

# Sleepers entrance shoppers in downtown windows

Shoppers in downtown Bloomington may have been startled to see a man sleeping in the display window of the Kahn clothing store. The event was not the case of an employee being accidentally locked in the store all night.

It was February of 1910, and the man's name was Roy Brown, a professional performer with the Duncan Hypnotic Company. As you may suspect, the sleep in the store window was a promotional gimmick for the company's scheduled appearance in Bloomington.

The *Daily Telephone* of Feb. 21 told its readers that the sleeping man had "created a great deal on interest and all day Sunday and today a curious crowd watched and commented freely on the sleeper."

The newspaper explained how the hypnotic trance was performed. "The man entered the window about 10 o'clock Saturday night, and when the call came from Prof. Duncan he put the receiver to his ear and upon the command of Professor Duncan over the wire, immediately became unconscious." (Duncan was calling from Crawfordsville.)

A cot was thoughtfully provided for Brown by N.D. LaBonte, press agent for the Duncan



## LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

company. Persons in the crowd around the window noticed that Brown's sleep seemed to be natural.

So how was this promotional stunt to be played out for the benefit of the audience? Well, the cot was to be carried to the Harris Grand theater where he was to be awakened by Professor Duncan. In describing the stunt, the *Telephone* recalled an incident that had happened some 15 years earlier. On that occasion "the professor gave a series of startling stunts and ended up by putting a girl, a member of a Bloomington family, asleep and on exhibit in a show window. When the time came to awake the girl the professor had all kinds of trouble and worked with his subject some ten hours before he could 'bring her to.'"

The newspaper noted that that particular incident created lots of anger and talk of lynching the professor/performer.

Brown was eventually replaced in Kahn's window by a young girl. On Feb. 22 the *Telephone* reported that mischief was afoot. "It leaked out on the streets today via the police department that a number of Indiana University students have carefully laid plans to 'swipe' the young lady who is in the Kahn window under the hypnotic influence of Professor Duncan ... and that some ten students stayed up all through the night awaiting for a chance to move the girl from the window."

The students got that bright idea while they were milling around downtown after the Indiana-Chicago basketball game. Word must have gotten back to Professor Duncan's company, because the young woman was thereafter guarded. Because of the rumors she was watched by members of "the night police force." The *Telephone* added, "Every few hours a member of the company enters the window and bathes and powders the young lady's face."

Anyway, Brown had been duly carried to the stage of the Harris Grand and was awakened by Professor Duncan, although it apparently took him several minutes to accomplish that. The rest of the program consisted of hypnotism of some local boys, as well as two girls

with the performing company and Professor Duncan's wife.

He revealed to the audience the most rigorous test of his ability. "For the more serious tests the professor used the members of his own company. On the rigid body of one young man, his head resting on the back of one chair and his heels on the back of another, seven men stood on him and other tests were made."

After her sleep in the window of Kahn's, the young woman was carried to the Harris Grand for her awakening. Professor Duncan's next stunt was to put another member of his company in a store window, seat him at a piano and hypnotize him. The man played the piano for 12 hours until awakened by Prof. Duncan. Explained the *Telephone*, "The pianist sat with his eyes closed, a foot on one of the pedals and his fingers rambled over the ivories in much the same manner as if he had been conscious, lazily pounding off a popular air. During the day he did not slacken or increase his speed."

The company moved on to a booking at Bedford. Were the trances phony? Perhaps. Bloomington was not much changed by the entertaining experience. Life went on.

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