

# HOW THE TAOM WAS BORN

by Bruce Chadwick, TAOM Historian

Austin Magician Herman Yerger initiated the Labor Day weekend magic gatherings that ultimately became the Texas Association of Magicians.

According to the first TAOM newsletter that was published and distributed shortly after the 1946 Austin magic gathering by Secretary M. S. Mahendra, Yerger was a most enthusiastic practitioner of the art of magic. Born on March 22, 1894 in Brooklyn, New York, Yerger and his wife Emilie operated a tent show, played schools, vaudeville, and carnivals. A former tight-wire walker, Mahendra writes that a fall paralyzed Yerger and left him confined to a wheel chair for life.

Yerger quit performing professionally and began operating a drugstore of sorts in Austin, Texas, in the 1930's. Although not a pharmacist, he sold herbs, potions, and over-the-counter remedies to his clients, provided readings, and maintained living quarters in the back of his establishment.

On a May Saturday in 1943, Yerger told Ray Santee, who was visiting from San Antonio, that if he (Ray) would bring some San Antonio magicians and the beer, Yerger would barbecue for them the next day.



Original TAOM logo created in 1946 by "an artist in San Antonio". It was a combination of ideas and drawings submitted by Carl Moore of Austin, L. U. Kaiser of Houston, and Franklyn Swan of Dallas.

Six magicians from San Antonio and four from Austin, all members of IBM Ring 18, convened in Herman's backyard for a day of food, fellowship, and magic. The only problem with this Sunday gathering was that it was also Mothers' day.



Ed DeWees, Jack Darrouzette, Doc Mahendra, Unknown Austin Magician, Mike Zens, Harry Tunks, Herman Yerger, Milas Dyer, Ray Santee, and George Jones (Photo by Vetwe)

According to Ray Santee, they all decided to have another meeting in 1944, but on Labor Day, so that "more magicians could attend." The location of this first "official" picnic was to be at Herman's lodge on Onion Creek, about six miles south of Austin where he erected a club house, some concrete picnic tables, an open air stage, and a barbecue pit.

Doc Mahendra, Dr. Carl Moore, Ed DeWees, and Yerger made a list of magician friends and sent out invitations. A flyer advertised this first picnic as "Herman's Magic Show and Picnic, featuring Texas Top Notch Magicians and Prestidigitators." Seventy-one magicians and ninety-eight guests from Austin, San Antonio, Fort Worth, Dallas, and Houston attended the first gathering on Sunday and Monday, Sept. 3 and 4, 1944.





Some of the magicians at the 1944 picnic

The next year, 112 people (mostly magicians and their wives) gathered on Labor Day Weekend at Yerger's lodge. A \$5.00 per person fee was collected. Mahendra, DeWees, Ralph DeShong, Moore, Ren Clark, Henry Schmidt, Jim Bowling, and a few others formed a committee to organize the group into a state magicians' association.

At that picnic, Doc Mahendra was named acting president of the organization, Ren Clark was selected to write a constitution and by-laws, Henry Schmidt was asked to be secretary, and Ed DeWees was asked to select a slate of officers to be presented to the 1946 gathering. Previously, Yerger had been opposed to such an organization, but eventually warmed up to the idea during the months that followed the 1945 gathering, especially after Ed DeWees proposed that he (Yerger) be the first president of the organization.

The Texas Association of Magicians was organized at the third Labor Day weekend picnic gathering, at the Stephen F. Austin Hotel in Austin, Texas on Sunday morning September 1, 1946. The first "T.A.O.M. Official Organ" newsletter contains "Minutes of the Meeting, Texas Association of

Magicians, Austin, Texas September 2, 1946." These minutes are designated as the second business session of the TAOM, the meeting being called to order in the Mural Room of the Stephen F. Austin Hotel, Austin, Texas at 11:00 A. M. on Sunday with acting President M. S. Mahendra presiding

Officers were President, Herman Yerger; Vice President, Ralph DeShong; Secretary, M. S. Mahendra; and Treasurer, Glen Y. Davidson. The initiation fee was \$2.50 and the first year's dues cost \$1.50. The Constitution and Bylaws were adopted and official club representatives were named, to wit: Dallas SAM 13, A. Robert White; Houston SAM 19, James Bowling; Fort Worth IBM 15, Ren Clark; San Antonio IBM 18, Herman Yerger; Amarillo IBM 34, H. H. Gaddis; and Houston IBM 39, John Dunlop.

It was emphasized from the onset that the TAOM was to be controlled by the Board of Governors, with each Governor being selected by the members of his or her Ring or Assembly. Each Governor, in turn, would represent his club in all matters requiring executive action.

Membership in the Association required approval by the Membership Committee, as well as membership in one of the magic clubs represented on the Board of Governors. There were 123 charter members. Our Association has thrived over the past sixty-three years, with almost 6,000 membership numbers having been assigned. Current paid-up members total just under 500...and we are growing every day!

The vision of our founding fathers has served us well; may it continue to do so for the next sixty-three years!

\* To settle the ambiguity of the convention number sequence, the 1997 TAOM Board of Directors voted to officially recognize the 1946 Austin picnic as the first convention of the Texas Association of Magicians. This convention numbering sequence follows the pattern established by the late Doc M. S. Mahendra (Sterling), the first Secretary of the TAOM organization.