

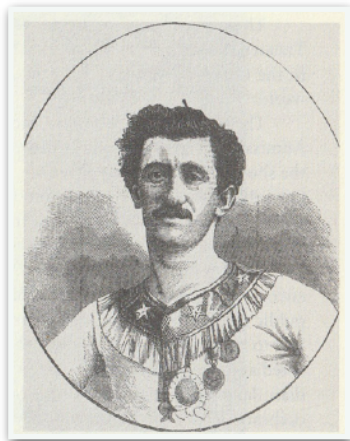
# Frank Pastor: the life and career of an equestrian acrobat in the palmy days of the circus

## 'This Miniature Prodigy'

**F**rank Pastor was born in New York, November 13th, 1837, the fourth child of Spanish immigrant, **Antonio Pastor**, and Connecticut woman, **Cornelia Buckley**. He spent his early years in Manhattan's Greenwich Street, where his father, a real-life *Barber of Seville*, owned a hair-cutting shop. Ads for Antonio Pastor's oil of almonds hair and scalp tonic appeared regularly in the New York newspapers of the 1830s.

Frank's older brother, Antonio or Tony, was a born performer and even as a child he enjoyed staging plays and sketches for friends in the basement of the Pastor home. His early creative activities foreshadowed the great fame he achieved later in life as the so-called 'Dean of Vaudeville'.

However it was Frank (or Francisco) who was the first of the four Pastor brothers to become a professional artist, when he was apprenticed to the circus of **John J. Nathan's**, part of the well-known Welsh, Delavan and Nathan's outfit. <sup>1</sup>The decision to apprentice 7 year-old Frank was likely to have been a financial one, as by the mid-1840s Cornelia Pastor was a single mother attempting to raise her family alone due either to the death or the disappearance of Antonio. By the late 1840s she was running a porter house on the northwest corner of Manhattan's Broadway and Duane Street. <sup>2</sup>



Drawing of circus equestrian Francisco Pastor circa 1866. The drawing appeared in the *New York Clipper* on 27 Oct. 1866. Pastor is wearing some of the medals he was awarded during his acrobatic career.



Circus manager and acrobat, John J. Nathans (~1814-1891) with three unnamed apprentices. The acrobat on the left may well be Frank Pastor but this can't be proved. Courtesy of Fred Nathan's Collection.

<sup>1</sup> *Fred Fried Artists in Wood American Carvers of Cigar Store Indians show figures and circus wagons*, Welsh, Delavan & Nathan's National Circus advertisement, page 88.

<sup>2</sup> *New York Daily Herald*, Nov 02, 1847, Page 2.

Circus impresario John J Nathans <sup>3</sup> was married to **Amelia Pastor**, (1825-1869) described as a cousin in-law of the Pastor family. <sup>4</sup> Because of Frank's contract with the circus from boyhood, Amelia Pastor and John Nathans became his de facto parents for most of his childhood. John Nathans was well known for training young apprentices in the dangerous art of trick riding and equestrian acrobatics. Other protégés included the Stickney and Kincaid Brothers and Philo Rust (an adopted son).

Frequently the equestrian acts of Nathan's Circus reenacted scenes from ancient mythology as the following fulsome excerpt from the 1840s describes:

*In his scenes of Centaur and Infant Achilles he (John J. Nathan's) is assisted by Frank Pastor, a most interesting and highly gifted child. This Infant Artist, will appear on his flying courser in an act entitled Nimrod Junior, in which he will justify the remarks of the press, that for grace, beauty and courage, he is the most wonderful child in the world. This miniature prodigy will, with his yet younger and smaller Brother, William, be introduced by his instructor, J.J. Nathans, in a series of personal gymnastics.* <sup>5</sup>

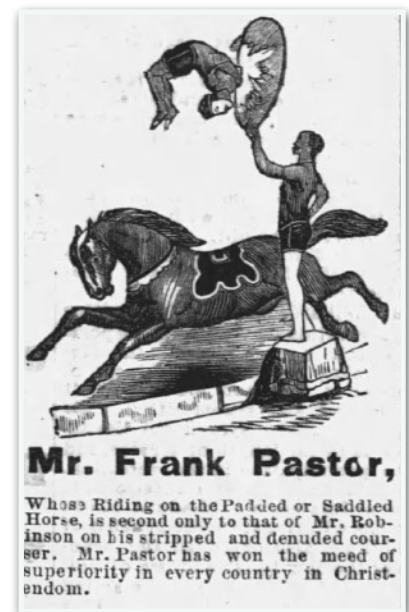
Frank's older brother, Tony, and younger brother, Billy, were to join Nathan's outfit later on following good reports of the circus life from Frank. Tony was never a horseman. Instead he concentrated on clowning, tumbling and ring master duties, while Billy performed on horse-back like Frank. Billy later married equestrian acrobat, Emma Nathans, John and Amelia Pastor's daughter. <sup>6</sup>

## Somersaulting through 'every country in Christendom'

**F**rank served a long and dangerous 10-year apprenticeship as an equestrian acrobat with Nathans, honing his skills as a child performer. He performed all over America and Canada before striking out on his own in 1856. That year he made his way to Europe where a good living was to be made by star equestrians. His debut occurred in Ireland (Londonderry) under a partnership arrangement with Irish circus impresario, **Thomas Price** (1813-1877).<sup>7</sup>

British and Irish papers of the period contain numerous accounts of Frank Pastor's daring exploits in the ring, as he performed with virtually all of the main European circuses, including Hengler's, Astley's, Cooke's, Walleth's, Foottit's and Rizarelli's. His speciality act consisted of backward and forward somersaults from a pad on a horse's back; somersaulting from one foot to the other; somersaulting through hoops, barrels and over flags, blankets or balloons. He also performed a revolving ball act.

Reviewers of Frank Pastor's act often remarked on the gracefulness of his riding and he maintained that he felt more at



Frank Pastor in action: from the *Leavenworth Daily Commercial*, 28 April 1872.

<sup>3</sup> John J. Nathans born Philadelphia circa 1814, died New York City 1891. Retired in 1880 and lived in Manhattan with a house at 137 East 34th Street.

<sup>4</sup> Armond Fields, *Tony Pastor, father of vaudeville*, page 8. Jefferson, N.C. : McFarland, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> *Fred Fried Artists in Wood American Carvers of Cigar Store Indians show figures and circus wagons*, Welsch, Delavan & Nathan's National Circus advertisement, page 88.

<sup>6</sup> William Harry Pastor, Billy and Emma Nathan's son, was a New York harbour pilot who died in 1911. He and his wife, Betty, had no children.

<sup>7</sup> Parker Zellers, *Tony Pastor, Dean of the Vaudeville Stage*, page 10, 1971, Ypsilanti, East Michigan University Press.

home on a horse's back than on the ground. <sup>8</sup> One newspaper gives a revealing portrait of him in the early 1860s :

*'He is a very quiet, unassuming young man, steers clear from the fatal cup, and above all is mindful of those at home, he having already sent to his mother many valuable presents'. <sup>9</sup>*

Always on the move, Pastor went on to tour a long list of countries in subsequent years - including Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Turkey, Russia, Italy, Portugal and especially France and Spain. He performed in several South American countries too, including Cuba, Chile, Brazil and Uruguay. <sup>10</sup> It was said he was particularly proud of the fact that he performed in front of Napoleon III and Amadeus, King of Spain. <sup>11</sup> During this time he was presented with many medals of excellence which added to his prestige.

## Great Exhibition in Paris, 1867

**W**hile touring Italy, he made a point of studying the classical equestrian sculptures with a view to imitating the riders' postures. <sup>12</sup> A notable highlight of his career was his many performances at the Great Exhibition in Paris in 1867. He stayed in the French capital for a number of years to act as equestrian director at the magnificent **Cirque de 'L'Impératrice** on the Champs-Élysées, which held up to 8,000 spectators. <sup>13</sup>

During that decade also he toured Spain (again at the invitation of Thomas Price who had a permanent circus in Madrid). While there he took the opportunity to visit his father's relatives in **Seville**. <sup>14</sup> Apparently quite a fuss was made of him there as he was reputed to be the first American to visit the city. <sup>15</sup>

Like many circus folk of his era, Pastor was a freemason. In his case he was a brother of the Scottish St. Mungo. No.27 Lodge from at least the 1860s. <sup>16</sup> Pastor seemed to have a particular affection for Scotland as a glowing 'card to the public' he placed in a local Scottish newspaper shows. <sup>17</sup>

## Journalist for the *New York Clipper*

**F**rank Pastor had an interesting sideline as a journalist. In the 1860s he wrote regular reviews for Frank Queen, editor of the weekly entertainment paper, *New York Clipper*. For the interested American public, and indeed for friends back home, his accounts were a window into a world



Circus advertisement from the 19th century featuring Frank Pastor. Courtesy of the Harry Ransom Center The University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>8</sup> *The San Antonio Light*, 03/10/1884

<sup>9</sup> *New York Clipper*, Aug 1863, page 140.

<sup>10</sup> *The Baltimore Sun*, Dec 12, 1885.

<sup>11</sup> *The Semi-weekly miner, Butte Monthly*, July 15, 1885.

<sup>12</sup> *The San Antonio Light*, 03/10/1884

<sup>13</sup> *New York Clipper*, 29/07/1911

<sup>14</sup> *New York Clipper*, Aug 1863, page 140

<sup>15</sup> *New York Clipper*, Aug 1863, page 140.

<sup>16</sup> *Glasgow Morning Journal*, 07/06/1865, page 2.

<sup>17</sup> *The Caledonian Mercury*, 10/10/1865, page 1.

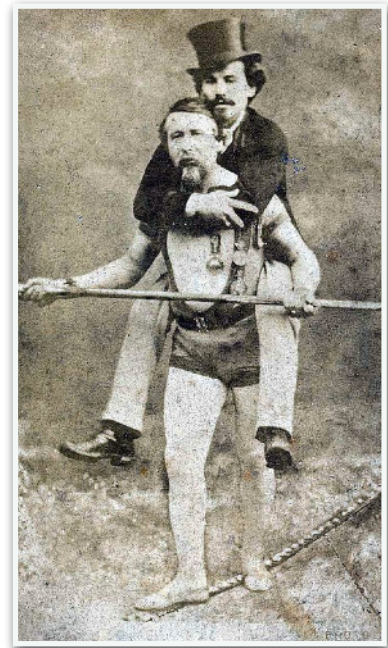
populated by what Thomas Frost called 'this strange race'<sup>18</sup> - the nomadic, classless and unorthodox who liked rubbing shoulders with royalty. Pastor was a life-long member of this 'strange race'. He could write with first-hand knowledge of the injuries and accidents, the sicknesses, the triumphs and hits, the hardships of incessant packing and travelling, as well as bread and butter matters like audience attendances and house receipts.<sup>19</sup>

In 1869, he returned to America for a time and toured with a travelling troupe for much of 1870. He was enumerated in the 1870 Census of New York, as he stayed with Tony and his brothers, Billy and Fernando (Dody), at **521 Broome Street**, Manhattan.<sup>20</sup> During this period he went on to form an ambitious travelling show with bareback rider, James Robinson.

## 'Blondin Never Fails'

In August 1875, at All Saints St. John's Wood Church of England, London, Frank Pastor married 21 year-old **Adèle de Gravelet**, daughter of famous high wire performer, **Blondin** (Jean François Gravelet) who in 1859 became the first man to cross Niagara Falls on a tightrope. The witnesses to the marriage were Blondin himself and his manager of the time, Stefano Annoni De Parravicini (1824-1897).<sup>21</sup> The couple were married for the next ten years and had no children. Pastor may have been on the rebound at the time of marriage as his previous intended, circus artist Kitty Sharpe, broke off their engagement in 1874 to concentrate on her relationship with English trapeze artist, Edwin 'Fritz' Smith.<sup>22</sup>

Adèle de Gravelet had known many adventures on the high wire. As a 5 year-old she caused a public outcry when a blind-folded Blondin wheeled her out in a wheelbarrow 100 feet above the ground at the Crystal Palace.<sup>23</sup> While Adèle carelessly showered the horrified audience below with rose petals, Queen Victoria ordered the stunt to be stopped. The Home Secretary had to serve the directors of the Crystal Palace with notice to cease Adèle's involvement.<sup>24</sup> The Blondin family were simply baffled by these concerns but the publicity did them no harm. Frank Pastor's opinion on the subject was later summed up by the remark: 'Blondin never fails'.<sup>25</sup>



Blondin (1824-1897) carries his manager, Harry Colcord (1830-1910) on his back as he dangles 250 feet over Niagara Falls in 1859. Colcord was a Chicago-born portrait artist. Blondin performed the same stunt with Frank Pastor at the Crystal Palace in the 1870s.

## Performed at the Rotunda Gardens

**A**fter his marriage to Adèle, Frank Pastor became Blondin's some-time treasurer and agent, although he found time to take his equestrian act to Dublin in the autumn of 1875,

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Frost, *Circus life and circus celebrities*, preface vii, London, 1875.

<sup>19</sup>An example of Frank Pastor's work as a reporter can be seen in *New York Clipper*, 28 Dec, 1912, page 11.

<sup>20</sup>1870 United States Federal Census, Ancestry.com.

<sup>21</sup> Marriage of Frank Pastor and Adèle de Gravelet Blondin, August 21, 1875. *London, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1938*. Ancestry.com

<sup>22</sup> Don Meade, *Kitty Sharpe, circus and stage sand dancer*, page 4, 2014. *KittySharpe\_Circus\_Stage\_SandDancer.pdf*.

<sup>23</sup> Ken Wilson, *Everybody's Heard of Blondin*, Page 71, Hawthorns Publications, 1997

<sup>24</sup>George Linnaeus Banks, *Blondin: his Life and Performances*, Google Books, page 83-84.

<sup>25</sup>*The San Antonio Light*, 03/10/1884.

performing at the Rotunda Gardens with Rizareli's Cirque.<sup>26</sup> By now he had spent over thirty years as a circus acrobat, risking his neck during his twice a day shows. But from this time on he appeared to step back from his daredevil acts. Was this due to injury, ill-health, increasing age or perhaps the loss of a favourite, trusted horse?<sup>27</sup>

Whatever the reason, Pastor began to diversify as a performer and even performed as a clown like his brother Tony had done in the 1850s.<sup>28</sup> He reenacted scenes from a Spanish bullfight with Adam's Circus.<sup>29</sup> At a show in Aberdeen with Cooke's Circus, he performed a 'mirth-provoking ...comic spade dance' that went down well with the crowd.<sup>30</sup> By 1877 he had even moved to the music hall scene, performing as a comic at the Prince of Wales Music Hall in Middlesboro.

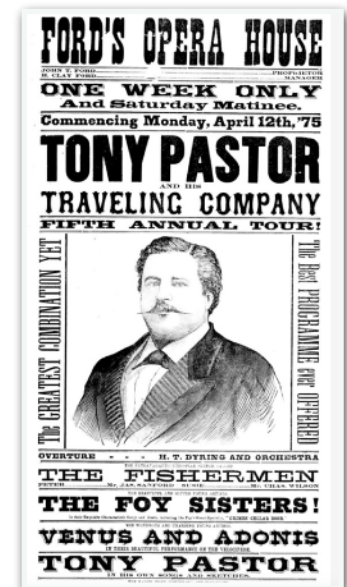
By 1877 too Frank had found a new risky venture. Blondin had begun to include him in his act, carrying him on his shoulders as he crossed the high wire without a net at the Crystal Palace. Newspapers spoke of Frank Pastor's *sang froid* during these perilous piggy backs, when he could do little else but act as a dead weight. This was even as the great acrobat pretended to lose his balance and tumble to the floor, which was all part of the act. The papers also noted, unsurprisingly, that Pastor often looked unusually pale when the show was over!<sup>31</sup>

## Fluent in many languages

**F**rank Pastor was undoubtedly the best travelled of the Pastor family. His constant touring, often staying in cities like Paris for years at a time, made him proficient in many languages. According to an American journalist who interviewed him in 1884, he spoke English with a slightly foreign accent.<sup>32</sup>

In February 1877, the papers reported that Frank had arrived at Valparaíso, Chile, from Liverpool, after a long 39-day journey at sea.<sup>33</sup> The papers added that he was in good health, which somehow implied that this had not been the case previously.

Following the unexpected death of their younger brother, Billy, Tony Pastor invited Frank to return to America to become theatre manager at his Broadway venue. (*The Metropolitan*). Sick of the European world and longing for home, Frank was quick to take Tony up on the offer. Immigration records for 1878 show him returning with Adèle in cabin class on the ship, *Greece*, in the company of showman, Zack Coup, brother of W.C. Coup of Barnum and Bailey fame.<sup>34</sup> In the ship's manifest he described himself as an 'artist'. He was never to perform with the circus again.



1875 newspaper ad for the Travelling Company of Tony Pastor

<sup>26</sup> *The Irish Times*, 01/10/1875, page 6.

<sup>27</sup> *The San Antonio Light*, 03/10/1884. Pastor describes the loss of a favourite, well-trained horse on a boat journey in the Bay of Biscayne, causing him to risk using an unfamiliar horse in the ring for subsequent shows.

<sup>28</sup> *New York Clipper*, 27 October, 1866.

<sup>29</sup> *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, Mar 18, 1875, page 2.

<sup>30</sup> *Aberdeen Journal, and General Advertiser for the North of Scotland*, Dec 24, 1877, page 2.

<sup>31</sup> *Norwood News and Crystal Palace Chronicle*, Oct 6, 1877, page 3.

<sup>32</sup> *The San Antonio Light*, 03/10/1884.

<sup>33</sup> *New York Clipper*, 24/2/1877.

<sup>34</sup> Ancestry.com. New York, U.S., Arriving Passenger and Crew Lists (including Castle Garden and Ellis Island), 1820-1957 [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010.

From 1878, Frank became general manager at Tony's theatre, No. 585 and 587 Broadway, and then later at Tammany Hall on East 14th Street from 1881.<sup>35</sup> He was also superintendent of theatre publications.<sup>36</sup> The New York City Directory of 1881 also listed his occupation as 'cashier' and in 1884 as 'clerk'.<sup>37</sup>

Although Frank Pastor had left the circus behind for good, the circus world was not quite done with him. The travelling show he had set up in partnership with bareback rider, **James Robinson** (real name James Michael Fitzgerald 1837-1919) had outstanding debts of \$18,000 which he was still liable to repay. It forced him to declare bankruptcy in 1878.<sup>38</sup> No doubt this dashed his chances of a comfortable retirement after decades performing dangerous stunts in front of an admiring public. It may also have made him fall back on the resources of his family again, especially Tony Pastor.

The 1880 New York census lists Francisco Pastor's home address as **246 East 40th Street** in mid-town Manhattan. This 4-storey brownstone near Reservoir (now Bryant) Square, belonged to his mother, Cornelia Pastor, who lived there until her death in 1887.<sup>39</sup> Pastor continued to live there for the remainder of his time in New York.<sup>40</sup> In addition to this three brothers, two of whom died in the 1870s, Frank Pastor had two older sisters : Caroline Clarke of Manhattan, and Dolores Fuller of Brooklyn. Both women had husbands in the brewing business and were comfortably off. Dolores Fuller was the only member of the Pastor family who would have living descendants.

In the early 1880s, newspapers referenced Frank Pastor's attendance at the funeral of many show business friends - dead from tuberculosis, typhus and typhoid. In August 1880, he was one of the mourners at the New York funeral of teenage ballet sensation, **Leonora St. Felix**, who had been appearing on Tony Pastor's stage when she fell fatally ill.<sup>41</sup> At the New York funeral of Irish variety actor, **W.H. Delehanty**, he carried the coffin alongside **Billy Barry** and Delehanty's partner, **Thomas Hengler** (otherwise Slattery).<sup>42</sup> He also attended the funeral of minstrel, **Charles Backus**, at Rochester, New York, in June 1883.<sup>43</sup>

## Illness and Death

**B**y his own account, Frank Pastor pinpointed the onset of serious illness as the 'winter before the assassination of President James Garfield'.<sup>44</sup> (1880-81.) The nature of his illness was almost certainly early stage consumption. He was advised by New York lung

<sup>35</sup> Parker Zellers, *Tony Pastor, Dean of the Vaudeville Stage*, page 67, 1971, Ypsilanti, East Michigan University Press.

<sup>36</sup> *N.Y. Star Almanac for 1880*, 1879, [googebooks.ie](http://googebooks.ie)

<sup>37</sup> New York City Directory, 1880/1881. Accessed at Heath Trust, December 2023.

<sup>38</sup> *The New York Times*, 9/11/1878. Page 6.

<sup>39</sup> *The Sun*, 19 Aug 1887, page 4. In her subsequent will, Cornelia Pastor bequeathed the house to Caroline Pastor Clarke, older sister of Frank and Tony who had married into a family of brewers.

<sup>40</sup> New York City Directories for 1881- 1884

<sup>41</sup> *Fort Wayne Gazette*, Aug 20, 1880.

<sup>42</sup> *The Pittsburgh Post*, 22 May 1880.

<sup>43</sup> *National Republican*, 23 Jun 1883, Page 1.

<sup>44</sup> *The San Antonio Light*, 03/10/1884 . Garfield was shot on July 2, 1881. He died September 19, 1881.

specialist **Dr. Alfred Loomis**<sup>45</sup> to avail of the hot, dry climate of San Antonio, Texas. <sup>46</sup> This town, famous for its Spanish mission, **San Antonio de Valero**, was well served by a rail network from the north since 1878 via a spur from Houston and New Orleans.

Further potential insight into Frank Pastor's shattered health was derived from a cough bottle ad called '*New Life*' (previously '*Pulmona*') that Pastor endorsed through a 'letter' published in the newspapers. <sup>47</sup> The 'letter' described the history of his lung problems in detail. He said it all started as far back as 1878 when he contracted a severe cold in Paris that destroyed his rest and appetite. Although he claimed to have spent a fortune on medicines and attended some of the best physicians in the world, nothing seemed to work. <sup>48</sup>

'*New life*' cough bottle was recommended to him by his good friend, **Harry S. Sanderson**, Tony Pastor's business manager and treasurer. In less than a week his cough was gone and he was sleeping like a baby, as well he might given the levels of morphine and chloroform in the product. (Bizarrely, the cough bottle company ran Pastor's ad for several years after his death.)



The Alamo (by Frank Thompson), San Antonio de Valero, famous church mission of San Antonio Texas. Frank Pastor died in the city in June 1885.

Evidence from city directories shows that Pastor was living full time in San Antonio, Texas, by at least July 1884.<sup>49</sup> The press reported that he had taken rooms at Menger's Hotel on Alamo Square, and was accompanied by Adèle. <sup>50</sup> His name ceased to appear in the papers in connection with Pastor's New York theatres after the summer of 1883.

In October 1884, Frank Pastor gave an extensive interview to *The San Antonio Light* newspaper. The article provided a detailed physical description of the circus veteran a mere eight months before his death :

*"The reader will fancy a small man, rather spare built, with small hands and feet, aquiline, though by no means sharp features, coal black, luxurious, glossy hair, small black*

<sup>45</sup> Dr Alfred L Loomis (1831-1895) of 31 West 34th Street specialised in tuberculosis and was one of the first to link climate with the fight against the disease.

<sup>46</sup> *The San Antonio Light*, 03/10/1884 .

<sup>47</sup> *The Baltimore Sun*, 05 Feb 1889, page 2. Letter from Frank Pastor dated April 3, 1883, addressed from Tony Pastor's 14th St. Theatre

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> *San Antonio Light*, 24 July 1884, page 4.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

*moustache, black eyes and a white complexion, and wearing neat, unostentatious clothing, and you will have Frank Pastor".* <sup>51</sup>

His final address in San Antonio was a house at the south west corner of San Pedro Avenue and Evergreen, situated close to the pleasant oasis of San Pedro Springs Park. <sup>52</sup> There he died aged 47 years on June 25th, 1885. Adèle accompanied her husband's body by train back to New York. On June 30th, 1885, after his funeral at St. Francis Xavier's Church in Manhattan, he was buried in the Pastor family plot, known as '*the shadowy way*', in Evergreen Cemetery, Brooklyn. <sup>53</sup>

There was less coverage of his funeral in the papers than might have been expected, except to note that many old colleagues from the circus world showed up. 'Who will be next', said circus rider **Levi North** to the group of sawdust veterans gathered. <sup>54</sup> They did not have long to wait. Levi North himself died a week later, having caught a cold at Pastor's graveside that proved fatal. <sup>55</sup>

Frank's death hit Tony Pastor particularly hard and he withdrew from public appearances and tours for an unprecedented eight weeks. No evidence could be found that Frank Pastor left a written will. But it appears that many of his possessions went to Antonio. <sup>56</sup>

Three years after his death, a wistful poem appeared in the *New York Clipper*<sup>57</sup> penned by Tin Pan Alley songwriter and composer of *The Man that Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo*, **Monroe (Rosey) Rosenfeld** (~1854-1918). <sup>58</sup> Entitled, *A Circus Rider to his Horse*, it was dedicated to the 'memory of the late Frank Pastor'. Rosenfeld, a notorious gambler who led a gypsy existence and who had no less than three pseudonyms, must have moved in Frank Pastor's circle to have penned such a tribute. A newspaper ad posted by Pastor in 1877 seeking the services of a cashier for a profitable drawing room entertainment, hints that he may also have had an interest in gambling. <sup>59</sup>

Beyond these hints, his exploits in the ring and journalistic work, it is hard to know for certain what sort of personality Frank Pastor had. Certainly he must have been a very brave man. Family and loyalty also appeared to have been important to him. He was certainly well travelled and perhaps possessed of a certain restlessness until illness overtook him. In its obituary of Pastor, the *Boston Globe* spoke of his genius being of a versatile character. <sup>60</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> 'Francisco Pastor, the world's great equestrian , in San Antonio,' *San Antonio Light*, 03/10/1884.

<sup>52</sup> San Antonio Texas City Directory 1885, page 249, Ancestry.com. U.S., City Directories, 1822-1995 [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011.

<sup>53</sup> Funeral was at St. Francis Xavier followed by burial at **Calvary Cemetery** according to *New York Clipper*. Funeral and attendees were not covered to any extent in the newspapers so apart from Levi North, it isn't known who attended.

<sup>54</sup> *The New York Times*, 08 Jul 1885, page 5.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> *The Sun*, 04 Sep 1908, page 4. In Tony's 1908 will, Adèle was left the presentation medals that Frank had earned during his career.

<sup>57</sup> *New York Clipper*, 18 August 1888, page 1.

<sup>58</sup> Monroe H. Rosenfeld (1861-1918), went under the pseudonyms E. Heiser, F. Belasco, Monroe Roosevelt, coiner of the term Tin Pan Alley. Composer of 'I'm the Man That Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo'. (Jim Mackin, *Notable New Yorkers of Manhattan's Upper West Side*, page 142. Fordham University Press, 2021. )

<sup>59</sup> *The Guardian*, Dec 21, 1877, page 2.

<sup>60</sup> *The Boston Globe*, Jun 27, 1885, page 2.



## Adèle de Gravelet returns

**A**dèle de Gravelet wasted no time returning to England after her husband's death, as all her blood relatives lived there. She appears in all the English censuses from 1891 to 1911, living first with Blondin and his third wife at the aptly named *Niagara House* in Ealing.<sup>61</sup> She had been left \$1000 by Cornelia Pastor in her 1887 will. And when Frank's older sister, Caroline Clark, died in 1894, she also left Adèle \$500.<sup>62</sup>

The press never lost interest in Blondin even after his retirement. While playing billiards with a reporter at his home in the mid 1890s, the famous acrobat commented on a photograph of his late son-in law, Frank Pastor, hanging on the wall of the billiard room, which led to a conversation on family relations.<sup>63</sup>

After Blondin's death in 1897, Adèle went to live with other relatives in the south of England, including her younger sister, Charlotte Gravelet Robiolo.<sup>64</sup> Like many legendary circus and theatre performers, Blondin died with less money than might have been expected. He left Adèle £200 in his will, the repayment of a loan she had apparently advanced to him, along with a £2 weekly allowance to be administered in trust for her by her brother, Henry de Gravelet.<sup>65</sup>

Perhaps not surprisingly, when Tony Pastor died in 1908, there was evidence that Adèle was in a hurry to have his will executed, as he too had left her \$1000.<sup>66</sup> She sought to force Tony's wife and executor, Josie Foley<sup>67</sup>, to cease dragging her heels on the process. Tony had been in possession of the many medals that Frank had received over his long circus career and these were returned to Adèle at this time also.<sup>68</sup> Blind like her sister, Charlotte, at the end of her long and eventful life, Adèle de Gravelet Pastor died at Battersea, England in 1941, two years shy of her 90th birthday.

Frank Pastor was not Spanish nobility but to many American and European circus goers he was nothing if not show business nobility.

Frank Pastor (Nov 13, 1837- Jun 25, 1885)

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<sup>61</sup> Ancestry.com. 1891 England Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2005. Accessed January 2024.

<sup>62</sup> Will of Caroline C. Clark, 22 Jun 1894, Record of Wills, 1665-1916; Index to Wills, 1662-1923 (New York County); Author: New York. Surrogate's Court (New York County); Probate Place: New York.

<sup>63</sup> "Blondin at Home", *Pontypool Free Press*, 17/05/1895.

<sup>64</sup> Ancestry.com. 1901 England Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2005. Accessed January 2024.

<sup>65</sup> "Blondin's Will", *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 26 March 1897, page 14.

<sup>66</sup> Tony Pastor's Will, *The Sun*, 04 Sep 1908, page 4.

<sup>67</sup> *The Evening Sun*, 29 Sep 1910, page 5.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.