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# The National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame

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The National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame (NMRHF) is located at 191 Union Avenue, Saratoga Springs, NY, 12866-3566. Hours are 10 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Monday-Saturday and noon-4:30 p.m. on Sunday. During racing season (mid July through August) the museum is open 9 a.m.-5 p.m. daily. Admission is \$3 for adults, \$2 for seniors and students, and free to members and children. The museum has a shop that is open to the public.

The NMRHF includes it all: fine art, the sounds of the starting gate, the touts, the dandies, the bangtails, photographs, films, audio- and videotapes, and anatomical/physiological reproductions. The permanent displays highlight diverse facets of the racing industry, including the people, the horse breeding, and the training, and the excitement of the race day itself. The NMRHF also offers traveling exhibitions, outreach programs, and special events and displays. The NMRHF is a rectangular building with an open garden in the center. There is an outstanding bronze statue of the great horse Secretariat, Triple Crown winner in 1973, set beautifully in the garden area. The visitor enters the exhibit area through a racetrack turnstile. Immediately to the left is a full-size replica of a thoroughbred breaking from a race track starting gate. One hears the sounds of the horses being loaded; the talk of the handlers, jockeys, and starter; and then the bell and the bang of the gates opening. This display typifies one of the goals of the museum: the re-creation of the sights, sounds, and drama of racing. The display area "The Racing Day," situated in the foyer outside the Hall of Fame, is designed in a similar fashion. The sounds and voices of grooms, jockeys, and trainers are heard as the horses are prepared for the events of the day.

Beyond "The Start" are two galleries devoted to the early history of racing America, "Into the 19th Century" and "After the Civil War." "Into the 19th Century" details the arrival and significant trends and events of racing in North America beginning as early as the mid-1600s. Original oil paintings highlight

outstanding early race horses and owners. Reproductions of newspaper advertisements, along with other artifacts and trophies, chronicle the rise of racing and the establishment of Jockey Clubs in Charleston, S.C., (1734) and the Maryland Jockey Club (1745). The Civil War gallery offers some fascinating information regarding the drafting of horses for the military and the use of race tracks as military camps. The oil paintings are outstanding, and several trophies and cups are truly priceless artifacts.

The town of Saratoga Springs was clearly the "Queen of the Spas" in 19th-century America. Two galleries—"Saratoga 1890's" and "August Races," replicate the halcyon days of this era. Figures garbed in period costumes set in reproductions of the great hotels of the period take you back in time to the zenith of Saratoga Springs and the lifestyles of the rich and famous of the gay nineties. The "August Races" also presents photographs and information about the establishment of the Saratoga race track. Moving from the historical to the contemporary, "The Thoroughbred" gallery contains a life-size skeleton of a race horse, accompanied by an interesting audio comparison of the physiological performance of a race horse to a human. The display emphasizes the remarkable, yet fragile, nature of the horse. An electronic display illustrates the tracing of thoroughbred bloodlines back to one of three great Arab sires, the Byerly Turk (1680-88), the Darley Arabian (1700-33), or the Godolphin Arabian (1729-53).

The Hall of Fame room and theater is the centerpiece of the NMRHF. The upper walls of the auditorium highlight 70 jockey-like figures in different colored racing silks. The silks are changed at regular intervals so that the more than 300 different silks owned by the museum get equal time. Plaques on the lower walls of the auditorium are inscribed with the citations of the Hall of Fame inductees. Video screens provide more detailed information and, where possible, film of the members. The spectacular film *Race America* is shown at regular intervals on the wide screen. The "Triple Crown" room includes plaques; photographs; racing silks; and some statutory and trophies that pay homage to the horses, owners, trainers, and jockeys who have succeeded in winning the Triple Crown (the Kentucky Derby, the Preakness, and the Belmont Stakes: the three races for 3-year-olds). The exhibition is enhanced by some impressive trophies and photographs. The "Racing Faces" gallery includes more oil paintings, trophies, statues, photographs, and citations of a wide variety of racing aficionados. There are photos of presidents, socialites, and celebrities, as well as the powerful names associated with American racing over the years, such as the Whitneys, Belmonts, and Vanderbilts. The trophies, cups, and original oils are real treasures of American racing.

The NMRHF was opened in 1955 and refurbished and expanded in 1988. A critical part of the museum's mission is to "convey the excitement of thoroughbred racing to the broadest possible audience." Thus, the displays are designed to accomplish this goal through a multimedia presentation of the sights and sounds of racing, the interesting personalities, the art, and the trophies. The outreach programs and the traveling displays also work toward this goal. From a scholarly perspective, however, the entertainment orientation rather than a stricter historical

focus might be considered a shortcoming. The combination of Museum and Hall of Fame may work at cross-purposes as well. The publicity and tourist appeal of a Hall of Fame can overshadow historical objectivity. Financial limitations and staff shortages make it difficult to accomplish the unique goals of each. The NMRHF does a fine job of presenting the story of racing and caters to race goers and tourists.

Thoroughbred racing produces some frustration for the historian because critical sources may be located in different geographical locations. Unfortunately, the NMRHF does not remedy this, as it lacks an accessible library/resource facility. Nevertheless, the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame is one of the most valuable resources for those interested in the sport of kings, and the displays represent only a small portion of the holdings. The museum staff are prepared to cooperate with bonafide researchers, but an appointment should be made in advance. The museum has produced a full-color booklet providing information on the features of the NMRHF (ISBN 0-9622583-0-x). The quarterly publication *Racing* is also available by subscription through the NMRHF.

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