



BHC-MSS 0257

Guide to the Edwin Martin Collection of Circus Photographs  
By Jaime Pettit  
December 2024

**Descriptive Summary**

**Creator:** Edwin Martin

**Title:** Edwin Martin Collection of Circus Photographs

**Dates:** 1981-1987

**Quantity:** Two boxes

**Abstract:** The Edwin Martin Collection of Circus Photographs features a wide array of images from 1981-1988, documenting modern American circus life in the 1980s. These black and white photographs contain scenes of animals, performers, and workers behind the scenes, ranging from training sessions to leisure time on the circus grounds.

**Language:** English

**Repository:** Bridgeport History Center

**Biographical History:**

Edwin Martin was born in 1943, and was educated at Florida State University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Indiana University. In 1986, he worked as a news photographer for the *Indianapolis News*, as well as various publications such as the *Miami Herald* and Associated Press in 1987. Martin was appointed a professor of philosophy and affiliate professor of journalism at Indiana University from 1968-1989, and has held various appointments at Rutgers University, North Carolina State University, and the University of Maine. He also worked as Curator of Photography at North Carolina State University Visual Arts Center from 1990-1993.

In his career as a photographer, Martin has produced two books, [Mud Show: American Tent Circus Life](#) and [Hope for a Good Season](#), as well as an assortment of publications. Martin's work has also been featured in exhibitions at the Albuquerque Museum of Art and the Martha White Gallery, among others. His original photographs are kept in the collections of a variety of prominent institutions, including the Library of Congress, the Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, Florida, and the New York Historical Society.

*Mud Show: American Tent Circus Life* was a project Martin completed in 1988 that paints an intimate picture of American circus life in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. "Mud show" is a colloquial term for traveling circuses that do not perform in enclosed venues, but rather outdoors and on dirt, which turns to mud in the rain. Martin had only been doing photography for three years when he began the project, enrolling as a student in the university he taught at in order to get better acquainted with the medium. [Mud Show](#) began as a school assignment for the course with Martin finding a subject of interest when the Carson & Barnes Circus arrived in Indiana to perform. Carson & Barnes were one of the six circuses that Martin photographed from 1983 to 1986. He would travel with the circus through six states, sometimes riding with Carson & Barnes over 100 miles to reach their next destination.

In his travels and photographs, Martin was able to create an intimate portrait of modern traveling circuses, showing the lives of performers and circus animals behind the scenes. "The lure of the circus is strong, pulling with the attraction of strange animals and people traveling to exotic places. It is a micro-society of wondrous performers displaying death defying feats," Martin wrote in Mud Show. "But underlying the glitter is a hard life, one filled with eighteen-hour work days, usually seven days each week. It is a life in which children struggle with education in the absence of qualified, systemic supervision. It is a business facing sharp increases in insurance and fuel costs as well as stricter regulation. And it is a legacy of transition... As America changed, so has its tent circuses. Like the rest of the country, they too are trying to prepare for the 21<sup>st</sup> century." Through his portraits, Martin hoped to show that the American circus is still alive, despite its decline as a source of entertainment, and remains a profound and active link to America's past.

**Scope and Content Note:**

The Edward Martin Collection of Circus Photographs features a wide array of images from 1983-1988, documenting modern circus life in the 1980s. These photographs contain scenes of animals, performers, and workers behind the scenes, ranging from training sessions to leisure time on the circus grounds, such as resting, religious ceremonies, and interactions between the circus workers. There are 130 images in the collection.

**Arrangement note:**

The Edwin Martin Collection of Circus Photographs are separated in approximately 9 folders and interleaved with acid free paper. However, the photographs have severely curved over time, meaning that they require more room and do not easily fit into archival folders. The collection included a list provided by the creator, which the History Center has elected to maintain in order to preserve the authenticity of the collection. The photos are arranged by their original titles given by Mr. Martin, names of photography subjects in parenthesis, circus company, location and date.

**Administrative information:**

**Provenance:** Donation of Edwin Martin. Accession #2024.20.

**Preferred Citation:**

Edwin Martin Collection of Circus Photographs (BHC-MSS 0256), Bridgeport History Center, Bridgeport Public Library.

**Names and Subject Tracings**

*Personal Names*

Martin, Edward, 1943-

*Corporate Names*

Carson & Barnes Circus

Hoxie Brothers Circus

Kelly Miller Bros. Circus

Franzen Brothers Circus

Clyde Beatty-Cole Brothers Circus

Toby Tyler Circus

*Subject Tracings*

Clowns--1980-1990

Circuses & shows--1980-1990  
Circus animals--Pictorial works  
Circus animals--United States--History--20th century  
Circus performers--United States  
Circus workers  
Elephant trainers  
Women circus performers

*Genres*  
Photographs

### **Detailed box and folder listing**

#### **Box 1**

Martin, E., & Wilmeth, D. B. (1988). Mud show: American Tent Circus Life. University of New Mexico Press.

#### **Folder 1.**

1. Biographical resume of Edwin Martin
2. Mud Show interview

#### **Folder 2.**

1. *Elephant Team* (Dutch), Hoxie Brothers Circus, Porterville, CA, 1981
2. *Elephants and Tent*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Nashville, IN, 1983
3. *Water Trough* (Jim), Carson and Barnes Circus, Porterville, CA 1984
4. Pole raising, Carson and Barnes Circus, Lake Isabella, CA, 1984
5. *Center pole holes*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Lake Isabella, CA, 1984
7. *Ben & Thumper*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Barstow, CA, 1984
8. *Backyard Wash*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Barstow, CA, 1984
9. *Ringmaster*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Barstow, CA, 1984
10. *Five Clowns* (Flip, Phil, Mariah, EJ and Bob), Carson and Barnes Circus, Bullhead City, AZ, 1984
11. *Lion taming* (Pat), Carson and Barnes Circus, Bullhead City, AZ, 1984
12. *Alfonso & Chulo*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Window Rock, AZ, 1984
13. *Bob & Sue*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Winslow, AZ, 1984
14. *EJ at the Front Door*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Window Rock, AZ, 1984
15. *Lone Windjammer* (Chuck), Carson and Barnes Circus, Cortez, CO, 1984
16. *Libby*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Durango, CO, 1984
17. *Backyard Performance*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Durango, CO, 1984
18. *Ben & Oakie*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Shiprock, NM, 1984
19. *Candy Butcher*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Shiprock, NM, 1984
20. *Rolling Globes*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Aztec, NM, 1984

**Folder 3.**

21. *Bus 41* (Vargas Troupe), Carson and Barnes Circus, Milan, NM, 1984
21. *Bus 41* (Vargas Troupe), Carson and Barnes Circus, Milan, NM, 1984 (second copy)
22. *Winded Clown* (Bob, EJ, Greg), Carson and Barnes Circus, Santa Fe, NM, 1984
24. *Wardrobe*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Tucumcari, NM, 1984
25. *Two clowns* (One asleep: Phil & EJ), Carson and Barnes Circus, Dalhart, TX, 1984
26. *The Golden Age of Chivalry*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Canadian, TX, 1984
27. *Clown in trailer* (Phil), Carson and Barnes Circus, Fairview, OK, 1984
28. *Cochise*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Enid, OK, 1984
29. *Flying Trapeze* (Alejandro & Bruno), Carson and Barnes Circus, Eau Claire, WI, 1984
30. *Elephant Act* (Pat), Carson and Barnes Circus, Eau Claire, WI, 1984
31. *Pedicure* (Allan & Becky), Carson and Barnes Circus, New Richmond, WI, 1984
32. *Cookhouse Tent* (Phil), Carson and Barnes Circus, New Richmond, WI, 1984
33. *Backdoor Play* (Mariel, Mattie Lou, Phil), Carson and Barnes Circus, New Richmond, WI, 1984
34. *Teeterboard*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Carson and Barnes Circus, New Richmond, WI, 1984
35. *Circus Posters*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Thorp, WI, 1984
36. *Watching the Setup*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Marshfield, WI, 1984
37. *Ringmaster & Acrobat* (Cleo & Mirna), Carson and Barnes Circus, Marshfield, WI, 1984
38. *The Morales Troupe*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Marshfield, WI, 1984
39. *Two Couples by the Backdoor* (Nancy & Lalo, Lois & Alejandro), Carson and Barnes Circus, Marshfield, WI, 1984
40. *Dismounting Tina* (Lili & Dino), Carson and Barnes Circus, Elroy, WI, 1984

**Folder 4.**

41. *On the Ropes*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Carson and Barnes Circus, Elroy, WI, 1984
42. *Sleeping Clown* (EJ), Carson and Barnes Circus, Oshkosh, WI, 1984
43. *Chained Elephant* (Libby), Carson and Barnes Circus, Adams, WI, 1984
44. *Girl and Elephants* (Pat), Carson and Barnes Circus, Adams, WI, 1984
47. *Waiting for Spec* (Pancho et al.), Carson and Barnes Circus, Greensburg, IN, 1984
48. *Dancing Elephants* (Lucy), Carson and Barnes Circus, Greensburg, IN, 1984
49. *Trapeze Practice* (Maricela), Carson and Barnes Circus, Martinsville, IN, 1984
50. *Cat Act* (Pat), Carson and Barnes Circus, Martinsville, IN, 1984
51. *Liberty Horses* (Pat), Carson and Barnes Circus, Martinsville, IN, 1984
52. *Makeup* (Phil) Carson and Barnes Circus, Martinsville, IN, 1984
52. *Makeup* (Phil) Carson and Barnes Circus, Martinsville, IN, 1984 (different angle)
53. *Circus School*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Bloomfield, IN, 1984
55. *Winter Quarters* (Bones), Carson and Barnes Circus, Winter Quarters, Hugo, OK, 1985
56. *Lion Poster*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Winter Quarters, Hugo, OK, 1985
57. *Elephant Practice* (Red), Carson and Barnes Circus, Winter Quarters, Hugo, OK, 1985
58. *Elephant Practice 2* (Red), Carson and Barnes Circus, Winter Quarters, Hugo, OK, 1985
59. *Bareback Practice* (Loyal Family), Carson and Barnes Circus, Winter Quarters, Hugo, OK, 1985
60. *Dead Trucks*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Winter Quarters, Hugo, OK, 1985
62. *Oiling Elephants* (Oakie), Carson and Barnes Circus, Winter Quarters, Hugo, OK, 1985

**Folder 5.**

64. *Red Reading*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Winter Quarters, Hugo, OK, 1985
65. *Tired Camel* (Al G.), Kelly Miller Bros. Circus, Radcliffe, KY, 1985
67. *Trained Giraffe* (Lena), Kelly Miller Bros. Circus, Radcliffe, KY, 1985
68. *Midway* (Chris), Kelly Miller Bros. Circus, Radcliffe, KY, 1985
69. *Teardown*, Kelly Miller Bros. Circus, Radcliffe, KY, 1985
70. *Setup*, Kelly Miller Bros. Circus, Fairdale, KY, 1985
71. *Poodle Act* (Larry & Lisa), Kelly Miller Bros. Circus, Fairdale, KY, 1985
72. *Three Ladies* (Chris, Nina, Manuela), Kelly Miller Bros. Circus, Fairdale, KY, 1985
73. *Unpacking* (Jesus), Carson and Barnes Circus, Columbia, MO, 1985
74. *Wet Lot*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Cedar City, MO, 1985
75. *Sweatbox 4* (Dennis), Carson and Barnes Circus, Cedar City, MO, 1985
76. *Mabel Leaps* (Pat), Carson and Barnes Circus, Cedar City, MO, 1985
80. *Horse Department* (Don et. al.), Carson and Barnes Circus, Effingham, IL, 1985

**Box 2****Folder 6.**

81. *Trapeze Play*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Effingham, IL, 1985
82. *Wash—Elephant Department* (James), Carson and Barnes Circus, Effingham, IL, 1985
83. *Luna Family* (Francis), Carson and Barnes Circus, Charleston, IL, 1985
84. *Two Young Clowns* (Rusty & Wayne) Carson and Barnes Circus, Palestine, IL, 1985
85. *Levitation* (Lili), Carson and Barnes Circus, Palestine, IL, 1985
86. *Stake Pulling* (Bud & Sue, Dee & Mini) Carson and Barnes Circus, Washington, IN, 1985
89. *Big Lasso* (Jay), Kelly Miller Bros. Circus, Bucyrus, Ohio, 1985
90. *Checking the House* (Donna & Manuela), Kelly Miller Bros. Circus, Bucyrus, Ohio, 1985
92. *Pedicure* (Jim & Viola), Kelly Miller Bros. Circus, St. Mary's, Ohio, 1985
93. *Waiting for Teardown* (Jim & Nina), Kelly Miller Bros. Circus, St. Mary's, Ohio, 1985
94. *Juggler* (Jose), Kelly Miller Bros. Circus, Lima, Ohio, 1985
95. *Odd Man Out* (Donna, Manuela, Sasha & Zippo), Kelly Miller Bros. Circus, Lima, Ohio, 1985
96. *Backyard Romance* (Jose & Manuela et. al) Kelly Miller Bros. Circus, Paulding, Ohio, 1985
98. *Rich Clown* (Fred), Franzen Brothers Circus, Rising Sun, IN, 1985
99. *Rope Guying* (Russell et. al.), Franzen Brothers Circus, Tell City, IN, 1985
100. *Ringmaster* (Bill), Franzen Brothers Circus, Tell City, IN, 1985

**Folder 7.**

101. *Mixed Animal Revue* (Wayne & Chuck), Franzen Brothers Circus, Tell City, IN, 1985
102. *Franzen Brothers Winter Quarters*, Franzen Brothers Circus, Webster, FL, 1986
103. *Retired Clown* (Diamond Jim Parker), Gibsonton, FL, 1986
104. *Frances Luna*, Gibsonton, FL, 1986
105. *Watering Elephants*, Clyde Beatty-Cole Brothers Circus, De Land, FL, 1986
106. *Elephant & House*, Clyde Beatty-Cole Brothers Circus, Winter Quarters, De Land, FL, 1986
107. *Caged Tiger*, Clyde Beatty-Cole Brothers Circus, Winter Quarters, De Land, FL, 1986
108. *Wet Clown* (Rod), Roberts Brothers Circus, Buena Vista, VA, 1986

109. *Setting the Flag*, Roberts Brothers Circus, Rainelle, WV, 1986
110. *Sidewall Shadows*, Roberts Brothers Circus, Alderson, WV, 1986
111. *Elephant Skin Dog*, Roberts Brothers Circus, Alderson, WV, 1986
112. *Tony*, Roberts Brothers Circus, Lost Creek, WV, 1986
113. *Clown by Back Door* (Rod), Roberts Brothers Circus, Lost Creek, WV, 1986
114. *Ostriches*, Toby Tyler Circus, New Brunswick, NJ, 1986
115. *Strange Animals*, Toby Tyler Circus, New Brunswick, NJ, 1986
116. *Overture*, Toby Tyler Circus, New Brunswick, NJ, 1986
117. *Small Clown* (Pete), Toby Tyler Circus, New Brunswick, NJ, 1986
118. *Tattooed Lady* (Dan, Lola, Louie), Toby Tyler Circus, Sterling, NJ, 1986
119. *Waiting for Setup*, Clyde Beatty-Cole Brothers Circus, Willow Grove, PA, 1986
120. *Safety Net Repair* (Hermino), Clyde Beatty-Cole Brothers Circus, Willow Grove, PA, 1986

#### **Folder 8.**

121. *Workingmen's Dreams*, Clyde Beatty-Cole Brothers Circus, Willow Grove, PA, 1986
122. *Kelly*, Clyde Beatty-Cole Brothers Circus, Willow Grove, PA, 1986
123. *Notice*, Clyde Beatty-Cole Brothers Circus, Willow Grove, PA, 1986
125. *Pete Pushes the Cats*, Clyde Beatty-Cole Brothers Circus, Brick Town, NJ, 1986
126. *Billy*, Clyde Beatty-Cole Brothers Circus, Brick Town, NJ, 1986
128. *Sunday Services* (Father Toner), Clyde Beatty-Cole Brothers Circus, Brick Town, NJ, 1986
129. *Juggling at the Back Door* (Robert), Clyde Beatty-Cole Brothers Circus, Brick Town, NJ, 1986
130. *Tonito*, Clyde Beatty-Cole Brothers Circus, Brick Town, NJ, 1986
131. *Memorial Day Parade* (Sandy), Clyde Beatty-Cole Brothers Circus, Brick Town, NJ, 1986
132. *Buzzz*, Clyde Beatty-Cole Brothers Circus, Brick Town, NJ, 1986
133. *Bareback Rider*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Milwaukee, WI, 1986
135. *Three Clowns* (Koto, Rhonda, Phil), Carson and Barnes Circus, Milwaukee, WI, 1986
137. *Koto*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Milwaukee, WI, 1986
138. *Carlos and Xochitl*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Milwaukee, WI, 1986
139. *Bareback Pyramid* (Alfredo, Lucy, Moira, Chava), Carson and Barnes Circus, Milwaukee, WI, 1986
140. *Andrea*, Carson and Barnes Circus, Milwaukee, WI, 1986
141. *Finger Stand* (Ramon), Carson and Barnes Circus, Milwaukee, WI, 1986
142. *Calliope* (The Great Circus Parade), Milwaukee, WI, 1986
144. *Guest Clowns*, Richmond, IN, 1986
147. *Carson & Barnes*, Carson and Barnes Circus, 1987
148. *Skin and Bones*, 1987
149. *Clown Act* (Phil), Carson and Barnes Circus, Linton, IN, 1987
150. *Elephant Riders by the Back Door* (Lili, Theresa), Carson and Barnes Circus, Linton, IN, 1987