

Franklin B. Voss once said  
that his ancestors had

“etched their  
fondness for things  
equine firmly  
into the family  
pattern...”



By Gregory R. Weidman,  
Guest Curator

Frank Voss made the remark in an interview for *The Maryland Horse*. The article titled “Artist at Work” appeared in April 1948 when Voss was already acknowledged as the leading American equestrian painter of his day. That fondness for things equine is reflected in the exhibition “The Voss Family, Artists of American Sporting Life,” organized by the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame in Saratoga

Springs, New York. It comes to the Maryland Historical Society this spring and summer before traveling on to the National Sporting Library in Middleburg, Virginia, for the fall. Over 85 works of art—oil paintings, watercolors, pastels, prints, and sculptures—are on loan from six museums and 28 private lenders. The Maryland Historical Society is adding works of special Maryland interest from its own and other



Above, *Photograph of Franklin B. Voss painting in a field.*

Location unknown, about 1950

Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas H. Voss

Left, *Man O' War as a Two-year Old, Johnny Loftus up*

Oil on canvas, signed F. B. Voss, dated 1919  
Courtesy of the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame

Believed by many to be the greatest race horse of the 20th century, Man o' War had 20 victories in 21 races.

Right, *Portrait of Franklin B. Voss*

Oil on canvas, signed Raymond P.R. Neilson, dated 1935.

Courtesy of Barbara Voss Noell

# The Voss Family

ARTISTS OF AMERICAN SPORTING LIFE

April 11-July 27, 2008

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private collections for the exhibition's Maryland venue.

When Franklin's ancestors Edward Voss and Robert Brooke immigrated from England to Virginia during the early 1700s, Brooke brought his foxhounds with him and became the first known master of foxhounds in America. Thus the family was in at the beginning of equestrian sports in the Colonies. In 1840, Benjamin Franklin Voss (1800-1886) moved to Baltimore, where he became a prominent merchant who

set down roots in Maryland through his five children.

By 1870, one of his sons, William Voss (1846-1928), was established in New York City, where he married Caroline Kane Neilson (1854-1941) and became a successful banker and stockbroker. The couple moved with their five children to Long Island in the mid-1880s during the heyday of equestrian sports. William was a founding member of the Rockaway Hunt Club in 1878, while his brother Joseph was a founding member of Maryland's Elkridge Hounds. William's children were encouraged to ride, foxhunt, and race throughout their youth. The Vosses were still very much connected to Maryland through William's siblings and extended family, and the family managed visits to Baltimore on a regular basis.

In addition to their intense interest in equestrian sports, William and Caroline's five children all showed artistic talent, though it was the middle three who became recognized artists. Franklin Brooke Voss (1880-1953) was particularly well known for his portraits of America's top Thoroughbreds. Jessie Voss Lewis (1876-1962) was a professional

pastel portraitist for New York's elite families. Edward Somerville Voss (1883-1969) captured scenes of racing and foxhunting in watercolor as a pastime that led to commissioned work. Edward's wife, Elsa Horne Voss (1895-1982), sculpted horses and other animals in bronze, both as commissions and gifts for her family and friends.

## Franklin Brooke Voss

The sporting life was essential to Frank Voss and the artist that he became. In a Baltimore newspaper article by Elizabeth Ober dated 1935, he said that he could "scarcely remember a time when horses ranked second either in his mind or in his daily life." Similar to his sporting interests, Frank's artistic talents also manifested themselves early, as he sketched horses or copied foxhunting prints at home as a young boy. Frank's formal training began around 1900 at the Art Students' League in New York City, where he worked under renowned anatomy instructor George Bridgman. By 1905, he painted gouaches of his father and brother on their hunters which, though somewhat stiffly painted, show a sure sense of animal and human anatomy. Frank's earliest



known professional commissions were portraits of dogs and hounds. By the early nineteen teens, he began to get important commissions from the major sporting families in his Long Island neighborhood.

From the very beginning of his career, Frank was equally an artist and a sportsman. A later description of Frank in a magazine article that appeared about 1932 succinctly sums this up: "Short, ruddy, with the terse courtesy of the hunting field, he is a centaur, half artist and half sportsman, who paints in riding breeches and who rides to hounds with a weather eye out for color effects." His sporting life also provided access to potential clients. "He is a welcome guest in his patrons' houses, riding their horses as masterfully as he paints them," the article continued. The artist traveled extensively, both to participate in sport and to paint his subjects on site. As his obituary would eventually describe: "He carried his easel and canvases to the race tracks, broodmare barns and into the open field to paint them." Frank himself reported in *The Maryland Horse* magazine article of 1948:

*I paint what I see. I put in the faults as well as the good points...I don't make any attempt to 'pretty up' a horse...I portray him exactly as I see him...I work outdoors mostly...whenever the weather lets me. I dislike the wind. But a still afternoon, late, when the sun slants in and throws shadows—that's one of the best times.*

After making what were usually detailed studies in the field of the horse, the landscape, and the humans, Frank then returned to his studio to complete the finished picture.

Frank Voss's first major exhibition, held in 1915 at A. Ackermann & Son's galleries in New York, featured 20 works varying from dogs, hounds, hunters, and children on ponies to steeplechase horses and one racehorse. The Ackermann show engendered a jump in commissions, and racehorses grew in importance in Frank's oeuvre. After paint-



ing foxhunting-related works for Samuel D. Riddle, Frank received the commission to depict one of the greatest racehorses of all time, Riddle's Man o' War. This portrait was just one of a remarkable 39 commissions in 1919 which earned Frank the then-impressive sum of \$16,750.

During the 1920s, leading racehorses became a significant percentage of the artist's work, who often painted multiple commissions for one owner, including different views of the same horse. Voss's paintings were before the public eye more and more, published in newspapers, magazine articles, and books. Work in England became another significant aspect of Frank's career. In 1926, the Duke of Beaufort commissioned Frank to paint himself, the Duchess, their hunt staff, and foxhounds in front of palatial Badminton House. The Beauforts' painting attracted such favorable attention that Frank was asked to execute several others of famous horses before returning home.

The early to mid-1930s can truly be seen as the pinnacle of Voss's career with regard to quality and diversity of works and breadth of clientele, as he traveled across the country to paint the top horses for

the top owners, including Whitneys, Vanderbilts, and Mellons. In 1937, he painted both the famed Seabiscuit and War Admiral, the principals in the most renowned match race in history, held at Pimlico Race track in 1938.

By the 1940s and into the 1950s, Frank Voss's work was very much focused on Kentucky, including his largest group of commissions for one owner, the 22 conformation portraits of the famous horses of Warren Wright's Calumet Farm, including Whirlaway and Citation. Commissions from foxhunters were still important, among them some of Frank's finest large scenes of hunts, *Elkridge-Harford Hunt Crossing Atlanta Hall Meadow* (1942) and *Thanksgiving Day Meet of the Elkridge-Harford Hunt at St. James Church* (1944).

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Above, *Seabiscuit, Red Pollard up*  
Oil on canvas, signed F. B. Voss, dated 1937  
Courtesy of the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame

An unlikely champion and symbol of hope during the Great Depression, Seabiscuit was immortalized in a 2001 book by Laura Hillenbrand and 2003 movie. At Pimlico on November 1, 1938, Seabiscuit beat War Admiral in what was dubbed the "Match of the Century."

These impressive pictures and portraits of foxhunters from this time reflect an important change in Frank's life, his move to Harford County, Maryland, in 1947. Frank had made regular visits to foxhunt for many years, and his brother Ned and sister-in-law Elsa relocated there in 1936. Frank purchased property near Monkton, adjacent to his brother's Atlanta Hall Farm. On January 31, 1953, Frank Voss was out with the Elkridge-Harford Hunt. Peter Winants recalled in a 1992 interview, "...Elkridge Harford's pack worked a line parallel to Hess Road, where a high hill on Hope Farm provides a marvelous view of Atlanta Hall Farm and Frank's own place, slightly to the east. Frank often told friends that this was his favorite view." Frank's cousin Suzanne White Whitman was also there. She related in a 1983 interview: "A member of the hunt comes back to meet us. He said, 'Mr. Voss is dead. He was jumping a fence abreast of a friend when he said: 'You know I love this horse.' Then he fell to the ground.'" Mrs. Whitman, who rode back to Frank's house to tell his sister Jessie of his death, went on:

*...Jessie recalled the conversation she had had that morning at breakfast with Frank. Jessie remembered Frank's words as being: "My eyes are getting bad. Suppose they go and I can't paint or fox hunt? I got a letter*

*the other day from the Duke of Beaufort who said that a friend had dropped dead in the hunting field. He was buried in his hunting clothes, and at the grave the huntsman blew gone away. You know, I envy him."*

Mrs. Whitman concluded her recollections: "When Frank Voss was buried at St. James graveyard, people came from far and near. He was put to earth like his English friend. It was [Elkridge-Harford huntsman] Dallas Leith who blew the horn." As Baltimore *Sun* sporting journalist Elizabeth Ober reported in her February 2, 1953 column, "The world of horse and hounds had lost one of its greatest exponents and America had lost its foremost sporting painter."

Jessie Voss Lewis

Like her younger brother Frank, Jessie Somerville Knox Voss (1876-1962) used her considerable talents to become a professional artist. Jessie's artistic impulses appeared at a very early age, though her first attempts were of people, not horses. After classes in New York City and England, Jessie pursued her studies with leading American artists at

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Below, *Howard Bruce on Billy Barton*  
Oil on canvas, signed F. B. Voss, dated 1927  
Courtesy of H. Bruce Fenwick  
Billy Barton was the only horse to have won the Maryland Hunt Cup and the Virginia Hunt Cup in the same year (1926). Then in 1928, he placed second in the world famous English Grand National steeplechase.



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the Art Students' League, including William Merritt Chase, who encouraged her to work in pastels because of her extraordinary sense of color.

Jessie began her professional career as an artist in earnest in the nineteen teens, portraying family, neighbors, and friends on Long Island. Her career took off, however, after she moved to New York City in 1920. Her first one-woman exhibit at Folsom Gallery in 1922, featuring portraits of notable society figures, brought her positive reviews, a growing reputation, and increasingly numerous patrons. As her career was burgeoning, Jessie took a major step in her personal life, marrying New York stockbroker Henry Llewellyn Daingerfield Lewis in 1925. The busiest period of Jessie's career was in the late 1920s, with numerous extensively publicized exhibitions in Manhattan and Long Island. Pastel portraits of children and debutantes had become her most frequent subjects.

Although 1929 was probably the peak year for Jessie Voss Lewis's career as an artist, it also brought the Stock Market Crash which greatly affected her but especially her husband. Jessie's commissions declined for several years, though her work appeared in two major shows in 1933. Jessie's life took an unexpected turn in 1935 when her husband died of a heart attack at the family home in Hewlett, Long Island. After this she seems to have retired essentially, though she did charity work during World War II. After her mother died in 1941, Jessie no longer felt tied to Long Island. When her brothers Frank and Stuart moved to Maryland in 1947, Jessie went with them. In her final years, she depicted lovely scenes of the gardens around her new home near Monkton. She died on December 12, 1962, at the age of 86.

### Edward Somerville Voss and Elsa Horne Voss

Known to family and friends as "Ned," Edward Somerville Voss was born in Lawrence, Long Island, on April 7, 1883. He pursued a career in real estate on Long Island from 1907 until the mid-1930s. Equestrian sports played a very large role in Ned's life, whether foxhunting, riding in steeplechases, or playing polo. Elsa Horne was born in Pittsburgh, September 16 1895. After touring Europe in 1911, Elsa and her mother moved to fashionable Park Avenue in Manhattan. By 1920, according to *The New York Telegram* of April 27, 1928, Elsa had become "one of the popular members of the Southampton summer colony ... She is an expert horsewoman and has won many blue ribbons at Southampton and New York."

On Long Island in the autumn of 1921, Ned Voss met Elsa Horne "through a mutual love of horses." After marrying in 1922, the couple moved to Old Westbury in the foxhunting district of Long Island. The family spent its summers at a ranch in Sheridan, Wyoming. In the early '30s, Ned and Elsa Voss regularly visited the foxhunting territory of Harford County, Maryland, where a number of Long Island "ex-patriots" were settling at the time. The Vosses

purchased Atlanta Hall Farm in Monkton in 1936.

Ned Voss used his artistic talent to record in watercolor and ink scenes of the things he loved best: polo, steeplechases, mounted jockeys, hunters and hounds. He also sketched and painted numerous western scenes and cowboys during Wyoming sojourns. In addition to these works for his own pleasure, Ned's participation in equestrian sports led directly to his first professional commissions. He illustrated two books by Harry S. Page, whom he knew well from race riding: *Over the Open* (Scribner's, 1925), a foxhunting memoir, and *Between the Flags, the Recollections of a Gentleman Rider* (Derrydale Press, 1929) about steeplechasing on Long Island.

After moving to Maryland, Ned Voss primarily depicted views of foxhunting, the local countryside, and his farm and horses. His 1948 watercolor of a jaunty fox crossing a field in the neighboring countryside engendered so many requests from friends that in 1950 he created his first commercially produced print. *The Harford Fox's* success inspired Ned to produce a series of prints based on his watercolors of local foxhunting scenes (*The Meet, Stiff Timber, Off to Draw, and Full Cry*), copyrighted in 1951 and still sought after today.

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*The Elkridge-Harford Hunt Crossing Atlanta Hall Meadow*  
Oil on canvas, signed F. B. Voss, dated 1944.  
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas H. Voss  
The artist painted this view of his brother MFH Edward "Ned" S. Voss (on the gray horse) and the Elkridge-Harford Hunt in a beautiful meadow on the estate near Monkton, Maryland that Ned bought in 1936.



THURSDAY,  
APRIL 10, 6-9 P.M.

## Preview Reception

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**Wednesday, May 21, 6 p.m. Wine and  
cheese reception 6:30 p.m. Lecture**  
*"I paint what I see..." Perspectives on  
the Sporting Art of Franklin B. Voss*

Lecture by Guest Curator Gregory  
R. Weidman

The lecture focuses on the  
works of Franklin Brooke Voss, both  
his portraits of America's top Thor-  
oughbreds and other sporting paint-  
ings. Ms. Weidman will highlight  
the artist's connections to Maryland  
and the sporting world.



**Saturday, June 14, 2 - 4 p.m.**

*Seabiscuit, War Admiral and the World  
of Franklin Voss*

Featuring Author Peter Winants and  
PBS Documentary on Seabiscuit

Peter Winants, author of *The  
Sporting Art of Franklin B. Voss*, will  
share his reminiscences of the 1938  
Match Race at Pimlico between  
Seabiscuit and War Admiral. Mr.  
Winants will discuss the legacy of  
America's premier equine artist and  
recall Frank Voss's poignant last ride.

The PBS documentary on  
Seabiscuit will be shown as part of  
the program. In his film, producer  
Stephen Ives illuminated Depressio-  
era America and explored the fasci-  
nating world of Thoroughbred racing,  
telling how an over-worked horse and  
broken-down jockey captured the  
imagination of the nation.

*Light refreshments will be served.*

**Wednesday, June 25, 6:30 p.m.**

**Wine and cheese reception,**

**7 p.m. Discussion**

*The Horse Industry in Maryland Today*

Discussion and Book Signing by

Josh Pons

Meet horse breeder, author  
and owner of the Country Life and  
Merryland farms, Josh Pons, who  
will share his perspective on modern  
horse breeding and Thoroughbred  
racing. Mr. Pons will discuss the  
future of racing in Maryland as the  
state competes in an ever-changing  
world— one clearly divided between  
states that have slots and those that  
do not. Mr. Pons will be available  
after his talk to sign copies of his  
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*Cowboy on Pony Standing*  
Bronze sculpture, signed E. Horne Voss,  
c. 1935  
Courtesy of Barbara Voss Noell

Like her husband, Elsa Horne Voss was a talented amateur, principally creating works of art for her own pleasure. She painted in oils and watercolors, but her most important works were sculptures. W. Frank Purdy observed in his Foreword to the 1940 Newhouse Galleries Catalogue: “Born close to the saddle, her fingers have known the ‘feel’ of a horse since early childhood. Her later development and knowledge came through earnest study of anatomy, sound construction and good draftsmanship.”

Notably, in the 1930 census, Elsa was listed as a working artist. Her work during the '30s, ranging from racehorses and colts to donkeys and dalmatians, began to appear on public exhibition in both New York, and Paris. Notable commissions included the famed Equipoise for C. V. Whitney (1932). Work from Wyoming included her best known pieces, *Cowboy on Pony Walking* and *Cowboy on Pony Standing* (1935), exhibited in 1938 at the Annual Exhibition of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Elsa reached the public pinnacle of her career in 1940 with her first solo show at Newhouse Galleries in Manhattan, which featured *Morning Gallop*, one of her finest sculptures.

In their later years, Ned and Elsa raised Angus cattle and Belgian draft horses at Atlanta Hall Farm and owned several winning steeplechase horses. Ned was entering his 31st year as Master of Fox Hounds for Elkridge-Harford, the “longest continuous mastership in United States,” when he died at home at age 86 on August 24, 1969. Elsa pursued her art until the very end of her life, and was working on a sculpture of Secretariat at the time of her death at age 86 on June 3, 1982.