

GOODSPEED MUSICALS

AUDIENCE INSIGHTS

A close-up photograph of an elephant's head and trunk, looking towards the left. The elephant is standing on a red and yellow striped circus ring. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the ring and some greenery.

THE
CIRCUS
IN WINTER
A NEW MUSICAL

TABLE OF CONTENTS



THE CIRCUS IN WINTER
The Norma Terris Theatre
Oct 23 - Nov 16, 2014

Music and Lyrics by
BEN CLARK

Book by
HUNTER FOSTER
&
BETH TURCOTTE

Inspired by the novel by
CATHY DAY

Lighting Design by
DONALD HOLDER

Costume Design by
MARINA DRAGHICI

Scenic Design by
JASON SHERWOOD

Choreographed by
SPENCER LIFF

Directed by
JOE CALARCO

Produced for
Goodspeed Musicals by
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Character Summary.....	3
Show Synopsis.....	4
Meet the Writers.....	5
Director's Vision.....	6
<i>The Circus in Winter</i> Route Book.....	7
Traveling Circuses at the Turn of the Century.....	9
Circus Lore, Culture, and Perception.....	12
Interesting Facts.....	15
Resources.....	16



The Max Showalter Center for
Education in Musical Theatre

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www.goodspeed.org/guides

CHARACTER SUMMARY



Pearly (Shannon Antalan), Wallace Porter (Aaron Ramey), Ollie (James Pencak), Jennie Dixianna (Dee Roscioli), and Jo-Jo (Charles Gray).
©EMMA Photography.

JAMES PORTER: The father of Wallace Porter. He has little tolerance for his son's fanciful nature and spends his days gambling.

WALLACE PORTER: The son of James Porter who helps his father run the family stables. He has been fascinated with the circus from a young age, particularly the elephants. After the death of his beloved wife, Irene, Wallace sells the stables and opens *The Great Porter Circus and Menagerie*.

JENNIE DIXIANNA: An exotic fortune teller and spinning aerialist for the circus. She joined the circus as a teenager to escape an abusive home and eventually falls in love with Wallace Porter.

CLYDE HOLLENBACH: The previous owner of *The Great Porter Circus and Menagerie*.

IRENE PORTER: Wallace Porter's wife who tragically passes away during childbirth.

PEARLY: A young black woman and former slave. Her real name is Dinah Cornelia Washington and she works as a servant in a railway camp before joining the circus. She is forced to leave her home after she falls in love with a white man and becomes pregnant with his child.

GUS: Pearly's father.

GORDON: A young Union soldier who falls in love with Pearly. He tells her about his time working for *The Great Porter Circus and Menagerie* in his home state of Indiana.

DODD: A young Union soldier who takes advantage of the black women he oversees.

ELEPHANT JACK: The trainer for the circus' elephant, Caesar, and the jealous former lover of Jennie Dixianna.

GORDON, JR.: Pearly and Gordon's son.

OLLIE: A young man who has grown up as a clown in the circus and longs to make his living as an artist. He has also fallen under Jennie Dixianna's spell.

MR. AND MRS. COLONEL: An elderly couple that moves to Lima, Indiana and hires Ollie to paint murals in their home.

ELIZABETH: Gordon's wife.

ETHEL HOBZIZNI, JO-JO, & TONY COLORADO: Circus performers and personnel.

SHOW SYNOPSIS



The show opens on a dark stage. Suddenly, lights come up on a multitude of circus performers. James Porter, the father of Wallace Porter, walks through the crowd to a small door followed by his son. Young Wallace is instructed to wait outside while his father plays cards with members of the circus troupe. While waiting, Young Wallace catches his first glimpse of Caesar the elephant and develops a fascination with the majestic pachyderm. James storms out of the card game while Wallace is admiring Caesar and forcibly drags his son away from the circus.

Soon after their visit to the circus grounds, James falls ill and dies leaving Wallace with a huge amount of debt. Eventually, Wallace is able to pay off his father's creditors and turns their once-shabby family stables into a thriving enterprise. Despite his success, Wallace has never forgotten his love for the circus and quickly sells his profitable stable business to buy a small, run down circus.

On a business trip for his newly acquired enterprise, *The Great Porter Circus and Menagerie*, Wallace meets a young woman named Irene. The pair fall in love on their first date at the circus, get married, and go back to Lima, Indiana. After Wallace learns that Irene is pregnant with their first child, he becomes obsessed with material things and begins spending more time designing their new mansion than supporting his wife. While he is busily overseeing the construction of his palatial home, Wallace hires a manager, Mr. Colonel, to help him with the day to day operations of the circus. Mr. Colonel finds Wallace a new act for his circus, an aerialist and psychic named Jennie Dixieanna. Wallace is intrigued by Jennie's clairvoyant abilities and she demonstrates her talent for him. While looking into the future, Jennie sees that Irene has gone into premature labor and she tells Wallace to return home as soon as he can. Wallace rushes home to find Irene has died while giving birth to their son.

While Wallace grieves for his wife, Pearly is coping with the loss of her mother and the changes occurring in her world due to the Civil War. While working in a railway camp with her father, Gus, Pearly meets a young, white Union soldier named Gordon. Despite the dangers of having a mixed race relationship, they fall in love and begin meeting in secret. Gus discovers the clandestine meetings and confronts Pearly. Caught, she confesses that she has fallen in love with Gordon and is pregnant with his child. Gus is horrified by his daughter's confession and demands that Pearly leave the camp immediately. Despite his daughter's pleas for forgiveness, Gus insists that he must report her relationship with Gordon to the proper authorities; however, he gives her time to escape by telling the camp supervisors that, upon learning about the relationship, he killed his daughter and threw her body in the river. Frightened and alone, Pearly flees the railway camp and travels the country, moving from place to place. One day she sees a train with "The Great Porter

Circus and Menagerie" written on the side and recalls Gordon telling her how he used to work for a circus with the same name. Pearly and her young son, Gordon, Jr., immediately stow away on the train. Ollie, a reluctant performer with the circus, who eventually offers them a part in his act, discovers the pair.

Most of the performers welcome Pearly and Gordon into their community, however, Elephant Jack is the exception. He feels that Pearly and Gordon don't belong with the circus. Elephant Jack becomes furious when Pearly shows an aptitude for animal training and he dislikes when Porter allows her to work with his elephant, Caesar. Porter, who has been in mourning for his wife, begins an affair with Jennie that further enrages her former lover, Elephant Jack. At the beginning of Jennie and Wallace's relationship, it is revealed that Irene Porter delivered a healthy baby boy before her death and Wallace asked Jennie to take the baby to a place where he would be content. The situation is further complicated when it is revealed that Ollie is Porter's son and that Jennie has had a physical relationship with both men.

Ollie is in love with Jennie and he begs her to leave the circus with him at the end of the season. Instead of returning his feelings as he hoped, she reveals his parentage. Ollie is shocked and angry to learn that Wallace Porter is his father and quits the circus. In an emotional and alcohol induced haze he stumbles to Caesar's pen and releases the elephant. Freed from his cage, Caesar goes on a rampage through town, injuring several circus workers and killing Elephant Jack before Porter shoots him. A torrential downpour begins after Caesar is killed and it causes the town to flood. The circus loses all of its animals and eight of its employees to the flood. Jennie Dixieanna is not among the dead but has vanished without a trace.

MEET THE WRITERS



Ben Clark

BEN CLARK (*Music & Lyrics*) is a singer, songwriter, composer, and an Indiana native. Ben has been writing music since age 14 and *The Circus in Winter* marks his full-length musical debut. For this piece he has received overwhelming response from both educational and professional worlds including the Kennedy Center Award for Outstanding Musical Composition. In 2012, he received a fellowship at the O'Neill Center and was an invited artist at the Johnny Mercer Writer's Colony at Goodspeed Musicals. Ben works in New York as a recording artist with his band, Ben Clark and the Long Shadows. He is releasing a full-length solo album in 2014 called *Time and the Miles Apart*. He is a graduate of Ball State University and currently lives in Brooklyn.



Hunter Foster

HUNTER FOSTER (*Book*) wrote the books for the Off-Broadway musicals *Summer of '42*, *Bonnie and Clyde: a Folktale*, and *The Hollow*. Additionally, Hunter has starred on Broadway: Leo Bloom in *The Producers*, Seymour in *Little Shop of Horrors* (Tony® nomination), Bobby Strong in *Urinetown* (Outer Critic nomination), *Les Misérables*, *Grease*, *Footloose* and Alan Menken's *King David*. Off-Broadway: *Ordinary Days* at Roundabout Underground, Lincoln Center Theater's *Happiness* (Drama Desk nomination), *Frankenstein* (Victor Frankenstein), *Dust, Modern Orthodox*, *Urinetown* (Lortel nomination). Regional: *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (Signature Theatre – Helen Hayes nomination), *The Government Inspector* (Guthrie), *Mister Roberts* (Kennedy Center), *Party Come Here* (Williamstown), and *Children of Eden* (Papermill). He is a graduate of the University of Michigan Musical Theatre Program.



Beth Turcotte

BETH TURCOTTE (*Book*) has been an inspirational theatre artist and educator devoted to the development of new work and emerging talent for the past 30 years. She has earned accolades in both professional and educational arenas for her visionary projects and passion for arts education. Beth is the recipient of the 2012 Creative Endeavor Award for her dedication to arts education and the creative process. In her community work, she created the Cornerstone Center for the Arts, an inner-city arts institution discovering young unheard voices and exposing over 15,000 children to theatre, dance and music. She is a Professor of Theatre and Dance Performance at Ball State University and received her MFA from Southern Methodist University.



Composer/Lyricist Ben Clark, Choreographer Spencer Liff, and Director Joe Calarco at Goodspeed's first read-through of *The Circus in Winter*. ©Diane Sobolewski.

What is your vision for *The Circus in Winter*? Tell us about your inspirations.

Well, the novel that the musical is based on covers a lot of territory. It takes place over many years and has many characters in it. That's exciting to me. It has a Dickensian quality in its episodic nature — I know when I read it, I thought of *The Thorn Birds* in terms of the sweep of it. Even though the show is set in the world of a circus, we're not looking to replicate that world, since that is not really what the show is about. It's about family, and home, and people trying to escape from the metaphorical cages that they feel trapped in. It is a period piece, but the score is contemporary. So I'm planning, visually, to give it an edge. To have those two styles rubbing up against each other and pulling at each other is very exciting to me and has been fun to explore with the design team.

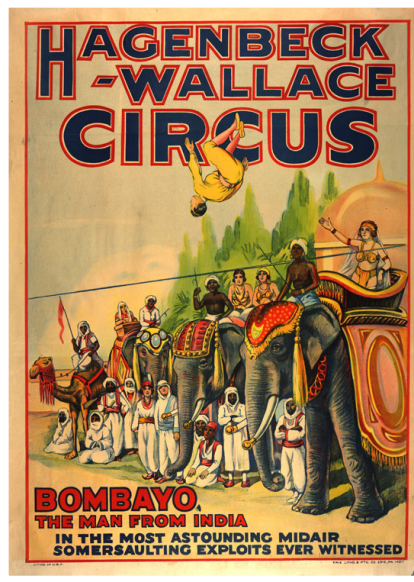
What plans do you have for working on your show at The Norma Terris Theatre? Do you expect to make many changes during the rehearsal period/run of show?

I expect there will be many changes. We just did a week-long reading of the show in New York, and the writing team made major changes every day. It's one of the wonderful things about working at The Norma Terris — the point is to develop the piece and continue to work on it.

Tell us what the audience can expect to see.

It's a very ambitious piece. The story itself is rather sprawling, covering many years and many characters. That's what is so wonderful about it. Trying to put a story that has the feeling of a novel on stage is difficult and demands a certain amount of theatricality. We're going to ask a lot of the audience in terms of using their imaginations. We don't plan to show actual circus acts — we're looking to find a more theatrical way of showing that world. And, of course, they should expect to see changes happening. There is nothing harder or more exciting than doing a new musical.

THE CIRCUS IN WINTER ROUTE BOOK



The novel *The Circus in Winter*, upon which the new musical is based, was partially inspired by one of Cathy Day's prized possessions, her great-great uncle's 1899 route book for *The Great Wallace Show*. A route book is a bound notebook or ledger that contains the details of a circus' journey across the country, so perhaps it is appropriate that this electrifying musical has traveled across the country, in various forms, to reach The Norma Terris Theatre in Chester, Connecticut.

Cathy Day, the author of *The Circus in Winter*, grew up in Peru, Indiana where *The Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus* would spend its winters. In fact, Day's aforementioned great-great uncle was an elephant trainer for Hagenbeck-Wallace and was killed by one of his animals. This tragedy was not uncommon in the circus world so it was not overly publicized at the time of its occurrence. However, this unusual death is one of the events that sparked the idea for the novel.



Growing up in Peru, Indiana, Day did not realize that her story and family history were unique. She felt, as many small town residents do, that her town and her background were "boring" and was surprised when she went to college at the interest people expressed in Peru's connection to the circus. This unexpected interest made Day take a more careful look at her hometown history and started her

down the path that would eventually result in a successful and well-reviewed book.

Cathy Day's novel, *The Circus in Winter*, is set in the town of Lima, Indiana and chronicles the rise and fall of *The Great Porter Circus*. The novel itself is actually a collection of interconnected short stories that weave together the history of *The Great Porter Circus*, its performers, their descendants, and the everyday tasks of circus life. Readers encounter three generations of circus families and the transformation that takes place in a small town during the golden age of the traveling circus, as well as how the demise of the organization affects the performers' descendants. Day captures the tone of the story and the legacy of

the circus in her town by stating, "in Lima, legend and lore outlive the circus itself, luring contemporary inhabitants to faraway places in search of the adventure that has moved on."

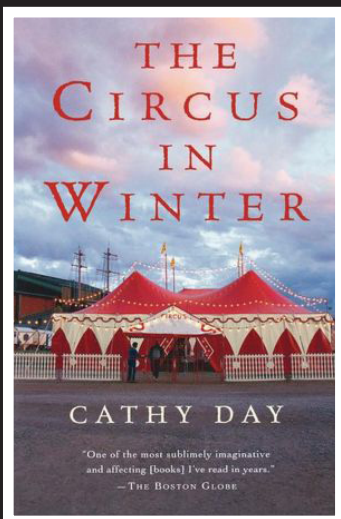
FROM PAGE TO STAGE

The Circus in Winter's interesting web of connections brought it to the attention of students at Ball State University. Kathryn Kennison, the Director of the E.B. and Bertha C. Ball Center who also grew up in Peru, Indiana, heard about Day's book when it was first published in 2004 and asked the author to do a reading on campus. Dr. Anthony Edwards, a Professor at Ball State, attended the reading at the invitation of Kennison and was so enamored with Day's novel that he began teaching the book in his history classes that same year.

In 2009, Beth Turcotte led a theater seminar in conjunction with The Virginia B. Ball Center for Creative Inquiry and broached the subject of creating a new work by asking her students to consider the word "circus." Several students in Turcotte's class had taken a history course with Dr. Edmonds. The students who read *The Circus in Winter* in Edmonds' class mentioned the novel to Turcotte. Then, Turcotte contacted Day to ask if she and her students could adapt *The Circus in Winter* into a musical production. Day was surprised by the request, but gave permission for her work to be adapted as long as she would be able to come and see the final product. When Day and her husband went to Ball State and saw the students' work, she realized that this was not simply a class project, but a true musical creation. It so happened that audiences agreed with Day's assessment and so *The Circus in Winter* grew into a full length musical.

BEYOND BALL STATE

Beth Turcotte and 14 students from Ball State University optioned *The Circus in Winter* in 2009 and a concert version of the show was performed in Muncie, Indiana at Sursa Hall. After the positive reception, the show received in Muncie, it moved to Chicago and was performed at Drury Lane



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THE CIRCUS IN WINTER ROUTE BOOK CONTINUED



The cast at the first read-through at Goodspeed. ©Diane Sobolewski

Theater. Then, *The Circus in Winter* traveled to Peru, Indiana and was performed at the Ole Olsen Memorial Theater, the International Circus Hall of Fame, and finally, at the Muncie Civic Theatre.

The Circus in Winter became a fully-realized production in 2011 and was performed at Ball State as part of the University Theatre's 2011-2012 season. The musical was then selected to be performed at the KC-ACFTF's Region III Festival at the University of Illinois in 2012. During the KC-ACFTF performances, *The Circus in Winter* was identified as one of the top five shows in the nation and won seven awards at the KC-ACFTF national awards ceremony in April 2012.

Subsequent to the astonishing success of *The Circus in Winter* at KC-ACFTF, the National Alliance for Music Theatre (NAMT) chose the musical as one of the finalists in their yearly new work

competition. Hundreds of scripts are considered annually for NAMT's Festival of New Musicals, however, only eight are selected to give condensed performances in what has become a leading industry event and a major stepping stone towards a full Broadway production. *The Circus in Winter* was given the honor of both opening and closing the event and was the first new work to do so in the history of NAMT.

Goodspeed Musicals' production of *The Circus in Winter* at the Norma Terris Theatre in Chester, Connecticut will be the first full-length performance of the musical since 2012 and the first performance using a revised libretto written by Hunter Foster and Beth Turcotte.



Choreographer Spencer Liff at the first read-through. ©Diane Sobolewski

TRAVELING CIRCUSES AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY



The origin of the circus can be traced back to Ancient Rome, however, the circus did not arrive in America until 1793 when a man named John Bill Ricketts began presenting exhibitions in Philadelphia and New York City that consisted of riding tricks, tightrope walkers, tumblers, and clowns. This new form of entertainment appealed to all levels of society and gained a particularly influential supporter when President George Washington began attending Ricketts' traveling show. Ricketts staged performances in solid structures and limited his tours to towns or cities that would either allow him to build a permanent arena or already had a physical space available for a performance.

The introduction of the circus tent, or big top, in 1825 by J. Purdy Brown freed circuses from their semi-permanent homes and allowed them to travel to a wider variety of rural areas. Circuses were now able to bring their venue with them as they moved from town to town and ease of movement became one of the defining features that separated the American circus from its European counterpart.

Another defining feature of the classic American circus that developed during

this time period was the addition of exotic animals, most notably the elephant. The first elephant to be imported to North America was owned by Captain Jacob Crowninshield in 1796. The second elephant on American shores was named Old Bet and belonged to man by the name of Hackaliah Bailey. Between 1809 and 1816 Bailey toured the elephant around the country by walking from town to town during the night in order to prevent anyone from receiving a free look at the animal. Old Bet's life was tragically cut short due to the actions of an unstable man with a shotgun, but her popularity and Bailey's financial success inspired other entrepreneurs to tour with exotic menageries of their own.

THE INFLUENCE OF P.T. BARNUM

The American circus underwent another metamorphosis when Phineas T. Barnum entered the circus business at age 61 and introduced the world to the circus sideshow or "freak show." As alluded to in *The Circus in Winter*, Barnum was one of the most influential people in the circus industry and anyone employed by his organization either as a performer, like Jennie Dixianna, or a manager, like Mr. Colonel, would be a sought after addition to his competitors' staff. Barnum is credited with the development of the three-ring circus and with being the first circus owner to transport his troupe by train.

P. T. Barnum started down the path to becoming a circus impresario in 1834 when he heard of an African-American woman named Joice Heth, who claimed to be the 161-year-old former nanny of General George Washington. Barnum was intrigued by the woman's impressive claim and quickly brought her into his employment. Heth died a few months after meeting Barnum and upon her autopsy it was revealed that she was no more than 80 years old. Unperturbed by Heth's deception, Barnum acquired the Scudder Museum in New York and turned it into Barnum's American Museum; a platform for shocking and bizarre exhibits. More than 82 million visitors flocked to the museum to examine human and animal oddities like Chang

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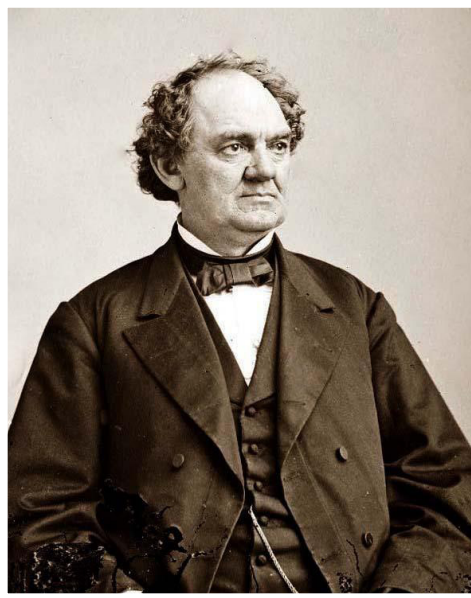


CLICK HERE
to learn more about
P.T. Barnum

LINK: <http://www.barnum-museum.org/manmythlegend.htm>



Barnum's American Museum



P. T. Barnum

and Eng, the “original” Siamese twins, Tom Thumb, and the “Feejee Mermaid.” Barnum closed his museum in 1868 and entered into a partnership with W.C. Coup in 1871 to form *P.T. Barnum’s Museum, Menagerie and Circus*.

Due to societal reform and various religious objections, the circus was banned in certain states causing the industry to lose both popularity and money during the mid-1800s. However, Coup and Barnum were able to entice audiences back to the circus by emphasizing Barnum’s museum background and the educational value of the animal menagerie. Soon, *P.T. Barnum’s Museum, Menagerie and Circus* became so popular that people were being turned away. Finding the loss of potential audience members unacceptable, Barnum and Coup added a second performing area also called a ring in 1872. The expansion to a two-ring circus was so lucrative that the duo added a third ring in 1881, allowing them to accommodate a massive audience under the big top at any given time. Once a larger circus format was proven to be a profitable investment, other circus owners began to expand their performing troupes in order to keep pace with Barnum and Coup’s flourishing business.

Coup and Barnum continued their partnership for several years until Barnum eventually purchased full control of the circus. He continued to produce and market the business on his own until a rival circus threatened to overshadow his operation. In the style of a true salesman, Barnum

proposed a merger to his rivals James A. Bailey, James E. Cooper, and James L. Hutchinson. Within six years of the merger Cooper and Hutchinson were bought out of the circus and the show became *Barnum and Bailey’s Greatest Show on Earth*.

CIRCUS TRAINS

In the mid-19th century, circuses traveled freely around the country thanks to the new tent system, but these nomadic troupes could only go so far in horse drawn wagons. Circuses did experiment with other modes of transportation, like steamboat and train, however, these forms of travel were found to be too impractical. Traveling by boat limited the areas that a circus could visit in a season to regional coast ways and train tracks that did not have a standardized rail gauge until the late 1800s which forced passengers to switch trains every time a different track gauge was used. Inconsistent railroad track gauges could, and often did, result in passengers boarding eight or nine different trains in order to complete a single trip. It wasn’t until 1872, when America adopted a standardized rail gauge that train travel became a legitimate option for circus transportation and allowed the roaming shows to travel from coast to coast.

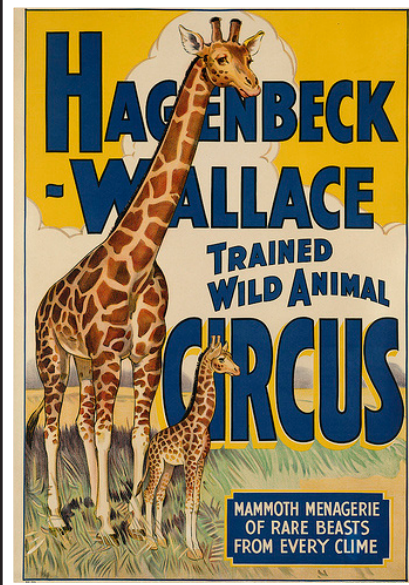
P.T. Barnum and W.C. Coup were the first owners to attempt transporting their circuses on railroad cars during the second season of their partnership—the same year that they made the transition to a three-ring circus—and the risk paid off when they grossed almost \$1 million in six months. In addition to increasing the distance a circus could travel in a season, the use of trains in transporting a circus from town to town aided in marketing the shows and allowed owners to send men out ahead of the traveling show to put posters up in towns and cities where the circus would be performing. Railroad companies jumped into the marketing bonanza and began offering discounted fares to people traveling to see the circus.

The use of railcars also allowed circuses to have more visually impressive wagons to transport their animals and equipment.



Barnum & Bailey Circus Train

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This eventually led to a parade filled with gilt covered wagons, calliopes, floats, and performers that would march down the main street of each town the circus visited. The parade became a staple of the late 19th century circus by giving crowds a taste of the performances that awaited them under the big top. This tradition continued until the advancement of the automobile made it impossible for performers and animals to move freely through town streets.

THE HAGENBECK-WALLACE CIRCUS

At the height of its popularity there were dozens of traveling circuses making the trip around the country, one of which was the *Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus* that served as the inspiration for *The Circus in Winter*. The *Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus* was originally two separate entities; *The Carl Hagenbeck Circus*, which was founded by noted animal trainer Carl Hagenbeck, and *The Great Wallace Show*, founded by Benjamin

other when Wallace claimed full control of the circus in 1890 and changed the name to the *B.E. Wallace Circus*. The *Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus* came into being in 1907 when Benjamin Wallace purchased *The Carl Hagenbeck Circus* and merged it with his own company. Carl Hagenbeck protested at the use of his name in the title since he no longer had any connection to the circus and tried to sue Wallace but lost the battle in court.

The *Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus* wintered in Wallace's hometown of Peru, Indiana and went through the flood of 1913 losing 8 elephants, 21 lions and tigers, and 8 horses when the Wabash River overflowed its banks. That same year, Wallace sold his share of the circus. The flood was not the only tragedy to strike the *Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus*; in 1918, a train engineer fell asleep and ran his locomotive into the rear of the *Hagenbeck-Wallace* train near Hammond, Indiana. At least 86 people died in the train wreck and 127 more were injured. Demonstrating the meaning of the words, "the show must go on," several competing circuses loaned *Hagenbeck-Wallace* their equipment and performers so that only two performances were canceled due to the tragedy.



Hagenbeck-Wallace clowns

Wallace. Hagenbeck pioneered the use of reward-based animal training as opposed to fear-based training that was utilized by most trainers in the 19th century, and eventually his methods were adopted by zoos and circuses across the world.

Shortly after the train accident, *Hagenbeck-Wallace* was bought by the American Circus Company, which boasted shows like the *Sells-Floto Circus* and *John Robinson Shows* on its roster. John Nicholas Ringling bought the American Circus Company and all subsidiary companies in the late 1920s for over \$1 million. The circus split from the Ringling enterprise in 1935 and began operating independently as *The Hagenbeck-Wallace and Forepaugh-Sells Bros. Circus* until it ceased operations in 1938. The compound in Peru, Indiana that was formerly the winter home of the *Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus* now functions as the Circus Hall of Fame.

Benjamin Wallace was a livery and stable owner in Peru, Indiana who bought a circus with his business partner James Anderson in 1884. Like most circus partnerships, this one ended with one partner buying out the

 **CLICK HERE**
to learn more about
circus history

LINK: <http://www.circusinamerica.org>

CIRCUS LORE, CULTURE, AND PERCEPTION



Photo by Frederick W. Glasier

The circus has long been a source of fascination for the American public both for its entertainment value and its inherent sense of danger. Audiences could safely sit beneath the big top and watch aerialists, like Jennie Dixianna and her Spin of Death in *The Circus in Winter*, perform deadly stunts, or enjoy a thrilling wild animal exhibition without taking any real risk. Though circus performances were highly anticipated by small towns across the country, people often viewed the nomadic lifestyle of the tented circus troupe as a hotbed of loose morals and vice with townspeople being quick to

blame members of the circus for any thefts or crimes that might have occurred during the group's stay in town.



Photo by Frederick W. Glasier

Despite the distinct line drawn between "circus people" and "non-circus people," the actual circus community was closely knit, often consisting of generational family acts and the domestic family was held in the highest regard; one generation trained the next so as time went on, so did the act. Once the "big show" was over, the performers would trade in their spangled costumes for casual attire and retreat to their train berth or tents to resume their everyday tasks. The circus was

their place of business and if an audience member was given the chance to peek into the performers' backstage world, they may have been surprised to see the aerialist who just defied death in front of thousands of people looking tired or the clown who brought laughter to the big top audience curtly dismiss a youngster that sought him out.

The world of the circus was a world unto itself with its own unique set of expectations and rules, both written and

unwritten. The success of the show as a whole depended on everyone doing his or her part swiftly and capably. The personal problems or friction that arose were to be kept in the background, and performers were required to be of sound mind and body because their lives depended on it. The original Ringling Brothers believed so strongly in the cohesion and respectability of their shows that they laid down over 50 rules in writing that all personnel had to follow. And though written rules could not always prevent people in the circus from having arguments or curb professional jealousy, the unofficial and unwritten mantra of "the show must go on" forced performers to thrust personal issues aside for the good of the show as a whole. Nursing personal jealousies, as many of the characters in *The Circus in Winter* do, would not have been tolerated because it could have deadly consequences.

PUBLIC PERCEPTION

The public perception of the circus has always been one of fascination and delight with a small dose of trepidation and disdain thrown in. As mentioned at the beginning of *The Circus in Winter*, "the world is divided into circus people and non-circus people." The public generally shared this mentality and was not sure what to make of a traveling society that consisted of clowns, acrobats, roustabouts, and sideshow attractions.

Oftentimes, roustabouts (aka workingmen) are the only "circus people" that these small towns would see outside of the big top and they did not always make the best impression. The performers and permanent employees of the circus were highly skilled and committed to their craft, but the seasonal roustabouts were composed of unskilled labor culled from the lower levels of society. According to Henry Ringling North, the roustabouts were often "rootless, reckless, and feckless. They were a tough anonymous lot—a sort of Foreign Legion of the Labor Army." Made up in large part by drifters, criminals, drunks, and other dropouts from life; the workers would come



CLICK HERE to learn more about modern-day circus life

LINK: <http://www.pbs.org/opb/circus/circus-life/>

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Photo by Frederick W. Glasier

from nowhere to join the circus, travel, carouse, and could disappear overnight. Circuses tried withholding portions of the roustabouts' pay to be given to them in one lump sum at the end of the season to encourage men to stay on, however, some unscrupulous circus organizations began practicing "red lighting" to avoid giving payment. "Red lighting" was the practice of throwing a laborer from a moving train. If the man survived the fall, all he would see were the disappearing red lights of the train in the distance. There was also a distinct mistrust felt by people in the circus towards the outside world, the nomadic shows would become societies

unto themselves and anything "not circus" was viewed with deep suspicion.

CIRCUS CULTURE

Like most societies, the circus had its own hierarchy and could be broken into several categories: management, employees, and performers. Management was at the top of the chain of command and consisted of owners, publicity managers, general managers, and labor managers. Employees and performers were usually considered to be of equal status but had their own rankings within their groups.

Employees of the circus would include ticket sellers, candy butchers, and front door men at the top of the caste system, since they usually worked their way up to management positions, followed by other workers, and roustabouts at the bottom of the system.

Performers were divided according to their specialty with equestrians and aerialists being awarded the most prestigious positions followed by animal trainers, acrobats, clowns, and sideshow freaks.

Circus personnel would have their place in the circus hierarchy and this could be identified by their sleeping assignments and place in the cook tent line. Featured performers and key personnel would be assigned a stateroom or a section of a railcar (depending on available space) while roustabouts could be assigned two to a bunk, if they got a bunk at all.



Photo by Frederick W. Glasier

INTERESTING FACTS



Clyde Beatty



- P.T. Barnum was born in Bethel Connecticut.
- For 50 years, Bridgeport Connecticut was the winter home of *Barnum and Bailey's Greatest Show on Earth*. The Ringling Brothers moved the headquarters of the show to Sarasota, Florida in 1927. The Barnum Museum is located in Bridgeport, Connecticut.
- Hunter Foster is one of the authors of the revised book for *The Circus in Winter* and his sister, Tony winner Sutton Foster, starred in the 2012 presentation of *The Circus in Winter* at the National Alliance for Musical Theatre's Festival of New Musicals.
- Cathy Day has two novels that have been published, *Comeback Season: How I Learned to Play the Game of Love* and *The Circus in Winter*. She is in the process of writing her third novel which will also begin with a C.
- Joe Skelton, the father of famous performer Red Skelton, worked as a clown in the *Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus*.
- Famed animal trainer, Clyde Beatty, toured with the *Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus*.
- The trunk of an elephant is so sensitive that it can pick up a pin.
- There are two main species of elephants: the African elephant and the Indian elephant.
- Most circus elephants are Indian elephants.
- An elephant's hair is so coarse that trainers sometimes use a blowtorch to trim it.
- Since the Animal Welfare Act came into law in 1966, every major circus that uses animal performers has been cited for violating the minimal standards of care.

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