

Marshall Lilly

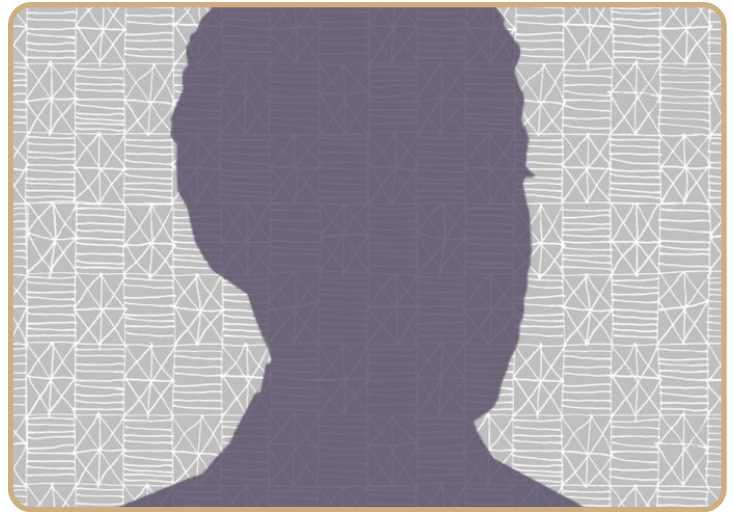
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Places: Lexington, Kentucky; Saratoga Springs, New York; Red Bank, New Jersey; Monmouth, New Jersey

Birth: January 3, 1885

Death: November 8, 1975

Professions: Trainer, Exercise Rider



Childhood

Marshall Lilly was born in 1885 in Lexington, Kentucky. His father was a horseman who worked for the prominent breeder James A. Grinstead.¹ Researchers are seeking more information about Lilly's childhood.

Youth in the Horse Industry

At age twelve, Lilly worked as an exercise rider for Edward Dudley Brown's stable in Louisville, Kentucky. A fellow African American in the horse industry, Brown was a successful trainer and owner. At approximately sixteen years old, in 1901, Lilly moved with Brown and his stable to New York. Though Brown moved back to Kentucky, Lilly lived in the Northeast for the rest of his life.²

Career with James Rowe

Lilly worked as a stable hand for the trainer James Rowe, Sr., who worked at James Keene's stable in New York. Rowe had a reputation as a strict and demanding employer. Yet Lilly grew to enjoy working for him. Lilly proved himself to Rowe by working with particularly strong-willed horses. Due to his success, Rowe promoted Lilly to exercise rider.³

Career with the Whitney Family

In 1910, Rowe began working for the Whitney family, and Lilly went with him. This position took Lilly to England. He worked for Jack Joyner at the overseas outpost of Whitney's stables due to increased legal restrictions on racing in the United States.

Upon his return to the United States in 1913, Lilly resumed working for the domestic Whitney operation, Greentree Stable, in Red Bank, New Jersey.⁴ He received another promotion in

1931. Lilly became assistant trainer and remained in this role until his retirement in 1949.⁵

Career Highlights

Throughout his career, Lilly worked with many great Thoroughbreds. These included two horses that were regarded as the greatest race horses in the country before Man o' War:

- Colin (born 1902), who never lost a race, and
- Sysonby (born 1905), who lost only one race.

Lilly also trained Upset, the fittingly-named Thoroughbred responsible for Man o' War's only defeat.

Derby winners under Lilly's care included:

- Plaudit (1898)
- Regret (1915)
- Whiskery (1927)
- Twenty Grand (1931)
- Shutout (1942)⁶

Aside from these Derby winners, Lilly also trained and rode many other champions. See below for a complete list at the end of this profile.

Retirement

Lilly retired in 1949 at 65 years of age due to his worsening asthma. He continued to visit Monmouth Park, the track near his home in New Jersey. His visits became infrequent as the years went on.

Death and Legacy

Marshall Lilly passed away at age 90 in 1975. Shortly before his death, two influential turf writers, Joe Hirsch, and Kent Hollingsworth, interviewed Lilly. They helped draw attention to Lilly's remarkable life. The oral history interview and magazine article have preserved Lilly's life story, memories, and achievements for generations to come.

Sources

Hollingsworth, Kent. "A Man Who Knew Champions." *The Blood-Horse*, November 24, 1975. Keeneland Library.

Lilly, Marshall. Interview by Joe Hirsch, June 17, 1975. *Horse Industry in Kentucky Oral History Project*. Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries. <https://kentuckyoralhistory.org/ark:/16417/xt74f47gt78b>.

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Footnotes

¹Hollingsworth, "A Man Who Knew Champions," 5152.

²Hollingsworth, 5152.

³Lilly, interview.

⁴Hollingsworth, 5156.

⁵Hollingsworth, 5154.

⁶Hollingsworth.