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# SETTING THE STANDARD

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Sir Barton's exploits added luster to America's classic races.

A century ago a colt bred by Hamburg Place won a trio of races that became known as the Triple Crown, a feat only 12 others have matched ~~~~~

By Edward L. Bowen





Sir Barton, with trainer H. Guy Bedwell and jockey John Loftus, wears the blanket of roses after winning the 1919 Kentucky Derby.



Sir Barton is renowned around the sports world as the first Triple Crown winner, and 2019 marks the 100th anniversary of his pivotal achievement in American horse racing history. For residents of Lexington, Kentucky — even those not closely attuned to racing — the name Sir Barton has an additional connotation, and a local one. The street Sir Barton Way is prominent in a section of the city known as Hamburg. Therein lies an additional link with history, for Sir Barton sprung from the famed Thoroughbred farm also known as Hamburg Place, which occupied the same land a century ago.

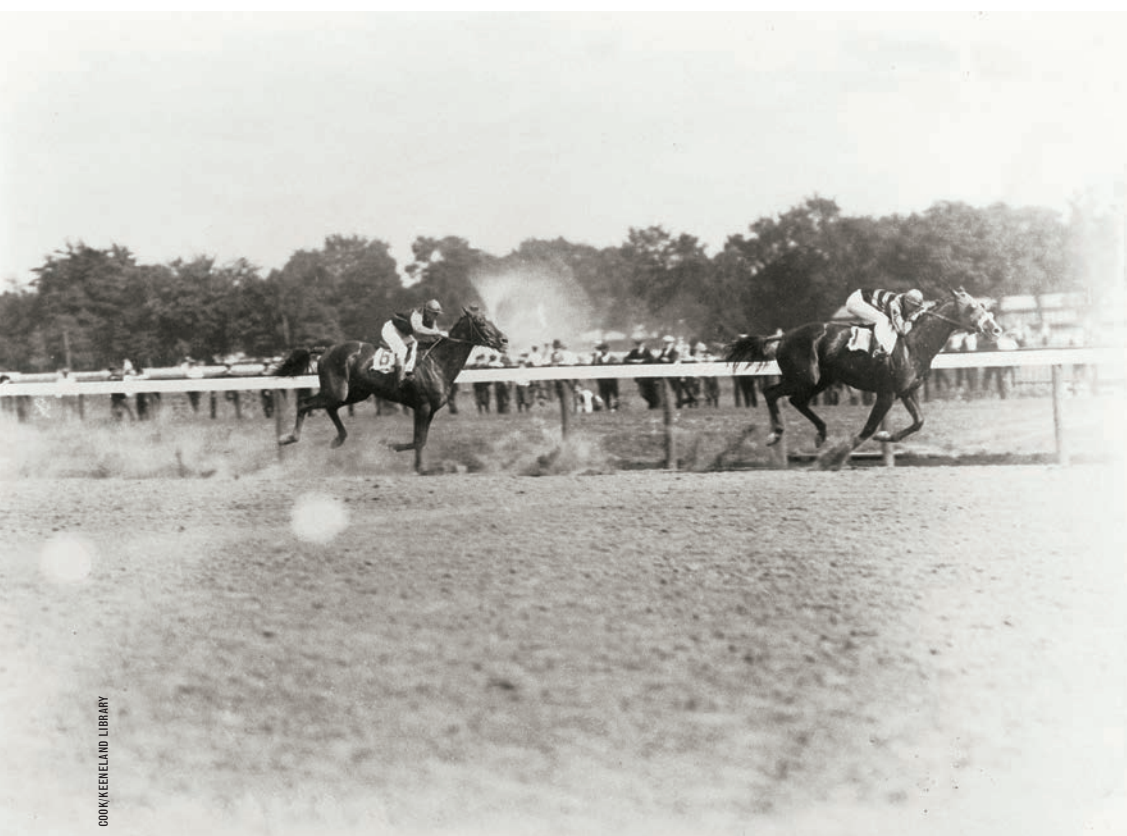
The colt Sir Barton was one of four Kentucky Derby winners bred at Hamburg Place by a master of the Turf, one John E. Madden. Like the horse's name, the name Madden also has come down through the years in a milieu of lasting and regenerating fame. First there was John E. Madden himself; and for the last half-century or so his grandson, Preston Madden, has burnished the significance of the name. Preston bred Alysheba, who in 1987 became the fifth Kentucky Derby bred at Hamburg Place. Preston's late wife, Anita, graced the family name with her own identity as she wove a tapestry of glamour, fashion, and philanthropy centered



SIR BARTON, 1916

**Sir Barton was one of four Kentucky Derby winners bred by John Madden, top, at Hamburg Place Farm.**

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Sir Barton defeats Exterminator in the 1920 Saratoga Handicap.

around imaginative Kentucky Derby parties. [See page 108.]

As easily as the phrase Triple Crown trips off the tongue of today's racing fan — entrenched or casual — it was not being banded about much in the spring of 1919 when Sir Barton won the Kentucky Derby, Preakness Stakes, and Belmont Stakes. Those races had individually achieved national prestige, and there had been a certain undertone linking them with England's original Triple Crown.

Still, it was not until Gallant Fox duplicated the feat of winning all three 11 years later that the New York Times employed the title. Even then, reference was a bit tentative, lowercase letters set aside in quotation marks, "the triple crown," as if neither writer nor copy editor was confident the phrase would stick.

### Emergence of the crown

English Turf writers of 2019 have not been

able to identify for this writer just when the phrase Triple Crown was first evoked for a series of races with the arcane names of the Two Thousand Guineas, Epsom Derby, and St. Leger. What can be stated is that the first horse to win all three was West Australian, who swept them in 1853. West Australian has been followed by only 14 others, the most recent of whom was Nijinsky II in 1970.

Several specifics of the lexicon of Thoroughbred racing come into play when Triple Crowns are addressed. Each of the races in the original English sequence was among a series of only \*five races designated years ago by fiat of racing leadership as "classic" races. All classic races are for 3-year-old Thoroughbreds only, clearly indicating that any horse has but one chance in a lifetime to win any of those races.

Since England was the fountainhead of organized Thoroughbred racing, various

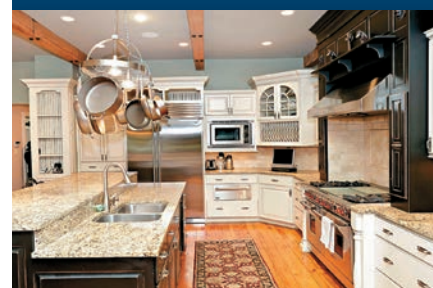
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**Left, a horse trains inside a barn at Hamburg Place. The main house witnessed several generations of Maddens.**

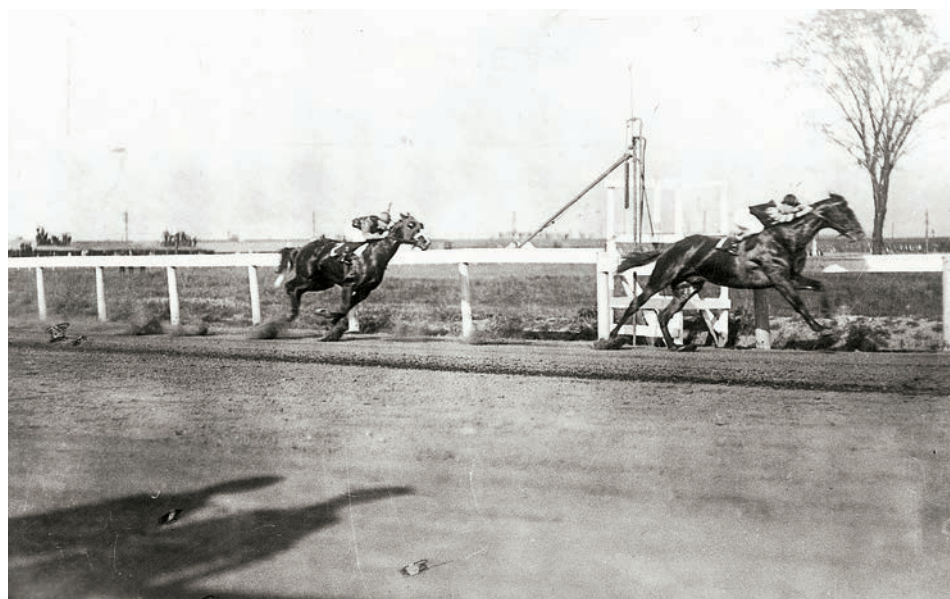
countries have oft imitated it. Ireland and France shaped their own series of classic races closely imitating the English, and in the United States several local attempts were made to grasp a national recognition.

Col. Meriwether Lewis Clark Jr., as early proprietor of what became known as Churchill Downs, hoped to gain such status for three of his track's races, but only the Kentucky Derby took hold as universally accepted at such distinction. In New York, traditionally the leading circuit in American racing, another attempt was made to link three races as American counterparts to the English series, but only the Belmont Stakes eventually came to hold the desired status.

The middle race of the American Triple Crown, the Preakness Stakes in Maryland, came to be recognized as part of the series through a growing purse size and the way it fit into the annual racing calendar. This timing was another major departure from the original. While the Guineas/Derby/St. Leger trilogy is spaced from spring into

September, in the United States all three are crowded into a wonderfully engulfing schedule that fosters fever-pitch public interest from start to finish. The first Saturday in May became the sacrosanct tradition for the Derby, and by early June the whole shebang has set the spring ablaze.

Moreover, the idea of an ascending distance logic drove the original, the races proceeding from the one-mile Guineas, to the 1½-mile Derby, to the 1¾-mile St. Leger. As the American Triple Crown came about willy-nilly rather than by design, the distance over some years settled as



H.C. ASHBY

**Three-year-old sensation Man o' War defeats Sir Barton in a 1920 match race.**





L.S. SUTCLIFFE

**Sir Barton had modest success as a sire and ended his days in Wyoming.**

the Kentucky Derby at 1¼ miles, the Preakness at 1⅜ miles, and the Belmont at 1½ miles.

(As the United States has no single racing authority, the restriction on the word “classic” cannot be enforced in this country. Nothing keeps a racetrack from simply using the word classic as part of a stakes race’s name, which was done as early as 1929 for Chicago’s Arlington Classic. Thus, there is no universal acceptance that the word “classic” has a highly specific meaning and is not synonymous with “really important event.”)

## The romance of Sir Barton

Sir Barton embodied many of the romantic elements that bless Thoroughbred racing. His breeder, John E. Madden, was a self-made character who grew up making an honest buck from boxing, running foot races, and the like, at fairs in the Pennsylvania coal and steel country. He graduated to driving harness horses in races and thence to the Thoroughbred sector, where he excelled in breeding, raising, training, and — above all — selling young horses.

Sir Barton was by Madden’s great stallion Star Shoot out of Lady Sterling, by Hanover. He was sold at 2 for \$10,000 to Cmdr. J.K.L. Ross of

## HAMBURG FOR A NEW AGE

Patrick Madden, a great-grandson of John E. Madden, is familiar with the age-old story of his ancestor choosing the location for a Lexington farm to facilitate a certain kind of business deal. The master horseman wanted a site close enough to the city that he could chat up a potential buyer at lunch in town and be close enough to drive his guest by carriage to the farm to see the horse in question while the charms of the transaction were still in mind.

Nevertheless, the present Madden said, “I have always wondered if maybe he had in the back of his mind that someday that farm could be developed.”

However, time passed, and John

E. Madden’s grandson, Preston Madden (father of Patrick), authored his own decades of success as a breeder and owner of Thoroughbreds. Any development idea remained on the back burner, if indeed it was on any burner at all.

Eventually, though, the needs of the state and a growing municipality came out to meet the Maddens at Hamburg Place — and not by carriage. As explained on the homepage of the present Hamburg Place development website, “The Madden family worked against government plans to run I-75 through the farm, but ultimately the interstate bisected Hamburg Place [farmland]. This interstate construction marked



E. MARTIN JESSEE



ANNE M. EBERHARDT PHOTOS

**Clockwise from top left, Anita Madden was known for her philanthropy and Kentucky Derby parties. Alysheba wins the 1987 Derby. Preston Madden continued the family horse business at Hamburg Place before its development.**

the beginning of an era of development in Hamburg Place. The city of Lexington began to construct sanitary force mains and included all of Hamburg Place in the Urban Service Area.”

With the die thus cast, Preston Madden’s wife, Anita, had a vision for a retail shopping development and with help from son Patrick successfully advanced the plan. The first stores opened in 1997. More than half of the farm’s original 2,000 acres have been developed, and Hamburg now encompasses houses and apartments in addition to retail and professional office space.

Patrick said he thinks his great-grandfather “would be proud.”

From the standpoint of the Thoroughbred fan, there is the charm of history in the existence of an intersection of Sir Barton Way and Man o’ War Boulevard, as well as the existence of Alysheba Way. Alysheba was the horse that enabled Preston Madden to build upon his grandfather’s history of breeding Kentucky Derby winners: He won the Run for the Roses in 1987. The more whimsical name Pink Pigeon, another major stakes winner for Preston Madden, also lives on via the development’s street patterns.

At 83, Preston remains an active breeder and owner, and last May he won the \$100,000 Winning Colors Stakes at

Churchill Downs with the marvelously named homebred filly Miss Kentucky.

Preston and Patrick revere the memories of Anita Madden and the glamorous personal stamp she gave to the Lexington social scene. Of Anita’s original fundraising Kentucky Derby parties, Preston recalls “she said, ‘the Boys Ranch needs money, and Lexington needs parties.’ And she added, ‘we need to keep the party in Lexington so people realize the Derby is not only about Louisville.’ ”

Preston and Anita were married 63 years before Anita’s passing in 2018. Both husband and son are willing to articulate to others their deep emotions. Husband: “She was everything to me.” Son: “She was a great mother. The main focus of her life was me.”

Father and son agree the lovely landscaping of the re-designed cemetery of revered Hamburg Place Thoroughbreds was envisioned and overseen by the lady of the manor. Patrick’s life experiences enable him to see the elegant cemetery both from the viewpoint of a nostalgic child of the property and the present-day entrepreneur. He hopes to entice a nice restaurant to build adjacent to the cemetery. Such placement would provide diners with a lookout view of the greenery and elegance fashioned by his ancestors and their dashing steeds.

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Many prominent horses had their final resting places in the original Hamburg Place cemetery.

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a Canadian railroad tycoon family. Sir Barton had not won a race until Ross and trainer H. Guy Bedwell sent him out in the Kentucky Derby as a running mate with their highly acclaimed horse Billy Kelly. However, by the time Sir Barton had swept the Derby, Preakness, and Belmont, he was drawing some “horse of the century” comment in the press.

That such hyperbole was employed as early in the century as 1919 seems less injudicious when one realizes that only a year later came another that elicited the same tag. That horse was Man o’ War, and when the century was over that sobriquet still prevailed.

Sir Barton was beaten by Man o’ War when they met in a match race in 1920, and his modest career as a stallion could not compare to the decades of continuing fame Man o’ War enjoyed as a tourist attraction at Faraway Farm in Kentucky.

Sir Barton won 13 of 31 races and earned \$116,857. Man o’ War won 20 of 21 races and earned \$249,465.

## Uniquely American

Several factors were inherent in the aura of the Triple Crown’s being accepted over the years as having a distinction unique in all of American racing. Thirty years after Sir Barton’s Triple Crown, Citation became the eighth horse to achieve the sweep, although by then the series had become central to the striving and dreams of virtually all owners of racehorses.

Then, it really became rare: 25 years until Secretariat in 1973, two more in the 1970s, and then no fewer than 37 years before American Pharoah in 2015. Consistent with the caprice of nature when it comes to this matter, Justify arrived three years later to win all three.

So, 100 years after Sir Barton broke through, only 12 other horses have cradled within themselves the combination of speed, stamina, heart, soundness, and the smile of Dame Fortune needed to win the Triple Crown.

Even the dictionary struggles to express what this is about, for you first must achieve the “pinnacle” — and then keep climbing from there. **KM**

*(\*The others are the One Thousand Guineas and Epsom Oaks specifically for fillies. Both genders are eligible for the Triple Crown races both in England and the United States. The United States has no races directly comparable to the two English filly classics.)*