

5. The King of Handcuffs

1. pages 77–78. **They’re plugged!** Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), 122–23.
2. page 77. **Houdini’s \$50 Dollar Challenge in Chicago.** Unidentified clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 14.2, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.
3. page 78. **Waldron’s “exposure” . . . received virtually no publicity** “Was an Unfair Test” in *Chicago Journal*, January 13, 1899, reproduced in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 15.1, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.
4. page 78. . . . **burgeoning scrapbook . . .** See Houdini’s Police letters scrapbook in the collection of the New York Public Library.
5. page 79. **He began to expose cardsharpping techniques . . .** For example, see “How Sleeves Are Stuffed with Cards,” unidentified newspaper clipping from the *San Francisco Chronicle* in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 27.1, 27a.1, 27a.2, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin; and an unidentified article from *Metropolitan Magazine*, in the Houdini

Pressbook 1894–1899, 50a.2, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

6. page 79. . . . **the three-card monte hustle . . .** “King of Magic Art,” unidentified clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 38.2, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

7. page 79. **“Morally, I had no compunctions . . .”** “Safe Breaker Wants Houdini to Be His Pal,” unidentified clipping in one of the Houdini scrapbooks in the collection of the Library of Congress.

8. page 79. **Houdini and Bess had just settled into their hotel.** This anecdote is taken from “A Chat with Houdini” in *The Referee*, April 6, 1910.

9. page 79. **Palm Garden . . .** Houdini’s diary, 1899, from the collection of Dr. Bruce Averbook.

10. page 80. **One of them was Martin Beck . . .** Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), 125–126.

11. page 80. **three sets of cuffs** Houdini’s account is in Will Goldston’s *The Magician Annual*, 1909–1910, 17. Houdini reported that Beck bought “a few” pairs of cuffs, we surmise it was three.

12. page 81. **“probably make you proposition . . .”** Beck letter to Houdini, March 14, 1899, from the collection of Mario Carrandi.
13. page 81. **Beck advised Houdini . . .** Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), 125–126.
14. page 81. **Creighton-Orpheum Theater . . .** Details were found in an article by Steve Grupe and Heike Langdon reprinted from the Opera Omaha October 25, 2002 program book, available online at http://www.omahaperformingarts.org/or_history.asp.
15. page 81. **No more sharing a dime museum stage with the Marvelous Little Askenas Triplets . . .**” Ad in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 15.1, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.
16. page 81. **The Dog-Faced Boy . . .** Houdini’s diary for September 1898, from the collection of Dr. Bruce Averbook.
17. page 81. **“He gives a performance that rivals in almost every respect . . .”** From “Amusements” article in *The World-Herald*, April 3, 1899, in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 16.1, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

18. page 81. . . . **comparing him favorably to Alexander Herrmann . . .** “Welsh Brothers Circus” in *The New Era*, April 20, 1898 in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 13.1, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin. See also “Successful Showmen” in *Mt. Carmel Daily News*, June 11, 1898, in the HH Pressbook 1894–1899, 13.2.

19. page 81. . . . **challenge Houdini to escape . . . time lock mechanism . . .** Culled from three clippings from the *World-Herald* in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 17.1, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

20. page 81. **he didn’t draw the curtain** From clipping in *Kansas City Times*, April 24, 1899, in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 24.2, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

21. page 81. **“1st time, I took off Hcuffs . . .”** Houdini’s diary, April 1899, from the collection of Dr. Bruce Averbook.

22. page 81. **The Wizard of Shackles . . .** Houdini’s changing billing designations were found in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

23. page 82. **The King of Handcuffs . . .** The first known time Houdini used this title was in Joplin, Missouri and was reported in “The Pavilion Opening,” *Joplin Daily News*, May 15, 1889, clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 24.4, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

24. page 82. . . . **local merchants began featuring him in ads . . .** For example, see the Nebraska Clothing Company ad in the *Kansas City Star*, April 27, 1899, clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 24.3, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

25. page 82. **“Houdini wastes a lot of valuable time . . .”** See “At the Theaters,” *Kansas City Star*, April 10, 1899, clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 17.2, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin. On the same page is an ad for the Central Meat Market that claims that “Houdini can get away from these handcuffs, but you can’t get away” their ridiculously low prices for meat.

26. page 82. **“I’m Houdini. You’re from Missouri . . .”** Cited in another Nebraska Clothing Company ad in the *Kansas City Star*, August 21, 1899, clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 38.2, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

27. pages 82–3. **The train was just about to leave the station . . .** This anecdote is taken from Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), 129–30.

28. page 83. **The counterfeiting of silver dollars in the Western portion of the country . . .** “Bogus Silver Dollars,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 1, 1899, 2.

29. page 83. **“Houdini was much pleased with the machine . . .”** Reported in “He Pleases the Coppers” in *The Times* (Kansas City), April 11, 1899, clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 22.2, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

30. page 83. **Houdini shuttled back and forth between San Francisco and Los Angeles . . .** Houdini’s diary, 1899, from the collection of Dr. Bruce Averbook.

31. page 83. **Chief Wilkie also made a trip to California . . .** See article “Counterfeiters in California” in *The Washington Post*, June 21, 1899, 3.

32. page 83. **hotel room for six dollars a week** Harold Kellock, *Houdini His Life Story* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928), 130–132.

33. page 85. **Chief Lee . . .** “King of Handcuffs Mystifies Police” in *The Call*, June 3, 1899, clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 26.1, in the collection of the

Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin. For Houdini's own account see "Secrets of My Handcuff Tricks" in *The Examiner*, July 23, 1899, clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 39.1, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

34. page 85. **Chief Glass's office . . .** Accounts in both *The Herald* and *Los Angeles Record* on June 23, 1899 are contained in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 32.2, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

35. page 85. **How I Effect My Rope . . .** Houdini penned an article "How I Effect My Rope Escape" in the *Sunday Examiner Magazine*, clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 29.5, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

36. page 85. **"Anyone can do the escape act if they . . ."** "Houdini Says It's Easy if You Only Know How" in *The Evening Express* (Los Angeles), July 8, 1899, clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 35.1, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

37. page 86. **"Professor Benzoni"** Benzoni exposed Houdini's "tricks" in the *Los Angeles Record*, clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 35.2., in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin; and in the

San Francisco Examiner, July 9, 1899, clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 37.1, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin. Houdini responded on July 14, 1899 in the *San Francisco Report*, clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 39.2, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin. For background on Benzon, see “He is the “King of Cards,” in the *Kansas City Star*, April 23, 1899. This clipping, in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 73.1, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin, was annotated by Houdini who wrote “Not” before “King of Cards.”

38. page 86. **“Professor Pooley . . .”** “Houdini’s Tricks” in *Boston Sunday Post*, January 21, 1900, clipping in Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 49.2, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin. The idea that the feud was staged is also alluded to by T. Nelson Downs in a letter to *The Sphinx* dated October 8, 1903 and published in the October issue. In referring to Benzon, Downs says “... the man who exposed (?) Houdini’s act...”

39. page 86. **Houdini sponsors Benzon in SAM...** The word *sponsors* is a miscommunication between Kalush and Sloman. What’s meant here is that Houdini and Benzon were both at numerous SAM meetings together in later years and there was never any indication of any animosity by Houdini toward Benzon.

40. page 86. **“I know I can do it and I will . . .”** Unidentified clipping from a St. Louis paper, “Will Jump In Irons,” contained in the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University.

41. page 87. **In Buffalo, a few months later . . .** “Houdini Very Deft” in *Buffalo Express*, March 5, 1900, clipping in Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 59.1, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

42. page 87. **“I’m glad to see you Houdini . . .”** Houdini’s test with Inspector Watts is recounted in “Slippery Hun” in the *Boston Journal*, January 9, 1900, clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 46.2, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin; and in “King of Handcuffs,” *Boston Traveler*, January 8, 1900, clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 47.1, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin. As for Watts’s relationship to the IACP, *The Washington Post* on April 7, 1903 reported that Watts would read a paper at the annual convention of the IACP held that year in New Orleans.

43. page 88. **“The King of Handcuffs is well named . . .”** *The Boston Herald*, January 13, 1900, clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 47.1, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

44. page 88. **“. . . scored a bigger hit” than Ching Ling Foo . . .** Ibid.

45. page 88. **“I’ve spread your fame . . .”** Houdini’s visit to the John Lovell Arms Company and with Captain Charles Bean was documented by a *The Boston Herald* reporter on January 14, 1900, clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 48.1, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

46. page 88. **“I don’t know about that . . .”** Houdini’s encounter with the thumb cuffs was reported in *The Boston Sunday Journal*, January 21, 1900, clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 50.1, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

47. page 89. **“Houdini may now add to his titles . . .”** *Boston Transcript*, January 23, 1900, clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 50.1, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

48. page 89. **Providence, Dr. Waitt challenge . . .** *Providence R.I. News*, January 26, 1900, clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 50.1, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

49. page 89. **Houdini had met Waitt . . .** Houdini’s local Keith’s press agent, H. J. Dillenback, wrote a misleading press release that claimed that “Dr. Waitt came here of his own volition, unknown to us and subjected Houdini to this test without any previous

knowledge by us [or] by Houdini of what the Doctor intended to do.” This statement is highly unlikely. A copy of this letter, originally from the collection of Marie Blood, was placed in the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin, by Kenneth Silverman.

50. page 89. **Waitt would become an intimate friend . . .** Houdini’s large correspondence with Waitt, which includes detailed discussions about challenges to Houdini that Waitt designed, is in the Harvard Theatre Collection in the Pusey Library, Harvard University.

51. page 89. **“Let me out! Let me out!”** This account is taken from an article “Wife in a Trunk, Key Lost,” which appeared in *The New York World*, February 5, 1900, clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 53.1, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin. The same article was also picked up by *The Philadelphia News* the next day.

52. page 90. **“Harry, I’ve never known an act . . .”** Bess’s sacrifice was reported in “Houdini’s Personal Side,” which appeared in *The Pittsburgh Leader* on March 18, 1906 and is collected in the Robinson Locke scrapbook, now in the collection of the New York Public Library.

53. pages 90–91. . . . **bitterly listen to Harry’s patter . . . use the word “I . . .”** There is much anecdotal evidence to suggest that Bess, in later years, resented what she perceived

as Houdini's ego. Specifically, a backstage rant at the New York Hippodrome ("Bess reflected in the dressing room: 'I . . . I . . . I . . . That's all he ever says! That's his favorite word. I . . . I . . . I . . . '") was reported in a comprehensive profile of her by David Charvet, "Beatrice Houdini," which appeared in the October 1995 issue of *Magic*, 54–63. The story seems to be verified by an item in the Houdini collection at the Library of Congress. It is a tearsheet of an article by Houdini where the word "I" has been circled every time it was used, which was a lot. Just who did the circling is not known.

54. page 91. . . . **collecting dolls . . . sewing costume . . .** Bess would go on to amass a huge doll collection, noted by Houdini in many interviews, perhaps to deflect criticism from his staggeringly huge collections of books and escape hardware. Bess not only collected dolls but also created dolls that were often given away as table prizes at various SAM banquets, after Houdini had ascended to the society's presidency. She also designed not only her costume but also the costumes of the rest of the troupe when Houdini put together his huge magic show near the end of his career.

55. page 91. ". . . **little man with a thin, pale face . . .**" This story is reported in *The Chicago Times-Herald*, April 6, 1900, clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 60.1, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

56. page 91. “. . . **created the sensation of the day . . .**” *Chicago Herald*, April 6, 1900, clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 59.2, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

57. page 91. “**Getting out of a cell . . .**” *The Kansas City Star*, April 11, 1900, clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 60.2, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

58. page 92. “. . . **one of the greatest living masters of mystery . . .**” *Toronto World*, February 20, 1900, clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 55.1, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

59. page 92. “**You will find [him] to be the most appreciate . . .**” Letter from Dillenback to Kierans, February 3, 1900. Originally in Marie Blood collection, copy put on file in collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin, by Kenneth Silverman.

60. page 92. . . . **coworker Gorlitzer . . .** Houdini’s compassion toward his older fellow necktie cutter is documented in two moving letters that Gorlitzer wrote Houdini, one from June 23, 1900, and the other from August 14, 1900. Both letters are in the collection of the Harry Ransom Center in the University of Texas at Austin.

61. page 92. “. . . **thunderstruck** . . .” Gorlitzer, who knew English as a second language, actually spelled it “tondor strack.”

62. page 92. **In Philadelphia, two men challenged Houdini . . .** *Philadelphia Item*, February 18, 1900, clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 55.1, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

63. page 93. **Denver’s “finest” had cut the eyes . . .** *Denver Sunday Times*, October 8, 1899, clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 43.3, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin.

64. page 93. **E. P. Wilkins** This story has been repeated over and over by authors of Houdini books. It was first reported in “Houdini Locked In,” an article, according to Houdini’s handwritten note, in the *Kansas City Globe* that was pasted into the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 62.1, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin. “This is the original story,” Houdini explained.

65. pages 93–94. **“The real Harry Houdini who chats with his friends . . .”** This regrettably unidentified *Omaha Daily News* reporter wrote one of the most perceptive and eloquent portraits of Houdini we’ve come across. It appeared in the April 21, 1900 issue and is on page 61.1 of the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin. He not only nailed

Houdini's driven personality and Bess's "singularly sun-shiny disposition," but also even got a major scoop, reporting in April that Houdini would undergo "severe tests" in Scotland Yards [sic], which casts doubt on the "official" storyline that it was Dundas Slater's idea to take Houdini to see Inspector Melville. (See next chapter).

66. pages 94–5. **Professor Paul Alexander Johnstone . . .** Houdini's seemingly "spontaneous" trip to get his palm read was documented by the reporter at the unknown paper who wrote up the incident as "Harry Houdini's Hand," clipping in the Houdini Pressbook 1894–1899, 61.2, in the collection of the Houdini Historical Center at the Outagamie Museum, Appleton, Wisconsin. We are indebted to Ricky Jay for the revelation that Johnstone was actually a magician, casting new light on the whole proceeding. Houdini's confession of his fear of "exposure" seems all too real, though.

67. page 95. **SS Kensington . . .** Ron Hilgert did yeoman's work in tracking down all of Houdini's various sailings. Ron Hilgert, Radner and Boldt, *Houdini Comes to America* (Wisconsin: Houdini Historical Center, 1996).