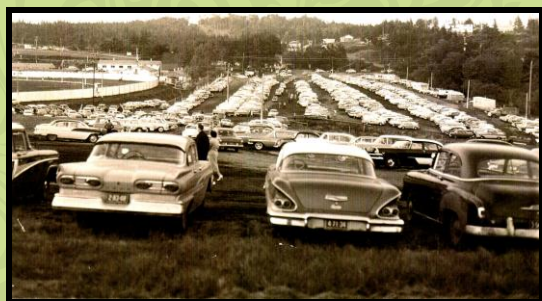


By 1970, the Downs netted three million in bets. Between 1973 to 1975, nearly three quarters of a million dollars was spent modernizing the track, including a heated grandstand and a dining room, which attracted more women to what was traditionally a man's sport.

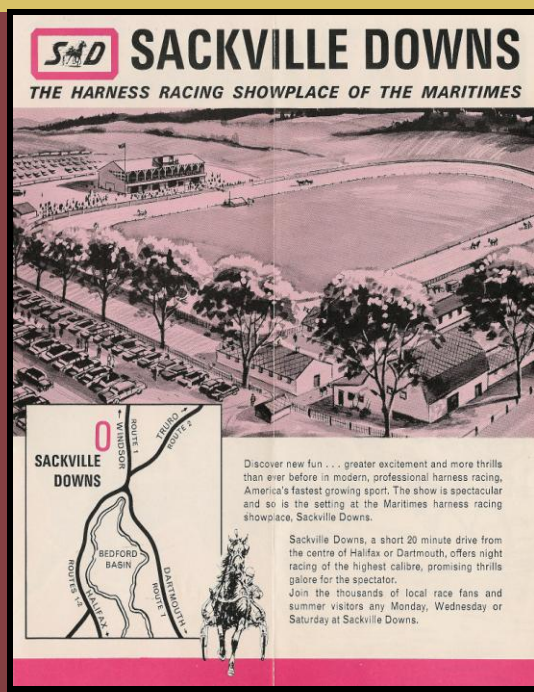
Sackville Downs came a long way in a short time. Improvements to the facilities, belief in the growth of the sport, planning for the future, coupled with overall cooperation from the men who owned and raced the horses led to Sackville Downs being billed the "Harness Centre of the Maritimes". It was in no small part that the Downs made harness racing one of the most popular sports draws in Atlantic Canada.

Into the 1980's, the track's fan base and interest eventually withered. With costs exceeding revenues, the track ceased operations in 1986 after a shaky start in 1956, exponential growth in the 1960's, and a rocky '80's end, many eyes shed a tear with the closing of one of Sackville's landmarks. With the closing of the track, came the end of a dream, an attraction, and a visible reminder of the changing landscape of Sackville. The track was to make way for future commercial development. The Sackville Downs is now home to the Downsview Mall extension, where a chain of retail outlets and Sobeys currently operates in 2012, along the heart of Sackville's business district, Sackville Drive.



The parking lot at Sackville Downs, looking towards Sackville Drive.

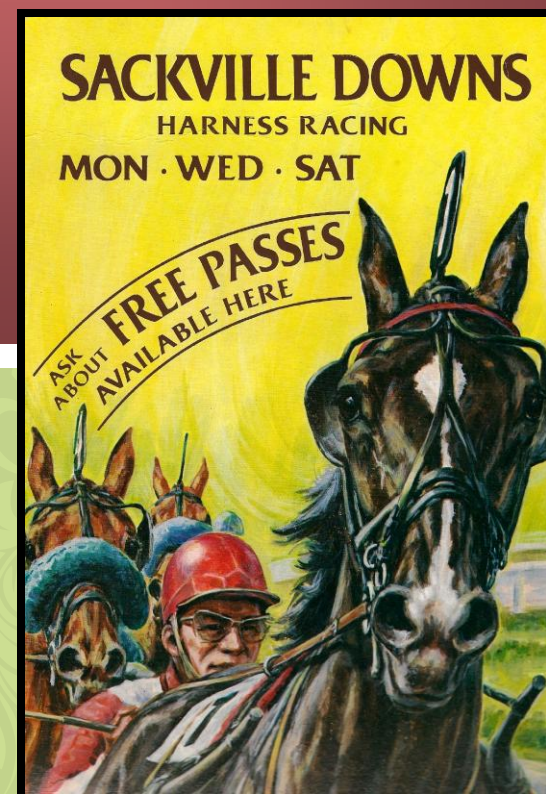
This brochure has been compiled and published by the Friends of the Fultz Corner Restoration Society.



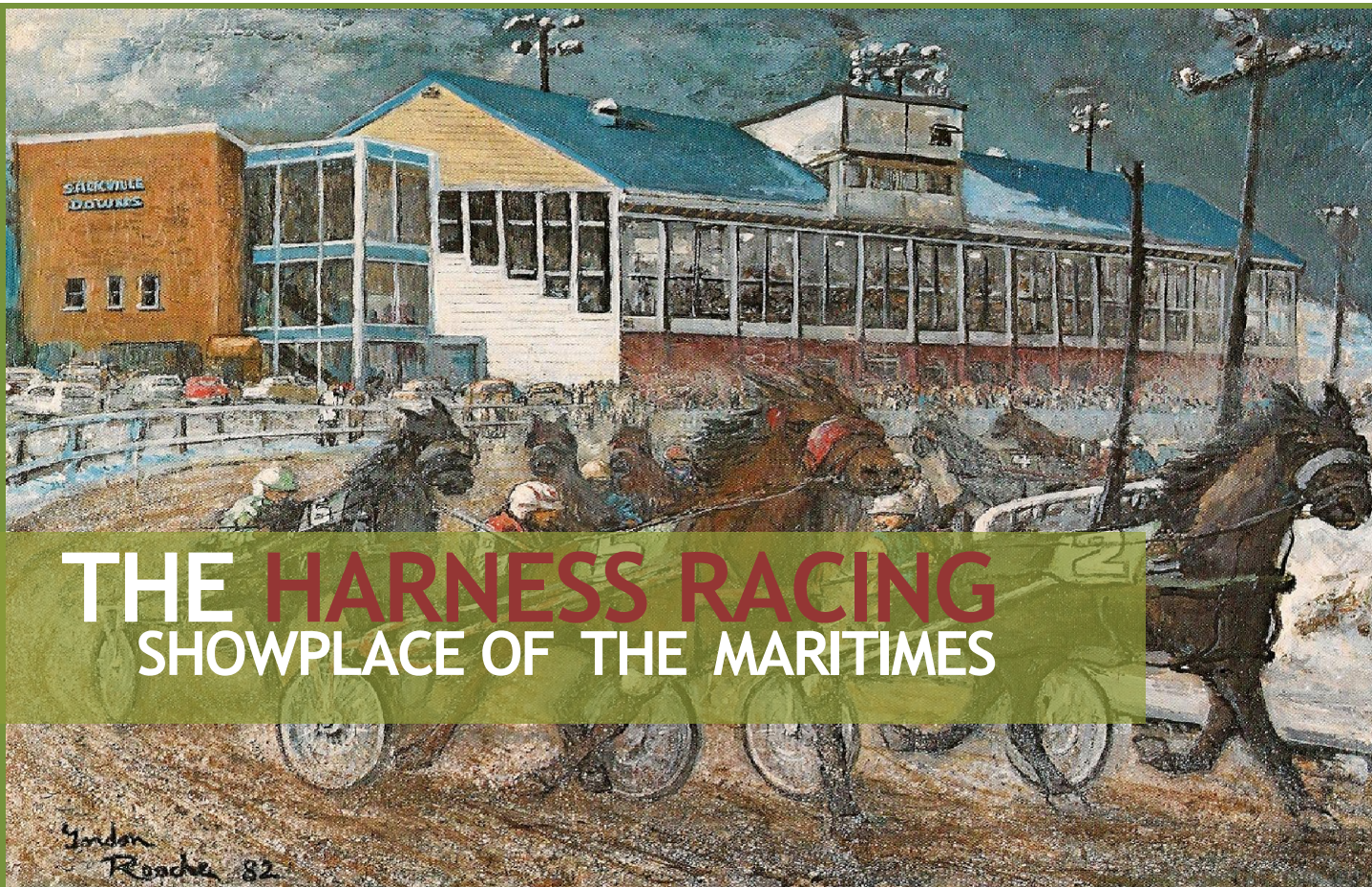
Stop by the Fultz House Museum and learn more about Sackville's connection to the harness racing industry. Take the time and view the virtual display on the development and activities of the Sackville Downs.

Visit the Fultz House Museum on the web @ www.fultzhouse.ca or call 865-3794 to learn more. There are many stories to be discovered!

Galloping into the past... The SACKVILLE DOWNS Story



FULTZ HOUSE MUSEUM



THE HARNESS RACING SHOWPLACE OF THE MARITIMES

On a chilly winter's afternoon in 1952 at the harness racing track on the Halifax Commons, a race fan was chatting with another racing enthusiast, John T. Cruickshank, about the predicament of their favourite sport. During the conversation, the fan asked Mr. Cruickshank, "Why don't we have any worthwhile racing facilities in this area? How come somebody doesn't do something about it?" This appears to have been a good question to pose, and one that would to be answered within three years.

In 1952, Mr. Cruickshank operated a dairy farm in Lower Sackville, twelve miles from Halifax and without today's modern highway, facilities between these two areas was truly "out in the country" to the Halifax city folk. The Cruickshank farm occupied 250 acres of prime land. With his mind now more on harness racing than dairy farming, horses were soon to replace the cows grazing in the pastures.

As with any business, capital is a necessary ingredient. Mr. Cruickshank went searching for local sports enthusiasts and businessmen to join him in the venture. None were found at first. For many business people, a general consensus existed, that being the proposed race operation would be a failure because of its distant location from the city.

Construction took place just yards from the Sackville Raceway that had operated in the late 1940's and early 1950's. The troubles that saw the demise of the old track caused issues for the new track as well. Among the problems were - distance from the city, lack of good patron facilities and a general apathy of the sport. Hockey and baseball were all the rage.

Interest in harness racing seemed to pick up in 1956, after a slow start to the 1955 opening. The second year of operation saw fairly well-attended events, which gave the operators of the Downs the will and strength to carry on with their dream.

Two outstanding pacers also attracted many fans to the track. In its early days of operation, the Sackville Downs had great horse rivalries. The first goes back to 1956 when Convair and Dave Gratton were stealing the others' thunder. Convair held the track's pacing record on two occasions with a 2.07.1/5 mile in 1956 and a 2.05.2/5 performance in 1959. Through the early sixties, Dee's Boy and Bob Brook were the stars of any performance. Both established track records. Dee's Boy had a 2.03.3/5 win in 1962 and Bob Brook breaking that record two years later with a 2.02.4/5 victory.

By the late 1960's fans were turning out in increasing numbers. With the increased fan base, the Sackville Downs changed with the times. The track modernized and expanded nearly every year from the early '60's into the 1970's. The track moved from a manually operated wooden tote board to an electric western tote. The small grandstand was increased to seat 1,500 people. Then in 1967, a clubhouse facility was built for two hundred thousand dollars.

The Halifax Harness Horse Club managed the winter race meet from November 11th to May 1st. The summer race meet ran from May 1st to November 11th and was under the management of John F. Cruickshank. Both of the meets grew in size and caliber as the sixties came to a close.

