

The AMERICAN MUSEUM OF MAGIC

STORY & PICTURES BY JOHN SHERWOOD

On April Fool's Day, the unusual town of Marshall, Michigan, became more unusual than usual.

It was on that day that the American Museum of Magic, owned and operated by Robert and Elaine Lund, opened with a fanfare after nearly four years of suspense -- not only among the Marshall townspeople, but among magicians everywhere.

You'd never guess that in this town of 7,000 people, snuggled between a motor supply shop and a utility firm on the Michigan Avenue main street, was the largest publicly displayed, privately owned collection of magic memorabilia in the world -- just 40 minutes from Colon, the Magic Capital itself.

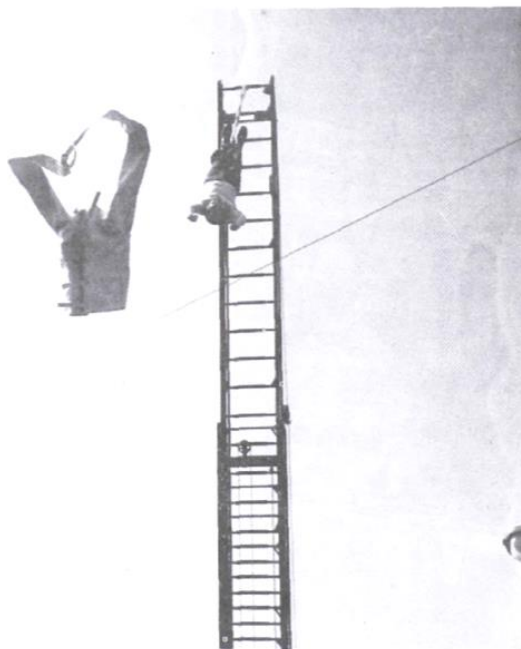
And you'd never have guessed the reaction when the museum opened its doors. Initial ribbon-cutting ceremonies were held the night of March 31. Three hundred local dignitaries and guests were present, including Marshall Mayor George P. Brown, Jr., city commission members and representatives of the Chamber of Commerce.

"Marshall is a unique town," said commission member Wayne Aikens. "We're all a little eccentric, and we need a little bit of everything." Marshall, however, outside

of being the hometown of several widely known performers, has never had its name so strongly linked with the magician's art.

It got off to a rousing start Saturday morning, April 1. Marshall magician Doug Collins was at the door dispensing tickets all day, and had -- as the resident fire-fighter -- arranged for the Marshall Fire Department's assistance in the day's spectacular entertainment.

As the morning continued brisk and windy (though sunny), two fire trucks blocked the main drag in front of the museum. Shortly before noon, Don Kill, 25, of Mason, emerged from the museum. Don, a licensed lock-



Don Kill of Mason, Michigan, releases himself during opening-day events at the museum.

Our columnist for "Just For Us Young Guys," John Sherwood, was on special assignment this month to cover the Grand Opening of The American Museum of Magic on April 1st in Marshall, Michigan. His regular column will resume next month. John is now a full time free-lance writer and author of several books on magic and diversified subjects. His home is in Battle Creek.

smith who performs as "The Amazing Kildon," has been doing magic for about three years and has been specializing in escapes at performances for about a year.

The museum's staff publicist, Detroit advertising executive Dan Waldron ("wearing Inez Blackstone Kitchen's magical tie"), manned the bull horn aboard one of the fire trucks and told the audience of 650 onlookers about the museum's grand opening. Meanwhile, Kildon was hoisted 80 feet and hung upside-down from the top of the huge, extended fire ladder.

As Kildon said later, it was windier than the dickens. The crowd gasped and applauded with excited amazement when the strait-jacket, which had adorned Kildon, came hurtling to the street 2 minutes and 4 seconds after the performer's inverted struggle began -- the fastest Kildon said he's ever managed.

The event was reported by Channel 10 of Lansing and given extensive coverage by both the Marshall and Battle creek newspapers.

The entertainment over, many people from the crowd poured into the museum, paying half price for the special day. More than 300 tickets were sold the first day, despite the admonishing sign in the 19th-century restored bakery's window:

PRICES OF ADMISSION

to this Splendid Establishment

Adults - - - - -	\$ 2.00
Children (12 and under)- - - - -	1.00
Family groups (Limit of six people)	5.00
If you're collecting social security	1.00
Doctors and lawyers - - - - -	10.00
Psychiatrists, parking lot operators, politicians and mountebanks, per	



Robert Lund discusses objects owned by John Booth and the Maskelynes with Marcia L. Groat, wife of John Sherwood.

½ hour - - - - - 18.00
 Indigents - - - - - It can be arranged
 Special rates for groups -Ask at the desk
 Cash only - We do not honor credit cards.
 No food, drink or smoking on the premises.
 No admission to people of mean disposition,
 chronic tosspots and despoilers of public tranquility.

"I'm just overwhelmed at the reaction," Bob Lund was heard to say at the end of opening day. "I couldn't be happier." It's easy to see why. Magicians had come from far and wide to be part of the event. Bouquets of flowers overflowed from the front window onto a table and to the floor, all sent from admirers and friends.

For much of the afternoon, magicians Bill Baird of Lansing, Frank W. Dailey of Indianapolis, David Allen of Battle Creek and Milt Kort of Birmingham, Michigan, conversed about magic and its history in the back of the museum while the curious looked on. Other magicians who joined the festivities, besides this reporter, were Tom "Silky" Sullivan of Marshall, Don Hebert of Bay City and Mike Thornton of Detroit. All were asked to sign Bob's special guest book for magicians only.

"Isn't this beautiful?" said Stuart Cramer, famed expert on the magic of Karl Germain, whose posters dominate one wall of the museum. Stuart pointed to some of the brilliant old prints that filled one wall from front to back. "I wonder how he keeps the colors so bright? I would have thought they'd be faded by now."

There are only 350 of Bob's posters on the museum's walls, however. He says there just isn't enough wall space for the remaining 2,300. The public also will never see the secret upstairs room that houses Bob's 9,000 books on magic and related subjects, from the most obscure magical pamphlet down to the biography of Buster Keaton (it's there because it mentions Houdini, who gave "Buster" his nickname).

The museum seems to have more in it than can ever be examined. The statistics: 30,000 magazines; thousands of programs, music sheets, clippings and photographs; 350 coins; 400 magic sets old and new; 40 pieces of statuary; 20,000 to 25,000 letters; countless stamps, toys, gadgets and doodads related to magic and magicians. Bob's lengthy row of filing cabinets, sequestered in the museum's basement, contains 160,000 individual bits of paper ranging from the foot-thick files of such greats as



Robert Lund in his library of 9,000 books on magic and related subjects -- a room which the public will never see.

Houdini to the thin little folder that tells the magical history of one J. Sherwood, relative nonentity.

"I have very few magic props," Bob says. But what he does have is particularly outstanding. Visitors gawked at the famous milk can from which the great Houdini extricated himself, along with four huge brass tubs which were used to fill it with warm water. Nearby is one of the packing crates which H.H. used in his underwater escapes. Elsewhere is a miniature cannon used by Madame Adelaide Hermann in her act and carried for years by Harry Blackstone's company.

"There's too much Houdini stuff," Bob says apologetically, but he knows that the escapologist's relics will draw pilgrims to his shrine. So, we find the master performer's letters and pictures in one case, and in another the very first copy of Goldston's locked book, "Exclusive Magical Secrets," purchased and signed by H. H. in 1912.

Betraying his personal prejudices, however, is the case devoted to Dunninger. For Bob, the great mentalist was the supreme magician. "People just didn't know

what the hell he was doing." But Bob shies from decking his halls with artifacts of the hallowed conjurers. "I want this museum to be devoted to more small-time magicians." True to his word, we find in another case the opened notebook of an itinerant performer: "Ended 1937 with not one cent to my name. Started 1938 the same way. What will the next year bring?"

But the "names" are represented: letters written by Robert-Houdin; John Booth's Cups and Balls set; the Maskelynes' playbills; portraits of Thurston; a poster used by Kellar when he used the name Robert Harcourt; pitch books used by Heller; a check written by Anderson; a poster publicizing one of Doug Henning's TV specials. Look around, and find the first Spanish work on magic, printed in 1733 . . . a German print of a magician, pressed in 1620 . . . painfully scrawled notes kept and filed by William L. Gresham in preparation for writing his famous biography of Houdini . . . a hairbrush H.H. once gave Dunninger . . . the list could go on and on.

And it does:

THE OLDEST ITEM: A document signed in 1583 by Reginald Scot, author of "The Discoverie of Witchcraft."

NEWEST ADDITION: A Ball-and-Vase trick carved in wood and donated by Lou Hayek of Toledo, Iowa, which arrived four days before the grand opening.

LARGEST: Houdini's overboard packing crate, large enough to hold a couple of men.

SMALLEST: A coin struck by Martinka about 1895, about one-half inch in diameter.

MOST DELICATE: It's a tie between a jade carving of a street magician, made in China, age unknown, and a piece of Rosenthal china, made in Germany about 10 years ago, portraying a magician and his assistant.

UNIQUE: As judged by Bob Lund, the item which may be most unique is a wall-hanging bust of Harry Blackstone. "But we have many one-and-onlies."

MOST IMPORTANT: Again, in Bob's opinion, this is a copy of Wilf Higgins' "The Midget Magician." As he says: "It reflects my interest in magic, in the man who put it out, and in typography. If there was a terrific fire, I'd grab that first."

STRANGEST: A copy of a book written by the mother of Washington Irving Bishop, a mindreader who died under peculiar circum-

stances while performing in New York in the late 19th century. Mom said "Sir" Washington was butchered by doctors after he fell into one of his frequent trances. The book has pictures of Bishop in his coffin.

The opening of the museum, an unconceived dream when Bob collected his first magical item at the age of 17 and a passing fancy when he was first confronted with the thought 10 years ago, culminates four years of constant work on behalf of Bob and Elaine Lund, their daughter, Susan, and their friends, magical or otherwise.

The Lunds moved to Marshall -- a city long noted in Michigan for its efforts to retain a 19th-century atmosphere -- from Southfield, and now regard the little city as a long-lost hometown. The Lunds plan to run the enterprise themselves, keeping the doors open from 10 A.M. until 6 P.M. each day except Monday -- "But if we see people wandering up and down the street, we'll stay open," Bob says.

And there are further surprises in store. For one, Bob is thinking about offering live entertainment occasionally at the museum, but perhaps more exciting is the fact that only half of the building which houses the museum has been opened to view. The second half -- located on the structure's second story -- may open within a year.

"However," Bob says, "when I first got going on this project I thought it would take about six months to knock the building into shape and another six to set up the exhibits, and here I am finally opening up only part of the museum after four years of work. So I'm reluctant to promise anything."

"I realize there's no crying need for a magic museum," Bob mused. "It'll probably take a couple of years to get rolling." But it's already rolling, like the long sheets of perforated paper that scroll up in the old player piano in the back of the museum, banging out a tune that reeks of nostalgia, good times, entertainment and something more. The tune: "That Old Black Magic."

=====

(ON OUR COVER: Robert Lund and John Sherwood with Houdini's original Milk Can Escape, in the American Museum of Magic.)

=====