

THE CENTURY

The list lengthens, as a dozen more are added to those significant people in magic who have influenced and shaped the performing art in America during the 20th century.

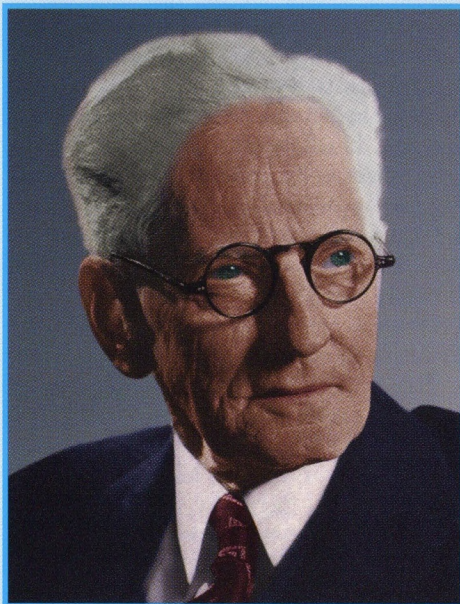
Those appearing in the first three installments of this ongoing feature are enumerated here.

THEODORE ANNEMANN
LANCE BURTON
BEN CHAVEZ
T. NELSON DOWNS
JOSEPH DUNNINGER
ALEX ELSMSLEY
S.W. ERDASE
WALTER B. GIBSON

A.C. GILBERT
U.F. GRANT
ROBERT HARBIN
DOUG HENNING
PROFESSOR HOFFMANN
HARRY HOUDINI
RICKY JAY
WILLIAM W. LARSEN SR.

BILL LARSEN JR.
MILT LARSEN
RENÉ LAVAND
ED MARLO
JAY MARSHALL
RICHIARDI JR.
MARVYN ROY
P.T. SELBIT

SIEGFRIED & ROY
SLYDINI
JIM STEINMEYER
HARLAN TARBELL
HOWARD THURSTON
EDDIE TULLOCK
MARK WILSON



Al Baker (1874-1951)

He was an American original — legendary in his own lifetime. With his cleverness and sparkling sense of humor, Baker became a leading Chatauqua star and a vaudeville mainstay. He was always in demand at parties, socials, and clubs, and was an entertainer who rarely turned down a children's birthday show.

His four books, the two-volume *Al Baker's Book, Magical Ways and Means, Mental Magic*, and *Pet Secrets* are major contributions to the literature of magic. Other original Baker material appeared regularly in *The Jinx*, with even more articles published in *The Sphinx*, where Al's comedic style was evidenced in his "Letters to Harold." To wit: "So, in forcing a card you find the spectator takes the one ahead of the one you want to force. It is simple to avoid this. Move the card you want to force up one."

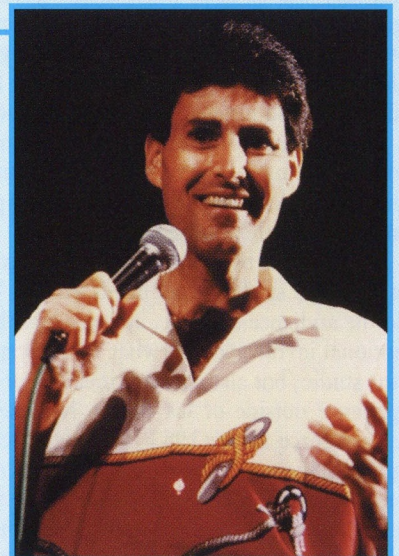
As a delegate to the National Council of the Society of American Magicians, he was tireless in his efforts to serve others. He was a longtime vice-president of the New York Parent Assembly, and when offered the presidency, Baker refused. "Why should I be President? That's a job where there is no chance for promotion." By 1938, the beloved performer was named Dean of American Magicians.

Uri Geller

When Uri was 23 years old, he began to perform telepathy and mind-over-matter experiments in Israeli night clubs. Finding his talents under appreciated in his own country, where some critics accused him of fraud, Geller tried his luck on television in the United States.

In the '70s, as floppy discs, barcode readers, and Pong video games came onto the scene, Geller appeared on numerous TV talk shows with his bending and breaking of spoons, stopping and starting of watches and clocks, and even causing a cable car to halt in mid-air. Many magicians were hostile to the assertions of genuine ESP and psychokenetic phenomena. Yet, it was the scientific world that became excited by his talents. The prestigious Stanford Research Institute included him in its ongoing psychic investigations, and although results were somewhat inclusive, Geller's apparent abilities conferred a legitimacy on the stage performer.

Believe them or not, Uri Geller's so-called psychic stunts and their resulting publicity were a boon to mentalism. He reshaped both the public's and magicians' perceptions of the potential of mental magic.



Michael Ammar

Although only 17 when he first became interested in sleight of hand, he was a quick study. At college, Michael minored in psychology and actually practiced magic during those classes. He majored in marketing and strategized how to sell the magic he was learning. By 21, Ammar was not only professionally performing intricate close-up magic, he was lecturing on the psychology of the craft.

Ammar began to build an international reputation when he won a FISM Gold Medal in 1982 and, the following year, became the youngest person ever awarded the Academy of Magical Arts "Lecturer of the Year" title. Michael has always focused on the classic works of the masters and their theories and techniques of teaching. Of particular influence was Dai Vernon, The Professor.

Motivated by the entrepreneurial spirit of positive-thinking speakers Earl Nightengale and Napoleon Hill, Ammar streamlined the magic lecture tour and introduced his extensive workshop method of teaching. In the last decade, the evolution of a mixed-media approach — combining his writings, video tutorials, and hands-on lectures — has caused Michael Ammar to become the most versatile marketer of close-up magic instruction today.

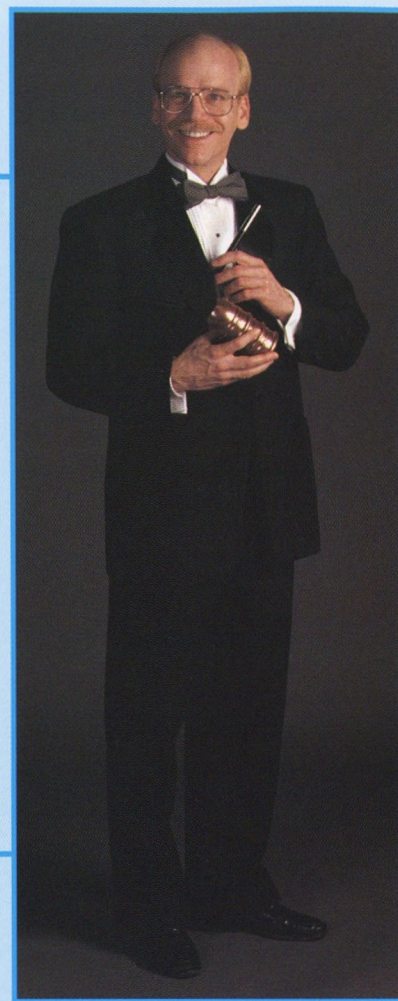


PHOTO: REAGAN BRADSHAW, L&L PUBLISHING



PHOTO: MIKE CAVENEY COLLECTION

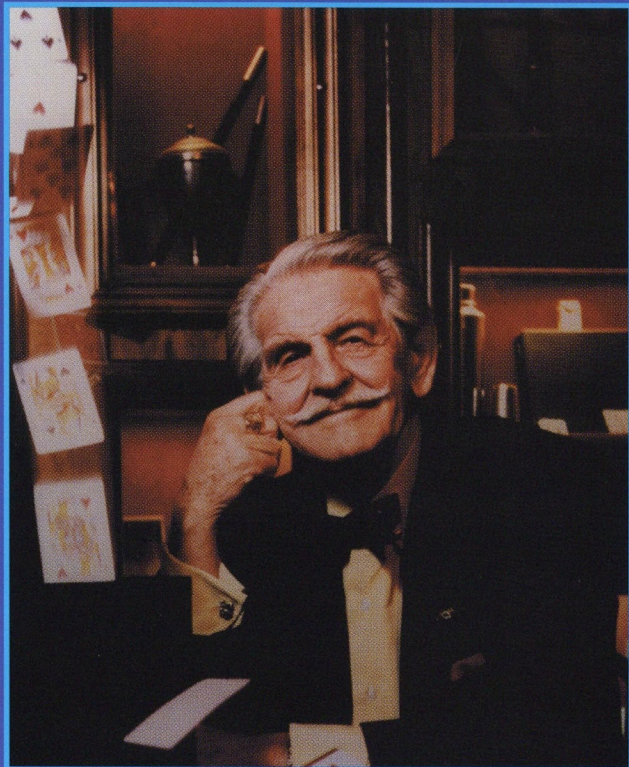
If only for his invention of "Asrah," Servais Le Roy is immortalized as a creative giant of magic. The now classic levitation — where a hypnotized lady, resting beneath a sheet, floats high in the air before disappearing — was first titled the "Mystery of Lhasa." In the acts or shows of just about every 20th century stage illusionist, the levitation is practically 100 years old, having been first performed publicly by Le Roy in South Africa in 1900. Servais claimed that inspiration for the illusion came from a remark made by Leon Bosco, original partner in the Le Roy, Talma & Bosco trio. Watching Servais float a playing card, Leon said in passing, "I wish you could do that with my wife."

The Belgian-born illusionist had already established a name for himself in England with his innovations, "The Flying Visit" and "The Three Graces." In 1897, when Le Roy arrived in the United States with his bride Talma, they joined Imro Fox and Frederick Eugene Powell to form The Triple Alliance, a formidable team that headlined vaudeville for two years. After forming the new act of Le Roy, Talma & Bosco, Servais took his creations around the world. Along the way, he invented more illusions, such as the "Duck Tub," "Duck Vanish," "Stolen Jam," "Devil's Cage," and a stage version of the "Hindu Rope Trick."

Le Roy took up permanent residence in America in 1918. Until his retirement in 1930, he continued to tour, invent, and build illusions for others. Of his performance and creative talents, Howard Thurston wrote: "Servais Le Roy is the only man I am afraid of."

Servais LeRoy (1865-1953)

Billy McComb



William McComb was born April 12, 1922 in Belfast, Northern Ireland. However, some magic historians suspect that this is a reincarnate McComb — one who's been around for a much longer time. For instance, name the oldest magic book you ever read. Billy knew the author. Call out that city where your grandfather attended the best magic convention of his life. Billy was there, too. Somehow, McComb has always been the veritable walking encyclopedia of the art and its secrets.

Early on, McComb established himself as one of the wittiest magical entertainers in the entire United Kingdom. He conquered the continent's cabarets, clubs, television, and music halls, replete with Command Performances at the London Palladium.

Then, he discovered America. Perhaps, it should be said that America discovered Billy McComb. He became a hot convention attraction throughout the '60s and '70s. By '74, the Magic Castle had bestowed upon "Sir William," the "Visiting Magician of the Year" award. Eventually, he moved to America.

In addition to McComb's forever-growing arsenal of original material, he has a twist on just about every trick in the books, whether it be a subtlety with the "Six Card Repeat" or a double whammy for "Sawing In Half." Some of his creations are standard fare — the "Hot Book," "Half-dyed Silk" and the "McCombical Deck."

Once upon a time ago — and it was in this lifetime — Billy was asked how he felt about the notion that most of his effects were done by numerous other comedy magicians. His reply: "It really doesn't bother me, even if they're doing my whole act. I've been doing it long enough that I think I do it much better."

He started in vaudeville at the bottom of the bill. His magic was good, but his talk fell flat. Audiences could not comprehend the garbled patter that accompanied his tricks. Goldin rarely received a good notice.

To overcome bad press and harsh criticism, Horace Goldin revolutionized his style. A new act was performed silently and at an extremely rapid pace. Being an inventive illusionist with many original tricks, Goldin crammed almost a full evening of dazzling effects into a whirlwind 17-minute turn that headlined. One reviewer called him "Lightning in Tails."

Goldin will always be remembered for capitalizing on the sensationalism and controversy of "Sawing Through a Woman." While other illusionists fought over its origins, Goldin hyped it to the hilt, selling tickets across the continent. Taking the "Sawing" on the Keith circuit in 1921, he received an unprecedented \$800 per week, the highest vaudeville salary that year. A decade later, Goldin would electrify audiences with his innovative "Buzz Saw" illusion.

Much of Goldin's good fortune came about because of his constant promotion. He spent untold sums on advertising and publicity. Subsequently, he raised his worth in the eyes of bookers around the world. He played Africa, Asia, Australia, and nearly every country in Europe. Goldin experienced command performances before kings and queens wherever he went, making his highly heralded, self-proclaimed moniker of "The Royal Illusionist" a reality indeed.



Horace
Goldin (1874-1939)

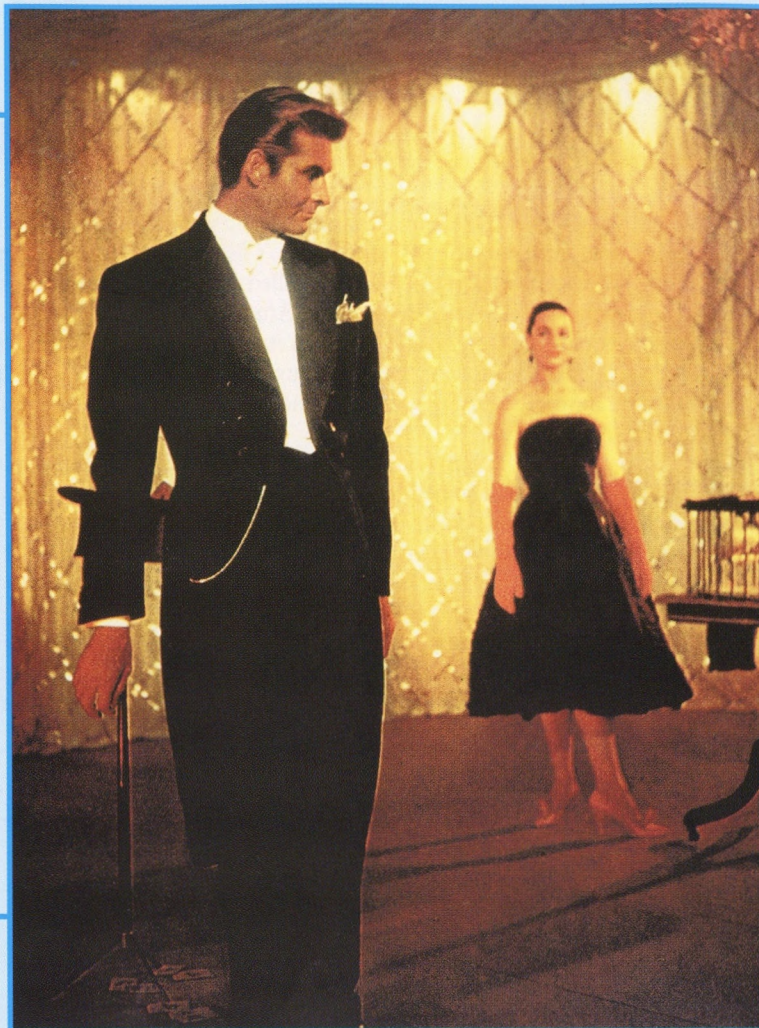
PHOTO: KENNETH KLOSTERMAN COLLECTION

Channing Pollock

The artistry of Channing Pollock made an indelible mark in the profession.

With the creation of his dove act, he popularized a genre of magic that would be emulated around the world. But of greater significance, Channing's immaculate skill and sophisticated style gave the role of the modern-day sorcerer a new respectability. In the '50s and '60s, when revue shows and night clubs were adamantly against magic, those producers and bookers, after seeing Pollock, started demanding classy acts.

His success, as a unique magical persona, made the career of Channing Pollock... inspirational.



LOBBY PHOTO: 1962 FEATURE FILM EUROPEAN NIGHTS



As World War II rumbled along overseas, acoustical engineer and semiprofessional magician Dariel Fitzroy was at home in San Rafael, California cranking out the books that would become known as The Fitzkee Trilogy. The volumes were not filled with magic secrets or audience-tested routines, but instead, were published as advice manuals and recipe books for what Fitzkee felt magicians should practice if they desired to become successful entertainers. Fitzkee's *Showmanship for Magicians* (1943), *The Trick Brain* (1944), and *Magic by Misdirection* (1945) all postdated the precepts put forth in Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936), but preceded the preachy approaches to be used in Norman Vincent Peale's *Power of Positive Thinking* (1952).

With a somewhat narrow assumption — “Magic, as exhibited by the majority, is the indulgence in a hobby which rarely instructs, seldom amuses, and almost never entertains” — Fitzkee analyzed the performance magic of his day from a scientific standpoint. And because of his breezy style of writing, many practitioners of magic, whether or not they agreed with his ideas or conclusions, began to realize that the science of psychology could be applied to the art of magic.

Dariel Fitzkee (1898-1977)

Don Wayne

Growing up in Oklahoma, he saw his first magicians on TV, and many a Saturday morning he visited Mark Wilson's *Magic Land of Allakazam*. Don eventually put together an act of what he called "magicians-type stuff," which was a contest-winner at a TAOM convention. After getting his college degree in advertising and commercial art, he moved to Los Angeles looking for a job. Discovering the studios of Mark Wilson — yep, same guy he'd watched as a kid — he wrangled a full-time position devising gimmicks and dreaming up tricks for Mark's ongoing magical enterprises.

Then, in 1977, David Copperfield came to town looking for fresh ideas for his first TV special. Don joined David's think tank in the middle of that production, and began a part-time creative relationship that would endure for 19 years. Effects, such as the "Vanishing Lear Jet," "Walking Through The Great Wall," "Escape From Alcatraz," "Niagara Falls Escape," "Flying," and countless others, are distinguished by a touch of Don Wayne's rare genius.

Through his Don Wayne Creations, he continues to provide magical solutions for the acts and shows of professionals, worldwide. And Don's services range from a simple, brilliant suggestion for a close-up segment to a totally new mega-trick concept with full-blown engineering details provided.

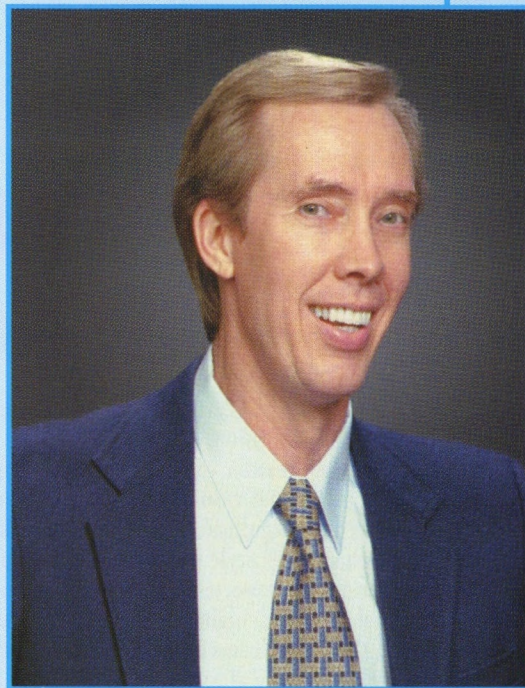
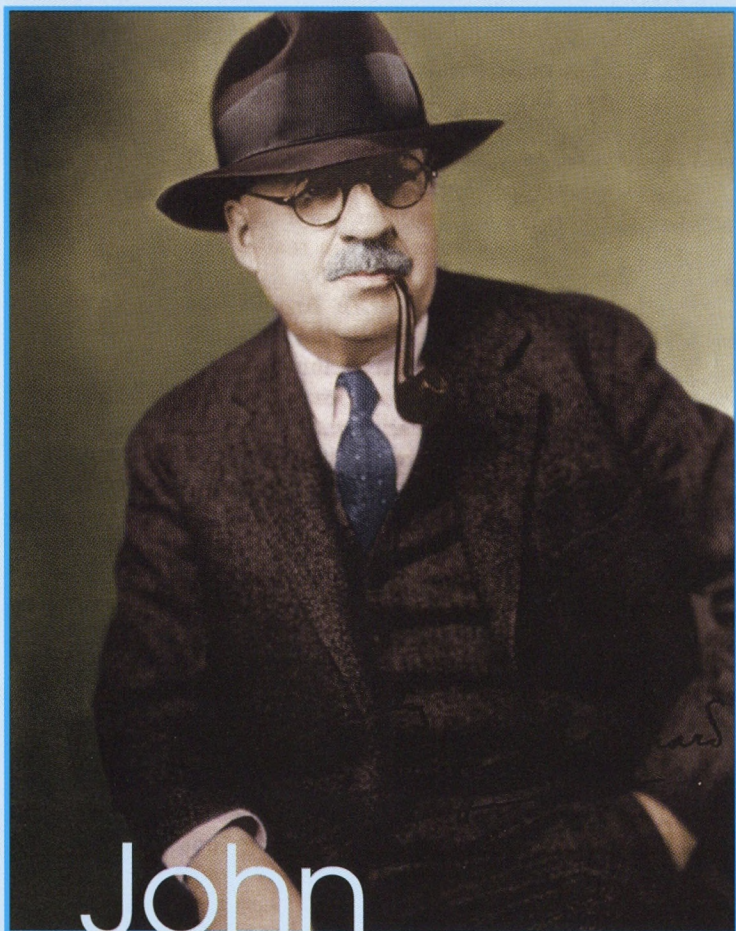


PHOTO: BILL TAYLOR



John

Northern Hilliard (1872-1935)

When he moved east in 1898 to write for *The New York Telegram*, the aspiring journalist met a rising young vaudevillian billed as "The World's Premier Manipulator of Playing Cards." Through that friendship with Howard Thurston, John Northern Hilliard became an impassioned student of the art of magic and its literature.

Years later, John hitched his wagon to a star when he became press agent for the Thurston show. His travels allowed him to meet the finest magicians and amass outstanding material for his "next" book. Then in 1931, with financial backing from Carl W. Jones, Thurston impelled Hilliard to begin writing what they felt would be the most important magic book ever published. Early on, Jones named it *Greater Magic*.

Hilliard's lavish text, reams of trick contributions, and profuse notations — some typewritten, but most longhand — filled stacks of three-ring binders. But when Hilliard died at age 62, only the first nine chapters of the book were completed. Thurston passed away the following year, but the project stayed alive. Hiring Jean Hugard to write and Harlan Tarbell to illustrate, Jones became the *Greater Magic's* "producer."

Published in 1938, John Northern Hilliard's visionary work still has that rare ability to transport magicians to new realms, bestowing hours of reading pleasures, wise counsel, and literally hundreds of cherished secrets.

The Blackstone show had an omnipresence throughout the century. Those fortunate to see father or son witnessed the performance of a true master — a moment that was “something to remember the longest day you live.”

Harry Blackstone Sr.

(1885-1965)

He was inspired to enter show business at an early age, after seeing a performance by Harry Kellar. Blackstone's illustrious career spanned from turn-of-the-century showboats to vaudeville stages, from legitimate theaters to the majestic movie palaces, and onto the airwaves of radio and early television.

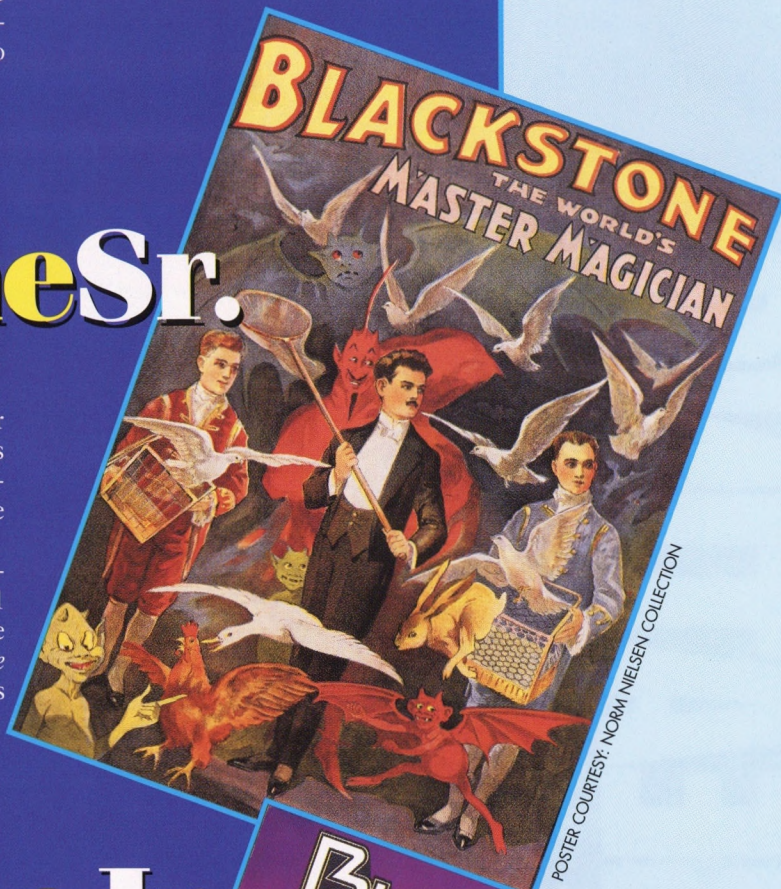
With an infectious sense of humor, often described as impish, Harry Blackstone trouped his glamorous “Show of 1,001 Wonders” across the nation. By the middle of the century, the name, already synonymous with magic, became legendary. *The Saturday Evening Post* proclaimed Blackstone “America's Number One Magician.”

Harry Blackstone Jr.

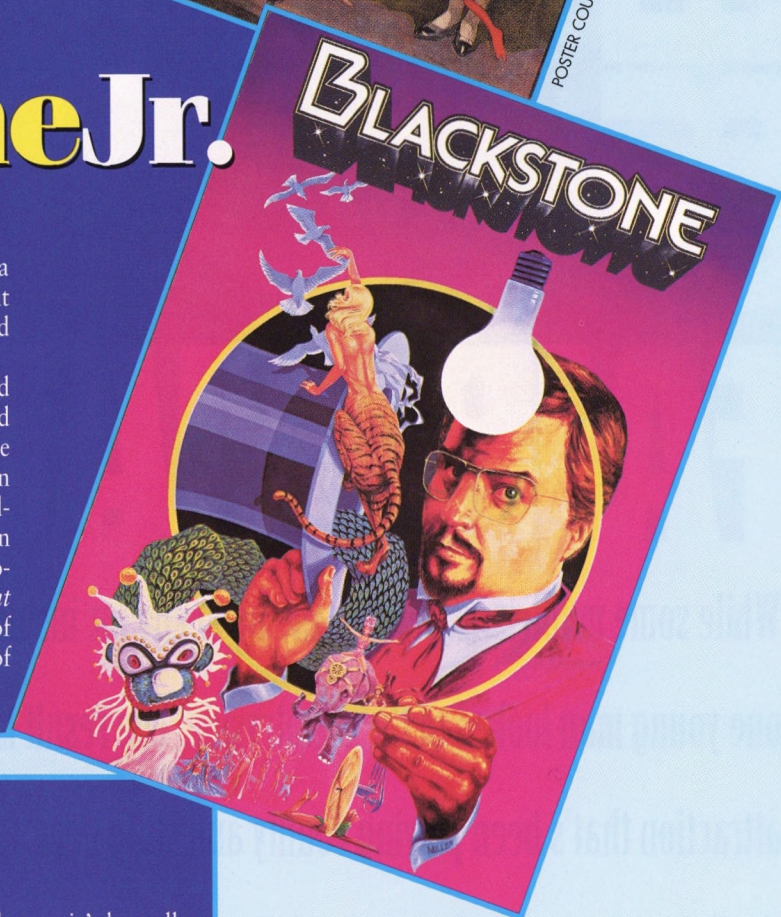
(1934-1997)

It was a family where magic was *the* way of life and, as a kid, he intermittently trouped with Dad's big show. However, it would be much later in his adult life before Harry Jr. would consider perpetuating the grand Blackstone tradition.

After graduating from the University of Texas, he pursued careers in broadcasting and television production. While he had done a stand-up act with the “Vanishing Birdcage,” “Rope Tie,” and “The Committee,” it was on an *It's Magic* show in the '70s that Harry started including the big stuff. He proceeded to build an illusion show, which not only toured the nation for a decade, but carried him to a zenith for any theatrical production. Harry's extravaganza, *Blackstone! The Magnificent Musical Magic Show*, by 1980, achieved the distinction of being the longest-running pure magic show in the history of Broadway.



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Next month,
“The Century” continues...

A continental performer who was considered by many to be magic's best all-around performer; a cardman and gambling expert with such an intriguing life that he wrote two autobiographies; and two generations of master magicians perhaps as well-known by their family name as their different stage names.