

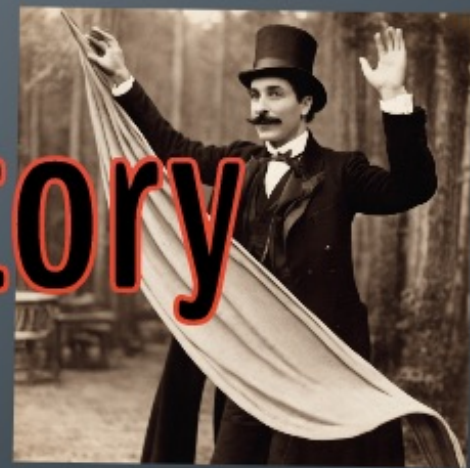
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Magicians and Circus Performers

Lost To History

Peter Alan Ross



Isadora Vale, better known by her stage name "Sister Flamara," carved a unique niche for herself in the early 20th century circus scene. Initially joining the Redwood Reverie Circus, she engaged in classic sideshow acts, showcasing her skills in sword swallowing, lying on a bed of nails, and fire eating.

It was during this time that Vale began adorning her body with tattoos, foreseeing the addition of "The Tattooed Lady" act to her repertoire. However, it was the introduction of "Sister Flamara" that catapulted Vale to circus stardom. Clad in a traditional nun's habit, she captivated audiences by fervently devouring fire while delivering spirited scripture from the Bible.

The act quickly became a sensation, with word spreading about the fire-eating nun who seamlessly blended religious fervor with pyrotechnic prowess. Despite performing in a circus setting, many believed Vale to be a genuine nun using a novel approach to spread the Gospel. She even had a dedicated "flock" of fans who religiously followed her travels, while her habit cleverly concealed her tattooed body, allowing her to continue performing as The Tattooed Lady.

Sister Flamara was popular enough that she spawned imitators, enough so that the public eventually grew tired of the whole act altogether. Vale decided to retire Sister Flamara and go back to her old repertoire.

As is common with professional sideshow fire eaters, Vale developed a chronic stomach illness and was forced to step away from the performing side of show business into a safer role as the circus's bookkeeper, closing the chapter on her fiery and unconventional career.

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Clarence MacGregor, the turn-of-the-century Unicyclist circus performer, made a lasting impression with his unique act as "Clarence Wheelington, The Aged Cyclist." Clad in bedclothes, MacGregor's performance started with a theatrical awakening from a nap, capturing the audience's attention as he gracefully mounted his unicycle.

The seasoned performer would then showcase his extraordinary skills by executing various tricks, such as dressing in a jacket, top hat, and pants while cycling around the ring. The spectacle continued with MacGregor juggling bottles of his supposed medicine, distributing popcorn, and even trimming his white beard, all accomplished effortlessly while navigating on one wheel.

Despite his captivating and physically demanding act, the mysterious origins of Clarence MacGregor, prior to his life as The Aged Cyclist, remain shrouded in uncertainty. Some speculate that MacGregor's early years were marked by illness, confining him to his bed. This theory suggests that once he recovered, MacGregor developed an insatiable desire for perpetual movement, eventually leading him to embrace the unicycle.

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Another narrative suggests a familial connection to wheel-related craftsmanship, stemming from his father's occupation as a carriage wheel repairman.

However, without a documented life story or personal disclosures from MacGregor, the true account of his pre-circus life remains a mystery, leaving fans to ponder the enigma of The Aged Cyclist. Sadly, there are no records beyond his memorable circus stint, and Clarence MacGregor appears to have disappeared from the public eye without leaving a trace of his later life.



Archibald Mallory, celebrated as Madame Illusionaire, emerged as a trailblazer in the late 19th century, breaking gender norms with their cross-dressing persona in the realm of stage magic. They captivated audiences with their unique blend of glamour and humor, seamlessly incorporating the latest ladies' fashions while maintaining a stylish mustache, challenging societal expectations. Remarkably, Mallory faced minimal backlash for their bold choice, and their comedic parlor magic acts became highly sought-after attractions.

Beyond their enchanting performances, Mallory was a socialite, gracing the gatherings of influential figures in business and politics. Their charisma extended beyond the stage, contributing to their acceptance in high society. Following a successful and respectful career in professional magic, Mallory transitioned their earnings into a thriving theater-owning venture.

Rumors circulated that their silent business partner was none other than Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, adding an air of mystery to her post-magic endeavors. Mallory's life exemplifies resilience, courage, and an unyielding commitment to breaking boundaries in both the magical and social spheres.

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Augustus "Augie" Montague, the elusive master card conjurer of the late 19th century, emerges from the shadows of history with an air of mystery that captivates contemporary magic scholars. This only known photograph of Montague adds a tangible dimension to his existence, placing him at the nexus of legendary card slights and illusions. At the heart of the intrigue lies "The Scholar At The Card School," a revered but enigmatic book worshiped by magicians, and attributed to A.G. Guetonam, a pseudonymous figure whose true identity remains elusive.

Recently, a serendipitous discovery in a Georgia estate sale unearthed a trove of magic ephemera, shedding light on Montague's life and the potential connection to A.G. Guetonam. The photograph, accompanied by letters and notes, reveals Montague's proficiency in card and parlor tricks, echoing the techniques outlined in Guetonam's revered book. As a Black performer in the racially charged South, Montague faced not only the challenges of mastering his craft but also the perils of navigating poker games fraught with racism and danger. The documents suggest that Montague, cognizant of the looming threats, embarked on a desperate endeavor to document his skills before an unforeseen tragedy could erase his unique contributions to the world of magic.

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The absence of concrete connections to the Georgia treasure trove and Guetonam invites speculation, creating a compelling narrative that weaves together the disparate threads of Montague's life and legacy into an intricate tapestry of magic history. Augie Montague emerges as a figure whose talents transcended the illusions on stage, confronting the societal challenges of his time and leaving an indelible mark on the world of card conjuring.

