

ALEXANDER MARION POE

Contributed by Leon J. Lyell

(1885-1957) American-born magician/illusionist Alexander Marion Poe lived in Australia between 1900 and 1908, although his activities during that time are currently unknown. When he returned in 1913 he had reportedly spent some time in Britain and had also toured the Far East as a vaudeville performer. Known to have worked as a magician and all-round variety entertainer well into the 1940s, including time on the Fullers' Australasian circuit, Poe often appeared under different stage names - including Abdul Khan ("The Hindoo Mystic") and Darky Deering (blackface singer). He also used the name C. A. Livingstone for his entrepreneurial and business activities. Poe died in Melbourne aged 72.

The only son and second of four children to Alonzo Marion Poe (hop farmer, sheriff and theatrical agent) and Minerva Elizabeth (nee Dearing), Alexander Marion Poe was born in August 1885 in Shasta Retreat, California. He left home in his teens, arrived in Australia in the early 1900s probably aboard the Lismore out of Eureka docking in Melbourne. Little is known of his time in Australia during the early 1900s, apart from the fact that he married in 1906. Interestingly the marriage registration details record his name as Alexander Marion De Poe.

Poe left Australia about 1908 and reportedly spent time in Great Britain and at one stage toured the Far East. He returned to Australia about 1913 with two Englishmen he met overseas; Jack Wright, who settled in Wagga Wagga and apparently taught Japanese martial arts, and a man named Waterford who had a tent show with Poe at the Sydney Easter Show until it was rained out in 1927. Waterford is thought to have settled in Junee.

When Poe married again in 1914 he described himself as a vaudeville artist. His wife Beatrice Keys from Hillston, eldest sister of boxer Hock Keys, called herself a dramatic artist. In his registration under the Aliens Registration Act of 1916 he described himself as a "magician and conjuror." By 1916 he was also touring on the Fullers circuit, although for how long is yet to be determined. His various stage names included Allan Poe (claiming a relationship to Edgar Allan Poe), Darky Deering (black face singer), Abdul Khan (magician). C. A. Livingstone seems to be the name he used as both a promoter and as the proprietor of a furniture repair business Penrith (New South Wales). At various times he also used the surnames Deering, Le Poer and Neville.

The Empire Variety Company will play in the School of Arts, Mittagong, to-morrow (Wednesday) night. Among the artists is Abdul-Khan, the Great Indian Magician, who is making his final appearance on an Australian stage.

Robertson Advocate (NSW) 13 July (1915), 3.

BAKER'S STADIUM.

Direction..Reg. L. Baker. TO-NIGHT (Wednesday), "POP," AT 8 O'CLOCK. Training Exhibitions by Wave Geikie, Matty Smith, Bobby Graham, Billy Monty, Joe Healey, Billy Riordon, and others. Six Rounds Contest between Joe Rivers and Martin Fredericks. Vaudeville by Abdul Khan, Hindoo Necromancer, Mystic, Conjuror, and Strong Man; Contortion Act; Singing and Dancing by Fernie Jackson; Songs by Billy Monty, Boxer, Singer, and Returned Soldier; also Tryouts and other items. Prices: 1/6 (2d. Tax), 1/ (1d. Tax), Ladies, 1/ (1d. Tax), admitting to all parts.

Brisbane Courier 14 Mar. (1917), 3.

Extraordinary Announcement

In conjunction with

ISON'S PICTURES

Thursday next, January 11th

SPECIAL ENGAGEMENT OF

Abdul Khan

THE INDIAN MAGICIAN.

Direct from Fuller's National Theatre, Sydney.

The death-defying human wonder. He eats fire, walks on broken glass with naked feet, washes his face and hands in broken glass, and he will also allow any sober man from the audience to come up on the stage and break a stone weighing 200lbs on his chest with a sledge hammer. The stone is on exhibition in the vestibule of the Open-Air Picture Palace. He will also defy any man in the audience to tie him up with 16 ropes.

We will also present

The 3 Sylvas

From the Fuller's Theatre, Sydney.

**THEY ARE MAGICIANS, VOCALISTS
COMEDIANS, DANCERS, AND
PATTEROLOGISTS.**

Daily Observer (Tamworth, NSW) 9 Jan. (1917), 4.

There is only one known photo of Poe. It was taken while he was performing at a country show in either New South Wales or Queensland around the early 1940s with his daughter and stepson. Poe reportedly had strong connections with the two states for much of his career.



Courtesy of Leon Lyell

Married three times, Poe had seven sons and four daughters between 1907 and 1940. He died in Melbourne aged 72 on 12 September 1957 from emphysema (possibly caused by his love of cigars). His death certificate records him as a travelling showman.

Leon Lyell is Alexander Poe's grandson.

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BOXING.

STADIUM "POPS."

**SPECIAL ATTRACTION
TO-MORROW.**

A special attraction has been secured by the Brisbane Stadium management for to-morrow night in conjunction with the weekly "Pops" programme. It consists of the special engagement, and first appearance in Queensland, of Abdul Khan, a Hindoo necromancer, magician, and strong man. It is claimed that the gorgeous robes of this wonder-worker will be quite a show in themselves. In addition to many remarkable feats of magic Abdul will place a block of granite weighing 2cwt. upon his chest, where it is to be broken by sledge-hammers. A 6-round contest will be decided between Joe Rivers and Martin Fredericks, who stopped Tom Bonds on Saturday. Training displays will be given by Matty Smith, Wava Gielkie, Wally Clark, Bobbie Graham, and the Melbourne bantam Billy Monty, who is known in his home-town as the "boxing baritone." He is an accomplished baritone, and is said to have been a pupil of the famous Arnes Beaumont. Monty has been to the front, and was discharged, suffering from shell-shock and rheumatic fever. He has recovered his health sufficiently, however, to resume his old pastime of boxing.

Brisbane Courier 13 Mar. (1917), 3.

**BELMORE HALL,
MONDAY, JUNE 18.**

MR. LIVINGSTONE PRESENTS

**Abdul Khan
And Troupe.**

**THE DEATH-DEFYING HUMAN
WONDER.**

He Eats Fire, Walks on Broken Glass with Naked Feet, and does numerous Indian Illusions. He invites someone from the audience to mount the stage and break a stone on his chest with a sledge-hammer; the stone weighs about 228lb.

He is supported by other comedians.

A DANCE TO FOLLOW.

POPULAR PRICES.

Northern Champion (Taree, NSW) 13 June (1917), 5.

HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS

1. In addition to his career as a variety entertainer and side-show man, Poe was a herbalist and sometimes worked as a carpenter and pastry cook
2. In correspondence with the AVTA (26 Nov. 2014) Leon Lyell writes that his family believe the Far East tour(s) occurred sometime between 1908 and 1913, and included China and Japan. His grandfather's UK agent (according to Lyell's father) was Ramos and Ramos. For additional information on **Ramos and Ramos** see the company's AVTA entry - "Trans-Oceanic Circuits" section.
3. Poe's first marriage was in 1906. His second, to Beatrice Keys, lasted between 1914 and 1924. His third wife was Gladys Neville (nee Clarke), the widow of American trapeze artist Keith Neville who is also believed to have taught tap dancing in Melbourne. They married sometime around 1930.
4. Poe's use of stage names and pseudonyms throughout his life has created difficulties in tracking his career. Although the reasons for him using so many other names are unknown, this type of "showmanship" was certainly not unusual back then. In earlier correspondence with the AVTA (24 Sept. 2014) Lyell provides some addition insights into his grandfather's life and activities.

[The name Livingstone] is taken from an uncle, Sam Livingston, who married his mother's younger sister Genevieve Deering. I can hear a play on words with "C A Living-stone" and his strongman act - withstanding the deadweight of a heavy stone being broken on his chest.

Lyell also notes that he had uncovered some references to letters for C. A. Livingstone being held for him by various newspapers during the WWI period. Letters sent to the papers were generally included in a "theatrical rack" section. In relation to his grandfather's use of names, Lyell adds:

Working out which name to use is difficult. He often he didn't use his real name, though it appears in [New South Wales] police reports. One of these mentions that he may be travelling with Vic Lavarna, which is a name I cannot find anywhere. His excuse was that "Poe" in the Australian lexicon of the early 1900s meant "bed pan" (not sure if this is true). He used **De Poe** with his first wife (an obscure usage which his family believed to be the original form of the name); **Poe** [while married to] my grandmother; **Deering** after he separated from her in about 1924 (it was used by three of his children from that marriage – my father and one of his brothers were fostered out to Bill Lyell which is where I get it from); then **Neville** when he moved in with Gladys Neville (nee Clarke) ca. 1930... His two children from that marriage carried the surname Neville. Grandmother Beatrice however adopted Deering by about 1930 and when she entered hospital near the end of her life described her late husband as "Allan Deering, pearl trader." The one entry for him in a US census shows him as "Marion Poe."

PICTURE PALACE.

A good programme was screened on Wednesday night last and an additional attraction given, in the alarming feats of Abdul Khan. After mystifying the spectators by walking on glass, eating fire and performing the usual tricks, Khan asked if anyone wanted to learn how to do the tricks. They all did, and he showed them "how." When it was seen how "dead" easy it was to do the "marvellous feats," the spectators felt as if they would not bother magicians and such like marvels again. He fairly knocked the soul of the conjuring business as far as Dungog is concerned, and we will soon have a crop of local performers eating fire, etc. However, there was one trick he could not give away, how he survived the breaking of the 2 cwt. stone on his chest with a sledge hammer lustily heaved by Mr P. Tope.

Dungog Chronicle : Durham and Gloucester Advertiser (NSW) 8 June (1917), 2.

5. Leon Lyell notes that many of the members of his extended family had had an interest or carved out careers as performers or entertainers. Among them have been his aunt Joy(ce) Deering was a Tivoli girl and worked with Maurice Rooklyn before moving to the USA in the mid-1940s where she worked for some time as a singer. A cousin, Bonnie Patey, was a singer in the 1950s.

Additional details contributed by Clay Djubal.

Any further information on Poe and his exploits would be very much welcomed. Contact either the Australian Variety Theatre Archive or Leon J. Lyell direct: leonjlyell@gmail.com

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