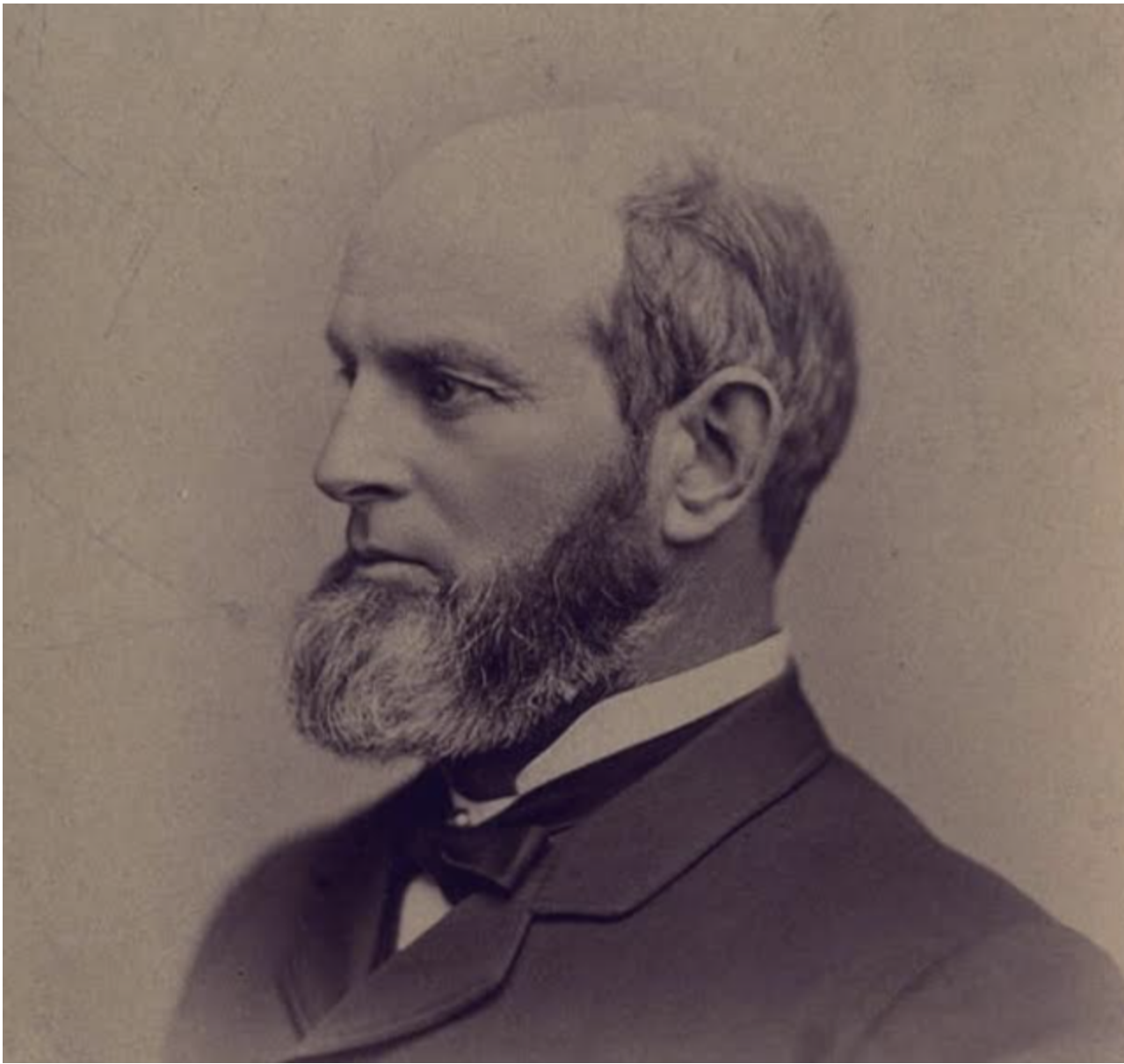




1889 Kentucky Derby Winner Was Bred In Macoupin County

by Tom Emery
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CARLINVILLE - One of the greatest annual events in American sports is the Kentucky Derby, which will be run for the 149th time this Saturday. One past champion was bred in Macoupin County.



This week marks 134 years since the victory of Spokane, who captured the 1889 Kentucky Derby during the infancy of the event. The horse was bred at “The Meadows,” the farm of Gen. Richard Rowett one mile north of Carlinville.

Rowett horses, and their jockey colors of orange jacket and blue cap, were on tracks throughout the west and south. But Spokane was the greatest production of The Meadows, a nationally recognized breeding ground for thoroughbreds.

In 1885, a prized dark brown horse named Hyder Ali was standing at The Meadows when Rowett bred him to one of his top mares, Interpose. This pairing had produced favorable offspring in the past, including Grey Cloud, a fine racer owned by Noah Armstrong of the Doncaster Ranch near Twin Bridges in the Montana Territory.

Armstrong's famous stable included such horses as Lord Raglan, the third-place finisher in the 1883 Kentucky Derby. When Rowett offered Interpose for sale late in 1885, Armstrong, familiar with the high quality of Rowett stock, purchased the pregnant mare and her suckling filly, Madelin, for the price of \$1,000 and shipped the brood to Montana.

The Doncaster Ranch was known for its spectacular, three-story round barn that featured an indoor track. While in Spokane in the Washington Territory on business, Armstrong received word of the birth of Interpose's colt. In honor of the city, he named the colt Spokane.

Spokane showed great promise as a two-year-old, winning two of five starts in 1888, and Armstrong entered him in the 1889 Kentucky Derby. Although a premier race, the Derby had not achieved the monumental status it enjoys today.

The race was run on May 9, 1889—a Thursday—in front of a crowd of 25,000, a fraction of the throngs that fill Churchill Downs today.

Home state favorite Proctor Knott was the overwhelming favorite at 1-to-2, while the relatively unknown Spokane was listed at 10-to-1 odds. That was enough for Frank James, brother of outlaw Jessie and a regular at countless tracks.

James, flush with a windfall of \$2,400 from an earlier race that day, asked a bookmaker of the odds on Spokane. The reply was "Ten-to-one and the sky's the limit." James threw down \$5,000 on Spokane, causing the bookmaker to reply, "As far as I'm concerned, that's the sky!"

Under jockey Thomas Kiley, Spokane edged Proctor Knott by a head, setting a record at 2:34 ½ over the mile-and-a-half layout (it was changed to a mile and a quarter in 1896). He remains the only Kentucky Derby winner ever born in Montana.

Proving the win was no fluke, Spokane again beat Proctor Knott five days later at the Clark Stakes in Louisville. On June 22, Spokane won another key race of the era, the American Derby at Washington Park in Chicago, to become the first horse to win both races in the same season.

Back in Illinois, Rowett did not live to see the triumph of Spokane, as he died on July 13, 1887. His death was covered on page one of the *New York Times* the following day.

In addition to breeding, Rowett is also remembered as the first to introduce the true-bred beagle hound to this country from his native England. Prior to that, he was a Civil War officer and state politician.

The only horse actually born in Illinois to win the Kentucky Derby was the 1970 champion, Dust Commander.

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