

THE CENTURY

This month, another dozen are added to the 100 people who have significantly affected the art of magic in America during the 20th century. Those who have appeared since the series began in January are listed here.

MICHAEL AMMAR	JOSEPH DUNNINGER	DOUG HENNING	SERVAIS LE ROY	P.T. SELBIT
THEODORE ANNEMANN	ALEX ELMSLEY	JOHN NORTHERN HILLIARD	HARRY LORAYNE	SIEGFRIED & ROY
AL BAKER	S.W. ERDNASE	PROFESSOR HOFFMANN	BOB LUND	SLYDINI
HARRY BLACKSTONE SR.	DARIEL FITZKEE	HARRY HOUDINI	JEFF MCBRIDE	JIM STEINMEYER
HARRY BLACKSTONE JR.	URI GELLER	GUY JARRETT	ED MARLO	HARLAN TARBELL
DAVID BAMBERG	WALTER B. GIBSON	RICKY JAY	JAY MARSHALL	HOWARD THURSTON
THEO BAMBERG	A.C. GILBERT	FRED KAPS	GARY OUELLET	EDDIE TULLOCK
J.B. BOBO	HORACE GOLDIN	WILLIAM W. LARSEN SR.	CHANNING POLLOCK	DON WAYNE
LANCE BURTON	WILL GOLDSTON	BILL LARSEN JR.	RICHARDI JR.	MARK WILSON
BEN CHAVEZ	U.F. GRANT	MILT LARSEN	MARVYN ROY	
T. NELSON DOWNS	ROBERT HARBIN	RENÉ LAVAND	JOHN SCARNE	

A reminder that when the list is completed in September, there will be a ballot for subscribers to vote for "The Top Ten of The Century." The results will be published in the December issue.

His "Miser's Dream" was once described as "invincible" — perhaps the strongest eight minutes in stand-up magic. Honed to perfection from the day-after-day grind of sideshows and circuses, Flosso's coin pail, where a kid from the audience is made "a millionaire in all of a few minutes," was legendary within his lifetime.

By 1939, Al had accumulated enough coins to buy Hornmann's, America's oldest magic shop. And it was from behind those hallowed counters that Flosso held court for almost three decades. The intriguing upstairs shop on West 34th Street became a haunt for the famous — Joe Dunninger, "Doc" Tarbell, John Mulholland, Richard Himber, John Scarne, Milbourne Christopher, and even Orson Welles.

Yet, Flosso's was a mecca for the neophyte, the kid with big dreams. When he set foot in Flosso's, they knew he would be guided down the right path. The gruff guy, who refused to sell that expensive piece of apparatus from the back room, was really that big-hearted guy who suggested, "This book is only two bucks, and you'll learn a lot more." Although, he often referred to himself as "the little man," Al Flosso was bigger than life.

Al Flosso (1895-1976)



PHOTO COURTESY JACKIE FLOSSO

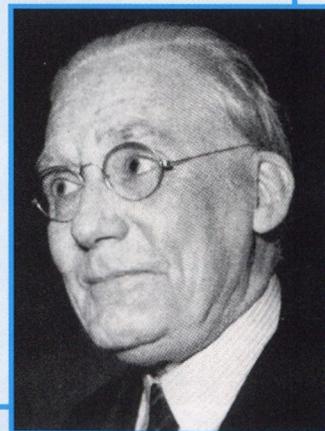
Jean Hugard (1872-1959)

At the turn of the century, former Australian banker and cattle rancher John Gerald Rodney Boyce patterned a magical persona after the famous Chung Ling Soo. As Chin Sun Loo, he immigrated to America, where he experienced moderate success in vaudeville with the Chinese act. After World War I, he changed his name to Jean Hugard and created a successful theater of magic at New York's Luna Park on Coney Island.

Hugard retired from the stage in 1927. Having become well-read and most knowledgeable about the art and craft, he initiated a second career — that of a writer. His lucid descriptions were equal to personal instruction. As he completed the writing of Hilliard's *Greater Magic*, Hugard lived in deafness. And, as he published the esteemed *Hugard's Magic Monthly*, he grew blind.

Of Hugard's last seven, sightless years, Milbourne Christopher wrote: "Mention a card sleight. His hands would reach for the well-worn pack and his fingers would deftly execute the moves."

In his final days of editing the *Monthly*, Hugard would have the trick contributions read to him. And being the thorough teacher and writer that he was, he would dictate the essential changes that best described and unraveled the mysteries.





John Ramsay (1877-1962)

In 1931, John Ramsay attended the first British Ring Convention ever held and won every competition he entered. Although he had been a member of the Magic Circle and the IBM for many years, it was at this gathering that the remarkable amateur from Scotland gained the attention of his peers. His originality and distinctive techniques deceived all present, and continued to do so even when he began to lecture and instruct. Ramsay was perhaps the century's first magician's magician.

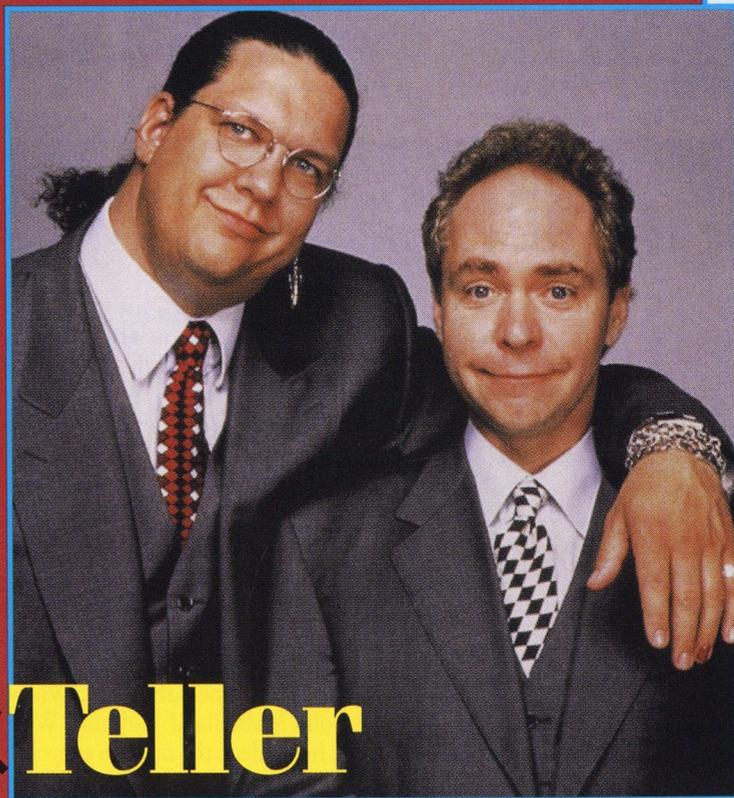
Ramsay's reputation reached the United States long before he himself did. When Dai Vernon finally saw Ramsay perform his "Cylinder and Coins," at the 1950 IBM/SAM Convention in Chicago, he observed, "Johnny has embodied some especially cunning moves and ruses, but his misdirection is diabolical." Cardini, Paul Rosini, and Slydini were equally impressed with Ramsay's dramatic and totally disarming misdirection.

Ramsay was the consummate amateur, the hobbyist that professionals envied. Because he had the security of owning a thriving grocery store, he could keep his sleight of hand as an enjoyable and occasionally profitable pastime. He entered the very first FISM competition in Paris, with his sights set on winning a trophy. He took second in the manipulation category. Undaunted, he went on to compete at two more FISM's. In Belgium, he won another second place for manipulation and, finally in Barcelona, John happily took home the first place for close-up magic... at the age of 73.

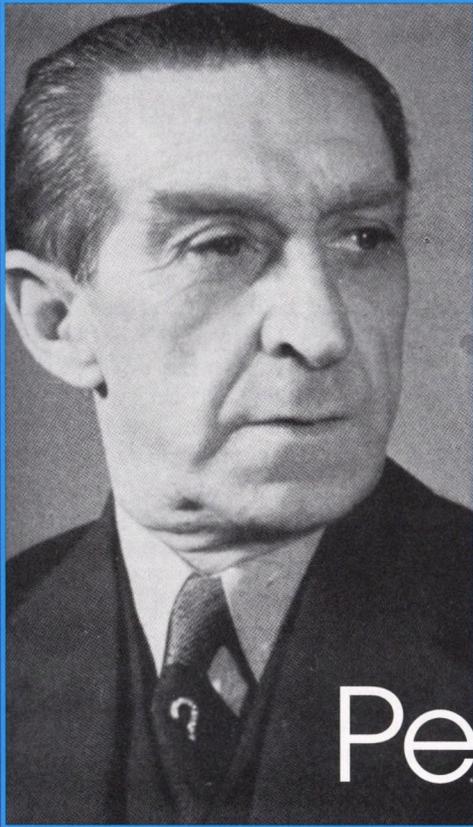
Why would a duo of merry pranksters, the self-proclaimed "bad boys of magic," be considered as influential on the course of magic in America in the 20th century? Because as Penn & Teller became prominent on the television scene with their wildly imaginative and flamboyantly irreverent style of trickery, they literally turned the magic world upside down.

When Penn & Teller appeared on *Saturday Night Live* with their brilliant topsy-turvy-studio-set, they turned every TV set tuned-in into a sucker trick. It was the epitome of the classic illusion "Backstage with the Magician." Millions of viewers were led down the garden path, and only those sitting in the studio knew where the water hose was hidden.

By shocking and amazing, they cultivated a new public interested in magic at a time when it was said there's already too much magic on the tube. The stereotyped magician with Mandrake-mustache, black velvet cape and silk top hat, and cage full of lily-white doves was told to take a hike. Penn & Teller turned sick stunts into true tomfoolery — they told us they were giving the secret away, but we were totally taken. New audiences suddenly saw the art as serious entertainment. Penn & Teller upped the ante for magic in the electronic age.



Penn & Teller



Percy Abbott (1886-1960)

Forever entrepreneurial, Percy Abbott never seemed to run out of ways to put his tricks at the doorsteps of magicians everywhere. Realizing a lucrative future in mail-order, he created catalogs the size of phone books. The evocative descriptions and intriguing illustrations were as powerful as a personal pitch from Percy. And what a deal, Abbott's paid the postage!

In the depths of the Depression, he organized and promoted the famed Get-Togethers, Percy's genteel way of luring customers into the backyard of his magic factory. Three days of round-the-clock demonstrations had a way of annually clearing the shelves and counters of the showroom.

Letting the world know that all roads led to Colon, Michigan, Percy published *The Tops*. To boost sales at Get-Togethers, he installed a fire-alarm siren in the showroom. Every time a subscription was sold, lights went on as the ear-piercing alarm was sounded. Often the magazine was purchased just to steal the spotlight from a demonstrator at another counter.

In the '40s and early '50s, he expanded retail operations, with branches in Indianapolis, Detroit, New York, Chicago, and Hollywood. And because Percy began to concentrate on wholesaling, Abbott-manufactured magic could be found in magic shops nationwide.

He was the ultimate magic demonstrator. Standing before a roomful of magi, he could create a buying frenzy over the latest Abbott item. Percy was masterful in knowing exactly how much of a trick's highlights to tip to seal a deal. And after the sale, you felt as if you had just stolen a miracle.

"Magic is an art that sometimes instructs, often amuses and always entertains."

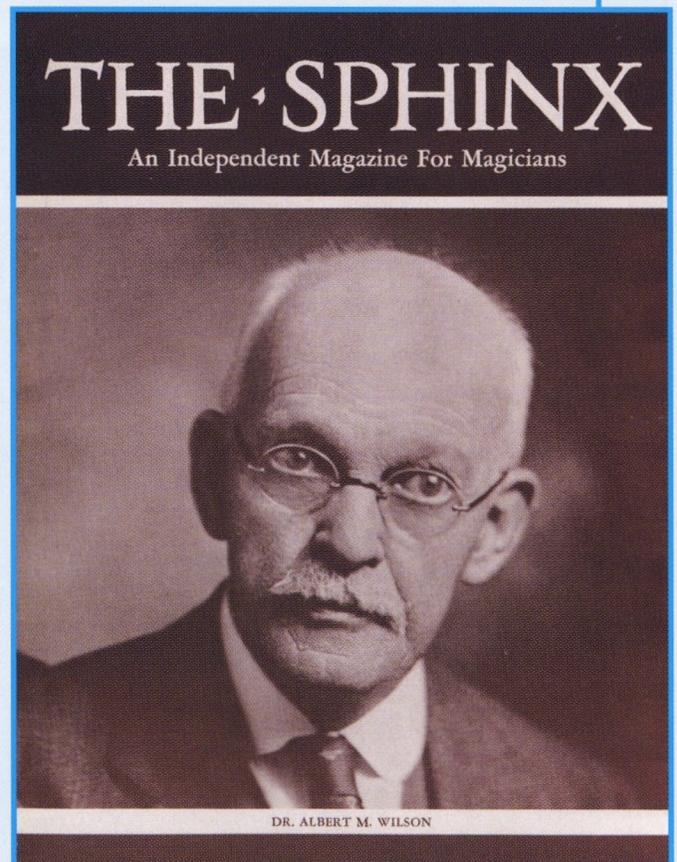
— the most oft quoted "Wilsonism"

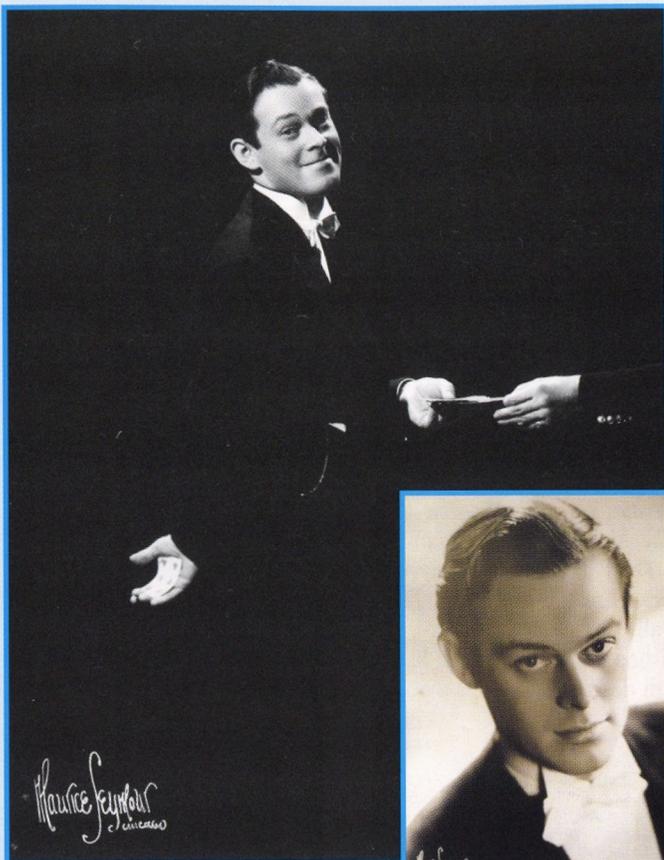
Dr. Albert M. Wilson (1885-1930)

He was America's pioneer of magical journalism, for until he was editor of *The Sphinx*, 1903 - 1930, no other conjuror's magazine carried real editorials. He was an uncompromising foe of the exposers. He feuded with the greats. He set great expectations for the near-greats. His writings were philosophical and intellectual. Howard Thurston once referred to Dr. Albert M. Wilson as "the Shakespeare of magic."

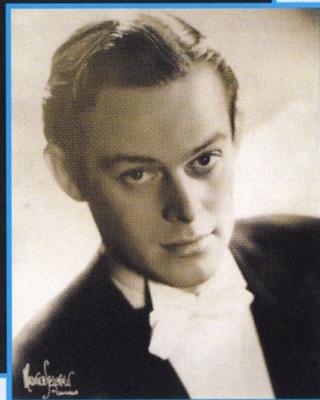
In 1928, when the good doctor began his 27th year of "uninterrupted and unselfish service for magic and magicians" he wrote: "Words are cheap. Promises are easy. Performance counts. The record of over a quarter of a century of the things *The Sphinx* has done, the sort of magazine, the influence it has exercised all these years, not only speaks for what it has done and is doing, but speaks for the years ahead."

Those high standards were carried on "In memory of Dr. Wilson" for another quarter of a century by John Mulholland. Although Wilson was not the founder of *The Sphinx*, he made it the incisive encyclopedia of the art for the first-half of the 20th century, and the magazine that can truly be called "Doc Wilson's grand journal."





PHOTOS: DOUG EDWARDS COLLECTION



For a while, young E.F.E. McQuade's interests were split between the art of photography and legitimate acting. By the time he had put together a proficient act of pure sleight of hand, he had acquired the stage name of Roy Benson, and he utilized his camera skills to make slow-motion pictures of his manipulations, refining his suave billiard ball routines.

In the 1930s, Roy traveled to Hollywood, not with dreams of being in the movies, but with hopes of becoming a cameraman for the silver screen. He picked up a two-week vaudeville date at Los Angeles' Orpheum Theater, which led to an appearance at *Ciro's*, a chic Hollywood night club. His pursuit of a career in photography was soon abandoned.

Deft manipulation accompanied by sharp wit and intellectual humor became his forte. During the years when variety venues were vanishing and supper clubs were bowing out to television, Benson carefully carved out a niche for the truly funny and talented magician as acceptable entertainer. Roy Benson contributed greatly to the establishment of the genre of the stand-up comedy magic act.

Roy Benson

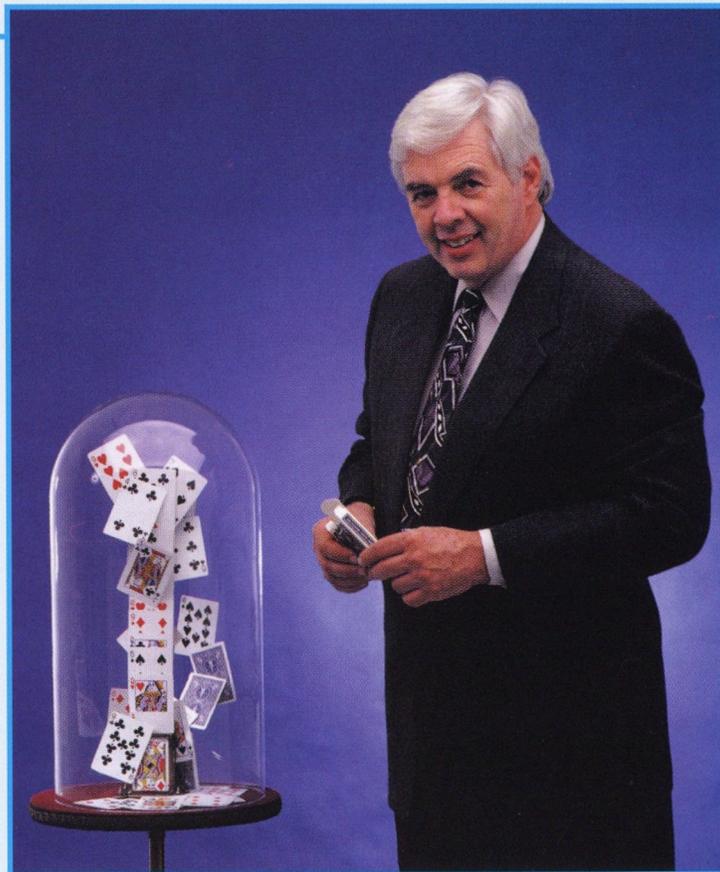
(1915-1978)

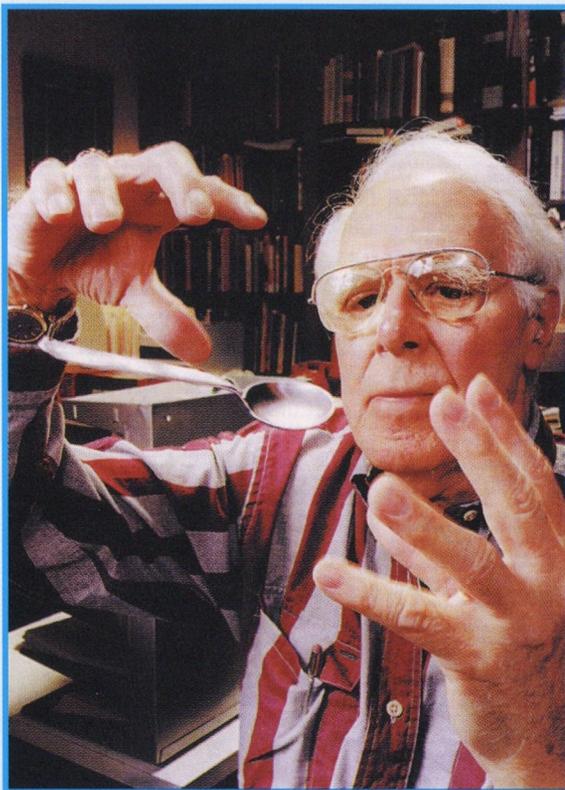
John Gaughan

As a historian of his craft, John understands the basics. Because he grasps the traditions of mystery and the proven principles of deception that he's gleaned from the study of past masters, he's capable of creating and constructing solutions for today's performers.

Following in the footsteps of pioneer artisans, Floyd Thayer and Carl Owen, John Gaughan trailblazed illusion construction for the mid-century phenomenon of the TV magic special. John began with Mark Wilson's *Magic Land of Allakazam* series, worked on almost all of *Doug Henning's World of Magic* shows, and continued with contributions to the many *Magic of David Copperfield* specials.

Whether it be the fabrication of a near-perfect illusion, such as an ultimate levitation for a Las Vegas superstar, or faithfully resurrecting a hidden secret, such as Robert-Houdin's "Antonio Diavolo" or Dr. Hooker's "Rising Cards," the career of John Gaughan is filled with wondrous accomplishments.





He wrote up a trick for *The Sphinx* and, within six months, his name appeared regularly on the cover as an ongoing contributor. The literary career had begun at age 15. Whether it be his writings on magic, mathematics, puzzles, games, theology, philosophy, politics, science, pseudoscience, psychic debunking, or just some of the best darned practical jokes ever conceived, being published was, is, and will forever be a way of life for Martin Gardner.

From a first booklet, *Match-ic*, published in 1935 by Ireland Magic Company; to the long-running *Scientific American* columns that began in 1952; to the mammoth *Encyclopedia of Impromptu Magic*, compiled in 1978; to the recent *Martin Gardner Presents*, assembled in 1993, there is an amazing breadth of material. Martin Gardner is the author of 65-plus book titles.

Martin's numerous contributions to periodicals, magical and otherwise, include: *Jinx*, *Hugard's Magic Monthly*, *Esquire*, *Uncle Ray's Magazine*, *Conjuror's Magazine*, *Harper's Weekly*, *Genii*, *Polly Pigtales*, *The Phoenix*, *True*, *Argosy*, *The New Phoenix*, *Esquire*, *Humpty Dumpty*, *Abracadabra*, *Reader's Digest*, *The Pallbearer's Review*, *Children's Digest*, *Physics Teacher*, *The Swindle Sheet*, *Games*, *Newsweek*, *The Skeptical Inquirer*, *Omni*, *Time*, and *MAGIC*, et al.

The distinguished Martin Gardner has taken his phenomenal scholarly pursuits to the n th degree, where n is a positive integer that's too immense to even contemplate.

Martin Gardner

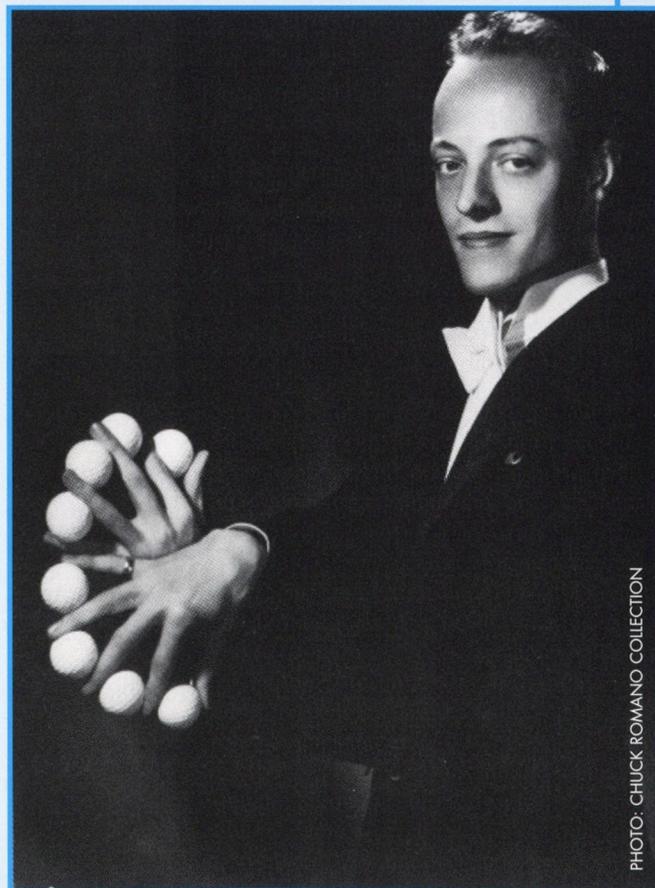
Neil Foster

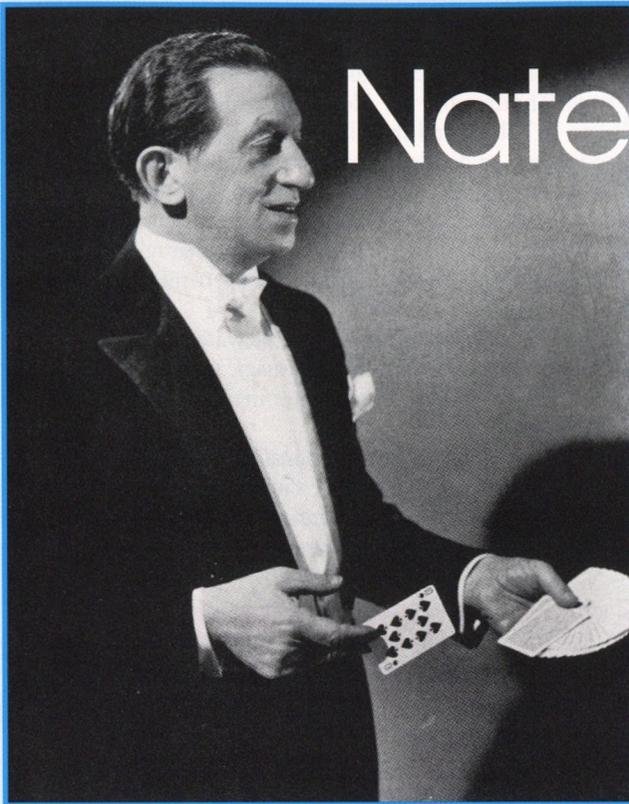
(1921-1988)

Early on, having established himself as an accomplished painter, Foster considered pursuing a career as an artist. However, in 1947, he turned to another art form — he enrolled at the Chavez College of Manual Dexterity. Proving to be the model student, Neil was requested to stay after school, for three years, to instruct the post-war flood of would-be conjurors. When Neil took off for a well-deserved vacation abroad, he packed his manipulative act. Playing night clubs and hotels in Europe and England, he was the first of Chavez's students to appear on the continent.

Returning home, he produced an elaborate school show and received a long-term contract to play assemblies. Accompanied by his new bride, Neil trouped his 45-minute production of *Neil Foster & Jeanne, A Concert of Illusion* throughout the Midwest, playing to over two million kids. After too many years of the rigorous three-a-day schedules, Neil moved to Chicago and became a demonstrator for Ireland's magic shop.

In 1959, he relocated to Colon, Michigan and soon became vice-president of Abbott's Magic Manufacturing. Utilizing his art background, he rejuvenated the folded *Tops* magazine as *The New Tops*. The glossy monthly featured top columnists, Clarke Crandall, Werner Dornfield, Robert Nelson, Karrell Fox, George Johnstone, Sid Lorraine, George McAthy, and Frances Marshall, with trick contributions by the likes of Ed Marlo, Nick Trost, Eddie Joseph, and U.F. Grant. Neil retired in 1979, however, and spent the remainder of his life teaching the Chavez Course from his home in Michigan.





Nate Leipzig (1873-1939)

Growing up in Detroit, Michigan, young Nate apprenticed 17 years in an optical shop near the theatrical district, affording him many opportunities to see performances of magic. Since the practice of sleight of hand was his hobby, he never missed Alexander Herrmann when he appeared on the grand stage of the Opera House. Leipzig not only emulated the master's digital dexterity, he was influenced by Herrmann's onstage manners and courteous style.

Nate Leipzig started his personal magic career in 1902. After three years of American vaudeville, he traveled to Europe, where he was a sensation. He appeared before the crowned heads of many continents and, by Royal Command, before the King and Queen of England.

When Leipzig finally returned to America, magicians could not believe the reception he received from New York theater audiences. With charm, grace, and manners, Leipzig had devised a method of making a skillful performance with playing cards a *cause célèbre*. Actor Fred Keating, who was Leipzig's only student, wrote of his mentor's dramatic instincts: "He made magic with cards happen by the expression in his eyes, his body movements, the subtle eloquence of his hands, the tone of his voice. He created the impression that here's a man you would like to know better."

Nate Leipzig brought to magic the fine art of being a gentleman.

Being around magic dealers almost all of her life, she once listed her occupation as "Magic Shop Slavery." Her first encounter with the world of magicians came at the age of 21, when she went to work as a typist and clerk for L.L. Ireland's magic shop in Chicago. Ever since, Frances has been performing magic, making magic, selling magic, and perhaps most importantly, writing about magic and the magicians that have surrounded her all her life.

Always dreaming of being a newspaper reporter, Frances had a habit of putting her thoughts on paper. She married Laurie Ireland in 1940, helped run the store, and by 1946, had written a book of memoirs, *You Don't Have to be Crazy*. Six years later, she had finished a second autobiography, *With Frances in Magicland*. And being a successful children's entertainer, she started writing and editing her *Kid Stuff* series in 1954 (there would eventually be six volumes).

Then in 1955, the widowed Frances Ireland married the multi-talented show business personality Jay Marshall. Together, they built the firm Magic, Inc. Over the years, millions of Frances' words appeared regularly in magic magazines across the nation. For over 30 years, her "Around Chicago" column in *The Linking Ring* not only documented the magic scene in the Windy City, but the entire world as well.

On March 25, 1981, hundreds of Frances' friends gathered for her 70th birthday and her anniversary of 50 years in magic. Frances celebrated by writing a third book of memoirs, *My First Fifty Years*.

After writing and publishing, with Jay, the acclaimed four volumes of *The Success Book*, Frances wrote: "I went into magic for what magic could do for me. What I could do for magic became a lifelong compulsion, because magic has given me a life so full of true riches that I can never repay it all." ♦



Frances Marshall

Next month, "The Century" continues...

A saloon busker who turned society entertainer, a stage illusionist who transported his wonders to the floors of night clubs, and a most inventive magician who set the world on it's ear with a single card trick.