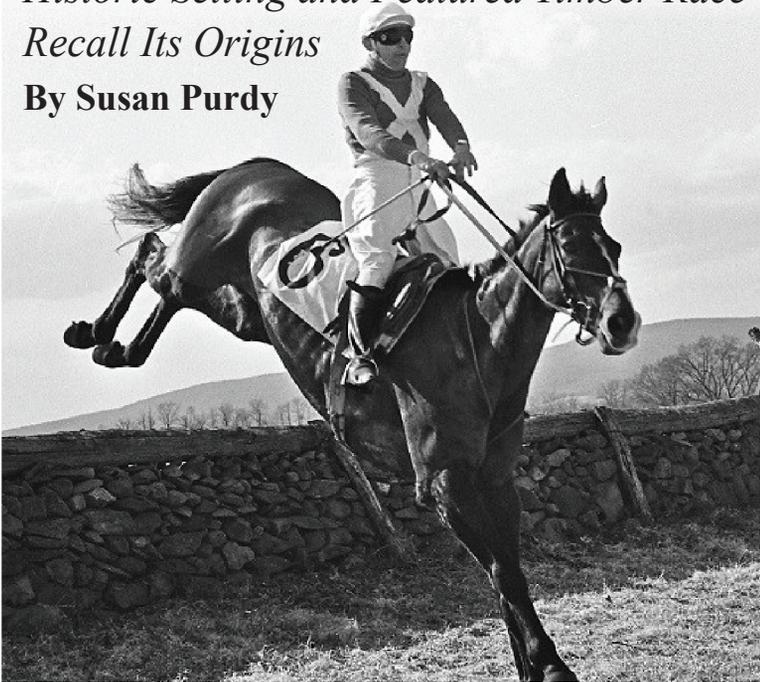


Oatlands Races, A Loudoun Tradition

*Historic Setting and Featured Timber Race
Recall Its Origins*

By Susan Purdy



PHOTOS COURTESY: LOUDOUN NOW

Dr. Joe Rogers aboard King of Spades, competing in the races at Oatlands in 1971. Rogers' horse won the featured race, the Eustis Cup, five times to retire the trophy, which is on display in the mansion at Oatlands.

William Corcoran Eustis (July 20, 1862 – November 24, 1921) was a captain in the United States Army and the personal assistant to General John J. Pershing during World War I. He was a co-founder of the Loudoun Hunt in 1894.

Mr. Eustis was an avid horseman who wanted the Oatlands property so he could have a home base in Virginia close to the social events and fox hunting. The Eustis' restored Oatlands to its former glory -- the condition of the property had deteriorated after the Civil War, having been used for a girls' boarding school and later a bed and breakfast.

Edith Eustis was responsible for restoring and expanding the beautiful gardens around the mansion. After Edith's death in 1964, the couple's children donated the home, its furnishings, and 261 acres to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and it was later opened to the public, as it remains to this day. Visitors at the races can stroll the beautiful gardens and tour the mansion which remains much as it was during the Eustis' time.

On display in one of the upstairs rooms in the mansion is the Eustis Cup trophy that was retired by Dr. Joseph M. Rogers, long-time MFH of the Loudoun Hunt, and his superhorse King of Spades. Of all the people associated with the Oatlands Point-to-Point races, Dr. Rogers, who died in



Fine tailgating and fancy hats are part of spring at the Oatlands races

Loudoun County has changed a lot in the past 54 years, but one thing that remains the same is the rite of spring which is the Loudoun Hunt Point to Point, a joint venture between the Loudoun Hunt and Loudoun Fairfax Hunt at Oatlands. The 54th running of the Loudoun Hunt Point-to-Point races takes place Easter Sunday, April 12, at the Oatlands, south of Leesburg.

This event is a major fixture on Loudoun social calendars, and serves as a kind of "family and friends" reunion after the long winter months, a chance to catch up with people you haven't seen since last year, and enjoy a day of socializing and merry-making in a most beautiful setting. The tree-lined drive up to the mansion will be filled with the subscribers along the rail spots with bountiful tailgate feasts for the party-goers, with picnickers on the infield and lots of kids running around.

The format for the races has changed a bit since the first meet in 1966. There are now two side-saddle exhibition races (over fences and on the flat). The feature race, the Eustis Cup, has been shortened to three and a half miles from the original four-mile distance, but they still jump three times over the twin stone walls on the drive, thrilling spectators with the close-up racing action.

Ron Johnsey, huntsman for the Loudoun Hunt, has been involved in running the races since the late 1970s. One of his main jobs back in those days was making sure the drive was clear of spectators before the horses came thundering over those stone walls during the Eustis Cup race. In those days it wasn't unusual to see Jack Kent Cooke strolling the lane with his little dog, out to watch his horses run and hang out with his good friend Randy Rouse, MFH of the Fairfax Hunt, who was always on the rail cheering on his talented steeplechasers.

The Eustis Cup is a timber race, named for the Eustis family who once owned Oatlands. William and Edith Eustis were a wealthy Washington couple who bought the property in 1903 from Stilson Hutchins, founder of the Washington Post.



Dr. Joe Rogers and Harry Wight christen one of the Oatlands stone wall jumps with a bottle of champagne in the 1960s.

2014, is perhaps the best known.

King of Spades won the Eustis Cup five times, first in 1967 when he was ridden by John Fisher, and again in 1970, 1971, 1972, and 1973. Dr. Rogers was the rider for three of those four years. In 1972, he was injured in a fall from another horse in an earlier race, and Fisher filled in that afternoon to win the Eustis Cup.

King of Spades was so popular that when he died in a freak paddock accident, one newspaper published an obituary for the horse as though he were a prominent citizen, and the bluegrass band The Country Gentlemen recorded a song about him.