* In the **1700s and early 1800s**, Virginia was known as **“the Race Horse Region.”** Some of the very best horses came from the Old Dominion, and their owners and trainers were famous for their expertise.
* Before the latter part of the 19th century, races were **usually run in 4-mile heats, with the horse who won 2 out of 3 heats being declared the winner.** But the race might go on for longer if a different horse won each heat… and there are records of races going on for as long as five heats, or 20 miles.
* As racing expanded, **rival tracks in Richmond, including *Broad Rock, Fairfield, New Market and Tree Hill,*** started running their races on subsequent weeks to **get a better share of the crowds.**
* I’d like to mention a few of the key Virginia sires from that early period:
  + About 1764**, Colonel John Baylor**, owner of **Newmarket Plantation in Caroline County,** asked his agent in England to **find "a most beautiful strong bay at least 14.3 hands high, as much higher as possible, provided he has beauty, strength and sp't with it, and one that had won some Kings plates with a pedigree at full length…”** ***Fearnought***, a 16-hand, bright bay 9-year-old and grandson of the Godolphin Arabian, met those qualifications handsomely.
  + One of the most **remarkable imports after the Revolution** **was a chestnut stallion named *Diomed*.** Although he was the **first winner of the Epsom Darby in 1780,** he was a disappointment at stud. In England, that is. He was **imported to Virginia in 1798, at the advanced age of 21,** against the advice of another English agent who called him **“a tried and true bad foal-getter.”**
    - **Colonel John Hoomes of Bowling Green, and John Tayloe III of Mount Airy,** did not follow that advice and paid **about 1,000 guineas for him.** They were proved right as his offspring in America were terrific racers, and the new American owners **were soon able to sell him at six times what they paid for him**. Esteemed race historian John Gilmer Speed: [*Diomed* was] **"the most important of all horses, so far as race-horses in America are concerned."**
    - ***Diomed*** stood **at Tree Hill Race Course**, home of **the Richmond Jockey Club**, and it was there that he sired ***Sir Archy*** (1805-1833), both a champion racer and outstanding sire. After only two years of racing, ***Sir Archy*** was bought by the governor of North Carolina and **retired to stud**, simply because there were no opponents ready to race against him**. *Sir Archy* was inducted into the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame** in the inaugural class of 1955
  + One **of *Sir Archy’s* grandsons** was **a big, bad-tempered chestnut with a blaze named *Boston*** (1833-1850). ***Boston*** was a brilliant racer with such a will to win he was notorious for **biting his opponents and, sometimes, his jockeys.** He was a legend on the track, **winning 40 out of 45 races,** and **15 of those in succession**. He went on to sire other brilliant horses and mares, including ***Lexington***, a renowned sire whose adventures recently featured in the best-selling novel, ***Horse.***
  + ***Fearnought, Diomed, Sir Archy, and Boston*** were ancestors of **all the Triple Crown winners**, *with the exception of* ***Citation****,* whose lines are not American, but who is still a descendant of ***Diomed*** during his time in Britain.

**And now to our distinguished guests…**

* **Governor Patrick Henry,** who made his famous “Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death” speech not far from where we are. He had some significant if indirect connections to horseracing.
  + As governor, he granted 9,000 acres of Kentucky territory to his brother-in-law, as a reward for his service in the French and Indian War. **Part of this land is now the site of the Kentucky Horse Park.**
  + **Governor Henry** later granted land to **Major John Keen of Fauquier County. Keen’s descendants were…keen horsemen, and, in the 1930s, the Keeneland Race Course opened for business.**
  + ***Syme's Wildaire***, ason of ***Fearnought***, was owned by **John Symes, Patrick Henry’s elder half-brother.** Foaled in 1776, the bay stallion was used to replenish the thoroughbred stock much depleted by wartime use and was also an ancestor of ***Lexington***… and therefore the ancestor of many modern American champions.
* **George Washington**
  + Among Washington’s **first tasks as a young surveyor** was to **lay out what would be one of his favorite tracks at Alexandria**. He attended races there as well as at Annapolis and Philadelphia and served for a time as **Secretary for the Fredericksburg Jockey Club**.
* **Martha Washington** – married George as a widow 1759
  + **Born in New Kent County** at Chestnut Grove Plantation, near where **Colonial Downs** was later established.
  + **Martha’s granddaughter** (and George’ adopted granddaughter) **Nelly Custis lived at Audley Farm near Berryville,** which continues the racehorse tradition into the 21st century, having **been named a Virginia Breeder of the Year four times.**
* **Thomas Jefferson**
  + In 1806**, President Thomas Jefferson** received **a Barb stallion *named Black Sultan* and two mares** as gifts **from the Bey of Tunis.** These were sold and the money handed over to the U.S. Treasury. ***Black Sultan*** first stood at **Tayloe’s Mount Airy in Richmond County. *Sultana*, daughter of *Black Sultan* and one of the two mares given to Jefferson, was bred to *Sir Archy* to produce *Lady Burton*,** considered one of the best broodmares in America at the time.

**Virginia’s popularity as the Race Horse Region has rebounded,** thanks in large part to the efforts of the people here tonight.

In conclusion, I should note that **at tomorrow’s Virginia Derby,** every colt and gelding leaving the starting gate is descended from **one or more of Virginia’s finest foundation sires,** who have continued **to leave an indelible mark** on the state’s horseracing industry.