

BENJAMIN RUSH MAGINLEY  
1832 - 1888

Benjamin Rush Maginley was born November 18, 1832, according to his obituaries and newspaper reviews. His tombstone says 1834.

He said he was born in Philadelphia. His father was a well-to-do Quaker who was a coal dealer. He had thirteen brothers and sisters, named after famous people. He left home after an altercation, at the age of 16 (1846), never to return.

Research of the Philadelphia Directories, 1846-47-48, showed no Mag/McG/McKinleys in the coal business.

Listed in the International Geneology Index (IGI) was the birth of a Benjamin McKinley, 1832, in Somerset (halfway between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh). Parents were James McKINLEY and Mary ROSE. James and Mary were married there in 1814.

One obituary listed his birthplace as Maryville. There are two; one is outside Harrisburg and the other in Greene County, south of Pittsburgh. A Directory of Greene County, 1855, lists a large number of coal companies on both sides of the Monongahela River. None were owned or operated by a Mag/McG/McKinley. Could his father have been a coal miner and Ben elevated him to "owner"?

Henry Clay McKinley was born in Somerset in 1840; father was Arthur McKinley. George Washington McGinley married Elizabeth Holbruner, Nov. 4, 1852, in Waynesboro Evangelical Lutheran Church, south of Harrisburg. They had eleven children christened there, including Lincoln.

Maginley was somehow supposed to be related to President William McKinley. William was 3rd great-grandson of David McKinley born about 1705 in northern Ireland and emigrated to York County in 1743. Decendants lived in Westmoreland County and Mercer County before moving to Ohio. Among the other surnames in William's family is ROSE.

The family is somehow supposed to be descended from Col. Hannum of the Revolution.. In "Publications", Vol. IV, of the Geneological Society of Penn. under the heading "Marriages by John Graves Esq., West Chester, PA." John McGinley married Martha Hannum, Nov. 24, 1808. This couple could be parents or grandparents of Benjamin.

Maginley first joined the company of Dr. Simpson's Pittsburgh Theater (which later became the Old Drury) under the management of John Foster. With Foster he moved to Cleveland. Then he got an offer in Cincinatti. He made his

Philadelphia debut at the Old Chestnut in 1853. He played at the Front Street Theater in Baltimore in 1856. In 1861 he became manager of a theater in Memphis, Tenn. He entered into partnership with William Carroll's circus under the name of Melville, Maginley & Co's Great Eastern Circus. He continued in the circus business as a manager and clown until 1875. He married Carroll's niece (and adopted daughter) Mary Ann Sprague (Carroll) Jan. 3, 1864. He made his debut in New York City in 1862. But he continued to reside in Memphis where his daughter, Mary Josephine, was born Nov. 5, 1864. He and his wife had two other children, Nola Eugenia and Viola Alberta, who died in childhood.

Mrs Maginley died at the home of her uncle, Benjamin Sprague, in Westchester, N.Y. Aug. 18, 1874 (aged 29) at 4 o'clock. She is buried in St. Peter's Churchyard, Westchester.

Between Sept. and Nov. 1861 Maginley is listed as editor of "Our Opinion" and Acting Manager of the Academy of Music in Milwaukee, Wisc. He is also listed as Sir Oliver Surface in "School for Scandal", Sept. 2.

In 1865, Maginley was Business Manager of the Washington Theater, 11th Street, near Penna. Avenue. On Oct 12, he appeared in Edwin Adam's "Hamlet" as the first Grave Digger.

from: Annals of the New York Stage. by George C.D. Odell, Columbia Press, N.Y.

Vol. 8 - March 15, 1868. Ben Maginley as Mme. Jinks in the Horse Marines.

Feb. 14, 1870. Hamlet at the Olympia Theater with Maginley as Claudius. Fox's version was the "funniest in the world, filled with songs, dances, a can-can, and every conceivable absurdity". It ran till April 16.

June 22, 1869. A benefit performance at the Niblo Theater. Maginley appeared.

Vol. 9 - Dec. 12, 1870. The Black Crook with dancing and elaborate settings, ran till April 8, 1871. Maginley was Von Puffengrunts.

Nov. 30, 1872. The new Niblo's opened with Leo and the Lotus with Maginley as the Grand Hereditary Muddle.

Apr. 30, 1874 to May 1. At North Second Street and Union Avenue, Brooklyn, Maginley and Co. Museum, Circus, Menagerie, and Trained Animals.

Vol. 10 - Feb. 21, 1876. The Olympic Theater - a burlesque Julius Caesar, with Maginley as Brutus - through Feb. 28.

Mar. 20, 1876. Hooley's Theater, Brooklyn. Julius Caesar, with Maginley.

- Jan. 28 1877. Maginley appeared as Cottereau in Dion Boucicault's The Dead Secret, which failed Feb. 9.
- Nov. 19, 1877. Lester Wallack appeared at the Grand Opera House as Rosedale, supported by Ben Maginley (Bunberry Kobb).
- Dec. 3, 1877. The Hunchback with Maginley was tried, but failed.
- Feb. 13, 1878. Maginley played in Champagne and Oysters, by J.W. Shannon at the Park Theater. Ran through Feb. 25.
- Mar. 25-30, 1878. Park Theater Company in Champagne and Oysters performed at Brooklyn Park.
- Apr. 8-9, 1878. Champagne and Oysters, again.
- Apr. 10, 1878. Our Aldermen. Maginley being one of the aldermen. Flopped in two weeks.
- Apr. 24, 1878. The Big Bonanza. Maginley as Jonathan Cadwallader.
- Apr. 25, 1878. Benefit performance. Lewis and Maginley as Slasher and Crasher.
- Sep. 12, 1878. At the Standard Theater, The Open Verdict.
- Sep. 21, 1878. At the Standard Theater, A False Title, with Maginley as Jonathan Webster.
- Nov. 9, 1878. Almost a Life with Maginley as Philippe.
- Dec. 5, 1878. John Gilbert testimonial performance brought the cast of Almost a Life, currently at Standard Theater, with Maginley
- Dec. 30, 1878. Don Boucicault's The Shaughraum with Maginley as Carry Krichela.
- Jan. 20, 1879. The Colleen Bawn with Maginley as Corrigan.

The next ten years of Maginley's career in this Annals, Vol. 11 and onward, have not been researched.

In the seasons of 1881 through 1883 he starred in Deacon Crankett and A Square Man, under the management of J.M. Hill.

His greatest fame was as Tom Blossom in David Belasco's May Blossom (1884). The story is about a young lady who has two suitors. She loves Richard and accepts him. He, arrested as a spy, contacts Steve to explain his disappearance. Steve tells May that Richard is dead. She marries Steve, and Richard returns, exposing Steve's lie. Both go to war and Richard is killed. Steve returns and is forgiven, and all live happily ever after. Maginley, as May's father, an old fisherman, provides the comedy, along with his fisherman friends. The show was presented by the Madison Square company and traveled the U.S.

A review from a N.Y. newspaper: "It is impossible at this moment to give any careful appraisal of the play, owing to

the exigencies of time; but it may be said, in a word, that it is one of the strongest that has been seen during the present season; that Mr Wheelock is surpassingly earnest and intense as Steve; that Ben Maginley is jovial as Tom Blossom; that Walden Ramsey is effective as Ashcroft (Richard); and that Miss Cayvan is strongly effective as May. Of the other merits of this strongest play yet produced at the Madison Square Theater, more extensive mention will be made when space permits. The house was crowded and the applause frequent and spontaneous.

At the end of the third act the impression was so great that it was found necessary to raise the curtain twice. When it was raised the second time, Mr Wheelock appeared, almost dragging the author, Mr Belasco, upon the stage. He in turn, pulled Miss Cayvan before the footlights, then he tottered, put his hand to his forehead, and fell prone upon the stage in a dead faint, overcome by the excitement caused by the success of his piece. The incident created quite a sensation, as being something almost unique in the history of the local stage."

The Company toured the country as follows: Baltimore, New Haven, Bridgeport, New York (Apr-Sep), Philadelphia, Boston, Richmond, Savannah, Atlanta, Mobile, Charleston, Montgomery, Nashville, Louisville, Buffalo, Pittsburgh, Albany, Providence, Hartford, Detroit, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Washington, D.C., San Francisco, Birmingham, Milwaukee, St Paul, Chicago, St Louis, and New York.

Exerpts from the "May Blossom" scrap-book in the possession of Kenneth Rothwell: Ben Maginley, of the Madison Square Theater Company, lives in Westchester County and goes home every night, when the boys on Union Square do not waylay him. Westchester sees Mr Maginley at least three times a month.

Mr Benjamin Rush Maginley as Tom Blossom, at the Madison Square Theater, is one of the joliest individualities on the local stage.

Miss Georgia Cayvan, Mr Joseph Wheelock, Mr Benjamin Rush Maginley, and de Wolf Hopper are great favorites with those who have seen them in May Blossom at the Madison Square Theater.

The Matin, the new telegraphic journal, announces that the principal roles in the play of "May Blossom", recently produced at the Madison Square Theater in New York City, were "Miss Georgie Van Wheelock et Ben Maginlez". Such is fame -

With one wind instrument and Ben Maginley's frontis-piece I'd go on the road as a circus.

Deacon Ben Maginley, of the Madison Square Theater, takes life about as easily and comfortably as any man I know. He never allows the serenity of his temper to be disturbed and never suffers any discomfort that he can possibly avoid. When he assumed the role of Brother Tom in "May Blossom", the discovery was made that there was not a chair in the theater able to accommodate Mr Maginley's dimensions. But he

expressed no displeasure at this fact. He had Mr Belasco send for a chair-maker, who took his measure and fitted him perfectly. Hence it is that Mr Maginley can take such solid comfort when he is off stage.

The character of a simple, kindly old Chesapeake fisherman is conspicuous, and largely so through the pathetic and exquisitely natural tone given to it by the actor. I have not many times seen a more truthful or moving characterization. I looked to the name in the bill, "Ben Maginley". Could it be? Wasn't there some mistake? No; it was the same man. My recollection of him was of a clown in a circus ring, cutting up the familiar antics, speaking the ancient jests, and wearing the chalk and motley.

The Tom Blossom of Benjamin Maginley is as wholesome, genial, truehearted a bit of human nature as one could wish to see. Equal praise belongs to Mr Ben Maginley for the creation of a type of exquisite, simple-minded good-nature that irradiates everything. His overflowing homely and kindly joyousness at the surprise party put the audience in good humor with the world. His love of May Blossom and his honest misinterpretation of her feelings shone through the scenes like a double ray of golden sunshine. There is no special underplot there; The old fisherman, Tom Blossom, the father of May; Owen Hathaway, a fisherman; Uncle Bartlett, the village preacher; Eph, a negro, and Aunt Deborah, are all homely, pleasant, every-day folks, whose talk and actions are characteristic. They do nothing in particular, but fill the stage, dance, sing, and occupy the intervals of the real action.

Since Ben Maginley has taken to going up and down town through Union Square there is talk of widening the walks.

Mr Maginley is a painstaking, artistic actor as everybody knows who has seen him as Tom Blossom in the Madison Square piece. He possesses more benignity to the square inch than any other man in Christendom -- and its not superficial. To know Mr Maginley is to like him, for he is as sociable as he is benignant.

Ben Maginley's Tom Blossom is said to be a companion picture of his Deacon Crankett, being a most magnificent piece of character acting.

Ben Maginley, one of the best character actors before the public.

The production of "May Blossom" at the Baldwin (San Francisco) will introduce Benj. Maginley, one of the famous comedians of the day.

The character of "Tom Blossom" is a perfect fit for Mr. Maginley. There is not a wrinkle in it.

Mr Ben Maginley, the capital comedian in "May Blossom" will leave us in the course of a week (San Francisco). Unlike many of the profession, he has been busy making himself acquainted with our city---. The genial Ben is an exception to most players, who fail to get the glare of the footlights out of their eyes, wherever they may be, and whose study of men and things is limited to the hotel where

they live and the street-space in front of the entrance to the theater at which they may happen to be engaged.

Benjamin Maginley stands out in the performance like a gem among precious stones.

Fat, jolly and hale, Ben Maginley, the comedian, is with the snow-bound Madison Square Company, which did not arrive in time last night to play "May Blossom" at Pope's.

I've been in the business 28 years and associated with all who you call great. I was a member of a dramatic club in Philadelphia in 1854, called the Boothsion Dramatic Association, and from this I got on the stage. I was then a tragedian. They couldn't get me to touch comedy. I found the heavies out of my reach and myself cast into utility; that is anything the manager tries to give you. The day the low comedian did not play, I was put on. Well, my fat round face gave tragedy the laugh, and I was at once installed a comedian, and comedian have I been ever since.

In San Francisco --- But here, just look at the time; I must be off. I have my daily letter to write to my daughter in our cottage home in Westchester, N.Y. We two are the only ones left. Goodbye.

Benjamin Rush Maginley was found dead in bed, June 3, 1888, at the home of his daughter, Mrs. Frank Buckel, in Westchester, N.Y. Death was attributed to heart disease, though he had been suffering from serious throat trouble for several months.

"Relatives and friends of the family, also members of the theatrical profession, are respectfully invited to attend the funeral on Tuesday, June 5 at 1 o'clock p.m. from St. Peters Church, Westchester. Carriages will be in waiting at Westchester Depot on arrival of the 11:55 a.m. train from Harlem River station, New Haven branch road".

I wish Maginley had lived into the age of radio and movies, so we could all have seen him. I get the impression that his style was somewhere between Carroll O'Connor and Red Skelton.