

THE MADISON THOROUGHBRED

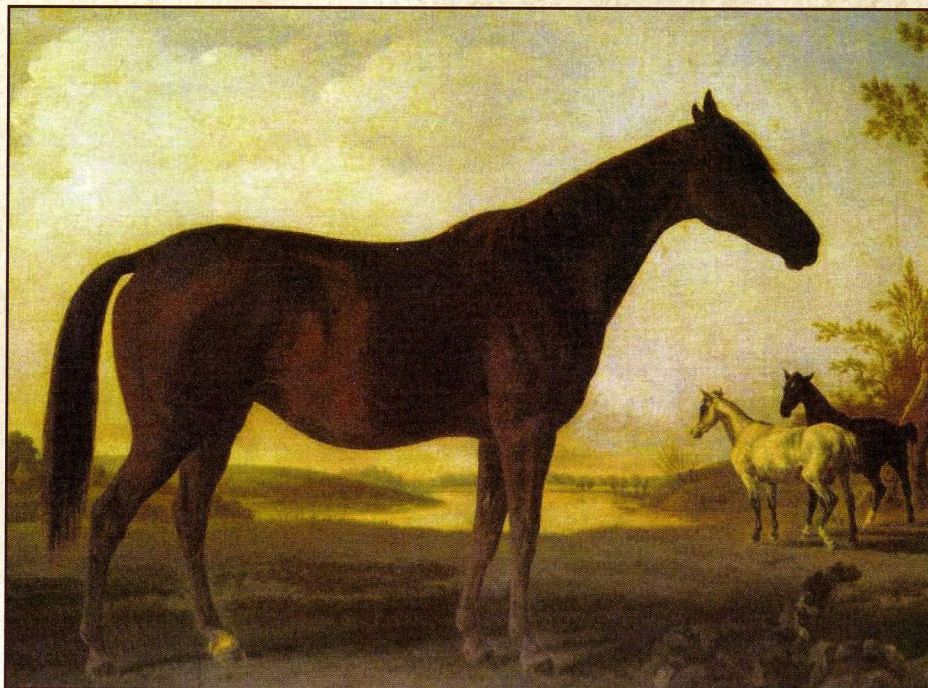
Contributed by Doug Simon, Madison Historical Society

Madison has had its share of fine athletes. Whether a race horse qualifies is open to debate. What is not open to debate is that the borough once was home to one of the all-time great race horses in America. The chestnut mare, Fashion, was bred in 1837 by William Gibbons of Madison. At the time Gibbons resided at what is now Mead Hall on the Drew University campus. Gibbons maintained a race track in Chatham Township and a barn off of Noe Avenue. Oddly enough, given his interest in racing, he never bet on racing.

Fashion's sire was Trustee and her dam was Bonnets o' Blue. Her trainer was Samuel Laird of Colts Neck, New Jersey and Laird's son, Joseph, was her only jockey throughout her career. Fashion won 32 of her 36 starts and during her career gathered \$41,500 in prize money, equivalent to roughly \$1.3 million in today's dollars. She was an incredibly popular horse with her highly publicized races drawing extraordinary sized crowds.

Her most celebrated race took place on May 10, 1845 at the Union Course on Long Island, New York. The race matched Fashion against the formidable thoroughbred Boston. At the time, a number of these celebrated match races were framed as regional competition, North vs. South. Which region was most adept at breeding race horses? Fashion, being from New Jersey, represented the North. Boston was Richmond bred and trained, representing the South.

In those days, races were generally four miles long and run in heats with each heat covering four miles. Race heats were repeated until a horse had won the event twice or "distanced" the opponent – arriving at the finish more than 30 horse-lengths ahead. The latter apparently applied in the Fashion-Boston race. More



Fashion Horse



Fashion vs Peytona Horses

than 70,000 fans showed up for the race and both horses were upset by the crowd often surging onto the track. Despite a three-mile lead by Boston, Fashion ultimately won the race by 35 lengths setting a new world record of 7:32.5 minutes for a four-mile race.

The second great match race for Fashion was against an Alabama mare called Peytona, who had made more money over a shorter career than Fashion. Her stride was long at 27 feet. Before a crowd of 100,000, Peytona won in straight heats. Fashion, however, defeated Peytona in two rematches.

Madison's great thoroughbred, Fashion, died in 1860 and was eventually inducted in to the Racing Hall of Fame in 1980. As a reflection of her popularity, she had a steamboat, several hotels, a brand of Ladies' gloves, and men's cigars named after her.



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