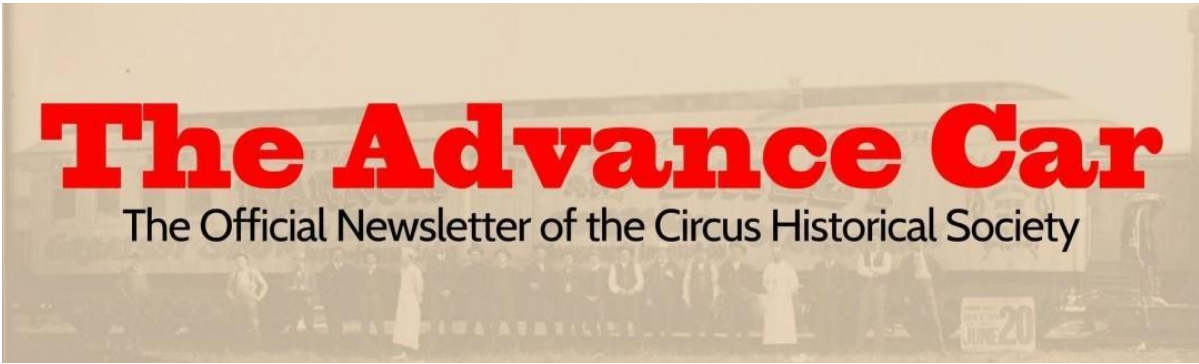




The Advance Car

The Official Newsletter of the Circus Historical Society

August 2026

We are pleased to bring you another edition of *The Advance Car*, the e-newsletter of the Circus Historical Society!

Since 1939, CHS members have been preserving circus history by writing articles for our *Bandwagon* journal, speaking at our conventions, working in the collections of the major circus history museums and libraries, teaching circus history courses at colleges and universities, and producing content for our websites, YouTube channel, and other online and social media programs.

In the June issue of this e-newsletter, we highlighted the circus history preservation efforts of our members at our extraordinarily successful 2026 convention. In this issue, we spotlight members who have recently published works on circus history. As an educational organization, we applaud them for their research and writing efforts in providing new resources to satisfy the public's rapidly growing interest in circus history.

We distribute *The Advance Car* to both members and non-members. If you are not already a member and want to help us preserve the ever-evolving history of circus and receive our beautiful *Bandwagon* journal quarterly, click the red button below to learn about the benefits of CHS membership. Dues are still only \$60 per year!

Bruce Hawley
President
Circus Historical Society

[Click here to learn more about CHS and join today!](#)

CHS Member Spotlight

Recognizing our members and their dedication to preserving circus history



Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library
Ringling Barnum Circus, Erie PA, 10 July 1956

Historic photos, such as this long-ago view of a circus backyard, regularly capture the attention of the thousands of people who follow our organization on Facebook and other social media channels. They invite viewers to wonder what was happening that day in circus history and what life was like for the circus people who lived and worked there.

During the last nineteen months, more than a dozen CHS members with similar interests shared their research and study of circus history by publishing ten books and one doctoral thesis about the lives, culture, and language of circus and sideshow people.

What follows is a brief description of their works in alphabetical order by author, all of which will be great additions to your circus history reading list. Enjoy!

Terry Tim Allread

Backyard Circus: The Life & Times of Grace Jr. and Arvel Victor Allread

Arvel Allread was a musician in both the Army Air Force Band during WWII and the circus. With his wife, Grace Jr., he was with C.R. Montgomery Circus, Robinson Bros. Circus, and the Tom Thumb Circus, before they began their own rare wild animal exhibition, the Great Pan-American Zoological Exhibit, which thrilled and educated children and families on the California Fair circuit and their Robinson Bros Circus.

[Click here](#) for additional information.

Deb Carson

Becoming Flo: A Mostly True Story

Most Orthodox Jewish boys at the turn of the 20th Century did not run away from home. Did not join the circus. Did not find fame. And did not find herself. Albert "Flo" White did. From the shtetl to the Big Top, Flo's true story inspires.

[Click here](#) for additional information.

Rebecca Didier

The Greatest Horse Trainer on Earth: The Sylvia Zerbini Story

In circus circles, the name Zerbini commands respect. In Rebecca Didier's new book, *The Greatest Horse Trainer on Earth*, we learn how Sylvia Zerbini contributed to that legacy. This ninth-generation performer earned international fame as an extraordinary equestrian and trapeze performer.

[Click here](#) for additional information.

Janelle Dietrick

A Circus Honeymoon Around the World

Follow two couples on a honeymoon journey around the world. All circus stars, they cross oceans from one exotic locale to another – Bombay to Rio de Janeiro – with newspaper-documented adventures along the way. Janelle Dietrick's *A Circus Honeymoon Around the World* includes 70 illustrations.

[Click here](#) for additional information.

Betsy Golden Kellem Thayer Prize Winner

Jumping Through Hoops: Performing Gender in the 19th Century Circus

Winner of the 2026 Circus Historical Society Stuart Thayer Prize,¹ Betsy Golden Kellem's *Jumping Through Hoops* reveals the hidden history of how early female circus performers executed impossible feats and transformed American culture. Her book brings to light boundary-breaking pioneers like Patty Astley, Lavinia Warren, and Millie-Christine McKoy, who wrestled snakes, performed magic tricks with electricity, and walked tightropes across waterfalls.

[Click here](#) for additional information.

Betsy Golden Kellem, Jenny Leigh Du Puis, Jennifer Lemmer Posey (editors) —

Circus and Sideshow in the Long Nineteenth Century: A Documentary History: Volume II: Circus in North America

North America's nineteenth Century saw huge cultural shifts, from immigration and industrialization to politics, religion, and human rights. The circus was there for it all and uniquely reflected the changes for audiences seeking distraction and joy. *Circus and Sideshow in the Long Nineteenth Century: A Documentary History: Volume II: Circus in North America* presents documents, manuscripts and recollections that chronicle the times. It is a distinctive a mosaic of spangles and grit that resonates with reverence for all that was.

[Click here](#) for additional information.

Dan Meyer and Marc Hartzman

To the Hilt: A Sword Swallower's History of Swallowing

Get an inside perspective on the enthralling world of sword swallowing and the lives of more than 100 entertainers as you learn about the history, careers, and medical risks involved in this rare pursuit. Co-written by world-renowned sword swallower Dan Meyer and noted sideshow historian Marc Hartzman, this book offers an array of rare images that enhance the riveting stories of sword-swallowers from the 1800's to today.

[Click here](#) for additional information.

Aíne Murphy Norris

***Back Yard Lingo: Language as Cultural Identity in American Circus*
(Doctoral Dissertation)**

This work is an exploration of the deeply insider language of American circus and identifies meaningful patterns and connections between language, identity, and community. Drawing upon the theoretical lenses of cultural studies and community of practice, the study offers a thorough examination of how circus people use insider language for business, performance, and community purposes that enhance belonging, share knowledge, gatekeep, and protect their group identity.

[Click here](#) for additional information.

Amelia Klem Osterud and Fritz Grobe

***The 388 Tattoos of Captain George and the 389 Tales of How He Got Them:
Being the Allegedly True Story of the World's Most Famous Tattooed Man***

Before he became an icon of the American sideshow, a mysterious figure stunned 1870s Europe when he surfaced completely blanketed in exotic, full-body ink. In *The 388 Tattoos of Captain George and the 389 Tales of How He Got Them*, Amelia Klem Osterud and Fritz Grobe uncover the allegedly true story of the world's most famous tattooed man.

[Click here](#) for additional information.

Aaron Smith

NATURAL BORN! Circus, Sideshow, and the Art of Being Human

This book takes readers into a side of show business experiencing generational change. It celebrates and examines the gifts of the “differently abled” 21st Century performers who’ve transformed their unique bodies into breathtaking artistry. Through intimate interviews with twenty artists, see how venues such as Omnium Circus and Sideshows by the Seashore on Coney Island are showcasing the extraordinary skills of artists including Shorty the Half-man, Lobster Girl, and John T. Rex. CHS member and Omnium Circus Founder Lisa Lewis provide the foreword to this special read.

[Click here](#) for additional information.

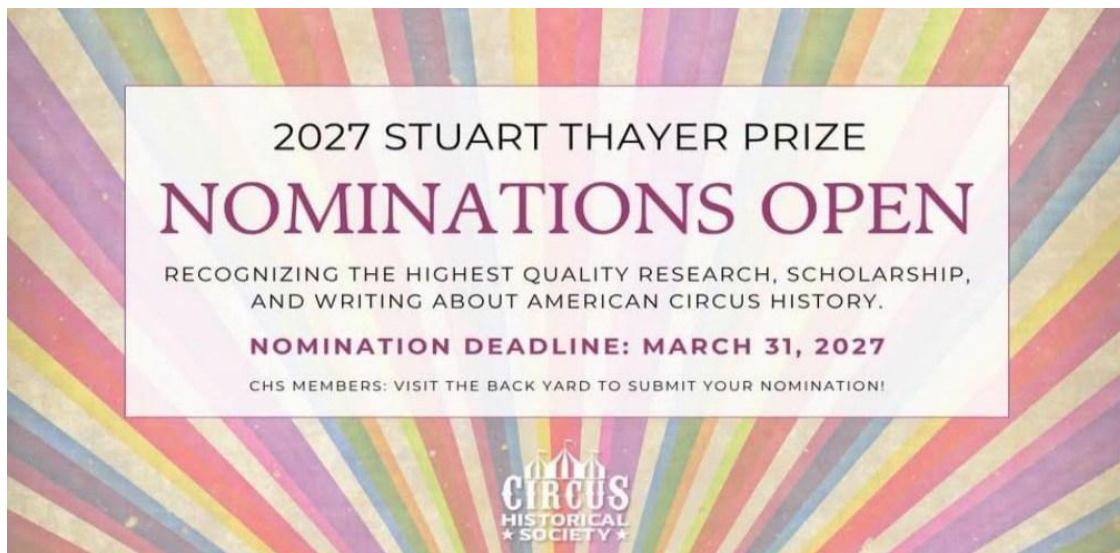
Dale Williams and Bob White

101 Ranch Wild West Posters

In *101 Ranch Wild West Posters*, recognized authorities Dale Williams and Bob White offer a definitive visual history of the Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Real Wild West Show. Painstakingly scouring both public archives and closely guarded private collections, the authors have assembled a complete, fully illustrated book featuring all known existing posters from the show.

[Click here](#) for additional information.

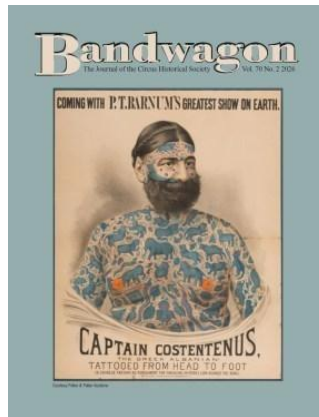
If you're a CHS member who has recently promoted circus history through publication, presentations, media appearances, or community talks, let us know! We try to highlight as much as possible in each issue. Email CHSmarketingpr@gmail.com



Call for Nominations for 2027 Thayer Prize

The CHS Thayer Prize Committee is now accepting nominations for the 2027 Thayer Prize. Only non-fictional works published, issued, or released during 2025 and 2026 are eligible for nomination for the 2027 prize, and only Circus Historical Society members are eligible to make nominations. Members may nominate one or more works, including their own. [Click here](#) for eligibility and nomination procedures.

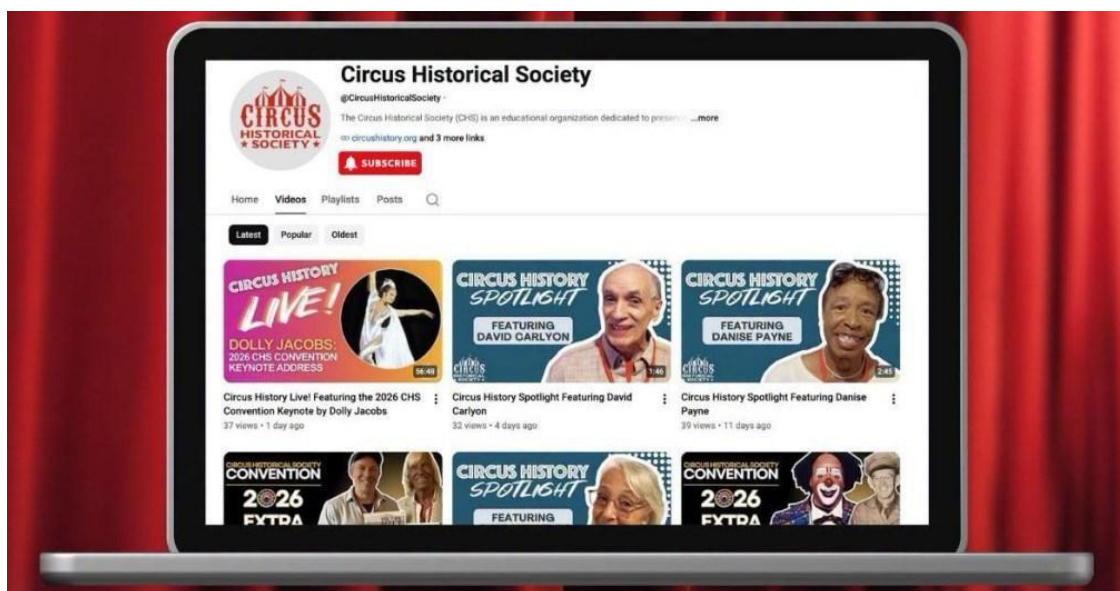
If you are a CHS member and know of any recently published circus history works, including any of those listed above, that meet the criteria for the Thayer Prize, please consider nominating.



Bandwagon Vol. 70, No. 2 (2026)

The new issue of our *Bandwagon* journal is in the mail! It includes four articles about circus history and a special tribute to CHS Trustee Emeritus Richard Reynolds who passed away several months ago.

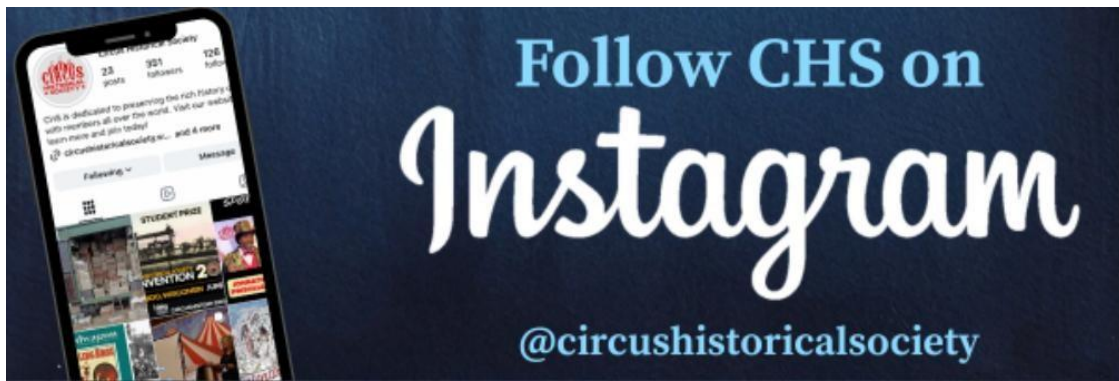
Most CHS members have already received their copy. If you are not a member and would like to receive *Bandwagon*, [click here](#) to join the CHS. Dues are only \$60 per year.



CHS YouTube channel reaches 141 videos and 77,000+ views!

Thank you for your continued support of our channel and both *Circus History Live!* and *Circus History Spotlight*. We love bringing this content to you and sharing circus history. Click the button below to visit our channel, and don't forget to subscribe!

[Click here to visit YouTube and start watching](#)



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