

RORY FELDMAN

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Rory Feldman
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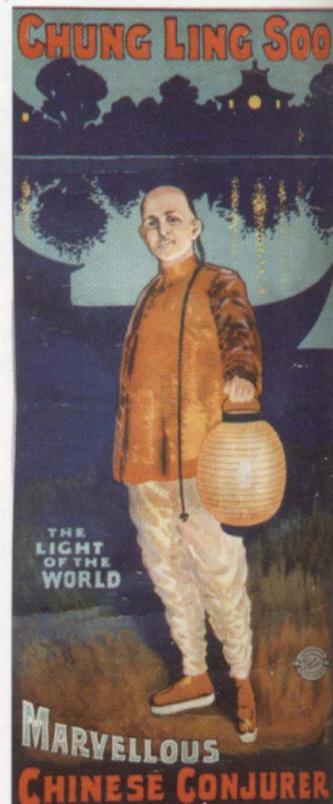


MICHAEL SKINNER



THE LAST GREAT SALE AND AUCTION OF THIS CENTURY

by Richard Kaufman
Photographs by Elizabeth Kaufman



George Daily and Mike Caveney:
"He bought it." "No, he bought it!" "No ... he bought it!!"

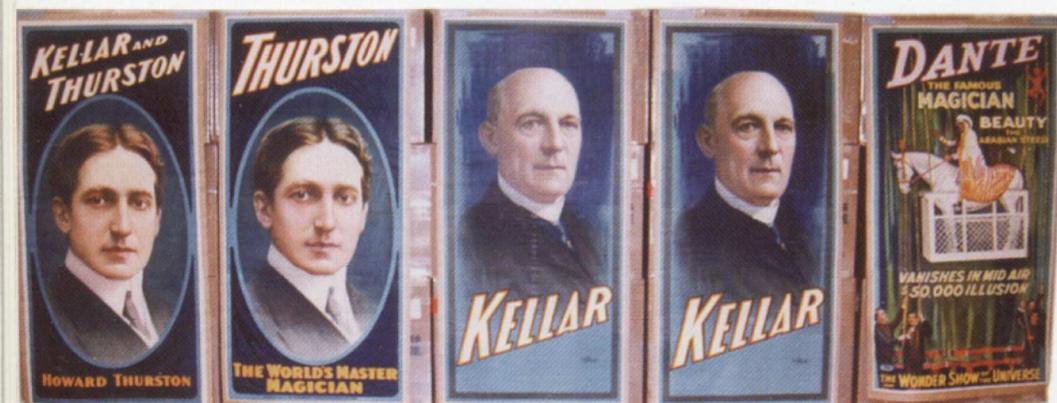
At the end of September, on a mere 30 days notice, collectors from around America suddenly found themselves at Yazoo Mills, a carton-making factory in New Oxford, Pennsylvania. George Daily and Mike Caveney had, about 5 weeks earlier, purchased The Egyptian Hall Museum from David Price, Jr. son of the man who created the museum. (An interesting article by Caveney on the history of The Egyptian Hall Museum and its acquisition by Caveney and Daily appears in the October issue of *MAGIC*.) How much did Caveney and Daily pay for this one-of-a-kind collection? The rumor, on which both new owners refused comment, is 2.2 million dollars.

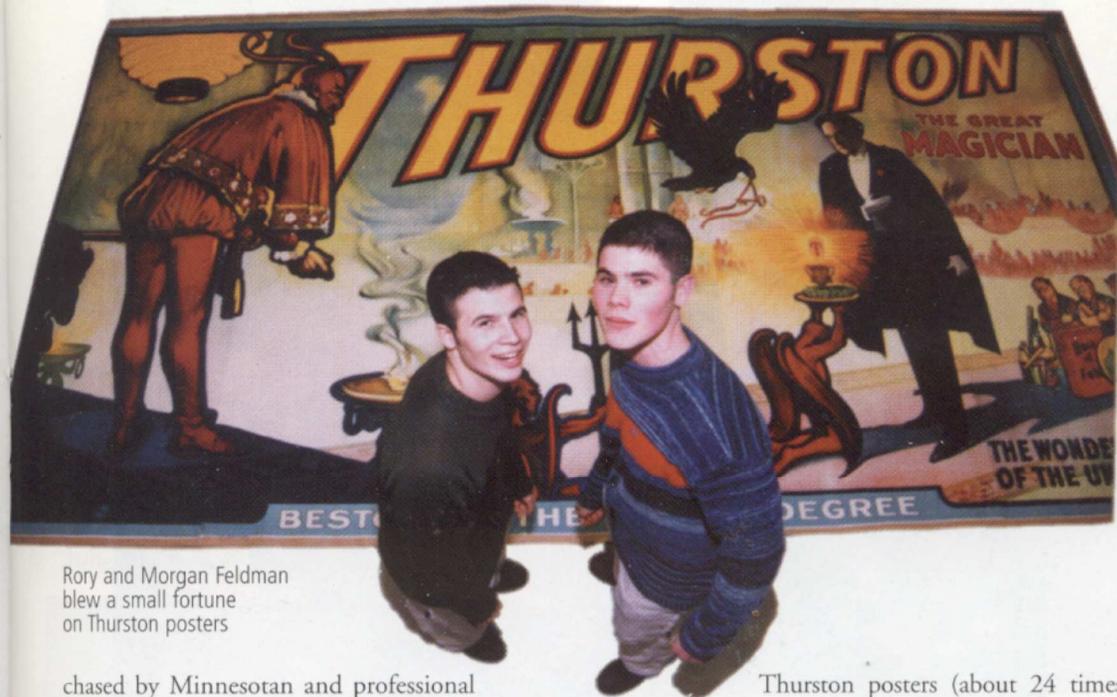
In order to understand the depth of the material being offered for sale, a little background on the history of collecting is in order. In the first half of the 20th century, the number of true collectors in the United States was tiny. And these gentlemen had the field mostly to themselves because old

apparatus, posters, and books were often thrown away—few saw any value in them. Consequently, huge collections could be built for small amounts of money (by today's standards). Chung Ling Soo posters that sold on the Sunday auction for \$7,000 and \$10,000 were thought of as scrap paper and used to wrap packages for customers at Davenport's magic shop in London not too many decades ago. Or, they could easily be bought for \$7 each. So, the men who began collecting 80 or 90 years ago got their stuff either for free, or inexpensively. Also, because the major collections were put together by buying older collections, the items went way back. You rarely see any Herrmann posters for sale today; David Price had between 20 and 30. So, this sale and auction was a unique event: many extremely rare items that are unlikely to be available for purchase again for many years, if ever, were sold.

Part of the Yazoo factory, site of the sale and auction, served as a warehouse and showroom for the "6 tons" of material carted back from Tennessee. Caveney and Daily each kept materials accounting for about 1 ton, which left 4 tons to be sold. The event was divided into two days: Saturday September 23 was a sale that began at 2 p.m.; Sunday September 24 was an auction that began at 1 p.m.

The sale on Saturday grossed, by my rough estimate, about half a million dollars. A huge amount of material remained unsold at the end of the day, but all of the prime (and most valuable) collectibles sold rapidly. The most expensive item of the day was pur-





Rory and Morgan Feldman
blew a small fortune
on Thurston posters

chased by Minnesotan and professional magician David Stahl: an Alexander Herrmann 6 sheet for \$25,000. It is the only known copy of this poster.

The person who spent the most money was not, however, David Stahl. That honor probably belongs to Rory Feldman. Feldman has been the subject of intense speculation in the collecting world since he began purchasing Howard Thurston memorabilia about two years ago when he turned 17. Today, at 19, he has one of the largest Thurston collections in the world. He spent about \$50,000 on Saturday at the sale, and another \$30,000 on Sunday at the auction. Several of his purchases included billboard-sized

Thurston posters (about 24 times the size of a one sheet) for \$10,000 each. He commented to me that he already had one of them, and was buying the duplicate so he would have *both* known copies—the only two. He lives in an apartment in Brooklyn with his mother. Where, everyone asks, does his money come from? I put the question directly to him, but his only response was a mischievous smile. The rumor is that it comes from a trust fund established for Rory and his brother Morgan, who's 21. When Rory Feldman wants a Thurston piece, price is no object. During the auction on Sunday he simply continued to bid relentlessly until all other competing bidders lost their nerve—or regained their sanity for a moment: history will be the judge of that.



\$5,000



\$6,000



The crowd eagerly waits to enter



John Gaughan leads the pack.



Rare books and magazines for sale



George Daily lays down the law



Genii publishers Jane and Daniel Solomon



MAGIC publisher Stan Allen and David Kaye



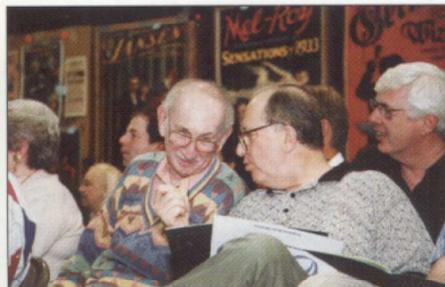
Norm Nielsen prepares to spend big bucks



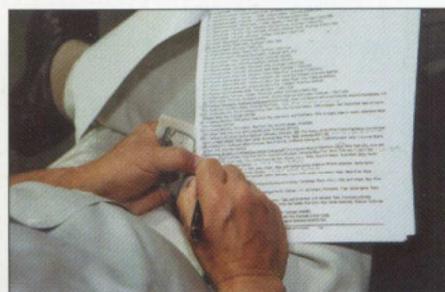
Mike Caveney, the "virgin" auctioneer



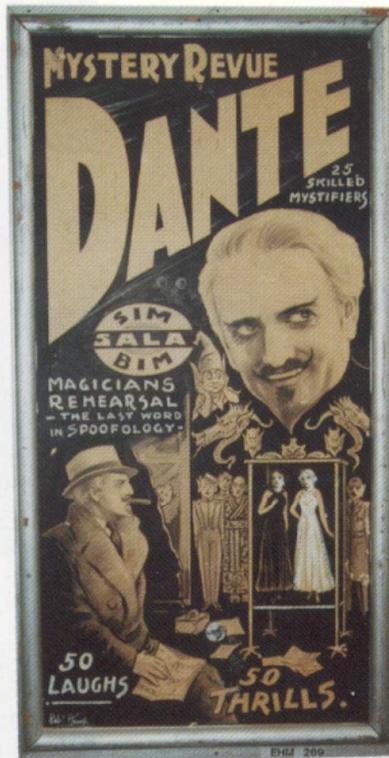
A wall of delights



Herb Zarrow and Ron Wohl



This guy can't wait to spend his dough



Original artwork for Dante insert



This one-of-a-kind poster, which few had ever seen before, and is autographed by Okito, failed to sell at half its reserve price of \$3,500.

The auction on Sunday contained 215 items. Mike Caveney, a "virgin" auctioneer, handled the microphone. He did an excellent job considering it was his first attempt, and kept things moving while giving bidders a real chance to jump in at the end. The first half dragged on a bit too long, and a quick voice vote indicated that the bidders wanted things accelerated. Caveney complied and the second part took half the time. The total amount taken in by the auction was \$437,650. Ten items passed without selling either because bids were too low, or there were no bids. All the bidders seemed to agree that the pre-auction estimates given in the catalogue were quite high, and that was reflected in the sale. Most items sold at or below the estimate, with a smaller number of items selling above the estimate.



This Kellar "Centipede" poster sold for \$7,500



Norm Nielsen bags a Soo



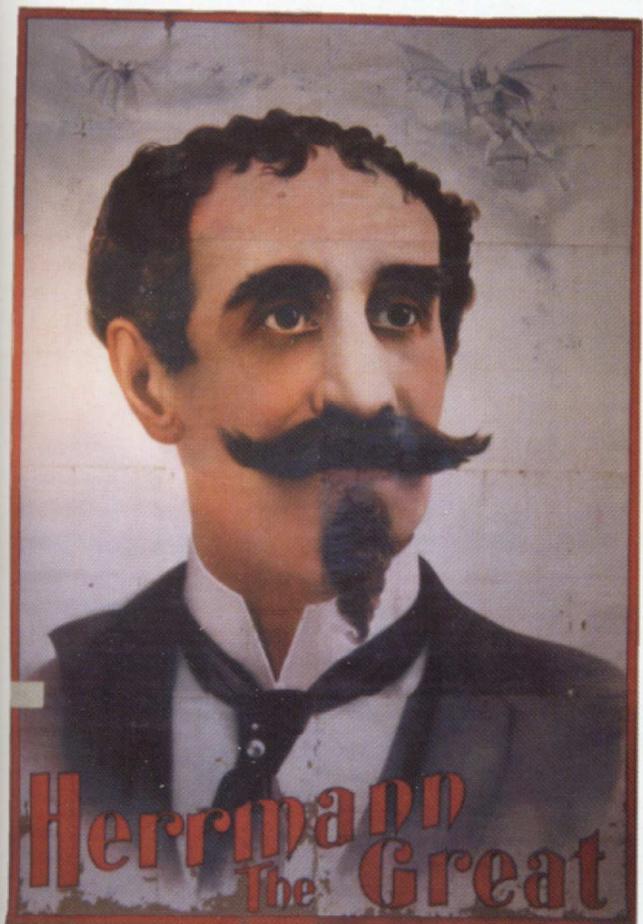
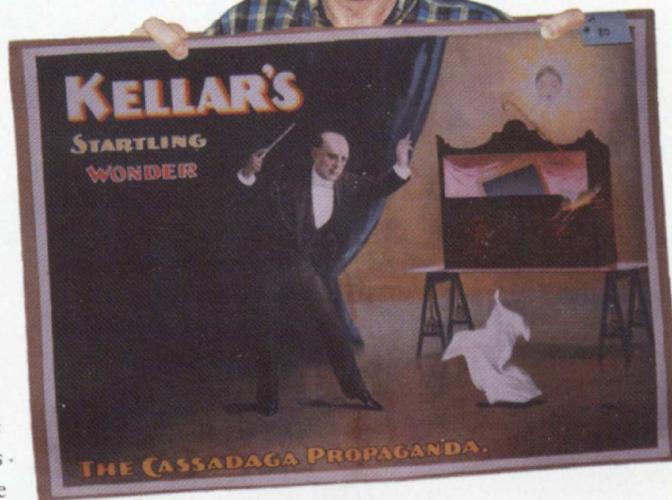
Mario Carrandi was a big winner

Happy winning bidders included Byron Walker of California, who purchased a catalogue from the magic dealer Hartz in New York City dated 1870. Byron told me, after paying \$5,500 dollars for it, that he had been searching for the catalogue for 25 years. I'm sure he was extremely relieved to have scratched that itch! Norm Nielsen bought the most expensive (and perhaps most beautiful) poster of the auction: a horizontal 1 sheet of Harry Kellar performing the Cassadaga Propaganda for \$23,500. One would've assumed that Norm was done for the day, but 72 lots later he purchased a Chung Ling Soo half sheet of the "Chinese" magician performing a Flower Growth for \$10,500. This was the highest price paid for a Soo poster that day. The other Soo posters sold for \$7,000 to \$8,000 each. Luckiest bidder of the day was Denny of Denny and Lee's Magic Studio, who purchased a Soo poster for a bargain \$4,500.

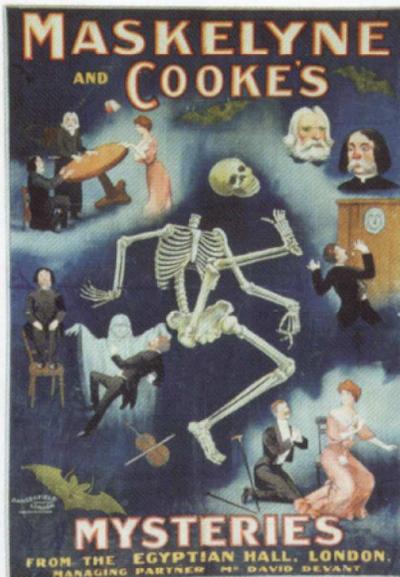
The silliest purchase of the day went to your editor, who bought *one* of Jean Hugard's Linking Rings for \$100. Seeing all of these treasures change hands, I felt moved to purchase something—so Jean Hugard's linking ring (yes, just one) now hangs in the *Genii* office. So, after two days George Daily and Mike Caveney

probably erased just under half of the 2.2 million it is rumored to have cost to buy the collection, leaving each still half a million dollars poorer, but considerably richer in collectibles the likes of which will probably not come up for sale again until well into the next century.

Norm Nielsen is now the happy owner of this Kellar poster for \$23,500.



David Stahl from Minnesota paid \$25,000 for this unique poster



Jim Steinmeyer and Michael Edwards



A rare Blackstone poster sells for \$2,250



Cardini expert Brad Ball wins a bid



The auction room was packed

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