THE CIRCUS DURING the 1930s



0. THE CIRCUS DURING the 1930s - Story Preface

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Major circus performances, during the 1930s, were often held inside "the big top" - a very large tent suitable for traveling troupes. This photograph depicts the interior of a circus tent, c. 1930. Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

Before radio broadcasts were commonplace, and television was invented, the circus was the greatest entertainment industry in the world. Stars of the big top were some of the world's most famous celebrities.

It wasn't just <u>big-name circuses</u> which lifted the spirits of <u>Depression-era people</u>. Independent shows, traveling by rail or road, would <u>set up their tents</u> and roll out <u>their attractions</u>. <u>Residents</u> of <u>small towns</u> and large cities, alike, lined the streets to welcome the visitors.

Posters, <u>plastered</u> on <u>sides of buildings</u>, announced when the circus would arrive. Promoting various skills, from contortionists to lion tamers, those ads - viewed decades later - allow us to step back in time. With them, we can assess the impact of a circus visit on the lives of people sorely needing a break from a seemingly non-ending financial downturn.

Let's take a look at some of the circus posters maintained by the U.S. Library of Congress:

- Riding a Silver Horse Gentry Bros. Circus
- <u>A Truly Big Show</u> Al G. Barnes & Sells-Floto Circus
- Troupe of Remarkable Trained Pigs Barnum & Bailey
- Flights Over Elephants Forepaugh & Sells Brothers
- <u>Schuman's German Horse Circus</u> Ringling Brothers
- <u>5-Ring Wild Animal Show</u> Christy Bros
- Greatest Show on Earth P.T. Barnum and J.A. Bailey
- <u>Lion Tamer</u> Predatory Cats as a Circus Main Attraction
- Grand Lay-Out Setting Up a Circus by the Rail Tracks
- Most Perilous Performance Forepaugh and Sells Bros.
- World's Most Marvelous Lady Gymnast Ringling Bros.
- The Lion Queen Women Find Work with the Circus
- The Man that Walked on His Head Ringling Bros.

- Jumbo The Giant African Elephant P.T. Barnum
- Tigers A Favorite Circus Attraction Ringling Bros.
- Five Proprietors and Managers The Ringling Bros.

Now that we've seen examples of the posters advertising traveling circuses, let's meet some of the performers from the 1930s.

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

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/THE-CIRCUS-DURING-the-1930s-Water-for-Elephants

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/THE-CIRCUS-DURING-the-1930s-Water-for-Elephants

Media Stream



<u>Circus - Largest, Grandest Best Amusement Institution</u>

Image of 1899 "Barnum & Bailey" poster - Reproduction Number: LC-USZ62-24508 - online, courtesy Library of Congress.

View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Circus-Largest-Grandest-Best-Amusement-Institution



Circus Ads on Manchester Buildings

1911 photo of Manchester, New Hampshire buildings, with circus-poster ads, online courtesy Library of Congress.

View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Circus-Ads-on-Manchester-Buildings



Downie Bros. Circus - Posters on Buildings

Photo by Walker Evans - Reproduction Number: LC-DIG-fsa-8a20304 - online, courtesy Library of Congress.

View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Downie-Bros.-Circus-Posters-on-Buildings

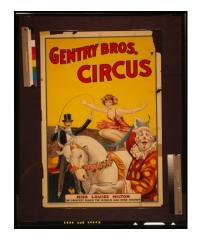


Welcoming the Circus on a Muddy Main Street

Photo of Sheldon, Iowa - in 1909 - online, courtesy Library of Congress.

View this asset at:

 $\underline{\text{http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Welcoming-the-Circus-on-a-Muddy-Main-Street}}$



Riding a Silver Horse - Gentry Bros. Circus

Poster by National Ptg & Eng. Co., Chicago, New York & St. Louis - created between 1920 and 1940 - image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Riding-a-Silver-Horse-Gentry-Bros.-Circus



A Truly Big Show - Al G. Barnes Circus

Circus poster, 1930s, online courtesy Library of Congress.

View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/A-Truly-Big-Show-Al-G.-Barnes-Circus



Barnum & Bailey - Trained Pigs

Image of Barnum & Bailey poster, online courtesy Library of Congress.

View this asset at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Barnum-Bailey-Trained-Pigs



Flights Over Elephants - Circus Act

Circus poster, circa 1900, online courtesy Library of Congress.

View this asset at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Flights-Over-Elephants-Circus-Act



Schuman's German Horse Circus

Image of poster, circa 1909, online courtesy Library of Congress.

View this asset at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Schuman-s-German-Horse-Circus



Wild Animal Show - Christy Brothers

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Wild-Animal-Show-Christy-Brothers



Greatest Show on Earth - P.T. Barnum and J.A. Bailey

Image of Barnum & Bailey poster, circa 1908, online courtesy Library of Congress.

View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Greatest-Show-on-Earth-P.T.-Barnum-and-J.A.-Bailey



Lion Tamer at the Circus

Lithograph - reproduction number LC-USZC4-2994 - by Gibson & Co, 1873, online courtesy Library of Congress.

View this asset at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Lion-Tamer-at-the-Circus



Circus Set-up Near the Rail Tracks

Image of "The Grand Lay-Out," an 1874 lithograph by Gibson & Co. - Reproduction number LC-USZC4-6048 - online, courtesy Library of Congress.

View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Circus-Set-up-Near-the-Rail-Tracks



Most Perilous Performance Devised by Mortal Man

Image of Adam Forepaugh and Sells Brothers poster, circa 1899 - Reproduction Number: LC-USZC4-5118 - online, courtesy Library of Congress.

View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Most-Perilous-Performance-Devised-by-Mortal-Man



Lion Queen - Women Find Work with the Circus

Image of "The Lion Queen" poster - by Gibson & Co, 1874 - Reproduction Number: LC-DIG-pga-03215. Online, courtesy Library of Congress.

View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Lion-Queen-Women-Find-Work-with-the-Circus



World's Most Marvelous Gymnast - Ringling Bros

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/World-s-Most-Marvelous-Gymnast-Ringling-Bros

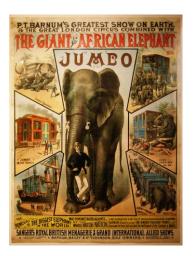


Alexander Patty - Walked on His Head - Ringling

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Alexander-Patty-Walked-on-His-Head-Ringling



Jumbo the Circus Elephant and His Tragic Death

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Jumbo-the-Circus-Elephant-and-His-Tragic-Death



Amazing Facts about Tigers

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

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Roustabouts at Work in the 1930s

Historical footage, online courtesy U.S. National Archives via YouTube.

View this asset at:

 $\underline{\text{http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Roustabouts-at-Work-in-the-1930s}}$



<u>Circus Attractions from the 1930s - Elephants</u>

Historical footage circus setup, from the 1930s, online courtesy YouTube.

View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Circus-Attractions-from-the-1930s-Elephants



Marlena and Jacob - Counterparts for Benzini Bros.

Video clip online, courtesy Taschen Books.

View this asset at:

 $\underline{\text{http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Marlena-and-Jacob-Counterparts-for-Benzini-Bros.}}$



Circus Parade - Small Town America

Video online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Circus-Parade-Small-Town-America