



The Ringling Brothers tent that was in place - on the 6th of July, 1944 - was new. Its canvas top had been specially treated, to make it waterproof, and the Hartford show was one of its first appearances.

For years, Ringling tents had been waterproofed in the same manner - with gasoline and paraffin. Stewart O'Nan, in *The Circus Fire*, gives more background on the treated roof:

The big top that was now up was new this year - the largest tent in the world, the circus claimed. It had come out of the sail loft the first week in May, and like its predecessors had been waterproofed with six thousand gallons of white gasoline and eighteen thousand pounds of paraffin.

Seventy canvasmen had helped to melt the wax in cauldrons, thin it with gas, stirring it with paddles, and then sprinkle the mixture on the laid-out sections and spread it with brooms. The process was cheap and effective. The show had treated their tops like this for years. (The Circus Fire: A True Story of an American Tragedy, by Stewart O'Nan, page 30.)

Making the tent waterproof, of course, was important. Many activities would take place inside the "big top," and circus owners could expect bad weather for some of those shows. No one wanted to get drenched inside the tent.

But ... if making the tent waterproof with white gasoline and paraffin would *also* make it more susceptible to fire, we are left to wonder why that method was used.

This view of the Hartford big-top fire shows it during the early stage. Shortly thereafter, flames completely consumed the tent.

Click on the image for a much-better view.

Credits:

Photo of Hartford Circus Fire, 1944, at the beginning stage of the blaze. Online, courtesy Library of Congress.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Hartford-Circus-Fire-Smoke-at-the-Tent0>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Hartford-Circus-Fire-Smoke-at-the-Tent0>



Hartford Circus Fire - Smoke at the Tent

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/>