Britain as the first Derby Stake winner at Epsom, the Claret Stakes at Newmarket, and many other races, he was imported into

America by Colonel John Holmes of Virginia, where his success was immense. He was sought as a stud for his fine looks and presence, and he founded a dynasty. At the age of twenty-seven,

***Diomed***

when bred by Rockingham to the esteemed mare *Castiana* (f. 1808), he

fathered *Sir Archy* (f.1805). *Sir Archy* was bred by Captain Archibald Randolph and Colonel John Tayloe III. The chestnut colt, bred for speed and stamina, proved a champion during his fourth year. He was most famous as a sire, often called “the *Godolphin Arabian*,” signifying a foundation stallion for the American thoroughbred. The best thoroughbreds in America in the 1820s were thought to claim his descent, and he sired at least thirty-one turf champions. It was not without reason rumored that, “Some American writer has sarcastically remarked that among the turf men of England, no American horse was known . . . except *Sir Archy*, and no distinguished man of America, beside Washington. Both of them, it will be remembered, were of Virginian birth.”<sup>45</sup>

Of all the horses noted by Thomas Peter, little is known about the bay horse *Wildair* (f.1753) sired by *Old Fenno* (nd), bred by Swinburne and imported to the United States in 1765, but later returned to England, or *Alderman* (f.1787), bred by Burton in England and brought to Richmond, Virginia, by John Banks. But most unfortunately, nothing could be uncovered about the history of the *Duchess* after she arrived at Ashland.

Clay acknowledged Peter’s letter:<sup>46</sup>

Washington, 19th Feby. 1829.

Dear Sir:

I hasten to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 17th instant, and to express to you my thanks for the information it contains relative to the *Duchess of Marlborough*. It is very full and satisfactory.

I am with great respect,  
Your obedient servant,

*Thomas Peter, Esq.*

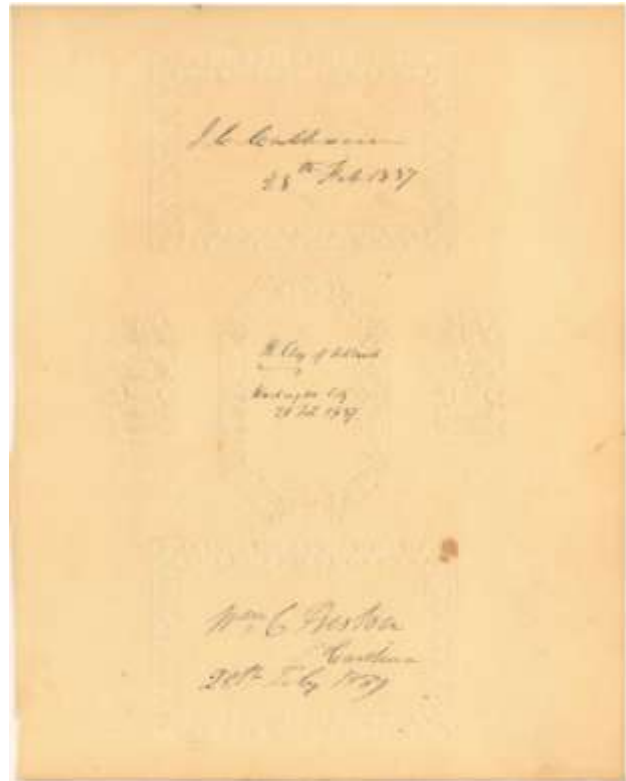
H. Clay

The fate of the *Duchess* after she arrived at Ashland is not known. History records that Henry Clay’s two most famous thoroughbreds were *Buzzard* (1778), which he purchased on the advice of John Tayloe III as “the finest horse upon the Continent,” with four other gentlemen for

\$5860 but who stood at Ashland, and *Yorkshire* (f. 1834), bred by Mr. Moss and imported by R.D. Sheppard of Jefferson City, Virginia, and later owned by the Honorable Henry Clay, a gift from Commodore Morgan of the Navy.<sup>47</sup>

The thread of Peter's and Clay's friendship now grows thin. Thomas Peter died in 1834. But on February 28, 1837 a Visitors Book at Tudor Place was inscribed by three guests to the house.<sup>48</sup> These signatures included those of J.C. Calhoun (1782-1850), Wm. Preston of Carolina (1794-1860), and H. Clay (1777-1852) of Ashland/Washington City, three politicians in Washington City on the eve of the March 4 inauguration of the eight President of the United States, Martin Van Buren paying their respects to Thomas Peter's wife, Martha Custis Peter.<sup>49</sup>

The thread of friendship ends here, but was not forgotten by family members. Years later in 1920 at a local bookstore a print of Henry Clay caught the eye of Thomas Peter's great grandson, Armistead Peter, Jr. (1870-1960), who had inherited Mr. Skinner's Stud Book from his grandmother. Surely he had seen and read Henry Clay's letters that his family had saved to his great grandfather; the blue sleeve from a Jockey's racing blouse flashed before him. The print of the "Mill Boy of the Slashes," to this day adorns a wall in Armistead Peter, Jr.'s office at Tudor Place, the memory of Henry Clay and horseracing most carefully preserved.<sup>50</sup>



**Visitors Book** with Henry Clay's signature in center, Papers of Thomas and Martha Custis Peter, MS 2, Box 1, Folder 27.

<sup>1</sup> Hugh T. Taggart, "Old Georgetown." Records of The Columbia Historical Society. Volume 11 (Washington, D.C.: The Columbia Historical Society, 1908), 164.

<sup>2</sup> Wilhelmus Bogart Bryan, A History of the National Capital. Volume I 1790-1814. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1914), 304; John Hervey, Racing in America 1665-1865. Volume II. (New York: The Jockey Club, 1944), 5. Hervey dates this race in 1798.

<sup>3</sup> Allen C. Clark, "The Mayoralty of Robert Brent." Records of The Columbia Historical Society. Volume 33-34 (Washington, D.C.: The Columbia Historical Society, 1932), 280. Clark noted, "These patrons were of the local aristocracy."

<sup>4</sup> James Grant Wilson and John Fiske, eds. Appletons' Cyclopaedia of American Biography. Volume II. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1888), 47; Biographical Directory of the United States Congress 1774-1989. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1989), 863; Allen C. Clark, "The Mayoralty of Robert Brent." Records of The Columbia Historical Society. Volume 33-34 (Washington, D.C.: The Columbia Historical Society, 1932), 281-282.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., Clark, 282.

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<sup>6</sup> The author thanks Pat Andersen, Librarian at the Montgomery County Historical Society, for supplying the date of birth and death for Francis Lowndes, son of Christopher and Elizabeth Lowndes.

<sup>7</sup> Collection of Tudor Place Historic House and Garden: sleeve of royal blue silk, ca. 1810-1830, acc. no. 8046; riding whip of wood, waxed linen thread, and brass tacks identified by Armistead Peter, Jr., "Riding Whip/Thomas Peter, of Tudor Place," nd, acc. no. 9981; Thomas Peter by Lt. W.G. Williams, oil on canvas, ca. 1830, acc. no. 6149w9258.

<sup>8</sup> Bryan, Volume I, 610.

<sup>9</sup> Hervey, 5; Hervey states the new race course was established in 1802.

<sup>10</sup> Clark, "Mayorality of Robert Brent," 281.

<sup>11</sup> Hervey, 5.

<sup>12</sup> The author thanks Tiffany Cole, Assistant Curator for Research and Documentation, James Madison's Montpelier, Orange, Virginia. Cole explained that while Anna Maria Thornton's ca. 1802 watercolor View of Montpelier depicts a temple structure, the temple was not actually constructed until ca. 1809-1812. The architectural style of the temple is reminiscent of Thornton's temples at Tudor Place and the U.S. Capitol. There is no definitive evidence to prove that Madison consulted Thornton about the later modifications at Montpelier, but it is likely that the Thorntons influenced Madison through Anna Maria Thornton's watercolor and William Thornton's architectural aesthetic. However, Cole added, it is also possible that Madison had been thinking about a domed temple and communicated this to the Thorntons when they visited Montpelier in 1802, and that this suggestion prompted Anna Maria Thornton to add it to her watercolor.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Dick and James E. Homans, eds. The Cyclopaedia of American Biography. Volume VI. (New York: The American Press Association Compilers, Inc., 1915), up, see Thornton, William.

<sup>14</sup> Allen C. Clark, "Dr. and Mrs. William Thornton." *Paper Read Before The Columbia Historical Society of Washington, D.C. on May 19, 1914* (Washington, D.C.: Records of The Columbia Historical Society, 1915), 181, Reprinted from Records of The Columbia Historical Society. Volume 18 (Washington, D.C.: The Columbia Historical Society, 1915), 181.

<sup>15</sup> "American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine" of April 1830 gives *Rattler's* foaled date as 1815 and later as 1816; it should also be noted that *Rattler* is spelled either "Ratler" or "Rattler." The same issue notes the *Duchess of Marlborough's* foaled date as 1817 and then 1819; *Duchess* is spelled alternately "Dutchess" or "Duchess." Skinner, J.S., ed. "American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine," Vol. 1, No. 8, April 1830. (Baltimore, Maryland: J.S. Skinner, 1830), 259, 379, 381. For our purposes we concur with 21<sup>st</sup> century spelling of both names.

<sup>16</sup> Bryan, Volume I, 610.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.; Biographical Directory of the United States Congress 1774-1989, 1515. Samuel Latham Mitchill (1764-1831) was a scientist and a senator from New York.

<sup>19</sup> Allen C. Clark, Life and Letters of Dolly Madison. (Washington, D.C.: Press of W.F. Roberts Company, 1914), 39; Bryan, Volume II, 519. Bryan locates the hotel at 1<sup>st</sup> Street between East Capitol and A Streets, S.E.

<sup>20</sup> Clark, "Mayorality of Robert Brent," 283.

<sup>21</sup> Bryan, Volume I, 610.

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<sup>22</sup> Allen C. Clark, "Joseph Gales, Junior, Editor and Mayor." Records of The Columbia Historical Society. Volume 23 (Washington, D.C.: The Columbia Historical Society, 1920), 119-120. Mrs. William [Peggy] Seaton, as the wife of William Winston Seaton (1785-1866), who was the proprietor of the "National Intelligencer" and in 1840 mayor of Washington, was in a unique position to observe the comings and goings of society, and was herself a talented observer and recorder of such events. Biographical Directory of the United States Congress 1774-1989, 2091: Robert Wright (1752-1826) was a senator and representative from Maryland, and governor of Maryland 1806-1809; Biographical Directory of the United States Congress 1774-1989, 1204: Col. David Holmes (1769/1770-1832) was a representative from Virginia and a senator from Mississippi. Mr. and Mrs. Madison need no identification!

<sup>23</sup> Bryan, Volume I, 611.

<sup>24</sup> Benjamin Ogle Tayloe, Our Neighbors on La Fayette Square: Anecdotes and Reminiscences. (Washington, D.C.: Privately printed, 1872, reprint edition, 1982), 4. Tayloe was a writer for the "American Turf Register," "The Spirit of the Times," and "Turf, Field, and Farm"; he wrote this description of the Washington Races in 1867.

<sup>25</sup> Clark, "Doctor and Mrs. William Thornton," 203.

<sup>26</sup> Library of Congress, Anna Maria Brodeau Thornton Papers, 1793-1861, ID No. MSS51862. Diary of Anna Maria Thornton, Volume 4, 1828-1835, MSS. entries dated May 20, 1828 and October 25, 1828.

<sup>27</sup> Dick and Homas, Volume I, up, see Clay, Henry; Dick and Homas, Volume VI, up, see Wythe, George. George Wythe studied law and rose to high rank in the Virginia bar. He was a member of the House of Burgesses and served there until the Revolution. During the Revolution he labored for freedom, and in 1775 was appointed a delegate to the Continental Congress from Virginia; he signed the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1775. He was Speaker of the house of delegates in 1777, and one of three judges of the chancery court in Virginia when he employed Henry Clay. Among his pupils were two presidents, a chief justice, and a secretary of state.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. As quoted by Dick and Homas; Jefferson, one of Wythe's pupils, made notes in 1820 for a biography of Wythe which was never written.

<sup>29</sup> Bernard Mayo, Henry Clay Spokesman of the New West. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937), 466. Biographical Directory of the United States Congress 1774-1989, 1684: Josiah Quincy (1772-1864) served in the state senate of Massachusetts and in several sessions of the United States Congress. He was president of Harvard University 1829-1845. He and his wife Eliza Morton Quincy were friends of the Peters. For information on Clay's role encouraging war with Britain, see Mayo's Chapter XIII: 'Mr. Clay's War.'

<sup>30</sup> Dick and Homas, Volume I, up, see Clay, Henry.

<sup>31</sup> Mayo, 13. Fn 1. Mayo states that this nickname was as untrue as presenting the youth as an elegant Virginia cavalier.

<sup>32</sup> Mayo, 194-195. Mayo quotes the "Kentucky Gazette," September 11, 1806.

<sup>33</sup> Gist Blair, "Lafayette Square." Records of The Columbia Historical Society. Volume 28 (Washington, D.C.: The Columbia Historical Society, 1926), 141.

<sup>34</sup> Skinner, "American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine," Volume 1, No. 5, 259.

<sup>35</sup> Blair, 141.

<sup>36</sup> Skinner, "American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine," Volume 1, No. 5, 259.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Seager II, ed. The Papers of Henry Clay. Volume 7: Secretary of State. (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1982), 525. This receipt is held in the collection of

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the University of Kentucky, Special Collections, Lexington, Kentucky, Papers of Josephine Clay, Part I, MSS ID: 2005MO1: “Anna Maria Thornton’s receipt of payment from H. Clay for bay mare, Duchess of Marlborough, gotten by Sir Archy. Febr. 1829. Filing note docketed in Clay’s hand, one page.”

<sup>38</sup>Tudor Place Historic House & Garden Archive, Papers of Thomas and Martha Custis Peter, MS 2, Box 1, Folder 2, Henry Clay to Thomas Peter, February 16, 1829.

<sup>39</sup>See Francis F. Heitman, Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army. Volume I. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1903), 228-229.

<sup>40</sup>Library of Congress, Anna Maria Brodeau Thornton Papers, Volume 4, 1828-1835. ID No. MSS51862. Entry dated October 10, 1828.

<sup>41</sup>Library of Congress, Anna Maria Brodeau Thornton Papers, Volume 4, 1828-1835. ID No. MSS51862. Entries dated September 18, 1828 and October 25, 1828.

<sup>42</sup>Library of Congress, Henry Clay Family Papers 1732-1927. ID No. MSS No. 16105. Thomas Peter to Henry Clay, February 17, 1829. The identity of General Gibson cannot be determined with certainty; he may have been General George Gibson of Pennsylvania, brevetted general in 1826, see Heitman, 453.

<sup>43</sup>Tudor Place Historic House & Garden Archive. Papers of Thomas and Martha Custis Peter. MS 2, Box 1, Folder 24. Mr. Skinner, Stud Book. (Privately printed, Valentine’s Day, 1826). Mr. Skinner was John Stuart Skinner who eventually published several volumes of The General Stud Book, Containing Pedigrees of English Race Horses, etc., etc.; from the Earliest Account to the Year 1831. (Baltimore, 1834). J.S. Skinner also was editor of “American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine.” He has described himself in the introduction to Thomas Peter’s Stud Book too modestly. Thomas Peter surely kept records of his own horses; a notebook in the Tudor Place Archive offers brief descriptions of the offspring of *Atlanta* and *Juno*, brood mares owned by Peter. This notebook is a fragment and incomplete: Papers of Thomas and Martha Peter, MS 2, Box 1, Folder 21. The entries are dated 1797-1800.

<sup>44</sup>Skinner, “American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine,” Vol. 1, No. 10, June 1830, 494; Vol. 1, No. 11, July 1830, 537.

<sup>45</sup>Tayloe, 62. Information on the thoroughbreds noted in Thomas Peter’s letter to Henry Clay was obtained from Thoroughbred Heritage: Historic Sires/Foundation Sires and Early American Imports: Bloodlines.net

<sup>46</sup>Tudor Place Historic House & Garden Archive, Papers of Thomas and Martha Custis Peter, MS 2, Box 1, Folder 2, Henry Clay to Thomas Peter, February 19, 1829.

<sup>47</sup>Mayo, 195, 299.

<sup>48</sup>Tudor Place Historic House & Garden Archive, Papers of Thomas and Martha Custis Peter, MS 2, Box 1, Folder 27, Visitor’s Book.

<sup>49</sup>Biographical Directory of the United States Congress 1774-1989: Calhoun, John Caldwell, 729; Preston, William Campbell, 1673; Henry Clay, 789. See also Wilson and Fiske: Calhoun, John Caldwell, 498-504 and Preston, William Campbell, 114-115. Calhoun, a senator from South Carolina and elected vice-president in 1824 and 1828, was a Georgetown neighbor of the Peters; Preston, a brilliant orator and senator from South Carolina from 1832-1842, was known as an admirer and follower of Calhoun.

<sup>50</sup>Collection of Tudor Place Historic House & Garden, Engraved portrait of Henry Clay. Engraved by E. Paul and printed by Dunbar. Published by R.A. Bachia, New York; entered according to act of Congress in the year 1855 by R.A. Bachia. acc. no. 6119.01W9225.01. Tudor



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Place Historic House & Garden Archive, Papers of Armistead Peter, Jr., MS 14, Box 73, Folder 25. Diary entry, April 28, 1920: "Purchased print of Henry Clay."

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