

GOING FINE SINCE 1889:

THE MAGICAL ARMSTRONGS



THE WIZARD
AND THE WITCH
PRODUCTIONS

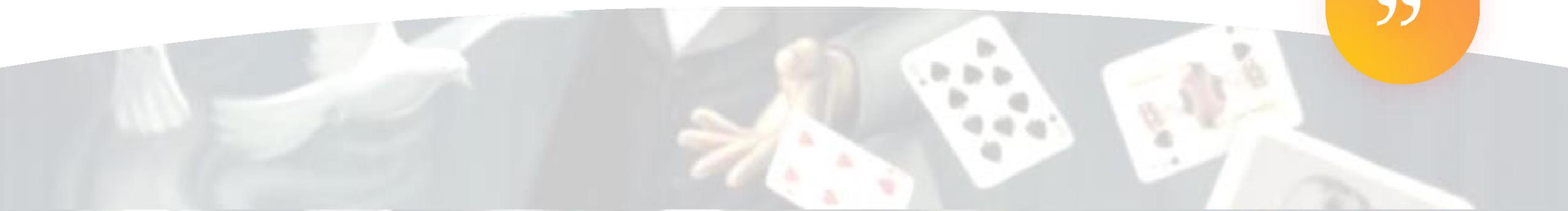
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“I still remember how I felt when I saw the first magical performance. As soon as the doors were opened, I took my seat and waited a full hour for the moment when the curtain would rise in front of this world of wonders. And when the performance began, when eggs changed to dollars, dollars to pocket-handkerchiefs, when bird cages disappeared in the air, and empty boxes held numerous presents, I felt as if I was living in a land of dreams, far away from earth.”

Dr. Max Dessoir

Psychology of the Art of Conjuring (1891)

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STORYLINE

Going Fine Since 1889: The Magical Armstrongs begins with a 1900 film produced by Edison Manufacturing Company entitled *The Magician*, where the audience sees a dapper man performing parlor tricks. An animated sequence takes the viewer through vintage magic posters while a quote from an 1897 book recounts the first time one sees magic as a child. Early American illusionists: Houdini, Thurston, Hermann, and Kellar, are compared to the first credited American born magician, African American Richard Potter, the son of a well-to-do Massachusetts man and one of his female slaves, Dinah.

Viewers will also be introduced to Henry “Box” Brown, a man who successfully escaped slavery by being shipped across state lines in a box, to later become a magician and tour the Lyceum circuit as a speaker and entertainer.



John Hartford Armstrong’s South Carolina origins are mysterious. Did he come from a family performing as a minstrel act beginning in Barnwell, South Carolina in the late 1880’s? Or was he the son of a Charleston merchant with ties to the West Indies? Early years of the magic show with brother Thomas set the stage for an exploration of the Armstrong venues, primarily African American churches and schools. Their quality entertainment showcased a level of talent that put them on par with their white contemporaries; richly traveled through an animated sequence.

STORYLINE

Marriage, the birth of his daughter Ellen, and then the untimely death of his wife saw Armstrong at a crossroads; but dedication to the craft drove him to persevere despite the hardship. When J. Hartford met and married Lillie Belle Mills, a teacher from Spartanburg, South Carolina, both his life and the act, took on a whole new dynamic with the entire family joining the show.

The 1920s saw a resurgence in the popularity of Spiritualism. The World War and flu pandemic of 1918 fueled the craze for mediums, Ouija boards, seances, automatic writing and the like. Famed illusionist, Thurston and celebrity author Arthur Conan Doyle embraced this pop-culture movement, but Houdini testified before Congress and began a crusade to expose it as fraud. The Armstrongs, too, took up this cause.

Well-researched illusions performed by the Armstrongs will be showcased throughout the film by magician Randy Shine, in a modern silent movie type film style, paying homage to the Edison film.

When J. Hartford and Lillie Belle died in 1939 and 1947, respectively; Ellen carried the torch, embarking on her own solo magic act as well as incorporating chalk art drawings and billing herself as “Cartoonist Extraordinary” during the early years of the Civil Rights Movement. Ellen married late in life with her magical past unknown to her husband’s grandchildren until the making of this film.

Legacy and achieving one’s goals in the face of adversity are universal themes explored throughout, culminating with a historical marker placed on College Street, where the family home stood in Spartanburg.

The Armstrong family story is not only an important part of magic history, but African American cultural history that embodied illusion, humor, joy and wonderment, during a crucial era of change in the country. Their accomplishments can be shared and celebrated by a cross-section of people and generations. Magic, at its heart is for anyone and everyone.



JOHN HARTFORD ARMSTRONG

Main Character

John Hartford Armstrong was born in South Carolina in 1874 under mysterious origins. Living most of his life and career in Spartanburg, he traveled throughout the South beginning about 1900 with a man called Charles Jordan, known as the “Un-Bleached Yogi.”

He married Ida Belle White in Georgia in 1903, and together they had a daughter Ellen Emma Armstrong. Ida died by 1907, and Ellen lived with her grandparents for some time. He married Lillie Belle Mills in 1908. Lillie Belle and Ellen eventually join the act performing as “The Celebrated Armstrongs”. He died in Spartanburg, South Carolina in 1939.

Ellen E. Armstrong

Main Character

Ellen E. Armstrong was born in 1904 to J. Hartford and Ida Belle White.

Ellen joined the act as a child traveling with J. Hartford and Lillie Belle after the death of her mother. She performed mentalism as “Little Zelle” and later incorporated her talent for drawing into the show. Performing “chalk talks” in which she would tell a story and have a drawing completed at its conclusion. She would often give her drawings out as souvenirs.

AN INVITATION
TO MYSTERY BY



Ellen E. Armstrong

*Mistress of
Modern Magic*

ADMIT ONE



Ellen continued to perform after the deaths of her father and Lillie Belle, making her the first Black woman magician to have a solo act.

Retiring in the mid 1950s and marrying late in her life, Ellen’s magical past was unknown to members of her husband’s family. She died in 1994 in Columbia, South Carolina.

Lillie Belle Mills

Main Character

Lillie Belle Mills was born in South Carolina circa 1888.

Shortly after her marriage to J. Hartford, he trained her in a two-person code act; and she joined the show as a mentalist.



Lillie Belle was a mother figure to Ellen, and they travelled as a close family. J. Hartford referred to the two ladies as his “babies.”

Lillie Belle died in 1947 due to diabetes complications in Columbia, South Carolina leaving her estate to her “beloved stepdaughter.”



GOING FINE SINCE 1889



ELLEN E. ARMSTRONG
MAGICIAN & CARTOONIST
IN HER
MODERN-MARVELOUS-MATCHLESS
MERRYMAKING MARCH THRU MYSTERYLAND
WILL APPEAR BENEFIT OF

If Laughing Hurts You . . . Stay at Home

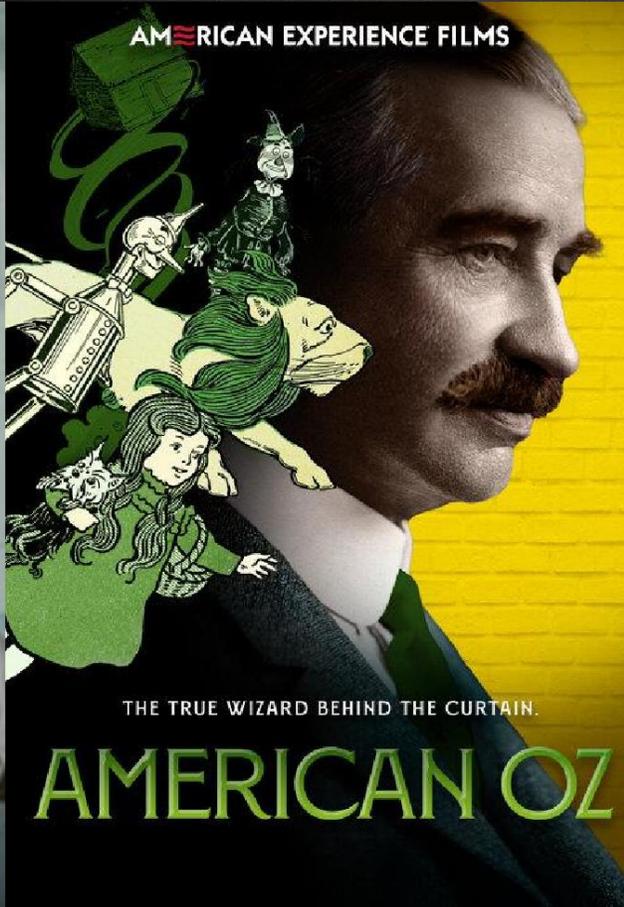
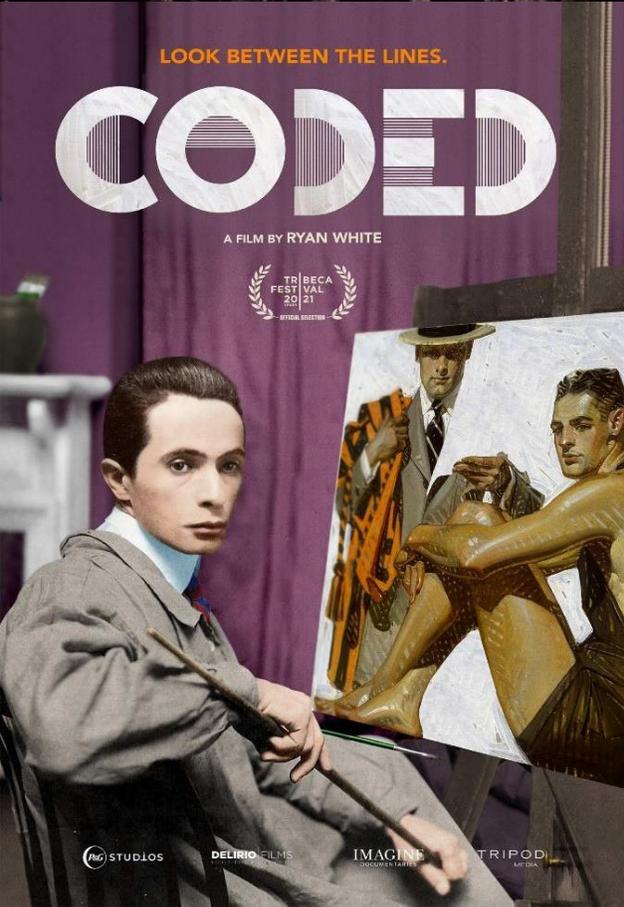




JUBILEE SINGERS

SACRIFICE AND GLORY

COMPARABLES



THE CREW

Jennifer Stoy

(Producer/Director/Writer)

Jennifer is a former casting director who worked on major film and television projects such as *Beverly Hills, 90210*, *3rd Rock from the Sun*, *Adventures of Joe Dirt*, and *House on Haunted Hill*. In the early 2000's she produced two straight-to-DVD releases, *Frog-g-g!* and *Sugar Boxx*.

She is a genealogical researcher and owner of Weird Genealogy, LLC, which specializes in odd and unusual stories. Her book, *Wicked Greenville* is due to be released in July 2022 by The History Press.



KENRICK ICE MCDONALD

(Producer/Master Magician/Historian)

Ice McDonald is an international master magician who has been featured on several top-rated programs. In 2014, he became the first African American to be inaugurated as the National President of The Society of American Magicians' (S.A.M.). Ice was recently inducted into the Magic Hall of Fame.

He is the producer/director of the documentary *Quiet Masters-The History and Relevance of the Black Magical Artist* and the author of the book *Born for This-Destiny Authenticated*.

Listed as one of 2020 Most-Influential Magicians of the Decade, Ice currently sits on the Board of Directors of the world's famous Magic Castle/AMA in Hollywood, CA.





Delhia Gaynor

(Associate Producer)

Delhia has 25 plus years in the industry working in Production for CBS, AMG, Paramount Pictures, Entertainment Tonight, Immortal Entertainment and Legend 3D.

She was an early supporter of this project, as she felt a deep connection to the history and subject matter.

Randy Shine

(Magic Historian/Technical Advisor)

Ran'D has been performed as a magician for over 16 years. In 2009, he was invited by President Barack Obama to show off his skills at the 44th Presidential Inauguration Banquet and Ball. He has also performed for Penn and Teller and toured with the show *The Art and Soul of Magic*, a showcase for African American magicians.

Randy's knowledge of the historical side of magic, combined with his talents makes him the perfect person to research as well as demonstrate the tricks performed by the Armstrongs.

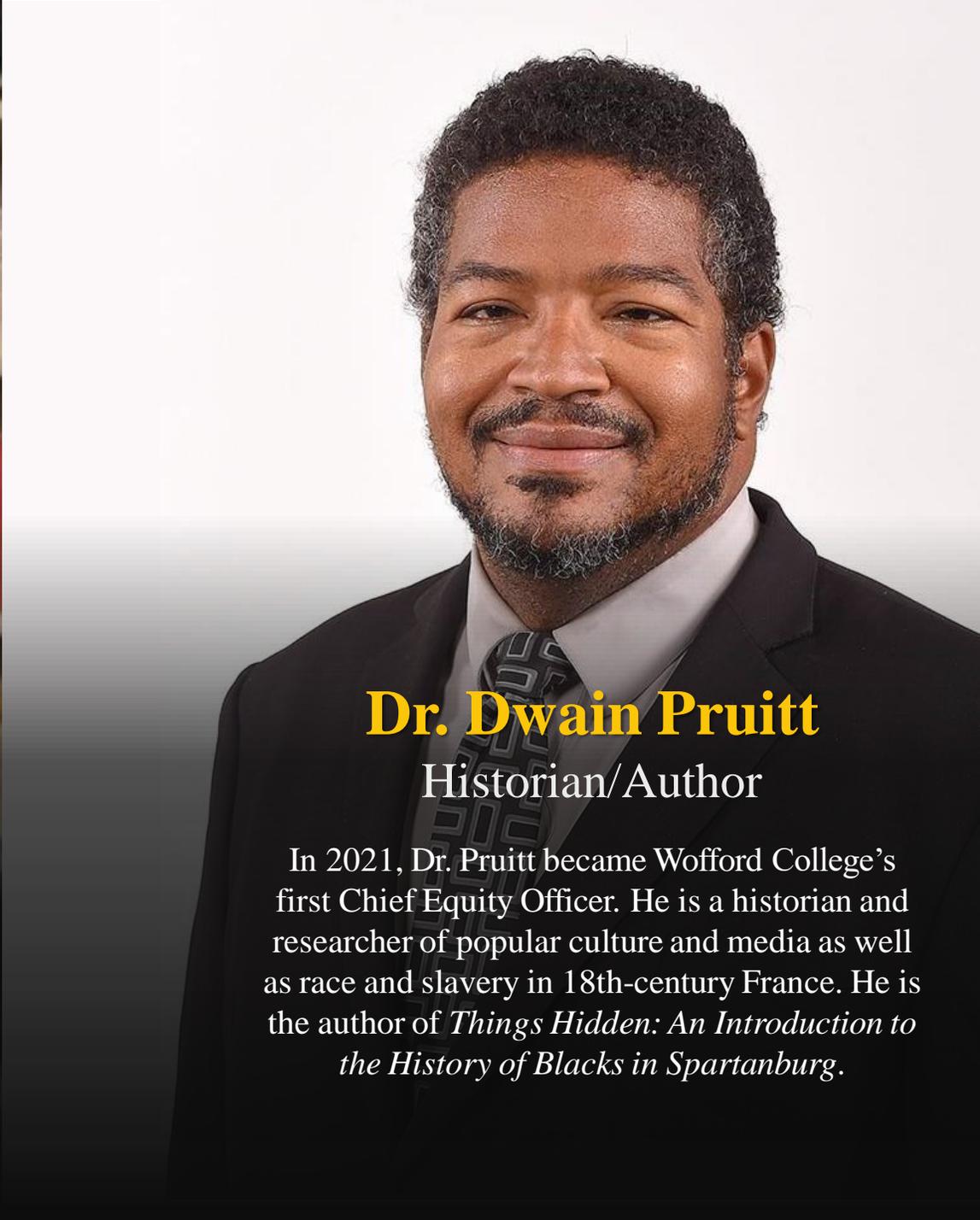




Michael Claxton

Magic Collector/Historian

Michael Claxton is an English Professor at Harding University and author of the book, *Don't Fool Yourself: The Magical Life of Dell O'Dell*. His extensive magic collection includes original Armstrong props and family scrapbooks.



Dr. Dwain Pruitt

Historian/Author

In 2021, Dr. Pruitt became Wofford College's first Chief Equity Officer. He is a historian and researcher of popular culture and media as well as race and slavery in 18th-century France. He is the author of *Things Hidden: An Introduction to the History of Blacks in Spartanburg*.

Seeing Is Believing

An early 1900s magic aesthetic provides the backdrop with a stark visual contrast to rural Jim Crow South imagery.



Historical and archival footage will weave through interviews with magicians, magic collectors, historians, and scholars. Colorful, robust animation sequences will tie transitions together. Modern-day footage of the South will have a vibrant vintage look and the Armstrongs' magic will be recreated with a retro cinema style as an homage to the Edison Magician film.

Upon completion, the film will have a polished, broadcast-ready look.





Wizard and the Witch, LLC is seeking funding from all types of collaborators – individuals, corporations and foundations to share and celebrate the Armstrong legacy. We encourage everyone who feels strongly about these magical pioneers to help bring this story to audiences everywhere. Contact Jennifer Stoy at Wizard and the Witch Productions with inquiries regarding donation and/or investment opportunities.

FOR FUNDING & INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT

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