

FLYING EBONY
A SPRIG OF THE OLD PENNYRILE

Thomas L. Riley

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The War was over! The Armistice was signed and, with it, the War to End All Wars became history. The mud and the blood, the rat infested trenches and the whining of shells that were the Argonne and Belleau Woods became but memories as jubilant doughboys mounted a victory parade down Fifth Avenue. George M. Cohen's "Over There" was quickly to give way to a catchy tune that had had its beginnings in France--"How You Gonna Keep Em Down on the Farm After They've Seen Paree."

A momentous era had just passed. America had suddenly become an awkward adult. The idealism with which a great president, Woodrow Wilson, led a nation through a devastating war in Europe was now being seriously questioned. The role of world leadership and reforms at home were to be denied to Wilson. The election of 1920 saw a nation rejecting Wilson and his policies, a people grown tired of world responsibilities and crusades, a nation where basic attitudes and outlook had changed, a nation who now felt that the slaughter and privations of the War had accomplished but little. Old values were indeed being questioned. But while the innocence and security of the turn-of-the-century years were gone, the nation had not reached the wisdom and poise of maturity.

Thus did a nation noisily, yet perhaps self-consciously, usher in a new decade--the Roaring 20's. The world had grown smaller--many had seen Paree--and Henry Ford along with Rickenbacker and Lindberg were delighted to help further shrink distances. Freewheeling was perhaps

the mood of the decade in business with Harding and Coolidge following a policy of governmental non-interference. After a few shaky first steps, the nation was to experience the most spectacular economic boom it had ever known. If Americans had experienced disillusionment over foreign policy, domestic politics, and Elmer Gantry evangelism, they had found a new faith based on the almighty dollar. Materialism became the popular religion as a country placed its faith in the supreme importance of automobiles, wicker furniture, radios, gasoline washing machines, and Frigidaires. The gross national product appeared destined to move ever upwards--if everyone wasn't getting rich at least the chances seemed to be getting better every day.

Accompanying the economic boom was a very determined effort to find the long pent-up excitement, seemingly, in whatever manner possible: the tabloids' description of a gory gang murder or a cave rescue effort, a royal visitor, a polar explorer, a movie shiek, it made little difference. Problems and problem solving seemed to find few takers in the 20's. Hip flasks, racoon coats, the Charleston, knee length dresses, speakeasies, ear-level hair bobs, bathtub gin, graft and scandal in government--each seemed to be a part of the fabric--and of the pleasures and frivolity--of the decade. Perhaps as a part of the fantasy and flamboyance--the search for identity either real or vicarious--America became a nation of hero worshipers. The ticker tape parades included such likely and unlikely personages by the hundreds as Lindberg, the Queen of Rumania, Admiral Byrd, and the Prince of Wales.

Nowhere could ready-made heroes be more easily found than in the athletes of the sports world. And idolized they were. And with such

admiring throngs, the sports world came into its own in the decade. To be sure, all major sports had had their beginning years earlier but it was the decade of the 20's that saw a nation produce and/or its sports writers manufacture its sports immortals. What baseball fan--or for that matter what person who had never seen a big league game then or now--couldn't reel off the exploits on field and off of a Babe Ruth, a Rogers Hornsby, Ty Cobb, Tris Speaker, Honus Wagner, Grover Cleveland Alexander, Walter Johnson--and each of you could add others equally well known to the list. This was the decade that produced football's "Galloping Ghost," Red Grange, and for Knute Rockne and Notre Dame a backfield comprised of the Four Horsemen. The greatest prize fight of the decade--perhaps of all time--occurred in a packed Chicago's Soldiers' Field. The principles: the aging challenger, Jack Dempsey and the world champion, Gene Tunney. The decade produced the swimming immortals Johnny Weisemuller and Gertrude Ederle, Bill Tilden and Helen Wills in tennis, Bobby Jones and Glenna Collett in golf, and out in Kansas, Coach Phog Allen was working with a young basketball player named Adolph Rupp. The "sport of Kings," horse racing, saw 1920 ushered in by no less than Man 'O War himself, termed by the decade's premier jockey, Earl Sande, the "greatest horse ever bred for running."

It was Man 'O War, perhaps more than any other horse, that brought fame to Kentucky and to its thoroughbred industry. Tracks across the country and certainly those Kentucky tracks at Latonia, Dade Park, Keeneland and Churchill Downs saw a renewed surge of interest in racing and the

wagering which accompanied the sport. The financial woes of but a few years earlier at Churchill Downs were wiped clean with enthusiastic crowds and Derby Day throngs of 60 and 70,000 fans.

It is with Churchill Downs and the Kentucky Derby and Christian County's connection with the 1925 Derby winner for which a stage has been set. As we approach the 101st running of this classic, it would seem appropriate to look back to the race of 50 years ago. For a group of Kentuckians, it would seem superfluous to stress the importance of a sports event known world-wide, the Kentucky Derby. The event is simply America's greatest horse race. It ranks with the World Series, the Indianapolis 500, the Davis Cup, the Super Bowl, and, for good reason, is often termed "the most exciting two minutes in sports."⁵

To be sure, there are older stakes in America, such as the Preakness and the Belmont, and today there are a number of \$100,000 races. But, the Derby is the oldest continuously run classic and no matter how horsemen may criticise the length, they all want to win this one. "Stardust, riches, and a measure of immortality attend the owners, breeders, trainers, jockeys and grooms connected with a Derby winner. The instant the winning colt-- and only one filly has ever won--flashes under the wire he's usually worth at least \$1,000,000 for stud purposes--and some have been syndicated for four and five times that amount.⁵ Secretariat was syndicated for more than \$6,000,000 even before the question of his fertility was settled.

Perhaps Irvin S. Cobb best summed up the importance of the event; when asked to describe the Kentucky Derby, he replied:

"If I could do that I'd have a larynx of spun silver and the tongue of an annointed angel, but if you can imagine a track that's like a bracelet of molten gold encircling a greensward that's like a patch of emerald velvet...all the pretty girls in the state turning the grandstand into a brocaded terrace of beauty and color such as the hanging gardens of Babylon never equaled...all the assembled sports of the nation going crazy at once down in the paddock...the entire colored population of Louisville and environs with one voice begging some entry to come on and win...and just yonder in the yellow dust the gallant kings and noble queens of the kingdom, the princesses royal, and their heirs apparent to the throne, fighting it out...each a symphony of satin coat and slim legs and panting nostrils...each a vision of courage and heart and speed...each topped as though with some bobbing gay blossoms by a silken-clad jockey... but what's the use? Until you go to Kentucky and with your own eyes behold the Derby, you ain't never been nowheres and you ain't never seen nothin'."7

With the surge of interest in thoroughbred racing, the demand and the price of promising yearlings began to excite a number of Christian County farmers. Perhaps the first to enter the thoroughbred field in the county was Dr. M. W. Williams, a Hopkinsville dentist, owner of Adelbert Stud on the Lafayette Road, at the city limits near the Belt Line. John H. White, at Herbert Stud (on the Bradshaw Road), and Lucian Moseley at River-view Farm soon followed suit. Within the next few years, Roadman Meacham at Sominco Farm. S. P. Moseley, B. P. Eubanks, T. W. Garnett, Cyrus White and Frank Dulin, J. J. Robertson, Cowherd and Altshelter, W. J. Glover, Melvin Kimmerling, Mrs. J. T. Garnett and John Rives all were producing

thoroughbreds for the Saratoga auctions. Local breeders would also sell occasionally at the Arlington Park Auctions, Chicago, a sale of lesser importance than Saratoga.² John Rives, it might be noted, was the owner of the famous Butterbeans, the thoroughbred who made the incredible journey from a race horse to a plow horse and back again to Churchill Downs. But Butterbeans is another story.

Lucian Moseley sold his first yearling at Saratoga in 1919. The colt was owned in partnership with Hal Price Headley of Lexington and was sold for the princely sum--then and now--of \$27,000 to Admiral Grayson, at that time personal physician to President Wilson. Sitting on a bale of hay in the stables following the auction, Moseley felt a hand on his shoulder and a complete stranger admonishing him "Son, don't let it go to your head." Moseley didn't--but there began at that point a life-long friendship between Moseley and B. B. Jones, a railroad clerk who had joined the trek to the newly opened Indian Territory and had made a fortune in oil leases. Riverview Dairy Farm, a tract located at the south city limits overlooking Little River on both sides of the Pembroke Road, came on the market in 1921. With the encouragement and backing of Jones, Moseley purchased the farm, complete with its newly piped in "city water." The acreage extended on the east to include the area where the present Kentucky New Era building and Cherokee Park are located, westward along the River to a point just west of the railroad tracks, thence south to join Forrest White's farm, now the Municipal or Skyline Golf Course.¹⁰ Moseley now entered the thoroughbred business in earnest. Following up his early success, he sold in 1921 a half-brother to Paul Jones, 1920 Kentucky Derby winner, again for the sizable sum of \$13,000.²

Horsemen, then as now, more often than not owned thoroughbred stallions and mares in partnership with others. During the period 1919-1922 Moseley had entered into a number of such partnerships with John P. Madden of Hamburg Place on the Ironworks Pike just out of Lexington.

Our story and that of the Kentucky Derby would not be complete without a reference to John P. Madden, patriarch of Hamburg Place. In 1897, Madden had purchased the two-year old Plaudit from Ed Brown, prominent black trainer of the time, and won the Derby with him the next spring. His next winner was Old Rosebud in 1914 with a track record of 2:03 2/5 which would stand for the next 19 years. Next came Sir Barton, winner in 1919, who went on to win the Preakness and Belmont Stakes thus becoming the first Triple Crown winner. Paul Jones, long shot winner in 1920--and best remembered simply because Man O' War didn't run--followed. Zev, son of The Finn, followed in 1923 and went on to become for many years the leading American turf winner at \$300,000. As will be noted later, Madden was very much involved with the 1925 winner, another son of the mighty Finn.

John P. Madden's first love was to sell horses and Kentuckians regarded him as the nation's best all-around horseman, as a breeder, trainer and owner. Starting in the 1860's in the farm country near Bethlehem, Pennsylvania by trading draft horses, he then moved to road horses and trotters at County Fairs. Eventually he drifted into the thoroughbred industry and the move to Central Kentucky was inevitable. His method was simple: buy cheap, break and train the horse, win a few stake races, then sell. He parlayed his turf winnings on the Wall Street of the 20's leaving an estate of \$9,000,000 in 1929.⁵

According to Mrs. Lucian Moseley, Madden consigned the mare, Princess Mary, to Moseley at Riverview Farm in 1921. The mare had been bred to the Finn, who was standing for the season at Col. Chinn's farm near Lexington. Madden and Moseley, as was frequently the custom, then entered into a partnership arrangement on the foal. After the colt was weaned, Princess Mary was shipped back to Hamburg Place, Lexington. It was at Riverview Farm that the little black colt, Flying Ebony, destined to become the Kentucky Derby winner of 1925, was foaled. With fond hopes and dreams, Moseley watched the colt as he pranced and ran with the other weanlings in Riverview's lush pasture fields.¹⁰

Moseley and other Christian County breeders had been in the practice of sending several carloads of yearlings to the Saratoga Sales which were set in August each year. From the Hopkinsville area it was necessary to leave about a month in advance because of the extreme conditioning and weight loss occurring enroute via train to the up-state New York track and sales arena. Moseley, his Negro trainer, Johnny Sallee, and other area breeders accompanied the prize carloads of young thoroughbreds on the three-day trip. The Moseley yearlings, each penned in narrow stalls in the cars, would take some comfort from the July heat as they nuzzled Johnny who slept on a cot between the stalls.¹⁰

Flying Ebony was in the lot of Moseley yearlings making the trip from Hopkinsville to Saratoga in the late summer of 1923. The colt was sold to Gifford A. Cochran of New York. The sales price of \$21,000 was split between Moseley and Madden.¹⁰ Cochran raced the colt as a two-year old

during the 1924 season. As a two-year old, the colt won four of his eight starts and placed "in the money" on two others.⁷ Coincidentally, one of these was a minor race on the Derby Day card of 1924. Black Gold, the 1924 Derby winner had done the same thing the previous year as a two-year old.⁶ Flying Ebony was becoming known as a "fast track sprinter." As a three-year old, the Cochran colt won three of his five starts including the big one, America's top race, the date: Saturday, May 16, 1925.

A reporter for the "Thoroughbred Record" described Louisville and Derby Day:

"At 7 o'clock in the morning the Churchill Downs gatekeepers were at their several places, while hundreds of early birds, anxious to get in and locate a place from which they might watch the big race were lined up on the outside of the grounds. At 7:30 the gates were opened and from that time there was a steady stream of humanity pressing forward. The majority of those among the early arrivals were from the surrounding towns and farms and most all carried baskets and boxes in which they had brought their picnic lunches to add to the real holiday outing.

At 10:30 the streets of Louisville leading in the direction of Churchill Downs had hundreds of automobiles in a steady stream of slowly moving traffic. Parking space for blocks around the course was at a premium. There were thousands of cars from other towns and some far away states. Even California licenses were noted.

Besides the eight-and-a-half miles of Pullman cars and special trains that brought visitors to Louisville for the Derby and the countless number of visiting automobiles, airplanes entered into the sport on a large scale for the first time.

Nearly 100 fliers landed at Bowman Field, it was estimated by Police Lieutenant Raymond R. Brown. Cots, bedding and cooking equipment were provided for aerial visitors. For the first time radio stations also operated from Churchill Downs by remote control. One was the Louisville station WHAS and the other a Chicago station.

If as recently as ten years ago, any one would have predicted that we would have a field for the landing of visiting airships, and that the result of the Derby would be sent broadcast all over the world by radio, he also would have been scorned and considered a lunatic.

All about the grounds the operators of moving pictures were flitting from post to post. Cameras with telescopic lenses were stationed on the roofs of various buildings, and by tomorrow night thousands of persons will see pictured on the screen the running of the fifty-first Kentucky Derby before the largest crowd that ever witnessed any sporting event in America!"³

The events leading up to the race itself, as described by a Louisville Herald sports reporter had their dramatic moments--

After a day of glorious sunshine, black clouds suddenly gathered in the southwest, threatening a deluge every second. When the officials saw the approach of the impending storm, it was hurriedly decided to post time twenty minutes in an attempt to beat the oncoming downpour. About 2 minutes before the 20 thoroughbreds were lined up for the parade to the post, a brisk shower started falling, driving the thousands of gaily attired spectators forced to stand out in the opening, to the shelter of already packed stands and betting sheds underneath. Then the shower

suddenly ceased, as quickly as it had started, but the instant the parade to the post was finished a terrific downpour cut loose literally soaking thousands to the skin.

Costly wearing apparel lost their grace and colors literally and actually ran riot, while the wearers thoroughly miserable in the face of the pitiless downpour, scampered for shelter, that was nowhere available. Thousands of beautifully gowned women had to stand and face that music of the drenching rain, their fashionable creations drooping and completely ruined and their clothing clinging to their rain soaked bodies as tightly as if they had been thrown into a bathtub of water.

As the rain fell down in sheets the downpour was accompanied by flashes of lightening as vivid as the coloring of the costumes, and rumblings of thunder heavier than the hoofbeats of a thousand flying horses. The horses were called to the post but the women were no longer interested. What they wanted more than anything else was shelter and they began hunting it, abandoning stately grace for speed.²

If the weather was unusual so were nearly all the other events surrounding Flying Ebony's race. A gallant reception was planned for Kentucky Cardinal by Barney Rapp, and his Brown Hotel Orchestra, but the musical programme had to be abandoned because it was feared that the horse, as well as the others in the shipment might become frightened. Rapp and his syncopators ready with their instruments at the Louisville and Nashville railroad loading platform at Third and Central Avenue, and a large crowd was disappointed when it was decided that a silent tribute was best.³

Heavily favored for the race in the very large field of 20, just as he had been ever since the winter nominations, was the son of Omar Khaym, Frederick Johnson's Quatrain who at race time was listed at 1.95 to 1.00. The mutual field, including Flying Ebony and eight other horses, was second at 3.15 for 1.00; Captain Hal was next in demand at 5.60 for 1.00. Had he not been entered in the field entry, Flying Ebony would undoubtedly had odds approaching 100 to 1.⁷

Earl Sande, rider of Madden's 1923 Derby winner, Zev, had been critically injured in a spill at Saratoga in 1924. His thigh bone, broken near the hip, was given little chance of healing sufficiently for him ever to ride again. Remarkably, he did recover in time for the 1925 racing season but was considered by the big owners as "washed up." On the day before the race, Sande had actually gone from stable to stable begging for a mount in the big race. He had attempted to buy from jockey Brunning for \$2,000 the opportunity to ride Quatrain. After failing an opportunity to ride one of the more favored horses, Sande finally persuaded Cochran to let him mount Flying Ebony. As the Louisville Herald noted, "Like Flying Ebony on his mighty mission--the mission of justifying faith of the few who believed in his ability to win."²

And win he did. After a delay of but four minutes at the post, starter Snyder sent them on their way.

Single Foot, Chief Uncas, Needle Gun and Flying Ebony were the first to show in front after the field had gone a hundred yards, but passing the stand Flying Ebony, under Sande's guidance, took command with Captain Hal right on his withers. Son of John was laying in a snug third

position, closely followed by Needle Gun and Single Foot and Step Along. Kentucky Cardinal and Quatrain were running far back with the struggling mass.

Rounding the turn into the back stretch Sande took Flying Ebony back, permitting Captain Hal to assume the leadership. He kept the black colt, however, within striking distance and never let him secure an advantage of more than a length and a half. Son of John was right at the throatlatch of Flying Ebony as they rushed down the back stretch, while Needle Gun and Single Foot were not far back of the leaders. Quatrain and Kentucky Cardinal were still far back among the tailenders struggling hopelessly to get to the front.

At the half-mile pole Captain Hal was a head in front of Flying Ebony while Son of John had dropped back but was still running in third position. Nearing the turn into the home stretch Sande made his move, but Heupel on Captain Hal was driving furiously, still keeping up with the leader.

Turning for home Captain Hal on the inside began to tire and he turned out, forcing Flying Ebony to go wide and making the latter lose ground. Sande went to work with a will and getting Flying Ebony straight he shot him again to the front and applying the whip lightly he drew away from his competitors in the final sixteenth and won by a length and a half to the accompaniment of the hoarse shouts of the multitude. The tiring Captain Hal just lasted to beat Son of John by a nose.

Sande was enthusiastically acclaimed after the race and he and Flying Ebony had to stand for a battery of cameras and motion picture machines.³

Among the hoarse shouts were those from a Christian Countian, Lucian Moseley, who threw his straw hat high in the air with, "How about that from a little country boy from Christian County!"¹⁰

Moseley joined the deleriously happy group in the stables after the race. Congratulations and, it is said more than a little Kentucky Bourbon, were happily passed to all and sundry connected with the little black colt.¹⁰

What then with the principals of our story? Flying Ebony was retired to his owner's farm at Lexington following his three-year season, was later sold in the dispersal sale of the Cochran estate, and moved to California where he died in 1943. Flying Ebony's best son was Flying Heels, an outstanding sire of two-year olds. Among his other sons and daughters were: Dark Secret, Microphone, Ebony Lady and Black Hand.⁷

The Finn, sire of two Derby winners, was purchased by W. R. Coe in 1923 from John Madden at a reported price of \$110,000. He died in 1925 at the age of 13.⁷

Earl Sande retired at the end of the 1925 season to breed and train horses on his own. He was coaxed out of retirement for one more season, 1930, and ended his magnificent racing career on the high note of riding still a third Kentucky Derby winner, Gallant Fox.

Lucian Moseley continued production of thoroughbred yearlings for the Chicago and Saratoga auctions until the late 20's when a new and

immediately popular sales auction opened in Lexington. The grueling three-day journey and the tremendous weight loss thus prevented, Moseley and other Christian County breeders quickly switched to the new auctions. Then, too, the racing crowds were beginning to be somewhat less enthusiastic as the Great Depression took shape. The industry declined sharply during the 30's.

Moseley had sold a portion of Riverview Farm on the east side of the Pembroke Road to the owners of the new invention--Radio Station WFIW. Following the death of the faithful old trainer, Johnny Sallee, Riverview was sold in 1958 to James Haddock.

Lucian Moseley, civic and farm organizational worker, a Kentucky leader in the Thoroughbred industry, a man who, if for only a fleeting moment, had placed Hopkinsville and Christian County on the sports map of the world, died in 1968.¹⁰

In conclusion--and on a high literary note--Moseley's good neighbor, friend of many years, and business associate, John H. White, in the enthusiasm of the moments following the 1925 Derby penned this verse--which was duly printed on the front page of the Kentucky New Era the following Monday:

"He was bred in Old Kentucky
Where the bluegrass doesn't grow,
But the scent of the Pennyroyal
In all the breezes blow.
He was raised on sprouts of Sassafras,
This offspring of the Finn's,
And the people at the Derby yelled:
'Ye Gods! Old Pennyrile wins.'"²

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