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OLD DREW

By Clark P. Thompson

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9/27/04

In the early 1800's Maine was known for producing excellent trotting horses. These horses helped to establish a unique American breed of horse that became known as "Standardbred". William H. Gocher, who served as Secretary of the National Trotting Association for forty years, observed in his book Pacealong (1928) that "Maine was the first state in which a successful effort was made to breed the trotter". Many of the stallions that helped put Maine on the map in trotting horse circles came from out of State. It started with a son of Messenger, a thoroughbred, that was brought to Winthrop from New York in 1816, four years before Maine became a State. This stallion was called "Winthrop Messenger". Later stallions like Winthrop Morrill, General Knox, and Gideon were imported to the state. However, in 1842 a colt was foaled in Exeter, Maine, that would become a foundation sire of trotting horses in Maine and beyond. This young colt became known as "the Drew horse" or "Old Drew".

Old Drew was foaled in 1842 on the farm of Timothy Drew in South Exeter near Linnell's Corner. He was owned by Timothy's son, Hiram, who lived on the farm. The newborn foal was the result of an accidental mating between a neighbor's horse and the Drew mare "Grace Darling". The sire was a young thoroughbred horse brought from New Brunswick by a neighbor, Albert G. Hunt Esq. The mare, later known as "Boston Girl", also traced back to a thoroughbred bloodline to Sir Henry, a son of American Eclipse, according to J.W. Thompson, the author of Noted Maine Horses, Vol. II (1887). Most of the successful Maine sires of that time had varying amounts of Thoroughbred and or Morgan blood in their veins.

Old Drew was not trained to trot so he never attained a fast trotting mark which would have helped him attract a quality book of mares to breed. He was a dark brown-bay stallion, with black points, 15 ¼ hands high, weighing about 1000 pounds according to Thompson. In all likelihood, he was used as a work horse on the farm like other horses. While we are not certain when his breeding career began in earnest, we do know that one of his fastest sons was a colt named "Hiram" foaled in 1854 and owned by John Hagen of Prospect. In 1857 the colt was sold to Andrew Mudgett of Belfast and renamed "Geo. B. McClellan". Shortly thereafter he made his record of 2.29 in a race over a half mile oval in Belfast. At that time, any horse that could trot a mile in a time better than two minutes and thirty seconds was placed on a select "2.30 List" which allowed it to be registered as a "Standardbred". In 1860 he was sold to Horace McKenney of Monroe who renamed him "Dirigo" and retired him for service in the stud. According to a sworn statement (1873) filed in the Penobscot County Stallion Registry by his then owner David Quimby, Dirigo was sold in 1864 to group of investors from Bangor led by steamboat Captain Charles Sanford for the princely sum of \$7,000 dollars. More importantly, this son of Old Drew was able to pass on his trotting prowess to the next generation. Thompson lists four sons of Dirigo which took marks better than 2.30. The daughters of Old Drew were

also excellent producers as several of their offspring made the 2.30 List. One such mare was the "Seavey mare" who produced Echo and Gen. Sherman, both by General Knox, and Violet and Pequawket, both by Gideon, all of which could trot in the twenties. Another daughter of Old Drew named "Stella" was the mate to Alice Gray in the great double team race against Lantern and Whalebone over the Union Course at Long Island in 1855. In 1887 Thompson's book makes reference to no fewer than 21 sons of Old Drew standing for service in Maine. They included the stallions Hiram Drew, not to be confused with the owner of Old Drew, Ned Davis, Independence, Garibaldi, Bachelder Horse among others. Several of his sons stood as stallions out of state as far west as California.

According to deed and probate records, Hiram Drew sold the farm where Old Drew was foaled in 1856. That same year he purchased a farm from Isaac Berry consisting of 209 acres in Levant on the road leading to the village of Kenduskeag. A history of Levant published in 1995 by Rogers and Pickard mentions Hiram Drew as being a farmer and dealer in "blood horses". Old Drew lived to the age of 24 (1866) when he was found one morning in his stall with a broken leg. The old stallion was described as follows by one who saw him shortly before his death: "Shoulders extremely high, broad and deep; neck light at the head, well arched and deep at the body; face a little rounding, eyes not very prominent, ears good length and well cut; body small, loins a trifle arched, hips very long and beautifully turned; limbs large, pasterns long, feet high, black and nice; mane spare, tail in waves, and hair short and fine all over his body." Two years following the death of Old Drew, Hiram Drew and his wife Nancy sold the Levant farm to Elijah Clement and moved to Bangor. Hiram continued to farm and deal in horse flesh but never owned another horse that had the impact of Old Drew. As Thompson noted in 1887, with the death of Old Drew "then passed away one of the most remarkable sires, considering his opportunities, that ever stood in Maine."

Hiram Drew passed away on February 27, 1905, in Bangor and was buried in a Levant cemetery (South Branch) not far from the farm where Old Drew expired. Today the Drew farm in Levant is being used as a dairy farm and is owned by the McGraw family who has farmed this land since the 1920's. Hopefully, in the near future, Old Drew can be remembered for future generations by the placement of an appropriate marker on the Levant farm where he inhaled his last drop of air and or in the town of Exeter where he was foaled.

P.S. In the Spring of 1857, Stella trotted several races over the Union Course which were reported in the "Spirit of the Times" - a sporting magazine of the time. One of these races on May 26, 1857, was the subject of a Currier and Ives print. The race was mile heats, best three out of five, in harness. Stella, driven by D. Tallman, won the first heat in a time of 2:31 ½ but was drawn after the fourth heat. 10/11/04