

Conjuring Arts Bulletin

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Thoughts on the Future

The 3rd European congress of Magic History and collecting took place in Vienna, Austria at the Natural History museum and was hosted by Magic Christian. Attendees enjoyed a number of very interesting lectures on a variety of subjects and while some were a bit far afield, all in all it was a great event.

The convention ended with a panel discussion featuring five prominent attendees. Ostensibly it was to be about who would host the next convention and how the group might attract some younger blood. Fergus Roy of Davenport fame offered to hold the next Congress in London and this was accepted so we can expect there to be a 4th European congress in 2011 and it will be by the Davenports. The second question however caused quite a few audience queries and responses but I don't believe it was really addressed. To this end Conjuring Arts has a proposal and an announcement.

Clearly we believe that the study of the History of magic is very important and should be approached with the utmost sincerity. We also believe that the magic history community won't spontaneously attract a new crop of young researchers and participants just because we need them. Something different has to be tried. We believe that the most serious and active members of this community should seek out a talented magician in the 20 to 30 year old range and create a kind of master/

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Annie Abbott, "The Little Georgia Magnet"

Reviewed by Barry H. Wiley

Susan J. Harrington and Hugh T. Harrington
2010, 248 pages, \$20.99, ISBN 1452847304
www.annieabbott.com

There has appeared in our midst a young lady, hailing from the land of new religions and wooden nutmegs, professing to possess abnormal powers, in the form of some occult magnetic influence, enabling her to perform feats of strength out of all proportion to her physical development. To say that this young lady has set the Thames on fire is a very mild way of putting it.

John Nevil Maskelyne
London
1891.

The young lady was Dixie Annie Jarrett Haygood from Milledgeville, Georgia. She was a small delicate woman, 31 years old, who performed under the stage name, Annie Abbott. She had begun performing her remarkable feats after having observed, for the first time, the originator of the Magnetic Girl act, Lulu Hurst, at the Opera House in Milledgeville on Tuesday, February 17, 1885. Haygood carefully observed Hurst's performance, its public impact, and the resulting steady income enjoyed by the

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The Conjuring Arts Research Center's Newsletter Conjuring Arts Bulletin is dedicated to helping the center disseminate information relevant to all the various aspects of conjuring knowledge: history, bibliography, theory, collecting, performing, methodology, presentation, preservation, and all other worthy pursuits that further our art.

apprentice relationship. Once the younger magician has been found and it's been established that this person has the beginning kernel of an interest in our history the elder historian should advise and guide the new student. This could include helping the younger magician find topics of interest and also help them find the resources that already exist with which to do research. I think this would be an ongoing grooming and coaching relationship. Once the young historian is ready, the elder could encourage the student to attend and participate in one of the several collector/history magic conventions.

It would also benefit the community if the conventions would systematically put aside an afternoon session and break the talks down to 15 minute slots that would be reserved for first time speakers from this group of younger apprentice historians.

To get the ball rolling Conjuring Arts is happy to announce the creation of a History Research Fellowship. Although it will be awarded, it's not a prize in the typical sense. Conjuring Arts will identify a number of potential candidates each year and one will be selected to be encouraged, taught and coached so that this person can become a contributing part of our magic history/collecting community. This fellowship will include special access to Conjuring Arts' research facility and online

materials. As well it will include hands on advising as to subject and methodology of research. Finally it will also pay for the expenses to travel to and attend one of the conventions. If it's appropriate this fellow will also be encouraged to deliver a paper at that convention.

Our hope in establishing this fellowship is that others will follow suite and actively seek out younger magicians that through teaching and coaching will become the historians of the future.



Annie Abbott review cont...

sixteen-year-old Hurst since early 1884. She experimented and practiced in private, finally mounting the stage on March 12, 1885, to give her first public performance.

But who was Annie Abbott, then Annie May Abbott and then again, another Annie Abbott, after the first had apparently vanished from the stage? Georgia historians, Susan and Hugh Harrington, through remarkable diligence and tenacity, have now written the first biography of Dixie Haygood. In the course of their extensive multi-year research, the authors have now found the illusive answers about the various Annie Abbotts -- even to their tracking down the unmarked graves of Haygood, and her later competitor, Annie May Abbott. The Harringtons are the

first to clearly identify Annie May Abbot as Matilda (Tillie) Tatro.

The Haygood story is a marvelously entangled tale of multiple marriages, estrangements, money, jewels and interchangeable husbands, a story that includes Europe as well as America. The Harringtons, for the first time, have clarified and sorted out just who were the other Annie Abbotts, along with identifying who were the managers/husbands involved. They provide a chart in an appendix that is helpful in clarifying the names and many relationships.

Richard N. Abbey managed and later married the original Annie Abbott (Haygood), and along with his brother, Theodore H. Abbey, also managed Tillie Tatro. The two Abbey brothers combined to manage the Annie Abbott Act with different women for almost thirty years and certainly contributed materially, along with the performers, to the sustained success of the act. The Harringtons have finally cleared up the long confusion of which Abbey was managing and marrying which Abbott.

Dixie Haygood hadn't been the only woman sitting in Hurst's many audiences who, with some private practice, came to duplicate some of the original Georgia Wonder's remarkable feats, but she was far and away the most successful -- though at the end, as the Harringtons sympathetically describe, Haygood was left with nothing.

Lulu Hurst had abruptly quit

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All submissions will be retained by the Conjuring Arts Research Center and will be added to our archives.

Annie Abbott
"The Little Georgia Magnet"
and the
True Story of Dixie Haygood



Susan J. Harrington
&
Hugh T. Harrington

her stage career in 1885, a few weeks after Haygood's first steps onto the stage, after having made the modern equivalent of a million dollars in two years, and never looked back. With Hurst gone, Annie Abbott had the Magnetic world largely to herself.

The resistance act is well known in conjuring history including the techniques of performing it. However, in their book, the Harringtons have focused on the difficult off-stage life of Dixie Haygood, coupled with the public perception of her as a woman of unexplained powers -- even in the face of extensive newspaper articles that claimed to expose, to "de-magnetize" Annie Abbott. The authors add to the charm of their story as they leave the reader to speculate on the events described and whether, at least in some circumstances, something beyond mere tricks was in play. Certainly, some of the Abbott performances described in the book cannot be explained by the usual techniques of leverage -- particularly the cases in which Annie Abbott heals illnesses with only a touch of her fingers. No one, prior to the Harringtons' investigations, had discovered such stories.

But even then, frequent exposures, accurate or not, tended to erode the public interest in the

Annie Abbott act which forced Haygood to move on as, e.g., with the disastrous exposure of the act that appeared in the London Star, November 17, 1891, which forced Haygood to leave for a tour on the Continent.

As responsible historians, the Harringtons have scrupulously annotated their text which allows the serious reader to seek out the data for themselves. The authors have clearly found new materials, and, remarkably, Annie Abbott's personal autograph book and photo album that allowed them, with admirable detective work, to clarify many previously confusing elements in the Annie Abbott story.

And in the end, the Harringtons, as with all who have written on the Magnetic Girls, do not answer the basic question of "Where did the act first come from?" Clearly, Haygood herself had learned from first watching Lulu Hurst. And though most of the early Magnetic Girls all came from Georgia, no book or pamphlet has ever been found there that describes such an act that might have been the basic source, or, until Hurst, no early performer demonstrating the act had appeared in Georgia, or elsewhere. Until other data might be found, the only conclusion must be that fifteen-year-old Lulu Hurst accidentally stumbled onto the resistance techniques, and her own imagination and that of her father, took it from there -- followed by others as Dixie Haygood who added to the original collection of stunts.

Dixie Haygood, the remarkable woman who in Maskelyne's metaphor ignited the Thames, has fortunately been rescued from obscurity as a result of the intensive research of Susan and Hugh Harrington.

The book is strongly recommended as a valuable contribution both to the history of Georgia and to the conjuring arts.

Randini

The Man Who Helped Houdini

by Ann Beedham

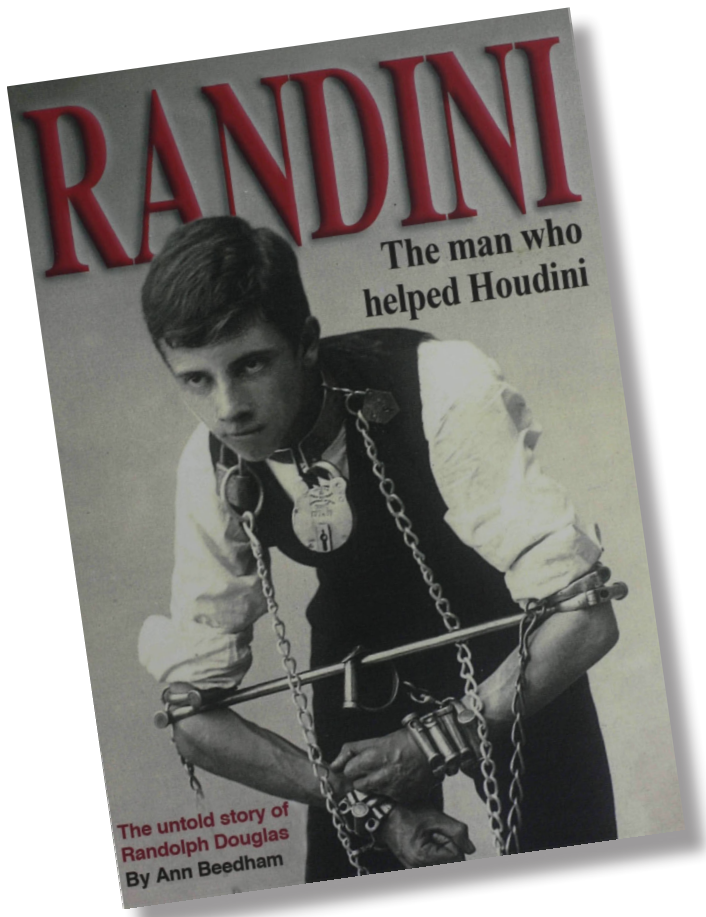
Reviewed by William Kalush

Published by Yourbooks.co.uk.
236 pp. coated stock with 16 pages in full color. Perfect bound in soft graphic wraps. Profusely illustrated with photographs throughout and with end notes and an index.

Sometimes history's course gets diffracted by the least likely of figures. Randolph O. Douglas was born in Sheffield England in 1895. The son of a talented silversmith the young Randolph took an early interest in magic with a special focus on the escape arts. Luckily for the boy Douglas had numerous opportunities to see the incomparable Houdini at his local theater. Over the years the talented young man would create and draw all sorts of new ideas and creations and as he fancied himself a performer he would also do these sorts of escapes.

Overtime the young man managed to become acquainted and then a friend and confidant of his ultimate hero, Houdini.

For years before Houdini's relationship with Douglas, Houdini pioneered the use of outdoor spectacle to create interest in his paid vaudeville shows. His first big outdoor spectacle was leaping into the Detroit River in November of 1906. As wonderful as the cold weather, death-defying escape was it still lacked one great and crucial element. Houdini was hidden below the water when the escape actually took place. This would be true until the young Randini shared something very wonderful with the master.



Although Houdini and his wife Bess would visit the Douglas family many times over the years during one momentous occasion Houdini's visit to the young magician, now known as Randini, would literally turn the concept of magic publicity upside down.

After a pleasant meal with the family Randini invited Houdini to his attic bedroom. Here he asked the escape grand master to strap him into a strait jacket, a feat Houdini had pioneered nearly 20 years prior. After Randini was secure he had rope tied around his feet and Houdini and Randini's mother threw the other end of the rope over a beam above and hoisted the man into the air upside-down. In this position Randini demonstrated the first dangling straitjacket release. Houdini would head back to the US and before too long this new take on an old escape became is greatest iconic image.

Of course this is just one of

many fascinating stories about Randolph Douglas. Ms. Beedham has done a remarkable job re-searching the full life of this multi-faceted and talented man. Ms. Beedham's style has a tendency to put you inside the characters' heads. Some may find this disconcerting but her prose flows well and makes for a lively and pleasant read. The point should also be made that Ms. Beedham does an excellent job of explaining how the magic she describes looks. It's quite common for non magicians to make naive and glaring errors in their descriptions and in the language they use. Ms. Beedham does a far better job of this than many others and this is no trivial task.

Ms. Beedham's book on Randolph Douglas presents a wealth of new research that is well written and profusely illustrated.

Recommended.



Something From Nothing

David Charvet

The value of the Conjuring Arts Research Center and Ask Alexander database were never proven greater to me than while writing my most recent book, *Ade Duval – Silken Sorcerer*.

Having previously written five in-depth biographies of magicians over the past 25 years, most of these projects allowed me access to large amounts of first-hand material to aid in the telling of those stories. In the case of Duval, it was the exact opposite. Nothing had surfaced in the way of personal scrapbooks or notes that would shed light on his remarkable life and career. I attribute this to Duval having died relatively young (66) and his wife having predeceased him, leaving no children. His death occurred 46 years ago, so any first-hand personal material that might have initially survived, has been lost over the ensuing years. Fortunately, Alexander was there to help me.

Typing "Ade Duval" into my laptop brought forth 1,975 pages of references within 424 documents in the collection. I read every one. While doing so, I started a notebook with one page for each year of Duval's life. From the nearly 2,000 pages found with Ask Alexander, I was able to construct a handwritten timeline of Duval's life from 1918 to 1965. Using the "collections" feature on the website I gathered specific pages from the database and then had the group e-mailed to me. After printing them out, these pages were inserted into a large, three-ring binder that became my personal Duval scrapbook.

Using Alexander as an index for my own paper files of *The Sphinx* and *Genii* proved invaluable. After locating a photograph of Duval from *The Sphinx* online, I could then go to my hard copy of the particular magazine and scan it for inclusion in the book. Without Alexander, finding a photo from among 52 years of *Sphinx* files would consume hours, if not days. Alexander did it in seconds. I also found that by taking the information from Alexander and combining it with the data on other sites such as www.ancestry.com and www.newspaperarchive.com

com I was able to discover things that would have been impossible only a few years ago. For instance, Ade Duval's early performing partner was Andy Blaeser. In an article from *The Sphinx* I found that Ade and Andy were classmates. That gave me a clue to his age. After Andy left the "Duval Brothers" act in 1927, all record of him in the magic press ended. Taking the information gathered from Alexander and entering it in the Ancestry.com search engine, I found that Andy Blaeser lived out his life in Chicago and died in 1988, at age 90. I can now even tell

you his Social Security number (as I can Ade's.)

The most amazing thing is that with Ask Alexander I was able to research and write the entire book in less than a year. Without Alexander, I estimate that the research alone would have taken five years, and I'm sure much would have been missed in the process. I truly value the efforts of Conjuring Arts every day. For a writer of magic lore, the resource is invaluable.



Cacoëthes Scribendi

A Bibliography of Edgar G. Heyl – December 1933 to June 1983

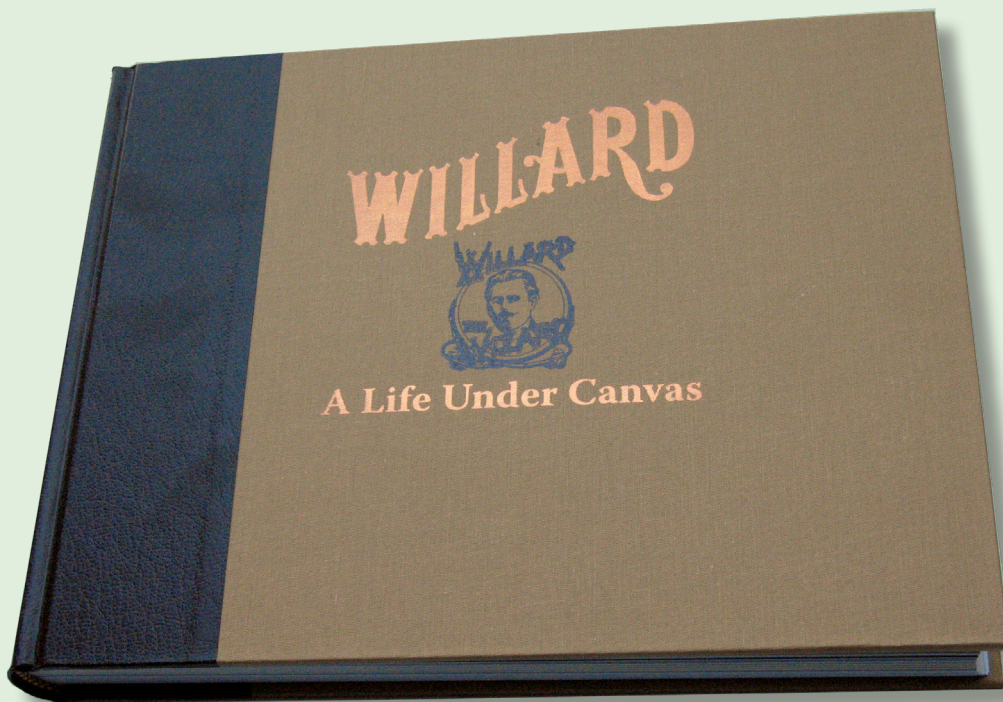
What follows is the final installment of Edgar Heyl's personally written bibliography.

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Willard: A Life Under Canvas

Here is the untold true story of the Willard family and the four men who toured rural America as Willard the Wizard. Besides scouring old magazines, newspapers, letters, scrapbooks and photographs, author David Charvet had the full cooperation of Eugene, Madeline and Frances Willard who grew up backstage on the Willard the Wizard show. Here is the ultimate behind-the-scenes story of a traveling tent show as told by those who lived it. *Willard – A Life Under Canvas* is number 14 in our series of Magical Pro-Files. It contains 370 pages with 276 photographs and because the entire book is printed in two colors, many of the photos appear in duotone, giving them the feel of a hot, dusty tent show. Eight pages of full color show Harry Willard in action along with some beautiful portraits of his well-worn apparatus. This edition is limited to 1,000 hand-numbered copies. Price \$85 plus \$5 postage.

DELUXE EDITION features a tipped-in, hand-tinted portrait of Harry Willard along with an extra page with a color photograph of Eugene, Madeline and Frances Willard. Each of them, along with the author David Charvet, has signed this page. The book is housed in a matching slipcase stamped in two colors. Only 150 copies of this hand-numbered, deluxe edition have been produced. Price: \$195 plus \$5 postage. Available from Mike Caveney's Magic Words at www.mcmagicwords.com.