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At the Stable All Day: **A Racetracker's Life Around 1900**

"From my twenty-first birthday...I am with my mother and step-father, ... who is an owner and trainer of racehorses. The stable consist of Sea Knight and Iola. A negro, Dave Williams, takes care of Iola. I take care of Sea Knight. We live inside the track-grounds near the 16th St. gate."

Thus begin the diaries of one Frederic Byron Littleton about a track at Harlem, Illinois. He kept them faithfully from 1899 to 1905, as his family and their small-time horses criss-crossed the United States and Canada, racing often and winning seldom. The entries end with his enrollment in a San Francisco business college.

One recurring theme in the training, riding, and use of horses in pre-automobile America is the divide between public presentation (and public record), and private preparation. Nowhere in equestrian sport-perhaps in all of sport-is this divide more profound than in horse racing. No one is more crucial than the grooms, 'guineas', or 'swipes' who keep the animals going-and no one is more marginal.

We are lucky, then, that Littleton was neither as mute nor as inglorious as his fellow backstretchers. He left a most unusual firsthand account of a livelihood that is little known or studied. His interests also lay beyond racing, and his descriptions of how he spent his free time (the Pan-American Exposition, revival meetings, vaudeville, renting a bicycle in Biloxi, and much more), make the diaries a fascinating resource for popular American leisure in general.

This paper uses Littleton's diaries and other sources to paint a picture of a racetracker's life a hundred years ago; from Buffalo to New Orleans, San Francisco to Memphis, and at many stops in between. It chronicles a way of life that may be as invisible as long-vanished tracks, but as long as there are racehorses to tend it will be a way of life that will never vanish.