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The Rise and Fall of the Narragansett Pacer

CHARLOTTE CARRINGTON-FARMER

When James Fenimore Cooper sat down to write *The Last of the Mohicans: A Narrative of 1757* in the mid 1820s, he not only made several important decisions about what people to cast, but also what non-human animals to include. The novel, which describes Alice and Cora Munro's journey across the northern part of New York to Fort William Henry, is set amid the Seven Years' War. While Cooper's book, which was first published in 1826, is widely known, readers have paid little attention to the horses that are central to the plot. Cooper selected a very particular kind of horse for the journey, a Narragansett Pacer.

Cooper’s decision to seat Alice and Cora on this specific breed of horse made perfect sense for a story about a long journey in 1757. Narragansett Pacers, which were first bred in Rhode Island in the seventeenth century, were renowned for their smooth and easy gait. In the novel, Alice’s Narragansett Pacer was a “sure-footed and peculiar” horse. Its gait was “between a trot and walk” and was “fast yet easy,” which made it the perfect mount for smooth long-distance travel. Pacers were able to cover up to a hundred miles a day, over rough roads, without tiring the rider or themselves. Narragansett Pacers were arguably the number one choice of horse to ride on a long journey in America in the eighteenth century.

Narragansett Pacers originated in “Narragansett Country” in Rhode Island, along the West Bay of the colony from Wickford to Point Judith, and westward to Charlestown. They were typically chestnut (sorrel), with some white markings on their legs and face. Narragansett Pacers typically stood no taller than 14 hands high (143 cm.) With every “hand containing four inches standard measurement,” the horses were measured from the lower part of the hoof to the upper part of their withers. Their smooth pacing gait was linked to the specific way their backbone moved in a straight line in the air, rather than swinging and inclining the rider from side-to-side. Throughout the eighteenth century, people from far and wide praised Rhode Island’s breed of horses. Writing in 1787, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur concluded in his Lettres d’un Cultivateur Américain that “Narragansetts is the best in all of America for pacing horses.” The market for trading in Pacers extended beyond New England and the North American colonies. Pacers, like other breeds, were shipped from New England to South America and the Caribbean. Narragansett Pacers were both useful and important horses, but in many ways the breed remains shrouded in mystery. Where did they come from? What made them so special? Who bred them, and how? And, after such popularity in the eighteenth century, why were they on their way to extinction by the mid-nineteenth century? This article seeks to answer these questions.

In The Last of the Mohicans, Uncas and Hawkeye discuss how Narragansett Pacers “planted the legs of one side on the ground at the same time, which is contrary to the movements of all trotting four-footed animals of my knowledge...And yet here are horses that always journey in this manner, as my own eyes have seen.” The half-brothers continue, “Tis the merit of the animal! They come from the shores of Narragansett Bay, in the small province of Providence Plantations, and are celebrated for their hardiness, and the ease of this peculiar movement; though other horses are not frequently trained to

An excerpt from the 1823 edition of James Fenimore Cooper’s The Last of the Mohicans, in which the characters Natty Bumppo (Hawkeye) and Duncan Heyward discuss the origin of the Narragansett pacer. Courtesy of the Watkinson Library at Trinity College (Hartford, Conn.).
As more settlers arrived following the foundation of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, it became clear that horses were necessary to ensure the long-term success of the venture.

roads. However, what made the Concord Coach so distinctive was its suspension. The "throughbraces" (leather strips), which supported the body of the coach, produced a rocking motion that was smoother than a coach with steel springs. The success of the Concord Coach, like the success of the Narragansett Pacer, rested on how it provided smooth long-distance travel. Cooper's decision to seat Alice and Cora on Narragansett Pacers was no accident. Writing at a specific design of coach revolutionized the American travel landscape, Cooper looked back to a time when a specific breed of horse had done the same.

Seventeenth-Century Breeding Programs

Horses were not native to New England, and in the early seventeenth century European colonists did not have horses for travel or draft work. The most popular mode of transport among Plymouth, Boston, and Cape Ann was following the coastline in a canoe. As more settlers arrived following the foundation of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, it became clear that horses were necessary to ensure the long-term success of the venture. Francis Higginson brought thirteen horses to Massachusetts in 1629, and while he did not record any breed specifics, he noted that three had "come out of Leicestershire." [6] In the early seventeenth century, Leicestershire was a celebrated hub of horse trading and rearing. [7] Approximately sixty additional horses arrived with John Winthrop's fleet in 1630. Although several horses died on the voyage, enough mares and stallions survived to tentatively start breeding horses in New England. [8] Noting the demand for horses by 1632, Sir Ferdinand Gorges pledged to ship several horses from England to Captain John Mason. [9] Writing in 1653, Winthrop hinted at the peril involved in shipping horses when he recorded that four horses died crossing the Atlantic. Slowly more horses arrived in the colony, with four mares successfully crossing the Atlantic on the Bird, and two more on the Bonaventure. [10] In 1635 another Dutch ship brought "27 Flanders mares...and 3 horses" into the colony. [11] While Henry VIII's supposed comparison of Anne of Cleves to a Flanders mare is perhaps the most famous reference to this breed, Flanders horses had their own merits. Flanders (or Flemish) horses were heavyset and known for their strength and power, which rendered them useful for draft purposes and pulling weight in war. The importation of Dutch horses diversified New England's breeding stock, which allowed the Bay colonists to cross-breed with their own English stallions.

With more and more horses in the area, New Englanders took increasing care to purify their stock as the seventeenth century progressed. In the early eighteenth century, both horses and cattle ran at large or public commons. [12] Despite the presence of herdsmen, who maintained the stock, countless horses were stolen or lost. Other horses strayed, causing damage to crops and gardens. [13] Free-roaming horses could also breed at will, and in 1668 the Massachusetts Bay Colony Court declared:

Whereas, the breed of horses is utterly spoilt whereby the useful creature will become a burden... be it enacted that no stone horse [stallion] above two years old be allowed on the commons or at liberty unless he be of good proportions and fourteen hands in stature. [14]

The order also stipulated that horses had to be branded, and during the course of the seventeenth century, the courts in Plymouth and Connecticut passed similar regulations. [15] All of these measures not only helped to purify breeds, but also created the conditions necessary to develop the first truly American breed of horse.

As European colonists settled in Providence in 1636, Portsmouth in 1638, and Newport in 1639, they introduced horses to the new colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. William Brenton and William Coddington, who were involved in settling Portsmouth and Newport, quickly realized that horses were not only necessary for travel around New England, but that there was money to be made in exporting horses to the burgeoning sugar plantations in Barbados. [16] By 1647, Brenton and Coddington identified that Barbadian planters needed two kinds of horses. Barbadians, just like New Englanders, required riding horses for travel, but, unlike New Englanders, they also needed horses for draft work. Writing in 1660, Samuel Maverick observed how horses and cattle had not only changed the New England landscape, but also had become part of its flourishing trade:

As for the Southern part of New-England. It is incredible what hath been done there...in the yeare 1646 or thereabout there was not a Neate Beast, Horse or Sheep in the Country and very few Goats or hogs, and now it is a wonder to see the great herds of Cattle belonging to every Towne...The great number of Horses... many sent to Barbados and other Caribbe Islands. [17]
New England was able to exploit fully the lucrative market for exporting horses to the sugar colonies, as England was in no position to export horses. Parliament set a duty on horse exports from England in 1654, due to the scarcity of horses in the wake of the Civil War. This left the market for shipping horses to the sugar colonies open to enterprising merchants across the Atlantic in New England.

The New England colonies, particularly Rhode Island, quickly gained fame in the second half of the seventeenth century as a center of horse breeding. By the end of the seventeenth century, Rhode Island's horse breeding industry was centered in "Narragansett Country." The area, on the west of Narragansett Bay, was ideal for horse raising due to its fertile, level, and well-watered pasturage. The swamp grasses made excellent hay, and the salt-water ponds provided water and natural fencing. As in other New England colonies, Rhode Island sought to monitor its common land and regulate its horses. To keep track of stock, all horses that were transported out of the area had to be viewed and registered with the clerk. [18]

In 1686, the justices of Peace in Kingstown came up with an interesting way to pay for the prison and stocks by rounding up and selling "wild or unmarked" horses aged two and older. [19] As in the other New England colonies, these measures helped to create the conditions where distinct horse breeds could be cultivated.

John Hull, better known as a merchant and mint-master in the Bay Colony, also made a notable contribution to horse breeding in Rhode Island. Hull was born in Market Harborough in Leicestershire. Leicestershire was a horse rearing hub, and the town of Market Harborough itself was a leading outlet for coach and carthorses. [20] People travelled from far and wide to Hull's hometown to buy horses that had been trained on the region's mixed farms. [21] While no horse market or fair appeared in New England that could rival England's legendary ones, Hull helped to put Narragansett Country on the map as a premier horse breeding region. Following the acquisition of Narragansett tribal lands in 1658 through the Pettaquamscutt Purchase, Hull and other planters worked to turn the region into stock and dairy plantations. Hull realized the economic value in expanding horse breeding in the area, and writing to Benedict Arnold in 1672 he outlines his vision:

Sir I have sometimes thought if we the partners of the pointe Juda Necke did fence with a good stone wall at the north End thereof that noe kind of horses nor Cattle might get thereon & allo what other parts thereof westerly were needful & procure a very good breed of large & fair mares & stallions & that noe mangel breed might come amonge them & you selfe Jof Brinton for his father's interest or Mr Sanford's in behaile of them all & any other partner that is able & willing to wee might have a very choice breed for coach horses some for the saddle some for the draught others & in a few years might draw of Considerable numbers & shipp them for Barbadoes Nevis or such parts of the Indies where they would vend wee might have a vessel made for that service accomodated on the purpose to carry of horses to advantage. [22]

Hull's plan reveals a clear distinction between the specific markets for coach, saddle, and draft horses. While oxen were primarily used for draft work in New England due to the rough ground, horses were ideally suited to turn the sugar mills in the nascent sugar colonies. Therefore, New Englanders bred distinct types of horses for specific purposes. Firstly, they raised draft horses solely for exportation to the sugar colonies; secondly, they bred horses for domestic travel use and exportation. It was a need for the second category of horses that led to the creation of the Narragansett Pacer. [23]
As Rhode Island emerged as a horse breeding and exportation center in the second half of the seventeenth century, it simultaneously developed its own breed of horse: the Narragansett Pacer. As the first new and distinct breed created in the colonies, the Narragansett Pacer was the first American breed of horse. As The Last of the Mockicans demonstrates, purebred Narragansett Pacers were prized saddle horses due to their ability to cover up to a hundred miles a day of rocky ground with their unique pacing gait. Their pacing gait was faster than a walk, but typically slower than a canter. The pace was a lateral two-beat gait, and the two legs on the same side of the horse moved forward together. At both the pace and the trot, two feet are always off the ground. However, in the trot, the two legs diagonally opposite from each other move forward together. [24] Purebred Pacers struggled to trot or gallop. In the early modern era, as today, horses were trained to pace, but Narragansett Pacers had a natural pacing gait. The Narragansett Pacer was also unique in the way that its backbone moved through the air in a straight line without inclining the rider from side to side. All of these qualities made them highly sought after as riding horses.

Due to their speed and comfort, they were "the steeds in a little more for the saddle." The "breed was propagated with much care" and throughout the eighteenth century people from far and wide sent for them "at much trouble and expense." [25] Dr. McSparran, rector of the Narragansett Church from 1721 to 1759, described how Narragansett Pacers were "remarkable for fleetness and swift pacing." McSparran had seen "some of them pace and trot more than two minutes and a good deal less than three minutes," McSparran himself had "upon the larger pacing horses rode fifty, nay sixty miles a day even in New England where the roads are rough, stony and uneven." [26] Newspaper advertisements for stolen horses provide rich detail on the types of horses New Englanders rode. When Jeremiah Williams enjoyed the hospitality of John Hoyle's Inn in Providence in the Winter of 1763, his horse was stolen from outside of the inn. Williams described how the horse was "of a dark color with a white stripe on his face. The horse was a 'sprightly high-couraged Creature' who was a 'natural Pacer.' Williams offered a ten-dollar reward to anyone who got his horse back and apprehended the thief. [27] In the same year, Nedabin Angel, from Johnston, offered a two-dollar reward if anyone returned his twelve-year-old red roan mare. The mare, who stood at 14h, "paces well." [28] The advertisements for lost and stolen horses illustrate how Pacers were highly valued during this period.

In 1711, Rip Van Dam of New York (and later governor of the colony) described the great lengths to which he went to acquire a Narragansett Pacer. When the horse was shipped from Rhode Island, it jumped overboard and swam back to shore to return home. When Van Dam finally got the horse, he wryly noted that it "always plays and acts and never will stand still, he will take a glass of wine, beer or cider, and probably would drink a dram on a cold morning." Van Dam acknowledged that even though the horse was "so high priced," it was "no beauty" and it was prized for its legs and comfortable gait. [29] Several contemporary writers concurred; describing pure-bred Narragansett Pacers as "villainously ugly." [30] The Pacer was clearly renowned for its utility, not prized for its beauty.

Despite its appearance, riding a Narragansett Pacer suggested a certain kind of status. They were "a source of inordinate pride" to their owners despite their "ugly sorrel color... broad back and short legs and curiously rocking pace" which made them "almost a caricature of a horse." [31] Narragansett Pacers played a central role in the "negroes annual election." The election, which took place in each town in Narragansett Country, was held annually in June throughout the eighteen century. It was an "imitation of the whites" and the slaves "assumed...the relative rank of their masters." [32] It reflected poorly on a slave owner if their slave was poorly clothed or mounted on a standard horse, therefore, slaves "mounted on the best Narragansett Pacers...pranced to the election" and then feasted, danced, and played games. Sources on the election are scarce, and the records that do exist are clearly written through a racially prejudiced lens. While the exact nature of the elections is unclear, it is evident that Narragansett Pacers were used to display a slave owner's wealth and power. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, slave elections declined, and by the turn of the nineteenth century they ceased altogether. [33] Outside of the elections, slaves rarely had permission to ride horses, and for the most part, the only other time that slaves rode them was during escape efforts. When Richard Dodge's slave ran away from him in Westham, Massachusetts, in 1751, he escaped on "a fine large Bay Horse, Fourteen Hands high...a natural Pacer." [34] Narragansett Pacers made the perfect getaway horse for runaway slaves due to their ability to cover long distances quickly and smoothly.

Countless eighteenth-century publications extolled the superiority of the Narragansett Pacer as a "gentle horse." For example, Robert Livingston, writing for the first American edition of the Edinburgh Encyclopedia, described the virtues of the Narragansett Pacer at length:

They have handsome foreheads, the head clean, the neck long, the arms and legs thin and taper; the hind-quarters are narrow and the hocks...are sickle hocked, which is the likeliest foot out a little; their color is generally, though not always, bright sorrel; they are very spirited and carry both head and tail high. But what is most remarkable is that they amble with more speed than most horses trot, so that it is difficult to put some of them upon a gallop...These circumstances together with their being very sure footed, renders them the finest saddle horses in the world; they neither fatigue themselves nor their rider. [35]

Published in 1757, John Chamberlain’s Magna Britannia Notitia agreed that they were "esteemed as the swiftest Pacers." [36] Early Modern horsemanship manuals offer an insight into what buyers looked for in a potential horse, and how horses were cared for and trained. Owners regularly added their own notes in the covers and margins of the books. [37] On the back cover of the John Carter Brown Library’s copy of Philip Astley’s The Modern Riding Master (1776) is a list in an unknown hand stating the ideal qualities for a riding horse. These include, a pricked ear, a bushy tail, a high neck, a full eye, a short front, and a lofty carriage; the ideal horse must also be easy to ride when mounted. The Narragansett Pacer undoubtedly embodied many of these qualities. [38]

Published in 1771, Richard Berenger’s The History and Art of Horsemanship, Vol. I, explored the merits of different horse breeds at length. As “Gentleman of the Horse to King George III,” Berenger was undoubtedly a knowledgeable horseman. He observed that New England had “a very peculiar sort” of horse that “naturally...pace...with great speed.” Narragansett Pacers moved with “such safety and exactness...they are chiefly esteemed for possessing this talent, which they exert in a degree very superior to all other horses.” [39] While Berenger noted that Narragansett Pacers were originally from English stock, he did not explain exactly where and when the breed originated. This is because the specific origins of the Narragansett Pacer remain unclear. Only in the eighteenth century, the Common Place Book of a Gentleman, Horses, and Neat Cattle concluded
that "the Narraganset" was "a peculiar breed, and peculiar to New England." Moreover, while the origin was "not certainly known," the book speculated that the "Narragansett breed was probably introduced from England by our forefathers." [40] Examining common breeds within England and their characteristics provides some insight into the types of horses that were most likely shipped to New England, and subsequently influenced the Narragansett Pacer. The Irish Hobbie, Scottish Galloway, and Spanish Ginete, all of which were common in early modern England, appear to be the most probable candidates.

In many ways, the Narragansett Pacer bears a striking resemblance to the Irish Hobbie. The Irish Hobbie was one of the most popular saddle horse in England in the early seventeenth century, as its pacing gait was comfortable for travel. Just like the Narragansett Pacer, Hobbies were "of middling size, strong, nimble, well-molded and hardy," often sorrel-colored, and "much admired and valued for their easy paces." Most tellingly, Hobbies paced in a specific way, "and go not as other horses do, but pace very softly and easily." [41] The qualities of the Scottish Galloway also hold a striking resemblance to the Narragansett Pacer. Writing in 1737, John Chamberlayne complimented the Galloway's "Hardiness in enduring Labour" although it was "generally small" and was "so well made, that they are very fit for Labour, or Travellings." [42] Galloways were "frequently brought up in England" and may have been amongst the horses that were shipped to New England. Daniel Defoe described the Galloways as the best breed of "strong low horses in Britain, if not Europe...These horses are remarkable for being good pacers, strong, easy gaunders, hardy, gentle, well broke." [43] Richard Berenger depicted the Galloway as "a peculiar sort of horses...much esteemed, and of middling size, strong, active." [44] The Hobbie and Galloway's height, build, color, and gait make them a likely foundation breed for the Narragansett Pacer.

The Navigation Act of 1660 required all commodities going to the colonies to be laden and shipped in England; however, horses from Ireland and Scotland were exempt. This meant that Irish Hobbies and Scottish Galloways could be shipped directly to New England. The similarity of the Narragansett Pacer to the Irish Hobbie and Scottish Galloway, and the likelihood that these two breeds were shipped to New England, suggests that these two breeds were part of the foundation stock. There were horses that paced in New England as early as 1684 and Waite Winthrop described their value. Winthrop offered £50 for a pair of horses, but "if the two paced well they would bring nearer £50 for such is difference from ordinary jades if they do but pace well." [45] However, it was only by crossingbreeding with another breed that Rhode Islanders were able to create a new and distinct breed of horse: the first truly American breed of horse.

One of the most widely debated issues at the time was how Spanish stock influenced the Narragansett Pacer. Thomas Hazard, whose family were key horse breeders in Rhode Island, pushed the idea that Deputy Governor William Robinson imported an Andalusian stallion to crossbreed with. Others have floated more fanciful theories, including that a shipmaster found an Andalusian stallion swimming off the coast of Spain and brought him to Rhode Island, or that there were wild horses in Narragansett Country prior to permanent European settlement. [46]

The Spanish breed most likely to have influenced the Narragansett Pacer was the Spanish Ginete, which originated in Andalusia. The Marquis of Marana sent King Henry VIII a gift of Ginetes from the Royal Stud in Cordoba, Andalusia. [47] Ginetes were prized throughout Europe because of their conformation, lightness, and speed. These characteristics, when mixed with those of the Hobbie and Galloway, provided the unique traits of the Narragansett Pacer.

William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, was a key player in improving horse breeding in England in the seventeenth century. [48] Cavendish built an acclaimed riding school at Bolsover Castle in Derbyshire, and was renowned for his mastery of the manège. Cavendish also published accounts on his method of horsemanship which were famed throughout Europe. When Cavendish commissioned a painting of his favorite breeds in 1665, he insisted that the artist include a Spanish Ginete. [49] Cavendish lavished praise on Spanish horses, noting: "that of All Horses in the World...Spanish Horses are the Wisest; far the Wisest, and strangely Wise, beyond Mans Imagination. He is the Noblest Horse in the World." [50] Cavendish described Spanish horses as "curiously shaped" with great spirit, courage, and temperament. He praised them as breeding horses, going as far as to say that there was "no Horse so fit to Breed on, as a Spanish Horse." [51] Cavendish elaborated that Spanish horses were very versatile and were suited for the manège, war, travel, hunting, or running. Cavendish published A New Method, and Extraordinary Invention, to Dress Horses, and Work Them According to Nature in London in 1667. In the book, he described how Andalusian horses were shipped from the port towns of Bilbao or San Sebastián to England. [52] The early pacing horses in New England were most likely Galloways or Hobbies, which were then crossed with the Spanish stock to create a distinct breed of Narragansett Pacer by the end of the seventeenth century. [53]

The Narragansett Pacer line evolved further when Thomas Hazard introduced a stallion named "Old Snip" to the breeding pool. It is not certain how and when Hazard acquired the stallion, and claims ranged from Old Snip having wandered wild near Point Judith, to Hazard having imported him from Tripoli. [54] Regardless, proving lineage to Old Snip was used as a hallmark of a true Narragansett Pacer. Rhode Island bred horses were also used to start other equine breeding schemes. For example, Roger Kilvert sailed from New Amsterdam to buy horses in "Rhode Island or Warrack" to pilot early breeding schemes in New Netherland. Rhode Island bred horses were also transported to the Carolinas and Maryland, there too used as the foundation to pioneer breeding programs. [55] Thomas Minor et al. from eastern Connecticut made recurring trips to Narragansett Country to buy breeding mares and colts during the second half of the seventeenth century. [56] By the turn of the eighteenth century, the Narragansett Pacer was an established breed, and targeted breeding programs had begun to flourish.

Breeding Horses in the Eighteenth Century

Horse raising rapidly expanded in Narragansett Country in the first half of the eighteenth century. Writing in 1755, William
Douglas noted in his summary of the British settlements in North America that “the most considerable farms are in Narragansett country.” The largest farms “milk 110 cows, cut about 200 loads of hay, make about 13,000 weight of cheese besides butter, and sell off considerable calves, fattened bullocks, and horses.” [57] Due to the export trade to the sugar colonies, horses of any type were a valuable commodity, and many farmers around the region raised horses for domestic use and exportation.

Recovering the details of how Rhode Islanders bred horses, specifically Narragansett Pacers, is problematic. When breeders died, most of their estate inventories simply list the number of horses they owned, not the specific breeds. Ichabod Potter’s estate inventory from 1739 is rare in that it specifically mentions, “one small white pacing horse 6 l.” [58] George Hazard’s inventory from 1746 offers a few more details, such as the age and sex of the horses: “1 Stallion, 4 young horses; 1 mare & colt, 7 mares & 5 colts, 2 two year old mares, 10 yearling horse kind.” William Gardiner had 30 horses and mares and one “young Stone horse” in 1732. In 1759, Jeffrey Hazard’s estate listed a “riding beast” valued at £300, a “Sorrel stone horse” valued at £400, “13 old breeding mares,” 3 geldings, 5 three-year-old mares and 8 two-year-old mares, all valued at £60. Estate inventories that simply list the number and sex of the horses are more typical. For example, when Rowland Robinson Sr. died in 1716, his estate in Narragansett Country simply listed “64 horses, mares and colts.” [59] While estate inventories do not necessarily list the different types and breeds of horses, they do show that horse breeding was a serious and large-scale operation by the early eighteenth century.

In contrast to estate inventories, newspaper advertisements for stud services provide a rich resource on how breeders constructed the parameters of the breed. Breeders from around New England regularly advertised their stallions and stud facilities in local newspapers. “Brown Bay, whose Name is derived from his Colour” was offered for stud services in the summer of 1768 in Newport and North Kingstown. The advertisement in the Newport Mercury emphasized that he was “an excellent Saddle Horse, remarkable for fast pacing...is fine carriage and good natural; has extraordinary Courage.” The stallion was “of a delicate Make, about fourteen Hands and three Inches high, neatly orna-mented with natural Marks of White.” Moreover, Brown Bay was “a true genuine Extract of the old Narragansett Snip Breed.” [60] Newspaper advertisements for Narragansett Pacers, for both shipping and breeding services, reveal that natural pacing ability, height, agility, pedigree, and color were central to classification. [61]

Other breeders stressed that their stallions were of the Old Snip breed too. For example, when George Irish advertised his “fine pacing” stallion in the Newport Mercury in 1774, he noted that he was “of the Snip breed.” [62] When Charles Eldridge’s “famous sorrel pacing Horse” stood at stud in 1775, his advertise-ment noted that the stallion is “of the old Narragansett snip Breed.” His “Sizo, Resolution, Beauty and Behaviour” were also “equal to perhaps any Horse in America.” [63] Selah Norton’s stallion, Smiling Ball, which covered mares in 1785 and 1786, was a “Narragan-sett Horse, of the old Snip breed...Chestnut Sorrel, fifteen hands high, paces exceedingly fast & easy.” Smiling Ball could “travel 80 miles a day, without tiring himself or rider.” Norton noted, “I cannot learn that he was ever beat in pacing” and his offspring made “excellent saddle Horses.” [64] In advertising the stud services of his stallion, “Narragan-sett Traveller,” in the Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser in 1794, Patrick Hayley bragged that the stallion was “a remarkably fine horse for the road, both as to gait and security.” The horse could “pace 12 to 14 miles in the hour; and goes uncommonly easy to himself and the rider at 8 miles in the hour.” [65] Pacing ability, suitability for riding, and claiming lineage to Old Snip were central to how the breed parameters were constructed.

By the end of the eighteenth century, Connecticut eclipsed Rhode Island as a horse breeding hub, even in Narragansett Pacers. During the summer of 1792, William Hyde ran a series of advertisements in the Connecticut Gazette proffering the study services of the “famous Narragansett pacing HORSE... THE PEACOCK.” Customers could pay “the moderate price of Two Dollars the season, and One Dollar the single Leap” and Hyde offers “Good pasturing for Mares.” The advertise-ment offers an insightful description of the breed’s desirable characteristics: “His size is good, his colour is a bright chestnut, his courage and carriage none will exceed.” The five-year-old Peacock is also “as good a saddle horse of that breed as ever was in America.” [66] Hyde emphasizes that the stallion “was formerly owned and raised by Governor
were all simply part of his trading empire. Upon arrival in the sugar colonies, the horses toiled alongside slave laborers in the sugar mills, literally turning the wheels of empire and trade through their forced labor.

Exportation

Rhode Island's equine breeding business was directly linked to the rapid rise of the sugar industry from the latter half of the seventeenth through the eighteenth century. Rhode Island and the other Northern colonies sent fish, foodstuffs, building supplies (such as timber, boards, and staves), cattle, and horses. [71] In return, they obtained sugar, molasses, rum, dyestuffs, Spanish dollars, and Bills of Exchange from London. [72] By 1680, Rhode Island's Governor Sanford acknowledged to the Board of Trade and Plantations that "the principal matters which are exported among us is horses and provisions." [73] By 1700, following the entrance of the Dutch and French colonies into the sugar market, the demand for horses increased further. [74] Over the next twenty years the shipping of horses grew "sixfold," and Rhode Islanders sent horses to Jamaica, Barbados, Nevis, Antigua, St. Christopher, Montserrat, and Surinam, among other places. [75] One record of the Secretary of Customs in London shows that in a single year, the total number of horses shipped to the British West Indies alone, from all of the New England colonies combined, was 7,310. [76] Reverend McSparran noted how Rhode Island's "fine horses" were exported to other colonies. [77] Rhode Island was perfectly situated, both literally and figuratively, to serve this purpose, as they had a surplus of horses at a time when the sugar colonies were expanding. [78]

In seventeenth-century New England, horses were primarily used for saddle purposes, and oxen performed most of the heavy draft work. However, in the sugar colonies, horses were in high demand not only to turn the mills to crush the sugar cane, but for travel purposes and for the militia. As the seventeenth century progressed, the increasingly lucrative horse export trade led to a corresponding increase in commercial horse breeding in Rhode Island, especially in Narragansett Country. The sugar colonies needed a constant supply of horses due to the high death rate. According to Governor Nepewit, it was not unusual for an estate in Surinam to lose 50 to 60 draft horses a year. [79] Planters almost always overworked their draft horses, making them vulnerable to disease. [80] As early as 1655, Henry Whistler noted that the sugar mills in Barbados "destroy so many horses that it beggars the planters." [81] In Surinam, John Gabriel Stedman observed that most of the horses died from overwork. [82] Timing was everything in sugar production, and Barbadian planters regularly complained that their properties stood "in great need of drawing horses...for the mills, without which a great quantity of sugar is likely to perish and be lost." [83]

This meant that New Englanders always had a ready market for their draft horses in the sugar colonies.

Riding horses, such as Narragansett Pacers, sometimes fared a little better. Newport merchant Thomas Richardson took great interest in the Narragansett Pacers that he shipped to the West Indies. Richardson's horses were not destined for the sugar mills, and they were clearly riding horses. Writing to his agent in the West Indies in 1717, Richardson described at length the horses he was shipping: "the Dark bay is a natural Pacer but som times will not goe very well at first mounting...The small sorrel is very Gentle when mounted my wife hasRID[en] him several times to portsmouths." He also made recommendations about tack (i.e. equipment like saddles, etc.): "When my gray Hors is RID[en]...he hath a soft and Easty Kirb bridle and soberly handled for fretting puts him..."
out of his gates.” Richardson provided his agent with information on feeding habits, too: “[The] Dark bay having been very little used to a stable eats his Grain very slow.” [84] Richardson’s attention to detail shows how the pacing horses that were exported for saddle purposes were often prized above the draft horses.

Although some horses were shipped from the docks in Narragansett and Providence, Newport was the epicenter of Rhode Island’s equine export trade. [86] Crossing the Atlantic with equine cargo was a risky business, but a profitable one. Loss at sea was common as the horses travelled as deck cargo. Newport merchant Aaron Lopez lost three horses during a voyage to Jamaica in 1767, and the horses that made it were “in bad order, poor and much bruised.” [86] Captain Crow’s voyage from Rhode Island to deliver sixteen horses and other livestock to St. Christopher in July 1732 did not go to plan. After a month at sea, they were hit with a gale off the coast of Bermuda, which overtook the ship and quickly cleared the deck of its equine cargo. While the horses put up a valiant struggle, they were quickly carried out to sea and drowned. Crow and his crew clung to the slop and were “almost up to their middle in Water, for 36 Hours” before cutting away the mast,righting the vessel. They continued for nineteen days and were hit again by hard gales. In the “Hazard of perishing,” they met with “divine Providence” when fellow Rhode Islander, Captain Jonathan Remington, took them and delivered them to safety. [87]

Crow was just one of many captains who faced difficult sailing conditions with his equine cargo. Captain Henry Bowers recorded the horrendous conditions on a voyage to St. Kitts on the brig Gleazer. When the main deck filled with water, “the Horses began to give out.” Within an hour, most of the horses were “unable to stand,” despite the crew trying everything to keep them upright. The crew tossed part of the awning and fifteen bundles of hay overboard to try to ease the vessel, but to no avail. When a hurricane struck the brig, nearly all of the horses fell and were in a “drowning condition.” The crew then “cut...the dead ones up and threw them overboard.” Disaster continued when the starboard quarter was struck and the crew desperately tossed more hay overboard. The assault continued and the vessel made “fair breach” on all sides of the vessel, at which point the Gleazer lost all her fowls and pigs. A few days later, on January 23rd, they lost another horse, which left only eighteen alive out of the forty-three they started with. The horses that were still alive were “very much chaffed” when they finally arrived at St. Kitts on February 2nd. [88]

Pirates and privateers also interrupted the horse trade. For example, a 1716 Surinam bound slop lost its horses, as there was a “Praye in those parts.” [89] Despite all of the dangers in crossing the Atlantic, it still made sense to import horses from New England. Planters sought out Narragansett Pacers from New England for riding and also draft horses to work on the sugar plantations. The soil in the sugar colonies was not suited to raising animals, and if planters had spare acreage, they planted sugar. Raising horses required time, too; a horse does not typically mature for work until it is around four years old. Planters did not want to waste valuable acreage and time raising horses when they could import mature work-ready horses from New England.

By the 1720s New England’s equine export trade was flourishing, and the British Parliament sought to regulate it. Parliament in London believed that Rhode Island’s horse trade “greatly enriched” the French sugar colonies, while the British sugar islands were “impoverished.” [90] King George II passed the Molasses Act of 1733, which put prohibitive duties on molasses, rum, and sugar imported from non-British colonies into Great Britain’s American mainland colonies. The 1733 Act was only laxly enforced, and customs bureaucracy allowed colonial commerce to continue without reprisal. Rhode Islanders even smuggled horses to the French during the Seven Years War through neutral Dutch and Spanish ports. [91] This all changed when the Seven Years’ War came to an end in 1763. While Britain and her allies triumphed, victory came at the price of considerable debt. The British Parliament felt that her American colonies needed to pay their share. Looking for ways to raise revenue, King George III and his Lord of the Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Grenville, decided that taxing sugar would help to raise the necessary money. As fate would have it, the Molasses Act of 1733 was just about to expire; Britain debated renewing the Act and enforcing it with more vigor.

Rhode Islanders vehemently opposed this plan, and officials met on 24th January 1764 in South Kingstown to discuss the state of affairs. They tried to play down the importance of their trade in horses to the French, noting that the only articles “furnished by the colony for exportation, are some lumber, cheese, and horses.” According to Rhode Islanders, the horses were for “luxury” purposes and were not of any “real use” on the sugar plantations. By luxury purposes, Rhode Islanders meant that the horses were used for travel, not for crushing sugar cane. In contrast to British Parliamentary reports, Rhode Islanders stressed how the Spanish could easily supply the French with mules and horses. Rhode Islanders claimed that Great Britain would easily remain in possession of the profit and advantage arising from the article of sugar and that the law would be “highly injurious to the interests both of Great Britain, and these northern colonies.” [92] These pleas fell on deaf ears, and Britain passed the Sugar Act in April 1764. The British occupation of Newport during the American Revolutionary War further upset Rhode Island’s horse trade. During the Revolution, the sugar islands were forced to work with their own resources, and many places used waterpower as a substitute for horsepower. Prior to the Revolutionary War, Connecticut slowly emerged as a serious rival to Rhode Island’s export trade. However, after the Revolution, Connecticut fully eclipsed Rhode Island as the nucleus of New England’s horse breeding and export industry. [93]

Decline

As Rhode Island’s exportation of horses declined after the Revolutionary War, so did the fortunes of the Narragansett Pacers. J. P. Hazard lamented that one of the causes of the “loss of that famous breed here” was the great demand for them in Cuba, when the island began to cultivate sugar extensively. Hazard argued that as Cuba’s sugar plantation industry expanded, the planters wanted pacing horses for themselves, their wives, and their daughters to ride, “faster than we could supply them.” Hazard acknowledged that because the breed was solely a riding horse, and not suitable for draft or carriage work, it was not as versatile as other horse breeds. [94]

Exportation certainly played a part in the breed’s decline, but so did other factors, including travel innovations in New England. The roads improved in Rhode Island and across New England during the eighteenth century, and travel by saddle decreased as carriages became more common. As early as the 1760s, New Englanders sought a more versatile horse. For example, one buyer, who advertised in the Providence Gazette in 1763 wanted a “Likely Horse” that “will both trot and pace” and that was both “easy in the Saddle” but would also “go in a Chair.” [95] Due to their unique backbone movement, which made them so desirable under saddle,
purebred Narragansett Pacers were unsuitable as carriage horses. Cross-bred Pacers could trot and pace, and references to horses skilled in both pepper newspapers and court records. When William Coon's horse was stolen in 1763, he offered a five-dollar reward for its return in the Newport Mercury. The horse was "blackish brown," 13.5hh, and had a "pretty large head, a little Speck of white Hairs upon his Buttocks, and gray Hairs round his left hind Foot." The horse "both trots and paces," meaning that it was likely a cross-bred of a Pacer. [96] William Brown described his horse that was stolen in the same year as a five-year-old 13hh "large bay horse" that "has good Shapes, paces and trots well." [97] William Antham's horse, which was stolen from his "door in Providence" in 1764 was "a black Horse, with a small White Spot on his Forehead, and a small Bunch on his near Side." The six-year-old was 14.5 hh, and carried his head and tail "handsomely" and "trots and paces well." [98]

Other New Englanders who were in the market for a new saddle horse increasingly sought a more versatile horse as the eighteenth century progressed. In 1764, Richard Olney offered "Hard Cash" for a "Good Saddle Horse" in the Providence Gazette. Olney wanted a horse that was "14 1/2 or 14 1/4 Hands high," and under six years old. The horse needed to be "light-footed and flippant in his Gates" and "of good Courage and sure footed." He wanted a horse with a handsomely formed head and tail that would "travel well and easy" and "not when required." He ended his advertisement with, "None need apply unless the Horse...answers the Description." [99] Olney's description provides an insight into the type of horses that Rhode Islanders coveted, and that Rhode Islanders had begun to seek out a more versatile horse than the purebred Pacer as the eighteenth century progressed.

As roads in New England improved during the eighteenth century, travel by coach became more common. Newport merchant Godfrey Malbone wanted to keep up with not only the latest travel innovations, but also the latest fashions from the metropole when he ordered an elaborate coach from London in 1734. The coach was made with "the best seasoned timber" and the glass door was "neatly carved." The doors and forepart were "arched according to the fashion." The body of the coach was painted olive and "a set of shields heightened in gold with arms and crest" were painted on the side. The covering was the best neat leather, and the arches were "lined with light cloth cloth" to match the interior and trimmings. Malbone ordered a set of wheels that were bright red and olive. The coach was designed to be pulled by four horses, and Malbone ordered four new harnesses made with the best neat leather for the coach horses. His order was very particular: "The traces sewed 4 times the collar 6 times...plates and brass plates on the fore part...[and] whole breeching straps cannon mouth bits." [100] Malbone was not alone in craving English fashions to demonstrate his wealth. In 1732, Abraham Redwood was desperate to import coach horses directly from England. Redwood tasked his business associates Rowland and Samuel Frye, who were based in London, with securing passage for the horses. The Fryes lamented that: "We cannot yet meet with any Captain that will carry your coach-horses, but cannot persuade any one of them to do it." The Fryes noted that no one was willing to carry the horses because there was a "great rise in it, and they will loose their Freight unless they bring them alive." They closed their letter, noting "we are afraid we shall never be able to send them." [101] Malbone and Redwood's decision to import directly from England illustrates how the wealthy elite used coaches and coach horses as a status symbol.

Rhode Island farmers, merchants, and breeders were not willing to allow their prized breed, the Narragansett Pacer, to die out without a fight. In 1763 merchants, farmers, and breeders sought to revive an interest in breeding Pacers through hosting a race with a sizable purse. The following advertisement appeared in the Newport Mercury on March 28th, 1763:

"Whereas the best Horses of this Colony have been sent off from Time to Time to the West Indies and elsewhere by which the Breed is much dwindled, to the great Detriment of both Merchant and Farmer; therefore, a number of public spirited Gentlemen of Newport, for the Good of the Colony, and to encourage the Farmers to breed better Horses for the future, have collected a Purse of ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS to be Run on Thursday, the Fifth of May next, at Easton's Beech, free for any Horse time or Gelding bred in the Colony... Proper Certificate of the Places where the Horses were bred, to be produced under the Hands of Breeders at the Time of Entrance."[102]

The call for entries openly addressed how the breed was "much dwindled" as the "best Horses of this Colony" were sent "to the West Indies and elsewhere," which was a detrimen to the merchants and farmers alike. By 1763, the neighboring colony of Connecticut had started to emerge as the center for
breeding Narragansett Pacers. Therefore, the race was restricted to horses that were "bred in the Colony" and entrants had to provide a "Proper Certificate" of breeding. Horse racing for a silver tankard or purse was common in Rhode Island throughout the early eighteenth century, notably on the beaches and roads in Narragansett Country near the horse-breeding plantations. [103] Samuel Gardiner of South Kingstown won the race 1763, but with only three starters, his victory may have felt quite hollow. [104]

The breed continued in Connecticut into the early nineteenth century. By 1820, when Charles Henry Hall, Esq., addressed the Windham County Agricultural Society in Connecticut, he lamented that "there was a time, when New England could boast of a race of Horses equal in most respects to those of any country." The "true Narraganset Horse was a most noble animal" which had been lost by "want of care and circumspection." Hall blamed crossing too many purebred Narragansett Pacers with Arabian stallions in the 1770s. Thus, "finally by degrees, one by one, the whole race disappeared, not leaving a solitary cross blood to procure the species." [105] In 1833, the Connecticut Mirror published extracts from the Common Place Book of a Gentleman, Horses, and Neat Cattle. The report acknowledged that the "Narraganset breed" was "nearly extinguished" and blamed crossbreeding with Arabians as New Englanders increasingly sought more "elegant saddle horses" that were a "mixture of the Narraganset and Arabian." [106] The breed was dying out slowly, and in 1823 one solitary "Narraganset breed Mare" was offered as part of an estate sale in Connecticut. [107] Throughout the 1830s, breeders in Connecticut tried various measures in an attempt to revive the pure strain of the bloodline. As late as 1826, breeders in Hartford offered a horse named "Sachem A Narragansett Pacer" for stud. The breeders, J. Ramsay and H. Kirkham, stated that their purpose was "reviving that most valuable breed of Horse, so esteemed for their extraordinary performance under saddle." The breeders were so keen to restore the breed to its former glory that they were willing to incur a loss. They offered a cover fee of only $3, which was "barely sufficient to pay for the keeping of the Horse." To demonstrate that the stallion was true to the breed, the breeders publicized how Sachem was "dark brown, of moderate size, well made, and for strength and speed has few equals." [108] Sadly, efforts by breeders such as Ramsay and Kirkham ultimately failed, and purebred Narragansett Pacers were on their way to extinction by the mid-nineteenth century.

Legacy

Staring in The Last of the Mohicans is not the only claim to fame for the Narragansett Pacer. In fact, the breed has inspired several myths and legends. Given its acclaimed gait so perfectly suited for travel, it is not surprising that some have speculated that Paul Revere rode a Narragansett Pacer on his midnight ride. The legendary ride has captured the public imagination in a range of ways, through historical re-enactments and the famous poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

Revere’s ride from Charlestown to Lexington on the evening of April 18th, 1775, has inspired generations of painters, who have used their artistic license to depict Revere on a range of horses. [109] Revere was a silversmith by trade, but during the war he carried messages for the Patriot cause as an express rider. On the evening of April 18th, 1775, Dr. Joseph Warren instructed Revere to ride to Lexington, Massachusetts, to warn Samuel Adams and John Hancock that British troops were marching to arrest them. After being rowed across the Charles River to Charlestown, Revere then took off upon a horse. On the way to Lexington, Revere “alarmed”
the countryside, stopping at each house, and arrived in Lexington around midnight. After delivering his message, Revere was joined by a second rider, William Dawes, who had been sent on the same errand by a different route. As Revere and Dawes continued to Concord, where weapons and supplies were hidden, they were joined by a third rider, Dr. Samuel Prescott. Soon after, all three were arrested by a British patrol. Prescott escaped almost immediately, and Dawes fled shortly thereafter. After holding Revere for some time, the British patrol finally released him. Left without a horse, Revere returned to Lexington in time to witness part of the battle on the Lexington Green. At this point, Revere’s horse passes out of the historical record.

While we know that John Larkin and his family owned the horse that Revere rode, there is significant debate about what breed it was. [110] Suggestions range from a collateral descendant of a heavy East Anglican horse, distantly related to the Suffolk Punch, to a fine-boned thoroughbred. David Hackett Fischer argues in Paul Revere’s Ride, “She was neither a racer nor a pulling animal, but an excellent specimen of a New England saddle-horse—big, strong and very fast.” [112] Others, including Richard O’Donnell, describe the horse as a ‘little brown mare.’ [112] While Fischer and O’Donnell coyly sidestep identifying a specific breed, in Rhode Island Farms, Robert Geake addresses the issue directly. Geake notes that “Such was the legend of the Narragansett Pacer” that stories abound about the breed. Geake acknowledges that one of these legends is that “Paul Revere favored the horse, and it was a Narragansett Pacer that carried him on his ‘midnight ride.’” Geake cautiously avoids taking a stance on the issue, and notes that while these “legends may be disputed by historians” the Narragansett...
A Pacer in terms of the time period (mid to late eighteenth century), location (New England) and the type of journey (long with rugged terrain); the sources that survive suggest otherwise. Revere provided three accounts of his ride, and although he acknowledged that the horse belonged to John Larkin, neither he nor anyone else took much notice of the horse. [120] Though written twenty-three years after the event, the most complete account of the ride is Revere’s letter to Jeremy Belknap, Corresponding Secretary of the Massachusetts Historical Society, dated 1798. In the letter, Revere stated that “I saw two men on Horse back…When I got near them, I discovered they were British…One tried to git a head of Me, & the other to take me. I turned my Horse very quick, & Galloped towards Charlestown neck.” [121] There are a few things in this letter that are worth considering, including the fact that the horse galloped. This calls into question whether it was a Pacer, as contemporary accounts note that purebred Pacers did not gallop well. For example, Robert Livingston, who described Narragansett Pacers at length, noted, “it is difficult to put them upon a gallop.” [122] Contemporary horsemanship manuals also described the difficulties in training a Pacer to gallop. A Gentleman’s Complete Jockey, published in London in 1700, averred that “the Gallop… is very awkward to be brought to’ as the horse “scrambles with his Legs.” [123] By specifically mentioning that the horse galloped, Revere’s account casts doubt on whether it was a purebred Pacer.

Other pieces of Revere’s account also suggest that the horse was not a purebred Pacer. Revere’s account noted that it was a large horse, as the sergeant of grenadiers took the mare to replace his own smaller mount. However, purebred Narragansett Pacers were small, a pony by today’s standards, normally no bigger than 14 hands. While the height and galloping indicators suggest that this was not a purebred Narragansett, it is possible that it was a crossbred. By 1775, Narragansett Pacers were routinely crossbred with Arabians, and which could trot, pace, and gallop, and were slightly bigger. If Revere rode any kind of Pacer that night, it was most likely a crossbred. That this narrative persists, however, is a testament to the Pacer’s role in shaping a distinctly American identity.

The legend that Paul Revere rode a Narragansett Pacer on his midnight ride is one of the most widely known stories about the breed. However, even if Revere did not ride one, other notable figures, including George Washington did. Washington was not only a keen horseman, but he also owned and raced Pacers. On September 24th, 1768, Washington recorded in his diary that he went “to a Race Place at Accotink,” Washington entered one of his horses in a pacing race that day and paid Robert Sanford 12 shillings “for Pacing my Horse.” [124] General Jeremiah Wadsworth of Hartford, Connecticut, was a notable breeder and trader of Narragansett Pacers in the late eighteenth century. He advertised Narragansett Pacers from his stable in the Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily Advertiser into the early nineteenth century. [125] George Washington was one of Wadsworth’s most notable clients, and the two men corresponded at length about horses. On June 12th, 1796, Wadsworth wrote to Washington to describe an eight-year-old black gelding that he had recently purchased for Washington. The horse was “a good pacer” who could pace “both slow & fast.” However, as with purebred Pacers, his trot was “not so good.” In line with other contemporary accounts, Wadsworth warned Washington that the horse was no beauty, “I wish I could say he was handsome but that rarely belongs to this breed, but he carries well & when moving has a decent appearance.” Wadsworth paid $120 for the horse and planned to send the horse to Washington “by a careful Man who rides Post.” Wadsworth

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Pacer was an enviable breed for over a century. Esthér Forbes goes further in Paul Revere and the World He Lived In, arguing Revere rode “a plain, lively, surefooted little creature, who paced naturally…sorel in color”—essentially a Narragansett Pacer. [114] A number of websites dedicated to public history claim that Revere rode a Narragansett Pacer. For example, the website for the International Museum of the Horse notes: “A Narragansett Pacer is reputed to have served as Paul Revere’s mount on his famous ride.” [115] Horse forums abound with claims that Revere rode a Narragansett Pacer. [116] Other websites, such as Learning About Horses, go as far as to say; “Deacon Larkin loaned his chestnut Narragansett Pacer to Paul for the ride.” [117] Wikipedia’s entry on the Narragansett Pacer offers the following comment: “Paul Revere possibly rode a Pacer during his 1775 ride to warn the Americans of a British march.” [118] Even children’s books, such as The American Saddle Horse, weigh in on the matter, claiming: “Paul Revere took his famous ‘Midnight Ride’ on the back of a Narragansett Pacer.” [119] Clearly, there are scholars, equine experts, and members of the public who believe (or at least want to believe) that Revere rode a Narragansett Pacer for his famous ride. Thus, this claim deserves further investigation.

While it makes sense that Revere would select
ended the letter with an interesting promise to Washington, "if we live two or three Years I hope to furnish you with a perfect Narraganset as I have two fine Mare Colts one of which when old enough you shall have." The final line not only shows that Narragansett Pacers continued to breed in Connecticut at the end of the eighteenth century, but it also hints that Washington had an interest in acquiring the "perfect Narraganset." [126] Washington was an esteemed horseman and judge of horse kind. When he passed away in 1799, Thomas Jefferson eulogized Washington as "the best horseman of his age, and the most graceful figure that could be seen on horse." [127]

When Wadsworth and Washington corresponded in 1796, there was clearly an ideal breed standard for the Narragansett Pacer. While the exact origins of the Narragansett Pacer remain a mystery, the breed foundations most likely came from a mix of Scotch Galloways, Irish Hobbies, and Spanish Ginetes, which were then diversified with the Old Snip line. Riders, including Washington, coveted Narragansett Pacers due to their ability to cover long distances on rough ground quickly and smoothly. The Narragansett Pacer emerged in response to a specific set of circumstances, and when these circumstances changed in the nineteenth century, the breed faded out and new and more versatile types of horses emerged. While crossing-breeding with Arabians and other breeds contributed to the demise of the purebred, it also allowed for new breeds to emerge. Through crossing breeding, the Pacer has influenced a range of modern breeds, most notably the Standardbred, Canadian Pacer, Rocky Mountain Horse, Kentucky Mountain Horse, and the American Saddlebred. Pacers also helped to create the Tennessee Walking Horse or the "Plantation Walker," which were known for their unusually smooth four-beat running gait and favored on plantations in the American south.

While the Narragansett Pacer may be gone, it is not forgotten. Its significant legacy lives on in the contemporary breeds for which it laid the foundation. Perhaps there is no better testament to the importance of the breed than that the first President of the United States and "best horseman of his age" sought out a "perfect Narragansett." [128]

Charlotte Carrington-Farmer is an Assistant Professor of History at Roger Williams University, specializing in early American History. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge (Trinity Hall) in 2010.

ARTICLE NOTES


2. The withers are the highest point on the back, between the shoulder blades. The description on how to measure horses comes from: David Pulsifer, ed., Records of the colony of New Plymouth in New England, Vol. 11, Laws 1623-1682 (Boston: William White, 1861), 225.


4. Fenimore Cooper, The Last of the Mohicans, 169.


15. The General Court in Massachusetts Bay ordered that the commons were monitored and all horses branded in 1647. Nathaniel Shurtleff, ed., Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay, Vol. 2, 1642-1649 (Boston, MA: William White, 1853), 190, 252. In 1665, Connecticut ordered every town to have a "town brand for horses." Horses had to be branded on "ye near shoulder" and anyone who sold a horse had to enter the sale in the brand book with the "artificial and natural marks, couler and age of such horses" within 10 days of the sale. In 1674, Connecticut acknowledged that people were not following the laws about keeping horses on the commons "for upholding a good breed of horses," therefore, selectmen were ordered to geld any stallions they found on the common. J. Hammond Trumbull, ed., The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut from 1665-1678, Vol. 2 (Hartford: F. A. Brown, 1852), 28, 244. Plymouth, New Haven, and Rhode Island passed similar measures. Pulsifer, ed., Records of the Colony of New Plymouth, Vol. 11, 226; Charles J. Hoadly, ed., Records of the Colony or Jurisdiction of New Haven, Vol. 2 (Hartford: Case, Lockwood, and Company), 590; John Russell Bartlett, ed., Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England, 1630-1663, Vol. 1 (Providence: A. Crawford Greene and Brothers, 1886), 150.


24. There is some debate among equine scholars about the meaning of amble and pace, and whether they were used interchangeably in the early modern era. The amble, like the pace, is an intermediate-speed gait, but it is a four-beat gait. The use of the term amble rather than pace could depend on the origin of the author. For example, when French Officer Baron Cromot Dubourg visited Newport in 1781, he noted that the horses were "extremely dear" and have the "gait which we term the amble, of which it is extremely difficult to break them." Baron Cromot Dubourg, "Diary of a French Officer, 1781," Magazine of American History, IV, 209. The term "racker" is also used, normally to describe crosbreds. Racking is a lateral gait. It is a similar speed to the pace, but it is a four-beat gait. The gait is most closely associated with the American Saddlebred. For example, in 1810, the stallion, "Narraganset," was advertised to cover mares near Baltimore. The horse was described as "chestnut sorrel, well formed, with star in forehead, one white foot, fifteen hands three inches high, a natural Racker, and is allowed by judges to be as good a Hack as any in the country. Narraganset is rising five years old, was got by the noted horse Narraganset." Federal Republican & Commercial Gazette, April 6, 1810.


28. Ibid, August 06, 1763.


30. Alice Morse Earle described "a Narragansett Pacer that was nearly full blooded. She was a villainously ugly animal." Alice Morse Earle, Customs and Fashions in Old New England (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1894), 189.


34. The Boston Post-Boy, June 03, 1751.


37. For example, George Strutt included annotated recipes on the back inside cover for "Balls to be given to a Horse When taken up from Grass" in his copy of Francis Clater’s Evermann’s His Own Farrier; Or The whole Art of Farriery laid open. Containing Cure for every Disorder, that useful Animal, a Horse, is incident to (Newark: J. Tomslinson, 1786), International Museum of the Horse, Lexington SF55.C35.1786, back inside cover.

38. Philip Astley, The Modern Riding Master: Or, A Key to the Knowledge of the Horse, and Horsemanship; with Several Necessary Rules


42. John Camberlayne, Magna Britanniae Notitia: Or, the Present State of Great Britain (London: D. Midwinter et al., 1737), 333.


44. Like the Narragansett Pacer, the exact origins of the Scottish Galloway is disputed. One point of contention is that the Galloway sprung from Spanish stallions, who swam ashore from the wreckage of the Spanish Armada fleet and bred with Native Scottish ponies. Both the Galloway and Hobbie, like the Narragansett Pacer, are extinct now. Berenger's The History and Art of Horsemanship, 205.


47. Published in 1807, H. Wallace contended in The horse of America in his derivation, history, and development that the Narragansett Pacer originated solely from New England stock and "there were no pacers in Andalusia or any other part of Spain...[and] the Narragansetts were a leading article of export from Rhode Island in 1680, thirteen years before Governor Robinson was born." Wallace misses the point by focusing on whether there were pacing horses in Spain, as the Narragansett Pacer inherited its pacing gait from the breed it was crossed with (most likely the Galloway or Hobbie). J. H. Wallace, The horse of America in his derivation, history, and development (New York, 1897), 174.


51. Ibid, 50.

52. Ibid, 51.


55. For example, as early as 1734, the South Carolina Gazette advertises "a Rhode Island pacing stallion." Harrison Fairfax, The John's Island stud, South Carolina, 1750-1788 (Richmond: Old Dominion Press, 1931), 159.


57. William Douglass, A Summary, historical and political, of the first planting, progressive improvements, and present state of the British settlements in North America, Vol. 2 (Boston, 1755), 101.


60. Newport Mercury, May 2 to May 9, 1768.

61. See for example, Providence Gazette and Country Journal, January 3, 1781; Providence Gazette and Country Journal, November 22, 1783.

62. The advertisement ran in the following editions: Newport Mercury, May 9, 1774, and May 16, 1774.

63. Commutical Gazette, May 12, 1775.


65. Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser, April 02, 1794.

66. The advertisement ran in the following editions: Connecticut Gazette; May 24, 1792, June 7, 1792, and June 21, 1792.

67. Newport Mercury, January 2, 1764.

68. Newport Mercury, March 10, 1776.


73. "Answer of Rhode Island to Inquiries of


78. Between 1649 and 1658 the importation of English horses was high. The British Colonial Papers note 48 different permits for such shipments, for a total of more than 1,900 horses. By the 1660s, New England had begun to take over this trade. Sainsbury, ed., *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies*, Vol. 1, 1, 329, 379, 382, 385, 390, 392, 393, 395, 401, 404, 404, 409, 411, 417, 418, 423, 431, 436, 439, 451, 461.


80. John Gabriel Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1796), 104.


82. Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition*, 51.


84. "Letter book of Thomas Richardson 1715-1719," MS 133, Newport Historical Society, Newport, RI.


87. The Weekly Rehearsal, October 08, 1733.

88. "Captain Henry Bower logbook: Brig Gleaner," Logbook 827, MS 82.61, Collections Research Center, Mystic Seaport, Mystic, CT.


92. Providence Gazette and Country Journal, October 20, 1764. This report was picked up and republished in the *New-York Mercury*, November 12, 1764.


96. Newport Mercury, September 05, 1763.


98. Ibid, December 03, 1763.

99. Ibid, September 01, 1764.


102. Newport Mercury, March 28, 1763. To maximize publicity and gather as many entries as possible, the advertisement ran again on April 4, April 11, April 18, April 25, and finally on May 2.


104. The results were published in the Newport Mercury, on May 9, 1765. Another attempt to run a "Horse Race of three two mile heats to be Run on Easton's Beach" for one hundred dollars was made in 1765; "Horse Race on Easton's Beach, 1765;" Vault A, Box 43 Folder 16, MS, folio 256, Newport Historical Society, Newport, RI.


112. Richard O'Donnell, "On the Eighteenth of April, in Seventy-five... Longfellow didn't know the half of it." *Smithsonian*, 4 (1973), 72-77.

114. Forbes, Paul Revere, 193.


121. The manuscript letter includes some interlineations, apparently in the hand of Jeremy Belknap. In printing the account in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 1st ser. vol. 5 (Boston, MA: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1798), Belknap assigned it to the date of 1 January 1798. At the end of the document, Revere signed his name but then, apparently choosing to remain anonymous, wrote above it “A Son of Liberty of the year 1775” and beside it “do not print my name.” Either he changed his mind or Belknap ignored his request, for the two phrases are crossed out in the original document, and the name is included in the printed version.


128. Ibid, 49.
A Tribute to Elizabeth C. Stevens

C. MORGAN GREFE

I feel like we've been saying goodbye quite a bit lately. And even though saying goodbye often brings sadness, it also allows us to stand back and take stock of someone's accomplishments in a way that we are often too busy to do in our normal day to day.

I've been a staff member of the Rhode Island Historical Society for thirteen years, and a part of the RIHS community for fifteen. To many people this seems like a lengthy tenure, but those people don't know Elizabeth Stevens's story. And, in light of her recent retirement from the RIHS as the editor of the journal you are currently reading, it seemed the perfect time to tell the story of a woman who has spent the last forty years, with a brief hiatus here and there, with the RIHS, fine-tuning the stories of the men and women who shaped Rhode Island—because, without question, so has she. ¶

And, as someone deeply dedicated to the art and craft of telling a good story, it seemed like it would be fun to put it in a framework that she is sure to recognize:

Exposition

Elizabeth Stevens was raised in Greenwich, Connecticut, the daughter of the president of a local radio station. She attended Rosemary Hall, a private girls school, before going on to the then all-women Wheaton College. It wasn't so much the place that changed her—Wheaton wasn't a fundamental shift from fashionable Greenwich and weekends at the Belle Haven Club—but the times: she was a freshman in 1964, the year that Cheney, Goodman and Schwerner were murdered in Philadelphia, Mississippi, and Elizabeth was a thoughtful and empathetic soul entering college during one of the most transformative moments of the 20th century. And, she too was transformed.

Rising Action

While at Wheaton, Elizabeth Stevens found herself absorbed in the fight for social justice of the day, and it did not take her long to find her voice for community action in the world of education. At first, she was able to convince three of her Wheaton classmates to go with her to tutor in Roxbury, under the auspices of a larger program started by the Northern Student Movement, the Northern arm of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). And before she graduated, the program included more than 60 of her fellow students. She continued her work in the summers at a community-based program at an African-American church in Hartford's north end, but she struggled to reconcile her deeply held conviction that getting to know persons of diverse backgrounds and experiences could break down barriers with her desire not to seem paternalistic in her actions. As was captured in a 1968 issue of TIME magazine dedicated to the "Graduate," this was a time when deep moralistic threads were woven with both hope in humanity and cynicism about the system. Elizabeth, the TIME author noted, was a primary example of this tension.

And yet, it was not a tension unique to the 1960s. Activists seeking social change had long struggled in this area. Elizabeth was interested in women's history, perhaps somehow knowing that she would find inspiration and antecedents in this annals. But even at such a distinguished women's college, the field of women's studies was essentially nonexistent.

Climax

When Elizabeth was graduating from college, she thought she would study social work, and so she joined a program in community organization at Columbia University and taught for a few years at the New Lincoln School in Harlem. Eventually, she made her way to Brown and entered the American Civilization (now American Studies) Department to pursue her Ph.D. And it was during this process when she began to explore the stories of women who had dedicated their lives to acting on behalf of social justice—names that are now celebrated parts of our state and nation's history, like Lydia Maria Child, Elizabeth Buffum Chace, and Chace's daughter Lillian Chace Wyman. Names that are recognized, in no small part, because of Elizabeth's work.

Elizabeth not only wrote about these women, but she also sank herself into their words, helping to edit the papers of Lydia Maria Child and Jane Addams. The personal papers of these women, and the dedication to detail that editing work necessitates, also brought Elizabeth to the Rhode Island Historical Society—though her work this time would not be on the papers of an influential woman. Yet still, her work would focus on an individual who was willing to die for what he believed to be right: Nathanael Greene.

In fact, while Elizabeth was pursuing her Ph.D., raising her three children, and pursuing her own academic interests, she also found time to be part of the massive Nathanael Greene Papers Project from 1998 to 2005. This, perhaps the single most significant contribution to the academy made by the Rhode Island Historical Society, would engage a deeply committed and passionate cohort of historians, Americanists, and editors. Elizabeth was part of an extraordinary team at the Greene Papers, but she was also part of the larger RHIS team, too—up on the third floor of Aldrich House.

Falling Action

The Nathanael Greene Papers wrapped up in 2005, celebrated in grants style at the History Maker's Ball at the Westin Providence Hotel with a keynote speech by Greene fan David McCullough. And by this point, as the Greene Papers were wrapping up, Elizabeth had already begun in 2004 to work as the Editor at Large of our journal, Rhode Island History.

Working with copy editor Hilliard Beller, Elizabeth pushed the journal in a new, more academic direction. Having come out of academia, Elizabeth knew that for an article to be counted as a publication for tenure, it must appear in a peer-reviewed journal. So that is what Rhode Island History would become, and that's what it's stayed.

When Hilliard Beller retired in 2011, Elizabeth, though living in Vermont at the time, decided to take over all editing work of the journal, spending days and weeks seeking out articles, working with authors, and helping to select the best images and layouts to make the articles come to life.

Resolution

And so it was with mixed emotions that I accepted Elizabeth's desire to retire from the RHIS. I could not imagine the RHIS without her. But, how could I say that she had not given the RHIS enough? She had been a
part of our team for a remarkable 39 years. It is astounding. She made her mark on our largest publications project, and our longest running. She made us immeasurably better and that is written on every page of Rhode Island History.

She took her passion for activism, which continues to infuse her personal life, and translated that into an academic study of those who came before her. I would like to posit, however, that she did something that was perhaps a more subtle form of activism: she took the academic publishing model, one which often only speaks to itself, and translated that to the public audience. It is an action that believed in the education, intelligence, and interest of the entire community, not only the academy. It is a lifetime of work dedicated to the idea that our history must be broadly shared to inform the present and inspire the future.

Thank you, Elizabeth, for educating and inspiring all of us. You are forever a part of the Rhode Island Historical Society, and I am so glad to have gotten to work by your side.

C. Morgan Greve, Ph.D., is Executive Director of the Rhode Island Historical Society.

Rhode Island Book Notes

WINTER / SPRING 2018

Don’t Tell Father
I Have Been Shot At:
The Civil War Letters of
Captain George N. Bliss,
First Rhode Island Cavalry

GEORGE N. BLISS
Eds. WILLIAM C. EMERSON AND ELIZABETH C. STEVENS
Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland Press, 2018

The edited correspondence of Captain George N. Bliss of the First Rhode Island Cavalry, who survived 27 actions during the Civil War. A colorful writer, Captain Bliss candidly chronicles his experiences in letters to a close friend and dispatches to a Providence newspaper.

Our Beloved Kin:
A New History of King Philip’s War

LISA BROOKS
New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2018

With rigorous original scholarship and creative narration, Lisa Brooks recovers a complex picture of war, captivity, and Native resistance during the “First Indian War” (later named King Philip’s War) by relaying the stories of Wessatawaa, a woman Wampanoag leader, and James Printer, a Nipmuc scholar, whose stories converge in the captivity of Mary Rowlandson.

Grappling with Legacy:
Rhode Island’s Brown Family and the American Philanthropic Impulse

SYLVIA BROWN
Bloomington, Ind.: Archway Publishing, 2017

What fuels a family’s compulsion for philanthropy? Self-interest? A feeling of guilt? A sense of genuine altruism? Sylvia Brown tells the story of the ten generations of Browns that came before her with warmth and lucidity. Today, in an era of wealth creation and philanthropic innovation not seen since the Gilded Age, Grappling with Legacy provides fascinating insights into a unique aspect of America’s heritage.

The Poison Plot: A Tale of Adultery and Murder in Colonial Newport

ELAINE FORMAN CRANE
Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2018

An accusation of attempted murder rudely interrupted Mary Arnold’s dalliances with working men and her extensive shopping sprees. When her husband Benedict fell deathly ill and then asserted she had tried to kill him with poison, the result was a dramatic petition for divorce. Elaine Forman Crane invites readers into the salacious domestic life of Mary and Benedict Arnold and reveals the seamy side of colonial Newport.
Christine Delucia offers a major reconsideration of the violent seventeenth-century conflict in northeastern America known as King Philip’s War, providing an alternative to Pilgrim-centric narratives that have conventionally dominated the histories of colonial New England.

Brimful of scandal, illicit affairs, spurned loves and unexpected tragedy. The Million Dollar Duchesses: How America’s Heiresses Seduced the Aristocracy reveals the closed-door bargaining which led to these most influential matches and how America’s heiresses shook up British high society forever.

James A. Warren explores the remarkable and little-known story of the alliance between Roger Williams’s Rhode Island and the Narragansett Indians, and how they joined forces to retain their autonomy and their distinctive ways of life against Puritan encroachment.

A biography of Mary Dyer, one of the “Boston martyrs,” four Quakers hanged by the Massachusetts Bay Colony between 1659 and 1661, and her husband William Dyer, one of Rhode Island’s founders. Johan Winsser’s biography traces Mary Dyer’s civil disobedience which led to the downfall of the puritan government, and advanced the principles of freedom of conscience and expression.

Margaret Ellen Newell reveals a little-known aspect of American history: English colonists in New England enslaved thousands of Indians. Drawing on letters, diaries, newspapers, and court records, Newell recovers the slaves’ own stories and shows how they influenced New England society in crucial ways. Sandra A. Turgeon of the East Providence Historical Society has compiled the wartime correspondence of Lt. Peter Hunt, native of East Providence. These intimate letters provide insight into the human cost of one of America’s bloodiest conflicts.

History Press (Charleston, S.C.) published a number of Rhode Island titles in 2017-18. These volumes include:

- Barrington
  BARRINGTON PRESERVATION SOCIETY
- Lost Providence: 15 Historic Postcards
  DAVID BRUSSET
- Rhode Island Clam Shacks
  BARRINGTON PRESERVATION SOCIETY
- World War II Rhode Island
  CHRISTIAN MCBURNIE, BRIAN L. WALLIN, PATRICE T. CONLEY, JOHN W. KENNEDY, AND MAUREEN A. TAYLOR

Newport Firsts:
A Hundred Claims to Fame
BRIAN STIMSON
Rhode Island Shipwrecks
CHARLOTTE TAYLOR