

## Howard Thurston – Master Magician

In his day, Howard Thurston was one of the best magicians and showmen in the world. He was a contemporary of Houdini and one might say, the David Copperfield of his time, an entertainer of royalty and presidents. He was born in Columbus, Ohio July 20, 1869 and lived on East Livingston Street as a boy. After his father went bankrupt, hard times fell on the family. Howard held down various jobs from the age of nine when he was a bellhop at the Neil House. By age 14 he had left home. After five years of wandering, riding the rails and getting into trouble, he was sent to a theological school in Massachusetts.

Howard had been interested in magic from the time he was a young boy when he saw the Alexander Herman magic show in Columbus. He perfected his card manipulation skills and soon gave up the idea of a life as a missionary or minister and hit the road again performing on street corners, circuses and in small halls. His big break finally came in 1899, in New York City, where Tony Pastor let him perform in his vaudeville theater. He soon became renowned for his card tricks and his showmanship. As his fame grew so did his act. His show became known as “Thurston’s Wonder Show of the Universe.” Howard’s father had been an inventor and Howard used some of these acquired talents to create magnificent illusions for his show. He made horses, elephants and cars disappear, he sawed a woman in half, or sometimes made her float in the air.

He moved to London and was a huge hit abroad. Calling himself the “King of Cards”, he once had the opportunity to perform for four real-life kings at the same time: Christian of Denmark, Edward VII, George of Greece, and Nicholas II. He also toured the Far East where he performed for emperors, sultans and shahs. He loved the mysteries of the East and sometimes performed in a turban. Though he traveled far and wide, Howard remained loyal to Columbus and came back often to perform. His last performance in Columbus was in March 1934 at the Ohio Theatre.

Thurston Howard died April 13, 1936 and is buried in the Greenlawn Abbey Mausoleum. Being a lover of mystery he told family and friends that he made a pact with Houdini, Conan Doyle and archaeologist Howard Carter to meet beyond the grave. He also made a pact with his friend, Claude Noble of Detroit, to make contact with him from the grave. For years Noble came to Greenlawn Abby Mausoleum on the anniversary of Howard’s death, but failed to make contact.

### Sources:

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