

The Run for the Roses: A Multi-Dimensional Approach

Experiential Research Project Reflective Essay

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Nothing is as electrifying as the scene that plays out each year in Louisville on the first Saturday in May. For weeks the city has been preparing; with ladies tirelessly shopping for the perfect hat, men scrutinizing the papers to select a true winning horse, and young and old celebrating with fireworks, festivals, and parades. The 20 three-year-old Thoroughbreds and their tiny jockeys, dedicated trainers, and wealthy owners have spent years training and preparing for the most important race of a horse's career. On that fateful day in May, spirits, of both the emotional and distilled kind, run high and free. The masses descend upon Louisville and Churchill Downs in a rare juxtaposition between those of extreme wealth, class, and refinement and the swarming, intoxicated masses, separated only by a thin ring of dirt and grass. When "the most exciting two minutes in sports" finally arrives, the entire nation waits with bated breath to see which horse will bolt out of the starting gate, break away from the pack, and pass the final post to win the greatest race in America, the Kentucky Derby.

My family moved to the great state of Kentucky when I was thirteen years old, to a small bedroom community outside of Louisville in scenic Oldham County. Situated north of Louisville on the Ohio River, Oldham County has a long history in Thoroughbred breeding and training, with many multi-million dollar Thoroughbred farms nestled among the county's rolling hills. For the residents of Oldham County, it is nothing out of the ordinary to pass five or six massive Thoroughbred operations and spot dozens of grazing Thoroughbreds simply to get to the grocery store. Being surrounded by all of the beautiful, sprawling farms, coupled with my lifelong love of horses, sparked a deep interest not only in the industry for which Kentucky is known, but also in the ultimate test of a Thoroughbred's speed and ambition: the Kentucky Derby.



Horses grazing at an Oldham County farm

I chose to create an experiential honors research project to study the Derby as a means to broaden my knowledge of the history and background of the sport of Thoroughbred racing, the cultural traditions that surround the Kentucky Derby, and the interactions between the Derby and the American political, economic, and social climate. However, I wanted to take an active approach in learning about the Kentucky Derby. Instead of simply reading literature on the topic and exploring online articles, I visited the

biggest, most successful Thoroughbred farm in Oldham County, Hermitage Farm; I observed firsthand the original 1894 blueprints for the grandstand and clubhouse at Churchill Downs drawn by D.X. Murphy & Bro, the predecessor of the company I co-oped with this spring, Luckett & Farley; and I attended the 139th running of the Kentucky Derby at Churchill Downs on May 4, 2013. In addition, I created a three-dimensional model of the iconic twin spires using blueprints found online and a program called Google SketchUp as a means to apply some of the technical skills I've gained in the Architectural Engineering program. By venturing into the field and gaining these active experiences, I was able to create a dynamic approach to the Kentucky Derby and expand my learning to include engaging and interactive environments.

Project Derby

My exploration of the Kentucky Derby began with a survey of the prevailing literature on the subject. I searched the Louisville Free Public Library and found over one hundred books and references on various topics of the Kentucky Derby and Thoroughbred racing. I carefully selected a few books that were the most recent and would provide me with an in-depth historical and cultural discussion of the Derby. The two most informative references I chose were The Kentucky Derby by James C. Nicholson and Churchill Downs: America's Most Historic Racetrack by Kimberly Gatto. These books, along with online references, provided me with a detailed timeline from the creation of the Derby, through its formative and intermediate years, to the most recent races after the turn of the century, all while supplying a thoughtful and reflective analysis of the cultural, economic, and social influences that shaped the Derby of today. The third and final book I read was Churchill Downs: A Documentary History of America's Most Legendary Racetrack by Samuel W. Thomas. This reference was a compilation of newspaper articles and commentary that outlined the establishment and evolution of the structure and grounds of Churchill Downs through a series of renovations and additions, most of which was planned and designed by Luckett & Farley. By pairing these three literary references with online articles, videos, photographs, and biographies, I was able to gain a thorough and complete background of the Kentucky Derby to expand my knowledge of the subject and prepare me for the more active portions of this experiential project.

As I began to research, I fell into a rhythm of reading, taking notes, and completing online research. I found it most helpful to search for articles and web pages on a certain topic as I was reading printed literature about the subject. I was then able to compile the information from these various resources to gain a complete understanding of the idea or subject about which I was learning. I was often excited or intrigued to read certain anecdotes or learn interesting facts that connect directly to the area of Louisville in which I live. Personal connections like these made the research aspect much more fun and interesting, and allowed me to add my own perspective to many of the things about which I was learning.

The process by which I settled on my “hands-on” experiences was fairly simple and developed quite naturally. I brainstormed a few activities that interested me and completed some brief online research to determine their practicality and probability. I wanted to gain as thorough and diverse of an understanding of the Derby as possible, so I settled on three very different, yet remarkably intertwined experiences. All three of these experiences, paired with the extensive research I completed beforehand, formed the quintessential Kentucky Derby experience complete with everything from newborn Thoroughbreds in huge breeding stables to magnificent hats in the shadow of the towering twin spires.

A Brief History of the Kentucky Derby

“The Kentucky Derby, to be run on the opening day [of the Louisville Jockey Club], is destined to become the great race of this country. For one day let us lay aside business cares, get away from the counting-room, and spend an afternoon in the cool, fresh air of the country.”

-The Daily Louisville Commercial, April 25th, 1875

Thoroughbred racing has long been an integral part of Kentucky culture, beginning when early settlers first crossed the Appalachian Mountains to settle the area. Early racing in Louisville would occur down the brick paved Market Street, often causing damage to property and passersby. Although a handful of small racetracks had unsuccessfully attempted to bring organized Thoroughbred racing to Louisville, there was definite interest in determining whose

horse was fastest. Demand for an established sporting venue, as well as a leisurely location to unwind from the stresses of the daily hustle and bustle, was quickly growing.

Meriwether Lewis Clark Jr., grandson of the famed westward explorer, was looking to capitalize on the great need for a Louisville Thoroughbred racetrack. He explored the nature of



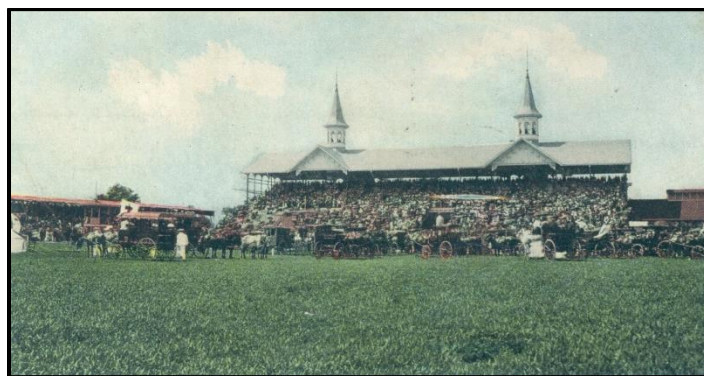
European Thoroughbred racing with several visits to Epsom Downs, located just south of London. Clark was especially intrigued by the refined manner of racing, held on a 1 ½ mile long track, in which the horses were pitted fairly against each other. Not long after his return to Kentucky, Clark established the Louisville Jockey Club by selling 320 shares of \$100 each to

The Louisville Jockey Club Clubhouse build a new racetrack facility on land rented from two of his uncles, John and Henry Churchill. The Louisville Jockey Club built a small grandstand, a handful of stables, and an exclusive clubhouse, reserved only for men, on the south side of the dirt racetrack, which mimicked the European length of 1 ½ miles.

The first running of the Kentucky Derby was held on opening day, May 17, 1875, and consisted of a field of 15 horses, including two fillies. Aristides, jockeyed by Oliver Lewis, won the \$2,850 purse and went down as the first winner of the prestigious race. It is notable that thirteen of the jockeys at the first Kentucky Derby, including Oliver Lewis, were African-American. In fact, in the first quarter century of the Derby's existence, the trainers, jockeys, and handlers of Thoroughbred horses were predominantly African-American, but were slowly pushed out of the world of Thoroughbred racing as the sport began to attract more attention and jockeys and trainers were paid more amounts of money. The most successful jockey in American history, who holds a 44% victory rate, was Isaac Burns Murphy, an African-American. By the turn of the century, however, few African-Americans remained in the racing industry, and only a handful can be seen training horses or riding atop Thoroughbreds today.

In 1894, the Louisville Jockey Club sold Churchill Downs to the New Louisville Jockey Club due to a deep financial debt and a decline in the popularity of the Kentucky Derby. The New Louisville Jockey Club, determined to bring Churchill Downs back to its earlier glory, focused on creating a strong gambling presence at the races, as opposed to the sportsman focus of the old Louisville Jockey Club. The New Louisville Jockey Club introduced pari-mutuel betting to the track, a style of betting in which bettors place wagers against the racetrack and not

bookkeepers, in hopes to eliminate the corrupt and dishonest reputation that had become associated with Churchill Downs bookies. As a way to gain a fresh start, The New Louisville Jockey Club demolished the original grandstand and clubhouse and spent \$30,000 for a new grandstand, designed by D.X. Murphy & Bro, on the north side of the track. This new grandstand, which still proudly stands today, marked a new beginning for Churchill Downs in which the track would flourish under the gleaming twin spires.



The New Louisville Jockey Club Grandstand

Essential to the success of the Kentucky Derby during its creation and formative years was a man known nation-wide for his exaggerated stories, hefty size, and traditional Kentucky gentleman image: Colonel Matt J. Winn. Present at every running of the Kentucky Derby from 1875 all the way to 1949, when he died at the age of 89, Colonel Winn is just as integral to the popularity of the Kentucky Derby as the renowned Churchill Downs. Known as the “Father of the Derby,” Colonel Winn was relentless in his effort to recruit investors, publicize Churchill Downs, and adapt the customs and imagery of the Derby to remain current as American culture transformed. It was Colonel Winn who saved the floundering Churchill Downs from eminent failure when he became Vice President after the New Louisville Jockey Club bought the track. Under Colonel Winn, the track thrived during the early 20th century, patriotically supported the WWI war effort, narrowly survived the Great Depression, and even managed to enhance the reputation of the Derby during WWII. Without the great efforts of Colonel Winn, the Kentucky Derby would be nowhere near the internationally known, multi-million dollar earning institution it is today.

For the majority of the 20th century, the Derby has remained a staple of American culture and has successfully evolved its image as the desires and interests of the American public have shifted. At the beginning of its existence, Churchill Downs catered to the requests and affections

of elite Louisville aristocrats, as it was mainly those of considerable wealth who could afford to travel by trolley or carriage to, what was one time, the Louisville countryside. In a time when the Civil War was freshly engrained in the minds of citizens, Churchill Downs portrayed itself as a quaint reminder of the old south of a bygone era, evident in the structure's Greek classical style. As the focus of the American public shifted, however, with the onset of WWI and the Great Depression, Churchill Downs began to brand itself as a more "All-American" venue where Americans could show their loyalty by betting on an American-bred Thoroughbred and celebrating their freedom as citizens of the wealthiest nation in the world. However, this nationality slowly disappeared as America became a more globally active nation and the Kentucky Derby began to attract a stronger international spotlight. The Derby of modern decades has held an image of elitism, overindulgence, and rowdiness characterized by organized political protests, a wild and crazy party atmosphere in the infield (the grassy area encircled by the track), and the escalation of the difference between those of wealth and the masses.

In fact, the separation of the classes has long been a part of Kentucky Derby and Churchill Downs heritage. Although the track began as an outlet for affluent Louisville citizens to escape from the city for an afternoon in the country, citizens or poor, or even average, wealth have been looked down upon as inferior since Churchill Downs creation. The infield, which is known today as a place for rambunctious college students and unrefined rednecks, was reserved in the 19th century for the poor and minorities. The grandstand, occupied mainly by Louisville aristocrats and northeastern elite, was an extremely social place with a delicate etiquette for interacting with other prosperous individuals. While Churchill Downs has definitely become more accessible for those of middle class affluence, a strong distinction still exists between the "haves" and the "have-nots" at Derby, determined mainly by the area in which one is seated. As a famous jockey once said "The sole reason of the existence of the Derby, is to prove that a class hierarchy still exists in America."

A discussion of the history of the Kentucky Derby would not be complete without a look at some of the most successful racehorses that have graced the track. Along with Aristides, Regret, the first of three fillies to win the Derby, is known as one of the great racehorses of the early years of the Kentucky Derby. In 1919, Sir Barton was the first Thoroughbred to win the trio of races that would later become the Triple Crown: the Kentucky Derby, the Preakness Stakes, and the Belmont Stakes. For the next quarter century, Derby champions consisted of

obscure horses from unknown farms. In the early 1940s, however, that all changed when



Secretariat Wins the 1973 Kentucky Derby

Calumet Farm, which is located in Lexington and had a whopping eight wins in the twenty years between 1940 and 1950. Citation, one of Calumet's most successful Thoroughbreds, won 19 of his 20 races as a three-year-old and securing the prestigious Triple Crown. It would be 25 years until Secretariat would win the Triple Crown in 1973; he was the most recent horse to have won the title. In recent decades, foreign bred

Thoroughbreds have competed in the Kentucky Derby with increasing numbers. However, the majority of Kentucky Derby champions have been bred in America, with many of them coming from the great state itself. Without these determined, fearless, and lightning-fast horses, the Kentucky Derby would be nowhere the renowned and celebrated sporting event that Americans have come to love.

Hermitage Farm – A Scenic Thoroughbred Factory

The first of my experiential learning activities was an afternoon visit to Hermitage Farm where I observed all of the training, timing, and preparation that goes into making a strong, healthy race horse. The farm, located among the rolling hills of Oldham County, is a 700 acre farm devoted mainly to the breeding and growing of young Thoroughbred horses. The farm was established in the early 19th century and was bought in 1936 by Warner Jones, the man who turned Hermitage into the complex breeding operation it is today. The farm's only Kentucky Derby winner, Dark Star, won the race's 1953 running. Among other impressive claims, Hermitage Farm holds the record for most expensive yearling sale when Seattle Dancer was purchased for \$13.1 million in 1985. The following year, due to interest sparked by the extremely expensive horse, Queen Elizabeth II visited the farm to tour the grounds, view the Thoroughbred stables, and eat



The Farm House at Hermitage Farm

lunch in the beautiful farm house built in 1835.

On the day I visited the farm in early April, many of the mares had already given birth and several foals were romping around the grassy hills. I met with the farm manager, Brian Knippenberg, to follow him around for a few hours as he went to the different barns and fields of the farm. Before heading to Hermitage Farm, my experience with the Thoroughbred farms that surrounded my home had been nearly non-existent. What I learned that afternoon with Brian opened my eyes to all of the interesting and unique things that were just outside my doorstep.

Within the first five minutes of being at Hermitage I was loaded up in Brian's big red Ford and barreling down the farm's narrow asphalt paths. After swerving around trees, barns, and paddocks, we arrived at a field near the rear of the farm where Brian and I proceeded to chase two pregnant mares to harness them and bring them into the stable for an evening of rest and relaxation. It was very exhilarating, and slightly scary, to be so close to such a massive animal that could injure me with the swift kick of a leg. Once the mares were securely in their stalls, Brian and I quickly made our way back to the main barns and fields where the majority of mares and foals were boarded.

As we drove, Brian rattled off fact after fact about the process of breeding and birthing Thoroughbreds. The age of a newborn horse is determined by the year in which it was born, not the day or month; a horse born in May is the same age as one born in January of the same year. For this reason, it is impractical to breed horses in the months between July and December, because they are at a developmental disadvantage when it comes to racing stamina and build. The breeding cycle revolves around two facts: that mares have an eleven month gestation period and that, once a mare has given birth, her body is able to become pregnant again just 25 short days later. By optimizing the timing of this cycle, a mare can, ideally, give birth to a foal once every year: in January, February, March, April, and May. After spending five years being pregnant, the mares are given a year to rest and to reset the birthing cycle so that they can foal in January. While this may seem like an exhausting way to live, it is important to realize that, due to miscarriages or insemination failures, few mares truly spend five straight years pregnant.

When the time for birth nears, the mare is brought to a special birthing barn where she is constantly monitored for the onset of birth, which will take approximately 20 to 30 minutes. Once the foal has successfully entered the world, mare and foal are kept together in a private stall to allow the foal to gain strength and become more familiar with its mother. The foal and mare

are slowly introduced to larger groups of horses until the foal is confident enough to leave the mother for training sessions and workout routines. The foals stay with their mother until September of their first year (by this time the mother is most likely already pregnant again) where they are sold at auction, at prices typically between \$80,000 and \$100,000, to larger Thoroughbred farms for intensive race training and preparation.



A Mare and Foal Being Led into a Barn

I had the fortune during my time at Hermitage Farm to see the mares and foals being guided into the barns for the evening, which was quite a parade. It was really neat to see the majestic mares and the stumbling foals marching past me after a long day of running, grazing, and soaking up the sun. I learned so much in my short time at the farm. I gained a general knowledge of the birthing and raising process for Thoroughbreds and got to interact with young horses who could one day win a proud owner thousands of dollars in the Kentucky Derby. My visit to Hermitage Farm was definitely an interesting and eye-opening experience that allowed me to broaden my horizons and gain yet another new perspective of the Derby.

Gambling, Glamour, and Glasses – Culture at the Derby

“One of the truly unique characteristics of the Kentucky Derby, and its sister event, the Kentucky Oaks, is that they are sports parties that showcase the finest in spring fashions. Both female and male attendees pull out all of the stops when selecting their Kentucky Derby and Oaks apparel.”

-Churchill Downs Inc.

Nothing is as extremely extravagant as the Kentucky Derby. Ever since its humble beginnings with a simple grandstand, the Derby has been a prime event to show off the latest fashion trends with bright springtime colors, gigantic flowery hats, and expensive name brands. Both men and women have been known to spend exorbitant amounts to look their best when the first Saturday in May arrives.

The Derby’s exclusivity and separation between classes is clearly evident in the fashion of those of the various statuses. At an event where it was at one time appalling for a man to be



A Woman Displays Her Derby Hat

seen without an overcoat and vest, it is common to see a woman in a \$2,000 ensemble brushing past a girl wearing nothing but a pair of skimpy jean shorts. The exclusive Millionaire's Row on the fourth floor of Churchill Downs is known for its strict dress code that only recently began to allow women to wear pants and men to wear sports blazers. On the other hand, in the wild and

free atmosphere of the infield, one can see any variety of genitalia and promiscuous dress. Although a number of scantily clad Derby goers can be spotted in the crowd, most spectators for the prestigious race put considerable thought into their attire to make sure they look as classy and attractive as the gleaming twin spires and beautiful Thoroughbreds.

Along with high fashion, a high affinity for alcoholic drink is ever present at the Kentucky Derby. The event's signature drink, the Mint Julep, is concocted of traditional Kentucky bourbon whiskey, sugar, and mint. The drink was first officially served to Derby goers in 1938 and has been served in signature Mint Julep glasses that list past Derby winners ever since. It is a natural sight to see many a person stumbling around Churchill Downs with a stack of Mint Julep glasses five or six high. Both sides of the racetrack, the wealthy in the grandstand and the average citizens in infield are known to be fairly intoxicated by the time the Derby is finally run. It is quite an interesting phenomenon to watch the condition of the crowd deteriorate



A Teenager Runs Across Port-A-Pottys in the Infield

as the liquor begins to flow freely. The annual port-a-potty run is always featured in the local papers, as well as the numerous mudslides, human wheelbarrow races, and human pyramids. Despite strict law enforcement, many instances of public intoxication have been known to slide past the authorities, encouraging the Derby's wide reputation as a place to indulge not only in betting, but in strong drink as well.

The Iconic Twin Spires and Extravagant Grandstand

“The new grand stand will be 250 feet long and will be made of glazed brick, stone and steel. The back wall is the most attractive, being thirty-one feet high and very imposing. With its monogram, keystone and other ornate architecture, it will compare favorably with any of the most pretentious office buildings or business structures on the prominent thoroughfares.”

-The Courier Journal, February 4th, 1895

Few places in America are as beautiful, massive, and grand as Churchill Downs. The racetrack, which now consists of a massive labyrinth of additions and expansions intertwined with original construction in a distorted horse-themed Frankenstein-structure, sits on 115 acres in the heart of Louisville. The structure, which originally began as a simple 250 foot long grandstand with only 16 levels of wooden bleachers, has evolved over the past century to the looming facility that attracts as many as 150,000 visitors on Derby day. In the past century, Churchill Downs has undergone an estimated \$1.5 billion in renovations and has nearly quadrupled its size. Throughout this endless series of renovations that have stretched, raised, and updated the racetrack, the owners and executives of Churchill Downs have worked carefully to maintain the structure’s timeless charm and elegance.



Gate 1 of Churchill Downs

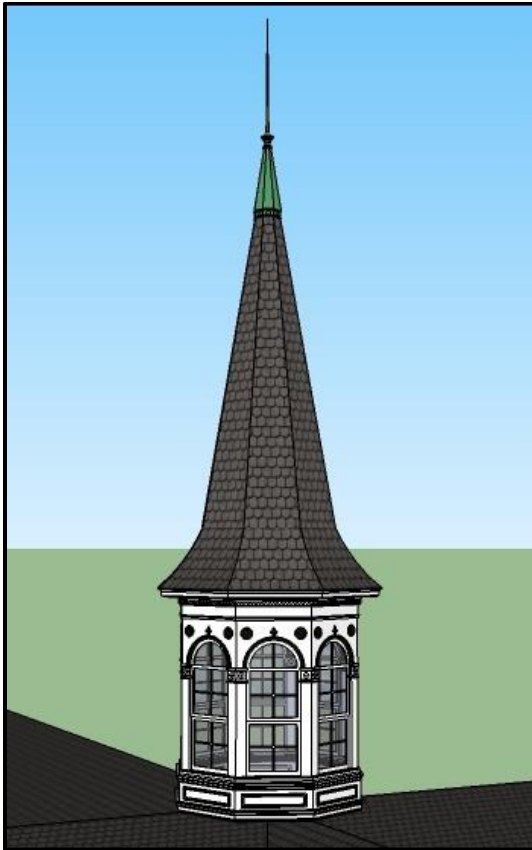
Known throughout the decades as a symbol of wealth, privilege, and status, yet serving as a playground for the unrefined and underprivileged, Churchill Downs has increasingly become a dramatic stage upon which the social classes collide. In a place where a box seat for the Kentucky Derby is upwards of \$400 and the most expensive ticket, to Millionaire’s Row, costs a whopping \$6,000, the separation between the privileged and the common is ever present in the seating arrangement of the grandstand. The hierarchy of the classes is just as literal at Churchill Downs as it is metaphorical: the higher the level, the more expensive the seats, and the more elite the individuals. Many signs and personnel restrict the access of the average citizen into areas reserved for those who could afford a pricier ticket; however, no restrictions prevent those with more expensive seats from entering locations populated by general admission, perfectly exemplifying the separation between “haves” and “have-nots”. It is quite a sight on Derby day to

see those fortunate enough to be able to afford seats descending the stairs to bet with the throbbing mob of general admission ticket holders, a poignant symbol in which the elite literally lower themselves to the level of average citizens to gamble, but then scurry back up to their lofty seats to enjoy the race.

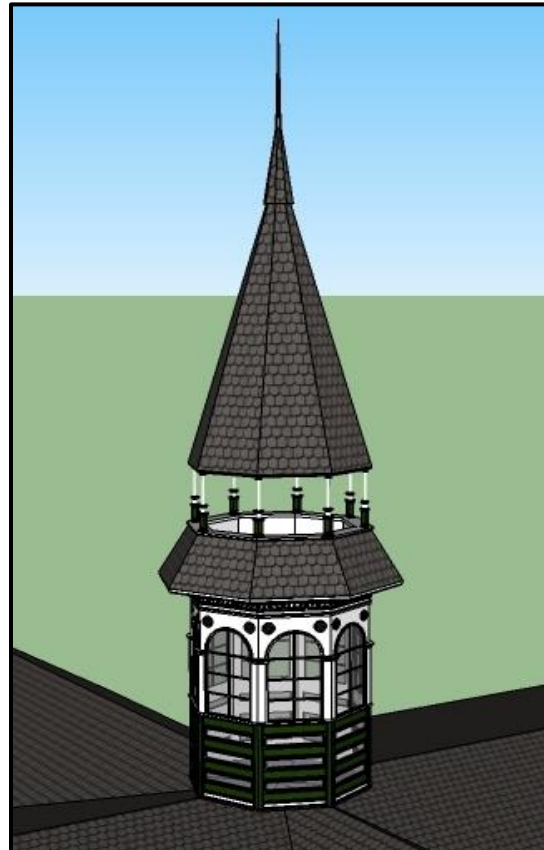
As a means to connect this experiential project with my major and to gain a greater understanding of the thought and planning that went into the design of Churchill Downs, I examined some of the racetrack's architectural and structural components. I was fortunate to be working as a co-op for Lockett & Farley, the modern descendent of D.X. Murphy & Bro who designed the original clubhouse and grandstand built in 1895. I spoke with the CEO of the company and secured the chance to observe the original linen drawings for the clubhouse and grandstand. It was really interesting to see how construction documents were created by hand in the 19th century in comparison to the computer dependent production process of construction documents that is used today. I noticed that the drawings lacked a grid system to show the placement of building components and in many places no dimension lines were drawn. The style of the architecture of the period was much more ornamental than the design of modern times; floral insets, sunken panels, crown molding, and galvanized ironwork helped to beautify the majestic structure. Many Greek and Roman influences, which were popular at the time, can be seen in the column style and triangular roof design of Churchill Downs.

The most widely renowned architectural aspects of Churchill Downs are the iconic twin spires that sit atop the original grandstand. These spires, which tower 46 feet above the roofline and feature galvanized ironwork as well as floral ornamentation, were designed by Joseph Dominic Baldez, a 26 year old architect with D.X. Murphy & Bro, as an addition to make the grandstand appear statelier. As an architectural engineer, I chose to examine the twin spires more closely by creating a 3D model of them in a program frequently used in the industry called Google SketchUp. Once I had successfully recreated the original spires, and, consequently, gained an intimate understanding of how they were designed and built, I went on to recreate the twin spires with a design entirely my own. I wanted to incorporate aspects representative of the Thoroughbred industry, so I tried to reflect the crisp black fences that surround most of the Thoroughbred farms in Lexington and Louisville. I also wanted to provide a place for spectators to view the running of the Kentucky Derby from a perch in the esteemed spires, so I created an open-air balcony as a part of my design of the twin spires. By redesigning the iconic spires, I was

able to connect with Baldez' thinking to understand some the forethought and design choices that went into the original design of the twin spires and further enhance my understanding of the structure of Churchill Downs.



3D Model of Original Twin Spire



3D Remake of Twin Spire

Derby 139 – Rain and Roses

There is nothing greater than to experience a running of the Kentucky Derby firsthand at Churchill Downs. After months of research and active experiences, I was thrilled to have the opportunity to watch the 20 contenders for the 139th running of the Kentucky Derby in person on May 4, 2013.

I wanted to do the Derby up right, so I organized a large group of about 20 of my high school friends to head to Churchill Downs that day. With the help of my mother, I planned out a special Derby breakfast to allow us to fill up on food before heading to the



My Friends and I on Derby Day

track and, of course, to take tons of pictures in our Derby attire. The week leading up to the Derby was full of preparations and last minute planning, so when the actual day arrived, I was brimming with excitement. We chose to dress the part, despite a prediction of thunderstorms and



My Friends and I on Derby Day

cool temperatures. The ladies wore colorful sun dresses, flowery hats, and heels as high as a skyscraper while the guys wore bright shirts, sport coats, and the occasional whiff of strong cologne.

Following our breakfast, we made our way downtown to the track shortly after noon. About the time we managed to find reasonably priced parking, the ominous clouds opened up and showered us with a bone-drenching rain. Although some of the group was discouraged by the sheets of precipitation and chilly temperatures, I was determined to make it into Churchill Downs to experience my first running of the Kentucky Derby.

Outfitted with ponchos and umbrellas, we left the car and began the thirty minute walk to the gate. As we walked closer to the track, and became more and more soaked, several members of the group decided to call it quits, sell their tickets to bystanders, and head back to the car. While this was discouraging to me, I chose not to let their pessimism affect my day and I trudged on with the eight remaining people to the track. When we arrived to the gate, we found ourselves in the first of many jam-packed crowds of the day. We nestled in between some kind middle aged ladies from Minnesota and a couple of overly-intoxicated college girls from Western Kentucky University and slowly moved toward the gate. After being checked, scanned, and patted, we finally entered the swarming racetrack.

Once inside, we made our way to the entrance of one of the two tunnels that burrow underneath the track to connect the infield to the grandstand. The tunnel, which is roughly 60 feet long, was a combination of scantily clad and overdressed individuals all intermingling under a thick stench of alcohol, sweat, perfume, and smoke. We moved quickly through the tunnel into the infield, which was nothing short of a circus of unrefined and uneducated people becoming wilder by the minute. Within the first five minutes of being there, we witnessed two fights, a woman throwing up, and numerous people running around with barely any clothing. As we made our way along the path, it became clear that the infield was just as rowdy as its reputation, making it a modern day manifestation of the lawless Kentucky of the early 19th century. Entering

another tunnel, we crossed back under the track into the lower level of the grandstand where we finally found some shelter from the pouring rain and cold temperatures.

The grandstand, or rather the general admission areas of the grandstand that we were allowed to enter with our \$40 tickets, were just as crowded and foul smelling as the cramped tunnels and entrance gate we had experienced earlier in the day. We spent four hours in the belly of the immense grandstand winding through the mass of people, searching for places to sit down, and fighting to keep from being separated. As we waited for the big race, we were presented with few options other than people watching to keep us entertained due to the long betting lines and lack of views of the racetrack.

When it finally came time for the running of the 139th Kentucky Derby, we made our way to an area of the lower level of grandstand where a large screen was erected to telecast the race to those who couldn't see it. The excitement that built up in Churchill Downs as the horses left the paddock and began the traditional walk around the track before entering their posts was unlike anything I had experienced before. Chills ran up my spine as we sang My Old Kentucky Home, the state song, and I was filled with pride to be a Kentuckian. Young and old, wealthy and average, held their breaths in the final moments before the starting gate erupted into a fury of Thoroughbreds, jockeys, and mud. The crowd cheered and hollered as the horses thundered around the track, everybody shouting the name of different horses that were predicted to win. As the horses came around the final turn and entered the homestretch, the audience, both in the grandstand and the infield, became more and more rambunctious to see who would come in first. The horse I had selected to win, Revolutionary, came in a disappointing third to the champion, Orb. The crowd exploded as Orb crossed the finish line with cheers from winning bettors, who earned \$12 on a \$2 bet, and grumbles from those who bet and lost.



Orb Wins the 139th Kentucky Derby

Although more races were scheduled for the remainder of the day, my friends and I decided to head out in an attempt to beat traffic and return to our warm, dry homes as quickly as possible. Despite the fact that I spent the majority of the day on my feet in the cold and rain, I

still had a fantastic time at the Derby. It was so exhilarating to be at Churchill Downs as the race was run and to feel the excitement in the crowd as the horses barreled around the track.

I feel extremely fortunate to be able to actually have my own personal experience of the subject that I had studied all spring. By venturing into the community that surrounded me, I was able to enhance my perspective of the area that I live in and grow in my pride as a citizen of Kentucky. I've learned enough information to make myself an "expert" on many aspects of the Derby, even though I feel that I have only skimmed the surface of all there is to learn. Most importantly, I've learned things about how I deal with researching a new and unfamiliar topic, meeting new people in situations where I'm out of my comfort zone, and navigating through a day filled with challenge after challenge. Through this experience, I've learned how to be a true learner: a person that successfully takes a broad, general topic and finds a way to break it into smaller pieces, seek additional opportunities to learn about the topic, and then combines all of the learning in a reflective and analytical manner.