

The Chainletter

An e-newsletter by and for the escape community

November 2019

Volume 10

Issue 110



Melbourne Christopher Awards 2019

This month's Chains...

Melbourne Christopher Awards	1
Dorothy and Dick Lifetime Achievement	1
Houdini in Controversy	3
An Independent Review	5

Dorothy and Dick: Lifetime Achievement

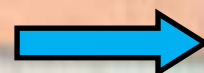
The 2019 Milbourne Christopher Awards, Magic's Highest Honor.

Life time achievement award given to two Pennsylvania magicians, Dorothy Dietrich and Dick Brookz of The Houdini Museum

News provided by the Houdini Museum. Sep 24, 2019
SCRANTON, Pa., Sept. 24, 2019 /PRNewswire/ --



Magic's most prestigious awards given by The Milbourne Christopher Foundation will be presented September 28, 2019 followed by a gala show at New London, Connecticut's Garde Arts Center. The committee has unanimously voted the Life Time Achievement Award be given to two Pennsylvania magicians, **Dorothy Dietrich and Dick Brookz of The Houdini Museum in Scranton, PA.** Other awards include Mentalist Award: Gil Eagles, Master's Award: Steve Cohen, Close-up Award: Daniel Roy, Illusionist: Chuck Jones, and Ambassador of Magic Award: Bill Herz.



The Awards were established by Maurine Christopher in 1989, to perpetuate her husband's memory and his encouraging excellence, originality, and leadership in the art of magic and to helping keep conjuring on a level with other popular entertainment forms including dance, drama,



comedy, and music. Incorporated in 1991, it is federally approved as a charitable organization. It's supported through her contributions, and others. The officers and judges donate their services. It's the foundation purpose, to sponsor awards that spotlight the best magic



has to offer in performing, writing, publishing and invention. Milbourne was also a former president of the Society of American Magicians. The categories reflect his diversified

career, and includes: Life time achievement; Author and/or publisher; Outstanding illusionist and/or illusion creator; Promising young magician; Master's; and Mentalist. Previous winners include David Copperfield, Lance Burton, and Siegfried & Roy.



Following the award ceremony, previous award winner David Charvet will perform several rarely-seen historic feats of stage magic, including Jack Gwynne's Stack of Bowls, and Dante's Beer Keg.



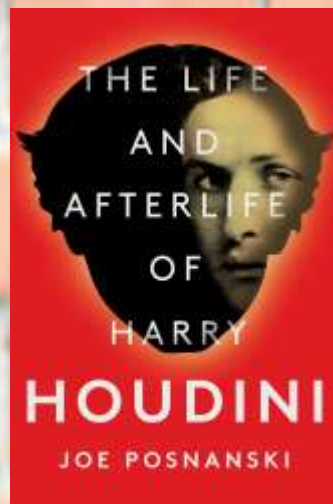
Among some of their accomplishments include:

establishing NYC's first magic show spot. The Magic Towne House ran for 15 years and mentored many future highly successful magicians; established The Houdini Museum, the only building in the world dedicated to Houdini. Now running for 32 years; the first and only woman to do the bullet catch in her mouth, and the first woman to perform a straitjacket escape suspended hundreds of feet in the air from a burning rope; the first woman to gain prominence as an escape artist since the days of Houdini, breaking the glass ceiling for women in the field of escapes and magic; replacing Houdini's vandalized bust at his

grave at a cost of

\$10,000;

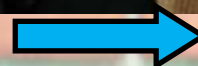
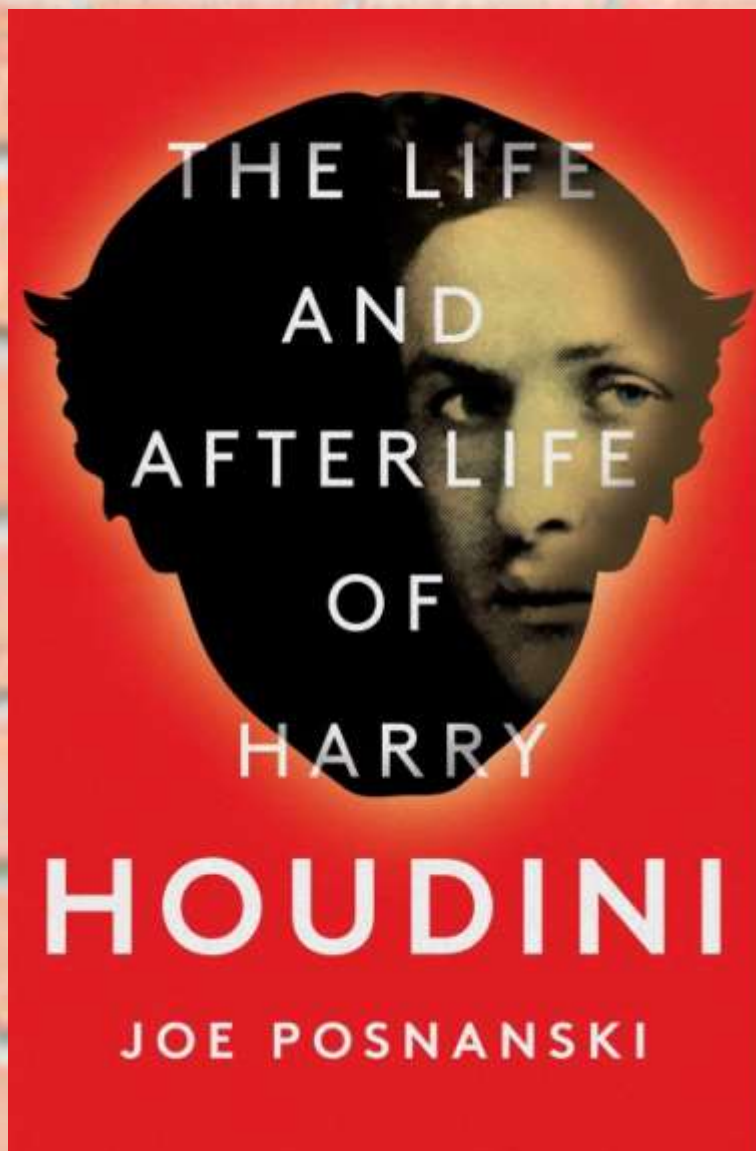
uncovered Houdini's long lost best Film "The Grim Game"; they'll be featured in Joe Posnanski's new Houdini biography, "Life and Afterlife of Harry Houdini", debuting October 22, 2019.



"Wild about Harry"
John Cox' Houdini web site
www.wildabouthoudini.com



Houdini: back in controversy again!



The Magic Nook
www.magicnook.com

"Do-It-Yourself" Magic for
"Built-It-Myself" Magicians



A great tribute site to the amazing
David De-Val



<http://www.daviddede-val.com/>

From the Academy of Magical Arts at the world Famous Hollywood Magic Castle...

The AMA Board of Trustees proudly presents:

"LIFE & AFTERLIFE OF HARRY HOUDINI" Book Signing/Q&A with author Joe Posnanski and host John Cox. No RSVP is needed. First come, first seated. Library Bar will be open for bar food and drinks sales. Books will be available for sale. Inner Circle doors open at 7pm with an 8pm event start.

All Members & Member Guests are welcome!

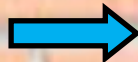
From the Houdini Museum in Scranton Pennsylvania.

New Book by Joe Posnanski.

The Life and Afterlife of Harry Houdini talks about our own Dorothy Dietrich as "a woman who runs away from home to chase her dream of becoming a magician."



Apparently, Joe Posnanski has made quite a splash with his new book, at least in the world of escape and Houdiniana. And yet there may be some controversy yet to come.



This site is well worth the time to study if you want to learn about lock picking
www.lockpickguide.com

Begging Box!

**Your input
is our output!**

This is the part of The Chainletter where the editor begs for you to give him some material to publish. No idea what to write?



Well, How about...

- ♦ Your first escape.
- ♦ How did you learn to escape?
- ♦ Your creative process.
- ♦ Your last escape.
- ♦ Who is your hero? Why?
- ♦ What makes a good escape.
- ♦ Your escape bio.
- ♦ An escape you saw on TV.
- ♦ An escape you saw live.
- ♦ Anything escape related.



**If you are
interested in
occult escapology,
you want S. Rob!**
<https://www.srob.co.uk/>

"Without a key"
For all your lockpicking needs
www.withoutakey.co.uk

There have been some questions raised as to the validity of research and other issues back and forth that may or may not be welcomed for discussion at the Magic Castle event on November 12th. Rest assured our ace Chainletter reporter will be there and let all our readers exactly what happens.

Will equal time be granted to those who would speak their mind?

Will the event run smoothly without interruption?

After all the fine work of Patrick Culliton, John Cox and others, is there really any more to be said about the great Harry Houdini?

It will be interesting to see how this plays out.

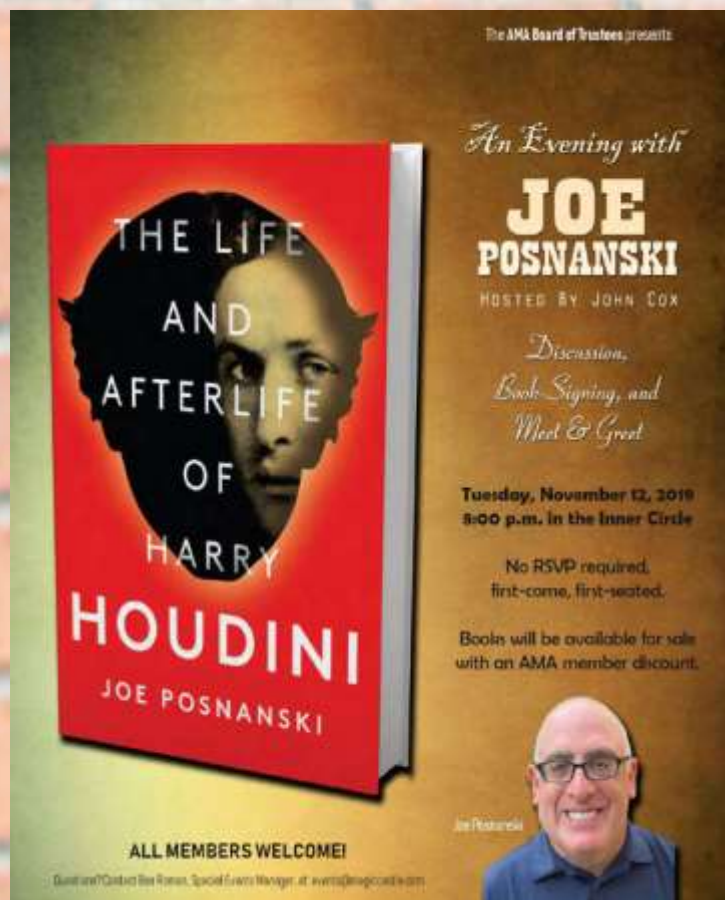
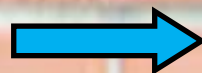
An Independent Review

Reviewed by Curtis Edmonds

on October 25, 2019

I have read autobiographies. I have read as-told-to autobiographies, where the subject will later come to claim that he has been misquoted. I have read biographies, everything from respectful scholarly tomes to cheap hit jobs. I have read fictionalized biographies and biographical fiction. But I don't think I have read anything *quite* like THE LIFE AND AFTERLIFE OF HARRY HOUDINI. While the book itself is perfectly, if narrowly, delightful, I hope that its particular genre doesn't catch on.

Part of this is due to the passage of time. Author Joe Posnanski, who has written an admirable and admiring biography of Negro League great Buck O'Neil (and a disastrously unlucky biography of Penn State



Have the lads at
Guinness turned down
your world record?
Online World Records
can help...
Contact Fenyx Fyre
info@fenyxfyre.ca



coach Joe Paterno, which was penned as the Sandusky scandal was unfolding), understands this; it's much easier to write a biography when you can talk to and interview the subject, and

those who knew the subject. But Houdini died in 1926, over 90 years ago, and everyone who knew him has since passed away. That leaves the biographer with secondary sources. Still, there are Houdini biographies that cover nearly every facet of his life and are tailored to almost every individual taste.

"Where the smart-aleck reviewer asks, "Why, then, does the world need another Houdini biography?" the intrepid author has hit on a solution.

THE LIFE AND AFTERLIFE OF HARRY HOUDINI is a biography, after a fashion, although a sketchy one.



(Posnanski, faced with the period of Houdini's life when he invested a good deal of time debunking spiritualism, literally says that he's not interested and moves on to the next thing.) But the focus of the book is not so much on Houdini



himself --- or even on the Houdini mythos, which is difficult enough to separate from reality --- but on the small group of people who are, in the 21st century, obsessed with Houdini.

Everybody needs a hobby. It is perfectly okay for someone to be interested in Houdini, and if that rises to the point of obsession, who am I to judge? I do not have an obsessive nature myself --- certainly not when it comes to collecting things. The people who Posnanski interviews and profiles in this book have that nature, and collect things, and a good part of the book is the author strolling through their collections. (The most

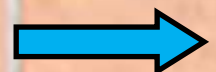


comprehensive of these is that of cheesy TV magician David Copperfield, who has a literal warehouse of stuff related to Houdini specifically and magic in general.)

The central thesis of THE LIFE AND AFTERLIFE OF HARRY HOUDINI is that Houdini has had an outsize effect on current American society far and above his contemporaries. Which is not wrong, necessarily. Just last weekend, I was watching the Red Zone channel, and heard two separate announcers describe quarterbacks



escaping a determined pass rush as being Houdini-like, this within the space of five minutes.



Posnanski produces several similar examples, most of which explicate the fact that TV broadcasters have a limited well of metaphor to draw from than anything else. I don't think you can question the general thesis, but I seriously doubt that Houdini's legacy is quite as pervasive as Posnanski makes it out to be.



He states, in one passage, that you simply can't be ambivalent about Houdini. I am entirely pleased to

be ambivalent about him, as I am about most things (except for Dr. Pepper, not putting beans in chili, and the perfidy of the New York Yankees).

The point I am trying to make here is this: If you are obsessed with Houdini, and you spend a long time talking to people who are, it is quite possible --- probable, even --- that you are going to come to the conclusion that Houdini's legacy is a lot more widespread than perhaps it actually is.

THE LIFE AND AFTERLIFE OF HARRY HOUDINI does two things very effectively. First, it lets Posnanski tell Houdini stories, which usually turn out to be interesting or fun. (This is one case where I wished I'd listened to the audiobook instead.)

Posnanski takes a great deal of glee in relating the best stories --- and debunking the worst ones --- and his excitement is infectious. Secondly, he lets his interview subjects dunk on Houdini from time to time



--- pointing out that he wasn't a great card or technical magician. (I do wish Posnanski had gotten to interview the late Ricky Jay, who had been critical of Houdini as well.)



As for the rest of the book, while it's technically fine, it doesn't quite capture the imagination. The epigram at the beginning is from Patrick Culliton, an actor turned Houdini obsessive, and Posnanski describes his struggles getting to talk to him or obtaining a copy of his detailed (and rare) Houdini biography. And then, at the end, he gets to meet Culliton --- and the most impactful story that he has to tell is about a Florida



dinner theater experience.

If you're even vaguely interested in Houdini, Posnanski's book is a great deal of fun and does a lot to separate the myths from the facts. But if you're primarily interested in a biography qua biography, the long divergent stretches where the author talks to Houdini obsessives will either strike you as engaging, in which case you're fine, or annoying bordering on grating, in which case you're probably in the market for a different Houdini biography.

