

Basic Detail Report



Program of Santa Ana Races

Date
c. 1892

Primary Maker
Silkwood

Medium
Paper and ink

Description

This is a program for the famous race between Silkwood and Dick, held at Santa Ana racetrack, Nov 5, 1892. The Annual Orange County Fair was created soon after Orange County's birth and was a unifying force in the new conglomerate. There is no evidence that bringing the new county together was the intention of the first Orange County Fair but were it not for the fair and the sense of camaraderie spawned by a racehorse named Silkwood, the distinct cities of Orange County could still be at odds. With the establishment of the Orange County Fair Association, or the 32nd District Agricultural Association for the 1891 fair, a previously unseen degree of planning went in to the First Annual Fair. Exhibits of gargantuan pumpkins, watermelons up to 80 pounds, and other notable produce were held in French's Opera House in Santa Ana; livestock were similarly awarded prizes in an outdoor enclosure; and the main event was held at the one-mile oval track which once stood at Bristol Street and Edinger Avenue. It was here that Silkwood raced his way into the collective hearts of Orange Countians. Owned and driven by Jacob Willits, an elder Kansan resembling a bearded veteran of the Union army, Silkwood was already known throughout the county as a good pacer when he was first entered in the 1890 races. The largest single peak of Silkwood-mania came in 1892 when the horse was billed to race against a trotter from Los Angeles against which Silkwood had lost on its home turf in the previous year. A \$1500 purse was offered to the winner and the crowd was tense. When the dust had settled, Silkwood had won the race with a time of 2:07, exceptional considering the buggy he pulled. Between 1890 and 1894 Silkwood became more than just an attraction, he was a local legend. He was photographed like a celebrity, painted by fans, and even myths formed: Jacob Willits was often accused of feeding his star horse a diet of pumpkins, which he slyly perpetuated. When Silkwood raced against horses and drivers from Los Angeles County he was advertised as "Our Silkwood." In 1895 Silkwood lost his first race at an Orange County Fair. Dejected by this defeat, Orange Countian's attendance of the fair dwindled in the following year.

Dimensions

Overall: 9 1/2 x 7 3/8 in. (24.1 x 18.7 cm)