

1. The Oath

1. pages 1–3. **The first shovel-load . . . cool, California air.** The entire story behind this event in Santa Ana is from Houdini's own accounts. Two examples are *Collier's*, April 18, 1925 and *Popular Science*, October 1925. There are those who think the story is apocryphal; even if it wasn't, it couldn't be done just as described. Steranko has done the buried alive and assures us that if Houdini had been buried without a box and six feet deep he wouldn't have been able to move a finger let alone dig his way out. On the contrary, Houdini might very well have done it mostly as described but without mentioning secret compartments that might have been pre-dug and useful for shifting the earth.

2. page 3. **Anne Fleischmann . . .** The details of Houdini's birth come from documents released in Germany a few years after his death. The material was sent to John Mulholland for inclusion in *The Sphinx* but with the discouragement of Bernard Ernst, Mulholland didn't see fit to publish it. The details appeared in *Magie* for December 1932 and were translated for our use by Dr. Lori Pieper. The original documents sent to Mulholland are in David Copperfield's International Museum and Library of the Conjuring Arts.

3. page 3. . . . **steady heartbeat and her warm caress.** Houdini's habit of laying his head on his mother's breast to hear her reassuring heartbeat is acknowledged to be a

“little peculiarity” by Houdini in his book *A Magician Among the Spirits* (New York: Harper, 1924), 151.

4. page 3. “. . . typically small **“room and kitchen”** . . . Gábor Gyáni, *Parlor and Kitchen—Housing and Domestic Culture in Budapest, 1870–1940* (Budapest: Ceupress, 2002).

5. page 3. **Mayer Samuel Weisz, who had recently** . . . According to document No. 536/1931, a birth record of the Rabbinate of the Jewish Communion of Budapest, Mayer Samuel’s position at the time of Houdini’s birth is listed as “Solicitor.” Earlier documents that were filed when the couple’s first children were born list Mayer Samuel as a “law graduate.” These documents are reproduced in Manny Weltman’s book *Houdini: Escape into Legend—The Early Years: 1862–1900* (California: Roadrunner Press, 1993). Mayer Samuel was a graduate of law school, which was confirmed by Theo in Louis Sobel’s column *The Voice of Broadway* in *The New York Evening Journal* on November 25, 1933.

6. page 3. **Mayer Samuel had been a recent Widower.** Manny Weltman. *Houdini: Escape into Legend—The Early Years: 1862–1900* (California: Roadrunner Press, 1993), 2.

7. page 3. **Mayer Samuel who knew Cecilia’s mother** . . . Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), 23.

8. pages 3–5. **In Pest a friend of his . . .** This and the rest of the Cyrano story is from Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), 23.

9. page 5. **“telling her everything . . .”** Houdini to Quincy Kilby, December 7, 1916, letter in the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University.

10. page 5. **They married in . . .** Facsimile of Mayer Samuel and Cecilia’s marriage record is in Weltman, *Houdini: Escape into Legend—The Early Years: 1862–1900* (California: Roadrunner Press, 1993), 2.

11. page 5. **by 1876 Mayer Samuel . . .** Mayer Samuel’s departure from Hungary is shrouded in myth. According to Milbourne Christopher, who wrote two books on Houdini, Mayer Samuel was forced to flee the country after he killed a nobleman in a duel. Weltman offers another explanation: Mayer Samuel answered a classified ad for a Rabbi that was placed in a German publication by the town of Appleton, Wisconsin. This seems unlikely too, since Mayer Samuel had influential friends in the town to where his family would ultimately migrate. We do know that he was gone by the beginning of 1876 because he was not present when his wife gave birth to Houdini’s younger brother Ferencz Dezso (Theo) on March 4, 1876 and was notified of the birth in a letter from Cecilia. [citations to above TK- W.K.]

12. page 5. **Cecilia and the five children . . .** Details about their trip and arrival are from Ron Hilgert, Radner and Boldt, *Houdini Comes to America* (Wisconsin: Houdini Historical Center, 1996), 25–35.

13. page 5. . . . **processed . . .** Ron Hilgert, Radner and Boldt, *Houdini Comes to America* (Wisconsin: Houdini Historical Center, 1996), 33.

14. page 5. **Cecilia was reunited . . .** Ron Hilgert, Radner and Boldt, *Houdini Comes to America* (Wisconsin: Houdini Historical Center, 1996). Hilgert suggests that the reunion took place based on census records that show that Cecilia’s sister, Rosalie Schonberger, was residing in New York as early as 1865.

15. page 5. . . . **by September, the entire Weiss family . . .** Ron Hilgert, Radner and Boldt, *Houdini Comes to America* (Wisconsin: Houdini Historical Center, 1996). In fact, the Weiss family might have been reunited in New York and then traveled together to Appleton. The September 28 *Appleton Crescent* reports that Mayer Samuel “Wise” had been in town for only a few weeks.

16. page 6. **Appleton was a stark . . . town counterparts** Benjamine Filene, *Afterword* in Ron Hilgert, Radner and Boldt, *Houdini Comes to America* (Wisconsin: Houdini Historical Center, 1996).

17. page 6. . . . **one of the towns . . . David Hammel . . .** *Appleton Post Crescent*, July 28, 1938, and *New York Evening Journal*, November 25, 1933. In the *Journal* Hardeen refers to David Hammel as Mayor Hammel. Hammel would become mayor of Appleton years later but wasn't when Mayer Samuel was hired as their first Rabbi.

18. page 6. **Back home he had been a soapmaker . . .** Mayer Samuel listed his occupation as *soapmaker* on his marriage documents from 1863. Facsimile in Weltman, *Houdini: Escape into Legend—The Early Years: 1862–1900* (California: Roadrunner Press, 1993).

19. page 6. . . . **when his friend Hammel told him . . .** *New York Evening Journal*, November 25, 1933.

20. page 6. **“the Hebrews of this city” . . . “able” . . . “remain permanently among us”** *Appleton Crescent*, September 28, 1878.

21. page 6. . . . **“the most profound respect”** *Appleton Crescent*, March 3, 1879.

22. page 6. **playing with some large iron spikes . . .** This story of stealing spikes comes from Milbourne Christopher, *Houdini: The Untold Story* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1969), 10. We have used a few stories from Christopher without substantiation. It's unfortunate that Christopher didn't provide sources for his research, but in many other instances where Christopher seemed to be the first source we did discover

corroboration. In this case we didn't find corroboration, but generally find Christopher dependable and the story not especially consequential.

23. page 6–8. **When Ehrich was about . . . bowed reverentially.** Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), 25.

24. page 8. **Jean Weitzman . . . “but luckily they grew back again.”** *American Hebrew*, June 13, 1924.

25. page 8. **There were two new . . .** Leopold's birth certificate is reproduced in facsimile in Weltman, 1993. Carrie Gladys's birth is somewhat obscure. In the 1930 census she states she's thirty-eight years old, had been born in Wisconsin of an Austrian father and French mother.

26. page 8. **“One morning my father . . . subject the better.”** Will Goldston's *The Magician Annual*, 1909–1910, 16.

27. page 9. **Settling in Milwaukee in . . .** *Appleton Post*, December 21, 1882. The family had left Appleton by this time.

28. page 9. **sold newspapers in front of Plankinton . . .** *The New York Evening Journal*, November 25, 1933.

29. page 9. **One day the two boys . . . nine-year-old's resourcefulness.** "Houdini as His Brother Saw Him" by Hardeen in *The Sphinx*, October 1936, 214.

30. page 9. **Ehrich Weiss hadn't even . . .** We have dramatized the details of Houdini working as an apprentice based on his account in Will Goldston's *The Magician Annual*, 1909–1910, 16. We've corroborated the story with details that follow in subsequent notes.

31. page 9. **Mr. Hanauer . . .** Upon Houdini's death, newspapers around the world ran many obituaries. *The Chicago Evening American's* Mildred Keogh did something the others didn't; she went back to Appleton to dig up people who actually remembered the young Houdini. The undated clipping in the Quincy Kilby scrapbook in the Boston Public Library reveals that she spoke with a number of Appleton residents who remembered Houdini from his childhood. One old-timer remembered that Houdini had been apprenticed to John Panauer [sic]. *The Appleton City Directory* for 1884 lists a John Hanauer as a gun dealer located on 124 Appleton, N. College Avenue.

32. page 9. . . . **notorious in Appleton as the boy . . .** Reported in "Visit of the escape artist," *Stevens Point Journal*, undated article from the collection of Tom Boldt.

33. page 10. . . . **remembered his buttonhook.** A clipping from a newspaper of unknown origin, most likely the *Boston Transcript*, April 7, 1906, (The "T" is missing from the clipping) in the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University.

34. page 10–11. **“The very manner in which I then picked . . .”** Will Goldston’s *The Magician Annual*, 1909–1910, 16.

35. page 11. **“He is the only person . . .”** *The Washington Times*, January 7, 1906, 7.

36. page 11. **Jack Hoeffler, an Appleton . . .** Johnny Hoeffler lived with his mother Dorothea and his father John at 7991 Appleton Street. Johnny was ten years old, per the federal census of 1880. This makes Jack Hoeffler four years older than Houdini and his Appleton neighbor.

37. page 11. . . . **red woolen stockings . . .** *Conjurers’ Monthly Magazine*, April 15, 1907, 264.

38. page 11. **Houdini always marked the . . .** Will Goldston’s *The Magician Annual*, 1909–1910, 16.

39. page 11. **He earned thirty-five cents** Houdini to *Houston Chronicle* journalist, undated 1916 article, cited in *Houdini’s Texas Tours, 1916 & 1923*, self-published by Ron Cartlidge, 2002, 35.

40. page 11. **“My training as a contortionist . . . first stunt.”** “Confessions of a Jailbreaker,” by Houdini, *Vanity Fair*, July 1919.

41. page 11. **“made a bolt for the door”** *Pall Mall Gazette*, March 19, 1904.
42. page 11. **He began by devouring . . .** This is from the text of Houdini’s 1922 speech before the club of Odd Volumes in Boston. It was printed in *The Sphinx* for October 1936, 205–206.
43. page 11. **“. . . pilfered from the pages . . .”** “Dusty Boxes in Magician’s Home Hide From Site a \$350,000 Library” otherwise undated or marked newspaper clipping in Quincy Kilby’s scrapbook in Boston Public Library.
44. pages 11–13. **Dr. Lynn was a magician and . . . curtain dropped.** This dramatic story of Dr. Lynn was composited from several sources. Chief among them was “What a Magician Did” from *The New York Times*, November 27, 1881, 14. Additionally we used a playbill from 1875 reproduced in *Facsimile in Price*, 1985, 121; “Dining With A Magician” *The New York Times*, December 25, 1881, 10; *The Magic Wand*, Vol. 15, 268–269.
45. page 13. **“I really thought that the man’s . . .”** Houdini’s diary, cited by Bernard C. Meyer, MD, in *Houdini—A Mind in Chains—A Psychoanalytical Portrait* (New York: Dutton, 1976), 11.

46. page 13. . . . **his portrait still hangs . . .** “Prof. Compars Herrmann” by Ottokar Fischer, *The Sphinx*, July 1938, 123. The painting is by Viennese portrait painter S. Dux and is at the Austrian Gallery of Paintings (*Österreichische Galerie*) in Vienna. Thanks to Magic Christian for giving us this information.

47. page 13. **His first marriage had made . . .** Compars Herrmann had been married to Rosa Csillag and Mayer Samuel had married her first cousin. Material about Compars’s life and marriage to Csillag is in “Prof. Compars Herrmann” by Ottokar Fischer published in *The Sphinx*, July 1938, 122–123, and 127. Houdini’s father’s relationship to Compars is in a letter from Houdini to Frederick Eugene Powell dated December 30, 1918. This letter was transcribed and in the *M-U-M* for May 1981, 18. Houdini states that Compars’s wife and Mayer Samuel’s wife are first cousins. Kellock says that they are sisters, but this is likely an error.

48. page 14. **Rabbi Weiss could never . . .** *Milwaukee News*, December 17, 1914.

49. page 14. **Cecilia was forced to repeatedly apply . . .** Provisions: Board Meeting Minutes, Hebrew Relief Society, 1867–1898, Meier Library Archives, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. Kenneth Silverman citation in his notes deposited in the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

50. page 14. **Keep working, tis wiser . . .** Houdini to Jim Bard, August 24, 1901, from the Steranko collection.

51. page 14. **In December of 1885 . . .** Herman Weiss's obit was published in *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, December 26, 1885, cited by Kenneth Silverman in his notes deposited in the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

52. page 15. **"My boy, I am poor . . ."** *Houdini Souvenir Program*, ca. 1926, 6.

53. pages 15–17. **He was gone before . . . in all its varieties.** This story of Delavan and the Flitcrofts comes from multiple sources: "Houdini's First Letter" by George Marquis, *The Sphinx*, April 1935, 1 and 50. *The Delavan Enterprise*, February 20, 1908. Several clippings not clearly marked or dated in the Kenneth Silverman Papers in the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin. *Mystifier* Second Quarter 1994, 4.

54. page 17. **His dutiful heir . . .** Houdini's diary for April 30, 1916, from the Dr. Bruce Averbook collection.

55. page 17. **shared a room in Mrs. Leffler's . . .** Mrs. Leffler was Catherine, the widow of Samuel. Her boarding house was listed at 244 East Seventy-ninth Street in New York City in the New York City Directory for 1890.

56. page 17. . . . **a job as a messenger boy** Houdini worked in New York in late 1887 for at least two messenger companies, Mutual District Messenger Co. (Limited) and American District Telegraph Company. At least two receipts for pay to H. Weiss are in an early Houdini scrapbook now in the collection of Tom Boldt.

57. page 17. **By 1888 they had saved . . .** Houdini's diary entry for April 29, 1907 indicates the address of 227 East Seventy-fifth Street. Unless otherwise noted, these diaries are in the collection of John Ernst, and the specific entries cited were reproduced by Kenneth Silverman in his notes in the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin. That it was on the second floor was deduced from a photograph where the apartment was clearly marked. This photograph is now in the collection of David Copperfield's International Museum and Library of the Conjuring Arts.

58. page 17. **Ehrich met them at Grand Central . . .** Milbourne Christopher *Houdini: A Pictorial Biography* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1976), 14.

59. page 17. **Christmas is coming . . .** "Harry Houdini as I Knew Him" by Betty Ross, Will Goldston's *Magical Quarterly*, Summer 1934, 19.

60. page 17. **"Shake me, I'm magic,"** Ibid.

61. page 19. **“Thank you for coming . . .”** Milbourne Christopher, *Houdini: The Untold Story* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1969), 19.

62. page 19. **Harry expanded . . . twenty-mile races.** “Houdini and His Thrills” *The Cleveland News* by Ed Bang, undated clipping (most likely from the end of January or early February 1922) in the collection of David Copperfield’s International Museum and Library of the Conjuring Arts.

63. page 19. **By 1890 . . . 305 East Sixty-ninth Street.** Houdini’s diary for May 20, 1916, from the collection of Dr. Bruce Averbook, corroborates the address.

64. page 19. **He learned some coin effects . . .** Milbourne Christopher, *Houdini: The Untold Story* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1969), 14.

65. page 19. . . . **1889, Jacob Hyman . . .** Joseph Rinn, *Sixty Years of Psychical Research* (New York: Truth Seeker Co., 1950), 65.

66. page 19. **“I know how he does that.”** “Houdini—The Most Mysterious Man in the World” by Raymond J. Brown, *Popular Science Monthly*, October 1925, 15.

67. page 19. **Schillerbund Hall . . . Hebrew Association.** Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), 36–37.

68. pages 19–21. **Memoirs of Robert-Houdin . . . contained the handkerchiefs.** From the Dr. R. Shelton Mackenzie translation of *Confidences d'un prestidigitateur*, Paris 1859.

69. page 21. **“My interest . . . life-long effort.”** Harry Houdini, *Unmasking of Robert Houdin* (Boston: E. P. Dutton, 1910), 7.

70. page 21. **Robert-Houdin believed . . .** Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin, *Secrets of Conjuring and Magic* (London: G. Routledge and Sons, 1878).

71. page 21. **Edwin Forrest . . .** *M-U-M*, November 1921, 84.

72. page 21. **adding the letter “i” . . .** Harry Houdini, *Unmasking of Robert Houdin* (Boston: E. P. Dutton, 1910), 7. Jacob Hyman’s contribution is noted by Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), 38.

73. page 21. **“I asked nothing more . . .”** Harry Houdini, *Unmasking of Robert Houdin* (Boston: E. P. Dutton, 1908), 7.

74. page 21. **April 3, 1891 . . .** Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), 36.

75. page 21. **“cheerfully recommend . . .** Ibid.

76. page 22. **Their first show was in the fall of 1891 . . .** “The Other Houdini” by Patrick Culliton and T. L. Williams, in *Genii*, Vol. 54, 1990, 826, dates the first appearances in 1891. Rinn, Houdini’s friend, specifies it was in the fall of 1891. Joseph Rinn, *Sixty Years of Psychological Research* (New York: Truth Seeker Co., 1950), 86.

77. page 22. **Huber’s Museum on . . .** Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), 64.

78. page 22. **George Dexter . . .** *Conjurers’ Monthly Magazine*, November 15, 1906, 86.

79. page 22. **Hyman decided to dissolve . . .** This curious document was written on the letterhead of the Newman Yeast Company, which was owned by Houdini’s maternal cousin. It is reproduced in Doug Henning with Charles Reynolds, *Houdini, His Legend and His Magic*, (New York: Times Books, 1977).

80. page 22. **Harry brought his brother Theo . . .** “Houdini as His Brother Saw Him” by Hardeen in *The Sphinx*, October 1936, 214.

81. pages 22–23. **“Hey, magician, go on home . . .” to “. . . your apron someday.”** This story is related in Fulton Oursler, *Behold This Dreamer!* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1964), 188. We took the liberty to change Oursler’s recollection of Rabbi Weiss calling

his son “Harry” and modified it to Ehrie, the less formal designation of his given name Ehrich.