

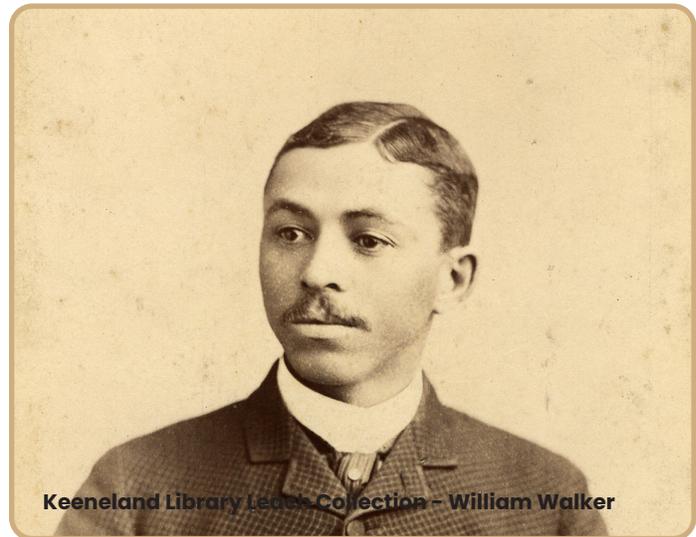
William Walker, Sr.

Author: Emily Libecap,
Graduate Student Intern

Places: Woodford County, Kentucky;
Louisville, Kentucky

Birth: 1860 **Death:** September 20, 1933

Professions: Jockey, Trainer, Breeding
Consultant



Childhood and Family

William "Billy" Walker was born into enslavement in 1860 at the Bosque Bonita Farm in Woodford County, Kentucky. Researchers are seeking more information about his parents in archive records. William Walker married Hannah Estill at the home of Isaac and Lucy Murphy in June 1891. They were parents of two children, William, Jr. and Sadie.²

Early Career

Walker began working with horses at an early age and rode in his first race at eleven years old at Jerome Park. At thirteen years old, Walker won his first race aboard the horse Astral during the 1873 Lexington fall meet.³

Jockey Career: Early Kentucky Derbies

Walker rode in the very first Kentucky Derby, held in 1875. Walker took fourth place aboard the horse Bob Wooley. The next year, Walker rode the horse Bombay and again took fourth place.

Walker won the 1877 Kentucky Derby aboard Baden-Baden by a two-length victory. Edward Dudley Brown, another successful African American in the Thoroughbred racing industry, trained Baden-Baden.⁴

Walker rode for the fourth and final time in the 1896 Kentucky Derby, and placed seventh on the horse The Winner.

Other Career Highlights

Walker had many other victories besides the Kentucky Derby. In 1875, he won the following races with the horse King Alfonso:

- Tobacco Stakes
- Galt House Stakes
- St. Leger Stakes

Walker rode Himyar and Ten Broeck in nearly all these horses' major races.⁵ In 1878, Walker rode Ten Broeck in a famous match against the horse Mollie McCarthy and won. This race between two rivals was so notorious that the folk song "Molly and Tenbrooks" memorialized it.⁶

Training Career

After retiring from his career as a jockey in 1896, Walker became a trainer for Jake Greenburg of Louisville and breeding advisor to John Madden.⁷ A newspaper described Walker as "one of the keenest judges of horseflesh in this state."⁸

Walker trained the horse Round the World, the favorite for the 1911 Kentucky Derby. In 1917, he brought fourteen yearling horses to race at Churchill Downs with moderate success.⁹

Legacy

Walker faithfully attended every Kentucky Derby until his death in 1933.¹⁰ He was buried in the Louisville Cemetery but his grave did not receive a headstone. Prior to the 1996 Kentucky Derby, Churchill Downs worked with Muldoon Memorials to place a granite headstone there to commemorate Walker and his career.¹¹

The Louisville and Jefferson County African American Heritage Committee, Inc. created a highway marker, also placed at the Louisville Cemetery. It describes Walker's life and achievements.¹²

In 2015, a new race at Churchill Downs was created in his honor to replace the Derby Trial. The race, entitled the \$100,000 William Walker Stakes, is a six furlong race open to three-year-olds. It kicks off Derby Week.¹³

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Footnotes

¹"Colored Marriage Book.," "Colored Social Events."

²Twelfth Federal Census, 1900 Jefferson County, Kentucky."

³Rode in the First Kentucky Derby."

⁴Project, "William S. Walker, Jock of All Trades."

⁵"Rode in the First Kentucky Derby."

⁶Rosenberg, Bluegrass, 84.

⁷Turf Gossip: Walker to Train for Jake Greenburg."

⁸Young Horses in W. Walkers Care."

⁹Jockeys Whose Skill Played Part in Kentucky Derbys of the Past."

¹⁰"Billy Walker At The Derby.," Rogers, "Derby Trial Renamed Pat Day Mile."

¹¹"Grave Unmarked No More: Racing Great William Walker Finally Gets a Fitting Memorial."

¹²Appleton Jr. and Hay, Roadside History, 253.

¹³Rogers, "Derby Trial Renamed Pat Day Mile."