



## A LOOK BACK





## TODAY'S LOUISVILLE BEATS TO THE

pulse of modernity and shines with the gleam of success. The city's sights and sounds include dramatic architectural and technological achievements and a stunning array of cultural and artistic presentations and venues.

Yet, the memories of one middle-aged man when asked about his thoughts on Louisville also describe much about the city. He remembered the summers of his childhood.

"Green," he said. "Green grass, and the pounding of horses hooves at the Downs." He remembered his grandfather taking him to the races and he recalled "all those ladies in big hats." He spoke about the people standing in waves and cheering as the horses rounded the track. "I was too small to see," he said. "I remember my grandfather lifting me up, and shouting, 'the horse, look at the horse!'"

Looking back into memory, he added, "And there were the trains, with whistles sounding throughout the big, blue sky." His recollection of the green grass, horses thundering and train whistles blowing captures a part of Louisville's mystery and mystique so well it seems like the scene could be the beginning of a motion picture.



The camera would pan down from that royal blue sky, across the green grass to the trademark spires of Churchill Downs. The crowd would be readying for the race. As nattily dressed gentlemen and lovely ladies sip mint juleps and discuss their wagers, a train's whistle echoes enticingly.

Riding on the whistle, the camera would leave the Derby and travel to a warehouse where huge rolls of tobacco stand around the room. Two men, their sleeves rolled up and hats cocked back, smoke cigarettes and drink straight bourbon as they argue.

Depending upon the story, their argument might be about some nefarious gambling operation or about an attempt to influence politics in Frankfort or Washington. It might be over a couple of bucks or millions of dollars.

It might be nothing more than a heated discussion about basketball rivals University of Louisville and University of Kentucky. Or, they might be trying to best each other with stories of their children's achievements. One of the men could be boasting to the other about his daughter's success in the Louisville Symphony, or Ballet, and the other countering about his son's performance at the Actors Theater.

Their quarrel could be about memories of life in Old Louisville some decades ago, when the area was known as one in decline, but they, as children, lived a relatively carefree life of interest and adventure. They might be debating the merits of one of the neighborhood soda fountains, which were frequented by everyone, and where children sipping cherry phosphates often sat next to working men quaffing a Fall Cities beer.

Numerous elements intertwine in this city's history. Many stories have been lived and told in its barrooms and boardrooms, at its racetracks and schools, in its tobacco fields and distilleries. Yet, beneath it all, and above it all, the simple and graceful pattern of life epitomized in a memory of green grass, the pounding of horses hooves and the wail of a train's whistle frames the sometimes ordinary, sometimes amazing tale of Louisville, a legendary American City.

The American South is iconic, epic and extraordinary. The North won the war, but the South conquered the popular imagination. Mention the South to people almost anywhere on the globe, and they will conjure up romantic imaginings. *[continued on page 16]*



(Opposite page) In 2000, Kentucky-bred *Fusaichi Pegasus*  
became the first Japanese-owned winner of the Kentucky Derby.

*Churchill Downs*

(Top) 4th Street Live! is an entertainment complex in downtown Louisville.

(Bottom) Louisville at night  
2005 photos by *Lars Lawson*





The clubhouse gardens at Churchill Downs c. 1920s  
*Kentucky Historical Society*



Sampling tobacco, c. 1920  
*Kentucky Historical Society*