

Francis Carroll Wilson

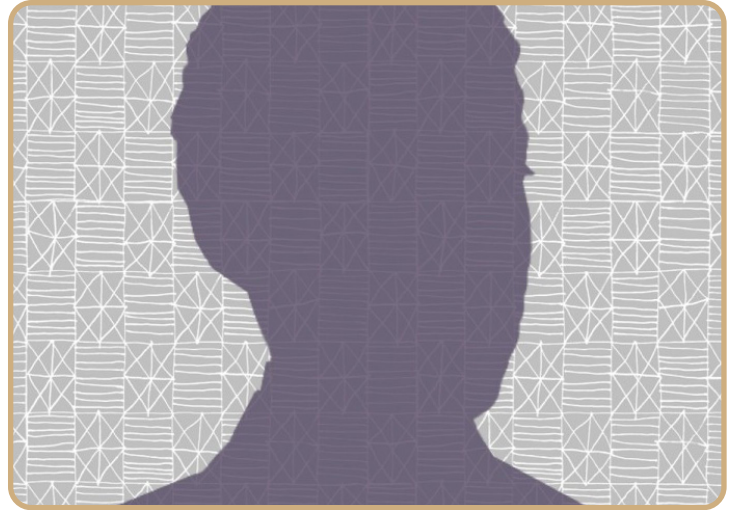
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Places: Georgetown, Scott County,
Kentucky; Lexington, Fayette County,
Kentucky

Birth: October 16, 1928

Death: August 11, 2015

Professions: Groom, Exercise Rider,



Francis Carroll Wilson's story was introduced by his grandson, Jermo Reese, during his Oral History interview July 8, 2019.

Birth and Family

Francis Carroll Wilson, known as Frank, was one of eighteen children born to Alvin and Sue Wilson. The family lived on a farm in rural Scott County, Kentucky. Wilson married Sue Dalton. They were parents to six children.¹

Finding Work

When Wilson graduated from high school in the late 1940s, he could not find a job. His brother, K.C., suggested that he go to work at a horse farm. He was hired in 1948 by John A. Bell, III. Bell and his wife Jessica [1] founded Jonabell Farm in 1946 on leased land at Hamburg Place in Lexington, Kentucky. Wilson was told employment "might be a week or it might be a month."²

Profession and Passion

Wilson stayed with the Bells when they moved in 1954 to an eight-hundred-acre farm on Bowman Mill Road in Lexington. Wilson found his life's profession and passion at Jonabell Farm which became known for breeding stakes winners. He was present when Damascus was foaled on April 16, 1964. The Thoroughbred became winner in 1967 of the:

- Preakness Stakes
- Belmont Stakes
- Jockey Club Gold Cup
- Wood Memorial

- Travers Stakes
- Dwyer Handicap
- Woodward Stakes

The horse also finished third in the Kentucky Derby and Damascus was named Horse of the Year. Wilson assisted when Epitome was foaled April 21, 1985. As a two-year old she won the Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies race.³ As a broodmare, eight of her eleven foals won races in Europe, the United States and the Arab Emirates.

Wilson was also on hand when Battlefield, Never Say Die, One for All and Try Something New were foaled.

Wilson's work with young colts and fillies did not stop at their births. He groomed, trained, and accompanied them to the yearling sales at Saratoga, New York.

Valued Employee

In 1991, Bell said of Wilson, that "He's part of our family. Wilson's kindness and his gentleness makes him so effective. You won't find any better." Wilson was employed at Jonabell Farm for forty-five years. He retired in 1993.⁴

Ringman

Wilson, while still working at Jonabell, became a part-time employee at Keeneland in 1967. He became a ringman, leading horses into the sales ring with a steady hand. Yearlings brought to auction are nervous and unfamiliar with the voices, noise, lights and other horses. Wilson was said to be "the calm in the eye of the storm." He effectively posed the horses to show their best qualities to potential buyers.

Dudley Sidney, Wilson's brother-in-law, and Cordell Anderson, a native of Jamaica, worked with him. Each of them showed 1,000 horses during a ten-day auction in 2001.⁵

Honor, Remembrance and Legacy

Keeneland acknowledged Wilson's importance to the success of yearling sales. They placed a brass plaque in the area where Frank sat. He had waited there for the sound of the gavel, a signal to bring another horse to the sales ring. The plaque reads, "Frankie's Corner."

Wilson's grandson, Jeremy Reese, began going to Jonabell farm with him. Reese, at the age of eight, took on odd jobs, flipping the stall - mucking it out - and sweeping the breezeway. He helped so that his grandfather could finish early. Reese wanted to learn to ride horses.

When Wilson died in 2015, Reese wanted to honor his grandfather and continue his legacy. He decided to begin an equine education program for youth in 2016. The program is Frankie's Corner Little Thoroughbred Crusade.

Wilson will always be remembered. His grandson, Jeremy Reese, is making sure that new generations will know of his grandfather's contributions to the equine industry.⁶

Sources

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Footnotes

¹Wilson, Francis Sr. Legacy.com

²Duke, Jacqueline. Racing Times. 1991. Wilson:Leading Man at the Keeneland Sales. July 13, 1991

³Duke

⁴Duke

⁵Haukebo,Kirsten. Courier Journal. 1997. Keeneland Auction Relies on Ringmen's Horse Sense. September 8, 1997

⁶Reese, Jeremy. 2019. Chronicle of African Americans in the Horse Industry Oral history project