

# Isaac E. Lewis

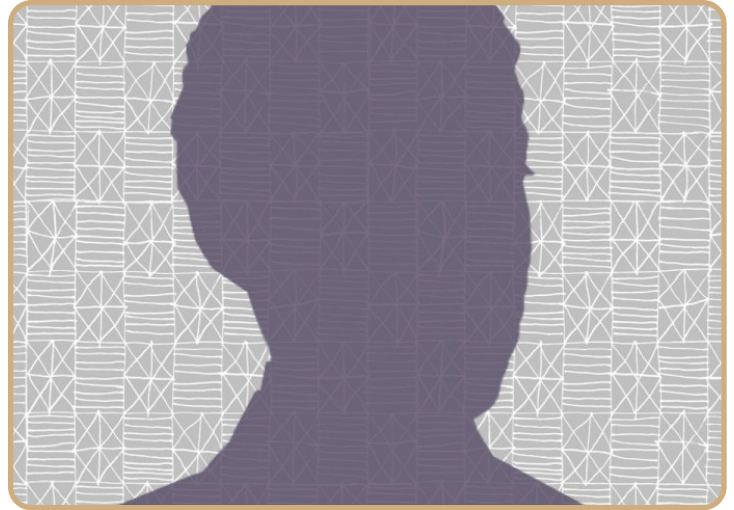
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**Places:** Bourbon County, Kentucky;  
Chicago, Illinois

**Birth:** November 1867

**Death:** March 10, 1919

**Professions:** Jockey, Groom



## Childhood and Family

Isaac E. Lewis was born in 1867 on a horse farm in Hutchison Station, Kentucky to parents Henry and Mary Lewis. He was one of eight children. His siblings were Mary, Martha, Garrett (who was also a jockey), Sallie, Oscar, Lutita, and Martin. Lewis and Parthin Summers were parents of a son, Charles, born in 1892.<sup>2</sup> The 1880 census lists Isaac Lewis and his brother Garrett as employed in horse-related occupations. Lewis began riding at eleven years old under the trainer Byron McClelland.<sup>3</sup>

## Career Highlights

As a jockey, Lewis had an impressive record. From 1881 to 1891, he won the following significant races:

- The Phoenix Stakes, 1886
- The Hotel Stakes, circa 1892
- The Phoenix Stakes, 1888
- The Great Western Hotel Stakes, 1888
- The Pansy Stakes, 1890
- Hyde Park Stakes, 1891
- Saratoga Cup Stakes, 1891<sup>4</sup>

Lewis was still riding in Chicago in 1895.<sup>5</sup>

## The Kentucky Derby

Lewis is best known for winning the 1887 Kentucky Derby aboard the horse Montrose, owned by Alexander and Isaac Labold. He raced in a total of four consecutive Derby races from 1886-1889. He rode the following horses and finished in these places:

- 1886: Grimaldi, sixth place
- 1887: Montrose, first place
- 1888: The Chevalier, fifth place
- 1889: Sportsman, sixth place

Throughout his career, he was known for his fearlessness and for his ability to break out of the starting gate quickly and maintain a solid lead.<sup>6</sup>

## Winners' Circle

Lewis' social life mingled with other Kentucky Derby winners. He was the best man at Anthony Hamilton's wedding in St. Louis in 1891.<sup>7</sup> He was also a guest at a formal party that Isaac Burns Murphy gave for the Hamiltons when they visited Lexington over their honeymoon.<sup>8</sup>

## Post Racing Career

By 1900, Lewis had retired as a jockey and became a groom for the J. B. Respass stable of Covington, KY. Lewis lived in Chicago, Illinois in Harlem Village, where many African American jockeys, grooms, cooks, trainers, and other racetrack employees lived.<sup>9</sup>

By 1910, Lewis was still living in Chicago but had completely left the horse industry. Instead, he owned and managed a Turkish bathhouse. Turkish baths were a popular gathering place for jockeys trying to lose weight, and a social ritual during those times.<sup>10</sup>

Lewis still visited Kentucky to see his family and gave his opinion of the Kentucky Association track during his visit in 1914. According to the Lexington Leader, "When he first arrived at the Association track today he could hardly believe his eyes, so many changes have been made."<sup>11</sup>

Lewis returned to Kentucky the next year to attend the funeral service of his 23-year old son, Charles.

## Death and Legacy

Lewis passed away in Chicago on March 10, 1919 and was buried in the Lincoln Cemetery, located in Alsip, Cook County, Illinois. He was fifty-two years old.<sup>12</sup>

Additional Research Provided By

Yvonne Giles and Katherine Mooney, Research Consultants

## Sources

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- "Kentucky Death Certificate #6456, Charles Lewis." 1915.
- Lexington Leader. 1891. "Isaac Lewis Instead of Isaac Murphy," January 14, 1891.
- . 1892. "New Club: Colored Jockeys Quartered in Lexington This Winter," January 19, 1892.
- . 1914. "Crack Racers Are Ready for Meeting," September 4, 1914.
- . 1915. "Charles Lewis, Son of Jockey Isaac Lewis, Died," March 1, 1915.
- . 1919. "Sallie Smith, Sister of Isaac Lewis to Attend Service," March 17, 1919.
- Lexington Transcript. 1891. "Grand Reception Given by Isaac Murphy and Wife, to Anthony Hamilton and Bride," January 25, 1891.
- Rees, Jennie. 2015. "Derby Countdown, Montrose, 1887." The Courier-Journal, April 24, 2015. <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/sports/horses/triple/derby/2015/04/24/countdown-kentucky-derby-montrose/26304727/>.
- Spirit of the Times. 1895. "Western Racing," June 15, 1895.

## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup>"1870 United States Federal Census."
- <sup>2</sup>"Death Certificate." No record of their marriage has been found. They were listed as parents on Charles Lewis' death certificate.
- <sup>3</sup>"1880 United States Federal Census."
- <sup>4</sup>Goodwin Brothers Firm, Goodwin's Official Annual Turf Guide, pts. 1884, 1885, 1889, 1890.
- <sup>5</sup>"Western Racing."
- <sup>6</sup>"African Americans in the Derby."
- <sup>7</sup>"Isaac Lewis Instead of Isaac Murphy."
- <sup>8</sup>"Grand Reception Given by Isaac Murphy and Wife, to Anthony Hamilton and Bride."
- <sup>9</sup>"1900 United States Federal Census."
- <sup>10</sup>"1910 United States Federal Census."
- <sup>11</sup>"Crack Racers Are Ready for Meeting." Lewis may have made other visits over the years; his parents and sister Sallie and her family had moved to Lexington by 1900.
- <sup>12</sup>"Sallie Smith, Sister of Isaac Lewis to Attend Service."