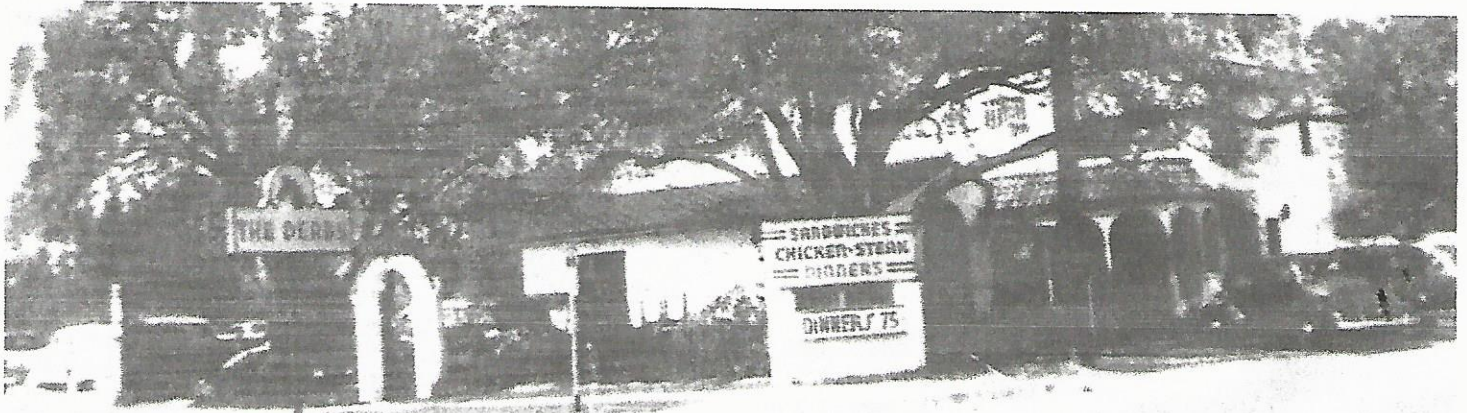


# HISTORY OF THE DERBY RESTAURANT

By William E. Mutschler



The Derby Restaurant, Arcadia, CA - circa 1930s  
Photo courtesy of "Chip" Sturniolo

*Note: Much of this article was extracted from an unpublished manuscript written by Dominic Sturniolo in 1983. Other sources are noted within the text.*

The Derby Restaurant, on Route 66 in Arcadia, CA has since 1938 been a favorite meeting place for the "racetrack crowd" from nearby Santa Anita. It has survived two wars, a major depression, prohibition, and a complete transformation of its' surroundings, and still it is known for that generous and leisurely hospitality, which has all but disappeared from this complex modern world.

## WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

The Derby Restaurant has a history steeped in excellent food with a bouquet of the sports world to toast its' long time popularity.

It all began before the Depression of the thirties in Arcadia California. There were five turning points in the history of the original Derby Restaurant opened 59 years ago.

Hudson M. Proctor created the original Derby in 1922, located at Foothill and Santa Anita, which he called "Proctor Tavern." When the establishment was opened, Proctor laid the cornerstone of an Arcadia landmark to which prominent personalities have gravitated ever since. Now, after more than a half century the Derby Restaurant stands as a museum of gracious living - a haven of Old World in a frantic age - where superb food and fine

drink carry forward the traditions of a bygone day.

It was built in what was a fashionable residential neighborhood, and its' down town was a city of chicken ranches and orange groves.

Proctor's Tavern is one of the places which can be credited for starting the distinctive architecture that prevails in Arcadia today.

The second chapter occurred in early 1931, when the Tavern was moved to its' present location, when Proctor purchased the Huntington Drive property. It proved a most traumatic and delightful acquisition to the artistic development of the City.

## GEORGE WOOLF - GREATEST MONEY RIDER

The Third Chapter occurred in 1938. George Woolf with his good friend, Bill Peterson, purchased the Derby chiefly as a meeting place for his friends of the turf, and operated it until his untimely end in 1946. It was then taken over by his widow, who operated it for five years before selling to the present owners.

George Woolf was acknowledged during his last years to be one of the greatest money riders of all time. He reached the point when he accepted only some 200 mounts a year, but among them were the Champions of his era - Seabiscuit, Whirlaway, Kayak II, Pavot, By Jimminy, Challedon, Occupation, and many others of their quality.



The only truly great race in the American calendar to elude him was the Kentucky Derby. Twice second, but never successful in this turf classic, Woolf once remarked, "I guess I jinxed myself, when I named my place The Derby - maybe I'll have to settle for a Derby in Arcadia instead of Louisville."

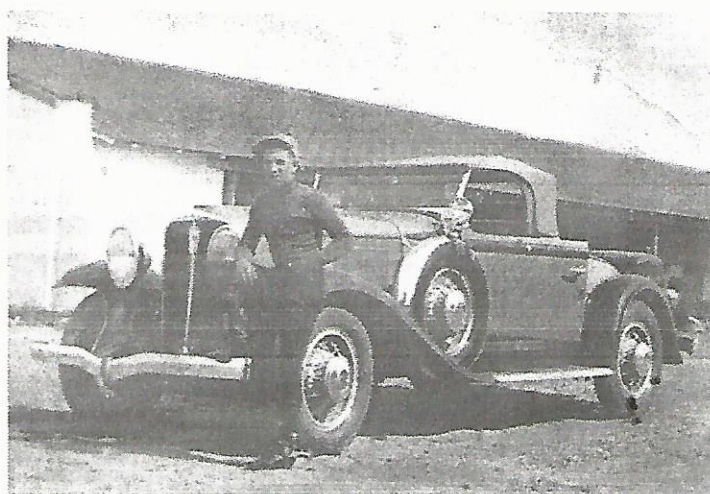
Woolf was fatally injured when thrown from his mount "Please Me" during the running of the fourth race at Santa Anita Race Track on January 3, 1946.

The Fourth Chapter began in early 1951, when Dominic and Lorene Sturniolo - "Murph and Slugger" - as they are affectionately known, acquired the Derby from Woolf's widow.

During the years after the death of George Woolf the Derby had fallen so low that it was a long and painful intermission. Due to mismanagement, gradual and inevitable, the tone changed; the atmosphere became heavier. The Derby was on its way to becoming a caricature. Patronage lessened and receipts decreased.

Genvieve, recognizing her limitations, decided to sell in 1949. The Sturniolos appeared in 1951 and dared to attempt what no other would dare, the resurrection of the ghost of the Derby.

True, the Sturniolos were not novices; they had experience. To succeed in this seemingly hopeless ven-



George Woolf  
Photo courtesy of "Chip" Sturniolo

ture, they were armed with determination, desire, lots of ambition and availability of long hours.

It wasn't long before the Sturniolos were turning people away at the door, and the Derby was once more the place to be seen.

The Sturniolos expanded the original structure by building an eighteen foot wide "circle" around Woolf's restaurant to provide room for those who savored the original idea of a steak, a filet mignon wrapped in bacon and charbroiled to one's desire. Over three million have been served in the enlarged dining area banquet room and lounge; a true testimonial to this stable menu item.

### IRISH COFFEE INTRODUCED

The Derby initiated another era with another "first", when bringing from San Francisco, "Murph's" native city, a libation he discovered in one of his favorite Pubs, the Buena Vista.

The drink had only recently been introduced at the urging of Stan Delaplane, travel editor, who brought it from Shannon, Ireland a few months before. It is called Irish Coffee, and in Murph's opinion, its history is as worth the telling as the history of the Derby itself.

Irish coffee was invented by a bartender in the Shannon Airport for air travellers, who wanted something just a little stronger than java. Murph was a bartender himself as far back as when the movie stars took the Super Chief across the country, and stopped in a little place across the street from the Los Angeles Union Station, known as "Jerry's Joynt," where Murph rubbed the mahogany.



Billy Barty and "Chip" Sturniolo at The Derby  
Photo courtesy of "Chip" Sturniolo



With this experience he realized that Irish Coffee was a drink that would be appreciated as an after dinner drink, or a late night toddy, and certainly it has been all of that at the Derby.

Persons interested in race track lore are missing something if they fail to pay a visit to this restaurant. On reflection it is probably the most outstanding collection of "Turfiana" in the nation, aside from that at the National Museum of Racing in Saratoga.

Photographs dating back to 1875, whips, saddles, racing silks, horse shoes and other relics, many of them collector's items, are on display and are shown with enthusiasm by the proprietors.

Among the collection and art display is a huge photograph of Churchill Downs on which the likeness of every Kentucky Derby winner from Aristides, the first is superimposed. It is said to be the only complete group of winners of the famous event in the world. Then there are also pictures of every Santa Anita Handicap and Santa Anita Derby winner; many of Seabiscuit, Woolf's favorite mount.

As one enters the Derby he is confronted by showcases containing the most prized items in the original Woolf collection. A faded and yellowing guest book signed by many noted personalities of the twenties and thirties. On the walls of the cocktail lounge, in the passages and in the dining rooms are pictorial testimonials to the greats of the Sporting World. Pictures of champion boxers dating back to John L. Sullivan; greats of the tennis, baseball and football worlds. These items went through a fire, which partially destroyed the place in 1942.

### ROGUE'S GALLERY

The fifth Chapter in the story of the Derby began in 1963, when a group of four friends fell into the pleasant habit of stopping off at the Derby to visit with Sturniolo for conversation and refreshments.

The bar of the Derby became their club. However, being civic minded, it occurred to them that something constructive might be accomplished with this leisure time, useful to the community and satisfying to the small group.

They were aware that the blood program in Arcadia could use help, so this became their adopted

project and "THE ROGUES" were born.



"The Rogues" of The Derby  
Charter Members ("Murph" Sturniolo center)  
Photo courtesy of "Chip" Sturniolo

The five Charter Members each became "Chief" during the next five years on a rotating basis. All ex-Chiefs served on a committee to select future Chiefs.

The membership of five grew to 130. Blood-giving in Arcadia more than tripled due chiefly to the "Rogues."

### SADDLE LINKS PHAR LAP, WOOLF

April 6, 1932, newspapers around the world shouted the stunning news: "HE'S DEAD!" cried the *Sydney Morning Herald*. "Poison Search in Phar Lap's Death" headlined the *New York Times*.

Woolf was one of several future Hall of Famers - Arcaro and Longden among them - in the young jockey colony at Tijuana when Phar Lap captivated the racing world with his romp in the Agua Caliente Handicap. Woolf was fascinated not only by the horse, but by his unusual saddle.

After Phar Lap died, a despondent Billy Elliott, Phar Lap's jockey, gave Woolf the saddle as a token of friendship before returning to Australia. Fashioned of kangaroo leather and trimmed in lizard skin, it was larger, fancier and softer than conventional cowhide tack.

With what he called his "lucky saddle," Woolf went



on to become America's top money rider, twice leading the nation in number of stakes victories and winning almost every major race save the Kentucky Derby.

On Jan. 3, 1946, rounding the clubhouse turn astride a modest allowance horse named Please Me, Woolf suddenly fell headfirst to the track, incurring fatal injuries. A contemporary newspaper account said Please Me "apparently stumbled." The uncertainty fueled speculation that Woolf, a diabetic, may have blacked out and simply toppled from his mount.

George Woolf died the following day.

Sportswriter Dan Parker supplied the final irony in the strange Woolf-Phar Lap story." Woolf, wrote Parker, did not use his lucky saddle that fateful day.

Along with other racing memorabilia, the saddle today is on display at The Derby Restaurant in Arcadia. The restaurant, once owned by Woolf, is approximately seven furlongs from the clubhouse turn at Santa Anita.

### **The Derby Restaurant Today**

The Derby remains one of San Gabriel Valley's favorite destinations, offering a full service bar and great entertainment. For superb dining or an "after the races" experience, check out The Derby!

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**Phone: (626) 447-8174 or (626) 447-2430**

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## **A Brief History of Arcadia, California**

by Susan Kasten (ca 1990)

*Editor's Note - This article was found in the archives of the Arcadia Historic Museum. It is reprinted here with permission of Carol Libby, Curator.*

An Indian village called Aleupkigna once stood in Arcadia near the lake at the present-day arboretum. In this mild climate the Indians found an abundance of wild game, roots, berries and seeds. They leached the bitterness out of acorns, making acorn meal for their bread. Generally peaceful, they traded with other villages as far away as the islands off the coast.

In the late 18th century, the Spaniards who had claimed Mexico began to settle Alta California, as they called it. In San Gabriel, they established the fourth of 21 California missions. The San Gabriel Mission was given all the land from the San Bernardino Mountains to the sea. The Indians who lived on that land were called Gabrielinos in Spanish. Many Indians were converted to the Catholic faith by the padres and were given the labor of building the mission, tending crops and herding cattle. They were taught the crafts necessary for daily life in the Spanish style but they were not allowed to leave the mission. Their numbers were greatly reduced by hardship and by diseases they had never known before. As the population of the nearby Pueblo De Los Angeles grew, more land was needed to produce food. The San Gabriel mission lands were divided into about 20 large ranchos. One of these was the Rancho Santa Anita. The rancheros continued to use Indian laborers and servants.

After Mexico achieved independence from Spain in 1821, Californians under Mexican rule enjoyed greater freedom to trade with foreigners and settlers from many nations began to arrive. In the 1830's, the California missions were stripped of their power and their property. By becoming Mexican citizens and joining the Catholic Church, Yankees and others could acquire land in Alta California. One such person was Hugo Reid originally from Scotland.

A businessman in Mexico, Reid visited San Gabriel



where he met and married an Indian woman. Victoria, as he called her, was a widow with four children. She had been well brought up in the household of a Mexican family. Part of her dowry was the Rancho Santa Anita. Hugo Reid adopted the name of Don Perfecto with his new faith. Although the family's principal home remained always in San Gabriel near the mission, Reid built an adobe home beside the lake on the Rancho Santa Anita. At that time it consisted of about 13,000 acres.

In the late 1840's, Mexico and the United States were at war in the southwest. When the fighting ended, California was a territory of the United States. The discovery of gold was bringing in rough and ready newcomers. The easy-going Spanish heritage of the ranches was doomed. Hugo Reid sold the Rancho Santa Anita, and for the next thirty years it passed through the hands of several owners.

Elias J. Baldwin came to San Francisco in the 1850's by wagon from the middle west with his first wife and daughter, Clara. Already enriched by sharp dealings along the trail, he added to his wealth with investments in gold mines.

Baldwin earned the name of "Lucky" by leaving orders to sell some mine shares while he was on a trip. But he failed to leave the key to his strongbox and when he returned, the shares had unexpectedly increased in value, making him richer than ever.

Visiting the San Gabriel valley for the first time in 1875, "Lucky Baldwin was so impressed by the beauty of the Rancho Santa Anita that he purchased it immediately for \$200,000 cash. The ranch by then had been reduced to 8,000 acres, so the price he paid was \$25 and acre.

Baldwin established his home in Hugo Reid's adobe, improving it according to Victorian standards and adding an elaborate coach barn and a guest house, the famous "Queen Anne Cottage." Baldwin built the ranch into a tourist attraction. Plants and animals of all kinds were raised and the produce of the ranch was widely advertised and sold. Trees were planted in great numbers. Baldwin was able to pursue his lifelong interest in race horses and had four derby winners to his credit.

In the 1880's, Baldwin sold a portion of the Rancho Santa Anita to N.C. Carter, founder of the town of Sierra Madre. Another portion was sold to the brothers Monroe who called their town Monrovia. The main route

from Los Angeles at that time was Duarte Road. Travelers turned onto Santa Anita (then Double Drive), shaded by four rows of Pepper and Eucalyptus trees. They drew ever closer to the mountains as they approached the east entrance of the Baldwin Ranch. It was outside these gates that Baldwin chose to subdivide and create his own town. The first house was on the northeast corner of Santa Anita and Colorado (then Orange). The second house was built on the southeast corner of First and Huntington (then Falling Leaf).



*Elias Jackson "Lucky" Baldwin (ca 1875)  
Photo Courtesy Sturniolo Collection*

Two railroads served Arcadia. At First and Santa Clara where the tracks crossed, Baldwin built the Oakwood Hotel where carriages waited to take visitors to see such sights as the Baldwin Ranch and the Ostrich Farm in South Pasadena. People also flocked to the Bonita Hotel, White City, the Mullins Saloon, Johnson's Arcadia Inn and the Green Front Saloon, among many others. These hotels, saloons, and places of entertainment made Arcadia popular. Clara, "Lucky" Baldwin's Daughter, ran "Clara Villa" on the northwest corner of First and St. Joseph.

In 1903, the city of Arcadia was formally established. The first city council was comprised of Baldwin,



his relatives and employees. Elias J. "Lucky" Baldwin was over 80 when he died in 1909. He had lived to see the transformation from ranch to city. Three years after his death, the sale of liquor was abolished within the city limits and Arcadia settled down to a slower, more family-oriented pace.

Baldwin's first two wives, Sarah Unruh and Mary Cochrane, divorced him. His third wife, the beautiful Jennie Dexter, lived but a short time. Her image is seen in the stained glass door of the Queen Anne Cottage at the Arboretum. Baldwin's fourth wife was Lillie Bennett, daughter of the architect of the cottage. She survived her husband but the bulk of Baldwin's estate of \$11 million was left to his daughters. During the remainder of their lifetimes (Clara died in 1929; Anita in 1939), they sold off the remaining land except that on which their homes stood. What was left went into a holding company and was developed over several decades.

Clara was married four times. She had a son, Albert, Jr. by her second husband, Albert Snyder. She also had a daughter, Rosebudd, by her third husband, Budd Doble, a trotting horse driver. Her fourth husband was Harold Stocker, a light opera singer. Clara went by the name of Mrs. Baldwin Stocker.

Anita was the daughter of Baldwin's third wife and about thirty years younger than her sister. Anita's second husband was Hull McLaughry, a San Francisco attorney and a member of Arcadia's first city council. They had a son, Baldwin, and a daughter, Dextra. On her divorce, Anita took back the name of Baldwin for herself and the children. She carried on her father's interest in horse breeding at the Baldwin ranch.

Arcadia has had two racetracks in its history. The first opened by "Lucky" Baldwin in 1907, was modeled after Ascot and was located on the southeast corner of the ranch. It was served by a railroad spur off the Southern Pacific so that race-goers could travel to and from the races with the utmost convenience.

After only two years, horse racing was outlawed in California. Baldwin died about this time and his daughter, Anita, sold the area occupied by the track to the War Department. During World War I, it became Ross Field, named for a fallen hero from Arcadia, but better known locally as the "Balloon School." Huge cigar-shaped bal-

loons went aloft, held by ropes, so that army officers could observe the accuracy of artillery practice. Later, the War Department deeded the land back for use as a recreational area and a public park and golf course were created.

In the early 1930's, horse racing again became legal in California. There was a failed attempt to build a track north of Huntington near Michillinda. The excavation was dubbed "Smoot Hole" after its erstwhile builder. On Christmas day, 1934, the new Santa Anita Park opened at its present site. Anita Baldwin, who cared for race horses as much as her father had, saw his beloved sport return to Arcadia. During World War II, racing was suspended and the track was used briefly as an assembly center for Californians of Japanese descent. Then (as Camp Santa Anita) it served the army, and tank practice took place north of Foothill.

By the 1920's small businesses lined First Avenue from Huntington toward Foothill. A city hall had been built on the northwest corner of First and Huntington. Some streets had been paved and the city had gas lines, electric lights and telephones. A second business center was developing on Baldwin Avenue south of Duarte Road, near the South Entrance of the Baldwin ranch. Truck gardens, chicken ranches, nurseries and orchards covered much of the city.

In the 1930's, Colorado and Huntington were extended through the Baldwin ranch. A road was built into the mountains from the top of Santa Anita to Chantry Flats. A county park was being developed where the "Balloon School" had been during World War I. Transcontinental Route 66 now ran along Huntington Drive.

After World War II, home building began anew and much of the rural flavor of the city was lost. On the site of the old ranch many changes were taking place — A new city hall and Police station were built and then a high school and the Methodist Hospital; the L.A. County Arboretum was taking shape around the lake and buildings of the Reid and Baldwin eras; and the final link of Baldwin Avenue was completed. When the 210 Freeway crossed Arcadia, the last remnants of the Baldwin ranch were erased.