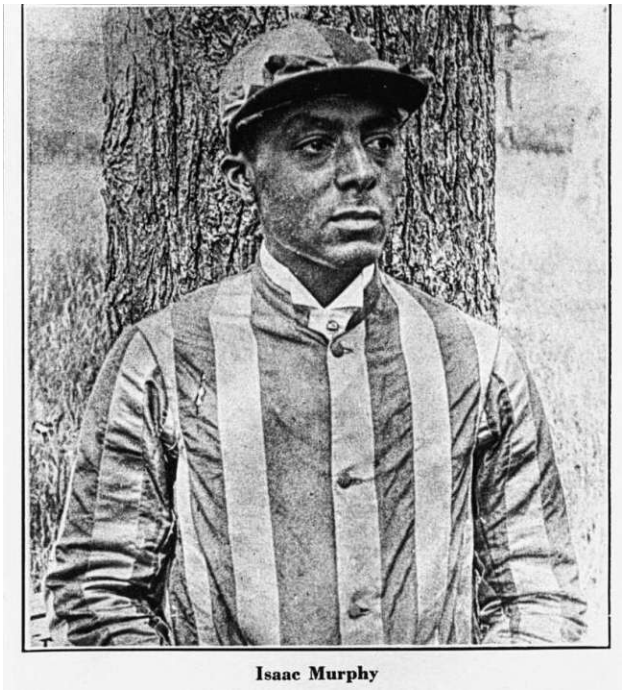


Born a slave, Isaac Murphy became one of history’s greatest jockeys

BY LIZ CAREY
250LexKy@gmail.com

Editor’s Note: As Lexington celebrates the 250th anniversary of its founding, the Herald-Leader and kentucky.com each day throughout 2025 will share interesting facts about our hometown. Compiled by Liz Carey, all are notable moments in the city’s history — some funny, some sad, others heart-breaking or celebratory, and some just downright strange.

Lexington’s Isaac Burns Murphy was considered one of the greatest jockeys in thoroughbred history. He was born enslaved, but he found freedom on the back of a horse. Murphy, who would become an American Hall of Fame jockey, was born in Clark County in 1861. Over the course of his 35-year life, he became one of the most famous jockeys of the 19th century and arguably one of the best of all time. While his mother America had been a slave



Isaac Murphy
Keeneland Library

Legendary jockey Isaac Murphy is one of the many black horsemen who are part of the rich history of Kentucky’s horse industry. The International Museum of the Horse celebrates the grand opening of its new exhibit “Black Horsemen of the Kentucky Turf” this weekend.

at the time of his birth, his parents were able to run to their freedom. Murphy’s father, Jerry, escaped slavery and enlisted in the 114th US

Colored Troops at Camp Nelson in the summer of 1864. America and Isaac moved to Camp Nelson and were considered

refugees of the Union Army there, where America worked and raised Isaac at the camp. Jerry, however, died at a confederate prisoner of war camp. In 1875, Murphy began his riding career riding for Williams and Owings Stables in Lexington, after befriending Eli Jordan, a prominent horse trainer at the stables. He was just 14 when he started racing. Over the course of his career, Murphy rode in 11 Kentucky Derbies, winning three of them. Murphy is the only jockey to win the Kentucky Derby, the Kentucky Oaks and the Clark Handicap in the same year, 1884. He became one of the highest-paid athletes, and among the most famous Black men in America. One of his most famous races over his career was in 1890, when he rode Salvator to a victory over Tenny ridden by rival white jockey Edward “Snapper” Garrison. It was considered to be one of the most thrilling races of all time, with the coun-

try’s leading Black jockey squaring off against the country’s leading white jockey. Murphy bested Garrison by half a head, a race that ended with the first-ever photo finish. In 1890, Murphy fell off his mount, Firenzi, after crossing the finish line in last place. The presumed favorites in the race, stories began to swirl that Murphy had been drunk during the race. Murphy was suspended pending an investigation. The jockey maintained that he’d been drugged. Scandal deepened even more when it was noticed that bettors had uncharacteristically wagered heavily against Murphy and Firenzi. Although Murphy vowed he had been poisoned, the accusation would follow him for the rest of his career. Murphy calculated that he had won 628 races out of the 1,412 times he’d started, a 44% win rate that still stands. Hall of Fame Jockey Eddie Arcaro said in a 1967 Lexington Herald-Leader article

about Murphy said, “There is no chance that his record of winning will ever be surpassed.” An independent calculation of records found that he had 530 wins in 1,538 rides, putting his win rate at 34%, a still impressive total. He was the first jockey to be inducted into the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame at its creation in 1955. Since 1995, the National Turf Writers Association has given the Isaac Murphy Award to the jockey with the highest winning percentage for the year. Murphy died of heart failure in Lexington on Feb. 16, 1896. He was buried in African Cemetery No. 2. During the 1960s, his unmarked grave was forgotten until it was found by University of Kentucky press specialist Frank B. Borries, Jr. Murphy was reinterred at the old Man o’ War burial site, and when the Kentucky Horse Park was built, his remains and the horse’s, were moved again to be buried at the park’s entrance. Have a question or story idea related to Lexington’s 250-year history? Let us know at 250LexKy@gmail.com.

Judge blocks freeze on Harvard enrolling foreign students

BY DANA GOLDSTEIN
NYT News Service

A federal judge in Boston said Thursday morning that she would issue an order blocking the Trump administration’s efforts to prevent Harvard from enrolling international students. The ruling was a win, at least temporarily, for the university in its ongoing confrontation with the White House, which has waged an all-out battle to undermine Harvard’s finances and global influence. Graduates in Harvard Yard lined up to receive their diplomas Thursday, even as the university’s future was under attack. The Trump administration stepped up its effort to restrict foreign students across higher education late Wednesday with an announcement by the secretary of state, Marco Rubio, that officials would begin to

“aggressively revoke” the visas of some Chinese students. Many undergraduates wore white flowers to the graduation ceremonies to signal solidarity with foreign students, who make up about a quarter of the student body. And unlike last year, when administrators faced boos over their sanctions for pro-Palestinian protesters, President Alan Garber was greeted with a standing ovation after emerging as an unlikely leader of resistance against the White House. Here’s what else to know: **Political target:** The administration has accused Harvard of liberal bias, violating the Supreme Court ban on affirmative action and allowing antisemitic behavior. Harvard’s lawyers were expected to argue in court Thursday – using the president’s own words and social media posts – that the institution

is being politically targeted in violation of the First Amendment. **Funding fight:** The Trump administration has frozen more than \$3 billion in federal funding to the university, and Trump has said he would like to revoke Harvard’s tax-exempt status. This week the administration said it would also cancel the federal government’s remaining contracts with Harvard, worth an estimated \$100 million. **Broader battle:** In its larger struggle with higher education, the administration has significantly cut federal funding for research, and a Republican budget bill moving through Congress would impose higher taxes on university endowments. **International students:** One of the administration’s most significant broadsides against Harvard has been its effort to prevent it from enrolling international students. The institution says the move would be devastating, both academically and financially. A Harvard professor and faculty leader, Kirsten Weld, called it “an extinction-level event.”

FROM PAGE 1A
TRUMP

carry out the necessary administrative moves to remove the tariffs. But if the decision holds, it would in a matter of days eliminate new 30% U.S. tariffs on imports from China, 25% tariffs on goods from Canada and Mexico and 10% duties on most other goods entering the U.S. Those tariffs and the prospect of retaliatory ones have been seen as a significant drag on U.S. and global growth and eliminating them – even temporarily – would improve prospects for the world’s major economies. Some central banks have cited the uncertainty caused by trade wars as a hindrance to economic activity. Even as investors cheered prospects for a tariff reprieve, there’s uncertainty over whether the ruling represents a permanent setback to Trump’s push to reshape global trade or a mere impediment. Trump and his supporters have attacked judges as biased and his administration has been accused of failing to fully

comply with other court orders, raising questions over whether it will do so this time. A White House spokesman dismissed the ruling as one made by “unelected judges” who should not have the power “to decide how to properly address a national emergency.” Trump has invoked national emergencies ranging from the U.S. trade deficit to overdose deaths to justify many of his tariffs. “Foreign countries’ nonreciprocal treatment of the United States has fueled America’s historic and persistent trade deficits,” White House spokesman Kush Desai said in a statement. “These deficits have created a national emergency that has decimated American communities, left our workers behind, and weakened our defense industrial base – facts that the court did not dispute.” If the ruling isn’t reversed or ignored, one of the consequences could be greater fiscal concerns at a time when bond markets are questioning the trajectory of the U.S.’s mount-

ing debt load. The Trump administration has been citing increased tariff revenues as a way to offset tax cuts in his “one big, beautiful bill” now before Congress, which is estimated to cost \$3.8 trillion over the next decade. U.S. importers paid a record \$16.5 billion in tariffs in April, and Trump’s aides have said they expected that to rise in the coming months. Major trading partners including China, the European Union, India, and Japan that are in negotiations with the Trump’s administration must now decide whether to press ahead in efforts to secure deals or slow walk talks on the bet they now have a stronger hand. Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi said at a press conference on Thursday morning in Tokyo that the government will “thoroughly examine the content of the ruling and its implications and respond appropriately.” Australia’s Minister for Trade and Tourism Don Farrell said the government will continue to engage and strongly advocate for the removal of tariffs, which he described as “unjustified.”

FROM PAGE 1A TAX

school board meeting asked the school board to hold off on voting on the resolution until a public hearing could be held, but board chair Tyler Murphy, vice chair Amy Green, and board member Penny Christian voted to ask the fiscal court for the increase. “I will be leading the recall effort. It can’t officially start until the fiscal court votes,” Vied said. “We will have 45 days to collect approximately 14,000 signatures. If we’re able to collect enough signatures, the issue would then be put on a ballot for a vote. Either special election, or the next regularly scheduled vote. FCPS would likely decide to not wait and decide to go with a special election.” “To propose and pass a \$30 million tax increase with just four days notice, three days of which were a holiday weekend, is unconscionable. Doing so likely violated state law and definitely violated

public trust,” he said. If the recall effort is successful, the district will find themselves in the position of needing to address their budget woes through fiscal responsibility and spending reductions, which is what they should have done in the first place as opposed to yet again leaning on the taxpayer for more and more revenue, Vied added. The current occupational license tax is expected to bring in \$57 million to the district for the next fiscal year. Initially, the increase in January 2026 would be \$13 million to \$16 million with an estimated \$27 million to \$32 million annually when fully implemented, Fayette Deputy Superintendent Houston Barber said. Kentucky state law — KRS 160.603 — says that “notice shall be given by causing to be published, at least one (1) time in a newspaper of general circulation published in

the county or by posting at the courthouse door if there be no such newspaper, the fact that such levy is being proposed.” The law also says: “The advertisement shall state that the district board of education will meet at a place and on a day fixed in the advertisement, not earlier than one (1) week and not later than two (2) weeks from the date of the advertisement, for the purpose of hearing comments and complaints regarding the proposed increase and explaining the reasons for such proposal.” District spokesperson Dia Davidson Smith said Wednesday afternoon the district’s process in seeking the increase was legal. The resolution became public for the first time over the weekend when it appeared on the Tuesday meeting agenda. No public hearing was held. “We’re incredibly thankful for the ongoing support from our Fayette County community. The investment in our public schools is making a real difference in the lives of students, and we value the commu-

nity’s trust,” Davidson Smith said. “Some have asked about the notice and hearing requirements under KRS 160.603. That law only applies when a school board itself imposes certain taxes, like the property tax or utility tax. That’s not what’s happening here. Instead, the Board of Education has adopted a resolution informing the Fayette County Fiscal Court of its desire to implement a countywide occupational license tax to support public education,” she said. “This would replace the current school district occupational tax. Because this is a county-level tax, it follows a different legal process and is not subject to the requirements of KRS 160.603,” said Davidson Smith. “This step represents a natural progression in the community’s growth and shared responsibility. Fayette County has now reached the statutory threshold at which the law was designed to broaden the base of support for public education across the entire county,” said Davidson Smith.

Fayette County Clerk Susan Lamb said the fiscal court had not received the resolution as of 2:30 p.m. Wednesday. Board members Monica Mundy and Amanda Ferguson voted against the resolution. “This community should not be misled into thinking they’ve had meaningful time to provide input on the Occupational License Tax announced over a holiday weekend,” Mundy said in a Facebook post after the vote. “The process by which we govern matters. Our students deserve to see a model of leadership that goes beyond the bare minimum—one that ensures every voice has a chance to be heard. she said. “If there’s time to consult with stakeholders, build a web page and produce a video, then there’s time to inform the board and the broader community before the vote,” she said. “We can do better. I will do better. Our students—and our community—deserve nothing less,” Mundy said. After the vote, Murphy said in a Facebook post

the tax increase will allow the school district to provide a 1% raise to all FCPS staff and increase pay for family resource center staff. The increase will fill the gap in the increase in school meal costs without increasing the cost to students and families, Murphy said, and continue to fund school safety efforts that cost more year over year than the safety nickel levied can cover. FCPS has cut almost \$18 million from last year’s budget already, he said. “This next step within the current tax code will allow FCPS to continue its investments in our students, staff, and families,” Murphy said. County Commissioners Brian Miller, Alayne White and David Lowe would be voting on the resolution. On Wednesday White and Lowe referred questions to County Judge Executive Mary Diane Hanna or County Attorney Angela Evans. Miller could not immediately be reached by telephone. **Valarie Honeycutt Spears:** (859) 379-4967, @vhspears