

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

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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.”

FRANK BUCK

By Richard J. Reynolds III

I saw Frank Buck once. It was in Atlanta in 1938, and he was with the Ringling circus (*Actually it was the Al G. Barnes and Sells Floto Combined Circus presenting features of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey. The Ringling show had closed in June due to a strike. It then sent its biggest features to the Barnes-Sells Floto show to finish the season. That included Frank Buck.*)

Here is a poster that I recall seeing on a building in Atlanta. The date tail is for an earlier engagement in New Jersey which got cancelled by the strike.



(Chris Berry Collection)

I was 4 years old but I recall it distinctly. With my Dad at the matinee on Nov. 8, 1938 in Atlanta, we saw Buck come into the big top riding in a howdah atop an elephant. Entering a ring, he gave a short spiel about what the patrons were about to see --namely, the famous male gorilla, Gargantua the Great. Introduction over, the back door opened and into the tent came a crawler tractor pulling Gargantua's huge custom-made air-conditioned cage wagon, painted white with gold trim. The big guy was up and about in his cage. Meanwhile the band played Ravel's haunting "Bolero" as the cage rolled around the tent. One does not forget that ! !

In 1938, Gargantua in his cage wagon were kept out of public view in a tent in the backyard outside the big top. From 1939 onward, however, he was shown in the menagerie tent. Millions of Americans saw their first gorilla in Gargantua. So, he was very educational.

There are countless stories about Buck. My favorite is about a deal he made with a guy to import a bunch of Indian blackbucks on a 50-50 basis. Losses were heavy in transit. When the ship arrived in California Buck told the guy that unfortunately his (the guy's) blackbucks were the ones that died.

I can just imagine him sitting on the porch of Singapore's Raffles Hotel under a revolving fan and drinking a Singapore sling. There he made deals for trappers to sell him animals.

He seemed to be mostly in Singapore. I wonder if the Ponggol Zoo held his animals before shipment.

He did go out into the field to make movies, e.g. Bring 'Em Back Alive, Wild Cargo and Fang and Claw. They were big winners, and I have some of them on VCR.

The aftermath of WWI provided Buck with a windfall in animal collecting. The German dealers/importers, were largely out of business so Buck had much of it to himself. His specialty was Asia and he had little competition there.

ELECTION PROCESS

The Circus Historical Society elects some Board members every two years as Board members end their four year term. Part of the Board's terms are staggered so that only some of the Board is up for re-election.

To start the process, you as CHS members may nominate anyone in the Circus Historical Society to run for office as long as they know this and are willing to serve. The Board meets in person each year at the Convention and by teleconference and emails throughout the year.

If you know of someone to nominate for the Board, please send an email to: a.campbell10@gmail.com

GONE, BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

Once a year, we pay tribute to our Circus Historical Society members that have passed on to grassy lots before us. Some have enriched our lives, some authored writings we may have read, some were friends and some were all alone. Bless them one and all.

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|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| # 780 – Dennis Watson | April 18, 2018 |
| # 1311 – Henry Bush | August 31, 2018 |
| # 1356 – James R. Evans | February 10, 2018 |
| # 1655 – Robert McLaughlin | July 8, 2018 |
| # 1706 – Robert J. Harris | October 25, 2018 |
| # 2132 – Joseph A. Manier | May 25, 2018 |
| # 2240 – Robert Connor, Jr. | October 1, 2018 |
| # 2875 – John F. Cuneo, Jr. | August 30, 2019 |
| # 4502 – Harold “Hal” Guyon, Jr. | August 5, 2019 |
| # 4885 – Jeanne Sleeter Singleton | March 8, 2019 |
| # F-1 – Gaston Auger | February 26, 2019 |

These are all that we know about. Unfortunately, some people pass away and all we get is an unable to deliver notice. If you know of anyone, please let us know.

CIRCUS WORLD

Circus World in Baraboo, Wisconsin has closed their Live performance season for 2019. With animals being at the core of the circus, Ryan Holder will return with his amazing tiger display for the 2020 season.



(Circus World Museum)

Ryan Easley has been a member of the Circus Historical Society for many years. His commitment to his animals and their presentations is unmatched anywhere in the United States. He has been raising money for tigers in the wild projects for the last couple years.

Raised around the zoo family where his father worked, Ryan also developed a love for the elephants in captivity. He has worked diligently at building his own database of elephants and their lives histories. After getting some assistance from other elephant historians, he has taken off in searching for information in places that most have never looked at before. You will know that you saw something special, the minute you see Ryan and his tigers.

HARTFORD FIRE

On July 6, 1944, in the City of Hartford, CT. a tragedy of unthinkable proportions struck the Big Top of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus as the show had just begun. It is estimated between 6,000 and 7,000 people were attending the performance. Suddenly flames appeared. The Big Top was on fire.



Images of the horror soon hit the press throughout the country. One Hundred and Sixty-Eight people lost their lives that day while over seven hundred were burned and injured. In the midst of WWII, the tent was water proofed with a paraffin and gasoline mixture. Once on fire, the tent was a huge candle, burning rapidly.



On July 7, 1944, five senior officials with the circus were all charged with Involuntary Manslaughter. Jail terms and nearly \$ 5,000,000.00 in compensation to the victims resulted.

Years later, the fire was still being looked at for clues that might have been overlooked as well as an unidentified child. Several books were written. Interviews have occurred on many occasions.



(Paul Gutheil photo)

On July 6, 2019 (75 years later) the Hartford community came together to remember all of those that lost their lives and were injured. Survivors told their stories. Circus Fans, historians and Model Builders all gathered to commemorate the worst circus fire ever. The Memorial is built on the exact location of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Big Top that day.

NEW MEMBERS

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

5081 – Bob Collins
Palmetto, FL.

5082 – Terri Ryburn
Normal, IL.

5083 – Jess Ray
Normal, IL.

5084 – Jeffrey Pennell
Browns Mill, NJ

5085 – Dennis J. Rich
Shelton, CT.

5086 – Richard L. Wright
Gulf Breeze, FL.

- # 5087 – Roy Cordato
Angier, NC
- # 5087 – Bill Powell
Seffner, FL.
- # 5088 – Nora Balliet
Bridgewater, NJ
- # 5089 – Joshua Shields
Shoreline, WA.
- # 5090 – Robert Pasquesi
Madisonville, LA.
- # 5091 – Tony Greiner
Portland, OR.
- # 5092 – Michael Skidgell
Plainville, CT.
- # 5093 – Dawn Tucker
Flagstaff, AZ.
- # 5094 – Aine Norris
Pensacola, FL.
- # 5095 – Frank Manola
Wilmington, MA.
- # 5096 – Paul A. Kelly
Corcoran, CA.

COMING SOON

Wait for the Big One!

Bandwagon contributing editor Chris Berry met with Kenneth Feld earlier this summer as part of an upcoming series of articles on the history of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey. The wide-ranging interview covered a variety of topics related to the purchase of the circus in 1967, and various issues related to 50 years of circus performances produced by Irvin and Kenneth Feld.



(Courtesy of Chris Berry)

A portion of the interview will be featured in Issue Four of *Bandwagon* later this year. Kenneth Feld’s recollections will be included in Berry’s research on the 100th anniversary of the combined shows, and the 50th anniversary of the first tours of the Red and Blue units in 1969.

DID YOU KNOW ?

That “Circo Atayde” is the oldest still running circus in North and Central America. It was founded on August 26, 1888 in the Plaza de Toros, Mazatlán, Mexico and is still run by the same family – Atayde, 4 generations later. Celeste Canestrelli has been married to Alberto Atayde for 52 glorious years. Their children help keep the legacy alive. <http://www.circoatayde.com/>

AN OLD PHOTO



In the Days of Wild West Shows, the Miller Bros. were one of the last to operate, successfully. This negative is part of the Conover Photographic collection.