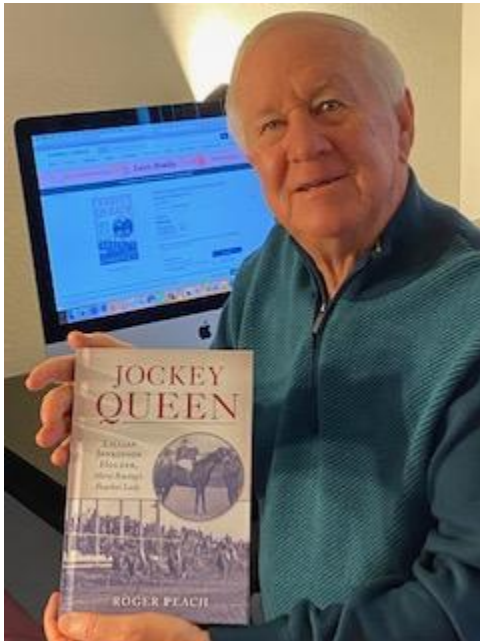


Venice Native Roger Peach Releases Insightful Book On Horse Racing's Lillian Holder

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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VENICE - Former Venice resident Roger Peach has written a book that has sparked interest across the country.

Early Southern Illinois jockey Lillian Jenkinson Holder is the subject of a nationally released biography entitled, *Jockey Queen: Lillian Jenkinson Holder, Horse Racing's Fearless Lady*, written by Peach.

Jockey Queen is the story of a young woman who over decades defied the “sport of kings” unwritten rule that females could not be jockeys. She literally fought for her place in the saddle against those “kings” and was never allowed to compete at recognized, pari-mutuel racetracks in spite of superb professional skills. When jockey Robyn Smith was recognized in 1973 as the first female jockey to win a major Thoroughbred race, Lillian Holder had been two years retired after an estimated 10,000-plus races and more than 3,000 wins.

In 1969, Lillian made national news for the final time when she applied for a jockey license at Cahokia Downs. She was 60 years old. At the time, she was exercising 20 horses a day at Cahokia. Despite passing all physical examinations without any problem, the Cahokia stewards refused issuing a jockey license.

Lillian appealed the denial, and despite House Resolution 205 (May 1969) passed by the Illinois House of Representatives, which supported her being licensed, Cahokia Downs refused to relent. It was her last chance at the license, despite the fact it smacked of illegality based on violations to the Federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 with its stipulations against discrimination of someone solely on the basis of age or sex. Lillian had effectively run out of time to fight further. She went back to racing at the county fairs where a jockey license from a recognized, pari-mutuel racetrack was not necessary to compete.

“Lillian was born and raised on a Holstein dairy farm located a mile north of Monroe, Nebraska,” says Peach. “That’s where she fell in love with horses, which resulted in her racing across the upper Midwest at unregulated racetracks. She raced in a dozen states during her career that officially began in 1926 and ended with injuries sustained in 1971 at the Randolph County Fairgrounds racetrack.

Peach began serious research of Holder’s career in 2016, just prior to his release of *Swamper Tales*, a book about his experiences on the Southern Illinois county fair circuit where he showed dairy and beef cattle. He was 16 when he took his position as a common railbird at the Perry County Fair in Pinckneyville to watch the Thoroughbred races. Keep in mind, it was 1966 and long hair on young men had not taken hold across Southern Illinois, particularly with farm boys.

“I just remember seeing this one particular jockey fighting off competitors on the straightaway, whips out as they charged for the wire,” Peach recalled. “This jockey’s face was so contorted in rage, it was scary. Out the back of the jockey’s headgear, there was all this long hair spewing out, blowing in the speed-generated wind. I asked my companion who the jockey was and my jaw must have dropped when he said, ‘Oh, that’s just Lillian Holder.’ Who heard of such a thing! That certainly explained the long hair.

I never forgot her and all summer long I had many chances to see her race. She was magnificent.”

Fifty-eight years after having first seen Holder race, Peach mentioned what little he heard of her in a *Swamper Tales* chapter. That led to making contact with Holder’s niece Jan Yarberry, who over the next five years pulled back the curtain on a fascinating and wide-ranging story, which included the Jenkinsons’ refusal to participate in rigged races, physical attacks and career damaging allegations forcing Holder to the hinterlands of Thoroughbred horse racing. It’s clear there was never any intent to let Lillian Jenkinson Holder ride against the “boys” in recognized, pari-mutuel races.

“Southern Illinois became her adopted home over the last couple of decades of her racing career. She married Pinckneyville’s Chick Holder and they lived in a house trailer set up next to the fairground horse barns. This was their home base for the better part of 20 years while racing at Little Egypt’s county fairs. They continued to live there even after Lillian’s injuries prevented her from continuing her jockey career.”

Lillian’s attempts to break through the female jockey ban made national news three times, but without success. Lillian’s shoulders, made so strong from handling tons of Holstein milk, were among those that supported other much younger women who would eventually be credited for tearing down the castle walls to the “sport of kings.”

Jockey Queen: Lillian Jenkinson Holder, Horse Racing’s Fearless Lady is published by Rowman & Littlefield of Washington, D.C. It is available nationally through all popular retail booksellers.

Peach grew up in Venice where he attended the town’s public schools. After graduating from Venice High School in 1968, he attended and graduated from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale with a B.S. degree in journalism. Later, he earned a second B. S. degree in English from Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville where he earned Illinois secondary school teaching certification.