

# The Advance Car



A Newsletter (New Series) of the

## CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ISSUED QUARTERLY

WINTER 2021

NEW SERIES, WHOLE #2

### Barnum's Bridgeport Serves As Focus For 2021 CHS Convention

The Circus Historical Society will hold its 2021 Convention September 19-22 at the Trumbull Marriott near Bridgeport, CT. Situated about 5 miles from the Barnum Museum and 50 miles from New York City, the Trumbull Marriott will be the perfect venue for circus historians to meet and explore the rich circus history of the area.

The Marriott will enforce any face-mask requirements and because of state restrictions as to space use, registrations are currently limited to 100 attendees. That number may change depending on any adjustments to local guidelines.

#### Convention Program

**Sunday** evening the convention will officially begin with a Gala Opening Reception, which will include a buffet, cash bar and live entertainment. The Convention Registration Desk and Sales Room will be open on Sunday afternoon.

**Monday** will be filled with presentations from leading circus historians, authors, and local experts. The day will end with the CHS Annual Banquet.



This 1882 Barnum & London one-sheet poster from the Cincinnati Art Museum fairly depicts the Bridgeport winter quarters prior to a disastrous 1887 fire. An 1881 version of the poster at the Ringling Museum differs only with the absence of the three owner's portraits. Now a public park, the site will be on the CHS tour.

**Tuesday** will begin with presentations about P. T. Barnum, Tom Thumb, the Barnum Museum, the Barnum & Bailey winter quarters, and other nearby historic circus sites. After lunch, the group will travel to Bridgeport to take a tour of the Barnum Museum, which is currently undergoing renovations. The group will also have an opportunity to view circus artifacts at the nearby Bridgeport History Center. Conventioneers will then drive to Mountain Grove Cemetery to see the gravesites of P. T. Barnum and Tom Thumb. Next up will be a "windshield tour" of Seaside Park where the seated Barnum memorial statue overlooks

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# Webmaster Kat Vecchio Shares How Circus Captured Her Interest

Last year I had the privilege of becoming the webmaster for the Circus Historical Society. What does that mean, exactly? Well, I work with our fantastic web committee –which is led by Alan Campbell, and includes Deborah Walk, Kristin Dawn Lee, William Hansard, Chris Berry, and Bruce Hawley—to design and implement our public facing website. While I have occasionally managed websites as part of my job, it’s actually not what I do professionally.

I am a documentary filmmaker and writer, and I’m currently the Chief Creative Officer for Fork Film Films, a New York based nonfiction media company. Outside of my work with Fork Films I also pursue my own creative projects. My first documentary feature, *This Is How I Roll*, is an unlikely underdog sports story about the first men’s roller derby teams to take part in the early 2000’s revival of the sport. My narrative non-fiction history writing has been published online at *Atlas Obscura*, and *Narratively*, and my piece on circus women and suffrage was published in *Bandwagon*.

It was my interest in learning more about female circus performers that led me to CHS. It started simply enough, some beautiful photographs caught my attention online and I wanted to know more about the women who were pictured. I thought there might be an interesting documentary to be made about their stories, so in 2015 I headed to Baraboo to visit the Robert L. Parkinson Library & Research Center at Circus World. Then a year later I was on my way to Sarasota for my first CHS convention and two years after that I presented a talk on circus women as stunt performers in the



Webmaster and Trustee Kat Vecchio shines with delight for a selfie during her first visit to Baraboo’s Circus World Museum in 2015.

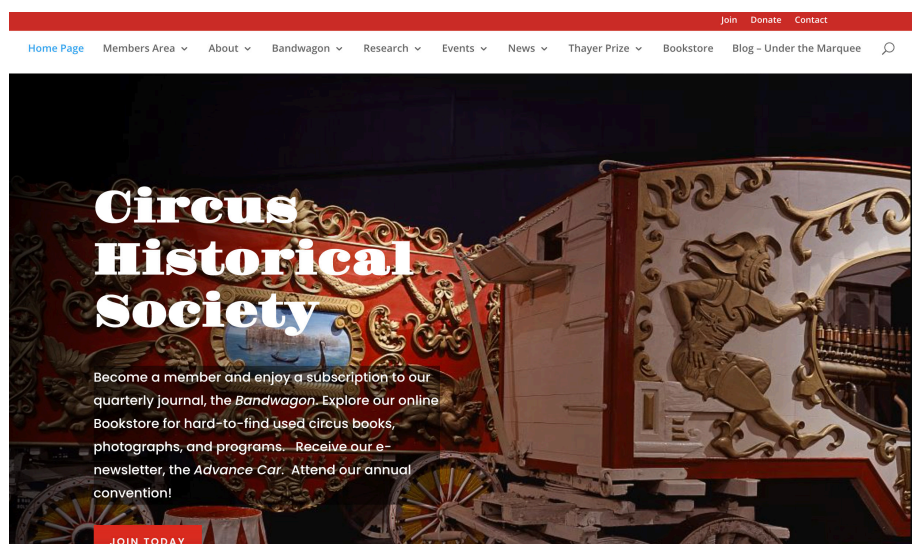
early movie industry. Now, I am honored to serve as a member of the Circus Historical Society board of trustees. The research I began for a film has over time transitioned into what is the beginning of a group biography of circus women. I have also begun a short documentary about May Wirth, utilizing an audio interview that past president Richard Flint recorded with her in 1972.

Looking back over the last six years, it has been a wonderful journey into the joys of circus history. My interest was sparked all because of some photos I saw online. Thus, I think it’s fitting that I now work on our website, and along with the committee, I help share circus history online, where hopefully it is not only enjoyed by current circus history fans, but also helps create new ones.

**Follow These Arrows To New CHS Website: <https://circushistory.org/>**

If you have not visited the Circus Historical Society website at <https://circushistory.org/> lately, please take a few minutes and visit it. Our beautifully designed, new, and improved CHS website is your gateway to circus history! It is also the portal to all your CHS member benefits. Scroll down the home page (see right) for an overview of the Circus Historical Society. Read across the top menu bar to discover all that the CHS has to offer!

Hover over the [Members Area](#) button and in the drop down



menu select the [CHS Back Yard](#) (see right). This is the *members-only* section of our website. If you forgot your password, choose "Forgot password" and follow the prompts.

While in the CHS Back Yard, take a moment to review and update your member [My Profile](#). It is important to list yourself in our [Directory](#) and that is a great way to meet other CHS members! Simply select the **Privacy** settings on the menu bar of the [My Profile](#) page and check the appropriate boxes. Also check out the other member settings on the menu bar on that page.

To assist you in accessing the member-only sections of the CHS website, Secretary-Treasurer Kristin Lee prepared two short videos. In her first video, Kristin shows you how to update your profile where, among other things, you can verify the delivery address for your *Bandwagon*. Kristin's second video explains how to use your privacy settings to list yourself in the CHS Membership Directory. Both videos, as well as future videos, can be found on our Back Yard [Help Videos](#) page.

2021 CHS Convention (continued from page 1)

Long Island Sound, and then Wendt Field, which was the home of the Barnum & Bailey winter quarters for almost 50 years. After the field trip, the group will return to the hotel for the traditional CHS auction of posters, books, artifacts, and other circus-related memorabilia.

**Wednesday** will be circus day! Subject to any COVID restrictions, the group will travel to West Springfield, MA, to visit the Eastern States Exposition and attend a performance of The Big E Circus Spectacular.

### Other Nearby Activities

Conventioneers can also travel on their own to nearby Hartford, Connecticut to visit the site of the 1944 Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey circus fire. Other circus-related attractions in the area include the historic Elephant Hotel in Somers, New York.

RIGHT: Streets named for two of Barnum's homes illustrate how deeply ingrained the showman's fame remains in Bridgeport. – Photo by R. Flint



## Making Your Marriott Hotel Reservations

Convention attendees will receive a reduced room rate of only \$125 per night (plus taxes) at the Trumbull Marriott. That rate includes free parking and breakfast for two. Since some people may want to arrive earlier or stay later, the Trumbull Marriott will honor that rate for three days before September 19 and for three days after September 22. In order to take advantage of the discounted convention rate, please make your hotel reservation as soon as possible by calling (203) 378-1400. Ask for the Circus Historical Society rate. You can also reserve your room online at: [CHS Reservations](#) at the Trumbull Marriott. *Please note that the last day to book a room at the CHS rate is August 19, 2021.*



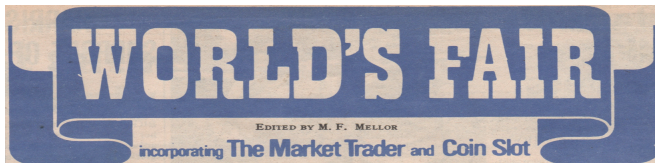
## How To Get To The Convention Hotel

The Trumbull Marriott is easily accessible by automobile from I-95 and by shuttle service from the Hartford-Springfield Airport and all of the New York City area airports. The hotel can also be reached by rail via Amtrak and Metro-North Railroad. The hotel provides free shuttle service to both the Bridgeport and Stratford railroad stations served by Amtrak.



If it were possible for you to have arrived in Bridgeport on Amtrak 95-130 years ago, your seat would have offered you the post card view seen at LEFT ABOVE. In the photograph to the RIGHT ABOVE, you can see at the left edge a stone embankment along Railroad Avenue that supports the same train tracks from which the post card view was taken; the contemporary view shows the vacant winter quarter's site today, named Wendt Park, that will be visited by convention attendees. – Both: Richard Flint

## Demise of British Fairground and Circus Newspaper After 115 Years



The *World's Fair*, the British showman's weekly newspaper that covered both the fairground and circus industries for 115 years ceased publication on December 2, 2019, due to bankruptcy. Its closing occurred the same month as did *Circus Report* in the U.S. A major feature of the *World's Fair* was its annual Circus Special in January, which would gather together all the reviews of the major Christmas circuses of Great Britain with many shows and performers placing ads in the same issue.

Over its long history, the *World's Fair* covered the British circus industry with a variety of writers. David Davis, a member of the British CFA, writes that the most memorable was probably Edward A. A. Graves, who served as Circus Editor for many years both before and after World War II.

Graves was also CHS member #714 and served for many years as a Director on the old CHS board. Edward Graves' death in September 1965 left a void which Don Stacey, a former Bertram Mills Circus employee offered to fill on a temporary basis. This rapidly became a permanent appointment with Stacey fulfilling the role of Circus Editor for the next 40 years. Under his guidance the circus section blossomed from an average of two pages to, on occasion, six pages of news and reviews with much more international circus coverage.

The *World's Fair* newspaper was born out of the idea to provide a means of communication for all show people in the various regions of the country. Founder Frank Mellor, a supplier to the travelling showmen, often found himself delivering messages between friends and family in different areas of the United Kingdom, reporting on all aspects of fairgrounds and generally keeping people up to date about the

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# Ringling Museum Invites CHS Members to Join Upcoming Online Seminars

*New Perspectives on Women & The Historic Circus* is a spring series offered virtually via Zoom from the Circus Museum of The John and Mabel Ringling Museums to its members as well as CHS members.

The presenters, whose research brought them to The Ringling, will address the experiences, contributions, and documentation of women in the circus. The series began on April 6 with Kristin Lee asking why “Women are stars in the circus but not in Wikipedia?” Four more sessions are offered and CHS members will be sent email invitations shortly before each seminar.

**Tues, April 20, 10:30 am -- KAT VECCHIO**

## ***"Circus Women Model Wives": Performing Domesticity At The Circus***

There was little a circus press agent couldn't craft into a good story, even laundry. Join writer and filmmaker Kat Vecchio to learn how and why circus women's daily domestic tasks occasionally became the subject of newspaper articles and circus press photos.



Clothes lines and guy ropes, H.A. Atwell, ca 1930 Ringling Museums, Tibbals Collection: ht0000611



**Thurs, April 29, 10:30 am -- JENNY LEIGH DU PUIS**  
***Glitz, Glamour, and Grit: Exploring the History of Female Aerial Circus Costume***

This presentation will explore the costumes of female aerialists from the late 1800s to the present day. From aesthetics to functional considerations for movement, these garments require special attention to detail and are designed to complement the performance. From corsets and crinolines to leotards and Lycra, aerial costumes have evolved considerably while maintaining the glamour and prestige of the performance. Join circus costume designer and researcher Jenny Leigh Du Puis for a tour through the wardrobe of female aerialists past and present. POSTER, LEFT: Strobridge, 1917, Ringling Museums

**Thurs, May 6, 10:30 am -- BETSY GOLDEN KELLEM**

## ***Lavinia Warren, the "Fairy Wedding" and the Birth of Celebrity Culture***

Lavinia Warren, who stood shy of three feet tall as an adult, was one of America's first bona fide celebrities. With the wit and fire to stand up to media, showmen and dignitaries alike, she became “Mrs. Tom Thumb” but was wildly famous in her own right. Attorney and historian Betsy Golden Kellem to learn about her part in how mass media created the celebrity machine.



ABOVE LEFT: Souvenir carte de visite by Matthew Brady titled *Mr. & Mrs. General Tom Thumb in their wedding costume*. ABOVE RIGHT: Souvenir cabinet card by Charles Eisenmann of tattooed lady Annie Howard — Both: Richard Flint Collection



**Thurs, May 20, 10:30 am -- AMELIA OSTERUD**

## ***The Stories We Tell: Presenting Tattooed Ladies to the Audience***

Join author Amelia Klem Osterud to learn about the stories behind the stories that tattooed ladies told to the world. From stories of capture and torture to tales of true love, these stories were often what remained behind after the performer was gone, coloring what was understood about these women by modern audiences.

## **In the Mail: Your First BANDWAGON of 2021**

Chris Berry tells how “There Used to Be a Circus Here – The Showgrounds of Washington, D.C.” about the tented shows in the District from the 1840s to the present. Chris also reports on “Mr. and Mrs. Gargantua and the

Honeymoon Tour of 1941.” Editor Greg Parkinson assembled many “Splendid Lithographs at the Library of Congress” and Fred Pfening edited “Jackie LeClaire’s Observations on Fellow Clowns” based on notecards he recently acquired from LeClaire’s estate sale.

## Final Bow: Dean Jensen



FAR LEFT: Dean Jensen in front of John Stuart Curry's painting *The Flying Codonas*. CENTER LEFT: Cover of the 122-page catalog accompanying the exhibit *Center Ring: The Artist*. LEFT: Leitzel book jacket cover.

Former CHS member and author of three circus history books, Dean Jensen, 82, died on February 17, 2021, from complications of lung cancer. He joined the CHS in 1972 (member #1966) and remained a member for many years. At the time of his death, Jensen was writing his fourth non-fiction book called "The Giant and the Half-Girl," about the marriage of two sideshow performers.

Dean's career began in journalism at several Wisconsin dailies before he joined the *Milwaukee Sentinel* in 1967 where he eventually became art critic. In 1987 Dean left the news world to open the Dean Jensen Art Gallery in Milwaukee. During his tenure at the *Milwaukee Sentinel* he had many assignments but later admitted he was not thrilled about being sent to Baraboo to write a story in advance of the then Schlitz-sponsored Milwaukee circus parade. Nonetheless, after he talked with Circus World Museum director Chappie Fox, the world of clowns and aerialists grew on him. This resulted in his first book, *The Biggest, the Smallest, the Longest, the Shortest: A Chronicle of the American Circus From Its Heartland* (1975), about the history of Wisconsin's many circuses. His research included traveling the state interviewing aging or active family members who had operated or performed in

the numerous circuses that were based in the Badger state of Wisconsin.

On loan from the *Sentinel*, Dean curated a 1981 exhibit for the Milwaukee Art Museum titled *Center Ring: The Artist* that included works by Picasso, Matisse, Chagall, and Calder as well as contemporary Wisconsin and American artists, plus a healthy dose of posters, banners, and circus memorabilia. The exhibit traveled to art museums in Columbus, OH; Albany, NY; and the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, DC, where it appeared during the 1982 CHS convention in Washington, DC. As CHS president and convention chairman that year, Dick Flint arranged for Dean to lead a tour of the exhibit for CHS members but he well remembers Dean's flustered if bemused reaction of being confounded by the Corcoran's arrangement of the art in the exhibit he created for a tour he had to lead!

Dean authored two additional books, *The Lives and Loves of Daisy and Violet Hilton* (2006) about the Siamese twins who were famous in vaudeville, and *Queen of the Air* (2013) an important biography of star aerialist Lillian Leitzel in the 1910s and '20s.

In addition to his wife Rosemary, Dean Jensen is survived by daughters Jennifer and Jessica and son Dane.

## Chanteys Gone From Circus Lots But Preserved in Newly Discovered Recording

In response to the "Cues & Hints" column on chanteys in the last issue of *The Advance Car*, CHS president Don Covington provided a recording of the tent crew guying out the Ringling-Barnum big top in 1956, their last year under canvas. The recording came from the late Ohio circus fan Ted Deppish and was a wire recording, the first form of magnetic recording technology and most commonly used for office dictation from the 1930s and into the 1950s when magnetic tape appeared. Don donated the original wire recordings to the Circus World Museum after having Deppish's work transferred to mp3 files. Thanks to Don, you can listen to the chantey on the CHS website at this link: <https://circushistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Circus-Chanty-guying-out-big-top-RBBB-1956.mp3> The chantey is

followed by several minutes of an audio recording sent to Deppish about the closing of RBBB in 1956. The chantey itself is a very simple but rhythmic chant capturing the work crew "guying out" or tightening the ropes securing the tents but does not match the more elaborate chants discussed in Tom Parkinson's 1957 *Billboard* article.

Chantey scholar and musician Stuart Frank notes in his book *Sea Chanteys* (2000) that "Like many other occupational genres – the prison and chain-gang songs of the black South, [and] railroad spike-driving songs – chanteys were not characteristically 'written' or 'composed.' Rather, they emerged and evolved in oral tradition, a folk process of adaptation and improvisation which 'borrowed' shamelessly from popular culture."

## A Winter Sport Makes Its Debut During a Summer Circus Season

In 1907, tens of thousands of spectators bought tickets to the Barnum & Bailey Circus in order to see the sensational act of a man on "skees" soaring 75 feet through the air, across "a yawning, death-inviting chasm. An act of a thousand thrills" proclaimed posters advertising the Greatest Show on Earth. "Seen for the first time this side of Norway's snow-capped peaks." It was one more thrill act in a series of risky acts introduced by James A. Bailey after he brought his show back in 1903 from a five-year European tour.

A hundred years ago, the "Perilous Scandinavian Winter Sport" of "skee-ing" was little known in America. But their ignorance wouldn't last long. Traveling circuses such as Barnum & Bailey constituted the biggest entertainment and cultural force in the nation at the time. The appearance of a ski jumper in the circus was thus guaranteed to make the new sport known to millions. The man who performed the "Frightful Falcon Flights on Skimming Skees" for Barnum & Bailey a century ago was "Captain" Karl Frithjof Hovelsen (1877-1955), a Norwegian cross-country and jumping champion who in 1905 emigrated to the United States where he became a stonemason in Chicago.

Howelsen supposedly was paid \$200 a week to "ski-sail" down a 45-degree, vaseline-greased 100-foot slide and land on a platform and be stopped by two strongmen. Howelsen did

not return for another season, supposedly because of injuring his back, but eventually made his way to Colorado, settling in Steamboat Springs where he was the star of the community's first winter carnival. In 1914, the locals cleared trees for what came to be known as Howelsen Hill. A jump was erected, and later a grandstand and slalom hill, and finally in 1938 a lift was installed. Essentially, it was Howelsen who introduced Colorado and the nation to recreational skiing according to John Fry's *The Story of Modern Skiing* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2010).

In 1922 Howelsen returned to Norway to see his elderly parents but during the visit he met his future wife and so remained in Norway until his death in 1955. A book-length biography, *The Flying Norseman*, was written by son Leif Hovelsen and published in 1983 by the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame.

Today, Howelsen is Colorado's oldest continuously operated ski area, with 15 trails down 440 vertical feet, a halfpipe, three jumps, and cross-country trails. A jewel of a municipal park, it has produced 54 Olympic skiers, the most of any U.S. town—the fitting legacy of a man who flew through the air with the greatest of ease in the circus to proclaim the sport to America.



ABOVE: Strobridge Lithograph, 1907 (1 sheet), Tibbals Circus Collection: ht2000278



ABOVE: Act as listed in the 1907 Barnum & Bailey program – Richard Flint collection

(World's Fair, continued from page 4)

business. This naturally developed into the idea of a publication that would be primarily for and about travelling show people. Its modest appearance in 1904 soon became a thriving newspaper with a circulation of 20,000.

Thomas Murphy in his *History of The Showmen's Guild* (1940) wrote that the *World's*

*Fair* was the first newspaper to devote its entire space to the news and interests of the travelling showmen." Among its important publishing highlights was the autobiography of Lord George Sanger (the "British Barnum") before it was published in book form in 1908 as the classic *Seventy Years A Showman*, a title that remains in continuous print after more than a century.



**2021 Circus Historical Society Annual Convention**  
September 19<sup>th</sup> through September 22<sup>nd</sup> Trumbull Marriott Trumbull, CT

**Registration Form**

Name (to be displayed on your name badge) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Spouse/Guest: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 City: \_\_\_\_\_ State/Prov. \_\_\_\_\_ Zip/Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

Registration Fees include the opening reception, all seminars, meetings, auction, tours of Barnum Museum and other Bridgeport sites and annual banquet. Tickets and transportation to The Big E Circus Spectacular are not included in the Registration Fee. The convention begins at 7:00 PM on Sunday September 19<sup>th</sup> with an Opening Reception and ends on September 22<sup>nd</sup> at The Big E.

\$190 - Registration Member/spouse/guest each until 07/01/21	Number	___	Total \$	_____
\$250 - Registration Non-member (includes \$60 membership)	Number	___	Total \$	_____
\$100 - Student Registration	Number	___	Total \$	_____
\$25 - Additional Late Fee after 07/01/21	Number	___	Total \$	_____
\$50 - Additional At-the-Door Late Fee	Number	___	Total \$	_____
\$50 - Virtual - Seminars Only Registration Fee	Number	___	Total \$	_____
\$12 - Big E Circus ticket(s)	Number	___	Total \$	_____
\$30 - Roundtrip bus ride to and from The Big E	Number	___	Total \$	_____
			Grand Total \$	_____

Cancellation Refunds: 100% before Aug. 1<sup>st</sup> - 50% from Aug. 2<sup>nd</sup> to Aug. 31<sup>st</sup>. No refund after Aug. 31<sup>st</sup>.

Mail the completed Registration Form with check made payable to "Circus Historical Society" to:

Circus Historical Society  
 P.O. Box 220643  
 Dorchester, MA 02122

Register on-line on with credit card on the CHS website:  
<https://backyard.circushistory.org/event-3796626>

**Hotel Information**

Trumbull Marriott - 180 Hawley Lane - Trumbull, CT 06611 USA - Tel: +1 (203) 378-1400

**\$125 per night, plus taxes and fees**

This rate includes free parking and breakfast for two.

It will only be available until either the Room Block is filled or until **Aug. 19, 2021**, whichever is first.

Reservations: Call (203) 378-1400. Ask for the "Circus Historical Society Rate."

Online: [Book your group rate for Circus Historical Society National Convention Sept2021](#)

For additional information, including sponsorships and sales & display table rentals, please contact Kristin Lee at [CHStreasurer@gmail.com](mailto:CHStreasurer@gmail.com) or Bruce Hawley at [chsconvention@gmail.com](mailto:chsconvention@gmail.com)

**Rideshare Information**

If you will have a vehicle at the convention, please indicate if you are willing to give a ride to other conventioners to either the Bridgeport sites on Tuesday and/or to the Big E on Wednesday.

Bridgeport \_\_\_ Big E \_\_\_ Number of passengers \_\_\_\_\_