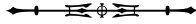


Feldman Presents Thurston



WILLIAM V. RAUSCHER

IN APRIL, 2000 I PRESENTED A LECTURE ENTITLED “WHEN THURSTON CAME TO TOWN” at the 31st Magic Collectors’ Weekend in Baltimore, Maryland. Who would have thought I could present another lecture eight and a half years later in 2008 entitled “When Thurston Came to Brooklyn.”

Without a doubt, Thurston’s memory is alive and well in Brooklyn. In fact, not far from Thurston’s original home in Whitestone, New York is probably the greatest assemblage of Thurston material in the world today. This massive collection consisting of over 13,000 items is stored in magician and magic collector Rory Feldman’s home.

This twenty-seven-year-old collector is unlike so many who only collect and then sell—Rory collects and keeps. Occasionally if he has a duplicate he may sell it, but he does fit the true meaning of what a collector really is. With so few young collectors today he is unique to say the least.

If Thurston were alive today he would probably be staggered by the dozens of scrapbooks filled with memorabilia of his life and performances—several of which came from Thurston’s own personal collection. I’m sure Thurston would feel very much at home if he could wander among this collection, and would no doubt express great admiration for Feldman, a gentleman who has worked so diligently to preserve his memory.

Rory's fascination with Thurston began when he was twelve years old and performed Thurston's Eggs Extraordinary for his sixth grade class, using Thurston's own top hat in his performance. One of the youngest collectors of his time, Rory began amassing photos, programs, apparatus, and lithographs of countless magicians in history. As he matured, his fascination with Thurston escalated, and he eventually decided to concentrate solely on collecting magic related to Howard Franklin Thurston.

Rory believes Thurston was the greatest magician of his day, not only across the United States, but perhaps throughout the world. When asked why, he replied, "I am not alone in my assessment of Thurston. His impact was very great not only for the size and longevity of his show, but his very manner caused him to gain tremendous respect. His persona was apparently magnetic. Young people who were interested in magic all wanted to be Thurston. He shaped a view of magic that was on a grand scale. His outreach was such that all the prominent people of the day attended his performances and many were his friends. His love of children is evidenced in the hundreds of shows he did for poor children, orphans, and crippled children. There are so many photos in my collection of Thurston performing for countless numbers of children. One photo shows him entertaining 22,000 children in the Detroit Coliseum. He was an idol to them. He was also idolized by the other magicians of his era. You could not compare 'The Wonder Show of the Universe' to any mere vaudeville magic act. When six twenty-foot trucks carrying the show came up Broadway and into Times Square, people knew they were in for a theatrical experience unparalleled in magic history. I believe he was our greatest magician and I stick to my guns on that one."

Rory is committed to keeping the memory of the master alive, and to build a base of interest so others might rediscover this man of the theater who may otherwise be forgotten. His main goal: to introduce America's master of magic to an entirely new generation.

A skilled performer himself, Rory is adept at close-up magic, performing regularly at corporate engagements and private gatherings. His busy schedule is split between these events, and collecting and networking to build upon his Thurston treasure trove.

Thurston's spirit is obvious in the Feldman home as Rory talks about his many treasures. Rory's collection includes apparatus, documents, posters, scrap books, scripts, films, and props that include anything from one of Thurston's Perfect Breathers to a twenty sheet Otis Lithograph Company "Bestowing The Mystic Degree".

I asked Rory to name a few of his favorite items. He started to name so many that I had to eventually stop him, but here is a sampling of some memorabilia and artifacts that fascinate him:

- A beautiful Thurston Strobridge one sheet lithograph from 1911 used to advertise the illusion "Do The Spirits Live?"
- Two unique window cards from 1905 used to advertise the illusions "Creation, The Aquarium Mystery" and "The Inexhaustible Cocoanut" that Thurston used while on tour in India
- Every known Thurston window card printed by the Otis Lithograph Company
- The largest collection of Thurston throw-out cards known to be assembled
- A large Wrigley's Pepsin Gum box measuring 18" x 5" x 3" that was produced out of a top hat during a Howard Thurston performance while promoting the product
- A Robert-Houdin clock that was a present to Howard Thurston from Harry Houdini
- Harry Kellar's cane that appeared alongside Kellar in the "Walk In The Woods" 1900 Strobridge Lithograph which was then presented to Howard Thurston
- Apparatus such as a cake pan that was used by Harry Kellar and then acquired by Howard Thurston
- Thurston's notes for illusions such as the Water Fountains and the East Indian Rope Trick
- A Demon's Club devil hat passed down from Kellar to Thurston
- A Society of Osiris plaque that was honoring Harry Kellar that was presented to Howard Thurston

Rory has gathered every conceivable item relating to this giant in magic, recognizing that Thurston was an inspiration to any and

all who watched him perform—many of whom entered the world of magic because of him. Scrapbooks, boxes, posters, binders, apparatus, costumes and films are kept in perfect order. All items are cataloged, and archival material is used throughout. A small glimpse of Rory's collection can be viewed on his website: www.thurstonmastermagician.com, along with a few old film clips of the Thurston show. Rory started the website in 2000 when he decided that it was time to share his collection with a larger audience and he updates it on a continuous basis.

Rory's motivation began with his early study of Thurston, when he realized this magician was not only an icon in the world of magic, but also a cultural icon. Rory considers the Thurston show a part of Americana, deserving of more attention from magic historians. A serious Thurston scholar, he hopes to be able to introduce a new appreciation for Thurston and *The Wonder Show of the Universe* as a grand theatrical attraction to be enjoyed by the general public.

In these days of documentaries like *Biography* and *American Experience*, the history of our country and countless lives of important people who lived before are being recorded and shown. Rory believes the lack of Thurston's history is a grave omission in public exposure, and as an important part of theater history, Thurston should be rediscovered and presented.

Indicative of Thurston's position in the annals of Americana is a book that documents his life story, written by Jim Steinmeyer and to be published in 2010 by Penguin, tentatively entitled *The Last Greatest Magician in the World*. Unlike others written for the magic fraternity, this book is the first to document Thurston's complete biography, and is intended for public consumption.

For those who can't wait, in 2009, Rory plans to issue a Pictorial History of Thurston, a coffee table book that will include an unprecedented amount of Thurston memorabilia and dozens of color reproductions of Thurston lithographs.

Within the next year, Rory will also be releasing a DVD documentary based upon my lecture "When Thurston Came To Town". When asked how he intends to promote a new awareness of Thurston, through this DVD Rory said, "It is my intention to produce a greatly expanded version of 'When Thurston Came To Town' on DVD



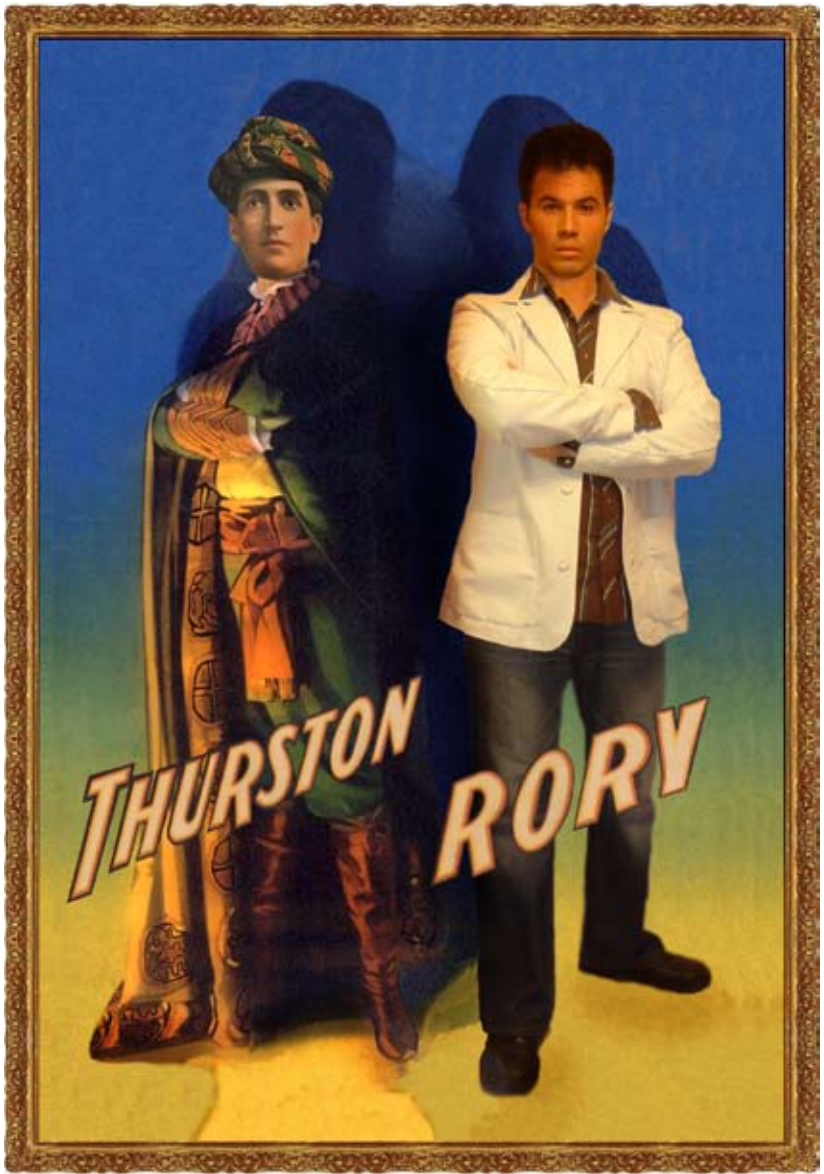
One of many Thurston displays in the Rory Feldman collection.

that will excite new minds about this great magician and contain information that will surprise and delight fans who thought they knew everything about his story. There will be countless photos and lithographs contained in this DVD along with rare film clips of Thurston, some never before seen.” Rory has asked me to do the voice over for this project and I am delighted to do so!

Through his efforts, Feldman hopes to prove—as few others have done—that a collection is not merely self-serving, but people-



One of many Thurston displays in the Rory Feldman collection.



Promotional photo for Rory Feldman (with Howard Thurston).



"Do The Spirits Live?": Strobridge Lithograph; 1911; One Sheet (courtesy of Rory Feldman).



"Full Portrait": Stobridge Lithograph; One Sheet (courtesy of Rory Feldman).



"Do Spirits Return?": Otis Lithograph; Window Card (courtesy of Rory Feldman).



"Jane": Otis Lithograph; 3 Sheet (courtesy of Rory Feldman).



"Great Indian Rope Trick": Otis Lithograph; 8 Sheet (courtesy of Rory Feldman).

serving as well. He believes collectors have an obligation not only to educate their own group, but to enlighten the general public.

Rory's interests extend beyond collecting for his own satisfaction. He has a serious interest in the preservation of Thurston's Tomb in Green Lawn Abbey, Columbus, Ohio. For almost three years, Rory has been selling a limited run of buttons with Howard Thurston's image on them. The proceeds go to restoring the Green Lawn Abbey Mausoleum, a project that will take years to complete. Updates are available at www.greenlawnabbey.com, the official website for the project, which Rory also manages.

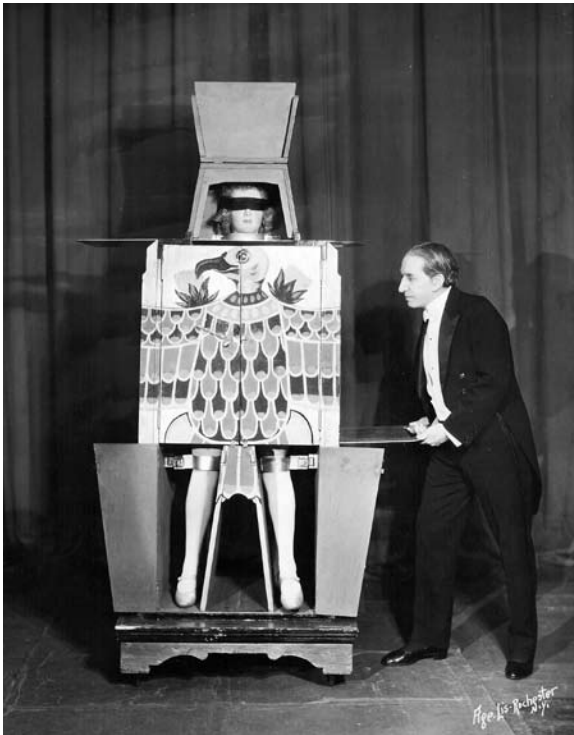
For all of the projects that Rory is involved with, there is one that is closest to his heart. His hope to establish a Museum of Magic in Brooklyn, New York is far from a dream. He has been granted museum status and given a provisional charter by the Board of Regents of The University of the State of New York. The



Thurston amazes some assistants (courtesy of Rory Feldman).

Museum of Magic is now incorporated as a tax exempt 501(c)(3) not-for-profit educational organization.

Through the Museum of Magic, Feldman seeks to share the conjuring arts with the world. The museum will preserve and display magic objects and artifacts, while educating and entertaining the public. The Museum of Magic will eventually house five permanent exhibits. These exhibits will be curated to give an exciting and comprehensive overview of the conjuring arts. The exhibits and displays planned for the museum include “How Magic Changed History,” “Magic in New York,” “Magic in the Movies,” “The Life and Times of Howard Thurston,” and “Houdini”—an exhibit featuring props that Harry Houdini used in his famous escape performances. The staff of magicians and historians will provide assistance upon request, and perform several daily routines



Thurston's Disembodied Princess (courtesy of Rory Feldman).

for visitors that feature props that are either taken directly from the exhibit, or are reproductions of those featured in the exhibit. Each exhibit will be interactive and feature a live or taped performance with opportunities for participation from visitors. The museum will also host lectures, film screenings, and performances by top magicians, magic historians, and authors in the field.

The mission of the *Museum of Magic* is to provide an interactive museum experience. The museum preserves and displays magic artifacts; celebrates and promotes the conjuring arts, all while educating and entertaining the public. The museum will be a place of amazement, education, and discovery. The Museum of Magic will strive to educate through entertainment.

In addition to the five permanent exhibits, the museum will have a revolving set of installations, including “Magic in the Movies,”



Thurston's Iasia (courtesy of Rory Feldman).

“How Magic Changed History,” “The Science of Magic,” “Magic in New York.” These special exhibits will rotate on a quarterly basis and will be installed after the Museum of Magic has been in operation.

An extensive research and resource library will contain books, manuscripts, and individual documents that pertain to the art of conjuring. The library will be part of the collection available for view. The theater will be home to monthly performances, lectures, talks, and films by top magicians, magic historians, authors, and directors in the field. Talks will include roundtables of magicians and magic historians whose discussions will center on topics that



Thurston's levitation (courtesy of Rory Feldman).

will relate to the museum's featured exhibits such as "Women in Magic". Rory intends on having lectures at the museum on the life and times of the great magicians such as Jean-Eugene Robert Houdin, Harry Houdini, Alexander Herrmann, Harry Kellar, Howard Thurston, and Dante. He also plans on approaching magic historians and authors of popular biographies of magicians to provide their lecturing services to our museum. Lastly, he would like to hold a variety of film screenings. To coincide with the museum's "Magic in the Movies" exhibit, there will be screenings of films that are important to the history of magic, and that feature illusions within their stories. To garner interest from magicians and film buffs alike, there will be screening films that star magic's greats.

Dean of the Society of American Magicians George Schindler says that he is very excited about the prospect of the museum. "Many great magicians had their homes here in Brooklyn," he said. "Coney Island was once the mecca of magic with stars such as Harry Houdini and Al Flosso, and I hope that the museum will bring tourists to our rich and cultural borough."

Rory's business plan for the Museum of Magic was chosen as one of the ten prizewinning finalists at the Brooklyn Public



Thurston among the children (courtesy of Rory Feldman).

Business Library's Power Up! Business Plan Competition. New developments on the museum occur on a nearly daily basis.

One of the latest developments was a meeting with Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz and his associates, who are in full support of the Museum of Magic. Rory has been given a letter of support for the Museum of Magic from Marty Markowitz, and the museum will be featured in an article in the Winter 2008 edition of Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz's newspaper "Brooklyn!!". This newspaper has a circulation of more than 385,000 registered voters in every corner of Brooklyn. Follow-up meetings are being scheduled through the Brooklyn Borough President's office to scout a location for the museum.

Rory has also established a board of directors, of which I am proud to be a member. Among the current goals of the board of the directors are decisions on the location of the museum, and an official announcement of what the museum will offer to the public and the world of magic.

Rory is a young man with big plans to get the general public interested in the history of magic. His enthusiasm is catching, in a manner similar to Thurston's magnetism. Among the lithograph posters in Rory's collection are two that announce: "Thurston Presents Dante" and "Thurston Presents Tampa." Maybe there should also be one now that reads "Feldman Presents Thurston."

If you want to get involved in helping Rory Feldman conjure a new museum, contact him at roryfeldmanmagic@aol.com or check out the website at www.museumofmagic.org.

Well known for his many books on magic and magicians, WILLIAM RAUSCHER continues to research and publish his work in magic periodicals. Rauscher was named a lifetime member of NEMCA for his many contributions to the organization.