

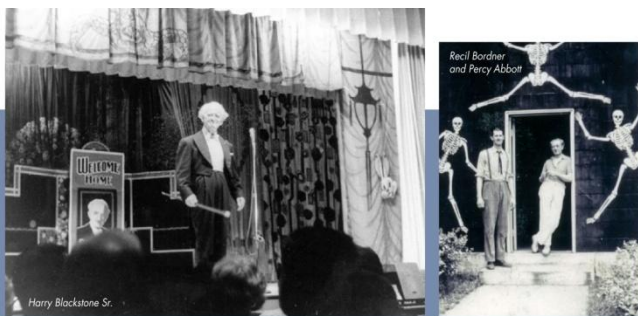
## Family Reunion 75<sup>th</sup> Get Together (by Dale Salwak)

2012

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Few magical destinations have greater allure and brim with more nostalgia than the sleepy, quiet village of Colon, Michigan — the Magic Capital of the World. Visitors feel this when they pass the secluded summer home of the late Harry Blackstone Sr. They discover it when they step into the photo-bedecked Abbott Magic Company's headquarters. They perceive it when they visit the local cemetery, the final resting place for many prominent magicians. And they sense it among the 1,200 residents, many of

whom cheerfully open their homes and hearts to everyone attending the annual Magic Get-Together.



Harry Blackstone Sr.



Regil Bordner and Percy Abbott



Abb Dickson and Karrell Fox

Duke Stern and Karrell Fox

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What is the secret behind 75 years of success? The answer is there, like a phantom, waiting to be discovered.

Unlike most magic conventions that move into a hotel for a few nights, blaze with a burst of activities, then fade into black and leave, here the art is woven into the rich fabric of Colon's history. Those silken fibers shimmer long after the last conference attendee has gone, enriching the town's



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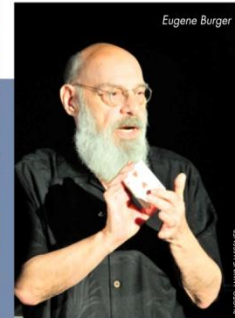
How the 6 page article looked in the pages of Magic Magazine

“I just love the town and how the Get-Together fits into it,” said a Pasadena, California, resident who has been attending for a long time and plans to keep on returning. “How many other high school stages can you say have featured so much talent over the years?”

The romance began in the summer of 1926 with the chance arrival of Harry Blackstone and his wife, Inez. They fell in love with the town’s flavor and its bloom, a peaceful slice of Americana sandwiched between the summer-cool waters of Lake Palmer and Lake Sturgeon. The couple bought property, which is still known as Blackstone Island, and spent each summer designing and rehearsing their shows for the next season’s tour. Lapping waters provided background music.



Abbott's showroom



Eugene Burger

An unexpected meeting with Australian-born magician Percy Abbott led to the opening of the Blackstone Magic Company in 1927. Although the two dissolved the partnership eighteen months later, Percy felt emboldened to establish his own business with a small loan from Will Nicola.



Mac King



Gabe Fajuri

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After Percy’s retirement in 1959, Ohio-born magician Recil Bordner, who had bought half interest in the business in 1934, purchased sole ownership and magically carried on until his own passing in 1981. Now with his son Greg at the helm, the company boasts a product line numbering in the thousands and operates an 8,000-square-foot manufacturing plant. At its peak, Abbott’s provided year-round

employment for up to 54 local workers.

The inspired idea for a Magic Get-Together goes back to 1934, when Percy held an informal open house for magicians. Fifty attended. The event, including a public show, was such a success that he decided to make it a yearly affair.

Percy knew instinctively that magicians want to connect with like-minded souls. Set aside politics and all other barriers in favor of a relaxed, friendly atmosphere where everyone feels welcome in the sharing of secrets, friendships, and memories, and people will not only attend, but will coalesce into a community.

It doesn’t matter if the person is a CEO, a former news correspondent, the wife of a famous magician, or a kid on his way to Idaho — all of them have this wonderful child inside that gives them a joy that they want to share with others. Magicians are happy people and Colon feeds that happiness.

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So this year they returned: magicians, enthusiasts, and interested spectators from around the globe. They pitched tents, settled into their RVs, stayed at motels in nearby towns, or rented rooms from residents in the village or by a lake.

Each evening, after the show, dealer displays at the Emerson Elementary School showroom drew a full house of the curious, propelled by the thrill of secrets. The Legion Hall was alive with magic and chatter well into the night.

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This year, we can only imagine who in the audience left inspired after seeing, for example, the dove magic of Victor & Diamond, the electrifying quick-change artistry of David & Dana, the comedy magic of Mac King, Michael Finney, Ardan James, and Dana Daniels, or the well-produced, full-evening show featuring members of the Long Beach Mystics.

Eugene Burger's lecture on how magicians think, and Tina Lenert's on how she created acts from life experiences, must have opened many eyes to a performer's inner world. The close-up magic of Eugene Burger, Tim Wright, Dana Daniels, Victor Cephas, and Mike Caveney combined the mysterious with the funny and the puzzling.

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Among the lesser-known magicians, the contestants gave exceptionally gifted and intelligent performances, with prizes going to Matt Roberts (First, as well as the People’s Choice Award), Patrick Thernes (Second), and Caleb Boyer (Third).

But this year’s pilgrimage to Colon, August 1–4, was also a pilgrimage into sheer nostalgia, beginning with Gabe Fajuri’s lecture on the history of the magic capital, and continuing with David Linsell’s pictorial history on Wednesday night. To the music of “The Magic Store” (from *The Muppet Movie*), “Over the Rainbow,” and “Comedy Tonight,” past performers were projected onto a large screen, each a frozen moment, a time past but still present in the memories of the viewers and thriving in the careers of so many recipients of that magical legacy. Images included Monk Watson, Duke Stern, Mike Caldwell, Gene Anderson, Recil Bordner, Neil Foster, Frances and Jay Marshall, Lefty, Lance Burton, Harry Blackstone Sr. and Jr., and so many more, some still alive, others passed on. “Hundreds of friendships have been made,” Karrell Fox said years ago, “and all of them will last.”



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The glance into the past later continued onstage, when Tom Mullica brilliantly revived some of Red Skelton’s routines, the material as fresh and funny today as it was when Red was alive, and when David Seebach presented the Willard Spirit Cabinet.

David Charvet appeared as Harry Blackstone Jr., dressed in his trademark sequined tuxedo and accompanied by original musical arrangements as he performed the Vanishing Bird Cage and the immortal Dancing Hank.

Gay Blackstone, along with grandchildren Tyler Anne (age 17), Madison (14), Jillian (11), Harry (9), and Bella (7), recreated the Six-Card Repeat routine, with the original wardrobes, as first performed by Harry Jr. and his family at the 1977 Get-Together.

And guest of honor Adele Rhindress related how, in 1947 at the age of eighteen, she was swept into Blackstone’s world of magic when, for three touring seasons, she made the transition from solo song-and-dance act to one of Mr. B’s “gorgeous girls.”

As the accompanying photos splendidly capture, there’s much more to a Get-Together, from the twice-daily shows at the Abbott plant with BJ Mallen and Gordon Miller to *Magic in the Streets* (busking),

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Ron Anderson

David Charvet

Adele Rhindress

Gordon Miller

Dale Salwak

from the Ladies Garden Party to the Arts & Crafts Fair. Every collector and historian will want to acquire copies of both the striking souvenir commemorative program assembled by Gabe Fajuri and the 480-page compendium on Abbott's history. Given Colon's rich history — as well as the current owner's contagiously optimistic conviction that if he invites people, they will come — no magical gathering resonates in the collective imagination as powerfully as Abbott's Get-Together. Percy Abbott got it right 75-plus years ago. Recil Bordner, and now Greg and his dedicated staff, have stayed true to his formula. This is one convention that has matured over the years but has never had to reinvent itself. May it endure. ❧

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*Dale Salwak performing at the 75<sup>th</sup> Magic Get Together*