



## LONNIE CLAYTON

Alonzo “Lonnie” Clayton, an African American who lived in the North Argenta Addition of North Little Rock, was one of American horseracing’s best jockeys in the 1890s. While only 15, he made racing history in 1892 by riding Azra to victory in the Kentucky Derby to become the youngest winner at the time. As a teenager Clayton was a national figure, known as a come-from-behind artist who could and did win high stakes races from New York to California and in between. Horseracing historian Edward Hotaling, author of *The Great Black Jockeys*, said “Clayton became one of the great riders of the New York circuit all through the 1890s, but he rode all over the country, doubling in the Kentucky Oaks in 1894 and 1895 and then returning to Saratoga to add the Flash Stakes.”

Clayton virtually disappeared after 1901, as did most of the black jockeys. He died in Los Angeles in 1917.

Hotaling contends that racism drove black jockeys out of the sport they had dominated since the mid-1600s. After they were ostracized, he

says, they were “written out” of history.

“It was bigotry,” Hoteling wrote in *The Great Black Jockeys*, “in the form of big money and physical threats and outright exclusion, which was as widely practiced as if it were written, which explained the vanishing of the black jockeys.”

Among the highlights of Clayton’s career:

- In 1891, he won the prestigious Jerome Stakes and the Champagne Stakes, both at Morris Park in Westchester County, New York, one of the major tracks nationally in the 1890s.
- In addition to his breakthrough win in 1892, he raced in three other Kentucky Derbies, finishing second in 1893 and 1897, and third in 1895.
- In 1892, he won the Clark Stakes at Churchill Downs and the Travers Stakes at Saratoga, then the capital of American horse racing.
- He won the Churchill Downs jockey crown during the fall meet in 1893; won the Brooklyn Handicap and the Futurity at Sheepshead Bay in Brooklyn in 1894; won the Kentucky Oaks in 1894 and 1895; won the Little Rock Jockey Club’s Arkansas Derby on Laureatte in 1895 at Clinton Park in Little Rock and was also second in the 1897 Arkansas Derby; won the Cotton Stakes in Memphis and the Saratoga Stakes, both in 1895; finished third in the Preakness in 1896; won the Latonia Derby in Cincinnati and the St. Louis Derby, both in 1897; won the California Derby in San Francisco in 1898; won the Suburban Handicap in Brooklyn in 1898, in what he called “the greatest race I ever rode,” according to the *Chicago Daily Tribune*.
- During the peak of his career in 1895, he posted 144 wins and was in the money on 403 of his 688 mounts (almost 60 percent), as reported in *Goodwin’s Official Turf Guide*.

Clayton moved to Pulaski County at age 10 with his parents in the mid-1880s. In 1888, he ran away from home to become a jockey. He joined an older brother, Albertus Clayton, who was a jockey in Chicago. Lonnie Clayton first worked as an exercise boy for the stable of the legendary E.J. “Lucky” Baldwin. His first outing as a jockey came in 1890 in Clifton, New Jersey.

With his winnings, he built a Queen Anne style house in 1895 at 2105 Maple Street in North Little Rock where he lived during the off-season. The house, one of only two surviving Queen Anne style homes in North Little Rock, was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1990. Clayton also built a two-story commercial building at 617 Main Street, North Little Rock, in 1897, but it was demolished about 1980.