



LITTLE BROWN JUG ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of T Thomson

April 11, 2019

Delaware County Historical Society

Delaware, Oh

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PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with T Thomson, conducted by Dr. Kyle McDaniel on April 11, 2019 at the Log Cabin on Delaware County Fairgrounds.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The following transcript has been created by Richard Leavy and has been edited for clarity only.

Transcriptionist	Richard Leavy
Transcription Date	August 1, 2019
Interviewee	T Thomson
Interviewer	Dr. Kyle McDaniel
Interview Location	Log Cabin on Delaware County Fairgrounds
Interview Date:	April 11, 2019

T Thomson Transcript

File #1 (duration: 0:25)

I am the sponsorship manager at Little Brown Jug. My grandfather, Hank Thomson, was co-founder. It's kinda in our blood and that's why I'm here.

File #2 (duration: 1:34)

Q: How was it coming up in, like, the family of the co-founder of the Little Brown Jug?

A: Not involved as a kid. I went to the Fair and we'd watch a race or two. I didn't really get involved until high school. That's when I learned how prestigious this is, what a great event we have in Delaware, Ohio.

Q: What happened in high school?

A: My dad was race secretary. I was his errand boy. Got out of school for a whole week and a car dealer was a sponsor. I would run to the bank or pick up people at the airport. A lot of fun. I did it for 3 years in high school. During college I always came back, at least for Jug Day.

File #3 (duration 1:31)

Q: Looking back how does it feel knowing that what your family started had such a big impact on the community?

A: It's very humbling, amazing to see it. A lot of people don't know the impact that it is. Go down to the southern tier of Delaware County; they don't know what the Jug is. A lot probably don't come up to the city of Delaware. To walk downtown and see the memorabilia and the things, the city closes for the day. It's very, very cool.

File #4 (duration 2:15)

Q: (Unintelligible)

A: I've been to Meadlowlands where they have the Hambletonian, with about a million dollars. That's a trotting race. They race on a mile track. I've been to Canada. They are all great, but...if you're a horse owner you don't care where you are racing, you want your horse to win. There are a lot of horses that don't like half-mile tracks and don't race on them. If they come here it takes some getting used to, to go around two times. I enjoy every minute of it.

Q: I've heard that what's unique is how close the fans get to the horses and stables.

A: Correct, correct. On Jug Day there's 8, 10, 12, 15 people deep but they're walking the horses right past them to get to the paddock so they go race. You won't get that at the Meadowlands, you won't get that anywhere. We're classified a county fair and you get that at a county fair, but not all county fairs are gonna have horses racing for part of the Triple Crown or for \$700,000, like we race here.

File #5 (duration: 1:40)

Q: Any stories about fans who come back year after year? Some special thing they do like costumes?

A: I've only missed one Jug. There are people who take vacations. The international crowd we get here now. A group from Australia. There's a bus back here of Canadians. They take a week's vacation to come here. Costumes--- we've never been like the Derby and have a hat contest or things like that. We've talked about possibly doing that. It takes it a little while to build up. The horse industry is a thriving thing here I Ohio. And we have a lot to thank to the governor, the previous governor, with what they've done to help.

Purses are increasing. We'll get the best horses here. The fans: it's a destination. People need to experience for themselves one time and they're going to be hooked.

File #6 (duration: 1:27)

Q: What are some things you do to get people to come?

A: When they get here we want them to experience something they'll never ever experience anywhere else. And it's hard. We have a half-mile track. It's the smallest they race on. If you've ever get a chance to ride in the starting gate before the race and the horses are right up on it. We're working to maybe working to get them where they may not do it during a live race but experience just off to the side where they can feel the adrenaline rush of the horses and things like that. We're lax on that. We know our demographics is an aging population that watches harness racing. We need to get the younger people involved. Is it going to happen overnight? No. But we have things to do. We have our work cut out for us.

File #7 (duration 1:45)

Q: What has your experience with the fans been like?

A: It's awesome. In today's age it's difficult. It happens at every racetrack. The fans who come here, they know why they come here---they're here to watch the greatest harness race ever, in my opinion. And a lot of them think that, too. But today's age with you being able to gamble on your phone, people don't have to be on the premises. So that's one of the things I'm tasked with: make it an experience for people to come. So they're awesome. You've been up to the Fair. We have the big pavilion hill. Those people are gonna watch the horse race. The grandstands aren't as full anymore. We're trying to find ways to get the younger crowd to come up: college students. We have three colleges within a half hour of here---Ohio Wesleyan, Ohio State, and Otterbein. We're working on ways to get the younger crowd. The tough thing---it's on a Thursday afternoon but also a blessing, we don't have to compete with Ohio State football and all these other sporting events. The fans: they are here for one reason---the greatest harness racing there is.

File #8 (duration: 1:51)

Q: Your grandfather helped start the race. What was he like?

A: Aaah. I would say he was the kindest man, gentlest man. There wasn't a person in Delaware he wouldn't say "hi" to. He would walk up to you and start a conversation. Very personable, soft-spoken. Unless he got really upset, of course, but I never saw that in my entire life. Just even-keeled, didn't have a temper. When things went out of what here with the races for whatever reason or even at the newspaper, he just even-keeled, loving... a great grandfather. I remember times that every Sunday, especially this week---Masters week---we would go down to his house and watch the Masters with him. He loved to golf. It was a lot of fun.

I'm sure you've heard the story how this was founded. Him and Joe Neville, a local attorney here in town, were doing... they were having races at the Fair and given the proposition to have a major stakes race here; part of the Grand Circuit. They decided they weren't going to do it. Well, Joe Neville forgot to send the telegram and so they were supposed to send this telegram "yes or no." Well, they didn't send the telegram so they said, "Well, you're going to have the race now." That's how the Little Brown Jug was started. So, yeah, he was very involved.

File #9 (1:49)

Q: Do you have any stable memories of your experience working the Jug, and, again, coming up with the family of things that stuck out to you?

A: Wow. Yeah, one big one. So my grandfather, Hank. His second wife, they owned a horse together, McKenzie Almahurst. That would have been '86, I believe. I might have that date wrong. [It was actually in 1982] But he entered into the Jug, won its division, and came back for

the final and broke. So.. broke stride. But just the hype of having... Not my horse but it was in the family...was very, very cool. That's the only horse our family ever had to be in the Little Brown Jug. It was a lot of fun.

Q: Broke stride? I don't know what that means.

A: They're pacers and so something spooked the horse possibly or a horse got in its way and it had to misstep. So it breaks its stride and, you know, it happens often, more with trotters than with pacers. But still it happens. So the horse has got to try and get out far from the rail of the racetrack... get the horse under control. Usually the horse ends up coming in last just because everyone's going by it. That's what "break stride" means.

File #10 (duration: 1:21)

Q: Describe what your time was like at the Fair.

A: It was so much different back then, especially for the Little Brown Jug. We race for 5 days a week--- 5 days for one week. The crowds we would get were SO much bigger. The grandstands were full and everything. I just remember the people. Delaware's a destination if you are a harness racing fan.

You need to come to the grounds and experience it yourself. But as a kid, like a said, I was more on the Fair side playing as a kid. I got some perks here and there, you know, nothing big. So we'd come up here and eat our dumbo ears and French fries and all that stuff...normal kid stuff...play the games. I still had to pay to play the games. There were no perks like that. Just being a kid.