

THE SIG BLITZ TOKENS



Comment by Jay Hunter on September 27, 2018 at 1:30pm

Okay, since no one that I know of has ever told the story, I will tell what could have happened to me concerning this token years ago. File this under correcting "Wrong History".

I was a member of the Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio Token and Medal Society, IKO-TAMS for short. At their annual swap meet over twenty years ago, I was asking dealers for magic tokens. One dealer said he had a Sig Blitz token. Now this token was not in Kuethe's token book which I had with me. The dealer wanted \$400.00 for it. It was a lot of money to pay for a token I knew nothing about, so I passed on it.

Another well- known dealer in the token world, who was from California, had the magic pocket mirror with the playing card on a tongue for \$100.00. I bought that and I told him about the Sig Blitz token. "Oh that" he said, "That's a Bill Kuethe fake. Bill Kuethe made those." This was the first I had ever heard of this.

Flash forward a few years to a Magic Collectors' Weekend. At the Saturday night banquet, I sat at a table with Bill and Bev Kuethe. As I have mentioned on this site when Bill passed away, the Kuethes were some of the nicest and most generous people in the magic collecting world. I took the opportunity to ask Bill the story, and he told it to me.

He had made a small number of the counter-stamped tokens basically as a joke or "fantasy piece". He allowed a few to get out into circulation to see what might happen with them. I do not believe Bill meant any harm in this at all. He was just having fun with it. However, I could have paid \$400.00 for it two decades ago, and it is not real. I have never seen where the true story has been told, even to this day. This is one of those "Wrong History" stories that must be righted so that 100 years from now, future magic collectors will know the story.

Now, all this being said, as a token collector I have always been intrigued by the Sig Blitz token. I wanted one. So when I had the chance to purchase one a number of years ago from another magic token collector, I was willing to pay well over a \$100.00 for it! I am glad I have it. That was because I liked Bill Kuethe, and it does make for a good story!

I invite comments from those who knew Bill Kuethe better than I, and know more about the Sig Blitz token story.



Comment by Robert A. Olson on Friday

Years ago, I was a passionate collector of magic tokens, attending all the coin shows, getting all the dealer auction lists, writing anyone who might have tokens for sale, telephoning Jimmy Findlay at 3:00 am, thinking it was 3:00 pm on the Isle of Wight. In my search for magic tokens that I did not have, I tripped over a Blitz Counter stamp from a dealer for a lot of money. Being afraid to spend so much for a single token, told the dealer of my interest and could he hold it aside for me. I called Bill Kuethe and asked him about it. He knew my passion so told me about the Blitz Counterstamp. He made them.

He wanted to show how they were made. He had a stamping company make him a counter stamp and used the Blitz name. He purchased worn early coins, and stamped them, giving about 6 to close friends, which included Melvin Fuld. He told them the story. Fuld was a major collector of tokens. When Kuethe did his Token Book in 1978, he did NOT include the Blitz token since he knew it was a fantasy piece.

Fuld passed away, his Blitz counter stamp, with a note that it came from Bill Kuethe, but evidently not the whole story is sold. The token was purchased by Dr. Gregory Brunk, a major collector and author on counter stamp tokens. Very soon after, it appears in The Standard Catalog of United States Tokens 1700-1900, by Russell Rulau. Rulau lists it as a Blitz token, with a value of \$500.00 but also adds a note: "This magician piece was not mentioned in the Kuethe monograph on Magic Tokens in TAMS Journal for 1976, page 52." In an earlier edition of Rulau's book, he mentions that the token came from Kuethe to Fuld. By appearing in Rulau's book, and in the Brunk book on counter stamp tokens, the Blitz token now had become a real magic token. I told the dealer that I would pass on buying it.

Bill Kuethe spoke with me soon after and asked if I bought the token. I told him no. He said that I was very wise. A week later a package arrives from him. He sent me one of his Blitz tokens for my collection. When I asked him why all this appeared in the Rulau book, he said that they never called him to ask why it came from him to Fuld and did not appear in his book. If they had asked him, he said that he would have told them.

The die Kuethe had made and used was in his collection, now in the David Copperfield collection.

I have attached an image of the box of dies with this one to the extreme left. I also have attached the listing of the Blitz token that appeared in the Rulau book. So is this a Blitz token...NO. It is a Kuethe Token. In the Paul Courville update on the Kuethe book, we have listed the location of the token as coming from Glen Burnie, MD, the town where Kuethe lived.



U.S. MERCHANT — MAVERICKS 326

SIG. BLITZ, MAGICIAN

Rulau	Date	Metal	Size	VG	F	VF	EF
Z2	(?)	Copper	29mm	—	—	—	500.

SIG. BLITZ / MAGICIAN ctsp on Connecticut 1787 cent. (Brunk Coll.; Brunk 4040)

This magician piece was not mentioned in the Kuethe monograph on magic tokens in *TAMS Journal* for 1976, page 52.

Sig. Blitz may have been a stage name; there is no U.S. census record in the 19th century for this name.

LAST WEEK
OF
SIGNOR BLITZ
AT THE
SOCIETY LIBRARY

Corner of BROADWAY and LEONARD.

Commencing Monday, October 18th, 1847.

(Change of Programme nightly.)

MAGIC AND VENTRILOQUISM,



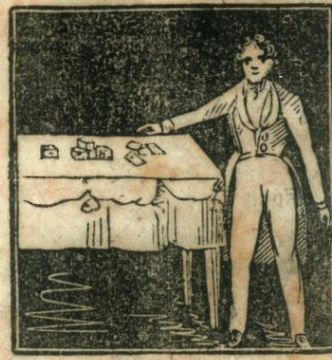
Inexhaustible Egg Bag.



Eating Glass.



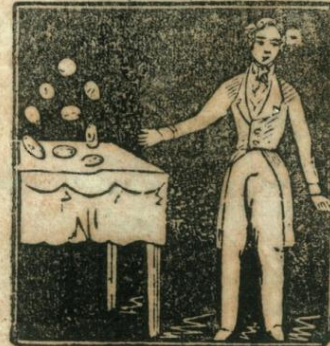
The Learned Rabbit.



The Gambler.



The Living and Dead Canary Bird.



The Enchanted Rings.

On the above evenings, when he will introduce a great variety of his most **Wonderful Feats,**

Illusions, Metamorphoses, and Transmutations,
 WITH BIRDS, QUADRUPEDS, COINS, RINGS, WATCHES, BOXES,
 FLOWERS, FRUIT, VEGETABLES, SWEET MEATS, GLOVES,
 HANDKERCHIEFS, and A HUNDRED OTHER THINGS.

VENTRILOQUISM,
OF THE MOST HUMOROUS DESCRIPTION.



Dance of Dinner Plates,
ACCOMPANIED WITH MUSIC.

Performance on Saturday Afternoon, at Three o'clock.

Doors open at 7.—Performance to commence at 7½ o'clock precisely.
Admission 25 Cents.—Children under Ten Years, Half-Price.

Herald Job Printing Office, 97 Nassau-street.

If you're not in awe after Signor Blitz eats glass and does something mysterious with a canary, surely you will marvel at the bizarre spectacle that is...THE DANCE OF THE DINNER PLATES!

Indeed, the New York Society Library has hosted many interesting events in its long history, including this magic and ventriloquism show performed by English magician Antonio Blitz. This, of course, was back when the Society Library was located downtown at Broadway and Leonard Street.

Last week of Signor Blitz at the Society Library corner of Broadway and Leonard. 1847. New-York Historical Society.

NOW EXHIBITING, DAY AND EVENING,

THE INDUSTRIOUS FLEAS.

From beyond doubt the most extraordinary and novel exhibition ever witnessed. They will be seen during the day or evening, assiduously working at their various employments according to the direction of their **TEACHER, Mr. C. WEISS.** These wonderful insects display the greatest comparative power ever witnessed, as they will actually draw various articles of **SEVERAL THOUSAND TIMES THEIR OWN WEIGHT!** In London they were visited by the Nobility, and many thousands of persons who pronounced them the greatest curiosities in the world.

SIGNOR BLITZ,

The Sorcerer is Engaged, his first appearance in Boston for 3 years. Due notice will be given of his first Night.

FANCY GLASS WORKING, DAY AND EVENING.

[ADMISSION to MUSEUM and EXHIBITION, 25 Cents, without distinction of age.]

An experienced Taxydermist is engaged at the Museum, and persons having pet Birds or Quadrupeds they wish preserved, can have them mounted in the best manner.

Marden & Co. Printers, 32 Congress Street, Boston.

Our next conjurer hails from Deal, England and was born Antonio Van Zandt in 1810. His stage name was Signor Blitz and he was so popular that there have been over a dozen other people using his name!

In fact, one of the most famous historical incidents in Blitz's life may have actually happened to one of his imitators, though I personally believe it did happen to the real Signor Blitz.*



President Lincoln's Summer Home

The incident took place near the Summer White House, this was a house used by Lincoln during the summer months to escape the heat. Today it's called 'Lincoln's Cottage'. In early July 1863, President Lincoln took a break from his duties to watch a rehearsal of the upcoming July 4th parade. Numerous people stood along the street watching the rehearsal and in the crowd was none other than Signor Blitz.

The sly magician reached out and produced a bird from the hair of one of the girls in the parade. This had the effect of stopping the parade as a number of people started to gather and watch the

impromptu performance of the magician. Among his magical feats was producing an egg from the mouth of the President's son, Tad Lincoln.

A fellow from the crowd formally introduced the President to the magician. Lincoln replied "Why, of course, it's Signor Blitz, one of the most famous men in America. How many children have you made happy, Signor Blitz?" The magician replied "Thousands and tens of thousands". The President then said "While I fear that I have made thousands and tens of thousands unhappy. But it is for each of us to do his duty in this world and I am trying to do mine." This exchange took place just as the Battle of Gettysburg was finishing up and Lincoln had not yet heard the news of which side won the battle.



Though Blitz did tour the world with his show, it was Philadelphia that he called home. According to the Blitz's own Autobiography, Philadelphia became the principal depot for the sick and wounded during the War. Because of this, Blitz donated his services many times to the soldiers. In his own words, "My exhibitions were remarkably popular with the soldiers. Constantly I was written to, and personally solicited by the surgeon and his assistants, or ladies of the committees, for my services. Occasionally some convalescent patient would procure permission to call, and entreat me personally, in behalf of his comrades, to come and amuse them; a request I am thankful I never refused."

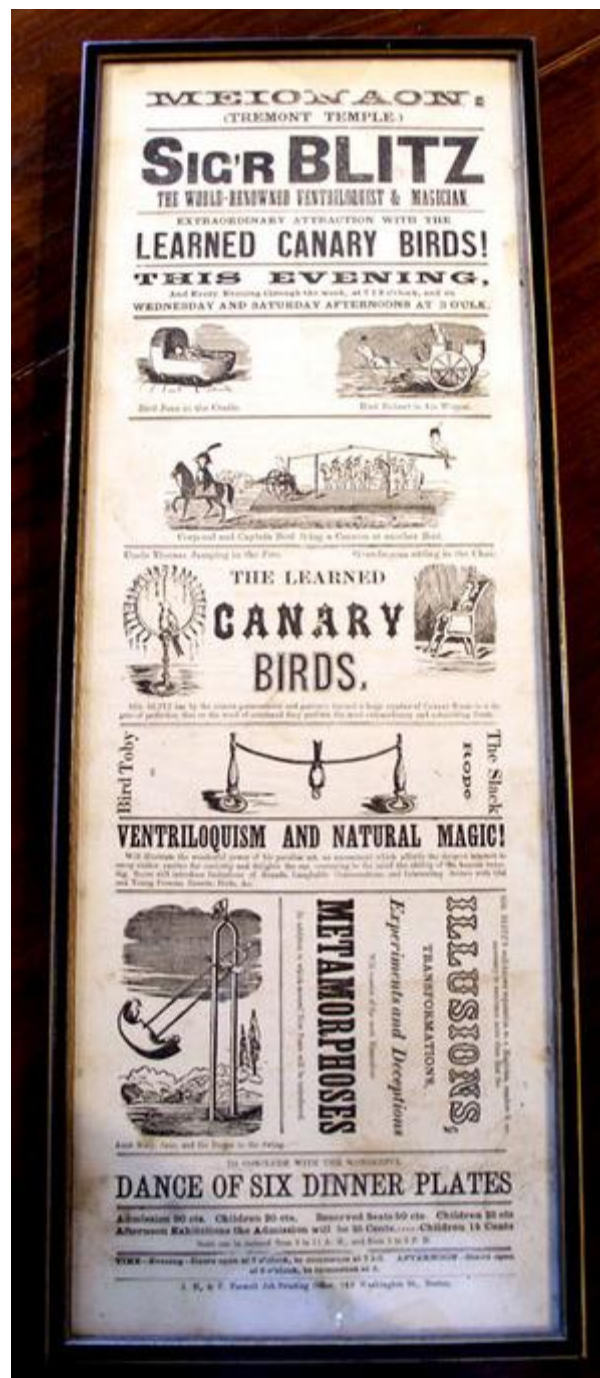
He continues, "How the poor fellows loved to laugh, and drive away their pains and cares! It certainly appeared of more advantage to them than medical attendance. Whenever it was known that I was to appear, unusual excitement prevailed. Men whose limbs had been amputated but a few days, although forbidden by the physician, begged to be dressed, that they might attend; and the same was the case with the feeble and exhausted, who were confined to their beds; who,

when reminded of the imprudence and danger, replied, 'A good laugh will raise our spirits, and bring about a speedy recovery.' 'Is not laughing good for health?' said one unfortunate man, who lost a leg and was suffering from a gunshot in the arm; he reminded the surgeon that there was no medicine like laughing."

One more thing of note that I think is important, Signor Blitz presented 132 shows before 63,000 soldiers. This was in Philadelphia, which means he performed for the Union Army, but there is no doubt that a few wounded Confederate Soldiers were in the mix as well.

His act was made up of magic, trained animals and ventriloquism. As with other magicians of his time, his favorite feat was the dangerous Bullet Catch. However, a number of close called persuaded the magician to remove it from his show. The last one was when an audience member took out a six shooter and proclaimed "if you can catch one, you can call all of them!". Fortunately, Blitz was able to stop the man from shooting.

Signor Antonio Blitz lived to be 67 and died in 1877. He is buried in the [same cemetery](#) in NY as Houdini.



Sig'r Blitz The World-Renowned Ventriloquist & Magician. Extraordinary Attraction with the Learned Canary Birds!... (Boston: J.H. & F. Farwell Job printing Office, [ca. 1860-1968]). Illustrated broadside. Graphic Arts GAX 2012- in process

The British magician, ventriloquist, juggler, and animal trainer Antonio van Zandt (1810-1877) performed under the name Signor Blitz, a name pirated by a dozen other magicians in an effort to capitalize on his extraordinary popularity. Blitz emigrated to the United States in 1834, settling in Philadelphia.



When Blitz died in 1877, obituaries ran in newspapers throughout the United States. *The Chicago Tribune* stated, "In the death of Signor Antonio Blitz ... the whole public will feel as if it had lost a friend, so many years had he devoted himself to its entertainment. His name has literally been a household word. He was born in Deal, England...and his peculiar talents were shown so early that at the age of 13 he made his first appearance at Hamburg and then performed in succession at Lubeck, Potsdam, and other continental cities, exciting wonder wherever he went."

The *Detroit Free Press* noted that "Signor Blitz deserves to be remembered as the prince of prestidigitateurs in his [time]. ...Three generations at least of Americans owed to him some of the happiest hours of their lives. He was 'the' conjurer of the republic; the most incredible of ventriloquists; the most insatiable consumer of yards of ribbon, omelettes made in badly astonished hats, and miscellaneous cutlery; the most indefatigable producer of canary birds from watch cases, rabbits from waistcoat pockets, and butterflies from egg shells, that America ever knew."

and Young Persons, insects, Birds, &c.



NO. BLITZ'S well-known reputation as a Magician, renders it unnecessary to announce more than that the

ILLUSIONS,
TRANSFORMATIONS,
Experiments and Deceptions

Will consist of the most Wonderful

METAMORPHOSES

In addition to which several New Feats will be introduced.

And Mary, Jane, and the Dogue in the Swing.

TO CONCLUDE WITH THE WONDERFUL

DANCE OF SIX DINNER PLATES

Admission 30 cts. Children 20 cts. Reserved Seats 50 cts. Children 25 cts
Afternoon Exhibitions the Admission will be 25 Cents.....Children 15 Cents

Seats can be secured from 9 to 11 A. M., and from 3 to 5 P. M.

TIME—Evening—Doors open at 7 o'clock, to commence at 7 1/2. AFTERNOON—Doors open at 2 o'clock, to commence at 3.

Read the magician's autobiography:

Antonio Blitz (1810-1877), *Life and Adventures of Signor Blitz; Being an Account of the Author's Professional Life; His Wonderful Tricks and Feats; with Laughable Incidents, and Adventures as a Magician, Necromancer and Ventriloquist* (Hartford, Conn.: T. Belknap, 1872). Firestone Library (F) GV1545.B6 A3 1872