

Who? What? Where? When? Why?

A PHOTO PUZZLE CASE STUDY

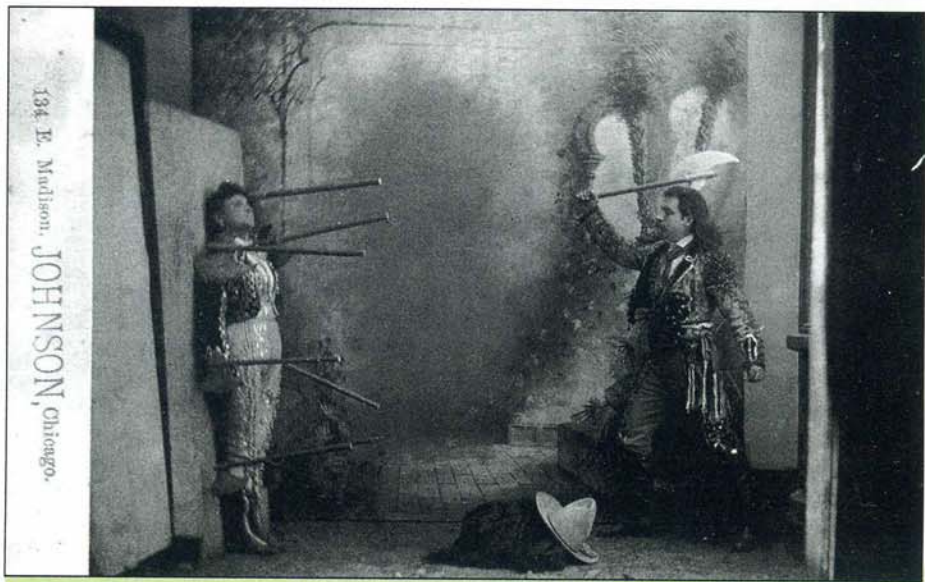
by Colleen Fitzpatrick

When you consider all the problems we are facing these days, one of the first things you *won't* think about is the epidemic of unidentified photos we are experiencing. This problem has long been overshadowed by the war in Iraq and the price of gasoline, but nevertheless is becoming an increasingly important issue among photo-puzzle fans.

In the November 2007 issue of *GAMES*, I wrote about some of the exciting work we've been doing in analyzing old photos, using as examples many pictures we have featured in the weekly photoquizzes we host on our website at www.forensicgenealogy.info. Although each one has taught us a new lesson on how to discover a photo's who, what, where, when, and why, we felt that one photograph in particular deserved more discussion than it could be given in my earlier article.

One of our most interesting photo puzzles featured the picture of a knife thrower and his assistant shown above. We first came across it on the Dead Fred website at www.deadfred.com, a site dedicated to the identification of old photographs.

In presenting our readers with a new photoquiz each week, we've challenged ourselves to discover new ways to glean clues from old pictures. Along the way, we've found that any aspect of a photo can lead to discovering when and where it was taken, or who appears in it. The edges, the paper it is printed on, the shape, and the back can provide important clues. (And even the picture on the front can be critical in identifying it!) But have you ever considered that the most important clue to identifying an old photo might not be the person posing in front of the camera, but rather the person behind the camera taking the picture? Sometimes the subject matter of a photograph



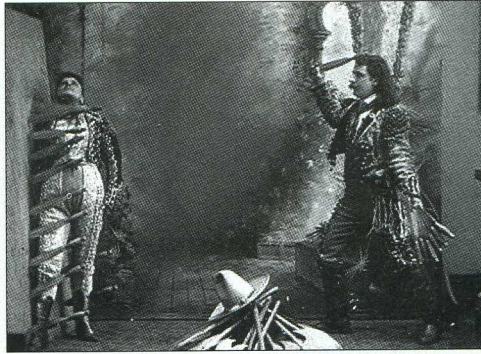
This 19th-century cabinet card photo became the focus of a lengthy investigation.

is not the key to discovering its story. You might get more information by researching the photographer.

Our knife-thrower picture is a cabinet card from the late 19th century. This type of photograph is an albumen print produced on paper and mounted on thick cardstock. The earliest kind of albumen print was known as the Carte de Visite (CdV), introduced in 1859 as an alternative to more expensive, one-of-a-kind Daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, and tintypes. The cabinet card, a larger version of the CdV, was wildly popular until it was replaced by the snapshot toward the end of the 19th century. Because of their low cost and wide availability, cabinet cards and CdVs make up the majority of pictures from the 1800s that are still found in family collections and antique stores today.

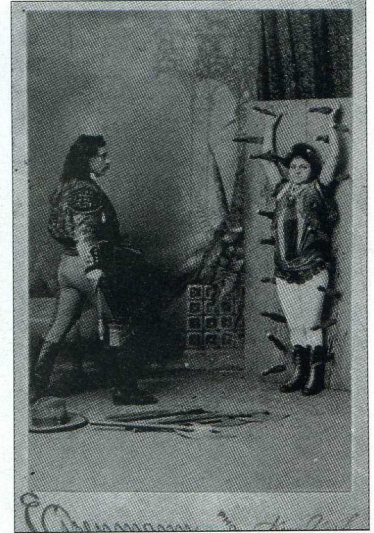
Cabinet cards were not only popular as a way to capture personal portraits of family members. They were also used by many performers to advertise their acts. We guessed that this was the purpose behind our knife-thrower picture. But to feature it as a quiz, we needed more definite information about the thrower and his accomplice.

Because the photo had few hints to the identity of the performers, we tried researching the name of the photographer on Google. A rule of thumb in photo identification is to start your investigation by researching any writing that might appear on or in a picture. Unfortunately, this did not work for us. The



Left: Meet The Great Throwdini, a.k.a. The Rev. Dr. David Adamovich, an ordained minister and the Guinness-recognized fastest knife-thrower in the world.

Center and right: These two photos showing The Great Arcaris are posted on Adamovich's website.



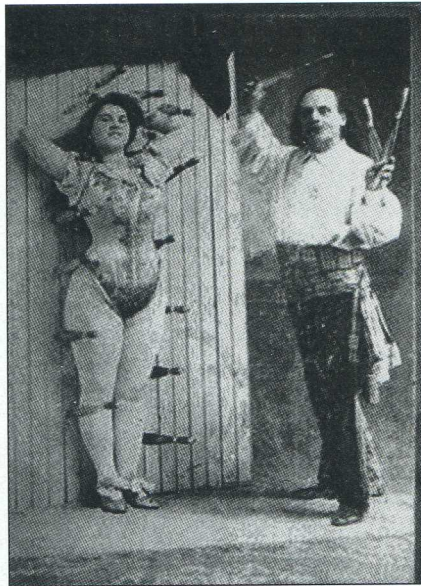
only discovery we made was that there were thousands of Johnsons in Chicago, including many who were photographers. This came as no surprise. Even when combined with the address "134 E. Madison St., Chicago," the name Johnson was too common to produce any specific results.

While a real die-hard would have located a historical society willing to look up Johnson Photography in old Chicago city directories, we decided it would be easier to continue our Internet search using other search terms. We tried searching on the keywords "Knife Thrower."

Bingo!

Meet The Great Throwdini, a.k.a. The Rev. Dr. David Adamovich, an ordained minister and the Guinness-recognized fastest knife thrower in the world. (above left). David has performed in circuses and theaters around the

world, and has even produced his own off-Broadway show called *Maximum Risk*. We were thrilled that he immediately recognized the thrower as his idol, The Great Arcaris, Father of Modern Knife Throwing. David even had several photographs of Arcaris posted on his website, www.knifethrower.com, including the two shown above (center and right). One was similar to the picture we found on Dead Fred. The other was a cabinet card of Arcaris at about the same age, taken by a photographer identified by his logo as "Eisenmann, New York." Additional photos from David's website (below) depicted Arcaris in various stages of life. On close inspection, we noticed that in his photo as an older man, Arcaris apparently had had a stroke that affected his right side, the side away from the camera. We wondered how this had impacted his career. Judging from Throwdini's collection of photographs, Arcaris appeared to be right-handed.



Arcaris at various stages of life, as seen in photos at David Adamovich's website.



This photo from Syracuse University's Ronald G. Becker Collection shows Arcaris with his sister Kate as his target girl.

While it was promising to know the name of the thrower, a Google search using the name "Arcaris" directed us to the Arcaris pharmaceutical company, which we guessed had nothing to do with Arcaris the performer. However, Googling the photographer's name, Eisenmann, was far more helpful. We were led to the Ronald G. Becker collection of Charles Eisenmann photographs housed at Syracuse University in New York. According to library.syr.edu/information/spcollections/digital/eisenmann/:

The Ronald G. Becker Collection of Charles Eisenmann Photographs includes more than one thousand photographs of 19th century sideshows and circuses, 403 by photographer Charles Eisenmann and 155 by his successor Frank Wendt, the remainder by unknown photographers. Most of the photographs depict the physical abnormalities of humans and animals featured at these shows. Subjects include P.T. Barnum, the P. T. Barnum Firm (Barnum and Bailey Circus), and Tom Thumb.

We discovered through further reading that Charles Eisenmann worked in the Bowery in New York in the 1890s and that his clientele included celebrities like Mark Twain and Annie Oakley. He photographed stars of the New York stage, and supplied the Duke Tobacco Company with cheesecake photos to stuff into their tobacco cans. He was also the

innovator of the postage stamp-size portrait photograph.

The Becker collection included several cabinet cards depicting The Great One, dating from the 1890s, including the photo shown at left of Arcaris with the same target girl who appears in our Dead Fred photo. She is identified by the autograph as his sister Kate. It reads:

*To Bert Cole
Sig. G. Arcaris and Sister Kate
Walter L. Main and Von Amberg Show
1890*

The two photos below are additional cabinet cards—one is from the Beckman collection taken by Ginther in Buffalo, New York, and the other was taken by an unknown photographer.

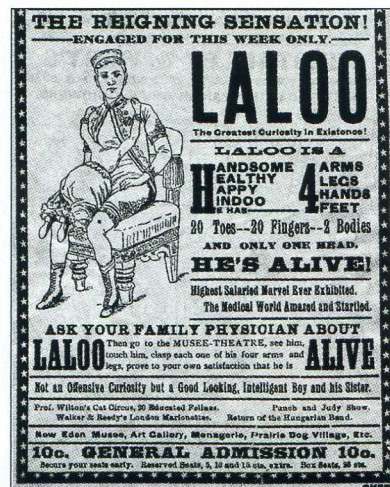
We now had some information about our knife thrower: (1) his first name started with a G; (2) the woman in the picture was his sister Kate; (3) he lived around 1890; (4) he performed for the circus; and (5) he was probably Italian, as *Sig.* is the abbreviation for *Signore*, the Italian equivalent of "Mister."

We posted Throwdini's Eisenmann photograph as part of the quiz asking for the performer's name, figuring that a search on Eisenmann's name would lead our Quizmasters to Arcaris's identity. Our website turned into a photoquiz shark-feed as information about Arcaris poured in from our readers. Two of our top Quizmasters, Grace Hertz and Mary Fraser, quickly unearthed the Arcaris family's history through census records. In 1920, we found him living in Detroit with his wife Mary and their four children. The census told us that Gustavo Arcaris and his wife were both born in Italy. They emigrated to the U.S. in 1887, where they were naturalized in 1897. Gustavo's occupation was listed as "actor in the theatre and the circus." The couple is listed along with their three sons, Salvatore, Louis, and George, and one daughter, Virginia. Also listed was Clara, Louis's wife. We were hot on the trail.

The 1920 census also told us that all the Arcaris children had been born in Illinois, and that Virginia was still with the circus, but the three sons had gone into the adding machine repair

The photo of Arcaris on the left was taken by Ginther in Buffalo, New York. The one on the right was taken by an unknown photographer.





Left: This photo of Hubert Wilke, who bore a resemblance to Arcaris, led to a case of mistaken identity.
 Center and right: One side of this playbill features an Arcaris performance, while the other features "Laloo, The Handsome, Healthy, Happy Hindoo."

business. By 1930, Gustavo and Mary Arcaris were living in Detroit with their youngest son George and his new wife Joy. Salvatore is listed next door with his wife Margareth and their three daughters Olive Mae, Esther Jane, and Bernie Catherine.

Knowing the names of the Arcaris children, we were also able to find the two oldest sons in the 1900 census living without their parents in a boardinghouse in Chicago. It is likely that Gustavo and Mary were on tour at the time, and left the boys to be cared for by friends and family. Their daughter Virginia was not listed with her brothers, so perhaps her parents had taken her with them on tour, not wanting to leave her at the boardinghouse.

However, we followed a few blind alleys during our search. For example, we were temporarily thrown off track by a comment on the back of one of the photos from the Becker collection that identified Arcaris as Hubert Wilke. The collection had a cabinet card of Wilke, produced by Eisenmann, that closely resembled the picture of Arcaris playing his flute. (Compare the photo of Arcaris in the right-hand picture at the bottom of page 8 with the photo of Wilke above.) Fortunately, we discovered that this was a case of mistaken identity. Wilke was a contemporary of John Barrymore, who performed on the stage and screen during the 1920s. Wilke had no connection to Arcaris other than a passing resemblance.

In the meantime, "Throw" (we had come to be on a first-name basis)

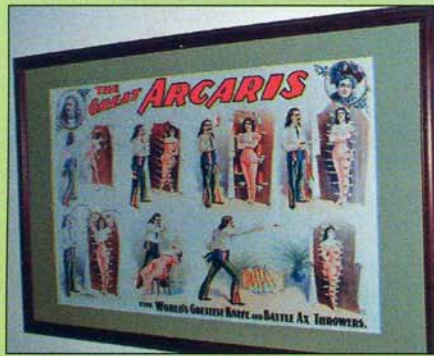
unearthed a playbill of an Arcaris performance for Winstanley and West (shown above center and right). We weren't able to find any information on this theater group or circus, but judging from Arcaris's appearance on the flyer, it probably dated from the late 1890s or early 1900s.

The other side of the playbill featured "Laloo, The Handsome, Healthy, Happy Hindoo; Not an Offensive Curiosity, but a Good Looking, Intelligent Boy and His Sister." Laloo, an Indian Muslim, was born in Oovonin, Oudh, India in 1869 (some say 1874). His parasitic twin was a nearly perfect miniature man attached to his chest, although it lacked a head.¹ Laloo became a sensation, touring with the major circuses, including Barnum & Bailey and the Ringling Bros., in the late 1800s. Although the twin was male, it was often billed as female to add to the sensation. Alas, Laloo and his twin came to a tragic end. In 1905 he embarked on a tour with the Norris & Rowe Circus with the intent to tour Mexico, but the train crashed soon after leaving New York and Laloo (and the twin) died in the accident. (This tells us that the playbill was printed before 1905). Laloo was also a client of Charles Eisenmann. A cabinet card of Laloo produced by Eisenmann is shown at left.



Back to Throwdini, who was determined to find the Arcaris family. "Where should I look?" he asked. "I found over a hundred Arcari [plural of Arcaris] in the U.S. phone books online."

But Throw is a cut above the rest. He nailed it on the first try. He picked the name David Arcaris from the online records because David is his own first name. Bingo! David Arcaris was The Great One's great-grandson, and he still had his great-grandfather's old knives and his flute. He also had a poster advertising his act. But he and the rest of the Arcari had no photographs of



David Arcaris, great-grandson of Gustavo Arcaris, still has a poster advertising his great-grandfather's act, as well as his knives and his flute.

their famous ancestor. We sent them more than a dozen. The news spread like wildfire through the Arcaris clan. They were amazed at the amount of information we had unearthed about their famous ancestor, all starting with our search for the photographer who took his picture. As Jacqueline Arcaris expressed to Throw:

David,

I think this is amazing. How wonderful of you and Dr. Fitzpatrick to work so hard on our family's history. I can't tell you how many times I admired Gustavo's clarinets, knives, and battle axes as a child. My mother (Susan Lio Arcaris) has them still.

I have always thought that Gustavo was discovered in Italy by Barnum and Bailey Circus. B&B liked him so much that they brought him to the U.S. as part of their act. I also thought that his last name in Italy was really Arcari, and that the "s" was added on when he came to the U.S. My Godmother, Bernie (Arcaris) Rustemeyer also knows a lot of the history, too.

Thank you for sharing yours and Dr. Fitzpatrick's hard work on the Web. It is truly fascinating to see. I love all the old photographs.

Jacqueline (Jax) Arcaris

CHARLES EISENMANN

There is more to this story. Since we featured the picture of The Great Arcaris as a quiz photo, we were contacted by Bob Wainwright, the great-grandson of Charles Eisenmann. Bob visited us one evening and shared nearly 500 Eisenmann photographs with us. These include pictures of Eisenmann's family and friends, as well as many of his famous clients. In return, we helped Bob research Eisenmann's genealogy.

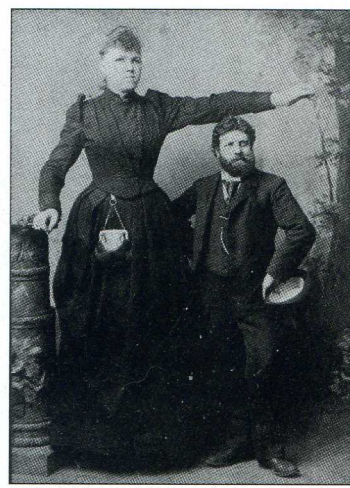
A self-portrait photo of Charles Eisenmann is shown below at left. Charles Eisenmann was born in Germany in 1848. According to census records, he came to the U.S. in 1868 when he was 20 years old. As a young man he was apprenticed to the W.W. Washburn photography studio in New Orleans as a photograph printer. There, he married Amelia Gastauer on March 18, 1875, against her father's wishes. The couple moved to New York City immediately, where Amelia tragically died in childbirth along with their newborn son, Charles Jr., on November 28, 1875. The faded photograph on the right below was discovered by Eisenmann's descendants on the back of a photograph of Eisenmann and his second wife. It is assumed to be of Amelia Gastauer, but we may never know the woman's identity for sure.

Eisenmann married his second wife Dora Reicher on June 29, 1879, in Manhattan. The couple is pictured in the left-hand photo at the top of page 11. He was 31, she was 16. Dora's parents owned the boardinghouse where Eisenmann lived. At the time



Left: A self-portrait photo of Charles Eisenmann, who photographed The Great Arcaris.

Right: This faded photograph is assumed to be that of Eisenmann's wife, Amelia Gastauer, but the woman's identity may never be known for sure.



Left: This photo shows Eisenmann with his second wife, Dora Reicher.
Center: Eisenmann photographed many circus performers, such as Madame Devere the Bearded Lady.
Right: This giantess towers over Eisenmann.

Eisenmann and Dora married, her parents had just died, leaving Dora as the oldest of seven children. Eisenmann supported Dora and her siblings while they raised eight children of their own—seven daughters and one son.

Eisenmann continued in the photography business, taking pictures of many stage actors, circus performers, and other notables of his day. He photographed the famous as well as the obscure. His subjects included circus performers like General Tom Thumb, Jo Jo the Dog-faced Boy, the Wild Men of Bomeo, Madame Devere the Bearded Lady, and the Skeleton Man. He also photographed Siamese twins, giants, dwarfs, the obese, skeleton men and women, armless and legless “wonders,” albinos, and tattoo artists. (See photos above.) While many of these “freaks” were genuine, many were not, having been created by the imagination and costuming talents of sideshow managers.²

In the late 1890s, Eisenmann sold an interest in his studio to George Wendt, his business partner who later became his son-in-law. By this time, the albumen print, his specialty, was losing popularity in favor of the silver gelatin print.

After financial reversals put the company out of business in 1901, Eisenmann became the head photographer for the Dupont Corporation. Charles Eisenmann died in December 8, 1927 at the age of 78.


BACK TO THROW...

Of the many quizzes featured on our website, this one was our favorite in that it brought together so many exciting elements—a team of photo-sleuthing experts, a world-class knife thrower/ordained minister, the grandson of Charles Eisenmann, and of course, Arcaris and his descendants—not to mention Laloo the Happy Hindoo and a passing connection to the adding machine repair community.

One of the best parts was that we had the opportunity to meet the Great Throwdini recently when he came out to California for a guest appearance on *I've Got a Secret*. He spent a couple of days with us, giving us world-class knife-throwing

lessons using lumber from the house next door that was under construction.

I knew nothing about knife throwing before all this started, but now I know more than I ever dreamed I would. When Throw offered me a job as his target girl (which I politely declined), I asked him, “Throw, what happens if you miss?”

Patently he replied, “You’re *supposed* to miss.” 

Footnotes

¹ phreeque.tripod.com/laloo.html

² Syracuse University Digital Projects Library, The Ronald G. Becker Collection of Charles Eisenmann Photographs, library.syr.edu/information/spcollections/digital/eisenmann/



The Great Throwdini “missing” in action.