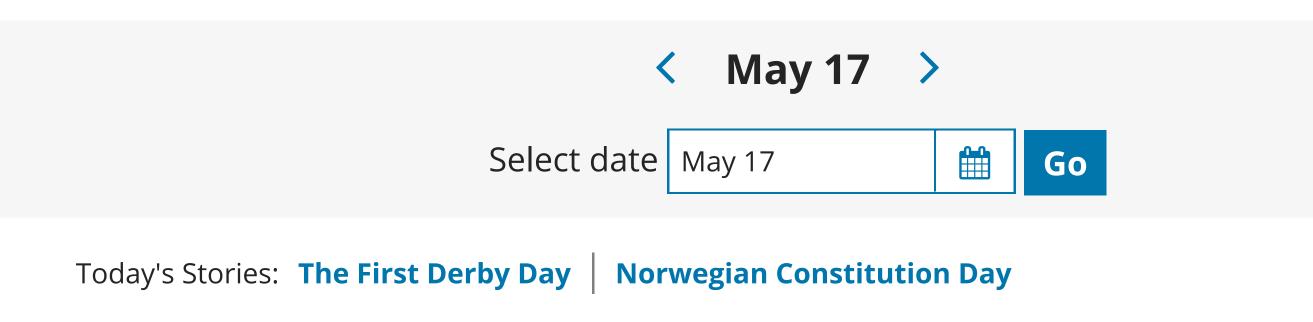
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Today in History - May 17

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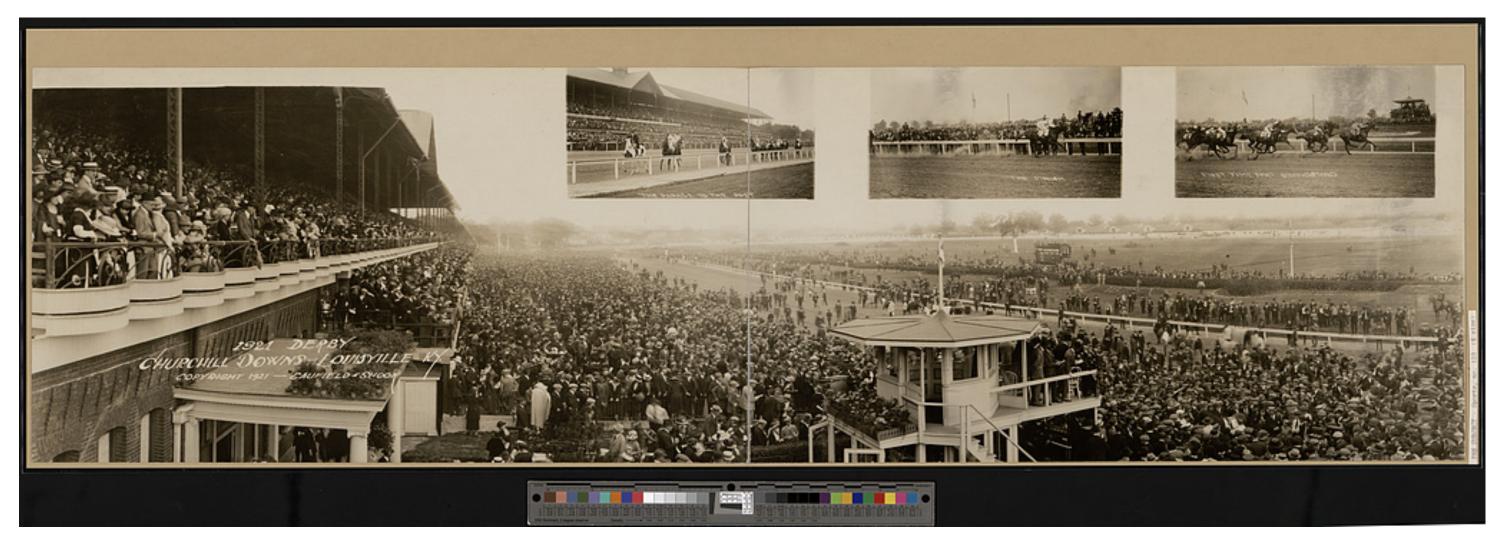


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The First Derby Day

Popular rider Oliver Lewis rode H. P. McGrath's thoroughbred Aristides to victory in the first Kentucky Derby on **May 17**, 1875, at the Louisville Jockey Club. Fourteen of the fifteen jockeys in the derby, including Lewis, were African Americans.



1921 Derby, Churchill Downs, Louisville, Ky. Caufield & Shook, photographer, 1921. Panoramic Photographs. Prints & Photographs Division

The Kentucky Derby was begun by Meriwether Lewis Clark, a prominent Louisville citizen who developed the Louisville Jockey Club. Clark began construction on the race course in 1874 on land leased from two relatives, John and Henry Churchill. He patterned the Kentucky Derby after the English Classic, the Epsom Derby. The Derby, now run annually the first Saturday in May at Churchill Downs, is the oldest consecutively held thoroughbred horse race in the United States. The Kentucky Derby, the Preakness, and the Belmont Stakes comprise the coveted Triple Crown of U.S. horse racing.



Churchill Downs, Louisville, Ky., Derby day. Apr. 29, 1901. Detroit Publishing Company. Prints & Photographs Division

In 1773, the College of William and Mary sponsored a survey of the area that eventually became Louisville, site of the Kentucky Derby. George Rogers Clark settled there in 1778, and the town, named for Louis XVI of France, was organized in 1779. By the early 1800s, Louisville became a major port serving both the Midwest and the South. During the Civil War, it was a key supply depot for Union troops.

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Every May, Louisville hosts the Kentucky Derby and the acclaimed horse show at the Kentucky State Fair. Another part of the Kentucky Derby Festival is a steamboat race on the Ohio River between Louisville and Jeffersonville, Indiana.



"That Kentucky Rag 7." Hampton Durand, music; Boyle Woolfolk, words; Chicago, IL: Forster Music Publisher, 1912. Historic American Sheet Music 7. Duke University Libraries

Learn More

- The Panoramic Photographs collection features panoramic photographs of horse racing, including several of the Kentucky Derby.
- Search on *Kentucky Derby* in the Detroit Publishing Company collection for more images of the event.
- Search on *Jockey Street* in the Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives collection to see images of farmers trading horses and mules in Compton, Kentucky. These black-and-white images were photographed in September 1940 by Marion Post Wolcott.
- Search the collections of maps or photographs and prints on *Louisville* to locate a wide variety of maps and images related to Louisville.

Norwegian Constitution Day

May 17 is Norwegian Constitution Day, a commemoration of the adoption of Norway's constitution in 1814. Many Norwegian-American communities celebrate the holiday in the United States.



Brooklyn, New York. Norwegian Independence Day celebration. Norwegian-American parade. Third generation Norwegian-Americans singing Norwegian songs in church. Albert Freeman and Howard Hollem, photographers, May 17, 1944. Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives. Prints & Photographs Division

A. H. Bratferg was among the many Norwegians who immigrated to the Upper Midwest and Northern Great Plains in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Born in 1856, he set sail for America with his parents, brother, and sister from Ringsager, Norway, in 1860. Sylvan Lee recorded Bratferg in an oral history interview:

Upon landing in New York they boarded a freight train and came to La Crosse, Wisconsin. This town was but a mere lumbering camp and had no depot. The family was dumped off the train, bag and baggage at a point near the present Mill Street crossing, where they awaited the arrival of John Kjos who was to meet them and conduct them to their future home.



"Pioneer Days of A. H. Bratferg." Sylvan Lee, interviewer; Wisconsin. American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1940. Manuscript Division

Ole Myrvik's Sod House, Milton, North Dakota... John McCarthy, photographer, 1896. Digital Horizons: Life on the Northern Plains ?. NDSU Institute for Regional Studies (North Dakota)

Inger Watland told the story of his family's pilgrimage from Norway to Nebraska in a 1940 interview:

My parents came from Norway and settled in Chicago, where my father was a carpenter, he helped to rebuild after the great fire of 1772.... My father came to Nebraska and homesteaded in what is now known as North Branch, Boone County. He came alone. He put up a sod house and some sheds for the stock and when he was ready to send for us every think [sic] burned down. So he had to put up more buildings and when we [went] to Nebraska in a moving wagon, mother, brother and myself...



"Inger Watland." Fay Levos, interviewer; Petersburg, Nebraska, Feb. 26, 1940. American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1940. Manuscript Division

Lutheran Church, Monona County, Iowa. John Vachon, photographer, May, 1940. Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives. Prints & Photographs Division

The Bratferg and Watland families were part of the large wave of Norwegian immigrants who came to the U.S. during the late 1840s through the 1860s. These pioneers came to better their economic and social conditions, largely settling in Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, and the Dakotas. Their strong religious heritage was evidenced in the construction of many Lutheran churches and colleges, such as St. Olaf College founded in Northfield, Minnesota in 1874.

The Norwegian immigrants brought their musical traditions with them. *"Paal paa Haugje"* (Paul on the Hill) forms part of a group of field materials documenting Norwegian songs performed on February 18, 1939, by Alf Nilsson, originally from the Lofoten Islands of northern Norway. His songs were collected by Sidney Robertson Cowell in Carmel, California and form part of the collection California Gold: Northern California Folk Music from the Thirties.

Learn More

- Read more Norwegian-American memories by searching on *Norway* or *Norwegian* in American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1940.
- Digital Horizons: Life on the Northern Plains C includes several hand-colored photographs of Norwegian immigrants and their descendants; search the collection on *Norwegian*.
- Pioneering the Upper Midwest: Books from Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, ca. 1820 to 1910 includes a wide variety of written materials portraying life in this part of the country ranging from the seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries. Search the collection on *Norwegian* to learn more about the Norwegian immigrants who populated the Upper Midwest.
- The Map Collections include early maps of a number of Midwestern cities where Norwegian immigrants settled, such as Chicago, Minneapolis, and La Crosse. Use the Zoom feature to view houses, street names, paddle wheelers, horse drawn carts, the aftermath of the Chicago Fire, and much more in fine and accurate detail.
- Search Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers on *Norwegian-Americans*, *Norwegian immigrants*, or other terms of interest to find hundreds of newspaper articles.
- Search on *Norway* or *Norwegian* for photographs in the Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives collection.
- View an intoduction to Norwegian-American Immigration and Local History from the Library's Local History and Genealogy Reference Services.

