



BHC-MSS 0034  
Guide to the Circus Collection  
By Meg Rinn  
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**Descriptive Summary**

**Creator:** Bridgeport History Center

**Title:** Circus Collection

**Dates:** 1840-1982 [bulk 1870s-1950s]

**Quantity:** 5 manuscript boxes, 7 oversize drawers.

**Abstract:** Due to Bridgeport's status as the adopted hometown of P.T. Barnum as well as the legacy of the Barnum and Bailey Winter Quarters, the Bridgeport History Center has actively collected circus related material through the years. The material in this collection represents individual acquisitions of handbills, programs, and the like, arranged in an artificial collection.

**Language:** English, Japanese

**Repository:** Bridgeport History Center

**Administrative History**

Due to Bridgeport's status as the adopted hometown of P.T. Barnum as well as the legacy of the Barnum and Bailey Winter Quarters, the Bridgeport History Center has actively collected circus related material through the years. This started very early on in the library's history, and predates the establishment of the Bridgeport History Center. This in turn means that as the archives have evolved, the curation habits and criteria have evolved alongside the collection.

As a result, the Circus Collection represents the habits of both librarians and archivists over the decades that had different collecting priorities as well as approaches to how material is to be organized. Unlike the other circus material collections held by the Bridgeport History Center which usually has a single known donor or have been grouped together by genre, such as the circus route books, this collection is a true artificial collection that pulls together all stray circus related material into one managed and described archival collection.

In some cases, index cards have been found with materials (particularly oversized handbills) that represent provenance as well as the librarian or archivist responsible for the acquisition. Those index cards are kept with the material.

It is highly likely that additional items will surface elsewhere over the years. They will be added to the collection if it is deemed appropriate.

**Scope and Content note:**

The scope of this collection focuses mostly on the ephemeral material from circuses that were produced from roughly the 1840s into the 1950s. Late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> handbills in particular are well represented, with Adam Forepaugh, the Ringling Brothers, and VanAmburgh being dominant. Ringling's presence is of no surprise, given that they bought Barnum and Bailey. Most circuses present are American.

Of particular note, are the five circus posters that relate not to an American circus company, but an Italian one, whose advertisements were meant for a Japanese audience. From 1882-1887, Giuseppe Chiarini toured East Asia with the Chiarini Circus, and his advertisements were done in the style of the respective place the circus was playing. As a result, the Bridgeport History Center has five Japanese posters (Meiji era), all from about 1887, created from woodblocks and beautifully colored. The color has remain undisturbed, and there are like pieces in the catalog of Harvard's Theatre Collection and the Metropolitan Museum of Art (from the same circus as well.)

**Arrangement note:**

Oversized material (series I) represents the bulk of the collection. It is arranged alphabetically by circus, then by date. Series II, circus ephemera, represents smaller items like programs, tickets and the like, also arranged by circus and then date. The third series, general ephemera, represents material that is related to specific acts or the circus in general, but *not* associated with a specific circus itself. Series IV features newspaper articles and other secondary works, and series V represents a number of photographs that were found as a part of this collection.

**Administrative information:**

**Provenance:** Individual purchase of some material, likely other donated material. Known provenance is noted in internal records as appropriate.

**Preferred Citation:**

Circus Collection (BHC-MSS 0034), Bridgeport History Center.

**Names and Subject Tracings**

*Corporate names*

Barnum & London Circus  
Barnum and Bailey  
Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Circus  
Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus

*Subject headings*

Circus animals--Pictorial works.  
Circus owners.  
Circus performers--United States.  
Entertainers--1840-1890.  
Entertainers--1890-1900.  
Entertainers--1900-1920.  
Women circus performers

**Detailed box and folder listing**

Series I - Oversized

Drawer 1

1. S.H. Barrett and Co., Handbill, 1883; Buffalo Bill handbill, November 16, 1876
2. Beatty-Cole Combined Circus, poster, undated
3. G.B. Bunnell's Museum, handbill, June 5, 1888
4. Charles Bartine, handbill, May 18, no year; W.W. Cole, handbill, June 17, 1881

5. Campbell's Circus and Menagerie, newspaper, 1869
6. Mr. Carter, handbill, October 20, 1840
7. Chiarini Circus, two parts of circus poster printed in Tokyo for Japanese audience, features equestrian acts, c. 1883-1887
8. Chiarini Circus, two parts of circus poster printed in Tokyo for Japanese audience, features minute on horseback, c. 1883-1887
9. Chiarini Circus, two parts of circus poster printed in Tokyo for Japanese audience, features acrobats c. 1883-1887
10. Chiarini Circus, circus poster printed in Tokyo for Japanese audience, 1887
11. M.L. Clark and Sons, ad, May 31, no year

#### Drawer 2

1. Forepaugh, Forepaugh-Sells, newspaper, c. 1880s-190s
2. Forepaugh, newspaper, October 27, 1880
3. Forepaugh, clippings (mounted on acidic paper), 1883
4. Forepaugh, courier, July 12, 1888
5. Fourepaugh, courier, 1890
6. Forepaugh, handbills, c. 1890s
7. Forepaugh-Sells, newspaper, c. 1880s-1890s
8. Forepaugh, Forepaugh-Sells, small handbills and courier, 1900
9. Forepaugh, Forepaugh-Sells, Courier, November 17, no year
10. Forepaugh --- Luella, Forepaugh, Fish Wild West Shows handbill, 1903
11. J.M. French's Great Oriental Circus, newspaper, August 4, 1869
12. German circus ads, 1872

#### Drawer 3

1. Grand Circus Royal, handbill, July 2, 1881
2. Great European Circus, Newspaper, July 24, 1864
3. Great London Circus handbills, 1870s-1890s
4. Great London Circus handbills, 1870s-1890s
5. Great London Circus, handbill, no year
6. Great London Circus, handbill, no year
7. Great London Circus, newspaper, undated
8. Carl Hagenbeck and Great Wallace Shows combined, handbill August 10, 1908; courier 1931
9. Holland-Dutch circus photograph, undated
10. King brothers and Cristiani Combined Circus, August 11, no year
11. Mons. J. LaThorn circus, handbill, undated
12. L.B. Lent, c. 1850s-1870s
13. Miller and French's Monster Railroad Show, June 27, 1888
14. Model Circus, handbills, 1851
15. Raymond and Co's and Herr Driesbach's Menagerie, May 21, 1851

#### Drawer 4

1. Ringling Brothers handbill (1896), route sheets (1919-1941)
2. Ringling Brothers, handbill, 1893 and courier, 1920s
3. Ringling Bros, lion photograph, 1904
4. Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey handbills, c. 1920s?
5. Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey handbills, c. 1920s?
6. Ringling Bros, route of Ringling Bros Circus drawn by Ray G. Fiege, 1950
7. Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey posters, c. 1970s
8. Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey poster feat. portraits, undated

#### Drawer 5

1. John Robinson, Yankee Robinson, handbills, 1867; c. 1890s
2. Royal American Shows poster, undated
3. Savoy Trio and their acrobatic bull terriers
4. Sells Brothers, handbills, 1881, 1909
5. Sells-Floto handbills and routes, 1918-1933
6. Sells-Floto, newspaper, Amusement Times, 1931
7. Charlie Shays Monster Quinceptial Troupe, handbill, undated
8. Stone, Roston and Co, Stone-Murray's Combined; John H. Murray's grand circus, 1860s-1870s
9. Texas Charlie Grant, handbill, undated
10. United States Equestrian Pictorial, March 15, 1857

#### Drawer 6

1. Van Amburgh, courier, August 5, 1874
2. Van Amburgh, handbills, 1885
3. Van Amburgh, handbills, undated
4. Van Amburgh, newspaper, 1868; 1879
5. Van Amburgh, New Jersey Eagle, undated and very fragile
6. Walter L. Main Shows, handbill, undated
7. Warning, Tufts and Co. , newspapers, May 1831
8. Welch's National Circus, July 21, 1852
9. Wirth and Hamid programs, undated

#### Drawer 7

1. "Circus Days" film (or short?) poster, extremely large and in three parts, undated
2. Chart of railroad circuses, 1872-1956, printed 1973
3. Clippings, mostly about circus posters, 1930s-1950s
4. Newspapers, series by Oney Fred Sweet for Chicago Sunday Tribune, c. 1930s or 1940s?
5. Newspapers, articles with circus content, 1930s-1960s
6. Circus engraving by R. Weaver (limited edition prints), c. 1970s?
7. Circus Scene poster by Creative Education Society, 1936
8. Modern Lithograph Circus Posters for In and Out Doors, undated
9. Poster reproductions from Circus World Museum, undated

10. Poster reproductions of Barnum and Bailey and Ringling Bros. Barnum and Bailey, undated

Series II, Circus ephemera

Box 1

1. Bailey Bros., route card, no year
2. Bailey and Co., c. 1870s
3. Barnum and Van Amburgh, handbill, undated
4. Beatty-Clyde, route, 1947
5. Beatty-Cole, program, 1957
6. G.B. Bunnell, booklet, "The Non-Descript Davy called the man-bear," undated
7. G.B. Bunnell, handbill, undated
8. Clyde Brothers, program, undated
9. Cole Brothers, program and routes 1930-1950s
10. Cooper and Bailey, Clippings, April 1880
11. Cristian brothers, route book, 1958
12. W. W. Cole, handbill, undated
13. W.W. Coup, Clippings and handbills, c. 1880s
14. Dailey Brothers, route, 1946
15. Downie Brothers, program and letter, c. 1936
16. Forepaugh, "Book of Wonders" (Animal history and program) c. 1900s?
17. Forepaugh, "The Progress of Civilization" (Wild west show program) c. 1880s
18. Forepaugh, "The Animal Kingdom Illustrated" c. 1880s?
19. Forepaugh, clown songsters. C. 1880s-1890s
20. Forepaugh, trade cards, c. 1880s-1890s
21. Forepaugh, programs and ads, 1879-1890s
22. Franconi's Hippodrome, handbill, 1855
23. Gilbert Bros, program, 1953
24. Hagenbeck Wallace, routes, 1928-1934
25. Howes and Turner, handbill, mid 1800s?
26. Hunt Brothers, route, 1960
27. Hunting Circus, 1891
28. Jacobs and Terrell, booklet, c. 1950s?
29. John Robinson's Circus, 1930
30. King Brothers, program, October 16, no year
31. Martin Brothers. Trained Animal Circus, circus magazine, 1936
32. Mighty Haag Circus, license contract, 1930s
33. Mills Brothers, route books, 1947, 1951, 1959
34. Moscow Circus, 1962
35. New York Hippodrome, 1905-1908
36. Nixon and Co's circus troupe, handbill, January 6, 1859
37. Polak Brothers circus yearbook, 1944
38. PW Truss and Co's production of Wang
39. O'Brien circus, handbill, 1876
40. Ogden, Weeks, and Co. (animal history), 1847
41. Old Yankee Robinson's Hippodrome, Circus, Coliseum, letterhead 1882

Box 2

1. Ringling, Booklet, story of Gargantua
2. Ringling, Magazine of Wonders and Daily Review featuring Solomon and the Queen of Sheba
3. Ringling, program , May 31, 1906

4. Ringling, magazine of wonders and daily review, 1911
5. Ringling, programs 1905-1915
6. Ringling, program and libretto for Cinderella, c. 1916
7. Ringling, tickets, 1919-
8. Ringling, program, 1925
9. Ringling, Christmas Cards, 1928-1930
10. Ringling, programs, 1930s
11. Ringling, Winter Quarters souvenir book, 1930s
12. Ringling, program, no year
13. Ringling, letterhead, undated
14. James Robinson, ads, 1882
15. Tony Pastor's opera house, handbill, no year
16. Walter L. Main's Grandest and Best show on earth, route book, 1895
17. Walter L. Main, tickets, c. 1880s-1890s
18. James Robinson, ads, 1882
19. Russell brothers circus, 1930s-1940s
20. Saint Leon Brothers European Circus letterhead
21. Sarasota High School presents Sailor Circus, March 14-17, 1952
22. Spark Circus, program and route cards, 1923-1930
23. Stone and Murray's Circus, Songs Sung by Tom Barry, the great Hiberian Clown, undated
24. Van Amburgh, ad, c. 1880s-1890s
25. Van Amburgh, History of the Animals, 1877
26. Van Amburgh, "A Brief Biographical Sketch of I.A. VanAmburgh..." undated
27. Wyoming Bill's Wlld West, route, 1913

### Series III, General ephemera

#### Box 3

1. Hagenbeck, ad, 1893
2. Bepxom book (German?), no year
3. Book, "The Fair, mobile pictures for good children" c. 1876
4. Booklet, "The Frolic Grasshopper Circus," 1895
5. Book, "Circus Tricks" c. 1880s-1890s
6. Booklet, History of the Little Fairy Dollie Dutton
7. Booklet "A Clown's Roman OR Won in the Big Tent" late 19th century
8. Booklet and cabinet card, Major N.G. W. Winner
9. Christmas card with elephants, c. 1940s?
10. Illustration of Joseph Grimaldi, 1846
11. Ad and photograph of the Tocci twins, 1891
12. Sheet music, "The Circus Mule" 1939
13. Songster, The Clown's Great Circus Song Book, undated
14. Reproduced images of paintings showing late fair/early circus life
15. Trade cards, circus animals
16. Trade cards, circus elephants
17. Trade card, circus elements
18. "World's Tallest Couple" book publicity info, 1982
19. Emmett Kelly clown plate literature, 1982
20. Book cover, "The Circus Kings" by Henry North and Alden Hatch
21. 19th century assemblage of handbill elements
22. *Greatest Show on Earth* promotional photographs
23. *Greatest Show on Earth* promotional material

24. Nelson Gordy tracings and sketches, 1 of 3, 1930s-1950s
25. Nelson Gordy tracings and sketches, 2 of 3, 1930s-1950s
26. Nelson Gordy tracings and sketches, 3 of 3, 1930s-1950s
27. Nelson Gordy manuscript, undated
28. Circus Fans Association of America roster, 1979-1980
29. Playbill, "Barnum" the musical
30. Sketches of various interiors of the Big Apple Circus by Ray Dirgo, 1981-1982

Series IV, Articles and secondary works

Box 4

1. History of famous parade wagons, April 13, 1940
2. Circus pictures from *Life*, April 4, 1938
3. "Gay Carusos of the Circus, songsters of the sawdust ring of yesterday" by F.P. Pitzer. *The Etude*, October, 1942
4. "Touring Circuses: popular amusement in the united states" July 1947
5. "Little Butch" by F. Beverly Kelly. *The Saturday Evening Post*, May 29, 1948
6. "Human cannonball fires himself 300 through the air" by Willard Neal. *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*. June 3, 1951
7. "Stars on the Sawdust." July 2, 1951
8. "New Shine for the Circus" *Life*, June 1955
9. Circus route book list, December 1955
10. "Big Top Bows Out Forever." *Life*, July 30, 1956
11. Country Beautiful feat. article on circus posters, 1965
12. "He Just Loves to Scare You" by Bernard Payton Jr." undated
13. Book cover for "Circus: Cinders to Sawdust"
14. "When the White Tops" by Earl Chapin May. *Popular Mechanics*.

Series V, Photographs

Box 5 – Circus photographs, early 20<sup>th</sup> century