



# LEXINGTON 1850-1875

Famous thoroughbred stallion bred by Eliza Warfield, "father of Ky. Turf". One of the first major breeders in the area, helped establish the breeding industry in Lexington at Robert Alexander's Ashland Farm. Farm fell victim to Confederate Raiders during Civil War. Lexington was sent to England to escape capture. Over

LEXINGTON SOCIETY KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF HIGHWAYS 2225



# HISTORY *on the* SPOT

## *Markers Pay Tribute to Kentucky's Past*

By Debra Gibson



This famous Thoroughbred won six of his seven starts. The *New York Times* called him “the king of sires” because the bay stallion led the U.S. sire list for 16 years — a record that still holds today. He was so valuable that he was hidden in Illinois during the Civil War to avoid capture during frequent guerilla raids on Kentucky horse farms.

The answer and more about him can be found on an elegant brown-and-gold marker at 301 E. Vine St., near the corner of Vine and Rose in downtown Lexington. The marker is one of more than 2,300 that succinctly describe historical sites, events, and personalities throughout the state.

“On-the-spot history lessons,” the Kentucky Historical Society calls them, and they are part of the Society’s Kentucky Historical Marker Program.

“People driving down the road, who would otherwise have no idea what happened, can stop and read the markers and learn something and maybe do more research on it,” said Becky Riddle, coordinator of the Kentucky Historical Marker Program. “The text on the marker is short; there is just enough information to pique your interest.”

Mary Quinn Ramer of the Lexington Convention and Visitors Bureau helped get a marker honoring the great stallion Lexington erected.



## History of the Horse in Kentucky

The Kentucky Historic Marker program pays particular attention to the Bluegrass and its all-important horse industry with markers for significant horses, jockeys, owners, tracks, and farms.

There is, for example, a marker for Leonatus, the 1883 Kentucky Derby winner who also won 10 stakes races in Kentucky and Illinois within 49 days. His marker, No. 1295, is in Young's Park on Linden Avenue in Harrodsburg.

Edward Dudley Brown (1850-1906) earned marker 2027.

This well-known African-American horse owner, trainer, developer, and jockey was born into slavery in 1850. Raised as a stable boy near Midway, he was nicknamed "Brown Dick" after the record-setting racehorse of that name. "Brown Dick" worked with Kentucky Derby winners Baden-Baden (1877), Ben Brush (1896), and Plaudit (1898). He was inducted into the National Museum of Racing's Hall of Fame on Aug. 8, 1984. His marker is on Main Street in Midway.

Keeneland was recognized with the second marker ever erected. "Here on May 14, 1825, General LaFayette was entertained by Major John Keene, who had served as his aide-de-camp during the Revolutionary War," reads the marker, which sits on Versailles Road not far from the main entrance to the famed track.



DEBRA GIBSON PHOTOS

A marker near the main entrance to Keeneland was the second erected in the state.



Program coordinator Becky Riddle says the historic markers inspire community pride.

Louisville's Bashford Manor, once a nationally known racing stable, was the 2040th marker. Bashford Manor was among Kentucky's top Thoroughbred horse farms until the horses were sold in 1922. Three Kentucky Derby winners — Azra (1892), Manuel (1899), and Sir Huon (1906) — were born there. Two Kentucky Oaks, a Preakness, and a Travers winner were also born on this farm.

There are many, many more, including one honoring Man o' War, the leading money winner of his day, having won 20 of 21 starts. "Big Red" sired 62 stakes winners. War Admiral, a Triple Crown winner, was the most famous of his offspring. Man o' War's marker is fittingly located near his statue at the Kentucky Horse Park.

## History of the State

Horses, however, are not the only focus of the Historical Marker Program. A lot of the markers honor important Kentuckians. Some such as former Gov. A.B. "Happy" Chandler and the 12th U.S. president, Zachary Taylor, are well known. Others such as Laura Clay, a Richmond native and women's rights

## CREATE A MARKER

Do you know about a piece of history that you believe should be commemorated with a marker? The first step is to complete the application process. To find out more, go to [www.history.ky.gov/markers](http://www.history.ky.gov/markers). You can also contact Becky Riddle at (502) 564-1792, ext. 4474 or e-mail her at [becky.riddle@ky.gov](mailto:becky.riddle@ky.gov).



leader, might not be as easily recognizable but still had enormous impact on the state.

Some markers tell aspects of history that might otherwise be forgotten — a duel of honor, a 7-year-old boy who served as a drummer in the Revolutionary War, the 1937 Ohio River flood.

Others highlight important firsts such as moonlight schools that were established to combat illiteracy, an Indian academy, and the first state-supported school for the hearing-impaired in the United States.

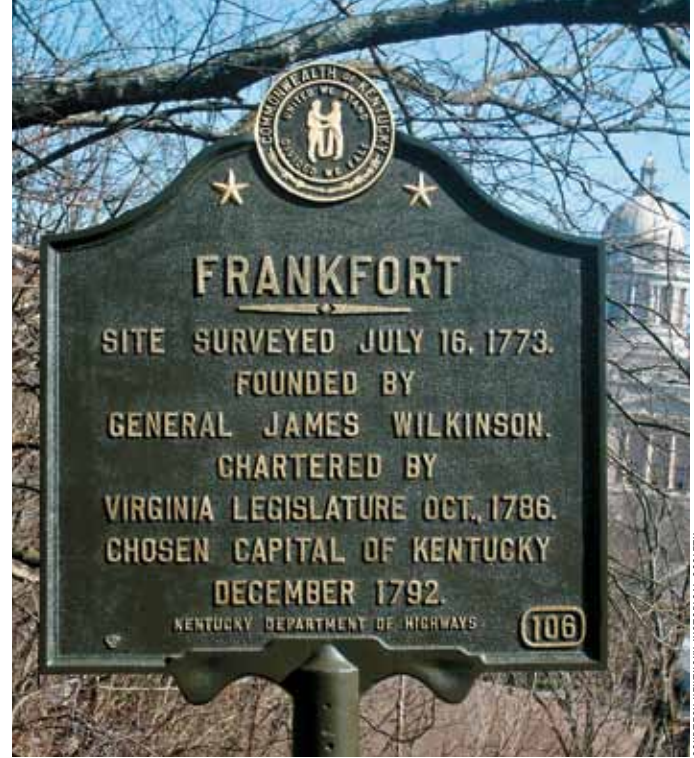
The first marker erected was at Ashland, the Lexington home of prominent attorney and statesman Henry Clay, the “great compromiser” and “Kentucky’s favorite son,” who also happened to own the first syndicated Thoroughbred stallion in America. The most recent — No. 2378 — is at the Tompkinsville National Cemetery in Monroe County, known as “The Old Soldiers Cemetery.”

The breadth of subjects is wide, but the purpose is the same: “to connect events and personalities with their place, to bring the past to life, and to increase the awareness of what we owe to those who came before us.”

### A History of Its Own

The program, operated in conjunction with the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, has an interesting history of its own.

W. A. Wentworth is considered the “father” of the marker program even though he did not start it. An advertising executive with Borden in New York for 27 years, Wentworth came to Kentucky upon his retirement because of his wife, a Frankfort native. When he started with the program in 1962, 80 percent



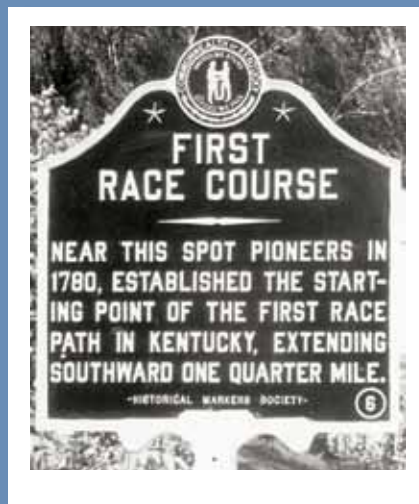
COURTESY KENTUCKY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Markers, such as the one that recognizes the state capital, are numbered.

of the state’s markers were in the Bluegrass area, but under his leadership markers were erected in every county.

Before 1990 the Kentucky Historical Society decided upon the sites, did the research, and paid for the markers. There was no outside involvement. The first 250 markers, such as the one in front of Keeneland, were smaller and one-sided as well.

In the early 1960s the historical society discovered Sewah Studios in Marietta, Ohio, and that company has been creating the larger, two-sided markers ever since. But while the



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Examples of early markers include one for Ashland, home of famed statesman Henry Clay and the first erected in the state.

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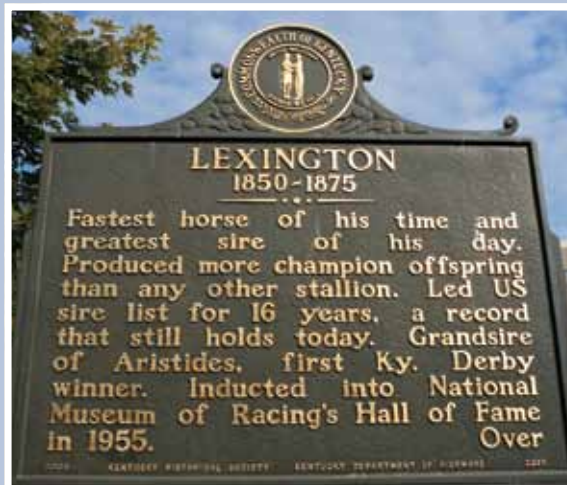


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## THE MAKING OF A MARKER: BEHIND THE SCENES OF LEXINGTON'S MARKER



DEBRA GIBSON

The boisterous conference room — filled with prominent Lexingtonians trying to find an appropriate icon for their city — was suddenly hear-a-pin-drop quiet.

“Wow,” one person said at the fall 2007 meeting. A cascade of wows followed.

The 10 people seated around an elegant conference table were focused on an image projected on the screen in front of them. This was it, they realized. It was just right. It quickly seemed so obvious.

The image — a stately Thoroughbred set in a classic 1900s pastoral setting — would be the new icon for Lexington. A horse, of course, was the perfect logo for the horse capital of the world, and this one even had a contemporary twist: It was recolored University of Kentucky (UK) blue. On top of that, serendipity crept in; the famous Thoroughbred was actually named Lexington.

“Lexington the horse was a superstar of his day,” said Mary Quinn Ramer, vice president of tourism marketing for the Lexington Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB). “Not only was he a great race horse, but he was much of the reason that Central Kentucky became known for horse breeding.”

As members of the CVB dug into Lexington's history, they became even more intrigued.

“When we started our research, we had no idea how important this horse was,” Ramer said, “but he was like the Michael Jordan of horses. The *New York Times* even ran an article on his passing.”

Lexington's important and colorful history needed to be told. Ramer contacted the Kentucky Historical Society in 2009 to find out more about the Kentucky Historical Marker Program.

Like everyone else wanting to have a marker erected, Ramer and her colleagues at the Lexington Convention and Visitors Bureau completed an application, which detailed the history of Lexington and why he should be honored.

Just two months later, on March 17 — Lexington's birthday — the Kentucky Historical Society erected a marker in his honor. Now visitors as well as Lexingtonians can learn more about a horse that helped shape the city with which he shares a name.





appearance of the markers hasn't changed since then, the process of selecting them has.

"We decided to involve the community," Riddle said. "Now people or organizations apply for a marker. They do the research, and a review committee makes sure all the documentation is correct and that nothing can be disputed. The applicants also pay for the marker. This way there is a lot of community pride and ownership in the markers."

A dedication ceremony is often held. Sometimes a handful of people simply gather by the marker to commemorate the occasion. More often, the dedication is a big event with tents and refreshments and speakers.

"Many of the dedications are touching," Riddle said. "There is a marker for Harry Clark Karsner in Monterey near Owenton, for example. After World War II, Harry Clark, as he was known, had an airplane and broadcast sermons from the air. He rigged the plane so people could hear the sermons over the noise of the engine. He also taught a lot of people in Owen County to fly.

"People thought so much of this person that they wanted to mark his flying field. People went by the field all the time but never knew anything happened there. Now they do."

## History in One Touch

Eventually, all the markers will have GPS coordinates to make them easy to locate, according to Riddle.

The Kentucky Historical Society will also be offering an app (application) for smart phones soon. Download the app and uncover pictures, maps, and oral histories involved with the markers. The first 40 will be launched this fall in honor of the Civil War sesquicentennial. Stuart Sanders, administrator of the historical society's professional services branch and a Civil War historian himself, wrote stories to go with the markers. Riddle said eventually, all of the markers will be included in the app program and will be searchable by number, subject, or location.

In the meantime, the historical society's website ([www.history.ky.gov/markers](http://www.history.ky.gov/markers)) provides an easy way to learn about the markers by exploring the searchable marker database. The historical society also published a book, *Roadside History: A Guide to Kentucky Highway Markers* (2002).

But perhaps the best way is to find a marker and enjoy an on-the-spot history lesson. No appointment necessary.

And if you haven't made it to Vine Street yet, the answer to the question about the Thoroughbred racer and "king of sires" is Lexington, the horse credited with making Lexington, the city, the center of horse breeding nationwide. : 🐎

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