

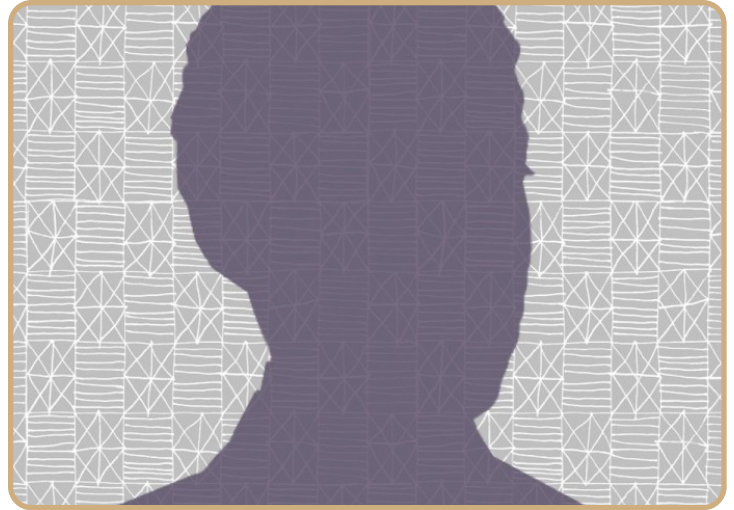
Arthur Alphonso Perossier, Jr.

Author: Merlene Davis

Places: New Orleans, Louisiana;
Havana, Cuba; Louisville, Kentucky

Birth: August 7, 1892 **Death:** May 21, 1997

Professions: Hot Walker, Exercise Rider,
Jockey, Trainer



Childhood

Arthur Alphonso Perossier, Jr., was the son of Arthur Alphonso Perossier, Sr. and Josephine Cecelia Blache (Black) Perossier of New Orleans, Louisiana. He was nicknamed 'Tat' or 'Tats' as a child because he persistently mispronounced 'that'.

His love of horses started when he jumped the fence of the Fairgrounds racetrack in New Orleans and fed horses with grass he had pulled.¹ He began walking horses in 1905.²

Perossier soon progressed to hot-walking horses, exercising horses and working as a jockey. At one point in those early years, Perossier said, he ran away from home just to be with the horses.³ He traveled throughout the racing circuit before finding work at Churchill Downs in 1915. The Downs was his dream place to be, although he traveled throughout the United States and Cuba.

Worked as Trainer

In Havana, Cuba, in 1928, he secured his license to be a trainer.⁴ For many years, he trained for Michael Dant, former owner and master distiller at Taylor and William distillery in Louisville, Kentucky. Perossier trained for wealthy developer J. Graham Brown also of Louisville, Kentucky for about thirty years. His name does not appear in records as Brown's trainer, however, because of Brown's "peculiar brand of racism." He privately donated to Black charities, but he only allowed Blacks to enter his hotel through the back doors.⁵

Suspended

On July 8, 1955, Perossier was suspended by the Ohio State Racing Commission after a banned stimulant was found in the saliva of Swanee's Penny, which had won a race at River Downs in Cincinnati on June 11. He received a forty-five day suspension as the trainer of the horse.⁶

Fire at Churchill Downs

The day after Thanksgiving in 1962, Perossier and a groom were just starting to feed eighteen of Brown's horses stabled at Churchill Downs when a fire broke out. Perossier rushed to save his wife, Madeline and their 5-year-old niece under their guardianship, who had come to spend Thanksgiving with him. Four other people were led to safety in sub-freezing weather. He and the groom saved nine of the eighteen horses, but others died later from smoke inhalation.⁷

Husband and Wife team

Madeline Perossier, his third wife, shared her husband's love of horses. The couple met in the early 1940s at Churchill Downs as she was going to place a \$2 bet. They married in 1948.⁸

By 1962, they were known as "the only Negro husband-wife training team in racing."⁹ They had stopped traveling thirteen years before and were running the "hospital barn" at Churchill. They cared for injured horses and broke the foals to get them ready for race training.¹⁰

Death and Legacy

Perossier retired in 1966 after working exclusively at Churchill Downs since the 1940s. For years after retirement, he could be found at Churchill Downs encouraging young grooms, trainers and jockeys who welcomed his wisdom.¹¹ He was a member of the United Thoroughbred Trainers of America and the Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association. He fathered four daughters and died at age 104.¹²

Sources

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Footnotes

¹Luster, Bill. "Everybody Knows 'Tats.'" Louisville Courier-Journal, Unknown.

²Morrison, Bill. "Going A Distance." The Courier-Journal. August 12, 1992.

³Luster, Bill "Everybody Knows 'Tats.'" Louisville Courier-Journal, Unknown.

⁴Morrison, George. "Going A Distance." The Courier-Journal. August 12, 1992.

⁵Renau, Lynn S. Jockeys, Belles and Bluegrass Kings. Louisville, Ky.; Herr House Press, 1995. Page 115.

⁶Stimulants Counts Aired By Ohio Racing Board; Four Trainers Punished." The Cincinnati Enquirer. July 9, 1955.

⁷9 Horses Perish at Louisville." Asheville Citizen-Times. November 24, 1962.

⁸Morrison, George. "Going A Distance." The Courier-Journal. August 12, 1992.

⁹"A Happy, Horsey Family." The Courier-Journal. October 4, 1964.

¹⁰"A Happy, Horsey Family," jump page." The Courier-Journal. October 4, 1964.

¹¹Luster, Bill "Everybody Knows 'Tats.'" Louisville Courier-Journal, Unknown.

¹²Ex-Trainer at Downs, 'Tat' Perossier, Dies." The Courier-Journal. May 23, 1997.