

Edmund Lincoln Anderson

Author: Merlene Davis

Places: Oakland, California; San Francisco, California; Los Angeles, California

Birth: September 18, 1905

Death: February 28, 1977

Professions: Horse Owner, Trainer



Early Years

Edmund Lincoln Anderson was born in Oakland, California, to Edward and Ella Mae Anderson. His father was a minstrel performer and his mother was a circus tightrope walker whose career ended after a fall. The family moved to San Francisco when Edmund was ten years old. He found work hawking newspapers and as an errand runner for an architecture firm to help his family financially. At fourteen, he quit school, working for the firm during the day and with his brother in an all African American vaudeville revue at night.¹

Show Business

After several years of eking out a living on the vaudeville circuit, Anderson began to star in Black films, making a name for himself. On March 28, 1937 he got a one-time bit part on comedian Jack Benny's radio show. Eventually he was hired as Benny's valet and butler, Rochester van Jones, becoming one of the first African Americans to have a regular role on a nationwide radio program.²

In 1942, Anderson was earning about \$100,000 a year which he invested well and, by 1962, was listed as one of the top one-hundred wealthiest Black people by Ebony Magazine.³

Despite his wealth and fame, Anderson was not always welcomed in hotels where all the other cast members were staying. If the hotel workers could not be convinced to let Anderson stay, the entire crew of forty-four people packed up and left.⁴

Horse Owner and Trainer

In 1941, Anderson bought four yearlings, one of which was Burnt Cork, for \$2,600 at the Saratoga Yearling Sales in New York. The colt was Kentucky-bred and, as a two-year and three-year old, had won enough races to qualify for the 1943 Kentucky Derby. Anderson

insisted on entering the colt in the Derby although it was a long-shot at best and some critics said Anderson wanted the publicity.

Anderson and his wife couldn't attend the Derby because of segregation. They stayed at the home of well-known Kentucky politician Mae Street Kidd, where they watched the race. Burnt Cork, named for one method used to create blackface makeup, finished last in a field of ten. Nevertheless, Anderson became the fourth third Black Thoroughbred owner to have a horse run in the Derby.⁵

After retirement, Anderson became a trainer working at Hollywood Park Racetrack in California, where he had a stable of horses. One of his race horses, Up and Over, was injured in a fall and the recommendation was euthanasia. Anderson refused. He worked with a veterinary surgeon to get Up and Over back on his feet.⁶

Family Life

Anderson married Mamie Wiggins in 1939. He adopted his wife's son, Billy, who became a National Football League player. She died in 1954. Two years later he married Evangela 'Eva' Simon. The couple had two daughters and a son before divorcing in 1973.

Legacy

Anderson died in 1977. His son, Eddie, Jr., followed his father's request to convert his mansion into a treatment center offering mental health and substance abuse services. It is now a bed-and-breakfast.⁷

Anderson has a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame for Radio and was inducted into the Radio Hall of Fame in 2001.

Sources

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Footnotes

¹Harris, Ned and Joy. "Eddie Anderson." RUSC Old Time Radio.

²Harris, Ned and Joy. "Eddie Anderson." RUSC Old Time Radio.

³Harris, Ned and Joy. "Eddie Anderson." RUSC Old Time Radio.

⁴Harris, Ned and Joy. "Eddie Anderson." RUSC Old Time Radio.

⁵Kelly, Kate. "Eddie Anderson (1905-1977): Created Role of Rochester." America Comes Alive, February 6, 2014.

⁶Harris, Ned and Joy. "Eddie Anderson." RUSC Old Time Radio.

⁷Kate Kelly, Kate. "Eddie Anderson (1905-1977): Created Role of Rochester." America Comes Alive, February 6, 2014.