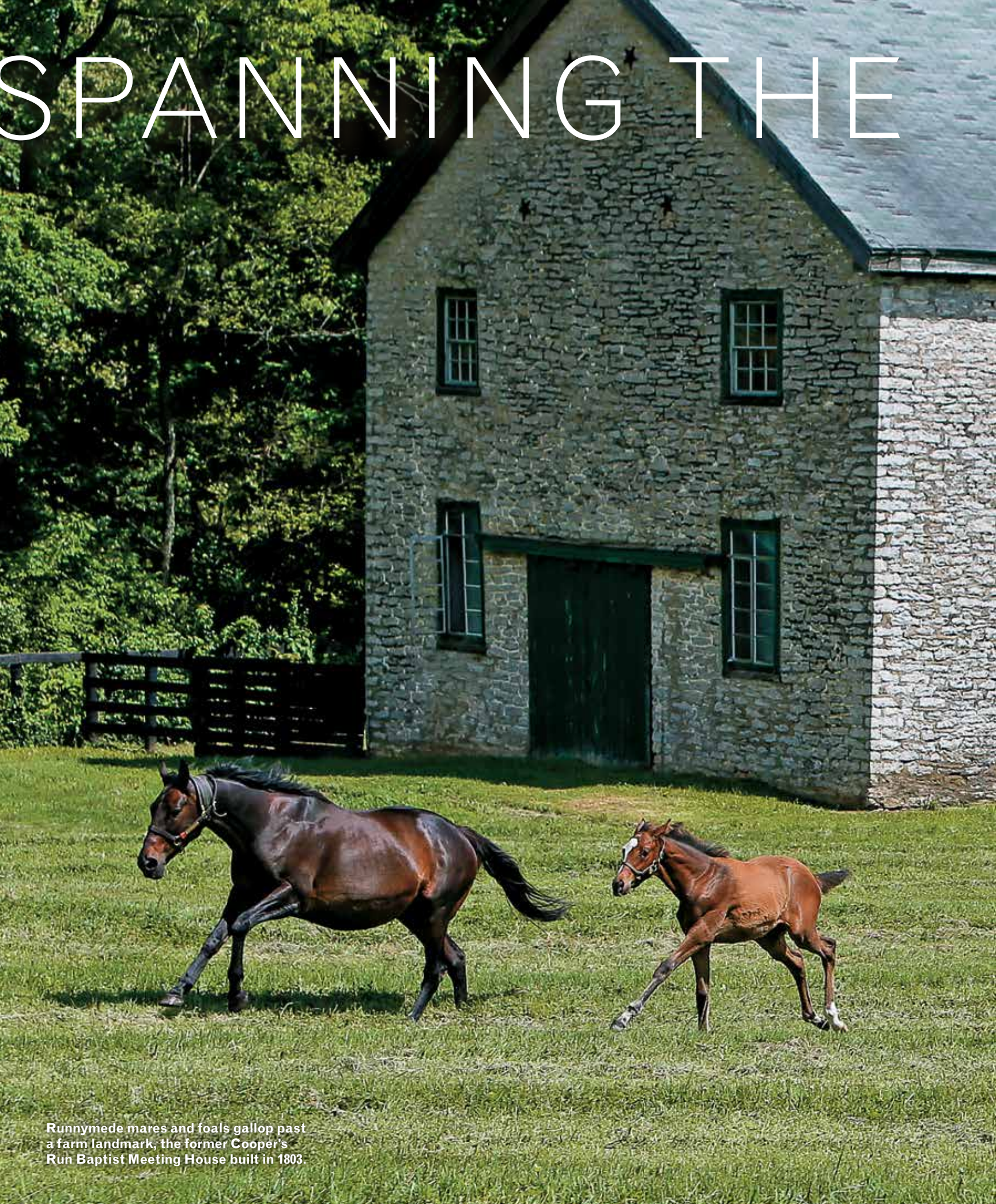


SPANNING THE



Runnymede mares and foals gallop past a farm landmark, the former Cooper's Run Baptist Meeting House built in 1803.

GENERATIONS

Runnymede Farm, which traces its origins to Kentucky's early days, celebrates 150 years of dedication to Thoroughbred breeding

Story and Photos by Michele MacDonald

Whispers of a vivid past swirl in the breeze that rustles the branches of pin oak and blue ash trees standing sentinel over the sloping fields of Runnymede Farm. A fiery Civil War officer, who survived being shot in the face and nearly a year in a notorious prison camp, imagined this land as a nursery for superior racehorses and transformed what had been a cattle farm into a birthplace of champions. The hoofbeats of record setters, Racing Hall of Fame enshrinees, and classic winners have resounded over these hills in the ensuing 150 years since Col. Ezekiel Field Clay first grasped the keys to the property in 1867.

Matching the strides of the dozens of stakes winners born here have been Clay's descendants, many of them just as committed as he to reaping runners from the pastures.

As much as life has changed from the era following the war that divided the union and Kentucky — as well as Clay family members who were torn in their sentiments — the more it has stayed the same at Runnymede.

Secluded from much of the ramble and roar of modern life, the farm kneels gently to the banks of babbling Stoner Creek outside Paris in Bourbon County. The land shields foxes, deer, and turkeys; whinnying and birdsong are the primary sounds here.

A stately Greek Revival mansion built in 1832 for Charles Todd Garrard, grandson of Kentucky's second governor, James Garrard, still buzzes with the laughter of children just as it did when Col. Clay raised four sons and two daughters within its walls.

Not far away, weanlings graze in the long shadows of the stone-mortared Cooper's Run Baptist Meeting House, where James Garrard held sway in the pulpit after the structure was completed in 1803. Eventually transformed into a barn, the church is now a National Register of Historic Places monument to a past that is the





Generations of Clays have lived in the 1832 Greek Revival home near Paris, which remains the base for family gatherings.

very taproot of Kentucky — and Thoroughbred breeding — history.

Yet the green fields shimmer with the sparks of the present and future as much as they smolder with the memories of long ago.

Within the last several seasons Grade 1 winners Lady Eli and Collected have taken their first breaths and steps at Runnymede. They grew strong on this land before being sold at Keeneland and moving on to racing glory.

Presiding over the upbringing of Runnymede's stars of today and tomorrow has been the Clay family's fourth-generation heir, Brutus J. Clay III, with the support of his seven siblings and their parents, Catesby Woodford and Elizabeth "Biz" Clay.

Runnymede is acknowledged by the Daughters of the American Revolution as Kentucky's oldest continually operated Thoroughbred breeding farm, and the Clay family is one of only a few that have maintained such an establishment through multiple generations.

The history and the expectations can be weighty, but Brutus Clay — somewhat to his surprise as he did not grow up with a passion for horses — finds fulfillment in treading the same paths taken by his ancestors.

"It's a wonderful history to be a part of, and we're writing our own chapter here now. I just hope it's not the last one," Clay said.

"You want to breed some good horses and make it viable and continue on because it is a way of life. As I say to people, it's not just my reputation connected with our horses — it's generations of reputations. It's a privilege to be in the situation we're in, but it's very much an obligation as well.

"We don't want to screw it up," he added seriously before punc-



Brutus J. Clay III holds Lady Eli's half sister by American Pharoah (right) and an Uncle Mo filly out of graded winner Bizzy Caroline.

tuating that very modern expression with a laugh.

Clay began mucking stalls and cutting weeds at Runnymede when he was 13, but, as he recalled, "I never got promoted to being a groom." In fact, he was more interested in pursuing his father's business interests in coal than learning about horses.

"I would say, 'You're crazy. No way!' if people asked me about running the farm," he said.

After he graduated from Georgetown University and earned an MBA from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Clay and his wife, Sarah, began raising their own family in Kentucky and eventually were charmed by the romance of Runnymede. Clay be-

came part of the farm's executive committee, along with brother-in-law David Blee.

Although oriented toward business and numbers, Clay said he was drawn to the mares and foals as he went on daily runs around the farm and saw the horses cantering through cloaks of morning fog.

Then one day in 2009, with the aftermath of the global recession squeezing the farm from all sides, "My father said, 'I'm turning the reins over to you because you have the financial sense and the business sense to take care of the family's interests,'" he recalled.

Brutus Clay, who had worked in private equity, timber, and real estate, said he had long assumed that his younger brother, Catesby "Chris" Clay Jr., would take over the farm since he was passionate about bloodstock. But Chris had heeded an inner call to become a Catholic priest, and Brutus

found himself with the responsibility of leading the family's legacy forward in a culmination, as he likes to joke, of divine intervention with nepotism.

It was hardly the first instance of a Clay being tested by life.

In 1613, Englishman John Clay risked everything on a seven-week journey across the ocean to settle in Virginia. He became the great great-grandfather of Green Clay, who, after fighting in the Revolutionary War, migrated west to what would become Kentucky. Green Clay developed distilleries, a ferry service, and a tavern, amassing tremendous wealth.

One of Green Clay's sons, Brutus Junius Clay, born in 1808, settled in Bourbon County to raise livestock, while another, Cassius Marcellus Clay, gained notoriety for impassioned pleas against slavery. Both Brutus Junius and Cassius stood for

the Union during the Civil War, with the former representing Kentucky in the U.S. Congress during the conflict; their cousin, Henry Clay, was known as the Great Compromiser and bred racehorses at his Ashland estate in Lexington.

Brutus Junius' son Ezekiel defied his family, left college, and, as Clay lore maintains, pledged himself to the Confederate cause after a night spiked with bourbon and arguments.

Ezekiel was once described as a man of "Herculean frame ...[an] accomplished horseman and a dead shot." He famously joined a group of volunteers in chasing down guerrilla raiders who stole the promising colt Asteroid from Robert Alexander's Woodburn Stud, securing the horse that became an undefeated racing sensation.

But Clay's own breeding of Thoroughbreds in later life eclipsed all his flam-



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A core band of 20 to 30 broodmares is the key to Runnymede's success in the sales ring and on the racetrack.

boyant Civil War-era deeds, which were forgiven by his family. Indeed, his father advanced him the funds to buy the Garrard mansion and the land he cultivated into Runnymede.

Daily Racing Form columnist and breeding authority Dr. M. M. Leach wrote in 1907 that Ezekiel Clay "was generally regarded as the most successful breeder of bloodstock in the United States." Four Racing Hall of Fame horses — Miss Woodford, Hanover, Roamer, and Ben Brush — were raised at Runnymede under his direction.

Miss Woodford became the first racehorse to earn more than \$100,000, and Hanover surpassed her record before becoming a foundation sire. Billet and Hindoo, respective sires of Miss Woodford and Hanover, both stood at Runnymede.

Roamer was conceived when teaser

Knight Errant or dam Rose Tree II jumped a fence to mate, according to stories passed down the generations. Roamer won the Travers Stakes and many other top races.

A partner in breeding these superstars with his brother-in-law, Col. Catesby Woodford of Raceland Farm, Clay also co-bred 2-year-old champion and Kentucky Derby winner Ben Brush.

Leading sire Sir Dixon, who like Hanover had won the Belmont Stakes, stood for Clay and Woodford, and they imported and stood Star Shoot, sire of the first Triple Crown winner, Sir Barton. Preakness Stakes winner Buddhist was bred by the duo, and another Kentucky Derby winner, Agile, was foaled at Runnymede in 1902.

When Clay died in 1920, his son Brutus Junius, a graduate of Princeton University and the University of Virginia law

school, gave up his Atlanta law practice and returned to continue the Runnymede tradition.

"I don't know if he was particularly inclined to raise horses, but he came back because he had a strong love of the home place," Brutus Clay said of his grandfather.

Fate did not allow that Brutus Clay to enjoy Runnymede long. Tragically, he fell down stairs and suffered a fatal injury in 1926 when his eventual heir, Catesby Woodford Clay, was only 3 years old.

Catesby's mother, Agnes, remarried Johnson Camden Jr., a breeder from Versailles who had served in the U.S. Senate, and they continued raising horses at Runnymede after the Great Depression led Camden to sell his own 1,500-acre Hartland Stud. When Camden died in 1942, Catesby's older brother, another Brutus J.



Col. Ezekiel Clay was a post-Civil War breeding legend.



Three generations of Clays include eight siblings and 15 grandchildren.



Brutus Junius Clay took over the farm after father Ezekiel Clay's death.

CLAY FAMILY COLLECTION, LEFT AND RIGHT: STACEY GUIDEMAN PHOTOGRAPHY, CENTER

Clay, helped guide the farm, and 1951 Kentucky Derby winner Count Turf was raised on the land.

Catesby Woodford Clay assumed the Runnymede mantle in the 1950s after his brother decided to join the Jesuit ministry. Named after Col. Clay's breeding collaborator, Catesby was born at the farm and still lives there, having celebrated his 94th birthday in July while surrounded by the 15 grandchildren whose laughter often echoes through the manor house.

"He didn't know his father, who had died when he was so young, and the farm was always that connection to his ancestry," said Joe Clay, the older brother of Runnymede's current chief executive.

While breeding Thoroughbreds was a secondary business pursuit, behind coal, for Catesby, it was a thrill he relished. He was recognized for his unique achieve-

ments — including service on the Kentucky Racing Commission and Churchill Downs Board of Directors — as the Thoroughbred Club of America's Honored Guest in 2009.

In addition to current stars Lady Eli, Collected, and Royal Ascot Group 1 winner Undrafted, Clay bred or co-bred a battalion of top-quality runners, including Kentucky Oaks winner Lady Vi-E.; Angle Light, who defeated Secretariat in the Wood Memorial Stakes; Grade 1 winner Plankton, honored as a champion Kentucky-bred; Japanese champion and \$8 million earner Agnes Digital; English Group 1 winner Palace Episode; and other Grade 1 winners such as Michael Tabor's Marylebone, Metropolitan Handicap winner Divine Park (who sired Lady Eli), Awesome Gem, and Jaycito.

"My father has always been low-key about what he accomplished as a breeder,

but he has always had great passion for it," said Joe Clay.

"He listened a lot when he was around his friends, some of the great breeders of their time like Leslie Combs II and C. V. Whitney, to learn from their ideas. And when British or Japanese breeders and buyers came over [to Kentucky], he always opened his home and the farm to them."

Long before it was fashionable, Clay and then Runnymede general manager Martin O'Dowd sent mares to be bred in Europe and Japan, a bold undertaking for a relatively small enterprise with a broodmare band of only 20 to 30 mares.

Yet the standing of Runnymede was such that Sheikh Mohammed, Coolmore, successful Japanese stables, and others sought yearlings from the farm. At the 2004 Keeneland September sale, Runnymede sold a Galileo colt out of Regina Maria, a




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SPANNING THE GENERATIONS

half sister to Kentucky Derby runner-up Tejano Run, for \$1.9 million to Coolmore.

Several years later, however, the global crash brought the market plummeting. Catesby Clay, who had experienced a similar dire plunge in the 1990s and was already 86, relinquished the farm keys to Brutus.

The younger Clay hasn't had to overcome anything as demanding as starting a new enterprise in the aftermath of a national war as did his great-grandfather. But he and his brothers and sisters have had to endure the recession's massive shock waves.

Rather than celebrate the past with parties for Runnymede's sesquicentennial, they have concentrated on finding a sound way forward to the future.

They have upgraded barns, naming major structures after stars such as Ben Brush as a salute to their history; acquired some new well-bred mares; and reoriented the breeding program toward stronger commercial performance.

All the while, they were confronted by the downturn of the coal business, which had provided financial fuel for the family, so that industry's decline has been painfully disadvantageous.

In the spring of 2017, they faced a turning point when each had to consider if and how he or she wanted to keep investing in the farm.

No doubt buoyed by the remarkable success of the courageous Lady Eli — a modern racing legend after recovering from laminitis and a descendant of Runnymede's most important broodmare of the past 50 years, Kazadancoa — they reaffirmed their dedication.

"It's been a challenging year. I've always discounted what role I've played in the farm's success, but this year I realized my worth. The thing that really was good is that my siblings and I came together and realized that we all value this farm," Brutus



Lady Eli ranks among Runnymede's best.



Brutus and Catesby Clay flank manager Romain Malhouitre at the sales.



Barns bear the names of major Runnymede-breds; this is the Agile, honoring the 1905 Derby winner.

Clay said while outlining how he developed a restructuring plan.

"The day after Easter, when they were together as a family, they all stood up and said, 'This is what we want to do,' " recalled French-born farm general manager Romain Malhouitre, who was hired by Brutus Clay in 2013 to take Runnymede forward.

Their resolve was well rewarded at the 2017 Keeneland September yearling sale, when Runnymede sold 12 horses for \$2.215 million and a robust average of \$184,583.

Starlight Racing bought a Pioneer of the Nile filly for \$700,000, the highest price for a farm yearling since 2006.

But Runnymede today is about much more than just breeding mares and taking a chance in the marketplace.

Clay and Malhouitre have focused on bringing in partners so Runnymede can reach for quality at the highest level and maintain successful female families, and they have broadened participation in ventures such as pinhooking.

One of the new partners is Nicolas de Chambure, who shares status as a fourth-generation family member to carry on a high-quality breeding establishment, in his case, Haras d'Etream in France.

Runnymede and Etream together invested \$500,000 in 3-year-old Moyglare Stud-bred Espirt de Vie, a daughter of Street Cry and half sister to Group 1 winner Royal Diamond, at Keeneland in November 2015. In February 2017, she produced her first foal, a Medaglia d'Oro filly for them and additional partners Peter Callahan and Ecurie des Charmes.

Clay has maintained the close family connection to Callahan, a friend and partner with Runnymede for three decades and with whom Agnes Digital and Awesome Gem were bred. The Clay and Callahan families traveled to Royal Ascot last June to cheer on Fairyland, a Scat Daddy filly they bred and sold at Keeneland to Coolmore.

"It was an extraordinary week,"

Clay said. "You couldn't ask for a better friend and partner than Peter Callahan."

Other partners have quietly joined the Clays. An interest in Lady Eli's weanling half sister from the first crop of Triple Crown winner American Pharoah was sold privately, and the filly will be raced in partnership, as will a yearling Medaglia d'Oro filly out of Lady Eli's graded stakes-winning half sister Bizzy Caroline.

Clay also has sought to further relationships between the Thoroughbred community and the public. He helped spearhead



A distinctive weather vane tops the garage of the Clay family home.

development of Horse Country, the organization that offers tours of Kentucky's farms, and he often guides visitors around Runnymede.

"We have to be more proactive in sharing our experiences and make the farm more available to people," said Malhouitre.

On one Runnymede tour, a visitor became so excited about the horses that she said she wanted to buy a weanling colt, Clay related.

"I said, 'No you don't — that's a very risky proposition,'" he said, finding himself in an awkward position since typically he aims to sell horses.

When the visitor maintained her interest, she was invited to participate in Runnymede's Magna Carta venture, through which foals are bought at the Keeneland November sale and resold as yearlings the following September. She ended up doubling her investment after the yearlings — topped by a Violence filly that was acquired for \$52,000 in 2016 and resold for \$200,000 — went through the ring.

Sale ring and racing successes have provided euphoric highs to balance inevitable lows.

Clay recalled that a jubilant emotional peak occurred the afternoon when about 20 Clays gathered informally to watch on television as Collected defeated Arrogate, the world's highest-rated horse, in the Pacific Classic Stakes. They also have shared, as all breeders do, the heartbreak of losing cherished mares to colic and the burden of ongoing financial obligations without guarantee of rewards.

"Owning the farm is not easy; that's why there are not a lot of farms that have been owned by generations of the same family," Clay said.

For many of the Clays, however, the desire to continue weaving more Thoroughbred history into the Runnymede tapestry is a fire that burns in their blood.

As Catesby Clay said when helping to prepare a brief farm history, "Breeding horses is more than a business for us — it's a family tradition that's been a way of life for generations. Everything we do is a testament to my grandfather, Ezekiel Clay, and his dedication to the breed. That aspect of Runnymede will never change." **KM**

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