

# Série VO :

## Batman/Houdini: The Devil's Workshop

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  - [Index](#)
  - [Article "Batman"](#)
  - [Article "Harry Houdini"](#)

Série VO: Batman/Houdini: The Devil's Workshop.



# Harry Houdini

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[Jump to navigation](#) [Jump to search](#)

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"Erich Weiss" redirects here. For the baseball player, see [Erich Weiss \(baseball\)](#).

## Harry Houdini

[HarryHoudini1899.jpg](#)



Houdini in 1899

Erik Weisz

**Born** March 24, 1874  
[Budapest, Austria-Hungary](#)

**Died** October 31, 1926 (aged 52)  
[Detroit, Michigan, U.S.](#)

**Cause of death** [Peritonitis](#)<sup>[1]</sup>

Illusionist, stunt performer, actor,  
**Occupation** historian, film producer, pilot,  
debunker

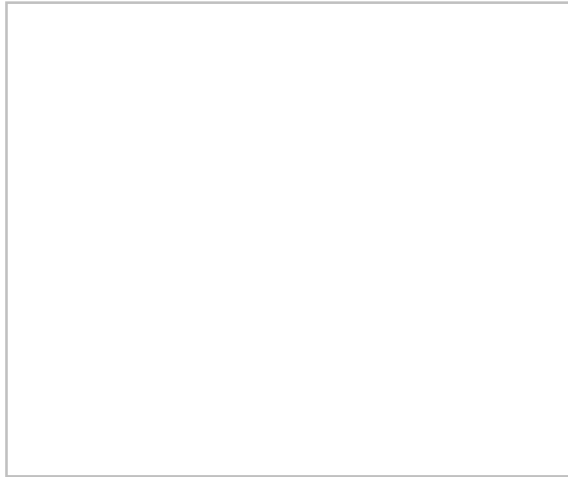
**Years active** 1891–1926

**Spouse(s)** [Wilhelmina Beatrice "Bess" Rahner](#)  
(m. 1894)<sup>[2]</sup>

**Relatives** [Theodore Hardeen](#) (brother)

### Signature

[HoudiniSig.svg](#)



Harry Houdini

**Harry Houdini** (born **Erik Weisz**, later **Ehrich Weiss** or **Harry Weiss**; March 24, 1874 – October 31, 1926) was a Hungarian-born American [illusionist](#) and [stunt performer](#), noted for his sensational [escape acts](#). He first attracted notice in [vaudeville](#) in the US and then as "Harry Handcuff Houdini" on a tour of Europe, where he challenged police forces to keep him locked up. Soon he extended his repertoire to include chains, ropes slung from skyscrapers, [straitjackets](#) under water, and having to escape from and [hold his breath](#) inside a sealed milk can with water in it.

In 1904, thousands watched as he tried to escape from special [handcuffs](#) commissioned by London's *Daily Mirror*, keeping them in suspense for an hour. Another stunt saw him [buried alive](#) and only just able to claw himself to the surface, emerging in a state of near-breakdown. While many suspected that these escapes were faked, Houdini presented himself as the scourge of fake [spiritualists](#). As President of the [Society of American Magicians](#), he was keen to uphold professional standards and expose fraudulent artists. He was also quick to sue anyone who imitated his escape stunts.

Houdini made several movies, but quit acting when it failed to bring in money. He was also a keen aviator, and aimed to become the first man to fly a plane in Australia.

## Contents

- [1 Early life](#)
- [2 Magic career](#)
- [3 Notable escapes](#)
  - [3.1 Mirror challenge](#)

- [3.2 Milk Can Escape](#)
- [3.3 Chinese water torture cell](#)
- [3.4 Suspended straitjacket escape](#)
- [3.5 Overboard box escape](#)
- [3.6 Buried alive stunt](#)
- [4 Movie career](#)
- [5 Aviator](#)
  - [5.1 Falsely reported as pioneer](#)
  - [5.2 After Australia](#)
- [6 Debunking spiritualists](#)
- [7 Appearance and voice recordings](#)
- [8 Death](#)
- [9 Houdini grave site](#)
  - [9.1 Proposed exhumation](#)
- [10 Legacy](#)
- [11 In popular culture](#)
- [12 Publications](#)
- [13 Filmography](#)
- [14 See also](#)
- [15 Notes](#)
- [16 References](#)
- [17 Further reading](#)
- [18 External links](#)

## Early life

Erik Weisz was born in [Budapest](#) to a Jewish family.<sup>[3]</sup> His parents were Rabbi Mayer Sámuel Weisz (1829–1892) and Cecília Steiner (1841–1913). Houdini was one of seven children: Herman M. (1863–1885) who was Houdini's half-brother, by Rabbi Weisz's first marriage; Nathan J. (1870–1927); Gottfried William (1872–1925); [Theodore](#) (1876–1945);<sup>[4]</sup> Leopold D. (1879–1962); and Carrie Gladys (1882–1959),<sup>[5]</sup> who was left almost blind after a childhood accident.<sup>[6]</sup>

Weisz arrived in the United States on July 3, 1878, on the SS *Fresia* with his mother (who was pregnant) and his four brothers.<sup>[7]</sup> The family changed their name to the German spelling Weiss, and Erik became Ehrich. The family lived in [Appleton, Wisconsin](#), where his father served as Rabbi of the Zion Reform Jewish Congregation.

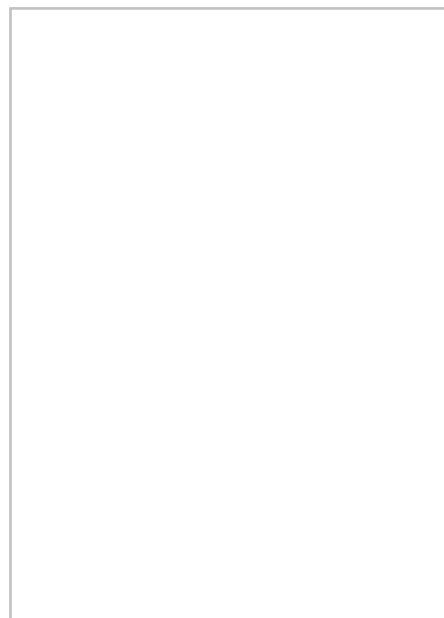
According to the [1880 census](#), the family lived on Appleton Street.<sup>[8]</sup> On June 6, 1882, Rabbi Weiss became an American citizen. Losing his job at Zion in 1882, Rabbi Weiss and family moved to Milwaukee and fell into dire poverty.<sup>[9]</sup> In 1887, Rabbi Weiss moved with Ehrich to New York City, where they lived in a boarding house on [East 79th Street](#). He was joined by the rest of the family once Rabbi

Weiss found permanent housing. As a child, Ehrich Weiss took several jobs, making his public [début](#) as a 9-year-old [trapeze artist](#), calling himself "Ehrich, the Prince of the Air". He was also a champion [cross country](#) runner in his youth. When Weiss became a professional [magician](#) he began calling himself "Harry Houdini", after the French magician [Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin](#), after reading Robert-Houdin's autobiography in 1890. Weiss incorrectly believed that an *i* at the end of a name meant "like" in French. In later life, Houdini claimed that the first part of his new name, Harry, was an homage to [Harry Kellar](#), whom he also admired, though it was more likely adapted from "Ehri," a nickname for "Ehrich," which is how he was known to his family.<sup>[10]</sup> When he was a teenager, Houdini was coached by the magician [Joseph Rinn](#) at the Pastime Athletic Club.<sup>[11]</sup>

Houdini became an active [Freemason](#) and was a member of St. Cecile Lodge #568 in New York City.<sup>[12]</sup> In 1918, he registered for [selective service](#) as Harry Handcuff Houdini.<sup>[13]</sup>

## Magic career

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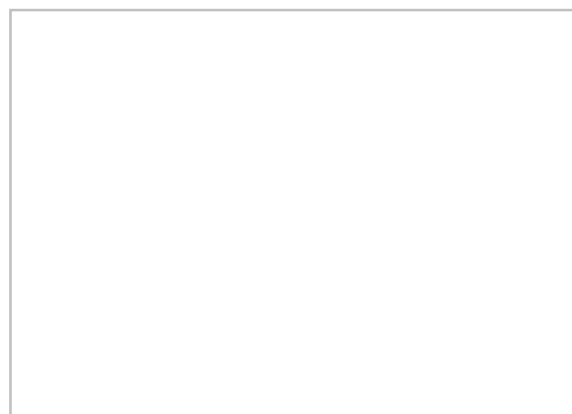
Houdini, c. 1900

Houdini began his magic career in 1891, but had little success.<sup>[14]</sup> He appeared in a tent act with strongman [Emil Jarrow](#).<sup>[15]</sup> He performed in dime museums and sideshows, and even doubled as "The Wild Man" at a circus. Houdini focused initially on traditional card tricks. At one point, he billed himself as the "King of Cards".<sup>[16]</sup> Some - but not all - professional magicians would come to regard Houdini as a competent but not particularly skilled sleight-of-hand artist, lacking the grace and finesse required to achieve excellence in that craft.<sup>[17][18]</sup> He soon

began experimenting with [escape acts](#).

In 1893, while performing with his brother "[Dash](#)" (Theodore) at [Coney Island](#) as "The Brothers Houdini", Houdini met a fellow performer, [Wilhelmina Beatrice "Bess" Rahner](#). Bess was initially courted by Dash, but she and Houdini married in 1894, with Bess replacing Dash in the act, which became known as "The Houdinis". For the rest of Houdini's performing career, Bess worked as his stage assistant.

Houdini's big break came in 1899 when he met manager [Martin Beck](#) in St. Paul, Minnesota. Impressed by Houdini's [handcuffs](#) act, Beck advised him to concentrate on escape acts and booked him on the [Orpheum vaudeville](#) circuit. Within months, he was performing at the top vaudeville houses in the country. In 1900, Beck arranged for Houdini to tour Europe. After some days of unsuccessful interviews in London, Houdini's British agent [Harry Day](#) helped him to get an interview with [C. Dundas Slater](#), then manager of the [Alhambra Theatre](#). He was introduced to [William Melville](#) and gave a demonstration of escape from handcuffs at [Scotland Yard](#).<sup>[19]</sup> He succeeded in baffling the police so effectively that he was booked at the Alhambra for six months. His show was an immediate hit and his salary rose to \$300 a week.<sup>[20]</sup>



"My Two Sweethearts" —  
Houdini with his mother and  
wife, c. 1907

Houdini became widely known as "The Handcuff King." He toured England, Scotland, the Netherlands, Germany, France, and Russia. In each city, Houdini challenged local police to restrain him with [shackles](#) and lock him in their jails. In many of these challenge escapes, he was first [stripped nude and searched](#). In Moscow, he escaped from a Siberian prison transport van, claiming that, had he been unable to free himself, he would have had to travel to Siberia, where the only key was kept. In [Cologne](#), he sued a police officer, Werner Graff, who alleged that he made his escapes via bribery.<sup>[21]</sup> Houdini won the case when he opened the judge's safe (he later said the judge had forgotten to lock it). With his new-found wealth, Houdini purchased a dress said to have been made for [Queen Victoria](#). He then arranged a grand reception where he presented his mother in the dress to all their relatives. Houdini said it was the happiest day of his life. In 1904, Houdini

returned to the U.S. and purchased a house for \$25,000 (equivalent to \$680,926 in 2017), a [brownstone](#) at 278 W. 113th Street in [Harlem, New York City](#).<sup>[22]</sup>

Whilst on tour in Europe in 1902, Houdini visited [Blois](#) with the aim of meeting the widow of Emile Houdin, the son of [Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin](#), for an interview and permission to visit his grave. He did not receive permission but still visited the grave.<sup>[23]</sup> Houdini believed that he had been treated unfairly and later wrote a negative account of the incident in his magazine, claiming he was "treated most discourteously by Madame W. Emile Robert-Houdin."<sup>[23]</sup> In 1906, he sent a letter to the French magazine *L'Illusionniste* stating: "You will certainly enjoy the article on Robert Houdin I am about to publish in my magazine. Yes, my dear friend, I think I can finally demolish your idol, who has so long been placed on a pedestal that he did not deserve."<sup>[24]</sup>

In 1906, Houdini created his own publication, the *Conjurers' Monthly Magazine*.<sup>[25]</sup> It was a competitor to [The Sphinx](#), but was short-lived and only two volumes were released until August 1908. Magic historian [Jim Steinmeyer](#) has noted that: "Houdini couldn't resist using the journal for his own crusades, attacking his rivals, praising his own appearances, and subtly rewriting history to favor his view of magic."<sup>[26]</sup>

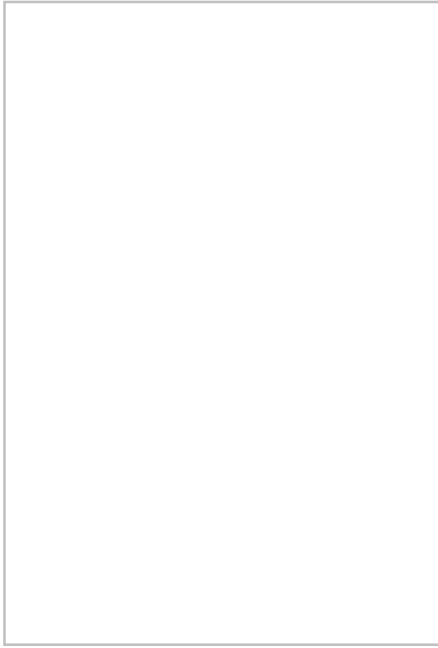
From 1907 and throughout the 1910s, Houdini performed with great success in the United States. He freed himself from jails, handcuffs, chains, ropes, and [straitjackets](#), often while hanging from a rope in sight of street audiences. Because of imitators, Houdini put his "handcuff act" behind him on January 25, 1908, and began escaping from a locked, water-filled milk can. The possibility of failure and death thrilled his audiences. Houdini also expanded his repertoire with his escape challenge act, in which he invited the public to devise contraptions to hold him. These included nailed packing crates (sometimes lowered into water), riveted boilers, wet sheets, [mail bags](#),<sup>[27]</sup> and even the belly of a [whale](#) that had washed ashore in Boston. Brewers in [Scranton, Pennsylvania](#) and other cities challenged Houdini to escape from a barrel after they filled it with beer.<sup>[28]</sup>

Many of these challenges were arranged with local merchants in one of the first uses of mass tie-in marketing. Rather than promote the idea that he was assisted by spirits, as did the [Davenport Brothers](#) and others, Houdini's advertisements showed him making his escapes via [dematerializing](#), although Houdini himself never claimed to have supernatural powers.<sup>[29]</sup>

After much research, Houdini wrote a collection of articles on the history of magic, which were expanded into *The Unmasking of Robert-Houdin* published in 1908. In this book he attacked his former idol Robert-Houdin as liar and a fraud for having claimed the invention of automata and effects such as [aerial suspension](#), which had been in existence for many years.<sup>[30][31]</sup> Many of the allegations in the book were dismissed by magicians and researchers who



defended Robert-Houdin. Magician [Jean Hugard](#) would later write a full rebuttal to Houdini's book.<sup>[32][33][34]</sup>

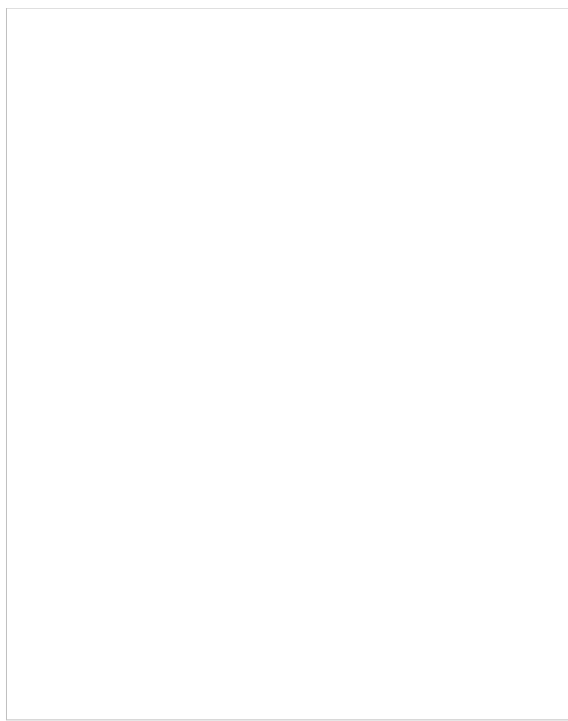


Poster promoting Houdini taking up the challenge of escaping an "extra strong and large traveling basket"

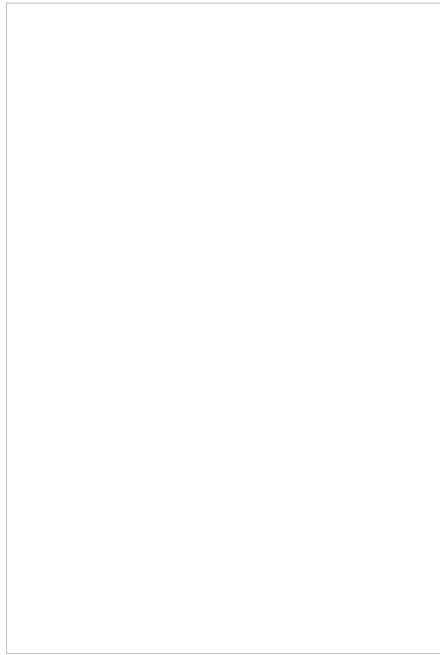
In 1913, Houdini introduced the [Chinese Water Torture Cell](#), in which he was suspended upside-down in a locked glass-and-steel cabinet full to overflowing with water, holding his breath for more than three minutes. He would go on performing this escape for the rest of his life.

During his career, Houdini explained some of his tricks in books written for the magic brotherhood. In *Handcuff Secrets* (1909), he revealed how many locks and handcuffs could be opened with properly applied force, others with shoestrings. Other times, he carried concealed [lockpicks](#) or keys. When tied down in ropes or [straitjackets](#), he gained wiggle room by enlarging his shoulders and chest, moving his arms slightly away from his [body](#).<sup>[29]</sup>





Houdini and Jennie, the  
Vanishing Elephant, January  
7, 1918



Houdini in handcuffs,  
1918

His straitjacket escape was originally performed behind curtains, with him popping out free at the end. Houdini's brother, (who was also an escape artist, billing himself as [Theodore Hardeen](#)), discovered that audiences were more impressed when the curtains were eliminated so they could watch him struggle to get out. On more than one occasion, they both performed straitjacket escapes while dangling upside-down from the roof of a building in the same city.<sup>[29]</sup>

For most of his career, Houdini was a headline act in [vaudeville](#). For many years, he was the highest-paid performer in American vaudeville. One of Houdini's most notable non-escape stage illusions was performed at the [New York Hippodrome](#), when he vanished a full-grown elephant from the stage.<sup>[35]</sup> He had purchased this

trick from the magician [Charles Morritt](#).<sup>[36][37][38]</sup> In 1923, Houdini became president of [Martinka](#) & Co., America's oldest magic company. The business is still in operation today.

He also served as President of [the Society of American Magicians](#) (a.k.a. S.A.M.) from 1917 until his death in 1926. Founded on May 10, 1902, in the back room of [Martinka](#)'s magic shop in New York, the Society expanded under the leadership of Harry Houdini during his term as National President from 1917 to 1926. Houdini was magic's greatest visionary. He sought to create a large, unified national network of professional and amateur magicians. Wherever he traveled, he gave a lengthy formal address to the local magic club, made speeches, and usually threw a banquet for the members at his own expense. He said "The Magicians Clubs as a rule are small: they are weak...but if we were amalgamated into one big body the society would be stronger, and it would mean making the small clubs powerful and worthwhile. Members would find a welcome wherever they happened to be and, conversely, the safeguard of a city-to-city hotline to track exposers and other undesirables."

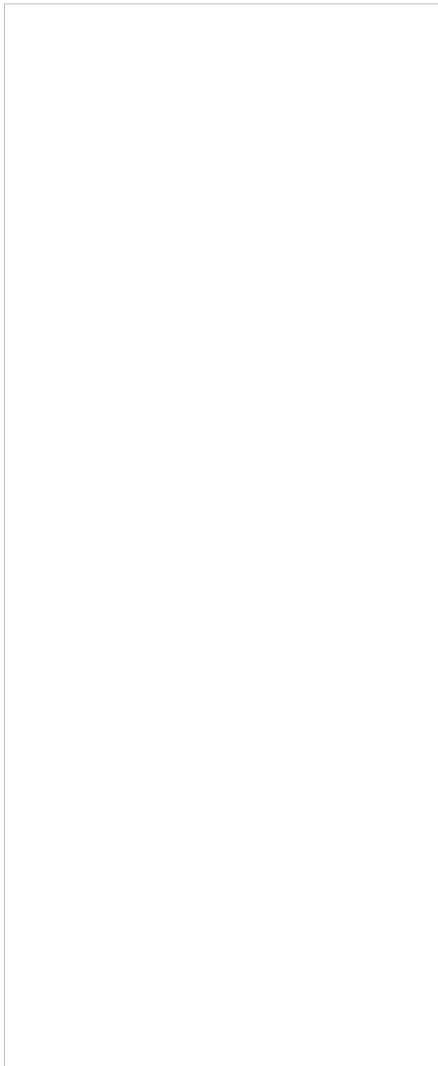
For most of 1916, while on his vaudeville tour, Houdini had been recruiting—at his own expense—local magic clubs to join the S.A.M. in an effort to revitalize what he felt was a weak organization. Houdini persuaded groups in Buffalo, Detroit, Pittsburgh, and Kansas City to join. As had happened in London, he persuaded magicians to join. The Buffalo club joined as the first branch, (later assembly) of the Society. Chicago Assembly No. 3 was, as the name implies, the third regional club to be established by the S.A.M., whose assemblies now number in the hundreds. In 1917, he signed Assembly Number Three's charter into existence, and that charter and this club continue to provide Chicago magicians with a connection to each other and to their past. Houdini dined with, addressed, and got pledges from similar clubs in Detroit, Rochester, Pittsburgh, Kansas City, Cincinnati and elsewhere. This was the biggest movement ever in the history of magic. In places where no clubs existed, he rounded up individual magicians, introduced them to each other, and urged them into the fold.

By the end of 1916, magicians' clubs in San Francisco and other cities that Houdini had not visited were offering to become assemblies. He had created the richest and longest-surviving organization of magicians in the world. It now embraces almost 6,000 dues-paying members and almost 300 assemblies worldwide. In July 1926, Houdini was elected for the ninth successive time President of the Society of American Magicians. Every other president has only served for one year. He also was President of the Magicians' Club of London.<sup>[39]</sup>

In the final years of his life (1925/26), Houdini launched his own full-evening show, which he billed as "Three Shows in One: Magic, Escapes, and Fraud Mediums Exposed".<sup>[40]</sup>

# Notable escapes

## *Mirror* challenge



"Handcuff" Harry  
Houdini, c. 1905

In 1904, the [London Daily Mirror](#) newspaper challenged Houdini to escape from special handcuffs that it claimed had taken Nathaniel Hart, a locksmith from [Birmingham](#), five years to make. Houdini accepted the challenge for March 17 during a matinée performance at London's Hippodrome theater. It was reported that 4000 people and more than 100 journalists turned out for the much-hyped event. The escape attempt dragged on for over an hour, during which Houdini emerged from his "ghost house" (a small screen used to conceal the method of his escape) several times. On one occasion he asked if the cuffs could be removed so he could take off his coat. The *Mirror* representative, Frank Parker, refused, saying Houdini could gain an advantage if he saw how the cuffs were unlocked. Houdini promptly took out a pen-knife and, holding the knife in his teeth, used it to cut his coat from his body. Some 56 minutes later, Houdini's wife appeared on stage and gave him a kiss. Many thought that in her mouth was the key to unlock the special handcuffs. However, it has since been suggested that Bess did not in fact enter the stage at all, and that this theory is unlikely due to the size of the 6-inch key<sup>[41]</sup> Houdini then went back behind the curtain. After an hour and ten

minutes, Houdini emerged free. As he was paraded on the shoulders of the cheering crowd, he broke down and wept. Houdini later said it was the most difficult escape of his career.<sup>[42]</sup>

After Houdini's death, his friend Martin Beck was quoted in [Will Goldston](#)'s book, *Sensational Tales of Mystery Men*, as admitting that Houdini was bested that day and had appealed to his wife, Bess, for help. Goldston goes on to claim that Bess begged the key from the *Mirror* representative, then slipped it to Houdini in a glass of water. It was stated in the book *The Secret Life of Houdini* that the key required to open the specially designed Mirror handcuffs was 6 inches long, and could not have been smuggled to Houdini in a glass of water. Goldston offered no proof of his account, and many modern biographers have found evidence (notably in the custom design of the handcuffs) that the *Mirror* challenge may have been arranged by Houdini and that his long struggle to escape was pure showmanship.<sup>[43]</sup>

This escape was discussed in depth on the Travel Channel's [Mysteries at the Museum](#) in an interview with Houdini expert, magician and escape artist Dorothy Dietrich of Scranton's Houdini Museum.<sup>[44]</sup>

A full-sized design of the same Mirror Handcuffs, as well as a replica of the [Bramah style](#) key for it, is on display to the public at [The Houdini Museum](#) in Scranton, Pennsylvania.<sup>[45][46]</sup> This set of cuffs is believed to be one of only six in the world, some of which are not on display.<sup>[47]</sup>

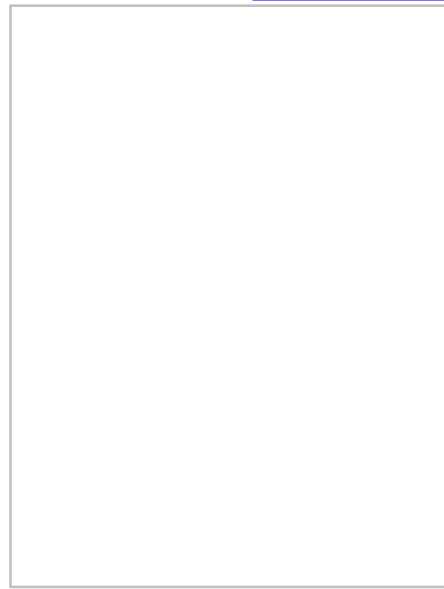
## Milk Can Escape

In 1908, Houdini introduced his own original act, the Milk Can Escape.<sup>[48]</sup> In this act, Houdini was handcuffed and sealed inside an oversized milk can filled with water and made his escape behind a curtain. As part of the effect, Houdini invited members of the audience to hold their breath along with him while he was inside the can. Advertised with dramatic posters that proclaimed "Failure Means A Drowning Death", the escape proved to be a sensation.<sup>[49]</sup> Houdini soon modified the escape to include the milk can being locked inside a wooden chest, being chained or padlocked. Houdini performed the milk can escape as a regular part of his act for only four years, but it has remained one of the acts most associated with him. Houdini's brother, [Theodore Hardeen](#), continued to perform the milk can escape and its wooden chest variant<sup>[50]</sup> into the 1940s.

The [American Museum of Magic](#) has the milk can and overboard box used by Houdini.<sup>[51]</sup>

## Chinese water torture cell

Main article: [Chinese Water Torture Cell](#)



Houdini performing  
the Chinese Water  
Torture Cell

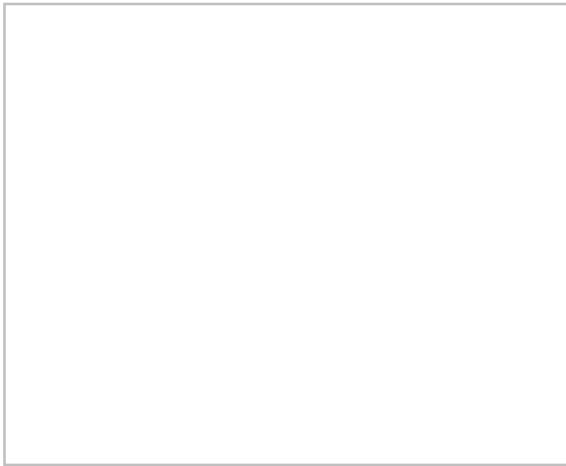
Around 1912, the vast number of imitators prompted Houdini to replace his milk can act with the Chinese water torture cell. In this escape, Houdini's feet were locked in stocks, and he was lowered upside down into a tank filled with water. The mahogany and metal cell featured a glass front, through which audiences could clearly see Houdini. The stocks were locked to the top of the cell, and a curtain concealed his escape. In the earliest version of the torture cell, a metal cage was lowered into the cell, and Houdini was enclosed inside that. While making the escape more difficult – the cage prevented Houdini from turning – the cage bars also offered protection should the front glass break. The original cell was built in England, where Houdini first performed the escape for an audience of one person as part of a one-act play he called "Houdini Upside Down". This was so he could copyright the effect and have grounds to sue imitators, which he did. While the escape was advertised as "The Chinese Water Torture Cell" or "The Water Torture Cell", Houdini always referred to it as "the Upside Down" or "USD". The first public performance of the USD was at the Circus Busch in Berlin, on September 21, 1912. Houdini continued to perform the escape until his death in 1926.<sup>[29]</sup>

## Suspended straitjacket escape

One of Houdini's most popular publicity stunts was to have himself strapped into a regulation straitjacket and suspended by his ankles from a tall building or crane. Houdini would then make his [escape](#) in full view of the assembled crowd. In many cases, Houdini drew tens of thousands of onlookers who brought city traffic to a halt. Houdini would sometimes ensure press coverage by performing the escape from the office building of a local newspaper. In New York City, Houdini performed the suspended straitjacket escape from a crane being used to build the New York subway. After flinging his body in the air, he escaped from the

straitjacket. Starting from when he was hoisted up in the air by the crane, to when the straitjacket was completely off, it took him two minutes and thirty-seven seconds. There is film footage in the Library of Congress of Houdini performing the escape.<sup>[52]</sup> Films of his escapes are also shown at The Houdini Museum in Scranton, PA. After being battered against a building in high winds during one escape, Houdini performed the escape with a visible safety wire on his ankle so that he could be pulled away from the building if necessary. The idea for the upside-down escape was given to Houdini by a young boy named [Randolph Osborne Douglas](#) (March 31, 1895 – December 5, 1956), when the two met at a performance at [Sheffield](#)'s Empire Theatre.<sup>[29]</sup>

## Overboard box escape



Houdini prepares to do the overboard box escape c. 1912

Another of Houdini's most famous publicity stunts was to escape from a nailed and roped packing crate after it had been lowered into water. He first performed the escape in New York's East River on July 7, 1912. Police forbade him from using one of the piers, so he hired a tugboat and invited press on board. Houdini was locked in handcuffs and leg-irons, then nailed into the crate which was roped and weighed down with two hundred pounds of lead. The crate was then lowered into the water. He escaped in 57 seconds. The crate was pulled to the surface and found still to be intact, with the manacles inside.

Houdini performed this escape many times, and even performed a version on stage, first at Hamerstein's Roof Garden where a 5,500-US-gallon (21,000 l) tank was specially built, and later at the [New York Hippodrome](#).<sup>[53]</sup>

## Buried alive stunt

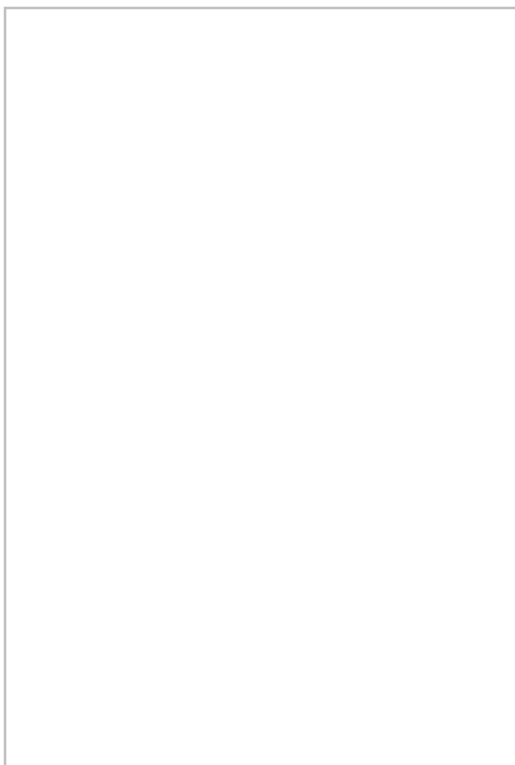
Houdini performed at least three variations on a [buried alive](#) stunt during his career. The first was near Santa Ana, California in 1915, and it almost cost Houdini his life. Houdini was buried, without a casket, in a pit of earth six feet deep. He became exhausted and panicked while trying to dig his way to the surface and

called for help. When his hand finally broke the surface, he fell unconscious and had to be pulled from the grave by his assistants. Houdini wrote in his diary that the escape was "very dangerous" and that "the weight of the earth is killing."<sup>[54][55]</sup>

Houdini's second variation on buried alive was an endurance test designed to expose mystical Egyptian performer Rahman Bey, who had claimed to use supernatural powers to remain in a sealed casket for an hour. Houdini bettered Bey on August 5, 1926, by remaining in a sealed casket, or coffin, submerged in the swimming pool of New York's Hotel Shelton for one and a half hours. Houdini claimed he did not use any trickery or supernatural powers to accomplish this feat, just controlled breathing.<sup>[56]</sup> He repeated the feat at the YMCA in Worcester, Massachusetts on September 28, 1926, this time remaining sealed for one hour and eleven minutes.<sup>[57]</sup>

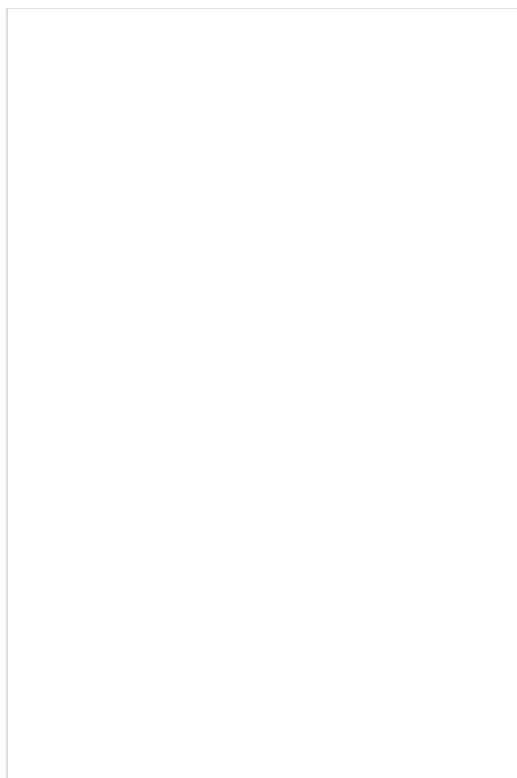
Houdini's final buried alive was an elaborate stage escape that featured in his full evening show. Houdini would escape after being strapped in a straitjacket, sealed in a casket, and then buried in a large tank filled with sand. While posters advertising the escape exist (playing off the Bey challenge by boasting "Egyptian Fakirs Outdone!"), it is unclear whether Houdini ever performed buried alive on stage. The stunt was to be the feature escape of his 1927 season, but Houdini died on October 31, 1926. The bronze casket Houdini created for buried alive was used to transport Houdini's body from Detroit to New York following his death on [Halloween](#).<sup>[58]</sup>

## Movie career

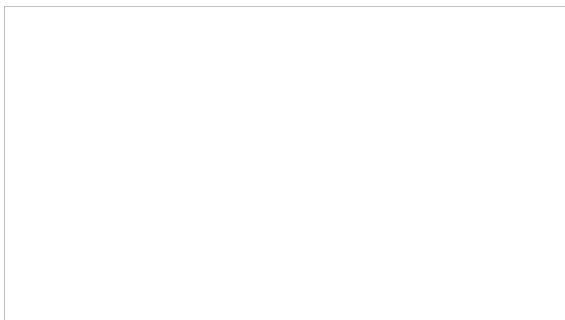


*The Houdini Serial*, 1919  
movie poster





*The Grim Game*, 1919  
movie poster  
Houdini Movie Posters



### [Play media](#)

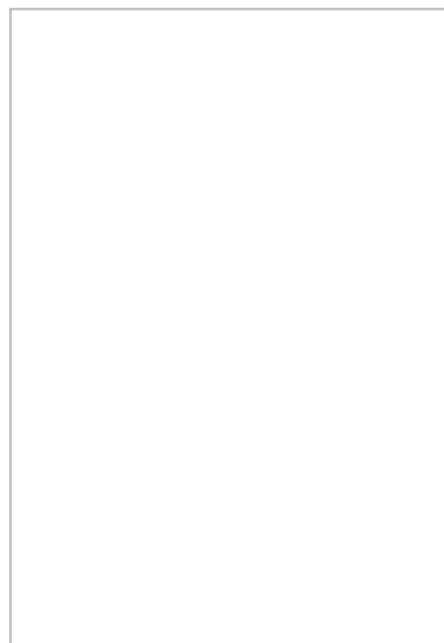
Silent movie *The Master Mystery* (1919). Running time: 09:39. Episode of a serial in fifteen episodes with magician and escape artist Houdini in the lead

In 1906, Houdini started showing films of his outside escapes as part of his vaudeville act. In Boston, he presented a short film called *Houdini Defeats Hackenschmidt*. [Georg Hackenschmidt](#) was a famous wrestler of the day, but the nature of their contest is unknown as the film is lost.<sup>[59]</sup> In 1909, Houdini made a film in Paris for Cinema Lux titled *Merveilleux Exploits du Célèbre Houdini à Paris* (Marvellous Exploits of the Famous Houdini in Paris).<sup>[60]</sup> It featured a loose narrative designed to showcase several of Houdini's famous escapes, including his straitjacket and underwater handcuff escapes. That same year Houdini got an offer to star as [Captain Nemo](#) in a silent version of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, but the project never made it into production.<sup>[61]</sup> It is often erroneously reported that Houdini served as special-effects consultant on the Wharton/International

cliffhanger serial, *The Mysteries of Myra*, shot in Ithaca, New York, because Harry Grossman, director of *The Master Mystery* also filmed a serial in Ithaca at about the same time. The consultants on the serial were pioneering [Hereward Carrington](#) and [Aleister Crowley](#).<sup>[62]</sup>

In 1918, Houdini signed a contract with film producer [B. A. Rolfe](#) to star in a 15-part [serial](#), *The Master Mystery* (released in November 1918). As was common at the time, the film serial was released simultaneously with a novel. Financial difficulties resulted in [B. A. Rolfe Productions](#) going out of business, but *The Master Mystery* led to Houdini being signed by [Famous Players-Lasky Corporation/Paramount Pictures](#), for whom he made two pictures, *The Grim Game* (1919) and *Terror Island* (1920).<sup>[63]</sup>

*The Grim Game* was Houdini's first full-length movie and is reputed to be his best. Because of the flammable nature of nitrate film and the inherent chemical instability of the [acetate "safety" film](#) that supplanted it, only 10 percent of old silent movies exist. Film historians considered the film lost. One copy did exist hidden in the collection of a private collector only known to a tiny group of magicians that saw it. Dick Brookz and Dorothy Dietrich of The Houdini Museum in [Scranton, Pennsylvania](#) had seen it twice on the invitation of the collector. After many years of trying, they finally got him to agree to sell the film to [Turner Classic Movies](#)<sup>[64]</sup> who restored the complete 71-minute film. The film, not seen by the general public for 96 years was shown by TCM on March 29, 2015, as a highlight of their yearly 4-day festival in Hollywood.<sup>[65]</sup>



Houdini swims above [Niagara Falls](#) in a scene from *The Man from Beyond* (1922)

While filming an aerial stunt for *The Grim Game*, two biplanes collided in mid-air with a stuntman doubling Houdini dangling by a rope from one of the planes.

Publicity was geared heavily toward promoting this dramatic "caught on film" moment, claiming it was Houdini himself dangling from the plane. While filming these movies in Los Angeles, Houdini rented a home in [Laurel Canyon](#). Following his two-picture stint in Hollywood, Houdini returned to New York and started his own film production company called the "Houdini Picture Corporation". He produced and starred in two films, *[The Man from Beyond](#)* (1921) and *[Haldane of the Secret Service](#)* (1923). He also founded his own film laboratory business called The Film Development Corporation (FDC), gambling on a new process for developing motion picture film. Houdini's brother, [Theodore Hardeen](#), left his own career as a magician and escape artist to run the company. Magician [Harry Kellar](#) was a major investor.<sup>[66]</sup>

Neither Houdini's acting career nor FDC found success, and he gave up on the movie business in 1923, complaining that "the profits are too meager".

In April 2008, Kino International released a DVD box set of Houdini's surviving silent films, including *The Master Mystery*, *Terror Island*, *The Man From Beyond*, *Haldane of the Secret Service*, and five minutes from *The Grim Game*. The set also includes newsreel footage of Houdini's escapes from 1907 to 1923, and a section from *Merveilleux Exploits du Célèbre Houdini à Paris*, although it is not identified as such.<sup>[67]</sup>

## Aviator

In 1909, Houdini became fascinated with aviation. He purchased a French [Voisin biplane](#) for \$5,000 and hired a full-time mechanic, Antonio Brassac. After crashing once, he made his first successful flight on November 26 in [Hamburg](#), Germany. The following year, Houdini toured Australia. He brought along his Voisin biplane with the intention to be the first person in Australia to fly.

## Falsely reported as pioneer

On March 18, 1910, he made three flights at [Diggers Rest, Victoria](#), near Melbourne. It was reported at the time that this was the first aerial flight in Australia,<sup>[68][69][70]</sup> and a century later, some major news outlets still credit him with this feat.<sup>[71][72]</sup>

Wing Commander [Harry Cobby](#) wrote in *Aircraft* in March 1938 that "the first aeroplane flight in the Southern Hemisphere was made on December 9, 1909 by Mr [Colin Defries](#), a Londoner, at [Victoria Park Racecourse, Sydney](#), in a Wilbur Wright aeroplane".<sup>[73]</sup> Colin Defries was a trained pilot, having learnt to fly in Cannes, France. By modern standards his flight time was minimal, but in 1909 he had accumulated enough to become an instructor. On his first flight he took off, maintained straight and level flight, albeit briefly, and landed safely. His crash

landing on his second flight, when he tried to retrieve his hat which was blown off, demonstrated what a momentary lack of attention could cause while flying a [Wright Model A](#).

It is accepted by Australian historians<sup>[74]</sup> and the Aviation Historical Society of Australia that the definition of flight established by the Gorell Committee on behalf of the [Aero Club of Great Britain](#) dictates the acceptance of a flight or its rejection, giving Colin Defries credit as the first to make an aeroplane flight in Australia, and the Southern Hemisphere.

Additionally, aviation pioneer [Richard Pearse](#) is believed by many New Zealand historians to have undertaken his first flight as early as 1902, which would give him not only the Southern Hemisphere but the World record, although this is disputed.<sup>[75]</sup>

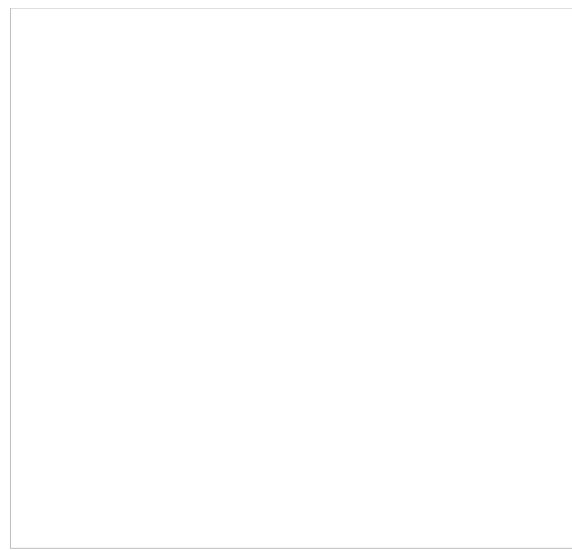
In 1965, aviation journalist [Stanley Brogden](#) formed the view that the first powered flight in Australia took place at Bolivar in South Australia; the aircraft was a Bleriot monoplane with Fred Custance as the pilot. The flight took place on March 17, 1910. The next day when Houdini took to the air, the Herald newspaper reported Custance's flight, stating it had lasted 5 minutes 25 seconds at a height of between 12 and 15 feet.<sup>[69]</sup>

In 2010, [Australia Post](#) issued stamps commemorating Colin Defries, Houdini and [John Robertson Duigan](#), crediting only Defries and Duigan with historical firsts.<sup>[76]</sup> Duigan was an Australian pioneer aviator who built and flew the [first Australian-made aircraft](#). Australia Post did acknowledge the part Houdini played (*Harry Houdini can't escape being part of Australia's history*) but did not attribute any record to him.

## **After Australia**

After completing his Australia tour, Houdini put the Voisin into storage in England. He announced he would use it to fly from city to city during his next Music Hall tour, and even promised to leap from it handcuffed, but he never flew again.<sup>[77]</sup>

## **Debunking spiritualists**



Houdini demonstrates how a [photographer](#) could produce fraudulent "spirit photographs" that documented the apparition and social interaction of the dead.<sup>[78]</sup>

In the 1920s, Houdini turned his energies toward debunking [psychics](#) and [mediums](#), a pursuit that inspired and was followed by latter-day [stage magicians](#).<sup>[79]</sup>

Houdini's training in magic allowed him to expose frauds who had successfully fooled many scientists and academics. He was a member of a [Scientific American](#) committee that offered a cash prize to any medium who could successfully demonstrate [supernatural](#) abilities. None was able to do so, and the prize was never collected. The first to be tested was medium [George Valiantine](#) of [Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania](#). As his fame as a "ghostbuster" grew, Houdini took to attending [séances](#) in disguise, accompanied by a reporter and police officer. Possibly the most famous medium whom he debunked was [Mina Crandon](#), also known as "Margery".<sup>[80]</sup>

[Joaquín Argamasilla](#) known as the "Spaniard with X-ray Eyes" claimed to be able to [read](#) handwriting or numbers on [dice](#) through closed metal boxes. In 1924, he was exposed by Houdini as a fraud. Argamasilla peeked through his simple blindfold and lifted up the edge of the box so he could look inside it without others noticing.<sup>[81]</sup> Houdini also investigated the Italian medium [Nino Pecoraro](#), whom he considered to be fraudulent.<sup>[82]</sup>

Houdini's exposing of phony mediums has inspired other magicians to follow suit, including [The Amazing Randi](#), [Dorothy Dietrich](#), [Penn & Teller](#), and [Dick Brookz](#).<sup>[83]</sup>

Houdini chronicled his debunking exploits in his book, *A Magician Among the*

*Spirits*, co-authored with [C. M. Eddy, Jr.](#), who was not credited. These activities cost Houdini the friendship of Sir [Arthur Conan Doyle](#). Doyle, a firm believer in [spiritualism](#) during his later years, refused to believe any of Houdini's exposés. Doyle came to believe that Houdini was a powerful spiritualist medium, and had performed many of his stunts by means of paranormal abilities and was using these abilities to block those of other mediums that he was "debunking".<sup>[84]</sup> This disagreement led to the two men becoming public antagonists, and Sir Arthur came to view Houdini as a dangerous enemy.<sup>[29]</sup>

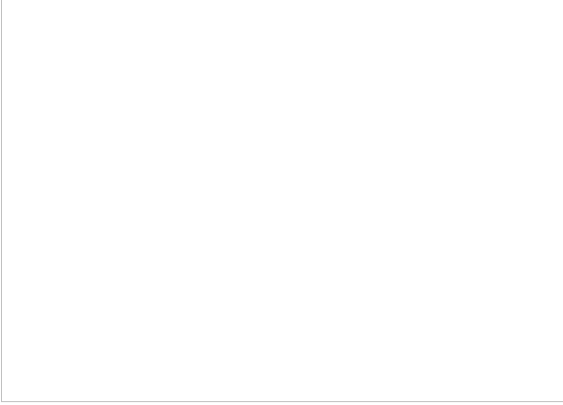
Before Houdini died, he and his wife agreed that if Houdini found it possible to communicate after death, he would communicate the message "Rosabelle believe", a secret code which they agreed to use. Rosabelle was their favorite song. Bess held yearly [séances](#) on [Halloween](#) for ten years after Houdini's death. She did claim to have contact through [Arthur Ford](#) in 1929 when Ford conveyed the secret code, but Bess later said the incident had been faked. The code seems to have been such that it could be broken by Ford or his associates using existing clues.<sup>[29]</sup> Evidence to this effect was discovered by Ford's biographer after he died in 1971.<sup>[85]</sup> In 1936, after a last unsuccessful séance on the roof of the [Knickerbocker Hotel](#), she put out the candle that she had kept burning beside a photograph of Houdini since his death. In 1943, Bess said that "ten years is long enough to wait for any man."

The tradition of holding a séance for Houdini continues, held by magicians throughout the world. The Official Houdini Séance was organized in the 1940s<sup>[86]</sup> by [Sidney Hollis Radner](#), a Houdini aficionado from Holyoke, Massachusetts.<sup>[87]</sup> Yearly Houdini séances are also conducted in Chicago at the [Excalibur](#) nightclub by "[necromancer](#)" [Neil Tobin](#) on behalf of the Chicago Assembly of the [Society of American Magicians](#);<sup>[88]</sup> and at the Houdini Museum in Scranton by magician [Dorothy Dietrich](#), who previously held them at New York's [Magic Towne House](#) with such magical notables as Houdini biographers [Walter B. Gibson](#) and [Milbourne Christopher](#). Gibson was asked by Bess Houdini to carry on the original seance tradition. After doing them for many years at New York's Magic Towne House, before he died, Walter passed on the tradition of conducting of the Original Seances to Dorothy Dietrich.<sup>[83]</sup>

In 1926, Harry Houdini hired [H. P. Lovecraft](#) and his friend [C. M. Eddy, Jr.](#), to write an entire book about debunking religious miracles, which was to be called *The Cancer of Superstition*. Houdini had earlier asked Lovecraft to write an article about astrology, for which he paid \$75. The article does not survive. Lovecraft's detailed synopsis for *Cancer* does survive, as do three chapters of the treatise written by Eddy. Houdini's death derailed the plans, as his widow did not wish to pursue the project.<sup>[89]</sup>

## Appearance and voice recordings





Heavyweight boxer [Jack Dempsey](#) mock-punching Houdini (held back by lightweight boxer [Benny Leonard](#))

Unlike the image of the classic magician, Houdini was short and stocky and typically appeared on stage in a long frock coat and tie. Most biographers give his height as 5 ft 5 in, but descriptions vary. Houdini was also said to be slightly [bow-legged](#), which aided in his ability to gain slack during his rope escapes. In the 1997 biography *Houdini!!!: The Career of Ehrich Weiss*, author [Kenneth Silverman](#) summarizes how reporters described Houdini's appearance during his early career:

They stressed his smallness—"somewhat undersized"—and angular, vivid features: "He is smooth-shaven with a keen, sharp-chinned, sharp-cheekboned face, bright blue eyes and thick, curly, black hair." Some sensed how much his complexly expressive smile was the outlet of his charismatic stage presence. It communicated to audiences at once warm amiability, pleasure in performing, and, more subtly, imperious self-assurance. Several reporters tried to capture the charming effect, describing him as "happy-looking", "pleasant-faced", "good natured at all times", "the young Hungarian magician with the pleasant smile and easy confidence".<sup>[90]</sup>



### [Harry Houdini's voice](#)

Recording of Harry Houdini's voice made on October 29, 1914

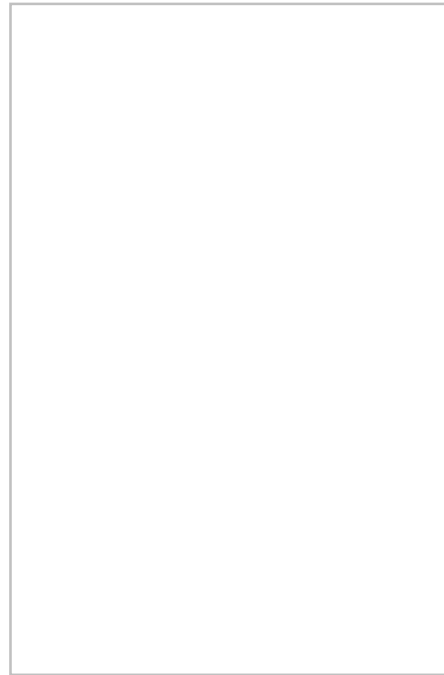
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Houdini made the only known recordings of his voice on Edison [wax cylinders](#) on October 29, 1914, in [Flatbush, New York](#). On them, Houdini practices several different introductory speeches for his famous [Chinese water torture cell](#). He also invites his sister, Gladys, to recite a poem. Houdini then recites the same poem in German. The six wax cylinders were discovered in the collection of magician [John Mulholland](#) after his death in 1970. They are part of the [David Copperfield](#)



# Death



Houdini and his wife  
[Bess](#)

Harry Houdini died of [peritonitis](#), secondary to a [ruptured appendix](#), at 1:26 p.m. on October 31, 1926, in Room 401 at Detroit's Grace Hospital, aged 52. In his final days, he optimistically held to a strong belief that he would recover, but his last words before dying were reportedly, "I'm tired of fighting."<sup>[29]</sup> Eyewitnesses to an incident at Houdini's dressing room in the Princess Theatre in [Montreal](#) gave rise to speculation that Houdini's death was caused by a [McGill University](#) student, Jocelyn Gordon Whitehead (b. 1895 – d. 1954), who delivered a surprise attack of multiple blows to Houdini's abdomen.<sup>[92]</sup>

The eyewitnesses, students named Jacques Price and Sam Smilovitz (sometimes called Jack Price and Sam Smiley), proffered accounts of the incident that generally corroborated one another. Price describes Whitehead asking Houdini "if he believed in the miracles of the Bible" and "whether it was true that punches in the stomach did not hurt him". He then delivered "some very hammer-like blows below the belt". Houdini was reclining on a couch at the time, having broken his ankle while performing several days earlier. Price states that Houdini winced at each blow and stopped Whitehead suddenly in the midst of a punch, gesturing that he had enough, and adding that he had no opportunity to prepare himself against the blows, as he did not expect Whitehead to strike him so suddenly and forcefully. Had his ankle not been broken, he would have risen from the couch into a better position to brace himself.<sup>[92][93]</sup>

Throughout the evening, Houdini performed in great pain. He was unable to sleep and remained in constant pain for the next two days, but did not seek

medical help. When he finally saw a doctor, he was found to have a fever of 102 °F (39 °C) and acute [appendicitis](#), and was advised to have immediate surgery. He ignored the advice and decided to go on with the show.<sup>[94][95]</sup> When Houdini arrived at the Garrick Theater in [Detroit](#), Michigan, on October 24, 1926, for what would be his last performance, he had a fever of 104 °F (40 °C). Despite the diagnosis, Houdini took the stage. He was reported to have passed out during the show, but was revived and continued. Afterwards, he was hospitalized at Detroit's [Grace Hospital](#).<sup>[92]</sup>

It is not entirely clear what relationship the encounter in the dressing room had on Houdini's eventual death, as the relationship between blunt trauma and appendicitis is uncertain.<sup>[92]</sup> One theory suggests that Houdini was unaware that he was suffering from appendicitis, which would have been clearer to him had he not received blows to the abdomen.<sup>[92]</sup>

After taking statements from Price and Smilovitz, Houdini's insurance company concluded that the death was due to the dressing-room incident and paid [double indemnity](#).<sup>[94]</sup>

## Houdini grave site

Houdini's funeral was held on November 4, 1926, in New York City, with more than 2,000 mourners in attendance.<sup>[96]</sup> He was interred in the [Machpelah Cemetery](#) in [Glendale, Queens](#), with the crest of the [Society of American Magicians](#) inscribed on his grave site. A statuary bust was added to the [exedra](#) in 1927, a rarity, because graven images are forbidden in Jewish cemeteries. In 1975, the bust was destroyed by vandals. Temporary busts were placed at the grave until 2011 when a group who came to be called The Houdini Commandos from the [Houdini Museum](#) in [Scranton](#), Pennsylvania placed a permanent bust with the permission of Houdini's family and of the cemetery.<sup>[97]</sup> The [Society of American Magicians](#) took responsibility for the upkeep of the site, as Houdini had willed a large sum of money to the organization he had grown from one club to 5,000-6,000 dues-paying membership worldwide. The payment of upkeep was abandoned by the society's dean [George Schindler](#), who said "Houdini paid for perpetual care, but there's nobody at the cemetery to provide it", adding that the operator of the cemetery, David Jacobson, "sends us a bill for upkeep every year but we never pay it because he never provides any care." Members of the Society tidy the grave themselves.<sup>[98]</sup>

Machpelah Cemetery operator Jacobson said, they "never paid the cemetery for any restoration of the Houdini family plot in my tenure since 1988", claiming that the money came from the cemetery's dwindling funds. The granite monuments of Houdini's sister, Gladys, and brother, Leopold were also destroyed by vandals.<sup>[99]</sup> For many years, until recently, The Houdini grave site has been only cared for by

[Dorothy Dietrich](#) and [Dick Brookz](#) of the [Houdini Museum](#) in [Scranton](#), Pennsylvania.<sup>[100]</sup> The Society of American Magicians, at its National Council Meeting in Boca Raton, Florida, in 2013, under the prompting of The Houdini Museum's Dorothy Dietrich and Dick Brookz, voted to assume the financial responsibilities for the care and maintenance of the Houdini Gravesite. In MUM Magazine, the Society's official magazine, President Dal Sanders announced "Harry Houdini is an icon as revered as Elvis Presley or Marilyn Monroe. He is not only a magical icon; his gravesite bears the seal of The Society of American Magicians. That seal is our brand and we should be proud to protect it. This gravesite is clearly our responsibility and I'm proud to report that the National Council unanimously voted to maintain Houdini's final resting place."<sup>[101]</sup>

The Houdini Gravesite Restoration Committee under the Chairmanship of National President David Bowers, is working closely with National President Kenrick "Ice" McDonald to see this project to completion. Bowers said it is a foregone conclusion that the Society will approve the funding request, because "Houdini is responsible for the Society of American Magicians being what it is today. We owe a debt of gratitude to him." Like Bowers, McDonald said the motivation behind the repairs is to properly honor the grave of the "Babe Ruth of magicians". "This is hallowed ground," he said. "When you ask people about magicians, the first thing they say is Harry Houdini." While the actual plot will remain under the control of Machpelah Cemetery management, the Society of American Magicians, with the help of the Houdini Museum in Pennsylvania, will be in charge of the restoration.<sup>[102]</sup>

Magicians Dorothy Dietrich and Dick Brookz have been caring for the escape artist's Queens grave over the years. "This is a monument where people go and visit on a daily basis," said Dietrich who is spearheading restoration efforts. "The nearly 80-year-old popular plot at the Machpelah Cemetery has fallen into disrepair over the years." "The Houdini Museum has teamed with The Society of American Magicians, one of the oldest fraternal magic organizations in the world, to give the beloved site a facelift." The organization has a specific Houdini gravesite committee made up of nine members headed up by President elect David Bowers who brought this project to the Society's attention. Kenrick "Ice" McDonald, the current president of the Society of American Magicians said "You have to know the history. Houdini served as President from 1917 until his death in 1926. Houdini's burial site needs an infusion of cash to restore it to its former glory." Magician Dietrich said the repairs could cost "tens of thousands of dollars", after consulting with glass experts and grave artisans. "It's a wonderful project, but it's taken a lifetime to get people interested," she said. "It's long overdue, and it's great that it's happening." Houdini was a living superhero," Dietrich said. "He wasn't just a magician and escape artist, he was a great humanitarian." To this day, the Society holds a [broken wand ceremony](#) at the grave every November.

Houdini's widow, [Bess](#), died of a heart attack on February 11, 1943, aged 67, in [Needles, California](#) while on a train en route from Los Angeles to New York City. She had expressed a wish to be buried next to her husband, but instead was interred 35 miles due north at the [Gate of Heaven Cemetery](#) in [Westchester County, New York](#), as her Catholic family refused to allow her to be buried in a Jewish cemetery.<sup>[103]</sup>

[The gravesite of Harry Houdini](#)

The gravesite of Harry Houdini

The grave marker at Harry Houdini's burial site

Weiss Family Grave Memorial Site at [Machpelah Cemetery](#)

## Proposed exhumation

On March 22, 2007, Houdini's grand-nephew (the grandson of his brother Theo), George Hardeen, announced that the courts would be asked to allow [exhumation](#) of Houdini's body, to investigate the possibility of Houdini being murdered by spiritualists, as suggested in the biography *The Secret Life of Houdini*.<sup>[104]</sup> In a statement given to the [Houdini Museum](#) in Scranton, the family of Bess Houdini opposed the application and suggested it was a publicity ploy for the book.<sup>[105]</sup> [The Washington Post](#) stated that the press conference was not arranged by the family of Houdini. Instead, the *Post* reported, it was orchestrated by authors Kalush and Sloman, who hired the PR firm Dan Klores Communications to promote their book.<sup>[106]</sup>

In 2008, it was revealed the parties involved never filed legal papers to perform an exhumation.<sup>[107]</sup>

## Legacy

Houdini's brother, [Theodore Hardeen](#), who returned to performing after Houdini's death, inherited his brother's effects and props. Houdini's will stipulated that all the effects should be "burned and destroyed" upon Hardeen's death. Hardeen sold much of the collection to magician and Houdini enthusiast

[Sidney Hollis Radner](#) during the 1940s, including the water torture cell.<sup>[108]</sup> Radner allowed choice pieces of the collection to be displayed at The Houdini Magical Hall of Fame in [Niagara Falls, Ontario](#). In 1995, a fire destroyed the museum. The water torture cell's metal frame remained, and it was restored by illusion builder John Gaughan.<sup>[109]</sup> Many of the props contained in the museum such as the mirror handcuffs, Houdini's original packing crate, a milk can, and a straitjacket, survived the fire and were auctioned in 1999 and 2008.

Radner loaned the bulk of his collection for archiving to the [Outagamie Museum](#) in [Appleton, Wisconsin](#) but reclaimed it in 2003 and auctioned it in Las Vegas, on October 30, 2004.<sup>[110]</sup>

Houdini was a "formidable collector", and bequeathed many of his holdings and paper archives on magic and spiritualism to the [Library of Congress](#), which became the basis for the Houdini collection in cyberspace.<sup>[111]</sup>

In 1934, the bulk of Houdini's collection of American and British theatrical material, along with a significant portion of his business and personal papers, and some of his collections of other magicians were sold to pay off estate debts to theatre magnate Messmore Kendall. In 1958, Kendall donated his collection to the Hoblitzelle Theatre Library at the [University of Texas at Austin](#).<sup>[112]</sup> In the 1960s, the Hoblitzelle Library became part of the [Harry Ransom Center](#). The extensive Houdini collection includes a 1584 first edition of [Reginald Scot's](#) *Discoverie of Witchcraft* and [David Garrick's](#) travel diary to Paris from 1751.<sup>[113][114]</sup> Some of the scrapbooks in the Houdini collection have been digitized.<sup>[115]</sup> The collection was exclusively paper-based until April 2016, when the Ransom Center acquired one of Houdini's ball weights with chain and ankle cuff. In October 2016, in conjunction with the 90th anniversary of the death of Houdini, the Ransom Center embarked on a major re-cataloging of the Houdini collection to make it more visible and accessible to researchers.<sup>[116]</sup> The collection is expected to re-open within a year with a fully indexed digital finding aid.

A large portion of Houdini's estate holdings and memorabilia was willed to his fellow magician and friend, [John Mulholland](#) (1898–1970). In 1991, illusionist and television performer [David Copperfield](#) purchased all of Mulholland's Houdini holdings from Mulholland's estate. These are now archived and preserved in Copperfield's warehouse at his headquarters in Las Vegas. It contains the world's largest collection of Houdini memorabilia, and preserves approximately 80,000 items of memorabilia of Houdini and other magicians, including Houdini's stage props and material, his rebuilt water torture cabinet and his metamorphosis trunk. It is not open to the public, but tours are available by invitation to magicians, scholars, researchers, journalists and serious collectors.

In a posthumous ceremony on October 31, 1975, Houdini was given a star on the [Hollywood Walk of Fame](#) at 7001 Hollywood Blvd.<sup>[117]</sup>



The [Houdini Museum](#) in Scranton, Pennsylvania, bills itself as "the only building in the world entirely dedicated to Houdini". It is open to the public year-round by reservation. It includes Houdini films, a guided tour about Houdini's life and a stage magic show. Magicians Dorothy Dietrich and Dick Brookz opened the facility in 1991.

[The Magic Castle](#) in Los Angeles, California, a nightclub for magicians and magic enthusiasts, as well as the clubhouse for the [Academy of Magical Arts](#), features Houdini séances performed by magician [Misty Lee](#).

[The House of Houdini](#) is a museum and performance venue located at 11, Dísz square in the Buda Castle in Budapest, Hungary. It claims to house the largest collection of original [Houdini](#) artifacts in Europe.<sup>[118]</sup>

The [Houdini Museum of New York](#) is located at Fantasma Magic, a retail magic manufacturer and seller located in Manhattan. The museum contains several hundred pieces of ephemera, most of which belonged to Harry Houdini.

## In popular culture

- *Houdini* (1953)—played by [Tony Curtis](#)
- *The Great Houdini* a.k.a. *The Great Houdinis* (1976)—played by [Paul Michael Glaser](#) (TV movie)
- *Ragtime* (1981)—played by [Jeffrey DeMunn](#)
- Houdini is the subject of the song "Houdini" on the 1982 album *The Dreaming* by [Kate Bush](#). The album's cover art, in which Bush is depicted holding a key in her mouth and bending in to kiss a chained figure whose face is turned away from the camera, is an homage to Bess Houdini.
- *Young Harry Houdini* (1987)—played by [Wil Wheaton](#) & Jeffrey DeMunn (TV movie)
- *A Night at the Magic Castle* (1988)—played by [Arte Johnson](#)
- *FairyTale: A True Story* (1997)—played by [Harvey Keitel](#)
- *Houdini* (1998)—played by [Johnathon Schaech](#) (TV movie)
- *Cremaster 2* (1999)—played by [Norman Mailer](#)
- *Death Defying Acts* (2007)—played by [Guy Pearce](#)
- *Murdoch Mysteries* (2008)—played by [Joe Dinicol](#) (TV series)
- *Houdini* (2014)—played by [Adrien Brody](#) (TV miniseries)<sup>[119]</sup>
- *Houdini and Doyle* (2016)—played by [Michael Weston](#) (TV series)
- *Timeless* (2016)—played by [Michael Drayer](#) (TV series)

## Publications

Houdini published numerous books during his career (some of which were written by his good friend [Walter B. Gibson](#), the creator of [The Shadow](#))<sup>[120]</sup>

- [\*The Right Way to Do Wrong: An Exposé of Successful Criminals\*](#) (1906)
- *Handcuff Secrets* (1907)
- [\*The Unmasking of Robert-Houdin\*](#) (1908), a debunking study of [Robert-Houdin](#)'s alleged abilities.
- *Magical Rope Ties and Escapes* (1920)
- [\*Miracle Mongers and Their Methods\*](#) (1920)
- [\*Houdini's Paper Magic\*](#) (1921)
- [\*A Magician Among the Spirits\*](#) (1924)
- [\*Houdini Exposes the Tricks Used by the Boston Medium "Margery"\*](#) (1924)
- [\*Imprisoned with the Pharaohs\*](#) (1924), a short story ghost written by [H. P. Lovecraft](#).
- [\*How I Unmask the Spirit Fakers\*](#), article for [\*Popular Science\*](#) (November 1925)
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## Filmography

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- [\*The Master Mystery\*](#)—Octagon Films (1918)—playing Quentin Locke
- [\*The Grim Game\*](#)—[Famous Players-Lasky/Paramount Pictures](#) (1919)—playing Harvey Handford
- [\*Terror Island\*](#)—[Famous Players Lasky/Paramount](#) (1920)—playing Harry Harper
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- [\*Haldane of the Secret Service\*](#)—Houdini Picture Corporation/[FBO](#) (1923)—playing Heath Haldane

## See also

 [Biography portal](#)

- [Illusionist](#)
- [List of magic museums](#)
- [List of magicians](#)
- [Swami Laura Horos](#)
- [Walford Bodie](#)—A friend of Houdini, and fellow magician

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## Further reading

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was a long time close friend of Houdini. Contains detailed information about the last Houdini message (there are 3) and its disclosure.

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- [Cross-Correspondences](#)
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- [Mediumship](#)
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- [List of Spiritualist organizations](#)
- [Spiritualist churches](#)
- [Spiritist centres](#)
- [London Spiritualist Alliance](#)
- [National Spiritualist Association of Churches](#)
- [Spiritualists' National Union](#)
- [Spiritualist Association of Great Britain](#)
- [Spiritual church movement](#)
- [Arthur Findlay College](#)
- [International Spiritualist Federation](#)

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