

# **Michigan Every Day**

## **By Patrick Sullivan and Carole Eberly**

*Nov. 16, 1965*  
*Death of Harry Blackstone*

Harry Blackstone was born in Chicago in 1885 and kindled a love for magic at age eight when he received a magic set as a gift. Blackstone would go on to become a would famous magician on the level of Harry Houdini. But he would also leave his mark on Colon, a small Michigan town in St. Joseph County that he first visited in 1926. Blackstone ultimately would help make Colon the “Magic Capital of the World.”

Born Harry Bouton, Blackstone rose to prominence as a magician in the 1920s and 1930s as he toured the country with his Vaudeville-style act that wowed audiences with a disappearing bird-cage trick and a woman sawed in half only to emerge unscathed.

In the summer of 1926, when he and his wife were looking for a place to retool their equipment and rest for the season, they happened upon Colon and discovered an island on Sturgeon Lake that was for sale. The island perfectly fit Blackstone’s needs, offering a farmhouse, cottages for his staff and a barn for his livestock. The residents of Colon immediately took to the world famous magician who performed a show at an afternoon garden party. The out-of-the-way farming town was glad for the excitement in their midst and the townsfolk became instant fans of magic. Blackstone liked to fish in the lake but he also awed his neighbors by performing a death-defying underwater escape from the lake before 2,000 people. If there was any doubt, the town’s residents now believed that their neighbor was truly the greatest magician in the world. Blackstone invited Australian Magician Percy Abbott to Colon in the summer of 1927. Abbott and Blackstone ran a magic company together for 18 months but a business dispute led to a falling out and Colon’s two famous magicians spent the rest of their lives not speaking to one another.

Abbott wound up spending the remainder of his days in Colon, marrying a local girl, raising four children and starting a company that would become the largest magic trick manufacturer in the world, Abbott Magic Novelty Company. Abbott and a partner also established the annual Abbott Get-Together, a weekend of magic shows for magicians that attracted performers from around the country and later from around the world. Blackstone remained a world famous magician and also remained in Colon, though he did not attend the Get-Togethers until after Abbott's death. Late in life, Blackstone moved to California for health reasons but he maintained that he preferred Colon to anywhere in the world. Blackstone had a son, Harry Blackstone Jr., who would go on to become a famous magician in his own right.

Colon renamed its Main Street to Blackstone Avenue in the 1960s. Blackstone was buried at Lakeside Cemetery in Colon following his death on Nov. 16, 1965.