

*Harry
Houdini*

(1874–1926)



One of the best-recognized names in magic is that of Harry Houdini. His ability to skillfully free himself from ropes, chains, locks, and handcuffs made him world famous, and he was billed in theaters as “The Elusive American.” He was a master of the escape act.

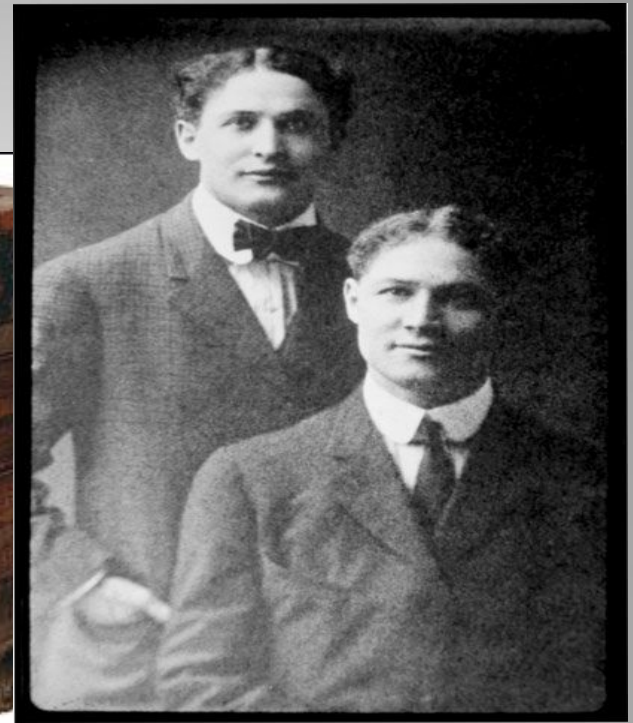


Born Erik Weisz in Budapest, Hungary, on March 24, 1874, he was brought to the United States as an infant. The family first settled in Appleton, Wis., then moved to New York City, where the father, Rabbi Samuel Weiss (the Americanized spelling of the name), made a meager living as a teacher.



Taking his stage name from a famous French magician, Jean-Eugène Robert-Houdin, young Harry set out to become a professional magician.





With a friend, who was later replaced by Harry's brother Theodore (known as Dash), he formed a team known as The Houdini Brothers, and they performed escape acts.



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While working at Coney Island in New York, Harry met and married Wilhelmina Beatrice Rahner. Bess, as she was known, served as his assistant for several years.



Houdini and his wife Bess



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



Houdini and Mrs. Houdini five years after their runaway marriage



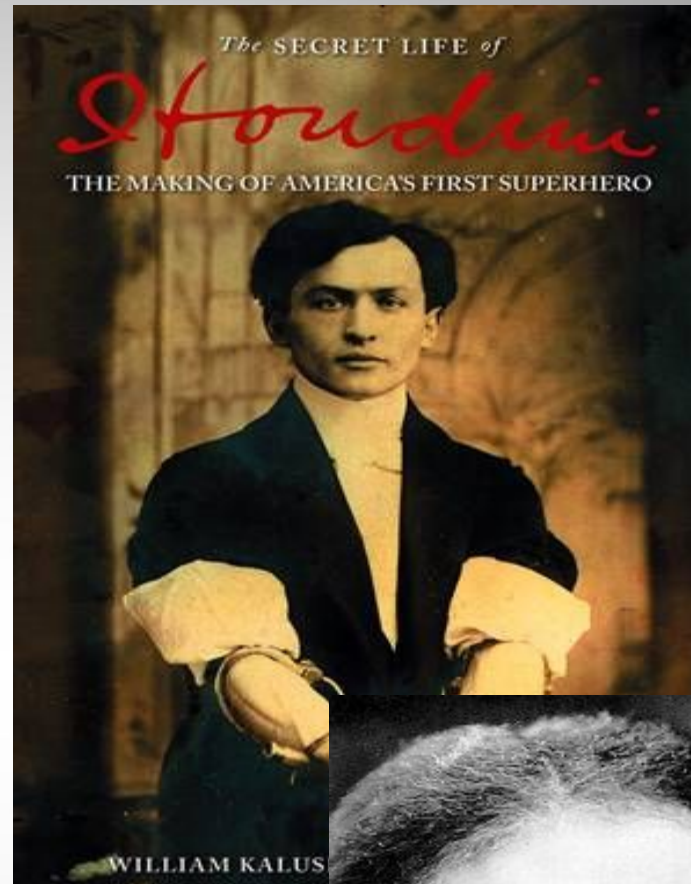
Houdini and his wife changed their act several times, at one point performing as spirit mediums. Never extremely effective with magic and conjuring, Houdini became a master of the escape stunt.







Following a highly successful tour of England in 1900, Houdini's act was solidly booked in the United States. He gave his stunts frightening, mysterious-sounding names like Metamorphosis, the Chinese Water Torture Cell, and Buried Alive.



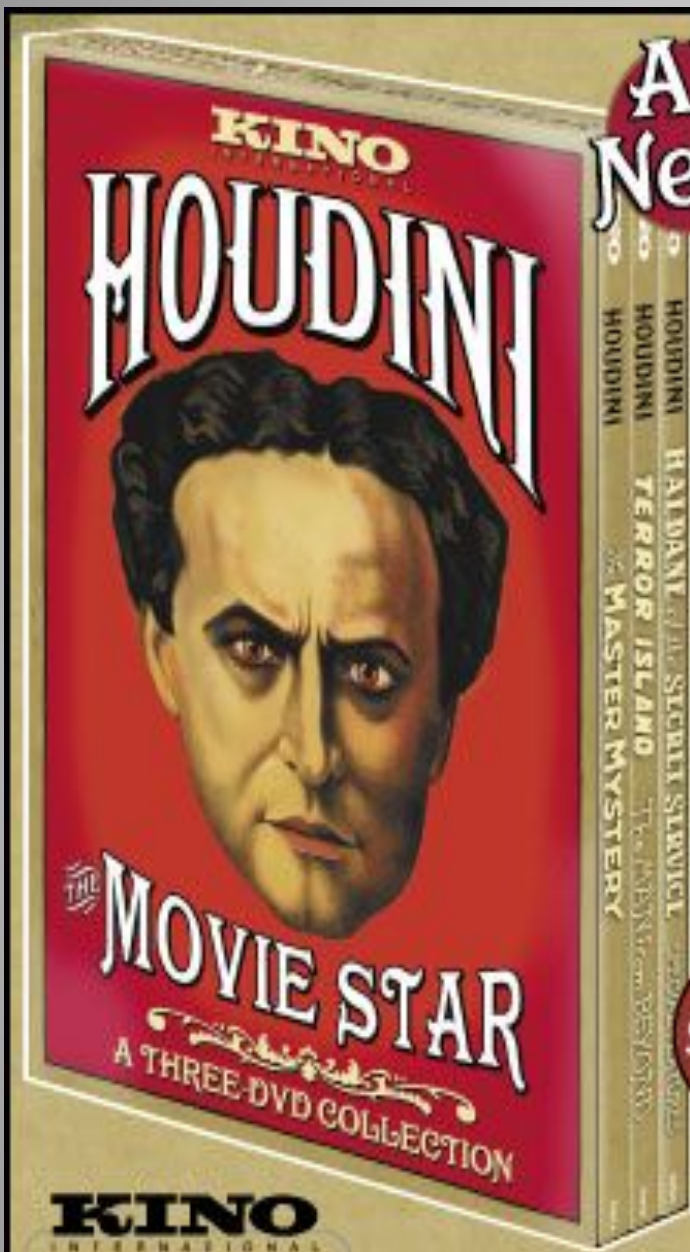


Onstage he might be tied hand and foot and nailed into a packing case, or submerged in a giant milk can filled with water. Between shows, he might be wrapped in a hospital straitjacket and suspended upside down high above the street, only to free himself in minutes.



I'm looking for you Joe to give you a ride in my bi-plane. N. Hordini





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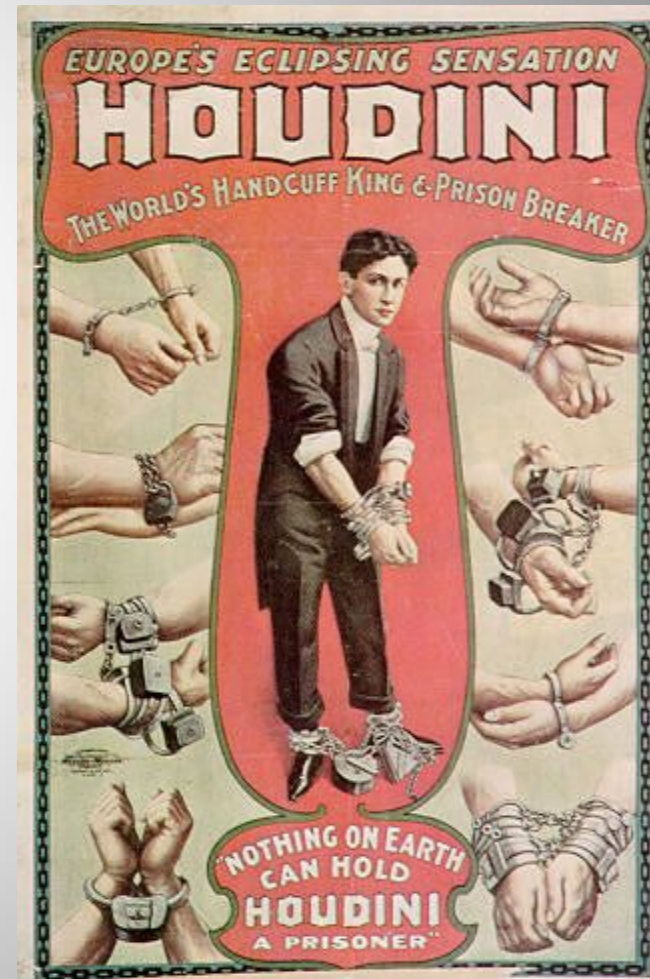
Later in life, after several international tours, Harry Houdini made a number of motion pictures and toured as a lecturer exposing the tricks of psychics and spiritualists.



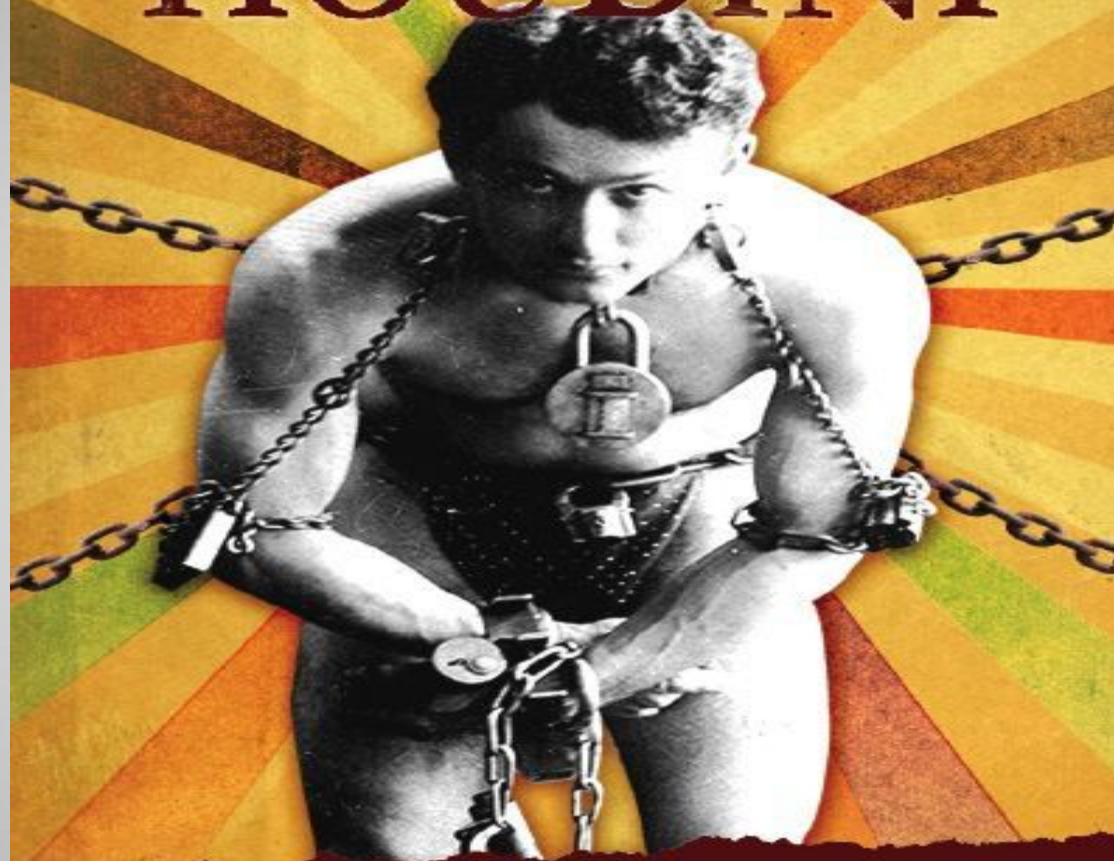
Poster promoting Houdini taking up the challenge of escaping an "extra strong and large traveling basket".



"The Houdini Serial", 1919



HOUDINI



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Do Spirits Return?



He died on Halloween 1926 in Detroit, Mich., after his appendix ruptured. He is buried in Machpelah Cemetery in Queens, N.Y.

