



Enduring PRESENCE

Keeneland Provides Sense of Constancy in Changing World

By Louis Guida

In the past eight decades the United States has sent men to the moon and fought several wars. Thirteen presidents have occupied the White House. Civil rights laws have been enacted. Women and minorities cracked glass ceilings. Wealth has been gained, lost, and redistributed. Computers, the Internet, cell phones, and social networks have wired generations. And the culture has gone, depending on your take, who knows where.



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ANNE M. EBERHARDT

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Amid the change and upheaval, in Kentucky at least, Keeneland has been an Old Masters painting. When it opened its gates in 1936, the now world-famed racetrack and auction house (and National Historic Landmark) on Versailles Road in Lexington was instantly traditional. It didn't have to wait for its ivy to grow and sycamores to age. It was just born that way.

Its mortared limestone walls and buildings, landscaped paddock, and manored interiors seem sprung from the roots of at least a half-century of Bluegrass breeding and the farms — McGrathiana, Dixiana, Elmendorf, Idle Hour, Claiborne, Greentree, Coldstream, Calumet, and others — that made the region legend.

Keeneland's founders and first directors — among them Hal Price Headley, Louie A. Beard, and Louis Lee Haggin II — were

old Lexington, and they conceived and created a classic facility that would from the outset be an integral part of Bluegrass social life and culture. Their successors have updated the frame every now and then — new barns and sales facilities, a public address system (with a polite race caller), innovative

Viewing horses in the paddock is a long Keeneland tradition, as are exciting finishes and white parasols.



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ANNIE M. EBERHARDT

Making an Impression

By Sue Wylie

KEENELAND WOVEN INTO THE FABRIC OF MANY LIVES

Keeneland has been part of life and culture in Lexington and the Bluegrass for decades. A first visit to the track during its early years was a rite of passage for many residents, and meets were memorable occasions, especially for those whose families were involved in racing and with Keeneland.



Louis and Betty Boz Haggin (with Darley's Charles Boden)

“The very first time I walked into Keeneland was back in 1955, 56 years ago. I was there to report for work and I wasn't too excited about it. I had just graduated from the University of Kentucky, where I majored in business, and I was planning to go off to the big, glamorous New York City to start some kind of exciting career. I had grown up in little Winchester, Ky., and I wanted big city adventure. So I wasn't interested in the Keeneland job, but Buddy Bishop, who was the track's general manager, wouldn't take no for an answer. I worked there for three-and-a-half wonderful years. Outside of the librarian, I was the only female on the staff. I met my husband, Louis, at Keeneland, and we were married in 1959.”

— Betty Boz Haggin, wife of Louis Lee Haggin III

“I remember my first visit to Keeneland very, very well. I was only 5 or 6 years old and had hardly ever been outside of Paris, Ky., so this was a huge event in my little life. My mother dressed me up in my Sunday best, tiny white gloves and all, and took me along to Keeneland with her cousin, Lizzie Walker. Daddy had a horse running that day. I remember going through the clubhouse to our family box. I was so excited. My eyes were wide open. Everything about the crowd and the track thrilled me. Even at that early age, I loved the horses, and from that day on I loved Keeneland.”

— Claiborne Farm's Dell Hancock, fourth-generation Thoroughbred owner and breeder



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

“Keeneland has been a big, important part of my entire life. My grandfather co-founded it, my father was its second director, and my mother was its unofficial major-domo. The first time I actually got to go to the races was when I was about 10 years old. My mother, who was a stickler for everything being right, picked out my clothes for the day. I was very excited. I remember the clubhouse looking very much like it does today.”

— Louis Lee Haggin III, Keeneland trustee



LEXINGTON HERALD-LEADER PHOTO ARCHIVE

Alma Haggin, Louis' late mother

“For years in the spring and in the fall, Lexington's social life revolved around Keeneland. Of course, the town was much smaller then, and the Thoroughbred industry was much more intimate. Everyone knew everyone. We knew not just the people but the jockeys and the horses, too. We went to the track nearly every day of the meets and got all dressed up to do it. The women wore skirts! Imagine that! And carried gloves! Nowadays, we don't even need a dress-up dress as we used to call them. Those were hectic, heady times. Guests came from all over the nation and from Europe for the races. There were parties galore, brunches before the races, cocktail do's, and dinner after the races. The spring meet even gave birth to the oh-so-grand Lexington Ball. A few of us women in the Thoroughbred industry came up with the idea of a big, glamorous ball as the finale to Blue Grass Stakes day, with the ticket proceeds to go to fighting cancer. Today, the social life is much more low key, but Keeneland is still the reason for lots of fun and entertaining.”

— Jessica Bell, who founded Jonabell Farm with her late husband, John



Jessica Bell, with trainer Ron McAnally and jockey Chris McCarron

“I was probably 7 the first time my parents took me to the races. It was to watch the Blue Grass Stakes race. Back then, it was held on a Thursday, so it was a school day. Imagine how surprised and thrilled I was when my mother said, “You're not going to school tomorrow. I'll write you an excuse. You're going to the races.” But then Mother always did say, “Never let your schooling interfere with your education.” I remember wearing my best Sunday school dress, with little white cotton gloves. I also remember, unfortunately, that I didn't take my gloves off before licking on a big, gooey caramel sucker. Naturally, the gloves were soon gooey caramel, too, and that made shaking hands with my parents' friends very sticky for them.”

— Benny Bell Williams, daughter of Jessica and owner of the Bell Group



KEENELAND / GOADY PHOTOGRAPHY

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technologies, an almost psychedelic Trakus tote board, a synthetic surface to replace a dirt one, a state-of-the-art library — but they've left the original painting intact.

At the heart of it all, there's still the iconic clubhouse, where you can't pay your way in but actually have to be a member to enter. You arrive in an oak-and-leather lobby — Citizen-Kane fireplace, wood-beamed ceiling, deeply cushioned couches and chairs, patterned rugs and draperies, fresh flowers bursting from perfectly placed vases.

After inspection — jacket and tie for men and something not too edgy for women — you ascend to a dining room for a white-tablecloth lunch or to your box outside to watch the races. If you're a lady struggling with the sun (the stands face west and the afternoon sun), an attendant offers you a frilled white parasol. And you're not fazed that you can't see the finish very well because your clubhouse is at the top of the stretch instead of near the first turn, where every other track positions its.

The grandstand, where anyone can pay to enter, is a hair-down version of the clubhouse. No dress code here, but you



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Proper attire has always been *de rigueur* for the clubhouse, whether in the dining rooms or on the lawn, below left.

Clubhouse or grandstand, elite or conservative, you leave at the end of the day with more or less in your purse than when you came.

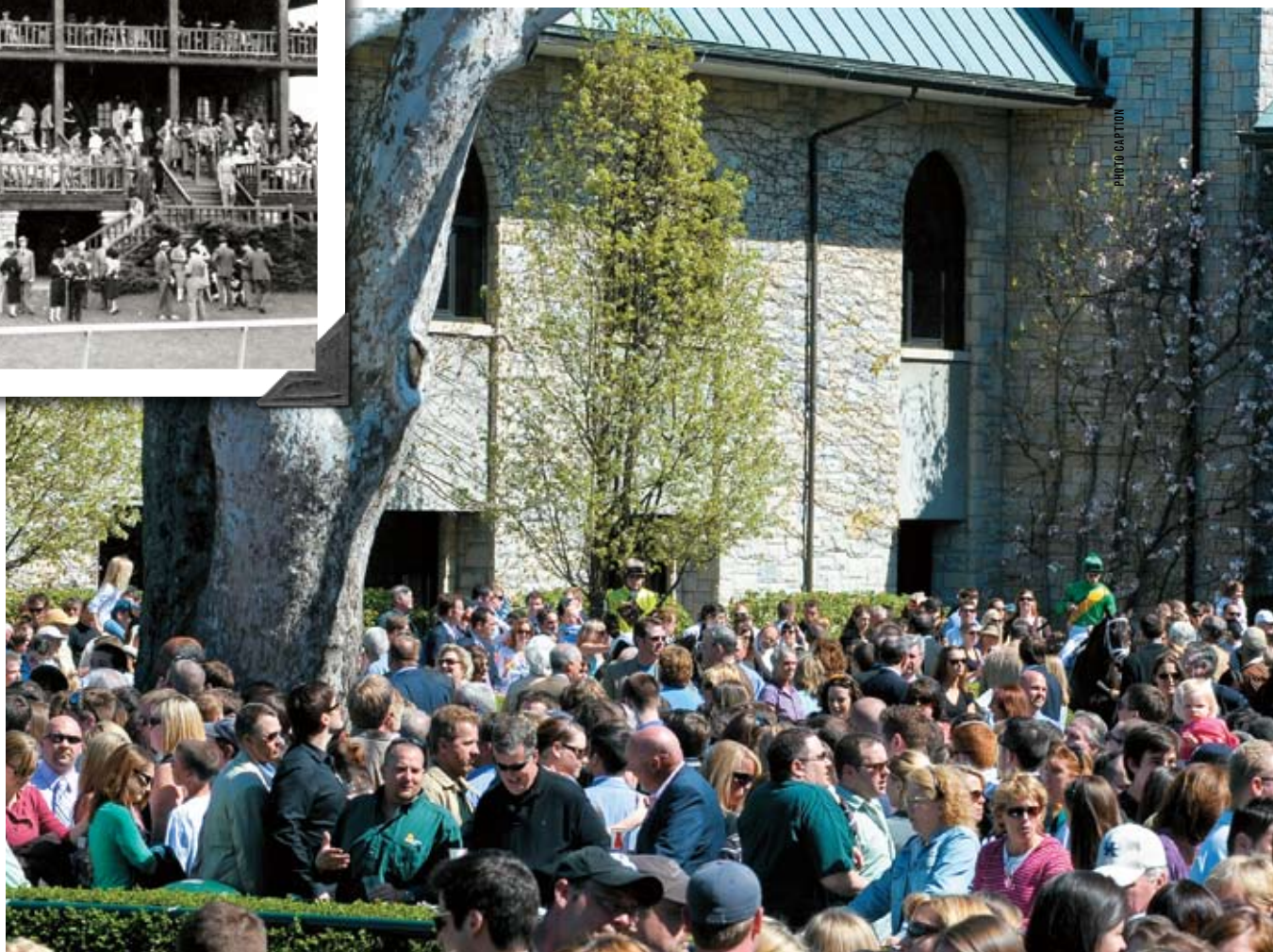
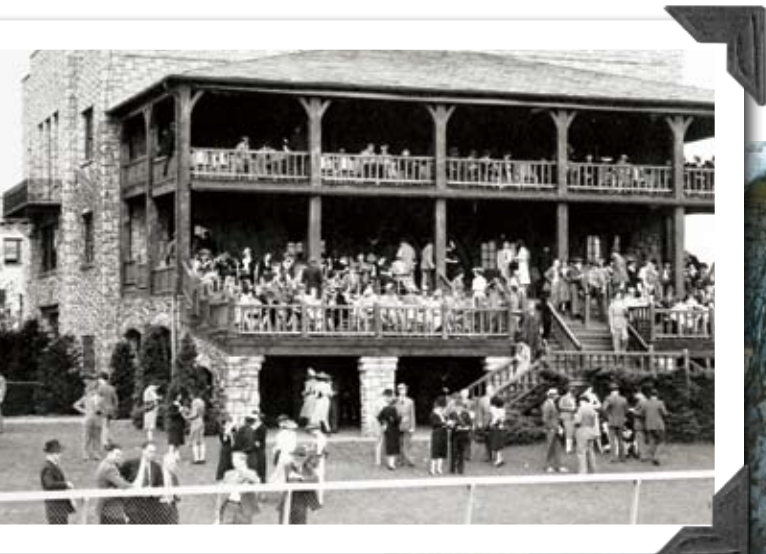


PHOTO CAPTION

quickly lose count of the Lands' End blazers and trendy (often skimpy) frocks in a crowd that seems less motley than scripted for the scene. Even with hot dogs and lite beer — supplied, along with the burgoo, bread pudding, and all the food at Keeneland, by its original concessionaire, Turf Catering — you feel somehow correctly ambient.

Maybe it's what James E. (Ted) Bassett, Keeneland's retired longtime president and board chairman, had in mind when he said being at Keeneland made him feel "a slight touch of elitism." Or what vice president of racing W.B. Rogers Beasley meant when he called Keeneland "selectively conservative."

Clubhouse or grandstand, elite or conservative, you leave at the end of the day with more or less in your purse than when you came. You drive past the cast iron gates — for a cocktail party a l'ancienne or a country-inn dinner or fast-food take-out and a flat-screen TV. And you can imagine, before the first traffic light stops you, you've been part of a Jeffersonian gathering of fair-minded citizens watching horses run in a pastoral setting once upon a time when racing was the sport of kings. 🐎

No matter where they sit or stand, Keeneland racegoers share a love of the horse.



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

OCTOBER 1936

A Month to Remember

In 1936 the Great Depression lingered in the United States, with unemployment nearly 17 percent. In Europe, Hitler intensified the aggressions that would lead to world war three years later.

Amid the world's uncertainty, construction crews and their mule teams hurried to complete the grandstand and track surface at a new race-track in Lexington, Ky. Keeneland Race Course would open Oct. 15, 1936. During the month of October, these events also took place:

- ▶ The New York Yankees beat the New York Giants to win all six games of the World Series; in one game the Yankees scored a record 18 runs.
- ▶ Generalissimo Francisco Franco established the state of Spain, where civil war had broken out that July.
- ▶ John Heisman, the American football coach, died.
- ▶ Hitler and Mussolini signed the treaty creating the Rome-Berlin Axis.
- ▶ Hoover Dam began transmitting electricity to Los Angeles.
- ▶ The first commercial flight from the mainland to Hawaii was completed.
- ▶ "Professor Quiz," the first radio quiz show, premiered.
- ▶ President Roosevelt rededicated the Statue of Liberty on its 50th anniversary.
- ▶ Wallis Simpson was granted her decree nisi from her husband, allowing her eventually to marry England's King Edward VIII, who abdicated that December.

The Price of Essentials in 1936:

- ▶ Average cost of new house: \$3,925
- ▶ Average annual wages: \$1,713
- ▶ Loaf of bread: 8 cents
- ▶ Cost of a gallon of gas: 10 cents
- ▶ Studebaker car: \$665



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