

OLIVER LEWIS

(1856-1924)

Oliver, five months past his eighteenth birthday, won the first Kentucky Derby, May 17, 1875. Mounted as a lightweight jockey for H.P. McGrath, an estimated 10,000 race fans witnessed Oliver Lewis ride Aristides over the 1.5 miles track in a record 2 minutes, 37.75 seconds. He was one of thirteen African American and two English jockeys mounted in the race.

Lewis, wearing racing silks of green and orange, rode Aristides, Calvin, Aaron Pennington, and Chesapeake for races in Kentucky, New York, and New Jersey. During the racing season in 1875, he brought his mounts to finish in first and second in eight of nine races. His wins contributed to the \$48,644 collected by H.P. McGrath.



Keeneland Library Collection

OLIVER LEWIS

1875 Racing Record

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| 1st | May 10 - Purse, Kentucky Association, Lexington, KY
May 17 - Kentucky Derby, Churchill Downs, Louisville, KY
May 17 - Mile Dash, Churchill Downs, Louisville, KY
May 18 - Purse, Churchill Downs, Louisville, KY |
| 2nd | May 11 - Mile Heats, Kentucky Association, Lexington, KY
May 22 - Clark Sweepstakes, Churchill Downs, Louisville, KY
June 12 - Belmont Stakes, Elmont, NY
July 12 - Ocean Hotel Stakes, Monmouth Park, NJ |
| Unplaced | June 5 - Wither's Stakes, Jerome Park, NY |

Source: *The American Turf Register and Racing Calendar, 1875*. Keeneland Library

In the months leading up to the 150th Anniversary of this milestone in racing, too many organizations and individuals used the incorrect image – jockey Jimmy Lee. Each error brought to our attention was addressed citing information about Lee, who was born in Louisiana in 1897. The correct image of Oliver Lewis is held at the Keeneland Library, Lexington. Rather than constantly complaint and correct, the more positive solution was to make Oliver Lewis' image more visible.

How?

A t-shirt was designed. The cost of production was funded by African Cemetery No. 2. Everyone who purchased was asked to wear it often but most especially on May 17th.

Old Hillside Bourbon Company bottled 180 "The First Rye'D" whiskey in commemoration and began shipping on May 17th.

"Oliver Lewis Day" was proclaimed on May 17th by Lexington Mayor, Linda Gorton.

A celebration at the Lyric Theatre was held on May 17, 2024, the date of the first KY Derby.

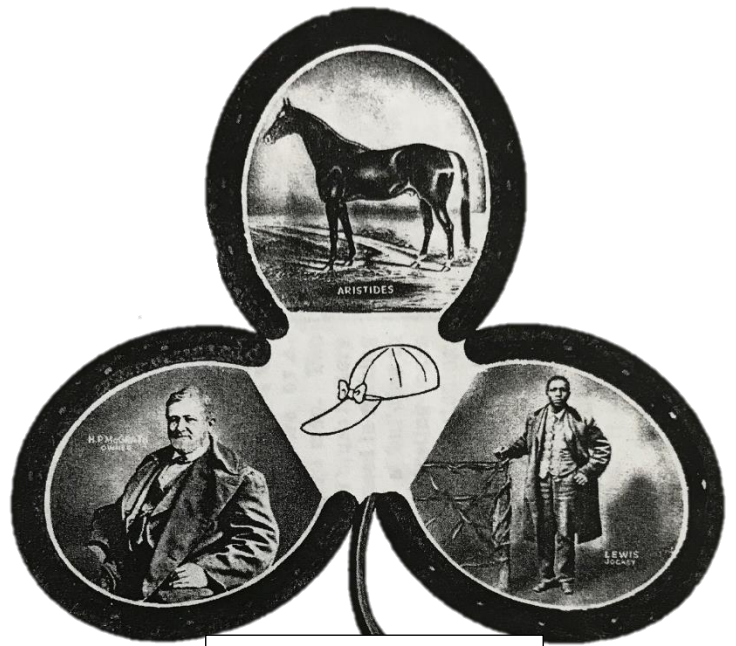
The archive panel in African Cemetery No. 2 was updated. His family monument has been cleaned.

We will continue to research and learn more about Oliver Lewis' career. His experience with horses began before his eighteenth birthday, perhaps at the age of ten.



Restoring and Preserving Our Past
African Cemetery No. 2, Inc.
Chartered 1870
© 2024

McGrathiana Farm residence image courtesy: Y. Giles ©



Keeneland Library Collection

