

New England Magic Collectors Association



Welcome to NEMCA's introductory newsletter. We aim to inform and entertain the Magic history/collecting community by assembling news, resources and articles of interest all in one convenient quarterly publication.

We ask you, our readers, to participate by sending content and questions for future publications to our editorial staff: NemcaEmail@gmail.com

If you enjoy this newsletter, please share it. [Click to subscribe](#), its free!

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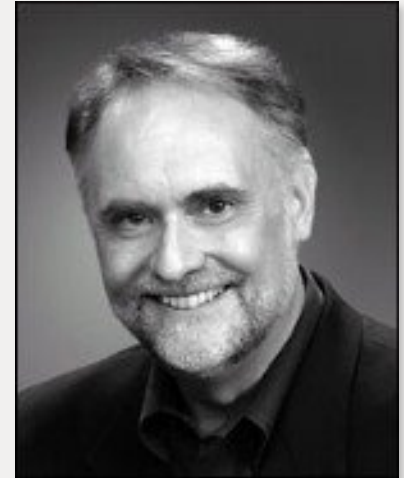
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2022 YANKEE GATHERING CONFERENCE

The 2022 *Yankee Gathering Conference* is official and we have great things planned! (In-person)

Join us November 3rd – 5th, 2022 in Westborough, Massachusetts - Guest of Honor, Jim Steinmeyer.

Registration & Hotel information will be posted soon. Please check back here and [our website](#) for further details



UPCOMING SPRING NEMCA MEETING

Our Spring meeting will be held virtually **April 10, 2022 - 1pm ET**
Featuring Paul Voodini's lecture on Victorian Spiritualism.

*This meeting is for Members only - More details to follow.



MAGIC COLLECTOR EXPO

Austin, TX. **April 13 - 15, 2022.**
Visit Harry Ransom Center at the
University of Texas.

(Largest collection of Houdini's material
purchased from Bess Houdini in 1958)

[REGISTER HERE](#)

WINTER MAGIC AUCTION

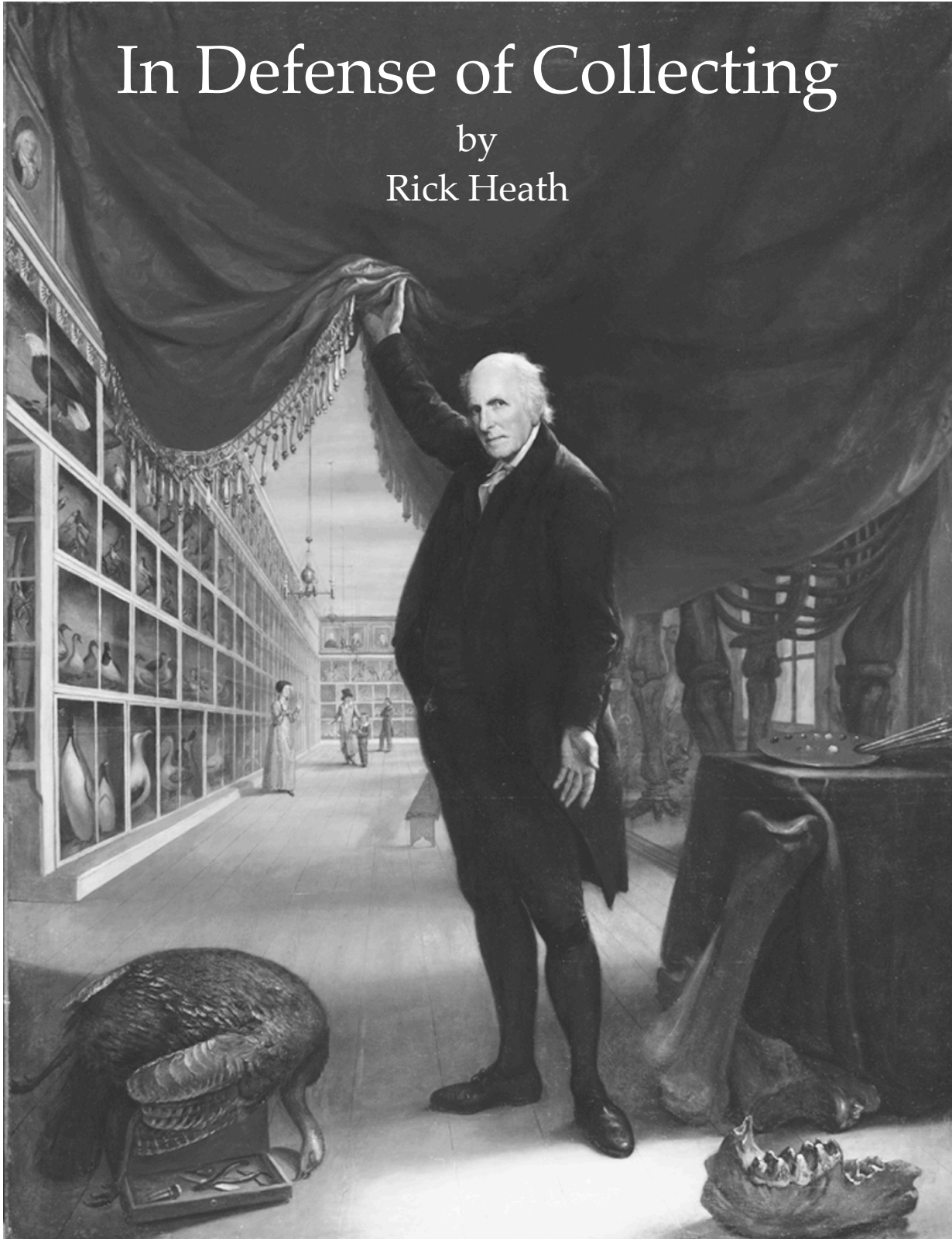
Haversat & Ewing Galleries hosts their
Winter Auction, Feb 19-20, 2022.
Great selection and prices!

Houdini paraphernalia, Tenyo, books,
ephemera and more.

[PERUSE CATALOGUE 227 LOTS](#)

In Defense of Collecting

by
Rick Heath



Charles Willson Peale of Philadelphia (1741-1827) \ "The Artist in His Museum." An 1822 self-portrait with the artist revealing his cabinet of curiosities. Peale founded the nation's first public museum in 1786.

In Defense of Collecting

by Rick Heath

(This article was first published in the April 2020 issue of The Linking Ring, the official monthly publication of the International Brotherhood of Magicians.)

*

*“It is the time you have wasted for your rose that makes your rose so important.”
Antoine de Saint-Euxpéry, *The Little Prince**

I'm not a collector. Why, therefore, an essay on collecting, and magic collecting in particular? The most compelling reasons are four.

First. My respect for magic collectors, some of whom are also magic historians, runs deep.

Second. Thirty-five years as a member of Le Grand David and his own Spectacular Magic Company, two auctions of Le Grand David illusions and memorabilia, and the sale of the company's two historic theatres led to a number of ponderings about the nature of collecting.¹

Third. Collecting magic memorabilia and preserving magic history appear to be under-represented, and perhaps under-appreciated, aspects of our beloved art.

Fourth. In our digital age, the future of magic collecting and the preservation of magic history *do matter*.

This essay is not a glorification of past or present luminaries of magic collecting or of encyclopedic collections that stagger the senses. It is not a “self-appointed expert's” definitive analysis or critique of collecting conjuring memorabilia. Rather, it may be construed as a distillation of some personal reflections of one

¹ *Le Grand David and his own Spectacular Magic Company* enjoyed a 35-year run from 1977 to 2012 in Beverly, Massachusetts. What to keep and what to put on the auction block became a significant question when preparing for two auctions and for the sale of the company's Cabot and Larcom Theatres.

who, over 60 years ago, could rightfully claim to be an avid collector of baseball cards, postage stamps and marbles, and who today is grateful that magic collectors from coast to coast entrust him with fulfilling their visions.²

At times, this essay ventures beyond the confines of the “magic world.” It places magic collecting and its tandem discipline of magic history in the larger context of the world of collecting in general. In so doing, four significant questions emerge: How might we portray the collector? Why are some objects considered collectible? What *does* determine value? What might, or might not, be the future of magic collecting?

The Collector

In over four decades in magic, this writer does not recall ever meeting a “professional” collector, though some may exist. Of course, there are top-notch professional dealers and outstanding auction houses that serve as capable and trusted intermediaries between sellers and buyers. Yet, is not the true collector, by definition, an amateur — one who loves — one who collects for the love of it? Or, perhaps the true collector combines both the acumen of a professional and the heart of an amateur.

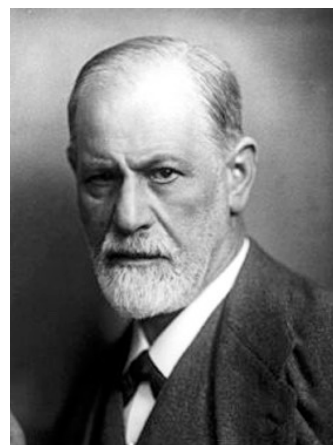
Clearly, then, once-zealous dilettantes now saddled with basements, attics, garages and closets full of dust-covered boxes that others may dismissively refer to as “that junk,” are not collectors. Neither are pathological hoarders who are imprisoned by far too much useless “stuff” in far too little space, often with debilitating consequences. Furthermore, voracious “raptor-like” predators, driven by the “law of the jungle,” self-aggrandizement, and bragging rights, are not, by our definition, collectors.

Admittedly, a true collector does evidence an “appetite” that extends well beyond what is practical or necessary. After all, does any person really *need* to stockpile manhole covers, or become a tyrosemiophile, that is, one

² In 2013, the writer started his own business, *Magician with a Paintbrush*, located in Salem, Massachusetts. He continues to specialize in the design, construction, restoration and painting of illusions, and in the creation of tables and posters for magicians and collectors.

who has a well-developed taste, not for cheese, but for cheese labels? Does any passionate magic collector really need a “paltry” two or three hundred die boxes or an equivalent number of magic sets? One might argue, though, collecting die boxes or magic sets is preferable to collecting barbed wire or moist towelettes.³

A number of psychological theories have been proposed for such predilections. Most notably, Sigmund Freud, founder of psychoanalysis, who, by the way, collected antiquities, unapologetically offered the view that collecting was compensation for “loss” associated with elimination in toilet training. His protege, the brilliant Swiss psychoanalyst, Carl Jung, differed from Freud by asserting that the impulse to collect originated with our ancient ancestors who gathered food for survival. Such views — and perhaps they do have a modicum of validity — are woefully limited.



Sigmund Freud, 1921

Collecting, and certainly magic collecting, may also satisfy the higher, deeper, and ego-transcendent needs for beauty, goodness, wholeness, creativity, order, completion and relatedness. Collecting is not necessarily a psychopathological anomaly or a sublimation of inherited instinctual impulses. Rather, it may be considered an art-form that serves as a vehicle for self-actualization and for establishing positive, life-affirming relationships with others.⁴

The true magic collector, in this writer’s experience, evidences an abiding love for seeking out, gathering, organizing and sharing the marvelous artifacts of the conjuring arts, and by so doing, creates displays of memorabilia that could not otherwise be seen in one place and at one time. Collectors are magic’s

³ Collecting such objects is an admirable and serious pursuit. For example, the Kansas Barbed Wire Museum has over 2,000 varieties. Barbed wire changed the face of the prairie during settlement of the West.

⁴ Abraham Maslow, the acknowledged “father” of Humanistic Psychology, proposed a Hierarchy of Needs in his quest to understand human motivation. In addition to lower needs, such as physical and psychological security, he recognized higher needs, called Being needs, including, among others, justice, freedom, truthfulness and those listed in the essay

custodians of the all-too-ephemeral, and magic's steadfast bastions of defense against the ravages of time, neglect and the elements, three relentless agents of oblivion.

Collecting

Because a collection is not merely a haphazard assemblage by an eccentric packrat, but an intentional arrangement of carefully selected objects, a simple but exacting question emerges. What is worthy of being collected?



Harry Blackstone, Sr.,
The Sphinx, 1946

For a devoted collector of manhole covers, a rusty sewer lid emblazoned with the municipal emblem of San Cristobal, Ecuador, not only functions as an entrance to a vast subterranean world, but is an historically and aesthetically valuable period piece of urban architecture.

For an ardent tyrosemiophile, the preservation of a cache of vintage Finnish cheese labels designed to celebrate the 1940 Helsinki Summer Olympic Games, an event never held because of World War II, is nothing less than obligatory.

For a passionate magic collector, a white pocket handkerchief that once belonged to the venerable Harry Blackstone, Sr., has a special significance. Because it has been rescued and displayed with pride, it is no longer any old handkerchief among countless others. It is *the* handkerchief that came to life in the deft hands of the celebrated white-haired conjuror.

Thankfully, collectors are able to take otherwise mundane objects and immortalize them. Blackstone's mischievous *mouchoir*, autographed and framed behind glass, approaches the status of a secular relic in a collector's Magic Room. In that inviolable space over which the collector presides, visitors are well advised to leave other concerns at the door, and to *look* with

appreciative eyes. Each piece, no matter how seemingly insignificant, is worth collecting and beckons one to imagine a moment or two of magic's storied past that may enrich an everyday humdrum existence.

Value

In March 2016, a respected collector of rare Asian art and antiquities told this writer the story of a newspaper reporter who had come to interview him and

to view his extensive collection. The reporter brought her eight-year-old son. During the entire tour, the son, who said absolutely nothing, was fascinated

by the exotic objects on display. The collector found his silence rather perplexing. Finally, just as the reporter was saying goodbye, the young man blurted out, "So how much do you think all of this is worth?." ⁵

At first, the story provoked a laugh. Later, upon reflection, a tinge of sadness set in. Money is one, but not the only, measure of the value of a collection. Of course, a fistful of cash will buy a rare Robert-Houdin wand, a stage-size Okito Checker Cabinet, or a treasured T. Nelson Downs "King of Coins" poster featuring vignettes of his coin manipulation act.

Yet, other considerations may sometimes eclipse the power of deep pockets. Pieces that could fetch a substantial sum at auction may be held long and dear in private collections because of their historic, aesthetic or sentimental value.



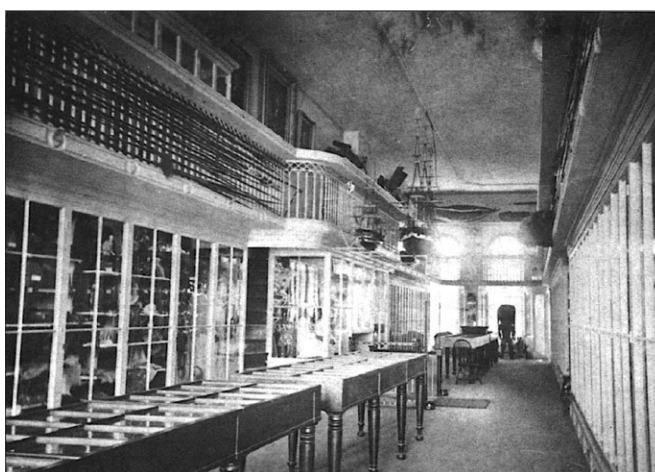
Howard Thurston is invested with the Mantle of Magic by Harry Kellar in this glorious 1908 lithograph.

⁵ This story was transcribed on March 31, 2016, after a conversation with the collector in Beverly, Massachusetts.

So, what *does* determine value — “market value?” Glorious Kellar and Thurston lithographs are universally considered “worth collecting.” Why do such fanciful images of tuxedoed conjurors consorting with devils and imps sell for thousands of dollars, when only several generations ago, these mere sheets of paper layered with colored ink could be had for a few dollars, cash on the barrelhead? The reason is simple. All value is by *agreement*.

Case in point. In August 2019, a charming French automaton, a magician who passes a hoop over his assistant’s levitating body, sold at auction for \$12,000. Immediately, value was established. The buyer *agreed* the mechanical marvel was worth the price paid.⁶

Bob Lund (1925-1995), founder of the American Museum of Magic in Marshall, Michigan, was one of magic’s quintessential collectors and most knowledgeable historians. Bob understood that value, “market value,” is purely the result of agreement. When asked to value his collection, he declared, “Here’s the problem of putting a value on it. It’s not worth anything unless you’re willing to sell it. It’s false to say a collection is worth a million dollars unless you’re willing to sell it for that amount. I’m not willing to sell a thing, so what’s it worth? It’s not worth anything.”⁷



(Left) Bob Lund, Founder of the American Museum of Magic, stands inside the Houdini Milk Can.
 (Right) East India Marine Hall, Salem, Massachusetts. An 1876 photo of its extensive cabinet of curiosities.

⁶ Potter and Potter Auctions Catalog. *Automata: Life & Other Illusions*. August 2019. [Visit: auction](#)

⁷ John H. McConnell. “An Interview with Bob Lund.” *Genii: The International Conjurors’ Magazine*, July 1979, p. 456.

Future Vision

During the Renaissance, cabinets of curiosities, *wunderkammern*, the precursors of what we now know as museums and collections, burgeoned throughout Europe. Some reached monumental proportions and were repositories for “treasures” such as unicorns’ horns, mermaids’ hands and saints’ fingernails. Several centuries later, in the early 1800s, an era of robust entrepreneurship in the fledgling United States, *wunderkammern* no longer housed credulity-stretching curiosities, but contained objects of anthropological and scientific interest collected by intrepid commercial seafarers from New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and Salem.

During those heady times, the East India Marine Hall in Salem, Massachusetts, could boast of a cornucopia of exotica that included a hornet’s nest from Surinam, lava from Java, several stuffed penguins and a double-headed dogfish. Dr. Seth Bass, the scholar-scientist who was hired to organize and catalog the profusion of rarities and create a true collection, might be considered a distant, and perhaps overwhelmed, forebearer of modern magic collectors.

Today, whether it be through “enlightened evolution,” or through the inexorable march of technological advancement, clipper ships no longer sail the seas searching for the strange and wondrous. We now have immediate access to a world of *virtual* objects, binary code *images* of “real things,” via the internet. For better or worse, computers may be 21st-Century *wunderkammern* — cabinets of *virtual* curiosities.

Furthermore, a magician armed with a mobile phone or tablet, a deck of cards and some clever mentalism effects, no longer needs to haul illusions and props from venue to venue. Consequently, are Silk Cabbies, Square Circles and Hippy-Hop Rabbits, Lota Bowls and Rice Bowls, Sword Boxes and Sword Suspensions, rapidly becoming things of an increasingly distant and forgotten past?



One of the Le Grand David galleries displaying part of its collection of illusions, posters and artifacts at the Larcom Theatre in Beverly, Massachusetts.

Are thoughtfully composed letters containing fascinating stories, studio photographs of magic's tuxedoed matinee idols, and books, real books, containing magic's history, apocrypha and arcana, succumbing to the powerful onslaught of emails, texts, tweets, selfies and digital downloads?

However speculative it may seem, we may be on the cusp of a future in which the collecting of physical, tangible illusions and magic memorabilia is endangered. The notion is worth entertaining, for the evidence appears to be mounting. In a future of magic apps and magic sets that offer everything needed to become a "digital magician," will the objects from which magic collections have been created for generations, still be considered "worth collecting?"⁸

In a February 1910 letter to Carl Jung, Sigmund Freud, speaking as an inveterate collector, confided, "I must always have an object to love."⁹ Freud's psychoanalytic consulting room contained not only his famous "couch," but also dozens of statuettes of ancient gods and goddesses. He so loved to hold

⁸ Will phones and tablets used by prominent magicians be considered collectible in the future, if not so already?

⁹ *The Freud-Jung Letters: The correspondence between Sigmund Freud and C.G. Jung*. Princeton University Press, 1974, p.292.

them in his hands, a favorite or two would often be packed in his suitcase when he traveled.

Objects to love and to hold, *or* digital devices and electronic impulses — must there be a critical divide, one *or* the other? Perhaps the future of magic collecting lies in the emergence of collectors who can wholeheartedly embrace a three-fold actuality: that performance magic may now be permanently wedded to cutting edge informational technology; that new forms and categories of collecting hitherto unimaginable may arise; and that to continue collecting the material objects of magic is not a fusty, antediluvian pursuit, but one that can be forever new and satisfying.

An Illuminating Conclusion

Dr. Hugh Francis Hicks (1923-2002), was a modest Baltimore dentist who amassed the world's largest collection of lightbulbs— a whopping 75,000. His

collection constituted an uninterrupted history of the lightbulb, and he just may have managed to collect one of every bulb ever created. Dr. Hicks possessed the spirit and soul of the true collector. From cradle to grave (His mother gave him a lightbulb to play with in his crib!), collecting lightbulbs was his lifelong passion. He wanted people to see one of civilization's greatest, but taken-for-granted, inventions in a new way and with a new appreciation.

Dr. Hicks' collection was meant for the common folk. Admission was free and visitors were treated to cookies. His day job as a dentist evidently paid for the cookies — and the electric bill.

In the mid-1980s, psychiatric researchers from Johns Hopkins University conducting a study of what drives collectors to collect, interviewed Dr. Hicks. "They were interviewing collectors from all over the world," said the doctor. "After spending \$4 million, they concluded that collectors collect for the

fascination of an object and for no other reason. Heck, I would have told them that for \$1 million.”¹⁰ Perhaps collectors collect for the *love* of it, too.

Finally, how would one who may be intimidated by the jaw-dropping prices, the thousands of dollars paid for a pair of gloves or a bow tie worn by Cardini, start a collection? The ever-practical Bob Lund, in his wisdom, did “shine some light” on the question. Bob said, “Just buy a deck of cards and send them to magicians to sign and return to you. You don’t need a lot of money.”

Amen!



Rick Heath is a NEMCA member who restores, designs and paints magic apparatus for collectors.

He can be contacted: richardpheath@earthlink.net or www.magicianwithapaintbrush.com.

¹⁰ Michael Kimmelman. “The Art of Collecting Lightbulbs.” *The Accidental Masterpiece: On the Art of Life and Vice Versa*. New York, The Penguin Press, 2005.

2021 VIRTUAL YANKEE GATHERING RECAP



For the second straight year, NEMCA hosted a successful virtual program on magic history. The presentational topics ranged from Dai Vernon (Gary Plants), The Great Raymond (Joe Quitoni), Pinetti (Pietro Micheli) and Fred Kaps (Marc DeSouza) to Native American Magic (Michael Claxton).

The virtual platform offered viewers flexibility and convenience to enjoy the conference at their leisure. The first of three intimate tours welcomed Joe Quitoni who walked viewers through his eclectic assemblage of magic memorabilia.

The second tour was an immersion into early magic literature at the *Conjuring Arts Research Center*. Executive Director Bill Kalush focused on key highlights of the facility, showcasing extremely rare magic publications. We saw behind-the-scene's processes of the Center's staff and the day-to-day operations of this incredible library.

Tim Moore capped off the tours with a memorable look into his personal collection of historic magic ephemera, apparatus and much more! The stories of individual pieces added tremendous insight and allowed the history to come alive.



Our event sponsor, Haversat and Ewing Galleries, hosted a one-hour live auction in tandem with the conference. After viewing lectures and tours of magical treasures, attendees cheerfully added new pieces to their own collections.

The 2021 NEMCA Founders Award honored *Magicana* for its dedication into the exploration and advancement of magic as a performing art. David Ben and Julie Eng's acceptance was followed by a view into The Screening Room, *Magicana*'s archive of converted analog media into a free, searchable online video database.



Yankee Gathering attendees discovered how *Magicana* procures, preserves, and shares digital media. The organization offered curated insight as to why this media is of such importance to magic and its history.

Additional aspects of the conference included a live question and answer panel, hosted by David Sandy and Lance Rich of *Magic Collector's Corner*. Attendees put forth their questions and comments to the day's presenters. This virtual roundtable of experience and discernment offered participants a rare opportunity to interact directly with our expert lecturers.

Concluding the event were several virtual lounges where conference goers gathered, discussed and shared their personal books, broadsides and apparatus. Thank you to all who participated in the 2021 Virtual Yankee Gathering Magic History Conference.



THE YANKEE MAGIC COLLECTOR

Dear Magic History Experts, Scholars, and Enthusiasts:

As you are aware, the New England Magic Collectors Association produces a high-quality journal with articles on magic history every even-numbered year—often from the perspective of contemporary curators of magic history: the magic collector.

We have been blessed over the last thirty-eight years to feature some of the finest writers in magic presenting original scholarship of interest to all magic historians. We look forward to continuing our relationship with such magical scholars and it is our hope to either welcome you back, or add your name to the list of contributors of *The Yankee Magic Collector* #20.

If you've written a biography, bibliography, tribute, review, interview or essay, or other non-fiction material relating to magic history, please consider submitting your work to be published in the November 2022 issue. We hope that you will be interested in sharing your scholarship with our readers.

Issue #20 will once again see color printing throughout (of submitted color images) and we hope to feature material from lectures presented at previous Yankee Gatherings.

If your work is accepted for publication we will feature your bio on the Contributors page, along with any links or other information you'd like to include. If you have a book or website, we can help you promote it in this way.

Authors who attend The Yankee Gathering will be recognized on the opening night and all authors will receive a personalized special edition "Author's Copy" of *The Yankee Magic Collector* #20 that features a distinct cover from the standard edition.

Submissions are preferred via e-mail at ymceditor@gmail.com, but material may also be mailed to: Andrew Pinard, P.O. Box 535, Bradford, NH 03221.

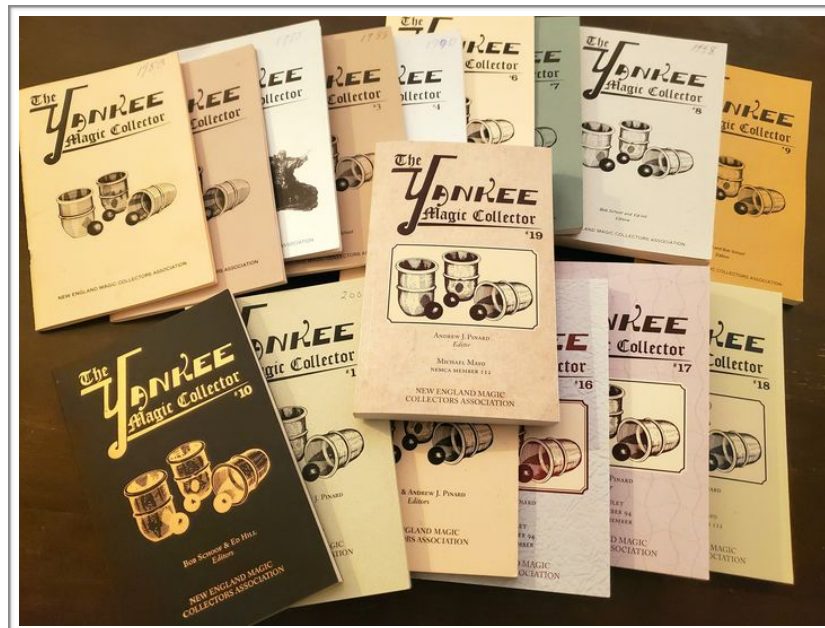
Please feel free to contact me for [a copy of our submission guidelines](#) or visit our website at www.nemca.com. Our deadline for submissions is July 1st, but we welcome submissions at any time.

Thank you for your interest and consideration, we look forward to presenting your work in the next issue of *The Yankee Magic Collector*.

Sincerely,
Andrew Pinard, Editor



As a reminder we also have back issues of *The Yankee Magic Collector* available to purchase in our shop section. Summaries of each issue can be found on the [NEMCA website](#). Hopefully you pick up #19 if you haven't already. There are 286 pages of excellent articles in this issue.



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Marc DeSouza

Marc has been involved in magic for over 60 years. His interest began with a magician at a friend's birthday party, then shortly after watching Mark Wilson's Magic Land of Allakazam on TV.

As a recent member of NEMCA, Marc has rapidly made significant contributions to the organization by serving as a board member, submitting his article to the Yankee Magic Collector #19 and lecturing at our recent 2021 Virtual Yankee Gathering Conference.

In addition to being a creator and lecturer, Marc is an accomplished performer of close-up, parlor and stand-up magic.



His favorite areas of magic collecting include Lecture Notes (as evidenced in his YMC#19 article), magic on video and magic apparatus.


Marc has a particular interest in the life and magic of Fred Kaps. He's given presentations for The Theory and Art of Magic Symposium at Muhlenberg College, the AMA's Behind the Bookcase program and recently at our own 2021 Virtual Yankee Gathering.

We're excited to welcome Marc's enthusiasm and expertise to our list of dedicated members.

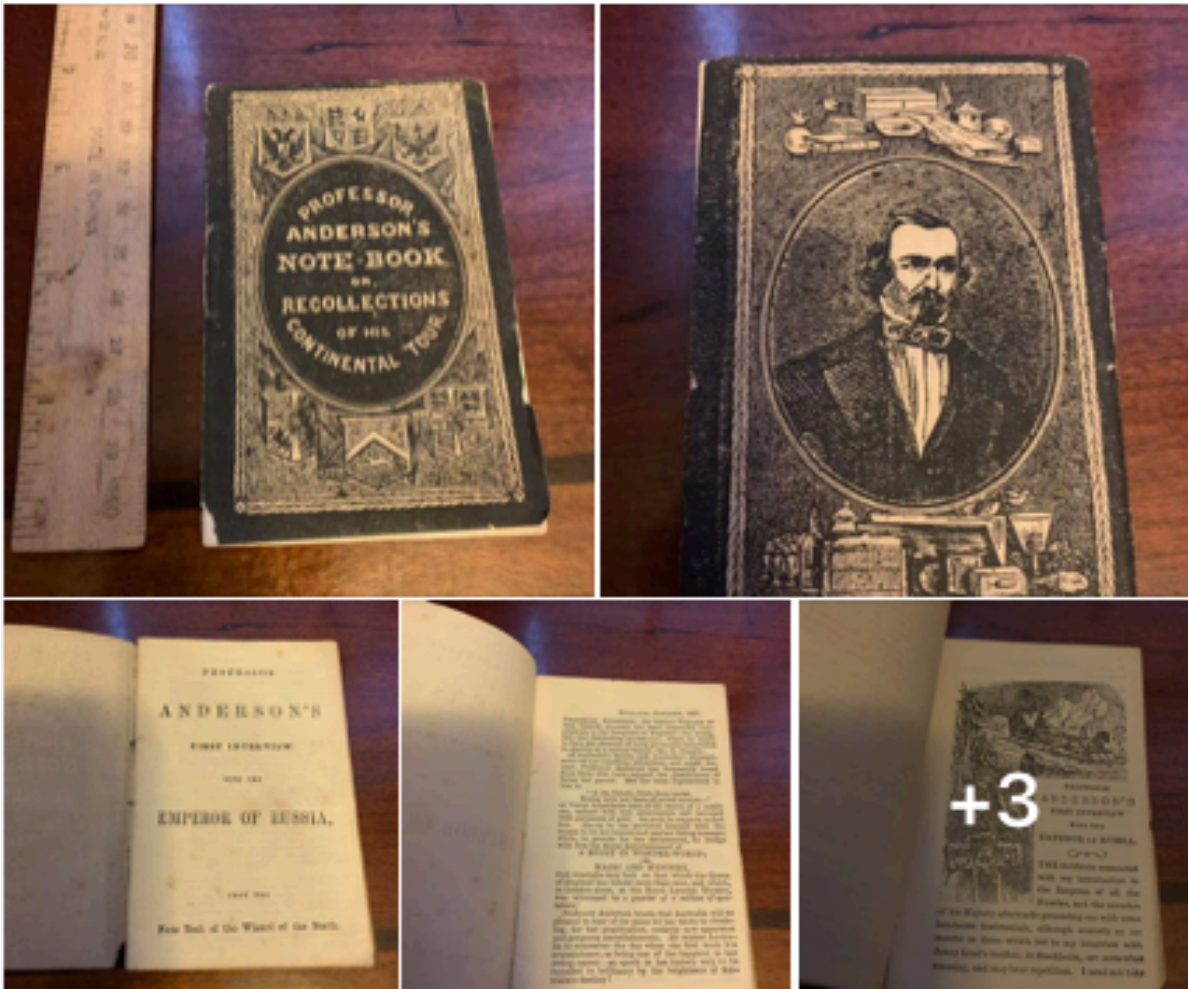
Interested in Joining NEMCA? If you have a sincere interest in magic history or collecting, please join us! [Membership Application Here](#)

NEMCA ONLINE

A highlight from *New England Magic Collectors Association* [Facebook page](#)

 **Raymond Ricard**
- October 31, 2021 -

Professor Anderson's Note-Book or Recollections of his Continental Tour, (n.d.) but circa 1857. Unlike many of Anderson's other pitch books, this little 15pp gem measures a whopping 4x3". This booklet features a Russian interview and contains no tricks. Although there are several other small pitch-book's listed in Toole Stott, this one does not appear.



CLASSIFIED ADS

- **Ray Ricard:** Interested in books, pamphlets and catalogs on magic, gambling and ventriloquism prior to 1876. rricard264@aol.com
- **Steve Lerner:** Looking for gambling items and equipment, especially info on old dice-makers. WTB, Crooked/gaffed carnival games. stvlrnr@gmail.com
- **Scott Martell:** WTB, J.F. Orrin books - *On With the Show: Part 2*. (1943), *Easy Magic for Evening Parties* (1923), *Carboard, Glue & Elastic* (1946), *Mechanical Magic* (1952), *Cardano the Gambling Scholar* (1953). wiffne1@gmail.com
- **Jim Zoldak:** Looking for rare/uncommon *Mysto* magic sets or 19th/early 20th century European magic sets. Please contact me with details and pictures. jzoldak@aol.com
- **Doc Rogers:** Is offering a pdf list of magic books for sale. Contact him to request a file: rogersmagic50@gmail.com
- **Michael Mayo:** Looking for books with a John Brown Cook bookplate, photos of John Brown Cook. 1880-1930 Magician programs from Boston theaters. cityside.mm@gmail.com



*Submit your "WANTS" and "FOR SALE" items to
NemcaEmail@gmail.com

The New England Magic Collectors Association (NEMCA)

NEMCA meets at least three times a year, and one must be 18 years or older with a genuine interest in magic collecting to apply for membership status. Members hail not only from New England, but from throughout the United States and Europe.

In 2017, NEMCA became a 501(c)(3) non-profit association. Since its inception, its purpose has steadfastly remained the education and promotion of interest in the collecting of books, memorabilia, history, and apparatus relating to magic

and the allied arts; the preservation of the history and knowledge of the theater arts; and the sharing of knowledge and expertise in the collection and preservation of magic apparatus and literature.



The Yankee Gathering: Essential to achieving that purpose, the New England Magic Collectors Association hosts the biennial Yankee Gathering, widely considered one of the premier magic collectors conventions, in November of even-numbered years.

The Yankee Magic Collector is the official journal of the association. Each issue contains a broad range of articles, news and research of interest to magic collectors and historians. The *Yankee Magic Collector* is published every two years for distribution at the Yankee Gathering and is free to NEMCA members.

- Scott Martell, Editor