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Arcade Exhibit Showcases RWU History Professor's Research

Research focuses on the Narragansett Pacer, the first “truly American” breed of horse, featured in “The Last of the Mohicans”



An illustration of the Narragansett pacer from a historic advertisement used in the exhibit.

June 28, 2018 | Edward Fitzpatrick

BRISTOL, R.I. – People walking by the Arcade in downtown Providence can now see a Rhode Island Historical Society exhibit of research that a Roger Williams University history professor did about the Narragansett Pacer – a type of horse first bred in Rhode Island that is described in glowing terms in “The Last of the Mohicans.”

Professor Charlotte V. Carrington-Farmer wrote the article, “The Rise and Fall of the Narragansett Pacer,” for the winter/spring 2018 edition of *Rhode Island History*, the peer-reviewed journal of the Rhode Island Historical Society.

“The exhibition and article show not only how Rhode Island created the first truly ‘American’ breed of horse but how their breed – the Narragansett Pacer – was the No. 1 saddle horse in America in the 18th century,” Carrington-Farmer said.

The exhibit can be seen in windows of the Arcade, an 1828 Greek Revival style building that was known as the nation’s oldest indoor shopping mall and that reopened in 2013 with shops and restaurants on the first floor and micro-lofts on the second and third floors.

The article notes that in James Fenimore Cooper’s “The Last of the Mohicans: A Narrative of 1757,” Uncas and Hawkeye discuss the attributes of Narragansett Pacers, concluding, “This is a breed highly esteemed.”





“As Rhode Island emerged as a horse breeding and exportation center in the second half of the 17th century, it simultaneously developed its own breed of horse – the Narragansett Pacer,” the article states. “As the first and distinct breed that was created in the Colonies, the Narragansett Pacer was the first American breed of horse. As ‘The Last of the Mohicans’ demonstrates, purebred Narragansett Pacers were prized saddle horses due to their ability to cover up to a hundred miles a day of rocky ground with their unique pacing gait.”

Carrington-Farmer raises questions about whether Paul Revere used a Narragansett Pacer for his midnight ride, as some have speculated. But she says it’s clear that President George Washington owned and raced Narragansett Pacers.

“While the Narragansett Pacer may be gone, it is not forgotten,” Carrington-Farmer wrote. “Its significant legacy lives on in the contemporary breeds that it laid the foundations for. Perhaps there is no better testimony for the importance of the breed than that the first President of the United States and ‘the best horseman of his age’ sought out the ‘perfect Narragansett.’ ”

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