

The  **GREATEST ILLUSIONIST** of our **TIME ...**

IN PERSON COPPERFIELD

International

presents
MUSEUMand Library
of the
Conjuring Arts

OF

VEGAS

Take
A TRIP
back
in time

WORLD'S
LARGEST
collection
of
artifacts
documenting
HISTORY
of art of
MAGIC



RARE
ITEMS
in working
order

A
SIGHT
EVERY
MAN
Woman
and
CHILD
Should
SEE

BY CAROLINE FONTEIN

Vegas.com

IT'S MIDNIGHT AND SOMEWHERE IN LAS VEGAS, PEOPLE ARE LINED UP OUTSIDE OF WHAT APPEARS TO BE AN AVERAGE LOOKING WAREHOUSE WAITING FOR THEIR TOUR OF DAVID COPPERFIELD'S INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM AND LIBRARY OF CONJURING ARTS TO START.

Copperfield has become synonymous with magic, but what many people may not know is that he also has the world's largest collection of artifacts that document the history of magic.

He was initially prompted to start his collection in 1991 when a friend approached him and suggested that he purchase the Mulholland Library of the Conjuring and the Allied Arts from an auction in order to keep all of the artifacts together.

"It's funny because in the very beginning I never paid attention to the history of magic... I acquired these things just wanting to do the right thing historically, but then I kind of got a new respect for these past masters," said Copperfield.

Since then he has purchased several other large collections totaling more than 80,000 different pieces of historical artifacts including countless Houdini items that were donated to the Mulholland Collection by Houdini himself. Contained in this collection is the only known recording of Houdini's voice, pressed onto wax cylinders by Thomas Edison in 1914.

Looking at all of the different Houdini artifacts is almost like flipping through the pages of his scrapbook.

"If Houdini were to come back he would see his entire life before his eyes," said Copperfield during the tour.

The museum contains everything from Houdini's baby shoe to his first magic wand. People may know about Houdini and his amazing feats, but Copperfield's museum actually houses those original illusions, in working order. He has a pair of handcuffs from one of Houdini's most notable escapes as part of a challenge by "The London Daily Mirror" in 1904. Houdini's infamous Water Torture Cell, a glass and steel cabinet that was locked and filled with water, which he would escape from while being suspended upside down, is also on display in the museum, among other of his signature illusions.

What most people only have the opportunity to

read about, a fortunate few get to actually see and experience as part of Copperfield's exclusive tour only for invited guests or other magic scholars.

Apart from the illusions, Copperfield has original posters, playbills, images and prints that chronicle the works of the greatest magicians of all time including Howard Thurston, Harry Kellar, Dante, Alexander - The Man Who Knows, Robert Houdin, Chung Ling Soo and others.

Walking through his warehouse and museum is like taking a trip back in time where you can catch a glimpse of the various achievements of these different magicians and the imprint that they made on the history of magic.

"It was an extraordinary experience, certainly something that I had never even remotely had the chance to be exposed to...," said Becca Thrash, who went on the tour with her husband and friends in March.

Not only does Copperfield collect the ephemera of different famous magicians, but he also has a carefully organized collection of items from his own career that spans everything from his first business card to his catalog of media clippings, various props and illusions. His collection even includes the actual Macy's Department Store magic counter where he purchased his first magic trick when he was a young boy.

With so many items to choose from, Cop-



ALEXANDER'S TURBAN

perfield relies on his audience to help dictate what he is going to talk about and feature during his tours.

"It really depends on the group. People that are lay public... We'll talk a lot about Houdini because that's a name that's familiar to people. We'll show a lot of things that are visually understandable..." said Copperfield. "If we have magicians and scholars of magic, everything changes... they would care much more about ... people that are legendary in the world of magicians and sleight of hand. We'll adapt it for the people depending on who is actually going to be there."

As Copperfield guides people through his magnificent museum, he stops to describe the significance of different pieces from his collection. Even if you are not familiar with some of the magicians mentioned on the tour, his explanations give you an immediate appreciation of them and their contribution to the art of magic.

He stops at an interesting item from Chung Ling Soo, an American magician and explains that many magicians, like Soo, pretended to be from Asia to add mystique and exoticism to their act and persona. Next, Copperfield describes how Soo died in 1918 while on stage when his bullet catch trick went awry, and points out a rifle on display that was used during this fatal performance. There's an eerie excitement in the air as guests look at this haunting artifact.

Another unusual feature in the museum is a room filled entirely with different marionettes including Charlie McCarthy, a renowned figure in the art of ventriloquism used by Edgar Bergen. The glaring motionless faces hanging in every direction create an uneasy feeling as guests move about the room.

The items in the museum are meticulously arranged with a fascinating piece of history at every turn. Posters, images, props and other artifacts line the walls as you visit the different exhibits.

Copperfield explains that his most valuable piece in the museum is an automaton, called 'The Singing Lesson', created by Robert Houdin, a French magician considered to be the father of modern magic. The Singing Lesson, an intricately designed woman who attempts to teach a bird how to sing, is the only one like it in the world, and it was created for royalty in the 1840s.

There are several of Houdini's automatons in the museum. These figures operate using the same technology as clocks and can be thought of as the predecessors of modern day animatronics. It is amazing to see these rare antiquities still operating and in perfect condition.

Along with his captivating explanations,

Copperfield weaves his magic into the experience by performing some illusions during the tour. As he moves on to different exhibits, it becomes clear that part of his enjoyment from having this incredible collection comes from being able to share it with other people.

"He's so exuberant and excited and passionate about what he does. Who knows how many times he's given that tour, but you would have thought it was his first... It's inconsequential if you like magic or not ... you are awestruck by his passionate devotion of his craft and his art," said Thrash.

Copperfield's collection of artifacts has attracted magicians, scholars and even people who have created movies based on the history of magic.

"People that do research for films about historical magic have used the museum as a resource..." said Copperfield. He mentioned the director and creative team from the movie "The Prestige" as previous guests on the tour. "All of the magic movies that have come out have used our archives as a resource to make sure they get it right."

As far as having a favorite piece in the museum, Copperfield does not take much notice of anything from his own career, but he finds a lot of joy in discovering new pieces from other famous magicians and being able to preserve them.

"From my own personal history, nothing is a favorite of mine. I don't pay attention to my own stuff at all... I guess one man's work is another man's treasure..." said Copperfield.



HOUDINI'S HANDCUFFS