

PHOTOS on the WALL

Story &
Pictures By
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unless noted

Hermitage Farm Showcases the Very Best of Kentucky



With each passing year, Hermitage Farm in Goshen, Kentucky hosts lavish social events, weddings, Kentucky Derby parties and sporting competition. Plans are in place for the farm to expand and become a popular tourist destination in the next two years.

Walk through the doors of Hermitage's main office, however, and as you approach the front desk you will see them. Framed memories. Snapshots in time. Reminders of a heritage which began to take root in the mid 1930's and focuses on — the horse. Lining an office wall are photographs of Thoroughbred champions across nearly 70 years who have called this 700-acre estate home. Their accomplishments placed them for a time near the top of the horse racing world. They took home trophies for the Kentucky Derby, Kentucky Oaks, the Breeders' Cup World Championships, the 2000 Guineas Stakes and most recently, the Travers Stakes at Saratoga. Hermitage was home to the most expensive yearling ever sold at a public auction and also North America's leading sire of 1980. Located near Louisville and 80 miles west of Lexington and the heart of Bluegrass country, Hermitage Farm boasts a tradition on par with most of the large Kentucky farms. And to think it all began nearly two centuries ago.



Photo Information:

Title page: The Main House at Hermitage was built in 1835. Photo courtesy of Hermitage Farm.

This page top: The signature black and red colors of Hermitage Farm.

Right: The Main House showcases an incredible collection of popular art. Photo courtesy of Hermitage Farm.

Opposite page: The legendary Raja Baba is buried on the grounds.



Beginnings

The farm was purchased by Captain John Henshaw back in the early 1800's as part of a Virginia land grant and was gifted to Henshaw's son Phillip Telfour Henshaw. Construction began on the main house at Hermitage in 1832 and during this time, Phillip, wife Sarah and children returned to Virginia to visit family. While there, Phillip fell ill from scarlet fever and died, leaving Sarah a widow with three small children.

Sarah returned with the kids to Kentucky and Hermitage where construction was completed on the home in 1835 and she lived on the farm for the rest of her life. Daughter Lucy Mary Jane married Richard Waters in the mid-1800's and oversaw the daily operation at a time when some 40 slaves lived and worked on the farm. All in all, Hermitage was owned by the Henshaw-Waters family for nearly 100 years until it was sold in 1935. The buyer was a 19-year-old young man whose great-great-great uncle was the founder of the Kentucky Derby. And soon, this young man would leave his own imprint on the history of thoroughbred racing.

Warner

Upon purchasing Hermitage, Warner L. Jones Jr. farmed the land and began his Thoroughbred operation with a single yearling. And then he added a mare and loaded the yearling on a train to Saratoga Springs and sold it. It was a simple beginning on a road that would see Hermitage become one of the most famous Thoroughbred farms in America. Seventeen years later, Jones' operation had increased significantly and one of his Hermitage-bred three-year-olds entered the starting gates as a 25-1 longshot in the 1953 Kentucky Derby. The colt's name was Dark Star and faced the daunting task of going up against the spectacular Native Dancer who entered the Derby unbeaten in eleven races. Dark Star broke early, held a clear lead throughout and held off Native Dancer's powerful finish to win by a head. It was one of the biggest upsets in Derby history and Hermitage Farm was suddenly on the industry map. In 1967, Hermitage added the Kentucky Oaks to its resume when Nancy Jr. captured the trophy.

Perhaps the most significant driver of Hermitage Farm's breeding success from the day Warner Jones came to the farm to present day was the outstanding broodmare barn Jones assembled along with fellow horseman William S. Farish III and other partners including Robert Clay. At the close of 1972, a stallion came to Hermitage who would take the farm to the highest level of Thoroughbred breeding across the world. His name was Raja Baba. The horse was a purchase by Will Farish who in turn sold a half interest to Warner Jones. He was syndicated in 1972 in a 36-share deal at \$10,000 per share. Ten years later, that selling price had increased to \$205,000 per share on the

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open market and later on in his career, a share reportedly sold for \$380,000. As a freshman stallion in 1976, Raja Baba was the leading juvenile sire and four years later, he became the overall leading sire in the United States. Bill Landes is the General Manager of Hermitage today and joined the farm in 1977. He still looks back with amazement at that special time.

"1980 was a really special year," recalls Landes. "Raja Baba could do no wrong. We had a stakes winner in America seemingly every week. And it seemed the horses we sold that went overseas to run in France, Ireland or England were winning a stakes race every week as well. It was enough to spoil you and cause you to take it for granted. But looking back now, I marvel because of how difficult it is nowadays to get a winner anywhere. It was truly remarkable."

Unparalleled Success

Raja Baba died in 2002 at the age of 34. During his career at stud, he had sired 62 stakes winners, two Breeders' Cup winners and two champions. He brought attention to Hermitage over the years that opened other doors to success. In 1985, Warner Jones sold a half-brother to the Triple Crown champion Seattle Slew for a world record \$13.1 million at Keeneland's July Select Yearling Sale. The yearling's name was Seattle Dancer. In that same year, Hermitage Farm set a record for the highest average price — \$2,433,750 — for horses consigned for sale. It is a record that still stands. Two years later, Warner Jones sold most of his breeding stock at Keeneland in a dispersal sale. Across his





career as a breeder, Jones sold a dozen yearlings for prices in excess of \$1 million and 130 stakes winners with total earnings of more than \$20 million.

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The success of Hermitage-bred horses was realized overseas when Lomond captured the 1983 Classic 2000 Guineas Stakes. And when Is It True won the 1988 Breeders’ Cup Juvenile, Warner Jones became the first person to breed winners of the Kentucky Derby, Kentucky Oaks and Breeders’ Cup races.

The Next Generation

Warner L. Jones Jr. died in February of 1994 at age 78. The following year, the Jones family sold Hermitage to 55-year-old Carl Pollard. It was Pollard’s vision to carry on the Hermitage tradition established by Jones and contribute to the Thorough-

bred industry. He especially sought to carry on and replicate the broodmare band model created before him.

“For twenty years we tried to duplicate Mr. Jones’ broodmare band but that was mission impossible,” recalls Bill Landes. “It took Mr. Jones a lifetime to put his band together.”

Continuing a championship tradition, however, would be something Carl Pollard and Hermitage Farm would accomplish. Along with bloodstock agent Mike Ryan, Pollard and team began to buy mares and some yearling fillies to hopefully race and turn into broodmares. In 1999, Pollard purchased three fillies. One was Kiss the Devil who became a graded stakes winner, retired and produced a couple of stakes winners of her own. Another of the fillies was a small dark bay who was purchased at the ’99 Keeneland sale for \$180,000. Her name was Caressing. And on a fall day in November of 2000, she reminded the racing world of Hermitage when, as the longest shot on the board at



47-1, she upset the field and won the Breeders’ Cup Juvenile Fillies world championship. Nearly three months later, Carl Pollard took his staff down to New Orleans as Caressing won the 2000 Eclipse Award for Champion 2-Year-Old Filly.

When Caressing retired and became a broodmare, she had some modest success after two of her foals raced and were graded stakes placed. It was a mating in 2013 with Claiborne Farm’s Flatter, however, that changed everything. Caressing gave birth to a colt who was entered in the Keeneland September 2015 Yearling Sale. Prior to the sale, Hermitage General Manager Bill Landes had some concerns.

“The great horseman Frank Brothers evaluated the horse for us and Frank was on the fence,” says Landes. “He felt the horse would either stay immature and behind or felt he would develop and flourish. We bet on the horse and put him in our second group of yearlings to sell and he certainly flourished.”

Photo Information:

Opposite page top: Caressing was a Breeders’ Cup champ and Eclipse Award winner.

This page top: West Coast captures the 2017 (G1) Travers Stakes at Saratoga. Photo by Steve Heuertz.

Caressing’s colt sold for \$425,000 and was named West Coast. In 2017, he captured the (G3) Los Alamitos Derby, the (G1) Pennsylvania Derby, the (G1) Travers Stakes and ran an impressive third in the (G1) Breeders’ Cup Classic in November. In January, he captured the Eclipse Award for Champion American 3-Year-Old Male and kicked off his 2018 4-year-old racing campaign with an impressive 2nd place finish in the \$16 million (G1) Pegasus World Cup.



tradition. Wilson and Brown enlisted the help of a Louisville design firm to completely re-do and redecorate the home's interior. The completed effort highlighted the couple's renowned art collection and provided many other luxury amenities. Since the restoration, the house is rented out throughout each year for groups ranging from tourists spending time on Kentucky's Bourbon Trail to couples hosting their weddings at the farm. Couples not only receive access to the Main House but also the historic Smoke House and the spacious grounds of the farm which enable open-air ceremonies, tented receptions, and spectacular views of the Thoroughbred operation.

"Couples come here for their weddings and get the horses, rolling hills and beautiful home," says Ashleigh McLean, Director of Marketing and Special Events at Hermitage, "It really encapsulates what they love so much about Kentucky and enables them to share it with their guests. It also is a place where they can spend the entire weekend in the Main House and devote more time to their friends and loved ones."

Hermitage has also been the site over the years for lavish parties and events. It is the home each year for the Hermitage Classic, a three-day United States Equestrian Federation-sanctioned combined driving competition.

Quintessential Kentucky

In 2003, Hermitage was purchased by Steve Wilson and Laura Lee Brown. The married couple own the Louisville-based 21C Museum Hotel chain as well as the Kentucky Bison Co. During the fifteen years that have passed, the couple has consistently sought to expand upon the vision of Hermitage's previous owners, the Henshaw-Waters family, Warner Jones and Carl Pollard, as a successful Thoroughbred operation. A large part of this vision was to restore the historic Main House, built by the Henshaws so many years ago, and make it available for rentals and events that would continue to honor the farm's equine

"When the Hermitage Classic first started, it was pretty small" says McLean, "But we've added components to it each year and have seen the crowds consistently grow. We offer family-friendly activities, greater food options, and the competition level has been so high that it is really fun to experience."

Photo Information:

This page: The farm is the site of several weddings. Opposite page: Hermitage hosts lavish parties and events throughout the year. Photos courtesy of Hermitage Farm.



The Future

When Steve Wilson and Laura Lee Brown acquired Hermitage, their long-term objective was to create a tourist destination that would celebrate the heritage of Kentucky and its signature industries — food, bourbon and horses. A large scale agri-tourism project is underway with construction beginning in December of 2017 and it is hoped the grand opening will be during the Kentucky Derby weekend of 2019. Hermitage hopes to draw tourists with a "farm to table" restaurant and a Kentucky bourbon experience.

"The 'farm to table' term is really about feeding people seasonally depending on what is growing at that time," says Haviland Argo, project manager for Hermitage. "The restaurant will be a 9,000-square foot space within our current Barn 8 and will seat close to 175 people with outside event space that can seat another 250."

The bourbon experience will offer tourists tastings of all the bourbons that are on the Kentucky Bourbon Trail. "Visitors will be able to sample the various tastings and then purchase a bottle of whatever bourbon they like best," added Argo.

The farm has commissioned an artist to begin work on another long-term project and this is a nod to Steve and Laura Lee's love for art. "The artist will create a studio projection-with-sound experience on a boardwalk next to a creek at the back of the property," says Argo, "The artist uses high definition projectors to project off of trees, hillsides, rocks, and pools of water to create a totally immersive atmosphere."

There is certainly excitement in the air at Hermitage Farm with growing anticipation of expansion and tourist counts in coming years. But a new photograph has recently been added to the office wall in the main office at Hermitage. And champion West Coast is symbolic and a reminder of the heart and soul of the farm's heritage since Warner Jones bought his first yearling back in 1936. In an industry that has seen its share of struggles in recent years, life goes on at Hermitage.

"We went to the November sales in Kentucky thinking we might sell 2-3 mares and may not replace them," says Bill Landes, "But we actually ended up increasing the number of boarding mares post-sale. I think our population is stable at worst and that excites me."

Warner Jones would likely be excited as well.



About the Author:

Tom Ferry has traveled throughout North America in pursuit of a lifelong passion for the horse racing industry. His published writing and photography has been seen in the pages and websites of The Thoroughbred Times, The Blood-Horse, Horse Racing Nation, International Racehorse, America's Best Racing, New York Breeder, Midwest Thoroughbred, Illinois Racing News and the 2010 book, They Call the Horses.

Tom's proudest moment came on November 15, 2008 when a framed enlargement of his published photograph of the late, Hall-of-Fame champion Princess Rooney was placed alongside her grave during a memorial service held to celebrate her life at the Kentucky Horse Park.

Born and raised in Waukegan, Illinois and a graduate of Western Illinois University, Tom has built a successful career in the advertising industry for more than 30 years. But while advertising pays the bills, the world of horse racing feeds his soul.

Brought to you by The Horse Resource:

My name is Christa Conway and I have been riding horses since I was old enough to sit on a saddle by myself. I am a third generation barrel racer and my kids make a fourth.

I met my husband, Vick, at a horse show. It was probably sometime in the 70s (no, we are not that old...we just met when we were really young.) Our families competed at horse shows together back then and I believe it was an arranged marriage. Someday I may write it all down.

The Horses

I've competed at barrel races since I can remember and have had made many great memories over the years.

My dad hauled me around the Midwest with a little red roan mare that taught me how to win and to never doubt the underdog. She was only 14.2H tall, but her heart was big enough for both of us.

Highlights include a qualification to the International Finals Rodeo in 2002 and a crushed knee just months before.

Vick and I have shared futurity wins, rodeo wins and watched our kids compete and win on horses we've raised and trained. We've watched others go on to compete and win with horses we trained and forged great and lifelong friendships along the way.

All of these accomplishments and life experiences were possible because of God's grace, a supportive family, wonderful friends, hard work and of course great horses.

About The Horse Resource

It all started in 2004 when I began writing a Christian Barrel Racer's Newsletter that included inspirational articles and devotional material that I either wrote or that was submitted by others. I distributed the newsletter to hundreds of people via mail and passed them out at the rodeos and barrel races I attended until 2008.

In 2008 the Christian Barrel Racer's Newsletter became the preface for the start of something bigger. My passion for the horses and the equine industry as well as the experience with the newsletter led me to start The Horse Resource in 2008 as a printed magazine. The Christian Barrel Racer's Newsletter became the monthly featured column called "Christian Cowboy Collection."

My goal from the beginning has been to bring great articles, relevant news, upcoming events and event coverage to other horse people like me while keeping a positive and uplifting message of hope that Jesus provides in the forefront.

It grew into a full time career for me and by the grace of God I've been blessed to turn something I love into something I do for a living.

I'll keep doing the work as long as God provides the platform.

Many blessings and thanks for reading,

~Christa

