

# THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC. PRESENTS

## NEWS & VIEWS

*Bringing Circus Past and Present Together!*

The Circus Historical Society Newsletter  
Bob Cline – Newsletter Editor

[www.circushistory.org](http://www.circushistory.org)

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Chris Berry – Co-Editor

**“Our Mission is to Preserve, Promote and Share through Education, the history and cultural significance of the circus & the allied arts, past and present.”**

### CIRCUS HISTORY . . . .

By Chris Berry

As the 1929 Circus season was coming to a close John Ringling was in a quandary. Management of the new Madison Square Garden on Eighth Avenue in New York told him that the circus would have to go dark on Friday nights during its spring opening in 1930, so that the arena could be used for very lucrative boxing matches.

When Ringling refused, Jerry Mugivan, owner of the American Circus Corporation, agreed to the terms that the Garden presented and actually signed a deal where his Hagenbeck Wallace and Sells Floto Circuses would combine for the 1930 spring date, thereby tossing The Greatest Show on Earth out of the Garden for the first time since PT Barnum had owned the show.

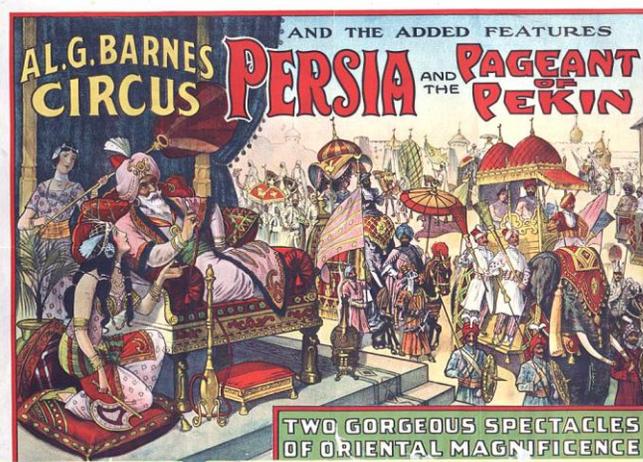
After rounds of negotiation, Ringling finally made a deal with Mugivan to buy the entire American Circus Corporation, which not only included the Sells-Floto and Hagenbeck Wallace shows, but also the Sparks, John Robinson and Al G. Barnes Circuses.

That is where this poster comes in. In 1930, the first year of Ringling ownership Al G. Barnes presented two specs. The opening pageant was “Persia” and the closing production number was “The Pageant of Pekin.” It is not clear whether the specs had already been planned at the time Ringling bought Barnes and the other shows, but in all

likelihood, the production numbers, and probably this lithograph were already on the drawing board.

Within a month of the purchase of the American Circus Corporation the stock market crashed, forcing John Ringling into a financial crisis that ultimately led to him losing control of the circus that he had started with his brothers.

Other showmen who didn’t make out as they had hoped were the biggest names in the circus world at the time.



( Tibbals Collection at Ringling Museums )

Charles Sparks, who didn’t particularly care for Mugivan, was hoodwinked into believing he was selling his circus to one of the Gentry Bros and was furious when he learned that it was actually the American Circus Corporation (which he despised) that had bought his show.

Al G. Barnes made a lot of money from selling his show to Mugivan in 1929, but he learned that “you can’t take it with you” as he soon became ill and died in July of 1931.

As for Jerry Mugivan, even though he effectively pulled a fast one on John Ringling, he too wasn’t long for the world - dying on January 22, 1930 - even before the New York Circus season began. So, there really was no winner in this whole fiasco involving the Madison Square Garden 1929 season and John Ringling’s purchase of the American Circus Corporation.

If there was any silver lining it was probably the fact that those attending the circus at Madison Square Garden in the spring of 1930 didn’t see the Hagenbeck-Wallace and Sells-Floto Combined Shows, but rather the old standby, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey.

Oh, and there was no boxing on Friday nights.

CHS Member, P.J. Holmes added this interesting response to this article – It has to be remembered that Jerry Mugivan and his partners (Bert Bowers and Ed Ballard) had first tried to buy Ringling out. (Ringling being on 90 cars, but the American Circus Corp had between 145-150 cars out at the same time) And John didn’t own the show all by himself and to me, that is a most interesting question. John exposed the other owners of the show (Edith Ringling among others) to this purchase in which he put all of their shares up, even though he did not own their part of the show. (according to Bloomberg, the circus was not incorporated until 1932). And it was always sad of Mugivan passing at the age of 56. At the time, "he took a sucker's bet", having a hernia operation that wasn't life threatening in Detroit, and didn’t survive. All of these players would be gone in such a short time, with Mugivan passing in 1930 and banker/circus man Bert Bowers passing in January of 1936, Ed Ballard being murdered in November of 1936 and then John Ringling passing in December of 1936. Have often wondered what would have happen if the Mugivan, Bowers and Ballard had won the flip.

## **NEW MEMBERS . . . . .**

We are pleased to welcome our new members that have joined since our last newsletter.

# 5070 – Russell Hancock  
Ft. Meade, FL.

# 5071 – Roy Schmidt  
Waterford, WI.

# 5072 – Linda Perkins  
Parrish, FL.

# 5073 – William Hansard  
Arlington, TX.

# 5074 – Bill Taggart  
Gibsonton, FL.

# 5075 – Marilyn Kirby  
Newport Beach, CA.

# 5076 – Mark Kikta  
Lothian, MD.

# 5077 - Toni Lee Sangastiano Mackin  
Fairfax, VA.

# 5078 – Chela Gaona  
Venice, FL.

# 5079 – Paula Bertloff  
Lanesville, IN.

# 5080 – Devin Neitzert  
Gulfport, FL.

## **AN OLD PHOTO....**



The 1939 season saw Fanchon and Marco agree to lease some of the former Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus equipment for their new show, the Great American Circus from the Ringling organization for \$ 2500.00 a week. It lasted five days. This was the Blacaman Ticket Wagon in 1938.

## **BANDWAGON GOES DIGITAL**

The CHS members are going to be in for a rare treat. Realizing that the day of computers is here to stay, the Board of Trustees has made a decision to scan and digitize every issue of Bandwagon in its entirety that has been produced from the beginning.

This is a HUGE job that is being coordinated through the John and Mable Ringling Museums staff. Jennifer Lemmer Posey came to the Board with the idea of doing this. The Ringling had enough duplicate copies of most issues that they could provide them without sacrificing their master file copies. Jennifer Lemmer Posey (Tibbals Curator of Circus at the Ringling) and Heidi Connor (Circus Archivist at the Ringling) then worked with Fred Pfening to locate any missing issues. Fred was very helpful in providing all of the rest, including several rare early editions.

Peggy Williams (Research Associate at the Ringling) was then assigned to double check that every issue of Bandwagon was available to scan. Peggy has personally confirmed that we have every single page of all back issues through 2006 and expects to complete the rest by next week. Once that is done, the Ringling will coordinate with Melken Solutions to arrange the transfer of all of the BW pages to the Melken facility in Oviedo, Florida.

Heidi Connor, an expert on digital research management, is coordinating with the CHS web team to ensure that the metadata specifics for the Bandwagon project are consistent with the state of the art. Once the entire project is turned over to Melken Solutions, they estimate the entire project will be completed in about three weeks with full OCR capabilities making searching for anything, possible.

Once the project is completed, it will be transferred over to the webmasters of the Circus Historical Society website. Here it will be prepared and presented so that any member can access it. Anyone not being a member that wants to access it would not be able to unless they joined the Circus Historical Society.

This will make research so much easier for anyone involved. No longer will you need to get up from your desk and find a couple different issues, you'll be able to do the same thing at the airport, hotel or anywhere away from your collection of Bandwagons.

## **BELGIAN RESEARCH**

from Gwendolien Sabbe

I'm doing research on Belgian circus artists who went to America in the period 1900-1940 to work for Ringling Brothers and/or Barnum & Bailey, sometimes Vaudeville theaters.

I do a lot of research in archives, databases and gather knowledge from many books. But sometimes the most precious information you'll find in unexpected places. So if you would have information or tips about these Belgian circus companies, please don't hesitate to contact me. It could really help my search move forward: Henri Frans Bento (Bento Brothers, Frans Bento Trio), DeKoe(s) Troupe (Joe Deko's Co, Joe De Kos Troupe, De Kock Trio), Troupe Lafaille, Mestrys, (Les) Passel(s) or Les 4 Charlos (The great Charlos Troupe, Troupe Charlos), contortionist and clown Pietro Van Acker, clown Paul Mortier, Henri Rosen (tramp violinist), The Sarat(t)os (Les 4 Sarathos, 5 Sarattos), The Cliftons, Vuylstekes, Marcel Parmentier (trick rider, Ringling 1930ties).

Most of them came to America once or multiple times. Some of them stayed, like Joseph (or Joe) DeKock (1881 - 1973, Sarasota). I'm searching for descendants or people who have stories about Joe, his family or his company: (Troup) DeKoe(s), Joe Deko's Co, Joe De Kos Troupe, Troep Joe De Koe, Joe Dekoes truppe, De Kock Trio.

They came for the first time to America in 1904, to play in in the Vaudeville theaters. They were with Ringling Brothers for the first time in 1906 as hand balancers. Later on, the company worked many seasons for Barnum & Bailey (1910, 1911, 1913, 1914, 1915, 1918) and for Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey combined shows in 1919, 1921. There is information that he would have stopped in 1921, and that a troupe with the same name carried on. They were with Ringling and B&B in 1922, 1923, 1930, 1931, 1933. But I'm still looking for proof whether Joseph or Joe DeKock was still a part of the company, or whether he indeed retired.

Joseph or Joe DeKock married with Laura Clarke. Their son Charles Ernest DeKock was born in the UK in 1904. He married Louise Rowland in 1924 in Portchester USA. He was in commerce, later on a travel agent. Charles died in Sarasota in 1972. His daughter Kathleen DeKock, also called

Toby, was born in Brussels on the 26th of January 1925. She married a man, last name 'Summer'. They had two sons: John and JD Summer. Kathleen or Toby DeKock/Summer died in Sarasota in 2003. Her last known address was 1512 Strafford Lane, Sarasota.

Since I'm in Sarasota in May for the Circus Historical Convention, it would be great if I could meet descendants who maybe still live in Sarasota, or people who have known the DeKock/Summer family

## KANGAROO TABLEAU

By Dave Lorbeske

The former Kangaroo Tableau is being completely restored at Circus World. Fellow circus model builder Bill Bahr is working on Heavy Burdick's restoration crew. Bill shared a photo of how the wagon will look when finished, returning it to its former circus appearance. The kangaroos weren't painted until just before it arrived at CW. The tableau will be painted light blue with diamond mirrors replacing the paintings.



## RINGLING MUSEUMS



The Circus Arts Conservatory and The Ringling are happy to partner once again to present the Summer Circus Spectacular at the Historic Asolo Theater. Don't miss this family-friendly show that runs Tuesday, June 11 through Saturday, August 3! The Summer Circus Spectacular showcases some of the finest circus artists from around the world, performing acts to thrill audiences of all ages.

The Summer Circus Spectacular takes place at the Historic Asolo Theatre at The Ringling (5401 Bay Shore Rd., Sarasota). Show times are 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays, and 2 p.m. and 5 p.m. on Saturdays. Tickets for preview shows, June 11-14, are just \$12; for the remainder of the run tickets are \$16/adults, \$12/children 12 and under. Contact 941-360-7399.

## CIRCUS HISTORIAN PASSES AWAY

Julio Revolledo Cardenas, widely considered to be the number one historian of Mexican circus, passed away May 5th in the city of Cuernava, Morelos. His legacy consists of his efforts to rescue the history of the circus in Mexico, and his work in creating the Bachelor's degree program in Performing Arts and Contemporary Circus at La Universidad Mesoamericana in Puebla, Mexico. This was the first program of its kind in Latin America, and he served as the program's director.

You can read more about Mr. Cardenas at <https://circustalk.com/news/julio-revolledo-considered-the-greatest-historian-of-mexican-circus-has-died/>