

James Perkins

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Places: Lexington, Louisville and
Hutchison Station, Kentucky; Chicago,
Illinois; San Francisco, California;
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Hamilton,
Ontario, Canada

Birth: April 1880 **Death:** August 17, 1911

Professions: Jockey, Trainer, Horse Owner



Childhood and Family

James Perkins was born in April of 1880. His parents were John and Mattie Perkins of Fayette County, Kentucky.¹ His father John was a trotting horse hostler. His brothers Frank and William were both jockeys and later trainers.²

The Perkins children also included two more sons, Edward and Walter, and two daughters, Carrie and Elizabeth. Perkins began working with horses when he was ten years old due to his father's and brothers' influence. He received the nickname "Soup" because it was his preferred meal to eat while training to keep his weight down.³

In 1899, Perkins married Elanora "Frankie" Saunders in Lexington, Kentucky. They lived on Wilson Street.⁴

Career Beginnings

In 1893, at thirteen years old, Perkins made his first appearance as a jockey at the Kentucky Association track. He won five of the six races he rode in that day and placed second in the sixth race. Out of the twenty-six starts in his first season, he placed first sixteen times. In 1895, Perkins rode for Byron McClelland, a prominent owner-trainer based in Lexington.⁵

Career Highlights

In 1895, Perkins became the second-youngest jockey to win the Kentucky Derby. Riding Halma, they broke early from the field and won by five lengths for an exciting victory. That same year, Perkins won the Phoenix Stakes, also aboard Halma.⁶

Later Career

Like many jockeys, Perkins struggled to maintain the low weight required by the sport.

He made a career change around 1899 to become a horse trainer and owner. He still jockeyed a race in 1902.⁷ One of his horses, Harting, was quite successful in meets at the Latonia Race Course.⁸

Death and Legacy

Perkins's training career brought him to Hamilton, Ontario. He passed away there due to heart disease in 1911.⁹ He was survived by his wife, his father, and three of his siblings. Perkins was buried in the family plot at Lexington, Kentucky's African Cemetery Number Two though his name was not added to the marker.¹⁰ The alley next to his childhood home on North Upper Street in Lexington, Kentucky is named Soup Perkins Alley in his honor.

Sources

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Footnotes

¹1880 United States Federal Census."

²Shot Down in His Own Door: Frank Perkins, a Negro Horse Trainer."

³Rees, "Derby Countdown Halma, 1895."

⁴Fayette County Clerk, "Marriage Record of James Perkins and Elanora Saunders."

⁵Rees.

⁶Halma Wins the Kentucky Derby with African American Jockey."

⁷Perkins Weighs 115 Pounds, Will Race at Newport."; "They're Off at Newport, Opening of the New Independent Track Is Very Successful."

⁸Overweight Riders at Latonia."

⁹Perkins, James 'Soup' (Jockey)."

¹⁰Perkins Body Here."