

S. Dexter's the MAINE SPIRIT of the TURF



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The Maine Spirit — Bringing Past to Present to Create the Future Starting Over — Creating a New Home for the Sport of Harness Racing by Stephen D. Thompson

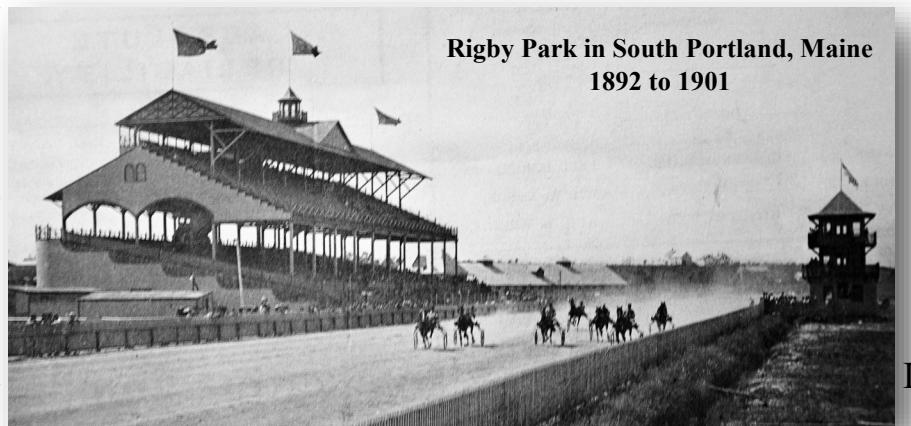
Several years ago I published a digital publication titled, *S. Dexter's Maine Spirit of the Turf*. I published eight issues totaling more than 400 pages. In many of the issues I included a column, *Outside the Oval*. The purpose of this column was to share ideas that did not come from long time members of the harness racing industry. I've always believed that a new set of eyes can be beneficial to any effort. I have been associated with the harness racing industry since 2007. This April will mark my ten year anniversary as founder and creative director of the Lost Trotting Parks Heritage Center. August will mark my sixth anniversary working for International Sound as the video patrol officer at eight of nine Maine Agricultural Fairs offering harness racing.

This post presents my ideas for the reinvention of harness racing for the 21st century. When I first started the Lost Trotting Parks research I read in one of the 19th century horse periodicals that "*Harness Racing was at its best when it is part of a greater event.*" I believe this statement needs to be examined as it relates to the re-branding and re-invention of harness racing in 2017. Harness racing and Maine fairs have a close relationship and history dating back more than 125 years. However, today attendance and live handle for harness racing at Maine fair is limited. Bangor Raceway and its greater event, Hollywood Casino have not led racing at Bangor to greater audiences or a significantly higher handle. Scarborough Downs for many still resonates as future possibilities for harness racing. However, audience and live handle still is limited and does not match the Downs best days between 1960 and 1985.

New harness racing industry initiative are presently in the works. The industry planners are proposing a new web site that will be closely tied to social media and multi-media marketing tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and YouTube.

As many of you know I have established a Facebook presence that is followed by many for the photographs I take before, during and after harness racing at Maine's agricultural fairs. As I have shared photographs, storyboards and comments through FB pages and groups I have evaluated the effectiveness of my presence on FB and the marketing tools that FB brings to my attention so that I will pay FB funds to help me gain greater viewership and increase ***Likes, Reach, and Engagement***. Facebook provides data for two types of reach when you pay for increasing your reach. You have organic reach that which happens naturally when you post to Facebook. When you pay for additional reach, Facebook extends your reach to new people. Both types of reach are hopefully leading to engagement. Often I have no idea of how additional reach is effective. Does this mean readers have read the post, or does this mean that readers will follow you on Facebook, visit one's web site or contact one for more information?

True and positive engagement for harness racing would be people showing up at the track, betting on races, following the sport, and returning to the track for future races. My message is mixed. Web sites and social media are necessary and can be effective. However, I believe what call "organic marketing and contact" is not done. Back in the 19th century and the early 20th century, the horse was in the consciousness of the people of the State of Maine. The horse was the mover of our economy, our transportation to the market place, our worker in the field, a warrior on the battlefield, and our entertainment on the roads and harness racing tracks that once could be found in more than 95 Maine communities.



Rigby Park in South Portland, Maine
1892 to 1901

I have spoken with the Sports Editors of every major newspaper in the State of Maine. I asked the question, "Why is the sport of harness racing not really covered by Maine newspapers?" The answer was direct and simple: "There is no interest by the majority of Maine people in the sport of harness."

It is my strong belief that somehow that organic connection with the horse that was experienced by Maine people in the 19th and early 20th centuries needs to be replicated -- a relationship with the horse is a prerequisite to increasing new people entering the industry as owners, trainers, drivers and grooms. Relationship is a must for the creation of an ever growing fan base. ***Perhaps relationship could be established through a Fantasy Harness Racing Stable Application with two versions: 1. An Adult Version that includes betting and 2. A Youth Version that does not include betting.***

The following link will allow you to download and read a survey conducted earlier this year on the sport of harness racing.

Survey Results can be downloaded from <http://losttrottingparks.com>

The survey does address the idea of a destination resort. Following this link is text that was posted on Facebook. The final paragraphs of this post will describe my idea of a destination resort.

The elements of this resort results from my experiences at destination resorts on the East coast, my work with Lost Trotting Parks, and my observations and discussions with people in the harness racing industry.

Recently I reviewed the results of racing in 1923 for the Maine & New Brunswick Circuit. Eventually the pages with these results will be posted. As I read the race results I realized I was reviewing data from a different day and age. At this point Maine communities (at least 45 towns) were building and supporting their own trotting parks for community events that were probably larger than just the harness racing. Today we are looking at the possibility of the re-building and re-branding of Scarborough Downs. If this venture is to be successful, my view is that the re-branding needs to make harness racing part of a much greater event -- a greater event that builds community and in some way bring the past to present to create the future.

Harness racing along and the possibility of a casino will probably not bring Maine families and the number of tourists needed to support this venture to make it successful.

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Imagination is the theme of this article. So let's use our imaginations to create the best and greater event that will attract tourists both from within and outside the State of Maine.

NORTHEAST HARNESS NEWS
Vol. II, Double Issue
For those interested in the Standard bred sport. 50¢

On Sunday, May 16th, Scarborough Downs hosted the Mr. 2000 Driving Championship, a prelude to the annual meet which begins June 1st. The drivers who had won the 2000 previous years were Bill Hougham, Bucky Day, Jack Bellis, Don St. John, Dave Plunkett, Freeman Parker, and Ben Webster met racing fans and signed autographs off to post time. These drivers returned to the sport, harness racing and the racing scene. Some of the greatest names in the sport were racing for the title, but in the final analysis Ben Webster and Freeman Parker tied for first place. Downs President, Joseph Racel presented impressive trophies to the winners to cap off a very enjoyable afternoon.

SEASONAL OPENER AT SCARBOROUGH DOWNS By Lloyd Johnson

Dear Roger, a vastly-improved son of the ill-fated Lord Roger, surprised many of the 2,000 harness racing fans on Saturday night, May 6th., winning the infield Velocimetro, and thus clinching his third win of the young 1965-campaign. With a Wing and a Prayer, Mike's Spirit dropped out of the speedy-trip early behind swift-fractious of 29.4, and 59.3 then circled back to the finish, drawing clear in the late stages of the final-turn. Dear Roger went to a very tight finish with very-reliable Alicia Almaburst, but came back along the rail. In the stretch Dear

Maine. That fantastic early-speed was apparently the result of a new diet of grain, and the fact that Mike's Spirit, who engaged in a spirited "speed duel" past the five-eighths mark, was not too far behind. Mike's Spirit dropped out of the race, with Dear Roger underneath along with Lite Me's with Gary Mosher driving. The two drivers swapped the lead at the top of the final turn to the immense satisfaction of the racing fans.

Roger drew clear, with Lite Me's with young Walter Case Jr. taking a boy dropping back, with every thin 14 to 11 lead over Gary Mosher. The pair swapped the lead at the top of the final turn to the immense satisfaction of the racing fans.

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Dear Roger was purchased by owner Basil Keltis during the winter season, the former owner being the late Fred W. Miller. Among the Downs driving colony, another fine duel has developed,

FOXBORO HARNESS MEET CONTINUES
HINSDALE SET FOR JUNE 18th PREMIERE
ROCKINGHAM PARK AWAITS GOVERNOR'S SIGNATURE

THE NEW HAMPSHIRE LEGISLATURE PASSES RELIEF BILL MAY 1st TO PROVIDE THE NECESSARY INCENTIVES FOR REBUILDING SALEM TRACK. AWAITING GALLEN'S APPROVAL

LOOKING FOR SELECTIONS? CHECK THE "AL-VAR" SPEED RATINGS

To accomplish this we might need to look at the development of an event center that includes harness racing and other agricultural themed events. The event center would also include concerts and car shows. The possibilities are out there. Instead of just creating a track for harness racing. I suggest the concept of a horse park that includes events such as horse pulling, barrel racing, rodeos and horse shows.

The goal of the Horse Park would include re-introducing Maine people and others to the horse. Over the years more than 95 Maine towns supported harness racing in their communities. The horse was integral to every community. The horse served as transportation to the market place, worker in the field, mover of the economy, a warrior on the battlefields, and our entertainment at Maine's agricultural fairs and private trotting parks. Often the talk of the town was who owned the fastest horse.

The broader community of horsemen and women need to realize that these different communities need to work together to secure our experiences with horses for current and future generations.

A Horse Park can be the home to an equine studies program, introductory programs and events to be introduced to miniature horses, pony rides, riding lessons and perhaps the shared ownership and taking care of their horses. A Horse Park can be the home to an equine studies program, introductory programs and events to be introduced to miniature horses, pony rides, riding lessons and perhaps the shared ownership and taking care of their horses.

As stated earlier, the event center will be far greater than just a Horse Park. How else could this idea be developed for success -- as Earl Nightingale once said, "Success is the progressive realization of a worthy idea." So perhaps we might start with what would our worthy ideals be that would bring a successful development and tourist destination for people and families from in and outside the State of Maine. Imagine it Harness Racing's Greater Event In the "Imagine It" original post, I asked each of you to imagine that you were standing on a balcony of a replica of an eighteenth century hotel located at the first turn of the track. The hotel was designed somewhat like the Elmwood Hotel in Waterville, Maine. The Elmwood Hotel had a rich history related to harness racing. From this hotel balcony you would be overlooking what has now been identified as a Horse Park. What do you see down to your right as you look down the track? What do you see at the other end of the track? Finally, what do you see as you look down the left hand side of the track? Several months ago, I completed this exercise of the imagination? Take out pencil and paper and create your vision of what you believe would be positive business offerings that would surround a half-mile track at a Horse Park in Scarborough,

Maine with quick access to the coastal Maine to Portland and to Maine Ski Resorts during the winter months.



Maine's Premiere Destination Resort

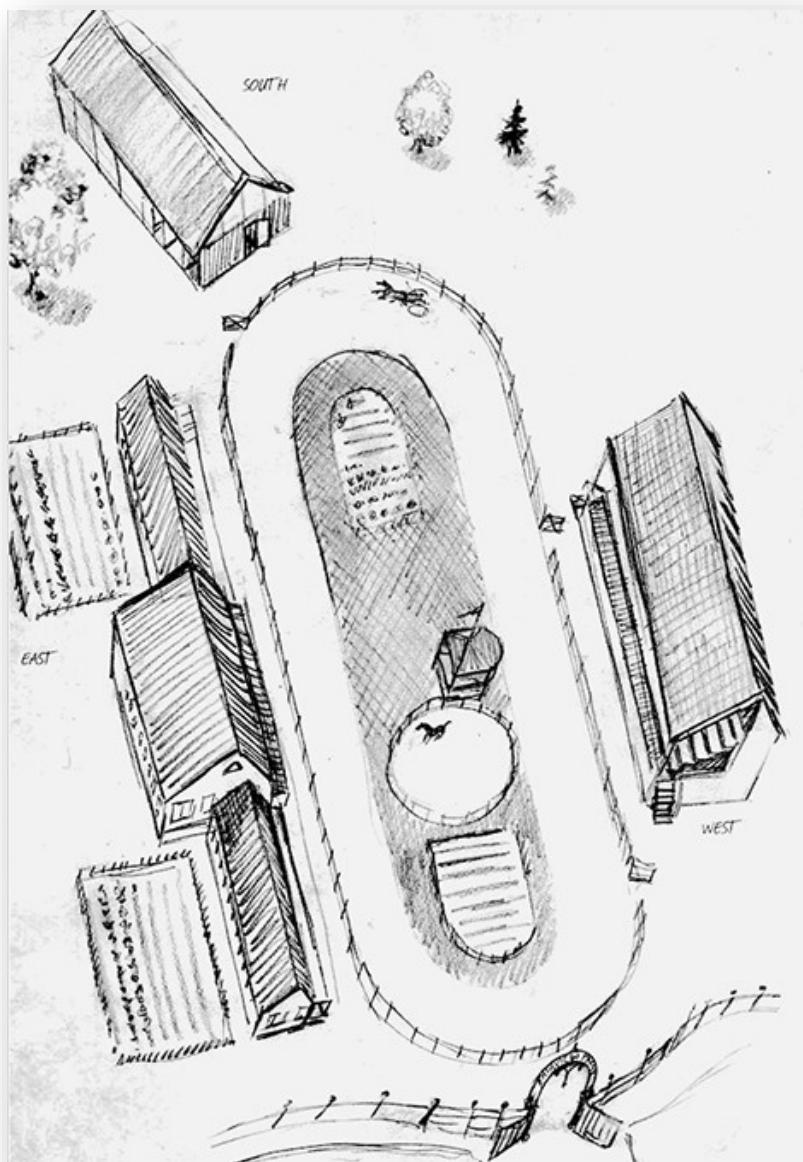
An Inter-Generational Living Community and Event Center

The idea is to create a destination resort with businesses and living accommodations that have at the heart of its business activity an event center that includes a horse park with a half-mile harness racing track including facilities for horse shows, barrel racing, horse pulls, carriage competitions, horse riding and carriage driving instructional programs and a set up for musical concerts and other events.

At the end of the first turn will be a 19th century styled hotel based upon a historic Maine hotel. Within the hotel will be dining services, banquet rooms, an Irish Pub, and a 19th century ice cream parlor. There would also be a concierge service that would connect guests to trips to the beach, trips to Portland, organized fishing and hunting trips, and ski trips during the winter. Family members can take advantage of the organized trips or stay on the premise and enjoy events of the day and shop at the shops surrounding the track. In the center of the section would be a glassed in grandstand with a restaurant and events rooms.

There would be a raised walking path surrounding the track that allows guests to observe activities in the park or stop by the shops and businesses along the pathway. These businesses/shops could include clothing stores, restaurants, exercise gyms, and even an IMAX styled theater with dining accommodations. Two added features would be a Merry-Go-Round and a Ferris Wheel that would provide views of the horse park.

At the end of the second turn would be horse stables, a paddock, and an indoor riding arena. This area would be a center for tours, demonstrations, and instructional programs. In partnership with the University of Maine, a Maine State Equine Program, could be established. In ad-



dition an equine program for Military Veterans that utilized retired Standardbreds could be organized.

Down the left hand side of the track would be apartments, housing for participants in educational and training programs related to the horse. Shops could be established on the first floor of this structure. A walk way with sitting areas would be designed so that residents could enjoy events at the park.

Behind and part of this structure would be a 19th century Maine village with a general store, an oyster saloon, a photography studio, a country diner, and two other restaurants featuring select menu items. In addition there would be a Carriage & Blacksmith's shop, a town hall, a Grange Hall, an Opera House, a Country Church and a museum celebrating the Age When the Horse was King and Maine's Agricultural Heritage. This aspect of the resort would connect people to the 19th Century. Carriage rides following carriage trails throughout the resort would be available. The Country Church make the resort a wedding destination with reception venues that include a Grange Hall to banquet/event rooms that would be available. Integrated into the Horse Park and surrounding building will be WiFi services that will bring video programming to businesses and living spaces throughout the complex. All events will be available for viewing.

Situated within this destination resort would be an inter-generational housing development. The Horse Park and Hotel would serve as the Town Center for those living in this community. This community would also include carriage and riding trails for guests and community members. The concept behind this tourist destination is the attempt to create a self-sustaining business community that supports the horse related events.

This is an exercise of imagination and imagination just what might be needed to revitalize Maine's harness racing industry.

S. Dexter Thompson

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Check out The Lost Trotting Parks Heritage Center online at . . .

<http://losttrottingparks.com>

With links to . . .

The Lost Trotting Parks Archives

The Lost Trotting Parks of New England

Profiles of Maine Harness Horsemen

Imagine 19th Century Kennebec County

Post linking you to Digital Maine & The Northeast Harness News

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