

HORSE RACING CULTURE CANE RIVER COMMUNITY



Go Tag Jr.
M. BONNETTE up- 350 yds
OWNER & TRAINER
2nd. VANDA BA

CLARENCE, LA. 7/14/68
SECTION #5

CLARENCE
DOWNS
Clarence
La



"The first picture I've got,
I'm about a year old on a horse."

-Michael Bonnete, Cane River Jockey

Cover Images: (Top) Finish line photo - Michael Bonnette (Bottom) Horse race award reception - Michael Bonnette

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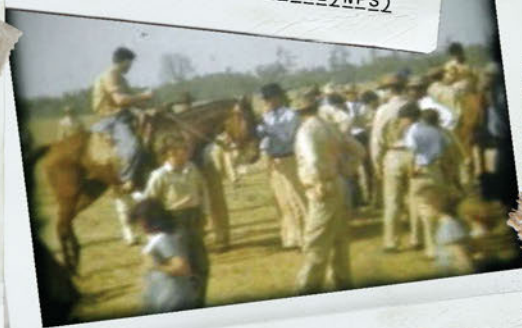
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INTRODUCTION

Many in the Cane River community went to church every Sunday during the 50s and 60s, but after church, families, regardless of race, would go to any of the racetracks on the river with their floral church dresses and their nice slacks to watch the horse races. If there was one thing that united Creoles, African Americans, and white citizens of the Cane River it was this leisure activity. All were welcomed and all could bet equally.



Horse racing spectators.
((ALL)NPS)



NATCHITOCHEES JOCKEY CLUB

Horse racing in Natchitoches can be traced back to the 1800s with the Natchitoches Jockey Club giving residents the opportunity to race at their track. Various members of the Natchitoches community belonged to the club.

(Rules and Regulations Manual, 1858; Natchitoches Jockey Club)

LIST OF MEMBERS OF THE NATCHITOCHEES JOCKEY CLUB.

Blanchard, C. P.	Fleming, E. B.
Breazeale, W. W.	Gainie, G. W.
Breazeale, W. O.	Gillespie, Geo. E.
Boulet, D. H.	Hunter, Tom.
Boyce, M.	Hynes, S. M.
Bogan, Jon. Jr.	Hunt, Thos. C.
Cloutier, F. C.	Hymes, E. L.
Criswell, D.	Hymes, A. J.
Cloutier, Jno. B.	Heury, Jos.
Chaplin, C., Jr.	Hamilton, A. W.
Calhonn, N. D.	Hertzog, Emile
Campbell, J. G.	Hertzog, F. R.
Deblieux, A.	Janin, J. C.
De Russy, L. G., Sr.	Janin, Jos.

30 The Natchitoches Jockey Club.

Levy, Wm. L.	Parsons, Samuel
Lambre, U.	Russel, S. D.
Lecomte, Ambroise	Rouquin, J. B. O.
Laplace, Jno.	Lecomte, J.
Lecomte, Jules	Sompayrac, C. E.
McLaurin, L. L.	Stephens, J. S.
Morrow, W. P.	Strong, W. A.
Metoyer, F.	Sompayrac, Jules
Morse, P. A.	St. Aman, C. E. S.
Tauzin, T. E.	
Tauzin, M.	
Tauzin, E.	
Proudhomme, P. P.	Vienne, F.
Patton, Jno.	Proudhomme, P. L.
Proudhomme, P. L.	Proudhomme, A. P.
Proudhomme, A. P.	Wells, T. J.
Proudhomme, G.	Proudhomme, F. A.
Proudhomme, F. A.	Walmsley, C. R.
Proudhomme, Jean	Waddel, Jno.
Perini, E.	Wakefield, T.
Plauché, J. B., Jr.	

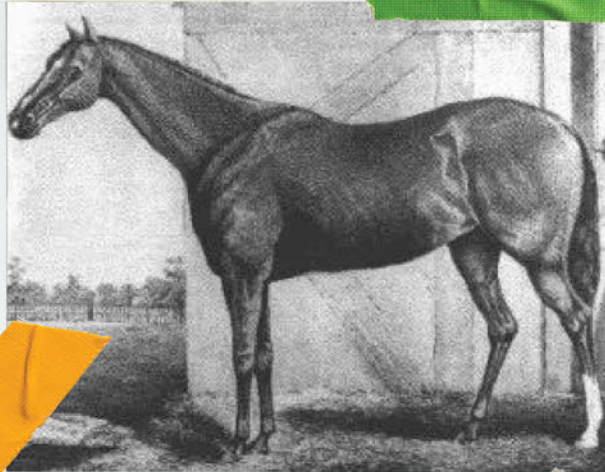
Their racetrack was the LeCompte racetrack located in downtown at the corner of Williams Avenue and St. Maurice Lane. This track was demolished in the 1900s to make way for Roselawn Mansion.

LECOMTE

One of the most famous horses in racing history is Lecomte, the only horse that ever beat the legendary racing horse Lexington. For the community in Natchitoches Lecomte is also a treasure. He was named after Ambrose Lecomte, a plantation owner in the Cane River area and a Natchitoches Jockey Club member. The thorough bred began his racing journey in Alexandria, Louisiana with his trainer General Thomas Jefferson Wells who named the horse after his friend.



INTERVIEW
ON HORSES



Lecomte portrait.
(Fair Grounds Racing Museum)

Many of the bush racetracks in Natchitoches are unofficial, unsanctioned tracks. The Cane River Region had tracks in Natchitoches and along the river. Most of the plantations like Magnolia welcomed hundreds of spectators on Sunday evenings to watch a race. During the races, people would place bets on horses. Bush tracks were typically a quarter mile run but the races could run at any length. The owners would decide before the race how far the race would be and match horses for that distance run. So, one race might run a quarter mile and the next one 100 feet.



INTERACTIVE
TRACK LOCATION
MAP

RACETRACKS

Typically, the races would start with the consent of the two owners racing their horses. In tracks like Melrose and Magnolia there were no starting gates. After an agreed upon signal would happen, the horses would be ordered to race. In bigger tracks like Clarence Downs that had six lanes for horses to race, all lanes would be used to race at once. Most of the tracks were personal training tracks for jockeys. The Balthazar track was for the Balthazar family, and they would use their land for training their own and other jockeys.



MAGNOLIA PLANTATION

During 1938 to 1950, the Magnolia Plantation also had a bush track where races took place. The movie, "Life on Magnolia Plantation," depicts races, betting and the excitement of this activity.



CLARENCE DOWNS

The first sanctioned oval track in Matchitoches Parish was opened in 1969 and closed sometime in the 1970's.



INTERVIEW ON CLARENCE DOWNS



Clarence Downs track remnants. (Google Maps)

BUBBA'S TRACK

This juke joint turned into a racetrack on Sundays as people from all backgrounds went to Bubba's for an evening of horse racing. Bubba Metoyer added the two-lane bush track in the 1940's. It was closed in 1971. Due to its location this is sometimes referred to as Melrose's track.



INTERVIEW ABOUT BUBBA'S ON A SUNDAY

DERRY TRACK

A July 27, 1922, newspaper clipping reports that Julia Chopin is constructing a racetrack that is a sanded quarter mile track at Derry Station. The track is open for the public to enter their horses and situated near the highway. The track is accessible to those passing by. (The Matchitoches Enterprise)

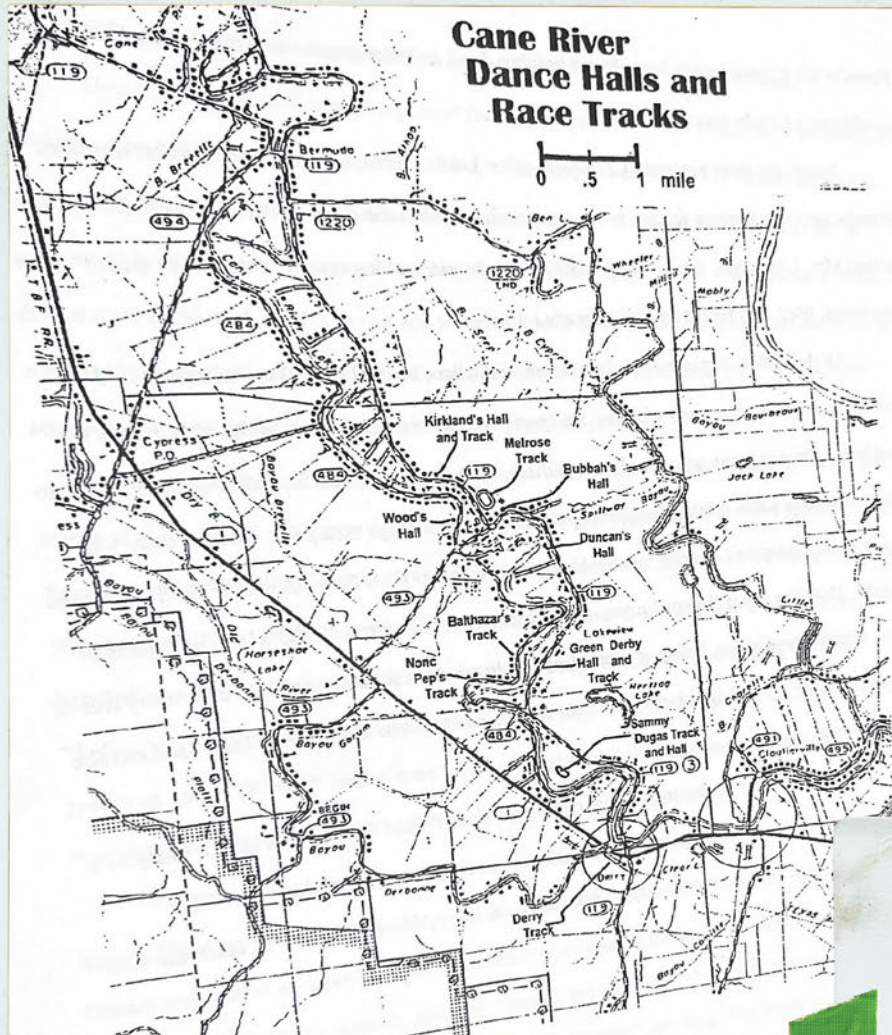
BALTHAZAR TRACK

This track was owned by the Balthazar family for training their horses. The Balthazar's are known around the state and nationally as horse trainers and jockeys. The track is said to be by the 24-mile ferry at the edge of the river.



KIRKLAND'S DANCE HALL

This dance hall was open from the 1930's until the early 1950's most know it as a famous stop along the "Chitlin Circuit" for musicians but it also boasted its own bush track and softball field.



(Cane River Creole National Historical Park)

DERRY

Miss Julia Chopin left last Thursday to be the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Grunewald at their summer home at Pass Christian, Mississippi. Later in the season Miss Chopin will visit Galveston and other points before returning to her beautiful Derry plantation home.

A quarter mile sanded **race** track is now under construction at the Derry Station, a most convenient center, both for the local public and those visiting **races** by train. Situated on the public highway, it will be most accessible to the motorists. The track will be in charge of two competent men, Mr. Ezeb Rachal and Mr. Sam Fry. Mr. Rachal displays great enthusiasm in **horse racing**, while Mr. Fry for several years was in charge of a section of the New Orleans Track **Racing** stables. The public is cordially invited to enter their horses.—XXX.

(The Natchitoches Enterprise, 1922)



Michael Bonnette on a race horse. (Michael Bonnette)



Two horses racing. (NPS)



"FIGURILE PAT" N. Bonnette up- 300 yds. Clarence Downs 5/18/27
 Owner: Lawrence Dunn Trainer: Joe Bonnette
 2nd. Star Bar Discard 3rd Tee Clegg

Finish line image.

(Michael Bonnette)

JOCKEYS

Most of the Jockeys that competed in these races were of African American or Creole descent. The Balthazar's raised many jockeys that became known nationally. One of these jockeys was Leslie Balthazar from Natchez.

(Both from Michael Bonnette)



Michael Bonnette horse racing.

In a newspaper clipping, "Locals On Top," they describe the talent of Fred and Leslie Balthazar. "Leslie made quite an impression at the Acadiana track when he registered two winners on the first four mounts he rode," the article read. In another clipping, they mention that Leslie Balthazar won five races during the semifinal thoroughbred racing card at Park Jefferson.



INTERVIEW ABOUT JOCKEYS

Another Jockey that grew up in the Cane River area is Michael Bonnette. Bonnette's father was a horse trainer and trained Michael during his youth. Michael raced at tracks across the state including Clarence Downs track and images of his racing have been caught in action. While he no longer races, he is an avid enthusiast of horse racing.

HORSES



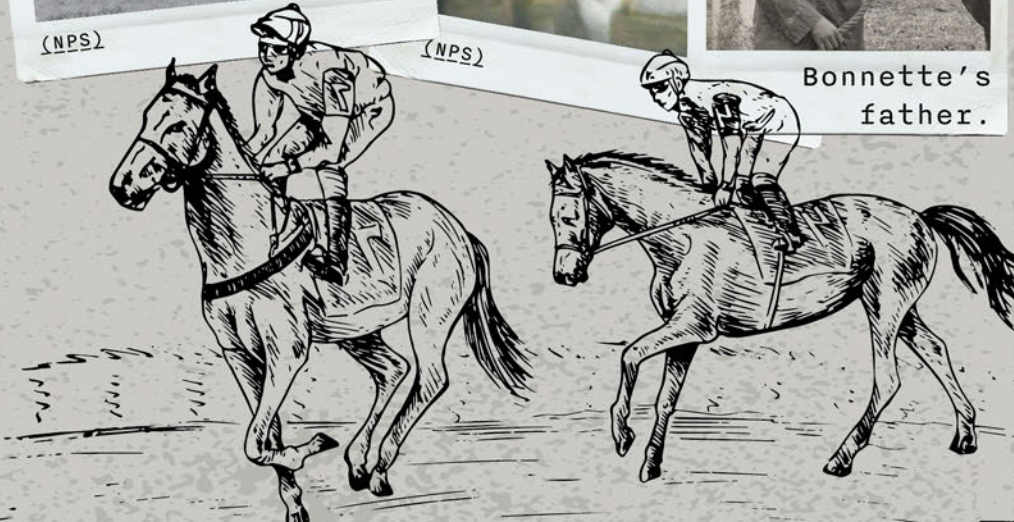
INTERVIEW ON RACING HORSES

Most of the horse racing in the Cane River area involved quarter horses. These horses are short but fast distance runners. Typically, they race a quarter of a mile. As the racing scene grew, thoroughbred horses started to appear. With a larger distance for running, but a slower time than quarter horses.

(Michael Bonnette)



Bonnette's father.



SOURCES AND CITATIONS

Despite the popularity of horse racing in Natchitoches, there is still no clear indication as to why it stopped. Tracks began to disappear around the 70s and reasons for this halt vary. Since most of the Natchitoches Parish tracks were unofficial tracks, many believe that the rise of sanction and regulated racing tracks attracted more people to compete there rather than the ones that were for just entertainment. It was more beneficial for jockeys to race on official tracks to earn rankings than to go to Bubba's on Sunday for fun.

Even with the decline of horse racing, the evidence of its impact on the Cane River community is still evident to this day. Whether it's stories from former jockeys, or aerial images of land that was once a track, horse racing was more than a sport - it was a lifestyle here on the Cane River.

(Both from Michael Bonnette)



Michael Bonnette
horse racing.



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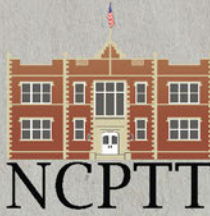
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