

WHIPPOORWILL E-COMMENT

May, 2004

Number 15

The Kentucky Derby

THIS is a short report on the annual Kentucky circus. Kentucky doesn't have very much going for it — ranking as it does near the bottom of most important national rankings — 48th or so in education, economically depressed — virtually no industry, and high unemployment. It is a beautiful state however, blessed with forests and mountains and gently rolling verdant country. But the people can't eat sunshine. College graduates usually beat rapid paths to other, neighboring states for much better paying jobs than are available here, as do physicians and professors. State government is a great joke. The legislature met for two months and spent so much time on trivia — on debate about gay marriage and whether motorized bike riders should be required to wear helmets, and whether a smoking ban should be legalized in Lexington restaurants, that they failed to agree on a budget for the next four years. But they could find time to discuss and decide on designating a state fossil — the trilobite. It is very depressing. The major exports are poisons — tobacco and alcohol. There is a score of major distilleries within a dozen miles of Frankfort, the capital city, where I live. About all we have to brag about are our imported college basketball teams and the Kentucky Derby.

The state puts on its best appearance for the Derby, traditionally run on the first Saturday in May. Weeds and grass are cut along the interstate between Louisville and Frankfort only once a year, and litter is cleaned up and even yellow lines marking the curbs in town are given a fresh coat of paint. Frankfort looks great at the moment, the race having been run on Saturday. It is a time for all-night parties thrown by the horse farm millionaires who try to outdo one another with lavish affairs, and see if they can invite more

Hollywood celebrities than their friends. It is an excuse to dress up in outlandish clothes, wear big hats, and drink mint juleps and be seen cavorting in front of TV camera lenses. I'm glad that they have the Derby. It is the culmination of a week of revelry. The race is almost anticlimactic. Most of the people who crowd into Churchill Downs in Louisville never get a glimpse of a horse, so great is the size of the milling crowd in the infield. One watching the race on TV sees it much better than most anyone attending — even those in air-conditioned, bourbon-supplied luxury boxes.

The names of the competing horses are not announced until a few days before the race, so very few people know the competitors. I'll wager that if someone took the identifying stable colors off the horses, not one in a million Kentuckians could distinguish one horse from another. And racehorses are treated better than people here.

This year's Derby was run in rain and mud, which seemed to do little to diminish the fervor of the festivities. I thought the name of the winner was cute — *Smarty Jones*. Racehorses always have more interesting names than their jockeys. Don't get me wrong — I do like horses; if they are cooked properly, they are delicious — a bit sweeter than buffalo and considerably less stringy than bear.



An advantage of an e-journal, as I pointed out in my last paper, is that I can write about topical subjects. If I had written this article and set it in type and printed it, months would still pass before it could be in the bundle and in the hands of the members.

This is the work (?) of J. Hill Hamon, sometime printer, who lives in the wilds of a most interesting, sometimes irritating state. Of all of the places I have lived, especially during many moves while in the Navy, this is the only place that truly feels like home — warts and all. Frankfort is, like many cities, expanding, and soon, unlike Fred Liddle, I will no longer be able to go toward town to hunt. Join in the fun and print your own e-journal. — 1515 Evergreen Road, Frankfort, Ky. KyHamon@AOL.COM.