

Whatever happened to...Marie Princeton and Mr. East?
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"Who are Marie Princeton and Mr. East," you ask. They were two of the better known local Standardbred pacers from the past that raced at the Palmyra Fairgrounds.

Your next question might be, "What is a pacer?" For those who are not familiar with horse lingo, pacing is almost like trotting, except it's different. When a horse performs at a trot, it places the opposing front and back foot on the ground at the same time producing a somewhat choppy action; this is a natural gait for most. A pacer places the front and back foot on the same side down simultaneously giving the appearance of an awkward rolling motion from side to side as it travels. There are two breeds of horse to which this gait is natural-Standardbreds and Tennessee Walking Horses.

Marie Princeton, a local pacer, was a sleek mare owned by Hayes Ostrander of Palmyra, and was trained and driven by G. L. ("Doc") Watters, DVM who brought her to the finish line in first place many times. Tragically, she was lost in a barn fire in 1940.

Mr. East, also a pacer, was owned, trained and driven by Eugene East of Palmyra, and went on to become a New York Sire Stakes winner. The colt was the fastest New York bred 2-year old on half-mile tracks in New York that year, and was retired to New Jersey where he stood at stud for several years.

Eugene East listed the local following owners, trainers and drivers as familiar names in harness racing circles during the 1950's: Tom and Lillian Hughes, Cardinal Priest (this horse was buried on the Rainbow farm outside of Macedon); Earl Rainbow, Day Song Clay (2:05 mi) and Earl's Pride; Al Mays, Red Banner Kanoga; Tom Smith, Play Along; Bill Byers Joan's Billy; Leo Byers, Handy Bill; Walt Sherwood, Major Laird; and trainer, Lenny Conklin. Many of these horses also raced at Buffalo Raceway, Batavia Downs, Vernon Downs and Saratoga Raceway as well as in Ohio.

East said, "A lot of old timers who frequented the fair remember "Doc" Watters whose driving silks were green and white. Others will probably remember calling him for their local livestock health care....I trained with "Doc", Earl Rainbow and Lenny Conklin between 1953 and 1960." As pointed out in a previous article, Earl Rainbow introduced Lenny Conklin to the Palmyra Fairgrounds track, and he would ultimately train and care for many horses before his death in 1996.

Charles Rainbow said his father, Earl, began racing about 1945 with a mare named Mighty Jane, who would become the dam (mother) of his more renown colt, Earl's Pride. His maroon and gold silks with a white shoulder stripe could be found at many of the northeastern tracks such as Saratoga Raceway and Batavia Downs where he raced a total of 26 horses during his career. Rainbow's first heart attack ended his active racing; his fourth and last ended his life in 1992.

Many who raced or frequented the races at the fairgrounds remember the Christmas parties held at the 4-H horse barn. East said Fred Nichols dressed up as Santa Clause and Lenny Conklin and Dick Beaucage decorated the barn. Then Nichols would drive in with a cutter (sleigh) hooked to Tom Smith's horse.

It was learned from a 1930 issue of this newspaper, that sixty-nine horsemen from the Finger Lakes region formed the Finger Lakes Racing Circuit on January 16, 1930. The following delegation represented Palmyra at that meeting: Earl Braman-race secretary, Charles Johnson-President of Palmyra Union Agricultural Society, H. N. Harmon-timer, F. A. Griffith-owner of a large stable, R. F. Tallman-trainer, Richard Peer and Hays Ostrander-trainer and owner, Milt VanAuken-trainer, Charles Amlott-trainer, Dr. G. L. Watters, owner and trainer, and his father, G. B. Watters as well as Elmer Brown.

"The meeting was called for the purpose of stimulating interest in horse racing in this section and to organize a circuit to include nearby towns now having tracks. Seneca Falls, Waterloo, Batavia, Caledonia, Palmyra, Geneva and Canandaigua are at present included on the circuit and Bath and Hornell plan to enter soon.

...The organization will sponsor trotting races this summer in Seneca Falls, Canandaigua, Waterloo, Naples, Palmyra, Geneva and Batavia. According to present plans, race matinees will be held in each of these places eight weeks before the annual fairs, a schedule of dates for such events to be fixed at a meeting of officers and official representatives to be held in Geneva in the near future.

The thrill of watching the speedy sleek Standardbreds like Marie Princeton and Mr. East can be renewed at the Palmyra Fairgrounds on Monday, August 12 at noon when the New York State Harness Racing Association once again sponsors harness racing for the afternoon.