

# The LINKING

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Ring



Rory Feldman

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Feldman Presents

# Thurston

## The Plans and Realities of Thurston's Biggest Supporter

BY WILLIAM V. RAUSCHER

Not far from Howard 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 fifteen thousand items is stored in magician and magic collector Rory Feldman's Brooklyn home.

At twenty-eight, Feldman is a special kind of collector – the kind that not only collects but also keeps. Occasionally, he may sell a duplicate, but he does fit the true meaning of a collector. 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 over one hundred 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. He would no doubt express great admiration for Feldman, a gentleman who has worked so diligently to preserve his memory.

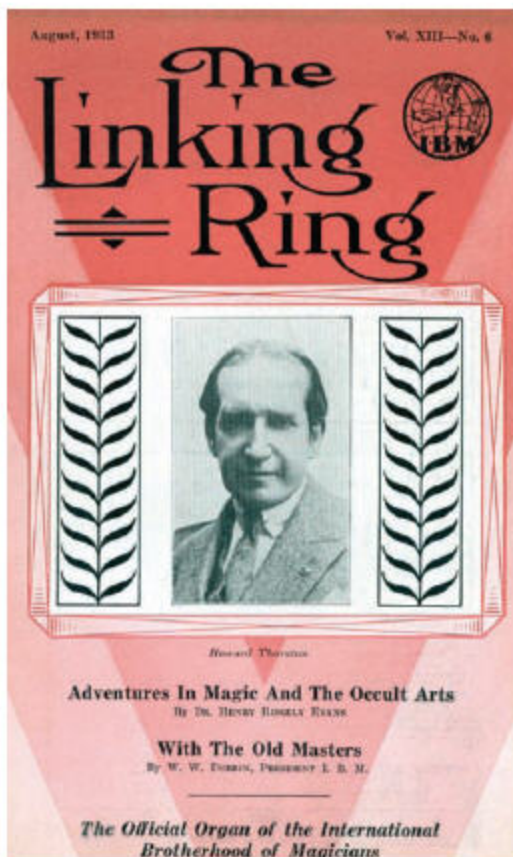
Rory was first mesmerized by magic when he saw a Fisher-Price magic set at

the age of three. By the time he turned seven, he was putting together an act. Within a few years, he secured a summer job as a magic demonstrator at Zak's Fun House, a reputable Brooklyn magic and costume shop.

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.

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.

Rory believes Thurston was the greatest magician of his day, not only across



*Howard Thurston appeared on the cover of The Linking Ring in August 1933.*

the United States but also throughout the world. When asked why, he replied: "I am not alone in my assessment of Thurston. His impact was 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 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 many photos in my collection of Thurston performing for countless num-

bers of children. One photo shows him entertaining twenty-two thousand 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.

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

I asked Rory to name a few of his favorite items, and he started to name so many that I eventually had to stop him. 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;



*Rory was first mesmerized by magic when he first saw a Fisher-Price magic set, at the age of three.*

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 Web site, [www.thurstonmastermagician.com](http://www.thurstonmastermagician.com), along with a few old film clips of the Thurston show. Rory started the Web site in 2000 when he decided that it was time to share his collection with a larger audience. He shares his new finds in a feature called "Item of the Month." Another element of the site is "Visitors to the Collection," which features photos from visits to his collection by prominent members of the magic community.

One fan and major supporter of Rory's efforts is William E. Self, producer of such hits as *The Twilight Zone*, *Batman*, *The Frank Sinatra Show*, *M\*A\*S\*H*, *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, and *Lost in Space*, to name just a few. Self not only saw Howard Thurston in 1935, but also performed on stage with him as a young man after winning a contest. Later in life, Self became



*A skilled performer himself, Rory is adept at close-up magic, performing regularly at corporate engagements and private gatherings.*

very good friends with Howard Thurston's daughter, Jane Thurston Shepard.

"Whenever professional magicians and magic historians get together to discuss who was the greatest magician of all time, the name Howard Thurston is always at or near the top of the list," Self said. "Today, unfortunately, most of the public doesn't remember Thurston because there aren't many around who saw him perform. Fortunately, a new voice has emerged to carry on his name. Rory Feldman, as a young magician and Thurston collector, is working to preserve the memory of this magic icon. His collection of Thurston is the finest in the world, and his plans for a museum of magic are astounding. All of us interested in the history of magic appreciate what Rory is doing."

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.

Through his efforts, Feldman hopes to prove – as few others have done – that a collection is not merely self-serving, but people-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 over four 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.org](http://www.greenlawnabbey.org), the official Web site for the project.

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. Jim Steinmeyer recently visited Rory's collection to do research on Howard Thurston for his upcoming book. While visiting, Steinmeyer uncovered many materials and information that would have a significant effect on his work.

"Rory Feldman has been working his own sort of magic, slowly assembling a collection on Howard Thurston and, in the process, becoming an expert on the man and his career," Steinmeyer said. "It's a labor of love and the work of a very clever young man who really loves magic. I've been grateful for the chance to see Rory's thousands of amazing artifacts."

Rory has also just released a video project in DVD format based upon my lecture, "When Thurston Came To Town," which I originally presented ten years ago. With permission, Rory took an audio copy of my lecture and enhanced it with photos, videos, audio clips, and music, and he received such a pour out of enthusiasm after posting the thirty-five minute video on YouTube that we decided to expand on the original concept and produce a full-length documentary. Over the last three years, never-before-seen images and movies of Dorny, Walter Gibson, James C. Wobensmith, Carl Jones, Howard Thurston, Jane Thurston, Milbourne Christopher, Gerald Heaney, and Harry Houdini have been added to the video. The project also includes commentary from an esteemed group of magicians and historians including John Booth, Maurine Christopher, Tom Ewing, George Goebel, Ray Goulet, Kenneth Klosterman, Rev. Robert E. Olson, and Stanley Palm, resulting in over two and a half hours of magic history.

The viewer takes a journey into the past, back to the time of a great and spectacular production called *The Wonder Show of the Universe*. Some will see Howard Thurston

for the first time; others will discover a forgotten man. But one thing is certain: all will marvel at the enormous influence Thurston had on our culture and come to the conclusion that he was, during his time and even now, "The World's Greatest Magician."

To provide a sense of who Thurston was before he was the "master magician," Rory has reprinted a rare, thirty-two-page manuscript from a 1928 biography of Thurston. The manuscript was found in the Gerald Heaney barn in 1988, and Feldman has accented it with rare photos.

In the near future, 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.

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 just 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 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

# THURSTON

THE GREAT  
MAGICIAN

THE WONDER SHOW OF THE UNIVERSE



DO THE  
SPIRITS  
COME  
BACK?

One of Rory Feldman's favorite items in his collection over over fifteen thousand pieces of Thurston memorabilia.





*Thurston loved children and performed for many charitable causes.*

exhibit featuring props that Harry Houdini used in his famous escape performances.

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 feature illusions within their stories. To garner interest from magicians and film buffs alike, there will be screening films that star magic's greats.

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



*Left: Thurston amazes three charming assistants. Right: Rory editing When Thurston Came to Town, a video project based on William Rauscher's lecture by the same title.*



*One of the display cases of Thurston memorabilia in the Rory Feldman Collection.*

Public Business Library's Power Up! Business Plan Competition. New developments occur on a nearly daily basis, and he is currently scouting out a location for the museum. He has 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 several that announce "Thurston Presents Dante" and "Thurston Presents Tampa." Maybe there should also

be one now that reads "Feldman Presents Thurston."

*William V. Rauscher has been a member of the I.B.M. since 1949. He is well known for his books and articles. He is currently working on his next book entitled Goebel: The Man with the Magical Mind – The Story of a Conjuror and Costumer.*

For more information on the Thurston DVD project, visit [www.whenthurstoncame totown.com](http://www.whenthurstoncame totown.com).

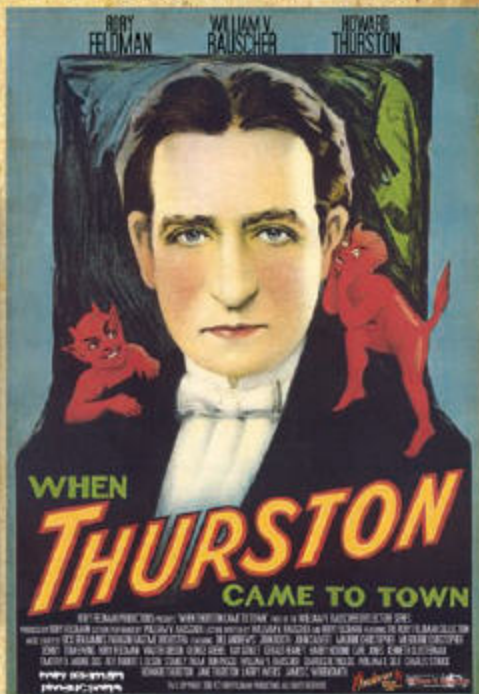
For more information about Rory Feldman's plans for the Museum of Magic, visit [www.museumofmagic.org](http://www.museumofmagic.org).

If you want to contact Rory Feldman, he can be reached at [roryfeldmanmagic@aol.com](mailto:roryfeldmanmagic@aol.com).

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- 17 Video Commentary Interviews
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- 5 Audio Clips Of Howard Thurston
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