

# Charles Henry Smoot

**Author:** Merlene Davis

**Places:** N/A

**Birth:** April 11, 1898 **Death:** March 26, 1979

**Professions:** Jockey, Groom, Race Barn Manager



## Early Years

Charles Henry Smoot was the son of Henry and Mollie Bailey Smoot. He was born in the African American community of Waterloo, Fauquier County, Virginia.<sup>1</sup> Smoot and his younger brother, George, both became accomplished steeplechase jockeys.<sup>2</sup>

## Well-paid Career

William du Pont, Jr., owner of Bellevue Hall near Wilmington, Delaware, rarely employed any African Americans on his properties. But as his stables grew, he bucked the socially-accepted bias to hire Smoot and Henry Jones. Smoot worked as jockey and exerciser in 1928 for four hundred dollars a month, top dollar at that time.<sup>3</sup>

Smoot was accepted as one of the best steeplechase jockeys despite having to confront the restrictions of the Jim Crow era the same way he guided the horses over various obstacles along a long, winding race course.

He won the prestigious Beverwyck Steeplechase Handicap at Saratoga Race Course in these years:

-1916

-1926

-1933.<sup>4</sup>

## Jockey for Montpelier

In 1928, Marion du Pont Scott, sister of William du Pont, Jr., inherited Montpelier plantation from their father. Montpelier, in Orange, Virginia, is the former home of James Madison, the fourth U.S. President. Scott rebuilt the stables and hired Smoot as jockey around 1930.

Unlike her brother, Scott did not embrace the racial exclusion. When North Carolina racing officials tried to block Smoot from riding in a race because of his skin color, Scott reportedly said, "Fine, but if Smoot doesn't ride my horses, they don't run." The officials relented.<sup>5</sup>

## Won with Broken Collar Bone

Astride Rooney during a race at Belmont Park in May 1930, Smoot heard a snap while taking the water jump. He had healed from a previous broken collar bone, but when he lost the use of his right arm, Smoot knew it had broken again. In pain, he pushed the reins into his mouth with his left hand and girded himself for the fast-approaching liverpool obstacle, the worst jump of the competition. As Smoot landed, he took a shorter hold on the reins, dropped them from his mouth, and finished the race with his left hand doing the work of two. He won by several lengths when other jockeys would have fallen off.<sup>6</sup>

## Legacy

Smoot remained at Montpelier for the rest of his life. He became the race barn manager when he retired as a jockey. He was married to Edna Porter and there were no known children.<sup>7</sup>

## Sources

Champion, Allison Brophy. n.d. "Beating the Odds: Black Horsemen at Montpelier Leave Legacy of Strength, Talent." Culpeper Star-Exponent. Accessed November 11, 2020. [https://starexponent.com/news/beating-the-odds-black-horsemen-at-montpelier-leave-legacy-of-strength-talent/article\\_5b58bbd8-85ef-5097-8dab-86eecbcb8253.html](https://starexponent.com/news/beating-the-odds-black-horsemen-at-montpelier-leave-legacy-of-strength-talent/article_5b58bbd8-85ef-5097-8dab-86eecbcb8253.html).

"Episode 6: The Color of Fame." n.d. Perpetual Blackness: A Podcast That Tells Black Stories from Here, There, Then and Now. Accessed November 11, 2020. <https://www.perpetualblackness.com/episodes/2019/2/21/the-color-of-fame>.

Nelson, Zann. n.d. "Buried Truth: Horsemen You May Know..." The Daily Progress. Accessed November 11, 2020a. [https://dailyprogress.com/community/orangenews/opinion/buried-truth-horsemen-you-may-know/article\\_ef03d298-6c8d-11e7-9861-1f93999a1621.html](https://dailyprogress.com/community/orangenews/opinion/buried-truth-horsemen-you-may-know/article_ef03d298-6c8d-11e7-9861-1f93999a1621.html).

———. n.d. "Posts by Montpelier Steeplechase and Equestrian Foundation, Inc." Facebook. Accessed November 30, 2020b. <https://www.facebook.com/JMMontpelier/posts/10164331765115193>.

———. n.d. "Zann's Place: A Search to Recognize Black Horsemen in the Area." Culpeper Star-Exponent. Accessed November 11, 2020c. [https://starexponent.com/entertainment\\_life/zanns-place-a-search-to-recognize-black-horsemen-in-the-area/article\\_bd5b8415-44e8-50e7-8046-355aacf04010.html](https://starexponent.com/entertainment_life/zanns-place-a-search-to-recognize-black-horsemen-in-the-area/article_bd5b8415-44e8-50e7-8046-355aacf04010.html).

The Brooklyn Daily Eagle. 1930, May 23, 1930. <http://img.newspapers.com/clip/18871620/the-brooklyn-daily-eagle/>.

The Cincinnati Enquirer. 1930, July 10, 1930.

Wilmington Daily Press Journal. 1935, August 24, 1935.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Perpetual Blackness, Episode 6.”

<sup>2</sup>Perpetual Blackness, Episode 6.”

<sup>3</sup>Fesak, Mary. Bellevue–Landscape.

<sup>4</sup>Sylvester, Melvin. African–Americans in the Sports Arena.

<sup>5</sup>Nelson, “Posts by Montpelier Steeplechase and Equestrian Foundation, Inc.”

<sup>6</sup>The Brooklyn Daily Eagle. “Smoot Wins With Broken Collarbone.”

<sup>7</sup>Nelson, “Zann’s Place.”