



African-Americans in Racing

TOLD IN FIVE ARTIFACTS



KENTUCKY DERBY
— MUSEUM —

Background

An **artifact** is a human-made object that can tell us something about culture or history. At the Kentucky Derby Museum, thousands of artifacts are collected, stored and some of them displayed, so we can tell the story of our great horse race.

A diverse group of people have contributed to the history of the Kentucky Derby. This cultural pass program focuses on the contributions that African-Americans have made. We have chosen five artifacts to help tell this story.

Artifact 1 Kentucky Derby Program

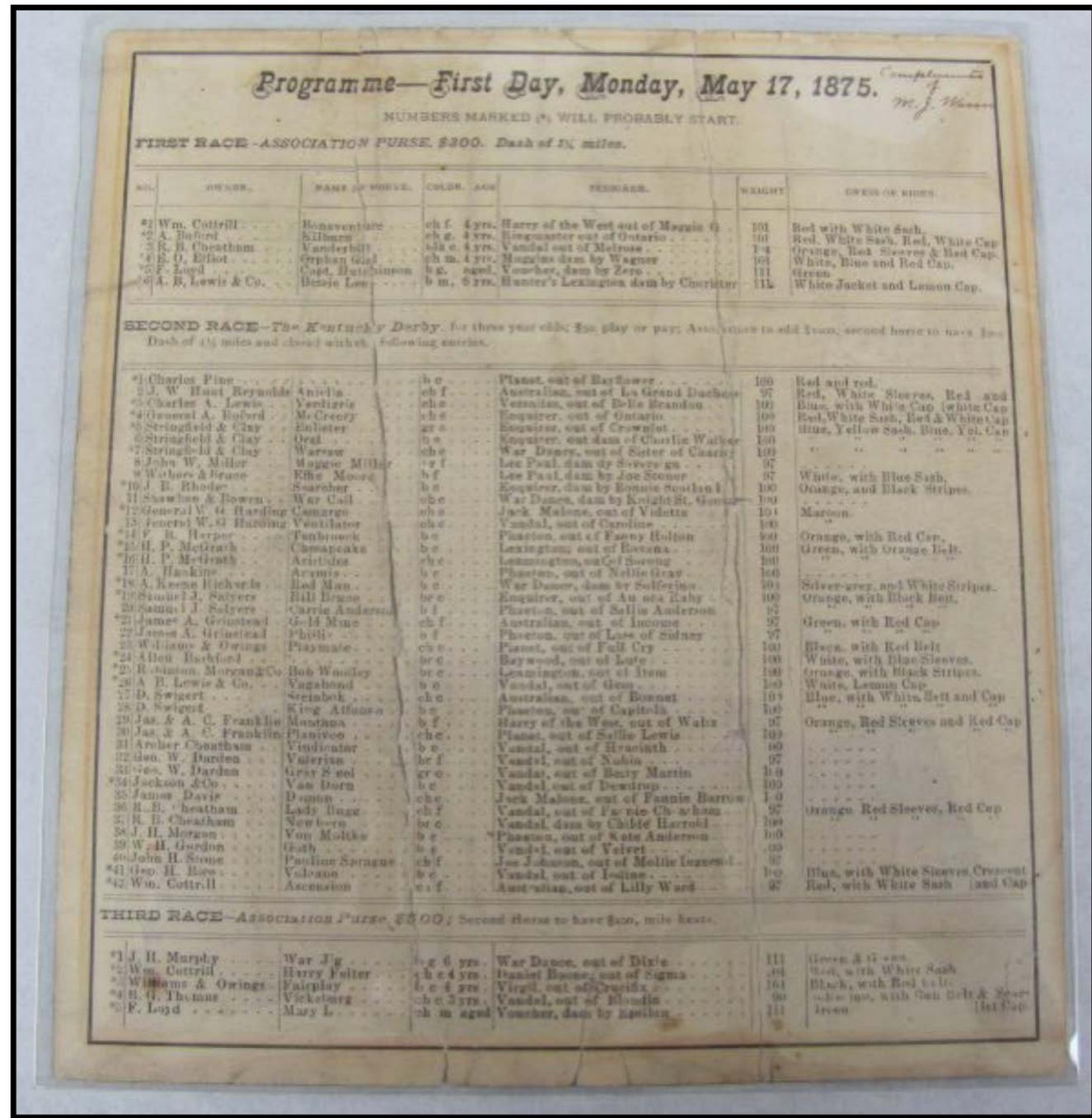
It's a Monday afternoon, May 17, 1875. You've arrived at the brand-new racetrack that later will be called Churchill Downs.

You take a nickel out of your pocket and buy a program. The program lists all the horses racing that day. Can you pick a winner?

The second race is the Kentucky Derby. Fifteen horses will compete, and you notice that of the fifteen jockeys, thirteen of them are African-American.

The first to cross the finish line is a horse named Aristides. He is ridden by a nineteen year-old African-American named Oliver Lewis.

When you get home, you decide to save the program as a souvenir. Not very many people decided to do that. Over a hundred years later, that same program is now in the Derby Museum and is considered a very important artifact.



Artifact #2 Willie Simms Lapel Pin

Willie Simms was one of the best jockeys in the 1890's.

This collector pin was made around 1895 and can tell us how he was viewed in that society. What does the word "celebrated" mean and why would he be celebrated? And why does it say "American" jockey?

Simms was celebrated because of his success on the racetrack. He won the Kentucky Derby two times and was one of the first African-American jockeys to race in England. Maybe that's why it denotes that he was an "American jockey".

Unfortunately, there is a word misspelled on the pin. Can you find it?



Artifact #3 *Silk Purse*

We know that a purse is something that holds belongings. But in horse racing, a purse is also the money an owner receives for winning a race.

This yellow, silk purse was given to Mr. Kinzea Stone, whose horse Kingman, won the 1891 Kentucky Derby. Stone owned the horse in a partnership with African-American Dud Allen. Allen also served as the horse's trainer.

Dud Allen is the only African-American owner to win the Kentucky Derby. How much money do you think may have been in the purse for winning the 1891 Kentucky Derby?

Front



Back



Artifact #4 *Isaac Murphy's Tombstone*

Black or white, Isaac Murphy may have been the greatest jockey ever. During his riding career, his reputation as a great athlete was unmatched, winning an extremely high percentage of races. He was also known for his honesty and integrity.

Murphy won the Kentucky Derby three times, a record which stood for many decades. He died of pneumonia at the age of 34 and was buried in Lexington's African Cemetery Number 2.

Over the years, the cemetery was neglected. It became overrun with weeds and many of the tombstones were victims of vandalism. Murphy's unmarked tombstone was lost until a researcher discovered it.

Today, Murphy is buried at Lexington's Kentucky Horse Park, and this tombstone is displayed at the Kentucky Derby Museum. Can you think of other ways we could celebrate the life of Isaac Murphy?



Artifact #5 *Oscar Dishman Plaque*

Oscar Dishman was an African-American Thoroughbred trainer who was active over four decades.

In the 1970's, Dishman trained several stakes winners, including a horse named Silver Series, winner of the Grade 1 Widener Handicap and whose name is etched on this plaque.

Dishman received this plaque at the first annual Thoroughbred Black Achievement Awards held in Lexington in 1977. A trophy was also presented, and is now part of the collection of the Kentucky Historical Society.

Have you ever won an award? Did you get a ribbon, plaque, or trophy? Were you proud of it?

