

John Henry Buckner

Author: Sharon McGee,
Research Consultant

Places: Lexington, Fayette County,
Kentucky

Birth: January 3, 1866

Death: January 7, 1947

Professions: Groom



Childhood and Family

John Henry Buckner, affectionately called “Buck,” was born in Lexington, Kentucky to Rebecca Hamilton and Nathaniel Buckner.¹ Buckner had eleven brothers and sisters.²

In the late 1800’s, his mother’s father, Calvin Hamilton, and Primus Keene purchased twenty-three acres of land. They sold small plots to freedmen and freedwomen, leading to the creation of the community Briar Hill which later became New Zion.³ Descendants of Buckner’s family still live there.

In September of 1892, Buckner married Mary Burley.⁴ Their son, William Henry Buckner, also worked as a groom.⁵ In the spring of 1922, Buckner married once again.⁶ Seven years later, his wife, Lillian Palmer, passed away.⁷

Career as the Groom of Famous Horses

Although decades of census data show Buckner employed in various equine occupations, he worked as a groom for much of his life.⁸ The typical job of a groom is to take care of the horses. Buckner’s career started when he was very young. He attended the first Kentucky Derby race in 1875 as a young boy. During the race, he was busy helping with Bill Bruce, a Thoroughbred owned by Samuel J. Salyers.⁹ Salyer’s house, built in 1866, still stands on the Kentucky Horse Park grounds.¹⁰

Buckner next worked at Colonel Milton Young’s McGrathiana Farm in Lexington.¹¹ Young’s prize horse, Favor, permanently crippled Buckner’s hand when he was holding the horse’s jaw to be bridled. Buckner was known to be able to rattle off the names of all of the horses that he knew, but he never mentioned Favor.¹²

Buckner began caring for Domino and other famous horses at James R. Keene’s Castleton farm in Lexington.¹³ Foxhall Daingerfield was the farm manager. His daughter, Elizabeth, trained under him. After her father’s death and Keene’s death in 1913, Elizabeth took over

the management of the farm.¹⁴ She retained Buckner as stud groom.

Buckner was responsible for Man o' War from 1921 to 1930 at both Hinata and Faraway Farm.¹⁵ Within the first year, many visitors flocked to see Man o' War. A guest book log was started by John Buckner, based on an inscription he made in an early volume.¹⁶ During Buckner's tenure, Man o' War sired sixty-two multi-stakes winners in flat racing and in steeplechase.¹⁷ When Daingerfield resigned as Faraway Farm manager, Buckner stayed for a while to transition the Thoroughbred's care to his second groom, Will Harbut.¹⁸

According to the 1947 issue of the Lexington Leader, Buckner also worked for Colonel Phil T. Chinn.¹⁹

Legacy and death

Buckner's legacy is that he is an African American that played a major role in the horse industry. He contributed his expertise to the breeding of some of the best horses in the world, such as Domino, Man o' War, Ben Brush, Kingston, and Disguise.²⁰ Many were stakes winners and several Hall of Fame horses, including Peter Pan and Masquette.²¹

In an August 30, 1941 letter to the editor of the Thoroughbred Record, Elizabeth Daingerfield clearly stated that during her time as a manager of Man o' War's stud career, John Buckner was probably the best known and certainly the most satisfactory stud groom in Kentucky.²² John Henry Buckner died in January of 1947.

Sources

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Footnotes

¹Niles; "U.S. Social Security Index and Claims Index, 1936 - 2007" (John Henry Buckner)

²1920 United States Federal Census (Fred Smith)

³Patrick

⁴Marriage Record (September 29, 1892)

⁵U.S., Death Records, 1852-1965 (William Henry Buckner)

⁶Marriage Record (May 2, 1922)

⁷U.S., Death Records, 1852-1965 (Lillian Palmer Buckner)

⁸U.S., Death Records, 1852-1965 (John Henry Buckner)

⁹Niles (Courier Journal)

¹⁰Baker

¹¹Talbott (Coldstream Farm)

¹²Niles (Courier Journal)

¹³Niles (Courier Journal)

¹⁴Lexington Herald Anniversary Edition

¹⁵"Man o' War with John Buckner," (Keeneland)

¹⁶Ours

¹⁷The Blood Horse

¹⁸Ours

¹⁹Lexington Leader, "Colored Notes"

²⁰Niles (Courier Journal)

²¹Lexington Herald. Anniversary Edition

²²Thoroughbred Record