

UNCANNY Midnight Tales

by John "The Gneech" Robey

LOOKING OVER YOUR SHOULDER

THE WORLD OF UNCANNY MIDNIGHT TALES

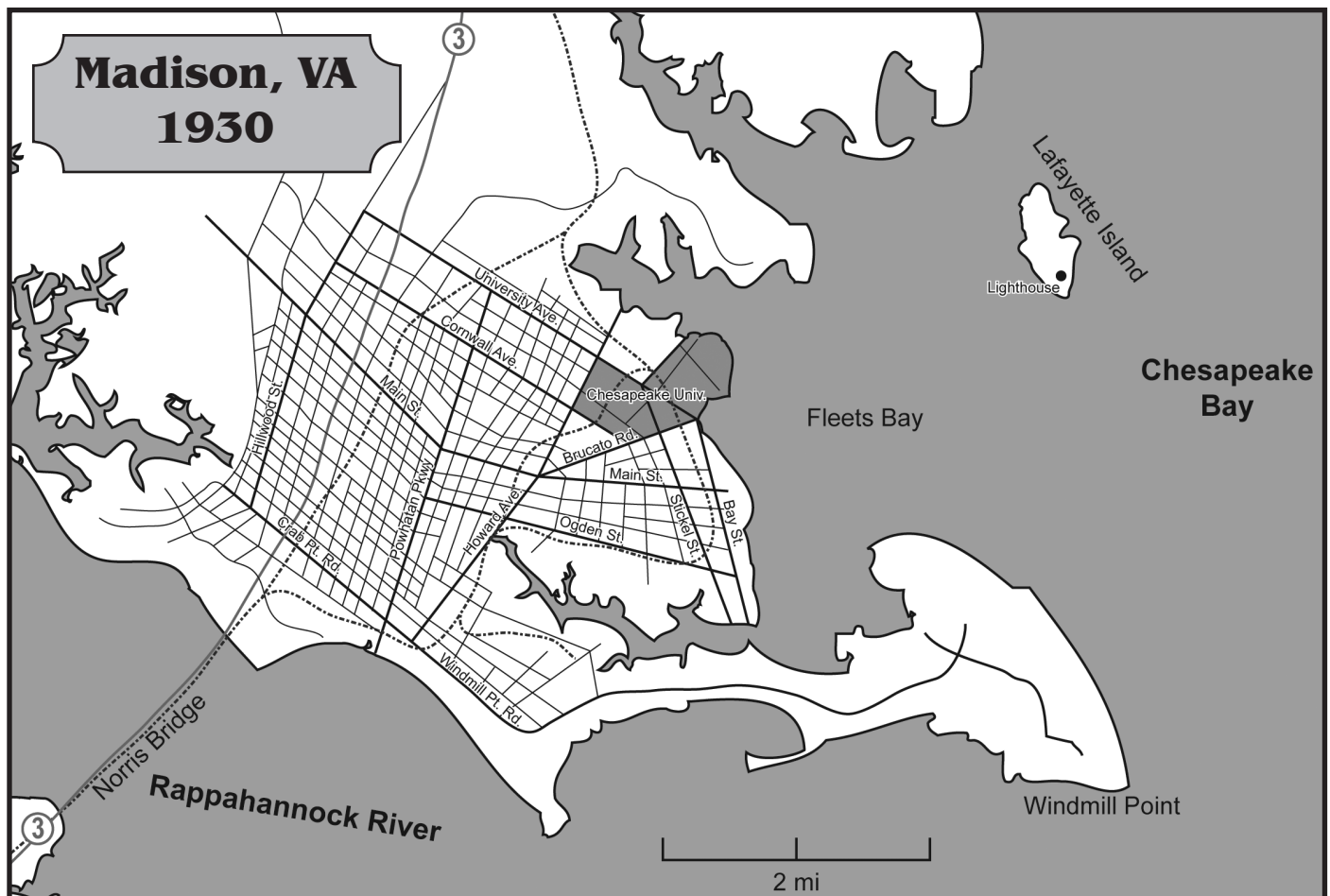
WELCOME TO MADISON!

(Excerpts from a 1930 tourism pamphlet put out by the Madison Chamber of Commerce, with editorial comment.)

MADISON: COUNTRY CHARM MEETS BIG-CITY SOPHISTICATION

Madison, Virginia is a small but vigorous city on the Chesapeake Bay, at the mouth of the Rappahannock River. Situated between Norfolk and Washington D.C. or Annapolis, Madison is an important

hub for both water and rail traffic. The city has a long and prestigious history. Founded by charter in 1764 under the name "Elizabethtown," it was an important headquarters during the American Revolutionary War. Upon the death of James Madison in 1836, the town was renamed in his honor effective New Year's Day, 1837. Several small but key Civil War battles took place in and around Madison, most notably a siege in 1862 that ended in the destruction of nearly a third of the town. *(NOTE: This includes a tragic fire that trapped fifty-six*



Chesapeake University students in the Kilmarnock House dormitory, leaving no survivors.)

Almost from its earliest days, Chesapeake University has been a primary feature of Madison, and today is considered by many to be a member of the “Ivy League.” (*NOTE: A minor member perhaps, but a member nonetheless.*) Famous for its leading programs in history, literature, psychology, and chemistry, the university attracts students and faculty from across the nation and all over the world. Madison is also a beautiful city, featuring several immaculately-maintained examples of Queen Anne, Victorian, and Edwardian architecture, as well as some buildings in the historic old-town district that date to pre-Revolutionary times and are still in use today.

The area has two primary industries, shell-fishing and mercantile traffic. The bay provides a bounty of oysters, shrimp, and softshell crabs that are harvested by both large concerns and independent fishermen with hand-made traps. With the ready availability of port, rail, and road traffic, combined with the lower fees Madison charges compared to Norfolk, Baltimore, or Annapolis, Madison is a popular transfer point with cargo haulers and regularly has boats running out to Tangier Island or the Del Marva Peninsula.



PLACES OF NOTE

Chesapeake University

Founded in 1826 largely through the efforts of James Madison, who was Rector of the University of Virginia at the time, Chesapeake University was conceived as a “younger sister” to that institution, and the two universities have enjoyed a friendly

“sibling rivalry” ever since. Madison’s contributions were not of material resources, but of organization, fund-raising, and gathering support. James Monroe, during the 1828 opening ceremonies, described Madison as Chesapeake University’s “spiritual father,” echoing a similar statement the Marquis de Lafayette had made of Thomas Jefferson regarding the University of Virginia some four years earlier. It was largely due to the existence of Chesapeake University that the city’s name was changed to honor Madison in 1837. The university motto, *omnis in caelo terraque scire*, literally means “to know everything in Heaven and on the Earth.”

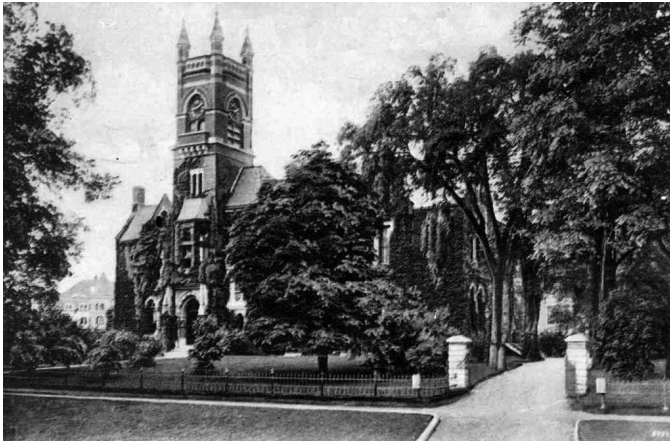
The main campus is a rambling expanse of wooded courts and colonial architecture at the northeastern-most edge of city limits, including a quarter-mile stretch of beachfront. Its panoramic vista of the bay, including the picturesque Lafayette Island Lighthouse, makes it a popular gathering spot for the students. In nice weather, jazz bands come and play twilight concerts on the beach, which are always packed. “Chessie,” the sea serpent purported to roam the bay, is the university’s unofficial mascot, and playful images of a romping, snake-like monster adorn many signs and most student publications.



University Features

Commonwealth Hall: This is the main building, holding both administrative offices and several large lecture halls. It is sometimes referred to as “the cathedral” due to its impressive size and tall, gothic spires. The central tower, holding most of the offices, is five stories tall, while the three wings, holding the Humanities, Science, and Law departments respectively, are three stories each. Commonwealth Yard, or “The Commons,” is the open, park-like area surrounding Commonwealth Hall.

Kilmarnock House: The largest dormitory on campus, the current Kilmarnock House is built on the site of the original Kilmarnock House, which was destroyed during the Civil War. The second floor of Kilmarnock House is reserved for female



students; male students are not allowed on the second floor after 5:00 p.m. – and female students are not allowed on any other floor during that time! (NOTE: The school, and most girls' parents, take this very seriously. Anyone attempting to linger after hours is likely to get into trouble, not to mention possibly facing ostracism, scandal, shotgun weddings, or even beatings from enraged fathers while authority figures are "looking the other way.")



Braddock Hall: A smaller dormitory reserved for honor students, consisting of two three-story wings. The ground floor is offices and a party hall; the upper floors of the north wing house male students, while the upper floors of the south wing house female students.

James Vardeman Memorial Special Collections Room: The noted author and scientist James Vardeman donated his extensive private collection of rare and valuable books to the university library on his death in 1912, along with a

substantial legacy for the purpose of acquiring further materials. Since then, the Special Collections room has continued to acquire, restore, and care for a wide and impressive selection of unusual and hard-to-find volumes of academic, historic, or cultural interest. Books are not permitted to leave the Special Collections room, but are freely available to students or faculty to peruse during regular hours.

Parapsychology 404: The Humanities Department has received some negative attention lately for including Parapsychology in its curriculum, but the school stands behind Professor Mannington, who is a respected authority in the matter. (NOTE: While standard Psychology has been viewed as a legitimate avenue of study for thirty-plus years, Professor Mannington's fascination with – and belief in the legitimacy of – the esoteric and highly-questionable tenets of Parapsychology has caused the school no small amount of embarrassment. Embarrassing or no, in the current craze for things supernatural the Parapsychology 404 course is an extremely popular one. Every semester it fills during the first two days of registration.)

Madison Beacon-Examiner

The *Beacon-Examiner* is the city paper. It has a slightly-questionable reputation, for printing lurid speculations as to the solutions to sensational mysteries, printing as fact such things as "Demon Exorcized From Local Farmhouse," or running photographs of blurry white splotches with the caption "Ghost of Late City Mayor Captured on Film!" Edgar Braddock, the publisher, editor, and president of the *Beacon-Examiner* bought the paper in 1923; at the time it was failing rapidly, had a subscription rate close to zero, and its previous owner was heavily into debt. Braddock wasted no time in changing the look, style, and content of the paper. Where before it had the bland, difficult-to-read "tombstone" look popular in the 1800s, Braddock modernized it, streamlined it, and implemented a new editorial policy: Give the public what they want! (NOTE: This is surprisingly forthcoming for a town advertising flyer. Maybe it was written by an estranged copy editor working freelance?)



Gregson-Parker Museum of Regional and Natural History

Overlooking the intersection of Main Street and Powhatan Parkway, the Gregson-Parker Museum, founded in 1907 by the will of the late Mrs. Agatha Gregson-Parker, is the largest museum in Virginia. Although not as large as the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, it is still a very impressive and grand building, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in a distinctive design which is neither “Arts and Crafts” style nor quite “Art Nouveau.” Its collection of rare and valuable objects from around the world is one of Virginia’s great treasures. *(NOTE: Unfortunately for the museum, the Gregson-Parker has had in the years since it was built twelve curators. The board of trustees seems to have particularly bad luck in this regard: one of the curators filched priceless treasures, while others have been fired for incompetence or scandal. One committed suicide in the vaults under the museum, and another was convicted for murdering another member of staff. Most have simply left with little or no notice, usually without giving a word of explanation as to why. The current curator, Dr. Haverston, has lasted the longest, but is nearly sixty and very close to retirement.)*

Madison-Rappahanock General Hospital

This is the largest hospital in the area, on Odgen Street near Howard Avenue. The city’s medical examiner, Dr. Stone, works here. There are numerous smaller doctor’s facilities, clinics, and such in the area, as well.

Police Headquarters

Police headquarters is a large brick building in downtown Madison. Adjacent to it is a small jail, and the county courthouse is two blocks away. *(NOTE: Captain of Detectives Mitchell Archer is the head of the Criminal Investigations Department; he’s a gruff, middle-aged ex-army Major from the Great War. He doesn’t believe in “bunk,” which includes all ghosts, spooks, long-leg-*



die beasties, or things {other than human crooks} that go bump in the night, and is highly suspicious of anyone who claims to believe such stuff. He is a very astute observer and an accomplished detective in his own right, although he seldom actively works on cases these days.)

Queen Anne Station

Situated at the intersection of Ogden and Stickel Streets, Queen Anne Station is large and well-equipped. While primarily a transfer facility for cargo going between land and sea, it is also comfortably-outfitted for its bustling passenger business, with a lunch counter and a handful of small shops.

Lafayette Island Lighthouse

Lafayette Island is a rocky promontory roughly a mile offshore northeast of town, causing a hazard to maritime traffic coming down from the northern end of the Chesapeake. A three-story lighthouse was built there in 1844 by a consortium of local businesses and eventually turned over to the Lafayette Island Foundation which continues to operate the lighthouse. The lighthouse is infamous among locals as supposedly being haunted, but the question of “By whom?” has a variety of answers. The most popular suspects are a trio of lighthouse workers who disappeared without a trace from the island in 1899, possibly having been murdered by smugglers. Other stories link the island to local Indian legends from pre-Revolutionary days, and even a few to “Chessie,” the sea serpent that supposedly makes the bay its home.



Candlewick Sanatorium

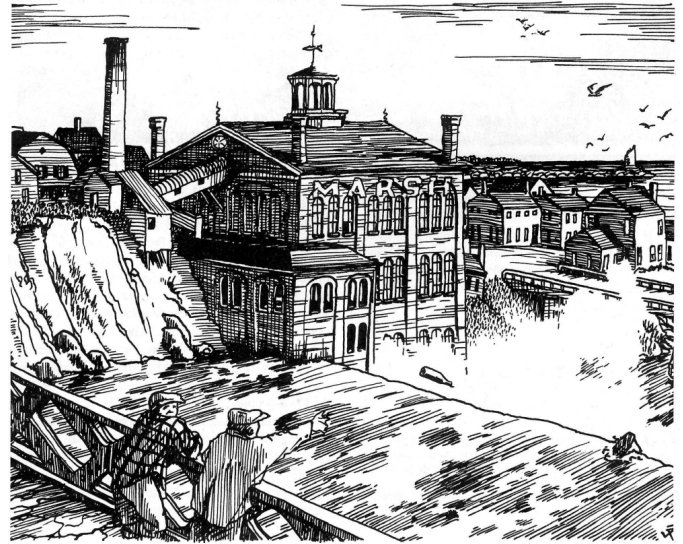
Candlewick Sanatorium is forty-five minutes outside city limits by car, on the banks of the Rappahannock. (*NOTE: "Sanatorium" does not necessarily imply an insane asylum: it's simply a place where people go to have other people take care of them, something like a cross between a hotel, a hospital, and a nursing home. Candlewick does have a wing for "mentally disturbed" patients, however.*)

Thistle and Shamrock Pub

It has, of course, been illegal to manufacture, import, or sell alcohol for a decade now, and however the general public may feel about the Volstead Act, Madison law enforcement takes a strong stance against those who try to get around prohibition in public or private. Thus, while the Thistle and Shamrock,, near Howard and Main, is modeled on an old-style "Irish Pub," it does not in fact sell beer, wine, or liquor of any kind. They do have a variety of "soft ales," as well as a small selection of lunch and dinner entrees. (*NOTE: The Thistle and Shamrock actually does not sell liquor, although most people who don't really know the place assume it does. Those who are in good with the bartender, however, can use him as a contact to find people who do sell decent alcoholic beverages to private parties.*)

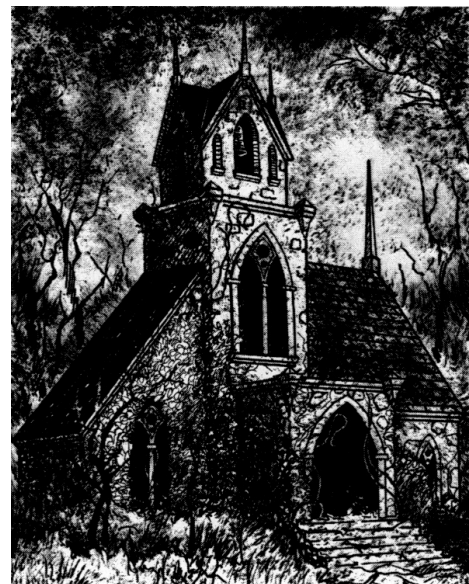
The Cannery

Madison's most sophisticated dance club, The Cannery gets its name from the fact that the building it is in was, in fact, a cannery on Bay Street that closed down in 1919 and stood vacant until 1926, when it was bought and converted. A regular program of live jazz plays here, featuring a rotating stable of regular artists as well as guests from up and down the eastern seaboard. A few big names have played here as well, including Louis Armstrong and up-and-comer Duke Ellington. (*NOTE: The Cannery has a public bar that serves soft drinks; however, it also has a fairly well-known and easy-to-access speakeasy room. Rumor has it that certain high-placed city officials are regular customers, which is why police raids are few and far between. Thus, The Cannery is extremely popular among local students and anyone who wants to flirt with trouble while actually being in very little real danger.*)



Hillwood Cemetery and Church Ruins

Hillwood, in the western part of town, is the largest cemetery within Madison city limits as well as most of the surrounding area. On a high, rambling bluff overlooking the Rappahannock, Hillwood entails approximately five acres and some sections have been in use for almost two hundred years. The Hillwood Church burned down during the Civil War, leaving only sections of the stone-work walls which now stand as a silent, ivy-covered ruin on the highest section of the grounds. Like many such places, the ruins of Hillwood Church are reputed to be haunted, by the ghost of a former priest, by Civil War soldiers from both sides who died fighting on the grounds, and by some of the more colorful persons who have been laid to rest there over the years.



1930 – THE GOLDEN AGE OF DESPAIR

The general outlook of the nation is a bleak one in 1930. In October of the previous year, the stock market completely collapsed, wiping out banks, businesses, and whole industries, and the nation is now what is already being referred to as “The Depression.” President Herbert Hoover’s response, based on the principle that relief should come from the private sector, was to cut taxes and expand public works, leading to towns of squatters looking for work, known as “Hoovervilles.”

Virginia, with a strong agricultural economy based on tobacco and Federal spending both in northern Virginia and the Navy shipyards at Norfolk, has fared better than many places, particularly in the midwest, but for the average Joe money is still tight and morale is low. People are doing whatever they can to cheer themselves up – movies, which have just become talkies in the past few years, are zany comedies such as the Marx Brothers or exciting crime thrillers like *Little Caesar*. Hot jazz music is on the radio and in every nightclub. Pulp magazines and radio dramas offer escape and adventure for weary working men and bored housewives, and card and board games are at the height of their popularity for being the cheapest entertainment around.

Prohibition, while still in full force, is now widely viewed as a disaster and repeal is seen (correctly so) as inevitable, leading people increasingly to ignore it, or at best nod and wink while they take a sip of “healthful tonic water.” Speakeasies are common and populated by all walks of life; among the young particularly, it’s seen as an act of romantic defiance to drink specifically for the purpose of getting drunk, a largely new phenomenon in America. The “gangster hero,” living a life of wild violence and excitement is coming into the fore, opposed by the “G-man,” who’s just as brutal but is “on the side of law.” A culture that had been based on hope for an ever-improving future has found itself haunted by the horrors of the Great War, adrift in a world where once-fixed notions such as the primacy of man and the reliable order of the universe were turned on their head, and where nations that had once been models of democracy and optimism are sliding into cynical totalitarianism.

In times like these, dark cults, old sorcery, and wild notions of pseudo-science find it easy to take hold, as people desperately cling to anything that seems to promise prosperity or give their life meaning. It’s not hard to understand why such monsters as Hitler and Stalin could rise to power in this environment – if anything, it’s harder to understand that more monsters didn’t.

DAILY LIFE

Life in 1930 moved at a slower pace than it does today, but modern people would recognize it. There are telephones, movies, rush hour traffic ... but instead of TV people congregate around the radio in the living room, or go out to theater and concerts. The newest, most expensive cars have just started coming with radios installed, allowing people to put the top down and go for a Sunday drive listening to their favorite shows.

However, there are things that would make a modern person feel distinctly out-of-place. The world is far from being the 24/7 busy place of today. In many places (including Virginia), it is actually illegal for most stores and businesses to be open on Sunday. In smaller cities and towns, curfews are common and often vigilantly enforced, especially for young people. Institutional racism and sexism are not “a problem,” they’re just accepted as the way things are. And air conditioning has just started to be a regular feature in movie theaters, department stores, and railroad cars. Most people have spent their lives using electric fans and clever tricks with opening windows at different amounts as the day went on to regulate temperature.





FASHION

In most situations, men who are not “laborers” generally wear 2- or 3-piece suits with a tie, depending on their taste and social standing; and even the average laborer will wear a coat that he then takes off to get to work. Anyone engaged in sporting events or otherwise expecting to get ruffled will probably wear a short-sleeve shirt with an open collar. Hair is almost universally short and often slicked back. “Longhair” is a derisive term applied to orchestra conductors and oddballs like Einstein. Fashionable men are clean-shaven or at most have a small, well-trimmed moustache; bushy faces are more popular among older, “more dignified” men, which of course just opens them up to having their beard pulled by cheeky youngsters. Most men wear hats outdoors – but never indoors, as that implies you have somewhere to go and is rude to your host.

Women wear long dresses or skirts, usually to the calf, with bare or lightly-covered arms and high heels. The current preference is for tall, slim, willowy women with short, wavy hair. Women often

wear hats at social gatherings, and usually keep them on indoors as well as outdoors, as the hat may very well be pinned into the woman’s hair to prevent it flying off in a high wind. Jewelry, especially in the form of long necklaces, is a much-desired status symbol.

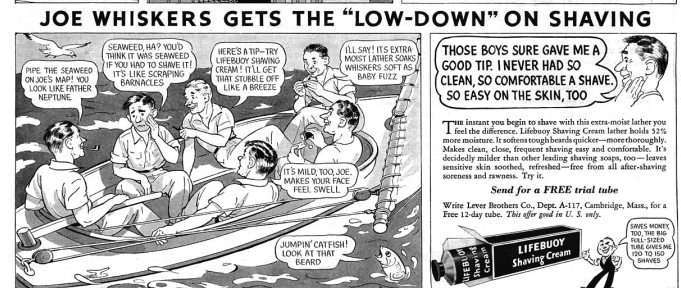
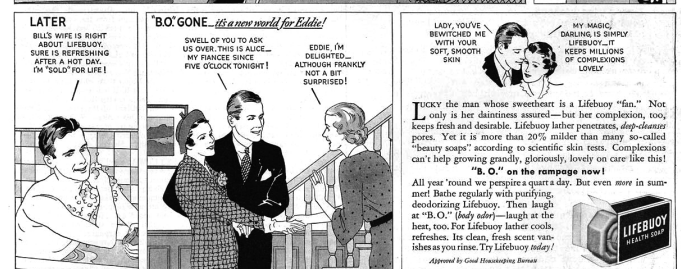
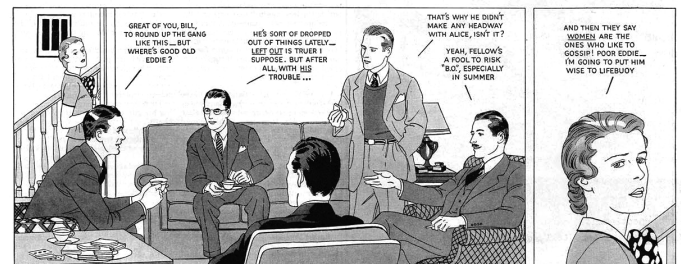


SOME SIGNIFICANT EVENTS OF THE PAST DECADE

1920

- ☞ WWI peace treaty signed in Paris January 1.
- ☞ League of Nations formed January 10.
- ☞ National Prohibition goes into effect January 20.
- ☞ Woman’s Suffrage amendment ratified August 26.
- ☞ First regular transcontinental mail service (New York to San Francisco) inaugurated September 8.
- ☞ Republicans blast the Democrats out of the White House with the election of Warren G. Harding and Calvin Coolidge November 3.
- ☞ First radio broadcast station KDKA operated in Pittsburgh by the Westinghouse Company, broadcasting sports.
- ☞ Agatha Christie publishes her first Hercule Poirot novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*.
- ☞ Mary Pickford stars in *Pollyanna*; Douglas Fairbanks Sr. in *The Mark of Zorro*.

MEN LIKE TO GOSSIP, TOO



1921

- ☞ Warren G. Harding becomes President, Calvin Coolidge becomes VP.
- ☞ On April 4 Germany is directed to pay 132,000,000,000 gold marks in reparations and they are not allowed to have an army.
- ☞ Resolution declaring peace with Austria and Germany signed by Harding July 2.
- ☞ A peace is established July 7 in Ireland between Irish and British forces.
- ☞ Irish Free State established December 7, heralding the eventual dissolution of the British Empire.
- ☞ Rorschach devises his inkblot tests.
- ☞ Rudolph Valentino becomes an overnight sensation starring in *The Sheik*.

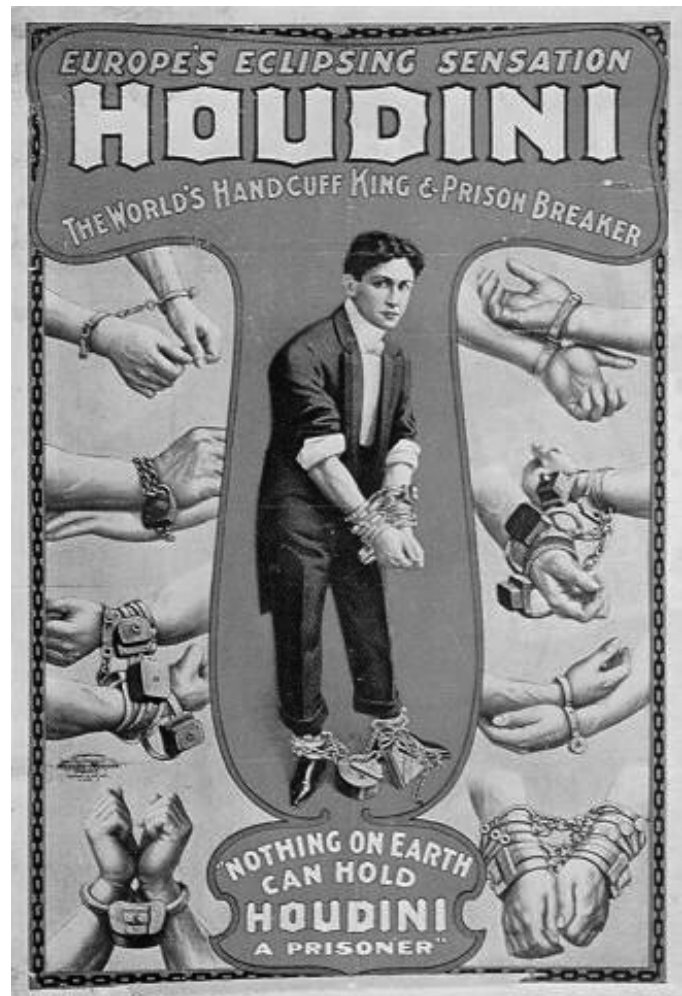
1922

- ☞ Gandhi arrested March 11 in Bombay and charged with sedition.
- ☞ Fascist coup in Italy; Mussolini forms cabinet October 31.
- ☞ Atoms of other elements are shown by Rowley to consist of multiples of hydrogen atoms.

Broad highways have become America's streets.
We're a nation on wheels. Distance doesn't matter
if you pause now and then . . . to put your feet
on the ground . . . to stretch . . . and get the feel of
wholesome refreshment with an ice-cold Coca-Cola.

EVERYWHERE AND ANY TIME

5¢



- ☞ Lincoln Memorial Temple at Washington dedicated.
- ☞ Revival and growth of the Ku Klux Klan.
- ☞ F. W. Murnau directs *Nosferatu*.
- ☞ James Joyce publishes *Ulysses*.

1923

- ☞ Tutankhamen's tomb discovered in Egypt February 17.
- ☞ First nonstop airplane flight across the continent, from New York to San Diego on May 2-3.
- ☞ Juan de la Cierva makes the first successful autogyro flight June 9.
- ☞ A stroke claims President Harding August 3 in San Francisco. Calvin Coolidge becomes the 30th president of the United States. His father administers the oath of office in Vermont.
- ☞ Munich beer-hall putsch led by Adolph Hitler is put down November 9.
- ☞ Last American troops withdrawn from the Rhine.

- ☞ Cecil B. DeMille produces *The Ten Commandments*.
- ☞ Emily Post publishes *Etiquette: The Blue Book of Social Usage*.

1924

- ☞ Vladimir Ilyich Lenin dies January 21.
- ☞ Woodrow Wilson dies February 4.
- ☞ The dirigible *Los Angeles* flies from Friedrichshaven, Germany, to Lakehurst, New Jersey.
- ☞ Japanese immigrants excluded from the U.S.
- ☞ J. Edgar Hoover is placed in charge of the FBI and begins cleaning up its act.
- ☞ Leopold and Loeb convicted of the kidnap-slaying of Bobby Franks.
- ☞ Teapot Dome oil scandals.
- ☞ U.S. Navy fliers encircle globe.

1925

- ☞ The Scopes "Monkey" trial ends on July 22.
- ☞ Aerial commercial crop-dusting developed.
- ☞ Lon Chaney (Sr.) stars in *The Phantom of the Opera*; Charlie Chaplin in *The Gold Rush*.
- ☞ F. Scott Fitzgerald publishes *The Great Gatsby*.

1926

- ☞ Richard Byrd flies over the North Pole May 10.
- ☞ Bullets fired from American and European makes of guns can be used to identify the weapon that fired them, hence helping in the location of murder weapons.
- ☞ Heisenberg and Schrödinger lay the foundations of quantum theory, causing heated controversy in the scientific community.
- ☞ Muller successfully uses X-rays to induce mutations in fruit flies.
- ☞ North Pole reached by U.S. Navy airplane from Spitzbergen.
- ☞ Fritz Lang directs *Metropolis*; Buster Keaton stars in *The General*.
- ☞ Rudolph Valentino's funeral touches off a mob hysteria in Manhattan that leaves the funeral parlor looted by souvenir seekers.



- ☞ Agatha Christie renews her fame with *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*; Ernest Hemingway publishes *The Sun Also Rises*.

1927

- ☞ Foreigners are attacked in China March 25. Consular offices in Nanking are looted and burned while U.S. and British warships shell the city. It is reported to be a Bolshevik plot.
- ☞ Disastrous floods in Mississippi valley and in northern New England states from April to May.
- ☞ Lindbergh flies alone from New York to Paris in 34 hours on May 20-21.
- ☞ *The Jazz Singer* is the first full-length sound film. Clara Bow becomes the "It" girl – the quintessential flapper – when she stars in *It*.
- ☞ The pop-up toaster is invented.

1928

- ☞ Amelia Earhart is the first woman to cross the Atlantic by air on June 19.
- ☞ Kellogg Peace Pact signed August 27; 15 nations outlaw war.
- ☞ Herbert Hoover elected the 31st president of the United States November 7.
- ☞ The dirigible *Graf Zeppelin* carries 20 passengers and 40 crew from Germany to the U.S.
- ☞ First Academy Awards.
- ☞ Geiger counter invented.
- ☞ Mickey Mouse makes his screen debut in *Steamboat Willie*.

1929

- ☞ The St. Valentine's Day massacre in a Chicago warehouse eliminates the last of Al Capone's rivals, February 14.
- ☞ October 29: Black Tuesday. The Stock Market collapses because of margin buying.
- ☞ Richard Byrd flies over the South Pole on November 30.
- ☞ 11 people associated with the opening of Tutankhamen's tomb have died.
- ☞ 16mm color film and Scotch tape developed.
- ☞ Ballistic science progresses to the point where bullet comparison between murder bullet or shell and test bullet and shell is acceptable in a court of law as evidence.
- ☞ Canadian rum runner *I'm Alone* sunk by U.S. Coast Guard under circumstances resulting in diplomatic protests.
- ☞ The dirigible *Graf Zeppelin* circumnavigates the globe.
- ☞ Gary Cooper stars in *The Virginian*; the Marx Brothers' first film, *Cocoanuts*, marks their transition from the Vaudeville stage to the big screen.
- ☞ Hemingway publishes *A Farewell to Arms*; Erich Maria Remarque publishes *All Quiet on the Western Front*; Robert Ripley publishes *Believe It, or Not!*.

CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

With three exceptions, the images in this booklet are either my own creation or were pulled from various online sources of vintage images from the 1920s and 1930s. Those three exceptions are a contemporary photo of the Cove Island Lighthouse on page 4, which I modified in Photoshop to give it that "period" feel, the cannery image on page 5, which is from *Escape From Innsmouth* and drawn by John T. Snyder, and the crumbling church also on page 5, which is from *Dark Cults*, created by Kenneth Rahman.

The setting of Madison, Virginia was created and developed by Phil Brucato and John Robey, with input from Laurie Robey, Jennifer Starling, and Gray Beeker



As Thousands CHEER-UP!

To thousands of people, no after-the-game celebration is complete without the sparkling, mellow good cheer that Canada Dry brings. From the smallest "rooter" to the oldest "grad", its invigorating zest is eagerly welcomed...

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"THE CHAMPAGNE OF GINGER ALES"

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