

0. THE CIRCUS DURING the 1930s - Story Preface

1. THE CIRCUS DURING the 1930s

2. CIRCUS PERFORMERS from the 1930s

3. ROSIE the CIRCUS ELEPHANT

4. GREAT CIRCUS DISASTERS



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 big-name circuses which lifted the spirits of Depression-era people. Independent shows, traveling by rail or road, would set up their tents and roll out their attractions. Residents of small towns and large cities, alike, lined the streets to welcome the visitors.

Posters, plastered on sides of buildings, 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
- A Truly Big Show - Al G. Barnes & Sells-Floto Circus
- Troupe of Remarkable Trained Pigs - Barnum & Bailey
- Flights Over Elephants - Forepaugh & Sells Brothers
- Schuman's German Horse Circus - Ringling Brothers
- 5-Ring Wild Animal Show - Christy Bros
- Greatest Show on Earth - P.T. Barnum and J.A. Bailey
- Lion Tamer - 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



Circus - Largest, Grandest Best Amusement Institution

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>

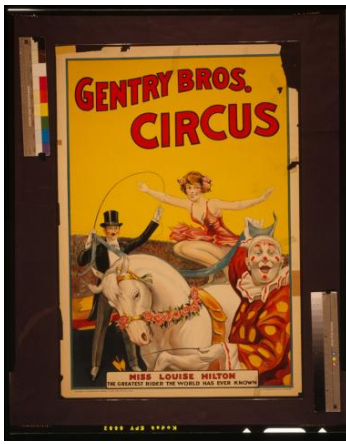


Welcoming the Circus on a Muddy Main Street

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

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Welcoming-the-Circus-on-a-Muddy-Main-Street>

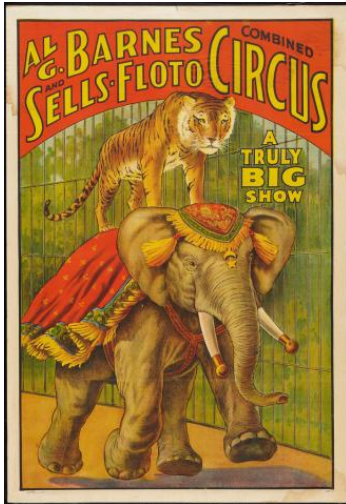


Riding a Silver Horse - Gentry Bros. Circus

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:

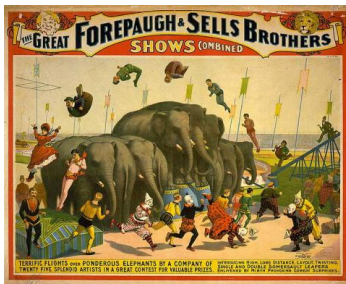
<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/A-Truly-Big-Show-Al-G.-Barnes-Circus>



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.

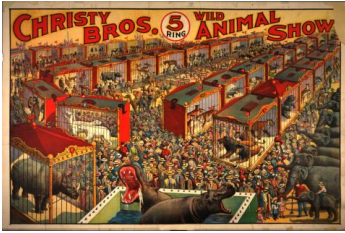
View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Flights-Over-Elephants-Circus-Act>



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>

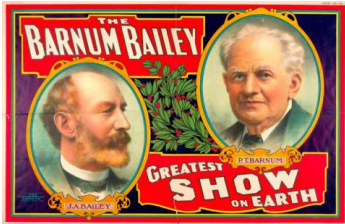


Wild Animal Show - Christy Brothers

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

View this asset at:

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

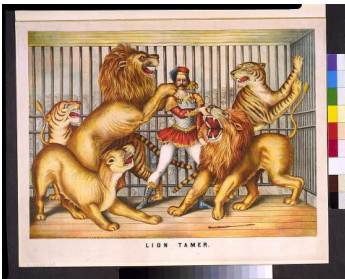


Greatest Show on Earth - P.T. Barnum and J.A. Bailey

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>

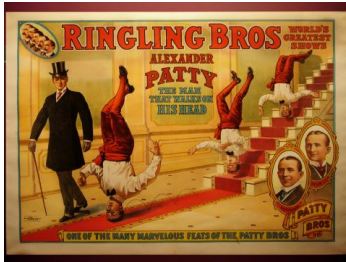


World's Most Marvelous Gymnast - Ringling Bros

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

View this asset at:

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

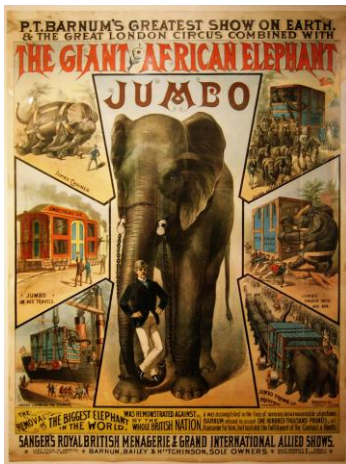


Alexander Patty - Walked on His Head - Ringling

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.

PD

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Amazing-Facts-about-Tigers>



Roustabouts at Work in the 1930s

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

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Roustabouts-at-Work-in-the-1930s>

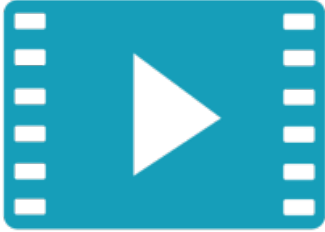


Circus Attractions from the 1930s - Elephants

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:

<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>