

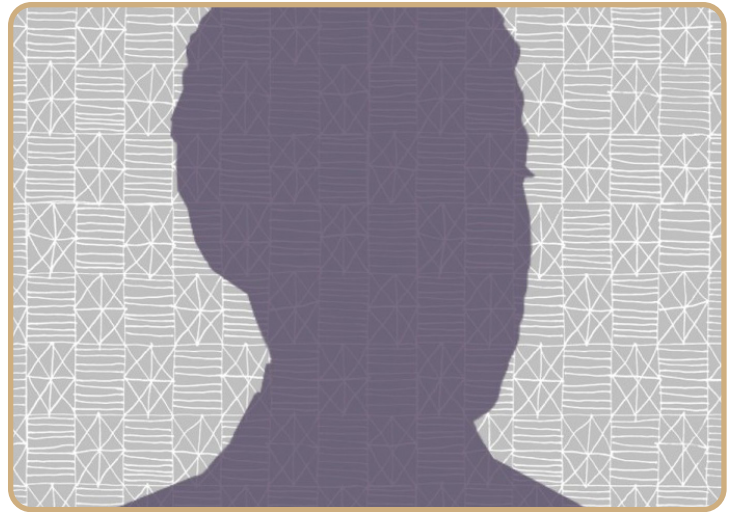
Ansel Williamson

Author: Emily Libecap,
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Places: Virginia; Alabama; New Orleans,
Louisiana; Saratoga, New York; Lexington,
Kentucky

Birth: circa 1810 **Death:** June 18, 1881

Professions: Trainer



Childhood and Family

Ansel Williamson was born into enslavement in Virginia around 1810. He married his wife Ellen on October 29, 1870, and they had a daughter and grandchildren. His grandsons worked with Thoroughbreds in New York, New Jersey, and Kentucky.¹

Early Career While Enslaved

The earliest record of Williamson's career is in the 1850s while enslaved by T. G. Goldsby in Alabama. His work with horses likely began much earlier. Williamson trained Goldsby's winning race horses for three-mile heats. He conditioned famous horses such as Brown Dick. Goldsby sold Williamson to A. Keene Richards. Williamson trained his horses Australian and Glycera.²

While working for Richards, Williamson chose Abe Hawkins, an African American jockey, to ride in races in New Orleans at the Metairie track.³

Williamson, Asteroid, and Edward Dudley Brown

In 1864, Richards sold Williamson to Robert Alexander, a wealthy Thoroughbred breeder and owner. Alexander admired Williamson's expertise, and even named a horse after him in 1856.⁴

While working for Alexander, Williamson trained the horse Asteroid. He mentored the young African American jockey Edward Dudley Brown. Brown and Williamson became a successful pair who dominated racing after the Civil War.⁵ The artist Edward Troye created a painting of them with Asteroid.

Civil War

During the Civil War, Confederate soldiers stole horses throughout Union territory, including Kentucky. When raiders arrived at the farm of Robert Alexander, they encountered Williamson. At that time, he worked as Alexander's trainer and stable manager. Soldiers pressured Williamson to hand over the famous horse Asteroid. But he substituted a different horse, and Asteroid remained safe.⁶

Career Wins

Williamson stayed on as Alexander's employee after emancipation in 1865. He later worked for H. P. McGrath, and trained the horse Aristides. Oliver Lewis, an African American jockey, rode Aristides and won the first Kentucky Derby in 1875.

Legacy

Ansel Williamson passed away June 18, 1881, in Lexington.⁷ Memory of his life and career lives on in the present day. In 1998, the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame inducted Williamson.⁸ In 2011, a highway marker dedicated to the horse Aristides was installed at the University of Kentucky's Coldstream Research Campus. This is the site of the former McGrathiana farm where Williamson trained. Though Williamson was not the main subject of the marker, it stands as a partial tribute to his successful legacy.⁹

Sources

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Footnotes

¹"1900 United States Federal Census."; "1910a United States Federal Census."; "1910b United States Federal Census."

²Ansel Williamson."

³Mooney, Race Horse Men, 138.

⁴Mooney, 164.

⁵Mooney, 165.

⁶Mooney, 129.

⁷Lexington Daily Transcript, June 20, 1881; Kentucky Live Stock Record, June 25, 1881.

⁸Ansel Williamson."

⁹New Historical Marker to Be Unveiled at Coldstream."