

ST LEGER
A sweepstake of 2000 guineas each, with 200
guineas added for the winner.
To be run on the 23rd March 1854.

Owner	Description	Age	Color	Remarks
M. Morris	Corwalli by Juncus a Bay Colt	3	5-6 Black & white	Paid £20 - 0
Edw. Macdonald	Warrigal	3	5-8 Blue Body & feet, black Neck & tail tip	£20 - 3
A. W. Hunter	Brown Colt Mick's Foal by Colborn & Co. Bussell	3	F. W. (same as Juncus)	£20 - 0
Philip M. Smith	Bay filly "Samborini" "Merry Merri"	3	Brown & black Black legs	Pair £10 - £10
Philip M. Smith	Dark f. "Fredrick" by "Robt. Ford"	3	5-7 Blue & black Black legs	Pair £10 - £10
A. Coughtry	Dark f. "Lion Bay" by "Pam" & "Hight"	3	5-8 Black & white	Pair £20 - 0
Anthony Green	Bay filly "Red Green" "Mick Little" & "John, the Laddy" & "Merri"	3	Blue Body Black & white Black legs	Pair £20 - 0
D. Powell	Dark f. "Juncus" by "Juncus" & "Pam" "Couchantus"	3	5-10 Blue & black Black legs	Pair £20 - 2
G. Watson	Grey f. "Merri" by "Juncus"	3	5-7 White	Pair £10 - £10
H. Simpson	Dark bay "Bolon" by "Juncus"	3	5-7 Blue & black Black & white Black legs	Pair £10 - £10
J. M. Smith	Dark bay "Merri" "Hill's" & "Merri"		Black & white Black legs	Pair £10 - £10

Details of the St Leger, a sweepstake race for three-year-olds run on 23 March 1854, Victoria Turf Club register, 1854-63. Australian Manuscripts Collection, MS 13540

Victoria Turf Club register

Australian Manuscripts Collection MS 13540

Acquired 2006-07

This might seem a mundane bound register but in fact it is the foundation document of that great Australian institution, the Melbourne Cup.

The Victoria Turf Club was not the first club to race in Melbourne. Indeed, it did not emerge until 12 years after the inaugural (1840) Flemington races, but it became the local arbiter for the sport. The handwriting in this ledger belongs to the club's hardest worker, James Henderson, a name largely forgotten in racing history. He ran Melbourne's busiest horse market, Kirk's Bazaar in Bourke Street West.

The register (1854-63), with its tooled leather label, 'Victoria Turf Club', contains 315 written pages. It was acquired with financial support from the State Library Foundation. Each race at Flemington from 1854 has its own page. Listed are conditions and entries, handwritten at first but later pasted in from press cuttings. Initially, the information is extensive. The Melbourne Town Plate on 21 March opens the book. It attracted three entries, for which owner, horse, breeding and age, weight allocated, jockey colours and amounts paid are listed.

The register records the details of some of the curious races held in the gold rush era: the Thespian Cup (gift of the Queen's Theatre); the Garrison Cup (gift of the officers); the Booth Holders' Purse; and once, as a novelty, the Cheroot Scurry, bona fide owners as riders 'smoking a lighted cheroot'.

Most importantly, the register confirms the first running of local classics, names copied from England, whose origins were later disputed. 'A race to be called the Derby will be run for at the next spring meeting', notes the register in 1855. Hector Norman Simson's filly, Rose of May, won this first Victoria Derby. The Oaks dates from 1859, even though James Bathe's filly, Birdswing, ended up the only runner. She won, literally, in a walkover.

Unfortunately, the first Melbourne Cup, won by the Sydney horse Archer in 1861, is represented by press cuttings only. From this we confirm that the total prize money for the winning owner reached £930, not £710 as is often stated.

In 1864 the Victoria Turf Club and its younger competitor, the Victoria Jockey Club (1857), brought themselves to insolvency through incessant rivalry. Wiser heads prevailed. The clubs dissolved and re-formed as the Victoria Racing Club, which has run Flemington and the Melbourne Cup from that day forward. No other original record of the Victoria Turf Club survives.