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Under Siege: Kentucky and the Transformation of American Thoroughbred Racing, 1865–1936

By Gary A. O'Dell

Cycles in Thoroughbred Racing

For many Americans, the sport of Thoroughbred racing must seem a quaint relic of a bygone era that only surfaces into public awareness once per year in May with the running of the Kentucky Derby in Louisville. Nevertheless, the breeding and racing of these horses is a multi-billion-dollar international industry. Kentucky has a long and globally recognized association with the sport that extends back to the earliest days of settlement, and which today constitutes a major segment of the regional economy. While many other locations, including Marion County, Florida; Newmarket, England; Chantilly, France; and the state of Texas, may with some justification compete for the title of “Horse Capital of the World,” there is little doubt that the Bluegrass region of Kentucky is the heart of the modern Thoroughbred industry. This has not always been the case.¹

The sport has long experienced cycles of decline and resurgence in vitality and popularity, driven by changes in the social, political, and economic fabric of the nation, and by the upheaval of war. In association with these root causes, the geographic centers for breeding

¹ Rebecca Cassidy, *Horse People: Thoroughbred Culture in Lexington and Newmarket* (Baltimore, Md., 2007), 54–56; Steven R. Haberman, “Horse Capital Question,” *Ocala Star-Banner* (Florida), March 29, 2002.

GARY A. O'DELL is professor of geography at Morehead State University and served as state geographer of Kentucky. In 2020, he received the Distinguished Research Award from MSU and the Peter M. Hauer Award from the National Speleological Society.

and racing Thoroughbred horses have periodically shifted back and forth from east to west, south to north, with Kentucky sometimes in the dominant position, and sometimes not. Thoroughbred racing was the first mass spectator sport in America, which, like baseball, was adapted from English precursors to suit American needs and tastes. First established in the colonies as an elite gentlemen's sport, Thoroughbred racing reached the point of extinction during the Civil War. Yet, racing rebounded strongly afterward and during the remainder of the nineteenth century experienced a profound transformation in virtually all aspects of the sport. Racing became increasingly democratic and commercialized, and whereas overt gambling was once prohibited from tracks, wagering on races became the most important revenue stream and a driving force in the post-war expansion of the developing industry. As the nineteenth century ended, the sport was roiled by competing internal factions and assaulted by Progressive anti-gambling social reformers who nearly succeeded in eliminating Thoroughbred racing. Because a preoccupation with horse racing has been nearly constant in Kentucky from the pioneer era to the present day, the history of the sport within the Commonwealth provides an appropriate lens to focus upon the broader picture of national developments in Thoroughbred racing and breeding.²

American Racing Before the Civil War

The first Thoroughbreds arrived in the American colonies near the middle of the eighteenth century, imported from England by wealthy southern planters who wished to emulate the aristocratic lifestyles of the mother country. Breeding and racing these horses became firmly rooted in colonial New York and in the southern states, particularly the Tidewater region of Virginia, Maryland, and South Carolina. During the Revolutionary War, destruction of infrastructure by the British invaders along with confiscation and deliberate slaughter

² Steven Riess, "The Cyclical History of Horse Racing: The USA's Oldest and (Sometimes) Most Popular Spectator Sport," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 31 (1 & 2): 29–54.

of bloodstock devastated the lowland racing establishment and promoted the westward shift of Thoroughbred racing and breeding into Kentucky and Tennessee. The central areas of these states, both known collectively as “the Bluegrass region” prior to the Civil War, were the first trans-Appalachian areas to be settled, and the hardy pioneers brought livestock with them to help tame the new land. Racing horses of ordinary breeds otherwise used for transportation and cultivation became a common form of recreation for Bluegrass residents, usually informal matches between a pair of horses down a straight path cleared for the purpose, or through the streets of a community.³

The Tidewater gentry who came to the western frontier imported Thoroughbred horses and brought order to the sport, laying out oval courses of measured length, establishing jockey clubs, and promulgating rules and regulations to govern the conduct of race meetings in the British tradition. Thoroughbred racing was essentially a gentlemen’s sport, indulged in by wealthy elites who had the means to acquire and maintain these expensive animals. The racing associations were exclusive clubs for the benefit of members who raced their horses against those of other members, with prizes awarded out of a racing fund raised by member subscriptions and entry fees. The first “jockey clubs” in Kentucky were established in Woodford County and at Lexington in 1797. The rules established by the Lexington club, reorganized as the Kentucky Association in 1826, served as the model by which race meetings in the Commonwealth were conducted. Common folk and non-members were welcome as spectators and were not required to pay admission. Although gambling was prohibited on the grounds of racecourses, numerous wagers on the outcome of races, often substantial, were arranged beforehand. By 1810, nearly every significant community in the West possessed a racecourse and

³ John Hervey, *Racing in America, 1665–1865*, vol. 1 (New York, 1944), 223–26; Kent Hollingsworth, *The Kentucky Thoroughbred* (1976, rept., Lexington, Ky., 2009), 13–15; Julie A. Campbell, *The Horse in Virginia: An Illustrated History* (Charlottesville, Va., 2010), 31–32, 35, 41.

conducted meetings on a regular basis, usually in the spring or fall of the year.⁴

The renewal of conflict with Britain during the War of 1812 again forced a suspension of Thoroughbred racing throughout most of the nation. This situation was prolonged by the Panic of 1819, a major financial crisis. Racing did not resume with any regularity until a decade after the war, but did so with great vigor. The period of the late 1820s through the 1830s witnessed an increase in Thoroughbred importations and a proliferation of racing venues that ushered in what might be considered a “golden age” for the sport during the early antebellum period.

This expansion was short-lived, for a new financial crisis, the Panic of 1837, touched off a major national recession that resulted in a significant contraction of racing and breeding operations. Racing all but disappeared from New York and the North, where capitalists whose wealth allowed them to maintain racing stables and support expensive breeding operations were no longer able to indulge in such extravagances. Facing financial ruin, many northern breeders were forced to sell their bloodstock and farms, and without a steady supply of Thoroughbreds available for competition, the region could no longer support racing venues. During this period, the southern states experienced a consolidation of the numerous community-based racing venues into a handful of tracks operating in the larger cities. The Bluegrass region of Kentucky and Tennessee became the undisputed focus of Thoroughbred breeding, and the racing capital of the nation shifted from New York to the new Metairie track in New Orleans, established in 1838.⁵

On the eve of the Civil War, the number of venues in Kentucky was reduced from more than a dozen tracks operating in 1838 to

⁴ Hervey, *Racing in America*, vol. 1, 226–33; Bruce Denbo and Mary Wharton, eds., *The Horse World of the Bluegrass* (Lexington, Ky., 1980), 10–17; Hollingsworth, *Kentucky Thoroughbred*, 15–23; *Kentucky Gazette* (Lexington) May 13 and October 21, 1797.

⁵ Hervey, *Racing in America, 1665–1865*, vol. 2 (New York, 1944), 339; Riess, “Cyclical History of Horse Racing,” 31–34; Melvin L. Adelman, *A Sporting Time: New York City and the Rise of Modern Athletics 1820–1870* (Urbana, Ill., 1986), 42–52.

only two in 1860, the Kentucky Association track in Lexington and the Woodlawn track in Louisville. In the great internecine conflict that followed, racing was suspended nearly everywhere. Kentucky was the only state, on either side of the conflict, that continued to host race meetings every year for the duration of the war. The horsemen of Lexington were so determined in their passion for the sport that the racing association in that city continued to hold meetings every spring and fall during wartime; not even the temporary occupation of the city by Confederate troops in September 1862 was considered sufficient reason to warrant postponing the fall meet. The only exception to this record of determined competitiveness was the cancellation of the spring meeting of 1863 because most of the major horsemen had shipped their racing strings north to compete at the opening of a new track in New Jersey. This was an event significant beyond the immediate understanding of participants, one that heralded a great transformation in Thoroughbred racing in which control and shaping of the sport passed from the South to the North.⁶

Northern Revival and Dominance

The resurrection of northern racing began amidst the turbulence of the early years of the war. In the summer of 1862, as Confederate generals Braxton Bragg and Edmund Kirby Smith prepared for their forthcoming invasion of Kentucky, racing entrepreneur John L. Cassady traveled from Cincinnati to the northeast and ignited a revival of Thoroughbred racing in that region. Cassady, a well-known correspondent to the New York-based sporting periodical, *Spirit of the*

⁶ George W. Ranck, "Lexington: War History," in *History of Fayette County, Kentucky*, ed., William H. Perrin (Chicago, 1882), 456–62; Neptunus (pseud. for Benjamin G. Bruce), "Racing at Woodlawn," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times*, October 4, 1862, 75; "Kentucky Association Course," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times*, March 7, 1863, 14; Larkin (pseud. for John Cassady), "Coming Congregation of High Mettled Racers in the East," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times*, May 23, 1863, 178; Neptunus, "Racing in Kentucky—Association Course," *Wilkes' Spirit of the Times*, October 3, 1863, 68; Henry G. Crickmore, *Racing Calendars 1861, 1862, 1863, 1864, 1865* (New York, 1901).

Times, in the years immediately preceding the outbreak of the war leased the famous Metairie track and Creole Trotting Course in New Orleans and came to Cincinnati to lease the Cincinnati Trotting Park and the Queen City trotting course in northern Kentucky. Cassady met with leading citizens in Philadelphia, Boston, and New York, who agreed to put up the purse money for racing events in each city in exchange for a share of the proceeds. Cassady thoughtfully scheduled the eastern meetings to take place after the close of the spring racing season in Kentucky and issued an invitation for the breeders of Kentucky and Tennessee to bring their horses north for the competitions. His strategy and timing worked well, for the races were attended by twelve different racing stables, three from the North and most of the remainder coming from the Bluegrass.⁷

In New Jersey, a group of wealthy capitalists concluded the time had come to restore Thoroughbred racing in the North, so they organized the Passaic County Agricultural Society in April 1862. The Society immediately set about to build a racetrack on the banks of the Passaic River near Paterson. The sponsors of the inaugural meeting of the Riverside track in May 1863 were less considerate of western courses in their scheduling than Cassady, so the surge of horsemen to New Jersey resulted in cancellation of spring racing at Lexington. Among the Kentucky breeders who brought their stock to Riverside, for competition and for sale, were Thomas G. Moore, Zeb Ward, and John M. Clay, youngest son of Henry Clay and proprietor of Ashland Stud. Later that summer, the notorious pugilist and gambler John Morrissey organized the first Thoroughbred races held at the Saratoga Trotting Track at Saratoga Springs in New York, America's most popular summer resort. Morrissey brought in Charles Wheatley,

⁷ "Sporting Intelligence," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, January 30, 1858; "Two Running Races To-Morrow," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, May 8, 1858; "Prospect for Splendid Sport," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, September 12, 1860; "Sporting Intelligence," *Detroit Free Press*, May 15, 1863; "The Turf," *New York Times*, June 23, 1862; "The Turf," *Boston Herald*, May 31, 1862; "The Boston Summer Meeting," *Boston Herald*, July 26, 1862; "Boston Races," *Boston Herald*, September 18, 1862.

former secretary of the Kentucky Association, to run the event, which attracted many Kentucky horsemen as competitors and thousands of elite northerners as spectators. The meeting was a resounding success, and Morrissey had no trouble thereafter securing financial backing to construct a luxurious new track at Saratoga Springs dedicated to Thoroughbred racing.⁸

Encouraged by the continued success of peripheral tracks such as those at Paterson and Saratoga Springs, in 1865 a group of wealthy New Yorkers wished to revive Thoroughbred racing in the metropolitan area. Led by Wall Street speculator Leonard P. Jerome, one of the investors in the Saratoga Springs track and a leader of the city's social set, these eastern capitalists founded the American Jockey Club and quickly enrolled more than one thousand subscribers. Among the members of the organization's elite governing body were two prominent Kentucky breeders, Robert Aitchison Alexander and Alexander Keene Richards, the latter also appointed as one of the club's ten stewards. The club purchased a tract of land in the city suburbs and built the most modern and lavish racing establishment then in existence, Jerome Park, and held its inaugural meeting in September 1866. Despite the name, the American Jockey Club was by no means a national organization, but it had considerable influence throughout the region. By 1870, the impetus provided by Jerome Park stimulated the opening of numerous additional venues in the Northeast and New York again became the capital of Thoroughbred racing in the nation.⁹

Racing was slow to revive in southern states after the war. As the primary theater of the war, the Thoroughbred establishments of the region, racing and breeding, were utterly devastated. Much of the finest bloodstock in the nation trotted off to war under Confederate

⁸ "Passaic County Agricultural Society," *Paterson Daily Register*, June 20, 1862; "Our N. York Correspondence," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, April 23, 1866; Crickmore, *Racing Calendars*, 53; Edward Hotaling, *They're Off! Horse Racing at Saratoga* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1995), 37–50.

⁹ Walter S. Vosburgh, *Racing in America 1866–1921* (New York, 1922), 3–13; Adelman, *A Sporting Time*, 80–81; Steven A. Riess, *The Sport of Kings and the Kings of Crime: Horse Racing, Politics, and Organized Crime in New York, 1865–1913* (Syracuse, N.Y., 2011), 23–28.

banners and was subsequently killed or captured, and both armies confiscated Thoroughbreds from stud farms for remounts. The Southern economy was in ruins, its infrastructure destroyed, and the planter class which supported the racing establishment was impoverished. It would be more than a decade before racing resumed in the South with even a shadow of its former vigor. The famous Metairie track of New Orleans, which dominated racing prior to the war, reopened in autumn 1865 but struggled financially until it was permanently closed in 1872. Its fate was sealed by a schism in the membership and competition from the recently established rival Louisiana Jockey Club.¹⁰

Although the sentiments of its citizens were divided, Kentucky remained on the Union side and the state was largely spared physical destruction. Both of Kentucky's racing venues remained intact. The tracks at Lexington and Louisville hosted meetings throughout the conflict, although racing at Woodlawn in Louisville was sporadic and altogether absent during 1862. Thoroughbred breeding operations in the state, however, were severely damaged by the war. In consequence, the Bluegrass state slipped from prominence as the focus of the breeding industry to become something of a backwater as primacy was transferred to New York. Historian Maryjean Wall attributed the post-war decline to three developments: depletion of the breeding stock, depletion of the farm labor pool, and the great disparity between the agricultural wealth of Kentucky and the Wall Street and industrial wealth of New York.¹¹

¹⁰ Paul F. Paskoff, "Measures of War: A Quantitative Examination of the Civil War's Destructiveness in the Confederacy," *Civil War History* 54 (March 2008): 35–62; James M. McPherson, *Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution* (New York, 1991), 11–12, 38; Katherine C. Mooney, *Race Horse Men: How Slavery and Freedom Were Made at the Racetrack* (Cambridge, Mass., 2014), 128–33; Hervey, *Racing in America*, vol. 2, 340–55; Dale A. Somers, *The Rise of Sports in New Orleans 1850–1900* (Baton Rouge, La., 1972), 92–95.

¹¹ Hervey, *Racing in America*, vol. 2, 343–46; Crickmore, *Racing Calendars*; Maryjean Wall, *How Kentucky Became Southern: A Tale of Outlaws, Horse Thieves, Gamblers, and Breeders* (Lexington, Ky., 2010), 56–67.

As a border state, Kentucky was the scene of persistent and violent guerrilla warfare. Frequent raids upon Bluegrass breeding farms by Confederate partisans and by cavalry commanders such as John Hunt Morgan resulted in the loss of much of the region's prime breeding stock. The raiders often sought to capture specific Thoroughbreds of noted prowess. Many of Kentucky's important breeders, such as Robert Aitcheson Alexander of Woodford County, sent their horses out of the state for sanctuary. Thoroughbred thievery was often undertaken with little concern for the political inclinations of the owners, and Kentucky breeders with Confederate sympathies were also concerned about the loss of breeding stock. At the outbreak of the war, Alexander Keene Richards of Georgetown, who served as aide-de-camp to Confederate general John C. Breckinridge during the early years of the conflict, sent his horses south for their protection. After the war, with so many southern courses no longer operating, the regional market for Thoroughbred bloodstock was depressed and many Kentucky breeders shipped their best horses north to find buyers at higher prices.¹²

In Kentucky and the southern states, Thoroughbred breeding and racing had been wholly dependent upon Black labor ever since the colonial period. The enslaved were customarily occupied in caring for their enslaver's bloodstock, and as jockeys and trainers, the most talented were viewed as valuable assets and often granted extraordinary privileges and authority not allowed to other slaves. During the war, many Kentucky slaves fled the farms to enlist in the Union army and to seek refuge in the army camps. Afterward, many migrated in large numbers to Lexington and Louisville, hoping to find employment and safety from widespread racial violence that marked the postwar

¹² Hervey, *Racing in America*, vol. 2, 264, 343–45; William P. Mangum II, *A Kingdom for the Horse: The Legacy of R. A. Alexander and Woodburn Farms* (Louisville, Ky., 1999), 46–105; Alexander Mackay-Smith, *The Race Horses of America 1832–1872: Portraits and Other Paintings by Edward Troye* (Saratoga Springs, N.Y., 1981), 222; Wall, *How Kentucky Became Southern*, 37.

rural areas. In Kentucky, the abundant antebellum labor pool of enslaved Blacks evaporated.¹³

In the northern states, where slavery had long been abolished, some free Blacks were employed as stable boys and grooms, but many positions were filled from the ample supply of poor urban whites, English, Irish, and native-born. The owners of racing stables combed city streets and orphanages for undersized white boys, often as young as eight or nine years, suitable for training as prospective jockeys. Race fans in the North began to see a few Black jockeys and trainers during the early years of the Civil War when Kentucky horsemen came north to compete at the new tracks. The postwar decades initially witnessed a considerable degree of experimental integration, at least in the North, in nearly all popular sports as Black men began participating in baseball, boxing, and cycling as well as a continuing presence in Thoroughbred racing nationwide. Although Black jockeys never dominated the sport in the northern region as they had in Kentucky and southern states, the exceptional skill and success of jockeys such as Isaac Murphy brought public approval and celebrity status to many Black riders. Many whites, however, began to fear that the prominence of Black athletes would inspire other Blacks to reject a subordinate place in American society. Growing racism led to enactment of Jim Crow segregation laws across the country. By the end of the century, a color line excluded Blacks from participating with whites in nearly every form of athletic competition. At the racetrack, Black men were forced out of the jobs they had held for centuries. From a peak in 1892, when Black jockeys comprised more than a third of the top jockeys in America, by 1901 the number of Blacks among leading jockeys dropped to zero and for the remainder of the decade would never occupy more than two positions on the top twenty-five list.¹⁴

¹³ Mooney, *Race Horse Men*, 8–9, 38–54; Wall, *How Kentucky Became Southern*, 62–67.

¹⁴ Wall, *How Kentucky Became Southern*, 111–24; “A Jockey’s Trials and Successes,” *Live Stock Record*, January 5, 1895, 11; Mooney, *Race Horse Men*, 126–39, 145–46, 163–73, 225–32; Edward Hotaling, *The Great Black Jockeys: The Lives and Times of the Men Who*

At the commencement of the war, Kentucky's economy was primarily agricultural, producing livestock, wheat, corn, tobacco, and hemp. Most of the farms in the state were of relatively small size, compared to the large slavery-based cotton, rice, and sugar plantations of the South, and the average Kentucky slaveholder possessed five or fewer slaves. The greater diversity of the Kentucky agricultural economy, with less reliance on slave labor, left landowners in the state in better postwar condition than Southern planters, who not only experienced destruction of property but lost considerable capital invested in slaves. Following the war, however, when New York capitalists set about to restore Thoroughbred racing in the North, Kentucky horsemen were at a significant disadvantage because the wealth generated by agriculture in the Bluegrass could not compete with the far greater wealth derived from northern finance and industry. The new titans of the turf used their vast wealth to build on a grand scale, setting up lavish racing stables and breeding farms in the northeast on a scale that could not be equaled by Kentucky gentry. As Wall observed, "verdant, woodland pastures were the hallmark of Kentucky farms, material excess characterized the new farms in the northeast." These modern horse estates were built to evoke a nostalgic rural charm and not only provided their owners with refuges from the noise and pollution of city life but enhanced and certified their elite status. Unlike Kentucky farms, however, where raising horses was but one of many agricultural operations, the new farms established by northeastern capitalists were devoted entirely to breeding Thoroughbreds.¹⁵

As the Reconstruction era ended, New York again became the focus of both Thoroughbred racing and breeding. The Northern turf

Dominated America's First National Sport (Rocklin, Calif., 1999), 277–339; Gregory Bond, "Jim Crow at Play: Race, Manliness, and the Color Line in American Sports, 1876–1916" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2008), 279–80, 307–13.

¹⁵ Wall, *How Kentucky Became Southern*, 74–77 (quotation on 74); Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter, *New History of Kentucky* (Lexington, Ky., 1997), 122–42, 207, 216; Garry Adelman, "A House Divided: Civil War Kentucky," *Hallowed Ground* 11 (Spring 2010): 18–19; Adelman, *A Sporting Time*, 83.

magnates, rather than adopting traditional Southern customs, looked across the Atlantic to Britain for their model. Among the most conspicuous of the changes established in the North was in the style of racing. Heat racing was the most common type of competition at American tracks prior to the Civil War. A “heat” consisted of multiple circuits of a mile or more each around the track. The same group of horses competed in several such grueling races in a day, the overall winner determined at the end of the day as the horse winning the greatest number of heats. Such races were a test more of endurance than speed, given that individual horses might be expected to run as much as twenty miles in a day, and often resulted in horses becoming permanently lame. Long a staple of English racing, these heroic long-distance contests faded in popularity in Britain by the time of the American Revolution, replaced by relatively short “dash” races consisting of a single turn around the course, but continued as the prevailing form in the United States. Heat racing in America declined in favor of dash races shortly before the war, and as it became the preferred mode in the North, spread from there to the rest of the country.¹⁶

Another popular event during the antebellum period was the match race, competitions set up between two exceptional horses. This form reached its peak in the series of North–South races during the early antebellum period. These intersectional races between elite representatives of Thoroughbred breeders from each region were true media events, highly publicized in advance, attended by crowds numbering in the tens of thousands, and upon which wagers were placed in large sums. Initially conducted in an atmosphere of friendly rivalry, as the century matured, intersectional races became increasingly politicized and partisan and were abandoned long before the war.¹⁷

¹⁶ Hervey, *Racing in America*, vol. 2, 340–42; Adelman, *A Sporting Time*, 84–85.

¹⁷ Hervey, *Racing in America*, vol. 2, 342; Nancy L. Struna, “The North-South Races: American Thoroughbred Racing in Transition, 1823–1850,” *Journal of Sport History* 8 (Summer 1981): 28–51. The Peytona (South) versus Fashion (North) race of 1845, which took

By the time of the Civil War, Thoroughbred racing matured as a modern sport of national scope. There were journals wholly or partly devoted to the sport, stud books containing breeding records for American stock, published national racing schedules, and efforts to standardize the rules that governed the conduct of racing. There was, however, no national organization of racing clubs and the individual associations often scheduled racing dates that conflicted with those of other clubs. The sport gradually became more egalitarian. Although most clubs remained in the hands of wealthy elites, a few proprietary tracks were established during the late-antebellum period, and all became increasingly dependent upon public patronage for their financial well-being. As equine historian John Hervey observed, "What had begun as a semi-private, semi-amateur sport which the public was allowed to witness as a concession by those who pursued it, had evolved into a great popular amusement for the whole body of the citizenry." Thoroughbred racing, the first spectator sport in America, became the nation's most popular form of mass entertainment.¹⁸

Despite its popularity, Thoroughbred racing suffered from a weak financial foundation. Jockey clubs traditionally covered the expenses of conducting race meetings through member subscriptions and entry fees. Since most clubs had relatively few members, revenues collected in this way, along with gate receipts, were barely sufficient to break even. The small scale of racing programs posed another financial difficulty because race meetings were generally held for a single week in spring and fall and tracks generated little income during the remainder of the year. Breeding Thoroughbred horses was an expensive proposition and many tracks had difficulty offering purses large enough to attract owners of the best horses to compete at their venues.¹⁹

place at the Union Course in New York, drew an estimated 100,000 spectators and was the last of the great North–South match races.

¹⁸ Hervey, *Racing in America*, vol. 2, 342 (quotation); Adelman, *A Sporting Time*, 31, 46.

¹⁹ Adelman, *A Sporting Time*, 49–50; Wall, *How Kentucky Became Southern*, 176.

Bookies and Pool-Sellers

In the new era of post-war Thoroughbred racing, economic necessity required track operators to develop new sources of revenue to support their programs. One way to do this was to attract a greater public patronage, with a more diverse class attendance. This was in large part accomplished by moving wagering on races from the private realm to the public, from wagers made between individuals to track-side betting. In this way, tracks could attract the masses who could only afford to place small bets and were unable to participate in the usual forms of wagering. Jockey clubs traditionally barred public gambling from the tracks, but now began to embrace it wholeheartedly. The fees collected from pool-sellers and bookies became a substantial revenue stream. The new dash system of racing was facilitated by overt gambling since shorter races allowed more events per day and increased the opportunities for wagering. Sanctioned on-site gambling made horse racing an extremely profitable enterprise, and encouraged the establishment of proprietary ventures, operated by businessmen without experience in horse breeding and intended solely to make money. Another significant change was in the length of meetings, which evolved from the short meetings of a few days early in the nineteenth century to meetings that lasted for weeks or even months. Some tracks were so eager to prolong wagering that racing was conducted at night under lights or even during the winter months, with Thoroughbreds galloping through snow and sleet storms upon occasion.²⁰

During the latter part of the century, American Thoroughbred racing was transformed from a pastime of elites into a national industry based primarily on economic considerations. The tremendous popularity and profitability of horse racing led to a great proliferation of racing venues during the period. Tracks were forced to compete

²⁰ Adelman, *A Sporting Time*, 84–89; William H. P. Robertson, *The History of Thoroughbred Racing in America* (New York, 1964), 91–93, 194–95; Reiss, *Sport of Kings*, xii; Wall, *How Kentucky Became Southern*, 176; Lyman H. Weeks, *The American Turf: An Historical Account of Racing in the United States* (New York, 1898), 42–43.

for both entries and patrons, leading to a bitter and disruptive rivalry between opposing associations of tracks in the Midwest and South at the beginning of the twentieth century. At the same time, the increased dependence upon gambling revenue promoted crime and corruption and focused the attention of anti-gambling crusaders upon horse racing. This provoked a further crisis in the industry, nearly as devastating in its effects as the Civil War, in which the efforts of moral reformers accomplished the near extinction of Thoroughbred racing, leaving only Kentucky and Maryland and a handful of other states in which racing persisted in diminished form.²¹

Wagering on the outcome of contests has been an inseparable part of racing for as long as horses have been pitted against one another. Mark Twain once observed, “It is difference of opinion that makes horse-races,” and one man’s boasts as to the exceptional speed or endurance of his horse were sure to be challenged by another. The result was a match race in which the respective owners backed their claims with a wager, and spectators made side bets among themselves. In either case, if the gentlemen were not acquainted, they would often post the money with another person who served as the stakeholder. As racing became more complex, with prolonged meetings that showcased multiple events and numerous horses, the task of stakeholders became far more demanding than a simple sense of sportsmanship would allow, and so stakeholders were rewarded with a commission upon the amount of money wagered.²²

The increasing popularity of horse racing led to the development of a class of professional stakeholders or “bookmakers.” The earliest form of bookmaking was the auction pool, a system in which the winning rights for specific horses were auctioned off prior to a race. No odds were posted; the highest bidder could choose his favored

²¹ Weeks, *American Turf*, 43–46; Walter S. Vosburgh, *Racing in America 1866–1921* (New York, 1922), 3–13; Hervey, *Racing in America*, vol. 2, 342.

²² Mark Twain, *The Tragedy of Pudd’nhead Wilson* (Hartford, Conn., 1894), 246 (quotation); Carson, *Colonial Virginians*, 51; Frank Menke, *Down the Stretch: The Story of Colonel Matt Winn* (New York, 1945), 29.

entry based on his opinion of the horse's merits, and then the second and third highest bidders made their selections. The remaining horses in the race, known as the "field," were combined in a group and went to the next highest bidder. The pool was then closed and the auctioneer began another pool on the same or a different race. The entire pool went to the man who selected the winning horse. According to long-standing tradition, this system was devised about 1855 by two Lexington men, H. Price McGrath, owner of McGrathiana Stud, and Robert H. Underwood, an equine veterinarian. McGrath owned a clubhouse at New Orleans, and instituted pool selling as a courtesy to his patrons without charging a commission for the service. On a visit to Lexington, he suggested to Underwood that pool selling might be a good system for the Kentucky Association track. Underwood first tried the idea out at a cockfight in his own stable; finding it successful, he introduced it at the Association track, charging a 5 percent commission. The system became very popular and spread throughout the region, prompting Underwood to take it to the northern turf in 1862, where he made his debut at Philadelphia as a pool-seller for John L. Cassady, taking it afterward to New York and Boston. The following year he introduced the system at the inaugural meetings of the Passaic Association and Saratoga and the method thereafter became, for a time, the dominant form of racetrack gambling.²³

Participation in auction pools was generally limited to persons of means who could afford to outbid others for the best horses. After the Civil War, as horse racing became an increasingly popular spectator sport, the use of auction pools at tracks declined and was replaced by bookmakers, professional gamblers who would take the small bets affordable to the working man. Bookmakers operated onsite at tracks

²³ Gerald Hammond, *The Language of Horse Racing* (Chicago, 1992), 160–61; "Doctor Underwood," *New York Herald*, December 15, 1874; "Robert H. Underwood," *New York Times*, December 15, 1874. McGrathiana Stud (later Coldstream Stud) was acquired by University of Kentucky during the 1950s and served as an Agricultural Experiment Station until the late 1980s, afterward developed as Coldstream Research Campus, a business hub that today is home to more than fifty organizations involved in biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, equine health, and other industry sectors.

in competitive groups known as “rings,” each paying a flat fee to the track, and were provided with a roofed shed, open in the front, to which the bettors thronged. Each bookmaker posted the names of horses and associated odds on a chalkboard in his stand prior to the beginning of a race and bargained with a chaotic crowd of bettors, constantly recalculating the odds to assure a profit. The details of each bet were recorded in a book or pad which gave the name to their profession.²⁴

A third type of racetrack gambling, the “French pool,” was introduced in America during the 1870s, first at Jerome Park in 1871 and thereafter at a handful of other tracks. Known as the “pari-mutuel” system, which loosely translates as “betting among ourselves,” this was a modified form of the auction pool developed in 1867 in Paris, France, by Joseph Oller after becoming disenchanted with way existing pools were operated. In the pari-mutuel system, tickets are sold to bettors at a standard price, the odds being determined after all bets have been placed, and winners divide the entire stake in proportion to their bet minus the seller’s commission. Pool sellers and bookmakers aggressively competed for customers at racetracks, and both were vehemently opposed to the new pari-mutuel system and did everything in their power to prevent its introduction at tracks where they operated. In the end, however, pari-mutuel betting prevailed when, in an effort to purge the sport of corrupt influences and crooked dealing, regulatory bodies outlawed all other forms of wagering at horse races.²⁵

²⁴ Arthur F. Bowers, “The American Passion for Racing,” *The Illustrated American* 13 (May 27, 1893), 625–28; Joseph F. Marsten, “The Maelstrom of the Betting Ring,” *Munsey’s Magazine* 29 (August 1903), 705–11; John Dizikes, *Yankee Doodle Dandy: The Life and Times of Tod Sloan* (New Haven, Conn., 2000), 22–24.

²⁵ Ferran Canyameres, *L’Homme de la Belle Époque* (Paris, 1946); Riess, *Sport of Kings*, 35–38; Fred S. Buck, *Horse Race Betting: A Comprehensive Account of Pari-Mutuel, Off-track Betting, and Bookmaking Operations*, 4th ed., (New York, 1978), 3–6; Richard Sasuly, *Bookies and Bettors: Two Hundred Years of Gambling* (New York, 1982), 71–73. Joseph Oller became enormously wealthy from his pari-mutuel enterprise and founded several music halls and other entertainment venues, including the famous cabaret, Moulin Rouge, in 1889.

The great inflow of cash associated with trackside wagering encouraged a proliferation of new tracks across the country. The *American Turf Register* noted eighty-six tracks operating in the United States in 1840, concentrated almost entirely in the South. By 1870, the number had increased only slightly, but, reflecting the devastation of the southern turf establishment by the Civil War, the geographic distribution of Thoroughbred racing shifted to the north and west, the majority being new tracks in California, Michigan, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. By the end of the century, however, the sport revived in the south and nationwide blossomed to peak at more than three hundred facilities. Most of the new tracks were owned by businessmen, rather than by associations of horse breeders, and many of these entrepreneurs were more interested in the profit margin than the sport itself. Racetrack betting both stimulated the expansion of the sport and became a vital component of the industry. In effect, gambling was now the tail that wagged the dog.²⁶

Many pool sellers and bookmakers ran honest operations at trackside, taking no more than their due as commission, but many were unscrupulous in their efforts to profit enormously from the betting public, resorting to such practices as promoting wagers on worthless horses, discouraging bets on the most likely winners, or even bribing jockeys to affect the outcome of a race. Moral reformers disdained the spread of off-track betting; a move facilitated by telegraph lines that could instantly report race results to metropolitan betting shops.

²⁶ Weeks, *The American Turf*, 42–54; Robertson, *History of Thoroughbred Racing*, 91, 196; Wall, *How Kentucky Became Southern*, 176; *American Turf Register* (New York, 1840, 1871); *Goodwin's Annual Official Turf Guide* (New York, 1897). Kentucky tracks operating in 1840 were located at Bardstown, Burkeville, Crab Orchard, Cynthiana, Frankfort, Georgetown, Henry County, Lexington, Logan County, Louisville, Maysville, and Merry Oaks (Barren County). Immediately after the war, only Lexington and Louisville continued to host race meetings. By 1897, two additional racetracks were established in northern Kentucky at Covington ("Latonia," opened 1883) and Newport ("Queen City," opened 1896). Somewhat later, Douglas Park in Louisville, which opened as a trotting track in 1895, converted to Thoroughbred racing in 1906 and competed directly with Churchill Downs as one front of the "turf war" between the Western Jockey Club and the American Turf Association.

Whereas racetrack patrons could at least pretend to have an interest in the sport, the far more numerous customers of the city betting shops were obviously interested only in gambling. The off-track sites, typically located in a storefront building, initially hosted auction pools and were thus known as “pool-rooms,” a label that stuck even for bookmaking operations. The proprietors of these operations often provided various forms of entertainment for customers who lingered about the premises, including card games and billiard tables. The term “pool-room” was subsequently applied to bookmaking outfits even when auction pools were not used and became a general designation for pocket billiard parlors. Track owners soon realized that off-track betting cut substantially into their own earnings and prohibited telegraph connections, although some corrupt track officials colluded in getting results out to betting shops. Despite the harm done to track revenues by the pool-rooms, many track owners were reluctant to push for legislation to shut them down, since this might serve to focus the attention of reformers more directly upon gambling at trackside.²⁷

Outside Investors Aid Kentucky Resurgence

Kentucky horsemen, many of whom eagerly served as advisers to northern industrialists and capitalists in developing breeding farms and racetracks, soon realized the focus of the Thoroughbred industry had shifted from the Bluegrass to the North. Rebuilding the industry in Kentucky into a competitive position required attracting big money from outside the region, but in the decades following the Civil War, Kentucky developed a reputation for violence and lawlessness that discouraged investment. Bluegrass horsemen adopted a promotion strategy that involved the deliberate cultivation of the more appealing stereotypes associated with the “Old South” before the Civil War. Kentucky was not part of the “Old South,” and in fact supplied more

²⁷ Sasuly, *Bookies and Bettors*, 69–82; Steven A. Riess, *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (Urbana, Ill., 1989), 185–86.

volunteers to the Union cause, but after the war white Kentuckians began to identify themselves with the Confederacy and the South.²⁸ A widespread misperception that slavery in Kentucky existed in a milder, more benevolent form enhanced associations with idyllic plantation life. Newspapers, novelists, and travel writers associated these sanitized images with the semi-mythical legends of Daniel Boone and the state's pioneer heritage, the allure of the Bluegrass landscape, and a quaintly depicted mountaineer culture to reinvent Kentucky in an idealized neo-Southern identity that appealed to the romantic imaginings of white Americans. As the new century unfolded, the annual Kentucky Derby at Louisville (inaugurated in 1875) began an effective promotion of the "Old South" image of Kentucky. Derby visitors who sipped mint juleps and sang the Derby anthem, "My Old Kentucky Home," could indulge in nostalgia for the "good old days" of a place and time that never really existed.²⁹

The promotion strategy paid off late in the nineteenth century as northern turf moguls perceived the Bluegrass region in a new and more favorable light. Violence had, in fact, escalated in the state, but in the view of outsiders, shifted from the Bluegrass region to eastern Kentucky as a result of highly publicized mountain feuds. Rising sentiment in the Northeast against racetrack gambling also persuaded many horsemen that Kentucky might offer a safer haven for their breeding operations. The first northern breeder to relocate to the Bluegrass was New York banker August Belmont, who in 1885, moved his lavish Nursery Stud operation from Long Island to Lexington. This marked a turning point for the Thoroughbred industry in Kentucky, for Belmont's decision to relocate his breeding farm to the Bluegrass inspired other northern turfmen to follow his example. With this new

²⁸ See Anne Marshall, *Creating a Confederate Kentucky: The Lost Cause and Civil War Memory in a Border State* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2010).

²⁹ Wall, *How Kentucky Became Southern*, 3–5, 74, 93–95, 202–08; James C. Nicholson, *The Kentucky Derby: How the Run for the Roses Became America's Premier Sporting Event* (Lexington, Ky., 2012), 3–5, 41–46, 63–81. The first report of the singing of "My Old Kentucky Home" was in 1921 and was soon after adopted as the anthem for the event.

infusion of wealth, the Bluegrass horse industry expanded rapidly during the early twentieth century, and Kentucky regained its prominence as America's breeding center and became a refuge for the sport at a time when anti-gambling reformers had virtually extinguished Thoroughbred racing from the nation.³⁰

These developments can be seen in the actions of Samuel Brown, a wealthy industrialist from Pittsburgh. In 1902, he not only purchased a major Thoroughbred breeding farm in the Bluegrass but also acquired and rehabilitated the financially troubled Kentucky Association track in Lexington. The Kentucky Association for the Improvement of the Breeds of Horses, established in 1826 at Lexington, Kentucky, was the one of the most durable of all the jockey clubs in the United States, with a career spanning more than a century from its debut to its dissolution in 1933. During this time, the Association was witness to the volatile condition of the industry and changes took place in the nature of the sport because of evolving social and economic circumstances.³¹

The Association's time of troubles began innocently enough in May 1889 when the stockholders voted to issue \$30,000 in bonds to finance improvements to the grounds, including construction of a new grandstand and an opulent new clubhouse. In a prearranged sale, the entire issue was purchased by Charles M. Green (1838–1907) of St. Louis and secured by a mortgage on the racing facility. Green was a wealthy man whose fortune was based in street railways and real estate. Expected revenues fell short, however, and the Association found itself forced to sell the property, burdened with an intolerable debt and unable to make payments on the mortgage.³²

³⁰ Wall, *How Kentucky Became Southern*, 168–71, 182–88, 209–26. On Appalachian violence, see also T. R. C. Hutton, *Bloody Breathitt: Politics and Violence in the Appalachian South* (Lexington, Ky., 2013); and Altina Waller, *Hatfields, McCoys, and Social Change in Appalachia, 1860–1900* (Chapel Hill, N.C. 1988).

³¹ *Kentucky Association, a Souvenir from the Kentucky Association: Centennial Meeting Spring, 1926* (Lexington, Ky., 1926).

³² "A Needed Improvement," *Kentucky Leader*, May 7, 1889; "Kentucky Association," *Morning Transcript*, June 6, 1890; "Oldest and Finest," *Morning Transcript*, March 13, 1891;



SAMUEL S. BROWN
MASTER OF TRANSPORTATION MONONGAHELA RIVER
CONSOLIDATED COAL & COKE CO.

Eastern capitalist Samuel S. Brown. Image in Percy F. Smith, ed., *Notable Men of Pittsburgh and Vicinity* (Pittsburgh, Penn., 1901), 202.

Bluegrass horseman quickly made plans to save the racing facility. The old Association was forced to dissolve, but long-time president James F. Robinson and the other trustees arranged with a local group of Thoroughbred breeders to convey the property to a new organization as soon as it could be formed. A syndicate was organized, and meeting at the Phoenix Hotel on January 15, 1892, members subscribed \$45,000 in stock and resumed the time-honored designation as the Kentucky Association. The purchase of the track was finalized during the first week of March, including assumption of the debt to Charles Green. The transfer was accomplished so smoothly that there

Mortgage Book (January 1, 1890), 143–58; “Charles Green,” *The Book of St. Louisans*, ed. John W. Leonard (St. Louis, Mo., 1906), 236; Fayette County Deed Book 94 (November 5, 1891), 272–78 and (December 22, 1891), 527–33.

was no interruption of the racing schedule, with the first race meeting under the new management on April 30.³³

The new Association, however, struggled with the same financial difficulties that plagued its predecessor. For many years, the Lexington track was the only racing venue of note in Kentucky, but now was forced to compete with several other major tracks in the state, Louisville's Churchill Downs and Latonia and Queen City in northern Kentucky. To attract entries from breeders in Kentucky and the eastern states, the Association offered substantial purses that often exceeded the proceeds from race meetings and so operated almost continuously in the red and unable to pay even the interest on the mounting debt to Green. Seeing no other way to recoup his investment, on May 11, 1897, Green filed suit in the Fayette Circuit Court to foreclose against the Association. At a few minutes after noon on July 12, the auctioneer's gavel knocked down the sixty-five-acre Kentucky Association property and franchise to the sole bidder, Green, for \$23,336.³⁴

At the time, Green told the commissioner in charge of the sale that racing at the track "will continue as usual if the public will patronize the enterprise." Green was no stranger to the racing scene. President of the St. Louis Jockey Club for many years, he was also president of the Agricultural and Mechanical Association in that city from 1880–1892 and was the driving force behind construction of a Thoroughbred racetrack at the St. Louis fairgrounds. Yet Green seemed to have no idea what to do with the newly acquired facility in Lexington and little interest in its fate. At Green's request, conveyance of the Association grounds was made to his attorney, George R. Lockwood, and both Green and Lockwood returned to St. Louis. A race meeting was held

³³ "The Horse Interests," *Kentucky Leader*, August 4, 1891; "The New Club," *Kentucky Leader*, January 10, 1892; "All Ready," *Lexington Leader*, April 29, 1892; "Racing Association," *Morning Transcript*, January 16, 1892; Fayette County Deed Book 95 (March 2, 1892), 276–81. Robinson was governor of Kentucky for a brief period during the Civil War, assuming the unfinished term of Beriah Magoffin in August 1862.

³⁴ "To Foreclose," *Morning Herald*, May 12, 1897; "It is Sold," *Kentucky Leader*, July 12, 1897; "K.A. Race Track," *Morning Herald*, July 13, 1897; "Sale Stands," *Kentucky Leader*, July 23, 1897.

at the track during November 1897, but a disgruntled Green made no profit on the event, declaring he had acquired “quite a loser,” and the spring of 1898 witnessed no gathering.³⁵

By the spring of 1899 the buildings and grounds stood empty, the gates were locked, and Green declared his intention to cut up the property into building lots. Bluegrass horsemen were dismayed over the prospect of demolition of the historic facility so in early April 1900, William C. Lyne, the former secretary of the now trackless Association, traveled to St. Louis to dissuade Green from his decision. Green proved willing to consider alternatives, and Lyne negotiated a four-year lease upon the property for a \$2,000 annual fee. Lyne intended to open the property as a training facility for young horses, hoping that this would provide the means for reviving the Association and restoring racing to Lexington. Upon his return to Lexington, Lyne immediately began restoring order to the long-neglected track and grounds, and to the delight of Lexington residents, announced his intention to hold a race meeting during the fall. This did not occur, not in the fall of 1900 nor for some time to come. Whenever Bluegrass breeders met socially, there was sure to be some discussion on the need to revive racing in Lexington, but none of the many plans to organize a meeting, or to put together a fund to purchase the track from Green, came to pass. In the meantime, Green cut and sold all the large trees in the centerfield in preparation for subdividing the historic property into building lots. The fences, stables, and other buildings were in poor condition and continuing to deteriorate. Upon this doleful scene arrived a savior: Captain Samuel S. Brown (1841–1905) of Pittsburgh.³⁶

³⁵ “K. A. Race Track,” *Morning Herald*, July 13, 1897 (first quotation); “Fifteen,” *Kentucky Leader*, November 21, 1897 (second quotation); “Charles Green,” *Book of St. Louisans*, 236; *Encyclopedia of the History of St. Louis*, vol. 4 (New York, 1899), 1961–963; Deed Book 110 (July 20, 1897), 593–97.

³⁶ “Mr. Green to be Here Today,” *Morning Herald*, March 28, 1899; “Running Races,” *Kentucky Leader*, September 18, 1898; “Keep Out,” *Kentucky Leader*, June 2, 1899; “It Opens Today,” *Morning Herald*, November 21, 1898; “Close Deal,” *Kentucky Leader*, April 18, 1900; “Lexington Race Track,” *Kentucky Leader*, September 20, 1900; “May Have a Fall Meeting,

The title of “Captain” was earned, rather than honorary, since in his youth Samuel Brown and his brother Harry piloted steamboats hauling strings of coal barges down the Mississippi River. Samuel subsequently invested heavily in coal and iron lands in Pennsylvania and became enormously wealthy, known throughout the east as the “coal king” of Pittsburgh. Brown became interested in racehorses in 1882, when he made his first purchase of a Thoroughbred, and soon accumulated a noted stable which he raced at various venues throughout the country, including the Kentucky Association track in Lexington. In June 1902, Captain Brown bought a farm of 370 acres on Ironworks Pike which he named “Senorita Stud” in memory of his favorite mare. He spared no expense to convert the property into a first-class facility for breeding and training Thoroughbred horses.³⁷

Brown’s attention next turned to the Kentucky Association property. Acting as Brown’s agent, Campbell Scott, owner and publisher of the *Thoroughbred Record*, visited St. Louis in September to negotiate with Green for the purchase of the track. Green proved more than willing to part with a property that had proved to be a source of constant aggravation. Rumors began to fly about the city, prompting Max Samuelson, manager of Senorita Stud, to confirm that a deal had been made. Lexington residents were elated to learn the Pittsburgh millionaire planned to invest heavily in converting the old and deteriorated facility into a modern racing and training venue, although it might be at least a year before a race meeting could be held because of the extensive renovation. Campbell Scott, whose influence persuaded Brown to purchase the track and who closed the deal with

Morning Herald, September 26, 1900; *Kentucky Association Souvenir*, 27; “Crack Two-Year-Olds in Training at Association Track,” *Lexington Leader*, March 16, 1902; “Keep Up Good Work,” *Lexington Herald*, December 25, 1904; Polk, “Sketch of Famous Old Ky. Racing Association,” *Lexington Leader*, April 30, 1905.

³⁷ *History of Pittsburgh and Environs*, vol. 3 (New York, 1922), 842–45; “Brown Pays \$35,305 for Ashland Wilkes Stock Farm,” *Lexington Herald*, June 12, 1902; “Capt. Brown’s Senorita Stud,” *Lexington Herald*, September 4, 1904; “Captain Samuel S. Brown,” *Kentucky Farmer and Breeder* 2 (March 23, 1905), 2; “Capt. S. S. Brown Dead,” *Thoroughbred Record*, December 16, 1905, 389; Deed Book 127 (June 11, 1902), 162–65. The grounds of the former Senorita Stud now comprise part of the present-day Kentucky Horse Park.

Green, was rewarded for his service with the position of general manager for the Lexington track, disposing of the *Thoroughbred Record* to Thomas F. Kelly in October.³⁸

Ground was broken on June 21, 1904, and by early spring of the following year, Brown spent nearly \$150,000 renovating the track and grounds. In May 1904, Brown announced a spring race meeting would be held next year, and if there was sufficient support from the breeders and public, he would continue to host meetings and improve the stakes and purses offered. The horsemen of the region responded with enthusiasm, so that by October more than four hundred horses were in residence at the new stables and training on the impeccably smooth new track. In late December, the leading horsemen of the Bluegrass met at their traditional watering hole, the Phoenix Hotel, to once again establish the Kentucky Association, electing Brown as president, Scott as secretary, and Samuelson as treasurer of the organization.³⁹

The spring meeting of 1905, which opened to perfect weather on May 3 and lasted for six days, was a resounding success. This was the first meeting of running horses held in Lexington for seven years, and a throng estimated at more than eight thousand filled the stands and crowded the rails to watch. All of Lexington and central Kentucky “society” came to the races, it seemed to observers, and special trains brought in delegations from Louisville, Cincinnati, and Nashville. Manicured to perfection, the track was “lightning fast,” and two track records were broken and another equaled, the latter when Brown’s Bay colt Agile captured the Phoenix Hotel Stakes on opening day. The

³⁸ “Old Track is Bought,” *Morning Herald*, October 1, 1903; *Morning Herald*, October 3, 1903, “Plans to Improve Ky. Association Track,” *Morning Herald*, February 21, 1904; “Race Track to Be Used as Training Grounds for Capt. Brown’s Youngsters,” *Lexington Leader*, October 5, 1903; Deed Book 132 (October 5, 1903), 274–80. Campbell Scott originally purchased the *Thoroughbred Record* in December 1899.

³⁹ “Ground Broken at Race Track,” *Morning Herald*, June 22, 1904; “Jockey Club Soon to Be Organized,” *Lexington Herald*, December 14, 1904; “Kentucky Association Lives Again,” *Morning Herald*, December 22, 1904; “Sketch of Famous Old Ky. Racing Association,” *Lexington Leader*, April 30, 1905.



Kentucky Association track, circa 1900–1910. Image courtesy Keeneland Library Photo Archives, Lexington, Kentucky.

spring event was hailed as the “most propitious meeting ever held by the Kentucky Association.” The future of racing in Lexington, under the benevolent guidance of “Captain Sam,” seemed assured.⁴⁰

This golden age was tragically short. Samuel Brown was very sick and unable even to attend the inaugural meeting of the splendid facility into whose restoration he poured so much energy and treasure.

⁴⁰ “Gates Open,” *Lexington Leader*, May 3, 1905 (quotations); “Superb Success Attends Restoration of Racing at Famous Association Track,” *Lexington Herald*, May 4, 1905; “Spring Meeting Closed Crowned with Success,” *Lexington Herald*, May 10, 1905. On May 10, one week after winning the Phoenix Hotel Stakes, Agile won the thirty-first running of the Kentucky Derby in Louisville, Brown’s second Derby victory as his horse Buchanan claimed the event in 1884, ridden by Isaac Murphy. Brown had a long association with the Downs, being a member of its board of directors from nearly the beginning and a principal shareholder since 1894. Brown also owned or was a partner in several other southern tracks.

Instead, he lay abed at his country home, “Brown’s Station,” on the Monongahela River near Pittsburgh, suffering from a renewed attack of the “stomach trouble” that tormented him during the previous winter. Brown was first afflicted in October 1904 while on a visit to New York City. Initially diagnosed as appendicitis, the ailment proved far more serious and puzzling to his physicians. Normally a corpulent man weighing in at 360 pounds, Brown shed more than 150 pounds during the next few months. In March 1905, Brown paid a visit to Lexington to inspect his properties, described by the press as “entirely recovered and looking unusually well,” but within weeks he was stricken again. During the latter part of 1905, Brown’s condition had so deteriorated that the ailing turfman realized he had little time left and began to put his affairs in order. On December 12, Lexington received sad news in a telegram from Harry Brown: “Brother Sam died this morning.” Samuel Brown passed at the age of sixty-three by cancer of the bladder, and once again, the future of the Association track was uncertain.⁴¹

By the terms of Samuel’s will, his Kentucky property, including Senorita Stud and the Association track, was devised jointly to his executors, the Union Trust Company of Pittsburgh and his brother, W. Harry Brown of the same city, to “improve, manage and control,” and empowering them to sell this property. Much like Green before him, Harry was not quite sure what to do with the racetrack that had so unexpectedly come into his possession. His initial reaction was simply to sell off these properties. “I have little knowledge of horses and have never been interested in them to any great extent,” Brown later told a *Herald* reporter. After a few weeks passed, Harry had second thoughts as to the need for any hasty action, recognizing that

⁴¹ “Capt. Brown Visits Properties Here,” *Lexington Herald*, March 23, 1905 (first quotation); “Capt. S. S. Brown Succumbs to His Long Illness,” *Lexington Herald*, December 12, 1905 (second quotation); “Capt. Brown Ill,” *Lexington Herald*, October 16, 1904; “Capt. Brown Improving,” *Lexington Herald*, October 20, 1904; “Capt. Brown is Well,” *Lexington Herald*, February 2, 1905; “Condition of Capt. Brown is Serious,” *Lexington Herald*, May 4, 1905; “A Speedy Return to Good Health,” *Lexington Herald*, May 8, 1905; “Capt. S. S. Brown Dead,” *Thoroughbred Record*, December 16, 1905, 389–90.

his late brother had a great personal attachment to Thoroughbred racing in the region. Acknowledging that the track would need to be sold, sooner or later, to settle the Samuel Brown estate, Harry allowed racing to continue during the interim. Samuelson, who was Samuel Brown's personal representative in the region and now served the same function for Harry, informed the Lexington public of this decision, and observed,

The Lexington track was one of the properties dearest to [Samuel Brown's] heart. He felt a deep interest in its future and was anxious to restore to it the prestige of former days. I feel sure that had he realized in time his serious condition, he would have made some specific provision whereby the track would be preserved to racing interests. But when he did come to an adequate realization of the inevitable there were so many affairs of importance to be settled and so much to be done that this was not attended to.

Samuelson, Association treasurer and manager of Seniorita Stud, was a significant influence in persuading Harry Brown to honor his brother's memory by allowing, at the very least, a spring meeting at the track.⁴²

The 1906 spring meeting of the Kentucky Association was held over an eight-day period beginning April 23 and considered a success. Harry Brown traveled from Pittsburgh to Lexington for the event, and evidently became infected by a little bit of the same racing fever that had so possessed his brother. Prior to the races, he announced he intended to preserve and maintain Seniorita Stud and to race under his own colors. A clause in Samuel's will, however, directed the sale

⁴² "Full Text of the Brown Will," *Lexington Herald*, January 24, 1906 (first quotation); "Capt. Harry Brown Will Disperse Stud," *Lexington Herald*, July 9, 1906 (second quotation); "Race Meeting Probable," *Lexington Herald*, February 7, 1906 (third quotation); "Race Track to Be Sold," *Lexington Leader*, January 28, 1906; "Track for Sale," *Lexington Herald*, January 30, 1906; "Details of Spring Meet Discussed," *Lexington Herald*, March 21, 1906; "'Cherry and Blue' is to Disappear," *Lexington Herald*, June 16, 1906; "Broodmare Brings Record Price for a Kentucky Sale," *Lexington Herald*, November 28, 1906.

of all the stock from the farm, and so the stallions, brood mares, and yearlings from Seniorita Stud went under the hammer at the Fasig-Tipton sale in November, although Brown purchased several of the more valuable animals for himself to continue breeding operations at the farm. There was, however, no fall meeting at the Association track. By this time, Brown had somehow lost his enthusiasm for holding on to the property, and in January 1907 came the news that he was no longer willing to continue operating the facility and would sell to the highest bidder. Once again, there was a possibility that the historic grounds would suffer the ignoble fate of being subdivided into building lots.⁴³

Thirty-two of the most prominent Thoroughbred breeders and businessmen of central Kentucky and Louisville met at the Phoenix Hotel on April 2, 1907 and formed a syndicate for the purchase of the Lexington track, incorporating as the Kentucky Association. The major shareholders were both Louisville men, Martin J. "Matt" Winn, general manager of Churchill Downs and a tireless promoter who led the small group of investors who rescued the financially troubled Louisville track a few years before, and Dennis X. Murphy, whose architectural firm designed and built the Downs' iconic grandstand and clubhouse. Charles Grainger spoke for the Louisville investors, stating that their interest was solely to prevent the oldest surviving racing facility in the country from being cut up and sold. To emphasize this, the Louisville men assigned the voting rights on their stock to the Lexington members, who would have complete authority and control. Even before the sale was finalized, the Lexington shareholders met at the Phoenix Hotel on April 5 to reorganize the Kentucky

⁴³ "Captain W. Harry Brown's Stable," *Lexington Herald*, March 21, 1906; "Seniorita Stock Farm Will Be Maintained," *Lexington Herald*, April 21, 1906; "Races Begin Tomorrow at Ky. Association Track," *Lexington Herald*, April 22, 1906; "Great Racing on the First Day of the Spring Meeting," *Lexington Herald*, April 24, 1906; "Successful Meet Closed Tuesday," *Lexington Herald*, May 2, 1906; "Notes of the Turf," *Lexington Herald*, January 23, 1907; "Important Sale at Lexington," *Daily Racing Form* 12 (October 14, 1906); "Seniorita Stud is to be Continued," *Daily Racing Form* 12 (November 24, 1906): 2; "Brown Buys Pick of Seniorita Mares," *Daily Racing Form* 12 (November 28, 1906): 2.

Association and elect officers, selecting Johnson N. Camden of Woodford County as president. Three weeks later, on April 27, the stands were crowded on opening day of a very successful eight-day race meeting, and in September, for the first time in nine years, the Association hosted a fall meeting. Given the track's recent history, perhaps no one would blithely predict the future as a "walk around the course," but it appeared that the property was, at least for now, safe from development as a housing tract.⁴⁴

Turf Wars

The first decade of the new century was a turbulent time for the sport of Thoroughbred racing, not just at Lexington, but across the nation. Bitterly contested turf wars were in progress between rival associations of regional tracks, and the very existence of American racing was being threatened by a wave of anti-gambling sentiment sweeping the nation. At the beginning of the century, Thoroughbred racing was controlled by two national organizations, the American Turf Congress and the American Jockey Club (AJC). The original American Jockey Club, founded in 1866, was dissolved in 1889 because of a schism in the ranks and was superseded in 1894 by a new organization of the same name that had a far broader mission. Whereas the older AJC was based on a single track, the new organization was intended as a centralized governing body modeled after the English Jockey Club. Its purpose was to standardize rules and coordinate the scheduling of racing dates to member tracks, and governed racing on the eastern

⁴⁴ "Blue Grass Fair is Now a Permanency," *Lexington Herald*, November 4, 1906; "Blue Grass Fair Directors Select New Officers and Arrange for Committees," *Lexington Herald*, January 25, 1907; "Movement on to Purchase Site for Blue Grass Fair," *Lexington Herald*, February 10, 1907; "Louisville Men Buy Race Track to Insure Meet," *Lexington Herald*, April 3, 1907; "New Association Incorporates on \$70,000 Capital," *Lexington Herald*, April 5, 1907; "Officers Elected for the Kentucky Racing Society," *Lexington Herald*, April 6, 1907; "Deeds for Race Track are Finally Drawn Up," *Lexington Herald*, April 19, 1907; "Races a Success," *Lexington Herald*, May 6, 1907; "Formal Transfer of Race Track Made," *Lexington Herald*, May 9, 1907; Menke, *Down the Stretch*, 1–2, 35–39; Gatto, *Churchill Downs*, 31–32; Deed Book 149 (April 30, 1907), 483–91. Charlie Price and Charles Grainger, who operated Churchill Downs with Matt Winn, were also among the stock subscribers.

seaboard from the Canadian border to Georgia as the new century began. The American Turf Congress, which had a similar mission in the Midwest, was organized at Louisville in November 1883 by representatives from ten tracks, including the Kentucky Association. The primary architect of the Congress was M. Lewis Clark, who a decade earlier built Churchill Downs in the same city. Upon formation of the new American Jockey Club in 1894, a reciprocal arrangement was made between the two organizations so that rulings by one would also apply in the jurisdiction of the other.⁴⁵

The opening salvo of the turf war was fired in 1901, when representatives of eight of the leading western tracks met at Chicago on January 17 and voted to withdraw from the American Turf Congress. The St. Louis, New Orleans, Memphis, Louisville, Latonia, and three Chicago tracks formed a new organization, the Western Jockey Club, which claimed jurisdiction over Thoroughbred racing from the eighty-first meridian to the Rocky Mountains. This move was prompted by a growing dissatisfaction with the management of the Turf Congress. The six remaining members of the Turf Congress, which was gutted by the departure of so many of its largest members, met in Cincinnati on February 12 to reorganize and issued a declaration of war against the upstart Western Jockey Club. Each organization named the tracks of the opposition to be outlawed and set up a schedule of racing dates that included only their own members.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Walter S. Vosburgh, *Racing in America 1866–1921* (New York, 1922), 43–45; Weeks, *American Turf*, 143–45; “The Louisville Conference,” *Spirit of the Times*, December 1, 1883, 531; Tom R. Underwood, *Thoroughbred Racing and Breeding: The Story of the Sport and Background of the Horse Industry* (Baltimore, Md., 1945), 163–66. The modern term “turf war,” used to describe competition over a territory or sphere of influence, appears to derive from Thoroughbred racing in the nineteenth century. In 1834, the term “turf warfare” was used to describe competitions between northern and southern horses, and thereafter appeared regularly in sporting journals and news accounts concerning horse races, peaking during the later conflicts between opposing racing associations. See *American Turf Register* (November 1834), 130–31.

⁴⁶ “New Racing Body Will be Formed,” *St. Louis Republic*, January 17, 1901; “The Western Jockey Club,” *Morning Herald*, January 17, 1901; “New Racing Circuit Assured,” *Morning Herald*, January 18, 1901; “New Jockey Club Formed; Turf Congress is Ignored,” *St. Louis Republic*, February 5, 1901; “Turf Congress Will Fight New Jockey Club,” *Morning Herald*,

This produced an untenable situation in which different tracks in the same region conducted race meetings on the same dates and thus competed for race entries and attendance. Individual tracks, as in the case of Latonia and Queen City in Kentucky, went to war with one another. The Queen City track at Newport, which retained membership in the old Turf Congress, threw its gates open free to the public for its May race meeting and began to draw much larger crowds than nearby Latonia, which was meeting at the same time and was associated with the Western Jockey Club. In response, Latonia, rather than offering a free gate, began to give away hundreds of admission tickets. Breeders and trainers became enraged when, having run a horse at a track subscribing to one organization, found their horses banned from competing at tracks with membership in the opposing organization. In August, the Western Jockey Club graciously announced that, if application for reinstatement had been made, all outlawed horses would be restored to good standing by special dispensation. The Club could well afford to be magnanimous since tracks were deserting the Turf Congress in droves. By January 1902, the Congress was dead in all but name, being represented by only a single diehard member, the Queen City track.⁴⁷

The Western Jockey Club proved to be no more impartial than its defeated rival. Most of the officials of the club (the "Board of Stewards") were men who owned or controlled racetracks and who expected to profit on racing, a clear conflict of interests. These men oversaw the allocation of racing dates to the member clubs and did not hesitate to assign the most favorable dates to their own enterprises or those of their friends. Several egregious abuses of authority, notably those involving tracks at New Orleans and at Hot Springs, Arkansas, angered turfmen throughout the region and prompted a widespread

February 13, 1901; "Turf Congress Drops Prodigal Race Tracks," *Morning Herald*, March 17, 1901; W. H. Rowe, "The Thoroughbred," *Outing* 37 (March 1901): 744.

⁴⁷ "Latonia Free to Public," *Morning Herald*, May 15, 1901; "Western Jockey Club Wins Case," *Morning Herald*, July 7, 1901; "Outlaws to be Re-Instated," *Morning Herald*, August 27, 1901; "Fowler is the Works," *New Orleans Item*, January 5, 1902; "Turf Fight in the West," *New York Times*, December 20, 1902.

rebellion. At New Orleans, the president of the racing association for the established Crescent City track was Charles S. Bush, also one of the stewards of the Western Jockey Club. Bush did everything in his power to repeatedly block the opening of the new track recently built by the New Orleans Jockey Club, using his influence on the board to assure that the club was not granted any race dates whatsoever. In November 1904, a new track, "Oak Lawn," nearing completion at Hot Springs was purchased by turf magnate "Blind John" Condon, owner of the Harlem Course in Chicago, and was subsequently given better meeting dates by the Chicago-based Western Jockey Club than were allowed to the older Essex course.⁴⁸

Matters came to a head at a meeting of the board of stewards at Chicago in December 1904. After appeals from several track associations for more favorable meeting dates were again arbitrarily overruled, representatives of the offended tracks met separately to formulate demands and arguments to be presented at the next monthly meeting of the stewards. On January 2, 1905, championed by Matt Winn of Louisville and Edward Corrigan, a Chicago businessman who owned tracks in Chicago and Kansas City and had an interest in the New Orleans Jockey Club track, the dissidents presented a petition outlining their grievances and requested better racing dates. Although some of the stewards were willing to compromise, the majority, following the lead of Charles Bush, once again dismissed their concerns and took no action to alleviate the growing mutiny. The angry dissidents left Chicago without taking further action, but plans were made.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ "Condon Buys Oaklawn Race Track at Hot Springs," *Lexington Herald*, November 12, 1904; "Edward Corrigan Heads the Race Track Fight," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, December 8, 1904; "Turf Fight to Finish is Now the Programme," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, December 9, 1904; "Jockey Club," *Lexington Herald*, December 17, 1904.

⁴⁹ "Jockey Club Will Meet in Special Session Today," *Lexington Herald*, December 17, 1904; "Turf War Possibility," *Lexington Herald*, December 18, 1904; "All Dates Refused," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, January 4, 1905.



Edward Corrigan, 1905. Owner of racetracks in Chicago and Illinois, Corrigan led a 1905 revolt of racing associations against the established Western Jockey Club. Image courtesy Keeneland Library Photo Archives, Cook Collection, Lexington, Kentucky.

Edward Corrigan lingered at Chicago for a few days, meeting individually with some of the track owners, and then left the city, bound for New Orleans. Meeting with the directors of the New Orleans Jockey Club on January 9, he was given authority to take whatever action he might see fit on behalf of the club. At about the same time, Matt Winn traveled to Pittsburgh to meet with Samuel Brown. Winn was unable to meet personally with Brown, who was very sick at this time, but he left Pittsburgh feeling quite satisfied with the assurances he received.⁵⁰

Representatives from nine dissenting racing associations met in Hot Springs on January 21 to set up a temporary organization in opposition to the Western Jockey Club. Although the Lexington track was not represented at this meeting, on January 28 secretary Campbell Scott announced that the Kentucky Association had withdrawn from the Western Jockey Club and would apply for racing dates from the new organization. Bluegrass breeders received this news with approval, particularly upon learning that the board of appeals of the new governing body would be made up of men entirely favorable to their interests. The board included not only Samuel Brown but also Thomas C. McDowell, owner of Ashland Stud near the city and great-grandson of Henry Clay, and Julius Fleischman, president of the Latonia track. The mutineers met again in New Orleans during the first week of February, this time with Campbell Scott representing the Kentucky Association, and the American Turf Association was born. The irrepressible Matt Winn was elected president of the organization, with Corrigan as his second. A new turf war had begun.⁵¹

⁵⁰ *Lexington Herald*, "To Ask Dates for Spring Meeting," December 5, 1904; "Dates for Race Meeting All That Could Be Desired," December 8, 1904; "New Track Will Start Within Thirty Days," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, January 10, 1905; "Winn Pleased with His Trip," *Pittsburg Press*, January 14, 1905.

⁵¹ "American Jockey Club Organized," *Lexington Herald*, January 26, 1905; "Kentucky Association Formally Withdraws from Western Jockey Club," *Lexington Leader*, January 29, 1905; "Breeders for New Turf Body," *Lexington Herald*, January 29, 1905; "Winn Elected President," *Lexington Herald*, February 7, 1905; "Bright Prospects," *Lexington Herald*, February 17, 1905.

In his 1945 autobiography, Winn described the war strategy that followed, referring to the Western Jockey Club as the Western Turf Association, or W.T.A.

I decided upon an aggressive offense, and deliberately waited until the W.T.A. had announced 1905 racing dates for the tracks which remained loyal to it. Then, in all cities where we had a competing track, I named dates for our tracks identical with those of the W.T.A. . . . In each competing city, we concentrated our best horses, and best jockeys. We went in for quite a bit of advertising, and some ballyhoo, while the opposition track was content to rest on its reputation and prestige as a spoke in the old-established W.T.A. wheel. It was about 50–50 for a while, and then, gradually, we began to move to the front. . . . At the end of the second year, the W.T.A. had enough. They asked terms. We named them—they weren't harsh—because, after all, what we had been fighting for was merely a fairer apportionment of dates, and those we then had. The W.T.A. agreed to our demands, and the two year war was done.

Although by 1906 all of the remaining Kentucky tracks, at Lexington, Louisville, and Covington, were members of the American Turf Association, during the spring the Kentucky state legislature, irritated by the incessant conflict, took an important step to end future turf wars by creating the Kentucky State Racing Commission, the first such body in the nation, to govern the allocation of racing dates at the various tracks.⁵²

⁵² Menke, *Down the Stretch*, 54–55 (quotation); “A State Racing Commission,” *Kentucky Farmer and Breeder* 3 (March 2, 1906), 12; “Act Which Will Place Racing on a High Plane,” and “Senate Remained in Session Until Hour of Midnight,” *Lexington Herald*, March 11, 1906; “The State Racing Commission,” *Lexington Herald*, March 27, 1906; “Colonel Chinn to Head Racing Commission,” *Lexington Herald*, April 19, 1906.

Anti-Gambling Reformers and the Near-Extinction of American Racing

The aim of the legislature in creating the Kentucky Racing Commission was motivated by recognition of the importance of the Thoroughbred industry to the state's economy. With the racing establishment under attack the intent was to protect the horse interests of the region by elevating the sport to a so-called "higher plane" that was not primarily a gambling enterprise but one that was, as indicated by most individual jockey club charters, expected to "improve the breeds of horses." The bill called for the commission to consist of five members appointed by the governor, three of whom must be breeders, with the power to grant annual licenses to racing associations or corporations conducting racing in the state and to oversee the rules under which they operated. The author of the bill, John P. "Jack" Chinn, who was subsequently appointed to the commission, believed it might serve as a model for other states, and his prediction proved correct.⁵³

Establishment of the Kentucky racing commission was intended not only as a solution to the chaos of the turf war, but also as a defense against the rising tide of public sentiment opposing gambling and the perceived evils of the racing industry. Gambling in all forms, from lotteries to casinos, was targeted by crusaders of the progressive reform movement that swept state governments at the beginning of the twentieth century. Largely driven by middle-class concerns in response to changes brought about by massive industrial growth, widespread political corruption, and the excesses of the Gilded Age, the many-faceted progressive ideology advocated a greater role for government in providing remedies for social problems such as alcohol and prostitution. Millions of progressive voters elected legislators who helped pass laws, from New York to California, conforming to the progressive

⁵³ "State Racing Commission Needed," *Lexington Herald*, March 3, 1906; "Interstate Racing Commission—Next," *Lexington Herald*, March 31, 1906; "Governor Names Racing Commission," *Lexington Herald*, April 5, 1906; "Text of Racing Commission Bill," *Lexington Herald*, May 5, 1906.

perspective of the “common good.” For the most part, anti-gambling legislation did not directly attack the racetracks, but the near-complete nationwide suppression of gambling had a devastating effect upon the Thoroughbred industry.⁵⁴

New Jersey was the first state to experience the complete elimination of racing, where gambling was outlawed by an amendment to the state constitution in 1897. This was just the opening act, as progressives marshaled their resources, to a rapid-fire proliferation of anti-gambling legislation shortly after the turn of the century. In 1905, Chicago’s racetracks were forced to close after a long and successful assault upon racetrack gambling by Mayor Carter Harrison. In February 1907 in Tennessee, long considered part of the “Bluegrass” Thoroughbred region, the governor signed a bill previously passed by the General Assembly that eliminated racetrack gambling within its borders. Tennessee’s lead was soon followed by nearly all the southern states, including Louisiana in 1908, the national focus of Thoroughbred racing prior to the Civil War. In the West, both Texas and California prohibited all forms of betting on horse races in 1909. In New York, host to no less than seven major tracks and leader of the racing world at the end of the century, the reformer’s mantle was taken up by Progressive governor Charles E. Hughes, who fought successfully for the passage of the 1908 Hart-Agnew bill to outlaw gambling of any kind. When racing fans discovered a loophole in the law that would permit oral betting among themselves, Hughes responded in 1910 by signing legislation that held racetrack owners legally liable for any gambling on the premises, a measure which effectively shut down all racing in the state.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Walter Nugent, *Progressivism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York, 2010); Ronnie Dreistadt, *Lost Bluegrass: History of a Vanishing Landscape* (Charleston, S.C., 2011), 45; Sasuly, *Bookies and Bettors*, 83–90.

⁵⁵ “Anti-Gambling Amendment,” *Trenton State Gazette*, June 14, 1898; Steven A. Riess, “Closing Down the Open City: The Demise of Boxing and Horse Racing in Chicago,” in ed. Elliott J. Gorn, *Sports in Chicago* (Chicago, 2008), 48–59; “Tennessee Places Ban,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, February 6, 1907; “Vote on the Locke Bill 21 to 19,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, June 24, 1908; “Facts on Decline of American Racing,” *Charleston* (South

By the summer of 1911, the number of Thoroughbred racing venues operating in the United States precipitously declined from the 1897 peak of 314 tracks located in twenty-nine states, the District of Columbia, and the Oklahoma Territory, to only two dozen tracks in eleven states, mostly in the far west. East of the Mississippi, racing was still permitted only in Kentucky and Maryland, each with three operating tracks, and at single facilities located in Virginia and South Carolina. The turf wars that roiled the industry for more than a decade were over—many tracks shut down that there were no longer sufficient members to support a single governing body in the region, let alone competing associations.⁵⁶

Local crusaders campaigned vigorously against racetrack betting in Kentucky but made little headway since many politicians had strong ties to the Thoroughbred industry. Even though racing continued to flourish in Kentucky, the virtual elimination of racing venues elsewhere throughout the country had serious repercussions upon the Thoroughbred breeding industry here, a far more important segment of the state's economy. As the American markets vanished, the demand for Thoroughbred stock plummeted and many breeders panicked, dumping their yearlings wholesale at low prices, and further glutting the market. The average sale price for yearlings reached a record low of \$230 in 1911, less than half of what had been brought only a few years before. At Lexington in November 1911, breeders were dismayed when 182 stallions, mares, and yearlings sold at auction for an average of only \$111.80; the yearling average for 1906 was \$597. Many breeders sent their horses overseas to sell in Europe

Carolina) *Evening Post*, February 2, 1909; "The Passage of the Robertson Bill," *Dallas Morning News*, March 7, 1909; "Governor's Signature Marks End of Racing," *Riverside (California) Independent Enterprise*, February 20, 1909; Bennett Liebman, "Horsing in New York in the Progressive Era," *Gaming Law Review and Economics* 12 (December 2008): 556–62.

⁵⁶ Robertson, *History of Thoroughbred Racing*, 196; Harvey T. Woodruff, "Sport of Kings Gets Blows," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 30, 1911; "Horse Racing in Plenty During Fall Season in Three States," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, October 1, 1911; "Lexington Sale is Over," *Daily Racing Form* 17 (November 23, 1911): 1; Woodruff, "Sport of Kings No Longer," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 31, 1911; "Racing Statistics of the Year 1911," *Daily Racing Form* 18 (January 3, 1912): 1.

and South America, depressing Thoroughbred values in foreign markets and alarming local breeders. Some American owners packed up their entire racing stables and shipped them abroad to compete in England, France, and other venues; many never returned to the United States. As a consequence of anti-gambling reform, many Thoroughbred bloodlines were lost. The number of foals registered annually in the Jockey Club's Stud Book declined by more than half between 1905 and 1910, bottoming out at two thousand new entries.⁵⁷

Assault on the Kentucky Racing Commission

The industry took decades to recover, aided in part by the establishment of state racing commissions and the adoption of pari-mutuel betting, which alleviated most concerns about the honesty of the sport, if not the moral objections to gambling. During the Depression years, many states reexamined their priorities and pragmatically concluded that Thoroughbred racing provided a much-needed revenue stream through taxation. The first pari-mutuel machines in Kentucky were installed at Churchill Downs in 1878 but were ignored by a race-going public more comfortable with traditional methods of wagering. In spring of 1908, although the Kentucky General Assembly passed legislation confirming the legality of trackside betting while criminalizing off-site poolrooms, Louisville officials attempted to shut down Churchill Downs by enforcing a city ordinance against bookmaking. Track owners Matt Winn and Charles Grainger found a specific provision in the state gambling laws that permitted the "French pools" or pari-mutuel system, and quickly reinstalled the old machines and brought in a batch of new ones from New York. When Louisville Mayor James Grinstead responded by announcing plans to make arrests at the 1908 Kentucky Derby, Winn obtained

⁵⁷ Robertson, *History of Thoroughbred Racing*, 197–98; Dreistadt, *Lost Bluegrass*, 47–49; "Thoroughbred Sales of Yearlings in 1906," *Lexington Herald*, December 9, 1906; "Enormous Cost of the Destruction of Racing," *Lexington Herald*, April 3, 1911; "Great Shrinkage in Yearlings," *Daily Racing Form*, 17 (August 27, 1911): 1; "Yearling Sales of 1911 in America," *Daily Racing Form* 17 (December 20, 1911): 1.

a temporary injunction that allowed the pari-mutuel machines to be used. Shortly afterward, the Kentucky Court of Appeals ruled in Winn's favor, and in June, the Kentucky Racing Commission adopted regulations permitting only the use of auction pools or the pari-mutuel system for wagering at tracks.⁵⁸

Following these actions, in September 1908, the newly reconstituted Kentucky Association installed five pari-mutuel machines for the fall races, but elimination of bookmakers from the facility apparently so discouraged patrons that both attendance and wagering were greatly depressed, and the track lost a considerable sum of money. In the weeks prior to the seven-day spring meeting of 1909, a vigorous publicity campaign urged Bluegrass residents to support the races with their patronage to assure the continuance of the sport in the region. Racing fans soon began to make heavy use of the ticket machines. During the next few years, the pari-mutuel system became increasingly popular as racing fans grew accustomed to it, so that the state racing commission in 1911 finally ordered that auction pools were prohibited and only pari-mutuel betting allowed at Kentucky tracks. The state's experiment with the system had proved so successful that Maryland soon followed suit, implementing pari-mutuel wagering at racing events beginning with the Pimlico track in 1913. As the progressive reform fervor gradually died away, many states legalized racetrack gambling, establishing racing commissions to regulate the sport, and adopting the pari-mutuel system.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Robertson, *History of Thoroughbred Racing*, 199–200; Riess, *City Games*, 187–88; Lev Russell, *Statutes of Kentucky* (Lexington, Ky., 1909), 844–45; "Pari-Mutuel System to Be Used at Churchill Downs," *Lexington Herald*, April 5, 1908; *Grinstead, et al. v. Kirby, Judge*, 110 S.W. 247 (1908); "Grinstead, et al. v. Kirby, Judge," *Kentucky Law Reporter: Court of Appeals* (Frankfort, Ky., 1908), 287–89; Menke, *Down the Stretch*, 69–75; "Police Will Arrest Would-Be Bettors," *Lexington Herald*, May 4, 1908; "Racing Commission Takes Stand Against Bookmaking," *Lexington Herald*, June 20, 1908.

⁵⁹ "Put Race Grounds in Good Condition," *Lexington Herald*, September 16, 1908; "Must Be Made a Success," *Lexington Herald*, September 22, 1908; "The Crucial Test," *Lexington Herald*, April 14, 1909; "Success of the Spring Meeting Seems Assured," *Lexington Herald*, April 29, 1909; "Wagers Growing Heavier Each Day at Race Meeting," *Lexington Herald*,

After being eclipsed by the migration of the horse industry to the Northeast after the Civil War, Kentucky reclaimed the prominence it once held as the Thoroughbred breeding capital of the United States. In 1918, as American troops fought on the battlefields of Europe, there were four Thoroughbred tracks operating in Kentucky: Churchill Downs and Douglas Park at Louisville, the Kentucky Association track at Lexington, and Latonia at Covington. The Queen City track in Newport was no longer in business, a casualty of the turf wars at the beginning of the century. Although racing flourished at the remaining tracks, many Kentuckians, in particular the Bluegrass horse breeders, were disturbed by the “foreign” ownership of Douglas Park and Latonia by outsiders from St. Louis and Chicago, believing this situation did not promote the best interests of the Thoroughbred industry in the state. Not only was there considerable concern over the flow of money out of Kentucky from these tracks, but the syndicate in control also had an unsavory reputation and constantly threatened the authority of the state racing commission by a succession of lawsuits against that regulatory body. The syndicate that owned Douglas Park and Latonia was comprised of St. Louis businessmen Louis A. Cella, Samuel W. Adler, and Andrew “Cap” Tilles, who, at Latonia, were also associated with “Blind John” Condon of Chicago. The real leader of the group was Cella, who had spent much of his life being either investigated or indicted for criminal activity.⁶⁰

Cella was fond of boasting that his wealth was founded upon the \$40,000 he had made in the late 1880s as the banker of a high-stakes

April 30, 1909; “Wires Removed From the Lexington Track,” *Lexington Herald*, September 15, 1911; Richard O. Davies, *Sports in American Life: A History* (New York, 2007), 154; “Pari-Mutuel Now,” *Baltimore Sun*, January 7, 1913; Menke, *Down the Stretch*, 77.

⁶⁰ “Receiver,” *Morning Herald*, July 29, 1903; “Insuring Racing in Kentucky,” *Thoroughbred Horse Association Bulletin* 3 (January 1919), 88; Joseph M. Porter, “The Kentucky Jockey Club: Political Involvement in the Twenties” (M.A. thesis, Eastern Kentucky University, 1969); “Craps Made Him Millions,” *Kansas City Star*, April 30, 1918. In 1928, the *Thoroughbred Horse Association Bulletin* was retitled as *The Blood-Horse*, which continues today as an important industry publication.

crap game held in the basement of his St. Louis saloon, which he parlayed into millions by investing in downtown real estate until he was one of the largest holders of commercial property in the city. With his partners, Adler and Tilles, he operated a chain of “bucket shops” throughout the country, small store-front operations similar to off-track betting shops except that wagers were placed upon fluctuations in the market price of agricultural commodities rather than horses; no actual stocks were traded. Cella’s bucket shop business was broken up by federal prosecutions that began in 1910. He first became involved in the racing business in 1895 when he bought into the South Side racetrack then operated by Adler and Tilles at St. Louis. In short order, Cella and his new partners bought, built, or acquired an interest in more than two dozen Thoroughbred racetracks across the country. Cella had no love for the sport but regarded these tracks as wonderful cash cows that could be milked for revenue in a variety of ways, some legitimate and some on the shady side.⁶¹

In the summer of 1905, while the turf war was at a peak, Cella came to Louisville determined to wage war against the rebellious Churchill Downs with the full financial backing of the Western Jockey Club. Cella inspected the grounds of the Douglas Park trotting track, which were idle for several years, and arranged a lease of the property through a local front man. Other representatives from the Western Jockey Club were present in the city, and in comments to the press made their intentions clear. It would be a fight to the finish against Winn; Douglas Park would schedule races at the same time as those at the Downs and would offer larger purses, more prominent horses, and more favorable odds for bettors from syndicate bookmakers. In November, Cella closed a deal to purchase the track from owner J. J. Douglas and made extensive improvements. Churchill Downs,

⁶¹ “Fair Grounds to Be Sold to a Syndicate,” *St. Louis Republic*, March 15, 1901; “Craps Made Him Millions,” *Kansas City Star*, April 30, 1918; Ann Fabian, *Card Sharps and Bucket Shops: Gambling in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, 1999), 156–57, 188–202; Al Spink, “The Man Who Owned All the Race Tracks and Who Won All the Bets,” *Lewiston (Maine) Evening Journal*, May 11, 1918.

however, proved to be too hard a nut for Cella to crack. When, in the spring of 1906, the St. Louis millionaire applied to the newly established Kentucky Racing Commission after having expended \$300,000 on the acquisition and renovation of Douglas Park, he was refused on the grounds that the dates requested had already been assigned to the Louisville Jockey Club and that the Douglas Park facility was unfinished. Cella had not foreseen the creation of the state racing commission, nor that the membership and officers of that body were all associated with the rival American Turf Association.⁶²

Cella immediately filed a class action suit with the U.S. District Court at Louisville, obtaining an injunction against the Racing Commission preventing it from interfering with the scheduling of racing dates at Douglas Park and claiming that the act which created the commission was unconstitutional. The appeals court subsequently ruled in favor of the state racing commission, holding that its existence and actions were constitutional, but in the meantime, Cella took steps to expand his racing empire in Kentucky. Early in 1906, he sought to purchase an interest in the Latonia track at Covington, but was rebuffed by Joseph L. Rhinock, president and majority stockholder and a U.S. Congressman at the time. Cella's response was typical. Again, operating through a local front man, the syndicate purchased a tract of land at Glen Park, fourteen miles up the Ohio River from Covington in Campbell County, whose avowed purpose was as home to a new track to run in opposition to Latonia. Faced with this pressure, Rhinock caved in to Cella and allowed him to purchase a controlling interest in Latonia.⁶³

⁶² "Turf War Opens at Louisville," *Lexington Herald*, August 12, 1905; "Louisville Race War on in Earnest," *Lexington Herald*, August 13, 1905; "Turf War Hits Louisville," *Lexington Herald*, November 29, 1905; Menke, *Down the Stretch*, 56.

⁶³ "Another Ky. Track," *Lexington Herald*, February 25, 1906; "Injunction Issued Against the State Racing Commission," *Lexington Herald*, May 16, 1906; "Turf War in West Reported at an End," *Lexington Herald*, May 24, 1906; "Douglas Park Opens," *Lexington Herald*, September 4, 1906; "Kentucky Racing Commission Law is Constitutional," *Lexington Herald*, October 3, 1906; "Interesting Aftermath of the Kentucky State Racing Commission's Meeting,"

Fresh upon his defeat in the courts over racing dates at Douglas Park, Cella was ready to tackle the racing commission again. On October 15, 1908, the board of directors of the Latonia Jockey Club voted to reinstate bookmaking at the track in defiance of the commission and Kentucky legislature, justifying this move on the basis that the track would lose money if forced to depend upon the pari-mutuel system. Joseph L. Rhinock, expressing sharp disagreement, immediately resigned his position as president. The track opened its fall meeting on October 19 to record-breaking crowds, and on the following day, the racing commission revoked Latonia's license. The Covington club immediately filed suit in the Kenton County Circuit Court on October 21, again seeking an injunction against the commission, and continued its race meeting for a full twenty-eight-day event ending November 15.⁶⁴

Judge Matthew L. Harbeson of the Kenton court ruled for the plaintiff, finding the legislative act creating the racing commission to be unconstitutional, a decision reversed when heard by the Kentucky Court of Appeals in Frankfort on December 10, 1909. The appellate court determined the state racing commission had the right to regulate conduct of racetracks and race meetings and to determine how betting was conducted. A few months later, in February 1910, Cella divested all his stock in Latonia, trading it to his partner Cap Tilles for an equal value of stock in an unspecified St. Louis business. Subsequently, Tilles bought out the interests of Joseph Rhinock and most of the other Latonia directors, giving him 90 percent of the

Daily Racing Form 18 (March 26, 1912): 1; "Chairman Chinn Blames the Latonia Trouble on Cella," *Lexington Herald*, October 24, 1908.

⁶⁴ "Racing Commission to Be Called to Meet Here Friday," *Lexington Herald*, June 17, 1908; "Bookmaking Will Be Reinstated at the Latonia Track," *Lexington Herald*, October 16, 1908; "Opening Day at Latonia," *Daily Racing Form* 14 (October 20, 1908): 1; "Latonia's License Revoked by State Racing Commission," *Lexington Herald*, October 21, 1908; "Latonia Meeting Likely to Run to End With Books," *Lexington Herald*, October 22, 1908; "Chairman Chinn Blames the Latonia Trouble on Cella," *Lexington Herald*, October 24, 1908; "Kenton County Grand Jury Investigating Latonia Meet," *Lexington Herald*, October 27, 1908.



Johnson M. Camden, who served terms as president of the Kentucky Association and the Kentucky Racing Commission and was the first president of the new Kentucky Jockey Club in 1919. Image courtesy Keeneland Library Photo Archives, Cook Collection, Lexington, Kentucky.

stock and leaving Tilles, Adler, and their Chicago associate, John Condon, in complete control.⁶⁵

Cella retained ownership of Douglas Park in Louisville and, in 1916, took yet another shot at the Kentucky racing commission. At their monthly meeting on September 1, chairman Johnson N. Camden and the members of the commission set minimums for the purses offered at racing events, based on the size of the metropolitan area served by the track; the rule to go into effect with the fall meetings. Minimum required purses for the two tracks in Louisville and the Latonia track near Cincinnati were established at \$800, and as Lexington was a smaller city, the Kentucky Association was required to offer purses of only \$600. Within a matter of days, Cella filed suit in the Jefferson Circuit Court again seeking an injunction against the commission, claiming that the requirement would be a financial disaster for Douglas Park. Cella also complained, with some justification, that the commission was discriminating in favor of Churchill Downs, allowing Winn's pet enterprise first choice of racing dates so that the Downs was always able to open the Louisville racing season ahead of Douglas Park. When the decision went against Douglas Park, Cella next filed with the Kentucky Court of Appeals in Frankfort, who on February 6, 1917, citing the precedent established by the earlier Latonia case, upheld the authority of the racing commission to regulate purses as "a necessary police power conferred by the legislature." Rather than accept the finding of the Kentucky court as final, as he had in 1909, Cella sought redress from the nation's highest court, filing an appeal with the U.S. Supreme Court on March 20. Aside from a flurry of paperwork, the case remained pending through 1918.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ "Believe Court of Appeals Will Not Sustain Decision," *Lexington Herald*, March 23, 1909; "Latonia Loses in Its Fight Against State Racing Act," *Lexington Herald*, December 11, 1909; "Latonia Changes Hands," *Daily Racing Form* 16 (February 15, 1910): 1; "Latonia Jockey Club Election," *Daily Racing Form* 16 (March 8, 1910): 1.

⁶⁶ *Reports of Civil and Criminal Cases Decided by the Court of Appeals of Kentucky*, Kentucky Reports, vol. 173 (Frankfort, Ky., 1917), 685-93 (quotation on 690); "More Money for Kentucky Racing," *Daily Racing Form* 22 (September 3, 1916): 1; "Interesting Litigation,"

Rise and Fall of the Kentucky Jockey Club

Cella died in St. Louis on April 29, 1918, and Kentucky horsemen saw this as golden opportunity not only to make this irritating lawsuit go away, but to solve many of the other problems faced by the Thoroughbred racing industry in recent years. Although moral reformers had been able to make little headway against racetrack gambling in Kentucky, there was a real fear that the racing oasis represented by Kentucky might be despoiled by the Philistines who virtually eliminated Thoroughbred racing elsewhere throughout the nation. The Cella-Adler-Tilles syndicate was viewed as a malignancy which gave a bad odor to the industry and drew the attention of reformers. A decade before, shortly after Cella's purchase of Douglas Park and Latonia, an editorial in the *Lexington Herald* observed that the "syndicate headed by Louis Cella [was] one of the most corrupting influences in Illinois and Missouri." Later, reporting on Cella's arrest in August 1910 on federal charges of operating a bucket shop, the *Herald* blamed Cella and his associates for "many of the misfortunes of the turf," referring to them as

Gamblers and crooks, [who] got control of racetracks around St. Louis and ran them solely for the financial profit to be made out of them. They owned tracks and the officials which they appointed to serve at those tracks, owned horses, bookmakers and jockeys. Without any conception of real sport, without any instinct of honesty, they conducted the tracks owned by them so that the people of Missouri revolted and stopped racing altogether.

Daily Racing Form 22 (December 2, 1916): 1; "Kentucky Racing Commission Upheld," *Daily Racing Form* 23 (February 7, 1917): 1; "Promoting Good Horse Breeding," *Daily Racing Form* 23 (February 9, 1917): 1; "Appeal to Supreme Court," *Daily Racing Form* 23 (March 28, 1917): 1; *Douglas Park Jockey Club v. Talbott: U.S. Supreme Court Transcript of Record with Supporting Pleadings*, *The Making of Modern Law: U.S. Supreme Court Records and Briefs, 1832–1978* (Detroit, Mich., 2011); *Douglas Park Jockey Club v. Talbott*, 249 U.S. 619 (1919).

Later references were more circumspect, alluding to the need to elevate racing to a “higher plane,” but the message was clear: the presence of the Cella syndicate was perceived as a danger to the future of racing in Kentucky.⁶⁷

In the summer of 1918, a casual conversation on this subject between Edward F. Simms, owner of Xalapa Farm near Paris and breeder of Thoroughbreds, and James P. Ross, superintendant of the Kentucky Association track, planted a seed in fertile soil. Ross, ostensibly inspired to liberate Thoroughbred racing in Kentucky from its “corrupting” influences and with financial backing from Simms and a coalition of like-minded men, approached John Hachmeister, manager of the Latonia track, with an offer to purchase both Latonia and Douglas Park for the sum of \$750,000. Hachmeister rejected the offer but indicated that the two tracks could be had for \$850,000. Ross was unable to persuade his associates to come up with the additional funds and there the matter rested for the time being.⁶⁸

At the regular meeting of the Kentucky racing commission on November 30, 1918, Hachmeister let it be known the Latonia and Douglas Park tracks could be purchased if the price was right. After the lunch break, chairman Camden met privately with commission member Thomas A. Combs, a former mayor of Lexington, to discuss Hachmeister’s announcement. Obviously, the commission itself could not act upon this offer, but as private citizens of considerable means there was no reason why Camden and Combs should not investigate further and so Combs was delegated to open negotiations with the syndicate. During the next few weeks, as negotiations were underway, the two men had a novel idea: Why not think bigger? Instead of acquiring Latonia and Douglas Park, if all the Thoroughbred racetracks in Kentucky could be brought in under the umbrella of a single cor-

⁶⁷ “Do You Want Racing Stopped?” *Lexington Herald*, October 30, 1907 (first quotation); “Against Cella is the Decision of the United States Commissioner,” *Lexington Herald*, August 1, 1910 (second and third quotations); “Craps Made Him Millions,” *Kansas City Star*, April 30, 1918; “Last Prop of the Reformers Gone,” *Daily Racing Form* 25 (February 5, 1919): 1.

⁶⁸ “James P. Ross Resigns at Lexington,” *Daily Racing Form* 25 (March 31, 1919): 1; “Insuring Racing in Kentucky,” *Thoroughbred Horse Association Bulletin* 3 (January 1919): 88.

poration comprised of men dedicated to the turf, this would assure a golden future for the sport and considerable profit for the principal shareholders.⁶⁹

Accordingly, simultaneous negotiations began for the purchase of Churchill Downs and the Kentucky Association track. For an enterprise of this magnitude, they had to form their own syndicate, and other horsemen of wealth and influence were brought in to underwrite the purchase package. Thomas Combs obtained an option on the Latonia and Douglas Park tracks in mid-December, and by early January agreements had been made with the directors of Churchill Downs and the Kentucky Association. The new syndicate, to be known as the Kentucky Jockey Club, filed articles of incorporation in Frankfort on February 28, 1919, capitalized at \$3 million. The sale of the Kentucky Association track was finalized on March 13, 1919, ownership transferred to the Jockey Club for the sum of \$275,000. The organization paid \$575,000 for the Downs, and \$850,000 in an arrangement combining the properties of Latonia and Douglas Park; the transaction for all four tracks totaled \$1.7 million.⁷⁰

All of Kentucky's Thoroughbred tracks were now part of one big outfit. At an organizational meeting in mid-March, Camden was elected president of the Jockey Club, with Winn as vice-president. Winn was also selected to be the general manager in charge of operations for all the tracks and chose to move his home to Covington to be more directly involved in the management of one of the primary trouble spots, the Latonia racetrack. Winn must have felt a particular satisfaction in being part of the decision to end all racing at Douglas

⁶⁹ "Kentucky Tracks Merger," *Daily Racing Form* 24 (December 21, 1918): 1; "Insuring Racing in Kentucky," *Thoroughbred Horse Association Bulletin* 3 (January 1919): 88; "Syndicate Will Own All Kentucky Tracks," *Lexington Herald*, January 30, 1919.

⁷⁰ "Kentucky Tracks Merger," *Daily Racing Form* 24 (December 21, 1918): 1; "Syndicate Will Own All Kentucky Tracks," *Lexington Herald*, January 30, 1919; "Last Prop of the Reformers Gone," *Daily Racing Form* 25 (February 5, 1919): 1; "Kentucky Jockey Club Incorporated," *Thoroughbred Record* 89(March 1, 1919): 123; "Kentucky Tracks Are Sold," *Daily Racing Form* 25 (February 13, 1919): 1; "Transfer Lexington Track Today," *Daily Racing Form* 25 (March 14, 1919): 1; Deed Book 192 (March 14, 1919), 99–103; Menke, *Down the Stretch*, 128–32.

Park, which had been a thorn in the side of Churchill Downs for a decade and a half. The former competitor would be relegated to the role of a training facility. Also in March, the pending litigation of Douglas Park versus the directors of the racing commission was dismissed by the Supreme Court because there was no longer a plaintiff in the case.⁷¹

The creation of the Jockey Club was initially popular with the people of Kentucky, who believed that the syndicate performed a public service in assuring both the integrity of the racing sport and encouraging the production of better horses. Horses were essential during World War I, and through the 1920s, the perception remained that the use of horses in war was both practical and necessary. The U.S. Army Remount Service identified the Thoroughbred horse as one of the types having characteristics desirable for military service, and widely promoted the breeding of light horses to serve military needs and replace depleted stocks; breeding and racing horses were thus generally viewed as patriotic. Within a short time, however, the luster had worn off the Kentucky Jockey Club in the perception of both Thoroughbred breeders and the public.⁷²

Although Kentucky survived as a bulwark of the American racing industry, forces for moral reform remained strong within the state even as the national progressive movement faded. Reformers sought to repeal the statute permitting gambling during nearly every session of the Kentucky General Assembly, submitting bills which were repeatedly stifled in committee but often by only a narrow margin. The Jockey Club became politically active in defense, involving itself in state and local elections to support candidates who favored its cause.

⁷¹ "Camden Heads New Jockey Club," *Thoroughbred Record* 89 (March 15, 1919): 157; "Kentucky Jockey Club" *Thoroughbred Horse Association Bulletin* 3 (March 1919): 1; "Winn to Reside in Covington," *Thoroughbred Record* 89 (March 29, 1919): 188; *Douglas Park Jockey Club v. Talbott*, 249 U.S. 619 (1919).

⁷² Porter, "Kentucky Jockey Club," 10–16; "Thoroughbred Horse a Necessity," *Daily Racing Form* 24 (October 17, 1918): 1; Clyde E. Hawkins, "American Remount Association," *Cavalry Journal* 20 (April 1921): 192–94; "In Defense of Racing: War Department Makes Clear Its Position in the Matter," *Daily Racing Form* 28 (January 29, 1922): 1.

As a result, the nature of the attacks upon the organization soon evolved from moral reform alone to include efforts to curtail the power and political influence of the syndicate. Even many of the Thoroughbred breeders became disenchanted with the commercialization and political activities of the organization. In Lexington, resentment against the Jockey Club was particularly strong, fueled by a perception that the syndicate, with Winn in charge of operations, favored Churchill Downs over the Kentucky Association.⁷³

Exit the Kentucky Association, Enter Keeneland

In 1923, Bluegrass horsemen had the opportunity to regain control of the old Association track. The Lexington track steadily lost money for the syndicate ever since it was acquired. A representative of the Jockey Club management approached Thomas A. Combs, who was instrumental in putting together the original package, to sound him out on the possibility of Lexington becoming independent from the organization. Combs did not hesitate to reply; in his opinion, he could “take over the track, create an organization to run it, so that it would have good racing at no loss.”⁷⁴

With Thomas C. Bradley, the current mayor of Lexington, Thoroughbred breeder, and resident manager of the Association track for the Jockey Club, Combs negotiated the purchase of the property in mid-January, for the price of \$290,000. The two mayors, with the deal assured, issued stock in early February and were able to incorporate on March 1, 1923, with a capital stock of \$325,000, sufficient to complete the purchase and make some needed improvements at

⁷³ Porter, “Kentucky Jockey Club,” 10–16; “Turf Notes,” *Thoroughbred Record* 97 (January 20, 1923): 51. Robert F. Sexton, “The Crusade Against Pari-Mutuel Gambling in Kentucky: A Study of Southern Progressivism in the 1920s,” *Filson Quarterly* 50 (January 1976): 47–57. A sampling of stories from the *Lexington Herald* reporting efforts to eliminate racetrack betting during the period include: “Horsemen Believe Sport is Saved,” February 25, 1920; “Gambling is Made Pulpit Target by Local Ministers,” September 13, 1920; and “Anti-racing Bill Defeated on Floor of House,” February 9, 1922.

⁷⁴ “The Editor’s Note Book,” *Thoroughbred Horse Association Bulletin* 7 (February 1923): 4 (quotation); “Turf Notes,” *Thoroughbred Record* 97 (January 20, 1923): 51.

the track neglected by the Jockey Club. The new corporation, comprised almost entirely of Thoroughbred breeders and owners from central Kentucky, assumed the traditional name of the Kentucky Association, whose primary purpose would be, as usual, “the improvement of livestock, particularly Thoroughbred horses, by giving exhibits of contests of speed and races between horses for premiums, purses, or other awards.”⁷⁵

The Kentucky Jockey Club was now reduced to two tracks, Latonia and Churchill Downs; though both were money-makers, the club now had to compete against not only the Kentucky Association but also against two new tracks, Dade Park at Henderson in western Kentucky, built in 1922, and Raceland in Greenup County, which opened in 1924.

The year 1927 witnessed the peak of the anti-racetrack gambling movement in Kentucky. During hotly contested state elections in that year, the Kentucky Jockey Club threw its support to the Republican candidate for governor, Flem D. Sampson, who carefully side-stepped the issue of pari-mutuel betting, against the Democratic candidate J. W. C. Beckham, who campaigned vigorously for an end to racetrack gambling. Samson won the governor’s race by a sizable margin, but his was the only Republican victory, lending support to the public perception that the Jockey Club and other power brokers controlled the election.⁷⁶

Because of its political activity, public sentiment against the Kentucky Jockey Club grew so strong that, in the fall of 1927, Kentucky Attorney General Frank Daugherty filed suit against the organization in the Jefferson Circuit Court, charging influence upon the election

⁷⁵ “Kentucky Association Incorporated,” *Thoroughbred Record* 97 (March 3, 1923): 210 (quotation); “Lexington’s New Resident Manager,” *Daily Racing Form* 28 (April 3, 1922): 1; “Turf Notes,” *Thoroughbred Record* 97 (January 20, 1923): 51; “The Editor’s Note Book,” *Thoroughbred Horse Association Bulletin* 7 (February 1923): 4; “Preferred Stock is Sold,” *Daily Racing Form* 29 (February 11, 1923): 1; Deed Book 216 (March 1, 1923), 375–79.

⁷⁶ James C. Klotter, *Kentucky: Portrait in Paradox 1900–1950* (Frankfort, Ky., 1996), 284–88.

and that pari-mutuel machines were a form of lottery and therefore illegal under Kentucky law. The suit asked for the revocation of the charters of Churchill Downs and Latonia, and, in a 1928 amendment, for an assessment of one million dollars in damages. Alarmed by the action, the directors of the Kentucky Jockey Club voted on December 28, 1927, to dissolve the club and organize a holding corporation to lease the tracks to corporations controlled by residents of the communities in which they were situated. By this time, the syndicate acquired three additional newly constructed tracks in Illinois, Fairmount Park in East St. Louis in 1925, Lincoln Fields and Washington Park in 1926, and an interest in the Hawthorne track near Chicago; ironic, considering that one of the primary motivations for the creation of the Kentucky Jockey Club had been to rid tracks in the state from outside ownership. The reason given for this drastic move was “to create a greater local interest in the Kentucky tracks, as is the case of the Kentucky Association track in Lexington,” but more likely was to sever the connection with the entity being sued. The stockholders of the new holding company elected Winn as president and resurrected an old name, full of significance: the American Turf Association.⁷⁷

Judge Eugene Daily of the Jefferson Circuit Court ruled in favor of the Jockey Club in August 1929, noting that the facts in evidence constituted at best a misdemeanor and did not justify the corporate death of the offending parties. The new state attorney, J. W. Cammack, submitted the case to the Kentucky Court of Appeals, naming not only the Jockey Club but Churchill Downs and Latonia as defendants. The appellate court, like the lower court, upheld the legality of race-track wagering and dismissed the evidence of political manipulations as inconclusive. Thoroughbred racing was once again safe in Kentucky.

⁷⁷ “American Turf Association,” *Thoroughbred Record* 107 (January 7, 1928): 14 (quotation); “State Sues to Dissolve Jockey Club,” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, November 24, 1927; “Directors Vote to Dissolve Jockey Club,” *Thoroughbred Record* 106 (December 31, 1927): 473; “Increase Capital Stock,” *Daily Racing Form* 34 (April 18, 1928): 1.

This was the last significant effort by reformers to overturn the legal status of racetrack betting.⁷⁸

The Kentucky Association endured a very turbulent career during the first three decades of the twentieth century, the organization having been dispersed time and again and the physical plant repeatedly threatened with obliteration. When the track was purchased from the Jockey Club in 1923 and the primary stockholders met to elect officers and finalize the language in the articles of incorporation, certainly some of those present must have looked around the room in the hotel where they had been meeting for nearly a century and thought that, perhaps, the organization might as appropriately be called the “Phoenix Association” as to resume its historic name, for had not this club been reborn many times? When the facility hosted a gala celebration of its centennial anniversary in 1926, few could have foreseen that very soon Thoroughbred racing in Lexington would face its greatest challenge. The catastrophic economic downturn of the Great Depression drove many once-thriving enterprises to extinction. The Association hosted its last race meeting in the spring of 1933, and two years later, the historic track met the fate that had so often threatened, razed to make way for a federal housing project that would be known as Bluegrass Park-Aspendale. For the first time in more than a century, Lexington no longer possessed a track for running horses. In such bleak times, how could Thoroughbred racing arise once more from the ashes?⁷⁹

⁷⁸ “Vote 6 to 1, Richardson Dissenting,” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, March 4, 1931; “Parimutuel Law Upheld,” *Daily Racing Form* 37 (June 18, 1931): 1; *Commonwealth v. Kentucky Jockey Club*, 38 S.W.2d 987 (1931).

⁷⁹ “Dismal Rain Marks Sale of Old Oval,” *Lexington Leader*, November 19, 1935; “U.S. Government to Take Over Kentucky Association Property,” *Thoroughbred Record* 122 (September 21, 1935): 170; “Finishing Touches Being Applied to Housing Project,” *Lexington Herald-Leader*, November 7, 1937; “City Has Always Bustled with Activity During Race Week,” *Lexington Leader*, June 30, 1938. By 1940 there were only two Thoroughbred tracks operating in Kentucky in addition to Keeneland: Churchill Downs and Ellis Park in Henderson County (formerly Dade Park). Raceland in Greenup County went bankrupt in 1928 after only four years of operation; the Latonia track persevered until 1939, the site now occupied by the Latonia Plaza Shopping Center at Covington.

Many of the prominent horsemen and business leaders of the Bluegrass were determined to restore Thoroughbred racing to Lexington. A committee appointed in late 1934 to study the situation concluded that it would be better to build a new facility, than to try to rehabilitate the old and deteriorated plant in the eastern part of the city. After reviewing several potential sites in the Lexington vicinity, the committee's attention kept returning to John Oliver (Jack) Keene's property on Versailles Road, five miles west of the city center. Keene let the committee know that the greater part of his Keeneland Stud farm was available to them, and the advantages of the site were readily apparent. Here was a location where Keene had nearly completed construction of one of the finest private racing facilities in the country before running out of money. A deal was arranged, and the newly formed Keeneland Association acquired the property and completed the necessary work. All was finished in time for opening day on October 15, 1936, and a legend was born.⁸⁰

The passing of the Kentucky Association and the establishment of Keeneland may be viewed as symbolizing the closing of one chapter in the evolution of the American turf and the opening of another. These events marked the end of a long period during which Thoroughbred racing, virtually extinguished by the Civil War, became increasingly commercialized and venues expanded greatly in number and geographic distribution, so that the industry became an important national, rather than regional, pastime. After four decades of rapid growth, real and perceived corruption and abuses associated with an industry almost wholly self-regulated triggered reform movements at the dawn of the twentieth century that again resulted in the almost complete elimination of running horse racing from America. The establishment of state regulatory bodies and the near-universal adoption of the pari-mutuel system of wagering quieted much of the public apprehension as to the honesty of the sport, which, combined with

⁸⁰ "The Development of Keeneland," *Keeneland, Lexington, Kentucky, Opening 1936* (Lexington, Ky., 1936), 23, 45–49.



Hal Price Headley (left), first president of the Keeneland Association, with Jack Keene. Image courtesy Keeneland Library Photo Archives, Cook Collection, Lexington, Kentucky.

a pressing need for government tax revenues, prompted the rebirth of the industry across the nation. In Kentucky, Keeneland's gestation coincided with the establishment of a newly transformed American Thoroughbred industry.