# MARYLAND

*To find exotic cultures far afield is expected; to recognize them in our midst forces a reappraisal of perceptions or value systems. If an Indian basket weaver, a Mississippi bluesman, and an Ozark ballad singer are accepted as valid carriers of folk traditions, why then should we question the validity of the Chesapeake Bay skipjack captain, the Baltimore street vendor, the hunt country equestrian and the Eastern Shore dockside raconteur or metal founder? The following articles provide answers to this question, along with valuable information and insights into some of the great variety of Maryland traditions to be found at this Festival.*

*While these articles cover only a small portion of these Maryland traditions, they do indicate the areas of concentration, water, horse, and metal traditions, selected on the basis of their richness and significance.*

*As the Nation's leading "fishing hole," the Chesapeake Bay, home of our last working sailing fleet, has clusters of skilled craftsmen and fishermen whose lives are part of the waters and their yield. The breeding, training, and racing of horses is one of the State's largest industries and, like the watermen, those who work with horses carry some of the most carefully guarded traditions and skills to be found in oral tradition. The Nation's oldest silversmith, Samuel Kirk and Son; its largest producer of pewter ware, Steiff Co.; and numerous skilled metal workers in copper, brass, iron, and tin are all to be found in Maryland. Hand skills, learned through apprenticeship, are the mainstay of these industries and they provide a natural link between the cottage industries and the Union Workers' exhibits, which, this year and last, have rounded out the presentations of the cultures of working Americans that the Festival was established to honor and to celebrate.*

*George Carey has devoted years to collecting and studying the lore and humor of Eastern Shore watermen. His recently published book,* A Faraway Time and Place, *is a welcome and long overdue treasury of the rich verbal traditions of the area.*

*William Warner has contributed to the fieldwork and planning of the Festival's waterfront site. His provocative article on the ecology of the Chesapeake was abstracted from a lecture he delivered at the Smithsonian for the National Parks and Conservation Association April.*

*Robert Burgess places the skipjack in the historical and contemporary perspective of Eastern Shore life. At the Festival, he shares with us his more than four decades of experience as a scholar, woodcarver, photographer, and admiring, valued friend of the watermen.*

*Mrs. Jean du Pont McConnell draws on her knowledge and skills as a horsewoman, fox hunter, and breeder of hounds, in presenting the tradition of the hunt at daily demonstrations on the Mall. Her handbook for all presentations in the ring provides details on horse and pony breeds common in Maryland.*

*Gerald Davis, with his understanding and respect for the skills and significance of Baltimore street vending as a craft, offers a more intimate acquaintance with "arabber" Sonny Diggs than the average visitor to the Festival will be priviledged to enjoy by watching Sonny as an artful purveyor of fresh fruit from his horsedrawn cart on the Mall. An interview that I did with brass-founder, Harry Evans is included to accomplish this very end through a direct transcription of Mr. Evans' forthright statement of his heritage and purpose.*

*Ralph Rinzler*

*(above) Carved eagle, fourteen inches, by Claude Yoder, Cumberland, Maryland. Photo: Margaret Bouslough.*

# THE HORSE AND MARYLAND: three vignettes

**by Richard Hulan**

I. The Horseman

Most observers agree that horses can't talk; the folklore of the horse is thus borne in the main by horsemen. No American has embodied that term more fully than a Maryland horseman of the early nineteenth century, John Stuart Skinner.

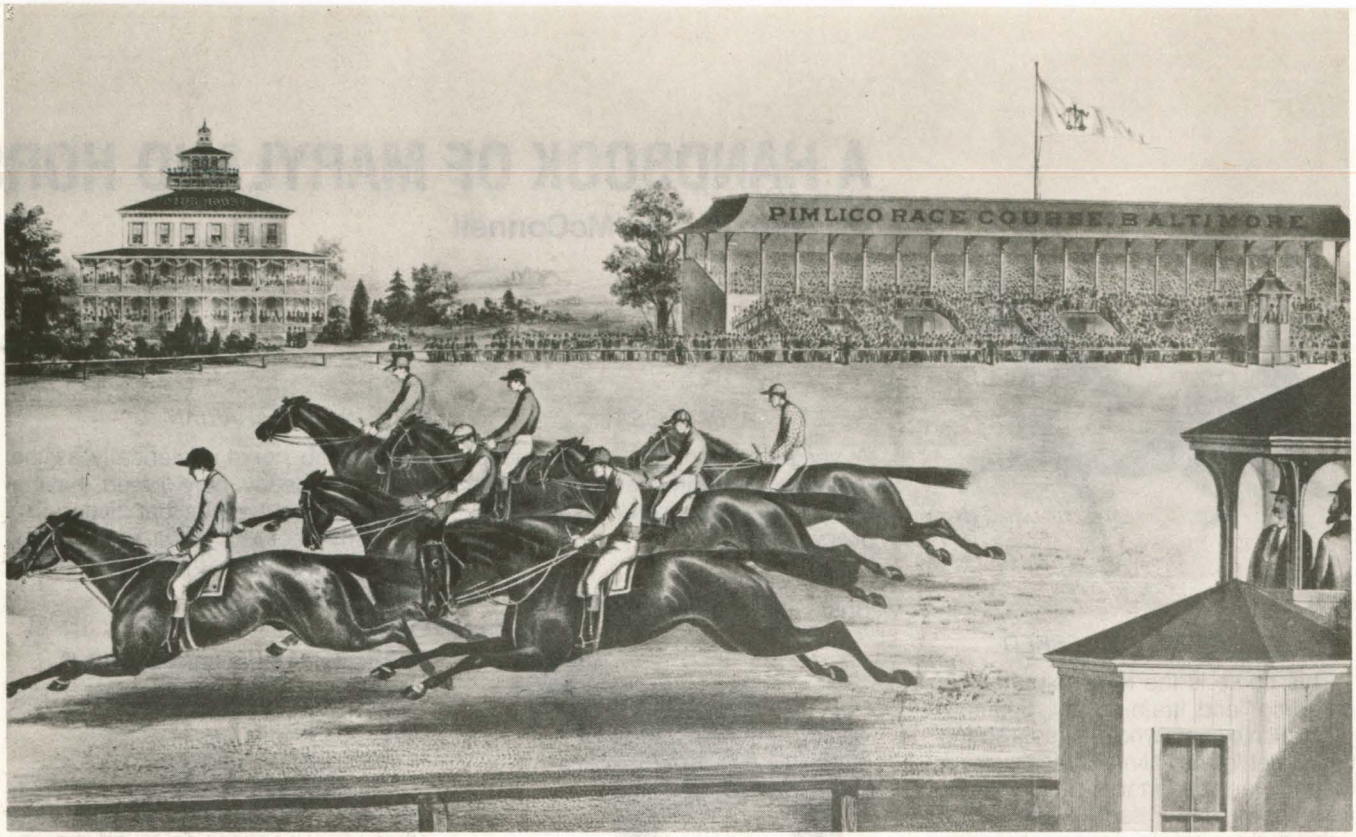
Like many another Maryland gentleman, Skinner loved field sports; he is said to have ridden in the "first flight" with the Baltimore and the Washington City Hounds. His mounts were Thoroughbreds, and his memory is honored primarily by those who breed and race the blood horse. Yet Skinner's own interests ranged across the spectrum of horse breeds and uses. His special field of endeavor, as a matter of fact, was the breeding of mules.

Born on a Western Shore plantation in 1788, J. S. Skinner rose rapidly through a series of public-service positions to become Postmaster of Baltimore at the age of twenty-eight. Although he held this post for twenty-one years, and was an Assistant Postmaster General of the United States for another four, Skinner's reputation nationally and internationally rested on his publications on agriculture.

*The American Farmer* appeared in 1819 and was immediately successful. The first periodical (monthly) in this country devoted to agriculture, it continued under Skinner's management for ten years. He was an outspoken advocate of contests (livestock shows and, of course, horse races) and of accurate pedigrees—the scientific substitute for natural selection in wild herds.

"One might as well look among the black Dutch for a dancing master," he wrote, as to look for good breeding stock in domestic herds whose owners did not follow these principles.

Skinner's lead in scientific agriculture was soon followed by other able editors, and he began in 1829 to concentrate on the Thoroughbred horse with publication of *The American Turf Register,* which he edited for six of its fifteen years. This was in a sense an enlargement of the "Sporting Olio" feature of the *American Farmer;* both re-




*Baltimore's Pimlico Race Course in an earlier day.*

ported the results of race meetings and pedigrees of living stallions from all parts of the Union. Skinner's periodicals were basic to the compilation of every American stud book from the first (Jeffreys', 1828) to the present one (Bruce's, 1868 to date).

We might mention that Skinner was in the boat with Francis Scott Key while the latter wrote "The Star-Spangled Banner," and that he rode fifty miles at night to warn that British troops were advancing on Washington.

His unusually eventful life was terminated in 1851 when he stepped through his office door into what had been a staircase and fell to the cellar, workmen had removed the stair for repairs without his knowledge.

The family tradition of horsemanship was maintained by a son who was a Confederate calvalry colonel and a noted sportswriter, a great-grandson who was the New York Racing Commission's first official representative for hunt races and a great-great-grandson who was an outstanding amateur steeplechase rider in the 1930s.

II. The Track

Folklife is often thought of as the property of peasants; in fact, definitions of the term "folk" frequently rule out educated or wealthy strata of a culture. Yet the behavior of a hunt club, a country club, or a bridge club may be as traditional (and as unconsciously so) as the behavior of a mountain village. Wealthy and poor alike flock to race tracks (occasionally moving from one economic level to the other at the end of a race); the track has its own lore and life.

"Take him down, Mr. Brown," the cry of fans who feel they have witnessed a riding foul, refers to the steward of the Pimlico Race Course after 1937, Mr. George Brown, Jr. One doubts that everyone who ever shouted that knew he was the steward, but the statement rhymes and it entered oral tradition.

Pimlico is 102 years old this fall, and has its share of tradition. The nickname of "Old Hilltop" was almost meaningless by 1938 when the small rise in the infield was bulldozed away; yet this act symbolized to oldtimers the utter disregard for tradition of the new club president, Alfred G. Vanderbilt. As luck would have it, Vanderbilt and his Sagamore Farm are now Maryland traditions in their own right, and "Old Hilltop" means almost nothing—as a name.

As a track, however, it is alive and well. The distinction of hosting one leg of America's Triple Crown makes it likely to remain so. Besides the Preakness, there are other famous stakes races at Pimlico, and occasional matches there have made turf history. The Seabiscuit win over War Admiral in the 1938 Pimlico Special was one such spectacle; its crowd of 43,000 still has not been exceeded at the track. Something of a Vanderbilt coup (Belmont had tried to get the match), this November race took the edge off the October leveling of the said hilltop. More of a national event was the 1877 three-way match for which Congress adjourned and rode a special train to watch Parole beat Tom Ochiltree and Ten Broeck. (Remember "Molly and Tenbrooks," all you Bill Monroe fans? Same horse, different race.)

III. The Byproducts

The horse is indispensable to the folklife of many Marylanders.

The Woodlawn Vase, trophy for the Preakness, was made by a Baltimore silversmith. So was J. S. Skinner's silver service, in 1828, and his 1822 trophy for "Shepherdess."

A young man in Phoenix makes harness and riding whips for hunt club enthusiasts.

A less-young man in Olney makes harness and governess carts for pony owners.

A slightly older man in Glyndon trains dogs for the hunt club, and finds suitable tree roots for whip handles for the man in Phoenix.

A still older man in Easton, a blacksmith, repairs farm equipment (leaky watering troughs) and does ornamental ironwork—unrelated to horses, as it happens. Wheelwright's tools on the wall evoke a question; he replies, "Making wheels used to be my pride and joy. Later on I mostly fixed broken ones. Now I've about run out of wheels. . . ."