

## Book Reviews

*That writer does the most, who gives his reader the most knowledge, and takes from him the least time.*

C.C. Colton

Mackay-Smith, Alexander. *The Race Horses of America: 1832-1872. Portraits and Other Paintings by Edward Troye*. Saratoga Springs, New York: The National Museum of Racing, 1981. Pp. xxxi, 458. Appendix, index, bibliography, portraits, paintings, notes. \$100.00.

Edward Troye was the foremost painter of American horses in the nineteenth-century. Troye was born in Switzerland in 1808 and was a descendant of a long line of artists. Educated in England, he migrated to America in 1831. During the subsequent four decades, Troye painted the portrait of almost every leading thoroughbred in this country as well as a goodly number of the best trotters. Alexander Mackay-Smith's study of Troye is an attempt to establish him "as a major American artist, as one of the best landscape painters of the 19th century, and certainly as our best portrait painter of horses." (xxxii). The biography also permits Mackay-Smith to examine the character of the leading thoroughbreds, discuss their races and owners, and provide a general overview of the history of horse racing between 1832 and 1872.

For Mackay-Smith, the Chairman of the Board of the National Sporting Library in Middleburg, Virginia, the project was obviously a labor of love. The lengthy book, beautifully illustrated with more than 100 photocopies of Troye's paintings, was not intended for a mass market as evident by the limited number of copies published (1500) and the high price tag (\$100). The work was also not written for the scholarly community even though Mackay-Smith combed a large number of primary and secondary sources. The book appears to be directed at those individuals who are members of racing associations or who are on the board of directors of organizations such as the National Racing Museum, the publisher of this work. For this audience, Mackay-Smith's book will prove quite interesting and it compares favorably with John Hervey's classic history of thoroughbred racing publishing by the Jockey Club in 1944. The professional historian will, however, find the work less satisfying. The book does explore an area of scholarship rarely investigated by sport historians and attaches new importance to a different type of sporting figure, but, in the final analysis, the work does not examine the types

of issues and relationships sports scholars are interested in and unfortunately leaves too many questions unanswered.

Mackay-Smith's book is at its best in describing the beauty of Troye's work and proving that he was the premier painter of horses in nineteenth-century America. The study does not accomplish another of its objectives, establishing Troye as one of the leading landscape artists of the previous century. Mackay-Smith does not place Troye's work within developments in the American art world and this neglect was largely responsible for his failure to achieve his goal. The study would have also profitted from a general discussion of the painting of horses, particularly in England and the United States. Moreover, the author never examines why horsemen desired these paintings. Was it simply a case of status or did these paintings have in the pre-photography days some utilitarian benefit?

Mackay-Smith's discussion of the horses of this era and their more important races is quite comprehensive although much of the material will be familiar to the historian of this sport. The same holds true for his treatment of the leading horsemen, but he does provide the professional scholars some useful biographical material on these men. At times Mackay-Smith's discussion of these themes overwhelms his examination of Troye and it appears as if Troye's paintings simply serve as a springboard to explore the history of horse racing. The book is more than half complete before the reader learns anything about Troye's family life. Mackay-Smith notes that Troye was a devout Christian who traveled to the Middle East to see the holy places as well as examine the Arabian horses for Kentuckian A. Keene Richards, one of his major sponsors. Nevertheless, he does not tell the reader how Troye rectifies his religious convictions with a sport which frequently came under attack from the clergy. Several themes are raised, but not sufficiently examined. For example, Mackay-Smith spends several pages detailing the events leading to the publication in 1866 of Troye's *The Race Horse In America*, but he never explains why the project failed to win the support of the racing community. In a similar vein, Mackay-Smith takes note of Troye's interest in establishing an American school of art, but he spends roughly two paragraphs on this important issue.

Despite its scholarly limitations, sports historians should examine Mackay-Smith's recent book if merely for the beauty of Troye's paintings. While the lengthy work falls short of its ambitious goals, Mackay-Smith should be commended for directing the professional historian to the importance of sporting art in general and Edward Troye in particular.