

The History of Oaklawn Park

1900s

Desiring to build a track closer to downtown, John Condon and Dan Stuart, who also ran Southern Club and Turf Exchange, a popular downtown Hot Springs night spot, and brothers Louis and Charles Cella of St. Louis formed the Oaklawn Jockey Club in 1904.

Celebrated Chicago architect Zachary Taylor Davis is hired to design Oaklawn's glass-enclosed, heated grandstand – among the first of its kind in the country. The grandstand reportedly seated 1,500 people and cost \$500,000. Davis designed Wrigley Field, the longtime home of the Chicago Cubs, a decade later.

Feb. 15, 1905 – The inaugural meet opens and runs through March 18.

1910s

March 11, 1916 – Owner Louis A. Cella returns racing to Oaklawn after nine years of political uncertainty in Arkansas. Cella, from St. Louis, was a bookmaker, horseman and financier and started running tracks, both in his hometown and in New Orleans. He later joined his brother, Charles J. Cella in operating Douglas Park and Latonia Race Course in Kentucky. For a time, they challenged the preeminence of Matt Winn and Churchill Downs in the Blue Grass state.

Fabled mare **Pan Zareta** won the feature that opening day and goes 3-for-3 on the meet.

March 8, 1917 – After one race in Mexico, **Old Rosebud** makes a winning debut at Oaklawn, 33 months after winning the Kentucky Derby in 1914. He would win again a week later, but would finish third at 137 lbs. to Pan Zareta at 113 when they met March 24. Old Rosebud would turn the tables April 6 in an allowance race en route to leading the nation in handicap earnings that year.

Earl Sande takes the Oaklawn riding title as an apprentice in 1918.

April 29, 1918 – Louis A. Cella dies at 51 in St. Louis. His wife dies four days later and the bulk of his estate goes to his brother, Charles, who takes over at Oaklawn.

March 22, 1919 – The great Hall of Fame gelding **Exterminator**, the Kentucky Derby champ of 1918, begins a long 21-race campaign with two victories at Oaklawn that would yield him the handicap money title. Winter Kentucky Derby favorite **Eternal** won his season debut in Hot Springs before finishing 10th behind Triple Crown winner Sir Barton in Louisville.

1930s

March 1, 1934 – Modern racing comes to Arkansas after a 15-year hiatus because of the political climate. The leading rider that season was Moose Peters, who went on to win the national title.

Oaklawn races under the auspices of the newly formed Arkansas Racing Commission in 1935.

The Arkansas Derby was born in 1936 with a purse of \$5,000. The first winner was **Holl Image**, owned and trained by Jack Carter. He would finish sixth in the Kentucky Derby. In the depths of the Great Depression, the state government requests Oaklawn run an extra fifth week of racing.

March 16, 1937 – **Sequoia** wins race one at 108-1. Sequoia combines with second race winner, **Immersal**, for \$2 Daily Double worth \$1,230.30.

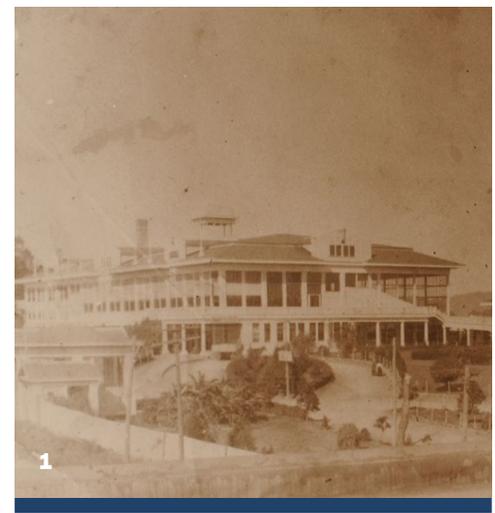
March 7, 1938 – The 2-year-old filly **Odessa Beulah**, owned by the Odessa Farm of J.B. Jones and trained by C. H. Smith, established an Oaklawn three furlongs mark of :34 then returned on April 1 to win going a half-mile and equal the track record of :47.

1940s

Chicago car dealer Emil Denemark and his wife dominate the owners' standings, winning four straight feature races at one point and finishing one-two in the Arkansas Derby with **Super Chief** beating Colorado Ore during the 1940 season.

October 29, 1940 – Charles Cella, president of Oaklawn, dies in St. Louis at 65. He had been in racing 48 years. His son, John G., and grandson, Charles J., would later head the track.

March 29, 1941 – An all-time high \$156,820 is distributed in purses during 30-day season. A two-mile-and-70-yard race is won by **Lonely Road** in 3.37 flat. A marathon race would later become a fixture on the final day of the season. Handicap mare **Veeks** won all four of her starts.



- 1 The old clubhouse at Oaklawn Park.
- 2 1907 / Members of the media needed this pass to attend the races.
- 3 1943 / Although he never raced at Oaklawn, 1941 Triple Crown winner Whirlaway was one of the many champions that has called Hot Springs home during the winter.
- 4 1946 / Southern Pride.
- 5 1954 / Construction begins on a new clubhouse dining room.

Calumet Farm and trainer Ben Jones stable at Oaklawn in 1943. Among their horses are **Mar-Kell**, who would be named champion mare that year, **Nellie L.**, who went on to win the Kentucky Oaks, and **Ocean Wave**. The latter was runner-up to **Seven Hearts** in the \$10,000 Arkansas Derby. Oaklawn alums **Dove Pie** and **Modest Lad** are in the gate for the Kentucky Derby behind Count Fleet's historic Triple Crown run.

Feb. 28, 1944 – Despite World War II restrictions, Oaklawn opens a 30-day meet. The stand would set attendance and handle records.

March 25 & April 1, 1944 – **Challenge Me** rolls to a 10-length victory in a race called the Oaklawn Handicap then returns a week later to take the Arkansas Derby over **Shut Up** by 3 ½ lengths. Shut Up would go on to finish fourth in the Kentucky Derby behind Pensive with Challenge Me tenth.



Jan. 2, 1945 – Tracks are asked to suspend operations because of the war effort.

Nov. 5, 1945 – The lost spring meet is moved to autumn with 30 days running through Dec. 8.

Purse distribution continues to soar at Oaklawn with \$283,130 paid to horsemen in 1946.

Apprentice jockey Red Keene won his first of three straight Oaklawn titles and went on to finish third

day, Jesse Parsons notched his and the following afternoon Joe White earned his career first.

The inaugural \$5,000 Ballerina in 1957 offers a lucrative purse to precocious 2-year-old fillies.

Allan W. (Doc) Lavin replaces McIntosh as Racing Secretary in 1958.

Arkansas Derby increased to \$20,000-added.

John G. Cella, father of current Oaklawn head Charles J. Cella presides over the first Hot Springs meet to average more than 10,000 fans and \$500,000 in handle per day in 1959.

1960s

March 9, 1960 – Ronnie J. Campbell won with four of his five mounts.

March 26, 1960 – The Arkansas Derby is divided for the only time in its history. Because of inclement weather, meet is extended through April 2.

The Oaklawn season is extended to 43 days in 1961.

The track's purse distribution tops \$1 million in 1962.

Oaklawn Handicap purse increased from \$15,000 to \$25,000-added in 1963 and is won by **Wa-Wa Cy**.

Feb. 15, 1964 – A record opening day crowd of 16,959 bets a record \$819,969 to start the 43-day season.

Arkansas Derby purse increased to \$50,000-added in 1965.

Attendance and wagering increase despite losing two of the 43 scheduled days in February 1966 because of heavy snow.

Feb. 18, 1967 – **Jet Avenger** takes Inaugural before a new opening day record crowd of 17,343.

April 8, 1967 – Claiborne Farm's **Monitor** wins the Arkansas Derby in 1:48 3/5 by a nose over Ask the Fare, setting a new track record. **Barbs Delight** was third in the blanket finish then went on to win the Derby Trial and finish second to Proud Clarion in the Kentucky Derby.

Track President and Chairman of the Board Charles J. Cella takes over as head of Oaklawn in 1968, succeeding his father John G. Cella, who died unexpectedly.

April 6, 1968 – **Nodouble** wins the Arkansas Derby. The Arkansas-bred goes on to finish third in the Preakness, then becomes the champion Handicap horse the following two years with coast-to-coast wins including the Brooklyn Handicap, Met Mile, the Jockey Club Gold Cup, twice the Hawthorne Gold Cup, the San Pasqual Handicap and Santa Anita Handicap.

April 1, 1969 – Jockey Larry Snyder won with six of his eight mounts to become first jockey to ever win that many races on a single Oaklawn program.

1970s

March 30, 1971 – **Faithful Win** (\$176.40) and **Trouble in Court** (\$46.20) combine for an record Daily Double payoff of \$6,902.

April 1, 1971 – **Crimson Saint** sets a world record for a half-mile in :44 4/5 in the Ballerina Stakes.

July 7, 1971 – General manager J. Sweeney Grant dies and is replaced later in the year by W.T. (Bish) Bishop.

April 1, 1972 – The Arkansas Derby becomes the track's first \$100,000 race. **No Le Hace** wins and later finishes second in the Kentucky Derby behind Riva Ridge.

The 50-day meet averages more than a million dollars in daily handle.

April 6, 1973 – The inaugural Fantasy Stakes goes to Fair Grounds Oaks winner **Knitted Gloves**. She and three other Hot Springs rivals appear in the Kentucky Oaks behind winner Bag of Tunes.

Jan. 14, 1974 – Racing secretary Doc Lavin dies.

The Racing Festival of the South is inaugurated in 1974 with a stakes race each day over the final seven programs of the meeting, climaxed by the Arkansas Derby.

May 15, 1976 – **Elocutionist** becomes the first Arkansas Derby winner to take a Triple Crown race with his victory in the Preakness.



nationally in wins to Ted Atkinson and Joe Licausi.

Feb. 24, 1947 – The Leo P. McLaughlin Inaugural Handicap is upset by **Bubbling Easy**, paying \$92.20, 63.20 and 16.40.

The Essex Handicap is inaugurated in 1948 with **Boden's Pal** winning for owner and trainer William Hal Bishop, who would become a perennial leader nationally.

1950s

March 7, 1950 – **Phaltup** pays a record \$350.80 to win the last race of the day.

Eugene Bury steps down as racing secretary after 18 years in 1952. Kenneth McIntosh is named as his replacement.

Oaklawn meeting extended from 30 to 31 days in 1953. Jockey Henry Forrest sweeps the three handicap stakes, winning the Inaugural with **Ever Bright**, the Hot Springs Handicap with **Sherry L.** and the Oaklawn Cap with **Our Challenge**.

In 1954, a new clubhouse dining room is built and new track cushion installed.

J. Sweeney Grant named General Manager, replacing R. Stanley Weber.

Feb. 21-23, 1955 – Apprentice Elbert Minchey rode his first career winner. The next

April 2, 1977 – The largest crowd ever at Oaklawn, with 54,216 attending Arkansas Derby day. The second largest crowd, 51,362, attend Fantasy Day March 26.

Meeting reaches 1,000,000 in seasonal attendance and \$2,000,000 in daily average handle for the first time in **1978**.

Arkansas Derby purse is raised to \$150,000-added. Winner's share of \$107,280 goes to **Golden Act**, who would hit the board in all three Triple Crown races in **1979**.

Coming off an impressive allowance race score at Hialeah, **Alydar** makes first stakes appearance as a four-year-old in the **1979** Oaklawn Handicap (G2) and finished second by a nose to **San Juan Hill**.

1980s

April 12, 1980 – **Temperance Hill** wins the Arkansas Derby and later becomes the eighth Eclipse Award winner to race at the Hot Springs track. More than 250,000 fans attended the Racing Festival of the South.

Feb. 5, 1982 – Opening day held over a revamped racing strip with a new aluminum rail on the track and new escalators in the building.

April 10, 1982 – Fans bet \$1,020,098 on the Arkansas Derby and a record \$6,346,549 on the card.

Records set for handle and attendance with daily betting averages above \$3 million spurred by six-figure stakes purses including the inaugural Prima Donna Stakes during the 1983 season.

May 7, 1983 – **Sunny's Halo** becomes the first Arkansas Derby winner to take the Kentucky Derby. He had also won the Rebel Stakes that season.

Feb. 10, 1984 – An expanded 62-day season opens before a new five-story glass-enclosed grandstand.

March 7, 1984 – **Win Stat** sets a world record for 1 mile 70 yards in 1:38 2/5.

April 21, 1984 – **Althea**, the reigning 2-year-old filly champion, becomes the first filly to win the Arkansas Derby – the first for Hall of Fame trainer D. Wayne Lukas.

May 18, 1985 – The second straight Arkansas Derby winner for trainer D. Wayne Lukas, **Tank's Prospect**, wins the Preakness.

April 19, 1986 – A record single day attendance of 71,203 sees **Rampage** win the Golden Anniversary of the Arkansas Derby. The crowd was a record for a sporting event in Arkansas.

For the second time in three years, D.Wayne Lukas saddles three winners of Racing Festival of the South stakes in **1987**.

Exotic wagering comes to Oaklawn with exactas initially carded twice a day in **1987**.

Longtime general manager W. T. Bishop dies in **1987** and is replaced by Eric Jackson, the former director of operations.

April 23, 1988 – The longest meet in Oaklawn history closes after 67 of 68 scheduled days, including experiments with five-day weeks.

April 9, 1989 – For the first time in its history, Oaklawn raced on a Sunday as the last two Sundays of the meet were used to make up two of five days lost to inclement weather.

April 19, 1989 – **Bayakoa** powerfully wins the Apple Blossom Handicap to help launch her two-year reign as top older female horse.

1990s

Feb. 2, 1990 – Carousel Terrace Restaurant opens. Accented by antique carousel horses, the grandstand dining area is sold out throughout the season.

Feb. 4, 1990 – Permanent Sunday racing begins.

Feb. 19, 1990 – A record Feb. weekday crowd of 29,952 is drawn by track's first-ever Cadillac sweepstakes giveaway.

Jan. 25, 1991 – Earliest opening day in Oaklawn history unveils a completely renovated Oaklawn Club.

April 13, 1991 – **Festin** upsets the field including previous year's Kentucky Derby winner **Unbridled** in a sloppy Oaklawn Handicap.

April 11, 1992 – **Best Pal** wins his first appearance in the Oaklawn Handicap.

He would return in 1993 & '95.

April 18, 1992 – **Pine Bluff** **Lil E. Tee** in the Arkansas Derby. two Arkansas-based stars go on to glory in the Triple Crown as Lil takes the Kentucky Derby and Pine the Preakness.

April 10, 1993 – **Jovial** overcomes start to fly past reigning Kentucky winner Lil E. Tee and defending Best Pal in the richest-\$750,000 Oaklawn Handicap.

April 16, 1993 **Reigning Breeders' Cup** champion **Paseana** captures her straight Apple Blossom Handicap.

April 17, 1993 – **Rockamundo** 10 rivals to win the Arkansas Derby and pay \$218 to win. It's the biggest win payoff ever for an Oaklawn stakes.

Feb. 5, 1994 – John Franks, a three-time Eclipse Award winning owner, wins five races including the American Beauty Stakes with **Parisian Flight**.

April 23, 1994 – Pat Day wins an unprecedented 12th consecutive jockey title.

Nov. 5, 1994 – Arkansas Derby-winner **Concern** wins the Breeders' Cup Classic.

April 15, 1995 – **Cigar** powers away from Silver Goblin and Concern to win his eighth straight victory in the Oaklawn Handicap. He would go on to match Citation and Mister Frisky with 16 straight wins.

April 22, 1995 – Calvin Borel ends the dominance of Pat Day by taking the jockey title with 87 wins.

Oct. 28, 1995 – **Northern Spur** upsets the Breeders' Cup Turf at Belmont Park in the silks of Oaklawn Park's owner Charles J. Cella.

April 5, 1996 – **Escena** dominates the Fantasy Stakes by a record seven lengths under Pat Day.

April 7, 1996 – Two days after winning the Fantasy, the Cigar team of owner Allen Paulson and trainer Bill Mott land their second straight Oaklawn Handicap with **Geri**, ridden by Cigar's jockey Jerry Bailey.

April 13, 1996 – **Zarb's Magic** won the 60th running of the Arkansas Derby, but runner-up **Grindstone** rebounded at Churchill Downs to take the Kentucky Derby

Jan. 11, 1997 – Oaklawn finally opens for the season after losing the first four scheduled days of the meet due to inclement weather. There was a tie for the first time ever at Oaklawn for leading trainer, with Kenny Smith and Gary Hartlage each saddling 26 winners.

March 21, 1998 – **Victory Gallop** takes the Rebel Stakes to begin a march through the Arkansas Derby winner's circle and eventually a scintillating nose victory in the Belmont Stakes to thwart Real Quiet in his quest for the Triple Crown. Victory Gallop was the champion older horse the following year.

April 10, 1998 – **Escena** wins the Apple Blossom in her third appearance at Oaklawn. She would win the Breeders' Cup Distaff later that season.

2000s

Jan. 14, 2000 – Instant Racing®, a pari-mutuel electronic system which allows players to wager on previously-run races, is introduced.



April 9, 2000 – **Heritage of Gold** became only the third runner to sweep the Azeri and the Apple Blossom with her win over the previous year's filly champion and Breeders' Cup Distaff winner **Beautiful Pleasure**.

April 6, 2002 – **Azeri** defeats four rivals in the Apple Blossom for her second consecutive Grade 1 win of that season. She went on to five additional Grade 1 victories including the Breeders' Cup Ladies' Distaff and the Horse of the Year title.

April 5, 2003 – The reigning Horse of the Year **Azeri** returned to Oaklawn to



- 6 1974 / Track President, Charles J. Cella (r) and longtime General Manager, W.T. Bishop make a special presentation to jockey Bill Shoemaker after winning his 100th \$100,000 stakes in the Fantasy aboard Miss Mucket.
- 7 1993 / Reigning champion older mare Paseana becomes the first two-time winner of the Apple Blossom en route to her second championship title.
- 8 2010 / Oaklawn Park favorite and Horse of the Year, Zenyatta.
- 9 2016 / Creator wins the Arkansas Derby and then the Belmont Stakes.

start her campaign and grimly caught Take Charge Lady in one of the greatest races in the track's history.

Jan. 23, 2004 – Oaklawn celebrates the 100th anniversary of the track's first meet.

May 1, 2004 – **Smarty Jones** cruises to a 2 3/4-length win in the Kentucky Derby and collects a \$5 million bonus for sweeping the Rebel and Arkansas Derby and "Run for the Roses". Smarty Jones is stopped by Birdstone in the Belmont Stakes, coming within a length of becoming the second undefeated Triple Crown winner.

Jan. 24, 2005 – Oaklawn and the Cella family receive the Eclipse Award of Merit.

June 11, 2005 – For the second straight year, the Arkansas Derby winner takes two legs of the Triple Crown as **Afleet Alex** builds on his victory in the Preakness to take the Belmont Stakes.

Nov. 9, 2005 – A public referendum to allow expanded games of skill at Oaklawn is passed by just 89 votes.

April 15, 2006 – A record crowd of 72,484 sees **Lawyer Ron** complete a sweep of the Southwest, the Rebel and the Arkansas Derby for trainer Bob Holthus. He would finish 12th in the Kentucky Derby, but was champion older horse as a 4-year-old in 2007 thanks in part to a track record setting performance in Saratoga's Whitney Handicap (G1).

April 14, 2007 – Trainer Steve Asmussen wins five races, including the Arkansas Derby with eventual Preakness winner and two-time Horse of the Year **Curlin**.

Sept. 27, 2007 – The Arkansas Supreme Court upheld the law authorizing Oaklawn to add expanded games of skill.

April 5, 2008 – In her fourth career start, **Zenyatta** overwhelms the Apple Blossom field that includes reigning Breeders' Cup Distaff winner **Ginger Punch**. Zenyatta would finish the season 9-for-9 with her own win in the Distaff. Her connections, owners Jerry and Ann Moss, trainer John Shirreffs and jockey Mike Smith also won the Oaklawn Handicap with **Tiago** that year.

April 7, 2008 – Immediately after the meet, Oaklawn began construction on a 60,000-square foot, two level structure to double the space for the track's gaming center.

Feb. 15, 2009 – One of the most remarkable seasons by a 3-year-old filly kicks off as **Rachel Alexandra** wins the Martha Washington by eight lengths. She would add the Fantasy Stakes April 5 before thrashing the Kentucky Oaks by 20 ¼ lengths and defeating the boys three times including the Preakness and the Woodward.

June 6, 2009 – **Summer Bird** goes from Oaklawn maiden to Arkansas Derby third-place finisher to Belmont Stakes winner in three short months. He would add the Travers Stakes and Jockey Club Gold Cup for his Arkansas-based owners Drs. K.K. and Vilasini Jayaraman and was named Eclipse champion 3-year-old.

2010s

Jan. 18, 2010 – **Rachel Alexandra** is named Horse of the Year.

March 13, 2010 – **Lookin at Lucky**, the reigning two-year-old champion wins the Rebel Stakes for Hall of Fame trainer Bob Baffert. 'Lucky' would go on to win the Preakness and champion 3-year-old honors.

March 25, 2010 – Track announcer Terry Wallace is honored for making his 20,000th consecutive call after the third race.

May 1, 2010 – **Super Saver** bounces back from a second-place finish in the Arkansas Derby to take a sloppy edition of the Kentucky Derby. Former Oaklawn riding champ Calvin Borel earns his third Derby win in four years.

Jan. 17, 2011 – Despite coming a head short in defending her Breeders' Cup Classic title, **Zenyatta** becomes the second straight female and fourth straight Oaklawn connected Horse of the Year. The mare won her 16th of an eventual 19 straight races eight months earlier in the Apple Blossom.

March 19, 2011 – **Havre de Grace** starts a Horse of the Year campaign by defeating her archrival and reigning 3-year-old filly champion **Blind Luck** in the Azeri Stakes. It would be the first of five wins on the year including the Apple Blossom at Oaklawn and the Woodward against males at Saratoga.

April 16, 2011 – **Archarcharch** becomes the first hometown winner of the Arkansas Derby in 19 years for Robert Yagos of Jacksonville, AR. He finished 15th in the Kentucky Derby.

Jan. 13, 2012 – Frank Mirahmadi makes his debut as the fourth announcer in Oaklawn's history.

April 14, 2012 – Trainer Bob Baffert completes an unprecedented sweep of Oaklawn's graded 3-year-old stakes when Bodemeister wins the Arkansas Derby. Earlier, Secret Circle and Castaway each won a division of the Southwest and Secret Circle returned to win the Rebel.

May 18, 2013 – Rebel Stakes runner-up **Oxbow** wins the Preakness Stakes to become the 10th Triple Crown race winner to come from Oaklawn in 10 years.

June 11, 2013 – Oaklawn announces plans for an expansion to its gaming area that increases its capacity by 50%. The work began in early August and ceases prior to the 2014 race meet.

April 14, 2014 – Construction resumes on the \$20 million expansion.

Nov. 3, 2014 – Oaklawn opens Phase 1 of its expanded gaming area featuring new games, Silks Bar & Grill and Bistro. By year's end, a High Limits area and Poker area were to open. It is 100% complete by opening day Jan. 9, 2015.

March 14, 2015 - Reigning champion 2-year-old American Pharoah begins his history making season by winning the Rebel Stakes.

June 6, 2015 - After also winning the Arkansas Derby, American Pharoah becomes the first horse in 37 years to sweep the Triple Crown with his impressive victory in the Belmont Stakes. He closed out the year by winning the \$5 million Breeders' Cup Classic.

Jan. 15, 2016 - Pete Aiello becomes Oaklawn's fifth track announcer

June 11, 2016 - Arkansas Derby winner Creator wins the Belmont Stakes. This marks the 14th Triple Crown race win by an Oaklawn-raced horse since 2004.

Jan. 13, 2017 - Vic Stauffer becomes Oaklawn's sixth track announcer

March 27, 2017 - Wayne Smith is named General Manager. Eric Jackson becomes Senior Vice President after 37 years at the helm.

Nov. 4, 2017 - Razorback Handicap winner Gun Runner wins the Breeders' Cup Classic becoming the third Oaklawn-raced horse to win that race in four years. He is all, but assured Horse of the Year honors with the victory.

Dec. 5, 2017 - Oaklawn President Charles J. Cella dies at age 81.